



## MAINTAINING THE STATUS QUO

By Trevor Clark, Director of Outreach Services

Can you believe that Thanksgiving is almost here? One could argue that it is one of the most popular holidays for family gatherings. Obviously Christmas will likely take the top spot in that category. But Thanksgiving brings in a new kind of camaraderie that some can't understand.

In Wisconsin, deer hunting season often plays a big role in this holiday. You could almost say that the opening day of gun deer season is a holiday in Wisconsin. Before I was old enough to hunt, I can remember going to my Grandma's for Thanksgiving anxiously waiting to see if my Dad and other family members harvested a deer before we ate. Shortly after eating they would head back out to try again. And now, after 20-plus years of being a hunter myself, my son will likely be witness to the same.

But will it be the same this year? My son is only a year old and obviously will not understand the situation that we are faced with this year. However, many families will. The frustration that this pandemic continues to bring families is heartbreaking. If you would have told me seven months ago that I would be writing this article I probably would have just shaken my head and maybe smirked a little. You know, the head shake with the little smirk that says, "I don't believe you but I'm not going to say anything."

And here we are, seven months into the Covid-19 pandemic. Many thought this would have passed by now, myself included. However, it seems to be just the opposite as

cases in Wisconsin continue to rise. Is this now considered the new normal? I don't know. Will it ever end? I don't know. Will it end after the election? I don't know. Are you getting the picture? I don't know, we don't know. We don't have the answer and we don't know who does.

### Carrying On, Safely

What we do know is how to do our job—how to take care of our members and do our best to make sure the lights stay on. We have a board of directors who truly care about the cooperative and its members. We have employees who are doing their very best to help our members, given the circumstances, and management who are always looking for ways to improve the cooperative and searching for new ways to operate in this "new normal."

We do feel it is important to inform our members that with the current rise in Covid-19 cases the office will remain closed. As disappointing as it may be for you, it is just as disappointing for us. We miss our members—we miss the face-to-face interactions whether they are good or bad. Once again, we do not know when we will return to our normal office hours but for now, we will maintain the status quo.

In the past, the situation would have been much more difficult but with new technology we are able to do much of the same work remotely. Some examples include meeting with a member needing a line extension, or fixing a meter that's not communicating, or maybe working with a new member who has just moved to the area and needs electricity. In



the past these tasks would have been very difficult to do if you weren't in the office. Now it is a few phone calls and a log-in through our private network and we can get the ball rolling.

Personally, most of my work consists of communications and marketing. The face-to-face contact that I deal with mostly involves advertising and or sponsorship requests, with some load management thrown in once in awhile. I have built relationships with our radio stations, newspapers, and schools. Granted, most communication can be done by email or phone, but both sides understand the importance of casual conversations.

### Working Around Challenges

Not only do we miss the interaction with our members, we also miss the interaction with our staff and board as well. REC only employs 15 people, but we have worked together for several years. We know each other's families and have watched all of our children grow. We do hold Zoom conference calls, but it is not the same as in-person staff meetings. We do the same for our board meetings. We hold a Zoom board meeting every month but again, looking at a computer screen is not the same as looking directly at a person. However, all staff and board understand the situation we are faced with and make it work to the best of our ability.

Other cooperatives have brought back most of their staff, but their office remains closed. Their employees wear their masks throughout the buildings except when in their private office. We did not see the benefit of doing that. We are a small cooperative in a relatively small office with a lot of common space. We have been able to communicate very well via email,



CEO/General Manager Shannon Clark spends some quality time with grandson Brock Hall.

phone calls, and conference calls and have been successful in doing so. We cannot stress enough the importance of distancing from each other so as to prevent the entire staff from contracting Covid-19.

Working remotely does have its drawbacks and our staff must be ever vigilant of cybersecurity attacks. Fortunately we have taken cybersecurity very seriously and have implemented many strategies to not only keep the cooperative safe, but its members as well.

When people began working remotely, security threats increased exponentially. Phishing scams were at an all-time high and jeopardized people's information. Luckily our staff has been very successful in preventing these potential risks through numerous training sessions. It's just another way that we are looking out for our members.



### Finding the Positives

When this pandemic is all over—and it will come to an end at some point—it will be important for us to try to find the positives. One positive that I have taken away from all of this is that I have gotten to spend more time with my son. When the pandemic started, he was eight months old. My wife's job was determined to be "non-essential" at that time and she was home with him for a month. I am beyond grateful that I got to see those very special moments as he started moving all over the place and standing on everything. I got to witness his first steps firsthand as opposed to a video or phone call. Even though this pandemic has been frustrating and annoying, I will never forget those moments.

I encourage you to try to find the good, no matter how hard it may be. I can understand the struggle of juggling work when your kids were sent home, or finding babysitters, or not being able to see loved ones. Here at Richland Electric we are forever grateful to our members who attended our hopefully once-in-a-lifetime drive-in annual meeting that garnered national attention. That is the highlight of our time during this pandemic; the way our staff has handled this situation and continue to do so is remarkable.

