

CONDENSER

Weekly News & Updates in the Electric Utility Industry



**Wisconsin
Electric
Cooperative
Association**

November 10, 2023

WECA Hosts 87th Annual Meeting in Eau Claire



L to R: Karen Newbury, Al Jicinsky, Steve Johnson, Roger Wiff, Craig Buros, Dan Hilberry, Barb Miller, Monica Obrycki, Justin Jahnz, and Cindy Thorman. Not pictured: Robert Cornell and Les Dokkestul

Electric cooperative leaders from across the state gathered in Eau Claire this week for the 87th Annual Meeting of the Wisconsin Electric Cooperative Association. The program included a diverse mix of speakers covering topics from clean energy policy, to broadband, to electrification of rural areas in the Navajo Nation. The event took place at the Florian Gardens in Eau Claire November 8–9.

The business meeting included the official seating of the WECA Board of Directors which includes:

- Dan Hillberry, Richland Electric Cooperative
- Barb Miller, Rock Energy Cooperative
- Monica Obrycki, Eau Claire Energy Cooperative
- Roger Wiff, Pierce Pepin Cooperative Services
- Justin Jahnz, East Central Energy
- Steve Johnson, Chippewa Valley Electric Cooperative
- Cindy Thorman, Polk-Burnett Electric Cooperative
- Robert Cornell, Washington Island Electric Cooperative
- Al Jicinsky, Clark Electric Cooperative
- Karen Newbury, Price Electric Cooperative

WECA President and CEO Steve Freese and Director Roger Wiff recognized outgoing WECA Chair David Hischke and thanked him for his service. “It has been an honor working with (Dave),” Freese said.

“He took over when I couldn’t be there to follow through with leading us. He kept the organization together and did just a phenomenal job in leading it. And I will tell you that he exemplifies the kindness and the best of humanity in his actions when I get sick.” (Freese returned to work in February after a remarkable recovery from stage 4 cancer, but announced he recently learned the cancer has returned. He is working with his doctors on next steps.)

Freese announced WECA Director Dan Smrekar, Jackson Electric Cooperative, has resigned from the board due to health issues. The board appointed Les Dokkestul of Jackson Electric to fill the remainder of the term for the position that will be up for election next summer.

In reorganization, new officers are:

- Dan Hillberry, Chair
- Karen Newbury, Vice Chair
- Steve Johnson, Secretary/Treasurer
- Barb Miller, Executive Team
- Craig Buros, Executive Team

The Finance Committee includes Steve Johnson, Cindy Thorman, Al Jicinsky, Justin Jahnz, and Monica Obrycki.



*L to R back row: Craig Buros, Barb Miller, Steve Johnson
Front row: Dan Hillberry, Karen Newbury*



During his remarks, Freese said, “We have some healing to do,” after a budget plan aimed at bifurcating the cost of research and production of Wisconsin Energy Cooperative News, in an attempt to also ensure a cohesive, consistent message among electric cooperative members, caused some discord.

Freese said as a member-controlled organization, WECA will continue to work toward a solution.

Dr. David Gattie, associate professor of engineering at the University of Georgia, took a look at the nation’s approach to clean energy policy and what it means for national security and energy security going forward. For reliability, Gattie spoke unapologetically in favor of baseload energy sources including coal, natural gas, and nuclear. He said if you look at the data on a broad scale there is no “exponential” growth in renewable energy worldwide, as places like China continue to build coal plants.

“The world is not moving to renewables, no matter what the headline news says,” Gattie said. “They’ve hoodwinked us on this. They (China) are not providing leadership. And they’re not going to,” he added, offering quotes from world leaders that are non-committal on clean energy. Gattie said emerging economies in countries like Indonesia, Malaysia, Cambodia, and Vietnam, are, or will be, looking for partnerships on energy and electricity, and will turn to China and Russia for reliable energy sources—fossil fuels and nuclear. Gattie cites this as one reason going “all-in” on clean energy is a national security blunder.



“I am not anti-climate change. I understand rising sea levels. I get that. It is an issue and that is settled. I’m not going to argue that. The question is, if we are going to transition and restructure our entire economy around low carbon, what is that going to cost us?” Gattie said.

Fighter Pilot, EMT, and professional magician Reed “Roller” Barrett delivered a dynamic presentation about overcoming adversity, based on his own experiences which rerouted his own career plans. During the evening reception, he wowed and amazed many members with a variety of remarkable card tricks.

