



OCONTO ELECTRIC  
**OEE**  
 COOPERATIVE



**Congratulations to our Christmas Card winner (on left) Brooke Fredrikson, age 6, Denmark. Our runner up (above) was Blake Jagiello, age 7, Lena.**

## Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!

With the holiday season upon us and the New Year just around the corner, I can't help but reflect on the gratitude I feel for our community. I think most will agree this has been a year like no other—certainly in my lifetime. And while we've seen our share of challenges, I am heartened by the ways in which we have all pulled together to make our community stronger.

Over the years, you've probably heard or read about Oconto Electric Cooperative's concern for our community. This is one of the core principles that sets cooperatives apart from other types of utilities and businesses. We've always taken this mission and responsibility to heart. It's who we are as a co-op.

Over the past few months, like so many of you, we've risen to meet new challenges and strengthen the safety net for our community, particularly for those who are most vulnerable. Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, we've made numerous adjustments to programs and operations to maintain business continuity while staying focused on the bigger mission of helping our consumer-members during this turbulent time.

Now, with the holidays fast approaching, these recent events have made me pause and think about the role we play in our community. While our purpose is to provide safe and reliable energy to you, the members we serve, we have a greater mission—to be a catalyst for good.

You're probably aware of our Community Change program, where we use donations from generous members like you who have "rounded up" the amount due on their electric bill to help those in our community. Another opportunity we offer is our Youth Tour program, where we take our community's brightest young people to Washington, D.C., for a week-long immersion to experiencing democracy in action.

We also have a strong commitment to safety—not just for our employees, but for our community as well. We visit schools to teach children of all ages how to stay safe around electricity. We have also held safety demonstrations for the

Oconto County Highway Department, at our annual picnic and at other events in the community.

You'll also see our employees serving on local boards, coaching youth sports, and volunteering at charitable events. Because when you work at a co-op, you understand how important a strong community is—after all, without you, the co-op wouldn't exist.

Our employees are just wrapping up a holiday toy drive that will bring joy at Christmas to children in need. In the past, employees have also donated to a local Christmas dinner event for those who didn't have a place to go.

I look at volunteerism as the gift that keeps on giving. While it's difficult to quantify the impact that volunteers have, I do know they make a tremendous difference in our community and make our corner of the world a better place.

I hope you'll consider volunteering. Give an organization or cause that you care about the gift of your compassion, time, and talent. In addition to the organization and the community benefiting from your efforts, you will receive a gift as well. Not only will you enjoy the satisfaction of knowing you are helping a good cause, but you will likely make new friends, expand your social network, strengthen existing skills or learn a new one.

Volunteering may provide additional dimension and purpose to your life. In the process, you will be a role model for your family because your commitment will offer a powerful lesson to your children. It will show them firsthand how one person can make a big difference and strengthen the community in which they live.

At the end of the day, the gift of volunteerism is a gift that will continue giving all year long. So, this holiday season, consider starting a new tradition—give the gift of time.

We know that our core job is to keep the lights on, but our passion is our community. We live and work here too, and we want to make it a better place for all.



It saddens us to announce the retirement of our hard-working and dedicated employee, co-worker, and friend, Pam Langlay.

It was August 1, 1979, when an eager 17-year-old started her career at Oconto Electric Cooperative. We are lucky enough to say that we have an employee who worked her entire career with us and worked in many facets of the cooperative.

I recently sat down with Pam as she reflected on her years and experience with Oconto Electric.

### **What jobs have you done at OEC?**

I started with answering the phones and processing bill payments that came in the mail. I did this for the first five years I worked at OEC.

Then a new position opened in the Operations Department. I built a digital model of Oconto Electric's distribution system so engineering studies could be done. As time went on, new duties were added so I became the liaison between the operations department and the members who needed work done, such as new service construction and service upgrades.

