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Spreading community caring through Operation Round Up



MEC lineworkers **Jesse Carter** and **Lucas Dusek** unload food at the Garrison Food Pantry.

Spreading community caring through Operation Round Up

BY PATRICIA STOCKDILL



MEC employees **Sonja Moe** and **Kelly Schmaltz** unload food at the Garrison Food Pantry.

February – it’s the month of hearts and love, showing how much a person cares about others, whether it’s one person or many people.

Yet, there is such a thing as silent caring and giving throughout the year and that is what a vast majority of McLean Electric Cooperative (MEC) member-owners do through Operation Round Up.

Each month, participating member-owners’ electric bills are rounded up to the nearest dollar. That “pocket change,” which can’t exceed \$11.88 a year, is placed in Operation Round Up’s trust account. A volunteer board of directors awards grants twice a year 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, as long as the organization supports charitable, education, scientific, health or safety-oriented community projects within McLean County or portions of neighboring counties MEC serves.

While many area residents offer their generosity and support to local food pantries throughout McLean County, Operation Round Up has strengthened and heightened that effort by providing grants to help fund an array of area food pantry needs, such as equipment or operating expenses.

In 2020 Operation Round Up’s board awarded \$12,000 in grants assisting food pantries in Garrison and Turtle Lake and the Great Plains Food Bank, which serves other areas in McLean County and throughout North Dakota. Operation Round Up also awarded a grant to Garrison’s Little Lunches Backpack program providing weekend meals for students in need.

In addition, the program assisted Max students in 2020 with a \$1,000 grant to aid in construction of an outdoor student courtyard, which provides a healthy, outdoor sitting and eating area.

Farm Rescue has touched several county farmers and their families’ lives by aiding with planting, harvest and other farming needs when a family has an emergency. That’s why that nonprofit organization received a \$2,500 grant in 2020. Other 2020 grants included the Mercer Community Center to help with its building renovations and Guardian and Protective Services, which helps elderly residents in a variety of home assistance needs.

While MEC member-owners provide Operation Round Up funding and MEC serves as the facilitator, the only



Nathan Ruud and **Loren Desjardins** unload food at the Garrison Food Pantry

program affiliation the cooperative has with Operation Round Up is its volunteer board members are selected from MEC's volunteer advisory board. Those members are appointed by each of MEC's seven board of directors.

MEC General Manager/CEO Mark Doyle views the cooperative as Operation Round Up's sponsor. "I think it's MEC's duty to participate in community projects. ... (Operation Round Up) is especially hands-on. What makes Operation Round Up special is it's an opportunity for member-owners to participate in charitable giving, plus its board – also (MEC) member-owners – decides who receives grants. It's local people helping local community projects," he added.

Sonja Moe, McLean Electric's communication manager, helps facilitate Operation Round Up. Eight grants were awarded in 2020, she described, which is fewer than in past years. She attributed part of the decline to issues surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic.

While Operation Round Up grants benefit multiple people through an organization's project or program, there are others who could also benefit: Individuals or families in need who have suffered a major medical situation or emergency. Or they have had fire or tornado

ravage their residence, for example.

Tragedy and emergencies know no boundaries; they occur daily, including throughout McLean County. Operation Round Up can help a person or family get over an unexpected, devastating financial hurdle, Moe offered.

Operation Round Up applicants must be a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. However, that also isn't a barrier for individuals or families in emergency situations. They may simply ask their local church or any area nonprofit organization such as a community service group or chamber of commerce for potential application sponsorship, Moe suggested.

The spring 2021 Operation Round Up grant application deadline is April 30. More information about the program, contact information for its seven board of directors, or a downloadable application is available by calling Sonja Moe at MEC, 701-463-6700 or 800-263-4922, or on MEC's website, www.mcleanelectric.com, clicking "Community" and then "Operation Round Up."

While it is February, the month for showing how much one cares, it's through Operation Round Up that caring – and lending a hand – continues throughout the year. ■

Growing McLean Electric's commitment to community

BY PATRICIA STOCKDILL

Operation Round Up is just one piece of the pie that is "commitment to community" for McLean Electric Cooperative (MEC).

The cooperative has a longstanding tradition dating back to 1965 of supporting community programs and organizations throughout its service area.

