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MANAGER'S MOMENT

Projects continue

BY MARK DOYLE, GENERAL MANAGER



Mark Doyle

I would appreciate a moment of your time...

Well, fall is here. Harvest is underway, hunting is starting and people are preparing for winter.

McLean Electric Cooperative (MEC) is trying to complete another incredibly busy construction season. It started a bit slowly, but more and more projects came forward as the year

progressed. As always, we are seeing development along Lake Sakakawea, in the White Shield area and with our agricultural and industrial members. Our growth rate is still around 4%, which is fantastic, as other electric cooperatives are around 1%.

The continued requests, along with continued supply chain issues, have caused MEC to carry a significantly higher amount of inventory. With inflationary costs, this prompted us to increase rates slightly to create a bit more cash flow. There is a high probability our wholesale power cost will be increasing in 2025. As I write this, we have not received confirmation, so I cannot speculate

what that will look like. I do promise you we will only pass along any cost we cannot absorb. I hope you feel good about your co-op. We have been some of the last organizations/companies to move rates due to inflation.

We appreciate the cooperation and patience the members provided in getting all the projects done. As for cooperation, easements are always an issue, and we ask the landowners for continued support in getting our infrastructure in place to enhance our reliability. As for patience, we had several contractors working along with the MEC crews to get this infrastructure in place and we thank you for understanding we cannot get everything done in a day, even though we try.

We hope to have everything done by the end of October or November if Mother Nature cooperates. Projects not completed will be carried over to next year.

If you have any projects, I strongly suggest you get with our staff now to discuss and get you in the queue for next year's construction season.

I wish you all a safe harvest and fall!

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



Guiding principles of electric cooperatives

BY PATRICIA STOCKDILL



McLean Electric Cooperative member-owners may actively participate in their electric cooperative by attending annual meetings to stay abreast of the cooperative's business, to elect those who will serve on the board of directors and to approve any bylaw changes. One member, one vote and representation on the governing board are two of the seven core principles guiding the cooperative business model.

We're in this together: Identify a need, work to address it and bring a solution to fruition.

That's the basis for how rural America entered the modern world of electricity almost 90 years ago – local folks working together to raise enough money to construct power lines, install meters and bring electricity to their families and neighbors at a time when others in the electric industry said it wasn't feasible.

That's also the basis for the cooperative business model.

"A cooperative is the purest business model there is," described McLean Electric Cooperative (MEC) General Manager/CEO Mark Doyle. "Members share in all of the trials and triumphs."

Three types of electric utilities serve people throughout the United States, Doyle continued. Those include investor-owned utilities (IOU), municipal utilities and electric cooperatives.

Congress created the Rural Electrification Administration in the 1930s to help fund rural electrification when IOUs and municipal utilities were reluctant to invest in the necessary expense.

In the process, the cooperative business model entered

the electric industry. Rural residents spearheaded the creation and operation of their local electric cooperatives.

Seven unique principles guide electric cooperatives, such as MEC, beginning with cooperative membership open to anyone who desires to purchase electricity within a cooperative's service territory.

"We don't discriminate on use or purpose, as long as it is a legal purpose," Doyle added.

Secondly, it's standard for all types of cooperatives, whether for agribusiness, food, consumer services or telecommunications such as RTC Networks or West River Telecommunications Cooperative, to have a governing board consisting of elected cooperative member-owners.

"That's where the argument is that a cooperative is a true democracy, because its governance is all made up of member-owners," Doyle explained.

Each cooperative structures its governing body to fit the needs of those it serves, such as the number of directors. MEC, for example, requires its directors to reside within the district they represent, not simply have a meter in the district.

People serving on other electric utility governing boards, such as investor-owned utilities, may or may not be consumers of that utility's services.

In addition, anyone with an active meter is an MEC member-owner with a vote in the cooperative's business. For example, MEC members approved mail-in ballot voting on bylaws and board of director elections, rather than strictly voting at annual meetings.

Member-owners directly participate economically in their cooperative in the form of capital credit allocations. It's not a dividend like those earned by stock market investors, Doyle described. Rather, each cooperative, through its member-elected board of directors, determines how capital credits are allocated. Member-owners own a cooperative's assets, Doyle added.

"And they are directly proportionate to the investment of the member-owner," he said.

Many cooperatives are like MEC, distributing capital credit allocations based on the annual margin of participation or usage.

