



# ELECTRIC COOPERATIVES CREATE CHARGE EV, LLC

by Craig Buros, CEO & General Manager



Vernon Electric along with a group of 28 other electric cooperatives have created a regional electric vehicle (EV) charging network across Wisconsin, Illinois, Iowa, and Minnesota named CHARGE EV, LLC.

The network currently includes over 30 Level 2 and Level 3 charging stations and that number is growing.

Vernon Electric is in the process of installing a Level 2 and Level 3 Fast Charger at Kickapoo Creekside Restaurant in Readstown. This particular project was made possible due to a partnership between Vernon Electric and five of our neighboring cooperatives, who combined awarded grants to fund the project. This location was selected because of its high traffic count, it has places to have a snack or meal while the EV charges (20–30 minutes on the Level 3 charger), and it's a midway location between major urban areas such as Madison, La Crosse, Eau Claire, Sparta, Tomah, and Dubuque.

We are planning for future growth in EVs, and want to alleviate “range anxiety,”

which is the concern some people have about traveling in an EV without a place to charge their vehicle. Our goal is to provide EV owners peace of mind traveling in the rural service territories of the participating cooperatives in



Iowa, Wisconsin, Minnesota, and Northern Illinois. We hope that this will give people confidence to consider an EV and encourage growth in the EV market.

The CHARGE EV infrastructure is just the start. The group has plans for additional investments in the EV market including, but not limited to, member education on installing home chargers and encouraging members to test drive EVs.

Cooperatives around the world operate according to the same set of seven core principles and values, adopted by the International Cooperative Alliance. The CHARGE EV, LLC partnership sets three of the seven principles in motion: 5. Education, Training, and Information; 6. Cooperation Among Cooperatives; and 7. Concern for Community.



## CAST YOUR BALLOT FOR YOUR CO-OP REPRESENTATIVE

Members in the following Divisions will receive a list in the mail of all the members in their township or village:

**Division II** Towns of Harmony, Genoa, Freeman, and Wheatland

**Division V** Towns of Leon, Sparta, Wells, Greenfield, Washington, and Portland

**Division VIII** Towns of Wellington, Glendale, Forest, Union, and Bloom

We ask that you select five members to represent you at the District Conference to be held virtually on

February 13, 2021. The two lowest of the five top vote receivers will be the alternates. Your vote is important, and those elected will be invited to attend the District Conference.

Business reports and work plans will be discussed, and director candidates will be selected by representatives of those divisions having elections.

Remember, when you get your ballot, choose five members, sign the ballot envelope, and return it to our office in the self-addressed, stamped envelope by January 14, 2021.





## NEW MEAT PROCESSOR FOCUSES ON LOCAL

By Leah Call

**N**ordik Meats, on U.S. Highway 14 between Westby and Viroqua, is all about local. This new locally owned, federally inspected meat processor provides custom cutting and packaging services to livestock producers in the Vernon Electric service territory and beyond. In business just six months, Nordik Meats already has processing appointments booked well into 2021.

“There was definitely a need for another processor in the area, because of the availability of cattle here and the time to get to other processors—some traveling as far away as Green Bay or Cannon Falls, Minn.,” said Nordik Meats co-owner Kevin Larson, who benefits from the nearby plant for his own beef and dairy cattle processing needs.

Larson serves as vice president on the Nordik Meats board of stockholders, along with six other investors, who purchased the former Driftless Meats and More facility in

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**—Kevin Larson**

April 2020. Built in 2009, the building housed two meat processors over the last decade, but was vacant for three years.

“It was a large facility sitting there empty. Now we are keeping the revenue stream going and employing 12 to 14 people—the majority live right here within 10 miles from the plant,” said Larson, pleased with the economic impact the venture has on his community.

Board President Rod Ofte led the effort to purchase the facility. Ofte is the general manager of the Wisconsin Grass-Fed Beef Cooperative. Members of that cooperative rotationally graze beef and hogs. Many of the cooperative members now utilize Nordik Meats for processing. The bulk of Nordik’s customers—both grass-fed and conventional—are within a 50-mile radius of the facility.

Before opening their doors, Nordik Meats’ investors first renovated the existing plant, which included 2,000 square feet of retail space. With no plans to provide retail services, the Nordik group converted the space to cooler and freezer space, upgrading equipment and adding new, energy-efficient compressors and coolers.

