

LIVELines

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Municipal crews answer mutual aid call after Hurricane Milton

When predicted wind speeds, rain totals, and tidal surges forced more than one million Floridians to evacuate from Hurricane Milton last month, nearly 50 Wisconsin municipal electric utility workers answered the call for help. Even before the hurricane made landfall, the Florida Municipal Electric Association (FMEA) began coordinating with the American Public Power Association's Mutual Aid Working Group to assemble a response team to help Florida's 33 public power utilities restore power after the storm had cleared.

FMEA quickly accepted mutual aid from Wisconsin lineworkers, who brought in their

hurricane restoration experience from 2022 in New Smyrna Beach, Fla., following Hurricane Ian and from 2017 in Kissimmee, Fla., following Hurricane Irma. Within just a few hours, nearly four dozen workers from 22 Wisconsin communities had mobilized for the 1,300-mile-plus journey to central Florida.

MEUW Director of Safety Services Mike Czuprynko and Electric Utility Safety and Training Coordinator Don Harnisch organized and led Wisconsin's response to FMEA's request. Initially assigned to Kissimmee, the crews assembled first just outside of Beloit, Wis., and the caravan of bucket trucks, digger/derricks, and other equipment left early on Wednesday, Oct. 9, to begin the journey. Crews then pre-staged in Tennessee, ready to jump in where needed.

As damage assessments became clearer, the Wisconsin workers were redirected to Lakeland, Fla., to assist Lakeland Electric crews and other mutual aid crews in restoring

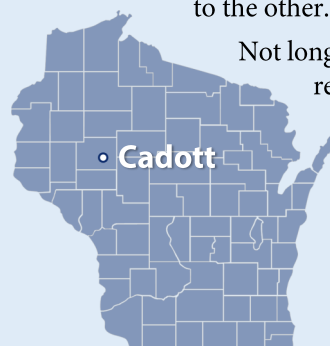
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Village of Cadott plans to retain ownership of its electric utility

News broke late in May 2024 that the Village of Cadott, in Chippewa County, was exploring plans to sell the community's electric utility to Chippewa Valley Electric Cooperative (CVEC), which has been maintaining and operating Cadott's system under contract since 2017.

The announcement was made after an engineering study showed Cadott's electric system requires a \$7.5 million investment to meet acceptable industry and safety standards. The electric system in Cadott, which serves roughly 840 customers, is adjacent to CVEC's and overlaps in some places, which would enable one to serve as a backup to the other.



Not long after the announcement, representatives of MEUW and municipal utilities in the area met with the Village Board to offer support. Over the summer, the village hired an accounting firm to complete a rate study to deter-

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Municipal Electric Utilities of Wisconsin's mission is to **strengthen and unify community-owned utilities**. Since 1928, MEUW has been the trade association for Wisconsin's 81 public power communities and is affiliated with the American Public Power Association (APPA) — www.publicpower.org

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the more than 86,000 reported outages. Wisconsin crews worked alongside mutual aid crews from Alabama, Florida, Illinois, Louisiana, Michigan, Ohio, Oklahoma, and Texas.

The crews worked diligently and made exceptional progress, encountering challenging conditions, including flooding, heat, maneuvering in tight spaces, and a significant amount of damaged infrastructure.

Without mutual aid from the Wisconsin crews and other municipal utilities, many of the Lakeland Electric customers could have been with-

out power for weeks. "It was a big sacrifice for our crews," acknowledged Czuprynko. "They left their families for an uncertain amount of time. But they saw people in difficult circumstances who needed help, so they dropped everything to answer the call. The work is highly skilled and can be dangerous. We were able to help out and bring a little bit of 'Midwest nice' to the people of Florida."

Czuprynko also noted that the crews staying behind in

Wisconsin at their home utilities also deserve thanks.

"The people at home did double duty to keep the lights on for our customers, so we could send help to Florida," he said.

Oconomowoc Utilities Electric Field Supervisor Todd Tremaine was among those making the trip. Having had prior out-of-state mutual aid experience, he didn't hesitate to volunteer again when he was called upon. "Getting that different experience is

huge," he said. "We have mostly underground, so working overhead lines is great experience."

Lakeland Electric received support from 47 Wisconsin lineworkers from Arcadia, Black Earth, Cedarburg, Clintonville, Columbus, Evansville, Fennimore, Hartford, Kaukauna, Lodi, Manitowoc, Marshfield, Mazomanie, Medford, Muscoda, Oconomowoc, Prairie du Sac, Rice Lake, Shawano, Stoughton, Sun Prairie, and Wisconsin Rapids.

