

# LIVE Lines

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## Electric Operations Conference & Expo draws large crowd

The annual gathering of municipal and electric cooperative employees from across the state took place at the Kalahari Resort in Wisconsin Dells in January. This year’s Electric Operations Conference & Expo (EOCE) brought together nearly 600 utility attendees and exhibitors for two days of learning, networking, and the Midwest’s premier showcase of utility tools, supplies, and services.

Asked what they “liked” about the conference, those who responded to a post-event survey highlighted the opportunities for networking. One respondent wrote, “It was my first time

attending, and I thought the ability to network was amazing. It’s great to get different perspectives and learn about what each individual municipal is facing.”

Attendees and exhibitors alike provided positive feedback about the event, with 85% of those who responded to a post-event survey saying they were “quite” or “extremely satisfied” with the conference, and 92% said they are “very” or “extremely likely” to attend next year.

The conference agenda offered something for everyone — municipal and cooperative employees and leaders alike — with a wide range of topics. Wednesday’s session included a presentation from Public Service Commissioner Kristy Nieto, who was appointed to the role two years ago. A former staffer at the PSC, she shared insights on her transition to being one of the state’s three utility regulators as well as current areas of continuing focus, including regional grid reliability, affordability concerns, demand growth, and transmission planning.

Wisconsin Emergency Management (WEM) Administrator Greg Engle discussed how WEM is adapting to the increasing frequency and severity of storms and the evolving challenges emergency management faces. He focused on the strength of Wisconsin’s utility public-private partnerships and discussed strategies utilities can employ to en-

hance resilience and ensure service continuity.

The topic *du jour* in utility circles is data centers and the impact these large energy users will have on utilities as well as long-term utility infrastruc-

*Continued on page 2*

Nearly 600 utility registrants and exhibitors attended EOCE26 on Jan. 14 and 15. Check out pages 2 and 3 for more photos from the event.



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ture. Attorney Delanie Breuer of Madison-based Fredrickson & Byron, P.A. shared her perspectives on the impact data center proposals are having on the energy landscape, as well as what utilities must know and do to be prepared.

Day one wrapped with a keynote address by professional speaker Brenda Clark-Hamilton, who led the group in an engaging and reflective presentation focused on personal resilience. She offered strategies participants can use to bounce-back and keep moving forward despite difficult challenges, both at work and at home.

Thursday kicked off with an update from ATC, during which participants heard about unprecedented load growth and how the transmission-only provider — the “utility for utilities” as the presenters described the company — is working to meet power demand. Two other presentations focused on new and improving energy storage technologies. Dave Krause, P. E., Engineering Operations Manager for EPS Engineering & Design, Inc., drew on his 25+ years of electric power systems engineering to lead a discussion of battery energy storage and power stations, highlighting both “promises and pitfalls.”

The group also heard about an innovative new effort — a first-in-the-nation long-duration energy storage project, the “Energy Dome” — being developed by Alliant Energy in Portage, Wis. Finally, with so much discussion about changes and budget cuts impacting the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), the audience heard from Giacomo Wray of the American Public Power Association (APPA), who provided an update on recent developments and insights about what utilities should know about reimbursements for mutual aid.

Breakout sessions gave attendees an opportunity to learn how to prepare for Department of Safety and Professional Services (DSPS) inspections, stray voltage testing in Wisconsin, and how different types of vehicles are being leveraged for utility security and resilience. The day’s presentations ran

## Arc-flash survivor implores workers to Believe in Safety

Having nearly a decade of experience as an electrical worker, **Brandon Schroeder** was well aware of the dangers of performing live maintenance tasks in his work. At the end of a long, hot work day in 2011, he was tasked with relocating a cord inside of a panel — something he had done dozens of times before. The cord fell and hit the live panel, catching Brandon in a massive arc flash. He spent four weeks in the hospital’s burn unit, and it took six more months of recovery before he could return to work. Soon after his near-fatal accident, he realized that he could use his experience to convince others to “Believe in Safety.”

Brandon was the featured speaker to end this year’s Electric Operations Conference & Expo in Wisconsin Dells. He shared his sobering story with the predominantly male audience, using his own experience to urge electric-industry workers to remember that safety shortcuts can go very wrong — and they are just never worth the risk.

In his impassioned and highly detailed retelling of the accident, Brandon talked about the toll it’s taken on his

family. With a wife and two young children, Brandon says it’s hard to imagine what their lives would be like if the events of that day had gone differently. Even so, the physical, emotional, and financial challenges of recovering from such a serious accident were difficult to overcome, and there’s not a day that goes by when Brandon doesn’t think about that day and how the series of decisions he made changed the course of his life.

