



**Local small business owners need to read this**

## JACKSON ELECTRIC TO OFFER LOANS

When area small business owners started to close their doors due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Jackson Electric’s team looked to the cooperative’s economic development program, which is designed to promote economic growth and well-being in rural communities. These funds are available through the USDA’s Rural Development Revolving Loan Program.

The team began working closely with the USDA to put together a plan to assist these businesses. Through an abbreviated application process and lenient funding guidelines provided by the USDA, Jackson Electric is offering loans to Jackson County area small businesses that have been economically impacted by the pandemic.

Jackson Electric may loan up to \$7,500 per eligible small business at a zero to 2 percent interest rate. The term of the note is up to 48 months, with the first payment due on January 4, 2021. Business owners must demonstrate how the COVID-19 pandemic has financially impacted the business.

Interested small business owners should contact Jackson Electric at 715.284.5385, press zero for the operator, to learn more about the application process or go to [www.jackelec.com](http://www.jackelec.com). Loan applications will be accepted through December 1, 2020, on a first-come, first-serve basis or until funds are depleted.

**Loans available:**

- Up to \$7,500
- Zero to 2% interest rate
- 48-month term
- First payment due January 4, 2021

# A TRIBUTE TO JACKSON COUNTY BEEF COOKOUT VOLUNTEERS

“Over 20 years ago, the Jackson County Beef Promotion Committee was organized by family and friends in the community that were passionate about educating the public on the beef industry, sharing information about the nutrition of beef, and providing guidance on how families could prepare beef products at home,” shares Jackson County Beef Promotion Committee Treasurer Diane Bush.

What started as a party on the Jerome and Hope Laufenberg farm turned into a public beef cookout event that is held each year in July. “We invited about 250 people that we knew from the fair or knew were involved with the beef industry,” shares Hope. “That fall, we invited that same list of people to a meeting and asked if we should go public with the event.”

The answer was a yes, with the first two public beef cookouts held on the farm. Every year thereafter, the cookout has been held at the Jackson County Fair Park to accommodate more parking. The public is served with a ribeye steak sandwich meal with sides of sweet corn and ice cream. An all-beef hot dog meal option has also been made available at past cookouts.

“It has always been a consumers’ event, not a producers’ event,” explains Hope. “We’re trying to reach beef consumers, teaching them about beef while feeding them a good meal.”

The cookout would not be a success each year without the help of volunteers. “We have a tremendous group of volunteers to help make our event successful yearly,” says Diane. “This group of people includes a wide variety of individuals from the community.”

FFA teams from area high schools help with setup of tables prior to the event, husk corn, serve the meals, assist with garbage disposal and clean up after the event, while FFA alumni teams serve the refreshments. Other area youth groups also get involved with setup, serving, running the drive-through, garbage disposal, and clean up. Cookout attendees will also see our area royalty helping serve meals, refreshments, and ice cream.

Last, but not least, are the family and friends in the community who started it all. These generous volunteers plan the event, order and transport the supplies, set up the event and the activities planned throughout the evening, and clean up afterwards. “We have loyal and reliable volunteers that have been there since the beginning,” says Hope.

“It takes many hands to make an event, such as our beef cookout, a success,” Diane shares. “We are extremely thankful to have a community that is willing to help out.” —*Brandi Shramek, Member Relations Advisor*



In addition to food, past cookouts have featured family-friendly activities, entertainment, and informational materials.

MY CO-

At the time of this writing, the status of the 2020 Jackson County Beef Cookout was unknown due to the events surrounding COVID-19. However, we wanted to highlight the wonderful community volunteers who help make the event successful each year. Please check your local news sources or the committee’s Facebook page @jacksoncountybeefcookout for the latest updates regarding this event. If you’re interested in getting involved with the Jackson County Beef Promotion Committee, please contact Hope Laufenberg.



## FARM TO TABLE SUPPORTS LOCAL ECONOMY

You don't have to look far to find fresh, sustainable produce in Jackson County. The Jackson County Farmers Market is open for business this summer at its location on Diploma Drive, near the Lunda Community Center in Black River Falls. Due to COVID-19, there are social distancing and sanitation policies and procedures in place to provide safety for both customers and vendors. "We feel the ability to attend the market during this time gives community members a sense of normalcy and community," shares Lisa Listle, farmers market coordinator.

The market was created in 2016 after a community survey suggested the want and need. "Providing a market where the community can purchase healthy, nutritious fruits and vegetables is a win-win for the community and for the growers who produce the food," says Lisa. "We encourage community members to shop the market for fresh, local produce, other food products, and crafts."

The Farmers Market is open from 2-6 p.m. on Thursdays and 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. on Saturdays. Visit the market's Facebook page or website, [www.jcfarmmarket.org](http://www.jcfarmmarket.org), for the event calendar and updates on the winter, indoor market.



