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Manager's moment

BY MARK DOYLE, GENERAL MANAGER



Mark Doyle

I would appreciate a moment of your time...

Happy spring, everyone!

By February, it was in the 40s and 50s after record cold just a few weeks earlier. Two phrases come to mind. "The only thing for certain is uncertainty" and "if you don't like the weather here in North Dakota, wait 15 minutes."

In addition, Watertown, S.D.,

experienced a tornado, which was the first in history for the state in February.

As we are preparing for spring, we continue to see significant growth. New requests for service are down from 2024, but we still anticipate a busy year. The MHA Nation at White Shield continues aggressive growth with groundbreaking on a new casino and hotel just south of White Shield. They are working on other projects, but this project is currently the most notable. The amount of infrastructure investment they are making in each of their segments is impressive.

In addition, we continue to see residential growth around the lake, agricultural service upgrades and anticipated growth with Rainbow Energy. As your cooperative grows, all members benefit!

The North Dakota Legislature has been in session, and it has been a busy session! There were several factors affecting our industry, including power supply and rural development. We all hope any legislation written into law is a common-sense law.

The McLean Electric Cooperative (MEC) board held a strategic planning session in February. Strategic planning is a great opportunity to discuss what topics are or can affect the cooperative. Once topics are identified as needing consideration, goals are set to prioritize them and we set objectives on how to accomplish those goals.

The main strategic goal set was to continue to support MEC's No. 1 strength, which is its culture of safety. Our No. 1 priority is to make sure all employees go home each night.

I am proud to let you know MEC received an award in 2024 for a decade of safety excellence. This award is for 10 years with no lost-time injuries for any of the MEC employees. Only one other co-op has received this award in the past. It shows we take care of each other and consider our co-workers like family. Other goals included rate structure, innovation, member communications, legislative relationships, and internal communications and processes.

Rates are always top of mind. As a member-owned cooperative, we want to make sure all our rates are fair and equitable for all our members. The board and staff have been discussing this for several years and are in the middle of a cost-of-service (COS) study. The COS will show us what rate classes are covering cost and providing appropriate margins. We anticipate finalizing the COS mid-year and proposing any changes needed thereafter. We have made incremental changes to our customer charge due to some cashflow issues with inflation and the supply chain, but we feel they may have plateaued, and we are in a good position.

As for the supply chain, we still have materials out longer than usual, so please let us know ASAP if you have any project you are considering, so we can gear up for it. We never want to tell a member we cannot complete the project if we can help it.

Again, we appreciate the cooperation and patience the members provided in getting these projects done. As for cooperation, easements are always an issue, and we ask the landowners for continued support in getting our infrastructure in place to enhance our reliability. As for patience, we will have several contractors working for us along with the MEC crews to get this infrastructure in place, and we thank you for understanding we cannot get everything done in a day, even though we try.

Be sure to check our website and social media for updates on what is happening at your cooperative.

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



McLean Electric Cooperative Warehouse Manager/Locator **Kelly Schmaltz** demonstrates equipment used to identify locations of the cooperative's buried electrical lines.

Planning to dig? Call 811 first

BY PATRICIA STOCKDILL

Spring is here and it's time to dig in the dirt for many McLean Electric Cooperative (MEC) member-owners.

Whether the cooperative member is a farmer, business owner or rural homeowner, spring often means outside projects. Maybe it's time to start that new home or shop construction project. Or perhaps install a new fence or flagpole. It's time to plant those beautiful apple trees. Or expand an irrigation system on a quarter of land.

As eager as one might be to start digging in the dirt, projects like those all need a phone call or website visit before starting the backhoe or posthole digger or finding a shovel. First, contact North Dakota One Call, either by calling 811 or visiting www.ndonecall.com.

North Dakota law requires anyone planning to dig to

contact North Dakota One Call at least two days prior to when they intend to start. It doesn't matter if it's a homeowner planting a tree, installing a fence or adding a new birdhouse on a post, nor a building contractor, a farmer installing an irrigation system or a large pipeline company.

If you want to dig, you need to call first.