Crews worked well together and operated safely, with no

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The 47 Wisconsinites who took their skills to provide mutual aid in Florida were (*front row, from left*): Isaiah Moesch, Shawano; Shawn Borlace, Shawano; John Ziegeweid, Arcadia; Nate Middleton, Arcadia; Bob Kaufman, Sun Prairie; Justice Dille, Muscoda; Jordan Fritche, Fennimore; Troy Wardell, Muscoda; Don Harnisch, MEUW; Brad Klos, Cedarburg; Kirk Peschel, Oconomowoc; (*second row*) Jake Francis, Wisconsin Rapids; Travis Eswein, Wisconsin Rapids; Dean Bohman, Marshfield; Mike Vanderwyst, Marshfield; Jon Carrick, Clintonville; Ethan Hoffman, Clintonville; Cody Kuphal, Sun Prairie; Dave Koenig, Lodi; Jake Boness, Columbus; Mason Mosher, Columbus; Chad Mason, Stoughton; Andy Ruder, Stoughton; Craig Bever, Hartford; Keith Priesgen, Hartford; Todd Tremaine, Oconomowoc; Mike Czuprynko, MEUW; (*third row*) Sean Palubicki, Kaukauna; Josh Warden, Kaukauna; Ed Kakes, Manitowoc; Dylan Kirschbaum, Fennimore; Weslee Carlson, Shawano; Ryan Steffen, Medford; Jared Hartl, Medford; Jordan Robertson, Prairie du Sac; Sandon McClurg, Prairie du Sac; Josh Bader, Vanguard (Black Earth/Mazomanie); Jeff Hecht, Jr., Columbus; Mike Nawrocki, Stoughton; Anthony Brady, Evansville; Chase Stiklestad, Evansville; Nick Feucht, Cedarburg; Dan Healy, Rice Lake; Jonny Hilbert, Rice Lake; (*on truck*) Jake Zipperer, Manitowoc; Klein Vogel, Manitowoc; and Shawn Thomas, Manitowoc.

Photo by Cora Seibt, Sun Prairie Utilities

Continued from page 2

incidents or near-misses reported. According to Tremaine, “That’s the thing with MEUW; everyone works together very well. Even with guys I’ve never met or worked with before, it just worked. It was a very positive experience.”

The Wisconsin crews began their journey home on Thursday, Oct. 17. The folks at Lakeland Electric expressed their appreciation in a post of the utility’s Facebook page:



Lakeland Electric

Oct 17 · 🌐

🌟 A Huge Thank You! 🌟 Today, Lakeland Electric extends heartfelt gratitude to all the mutual aid crews who have joined us in our time of need. Your dedication, hard work, and unwavering support have made a significant difference in our community’s recovery efforts. As you head back home, know that you have not only helped restore power but also uplifted spirits here in Lakeland. Your selflessness and commitment to service inspire us all! Safe travels, and we hope to see you again under brighter skies! 🚗💡 #ThankYou #MutualAid #PublicPower #LinemanStrong

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Members' *NEWS*



Dan Olson is retiring from Spooner Municipal Utilities after 35 years. He began his career at Spooner as an apprentice with a background in cable TV. He received Journeyman status three years later, and held both water and sewer credentials with the Wisconsin DNR. Dan became Lead Lineman in 2011, a position he held until his last day of work Oct. 19, with his official retirement scheduled for Jan. 8, 2025.

Ryan Schlapper has been promoted to fill the lead lineman position in Spooner and **Justin Abrahamson** has been hired to fill the vacancy at the utility.

Send us your news! Tell MEUW about new hires, promotions, retirements, honors, and awards, so those tidbits can be shared in MEUW member communications. Simply send an email to news@meuw.org to share your news.



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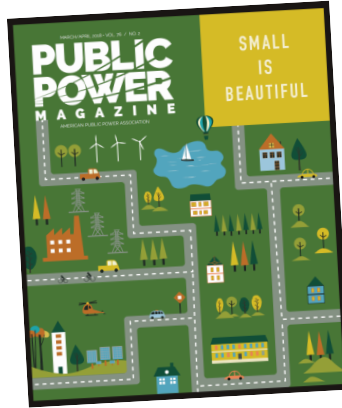
Small utility systems are the backbone of public power

By Tim Heinrich

Not long after I began working for MEUW in April 2018, I came across an issue of *Public Power Magazine*. The cover story — “Small Is Beautiful” — focused on smaller public power systems and how they pride themselves on doing more with less and saving their customers money. As I flipped through the pages and read some of the articles, I still remember that feeling of being home again. At the time, it had been 25 years since I started my first job in the utility industry. I didn’t know or appreciate the difference between an IOU or a muni in 1993. Over the next two decades, I witnessed the relatively small investor-owned utility I had joined morph into a multi-state conglomerate that no longer resembled my first employer. The culture had changed, the focus on customers and the community had gotten blurry, and a “bigger-is-

better” mentality had won out. Public power was — and continues to be — a refreshing kind of homecoming for me.

Flash forward; it’s so gratifying to see how public power continues to celebrate being “fun-sized.” If you’re a regular reader of *LIVE LINES*, you know that MEUW dedicates space



An April 2018 edition of APPA's magazine focused on the unique character of small electric systems

each month to showcase one of the 81 communities across Wisconsin that are lucky enough to own and operate their own electric utility. This month, the spotlight is shining on the Village of Viola, which straddles the lines between Vernon and Richland counties in Western Wisconsin. It is among the smallest of the small munis in our state, with 410 electric meters serving its 685 residents. Viola is proof that small is beautiful, and I hope you'll enjoy reading all about it.

