



Growing for the future: Turtle Lake Farmers Union Oil

BY PATRICIA STOCKDILL

PHOTO BY PATRICIA STOCKDILL

Turtle Lake Farmers Union Oil Co. General Manager **Shaun Ness** and the cooperative's mobile seed treatment unit. Agronomy Manager Darin Okerson said the mobile unit has helped producers as far away as Kenmare with its on-farm services.

Turtle Lake Farmers Union Oil Co. is positioning itself for agriculture's next evolution.

The agriculture industry is now in its third generation of farming evolution, explained General Manager Shaun Ness: It's the mathematics evolution; melding science and technology to manage the plant seed and soil health, and ultimately improve bottom lines.

The goal in this new evolution is a better return on investment (ROI) and Turtle Lake Farmers Union wants to be there to assist producers to attain that goal. "My goal with any producer is to maximize profit," Ness added. "We want to be a partner with the producer."

That's not a new concept. It's just that now the cooperative's board of directors is taking steps to leverage its position in the region's agricultural industry even

more. It began when the cooperative grew its already existing agronomy services by expanding its seed treatment, chemical and fertilizer mixing services with construction of a new facility at the junction of Highway 41 and Highway 200.

Located a couple miles south of Turtle Lake, the new facility is served by McLean Electric Cooperative (MEC).

When Ness joined the cooperative in August 2017, he came with a strong business and finance background from North Dakota State University and 10 years of agronomy experience. It was also a chance for him to be closer to his Underwood roots, as well the opportunity to have a role in growing the cooperative's presence.

The current location on the north side of Turtle Lake offers gas and fuel, hardware and other services. By

moving the agronomy portion of the business to its new, larger facility in 2016, it can better serve its members within its 50-mile service area by treating seed and mixing fertilizer faster and more efficiently, Ness explained.

“I told the board, “when you built the agronomy center and you put it on the highway, you got people’s attention,” he said.

Turtle Lake Farmers Union is serious about serving its customer base. It will take another step forward in 2018 by doubling the output capacity from 8 to 16 tons to weigh and mix fertilizer. That means less waiting for producers during one of their busiest times of the growing season.

Agricultural producers have little to no control over their market prices. But they can focus on reducing costs and improving ROI. One way that can be done is through something in which Ness is keenly interested – precision agriculture, which identifies specific areas within each field with low ROI.

The cooperative’s agronomy center can work with producers to identify ways to improve those areas. “The new seed treatment facility allows producers to be more proactive than reactive for each crop,” Ness explained. Couple in the technology of something like precision agriculture and “it really helps you dial in your costs,” he added.

Turtle Lake Farmers Union Oil Co. currently has 15 full-time employees between its service station and agronomy center, including Agronomy Manager Darin Okerson, two sales agronomists and two sales applicators. Additional seasonal employees are added during the busy planting season. The goal, Ness added, is to grow the staff and agronomy service. Currently, about 75 percent of its business focuses on agronomy among its local patrons.

The new agronomy center is just the beginning, Ness believes. The cooperative’s board of directors and Ness are looking long-term. Farmers Union Oil already owns property adjacent to the new agronomy center. Some long-term options include potentially moving its services from its current location – gas, fuel and convenience store – to its acreage adjacent to the new agronomy center, expand its already increasing agronomy presence, and possibly expand its livestock supply inventory.

In a nutshell, Turtle Lake Farmers Union Oil Co. is looking at being much more aggressive from that total farm perspective,” Ness continued.

It already offers mobile seed treating services. Okerson said the cooperative has



PHOTO BY PATRICIA STOCKDILL

*Turtle Lake Farmers Union Oil Co. General Manager **Shaun Ness** explains the control panel at the cooperative’s seed treatment and mixing facility. The building was completed in 2016 and is located at the junction of Highway 41 and Highway 200. The location allows farmers easy access to getting their seed treatment and fertilizer needs.*

helped producers as far away as Kenmare with onsite treatment, which saves time and, ultimately, money.

Other new projects include recently launching a new, updated logo, incorporating new accounting software so members have easier, more streamlined billing statements, and it will add an internet presence with an upcoming website, www.turtlelakecoop.com. It’s all part of listening to the patrons and providing services that can advance everyone’s bottom line.