WECA Vice President of Government Affairs and External Relations Rob Richard offered a candid presentation about WECA’s approach to politics and political candidates, ensuring members “We support those who support us,” regardless of what side of the aisle they are on.



Reed “Roller” Barrett



Rob Richard

A moving panel presentation on efforts to electrify rural homes in the Navajo Nation included remarks from Walter Haase, general manager of the utility co-op in the region; Jeff Haas of the American Public Power Association, which helps support and promote the Light Up Navajo project; Kevin Kurtzweil, vice president of operations, Central Wisconsin Electric Cooperative; and two of his lineworkers who recently traveled to the New Mexico region to participate in the project, Alex Lutz and Jarrett Brow.



L to R: Walter "Wally" Haase, Jeff Haas, Julie Lund (WECA Director of News and Communications), Kevin Kurtzweil, Jarrett Brow, and Alex Lutz.

Even though the Navajo Nation is within the United States border, it was left behind during the electrification that happened in the 1930s and '40s, and despite the best efforts of the Navajo Tribal Utility Authority (the cooperative serving the area), there are still more than 13,000 households without electricity, and 18,000 without running water.

Haase shared moving stories about the work that has been done to assist with electrification in the Navajo Nation, as well as the training benefits the program offers for young lineworkers.

Lutz and Brow both said their experience was extremely rewarding. The Central Wisconsin Electric Cooperative board has already approved a plan to send another crew to the Navajo Nation in 2024.





Dan Kanack, Oconto Electric Cooperative, and Bob Kretzschmar, Bayfield Electric Cooperative



Mark Santikko, Bayfield Electric Cooperative, Lee Lehrer, Central Wisconsin Electric Cooperative, "Wally" Haase

To watch the 2023 WECA Year in Review video, go to:
<https://vimeo.com/882048564/21d32a8b8c?share=copy>

To watch a recap of the 2023 Youth Leadership Conference, go to:
<https://vimeo.com/882169063?share=copy>

Anibas Elected to NRECA Board



Judy Anibas, former WECA board member and chair, and Eau Claire Energy Cooperative director since 2009, was elected to represent the Wisconsin statewide on the NRECA board of directors. Anibas and Ken Ceagske, president and CEO of Taylor Electric Cooperative, ran for the seat that was vacated by Chuck Simmons.

In running for the position, Anibas said, "I recognize the commitment of electric cooperatives and

cooperatives in general in the world. Many of you probably belong to more than one cooperative in your rural America setting. They're great organizations. Electric cooperatives are recognized as reliable organizations in rural America, and also for commitment to education."

"I too recognize the importance of that education. I currently hold and maintain the Director Gold credential through NRECA. But the best part of that education is that I am better in the boardroom. I have more knowledge. I have better knowledge. We can use that knowledge consistently, confidently, and with a conviction to benefit our members. I have also used that knowledge and education while serving two consecutive terms on the WECA board."

While on the WECA board, Anibas was also the board appointee to Federated Youth Foundation. "As for commitment, I have the time and the ability. I'm actually

retired. I have the knowledge to be an effective board member, and the experience and to commit to that cause. I'm also an advocate for electric cooperatives in rural America."

Anibas, a former law enforcement officer, also noted she has been a longtime financial supporter of the electric cooperatives PAC, now known as the America's Electric Cooperatives PAC.

"These are exciting and challenging times for electric cooperative world. I'm up for the challenge. I'm committed to advocate for Wisconsin. I'm invested and I'm proud to be able to serve on the National Board for you," Anibas said.

Leifer, Potthast, ACE Awards Presented

WECA hosted an awards presentation following the first day of programming at the annual meeting, to recognize the honorees selected to receive the Leifer, Potthast, and ACE awards.



L to R: Wendy Fassbind, Dallas Sloan, and Liz Gunderson

Dallas Sloan, longtime community and cooperative leader and former head of Barron Electric Cooperative, accepted the 2023 Ally of Cooperative Electrification (ACE) award, WECA's highest honor. Sloan retired in 2021 after 36 years with the co-op, having served as general manager since 2009.

WECA Director of Education and Events Wendy Fassbind was honored with the 2023 Herman C. Potthast Award for outstanding service, dedication, leadership, and cooperation with an emphasis on safety. The Job Training & Safety (JT&S) Committee selected Fassbind, who has been with the statewide for nearly 23 years and has been instrumental in growing and expanding WECA education and safety program offerings. This year marked a record year for education programming.

