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4 RIVERS

Electric Cooperative

A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative 

4 RIVERS ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE

CURRENTS

4 Rivers Electric Cooperative, Inc.

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Vice-President

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Trustee

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Dennis Svanes
General Manager/CEO

Mark Doebele
Assistant General Manager/COO

Dennis Duft
Manager of Operations

Roger Cole
CFO

Ken Caudell
Manager of Member and Corporate Services

BECOMING 4 RIVERS

Join us March 21 in Burlington



Dennis Svanes

Annual Meeting time ... I always look forward to annual meetings. As one of the seven cooperative principles, democratic member control is an essential part

of being a cooperative. Our cooperative is governed by a member-elected board of trustees. The annual meeting is when you, the member, can vote on the various topics or for the election of the trustees. There will not be an election for a trustee this first year of 4 Rivers Electric Cooperative. However, the board of trustees has put together bylaws for the membership to consider for ratification. The bylaws define the basic outline of how the cooperative will run.

4 Rivers Electric's first annual meeting of members will be Saturday, March 21, at Burlington High School in Burlington. The board of trustees has drafted bylaws for the cooperative that will be voted on at the meeting. Each member in attendance will be able to vote. It is part of being a cooperative – one member, one vote. As a reminder, a joint membership, such as a married couple, is one member. Members who have multiple meters are also one

member with one vote.

I hope that many of you can attend this historic inaugural annual meeting of 4 Rivers Electric Cooperative. 4 Rivers will serve lunch after the meeting and member gifts and door prizes will be distributed. Check next month's *Kansas Country Living* for details about the meeting.

On another note, I want to extend my thanks and appreciation to the entire Kansas delegation for their support and co-sponsorship of the RURAL Act. It is their support that was crucial to getting the RURAL Act into the final appropriations legislation that was passed during 2019. I thank our Kansas RURAL Act co-sponsors: Senator Pat Roberts, Senator Jerry Moran, Representative Sharice Davids, Congressman Roger Marshall, Congressman Steve Watkins, and Congressman Ron Estes. The RURAL Act helped fix the federal tax code protecting the tax status of rural electric cooperatives who receive grants for storm damage from FEMA and other grants to extend services to their members.

March 2020						
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29	30	31				

Keep Your Furry Friends Safe Around Electricity

4 Rivers employee **BECKY SCHWATKEN** knows a thing or two about pet ownership and keeping pets healthy and safe. In 2014, Schwatken organized a group of local volunteers to form Fredonia Pound Pals, a donation-based entity of the City of Fredonia dedicated to caring for and finding homes for the many lost, stray or unwanted animals that end up in the City of Fredonia's animal pound. Since its inception, Fredonia Pound Pals has adopted out or found owners for nearly 700 animals.

"Pets aren't just animals; they are family," Schwatken said. "We require the animals we adopt out to be healthy and current on vaccinations."

But ensuring your pet is in good health isn't all you can do for them. To keep your furry friends safe, pet owners need to look around for potential hazards to reduce the chance of injury or worse. "Sometimes danger lurks in unexpected places around your home," Schwatken said.

Here are some helpful tips:

- ▶ Electrical cords are a primary electric danger for pets as they love to chew on them or bat them around with their paws. If you can't keep cords hidden behind appliances or furniture, pet-proof them with cord covers or inexpensive split loom tubing found at home improvement stores or online. Provide teething or play alternatives and consider using special products that deter chewing, like bitter no chew sprays.
- ▶ Do not leave your pet alone around items that get hot: curling irons and straighteners, an outdoor grill, a portable heater and other electric appliances, including cooktops.
- ▶ Watch your pet around dangling or sagging cords, including phone or tablet charging cables. Unplug charging cables once your devices are charged. Consider charging phones before you go to bed so cords are put away while you



To learn more about Fredonia Pound Pals, follow them on Facebook and Twitter.

sleep. Not only do they draw a small amount of energy when not in use, but the dangling cords are just crying to be played with.

