

MENOMINEE TRIBE GETS \$872K GRANT FOR POWER LINE CONVERSION PROJECT

Through the Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities grant program, FEMA has awarded \$872,894 to the Menominee Indian Tribe of Wisconsin (MITW) for an underground power line conversion project. The co-op started looking for funding after the July 2019 storm that went through our service territory and was declared a natural disaster.

This project to convert 14 miles of overhead power lines to underground will cost an estimated \$985,526. Fortunately, the grant covers a portion, leaving the co-op responsible for only \$112,632. Without the grant, the entire cost would have fallen on us.

“MITW Emergency Management is very appreciative of the FEMA assistance. This project will provide electrical infrastructure protection in one of the most rural parts of our reservation,” said Ben Warrington, emergency management coordinator, Menominee Indian Tribe of Wisconsin. This project will ensure power to the reservation remains operable during severe weather, ice storms, and extreme cold.



Power lines that run cross country on the MITW reservation. The tribe wants to conserve the land and keep it in its natural state. Overgrown trees are a hazard during storms.



Many utility poles throughout the reservation look like this due to black bears leaving their scent through bites and scratches to mark their territory to other bears. A pole costs approximately \$1,500-\$2,500 to replace.

MENOMINEE INDIAN TRIBE UNDERGROUND POWER PROJECT TIMELINE

June 2020

OEC looked into potential funding and began initial screening process for Hazard Mitigation Grant through FEMA.

February 2021

Wisconsin Emergency Management assisted us through the grant process with MITW being the sub recipient.

January 2023

MITW submitted the grant on behalf of OEC.

March 2024

Grant was approved by FEMA.

May 2024

Preliminary design, marking the routes, calling in locates.

MITW Archaeologists survey the proposed route and dig test holes.

June 2024

Crews begin construction with on-site Menominee monitor at all times.

July 2024

Crews will remove overhead lines, equipment, and poles.

August 2024

Crews will follow up with restoration.

LENA TEACHER USES GRANTS TO GROW AN EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITY

With the help of a Community Change grant and the support of other local partners, Lena High School is the proud owner of two Flex Farms. Mrs. Windus has been teaching agriculture and serving as an FFA advisor in Lena since 2006. “This grant as an opportunity to bring something new into the classroom. When students are engaged, they connect with the subject matter and have fun while learning. My hope is that what they learn will be used outside of the classroom,” said Windus.

Flex Farms are fully self-contained hydroponic growing systems, also called towers, that allow for growing fresh, affordable produce year-round. Hydroponic farming is a type of horticulture that involves growing plants without soil by using water-based mineral nutrient solutions.

I sat down and talked with seniors Mackenzie Vorpahl and Whitney Potter, who are students in Mrs. Windus’ horticulture class. They took the time to explain from start to finish how the Flex Farm works.

“At first we were scared of the expensive tower, but after we watched a video on how to set it up, it is actually fun and easy,” said Mackenzie.

Step one

First they had to plant their lettuce seeds into Rockwool growing cubes. Similar in texture to steel wool, Rockwool is a dense mat consisting of long strands of natural fibers. Once the seeds were planted, they covered the nursery tray with plastic and placed it in a warm area so seeds could germinate. Students were responsible for watering them daily until they sprouted.

Step two

Next they prepared the tower by filling the water reservoir. The students then had to add nutrients and fertilizer to the water. Water health is important so it needs to be checked daily to see if the pH and nutrient levels are in perfect ratio. They do this by using a TDS meter and pH test indicator.

Step three

In one week the seeds had sprouted and were ready to be transplanted. The Rockwool cubes were then separated and inserted into the Flex Farm spaces. The plants then received 18 hours per daylight from the tower.

Final steps

Four weeks after transferring the seeds to the grow tower, the lettuce was ready to be harvested. The students cut the lettuce and delivered it to the school’s cafeteria, where it was washed and served that day on sub sandwiches. “The lettuce is so much greener and so crispy compared to the iceberg lettuce they usually use,” said Whitney. “It is rewarding to deliver fresh produce for the school to serve and also provide a cost savings to the food program,” said Mackenzie.

“I made the decision to plant one type of produce at first since it was a learning process for all—including me. I look forward to next year, when we will add herbs for Mrs. DeBauch’s consumer education class,” said Windus.

— Katie Jagiello



Senior Anthony Seefeldt transplanting the sprouted seeds into the Flex Farm spaces.



Seniors Mackenzie Vorpahl and Whitney Potter pose with the Flex Farm.