As the co-op grew, more departments were added. So after 15 years in Operations, I switched jobs and started working in the Member Services Department as the marketing and communications person. I was the local editor for the *WEC News* magazine and I created all marketing materials for the co-op. During this time, OEC began a new program called MainStreet Messenger (MSM), which is a personal emergency response program. I became the lead person, installing and servicing the MSM units in homes around Oconto and Marinette Counties. I had this position for about the next 15 years.

The last seven years of my career at Oconto Electric have me back at the front desk answering the phone and handling members who come into the lobby. I am also processing mail payments and work with capital credit estate payouts. My ample knowledge and experience of working in all other departments over the years brings great value to the front desk. Plus I really enjoy working with our members.

### **What was your favorite memory of your time at OEC?**

That would have to be when I won the N. F. Leifer Memorial Journalism Award in 2000. It was my first year of writing for our local pages in the *Wisconsin Energy Cooperative News* magazine.

### **What was the biggest change you witnessed at OEC?**

There have been so many changes over 40 years, but I think the change that impresses me the most is how outages are handled. When I worked in Operations, I was the dispatcher for all of the crews. Having built the engineering model of OEC's electric system, I knew the distribution system very well. So, if a storm came through and we had a lot of outages all over the system, everyone in the office would answer the phones and write down who was out of power. I would walk around the office and collect these lists of names and put them into order so we knew which lines were out of power. Then I dispatched the crews to different locations until outages were restored. Today, when we have large outages, there is a program that manages the outages for us. We just keep entering names of members who call in and the computer puts them into line location order and notifies the dispatcher what lines

are out. It tracks where the crews are and you can add notes that the linemen can see regarding information on the outages. The automation is amazing.

### What was your favorite part of working at OEC?

My co-workers. I work with them day in and day out; they became my family.

### What do you plan on doing once you are retired?

Spend more time with children and grandchildren. Ride motorcycle, go fishing and camping, and learn how to sew and make cards. I also plan on spending a lot more time at my church.

Pam possesses institutional knowledge of this co-op and we hate to see her leave. Thank you for your 42 wonderful years of dedication to the co-op. You will be greatly missed, but we wish you the very best in your new chapter of your life. Enjoy your well-earned retirement!

## Messages from Pam's Co-workers

*You will not find someone with more knowledge of OEC than Pam, for that she will be missed immensely. Her dedication to OEC has gone above and beyond and she always has the best interest of the members at heart. She would always bring a different perspective to any conflict or issue I had, giving me a new way to think about situation and handle it. I am going to miss our fun banter and interesting conversations. I want to wish Pam lots of happiness and health for the future. Love, your "work bestie!" — Brenda*

*Pam has been a big part of the success of this cooperative. She has been here 42 years and has worked in or with every department. Pam was always willing to take on additional duties and most importantly, her attitude was always positive. It has been a pleasure to work with Pam throughout these years. I have always loved talking with her about our faith and getting her opinion on a variety of issues. Pam is someone who will be greatly missed by everyone. I wish Pam a long and healthy retirement. This will give her more time to spend with her husband, kids and grandkids, which we have had many conversations about. Take care, Pam, and remember this is the cooperative you have helped build and you will always be welcome at our doors. — Byron Nolde, CEO*

*If I have questions I can ask Pam as she has worked here so long she usually has the answers. I will miss her when she retires but I am sure she will love retirement. God bless her on her retirement! — Amy*

*Pam is one of the most knowledgeable and dedicated cooperative employees retiring from OEC. She has mentored and trained many of us in different areas at the co-op. We will miss you Pam! Please don't forget to come back and see us! Enjoy your well-deserved retirement. — Kriss Krause*

## Congratulations to our Co-op Month Giveaway Winners!

We would like to thank everyone who participated in our Co-op Month giveaways. We were amazed with the highly increased engagement. We had over 500 members that participated.

