



# SAVE A LIFE: Avoid Distractions While Driving

by Craig Buross, CEO & General Manager

Some temptations are hard to resist including checking an incoming text or taking a phone call while driving. While driving, we typically hear that “ding” on our phone, alerting us to a text or call coming through, and we sometimes feel the urgent need to check it. We know we shouldn’t, but we reason that we’re going to make an exception—just this once.

According to AAA research, most people feel they are better-than-average drivers. After all, we have busy lives and are accustomed to multitasking. But mounds of

research and thousands of deaths every year prove otherwise.

As a new school year begins with young drivers and school buses back on the road, I thought it would be a good time to remind folks, including myself, of the dangers of distracted driving.

The reality is that using a phone while driving creates enormous

Sending or reading one text takes your eyes off the road for an average of five seconds. At 55 mph, that’s like driving the length of an entire football field with your eyes closed.

potential for injuries and fatalities. Distractions take a motorist’s attention off driving, which can make a driver miss critical events, objects and cues, potentially leading to a crash.

According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, one of every 10 fatal crashes in the United States involves distracted driving, resulting in more than 3,000 deaths annually. I find this statistic heartbreaking considering so many of these accidents could easily be avoided if we’d simply put down our phones while driving.

Distracted driving is considered any activity that diverts our attention, including texting or talking on the phone and adjusting the navigation or entertainment system. Texting is by far one of the most dangerous distractions. Sending or reading one text takes your eyes off the road for an average of five seconds. At 55 mph, that’s like driving the length of

an entire football field with your eyes closed.

In addition to refraining from texting while driving, we can help keep the roads safe by moving over for first responders and other emergency vehicles. Additionally, if you see our line crew conducting work near the roadside, I’d encourage you to slow down, move over when possible, and give them extra space to perform their work safely.

At Vernon Electric, safety is foremost in everything we do—for our employees and the members of the communities we serve. We routinely remind our crews of the dangers of distracted driving, and we hope you’ll have similar conversations with your teens who may be new to the roadways and are especially susceptible to the lure of technology.

Let’s work together to keep everyone safe on the roads. Remember: That text can wait, and waiting just might save a life.





# ALCHEMY ON TAP

By Leah Call

**M**erriam-Webster defines Alchemy as, “a medieval chemical science...a power or process that changes or transforms something in a mysterious or impressive way.” True to its name, Alchemy Brewing Company, powered by Vernon Electric Cooperative, transforms hops, grains, yeast, and malt into an impressive selection of unique beers now on tap at its newly opened Alchemy Brewing Co. tap house and pub on Hwy. 27 between Cashton and Sparta.

“We brew everything from sours, to lagers, to dark stout, barrel aged, seltzers—anything you can think of,” said owner Matt Schaitel. “We like to experiment.”

Not your average mad scientist, Schaitel uses local ingredients in his experiments whenever he can. “Any beers that have fruit or other flavors, we use real and not extract, and we always try to source it as local as possible.”

## Beer Here

In March, Schaitel and his wife, Angie, purchased the former Terry’s Hideout restaurant, seeing an opportunity to expand their brewing business, which literally began in a garage.



“We started brewing beer around 2005 for home brewing. In 2017, we became an LLC and got licensed to sell commercially,” explained Schaitel, who originally sold his beer at Leon-based bar and restaurant The Cotter Pin. “After that we opened up our own place and put tap lines in. But with just six stools at the bar, it got kind of crowded.”

Alchemy Brewing is the first brewery in Monroe County since the late 1800s. While the Schaitels still brew some beer in the original building, the plan is to move all production to the new location. “Our goal is to brew four to six barrels [33 gallons per barrel] per week,” noted Schaitel. “We now have 19 taps for beer and one tap designated for root beer.”

In addition to Alchemy brews on tap, customers can also enjoy other Wisconsin-brewed beers, as well as domestic beers and wines. The brewery draws a mix of local customers along with craft beer enthusiasts from farther away.

For those wanting to soak up the suds with some grub, there is a limited food menu. “We intentionally keep the menu small,” noted Schaitel. “We want to focus on the beer.”

Menu items and upcoming events can be found on the Alchemy Brewing Co. Facebook page. The new tap house is open Thursday through Monday, with indoor and outdoor seating, games and live entertainment. “We’re taking it one step at a time,” said Schaitel. “Our plan is to make good beer and have people come out and enjoy themselves.”



Matt and Angie Schaitel, Alchemy Brewing Company owners.







# LIFE WITH AN ELECTRIC VEHICLE



Cole Cary and Bob Leis stand beside their courtesy electric vehicles as they charge outside the Vernon Electric Cooperative headquarters in Westby.

