

# LET THERE BE LIGHT

## History of Riverland Energy Cooperative

1937-2012



## Acknowledgements:

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Thank you to the members, past and present board of directors, and past and present employees who shared their memories and photographs of the cooperatives.

Although some dates and names could not be found, much of the material used in this book was composed through past historical writings, annual reports, and other co-op publications.

Beth Alesch, Editor

## Sources:

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Arcadia Historical Society

Buffalo County Historical Society

National Rural Electric Association (NRECA)

Wisconsin Electric Cooperative Association (WECA)

## Greetings!

The year 2012 marks the co-op's 75th anniversary and we are proud to share this historic milestone with our members and the communities we serve. "Let there Be Light" celebrates in words and photos the generations and powerful legacy of Riverland Energy Cooperative.

As we honor our past, celebrate the present and define our vision for the future, we warmly invite you to join us in our journey through this booklet.



Although most of the early pioneers of Trempealeau and Buffalo Cooperatives are gone today, the light they helped bring to their rural areas still shines through the spirit of their efforts. As a cooperative owned by the people it serves, Riverland Energy has grown from providing reliable, affordable electricity to offering energy related products and services. From solutions for keeping costs down to helping with energy efficiency, today the co-op is finding new ways to save energy and money by working together inside Riverland Energy and outside with the people we serve.

Riverland Energy and our members have seen many changes since our inception in 1937, and there will undoubtedly be more as we move into the future. Yet despite what lies ahead, we remain confident in our ability to surmount any challenges with the same resolve as in years past, keeping members at the forefront of Riverland Energy Cooperative.

The philosophy of Riverland Energy has and will always be to keep the interest of the membership as our number-one priority. This philosophy has served the cooperative and its members well for seventy-five years.

Cooperatively Yours,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "David R. Oelkers".

David R. Oelkers  
General Manager

## RURAL ELECTRIFICATION

The history of rural electrification and the tradition of providing affordable electric service began in the darkness of despair, but with perseverance gained success through a ray of hope. Eventually, investor-owned electric utilities began providing electric service to cities. Yet, nearly 90 percent of rural people lived and worked without electricity in the 1930s. Investor-owned power companies avoided rural areas that did not ensure immediate profit. Because of their remote locations and rural citizens' low wages, electricity in rural America seemed unlikely. By 1935, only 10.9 percent of local farms had electricity. In fact, many rural people who didn't live close to existing power lines had to do without electricity.

Initiated by government intervention, hope for rural electrification became a reality through the Rural Electrification Administration (REA) created by President Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1935. Entering his term in the midst of the Great Depression, President Roosevelt faced a nation of unemployment, foreclosures, and bank failures. He immediately worked to provide relief, recovery, and reform for Americans through his promised New Deal. Roosevelt's administration brought hope to America, touching lives of citizens from all walks of life—even poor farmers living in powerless lands.

His dedication to progress and the establishment of the REA helped to bring affordable electricity to rural areas and made it more feasible for communities to obtain electric service. Slowly, but surely, power lines began to sprout along country roads. The creation of the REA set the wheels in motion that led to the founding of Buffalo and Trempealeau Electric Cooperatives.



Photos: NRECA



# BUFFALO ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE

## • The First 25 Years

On April 23, 1936, five leading REA cooperators of the Buffalo County project filed to incorporate as Buffalo County Electric Cooperative, Incorporated with headquarters in the office of the County Agent in Alma. The names of the persons forming this association were Arthur Hitt, Alma; Martin Hagen, Modena; Clayton Butler, Mondovi; Frank Krampeter, Gilmanton; and County Agent John Zahorik, Alma. The Articles of Incorporation established offices of president, vice president, secretary and treasurer and the duties of each officer.

On August 15, 1936, Morris L. Cooke, REA administrator, released a settlement that a \$260,000 loan for Buffalo County Electric had been approved.

Line construction began and membership applications were being approved. By May 1937, construction was in progress, and the office was moved from the County Agent's office to the Reiter building in Alma. It was then that they hired Katherine Jackson as office manager. As more line was being built, more employees were necessary, and on July 13, 1937, Edwin A. Hauser was elected at a salary of \$100 a month as project superintendent. In 1938, Annetta Jackson was hired as book-

keeper and in September 1938, Edwin Hauser was appointed manager of the co-op by the board at \$100 a month with allowance of five cents per mile for travel.

By mid-June 1937 construction of lines progressed rapidly. More than 1,900 post holes were dug, 350 poles set, and 4.5 miles of right-of-way cleared. Farmers were then becoming more interested in and were wiring their premises as rapidly as they could get electricians to perform the work. All wiring was installed according to code and each farm wiring job was examined by a project inspector.

In the meantime, officers and the board of directors of Buffalo Electric Cooperative met at the courthouse to transact all business. Officers were: Frank Krampeter, president; Edwin Haeuser, vice president and project manager; and Arthur Hitt, secretary/treasurer. Other directors included Arthur Benjamin, Nelson, Reuben Kaste, town of Lincoln; Elmer Steiner, town of Belvidere; Martin Hagen, Modena; Irwin Accola, town of Naples; and Socar Miller, Waumandee.

In order to meet REA requirements, the co-op was reincor-



porated on January, 1937 as Buffalo Electric Cooperative (BEC).

By the end of 1937, farms were ready to be energized, but the power plant near Chippewa Falls was not yet complete, so only 100 of the 800 members received power by temporarily connecting to a substation that was fed from the Arcadia Municipal power station.

Since that time all farmers who had all of their wiring completed and inspected have had the convenience of electrical power placed at their disposal. It was expected that before the end of March all of the lines of Buffalo Electric Cooperative would be energized.

In March 1938, the entire membership, including the initial 100 members, were connected to the newly constructed power plant near Chippewa Falls.

I had been to Ladies Aid and as I came over the hill, I could see the yardlights shining. It seemed just like heaven.

- BEC Member Mrs. Edward Linse, Mondovi (taken from BEC News 1986)



Only two photos of the founding directors of BEC were found.

Left is Arthur Benjamin and to the right is Arthur Hitt.



### *They Helped Bring Electricity To Farmers*

This group includes some of the men who were most active in securing for Buffalo county farmers the electric service they have been receiving for a number of weeks thru the recently completed lines of the Buffalo Electric Cooperative, an REA project. They are the officers and directors of the Coop., and their names are, reading from left to right: Irwin E. Accola, town Naples; Marlin Hagen, Modena; Arthur Benjamin, Nelson; Oscar Miller, Waumandee; Frank Krampeter, president,

Gilmanton; Edwin A. Haeuser, vice president and project manager, Cross Reuben C. Kaste, Lincoln; Elmer Steiner, Belvidere; and Arthur Hitt secretary and treasurer, town Alma. Farthest to the right, John J. Zahorik, county agent, who gave much time and effort during the pre-organization period, preparing the ground at numerous educational meetings. The Buffalo Electric Cooperative is holding its annual meeting in the courthouse here today, Thursday.

## Farmers Co-op. To Turn On Current

**Electric Lines Of Buffalo Electric Co-op. To Begin Receiving Energy This Week From New Central Plant Near Chippewa Falls**

Ever-ready energy and comforts that only electricity can bring will be brought to many farmers in Buffalo county who will within a few days have at their control co-operatively produced electricity for the first time in the history of farming in the county.

This assurance was given to officials of the Buffalo Electric Co-operative when a telegram was received from the Rural Electrification Administration at Washington, D. C., signed by John M. Carmody, Administrator. The message reads as follows:

"Our engineers have been informed by the plant superintendent, that plant will be ready to deliver power March 10th. My engineers inform me that transmission lines and your substation is complete and ready to go. From here it looks as if only a few days intervene until your project will be energized and you will be able to see more definite results of your fine work." The reference is to the farmers co-operative plant near Chippewa Falls, to serve a large group of counties, completed after weeks of delay.



The Buffalo County Journal,

March 10, 1938

The Buffalo County Journal, June 2, 1938



The first ten years were not easy ones, partially because of World War II. Shortage of materials backed line construction and reduced production of appliances. The doubting or more cautious farmers became convinced that the rural electrification program would be a success and applied for service. At the end of the first ten years the cooperative had 1,721 members. The first monthly bill for energy purchased in 1938 was \$99.20 and in 1955 the bill was approximately \$15,000.

Buffalo Electric began with one lineman, Henry Hopf. After twenty years the co-op had ten men on the lines, two in the power use department, and five in the office.

Two managers were employed by Buffalo Electric in 1940-1945. Frank A. Mason was first from January 1940 until June 1940. William G. Killmer, who had been project foreman for the Wylee Construction Company, accepted the job as manager in September 1940.