When something is small, it can be vulnerable and fragile. That principle applies in nature and in business. As the MEUW Board of Directors met in late August for a focused discussion about the association's long-term strategy, the conversations naturally came around to what MEUW could do to help support its smallest member utilities. The discussions were especially urgent based on

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1 in 10

Wisconsin electric meters is served by a municipal utility



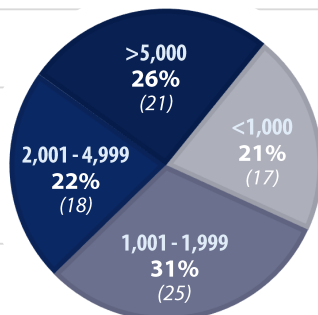
Each bar represents one of the **81** public power utilities operating in Wisconsin

Ten smallest municipal electric utilities in Wisconsin (by meter count)

Merrillan	410
Viola	428
Wonewoc	473
Argyle	506
Benton	550
La Farge	558
Belmont	581
Hazel Green	637
Cashton	647
Shullsburg	736

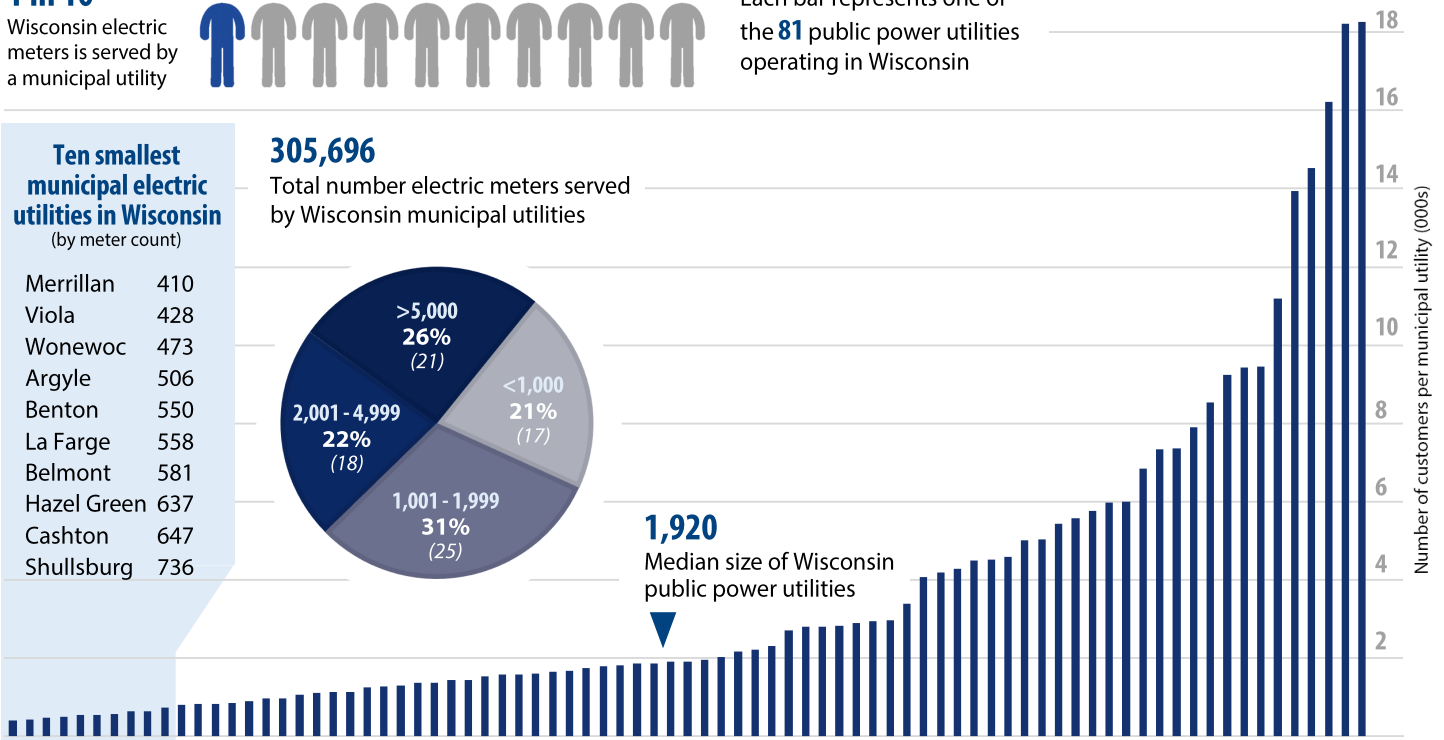
305,696

Total number electric meters served by Wisconsin municipal utilities



1,920

Median size of Wisconsin public power utilities



2023 data based on utilities' annual reports filed with Public Service Commission of Wisconsin



Continued from page 1

mine the customer impact of a sale and the overall cost of hiring a lineman to serve the community and help to update and maintain Cadott's electric system. In the meantime, CVEC offered a month-to-month maintenance agreement to replace the annual contract and allow the village more flexibility for the future.

