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WISCONSIN ENERGY *Cooperative* February 2025 NEWS

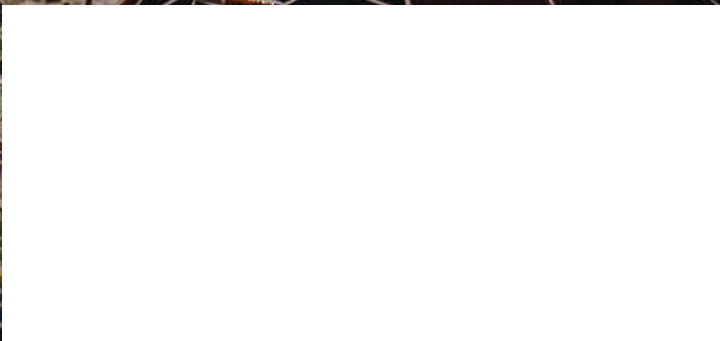
VERNON
Electric
COOPERATIVE
WESTBY, WISCONSIN
Your Touchstone Energy® Cooperative

MILTON HOUSE MUSEUM
BRINGS UNDERGROUND
RAILROAD TO LIFE

POSTCARD CALL TO ACTION INSIDE

BILLION DOLLAR BILL

ANNUAL MEETING INFORMATION INSIDE





89 YEARS OF PROGRESS: CELEBRATING VERNON ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE'S ANNUAL MEETING

by Craig Buros, CEO & General Manager



As Vernon Electric Cooperative (VEC) prepares to host its 89th Annual Meeting, we reflect on a remarkable year filled with achievements that underscore our commitment to innovation, sustainability, and community. Few organizations can boast an 89-year history, and even fewer can claim the legacy of member-driven success that defines VEC.

The story of electric cooperatives began in 1935, when local farmers, empowered by President Franklin D. Roosevelt's Rural Electrification Administration, worked together to bring electricity to rural communities. Their vision created an electric cooperative that prioritizes its members and continues to thrive nearly nine decades later.

A Historic Moment: Hosting President Biden

One of the defining highlights of 2024 was hosting President Joe Biden at our headquarters to announce a significant milestone for the cooperative and our region. As part of the Inflation Reduction Act's New ERA program, Dairyland Power Cooperative, Vernon Electric's wholesale

power provider, received a \$579 million grant to help facilitate new clean energy investments in rural communities.

This investment will support 1,020 megawatts (MW) of power purchase agreements for solar and wind energy installations in Iowa, Illinois, Minnesota, North Dakota, and Wisconsin. Projects include 593 MW of wind, 427 MW of solar, and 60 MW of energy storage. President Biden's visit underscored the national significance of this grant and the pivotal role cooperatives like VEC play in advancing clean energy initiatives.



Continued on following page

OFFICIAL NOTICE OF ANNUAL MEETING

VERNON ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE ANNUAL MEETING

Thursday, February 27, 5:30 p.m.

Vernon Electric Cooperative Headquarters
110 Saugstad Rd., Westby, WI 54667

Registration: 4:00 p.m. – 5:30 p.m.
Spaghetti Dinner: 4:00 p.m. – 5:30 p.m.
Business Meeting: 5:30 p.m.

Door Prizes Include:

- Milwaukee battery-operated chainsaw
- \$50 gift card to Von Ruden Meat Processing
- \$50 gift card to Steve's Country Meats
- Five \$25 bill credits



Members will receive an attendance gift following the meeting.

The visit also marked the first time in history that a sitting president of the United States made an official visit to an electric co-op headquarters.

Our **Bluff Prairie Community Solar Array** celebrated its first full year of operation, delivering renewable energy to members while breaking new ground in accessibility. Members were provided the opportunity to subscribe to the output of the array, and through a partnership with the Wisconsin Office of Energy Innovation and Couleecap, income-eligible households benefited from bill credits tied to the array's output, making affordable clean energy available to those who need it most. In total, the array produced more than 2.7 million kilowatt-hours of local renewable energy.

We also advanced our efforts to support electric vehicle (EV) adoption. Our EV pilot program incentivized members to charge their vehicles during off-peak hours, reducing strain on the grid and helping to stabilize rates for all members.

Join us for the 89th Annual Meeting

The Annual Meeting is not just a requirement of our bylaws—it's a cornerstone of cooperative governance and a celebration of community. This year, we invite you to join us at our headquarters facility on **Thursday, February 27, 2025, at 4:00 p.m. for a spaghetti dinner with the business meeting beginning at 5:30 p.m.**

Last year's transition to an evening meeting was met with

enthusiasm, providing a convenient opportunity for members to engage without sacrificing their weekend plans. We're excited to continue this tradition and look forward to an informative and engaging event.

Members will hear updates on VEC's financial health, strategic goals, and ongoing projects. Election results for board director positions in **Divisions 3, 6, 9, and 10** will also be announced. Ballots will be sent to members in the Divisions up for election—be sure to review the candidates' biographies, cast your vote, and sign the envelope when submitting your ballot.



