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# WISCONSIN ENERGY *Cooperative* NEWS

May 2025



**FORAGE FOR FUN AT THE  
MUSCODA MOREL  
MUSHROOM FESTIVAL**

**COOPERATIVE FAMILY FUND**

**TIPS TO BEAT THE ENERGY PEAK**

**BEEF RECIPES**







# DAIRYLAND DIRECTOR REPORT: A 2024 REVIEW



by Dan Korn, Director Representative to the Dairyland Board

Just as directors are elected from our membership to govern Vernon Electric, the same applies to Dairyland’s Board of Directors. I’ve had the privilege of being a director of Vernon Electric for 22 years and have been proud to serve as your representative on the Dairyland Board for 21 years. I currently serve as Treasurer of the Board.

Dairyland Power Cooperative is the generation and transmission (G&T) cooperative that provides the power required by Vernon Electric Cooperative members 24/7/365. Dairyland was created in 1941 to be the wholesale power provider to its member electric cooperatives. Today, Dairyland continues to deliver power to 24 member electric cooperatives, including Vernon Electric and 27 municipal utilities throughout Illinois, Iowa, Minnesota and Wisconsin.

Dairyland is committed to providing safe, reliable and cost-effective energy services to its members. It all starts with safety, which is Dairyland’s top priority. Proper maintenance of the generation

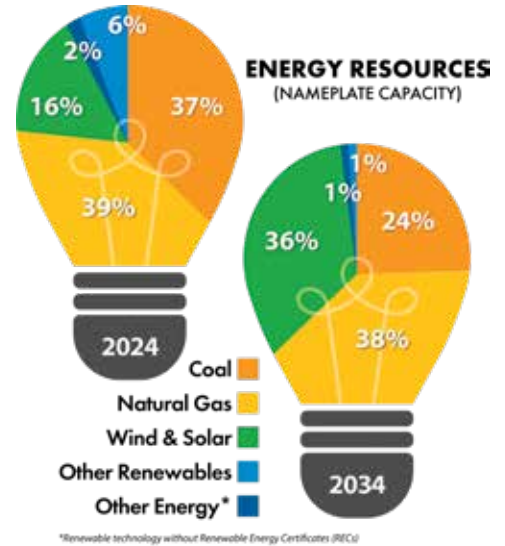
and transmission facilities is crucial for public safety and the way the work is performed ensures employees safely go home to their families at the end of the day. Employees are the center of the safety initiatives at Dairyland. I commend them for the work they do.

## A New ERA

Dairyland’s decarbonization goal includes diversifying the sources used to generate electricity. Last year was a banner year as Dairyland was awarded more than \$600 million in grants through programs created by the Inflation Reduction Act and the bipartisan Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act. The grant projects will help reduce Dairyland’s carbon footprint and add resiliency to the grid through more than 1,000 MW of renewable energy projects and battery storage, as well as upgrades and rebuilds to existing transmission infrastructure.

Dairyland works with elected officials, regardless of party affiliation, to advocate for policies benefiting electric cooperatives. With a new federal administration, Dairyland, our statewide association and the NRECA (National Rural Electric Cooperative Assoc.) are monitoring developments and advocating for co-op priorities that support growth and development in the rural communities we serve.

As part of its overall sustainable power supply plan, Dairyland



continues to explore small modular nuclear reactors and other generation technologies that will balance their generation portfolio and provide the energy and capacity needs of its members for years to come. Nuclear or other baseload resources are vital to support economic growth and the integration of wind and solar.

## No Transition Without Transmission

Vernon Electric and Dairyland are part of the Midcontinent Independent System Operator (MISO), which is the air traffic controller for reliable and cost-effective electricity in a 15-state region plus the province of Manitoba, Canada.

One critical aspect of reliably powering the lives of more than 40 million people in the MISO footprint is construction and maintenance of power generation facilities; the other is efficiently delivering electricity to where it is needed. In September 2024, the 102-mile, 345 kilovolt (kV) Cardinal-Hickory Creek transmission line was energized between Dubuque, Iowa, and



Middleton, Wis. By the time Cardinal-Hickory Creek was placed in service, 160 renewable generation projects totaling 24.5 gigawatts were dependent upon the line.

Dairyland passes along the financial benefits from its investments to its member cooperatives in the form of stable rates that are among the lowest in the region. Dairyland holds credit ratings of “A3” with a stable outlook from Moody’s Investors Service and A+ with a stable outlook from Standard and Poor’s (S&P).