Since that time, the effort to grow and enhance opportunities and the lives of county residents has grown and expanded to include economic development and community betterment, underscoring one of a cooperative's core principle values, "commitment to community."

It's now being done through programs such as the North Dakota Association of Rural Electric Cooperatives Rural Development Finance Corporation (RDFC) and the U.S. Department of Agriculture Rural Economic Development Loan and Grant Program (REDL&G), for example.

However, if businesses, organizations and cooperatives – or individuals, as well – don't look at other ways to get better and do more, it's more difficult to succeed at one's chosen task.

With that in mind, MEC is looking at ways it can

maximize its partnerships to do more. MEC already looks for ways to maximize projects with its partners through its charitable programs, MEC General Manager/CEO Mark Doyle explained. Now the question is "how can we do it better?"

In seeking its answers, Doyle explained the cooperative will review its past projects, such as those it helped facilitate through RDFC and REDL&G. Over the years, those partnerships funded several successful projects, including a new ambulance for the Underwood Ambulance Department, CHI St. Alexius Health-Garrison Memorial Hospital emergency room renovations, and renovations for a Washburn Clinic, for example.

The cooperative will review its application process, Doyle continued; maybe it's time to update or streamline the process, for example.

MEC would remain a participant in the process, perhaps taking on more of a facilitator role, Doyle described. It will look for additional partnerships. It's not that the cooperative is looking at expanding its financial commitment; it's looking at maximizing opportunities using its current funding sources for programs such

as economic development, businesses and employee recruitment and retention, and improving the quality of rural living.

In addition to looking at how it works with its current partners, MEC wants to find new opportunities. For example, CoBank, a national financing cooperative that is one of McLean Electric's lenders, has a Sharing Success program, Doyle suggested.

While RDFC looks at supporting broad-based, economic development projects, Sharing Success focuses on community-based projects, Doyle added.

Like CoBank, Basin Electric Power Cooperative (BEPC), MEC's major generation and transmission provider, also has a charitable giving program. It focuses on education, health and human services, civic and community betterment, and culture and arts.

It's important for MEC to be part of the community of McLean County as a whole, Doyle offered. And if there are ways to enhance those opportunities, the cooperative wants to be involved – it is a commitment to community and the philosophy that when one benefits, all benefit. ■

Ambulance benefits from local giving

The Garrison-Max Ambulance District serves approximately a 2,000-mile area in parts of McLean and Ward counties. It stretches into the Max, Garrison, Ryder and Makoti areas and works closely to assist other neighboring ambulance districts – just as they assist Garrison-Max when needed.

But it needed more space to properly train not just its staff of managers and EMTs, but conduct community classes and better facilitate its role as a regional training center. It needed better sleeping quarters for crews while they're on duty. It needed to fix drainage issues on its existing building and it needed a safer working environment.

That will come to fruition through the generosity of a multitude of sources, described Garrison-Max Ambulance District President and EMT Sandra Nelson-Olzweski, Garrison. Local organizations and individuals contributed to fundraising efforts, for example. People within the district's boundaries in McLean County voted to increase their county property taxes, allowing the ambulance service to get 15 mills rather than the 5-mill assessment that was in place for decades.

And the U.S. Department of Agriculture Rural Economic Development Loan and Grant Program (REDL&G) provided a \$130,000 0 percent loan. The funding is available to McLean Electric Cooperative (MEC) through its revolving loan fund for loan recipients. As recipients, such as the ambulance district, pay back the money, it goes into the fund which can then be accessed for future projects.

"We're just so thankful as this is an opportunity to enhance our community," Nelson-Olzweski offered.

The timing of the REDL&G loan was perfect, she added. It allowed them to start construction until income from the mill levy increase arrives.

With a lack of space in the existing structure prior to expansion, the kitchen doubled as meeting and training



PHOTO BY SANDRA NELSON-OLZWESKI

Construction to expand the Garrison-Max Ambulance District's facility in Garrison began in the fall of 2020. Partial funding for the project was facilitated by McLean Electric Cooperative through the U.S. Department of Agriculture Rural Economic Development Loan and Grant Program with a \$130,000 0 percent loan. The district will pay back the loan, with the money going into a revolving loan fund for future community betterment projects throughout the region.

rooms. The generosity of Garrison's Farmers Union Oil allowed them to wash ambulances in their workspace. When completed in 2021, the expansion means ambulances can be kept clean and more visible onsite.

