



KEEPING ELECTRIC RATES AFFORDABLE

by Craig Buross, CEO & General Manager



I have good news, and I have more good news. The good news is that electricity provided by Vernon Electric Cooperative continues to be both reliable and of good value. For more good news... I am happy to report that despite high levels of inflation, particularly in the energy industry, we are forecasting a **0% rate increase** for 2022. You may ask, what is driving the favorable cost-value of electricity for Vernon Electric Cooperative members? Here are some reasons:

- Vernon Electric Co-op employees have a long history of prudent system planning, improvements, and maintenance of our electric distribution system to maximize safety, efficiency, and reliability.
- Employees work hard to manage controllable expenses. Your cooperative's low controllable expenses are amongst the best in the industry.
- When Mother Nature does not cooperate and provides a blow to the electric distribution system, your cooperative's line crews quickly respond day or night in all weather conditions.
- Vernon Electric's directors (your elected representatives) ensure that decisions and policies reflect our mission which includes balancing reliability, sustainability, and of course, affordability.
- Dairyland Power Co-op, which generates and supplies most of the electricity we need, continues to work toward

a balanced sustainable generation plan while keeping rates stable.

- Electricity continues to become more climate friendly. As we work toward lowering our carbon footprint, beneficial electrification (or strategic electrification) helps to reduce overall emissions and energy costs.
- Energy efficiency, conservation, and load management programs have helped lower the demand for electricity during peak times, which helps stretch our members' energy dollars.

During this time when prices for just about everything seem to be spiraling out of control, and many investor-owned utilities across the Midwest are seeking large rate increases for both electricity and natural gas (some approaching 20%), Vernon Electric has been able to keep your electric rates flat. As a member, you can help by reducing your electricity use between the hours of 5-8 p.m. in the winter and 2-6 p.m. in the summer (peak times). You can also help by replacing and/or purchasing energy efficient appliances. Be sure to take advantage of our energy efficiency incentives.

As we work through these challenging times of supply constraints and price inflation in all areas of our lives, Vernon Electric Cooperative is focused on making sure that electricity remains of great value to you, our member, by continuing to provide safe, sustainable, and reliable energy at affordable rates.

MEMBERS RECEIVE MULTIPLE BENEFITS WITH ENERGY EFFICIENT PURCHASES

Members wanting to save energy and money in the new year should review Vernon Electric's new 2022 incentive forms. Vernon Electric annually publishes a list of energy efficient items that are eligible for an incentive when a member makes a qualifying purchase and submits the required paperwork. A list of rebates and incentive forms can be found at www.vernonelectric.org/rebates or by contacting our office.

Eligibility criteria for each category is listed on the forms. Incentives begin at \$0.50 and go up to \$800 for certain items. To receive an incentive, the member

must purchase a qualifying item, fill out the incentive form, and return the form and documentation to the cooperative within three months of purchase or installation (this will be clarified on the form). Equipment must be installed within the cooperative's service territory and, in most cases, must be ENERGY STAR® rated.



State and federal energy efficiency and conservation incentives are also available through Wisconsin's Focus on Energy program and through

federal tax credits. When considering or implementing energy efficiency measures check with Focus on Energy's website, www.focusonenergy.com, or give them a call at 1-800-762-7077. Energy efficiency and conservation tax credits can be found at www.energystar.gov or by contacting your tax professional.

Questions regarding Vernon Electric's incentive program or general energy efficiency questions can be directed to Dave Maxwell at dmaxwell@vernonelectric.org or by calling 608-634-3121.



Vows in the Vineyard, **PARTY IN THE BARN**

By Leah Call

Love is in the air. It's February, the month of Valentine's Day—a day of hearts, flowers, and exchanging gifts with those we cherish. If exchanging vows is in your future, Pedretti's Party Barn, in the Vernon Electric Cooperative service territory, offers an idyllic setting for a storybook country vineyard wedding.

This event venue within Vernon Vineyards, a 75-acre vineyard and winery situated 7 miles northwest of Viroqua, welcomes dozens of couples annually.

"You can't plan a wedding until you have a venue," noted Party Barn owner John Pedretti, who married his wife, Deanna, in the original barn, once a working dairy barn near acreage he purchased from his father in 2002.

