

Since 1940

WISCONSIN ENERGY *Cooperative* June 2026 NEWS



SAVOR

JUNE'S DAIRY DAYS

SHINE ON

LOW- TO NO-COST WAYS
TO SAVE ENERGY

JOIN US FOR OUR MEMBER
APPRECIATION PICNIC – JUNE 10





ENSURING SAFETY AND ELECTRIC RELIABILITY



By Mark See, Director of Operations



Providing safe and reliable electricity to our members remains a top priority for Vernon Electric Cooperative (VEC). VEC owns and operates more than 2,100 miles of distribution lines, serving approximately 10,000 members throughout the area. A key

way we maintain reliability is through ongoing right-of-way maintenance and vegetation management efforts.

What are Rights-of-Way?

A right-of-way is a corridor of land where VEC power lines are located. These corridors create an important safety zone between electric lines and nearby trees, buildings, and other structures. Keeping right-of-way areas clear helps protect the electrical system and ensures line crews have safe access to inspect, maintain, repair, and improve poles and power lines when needed.

Why vegetation is removed

Trees and vegetation are among the leading causes of power outages. Branches that come into contact with power lines can interrupt service, create dangerous sparks or



electrical arcs, and increase the risk of fire. During storms and high winds, weakened limbs can break and fall onto power lines, causing outages and creating hazardous conditions. Routine vegetation management helps improve electric reliability, reduce the frequency and duration of outages, enhance public safety, and provide safer working conditions for utility crews.

Who does the clearing?

Vernon Electric employs a dedicated right-of-way clearing crew to maintain the cooperative's electrical system. In addition to in-house efforts, VEC has once again contracted Zielies Tree Service Inc. to assist with vegetation management in select areas. This year's contracted work will focus on Kendall, La Farge and Viola substation areas.

How is the right-of-way cleared?

Right-of-way maintenance may include removing trees, side trimming branches, mowing vegetation, and applying herbicides where appropriate. These methods are used strategically to maintain safe clearances around power lines while supporting long-term system reliability.

What happens to the cut wood?

Logs removed during clearing operations remain on the property of the landowner. In wooded areas, branches and smaller debris are typically chipped or mowed and left on-site to naturally decompose and return nutrients to the soil. In maintained yard areas, branches and smaller debris are generally chipped and removed unless the member requests otherwise.



How we work with you

We understand the importance of communication with property owners during right-of-way work. VEC provides advance notice to landowners when maintenance is scheduled in their area. Zielies Tree Service may also contact members directly regarding upcoming work.

When members see crews trimming trees and clearing

brush near power lines, it is all part of maintaining a safer and more reliable electric system. Keeping rights-of-way clear helps prevent outages, improves restoration times after storms, and ensures crews can safely access equipment when repairs are needed. Vegetation management is an ongoing investment in the safety, reliability, and quality of service Vernon Electric Cooperative provides to its members every day.



SMARTHUB: AN EASY WAY TO MANAGE YOUR ELECTRIC BILL

SmartHub is a convenient, all-in-one tool that gives members greater control over their electric account anytime, anywhere. Designed with ease of use in mind, SmartHub allows you to quickly and securely pay your bill, set up Auto Pay and view your billing history with just a few clicks.

Beyond basic bill payment, SmartHub offers a clear and detailed look at your energy usage. Members can track daily, monthly, and even hourly consumption trends, helping identify patterns in electricity use. This information makes it easier to manage energy costs, adjust habits, and take advantage of potential savings opportunities.

SmartHub improves communication between the cooperative and its members. Users can sign up for alerts and notifications for bill reminders, payment confirmations, and important service updates. In

the event of an outage, SmartHub can also provide updates and allow members to report issues quickly and efficiently.

For added convenience, members can go paperless, reducing clutter while ensuring they always have access to their account information digitally. Account settings can also be managed directly through the platform, making updates fast and simple without needing to call the office.

Whether accessed through a computer or mobile device, SmartHub puts account management at your fingertips. It is a secure, reliable, and efficient way to stay connected to your electric service while saving time and improving awareness of your energy usage.



Brushstrokes IN BLOOM

By Leah Call

Botanical watercolor artist Anne Butera has built a life and a business rooted in creativity, curiosity and a deep appreciation for the natural world. Working under the studio name, My Giant Strawberry, her paintings capture the color and quiet beauty around her with little more than water, a brush and a palette.

