



# MEMBERSHIP SURVEY TO BEGIN

by Craig Buross, CEO & General Manager

Vernon Electric Cooperative is partnering with Power System Engineering to assess how we can better serve you! A random selection of 2,000 members will be asked to participate in a mail survey to provide feedback on our current program offerings as well as:

- Satisfaction with your cooperative
- Perspectives on conservation and climate change
- Interest in participating in energy-saving rates and programs
- Interest in electric vehicles, renewable energy, and energy-efficient technologies

Your opinions and feedback are extremely valuable and will help us determine programs that may be offered in the future.

The survey should take only 5-7 minutes to complete, and if you are selected to participate, your response will enter you into a drawing to win one of ten \$25 bill credits! Please take the time to fill out this important survey if you receive one in the mail. Thank you!

## Vernon Electric Cooperative Annual Meeting Well Attended

Thank you to all the members who attended Vernon Electric Cooperative's 87th Annual Meeting held in our warehouse on March 25, 2023. Nearly 400 people enjoyed a pancake breakfast before the start of the meeting. 230 memberships were registered to vote, making it one of the most well-attended annual meetings in years. \$750 scholarships were presented to 18 students along with a \$1,000 lineworker scholarship.

A detailed report from the member-elected Review Committee was read aloud confirming board minutes were in order and highlighting significant accomplishments of the board and cooperative in 2022.

In board elections, Orlan Bakkum, representing the Towns of Viroqua, Christiana, and Coon, retained his seat. Jerry Kramer, representing the Towns of Medary, Shelby, Hamburg, and Bergen, retained his seat. Ole Yttri, representing the Towns of Webster, Stark, Liberty, Forest (Richland Co.), and Kickapoo, was newly elected, replacing the incumbent.

Bylaw amendments recommended for approval by the District Delegates at this year's District Committee Conference were discussed and passed.

Three advisory resolutions were presented by members. The resolutions had to do with "Transparency and Community Concern," "To Encourage Farm and Home Solar," and "Energy Planning." After discussion and voting, two of the resolutions were defeated, and the Resolution to Encourage Farm and Home Solar passed.

Due to the length of the meeting from much discussion over bylaws and resolutions, my report and the Dairyland Power Cooperative update were postponed, and after the drawing of door prizes, the meeting was adjourned. To find out who won door prizes, see the newsletter that came with your billing statement (linked in email if you are paperless, and also available at [www.vernonelectric.org/newsannual-report](http://www.vernonelectric.org/newsannual-report)).

Following the Annual Meeting the board met to elect board officers. As a result, there were no changes. Bernadine Hornby is chair, Orlan Bakkum is vice-chair, David Dregne is secretary, Richard Nemec is treasurer, and Daniel Korn remains VEC's representative to the Dairyland Power board.



Scholarship winners from L to R: Alexis Pasch, Westby HS; Gracyn Beck, DeSoto HS; McKala Huebsch, La Farge HS; Madalyn Komay, Westby HS; Helen Clements, Kickapoo HS; Blake Larson, Central HS; Emma Solverson, Westby HS; and Braylan Zitzner, Viroqua HS. Other scholarship winners not pictured were: Bobby Skemp, Aquinas HS; Austin Culpit (lineworker scholarship), Chelsie Paulsen, and Zachary Mlsna, Chaston HS; Jeremiah Frederick, Hillsboro HS; McKinley Ray, Kickapoo HS; Tanner Bass, Luther HS; Aaliyah Fox, Viroqua HS; Blake Hatlan, Westby HS; and Kelsi Craker, non-traditional winner attending Edgewood College.

# DEEP ROOTED

## TOMATOES AND MORE



By Leah Call

In early May, eager gardeners and veggie lovers will have their first chance to purchase seedlings and bedding plants at Deep Rooted, three miles east of Westby. Celebrating its tenth year in business, this Vernon Electric Cooperative member is a source for organically grown seedlings and produce sold direct from the farm and at farmer's markets, co-ops, and restaurants throughout the region.

