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## Manager's moment

### You have a voice in your cooperative

BY MARK DOYLE, GENERAL MANAGER



**Mark Doyle**  
General manager/CEO

I would appreciate a moment of your time...

As we get ready for McLean Electric Cooperative's (MEC) annual meeting, it is important to focus on the reason for the meeting. You all, as member-owners, have a right and a responsibility to participate in the business of your cooperative. YOU choose the direction(s) that are taken. How do you

do that? By making sure your voice is heard. How is that accomplished? By selecting your respective director representative. The selected director will provide a conduit for your voice in the governance of the cooperative.

The directors' responsibilities include determining the organization's mission and purpose, determining the company's strategic objectives and policies, monitoring progress toward achieving the objectives and policies, appointing an executive, and accounting for the cooperative's activities to the member-owners. Overall, they represent you at the board table.

So, I emphasize the importance of participation. At this year's annual meeting, not only will you be electing your director, but you will be deciding about changing the way member-owners can vote. In 2020, during the pandemic, MEC was unable to have a quorum to hold the annual meeting and conduct business. The MEC board has proposed changes in 2021 that will provide more opportunities to participate.

They are proposing a change in the bylaws to include mail-in ballots for elections and other changes that come before the membership. In addition, it is also being proposed to remove the time of year restriction for holding the annual meeting. If approved, it would provide more flexibility, given the uncertainties we have experienced. The endgame is to provide the member-owners with the greatest opportunity and flexibility to participate in the business meeting of the cooperative.

In closing, I encourage you as a member-owner to exercise your right and participate!

As always, feel free to reach out to me with any questions or comments. My door is always open.

Regards,  
Mark Doyle  
General manager/CEO

## Annual meeting June 22

McLean Electric Cooperative will celebrate its 75th anniversary (2020) in its 76th year on June 22, 2021 at the Garrison City Auditorium.

Other activities take place at Garrison High School's football field and feature Rocky Top Petting Zoo, Ruso and

tethered Touchstone Energy® balloon launches, weather-permitting.

Stay tuned for details with additional annual meeting announcements.

# Celebrating a milestone: **75 years of McLean Electric**

BY PATRICIA STOCKDILL



*McLean Electric Cooperative completed construction on its present headquarters east of Garrison in 1958. Today, the cooperative has expanded with a separate large facility for its maintenance vehicles, equipment and lineworker offices, a separate cold storage facility, large material yard and expansions to its original building.*

**“To create the future, we must understand the past.”**

– TIM KASTELLE

## **Seventy-five years.**

That’s a long time for a business to serve a community, surviving not only the ups and downs of local, regional and national economies and trends, but thriving and evolving.

That’s exactly what McLean Electric Cooperative (MEC) has done.

Actually, that’s not quite true ... make that 76 years. MEC is celebrating its 75th anniversary in its 76th year.

And, like the rest of the community, state and country, MEC is emerging from the worst pandemic in more than a century.

That alone underscores the resiliency of the American spirit. Bringing electricity to rural America also underscores that spirit.

It doesn’t seem possible, but 76 years ago, as World War II was drawing to a close, much of rural America was still without electricity, even though “city” friends and families enjoyed its modern conveniences.

Those city folks weren’t in distant, metropolitan

places across the country, either. While rural McLean County residents lacked modern electricity, “city” folks in communities such as Underwood, Washburn, Max and others enjoyed electrical conveniences long before someone even a mile or two out of town could fathom the idea of having that same opportunity.

In today’s world, it doesn’t seem possible that people can live, let alone survive, without electricity. The COVID-19 pandemic illustrated just how critical electricity is to today’s America.

A group of rural McLean County residents launched the opportunity for electricity throughout the entire county as World War II was nearing its end. It was possible only because the 1936 Rural Electrification Act (REA) provided funding and resources to bring electricity to rural America.

A diverse group of people from throughout McLean County voted to incorporate MEC Aug. 31, 1945.

The incorporating board of directors did so only after directors, and other rural residents, spent countless hours and miles reaching out to farmers and their families, advancing the idea that electricity could become a reality.

The problem with electrifying rural America prior to creating the REA was it simply didn’t make economic sense for utility companies already serving cities and towns to build lines and provide service to people in the country.

The harsh reality is there weren’t enough people to make it economically feasible. For example, with only a consumer or two per mile of line, it was too expensive to provide electricity when a utility company could serve multiple consumers per mile of line in town.

