

Closing Thoughts

Anderson's first year as president.
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Co-op Forum

Why co-ops embrace DEI. p. 14

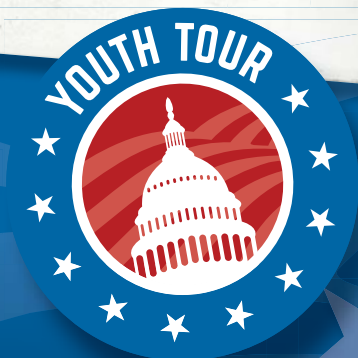
Infographic

AMI 2.0 explained. p.9

RE

RURAL ELECTRIC MAGAZINE

FEBRUARY 2024
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The life-altering impacts of being a YLC spokesperson



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ON THE COVER

Former YLC spokespeople (left to right) Kade McAdams, Rukaya Alrubaye and Bubba Bass.
NRECA photos

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NEWS + ANALYSIS



CO-OPS HELP BRING EV TRACTOR TO N.C. ZOO

By Erin Kelly

The North Carolina Zoo has a new all-electric tractor that will help electric cooperatives gather data about the vehicle's potential use for the state's dairy farms, horse farms and greenhouses.

North Carolina's Electric Cooperatives and Randolph Electric Membership Corp. asked the zoo early in 2023 if it would be interested in partnering on a yearlong pilot project to learn more about how the electric tractor performs. The data being collected includes how much energy the vehicle consumes, how often it needs to be charged, how well it does the job and how much money it saves on fuel and maintenance costs.

Michael Trent, vice president of member services and public relations at Randolph EMC, came up with the idea to collaborate with the zoo.

"I started out reading meters for the co-op 28 years ago, and I used to read meters at the zoo and knew that they do a lot of horticulture work there," Trent says. "I thought the zoo would be a great fit."

Zoo officials agreed, deciding to participate after Asheboro-based Randolph EMC and the statewide association arranged for employees to test drive the small, sub-compact tractor. The zoo paid about half the \$39,000 cost of the Solectrac e25 tractor and the co-ops covered the rest.

The zoo has seven greenhouses where it grows plants native to North America and Africa to use in the habitats of animals from those regions. The new tractor—which has been in use since October—helps employees tend the plants and move them around the property.

"The electric tractor is much quieter than the old diesel-powered tractor it replaced, and that's great for the animals and great for our guests," says Bob Langston, the zoo's sustainability and conservation outreach coordinator. "It also benefits our employees, who don't have to wear PPE to protect their ears from the noise."

Jim Musilek, vice president of innovation and business development at North Carolina's Electric Cooperatives, says the project is part of the association's focus on the electrification of the economy, especially agriculture—the state's biggest industry.

"A huge number of our members' consumers are farmers," he says. "And one of the most iconic things you see on a farm is a tractor."

The data collected from the zoo tractor's computer will help co-ops advise farmers about what to expect, he says.

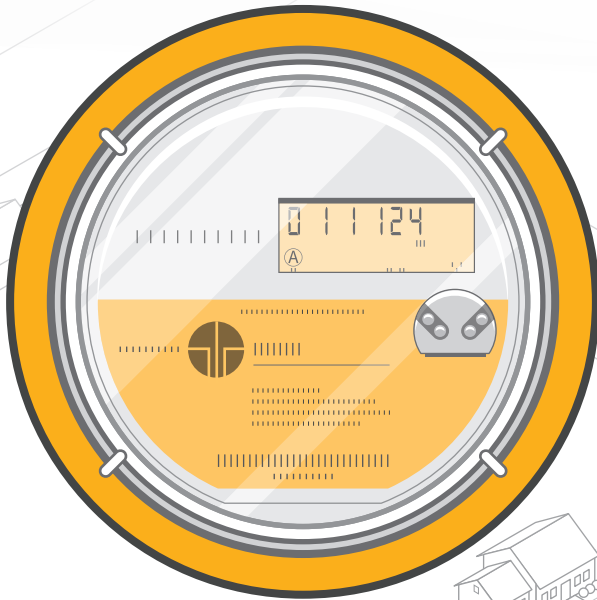
"You want them to know that they have another option, and that they can electrify if they want."

"A huge number of our members' consumers are farmers, and one of the most iconic things you see on a farm is a tractor."

— Jim Musilek, Vice President of Innovation and Business Development, North Carolina's Electric Cooperatives

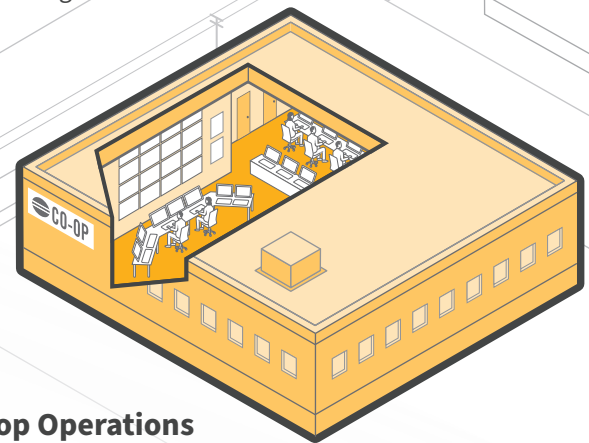
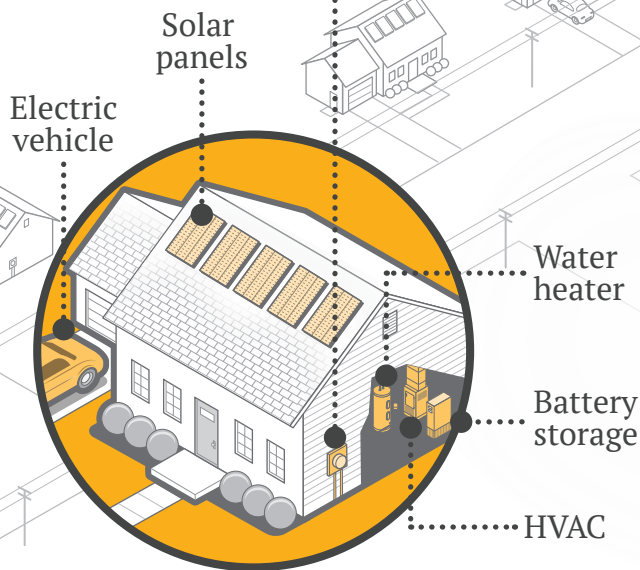
AMI 2.0

Advanced metering infrastructure or AMI has been the state of the art for utilities for the past 20 years, and electric cooperatives have been among its earliest and most aggressive adopters. Now, as those first-generation meters begin to age out, highly advanced AMI 2.0 systems are set to revolutionize the industry, with new edge-computing and data collection and analysis capabilities that promise to enable multiple new applications and improve the reliability and flexibility of the grid. Here are some of the benefits of AMI 2.0.



Meter Features

- Faster, more accurate readings.
- More frequent transmissions.
- Enable greater control of energy-producing and consuming devices.
- Sample voltage and amperages on demand.
- Independently detect anomalous conditions.
- Applications pushed to meters to meet new needs.
- Faster processor.
- Increased memory.
- Longer-lasting batteries.



Co-op Operations

- Better data acquisition and analytics.
- Improved member engagement.
- Integration and tracking of DERs.
- Design innovative energy programs.
- Evaluate, measure and verify cost/energy savings.
- Improved power quality and resilience.
- Quicker outage restoration.
- AMI network self-healing capabilities.
- Load disaggregation programs.
- Virtual power plants.

Member Benefits

- Better integration of distributed energy resources.
- Ability to combine a standard meter and a net meter into a single unit.
- Improved customer awareness of consumption, pricing.
- Real-time home energy management, load control and outage/usage alerts.



CVEC: DON'T SHOOT AT BIRDS ON A WIRE

By Erin Kelly

Central Virginia Electric Cooperative and its broadband subsidiary have launched an education campaign urging dove hunters not to shoot birds on power lines.

Last fall, when birdshot during dove-hunting season struck the fiber optic cables that Firefly Fiber Broadband—a wholly-owned subsidiary of CVEC—uses to bring high-speed internet service to rural communities, they shattered. The fiber lines typically run just below the power lines.

The damage stripped some local residents of the ability to use their cellphones and laptops until the fiber was repaired. It was also expensive to fix, says Gary Wood, president and CEO of Palmyra-based CVEC and Firefly. An average 12-fiber or 24-fiber cable costs about \$1,000 to \$2,500 to splice back together while a cable with large bundles of fiber can cost as much as \$20,000 to fix.

For now, the money for repairs is coming from the co-op's maintenance budget while it works to educate members and broadband customers not to shoot at birds on power lines, which is a federal crime.

"Bird hunting generally is thought of as the sport of shooting a bird in flight," Wood says. "We encourage hunters to use their skills to do that."

CVEC is reaching out to its 39,000 members through bill inserts and to the broader community through a social media campaign and coverage from local print and broadcast media.

HOMESTEAD'S NEW INCENTIVE PROGRAM

By Victoria A. Rocha

Electric cooperatives having a hard time attracting and retaining employees for hard-to-fill positions now have new tools at their disposal.

Homestead Advisers, NRECA's financial services subsidiary, is helping co-ops create customized incentive and bonus programs for employees in technical roles, linework and other in-demand fields. Funding for the bonus and retention awards is invested in a money market mutual fund, which, when vested, goes to the employee.

"We created these programs to meet demand and the workforce challenges co-ops are facing," says Homestead Advisers President and CEO Mark Santero.

Large, publicly traded companies can offer stock options to motivate workers, something co-ops can't do. To counter that, these programs aim to help co-ops stand out by rewarding high contributors and building employee loyalty by "keeping workers long enough to educate and train [them] on the benefits of working at a co-op," Santero says, adding that the program could, for example, encourage lineworkers approaching retirement to stick around to train apprentices.

Participating co-ops can structure their plans to recruit or reward staff members for meeting particular job targets. Homestead Advisers will help co-ops create their own programs by providing templates, forms and other assistance. Co-ops can choose vesting periods, amounts, percentage of salary and payment options.

Employees and co-op managers will get quarterly account statements "to serve as a consistent reminder of the potential award that's coming down the road—or the amount potentially left on the table if the employee were to leave," Santero says.

Homestead Advisers provides a range of investment advisory services, including financial planning, and also serves as the investment adviser for the Homestead Funds, a family of registered mutual funds.

Homestead Advisers Corp., a registered investment adviser with the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission, is an indirect, wholly owned subsidiary of NRECA.



Homestead Advisers CEO Mark Santero

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Cuivre River Electric Cooperative CEO Doug Tracy (left) and Vice President Keith Stone

BEEFY WIN FOR A MISSOURI CO-OP

By Victoria A. Rocha

When Missouri's Cuivre River Electric Cooperative threw its hat into the ring to serve an \$800 million meatpacking plant with an estimated annual economic impact of \$1 billion, it faced stiff competition.

Also vying for the chance to serve American Heartland Packing, a state-of-the-art 775,000-square-foot facility with the potential to provide more than 1,300 jobs, was an investor-owned utility based in St. Louis.

"Nobody had ever beaten an IOU in Missouri for such a large load competing against an investor-owned utility," says Doug Tracy, president/CEO of the Troy-based co-op, of the bidding campaign that began in June 2021.

But the co-op got the job. In July 2022, American Foods Group selected Cuivre River EC to serve its subsidiary, American Heartland Packing, both during the current construction phase and when it becomes fully operational in January 2025. The facility will be three times bigger than the co-op's largest commercial load and will be one of the largest served by generation and transmission co-op Associated Electric Cooperative in Springfield.

Cuivre River EC's "Triple R" approach of rates, reliability and relationships prevailed despite the IOU's deeper pockets and ability to offer discounts to potential commercial customers through Missouri's Public Service Commission. "Our rates are pretty competitive,

but IOUs can offer these economic incentive rates to get large loads," Tracy says.

The co-op's small size proved to be an advantage. "When we started the process, I gave my board a basketball analogy," Tracy says. "When you're up against a team that's really tall and really big, the way you beat that is through speed. You do things they can't do."

When developers requested temporary electric service at the site, Cuivre River EC jumped into action to build a substation and a 61-kilovolt transmission line to serve the project before the company's deadline.

"It was almost like a challenge, and they wanted to see what we were capable of," says Keith Stone, Cuivre River EC's vice president of economic development and corporate services.

And as for the final "R," the co-op "hit the relationship and service side of things really, really hard," Tracy says.

During the bidding process, the co-op and the plant's owner, American Foods Group, a family-run company based in Green Bay, Wisconsin, discovered their work and community cultures went hand in hand.

"We talked about how we work out here, our kids go to school out here, and we go to church here," Tracy says. "We've been involved with the community forever. The cooperative model will sell itself if we just tell the story." **RE**

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CO-OP FORUM

THIS MONTH'S QUESTION:

How does focusing on diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) help a cooperative?



GARY RAY

CEO
Jones-Onslow EMC
Jacksonville, North Carolina

SIZE
80,287 meters

CO-OP WEBSITE
joemc.com

ANSWER

In our cooperative, diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) are not just buzzwords but integral to our identity. Co-op principle #1, voluntary and open membership, embodies our commitment to embracing everyone in our communities without bias. Introducing DEI is a profound stride toward a workplace where everyone is valued. Championed by our leadership, from the board of directors to senior staff, DEI seamlessly integrates into our strategic plan, driven by a clear vision and mission. Beyond business benefits, DEI is about doing what's right. Our policies foster a workplace where respect knows no bounds—regardless of race, gender, age, sexual orientation, disability or financial situation. This leads to better choices and cultivates an intelligent team through diverse collaboration. Our workforce, reflective of our community's diversity, understands and meets member needs. The environment we've cultivated encourages diverse perspectives, fueling innovation. Our DEI policy enhances our appeal, attracting and retaining a broader talent pool. Strengthening ties with communities garners support, solidifying our positive reputation. In embracing DEI, we lead with purpose. Benefits of embracing DEI:

- Increased employee engagement and morale
- Employees feel valued and included.
- Enhanced customer relationships
- Workforce better understands member needs.
- Innovation and adaptability
- Diverse perspectives facilitate creative thinking.
- Talent attraction/retention
- Appeal to a broader talent pool.
- Community relations
- Earn support from a diverse set of stakeholders.



GARY MILLER

President and CEO
GreyStone Power Corp.
Hiram, Georgia

SIZE
144,196 meters

CO-OP WEBSITE
greystonepower.com

ANSWER

When you have a company culture that promotes diverse perspectives, employees feel valued, you have better collaboration, and diverse teams make better decisions. Having an inclusive environment also strengthens employees' commitment to the team. At GreyStone, we feel united in our mission of making life better in the communities we serve. I think our leadership team is very well-equipped to handle many of the challenges that co-ops face today in part because our team is made up of leaders with diverse perspectives and backgrounds. We felt that our senior management needed to reflect the diversity of the members in our service area. As part of our talent management efforts, we established the Leadership GreyStone program. This program was developed to train high performers with leadership potential. We've had quite a few employees go through the program and then be promoted or transferred to other departments, with a few joining our leadership team over the past five or so years. Through this program, our leadership team is becoming more diverse as we're developing and advancing employees based on their abilities. In my view, cultivating a company culture that supports diversity and inclusion really goes back to the cooperative principles. We know that membership in a cooperative is open to all people, regardless of race, religion, gender or economic circumstances. Building a diverse team is a reflection of those co-op values.



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THIS MONTH'S QUESTION:

How does focusing on diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) help a cooperative?



SONJA COX

President and CEO
Southern Maryland EC
Hughesville, Maryland

SIZE

172,942 meters

CO-OP WEBSITE

smeco.coop

ANSWER

I believe that having a focus on DEI makes our workforce stronger. Diverse points of view and persons from different backgrounds and experiences bring healthy debate, better ideas and a more collaborative workplace. We recognize and appreciate the differences each of our team members bring to the cooperative. In 2020, we recognized that we had some issues as an organization when it came to DEI. As a result, we created a Minority Task force initially to get the input specifically from our minority employees. We have since broadened it and titled it the Diversity and Inclusion task force to help us understand where we needed to do a better job with DEI. Beginning in 2023, when conducting interviews, we included at least one question on diversity, equity and inclusion. We also have events to celebrate the various heritage months. This allows us to educate others about the history and the contributions people with different backgrounds have made to society. In the past, during some of these celebrations, we have had individuals bring in dishes of their heritage, and our employees were able to share these and ask questions about other cultures. I believe that every employee should feel included and believe that their point of view matters. When employees feel included, they are happier in their job. It is my hope that happy and fulfilled employees will stay with the cooperative into the future.



DESIREE DUNHAM

Workforce Programs Mgr.
NRECA
Arlington, Virginia

CO-OP TYPE

National association

CO-OP WEBSITE

cooperative.com

ANSWER

As organizations are faced with challenges attracting and retaining talent, embracing DEI is another way to demonstrate that our employees are our most valuable asset, which can be a competitive advantage. DEI should not be thought of as a single program with a start and an end date. In fact, it is an ongoing journey that should evolve over time and be embedded in our culture, programs and practices. While cooperatives might feel hindered because of location or size, the Center for Energy Workforce Development published a Roadmap for Industry Change that encourages companies to look for ideas and opportunities to implement diversity. It was developed with the understanding of the need to shift the perception of the industry, the shortage of workers and that a diverse workforce leads to better outcomes. Cooperatives are already implementing initiatives that are not always labeled as DEI. Remember to not get caught up in the term. Keep the principle and goals of DEI in the forefront so potential candidates and current employees understand that the cooperative values all employees from recruitment to retention. Ultimately, focusing on DEI is indicative of a commitment to building, recognizing and respecting an inclusive workplace. **RE**



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BEHIND THE SCENES



‘POSITIONING AS AN AGGREGATOR’

Central Electric reshapes business plan to fit the changing industry

By Derrill Holly

Central Electric Power Cooperative is reshaping its business plan to help meet the current and future energy needs of its 20 distribution co-op members in South Carolina.

The generation and transmission cooperative is using long-term power purchase contracts, developing renewable energy projects, upgrading its demand response programs and helping member co-ops design rate plans that give consumers more control over how and when they use electricity.

“We are positioning ourselves as an aggregator to help meet the wholesale power needs of our 20 member cooperatives,” says Robert Hochstetler, president and CEO of the Columbia-based G&T. “We’re focusing our investments on smaller projects like utility-scale solar and battery storage and looking at purchase power agreements, which don’t include large investments in new baseload generation.”

“WE KNOW THERE’S GOING TO BE NEWER TECHNOLOGY, AND WE WANT TO BE POSITIONED TO GIVE CO-OP MEMBERS THAT FLEXIBILITY.”

— Cole Price, SVP, Central Electric Power Cooperative



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STORIES THAT SHOW WHAT MAKES ELECTRIC CO-OPS SPECIAL



South Carolina's Central Electric Power Cooperative has contracted for output from Santee Cooper's Cherokee County Cogeneration Plant in Gaffney.

Those changes also include supporting efforts by its state-owned wholesale power supplier, Santee Cooper, to diversify its portfolio with the acquisition of the Cherokee County Cogeneration Plant facility in Gaffney, South Carolina. An agreement to share output from the 98-megawatt natural-gas-based facility was finalized in November, clearing the way for the \$17 million purchase. The 25-year-old plant previously served Santee Cooper under a power purchase agreement.

"As we performed our due diligence with Santee Cooper, it became clear this resource would provide an immediate boost to the reliability of our system while also helping to keep electric rates competitive," says Hochstetler.

The G&T's directors cited several benefits, including a 50% reduction in carbon dioxide emissions compared to coal generation and opportunities to control wholesale power costs. They also examined improvements to extend the plant's productive life and considered Santee Cooper's tax-exempt status as a factor controlling overall wholesale power costs.

"It takes a long time to build power plants," says Cole Price, Central Electric's senior vice president of member services. "We can keep our balance sheet tighter and smaller by investing in Santee Cooper projects through partnerships."

Although Central Electric's member co-ops avoided major disruptions during Winter Storm Elliott in December 2022, an increase in extreme weather events remains a concern. The G&T is also preparing for the uncertain impact on near-term electricity demand as more consumers and businesses add electric vehicle charging to their systems.

Central Electric is pursuing development of tools designed to add residential solar and energy storage. It has also upgraded its demand response program with a goal of increasing its overall peak-shaving ability from the current 125 MW to as much as 300 MW.

New features now available or under development will allow consumers to use various devices to control HVAC systems, water heaters and irrigation and to shift the timing of power-intensive activities like EV charging outside of peak demand periods.