As would be expected, there were a number of personnel changes over the years and the

drafting of key men into the armed services created a critical situation. When office manager and chief bookkeeper, Howard Kondow, was to be drafted the board attempted to have him deferred. That was unsuccessful, however, and Kondow became one of the World War II casualties.

The membership in Buffalo Electric co-op increased to over 2,350 including industries and non-farm residents in 1966.



The first employees stand in front of the Buffalo Electric office in 1941.

Pictured left to right: Hank Hopf, Howard Kondow, Elmer Timm, unidentified, Annetta Jackson, Clarice Reidt, and Bill Killmer.



The first REA-financed power line pole in Wisconsin was erected at Richland Electric Cooperative on Sept. 7, 1936.

Members gather  
at the annual  
meeting in 1948.





The first power bill from the City of Arcadia on January 3, 1938.

Bill Killmer stands  
in front of a Buffalo  
Electric truck in 1941.



Construction and maintenance employees, 1960

Left to right, standing: Norbert Rothering, Alvin Mau, Harold Holtzman, Fred Borgwardt, Walter Klee, Ed Gunning. Kneeling left to right: Christian Schultz, Lee Zastrow, LeRoy Janett, William Palkowski, and Herbert Ruff



The 1960 board of directors.  
Standing left to right: Reuben Suhr, Herman Linse, Richard Dierauer, Rudy Christ. Seated left to right: William Thaldorf, Walter Schlawin, Carl Pabst, Art Benjamin, Leonard Bollinger.

## • Junior Board

The Wisconsin Electric Cooperative Association (the "Statewide") assisted local co-ops in establishing junior boards of directors. Selected high school students learned about their cooperative and saw firsthand how it operated. The junior boards led to the first WEC Youth Seminar in 1964. The program was so successful, it became permanent. Renamed the Youth Leadership Congress in 1966, it has brought thousands of young people to River Falls and continues to do so today.

Buffalo Electric Cooperative began its junior board in 1969.



Buffalo Electric Cooperative Junior Board, 1970



The first Youth Seminar brought young people from electric cooperatives to the River Falls "State College" campus in 1964. The program continues today, renamed the Youth Leadership Congress.



## • The Office: Old and New

The first office space was rented in the Reiter Building in Alma, commonly known back in 1936 as the old post office building. The warehouse was located across the street in the Meuhleisen building.

In 1939, the co-op moved to the American bank building, then later purchased in 1945 with several improvements being made. At that time the Miller Garage was used as garage and warehouse. In 1946 the co-op purchased the garage and residence just north of the Burlington Hotel and occupied the same as a garage and warehouse. In 1953, a new warehouse was built on the same lot.

In 1958 a new office was built on Main Street in Alma.



BEC Headquarters under construction, 1958



BEC Headquarters from 1939-1958

The Buffalo Electric Cooperative Headquarters was built in 1958 on Main Street in Alma



# PUSHING AHEAD

## • The Next 25 Years

The history from 1961 to the 1990s, while perhaps not as dramatic as the first 25 years, nevertheless is a period of growth and change. The early years were years in which the chief efforts were directed toward building lines, receiving members, and providing a reliable source of power at a reasonable rate. During those years the load was light and line loss was high. Then followed a period of steady growth during which members used more and more electricity to help them in their daily tasks and to brighten their home life. This increase in consumption was so much greater than had been anticipated that it became necessary to use larger transformers, to install additional substations, and to convert many lines to two-phase or three-phase lines in order to keep up the voltage.

The co-op became a source for electric appliances such as electric ranges, refrigerators, washers, and dryers through the 50's and 60's.

In the cooperative world, members' energy needs soared from 1970 to 1978 – as high as a 12 percent increase in 1970.

In 1994, Buffalo Electric formed a subsidiary to bring digital TV to the countryside. On January 6, 1994, Riverland Satellite Corporation was officially recognized as a viable corporation. The Corporation operated with its own board of directors and sharing a manager and employees with BEC.

In the late 1990s, the threat of deregulation swept the countryside. Buffalo Electric had grown to nearly 4,000 members, 17 full-time employees, seven substations and 1,124 miles of line. Many Buffalo

Electric directors along with leaders on the state and national level became concerned that the smaller electric cooperatives would be vulnerable to being swept up by the larger investor-owned utilities. With this possibility in mind, discussions of mergers with neighboring co-ops began. In 1999, Buffalo Electric merged with Trempealeau Electric.



Flossie Johnson listens intently upon installation of her meter. Flossie Johnson went 58 years without electricity until receiving it for the first time in May 1978 at her farm in Buffalo County. She purchased her home and the buildings surrounding it in September 1920.

# MANAGERS OF BUFFALO ELECTRIC CO-OP



Edwin Hauser  
1937-1940



William "Bill" Killmer  
1940-1947



Eli Maule  
1947-1967

## Willie Wiredhand

Willie Wiredhand was "born" October 30, 1950, the creation of the late Andrew "Drew" McLay, an entomologist turned-freelance-artist working for the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA), based at the time in Washington, D.C.

Willie came along in the heyday of "cartoon" advertising, when hundreds of lovable characters — Mr. Clean, the Jolly Green Giant and Elsie the Cow — promoted everything from food to household cleaners. Willie Wiredhand, ReddyKilowatt, KatieKord, HandyHeat and Miss Flame were among the many characters electric and gas companies developed.

*Photo on page 10: The Statewide's "larger than life" Willie Wiredhand. Photo courtesy of WECA.*



William Dallman  
1967-1968



Benjamin Schaefer  
1968-1972



Dean Baldwin  
1973-1994



Dave Reschke  
1994-1999



# BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Martin Hagen	1936-1940	Alger Marum	1963-1968
Frank Krampeter	1936-1940	Donald Serum	1963-1968
Irwin Occola	1936-1943	Elton Suhr	1963-1968
Arthur Hitt	1936-1947	LaVerne Wenger	1964-1969
Arthur Benjamin	1936-1948, 1956-1961	Ellsworth Anderson	1965-1970
Reuben Kaste	1936-1948	Millar Klein	1965-1970
Edwin Hauser	1936-1937	Orlin Mikelson	1968-1973
Elmer Steiner	1936-1938, 1952-1957	Kenneth Moy	1969-1974
Oscar Miller	1936-1948, 1950-1956	Martin Heike	1969-1977
J.P. Lemmer	1938	Allen Dorn	1969-1977
George Engel, Jr.	1939-1949	Norman Schaffner	1970-1978
Walter Passow	1939-1949	Delmar Linse	1971-1979
Edward Linse	1941-1949, 1951-1956	Galen Engel	1971-1979
WM S. Moy	1941-1942, 1944-1946	Martin Loewenhagen	1973-1981
Ralph Moy	1943	Dale Pace	1973-1981
Glen Hardy	1943-1946	Elmer Timm	1974-1978
Arnold Borgwardt	1947	Gene Weiss	1975-1983, 1991-1992
Rangnar Segerstrom	1947		(unexpired term of Plett), 1993-2001
Ray Accola	1948	Eldon Adams	1978-1986
Otto Farner	1948-1953	Stanley Doebsbert	1978-1986
Charles Rutschow	1948-1954	Harley Schlieker	1979, 1980 – 1988
WM Thaldorf	1949, 1957-1962	Merlin Haeuser	1979-1987
Albert Keenlyne	1949-1955	Warren Bechly	1980-1988
Ray Grob	1949-1954, 1967-1972	Leslie Winsand	1980-1988
Rudy Christ	1949-1955, 1959-1964	Frank Huber	1982-1990
Oscar Miller	1950-1956	Jane Hieb	1982-1989 (resigned, moved)
Melvin Quarberg	1950	Harlan Plett	1984-1990 (died 9/4/90)
Andrew Stettler	1950-1953	James Hagen	1987-1995
Alvin Bade	1951	Lee Wieland	1987-1995
Arnold Gehrke	1954-1956	Judith Whelan	1989-1999
Leonard Lettner	1953-1958	Robert Wittig	1996-1999
Richard Dierauer	1955-1960, 1996-1999	Gary Pronschinske	
Carl Pabst	1955-1960, 1967-1972	John Stettler	1992-
O.K. Lee	1956-1958	Bergie Ritscher	1998-
Aurthur Benjamin	1956-1961	William Bruegger	1996-2010
William Thaldorf	1957-1962	Bernard Pronschinske	1996-present
Herman Linse	1957-1962	Merlyn Ruff	1997-1998
Leonard Bollinger	1957-1962	Michael Aus	1998-1999
Walter Schlawin	1958-1963	Allyn Wick	
Reuben Suhr	1959-1964		
Lester Jost	1961-1966		
Lester Moy	1961-1966		
William Weisenbeck	1962-1967		

