

# LIVE Lines

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## Electric utilities faced with rising costs

By Sharon Wolf

**E**lectricity costs are becoming a more noticeable part of household and business budgets across Wisconsin, adding to broader cost pressures from food, insurance, and housing. While national electricity prices have generally followed inflation in recent years, Wisconsin is among the states where consumers are experiencing sustained upward pressure on electric bills. These trends affect all utility customers, including those served by Wisconsin's public power utilities.

Research from Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory, a federally funded research and development center sponsored by the U.S. Department of Energy, helps explain why electricity prices are rising and why the experience can differ by state and utility type.

From 2019 to 2024, U.S. electricity prices rose sharply in nominal terms, due to inflation, fuel price volatility, and major infrastructure investments. Although many states saw flat or declining prices after adjusting for inflation, others — including Wisconsin — have seen real increases that directly affect consumers.

Residential customers tend to feel these increases most acutely. Residential rates are generally higher than commercial and industrial rates and have risen faster in

recent years due to how costs are allocated through rate design.

Several of the drivers identified in national research have particular relevance in Wisconsin:

**Costs for utility infrastructure and grid modernization:** A significant share of rising electricity costs comes from investments in transmission and distribution systems. Utilities are replacing aging infrastructure, improving reliability, hardening systems against severe weather, and modernizing the grid to accommodate new technologies.

**Modest load growth and recovery of fixed costs:** One of the strongest findings from the Berkeley Lab research is that states with slow or declining electricity demand tend to see higher prices. When overall electricity sales are flat, utilities must recover fixed costs — such as infrastructure investments — over fewer kilowatt-hours.

This dynamic is especially relevant for public power utilities in Wisconsin, many of which serve stable or slowly growing communities. Without significant load growth, even well-managed municipal utilities can face upward rate pressure simply to cover essential system costs.

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## Customer satisfaction plummets to all-time lows in national surveying

Results of an annual survey of residential electric utility customers released in mid-December show that overall customer satisfaction has dropped to 499 (on a 1,000-point scale), the lowest score ever recorded across residential utility studies conducted by J.D. Power and Associates. By comparison, a year ago, the overall score nationally was 707.

Ratings for Wisconsin's investor-owned utilities (IOUs) reflected the national trend of lower residential customer satisfaction in the most recent surveys. The average of large Midwest-based utilities was 509 —

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# Avoid feeling bad: Beat the winter blues, by taking care of you



As we move into the heart of winter, shorter days, colder weather, and busy schedules can take a toll on both physical and mental well-being. Seasonal fatigue, low energy, and stress are common this time of year, making it especially important to take care of yourself — both on and off the job. **Here are a few helpful reminders to help you stay healthy and focused:**

**Watch your diet:** The holidays often come with richer foods and less consistency in eating habits. Be mindful of what you're putting into your body. Try to maintain balanced meals, limit excess sugar and alcohol, and stay hydrated — proper nutrition

plays a key role in energy levels and alertness.

**Stay active and get outside:** Limited daylight can impact mood and energy. When possible, spend some time outdoors and stay physically active. Even short walks or light activity can help boost energy, improve sleep, and support mental health.

**Protect your sleep schedule:** Prioritize quality sleep by keeping a consistent bedtime, limiting screen time before bed, and allowing your body time to unwind. Adequate rest is critical for focus, reaction time, and safe decision-making.

**Recognize and manage fatigue:** Fatigue affects mood, concentration, and overall safety. It can be caused by lack of sleep, poor diet, or stress. If you're feeling run down, take steps to rest, refuel, and reset before

fatigue becomes a safety risk.

**Make time for connection:** Spending quality time with family and friends can help reduce stress and recharge your mental batteries. Simple things like shared meals, conversations, or checking in with loved ones can make a big difference during the winter months.

**Practice kindness and patience:** Stress and winter conditions can impact everyone differently. Be mindful of those around you, extend patience, and lead with kindness. A small gesture — a smile, a greeting, or a helping hand — can go a long way.

Winter can be challenging, but staying aware of your health and fatigue helps keep everyone safer. Take care of yourself, look out for one another, and remember brighter days are ahead. ●

## MEUW is your partner keeping workers safe

Dues-paying members of MEUW can take advantage of a comprehensive suite of safety-related services from the association, including:

- Access to MEUW's reputable on-the-job safety and training program, delivered onsite by highly experienced instructors who build rapport and establish credibility with lineworkers
- Expert advice and support from safety professionals and fellow utility operators who understand the full scope of safety rules and professional standards
- Weekly safety messages, monthly safety calls, and regular updates regarding near-miss accidents and critical alerts.

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**Shifting costs of customer-owned renewables:** Growth in behind-the-meter solar reduces the amount of electricity sold by utilities. While customers with solar benefit from lower bills, rapid growth in net-metered solar can shift grid costs onto remaining customers if rates are not well-aligned with fixed system costs.

Municipal utilities across Wisconsin continue to evaluate rate structures to balance support for local renewable energy with fairness for all customers.

**Clean energy policies and market forces:** The research shows that utility-scale wind and solar built through market forces — often supported by federal tax incentives — have not broadly increased electricity prices. However, renewable energy requirements that mandate higher-cost incremental resources can contribute to rate increases in some states, depending on resource availability and policy design.