"Mid-Carolina Electric Cooperative in Lexington has developed a three-part rate that allows members to look at costs for vehicle charging at different times. Their members can select the charging period that best fits their needs at a cost they are willing to pay," says Price. "We've run EV-related pilots, and we're developing a full-blown program to roll that out [to other member co-ops]. We know there's going to be newer technology, and we want to be positioned to give co-op members that flexibility."

Central Electric authorized development of up to 5 MW of community solar at 21 sites proposed by its member co-ops. The G&T also has a power purchase agreement for 150 MW of utility-scale, investor-owned solar in South Carolina's Orangeburg County commissioned last year. The co-op also buys solar output from Volvo, which has solar arrays designed to produce 8.5 MW of power in Ridgeville.

"A lot of our focus is on partnerships and contractual opportunities in South Carolina or surrounding states," says Hochstetler. "These projects are not only an important part of our nation's changing energy dynamic, they are also key to economic growth in the state and offer achievable approaches to meeting growing demand in a timeframe that saves co-ops money and helps keep power reliably flowing to their members." **RE**



Photos courtesy Santee Cooper (top-left) and Central Electric Power Cooperative

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‘ALL THOSE EYES ON YOU’

FORMER YLC SPOKESPEOPLE LOOK BACK AT THE EXPERIENCE AND THE IMPACT

By Victoria A. Rocha



2017 YLC Spokesperson Sylandi Brown

As a student at a small high school in Texas, Kade McAdams did a lot of public speaking, performing in one-act plays and participating in the speech and debate clubs.

But speaking in front of thousands of people on a big stage at NRECA PowerXchange? That was a whole other level, he says.

McAdams addressed the 2020 annual meeting in New Orleans as that year's national spokesperson for Youth Leadership Council, a program within the Electric Cooperative Youth Tour that selects 44 delegates to represent their states on a national level.

"I was fairly comfortable with public speaking, but this was mind-blowing," says McAdams, now 21. "To have all those eyes on you, with the lights and music ... it was pretty nerve-wracking. The experience blew all my expectations out of the water. But it definitely strengthened my confidence and provided me with additional leadership skills I have used in my journey the past four years."

As national ambassadors for electric cooperatives, McAdams and other YLC spokespersons say they came away from their experience transformed, with a broader worldview, new connections and more confi-

NRECA photos

dence and motivation. Many find themselves pursuing interests and careers that they'd never considered before.

"You're talking to 8,000 people from all across America, from all sorts of backgrounds, and it opens doors," says NRECA Director of Political Affairs Pat Ahearn. "And there's even more opportunities when you get to be a national spokesperson. They take advantage of every opportunity that presents itself because you never know what's going to happen."

The road from rural America to the national stage starts with Youth Tour applications at the local co-op. Those selected to go on the June trip to D.C. can apply to be that year's YLC representative for their state and are chosen in a variety of ways.

In November and December, YLC members deliver 5-to-7-minute speeches at their statewide and local co-op about their Youth Tour experience and their inspiration for applying. Videos of those speeches are then sent to NRECA, and a panel of judges watch all 44 and choose a spokesperson to present at the following year's PowerXchange conference.

In feedback, past "YLCsters," as they're called, have said that one of the program's biggest strengths is the access to a like-minded cohort of young people.

"They're all high achievers and very involved and passionate people," says NRECA Youth Programs and Training Manager Beth Knudson. "And a lot of them are in their small towns, and they just don't really experience people who think like them or place the same importance on the things they do."

The spokesperson will also give the speech several times the following year, at Youth Tour and sometimes at their co-op's or statewide's annual meeting.

Youth Tour and YLC are "a way for co-ops to give the best and brightest from some of the nation's most rural areas an opportunity they might not have at any other time," says NRECA Arkansas Director Mel Coleman, a longtime advocate of cooperative youth programs. "The inspiration goes both ways, from them to us and from us to them. It's one of the greatest things we as co-ops do."

What follows are the stories of five former YLC national spokespersons and how the experience shaped their lives.

WHAT IS THE YLC?

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★
BY CALE MCCALL



NRECA's Youth Leadership Council aims to give the 44 delegates (one from each state participating in the Electric Cooperative Youth Tour) a holistic picture of the electric cooperative industry while developing their leadership qualities.

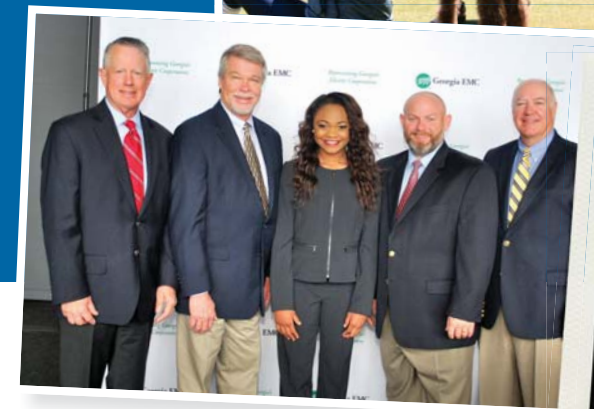
The journey to becoming a YLC member varies by state. Some hold essay contests, some have applicants give speeches, and some hold interviews, but all look for a leader who will represent their state well on the national level.

Once selected, delegates engage in a year of service in their communities in activities including:

- Joining virtual meetings to hear from leaders on key issues.
- Working with NRECA's Co-ops Vote program to promote civic engagement in their community.
- Partnering with their sponsoring co-op to complete a Co-op Month project in October.
- Delivering a speech to their sponsoring co-op's board of directors.
- Attending NRECA's PowerXchange and TechAdvantage/Expo to assist with breakout sessions; work at NRECA's booth in the Expo Hall; join Touchstone Energy® Cooperative for its community service projects; and introduce themselves to PowerXchange attendees during the second general session.

During this year's Youth Tour in June, for the first time in five years, all YLC delegates will gather for the event's Youth Day program.

"We're excited to have every state back in the same room for Youth Day," says NRECA Youth Programs and Training Manager Beth Knudson. "It's going to be something special for YLC delegates to introduce themselves to a group of over 2,000 people."



SYLANDI BROWN, 25 2017 YLC SPOKESPERSON

NRECA annual meeting location: San Diego, California
Sponsoring co-op: Middle Georgia EMC, Vienna, Georgia
Where is she now? Communications manager, U.S. Overseas Cooperative Development Council, International Cooperative Research Group

For Sylandi Brown, the chance to address a crowd of thousands in San Diego fueled “a dual passion for communications and cooperatives that changed my trajectory.” In fact, when Brown started at Valdosta State University in Valdosta, Georgia, she immediately switched her major from middle grades education to communication.

Co-op sponsor Middle Georgia EMC hired Brown right out of college as its first marketing and communications specialist. “During her interview, she said, ‘I’ve seen the difference that co-ops have made in their communities. I want to be a part of that,’” says Chipper Jones, the co-op’s manager of member services. “After that, we just had to create a position for her. It wasn’t even a question.” Brown worked at the co-op, Georgia’s smallest, for two years until 2022. From there, she joined the D.C.-based U.S. Overseas Cooperative Development Council and has spoken about cooperatives in several countries, including France, Kenya and South Korea.

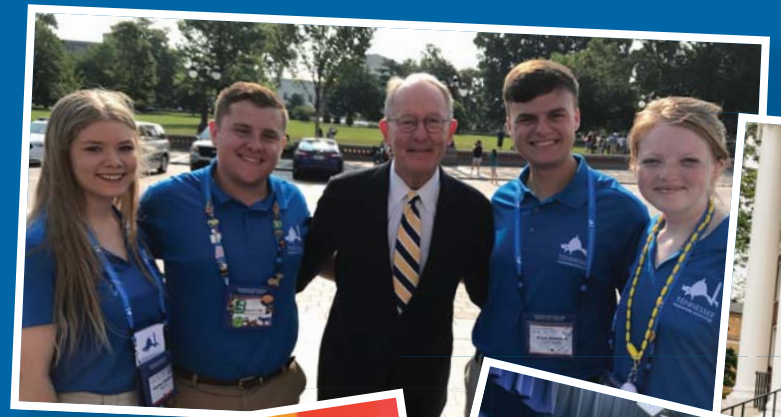
Brown’s career has taken her around the world, but that doesn’t diminish her embrace of the seventh cooperative principle, Concern for Community.

“It’s very important to me that I remain involved in my community, because change starts at the local level,” she says.

Because she works remotely from her home in Hawkinsville, she’s able to engage in civic activities. She was recently elected chair of the Hawkinsville-Pulaski County Chamber of Commerce and also serves on the Middle Georgia Regional Commission Council. In 2023, she was appointed to serve a partial term on the local school board. Later this year when her term expires, she plans to run for a full term.

“I’m also passionate about encouraging young women to run for office,” she says. “What better way to use your voice than having a seat at the table where decisions are being made?”

All photos courtesy Sylandi Brown



AARON LAY, 23 2018 YLC SPOKESPERSON

NRECA annual meeting location: Nashville, Tennessee
Sponsoring co-op: Fort Loudoun Electric Cooperative, Vonore, Tennessee
Where is he now? Harvard Law School, class of 2026

Nearly six years later, Aaron Lay says he still regularly reflects on the impact of his Youth Tour experience. Program organizers, he says, “poured an immense amount of resources, support and encouragement my way, and I returned home a much more confident, passionate and motivated person.” Also transformative, he says, was exposure to other high achievers, who, like him, aspired “to be productive contributors within our communities. It was very empowering for us all to get together.”

Lay returned home with a newfound passion for improving rural America through government and policy. At Tennessee Tech University, he was student body president, an intern for Rep. John Rose, R-Tenn., a volunteer on a U.S. Senate campaign and a researcher for a rural county mayor. In between college and law school, he married his high school sweetheart, Madison, and worked in rural economic development for the Upper Cumberland Region of Tennessee.

“We were grants administrators, and we’d help rural communities use federal and state dollars to improve

All photos courtesy Aaron Lay

their infrastructure to then market properties to potential industrial partners,” he says.

Helping improve the economic well-being of rural communities, as well as energy, infrastructure and real estate are areas of interest “as I approach extracurricular and summer opportunities,” he said.

“Whether it’s in a large firm or as general counsel ... I really want to be at a place where they’re using their resources to advance the interests of rural America, whether that’s supporting them hand in hand in the communities or from afar.”

Fort Loudoun EC Corporate Services Specialist Amy Kirkland has no doubt that Lay has a bright future.

“We’re so very proud,” she says. “When he applied, I was struck by his ability to relate to students and adults, which is not something you find in a 16- or 17-year-old. He’s such a hard worker, and he has an amazing talent, especially for public speaking.”



WALLACE "BUBBA" BASS, 23 2019 YLC SPOKESPERSON

NRECA annual meeting location: Orlando, Florida
Sponsoring co-op: Central Electric Power Association, Carthage, Mississippi
Where is he now? Tuskegee University, class of 2024

During Wallace "Bubba" Bass's initial Youth Tour interview, he told co-op officials that he wanted to be a politician.

"We could definitely see that," recalls Jessica Patterson, Central EPA's youth leadership program coordinator. "He has a gift for public speaking along with a phenomenal personality. He's never met a stranger."

After Bass made his speech at the NRECA annual meeting in Orlando, "people came up to me saying, 'Man, you should run for office,' or 'I would invest in your campaign.'"

Bass, though, has his sights on an engineering career, mixed in with public speaking and leadership. As a mechanical engineering major at Tuskegee University in Alabama, he's heavily involved in engineering societies and student leadership organizations. Recently, he was named to the Tuskegee President's Men and Women Leadership Program, a prestigious

yearlong experiential program in which students work directly with the HBCU's president. Certified in robot operations through Nissan North America, Bass wants to run an engineering, architecture and construction firm.

If Bass does return to the stage, he says he'll continue to pay tribute to his great-grandfather, John Watson Selmon, a sharecropper whose work ethic and quiet sense of self and strength captivated him growing up. In Bass's annual meeting speech, a pair of Selmon's old shoes symbolize hard work and hopes for his great-grandchildren.

"If he had the resources and opportunities that I have today, he would probably be a lot further in life than the cards he was dealt," he says. "I was dealt the better hand, so I'm just trying to fill those shoes."

All photos courtesy Wallace "Bubba" Bass



KADE MCADAMS, 21 2020 YLC SPOKESPERSON

NRECA annual meeting location: New Orleans, Louisiana
Sponsoring co-op: Tri-County Electric Cooperative, Aledo, Texas
Where is he now? Texas A&M University, class of 2024

Kade McAdams's YLC speech at the 2020 annual meeting in New Orleans was a can't-miss moment. That's when the Texan serenaded the crowd with snippets from country songs. Although the business and pre-med student is "not a singer by any means," he says that moment "forced me outside my comfort zone."

"The national spokesperson spot was a massive growth opportunity," he says. "It significantly boosted my confidence and faith in my own abilities to go out and do things that I'm not comfortable with."

That also includes attending one of the largest undergraduate schools in the country after being one of just 35 graduates in his high school class. The YLC experience stoked McAdams's desire to seek out leadership roles in student government and on- and off-campus pre-medical groups, including Global Medical Brigades, in which students help organize health clinics

All photos courtesy Kade McAdams

in developing countries. In addition, he has served as a peer leader, an organic chemistry tutor and a member of Texas A&M's club tennis team.

That breadth of accomplishments doesn't surprise TCEC's Annie Watson, also a Youth Tour alum.

"His application was the first to arrive. I was reading it, and I was so excited that I ran into our CEO's office, and I said, 'This is our Texas Youth Leadership Council representative right here!'"

McAdams says he wants to make a difference in the dire shortage of reliable, accessible health care in the country's rural communities as a family doctor.

"Of course, a lot could change over time, but no matter what type of medicine I practice, I know for sure that I want to play a role in expanding access to care for people."



RUKAYA ALRUBAYE, 18

2023 YLC SPOKESPERSON

NRECA annual meeting location: Nashville, Tennessee
Sponsoring co-op: Ozarks Electric Cooperative, Fayetteville, Arkansas
Where is she now? B.A./M.D. Program, University of Missouri-Kansas City School of Medicine, Class of 2029

Rukaya Alrubaye has already lived several lifetimes since her family’s escape from Iraq to Fayetteville, Arkansas, aided by a U.S. military officer—a journey she described in her riveting speech in Nashville last year. Since then, life has been a whirlwind for the 18-year-old.

In a span of six months, she went to the White House for a bill-signing, graduated high school in Fayetteville, moved to Kansas City, Missouri, to start medical school, and has been invited to speak at several functions—all while dealing with long-haul COVID, a battle that’s included numerous rounds of doctor and ER visits and two hospitalizations. The White House event and high school graduation took place all within one week.

“On Saturday, NRECA CEO Jim Matheson reached out to me. On Sunday, we were booking flights and hotels, and on Monday we flew out. Tuesday was the event. Wednesday I returned home. And Thursday was high school graduation. It was crazy.”

Today, Alrubaye lives in Liberty, Missouri, about 30 minutes from Kansas City, with her younger brother,

a high schooler and aspiring Youth Tour delegate who moved with her to help her manage her health challenges.

Alrubaye’s ultimate career goal is to be a surgeon, but she also wants to continue public speaking after realizing that her words had “the power to bring so many people together.”

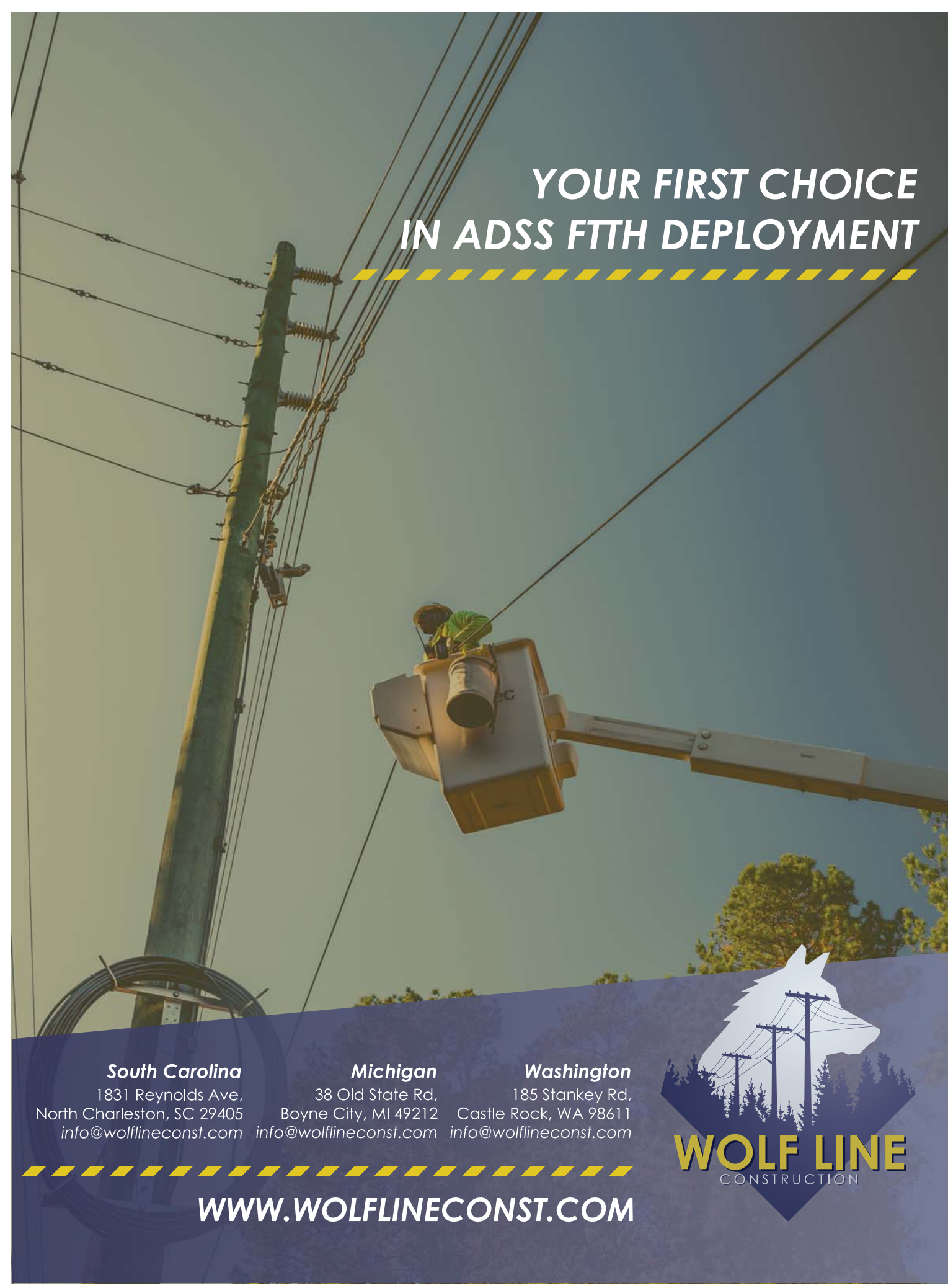
After the annual meeting speech, “people came up to me with tears in their eyes, saying they found my story inspiring and saying they wanted to commit acts of kindness in their communities. It really was shocking and heartwarming, and I’ll always cherish those connections.”

Alrubaye has that effect on people, says J.D. Lowery, community and economic development manager for the Electric Cooperatives of Arkansas.

“She’s just fantastic. She makes adults wonder, ‘What am I doing with my life?’ Some people just have the capacity to do all of these things, and she’s one of them.” **RE**

All photos courtesy Rukaya Alrubaye

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2024 PowerXchange

What to expect this year in San Antonio

By Victoria A. Rocha

The last time electric cooperatives met in San Antonio, Texas, for NRECA's annual meeting, it was 1945 and World War II had just ended. Co-ops were in their infancy, and it was just the third annual meeting for the association.

Nearly 80 years later, co-ops will return to the Alamo City March 1-6 for NRECA PowerXchange to conduct association business and discuss challenges and opportunities amid a transforming electric utility industry. All pre-conference courses and events will take place at the Henry B. Gonzalez Convention Center near the city's famed River Walk.

"Co-ops Keep the Lights On" is the theme of 2024 PowerXchange, and co-op leaders and directors will have opportunities to share ideas, strategies and

leading practices on industry issues.

"From turning on the first lightbulb in rural America to powering the data farms of today, electric cooperatives have been providing light, comfort and access to our communities for decades," says Erin Pressley, NRECA's senior vice president for Education, Training and Events. "We're returning to San Antonio to recognize how far we've come and to celebrate the growth and resilience of our industry in spite of some critical challenges to our future."

