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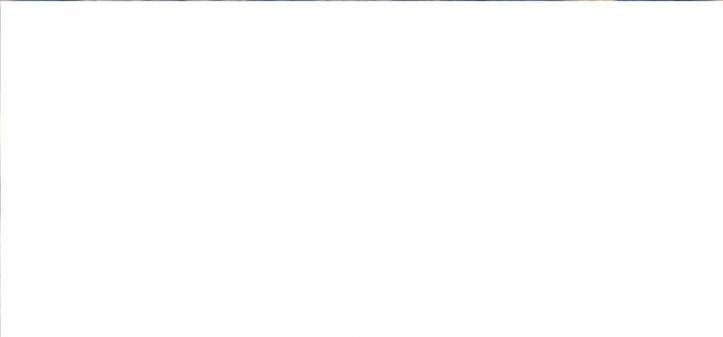
WISCONSIN ENERGY

Cooperative

February 2021

NEWS

A NICE WAY TO FISH



Richland Electric Cooperative

Your Touchstone Energy® Cooperative



“...YOU CAN STICK AROUND AND TALK FOR A WHILE.”

*Service call leads to lesson
in the power of human
connections*

MY CO-OP



By Trevor Clark, Director of
Outreach Services

In the past couple of months, I have been tasked with installing and updating FirstCall medical monitoring units. These devices are like what you see in the “Help, I’ve fallen and can’t get up” commercials. We have been

installing these units for several years now and I have seen the benefits of these devices, which consist of a small button that can be worn as a watch or a necklace. When pushed, the device alerts our emergency call center, the Cooperative Response Center (CRC). CRC then tries to communicate with the customer, and begins calling emergency contacts if the customer does not respond. It’s really that simple. However, explaining how these units work is not the point of this article.

We are almost 10 months into this pandemic and although a vaccine has been developed and is being distributed, I still believe our need for caution and social distancing will continue for some time. In late October when our CFO, Amy Martin, asked me if I would be

willing to help with our FirstCall system for a short time, I jumped at the opportunity. One day a week to get out of my home office and see people! How could I not get excited? When I go out on a FirstCall appointment, I still make sure to wear my mask and respect the social distancing and protective equipment protocols since I generally will be working with the elderly or other high-risk people. Installing the unit only takes about 10 minutes after we test it and make sure the customer is comfortable with it.

What started as just a “help out” has developed into another part of my job. One day a week I dedicate time to install or update units for customers. But I am not sure who is helping whom more. During the past few months, I have learned a great deal from these customers. Mostly I have learned how much this pandemic has affected them. It’s more than just the virus itself, although the virus is dangerous. But it’s the loneliness the pandemic has brought to these people. If you think about it, three major holidays at which families gather—Easter, Thanksgiving, and Christmas—have basically been canceled.

In many cases, holidays like these are the only times family members see each other. Our lives have become extremely busy and we are finding less time for one another, which makes holidays so important for



families. When asking customers how their holidays were, I could see it was obviously a hard subject for them as the common answer was “okay.”

Most of us are finding new ways to communicate with each other whether it be Zoom conference calls, phone calls, and video phone calls, but in the end, we know it is not the same as in-person contact. Our parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, and many others look forward to the family interactions, especially when little ones are involved. They bring everyone so much joy, and having to go without them can make life very lonely. I have found myself finishing my installations and just chatting with the customers.

I can remember such a conversation, which led me to write this article and made me rethink who may be the most affected by this pandemic. I had an appointment to do a battery change on a unit, which at most takes only a few minutes. As I was finishing, I asked the customer if there was anything else I could help him with. His response was, “No, but you can stick around and talk for a little while.” To say I was caught off guard would be an understatement, mainly because I was thinking about the social distancing, how we have been told to wear our masks and protect one another. I assumed that for safety’s sake, I should leave as soon as possible once the job was done.

However, I decided that I had time

to have a short conversation with this gentleman. I stood in the doorway so as to maintain my distance while he sat in his chair and shared part of his life with me. He talked about how he has lived in the area his entire life but had bounced around from farm to farm. He and his late wife both worked on a farm but when those farm owners decided not to continue, they went to work for another. Again, that farm ceased operating, and

I am grateful to one gentleman who simply wanted to have a conversation...

the couple made the decision to buy their own farm. Farming was all they ever knew and they wanted to continue that lifestyle.