What started as a single speaking engagement to share the circumstances surrounding his accident became a new calling for Brandon, who lives in eastern Iowa, and he has presented his story to hundreds of organizations all across the country. His thought-provoking talk included a brief video summarizing the journey, which is available [here](#).



concurrently with the start of the Expo, which featured more than 130 exhibitors showcasing a wide variety of utility-related services and supplies.

Small-group cohort discussions rounded out the program, offering both municipi-

pal and electric cooperative attendees the opportunity to discuss mutual aid, safety leadership, or advocacy. The closing keynote (*see above*) left the crowd moved by the speaker’s own near-fatal experience and his urging to believe in safety. ●



# Scenes from EOCE26 in Wisconsin Dells

The 2026 edition of the Electric Operations Conference & Expo featured large-group general sessions along with breakout and smaller group cohort sessions, allowing attendees to select the topic most relevant to their role. The event also included a trade show covering more than 15,000 square feet of space with more than 130 utility supplier displays and five hours to network and explore the utility products and services.



1

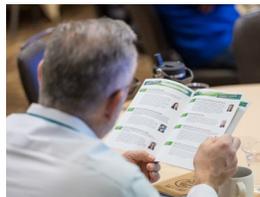
(1) Director, Customer & Corporate Affairs Rob Hanson and Manager, Customer Engagement Andy Eberhardt provided an update from ATC, explaining how transmission infrastructure is expanding to meet growing demand; (2) Dave Krause of EPS addressed hybrid power plants and the promises and pitfalls of battery energy storage systems; (3) Corey Anderson of Wesco — one of four presenting sponsors of the event — visited with attendees in the Exhibit Hall during Thursday’s five-hour Expo.



2



3



## Special thanks

*to these exhibitors who provided door prizes for the Expo Bingo*

- |                              |                                       |
|------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| American Padmount Systems    | JJ Kane                               |
| Border States                | Koppers, Inc.                         |
| Broadband Technology Group   | KW Associates                         |
| Chippewa Valley Connected    | MJ Electric                           |
| Clearline Innovation, LLC    | MP Technologies, LLC                  |
| Crescent Electric Supply Co. | Northeast Wisconsin Technical College |
| Electrical Consultants Inc.  | The Okonite Company                   |
| ElectroTech Inc.             | Professional Computer Solutions       |
| Fast Forward                 | Radian Research                       |
| FS3                          | SCS Engineers                         |
| G.E.T. Utility Sales         | Specialty Fleet                       |
| Hubbell Power Systems        | TE Connectivity                       |
| Irby                         | Terex                                 |
| ISG                          | TSTM                                  |
|                              | USSI                                  |
|                              | Vermeer                               |
|                              | WESCO                                 |
|                              | Wintroy Supply                        |

**Save the dates for EOCE27:** Next year’s Electric Operations Conference & Expo is scheduled to return to Kalahari Resort in Wisconsin Dells on Jan. 13 and 14, 2027. Details will be released in late August.

# Applications for MEUW Safety Achievement Awards due by March 1

**W**orker safety is a central priority for MEUW, and the association recognizes municipal utilities that actively work to improve safety performance. MEUW is now accepting applications based on 2025 performance measures. Each utility must compile the required information and submit the application spreadsheet with the accompanying instructions. (Regional Safety Management Program participants can expect their Regional Safety Coordinator to complete the spreadsheet.)

The MEUW Safety Achievement Award honors strong safety performance and encourages proactive safety efforts. Based on voluntary reporting, the award recognizes utilities for maintaining on-the-job focus, following safety rules, using safe work practices, and supporting one another. In 2025, MEUW recognized 43 utilities for their 2024 safety record.

The award also reflects the commitment of management and governing boards to supporting safe operations by providing proper equipment and ongoing training.

Recipients are placed in gold, silver, and bronze categories based on established safety criteria. Applications and required documentation are due by March 1, with awards presented at MEUW's Annual Conference in May. Please direct any questions to Director of Safety Services and Operations Mike Czuprynko at (608) 478-2530 or by [email](mailto:email).

## Members' NEWS



**Hershel Marks** is now Director of Public Works for the City of Boscobel. He most recently worked as Water Foreman and is taking on responsibilities previously held by Mike Reynolds, who is officially retiring on June 30.

