

# NEWS, NOTES & VIEWS 05/21



Front Row (L-R): Julia Eberlin, Albert Jenkins, Cindy Jenkins, Tom Meehan, Luke Fraley. Back Row (L-R): Dave Gresham, Scott Rushton, Cody Schnettgoecke, Kurtis Weber, Aaron Rodhouse, Randy Long.

The co-op installed our first Calhoun fiber internet consumer in mid-March. Albert and Cindy Jenkins were the first to be installed near Brussels.

"We're thrilled to have fast and reliable internet service finally," Cindy said. "It will be great for when family comes to visit. Everyone will be able to get on the internet with their devices without it being slow or not working."

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## Illinois Electric Cooperative

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Albert Jenkins viewing a Youtube video at home with his new fiber internet connection.

Cindy is also looking forward to the positive impact this will have on her staying in touch with friends and family as well as her crafting business. Both she and Albert are thrilled they'll no longer face long periods without internet service when it went down in the past.

"I like watching Youtube, and now I won't have to worry about it taking forever to load," Albert shared. The Jenkins are excited about the possibility of replacing their current TV provider with an online TV streaming service. "This is way faster and half the price of what we're currently paying, so we're happy," Cindy said.

"We are delighted to connect Albert and Cindy as the first residential members today." Randy Long, General Manager of Illinois Electric Cooperative, said. "Over six years ago, we started the process of bringing high-speed internet service to Calhoun County. Today is a milestone in that effort, and we look forward to providing service to all Calhoun over the next few years."

Illinois Electric Cooperative first began providing internet service in 1993. At the time, the motivation was simple: there was no way for rural residents to get internet in their homes and we wanted to change that. Over the past 28 years, the co-op has drastically improved their infrastructure to increase bandwidth speeds across our service territory. Today the co-op provides internet to over 5,000 consumers.

The co-op first began its journey to bringing fiber optic internet to Calhoun County in 2014. That year, the FCC announced the Rural Broadband Experiment, which was a \$100 million funded program that looked for rural areas in which they could establish and test new technologies, such as fiber internet, to better understand the technological divide faced by rural areas. The co-op applied for funding fiber internet in Calhoun County, but unfortunately, the co-op was not awarded a grant.

In 2016, the Connect America Funds (CAF) II auction was announced. This was a reverse auction where funds were





Aaron Rodhouse, Internet Service Technician, next to the junction box where the fiber enters the home.

distributed to internet service providers for broadband projects across the country. It was a two-year process that included conducting studies, doing groundwork, and preparing bids. The co-op made bids for blocks across our territory in 2018, but again, the co-op was not awarded funds for Calhoun County.

With co-op members in Calhoun at a technological disadvantage, we continued to look for opportunities to bring reliable, high-speed internet to the county. One specific opportunity that was brought to our attention was the FCC's E-Rate program. The E-Rate program's goal is to bring affordable broadband to schools and libraries.

Calhoun Schools and Brussels School system each applied for E-Rate funding through the FCC and the Illinois State School Board of Education. Both school systems were awarded funds, and Illinois Electric Cooperative was chosen as the contractor. After a ground-breaking at Calhoun School last fall, fiber internet became active at the schools in February of last year and Brussels School in August.

Over the years, the co-op continued to work on ways to get fiber internet to its full membership in Calhoun. While preparing for the CAF II auction in 2016, Illinois Electric Cooperative Design Engineer Kurtis Weber and contractors designed a county-wide build-out plan for fiber internet.

In 2019, the co-op launched CalhounFiber.com to collect interest for fiber internet from residents in Calhoun County. The website uses a platform called Crowdfiber, where we can gauge where within the county the most interest is. The county is divided up into 25 zones, and each zone has a specific number of sign-ups needed to greenlight construction.

With our first home installed, and 30 more installed to-date, the co-op will continue reaching out to those signed up in areas where the fiber is already built and active. We like to remind residents that Calhoun Fiber is a multi-year project and in total, there will be 421 miles of fiber optic cable run in Calhoun once construction is completed. To learn more about the project and sign-up, visit [calhounfiber.com](http://calhounfiber.com).





# Illinois Electric Cooperative's *2021 Annual Meeting* Saturday, June 12th

Drive-through Registration at the  
Winchester Grade School

Registration Starts at 8:00 a.m.  
Meeting at 10:00 a.m.

Bring Your Registration Card to  
Receive a \$15 Bill Credit!

\$4000.00 in Prizes  
We hope to see you there!