



JANUARY 2021
AN NRECA PUBLICATION

RURAL ELECTRIC MAGAZINE

DIVERSITY, EQUITY, INCLUSION

Leveraging the co-op principles to meet a changing landscape

What a Year

2020: Upheaval and opportunity p.8

Fiber or 5G?

Next-gen wireless won't likely be a cure-all p.24

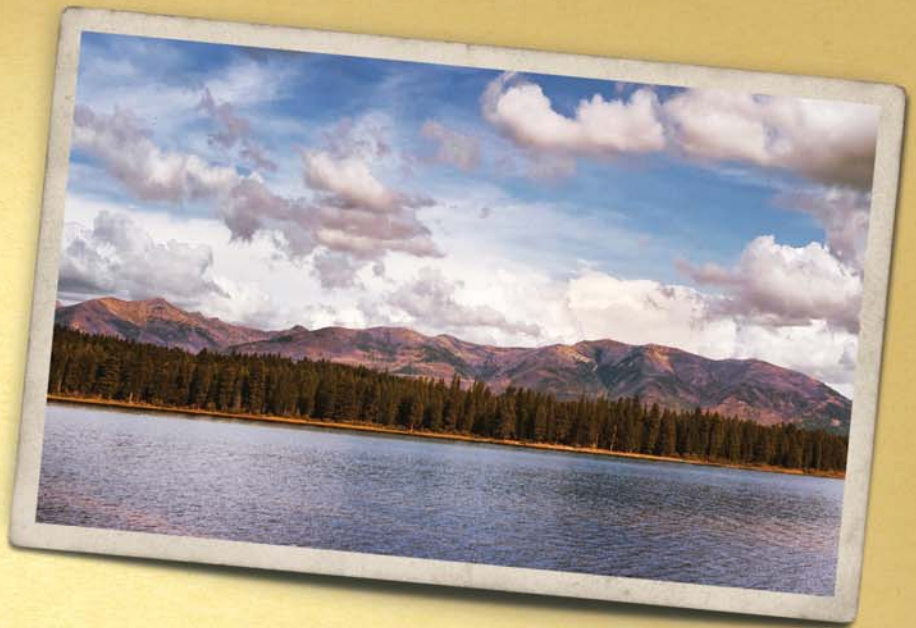
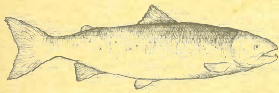
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prior to go-live was stressful.
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Seeley Lake, Montana,

AND WHY MOTHER NATURE DESERVES A MEDAL.

Breathe in. Breathe out. That's the crisp, fragrant mountain air of Seeley Lake (pop. 1,648). The scents may be enticing, but the sights are the true winners here. The ever-hypnotizing vivid sky and lake chrome blues sandwich the emerald waves of ponderosa pine. So it's no surprise windows have a habit of drawing greater attention than art. This is life inside a postcard. And still, tourism takes a back seat to an even more flourishing industry in Seeley Lake. Timber.

With the vast forestland, one would automatically assume lumber tycoons might get greedy here. They won't. They never will. Seeley Lake firmly observes forests as sacred, giving back as they take. It's a high degree of respect from this otherwise low-key town. The pleasant atmosphere does get its occasional bouts of drama, like spotting a mother black bear out for a stroll with cubs in tow. Or drivers exercising patience as whitetail deer jaywalk across Highway 83—slowly. And Seeley Lake is where locals pay visits to their good friend Gus, North America's tallest western larch tree that dwarfs the Statue of Liberty. This beloved aging giant has experienced more than 1,000 summers and 1,000 winters—as well as a countless number of hugs.



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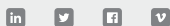


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EDITORIAL

Editor

Scot Hoffman

Deputy Digital Producer

Matt Ringelstetter

Senior Specialist Publications & Operations

Alison Cherryholmes

Contributing Writers

Cathy Cash

Todd H. Cunningham

Frank K. Gallant

Derrill Holly

Reed Karaim

Erin Kelly

John Lowrey

Victoria Rocha

John Vanvig

Senior Director of Editorial and Digital Strategy

Jessica O'Neal

Art Direction

Kevin Kepple

Design

Riva Cho

Jen Wheeler

Senior Vice President of Communications

Scott Peterson

Editorial Office

703-907-5713 • remag@nreca.coop

ADVERTISING & CIRCULATION

Circulation Manager

Veronica Franco

Advertising Sales

301-829-6333 • Fax 301-829-6336

Buyer's Guide

rebuyersguide.nreca.coop

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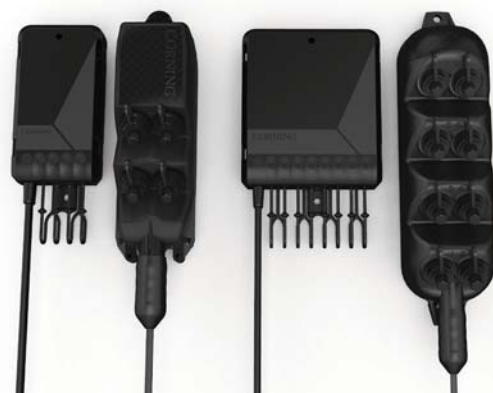
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A CELEBRATED 'SECOND'

BY FRANK K. GALLANT

It's nice to be first, but sometimes, second is pretty good too.

Pontotoc Electric Power Association (PEPA) in northeastern Mississippi proudly touts its position as the second electric co-op to go into business in the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) era of rural electrification. Alcorn County Electric Power Association (often called ACE) beat it by eight months in June 1934.

Before the Rural Electrification Administration got up to speed, ACE, in Corinth, Mississippi, was where rural policy officials in Washington and at TVA chose to test the electric co-op business model. It was known as the Corinth Experiment.

PEPA goes by the slogan "Second Oldest Electric Cooperative in America."

The history page on the co-op's website pinpoints the precise day and time PEPA became a going concern in a footnoted narrative by Chuck Howell, the co-op's general manager.

"At midnight between Thursday, February 28, and Friday, March 1, 1935, the Tennessee Valley Authority read a meter on a primary metering point located on State Highway 6 at the Lee-Pontotoc County line and officially transferred its interests in the electric distribution system to Pontotoc County Electric Power Association."

Go back to September 30, 1933, and PEPA was holding its first organizational meeting at the county courthouse in Pontotoc. The following February, it filed incorporation papers at the state capital in Jackson.

By this time, TVA had purchased the assets of the investor-owned utility serving Alcorn, Pontotoc, and six other counties in the region for \$850,743.

"Due to the high capital costs of line construction in rural areas with

very low customer densities, Mississippi Power Company served only the towns proper and practically none of the rural areas in these counties," Howell writes.

TVA began to build distribution

lines in Pontotoc County, connecting the villages of Springvale, Randolph, and Toccopola, which were transferred to PEPA on that February midnight.

continued on page 47



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JIM MATHESON, CEO

Turning the page to 2021 is a good time to take stock of the past year and survey the opportunities that lie ahead. Part of this process involves developing a set of strategic priorities that will guide our work to advance NRECA's mission and deliver value to our members.

Like your co-op, we dedicated much of 2020 to responding to COVID-19 and adjusting our programs and member engagement to best serve you. We view the next two years as a recovery period and have updated our priorities to include new dynamics brought about by the pandemic and ways to enhance our advocacy capacity during this period of transition in Washington.

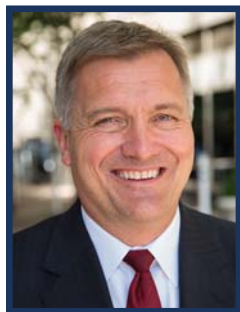
Albert Einstein said, "In the middle of difficulty lies opportunity." As we've navigated the pandemic, the adjustments we made have revealed many opportunities to improve, including in our operational efficiency, our engagement with you, and our capacity as an influencer.

One of our top priorities this year is to expand the ways in which you interact with us. We had already begun work on a new online learning platform, but circumstances in 2020 accelerated that effort as well as new virtual member engagement activities.

Stay-at-home orders affecting work, school, and health care bolstered our support of broadband development and cybersecurity programs. We will continue to partner with you in these areas this year.

Perhaps the most significant

change during the pandemic has been how we apply NRECA's influential leadership. We are using new tools and platforms to enhance the advocacy capacity of America's electric cooperatives and finding new ways to impact the national policy agenda. This includes acknowledging



"The adjustments we made have revealed many opportunities to improve, including in our operational efficiency, our engagement with you, and our capacity as an influencer."

societal and technology shifts in reimagining how we engage, leverage, and grow our grassroots network to amplify our collective voice in Washington and across the country.

As always, we're committed to delivering strong benefits plans. Significantly, there is no increase in the 2021 base premiums for our Group Benefits Program, and base rates for the Retirement Security

Plan will be held to a 3% increase.

Operationally, we expect that much of NRECA's staff will continue to work remotely for part of this year. That reality has shaped our priority of achieving stronger employee engagement and teamwork. While NRECA teams made a smooth transition to working remotely last spring, we recognize there are ways for us to prioritize continuous improvement while ensuring the wellness of our staff.

These strategic priorities reflect a collaborative approach to making progress on crucial issues and meeting our members' most important needs. As we begin this new year, I want to thank you for your ongoing support of NRECA. We look forward to expanding our partnership and making the electric cooperative network even stronger. **RE**



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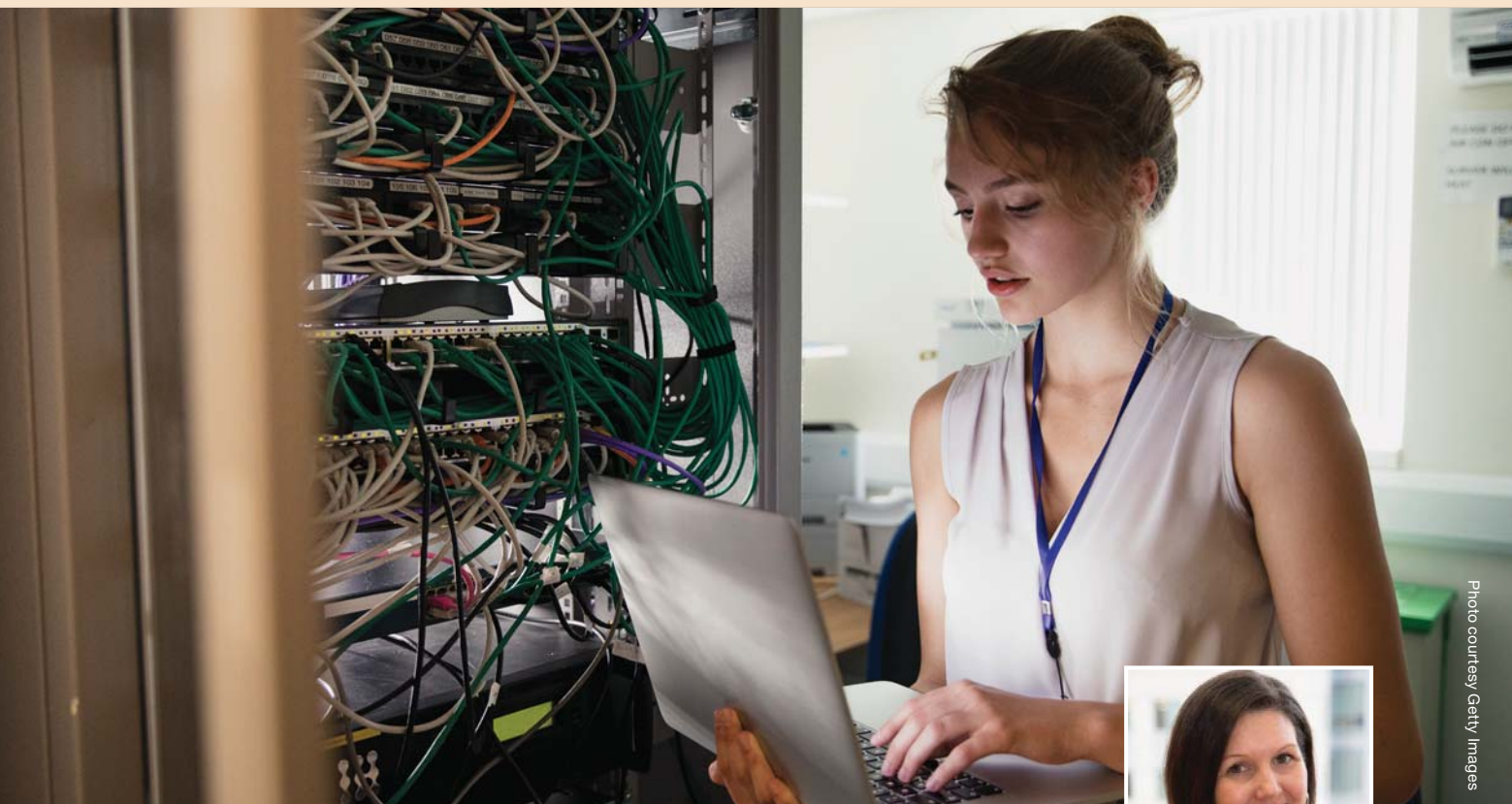


