



ANNOUNCING BLUFF PRAIRIE COMMUNITY SOLAR

by Craig Buros, CEO & General Manager



Vernon Electric installed the first community solar array in Wisconsin in 2014 at the headquarters facility in Westby. At that time, it was one of the largest solar arrays in the state. The 305 KW community solar project was built simultaneously with a 520 KW array nearby. The 1,000 panels in the community solar project sold out in two weeks with a waiting list of members eager to take part.



Since 2014, Vernon Electric’s service area saw the construction of two more arrays at 1 MW each located near Liberty Pole and south of Hillsboro in Vernon County. The Liberty Pole array included 300 KW more of community solar shared amongst all members of the cooperative.

We are happy to announce the addition of the 1.5 MW Bluff Prairie Solar Array which will become the fifth utility-scale solar project in Vernon Electric’s service area. The array will be constructed in the Town of Wheatland, just east of Red Mound in Vernon County. The 9-acre site will have 3,276 panels that operate on a tracking system to follow the path of the sun for maximum power generation.

Vernon Electric’s Bluff Prairie Solar project is one of 12 utility-scale solar arrays being constructed across the state. It developed out of a partnership with nine Wisconsin electric cooperatives and OneEnergy Renewables out of Madison, which will be constructing the arrays. Construction is set to begin in each co-op community in 2023 through 2024. If all goes well, the Bluff Prairie solar array should be operational by January 1, 2024.

We are coordinating the timing of our local solar project with other cooperatives to get a better price and return on our investment for our members. Cooperation among cooperatives is our guiding principle for this project. Wisconsin electric cooperatives are known for our work together to benefit members; for example, you often see co-ops assisting each

other with storm recovery. This solar partnership will benefit our local membership by providing clean power at a long-term, stable cost.

Bluff Prairie Solar adds more clean energy to the grid as Vernon Electric supports a balanced transition to a lower carbon future. We’re gradually investing in local solar and working toward providing members with opportunities to participate in renewable energy projects. Community solar has the advantage of allowing members who don’t own their property, or have too much shading on their property, to have access to solar energy. It also lowers upfront costs and gives peace of mind knowing maintenance issues will be taken care of. You can look for more information on this community solar offering as the project continues to come together over the next few months.

Restoring Native Prairie and Pollinator Habitat

Co-op solar arrays are dual-purpose spaces that provide renewable energy for members, as well as acres of important ecosystems. The ground under all 12 arrays will be restored with pasture and prairie grasses and wildflowers, providing habitat for pollinators and healthy root systems to prevent soil erosion from wind and rain. One of the sites will even be grazed by sheep in partnership with a local farmer.



OneEnergy Renewables Brings Experience and Expertise

OneEnergy Renewables is a leading solar energy company in Wisconsin that offers expertise in site development, engineering, equipment purchasing, construction, and operations. The Madison-based team has developed 15 projects across Wisconsin, and another 11 in adjacent states.

Eric Udelhofen, OneEnergy’s VP of Development, said, “We are excited to partner with electric cooperatives to help bring affordable, clean energy to rural Wisconsin. We look forward to delivering cost-effective, reliable electricity for your local communities.”

HEAVY-DUTY ARTIST

By Leah Call

Artist Mike Koppa creates his art in a small shed he dubbed Der Klubhaus off Hwy 56 in the Town of Liberty, between Viroqua and Viola. It is there this Vernon Electric Cooperative member expresses his creativity on a 1965 printing press with handset metal type.

“I can’t explain exactly why, but ever since I was introduced to it in 1990, I have loved the experience of setting type by hand, the same way so many books were produced 100 years ago,” noted Koppa. “I like the slow pace of it. I like having an organized shop of little tools or weapons, or whatever you want to call letters that make words that make sentences and put thoughts in people’s heads.”

Koppa wields those weapons artfully to create limited edition books and prints sold under his letterpress business name, The Heavy Duty Press. Letterpress printing involves setting the letters one by one, locking them into the bed of the press, inking them, and pressing them onto paper, one print at a time. “It’s a long process, but it’s fun to do, and the results are tactile. You can see the impression of the letters in the paper,” said Koppa, who stresses that his press is strictly for his own artistic expression, not for hire.

Prints made using this time-consuming intricate process have a handcrafted charm not found in other printed materials. Letterpress books are made for a collecting audience and are found in university and institutional libraries. Koppa’s creations appear in collections at UW-La Crosse, UW-Madison, UW-Milwaukee, and other libraries in California, Florida, and Missouri. His works rise to the level of fine art and are the expression of a creative spirit.

