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Celebrate with us:

McLean Electric observes 75 years of service in June

BY PATRICIA STOCKDILL

Seventy-five years.

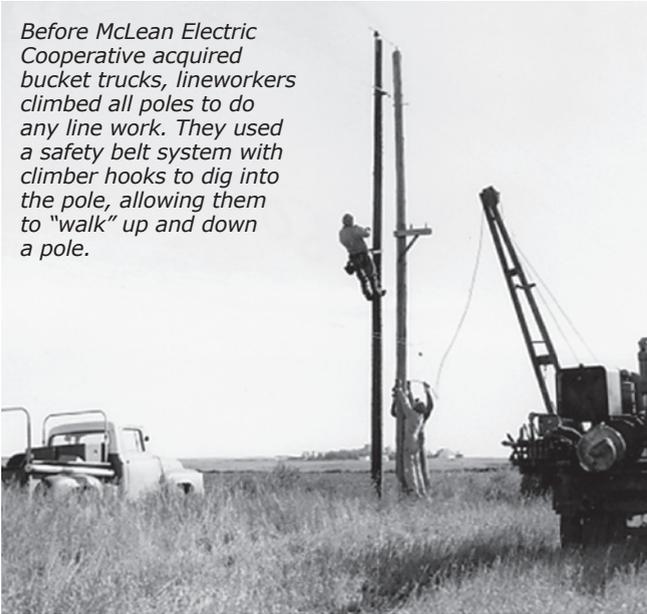
That's a long time for a business to serve a community, surviving not only the ups and downs of local, regional and national economies and trends, but thriving and evolving as times evolve.

That's exactly what McLean Electric Cooperative (MEC) has done.

It doesn't seem possible, but 75 years ago, as World War II was drawing to a close, rural McLean County residents still lacked modern electricity. In today's world, it doesn't seem possible that people can live, let alone survive, without electricity.

Seventy-five years ago, that's exactly what people throughout many parts of rural America were still living,

Before McLean Electric Cooperative acquired bucket trucks, lineworkers climbed all poles to do any line work. They used a safety belt system with climber hooks to dig into the pole, allowing them to "walk" up and down a pole.



McLean Electric Cooperative's longtime line crew, left to right: **Ron Erickson**, **Elmer Affeldt**, **Bob Hochsprung** and **Art Gartner**. Erickson and Affeldt were based in Garrison; Hochsprung and Gartner in Turtle Lake.



McLean Electric Cooperative Member Services Advisor **Ken Hopkins**, left, and McLean County farmer/welder **Harry Olson**, center, watch as a salesman demonstrates an electric water pump and its ability to pump mud.

even though their "city" friends and families enjoyed electricity's modern conveniences. Those city folks weren't in distant, metropolitan places across the country, either. City folks in communities such as Underwood, Washburn, Max and others enjoyed electrical conveniences long before someone even a couple of miles out of town could fathom the idea of having that same opportunity.

A group of rural McLean County residents launched the opportunity for electricity throughout the entire county as World War II was nearing its end. It was only possible because in 1936, the Rural Electrification Administration (REA) provided funding and resources to bring electricity to rural America through programs providing resources and low-interest loans.

A diverse group of people from throughout McLean County voted to incorporate McLean Electric Cooperative (MEC) on Aug. 31, 1945. The incorporating directors did so only after they, and other rural residents, spent countless hours and miles reaching out to farmers and their families, advancing the idea that electricity could become a reality.

The problem with electrifying rural America prior to creating REA was that it simply didn't make economic sense for utility companies who already served cities and towns to build lines and provide service to people out in the country.

The harsh reality is that there were not enough people to make it economically feasible. For example, with only a consumer or two per mile of line, it was too expensive to provide electricity when a utility company could serve several consumers per mile of line in town.

In addition, it was cheaper to maintain lines in town than in the country, where Mother Nature was more apt to create havoc with wind-and-storm-swept power poles and lines.