The renovated space now includes approximately 5,000 square feet of cooler and freezer space. The additional space accommodates customer requests for longer hanging time for meat.

“Instead of the typical one-week hang, we have people hanging 14, even 21 and 28 days,” noted Larson. “The result is really tender cuts with a lot of flavor.”

The Nordik Meats facility also has rooms dedicated to specialty-type products. “We have two smokers and rooms for smoking, if you want smoked meat,” noted Larson. “And we have a separate room for making sausages.”

### Appointments and Customization

Nordik currently processes beef, hogs, and sheep—both grass-fed and conventionally raised. Those interested in utilizing Nordik’s services can book processing appointments and livestock drop-off dates online at [nordikmeats.com](http://nordikmeats.com), along with customized cutting and packaging instructions. Customers can also submit a farm logo to be printed on the packaging.

While Nordik does not sell products, they are happy to connect buyers to customers who direct-market their meats.

Right: Kevin Larson and Rod Ofte pose at Nordik Meat’s main entrance. The building had been vacant for three years before transformed into Nordik Meats.



## \$100,000 RETURNED TO MEMBERS IN DECEMBER

I am happy to report that reduced operating costs and lower wholesale energy prices in 2020 have allowed Vernon Electric Co-op to provide each of our co-op members with a PCA (Power Cost Adjustment) credit. You will see this PCA credit on your December power bill arriving in email and mailboxes the first week of January 2021.

I thank our wholesale power provider, Dairyland Power, and the Vernon Electric directors and employees for continuing to look for ways to reduce costs while continuing to provide innovative, safe, and reliable electric service to our members.

—Craig Buros, CEO & General Manager



# SCHOLARSHIPS AVAILABLE FROM VEC

In 2021, scholarships will be made available to students whose parents or legal guardians are members of Vernon Electric Cooperative. Twenty seniors will be eligible to receive a \$750 scholarship for the college or university they decide to attend.

Applicants from the high schools listed below, plus one at-large applicant and three other students, will be chosen in a random drawing at the Vernon Electric Co-op January board meeting from all the completed and verified applications received for the scholarships.

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

Of all the seniors, six will be eligible to attend the Youth Leadership Congress (YLC) at UW-River Falls this summer, on a first come, first serve basis if pandemic safety guidelines allow (last year the YLC had to be canceled due to the coronavirus). The YLC is a first-class event put on by the Wisconsin Electric Cooperative Association (WECA), and the students are chaperoned and transported by a Vernon Electric representative. The students who attend the YLC will receive an additional \$250 added to their VEC scholarship. In addition, students will have the option to enter an essay in the WECA's Youth Leadership Congress 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**.

## Nontraditional Scholarship

This \$750 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.

## Line Worker Scholarship

One \$1,000 scholarship will be awarded. Anyone who is a high school senior or older, and a member of Vernon Electric Cooperative may apply. Recipients must enroll in a full-time power line program. The scholarship is awarded after the first semester. This is a one-time per member award.

The purpose of the Line Worker Scholarship is to aid and encourage men and women in the local area to pursue an electrical line worker career. Line workers make up a large percentage of Vernon Electric's workforce and are an important asset to the cooperative and community. Their primary duty is to build, maintain, and repair power lines, which are a lifeline to the community and a connection to the local economy.

**Applications and guidelines** can be downloaded at <https://vernonelectric.org/scholarships-applications>. You can also have a scholarship application mailed to you by calling 608-634-3121 or 1-800-447-5051. The deadline for scholarship applications to be received by Vernon Electric's office (email, mail, or drop-box) is **Wednesday, January 20, 2021, 4:30 p.m.**

Scholarships are chosen in a random drawing at the January board meeting from all the completed and verified applications received. The winner will be announced at Vernon Electric's Annual Meeting on Saturday, March 27, 2021. These scholarship funds are made available from unclaimed capital credits of the cooperative.

## Craig Buros, CEO & General Manager

110 Saugstad Road, Westby, WI 54667  
608-634-3121 • 608-447-5051  
email: [info@vernonelectric.org](mailto:info@vernonelectric.org)  
website: [www.vernonelectric.org](http://www.vernonelectric.org)

## David Maxwell, Editor

