



Mid America Cooperative Council Fosters OPEN DISCUSSION AND COLLABORATION Among Board Chairmen

Duane Noland's family has been involved with the Shelby Electric Cooperative since 1938, so it's only fitting that Duane's career path has led him back to his cooperative roots. Duane is the president and CEO of the Association of Illinois Electric Cooperatives (AIEC) and has been since December 2006.



Under Duane's leadership, AIEC has become the epitome of a cooperative service organization, providing services to 24 locally owned and locally controlled rural electric distribution cooperatives, five generation and transmission cooperatives and six telephone cooperatives. Based in Springfield, Ill., AIEC was formed in 1942.

As a member of the Mid America Cooperative Council, AIEC not only interacts with its member cooperatives, but also with cooperatives across the Midwest.

"There is always strength in numbers," says Duane of being a MACC member. "Collaborating with cooperatives in various service and supply sectors allows all cooperative leaders to benefit from our strength and diversity."

This collaboration is made easier through MAC-Ed programming, which was created to design and deliver cooperative higher learning and development programs for all stakeholders.

“The course offerings are uniquely suited to the cooperative program and the networking opportunity is invaluable,” explains Duane.

In particular, Duane is a strong supporter of the MAC-Ed Board Chairmen's Roundtable and its ability to inspire board chairmen to think outside the box when it comes to leading their respective cooperatives and fellow board members. As an avid proponent, he sends his board chairman to the conference each year.

The Board Chairmen's Roundtable gives chairmen across different disciplines the opportunity to meet, discuss issues, and exchange ideas and thoughts, explains Duane.



"Oftentimes, the issues they deal with are very similar."

Perhaps the most valuable aspect of this program is in bringing together a diverse group of chairmen, with different backgrounds and experience levels, which lends itself to the fifth cooperative principle: education, training and information.

"I'll see a first or second-year chairman discussing how they handle certain situations with a 15 or 20-year chairman. There is a sharing and mentoring process, allowing them to build their self-esteem and confidence as a chair of a cooperative board," says Duane.

Duane recalls a first-year chairwoman at last year's Board Chairmen's Roundtable asking detailed questions on how to handle a certain issue, which allowed for open discussion among all of the chairmen in attendance, sharing their opinions and how they had handled similar situations in the past.

"The chairwoman went home feeling better about how to handle those situations and others felt good about sharing and helping mentor her with these issues," remembers Duane.

To sum up the importance of the Board Chairmen's Roundtable and why board chairmen should attend, Duane says it best:

“It's easy to be a board member; it is tougher to be a board chair, where you have to listen, control and engage debate. It's important for board chairmen to come and better understand their role as a chair, fine tune their skills and make their board more valuable.”