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MEASURE OF SUCCESS

MY CO-OP

Touchstone Energy balloon brings joy to Viola Horse and Colt Show

By Trevor Clark, Director of Outreach Services

How do you measure success? Did you receive a passing grade? Accomplish a longstanding goal? Start your own business? Build a piece of furniture? According to the Cambridge Dictionary, the definition of success is “the achieving of the results wanted or hoped for.” I bet if I were to ask 10 people for their definition of success they would give basically the same response; however, what they “succeeded” in would be completely different for each person.

Success does not have a universal base to build from. For example, one person who gets a B on a project may view that as a success because a B is a passing grade. However, another person who had hoped for an A may not view a B as a success. Our standards directly reflect what our own personal wants and hopes may be.

So what does this have to do with Richland Electric Cooperative, and why should I care?

In the September edition of the *WECN* magazine, we told you how three local electric cooperatives came together to bring the Touchstone Energy hot air balloon to the Viola Horse and Colt Show. Like most small communities, Viola has had a difficult

time lately. Flooding and COVID-19 ultimately resulted in the cancellation of the Horse and Colt Show the last three years. Viola is split between Vernon and Richland counties, and both Vernon and Richland Electric Cooperative serve members of the community. Our joint service to this community made it that much more important to us that we give back to it.

As the day of the event grew near, we felt unprepared as we weren't sure how to answer a lot of questions. When was the balloon going to fly? How high was it going to fly? How long would the rides be? The reason for our lack of answers was none other than weather. For obvious reasons the balloon cannot fly during windy days or rainy/stormy days, but much to our surprise, temperature does not play a significant factor; our pilots will be participating in a balloonfest in Hudson, Wisconsin, in February.

Richland Electric Cooperative (REC), Vernon Electric Cooperative (VEC), and Dairyland Power Cooperative (DPC) were able to participate in the highly anticipated Horse and Colt Show parade. The parade is well known for bringing as many as 10,000 people to the community of approximately 700 people. For you statisticians out there,





that is approximately 15 times the amount of people living in Viola. REC and VEC proudly displayed their utility vehicles in the parade, and in between their vehicles was the Touchstone Energy van and balloon basket that showcased the balloon's burners. You could hear the cheers when pilot Scott Wooge ignited the burners that displayed a tremendous amount of energy as flames reached towards the skies. The excitement continued as we reached the end of the parade route, and interested parties began asking when the balloon rides would take place.

In typical Driftless Region fashion, the winds picked up in the afternoon, causing some concern about whether or not we'd be able to fly. However, our pilots were as cool as cucumbers and assured us that we were going to fly, even if it meant flying later in the evening. By late afternoon the pilots informed us that it was time to get started. Believe it or not, everything related to the balloon, including the basket and fuel, could be packed into a 15-passenger van—one of the many aspects of the balloon that still amazes me.

Staff from each cooperative jumped right in to help, and the entire process of inflating the balloon took less than an hour. The balloon was tethered to three vehicles and was first inflated using a high-powered fan. At that point, Wooge instructed us to walk inside the balloon where he stated, "Welcome to my world!" And what a world it was! The amount of room inside the balloon compares to large "sheds" you see around the Driftless Area—77,000 cubic feet, which is the equivalent of 77,000 basketballs.

Once the balloon was fully inflated there was once again reason for concern as we did not see many people waiting for rides. We definitely had our doubts. Once again, Wooge pushed our concerns to the side, assuring us that "once we are in the air, people will come." He couldn't have been more



Thanks to Scott and Cynthia Wooge for bringing the Touchstone van and balloon. Scott Wooge was our balloon pilot.

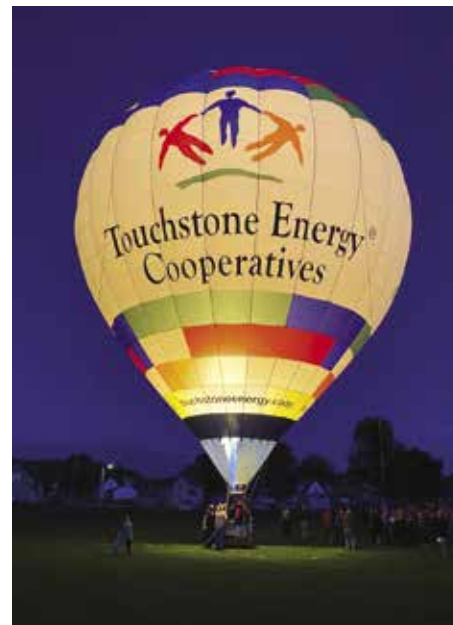
right. Shortly after volunteers from the co-ops had their turn, visitors to the event made their way to the balloon. Before we knew it more than 50 people had made their way and the line continued to grow.

The rides continued for over two hours, and the excitement and joy we felt from the community was exactly what we had hoped for. Many times we heard, "This was on my bucket list," or "I never thought I would be able to do something like this." But perhaps most rewarding of all for us was the amount of "Thank yous" we received as well as the smiling faces we saw throughout the evening.

When the balloon was out of fuel it was time to pack everything back into the van. Because of all the volunteers from the cooperative, the process was made that much easier.



Left: Volunteers from the three sponsoring cooperatives helped inflate the balloon. Left to right are Dana Bolwerk, Dairyland Power; Craig Buros, Vernon Electric; and Shannon Clark, Trevor Clark, and Amy Martin, Richland Electric. Once the balloon was inflated, Viola Horse and Colt Show guests had the opportunity to take rides (right).



