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KIDS AND CRITTERS





2025 ENERGY RATES STABLE, SLIGHT FACILITY CHARGE ADJUSTMENT

By Craig Buros, CEO & General Manager

Vernon Electric Cooperative is forecasting stable energy rates but will implement a small facility charge increase to ensure the continued reliability and quality of our services. This adjustment is a modest increase of \$1 for residential members, \$2 for three-phase members, and \$5 for large-power members on Peak Alert. While any increase in rates can be a concern, it is essential to understand the factors driving this decision and how it ultimately benefits our cooperative community.

Addressing Inflation and Rising Costs

One of the primary reasons for the facility charge increase is to address the impact of inflation. Over the past few years, the cost of goods and services has steadily risen. This inflation affects various aspects of our operations, from the price of raw materials and equipment (facilities) to maintenance expenses. By adjusting the facility charge, we can ensure that Vernon Electric Cooperative (VEC) remains financially stable and capable of meeting these rising costs without compromising service quality.

Investing in Infrastructure and Technology

To maintain and improve our electrical grid, continuous investment in infrastructure and technology is necessary. Upgrading substations, power lines, and transformers is crucial for preventing outages and ensuring efficient power delivery. Additionally, integrating modern technology, such as smart grid systems, enhances our ability to monitor and manage the grid in real-time, leading to improved reliability and quicker response times during emergencies. The facility charge helps fund these essential upgrades and technological

advancements, ensuring that our members receive the highest quality service possible.

Enhancing Renewable Energy Initiatives

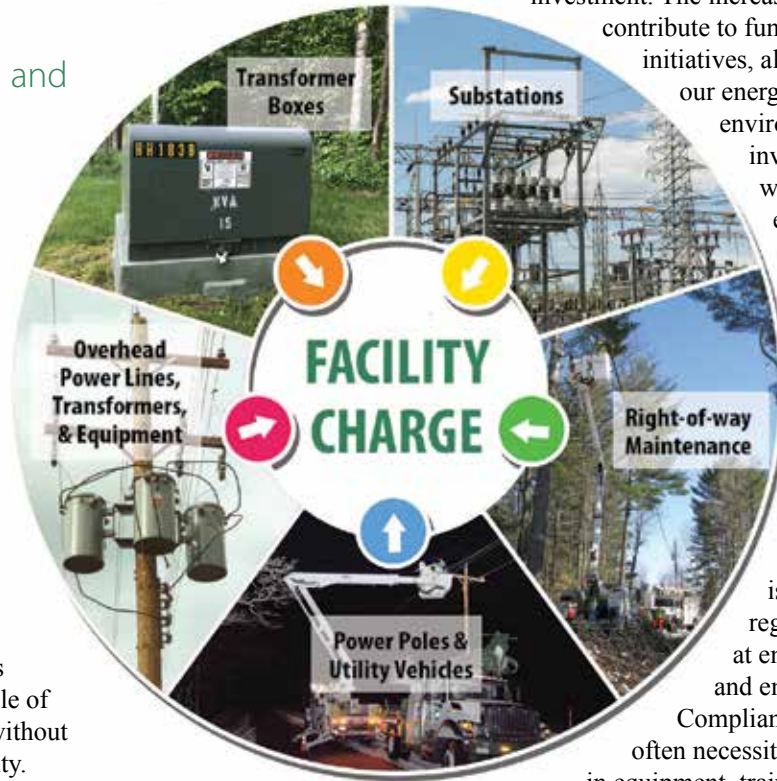
VEC is committed to supporting renewable energy and reducing our carbon footprint. Transitioning to cleaner energy sources, such as wind and solar, requires significant investment. The increased facility charge will contribute to funding these renewable energy initiatives, allowing us to diversify our energy portfolio and promote environmental sustainability. By investing in renewable energy, we not only help protect the environment but also provide our members with more sustainable and potentially cost-effective energy solutions overall.

Meeting Regulatory Requirements

The energy industry is subject to numerous regulatory requirements aimed at ensuring safety, reliability, and environmental protection. Compliance with these regulations often necessitates additional investments in equipment, training, and monitoring systems. The facility charge helps cover compliance costs, ensuring that VEC adheres to all necessary regulations while continuing to provide safe and reliable service to our members.

Supporting Community Programs and Services

As a cooperative, we are deeply committed to supporting our local communities. This includes funding various



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A PASSION FOR *Pottery*

By Leah Call



Photo credit: Hanna Agar

In the quiet of her homestead studio, Maureen Karlstad sits at her electric pottery wheel. She dips her hands in water. As the clay before her spins, she applies gentle pressure. Ripples rise, and her creation takes shape. Watching this skilled potter transform a simple lump of clay into a bowl or mug is mesmerizing. It's magical.

For this Vernon Electric Cooperative member and founder of Pierce Hill Pottery, the love of pottery ignited during adolescence and endured through raising children and working full time as a special education teacher. Since retiring from education ten years ago, Karlstad has immersed herself fully in her art.

