



# condenser

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## Longer and stronger

## Statewide organization strengthened during past year

America's first statewide organization for electric cooperatives grew a year older and significantly stronger compared with last fall, attendees at the Wisconsin Electric Cooperative Association's (WECA) 81st annual meeting learned this week.

Nearly 140 delegates gathered Tuesday and Wednesday at the Holiday Inn Convention Center in Stevens Point, where they were told that the WECA's unrestricted equity had reached almost \$545,000, four times the amount from a year ago, and that the organization had been ahead of schedule in paying off \$100,000 on its quarter-million dollar line of credit with the National Rural Utilities Cooperative Finance Corporation.

WECA finished the 2016-17 fiscal year with a net margin of more than \$408,000, a number that was



Elaine Eckendorf

41 percent better than the budgeted amount, delegates learned from Director Elaine Eckendorf's final treasurer's report.

Reaching her term limit, Eckendorf stepped down from the board at the annual meeting and was presented with a plaque commemorating her outstanding service as a "steadfast director" in the words of WECA President and CEO Steve Freese.

Board Chairman David Paudler reported that the organization finished the year "in extraordinarily good financial shape," emphasizing that the larger-than-expected margin was achieved without increasing dues above levels for 2015 and with no increase in the subscription rate for the

monthly *Wisconsin Energy Cooperative News* magazine.

In fact, Paudler noted, subscribing cooperatives received partial refunds from WECA on magazine revenues—in lieu of a substantial sum being paid out in taxes. Checks totaling \$79,000 for the 2016-17 fiscal year were presented Tuesday afternoon to the subscribing cooperatives.

Paudler also noted the creation of an operating reserve policy aimed at setting aside a half-million dollars over five years to support continuing day-to-day WECA operations in the event of unforeseen shortfalls. Paudler reported that the strong performance over the past fiscal year—plus the two preceding months—has already allowed management to propose



David Paudler

## Clark: Service "makes us what we are"



Richland Electric Cooperative CEO and General Manager Shannon Clark praised a previous ACE Award winner as a mentor as he accepted the Wisconsin Electric Cooperative Association's highest honor Tuesday evening in Stevens Point.

The late Richland Electric Board President Gilman Moe, the 1996 ACE Award winner, helped create "a culture of people putting service above self," Clark said, adding that for Wisconsin's electric co-op community, the commitment to service "makes us what we are."

"There are very few times I'm at a loss for words and I didn't think tonight would be one of them,"

Clark said, clearly moved by the recognition. But he then found the words to deliver an inspiring account that included the bitter loss of a close friend in the 1983 Beirut Marine barracks truck bombing that he said helped focus his own life on service to others.

He thanked the Richland Electric board for giving him "the authority and autonomy to make changes" that helped the cooperative serve as an engine of economic growth and development in its service area.

Clark joked that people receiving the ACE award are typically at or nearing retirement, but assured the audience that he was not planning to leave his position anytime soon.

The Ally of Cooperative Electrification Award has been given since 1967 to recognize distinguished contributions to the advancement of rural electrification in Wisconsin.



**Eau Claire Energy Cooperative's journalism** was hailed Tuesday evening in Stevens Point as its Communications and Public Relations Manager Mary

Kay Brevig received the N.F. Leifer Award for the past year's best efforts in creating the local co-op pages of the *Wisconsin Energy Cooperative News* magazine. Brevig had previously received the award in two consecutive years and for three of the past four. She spoke of the extensive variety of topics she was able to address in her writing, called the work "exciting," and thanked the co-op board and management for allowing her the time needed to focus on the local-page work.



**Barron Electric Cooperative's Director** of Operations Nathan Steines was presented with the Herman C. Potthast Award recognizing distinguished performance in the field of electric cooperative job training and safety Tuesday evening at the Wisconsin Electric Cooperative Association annual awards banquet in Stevens Point. Seen here, Steines and his wife, Kelly, display the plaque earned by actions a Washburn County sheriff's officer described as "heroic" in assisting two highway accident victims while performing his daily co-op duties. Steines thanked Barron Electric for "providing the training that allowed me to assist the victims in their time of need."