Pierce Pepin Cooperative Services and local pages editor Liz Gunderson were honored with the 2023 N.F. Leifer Memorial Journalism Award, bestowed upon the co-op adjudged to have had the strongest overall local pages in the Wisconsin Energy Cooperative News over the previous 12 months. This is Pierce Pepin's first-ever Leifer award since the local pages contest was established in 1966.

Also, the following co-ops were recognized with certificates for their commitment to the Rural Electric Safety Achievement Program (RESAP):

- Barron Electric Cooperative
- Bayfield Electric Cooperative
- Central Wisconsin Electric Cooperative
- Eau Claire Energy Cooperative
- Rock Energy Cooperative
- Scenic Rivers Energy Cooperative
- Taylor Electric Cooperative
- Washington Island Electric Cooperative

Federated Youth Foundation Investments Rebound, Board Filled



*New FYF board members Monica Obrycki
and Trevor Clark*

The Federated Youth Foundation held its 2023 Annual Meeting at the Florian Gardens just prior to the WECA Annual Meeting. This was Rob Richard's first annual meeting as executive director of FYF. Richard talked about the transition that has happened since taking over and plans going forward to continue to operate as efficiently as possible.

WECA director and CEO of Eau Claire Energy Cooperative Monica Obrycki and Vernon Electric Cooperative Manager of Communications and Member Services Trevor Clark were both elected unanimously to fill two open board seats.

Jackson Electric Member Relations Manager and FYF Board Secretary/Treasurer Carol Blaken reported member contributions came in just below last year's record (\$1.6 million) at \$1.459 million. Due to more favorable market conditions, FYF saw an unrealized gain on investment of \$288,339, an increase of \$1.02 million over last year (when there was a loss). Blaken reported FYF is in good financial condition, ending the fiscal year in August of 2023 with \$5.37 million in total assets.

In the 2023 fiscal year, FYF awarded 665 college scholarships totaling nearly \$1.24 million and made 753 charitable distributions totaling \$441,000.

PSC Receives Record Applications for Latest Round of Broadband Funding

State and federal government representatives were on hand at WECA's annual meeting to talk about broadband funding access, including the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law's Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) Program.

Wisconsin is set to receive more than \$1 billion.

Alyssa Kenney, Wisconsin broadband and digital equity director, Public Service Commission of Wisconsin (PSC), reported that Tuesday the application period closed for the Capital Projects Fund (CPF). Under the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA), the U.S. Department of Treasury awarded Wisconsin \$42 million through CPF to administer the Broadband Infrastructure Program and invest in projects that will provide high-quality internet to locations that lack access.

Kenney said the PSC received 124 applications seeking more than \$221 million.



Carah Koch (L) and Alyssa Kenney (R)

"It's five times more money than is available was requested. It is the highest ratio we have ever had to available grant funds," Kenney said. "So we're really excited for it because we know there's a lot of need in this state."

East Central Energy, Ntera (Chippewa Valley Electric Cooperative and Citizens Connected), and Swiftcurrent Connect (Pierce Pepin Cooperative Services) are among the entities that applied for funds under this program.

Carah Koch, federal program officer (WI), Office of Internet Connectivity and Growth (OICG), National Telecommunications and Information Administration, also presented at the meeting.

In Memory: Bradley Jordan



Bradley Jordan, who was a hands-on asset to Washington Island Electric Cooperative in its work to install fiber internet to the island, died in a motorcycle crash in July. He was 23.

Jordan interned and worked part-time at the co-op while he was still in high school, and he earned his diploma in Electrical Power Distribution from Northeast Wisconsin Technical College with the hopes of returning to Washington Island to work at a lineworker.

Washington Island Electric Cooperative General Manager Robert Cornell wrote in WECN, "He will be missed by many, but our thoughts are particularly with his family and we hope they find a bit of solace in how well liked he was, how proud of him we all were, and how a little bit of Bradley will always be a part of why the lights are on here."



STATEWIDE SUPPORTERS

The Wisconsin Electric Cooperative Association would like to recognize all of our sponsors and associate members for supporting our efforts on behalf of the state's electric cooperatives, so they may continue to supply safe, reliable, and affordable electricity to members. Please join us in supporting these partners of the electric cooperative community.

This week we would like to highlight:



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