



Community Concerns

Building The Community Economy

(NAPSA)—Helping the local economy could start with a long-distance phone call.

People in communities nationwide are helping to keep money spent on phone calls, Internet access, wireless service and cable television in their own cities and towns by signing up with a local telephone provider or cooperative rather than opting for large corporate telecommunications providers.

Take the case of Rick Jarrett, a rancher and founding member of Montana Bunkhouses Working Ranch Vacations. Jarrett relies on an area telephone cooperative for phone and Internet service to help him stay in touch with potential visitors. His co-op alone has 10,500 members. And Jarrett's co-op, like others across the country, plans to offer IPTV—digital television delivered over a broadband network.

Of course, telecommunications groups aren't the only ones in the co-op business. U.S. cooperatives serve about 130 million members, or about half of all Americans. While each operates on the principle of member control and keeping money in the community, they offer a variety of services.

For example, about 30 percent of all farmers' products in the U.S. are marketed through more than 3,000 producer-owned cooperatives. Well-known brands ranging from Sunkist citrus to Blue Diamond almonds are products of farmer-owned cooperatives.

There are also more than 8,500 cooperatively owned credit unions in the U.S., many of which offer special services for



Communities have found ways to keep their investments local.

military personnel and financial guidance and products to their 89 million members.

Additionally, a growing number of restaurants are going co-op, with employees working to own a piece of the business, and Americans can join co-ops that offer health insurance, solutions for seniors and discounts on food, among others.

There are even co-op schools, owned and governed by parents who share their resources to enrich students' learning experiences.

Local Benefits

Money spent at co-ops stays in the community and most local cooperatives give back to the areas they serve by investing time and money in supporting local causes.

Additionally, consumers benefit by knowing that when there's a problem with a service, they have a local representative to talk to. For instance, telecommunications customers who experience a phone outage or Internet issue do not need to navigate an automated menu of options before speaking with a co-op representative.

For more information about all kinds of co-ops, please visit www.go.coop.