# EMPLOYEES

Edwin Haeuser	Manager	1937	Roger Burmeister	TV Tech	1960
William Kilmer	Manager	1940	Charlene Bauer	Billing	1961
Howard Kondow	Accountant	1940	Patrick Leahy	Lineman	1961
Clarice Reidt	Assistant Clerk	1940	Craig Buchholz	Lineman	1962
Annetta Jackson	Clerk	1940	Marlene Gross	Demonstrator	1963
Henry Hopf	Lineman	1940	Holly Averbeck	Cashier	1964
Elmer Timm	Truck Driver	1940	Leslie Heinemann	Laborer	1965
Oscar Guenzler	Groundman	1940	Benjamin Schafer	Manager	1966
Frank Mason	Project Superintendent	1940	Carolyn Pronschinske	Secretary	1967
Durell Gotchling	Foreman	1940	Judith Korte	Billing Clerk	1967
Kermit Spieth	Bookkeeper	1941	William Dallman	Manager	1967
Lloyd Wagner	Line Foreman	1943	Bonnie Baumann	Secretary	1968
Paul Pyka	Lineman	1943	Diane Fetting	Cashier	1968
Ralph Miller	Groundman	1943	Ronald Davis	Lineman	1969
Clarence Giemza	Groundman	1943	Sheldon Teigland	Office Manager and Accountant	1971
Ralph Miller	Groundman	1943	Joseph Reuter	Work Order Clerk	1972
Walter Klee	Lineman	1944	Curtis Youngbauer	Staking Engineer	1972
Leland Zastrow	Truck Driver	1945	Diane Jacobson	Cashier	1972
Alvin Mau	Groundman	1945	Dean Baldwin	Manager	1973
Earl Waddell	Groundman	1945	Lonnie Sass	Line Foreman	1973
LeRoy Janett	Line Superintendent	1946	Mary Larson	Office Coordinator/Capital Credits	1974
Herbert Ruff	Line Foreman	1947	Cynthia Schar	Customer Service Representative	1974
Eli Maule	Manager	1947	Sheila Abts	Staff Coordinator	1974
Edwin Gunning	Line Superintendent	1947	Dale Kennebeck	Work Order Clerk	1979
William Palkowski	Laborer	1947	Scott Smith	Apprentice Lineman	1980
Shirley Holberg	Steno Clerk	1947	Judy Carothers	Office Clerical	1982
Beatrice Moham	Office	1947	David Fetting	Groundman Apprentice	1985
Ross Pearson	Groundman	1947	Bradley Ristow	Lineman Member	1987
Clifford Peterson	Lineman	1947	Martin Wenger	Service Advisor	1990
Michael Pink	Lineman	1947	Steven Paulson	Lineman	1991
Ed Short	Lineman	1947	Pete Mueller	Member Services Manager	1991
Fred Borgwardt	Lineman / Foreman	1948	Mark Schamaun	Lineman	1991
Christian Schultz	Line Superintendent	1948	Todd Anibas	Lineman	1992
Ryland Michaels	Work Order Clerk	1948	Denise Noll	Member Service Representative	1992
Norbert Rotering	Laborer	1948	Dale Kircher	Lineman	1994
Ed Gunning	Line Superintendent	1948	David Reschke	Manager	1994
Florence Kurtzweg	Steno-Clerk	1948	Scott Kolinski	Apprentice Lineman	1995
Truman Sauer	Laborer	1948	Stewart Walters	Load Management Technician	1996
LaCroix Johnson	Member Service Consultant	1949	Scott Odegard	Manager of Operations	1996
Kate Saxbury	Bookkeeper	1949	Scott Hayes	Load Management Technician	1997
Marlene Bai	Clerk	1952	Michael Truttman	Apprentice Lineman	1998
Harold Holtzman	Groundman	1953	Russ Revie	Apprentice Lineman	1998
Clarence Schollmeier	Lineman	1956			
Ruth Breitung	Office Manager and Bookkeeper	1958			
Leona Hutchinson	Billing Clerk	1959			
Ronald Herold	Bookkeeper	1960			
Judith Buchholz	Cashier	1960			

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# TREMPEALEAU ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE

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## • The First 25 Years

As other rural communities in the nation were learning of the low-cost loans available through REA and began working to get electricity to their rural farm home, a group of undiscouraged local farm people came together to organize an electric cooperative.

George A. Lewis, Hale township farmer and a field man for the Wisconsin Farmers Union, brought the first spark of hope for the rural electrification into Trempealeau County. He was recognized by REA in Washington, who quickly obtained his services in organizing electric cooperatives throughout our state and nation.

Lewis met with Trempealeau County agricultural agent R.V. Larson and together they enlisted the interest and help of farm leaders throughout the county. Rumors started circulating that rural people could lose their farms because they would be obligated to pay the loans from REA. But there were enough farmers who refused to be influenced by this. A meeting was held at the court house in Whitehall (there is no record of the exact date) attended by members of town boards, school boards, AAA committee members, and other farm

leadership of the county. Orland S. Loomis, who was appointed Director of Rural Electrification Coordination, met with the group of men at the court house and explained the provisions of the REA Act and the steps required in the organization of an electric cooperative.

In the spring of 1936, a meeting was held at the City Hall in Arcadia at which time a corporation was formed under the name Trempealeau County Rural Electric Cooperative. The incorporators and members of the first Board of Directors were: E.R. Finner, President, Dodge; Clarence Kaas, Vice President, Osseo; E.N. Kleven, Secretary-Treasurer, Strum; A.C. Hagestad, Ettrick; John Huslegard, Independence; E.H. Schroeder, Whitehall; Julius Hegge, Ettrick; Ingwald Myhers, Strum; H.A. Hardie, Galesville.

On May 29, 1936 the REA gave a loan of \$95,000 to the cooperative. At that time, it was to be used to build some of the main feeder lines for the project. However, prospective members and mile-



age of line accumulated so rapidly that a second loan application was made in the amount of \$350,000 on August 1, 1936.

On February 9, 1937, the board of directors met to reincorporate the cooperative as Trempealeau Electric Cooperative to meet certain REA requirements. The same men formed the new Board of Directors with E.R. Finner as President, E.N. Kleven as Vice President and Clarence Kass as Secretary-Treasurer. Norris E. Maloney of Madison was selected as project attorney.

Following the reorganization, a series of meetings were held to detail the final points of the organization including the \$2.00 membership fee. They discussed and approved the first set of bylaws and then defined the operating area of the cooperative in parts of Buffalo, Eau Claire, Jackson, La Crosse and Trempealeau Counties. The two loans in the amounts of \$95,000 and



\$350,000 to build the system were voted to execute on. This amount would build 442 miles of line to form the original system, which was to serve 1,273 members.

With the project moving toward reality, there was a need for office staff.

The first employee of the cooperative was T.A. Webster who was assigned to take charge of easement work on April 19, 1937.

A few days later Bernadine Brownlee was hired as stenographer. On April 24, 1937, M.J. Lawrence was hired as a temporary manager at a salary of \$150 per month following the approval by REA. He began work on May 1. Following the completion of the easement work, T.A. Webster was retained as bookkeeper and assistant superintendent. The board then authorized hiring three easement solicitors, August Knudtson, B.I. Enghagen, and Einar Isackson to keep ahead of the line crew.

Once the line was energized, the cooperative hired Bernard Misch and Paul Pyka as linemen, and John Progreba as groundman.

Meanwhile, newly organized electric cooperatives throughout this area of the state were finding it impossible to negotiate with private power companies for wholesale power. Although the Arcadia Municipal plant could have supplied the early needs of TEC, a move had been made by several electric co-ops to borrow funds from REA and build their own central generating station. The result was the formation of The Wisconsin Power Cooperative incorporated in June 1937.

## OUR FOUNDERS

The incorporators and members of the first Board of Directors of Trempealeau Electric Cooperative



Ewald Finner



Andrew Hagestad



H.A. Hardie



Clarence Kaas



Julius Hegge



John Huslegard



E.N. Kleven



Ingwald Myhers



E.H. Schroeder

There were many delays to contend with before the cooperative began serving a membership that had been waiting for service long after the lines had been built and their premises wired, but construction continued on.

Finally, March 14, 1938, Trempealeau Electric's first substation located a mile north of Arcadia on Highway 93, was energized. This substation also served Buffalo Electric Cooperative. Ewald R. Finner, TEC's first president, was the first farm to be electrified on the evening of March 14, 1938. The farm was located four miles southwest of Arcadia in the Town of Arcadia. An impromptu celebration quickly developed. Neighbors came to join with members of the board, the office and line staff, and a few from the contractor's crew. There was a radio to listen to, a brand new refrigerator to inspect, and a new electric flat iron to try out. It was close to midnight when the party disbanded. The remaining 620 farms received energy in a few weeks.

