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# WISCONSIN ENERGY *Cooperative* January 2022 NEWS



**Richland Electric  
Cooperative**

Your Touchstone Energy<sup>®</sup> Cooperative

**TREK INTO THE NEW YEAR**

**MAKING DOLLARS AND SENSE  
OF ENERGY EFFICIENCY**

**ADVANCING THROUGH ADVOCACY**







# IT'S 2022 AND THERE'S A LOT IN STORE

By Shannon Clark, CEO/General Manager

It's 2022 and as I reflect, I notice how my life and my time at Richland Electric Cooperative (REC) have drifted through numerous twists and turns. In a couple of months, I will celebrate 31 years as an employee of REC, having just recently celebrated 24 years as the CEO & general manager. It seems like just yesterday my job was, among other duties, editing the local pages of this very magazine, except then it wasn't a magazine—it was more of a newspaper tabloid style. Now, as we start another year the promise of even more change and challenges is apparent. As a result, I've requested column space in several months of the magazine to pen some updates to help keep you informed in a way that is a bit more personal directly from me to you, our members.

In December, we closed on the sale of our office to Richland County. They will use the building to house the ambulance service and emergency management functions for the county. This sale provided both of us with an excellent opportunity to realign our services with more appropriately sized facilities. They will have multiple ambulance bays, residential quarters for on-call staff, and dedicated facilities to meet the health and welfare needs of our community. We will finally, after nearly 20 years, once again have all our staff in one location. We are planning to build offices on to our service center located in Richland Center's north industrial park—the very site that has hosted numerous member appreciation picnics and now, two drive-in annual meetings.

When we built our service center, we did so because Richland Center was developing the Orange Street corridor and they opted to buy us out to accommodate that change. However, we didn't feel that our existing office building was by any means inadequate and simply could not justify asking members to pay for a new office building, so we opted to build just an operations service center. We did anticipate that the need for a new office building would someday arise, so in designing the service center we made provisions to easily add on when needed, like installing rim joists, site and lot preparation, and mechanical access centrally located.

Now, after Tech Com, Inc., who until last year shared our building, has left, and COVID protocols drove us to more remote workforce, we find that we have more office building than we need. As a result, we can downsize a bit, increase our efficiency, and improve our security, both physical and cyber. But one thing that will be very welcome, even in a world where remote workforce is likely going to be a part of how we do business, is a central location for all employees. Little things like speaking face to face and the ease of putting together staff meetings and impromptu discussions help us

all work better. But the reduction in duplication also will be efficient and economical. We will eliminate extra office equipment like copiers and fax machines (yes, we still fax), network routers, switches, and other equipment necessary to link distant buildings together.

Best of all, we can do it within our means. I'll admit I am a form follows function believer. Functional is more important than form most of the time unless it causes extreme inefficiencies. Our office building will likely reflect that sentiment as most of our board and staff have little time for extravagance or opulence when we are spending someone else's money. That's not to say it won't be built well and be professional, but it won't be flashy. We have an idea of final cost but in today's world that changes quickly, and we know that we have a net of \$340,000 from the sale of our existing

**...we can downsize a bit, increase our efficiency, and improve our security, both physical and cyber.**

building to apply. So, we've estimated it will take about a million dollars more—no small sum but within our means. We will pick up some savings from being in one location, but it won't go far in paying for a building. In all likelihood it will

merely offset inflationary pressure for future office operating expenses. Because of our agreement with Tech Com, Inc., when we sold our shares of ownership, we realized some benefit that will also help offset building costs. In the end, we know whose money we are spending and that impacts each decision when operating a cooperative.

As we are transitioning, we will have to ask members to be flexible. There will be a period where we will have offices in temporary settings. We are working through details of how to establish a drive-up area where we can do business like we have over the last nearly two years. As those changes are implemented, we will let members know by signage at existing sites, our Facebook and web page, and via radio and newspaper announcements.

We are doing our best to work quickly and efficiently to have a building done and occupied in late summer or early fall—certainly before next winter. Supply chain challenges have been problematic for many building projects, and we've built in some workarounds for those we anticipate remaining a problem.

This is just one of the changes 2022 will bring. Throughout 2022 we will be going through other significant changes. Next month I will provide more detail on the various changes that can only be described as once in a generation that will be occurring.



## Concern for Community at Christmas

Richland Electric Cooperative once again volunteered a night of staffing the Rotary Lights in the Park in December. The co-op also sponsored a tree within the holiday light display in memory of former director Gerald Wendorf's wife, Brenda. Pictured at left, l-r, are Shannon Clark, Jeff Monson, Amy Martin, Angela Martin, Kim Cejpek, Makenna Monson, Chris Mathews, and Curt Brockway.

## CALLING ALL PHOTOGRAPHERS

*We're looking for pictures of rural Wisconsin for our 2022/2023 calendar!*

With the new year now begun, we'll soon begin working on our annual report. That means our search for photos for our calendar is underway. If you've taken a photo that shows off our beautiful rural part of the state, please share. And if you haven't taken any such photos yet, start snapping! We'd love to see your photos!

