



# ANNUAL MEETING HIGHLIGHTS

## New director elected, co-op's operations and challenges reviewed

By Jesse Singerhouse, General Manager

Dunn Energy Cooperative (DEC) celebrated the 86th Annual Meeting of Members on Thursday, May 18, 2023. With 120 people in attendance, the cooperative bid farewell to longtime Director Larry Amble. Amble has represented District 1 for the last 12 years and has reached his term limit. During his final president's speech, he took time to thank the directors, managers, and employees both past and present for their support throughout the years. Amble was given a meter lamp as a token of the cooperative's gratitude for his years of service.

Amble also spoke to his belief in the cooperative's Operation Round Up program. Through small actions, the voices (and change) of many can combine to do great things. In 2022, the Operation Round Up program awarded nearly \$48,000 in grants to local not-for-profit organizations. Amble asked members who do not currently participate to think about signing up, to help create an even bigger contribution to organizations in need in our communities.

In the election of directors, Karl Varnes won the seat held by Amble, and Directors Stokke and Kummer retained their seats for another term.

It was my pleasure to introduce the 2023 scholarship winners. Each year Dunn Energy Cooperative awards 15 scholarships to local graduating seniors whose parents are members of the cooperative. Along with the youth scholarship, DEC awards a single non-traditional scholarship to someone returning to school after a hiatus of at least three years, as well as a scholarship at Chippewa Valley Technical College for someone in the Electrical Power Distribution program.

I also spoke about the day-to-day operations of the cooperative, as well as the cooperative's financial stability.

First and foremost, we operated safely day in and day out. We kept your energy reliable, with members having power over 99% of the time, we kept your energy affordable by controlling costs where we could, to try and minimize the impacts of inflation. We made your energy more environmentally responsible by securing agreements to build small-scale solar farms near Boyceville and Colfax. (2502003) Those principles of safely providing our members with reliable, affordable, and environmentally responsible energy

drive what we do operationally each day.

I also spoke about the challenges the cooperative faced in 2022. Supply-chain issues and the dramatic increase in the costs of materials were a major hurdle in 2022 and will continue to be for the foreseeable future as well as the push from outside influences trying to disrupt the regulated industry we currently enjoy.

You see, our industry is seeing efforts by groups, individual states, and federal agencies through laws, regulations, and mandates to take away our ability to use an all-of-the-above approach to power generation. Energy policy, like many issues in our society, has been overtaken by a political ideology which tries to divide people on issues by making things absolute, meaning you're either for it or against it, with no middle ground.

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Being an electric cooperative allows us to be the truth tellers as we talk about the future of power generation. We were formed by our members to serve our members, not shareholders or profits. It allows us to approach issues in a fair and practical way with the goal of solving problems and looking out for the best interest of our members. Energy policy does not have to be an absolute. We can have both a reliable grid and a healthy environment by using a common-sense, long-term practical approach with an all-of-the-above energy policy while technology develops.

Guest Speaker Rob Richard, the director of government affairs at WECA, also spoke to the threat of third-party ownership of renewable energy systems. Richard noted that the threat is that third-party installers would piggy-back on cooperative-owned infrastructure, without having to pay for it, and at the same time cherry-pick the largest loads to serve. This could create a large loss of load and reduction in sales for the cooperative while creating the need to maintain facilities (lines, poles, and equipment) without revenue. This could be the perfect storm of sales loss and maintenance cost increases that would negatively affect the rates of the rest of the cooperative membership.

"With nearly \$400 billion being invested in clean energy programs and tax credits, there are many reasons why clean energy startups are booming and some of their business practices may be a little unscrupulous," stated Richard. "What



Karl Varnes

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# EAU CLAIRE EVENTS DISTRICT: *There's a New Venue in Town*

**B**y now you've probably heard that Country Jam has moved. For over 30 years, the festival has been at home off of County Road EE in the Town of Union, near Eau Claire. Starting this month, with Country Jam 2023, the festival grounds will be on County Highway T just south of State Road 29 in Chippewa County.

This move isn't just about Jam though. The new grounds have expanded into what's called the Eau Claire Event District. This is the largest event venue in the Chippewa Valley, boasting two indoor sites, a pavilion, and festival

grounds including camping. There are 1,300 parking spaces, and at any given time the space can hold 4,000 people under the cumulative of the three roofs.

If you reserve one of the two indoor venues, you'll find state-of-the-art audio-visual equipment and full-service catering. You will also have access to an event coordinator dedicated to you and your needs, and you won't have to worry about renting tables, chairs, or linens either. The venue fee includes the use of their high-end furnishings.

You can book the High Country venue, which is 18,000 square feet of

customizable event space that can seat up to 1,000 people. A wall of glass overhead doors can open to patio space and boasts a dedicated bar, high ceilings, and outdoor patio.