Left to right: The Touchstone balloon basket was a hit in the Viola Horse and Colt Show parade, with the flames whooshing out from the burners all along the parade route; there were lots of smiles as people climbed into the balloon basket for a tethered flight; balloon rides continued into the evening, with the balloon glowing against the dark summer sky.

The balloon went back into its large bag, which I know would not be big enough to even hold all my hunting clothes, and the basket went back into the van. Our pilots greatly enjoyed the Driftless Region and told us they hope to be back before heading back home to St. Louis.

I circle back to my beginning question: What does this have to do with Richland Electric Cooperative, and why should I care? I think it should go without saying that we are more than an electric cooperative. Our number one priority is safety and keeping the lights on. But we view ourselves as

so much more than that. In the past year we have been able to accomplish so much despite the challenging circumstances, and hopefully you are proud of what we have done. We don't want to be just an electric cooperative—we enjoy participating in community events, providing scholarships, educating the public, offering giveaways, and we couldn't do that without your continued support.

In closing, if you were to ask me how the Touchstone Energy Balloon went over at the 90th Viola Horse and Colt Show, I would have one simple word. Success.

DO YOU NEED HELP WITH YOUR HEATING COSTS?

WHEAP provides assistance to qualifying households

The Wisconsin Home Energy Assistance Program (WHEAP) provides assistance for heating costs, electric costs, and energy crisis situations to qualifying households. Your household may be eligible based on a number of factors, including the household's size, income, and energy costs. In most cases the energy assistance benefit is paid directly to the household energy supplier.



If the gross income for your household is less than the amount shown on the chart at right, you might be eligible to receive assistance. Households must complete a Home Energy Plus application through the local WHEAP agency. For Richland, Vernon, and Crawford counties, that agency is Energy Services Inc., 800-506-5596. You may also apply online via: <https://energybenefit.wi.gov/>.

For more information, please call **1-866-HEATWIS (432-8947)**, or visit **www.homeenergyplus.wi.gov**.

homeenergy+

Income Guidelines for the 2021–2022 Home Energy Plus Program Year (10/01/2021 through 9/30/2022)

60 percent of state median income guidelines

Household Size	One Month Income	Annual Income
1	\$ 2,591.92	\$31,103
2	\$ 3,389.42	\$40,673
3	\$ 4,186.92	\$50,243
4	\$ 4,984.42	\$59,813
5	\$ 5,781.92	\$69,383
6	\$ 6,579.42	\$78,953
7	\$ 6,729.00	\$80,748
8	\$ 6,878.50	\$82,542



REC CHIEF OPERATIONS OFFICER RECEIVES STATEWIDE SAFETY AWARD



Larry Hallett

Larry Hallett, chief operations officer with Richland Electric Cooperative, has been selected as the recipient of the 2021 Herman C. Potthast Award. Hallett's career spans more than 40 years progressing from linework to management. Nominators laud Hallett's unwavering commitment to safety of the course of his career.

Richland Electric Cooperative General Manager and CEO Shannon Clark writes in part, "In 1998 Richland Electric Cooperative had a workers compensation experience modifier of 1.76. The cooperative had not made any attempt to become a RESAP (Rural Electric Safety Achievement Program) Accredited System due to the 'laundry list' of things that would have had to improve. Beyond that, employee morale was such that very few took an active interest in improving the culture. When I interviewed Larry, who was then a journeyman lineman for the operations manager position, he made it abundantly clear that if he were to be selected, changing our safety culture would be the number one priority. In 2003 I selected Larry to serve as the Operations Manager at Richland Electric Cooperative.

"Locally, Larry has been instrumental in moving us from a system with some serious safety issues to one that has a safety culture that is ever-present and never complacent. On average our experience modifier ranges near .78. We have experienced but one lost-time accident in recent years. We have been a RESAP Accredited System for about 20 years. Perhaps you can't measure the accident that didn't happen, but you can certainly measure the results of a system where accidents haven't happened."

Clark also lauds Hallett's development of the in-house "Safety Pays" programs, which rewards employees who

make a personal commitment to safety, and his participation in the WECA JT&S Committee and rules sub-committee. Nationally, Hallett was active in participating with national safety summits and provided written input to the RESAP Delegate Committee during the efforts to revise and improve the RESAP program.

"In summary, Larry Hallett has gone above and beyond simply keeping the lights on to making sure that our cooperative and many others in the industry recognized that without safe working practices the world would be a much darker place," Clark writes.

Pat Hawes, journeyman lineman and transmission maintenance supervisor with Dairyland Power Cooperative, writes, "Whenever we've had the opportunity to work together Larry makes sure that every aspect is addressed to ensure the safety of everyone. His ability to communicate safety concerns and issues causes everyone on the job to step up their game just a little bit extra to ensure people go home to their families at night."

"Larry Hallett has gone above and beyond simply keeping the lights on to making sure that our cooperative and many others in the industry recognized that without safe working practices the world would be a much darker place."

— Manager/CEO Shannon Clark


About the Award: The Herman C. Potthast Award is named for a man of great dedication to training and safety who served Wisconsin rural electric cooperative for 29 years. He was a state and national leader, instrument in implement and promoting instruction and training to ensure safety among those working in the electric cooperative field. Potthast passed away in 1972.

Shannon Clark, Manager/CEO

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