



# HELPING OTHERS AND RENEWABLE ENERGY OPTIONS FOR OUR MEMBERS

by Craig Buross, CEO & General Manager



## Operation Round Up® improves quality of life for our local area

I've always been amazed at all the community service organizations in our area and the amount of good they provide. Not only do we live in a beautiful area, but we are blessed with great citizens who come together in time of need to help each other out. Neighbors helping neighbors and strangers alike. Whether it's putting the pieces together after a natural disaster, implementing a community project, or contributing to a family in need, it's wonderful to see everyone pull together to make it happen.

Operation Round Up is a program started by Vernon Electric Co-op to help needy families and charitable organizations in our area. Through this program you can volunteer to have your electric bill "rounded up" to the nearest dollar and have that extra change donated to the Operation Round Up Trust Fund. For example, if your electric bill was \$190.51, we would round it up to \$191.00 and put 49 cents in the Trust Fund. On average, you would be donating about \$6 per year if you participated. Vernon Electric Co-op has about 10,000 members. By doing the math you can see that if everyone participated, we could do tremendous things and make this an even better place to live than it already is.

A 10-member, volunteer board representing all areas of our service territory administers the Trust Fund. The board meets on a quarterly basis to go through applications and decides who will get money and how much. The board's decision is based on the quality of the application, the applicant's need, and how much money is in the fund.

Money from Operation Round Up can not only be used to help pay medical expenses to needy families, but it can also be used to help buy equipment for volunteer fire departments, playground equipment, construction or repair costs for buildings and homes, youth programs, and much, much more. One of the best reasons to sign up is that all the money stays local. Who knows, you may even be helping yourself. All you need to do to participate in the program is do one of the following:

- Fill out the online form at [VernonElectric.org/operation-round](http://VernonElectric.org/operation-round)
- Sign up online through SmartHub > Billing & Payments > Operation Round Up
- Complete the form below and send it back to Vernon Electric
- Give us a call and ask to enroll in Operation Round Up

Once you've signed up you may opt out of the program at any time.

Some of the past benefactors of Operation Round Up:

- Couleecap's Supportive Housing Program
- National Night Out
- Readstown Library
- Family & Children's Center
- Scenic Bluffs Community Health Center
- Crimestoppers
- Food Pantries
- Emergency Medical Services (EMS)

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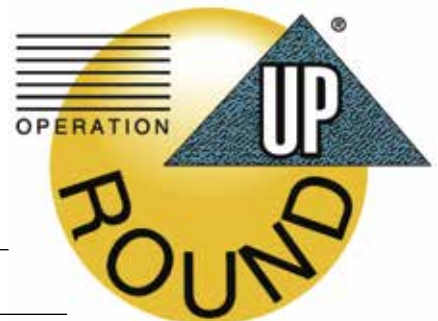
**Yes, I'd like to participate in Operation Round Up®.  
Please round up my electric bill to the next whole dollar.**

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Account Number \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_



# Evergreen program lets you lower your carbon footprint

The reward of the Evergreen Program is a supply of electricity from an energy source that's abundant and completely renewable—wind, hydro, biogas, and solar. In 1998, Vernon Electric Cooperative (VEC), in partnership with other electric co-ops in the region, and Dairyland Power, began the Evergreen program by purchasing energy from a new wind farm in rural Minnesota. Since then more wind and other renewable energy sources have been added to the mix. Your purchase of Evergreen blocks ensures the program's growth. VEC currently has 164 members purchasing over 500 blocks of Evergreen power. There are blocks available and they are being offered to interested VEC members on a first-come-first-serve basis. Although renewable energy sources cost more than traditional forms of energy, there are benefits. These renewable resources have saved and will save fossil fuels from being burned.

