

A WORD FROM



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## Join us for your cooperative's annual meeting!

When you attend your annual meeting on Saturday, March 28, at the North Butler Elementary School in Allison, you can expect a delicious, free lunch; the great sounds of the band Wichita; and the opportunity to speak with your cooperative directors and employees. You can also learn about our services and programs and check out displays in the gymnasium.

One of the benefits of being a cooperative member is voting for directors. You decide who governs your electric utility. For the first time, this year we are offering mail-in voting, along with voting at the annual meeting. Mail-in ballots were sent out at the end of February. If you choose to mail-in your ballot, be sure to send it so we receive it by Friday, March 27, at 11 a.m.

The business meeting will be followed by a drawing for prizes, including cash, and each voting member will receive a picnic blanket. We look forward to seeing you at the annual meeting!

### ANNUAL MEETING: SATURDAY, MARCH 28

**10:30 a.m.** — Doors open at the North Butler Elementary School in Allison

**11 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.** — Lunch in the cafeteria and displays in the gymnasium

**11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m.** — Wichita performs in the auditorium

**1 p.m.** — Business meeting in the auditorium, including election of directors, reports, and drawing for prizes

## ECA reduction for 2020

Your board of directors has approved a negative energy cost adjustment (ECA) factor effective on your January usage bill received in February, seen as ENERGY COST ADJ. The decision was made after careful analysis of Butler County REC's year-end financial information.

The ECA is a pass-through from our wholesale power supplier, Corn Belt Power Cooperative. In other words, Corn Belt Power reduced our ECA, so we are in turn reducing our members' ECA. The amount of the ECA will be -.00109.

Call us at 319-267-2726 if you have questions about the ECA factor. We are here to serve you.



## Directors earn Gold recertification

Congratulations to Butler County REC directors Gerald Schmitt, asst. secretary/treasurer, and Tim Schrage, secretary, (above left and right with board president Duane Rieckenberg) for earning their Director Gold Renewal Certificates from the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA).

The renewal requirements include three credits of continuing education over a two-year period. The Director Gold Credential goes beyond the Credentialed Cooperative Director and Board Leadership Certificates.

Engaged, dedicated, and educated board directors are essential to the success of your cooperative.



## Stay in the know

At your Touchstone Energy cooperative, we are constantly striving to improve our operational efficiency so we can provide the most reliable electric service possible to you.

We rely on data for nearly every aspect of our operations, which is why we need your help. By making sure we have your most accurate and complete contact information, we can continue to provide the high level of service that you expect and deserve. Accurate information enables us to improve customer service and enhance communications for repairing outages. It also allows co-op members to receive information about other important programs, events, and activities.

Many of you have been members of the co-op for years, and it's possible that your account information hasn't been updated for some time. We recognize that many members now use a cell phone as their primary phone service, and we might not have that number in our system.

We will never share your information with any third parties. We use it only to send important information to you. Please take a moment to confirm or update your information by contacting our office. By doing so, you will be helping us improve service and efficiency so we can better serve you and all members of the co-op.

## Electrify your lawn care



Spring is just around the corner. If you're in the market to upgrade your lawn care equipment, consider electric (or battery-powered).

### Lawn mowers

Electric lawn mowers have come a long way. Newer cordless electric mowers are more expensive than gas-powered mowers, but much of the upfront cost can be recovered because electricity is less expensive than gas, and electric engines generally require less maintenance than gas engines. Cordless electric mowers typically range from \$200 to \$500.

### Trimmers

Cordless electric string trimmers are a great option for most lawns. New versions of electric trimmers are improving and are now considered worthy competitors of gas-powered models.

Cordless electric trimmers are much quieter and easier to use. Most batteries last about 30 to 45 minutes. Costs can vary depending on your needs, but you can find a quality version for about \$100.

### Leaf blowers

After cutting and trimming your lawn, you'll need to clear off those walkways and patios. Consider a cordless electric leaf blower.

Cordless electric leaf blowers are lightweight and easy to maneuver, but they don't offer quite as much power as gas-powered and corded blowers. Costs for a cordless electric blower vary depending on power and battery quality. You can purchase a dependable model for about \$150 and up.

If you're looking to electrify your lawn care equipment, search online for the latest reviews. You could be well on your way to Lawn of the Month.

## Census 101: Make it count

President Thomas Jefferson directed the nation's first census in 1790. Today, the U.S. Constitution requires that everyone in the country, including the District of Columbia and five U.S. territories, be counted every 10 years.

The results of the census are used for a variety of reasons including to reapportion the U.S. House of Representatives; to determine how federal funds and grants are dispersed; for public safety and emergency preparedness plans; and businesses consult the data to decide where to build factories, offices, and stores, which creates jobs and fosters economic development.

Census invitations will begin in mid-March. The census can be completed online or by phone in English and in 12 additional languages. The official Census Day is April 1. By mid-April, a paper questionnaire will be mailed to every household that has not yet responded. If necessary, participants can also respond in person beginning in mid-May.

It is against the law for any Census Bureau employee to disclose or publish any census information that identifies an individual or business. The Bureau will never ask for your Social Security number, bank or credit card account numbers, money or donations, or anything on behalf of a political party.

