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Times change, a mission doesn't

BY PATRICIA STOCKDILL

McLean Electric Cooperative (MEC) General Manager/CEO Mark Doyle may have best summarized the drive behind the electric cooperative movement: "We were founded to serve the unserved."

Big cities had electricity in the 1920s and 1930s. Small-town North Dakota had electricity.

Rural America, including rural North Dakota and rural McLean County, had nothing but kerosene lanterns, outdoor plumbing and a woodburning stove as the likely heat source during long, cold and dark winter nights.

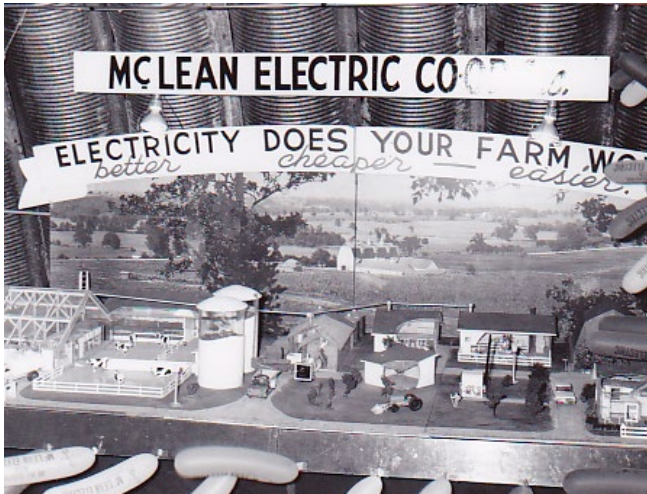
The Rural Electrification Act signed by President Franklin D. Roosevelt in May 1936 changed that by providing a program and funding for rural folks to form

electric cooperatives. Baker Electric Cooperative was the first electric cooperative in North Dakota to provide electricity, when lights came on at a family farm near York in northeastern North Dakota in November 1937.

The dream to serve rural McLean County residents took a giant step forward by incorporating MEC in August 1945.

It wasn't always easy to convince farmers and ranchers to pay a \$5 application fee – significant money at the time – and make the commitment to purchase electricity. Nor was it easy to convince them it was even doable. In some instances, it wasn't easy to get easements for power lines. Yet, it was important to have as many farms and ranches participate as

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It was important to educate rural McLean County residents about the benefits and importance of having electricity, and the opportunities it presented.

possible to generate income and spread out costs, Doyle described.

Armed with a \$500,000 Rural Electrification Administration (REA) loan to start, the dream became reality when the first lights serving rural McLean County came on in early 1947, less than two years after MEC was founded.

My, how times have changed.

Gone are the days when an electric cooperative touted all of the wonderful, newfangled electric appliances – refrigerators, irons, ovens and lights – at annual meetings, county fairs, community events or the North Dakota State Fair.

They talked about the amazing work an electric welder could do in the shop. The forerunner to the modern *North Dakota Living*, the *North Dakota REC Magazine*, touted the benefits of heat lamps in the barn in the early days of its publication: “It might be a baby pig, a baby calf or a baby chick. But the important thing to remember is that they are still babies. And babies need extra warmth. The best way to get it to them is to use electric heat lamps.”

There was the wonder of a water pump to fill a stock tank. Even chicken egg incubators.

Today’s world is centered around the need for electricity. It not only drives one’s daily life, but it also drives the nation’s and world’s economies and national security.

The need to promote the use of electricity is a distant memory.

“This addition of those modern conveniences also generated increased need for increased size of service,” Doyle continued. Early farmsteads and ranches likely had 10- or 20-amp services – maybe 40-amp – as electric demand increased.

In 2025, it’s common for MEC to install 200- or 400-

amp services in new hookups, he explained.

And just as technology has changed everyone’s life over the generations, the electric industry has evolved at lightning speed. Gone are fuses screwed into fuse boxes.

“Now, it’s automated and smart meters,” Doyle said.

While overhead power lines remain part of the rural landscape, the advent and subsequent advances in underground electric cable not only changed the landscape with fewer overhead lines, but also provide greater capacity and reliability. Plus, it’s now more economically feasible, allowing cooperatives such as MEC to build new services using underground line where environmental conditions permit.

While the establishment of the REA provided the major startup for electric cooperatives across the country, including MEC, states such as North Dakota also stepped up with laws that would allow electric cooperatives to grow to better serve rural areas that were still unserved.

“Early regulations were pro-expansion, so everybody could have electrification,” Doyle added.

