



THANK YOU, MEMBERS!

Kevin Babcock, General Manager/CEO

As we reach the end of the six-month COVID-19 pandemic protocols, I'd like to share with the membership a snapshot of what your electric cooperative has endured over these past few months.

On March 17, 2020, Governor Evers issued an executive order shutting down all non-essential businesses. Fortunately, Jackson Electric is considered an "essential" business and continued with modified operations. On the flip side, the shutdown of non-essential businesses made a significant impact on Jackson Electric's financials, as well as the budget, and our membership.

Shortly following the executive order, one of Jackson Electric's largest loads suspended its operations and two schools on our service lines closed their doors. In addition, large commercial members reduced their electrical consumption by operating at limited hours, thus creating a perfect storm for Jackson Electric. Sales declined quickly and accounts receivable climbed rapidly.

In a period of less than 45 days, Jackson Electric had outstanding electric bills due of nearly \$325,000, while kilowatt-hour sales were down 30% and continued to decline. Our office received calls from members asking if we could work with them as they were trying to make ends meet. We heard the personal stories of members being laid-

off or taking a reduction in pay because their employer closed its doors or were operating at limited hours. Schools were closed and parents were forced to home-school their children.

Working closely with the board of directors and staff, business strategies were implemented to maintain operations at Jackson Electric. Because of the decline in sales and outstanding bills, Jackson Electric suspended all capital budget items such as pole testing and vegetation and equipment maintenance, to name a few. Our work hours were adjusted, and staffing numbers reduced. Vendors willingly worked with Jackson Electric on payment arrangements for material orders, which helped stretch our cash flow. This in turn allowed Jackson Electric to work with members to put payment plans in place.

While Jackson Electric was able to leverage some of its capital, delay payments, and restructure daily practices, the wholesale power bill still had to be paid, regardless of outstanding electric bills. This payment is due the last Wednesday of each month and typically ranges between \$950,000 and \$1.4 million. The goal was not to advance on the line of credit unless it was the last possible option. We are appreciative Jackson Electric's members understood the significance of paying their electric bill during this unprecedented time. Because of this, the wholesale power bill has been paid each month and Jackson

Electric has not had to draw on the line of credit, as of this writing.

You may recall, Jackson Electric closed its lobby to all walk-in traffic one day after the executive order was issued. Members were encouraged to use the on-line payment services to pay their electric bill, and Jackson Electric employees acted quickly to deploy online services for membership applications and new line builds.

Our lobby remains closed to walk-in traffic. While this may not be the most convenient situation for everyone, it is the best strategy for your cooperative. We are responsible for keeping our members' lights on 24/7/365. Because we operate with a small number of staff, Jackson Electric risks a company-wide quarantine if an employee tests positive for COVID-19. If Jackson Electric were to quarantine, our crew would not be available to respond to power outages, office employees would not be available to answer the phones or care for the daily needs of our members.

Jackson Electric employees are dedicated to the members we serve. The employees understand the significance of staying healthy and safe so they can continue to serve the thousands of members who rely on them to keep the power on.

We hope this soon will be in the past. I want to assure you that Jackson Electric is present, we never stopped operating, and we will always be here to serve our members.



Rain or shine,
day or night,
we're here for you.
October is National
Co-op Month.

#PowerOn

Jackson Electric's Pledge to Its Members

MISSION:

To provide safe, reliable power for all generations.

Our Pledge is to:

- Encourage the wise use of our energy resources
- Perform our work in a manner that is environmentally and socially acceptable
- Reference "The Seven Cooperative Principles" as our guide to do our business
- Operate our business in a financially sound manner
- Hold ourselves accountable to the highest standard for employee and public safety and security



MORE THAN A BUILDING WITH

Library offers programs *Books* for everyone

“Come in and see what’s new at your library!” says Joan Zenz, current chair of Friends of the Black River Falls Public Library. “In addition to books, you can also check out DVDs, CDs, and even specialty cake pans. If you need to use a computer, there are several stations available with staff to help with questions,” she adds.

Friends is a group formed for the purpose of assisting the Black River Falls Public Library with financial and volunteer support of programming and other needs as they arise. Friends was selected as this year’s recipient of the annual \$1,000 Mike Anderson Memorial.

The Black River Falls Public Library is truly a library for all, whether you live in the city of Black River Falls or in the rural areas. The library’s free services expand beyond a visit to the library to check out items. Your free library card also offers convenient access to thousands of e-books or audiobooks, from the comfort of your home. Additionally, Gale Courses can help you brush up on skills, such as photography, while Mango Languages can get you speaking Spanish or Italian. “When conditions allow, there will also be book clubs, story times and other programming available,” Joan adds.