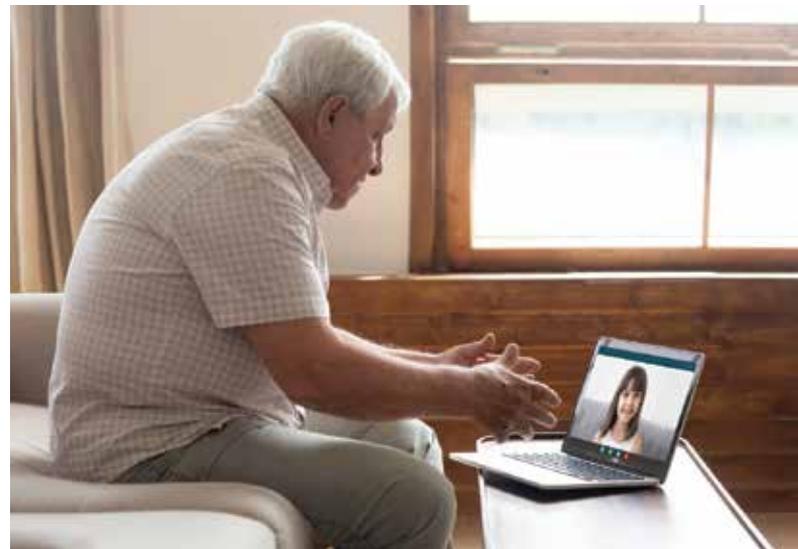
You could tell by listening to the gentleman that he greatly missed farming and living in the countryside. He had to make the decision to move to town, and although he never spoke badly about living in town, you knew the country would always have his heart. He spoke of how his kids come to see him once in awhile but not as often as they used to due to his health and the pandemic. It broke my heart to hear that and made me wonder how many others are feeling the same way.

When the pandemic began my first

thought was how big of an impact this would have on our younger generation. I am a firm believer that kids need social interaction and this pandemic would set them back. However, children are incredibly resilient, and they are so in tune with the technology around them that I doubt they have even missed a beat. If anything, my sadness for them is due to the things they are missing out on. Fortunately, it does seem young people are able to participate in some events—they may just look a little different.

Which brings me back to the older generation that enjoys watching their grandchildren participate in sporting events, hosting the holiday dinners, or even babysitting. There is no doubt that this pandemic has hit everyone hard and there is little we can do about it. If anything, it should tell us to slow down and look at what is important to us. Do not be afraid to pick up the phone and talk to someone. Learn how to Facetime, as it does bring a more personal side to the conversation.

I am grateful Richland Electric has given me the opportunity or, should I say, privilege to work with these systems as it has opened my eyes to a whole side of the pandemic that I was unaware of. I am grateful to one gentleman who simply wanted to have a conversation. He has made me slow down and take the time to talk with other customers as I make my FirstCall appointments. It has turned into a highlight of my work week.





Put a

FREEZE

on Winter Fires

Home fires occur more in winter than in any other season. As you stay cozy and warm this winter, be fire smart!



Half of all home heating fires occur in December, January and February.



1 in every 7 home fires and 1 in every 5 home fire deaths involves heating equipment.



Keep anything that can burn at least 3 feet from any heat source like fireplaces, wood stoves, radiators or space heaters.



Keep portable generators outside, away from windows, and as far away from your home as possible.



Install and test carbon monoxide alarms at least once a month.



Plug only 1 heat-producing appliance (like a space heater) into an electrical outlet at a time.



Have a qualified professional clean and inspect your chimney and vents every year.



Store cooled ashes in a tightly covered metal container, and keep it outside at least 10 feet from your home and any nearby buildings.

MY CO-OP



For more information on how to prevent winter fires, visit www.usfa.fema.gov/winter and www.nfpa.org/winter.



BEHIND THE STORIES



By Shannon Clark

For the last five years or so Jerry Apps has written a column for us in our section of the *Wisconsin Energy Cooperative News*. During that time I've been inspired by many of his stories which many people view as "reminiscent." Often as I read his stories, I thought about my parents, my grandparents, or friends and neighbors who had shared similar experiences as those Jerry so eloquently described.

Now, as Jerry retires from writing for our magazine, I think it is worth taking a look at the depth and breadth of experiences that formulated each of those stories Jerry wrote. Jerry's style of writing has the ability to transport readers back in time, and some who don't know Jerry well might have just assumed that Jerry simply had a talent for bringing back enjoyable memories to all of us.

While Jerry is certainly an accomplished writer with over 35 books to his credit, he was also a vital part of the success of Wisconsin agriculture. His roles varied from county extension agent, to professor, to helping build leaders across the nation. Jerry was an educator, formally

and informally, with the experience and education to reach nearly anyone.

In each of the stories Jerry wrote for our magazine there was always something to be learned, and yet I never had the feeling I was getting an education from reading them; I was simply enjoying them. It is what Jerry does—teach by experience. An experience he shares has meaning, perhaps beyond what mere words can usually accomplish, yet Jerry succeeds.

We are extremely grateful for the words Jerry wrote each month and we'll miss his interaction with our members, as I am sure they will as well. He has taught me each month how important it is to share memories with those around us, particularly in a way that teaches yet entertains.

I would encourage you to look a little deeper into the many stories and books Jerry has written by visiting his website, jerryapps.com. I'm sure you will enjoy the time and probably learn a little something too.

Thank you, Jerry Apps, for being a part of our cooperative. It is sincerely appreciated.

Shannon Clark, Manager/CEO

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