In closing, I hope that you all have a wonderful Thanksgiving and that you find plenty to be thankful for. I am thankful for my family, my health, my home, and my job. Richland Electric is thankful for its members, employees, and board of directors. Without any of those we would not be around today. For those who will be participating in the gun deer season I leave you with the Hunter's Prayer:

*We pray our sights be straight and our aim be true.  
We pray for no pain to the game we pursue  
We thank you Lord, for this land  
We thank you for the sights from our stand  
We pray for safety one and all  
We pray we may return next fall.*

# SERVE UP ENERGY SAVINGS ALONG WITH YOUR FEAST

**L**ike everything else, Thanksgiving may look a little different this year. With public health experts advising folks to avoid traveling to crowded holiday gatherings due to a still-dangerous pandemic, more people are expected to stay closer to home this holiday season. That may mean more people will be fixing holiday dinners and baking treats in their own homes, using their appliances more frequently. Fortunately, there are many ways to save money in the kitchen. Follow these tips from the Department of Energy to gobble up savings along with your turkey:

- **Turkey Talk** – Don't buy a turkey that's bigger than you need for your group. A smaller turkey takes less time to cook and saves energy. It's also not necessary to preheat the oven when slow roasting a turkey for several hours. You can also often turn down the temperature on your thermostat a few degrees while the turkey is cooking because the oven will add heat to your home, especially in the kitchen area.
- **Overdone Appliances** – Many side dishes can be prepared in smaller kitchen appliances, like slow cookers and toaster ovens, which use less energy than a large stove or oven. In addition, some side dishes can be cooked right along with the turkey, reducing oven use.
- **Dish up Savings** – Take advantage of your dishwasher. An Energy Star-certified dishwasher uses less than half as much energy as washing dishes by hand, and uses less water. Even an older model can be used more efficiently if you're mindful of washing only full loads and letting your dishes air dry. If your dishwasher doesn't have an air-dry switch, simply turn it off after the final rinse and prop the door open so the dishes will dry faster.
- **Fight the Phantoms** – Halloween may be over, but you should still be alert for any energy vampires in your kitchen. These are the appliances that draw energy even when they're not in use, like coffee makers, microwaves, and toaster ovens. One home's energy vampires left plugged in year-round can add up to \$100–\$200 in wasted energy costs. Unplug them when they're not in use, or better yet, use a power strip for convenient control.



# SHOCKING CORN

**In the fall of 1951, I was a freshman at the University of Wisconsin in Madison. I had been awarded a scholarship, which paid for my tuition that first semester; otherwise I probably wouldn't have been there, as our farm income couldn't support a kid in college.**

This was my first time away from home, away from the farm. After a couple weeks in Madison, I so missed the farm, especially the quiet with no sirens in the middle of the night, no traffic noise, no people. People were everywhere in Madison. Walking, driving, hurrying, always in a hurry it seemed to me.

My first time home for a weekend wasn't until mid-October. My dad had just cut 20 acres of corn with the horses and the corn binder. "Glad you're home for the weekend," Dad said. "You can help shock corn."

I may have been unusual for a kid my age, I was 17, but I really liked shocking corn, having done it since I was a little guy. There was something about the experience of standing several bundles of corn on end that appealed to me. You see progress as the teepee-like structures appeared one after the other as Dad and I picked up bundle after bundle, creating corn shocks in long rows, almost the exact distance apart although we didn't plan it that way.

As I think back to that time, I don't remember how tired I had been at day's end, for shocking corn was not an easy job. I don't remember thinking how boring the job was either; it was the same repetitive task again and again. In those days, many farm tasks were like that, whether it was digging potatoes by hand, picking a half-acre of cucumbers, bunching hay, making wood, even milking cows by hand. All the same, but not really. Not if you enjoyed doing them. However, I must confess that picking a half-acre of

cucumbers for the pickle factory under a boiling sun had not been one of my favorite jobs.

As for shocking corn, it was the fringe benefits. I so enjoyed the smells of fall and the quiet—how I enjoyed the quiet, broken by the occasional word from my Dad. "How do you like that big university?" he asked. He had no idea what a university was like, or for that matter high school because his parents, my grandparents, had taken him out of school after fifth grade to work.

As we worked, we heard the honking of Canada geese, strung out in a long two-legged V, winging their way south, away from the cold and snow of winter. We stopped and watched them. Another fringe benefit of shocking corn was the fall colors, the oaks with their various shades of brown and tan. The yellow of the aspens, and the bright red of the maples. And the smells of fall, how I enjoyed them.

These are a few of my memories of a kid homesick for the farm.



Go to [www.jerryapps.com](http://www.jerryapps.com) to learn more about Jerry's work.

**Shannon Clark, Manager/CEO**

1027 N. Jefferson St., P.O. Box 439, Richland Center, WI 53581


608-647-3173

[www.rec.coop](http://www.rec.coop)

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