



An Equal Opportunity Provider & Employer

A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative 

P.O. Box 278, WaKeeney, KS 67672  
800-456-6720

[www.westerncoop.com](http://www.westerncoop.com)  
[www.facebook.com/WesternCoopElectric](https://www.facebook.com/WesternCoopElectric)

WESTERN COOPERATIVE ELECTRIC

# NEWS

## Western Cooperative Electric, Inc.

### Board of Trustees

**Craig Crossland**  
President

**Terry Hobbs**  
Vice President

**Richard Schaus**  
Secretary-Treasurer

**Landon Heier**  
Trustee

**Frank Joy**  
Trustee

**Marvin Keller**  
Trustee

**Charles Luetters**  
Trustee

**Susan Rohleder**  
Trustee

**Dale Weinhold**  
Trustee

### General Manager

**Tom Ruth**  
General Manager

### Contact Us

635 S. 13th Street  
P.O. Box 278, WaKeeney, KS 67672  
785-743-5561  
FAX: 785-743-2717  
[www.westerncoop.com](http://www.westerncoop.com)

## Like us on Facebook

Be sure to LIKE us on Facebook! Just go to [www.facebook.com/WesternCoopElectric](http://www.facebook.com/WesternCoopElectric) to find co-op news, energy tips, photos from co-op events and more!



## FROM THE MANAGER

# Power On: October is National Co-op Month



Tom Ruth

As an electric cooperative, one of our top goals is to provide reliable, affordable energy to you, the consumer-members we serve. One of the seven principles

that guide all co-ops is “concern for the community.” To me, this principle is essential to Western Cooperative, and it sets us apart from other electric utilities.

October is National Co-op Month, and electric cooperatives across the country are highlighting the many ways we “Power On.” Keeping this theme in mind, I recognize the essential role we play in serving special communities like ours.

Who could have predicted in March, that COVID-19 would have tested our

community and our nation as it has? The changing circumstances due to the pandemic have created both challenges and opportunities. Over the past several months, we’ve all been challenged to operate differently, and Western Co-op has stepped up to help our members and strengthen the safety net for our more vulnerable neighbors.

As an essential service, and to ensure the reliability of your power supply, we modified our operations to safeguard business continuity. Our line crews and customer service representatives began working on staggered schedules to maintain separation.

In some instances, our staff was able to work remotely. In the office, we limited and modified meetings and gatherings to allow for safe separation. We also adjusted our walk-in office availability and in-person service calls to ensure the health and safety of our

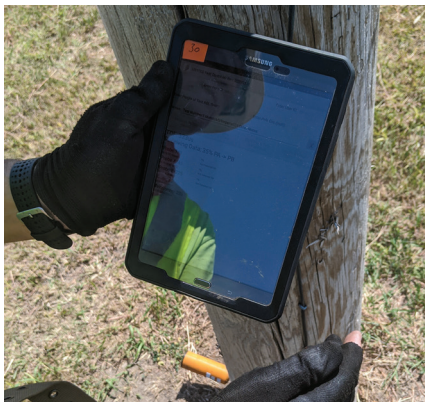
*Continued on page 16C ▶*



## Passing the Test: Western uses Technology to Test Electric Poles

Every year Western Co-op tests 10% of the poles on our system. Pole testing is essential because it catches potential problems before they can affect Western's members.

Line Superintendent Ron Aschenbrenner explained, "There are over 80,000 electric poles within Western Co-op's territory. To ensure our system is properly maintained, we test more than 8,000 poles per year, so every pole is tested on a 10-year cycle. That way, if something were to happen, like a big ice storm, we feel confident that we have done everything on our end to prevent a massive infrastructure failure."



Technicians can trigger the ultrasound pole test and get instant readings from their tablets.



Western Line Superintendent Ron Aschenbrenner (left) discusses pole testing procedures with Utility Asset Management President Wayne Hall.

The traditional pole testing method involves excavating around each pole to a depth of 18 inches. Then a core sample is taken and analyzed by the technician. If the pole passes the inspection, the technician will chemically treat the pole's exposed portion, wrap it with a moisture barrier and replace the excavated dirt. If the test shows a compromised pole, Western's line crew will replace it.

Recently, Western contracted Utility Asset Management Inc. to begin pole testing with a new, more efficient hybrid method. This hybrid technique uses soundwaves (ultrasound) to perform the initial test. If the ultrasound readings indicate the pole is solid, with no signs of moisture or decomposition, the pole passes inspection. This method tests poles without ever having to disturb the ground or drill into an otherwise sturdy pole.

President of Utility Asset Management Wayne Hall explained, "You wouldn't want your doctor to pull out a scalpel before taking your temperature. By using ultrasound, we can get a good idea if the pole has issues without ever having to dig, drill, or otherwise compromise a healthy pole."