In May, 1938, a group of farmers in northwestern La Crosse county applied for membership. The request was granted, and construction of 156 miles of additional lines was completed by December 24, 1938. Contractors erected the lines but later the cooperative's own crews built additional lines. They started their construction with one pickup truck that had been furnished as a service truck. By the end of 1938, Trempealeau Electric Cooperative was the second largest electric cooperative in the state for members being served, serving 1,026 members.



E.R. Finner, the owner of the first farm energized on March 14, 1938.

## "Let There Be Light: And There Was Light"

The Trempealeau Electric Cooperative received its first energy Monday afternoon at 4:30 when the main switch of the substation was closed and energy turned on the first section of the distribution lines. Shortly afterward, seven farms were connected to the line and are receiving service. The first farm was that of E. R. Finner, President of the Cooperative.

Several crews are working to connect other customers as fast as the lines are energized and free from trouble. Tests of voltage at the customers' premises showed it to be very satisfactory.

The remaining 600 farms which have been wired will all receive service within the next few days.

Several snap-shots were taken by amateur photographers at the substation when the current was turned on.

Among those present were, E. B. Ways, Manager, Wisconsin Power Cooperative at Chippewa Falls which supplies the energy; M. J. Lawrence, Project Superintendent, Trempealeau Electric Cooperative; L. E. Parkyn, Resident Engineer; K. T. McHugo, Construction Superintendent of Snyder & Johnson, Inc., the contractors who constructed the lines; Ed. Haeuser, Project Superintendent of the Buffalo Electric Cooperative; William Peterson, Manager, Tamarack Telephone Company; several maintenance men and other employees

The Arcadia News-Leader,  
March 18, 1938



Unidentified employees in front of the original line truck

The first office staff and line crew are pictured. Left to right is M.J. Lawrence, manager; Bernard Misch and Paul Pyka, linemen; John Progreba, helper; Bernardine Brownlee, stenographer; and T.A. Webster, bookkeeper.



Joseph Breska watches linemen constructing a line to his farm in Rainey Valley near Arcadia in 1936.





Only three men gathered at the first substation could be identified in this photo. Far left is Ross Copper, first lineman for the power co-op. L.E. Parkyn, resident engineer from State-wide, is in the right front wearing the laced leather boots. Back over his left shoulder is M.J. Lawrence, Manager of Trempealeau Electric.



Articles of Incorporation

The Wisconsin Power Cooperative is a great thing for Western Wisconsin and for all the state. It represents a weapon that has broken the grip of the private utilities.

- REA Administrator John Carmody

The next couple of decades saw rapid growth at the cooperative at an even faster pace than the previous years.

Throughout the 1950s, workforce increased, new loans were undertaken, and construction continued to push forward. By 1962, the co-op had grown to a system of 1,200 miles, serving 3,600 members from six substations.

M.J. Lawrence, serving as the first manager of the co-op since its organization in 1937, resigned on May 11, 1944. E.F. (Gene) Thornton was elected to succeed Lawrence. Thornton was manager for 16 years. Gordon Meistad was hired to take his place in 1960.

In only twenty-five short years, the cooperative had grown from the darkened rural areas of Trempealeau County to an electric cooperative providing its members with reliable electricity. The Silver Anniversary Meeting was held on October 6, 1962 with more than 500 members attending. The meeting was held at the Independence High School gym. At this meeting, it was announced that the first capital credit refund checks were scheduled to be mailed out in December that year.

## Julius Hegg, Director 1937-1963

"There were times when I could hardly believe my own story. Here we are, so far from a power line. And yet, as I was traveling the area surrounding Frenchville, and farther, telling my friends and neighbors that we would all get electric service if they would sign a membership and give me two dollars, or one dollar, if that was all they could spare."



"No matter where we went to solicit members," he remembered, "we would run smack into the story that farmers would be putting a mortgage on their farms and were liable to lose them if they signed their names onto an application for membership in an electric cooperative."

"Of course", he continued, "I knew that was a danged lie. I wonder why folks start stories like that, but I sometimes doubted the story I was telling out over the country. It just didn't seem possible that after all those years, farmers would be getting electricity. I didn't have much of an education, you know, and there are lots of things that were too deep for me to understand but I guess it was just a case of farm folks having faith in themselves; believing that if the job was to be done they would have to do it for themselves, cooperatively."

*This interview was previously published in the Wisconsin REA News, May 1985*

Pictured is Isadore Bryonk (left) and Tom Bryonk on top of what was the extent of the line truck equipment in 1940. The brothers were employed from 1943-1947.



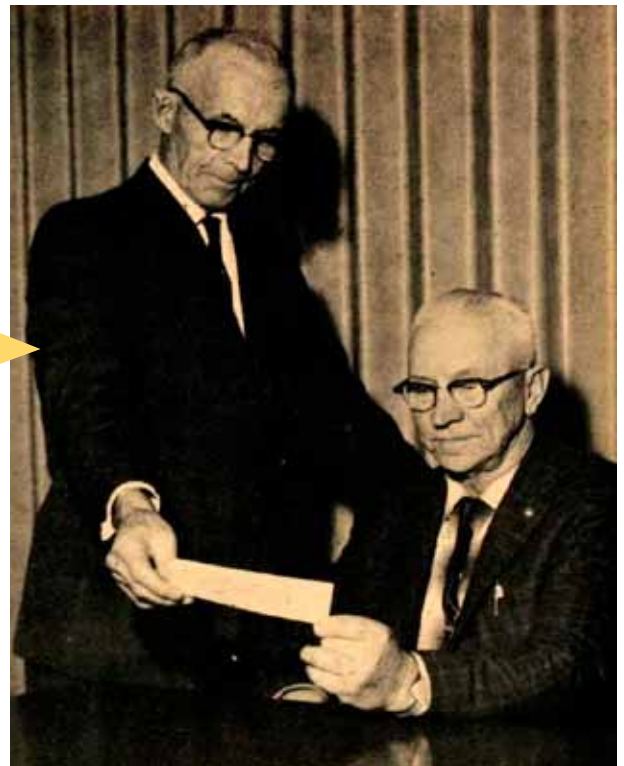


In honor of the Silver Jubilee, the employees of Trempealeau Electric Cooperative were paid in silver dollars for the May pay period. Shown left to right are: Betty Boland, bookkeeper; Dawn Zastrow, cashier; Elda Kried, billing clerk; and E.F. Thornton, manager.



Bylaws of Trempealeau Electric Cooperative of 1955.

E.R. Finner (left) receives the first capital credit check from Elmer Anderson, president of the co-op in 1962. Finner's check was in the amount of \$28.16 and represents his capital investment in the cooperative for the years 1944-1946. Upon receiving his check Finner said, "It is gratifying to me that Trempealeau Electric Cooperative, in a short period of 25 years, has prospered to the extent that it can begin to return patronage capital. "





## • Meeting Demand for Service

Naturally, as the co-op grew, new positions opened up. Typewriters, adding machines, filing cabinets, and other pieces of office equipment were purchased in order to meet the needs of the growing business. Every year saw the continued addition of new members and more miles of line. The cooperative had grown enough to build a new office headquarters building. The office was first located in the City Hall in Arcadia. Then the building formerly occupied by Farmers Bank at Arcadia, was engaged for office space and occupied on May 7, 1937.

In 1947, a site was purchased from the City of Arcadia and the construction began. Meanwhile the office was set up in the show room of the Arcadia Implement

Company until the building was complete on September 2, 1948. An addition was added in the fall of 1950 and a garage and warehouse space was added in 1961. The total cost of the headquarters building was more than \$110,000.

To accommodate the growing membership and provide quicker service to its members, more property was purchased to house service crews. In October 1948, a house was purchased in Galesville and in 1949 a garage was added. Two houses and a garage were also purchased in Strum in December 1950.

An addition to the existing headquarters building was added in 1963. Following remodeling in 1969, 139 meetings were held in the Willie Wiredhand Room during the first year. It was the only facility like

that available in the area. In 1976 the warehouse and garage was purchased near the Arcadia headquarters for \$27,500.

The La Crosse County area continued to grow as well, and the new Onalaska area facility opened on March 1, 1966 on Hwy 35-53 directly across from the Deer Farm in the former Henry Thompson residence. From there the co-op moved to the new Onalaska office in 1968. In 1973 the Onalaska office building was remodeled to provide office facilities for engineering. In 1981 the Onalaska office was again remodeled and reorganized for staffing. The end of March 1990 saw the completion of the new Onalaska office, with an Open House held in May of 1990.



A new headquarters was built in 1948 on Main Street, Arcadia.

The office in Onalaska was completed in 1965. The office was located off of State Road 93, where it is located today.