Photo courtesy Getty Images



Shawna Ryan

NRECA MENTORSHIP PROGRAM GIVES CO-OP IT PROFESSIONALS A BOOST

When Jason Ward, a highly trained IT professional, left corporate America for EnergyUnited last December, he knew what he didn't know.

"I was brand new to the co-op field," says Ward, a cybersecurity specialist for the Statesville, North Carolina-based cooperative who has 15 years of experience in IT and a Master of Professional Studies in homeland security-information security and forensics from Penn State University. "I'd been doing security a long time in large companies, so I was looking for ways to learn the co-op space."

So, when NRECA launched the Cooperative IT Mentoring Program pilot in January, Ward applied as a mentee.

Ward was paired with Mike Gayda, security analyst at Withlacoochee River Electric Cooperative in Dade City, Florida. Gayda provided Ward with a foundation of electric co-op protocols and how co-ops serve consumer-members, collaborate, and support each other in finding IT solutions.

Having a mentor "really helped me understand the culture of a cooperative," Ward says. "In IT and cybersecurity, being successful in this role has everything to do with understanding the organization, the commitment, and who you serve. The mentorship helped me to reach those goals."

This year, NRECA will open the Cooperative IT

Mentoring Program to all co-ops. The curriculum requires a six-month commitment and provides support and discussion materials for free. A toolkit is available to facilitate meaningful professional connections.

"At the end of the day, it's human nature; we all want to help people be successful," Gayda says. "To have an outlet like the mentoring program to help meet that collaborative need as a mentor is rewarding."

The idea for the program came to Shawna Ryan five months into her post as head of IT cooperative relations at NRECA. "I was impressed with the amount of connection I saw among the IT professionals and the appetite for even more," Ryan says. "There are fewer than three IT professionals on average in an electric co-op, and one third of the electric co-ops have no IT staff at all."

She says the mentoring program offers participants "that extra person to talk to, someone to help them grow and help them achieve their professional goals."

Electric co-op professionals who want to participate in NRECA's IT Mentorship Program should contact Shawna Ryan at shawna.ryan@nreca.coop.

For more on this story, visit cooperative.com.

—By Cathy Cash



Photo courtesy Anza Electric Cooperative

Anza Electric Cooperative solar array

BRINGING SOLAR POWER TO LOW-INCOME MEMBERS

NRECA has won a \$1 million three-year grant from the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) to research the best ways for electric cooperatives to extend the benefits of solar power to low- and moderate-income members.

“Eighty-five years ago, rural electric cooperatives were born out of the need to address the lack of access to electricity in many rural households,” says Adaora Ifebigh, NRECA’s senior manager of research and development engagements and leader of NRECA’s Advancing Energy Access for All initiative. “Fast forward to today. While the needs are different, changes in the global and U.S. economies have presented new challenges, and those communities are at risk of being left behind.”

The DOE grant funds NRECA’s Achieving Cooperative Community Equitable Solar Sources (ACCESS) project, the flagship effort of the Advancing Energy Access for All initiative, which spotlights co-ops’ efforts to ensure that grid advancements benefit everyone.

NRECA will work with seven co-ops that are already conducting innovative solar projects designed to benefit low- and moderate-income consumer-members: Anza Electric Cooperative in Anza, California; Oklahoma Electric Cooperative in Norman, Oklahoma; Orcas Power & Light Cooperative in Eastsound, Washington; Roanoke Electric Cooperative in Aulander, North Carolina; BARC Electric Cooperative in Millboro, Virginia; Ouachita Electric Cooperative in Camden, Arkansas; and Kit Carson Electric Cooperative in Taos, New Mexico.

For more on this story, visit electric.coop.

—Erin Kelly

THE CO-OP AND THE ACEQUIAS

It’s a classic example of an electric co-op helping another essential local institution.

The Santa Cruz Irrigation District in the Sangre de Cristo Mountains north of Santa Fe, New Mexico, needed to modernize the antique electric service at its dam on the Santa Cruz River, but it didn’t have the \$85,000 to do it. So the board of directors of Española-based Jemez Mountains Electric Cooperative (JMEC) waived its pay-up-front policy for the district, a co-op member.

The district was waiting for a check from the state’s Capital Projects Bureau. “We expect the money early next year,” District Chairman Kenneth Salazar says. “We already have \$53,000.”

The dam, built in 1927, supplies water to 30 *acequias*, the hand-dug and -maintained community irrigation ditches that have sustained small farms and orchards in New Mexico for centuries.

The Santa Cruz acequias have a total of 2,400 *parciantes* (members), who share responsibility for keeping the ditches clear of silt and debris. A *mayordomo*, or ditch manager, heads each acequia.

Chili peppers and apples are the primary crops.

Salazar—a *parciantes* himself as well as a JMEC member—has been busy overseeing three big projects: dredging silt from the reservoir, adding 8 feet to the top of the dam, and now upgrading the electrical service.

The dam gets single-phase service from JMEC, which is converted to three-phase inside the dam. The switch limits the dam to four diversion settings, meaning that sometimes, Dam Tender Richard Chang lets out more water from the reservoir than the acequias need and sometimes less. It’s a crude, unreliable system requiring frequent maintenance.

“The components that convert single-phase power to three-phase power give us heartburn and headaches all the time,” Salazar says.

The new three-phase line JMEC is building will allow Chang to divert any amount of water to any acequia using a smartphone, thanks to a fiber-optic cable that will go in at the same time. These and other electronics will cost an additional \$40,000, Salazar says.

“We’ll be able to conserve water and use electricity we get from Jemez Mountains more efficiently.”

JMEC started working on the upgrade in the fall.

“We haven’t started the actual construction,” General Manager Ernesto Gonzales said at the time. “We’ve done the tree trimming, and we’re still finishing the easements; we’ve got two or three more to go.”

He expected construction to be completed “late winter or early spring.”



Shenandoah Valley Electric Cooperative is adding an educational arboretum to the grounds of its new headquarters in Rockingham County, Virginia.

CO-OP ARBORETUM COMBINES RENEWABLES, POLLINATOR GARDEN, SMART TREE GROWTH

Situated on almost 20 acres in Virginia's Rockingham County, Shenandoah Valley Electric Cooperative's new headquarters has more amenities than its former site, including a drive-through member service kiosk, a track for employees, and solar panels.

Eventually, a unique arboretum with educational and environmental benefits will grace the grounds, thanks to a project spearheaded by Scott Sorrels, the co-op's vegetation management supervisor.

"The arboretum will show how the cooperative is committed to caring for the environment," says Sorrels, who's also the Rockingham-based co-op's arborist. "It will have a lasting impact on the valley as a showcase of renewable resources. We can't wait to have people stop by to learn more."

Initially, Sorrels envisioned the arboretum strictly as a lush, leafy enclave. But after researching a Virginia Tech

program that promotes utility-friendly trees, he settled on the idea of the three-in-one arboretum, which will showcase renewable energy, a pollinator habitat, and small trees designed not to interfere with power lines.

He pitched the plan to Greg Rogers, the co-op's president and CEO. Leadership approved the idea, "as long as it didn't cost the members anything," he said.

Sorrels has pulled together an array of private partners to help fund his vision. When the project is complete, he envisions a landscape dotted with a variety of small renewable energy installations—the co-op's solar panels already are on display—and a habitat to attract butterflies and other pollinators. Low-growing trees will adorn the area, and displays will educate the public on the co-op's smart tree practices.

For more on this story, visit electric.coop.

—By Victoria A. Rocha





Photo by Chris Johansen

The Vermont Electric Cooperative Community Fund is helping a co-op member start a service giving rides in an electric boat to cancer patients.

‘LEAVE CANCER ON SHORE’: VEC HELPS LAUNCH ELECTRIC BOAT CHARITY

A veteran leisure boat captain whose family was affected by cancer will offer patients a little relief this summer with free tours aboard a battery-powered lake cruiser, with help from his electric cooperative.

“Our goal is to provide a respite from the daily struggles of dealing with this disease that touches far too many of us,” says Chris Johansen, a longtime member of Vermont Electric Cooperative (VEC). “We are grateful for all the help we’ve received, including the support from the VEC fund.”

VEC’s Community Fund helps local nonprofits with contributions from consumer-members in the form of rounded-up electric bills or donated capital credits. The Johnson-based co-op is giving \$1,000 to Floating Grace, Johansen’s charitable group and the name of its all-electric “picnic” boat.

The boat will host cancer patients and their families and friends for tours of Lake Memphremagog in Newport. Its inaugural launch is set for Memorial Day.

“VEC has been awesome,” says Johansen, who has captained diesel motorboats for decades. “They have also given us a lot of technical support with the electric end of things.”

Built by California-based Duffy Electric Boats, the 21-foot vessel runs on 16 6-volt batteries. A full charge will allow Floating Grace to cruise, noise- and fume-free, for

about 12 hours, Johansen says. He expects the batteries to last five years while providing tours for patients 100 days a year.

“I’m an old diesel-motor guy, but I can see the writing on the wall with this technology,” Johansen says. “It’s going to grow fast. We are definitely impressed with it.”

Low maintenance—no starter motor, fuel pump, or water pump to replace—and low operational costs convinced him to go all-electric.

“It’s really pennies a day to charge,” he says. “When you figure out the amount of gasoline you burn in five or six years in a boat, you will come out well ahead with the electric version.”

The idea for Floating Grace came about when Johansen’s wife was diagnosed with cancer earlier this year. During multiple trips to the hospital for treatments, they saw many other patients grappling with the mental toll the disease takes.

