

The Touchstone Energy Cooperative hot air balloon will be flying over the treetops of Viola this month, courtesy of Richland Electric Cooperative, Vernon Electric Cooperative, and Dairyland Power.

CO-OPS BRINGING SOME HOT AIR TO VIOLA HORSE AND COLT SHOW

You often hear us discussing the cooperative principles and how they are a vital component for not just electric cooperatives but cooperatives in general.

They are our way of life. Perhaps you are most familiar with the principles Concern for Community or Cooperation Among Cooperatives. We often provide sponsorships or attend many local events, provide scholarships to graduating seniors, and we even created a bottled water program to support local schools just to name a few examples. Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic has put a damper on a lot of events, but we do our best to provide support in one way or another.

The Viola Horse and Colt Show has had an extremely difficult past few years. Back-to-back years of major flooding caused the event to be canceled, and then the COVID-19 pandemic canceled it last year too. This event brings

thousands of people from all over to the small community of Viola. As always, we have been a supporter of this event, much like the Richland County Fair. This year we decided to do something a little different and out of the ordinary. The Viola Horse & Colt Show will be celebrating its 90th year. After three years of disappointment, our hope is that the COVID variants slow down and allow this event to happen September 24-25, as scheduled. But it takes all of us doing our part to make that a reality.

This year, instead of doing our normal sponsorships, we went above and beyond and cooperated with Vernon Electric Cooperative and Dairyland Power Cooperative to bring the Touchstone Energy hot air balloon to the Horse and Colt Show for Saturday evening after the parade (time to be determined). In this area, we rarely see



Visitors will also have an opportunity to take a tethered ride in the balloon.



hot air balloons and thought this would be a very special attraction to bring to the event. Fortunately for us the balloon and pilots were available for that date.

The Touchstone Energy hot air balloons serve as goodwill ambassadors for Touchstone Energy Cooperatives. Their flight teams travel around the country bringing the magic of ballooning to cooperative communities. They currently have five balloons available for events. Each hot air balloon holds 77,000 cubic feet of hot air. They stand over 75 feet tall and are 60 feet wide when fully inflated. The Touchstone Energy balloon and its award-winning professional flight team are available for balloon competitions, community events, fairs, and cooperative meetings around the country. All pilots and ground crew exemplify “the power of human connections” in their relationships with local communities, key account customers, and the general public.

We will be participating in the parade and will have the hot air balloon basket on a trailer where the pilot will occasionally fire off the burners as a showcase.

A little bit about our pilot, Scott Wooge: After flying balloons for over 30 years, Scott still enjoys the ballooning experience and the people he meets across the world. He has completed flight operations in 30 states and four countries. Adding a new state every

year is a goal. Previously, he was the at-large director for the Ballooning Federation of America (BFA) and the BFA vice-president. Also, Scott runs a FAA (Federal Aviation Administration) repair station for hot air balloons and is a Designated Pilot Examiner (DPE). Finishing in first place in a BFA Long Jump contest is one highlight of his flying. He is a member of the Federal Aviation Administration Safety Team, FAA FFAST Team, and FAA Ambassador Program as an SME (Subject Matter Expert). He is also a speaker at many educational seminars. Scott’s spouse, Cynthia, is also a commercial hot air balloon pilot. Scott and Cynthia have crewed for their daughter Kim in Lithuania and Poland for both the Women’s and Junior World Championships.

The Touchstone balloon will offer tethered rides to anyone who is interested and there will be no cost to do so. They will continue until they run out of fuel, which is about two hours. They will go up anywhere from 15-30 feet. Since this is a balloon, it is weather dependent, so let’s hope for some fantastic fall weather.

We are grateful to the committee of the Horse and Colt Show for saying yes to this unique experience. We hope to see you there and hope you take advantage of what could be a once-in-a-lifetime experience.



90th Annual VIOLA HORSE AND COLT SHOW

**Friday and Saturday,
September 24-25**

at various locations in Viola

Events:

- Horse Show
- Ranch Rodeo
- Horse Pull
- Tractor & Truck Pull
- Raffle Drawing
- Arts & Craft Show
- Midway Carnival
- Parade
- Country Music Dance
- Live Entertainment

For more information visit
horseandcoltshow.com

Events subject to weather



September is National Preparedness Month

Preparing for disasters is protecting everyone you love. Each week in September, focus on a different aspect of preparedness for you and your family.

**WEEK
1**

September 1-4: Make A Plan

Talk to your friends and family about how you will communicate before, during, and after a disaster. Make sure to update your plan based on the Centers for Disease Control recommendations due to the coronavirus.

**WEEK
2**

September 5-11: Build A Kit

Gather supplies that will last for several days after a disaster for everyone living in your home. Don't forget to consider the unique needs each person or pet may have in case you have to evacuate quickly. Update your kits and supplies based on recommendations by the Centers for Disease Control and your family's medical needs.