Evergreen has made a difference. The choice is yours. You can utilize existing renewable capacity and encourage the development of more renewable energy sources by doing one of the following:

- Signing up online at [vernonelectric.org/evergreen](http://vernonelectric.org/evergreen)
- filling out the commitment form at right and mailing it back to our office
- calling our office and requesting to enroll in Evergreen

Of course, you can choose exactly how much environmentally friendly green power you want. Each 100-kwh block costs \$1 per month more than electricity generated by traditional means (ex. A \$190 electric bill would become \$191 if one block is chosen). But you can feel good that you're helping ensure a cleaner environment. This program has no effect on members' bills for those who choose not to participate. You can get more information by calling our office or visiting our website at [www.vernonelectric.org/evergreen](http://www.vernonelectric.org/evergreen).



## I want to invest in the Evergreen<sup>(SM)</sup> Program.

Please count me in for one \_\_\_ or more \_\_\_ (specify number) 100 kWh blocks per month of electricity from renewable sources. I understand that each block adds \$1.00 to my monthly electric bill to support renewable energy.

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
*(please print)*

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_

State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Account Number \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

## Frequently Asked Questions About Evergreen<sup>(SM)</sup>

### Q. What is Evergreen?

**A.** Evergreen is an opportunity for members to voluntarily contribute to the increased use of renewable energy sources. Private ownership of renewable energy does not work for everyone. A member's property may not support it or the upfront costs and maintenance may be too great. Evergreen is an easy way for any member to do their part to "be green." Participation in Evergreen is separate from any federal or state requirements.

### Q. Where does Evergreen renewable energy come from?

**A.** Each Evergreen block is tracked by our wholesale power provider, Dairyland Power Cooperative. Dairyland's renewable energy comes from regional solar, wind, hydro, and biogas generation resources.

### Q. Aren't power providers required to produce a certain amount of electricity from renewable energy resources?

**A.** Some states require a specific percentage of a utility's energy sales come from renewable energy sources. Dairyland is exceeding those directives. The Evergreen blocks members are assigned are above and beyond those requirements.

### Q. What are the benefits of participating in the Evergreen renewable energy program?

**A.** It is affordable. With blocks starting at just \$1 per 100 kWh per

month, it allows members an opportunity to be "green" and support renewable energy to the extent their budget allows. It is easy. Private ownership of renewable energy generation equipment can be limited by cost and location. Evergreen doesn't require any upfront costs for equipment or future maintenance. It provides an option for your home, farm, or business to be "green" without solar panels or wind turbines physically on the property.

### Q. How do I know I am getting my electricity from renewable energy sources?

**A.** Dairyland's own generation facilities and others within its service territory send their power onto the power grid. The actual electricity that serves your home, farm, or business may or may not come from renewable sources. However, when members enroll in Evergreen, each member increases the amount of renewable energy flowing into the grid. The Evergreen renewable energy that you purchase will be above and beyond state requirements and will replace electricity that would have been generated by conventional fossil fuels.

### Q. How are Evergreen program funds used?

**A.** Renewable energy from regional renewable energy resources is procured to meet Evergreen subscriptions. Funds are used to procure renewable energy and administer the Evergreen program.





# SECOND NATURE AT READS CREEK: Plants, trees and so much more

By Leah Call

“Come for the plants. Stay for the experience.” That’s the irresistible invitation calling visitors to Second Nature at Reads Creek, a retail nursery and arboretum-in-progress, on Hwy. 14 just north of Readstown and 7 miles south of Viroqua.

When Dave and Jen Tubbin first stepped onto the property that would become Second Nature at Reads Creek, they envisioned turning the site into something very special—a backyard for the whole community, a tranquil place to relax and unwind, with children playing in the creek, families having picnics, and, of course, a vast variety of vegetation to

peruse and purchase.

That was seven years ago. Today, Second Nature at Reads Creek, powered by Vernon Electric Cooperative, is everything the Tubbins dreamed it could be. It’s a destination greenhouse, nursery, landscape design center, and so much more.