Cooperatives are also autonomous, making decisions based on their member-owner needs. For example, MEC's board of directors approved purchasing its power supply from Central Power Electric Cooperative,

Doyle said, as well as joining organizations such as the North Dakota Association of Rural Electric Cooperatives (NDAREC) and the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association.

The cooperative principle of education, training and information applies to employees, directors and the member-owners themselves.

MEC strives to educate its employees on aspects such as safety and its line crews. NDAREC honored MEC line crews in 2024 for their many years of on-the-job safety.

Board members attend a litany of educational workshops, ranging from the cooperative business model to cybersecurity.

“Cooperatives do everything we can to ensure its employees, directors and member-owners have all of the opportunities possible to contribute to the success of their cooperative through education. Education is transparency,” Doyle stressed.

In addition, NDAREC was a leader in establishing and growing the state’s lineworker school in cooperation with Bismarck State College.

MEC and other cooperatives even reach out to the children of member-owners through scholarships and opportunities in Washington, D.C., to learn about government and cooperatives.

Two principles focus on community as a whole:

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"Serving the community" has a unique meaning at McLean Electric Cooperative annual meetings, where directors serve dinner to those attending the 2024 meeting in Garrison. "Concern for community" is another cooperative business model guiding principle. In this case, it's literally "serving others."

Cooperative business model's seven guiding principles

- **Voluntary and open membership:** Members are the most important part of a cooperative and membership is open to all who use its services.
- **Democratic member control:** Cooperatives are founded on the ideals of democracy. Members have equal voting rights.
- **Members' economic participation:** Members contribute to and benefit from the cooperative's economic activities.
- **Autonomy and independence:** Cooperatives are self-governing.
- **Education, training and information:** Cooperatives provide education and training for employees, the governing board and member-owners, communicating with the public to improve knowledge of the cooperative structure.
- **Cooperation among cooperatives:** By working together through local, national, regional and international structures, cooperatives improve services, bolster local economies and deal more effectively with social and community needs.
- **Concern for community:** Cooperatives work for sustainable development of their communities through policies supported by the membership.

Source: National Rural Electric Cooperative Association

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cooperation among cooperatives and concern for community. Cooperatives are a community with employees and member-owners living, working and recreating in geographical areas served by cooperatives such as MEC, Doyle described.

“If a community dies, a cooperative dies. ... They’re one in the same,” he said.

Electric cooperatives work together, networking through organizations and associations.

There’s also the physical cooperation among cooperatives during major weather events in North Dakota and beyond through mutual aid agreements. MEC has sent line crews to several areas of North Dakota to assist after blizzards or tornadoes when its service area wasn’t impacted.

Cooperatives reciprocate when MEC is in need of additional crews.

“With the cooperative culture, we want to help our neighbors,” Doyle described.

The sense of community – whether a community of member-owners or other of cooperatives – extends to the

seventh principle, which is concern for community. This is the broad community extending throughout MEC’s entire service area. The philosophy circles back to the original concept of forming electric cooperatives. We’re in this together and we do what needs to be done.

What can be done to help someone in need? Or help a benevolent community organization? The answer, electric cooperatives like MEC have found, is through examples such as Operation Round Up, in which member-owners round their monthly electric bill up to the nearest dollar.

Operation Round Up financial grants support community projects and individuals facing medical or emergency crisis.

That’s just one example, along with supporting local community and school projects and programs.

October is National Co-op Month, celebrating the role the unique cooperative business model plays throughout America, especially rural America. It’s a business model that brought electricity, communications and many more opportunities to places like McLean County. ■

Where cooperatives started

They were the Rochdale pioneers: A group of more than two dozen poverty-stricken men, many who lost textile industry jobs during the heyday of the Industrial Revolution.

They sought to find a way for their families and others to buy food and necessities at a time when few could afford much of anything. They saw a need and they had ideas for a solution.

They carved those ideas into guiding principles, put those principles into action and crafted a business model that still guides modern cooperatives throughout the world 180 years later.

They were the Rochdale Society of Equitable Pioneers, forming a consumer’s cooperative – basically a store – in 1844 that would grow to more than 70 members in a year’s time and serve as the model for more than 1,400 cooperatives throughout Great Britain by 1900.

The men sold shares to households – members – collecting enough to rent space in an old warehouse at 31 Toad Lane in Rochdale. On opening day, Dec. 21, 1844, “in stock were a few pounds of butter and sugar, six sacks of flours, one of oatmeal and 24 candles,” described a BBC website article.