“People are scared. They are looking for answers, and the journey through treatment can bring a lot of stress,” Johansen says. “This is a just a simple way for just one day to leave cancer on shore.”

Eventually, he says, he wants to work with VEC to purchase solar energy to charge the boat.

“It will be an ongoing partnership.”

—By Cathy Cash

TOO MUCH OF A GOOD THING?

With all the positive aspects of driving electric, it's easy to assume the more electric vehicles (EVs), the better. Not necessarily so.

A new study from the Department of Energy's Pacific Northwest National Laboratory (PNNL) modeled various scenarios and found there is a point where power demand of EVs could

overwhelm the grid. *Electric Vehicles at Scale—Phase 1 Analysis: High EV Adoption Impacts on the Western Power Grid* focuses mainly on generation and transmission.

"While we don't know exactly when the tipping point will happen, fleets of fast-charging vehicles are going to change how cities and utilities manage their electricity infrastructure," says Michael Kinter-Meyer, the study's lead author. "It's not a question of if but when."

The researchers determined that the grid holds up well up to 24 million EVs, the equivalent of about 9% of current traffic on U.S. roads. But at 30 million EVs, problems begin to crop up.

Locally, this could happen with even smaller percentages, with a single EV fast charger drawing as much load as 50 homes.

"If, for example, every house in a cul-de-sac has an EV, one power transformer won't be able to handle multiple EVs charging at the same time," a PNNL news release states.

Current grid planning doesn't account for widespread EV adoption, PNNL's researchers say, and demand for electricity could quickly exceed supply if smart charging (off-peak) strategies are not adopted.

SOLAR FOR THE SANTA ROSA BAND

Starting this fall, Anza Electric Cooperative will help the Santa Rosa Band of the Cahuilla Indians and their neighbors reduce their monthly electric bills by up to 50%.

About 38 Cahuillas and 150 to 250 other residents on and off the reservation, in the high desert country northeast of San Diego, will be hooked up to a nearly 1-MW solar array built with volunteer labor by Grid Alternatives, an affordable solar company. The array has 2,628 panels and spreads across 5 acres.

"It's a great project," says Kevin Short, general manager of the 5,000-meter co-op. "It really benefits the low-income residents of the area."

It was made possible by a \$2 million grant from the California Department of Community Services and Development (CSD) Low-income Weatherization Program's Community Solar Pilot Program. It's Grid Alternatives' largest community-scale project so far.

The array project will save the beneficiaries about \$5.4 million over the next 25 years through co-op bill credits.

Anza Electric's headquarters is in the small town of the same name and about 7 miles from the reservation. Short says the cost of the Santa Rosa Band array will not affect the rates of the co-op's 3,800 members on or off the reservation. **RE**

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‘SO OUR ENTIRE COMMUNITY CAN FLOURISH’

Co-ops leverage their founding principles to advance diversity, equity, and inclusion

By Victoria A. Rocha



Photo by Rob Roedel

Group shot of a recent class of interns at Arkansas Electric Cooperative Corp.

When Chemia Woods took over the internship program at Arkansas Electric Cooperative Corp. (AECC) eight years ago, she wondered why there were so few Black interns at the Little Rock-based G&T.

“It wasn’t a bad or good thing,” she recalls thinking. “It was just something to be discussed and understood.”

In Michigan, senior leaders and directors at Cherryland Electric Cooperative were similarly concerned about diversity during a recent search to nominate candidates for two open board seats.

“The board felt they weren’t getting as many younger applicants as they had hoped,” says Rachel Johnson, member relations manager at the Grawn-based co-op.

To fill the gaps, both co-ops took a “go where they are” approach.

AECC broadened its intern recruitment process to include the region’s rich network of historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs). Cherryland began a program to develop “a bench of smart, talented younger

members” who could someday serve on the board, Johnson says.

Such forward-thinking adaptations are examples of a burgeoning emphasis among co-ops and other businesses to prioritize DEI—diversity, equity, and inclusion—in their workplaces and in their community outreach.

Industry experts see these efforts as a direct response to a broad, ongoing shift in U.S. demographics as well as changing public attitudes. Beyond that dynamic, they say, DEI is being recognized as a proven business practice for recruiting talent and boosting worker satisfaction.

Several cooperative groups, including the Credit Union National Association, have adopted DEI-focused resolutions. A DEI resolution was offered by several electric co-ops during NRECA’s 2020 national resolutions process, and co-op representatives will vote on adoption of the measure during the PowerXchange virtual annual meeting this year.



Photo by Rob Roedel

AECC Human Resources Rep Chemia Woods (standing) and Maria Bunting Smedley, AECC vice president of human resources and corporate strategy

Roanoke Electric Cooperative CEO and NRECA President Curtis Wynn, who has made DEI at electric co-ops a priority during his final year leading the national board, says diversity, equity, and inclusion have been cooperative values since the beginning.

“This is not a new concept for electric co-ops,” he says. “But as with any other part of our business, it requires co-ops to continuously assess and evaluate how we’re doing, and to make adjustments and improvements as new circumstances arise.”

During Wynn’s tenure as president, the NRECA board of directors established the Diversity Champion Award to recognize co-op employees or directors for “outstanding contributions to lead and promote diversity, equity, and inclusion.” The inaugural award will be presented in 2022.

Wynn says examining and emphasizing DEI practices will be essential as utilities respond to rapid changes in the industry and co-ops look for creative ways to further integrate things like distributed generation, beneficial electrification, battery storage, and other grid advancements.

“As we witness an energy transformation that requires a different approach and a new perspective, workforce diversity becomes increasingly important,” he says.

WHAT IS DEI?

Historically, diversity, equity, and inclusion practices have centered on correcting bias based on gender or race. But the concept has evolved to encompass a much

broader scope, now including ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, age, disabilities, and religious or political beliefs, among other facets.

DEI proponents define the terms in different ways, but they generally revolve around the following tenets:

Diversity is the recognition that a team, a workplace, a community, or a society benefits when it is made up of people with differing worldviews, ideas, and experiences.

Equity is the understanding that certain people have been historically marginalized in society, and it is the sustained commitment to providing a level playing field for all.

Inclusion is building a culture where all people feel valued and encouraged to succeed, regardless of race, identity, gender, etc.

Organizations evaluating their DEI position should take a broad view of diversity, says Michele Rinn, NRECA’s senior vice president for human resources.

“Are you leveraging the diversity you have today? Everybody has diversity in some way,” Rinn says. “It really becomes about employee engagement and using staff for all the skills and thoughts they have so that you get to better, more creative ideas.”

Ed VanHoose, for instance, points to his childhood spent in foster care.

“That’s really a marginalized existence that a lot of people don’t go through,” says VanHoose, general manager of Lorain-Medina Rural Electric Cooperative and North Central Electric Cooperative in Ohio. “My experiences have informed who I am as a person, and to be able

to bring that to bear in a cooperative world is pretty important. I can use that to share what I've done and how I've gotten where I am with others, so that way we can all be stronger together."

Most agree that DEI is *not* about hitting quotas, checking boxes, or entitlement-hiring.

"It's not a numbers game," says Bill Hetherington, CEO of Bandera Electric Cooperative, which serves some 36,000 members in the Texas Hill Country. "It's not, 'I have to go out and hire 6.8 out of 10 people with a Hispanic background because 68% of our community is Hispanic.'"

Bandera Electric recently created its "Reimagining Rural America" program to attract a wider talent pool for critical positions at the co-op.

"It's about treating employees with respect and equality," Hetherington says. "It's about promoting a culture of trust and integrity that allows employees to feel comfortable in voicing their opinions."

GOOD FOR BUSINESS

Studies have consistently shown that DEI practices are good for business.

A 2018 McKinsey analysis of companies in the United States and United Kingdom found that firms with the most gender diversity among executives were 21% more likely to record higher profits and 27% more likely to offer better products. Companies with "highly diverse" employees in areas like age, sexual orientation, or socioeconomic background were 33% more likely to have higher profits than competitors.

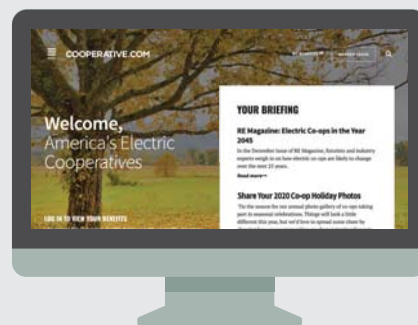
While the report acknowledges that progress on DEI is slow, "individual companies have made real strides in improving their I&D [inclusion and diversity] outcomes and in effectively using these results to influence business outcomes."

Other prominent trends in society may make DEI practices even more important.

The back-to-back shocks of the coronavirus pandemic and civil unrest are causing many to re-evaluate where they live and whom they do business with. Telework and a growing awareness of companies' environmental and social practices were already in motion, but observers say the crises have accelerated them.

"It's a weird thing to say, but if there's any silver lining in this awful pandemic, it's simply that it presents an interesting and urgent opportunity for rural communities," says Zachary Mannheimer, a consultant at McClure Engineering who works with co-ops on community development. "We're trying to say to rural communities, especially co-op communities, that there are opportunities right now. And if you don't act in the next two years, you're going to miss the window."

Data collected by Mannheimer's firm points to "a migration shift unlike any we've seen in our lifetime," he



DEI RESOURCES

BY VICTORIA ROCHA

Experts say maintaining strong diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) practices relies on conducting regular assessments and having a plan for improvement. Below is a list of resources to get started:

- Cooperative.com provides workforce assessment tools to explore state-level data on hiring and employment trends. Contact: Desiree Dunham, NRECA manager of talent programs, desiree.dunham@nreca.coop or 703-907-5995.

- NRECA is developing resources on cooperative.com to assess workplace culture. Co-ops can participate in a customized culture survey to identify gaps and work with a facilitator on a follow-up plan. An assessment tool and other resources will go online later this year. Contact: Delaine Orendorff, NRECA senior principal for management services, delaine.orendorff@nreca.coop or 571-289-9023.

- NRECA offers several certificate programs for co-op staff and directors on concepts integral to building DEI in workplace culture. Programs include Cooperative Career Essentials, the Supervisor and Manager Development Program and Director Education Certificate programs. Contact: Val Parks, NRECA director of education programs and strategies, valerie.parks@nreca.coop or 703-907-5578; Pat Mangan, NRECA director of governance education, patrick.mangan@nreca.coop or 703-907-5626; or Jeanette Will, NRECA event program planning representative, jeanette.will@nreca.coop or 703-907-6374.

- NRECA's economics and business unit can analyze demographics within your service area based on government sources. Contact: Michael Leitman, NRECA senior analyst for economics and business, michael.leitman@nreca.coop or 703-907-5864.

- The Women in Power online professional community on cooperative.com was started this past fall and has more than 1,000 members. Contact: Brandon Hensley, NRECA senior manager of membership, brandon.hensley@nreca.coop or 703-907-5930. **RE**



Photo by Rob Roedel

Orientation for AECC's class of 2019 interns included a tour of the G&T's solar array in Little Rock, Arkansas.

says. As of October 2020, “roughly 5% of the urban workforce have left for suburban and rural locations around the country. Most people are going within 200 miles of where they were. And of that percentage, most were thinking of leaving before COVID, which was the thing that pushed them over.”

The crises have also fueled the growth of “values-based companies,” adds Sheldon Petersen, CEO of the National Rural Utilities Cooperative Finance Corporation. If businesses make public statements supporting DEI, he says, investors, consumers, and employees expect their practices to match.