## What this means for public power customers

Wisconsin's public power utilities are locally owned and governed, giving communities direct oversight of decisions about rates, investments, and priorities. This local control allows municipal utilities to focus on reliability, transparency, and long-term value rather than shareholder returns.

However, public power utilities still face the same economic realities as other utilities: inflation, fuel price volatility, infrastructure needs, and evolving energy demands. As a result, many municipal utilities are implementing gradual rate increases to ensure continued reliability and financial stability.

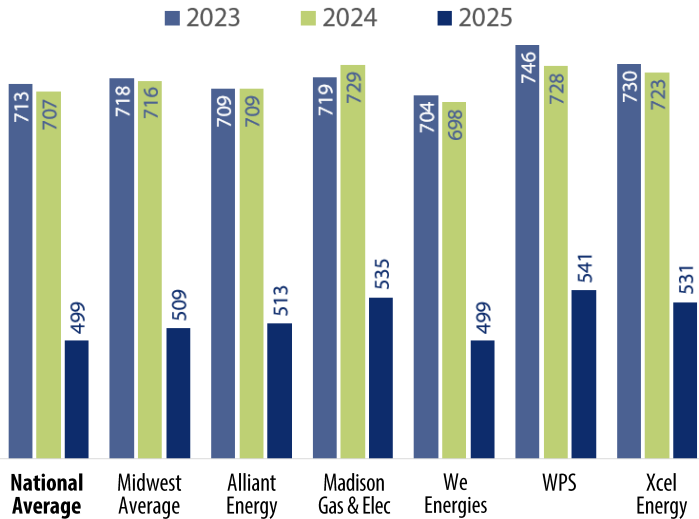
For consumers, rising electricity costs are the result of multiple overlapping factors rather than any single decision or policy. As Wisconsin continues to modernize its electric system and prepare for future demand, electricity affordability — especially for residential customers — will remain a central issue for public power utilities, their governing boards, and the communities they serve. ●

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above the national average, but more than 200 points lower than in 2024 (716). Xcel Energy (531) and Alliant Energy (513) rated above the group average, in which Iowa-based MidAmerican Energy ranked highest for the fourth consecutive year (559). The numeric rating for We Energies was 499, which ranked 13th among the 15 utilities in its peer group.

Among the 16 medium-sized Midwest utilities in the survey, Wisconsin Public Service Corp. was ranked second with a score of 541 and Madison Gas and Electric was fourth (535), compared to the group’s average of 486.

**Residential Electric-Utility Customer Satisfaction Rating**



Source: J.D. Power and Associates

J.D. Power surveyed more than 125,000 residential customers nationwide in the first 11 months of 2025. Overall satisfaction with electric utilities declined for a fifth consecutive year, driven by average monthly bills that have surged 34% since 2020. The survey results were announced Dec. 17. ●

# Members' NEWS

**Cade Schreiber** is now Utility Manager for Hustisford Utilities. He most recently worked as Lead Lineman and succeeds Todd Tessmann, who has retired.



**Schreiber**

**Randall Myrum** has been named Utilities Director for Columbus Utilities. He previously served as Public Works Director for the City of Lake Mills.



**Borlace**

Journeyman Lineman **Shawn Borlace** has retired after 30 years with Shawano Municipal Utilities. **Ethan Hoffmann** is stepping in to succeed Shawn, transitioning from Clintonville Utilities to Shawano.

**Becky Neefe** is now Utility Clerk at Spooner Municipal Utilities.

**Gregory Buchholz** has joined Kaukauna Utilities as Purchasing & Warehouse Technician.

Manitowoc Public Utilities recently welcomed two new team members: **Lance Mulgrew** as Electric Distribution Field Superintendent, and **Adam Niemer** as Electric Distribution Manager.

**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](mailto:news@meuw.org) to share your news.



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# Inside 725 Insights from the MEUW Office



By Tim Heinrich,  
President and CEO

Taking time to reflect on successes and setbacks is a common tradition when we turn the calendar to a new year. Happily, I can report that MEUW recorded many more successes than setbacks in 2025. Guided by a member-focused strategy developed by our forward-looking Board of Directors, our hard-working staff delivered on the promise to “unify and strengthen” municipal electric utilities. Member satisfaction remained high, attendance at conferences and workshops surpassed expectations, engagement by suppliers and consultants through our Associate Member program reached new levels, and participation in the association’s fee-for-service programs continued to grow. Sure, there were setbacks, but we dealt with them and moved forward. Thank you to our employees and to our members for a truly remarkable year!

And now, just like that, it’s 2026 — and there is much to anticipate. Here’s a preview of what lies ahead:

This year’s **Electric Operations Conference & Expo** promises to be the biggest one yet. More than 250 employees and leaders from Wisconsin’s municipal and cooperative utilities are registered for the Jan. 14 and 15 events. For the second year in row, the trade show is sold out, including “auxiliary” (e.g., overflow) exhibit space added to accommodate the large number of exhibitors. We look forward to seeing many of you in the Dells to start the new year.

On March 25, we’ll host the third annual **Foreman’s Roundtable**. This forum was created to support utility line crew leaders who often face similar challenges and can feel isolated in their roles. The event provides an opportunity to exchange ideas, learn from peers, and strengthen leadership and communication skills, with a particular emphasis on safety. Discussion topics are driven by those attending, so participants can take away as much

as they put in. Based on attendee feedback and the insights gained in previous years, this year’s session promises to be time well spent.