# “The more we know about the past, the more prepared you are for the future.”

– PRESIDENT THEODORE ROOSEVELT

In addition, it was cheaper to maintain lines in town than in the country, where Mother Nature was more apt to create havoc with wind- and storm-swept power poles and lines.

It simply wasn't good business to bring electricity to rural America. That's why it was necessary to form cooperatives. The consumers themselves were members and expenses could be spread among those receiving electricity. Low-interest loans also helped make it feasible.

MEC's founders had a vision to bring electricity to their friends and neighbors. The nine incorporating directors – Walter Fiedler, Julius Mattson, Gordon Hacanson, Sara McElwain, Ellen Stenson Romsaas, Carl A. Hanson, Emanuel Keck, Arnold Hill and Ralph Keel – then hired contractors, established application fees, and sorted through the extensive process of establishing a rural



*Willie Wiredhand has been promoting electricity – along with its wise use – for generations.*

electric cooperative.

Over the years, MEC has grown as the county has grown. It has evolved as the county evolved. Yet, it seems like it's always been there, just as it seems electricity has always been available.

Yes, there are times when Mother Nature displays her rather unpleasant demeanor and rural residents lose electricity in blizzards, tornadoes and summer lightning storms. MEC lineworkers are on the job in that weather, though, working to restore electricity as quickly as possible.

Because, after all, electricity should always be there.

MEC will present every account member a copy of “75 Years of Empowering Our Members,” a hardcover book exploring the cooperative's history, when they attend the 76th anniversary annual meeting.

Former General Manager/CEO Marty Dahl reflected on the cooperative's history prior to retiring in August 2020 – ironically almost 75 years after the exact date of incorporation: “Any business that has been at it 75 years and is healthy has to be doing something right. Everyone works hard to be successful, from the board to management to the entire staff. I think it's a great celebration. ... How many businesses can say they've been around 75 years?” Dahl queried.

Now, as MEC celebrates its 75th anniversary in its 76th year, Mark Doyle is looking to the cooperative's future as its new general manager/CEO. While MEC serves one of the largest counties in North Dakota, it's not a large cooperative in terms of the number of accounts it serves.



*McLean Electric crews work on a pole with an early bucket truck and digger. It would be several years after the cooperative was established before bucket trucks were added to its vehicle fleet.*

Yet its member-owners are diverse, with a mix of large industrial, small industrial, agricultural, military, rural residential and recreational accounts.

As MEC stands in its 76th year, it's well-poised to move into the next 75 years and beyond, in part because of that diversity, Doyle described.

"Given our diversity, we're not susceptible to large business cycles," he explained.

Slow and stable growth in a variety of venues helps provide long-term stability, compared to riding a roller coaster of economic boom and bust cycles. "It's the cooperative's job to look over the horizon for the next 75 years," he added. "Every decision brought to the board of McLean Electric's directors will affect the next generation."

While McLean Electric had to move its 75th anniversary celebration in 2020 to 2021, the delay in celebrating doesn't deter or take away the significance of what it took to become a rural electric cooperative and what it means to its member-owners. ■



*Lineworkers use a tracked skidsteer to set a pole in an area less accessible with larger bucket trucks, a tribute to the changing times from the cooperative's humble beginnings in 1945.*

# STAY SAFE ON THE FARM



**O**verhead power lines are necessary to deliver electricity to hardworking farmers and ranchers, but those same power lines can also be deadly if not treated with respect. While you need to focus on the field and your machinery, McLean Electric Cooperative urges you to also watch for electrical hazards around the farm or ranch.

## BE AWARE

Farmers and their equipment should always be 10 feet away from power lines on all sides. Field cultivators and sprayers can often reach as high as 12 feet in the air. Practice extreme caution and use a spotter to make sure you stay far away from power lines when you use tall equipment.

If you have purchased new equipment, be aware of antennas or other attachments that may pose new hazards. A newer, bigger piece of equipment may no longer clear a line. In addition, shifting soil may also affect whether or not machinery avoids power lines from year-to-year.

Power lines also may sag over the years. If power lines on your property are sagging, contact your electric cooperative to repair the lines. Never try to move a power line on your own.

Overhead power lines are not the only electric hazard on the farm. Pole guy wires, used to stabilize utility poles, are grounded. However, when one of the guy wires is broken, it can become charged with electricity. If you break a guy wire, call the cooperative to fix it. Don't do it yourself. ■

## Hot air balloon to offer rides during anniversary

In celebrating McLean Electric Cooperative's (MEC) 75th anniversary in its 76th year, McLean Electric is bringing the Touchstone Energy® hot air balloon to Garrison.