Two principles were key to the Society’s growth and success: Membership was open to all and each member had a vote in how the Society (cooperative) conducted business.

It was a unique concept, given the era. It was 74 years before women’s suffrage and in 1844 only approximately one in every seven men in Great Britain had the right to vote.

Another principle was “dividend on purchase,” ensuring income brought into the store was either returned to its members (modern day capital credits) or held in reserve for use if needed by the Society.

Yet another principle presented a more holistic view: Commitment to the communities the cooperative served in form of “promotion of education.”

While other cooperatives preceded the Rochdale Society of Equitable Pioneers, it was one of the first to pay patronage dividends. Its guiding principles set the foundation for cooperation – and cooperatives.

The building on 31 Toad Lane still exists, opening as a museum in 1931.

Sources: July 10, 2010, BBC website article, ([news.bbc.co.uk/local/manchester/hi/people_and_places](https://www.bbc.co.uk/local/manchester/hi/people_and_places)) and Wikipedia. ■

TWICE AS NICE: McLean Electric Cooperative celebrates with two Pie Day events

BY PATRICIA STOCKDILL

October is National Co-op Month and McLean Electric Cooperative (MEC) is commemorating the designation with not one, but two celebrations, of Co-op Pie Day.

MEC, in conjunction with RTC Networks, Garrison CHS, Farmers Union Oil Cenex, Great River Energy, West River Telecommunications Cooperative, Dakota West Credit Union and Central Dakota Frontier, will serve pie and ice cream in Garrison and Turtle Lake, home to its office headquarters and outpost.

The events take place Oct. 24 at the Garrison City Auditorium from 2:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. and Oct. 23 from 2:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. at the American Legion in Turtle Lake.

It doesn't matter which cooperative serves you, MEC Communications Manager Sonja Moe says. It's a thank you to member-owners.

"It's just something fun to do for our members and get everybody out and have a chance to visit with our members," she says. Each year, about 20 apple and 20 pumpkin pies are served, she adds.

While Pie Day is a tradition, just as National Co-op Month has been a tradition since 1964, the history of pies and their tradition stretches back centuries to the ancient Greeks, Romans and Egyptians.

Early "pies" were dough around meat or vegetables, according to a 2012 NPR radio interview with nutritional anthropologist Deborah Duchon, Atlanta. England was home to the familiar apple pie, with its history dating back to the 1400s.

Early settlers in American made pumpkin, apple, pear, quince and blueberry pies, described Jennifer Harbster in a 2011 U.S. Library of Congress blog. Their variety of fruit and nut filling selections expanded as the nation itself expanded.

"American Cookery" written by Amelia Simmons in 1796 is considered the first American cookbook, Harbster wrote. It contained a "Pompkin Pudding" recipe baked in a crust. It's one of the first recipes for what many people would consider the classic American pumpkin pie.

The American Pie Council (APC), originating in 1995, has a litany of pie facts:



- An APC survey shows the top five most popular pies in the United States are apple, pumpkin, pecan and banana cream, with cherry pie the fifth most popular.
- The APC survey also found 35% of Americans admitted to eating pie for breakfast; 66% had pie for lunch and 59% as a midnight snack.
- Pumpkin pie was first served in 1623 at the pilgrims' second Thanksgiving.
- 6 million American men between the age of 35 to 54 ate the last slice of a pie, but denied it, according to the APC.
- One in five Americans admits to eating on entire pie by themselves.
- Grocery stores sell about \$2 billion in pies annually in the United States, and that doesn't include what's sold in restaurants or other retail sales. ■

What's that in my yard?

If you're a homeowner, you likely have at least one form of utility electrical equipment somewhere in your yard. You should know how to care for the areas around equipment to ensure it remains reliable, safe and easily accessible.

Electric meter

What it does: An electric meter calculates your home's electricity consumption in kilowatt-hours. They are typically found on the side or back of a home. Although many modern electric meters take automated readings, it's still important to keep the equipment accessible to crews and first responders.

What you can do: Make sure shrubs and plants are trimmed (or removed) to allow a 3-foot access radius around the meter. Ensure that locked fences or animals don't obstruct emergency access.

Power pole

What it does: These tall poles are the infrastructure that keep overhead power lines safely out of reach. You will more likely have a power pole on your property if you are a rural member, but poles can be found within the city as well.

What you can do: Never attach anything to a power pole with nails, staples or even tape. Unauthorized attachments to poles could injure co-op employees or damage the pole's ground wire.

