

IN THIS ISSUE:

- Commitment to community
- Loan program benefits community
- Events and activities



PHOTO BY PATRICIA STOCKDILL

The Garrison Chamber of Commerce previously recognized McLean Electric Cooperative Billing Supervisor **Tonya Graeber**, left, and Customer Service Representative **Julie Streich** with customer service awards.

National Co-op Month: Commitment to community

BY PATRICIA STOCKDILL

October is National Co-op Month, celebrating the role cooperatives play across the United States in business, the economy and beyond.

Cooperatives take on many forms – telecommunication or food cooperatives, grain elevators or rural electric cooperatives such as McLean Electric Cooperative (MEC), for example.

Originating in 1964 when U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Orville Freeman proclaimed October Co-op Month, the 2019 theme is “Co-ops: By the Community, For the Community.” It fits well with the seven cooperative principles adopted by Touchstone Energy®, the coalition of rural electric cooperatives, which includes its “commitment to community” principle.

Examples of McLean Electric’s “commitment to community” run long and deep throughout its history, as well as in recent years. McLean Electric’s Member Service Representative Sonja Moe attends monthly community business meetings in McLean County, including Garrison and Turtle Lake’s chambers of commerce and the Washburn Civic Club.



PHOTO COURTESY UNDERWOOD AMBULANCE DEPARTMENT

Four Underwood ambulance crew members, left to right, **Nathan Renford**, **Erika Levey**, **Brianna Robinson** and **Freedom Bassett**, stand next to their current ambulance. The district received a loan to help it acquire a new ambulance. Working with McLean Electric Cooperative to secure the loan, the new ambulance arrives later this fall.

MEC also has a long history of supporting schools, students and organizations throughout the county.

“We try to be a good community partner,” McLean Electric General Manager/CEO Marty Dahl added. Dahl is currently in his 10th year serving on the Garrison Area Improvement Association Committee.

For example, McLean Electric supports the McLean County Fair and Turtle Lake’s Feeder Calf Show, has a booth at the McLean County Ag Show, which is managed by Garrison High School’s FFA chapter, and launched Operation Round Up in McLean County. That program assists nonprofit organizations and families facing medical or other emergencies within its service area.

Funds are generated when McLean Electric members “round up” their monthly electric bill to the nearest dollar. Operation Round

Up is a national program originated by a rural electric cooperative. It has grown throughout the country through efforts of cooperatives such as McLean Electric.

For a variety of reasons, the concept of doing good and giving back is increasing in popularity in corporate America, but cooperatives have been doing good and giving back for decades.

In addition, economic opportunities to better rural America exist because of rural electric cooperatives. Two examples include the Rural Economic Development Loan and Grant (REDLG) Program and Rural Development Finance Corporation (RDFC), Dahl continued.

REDLG funds are available through the U.S. Department of Agriculture Rural Development and allow rural electric cooperatives such as McLean Electric to access funds for economic and community

development projects.

RDFC is a North Dakota program established by the North Dakota Association of Rural Electric Cooperatives and its member cooperatives, including McLean Electric.

Boosting McLean County’s economy through its REDLG and RDFC involvement is just another way MEC delivers in its “commitment to community.”

Rural electric cooperatives’ commitment to community also reaches out to young adults through the annual National Rural Electric Cooperative Association Youth Tour program, providing a trip to Washington, D.C., to learn about government and cooperatives, several college education scholarships, and supporting local Dollars for Scholars programs in the county.

Providing good customer service

continued on page C4

Volunteerism remains strong at co-op

Volunteerism is a cornerstone of many rural communities throughout America.

It takes on many forms, whether helping sell tickets at a school basketball game, serving on an ambulance squad, raising funds for a community development project, or spending an evening hosting a children's Halloween party.

Like many businesses across McLean County, McLean Electric Cooperative (MEC) has several employees volunteering their time to help their communities. Sometimes the whole family gets involved, such as when Turtle Lake Line Foreman Travis Voth's wife, Kelly, created a miniature bucket truck for Turtle Lake's Turtle Days parade, with the couple's children as "lineworkers."