Touchstone Energy is a coalition of more than 750 electric cooperatives in 46 states working together to ensure cooperative members have the information and resources needed to make sound decisions.

The 77,000-cubic-foot balloon is the official Touchstone Energy goodwill ambassador for member cooperatives such as MEC. It makes appearances throughout the United States to help recognize electric cooperatives and the role they play in people's everyday lives.

Although the balloon has made previous appearances in North Dakota, McLean Electric's 75th anniversary marks the first time it will be in McLean County. Not only will people be able to see the balloon, free tethered rides will be available, weather-permitting. Launches will only take place if it isn't raining, winds are less than 10 miles an hour, and weather is clear in the area for no surrounding storms.

Anyone interested in a possible balloon ride should dress appropriately in sneakers, walking shoes or light hiking boots and wear comfortable clothing. Don't wear skirts or dresses, high-heeled boots or shoes, or open-toe shoes or sandals.

It's OK to bring a camera or cellphone for photos, but they should be safely stowed during landing. Everyone must also sign a waiver of liability before launching, as well.

Although the balloon typically flies at least 500 feet in the air, the anniversary rides will be tethered because of



the confined space of the football field in Garrison, which is where all outdoor activities will be held.

Five balloons make up the current Touchstone Energy fleet. The two newest fleet members were built in 2014. Each is 77 feet tall and 60 feet wide when the silicone-coated Hyperlife™ paneled fabric balloon is fully inflated.

The 14-foot-wide basket with its cushioned floor carries a pilot and two average-sized passengers. Dual propane burners power the balloon and it's fueled with two 15-gallon propane tanks. All of the balloons in the fleet were made in Illinois. ■

## Employees retire

As McLean Electric Cooperative (MEC) moved into its next 75 years, two employees moved onto another phase by celebrating retirement.

Les Larson joined MEC in 1988 as its second operations manager in the cooperative's history. He retired, but was drawn back to MEC. While officially retired, he now serves as an engineering consultant.

Marcia Zimmerman retired in January after 17 years as MEC's accountant.

Both Larson, and his wife, Nicole, and Marcia and her husband, Mike, remain in the Garrison area. ■



**Les Larson** began his career with McLean Electric as operations manager. He retired in 2020 and currently serves as a consultant.



**Marcia Zimmerman** retired in 2021 after serving 17 years as the cooperative's accountant.

# Q&A on your cooperative

**M**cLean Electric Cooperative (MEC) offers a quiz to test one's familiarity with the organization that keeps the lights on in rural McLean County:

**QUESTION:** How many managers has MEC had in its 75-year history?

**ANSWER:** Six. However, make that seven in 76 years, because Mark Doyle joined MEC in October 2020, succeeding General Manager/CEO Marty Dahl, who retired in 2020.

**QUESTION:** Who was the first manager?

**ANSWER:** Ralph Keel. As one of the original nine incorporating directors, Keel was elected to the first board of directors at the cooperative's inaugural annual meeting in 1946. He was named manager in 1947 and resigned his director position to accept its managerial role.

**QUESTION:** Who was the longest-tenured manager?

**ANSWER:** Joe Walters. Originally from Stanley, Walters was the first employee hired. He began as easement coordinator in 1946 and was named manager in 1954, retiring in 1981.

**QUESTION:** Where was the first line energized?

**ANSWER:** While MEC's early board of directors planned to build line first to farmers north and south of Turtle Lake and west of Garrison, their plans changed with the coming of Garrison Dam. Instead, their first energized line served Garrison Dam construction "boom towns" of Dakota City and Big Bend.

**QUESTION:** When was MEC's first pole set?

**ANSWER:** Aug. 8, 1946, almost a year after a meeting was held to approve incorporating.

**QUESTION:** How many employees does MEC currently have on staff in 2021, its 76th year?

**ANSWER:** 21.

**QUESTION:** Who supplies MEC's power?

**ANSWER:** Basin Electric Power Cooperative is the region's cooperative wholesale generation and transmission provider. Central Power Electric Cooperative also provides electric transmission for MEC. In addition, MEC receives a hydropower allocation from Western Area Power Administration.

**QUESTION:** Has MEC always bought its electricity from Basin Electric Power and Central Power Electric cooperatives?

**ANSWER:** No. It wasn't until Central Power Electric Cooperative completed construction of the William J. Neal Station coal-based power plant near Velva in 1951 that MEC and six other electric cooperatives in the state had their own cooperative source of wholesale electricity.

