

Since 1940

WISCONSIN ENERGY *Cooperative* January 2026 NEWS

OCONTO ELECTRIC
OEE
COOPERATIVE



QUILTS, COMMUNITY,
AND CREATIVITY
BIND IN WITTENBERG

PICKING WINNERS AND SOLAR LOSERS

YOUR VOICE MATTERS

SHEET PAN RECIPES

KNOWLEDGE IS POWER

Ready to Power Your Future? Apply for an OEC Scholarship Today!

College is exciting—but let's be honest, it's expensive. What if you could ease that burden with a scholarship that's designed just for you? Oconto Electric Cooperative (OEC) is proud to invest in the next generation by offering two incredible scholarship opportunities for graduating high school seniors. And the best part? These scholarships are funded through unclaimed capital credits, so they have zero impact on members' bills. It's our way of giving back to the community and helping you shine.

Youth Scholarship

OEC is awarding twelve scholarships of \$2,500 each to graduating seniors who plan to continue their education at an accredited college or technical school.

Lineworker Scholarship

Dreaming of a career in the energy industry? We've got you covered! OEC is offering one \$2,500 scholarship to a graduating senior enrolling in the Electrical Power Distribution program at Northeast Wisconsin Technical College.

Who's Eligible?

If you're a graduating high school senior and your parent or guardian is a residential member of OEC (primary residence within our service territory), you're eligible! Scholarship funds will be paid upon entry into your second full-time semester of post-secondary education.

Why Wait? Apply Today!

Your future deserves this boost. Applications are reviewed by a volunteer, member-appointed committee—so every decision is made with care and fairness. Don't miss your chance to lighten your college load and power up your dreams!

Application

Scholarship applications are available from local high school guidance counselors or online at www.ocontoelectric.com.

Deadline

Completed scholarship applications need to be at OEC's office no later than Wednesday, February 11. Recipients will be asked to attend the cooperative's Annual Meeting on April 11 to receive recognition from the membership.

Questions?

Information can be found at www.ocontoelectric.com. If you have questions, you can also call OEC at 800-472-8410 or email customerservice@ocontoelectric.com.



VALUABLE VOLTAGE

INFRASTRUCTURE COSTS ARE SOARING

The past five years have been a period of exploding costs for the electric utility industry, pushed by soaring demand, supply chain challenges, raw materials shortages, increased labor costs and tariffs. The impact has been rapid increases in the cost of producing power, longer and more unpredictable project timelines and the need for more financing, all of which have driven electric rates up for residences, businesses and other end-users. Here's a look at what's contributing to the trend. The following are percentage increases since 2020.

Infrastructure

Infrastructure for an electric cooperative refers to all the physical systems and equipment needed to generate, transmit, and deliver electricity reliably to members. It's the backbone of your power supply.

Key components include:

Utility poles (wood, steel, composite)	+40-100%
Crossarms & braces (steel/wood)	+20-35%
Conductor wire (aluminum/copper)	+50-100%
Transformers	+70-100%
Grain-oriented electrical steel	+80-100%
Meters	+20-35%
Pad-mounted switchgear	+50-100%
Circuit breakers/reclosers	+35-60%

Build-outs

A build-out refers to the process of expanding, upgrading, or constructing the physical infrastructure needed to deliver electricity reliably to cooperative

members. It's more than just putting up poles and wires—it's a coordinated effort that involves multiple cost drivers:

Utility construction labor	+20-40%
Freight/logistic	+30-60%

Generation

Generation is the first step in delivering electricity—it's how power is produced before it moves through transmission and distribution systems to reach homes and businesses. For electric cooperatives, generation can happen in several ways:

Gas turbines	+20-30%
Solar PV systems	+25-35%
Wind turbines	+25-35%
Hydropower components	+20-30%
SCADA/EMS systems	+20-30%
Relays & switchgear	+25-40%
Natural gas	+20-120%
Coal	+30-60%

Fleets

Fleets refer to the vehicles and mobile equipment that an electric cooperative uses to build, maintain, and repair its electric system. These are essential for keeping power reliable and responding quickly to outages.

Light trucks	+25-40%
Bucket trucks, digger derricks	+20-50%
Maintenance	+15-25%
Insurance premiums	+20%



OCONTO ELECTRIC HONORED WITH 2025 LEIFER AWARD

Oconto Electric Cooperative (OEC) has earned top honors in cooperative communications, receiving the prestigious 2025 N.F. Leifer Memorial Journalism Award. The award recognizes the electric cooperative whose local pages in Wisconsin Energy Cooperative News demonstrated the highest overall excellence over the past year.