MEUW’s **96th Annual Conference** returns to Madison this year with a refreshed schedule designed to enhance member engagement. Based on your feedback, we’ll host a “Day at the Capitol” in conjunction with the event, providing members the opportunity to share the public power story with lawmakers. There will be a Wednesday golf outing, and attendees also can tour Sun Prairie Utilities’ impressive new 83,000-square-foot facility. In addition, there will be a “mini” trade show to complement the traditional activities, including the Awards Luncheon. Mark your calendars for May 12–14.

We are introducing a one-day pre-conference workshop on utility cost-of-service and rate design as part of this year’s **Accounting and Customer Service Seminar**. Members have consistently expressed interest in a founda-

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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](mailto:news@meuw.org)

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## Inside 725 *Continued from page 4*

tional session on electric rate setting, and this training is designed to meet that need. The full-day workshop will provide practical insights for municipal employees, as well as help local utility commissioners and governing body members gain a clearer understanding of the rate-making process. Make plans to join us on Tuesday, Sept. 22, in Mauston (and stick around for the next day's seminar).

Besides the events, our team is enhancing the services and support MEUW provides our members in 2026:

The lineworker training program will continue to offer a comprehensive slate of topics focused on safe work practices. While the overall structure of the **Job Training & Safety (JT&S) program** remains unchanged, we are emphasizing flexibility to better serve members. Utility employees may attend any session that aligns with their schedule and training needs, rather than being limited to the location nearest them. Larger utilities can divide crews across different dates and sites, and anyone who misses a session due to illness, emergency work, or vacation will have the option to make it up at another location.

An updated **Membership Directory and Resource Guide** will be released in late April. This comprehensive, printed directory will include contact information for utility leaders, details about MEUW member utilities, and listings of suppliers and consultants who support MEUW as Associate and Affiliate Members. In addition to the printed version, an [online flipbook](#) — similar to what we offer now — will be available for easy access. We also plan to launch a smartphone app to offer members convenient access to directory information, MEUW communications, and essential forms and reference materials. Notably, the new directory will include [Reedsburg Utility Commission](#), reinstated as a MEUW member in 2026.

Our Awards Committee has created a new award designed to recognize a MEUW member utility that has demonstrated exceptional collaboration, partnership, and mutual support in advancing the goals of public power. The aptly-named **Public Power Partnership Award** highlights the spirit of cooperation that strengthens Wisconsin's municipal utilities and exemplifies the values of shared expertise, resourcefulness, and community-minded service. We'll begin accepting nominations in February and hope to honor a deserving municipal electric utility with the new award during the Annual Conference in May.

To ensure MEUW's long-term viability, we will build on **succession planning and organizational continuity** efforts initiated in 2025. Operating with a small staff underscores the importance of preparing for both planned and unexpected transitions. We're recruiting an Electric Utility Safety and Training Coordinator to join the JT&S team and help to support Don Harnisch's upcoming phased retirement. At the same time, we are refining strategies and documenting institutional knowledge to preserve critical expertise and facilitate a smooth transfer to future MEUW leaders.

As you can tell, there's no shortage of priorities in the year ahead. Our entire team looks forward to the opportunities in front of us. Thank you for your continuing support. Your feedback is always welcome.

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# MEUW NEWS Monitor

## Deadline to register for EOCE26 is Friday, Jan. 9

There are still a few days left to register for the 2026 Electric Operations Conference and Expo, which will be held Jan. 14–15 at the Kalahari Resort in Wisconsin Dells. This annual conference attracts municipal and cooperative utility leaders and employees from across Wisconsin for informative presentations and a large trade show featuring a wide array of utility suppliers and consultants. Full details and registration info is available at [www.meuw.org/eoce](http://www.meuw.org/eoce).

## Next Fundamentals of Utility Management course set for Feb. 11

Understanding the many financial aspects associated with utility operations is essential for anyone in a management position. The next course in MEUW's four-part Fundamentals of Utility Management Training Series — Utility Accounting & Finance — will provide attendees with a solid foundation of public utility accounting, a clear understanding of business operations, and the skills needed to review and effectively manage budgets. Training will take place on Wednesday, Feb. 11, at The Lodge At Mauston. Register [here](#) today.

## Get hands-on training at Apparatus Workshop

MEUW and Chippewa Valley Technical College (CVTC) have organized an Apparatus Workshop for Feb. 10–11. Held at CVTC's campus in Eau Claire, this workshop will cover topics such as jobsite safety, capacitors, voltage regulators, reclosers, trip savers, meters, and connectors/connections (final topics may change depending on presenter availability). Details and registration information can be found [here](#).

## Leadership workshop will focus on leading through change

MEUW is once again offering an interactive two-day Leadership Workshop to support the next generation of public power leaders. With many leadership transitions underway across Wisconsin municipal utilities, this program is designed to strengthen communication, sharpen leadership skills, and help participants lead confidently through change.

The workshop will be led by Nilaksh Kothari, retired CEO of Manitowoc Public Utilities, and Dr. Craig Woolard, Head of Civil Engineering at Montana State University — two distinguished leaders with decades of utility management experience.