It simply wasn't good business to bring electricity to rural America. That's why it was necessary to form cooperatives. The consumers themselves were members and it allowed expenses to be spread out among those receiving electricity. Low-interest loans also helped make it feasible.

McLean Electric's founders had a vision to bring electricity to their friends and neighbors. The nine incorporating directors – Walter Fiedler, Julius Mattson, Gordon Hacanson, Sara McElwain, Ellen Stenson Romsaas, Carl A. Hanson, Emanuel Keck, Arnold Hill and Ralph Keel – then hired contractors, established

application fees, and sorted through the extensive process of establishing a rural electric cooperative.

Over the years, MEC has grown as the county has grown. It has evolved as the county evolved. Yet it seems like it's always been there, just as it seems like electricity has always been available.

Yes, there are times when Mother Nature displays her rather unpleasant demeanor and rural residents lose electricity in blizzards, tornadoes and summer lightning storms. MEC lineworkers are on the job in that weather, though, working to restore electricity as quickly as possible.

Because, after all, electricity should always be there.

McLean Electric will present every account member a copy of "75 Years of Empowering Our Members," hardcover book exploring the cooperative's history, when they attend the 75th anniversary annual meeting.

McLean Electric General Manager/CEO Marty Dahl reflected on the cooperative's history as anniversary preparations got underway: "Any business that has been at it 75 years and is healthy has to be doing something right. Everyone works hard to be successful, from the board to management to the entire staff. I think it's a great



Adeline Birkholz worked in McLean Electric Cooperative's office for many years.

celebration. How many businesses can say they've been around 75 years?" he queried. ■

Touchstone Energy® hot air balloon to appear



(All community and annual meeting activities could be postponed or cancelled, depending on coronavirus (COVID-19) mandates and regulations. McLean Electric Cooperative will keep its members updated and informed on the status of the annual meeting and activities as the situation evolves.)

In celebrating McLean Electric Cooperative's (MEC) 75th anniversary, MEC tentatively plans to bring the Touchstone Energy® Cooperatives hot air balloon to Garrison

Touchstone Energy is a coalition of more than 700 rural electric cooperatives

throughout the country working together to ensure cooperative members have the information and resources needed to make sound electric decisions.

The 77,000-cubic-foot balloon is the official Touchstone Energy goodwill ambassador for member cooperatives such as MEC. It makes appearances throughout the United States to help recognize electric cooperatives and the role they play in people's everyday lives.

Although the balloon has made previous appearances in North Dakota, MEC's 75th anniversary marks the first time it will be in McLean County. Not only will people be able to see the balloon, free rides will be available, weather-permitting. Launches will only take place if it isn't raining, winds are less than 10 miles an hour, and weather is clear in the area, with no surrounding storms.

Anyone interested in a possible balloon ride should dress appropriately in sneakers, walking shoes or light hiking boots and wear comfortable clothing. Don't

wear skirts or dresses, high-heeled boots or shoes, or open-toed shoes or sandals.

It's OK to bring a camera or cellphone for photos, but they should be safely stowed during landing. Everyone must also sign a waiver of liability before their ride.

Although the balloon typically flies at least 500 feet in the air, the anniversary rides will be tethered because of the confined space of the football field in Garrison, which is where all outdoor activities will be held.

Five balloons make up the current Touchstone Energy fleet. The two newest fleet members were built in 2014. Each is 77 feet tall and 60 feet wide when the silicone-coated Hyperlife™ paneled fabric balloon is fully inflated.

The 14-foot-wide Ascot basket with its cushioned floor carries a pilot and two average-sized passengers. Dual propane burners power the balloon and it's fueled with two, 15-gallon propane tanks. All of the balloons in the fleet were made in Illinois. ■

Q&A

about your cooperative

As the anniversary nears, here is a McLean Electric Cooperative (MEC) question and answer quiz to test one's familiarity with the organization that keeps the lights on in rural McLean County:

Question: How many managers has MEC had in its 75-year history?