There are several volunteers who serve on the market's board of directors, and there are those who help with the market set up and clean up. There are also several local partner entities: Black River Memorial Hospital, Jackson County UW-Extension, Jackson County Board of Directors, and Jackson County Public Health. "We are always looking for volunteers to help with the market," Lisa concludes.



## SCHOLARSHIPS ENCOURAGE DEVELOPMENT OF RURAL COMMUNITIES

Cooperatives are committed to the enrichment of the communities they serve. That's why each year since 1998, Jackson Electric Cooperative has used a portion of its Federated Youth Foundation funds to provide post-secondary education

scholarships to area high school seniors. This account is funded from Jackson Electric's unclaimed capital credits.

This year, we were honored to provide \$8,500 in scholarship awards to eight deserving students in the class of

2020. While our directors weren't able to present the scholarship certificates face-to-face due to the cancellation of the scholarship awards ceremonies in response to COVID-19, the positive news was delivered to each of the recipient's mailboxes.

This annual youth scholarship program offers a \$1,000 scholarship to one qualified candidate from each of the eight high schools in Jackson Electric's service territory. These candidates are selected by the respective high school's scholarship committee. Open-enrolled, home-schooled, or private-schooled students are also eligible for a \$1,000 scholarship; a \$1,500 scholarship is awarded to one deserving senior who participates in Jackson Electric's Youth Ambassador Program.

We know that post-secondary education is costly, and it is our hope that these scholarship funds assist these students in making their post-secondary education dreams a reality.

*Scholarships were offered to the Melrose-Mindoro and Neillsville high schools. We were notified by these schools that there were no qualified applicants for the scholarship.*



Emma Fischer,  
Alma Center-  
Humbird-Merrillan  
High School



Raven Farry,  
Osseo-Fairchild  
High School



Emma Watkins,  
Black River Falls  
High School



Lauren Steien,  
Blair-Taylor  
High School



Abby Schaitel,  
Sparta High School



Morgan Lauterbach,  
Whitehall  
High School



Seth Peterson,  
Youth Ambassador



Kaci Theurer,  
Open-Enrolled

# YOUTH AMBASSADORS

## CONTINUE COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT AFTER HIGH SCHOOL

**T**his year marks a decade of the youth ambassador program, and each year we have been checking in with our past youth ambassadors to see where their life journey has taken them after high school. We were fortunate to hear back from five youth ambassadors from the Class of 2015, and we enjoyed hearing about what exciting experiences they've had and where they plan to go in the future.

**Traci Langan** Following graduation from Lincoln High School in 2015, Traci attended the University of Wisconsin-River Falls, where she recently graduated with a bachelor's degree in elementary education and a minor in early childhood.



At the time of this writing, Traci shared: "I am student teaching in the River Falls School District at Rocky Branch Elementary with K/1, and I LOVE it. During this time with COVID-19, I am teaching students virtually."

Traci looks forward to her official college graduation ceremony in August and obtaining a teaching position for the upcoming school year.

Since her participation in the youth ambassador program, Traci has had experience with cooperatives through the Co-op Credit Union and by practicing the cooperative principle of concern for community. "Throughout college, I was on the Leadership/Servant team for InterVarsity Christian Fellowship at UW-RF. As the communications coordinator of this campus organization, I was responsible for reservations, emails, and did a bit of the budgeting," says Traci.

Traci was also involved with Aspiring Educators, a campus organization for future teachers. While she didn't hold a leadership role in this organization, she actively attended weekly meeting and service events.

Participating in the youth ambassador program made a positive impact on Traci's college career and future classroom. "My experiences made me more willing and comfortable to take on leadership roles in college, my student teaching, as well as my future classroom. I also gained more knowledge about co-ops," she adds.

**Kandi Shramek** Ever since Kandi was dressing up as a nurse in 4K, she knew that she wanted to become a real nurse one day. Kandi went on to pursue that dream after graduating from Lincoln High School in 2015. She started by completing her general education credits at Western Technical College. In the meantime, she also completed the certified nursing assistant,



phlebotomy, and emergency medical technician courses at Western while waiting for acceptance into the nursing program.

"No, this wasn't exactly what I planned to do," shares Kandi. "After seeing all the programs offered at Western, I was interested in gaining more skills. Stepping out and trying other programs before getting into the nursing program has positively benefitted me. These programs, along with my nursing courses, have helped me in my current positions as an emergency room technician and a nurse intern at Black River Memorial Hospital."

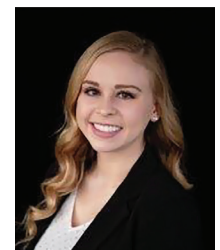
While attending school, Kandi also worked as a resident assistant at an assisted living facility and provided in-home care for clients, taking them out shopping or helping them with small chores around the home. She is also a member of the National Student Nurse Association and has volunteered with the Salvation Army and River Watch at Riverside Park in La Crosse.

Kandi has been simultaneously taking classes to complete her associate and bachelor's degrees. She will graduate with her associate degree in nursing from Western in August and her Bachelor of Science in nursing from Grand Canyon University in December. "After graduation, I plan to continue working at BRMH, where I would like to work as a registered nurse on the medical-surgical or ER units," Kandi shares.

