

Since 1940

WISCONSIN ENERGY *Cooperative* March 2026 NEWS



**FROM POWER LINES
TO FIREWALLS:**

THE RURAL REALITY OF CYBER THREATS

**HOW ENERGY EFFICIENCY
REBATES AND INCENTIVES WORK**

AFFORDABILITY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

PEANUT BUTTER RECIPES





DISTRICT MEETINGS CONDUCTED

2026 ANNUAL MEETING WILL HOST AN ELECTION

Oconto Electric Cooperative operates with seven director districts, each represented by one director on the board. Directors serve three-year terms, meaning two or three seats come up for election each year. District meetings provide members the opportunity to nominate candidates for these positions.

According to cooperative bylaws, only two candidates can advance to the ballot for the annual meeting. A district-level election narrowed the field to Duane Jagiello and Tony Sailer, who will appear on the ballot at the Annual Meeting on April 11. Each member is entitled to one vote. For joint memberships—such as marital property, joint interest, or tenancy in common—members share one vote.

District 6 Meeting – Lena High School

On Tuesday, January 6, District 6 members gathered at Lena High School for their district meeting. Despite rainy and icy conditions, attendance was strong. Incumbent director Dan Kanack had previously announced he would not seek reelection, opening the door for new leadership.

Five nominations were made for the District 6 seat:

- Duane Jagiello
- Garth Sellen
- Tom Grosse
- Eric Blazek
- Tony Sailer

District 4 Meeting – Little Suamico

The following evening, January 7, District 4 held its meeting at St. John’s Lutheran Church in Little Suamico. Incumbent director Jan Stranz and William LaPointe were nominated to fill the director position. The final election by the membership will be at the annual meeting.

Looking Ahead:

Be sure to check the April issue of *Wisconsin Energy Cooperative News* for official meeting notice and complete Annual Meeting reports and detailed profiles of each candidate running for election.

SAVE THE DATE – OEC ANNUAL MEETING – APRIL 11

held at the Oconto Falls High School Performing Arts Center



Cooperative Principle #2

Democratic Member Control

Cooperatives are democratic organizations controlled by their members, who actively participate in setting policies and making decisions. Elected representatives (directors) are elected from among the membership and are accountable to the membership. In primary cooperatives, members have equal voting rights (one member, one vote); cooperatives at other levels are organized in a democratic manner.

Keeping the Lights On Through Bitter Cold: How OEC Linemen Braved -40° Wind Chills to Restore Power

When bitter cold swept into our area on January 23—with wind chills plunging to -40°—some members faced what no one wants during a Wisconsin winter: a power outage. As temperatures fell, our crews rose to the challenge. Oconto Electric Cooperative (OEC) linemen worked through extreme, dangerous conditions to restore power as quickly and safely as possible.

In weather this cold, linemen must take frequent warm-up breaks to prevent frostbite and hypothermia. Even with those necessary pauses, our crews pushed forward, determined to get every home energized again. Their dedication is just one example of how your cooperative shows up for you—no matter the challenge, no matter the temperature.

We know that losing power in winter is more than an inconvenience. Homes cool rapidly, pipes can freeze, and families feel the strain. That's why many members look for backup solutions to keep essential appliances running when the unexpected happens.

Permanent Generators

A permanently installed generator must be wired by a licensed electrician using a transfer switch. This prevents power from backfeeding into overhead lines—an extremely dangerous situation for linemen working to restore service.

A Backup Power Option for Members: GenerLink™

Did you know OEC allows members to purchase and use a GenerLink™ transfer switch? For many households, it's an affordable and convenient alternative to installing a whole-home generator system.

A generator—whether portable or permanent—can keep your essentials running during an outage. But how you connect it makes all the difference in keeping your home and our linemen safe.

OEC supports member-owned GenerLink™ transfer switches, offering a simple way to connect a portable generator to your home's electrical system.

- UL-listed and socket-mounted
- Installs behind your electric meter
- Sends generator power directly to your breaker box
- Eliminates the need for extension cords running through the house
- Available in 30-amp and 40-amp models, depending on your generator size

GenerLink™ units can be purchased from www.generlink.com or go to www.ocontoelectric.com/generlink we also list a few more options. Once you have your device, contact OEC to complete the necessary paperwork and schedule in-



Despite the extreme cold, Lineman Tanner R. pushed through to restore power for our community.

stallation. (97700) We're happy to answer questions and help you choose the right setup.

