



GIVING BACK TO OUR COMMUNITY

by Craig Buros, CEO & General Manager

Over the years, you've probably heard or read about Vernon Electric Co-op's concern for our community. This is one of the core principles that sets cooperatives apart from other types of utilities and businesses. We've always taken this mission and responsibility to heart. It's who we are as a co-op.

Over the past few months, like so many of you, we've risen to meet new challenges and strengthen the safety net for our community, particularly for those who are most vulnerable. Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, we've made numerous adjustments to programs and operations to maintain business continuity while staying focused on the bigger mission of helping our consumer-members during this turbulent time. While our purpose is to provide safe and reliable energy to you, the members we serve, we have a greater mission—to be a catalyst for good.

You're probably aware of our Operation Round-Up program, where we take donations from generous members like you who have "rounded up" the amount due on their electric bill to help community organizations. Vernon Electric Co-op also invests in the economic development of the community through an active role in local economic development associations and writing federal grant applications.



We also have a strong commitment to safety—not just for our employees, but for our community as well. We teach children of all ages how to stay safe around electricity. We have held safety demonstrations at community meetings and other gatherings and will do so again when we get through this pandemic. We also teach safety with newspaper, TV, radio, magazine, and social media ads and posts.



A family learns about electricity at a Vernon Electric display during a community event.

You'll also see our directors and employees serving on local boards, coaching youth sports, volunteering at charitable events, and participating in local community organizations. Because when you work at a co-op, you understand how important a strong community is—after all, without you, the co-op wouldn't exist.

We know that our core job is to keep the lights on, but our passion is our community. Because we live and work here too, and we want to make it a better place for all.

If there's anything we can do to help you—whether providing energy-saving advice to help lower your monthly bill or discuss payment plan options during these difficult times—please reach out to us at Vernon Electric Co-op.

Concern for community is the heart and soul of who we are. And no matter what the future brings, you can count on *your* electric co-op.



SMALL TOWN *Grocer*

By Leah Call

For people living in rural communities, a local grocery store means access to food and essentials without having to drive long distances. The local store provides life-sustaining goods, jobs, and contributes to the local economy. For residents in Hillsboro and neighboring small towns, the Hillsboro County Market is that important lifeline.

In 2013, the Gorius family purchased this rural store in the Vernon Electric Cooperative service territory from Leonard and Alice Weiland. While Stan Gorius has stepped back from the day-to-day operations, his sons Eric, Geoff, and Andrew Gorius continue to run the family business—a familiar role for these brothers who grew up lending a hand in their family’s beverage distribution company.

Since purchasing the County Market, the Goriuses have made many improvements and some additions.

“The store had not gone through any major updates for 20 years or so,” noted Andrew Gorius. “We added some new equipment, changed out the flooring and moved some departments around.”

The biggest change happened in fall 2015 when they added a hardware section, something the area needed after losing the local hardware business.

“The closest hardware store is about 30 miles in any direction,” said Gorius. “So we made some renovations to the square footage of the sales floor, moved an entire frozen department and added in about 4,200 square feet of hardware space. That has been a nice addition to the town. It’s the third busiest department here at the store.”

COVID Impact

As most businesses struggle to cope with the financial impact of COVID-19, grocers like County Market face a different kind of challenge. When people rushed to stock their kitchens for making meals at home, Gorius and the store’s 65 employees scrambled to keep shelves stocked while implementing extra cleaning and safety measures.

Gorius noted that sales at County Market have increased



Co-owner, Andrew Gorius stands with his wife, Heather Jo, and their kids, Levi and Charlie Faye, in front of the County Market Grocery Store in Hillsboro.



since March, due to panic shopping and lifestyle changes brought on by fear of the pandemic. “People are forced to think about whether they feel safe traveling out of the community. And a lot of people don’t feel safe going to restaurants,” said Gorius of the change in shopping patterns.

Sales volumes increased both from residents staying home and from those traveling to the area for outdoor recreation. Each summer Hillsboro draws recreation-seeking visitors flocking to the Baraboo and Kickapoo Rivers, Hillsboro State Trail, Hillsboro Bike Trail, and nearby Wildcat State Park. Summer 2020 saw an explosion of those looking for outdoor fun.

“Because of COVID, we saw a greater increase in our seasonal shopping as people shifted to doing more outdoor activities,” added Gorius. “That has started to slow down a bit, but volumes are still up from previous years with people staying in the area.”