### The winners are:

- 43" TV – Sara Kruschke, Greendale
- \$50 My Sisters Shop – Carol Lentz, Abrams
- \$50 Kwik Trip – Lonnie Pillath, Oconto
- \$50 OEC Bill Credit – Robert Treptow, Oconto
- \$50 Kwik Trip – Cathy Hansen, Abrams
- \$50 Springside Cheese – Linda Wandzala, Pound
- \$50 Shell Gas Station – Mary Westberg, Oconto Falls
- \$50 Meatskis – Francis Olejniczak, Oconto
- \$50 Meatskis – Francis Kostreva, Pound
- \$50 Take A Peek – Debbie Trudell, Oconto Falls
- \$50 OEC Bill Credit – Michael Schutte, Shawano



Grand prize winner Sara Kruschke of Greendale pictured with her new 43" TV.



## Electronics Recycling Event a Success!

In recognition of National Cooperative Month, we hosted our first-ever Electronics Recycling Event on October 27 and 28. Members were given the opportunity to get rid of old and broken electronic equipment such as computers, printers, telephones, vacuums, and televisions. Members were allowed to bring a total of five items and one of them could be a TV or monitor.

This first-time event was a great success. As members drove up, we registered them to verify that they were indeed an OEC member, and then they pulled ahead to the unloading area where OEC employees unloaded their goods.

We registered 276 members and over 900 electronic items. We collected 13,266 pounds of TVs and monitors, and 7,557 pounds of other electronics that could have ended up being hazardous to the environment in a landfill, but are instead being properly recycled.

Members commented on how smooth and efficient the process was and we received endless “thank yous” too. We even received a personal note from a member who said this event rated above any others we offer, such as meetings, the summer picnic, even winning prizes (or course, not above fixing downed power lines)! We’re glad our members helped us celebrate Co-op Month while doing something good for the environment. (56400)



**The following employees were recently recognized for their years of service.**

**20 YEARS**

**Brenda Fricton**

**Kriss Krause**

**Stephanie Paitl**

**5 YEARS**

**Stachia Desterheft**

**The following director was recently recognized for their years of service.**

**45 YEARS**

**Dan Kanack**

### Energy Efficiency Tip of the Month



Energy bills can increase during winter for a variety of reasons, like houseguests, more time spent at home, and shorter days and longer nights. Small actions, like turning down your thermostat, replacing old bulbs with LEDs, and washing clothes in cold water can help you save.



# IT'S DISTRICT MEETING TIME AGAIN!

One of the best differences between OEC and most other utilities is where the control (the power to guide the way the utility is run) lies. When you buy power from an investor-owned utility, the control lies with the chief executive officer. You have no say in who that person is, and you probably don't know what state that person lives in, or even where the board meetings are held. The profits made by investor-owned utilities go to the investors.

When you are a member of OEC, you are also a part owner. The profits made by OEC go to you in the form of capital credits. The control lies with our board of directors. The seven people on our board are all local people who live and work in this area and are elected by you. The decisions they make affect their lives as much as yours and mine. You, our member,

can help decide who guides our cooperative.

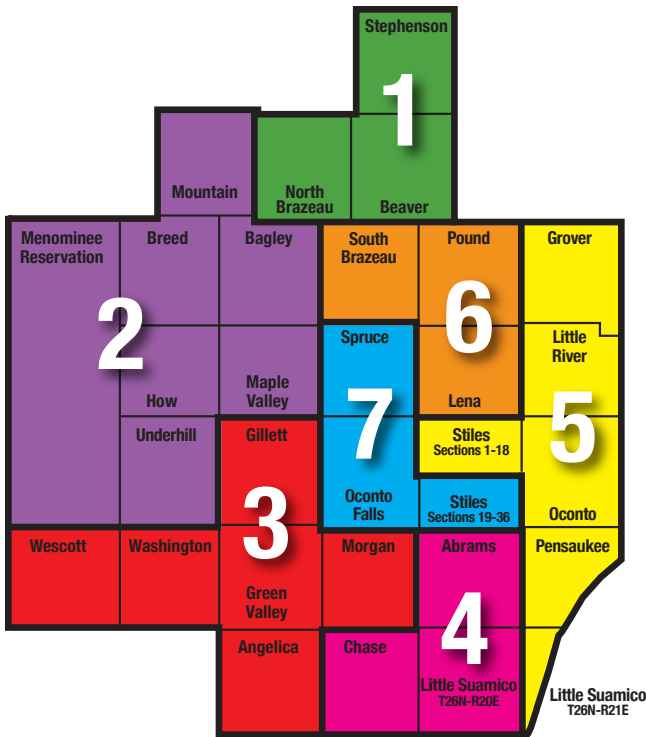
January is district meeting time for OEC. District meetings are held for members to nominate candidates for election for the upcoming board of director terms. The persons nominated must reside within the district they are running for. If there are two nominations, those names will be placed on a ballot, and every member of OEC is entitled to vote at the annual meeting on March 20, 2021.

