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WISCONSIN ENERGY *Cooperative* February 2024 NEWS

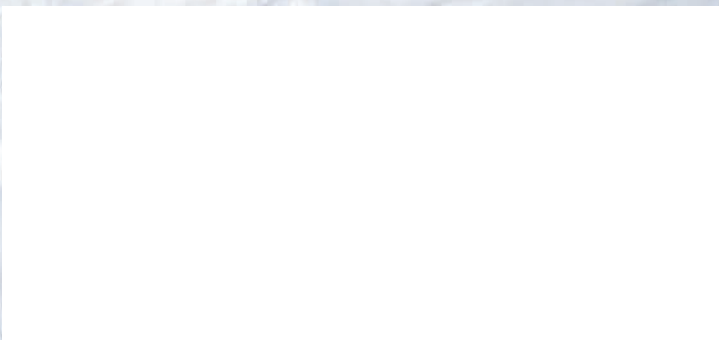


EAU CLAIRE TO HOST U.S. NATIONAL SNOWSHOE CHAMPIONSHIPS

TREADING WATER

EFFICIENCY TIPS FOR
MANUFACTURED HOMES

VEC ANNUAL MEETING FEBRUARY 29;
OFFICIAL NOTICE INSIDE



VERNON ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE

OFFICIAL NOTICE OF ANNUAL MEETING

Thursday, February 29, 5:30 p.m.

Vernon Electric Cooperative Headquarters
110 Saugstad Rd., Westby, WI 54667

Registration: 4:00 p.m. – 5:30 p.m.

Soup and Chili Dinner: 4:00 p.m. – 5:30 p.m.

Business Meeting: 5:30 p.m.



MY CO-OP



88 YEARS OF SERVING OUR MEMBERS

by Craig Buros, CEO &
General Manager

We invite you to take a moment and think about how many businesses with an 88-year history you have encountered. We believe the list is relatively short, but we're sure there are a few, some of which may be mergers with other organizations. We are certain several farms have surpassed the 88-year mark, which is no surprise as farmers were the ones who initiated bringing electricity to their community. Eighty-eight years ago, a group of farmers understood the importance of bringing electricity to the rural community, as did President Franklin D. Roosevelt, who established the Rural Electrification Administration.

Since their inception, electric cooperatives have always had a strong sense of community and member control; after all, Concern for Community and Democratic Member Control are just two of the seven established cooperative principles. These principles are what set America's electric cooperatives apart from other electric utilities, ensuring cooperatives put the members' needs first.

This month we will host our 88th Annual Meeting at our headquarters facility. The annual meeting is not only a requirement in our bylaws but also an opportunity for us to highlight the previous year with our members. This meeting fosters transparency and accountability within the cooperative. Members gain insight into the cooperative's financial health, future projects, and strategic planning.

Attending the annual meeting creates a sense of community and ownership among VEC members. This sense of inclusivity and involvement creates a unique bond between the cooperative and its members, building trust and loyalty.

2023 was a year to be remembered as we continued to work to enrich the lives of our

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members. For example, we created a pilot program designed for electric vehicle charging. As electric vehicles continue to gain popularity, they can also add unwanted stress to the grid due to their large electric load while charging. This program allows members to charge at their convenience, but at a better rate if they charge during off-peak hours. It is good not only for the members with EVs but also for the overall membership, as this will help control demand during peak hours of the day, ultimately leading to cost savings for the cooperative.

Most recently, we launched our Bluff Prairie Community Solar Array, with benefits incorporated for income-eligible members. We believe this project to be the first of its kind. By cooperating with Coulececap, we've made it possible for income-eligible households to receive panel subscriptions to the output of the array. Eligible households will benefit from bill credits generated by the output of the array. Over 1,900 panels have been made available to members of Vernon Electric Cooperative. The project came on-line on January 1, and members who have subscribed will begin to see the benefits on the bill they receive in February.

These are only a few of the highlights from the previous year, and they could not have been accomplished without a dedicated board of directors who understand the members' needs. Within the next few days, members will receive their ballots in the mail for the election of directors to serve a

three-year term. Divisions 2, 5, and 8 are up for election this year. Please take the opportunity to read the biographies of the candidates. As you vote for the candidate of your choice, it is essential that you remember to sign the outside of your envelope when submitting your ballot.

In previous years, our annual meeting traditionally took place on a Saturday morning, featuring a pancake breakfast.

This year, we are introducing an exciting change by hosting an evening annual meeting at our headquarters facility on Thursday, February 29.

However, this year, we are introducing an exciting change by hosting an evening annual meeting at our headquarters facility on Thursday, February 29. We hope this change will allow more members the opportunity to join without having to give up their precious Saturday mornings.

