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May 2026



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KIDS AND CRITTERS





MILES, MEMORIES, AND MILESTONES

A Lasting Mark of Dependability



**Richland Electric
Cooperative**
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For some, an office is defined by four walls, a fluorescent hum, and a swivel chair. For the man who has spent the last decade overseeing the vegetation management of our local electrical grid, the office has always been a moving target. It's the windshield of a pickup truck winding through six counties, the rugged terrain of the Duluth woods, and the shifting canopy of Richland and Oakdale Electric Cooperatives.

After 22 years in the industry—ten of those as a Vegetation Management Supervisor for Encore Services, Inc, a subsidiary of Richland Electric Cooperative—this “outside guy” is finally preparing to trade his 4:30 a.m. alarm for a permanent Saturday. As he reflects on a career built on sawdust, safety, and the delicate balance between nature and the power grid, his story serves as a reminder of how much the cooperative world has evolved.

The journey didn't start with a clipboard or a supervisor's title. It started with a saw. Twenty-two years ago, living in Duluth, Minnesota, Mark was looking for a change of pace. “I have always been an outside guy,” he explains. “An office job was never on my radar.” He applied for a tree trimming job, and what began as a search for a new paycheck turned into a lifelong vocation.

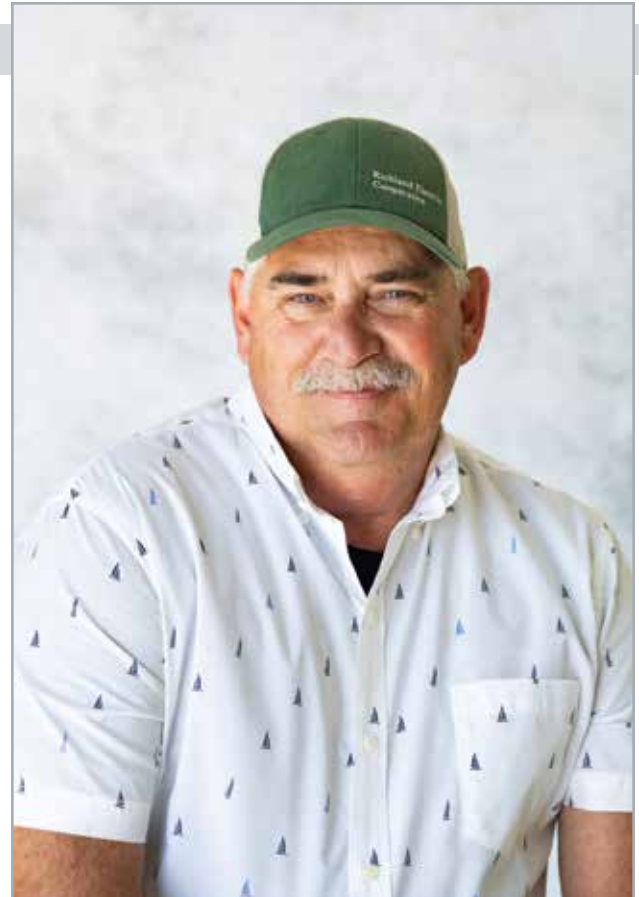
After a few years in Duluth, he transferred to Oakdale Electric Cooperative as a tree trimmer foreman. He spent 12 years as a climber and bucket operator before the opportunity for the two cooperatives arose. It was a natural progression, but one that required a shift in perspective. Moving from the person cutting the limb to the person responsible for the entire system meant learning to see the forest *and* the trees.

ONE MAN, TWO COOPERATIVES

Perhaps the most unique chapter of his tenure has been the operational hurdles of serving two different electric cooperatives simultaneously.

“It's been an interesting adventure having two supervisors,” he notes with a chuckle. “Both cooperatives are at different trimming stages, and that brings up different approaches to completing tasks; but having two points of view was a positive, giving me different ways to look at things.”

The challenge wasn't just mental; it was physical. Covering thousands of line miles across more than six counties requires a level of coordination that would exhaust



Mark: Vegetation Management Supervisor

“Trying to be everywhere at once is a logistical challenge. I learned that some things must be put off until another day. You deal with the most critical issues first, and the rest has to wait. You have to prioritize the health of the system over the desire to be perfect.”

most. Early in his supervisor career, he admits he made the mistake many ambitious leaders do: trying to be everywhere at once. “The mistake I made early on was trying to do everything ASAP,” he reflects. “Trying to be everywhere at once is a logistical challenge. I learned that some things must be put off until another day. You deal with the most critical issues first, and the rest has to wait. You have to prioritize the health of the system over the desire to be perfect.”