Many of the pole testing procedures are the same when comparing the traditional and hybrid ultrasound methods.

First, the technician will walk up to a pole doing a visual inspection. He will look for splits, broken cross-arms, or even fire damage from lightning strikes at the very top.

If everything looks good, the technician will

walk up to the base of the pole and test for internal rot using the not so scientific method of giving the pole a few blows with a hammer.

"After a few years of experience, you can develop a feel for internal rot by hitting the pole with a hammer," Hall said. "If the pole is solid, the hammer bounces back quickly. If there is rot, it makes a deeper sounding thud and doesn't spring back the same. Sort of the same concept. If the ultrasound waves move back and forth quickly through the pole, it is solid. If the soundwaves hit moisture or rot, it will slow them down."

After doing a visual inspection, the technician attaches the transmitter and receiver to the pole's base. They then use a tablet to start the test and immediately receive the results.

If the tester discovers internal rot, he may drill into the pole to confirm the extent of the damage. Unlike the traditional method, there is only a small percentage of poles that require drilling. This greatly reduces damage to the overall pole population and helps extend the usable life of a utility pole.

Hall explained how all the data that is instantaneously collected and stored could make a long term difference, "After several years of testing poles for the same co-op, we get a better understanding of which areas might be susceptible to higher rates of pole decay. That way, we can provide the customers with enough data, so that they might start testing more regularly or change the size of the poles used to build in certain areas."

"If we tried to cut corners by not testing poles like we do, eventually, it would cost our members a lot more in outage restoration time," Aschenbrenner said. "Performing regular maintenance minimizes the amount of damage sustained by our system at one time. By doing things the right way, we are doing our best to serve our members."

# Western's Sharing Success Fund Awards City of Otis \$2,000 Grant

Western Cooperative Electric's Sharing Success Fund has awarded a \$2,000 grant to the City of Otis to help establish Cougar Park.

What was once an empty lot across from the City Hall building in Otis is now being converted into a city park.

"We hated having that empty lot just sitting there, and we knew there were concerns over new construction due to the basement of a previously torn down building," said Shelly DeWald Otis City Clerk. "The City Council agreed that we would be able to convert the land into a quiet, peaceful park for a minimal cost."

Making this project a reality through donations of time, labor and money, the park will be ADA compliant with a gazebo serving as the main feature.

Otis-Bison Elementary School students even chipped in on the creative process. "Last year we had a 'Name the Park' contest," said Dewald. "The City Council selected 'Cougar Park' as the winning name. We are very proud of our little town and this project."

The Sharing Success grant will go



Member Services Manager Nolan Numrich (right) presents a \$1,000 Sharing Success grant from Western Cooperative along with the matching \$1,000 from CoBank to Otis City Clerk Shelly DeWald for completion of the newly established Cougar Park.

toward building the seating and lighting inside the converted grain bin gazebo.

The Sharing Success Fund is a partnership between CoBank and Western to support our local communities with funding.

"Our Sharing Success program with CoBank continues to be a great benefit for our members and the communities we serve," said Nolan Numrich, Western's member services manager.

## New Employee Spotlight

Western Cooperative Electric welcomes **THOMAS "TAP" PENKA** to the electric cooperative family as our newest apprentice lineman at our Olmitz outpost.

Originally from Olmitz, Penka attended

school at Otis-Bison and is familiar with the southeast portion of our service territory. Being from the area and having prior electrical experience, he will be a great asset to our Western team.

For the past 10 years, Penka has been a journeyman electrician. He and his wife, Lindsay, have two children with a third on the way. They enjoy going to the zoo and barbecuing on the weekends.

Welcome to the co-op family!



Tap Penka

## Power On *Continued from page 16A*

employees and our valued members. For the health and safety of everyone, we think these measures were the prudent course of action for the times.

For our members impacted by COVID-19 who have needed help with their electric bills, we worked with those most impacted to make special payment arrangements. We also offered payment assistance through our Western Cares program, a fund made possible from your kind donations through Operation RoundUp.

We've seen other local businesses rising to meet similar challenges during this time because that's what communities do. While the challenges caused by COVID-19 have been daunting, I'm heartened to see how everyone has pulled together.

Seventy-five years ago, Western Cooperative was built by the community to serve the community, and that's what we'll continue to do.

## Fall Back on Nov. 1

On Sunday, Nov. 1, remember to turn your clocks back one hour. It is also a good time to change the batteries in your smoke detectors and have a professional check your fire extinguishers.



## Energy Efficiency Tip of the Month

The average household owns 24 electronic products, which account for roughly 21% of home energy use. When shopping for electronics, consider purchasing ENERGY-STAR®-certified products, which can be 70% more efficient than conventional models.