Personnel in 1953: l-r: Arnold Borgwardt, Galen Hessler, George Smick, Roman Kampa, Leonard Gruentzel, Deward Richmond, Burnett Otterson, Aloizy Kulig, Earl Everson, Edward Erickson, Joe Fernholz, and Iver Hoem.

Betty Boland was employed by the co-op as bookkeeper from August 1942 until May 1960. She is pictured here presenting the financial report at an annual meeting.



“I remember an outage we had once. The members were out for a week. They notified us by postcard because it was cheaper than making a phone call. The phone call would have cost them \$.25.”

Leonard Pierzyna,  
lineman 1957-1993



The Arcadia line crew in 1962 consisted of (left to right): George Smick, foreman; Iver Hoem, patrolman; Joe Fernholz, lineman; Aloizy Kulig, truck driver; and Leonard Pierzyna, lineman.

## • The First Bill

**TREMPEALEAU ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE**  
ARCADIA, WISCONSIN

MEMBER'S MONTHLY BILL, JAN. 10, 1939

METER READING <u>17</u> JAN. 1	FIRST 40 KWH AT 8.75c
METER READING <u>2</u> DEC. 1	NEXT 40 AT 5. c
NO. KWH USED <u>17</u> <i>in 10 days</i>	NEXT 120 AT 2. c
	OVER 200 AT 1.25c
	NET AMOUNT OF BILL \$ <u>1.35</u>
	ARREARS
	E H F A
	LOAN INT.

**PAID**  
JAN 23 1939

TREMPEALEAU ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE  
*Melvin Ackley*  
*Whitcomb, Ind.*

PAYABLE AT ANY AUTHORIZED PAY STATION. TAKE THIS BILL ALONG AND HAVE IT RECEIPTED. THIS BILL WILL BECOME DELINQUENT IF NOT PAID BY JANUARY 23TH.

Shown above is a receipt for the first light bill ever paid by Melvin Ackley, who at that time operated his farm near Pigeon Falls with his brother Selmer. The bill was \$1.35 for 17 killowatt hours used in 10 days.



The first Miss Trempealeau Rural Electrification, was Barbara Ann Slaby (second from right). She was selected at the 25th Anniversary Meeting in 1962. Also in photo, left to right: Manager Gordon Meistad, Gov. Gaylord Nelson, Board President Elmer Anderson, and Linda Kaye Benson, Miss Wisconsin Rural Electrification.

The story of the co-op's growth is reflected in its annual report. Looking over TEC's a report at its annual meeting on Oct. 6, 1956 are (left to right, front row): John P. Madgett, La Crosse, Dairyland Power Co-op general manager; A.C. Hagestad, retiring TEC secretary; President E.R. Finner and Manager E.F Thornton. Back row, left to right: U.S. Congressman Lester Johnson, Assemblyman Keith Harder, and Grover Younker, chief engineer for Wisconsin Electric Co-op.





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# DIVERSITY

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## • The Next 25 Years

The effects of changes in rural population, recreation, agriculture, transportation, and energy use that had begun in the 1960's would register in full force in the coming years. Now that they were well established as a co-op, their mission then turned to providing members with information on how to use electric home appliances and farm equipment more productively, safely, and economically. In 1963, Trempealeau Electric opened a new appliance sales and service center. The co-op saw record sales in appliances in 1973, but by 1977 sales were declining and in 1982 the appliance sales department was discontinued.

In order to introduce themselves to the young people and to teach young people about co-ops, TEC began sponsoring students to the Electric Cooperative Youth Congress. The Youth Congress, first called WEC Youth Seminar began in 1964.

In the 1970's cable television became an important issue. Gordon Meistad, Trempealeau Electric Manager originated the Western Wisconsin Communications Cooperative (WWCC). Organized in 1974, and using poles of the co-op and Tri-County Telephone cooperatives, WWCC was the first cable television cooperative in the country.


Programs were developed through the next couple decades. These included Main Street Messengers, "hot line" safety demonstrations, conversion to an online computer system for accounting functions, and implementation of a monthly newsletter, *The OUTLET*.



In 1982, the Energy Resource Conservation (ERC) Loan Program was adopted to make loans available at 5% interest for up to \$2,000 for member weatherization on their homes.

A water heater program was also established and in 1982 and over 1,600 members volunteered to participate in the program. Members received a credit of \$5 a month for allowing TEC to control their electric water heaters. In September 1986, the co-op began the free water heater program in which a member could pick up a free 80-gallon water heater and the co-op would add a control that would shut off the water heater during peak usage times. The co-op gave out 2,035 water heaters in 1986.

Maintenance of the lines also remained important. As the load of each service grew with the new appliances and electrical devices, heavier and better materials were required in line construction and



The local youth who attended the fifth annual youth congress at River Falls in 1969 are pictured above. Pictured left to right: Larry Adams, Trempealeau; Bonnie Schonsberg, Blair; La Vern Kleinsmith, Jr., Holmen; Barbara Solfest, Strum; Barbara Haines, Arcadia; Eileen Anderson, Strum; Sigurd Hanson, Onalaska; James Tranberg, Ettrick; and Nathan Goplin, Osseo.

maintenance. New substations were built, linemen were added to the co-op, and new land was acquired.

The next couple of decades saw rapid growth at the cooperative at an even faster pace than previous years. New memberships were increasing and new services were skyrocketing. Meters connected in 1988 were 7,195.

The co-op saw three general managers between 1960-1991. Gordon Meistad served for 15 years from 1960-1975, followed by Bruce Meistad from 1975-1982. In 1983, N.L. Erickson was hired as manager until 1991 when he decided to retire. David Oelkers was hired to replace him that same year.

In 1985, Wisconsin cooperatives persuaded the state to alter its legislation to allow the cooperatives to use capital credit funds that had gone unclaimed to use for charitable or educational purposes. In 1987, Trempealeau Electric Cooperative inaugurated a scholarship program using unclaimed capital credit money for students pursuing post-secondary education.

Bringing information age technology to the countryside was a goal during the 1980's. Rural electric cooperatives entered the fray of broadcasting by satellite on a national level in the early 1980s. In the summer of '86, the electric cooperatives joined with rural telephone cooperatives to

organize the National Rural Telecommunications Cooperative (NRTC). It would establish national standards for equipment, and purchase programming to be sold locally through member cooperatives.

In 1993, Trempealeau Electric launched Direct Broadcast Satellite (DBS) TV. The name given for the subsidiary was Riverland Satellite Corporation. The board of directors for Riverland Satellite Corporation were Greg Sacia, Robert Lunde, Dave Oelkers, Judy Whelan, Earl Anderson, William Engel and Dean Baldwin.

Throughout the years acquisition studies took place with Buffalo

Electric Cooperative. It wasn't until the 1990's when the merger actually became a close reality and in 1999, Trempealeau Electric Cooperative merged with Buffalo Electric Cooperative.

Dave Woyicki, Manager of Operations conducts a safety demonstration in 1998.



The co-op donated to various projects around the community, including sponsoring many youth projects. Pictured left to right: John Berg, Arcadia High School, Shelby Oelkers and Jenny Blascko, and TEC's Jerry Sorenson presenting a check to the students for Project Close-Up.

## TREMPEALEAU ELECTRIC GROWTH

	1938	1948	1958	1968	1978	1988	1998
Meters connected	1,026	2,667	3,370	3,912	5,926	7,212	13,974
Miles of Line	582	1,006	1,179	1,236	1,486	1,669	2,912
Avg bill per member per month	\$3.75	\$7.50	\$14.01	\$19.78	\$43.86	\$85.91	\$85.19

### • Trempealeau Electric Managers



M. J. Lawrence  
1937-1944



E. F. Thornton  
1944-1960



Gordon L. Meistad  
1960-1975



Bruce L. Meistad  
1975-1982



N. L. "Binky" Erickson  
1983-1991



David R. Oelkers  
1991-present

Roger Erickson (TEC board president) was Interim Manager from April 1982 - January 1983



# TIMELINE

## 1930's

**1937** - The first truck was purchased

**1938** - Two service trucks were purchased

## 1940's

**1947** - Capital credit plan was adopted by members at their annual meeting in June

**1948** - New headquarters building was completed

**1949-50** - Purchased property in Galesville and Strum

## 1950's

**1953** - Pleasantville substation was completed

**1955** - Members marked their own readings down on a card and mailed them in

**1956** - The first two members to have All-Electric Farm signs were George Lund and Harold Lund

**1958** - The co-op interconnected with City of Arcadia

## 1960's

**1962** - 25th Silver Anniversary meeting

The first general retirement of capital credits was allocated in the amount of \$33,000

**1963** - Addition added to headquarters building

Opened new appliance sales and service center

Implemented self-billing

**1965** - First irrigation load at New Amsterdam

New addition added to the headquarters building

**1966** - Trempealeau/Buffalo consolidation study initiated

Onalaska branch office opened on March 1

**1967** - First installation of underground line at Salsman Mobile Home Court on County Trunk K between Galesville and Trempealeau

Expanded Onalaska facilities

**1968** - SandLake substation was built - the first substation with underground wiring on the system

**1968** - New fleet identification was used - yellow with horizontal green and white stripes on the body and identification signs on each side with white and green striping

New office building and warehouse in Onalaska complete.