Participants will notice more collaborative experiences between PowerXchange and TechAdvantage. The changes this year include:

- One mobile app and program guide for both events, making it easier for attendees to navigate the convention center and the Expo.
- A combined closing general session on future technologies and 10 crossover education sessions on topics critical to the cooperative industry.
- The Welcome Happy Hour, NRECA International Lunch and Entertainment Night will be available to attendees from both events.
- Meals for both events will be combined, delivering more networking opportunities for attendees.

Photo by Allan Baxter/Getty Images

- Youth Leadership Council delegates will "be more visible than ever" this year as they take on roles as ambassadors and breakout session assistants, among other duties, says Beth Knudson, NRECA's youth programs and training manager.

BUSINESS MEETING

The annual member business meeting will be on March 5. Voting delegates from each NRECA voting member system will have the opportunity to vote on proposed member resolutions forwarded by the NRECA Member Standing Committees and National Resolutions Committee. Voting members should have received the 2024 Proposed Member Resolutions via email in late January. The National Resolutions Committee will host a proposed resolutions forum at 4 p.m. March 3 to answer questions.

GENERAL SESSION SPEAKERS

NRECA CEO Jim Matheson will address participants at the March 4 opening general session and welcome keynote speaker Liv Boeree, a British science communicator, television presenter and former professional poker player. In "Poker Thinking Applied to Business and Life," she will discuss how techniques and tricks used by top poker players can be applied to decision-making amid times of uncertainty.

On March 5, NRECA will introduce the 44 members of the Youth Leadership Council, and the YLC spokesperson will address the meeting. NRECA President Tony Anderson will also take the stage, as well as Touchstone Energy® Cooperative Executive Director Jana Adams and Touchstone Energy President Tim McCarthy, CEO of Sioux Valley Energy. Baseball legend and retired Baltimore Oriole shortstop and third baseman Cal Ripken Jr. will give the keynote presentation, "Just Show Up: And Other Enduring Values from Baseball's Iron Man," and reflect on his experience setting the record for most consecutive games played (2,632).

Mike Walsh, founder and CEO of Tomorrow, will be the third general session speaker on March 6. In "Thriving in an Age of Accelerating Technology," he will provide insights on what companies, technologies

and global forces are shaping the age of machine intelligence and discuss how business leaders can redesign their organizations, reimagine their roles and reinvent the way they make decisions.

BREAKOUT SESSIONS

This year, 19 breakout sessions will take place March 4 and 5. Speakers will discuss a range of industry topics, including the board's role in reliability; resilience in a changing environment; the future of work and how to adapt; artificial intelligence; preparing for natural disasters; and the latest federal funding programs.

A March 5 breakout for women in power will feature Joy Ditto, former president and CEO of American Public Power Association, on a panel that will include co-op leaders. A reception will immediately follow.

ENTERTAINMENT NIGHT

Country and gospel singer and songwriter Josh Turner will perform on March 5. Tickets are still available.

OTHER ACTIVITIES

The NRECA International Lunch sponsored by CoBank will take place March 4 and will feature a panel on the burgeoning electric co-op movement in sub-Saharan Africa and American co-ops' role. The America's Electric Cooperatives PAC breakfast is set for March 5. Tickets are required for both events.

COMMUNITY SERVICE OPPORTUNITIES

This year, Touchstone Energy is sponsoring three community service events in partnership with Veteran's Last Patrol (March 4), Meals of Hope (March 5) and Operation Gratitude (March 6). Participants must sign up ahead of time during PowerXchange registration for 30-minute time slots for the March 5 and 6 activities.

Visit the NRECA PowerXchange conference webpage on cooperative.com for more details and registration information. [RE](#)

2024 PowerXchange Schedule

FRIDAY, MARCH 1

8:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.
Pre-Meeting Education

SATURDAY, MARCH 2

8:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.
Pre-Meeting Education

SUNDAY, MARCH 3

8:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.
Pre-Meeting Education

7:00 a.m. – 6:00 p.m.
NRECA Registration

10:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.
NISC Annual Meeting

2:00 p.m. – 3:30 p.m.
NRTC Annual Meeting

4:00 p.m. – 5:00 p.m.
Proposed Resolutions Forum

5:00 p.m. – 6:00 p.m.
Welcome Happy Hour

MONDAY, MARCH 4

7:00 a.m. – 8:30 a.m.
Breakfast

7:00 a.m. – 6:00 p.m.
NRECA Registration

9:00 a.m. – 10:30 a.m.
Opening General Session

11:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.
Breakout Sessions

12:00 p.m. – 2:00 p.m.
Lunch

12:15 p.m. – 1:45 p.m.
NRECA International Lunch

2:00 p.m. – 3:00 p.m.
Breakout Sessions

3:30 p.m. – 4:30 p.m.
Breakout Sessions

4:45 p.m. – 7:00 p.m.
Expo Grand Opening Reception

TUESDAY, MARCH 5

7:00 a.m. – 8:30 a.m.
America's Electric Cooperatives PAC Breakfast

7:00 a.m. – 8:30 a.m.
Coffee and light breakfast

7:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.
NRECA Registration

9:00 a.m. – 10:45 a.m.
General Session 2

11:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.
NRECA Annual Member Business Meeting

11:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.
Expo Open

11:30 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.
Lunch

1:00 p.m. – 2:00 p.m.
Breakout Sessions

2:30 p.m. – 3:30 p.m.
Breakout Sessions

3:30 p.m. – 4:30 p.m.
Women in Power Reception

7:30 p.m. – 9:30 p.m.
Entertainment Night
(Doors open at 7:00 p.m.)

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 6

7:00 a.m. – 8:30 a.m.
Coffee and light breakfast

7:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.
NRECA Registration

9:00 a.m. – 10:30 a.m.
Closing General Session

10:30 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.
Expo Open

11:15 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.
Lunch



Bedias, Texas,

AND KNOWING THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN NEIGHBORS AND NEIGHBORLY.

Pride. It comes natural for Texans about their towns, that special strand written into their state's DNA. The low-key town of Bedias (pop. 471) is all about pride. Of the 3,300 or so towns across the great state of Texas, it's the one renowned for knitting the very first Lone Star flag. But symbols and folklore can only go so far. Here in Bedias, something runs deeper. Something you can't see, but you sure can feel.

The sun wakes up every morning at the Pit Stop, the café where the stories are as hearty as the biscuits sopping up country gravy. Fishermen don't flinch at bushwhacking through thickets and trudging through molasses-like mud to the all-natural lake when they are itching to land prized white bass. Generations congregate at the Civic Center, the Bedias epicenter of bake sales, women's club gatherings, tributes to veterans and live auctions supporting folks who've fallen on hard times. It's true. This town practically rains Samaritans, ready and raring to help out in a flash. That's the way it should be. Things are indeed bigger in Texas. Here in Bedias, it's their hearts.



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2024 NRECA PowerXchange & TechAdvantage

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2024 TechAdvantage

The latest industry technologies, solutions and practices

By Derrill Holly

This year's TechAdvantage in San Antonio, Texas, will offer electric cooperative decision-makers opportunities to delve into the latest technologies, solutions and practices to serve their members more effectively and respond to the industry's most pressing challenges.

The March 3-6 event at the Henry B. Gonzalez Convention Center, which runs concurrently with NRECA PowerXchange, will feature more than 70 breakout sessions designed to arm attendees with technology, tools, insights and real-world solutions they need to provide reliable, resilient and affordable power to members.

General sessions will focus mainly on operational and management challenges.

On March 4, Phil Gwoke, from the personnel consulting firm Bridgeworks, will discuss the goals and expectations of millennial and Generation Z employees and offer insights into communications techniques, leadership and management styles.

In the March 6 combined closing general session with PowerXchange, futurist Mike Walsh, CEO of Tomorrow

Photo by Michael Lynch, NRECA

consultancy, will help take some of the uncertainty out of artificial intelligence and its applications in today's workplace.

"His focus will help today's managers understand new and emerging technologies and how they can be harnessed to help maximize human potential," says Alison Kent, NRECA education program manager.

IEEE

Once again, the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers is partnering with TechAdvantage, and several of the top presenters from IEEE's 2023 Rural Electric Power Conference in Cleveland will be featured on the TechAdvantage stage.

"Our industry is constantly evolving, presenting new challenges and opportunities for electric cooperatives," says Kent. "Our dozens of breakout sessions—along with pre-conference workshops—arm attendees with the tools and information to adapt and plan to meet these challenges head-on."

During those breakout sessions, attendees will also gain understanding of the roles that broadband, cybersecurity and electric vehicles are now playing in co-op operations, and they'll learn about new and emerging technologies that can help control costs, predict system risks during weather events and improve restorations.

PEER-TO-PEER

In addition to a number of networking opportunities, 2024 TechAdvantage features peer-to-peer discussions where ideas, questions and challenges can be shared in an unfiltered environment.

"Open discussions among engineers, operations professionals, IT professionals and supply chain managers provide opportunities to share ideas and learn fresh approaches to the issues co-ops are dealing with in real-time," says Kent.

THE EXPO

The popular Expo at PowerXchange and TechAdvantage will feature more than 440 vendors filling some 100,000 square feet of exhibit space. Many of the products and services on display offer solutions

designed to work within the co-ops' operational structures and enhance and extend the value of their existing processes and assets.

"Senior co-op staff and technical professionals will get a lot of valuable information at the Expo," says Eric Commodore, NRECA's director of meetings and events. "As co-ops are called upon to provide new services and members gain more direct control of how they use electricity and new digital technologies, knowing what will work best for your members is crucial to our future success. The Expo at PowerXchange and TechAdvantage is a great place to get started."

EVENT REGISTRATION

Online conference registration is available until March 4, and participants can sign up on-site through March 6. [RE](#)

“AS CO-OPS ARE CALLED UPON TO PROVIDE NEW SERVICES AND MEMBERS GAIN MORE DIRECT CONTROL OF HOW THEY USE ELECTRICITY AND NEW DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES, KNOWING WHAT WILL WORK BEST FOR YOUR MEMBERS IS CRUCIAL TO OUR FUTURE SUCCESS. THE EXPO AT POWERXCHANGE AND TECHADVANTAGE IS A GREAT PLACE TO GET STARTED.”

— Eric Commodore, Director of Meetings and Events, NRECA

2024 TechAdvantage Schedule

SUNDAY, MARCH 3

8:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.

Leading Today - Invigorate Employee Performance Through Situational Leadership

8:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.

- Contract and Procurement Fraud
- Essence Cyber OT Monitoring Technology Suite Masterclass
- Introduction to System Integration Fundamentals and the MultiSpeak Specification
- Navigating the EV Transition: Tools and Strategies for Electric Cooperatives

1:00 p.m. – 5:00 p.m.

- Inverter-Based DER Interconnections
- Win Federal Infrastructure Funding: How to Create and Perfect your Project Concept Paper
- How to Make Sure You Get the Software Interface You Need – Leveraging MultiSpeak Artifacts to Create Testable Requirements
- Shared User Forum on Applied Data Analytics

MONDAY, MARCH 4

8:00 a.m. – 9:15 a.m.

Navigating Generational Shifts in the Modern Workplace

9:45 a.m. – 10:45 a.m.

- IT Peer to Peer, Part 1
- Conducting a Comprehensive Load Shed Tabletop (Proactive to Lessons Learned)
- Microgrids as a Non-Wires Alternative (NWA) for Distribution System Resiliency
- Use Cases Enabled by Smart Grid Networks and How to Enable Them
- How DEC Uses Satellite Vegetation Intelligence to Reduce SAIDI and Optimize Operations Costs
- Hard Fought Lessons Learned: Members' Experiences Standing Up and Running Broadband Businesses
- Supply Chain Professionals Peer to Peer, Part 1
- Critical Role for Reliability for Situational Analysis and Analytics

11:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.

- IT Peer to Peer, Part 2
- Leveraging Federal Funding to Improve Co-op Cybersecurity: A Success Story

- EV Managed Charging: Why Now?
- Outsmarting Outages During Extreme Weather Events
- Rose Acre Farms, a Microgrid Implementation Story (An Eggs-celent Adventure)
- IEEE Session: Demand Management Using Dynamic Voltage Reduction at Rural Electric Cooperatives
- Supply Chain Professionals Peer to Peer, Part 2
- Powering Affordable Clean Energy (PACE) Program and Empowering Rural America (New ERA) Program Updates

2:00 p.m. – 3:00 p.m.

- IT/OT Convergence: Risk, Reward, and Automated Response
- Electric Co-ops vs. Ransomware: Comparing Attacks Over Half A Decade
- Developing Cost-Effective EV Managed Charging – Program Design Choices for Utilities
- Predicting Future Adoption of Electric Vehicles and Potential Grid Impacts
- Co-op Internet Service Provider Considerations – Competition and Opportunities for Growth
- Innovative Warehouse and Vehicle Storage Design for Current and Future Demands
- NRECA Cybersecurity Brief
- Introducing the Updated NRECA FEMA Procurement Guide: What You Need to Know

3:30 p.m. – 4:30 p.m.

- Marriage Counseling for IT and OT
- Situational Awareness: Bringing Together Utility, DER, and Third-Party Data
- More Than Just Meter Readings-Improving Member Benefits, Process Efficiency, and Revenue Protection
- The Great Debate: Load Control or Rate Design to Influence Residential EV Charging
- FERC Order 2222 – Are You Ready?
- Navigating the Current Landscape: Electric Utilities and the State of the Supply Chain
- How Automation Can Revolutionize the Cooperative Landscape
- Going with the Flow: Exploring the Value of Flow Batteries to Electric Cooperatives

TUESDAY, MARCH 5

8:30 a.m. – 9:30 a.m.

- Implementing Modern Facility Maintenance Programs and Best Practices
- IEEE Session: Case Studies in Regulator Failures During Single Phase Medium Voltage Bypassing Operations
- Acceptable Use for Generative AI: Where Do AI, Machine Learning, and ChatGPT Fit into Co-ops?
- Identifying Resource Gaps and Effectively Communicating Needs
- The Influence Formula: How to Understand & Increase Your Influence
- Engineering & Operations (EO) Peer to Peer
- Protecting Critical Infrastructure Through Transformer Analytics
- Leveraging Your Broadband for Grid Resiliency, Control of DERs and Migrating to AMI 2.0

9:45 a.m. – 10:45 a.m.

- Emergency Response: Planning is Critical; Agility is Paramount
- Fleet Electrification: Collaboration Between Industry and Electric Cooperatives
- Setting the Standard for IT Collaboration and Shared Services
- Enhance Customer Engagement with Enhanced Data
- 12 MWh Battery Storage System for Peak Reduction
- Using Networked Arrays of Smart Meters to Monitor Distribution Networks
- A Top-Down View: How Drones Can Improve Reliability and Enhance Safety
- Broadband and Safety

11:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.

- A Journey in the Wilderness to Secure Downline Assets
- Where to Focus Your Cooperative's Limited Cybersecurity Budget
- Updating, Streamlining, and Automating Joint Use Processes to Save Your Utility Time and Money
- Using Automated Infrared Monitoring to Reduce Maintenance Costs
- Challenges and Unintended Consequences of Renewable Energy and Future Electrification on the Grid

- Virtual Power Plants: What's All the Buzz About?
- Dairyland Power Cooperative's ERP Journey and Key Learnings
- Rural Hybrid Generation & Microgrids: National Labs are Here to Help

1:00 p.m. – 1:30 p.m.

TechTalks in the TechPark

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1:00 p.m. – 2:00 p.m.

- Natural Disasters: Are You Prepared?
- USDA Updates: The Inflation Reduction Act (IRA), Infrastructure Loans and Rural Energy Savings Program (RESP) and ReConnect
- Demystifying Artificial Intelligence
- Leading Across Generations
- Becoming an Influential Safety Leader

2:00 p.m. – 2:30 p.m.

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2:30 p.m. – 3:30 p.m.

- Women in Power: Finding Your Voice as a Leader
- Innovation Unleashed: Transforming Into a Future-Ready Organization
- Federal Infrastructure Funding: Where We Have Been, Where We Are Going, and Is the Juice Worth the Squeeze?
- Demystifying Artificial Intelligence
- Broadband Evolution: A Comparative Analysis of Fiber Builds Then vs Now

3:00 p.m. – 3:30 p.m.

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WEDNESDAY, MARCH 6

9:00 a.m. – 10:30 a.m.

Thriving in an Age of Accelerating Technology

11:00 a.m. – 11:30 a.m.

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11:45 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.

Wrap Up: Peer-to-Peers in the TechPark

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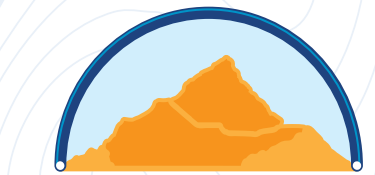
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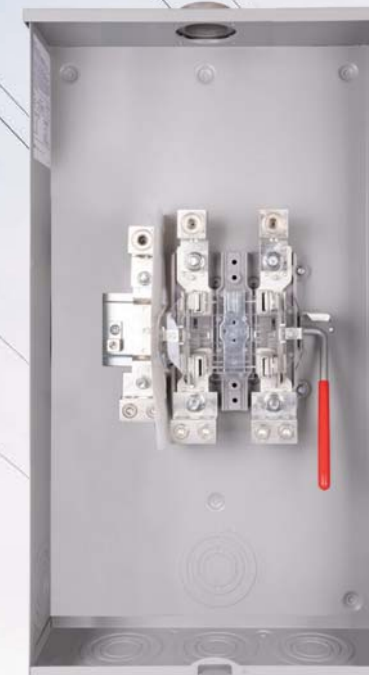
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ERMCO Inc. manufactures a full range of liquid-filled and dry-type transformers and components. As the nation's market leader in low-voltage distribution transformers, ERMCO and its subsidiaries deliver the broadest range of transformers and power solutions for renewable energy, public power, commercial, and industrial markets.

NRECA Service Member

**Ervin Cable Construction
LLC (ECC) 1865**

Paige Malone
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ECC delivers quality turnkey

communication construction services throughout the United States, having constructed over 20,000 miles of fiber-to-the-home in the last year alone. At Ervin Cable Construction, we are continually expanding our capabilities within the industry and provide over 40 years of hard-earned experience.

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ETAP offers an integrated platform to design, operate, and automate smart grids for increased energy efficiency, resiliency, safety, reliability, and compliance, including network analysis, planning, safety and optimization, and advanced distribution management system; microgrid controller and energy management system; and asset and relay settings management system.

**Evans Consoles
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Evans is the global leader of solutions for control room environments. Backed by more than 40 years of experience and thousands of installations, serving 15 industries, it's our experience that makes the difference for our customers.

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Evluma 1110

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Evluma is committed to developing environmentally low-impact LED lighting solutions that are affordable and long lasting. Evluma's high standard of customer service enables a constant feedback stream to their Renton, Wash., facility to create products that meet the needs of the utilities and contractors they work with every day.

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Fast Forward 2049

Dusty Birge
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Fast Forward uses vehicle-mounted camera systems to automate line inspection and patrol of over 30,000 poles per week. For utilities or contractors looking to automate line patrol and documentation, this is the most scalable and economical option for distribution line.

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Federal Pacific 2061

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Fedsprout 901

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Fedsprout's services encompass government proposal writing and government business pipeline development. Our team of experts spans utilities, community benefits, and environmental experts. We've developed proposals for funding opportunities under the Infrastructure and Investment Jobs Act and the Inflation Reduction Act.

**Fiber Broadband
Association 757**

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**Fiber Instrument Sales
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FIS is a manufacturer and full-line distributor of communication fiber optics: test equipment, connectors, cable and cable assemblies, tools and tool kits, fiber-optic consumable products, category 5e and 6 cabling products, active network equipment, and fiber-optic security systems and components.