Being a cooperative member is a benefit and a responsibility. To make the cooperative system work, it is your responsibility to attend the district and annual meetings to have your vote count.

In December, all members in Districts 1 and 7 will receive an official notice of the meetings. All OEC members are welcome to attend district meetings, but only the members from the specific district will be eligible to vote. If you would like more information about the director election, please call our office at 920-846-2816.

These meetings also provide Oconto Electric the opportunity to keep our members updated with co-op information.

Masks are encouraged for those attending the meeting.



OEC DISTRICT MAP

Districts 1 and 7 are up for nominations to be elected onto the OEC board of directors.

**DISTRICT 1**  
Incumbent director is Vern Gisenas

Thursday, January 7, 2021  
Registration begins 6:00 p.m.; Meeting begins 6:30 p.m.  
At Beaver Town Hall, W8405 County Road P, Crivitz

District 1 consists of the townships of Beaver, Stephenson and the north part of Brazeau Township (T31N-R18E).

**DISTRICT 7**  
Incumbent director is Todd Duame

Tuesday, January 5, 2021  
Registration begins 6:00 p.m.; Meeting begins 6:30 p.m.  
At St. Anthony Church in lower level, 253 N. Franklin St, Oconto Falls

District 7 includes members in the entire townships of Oconto Falls and Spruce, and sections 19 through 36 in the township of Stiles.



## Cooperative Principle #2

### Democratic Member Control

**Cooperatives are democratic organizations controlled by their members, who actively participate in setting policies and making decisions. Elected representatives (directors/trustees) are elected from among the membership and are accountable to the membership. In primary cooperatives, members have equal voting rights (one member, one vote); cooperatives at other levels are organized in a democratic manner.**

## COMMUNITY CHANGE BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Have you ever wondered how Community Change grants are awarded? When the program began, it was decided that it would be governed by a board of directors that is separate from Oconto Electric Cooperative. This means no current OEC employees or directors can sit on this board.

The board is made up of seven volunteers who are members of Oconto Electric. They meet quarterly to go over grant applications and handle any business of the Community Change organization. One OEC employee acts as facilitator at the meeting but has no voting rights.

There are term limits set up so each director can serve up to two three-year terms and then must be off of the board for at least one year. We would like to thank Denise Langlay for serving on the board the last six years.

Since funds are limited, decisions on who is awarded a grant create a lot of discussion among the directors. They look at whether the request fits the mission of Community Change, how many people will benefit from the grant, what happens to the grant if not enough funding is raised to complete the project, and many other things.

When you give to Community Change, 100 percent of your donations are distributed as grants. OEC bears all administrative costs of the program.

### How You Can Help

Have you thought about contributing to Community Change? Funding comes from members who round their bill up to the next dollar. On average, each member donates \$6



The Community Change board of directors, left to right: Brian Rieth, Audrey Ferfecki, Wayne Strei, Lindsay Falash, Denise Langlay, and Jan Stranz. Missing is Dale Baker.

a year. If you would like to contribute to Community Change, please check the box on the bottom of your bill stub or call our office at (920) 846-2816.

### How to Apply

If you know of a charitable or service organization, civic group, or individual with unusual financial needs, you can encourage them to apply for a Community Change grant.

