



By Michael P. McMahon

Our Energy, Our Future

It seems like every time America discovers it has a crisis on its hands, our government wakes up and proposes a crash program to fix it. Henry Ford was one of the first to observe it and even coined a name for it: “The crisis-crash syndrome.”

Sometimes, a crisis pushes us to great heights—literally. In 1958, when the Soviet Union launched Sputnik, the first orbiting satellite, President Kennedy responded by launching a “crash program” to commit all necessary U.S. talent and resources to putting an American on the moon by the end of the decade. And, amazingly, we did it. Neil Armstrong set foot on the moon July 1969, well within the Kennedy’s proposed timeline.

As policymakers in Washington begin the daunting task of trying to reduce the greenhouse gases responsible for climate change, it is instructive to look back at Kennedy’s example. The Apollo program harnessed the resources of government to make this stunning achievement possible.

But not every crisis leads to such an impressive result. Some of you may remember the first Arab oil embargo of 1973—35 years ago—or the several more that followed over the years. Each time we were inconvenienced at the pump—often with no gas available at any price—we heard our leaders pledge to develop a national energy policy that would free us from the sword the foreign oil-producing nations hold over us and our economy.

However, every attempt to formulate a serious national energy policy fizzled under the stress of competing special interests pulling policy makers in first one direction, then another. And in fact, as Congress considers various approaches to dealing with climate change, lawmakers are already hearing from many of the same special interests.

The goal of addressing greenhouse gas emissions may pose a more difficult challenge than reaching the moon. True leadership on climate change will require

balancing competing goals that all serve the public interest. Keeping electricity affordable and reliable is just as much in the public interest as mitigating climate change. As we race to develop the technology to limit carbon dioxide, we must also ensure Americans have the energy they need, not just in their homes but also to grow the economy.

Some of the legislative proposals under consideration, however, put at risk the current system that gives nearly every American access to dependable electricity. Congress needs to see the broader picture. That’s where you, as co-op members, as electricity consumers, come in.

Each of us has a role to play in influencing this debate that will likely result in new laws on climate change soon after the new administration and new Congress begin their work in 2009.

Over the next 20 years, electric utilities must increase generating capacity by 30 percent just to keep up with projected demand. The excess capacity we enjoyed for decades has been used up. At the same time that lawmakers address climate change, they need to address an impending electricity shortage, which in our part of the country could be here as soon as 2012.

Some people say we can meet future demand through efficiency and renewable energy, and I am proud to say that our electric co-op has had great success in those areas. We are quickly deploying demand-side management tools, increasing system efficiency, and promoting conservation and efficiency at the consumer level, all while our wholesale supplier, Dairyland Power, is integrating new renewable energy resources for us to utilize. And while that is a good thing, it is a drop in the bucket.

We need to remind Congress that energy efficiency alone won’t solve the climate change challenge. Nor will renewable sources of energy suffice. Today, just over 5 percent of our co-op power comes from renewable sources. That percentage is growing steadily, but renewables are a long way from becoming a major reliable source.

(Continued on page 29 ►)



Former VEC Manager Earl Jaeger Passes

Earl Jaeger, who served as manager of Vernon Electric Cooperative during most of three decades, died Wednesday, May 28. He was 92.

Jaeger became manager of the cooperative in 1961 and retained the position until retiring in 1987. But his tenure reached to the beginning of Vernon Electric's history. Jaeger began his career as a draftsman in July 1937, making wiring diagrams of farms to be served six months before the co-op's lines were energized. He then served as bookkeeper, accountant, and office manager until assuming the manager's role. His cooperative employment was interrupted for five years by service in the U.S. Army during World War II.

It is impossible to separate the career of Earl Jaeger from the history of Vernon Electric Cooperative be-

cause his service and involvement spanned virtually its entire history until mid-1987. Vernon Electric Cooperative evolved from being an exciting new influence in rural western Wisconsin to becoming part of the everyday fabric of life in our area. A major share of the credit for bringing Vernon Electric Cooperative through a full half-century of service and accomplishment goes to Earl Jaeger.

Jaeger's July 1, 1987, retirement came exactly 50 years after he began his work for Vernon Electric. He was succeeded by Merle Holden. Jaeger became the Wisconsin Electric Cooperative Association's 24th ACE (All of Cooperative Electrification) Award winner in 1990. The award is the highest honor WECA bestows on an individual each year.

Earl was married to Elaine



Larson in 1942 at the Westby Coon Prairie Lutheran Church in Westby. He was a 1934 graduate of Westby High School. Condolences may be sent to Elaine Jaeger, 1204 Sunset Blvd., Box 6, Westby, WI 54667. ■



MEMBER APPRECIATION PICNIC

For the members of Vernon Electric Cooperative

Wednesday, July 9, 2008

Hillsboro Fireman's Park next to Hwy. 33 on the west side of Hillsboro.