“I have to create things, and I’m very grateful that I have the equipment necessary to make beautiful things that, hopefully, are not going to end up in the landfill or the recycle bin,” said Koppa. “I hope they will have a positive influence on the world, even if in just the tiniest measure.”



An Artist's Life

After earning an art degree from UW-Madison in 1991, Koppa worked as a typesetter and managed his parent’s grocery store in Milwaukee. Even while working in a food store, Koppa’s creativity could not be shelved. He merged his passion for book art and collage art, publishing 20 issues of a grocery fanzine. “It was entirely hand drawn, like a comic book, with clippings and photographs from old magazines,” he recalled. “It was then that I started to combine two or three images together to make one.”

In 1995 Koppa acquired his printing press and has dabbled in letterpress arts from that point on. In 2004, he moved with his family from Milwaukee to Viroqua, taking a job as a graphic artist at Organic Valley. For a decade the press was mostly idle. In 2014 Koppa moved it to the shed where it stands today, reviving his passion for the craft. Since then, he has created numerous posters, books, and prints.

Koppa's latest creation, "8t Bags About the Natural World," is a 11x7 centimeter, 28-page book featuring nature-related quotations inspired by tea bags he read while drinking tea. This tiny book is a sweet art piece that carries a heavy message of how nature unifies us as humans no matter where we are in the world. "It also calls attention to the fact that we are in the process of destroying it," said Koppa. "I put the word 'bag' in there 80 times in all 80 fonts I have in my collection to represent 8 trillion plastic bags floating around in the natural world."

Using The Heavy Duty Press to spread positive social awareness is important to Koppa. "Even though I'm only printing 40 copies or 80 copies, there is a lot of heart and emotion in what I create. I want to do something good for the world."

8t Bags is sold on Etsy and debuted at the Oxford Fine Press Book Fair in Oxford, England, in March 2022.

In addition to letterpress work, Koppa creates collage art from old books and magazines. His basement collage studio consists of a 4 ft. by 8 ft. table, shelves with books and stacks of *National Geographic* magazines, and all the necessary equipment: X-acto knives, a cutting mat, adhesives, a framing vice, and a vertical cutter he purchased 30 years ago from a framing shop in Madison.

When beginning a collage piece, Koppa turns on some music and browses old books for images that speak to him. "It's about finding the images you want to use, and then about putting them all in just the right place within the composition," he explained. "It's like making a painting, but you don't have to do the painting, and you don't get to decide what to paint. You have to make use of what is already there. It's a metaphor for life, maybe...making the most of what you have instead of always wanting something new."

Koppa's creations are available to view and purchase at the Public Market and The Nobel Rind in Viroqua, Etsy, and on his websites, heavydutypress.com and misterkoppa.com. The Heavy Duty Press in Liberty is a stop on the upcoming Winding Roads Art Tour, June 3-4, from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Koppa invites visitors to stop by to see the press and how his books are made. Some prints and collage pieces will be available for purchase during the art tour.



Mike Koppa at work on his 1965 printing press in his home studio, where he creates handset books and prints as well as collage art.

Plant Trees Safely

Before you dig, call 811 to locate buried utility lines.

LOW TREE ZONE

Avoid planting within 20 ft. of power lines. If planting is unavoidable, only plant shrubs and small trees that reach a mature height of 15 ft. or less.

MEDIUM TREE ZONE

Plant medium trees (under 40 ft. when mature) at least 25 ft. away from power lines.

LARGE TREE ZONE

Plant large trees (over 40 ft. when mature) at least 50 ft. away from power lines.

Over 40 ft.

40 ft. high or less

Maximum tree height 15 ft.

Keep shrubs at least 10 ft. away from transformer doors and 4 ft. away from the sides.

4 ft.

10 ft.

0

10 ft.

20 ft.

30 ft.

40 ft.

50 ft.

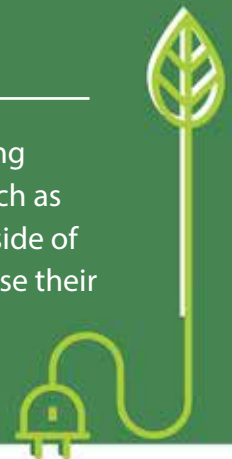
60 ft.

70 ft.

Energy Efficiency Tip of the Month

This planting season, include energy efficiency in your landscaping plans. Adding shade trees around your home can reduce surrounding air temperatures as much as 6 degrees. To block heat from the sun, plant deciduous trees around the south side of your home. Deciduous trees provide excellent shade during the summer and lose their leaves in the fall and winter months, allowing sunlight to warm your home.

Source: energy.gov



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