

## President's Report



William R. Dodds  
President/CEO

## What would life be like without electric co-ops?

By Adam Schwartz

In the holiday movie classic, "It's a Wonderful Life" the lead character, George Bailey (played by Jimmy Stewart), wishes he had never been born due to financial troubles he is experiencing. Through the help of an Angel, he sees how many lives would have been negatively affected if he didn't exist. George comes to realize that, even with his problems, he has a wonderful life with great friends and family.

So what do you think life would be like if community leaders had not founded Spoon River Electric 78 years ago?

Living in the U.S. in 2015, it is nearly impossible to imagine life without electricity. So many of our modern conveniences that improve the quality of our lives are dependent on electricity as the "fuel" to make them work. From the alarm clock that wakes us up, to the refrigerator that keeps our morning milk cold and fresh. From the HVAC unit that keeps us cool in the summer and warm in the winter, to the vacuum that lets us clean more efficiently and all those kitchen appliances that save us time and physical energy. Of course, so much of our entertainment, whether it comes from the TV, radio or computer, depends on the kilowatt-hours that your electric co-op provides. Just think, there would be no smartphones or cell phones if there were no electricity.

Businesses of all kinds rely on electricity to produce and sell the products we need. So, it is no wonder that many electric

co-ops feel that, while our primary product is electricity, we are really in the quality of life business.

As we celebrate the season that reminds us to be thankful for all that we have, it is important to remember the 1.3 billion people in the world that still live without reliable electric service. That is equal to about four times the U.S. population!

Many of the things we take for granted living in the U.S. are much harder and

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more time consuming for people in developing countries around the world. We are proud members of the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA) that is working through their affiliate, NRECA International, and the NRECA International Foundation to help bring

power to people in developing countries like Haiti and Liberia. (<http://www.nreca.coop/it-starts-with-power/>)

We are thankful that our community ancestors right here had the vision and foresight to do for ourselves what needed to be done, gathering our friends and neighbors to form our electric co-op. As the electric business of the 21st century continues to evolve, you can count on Spoon River Electric to meet all of your electric energy needs. More importantly, we are here to help improve the quality of your wonderful life.

## Spoon River Electric Cooperative

930 South Fifth Ave, PO Box 340,  
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### *President/CEO*

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## Spoon River Electric Cooperative – By the Numbers

Miles of line energized: 1,255

Number of members served: 4,808

Number of power poles  
in territory: 29,255

## Illinois electric cooperatives dedicate solar farms

Prairie Power, Inc., a Springfield, Ill. based generation and transmission cooperative providing wholesale power to ten electric distribution cooperatives, has completed construction of two 500 kW solar farms. The Spoon River Solar Farm was dedicated on October 16. The solar farm, located between Havana and Astoria on Highway 24, also includes a unique learning center.

Adams Electric Cooperative, Camp Point; Coles-Moultrie Electric Cooperative, Mattoon; Eastern Illini Electric Cooperative, Paxton; Illinois Electric Cooperative, Winchester; Jo-Carroll Energy, Elizabeth; McDonough Power Cooperative, Macomb; Menard Electric Cooperative, Petersburg; Shelby Electric Cooperative, Shelbyville; Spoon River Electric Cooperative, Canton; and Western Illinois Electrical Coop., Carthage are the distribution cooperative owners of Prairie Power, Inc. and participants in the two solar projects.

The Shelby Solar Farm will be dedicated on October 19 and is located in Shelby County along Highway 16 approximately one mile east of the Lake Shelbyville Dam. These two locations were chosen because they were in electric cooperative service territories, the land required was available for lease and there were electric cooperative power lines nearby for the solar farms to tie into.

“The electric cooperatives believe in an all of the above electric supply portfolio that includes renewable energy,” said Dan Breden, Interim President/CEO. “Prairie Power already owns wind generation from

an Illinois wind farm near Paxton.”

Breden said diversity in the cooperative’s power supply is important. “Managing a power supply portfolio is similar to managing one’s personal investments and diversity is essential,” he said. “Solar and other forms of renewable energy will provide additional diversity in our power supply portfolio, which has the potential to reduce risks and costs over the long term.”

The cost of each of the two solar farms was \$1.6 million. Breden said building a larger solar facility as opposed to smaller rooftop solar projects has the advantage of lower cost. “While solar energy is still somewhat more expensive than traditional resources such as coal and natural gas fueled generation plants, the cost of large scale solar projects has declined substantially over the past several years and the panels are becoming more efficient in turning sun light into electricity.”

Although the energy will flow directly into the local electric distribution grid, Breden said they are considering offering the member consumers of the 10 member co-ops of the G&T the ability to participate directly in the solar farms. More will be coming on these possibilities once we have the details worked out. He said, “It’s exciting to think we will be providing member consumers a means of participating in solar renewable energy without the risks, hassles and costs of having solar panels on their roofs.”

