

Where are they now?

Original incorporator edition: Leroy Schecher



A hail storm put him on his REC career path

As the cooperative approaches its 50-year anniversary in May 2011, Basin Today will occasionally highlight some of the 69 original incorporators who were inspired to form Basin Electric.

As one of the original incorporators of Basin Electric, Leroy Schecher's name, along with 68 others, is embossed on a metal plaque near the front entrance of the Headquarters building. He was barely 30 years old when the cooperative was started in 1961. Since then, Schecher has been an advocate of rural electric and telephone cooperative programs and a public servant for rural America.

Schecher started at Grand Electric Cooperative in Bison, SD, on Sept. 22, 1952. He was 21 years old. "What got

me there was a hail storm and a rain storm. I was living on the farm and when the storm was over, there was nothing left. It was obvious I needed to find a job, so I went to town and just happened that one of my high school classmates, who had been working for Grand, was leaving to go to college, and when he walked out I walked in and they hired me." Schecher stayed for 31 years and worked his way up to manager.

In the 1950s, Schecher says cooperatives knew something had to be done about power supply, and they relied on the advice of Leland Olds. At the time, Fred Aandahl, assistant secretary of Interior for the Eisenhower administration, was telling the cooperatives all the power that could be generated from the Missouri River dams has been allocated, "so if you are going to grow, you've got to do something for yourselves."

Schecher became Grand Electric's manager on June 9, 1961, and the incorporation of Basin Electric was just a month earlier on May 5. He says the former manager had already resigned, so he went with a number of Grand Electric directors to help incorporate Basin Electric.

"I remember that day real well. We drove to Bismarck and back," Schecher said. "There were a lot of people there from all over: North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, Minnesota and Iowa."

In the years since Basin Electric's incorporation, Schecher served as general manager of both Grand Electric and West River Cooperative Telephone Company until January 1984.

From January 1984 until March 1986, he was involved in private business. In March 1986 he became general manager of Minnesota Valley Cooperative Light and Power Association in Montevideo, MN. He held that position until he retired on Jan. 5, 1996. He took an interim job as manager of FEM Electric Cooperative, Ipswich, SD, from September 1999 to January 2000.

He also helped incorporate the former North Central Data Cooperative (now National Information Solutions Cooperative) in Mandan, ND, and the Cooperative Response Center in Austin, MN.

For the work he's done for cooperatives throughout more than half a century, Schecher was inducted into the South Dakota Cooperative Hall of Fame on Sept. 11, 2007. Today, Schecher lives in Rapid City, SD, with his wife, Carol.

Schecher says Basin Electric has grown beyond his wildest imagination. "I was pretty new to these kinds of challenges; it just seemed to me that it was a good way to do it and probably the only way. There just didn't seem to be anything else, and so we just put our shoulder to the wheel and decided we were going to see it through."