

Since 1940

WISCONSIN ENERGY *Cooperative* November 2024 NEWS



A YARN ABOUT SIEVERS
RENOWNED FIBER ARTS SCHOOL
KNITS PEOPLE TOGETHER

UNIMAGINABLE

SMART HOME TECH
ON A BUDGET

KIDS AND CRITTERS





SUSTAINABILITY & THE ENERGY TRANSITION



by Craig Buros, CEO & General Manager

You may often hear that Vernon Electric is focused on providing safe, reliable, affordable, and sustainable power. As the world continues to pivot toward renewable energy solutions, Vernon Electric Cooperative's Bluff Prairie Community Solar project stands as a shining example of local leadership in sustainability. What does it mean to be sustainable?

For power suppliers, this means ensuring we are keeping our promises to you, our members—the promises that power our needs and wants 24/7/365. Safety, reliability, and the clean energy transition are key elements of sustainability. These three elements must work in tandem to successfully meet low-carbon goals while ensuring a reliable and affordable supply of electricity.

Recently, our wholesale power provider, Dairyland Power Cooperative, was awarded a \$579 million New Empowering Rural America (New ERA) grant to accelerate the clean

energy transition. The funds will develop 1,020 megawatts (MW) of solar and wind energy projects in the Upper Midwest region. New ERA funding will accelerate Dairyland's carbon profile goals, resulting in 3.3 million metric tons of carbon reduction for over a 70% decrease in carbon emissions. Dairyland has already retired 579 MW of coal generation since 2014.

In addition to its massive investments in renewable energy, Dairyland is actively exploring carbon-free power supply technologies, including small modular reactor nuclear plants and pumped storage hydropower. An all-of-the-above approach is essential for sustainability.

Bluff Prairie Community Solar was launched with the intention of making solar energy accessible to all members. By subscribing to the community solar array, members can "buy in" to local clean energy production and receive credit on their electric bill for the energy produced by the solar array.

The program allows members to subscribe to solar power without having



to install panels on their own homes and businesses. Each subscription translates into credits on the member's electric bill, based on their portion

One of Bluff Prairie's ongoing successes is the way in which it makes clean energy accessible.

of the solar array's energy output. This unique model has not only democratized access to renewable energy but has also been financially beneficial for members, helping to reduce their energy costs while contributing to a cleaner environment.

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makes clean energy accessible. Whether a member rents or owns their home, they can participate in solar energy production through the subscription model. The Bluff Prairie “annual” subscription model has been very popular with the members as it significantly reduces the upfront cost to participate in the benefits of local community solar. This system's flexibility ensures that everyone who wants to make a positive impact on the environment has the opportunity to do so.

Each subscription represents a commitment to both environmental stewardship and the future of sustainable energy. Members who subscribe will

continue to receive the benefits of clean energy production, including credits on their electric bills based on the solar farm's output.

The project has provided a pathway for the community to participate in renewable energy. As we prepare for 2025, we are excited to share that members have the opportunity to subscribe or renew their subscriptions to the Bluff Prairie Community Solar array. The \$50 annual panel subscription remains one of the most affordable ways for individuals to support clean energy in their community. We encourage all members to take advantage of this opportunity to support solar energy at an affordable price.

Interested in Subscribing?

If you or someone you know is interested in subscribing to the Bluff Prairie Community Solar array, please reach out to our office to inquire about your eligibility. If you are a current subscriber, keep an eye out for your renewal letter and join us in making 2025 another year of progress toward a cleaner, more sustainable energy future. Together, we can continue to demonstrate the power of collective community action through projects like Bluff Prairie Community Solar. This project has been a success because of the commitment of our community, and we encourage members to join in this opportunity to support renewable energy.

Members are encouraged to sign up early as there are a limited number of panel subscriptions available.



WELLNESS AT 170 DEGREES

By Leah Call

For Joel Turino, founder of Soulful Saunas, Wellness at 170 Degrees is more than just a tagline— it’s a way of life. Since 2020, this Vernon Electric Cooperative member has been honoring his Finnish heritage by constructing indoor and outdoor saunas that cater to customers’ individual needs. With each hand-crafted sauna, Turino carries on the sauna culture of his Finnish ancestors while happily promoting the health benefits associated with this age-old custom. “Once you get into a sauna routine, the benefits are numerous: blood pressure reduction, reduced anxiety, better skin, better sleep,” noted Turino.

Family Tradition

The first lesson in sauna culture is the correct pronunciation of “sauna.” Turin notes that in Finnish, the first syllable is pronounced “Sow,” like a female pig; so it’s “SOW-na rather than the American pronunciation SAW-na. Saunas actually originated in Finland centuries ago. Turino enjoys sharing the history of Finnish sauna culture and the claim that in Finland “There are more saunas than cars.”

Raised in northern Michigan, Turino has fond memories of family sauna nights. His grandfather and father both built saunas for their own use and for other people. “In the early 1960s, my father built a little cabin near the lake so we could sauna and then jump in the lake,” he recalled. “In the Upper Peninsula, when you have a sauna, you either jump in the lake or roll in the snow.”

After four decades as an industrial engineer, Turino ultimately turned his appreciation for saunas into a business.



Experiencing steady business growth over the past four years, Turino has built 25 saunas so far this year – his biggest year yet.

Made to Order

Each one-of-a-kind sauna Turino builds is uniquely crafted to customer specifications. He constructs indoor and outdoor saunas, with options for wood-fired, electric or gas heating. Turino first consults with customers to understand their vision. He then drafts a series of sketches and diagrams before building the sauna either on-site or in his workshop east of Viroqua. Those built there are then hauled to the customer’s location.





Turino has built saunas in the Twin Cities, Northern MN, the UP, Door County, Lake Geneva, Chicago, and Vernon County. He uses conventional building materials for indoor saunas, while outdoor saunas are often made of logs or pine and include a changing room. The interior of both indoor and outdoor saunas is lined with a non-conifer-type wood such as cedar, to prevent pitch from oozing at high temperatures.

Saunas are heated to temperatures of up to 200 degrees. Once heated to desired temperature, water is poured over hot rocks to create steam – what Finnish people call the löyly. In Finnish sauna culture, the löyly is thought to be essential to creating a peaceful, relaxed experience contributing to a bounty of health benefits.

The ideal sauna temperature is as unique as the individual using it. “Everyone has their own happy place with the heat,” said Turino. “I like 180 degrees. I’ve been in the sauna all my life. For me, if it is hotter than that, I don’t sweat as much. At 170 to 180 degrees, I sweat profusely – and you

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want that to happen.”

Turino takes pride not only in his craftsmanship, but also in the health benefits his saunas provide. “I tell people not to fear the heat. It has unbelievable health benefits, especially for older folks. If you go into the sauna three days a week, you’ll notice a difference in your joints, in your attitude, and in your sleep.”

For those curious about trying a sauna before committing to a purchase, Soulful Saunas offers rental options within 20-miles of Viroqua. He also has a sauna on display at the Viroqua Farmer’s Market throughout the summer. To learn more about rentals, custom-built saunas and the health benefits, visit soulfulsaunas.net.

ENERGY EFFICIENCY TIP OF THE MONTH

If you’re heading out of town during the holiday season, remember to set your home to vacation mode. You can save energy while you’re away by lowering your thermostat a few degrees or creating an “away” schedule with a smart or programmable thermostat. Newer water heaters include a vacation mode setting to help you save on water heating costs, or you can simply lower the temperature manually.

Small actions can also stack up to energy savings. Unplug devices that consume energy when they’re not in use, including phone chargers, toothbrush chargers, TVs and gaming consoles.



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