BENCO Employees and Directors Celebrate Years of Service

Brad Leiding - Director
20 Years

Blake & Sheryl Mechke - Director
15 Years

Paula Metzler
5 Years

Chris & Sara Schweiss
5 Years

Nick Smith
5 Years

Tom & Pam Wilmes
Retirement

Congratulations to all our award recipients!

Not pictured: Paul Cumbee - 20 Years - Ryan Weller - 20 Years

Mark your Calendar!
BENCO Electric Cooperative Annual Meeting
April 4, 2020
Mankato Civic Center, Mankato
Happy New Year! We had a good 2019 at BENCO Electric Cooperative and we are looking forward to serving you in 2020.

In April of this past year we had one major ice storm. It left some members without power for a few days. We are very proud of our employees for their long hours in safely restoring power to the members. Also, we are grateful to have neighboring electric cooperatives and contractors to assist us in this process.

We are still working with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and Minnesota Homeland Security and Emergency Management, that offer financial assistance, to rebuild our damaged system. This is a detailed process and should be completed in 2020.

In 2019, we started the process of rebuilding our Jamestown Substation in Blue Earth County. This substation should be completed in the 1st quarter of 2020. It was one of our oldest substations that feeds a growing area in northeast Blue Earth County.

Save the date for the BENCO Electric Annual Meeting! The annual meeting will be held on Saturday, April 4th, at the Civic Center in Mankato. We hope to see you there!

Please feel free to stop by or give me a call if you have any questions or concerns.

Cooperatively yours,

From the Board

Thursday, November 21, 2019
Blake Meshke Presided

The board reviewed and approved the minutes of the October 31, 2019 board meeting.

Chuck Peterson gave the legal report and reviewed recent work for the Cooperative.

Dave reported on CTV and filings with the FCC for recent channel changes.

Tim gave the Operations and Engineering report. He stated that Logan Stadheim will be starting as a First Step Apprentice Line Technician and that construction has started to slow down due to the cold weather.

John gave the Energy Services Report. Duels Fuel members can sign-up and receive notifications through text messaging.

Kathy gave the Member Services Report. Nominating Committee Meetings were held in District 3, 5 and 7.

Matt Starkey was accepted by the BENCO Electric Board as a director on the Operation Round Up Trust Board representing District 4.

Directors’ reports were as follows:

Gary reported on Great River Energy.

Blake and Duane gave the CTV Report.

John reported on MREA.

Those directors attending reported on the Cooperative Network Annual Meeting.

Parents of High School Sophomores & Juniors!

Your child could win an all expense paid trip to Washington, DC

Each year, BENCO Electric Cooperative partners with the National Rural Electrical Cooperative Association (NRECA) and Minnesota Rural Electrical Association (MREA) to award an all-expenses paid trip to Washington, DC for one high-school sophomore or junior who’s parents are members of the Cooperative.

To apply, include the following:

• submit a one page, typed essay on “Why I want to go to Washington, DC”
• students’ name
• parents’ names
• email address
• name of the high school they attend
• a list of activities they’re involved in

Please mail your entry to: BENCO Electric Cooperative, Attn: Chelsea, PO Box 8, Mankato, MN 56002. Entries must be received no later than Friday, February 7, 2020.
5 Ways to Pay

In a world full of options, convenience and flexibility, BENCO offers its members a variety of different ways to make timely payments. Check out the list below to find the form of payment that best fits your lifestyle.

1. Pay Online - Manage your account right from your computer, laptop, smartphone or tablet via benco.org/payonline. Users can “Pay Now” and make a one-time payment with a debit or credit card. This is available 24/7/365 and no registration is required. Users can “Pay Bill and View Usage” on a monthly basis with a debit or credit card; this is available 24/7/365 and requires registration on SmartHub.

2. Auto Pay - The most secure and cost-effective method of payment, automatic payments (Electronic Funds Transfer) will be made toward your account by automatically deducting funds directly from a checking or savings account. Full payment will be deducted on the due date of the bill. In order to utilize AutoPay, users are required to create an account within SmartHub. To sign up for AutoPay, visit the web page www.benco.org/autopay.