At its regular meeting on Oct. 7, the Cadott Village Board heard the results of the rate study, which showed an increase in residential customer rates between \$440 and \$563 annually over a 10-year period. After discussion in closed session, the Board voted to retain ownership of the electric utility.

When the Village Board met again on Oct. 21, they decided to proceed with a rate-case filing and plan to continue evaluating whether or not to hire a lineman of their own. ●

Continued from page 4

recent news that the Village of Cadott was considering a proposed sale of its electric system to the neighboring electric cooperative. With input from the community and a re-evaluation of its options, the Village Board decided to retain its electric utility and make the necessary investments to keep it operating safely and efficiently. The decision preserves the local control that is a hallmark of public power, and we are glad to celebrate the positive outcome in Cadott.

Some might suggest small municipal utility systems can't go it alone and face operational challenges too difficult to overcome. In fact, there are numerous places where MEUW members have supported one another with resources, equipment, and supplies in the same "neighbor-helping-neighbor" spirit that folks who live in a small community have come to expect. One recent example is the Village of Merrilan in Jackson County, which entered an agreement with Black River Falls Municipal Utilities to provide added support for the village's distribution system while Merrilan works to solidify its workforce.

It's no secret that even the largest municipal electric systems among MEUW's members are small compared to the investor-owned utilities

operating in Wisconsin. That fact is one of the founding principles of MEUW: stronger together! If you brought together 10 Wisconsinites from all corners of the state, one of those folks (statistically) would be a public power customer. That person enjoys not-for-profit electric service that is considerably more reliable and more affordable, not to mention the fact that the people maintaining the system and making decisions about its future live in the same community. Those of us who work in public power know that, but too many others do not.

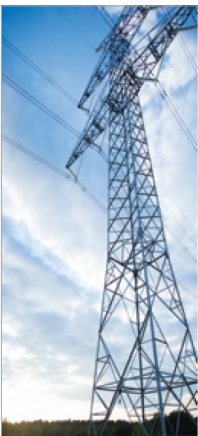
November is a time when Americans pause to give thanks. For the past 15 years, the Saturday after Thanksgiving has also been a time to recognize and support small businesses. While municipal utilities may be small compared to our counterparts, we play a powerful role throughout Wisconsin. Thank you for all you do to keep the lights on and your communities strong. All of us at MEUW are proud to support and represent you. Isn't small beautiful?

Tim Heinrich is MEUW's President and CEO. He can be reached by phone at (608) 478-0998 or by email at theinrich@meuw.org



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LIVELines

Official monthly publication of **Municipal Electric Utilities of Wisconsin, Inc.**, the statewide trade association representing the interests of Wisconsin's public power providers since 1928.

This e-newsletter is distributed to more than 1,200 utility professionals and leaders throughout Wisconsin and the Midwest on the first Tuesday of every month.

LIVE LINES has been published continuously for many decades and provides useful information, news on emerging utility issues and legislation, updates on events, training programs and member services, as well as engaging feature stories spotlighting utilities, communities and leaders.

Reader comments and suggestions are welcome — send by email to news@meuw.org

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An archive of past issues of *Live Lines* is available at www.issuu.com/meuw

Wisco munis earn national recognition

In October, the American Public Power Association (APPA) presented awards recognizing municipal electric utilities from across the country for their efforts in providing excellent service to their communities. APPA also presented Smart Energy Provider designations for 2024 to 45 utilities nationally. Public power utilities operating in Wisconsin were among the honorees.



Public Power Customer Satisfaction Awards

The Wisconsin municipal utilities — Kaukauna Utilities, Stoughton Utilities, and Sun Prairie Utilities — were honored at APPA's Customer Connections Conference in Louisville, Ky. The award recognizes utilities that receive high marks from customers in the areas of customer service, field personnel, communication, reliability, value, outage response, innovation, and overall satisfaction.

Smart Energy Provider Designations

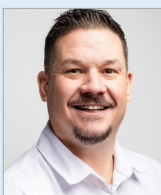
Eight Wisconsin public power utilities earned APPA's [Smart Energy Provider \(SEP\) designation](#) for demonstrating commitment to and proficiency in energy efficiency, distributed energy resources, and environmental initiatives that support the goal of providing safe, reliable, low-cost, and sustainable electric service. The SEP designation, which lasts for three years (Dec. 1, 2024, to Nov. 30, 2027), recognizes public power utilities for demonstrating leading practices in four key disciplines: smart energy information; energy efficiency and distributed energy resources programs; environmental and sustainability programs and initiatives; and communication, education, and customer experience. This is the sixth year APPA has designated SEPs, which were presented on Oct. 28 in Louisville, Ky.



**SMART
ENERGY
PROVIDER**

2024 designees from Wisconsin are: Algoma Utilities, City of Eagle River Light & Water Utility, Cuba City Light and Water, Hartford Utilities, Juneau Utilities, Slinger Utilities, Sturgeon Bay Utilities, and Waupun Utilities. The eight new SEPs join 16 other Wisconsin utilities that received the designation in 2023. Those utilities operate in Cedarburg, Columbus, Florence, Jefferson, Kaukauna Utilities, Lake Mills, Lodi, Menasha, New London, Oconomowoc, Oconto Falls, Richland Center, River Falls, Stoughton, Two Rivers, and Waunakee. The Wisconsin utilities are among 111 SEPs designated nationally. ●

Wall marks MEUW employment milestone this month



Regional Safety Coordinator **Sean Wall** is celebrating 10 years of service to MEUW and its members this month. He delivers safety services and support to municipal utilities in five communities, including Clintonville, Marshfield, Medford, New London, and Wisconsin Rapids. He first joined MEUW on Nov. 17, 2014.