Even before the pandemic, Petersen says, “companies were already feeling the pressure, from investors demanding to see how companies measure up to environmental, social, and governance metrics to customers wanting to purchase goods and services from companies they feel good about and employees wanting to work for organizations that have a purpose larger than profit.”

As the energy industry transforms and many co-ops begin to feel the impact of third-party service providers,

strong DEI practices coupled with the guiding cooperative principles could help engage members who will have more energy choices.

“DEI may become even more important as co-ops have to innovate more rapidly as their function and role evolves along with member and community needs,” says Ginny Beauchemin, NRECA's managing director of business optimization.

RETHINKING RECRUITING

In recent years, as waves of older employees have retired and job roles at co-ops reorient to meet new industry challenges, some co-ops have looked to strengthen their DEI efforts to make up an increasing “talent deficit,” particularly in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) fields.

“And one way to address that is to recruit from areas that we have not historically recruited from,” says Maria Bunting Smedley, AECC's vice president of human resources and corporate strategy.



Photo by Rob Roedel

Arkansas Electric Cooperative Corp.'s 2019 summer interns visit the G&T's Oswald Generation Station in Wrightsville, Arkansas.

With a workforce of about 700, AECC is a major employer in the region. Yet when Woods took over the internship program in 2013, she found few college students had even heard of the G&T.

“Our internship program operated more by word-of-mouth,” Woods says. “If your dad or your grandparents worked here or used to work here, that’s how you would get referred. In most cases, the students were the most qualified candidates, but you also want to increase your talent pool for the future.”

A graduate of Howard University, one of the nation’s prominent HBCUs, Wood now travels to 15 colleges each year to recruit interns. She also visits local high schools to talk about co-op careers.

Interest in the program has soared, from 500 applicants when Woods began to about 1,000 today. Intern placements at the G&T have increased by one-third on average. AECC itself has hired 15 interns, three of them from HBCUs. Even better, Woods says, “students are beginning to reach out to us now through word-of-mouth from their peers working with us through the summers.”

At Cherryland Electric, two cohorts have gone through the Emerging Leaders program to learn co-op finances, distribution operations, and future challenges and trends in power supply and technology. Participants get a per-diem and attend four two-hour sessions over four months.

While the co-op hasn’t had any board vacancies to fill since the program started, strong potential candidates are waiting in the wings, Johnson says.

“If you want a more diverse board, you have to develop interest in serving on your board from a diverse group of people. Programs like ours are a great way to do that.”

‘A UNIFYING FORCE’

Adam Schwartz, founder of the Cooperative Way, notes that when co-ops incorporate DEI principles into their business strategies, they’re leveraging the co-op principles of open and voluntary membership, democratic control, and concern for community.

“Co-ops have an economic purpose that is absolutely fundamental to who we are, but we also have a social purpose,” he says. “Years ago, that social purpose was to bring electricity for a better quality of life. But in times of social unrest or division, co-ops can be a unifying force too.”

The cooperative difference can help guide co-ops in ensuring an equitable industry transformation, whether that involves removing barriers so that all members can benefit or finding workers knowledgeable of new technologies, says NRECA President Wynn.

“That’s why the cooperative difference continues to be so important. ... We include everyone to improve quality of life and economic opportunity,” he says.

“It’s our job, as co-ops and purpose-driven organizations, to nourish each of our diverse members with equity, providing the programs, products, and services they need so our entire community can flourish.” **RE**

“It’s our job ... to nourish each of our diverse members with equity, providing the programs, products, and services they need so our entire community can flourish.”

—Curtis Wynn, NRECA president and CEO of Roanoke EC



NRECA President Curtis Wynn (center) with Youth Leadership Council delegates at the 2020 Annual Meeting in New Orleans

NOVEMBER 2020 PHOTO CHALLENGE WINNERS

Congratulations to Missy Kidwell with Consolidated Cooperative in Mount Gilead, Ohio, for “Practice Makes Perfect” (below), winner of the November 2020 *RE Magazine* Photo Challenge with the theme “Youth Ag Programs.”

Congratulations as well to Trisha Moultrie with United Electric Cooperative in Heyburn, Idaho. Her photo, “Bonding With No Words” (right), earned runner-up honors in the competition.



Practice Makes Perfect

Cooper, son of a Consolidated Cooperative employee, takes Daisy on a training walk at their home near Mount Gilead, Ohio, in preparation for an upcoming county fair.

Photo by Missy Kidwell



Upcoming contest themes are:

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- **March:** Church Windows
- **April:** Interesting Tools

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Bonding With No Words

United Electric Co-op Billing Specialist Trisha Moultrie says her daughter, Madelyn, just has a way with her animals. “She is an animal whisperer. “

Photo by Trisha Moultrie

FIBER OR 5G?

For all its promise, tomorrow's cellular technology won't be a connectivity cure-all for rural areas

BY REED KARAIM

5G is going to change the world.

It's a familiar refrain from tech media and certain cellular carriers, but for most electric cooperatives and their rural consumer-members, the truth is likely to be far from the hype.

"It's been touted as basically the best thing since sliced bread," says Brian O'Hara, NRECA senior director for regulatory issues, telecom, and broadband. "The marketing has been through the roof. The reality is something very different, especially for rural America."

5G is advertised as having the speed and bandwidth to not only provide cellphone service but even replace other internet connections in homes and businesses.

"5G will form our communications infrastructure in the same way that roads and power grids formed our industrial infrastructure," says Asha Keddy, an Intel vice president, reflecting the claims made by 5G advocates. "It will touch every facet of our lives."

But the infrastructure required to fully realize the potential of 5G, along with range limitations—particularly in the high-band millimeter frequency that provides the fastest speeds—mean it will be years before 5G arrives in many parts of the country, if it arrives at all, O'Hara says.

Still, 5G has attracted interest in areas on both sides of the "digital divide," the gulf between highly connected urban communities and rural areas still suffering a lack of access to broadband internet and reliable cellular service. Lawmakers and officials in some states have gone so far as to question the need to build broadband fiber networks with 5G on the horizon.

"The hype about 5G is causing confusion in rural America," says Kathy Nelson, a telecommunications consultant and a former electric co-op telecom engineer.

Greg Santoro, chief marketing and strategy officer at technology service co-op NRTC, says the confusion is understandable.

"They hear about all this phenomenal speed and capability in 5G," he says. "But those capabilities require fully upgraded, compatible hardware and [high-end, millimeter frequency] spectrum."

5G'S FLAVORS

Under ideal circumstances, the faster speeds of 5G cellular—up to 10 times that of 4G—and its higher data capacity can enable a new level of wireless connectivity. The potential benefits go beyond fast downloads to more internet-of-things (IOT) devices and expanded use of data-intensive applications like augmented and virtual reality.

But bringing those benefits to the public comes with challenges. First, 5G is often discussed as if it's one blazing-fast standard, when it actually comes in different flavors that operate at varying speeds based on the network's radio wave frequencies.

The three major U.S. cellular carriers—Verizon, AT&T, and T-Mobile, which has acquired Sprint—all initially focused on using different parts of the radio spectrum for their 5G networks. AT&T is using 850 MHz low-band spectrum, which has better range but slower speeds. T-Mobile is also operating a low-band network using 600 MHz spectrum, although it's also integrating Sprint's faster mid-band 2.5 GHz spectrum for what it calls a "layer cake" approach. Verizon has focused on high-band millimeter wave (mmWave) spectrum, which provides a

larger bandwidth for faster speeds.

The mmWave version of 5G, which AT&T and T-Mobile are also installing in limited urban locations, is the one advocates point to when discussing how transformative the new technology is. But it comes with the most significant limitations. The signal is extremely short range, generally traveling 1,500 feet or less, which requires installing a dense array of antennas to provide decent coverage.

It's also more easily blocked by solid objects like walls and trees. Independent tests in cities where it's been introduced have found that coverage is very spotty, sometimes disappearing if you simply cross the street.

Finally, to provide the bandwidth to get all the potential advantages of 5G, it requires many small antennas in each array. In cities, where streetlights, buildings, and other infrastructure offer ample opportunities to attach arrays, this can be a manageable if expensive problem. But in rural areas, it becomes more difficult and much more expensive to build out such a network.

Low-band and mid-band 5G, the types featured by T-Mobile and AT&T, have longer broadcast ranges measured in miles, which don't require as much new equipment. But they lack the blazing speed of mmWave 5G. Tests have shown they sometimes provide no more speed than 4G or offer improvements of only 20% to 30%, though both are capable of higher speeds under the right conditions.

'JUST TOO MANY HOLES'

All of these limitations have contributed to a growing awareness among electric cooperatives that 5G is not the answer to bridging the digital divide.

Some of Great River Energy's member co-ops were excited about the prospect of helping their consumer-members get broadband internet, says Chris LeLeux, the Minnesota G&T's manager of infrastructure services.



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"Then, when you get down into the details, you find out what the reality is compared to fiber," he says.

Today, LeLeux adds, he no longer hears talk that 5G could be a cure-all. For one thing, any 5G system, even a mid-band or low-band one, still requires a fiber backbone reaching out to the antennas.

"From a coverage perspective, you're at 2 square miles for a tower. We have areas in Minnesota where that might cover one or two or three users," he says. "If you're going to have to build fiber to that tower, you might as well just drop fiber into the homes and save yourself in antennas."

Mille Lacs Energy Cooperative, based in Aitkin, Minnesota, is a Great River Energy member in the middle of a fiber build-out to serve its members. Mille Lacs is partnering with the local telephone co-op, which is providing the back-end connection to the internet.

Stacy Cluff, the co-op's technology and energy services manager, says they've tried different options over the years to provide internet service, including fixed wireless and satellite.

But these options had limitations that made them less than ideal. Satellite connections are weather dependent and can have a noticeable delay in response. For fixed wireless, the challenges included "getting the towers high enough and getting it high enough on the houses, getting it over the trees," Cluff says. "We found that pine trees here are just a killer of wireless signal."

Mille Lacs' service territory includes lakes, swampy areas, and heavily wooded country that all worked against fixed wireless and hampered cellular service.

"We have many areas in our service territory that can't even get good cellular coverage now," she says. "5G didn't seem like it could be any kind of a viable solution—just too many holes. I don't think we'll see it for many years, if ever."

The cooperative is taking

advantage of a state grant program to install fiber to the home. Member response, she says, has been "nothing but positive. People are desperate for it. Every day we get phone calls, 'When are you coming to our area?'"

IT'S 'NOT CHEAP,' BUT IT'S THE BEST

The cost of bringing fiber to the home is the biggest hurdle for co-ops, notes Ricky Hignite, IT manager at Northeast Oklahoma Electric Cooperative in Vinita, Oklahoma. His co-op has been providing a fiber connection to homes and businesses since June 2015 and has 13,000 members receiving high-speed broadband internet or telephone and TV service through a subsidiary, Northeast Rural Services.

"Fiber is definitely not cheap," he says, but for bridging the digital divide, it's the best solution, providing unmatched bandwidth, speed, and reliability. "Once you invest in it, it's going to be there forever. So it was a safe future investment to be able to provide broadband and other services to our customers."

NRECA's O'Hara says grants are available at both the state and federal level to help co-ops with the cost of fiber. Northeast Oklahoma Electric initially took advantage of the federal Rural Broadband Experiments (RBE) program, which provided nearly \$100 million to bring broadband service to rural areas.