An Artist's Eye

As a child growing up in suburban Chicago, Butera found endless inspiration in her mother's garden. "I thought it was magical to be out there surrounded by plants and discovering frogs in the garden or watching the birds," she recalled.

Despite an early fondness for art, she never considered herself an artist. Instead, her path led her to study biology and later creative writing, eventually building a career as a children's librarian. She never lost her love of art and found ways to apply creativity to her work and daily life.

In 2010, while helping her parents move to the Viroqua area, something shifted. Surrounded by the beauty of the Driftless region, her passion for art returned—this time with intention. Drawing on her love of flowers, she began painting botanicals in watercolor. "I had a vision in my head of the kind of art I wanted to create," she said. "Over time, my obsession and stubbornness helped to develop my art style into what it is today."



Anne adds finishing touches to a watercolor poinsettia painting.



Anne Butera creates botanical watercolor paintings inspired by the flowers and plants she grows in her own garden studio.

Reclaiming Creativity

Today, Butera is a full-time artist. At the heart of her work is her connection to the garden. She paints what she grows, from heirloom tomatoes to vibrant dahlias and delicate irises. "I love the full circle idea of planting something from seed, growing it, and then painting it. That is such a joy to me." She shares that joy with others as a teacher, both online and in-person. Budding artists who sign up for video tutorials on her website develop their own watercolor skills through creative assignments, exercises and encouragement.



Butera also offers watercolor classes to students around the world as a top instructor on the online platform Skillshare. Locally she teaches in-person classes at venues including the Kickapoo Valley Reserve, Driftless Curiosities and area libraries. Those interested in upcoming classes can sign up for

her newsletter at mygiantstrawberry.com, where she regularly shares updates, inspiration, and glimpses into her creative process.

Discover and Create

Art enthusiasts can discover Butera's watercolor creations at the annual Winding Roads Art Tour, June 13-14, 2026. This year, her stop on the tour is at Sitting Pretty Farm, on Ridge Road south of Viroqua. Tour attendees can view a variety of Butera's work, including framed paintings, fine art

prints, and smaller items such as note cards and postcards.

Butera encourages others to slow down, observe the beauty around them, and find joy in creativity. "I think everyone is creative in some way or another. If you feel that calling, go for it. Picking up a paint brush after all those years, changed my life in ways I would never have imagined."

Butera is one of 26 area artists participating in the Winding Roads Art Tour. Tour guidebooks are available at VIVA Gallery in Viroqua.





June is Dairy Month

Vernon Electric Cooperative is proud to support the dairy industry, which remains a vital part of the local economy and rural way of life. Many of our members are dairy farmers who work hard every day to provide quality food and sustain our communities. The cooperative is committed to serving these members with reliable electric service, energy solutions, and programs that help support efficient and productive farm operations.

Each year, the region comes together to celebrate the dairy industry through community dairy breakfasts. Local dairy breakfast events in and around our service area include:

- Crawford County Dairy Breakfast – June 6**
Payne Rock Acres – 25653 Roach Lane, Eastman, WI 54626
- Juneau County Dairy Breakfast – June 28**
Elroy Fair at Schultz Park – 301 S. Main St. Elroy, WI 5392
- La Crosse County Dairy Breakfast – June 20**
Creamery Creek Farms – W1250 County Rd U, Bangor, WI 54614
- Monroe County Dairy Breakfast – June 6**
Trescher Town-View Dairy – 829 Cashton Ave, Cashton, WI 54619
- Sauk County Dairy Breakfast – June 13**
Windi Ridge Farm - S5424 Cty Hwy G, Hillpoint, WI 53937
- Vernon County Dairy Breakfast – June 13**
Fleming Family Farm - S2095 Volden Rd, Westby, WI 54667

These gatherings offer a great opportunity to enjoy a hearty breakfast, learn more about modern dairy farming, and show appreciation for the hardworking producers who keep our communities strong.



SAVE THE DATE!

MEMBER APPRECIATION PICNIC

Wednesday, June 10

11 a.m. to 1 p.m.

Genoa Park
405 Water Street, Genoa, WI



vernon.com



Craig Buros, CEO & General Manager

110 Saugstad Road, Westby, WI 54667
608-634-3121 • 608-447-5051
email: info@vernonelectric.org
website: www.vernonelectric.org

Trevor Clark, Editor