Participants will explore strategies to build trust, communicate effectively, manage change, and enhance team collaboration. The hands-on sessions will benefit utility professionals at all stages of their leadership journey.

The session will be held March 12–13 at Great Wolf Lodge in Wisconsin Dells. Registration is now open and available [here](#).

## Share and learn at Foreman's Roundtable

MEUW's annual gathering of electric-utility foremen and crew leaders provides an opportunity share ideas, learn from one another, and develop leadership and communication skills, especially regarding safety. The 2026 Foreman's Roundtable will be held on Wednesday, March 25, at Pinseekers in DeForest. After the event, those in attendance can take part in an optional team building and networking activity at the hybrid golf facility. Learn more and register [here](#).

## Underground Facility Locator Workshop planned for spring

A one-day Underground Facility Locator Workshop will be offered on Wednesday, April 1, in Spooner. The workshop will include both classroom instruction and hands-on practice, covering information found in Units 1–3 of the National Utility Locating Contractors Association (NULCA) Professional Competency Standard including use of the transmitter and receiver. All learners will receive a certificate of completion. Registration is available [here](#). ●

## Training focused on switching and communications planned for Feb. 25

Effective lockout/tagout procedures depend on clear, consistent communication — not only among crew members, but also with utility dispatchers and wholesale transmission providers. This training reviews the fundamentals of lockout/tagout requirements, including OSHA standards for hold cards and the importance of precise three-way communication.

While specific procedures may vary by transmission provider, this informational session focuses on common communication expectations utilities encounter when coordinating with wholesale transmission suppliers. It is designed to provide practical insight that utilities can apply regardless of their transmission provider.

Training will focus on:

- Dispatcher communication when opening or closing disconnect switches;
- De-energizing and energizing substations; and
- Transferring load within a distribution system supplied by multiple substations.

The two-hour hybrid class will be offered via a virtual webinar, or you can attend in person in Sun Prairie. Full details are [here](#). There is no cost, but pre-registration is required.

# John Berning leaves a legacy of hard work in Hazel Green

By Sharon Wolf

For more than three decades, John has been one of those people every small town quietly relies on — the kind of employee who shows up, figures it out, and gets the job done. On Jan. 30, 2026, John will retire from the Village of Hazel Green after 34 years of dedicated service, closing a career defined by commitment, craftsmanship, and deep community roots.

John's journey into municipal service began far from substations and power lines. Early in his career, he worked as an automotive technician in Dubuque, Iowa. When the operation closed and split into smaller shops, John found himself ready for a change, which led him back closer to home and to a mechanic position with the Village of Hazel Green. As is often the case in small towns, the job quickly became much more than its title. Hazel Green needed versatility, problem-solving, and a willingness to take on responsibility — and John delivered.

At the time, his supervisor, Jim Colby, was preparing for retirement. Recognizing the village's need for licensed electrical expertise, John was encouraged to pursue an apprenticeship. With his father having been an electrician, the work felt familiar. John completed his apprentice training under Randy Larson, earned his journeyman credentials, and gradually assumed greater responsibility for the electric utility. When Jim later passed away, John stepped in to the utility leadership role himself — a position he's held for decades. Along the way, he helped build the future workforce by sending two employees through apprenticeship school.

Looking back on his 34-year career, John says the biggest changes weren't just technical.

"People expect more now," he explains. "They pay more for things, so when there's an outage, they want it fixed right away."

Equipment, technology, and industry knowledge have all evolved. John credits MEUW as a critical resource, especially for municipal utilities where employees often work independently. "The information MEUW puts out is 100% accurate," he says. "When you're out there on your own, that really matters."

Despite the changes, the core of the job has remained the same. "At the end of the day, you still have to get the work done," John says. "That won't ever change."

Storm responses stand out as some of the most memorable aspects of his long career. Hazel Green sits in a unique corner of the state alongside Cuba City, Benton, and Shullsburg, and the utilities in those communities have long supported one another during emergencies.

"We help each other out," John says. "You know the help will come back when you need it."

What made John's work especially meaningful was serving a town he has called home his entire life. A 70-year resident, he knows nearly everyone — and they know him.

"It's easier for people to talk to you when they know you," he says. "That's one of the best parts of working for a municipal utility."

John and his family have always been active in the community, from youth sports to local events, reinforcing the close connection between the utility and the people it serves. That familiari-

ty, he believes, builds trust and helps prevent conflicts before they start.

Throughout his career, John remained deeply involved with MEUW, attending conferences, safety training, and monthly meetings for more than 25 years. "You build relationships," he says. "If you need an answer, there's always someone willing to help." Even as he prepares to retire, John continues to invest in the next generation, supporting leadership training for younger employees like Bo Brunkow, who will take over as lead lineworker.

Retirement doesn't mean stepping away from service. John will remain active as a captain with the Hazel Green Fire Department, and working shifts as an emergency medical technician. He also looks forward to spending more time with his wife Nancy, with whom he recently celebrated 50 years of marriage, their two sons' families — Erik, who lives in Oregon, Wis., and Evan, who passed away five years ago from cancer — and six grandchildren, who keep him busy with plenty of "bleacher time." Having already visited every U.S. state, John plans to enjoy a well-earned slower pace without losing his connection to the community.

For those just starting out in the utility industry, John's advice is simple and hard-earned: the work is demanding, but it matters.