THE TECHNOLOGICAL REVOLUTION

If you ask him what has changed the most since he first strapped on a climbing harness in Minnesota, the answer is immediate: machinery.

In the “old days,” if a bucket truck couldn’t reach a tree, a crew member had to climb it. It was slow, grueling, and inherently dangerous work. One difficult tree could easily swallow an entire workday. Today, the landscape looks vastly different thanks to the introduction of specialized equipment like the Jarraff—a mechanical tree trimmer with a long, retractable reach—and high-efficiency forestry mowers.

“Machinery has changed the game,” he says. “Jarraffs and mowers trim trees ten times faster and ten times safer than a manual crew. Mowers clean up the debris faster, saving time and money. The utility system has evolved to the point where climbing trees rarely happens anymore.”

This shift isn’t just about efficiency; it’s about a fundamental change in how cooperatives view vegetation management. It is no longer seen as a chore or a secondary expense. It is now recognized as a vital pillar of safety and grid reliability. Every limb kept away from a line is a potential outage prevented, and in the cooperative world, reliability is the ultimate currency.

TREES, PROPERTY, AND PATIENCE

One of the most challenging aspects of the Vegetation Management Supervisor role is navigating the emotional attachment people have to their land. To a cooperative, a tree might be a hazard; to a homeowner, it might be a memory.

“People can be very protective of their trees,” he explains. “Sometimes you just have to let them speak their mind, then hopefully they allow me the opportunity where I can explain what we need to do and why.” He emphasizes that people simply want to be heard. By remaining calm and diffusing the conversation, he finds common ground—reminding members that a safe, reliable electrical system is in everyone’s best interest. “I try to explain that we aren’t just trying to cut all the trees down. We are protecting the system. Right-of-ways were established 90 years ago for a reason, and they remain just as critical today.”



His advice to his successor is simple: “Be patient. Remember that it’s not personal—it’s your job to find a compromise between all parties involved.”

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A LEGACY OF GROWTH

As he prepares for retirement, he looks back not at the paperwork, but at the state of the grid. His proudest accomplishment isn’t a single project, but the cumulative improvement of the systems he oversaw.

“Both systems are in better condition now than they were when I started,” he says with pride. “They have a work plan in place to keep improving them, keeping them safe and reliable for the foreseeable future.”

This sense of responsibility extends to the next generation of workers. He has made it his mission to pass on the virtue of patience, recognizing that not everyone starts with the same skill set. By taking the time to teach, he has ensured that the leadership of the future is as sturdy as the lines they protect.

THE ROAD AHEAD

So, what does a man who has spent 22 years looking up at branches do when he finally puts down the saw? “The



Mark’s “office view” through the windshield of a pickup

KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM A CAREER IN THE CANOPY

- **Safety First:** In severe weather, the goal is always the same: “Everyone comes home safely.”
- **Embrace Change:** Technology like Jarraffs has made the industry 10x safer and more efficient.
- **Communication is Key:** Listening to members is the hardest, but most important part of the job.
- **Perspective:** Vegetation management is the frontline of electrical reliability.



4:30 a.m. alarms are not going to be missed," he laughs. His immediate plans are refreshingly simple: settle into the retired lifestyle, hit the golf course, and log some miles on his e-bike. Most importantly, he looks forward to spending every day—or every Saturday, as he calls it—with his wife, enjoying the life they've built.

He admits he will miss the "office view." Those sunrise drives down the highway, witnessing the beauty of the Wisconsin and Minnesota landscapes, provided a perspective few get to experience. He'll miss the camaraderie of his coworkers—the ones who stood in the mud and the snow to keep the lights on.

It will be hard to imagine our team without Mark. Beyond his role as Vegetation Management Supervisor, he was the employee who could always make you laugh; who taught you how to save your dying plant; and there was never a day he didn't greet you with a smile. His warmth, wisdom, and contagious positive energy will be missed the most.

As he drives off into his final sunset as Vegetation Management Supervisor, he leaves behind a grid that is stronger, safer, and clearer than he found it. For a man who lived his life outdoors, there is no greater professional tribute than a job well done and a clear view ahead.