To make sure you and everyone you know is counted, visit [www.2020census.gov](http://www.2020census.gov).

## Downed line danger

If you see a downed power line, always assume the line is energized and deadly. This also applies to any electrical equipment, including pad-mounted transformers (“green boxes”) or other utility cabinets or fenced substations.



**In an accident with a downed line or other utility equipment,** do not get out. You could be electrocuted. Call 9-1-1.

**If you must leave a vehicle due to smoke or fire,** jump out with your feet together and without touching the car or truck. Then hop (making sure both feet land at the same time) at least 30 feet to safety, so you are less likely to enter two different voltages of electricity at the same time, which causes shock and electrocution.

## What is right-of-way?

A right-of-way, when it comes to utilities, is an agreement that allows a utility to use or access a piece of property according to the terms of the easement.

Easements are areas designated for overhead and underground utility access and are usually defined when a lot or neighborhood is first platted. Easements are implemented because it is more efficient and less expensive to run utility lines straight through neighborhoods than it is to run them around parcels of land.

Having right-of-way means that utilities can access the area to fix a utility-related problem or to perform maintenance.

Easements outline general property rights by others while right-of-way (as its name implies) is a specific property right.

Workers who service utility lines should arrive in a marked vehicle and have proper identification. If you have any concerns, please call us.

*Q: Who decides whether an electric utility can cut down a tree near a power line?*

A: The choice is primarily made by the electric utility, subject to state and local requirements and laws, safety codes, and limitations specified in rights-of-way agreements.

*Q: The power lines near my house don't seem be anywhere near the trees. Why is the utility trimming my trees?*

A: Electric utilities are required to maintain the appropriate clearance between trees and transmission lines at all times.

*Q: Why can't I stop the utility from cutting down or trimming the trees in my yard?*

A: An electric utility is granted an easement or a right-of-way on private property to build and maintain electric power lines. The terms of a utility right-of-way are specified in rights-of-way agreements, and these agreements are usually attached to a property deed.

# TRIMMED TREES = BETTER SERVICE



**When you see us trimming trees near power lines, know that we are doing so because:**

- **Tree and foliage overgrowth** can interfere with power distribution.
- **Power lines** can give off a spark or arc that may land on a nearby branch and ignite.
- The lights in your house may flicker when tree branches brush power lines during **high winds**.
- **Stormy weather** can cause nearby limbs to break off and land on power lines.
- Unobstructed power lines make it easier and **safer** for lineworkers to **maintain equipment** or **restore power**.

## Kent Gulick to retire

Despite growing up with a grandfather and a dad who were linemen, Kent Gulick never thought he would work for a utility company.

And when he started for Butler County REC on March 1, 1982, he didn't think he would retire from the utility company.

But he did and he is. "I've walked in and out of the same building every morning and night for 38 years," Kent said.

Previously, Kent was a mechanic at the Chevy garage in Allison. After the garage closed he was approached about an opening at the REC for a mechanic and warehouse worker. Kent worked in this position for a few years before starting his lineman career and taking the merchants' course. In 1997, he took a position in member service. Then, after the ice storm of 2007, a staking coordinator was needed and Kent was offered and accepted the responsibility of the new position.

Over the years, he has met and worked with a number of members and electricians. "I built so many good relationships. That was fun," Kent said. "I'll miss the people."

Kent is looking forward to retirement and moving on, though. His plans include fishing, golfing, hunting, and family time. His family includes his wife Pam; their two kids Levi of Waverly, a lineman for Waverly Utilities, and Brooke of Allison, office manager at Dumont Communications; and their six grandchildren, Leyton, Lennon, Theo, Brody, Curee, and Harrison.

Congratulations, Kent—we'll miss you!



## Planning to build a new home?

Building a new home can be overwhelming and challenging. There are a lot of decisions to be made, and we can help!

At Butler County REC, we are your trusted source. We are here to help you make informed decisions about the types of heating systems, cooling systems, and more that are best for you and your family.

Also, we offer rebates for appliances, heating and cooling—including geothermal and air source heat pumps, and electric water heaters. Furthermore, if your home is all-electric, we have a Touchstone Energy home rebate of up to \$1,000. And as if that isn't enough, we offer a discounted electric heat rate for qualified members.

Let us take away some of the stress of building your new home. As you begin to make your decisions, contact our Energy Efficiency department at 319-267-2726 to learn how we can help.

## Committed to their communities

This past year, 13 Butler County REC employees volunteered a total of 1,385 hours to their communities. They chose to donate their personal time to churches, fire departments, fairs, and their towns and schools.

Gary Doehrmann, accountant, logged the most hours with 319. Kyle Lorenz, crew chief, and Lori Roose, accounting clerk, each volunteered 214 hours tying for second place. Gary chose the University of Iowa Center for Advancement at Stead Family Children's Hospital to receive a \$25 donation, while Kyle chose Hunt of a Lifetime, and Lori chose the Waverly-Shell Rock Area United Way.

Thank you to those Butler County REC employees showing their commitment to community.

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