*Photos can be submitted to [tclark@rec.coop](mailto:tclark@rec.coop).*



**CONGRATS**  
to the winners of our  
Holiday Giveaway!

**Karen Dieter**  
winner of the ham

**Joyce Fichtel**  
winner of the turkey





# ARE PORTABLE SPACE HEATERS EFFICIENT FOR MY HOME?

**S**mall space heaters are meant to do exactly as their name says: heat a small space. But unfortunately, many people use portable space heaters to heat their entire home, which can really take a toll on your energy bills. The truth is, whether you should use space heaters really depends on your home's efficiency and energy needs.

If you're using a space heater to compensate for problems in your home, like inadequate insulation, drafty windows and exterior doors, or an inefficient heating system, space heaters are not a practical solution. Your best bet is to improve the overall efficiency of your home. If you're on a tight budget, caulking and weather stripping around windows and exterior doors is a low-cost, easy way to save energy. Depending on the size of your home, adding insulation can be a great next step. Loose fill insulation typically costs \$1 to \$1.50 per square foot. Taking these proactive energy-saving measures rather than relying on space heaters for

supplemental warmth can reduce your heating and cooling bills for years to come.

Perhaps your home is energy efficient but you're cold-natured and want a specific room to be cozier than the rest. In this case, a space heater may work for your needs. A good comparison is ceiling fans; we use ceiling fans in the summer to cool people, not rooms. A space heater can be used in a similar way during winter months. Only use a space heater in small spaces that you're occupying and, if possible, try to shut off other rooms to contain the warmth provided by the space heater. If you decide to use a space heater to heat a small area in your home, make sure the heater is properly sized for the space; most heaters include a general sizing table.

A word about safety: The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission estimates more than 25,000 residential fires are associated with the use of space heaters every year, resulting in

more than 300 deaths. If you must use a space heater, purchase a newer model that includes the most current safety features and make sure it carries the Underwriter's Laboratory (UL) label. Choose a thermostatically controlled heater to avoid energy waste and overheating, and place the heater on a level surface away from foot traffic when in use. Always keep children and pets away from space heaters.

Consider alternative ways to stay warm like extra layers of clothing or UL-approved electric blankets. If you have hardwood or tile floors, lay down area rugs to provide additional insulation (and appeal!) and maintain warmth. We know it's cold out there, but remember in addition to safety concerns, space heaters can greatly increase your energy bills if used improperly.

If you're looking for alternative ways to save energy and increase comfort in your home, contact Richland Electric Cooperative. We're here to help you manage your energy use.



## TIPS TO DITCH THE SPACE HEATER

Space heaters are energy hogs, and older models can be extremely dangerous. This winter, ditch the space heater and try these alternative solutions to stay cozy.

- Use an electric blanket to keep warm during the night.
- Caulk and weatherstrip around all windows and doors to prevent heat loss.
- Consider adding insulation to your attic and around duct work.





## WHY DIRT SLIDES WERE NEVER PATENTED

By Al Cornell

With the joy of sledding on our country road several months away, Terry and I thought we had stumbled onto the ideal summer alternative. Armed with long, hot summer days as the backdrop for innovation, we resourcefully tested an alternative. After a couple hours into the project, we got our introduction to its fatal flaw.

We were playing in the pasture down behind the barn. After a casual assessment of some stones in the dry ditch, we wander over to the steep east-facing hill. The heavy canopy of basswood and maples shaded out the understory. The black soil was still covered by the past year's leaf litter.

We bent over and used our hands to help propel us up the hillside for about 80 feet. Terry sat down and began sliding down the hill on the seat of his pants. Though the leaf litter slowed the slide, some of it was pushed aside. I followed.

With each successive climb to the head of our developing dirt slide, we gained incentive to go again. Quickly, an ideal black dirt trough had developed. For two hours, we enthusiastically climbed the hill and slid down. The shade of those trees muted the summer heat, and we had embarked on a new summer vacation adventure.

Now, through it all, there was a blackness that had penetrated all our clothes and tweaked our complexions. That wasn't an immediate concern. We scrambled back to the top and continued the joy of sliding down the trough. At the foot of the trough, we slid out of the shade onto the nearly level pasture. Our gritty pants seats ground into the grass and quickly stopped us. We scrambled up the hill again, like kids climbing the playground slide. Now we raised our hands in the air and gleefully glided downslope.

Eventually, our bellies signaled that it was time to cross the ditch and head back to the house. We never got the opportunity to describe our euphoric cascades down the hillside and our bellies discontinued sending signals.


We were quickly directed to go out to the pump and to remove our clothes. The washtub was brought out and filled with that cold well water. In turn, our bare butts were immersed in the bone-chilling bath, and the first layer of black soil was washed away.

The next round took place in the house. We did not have running water, but water from the pail was warmed on the gas cook stove and put in the wash pan used for handwashing and rag baths.

Dad applied the necessary pressure to a washcloth for the removal of the remaining dirt. Well, he not only applied the necessary pressure to remove that dirt, but he also made sure he was eliminating a lot of potential future dirt. Since the ears are not far from the brain, what happens to the ears likely has an advantage for creating lasting memories. Under said pressure, my ears went directly from black to red. All future dirt sliding was deterred. Never again did we even glance longingly at that hillside.


The next time Mom heated water to fill the wringer washer, that pile of dirty clothes was the last batch to be put in that wash water. With that final load, that water took on that complexion previously worn on Terry's and my faces.

The water slide had already been patented by Herbert Sellner of Faribault, Minnesota, in 1923, but the dirt slide never did get patented. If you decide you'd like to try patenting it, the Cornell brothers will not think their rights have been infringed on.

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