In the past, Friends has provided financial support, such as incentives or materials, for adult and children’s reading programs. A portion of the Mike Anderson Memorial received

by Friends was used towards the summer reading program, while another portion has been set aside to support the Jackson County Reads program and author visit. “The summer reading program serves children ages 4-12. Children fill out reading logs for accomplishing certain goals and are able to select books to keep,” Joan explains. “There are also weekly special activities, which this year were mostly ‘grab and go’ kits due to social-distancing recommendations.”

Jackson County Reads is like a county-wide book club that you can get involved with. A book is selected each year, and several copies are either purchased or borrowed to have available for check out by library patrons. “Several book discussion groups are available at various places throughout the county and special programs and speakers that relate to the book’s theme are scheduled,” says Joan. “The culminating activity is the author visit, which is held at the Lunda Theatre. Costs associated with the program include the purchase of the books, speaker’s fees, and any travel costs that need to be paid.”

The Jackson County Reads event is held every other year, with planning currently taking place for 2021. At the time of this writing, Friends has tentatively selected a book and has had correspondence with the author.

In addition to the programming that the Mike Anderson Memorial funds will support, Friends has also offered a winter reading program, “warm books for cold nights,” hosted antique appraisal events and “golf at the library,” decorated the library for the holidays, raised funds through a used book sale, and helped with the sale of the Project Christmas book.

One program you may not have realized Friends also facilitates is an adult literacy program. “A student enrolled in the Western Technical College GED program needed more in-depth training on reading. I agreed to start a program as long

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More information regarding Friends, including a sign-up form, can be found on the library’s website, www.blackriverfallslibrary.org. Don’t have a library card? A registration form can be filled out at the library. You will need to bring a valid ID and proof of current address. Children under 16 must have a parent/guardian sign the registration form.



Left to right: “Golf at the library” event. Each year, Friends runs a used book sale fundraiser. An appraiser examines this clock at a Friends antique appraisal event.



MAKING MEMORIES, ONE PUMPKIN AT A TIME

The nights grow cooler, the days shorter. The leaves turn color with the calendar. You can already smell a pumpkin pie baking in the oven and taste a mug of hot apple cider. While many things are left uncertain this year, it is certain that fall is in the air. With fall comes the perfect opportunity to create family memories in a safe outdoor atmosphere with plenty of room for social distancing; a visit to a pumpkin patch is no exception. Whether you're a longtime customer or a first-time picker, look no further than rural Alma Center, where memories are made one pumpkin at a time.

Zinn's Pumpkin Field "I enjoy stepping out the back door and hearing the kids. We enjoy doing this for families to make memories," says Wayne Zinn of rural Alma Center. Wayne and his wife, Darla, are the third generation on their Prindle Road farm, the second generation to continue with the pumpkin-growing tradition.

Darla's dad, Jim Shoemaker, was raised on this farm, and his father grew fruits and vegetables there. When Jim was discharged from the Army, he bought the farm from his dad and continued growing produce. "My two brothers and I spent our entire summer, every summer, weeding and harvesting the produce. I think the pumpkins were one of the crops we enjoyed picking the most," shares Darla. "It's fun to find the biggest one, or the one that's unusually shaped."

Jim started the pick-your-own pumpkin concept about 30 years ago. "He looked at the field of pumpkins



Darla and Wayne Zinn

and thought 'well if I just had someone pick these for one dollar each, I'd have \$10,000,'" Darla recalls. "He really enjoyed having families come out and have fun picking pumpkins, so he kept doing it."

As you could guess, Jim didn't make anywhere near \$10,000, but he did realize that families were making memories by visiting his farm. He continued with the pumpkin-growing business that Darla and Wayne would eventually carry on for years to come. "Wayne and I bought the farm from my dad and continued growing the pumpkins, never raising the price," explains Darla. "You drive right out in the field and truly pick your own pumpkin for one dollar. We use the honor system, and also offer decorating kits and stickers."

The Zinns have run the pumpkin-growing business for over 18 years, while also working full-time off the farm. "We start planning in April, and the seeds are planted by the end of May," says Wayne. "You have to wait until the soil is warm."

The pumpkins are cultivated until they are vining. At that point, a walk through this pumpkin patch reveals about four varieties of pumpkins, squash, and mini gourds. "We mainly grow larger pumpkins that are good for carving such as the Jack-O-Lantern variety," says Darla.

Darla and Wayne enjoy seeing the different groups of people that stop by, such as youth groups. "We've even

had families bring a lunch to eat at the patch," says Wayne. "We truly enjoy doing this for the families, offering an affordable price to make memories."

