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## MANAGER'S MOMENT Plan projects early



**Mark Doyle**

*I would appreciate a moment of your time...*

As spring approaches, many of you are anticipating getting outdoors and enjoying the weather. Here at McLean Electric Cooperative, it is the start of construction season!

This year, we anticipate continued growth in all sectors of our membership,

which is great! Unfortunately, due to the pandemic and other economic factors, the supply chain is a real issue. I'm sure you all are feeling the effects in one way or another.

Our material suppliers are doing their best to make sure we get the material we need in a reasonable and timely manner. In 2021, we were ordering for 2022 and some items for 2023. This requires us to carry a bit more inventory than usual, but that is necessary. Even then, not all materials, like transformers, are available. They currently are 52 weeks out from the order date and that is not guaranteed!

So, if you are anticipating a project, like a new service, please contact us early, so we can do our best to facilitate the work.

As always, feel free to reach out to me with any questions or comments. My door is always open.

Regards,

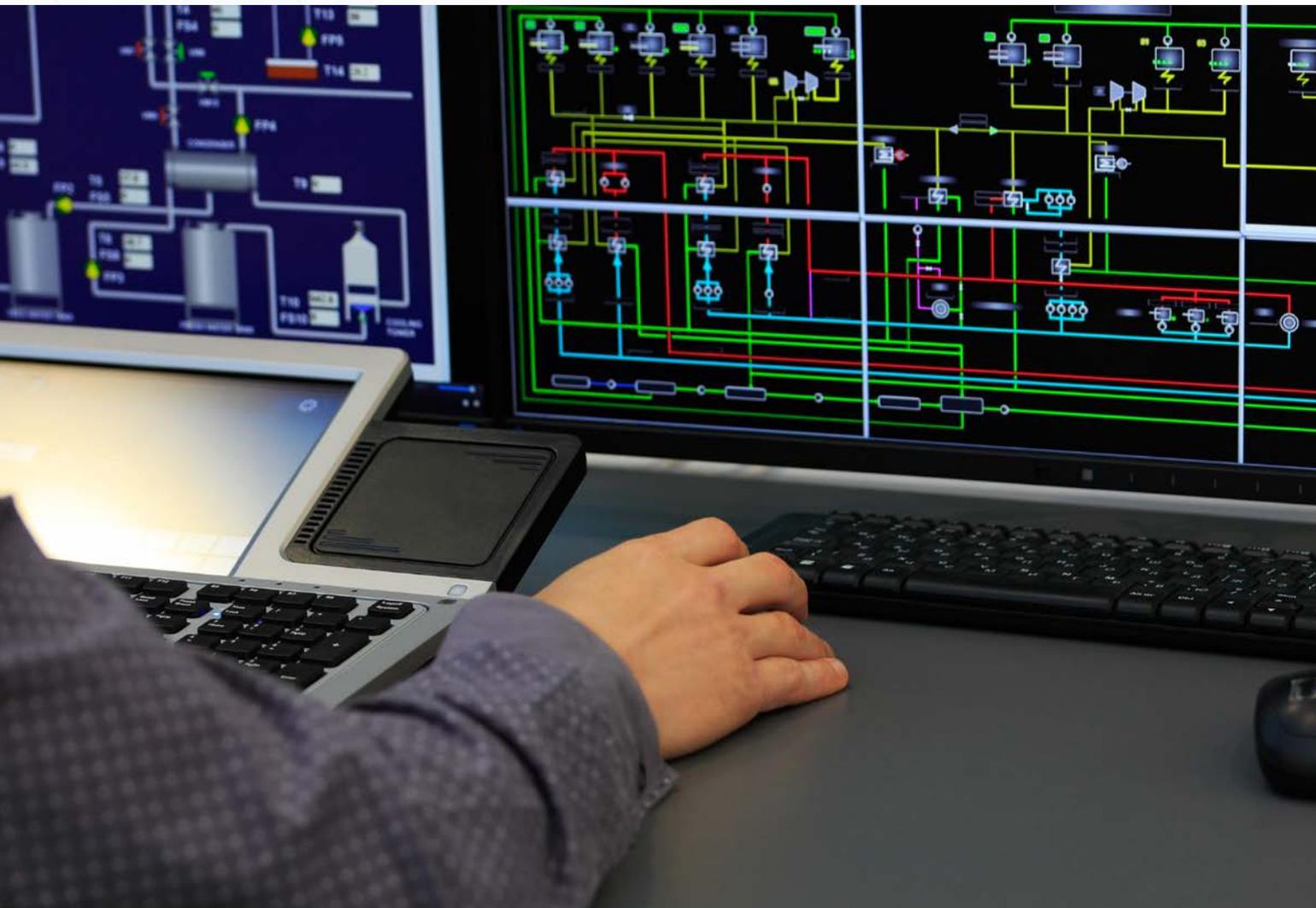
*Mark Doyle, general manager*



## Digging into an outdoor project?



Before you dig, dial 811 or visit [www.call811.com](http://www.call811.com) to protect underground utilities. Careless digging poses a threat to people, pipelines and underground facilities. Contact 811 first and help keep our community safe.



## FROM GRASSROOTS TO THE GRID: **Protecting McLean Electric Cooperative and the nation's electric industry**

BY PATRICIA STOCKDILL

**F**or most people, electric reliability means not having to worry about lights going out or their computer shutting down in a storm.

It means water splashes across cropland when an irrigation system is turned on, refrigerators stay cold and work-from-home employees keep working.

Yes, that's electric reliability.

However, in today's interconnected world, electric reliability means ensuring that when a major weather event occurs – like it did in Texas in February 2021 – it

doesn't impact dozens of other states.

It means that when some cybercriminal down the road or across the world hacks an industry – like it did in 2021 – that a country doesn't slam to a halt.

The reality is electric reliability ensures the world keeps moving, whether it's in good or bad weather, and in a time when it's all too common to have cybersecurity breaches.

Electricity powers today's world.

And the electric industry is working to ensure it continues, even in the face of increasing cybersecurity

threats. It doesn't matter if it's rural McLean County or anywhere across the United States.