North Dakota isn't unique in its requirements. One Call digging requirements are common throughout the United States, because it saves lives by preventing accidents or even death should someone expose a potentially dangerous hazard, such as gas line or underground electrical cable.

It's free to have underground lines and wires located, although anyone digging is required to request a locate at

least 48 hours prior to when they intend to dig to allow all of the utilities time to get to the area.

North Dakota's electrical codes require electric lines be buried at a certain depth, depending on voltage, MEC Operations Manager Keith Thelen explained, with most at least a foot underground.

Even though someone may think they won't dig deep enough to hit any buried wires or pipelines, something like communications wires are often shallower than water lines or electrical cable.

It's better to be safe than sorry.

MEC locates are done within the required time period during business hours Monday through Friday and not on holidays or weekends. Don't call North Dakota One Call on Friday with plans to dig over the weekend, Thelen advised.

MEC locates lines it owns only to the member-owner's meter because of liability concerns, Thelen explained. Members are responsible if they want any secondary wires located from MEC's meter to another area.

He recommends members contact an electrician or qualified contractor to identify other electrical lines or other buried cable, including water lines, on their property that aren't the responsibility of the utility provider, whether it is communications, electrical, water or gas.

Thelen also recommends members wanting to bury something on their property – whether it's an electric line, water lines or anything else – to measure and map the precise location of those buried lines. It's easy to forget where lines are buried. Maps help property owners and others doing any future cable or line locates, as well as future property owners.

Another tip: Don't plant trees or shrubs within 4 feet of any buried underground electrical cable. Roots can easily wrap around cable and cause damage. Digging to repair damaged cable will likely kill the trees and shrubs.

"And while landscaping, please don't remove topsoil from over the top of our lines," Thelen added.

The area where digging is slated should be marked with white flags to help MEC Warehouse Manager/Cable Locator Kelly Schmaltz identify the location if no one is onsite when the locate takes place. It's beneficial if the person requesting a cable locate is onsite in the event of any questions or concerns, but it is not required, Schmaltz added.

Each utility locating buried lines uses flags specific to what is buried: red for electrical; yellow for gas, oil or gaseous materials; green for sewer or drain; orange for



*McLean Electric Cooperative Warehouse Manager/Locator **Kelly Schmaltz** anticipates another busy year when spring arrives. He and Turtle Lake-based lineworker Brian O'Shea cover the cooperative's service area, meeting requests to locate buried electrical lines when anyone plans to dig or excavate. People planning to dig should call North Dakota One Call at 811 or visit www.ndonecall.com at least 48 hours prior to digging.*

communication; pink for temporary survey markers; blue for potable water; and purple for reclaimed water, slurry and irrigation lines.

The request process can be enhanced by being prepared with information, such as the site's legal description, project description, exact address and specific location.

Having the specific location available when contacting North Dakota One Call is beneficial for Schmaltz and other utility locators in areas of McLean County that experienced address changes in recent years or new rural residential developments, Schmaltz added.

When North Dakota One Call receives a request, it notifies utilities, pipeline companies, water authorities and others. Those utilities then identify if they need to conduct a cable or pipeline locate.

Thelen and Schmaltz receive notifications from North Dakota One Call by the next business day when requests are made.

A work order ticket is printed to verify the request, and Schmaltz or Turtle Lake lineworker Brian O'Shea will locate electrical cables within 48 hours after receiving the work order ticket.

"And we won't locate without a ticket," Thelen added, because the ticket provides written verification with the necessary details.

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Emergency locate requests, however, are done as soon as MEC is notified.

The cooperative is contacted directly by authorities or individuals involved in emergency situations, such as a downed electrical pole, damaged pad-mounted electrical cabinet or broken water line, for example, and locates are done as quickly as possible to address potential safety concerns.

Anyone requiring an emergency cable locate or hitting buried electrical cable or power lines should stay away from the area and contact MEC or law authorities at 911, he added.

If someone doesn't request a cable locate and hits MEC's underground electrical cable, that person, company or contractor is liable for injuries and repair expenses. The main reason for billing those responsible is so repair costs come at the expense of those damaging the cable and are not borne by MEC's members.