Lettuce that was harvested by the horticulture class and served in the school cafeteria.



HELP “CHANGE” YOUR COMMUNITY

Participate in Community Change

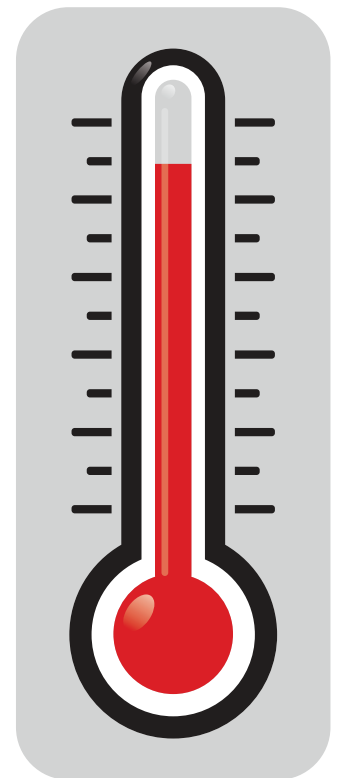
In 2023 Community Change distributed over \$15,000 to help charitable organizations, individuals in need, and educational purposes in our local communities, thanks to members who have chosen to participate in the Community Change program. Collectively, and for just pennies a month, we can help make a change in our communities.

The Community Change board is asking for your help. Currently we have 870 electric accounts enrolled in the program. With only 8.5% of our membership currently participating, the board aims for 10% participation in 2024. To achieve this, we need 150 new accounts to sign up.

How it works. Members who participate in this program have their monthly bill rounded up to the nearest dollar and those few cents are deposited into the Community Change fund. On average, members donate around \$6 annually, with the highest donation being \$11.88. Donations are tax-deductible. (299601) Members are always welcome to make a one-time donation or donate a specific amount each month. For example, you can choose to round up your electric bill and donate an additional \$2 each month.

Who decides on how the money is spent? The Community Change Board of Directors is composed of seven Oconto Electric Cooperative members who meet quarterly to review applications. Grants are awarded based on how much money is available and whether or not the purpose of the request is consistent with Community Change guidelines. One hundred percent of donations made to Community Change are awarded as grants. Our 2024 Board of Directors are: Brian Rieth (president), Penny Hemle (vice president), Wayne Strei (secretary/treasurer), Virgie Damp, Dick Gilles, Mark Higgins and Pam Langlay.

How do I sign up? You can call our office, return the completed form (below), or check the box on the back of your energy bill.



Please help us reach our 2024 goal. We need 150 accounts to sign up this year.

I wish to participate in the Community Change program using the following method:

- Nearest Dollar
- Nearest Whole Dollar Plus An Extra \$_____ each month
- One-Time Donation \$_____



Account #: _____ Phone #: _____

Name: _____ Address: _____

Return to OEC, PO Box 168, Oconto Falls, WI 54154



Increasing Safety Awareness

Oconto Electric Cooperative attended the 2024 Oconto County Breakfast on the Farm to focus on the importance of high-voltage safety. Pictured above is lineman Brian Arndt, making an arc on the power line to demonstrate that when a tree branch makes contact with the lines, your lights blink a few times before causing an outage.

Pictured to the right is lineman John Havemeier talking with a couple about the benefits of having a GenerLink transfer switch installed. The device provides a safe, easy, and affordable way to connect a portable generator to your home during an outage.



Energy Efficiency Tip of the Month

Electricity used to operate major appliances accounts for a significant portion of your home energy use.

Here's an easy way to lighten the (665603) load on your clothes dryer. Before you dry a load of damp clothing, toss in a clean, dry towel. The towel will absorb excess water, shortening the drying time. If your dryer does not include an autosense feature to determine drying time, remember to reduce the timer to about half of what you normally would. Remove the towel about 15 minutes after the cycle begins. Shorter drying times will extend the life of your dryer and save energy.

Source: homesandgardens.com



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 June account numbers belonged to Carl Fiala, Gillett, and William and Belinda Seefeldt, Coleman.



Ryan Miller, CEO

Katie Jagiello, Communications and Marketing

7479 REA Road, P.O. Box 168, Oconto Falls, WI 54154
www.ocontoelectric.com

Hours of Operation: 7:30 a.m.–4:00 p.m.

Hours of Lobby: 9:00 a.m.– 3 p.m. Friday

Non-emergencies: 920-846-2816

Emergencies & outages: Toll FREE 800-472-8410
24 hours a day, 7 days a week