**Eric Saltenberger** has taken on the role of Utility Foreman at Eagle River Light & Water, succeeding Bob Mignon, who retired after more than 25 years in public power.



**Jill Weiss**, General Manager of Sun Prairie Utilities, recently accepted an appointment to a three-year term on the MEUW Board of Directors' Nominating Committee, which is tasked with recommending candidates to stand for election to the association's Executive Committee. The

Nominating Committee is chaired by **Tim Aaby** (Rice Lake), and includes **Steve Brooks** (Waupun) and **Brian Carroll** (Gresham) as members.

### MEUW Community Spotlight

The regular *LIVE LINES* feature focusing on the history and unique qualities of municipal electric utilities will return next month.

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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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An archive of past issues of *Live Lines* is available at [www.issuu.com/meuw](http://www.issuu.com/meuw)

## Larson plans to retire from MEUW in May

After more than four decades dedicated to electric line work, Randy Larson is retiring (again). His last day with MEUW is May 29. Randy joined MEUW in August 2018 after retiring from Chippewa Valley Technical College, where he served as the State of Wisconsin Apprenticeship Instructor for 26 years. He is the primary classroom instructor for MEUW's Job Training and Safety (JT&S) program. All total, he taught more than 500 apprentices to become journeyman lineworkers, with many of them continuing to learn from Randy through his role with MEUW in the past seven-plus years.



MEUW President and CEO Tim Heinrich said, "For years I've been asked, 'What is MEUW going to do when Randy retires?' So when Randy pulled me aside after EOCE and told me his decision and timing, I realized it was the moment of truth. I also realized how fortunate MEUW has been to have someone with Randy's expertise, dedication, and passion representing us and all of our municipal utilities. Saying 'thank you' to Randy doesn't begin to express the impact he's had on so many."

More than a year ago, the MEUW Board of Directors began developing a playbook to ensure the association is prepared when business-critical positions and key employees like Randy step away from MEUW. That process included developing a set of key competencies and experience requirements needed to fully support the key employee's successor and ensure continuity of operations. MEUW Director of Safety Services and Operations Mike Czuprynko is already using the playbook in anticipation of hiring a new JT&S instructor when Don Harnisch begins a phased retirement in early April. Randy's decision means MEUW will be able to fill two new positions from the pool of qualified candidates. Among the critical requirements for the role is a journeyman's card as an electric lineworker. The position is currently posted [here](#).

"Randy is such a big part of MEUW's safety program and we congratulate him," Mike said. "We'll never be able to replace his knowledge and passion, but he's given us the time and opportunity to find the right person and make sure they get started on the right path to keeping MEUW's training as good as it's been in the years Randy has delivered it."

"The reality of Randy's retirement is still fresh," Tim added. "I'm hoping we can work out having Randy stay connected to MEUW as a consultant when needed. No matter what, we want to spend the next few months celebrating Randy and the tremendous legacy he leaves."

EOCE — the Electric Operations Conference & Expo, formerly known as the Joint Superintendents' Conference — includes the annual Apprentice Graduation banquet, honoring the newest journeyman line workers, meter technicians, and substation technicians. Every year, Randy has served as Master of Ceremonies for the event, offering words of wisdom and encouraging the next generation of utility workers to "work it safe." This year's banquet was Randy's last before his retirement.

"Randy kept his retirement private at the banquet because he didn't want to steal any of the graduates' limelight," Tim said. "Nevertheless, the folks who gather for EOCE deserve a chance to honor Randy and his career. We'll put together a celebration worthy of Randy's contributions for EOCE27 next January. I look forward to sharing the details when they're finalized." ●

# MEUW NEWS Monitor

## Utility Accounting & Finance are subjects of Feb. 11 training class

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.

## There's still time to register for Apparatus Workshop next week

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](#).

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

Effective lockout/tagout depends on clear communication among crews, dispatchers, and transmission providers. This two-hour session on Wednesday, Feb. 25, covers key requirements, OSHA hold card standards, and the essentials of accurate three-way communication. While procedures vary by provider, the training highlights common expectations and practical guidance

you can use across systems. The training is free and can be attended in-person (in Sun Prairie) or virtually. Advance registration is required; learn more [here](#).

## Foreman's Roundtable is unique opportunity to share and learn

The foreman role is important to safety and efficiency when operating a utility. The people leading utility line crews face common challenges and often don't have an opportunity to talk with others facing those same challenges. For the third consecutive year, MEUW is bringing crew leaders together to share ideas, learn from one another, and develop leadership and communication skills, especially regarding safety. The one-day forum is planned for Wednesday, March 25, at PinSeekers in DeForest. The day's agenda will include discussion on topics most im-

portant to the participants. Following the Roundtable, attendees will have the chance to take part in an optional teambuilding and networking activity at the 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 material from 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](#).