Viola: (Re)building for the future, focusing on renewables



By Karen Whitmer

When visiting Viola for the first time, most are enchanted by the village's scenic beauty, friendly locals, and family-oriented atmosphere. This

small, bucolic village of nearly 700 people is located in both Richland and Vernon counties and proudly owns and operates its own electric and water utilities.

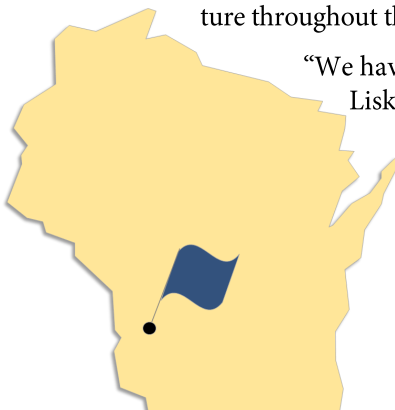
There is so much that makes this village special, but one word that captures the spirit of the Viola community is resilience.

Jeff Liska, the village's Electric Utility Manager and Director of Public Works, is a life-long resident of Viola and has been working in various capacities since he went to work as a municipal employee 42 years ago. He also served as Chief of Viola's volunteer fire department for many years before turning over the position to another village employee, Ben Culver.

Liska has faced a multitude of emergencies in both of his roles and has witnessed the people of Viola pull together over and over to keep their community strong. "You know you are part of a very special community when you see the heroes and angels that show up to help and support each other during tough times," he said. "There is very little middle ground during a crisis, people are either angels or devils. And we are fortunate to have many angels in our community."

And Viola has needed those angels. Liska said the town had to repair damage caused by a tornado in 2005, and major flooding in 2008, 2016, 2017, and 2018. Viola is particularly prone to flooding due to its proximity to the Kickapoo River.

One of the most devastating events was the flood of August 2018, which was triggered by an epic 15-inch rainfall, causing the Kickapoo River to set flood-stage records. The floodwaters caused extensive damage to homes, businesses, and infrastructure throughout the area.



"We have repaired and rebuilt,"

Liska said. And the community is now working to avoid future damage from the Kickapoo River through flood-mitigation planning. With the help of grants and federal funding, in the last few years, Viola has repaired sewer

systems, installed new roads, and built the infrastructure for new neighborhoods.

Liska said even now — six years after the 2018 flood — Viola continues to build for the future. New apartments, quadplexes, and a gas station have gone up on the south end of the village, away from the floodplain. Both residential and commercial lots in the area are also available for more housing and businesses.

"Despite the challenges we've faced, our town is growing and thriving," Liska said. "Housing is in demand in Viola, so we continue to expand and create new options and opportunities for our community."



The Village of Viola is in the final stages of constructing a community solar garden, which will have a capacity of 500 kilowatts.

A Commitment to Renewable Energy

Viola Municipal Electric Utility (VMEU) currently has about 425 electric customers within its service territory, which includes the village as well as a neighborhood just outside the village limits where the Kickapoo Area Schools are located.

The Village of Viola has a small, hard-working staff of four, and the electric utility contracts with Vernon Electric Cooperative in Westby for line work. It is a member of the Upper Midwest Municipal Energy Group, which includes 16 municipal utilities that are wholesale customers of Dairyland Power Cooperative Inc.

The village owns and operates the Viola Electric Utility Plant, a distillate fuel oil power plant, which has a peak capacity of 1.8 megawatts and has been operational since 2002.

According to Liska, the plant is primarily used for stand-by or back-up generation and provides additional power during peak demand periods or emergencies, which helps to ensure reliability for the local grid.

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And now this small and resilient community is focusing its energies on renewable power.

VMEU's largest customer, GoMacro, has contributed to helping the community increase this commitment.

GoMacro is known for producing organic, plant-based nutrition bars called MacroBars. The company was created by a mother-daughter duo in 2004, after the mother was diagnosed with breast cancer and adopted a plant-based macrobiotic diet as part of her treatment. The very first MacroBar recipe was created in the kitchen of their family farmhouse in Viola.



Founded in 2004 in the Village of Viola, GoMacro sells its organic nutrition bars online and in retail stores nationwide, and has a strong focus on sustainable operations.

renewable energy for production, and its headquarters building includes sustainable features like solar panels and energy-efficient lighting.

With a focus on helping the entire community become more “green,” in 2020, GoMacro worked with VMEU to forge a first-of-its-kind arrangement. The company helped to subsidize Viola’s use of renewable energy by purchasing renewable energy credits (RECs) for the entire village. Although VMEU no longer helps to purchase the RECs, GoMacro remains committed to increasing the use of renewable power in Viola.