**QUESTION:** How did they get electricity prior to that?

**ANSWER:** MEC purchased electricity from the investor-owned utility company, Otter Tail Power Co., based in Fergus Falls, Minn., which served area communities such as Garrison, Underwood and Washburn.

**QUESTION:** Does MEC serve areas outside of McLean County?

**ANSWER:** Yes. A limited number of members live outside of McLean County. They're served by MEC, because the cooperative was able to provide the closest available service feed.

**QUESTION:** Where was the first lake cabin located that MEC served?

**ANSWER:** A service to a Strawberry Lake cabin in eastern McLean County was built in 1955.

**QUESTION:** What year did MEC move to its present headquarters offices east of Garrison?

**ANSWER:** 1958.

**QUESTION:** How many active accounts does MEC have?

**ANSWER:** The cooperative served 4,107 accounts as of Dec. 31, 2020.

Go to about MEC's website ([www.mcleanelectric.com](http://www.mcleanelectric.com)) to learn more about the cooperative, including the role it plays in community programs and rural economic development.

Seventy-six years is a long time. It's a good reason to sit back and try to imagine life without electricity and today's modern conveniences at one's fingertips.

It is a reason to celebrate. ■

# Bylaw amendment proposed

Here is the proposed amendment to the bylaws for consideration at the June 22 annual meeting.

## MCLEAN ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE INC. PROPOSED AMENDMENT TO BYLAWS JUNE 22, 2021

### ARTICLE III MEETINGS OF THE MEMBERS

**SECTION 1. ANNUAL MEETING.** The annual meeting of the members shall be held in ~~the first six (6) months following the end of~~ each fiscal year, at such place in the County of McLean, State of North Dakota, as shall be designated in the notice of the meeting, for the purpose of electing directors, presenting reports for the previous fiscal year, and transacting such other business as may come before the meeting. The place and date of such meetings shall be determined by the Board of Directors at least thirty (30) days before the date of such meeting. It shall be the responsibility of the Board of Directors to make adequate plans and preparations for the annual meeting. Failure to hold the annual meeting at the designated time shall not work a forfeiture or dissolution of the Cooperative.

**SECTION 5. VOTING.** Each member shall be entitled to only one vote. All questions shall be decided by a vote

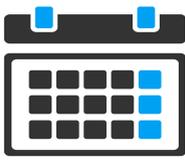
of a majority of the members voting thereon in person or by mail, except as otherwise provided by law, the Articles of Incorporation of these Bylaws.

**Voting by Mail.** Any member may vote by mail for directors and the ballots for all the nominated directors shall be submitted with the notice of the annual meeting. Voting by mail on other matters shall only be allowed and authorized by the Board of Directors. To be accepted as a mail ballot, each mailed-in ballot must be received in an envelope which contains the signature of the member stating that such member acknowledges the enclosed ballot to be the member's vote and certifies that they will not be voting on the issues contained on the ballot in any other manner. Each ballot will be considered and counted toward a quorum. Mail ballots, when used, must be received in the Cooperative's office not later than noon of the day of the meeting of the members in order to be counted or tabulated. Joint membership shall be entitled to one vote by mail. The failure of any member to receive a ballot shall not invalidate any action which may be taken by the members at a meeting. ■

## STATEMENT OF NONDISCRIMINATION

McLean Electric Cooperative Inc. is a recipient of federal financial assistance from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). In accordance with federal civil rights law and USDA civil rights regulations/policies, USDA, its agencies, offices, and employees, and institutions participating in or administering USDA programs are prohibited from discriminating based on race, color, national origin, religion, sex, gender identity/expression, sexual orientation, disability, age, marital status, family/parental status, income derived from public assistance program, political beliefs, or reprisal/retaliation for prior civil rights activity, in any program or activity conducted or funded by USDA; not all bases apply to all programs; remedies and complaint filing deadlines vary by program or incident. Persons with disabilities who require alternative means of communication for program information (e.g., Braille, large print, audiotape, American Sign

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## McLean County community calendar:

# Events and activities to see and do

BY PATRICIA STOCKDILL

### McLean County community food pantry March distributions:

- **Community Cupboard of Underwood:** 4-6 p.m. May 6 and June 3, 208 Lincoln Ave.
- **Garrison Area Resource Center & Food Pantry, Garrison:** noon-2 p.m. and 5-7 p.m. May 27, former Lazy J's building back door.
- **Our Savior Lord's Food Pantry, Max:** noon-3 p.m. and 5-7 p.m. May 17, Max City Hall, 215 Main St.
- **The Lord's Pantry, Turtle Lake:** May 13, 2-4 p.m. and May 22, 10 a.m.-noon, Trinity Lutheran Church, 515 Kundert St.
- **Wilton Food Pantry, Wilton:** "Mini" distributions every Friday, 11:30 a.m. until gone; full distribution, May 20, 4-6 p.m., Wilton Senior Citizens Center, 42 Dakota Ave.