The community – not just Garrison or Max, but the entire area the ambulance district serves – benefits with the expansion, Nelson-Olzweski suggested. It helps retain its highly qualified staff and encourages volunteerism, which is especially important for the region, given its major influx of people during its popular summer outdoor recreational season. Much of the work and materials were through local businesses and contractors.

"We tried to keep everything as local as possible," she added, because it helps better everyone in the area.

"I'm just so proud to be a part of this," she exclaimed.

McLean Electric is proud to help facilitate REDL&G loan and grant opportunities. Whenever a project is funded, it helps grow the fund for future projects. Contact McLean Electric's Communication Manager Sonja Moe, 701-463-6700 or 800-263-4922 for more information or go to McLean Electric's website, www.mcleanelectric.com, clicking "Community" and then "Rural Development Loans & Grant." ■

Charitable giving close to home

Community involvement and “commitment to community” extends beyond McLean Electric Cooperative (MEC) and other fellow electric cooperatives.

Basin Electric Power Cooperative (BEPC) is a major generation and transmission cooperative for MEC, serving electric cooperatives across nine states. It, too, has a charitable giving program.

Its charitable giving touched close to home for some MEC member-owners, as a past contributor to Turtle Lake’s Santa Store, a unique opportunity for students to purchase Christmas gifts at special discounted costs for family and friends. Volunteers, which included MEC board members Karen Hanson and Troy Presser in 2020, helped wrap presents, assist “shoppers” and serve as cashiers.

Presser enjoys watching students, especially the young elementary children, determine the perfect present for the special people on their list and carefully count their money to pay the cashier, he described.

The broad array of items are often donated or purchased through donated funds.

“There’s a lot of math and consumer science going on with the kids,” Presser smiled. In the big scale of a multi-state cooperative, supporting the Santa Store may seem a small gift. But each year, it’s a special day for Turtle Lake students.

Basin Electric’s Charitable Giving Committee also provides matching funds for employee fundraising efforts, Presser added. For example, in 2020 Basin and a partner cooperative in Wyoming contributed \$35,200 to local food pantries in that state.

In addition to serving on MEC’s board, Presser represents MEC on Central Power Electric Cooperative’s (CPEC) board, which is an MEC transmission provider, and is CPEC’s representative on Basin Electric’s board of directors.

Basin Electric has the same community philosophy as MEC, a common thread among cooperatives of all types: “We really try to help. ... It’s very important as the number seven cooperative principle, commitment to community. If our communities don’t succeed, we don’t succeed,” Presser concluded.

More information on the Charitable Giving Program is available by contacting its coordinator, Jennifer Holen, at Basin Electric Power Cooperative, 701-223-0441, or visiting www.basinelectric.com/about-us/social-responsibility/charitable-giving. ■



MEC Director **Troy Presser** and the **Rev. Steve Vetter** cashier at the Turtle Lake Santa Store.



MEC Director **Karen Hanson** wraps gifts at the Turtle Lake Santa Store.

Statewide Foundation formed

The North Dakota Association of Rural Electric Cooperatives (NDAREC) wants to do more to help and to grow rural North Dakota.

NDAREC, the statewide organization representing North Dakota's electric cooperative such as McLean Electric Cooperative, has an economic development branch, the Rural Electric and Telecommunications Development Center (RE&T). While RE&T works to advance rural economic development, NDAREC formed a nonprofit foundation in 2018 to take its efforts to the next level and broaden its impact on the betterment of rural North Dakota. It received its Internal Revenue Service 501(c)(3) nonprofit designation in November 2019.

The North Dakota Rural Electric Cooperative Foundation will hold its first organizational board of directors meeting in the spring of 2021. McLean Electric's General Manager/CEO Mark Doyle was appointed to the board in December 2020.

As a nonprofit organization, "it opens up our

opportunities for funding for more of our charitable opportunities. ... It maximizes dollars and opens the door for funding sources," described NDAREC Rural Development Director Lori Capouch. "We incorporated for the good of rural people."