“Our nursery is a safe haven, a place of renewal and rejuvenation, and a place where the worries of the outside world fade away,” said Jen Tubbin.

Second Nature has a wide selection of annual and perennial plants, trees, shrubs, and landscaping inspiration. The nursery alone takes up 10 acres of the 240-acre property with thousands of unique, zone-hardy, healthy plants. In spring, the greenhouse is bursting with hanging baskets, vegetable starts, succulents and houseplants.

Two waterfall areas, ponds, a class A trout stream, and a beach and swimming area beckon community members and others to stop by and stay awhile. There’s even a gift shop where customers can find unique items to dress up their homes and gardens.

“Our gift shop, housed in a 10-year-old former tobacco shed, is a destination in itself. From fun, trendy home décor to vintage wares and handmade items, we have a little bit of everything,” said Jen. “You will find local goods, quirky items, garden and outdoor decor, mugs, stoneware, towels, fairy garden delights, memorial gifts, along with soil amendments, garden pots and statuary for garden enthusiasts.”

Marketing and Event Coordinator Karen Solverson, who





has been with Second Nature at Reads Creek since its start, encourages people to wander and enjoy themselves. “When people come here, they should plan to spend two or three hours to take it all in, though we can get customers in and out quickly if they have something specific in mind,” she said.

**Landscape with a Pro** Second Nature has several professional landscapers on site, ready to help customers with all their landscaping needs. Plan with a Pro sessions are available for expert insight into creating your own backyard haven.

“We will take your measurements, look at pictures of your home, and within an hour or two, we will create a computer vision of what you could do at your home along with a printed list of the plants to create your new space,” explained Solverson.

Those wanting to do the heavy lifting themselves can purchase their plants, take them home and get started. Or let Second Nature’s landscaping team do the work. Solverson says those with spring landscaping plans should schedule a time now to meet with their design team in order to be ready to roll when the ground thaws.

Second Nature at Reads Creek also offers spring and fall cleanup and monthly maintenance services for homeowners and businesses.

“Our landscaping and maintenance part of the business has absolutely exploded,” said owner Dave Tubbin. “I think people are tired of having a cookie-cutter backyard, and they are coming to us to create a backyard sanctuary, just like we have created here.”

Another service that has taken off is the memorial tree planting and customized tree tag creation to honor a loved one who has passed away or to celebrate a significant life event. “People can come here and choose a tree that speaks to their heart, and we will come out and plant it and hang a personalized memorial tag on the tree for them,” explained Solverson.

**Family, Fun and Community** Dave and Jen Tubbin have lived in the area for almost 30 years. Together they started and grew a successful home décor business called Second Nature by Hand, which they sold along with another business, Sweet Bird & Co., in order to focus their attention on their family and the growth of the nursery.

In true family-business style, the couple along with son Severin and daughter Siri all pitch in to make Second Nature at Reads Creek a success.

Educational and social events at Second Nature help to



Dave and Jen Tubbin with their children, Siri and Severin.

solidify Dave and Jen’s dream of bringing the community together. One of their most popular events, the Live Raptor Meet & Greet, brought in several hundred people. This fall, they will host the second annual Gem & Fossil Event on August 21, 2022, featuring rock and fossil hunting in the valley and a beach seeded with semi-precious gems for kids and adults of all ages. The Third Thursday Market takes place at the nursery from 4-8 p.m. every third Thursday from May through October. That event features local vendors, food trucks and live music on the porch.

“We started the Third Thursday Market with the goal of lifting up other small businesses. We were crafters for more than 20 years, and we know how important it is to just have a space and a presence somewhere, so this is just one way we can give back,” said Dave Tubbin.

The event draws a growing number of people, who gather to enjoy fun and fellowship, while feeling the stress melt away. And that’s exactly what Dave envisioned.

“This is my happy place,” said Dave.” How can anyone come to a place that is this beautiful and NOT be happy?”

*Photos courtesy of Karen Solverson*

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