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Fiber Optic Solutions . . . 2118

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Finley is a full-service, end-to-end engineering consultancy serving both the broadband and energy industries. We provide expertise in communications technology for independent telecom providers, electric co-ops, telecom co-ops, municipalities, large carriers, and government entities.
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Firmatek is the industry leader of drone-based services for electric co-ops with 30 Federal Aviation Administration-certified drone pilots nationwide. Firmatek provides pole and equipment inspections, storm response services,

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As a turnkey network systems integrator, Fujitsu guides co-ops through every stage of the broadband journey, so they're prepared to stand up and run their broadband businesses. We'll make sure co-ops are ready to invest in their communities, offer broadband services, and onboard customers.
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GDS is a multi-service consulting and engineering firm with expertise geared to electric co-ops. Services include power supply planning, rate analysis, load forecasting, transmission, demand-side management and energy efficiency, and other specialized services. GDS includes Hi-Line Engineering and EES Consulting and serves clients nationwide from nine office locations.
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GLDS provides small to mid-sized broadband providers with best-of-suite customer management, billing, and service delivery solutions. Stand-alone and cloud-based platforms offer full customer life-cycle management for fiber-to-the-home, internet, VoIP, IPTV, OTT, and more. GLDS had installed solutions for more than 800 operators in 49 states and 47 countries.
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GreatCo-Ops works with electric cooperatives on strategic planning, risk management, governance, executive search, leadership development, executive coaching, employee surveys, HR consulting, and more. Our clients are leaders and directors of distribution cooperatives, G&Ts, and state-wides across the nation.
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throughout the US

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relationships

250k
miles of fiber
installed

About Us

Headquartered in Nashville TN and operating in over 30 states, ITG Communications is a national full-service fiber construction company, supporting the broadband cable, telecommunications, and Electric Cooperative industries. We provide Design and Engineering, Aerial and Underground Construction, Drop Bury and In-home installation, as well as maintenance and storm restoration.



Our Services

Construction

- Our national services include design and engineering, aerial and underground construction, fiber backhaul, and MDU wiring and emergency maintenance services, including storm restoration services.

Fiber Install

- ITG constructs, upgrades, and maintains FTTx networks spanning short to long distances. Your extensive experience ensures quick responses to service interruptions, solidifying your reputation as a dependable service provider.

Drop Bury

- ITG provides skilled nationwide crews for various tasks like road, driveway, or sidewalk work through burying methods such as boring, plowing, and hand burials.

Fulfillment

- Services include new installations, upgrades, and service calls for residential and commercial locations. We provide a logoed fleet and launch evergreen operations that set us apart from others in the industry.

Maintenance

- Our expert maintenance capabilities help our customers to provide reliable cable and high-speed Internet service to millions of satisfied subscribers.

 itgcomm.com

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GRESKO 1313

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For over 60 years, Gresco has served the utility and electrical supply needs of the Southeast, including cooperatives, investor-owned utilities, municipals, and contractors. Today, we continually expand our product markets to help our customers widen their reach.

Gresham Smith 1756

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Gresham Smith is an architecture, engineering, and design practice. Unique to Gresham Smith is a team of highly skilled utility design, coordination, and inspection staff with more than 30 years of experience working with numerous state departments of transportation as well as municipal, for-profit, and cooperative utility companies throughout the Southeast.

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GridIntel 532

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Electrical transmission and distribution engineering company providing comprehensive customer support, from project conception to design engineering, project management, and construction.

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Gridsight is a data analytics platform purpose-built for utilities. Co-ops use Gridsight to create powerful visualizations with their GIS, smart meter, and internet of things data—driving informed investment decisions (understanding where to prioritize and defer) and more proactive and efficient operations.

NRECA Gold Associate Member

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Groundline USA is a global leader in providing cost-effective and safe overhead solutions and systems, providing resilience and reliability to keep utilities operating effectively. Our engineering consulting services offer co-ops a trusted partner for power line systems, asset management, pole tests, and foundation needs. Stronger, safer, smarter!

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Gunnison companies have 120-plus years of industry experience and vegetation management expertise, combined to better serve our customers. We are an industry-leading provider of tree and vegetation management services. Our companies serve a growing list of sectors, including utility, industrial, government and departments of transportation, residential, and commercial.

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H2scan 659

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H2scan designs and manufactures accurate and robust industrialized hydrogen-sensing solutions for mission-critical applications in support of our climate and the safety of our people. H2scan's sensors provide early warning of transformer maintenance problems so critical systems stay operational.

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Harris Utilities 2035

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Hendrix and Kerite 2038

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Hendrix and Kerite are manufacturers of medium- and high-voltage underground cable from 5 kV to 138 kV, subsea cable, aerial covered cable systems, polyethylene insulators, and molded access. They deliver robust products that enable customers to achieve outstanding system reliability in the most challenging distribution and transmission environments.

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For over 100 years, Hexion has been advancing specialty chemicals and performance materials. To ensure power grid stability in the face of wildfires, Hexion has developed Armor-Built wildfire shield—a durable, burn-prevention safeguard for utility poles.

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Hitachi Energy is a global technology leader that is advancing a sustainable energy future for all. Together with customers and partners, we pioneer technologies and enable the digital transformation required to accelerate the energy transition toward a carbon-neutral future.

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The Utility Products Division of Howard Industries is a leading manufacturer of electrical transmission and distribution equipment. Our products include distribution transformers, power transformers, voltage regulators, switching/sectionalizing cabinets, junction boxes, and transformer components.

Hubbell Utility Solutions 1437

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Huskie Tools 1438

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Huskie Tools was created 50 years ago to meet the demand for better-engineered, longer-lasting, and safer lineworker tools. We are the category leader in providing the energy industry with an unmatched range of products, including battery-powered cutting, crimping, and bending tools, jaws, presses, pumps, dies, manual tools, and the TiiGER pole puller.

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IEEE Power & Energy Society Transmission & Distribution Conference & Exposition 629

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IEEE PES provides the world's largest forum for sharing the latest in technological developments in the electric power industry. The 2024 PES Transmission & Distribution Conferences will be May 6-9 in Anaheim, Calif. This event will showcase the technologies, products, companies, and minds that are leading the change in the power industry.

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IFD Technologies develops distribution transformer sensors that simplify outage troubleshooting, improve system reliability, cut operating costs, and deliver unprecedented safety standards for linemen. With over 2.2 million IFD sensors installed in over 850 utilities since 2001, line crews have come to trust IFD.

IML North America LLC 1359

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IML North America manufactures the utility pole inspection drills that detect the percent of decay and cavity found inside wooden poles. Companies have the ability to export the

data to GIS programs and save the results in formats like Excel, PDF, and more. This calculation takes only a few minutes per pole and provides automatic pass and fail results.

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National Information Solutions Cooperative (NISC) is an industry-leading information technology company that develops and supports advanced, integrated solutions, such as billing, accounting, engineering and operations, and mobile apps for utility cooperatives and telecommunications companies across the nation.

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National OnDemand Inc. 2005

Jay Daugherty
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National OnDemand Inc. is a communications and utilities infrastructure provider delivering fiber construction and last-mile services across its 45-state service footprint.

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NCTI 664

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Nelson delivers complete distribution and transmission line clearance services for utilities throughout the U.S. From our customer-trained workforce to our innovative safety program, everything we do is aimed at protecting the reputation of the utilities we serve—it's part of our job.

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Network Innovations 564

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Network Innovations provides cost-efficient (BGAN), expedited field operations (meter reporting), high-speed transmissions (AVL) via satellite broadband, GPS (tracking), machine-to-machine telemetry/SCADA, and voice communication solutions that enable co-ops to maintain high availability of their infrastructure and mobile workforce safety!

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www.nexgenutilitysales.com

NexGen Utility Sales, a premier manufacturer's rep agency serving manufacturers and utilities throughout the Southeast and Mid-Atlantic United States. A dynamic and growing manufacturer's representative agency serving the Southeastern and mid-Atlantic United States. We focus on specialized equipment for Generation, Transmission and Distribution. Visit our booth to discuss PV SOLAR, BESS, Transformers, Mobile Substations, Control Buildings, STATCOM, and much more! Nexgen is also a certified WBENC company.

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nexgrid.net

Nexgrid is a U.S.-based company that provides an end-to-end solution for wireless smart grid and advanced metering. Their solutions use high-speed, 100% standards-based communications, providing real-time data enabling energy management and utility operations.

NextEra Infrastructure Solutions. 622

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NextEra Infrastructure Solutions combines industry expertise in street lighting, advanced metering infrastructure, and fiber with personalized service to create exceptional customer care for cooperatives and their members.

NRECA Silver Associate Member

Nokia 1159

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Noteworthy AI Inc. 2115

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Noteworthy AI helps utilities evaluate the electric distribution grid at scale with fleet vehicle-mounted cameras, edge computing, and AI. We provide an end-to-end data collection and analysis platform that can significantly increase situational awareness on the distribution grid while reducing operations and maintenance costs.

NRECA 949

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electric.coop

The National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA) is the national service organization that represents more than 900 not-for-profit, consumer-owned electric cooperatives, which provide service to 42 million people in 48 states. At the NRECA booth, you will be able to speak directly with employees about a variety of products and services offered by NRECA. You'll find representatives from Associate Membership, Business and Technology Strategies, Communications, Education and Training, Insurance and Financial Services, National Discounts Program, and Wood Quality Control.

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Essence provides continuous cyber and physical monitoring of SCADA/ICS networks. Essence includes a suite of tools that enable utilities to work collaboratively with real-time cyber and grid situational awareness. Essence enables cooperation among cooperatives for cyber incident response while giving autonomy of ownership to the local utility.

NRTC. 1449

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NRTC is member driven and technology focused. We provide solutions that help electric cooperatives bring the advantages of today's evolving technology to rural America—metering, analytics, demand management, solar, and energy storage as well as broadband infrastructure evaluation, build, and operational support.

NRECA Service Member

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OATI is the No. 1 provider of distributed energy resource management systems (DERMS), offering a robust portfolio to enable next-generation smart utility technology to navigate the energy transition and a connected-devices world, to include an internet of things/open standards-based advanced metering infrastructure, smart electric vehicle charging, microgrid and distributed energy resource controls, and the industry's No. 1 DERMS platform.

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Olameter. 858

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Olameter manages key assets and processes critical data for over 250 electric, gas, and water utilities and sewer, streetlight, and telecom clients across the U.S. and Canada. Services include workforce management, internet of things platform, network operations center, meter data management, call center, locating, leak detection, pole audits, and meter services.

Olsson. 1269

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OneSource Restoration (OSR) 1220

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OSI Digital Grid Solutions. 805

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OSI Digital Grid Solutions provides open, state-of-the-art, high-performance automation solutions to utilities worldwide. These solutions empower users to meet their operational challenges, day in and day out, with unsurpassed reliability and a minimal cost of technology ownership and maintenance.

NRECA Gold Associate Member

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Pacific Volt 1465

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Panduit Corp 1559

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Permacast Walls 924

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Polaris Electrical Connectors 822
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Power & Tel 1013
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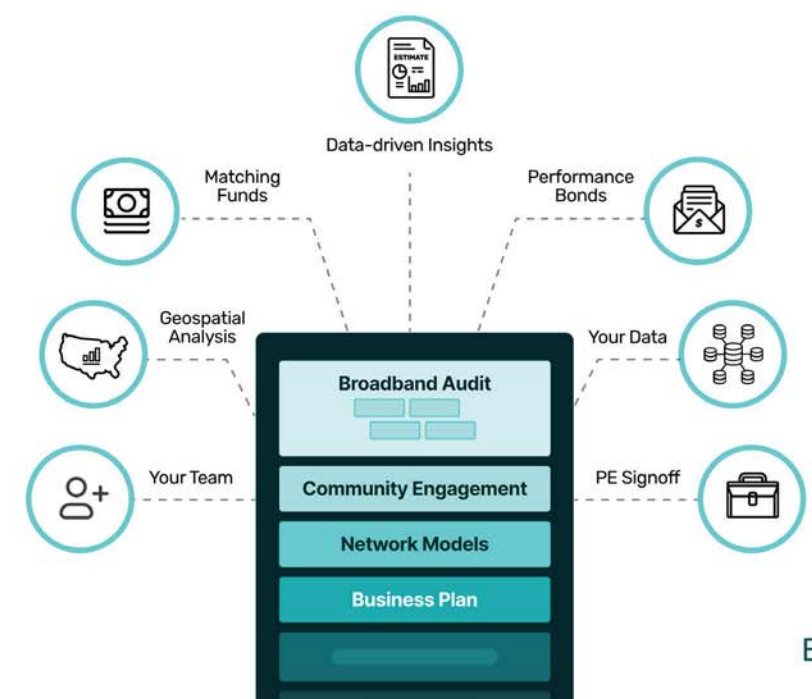
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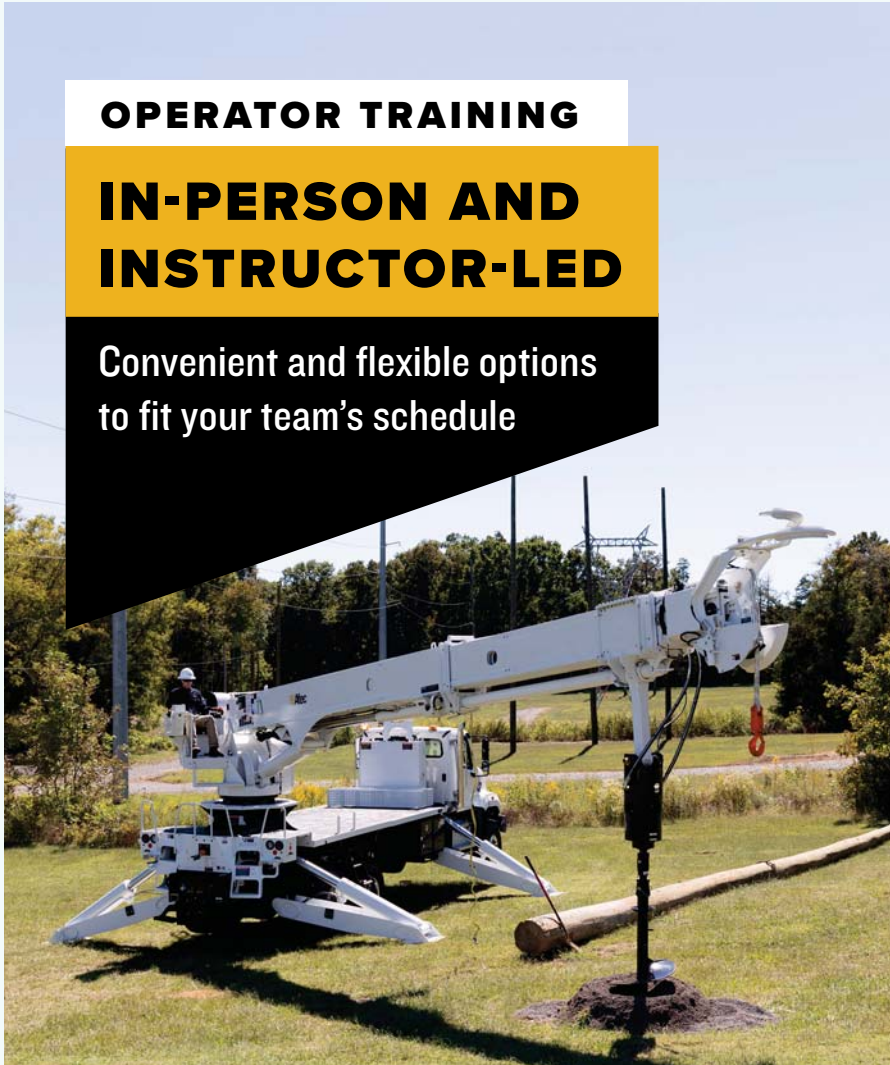
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Powertec Solutions International 761

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PowerTec Solutions International is a privately held technology design and manufacturing company focused on providing custom DC power, uninterruptible power supply, and other standby power solutions to compliment global fiber-to-the-x, wireline, and wireless applications.

PowerTrunk 1018

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PPC Broadband 828

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expertise and craft-friendly innovations support fiber and wireless architectures operated by customers around the world.

Precision Optical Technologies 205

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Precision Optical Technologies Inc. is a systems integration company focused on end-to-end optical networking solutions, network design services, and cutting-edge product development advancements. Backed by our extensive experience and robust research and development efforts, we play an integral role in enabling next-generation optical networks worldwide.

Preformed Line Products 1628

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Preformed Line Products has been providing innovative product and service solutions to the electric power utility industry since 1947. We offer solutions for supporting, protecting, terminating, splicing, and inspecting transmission and distribution lines and fiber optic cables—proudly made in the USA.

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Princeton TEC 612

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NRECA Silver Associate Member

Protection Zone Management 1259

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Protection Zone Management (PZM) is substation inspection, maintenance, and line patrol software that tracks deficiencies and helps users manage their system with confidence. PZM uses Risk Matrix and Protection Zone analytics to identify and prioritize problems before they lead to unplanned, high-impact, expensive failures.

NRECA Silver Associate Member

PUPI/GEOTEK 920

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Q

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Quanta Services is the leading specialty contractor with the largest and highly trained skilled workforce in North America—providing fully integrated infrastructure solutions for the electric power, underground utility, and communications industries.
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R

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Reinhausen is the world market leader in energy technology. Fifty percent of the electricity generated worldwide is regulated with our products, from innovative tap changers to integrated, intelligent solutions for dynamic power grids. Products featured at TechAdvantage will be the voltage regulating distribution transformers.

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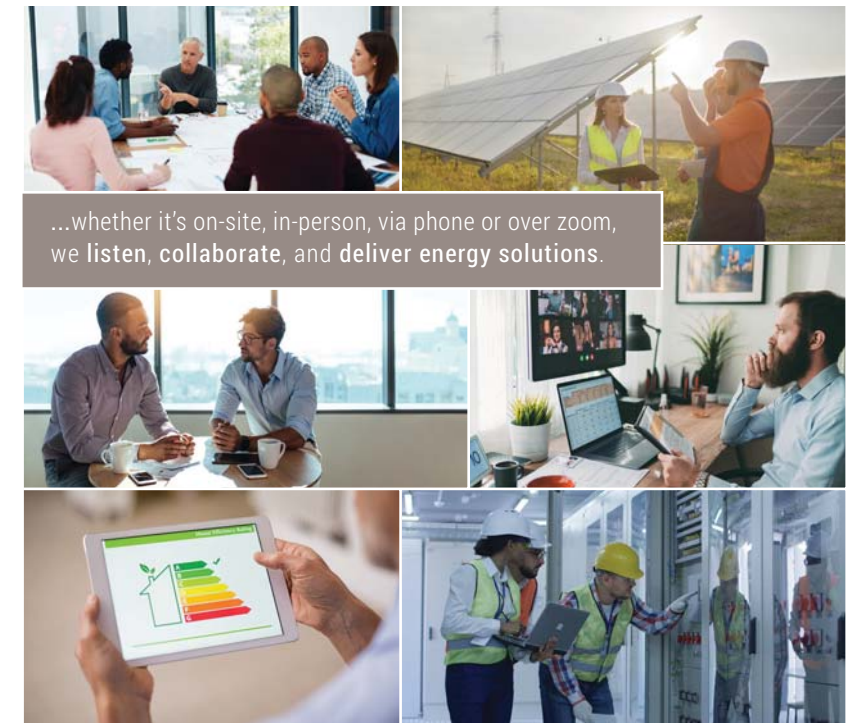
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By Erin Kelly and Cathy Cash

NERC 10-YEAR OUTLOOK WARNS OF RELIABILITY RISKS

Unprecedented electricity demand and lagging infrastructure development could place many regions of the U.S. at risk of power supply shortages over the next decade, particularly during periods of extreme weather, the North American Electric Reliability Corp. says in its latest Long-Term Reliability Assessment.

Over the next five years, NERC forecasts that all or parts of 19 states from Montana to Louisiana are at high risk of rolling blackouts during normal peak conditions. And most of the rest of the country is at similar risk when demand spikes during exceedingly hot or cold temperatures.

NERC warned that planned retirements of baseload power plants, transmission congestion, fuel supply issues and inadequate maintenance increase the risks of prolonged service disruptions during major winter cold snaps or summer heatwaves.

“NERC’s latest assessment paints another grim picture of our nation’s energy future as demand for electricity soars and the supply of always-available generation declines,” NRECA CEO Jim Matheson says.

Matheson is among the energy industry leaders urging government agencies and policymakers to reconsider regulations that threaten to exacerbate regional shortfalls.

“Nine states saw rolling blackouts last December as the demand for electricity exceeded available supply. And proposals like the Environmental Protection Agency’s power plant rule will greatly compound the problem,” says Matheson. “Absent a major shift in state

and federal energy policy, this is the reality we will face for years to come.”

NERC’s report noted that some areas have improved generation and transmission, which could help ensure adequate reserves through 2028. But resource shortfalls could become more common, based upon demand growth, anticipated retirements of older power plants, and slow or stalled development of new generation.