Throughout 2024, a Wholesale Rate Study Task Force met to evaluate the wholesale rate structure. While there are some minor changes that factor into how wholesale rates to the cooperative are calculated, Vernon Electric members will continue to see stable wholesale power rates from Dairyland through 2025.

## Community

In October, our cooperative joined Dairyland in donating \$1,000 to the Friends of Snowflake Ski Jump through Dairyland’s Cooperative Contributions program. The funds will help provide summer training opportunities for our local youth skiers. This organization is an asset to our community’s vibrancy, and we are proud to continue to support its efforts.

On Oct. 2, about 200 volunteers from Dairyland and 10 electric cooperatives converged on six community service project sites to make a difference in our local communities. I’m proud to share that Vernon Electric employees participated at the Kickapoo Valley Reserve near La Farge to work on



Cardinal-Hickory Creek Transmission Line

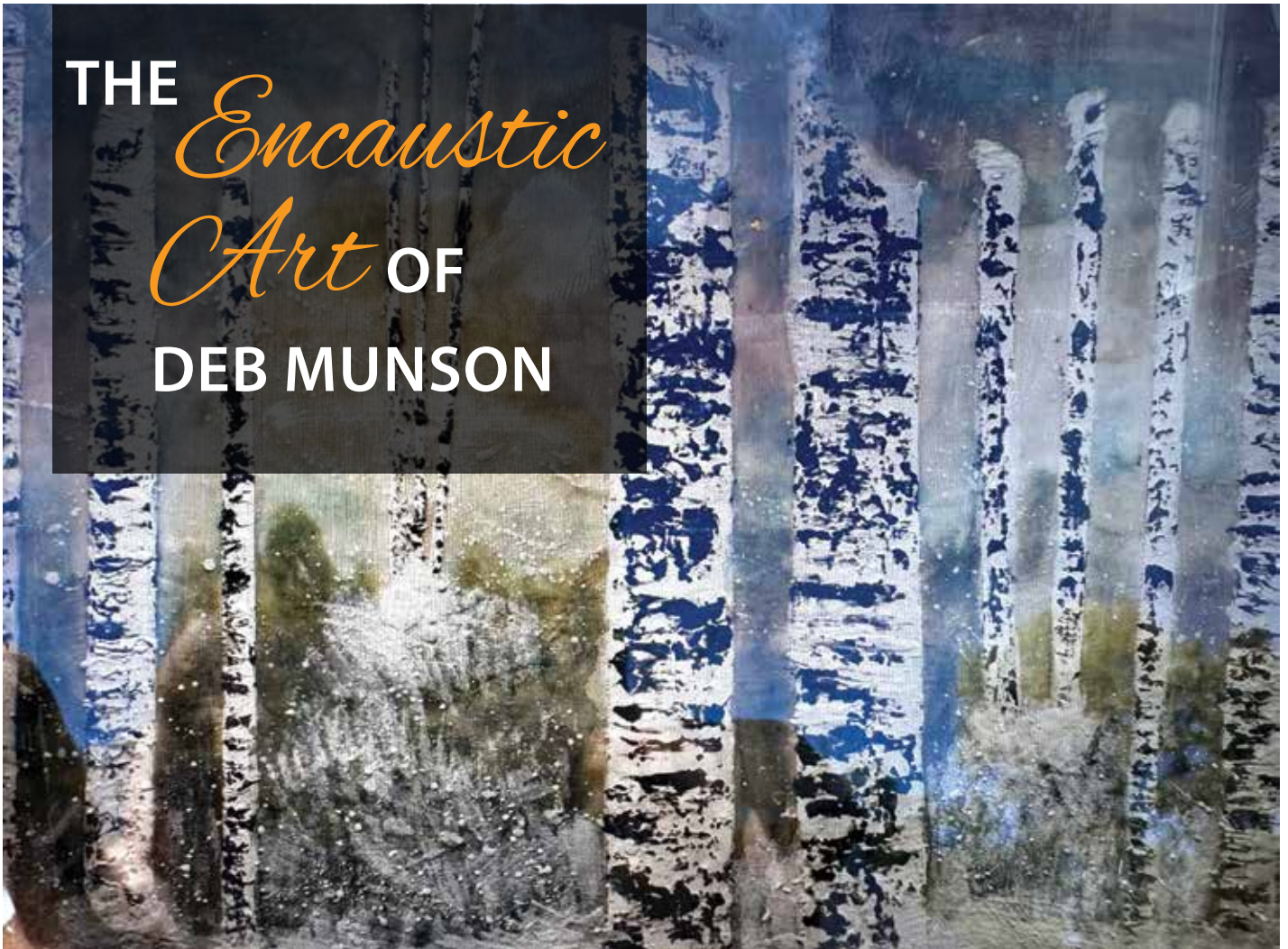
trail maintenance, cleaning the Kickapoo River, and helping with invasive plant removal. It is a very visible demonstration of two of our Cooperative Principles, Cooperation Among Cooperatives and Concern for the Community.