## Develop skills to be a more effective coach during April training

High performing leaders develop the skills to coach others effectively. Knowing how and when to coach is an essential leadership quality that can benefit both you and your organization. Save the date for the next class in MEUW's "Municipal Utility Leadership Certificate Program" – Leading Through Coaching – which will be held Wednesday, April 2. Registration and details are available [here](#). ●

## Upcoming workshop will offer practical strategies for utility leaders

MEUW is hosting an interactive, two-day Leadership Workshop — on March 12 and 13 in Wisconsin Dells — that is designed to help develop and strengthen the next generation of public power leaders across Wisconsin. The training features two highly experienced utility industry leaders who have led similar training sessions for municipal employees at sites across the country, and will provide participants with practical tools and insights to lead confidently through the day-to-day challenges that impact a municipal utility.

The program will focus on strengthening communication skills, building trust, managing change, and enhancing team collaboration. Through facilitated discussions, attendees will explore real-world strategies they can apply immediately in their organizations. The workshop is geared toward utility professionals at all stages of their leadership journey.

Beyond the formal curriculum, the workshop's true value lies in the connections formed among peers. Participants will not only have opportunities to learn new leadership concepts, but also to exchange ideas with fellow leaders who face similar challenges. Registration is now open. Full details are available [here](#).

# Help MEUW honor those strengthening public power

Recognizing the industry leaders who have helped to strengthen public power in Wisconsin is a long-held tradition for MEUW. Honorees include municipal utility employees, governing officials, business partners, legislators, and others who support public power.

MEUW Honors was created to acknowledge impactful contributions at the community, state, and sometimes national level. Over time, new categories have been added, including the Exemplary Service and Next Generation Leaders awards that were presented for the first time in 2024. The “Public Power Partnership Award” is a new category added to this year’s program (*see sidebar*).

Each award has defined criteria, and MEUW values the opportunity to highlight the achievements of public power professionals.

There is no cost to nominate someone, and the process is simple. Just share information about the person you believe deserves recognition, and the Awards Committee will assign the appropriate category. Eligibility details and the nomination form are available at [www.MEUW.org/awards](http://www.MEUW.org/awards), with submissions due Monday, March 30.

Awards will be presented during a luncheon at the MEUW Annual Conference on Thursday, May 14, in Madison. ●



## New award highlights the power of partnership

The MEUW Awards Committee is introducing a new award category for 2026. The award is intended 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.

## MEUW is seeking nominations for these awards by March 30:

### To recognize municipal utility leaders

**Distinguished Service Award:** The highest honor bestowed by MEUW, the award recognizes exceptional leadership in and dedication to public power. A nominee must be an employee of a MEUW member system and active in MEUW for at least 10 years.

### To recognize public officials

**Public Official Award:** Presented to individuals who have made a significant impact on public power through an extraordinary commitment to service. Recipients are honored based on years of service.

**Pillar of Public Power Award:** Presented to individuals who have served a minimum of 10 years as a member of a public power governing body (e.g., utility com-

mission, city council, or village board). Recognizes those who support public power ideals, but do not directly work in or for a public power utility.

### To honor service by municipal employees

**Exemplary Service Award:** Recognizes outstanding service/achievement or other recognizable acts, including contributions to MEUW through committee meetings and groups. Awarded to a municipal utility employee who has made substantial contributions toward the overall success of their member utility.

**Excellence in Line Work Award:** Celebrates individuals who consistently demonstrate dedication to line work.

### Next Generation Leader Award:

Recognizes employees who may be relatively new to public power and have made significant contributions to their municipality; awarded to individuals with fewer than eight years of service to their utility to showcase emerging leaders.

### To honor others

**Friend of Public Power Award:** Honors individuals and organizations whose work supports the principles and ideals of public power, but who do not work in or for a community-owned utility.

**MEUW Meritorious Service Award:** Presented to individuals to recognize outstanding service/achievement, or other recognizable acts while an employee of an MEUW member utility, or in service to MEUW.



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# Wisconsin UTILITY NEWS Digest

## Data center proposals draw scrutiny from communities, PSC

Two major data center proposals in Wisconsin are encountering challenges at both the local and state levels, raising questions about transparency, infrastructure costs, and long-term impacts on communities and utility customers.