- ▶ Watch where you place lamps and other plugged-in items. Lamps can be a fire hazard if they are knocked over, especially if they have halogen bulbs. Cats love to curl up near or behind warm computers so create another warm, inviting space for them next to a radiator or in the rays of a sunlit window.

Pet-proof your home much like you would for a baby or toddler. If you suspect your pet has been shocked or burned, take it to the vet right away. Owners may not realize a pet has been shocked until a few hours later when it has trouble breathing. Other symptoms include ulcers in the mouth and lesions on the tongue and gums.

HELP KEEP LINEWORKERS SAFE

Lineworkers take great pride in providing safe and reliable service, but they depend on you to keep them safe. Remember to move over when you see a utility vehicle pulled over and never affix signs to electrical poles.



EMPLOYEE SPOTLIGHT

Getting to Know Your Co-op Team

From linemen to member service representatives to managers, your 4 Rivers team is dedicated to making the transition to 4 Rivers as smooth as possible for our members and look forward to getting to know those in our expanded territory.



April Engstrom

APRIL ENGSTROM began working for Radiant Electric in 2008 to assist with the implementation and operation of their Automated Metering Infrastructure (AMI) system. Over the years, she's enjoyed serving the cooperative in different capacities, such as helping diagnose system issues through AMI analysis, getting to know co-op members while writing member spotlights for *Kansas Country Living* and helping members learn to use technology, like SmartHub, to better analyze their power consumption.

April grew up in Fredonia, where she lives now with her two sons, Tucker, 14, and Hudson, 6, and her daughter, Marley, 3. She enjoys spending time with her family at the family homestead northwest of Coyville, traveling whenever possible and learning more about different people and places. She loves hearing her dad, Larry, and other area folks tell stories about growing up in rural Wilson County and the history of the area. She is inspired by many people, but especially her mother, Donna, and sister, Jante, who are both funny, kind, compassionate, logical, hard-working and resilient women.

April wants members to know that they have a great group of people dedicated to serving them, who are always looking for ways to improve their service safely, reliably, and economically.



Eric Gifford

ERIC GIFFORD is a journeyman lineman who started working for Lyon-Coffey Electric three years ago. He worked for a municipal electric department prior to joining the Lyon-Coffey team and appreciates the methods he's learned at the co-op. As a journeyman lineman, he helps maintain the line, including pole change outs, service retirements, and new construction, among other things. Eric finds it rewarding to supply people with reliable power and watch a project progress to completion.

Eric grew up in Waverly, but currently resides in Burlington with his wife of seven years, Hailey, and their two daughters, Lydia, 4, and Evalee, 8 months. In his free time, he loves being outdoors, riding his side-by-side and four-wheeler and spending time with his family. He appreciates the example his father set to be a good worker and help people out whenever you can.

In his time with the co-op, he's seen an improvement in technology, including digital maps and the use of mobile tablets for work. He wants our members to know that we do our best to supply reliable power and continually look for ways to improve their service. Thanks for your service to the cooperative, Eric!



Mark Doebele

MARK DOEBELE is the Assistant General Manager/Chief Operating Officer of 4 Rivers Electric. In 1989, he started working as an apprentice lineman at what is now Prairieland Electric Cooperative, where he worked for 10 years before joining

Lyon-Coffey Electric as a journeyman lineman and where he's stayed the last 20 years. In the last couple of years, Mark assisted with organizing the 4 Rivers consolidation. As COO, he helps the operations team provide affordable and reliable electric service to the consumer-members. Mark appreciates the great team with whom he gets to work, which makes it nice to come to work every day. He enjoys the variety in his job, which includes working both indoors or outdoors.

Mark grew up in Hanover where his family owned a service station and sold bulk fuels to the rural community. He and his wife, Cindy, have been married for almost 21 years and have enjoyed raising four kids. He enjoys working in his shop and doing yard work. He is proud to have worked for rural cooperatives for over 30 years and has seen many changes along the way. When he first started line work, two linemen maintained their districts with service trucks — no bucket trucks — so maintenance was completed by climbing poles or ladders. He appreciates that today's linemen have better tools to help them work safely and retire with a healthy body.

