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Sam Houston EC Wins NRECA Chesnutt Award

LIVINGSTON, May 18, 2009 – Sam Houston Electric Cooperative received the Edgar F. Chesnutt Award for Best Total Communication Program, the highest honor bestowed through the Spotlight on Excellence Awards program. Sam Houston EC was recognized during Connect 2009, a national communication, marketing and member services conference convened by the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association and Touchstone Energy® Cooperatives.

Keith Stapleton, Sam Houston EC chief communications officer, accepted the Chesnutt Award from Karen Combs, president of the Council of Rural Electric Communicators, which established and oversees the Spotlight on Excellence Awards. The Cooperative has received this honor twice, the first being in 2005, and is the only Co-op in the nation to do so.

Combs cited Sam Houston EC's comprehensive plan and success in using a broad array of communication tactics to update more than 51,000 Co-op member-owners after a major storm. Hurricane Ike devastated the Texas Gulf Coast and Sam Houston EC's entire electrical distribution system on Sept. 13, 2008.

In the days following Hurricane Ike, many of the Cooperative's members were displaced. This displacement heightened the need for disseminating regular updates about restoration of service. Sam Houston EC's goal was to utilize every available communication tool to keep the public informed.

The Co-op did that by employing traditional and non-traditional methods of communication. First, the utility established a central information source – the "Storm Central" Web site. Once the hurricane started its approach, updates were posted to prepare neighbors for what was about to happen next. Second, the Co-op recognized the need for multiple levels of communication to reach out to people once power was out systemwide.

Sam Houston EC's communications staff's existing relationships with local media helped keep the lines of communication open once the storm hit, maintaining daily contact with local and regional radio stations, as well as newspapers and television stations.

Ten countywide Emergency Operations Centers (EOCs), along with the Multi-Agency Communication Center (MACC), played an integral role in the Co-op's communication following the storm as well. Sam Houston EC became a key component in creating a dynamic communication network that included law enforcement, emergency personnel and community leaders who met to share vital information further demonstrating the cooperative spirit at work.

As the restoration process began, Sam Houston EC put its focus on keeping its members informed about safety during emergency events and how to better plan for the needs of themselves and their families. The Co-op firmly believes measures such as this will maintain high member satisfaction levels following storms like Ike. In fact, the Co-op topped 90 percent in member satisfaction during the third quarter of 2008, the same quarter in which the hurricane hit.

The annual Spotlight on Excellence awards recognize electric cooperatives across the country for their high-quality communication and marketing efforts. More than 700 entries were submitted in this year's competition. Sam Houston EC received the Chesnutt award for the category of "Best Total Communication Program," and took

home awards of excellence and merit in nine other categories; more awards than any other cooperative in the nation.

More than 500 electric co-op professionals in marketing, member services and communication attended the Connect 2009 Conference, May 12-14. NRECA is the national service organization representing the nation's more than 900 consumer-owned electric cooperatives, which provide electric service to 42 million people in 47 states. Touchstone Energy is a national alliance of local, consumer-owned electric cooperatives providing high standards of service to customers large and small. Touchstone Energy Cooperatives serve their members with integrity, accountability, innovation and a long-standing commitment to community.

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