



THE *Hart* OF THE MILKHOUSE

For some families, important decisions happen around the kitchen table. For the Hart family, they happened in the milkhouse.

It's fitting, then, that Jackson Electric member Max Hart would one day name his business, Milkhouse Market, after that space, a place where work was done, problems were talked through, and plans for the future were made.

Born and raised on a dairy farm in Jackson County, Max grew up knowing the value of hard work and home. While Max was attending college, his family faced hardship with the tragic passing of his father. After graduating, Max made the intentional decision to return home and help manage the family farm. His decision to stay in the area was one rooted in family, responsibility, and love for the community that shaped him.

Today, Max is a young entrepreneur with a clear vision for rural communities. In addition to helping run the family farm, he has worked at a local bank in Melrose for several years, where he's had a front row seat to the challenges small towns face. "You see fewer and fewer small-town businesses over time,"



Jackson Electric member Max Hart opened the Milkhouse Market in Melrose, Wis. after noticing an opportunity to market his animals and sell quality dairy products in the community.

he says. "My goal is to reverse that trend."

The Hart family's dairy operation transitioned to beef cattle, and for years Max sold locally raised meat directly out of the freezer. Still, he saw an opportunity to do more for both his farm and the community. In 2021, he noticed an empty building in the Village of Melrose and saw an opportunity to market his animals and sell quality dairy products. Although it was rented out shortly after, the idea stayed with him. "When the building became available again two years ago, I acted on the opportunity," shares Max.

Max's idea came to fruition in 2024 when he opened the Milkhouse Market. He brought farming knowledge into the business but quickly found there was much to learn about retail, with

inventory control and refrigeration as the biggest challenges. "Cheese has a long shelf life, but milk and cottage cheese do not," Max explains. He took the time to learn proper refrigeration requirements and personally invested in purchasing the coolers for the store. That effort is paying off. "Milk sales have doubled in the past month," he adds.

Determining which products to carry was another lesson learned through experience. Max initially leaned on personal preference but soon began tracking sales trends. "I learned what customers are looking for, but I always try to introduce people to a new cheese by offering samples of something they aren't accustomed to," he says.

Max is quick to point out that the Milkhouse wouldn't be possible



Left: A new display features historic Melrose-area photos. Block cheese, cheese curds, milk, and meat products are conveniently located at the Milkhouse Market. Middle: Farm and dairy décor throughout the store nod to the past. Right: In need of a steak or hamburger for supper? The Milkhouse Market offers locally raised and processed meat products.

without help. He's grateful for the employees and volunteers who assist with daily operations and make regular cheese and milk runs, helping keep the shelves stocked and the doors open. "Their support has been essential as the business continues to grow," he says.

Today, about 80 percent of the Milkhouse's regular customers are Melrose-area residents, with others stopping in from surrounding communities or while passing through. Inventory includes block cheese, spreads, milk, summer sausage, beef sticks, steaks, hamburger, brats, hot dogs, local wine from Creekside Winery, and Wisconsin-made craft beer. "I try to carry as many local products as possible," Max says.

Max's commitment to supporting local goes well beyond what's on the shelves. He has hosted a vendor fair at the Milkhouse, providing a place for entrepreneurs without a storefront of

their own to showcase their products, and he makes a point of supporting local causes by backing FFA programs and helping promote community events whenever possible. Inside the store, tables invite gathering and conversation. "On Friday nights, Milkhouse Market After 5 events offer neighbors a relaxed space to connect," Max shares.

Mindful of other organizations' events, Max focuses on other holidays and partnerships. Earlier this year, the St. Patrick's Day celebration drew a full house. "Last fall, I hosted an Oktoberfest celebration and partnered with the Melrose Rod & Gun Club to raise funds for a breast cancer fundraiser," Max shares. "I plan to host it again on October 3 this year, featuring a 50-pound brat and a polka band."

For Max, success isn't just measured in sales, but in connection. Much like the milkhouse of his childhood, Max's business has become a gathering place,

proof that when people choose to stay, invest, and build locally, strong communities continue to grow. "It's a beautiful area to live and grow my business," he concludes. — *Brandi Shramek, Member Relations Supervisor*



MILKHOUSE MARKET

Milkhouse Market
202 N. Washington Street
Melrose, WI 54646

Hours:
Thursdays: 3 to 6 p.m.
Fridays: noon to 6 p.m.
Saturdays: 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

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2026 SCHOLARSHIPS AWARDED

JACKSON ELECTRIC AWARDS \$17,500 TO LOCAL STUDENTS

Each year, Jackson Electric proudly supports the future of its community by investing in education through its annual youth scholarship program. Consumer-member-owned electric cooperatives like Jackson Electric do more than provide electric service. We also give back to the community in meaningful ways.

The cooperative awards up to ten scholarships to high school seniors whose parents or guardians are active members. A youth ambassador scholarship is also available to a student who has actively participated in Jackson Electric’s youth ambassador program. This year an additional scholarship was awarded to a student pursuing an electrical energy related career.

These scholarships are made possible through unclaimed capital credits, funds that would otherwise go unused. When you are a member of a cooperative, you earn capital credits based on how much you use the service. At the end of each year, any margins the cooperative earns are allocated back to members in the form of these capital credits.

Sometimes, however, capital credits can’t be returned. Members may move, pass away, forget to update their mailing address, or simply never cash a check. Jackson Electric makes every reasonable effort to return these funds to the rightful members. When a member cannot be located, the money cannot be kept as profit. Unclaimed capital credits are regulated and must be used for the benefit of the community. That’s why these funds are legally restricted and can only be used for purposes like scholarships and charitable giving, ensuring they continue to serve the community the members came from.

A total of \$17,500 in scholarships were awarded to the class of 2026, helping local students take the next step toward their futures.

“The future belongs to those who believe in the beauty of their dreams.”
– Elanor Roosevelt



Isabelle Huber
Alma Center-Humbird-Merrillan (Lincoln)



Morgan Berg
Black River Falls



Anna Janowski
Black River Falls



Andi Beck
Blair-Taylor



Kelsey Lien
Blair-Taylor



Paige Spors
Melrose-Mindoro



Jayce Stetzer
Melrose-Mindoro



Lydia Tracey
Melrose-Mindoro



Rachel Dux
Neillsville



Abbey Newbern-Torbert
Osseo-Fairchild



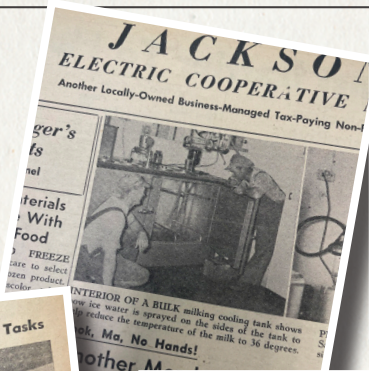
Anton Cassidy
Black River Falls
Youth Ambassador
Scholarship



William Jerome
Sparta
Dairyland Power Scholarship

WIRED THROUGH TIME

A look back at dairy life in rural Wisconsin — these photos appeared in the 1952 pages of *REA News*, celebrating the hardworking farm families who helped power our cooperative communities.



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