

Since 1940

WISCONSIN ENERGY *Cooperative* NEWS

February 2025

OCONTO ELECTRIC



COOPERATIVE

MILTON HOUSE MUSEUM
BRINGS UNDERGROUND
RAILROAD TO LIFE

POSTCARD CALL TO ACTION INSIDE

BILLION DOLLAR BILL

KIDS AND CRITTERS



DISTRICT MEETINGS CONDUCTED



Tony Wagner, director of district 3, conducted his last district meeting. Wagner is retiring from the OEC board after having served 36 years.

Oconto Electric Cooperative has a seven-member board of directors, with each director representing a specific geographic area. To ensure consistent member engagement, district meetings are staggered, allowing members in each area to meet once every three years within their respective region. At these meetings, members nominate candidates for the upcoming board elections.

On Monday, January 6, the District 5 meeting was held at the Oconto Town Hall. Incumbent director Ronnie Kruse was nominated with no opposition. On Wednesday, January 8, the District 2 meeting was held at the How Community Center. Incumbent director Dave Hischke was nominated with no opposition.

On Thursday, January 9, the District 3 meeting was held at the Morgan Town Hall. District 3 was in need of nominations to fill the seat of Tony Wagner, who is retiring from the board after 36 years of service. Carl Tennie was nominated with no opposition.

At the April 12 annual meeting, members will approve all nominations by voice vote.

Please look inside the April issue of the *Wisconsin Energy Cooperative News* for the official notice of the Annual Meeting, reports and a write-up on new candidate Carl Tennie.



SAVE THE DATE
OEC ANNUAL MEETING
APRIL 12



UNDERSTANDING POWER OUTAGES

It doesn't matter if a power outage is planned or unplanned, losing power can be inconvenient and frustrating. When an outage occurs we try to restore your power as quickly and safely as possible.

What causes an outage?

Power outages can be caused by many circumstances. Severe weather, accompanied by heavy winds, lightning, snow or ice are the major causes of power outages. However, wildlife interference and people (motor vehicle accidents, construction work) can also cause the power to go out.

What should I do if an outage occurs?

If your power goes out, you should never assume that someone else will call it in. While that might be true in some cases, there are other times where an isolated outage is the problem.

In the event that your service is interrupted, the first thing you should do is check your fuses or breakers to make sure the problem is not your own. Next, check to see if your neighbors have power. This gives the line crews an idea of the extent of the outage.

You can report an outage anytime, day or night, by calling 800-472-8410. This is our designated outage line. To report an outage, you will need to press option 1 so your call can be put

into our automated system. If you have information about the cause of the outage (tree limb, broken pole, etc.) please tell the dispatcher as this can help speed the restoration of service.

If you are unable to get through on the phone, you can report your outage using the SmartHub app.

How long until power is restored?

After you report an outage, please be patient. In the case that the outage was caused by severe weather, we must effectively make a plan for repairs or rebuild. The plan will be to restore power to the largest group of members first before we can move on to the smaller groups and individuals.

How does the restoration process work?

We first need to start with the transmission lines, this is the backbone of our system, carrying high voltage electricity from generation sources to our substations. If there is a problem with a transmission line, no one will have power, and this must be addressed before other repairs can be made.

Next will be our substations, they reduce the high-voltage electricity from the transmission lines so it can be safely carried on distribution lines. If there is an issue at a substation, it must be

addressed before re-energizing distribution lines.

Distribution lines: these power lines, sometimes called primary lines or feeders, carry power from the substation to various areas for further distribution. Repairing damage to these components is the next necessary step in the power restoration process.

Lastly, tap lines and secondary lines: tap lines carry power from distribution lines to smaller groups of homes. If an entire portion of your neighborhood is without power, the tap line is a likely source of the problem. (1113601) This is the most time-consuming part of the restoration process.

My neighbor has power, but I don't.

Sometimes it may be as simple as checking for a tripped breaker in your home. Your neighbor's power also might be fed from a different substation or line than yours. Lastly, does your neighbor have a generator?

Where can I get outage updates?

