

AVEC Board selects operator of the year

At their December meeting, the AVEC Board of Directors approved a resolution to select an Operator of the Year on an annual basis. "Choosing the best operator from among 44 generating villages was no easy task," said C.C. Dunkelbarger, AVEC's member services manager. "We have a number of very fine operators and to single one out takes a lot of thought and discussion."

Joe has been helping keep Anvik electrified since 1970. The smooth, steady performance of the village's two Allis-Chalmers generator sets attest to Joe's

skill as a power plant operator. Joe's careful maintenance and painstaking attention to detail were major factors in his selection as Operator of the Year.

Being an AVEC plant operator is a demanding job. It includes keeping detailed logs on fuel consumption and plant performance, regular maintenance tasks like changing lube oil filters, keeping AVEC Operations and Maintenance and Engineering Departments up to date on the many aspects of the village's electric consumption and keeping the plant clean.

"Joe takes his job seriously," said Bob Brouillette, AVEC

Operations and Maintenance manager. "He's quick to understand complex instructions and carries them out effectively. He has a real desire to learn about the power generation system and is extremely helpful to any of our staff members who travel to Anvik."

Brouillette also had praise for Joe's care of the plant, calling it "outstanding." "He keeps the plant spotless and free of fire hazards, as well as keeping spare materials well organized within the plant," he said. Brouillette also attributes Joe's success to his dependability in

dealing with a wide range of responsibilities, such as consumer questions and problems that may come up concerning the power system. He also has a deep understanding of the consumer's role in a cooperative, according to AVEC staff members.

Don Aemisegger, AVEC Operations analyst, works closely with all plant operators. He said of Joe, "If there's any problem with any aspect of the electrical system; pedestals, transformers, fuel tanks, cables or mechanical problems, Joe always reports it right away and also

gives detailed descriptions of what action he takes to correct the problem. You can't ask for much more."

It's been eight years since Anvik first received electric power, and now the man who has kept the lights burning in that quiet village on the Yukon is being honored by the Alaska Village Electric Cooperative.

Joe Jerue is the first person to be selected as Plant Operator of the Year by AVEC. He will travel to Anchorage as the guest of the cooperative and receive the award at the AVEC Annual Meeting March 29.

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"What you're talking about is a policy question, and one the state has to answer. The costs to the consumer are a concern, but the APUC is not a policy-setting group," Guess says.

Ferguson says urban residents now pay considerably less than villagers and yet urban consumers get better service. "We're going to force people out there to not be able to even have electricity," he said.

Making the situation more complex are frequent accusations that the electric cooperative operates inefficiently, thus creating higher than necessary costs. "The study indicates that AVEC is cost-efficient. But the superintendents' testimony is just the opposite," Ferguson said.

Joe Cooper, district superintendent of Yukon Koyukuk School District, is among those dissatisfied with the cooperative's costs.

"Private rates are cheaper, and AVEC is keeping private business out of the electric business in the Bush," Cooper said. "The highest power we pay privately is 25 cents a kilowatt, and the rate we pay AVEC at Nulato High is \$1 a kilowatt."

Opinions are mixed about the

potential role of private electrical utilities in the Bush, as are theories about the continuing role of the state in assuring electrical service to rural Alaska.

Several possible solutions are expected to be presented to the State Energy Policy Committee, which was requested by Gov. Jay Hammond to coordinate the task of formulating a policy for rural electrical service.

One approach advanced by Ferguson would create a state-wide electricity tax as a source of subsidies for Bush power, or a simple state guarantee of money to school districts that continue to contract with AVEC.

"Only one thing's for sure," says one state official. "You can't keep them on the farm once they've been to Gay Paree."