The original incorporating board consisted of four members of NDAREC's board of directors. Each electric cooperative has a board member representing it on the NDAREC board. The expanded board consists of additional cooperative managers, such as Doyle, employees and cooperative member-owners.

Just as McLean Electric helps facilitate the charitable organization Operation Round Up, NDAREC will facilitate the new North Dakota Rural Electric Cooperative Foundation.

Doyle looks forward to serving on the new board: The Foundation is another potential partnership and allows for McLean Electric to have a voice in advancing rural North Dakota, he offered. ■

Sport of a different kind

by Patricia Stockdill



PHOTO BY BOB ELL

Garrison students practice their archery aim through the National Archery in the Schools Program. Students plan to compete in the 2021 North Dakota state tournament in March.

Basketball and football are the most popular school sports across McLean County – and probably the entire state of North Dakota – but a relatively new sport in two McLean County schools is gaining huge traction – archery.

Garrison and Wilton public schools have National Archery in the Schools Programs (NASP). While Wilton students have been shooting nine years, Garrison started more recently. Had the COVID-19 pandemic not shut down the March 2020 North Dakota NASP state tournament, Garrison archers were gearing up to attend their first state event, said Amber Carter, one of Garrison's team of NASP coaches.

Amber and her husband, Jesse, a McLean Electric Cooperative lineworker based in its Garrison headquarters, coach alongside Robert Miller, Chad Wimer and Steve Zacharias. Typically about 30 students attend after-school practice at the Garrison City Auditorium.

NASP is a Wilton and Garrison in-school program as part of the school's curriculum. After-school archery takes more of an on-your-own shooting and practice approach, where participating students can come and shoot or practice with the goal of participating in tournament competitions, described N.D. Game and Fish Department Outdoor Skills Coordinator Jeff Long.

He assists with NASP training and the Game and Fish Department grant program. It takes at least 10 hours of practice to qualify for competition participation, Long added.

Bob Ell has coached at Wilton six of the program's nine

years. His oldest daughter, Caitlyn, started shooting as an eighth-grader and now assists with coaching duties, along with Emily Risty. Ell also serves on North Dakota's state NASP governing and advisory board.

Wilton's elementary team won its division in 3D and was runner-up in bullseye competition in 2019 at Western Nationals, Salt Lake City, Utah.

Twenty-one students, ranging from fourth- and fifth-graders to seniors, participated in NASP when Ell began coaching. As students discovered the fun of archery, its camaraderie and challenge of competition, the number grew to more than 60 students in 2021, he described.

Typical of anyone beginning a new sport or activity, archery participants have a learning curve with the strict NASP safety rules and learning the nuances of shooting a bow, Ell described. But by state tournament time, they're ready to aim for the top.

Because NASP has its roots within school districts, the first step both Wilton and Garrison organizers undertook was support from their respective school administrators and school boards. Funding for both programs is through a Game and Fish Department grant to acquire targets, arrows and bows, along with participants themselves raising money for the required 50-50 grant match and other expenses.

Both Ell and Carter credit the support of area businesses, organizations, individual donors and the students' fundraising efforts for helping acquire equipment and funding. For example, Garrison Bay Honey's manager, Casey Steele, provided the facility so participants could get extra practice to be ready for the 2020 state tournament, had it not been canceled.

The Carters and Ell agree NASP offers many things to its participants, extending far beyond the fact that students enjoy it, find they can represent their school in a way they hadn't done before, and spread the word about the fun of shooting and competitions. They can also take their talents directly to the national level. Archery in general teaches discipline, concentration and focus, Jesse Carter added.

NASP takes that to another level: It teaches rules and standards, responsibility, and teamwork, because it has extremely strict safety standards students must follow. Even though it's an individual sport like wrestling or swimming, it also teaches teamwork. NASP is a team sport, because individual scores tally into team scores. Students can qualify as an individual, team or both, Ell added.

NASP knows no social, physical, academic or economic barriers, Long added. Unlike other sports requiring some level of athletic ability or physical body attribute, archery

participants can be any size – they just have to be able to draw back a bow and release an arrow in some manner. They may also have physical limitations.

Students might not be able to afford expensive equipment, which is OK, because all NASP equipment is standardized and provided through grants or fundraising.