Answer: Six.

Question: Who was the first manager?

Answer: Ralph Keel. As one of the original nine incorporating directors, Keel was elected to the first board of directors at the cooperative's inaugural annual meeting in 1946. He was named manager in 1947 and resigned his director position to accept the position.

Question: Who was the longest tenured manager?

Answer: Joe Walters. Originally from Stanley, Walters was the first employee hired. He began as easement coordinator in 1946 and was named manager in 1954, retiring in 1981.

Question: How many employees does MEC currently have on staff?

Answer: 23.

Question: Where was the first line energized?

Answer: While MEC's early board of directors planned to build line first to farmers west of Garrison and north and south of Turtle Lake, plans changed with the coming of Garrison Dam. Instead, the first energized line served Garrison Dam construction "boom towns" of Dakota City and Big Bend.

Question: When was MEC's first pole set?

Answer: Aug. 8, 1946, almost a year after a meeting was held to approve incorporating.

Question: Does MEC serve areas outside of McLean County?

Answer: Yes. A limited number of members live outside of McLean County. They're served by MEC,

because the cooperative was able to provide the closest available service feed.

Question: Who supplies MEC's power?

Answer: Basin Electric Power Cooperative is the region's wholesale generation and transmission provider. Central Power Electric Cooperative also provides electric transmission for MEC. In addition, MEC receives a hydropower allocation from Western Area Power Administration.

Question: Has MEC always bought its electricity from Basin Electric Power and Central Power Electric cooperatives?

Answer: No. It wasn't until Central Power Electric Cooperative completed construction of the William J. Neal Station coal-based power plant near Velva in 1951 that McLean Electric and six other electric cooperatives in the state had their own cooperative source of wholesale electricity.

Question: How did MEC get electricity prior to that?

Answer: MEC purchased electricity from the investor-owned utility company, Otter Tail Power Co., based in Fergus Falls, Minn., which served area communities such as Garrison, Underwood and Washburn.

Question: Where was the first lake cabin located that MEC served?

Answer: A service to a Strawberry Lake cabin in eastern McLean County was built in 1955.

Question: What year did MEC move to its present headquarters offices east of Garrison?

Answer: 1958.

Question: How many active accounts does MEC have?

Answer: The cooperative served 4,088 accounts as of Dec. 31, 2019.

Go to about McLean Electric Cooperative's website, www.mcleanelectric.com, to learn more about the cooperative, including the role it plays in community programs and rural economic development.

Seventy-five years is a long time. It's a good reason to sit back and try to imagine life without electricity and today's modern conveniences at one's fingertips.

It is a reason to celebrate. ■

Trees and shrub planting do's and don'ts around overhead and underground power lines

BY PATRICIA STOCKDILL

North Dakota has been a treeless rolling prairie landscape for thousands of years. Even so, it's in the nature of many North Dakotans to plant trees – and for good reason. From a practical standpoint on the treeless prairie, they help block wind. Secondly, they help block snow from engulfing roads, yards and driveways.

Trees also provide environmental benefits: Trees absorb carbon dioxide, release oxygen into the air, and store carbon. Their roots help reduce soil erosion and hold water, which helps reduce flooding. They absorb dust and other airborne pollutants, provide homes for wildlife, and they provide a pleasing appearance.

Trees are valuable economically, as well, by increasing property values. When properly planted, they provide summertime shade and can reduce cooling costs.

Conversely, properly planting evergreen trees that retain their needles year-round can provide additional wintertime warmth, reducing heating costs.