## Two Vernon Electric Employees' Perspectives

**T**wo Vernon Electric Cooperative employees recently found themselves forced out of their usual vehicles and into the driver's seat of electric vehicles (EVs). Bob Leis, warehouse clerk, and Cole Cary, staker, each took their personal vehicles into Sleepy Hollow's auto body shop for maintenance work, and they were each offered a courtesy vehicle to drive in the meantime. The only catch: Both courtesy cars were electric vehicles.

At first mention of a Chevy Bolt EV, Bob was hesitant to accept the courtesy vehicle as he worried where to charge the electricity-run car. While gas stations are around nearly every turn, Bob worried electric charging stations would be few and far between. Cole, on the other hand, didn't hesitate to accept a Chevy Bolt EUV as he knew of charging locations accessible to him. During Bob's one-month and Cole's three-week EV driving experience, they each found aspects they enjoyed and others that were challenging.

Bob and Cole each grinned when sharing their favorite feature of driving an EV: acceleration with no transition shift. This provided a smooth ride and allowed for easy passing when needed. Plus, the quiet engine was a bonus for both men. For Bob, the compact vehicle size and shorter turning radius were also positive features—especially compared to his

usual truck. While many vehicles on the roads today provide air-conditioned seating and advanced camera technology, these elements were other features of the EVs both Bob and Cole appreciated.

On the flip side, the two faced some challenges with the EVs. Bob said he had a bit of range-anxiety and worried when and where he would need to charge his Bolt. He wasn't sure of many charging locations and wasn't certain how long the EV battery would last, so that added to the concerns. Over time, he became more comfortable, but he wonders what the future of battery life and battery retirement may look like. Furthermore, he worries electrical issues can be hard to diagnose in vehicles, so maintenance work may take even more time for EVs.

Cole tried to utilize the Level 1, 120-volt (standard plug) charger the EUV is supplied with, but that method for charging can take 1-2 days if the battery is low. For his family's busy life, "the Level 1 charger took way too long," according to

Bob and Cole each grinned when sharing their favorite feature of driving an EV: acceleration with no transition shift.

Cole. He felt a Level 2, 240-volt charger would be necessary for him to consider regular use of an EV. Lucky for Cole, he has the skills and knowledge to install his own Level 2 charger should his family decide to purchase their own EV.

“We’re not currently looking, but if I was in the market for a new vehicle, I



Cole Cary next to his courtesy Chevy Bolt EUV.

would definitely consider an EV,” Cole said.

While Cole may consider one in the future, Bob says more research needs to be done and reviews shared with him to feel confident in driving an all-electric vehicle of his own. “I have mixed feelings because working for Vernon Electric, I would like to help promote the use of EVs, but I still have some concerns and hesitations,” Bob said. Of largest concerns, Bob mentioned the power grid’s ability to handle extra loads from EVs during peak times, the lack of charging capabilities from the standard Level 1 charger, and the longevity of EVs in Wisconsin weather.

In the heat of summer, Cole made two trips from Westby to Madison and back in his EV. For the first trip, he wondered if he would be able to make the 220-mile round-trip adventure without needing to stop for a charge. His Bolt EUV displayed a 240-mile charge when he first departed, and he returned with 55 miles of charge. If you run the numbers, that may not seem possible. It



Bob Leis next to his courtesy Chevy Bolt EV.

turns out the hills allowed Cole to coast down and regain power—about 35 miles worth.

Considering the various elements, Bob and Cole enjoyed their short-term experiences driving courtesy EVs provided by Sleepy Hollow Auto. They both feel EVs are ideal for in-town driving or traveling short distances. Electric vehicles are more efficient compared to gasoline-fueled vehicles when driving at lower speeds and shorter distances thanks to the battery’s ability to regenerate when using the breaks.

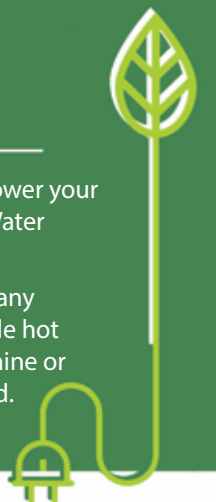
Cole said the EV was perfect for his 16-year-old daughter to drive a short distance to her summer job. Plus “she was always smiling driving it,” Cole said of his daughter. She wasn’t the only one who seemed to enjoy the ride. Despite Bob’s initial hesitation to drive an EV, he was happy with the acceleration and ease of driving. “I didn’t mind it; I actually enjoyed driving the darn thing!” Bob said with a grin.

## Energy Efficiency Tip of the Month

Our faucets and appliances use a lot of hot water. You can lower your water heating costs by using less hot water in your home. Water heating accounts for a large portion of home energy bills.

To save energy (and money!) used for water heating, repair any leaky faucets, install low-flow fixtures, and insulate accessible hot water lines. When it’s time to purchase a new washing machine or dishwasher, look for models that are ENERGY STAR®-certified.

Source: Dept. of Energy



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