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WISCONSIN ENERGY *Cooperative* NEWS

September 2026



**Richland Electric
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CELEBRATING FIBER ARTS

FROM LIGHT SWITCHES
TO LIFELONG HABITS

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KIDS AND CRITTERS



BACK-TO-SCHOOL PREPARATION INCLUDES LIFE-SAVING DRIVING TIPS



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It is back-to-school time, and that means shopping for school supplies or dorm room décor and the sound of cicadas beckoning us back into our pre-summer routine.

As you prepare the students you know to return to school or a college campus, take a

moment to share the story of Mary Gehrig, a teenager who was driving home from a friend's house on a stormy June night. Although some cars had pulled over to wait out the storm, Gehrig was close to home, and she thought she could make it.

Around 25 minutes into her 30-minute drive, Gehrig turned onto the county road that would take her home. Although there was near-zero visibility due to the storm, which turned much more severe than originally forecast, she noticed two white lines in the distance. As she got closer, she realized that those lines were across the road, in her path, and they were anything but small.

"I realized I was not going to (be able to) drive over it," Gehrig recalls. She slammed on the brakes and her car struck the object, which happened to be one of two high-voltage transmission power lines lying in the road. The massive cable stopped Mary's car in its tracks. The car's electrical system was damaged, and she was stuck there alone during the storm.

The next thing Gehrig did was pick up her phone and call her parents. When her dad heard that there was a downed power line involved, he told her to stay in the car and call 9-1-1.

Fire chief Rich Schock, who was on the scene that night, said, "Those are large transmission lines with a lot of volts in them," adding that the outcome could have been fatal had Mary gotten out. "Mary did everything right," he said.

When there is an accident involving downed power lines, a padmount transformer, or other related utility equipment, Safe Electricity offers these safety tips:

- Call 9-1-1 and report that a downed line or other electrical equipment is involved.
- Do not get out of the vehicle until electric utility workers say it is safe to exit.
- Warn those involved in the accident to stay put and alert others who might approach to stay back.

Exiting a vehicle or equipment is the last resort and should only be attempted if the car is on fire or giving off smoke. If this is the case, exit the vehicle by crossing your arms and jumping from the vehicle without touching it. Then hop with both feet together as far as you can.

To watch Mary's story, go to safeelectricity.org.

Don't Become Electricity's PATH TO GROUND



When electric utility equipment becomes damaged, **the ground and objects can become energized.**

If you are in a situation where there could be downed power lines or a damaged pole, guy wire or padmount transformer (green box), **know what to do to save your life and the lives of others:**

CAR ACCIDENT



Stay inside your vehicle or cab since the ground or objects could be energized.

Call 9-1-1 and report that there are downed or damaged power lines or a dislodged green box.

Wait for the utility crew to arrive to deenergize the power.

Do not exit until someone from the utility says it is safe to do so.

ONLY EXIT IF THE VEHICLE IS ON FIRE

Cross your arms over your chest and **make a clean jump out.**

Do not touch the vehicle and the ground at the same time.

Make solid hops with your **feet together** as far away as you can.

Do not return to the vehicle.



IF YOU ARE A BYSTANDER

Do not approach the scene to try and help.

Stay at least 50 feet away and do not lean on or touch anything, including fences or guardrails.



Learn more at:

**Safe
Electricity.org®**

YLC 2026: SHAPING THE FUTURE



HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE YOUTH LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE

By Nicole P.
Operations Assistant

Richland Electric Cooperative once again sponsored area students to attend the annual Youth Leadership Conference, a three-day event sponsored by Wisconsin's electric cooperatives and facilitated by WECA. The conference provides students from across Wisconsin with opportunities to strengthen their leadership skills while gaining a greater understanding of the cooperative business model. Temperatures during this year's conference went well into the 90s, and, as a result, attendees experienced firsthand the importance of electric cooperatives managing demand, including circumstances where utilities need to shed electrical loads to maintain a reliable power system.

Attending the 2026 Youth Leadership Conference were two students from Riverdale School District. Kaitlyn M., a junior, stated she is excited to bring her new leadership skills to the classroom and extracurricular activities. She said she learned how to better "read the room" and help her group work together more effectively as a team.

Kaitlyn encourages anyone considering YLC to attend. Kaitlyn's advice to those thinking about attending, "Go—even though I was a little nervous at the beginning, that went away as soon as we had our first group meeting. You get to learn new things while also having a lot of fun." One of her favorite parts of the experience was meeting new people and she plans to stay in touch with many of the friends she made.

After attending the Youth Leadership Conference for the second year, Ella M., a Riverdale High School senior, says she would encourage every student to go. She believes YLC helped her become a stronger leader, build confidence, and make lifelong friends. Ella said that stepping outside your comfort zone can be very nerve-racking and scary, but the Youth Board leaders and chaperones make YLC a welcoming experience.