However, there are some definite do's and don'ts when planting trees in North Dakota near utility power lines, both overhead and underground:

- Plant trees and shrubs of any height at least 20 feet away from either side of overhead power lines.
- Know the anticipated height of a tree at its maturity. Don't plant trees 40 feet or taller at maturity within 35 feet either side of an overhead power line.
- Trees 20 to 30 feet at maturity should be at least 20 feet from overhead lines.
- Shrubs that reach 10 feet at maturity should be at least 15 feet from either side of overhead lines.
- Always call North Dakota One Call, 811, or go online to www.ndonecall.com before planting trees to locate buried utility lines.
- Never plant trees near buried utility cable.
- While shrubs near air conditioners can help cool a unit, never plant them too close, so maintenance workers can't access it or vegetation blocks airflow.
- Never plant shrubs or trees near pad-mount transformers and outside metering equipment.

Trees in power lines are a major cause of electrical outages in North Dakota, especially during high wind events. In addition, branches and even the entire tree can fall into a power line.

Roots can also damage buried underground lines. When underground faults occur in areas with nearby trees and shrubs, utility crews could damage trees and roots alike making necessary repairs.

Planting trees too close to power lines also costs consumers money. Each year, McLean Electric Cooperative (MEC) spends about \$100,000 on tree trimming in efforts to keep trees and branches out of power lines during storms.

"We clear them about 10 feet from the power line," described MEC Operations Manager Keith Thelen.

Typically, trimmed trees lose a great deal of their aesthetics in the process, especially evergreens, because the goal isn't beauty – the goal is to prevent outages.

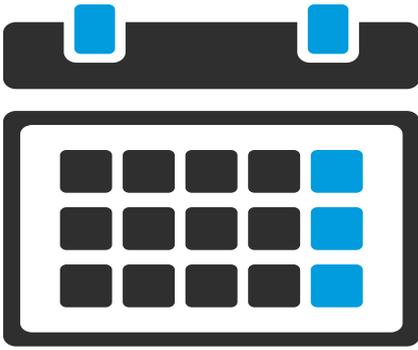
Public safety is another concern with trees too close to power lines, Thelen added. "Even kids climbing trees near power lines," he explained.

Thelen also reminded rural residential homeowners and farmers that while planting trees along property lines or the edge of a road right of way makes a pleasing living fence from an appearance standpoint, it's possible underground power lines could run along those same property lines and road right of ways. Always call North Dakota One Call, 811, before digging of any type – even when planting trees – and keep the proper distance away from overhead and underground lines. ■



The mature tree in the foreground is planted far enough away from utility lines, so it wasn't trimmed, unlike the evergreen tree in the background, which is directly beneath a utility line. Trees and tree branches blowing down and into overhead power lines cause many outages in windy and stormy weather.

PHOTO BY PATRICIA STOCKDILL



McLean County community calendar:

Events and activities to see and do

BY PATRICIA STOCKDILL

(Please note that scheduled events are subject to change, pending coronavirus (COVID-19) precautions and mandates. Please follow health guidelines and recommendations and contact event sponsors for details and updates:

McLean County food pantry distributions: With additional demands for food pantry services and in meeting COVID-19 precautions and mandates, please feel free to contact your local pantry for schedule changes, questions or concerns. Some pantries may have additional temporary distributions or changes in distribution procedures

McLean County food pantries:

- **Community Cupboard of Underwood:** 4-6 p.m. April 2, 10 a.m. to noon April 18, and 4-6 p.m. May 7, 208 Lincoln Ave.
- **Garrison Area Resource Center & Food Pantry, Garrison:** May 28, noon-2 p.m. and 5-7 p.m., back door, former Lazy J's building.
- **Our Savior Lord's Food Pantry, Max:** May 18, noon-p.m. and 5-7 p.m., Max City Hall, 215 Main St.
- **The Lord's Pantry, Turtle Lake:** 2-4 p.m. May 14; 10 a.m.-noon May 23, Trinity Lutheran Church, 515 Kundert St.

- **Wilton Food Pantry, Wilton:** "Mini" distributions every Friday, 11:30 a.m. until gone; full distribution 4-6 p.m., May 21, 16, Wilton Senior Citizens Center, 42 Dakota Ave.