This marks the second time OEC has received the Leifer Award, having previously won in 2000. The 2025 recognition highlights the exceptional work of Katie Jagiello, OEC's communications and marketing specialist, who serves as editor of the co-op's local pages. The judge commended OEC's submissions for their clear, informative writing and engaging visual presentation, noting the effective use of photos and infographics.

"Katie is a true leader and a valued resource among our local page editors," said Dana Kelroy, WECN editor, "She consistently brings fresh ideas and a member-focused perspective to our monthly communicator calls. Her background in design also shines through in her pages each month."

In her review, the judge remarked, "Very well-written articles that really demonstrate commitment to community and involvement." She also praised the publication's member-focused approach, stating, "There is a clear commitment to include info about members and ways members can be involved."

Jagiello's reputation as a talented designer and photographer is well established among her peers. She frequently earns accolades in co-op communicator cover photo contests and consistently ranks near the top in various category awards. Her work reflects a commitment to member engagement.

In 2024, Jagiello partnered with former OEC Line Superintendent Jack Pardy to present a session titled "Effective Communicating on the Jobsite" at the Communication Power conference. The presentation, which received high praise, detailed OEC's response to Winter Storm Cora, showcasing how the co-op maintained transparent communication with members during a massive power restoration effort.

Jagiello's ability to work safely and effectively alongside line crews during the crisis exemplified the cooperative spirit and dedication to service.

Beyond her editorial and marketing responsibilities, Jagiello also contributes to OEC's youth programs and safety demonstrations, further reinforcing the co-op's mission to educate and empower its members.



I am incredibly honored to be this year's recipient of the Leifer Journalism Award. The last time Oconto Electric Cooperative received this recognition was in 2000, so it's truly humbling to bring it home again after 25 years.

This award is not just a personal achievement—it reflects the incredible team and community I get to work with every day. Telling the stories of our members and the cooperative difference is a responsibility I take to heart, and I'm grateful for the trust placed in me to share those voices.

Wisconsin's cooperatives are filled with so many talented communicators, and to be recognized among them is a true privilege. I want to especially thank Mary Erickson, who has always been my biggest cheerleader. When I first started at OEC, writing was not my strong suit—but with encouragement, mentorship, and a lot of learning, I've grown into a communicator I'm proud to be.

I look forward to continuing to grow, learn, and celebrate the values that make our cooperative family so special. — Katie Jagiello



Spreading Holiday Cheer in Our Community!

We're proud to live out Cooperative Principle #7 – Concern for Community this holiday season! The following (1015400) donations were made:

- The Main Course to help provide ready-to-heat meals for students in need during the Christmas school break.
- Linemen Chris and Jacob brightened up the East Side Beach in Oconto Falls by stringing lights for The Avenue of Lights.
- We were a Toys for Tots drop-off location—we donated toys to make Christmas extra special for kids in our community.
- Help A Hero, we sent supplies to our troops overseas.
- Sponsor an Elder through BloomHouse 23 | Coleman Floral, beautiful flower bouquets surprised our local seniors on Christmas morning in nursing homes and hospice care.
- We sponsored a Thanksgiving Meal through RoseHaus Floral. A meal will be given to a family of Golden House. Each meal included a floral arrangement donated by RoseHaus Floral.
- Kathy's Kids Toy Drive, donations were given to the Green Bay Area Children's Hospital.

Together, we can make a difference. Thank you for helping us support our neighbors and spread joy this season!

TIPS TO AVOID ENERGY SCAMS

Beware of "winter bill relief" energy scams. Scammers often exploit high winter bills by offering fake discount or relief programs. They may ask for upfront payments or personal details to lower your rate. Legitimate utilities never demand gift cards, wire transfers or payment through apps like PayPal or Venmo. Always verify offers directly by calling your utility's phone number located on your energy bill—do not call any phone numbers provided in a suspicious email or text. Remember to take time to confirm before you pay; real savings programs won't pressure you for immediate action.

**HOLIDAY
LIGHT
RECYCLING**

Recycle your used holiday lights
in our lobby for free!
December 1 - January 15

STRING LIGHTS ONLY

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 December account numbers belonged to Michelle Stank, Pound and Gerald and Linda Boomsma, Oconto.



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