Ella learned that leadership isn't about being the loudest person in the room but about listening to others and making sure every voice is heard. She also found the 'License to Live' presentation by Ben Bella of WECA especially impactful, saying it reinforced the importance of safe, distraction-free driving.

This immersive experience goes beyond traditional classroom learning. Students spend three days on a college campus living in residence halls and navigating a university environment. This unique by-teens-for-teens format gives local youth a taste of independent living while building a foundation for future career and community success.

As for myself, serving as a chaperone is always rewarding because it provides the opportunity to watch students work together with peers while developing their leadership skills. As a cooperative employee, I also enjoy seeing them gain a better understanding of the cooperative business model.

Throughout the event, the attendees form new connections, step outside their comfort zones, and grow both personally and professionally. I always enjoy the ride home to hear about the students' YLC experience, new friendships they made, and their thoughts about staying in the college dorms.

Do you know someone who would be interested in attending YLC in the future? More information can be found at www.rec.coop or by contacting the Richland Electric Cooperative office at 608-647-3173.

EDITORS' NOTE:

Feedback from the students highlighted Nicole as the "best chaperone ever!" A sincere thank you goes out to the students and employees who dedicated time away from family to make this experience possible. Your participation and energy truly make this event a success.



**Richland Electric Cooperative**
Your Tomorrow Energy Cooperative

MEMBER APPRECIATION PICNIC

We are firing up the grill to say a huge THANK YOU for being the best part of our community.



 **Thursday October 15, 2026**
3pm - 6pm

 **30 E. Robb Rd., Richland Center, WI**

 **FOOD PANTRY DRIVE: BRING A NON-PERISHABLE ITEM FOR THE RICHLAND COMMUNITY FOOD PANTRY**

HAPPY LABOR Day

REC will be closed on Monday, September 7th.



Is Backup Power Right for Your Home?

WHY CONSIDER A GENERATOR?

A generator may be especially helpful if your household depends on electricity for:

- Medical or mobility equipment
- A sump pump or sewage pump
- A private well
- Electric heating
- Refrigerators or freezers with food, medication, or farm products
- Remote work or a home-based business
- Livestock, agricultural or other essential operations

Your home's location matters too. Rural or heavily wooded properties may be more vulnerable to storm damage. A permanently installed generator can also provide reassurance when the house is empty.

You don't need to power your whole home, just the equipment that matters most. A qualified electrician or generator dealer, such as REC, can help you determine the right size.

PORTABLE OR STANDBY?

Portable generators cost less and can power essential appliances, but they require manual setup, fueling, and outdoor use.

Standby generators are permanently installed and connected through a transfer switch. They start automatically during outages and offer greater convenience, but at a higher cost.

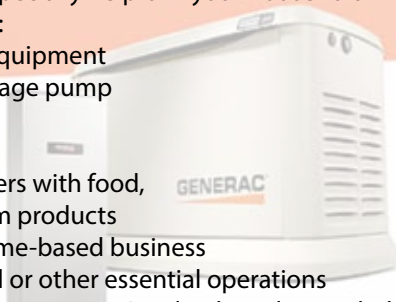
MAKE SAFETY A PRIORITY

Follow the manufacturer's instructions and always operate generators safely. Run portable generators outdoors, away from doors, windows, and vents, to prevent carbon monoxide exposure.

Never plug a generator into a wall outlet. Backfeeding can endanger REC lineworkers. Generators connected to home wiring must use a properly installed transfer switch. Use outdoor-rated extension cords, let generators cool before refueling, and maintain working carbon monoxide detectors.

As an authorized Generac dealer, Richland Electric Cooperative offers a wide range of standby generator solutions to meet the unique needs of your home. Our knowledgeable and experienced staff will work with you to help you choose the system that best fits your needs and budget. Contact our office at 608-647-3173 to discuss your options and receive a personalized price quote.

GENERAC



7 CAMPUS SAFETY TIPS



Every College Student Should Know

Relay these safety tips to your young adults who are about to hit campus for the first time or return for another year.

1. Do not overload electrical outlets, power strips or extension cords. Use power strips with an overcurrent protector.
2. Be aware of your surroundings, especially when listening to music or texting.
3. Unplug small appliances when not in use and all appliances when away for extended periods.
4. This tip still holds true: never walk alone at night.
5. Avoid using generic cubes or cords. They could overheat, shock or burn you.
6. Locate the emergency call buttons or phones across campus in case of an emergency.
7. Do not put your cell phone on or under your pillow or bedding. It could overheat or catch fire.



Safe Electricity.org®

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