Almost 200 electric cooperatives also have submitted applications to receive monetary support over 10 years under the federal Rural Digital Opportunity Fund, which will disperse \$16 billion to co-ops and other providers to deploy broadband in underserved areas. The winners will be determined through a reverse auction that awards money to the providers who pledge to provide the greatest speed at the lowest cost.

In October, the Federal

Communications Commission announced the creation of its 5G Fund for Rural America, a \$9 billion reverse auction to help to help drive 5G into rural areas, though the fund is on hold pending a federal broadband mapping effort. While it could create competition for co-op broadband in some areas, it may also provide opportunities for broadband co-ops to lease fiber capacity, O'Hara says.

Even when 5G or later generations of cellular do make inroads into rural areas, NRTC's Santoro says fiber will continue to be the essential communications technology.

"Fiber all the way to the home is the best technology that can be deployed" while also being essential to future wireless networks, he says. "It all comes back to fiber infrastructure. Yes, wireless will continue to get better and better, but without fiber infrastructure, you won't see much of a difference in people's lives." **RE**

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A one-size-fits-all broadband template often ends up not fitting at all. Every electric cooperative has its own unique service area, business and financial goals, and member needs. NRTC knows this because we were created *by* electric cooperatives, and we *are* a cooperative. Cooperative principles guide everything we do. Our technology evaluation, feasibility studies, design and engineering services, construction and project management, and managed services ensure that we will be with you every step of the way.

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Photo courtesy Consumers Power

WITHOUT HESITATION

THE WORST OF 2020 BROUGHT OUT THE BEST IN CO-OP CREWS

BY GEORGE STUTEVILLE

After a year of relentless calamity for electric cooperatives—from the impacts of the coronavirus pandemic to a punishing season of hurricanes and storms in the south to hellish wildfires in the northwest—weary workers can take heart: for co-ops, help will come without hesitation.

Roman Gillen, CEO of Consumers Power Inc. in Philomath, Oregon, says that phrase, *without hesitation*, conveys a deep meaning for him.

On the surface, the words describe how volunteer line crews from four other co-ops rushed to Gillen's urgent call

for help in restoring power after Labor Day fires incinerated about 75 percent of the Consumer Power system that was within the fire zone.

But Gillen says the meaning of the words and their impact are more profound.

Even months later, you can hear it when he describes what it looked like when he surveyed the co-op's service territory in the immediate aftermath of the Sept. 7 Santiam Canyon inferno. About 850 homes were damaged or destroyed, leaving surreal scenes with twisted car frames

still in driveways and mangled swing sets in backyards.

As bad as the scene was, what moves Gillen most is the response when they reached out for help from Salem Electric, Hood River Electric Cooperative, Midstate Electric Cooperative, and Oregon Trail Electric Cooperative.

"There was no hesitation," he says. "They all said, yes. Within two hours they were on the way with four full crews, committed for a week and more if we needed it. We got all the help we needed, and that chokes me up. It goes beyond a mutual aid agreement."

'YOU JUST GO'

While the Oregon crews were working ankle deep in smoldering, ash-covered ground to set poles and stretch wires, in southeast Texas, another co-op line-worker, 28-year-old Justin Smith, was recovering from injuries he'd sustained doing his part to restore a storm-stricken system.

In late August, Category-4 Hurricane Laura pounded through Jasper-Newton Electric Cooperative's territory, knocking out power to 21,000 in its furious wake.

Smith was riding out the storm at his mother's house close to the co-op, because he knew he'd be needed as soon as it was safe to work. But in the middle of the storm, a neighbor called: "Justin, a tree's fallen on your house."

During a lull as the hurricane eye was passing, Smith rushed home, where he found limbs poking through the shattered roof.

"Everything was soaking wet," he recalls. "There was insulation all over."

But rather than stay to repair damage, he quickly shoved valuables and other items into dry rooms. Then, he went to work.

"When you got 20,000 people out, you put yourself aside. You just go," he says. "There was nothing else I could do."

While working to restore power, Smith was badly injured when an oak tree he was



Photo by Mike Lout

Justin Smith (left) with Texas State Rep. James White at a benefit for Justin at the Beech Grove Volunteer Fire Department

cutting off a line broke in half and sent a 10-foot section onto his foot. The impact snapped three bones and mangled ligaments.

Now it was Smith's turn to receive support.

When Beech Grove Volunteer Fire Department crews learned what had happened, they quickly arranged a benefit fish fry for Smith and asked the community to help:

"This young man went to work to restore OUR electricity while leaving his house destroyed by Hurricane Laura," they wrote on their department Facebook page. "He ... can't work and is faced with a coming surgery and rehabilitation. So let's show Justin and his family what it means to be supportive and appreciative of him, his chosen profession, and his situation."

It seems the act of helping without hesitation is contagious.

Last month as Gillen watched the rebuilding of CPI's system, he said the message was indelible: "If you need help, we are going to come running to your aid."

Smith said he will always be in the debt of those who gave him a hand. He's looking forward to March, when his rehabilitation ends and he can return to work on the line.

"I'll be there, whenever or wherever I am needed."

Without hesitation. **RE**

Know someone RE Magazine could profile for our "Front Lines" column? We're looking for co-op operations and member services staffers, from meter readers to lineworkers to engineers, who make things work at electric co-ops nationwide. Contact us at remag@nreca.coop, or you can reach writer George Stuteville directly at gstut@outlook.com.



Photo courtesy Consumers Power

Roman Gillen, CEO, Consumers Power

KANSAS CONTRACT CHANGES PUT 'SUN' IN SUNFLOWER STATE

A change in the terms of the wholesale power contract between participating Kansas electric cooperatives and their G&T will put more sun—more than 20 MW of it—into the Sunflower State.

The change allows the cooperatives to self-procure up to 15% of peak demand, with 5% of that amount specifically allowing for the addition of solar power, and a dozen co-ops are crossing a state line, or two, to partner with Arkansas-based Today's Power Inc. (Affiliate Member; todayspower.com) for construction of the systems.

The Kansas facilities, all in the 1-MW range, will be spread across more than 800 miles. They will be developed and owned by Today's Power and will sell output under 25-year purchase agreements with additional five-year options. This will allow the co-ops to procure solar energy with low upfront costs while reducing peak demand, providing members with financial stability and reducing their carbon footprint. The projects are in the engineering process, with construction to take place in phases beginning this year and running into next.

The Kansas Cooperative Sun Power Program draws on Today's Power's experience in building solar arrays for 15 of the 17 electric co-ops in Arkansas, as well as projects in Oklahoma and Tennessee.

Contact: 4 Rivers Electric Cooperative, 620-364-2116; Ark Valley Electric Cooperative, 620-662-6661; Bluestem Electric Cooperative, 785-456-2212; Butler Electric Cooperative, 316-321-9600; CMS Electric Cooperative, 620-873-2184; DS&O Electric Cooperative, 785-655-2011; FreeState Electric Cooperative, 800-794-1989; Heartland Rural Electric Cooperative, 620-724-8251; Ninnescah Rural Electric Cooperative, 620-672-5538; The Sedgwick County Electric Cooperative Association, 316-542-3131; Sumner-Cowley

Electric Cooperative, 620-326-3356; Twin Valley Electric Cooperative, 620-784-5500; Today's Power Inc., Jennah Denney, 501-400-5548.

CO-OP ISPs LOOK TO CLOUD FOR VoIP PHONE PLATFORM

Many electric co-ops are offering VoIP—voice over internet protocol—phone services as part of the communications mix they're providing, or planning, in rural communities, and they're reaching for the cloud to do so. Cloud services provide a better overall user experience to co-op members while reducing the cost of VoIP ownership.

Alianza (alianza.com) says four co-ops are offering a broadband-VoIP combo as part of their initial offering or are adding the voice component after launch.

They include MidSouth Electric Cooperative's

MidSouth Fiber Internet in Texas, which is offering broadband and VoIP together as it builds out; Continental Divide Electric Cooperative's Red Bolt Broadband in New Mexico and Jackson Electric Cooperative's MyJEC.net in

Texas, which are adding VoIP to win customers and serve communities with "compelling cloud communications offerings"; and Bandera Electric Cooperative's BEC Fiber in Texas, which is upgrading its voice option as it deploys 100% fiber broadband.

"A cloud communications platform represents an attractive alternative that is more flexible and scalable than VoIP 1.0 equipment, vastly simpler to manage, and provides an agile, future-proof feature set," says Kevin Mitchell, Alianza's vice president of marketing.

Contact: MidSouth Electric Cooperative, 936-825-5100; Continental Divide Electric Cooperative, 505-285-6651; Jackson Electric Cooperative, 770-963-6166; Bandera Electric Cooperative, 866-226-3372; Alianza, Kevin Mitchell, 801-802-6400.



A Today's Power solar array at Woodruff Electric Cooperative in Arkansas

Photo courtesy Today's Power



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SUN SHINES BRIGHTER FOR GREEN POWER EMC, GEORGIA CO-OPS

Green Power EMC will provide renewable energy to more than 30 electric co-ops upon completion of the 86-MW Snipesville solar facility in southeast Georgia.

Tucker-based Green Power EMC is a not-for-profit cooperative founded in 2001 and owned by 38 Georgia co-ops to support their search for renewable resources. Its primary efforts have been to find, screen, analyze, and negotiate power purchase agreements with Georgia-based renewable resource providers.

"We are grateful for the support from our members," President Jeff Pratt says.

The project's owner and operator is independent solar power producer Silicon Ranch (NRECA Associate Member, siliconranchcorp.com), which will supply the energy produced to Green Power EMC. The company already operates three solar projects, totaling 112 MW, in the same county.

Contact: Green Power EMC, Yvonne Jordan, 770-270-7229; Silicon Ranch, Rob Hamilton, 629-202-4009.

LOOKING UP TO MANAGE TROUBLE TREES IN VIRGINIA

Rappahannock Electric Cooperative's (REC) vegetation management program is looking up—way up—in an effort to help the Virginia co-op's personnel identify trees at risk of falling and causing outages along power lines in its far-flung service area.

Currently, the co-op's vegetation management team compiles ground-level data to identify hazard trees. The research project began when the Electric Power Research Institute (EPRI, epri.com) reached out to REC with satellite data on trees in one of its rights-of-way.

The data used hyperspectral analysis to determine the amount of chlorophyll on a leaf's surface. Researchers note that a healthy tree will have a significant amount of the substance, while a declining one will have far less, and a dead one won't even register.

Armed with the EPRI data, co-op foresters went to the right-of-way to visually inspect the trees, and they compared their ground-level data with that gathered from satellites.

While additional research and analysis continue, REC Director of Vegetation Management Cindy Musick says the technology could dramatically help the co-op identify hazard trees before they fall and cause an outage, greatly improving reliability.

The implications may be far wider. "Ultimately, if this can be accurate, it would be groundbreaking for the utility industry around the world," Musick adds.

Contact: Rappahannock Electric Cooperative, Casey Hollins, 540-891-5908; Electric Power Research Institute, 650-855-2000.

SOLAR PROJECT COMPLEMENTS WIND POWER PORTFOLIO IN IOWA

The Wapello Solar project in southeastern Iowa is nearing completion, with commercial operation scheduled to begin early this year. Central Iowa Power Cooperative (CIPCO, G&T) is purchasing 100% of the power from the project under a 25-year agreement from developer Clenera LLC (clenera.com), an independent renewable energy company. The 100-MW project is one of the largest solar facilities in the Midwest.