“This initiative not only supported environmental sustainability but also set a great example for other communities throughout Wisconsin and the entire country,” Liska said.

And there’s more exciting renewable energy news in Viola.

VMEU is now in the process constructing a solar garden next to the Kickapoo Area Schools and near GoMacro. This solar photovoltaic system, which will have a capacity of 500 kilowatts with a 440-kilowatt battery storage system, is expected to be operational by January 2025.

“It’s a very exciting time,” Liska said. The solar garden is currently in the final stages of construction, and the team is just awaiting the installation of the battery storage system.

“The solar garden will help make Viola more resilient during emergencies ... and decrease our need for back-up fossil fuel generation,” Liska said. VMEU has also committed to using the solar garden for education purposes. “We constructed the garden near our schools so it can be used for ongoing public education programs, especially for our students at the Kickapoo Area Schools.”

A Rich History and Positive Future

Viola has a rich history dating back to its founding in 1855. It is a part of the Midwest known as the Driftless Area, a unique region that was untouched by the last glaciers, resulting in a landscape without the glacial deposits known as “drift.” It is characterized by steep hills and deep river valleys.

The area was originally inhabited by people known as “Mound Builders,” who created interesting earth mounds shaped like birds and animals. Over time, the mounds have disappeared, but Viola’s Mound Park still honors these early inhabitants.

In addition to visiting Mound Park, visitors often come to Viola for its outdoor activities such as camping, trout fishing, and canoeing.

September is the perfect time for a road trip to Viola, when the village holds its annual Horse and Colt Show. This year marked the event’s 93rd anniversary. The day and a half-long event includes a horse show, rodeo, parade, music, dancing, arts and crafts fair, food, and carnival games. Every year, the family-friendly community event attracts more and more people.

“In good times and in bad, the people of Viola stick together,” Liska said. “Despite some past hardships, good things are ahead. I’m so proud to call this community my home.” •

Karen Whitmer is a freelance communicator. She is a regular contributor to LIVE LINES and supports other MEUW projects.

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January conference is prime opportunity to learn, network

Municipal and electric cooperative employees will have a chance to come together to network and learn about important topics impacting utility operations at the 2025 [Electric Operations Conference & Expo](#). MEUW and the Wisconsin Electric Cooperative Association will host the annual gathering in Wisconsin Dells from Jan. 15–17. Employees at all levels are welcome and encouraged to attend the event, which will feature a variety of dynamic speakers covering a wide range of relevant topics.

The event will kick off at 1 p.m. on Wednesday, Jan. 15, with general session presentations for both MEUW and WECA attendees, including a presentation by Public Service Commissioner Marcus Hawkins. A Welcome Reception will be held that evening.

The program for Thursday, Jan. 16 includes general sessions, breakout presentations, and a keynote presentation from Wisconsin legend and Green Bay Packers Hall of Famer Gilbert Brown. New this year, the event will include several “cohort” discussion to enable participants to choose from a list of topics

and have smaller group discussions with others who share the same interest.

Thursday’s Expo will extend for five hours, allowing exhibitors and attendees plenty of time to interact. The Exhibit Hall will be open from 9:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. Another new addition this year is the “Supplier Showcase Stage” inside the Exhibit Hall.

Similar to “state-fair-style” expos, the stage area will allow suppliers to host brief demonstrations of their products or services throughout the day.

Expo bingo will also be back in 2025, giving Expo attendees the chance to win a wide variety of exhibitor-donated door prizes while also learning about their offerings.

The Apprentice Graduation Banquet will take place Thursday evening and features a brief program to recognize the Class of 2024, who completed the lineworker and meter technician programs at Chippewa Valley Technical College and Northeast Wisconsin Technical College. There is a separate registration and \$55 fee required to attend. ●

Electric Operations Conference & Expo Jan. 15–17, 2025

www.meuw.org/eoce

Utilities celebrate Public Power Week with their customers, communities

Warm weather and friendly neighbors helped municipal utilities celebrate Public Power Week. The first full week in October is the public power industry’s annual opportunity to celebrate the benefits of being community-powered, with many member utilities hosting events. Here are a few fun examples:

(1) Events at Shawano Municipal Utilities featured equipment demonstrations; **(2)** Menasha Utilities’ Public Power Week open house included education about electric vehicles; **(3)** The Sun Prairie Utilities team sponsored a dinner for those in need. **(4)** Stoughton Utilities customers took part in a scavenger hunt, finding Linemen Andy and Mike (and a squirrel!!) for the win; **(5)** Marshfield Utilities’ Lineman Andy Goettl read the book *LineKid’s ABCs* to a group of local kids; **(6)** Rice Lake Utilities’ celebration included giveaways.



