

Interview with J.P. Lorenz Jr.

Interviewer: Karen Yancy

Transcriber: Karen Yancy

Date of Interview: July 23, 1987

Location: Mr. Lorenz's Home, Stockdale, TX

Begin Tape 1, Side 1

Karen Yancy: This is Karen Yancy. Today is July 23, 1987, and I'm conducting an oral interview with Mr. J.P. Lorenz Jr., director of Guadalupe Valley Electric Cooperative [GVEC] at Gonzales, Texas.

Why did you become a director?

J.P. Lorenz Jr.: Well, it was to fill an unexpired term, originally held by my father. He had been a director for several years and then passed away, and so I was appointed to serve out his unexpired time.

Yancy: What experience did you bring to the board?

Lorenz: Well, business experience; I was in the construction business and also involved in ranching and so forth, and the Co-op is concerned with such activities, and I thought from experience of being around directors and serving on other boards and being well-known in this area—I figured that I could contribute to the betterment of the Co-op. I also had a B.S. degree in electrical engineering.

Yancy: How many years have you served as a director?

Lorenz: Let's see, I believe it's twenty-six.

Yancy: Twenty-six years. What kind of time commitment is involved in being a director?

Lorenz: Well, it's very uncertain, but you have, of course, one direct commitment of spending an entire day once a month. We have, whenever it's necessary, special meetings. We attend meetings concerning consumer relations and etcetera at night and different places. So do you want about how many days a month or something like that?

Yancy: Yeah. Could you approximate under normal circumstances?

Lorenz: Well, as far as the direct meetings with the board or employees, I would say between two, little over two days a month.

Yancy: What are your responsibilities as a director? What are your week-to-week commitments?

Lorenz: Week to week; well, it's to keep our eyes and ears open. (Yancy and Lorenz laugh) Our members, we visit with them occasionally about the Cooperative, which we have a very good relationship with. We try to see that the Co-op is operated in a good efficient manner, keep our consumers happy.

Yancy: To what do you contribute this good relationship that GVEC has with its consumers?

Lorenz: Well, one of the main things I consider is information. Our consumers, I believe, are better informed about the operation of the Co-op than other co-ops I have been connected with and visited and things. Our consumers know more about the activities of the Co-op through the publications and meetings, district meetings, and so forth.

Yancy: What kind of personal satisfaction do you get as a representative of the Co-op members?

Lorenz: Well, I think that I contribute part of my time to the betterment of my fellow neighbors and members that are connected with the Co-op and—well, it's a lot of things, I guess, that you could take into consideration.

Yancy: Do Co-op members contact you about policy changes or other matters concerning the Co-op?

Lorenz: Well, they have occasionally, and if something comes up that concerns a member which I am unable to answer immediately, I will find the answer and report back to them very soon. If management cannot give me an answer, then at the next board meeting I'll always bring it up to board, which makes the final decision, and report back to the member.

Yancy: When they contact you is it problems with their bill, or is it just general policy or wanting to know what's happening?

Lorenz: It's both. I have had not a great number, but quite a few, I guess, through the years that couldn't understand their bills, and I was familiar with the way the bills were calculated and stuff and able to straighten them out a great part of the time. (Lorenz and Yancy laugh)

Yancy: What are the aspirations of the board in regard to GVEC?

Lorenz: Well, to try to make it one of the most efficient and well-operated co-ops in the United States, which I believe it already is, regardless of what some members may think, but electricity and other services at the lowest possible cost is our aim.

Yancy: Other co-ops tend to have very argumentative board meetings, but GVEC doesn't. In your opinion, why doesn't GVEC experience these problems?

Lorenz: Well, our management brings all the questions to us and explains them from their point of view, and we will have a chance to consider them and give our points of view and sometimes have difference of opinion like any board will, but we've never really got into a, oh, say a dog fight. (Lorenz and Yancy laugh)

Yancy: In talking with GVEC employees, [the] Co-op seems to be one big happy "family." Would you agree with the use of this term in describing the relationship?

Lorenz: I believe that you can describe it very well that way because we try to keep our employees happy one way or the other and try to compensate them fairly and provide other goodies, as the old saying goes, and they seem to appreciate it; a very appreciative bunch, and we appreciate the employees. As a result, we are just one big family, I guess.

Yancy: What are some of the significant events you've seen during your years as a director?

Lorenz: Well, one big event was when we built our new headquarters in Gonzales. I was connected with that very closely because I was in the construction business myself at the time, and the manager at that time and I made several trips to look at other cooperative buildings around the country looking for ideas. So I think I contributed a little bit to the Co-op by making logical business decisions gained from many years of experience. What else was there on that?

Yancy: This was just a question raised in my mind—significant events you have seen happen to the Co-op during your years—

Lorenz: Well, I've seen it grow considerably. When I went onto the board in '61, I forget what the membership was but it was—I guess it was about a third of what it is now, approximately. It has grown steadily and continues to grow. I think it will keep on growing and prospering. We were, I guess, one of the first cooperatives in the United States to take on experiments to try to save money, like load management. We were, well, one of the very few in our area that has gotten into the load management situation, which is another way of saving our members money in the long run. It cost quite a bit to start with, but we can see the fruits of it already. I look for the Cooperative to keep growing. We've grown just more and more than a lot of people ever thought we would.

Yancy: I know that, as a board member, you attend meetings to get certified and stuff, and one of the directors said that GVEC has taken the initiative and done things that other board members are talking about, that GVEC has done a couple of years in the past, has already done.

Lorenz: Well, between you and I, I have been to quite a few of those seminars and things, and nearly every one that I go to, it seems like we have already been doing those things for a good while, and it's like they developed their idea from what we were doing, it seems.

Yancy: Where does GVEC get the initiative to go ahead and take these steps that other co-ops are following?

Lorenz: Well, we have managed to have good management, I would say, but very active in promoting the welfare of the Co-op. Of course, they're looking into the future and long-range planning and whatnot, and management has been real good. We've been fortunate to have good management. I guess ever since the Co-op has been in existence.

Yancy: What are your greatest concerns for GVEC? What are the problems that are facing GVEC?

Lorenz: Well, in the future, of course everybody's got to face it, has got to be is the high cost of wholesale power, which was one of the things that brought on our load management. We are trying to postpone that building of new power plants by efficient use at the ones we already have. The load management deal really helps us, and we encourage other co-ops to get into load management also.

Yancy: Well, that's all the questions I have. Do you have anything else you would like to add?

Lorenz: Well, not right off the top of my head, I guess, but if there is anything you might think of, I would be glad to try to answer it for you.

Yancy: I can't think of anything else.

End of interview