“That’s the beauty of a cooperative. ... You can be involved as a patron. Having input from our customers is important,” Ness continued. “I’m excited. I’m excited to see what we can do.”

Growing Turtle Lake Farmers Union Co. grows the community and improves McLean County’s economy. It benefits McLean Electric Cooperative by providing services for McLean Electric Cooperative’s members within the Turtle Lake and Mercer region, as well as members throughout the county. Growth for one means opportunities for growth for all and it’s a goal set forth one step at a time by Turtle Lake Farmers Union Co. ■

Save a life: Donate blood

BY PATRICIA STOCKDILL



Nobody wants to need a blood transfusion to survive.

Yet every day somewhere in North Dakota – probably even McLean County – it’s likely someone will need another person’s blood to see the next day.

United Blood Services is the lone blood provider to hospitals throughout North Dakota. In a rural state, that’s challenging because blood only has a 42-day shelf life. “It’s the blood on the shelf that’s going to save lives,” described United Blood Services (UBS) Donor Recruitment Manger Travis Dressler.

The need to ensure there will always be enough blood available in emergencies underscores the importance of community blood drives. Two blood drives have already been held in McLean County in 2018 in Garrison and Max.

Drives are efficient ways to collect blood, Dressler

explained. The goal of any drive is to fill the sign-up schedule at each event. “We rely heavily on organizations to set up drives,” he added.

Virtually any organization or business can sponsor a blood drive. “(For example), we partner with high schools and businesses. It’s amazing what rural communities can do. ... We’ve had high school sports teams. ... There’s really no limit (to who can sponsor blood drives),” Dressler described.

Most people don’t think about donating blood until they’re smacked with the reality of the need – either personally or knowing a friend or family member who suddenly finds themselves in an emergency or medical situation requiring blood.

“They say the number one reason people don’t donate is because no one asked,” Dressler said.

A blood drive is really just someone asking others in their community for a little help, an hour or so of their time. The beauty of the human spirit oftentimes is the willingness to step up and help others in need. Donating blood or helping sponsor a blood drive is one way to step up. ■



The blood donation process:

- Check in and answer some health history questions.
- Check vital signs.
- Two types of donations – whole blood or red cell. It takes about six to eight minutes to donate a pint of whole blood. Red cell donations take about 15 to 20 minutes.
- Donors receive refreshments to help speed their recovery and can leave after a few minutes.

Any organization or business can sponsor a blood drive. Visit United Blood Services website, www.unitedbloodservices.org, for more information or telephone the Bismarck office toll-free 800-456-6159 or Minot, 800-863-9079.

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OPERATION ROUND UP





McLean Electric Cooperative Cable Locator **Kelly Schmaltz** is locating underground electric cable leading from the cabinet in the background. He will be busy throughout the year locating MEC cable throughout its service area for anyone calling North Dakota One Call with a digging project.

Dialing 811

BY PATRICIA STOCKDILL

Identifying everything buried beneath the ground with plastic flags on wires creates more of an array of colors than what adorns the Olympic flag.

Pink, red, yellow, orange, blue, purple and green: Each color indicates a buried line of some type that if not properly identified before anyone digs into the ground could spell big problems – not only for the one digging, but also for those relying on what flows through those lines.

North Dakota laws require anyone planning to dig to contact North Dakota One Call at least two days prior to when they intend to start digging. It doesn't matter if that person is a homeowner planting a tree, installing a fence, or adding birdhouse on a post, a building contractor, farmer installing an irrigation system, a rural

telecommunications cooperative expanding its fiber optic services or a large pipeline company.

If you want to dig, you had better call first.

North Dakota isn't unique in its requirements. One Call digging requirements are common through the United States. The reason is it saves lives by preventing accidents or worse – death – should someone expose a potentially dangerous hazard such as gas line or underground electrical cable.

However, it also helps prevent disruption of services, such as an outage when underground electric cable is cut.

"It takes time and costs money," explained McLean Electric Cooperative (MEC) General Manager/CEO Marty Dahl, when underground outages occur because of damaged cable. And

most importantly, “it could kill you, especially if it’s a primary line. ... If you happen to be the easiest path to a ground, it could be you,” he emphasized. The risk is even greater if using a shovel or post hole digger with a metal handle.