North Dakota took a major step with that philosophy by enacting the Territorial Integrity Act in 1965. It provided a means for public cooperatives and private investor-owned utilities to resolve service area disputes.

Nowadays, the electric industry is more than serving the unserved.

“Today in the 21st century, (electric industry) regulations and legislation also focus on human,



A young girl is buckled up for safety prior to going up in McLean Electric Cooperative’s bucket truck during its 2025 annual meeting.

PHOTO BY PATRICIA STOCKHILL

environmental and personal impacts. ... We strive to protect and are much more conscious of the environment, worker and public safety, and individual and personal rights," Doyle explained.

Among the many challenges the electric industry and MEC face is how to adopt the technology and improvements within the cooperative's economic means, and that's the beauty of a cooperative: Under the cooperative business model, a cooperative elects members to serve as its board of directors and govern its business, rather than being steered by stockholder interests.

"We have a fiduciary responsibility to our member-owners," Doyle emphasized.

It guides MEC's management philosophy.

"It goes back to our mission statement," he continued: "It shall be the aim of McLean Electric Cooperative to make electric energy available to its members at the lowest cost consistent with sound economy and good management."

Cooperatives, through their boards of directors, determine what fits their needs, Doyle continued.

"One size fits all doesn't fit RECs," he said.

MEC is as unique as Mountrail-Williams Electric Cooperative in northwestern North Dakota, Cass County Electric in the east and even neighboring Capital and Verendrye electric cooperatives.

As the cooperative celebrates its 80th anniversary, it's a given that change will be the one constant in life.

But throughout all of the changes, from technology to safety to regulations and laws, there is another constant driving MEC.

"Every day since the first light bulb came on at McLean Electric Cooperative, we continue to get smarter on how to deliver electricity to our members," Doyle said.

Serving the unserved founded MEC, which continues to serve with sound economy and good management. ■



McLean Electric Cooperative Member Services Director **Ken Hopkins** attends the McLean County Fair. It was standard for electric cooperatives to reach out to local fairs and events to spread the message of the benefits of electricity and the importance of the cooperative.



Prior to the invention of the bucket truck allowing lineworkers to be hoisted up to a pole, climbing with hooks was standard.

Perspective of 2025 legislative session

BY PATRICIA STOCKDILL

Legislation approved by the 2025 N.D. Legislature and signed into law by Gov. Kelly Armstrong became effective Aug. 1.

Electric cooperatives across North Dakota and their statewide organization, the North Dakota Association of Rural Electric Cooperatives (NDAREC), followed several bills directly relating to member-owners' electrical costs and rural quality of life among the mountain of legislation, described McLean Electric Cooperative (MEC) General Manager/CEO Mark Doyle.

SB 2339 now provides electric cooperatives with a structure to submit wildfire mitigation plans specific to their cooperative, which must be approved by each cooperative's board of directors, posted on its website, reviewed, updated and reapproved every two years.

The new law helps protect cooperatives from large-scale lawsuits in the event of wildfires, Doyle explained. It can help protect member-owners from higher costs associated with any wildfire-related lawsuit, while also creating a proactive path for improved communications and coordination to help prevent wildfires and respond in the event it occurs.

HB 1279 increases taxes on the state's coal-based electrical energy producers. Prior to the new law, North Dakota's power plants paid a lower tax structure to the state of North Dakota, Doyle described.

Rather than extending the past structure, final legislation has the state of North Dakota collecting \$35 million in coal conservation taxes over five years, beginning in 2026. However, the increased funds are directed into the state's Legacy Fund principal and will not go into the state's general fund or back to local governments.

The concern among cooperatives such as MEC is those increased expenses could put additional pressure on wholesale electric costs, while not providing benefits to local counties and townships, Doyle explained.

"Why do we want to create this (electricity) rate pressure for nothing?" he queried. "Cooperatives and businesses can only absorb so much additional costs of doing business if those costs are passed on."

HB 1258 now aligns the transmission line siting process to mirror the oil and gas pipeline siting process. As long as an electric transmission facility complies with local road use agreements, N.D. Public Service Commission permitting now preempts local land use and zoning regulations.

While investor-owned utilities supported the bill, focusing on zoning issues experienced in Stutsman County regarding a major transmission line, NDAREC didn't testify.

"While routing and permitting projects is increasingly difficult, good relationships with local political subdivisions and landowners is critical to our operations," the organization stated in its review of the

2025 legislative session.

SB 2228 helps address quality of life concerns among rural North Dakotans by funding \$1 million to the N.D. Department of Commerce for rural grocery store sustainability.

"It helps our small communities keep – or get – a grocery store," Doyle commented. "For us as an electric cooperative serving rural communities, we need to sustain our communities, our development."