**1969** - Headquarters building was remodeled and enlarged. Willie Wiredhand Room was added

The co-op became a member of CFC

## 1970's

**1972** - Executed an agreement to participate in the development of a Fast Breeder Reactor with an investment of \$13,316

Began the meter reader program

The co-op was franchised by Maytag Company as a "Red Carpet Dealer" denoting excellence of sales and service by staff of our appliance and operations

**1973** - Total kWhr purchases declined from 80,189,600 to 79,994,520 - the first decline in purchases in the history of the cooperative

The co-op initiated the development and incorporation of the Western Wisconsin Communications Cooperative (WWCC)

**1976** - Warehouse and garage was purchased in Arcadia for \$27,500

**1977** - Grassroots Advocacy Group was formed

**1978** - Instituted "hot line" safety demonstrations

Began conversion to online computer system for all accounting functions

## 1980's

**1980** - One millionth capital credit dollar was distributed

Obtained land from the City of Arcadia for pole and material storage yard

Entered into agreement to provide direct wholesale energy sales to the city of Arcadia Municipal Utility by Dairyland Power

**1981**– Implemented a quarterly newsletter, the *OUTLET*, as a bill insert

Implemented a late payment charge on delinquent accounts

Energy Resource Conservation (ERC) loan program was adopted

**1982**– Changed the *OUTLET* to a monthly publication

Cooperative Resource Center opened in Austin, MN

Discontinued the appliance sales department

Onalaska branch was revised to a part-time service center

Implemented load management / electric water heater control program

**1983**– Began using a new type of underground cable - 100,000 ft. installed

Trempealeau Electric Cooperative Ladies Association (TECLA)

**1984**– Phased out of appliance repair and service

**1985**– Krause substation was energized

Participation in TECLA dwindled, the group was deactivated

**1986**–Implemented free water heater program

**1986**–Realigned director district boundaries to confirm membership count

Purchased safety demonstration model

Designed new bill format

A Welcome Wagon of volunteers were started to take membership packets of information to welcome new members to the cooperative

**1987** – Joined Wisconsin Crime Watch program

Scholarship program began

**1989** – Acquired the TESH property – 53 acres in an industrial site in Onalaska

## 1990's

**1990** – Remodeled the Onalaska office. Held an open house in May

**1991** – Assisted Desert Storm families with an electric bill credit

Sold 29 acres of TESH property for the development of a mobile home court

A bar code reader was installed for posting payments

No rate increase

**1992** – Received the NRECA Gold Seal Service Award

Received the WWTC Rural Development Award for Best Cooperative Effort

Published the first Trempealeau County Dairy Breakfast cookbook

Became members of Digger's Hotline

**1993** – Introduced the Main Street Messengers (Emergency Response System)

Launched Direct Broadcast Satellite (DBS) TV

Purchased Cedar Creek Business Park in Onalaska

Began using CRC for after hours calls

**1994** – Riverland Satellite Corporation was incorporated and its Board of Directors were established for DBS

Linemen help rescue plane crash survivors

A free timer program was started, giving away 650 timers the first year

**1995** – Senior Volunteer Home Repair Program began

**1996** – Compliance Provider hired for Shared Services group

The first commercial newsletter, *The Link*, was published

**1997** – Began offering a complete line of residential surge suppression and uninterruptible power supplies

Explored the options and possibilities of a Radio Shack franchise

Implemented new billing system

**1998** - Launched the first website

**1999** - Merger with Buffalo Electric Cooperative

# BOARD OF DIRECTORS

## • Trempealeau Electric Cooperative

Ewald Finner	1937-1961	B. R. "Richard" Kopp	1971-1972
John Huslegaard	1937-1952	Alton Engen	1971-1983
Clarence Kaas	1937-1943	Wilfred Breska	1971-1989
E. H. Schroeder	1937-1944	William Kwosek	1973-1988
H. A. Hardie	1937-1944	Roger Erickson	1974-1989
Julius Hegge	1937-1963	Alice Mullen	1981-1987
Ingwald Myhers	1937-1939	Paul Dunham	1981-1984 1985-1987
E. N. Kleven	1937-1953	Alex Nilsestuen	1982-1986
A. C. Hagestad	1938-1956	Robert Scheitzach	1984-1985
Wesley Chalsma	1939-1963	Donald Woychik	1988-1989
Elmer Anderson	1943-1974	LaVern Kleinsmith Jr.	1981-1990
Albert Erickson	1944-1953	William Lehmann	1972-1981 1982-1994
Carroll Carhart	1944-1963	Robert E. Lunde	1970-1971 1983-1995
Harry Hawkenson	1952-1955	Andrew Dejno Jr.	1989-1995
Wendell Burt	1955-1973	James Sciborski	1987-1999
Robert Schaller	1956-1963	Kenneth Sonsalla	1989-2001
Ted Gilbertson Sr.	1953-1970	Bob Bilskemper	1986-1999 2000-
Oluf Lovlien	1944-1944	Irvin Romskog	1986-2000
Nick Jensen	1961-1968	William Suttie	1987-2001
Ralph Weisenberger	1968-1971	Greg Sacia	1990-2002 2005-
Erling Hanson	1955-1982	Steven L. Hogden	1994-2008
Henry Kopp	1963-1971	Curtis Skoyen	1994-2010
Conrad P. Hanson	1963-1981	Robert Kampa	1995-1997
LaVerne Kleinsmith Sr.	1963-1981	Gene Marsolek	1997-2010
Ralph Kittleson	1963-1982	Tom LaFleur	1999-2004

## Dairyland Power Cooperative

As time passed, the co-op's, along with other electric cooperatives in Western Wisconsin, realized the need for owning and controlling their own power generating and transmission system. The co-ops banded together and with financial assistance of the REA they formed Dairyland Power Cooperative as their source for wholesale power in 1941.