### **The grassroots level**

Electricity and today's technology allows humans to interconnect as they never have before, and that opportunity will likely only increase. However, "there's no denying that the more connected we are, the more vulnerable we are," McLean Electric Cooperative (MEC) Engineering Manager Lucas Schaaf described.

It doesn't matter if it's online shopping, banking, simple communications via email, stock market trading, bill paying, reviewing notes from a doctor's appointment or any other business conducted via computer and the internet, businesses, government agencies and others strive to protect consumer identity, information and personal data, staying ahead of potential cyber threats.

MEC does as well, whether it's protecting online billing payments or a substation.

The convenience of online bill pay through SmartHub is one example of how technology can simplify MEC members' lives. The cooperative works with Mandan-based National Information Solutions Cooperative (NISC) to provide its software systems – everything from accounting, engineering, operations and other IT solutions, Schaaf described.

NISC is one of the nation's leading technology experts for the cooperative industry, providing electric and broadband cooperatives with state-of-the-art, best-of-class tools, including addressing cybersecurity needs.

On the grassroots level of paying an MEC bill online, Schaaf said members have that high level of credit card payment security through MEC's website and the NISC software. To help ensure security, he suggests member-owners set their credit card account alerts to send notices of any charges at the level of \$0.00. Then, if anyone even tries to charge a penny, an account holder receives a notice, whether email, text or both, depending on what options they select.

In addition, members can go to "iVue" on SmartHub to set their account to receive notices if a payment was late or wasn't received. SmartHub is protected through NISC software technology, Schaaf continued. The system is also backed up for additional protection.

MEC's own IT support is through NRG Technology Services, Bismarck, which also works with a variety of other businesses and local and county governments. NRG Technology Services keeps MEC's technology up-to-date on firewall protection, its computers, servers and other technology, Schaaf added.

Cloud-based technology, such as Amazon Web Services

or Microsoft OneDrive, took the ability to work remotely to a new level, Schaaf continued.

"It really helps on a sharing basis," he explained, as well as working on multiple devices. Plus, it reduces dependency for onsite physical damage of data from something such as fire or robbery.

A complex backup system of multiple firewalls, passwords and two-factor identification sent to separate devices, and layers of off-site data protection, are all designed to maintain state-of-the-art cybersecurity, whether it's an MEC member's credit card number, MEC's financial information, day-to-day operations or the actual running of a substation.