In addition to adding to its diversified power supply, PPI’s board of directors felt it was important to use this project as both a learning

Continued on 16c ▶

Solar farms continued from 16b



*Helping dedicate the Prairie Power Spoon River Solar Farm on Friday were nearly 100 students from Astoria. They joined (l-r) Prairie Power, Inc. Board Chairman Jim Thompson, Interim President/CEO Dan Breden, U.S. Rep. Cheri Bustos, State Rep. Michel Unes and Spoon River Electric Cooperative President/CEO Bill Dodds. The 500 kW solar farm includes a unique interactive learning center that is open to the students and the public. It is located 3 miles northeast of Summum, Ill. along Highway 24.*

project for the co-ops, their members and the public. Breden said, “The learning center is one of the most exciting aspects of this solar farm project. Bill Dodds, the manager at Spoon River Electric Cooperative had the vision for the learning center and he wanted to engage young people through the schools in learning more about renewable energy. Through working with Tracy and Scott Snowman, two prominent artists and designers from Canton, they brought the vision to life.”

The solar farms will be owned by two wholly owned subsidiaries

PPS – Spoon River, LLC and Prairie Power Solar, LLC. Breden credits the cooperation of several organizations for helping make the two solar farms possible. He says, “PPI drew on a variety of resources to develop this project. We have worked with National Renewables Cooperative Organization (NRCO), Cooperative Finance Corp. (CFC), CoBank, Azimuth Energy, Shelby Electric Cooperative and Spoon River Electric Cooperative. NRCO assisted with the technical and economic feasibility analyses as well as the business structure of the project. CFC and CoBank arranged

the financing. Azimuth Energy was the successful bidder for the engineering, materials procurement and construction of the project. Shelby Electric Cooperative and Spoon River Electric Cooperative have both assisted in numerous ways ranging from facilitating the land arrangements to the electric connection to the solar farm.”

Prairie Power, Inc. provides wholesale electricity to 10 electric distribution cooperatives and is a member of Touchstone Energy — an alliance of 750 local, consumer-owned electric utilities around the country.

**Our office will be closed on Thursday, December 24 and Friday, December 25 in observance of Christmas and on Friday, January 1 in observance of New Year's.**

# Tips for a safe and happy holiday season

The holidays are upon us. For many, that means more celebrations with friends and family, travel, decorations, cooking and shopping. Spoon River Electric wants you to stay safe during the holidays, so here are a few tips to consider as you gear up for the season.

We can't guarantee that the hustle and bustle of the season won't leave you with a few frayed nerves, but we can certainly help you avoid frayed wires.

## Inspect your seasonal items

Many of us have treasured holiday mementos that we bring out of storage and proudly display every year. The holidays are also a time when we dust off specialized cooking gadgets that allow us to prepare our favorite seasonal treats. These items are often handed down through generations and might lack modern safety features.

Take a few moments to carefully inspect all your holiday items to ensure everything is in safe, working order. A few things to look out for include:

- Brittle insulation on wires
- Rodent damage to wires
- Chafed or frayed wires, especially at stress points
- Worn switches with the potential to short circuit
- Corroded metal parts
- Broken legs, unstable bases and other tip-over hazards

## Extension cords are temporary

When you asked your teacher for an extension on your term paper, it was a one-time thing, right? The same holds true for extension cords. They are designed for temporary use and should never be used as a permanent or long-term solution.

## Never defeat safety devices

There are reasons why some devices have fuses, some plugs have three prongs instead of two and

one prong is wider than the other on two-prong outlets. When those safety features get in the way of your grand holiday décor plans, you might be tempted to tamper with or defeat those features. Don't do it! If your plugs won't fit together, that means they're not designed to work together. Rather than tampering with a safety feature, find a safe solution.

## Look up and live

When working outside with a ladder, be mindful of the location of overhead power lines. Always carry your ladder so that it is parallel to the ground. Before placing your ladder in an upright position, look around to ensure you are a safe distance from any power lines.

## Beware of power lines through trees

Over time, tree branches can grow around power lines running along the street and to your home. If those branches come in contact with power lines, they can become energized, too. If your holiday plans call for stringing lights through trees, this can create a safety hazard. If you notice tree limbs that are too close to electric lines, contact Spoon River Electric.

## Stay away from your service connection

The overhead wire bringing power from the utility pole to your house is dangerous. You should treat this line the same way you'd treat any other power line on our system. Maintain a safe distance – even if that means a small gap in the perfect gingerbread house outline of lights. If you must perform work close to your service entrance, contact Spoon River Electric, and we can send out a crew to temporarily wrap the wires in a protective shroud.

## Read the fine print

If you take a few minutes to read

and understand the specifications and limitations of your lights and other electrified holiday decorations, you can save yourself a great deal of work and frustration in the long run. For example, the tag at the end of an extension cord will tell you if it's rated for outdoor use, whether it will remain flexible in cold temperatures and how much energy it can safely handle. Similarly, holiday lights will tell you how many strings can be safely linked together.



## Don't forget about the kids... and pets

If you have small children, you've probably spent a great deal of time making sure every square inch of your home is childproof. Every cabinet is locked and every outlet is covered. But sometimes the joy of celebrating the holidays with our little ones makes us a little less vigilant about electrical safety. Make sure your holiday décor receives the same level of safety scrutiny you apply to all of the permanent items in your home. Curious and mischievous pets can present similar challenges. Make sure Fluffy isn't nibbling on all those extra wires or using your tree as her personal back scratcher or jungle gym.