Temporary Portable Generators

Portable gasoline-powered generators should never be plugged into a circuit breaker, fuse, or outlet. Before purchasing a generator, determine:

- The wattage needed to run essential appliances
- The surge power required to start each appliance

Important portable generator safety facts:

- DON'T operate a generator inside your home or in any enclosed or partially enclosed space. Generators produce high levels of carbon monoxide (CO), which can be deadly.
- DON'T open windows or doors while the generator is running—this can pull CO into your home.
- DON'T rely on a generator as a full-time source of power. Generators are intended for temporary or emergency use only, to run essential equipment or appliances.
- DON'T overload the generator. Only power essential items, and ensure your generator can safely handle the total load.
- DON'T connect a generator directly to household wiring unless a properly installed transfer switch is in place. Without a transfer switch, power can backfeed into electric lines and pose a deadly risk to utility lineworkers making repairs.



BEAUTIFY YOUR YARD, NOT UTILITY EQUIPMENT

Utility Equipment Needs to be Accessible 24/7

Electrical equipment located on your property still belongs to Oconto Electric Cooperative (OEC), and our crews must be able to access it at all times. Clear access isn't just a convenience—it's essential for safety, reliability, and quick response. Here's why:

Emergencies

In the event of a fire, crews must be able to shut off power before firefighters can begin their work. Every second counts, and any delay can jeopardize lives and property.

Routine Maintenance

OEC regularly inspects and maintains meters and transformers to ensure equipment is undamaged and operating safely. Easy access allows our crews to work quickly and efficiently.

Power Outages

During outages, crews may need to access equipment on or near your property. If equipment is blocked, it can extend outage times for you and your neighbors.

Locked Gate

If your property has a locked gate, OEC can provide a lock that links with your existing lock. This allows our crews access while respecting your privacy. We will only enter when necessary to service or inspect OEC equipment.

Power Poles

Please keep utility poles free from personal items such as signs, balloons,

staples, nails, and tacks. Clear poles help ensure fast, safe repairs—especially during storms.

Foreign objects can:

- Interfere with the climbing equipment used by lineworkers.
- Damage (44215) protective gear that keeps crews safe from electrical hazards.

Padmount Transformers (Green Utility Boxes)

Padmount transformers are the green boxes found in residential areas, and they sit on easements that allow OEC access. Their purpose is to step down high-voltage electricity to a lower voltage for underground distribution to homes.

Important Guidelines

- Do not paint, decorate, block, or cover padmount transformers.
- Avoid planting shrubs, trees, or landscaping too close to the box.
- Restricted access creates safety hazards and delays outage restoration.
- OEC requires 10 feet of clear space in front (the side with the padlock) and 4 feet of clearance on the other three sides.



Meters

Meters must always have an unobstructed path for access. They should not be placed in hard-to-reach areas or areas designed for privacy.

If crews cannot safely access your meter, OEC will contact you to schedule an on-site meeting to relocate the pedestal.

Meter Placement Guidelines

- Install meters 36–66 inches above the ground.
- Meters should never be enclosed or obstructed.

Working Together for Safety and Reliability

By keeping all utility equipment—from meters and transformers to power poles—clear and accessible, you help protect utility workers, ensure quicker outage response, and keep your community powered safely.



Meters should be located so accessibility will not be obstructed by future alterations or additions.



L to R: Ryan Miller, CEO, Maguire Girtz, and Operations Manager, Greg Kuhn

From apprentice to journeyman

Congratulations to Maguire Girtz on achieving a major career milestone. Maguire recently earned his Journeyman Line Worker certification after completing Wisconsin's rigorous four-year Electric Line Worker Apprenticeship program through Chippewa Valley Technical College in Eau Claire.

This accomplishment reflects years of dedication and hard work. To earn this certification, apprentices must complete 7,360 hours of on-the-job training and 640 hours of classroom instruction—a total of 8,000 hours. Maguire successfully passed his final comprehensive exam this past spring, officially marking the end of his apprenticeship and the beginning of his journeyman career.

Maguire has been a valued employee of OEC since June 2022, and his commitment to OEC, our members, and the communities we serve has been evident every step of the way. His professionalism, strong work ethic, and team-focused mindset make this achievement even more noteworthy.

Please join us in congratulating Maguire Girtz on this outstanding accomplishment. We are honored to have him on our team and look forward to his continued contributions as a journeyman lineman.

Energy Efficiency Tip of the Month

As spring arrives, take advantage of milder temperatures to save energy at home. Open windows on pleasant days to bring in fresh air instead of running your HVAC system. It's also a great time to replace dirty air filters, which helps your system run more efficiently and improves indoor air quality. As daylight increases, turn off unnecessary lights and rely on natural sunlight when possible. Small seasonal adjustments like these can reduce energy use, lower monthly bills and help keep your home comfortable as winter transitions into spring.

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 February account numbers belonged to Janet Pascoe, Krakow and Michael and Kathleen Monette, Little Suamico.



Ryan Miller, CEO

Katie Jagiello, Communications and Marketing

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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