N.D. One Call is primarily for safety, Dahl continued, but it’s inconvenient for MEC members when cut underground line causes outages. Cuts and damage also create potential weak spots in underground cable, which could result in future outages and expense.

North Dakota electrical code requires major electrical lines to be buried at least 36 inches deep. Typically, McLean Electric buries its lines 42 to 48 inches, Dahl described, although lower-voltage underground cable may not be as deep. It’s possible electric utility underground cable could be anywhere from 18 to 24 inches deep and deeper. However, just as rocks mysteriously appear where they never existed the previous summer, winter weather can cause frost heaves to skinny electric lines into shallower depths.

Even though someone may think they won’t dig deep enough to hit any buried wires or pipelines, something like communications wires could be shallower than a water line or electrical cable.

It’s better to be safe than sorry.

The good news is that it’s free to have underground lines and wires located, although anyone digging is required to request a cable locate at least 48 hours prior to when they intend to dig to allow all of the utilities time to get to the area.

McLean Electric goes to the member’s meter, Dahl explained, and it’s the member’s responsibility if they want secondary wires located from the meter to another location.

“But Kelly (McLean Electric Cable Locator Kelly Schmaltz) will help – if he’s got time – to locate wires on the other side of the meter,” Dahl said. However, the consumer must sign a waiver of liability and he must be able to do it without the cooperative’s expense of another trip to the site. “I’ll gladly locate if they sign a waiver,” Schmaltz added.

The area where digging is slated should be identified with white flags to help those locating if no one is on site when the locate takes place. Entities locating buried lines use flags specific to what is buried: Red for electrical; yellow for gas, oil, gaseous materials, etc.; green for sewer or drain; orange for communication; pink for



McLean Electric Cooperative cable locator **Kelly Schmaltz** is ready to locate the cooperative’s underground lines. He reminds people that they need to contact North Dakota One Call – it’s state law – at least 48 hours prior to starting a digging project.

temporary survey markers; blue for potable water; and purple for reclaimed water, slurry and irrigation lines.

People can notify North Dakota One Call via telephone at 811, or go online to the website, www.ndonecall.com. The process can be enhanced by being prepared by having the site's legal description available, project description, exact address, and specific location. North Dakota One Call then notifies utilities, pipeline companies, water authorities and others and they, in turn, identify if a line locate is necessary.

By contacting North Dakota One Call, the onus is on the entity responsible for any cables or pipelines. For example, if someone doesn't request a cable locate and hits McLean Electric's underground electrical cable, it is that person's responsibility. "We (McLean Electric) do send bills out to people when they dig up a line. It's not cheap to fix, especially if it's on overtime," Dahl expressed.

The main reason for billing those responsible is so that repair costs come at the expense of those damaging the cable and isn't borne by McLean Electric's consumers.

Schmaltz recommends anyone planning to dig call as soon as they know their intentions and then mark the location with white flags. "I go in order from the time they (requests) come in time within the required 48-hour time period," he explained.

Utilities and companies are required by law to complete a locate request within 48 hours.

Schmaltz tries to coordinate locations so he can do several cable locates while in close proximity to each other, when possible. He also notifies anyone requesting a cable locate if he is delayed for any reason. It's beneficial to have the person requesting a cable locate be present, but it's not required, he added.

The best thing for anyone planning to dig, especially homeowners or new rural subdivision property owners, is to recognize that not everything is buried along road or section line right-of-way. If Schmaltz sees someone digging in an area near where any McLean Electric underground cable could be buried and he knows they didn't have a North Dakota One Call locate request, he will advise them to stop digging until a locate is completed.

Schmaltz has some additional advice for anyone planning to dig, especially homeowners: Once a homeowner has a cable locate made and they know where lines are buried, don't plant trees or shrubs within four feet of any buried underground electrical cable. Roots can easily wrap around cable and cause damage. Digging

to repair damaged cable will likely kill the trees and shrubs.

The use of underground electric cable is now standard in new cabin sites served by McLean Electric and commonplace in many other areas of its service area. "Right now most of what we put in is underground," Schmaltz explained.