MEC Operations Manager Keith Thelen has served on the Garrison Fire Department for three years, something he did in Columbus for 25 years prior to joining McLean Electric.

"It's a good way to help out the

community," he offered. Like most businesses, McLean Electric allows Thelen to go on fire calls during office hours.

There is a correlation between a fire department and line work, Thelen explained, with both emphasizing safety, training and working together as a team. Safety is always paramount, and the goal is always to have the entire crew come home safely - whether it's after volunteering on a fire call or part of a lineworker's job.

Thelen also enjoys the camaraderie of the fire department. "As long as I'm physically able, I'll continue doing it. And when that time comes, I'll just volunteer to help with pancakes (for fundraising)," he smiled.

MEC Billing Supervisor Tonya Graeber became involved with the Garrison Optimist Club when it was created about six years ago. The organization focuses on projects involving area youth, such as the high school's post-prom party, children's Halloween party and other events. "The reason I do it is to have something for our

community kids to do," she explained. She believes an entire community benefits when there are productive activities for its children.

Graeber encourages people to get involved with community organizations. "It's just volunteering to help with something good," she suggested.

The Garrison Chamber of Commerce sponsors a host of events throughout the year and it takes many volunteers helping to make them successful. MEC Technical Services Manager Anne Brawley, currently the Garrison Chamber president, also sits on the Trade Promotion Committee and Executive Committee. She moves into the past president position on the Executive Committee once her term expires at the end of 2019, ultimately completing a three-year process of executive service.

"It's a great way to meet community members," she offered. "It's putting community first. It's important to be involved within your community." ■

Co-op helps with economic development

Improving the quality of rural living while growing its economy is another reason to recognize rural electric cooperatives throughout the United States during October's National Co-op Month.

In addition to North Dakota's own Rural Development Finance Corporation, other rural development programs are available through joint efforts of rural electric cooperatives and federal agencies.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Rural Development Rural Economic Development Loan and Grant Program (REDLG) is an example of how rural electric cooperatives

- including McLean Electric - help grow rural America, benefiting members it serves, as well as the county and state.

REDLG loans are available at 0 percent or low interest to cooperatives, which they pass onto loan recipients. Projects focus on creating and retaining jobs and improving quality of life in rural America. As funds are paid back, they go into a revolving loan fund McLean Electric Cooperative can access for future loans. REDLG loans and grants require a 20 percent recipient match, McLean Electric General Manager Marty Dahl added.

McLean County has directly

benefited from previous REDLG projects, including projects in Washburn, Garrison and Turtle Lake.

Most recently, the Underwood Ambulance Department received a \$200,000 0 percent loan from McLean Electric's revolving loan fund for a new ambulance, described Underwood Ambulance Department EMT/Squad Leader Brianna Robinson. The ambulance squad serves Underwood and the outlying rural area, Robinson continued.

"Safety issues are huge (as a rural ambulance department), not only for the patient but for our staff," she

continued on page C4

continued from page C2

also goes a long way toward engaging McLean Electric with its members and the community.

The Garrison Chamber of Commerce previously honored two employees for their customer service – Billing Supervisor Tonya Graeber and Customer Service Representative Julie Streich.

Tonya Graeber is the “go-to” person to answer members’ questions about reading and understanding the numbers behind a billing statement. She can help identify high usage and determine

ways members can reduce their electric bill.

Graeber can walk new customers through the cooperative’s base rate, its purpose and concept. A common question she receives pertains to McLean Electric’s heat rate for members using electric heat.

Streich is the person behind McLean Electric’s front desk in Garrison. “I don’t consider this a job,” she beams, which is evident to visitors greeted by her enthusiastic presence and callers greeted by her bubbly voice on the telephone. She is the person behind the candy

dish typically well-stocked with chocolates in the main office, and is a firm believer in the mantra “treat people how you would like to be treated.”