# EMPLOYEES

Thales A. Webster	Easement Solicitor/Bookkeeper	1937	Duane Bain	Lineman	1968
Bernardine Brownlee	Stenographer	1937	Judy Scow	Office	
M.J. Lawrence	Superintendent	1937	Orlin Erickson Jr.	Custodian	1969
August Knudtson	Easement Solicitor	1937	Sara Jane Arntsen	Clerk – Cashier	1969
B.I. Enghagen	Easement Solicitor	1937	Linda Skroch	Payroll	1971
Einar Isackson	Line Building Crew Head	1937	James “Jesse” Kaseno	Load Mgmt Technician	1971
Bernard Misch	Lineman	1938	Doug Falkenberg	Appliance Sales	
Helen Severson	Steno	1938	Joyce Woychik	Billing	1974
Paul Pyka	Lineman	1938	Doug Gerritts	Lineman	1974
John Progreba	Helper	1938	Scott Scheel	Lineman	1974
Peter Johnson	Groundman	1938	Bruce Meistad	General Manager	1974
M.L. Olson	Bookkeeper	1941	Dave Woyicki	Mgr. of Operations	1975
Dave Kiekhoefer	Lineman	1942	Bryan Berklund	Lineman	1976
Ruth Steffenton	Steno	1942	Harry T. Peterson	Consumer Services Mgr	1978
Betty Schultz (Boland)	Assistant Bookkeeper	1942	Roger Wygel	Lineman	1978
Ed Gunning	Lineman	1944	Kurt Nelson	Lineman	1978
Dawn Zastrow	Cashier	1943	Tim Smith	Dist Line Superintendent	1979
Galen Hessler	Lineman-Line Supt.	1943	Bob Blencoe	Appliance Service	1979
Aloizy Kulig	Groundman	1944	Mike Hestekin	Lineman	1979
Isadore Brynok	Groundman	1944	Tom Tidquist	Lineman	1979
Tom Brynok	Groundman	1944	Karen Motszko	Accountant/Bookkeeper	1979
Eli Maule	Lineman	1944	Ben Thompson	Lineman	1979
E.F. Thornton	Manager	1944	Bill Moussette	Lineman	1979
Roman Kampa	Truck Driver	1944	Randy Rykal	Appliance Dept	1980
Norma Fetting	Steno	1945	Cindy Schreiber	Cashier/Receptionist	1980
Joe Fernholz	Apprentice Lineman	1946	Mary Jacobson	Office Clerk	
George Smick	Line Foreman	1946	Irvin Diamond	Consumer Accts Supervisor	1981
Richard Kamla	Steno/Asst. Bookkeeper	1946	Norrell “Binky” Erickson	General Manager	1983
Elda Kreid	Billing Clerk	1946	Joel Von Haden	Member Services	1984
Deward Richmond	Lineman	1948	Kate Langreck	General Clerk	1984
Burnett Otterson	Groundman - Patrolman	1948	Jay Lyons	Lineman	1987
Iver Hoem	Groundman - Patrolman	1948	Corry Droog	General Clerk	1987
Ed Erickson	Stockclerk - Meterman	1948	David R. Oelkers	General Manager	1988
Arnold Borgwardt	Power Use Advisor	1949	Kevin Helgeson	Lineman	1988
Burnett Otterson	Lineman	1950	Larry Skoug	Lineman	1988
Leonard Gruentzel	Lineman	1952	Mike Polinske	Lineman	1988
Earl Everson	Lineman	1954	Lance Kowalsky	Lineman	1988
Frederick Glowcheski	Materials Clerk	1954	Pete Boos	Lineman	1988
Leonard Pierzyna	Apprentice Lineman	1957	Tim Holtan	Line Supt.	1989
Lance Anderson	Apprentice Lineman	1957	Sharon Sluga	Operations	1989
Paul Raymond	Lineman	1959	Todd Hong	Lineman	1989
Mary Lou Sobotta	Stenographer	1960	Mike Hurley	Lineman	1989
Gordon Meistad	Manager	1960	Roger Schmidtke	Materials Clerk	1990
Kate Deaver	Office Manager	1961	Jerry Sorenson	Assistant Manager	1991
Jean Everson	Billing	1962	Pam Powers	Office	1991
Willard Weiss	Office Manager		Orlando Blackwell	Materials Clerk	
Joseph Snow	Appliance Service		Andy Reichwien	Technical Field Services	1993
Peter Bergum	Lineman		Charles Dienger	Lineman	1993
Allen Kujak	Lineman	1962	Tammy Hilmanowski	Payroll	1993
Jerry Thurston	Lineman	1962	Bernie Fargen	Member Service Supervisor	1995
Charles Wolover	Member Services	1962	Shane Rowan	Engineer	
Wally Jelen	Appliance Service		Aaron Torud	Load Management Technician	1997
Carol Kube	Secretary		Becky Kramer	Member Service Rep	1998
Henry “Mack” McConnon	Appliance Sales	1963	Pete Reuter	Mechanic	1998
Dan Thompson	Appliance Service	1963	Ken Casey	Key Accounts Director	1999
Donald Gaddes	Lineman	1963	Bill Mason	Lineman	1999
Edward F. Kulig	Office Manager	1964	Alex Tetzlaff	Lineman	1999
Vernon Peterson	Materials Clerk	1965			
Bernard Gust	Lineman	1968			

# RIVERLAND ENERGY COOPERATIVE

## • A New Beginning



With deregulation and “retail wheeling” becoming a threat to electric cooperatives, Buffalo Electric and Trempealeau Electric were willing to consider a radical change for their business operations, which covered six counties.

A comprehensive study pointed the way to economic benefits for the memberships of both cooperatives. By combining operations, the two cooperatives would apply costs to a greater number of members and eliminate the need for duplicate facilities for serving power in the same general area. As a result, the cost of doing business would be reduced, ensuring the economic viability of the cooperatives and reliable delivery of electricity to the region.

For the consolidation to be successful, it would take member action and regulatory oversight. The boards of directors of each Cooperative approved the consolidation, initiating the approval process. The final step was a vote by the members of each Cooperative at their respective annual meetings. By voting in person or by proxy, they could support or deny the consolidation.

The effort of the memberships and employees was successful and the consolidation was approved at the Buffalo Electric Cooperative annual meeting and at Trempealeau Electric Cooperative’s meeting, both of which were held on March 27, 1999.

With approval finally gained, the newly created Riverland Energy Cooperative began business on June 1, 1999.

Trempealeau Electric Cooperative General Manager Dave Oelkers was elected to be the General Manager of Riverland Energy. Dave Reschke, who was the general manager of Buffalo Electric became CEO of Riverland Communications.

Buffalo Electric and Trempealeau Electric Cooperative’s members combined gave Riverland Energy more than 12,000 consumer-owners.



# EMBRACING A NEW MILLENNIUM

As the two systems integrated, Riverland Energy set a foundation for the future. Modern technology would be used to the benefit of both suburban and rural members.

Computers automated processes like reading meters, storing customer information, monitoring system equipment, and tracking inventory.

These milestones signaled that Riverland Energy was preparing for a new electric industry.

In 2001, the membership was at 12,524. Having met its goal of 100 percent Y2K (Year 2000) compliance, Riverland did not have any problems when the clock struck 12 a.m. on January 1, 2000.

In 2001, Riverland Energy and the Arcadia Cooperative Association united in a partnership to form Creative Energy Solutions, LLC, (CES) that provided propane, HVAC services, and heating and cooling technology. Riverland Energy sold CES in 2010 to focus on their core business of providing electric service.

In 2004, Riverland Energy began the construction of the current headquarters building located at N28988 State Road 93 in Arcadia. The building was occupied in January 2005. The new facility was designed by MBA Architects and constructed by Borton Construction.

Riverland Energy installed an Automated Meter Reading (AMR) system throughout the entire territory between 2004 and 2009. This digital technology allows Riverland to get daily readings from the meters. The meters could be read remotely, which saves time and money. The meter readers who manually went out and read the

meters were no longer needed.

A new telephone outage reporting system was also implemented to allow quicker response to outage-related calls. In addition, new software was purchased in 2009 to help streamline the administrative response process to widespread outages and allowed the co-op to have a better handle on how best to respond at all times.

In 1999 Riverland Energy joined Touchstone Energy Cooperative, a nationwide network of electric co-ops that are dedicated to bringing added value and benefit to mem-

bers. Touchstone Energy is the brand name by which cooperatives identify and connect themselves with that alliance.

Riverland offered new services such as budget billing, automatic and online bill pay, and many rebates and programs over the last few decades. These value-added services proved the cooperative remained committed to the needs of the membership.

In the late 1960's, cooperatives around the state organized Restoration of Power in an Emergency program - ROPE. From flash



The ground breaking ceremony for the new office Headquarters was held in June 2004. Pictured left to right: Paul Borsheim of Borton

Construction; directors Bill Bruegger, Bernard Pronschinske, Robert Bilskemper, Barb Larson, Steve Hogden; Colin Klos, architect; and

directors Mark Vinz, Curt Skoyen and Gene Marsolek.



floods to tornadoes, cooperatives extend aid to and receive aid from each other when called upon. In September 2007, Riverland Energy and several other Wisconsin cooperative volunteers assisted Washington-St. Tammany Electric Cooperative located in Franklinton, just 30 miles north of New Orleans following Hurricane Katrina. An estimated 3,500 miles of power lines and poles were blown to the ground when the Hurricane swept through the area, leaving roughly 47,000 cooperative members without power.

While the membership continued to grow throughout the last ten years, it did so at a slower pace. In 2011 the co-op served 16,973 members and had 46 full-time employees and over 3,250 miles of line.

Although overall growth in new services has diminished due to today's economic climate, the

demand for electricity per household is increasing due to newer and increased ways to use power, especially in technology.

Reliability, efficiency, and community service are essential today as it was in 1937. For 75 years, Riverland Energy Cooperative demonstrated that no matter what the challenge, the cooperative has remained focused on its mission to deliver safe and reliable energy at a competitive price. Electricity brought with it a better life and economic opportunity for the region, and the cooperative spirit of the membership.



Automated Meter Reading Device

Hurricane Katrina  
damage, September 2007



Linemen Bill Mason (far left) and Kevin Helgeson (second from left) assisted Adams-Columbia Cooperative in September 2011.

## • Our Youth

Educating the youth was important at both co-ops, so it was no surprise that it continued through the merger.

The Junior Board was adopted from Buffalo Electric Cooperative and still continues today. The program name changed to Cooperative Youth Ambassadors in 2003, but continued with the same purpose. The students have the opportunity to attend youth conferences; participate in JPM Power Plant tour, and methane digester tour; participate in Riverland Energy activities and community service projects; and learn about careers at a cooperative.

2009 youth ambassadors  
at the methane  
digester tour.

Helping member families achieve their educational goals, Riverland Energy continues to offer \$1,000 scholarships to high school students.

The co-op continues to support the youth by presenting educational programs to the schools including safety demonstrations and participating in reality workshops.