May events:

- **May 6:** Northland Health Center Specialty Foot Care Clinic, 8:30-11:30 a.m. and 1-4 p.m. Call 701-448-9225 for information and appointments.
- **May 6:** Customer Appreciation Pancake and Sausage Supper, 5-7 p.m., Underwood City Hall, sponsored by the Underwood Civic Club.
- **May 9:** Turtle Lake Bike Fest, 8:30 a.m., in front of Turtle Lake Rexall Drug, Turtle Lake.
- **May 16:** Turning into Spring Barrel Racing Jackpots, Max Rodeo Grounds, 1 p.m.
- **May 17:** Wilton High School graduation, Wilton school.
- **May 20:** Northland Health Center Specialty Foot Care Clinic, 8:30-11:30 a.m. and 1-4 p.m. Call 701-448-9225 for information and appointments.
- **May 22:** EMS Kid Strong, 5-8 p.m., celebrating Emergency Medical Services Week with family activities, Fort Stevenson State Park, Garrison. Call 701-337-5576, for more information.
- **May 23-25:** SkyFest over Fort Stevenson Kite Festival, 10 a.m.-4 p.m. daily. Kite festival for all age with kite flying, kite building and other activities. Fort Stevenson State Park, Garrison. Call 701-337-5576, for more information.
- **May 23:** St. Paul Lutheran Bazaar, 9 a.m.-4 p.m., Riverdale Coffee Shop (adjacent to post office), featuring rummage and bake sales, sloppy joes, chips and coffee lunch.
- **May 23:** Garrison Dam National Fish Hatchery Fun Day, 9 a.m.-1 p.m., free admission and activities. Located

downstream of Garrison Dam, Riverdale.

- **May 23:** Max High School graduation, Max school.
- **May 23:** Turtle Lake-Mercer High School graduation, Turtle Lake.
- **May 24:** Garrison High School graduation, Garrison school.
- **May 24:** Underwood High School graduation, Underwood school.
- **May 24:** Washburn High School graduation, Washburn school.
- **May 25:** Memorial Day program, Washburn.
- **May 25:** Fort Stevenson State Park Military Service Personnel Day, free park admission for military personnel.
- **May 25:** Memorial Day Program presented by American Legion Post 49, 10 a.m., Garrison City Auditorium, Garrison.
- **May 29:** White Shield High School graduation, White Shield.
- **May 30 and 31:** Turning into Spring Barrel Racing Jackpots, Max Rodeo Grounds, 1 p.m.

June events:

- **June 3:** Northland Health Center Specialty Foot Care Clinic, 8:30-11:30 a.m. and 1-4 p.m. Call 701-448-9225 for information and appointments.
- **June 6:** National Trails Day, 2 p.m.: Guided ranger hike through Fort Stevenson State Park's native prairie area beginning at the Fort Stevenson Guardhouse Interpretive Center, Garrison. Call 701-337-5576, for more information. ■

McLean County organizations and communities can contact Patricia Stockdill by emailing stockdill.patricia@gmail.com, or calling 701-337-5462, to submit listings.

PLAY IT SAFE AROUND ELECTRICITY

To play it safe around your home this summer, remind your children of the rules for using electricity the right way.

DON'T plug a bunch of stuff into one outlet or extension cord. It could damage the electrical system in your house or even cause a fire.

DON'T ever climb the fence around an electrical substation. If a ball or pet gets inside the fence, ask an adult to call the electric cooperative – they'll come and get it out for you.

DON'T yank an electrical cord from the wall. Pulling on a cord can damage the appliance, the plug or the outlet. And don't stick any objects into an electrical outlet.

Ask an adult for help when you need to use something that uses electricity.