Brochures, member information packets and surfing McLean Electric’s website all help members answer questions and find information. However, both Streich and Graeber agree that a phone call or face-to-face conversation is welcomed and often a great way to answer any questions. ■

continued from page C3

said. The new ambulance reduces road noise and vibration for better communications with crew and patient, provides safety restraints for its crew with safe patient contact, machines are securely mounted, and new equipment layout brings everything within safe reach.

It’s slated to arrive in late October or early November.

The ambulance squad – seven active EMTs and 12 to 15 volunteers who assist in the ambulance and as drivers – typically transport patients to Bismarck medical facilities and provide mutual aid with adjoining ambulance departments. Many volunteers also serve on the Underwood fire department, Robinson added.

The McLean Electric loan allows

the department to obtain its new ambulance sooner than if it had to raise money through other funding sources. In addition, as a 0 interest loan, “we can actually do our monthly payment with our call-run income,” Robinson explained. The loan also helps the department in planning for its future need of paid staff for 24-hour, daily coverage. ■

TURN YOUR COINS INTO
CHANGE.



MAKES A DIFFERENCE!





Heidi Smith will be able to expand her child care business in Garrison with the help of a Rural Development Finance Corporation low-interest loan, facilitated by McLean Electric Cooperative and the North Dakota Association of Rural Electric Cooperatives Rural Development Program.

Programs dedicated to assist

A variety of programs dedicated to rural economic and community development and improvement through the Rural Development Finance Corporation (RDFC) are available to rural communities, businesses and nonprofit organizations.

RDFC loans reflect the program and its organizers' vision statement: "Rural communities enjoy a vibrant and fulfilling quality of life through RDFC initiatives."

RDFC is a North Dakota nonprofit finance and development corporation. Every North Dakota rural electric cooperative, nine North Dakota rural telecommunications cooperatives, and their statewide organization, the North Dakota Association of Rural Electric Cooperatives, united to establish RDFC.

Its funding is derived from fee income generated by Dakotas America, which also works to spur economic development and quality of life in underserved areas of the United States – rural and urban, alike.

The program provides low-interest loans to qualifying recipients.

More information is available, including contact information for RDFC Executive Development Director Lori Capouch and loan application forms on the RDFC website, www.ndarec.com/content/rdfc-rural-development-finance-corporation.

Potential qualifying RDFC applicants are encouraged to also contact McLean Electric Cooperative General Manager Marty Dahl, who is the current RDFC vice president, at 701-463-6700 or 800-263-4922.

Loan program benefits community day care needs

BY PATRICIA STOCKDILL

Heidi Smith never envisioned her life's work would benefit young families in the Garrison area.

Smith, owner of Heidi Smith Daycare, began her business six years ago. She and her husband, Shane, struggled to find day care for their young children, especially juggling around the fact they both worked shifts.

Recognizing the challenges working parents face for qualified, adequate child care, she initially attained licensing to accept a maximum of six children.

Since then, her business has expanded and she's currently licensed to accept up to 24 children, as well as groups. She accepts children 6 weeks of age up to 12 years of age, with additional staff when necessary, she described.

As her waiting list of parents in need of day care grew, she began contemplating a possible expansion to hire more staff and allow for more children.

But that would require more space.

That's where the North Dakota Association of Rural Electric

continued on C6

continued from C5

Cooperatives' Rural Development Finance Corporation (RDFC) came into play, providing a low-interest loan to make the expansion project a reality. She was approved for a RDFC loan earlier in the spring of 2019. Construction began in August.

Smith worked with McLean Electric Cooperative (MEC) and General Manager/CEO Marty Dahl to secure MEC board approval to facilitate the loan through RDFC after submitting business and construction plans and loan application.

Expansion allows Smith to dedicate the existing structure entirely to day

care, providing space for additional children, more stations so children can be with their own age groups, and she will be able to quarantine a child in the event of an illness.

"It could open up two jobs (in the community), Smith added, as well as benefiting families who may only need day care for a short duration.

When Smith started her business, she made certain to accept children whose parents juggled shift work, knowing the challenges based on her family's experience. She knew there was a need in the Garrison area – especially for flexible hours – but was surprised at the demand.