"Energy from Wapello Solar will be produced during daily and seasonal peak demand times," says G&T CEO and Executive Vice President Bill Cherrier. "This is an innovative way for us to offer reliability and efficiency to CIPCO's energy portfolio."

Cherrier also notes a synergy between Wapello Solar and the Heartland Divide Wind Energy Center. CIPCO purchases that center's entire 103.5-MW output. Another project, Independence Wind, will come on-line later this year, and CIPCO will purchase all of that facility's 54-MW output.

"Energy produced by the sun provides an excellent complement to wind energy," Cherrier says.

Contact: Central Iowa Power Cooperative, Dawn Sly-Terpstra, 515-975-8433; Clenera, 208-639-32320.

NOLIN RECC EXPANDS AMI PARTNERSHIP

Nolin RECC is expanding its advanced metering infrastructure (AMI) network partnership with Trilliant, which helps the co-op provide reliable service and two-way communication to its AMI across its rural Kentucky service area. Nolin uses the company's SecureReach low power wide area network technology to connect and manage its 36,000 advanced meters.

With a reliable networking technology based on the latest security standards, Nolin's AMI deployment has provided members with a unique capability to manage their energy consumption while keeping information safe and secure.

"Advanced metering infrastructure technology has revolutionized the way we work and, more importantly, improved the flexibility and experience our members enjoy," Nolin President and CEO Greg Lee says.

"The engineering team at Nolin has been quick to innovate and find new ways of gaining value out of their existing AMI investment," says Nick Matchett, Trilliant's managing director of the Americas (NRECA Associate Member, trilliant.com)

Contact: Nolin RECC, 270-765-6153; Trilliant, 919-495-6111. **RE**

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DECORATIVE LED STREETLIGHT

The *Build-Your-Own Acorn* from street- and area light manufacturer **Evluma** is a full-fixture, decorative street-light replacement that includes the customer's choice of acorn globe, finial, and capital fitter. Featuring the OmniMax LED lamp as its light source, this solution is designed for utilities, municipalities, facilities, and property managers looking to upgrade their existing decorative lighting from HID to LED. The fixture options include multiple styles of acrylic and polycarbonate globes, in addition to a cast aluminum capital fitter.

Contact: *Evluma, Renton, Washington, 425-336-5800; cshattuck@evluma.com; evluma.com.*

CELLULAR IOT ENERGY MANAGEMENT PARTNERSHIP

Landis+Gyr and **Vodafone Business** are announcing a partnership that will deliver *cellular internet of things (IoT) capabilities for energy management* and will help accelerate digital transformation and renewable energy integration. The cellular capabilities will be part of Landis+Gyr's bundled energy management service network options without the hassle of managing multiple subscription contracts. Benefits include low-power wide-area technology capabilities with the ability to transition to 5G networks when available; renewable integration; and improved management of cellular smart grid devices.

Contact: *Landis+Gyr, Alpharetta, Georgia, 678-258-1500; jerry.olson@landisgyr.com; landisgyr.com.*

CYBERSECURITY EDUCATION KIT

National Information Solutions Cooperative (NISC) has updated and added more elements to its *CyberSense cybersecurity arsenal*, a free educational kit available to organizations nationwide. Designed specifically for electric cooperatives, public power utilities, and telecommunications companies, the kit includes short animated videos, downloadable bill inserts, social media content, and retractable banners. The full CyberSense kit is available for download on NISC's website.

Contact: *National Information Solutions Cooperative, Mandan, North Dakota, 866-999-6472; cybersecurity.sales@nisc.coop; nisc.coop.*

A man wearing a cap and a work shirt is looking down at a tablet device. The background is blurred, showing what appears to be a construction or outdoor work site. The entire image has a blue tint.

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NEW UAV LIDAR SOLUTION

Unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) LiDAR solutions provider **YellowScan** is integrating *Livox's Horizon laser scanner* into a new solution, the *YellowScan Mapper*. It's designed to fit all DJI professional drones (M200, M210, M300, M600) and comes with an integrated camera module. The YellowScan Mapper is ideal for general topography projects and is particularly suited for power line surveys and post-disaster missions. It integrates with YellowScan's existing software, LiveStation and CloudStation.

Contact: YellowScan, Montpellier, France, 33 (0)4 11 93 14 23; morgane.selve@yellowscan-lidar.com, yellowscan-lidar.com.



FIBER FUSION SPLICER

AFL is launching two new *Fujikura splicer models: the 90S single fiber fusion splicer and 90R ribbon fusion splicer*. Both feature ergonomic improvements and enhancements to automate operation, maximize productivity, and minimize downtime for routine maintenance. The 90S kit solves common problems, from splicing poor-quality legacy

fiber to automated equipment maintenance and upkeep. Applications include bend-insensitive fibers in drop cables, long-haul terrestrial and submarine LEAF fibers, loose buffer fiber, and splice-on connectors.

Contact: AFL, Duncan, South Carolina, 800-235-3423; david.mason@aflglobal.com; aflglobal.com.



CLEVEST

HEALTH CHECK TECHNOLOGY

To protect utility workers and members of the public from the spread of viral infections, **Clevest** is partnering with **Clear360**. The integration of **Darwin Lab's Clear360** with the *Clevest Mobile Workforce Management (MWFM)* platform will introduce a proactive step in daily safety readiness procedures for essential front-line workers. A prerequisite step asks each worker whether they're symptom-free before interacting with fellow employees and customers. Workers will voluntarily answer a set of questions, self-testing for temperature and other symptoms, and

collected data is anonymized. In the event a COVID-19 test result is positive, an authorized member of the company's human resources team will be informed. Leveraging GPS tracking and other data within the Clevest MWFM platform, employee contact tracing can be performed immediately.

Contact: Clevest, Richmond, British Columbia, 604-214-9700; contact@clevest.com; clevest.com or clear360.com/clevest.

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571-326-9547 | Leigh.Taylor@nreca.coop



STREAMLINED BROADBAND VOIP

Alianza Inc. is integrating with **NISC's iVUE Connect platform**, simplifying VoIP management, accelerating time to revenue, and reducing the cost of delivering cloud communications. iVUE Connect provides a suite of broadband billing, customer management, and provisioning solutions. Alianza's *Cloud Communications Platform* provides a turnkey VoIP solution that enables broadband providers to deliver a portfolio of residential and business communication services.

Contact: Alianza, Pleasant Grove, Utah, 801-802-6400; kmitchell@alianza.com; alianza.com.

DEDICATED LINEMAN TOOLS

Milwaukee Tool is introducing new *tools specifically for electric lineworkers*: fiberglass bolt cutters featuring rotating handles; an aerial compact tool apron that fits into a single bucket and is made of durable vinyl; and a high-leverage ratcheting wrench and a 5-in-1 ratcheting wrench equipped with durable ratcheting mechanism, a built-in milled strike face for hammering, and large directional switches for use with gloves.

Contact: Milwaukee Tool, Brookfield, Wisconsin, 800-729-3878; michael.dumoit@milwaukeeetool.com; milwaukeeetool.com. **RE**

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Rhode Island
Vermont
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Florida
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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
Alaska
California
Hawaii
Idaho
Montana
Nevada
Oregon
Utah
Washington

Region 10
Arizona
New Mexico
Texas

NATIONAL

CFC PRESIDENT TESCH DIES

Dean Tesch, a former grade-school teacher whose work as a director at a Wisconsin co-op led him to the head of the board table at the National Rural Utilities Cooperative Finance Corporation (CFC, service), Dulles, Virginia, has passed away. Tesch, 58, had moved from teaching to financial planning by 2006, when he was first elected to the board at Taylor Electric Cooperative, Medford, Wisconsin. He was elected chair in 2014, and a year later, he was elected to the District 5 director's seat on the CFC board. Tesch, who also represented his co-op on the board of Dairyland Power Cooperative (G&T), La Crosse, Wisconsin, from 2015 to 2019, was serving as CFC board president at the time of his death. "He often referred to the CFC board and employees as his family," CFC CEO **Sheldon Petersen** wrote in announcing Tesch's passing. "As CFC board president, he led the board through an unprecedented time and ensured CFC was able to move forward while keeping its members and staff safe. Dean was a talented, humble man who has left a huge mark on CFC. He will

Send news items to remag@nreca.coop or johnlvnavig@yahoo.com.



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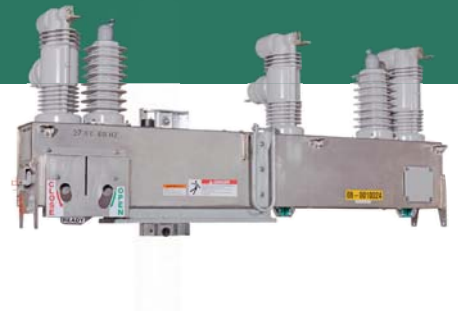
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be greatly missed.” Board Vice President **Alan Wattles**, president/CEO at Monroe County Electric Cooperative, Waterloo, Illinois, stepped in as CFC president pending a special board meeting to elect Tesch’s successor.

Members of the National Cooperative Services Corporation (NCSC), an affiliate of the National Rural Utility Cooperative Finance Corporation (CFC, service), Dulles, Virginia, elected a new board member and re-elected an incumbent at their recent annual meeting. They also saluted their outgoing board president, **John Lee**, president & CEO at Mecklenburg Electric Cooperative, Chase City, Virginia, who retired from the board after nine years of service. “I speak on behalf of everyone when I say how much we value your guidance and leadership,” CFC CEO **Sheldon Petersen** said. Taking Lee’s seat on the NCSC board is **Steven Harmon**, president & CEO at Community Electric Cooperative, Windsor, Virginia.

Deborah Erickson, a board member at Minnesota Valley Electric Cooperative, Jordan, Minnesota, was re-elected to the NCSC board. The board’s new officers are **James Webb**, president/CEO at Lower Valley Energy, Afton, Wyoming, president; **R. Wayne Stratton**, a board member at Shelby Energy Cooperative, Shelbyville, Kentucky, vice president; and Erickson, secretary-treasurer.

REGION 1 INAUGURAL AWARD

The Energy Storage Association has presented its new Diversity & Inclusion Award to **Peter Muhoro**, vice president of strategy & technology at Rappahannock Electric Cooperative, Fredericksburg, Virginia. “Peter Muhoro is the inaugural recipient this year for his dedication to initiating,



Peter Muhoro

supporting, and integrating programs for diversity and inclusion both within and outside of the energy industry,” the national trade group said in announcing the honor. Muhoro said he was “honored and humbled” to be chosen. “I urge the energy industry to continue to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion,” he added. “And to celebrate the diversity of people, ideas, cultures, and educational backgrounds.” Also at Rappahannock Electric, **Josh Johnson** has been named director of procurement & facilities management. Johnson joined the co-op as a key account executive in 2018 with 20 years of co-op experience in South Carolina and Virginia.



Josh Johnson

Staffers at Northern Virginia Electric Cooperative, Manassas, Virginia, have welcomed two newcomers into their ranks. **Colin Hood** signed on as an associate engineer, and **Serena O’Rourke** is a customer care supervisor.