### **Protecting electric distribution**

Electric distribution cooperatives, such as MEC, are the grassroots of the electric system. Back in the "good ol' days," when the power went out, a lineworker had to identify the problem source and physically fix it. While that's still true today, technology makes it easier to identify problems through the use of supervisory control and data acquisition (SCADA).

For example, SCADA monitors and can remotely switch a line, so if one area is out of power, electricity can be fed from another line without having lineworkers physically make the switch.

MEC hasn't fully integrated SCADA in its operations, given the cost-benefits of the system, but continues exploring options to best suit the cooperative.

SCADA provides remote capability advantages, but also means additional security has to be built in to protect the physical substation plant itself through additional firewalls. A high-wall fencing system protects substations serving MEC's members from physical damage, with Central Power Electric Cooperative as its electric transmission provider.

Western Area Power Administration, a 15-state hydropower marketing administration within the U.S. Department of Energy, and Central Power also protect MEC's substations – physically as well as through cybersecurity.

Ransomware is a huge issue on any level of business.

"(Cybercriminals) hack you out and you pay," McLean Electric General Manager/CEO Mark Doyle said.

A ransomware attack on Colonial Pipeline is one example that hit the eastern United States in May 2021. Even on a large regional level, the incident was for financial gain on the part of the attackers.

Cyberattacks on a national or global level are terrorism, Doyle added.

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### Protecting the grid and beyond

Cyberattacks on any level – whether for financial gain by cybercriminals or to bring an industry or nation to a halt – are in the forefront of the electric industry. The question is identifying the attacker at the other end, Doyle continued, such as someone across the world funded by a nation unfriendly to the United States or someone in a college dorm testing his computer skills to see if it's doable.

The end result could be the same – a shutdown.

Protecting the nation's electric supply involves protecting physical plants and technological assets, whether it's a distribution cooperative's substation, office data or a generation and transmission supplier, Doyle emphasized. Even distribution cooperatives can't access all data from their generation and transmission suppliers, he added.

For example, Central Power and its six distribution cooperatives can't share the same communication lines, Doyle continued. That doesn't mean they don't communicate – they continuously communicate. It just means not all data is on the same system.

Of the entire critical infrastructure in the United States, only the electric utility industry has mandatory and enforceable cybersecurity standards. In addition to regulating interstate natural gas, oil and electric transmission – among other duties – the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) oversees development

and enforcement of cybersecurity standards for high-transmission systems and those hydroelectric facilities within its jurisdiction. Congress gave FERC the authority through the 2005 Energy Policy Act.

FERC has the authority to approve or send back (remand) standards pertaining to the United States, as established by the North American Electric Reliability Corporation (NERC), which sets reliability, physical security and cybersecurity electric standards across North America. NERC can level noncompliance fines.

FERC identified several focus areas to protect against cybercriminals in 2019, including supply chain, insider threats and third-party authorized access, providing timely information of threats and vulnerabilities for industry access.

The National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA), the national organization representing electric cooperatives, works with others in the electric industry, including municipal and investor-owned sectors and government agencies, such as FERC, on a variety of levels to ensure physical plant and cybersecurity.

The Electricity Subsector Coordinating Council serves as a liaison between federal agencies and the electric industry, including NRECA, which helps with information sharing regarding potential threats – physical and cybersecurity alike.