To prepare for the gardening season, the crew at Deep Rooted has been hard at work since January selecting and growing thousands of vegetable and herb seedlings. "We start everything from seed. All the transplants we sell in the spring are from seed that we get from Seed Savers out of Decorah, Iowa," said Deep Rooted owner Tiffany Cade, who has seen a surge in business over the last few years.

"During the pandemic we saw a lot of people move toward having gardens, growing their own food and preserving. So that created a huge increase in the sale of our vegetable and herb seedlings," said Cade.

### Top Tomato

Tomatoes are the star among the bounty of produce grown at Deep Rooted. "This year we are growing 43 varieties of tomatoes—a combination of cherry tomatoes, heirloom tomatoes, slicing tomatoes," Cade said.

Growing tomatoes runs in the family for Cade, whose stepfather grew tomatoes conventionally on the land where Deep Rooted stands today. When Cade took over the farm in 2012, she changed the farming methods, but continued to specialize in tomatoes.

"Our main goal was to switch the systems over to certified organic growing methods," explained Cade. "We had interest in heirloom seeds, so we expanded on those."

Deep Rooted sells vine-ripened organically grown tomatoes direct to customers and to area restaurants from May through October. They even offer bulk quantities of canning tomatoes beginning in June for those who want to get an early start on the preserving process.

Through the years, Cade has been on a quest to find the most flavorful tomatoes. "This year we are trialing five new varieties. It's nice to offer a selection of different flavor profiles, colors, and shapes that people in this area may not be familiar with," she said.

For those home gardeners looking to try something new, Cade suggests experimenting with green tomato varieties. "When people think of a green tomato, they think of an unripe tomato, but there are actually quite a few varieties that turn a lighter shade of green when they are ripe," she explained. "Sun Green is a cherry tomato we like that is actually really, really sweet."





Tomato lovers can sample all 43 tomato varieties grown at the Deep Rooted at the annual Tasty Tomato Festival, held over Labor Day weekend. The event features music, a taco bar, bloody Marys, and, of course, lots of delicious tomatoes. “We slice all our varieties and set them out for people to sample and vote for their favorite,” says Cade.

## New Energy, New Offerings

In 2020 Deep Rooted installed solar panels that power the greenhouses and supply the farm’s energy throughout the summer. “We like to say the tomatoes are not only ripened by the sun, they are also grown by the sun,” quipped Cade. “We have seen a huge savings. It is fun to watch our usage and how much is generated by the solar panels.”

Deep Rooted then increased its energy efficiency by switching to LED grow lights used for growing microgreens year-round.

A Farm Share Program provides cash flow that also keeps things growing. The program functions much like a CSA membership, but it gives members more control over what they get in the box. “Members can spend that money on anything Deep Rooted,” explained Cade. “If they run out of money, they can add more to their credit.”

While the Farm Share Program is not new, the Cut Flower Subscription is in just its third year and drawing a lot of interest. Subscribers choose the subscription duration—from 4 to 15 weeks—for a weekly bouquet of fresh-cut flowers delivered to various pick-up locations.

The garden center also offers new floral workshops throughout the summer. “People can come to the farm, tour our cut flower fields, and then make a bouquet or centerpiece that they can take home,” explains Cade.

In May a Mother’s Day-focused workshop will feature specialty tulips and spring blooms. In June, the workshop will highlight ranunculus, which Cade says is her favorite flower. “A lot of people are not familiar with those, but they are gorgeous,” she said.

For more details on the Farm Share Program, Floral Subscription, and upcoming floral workshops, check out Deep Rooted’s website and Facebook page.