**Area food pantries often experience high needs for the following items:** Baked beans, pork-and-beans, canned fruit, tuna, chicken, cereal, oatmeal, granola and breakfast bars, juice, mac-and-cheese, hamburger and tuna helper, pancake mix and syrup, pasta and pasta sauce, peanut butter, jelly, rice side dishes, soups and household items such as body wash and soap, dish soap, laundry detergent, shampoo and conditioner, toilet paper, toothpaste and toothbrushes. Contact local food pantries for drop-off information or list of additional needs.

County residents with questions or concerns regarding COVID-19 vaccines should contact their local health care facility or First District Health Unit office with questions, appointment

- **Garrison:**  
CHI Garrison Family Clinic, 701-463-2245.  
First District Health Unit, McLean County Garrison office 701-463-2641.  
Trinity Community Clinic, 701-463-2626.
- **McClusky:**  
First District Health Unit, Sheridan County McClusky office, 701-363-2506.  
Northland Health Center, 701-363-2296.
- **Turtle Lake:**  
Northland Health Center, 701-448-9225.
- **Underwood:**  
Underwood Clinic, 701-442-3148.
- **Washburn:**  
Washburn Clinic, 701-462-3389.

First District Health Unit, McLean County Washburn office 701-462-3330.

### Tentative May events. The scheduling could change, so contact sponsors with questions:

- **May 5:** Customer Appreciation Pancake Supper sponsored by the Underwood Civic Club, 5-7 p.m., Underwood City Hall.
- **May 8:** Bike Fest, Turtle Lake. Weather-permitting, children 3 to 18 years of age can ride their bikes from Turtle Lake to Lake Brekken with events featuring bike races, games, short educational health and fitness programs, lunch, and bike rides back to Turtle Lake.
- **May 8:** Highway 36 Rummage Sale, 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. Look for bargains and unique items along N.D. Highway 36 south of Wilton heading to Regan and Wing, with a vendor show tentatively scheduled at the Wilton Memorial Hall.
- **May 15:** Max High School graduation.
- **May 23:** Garrison High School graduation.
- **May 23:** Wilton High School graduation.
- **May 23:** Turtle Lake-Mercer High School graduation.
- **May 23:** Underwood High School graduation.
- **May 28:** White Shield High School graduation.
- **May 28:** EMS Kid Strong, Fort Stevenson State Park, 3 miles south of Garrison, featuring emergency services entities providing family activities to celebrate Emergency Medical Services Week. Contact the park, 701-337-5576, for details.
- **May 29-31:** Sky Fest over Fort Stevenson, Fort Stevenson State Park. Kite festival for the entire family with kite building and flying, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Contact the park for details.
- **May 30:** Washburn High School graduation.
- **May 31:** Military Service Personnel Day, Fort Stevenson State Park. Free daily park admission for military personnel. Contact the park, 701-337-5576, for details.

McLean County organizations and communities can contact Patricia Stockdill, ([stockdill.patricia@gmail.com](mailto:stockdill.patricia@gmail.com)) or telephone, 701-337-5462, to submit community events.

### BOARD OF DIRECTORS:

**Larry Gessele**, president  
701-447-2461  
District 7, Mercer

**Darcy Klain**, vice president  
701-448-2408  
District 4, Ruso

**Rod Stockdill**, secretary-treasurer  
701-337-5462  
District 3, Garrison

**Clarence Behles**, asst. secretary-treasurer  
701-337-5362  
District 2, Garrison

**Troy Presser**, director  
701-447-2855  
District 5, Turtle Lake

**Karen Hanson**, director  
701-448-2636  
District 6, Washburn

**James Odermann**, director  
701-743-4415  
District 1, Parshall

### STAFF:

**Mark Doyle**, General Manager/CEO  
**Keith Thelen**, Operations Manager  
**Lucas Schaaf**, Engineering Manager  
**Wendy Kinn**, Finance Manager

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