Public Power Week 2025 will take place Oct. 5–11. It’s never too early to start planning fun ways your utility and employees can connect with customers to celebrate what makes it special to be community-powered! ●

Wisconsin UTILITY NEWS Digest

PSC declines to issue ruling in third-party financing docket

After nearly 28 months of regulatory and court filings, the Public Service Commission (PSC) has declined to issue a declaratory ruling about whether third-party financiers of solar installations should be regulated as a “public utility” under Wisconsin law. The Final Decision came on a 2-0 vote (Commissioner Kristy Nieto was recused) at the Commission’s regular meeting on Sept. 12, officially ending a request originally filed in May 2022 by Vote Solar, a San Francisco, Calif.-based nonprofit advocacy group.

A December 2022 PSC decision would have allowed a Stevens Point family to

lease a solar system installed on their home by North Wind Renewable Energy Cooperative, a project two of three Commissioners at the time concluded was not subject to regulation as a public utility. The family later sold the home and did not move forward with the project. In May 2023, the Wisconsin Utilities Association (WUA), which represents investor-owned utilities (IOUs), petitioned for judicial review of the PSC’s decision. MEUW was one of more than a dozen parties that intervened in the docket, with many subsequently joining WUA in the court filing.

In April 2024, a Circuit Court judge sent the issue back to the PSC, ruling that the regulatory agency incorrectly inter-

preted what constitutes a “public utility” because it focused on the singular project and not North Wind’s activities as a whole. In late June, the PSC reopened the Vote Solar proceeding, in response to the circuit court’s remand and changed circumstances, to consider modifications to its 2022 Final Decision.

Vote Solar asked the Commission to refrain from taking further action or setting a procedural schedule until all pending appeals could be exhausted; WUA disagreed, arguing that the project’s cancellation made further court proceedings moot. With the matter now closed, WUA and the other parties have filed a motion to dismiss a pending appeal and formally conclude the case.



Long-awaited decision on updated PG tariffs delayed

After months of investigation into a proposal by Sturgeon Bay Utilities (SBU) to update its parallel generation (PG) tariffs (and buy-back rates for excess generation), the Public Service Commission (PSC) opted not to issue a final decision in the docket (5780-TE-111) at its open meeting on Oct. 10. PSC Chair Summer Strand and Commissioner Hawkins deliberated over several contested issues in the application, ultimately agreeing to [re-open the investigation](#) in order to allow time for additional discovery and analysis. Commissioner Kristy Nieto

had recused herself because of prior involvement in the investigation when she was Division Administrator.

During the discussion, Chair Strand requested additional information about how the base cost of power calculation in the power cost adjustment could be utilized in the avoided cost methodology — a suggestion made by PSC staff during the investigation. She also requested more info about various components of [SBU’s proposal](#), including its analysis of avoided capacity cost; its use of a historic locational marginal pricing (LMP) average rather than a forecast; and the administrative mechanics of updating the LMP average going forward.

Although Commissioner Hawkins indicated he had been prepared to issue a decision and thought the application had been ade-

quately laid out, he ultimately agreed to reopen the record to allow for additional and clarifying information, particularly on the use of seasonal LMPs rather than on-peak and off-peak to set the historic avoided energy cost and avoided capacity price for both behind the meter and front of the meter facilities.

SBU’s PG filing was the first to have been made by a municipal utility since a series of updated PG applications were approved by the PSC in 2022 and 2023. In the time since SBU made its filing, other municipal utilities have either filed or are preparing to file proposed PG tariff revisions, so there is considerable interest in the PSC’s ongoing review of the SBU proposal. A timetable for the reopened investigation has not yet been established.

— Richard Heinemann

Legislative Committee authorizes funding to add staff at PSC

In August, the Wisconsin State Legislature’s Joint Finance Committee (JFC) approved a [funding request](#) from the PSC to increase agency spending by about \$2.6 million annually in order to add 23 permanent full-time equivalent positions to the PSC’s current staffing levels.

In the request for added staff, PSC Chair Strand said the Commission is experiencing an influx of regulatory filings driven by the “significant transition in energy generation resources” happening among Wisconsin utilities. She cited “a critical and urgent need for additional staff resources to process the increased number and complexity of utility filings, which is expected to continue into the future.”

Continued on page 11

Focus on Energy launching new community-based pilots

Focus on Energy has launched two community-based pilots under the “Future Focus” initiative to explore and implement new energy efficiency concepts and technologies. Future Focus is a program that allows Focus to test new approaches and emerging technologies for potential inclusion in existing program offerings. The Future Focus team screens new ideas quarterly and through competitive requests for proposals for their potential to achieve energy savings, high customer satisfaction, and market transformation.

The new community-focused pilots recently launched as part of Future Focus are designed to explore the effectiveness of leveraging community-based organizations (CBOs) to deliver energy efficiency resources to populations that have traditionally been difficult for the Focus program to reach. By partnering with CBOs, the pilots aim to build trust within communities, ensure tailored outreach, and provide support meeting the specific needs of different populations. This approach should sound familiar to public power utilities who have long fostered community partnerships and cooperation to effectively deliver service to their customers.

Home Energy Upgrades Pilot

The Home Energy Upgrades pilot aims to leverage the local knowledge and community relationships of CBOs to connect with and provide whole-home

energy efficiency retrofits at no- or low-cost to 125 single-family homeowners in two Wisconsin communities. Homeowners must have an income at 80% or less of the Area Median Income by family size to qualify. In addition to assessing the effectiveness of partnering with CBOs, the pilot will conduct research through interviews with stakeholders and participants to gauge their knowledge and understanding of the energy-saving resources available to them, including Focus on Energy.