3. Pay by Mail - Check payments can be mailed to: BENCO Electric Cooperative, PO BOX 8, Mankato, MN 56002.

4. Pay By Phone - Payments can be made by phone, 24/7/365 with a debit or credit card or electronic check, by calling 1-855-730-8705. If paying by electronic check, user must have previously set up a PIN number.

5. Pay In Person - Stop by our office, located at 20946 549 Ave., Mankato, MN 56001, to make payments of cash, check, debit / credit card, money order or cashier’s check. Payments are accepted in-person, Monday - Friday, from 7:30 am - 4:00 pm. Payments can also be submitted at this location using our drop box 24/7/365.

PCA Update

Actual PCA for December
$0.0283

The Power Cost Adjustment (PCA) is due to changes in the monthly wholesale rate from our power supplier, Great River Energy (GRE).

We Need You!

As people shift away from land lines and move to cellular telephones, we are finding that we don’t always have current telephone numbers on file.

To help keep the lines of communication open, please take a few minutes to verify that the phone numbers and email addresses we have on file for your account are correct. This will allow BENCO to utilize multiple methods of communication to ensure you stay informed, like during power outages. Mostly, ensuring that correct contact information is on your account allows BENCO to contact you regarding your account for whatever need arises. You can review and update your contact information by:

• Going to benco.org and reviewing your account information on SmartHub
• Calling BENCO at 507-387-7963
• Sending an email to contactbenco@benco.org

Help us, help you by taking the time to ensure we have your contact information up to date.
Employee Announcements

Congratulations Tyler!

Tyler Moorman, a BENCO Electric Cooperative employee, has successfully completed one of the world's most comprehensive training programs for power line personnel. The Merchant Job Training and Safety Program (MJTS) is administered to line personnel in 40 states throughout the United States. MJTS is also under contract with NRECA International LTD, supplying a Spanish program for use around the world.

Tyler and the support staff at BENCO Electric Cooperative can be proud of their accomplishments. Each utility has an Acting Training Coordinator assisting trainees by administering “closed book” testing. The coordinators manage their own people throughout the training process from rules set by the MJTS and the statewide association people.

BENCO Electric Welcomes Logan Stadheim!

Logan Stadheim joined BENCO Electric Cooperative as an Apprentice Line Technician in December.

Logan comes to BENCO from Albert Lea. He was doing contract work with Emblom’s Midwest Power Line Construction out of Sauk Centre before coming to BENCO to work as a 1,000 hour apprentice this past Fall.

Logan enjoys hunting, fishing and playing softball in his spare time.

He looks forward to completing his apprenticeship at BENCO and becoming a Journeyman.

Welcome Logan!

Where, Oh Where?
The following is a list of former BENCO Members whose capital credit checks were returned by the post office as undeliverable. Any information you can give us to help locate them would be greatly appreciated. Please contact Lori at 387-7963 or 1-888-792-3626.

C
Olivia Cuellar, St. Peter
Joseph Culhane, Lobelville, TN
Gail A. Curran, Mankato
Michael I. Curtis, Eden Prairie
Perry Cuttino, Newport, RI

D
Doug Daberkow, North Mankato
Travis N. Dahl, Mankato
Judith A. Danberry, Mankato
Ronald Danberry, Truman
Arthur L. Danks, Vernon Center
Margaret A. Danks, Mapleton
Cindy Dauer, Eagle Lake
Kevin Davenport, Las Vegas, NV
Chris J. Davis, St. Cloud
James B. Davis, Merrimac, WI
Kenneth Davis, Mankato
Michael A. Davis, Mankato
Ralph W. Davis, St. Paul
Edward A. Day, St. Peter
M S De Jong, Oreana, IL
Russell De Mars, Waseca
Ingrid DeVries, North Mankato
Gina Deegan, Mankato
Jeanne K. Delbarre, Mankato
Cindy J. Den Hartdog, St. Clair
Gary Desai, Carmel, IN
Tim D. Detert, Highlands Ranch, CO
Timothy M. Dettmer, Batavia, NY
Steve Devney, Mapleton
Vaughn Diamond, Trinidad, CO
Joe Diaz, Eagle Lake
Charles H. Diener, Nicollet
Carter L. Diers, Mankato
Melissa Dimmick, Eagle Lake
Richard S. Dixon, Austin
Terrence L. Dobbelaere, N Mankato
Consumer Alert: Department of Commerce Alerted to New Publishers Clearing House Lottery Scam

The Minnesota Department of Commerce has been alerted to a new mail scam targeting seniors across Minnesota.