She will be able to determine the

number of additional children she can accept once construction is complete. "I just want to be able to help out the community. I know how (challenging) it is to juggle work schedules and everything with your kids," she exclaimed.

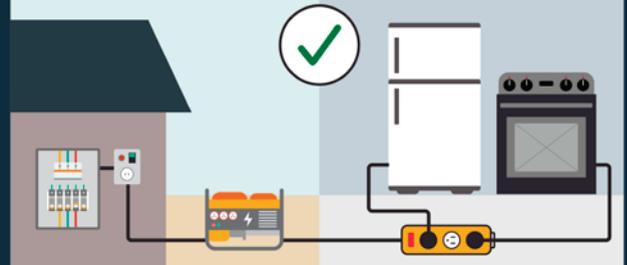
Smith was ecstatic to receive the loan to help advance her business, especially because it isn't a traditional storefront business. A majority of the construction project involves local contractors, plumbers, concrete work and materials, with Heidi and Shane finishing the interior themselves to help reduce overall costs. ■

SAFETY TIPS DURING POWER RESTORATION



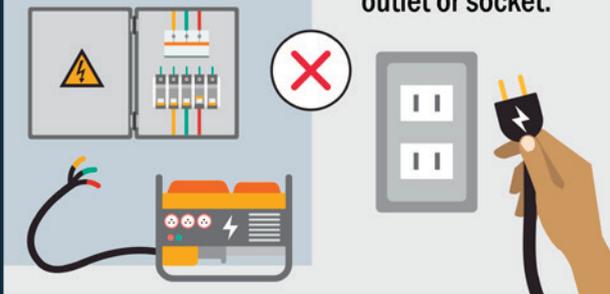
Do use a power inlet box and transfer switch to connect to your home wiring.

Do use extension cords to connect electrical devices directly to your generator.



Do not connect your generator directly to your home's wiring.

Do not plug your generator into a regular household outlet or socket.



If you see utility trucks in your neighborhood, turn off your generator to keep technicians safe while they work.



Karen A. Hanson joins MEC board of directors

BY PATRICIA STOCKDILL



Karen A. Hanson, Turtle Lake, was recently appointed to McLean Electric Cooperative's board of directors, filling out the term of the late Tom Sheldon.

Turtle Lake's Karen A. Hanson is ready for a new challenge. McLean Electric Cooperative's (MEC) board of directors recently appointed Hanson to serve the remaining term of the late Tom Sheldon. With two years left on the three-year term, Hanson can then opt to seek election to continue serving her District 6 members in 2021, explained McLean Electric General Manager/CEO Marty Dahl.

Hanson farms with her husband, Richard, in the midst of the triangle between Turtle Lake, Washburn and Underwood. They have three grown children: Rachel works at Northland Community Clinic in Turtle Lake; Joshua is an Otter Tail Power Co. lineworker based in Garrison; and Jacob is in the energy industry in Greeley, Colo.

Growing up on a farm, "we've always been members of McLean Electric," Karen offered.

As a diversified grain farm producing beans, canola, wheat and corn, reliable electricity is critical to their operation, she added.

Farming isn't limited to planting and harvesting a crop – it's an international industry in today's geopolitical times, she described.

So, too, is the electric industry. Reliable electricity at an affordable cost is attained through a complexity of global issues.

Karen said she is eager to serve McLean Electric's members, learn about the industry and contribute to the cooperative's success.

She continues a tradition of serving by joining the MEC board after Sheldon asked her to represent District 6 on the Operation Round

Up board of directors. Karen will now seek a new Operation Round Up board member from her district to fill her term on that organization.

Operation Round Up awards grants within McLean Electric's service area to nonprofit organizations or individuals in need of financial assistance due to unexpected medical emergencies or events such as a fire. Funds are generated when MEC members "round up" their electric bill to the nearest dollar.