## Knowledgeable Staff

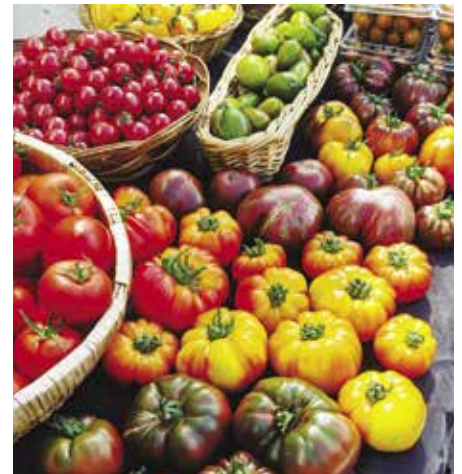
The garden center at Deep Rooted is open seven days a week: 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday – Saturday, and 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. on Sundays. All the vegetable and herb seedlings are listed on its website, so gardeners can research and make selections prior to visiting the center. They can even place their order in advance for easy pick up.

Customers can order and pick up

fresh organic ready-to-eat produce at Deep Rooted on Tuesdays and Fridays throughout the growing season.

Like the produce on her farm, Cade’s family is growing with the addition of eight-month-old Orion. “This summer we are just trying to figure out how to farm with a baby,” said Cade.

Luckily, she is not alone. The skilled staff at Deep Rooted are always ready to lend a hand. “That is what makes our garden center unique—all the heirloom varieties and our knowledgeable staff. We want customers to get off to a good start with healthy plants and the knowledge they need to be successful in their gardening venture.”



# MESSAGE FROM NEWLY ELECTED BOARD MEMBER

By Ole Yttri

Thank you to those members who supported me with your vote during our recent election. I'm a lifetime resident of Vernon County and a proud member of Vernon Electric Cooperative. As a member and former director, I believe the members of Vernon Electric Co-op are very fortunate to be a part of an entity which cares for its community in many valued ways including the following:



- Commitment to providing safe, reliable, and cost-effective energy
- Scholarship programs that support young people as they pursue higher education
- Donations to local food pantries, fire departments, and EMS associations that help to sustain these important services to members of our cooperative

My commitment to community is evident outside of Vernon Electric as well. For much of my life I have been a devoted community member. My additional leadership experience includes serving as Vernon County Board Supervisor #14 for my ninth two-year term, present chair of the Vernon Manor/Vernon Acres Trustees, a member of the Vernon County General Government Committee, and the Vernon County Board representative for the Aging Disability Resource Center. I have also served 20 years as the clerk for the Town of Webster.

I am looking forward to again representing Vernon Electric Cooperative members in the Towns of Forest (Richland Co.), Kickapoo, Liberty, Stark, and Webster. My strengths as a director for Vernon Electric include helping evaluate best use of funds for future projects, listening to diverse points of view, and assisting in moving forward with a cohesive, supported plan that benefits all members of the cooperative. I have completed the required Credentialed Cooperative Director (CCD) Certificate of five educational courses, plus eight additional courses. I support Vernon Electric Cooperative's Community Solar project offerings. I am open to innovative plans, exploring electrical service options, and ensuring safe, reliable, and cost-effective electric energy for all members of the cooperative. Thank you again for your support. I look forward to representing you.

**Craig Buros, CEO & General Manager**

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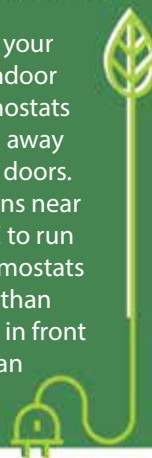
## A Safe, Happy House

Four Easy Ways to Boost Electrical Safety at Home



## Energy Efficiency Tip of the Month

The location of your thermostat can impact your HVAC system's ability to maintain an ideal indoor temperature. For maximum accuracy, thermostats should be placed in the center of the home, away from air vents, plumbing pipes and exterior doors. Avoid placing items like lamps and televisions near your thermostat, which can cause the HVAC to run longer than necessary. Avoid installing thermostats in rooms that tend to feel warmer or colder than the rest of the home. Do not place furniture in front of the thermostat, which can block air flow and result in inaccurate readings.



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