The report warns that the nation’s bulk power system must be maintained to respond to demand during extreme weather events. “Generator performance and fuel issues are more likely to occur when generators are called upon with short notice,” analysts say.

Amid potential plant failures and variable output from wind and solar facilities, NERC’s assessment places portions of New England, the upper Mid-Atlantic region, and much of the nation west of the Dakotas and Texas at elevated risk, particularly when natural gas supplies are stretched by high heating demand.

Portions of the Midwest from the western Great Lakes to the Gulf of Mexico are categorized as high risk, due in part to what analysts describe as “overly rigid” environmental regulations and energy policies threatening reliability.

These policies have the “potential to influence generators to seek deactivation despite a projected resource adequacy or operating reliability risk,” analysts wrote. “Regulators and policymakers need to consider effects on the electric grid in their rules and policies and design provisions that safeguard grid reliability.”

HYDROPOWER



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Nearly 20,000 electric co-op consumer-members and employees signed a petition urging the Biden administration to abandon any plans to breach the four Lower Snake River dams that provide carbon-free hydropower to more than 50 Northwest co-ops. “We strongly oppose any efforts that would breach the Lower Snake River Dams and risk the reliability of our electricity,” states the petition, which was delivered in December to the White House on behalf of Voices for Cooperative Power.



CONTACT

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Photo by stevelenzphoto/Getty Images

BROADBAND



‘NET NEUTRALITY’ EXEMPTIONS

NRECA asked the Federal Communications Commission for targeted compliance exemptions for electric co-ops in any new “net neutrality” rules for internet service providers. The FCC plans to reinstate 2015 net neutrality rules and reclassify broadband to a more regulated telecommunications service. NRECA filed comments recommending that the FCC limit regulatory burdens on co-ops and other small providers who serve fewer than 100,000 customers.

100/100 MBPS BROADBAND STANDARD

NRECA is urging the Federal Communications Commission to define universal broadband as 100 megabits per second symmetrical for data download and upload with a long-term goal of 1 gigabit per second symmetrical to ensure that rural America is not left behind. The FCC is preparing to update the current broadband benchmark of 25 Mbps download/3 Mbps upload, set in 2015, to 100/20 Mbps. But that speed is insufficient, NRECA said in comments submitted to the agency.

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ENVIRONMENTAL



COAL ASH RULE

NRECA recently filed comments in response to the Environmental Protection Agency’s eleventh-hour attempt to fix problems with its proposed coal combustion residuals rulemaking for legacy surface impoundments and historical coal ash disposal “management units.” NRECA said the new risk analysis and information it published on those potential CCR sites has numerous errors and does not correct the underlying flaws with the proposal. NRECA urged EPA to prepare a valid and scientifically sound risk assessment and reissue a proposed rule that is supported by such an assessment.

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DISASTER RECOVERY



FEMA PROCUREMENT TOOLKIT

NRECA’s Federal Emergency Management Agency Public Assistance Basics and Procurement Toolkit, first published in 2017, has been revised and updated and is available for download on cooperative.com (login required). The toolkit is a collection of detailed policy information, templates and forms that co-ops can use to guide a successful application for FEMA funds after a federally declared disaster. It provides information that is helpful during disaster recovery as well as guidance to consider and implement during blue sky periods.

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LAWMAKER PROFILE

REP. ROB WITTMAN

By Erin Kelly



Rep. Rob Wittman

STATE: Virginia

Rep. Rob Wittman has been a champion for Virginia's electric cooperatives, pushing efforts to fund rural broadband and trying to find solutions to the supply chain delays that are making it tough for co-ops to get transformers and other crucial equipment to serve their consumer-members,

co-op leaders say.

"Rob grew up on co-op lines—and is currently a member of Northern Neck Electric Cooperative—and he understands the needs of rural Virginia," says Andrew Vehorn, vice president of member and public affairs at the Virginia, Maryland and Delaware Association of Electric Cooperatives. "From the beginning, he has reached out to us and asked, 'What can I do to help?'"

The Republican congressman serves as co-chairman of the House Rural Broadband Caucus and introduced legislation, the Serving Rural America Act, that paved the way for the National Telecommunications and Information Administration's Broadband Infrastructure Program, which provided \$288 million in funds for broadband deployment.

Vehorn describes Wittman, who has served in the U.S. House since 2007, as a "pragmatic conservative" and credits him as one of the first Republicans in Congress to recognize the need for federal funding to bring high-speed internet to overlooked rural communities.

"In the early days, it was hard to get Republicans to agree to use federal dollars on broadband," Vehorn says. "They thought it would be taken care of by Comcast and the other big internet providers, but that of course wasn't the case."

Wittman realized that in many sparsely populated rural communities, not-for-profit electric co-ops were the only businesses willing to step in and provide broadband service, Vehorn says.

"High-speed internet service really separates the haves from the have-nots," he says. "We saw it during the pandemic. Kids in the suburbs worked at home on their laptops while kids in rural areas had to go to the McDonald's parking lot to get service. Rob understands that broadband is a necessity."

Wittman has also worked with electric co-ops in Virginia to try to help end the supply chain delays that began during the pandemic. Rappahannock Electric Cooperative has run into shortages just as development has increased, membership has grown and vehicle elec-

trification has surged in their territory, says Lindsey Watson, the co-op's director of governmental affairs.

"If we can't get transformers or poles and wires, then we can't upgrade our grid to meet our members' demand for EVs or support new economic and residential development," she says. "We've been working on supply chain challenges for about two years, and the congressman and his staff have been responsive and shown incredible leadership."

In July 2023, Wittman introduced a bill called the Empowering Electric Grid Reliability Act, which would require the secretary of Energy to create a task force to study and report on supply chains for local electric distribution grids, including transformers and equipment. The task force would be required to submit a report to Congress after studying the problem.

"Rep. Wittman sponsored that bill for us to study the origins of the supply chain crisis," Watson says. "He worked in partnership with co-ops and the [statewide] association. We had a lot of meetings with the congressman to brainstorm ideas. He made a great collaborative effort to bring that bill to fruition."

Wittman said that "supporting Virginia's electric cooperatives is personal to me."

"As a resident of Virginia's Northern Neck, I know firsthand how integral electric co-ops are to our rural communities," the congressman says. "I have been proud to work with local co-ops to improve access to electricity and broadband while expanding job opportunities, boosting our local economy and improving our children's education for generations to come."

Wittman, who was re-elected to an eighth full term in 2022, served in state and local government prior to Congress. He was a member of the Montross Town Council for a decade, serving as the town's mayor for four of those years. He was later elected to the Westmoreland County Board of Supervisors and the Virginia House of Delegates.

Wittman is a strong advocate for the Chesapeake Bay and an avid fisherman whose office walls are filled with mounted fish that he caught in the bay, Vehorn says.

"He can tell you a story about every fish that is on the wall—what kind of fish it is and how he caught it," he says. "He's very down to earth, just a nice guy. He's what you'd expect from a small-town mayor who went to Washington. He hasn't forgotten where he came from." **RE**



Rep. Wittman (third from right), meets with VMDAEC leaders.

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Photos courtesy Rep. Wittman (top-left) and VMDAEC

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CO-OP SHOTS

DECEMBER PHOTO CHALLENGE WINNERS THEME: LET IT SNOW



WINNER: SNOW CREEK

Snow Creek runs through a snow-covered dairy farm in the territory of Jackson Electric Cooperative in Black River Falls, Wisconsin.

Photo by David Peasley



RUNNER-UP: LAUGHING ALL THE WAY

Brothers Trigger and Colt have some fun in the snow after a light dusting in Verdigris Valley Electric Cooperative's Oklahoma territory.

Photo by Megan Jackson

OTHER FINALISTS



Wyoming Winter Wonderland
Photo by Brooke Darden



Lighting Up the Night
Photo by Alysia Lorenzo



Into the Snowy Night
Photo by Jason Crouch



UPCOMING CONTEST THEMES:

- February: Rural Main Streets
- March: The Work of Co-op Artists
- April: Local Festivals and Events
- May: Flowers

Visit cooperative.com/REmagazine to see all the photos, read the contest rules, like your favorite shots, or enter some images of your own.



THINKING BIG

‘BY OUR SIDE’

When Chapel Hill Transit started going electric, they found a partner in Piedmont Electric

By Erin Kelly

When Chapel Hill Transit in North Carolina wanted to begin replacing its diesel-powered bus fleet with new zero-emission electric vehicles, it reached out to Piedmont Electric Cooperative to make sure there would be enough power to charge them.

“It was sometime in 2020 that they approached us,” recalls Larry Hopkins, the Hillsborough-based co-op’s vice president of engineering. “We realized right away that we were going to have to put in some new infrastructure.”

Piedmont Electric worked with the transit agency for two years, designing a 750-kilowatt transformer to provide electricity to four charging stations capable of fully charging a bus in less than four hours.

Four of the transit agency’s 99 buses were electric by mid-2023, and officials had ordered seven more that were set to arrive by the end of the year. The Town of Chapel Hill plans to purchase 10 additional electric buses that will most likely arrive from manufacturers sometime in 2025, says Nick Pittman, assistant transit director.

“Our partnership with Piedmont Electric has been extremely important,” Pittman says. “Purchasing electric buses has been a learning experience for all of us, and it has been good to have the cooperative by our side to work through the challenges and to help us understand the necessary equipment as we expand our battery electric bus fleet.”

The 34,000-member co-op has also helped the Town of Chapel Hill manage costs. Pittman estimates that the transit agency, which serves the University of North Carolina campus as well as the town, saved more than \$25,000 on its electric bill in 2023 by charging its buses during off-peak hours.

Piedmont Electric offers discounted time-of-day rates for EV owners who charge their vehicles during the night and early morning hours, when overall demand for electricity is low.

“Chapel Hill Transit is doing a really good job of keeping most of their charging off-peak,” says Ed Durham, the co-op’s manager of energy services. “I’m working with them to optimize that and hopefully move them to a completely off-peak load.”

Encouraging EV owners to charge during off-peak hours helps to keep rates down and ensure the system doesn’t get overloaded, co-op leaders say.

INNOVATIVE PROBLEM-SOLVING OF SMALL AND MEDIUM-SIZED CO-OPS



Piedmont Electric worked with Chapel Hill Transit to design a system to power charging stations for the city’s new electric buses.

“We’re maximizing the number of off-peak usage hours, which benefits everyone,” says Susan Cashion, Piedmont Electric’s vice president of compliance and administration officer. “And we’re being good stewards of the environment by encouraging beneficial electrification.”

The co-op and the transit agency have also worked together to educate the community about electric vehicles. Last September, Piedmont Electric held an EV Day, setting up a tent at a local shopping center for people to learn about the co-op’s special rates and get an up-close look at EVs owned by co-op members. Piedmont Electric also unveiled a new DC fast-charger for EV drivers to use when they visit the shopping center.

“Chapel Hill Transit brought one of their electric buses, and about 20 people went for a ride,” says MaKayla Killens, the co-op’s public relations specialist. “A lot of people didn’t realize that Chapel Hill had purchased electric buses, so our event helped spread the word. Our members thoroughly enjoyed it.”

The co-op is now preparing for the additional buses and other large vehicles—including one of the town’s garbage trucks—to go electric.

“We’re building another substation and upgrading the circuit,” Hopkins says.

Co-op leaders say the key to serving new EV fleets is to be part of the planning process from the beginning.

“With government accounts, you should always consider them a key account and be in close touch with them,” Durham says. “It’s good to get ahead of the curve and make sure you know what their load is really going to look like.”

Hopkins says that Piedmont Electric’s president and general manager, Steve Hamlin, and its board have been “very supportive of EVs for over a decade.” The co-op started offering special rates to EV owners about eight years ago in anticipation of more of its residential and commercial members choosing electric cars and trucks.

Commercial fleets are changing quickly as Amazon, Walmart and other large companies electrify their delivery trucks, Cashion says.

Co-ops that serve truck stops should prepare for a growing number of electric tractor-trailers that could dramatically boost demand for chargers, Hopkins says.

“If you have a truck stop in your service area, go talk to those people now,” he advises.

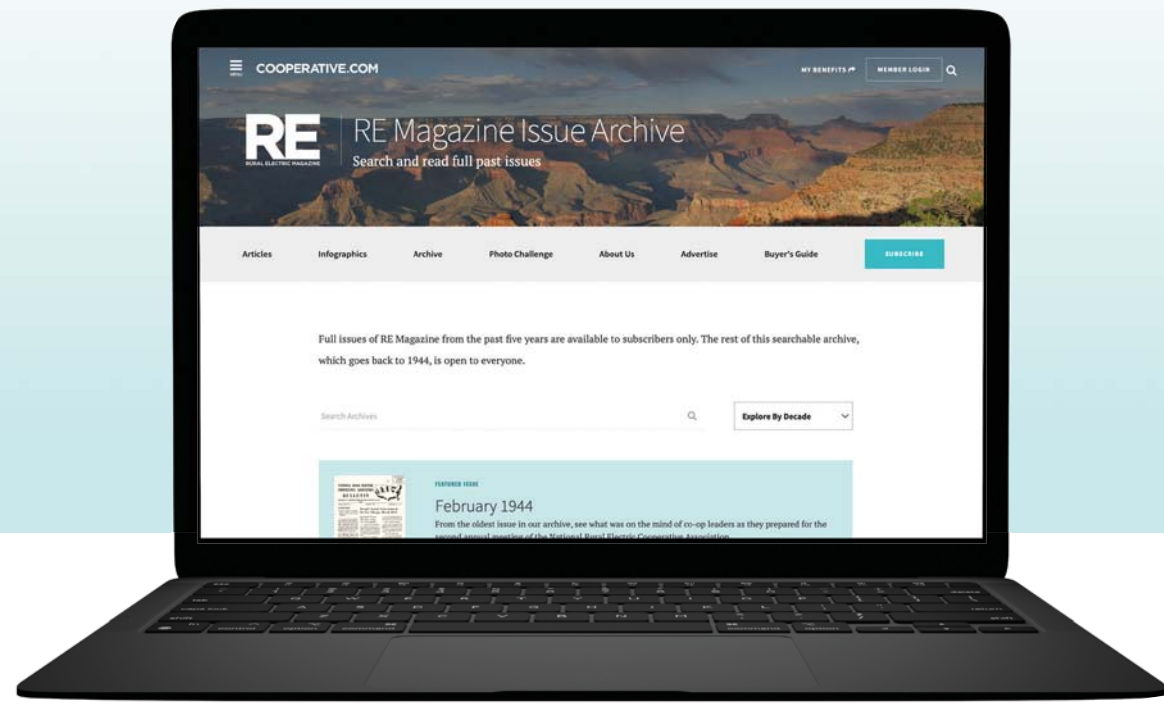
Piedmont Electric serves a large truck stop and has been talking to them for years, Cashion says.

“In five to 10 years, it could be another large industrial load,” she says. “Ten years ago, we reached out to them, and they didn’t even want to talk about EVs. Now, they see the opportunities that are coming.” **RE**

Photo courtesy Piedmont Electric Cooperative

“IT’S GOOD TO GET AHEAD OF THE CURVE AND MAKE SURE YOU KNOW WHAT THEIR LOAD IS REALLY GOING TO LOOK LIKE.”

— Ed Durham, Energy Services Manager, Piedmont Electric



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*The most recent five years of the RE Magazine archive are only accessible to subscribers.

TECH INSIGHTS

By Todd H. Cunningham

AT A GLANCE

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- 119 Animal Damage Detection
- 120 Distribution Automation

MidSouth Electric Cooperative

CO-OP TYPE
Distribution

SIZE: 37,349 meters

LOCATION
Navasota, Texas

GOAL
Expand fiber internet service inside the city limits of Madisonville, Texas.

CONTACT
MidSouth EC, MidSouth Fiber, 936-825-5100

SOLUTION

The co-op's MidSouth Fiber (midsouth-fiber.com) subsidiary was slated roll out access in the city in the beginning of 2024, with priority to government buildings and pre-registered individuals. Business customers will have a dedicated line to directly contact a support technician and priority repair service during any outages, mainly to ensure that vital businesses remain open during disasters.

“We treat our internet service the same way we treat our electric.”

—Darryl Dickerson, Fiber Solutions Architect, MidSouth EC



Tipmont REMC

CO-OP TYPE
Distribution

SIZE
29,290 meters

LOCATION
Linden, Indiana

CONTACT
Tipmont REMC, 800-726-3953
Landis+Gyr, 320-307-7486

GOAL

Select a smart grid technology capable of providing long-term energy management benefits for members while improving their engagement.

SOLUTION

Chose Revelo sensing meters from Landis+Gyr (landisgyr.com) to better manage Tipmont's grid and improve member engagement as part of the co-op's grid modernization strategy. The agreement includes installation of the Grid-stream RF Mesh network to cover more than 30,000 Revelo advanced meters being deployed across Tipmont's service territory. Software hosting and project support is included.

“We selected a smart grid technology capable of providing long-term energy management benefits for our members.”

—Ron Holcomb, President & CEO, Tipmont REMC

Clark Electric Cooperative

CO-OP TYPE
Distribution

SIZE: 9,564 meters

LOCATION
Greenwood, Wisconsin

GOAL

Provide members with renewable energy to work toward the goal of decarbonizing the power supply in a cost-effective way.

CONTACT

Clark EC, 800-272-6188
OneEnergy Renewables, 877-775-9707

SOLUTION

Entered a power purchase agreement with project developer OneEnergy Renewables for the output of the 2-MW Popple Creek Utility Scale Solar Project. The development stemmed from a concept by eight other Wisconsin co-ops and OER (oneenergyrenewables.com), and its timing was coordinated with other co-ops' projects to get a better price and return on investment for members. Popple Creek contains 4,472 modules and 20 inverters and utilizes a tracking system that maximizes energy production. Operation was set to begin in January.

Photo courtesy NRECA

NCEC and Tideland EMC

CO-OP TYPE: Statewide; Distribution

SIZE: 23,676 consumers

LOCATION: Raleigh and Pantego, North Carolina

GOAL

Develop a microgrid to provide power to a defined area.

SOLUTION

North Carolina's Electric Cooperatives partnered with Tideland EMC and Rose Acre Farms (goodegg.com), the second largest egg producer in the country and the largest employer in Hyde County, North Carolina, to build a microgrid that includes a 2-MW solar array, a 2.5-MW battery energy storage system and 6 MW of backup diesel generation. It typically remains connected to the grid, providing resiliency and peak shaving, but can operate in an “island mode” during an outage.

CONTACT

NCEC, 800-662-8835
Tideland EMC, 800-637-1079

“The partnership ... demonstrates that agriculture and electric utilities ... can work together to improve power.”

—Paul Spruill, General Manager and CEO, Tideland EMC

“Cooperation among cooperatives is our guiding principle for this project.”

—Tim Stewart, CEO/GM, Clark EC

Southern Rivers Energy

CO-OP TYPE: Distribution

SIZE: 20,857 meters

LOCATION: Barnesville, Georgia

GOAL

Bring internet service to co-op members across nine counties and smart grid technologies to strengthen the Southern Rivers Energy system.

CONTACT

Southern Rivers Energy,
877-358-1383
Conexon, 202-798-3884

SOLUTION

Partnered with Conexon Connect (NRECA Associate Member; [conexon.us](https://www.conexon.us)) to build a nearly-2,000-mile fiber broadband network. The \$60 million undertaking, dubbed The Connect, was completed in two years rather than the estimated three. It has a 40% penetration rate — exceeding the 32% take-rate used in the business model—and according to Southern Rivers, interest continues to grow as more members are connected. “This network will not only enhance our quality of life, but also foster economic growth, educational opportunities and technological innovation within our region,” said Michael McMillan, the co-op’s president and CEO.

“The digital divide for Southern Rivers Energy members is finally closing.”