In late January, the Village of De Forest announced it will not move forward with a proposed \$12 billion data center from Virginia-based QTS Data Centers, stating the project is “not feasible.” The proposal would have required annexing roughly 1,600 acres from the neighboring Town of Vienna and had drawn significant public opposition.

The announcement came after reporting by Wisconsin Watch revealed village staff had been discussing the project with the developer for several months before it was publicly disclosed. A developer presenta-

tion and public hearings had been scheduled, however, village staff ultimately recommended rejecting the annexation request, effectively ending the proposal.

In a statement, QTS said, “it has become clear that now is not the right time for our proposed project to move forward in De Forest.” Adding, “we are disappointed with this outcome.”

At the state level, a separate data center-related proposal is under review by the Public Service Commission of Wisconsin (PSC). Milwaukee-based We Energies is seeking approval for a new electric rate structure designed for large data centers, intended to require those customers to pay for the infrastructure needed to serve their significant energy demand.

Consumer advocates, PSC staff, and environmental groups have raised concerns that parts of the proposal could shift some infrastructure and fuel costs to oth-

er utility customers, particularly if projected energy demand or market revenues do not materialize. We Energies has stated the proposal is designed to prevent data center costs from increasing rates for other customers.

According to Wisconsin Public Radio, the state is home to roughly 40 data centers, stretching from Kenosha to Eau Claire. The existing facilities are tiny compared with the most recent developments, including three under construction in Beaver Dam, Mount Pleasant, and Port Washington. Other projects have been proposed in Janesville, Kenosha, and Menomonie.

In Port Washington, where three people were arrested during a city council meeting on the data center in December, residents are attempting to recall the city’s Mayor, alleging he has been secretive about the \$15 billion data center from OpenAI, Oracle, and Vantage Data Centers.



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## Manitowoc refueling project is subject of recent utility podcast episode

The “Refuel Renewable” project at Manitowoc Public Utilities (MPU) is the topic of a podcast produced by the Customers First Coalition (CFC). MPU is refueling two existing circulating fluidized bed boilers that burn primarily fossil fuels, such as coal and petroleum coke, in order to burn renewable fuel pellets. The pellets, touted as “100% Wisconsin-recognized,” are made from local non-economically-recyclable industrial paper and plastic waste that would otherwise be landfill-bound.

MPU CEO and General Manager Troy Adams and MEUW Director of Legislative and Regulatory Relations Tyler Vorpapel joined podcast host CFC Executive Director Kristin Gilkes to discuss the refueling project. The MPU episode of *The Electric Wire* was released Dec. 30. CFC’s podcast is available publicly and includes state lawmakers and regulatory and legislative staff among its regular audience.

CFC launched the podcast series in February 2020 and has featured municipal utilities in a number of episodes through the years. To access, search for *The Electric Wire* wherever you subscribe to podcasts, or listen at CFC’s [YouTube channel](#). MEUW is a founding member of CFC, which formed in the late 1990s in response to talk about deregulating electricity in Wisconsin. ●

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## Public power utilities mobilized early to prepare for winter storm

Days before the storm had fully formed, weather forecasters were warning of the potential for catastrophic damage and widespread power outages from a massive winter storm set to impact 200 million Americans. As the likelihood of severe ice, snow, and extreme cold became more obvious, Winter Storm Fern earned a name on Jan. 22. Public power utilities from the South through the Northeast U.S. heeded those warnings and the American Public Power Association (APPA) began mobilizing resources to provide mutual aid to the affected areas.



Ice accumulated on tree limbs and power lines as Winter Storm Fern impacted a large part of the southern and eastern U.S. in January, including on this street in Nashville, Tenn.

grew to provide mutual aid to the affected areas.

In cooperation with APPA's Mutual Aid Working Group, utilities in 13 states proactively monitored forecasts, secured crews, prepared equipment, checked inventories, and warned customers about potential outages and higher energy usage.

Across the areas impacted — from Texas to New England and all parts between — grid operators worked with state agencies and utilities to prepare for freezing temperatures, higher electricity demand, and potential lower reserves.