The pilot kicked off in Black River Falls in September, along with another Focus pilot targeting small businesses. The Focus team met with Black River Falls Municipal Utility’s General Manager Casey Engebretson and Energy Services Manager Sally Turpin who provided valuable insights on community organizations to engage. The team met with the local Chamber and other CBOs to explore partnerships to help the pilots reach customers in need. The pilot will launch in a second community by midyear 2025 and expand participation to multifamily owners and residents. The Home Energy Upgrades pilot will conclude by August 2026 after which the Focus team will assess the pilot’s impact and potential to scale the effort with more communities or even statewide.

Empowering Faith Communities for Energy Efficiency

The Empowering Faith Communities

pilot supports faith-based organizations in promoting energy efficiency to the people they serve. The pilot will offer tailored energy-efficient products and services, including energy assessments, enhanced rebates, customized workshops, and connections with diverse Trade Allies. The pilot will launch in 2025 and run for two years with a goal to conduct 30 energy assessments and 12 educational workshops annually to evaluate the impact of engaging faith-based communities.

Through these pilots, Focus on Energy continues to innovate and expand its offerings to better serve utility customers and their communities. ●



Jennie Brooks has joined the Focus on Energy program administration team as a new Utility Relations Manager.

She will serve as a liaison between the Focus program and its utility and electric cooperative partners. A resident of Lodi, Jennie joins Focus program team with several years of experience implementing energy-efficiency programs for Focus and utilities, most recently managing a residential weatherization/home performance program for a Michigan utility. She can be reached at jennie.brooks@focusonenergy.com or (563) 580-5564.

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The newly authorized positions are funded through utility assessments. A staff billable time system is used to record hours worked on individual utility dockets, which are then assessed directly to the utilities involved. Expenditures that are not recovered via

direct assessments are funded by an annual remainder assessment that all regulated utilities are subject to. The JFC authorized funding for nine additional program and policy analysts, who will serve as case coordinators; as well as eight environmental analysis and review special-

ists, five public service engineers, and one program and policy analyst in the PSC’s Consumer Affairs bureau.

The positions designated as “case coordinators” will be responsible for creating and managing the docket schedule, drafting documents, and being the point of contact for

specific inquiries about the project, a role previously fulfilled by the engineer assigned to the docket. The change will enable current technical staff and any new engineers and environmental analysts to better focus on their technical research responsibilities. ●

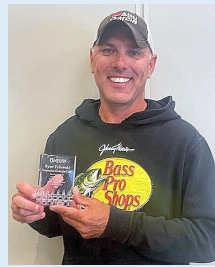
MEUW NEWS Monitor

Register for Leading Through Collaboration

Collaborating isn't just about working with people — it also involves using influence and persuasion to drive high-performing teams. Leaders skilled in collaboration understand how individuals impact one another and how to foster creative thinking and effective problem-solving to drive results. Part of our three-part Municipal Utility Leadership Certificate series, Leading Through Collaboration will give attendees practical ideas and skills they can bring back to their workplace. The class will be held in Mauston on Wednesday, Dec. 4. More information and registration are available [here](#).

Day at the Capitol promotes advocacy, awareness

Join fellow members in Madison to help increase state legislator awareness of public power. You'll be representing not only your public power community, but also the nearly 300,000 Wisconsinites who get their electricity from a community-owned utility. Full details are available [here](#). A room block is available for those who need lodging Tuesday, Feb. 4. Details and registration are [here](#).



Ryan Pelowski, Lead Lineman at Trempealeau Municipal Utilities, recently completed MEUW's four-part Fundamentals of Utility Management Training Series and was awarded a commemorative trophy for his achievement.

Learn about the fundamentals of utility regulation, compliance and safety

As a highly regulated business, utilities must comply with dozens of operating rules to retain the "right to serve" electric customers. Part of MEUW's Fundamentals of Utility Management training program, this Regulation, Compliance & Safety class will explore the wide array of regulations, compliance, and safety rules every municipal utility leader must follow. Offered Wednesday, Feb. 12, 2025, in Mauston, the course will explore the reasons behind the rules and provide insights to make compliance easier. An outline of the training topics, the instructors, and registration details are [here](#).

LIVELines Classifieds

MEUW is pleased to promote job openings with its member utilities across Wisconsin. New positions are regularly added to our website — check them out [here](#). Here is one current opportunity available:

Cumberland Municipal Utilities [Journeyman Electric Line Foreman](#)

When your utility is hiring, be sure to email the job posting to office@meuw.org.

APPA asks members to complete short survey about ongoing supply chain challenges

For the past several years, the American Public Power Association (APPA) has been engaging with other trade organizations and the federal government to help address supply chain constraints. To further aid those advocacy efforts, APPA is asking utilities to complete a quick survey about the environment around distribution transformer shortages and other supply chain shortages. **The survey can be found [here](#).** Responses are requested by Monday, Nov. 25.

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