"It breaks down those social barriers," Long added.

Long feels schools support NASP, in part, because it is safe. NASP has a 100 percent nationwide safety record since its inception in Kentucky several years ago. Just as learning can – and should be – a lifelong endeavor, archery can be a lifelong activity.

"It's a life skill you can take with you after you graduate," Ell suggested.

Students can be beginner archers or, like Jesse and Amber's son, Hoyt, already experienced through hunting or competitions sponsored by the North Dakota Bowhunter's Association.

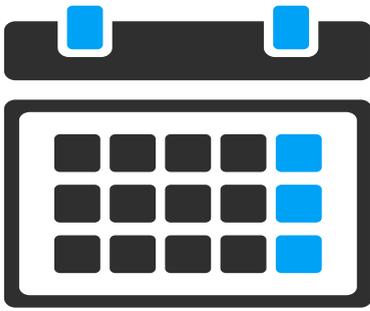
NASP began with students shooting bullseye targets. The North Dakota Bowhunter's Association worked with NASP to add 3D targets, Jesse described, which are more life-like animal targets. When 3D competition was added to the state tournament in 2015, 226 students participated, Long added. That number grew to 702 in 2019.

The number of NASP participants has grown tremendously each year nationwide as well as in Garrison, Wilton and across North Dakota. All it takes is a supportive school administration and board and parents or teachers – or both – willing to take NASP training and coach.

Competition is divided into three grade categories: elementary division, fourth- and fifth-graders; middle school division, sixth through eighth grade; and high school division, grades nine through 12.

COVID-19 issues may have shut down the 2020 state tournament and 2021 events are often held virtually, with students shooting at their home site and uploading scores to the NASP website. Yet COVID-19 isn't keeping Garrison, Wilton and other schools from practicing and setting their sights on the upcoming 2021 state tournament, as they continue following COVID-19 protocols.

February and March is tournament time across North Dakota schools for winter sports like basketball, wrestling and hockey, for example. But for a growing number of schools and students, it's also time to gear up for local, state, and national archery tournaments through the National Archery in the Schools Program. ■



McLean County community calendar:

Events and activities to see and do

BY PATRICIA STOCKDILL

McLean Electric Cooperative's 75th anniversary of incorporation was in 2020. However, the COVID-19 pandemic prompted the cooperative to move its celebration to 2021. Please follow our website, Facebook page and your *North Dakota Living* local pages for details and the date so we can celebrate together.

McLean County food pantry distributions:

- **Community Cupboard of Underwood:** 4-6 p.m. Feb 4; 10 a.m.-noon Feb. 20; and 4-6 p.m. March 4, 208 Lincoln Ave.
- **Garrison Area Resource Center & Food Pantry, Garrison:** Feb. 25, noon-2 p.m., 5-7 p.m., former Lazy J's building back door.
- **Our Savior Lord's Food Pantry, Max:** Feb. 15, 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. Feb. 11 and 10 a.m.-noon Feb. 27, 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. Feb. 18, Wilton Senior Citizens Center, 42 Dakota Ave.

PLEASE NOTE THAT SCHEDULED EVENTS ARE SUBJECT TO CHANGE PENDING COVID-19 PRECAUTIONS. PLEASE FOLLOW HEALTH GUIDELINES AND RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONTACT EVENT SPONSORS FOR DETAILS AND UPDATES.

Tentative February events:

- **Feb. 3:** McLean County Ag Show, Garrison High School, 9 a.m.-3 p.m.
- **Feb. 20:** Garrison Fire Department Annual Buffalo Feed and Dance, Garrison City Auditorium. Serving from 4:30-8 p.m. with dance beginning at 8:30 p.m.
- **Feb. 27:** Full Snow Moon Candlelight Hike, Fort Stevenson State Park, 3 miles south of Garrison, 6 p.m. Snowshoe, cross-country ski or hike, depending on snow conditions, with snacks and refreshments at the Visitor Center. Contact the park, 701-337-5576, for details and potential COVID-19 restrictions.

McLean County organizations and communities can contact Patricia Stockdill, (stockdill.patricia@gmail.com) or telephone, 701-337-5462, to submit 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
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