While Wisconsinites felt the extreme cold, ice and snow did not affect the state or any of MEUW's member utilities. Despite significant uncertainty about Fern's path and impact, MEUW staff worked with APPA to monitor evolving needs and assembled a list of available equipment and line personnel ready to be deployed. Although the call never came — Florida utilities were

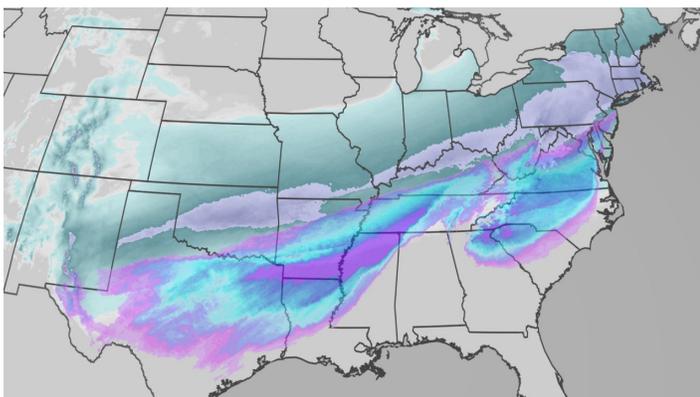


Photo above from NES Facebook page; map from The Weather Channel.

## New working group is focusing on cyber and physical security

At the suggestion of an MEUW member utility, a new Cybersecurity/Physical Security working group has formed to support Wisconsin's municipal electric utilities as they navigate evolving security risks. The group is intended to be a peer-driven resource for MEUW members, particularly smaller utilities that may have limited staff, budgets, or technical capacity.



With cyber threats continuing to escalate, much of the available guidance is designed for large, investor-owned utilities. Municipal utilities are generally much smaller and are not subject to formal cybersecurity compliance requirements. Nevertheless, the risks remain real and adopting baseline security practices can significantly improve resilience.

The working group plans to address both cybersecurity and physical security, recognizing the close connection between the two. This self-managed initiative will provide a forum for utilities to share experiences, learn from peers, and collaborate on practical, right-sized approaches to security.

MEUW members interested in learning more are encouraged to contact [Don Krause](#) at Kaukauna Utilities, who is chairing the new working group.

eager to repay their neighbors for help provided after hurricanes in recent years — the exercise provided a good test of MEUW's response to out-of-state mutual aid. Nearly 20 municipal utilities had offered more than 35 workers from Wisconsin.

Fern took aim at areas that are not accustomed to handling the worst that winter can bring. The storm began impacting local areas during the weekend of Jan. 24 and 25. One of the areas hardest hit was Nashville, Tenn., home to one of the larger municipal electric systems in the United States. Nashville Electric Service (NES) — which serves 470,000 customers and maintains nearly 5,900 miles of distribution and transmission lines in a 700-square-mile area in north-central Tennessee — reported 230,000 customers lost power as a result of the storm. Mutual aid crews from Florida, Indiana, Kentucky, Maryland, Mississippi, Ohio, and Tennessee assisted in the recovery. As of Jan. 31, NES had worked to replace more than 550 broken poles, with 45,000 customers still without service. The utility said it expects to have power fully restored by Feb. 9 — three weeks after Fern arrived in Music City. ●

# Graduating apprentices honored at January banquet

Each year, the municipal and cooperative utilities in Wisconsin honor the apprentices who have completed their training and graduated to journeyman. Nearly 300 guests attended a special banquet held in conjunction with the Electric Operations Conference & Expo on Jan. 15 in Wisconsin Dells where the Class of 2025 from Chippewa Valley Technical College and Northeast Wisconsin Technical College were recognized. MEUW's Randy Larson served as master of ceremonies for the banquet, which included a talk by Eric Johnson, Safety & Environmental Coordinator from Adams-Columbia Electric Cooperative. ●



Tyler Duessing — Two Rivers Water & Light  
 Jordan Dyer — City of Fennimore Electric Utility  
 Cody Heyrman — WPPI Energy  
 Chad Hoffman — Wis. Public Service Corp.  
 Mike Holsclaw — Superior Water, Light & Power  
 Jeremy Jelinek — Wisconsin Public Service Corp.  
 Eric Martinson — Oconomowoc Utilities  
 Michael Mathews — Evansville Water & Light  
 Grant Mattson — Wisconsin Public Service Corp.  
 Corey O'Hearn — Mount Horeb Utilities  
 Colton Sanborn — Eagle River Light & Water  
 Sam Trace — Waunakee Utilities