Serving on the Operation Round Up board of directors was a rewarding experience, Karen added, and she plans to give that energy and dedication to her new role as MEC's District 6 director. ■



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

BY PATRICIA STOCKDILL

McLean County food pantries:

- **Community Cupboard of Underwood:** 10 a.m. to noon Oct. 19, 208 Lincoln Ave.
- **The Food Pantry, Max:** 1-3 p.m. and 5-7 p.m., third Monday of every month, Max City Hall.
- **The Lord's Pantry, Turtle Lake:** 2-4 p.m. Oct. 10; 10 a.m.-noon Oct. 26, Trinity Lutheran Church.

October:

- **Washburn Farmers Market,** 3-6 p.m., every Friday through Oct. 25, Lewis & Clark Interpretive Center.
- **Oct. 1 & 2:** North Dakota State University Energizing Entrepreneurs Conference, KOTA Theater and Garrison Main Street businesses.
- **Oct. 3:** Pie & Ice Cream Social, National Co-op Month, 2-4 p.m., Garrison City Auditorium.
- **Oct. 5:** Max Museum Fundraiser (freewill donations), 7 p.m., Max High School. Entertainment by Gordon "Crazy Fingers" Lindquist. Refreshments served by Max FFA.
- **Oct. 6:** Fire Prevention Breakfast, 9 a.m., Garrison Fire Hall.
- **Oct. 12:** North Dakota Firefighter's Museum Hall of Fame Banquet, Garrison City Auditorium, 5:30 p.m.

- social. Museum open house 4:30 p.m., with 5 p.m. remembrance ceremony.
- **Oct. 16:** Foot Care Clinic, 8:30-11:30 a.m. and 1-4 p.m., Northland Health Center, Turtle Lake. \$25. Contact 701-448-9225 for appointment and insurance pricing options. Walk-ins welcome.
- **Oct. 18 & 19:** Northern Expressions Arts Council Macabre Manor Haunted House, 7 p.m. to midnight, Rose Theater, Lincoln Ave., Underwood.
- **Oct. 19:** Dakota Feeder Calf Show, Turtle Lake.
- **Oct. 25:** "Go Loco for Local" Soup & Best Experience Contest, 5 p.m. to 8 p.m., Underwood. Halloween decorations, soup tasting, games, goodies and Halloween costumes for businesses and customers alike. Bingo, Taste Buds and costume judging, 8 p.m., Underwood City Hall, while best soup and chili votes are tallied.
- **Oct. 25 & 26:** Northern Expressions Arts Council Macabre Manor Haunted House, 7 p.m. to midnight, Rose Theater, Lincoln Ave., Underwood.
- **Oct. 26:** Max Annual Steak Fry, 5-8 p.m. Max Community Center, \$25 per person. Entertainment by Danny Elvis and the Legends Show Band.

- **Oct. 31:** Children's Halloween Party, Garrison.
- **Oct. 31:** Trunk or Treat, downtown Wilton.
- **Oct. 31:** Candy Caravan, trick-or-treat Washburn area businesses, 3:30-5:30 p.m. Sponsored by the Washburn Civic Club.
- **Oct. 31:** Northern Expressions Arts Council Macabre Manor Haunted House, 6-10 p.m., Rose Theater, Lincoln Ave., Underwood.
- **Nov. 1-2:** Northern Expressions Arts Council Macabre Manor Haunted House, 7 p.m. to midnight, Rose Theater, Lincoln Ave., Underwood.

Early November:

- **Nov. 6:** Foot Care Clinic, 8:30-11:30 a.m. and 1-4 p.m., Northland Health Center, Turtle Lake. \$25. Contact 701-448-9225 for appointment and insurance pricing options. Walk-ins welcome.
- **Nov. 9 (tentative):** Fall Frenzy Craft Show, Wilton.

McLean County organizations and communities can contact Patricia Stockdill at stockdill.patricia@gmail.com or 701-337-5462, to submit listings. Listings for the November issue are due Sept. 25.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS:

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District 7, Mercer

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

Rod Stockdill, secretary-treasurer
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District 3, Garrison

Clarence Behles, asst. secretary-treasurer
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District 5, Turtle Lake

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District 6, Washburn

James Odermann, director
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District 1, Parshall

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