Another tip from Schmaltz is that anyone who buries something on their property – whether it's an electric line to serve an adjacent building or a decorative outdoor living area, water lines, or anything else – should measure and map the precise location of those buried lines. It's easy to forget where things are buried. Maps help property owners and others doing any future cable or line locates, as well as future property owners.

Schmaltz already knows he has a busy season ahead of him for MEC cable locates. He will start locating cable once spring arrives. "Once it thaws," he explained. "Last year I was locating cable once it thawed until it was freeze-up."

In addition, West River Telecommunications is bringing fiber optics to the Underwood area, he said. "They're (WRT) going into the cabin sites (Wolf Creek, etc.) and we've got all underground over there. 2018 will be hectic."

Or, as McLean Electric Operations Manager Keith Thelen added, "They (locate requests) keep us busy."

But that's OK. It's better to be safe than sorry or to have a consumer without electricity because of a damaged underground electric cable.

Call 811 or go online to www.ndonecall.com, have all of the information available, wait until all lines are identified, and then go ahead and dig to one's content. ■



**Know what's below.
Call before you dig.**



TEACH CHILDREN OUTDOOR ELECTRICAL SAFETY

Sunny, warm days and summer activities lead children outdoors. But before your children head outdoors to play, McLean Electric Cooperative recommends families review electrical safety rules with their children.

McLean Electric Cooperative recommends sharing this basic information with children:

Point out overhead power lines and electrical equipment to your children, and emphasize that they should never climb on or play near them.

Never go into an electric substation for any reason. Electric substations contain high-voltage equipment, which can kill you. Never rescue a pet or retrieve a ball or toy that goes inside. Call your electric cooperative instead.

Fly kites, drones and other toys in large open areas like a park or a field. Stay far away from power lines. If a kite gets stuck in a tree that's near power lines, don't climb up to get it. Contact your electric cooperative for assistance.

Let your child know that water and electricity are a dangerous combination and should never be used near each other.

Never climb a utility pole or tower. The electricity carried through this equipment is extremely high voltage and could kill you.

Never climb trees near power lines. Even if the power lines aren't touching the tree, they could touch when more weight is added to the branch.

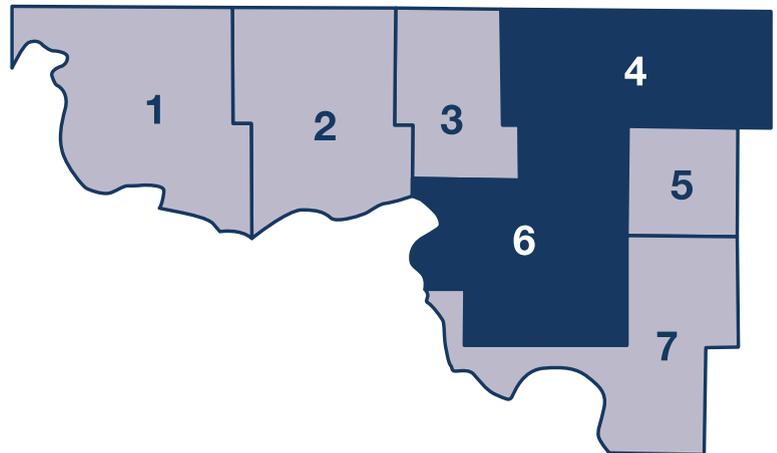
Do you want to become a director?

Have 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 2018 director election must be filed with the co-op by Thursday, April 19.

According to the bylaws, any member of McLean Electric Cooperative who is a member of this cooperative as a bona fide 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 currently serve the cooperative find the duty extremely rewarding.

This year, the districts up for election are:

- **District 4.** District is currently served by Darcy Klain.
- **District 6.** District 6 is currently served by Thomas Sheldon. ■

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

Thomas Sheldon, director, 701-462-3563,
District 6, Washburn

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

STAFF:

Martin Dahl, General Manager
Keith Thelen, Operations Manager
VACANT, Engineering Manager
Wendy Kinn, Finance Manager

Office: 701-463-6700
Toll-Free: 800-263-4922
Fax: 701-337-5303

Email: mclean1@mcleanelectric.com
Website address:
www.mcleanelectric.coop



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