—Michael McMillan, President/CEO, SRE

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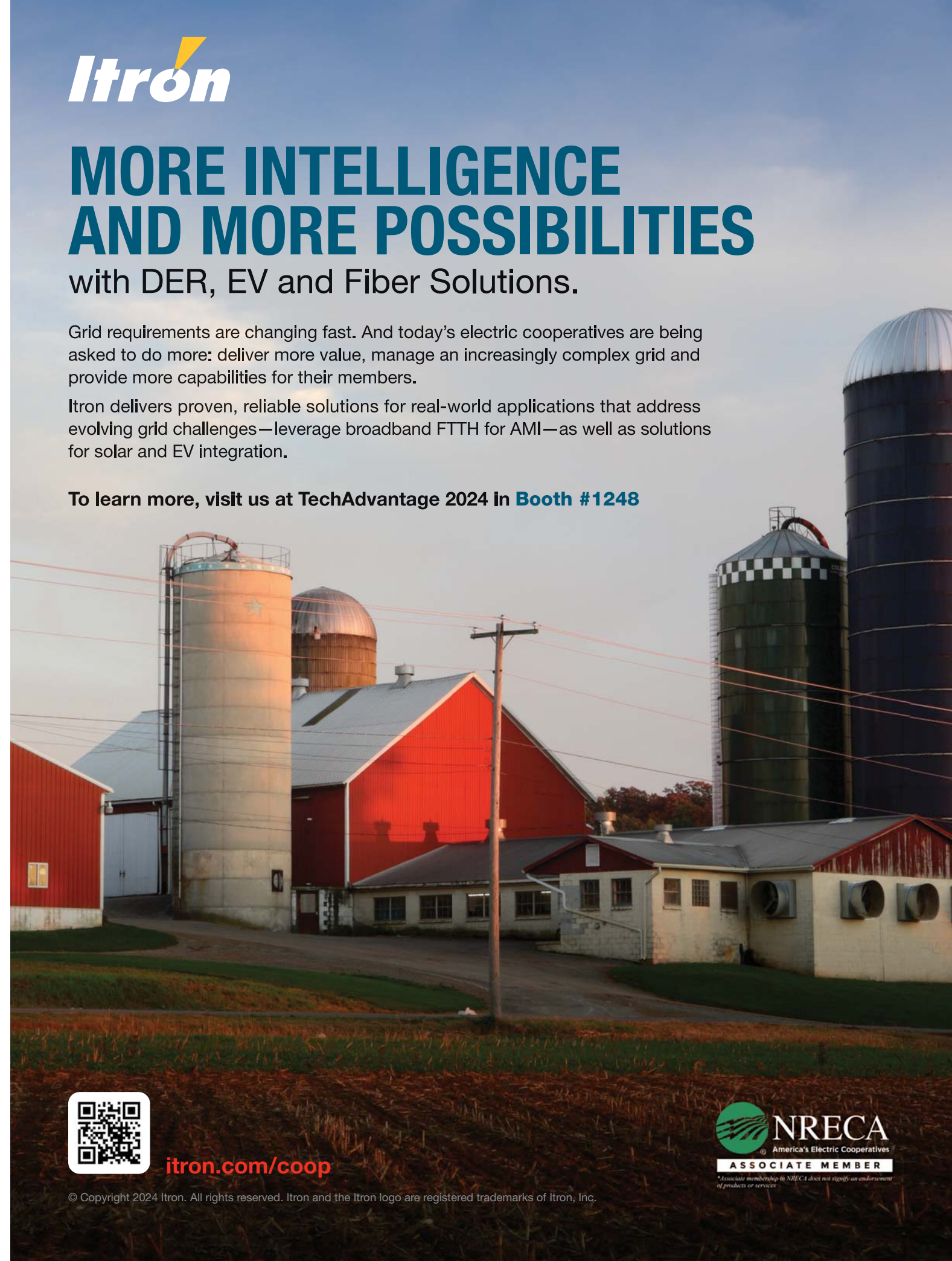
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AMI 2.0



ANIMAL DAMAGE DETECTION



By Reed Karaim

When Clarke Electric Cooperative, based in Osceola, Iowa, decided it was time to replace its 12-year-old AMI system, “the need was multifaceted,” says Brad Wilson, the co-op’s manager of engineering.

But so was the opportunity presented by moving to AMI 2.0, the latest generation of advanced metering infrastructure. First-generation AMI was focused on

automated metering and billing, says Lidija Sekaric, NRECA vice president for innovation and emerging technologies. AMI 2.0, now making its way into distribution systems nationwide, has much broader capabilities.

“It has more intelligence built into it, more computer processing, enabling it to do what’s known as edge computing,” Sekaric says. “It has more sensors; it can sense things up and down the line, and it can talk to many more devices.”

AMI 2.0 can even determine what appliances in a household are using power and how they’re running, she adds.

These advances transform AMI into a network support system, allowing greatly improved system analytics and outage management. It also enables new member services, a key part of the business case for Clarke Electric.

“One of the things we’re looking forward to is having the ability to analyze that load profile data to come up with options for more dynamic rates,” says Wilson. Specifically, he adds, the co-op will be able to offer time-of-use rates to its members.

Clarke Electric is installing its first AMI 2.0 test meters this winter and hopes to have a complete network up by the end of 2024. The co-op serves more than 5,000 members in south-central Iowa, a largely rural area, and Wilson notes that integrating AMI 2.0 with the co-op’s outage management system will transform its ability to determine where outages are occurring in near real-time.

That capability, he says, means Clarke Electric will “be able to be proactive in our operations, knowing what’s going on out in the field before our members potentially even know they’re being affected by an event.”

By Reed Karaim

Damage caused by animals has been a problem since the first electrical lines were put up on poles. But technology is giving electric cooperative engineers new insights to understand and combat the problem.

The Utilities District of Western Indiana, a co-op based in Bloomfield, used Power Solutions LLC’s Distribution Fault Anticipation (DFA) tech to determine that 10 to 15 percent of outages were being caused by animals.

“It’s opened eyes a bit to see how bad the problem can really be,” says Mike Reinhart, the co-op’s AMI administrator and metering foreman.

DFA is an analytics tool that uses data from the field, including voltage and current waveforms, to identify and anticipate problems on a distribution system. Corroded conductors, loose contacts, tree branch contacts and other potential causes of faults present unique signals that allows issues to be identified. The same is true for damage caused by animals, whether its squirrels or birds shorting the lines or mice and squirrels nibbling away at insulation.

“In both cases, the signature of the problems can appear in the voltage and current waveform that can be detected by the DFA,” says Ravindra Singh, NRECA senior principal for distribution automation.

For Utilities District, which has both wooded, hilly territory and more open farming country, it’s been all of the above, says Reinhart.

“It’s mostly squirrels, but you got racoons, possums, birds, a little bit of everything.”

DFA has helped the co-op plan a response to the problem. The engineering department looked at the places where certain animal-caused outages were more frequent and is using plastic pole wrap to prevent critters from climbing their way into trouble. They’re also covering bushings and using coated, insulated jumper wire. The co-op hopes to make the wrap and other protection standard on new construction.

“We hadn’t been able to get a real handle on the problem before,” Reinhart says, but with DFA “we’re getting a better idea of it and how to respond. It gives us a level of awareness on circuit conditions, including incipient-failure conditions, that we do not get from any other system, enabling us to keep some outages from happening and to respond more effectively to outages that do occur.”



Top AMI 2.0 Features

- Edge computing capability
- Enhanced cybersecurity
- Improved member engagement
- Intelligent automation
- Outage detection
- Load disaggregation

Photo by Brad Wilson/Clarke Electric Cooperative

Photo by CassieB03/Getty Images

“THE SIGNATURE OF THE PROBLEMS CAN APPEAR IN THE VOLTAGE AND CURRENT WAVEFORM THAT CAN BE DETECTED BY THE DFA.”

— Ravindra Singh, Senior Principal, NRECA

DISTRIBUTION AUTOMATION COMMS



By Reed Karaim

Distribution automation (DA) offers a way to improve system efficiency and reliability, but as electric cooperatives invest in the latest DA platforms, veterans of the process say software and hardware are only part of a successful transition.

Robust communications and cybersecurity are keys to making sure DA provides maximum benefits, says

Reed Wells, manager of SCADA and system operations at Flint Energies, based in Reynolds, Georgia.

“I tell people to really pay attention to the communication network. If you have a communication system that only works 80 to 90 percent of the time, your DA is only 80 to 90 percent reliable,” Wells says.

DA uses an integrated set of technologies, including sensors and smart switches in the field along with DA controllers that allow a co-op to automate some operations while also providing additional data and analytics capabilities to further improve operations.

Flint Energies’ DA project was largely completed and operational in 2022, but the co-op continues to expand and improve the system. It combines field hardware such as new reclosers with SEL’s automation controllers.

As it progressed, Flint Energies also found it had to invest in security upgrades.

“We considered our office pretty protected, our substations pretty secure. But we were adding a lot of networked devices that are in a cabinet hanging on a pole,” Wells says. “We wanted to be sure that somebody who cut the lock on a cabinet couldn’t get all the way back into our system.”

The cooperative ended up putting in additional firewalls in its substation and radio tower equipment, Wells says. They also added a managed cybersecurity platform that inspects traffic on their SCADA network.

With the benefit of an American Rescue Plan Act grant, Flint Energies is also moving from its radio system to a fiber network, which Wells says will provide operations with more secure, faster communications.

As operations continue to evolve with new smart devices communicating in the field, he notes, making sure “communications is not a bottleneck” becomes even more important. **RE**

“IF YOU HAVE A COMMUNICATION SYSTEM THAT ONLY WORKS 80 TO 90 PERCENT OF THE TIME, YOUR DA IS ONLY 80 TO 90 PERCENT RELIABLE.”

— Reed Wells, SCADA and System Ops Manager, Flint Energies

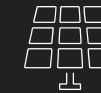
Photo by Blair Brown/Flint Energies



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ENERGY STORAGE PACKAGES

Briggs & Stratton Energy Solutions has created six Energy Storage System packages that utilize its SimpliPHI and AmpliPHITM batteries. The all-in-one bundles include three core components: Lithium Ferro Phosphate batteries, a recently enhanced 6-kW inverter and the EnergyTrak Control System and App. They come with installation hardware, are engineered and assembled in the U.S., and all EnergyTrak customer information is stored in the U.S. Four batteries deliver up to 32 hours of backup power at 19.92 kWh storage capacity. The package can be scaled with the addition of AmpliPHI batteries.



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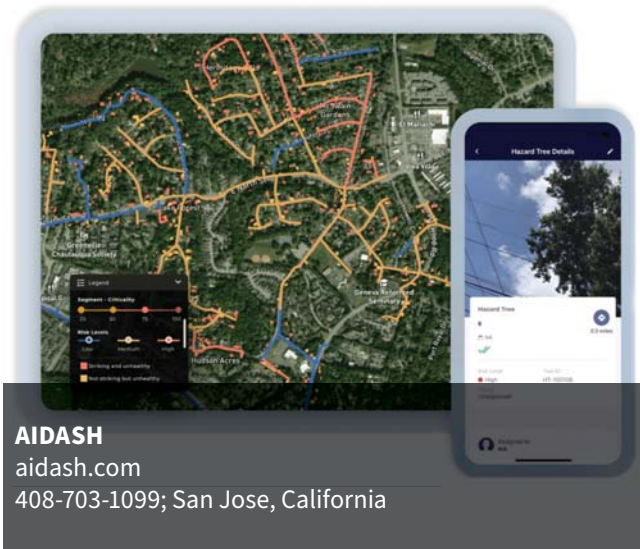
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VM WITH SATELLITE AND AI

AiDash has released its *Intelligent Vegetation Management System (IVMS) 2.0*. The *SatelliteVision* and *VegetationAI*-powered software offers new capabilities for vegetation management operations. The platform can process remote sensing data at scale from satellites, aerial imagery from drones, helicopters and fixed-wing planes and LiDAR data from aerial or vehicle-mounted sensors. It procures and cleanses all required remote sensing and third-party information as well as all utility data. With multisource data, vegetation management activities can be prioritized based on weather risks, including storms and wildfires.



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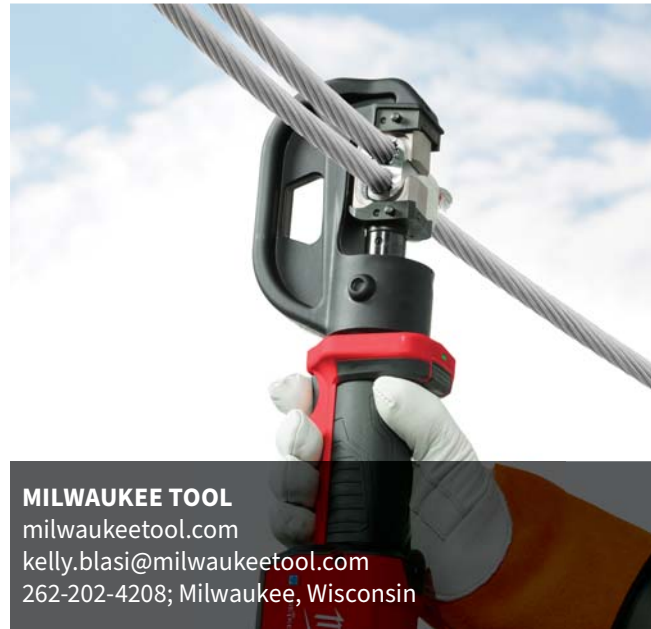
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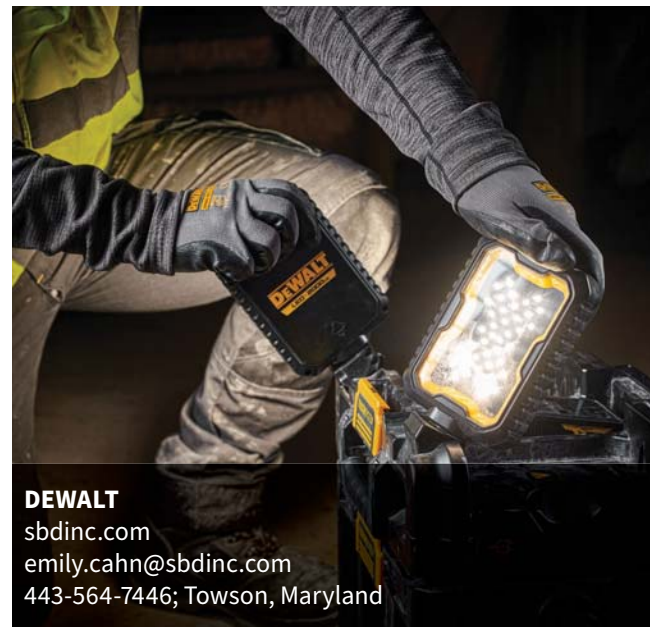
KEARNEY LINEAR CRIMPER

Milwaukee Tool's new M18 FORCE LOGIC 12T Kearney Linear Crimper has a linear design that provides an optimized center grip for ideal balance and maximum control. A 340-degree head rotation allows it to be set up in multiple orientations and in a variety of spaces, such as transformers, substations and overhead applications. Compatible with all industry-standard Kearney dies, it has a pull-pin die retention system for fast, tool-less changes.

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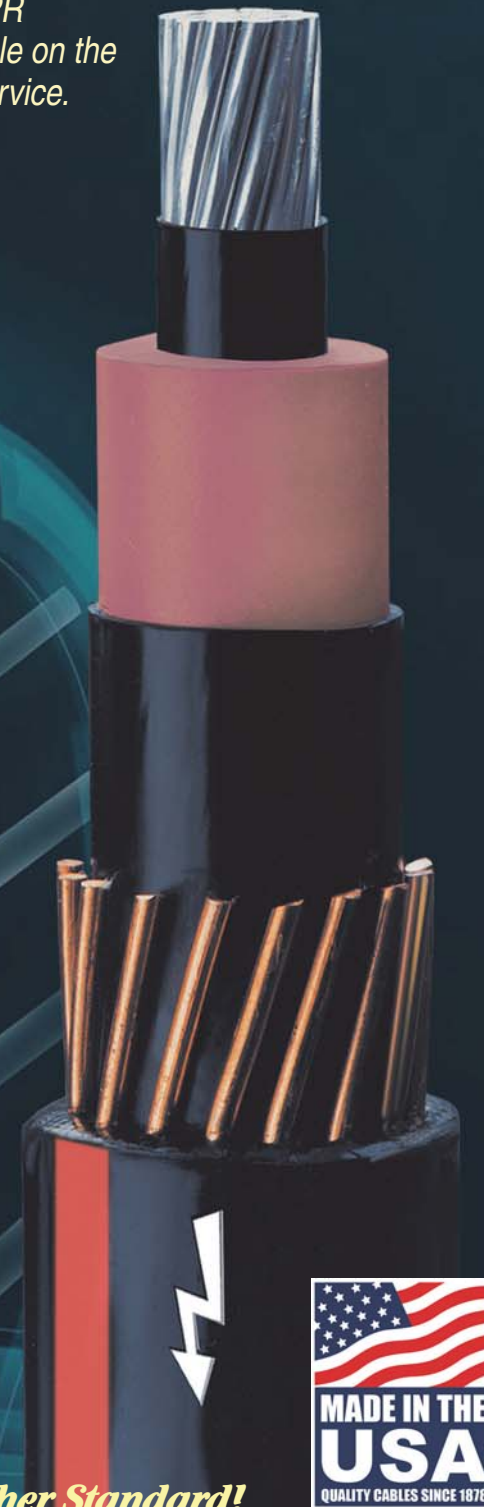
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STAFFING

MIDWEST ENERGY & COMMUNICATIONS - MICHIGAN, NORTHERN INDIANA AND OHIO

Chief Executive Officer – Cassopolis, Michigan



The Board of Directors for Midwest Energy & Communications, a not-for-profit electric Cooperative (MEC), operating principally in Michigan, seeks to fill the position of President & Chief Executive Officer. A vacancy in this position will be created when the current long-serving President & CEO retires at the end of September 2024.

Who We Are

MEC operates an electric distribution network across approximately 3,600 miles of line, serving nearly 36,000 meters in Southern Michigan and portions of Indiana and Ohio. Its headquarters is based in Cassopolis, Michigan with service centers located in Paw Paw, Tecumseh, Gobles, and White Cloud Michigan. MEC is a member of Wolverine Power Supply Cooperative G&T, headquartered in Cadillac, Michigan and Buckeye Power headquartered in Columbus, OH. In addition to its traditional electric service, MEC provides propane service to over 8,000 customers and high-speed broadband to over 25,000 customers.

What We're Looking For

The Board seeks candidates with demonstrated competence in the management and leadership of an electric cooperative. In addition to strong people skills, the well-qualified candidate will have "hands-on" operations experience in power supply, rates, engineering, human resources, safety, customer service, and a proficiency in finance and accounting. The candidate will have the ability to work effectively with the MEC Board, exemplified by a collaborative, team-oriented approach to governance and the ability to bring initiative, innovation, and strategic vision to the President & CEO role. The President & CEO is expected to present a positive organizational image of MEC in interactions with the community, other cooperatives, and the public in general.

The President & CEO is responsible for the overall management of MEC and reports directly to the nine-member Board of Directors (the Board), which is elected by the MEC membership. The position is accountable to the Board and is responsible for administering policies and directives established by the Board.

A summary of candidate qualifications is below:

- Must have 5 years of management experience with increasing responsibility
- Must have 7 years of electric utility industry experience
- Must provide leadership examples, as well as business and personal references
- Applicant is expected to reside within the MEC service area within 6 months

Preferred applicants:

- Have the ability to successfully lead, as well as identify and develop talent
- Possess strong verbal and written communication skills and are at ease with presentations to the public.
- Demonstrate commitment to Cooperative Principles
- Have prior broadband industry experience
- Demonstrate a strong level of participation in and commitment to cooperative communities
- Possess a working understanding of Board-Manager relations
- Have a Bachelor's Degree in business administration, public administration, management, or a technical-professional area

What We Offer

MEC is an Equal Opportunity Employer and provides a defined contribution plan with significant employer contribution amounts and immediate vesting. The Cooperative offers medical, dental, LTD, STD and life insurance plans along with paid time off. Salary is commensurate with qualifications and experience.

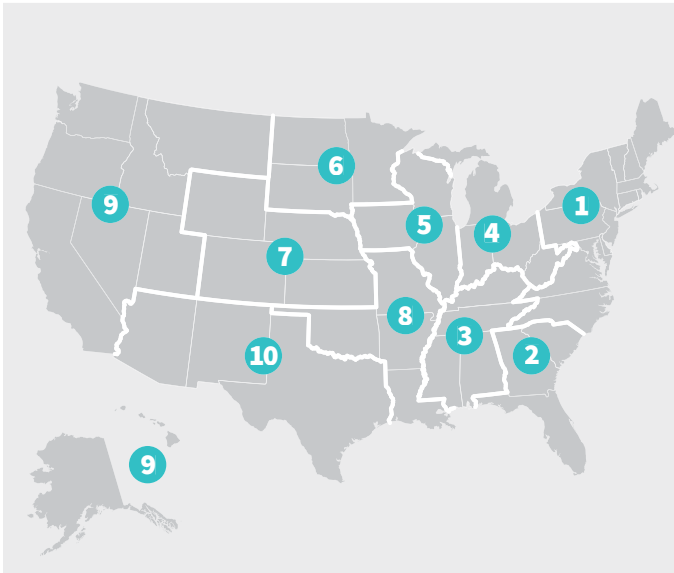
How to Apply

Interested applicants should email MEC_CEO_Search@enervision-inc.com. Application packages should include a cover letter and resume, with the cover letter setting forth why the applicant is seeking the position and why the applicant believes he or she is the best choice for the position. Applicant should state salary requirements or salary range requested. Other information deemed relevant may be included by the applicant. The application package should include three (3) business and three (3) personal references.