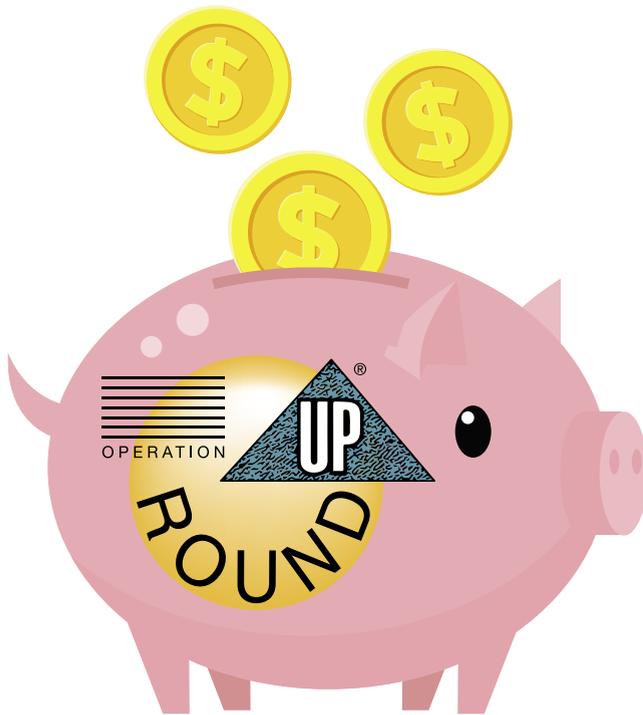
NRECA created the RC3 program, Rural Cooperative Cybersecurity Capabilities, to help cooperatives gain tools, training and preparedness to improve cybersecurity readiness and response in 2016.

The U.S. Department of Energy awarded NRECA a \$5 million grant in October 2021 to address cyber threats even further, as it continues developing and implementing cybersecurity tools and ways to protect the industry.

Whether it's protecting one's identify from credit card theft by using safe passwords and setting up fraud alerts or striving to protect the nation's intricate electric generation, transmission and distribution system, it still comes down to the human element, NRECA CEO Jim Matheson said.

Writing in a January *RE Magazine* "Closing Thoughts" column, Matheson said: "But even with all these tools in place, one of the most challenging aspects of cybersecurity remains the human element. The top way for hackers and criminals to gain access to networks involves things like stolen credentials and successful phishing email scams. Cybersecurity is no longer just a challenge for a co-op's IT team. Everyone plays a role in managing cyber risk."

Electric cooperatives are on the forefront of grid security innovations. ■



## By the numbers - Operation Round Up and its important role

BY PATRICIA STOCKDILL

**M**cLean County nonprofit organizations should mark April 1 on their calendar. It's the deadline for Operation Round Up spring grant applications.

Each month, McLean Electric Cooperative's (MEC) participating member-owners' electric bills are rounded up to the nearest dollar. That "pocket change" is placed in Operation Round Up's trust account. A volunteer board of directors awards grants to nonprofit organizations or individuals in need within MEC's broad service area.

It doesn't matter if organizations or individual recipients are MEC member-owners or not. What is important is the organization supports charitable, educational, scientific, health or safety-oriented community projects within McLean County or portions of neighboring counties MEC serves or individuals in need due to emergency issues.

Here is a look at some Operation Round Up numbers:

- **\$1,100:** The average monthly total contribution of MEC's participating member-owners.
- **99 cents:** The most a monthly statement could be

rounded up.

- **\$11.88:** The maximum amount per year an MEC participating member-owner could contribute when his or her bill is rounded up (99 cents per month for 12 months).
- **\$6:** The average annual amount a participating MEC member-owner contributes to Operation Round Up.
- **2011:** The year the late Don Gackle, a rural Garrison MEC member-owner, proposed MEC participate in Operation Round Up.
- **2013:** The first year Operation Round Up's volunteer board of directors awarded grants.
- **7:** The number of volunteer MEC member-owners serving on Operation Round Up's board of directors.
- **75:** The approximate percentage of MEC member-owners participating in Operation Round Up.
- **2:** The number of Operation Round Up annual grant rounds.
- **\$2,500:** The maximum total amount one recipient can receive in one year.
- **4:** The number of individuals who experienced catastrophic medical or other emergency expenses receiving support when nonprofit organizations submitted Operation Round Up grant requests on their behalf.
- **6:** The number of area food pantries receiving help to acquire food, fund building repairs or acquire equipment since Operation Round Up began serving McLean County and the surrounding area.
- **\$14,260:** The amount of Operation Round Up grants awarded in 2021.
- **8:** The number of Operation Round Up recipients in the two grant rounds awarded in 2021.
- **Priceless:** The feeling that contributing to Operation Round Up can give MEC member-owners, knowing they're helping others in need throughout the county – friends, family or strangers alike.

MEC is one of hundreds of electric cooperatives across the United States participating in Operation Round Up. Other than nominating volunteers to serve on the Operation Round Up board of directors, the only role MEC plays is to help facilitate and promote the program.

