



### More Power to You

## July Marks 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Electricity's Rural Arrival

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In this case it's okay to be taken for granted. While most people don't like to be taken for granted, when it comes to the omnipresent and super reliability of electricity, I think it's okay. If we would take 30 minutes and reflect on how electricity impacts our lives each and every day, I would wager that we would inadvertently miss at least half of how electricity plays a vital part in our daily existence.

How about the radio in your car? The broadcasting station uses electricity to send out its signal. Or your cell phone? You plug it in each night so it's ready when you need it the next day. Or the carpet you're walking on? It was made with the assistance of electricity in a plant somewhere.

Electricity's application is virtually endless. However, getting those electrons into your home or business didn't just magically happen.

On July 15, we'll mark the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the first electricity used by Rock County Electric Cooperative Association, which is now Rock Energy Cooperative. At 9 a.m. on that day in 1937, engineer Harold Durnin climbed a utility pole at the J.O. Woodman farm in La Prairie Township east of Janesville and turned on the power. An electric whistle sounded to celebrate the occasion.

A crowd had gathered at the farm to welcome electricity to the Rock County countryside and begin a day of celebration throughout the area. After power was turned on at the Woodman farm, a total of 122 miles of line were energized in La Prairie, Bradford, Turtle, and Clinton townships in Rock County and Darien and Sharon townships in Walworth County.

When the sun set that night, farmers didn't need their kerosene lanterns. Instead, they flipped a switch to light up their homes and barns. Rural folks finally had the same convenience that city residents had enjoyed for years.

The farmers had requested power from the local utility company, but they repeatedly were told that it was not economically feasible. Company officials deemed that it

would be too costly to run power lines outside of municipalities, and they didn't think farmers would use enough power to make the venture profitable.

Undiscouraged, the farmers decided to form a cooperative that would provide electric power to rural areas. The articles of incorporation for RCECA were filed in April 1936, shortly after the Rural Electrification Administration was initiated by an act of Congress. Fourteen months later, their dream of electrifying rural Rock County was realized.

You might wonder why the Woodman farm was chosen to be the first one energized. Well, it was largely a reward because J.O. Woodman worked so hard to recruit members. The co-op had to show the REA that it had an

average of three potential consumers per mile of line.

During the severe winter of 1936–37, when roads were blocked for days, Woodman rode his trusty mule named Ginger to neighboring farms. When family members advised him to wait until the weather improved, he replied: "If I go out in this kind of weather, the farmers are going to be home."

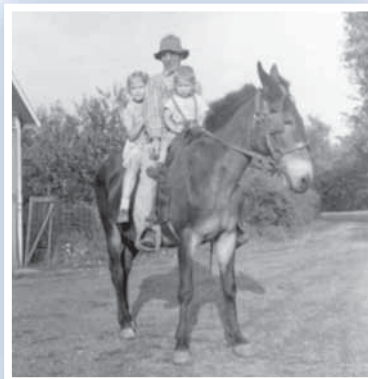
Some farmers were skeptical and needed to be convinced. They thought the local utility company eventually would bring them power and it would be more reliable than what the co-op could provide. Farmers also were concerned about investing the \$2 or \$3 membership

fee, which was a lot of money in those days.

The Woodmans had waited a long time for electricity. They built a new house on the farm in 1934 and had all the electrical and plumbing fixtures installed so they would be ready when power became available.

It's ironic that utility companies in the 1930s were reluctant to extend power lines to farms because they didn't think farmers would use enough electricity to make the venture worthwhile. In reality, farmers embraced their newly acquired electricity by installing milk machines, milk coolers, deep freezers, chicken brooders, pig brood-

*(Continued on page 16d ▶)*



*J.O. Woodman rode Ginger the mule to neighboring farms to sign up co-op members. This old photo shows Woodman with his grandchildren, Bob and Nancy, riding Ginger.*



## Field Technicians Take Inventory Pole by Pole, Meter by Meter

Imagine taking a physical inventory of 13,210 electric poles, 7,200 meters, and 1,500 green electric boxes. It wouldn't be such a big task if the equipment was all located in the same spot. But this electrical equipment is located throughout Rock Energy Cooperative's service territory in Wisconsin.