**WEEK
3**

September 12-18: Prepare for Disasters

Limit the impacts that disasters have on you and your family. Know the risk of disasters in your area and check your insurance coverage. Learn how to make your home stronger in the face of storms and other common hazards, and act fast if you receive a local warning or alert.

**WEEK
4**

September 19-25: Teach Youth About Preparedness

Talk to your kids about preparing for emergencies and what to do in case you are separated. Reassure them by providing information about how they can get involved.

Source: ready.gov/september

ELECTRIC CO-OPS PREPARE FOR A POSTAL INCREASE

Your electric cooperative has been working proactively to mitigate effects of the unprecedented postal rate increase for nonprofits that was approved by the Postal Regulatory Commission despite 21 members of Congress from both political parties expressing “serious concern.” However, members should be prepared for the increased costs and possible service delays that may be coming as electric co-ops seek to overturn the new rules.

The increase took effect at the end of August. It raises rates for nonprofit marketing mail by an average 7.8%. This increase hits electric cooperatives nationwide particularly hard because co-ops, which serve areas less likely to have reliable internet that is needed for digital options, rely on nonprofit mailing for everything from monthly bills to communication vehicles.

Co-ops have leaned on the relationships they build constantly with legislators on both sides of the political aisle, as well other organizations with shared concerns, in working toward an acceptable outcome to this issue. Through our national service organization, the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA), co-ops have joined with the Alliance of Nonprofit Mailers (ANM) in fighting these rate increases. In the meantime, we’ve taken what steps we can to help alleviate some of the financial burden of this postal hike.

For example, Richland Electric is encouraging the use of SmartHub as a safe, convenient way for members to pay their

bills without relying on the U.S. Postal Service. Setting up a SmartHub account is easy—just click on the SmartHub link on our website, www.rec.coop, and follow the prompts under New User. Or, call our office and our staff will be happy to help you through the process. We’re adding some incentives to sign up by offering a drawing for \$50 and \$25 bill credits (*see below*) for SmartHub users. Members who are already signed up for SmartHub will automatically be entered in this drawing.

As for other communications mailings, our statewide service organization, Wisconsin Electric Cooperative Association, which publishes the *Wisconsin Energy Cooperative News*, has also been proactive in taking steps to absorb some of the increased postal costs. They’ve spent the past few months examining different printing options and have switched to a printer that is able to offer additional postal savings through different processing methods. Magazine staff also continues to seek out other opportunities through new advertising and grants.

In the meantime, electric co-ops and their allies continue working to try to overturn the regulators’ new rules. The ANM has filed litigation in federal court against the Postal Regulatory Commission to reverse its decision to separate rate hikes from inflation. Oral arguments on the case are slated for September 13th. A decision by the court is expected in early 2022. (*Parts of this article are from Cathy Cash, staff writer at NRECA*)

SIGN UP FOR SMARTHUB

and enjoy the safety and convenience of paperless billing!

Sign up now and you could save even more...

ALL SmartHub users—new and existing—will be entered into a drawing for Richland Electric Cooperative bill credits of

\$50 or \$25!

Drawings will take place during October Co-op Month so be sure to sign up right away and go paperless!



SmartHub allows you to:

- Pay your bill online
- Check your usage
- Manage your account
- Set up recurring and stored payments
- Communicate directly with the co-op

To sign up, go to www.rec.coop, click on the SmartHub link, and follow the prompts under New User



LOOK UP AND STAY SAFE DURING HARVEST SEASON

Agriculture is the backbone of our country, and our livelihood greatly depends on the crops provided by American farmers. In addition to being one of the most labor-intensive professions, farming is also considered one of the most dangerous jobs in the United States.

The hard work and exhaustive labor are tough, but rushing the job to save time can be extremely dangerous—even deadly—when farming near electrical equipment.

Every year, we see collisions where tractors and other farming equipment accidentally collide with utility poles and power lines, causing injuries and power outages. These dangerous accidents can be avoided by looking up and around your surroundings when operating large farm machinery. If you're preparing for harvest season, please keep the following safety tips in mind:

- Maintain a 10-foot clearance around all utility equipment in all directions.
- Use a spotter and deployed flags to maintain safe

distances from power lines and other electrical equipment when working in the field.

- If your equipment makes contact with an energized or downed power line, contact 9-1-1 immediately and remain inside the vehicle until the power line is de-energized. In case of smoke or fire, exit the cab by making a solid jump out of the cab (without touching it), and hop away to safety.
- Consider equipment and cargo extensions of your vehicle. Lumber, hay, tree limbs, irrigation pipes, and even bulk materials can conduct electricity, so keep them out of contact with electrical equipment.

September 19-25 is National Farm Health and Safety Week, but practicing safety on the farm year-round yields positive results. We hope you never find yourself in a situation where farming equipment contacts power lines or poles, but if you do, we hope you'll remember these safety tips.

Shannon Clark, Manager/CEO

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