"You can't do this job halfway," he says. "Even when you do everything right, things can still happen — but that's why training, safety, and commitment are so important."

As John's career comes to a close, Hazel Green isn't just marking a retirement — it's honoring a humble hometown hero whose steady presence kept the lights on, the power flowing, and the community connected for more than 34 years. ●



# Reedsburg Utility Commission powers a connected community



By Karen Whitmer

For more than 130 years, the Reedsburg Utility Commission (RUC) has been the steady force behind Reedsburg's growth, keeping the lights on

while bringing in new tools and technologies that improve life across the community. Located in Sauk County, just a short drive from Madison, Reedsburg is home to about 10,000 residents and a mix of thriving businesses.

RUC provides electric service to approximately 5,800 customers within the city and surrounding areas, while also supplying water and fiber optic broadband services, establishing itself as a comprehensive multi-utility provider. Supported by a workforce of 45 employees, including six lineworkers, RUC is dedicated to maintaining reliable service while contributing to productivity of the community it serves.

"Our team works hard every day to keep the lights on, but our job goes beyond reliability," said Brett Schuppner, RUC's Utility General Manager. "At its core, Reedsburg Utility consists of local people working together to meet local needs and support the progress that keeps Reedsburg moving forward."



**Schuppner**

## Serving Homes and Industry

While most of RUC's electric customers are households, Reedsburg also has a robust industrial base that forms a key part of the local economy. Residential accounts make up about 86% of the customer base but represent only 17% of annual electricity sales, with industrial facilities accounting for the bulk of electricity demand (71%).

Grede Foundries, an iron casting facility, is RUC's biggest individual customer, representing 39% of the utility's electricity sales alone.

Other significant industrial customers include Primex Plastics, which produces extruded sheet and roll plastic products; Seats Incorporated, which designs and manufactures seating for transportation and commercial uses; Lakeside Foods, freezer plant, which processes and flash-freezes locally grown vegetables; Fore-

most Farms, which annually produces 44 million pounds of butter; Meister Log & Lumber, which mills and kiln dries hardwood lumber products; and Graco Children's Products, which is a global baby-product manufacturer with a facility in town — meaning that favorite Nuk your child once enjoyed was likely made in Reedsburg.



Historic downtown Reedsburg is home to the iconic Hotel Stolte building, which was built in 1896 in the Queen Anne style and is prominently featured on the colorful welcome sign that also highlights Reedsburg's roots in public power.

*Photos from Reedsburg.org*



"Our big industrial customers depend on us every minute of the day, but reliability matters just as much to the families who call Reedsburg home," Schuppner said. "Whether it's keeping a production line moving or making sure someone's lights and heat stay on, people count on us — and we're proud to be there for them."

## Electric Utility Operations and Community Growth

Reedsburg's established industrial sector has contributed to the community's ongoing growth. Data from the Sauk County Profile, published by the Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development, indicates that Reedsburg experienced the highest rate of population increase in the county between 2020 and 2023, representing approximately 2.8% growth over three years. A housing market study presented to the Reedsburg Common Council in 2025 projects that the city will need roughly 500 additional single-family homes by 2040 to keep pace with this anticipated expansion.

To meet the needs of a growing community, RUC is systematically strengthening its transmission and distribution infra-

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structure while installing electric service for new construction projects across the city.

RUC owns and operates transmission lines that connect local substations and help maintain strong system reliability. RUC secured two federal-backed Grid Resilience grants totaling nearly \$650,000 through a program offered by the State of Wisconsin's Office of Energy Innovation. These funds are being used to upgrade equipment, rebuild and harden the transmission lines, and advance other projects that enhance reliability throughout the community.

"By leveraging these grants, we are proactively improving service, reducing the risk of outages, and ensuring we meet the needs of our growing community," said Dennis Horkan, Electric System Supervisor.

Beyond the grid itself, RUC also helps power new building and community amenities, ensuring Reedsburg's expansion comes with an enhanced quality of life. The team stays busy installing electric service for new homes, apartments, and city facilities. According to Horkan, community donations, local fundraising, and strategic grant awards have supported recent upgrades



to Reedsburg's recreational offerings. The city recently added a new splash pad, an indoor sports complex,

and is currently constructing Legends Park, which is a new outdoor recreation facility that includes another splash pad, concession building, and several soccer, baseball, and softball fields. Reedsburg also created the River District Gathering Space along the Baraboo River, funded in part by a state Vibrant Spaces grant.

### Broadband: Connecting the Community

RUC has been a pioneer in municipal broadband since the late 1990s, beginning with a simple but powerful goal: to connect utility operations and local schools with reliable fiber. What started as a tool to improve electric and water services has grown into a full-fledged community broadband network.

Today, RUC is one of the few municipal utilities in Wisconsin to offer its own broadband service, joining a select group of utility-run networks in other states, such as Iowa. In 2014, RUC was the first to offer gigabit service in Wisconsin, and — in 2018 — was only the third in the nation to make gigabit speed as its standard speed offering, making it one of the most affordable gigabit plans in the nation.

Over the years, RUC has steadily expanded its LightSpeed fiber network beyond its city limits, bringing high-speed internet,



The crew keeping the lights on in Reedsburg is made up of (from left) Meter Technician Ryan Harms; Linemen Dennis Duren, Kyran Horkan, Mike Kinser, Jeremy Schyvinck; Electric Foreman Scott Waffle; Meter Reader/Laborer Travis Bohlen; and Electric Supervisor Dennis Horkan.