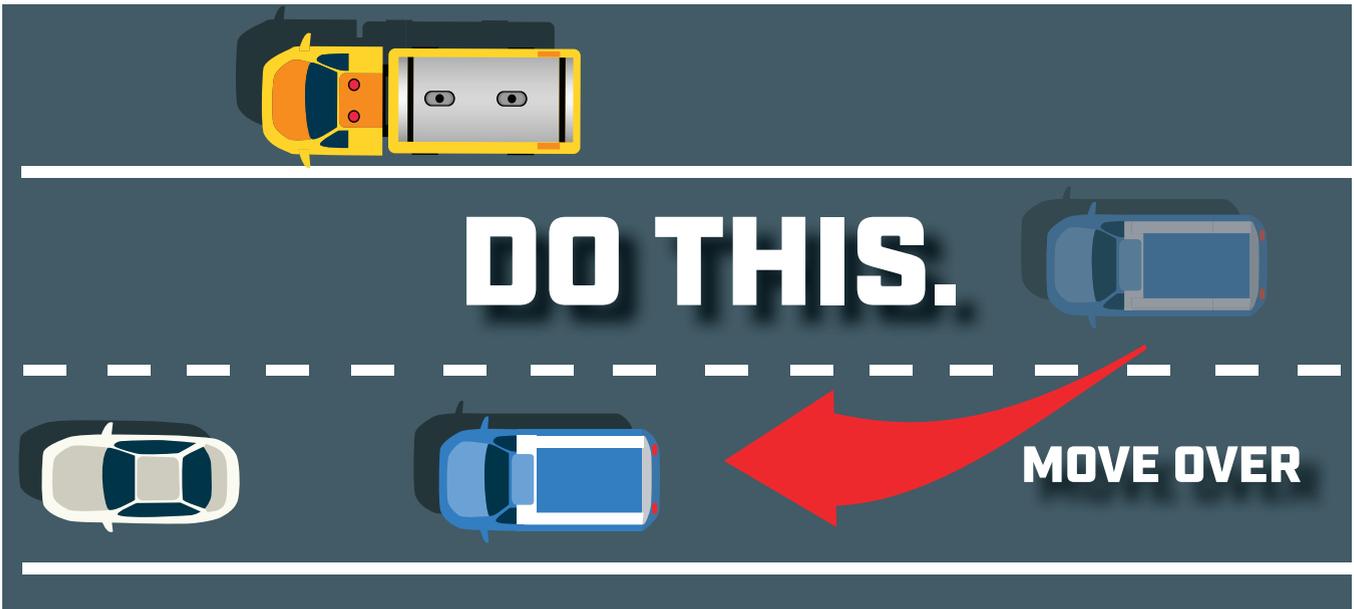
Fly your kite far away from power lines or substations. The kite and the string may conduct electricity – sending it right through you to the ground.

DO look up and look out for power lines before you climb a tree. The electricity can go right through the tree branch – and right through you!



Keep electrical stuff far away from water. Most electrical accidents around the house happen when people use electricity near water. Don't place a hair dryer or other electronics near the bathtub or shower. Electricity and water are dangerous partners! Dry your hands thoroughly before using anything powered by electricity.

SEE THESE?



Move over. Protect roadside workers.

If your car has ever broken down or had a flat tire, leaving you stranded on the side of a road, you know how dangerous and unnerving it can be. Cars and trucks speeding by just inches away leaves too little margin for error and could so easily result in a disastrous crash.

America's first responders – police, firefighters and ambulance crews –

face this peril every day in the line of duty. Also at risk are tow truck drivers, highway workers, utility workers and others whose jobs sometimes require that they park their vehicle on the roadway or the side of the road.

Every driver has a part to play in keeping utility workers, first responders and others safe. When

you see a vehicle with flashing lights, please slow down, move over and give them space to stay safe. “Move over” is not only the law in all 50 states, but is also the courteous thing to do. And when you safely move over, you are signaling to the drivers behind you that they should follow your lead. ■

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:

Martin Dahl, General Manager
Keith Thelen, Operations Manager
Lucas Schaaf, 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.com