

How Horry Electric Cooperative is helping member-owners



Rural business down-home, high-tech at same time

In an unlikely location, Adrian Corporation has strong connections to its electric co-op

By Walter Allread

Co-op power makes it possible to locate a business or industry in areas where, decades ago, farming, ranching or timber management might have been the only feasible ways to earn a living.

Nobody knows that better than John and Mary Hardwick, owners and operators of Adrian Corporation, a marketing and printing business that's slightly off the beaten path.

For visitors to 6297 Adrian Parkway, it's easy to imagine you're in a downtown Conway office, but in fact you're 10 miles north of town — inside an old barn, behind a farm house, down a dirt road. Sometimes, there's even a herd of miniature Mediterranean donkeys and a pair of llamas grazing just outside.

The Hardwicks offer donkeys for sale but mostly the animals, along with their dog and cats, are their pets. After the UPS man comes on Fridays, the couple usually locks the front gate and lets their donkeys and llamas come up from their pens in wooded areas behind the pond.

Come Monday morning, however, it's business as usual at this unusual location. Adrian Corporation goes back to handling print jobs, everything from business cards to letterhead to forms to labels and everything you might need for your wedding. "We do all types of general

Adrian Corporation handles many of Horry Electric Cooperative's printing needs. Owner-operators John and Mary Hardwick, above, display print jobs and other items they handle for the co-op, such as magnetic and adhesive logos for co-op vehicles. Co-op power, meanwhile, keeps operations humming along inside Adrian Corporation's production area, right.



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printing,” notes John.

Through vendors, they also provide magnetic or adhesive signage and other specialty marketing items.

Horry Electric Cooperative years ago built three-phase service to Adrian Corporation but reliable, affordable co-op power isn't the only connection that Adrian Corporation has to the cooperative. The Hardwicks have handled most of the co-op's printing needs for years. “What we do with Horry Electric is pretty extensive,” John says.

That includes many materials that fellow member-owners might never see, such as forms the co-op is required to file with government agencies, or short press runs of 150-page technical reports for co-op engineers, as well as employee handbooks. Fellow co-op members, however, see plenty of Adrian Corpora-

tion's handiwork on co-op vehicles and lineworker hardhats: The cooperative gets those adhesive logos featuring its symbol, co-op “mascot” Willie Wiredhand, through Adrian Corporation.

Members also see a wealth of the company's printed materials helping to publicize the co-op's annual meeting and other special events. One of those events is the annual Rural Lady of the Year luncheon, for which Horry Electric Cooperative has served as host each spring since 1979. The Hardwicks print the program for the luncheon, where the Rural Lady Honor, formally known as the Leo G. Knauff Leadership Award, is presented.

Coming full circle

The mention of the late Knauff, who worked for the co-op for decades in a variety of roles, reminds John of his earliest co-op connection. He met Knauff when she visited the Hardwick farm to take photographs for a Living in South Carolina Magazine story about his father's livestock. “I was a little fellow,” says John. He chuckles as he recalls

a Knauff photo with the caption, “J. Oscar Hardwick and his son, John Derrell, and 13 other sheep.”

In a way, the co-op allowed John to come full circle: A graduate of the University of South Carolina, he began his career as a business math and economics teacher at Conway High School. (John also became an assistant principal and, for a time, was the youngest school administrator in the state,

Car Care, Advance Surgical Associates, and many others throughout the area. Adrian Corporation also produces bulletins for Poplar United Methodist Church and other local houses of worship.

But the co-op keeps them fairly busy, John and Mary say. Aside from the print jobs, Adrian Corporation handles specialty items ranging from Do-Not-Tamper warning tags on co-op meters to door hangers that



John and Mary Hardwick with their miniature Mediterranean donkeys and llamas outside the office, a converted barn. They let the animals graze there on Fridays after shutting down business operations and closing the front gate.

he notes.) He moved on to the Sun News, leaving to establish Adrian Corporation in 1980.

With help from his brother, Russ, they transformed the old barn on the farm where they grew up into a modern office and production space. He later added a second, metal building to house a large press.

Adrian Corporation specialized in direct mail for many years, notes John, who employed 10 people at one point in the early '90s. Unforeseen business developments and other life changes, including divorce, led John to scale back operations. But better days were soon to come.

Today, he and Mary, a native of Knoxville, Tenn., he met in 1997, are pleased to serve a solid base of good customers, chief among them their electric co-op. “When I got started with Horry Electric, they just fit so well with us,” he says. “Mary and I just work so well with the Horry Electric staff.”

Clients include Conway Chrysler and Conway Ford, Horry Telephone Cooperative, VCA Palmetto Animal Hospital, Main Street

co-op employees can leave at a service location. Adrian Corporation even prints and produces the “Winner!” signs that co-op employees hold up during the prize drawings at the annual meeting.

Evolution, Horry-style

Adrian Corporation, like the co-op and Horry County in general, continues to evolve. That's reflected in some of the jobs that John and Mary do for the co-op, such as producing bilingual signs and posters to communicate with Hispanic consumers, or in emailing advertisements and other materials they've produced for the co-op to local publications. And, like any modern business anywhere, Adrian Corporation also has a web site, www.adriancorp.com.

Even so, the site is a reminder of how Adrian Corporation, like many electric cooperative-powered businesses, takes a high-tech approach but adds a down-home touch. After all, where else can you find “Full-service printing and marketing of quality products, with quality service the standard,” plus “Donkeys for Sale”! †