Complimentary pork sandwiches, hot dogs, chips, beans, pop, milk, coffee, and ice cream.

3 p.m. to 7 p.m.



Operation Round Up[®] The Power of CHANGE



Vernon Electric Cooperative has been proud to introduce the Operation Round Up program to our members. Operation Round Up is the newest offering in a long list of community service programs offered by your cooperative. It uses the power of cooperation to provide much-needed grant dollars for community projects and non-profit groups within the Vernon Electric Cooperative service territory.

Members can voluntarily choose to have their monthly energy bill rounded up to the next whole dollar amount. For example, if your monthly energy bill were \$112.48, it would automatically round up to \$113 and \$0.52 would go to the Operation Round Up Fund. Your contribution, along with the contribution of other Vernon Electric members, would then be used to fund local grants for community service projects.

Grant applications are available from our office, or they can be downloaded from our website at www.vernonelectric.org.

If you would like to participate in the Operation Round Up campaign, please sign up below or call 1-800-447-5051 or 608-634-3121. You may also simply check

the appropriate box on your next billing statement to join the Operation Round Up program.

Thank you for your interest. Let's show our community the power of change!

Past Recipients of Operation Round Up:

- VISIONS (Visually Impaired Serving & Inspiring Others Needing Support)
- Bethel Butikk Food Pantry and Thrift Shop
- Vernon County Crime Stoppers
- Westby EMS (Emergency Medical Service)
- Living Waters Bible Camp
- Norskedalen Nature & Heritage Center ■

Yes! I want to sign up to have my monthly bill rounded up to the nearest dollar. I know that this money will be donated to a worthy cause, chosen by the Operation Round Up Trust Fund Board of Directors. I understand that by signing and returning this form, my bill will be rounded up to the nearest dollar and that unless I call in to have that changed, this will happen until I no longer live in Vernon Electric's service territory.

Sign me up!

Name _____ VEC Acct. # _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Signature _____ Date _____

Manager's Comments

(Continued from page 4)

I want to ask you to go to www.ourenergy.coop on the Internet. Enter your address and send Congress your questions. You can start with "What are you doing to make sure we'll have the power we need in the future?"

If we are united and clear about what we want policy makers in Washington to do—and I believe we are—then we will be on the phone today, on the Internet tonight, sending e-mails tomorrow, or text messaging legislative directors every day.

New Building Update

Architects are pouring over the plans, putting together the final details with the input of staff, employees, and directors of the co-op. Drafts and re-drafts of the blueprints are being made to make sure the new headquarters will not only fit our needs for today, but well into the future.

Our present building has lasted us over 50 years, so we want to make sure that the folks using the new building 50 years from now will look back and say, "Whoever



designed this building put a lot of forethought into it". Design committees are meeting weekly to make sure no detail remains unnoticed. A groundbreaking goal date has been set at September 1, 2008, with hopes of moving into the new facility in the spring of 2009.

High on the priority list for the new building is making it energy efficient while trying to keep construction costs as low as possible. The heating and cooling system will utilize super-efficient geothermal heat pumps with in-floor heat in the garage and warehouse, while the office space will have water to air heating and cooling. The building will utilize passive-solar heating with its southeast orientation and have efficient lighting with automatic sensors, which will reduce energy consumption even more.

Work efficiency will be increased by having the three current buildings around Westby combined into one centralized location. The existing buildings are now up for sale. Vernon Electric will still maintain the service outpost near Hillsboro. Office, Plant and Member Service Departments will be designed with more efficient work spaces for their own departments as well as interrelating with other departments and members.

The new headquarters will be located just on the outskirts of Westby as you head north on Hwy. 27 toward Cashton. This location will give quick access to highways leading to all parts of the service territory as well as allow room for future expansion, if needed. ■



Did you know co-op members can help minimize power costs by conserving energy during periods of peak electric demand?

The increasing demand for electricity is causing electric costs to rise, since power needs must be met by high-priced generation. To help save money, we ask that co-op members voluntarily reduce their energy consumption between the hours of 4 and 8 p.m. Please wait until after 8 p.m. before using major appliances.

Wait 'til eight is not an emergency alert indicating a shortage of electricity or line overloading. We simply want you to be aware that you can make a difference by using energy wisely. ■

VERNON
Electric
Cooperative

110 N. Main Street
Westby, WI 54667
(608) 634-3121

Your Touchstone Energy® Cooperative 

Michael McMahan, Manager
Dave Maxwell, Editor
vec@mwt.net
www.vernonelectric.org