All contractors working on a jobsite should contact North Dakota One Call, Thelen added, and not rely on other contractors onsite or the property owner.

Schmaltz typically locates electrical cable in the western half of McLean County and O'Shea covers south of Lake Audubon and Lake Sakakawea, as well as the eastern half of the county. However, they coordinate with each other to help ensure they can respond in a timely manner within MEC's service area.

The best thing for anyone planning to dig, especially homeowners or new rural subdivision property owners, is to recognize not everything is buried along road or section line rights of way and depths of buried utility lines and pipelines vary.

Schmaltz will advise someone to stop digging until a locate is completed if he sees anyone digging in an area near where any MEC underground cable could be buried and the cooperative hasn't received a North Dakota One Call locate request.

Call 811 or go online and have all of the information available, wait until all lines are identified, then dig.

"Anytime, you put a shovel in the ground excavating, you're supposed to call (North Dakota One Call)," Schmaltz said.

Thelen and Schmaltz credit MEC's member-owners for their willingness to follow North Dakota One Call regulations: As much digging in the dirt occurs throughout the MEC service area, the cooperative receives a limited number of reports of people damaging its buried cable each year, Thelen added. ■



Directors earn certification

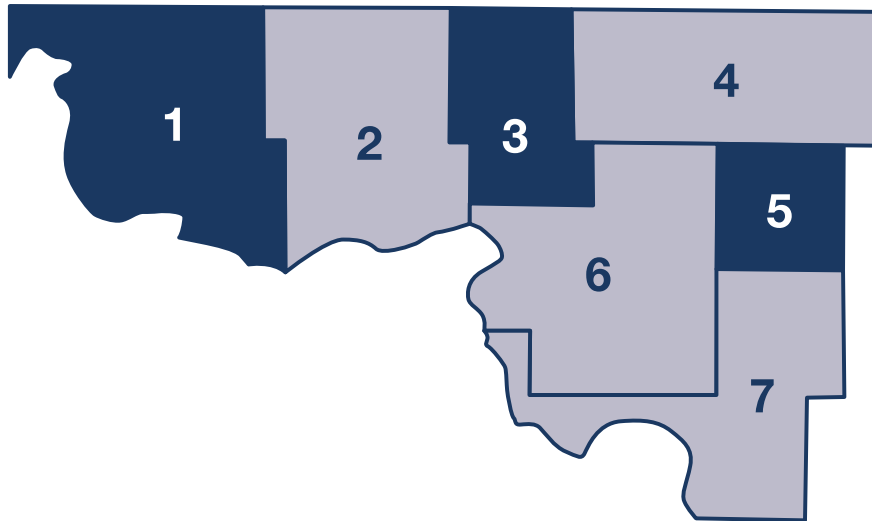
Congratulations to McLean Electric Cooperative Directors Darcy Klain and Troy Presser! Klain completed the second part of the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA) director education program. This board leadership program consists of courses that delve deeper into industry and governance issues.

Presser renewed his NRECA Director Gold credential. This program is an addition to NRECA's director education program for directors' continuing education and advancing their knowledge throughout tenure on the board. ■



Three director seats up for election

DO YOU WANT TO BECOME A DIRECTOR?



Have you ever thought of running for a seat on the board of directors? It is quite simple. Pick up a petition at the McLean Electric Cooperative headquarters in Garrison and secure 15 signatures of members from within your district. You can start circulating the petition right away, but it must be filed not less than 60 days before the annual meeting. Petitions for the 2025 director election must be filed with the co-op by April 15.

According to the bylaws, any member of McLean Electric Cooperative who is a member of this cooperative as a bonafide resident of the district he/she represents, and is in no way employed by or financially interested in a competing enterprise, can become a candidate for the

board of directors. Directors shall be elected by the members at large.

Director duties

Directors have a fiduciary responsibility to the cooperative. They exercise care, time and responsibility in reviewing cooperative matters. Directors treat cooperative business as if it were their own.