His father continued to host weddings inside that barn-turned-wedding-venue for several years. Then in 2015 Pedretti took over Vernon Vineyards. "I purchased



John Pedretti, creator and owner of the Party Barn, greets guests inside the venue.

the vineyard adjoining my acreage and that's when I started running the party barn," he said.

When necessary repairs to the original barn totaled more than \$200,000, Pedretti opted to construct a new building with the same rustic barn-like charm as its predecessor, but with modern amenities and improvements.

The Party Barn is almost completely booked for 2022 with just seven weekends available. "We are starting to get bookings for 2023, and we even have bookings for 2024," said Pedretti. "The sooner you can get your venue, the better off you are."

Choosing a Venue According to The Wedding Report, a research company focused on collecting wedding statistics nationwide, Wisconsin had a total of 21,884 weddings in 2020 at an average price tag of \$19,600.

In addition to booking early, Pedretti suggests paying attention to the details can help to keep costs in check. "When booking a venue, you should be really clear about what is included. For us tables and chairs are included for 300 people. Some places require you to rent tables and chairs from them. You really want to know what all is included in the



venue and what the rules are.”

Pedretti’s offers a wedding weekend package that runs from noon on Friday until noon on Sunday. The package includes outdoor and indoor seating, customizable floor plans, a certified kitchen and more.

“We have a bride’s room inside our tasting room and a cook shack, so if you want to grill out for the rehearsal dinner, you can do that,” added Pedretti, noting that The Party Barn does not restrict what caterers can be used—a common practice at some venues.

The Perfect Place Imagine saying “I do” surrounded by the lush landscape of the Driftless Region. Your guests stroll through the vineyard while sipping wine produced just yards away.

“Everyone comments on the views,” noted Pedretti. “The vineyard wraps around the tasting room and

the wedding ceremony spot. So you are actually in the vineyard.”

Pedretti is on site to offer tours and answer questions before and after the event. “I work in the vineyards and usually harvest about 60 tons of grapes off the farm,” he said. “And I produce the wine in a building right across the parking lot from The Party Barn.”

In addition to weddings, The Party Barn is used for graduation celebrations, holiday parties, craft shows, meetings and more. “It’s a temperature-controlled building with a kitchen and bathrooms, so we can have events anytime of the year,” said Pedretti.

Check out Party Barn’s website and Facebook page to arrange a tour or book that special wedding weekend.

“We try to make everything possible for the bride. It is their special day,” said Pedretti. “If we can make it happen, we’ll do whatever we can to get it done.”

Energy Efficiency Tip of the Month

About 30% of a home’s heating energy is lost through inefficient windows. Caulk and weatherstrip all windows to seal air leaks.

When running your home heating system, lock all operable windows to ensure the tightest seal possible.

Source: Dept. of Energy



WINTER STORM SAFETY

The Consumer Product Safety Commission reports that 50% of all **portable generator**-related carbon monoxide deaths occur during the winter months (November - February). **Space heaters**, whether portable or stationary, account for one-third (33%) of home heating fires and four out of five (81%) of home heating fire deaths according to the National Fire Protection Association. In addition to these inherent winter hazards, winter storms can also lead to serious hazards such as **downed power lines** and **flooding**.

ESFI OFFERS THESE SAFETY TIPS TO HELP YOU:



PREPARE

- Unplug your appliances and power cords from outlets to **protect** them from **power surges**.
- If you plan to use a portable generator, ESFI recommends a **licensed electrician** install it to ensure it will **operate safely**.
- Test your home's **carbon monoxide detectors** and **smoke alarms** to ensure they're functioning.



WEATHER

- Use **flashlights** as a source of light. Candles are a fire hazard.
- **Never operate a generator inside your home** or in other enclosed or partially-enclosed spaces, including the garage.
- Use a **battery-operated** radio to stay informed about important safety updates.
- If using a **space heater**, plug directly into a wall outlet and keep at least three feet away from combustibles.



RECOVER

- If **flood** waters reached the level of electrical outlets, contact a **licensed electrician** before attempting to use electricity in the home.
- Prior to use, have a qualified service repair dealer determine what electrical equipment should be **replaced** and what can be **reconditioned**.
- **Never touch** a fallen power line or drive through standing water if a downed power line is nearby. **Report downed lines** to local authorities.

Craig Buros, CEO & General Manager

110 Saugstad Road, Westby, WI 54667
608-634-3121 • 608-447-5051
email: info@vernonelectric.org
website: www.vernonelectric.org

David Maxwell, Editor

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