## Annual meeting brings board changes

Just one new director was seated on the Wisconsin Electric Cooperative Association board at the 81st annual meeting this week, but other changes took place in the reorganization meeting that followed.

David Hischke, chairman of the Oconto Electric board, was seated to succeed Elaine Eckendorf of Central Wisconsin Electric, who reached her term limit. Hischke was elected during district meetings this past summer.

In the reorganization, incumbents David Paudler of Riverland Energy and Larry Dokkestul of Pierce Pepin Cooperative Services were re-elected chairman and vice chairman, respectively. Multiple ballots were required before Derrick Oberle of St. Croix Electric emerged from a field of four nominees to succeed Eckendorf as secretary-treasurer.

Multiple ballots were also needed to choose among five nominees for two executive committee slots, with incumbent Diane Zimmerman of East Central Energy winning re-election and Barron Electric's Dallas Sloan picked to succeed Bill Fischer of Rock Energy.

## FYF joins WECA meeting

Delegates to the Federated Youth Foundation (FYF) annual meeting Wednesday at Stevens Point voted unanimously to approve permanently scheduling the gathering in conjunction with the Wisconsin Electric Cooperative Association's annual meeting. The motion was approved on a voice vote and without debate.

Delegates also voted, without opposition, to re-elect Director David Cooper, general manager of Madison-based Farm First Dairy Cooperative. His was

the only board seat up for election.

Board Chairman Herman Seebandt of Clark Electric Cooperative and Executive Director Ethan Giebel reported strong performance by the organization over the past year. It now holds \$3.05 million in total assets and has realized a 6 percent return on investments averaged over the years beginning in 2003.

Thirty-four cooperatives are contributing annually and administrative costs, at about 12 percent, are only a little more than half the 20 percent of revenues typically reported by similar foundations, they said.

## WECA annual meeting (continued from previous page)

for board approval the contribution of \$225,000 to the reserve, nearly half the five-year targeted amount.



Steve Freese

Freese presented a wide-ranging report detailing multiple government-relations successes in WECA lobbying efforts, stronger offerings in member education programming, continuing high-profile communications programs for both the broad membership and co-op personnel, and an anticipated higher level of involvement with federal government issues and international co-op development.

Citing Wisconsin Department of

Natural Resources planning for monarch butterfly habitat preservation and a potential U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service listing of the monarch as an endangered species, Freese urged member co-ops to look into habitat-restoration projects that might help stave off both the federal listing and a state program that could affect more than 350,000 acres, with more than 46,000 of those acres including utility right-of-way.

## Chapter 185 revisions approved

Both houses of the Wisconsin Legislature voted Tuesday afternoon in favor of a package of revisions to the state's Chapter 185 cooperative laws.

The Assembly produced a bipartisan 74-18 majority supporting Assembly Bill 353 as amended with co-op input, and the Senate voted later on the same version of the bill, approving it on a voice vote.

All opposing votes were cast by Assembly Democrats. Thirteen Assembly Democrats voted with majority Republicans to pass the bill. No individual votes were recorded in the Senate.

## Ag secretary appointment reported

In what would almost certainly be history's first example of siblings serving the same state in the office of agriculture secretary, State Senator Sheila Harsdorf was believed to be set for appointment to the post by Governor Walker in unconfirmed reports reaching *Condenser* at press time for this week's edition.

She would succeed Ben Brancel, who retired as secretary in August. Brancel served two stints as agriculture secretary, from 1997-2001 and from 2011 until this summer.

Harsdorf (R-River Falls) has served in the state Senate since 2001 and represents parts of Burnett, Dunn, Pierce, Polk, and St. Croix Counties. She previously served five terms in the Assembly, from 1989-99.

Her brother, Jim Harsdorf, served as Wisconsin's agriculture secretary from 2001-03, and had previously served in the state Senate and Assembly representing districts in the same region to be served later by his sister.

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**Wisconsin Electric Cooperative Association**

222 W. Washington Ave., Suite 680  
Madison, WI 53703