More Than Just Food

From gas to greeting cards, firewood, to fishing licenses, the Hillsboro County

Market is a one-stop for more than just food items.

For area visitors, the County Market is a pleasant surprise. “A lot of people that come through the door are amazed at how large the store is for a community of 1,400,” said Gorius. “Usually a community this size wouldn’t have a store at all. People would be forced to drive 15 or 20 miles to find the nearest place.”

That is something the locals and visitors alike appreciate. With winter and the holidays approaching, County Market is pleased to carry additional necessities, such as wood pellets and ice melt, and they offer attractive pricing on the fixings for the holiday meal. Need tools for putting up that Christmas display? They’ve got that, too.

While residents are thankful for the Hillsboro County Market, the Gorius family is grateful for the support of their community.

“People really do appreciate the changes and improvements going on,” said Gorius. “And to show us their appreciation, they keep coming back.”

Hillsboro County Market
E18590 Wisconsin 33
Hillsboro, WI 54634

Hours

Sunday: 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Monday-Saturday: 7:30 a.m. to 8 p.m.

VERNON ELECTRIC VALUES OUR VETERANS

Vernon Electric Co-op has always had a high percentage of its workforce coming from a military background. Many of the skills learned in the military are also skills important to operating a rural electric cooperative. Today 16% of our workforce are veterans.

This Veteran’s Day (November 11), Vernon Electric Co-op salutes America’s veterans for their historic and ongoing service and sacrifice to our nation.



Pictured l-r: Matt Hirschfield (Army National Guard), Andy Hefel (Army), John LaDue (Marines), Jason Johnson (Army Reserve), Don Gander (Army)



CO-OP MONTH TRIVIA WINNERS AND ANSWERS

\$25 Bill Credit Drawing Winners:

Steve & Elizabeth Schiltz
 Todd Buchholz
 Patricia Jones
 Doug Allen
 Heidi Jansky
 Todd Opprieht
 David & Patricia Fisher
 Leland Diehl
 Stacy Wempe
 Nick Caruccio
 Trudy Wallin
 John Nicklay
 Chelsey Nedland
 Ross O'Niel
 John Urch
 Joseph Erickson
 Bonnie Geies
 Jaime Tjoelker
 Diane Barber
 Michael Vande Zande



The grand prize winners of a new Meco Deluxe Electric Cart Grill are Tom and Sandy Ludwigson. Their name was picked in a random drawing of all the entries with the most correct answers.

The answers to our trivia questions are as follows:

1. Franklin Delano Roosevelt was the U.S. president who signed the Executive Order establishing the Rural Electrification Act. Bonus: Even though REA was established in 1935, he didn't sign the Executive Order until 1936.
2. The first farms were connected to Vernon Electric Co-op lines in 1938.
3. Vernon Electric's board president is Bernadine Hornby.
4. There are 7 Cooperative Principles. Bonus: Voluntary and Open Membership; Democratic Control; Members' Economic Participation; Autonomy and Independence; Education, Training, and Information; Cooperation Among Cooperatives; Concern for Community.
5. October is Co-op Month.
6. Willie Wiredhand is the mascot of our nation's rural electric cooperatives.
7. There are 24 electric cooperatives in Wisconsin. Bonus: There are 897 electric cooperatives in the United States. There are over 900 electric cooperatives, public power districts, and public utility districts, but only 897 of these are electric cooperatives.
8. April is when we celebrate National Lineworker Appreciation Month.
9. A lineworker's apprenticeship takes four years, or 7,000 hours.
10. Yes, Vernon Electric will know your power is out, even if you don't call the outage in. The advanced meters we use will report the outage for you, even if you're not home.
11. The pictured object was an insulator, used to hold an energized wire safely on a pole.
12. "Beneficial Electrification" is a term used to describe electrical use that is sustainable, economical, safe, reliable, and life improving.
13. Dairyland Power Cooperative is Vernon Electric's wholesale power supplier.
14. The National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA) is our national organization.
15. The Youth Leadership Congress is the conference we send students to each year in River Falls.
16. The geologic formation pictured is called Three Chimneys Rock.
17. Craig Buros is the current CEO and general manager of Vernon Electric Cooperative.
18. SmartHub is the name of our online app for accessing and interacting with your electric account.
19. Vernon Electric serves an approximate average of five members for every mile of powerline installed.
20. Facility Charge is the line item on your billing statement each month that pays for fixed costs (i.e. poles, wires, transformers, regulators, etc.)

Craig Buros, CEO & General Manager

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David Maxwell, Editor