Laufenberg's Pumpkin Patch If you're looking for a large variety of specialty pumpkins and gourds of all sizes and colors for fall decorating, you need to check out another fall attraction located just a few miles away at the Laufenberg Pumpkin Patch on North Casper Road, owned by Frank and Sue Laufenberg.



Frank and Sue Laufenberg

Located just a few miles from where he grew up, Frank bought the property in 1999. With plenty of land, he wanted to grow something that he could sell. There was already an abundance of Christmas trees and fruit farms in the area, so he decided on pumpkins. "I liked gardening and had been doing it my whole life," shares Frank. "I tried out pumpkins, experimenting with different seeds and brands to determine which ones worked for my soil, and I stuck with it."

Like any business, it took a few years before consumers started visiting the farm. "I used to haul the product into town to sell," shares Frank. "By the third year, people started to come out once they knew where we were."

A successful pumpkin crop has ev-

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everything to do with the weather and the time put in. “We plant around Memorial Day weekend, and with enough moisture, they take off,” says Frank. “The key is keeping the gardens clean and keeping up with the weeds.”

While you are welcome to pick your own at this patch, the Laufenbergs have the best of the crop pre-picked, washed, and displayed on tables by the weekend after Labor Day. This offers the perfect opportunity to set your eyes on your favorite variety, whether that’s a little orange moon pumpkin, a speckled swan gourd, or a Turks’ Turban squash. Additionally, not all pumpkins are orange. As the name implies, the porcelain doll pumpkin is a peach color, while the Jarrahdale Gray sometimes takes on a blue tint. “The Cinderella is the best to eat and makes the best pumpkin pie because of its texture and sweet flavor,” Frank advises.



The Cinderella pumpkin is the best for making pumpkin pie.

In addition to pumpkins, gourds, and squash, also available for your decorating needs are beautifully colored bundles of Indian corn, along with broom corn, corn shocks, and sunflower heads. “Everything we sell is grown right here,” shares Frank.

There are challenges to the pumpkin business, but the reward is the customers, from the families to the kindergarten classes that stop by each year. “I enjoy seeing all the smiles, the good people that stop by, repeat customers, and the thank yous,” Frank concludes.

Full-Circle Pumpkins There are many sustainable ways to dispose of your pumpkins after Halloween to bring them back to their soil roots. When tossed out with the trash and taken to a landfill, pumpkins release methane. Rather, pumpkins are organic material and you’ll want to consider adding them to your compost pile. Make sure you remove any remaining seeds if you don’t want any unwanted pumpkins to grow. If you don’t compost, you can dig shallow holes in your garden to bury the pumpkin pieces. All you need to do is remove the seeds and any decorations/candles you may have added.

Some of your wildlife friends also enjoy eating pumpkin, as long as you haven’t decorated it with any materials that could be toxic.—*Brandi Shramek, Member Relations Advisor*

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as I could find tutors,” shares former Friends chair and current member at-large Linda Heller.

Currently, 14 trained adult literacy tutors provide basic education, GED tutoring, and English as a second language (ESL) to study for the United States Citizenship test. “ESL is the most popular program that we offer,” shares Linda. “However, we would like to do more. We’re always in need of adults interested in improving their reading.”

Beyond tutors and tutees, Linda also seeks financial resources to obtain materials for the program. “I usually write grants to raise the money to fund the adult literacy program,” Linda says. “It’s the generous support of community foundations that allows us to meet our needs. We are very pleased that Friends was selected for the Mike Anderson Memorial.”

If you’re passionate about the library like Joan and Linda, you can get involved by becoming a formal member of the Friends group or you can get an idea of what the organization is like by volunteering at a Friends event. “Not just me, but many of the others involved with Friends grew up in the library. The community library wherever we lived was a big part of our lives; it’s a way of giving back to the library, the community,” shares Linda.

“The library is a hidden asset,” adds Joan. “Like any other organization, Friends runs on people. The more hands, the more services and programs we can offer.”—*Brandi Shramek, Member Relations Advisor*

October is recognized as National Cooperative Month. Cooperatives were built by the community, for the community. They practice the cooperative principle of concern for community through volunteerism and monetary support as a way of giving back to their roots. The annual Mike Anderson Memorial is one way that your Jackson Electric Cooperative gives back to the community. Mike was passionate about this cooperative principle.

FROST CHARGES

If you plan to have Jackson Electric install electric service on your property after November 1, an additional charge may be applied if the conventional method of electric service installation is not feasible due to frost.

If you’re planning to build a structure during the winter season and will need electric service, please contact Jackson Electric now so any line builds can be arranged.



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