Since her youth ambassador days, Kandi has had experience with cooperatives through her Jackson Electric and Co-op Credit Union memberships. She was also sponsored by Jackson Electric to attend the Electric Youth Tour in the summer of 2015. "The Youth Tour allowed me to gain confidence and try new things," says Kandi. "It was a great opportunity to meet new people, see D.C., learn about cooperatives, and gain leadership skills," she adds.

"Becoming a youth ambassador is great for your resume, you have an opportunity to represent your community through travel/tour opportunities, and you get to meet students from other area schools," Kandi concludes.

**LeeAnn Hertzfeldt** After graduating with a bachelor's degree in finance from UW-La Crosse in May 2019, LeeAnn began working at Anderson Financial in Black River Falls as a wealth plan manager. In this position, she is responsible for the creation and maintenance of clients' financial plans.



The 2015 Melrose-Mindoro High School graduate knew she wanted to study business, and after taking some general business courses narrowed her studies down to the finance sector. "I particularly enjoyed my personal finance and financial planning courses, which was the career path I wanted to follow," shares LeeAnn.

During college, LeeAnn worked at a few jobs in the service industry and as a childcare provider. She was also employed



as a teller at Altra Federal Credit Union, her longest interaction with a co-op since the youth ambassador program. “I truly enjoyed working for such a community-focused organization,” she shares. “They stood by the cooperative principles of service for others, and I experienced that in my teller role as well as the many volunteer opportunities that followed with the job.”

In addition to career experience, LeeAnn has gained valuable volunteer experience through her past and current employment. As a childcare provider, she often participated in family events for the children and their families. She also volunteered at Altra’s community events, such as their annual Easter egg hunt, Applefest, and Altra Gives Back day. “Last spring, I participated in the Interfaith Volunteer Caregivers Golf Outing at Skyline along with my Anderson Financial team,” says LeeAnn. “Community events are important in so many ways, both for personal development and for the togetherness that stems as a result.”

LeeAnn was a participant in the youth ambassador program and attended the Youth Leadership Congress held at UW-River Falls each summer. These opportunities allowed her to learn more about the function of a cooperative and how they benefit our communities. “As a youth ambassador, I participated in group projects and fundraising events that helped bolster my leadership and teamwork skills,” explains LeeAnn. “I also was able to participate in the Youth Leadership Congress, which allowed me to learn about the other various small-town cooperatives in our surrounding communities, the similar principles cooperatives all follow, and lifelong skills I have taken with me.”

**Kayla Green** “I hope to stay in the Jackson County area since I enjoy it here,” shares Kayla. “I plan to broaden my knowledge at my current job and see where life takes me from there.” Kayla is currently employed at the Krohn Clinic and works in a position in the front business office.



Following graduation from Lincoln High School in 2015, Kayla attended Chippewa Valley Technical College, where she graduated from the physical therapist assistant program with an associate degree in applied science.

Jackson Electric’s youth ambassador program strongly encourages community involvement and volunteerism, and Kayla took her youth ambassador experience with her after high

school. During her time in college, Kayla joined the Physical Therapist Assistant Club and took on a leadership position as the club’s secretary.

Kayla has also been involved with a variety of community events now that she has graduated from college. “I have volunteered at the Jackson County Dairy Breakfast, the Hixton Legion Pizza and Oyster Ball, as well as the Chicken and Rib Feed,” says Kayla. “I have also mowed the lawn at the Jackson County Veterans Park multiple times, and I have volunteered to monitor the Antique Building at the Jackson County Fair.”

Youth ambassadors are also exposed to opportunities to gain valuable leadership skills. “The program has impacted my life in a few ways,” Kayla explains. “It taught me to be a good leader, how leaders communicate with other people, and how important it is to give back to your community.”

**Matt LaFauge** After graduating from Black River Falls High School in 2015, Matt attended the University of Saint Thomas (UST), where he was also a student-athlete on the football team. He had originally planned to play football all four years at UST and then go on to become a physical therapist. “After my first year, I transferred to University of Wisconsin-La Crosse,” Matt shares. “I graduated this spring with a degree in sport management and will be attending the University of Minnesota to pursue a Master’s Degree in sport administration.”



While Matt has not had a whole lot of interaction with cooperatives since his time in the youth ambassador program, he does note his membership with a credit union and leadership experience. “Since high school, I have coached basketball and football at local middle schools,” says Matt. “These opportunities provided leadership to these young students.”

Matt has also taken his leadership to the next level by helping to organize a community event called Wheels for All. “This event promoted inclusiveness in sports, and brought people of all abilities together to play wheelchair basketball and handball,” explains Matt.

It is evident Matt’s participation in the youth ambassador program made a positive impact in his life. “Being a youth ambassador in high school allowed me to gain friendships, learn from area businesses, and carry valuable lessons with me throughout my later years,” Matt shares.



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