HB 1176 brings property tax relief for many North Dakotans.

Some key points to the new law allow primary residence property owners a credit up to \$1,600 as long as that doesn't exceed the amount owed. It also doesn't apply to special assessments. Renter refunds increase to \$600, and disabled veteran credits will be expanded.

In addition, the new law lays out "legislative intent" for the 2027 Legislature to address potential property tax relief for agricultural, commercial, centrally assessed and non-primary residential property.

How that plays out as it relates to MEC and electric cooperatives across North Dakota remains to be seen. Electric cooperatives, rather than pay property taxes, are assessed "payment in lieu of taxes," which wasn't addressed in the portion of the new law as it relates to the 2027 session.

HB 1579 directs a legislative management study on the impact of large energy consumers and the state's electrical grid. The summary of the new legislation reads: "During the 2025-26 interim, the legislative management shall study the impact of large energy consumers, including data centers, on the electrical grid of this state, regulatory structure and economic development."

It also directs the study to include the state's electrical grid reliability and infrastructure requirements, grid capacity, upgrades needed to accommodate large energy consumers and upgrade costs, regulatory consistency, economic impacts to the energy industry, market dynamics and other issues relating to the electric energy industry.

Large facilities require large electrical energy demands, which can help provide additional revenue for cooperatives such as MEC. Yet, cooperatives must balance energy needs with electrical capacity and have the capability to meet all member-owners' electric needs.

Electric cooperatives will be among the multitude of entities providing input into the massive study. Any potential future legislation could impact MEC and electric cooperatives across North Dakota, Doyle concluded. ■



CAMERA READY

Still time for photo contest entries

BY PATRICIA STOCKDILL

The busy autumn days of harvest, back to school and fall sports will soon be here. But there are still abundant photo opportunities and great photos McLean Electric Cooperative (MEC) member-owners can submit to its first annual MEC photo contest.

Entries are due Dec. 1.

The grand prize winning photo will be featured on the 2026 MEC annual meeting booklet cover and as MEC's May 2026 local pages feature photo within *North Dakota Living*.

In addition, the winner will receive a \$50 MEC bill credit and \$50 Visa gift card (\$100 total value).

First place winners in each category will have their photos published in upcoming issues of MEC's 2026 local pages and receive a \$25 MEC bill credit and \$25 Visa gift card (\$50 total value).

There are three categories:

- **Family, Furry and Friends Make Life Great:** Celebrate McLean County residents – and don't forget our furry and feathered friends – through portraiture or play in McLean County.
- **Hats Off to Work:** MEC member-owners or family members at work, whether in the agriculture or energy industry, business world or self-employed.
- **Our Great Outdoors:** Let's celebrate what makes McLean County an outdoor destination – its lakes of all sizes, Missouri River, wildlife of all types, flora, fauna and its natural scenic beauty.

Look for complete rules and more information on MEC's website, mcleanelectric.com, Facebook, [facebook.com.mclean.electric.coop](https://facebook.com/mclean.electric.coop), contact MEC Communications Manager Sonja Moe at 701-463-6700 or 800-263-4922 or email MECphotocontest@mcleanelectric.com. ■

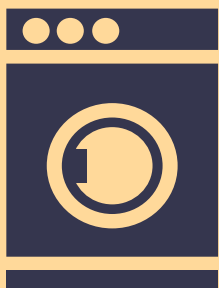


BEAT THE PEAK

Did you know electricity costs more during peak hours of usage? That's why we encourage members to use less electricity during peak demand hours from **2 p.m. to 8 p.m.**

If you can lower your use of electricity during these peak hours, you can help your electric cooperative keep rates stable.

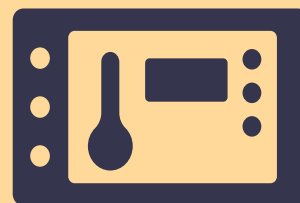
DURING SUMMER PEAK HOURS:



Do laundry during the day or later at night.



Avoid using the dishwasher or other major appliances during these hours.