Directors devote a certain amount of time to the cooperative. At a minimum, a director attends each monthly board meeting.

Directors learn about the industry as a whole by reading other materials and by attending state and national meetings. An understanding of the issues facing the industry is vital.

To help directors with their responsibilities, training is offered

through the electric cooperative's statewide organization. Courses cover director duties and liabilities, understanding the electric business, board roles and relationships, strategic planning and financial decision-making.

Directors who currently serve the cooperative find the duty extremely rewarding.

This year, the districts up for election are:

- **District 1** – Parshall is currently served by James Odermann.
- **District 3** – Garrison is served by Rod Stockdill.
- **District 5** – Turtle Lake is served by Troy Presser. ■

Three directors will be elected at the McLean Electric Cooperative annual meeting, Tuesday, June 17, in Garrison.



**Know what's below.
Call before you dig.**

**Planting a tree? Installing a fence?
Remember to contact North Dakota One Call first!**

Numerous utility lines may be buried on your property, ranging from electric and telephone lines to water and sewer lines, but North Dakota One Call will help you locate these lines before your project begins.

Contact North Dakota One Call and utility line owners will locate and mark their lines. These locates do not include any lines you may have installed to your private facilities, such as detached garages, wells or yard lights.

Go online at www.ndonecall.com or call 800-795-0555 or 811.

It's free, it's simple and it's the law.

The 811 process:

1. Notify

Notify the North Dakota One Call Center by calling 811 or making an online request at least 48 hours before work begins, excluding weekends and holidays.

2. Wait

Wait the required amount of time for affected utility operators to respond to your request.

3. Confirm

Confirm all affected utility operators have responded to your request and marked underground utilities.

4. Respect

Respect the marks. The marks provided by the affected utilities are your guide for the duration of the project. The marks are valid for 21 calendar days. If you are unable to maintain the marks during your project, or the project will continue past your request's expiration date, call 811 to ask for a re-mark.

5. Dig carefully

Dig carefully around the marks. No mechanical excavating can take place within 24 inches on either side of the marked location of the underground facility. If you plan on digging within that 4-foot-wide area, hand digging is allowed, but dig carefully and cautiously. ■



STAY SAFE WITH LARGE EQUIPMENT

As spring planting begins, McLean Electric Cooperative urges farmers to be safe.

Overhead 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 focusing on the field and your machinery, also watch for power poles, lines and other electrical equipment.

Size of equipment

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

Be aware

- **Observe your surroundings.** Always check above and around before moving or raising equipment.
- **Plan your route.** If there's any doubt equipment will clear a power line, opt for an alternative route.
- **Keep a distance.** Always keep equipment at least 10 feet away from power lines and poles. Sprayers can often reach as high as 12 feet in the air.

- **Keep it lowered.** Always lower equipment extensions, portable augers or elevators to their lowest possible level before moving or transporting them. Folding and unfolding should be done well into the field, not at the field's edge, which could have power lines running next to it. Don't raise augers near a power line.
- **Take over steering.** Don't rely on auto-steer around power lines and poles.

Use a spotter

- **Avoid moving large equipment alone.** Have someone watch as you move equipment to ensure you are clear of power lines.

Educate the crew

- **Make sure you, your family and employees know the location of overhead power lines, and use routes to avoid the lines when moving equipment.** Do this every year, as equipment sizes and soil conditions may change.

Look around, too

- **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. ■

McLean County community calendar: Events and activities to see and do

McLean County area food pantry April distribution and donation thrift store dates, times and locations:

- **Garrison: Garrison Area Resource Center & Food Pantry:** Noon-2 p.m. and 5-7 p.m. April 24.
- **Community Food Pantry serving Makoti, Parshall, Plaza, Roseglen, Ryder, White Shield and others in need:** 10 a.m.-1 p.m. April 26, 181 Ellsworth St., Makoti.
- **Community Thrift Store serving Ryder, Makoti, Roseglen, Plaza, White Shield, Parshall and the region:** 3-6 p.m. Tuesday, 4-7 p.m. Thursday and 10 a.m.-1 p.m. Saturday, except holidays, 181 Ellsworth St., Makoti.
- **Max: Our Savior Lord's Food Pantry:** Noon-3 p.m. and 5-7 p.m. April 21, Max City Hall, 215 Main St.
- **Turtle Lake: The Lord's Pantry:** 2-4 p.m. April 10 and 10 a.m.-noon April 26, Trinity Lutheran Church, 515 Kundert St.
- **Turtle Lake: Free Community Clothing Share & Exchange Store,** every Thursday, noon-6 p.m., 221 Main St.
- **Underwood: Community Cupboard food distribution:** 10 a.m. -noon April 12 and 4-6 p.m. April 24, 208 Lincoln Ave. Like Community Cupboard of Underwood on Facebook for distribution dates and other information.
- **Underwood: Thrift Store:** 1-5 p.m. Tuesdays, 208 Lincoln Ave.
- **Washburn: McLean Family Resource Center:** McLean County residents can contact the center, 701-462-8643, for an appointment to pick up baskets along with more information or assistance through the center's services, 205 Seventh St.
- **Washburn: McLean Family Resource Center Clothing Outlet:** 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday, 205 Seventh St.
- **Wilton: Wilton Food Pantry:** mini distributions every Friday, 11:30 a.m. until gone. Full food distribution, 4-6 p.m. April 17, Wilton Senior Citizens Center, 42 Dakota Ave.
- **Wilton: The (free) Clothes Closet:** 3-5 p.m. March 20, First Presbyterian Church, 401 Dakota Ave.

Area food pantries often experience high needs for the following items: baked beans, pork and beans, canned fruit, tuna, chicken, vegetables, cereal, oatmeal, granola and breakfast bars, juice, macaroni and cheese, hamburger and tuna helper, pancake mix, syrup, pasta, spaghetti, Alfredo and pasta sauce, peanut butter, jelly, rice side dishes, soups

and chili, 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 locations, information or a list of additional needs in your community.

April and early May events:

- **April 5:** Taste of Washburn Beach Party Bash sponsored by Washburn Life, 4-7 p.m., Washburn Memorial Hall. \$5 per person or \$20 per family. Children 5 years old and younger free.
- **April 5:** Painted Woods Pheasants Forever chapter annual banquet and fundraising event, Wilton Memorial Hall.
- **April 12:** Annual Maple Sugaring Day, 10 a.m.-3 p.m., Fort Stevenson State Park Guardhouse Interpretive Center, Garrison.
- **April 12:** "Pasta for a Purpose" McLean Family Resource Center Freewill Donation Spaghetti Feed, Washburn Memorial Hall. Serving begins at 5 p.m. with presentation by Danielle Leukam, Minnesota. Adults only, as she recounts her powerful story of assault and survival in recognition of Sexual Assault Awareness Month.
- **April 14:** National Lineworker Appreciation Day.
- **April 18:** McLean Electric Cooperative closed in observance of Good Friday.
- **April 19:** Annual Easter Egg Hunt sponsored by Underwood Civic Club, 10:30 a.m., Poolside Park (or Underwood school gym in case of inclement weather).
- **April 19:** Movie with the Easter Bunny, 10 a.m., KOTA Theater, Main St., Garrison.
- **April 20:** Easter Sunday.
- **April 28:** Preschool Story Hour, 10:30 a.m., Max Community Library.
- **April 29:** Book Club, 7 p.m., Max Community Library.
- **April 30:** Operation Round Up grant application deadline. Go to McLean Electric's website, www.mcleanelectric.com, or contact MEC Communications Director Sonja Moe, 701-463-6700 or 800-263-4922, for details and applications.
- **May 2-12:** Audubon National Wildlife Refuge Migration Game, self-guided hike along the refuge headquarters' Interpretive Trail with activities for all ages and selfie photo opportunities in celebration of May 10 World Migratory Bird Day. Located a mile east of Lake Audubon along the south shore.

Nonprofit organizations and communities throughout McLean County can contact Patricia Stockdill at stockdill.patricia@gmail.com or 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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