## Northeast Wisconsin Technical College (NWTTC)

### Lineworker Apprenticeship

Joshua Bader — Menasha Utilities  
 Ty Becker — Wisconsin Dells Water & Light  
 Zach Boehnlein — City of Kiel Elec Utility  
 Jacob Boness — Columbus Utilities  
 Jacob Dowden — Sun Prairie Utilities  
 Andrew Herzog — Shawano Municipal Utilities  
 Wyatt Johnson — Riverland Energy Cooperative  
 Elton Kelsey — Upper Peninsula Power Co.  
 Sandon McClurg — Village of Prairie du Sac  
 Nicholas Mueller — Jefferson Utilities  
 Garrett Nesheim — Waunakee Utilities  
 Zachary Nilssen — St. Croix Electric Cooperative  
 Eric Osesek — Sheboygan Falls Utilities  
 Jacob Percival — Jefferson Utilities  
 Mason Rice — Kaukauna Utilities  
 Paul Schmeling — Stoughton Utilities  
 Gage Schmidt — Menasha Utilities  
 Hayden Shefchik — Sun Prairie Utilities  
 Mitchell Thompson — Riverland Energy Cooperative

### Substation Technician Apprenticeship

Ryan Ash — Rice Lake Utilities  
 Andrew Chandler — New London Utilities  
 John Clements — Dairyland Power Cooperative  
 Chad Erickson — Dairyland Power Cooperative  
 William Kosmeder — New Glarus Utilities  
 Beau Neinas — Kaukauna Utilities  
 Michael Preissner — Kaukauna Utilities

### Meter Technician Apprenticeship

Joseph Brzezinski — Wisconsin Public Service Corp.  
 Derek Chavers — Wisconsin Public Service Corp.  
 Hunter Dischler — City Utilities of Richland Center

## Chippewa Valley Technical College (CVTC)

### Electric Line Apprenticeship

Matthew Beiswanger — Jolma Utilities  
 Kristopher M. Buran — Superior Water Light and Power  
 Josh Carlsen — Eau Claire Energy Cooperative  
 Brennen Christopherson — Dairyland Power Cooperative  
 Keith J. Ciolkosz — Price Electric Cooperative  
 Nicholas Cork — New Richmond Utilities  
 Tyler Dammann — Marshfield Utilities  
 Ryan Flock — Dairyland Power Cooperative  
 Levi Gage — Marshfield Utilities  
 Maguire C. Girtz — Oconto Electric Cooperative  
 Forrest Gleason — St. Croix Electric Cooperative  
 Hayden Gran — Riverland Electric Cooperative  
 Garret Heim — Dairyland Power Cooperative  
 Noah Jennings — Dairyland Power Cooperative  
 Trevon W. Kennell — Barron Electric Cooperative  
 Reece R.J. Kinney — Jump River Electric Coop  
 Tanner D. Klobucher — Jackson Electric Cooperative  
 Cody S. Kruger — River Falls Municipal Utilities  
 Ian G. Martin — Scenic Rivers Energy Cooperative  
 Joseph R. McKernon — Minnesota Valley Electric Cooperative  
 Tate E. Ovik — Northwestern Wisconsin Electric Co.  
 Brent Paulson — Pierce Pepin Cooperative  
 Kordell Roberts — Jolma Utilities  
 Adam E. Schlicht — LaFarge Municipal Utility  
 Brady Schommer — Pierce Pepin Cooperative  
 Carson Steven Schramm — Waupun Utilities  
 Joel Shear — Dairyland Power Cooperative  
 Braden E. Stegmann — Bayfield Electric Cooperative  
 Randal M. Turnquist — Jolma Utilities  
 Dylan W. Tydrich — Scenic Rivers Energy Cooperative  
 Jesse J. Voldberg — Jolma Utilities  
 Austen Whitwam — Whitehall Electric Utility  
 Isaiah Robert Zak — Northwestern Wisconsin Electric Co.

# New school in Oconto Falls built with focus on energy efficiency

From classrooms and cafeterias to gyms and performing arts spaces, school facilities rely on energy to provide safe, comfortable learning environments. As districts across Wisconsin plan new construction and modernize aging facilities, energy efficiency has become an increasingly important tool for managing long-term operating costs while supporting community sustainability goals.

In partnership with participating utilities, Focus on Energy offers financial incentives and technical resources to help schools incorporate energy-saving measures into capital projects and facility upgrades. These resources are available to public and private K–12 schools, colleges, and universities, and are designed to complement local utility planning and community priorities. In 2025, Focus on Energy paid more than \$6.4 million in rebates to school districts across Wisconsin to support energy-efficient projects and upgrades. Collectively, these improvements are expected to save nearly 45 million kilowatt-hours over their lifecycle, an amount of electricity roughly equal to the annual consumption of about 117 homes, according to the Environmental Protection Agency.