Building for the Future

As we look ahead, Vernon Electric Cooperative remains committed to meeting the evolving needs of our members. From clean energy initiatives to innovative efficiency programs like HOME & HEAR through Focus on Energy. Mark your calendars and join us for an evening of reflection, celebration, and collaboration. Together, we'll honor the legacy of Vernon Electric Cooperative and shape a brighter future.

We look forward to seeing you on February 27!

REBATES AVAILABLE FOR ENERGY-EFFICIENCY HOME UPGRADES



Members wanting to save energy and money in the new year should review Vernon Electric Cooperative's new 2025 incentive forms. Vernon Electric annually publishes a list of energy-efficient items 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 online at www.vernonelectric.org/rebates or by contacting our office.

Eligibility criteria for each category are listed on the forms. Incentives begin at \$0.50 and may be greater than \$800 for specific items. To receive an incentive, a 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 at a member's location served by Vernon Electric Cooperative 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 Federal tax credits. When considering or implementing energy efficiency measures, check with Focus on Energy's website, www.focusonenergy.com, or call them at 800-762-7077. Energy efficiency and conservation tax credits can be found at www.energystar.gov or by contacting your tax professional.



WOOD WITH A STORY



By Leah Call

Furniture can tell stories. The bookshelf your father made before he lost the ability to walk. The grandfather clock passed down for generations. The table crafted from your great aunt's cedar chest. For Vernon Electric Cooperative member JR Manske, the stories lie not just in the furniture but in the wood itself.

A woodworking enthusiast from a young age, Manske was intrigued by stories behind heirloom pieces he encountered over nine years as a carpenter for Poellinger, Inc. As he listened to those stories, he wondered: "What if the tree it was made from was the story?"

"That was my dream—crafting pieces made from wood that has a story," Manske said.

In 2018, he turned that dream into

reality by launching JR Manske Woodworking LLC. From a home-based workshop between Chaseburg and Stoddard, Manske took a leap of faith, leaving a secure job to pursue his passion full-time.

The Power of Growth

Vernon Electric Cooperative played a role in Manske's success by installing three-phase electrical power, enabling him to meet the high-power demand of his equipment. "Once I got that, I could grow another step bigger. It has been baby steps for me, but I'm getting there."

Today, JR Manske Woodworking boasts an impressive workshop, iDRY 2.0 Vacuum Kiln, and a Wood-Mizer LT40 hydraulic portable sawmill. In addition to custom woodworking services, Manske sells Kiln-dried wood

slabs, EcoPoxy finishes and tools as a full-line Festool dealer.

"People want to buy and use the stuff the pros use," noted Manske. "This is a one-stop shop. You can buy the wood, the bases, the finishes and the tools all in one place."

Custom Excellence

Manske specializes in creating custom wood pieces you won't find in big box stores. "I never want to compete with Menards or Home Depot. I want to be the guy who can make the stuff you can't buy."

While he welcomes any challenge, he has found a niche in crafting tables, countertops and bartops. His creations can be found at local venues including the La Crosse Center, Mt. La Crosse, and Bennett O'Riley's in La Crosse.

The bartop at Bennett O’Riley’s is a standout example of Manske’s philosophy and craftsmanship. Made from logs salvaged from deforestation done at La Crosse’s Hixon Forest, the bar isn’t just functional – it is a piece of local history. Manske recalled, “I asked them, ‘do you want a bar out of walnut or do you want a bar with a story?’ They chose the story.”

Manske primarily uses locally sourced, salvaged logs, and he knows the origin of each one. A slab milled from a large tree that fell near Westby five years ago will soon become a conference table for an Onalaska-based construction business. “I typically pick the logs up myself, so I know exactly where every slab came from,” he explained.

Recently he salvaged a large maple tree cut down to make way for Westby’s Main Street improvement project. “They asked if I wanted it. If I didn’t, it would become firewood. So I hauled it here. The tree measures six feet across. I don’t know what I’m going to do with it yet.”

Word Spreads

Whether it’s a call about a downed tree or a request for custom woodworking services, Manske’s phone is buzzing. While the majority of his work is within a three-hour drive, he has worked for customers in Minneapolis, Chicago and beyond. He is currently working on a table that will end up somewhere in Alabama.

A recent grant from Altra Federal Credit Union will help Manske take his business to the next level. With plans to also offer classes soon, he aims to become a destination that inspires and supports woodworkers.

“My dad always said, if you love what you do, it’s not work,” Manske noted. “That’s how I feel. Working 20-hour days is no problem when you are doing something you love.”

Those interested in contracting Manske for a custom project should call to schedule an appointment. Upcoming demonstrations, sales and events are advertised on Manske’s Facebook page and website. Learn more at beneaththebarklumber.com.



Manske’s creation displayed at the La Crosse Center.



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Trevor Clark, Editor