Southern Maryland Electric Cooperative (SMECO), Hughesville, has created a Strategy & Innovation department and hired a new employee to oversee it. **Campbell Hawkins**, SMECO’s newly named senior vice president & chief strategy & innovation officer, comes to the post with more than two decades of utility experience at investor-owned utilities and a major municipal system. He most recently served as senior director of the innovation & transformation office at Minnesota-based Xcel Energy, and he was director of customer operations at the Los Angeles (California) Department of Water & Power. Hawkins’s newly formed operation at SMECO will focus on the tech challenges of a changing utility industry, according to President & CEO **Sonja Cox**. “With innovations such as electric vehicles, solar panels on homes, and increasing battery storage capabilities, SMECO

is looking forward to implementing the kinds of products and services that will benefit our members,” she said. Co-ops, Hawkins said, were made to meet such challenges. “Electric co-ops are innovative by their very nature,” he said.

REGION 2 A CO-OP’S THANKS

Mutual-aid recovery efforts after a hurricane smashed into a Florida co-op brought a high-level thank-you note from the co-op’s CEO. Some 95% of the meters at Escambia River Electric Cooperative (EREC), Jay, were out of service after Hurricane Sally swept through in September, but guest lineworkers from SECO Energy, Sumterville, Florida, streamed in to reconnect them. “Our call for help was answered with manpower that rose to the challenge and succeeded through teamwork and perseverance,” EREC CEO **Ryan Campbell** said in a personal message to **Jim Duncan**, his counterpart at SECO Energy. “There is no better example of cooperation among cooperatives.”

Bill Barnett has been elected to the board of directors at Sawnee Electric Membership Corporation, Cumming, Georgia, following a two-stage drive-through election process triggered by the coronavirus pandemic. Four candidates ran in the initial round to succeed **Lamar Sexton**, who retired in 2019 after 44 years of service. When none of them received a majority, the top two went on to a runoff election. **Larry Evans** and **Donna Yost** were re-elected in their district elections. “We are excited to be working with Mr. Bill Barnett and welcome him into his new position,” President & CEO **Michael Goodroe** said. “We also congratulate Mr. Evans and Ms. Yost on their re-elections.”



Bill Barnett

REGION 3

DILLWORTH DEPARTS

An electric utility career spanning more than half a century drew to a close with the recent retirement of **Tom Dillworth** as a staker at Jackson Purchase Energy Corporation (JPEC), Paducah, Kentucky. Dillworth's life on the line began in 1967, when he joined Kentucky Utilities. "I was on call every day for 31 years," he said in a farewell story for the co-op's pages in *Kentucky Living*, the statewide co-op consumer magazine. "But instead of dispatch calling you to an outage, the person experiencing the outage would come to your house or find you in the tobacco field, and we would go and repair the outage. That's just how it was." Dillworth retired from the investor-owned utility in 1998 and spent about two years with a staking contractor before signing on at JPEC as a staking technician. **Scott Adair**, the co-op's vice president of human resources, communications & member services, interviewed Dillworth for the story on his career, and the staker agreed with one condition: "I don't want this to sound like an obituary," he joked. But then he turned serious: "The power business has been a good career. It has allowed me to provide a good living for my family and enjoy life while working with a lot of great people. In this business, we are able to help people who are in need, and it is great to have a



Tom Dillworth

feeling of being helpful." Taking Dillworth's place on the JPEC staking crew is **Ryan Boatright**, who comes to the co-op with 25 years of experience as a lineworker for the Benton (Kentucky) Electric System. Also at the co-op, **Jonas Roberts** has joined the staff as the new dispatcher. Roberts brings both customer service and 911 dispatch experience to his new post. "We are excited to have him as part of the team," the co-op said in announcing his arrival.



Ryan Boatright

Long after his passing, and much longer after his graduation, **Claude Elrod** has been inducted into the Alumni Wall of Fame at Boaz (Alabama) High School, where he was a member of the class of 1920. Elrod went on to become a leading Boaz banker, a cotton mill owner and operator, and an insurance agent. But it was his role as a founding board member and 41-year president of the board of Marshall-DeKalb Electric Cooperative, Boaz, that most endeared him to his community, as the *Sand Mountain Reporter* recounted in announcing the induction of Elrod and five others into the high school's Wall of Fame. "Perhaps his most vested interest," the newspaper reported, "was that of Marshall-DeKalb Electric Cooperative. In the late 1930s and early 1940s, Claude persuaded [the Tennessee Valley Authority] to bring Boaz into the hydroelectric system that



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had been created at the Guntersville Dam. Because of his efforts, in 1942, the whole of Sand Mountain got electricity. He served as the first president of the board beginning in 1941 and held that position until he retired in 1982." Elrod died the following year.

REGION 4

HOWARD'S NEW JOB

Magen Howard has left Ohio's Electric Cooperatives (statewide/G&T), Columbus, to join Consolidated Cooperative, Mount Gilead, Ohio, as its cooperative services manager. In her new role, the veteran co-op communicator will lead communications and marketing for all four of Consolidated Cooperative's utility services: electric, natural gas, propane, and fiber internet. Howard worked at the statewide for seven years, most recently as manager of communications & member services, and previously served at NRECA and Blue Grass Energy, Nicholasville, Kentucky.

Folks at Ohio's Electric Cooperatives (statewide/G&T), Columbus, welcomed two new staffers recently.

Jim Martin is the association's new facilities manager, and **Tim Street** signed on as director of cooperative development.

Employees, members, and his fellow trustees at The Frontier Power Company, Coshocton, Ohio, along with co-op leaders across the state mourned the recent passing of **Bob Wise**, who served on the board for 33 years, including several years as its president. He also represented his co-op on the board of Ohio Rural Electric Cooperatives (statewide), Columbus, where he was an executive committee member. Wise was 78.

Indiana Electric Cooperatives (statewide), Indianapolis, has presented its prestigious **Tom Taylor** Award to **Kevin Dreibelbis**, communications & marketing director at Noble Rural Electric Membership Corporation, Albion, and LaGrange County Rural Electric Membership Corporation, LaGrange. The award, named in honor of its first recipient, is presented annually to an Indiana co-op member

services employee for excellence in leadership, attitude, and commitment to the co-op principles. Dreibelbis clearly met the criteria, according to the two CEOs he works for. "Kevin is an ambassador for the cooperatives," said **Ron Raypole** at Noble REMC. "He is helpful, caring, resourceful, and happy to offer service no matter the task." Added LaGrange County REMC's **Mark Leu**: "Kevin has a heart for all those around him and is constantly juggling his schedule so he can accommodate the request of those who need his help, support, or guidance. It is simply in his nature to be a servant to all those he is involved with."

REGION 5

FRANCE'S HONOR

The Association of Illinois Electric Cooperatives (AIEC, statewide), Springfield, has presented its prestigious Effort Award to **Thad France**, the statewide's manager of lineworker & apprentice development. The award, given each year during the association's AIEC Co-op Day celebrations, recognizes an employee for exemplary work on the job. "France has worked hard to make the lineworker school a success," AIEC reported. AIEC President/CEO **Duane Noland** presented the award.

Two new directors have taken their places on the board of Eastern Iowa Light & Power Cooperative, Wilton, following drive-through voting in district elections. "Due to provisions in our articles of incorporation, this voting has to be done in person," the co-op explained. "Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the cooperative adopted a drive-through style for its 2020 meetings, using five area high school parking lots." Voting from their vehicles, members elected **Michael Bixler** to succeed **Mark Patton** and **Dan Heater** to take over from **Terry Phillips**. **Joel Carstensen**, **Robert "Skip" Crew**, and **Mike Shuger** were re-elected to three-year terms. After the elections, board member **Kurt Olson** was elected assistant secretary to succeed Phillips. President **Gary Kester**, Vice President **Tom Hotz**,

Secretary **Kathy Wunderlich**, and Treasurer **Ken Purdy** were all re-elected to their officer posts.

REGION 6

REMEMBERING 'MR. REA'

"Mr. REA" was the subject of a 10-minute conversation recently on South Dakota Public Broadcasting's *Images of the Past* broadcast. The late **Leo Flynn**, known throughout the state and even nationally as Mr. REA, was a lawyer and philanthropist in Milbank who helped found the South Dakota Rural Electric Association (statewide), Pierre, in 1942. As a founding attorney for the statewide, the public radio station noted in announcing the program, Flynn "wrote or co-wrote many of the legislative actions that made rural electrification possible from a regulatory standpoint." **Lori Walsh**, host of the broadcast, spoke with **Arlo Levison**, a member of the Grant County Historical Society in Milbank who knew the pioneering co-op leader, about Flynn's role in electrifying the South Dakota countryside. "What he would say was, 'With electricity, you no longer have to use your outdoor toilet,'" Levison said with a laugh. "The concept of creature comforts, he stressed that." Flynn, who died in 2001, supported numerous local and state charities later in life, Levison added. "He was a fixture."

Members of Douglas Electric Cooperative, Armour, South Dakota, saluted **Joel Baier** for his 20 years of board service at their recent annual meeting, before re-electing him to another term. **Wayne Lefers** was also re-elected to the board, and **Jay Spaans**, manager/CEO, was recognized for his 15 years of service to the co-op.

REGION 7

OURSLESLER'S ADVANCE

Mountain View Electric Association (MVEA), Limon, Colorado, has promoted **Cole Oursler** from information technology supervisor to information services manager. The promotion, coming after Oursler's two and a half years at the co-op, puts him in

charge of cybersecurity, data management, technology updates, and the final stages of a digital meter upgrade. "The most important part of technology is the end user: our members and our employees," Oursler said. "My goal is to ensure that MVEA continues to have reliable and secure IT infrastructure in place. Keeping our members' information safe is a top priority. I also enjoy working with employees to provide them with the technology needed to best serve the growing needs of our membership." Prior to joining MVEA, Oursler was the IT specialist at Wheatland Electric Cooperative, Scott City, Kansas. Also at the co-op, staffers, board members, and consumers were sorry to learn of the recent passing of **B.D. "Bud" Paddock**, who retired from



Cole Oursler



B.D. "Bud" Paddock

the MVEA board in 2017 after nearly half a century of dedicated service. Paddock, who also served for 27 years as the co-op's representative on the board of the Colorado Rural Electric Association (statewide), Denver, joined the MVEA board in 1971 and was vice president from 1988 to 2014. "When he retired from the MVEA board, Paddock said it was the MVEA members he served and the employees that

made his time memorable," the co-op said in announcing his death. "Now, we take the time to remember Paddock and his 47 years of service to electric cooperatives."

Employees at Pioneer Electric Cooperative, Ulysses, Kansas, roamed the Grant County Civic Center parking lot recently, distributing ballots and boxed meals to vehicle-bound members who attended the co-op's "drive-in style" annual meeting. After listening to reports and proceedings over their car radios, members elected **Steve Arnold** as the co-op's newest board member and re-elected **Mike Brewer** and **Martie Floyd**.