Sources: [energystar.gov](http://energystar.gov) and Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory



## Preparing for the Big Hunt: Consider Electrical Safety, Too

As you prepare for hunting season, keep in mind that along with general hunting safety, electrical safety should also be top of mind.

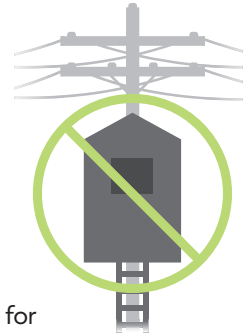
You might be preoccupied and excited about the big hunt, but be sure to look up for power lines. Never place a tree stand near a power line. Contact with the power line, utility pole, or related equipment can alter the electricity's path to ground, sending electricity through anyone or anything that comes too close or in direct contact with the power source. Even coming within 10 feet of the line can cause an arc, transferring energy from the power line/source to an object or person.

In addition, do not shoot near or toward power lines, utility poles, transformers or substations. Stray bullets or pellets could damage equipment, possibly interrupting electric service. Even more concerning, they could drop a power line to the ground, causing a hazardous scenario: Those who get within 50 feet of the downed line could be shocked or electrocuted.

Western Cooperative Electric and Safe Electricity remind hunting enthusiasts of these electrical safety tips:

- ▶ Observe all signs or postings that advise electrical safety, especially when scouting a location for your tree stand.

- ▶ Familiarize yourself with the area before heading out to hunt. Take note of power lines and equipment, especially when hunting in densely wooded areas.
- ▶ Do not use power poles to support a tree stand.
- ▶ Do not place a tree stand near a power line or pole.
- ▶ Be in the habit of looking up and out for power lines and do not come within 10 feet of an overhead line or pole when setting up or taking down a stand.
- ▶ Never climb a utility pole.
- ▶ Please report any damage to a line or other related equipment to us so we can address it. Although we perform routine maintenance, damage may not be noticed for weeks or months due to the vast amount of lines that cover our service area.




Of course, always take the time to observe general hunting safety measures as well. Stay safe out there!

For more information about safety around power lines and other sources of electricity, go to [SafeElectricity.org](http://SafeElectricity.org).

### UNDERSTANDING THE SEVEN COOPERATIVE PRINCIPLES


Cooperatives around the world operate according to the same set of core principles and values, adopted by the International Co-operative Alliance. These principles are a key reason why America's electric cooperatives operate differently from other electric utilities, putting the needs of our members first.



**1**

**VOLUNTARY AND OPEN MEMBERSHIP**


Co-ops are voluntary organizations, open to all persons able to use their services and willing to accept the responsibilities of membership, without gender, social, racial, political or religious discrimination.



**2**

**DEMOCRATIC MEMBER CONTROL**

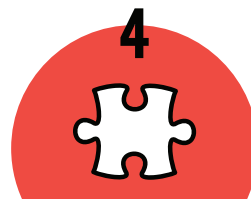
Co-ops are organizations owned and controlled by their members, who actively participate in setting their policies and making decisions. Men and women serving as elected representatives are accountable to the membership. In co-ops, members have equal voting rights (one member, one vote).



**3**

**MEMBERS' ECONOMIC PARTICIPATION**


Members contribute equitably to, and democratically control, the capital of their co-op. They usually receive limited compensation, if any, on capital subscribed as a condition of membership. Members allocate surpluses for any or all of the following purposes: developing the co-op, setting up reserves, benefiting members in proportion to their transactions with the co-op, and supporting other activities approved by the membership.



**4**

**AUTONOMY AND INDEPENDENCE**


Co-ops are self-help organizations controlled by their members. If they enter into agreements with other organizations, including governments, or raise capital from external sources, they do so on terms that ensure democratic control by their members and maintain their co-op autonomy.



**5**

**EDUCATION, TRAINING AND INFORMATION**

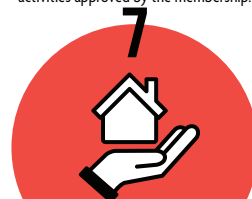
Co-ops provide education and training for their members, elected representatives, managers and employees so they can contribute effectively to the development of their co-ops.



**6**

**COOPERATION AMONG COOPERATIVES**

Co-ops serve their members most effectively and strengthen the co-op movement by working together through local, national, regional and international structures.



**7**

**CONCERN FOR COMMUNITY**

While focusing on member needs, co-ops work for the sustainable development of their communities through policies accepted by their members.

16D KANSAS COUNTRY LIVING ■ OCTOBER 2020

KCLOCT20\_WES 2.indd 4

9/16/2020 9:26:13 AM