The future is exciting, and I am honored to represent the members of Vernon Electric on Dairyland’s Board of Directors. The cooperative business model is unique, and it positions all of us to make decisions in the best interests of our members and communities. Thank you for your membership!



Vernon Electric and Dairyland Power Cooperative employees volunteered at the Kickapoo Valley Reserve and pitched in on trail maintenance, river clean-up, and invasive species removal.





# THE *Encaustic* Art OF DEB MUNSON

By Leah Call

Vernon Electric Cooperative member Deb Munson always felt a creative spark within her—waiting for the right moment to ignite. After raising children and building a successful career in real estate, that moment arrived when a relative introduced her to encaustic painting. “I fell in love with it. It stole my heart,” Munson said. “It is a very meditative process.”

Derived from a Greek term meaning “to heat or burn.” Encaustic painting is an ancient technique using beeswax and dammar resin, which is crystalized tree sap. Pigments and oils are mixed with the wax, and heat is applied to build layers creating richly textured works of art. Munson’s journey into encaustic painting began at a time when her husband faced

a debilitating illness that limited his activity. Seeking a creative outlet, she transformed a chicken coop on her property into a humble studio. What started there as a small-scale exploration blossomed into a full-fledged artistic pursuit.

## From Coop to Gallery Walls

The encaustic paintings Munson created in that rustic studio on Highway 162, between Chaseburg and Stoddard, soon caught the attention of art connoisseurs, including Floyd Storey, owner of Central Park Gallery in Coon Valley. “That was about 12 years ago,” recalled Munson. “I showed my work to Floyd, and he told me I needed to be in a gallery.”

Central Park Gallery was the first



Deb Munson

to display Munson’s art. Storey’s encouragement lit a fire that transformed her hobby into a passionate vocation. As recognition for her work grew, so did the size of her pieces, which typically span 4x6 feet.



Munson's artistic process is meticulous and time-intensive. A single piece can take between 45 to 60 hours to complete. The process begins with laying down at least five base layers of wax. "Just doing the base layer can take me all day," she noted. "You have to heat the panel first, because you want your first layer to soak in to the pores of the wood. Then you do more layers and keep

burning every layer."

Starting with a white wax base, Munson adds color and texture with paint, alcohol ink, or oils. Wielding a torch as her paintbrush, she shapes the wax into an image. Layers are built up, carved away, and reworked. "It is a very layered process. I have to torch everything I put on; I have to burn it and seal it to bond."

expanded into a renovated tobacco shed—a larger space, better suited for her expansive creations. She hopes to one day offer encaustic painting classes in that studio for both children and adults, sharing her passion and encouraging others to explore their creativity.

For Munson, encaustic painting is more than a craft—it's a way to connect with others. "People need to understand that as artists, we are not doing this to make money," she said. "We do this because we love our craft—and we want people to take it home and find joy in what we create."

Munson's work is featured in a solo exhibit at the Weber Center from April through June. Additionally, her creations are on display at River City Gallery and 1802 Gallery in La Crosse. She is also a participating artist in the upcoming Artspire, June 14, and the 2025 Winding Road Art Tour, June 7-8.



### Inspired by Nature

Many of Munson's creations reflect the inspiration she gets from the natural world around her. Living on a farm in one of Wisconsin's most picturesque regions, she often finds herself drawn to trees. She's even incorporated actual bark into her pieces.

In the process of retiring from real estate, Munson is able to devote herself more fully to her art. While she occasionally still works in the original coop studio, she has

Inspired by the natural beauty surrounding her Wisconsin farm, Munson often turns to trees for creative inspiration—sometimes even incorporating real bark into her artwork.



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