TV, and phone services to more of the greater Sauk County region. Thanks to state and federal grants — including the USDA ReConnect loan — the Utility has extended fiber into neighboring rural townships of Sauk, Juneau, Iowa, and Richland counties. These rural fiber network projects help bridge the digital divide, ensuring that farms, rural households, and small businesses have access to the same reliable, gigabit-speed connections available in town.

"Our broadband network started as a way to support utility operations, but it has grown into a service that strengthens the entire community," said Schuppner. "It helps families, schools, and businesses thrive, and it's an essential part of keeping Sauk, Juneau, Iowa, and Richland counties connected and competitive for the future."

### A City with Character

Reedsburg might be small, but it's packed full of charm and personality.

Proudly known as the birthplace of Little League Baseball in Wisconsin, the city celebrates its sports legacy through vibrant youth programs and community events. Residents also honor Reedsburg's rich dairy heritage: The city is known as the Butter Capital of the World, reflecting the local creameries and cheese factories that fueled the region's economy for generations.

Outdoor enthusiasts flock to the 400 State Trail, a scenic 22-mile corridor through forests, farmland, and neighboring towns, perfect for biking, hiking, walking, and cross-country skiing. Reedsburg is also home to other well-maintained parks and recreational facilities, giving families plenty of space to enjoy the outdoors.

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Reedsburg has several festivals and events throughout the year to keep the community engaged. Community events include Butter Fest, Vet Fest, Freedom Fest, Fermentation Fest, Living Windows, and Christmas in the Park, along with seasonal farmers' markets and summer concerts. Reedsburg also supports community-focused events that raise funds for local causes, including the United Fund Auction and the Great Steak Challenge.

### Investing in People

RUC staff are deeply embedded in community life, going beyond utility operations to actively support residents. Many employees coach youth sports, including Schuppner, who fondly recalls his time coaching baseball, softball, basketball, and clay target shooting when his kids were young. Staff members also volunteer with local civic organizations and events.

Each year RUC partners with local restaurants to provide free meals to veterans on Veteran's Day and to emergency personnel working on the Christmas and New Year's holidays. This past year, RUC provided more than 220 meals to local veterans living in the community.

The Utility partners with Reedsburg High School on a "House Flipping" course, where students renovate homes with guid-



RUC partners with Reedsburg High School on a "House Flipping" course, where students renovate homes with guidance from utility staff, including Journeyman Lineman Mike Kinser (at left above), about safe, code-compliant electrical work. Now on its third project, the program gives students hands-on experience while sparking interest in the trades.

ance from RUC staff on safe, code-compliant electrical work. Now on its third project, the program gives students hands-on experience while sparking interest in the trades. Beyond this program, RUC also supports local students through scholarships, helping them pursue further education and invest in the community's future.

"We treat you like a neighbor, because we are your neighbors. We take great pride in our work and are always looking for ways to learn and improve," Schuppner said. Horkan added that RUC staff are eager to take part in statewide training and networking opportunities. "MEUW's safety program stands out as best-in-class, and participation allows our staff to build lasting networks with neighboring utilities," he said.

With RUC at its core, residents can enjoy the confidence that comes from infrastructure built for the future, in a city that is connected, resilient, and ready for whatever comes next.

Reedsburg may be small in size, yes — but big in heart, innovation, and community pride. ●

*Karen Whitmer is a regular contributor to LIVE LINES; she is a freelance communicator based in the Fox Valley.*

## Wisconsin UTILITY NEWS Digest

### WPPI Energy extends agreement for power from Point Beach

Sun Prairie-based WPPI Energy announced Dec. 8 that the not-for-profit power supplier reached a new agreement with NextEra Energy Resources and will continue to take 168 megawatts (MW) of electric generation from the Point Beach Nuclear Plant into the 2050s. Located near Two Rivers, Wis., Point Beach is a major source of emissions-free baseload generation in the region and has supplied dependable power since the early 1970s.

"Maintaining a diverse, balanced portfolio is one of the WPPI membership's greatest strengths," said WPPI President and CEO

Mike Peters. "Securing this emissions-free baseload resource at a known cost supports long-term stability for our member communities in a rapidly changing energy industry."

The agreement follows a September approval by the Nuclear Regulatory Commission of Point Beach's second license renewal, allowing the facility to continue operating for an additional 20 years.

### Former PSC Chair named head of Alliant's Wisconsin utility

Becky Valcq was appointed President of Alliant Energy's Wisconsin energy company, effective Jan. 5. Valcq served as

Chair of the state Public Service Commission (PSC) after a 2019 appointment by Gov. Tony Evers. She left the PSC in February 2024 and joined Madison-based Alliant as Assistant Vice President of Regulatory Affairs six months later. She succeeds David de Leon who retires July 1, 2026, after 39 years with the company. In a news release, Alliant described the move as a "planned transition."