Congratulations, Mark, on a remarkable career and a well-deserved retirement! As you start this exciting new chapter, we wish you joy, relaxation, and time to enjoy your passions. Thank you for everything!



CEO/GENERAL MANAGER, AMY, PRESENTS MARK WITH HIS 10 YEAR PLAQUE

MEMORIAL DAY
remember & honor

**OUR OFFICE WILL BE
CLOSED ON MAY 25**

Richland Electric
Cooperative
Your Technician. Every. Cooperative

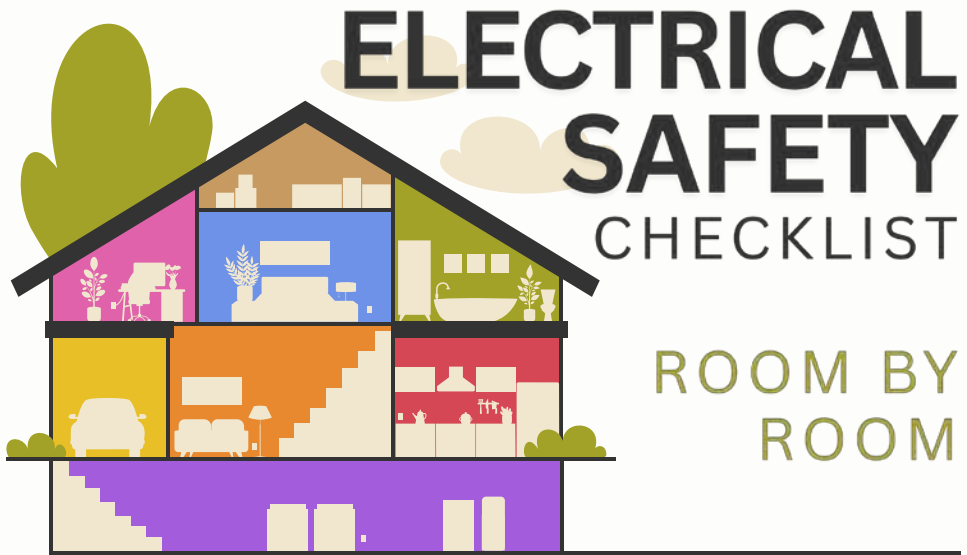
DON'T JUST DIG IN! DOING SO COULD BE COSTLY. CALL 811 THREE BUSINESS DAYS PRIOR TO DIGGING. IT'S A FREE SERVICE.

**CALL 811
BEFORE YOU DIG**

For projects big or small,
call at least three days
prior to digging.

May is Electrical Safety Month

Knowing what to look for around your home and identifying potential hazards can help ensure your family's safety. Pair these habits with energy-smart steps like turning off lights and unplugging unused devices, and you'll reduce risk while lowering your utility bill. The little choices you make every day add up to a safer, more efficient household.



ELECTRICAL SAFETY CHECKLIST

ROOM BY ROOM

Check these monthly to keep your home and family safe.

Kitchen

- Clean refrigerator coils and allow space for airflow.
- Store and use appliances away from the sink.
- Use and test GFCI outlets.
- Inspect cords for cracks or frays.
- Keep cords off counters; unplug when not in use.

Bedroom

- Place and test smoke and CO detectors on every level and near sleeping areas.
- Keep cords out from under rugs or furniture.
- Unplug devices and chargers when not in use.
- Make sure lightbulbs are the correct wattage.
- Plug window AC units into a dedicated circuit.

Basement

- Ensure washer and dryer are stable and ventilated.
- Remove dryer lint after each use.
- Set water heater to 120°F or lower.
- Have furnace inspected and confirm proper ventilation.

Bathroom

- Keep appliances away from water (sink, toilet, tub, shower).
- Unplug appliances when not in use.
- Use and test GFCI outlets.

Living Room

- Use safety caps on unused outlets, especially if children or pets are present.
- Ensure electronics have space for airflow.
- Replace cracked light switch or outlet covers.
- Avoid overloading outlets, power strips and surge protectors.

Garage


- Use and test GFCI outlets.
- Inspect cords for cracks or damage.
- Unplug tools and appliances when not in use.
- Place garage refrigerators/freezers on dedicated appliance circuits.

Learn more at: SafeElectricity.org

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