In essence, attending the VEC annual meeting

epitomizes what it is to be a member of an electric cooperative. It signifies active participation, informed decision-making, and community empowerment. It cements the cooperative's commitment to the seven cooperative principles and the members we serve. We look forward to seeing you!



REBATES AVAILABLE FOR ENERGY-EFFICIENCY HOME UPGRADES

Members wanting to save energy and money in the new year should review Vernon Electric Cooperative's new 2024 incentive forms. Vernon Electric annually publishes a list of energy-efficient items eligible for an incentive when a member makes a qualifying purchase and submits the required paperwork. A list of rebates and incentive forms can be found online at www.vernonelectric.org/rebates or by contacting our office.

Eligibility criteria for each category are listed on the forms. Incentives begin at \$0.50 and may be greater than \$800 for specific items. To receive an incentive, a member must purchase a qualifying item, fill out the incentive form, and return the form and documentation to the cooperative within three months of purchase or installation (this will be clarified on the form). Equipment must be installed at a member's location served by Vernon Electric Cooperative and, in most cases, must be ENERGY STAR® rated.

State and Federal energy efficiency and conservation incentives are also available through Wisconsin's Focus on Energy program and Federal tax credits. When considering or implementing energy efficiency measures, check with Focus on Energy's website, www.focusonenergy.com, or call them at 800-762-7077. Energy efficiency and conservation tax credits can be found at www.energystar.gov or by contacting your tax professional.



BAD AXE RIVER COUNTRY CLUB: EMBRACING COMMUNITY AND NATURE

By Leah Call

Nestled in the picturesque Esofea Valley, Bad Axe River Country Club is more than just a bar; it's a place where patrons feel like family. That's due to the genuine love Vernon Electric Cooperative member Cindy Hoff has for her customers and for the beautiful place she calls home.

Hoff became sole owner of Bad Axe River Country Club and Esofea Gardens in 2021, following the passing of her partner Joe Hayes, AKA Hippy Joe. Hayes started Esofea Gardens in 1976 nearly a decade before Hoff joined him there. In 2004 the couple created a nine-hole golf course on their property.

"If you have a golf course, you have to have a country club," said Hoff. "So, the bar got built at the same time."

In June, Hoff will host an open house to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the

Bad Axe River Country Club. "It's my way of thanking everyone for literally making my mortgage payments and paying my light bills," said Hoff. "It



Bad Axe River Country Club owner Cindy Hoff

is because they come down here and support us that we get to stay open."

Managing a golf course, bar, and a garden center is a daunting task. The 70-year-old Hoff considered shutting down the golf course after Joe passed away, but her brother Tom stepped in to help run the businesses. "Tom spends nine hours a week on a tractor mowing the golf course," said Hoff. "The day he doesn't want to do that anymore is the day it goes back to Mother Nature."

The country club and golf course are adjacent to Esofea Park on the north fork of the Bad Axe River. If you grew up in the Westby area in the 1960s and 1970s, you might remember Esofea Park as a venue for school picnics and 4-H softball games. Older area residents may have attended South Ridge Baseball Club games at the park's lighted ball diamond

in the 1940s and early 1950s. Those games drew crowds of up to 3,000.

Esofea has changed over the years. The ball diamond, lights, and bleachers are gone. Esofea Park is now a campground, and fisherman flock to the plentiful trout streams that weave through the valley. Many of those anglers stop by the Bad Axe Country Club for a drink and some conversation.

Though the bar has no elaborate menu, its simplicity is part of its charm. Club offerings include pizza, chips, and drinks served in plastic cups. Hoff doesn't have time to do dishes!

The Beautiful Gardens

While the bar holds a special place in Hoff's heart, the greenhouse and gardens are her true passion. "On March 1, we turn the heat on in the greenhouse, and then don't talk to me for a couple months, because I'm busy," said Hoff.

The garden center offers a variety of flowers and starter plants. While most plants find new homes each year, the ones that don't sell bring Hoff the most joy. "Every year the gardens around here change, because when the selling season is over, I get to plant all these gardens with what is left over. How much better can life get?"

A chance to view the vibrant gardens that surround the Bad Axe River Country Club is worth the drive to this somewhat remote destination. Some gardens are planted just for Hoff's beloved birds. "There's a garden in front called Hummer Haven," said Hoff. "Every plant that gets planted in there is for the humming birds."

Club regulars know Hoff's passion for birds and often shower her with bird-themed gifts, a testament to the connection that goes beyond a typical customer-owner dynamic. Hoff is sincerely touched by the kindness and support she receives.

"I'm thankful every day for what I have; not only the scenery, but the family, the friends. I have this bar. I'm a very lucky person."

Check the Bad Axe River Country Club Facebook page for live music and events taking place throughout the year.



Craig Buros, CEO & General Manager

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