Mark wants to ensure our members that the consolidation to 4 Rivers was not out of necessity but because two cooperatives have boards of trustees that care deeply about their memberships and employees. They were not afraid to lose individual identities to pursue future efficiencies to keep competitive rate and wage structures. Mark is not only an employee but also a proud member of 4 Rivers Electric Cooperative. Thanks for your dedication to our members, Mark!

Stopping Scams for Better Service

Consumers Urged to Help Fight Fraud



Our increasingly connected world is giving scammers more opportunities to connect with unsuspecting consumers, and local authorities, utilities and other businesses are working overtime to keep people informed. They suggest 'if you see something, say something,' is a vigilance adage that can help prevent you, your family or your business from being victimized.

"The Federal Trade Commission has been hearing about scammers impersonating utility companies in an effort to get your money," said Lisa Lake, a federal consumer education specialist. "Your reports help us fight these scams."

Electric cooperatives are among the businesses and consumer organizations supporting Utilities United Against Scams (UUAS), the international consortium of electricity, natural gas, water and sewer providers, and trade and industry associations sharing information on payment scams, identity theft, sales and service schemes.

Mike Morley, director of corporate communications and government affairs for Midwest Energy headquartered in Hays, led the effort to bring the co-op on board with UUAS to help prevent future scams for their consumer-members. Morley says part of the reason utility scammers are so successful is that they hop around, calling different locations and pretending to be a variety of utility companies. Because the scams were varied by company, they were hard to connect. "Now companies involved with the UUAS bring their reports together, making it easier for law enforcement to link the scams and scammers," Morley said.

Imposter scams are the most common type of fraud reported to the Federal Trade Commission, according to UUAS officials. The frequency of the incidents picks up during peak heating and cooling seasons, in part because consumers are most concerned when temperature extremes increase the urgency of maintaining utility service.

"Never give banking information over the phone unless you place the call to a number you know is legitimate," wrote the FTC's Lake in an FTC blog.

There has also been an uptick in door-to-door scams by individuals claiming to represent utility providers like your electric co-op. Representatives knock or ring the doorbell offering to replace or repair a meter or other device, or solicit personal information to sign a consumer up for programs that could reduce their energy bills.

They may try to charge you for the phony service, sell

you unnecessary products, collect personal information for use in identity theft or simply gain entry to steal valuables, officials said.

High-pressure demands are a common tactic in many of the schemes, urging immediate decisions or actions, like immediate payment. Specific payment options like a gift card, wire transfer, cell phone or third-party computer app should raise serious concerns.

"The way a scam works is someone calls saying 'Hey, I'm going to turn off your electricity in 30 minutes unless you pay me \$550' or pick a number and usually it's somewhere above \$300," said Morley. Scammers will then likely inform their targets to purchase a money pack card and call back with the 16-digit pin code located on the back of the card.

"Once you give somebody that 16-digit pin code, that money is gone," said Morley. "They can take it, deposit it into a bank, they can load it to a pre-paid visa card. They can do anything they want with it and at that point, the money basically becomes untraceable."

Utility-connected scams are common because utility services are so common. Lighting, heating, water and sewage services are all essential to modern living, so any threat of service disconnection can provoke a lot of anxiety.

Your first defense is personal awareness of your account status, including knowing your co-op will never call you to get banking information over the phone. According to Morley, it takes three steps to complete this scam: the initial call, the purchase of a card and finally providing payment information.

"If you interrupt the scam at any of those three points, it doesn't work," Morley said. "The scam fails. The most important thing in that three-part triangle is knowing these scams exist and to be skeptical."

Your 4 Rivers staff have received many reports from members in the last few weeks that they have been called by someone pretending to be from the electric company and threatening to shut off their power if they don't make a large payment immediately. We urge you to be vigilant and never give your information to someone who calls you to demand payment immediately or specifically requires you to use a pre-paid card. If you feel uncomfortable or pressured for immediate payment or personal information, hang up the phone and call us directly. This will ensure that you are speaking to a real representative of 4 Rivers Electric Cooperative.