Bush gets his power from a co-op

By David J. Thompson

PRESIDENT George Bush’s Western White House in Texas gets all of its energy from a co-op — the Heart of Texas Electric Co-operative Inc., founded in 1937.

The co-op serves over 14,000 member families and organisations. It covers the rural parts of seven counties in Texas through 3,550 miles of cables. The rural territory serviced by the co-op is 12 miles west of Waco, Texas. The area is best known for cattle ranching and farming and the President’s Western White House.

Just like the other electric co-ops throughout rural America, the co-op is governed by a board elected from its members. If he had the time, the President could even run for the board. He’ll especially have some free when the new President takes office on Inauguration Day in January.

Most people do not know that electric co-ops are a major part of the economy and life of rural America. There are more than 900 electric co-ops throughout the USA, which serve over 40 million people in 47 states and they provide distribution to 75% of the land mass in the USA.

The National Rural Electric Co-operative Association represents the interests of the co-ops to government and regulatory agencies and lobbies for opportunities to serve its members in the fields such as energy regulation, economic development and rural community building.

The National Rural Electric Co-operative Association (NRECA) is the national service organisation dedicated to representing the national interests of co-operative electric utilities and the consumers they serve.

Of the co-op sectors in the USA, NRECA fly the Co-op flag stronger than any other. When you go to their website at www.nreca.coop you will see many references to the co-operative difference such as the following:

Electric co-ops got their big break from President Franklin Delano Roosevelt who went to Warm Springs, Georgia, for treatment of his polio. Roosevelt noted that electricity cost four times as much in Georgia as it did at his home in New York State. How would rural folks ever afford the electricity that would bring them a better life?

It was at his cottage in Warm Springs (called the Little White House) that he conceived of and in 1935 signed the legislation establishing the Rural Electrification Administration (REA) to bring electricity to rural communities.

Roosevelt’s idea to bring electricity to rural America required enormous planning and access to massive specialised financing agencies. Electricity for all was the goal and co-operatives were chosen to be the most effective means to bring it to rural America. Rural Electrification was a cornerstone of the “New Deal” and one of its most enduring and successful outcomes.

According to Nobel Laureate economics professor, Lawrence R. Klein of the University of Pennsylvania, all types of utilities in the USA, such as investor-owned utilities, municipal-owned utilities and electric co-operatives enjoy some form of government subsidy. Klein found that electric co-operatives receive the least amount of subsidy per customer.

George Bush was not the only President from Texas to receive his energy from a co-op. As a Texas congress member in the 1930s, Lyndon Johnson was the power behind the creation of the Pedernales Co-op.

Today, Pedernales is the largest electric co-op in the USA providing electricity to more than 221,000 members. For all of his adult life, Johnson got his energy from the Pedernales Electric Co-op for the LBJ Ranch also called the Texas White House.

Rural electrification brought a massive change to rural America and everyone from powerful Presidents to farming families have equally benefited.

And at the centre of the powerful success is the co-op idea conceived by candlelight in Rochdale in 1844. Around a hundred years later in a new world, electric co-ops brought a new kind of power to the people.