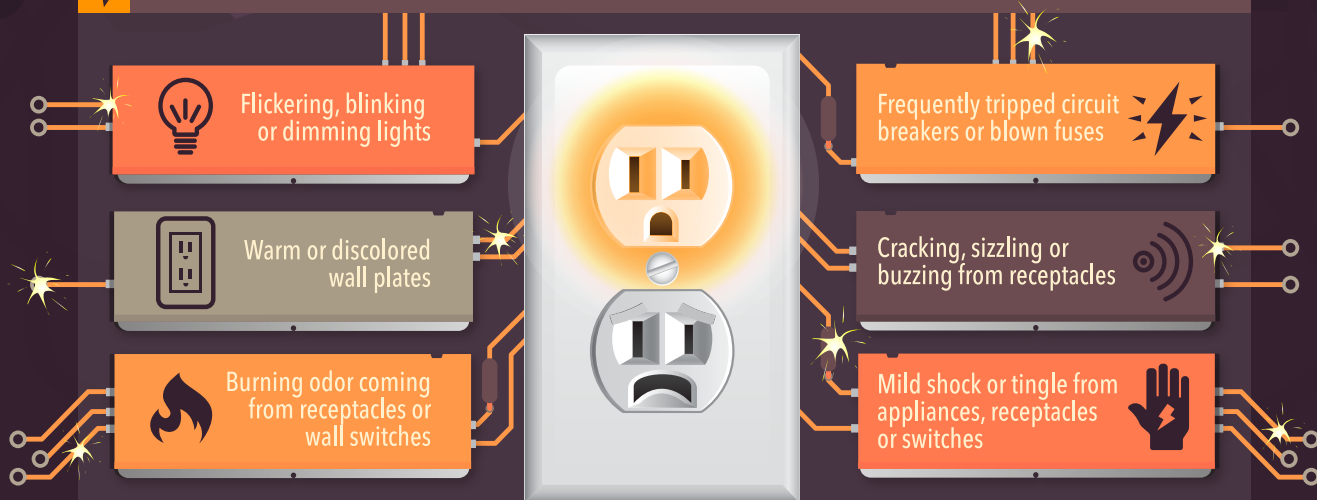
Turn up the thermostat by 2 to 5 degrees.

WITH YOUR HELP, WE CAN ALL "BEAT THE PEAK!"

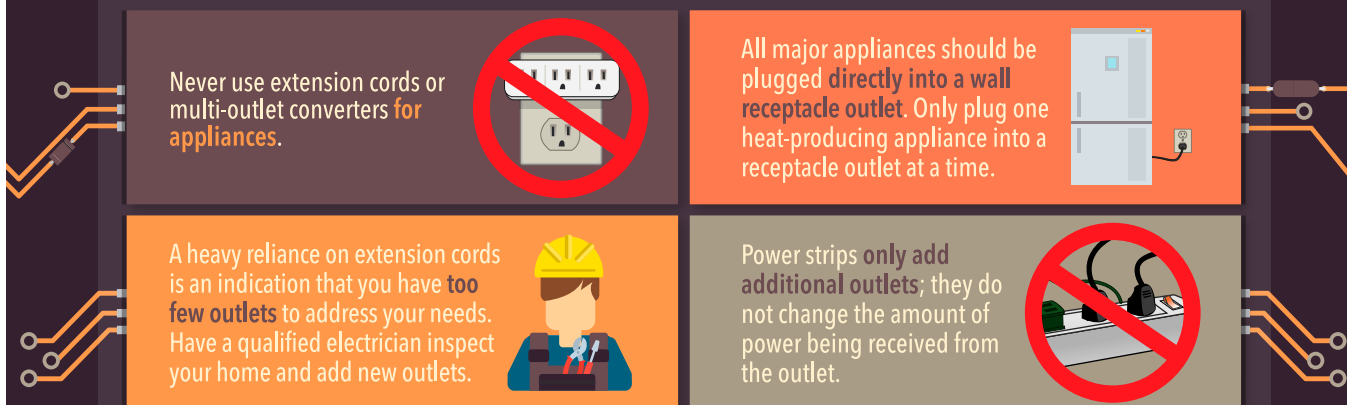
DON'T OVERLOAD YOUR HOME!

i According to the National Fire Protection Association, **47,700 home fires** in the U.S. are caused by electrical failure or malfunction each year. These fires result in **418 deaths**, **1,570 injuries** and **\$1.4 billion in property damage**. Overloaded electrical circuits are a major cause of residential fires. Help lower your risk of electrical fires by not overloading your electrical system.

OVERLOADED CIRCUIT WARNING SIGNS



HOW TO PREVENT ELECTRICAL OVERLOADS



50%

The CPSC estimates more than 50% of electrical fires that occur every year can be prevented by Arc Fault Circuit Interrupters (AFCIs). To learn more about AFCIs, visit ESFi.org.



Only use the appropriate watt bulb for any lighting fixture. Using a larger watt light bulb may cause a fire.