Pole transformer

What it does: These high-mounted transformers convert the overhead line's higher-voltage power to a usable lower voltage. Pole transformers are usually found near rural homes.

What you can do: Simply stay away from it! Avoid using extended tools or aerial equipment like drones around ANY power pole.

Utility pedestal

What it does: The utility pedestal may look like a pad-mounted transformer, but much smaller. This piece of equipment is seen more regularly in neighborhood yards, serving as a junction point to send the transformer's stepped down electricity to each home.

What you can do: Keep 3 feet of clearance on every side of the pedestal.

Pad-mounted transformer

What it does: This is a distribution transformer housed in a safe metal cabinet, usually 4 feet by 4 feet and sitting on a small concrete slab. They are connected to underground lines and step down high-voltage power to supply residences. One transformer can serve many homes.

What you can do: Be sure you have 10 feet of clearance in front of the transformer (where the lock is), as well as 3 feet on all other sides. This means no plants, fences or other obstructions within that area.

5 KEYS TO YOUR COOPERATIVE

By providing electricity to your home, farm or business, electric cooperatives power your daily life. But cooperatives have strong ties to their members in other ways, too.

As we observe Co-op Month in October, electric cooperatives are a true example of grassroots

involvement, because cooperatives are owned and controlled by those they serve.

Look across North Dakota's landscape and you'll notice cooperatives improve our quality of life everywhere. Your electric cooperative is standing behind you each and every day with five key points that set it apart.

1. YOU ARE A MEMBER

Electric cooperatives are owned and democratically controlled by their members – the people who purchase the power. With voting power, you have a voice in how your co-op operates by attending annual meetings and electing fellow members to represent you on the board of directors.

2. MEMBERS RECEIVE CAPITAL CREDITS

Did you know electric cooperatives return money to their members in the form of capital credits?

An electric cooperative exists to provide its members with electric service on a nonprofit basis. Capital credits reflect each member's ownership in the cooperative. Electric cooperatives do not earn profits. Instead, any remaining revenue after all expenses have been paid are returned to the cooperative's members in proportion to their electric usage.

Those capital credits are the most significant source of equity for the cooperative. Equity is used to help meet the expenses of the co-op, such as paying for new equipment to serve members and repaying debt. Capital credits help keep rates at an affordable level by reducing the amount of funds that must be borrowed to grow and maintain a cooperative's existing electric system.

Upon completion of a rotation period, the board of directors will review the cooperative's financial health and can declare a retirement (your cash payment), and a portion of your capital credits are returned to you.

3. YOUR COOPERATIVE IS NONPROFIT

An electric cooperative is a nonprofit electric utility owned and controlled by the members it serves. A co-op provides high-quality service at the lowest possible price for its member-owners.

Electric cooperatives developed because many citizens who did not have access to electricity in the 1940s decided to band together and form cooperatives to acquire power. Investor-owned power companies said they couldn't make a profit in areas with a small number of consumers per mile of expensive power line.

Nonprofit cooperatives were a natural solution for distributing electricity in areas where making a profit would be difficult.

4. YOU ELECT THE DIRECTORS

Since an electric cooperative is owned by those it serves, members elect their own representatives to the board. Members maintain democratic control of a co-op, which means they elect fellow members to represent them on the board of directors. They operate on the principle of "one member, one vote." So, each member of a cooperative has the same voting power. And, they return profits to their members proportionate to their use of the cooperative.

5. YOUR COOPERATIVE CARES ABOUT YOUR COMMUNITY

North Dakota's electric cooperatives are continually involved in the communities they serve, from offering scholarships to college-bound students to offering grants to community entities.

As one narrator notes in an historical perspective: "When the electric co-ops were born, something much bigger happened. For when we turned the lights on, we helped democratize the American dream for the people, families, farms, ranches and businesses of rural America."

That dream continues as cooperatives help develop the communities they serve.