Applications can be found at [www.ocontoelectric.com](http://www.ocontoelectric.com).

Applications for the December board meeting must be submitted by December 4.

## Four Ways Santa Saves Energy in His Workshop

The holiday season is finally upon us, and Santa and his elves have been especially busy as they gear up for their biggest night of the year.

It's no secret that Santa is known for running an efficient workshop—how else could he make all those toys in time for Christmas Eve? Rumor has it that one way Santa ensures an efficient workspace is through energy-saving measures.

### Here are four ways Santa saves energy in his workshop.

1. Santa leaves his decorations up year-round, so by using LED holiday light strands, he's able to save on his monthly energy bills. LED holiday strands can (58601) last up to 40 seasons, which make them a great option for any festive home.



2. Santa requires several power tools to make a year's worth of new toys. That's why he insists on using cordless power tools with the ENERGY STAR® rating. According to [energystar.gov](http://energystar.gov), if all power tools in the United States used ENERGY STAR®-rated battery chargers, 2 billion kWh hours of electricity could be saved—that's equivalent to reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 1.7 million tons!

3. Mrs. Claus loves to keep warm by the fire in the evenings, and Santa knows one of the best tricks to ensure fireplace efficiency. While a fireplace can keep a small area of your home cozy and warm, it can also pull heated air from the room through the chimney. That's why Santa always closes the fireplace flue when a fire isn't burning.

4. Santa also saves energy by using power strips. Power strips are ideal for workshops, craft nooks, game rooms, and other spaces in your home. With one simple switch, you can conveniently control several devices and electronics that are plugged into the power strip.

This holiday season, let's take a page from Santa's book and remember to save energy when possible. With these four tips, you'll be well on your way to savings (and hopefully, Santa's "nice" list!).



## BUSINESS SHOWCASE

# BOB WHITE TROUT AND BAIT



The official start of winter is approaching and many are starting to think about spending their days out on the ice with a fishing pole in their hand.

BobWhite Trout and Bait is your one-stop shop for all your fishing needs. They have a great selection of baits and fishing essentials. Bob has a wide variety of live bait including wax worms, spikes, mousies, shiners, fat heads, water bugs, suckers, leeches, and night crawlers.

For those of you fishermen who prefer not to use live bait, BobWhite Trout and Bait has thousands of artificial baits and lures to choose from.

Bob also sells hunting goods, deer bait, fresh produce during the summer months, pre-cut Christmas trees after Thanksgiving, firewood, local honey, maple syrup, and so much more!

BobWhite Trout and Bait is conveniently located off of Highway 141 at W8860 Benser Lane, Coleman, WI 54112. Phone: 920-897-3812.

Business hours are Monday – Wednesday 4 a.m. – 4 p.m., Thursday – Friday 4 a.m. – 9 p.m., Saturday 4 a.m. – 4 p.m. and Sundays 4 a.m. – 7 p.m.

For more information visit their website at <https://bobwhitetroutandbait.business.site/>.

## Give the Gift of Energy

Do you have a friend or family member who is hard to buy for at Christmas? Try the gift of energy. If they are members of Oconto Electric you can pay their electric bill for a month, a year, or any amount in between. Call Oconto Electric at 1-800-472-8410.



WE WISH YOU A MERRY CHRISTMAS AND A HAPPY NEW YEAR!

Our offices will be closed on Dec. 24 & 25 and Jan. 1.



By: Ryland Solomon



## HIDDEN ACCOUNT NUMBERS

Oconto Electric Cooperative hides two account numbers in the local pages of the *Wisconsin Energy Cooperative News* each month. If you spot your account number, call our office before you receive the next issue, and OEC will give you a \$15 credit on your electric bill or a \$25 credit if you have a load management receiver. The November account numbers belonged to George Kopczynski, Coleman, and Scott Shallow, Green Bay.

### Byron C. Nolde, CEO

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### Katie Jagiello, Editor