A recent project in Oconto Falls illustrates how these resources can deliver lasting value. The new Oconto Falls Middle School was planned as a long-term investment in the students, community, and environment. Through early coordination and thoughtful design, the district earned more than \$33,000 in incentives from Focus on Energy, including a bonus for reducing peak energy demand. In addition, Oconto Falls Municipal Utilities, a member of WPPI Energy, contributed \$4,758 to support the project.

“From the start, we wanted our new middle school to reflect our community’s commitment to our kids,” said Oconto Falls School District Superintendent Stuart Russ. “By adding energy-saving features, we have created a safe and comfortable place to learn

while keeping more of our budget focused on students, teachers, and the programs that make our schools special.”

The school’s design includes several energy-efficiency upgrades, such as heat recovery systems and a high-efficiency boiler with temperature reset controls. These features are expected to improve operational performance while reducing overall energy use and peak demand. Over time, the school is projected to reduce carbon emissions equivalent to planting more than 4,000 trees annually. Estimated energy cost savings over the next 18 years are expected to offset the average annual salaries of four teachers, highlighting how energy decisions can directly support educational outcomes.

“The Oconto Falls community took a forward-thinking approach to this project,” said Sylvia Lopez, Focus on Energy Energy Advisor. “These upgrades are an investment in the District’s future, creating a school that supports innovative learning for the students.”

Projects like this show the value of partnering with local school districts early in the planning process. Focus on Energy offers design assistance, equipment incentives, and performance bonuses. These resources help utilities manage system demand while supporting critical community infrastructure. Opportunities are available for both new construction and existing-building improvements, including HVAC systems, lighting, controls, and building envelope upgrades.

Efficiency investments in educational facilities help keep resources where they matter most: supporting students, strengthening programs, and building resilient communities. Municipal utilities play a key role in connecting schools with available resources and supporting projects that deliver long-term benefits for the communities they serve.

To learn more about energy-efficiency resources for schools, visit [focusonenergy.com/business/education](https://focusonenergy.com/business/education). ●



## Submit a photo we can use for the cover of MEUW’s next member directory

A photo taken by Arcadia Electric Utility Line Foreman Sam Sobotta appears on the cover of the 2024 edition of the [MEUW Membership Directory](#) (shown at left). And we’d like to feature another picture taken by a MEUW member on the new directory that will be released later this year. If you or someone you know has a great shot you think we should use, please submit it by March 1. Full details are [here](#).



## Mutual Aid Hotline

When you need help, call MEUW – 24 hours a day, seven days a week – for help coordinating mutual aid assistance

# 1-844-ME UW-911

(1-844-638-9911)

# 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:

**Jefferson Utilities** — [Customer Accounts Clerk](#)

**Waunakee Utilities** — General Manager

*This position is responsible for the overall management of the electric, water, and wastewater utility, and reports directly to the Utility Commission.*

*Detailed information about the position and hiring process can be found at [www.waunakeeutilities.com](http://www.waunakeeutilities.com).*



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

**NOTICE:** MEUW uses Mailchimp to distribute *LIVE LINES* and *MEUW Weekly*. In an effort to outsmart spammers, some email servers are known to mark messages sent using Mailchimp as “spam” or “junk.” The best way to ensure you don’t miss MEUW communications is to confirm your email settings are enabled to receive messages from [meuw.org](http://meuw.org).

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## Customer Service Roundtable sessions planned in March, April

Every other year, MEUW organizes a series of roundtable meetings where member utilities can gather and exchange ideas. Six Customer Service Roundtables are planned around the state in March and April. Each forum is a chance for municipal employees of all levels to learn from one another about leading practices, service trends, and emerging issues affecting electric utility customers. Everyone is welcome!

A member of MEUW’s Accounting and Customer Service Committee moderates each session. Focus on Energy provides sponsorship support for the meetings. There is no fee to register; a light lunch is provided at no charge.

The planned dates and locations are:

- Wednesday, March 18 — Rice Lake
- Wednesday, March 25 — Oconomowoc
- Thursday, March 26 — Menasha
- Tuesday, April 7 — Stoughton
- Wednesday, April 8 — Wisconsin Dells
- Thursday, April 14 — Merrilan

Pre-registration is required. Sign up today at [meuw.org/csr](http://meuw.org/csr). Check the website to confirm dates and locations, as some details may change. ●

Check out the  
**archive of past issues**  
 LIVE LINES:  
[www.issuu.com/meuw](http://www.issuu.com/meuw)

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