Nearly a quarter-century of work in the customer service department at Midwest Energy, Hays, Kansas, will draw to a close next month with the retirement of **Michael Sadeghi** as director. "He is an encyclopedia of knowledge on all aspects of customer service, as well as the requirements of various regulatory agencies," *Shop Talk*, the co-op's employee newsletter, reported, along with an invitation to other staffers to apply for the post. "We want to ensure the next candidate has plenty of time to learn from Michael, to help them succeed," said **Bob Muirhead**, vice president of customer service. Seven of Sadeghi's co-workers, meanwhile, celebrated milestones in their careers. They were **Jeff Miller**, 45 years; **Brian Dreiling**, **Sandra Dreiling**, and **Mike Freund**, 40 years; **Howard Fisher** and **T.J. Vallejo**, 20 years; and **Ryan Flick**, 10 years. And three newcomers arrived to begin their Midwest Energy careers: **Spencer Bowman** is an apprentice lineworker, **Ryan**

RE

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Hammerschmidt is a rates & billing analyst, and **Ruwan Weerasundara** is an electric distribution engineer.

REGION 8 POLITANO'S PROMOTION

Aнна Politano has advanced to director of public relations & communications at the Oklahoma Association of Electric Cooperatives (OAEC, statewide), Oklahoma City. The position also makes her the publisher of *Oklahoma Living*, the statewide co-op consumer magazine for which she has been managing editor for 10 years. A Certified Cooperative Communicator who served on the CCC board for six years, including a term as its president, Politano led the magazine to win NRECA's prestigious **George W. Haggard** Memorial Journalism Award in 2016 and 2017. She's also active in the Statewide Editors Association, serving on its e-media and governance committees. In her new role at the Oklahoma statewide, Politano succeeds **Sid Sperry**, whose retirement this month will mark the end of a 40-year rural electric career.

His signature "doughnut day" isn't the only things folks at Northeast Oklahoma Electric Cooperative, Vinita, are missing



Anna Politano

since **Craig Hendrickson** retired as the co-op's marketing specialist. "Not a day went by that Craig Hendrickson didn't have a word of encouragement, compliment, or humorous quip for one of his co-workers," the co-op reported. "A true people person in every sense of the word, the outgoing Hendrickson was a perfect fit for a growing public relations department when he was hired, back in May of 1998." Hendrickson had previously served as vice president of a software company, and he appreciated the new culture he found at the co-op. "The corporate world can be fairly harsh and demanding," he said. "Coming from corporate to the co-op was a welcome change."

More than three decades of board service came to a close when **Raymond Nettles** retired recently as a trustee at Central Rural Electric Cooperative, Stillwater, Oklahoma. Nettles, who achieved Director Gold status under NRECA's director training and education program, joined the co-op's board in 1987 and also served as his co-op's representative on the boards of the Oklahoma Association of Electric Cooperatives (statewide), Oklahoma City, and KAMO Power (G&T), Vinita, Oklahoma. "Members knew he was ready and willing to listen and answer their questions or concerns," Central REC CEO **Hunter Robinson** said. "Everyone knew that if they needed help, he was available by phone or in person at the local coffee shop. His diligent service to the membership and many years of experience will be greatly missed."

Some Louisiana co-op employees, like thousands of their



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members, lost their homes or saw major damage as hurricanes and related storms ravaged their state this fall. Co-ops across the country, along with their employees and statewide associations, responded with donations to help. “They’ve lost their homes and everything they have worked for,” said **Jeff Arnold**, CEO of the Association of Louisiana Electric Cooperatives (ALEC, statewide), Baton Rouge. “But because of the generosity of others and the cooperative way, we are able to deliver them some hope and relief.” Arnold hand-delivered checks to **Kevin Turner**, general manager, and **J.R. Hickman**, director, at Beauregard Electric Cooperative, DeRidder; **Mike Heinen**, general manager at Jeff Davis Electric Cooperative, Jennings; and **Mark Brown**, general manager at Claiborne Electric Cooperative, Homer. The three co-op CEOs saluted their employees for working through unimaginably difficult circumstances to restore power to their members. “It’s a selfless act,” Heinen said. “We have employees that have lost their homes, we have expecting mothers and fathers that can no longer return to their homes. Yet they are here at the office working 16-hour days, seven days a week.” Those sacrifices resonated at co-ops across the country, and donations poured in, according to ALEC Chief Operating Officer **Beama Pierce**. “We began getting inquiries from our sister cooperatives and cooperative partners all over the United States within days of the storm,” Pierce said. “It was overwhelming to see the outpouring of love and support.” Arnold added: “It’s what makes working for electric cooperatives so special. We are all family, and we take care of one another.”

REGION 9

GIRNUS ARRIVES

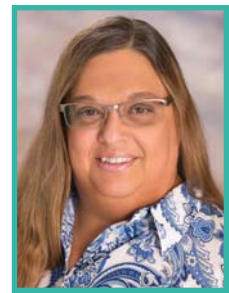
Her new co-workers at Kootenai Electric Cooperative, Hayden, Idaho, have welcomed **Garcy Girnus** into the

fold as the co-op’s new plant accountant. She comes from a Washington-based newsprint company, where she was a senior accountant.

Tye Williams has joined the staff at Southeast Electric Cooperative, Ekalaka, Montana, as its new assistant manager. A native of the area, Williams is an electrical engineer who worked in North Dakota’s oilfields and at a manufacturing company in Dickinson, North Dakota, before moving into the co-op world in his new job at Southeast Electric. “Growing up in Ekalaka, the electric cooperative meant a lot to our family ranch, and I did not even realize it,” he wrote in an introductory column for the co-op’s pages in the statewide consumer magazine, *Rural Montana*. “Being able to turn the lights on with a flick of a switch, watch TV at night, or make sure the tractors were plugged in during the winter, these were just a few of the things I took for granted growing up. All of this was possible because of the foresight and hard work put in by previous generations.”

The co-op family at Big Flat Electric Cooperative, Malta, Montana, were saddened by the recent passing of one of their own; **Clyde Robinson** had served on the co-op’s board for 16 years. Robinson passed away where he spent most of his life: on the family ranch, which he worked with his brother and best friend, **Jim Robinson**. “Their passion for working livestock became the standard by which all stockmen are measured,” observed an obituary in *Rural Montana*, the statewide co-op consumer magazine.

Brad Janorschke, general manager/CEO at Homer Electric Association, Homer, Alaska, has been elected president of the board of trustees of the Northwest Public Power



Garcy Girnus

FLASHBACKS

FROM PAGE 7

The next year, PEPA extended its line south into Calhoun County and dropped the word “County” from its name to reflect its regional coverage.

The co-op helped the city of Pontotoc install its first two traffic lights in 1937. Howell notes that at that time, traffic lights came only with red and green signals, not yellow.

That same year, TVA built a 44-kilovolt transmission line across Pontotoc County and a new substation just west of town to stabilize voltage. Then in 1947, TVA upgraded the substation and extended the line so the co-op could handle more load, facts Howell found in the archives of the *Pontotoc Progress* newspaper.

A fully fledged utility now, the co-op needed more and better space for its headquarters. The board of directors decided to remodel a building that had housed a wholesale grocery business.

According to the January 19, 1950, issue of the *Progress*, “The remodeling job includes a year-round heating and air-conditioning system, partitioning of office space,

engineering and drafting room, metering laboratory, vault for storage of records, auditorium for seating about 45 people, appliance demonstration room...”

The two exterior walls facing the street were mostly glass with a sun canopy extending over the sidewalk, making the building “one of the most modern in the state.”

Three years later, PEPA built a branch office in Bruce, the Calhoun County seat, and three years after that (1956), the “Second Oldest Electric Cooperative in America” was credited with an auspicious “first”: the first bucket truck in Mississippi, a Sky Worker with a reach of 40 feet.

General Manager J.C. “Cy” Sneed “has lost his mind spending that kind of money for a bucket truck,” another utility general manager said when he heard it cost \$10,000.

But Sneed had the last laugh.

“We used that first bucket for 14 years and sold it for \$9,000,” he said many years later. “I think it was a pretty good investment.” **RE**

Association (NWPPA, service), Vancouver, Washington. Janorschke succeeds **Ron Holmes**, vice president of the board at Wasco Electric Cooperative, The Dalles, Oregon, at the head of the multistate service organization's board. Other co-op representatives who were newly elected to officer posts at NWPPA's recent annual meeting are **Dave Kelsey**, a board member at Yellowstone Valley Electric Cooperative, Huntley, Montana, second vice president; and **Don Smith**, general manager at Wheatland Rural Electric Association, Wheatland, Wyoming, secretary treasurer.



Brad Janorschke

REGION 10 MERSHON MOURNED

Longtime staffers and members of Otero County Electric Cooperative (OCEC), Cloudcroft, New Mexico, were saddened by the recent passing of **Bill Mershon**, who retired in 2002 as the co-op's longest-serving general manager. Mershon's father, **John Mershon**, was a founding board member who served from 1939 to 1947. "So it was no surprise that Bill became a valued employee and lifelong supporter of OCEC," *Power-Gram*, the co-op's member newsletter, reported. "Bill worked as the co-op's engineer before becoming the general manager, where he served longer than any other GM in OCEC's history, from 1982 until his retirement in 2002. Bill not only served his cooperative but also his community. He offered his wisdom and dedicated countless hours to numerous boards for banks, hospitals, schools, and more. He will be genuinely missed by those who had the honor of knowing him." Mershon was 81. Also at the co-op, board member **Tim Rabon** was recently elected vice president of the board of Tri-State Generation & Transmission Association, Denver, Colorado. Rabon, an OCEC board member since 2010, has represented his co-op on the G&T's board since 2014.

Continental Divide Electric Cooperative (CDEC), Grants, New Mexico, teamed up with CoBank (service), Denver, Colorado, to provide a \$5,000 grant to a Native American arts cooperative. The co-op and the co-op lender each donated \$2,500 for the co-op's Sharing Success grant to Zuni MainStreet, which will use the money for tools and equipment for the Ancestral Rich Treasures of Zuni (ARTZ) Cooperative. "Awarding the grant to the ARTZ co-op is a direct infusion into the Zuni Pueblo's livelihood and economic development," said **Mac Juarez**, CDEC's member services manager. **Blanche Clawson**, a member of the co-op's board, presented the grant to a grateful Zuni MainStreet. "Most artists do not have the resources to purchase the larger and more expensive tools and equipment," said **Mario Hooee**, the group's executive director. "Our proposal is to purchase the equipment and make it accessible for artists' use." **RE**

NEW EMPLOYEE SPOTLIGHT

A monthly column to showcase a newcomer to the co-op program

BY MEGAN MCATEE



Brooke Reiboldt

Brooke Reiboldt

- Member Support Representative
- Whitewater Valley REMC, Liberty, Indiana
- Co-op employee since February 2019
- Birthplace: Oxford, Ohio

Hobby: I most recently went skydiving. I have always wanted to do it, and I love trying new things.

Where did you skydive? Middletown, Ohio. I thought I would have to attend a skydiving class, but when I arrived, we basically went right up in the air. I would definitely do it again, but it was a little terrifying not knowing what was going to happen. They basically push you out of the plane, pull the parachute and as you go down, they teach you how to steer and how to land. It was amazing, and it was so smooth.

What did you like the most about it? The adrenaline rush and trying something I have never done before.

How did you hear about the job at the co-op? Through a family friend.

What were you doing before you joined the co-op? I worked at a bank.

What do you like most about working at the co-op? Everyone is here for everyone else. No one is here for just themselves. Working at the co-op makes me feel like I have a second family.

Education: I am currently enrolled at University of Arizona studying geographic information systems.

What else do you enjoy doing in your free time? My friends and I play cornhole and pool, and I work on the family farm whenever I have the time. I also play softball. **RE**

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