COOPERATIVES FOLLOW SEVEN RECOGNIZED PRINCIPLES:

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

CELEBRATE



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

McLean County area food pantry October distribution dates, times and locations:

- **Community Cupboard of Underwood food distribution:** 10 a.m.-noon Oct. 5 and 4-6 p.m. Oct. 17, 208 Lincoln Ave. Like us on Facebook (Community Cupboard of Underwood), for distribution dates, thrift store and other information.
- **Community Food Pantry serving Ryder, Makoti, Roseglen, Plaza, White Shield, Parshall and those in need:** 10 a.m.-1 p.m. Oct. 26, 181 Ellsworth St., Makoti.
- **Community Thrift Store serving Ryder, Makoti, Roseglen, Plaza, White Shield, Parshall and the region:** 3-6 p.m. Tuesday, 4-7 p.m. Thursday and 10 a.m.-1 p.m. Saturday, except holidays, 181 Ellsworth St., Makoti.
- **Free Community Clothing Share & Exchange Store:** Every Thursday (except Thanksgiving Day), noon-6 p.m., 221 Main St., Turtle Lake.
- **Garrison Area Resource Center & Food Pantry:** Noon-2 p.m. and 5-7 p.m. Oct. 24, Garrison.
- **McLean Family Resource Center:** McLean County residents can contact the center, 701-462-8643, for an appointment to pick up baskets along with more information or assistance through the center, 205 Seventh St., Washburn.
- **McLean Family Resource Center Clothing Outlet:** 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Monday, Wednesday and Friday, and 10 a.m.-1 p.m. first Saturday of every month, 205 Seventh St., Washburn.
- **Our Savior Lord's Food Pantry:** Noon-3 p.m. and 5-7 p.m. Oct. 21, City Hall, 215 Main St., Max.
- **The Lord's Pantry:** 2-4 p.m. Oct. 10, 10 a.m.-noon Oct. 26, Trinity Lutheran Church, 515 Kundert St., Turtle Lake.
- **Wilton Food Pantry, Wilton:** "Mini" distributions every Friday, 11:30 a.m. until gone. Full food distribution, 4-6 p.m. Oct. 17, Senior Citizens Center, 42 Dakota Ave., Wilton.

Area food pantries often experience high needs for the following items: baked beans, pork and beans, canned fruit, tuna, chicken, vegetables, cereal, oatmeal, granola and breakfast bars, juice, macaroni and cheese,

hamburger and tuna helper, pancake mix, syrup, pasta, spaghetti, Alfredo and pasta sauce, peanut butter, jelly, rice side dishes, soups, chili, and household items, such as body wash and soap, dish soap, laundry detergent, shampoo and conditioner, toilet paper, toothpaste and toothbrushes. Contact local food pantries for drop-off locations, information or a list of additional needs in your community.

October and early November events:

- **Oct. 5:** Our Savior's Lutheran Church Annual Fall Bazaar featuring raffle, rummage, bake sales and lunch, 9 a.m.-1 p.m., Mercer.
- **Oct. 6:** Kickoff for Fire Prevention Week Freewill Breakfast, Fire Hall, 9 a.m.-1 p.m., Garrison.
- **Oct. 12:** North Dakota Firefighter's Museum Hall of Fame banquet, featuring social, supper and Hall of Fame induction ceremonies, Firefighter's Museum and Garrison Fire Hall.
- **Oct. 12:** Sakakawea Pheasants Forever Fall Flush, beginning with 5:30 p.m. social with dinner, raffles and auction, Garrison City Auditorium.
- **Oct. 23:** Co-op Pie & Ice Cream 2 p.m.-4 p.m. at Turtle Lake American Legion.
- **Oct. 24:** Co-op Pie & Ice Cream 2 p.m. - 4 p.m. at Garrison Auditorium
- **Oct. 26:** Evening Hike Series Halloween Hike, 7 p.m. Fort Stevenson State Park, Garrison.
- **Oct. 26:** Halloween Bash sponsored by McLean Family Resource Center, 4-7 p.m., soup and chili cookoff, music, kids costume contest and more, Washburn Memorial Hall.
- **Oct. 26:** Fall Frenzy Vendor Show, Memorial Hall, Wilton.
- **Oct. 28:** Preschool Story Hour, 10:30 a.m., Max Community Library.
- **Oct. 29:** Book Club, 7 p.m., Max Community Library.
- **Oct. 31:** Halloween Party, 3:30-5 p.m. Max Community Library.
- **Oct. 31:** Candy Caravan at Washburn businesses, 3:30-5 p.m.
- **Oct. 31:** Trunk or Treat, downtown Wilton.
- **Oct. 31:** Trick or Treat Down Main Street, 3-4 p.m., with children's trick or treating two blocks of the community's business district on Lincoln Ave., Underwood.

Nonprofit organizations and communities throughout McLean County can contact Patricia Stockdill at stockdill.patricia@gmail.com or 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
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Troy Presser, director
701-447-2855
District 5, Turtle Lake

Karen Hanson, director
701-448-2636
District 6, Washburn

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

STAFF:

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

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

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