More information about the program, contact information for its seven board of directors or a downloadable application is available by calling McLean Electric Communications Manager Sonja Moe, 701-463-6700 or 800-263-4922, or on MEC's website, [www.mcleanelectric.com](http://www.mcleanelectric.com), clicking "Community" and "Operation Round Up." ■



## CO-OP 101:

# What is a cooperative?

North Dakota's electric cooperatives are continually involved in the communities they serve, from delivering power to offering scholarships for college-bound students. But what is a cooperative?

Electric cooperatives are owned and democratically controlled by their members – the people who use the electricity.

They operate on the principle of “one member, one vote.” So, each member of a cooperative has the same voting power. As a member, you have a voice in how your co-op operates, by electing directors to represent you.

And, cooperatives are nonprofit entities, returning profits to members proportionate to their use of the cooperative's service.

Cooperatives are shaped by the specific needs

of the communities they serve. This local, member-driven structure is one reason why cooperatives enjoy the highest consumer-satisfaction scores within the electric industry. Electric cooperatives, on average, score higher than all other electric companies, according to the 2021 American Customer Satisfaction Index.

Electric cooperatives are built by and belong to the people they serve. They are led by members from the community and are uniquely suited to meet local needs.

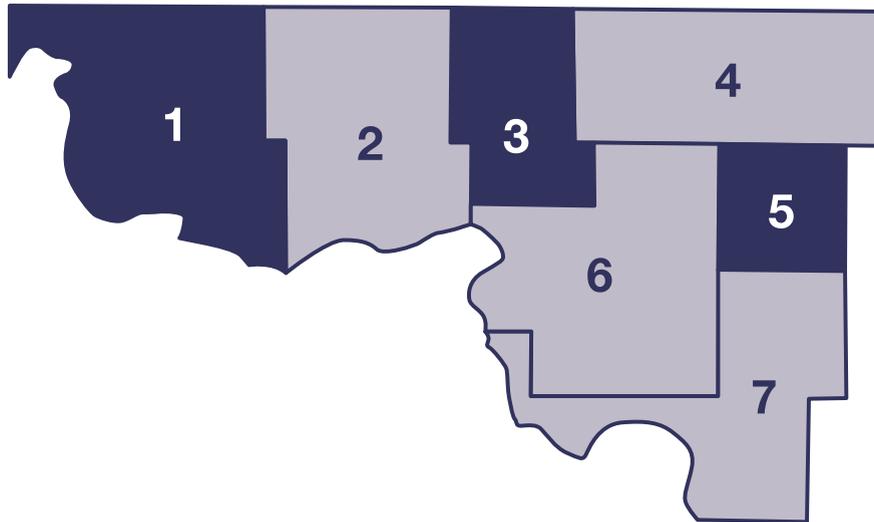
Cooperatives have strong ties to North Dakota's history – and the state's future. Rural electrification was born 85 years ago in the spirit of cooperation, and electric cooperatives play a vital role in developing the state today. ■

## 7 COOPERATIVE PRINCIPLES:

- Voluntary and open membership
- Democratic member control
- Members' economic participation
- Autonomy and independence
- Education, training and information
- Cooperation among cooperatives
- Concern for community

# Three director seats up for election

## DO YOU WANT TO BECOME A DIRECTOR?



**H**ave you ever thought of running for a seat on the board of directors? It is quite simple. Pick up a petition at the McLean Electric Cooperative headquarters in Garrison and secure 15 signatures of members from within your district. You can start circulating the petition right away, but it must be filed not less than 60 days before the annual meeting. Petitions for the 2022 director election must be filed with the co-op by April 22.

According to the bylaws, any member of McLean Electric Cooperative who is a member of this cooperative as a bonafide resident of the district he/she represents, and is in no way employed by or financially interested in a competing enterprise, can become a candidate for the

board of directors. Directors shall be elected by the members at large.

### Director duties

Directors have a fiduciary responsibility to the cooperative. They exercise care, time and responsibility in reviewing cooperative matters. Directors treat cooperative business as if it were their own.

Directors devote a certain amount of time to the cooperative. At a minimum, a director attends each monthly board meeting.

Directors learn about the industry as a whole by reading other materials and by attending state and national meetings. An understanding of the issues facing the industry is vital.