According to reporting by Wisconsin Public Radio, Valcq's new role heightens concerns about what utility watchdogs call a "revolving-door pattern," in which former regulators take positions with the same entities they once regulated. ●

## Municipal employees earn certificate for completing leadership program

Seven MEUW members recently took the next step in their professional development journeys. Pictured at right are (*back row, from left*): **Kim Ganz** (Electric Superintendent, Trempealeau), **Scott Hoffman** (Electric Foreman, Sturgeon Bay), **Bryan Breuning** (Crew Leader, Sturgeon Bay), **Ryan Roehrborn** (Electrical Operations Manager, Plymouth), (*front row*) **Max Mayer** (Journeyman Lineman, Plymouth), **Josh Wellmann** (Water Field Supervisor, Oconomowoc), and **Tyler Sneen** (Electrical Engineer, Wisconsin Rapids), who were recognized during a recent training session held in Mauston.

Each of them has now completed MEUW's three-part Municipal Utility Leadership Training program. The certificate program focuses on a set of core competencies essential to success as a leader in a municipal utility setting. Training is designed for new, emerging, and seasoned leaders, managers, and supervisors. Courses in the program are offered on a rotating basis each calendar year. Classes and dates are for 2026 are:

- Leading With Collaboration: April 2;
- Leading Through Consistency: Aug. 5; and



- Leading Through Coaching: Dec. 2.

All training classes are held in Mauston and offered in-person only. Check MEUW's website for full details. Registration will open six weeks prior to each scheduled date. ●

To learn more about professional development opportunities, visit [meuw.org/pdp](http://meuw.org/pdp). ●



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Whether you need to tackle aging poles, resolve double wood, plan future distribution improvements, or simply get ahead of joint use demands, ISG brings practical solutions and momentum to every project.

We look forward to supporting MEUW members and continuing the strong tradition of public power across Wisconsin.



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## Associate Member program helps keep public power strong

The Associate Member program that MEUW offers for consultants, manufacturers, and distributors of utility equipment and supplies has been relaunched for 2026. As part of the redesigned engagement effort, Associate Members choose from and take advantage of a variety of valuable benefits, including trade show space, sponsorship opportunities, advertising placements, member communications, and access to MEUW events and utility members.

MEUW Associate Members are routinely recognized in communications materials shared with member utilities. Funding provided through the Associate Member program enables MEUW to deliver services to its member utilities for fees that are lower than otherwise would be possible. Connecting utility suppliers with municipal utilities leaders helps strengthen public power.

As part of the 2026 program, companies providing more than \$750 of annual support through membership fees and sponsorships receive tiered recognition. Those companies are being recognized as annual sponsors at MEUW events throughout 2026. To date, 22 companies are supporting at “Elite” or “Premier” levels in 2026. A full list of annual supporters is available at [www.meuw.org/2026](http://www.meuw.org/2026).

### MEUW scholarship applications are due Jan. 23

Applications for MEUW’s “Powering Futures” Scholarship are now being accepted. MEUW provides this scholarship annually to support students pursuing careers in electrical power distribution. Applications for this year’s awards will be accepted through Jan. 23. To be eligible, students must reside in a Wisconsin public power community and must be pursuing post-secondary education to become a Field Service Technician, Groundman, Lineman Apprentice, Electric Meter Technician, Substation Electrician Apprentice or Utility Technician. MEUW members are encouraged to share this opportunity with high school seniors in their community! Full details can be found at [meuw.org/scholarships](http://meuw.org/scholarships).

## In case you missed it ...

### PPE credited with saving Wisconsin man’s life

Personal protective equipment (PPE) is not optional, and it’s not something to take for granted. A recent incident widely reported by news outlets across Wisconsin is a powerful reminder of why inspecting and wearing your PPE matters.

A 39-year-old man chopping wood was struck in the head when a tree fell the wrong way. He suffered severe injuries to his face, jaw, and neck —



but he survived because he was wearing a helmet. Medical staff told his family that the helmet (shown in the photo being held by the man’s mother) is what saved his life. The helmet cracked and broke as it absorbed the impact, doing exactly what it was designed to do.

That outcome could have been very different if the helmet had been damaged, worn out, or not worn at all. PPE only works if it is:


- Worn every time;
- The correct type for the task;
- Properly fitted; and
- Inspected before use.

Cracks, UV damage, worn straps, missing padding, or expired equipment can all reduce the level of protection — sometimes to the point where it fails when you need it most.

Take a moment before each job to inspect your PPE. Replace anything that shows signs of wear or damage. That simple step can be the difference between a close call and a life-altering injury.

As this family’s story shows, PPE isn’t just equipment — it’s protection for your life, your family, and your future.

**Editor’s Note:** The incident reported here occurred in December 2025; it did not involve a municipal electric utility worker. *LIVE LINES* is sharing the story as a reminder to always use PPE — it can save a life!



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# Focus on Energy expands offerings, increases incentives for 2026

**F**ocus on Energy has announced a wide range of program changes for 2026 designed to expand offerings, increase rebates and incentives, and make energy efficiency more accessible for both residential and business customers. The updates include new product options, higher rebates across multiple categories, and streamlined participation pathways. These changes are intended to give utilities even more tools to help customers save energy, reduce costs, and maximize the benefits of Focus on Energy programs.

## Residential Program Updates

Residential customers will see more choices and higher incentives in 2026. Focus will begin testing a new “build-your-own” Pack option, allowing a limited selection of customers to customize their free energy-saving packs. In addition, new pre-configured packs will be available, tailored specifically for the kitchen, bathroom, and family room. Focus on Energy's [Online Marketplace](#) is expanding this year to include discounted spray foam and cellular shades, with free shipping continuing for all orders.