Applications will be accepted until March 15, 2024. Short-listed candidates will be asked to submit a three-minute video resume, complete a Predictive Index assessment, and a formal employment application form.

Anticipated start date: September 1, 2024.

CO-OP PEOPLE



REGION 1

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Maine
Maryland
New Hampshire
New Jersey
New York
North Carolina
Pennsylvania
Rhode Island
Vermont
Virginia

REGION 2

Florida
Georgia
South Carolina

REGION 3

Alabama
Kentucky
Mississippi
Tennessee

REGION 4

Indiana
Michigan
Ohio
West Virginia

REGION 5

Illinois
Iowa
Wisconsin

REGION 6

Minnesota
North Dakota
South Dakota

REGION 7

Colorado
Kansas
Nebraska
Wyoming

REGION 8

Arkansas
Louisiana
Missouri
Oklahoma

REGION 9

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California
Hawaii
Idaho
Montana
Nevada
Oregon
Utah
Washington

REGION 10

Arizona
New Mexico
Texas

NATIONAL

VANVIG VAMOOSSES



JOHN VANVIG



RICHARD G. BIEVER

After 27 years chronicling the countless comings and goings of electric cooperative employees around the country, **John Vanvig** has filed his last People column for RE Magazine. With this month's piece, Vanvig has cranked out 326 People columns as well as hundreds of features and cover stories for the publication, totaling, by Vanvig's calculation, nearly 2 million words under his byline. "John has been an absolute stalwart over the years, never missing his deadlines and always turning in extremely clean copy," said RE Editor **Scot Hoffman**. "For People, he took what used to be a shorter, more formulaic column and transformed it into comprehensive, highly readable and familiar monthly section." A North Dakota native and former press secretary to Sen. **Kent Conrad**, Vanvig joined NRECA as a staff writer in 1988. He left NRECA in 1995 and became a freelancer for RE Magazine, writing features and technology content (in addition to People). "I've enjoyed it all along," Vanvig said. "Everyone who works with the rural electric program thinks they are the best people in the world,

and they're right." Starting in March, **Richard G. Biever**, former senior editor of Indiana Connection, the consumer publication produced by Indiana Electric Cooperatives, will take over the column. He can be reached at rgbiever@yahoo.com.

Cliff Johnson has been named as the first-ever director of NRECA Broadband. Johnson has a deep background in program development, marketing and strategic planning at Bloomberg Government, National Journal Leadership Council and the National Association of Manufacturers. "Cliff is a collaborative leader who is sincerely drawn to the member-focused mission we share at NRECA," said NRECA COO **Jeffrey Connor**. "He understands the challenges facing electric cooperatives in the telecommunications business as well as the significant opportunities for our members." Connor said Johnson will be tasked with leading NRECA Broadband to the next level to "advance our members' interests."

The Cooperative Family Fund, created in late 2022 by NRECA Board President **Tony Anderson**, blew past its first-year goal of \$500,000 in contributions and was on track to come in at double that by the end of 2023. Supported entirely by co-op donations, the fund provides support to children of active rural electric employees who have died. "Cooperatives operate as a family," Anderson said. "It only makes sense that we show up fully when someone in our family is suffering." The fund's goal is to provide a one-time payment to the



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CO-OP PEOPLE

surviving children of a lost co-op employee when the child turns 18. “This is just giving back to the industry that has literally given me everything I have,” said Anderson, who retired last year as general manager at Cherryland Electric Cooperative, Grawn, Michigan, after a 32-year co-op career. “These families are an extension of my own family, and I want to make sure they never feel alone.”

Ray Kuhl, a former associate editor of RE Magazine who spent decades promoting rural electric and water co-ops from South Dakota to Ghana, has passed away. After a short stint in the Air National Guard at the dawn of the Cold War, Kuhl returned to his home state of South Dakota to join East River Electric Power Cooperative (G&T), Madison, and went on to edit the co-op consumer magazine for the South Dakota Rural Electric Association (statewide), Pierre. “He traveled farm to farm promoting the idea of electric cooperatives throughout South Dakota,” said his obituary in his hometown newspaper, the Sioux Falls Argus Leader. “Ray’s love of creating community evolved into a love of rural electric cooperatives.” In 1962, he joined the NRECA staff as associate editor of Rural Electrification Magazine. In 1964, he returned to South Dakota to be closer to his ailing parents and took the job of public relations director at Sioux Valley Empire Electric Association (now Sioux Valley Energy) in Colman. He shifted gears in 1977, putting his co-op organizing and communications skills to work as executive manager of the South Dakota Association of Rural Water Systems. The rural electric program lured Kuhl back in 1979, when he became the first general manager of the Michigan Electric Cooperatives Association (MECA, statewide), Lansing. “The cooperative world lost a fierce advocate and lifelong community leader when Ray Kuhl passed away,” the statewide said in announcing his death. “The founder of MECA, Michigan Country Lines magazine, and the state association political action committee, Ray also used his talent for storytelling to write articles for RE Magazine to bring attention to the power of the cooperative model.” Kuhl’s book, “On Their Own Power,” underscored his work, tracing the history of rural electrification in Michigan. His long career reflected a single underlying philosophy, according to **Craig Borr**, Kuhl’s successor as the Michigan statewide’s current president. “He understood that together, we are so much more powerful than we are on our own,” Borr said. Kuhl retired from the statewide in 1996, but he couldn’t resist one last adventure. In retirement, he traveled to Ghana as an adviser to a rural water cooperative movement that was just getting started. Kuhl was 90.

REGION 1

‘A VISIONARY’ RETIRES

Olin Davis III has retired from the board at Choptank Electric Cooperative, Denton, Maryland, closing out 34 years of service as a director. A former Maryland representative on the NRECA board, Davis served as president of the Choptank Electric board from 2013 to 2018. In that role, he followed in the footsteps of his grandfather, the first **Olin Davis** and the co-op board’s second president. “I have always been proud to serve on Choptank’s board,” Davis told **Valerie Connelly**, vice president of government affairs & public relations at the co-op, for an article announcing his retirement. “Olin has been a visionary and the voice of reason for members of the cooperative,” said **Mike Malandro**, president & CEO. “He has made an indelible mark that will be long remembered.” Davis said his retirement will allow a new generation of members to make co-op policy. “I’m sure our new board member from Kent County, **Kristen Nickerson**, will find that co-op folks are just great people,” he said. Nickerson, who was appointed recently to fill out the remainder of Davis’s term, is a managing partner in a Kent County family farm operation. Also at the co-op, staffers recently welcomed six newcomers into their ranks: **Ariel Dawson** and **Judi White** are the new member service specialists; **Colby Benton**, **Camden Stinson** and **Luke Turner** signed on as apprentice lineworkers; and **Dylan Perdue** joined the staff as an engineering fieldman. And **McKayla Kiernan** was recently promoted to communications specialist.

More than half a century has passed since **Roger Fox** attended his first annual meeting at Washington Electric Cooperative (WEC), East Montpelier, Vermont. “I was by far the youngest person there,” Fox said. “I remember a sea of white hair. It was a big social event, which it still is.” Recently retired as vice president of the WEC board, on which he’d served for 32 years, Fox recalled his long involvement with the co-op in a remarkable story for Co-op Currents, its member newsletter. Editor **Katie Titterton** included plenty of history in the lengthy, lively story. When he attended that first annual meeting in 1972, Fox was living with



OLIN DAVIS III



KRISTEN NICKERSON



ROGER FOX

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half a dozen other “nerds and assorted misfits” in a rough, communal home they’d built themselves, enough of a structure to qualify as house eligible for a WEC line extension. When power came to Apocalypse Farms, the commune Fox and his friends had founded, his engineering training alerted him to a problem with the co-op’s service voltage. Frustrated with the “sticks in the mud” in WEC board and management, he and other members formed the Committee for an Effective Co-op, or CoFEC, which published an alternate member newsletter called Co-op Transformer. “RATE HIKE REFLECTS MANAGEMENT ILLS” blared the headline on a sample front page from 1974, reproduced in the story announcing Fox’s departure. CoFEC was still around in 1991, when Fox and two other reformers won seats—and a majority—on the WEC board. “We were early adopters of the value of environmental responsibility by electric utilities,” he told Titterton. They proceeded to get WEC out of its nuclear power contracts, replacing the energy with landfill gas and wind generation, and pushed for greater accountability for the utility-owned statewide transmission system. His long record of service earned Fox the prestigious **George Aiken** Award, presented by the Northeast Association of Electric Cooperatives (statewide), Bath, New York. **Barry Bernstein**, WEC’s retired board president, former NRECA board member, and himself

a previous Aiken Award winner, said Fox’s honor is well deserved as “one of the original group of co-op members who got together in the early ’70s to raise questions about the openness and direction of our owner-member co-op.” Bernstein’s successor, current board President **Steve Knowlton**, agreed: “I appreciate his deep commitment to the cooperative, and he backs it up with his deep knowledge of what a cooperative does and what WEC’s culture is.” At 76, Titterton reported, Fox still describes himself as a young radical. “I should make it clear,” he told her, “I haven’t grown up.”

Greg Dove has moved up to line superintendent at Northern Neck Electric Cooperative, Warsaw, Virginia, capping more than two decades of working on the co-op’s lines. “Greg has constantly demonstrated his commitment to our cooperative and the membership,” said **Richard McLendon**, vice president of operations. “His readiness to respond, whether for late-night outages or everyday member assistance, exemplifies his service-oriented mindset. Greg is an outstanding professional and is well respected among his peers.” But his contributions to



GREG DOVE

the co-op go beyond his work on its lines, according to **Brittany Johnson**, public engagement coordinator. “He is a familiar face at community and school events, actively participating in career days, parades, and more,” she said. “His enthusiasm for his profession and his eagerness to engage with the community showcases his passion and dedication.”

REGION 2

HAMBY’S SIDE GIG

By day, **Bobby Hamby** is a mild-mannered meter technician for Little River Electric Cooperative, Abbeville, South Carolina. But on Friday nights during high school football season, Hamby is “the voice of the Wildcats,” doing play-by-play internet streaming radio coverage of the Ninety Six High School’s varsity team. He’s not the only Hamby involved in the small town’s school; his wife teaches science there, and their son plays in the marching band. Hamby shows up two hours before kickoff to set up and test the equipment he uses to bring the game to a broader audience. “This is my baby,” he told the co-op’s **Josh Crotzer** for a feature on its website. “Just like the metering system at Little River Electric, I take pride in it. I make sure it is operating properly because there are people that can’t

come to the games, and they depend on our broadcast.” Employees, board members, and consumers at Horry Electric Cooperative, Conway, South Carolina, were saddened by the recent passing of **Henry Boyd**, who retired as a trustee after more than four decades of service. An Army veteran and lifelong farmer, Boyd “was especially proud to have served as a trustee with Horry Electric Cooperative for 42 years,” his obituary said. Boyd was 88.

A lineworker’s glove bag bearing messages of hope and love from his family won **Travis Smith**, a district crew chief for Aiken Electric Cooperative, Aiken, South Carolina, local bragging rights in the “My Why” safety contest sponsored by the Electric Cooperatives of South Carolina (statewide), Cayce. His entry, which was sent on to the statewide to be judged against others in the association’s effort to emphasize safety on the job, was adorned with an original poem signed by his three children and a love note from his wife. “My glove bag is a daily reminder of my reason to work safely and come home every day,” Smith said. “My kids are always asking to come to work with me, and this was a chance to have them be a part of my day-to-day.” Two Aiken Electric newcomers, **Luke Lamb** and **Braley Wallace**, both apprentice lineworkers, have joined Smith on the outside crews. And the co-op announced three recent promotions: **Sharon Oswald** moved up to program



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representative, **Robert Rodgers** is the new fleet maintenance supervisor, and Thomas Sharpe was named vice president of operations.

MPD Electric Cooperative, Bennettsville, South Carolina, has picked up right where its two predecessor co-ops, Marlboro Electric in Bennettsville and Pee Dee Electric in Darlington, South Carolina, left off. “Our shiny new name change is already looking really spiffy on our trucks, buildings, hats, and uniforms,” MPD Electric said in announcing the merger. “But one thing that hasn’t changed is our continued commitment to you, our members.” **William Fleming Jr.**, who was the shared president/CEO for both co-ops and continued in the post following the merger, said it was simply the right move. “This smart and foresighted merger positions your electric cooperative to create even more economic benefits, long-term efficiencies and better reliability for the entire membership,” he said. “All of us can be proud that our combined service area has created the largest geographical territories of any cooperative in the state of South Carolina, with the efficiencies and effectiveness that should stand the test of time, God willing.”

REGION 3

DELTA’S EDGE DELIVERS

Mississippi co-op leaders, state officials, and other guests gathered in force when Delta’s Edge, the newest solar site at Cooperative Energy (G&T), Hattiesburg, recently began producing power at utility scale. “Delta’s Edge represents a significant commitment to our member systems and their consumer-members who have expressed a desire for more green energy where it makes good economic sense,” **Jeff Bowman**, the G&T’s president & CEO, said at the gathering at the 100-MW facility in Greenwood. “Growing our investment in affordable solar energy advances our commitment to the nearly 1 million Mississippians we serve.” Delta Electric Power Association, Greenwood, appreciates that investment too, according to **David O’Bryan**, the co-op’s general manager. “We are very pleased with the economic benefits this project brought to the Greenwood trade area,” O’Bryan said. “As a member of Cooperative Energy, Delta Electric is appreciative of the cooperative’s efforts to bring additional solar energy on a large scale to our Delta Electric consumer-members.”

The Prattville (Alabama) Chamber of Commerce caught **Tom Stackhouse**, president/CEO at Prattville-based Central Alabama Electric Cooperative, by surprise at the chamber’s recent Autauga County Farm City Banquet. Stackhouse was called to the head table to receive the chamber’s Business Leader of the Year award.

Jennifer Ward, communications & public relations manager at Wiregrass Electric Cooperative, Hartford, Alabama, has received the prestigious **Darryl Gates** Cooperative Communicator of the Year Award. Presented at a recent awards banquet sponsored by the Alabama Rural Electric Association (statewide), Montgomery. The co-op also earned top awards for its annual report, digital communications, safety campaign and calendar. “We see recognition as a measure of how well we’re serving you, our members,” the co-op said in announcing the honors. “These accolades serve as proof of our organization’s relentless pursuit of clarity, transparency, engagement and the wellbeing of our community.” The Gates award is named in honor of the late long-time statewide communications chief and editor of its prize-winning consumer magazine.

Chickasaw Electric Cooperative, Somerville, Tennessee, and its members saluted eight of the co-op’s dedicated employees for a combined total of 120 years of service in its pages of a recent issue of The Tennessee

Magazine, the statewide consumer publication. Those veteran staffers are **Chris Parker**, 35 years; **Chris Whittemore**, 30 years; **Matt Oliver**, 25 years; **Dylan Edmonds**, 10 years; and **Nikki Culver, Coleman Hodge, TJ Richardson** and **David Sykes**, five years. “The knowledge that our employees have attained during their time with Chickasaw Electric is incredibly valuable to each of us and the customer-members we serve,” the co-op said. “We thank these employees for their contributions and dedication!”

REGION 4

BROADBAND CHAMP

Bob Hance, president/CEO at Midwest Energy & Communications (MEC), Cassopolis, Michigan, has been recognized by his co-op peers for his dedication to bringing high-speed internet service to under-served areas. Michigan’s U.S. Sen. **Debbie Stabenow** was on hand at NRECA’s recent Broadband Leadership Summit when Hance received the Impact Award for Greatest Technical Achievement in Connecting the Unconnected. “Since 2013, Bob has been a tireless champion for rural broadband,” his co-op said in announcing the honor, “racking up airline miles flying all over the country and advocating for funding and support. His quest hasn’t been an easy one. But he didn’t give up. Why? Because where some see risk, Bob sees opportunity. He knew the challenges would be worth it.”

The Ohio Line Supervisors Association at Ohio’s Electric Cooperatives (OEC, statewide), Columbus, has donated more than \$16,000 to the **Blake Rodgers** Memorial Scholarship fund, established in memory of a young co-op lineworker who died in the line of duty during a Christmas storm in 2022. It’s the second large donation from OEC and the superintendents’ group, with the fund used to help students in the power line program at Scioto County Career Technical Center, Lucasville, Ohio, where Rodgers learned his craft before going to work for Buckeye Rural Electric Cooperative, Rio Grande. His mother and stepfather, **Brandie** and **Brandon Hale**, accepted the recent check from the superintendents. “Blake touched so many lives in one way or another,” Brandie Hale said. Among those are **Cayden Maddix** and **Wyatt Pierce**, two Scioto County Technical Center students who received the first scholarships last summer. The statewide association and the superintendents group “are committed to continuing to provide financial resources” to the scholarship fund, according to **Doug Miller**, OEC’s vice president of statewide services. “It allows students to pursue the career and training they need in a field of work that is so vital to all of us.”

Allison Saffle has been promoted to CFO at South Central Power Company, Lancaster, Ohio. Formerly vice president of strategy & special projects, she takes over from **Becky Witt**, who retired early this year after more than 10 years of service. Saffle will retain oversight of strategic planning while taking charge of the billing, finance, information technology and procurement teams. President & CEO **Rick Lemonds** also announced that **Amy Palmer**, formerly the co-op’s human resources manager, has been promoted to vice president of human resources. Palmer joined the co-op in 2009.

Carroll Electric Cooperative, Carrollton, Ohio, mourned the recent passing of **Harold Barber**, who retired from the co-op’s board two years ago after 14 years of service. Barber served as the board’s secretary-treasurer for almost all of his tenure. He was 72.

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REGION 5

G&T'S JUNIOR PARTNERS

Dairyland Power Cooperative (G&T), La Crosse, Wisconsin, took on some very junior partners recently when it joined fourth-graders in nearby West Salem for a pollinator project as part of the G&T's environmental stewardship program. Dairyland Power provided support, expertise and guidance when the students set out to develop local pollinator habitat. "We are excited to partner with the West Salem School District on this important initiative," said **Brad Foss**, director of environmental & compliance. "Not only will we be making a positive impact on local biodiversity, but we are also investing in the education and awareness of the next generation of environmental stewards. This project reflects our longstanding commitment to sustainability and community engagement."

The Wisconsin Electric Cooperative Association (statewide), Madison, has presented its prestigious Ally of Cooperative Electrification (ACE) Award to **Dallas Sloan**, who retired in 2021 as general manager at Barron Electric Cooperative, Barron. Sloan worked at the co-op for nearly 40 years, rising from staff assistant in operations to the top staff post in 2009. Sloan "was a strong supporter of clean energy," the co-op reported in its member newsletter, pioneering community solar, electric vehicle charging stations, and habitat gardens. He led his co-op through ice storms, the 2017 tornado and the 209 derecho and in retirement remains active in civic organizations and the Barron City Council. The statewide's ACE Award recognizes co-op leaders who have made outstanding contributions to rural electrification in Wisconsin, and the co-op said Sloan was a model recipient. "He makes a difference in the lives of others and encourages people to do the same," the co-op said.

Chippewa Valley Electric Cooperative (CVEC), Cornell, Wisconsin, and its G&T, Dairyland Power Cooperative, La Crosse, teamed up recently to improve emergency medical transport service by supporting construction of a local helicopter landing pad. CVEC's \$1,000 donation, matched by the G&T, kicked off fundraising for the newly completed helipad. "Without a doubt," said **Russ Falkenberg**, CVEC president & CEO, "this project will help save lives right here in the community, and CVEC is proud to support it. We know that minutes matter when it comes to a medical emergency, and we are eager to see this helipad put to use here in the CVEC service area." His comment hit home for **Danielle Endvick**, a CVEC member services representative whose 58-year-old uncle died in an ambulance after suffering a heart attack at his home only a few miles away from the new helipad. "In this remote corner of Chippewa County," she said, "our loved ones are far enough away from the larger medical

facilities that emergency response times and access to resources like this helipad can mean the difference between life and death." Dairyland Power's donation was made under the G&T's Cooperative Contributions Program, which invests in projects that support safety, education, environmental stewardship and community well-being, according to President & CEO **Brent Ridge**. "The contribution reflects our cooperatives' shared commitment to the communities we serve and our constant pursuit of innovative solutions to address safety needs," he said.