If you're looking for something a little more intimate, The Crescent accommodates up to 650 seated guests and has two on-site hospitality suites. With exposed wooden beams, large fireplace, and beautiful chandeliers, this space is sure to be perfect for weddings, class reunions, and more.

But don't let these ideas pigeon hole the spaces. If you can dream it, Eau



Claire Event District will help you make it a reality. (9300008)

“We are incredibly excited for the opportunities the Eau Claire Event District will provide for planners in the Chippewa Valley, but beyond that, we expect that our venue will become a destination sought out by coordinators in the Twin Cities, Chicago, and beyond,” said Holly Hedrington, Eau Claire Event District CEO.

The grounds are built for potential growth with six lots, ranging in size from four to five acres, just begging for hotels and other event partners to fill them. With the widening of County Highway T and upgraded energy infrastructure, this area is likely to become a leading entertainment attraction in the Midwest.

“Dunn Energy Cooperative is excited to provide energy service to the Country Jam music festival and the Eau Claire Event District. The area along County T in Chippewa County and entering the City of Eau Claire is a place where we think economic development will continue to happen,” said Dunn Energy CEO Jesse Singerhouse. “The cooperative has invested in energy service infrastructure in this area, so it is ready to serve new projects as they develop. We look forward to working with the Eau Claire Event District, local economic development agencies, and developers to make this area a premier entertainment destination.”

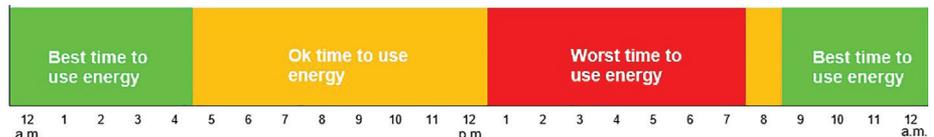


## DEVIL'S PUNCHBOWL GETS A BOOST FROM OPERATION ROUNDUP



Over the years the Dunn Energy Cooperative Operation Round Up program has donated over \$5,000 to the improvements of the Devil's Punchbowl along the Red Cedar River. The most recent award is \$1,600 for the framing of the new informational signage. If you haven't been there in a bit, the 30-foot sandstone cliffs and small waterfalls are a picturesque stop on Rustic Road 89. The addition of a massive staircase makes it a great place to swing in for a walk, take guests for a picnic, wander and take some pictures, or just do some bird watching. Did you know that there are 13 different species of ferns growing in the Punchbowl? The Devil's Punchbowl is a special spot in Dunn County; one certainly worth the drive to see.

## Don't forget to do the Summer Shift



# DIRECTOR OBTAINS NATIONAL RECOGNITION

Rachel Kummer from Dunn Energy Cooperative recently received the Credentialed Cooperative Director (CCD) certificate from the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA).

An ever-changing business environment has imposed new demands on electric cooperative directors, requiring increased



Board President Jeff Gasteyer presents Rachel Kummer with her CCD Certificate.

knowledge of changes in the electric utility business, new governance skills, and a solid knowledge of the cooperative principles and business model.

Dunn Energy Cooperative has a commitment to work through both our statewide association, Wisconsin Electric Cooperative Association, and NRECA to sharpen this body of knowledge for the benefit of our electric cooperative member-owners.

The NRECA Credentialed Cooperative Director program requires attendance and demonstrated understanding of the basic competencies contained in five core courses:

- Director Duties and Liabilities
- Understanding the Electric Business
- Board Operations and Process
- Strategic Planning
- Financial Decision Making

NRECA represents the nation's more than 900 private, member-owned electric cooperatives, which provide electric service to more than 42 million people in 47 states, with over 7,200 directors.

*Working for You*

## Hidden Account Numbers

If you find your account number hidden in the pages of this magazine and you call and tell us before the next issue is mailed, we'll put a **\$50 credit** on your electric bill. Happy hunting!

Last month's winners were John & Jeff Creaser and Shannon Birkholz.

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the bankruptcies of Moxie Solar and Sun Badger Solar have taught us is that there is a role for our electric cooperatives to play in helping to fully educate our consumer members on issues like community solar and third-party ownership. At the very least, our cooperative members need to have a basic understanding of how the business practices of unregulated entities can financially impact the cooperative, cause potential cost-shifting to members who would not participate in these programs, and why the lack of strong consumer protections for signing 20–25 year contracts should worry them significantly.”

Richard made sure to stress that WECA supports the installation of renewable energy, but not at the detriment of reliability and increased costs to the membership.

Members in attendance enjoyed a meal and fellowship and ended the meeting with a progressive drawing for bill credits in amounts increasing from \$25 to \$400. As a thank you, each member attending was also given a pound of cheese from neighboring cooperative partner, Ellsworth Cooperative Creamery.

**Jesse Singerhouse, Manager**

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