Minnesotans are receiving letters in the mail mimicking the branding of Publishers Clearing House, announcing they have won the “100 Million Dollars Super Cash Giveaway Promotion.” The letter includes an enclosed check of approximately $6,000 to cover “insurance and attorney fees.” Recipients are instructed to contact the “Claims Manager” before cashing the check to receive further information on the prize. Recipients are also instructed to not discuss their win with third parties, “as required by Federal and State laws.”

The Department of Commerce discovered that when the “Claims Manager” is called, the recipient answers the call with, “Publishers Clearing House, how may I help you?” The caller is instructed to cash the check and then wire money to the scammer as soon as possible in order to process their multi-million dollar winnings. The original check then bounces, and the recipient has lost the money they wired and incurs returned check charges.

The scam is particularly sophisticated, due to the convincing Publishers Clearing House branding and the professionalism of the call centers that field the calls. Even so, Minnesotans can stay in control by remembering these tips:

- Do not wire money or send a money order, gift card or cashier’s check. It is almost impossible to recover these funds if you have been scammed.
- Be wary of urgent requests. Do not fall for a pitch that encourages you to “act now” or creates a false sense of urgency.
- If a deal sounds too good to be true, it probably is. Avoid investments that are pitched as having no risk or offering unrealistic returns. Always be cautious of lottery scams.
- Never rely on information you receive in a letter or email. Look up contact information yourself and call Publishers Clearing House, or whatever company sent you the letter, directly if you have any questions.

“If you suspect that you have received this scam, or any financial scam, please contact the Department of Commerce,” said Commerce Commissioner Steve Kelley. “Hearing from Minnesotans helps us investigate fraud, gather evidence to share with our federal partners and stop scammers from finding new victims.”

One Minnesotan who alerted the Department of Commerce to the scam is Donna Osmundson of Adams, Minnesota. “When I received the letter in the mail, it looked too good to be true,” said Donna. “The Department of Commerce confirmed for me that it is scam. I am glad I notified the Department, so they can help educate people that these types of scams are out there, and they can help seniors know what to look for.”

“We have not yet received reports of victims in Minnesota who have fell for this specific scam, but we are aware of victims in other states. We have seen victims of other lottery scams who have lost substantial amounts of money and it is almost guaranteed that there are victims of this Publishers Clearing House scam who have not reported their loss to the Department,” said Marty Fleischhacker, senior fraud ombudsman at Commerce. “All signs point to this scam being widespread, so please, contact Commerce if you have received it.”

If you have questions or if you believe you may have been the victim of a scam or fraud, please contact the Commerce Department’s Consumer Services Center by email at consumer.protection@state.mn.us or by phone at 651-539-1600 or 800-657-3602 (Greater Minnesota). Commerce staff will maintain your confidentiality.
What’s Cookin’ in your Kitchen?

Slow Cooker Cheesy Turkey Sandwiches
From the Kitchen of: Colleen Bach

Ingredients:
• 6 cups cooked turkey, shredded
• 2 cups cubed cheese (Velveeta)
• 1 can cream of chicken soup
• 1 can cream of mushroom soup
• 1/2 cup chopped celery
• 1/2 cup chopped onion

Instructions:
In a frying pan saute celery and onion with a tablespoon of butter; then place in a slow cooker with shredded cooked turkey, cheese, cream of chicken soup and cream of mushroom soup. Stir and cook on low for 3-4 hours. Stir well and serve on hamburger buns.

You can receive a $20 credit on your electric bill if your recipe gets printed in the newsletter.
Send your favorite recipes to:
Chelsea, BENCO Electric Cooperative, PO Box 8, Mankato, MN 56002