Members can visit our Facebook page for the most up-to-date outage information in the event of a large outage. This year we will be working on a new website that will include an outage map and an outage information page.



Invest your *spare change* on the *community you love*

A local family loses their home in an early morning fire. A local Scout needs supplies to finish their Eagle Scout project. A young couple is trying to deal with the financial strain of their child's medical condition. A local food pantry needs help filling their shelves with food. You hear about these types of stories quite often. What do they all have in common? Thanks to Oconto Electric's Community Change program, the answer to this question is "help in time of need."

The mission.

How can one person help make the community better? Members can sign up for the Community Change program. By voluntarily "rounding up" your electric bill and contributing a few cents every month, you can easily help support your community.

How it works.

Members who participate in this program have their monthly bill rounded up to the nearest dollar and those few cents are deposited into the Community Change fund. For example, if your energy bill is \$71.60, it will automatically be rounded to \$72, with the additional 40 cents going to the Community Change fund. Your Community Change donation is a separate line item on your monthly energy bill. The average donation per member, per year, is around \$6, with a maximum of \$11.88. All donations are tax-deductible. Members

are always welcome to make a one-time donation or donate a specific amount each month. For example, you can choose to round up your electric bill and donate an additional \$2 each month.

Small change. Big difference.

Contributions could be as little as a penny, but never more than 99 cents. Every penny that is donated will be pooled together to help local non-profit and charitable organizations within our communities. Collectively, we can make a difference.

How are funds used?

The Community Change Board of Directors is comprised of seven volunteer Oconto Electric Cooperative members that meet quarterly to review applications. Grants are awarded based on how much money is available, and whether or not the purpose of the request is consistent with Community Change guidelines. One hundred percent of donations made to Community Change are awarded as grants. Our 2025 Board of Directors are: Brian Rieth (president), Penny Hemle (vice president), Pam Langlay (secretary/treasurer), Virgie Damp, Dick Gilles, Mark Higgins and Lynn Jones.

How do I sign up?

Call our office at 920-846-2816 or check the box on the back of your energy bill.



Help is at the touch of a button

Safety first should be priority number one when it comes to keeping yourself safe at home. Our MainStreet Messenger program is an emergency response service that helps make independent living a reality while giving peace of mind to the families whose loved ones prefer to stay in the comfortable surroundings of their own home.

When you press the help button on your personal emergency response system, it connects you with a 24/7 monitoring center. Upon connecting with the response center, the agent will speak with you to determine the type of help you need. If you are unable to respond, the response center staff will automatically call your responders or emergency services.

We offer two types of MainStreet Messenger unit options. We have a unit that works with a landline and one that is cellular. This unit is not a mobile on the go device. It is still meant to be used inside the home and directly outside of the home.

If you would like more information please call the office at 920-846-2816 and ask about MainStreet Messenger.

TIPS TO AVOID ENERGY SCAMS

Scammers will try anything to deceive utility customers, including a tactic that claims customers have overpaid their bill. If you receive a call, text or email from someone claiming you overpaid a utility bill and need to provide your banking or credit card information to receive a credit, it's likely a scam. In most cases, your utility will apply a credit to your account to cover future charges or refund an overpayment with (369201) a mailed check.

Source: Utilities United Against Scams



HIDDEN ACCOUNT NUMBERS

Oconto Electric Cooperative hides two account numbers in the local pages of the *Wisconsin Energy Cooperative News* each month. If you spot your account number, call our office before you receive the next issue, and OEC will give you a \$15 credit on your electric bill or a \$25 credit if you have a load management receiver. The January account numbers belonged to Jason Slade, Milwaukee and Steven and Mary Pribbernow, Green Bay.



Ryan Miller, CEO

Katie Jagiello, Communications and Marketing

7479 REA Road, P.O. Box 168, Oconto Falls, WI 54154
www.ocontoelectric.com

Hours of Operation: 7:30 a.m.–4:00 p.m.

Hours of Lobby: 9:00 a.m.– 3 p.m. Friday

Non-emergencies: 920-846-2816

Emergencies & outages: Toll FREE 800-472-8410
24 hours a day, 7 days a week