Alacia Greenwold  
and Connor  
Leonard participate  
in the 2010  
Youth Leadership  
Conference.



2011  
Youth  
Ambassadors

## • Commitment to Community

Electric cooperatives give their communities more than electric services. They give time and talents to help make their communities better. Riverland Energy is no exception. Riverland continues to help scores of charitable, health, educational, art and children's sport groups in the service area.

In 1999, Riverland Energy employees and board of directors and Riverland Communications employees, began the Jeans Day Charity Fund in which each employee donates \$1 a month throughout the year and the total amount contributed is donated to organizations or individuals in our communities. Each employee who donates is allowed to wear jeans on the last Friday of every month. Donations have included the Children's Miracle Network, Toys for Tots, food pantries, local families and employees who were having a financial hardship, and many more organizations.

Since 2005, Riverland

Energy has sponsored a team in the American Cancer Society Relay for Life or 5K run/walk. In 2010, Riverland began a CFL food drive, in which members bring in food donations and receive a CFL bulb and the food is donated to local food pantries. That same year an appliance and recycle drive began in which members bring in their old appliances or electronics to be recycled.

Riverland Energy was honored at the 2005 NRECA Annual Meeting for demonstrating commitment to the youth in its community by receiving the 2005 National Community Service Award.

In November 2011, Riverland Energy began an innovative program that provides financial assistance to worthy organizations and individuals in its service area. Through Community Care, each participating member makes a small monthly contribution by voluntarily signing up to round their electric bill up to the next dollar. That spare change goes back into the community.



Dave Oelkers, Riverland Energy General Manager, right, accepts the National Community Service Award from NRECA President David Cowan, center. Far left is NRECA CEO Glenn English.



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# HONORS & AWARDS

- 1968 Buffalo Electric was recipient of REC News Center Page Award for Photography
- 1979 Buffalo Electric was recipient of N.F. Leifer Memorial Journalism Award
- 1988 Dean Baldwin, Buffalo Electric, was recipient of Ally of Cooperative Electrification (ACE) Award
- 1992 Trempealeau Electric received NRECA Gold Seal Service Award
- 1992 Trempealeau Electric received WWTC Rural Development Award for Best Cooperative Effort
- 1993 Leonard Pierzyna, TEC, received Herman C. Potthast Award
- 1994 Dean Baldwin, Buffalo Electric, was recipient of the Herman C. Potthast Award
- 1995 Jean Everson, TEC, was the recipient of the Herman C. Potthast Award
- 1995 TEC Director Robert Lunde received the ACE Award
- 1996 Buffalo Electric was recipient of N. F. Leifer Memorial Journalism Award
- 1999 *WEC News Magazine* Honorable Mention Award for Human Interest
- 1999 Dave Oelkers was the recipient of the Herman C. Potthast Award
- 2001 *WEC News Magazine* Photography Award
- 2003 *WEC News Magazine* Co-op Operations Info Award
- 2003 Dave Woyicki was the recipient of the Herman C. Potthast Award
- 2005 Recipient of National Community Service Award for our Youth Programs through NRECA
- 2005 Named Business of the Year by The Arcadia Chamber of Commerce
- 2005 *WEC News Magazine* Co-op Operations Info
- 2006 *WEC News Magazine* Honorable Mention Award for Energy Info
- 2008 *WEC News Magazine* Honorable Mention Award for Photography
- 2010 *WEC News Magazine* Energy Information Award
- 2012 Scott Hayes was the recipient of Herman C. Potthast Award



Photo left is Leonard Pierzyna receiving the Herman C. Potthast award in 1993. Photo right is Dave Oelkers receiving The Business of the Year Award on behalf of Riverland Energy in 2005.

## OUR LEADERS

The first board of directors for Riverland Energy were Bernard Pronschinske, Greg Sacia, Steven Hogden, Michael Aus, William Bruegger, Richard Dierauer, Tom La Fleur, Gene Marsolek, Gary Pronschinske, Bergie Ritscher, Irvin Romskog, Curt Skoyen, Kenneth Sonsalla, William Suttie, Gene Weiss, Judith Whelan, and Robert Wittig. Also serving on the Riverland Energy board of directors were Barb Larsen and Robert Bilskemper.



### The 2012 Board of Directors

Front row, left to right: Beth Ede, Mark Vinz (President), Bernard Pronschinske (Vice President), David L. Anderson (Secretary-Treasurer). Back row, left to right: Robert Lunde, Daniel Filla, Greg Sacia, Clarence Castleberg, and David Paudler.

## HIGHLIGHTS

- 2000 First annual meeting as Riverland Energy Cooperative was held on March 25 at the Arcadia High School
- 2004 REC began promoting long distance through PowerNet Global
- 2004 Began offering Energy Star Appliance and Lighting rebates
- 2005 New Headquarters building was finished and moved into
- 2005 Began implementing the Automated Meter Reading (AMR) Turtle installations
- 2005 Granted a USDA Economic Development Loan to YMCA, Onalaska
- 2006 Sponsored Coulee Conference Classic Basketball Extravaganza with Dairyland Power, Tri-County Electric, Jackson Electric, and Vernon Electric cooperatives
- 2007 Online billing was implemented through Bill4U
- 2009 Implemented an Outage Management System
- 2009 Began giving out treats honoring June Dairy Month at each office during the last week of June
- 2010 Creative Energy Solutions, LLC Dissolves
- 2007 Sponsored member tour of JPM
- 2010 Sponsored Tour of Wind McNelius Wind Farm
- 2010 Dairyland Power Cooperative joined MISO
- 2010 Held first annual appliance and electronics recycle drive (April)
- 2010 Held first annual CFL food drive (February)





## RIVERLAND ENERGY EMPLOYEES TODAY

Josh Abramczak	Lineman	2006
Beth Alesch	Marketing & Communications	2003
Todd Anibas	Lineman	1992
Bryan Berklund	Meter Serviceman/Lineman	1976
Pete Boos	Lineman	1988
Mike Burkart	Load Management Technician	2006
Amanda Fehr	Member Service Representative	2010
Doug Gerrits	Staking Engineer	1974
Scott Hayes	Load Management Technician	1997
Kevin Helgeson	Lineman	1988
Mike Hestekin	Line Foreman	1979
Tammy Hilmanowski	Operations/Payroll	1993
Tim Holtan	Line Superintendent	1989
Todd Hong	Lineman	1989
Marlene Kaiser	Consumer Accounts Representative	2011
Dale Kennebeck	Operations/Mapping	1979
Dale Kircher	Lineman	1994
Royce Kosik	Apprentice Lineman	2008
Mary Larson	Office Coordinator/Capital Credits	1974
Kristina Marsolek	Accountant/Bookkeeper	2010
Bill Mason	Lineman	1999
Kurt Nelson	Lineman	1978
Denise Noll	Member Service Representative	1992
David Oelkers	General Manager	1988
Damian Pasch	Lineman	2011
Jenny Pate	Load Management Technician	2006
Steve Paulson	Lineman	1991
Mike Polinske	Lineman	1988
Adam Pronschinske	Lineman	2006
Pete Reuter	Fleet & Facilities Supervisor	1998
Lonnie Sass	Line Foreman	1973
Mark Schamaun	Lineman	1991
Cindy Scharr	Consumer Accounts Representative	1974
Roger Schmidtke	Materials	1990
Larry Skoug	Line Foreman	1988
Linda Skroch	Member Services Representative	1971
Sharon Sluga	Operations Coordinator	1989
Jerald Sorenson	Assistant Manager	1991
Rob Sosalla	Lineman	2002
Tom Tidquist	Lineman	1979
Aaron Torud	Manager of Member Services	1997
Joyce Woychik	Consumer Accounts Representative	1974
David Woyicki	Manager of System Operations	1975
Eric Wright	IT Specialist	2010

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Cooperatives worldwide generally operate using the same principles. These principles, as with many co-ops, are part of Riverland Energy Cooperative's statement of identity.

### **Voluntary and Open Membership**

Cooperatives are voluntary organizations, open to all persons able to use their services and willing to accept the responsibilities of membership.

### **Democratic Member Control**

Cooperatives are democratic organizations controlled by their members, who actively participate in setting policies and making decisions.

### **Members' Economic Participation**

Members contribute equitably to and democratically control the capital of their cooperative.

### **Autonomy and Independence**

Cooperatives are autonomous, self-help organizations controlled by their members.

### **Education, Training, and Information**

Cooperatives provide education and training for their members, elected representatives, managers, and employees so they can contribute effectively to the development of their cooperatives.

### **Cooperation Among Cooperatives**

Cooperatives serve their members most effectively and strengthen the cooperative movement by working together.

### **Concern for Community**

While focusing on member needs, cooperatives work for the sustainable development of their communities.