Rebates for [insulation and air sealing](#) in single family homes will increase by roughly 25 percent with higher incentives for households below 150% of area median income. Rebates will now cover sealing and insulating ducts in both conditioned and semi-conditioned spaces, opening participation to mobile homes.

[Multifamily](#) property owners will benefit from higher lighting and HVAC rebates for existing building upgrades, now aligned with business program rates. A new Affordable Housing tier offers enhanced incentives for new construction projects serving low-income and affordable housing residents.

[Residential solar PV](#) incentives will be set at \$600 per kilowatt, capped at \$2,400 per system. The rural bonus will be discontinued, and all applications will require confirmation of installation date and Federal Residential Clean Energy Credit status.

## Non-Residential Program Updates

Business customers will also see expanded opportunities.

[Standard rebates](#) will increase by 20%–30% across most technology types, with updated amounts posted after Jan. 1, 2026. Focus continues to simplify rebate structures by reducing the number of measures and transitioning common custom projects into standard categories.

[Custom incentives](#) for efficiency projects will rise by about 30%. Projects with a base payback under one year will now qualify for incentives up to 100% of project cost, capped at \$50,000. Business solar PV incentives will be set at \$600 per kilowatt up to \$2,400, then \$50 per kilowatt thereafter, capped at \$25,000. The solar PV incentive bonus for agricultural producers will be discontinued.

Customers participating in [Energy Design Assistance](#) and Energy Design Review will see higher incentives for new construction projects, including added incentives for demand savings and adjustments to reflect rising costs and updated building codes.

## Building Optimization Updates

To qualify for [retrocommissioning](#) incentives, projects must now achieve at least 3% energy savings to qualify, up from 1%. For buildings not meeting this threshold, the rebranded Building Performance Optimization (BPO) program will provide a simpler path, with reduced data collection requirements, straightforward rebate amounts, and new boiler and chiller tune-up measures.

[Practical Energy Management](#) for commercial, small and medium industrial, school, and government customers will continue, offering energy plan development, benchmarking support, and training reimbursement. [Strategic Energy Management \(SEM\)](#) for large industrial and higher education facilities will also continue, providing enhanced support such as energy modeling, project identification, and incentives for implementing SEM strategies.

## Other Business Updates

- **Agribusiness:** New referral bonuses for farmers, plus additional incentives tied to tune-up projects.
- **Compressed Air Energy Challenge:** Rebates for leak repairs and a 20% bonus coupon for retrofit projects will continue.
- **Schools & Government:** The Tribal Investment Fund will be restructured to provide up to \$25,000 per tribe for eligible energy-efficient upgrades. The Rural Electric Reduction Accelerator will sunset after 2025, with final applications due by Feb. 28, 2026.

To make participation easier, Energy Advisors will continue to help business customers with paperwork. The Prefilled Application Request Form at [focusonenergy.com/PFApp](https://focusonenergy.com/PFApp) allows customers to upload invoices or proposals and receive guidance on next steps.

With expanded offerings, higher incentives, and streamlined participation, Focus on Energy's 2026 updates provide municipal utilities with powerful tools to help customers save energy and money. Focus on Energy will also continue to implement the [IRA Home Energy Rebates](#) in 2026, building on the successful rollout in 2024 and 2025. These rebates, which can be combined with Focus rebates, provide instant discounts on qualifying electric appliances, home upgrades, and contractor-installed envelope measures for qualified households. Participating utilities are encouraged to share all of these opportunities, ensuring that households, businesses, and institutions across Wisconsin can take full advantage of programs. ●

# MEUW hosts Customers First Annual Meeting in Sun Prairie

The Customers First Coalition (CFC) held its annual meeting in Sun Prairie on Dec. 9. MEUW is a founding member of the issues-advocacy organization that was born out of the threat to deregulate Wisconsin’s electric utilities in the late 1990s, and has a permanent seat on the CFC Board of Directors. MEUW hosted the meeting at its office in Sun Prairie, which also included a pre-meeting visit to the new home of Sun Prairie Utilities (SPU), which was nearing completion. State Sen. Melissa Ratcliff and Public Service Commission Kristy Nieto were among those taking part in the SPU tour. Also at the meeting, MEUW President and CEO Tim Heinrich was elected to serve as 2026 Chair of CFC’s Board. ●



The Customer First Coalition visited Sun Prairie Utilities’ new facility for a hard-hat tour on Dec. 9. (From left) Cody Conrad (SPU), Tim Heinrich (MEUW), Rob Richard (Wisconsin Electric Cooperative Association), Commissioner Nieto, Sen. Ratcliff, Jill Weiss (SPU), Tom Hanrahan (WPPI Energy), Luke Fuller (Dairyland Power Cooperative), and Matt Sweeney (PSCW).

## 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](#) or use your smartphone to scan the QR code. Here are some current opportunities available:

**City of Evansville** — [Water and Light Foreperson](#)

**City of Lake Mills** — [Director of Utilities](#)

**City of Cumberland** — [Journeyman Line Worker](#)

**City of Cuba City** — [Journeyman Lineman](#)

Review postings for application deadlines.

When your utility is hiring, be sure to email the job posting to [office@meuw.org](mailto:office@meuw.org).



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