ESFi.org

McLean County community calendar: Events and activities to see and do

McLean Electric Cooperative summer hours: 8 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. Monday through Thursday and 8 a.m. to noon Friday.

McLean County area food pantry August distribution and donation thrift store dates, times and locations:

- **Garrison: Garrison Area Resource Center & Food Pantry:** Noon-2 p.m. and 5-7 p.m. Aug. 28.
- **Makoti, Parshall, Plaza, Roseglen, Ryder, White Shield and others in need: Community Food Pantry:** 10 a.m.-1 p.m. Aug. 23, 181 Ellsworth St., Makoti. Community Thrift Store: 3-6 p.m. Tuesday, 4-7 p.m. Thursday and 10 a.m.-1 p.m. Saturday, except holidays, 181 Ellsworth St., Makoti.
- **Max: Our Savior Lord's Food Pantry:** Noon-3 p.m. and 5-7 p.m. Aug. 18, Max City Hall, 215 Main St.
- **Turtle Lake: The Lord's Pantry:** 2-4 p.m. Aug. 14, and 10 a.m.-noon Aug. 23, Trinity Lutheran Church, 515 Kundert St.
- **Turtle Lake: Free Community Clothing Share & Exchange Store:** Noon-6 p.m. every Thursday, 221 Main St.
- **Underwood: Community Cupboard of Underwood food distribution:** 4-6 p.m. Aug. 14, 208 Lincoln Ave. Like us on Facebook (Community Cupboard of Underwood) for distribution and thrift store updates.
- **Underwood: Community Cupboard of Underwood Thrift Store:** 1-5 p.m. every Tuesday.
- **Washburn: McLean Family Resource Center:** McLean County residents can contact the center, 701-462-8643, for an appointment to pick up baskets along with more information or assistance through the center's services, 205 Seventh St.
- **Washburn: McLean Family Resource Center Clothing Outlet:** 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday, 205 Seventh St.
- **Wilton: Wilton Food Pantry mini distributions:** 11:30 a.m. every Friday until gone. Full food distribution 4-6 p.m.

Aug. 21, Wilton Senior Citizens Center, 42 Dakota Ave.

- **Wilton: The (free) Clothes Closet:** 3-5 p.m. Aug. 21, First Presbyterian Church, 401 Dakota Ave.

Area food pantries often experience high needs for the following items: baked beans, pork and beans, canned fruit, tuna, chicken, vegetables, cereal, oatmeal, granola and breakfast bars, juice, macaroni and cheese, hamburger and tuna helper, pancake mix, syrup, pasta, spaghetti, Alfredo and pasta sauce, peanut butter, jelly, rice side dishes, soups and chili, and household items, such as body wash and soap, dish soap, laundry detergent, shampoo and conditioner, toilet paper, toothpaste and toothbrushes. Contact local food pantries for drop-off locations, information or a list of additional needs in your community.

August and early September events:

- **Aug. 5:** Harvest Market on Main begins with vendors every Tuesday evening through August with make it, bake it and grow it vendors, Main Street, Garrison.
- **Aug. 7-9:** Party in the Park/All-School Reunion, Garrison.
- **Aug. 9:** Evening Hike Series, Sensory Hike, Fort Stevenson State Park, Garrison. Meet at the Visitor Center, with the hike beginning at 9:15 p.m.
- **Aug. 30:** Evening Hike Series, Lantern Hike, Fort Stevenson State Park, Garrison. Meet at the Visitor Center for a hike with paper lanterns (free) along the park's perimeter trail beginning at 8:30 p.m.
- **Sept. 30:** Operation Round Up application deadline. Go to McLean Electric Cooperative's website, mcleanelectric.com, and click "Grants and Scholarship" on the homepage for information or contact Communications Manager Sonja Moe at 701-463-6700 or 800-263-4922.

Nonprofit organizations and communities throughout McLean County can contact Patricia Stockdill at stockdill.patricia@gmail.com or 701-337-5462 to submit community events. ■

BOARD OF DIRECTORS:

James Odermann, president
701-743-4415
District 1, Parshall

Darcy Klain, vice president
701-448-2408
District 4, Ruso

Rod Stockdill, secretary-treasurer
701-337-5462
District 3, Garrison

Clarence Behles,
asst. secretary-treasurer
701-337-5362
District 2, Garrison

Troy Presser, director
701-447-2855
District 5, Turtle Lake

Karen Hanson, director
701-448-2636
District 6, Washburn

Larry Gessele, director
701-447-2461
District 7, Mercer

STAFF:

Mark Doyle, General Manager/CEO
Keith Thelen, Operations Manager
Lucas Schaaf, Engineering Manager
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