To help directors with their responsibilities, training is offered

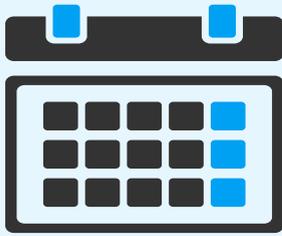
through the electric cooperative's statewide organization. Courses cover director duties and liabilities, understanding the electric business, board roles and relationships, strategic planning and financial decision-making.

Directors who currently serve the cooperative find the duty extremely rewarding.

### This year, the districts up for election are:

- **District 1** - Parshall is currently served by James Odermann.
- **District 3** - Garrison is served by Rod Stockdill.
- **District 5** - Turtle Lake is served by Troy Presser.

**Three directors will be elected at the McLean Electric Cooperative annual meeting, Tuesday, June 21, in Garrison**



## McLean County community calendar:

# Events and activities to see and do

### McLean County community food pantry March distributions:

- **Community Cupboard of Underwood:** 4-6 p.m. March 3 and 10 a.m.-noon March 19. 208 Lincoln Ave. Like us on Facebook, Community Cupboard of Underwood, for food pantry distributions, thrift store and other information.
- **Garrison Area Resource Center & Food Pantry, Garrison:** March 24, noon-2 p.m. and 5-7 p.m., former Lazy J's building back door.
- **Our Savior Lord's Food Pantry, Max:** March 21, noon-3 p.m. and 5-7 p.m., Max City Hall, 215 Main St.
- **The Lord's Pantry, Turtle Lake:** 2-4 p.m. March 10 and 10 a.m.-noon March 26, Trinity Lutheran Church, 515 Kundert St.
- **Wilton Food Pantry, Wilton:** "Mini" distributions every Friday, 11:30 a.m. until gone; full food distribution, 4-6 p.m. March 17, Wilton Senior Citizens Center, 42 Dakota Ave.

Area food pantries often experience high needs for these items: baked beans, pork and beans, canned fruit, tuna, chicken, cereal, oatmeal, granola and breakfast bars, juice, mac and cheese, hamburger and tuna helper, pancake mix, syrup, pasta, pasta sauce, peanut butter, jelly, rice side dishes, soups 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 information or a

list of additional needs in your community.

### March activities:

- **March 9-13:** Crafting Weekend, Camp of the Cross, Lake Sakakawea. Contact the camp, 701-337-2245, or visit [www.campofthecross.com](http://www.campofthecross.com) for registration and more details.
- **March 13:** Benedictine Living Center's St. Patrick's Day meal, 11 a.m.-1 p.m., Garrison City Auditorium.
- **March 17:** Leprechaun's Geo Cache, Fort Stevenson State Park, Garrison. Contact the park, 701-337-5576, or go to its Facebook page for details.
- **March 18-19:** Fourth through Sixth Grade Bash, Camp of the Cross, Lake Sakakawea. Contact the camp, 701-337-2245, or visit [www.campofthecross.com](http://www.campofthecross.com) for registration and more details.
- **March 25-26:** Seventh through Ninth Grade Bash, Camp of the Cross, Lake Sakakawea. Contact the camp, 701-337-2245, or visit [www.campofthecross.com](http://www.campofthecross.com) for registration and more details.
- **April 1:** Operation Round Up grant application deadline. Visit McLean Electric Cooperative's website, [www.mcleanelectric.com](http://www.mcleanelectric.com), click "Grants and Scholarships" and "Operation Round Up" or contact Communications Manager Sonja Moe, 701-463-6700, for details.

*Nonprofit organizations and communities throughout McLean County are encouraged to contact Patricia Stockdill, [stockdill.patricia@gmail.com](mailto:stockdill.patricia@gmail.com), or telephone 701-337-5462, to submit their community events. ■*

### BOARD OF DIRECTORS:

**Larry Gessele**, president  
701-447-2461  
District 7, Mercer

**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

**James Odermann**, director  
701-743-4415  
District 1, Parshall

### STAFF:

**Mark Doyle**, General Manager/CEO  
**Keith Thelen**, Operations Manager  
**Lucas Schaaf**, Engineering Manager  
**Wendy Kinn**, Finance Manager

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