In love with the process

For Karlstad, the appeal of pottery begins with the clay itself. "It is such a basic medium, and it has so much potential," she said. After nearly 45 years of working with clay, Karlstad finds joy in both the creativity and the repetition of her craft. "There is something about doing the same thing over and over again that really inspires me," she noted. "Most of the stuff I do quickly, because I've done it for so many years. I like that about it—that I can make something beautiful in a short amount of time."

Her signature mugs are unmistakably hers. While she

makes exquisite plates, bowls and jugs, it is mugs in various stages of the completion that often dominate her studio shelves—and she never tires of making them.

Functional art

Karlstad refers to herself as a craftsperson because of the simplicity and functionality of her pieces. "People buy my mugs because they like to drink coffee out of them," she said. "I make objects that people use. I like the functional aspects of it."

Yet her mugs are far from ordinary. Each one gets her loving attention. After shaping the mugs on the wheel, she allows them to dry slightly before skillfully applying each handle. Once fully dry, the pieces are fired in a kiln, glazed,



and fired again. Some sanding and finishing touches complete the process.

Whether it's mugs, jugs, plates, or bowls, Karlstad's unique style shines through in her distinctive shapes and use of color.

Karlstad is so familiar with the pieces she makes that she can literally create them blindfolded. She knows that for certain, because she tried it. "It came out perfect, because my hands know what to do. The shapes I make are like old friends."

Encouraging creativity in others

Over the years, Karlstad has taught pottery classes and mentored an apprentice, who has blossomed into a skilled potter. Though she no longer teaches classes, she encourages aspiring potters to start with hand-building—shaping clay into pinch pots with only their hands. "Hand-building doesn't require the steep learning curve of the wheel, and you can pick it up and stop at any time," she explained. She also directs people to the La Crosse Clay Center for classes.

There is no doubt that Karlstad's passion for pottery will continue for many years to come. "I think everyone should have something they do artistically that they like—something where every part of the process is fulfilling. That's what pottery is for me."

Karlstad's pottery is available online at piercehill.art and at Viroqua-based Viva Gallery, which she co-founded in 2004. She also markets her pottery at various art fairs, including the Driftless Art Fair and Winding Rivers Art Tour.

Follow her Facebook page and website for details about her upcoming studio sale in late January.



Facility Charge Continued from page 15

programs and services, such as energy efficiency initiatives, educational outreach, and assistance programs for low-income members. VEC will continue offering these valuable programs, benefiting our members and the broader community.

Superior Service at a Reasonable Cost

While the facility charge increase may seem modest, it plays a crucial role in ensuring the continued reliability, sustainability, and quality of our services. By addressing inflation, investing in infrastructure and technology, enhancing renewable energy initiatives, meeting regulatory requirements,

and supporting community programs, Vernon Electric Cooperative can continue to serve our members effectively.

We understand that any increase in rates can be a concern, and we are committed to maintaining transparency and providing the best value for our members. Vernon Electric Cooperative continues to remain in the top quartile of electric cooperatives across the country with low controllable expenses. Rate impacts on our members continue to track far less than the cost of inflation, while maintaining reliable, cost-effective energy services. We appreciate your understanding and support as we work together to build a stronger, more resilient cooperative.

VEC OFFERS SCHOLARSHIP OPPORTUNITIES

**DEADLINE TO APPLY IS
JANUARY 22, 2025**

In 2025, scholarships will be made available to students whose parent(s) or legal guardian(s) are members of Vernon Electric Cooperative. High school seniors selected will each receive a \$750 scholarship for the college or university they decide to attend. Funding for the scholarships comes from unclaimed capital credit checks which are forfeited to the Federated Youth Foundation. This Foundation, in turn, makes this money available for youth scholarships to Vernon Electric Cooperative. **A Non-Traditional and Line Worker scholarship will also be offered.**

Applicants from each of the high schools listed below, **plus one at-large applicant**, will be chosen in a random drawing at the January board meeting from all the completed and verified applications received. Each applicant, or one of the applicant's parents or legal guardians, are welcome, but not required, to be present during the drawing.

Aquinas	Hillsboro	Sparta
Brookwood	Kickapoo	Viroqua
Cashton	La Crosse Central	Westby
Cornerstone Christian Academy	La Farge	Wonewoc
De Soto	Onalaska Luther	Youth Initiative High School
	Royall	

Students who attend the Youth Leadership Conference (YLC) will receive an additional \$250 added to their VEC

scholarship. Students will have the option to enter the WECA's Youth Leadership Conference Essay Contest and win \$1,000 for first place, \$500 for second, or \$250 for third. One student from VEC's service territory could potentially win a total of **\$2,000 worth of scholarship money.**

\$750 Non-Traditional Scholarship

This scholarship is awarded to a member who is returning to school in a two- or four-year program at least three years after graduating from high school.

\$1,000 Line Worker Scholarship

This scholarship is awarded to a high school senior or older and an active member of Vernon Electric Co-op. If the applicant is a high school senior, their parent or legal guardian must be an active member. Enrollment in a full-time power line program is required with a minimum grade point average of 2.0.

Scholarship applications are available online at www.vernonelectric.org/scholarships, by calling our office, or through school counselors. Scan the QR Code at the right to be directed to our scholarships web page for more information or an application.



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