REGION 6

MCGRANE PASSES

Veteran co-op communicators nationwide joined friends and family in mourning the recent passing of **Martin "Marty" McGrane**, the retired director of communications for Sioux Valley Energy, Colman, South Dakota, who died in his sleep at the age of 80. A former journalism and photography professor at universities in Idaho and South Dakota, McGrane went on to "a distinguished career in public relations in rural electrification," his obituary reported. He worked on the co-op consumer magazine published by the South Dakota Rural Electric Association (statewide), Pierre, before moving to Sioux Valley Energy. "Marty's public speaking and writing talents saw him earn national and regional communications awards, speak at national conferences and entertain thousands every month with his short fiction stories and biographical articles," the obituary said. "He loved history and was a longtime chairman of the Friends of **Jesse James** Foundation. In retirement, Marty wrote and published a humorous, heartfelt memoir, 'California Calling,' during the COVID-19 lockdown. Marty enjoyed spending time and sharing his warm sense of humor with those he loved." Also at Sioux Valley Energy, board members **Don DeGreef** and **Rodney DeMent** have earned Director Gold status in NRECA's director training and certification program.

Tom Burns, the attorney for Codington-Clark Electric Cooperative, Watertown, South Dakota, who followed his father **Francis Burns** as the co-op's legal counsel, died in a recent car accident as he returned from a charity event for a long-time friend. "One could say Tom was destined to become a rural electric co-op attorney," the South Dakota Rural Electric Association (statewide), Pierre, said in announcing his passing. "He became a guardian of rural electric and cooperative law just as his predecessors had done. He spent more than 30 years protecting and defending the cooperative principles. His actions laid down a challenge to those who come next." Burns was 68.

The board of directors at Basin Electric Power Cooperative (G&T), Bismarck, North Dakota, has



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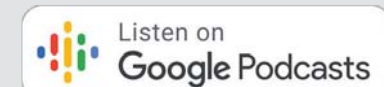
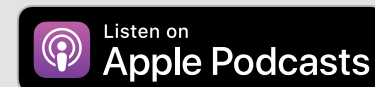


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CO-OP PEOPLE



TODD BRICKHOUSE

he took on the interim CEO role. “The board has worked closely with Todd Brickhouse during his tenure at Basin Electric and believes he has the skills, strategic vision, work ethic and integrity to lead the organization,” said Wayne Peltier, the G&T board president and a board member at Minnesota Valley Cooperative Light & Power Association, Montevideo, Minnesota.

taken the “interim” off **Todd Brickhouse**, recently naming him the new CEO & general manager of the G&T. Formerly a vice president & treasurer at Old Dominion Electric Cooperative, **Glen Allen**, Virginia, Brickhouse served as Basin Electric’s senior vice president & CFO from June 2022 until last summer, when

Commerce with a Kansas Business Award in the “Apprenticeship Champions and Partners” category. “Our apprenticeship training program is a team effort,” said **Rick Klaus**, director of operations, who considered it an honor to be named an instructor in the co-op’s program in 1990 when he was a line foreman. “I learned so much more by teaching it. Today, my former students are servicemen, area wide supervisors and district managers. It’s a good feeling.” Wheatland Electric’s prize-winning program includes the in-house Joint Apprentice Training Committee, made up of four line crew members and four management staffers who keep the trainees on their toes. “They’re hit with a variety of questions they might get in real life from their manager or from a member,” Klaus said. That level of preparation led to the Commerce Department’s recognition, he said. “To be recognized for something you’re passionate about is very rewarding.”

Board members at Sunflower Electric Power Corporation (G&T), Hays, Kansas, have named two newcomers to join them as representatives of Pioneer Electric Cooperative, Ulysses, and Southern Pioneer Electric Company, Liberal. **Mike Brewer**, a



MIKE BREWER

nine-year trustee at Pioneer Electric and its Southern Pioneer affiliate, moved up from alternate director



JEFF MOYER

on the G&T’s board to succeed **Martie Floyd**, who’d held the seat since 2019. **Jeff Moyer**, a four-year member of the Pioneer boards, was named to succeed Brewer as alternate. “It is a privilege and a blessing to represent Pioneer on the Sunflower board of directors,” Brewer said. Moyer said he was “humbled and honored” by his appointment as alternate. “Sunflower is such an important part of the success of our region, the communities and its members,” he said. “I have learned there is always more to learn.”

REGION 7

TOP TRAINERS

The long-running lineworker training program at Wheatland Electric Cooperative, Scott City, Kansas, has been recognized by the state Department of

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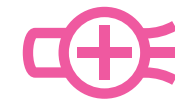
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The generous employees at Bridger Valley Electric Association, Mountain View, Wyoming, helped bring a brighter Christmas to their deserving neighbors, coming up with \$2,100 after passing the hat for the local Sub-4-Santa effort. On behalf of all those staffers, CEO/General Manager **Andy Hewitt** presented the check to the charitable group. "This act of generosity not only benefits the families directly supported by the Sub-4-Santa program, but also sets an inspiring example for other organizations and individuals in the community," the co-op said in announcing the donation. "It fosters a positive corporate culture and reinforces the idea that businesses can play a vital role

in addressing social needs and of the community they serve. Such initiatives also strengthen the sense of unity and shared purpose among the employees."

Jan Kulmann has joined United Power, Brighton, Colorado, as senior vice president & COO. She comes to the co-op from Xcel Energy, a Minnesota-based gas and electric utility, where she was director of standards & compliance program development, and brings 25 years of energy



JAN KULMANN

industry experience to her new post. "She is the right leader for our operations transition," said **Mark Gabriel**, president & CEO. "Now, more than at any time in the cooperative's history, having the right people in place in our organization is critical, and Jan brings a rich combination of education and experience to this vital leadership position."

REGION 8

ROEDEL MOVES UP

Arkansas Electric Cooperatives (statewide)/Arkansas Electric Cooperative Corporation (G&T), Little Rock, have promoted **Rob Roedel** to senior director of corporate communications at the combined organization. "Roedel will direct the cooperatives' extensive marketing and communications efforts, which include Arkansas Living, the most widely circulated publication in Arkansas," the press release announcing his promotion said. "He will continue to serve as a resource for the state's 17 distribution cooperatives and cooperative subsidiaries with regards to community relations and communications issues." Roedel has worked at the Arkansas statewide since 2002. Also at the statewide, Jason Allen joined the staff as chief commercial officer, in charge of the association's utility sales and services division. And the G&T recently announced three staff moves: **Tom Wright** was promoted to vice president of power delivery, **Kollin Derynck** came aboard as vice

president of power production, and **Lance West** joined the staff as controller.

Co-op leaders nationwide were sorry to learn of the recent passing of **Larry Frazier**, the retired long-time CEO at White River Valley Electric Cooperative, Branson, Missouri. Frazier led the co-op for 25 years through a period of rapid growth as its headquarters town became a popular destination for country music fans across the country. He was a former board member for two Missouri G&Ts, Sho-Me Power Electric Cooperative, Marshfield, and Associated Electric Cooperative, Springfield, as well as numerous local and state civic and business boards. "He loved joking around and telling stories to all who would listen," his obituary said. Frazier was 86.

Larry Weaver, line superintendent at Tri-County Electric Cooperative, Lancaster, Missouri, has received the prestigious **A.C. Burrows Award** from the Association of Missouri Electric Cooperatives (statewide), Jefferson City. The award, named in memory of the statewide's general manager from 1968 to 1976, recognizes Missouri co-op employees and board members for outstanding service to their co-ops, communities and service territories. "Larry has been dedicated to Tri-County Electric Cooperative as a lineman, lead line, journeyman and line superintendent over the last 41 years," his co-op said in announcing the honor. "His leadership skills are impressive, with his stoic management style, sincere thoughtfulness and expansive knowledge. Larry is Tri-County's past, present and he's paving the way for its future." Also at Tri-County Electric, staffers and members mourned the recent passing of **Dave Ramsey**, its former general manager who went on to work as energy efficiency program manager at Associated Electric Cooperative (G&T), Springfield, Missouri. Ramsey, 70, was inducted into the Missouri Institute of Cooperatives' Cooperative Hall of Fame in 2018, his obituary reported. "He loved what he did," the obituary added, "and never left a room with a light on."

Co-workers at DEMCO, Baton Rouge, Louisiana, joined co-op

safety experts around the region recently in congratulating **Jacob Overhultz**, DEMCO's safety & loss control supervisor, on being elected president of the Southern Area Instructors Association. Overhultz joined the association in 2015 and was vice president for a year before rising to the top officer position.

Seven staffers at South Louisiana Electric Cooperative Association, Houma, earned a salute from their co-op's member newsletter when they recently rounded major service milestones. The veterans were **Craig Fournier**, 30 years; **Leroy Norman** and **Suzanne Woods**, 25 years; **Raymond Hines**, 20 years; **Neal Foret**, 15 years; and **Ben Adams** and

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CO-OP PEOPLE

Richard Dufrene, five years. “Our valued employees are responsible for maintaining more than 1,500 miles of electric power lines and poles serving more than 16,000 members,” the newsletter reported. “Thank you for keeping the lights on.”

REGION 9

BIG SKY HEROES

Jerry Lemm, safety/loss control instructor at the Montana Electric Cooperatives’ Association (statewide), Great Falls, put his knowledge and skills to use off the job last summer and learned a new lesson in the process. While traveling in central Montana, he came upon a truck that had rolled in a ditch. One man was stumbling around the accident site, the driver appeared to be pinned in his seat, and a woman had been thrown from the vehicle. Other passers-by had stopped too, but they were unsure what to do. Lemm confirmed that one of the spectators had called emergency services and directed that person to slow passing traffic while he went to work. He attended to the woman, fearing that she had serious neck or lower back injuries. He improvised a collar to stabilize the woman’s neck. “She was in rough shape,” Lemm said. “My initial assessment was she had a broken neck.” An ambulance finally arrived, and Lemm helped the technicians get her aboard. A few days later, he was contacted by the Montana Highway Patrol. A trooper informed him that the driver and the woman had hijacked the vehicle from the second man on the scene, and that the driver was likely armed. The experience, he said, has changed the way he teaches first aid and life-saving efforts, and he now tells his audiences to stay alert and realize that anything can happen. “Don’t think for a moment there isn’t more to this than meets the eye,” Lemm said. “You have all of your life to panic, but you only have a few minutes to get it right.” For his quick thinking and life-saving work in an unexpected situation, Lemm recently received the Life Saver Award from the statewide co-op association he works for. Another Montana co-op employee received the award at the same time, for another bizarre rescue. **Chuck Knight**, a two-year employee at Yellowstone Valley Electric Cooperative, Huntley, was headed back to the office last spring when he saw a man standing on a bridge, holding a rope. Another driver had stopped too, and told Knight that the man was preparing to jump from the bridge. Knight parked his vehicle and turned on its warning lights, and along with two other bystanders approached the sobbing man on the bridge. They pulled him down from the railing and Knight cut the rope, which had been tied into a noose around the man’s neck. The two men who helped him, Knight learned later, were an emergency medical technician and a police officer, both of

them off-duty.

Communications staffers at Big Flat Electric Cooperative, Malta, Montana, were the big winners when the Montana Electric Cooperatives’ Association (statewide), Great Falls, presented awards at its recent annual meeting. **Shawna Myers**, newsletter editor, won first place and an honorable mention in the feature story category, while **Brendan Johnson** got an honorable mention for a news photo. **Kari Hammond** and **Nick Daniels** received an honorable mention for their work on the co-op’s annual report. Taken together, the awards earned Big Flat Electric the statewide’s Excellence in Communications for Small Cooperatives Award.

Columbia Rural Electric Association, Walla Walla, Washington, wasn’t shy about announcing its successes at a recent regional utility communications conference. The co-op reported that **Steve Owens**, its member services communication specialist, “hogged the spotlight a little bit” when the Northwest Public Power Association (NWPPA, service), Vancouver, Washington, held its Northwest Innovations in Communications competitions. All told, Owens accepted six awards, including a first-place finish for Best Newsletter/Magazine and a People’s Choice Award in Photography.

REGION 10

TORCH TO BE PASSED

With **Esther Dominguez** nearing retirement as Youth Tour coordinator at Texas Electric Cooperatives (TEC, statewide), Austin, she’s already begun working with her future successor—who’s a former Youth Tour participant herself. **Madeline Pena**, who was recently named Youth Tour & training manager, was sponsored on the tour by Wise Electric Cooperative, Decatur, in 2013 and went on to serve on the Youth Leadership Council. Dominguez, who’s worked the Youth Tour on and off at TEC since 1994 and full-time since 2006, said Pena’s experience is not unique. “A lot of them have gotten jobs at a co-op,” she said. Also at the statewide, **Alex Dal Santo** moved up to assistant production manager in the statewide’s member services & communications department. And Kat Pardo signed on with the



ESTHER DOMINGUEZ



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Leigh Taylor

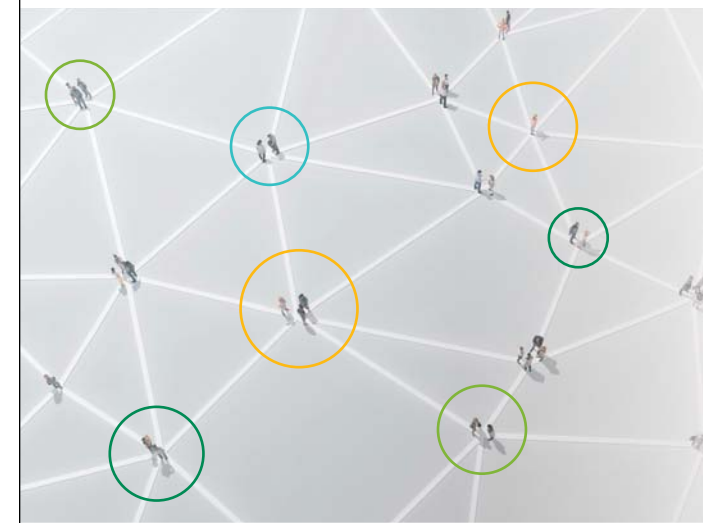
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CO-OP PEOPLE

association as a training coordinator.

Grayson-Collin Electric Cooperative, Van Alstyne, Texas, announced a temporary closure to mourn the recent passing of **Jacob Waldrip**, who spent 18 years as a lineworker and staking engineer at the co-op. “Jake played a large role in not only our operations team but an even bigger part in our co-op family,” the co-op said in a tribute. “As we continue to work through this tremendous loss of a member of our co-op family and dear friend, we ask that you please keep his family, loved ones and friends in your thoughts and prayers.” Waldrip was 43.

Douglas Letz has moved up to information technology infrastructure manager at Tri-County Electric Cooperative, Aledo, Texas. Letz came to the co-op as a network manager in 2019. Also at Tri-County Electric, employees, directors and consumers mourned the recent passing of **Jorden Wood**, a member of the co-op board since 2006 who served for many years as its chair. Wood, 72, was also an active community leader, serving on numerous local boards and organizing charity events.

His co-workers at Pedernales Electric Cooperative, Johnson City, Texas, and fellow lineworkers across the country congratulated **Zackery Gough**, who won first place against 440 other apprentices at the recent International Lineman’s Rodeo in Kansas. It was the second time in a row that Gough had claimed the title. “It’s an honor to receive such a high achievement against the best in the world two years in a row,” he said. “We put in a lot of work to become the best lineworkers we can be for our members and our communities, and although we don’t do it for the accolades, it is nice to be recognized for our efforts.” Two other Pedernales Electric apprentice lineworkers, **Daniel Wilson** and **Matthew Mabry**, finished third and fourth respectively, and three of the co-op’s journeyman teams ranked in the top 10 among co-ops.

Blake Daniel, engineering assistant at South Texas Electric Cooperative (G&T), Nursery, revealed an unusual off-duty world-class talent, claiming an international title at the recent Wakeboard World Championship in Portugal. He was one of 23 wakeboarders from all over the world to achieve the title. The event, in which competitors demonstrate flashy moves as they’re towed behind a racing speedboat, was sponsored by the World Wake Association.

Central Valley Electric Cooperative, Artesia, New Mexico, invited its members to join in congratulating two staffers who recently completed the Merchant Job Training & Safety Program. **Kevin Gaines** and **Dillon Trapp**, the co-op reported in its local pages of the statewide magazine, finished their studies in “one of the most comprehensive training programs for power line personnel.” **RE**

NEW EMPLOYEE SPOTLIGHT

A MONTHLY COLUMN TO SHOWCASE A CO-OP NEWCOMER
By Megan Newton



Crystal Pomeroy Graphic Designer

Ohio’s Electric Cooperatives,
Columbus, Ohio
Co-op employee since July 2022

Birthplace:
Virginia Beach, Virginia

Hobby:

Graphic design, illustration, painting, photography and animation

Have you always had an artistic and creative side?

My dream was to be an artist when I was a kid.

How and when did you realize that you had this talent?

I have always made art my entire life since early childhood.

What is unique about your art?

I can change art styles easily based on the needs of the project.

What do you enjoy most about it?

I enjoy anything that takes problem solving through creativity.

How did you hear about the job at Ohio’s Electric Cooperatives?

I have a decade of publication experience and was keeping my eye out for a good design position.

What were you doing before you joined the co-op?

Before this, I was working at an agency with industry-leading fast-food chains.

What do you like most about working at the co-op?

I like utilizing my skills for a purpose that goes beyond advertising. The educational aspect and the ability to conceptualize magazine layouts with total creative freedom has been great.

Education: Columbus College of Art & Design, majoring in illustration

What else do you like doing in your free time?

I have been working in 3D programs creating sculptures and masks that I airbrush and hand paint to sell at large music festivals and events.

Random fact about you:

I have a lightning bolt scar on my left palm from an art-related accident. I am basically the Harry Potter of the electric cooperative design industry. **RE**

You can see all of Crystal’s work by visiting her website at www.crystaldawncreations.com and on Instagram @[crystaldawndraws](https://www.instagram.com/crystaldawndraws).

Know someone who could be profiled?
Contact Megan Newton at mcatee.megan@gmail.com.



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CLOSING THOUGHTS



TONY ANDERSON, PRESIDENT

Working the Room

If I had to sum up my first year as NRECA president in three words, they would be “Working the room.” Taking on the task of representing the NRECA board across the country means you find yourself in many rooms you have never been in before (and may never be again). I have literally been at cooperative meetings and events from coast to coast.

While the travel is sometimes daunting and the requirements on my time demanding, none of it has been a surprise. When you run for an officer seat on the NRECA board, you KNOW what you’re getting into. Every officer accepts the role with eyes wide open. I have watched each of my predecessors accept the role with a servant heart. I have only tried to live up to their examples in my own small way.

Every meeting and event has been special to me. The journey to get my feet into these rooms was a long and winding road with more than one bump along the way. When I look down and find my shoes in yet another room, I say a silent “thank you” to everyone who has helped, encouraged and mentored me along the way. Nobody gets into any room on their own. This is one fact my heart will never forget.

Then, I look up and set about “working the room.” I love meeting new people and talking co-op shop. What is going on in their world? How can NRECA help? What do they need the most from their national association? My role is to be the eyes and ears for NRECA and attempt to be a bridge from every far-off room into

their national association. We are all connected to a common cause. It’s my job to strengthen that connection as best I can.

The granddaddy of all the rooms to work, for us all, is PowerXchange. This annual showcase of all things electric cooperative offers opportunities for every director and employee to connect on all the issues. San Antonio in March 2024 will be no different. NRECA has lined up some great nationally renowned speakers, inspiring and educational breakout sessions, updates on the latest issues impacting the industry, all the newest technology and valuable opportunities to share ideas, strategies and best practices with each other.

If you are new to our world or a grizzled veteran, I encourage you to get your feet into every opportunity at PowerXchange and work the room for your cooperative. Create your own bridge from the national network into your individual co-op. You will learn, grow and make lasting friendships while moving your cooperative forward.

When you see me walking down the hall, please extend a hand and introduce yourself. I would like to meet you and hear about what’s going on in your world. Communication is the bridge that will forever connect us all. We should always be working the room together. **RE**

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