Field technicians from Global Mapping Solutions, based in Wyoming, started the project in May and will continue working seven days a week throughout the summer until the last pole is inspected. When complete, the data will be used to create digital maps that will assist in providing quicker power restoration during outages and planning future engineering projects.



*This field technician enters data on a tablet computer while the GPS device on his back records the location.*

Members will see the technicians traveling either on foot or on a four-wheel all-terrain vehicle. They are equipped with a GPS (global positioning system)

device on their back and a tablet computer positioned in front of them to record the data. The GPS coordinates of each electric pole are recorded along with details about the equipment associated with that pole, including whether it has a crossarm, what

*Inventory of the overhead distribution system includes each electric pole and all the equipment on it: crossarms, transformers, wires, insulators.*

type and how many transformers are attached, the size and lengths of wires, and the insulators used. That information is entered into the technician's tablet computer and eventually downloaded into the co-op's geographic information system (GIS).

Technicians also visually inspect the poles to make sure they are in good condition and the proper warning signs are attached. A simple hammer test helps technicians with what they can't see. They hit the pole with a hammer, which will produce a clear sound and rebound sharply when striking good wood. A dull sound or a less pronounced hammer rebound indicates that the wood might be decaying. If that happens, the technicians specify that the pole needs further inspection by Rock Energy crews.



*A field technician opens a green box as part of the underground residential distribution inventory. Warning signs are required on the outside, and danger signs are located inside.*

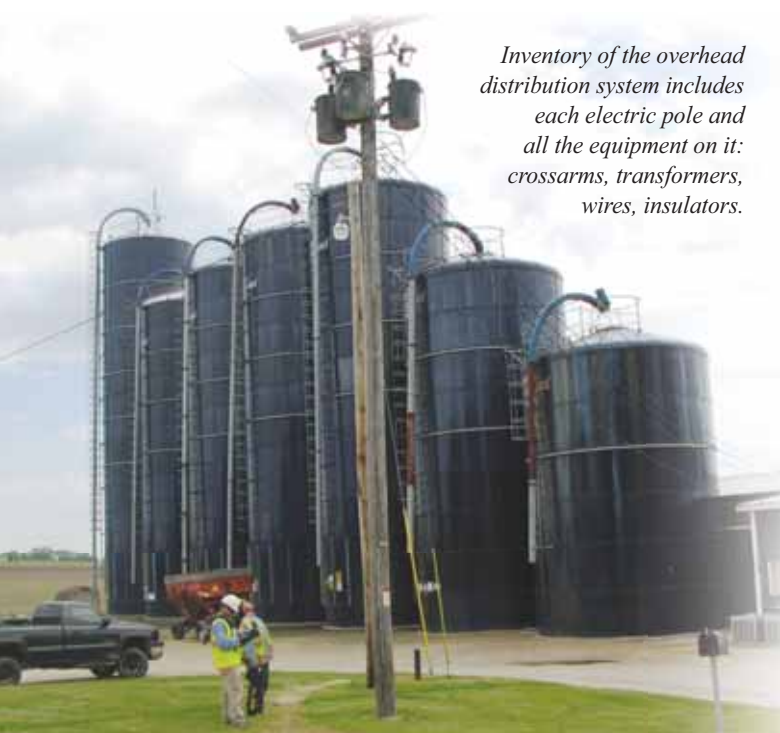
Rock Energy's system also includes underground residential distribution, which are the green boxes positioned throughout subdivisions. Again, the technicians record the GPS coordinates of the equipment and then begin their inspection. Before unlocking the box and checking inside, they make sure each box is marked with the proper signs. Warning signs are required on the outside, and danger signs are located inside. Any missing or unreadable signs are replaced.

Technicians also check for any animals, dirt, or debris inside the box and look for any mechanical defects. If anything is discovered, the box is marked so Rock Energy crews can return to make any needed repairs.

Another stop is made at each member's meter. Technicians will record the type of meter and its GPS coordinates, inventory all co-op equipment, and indicate any potential problems that need further inspection.

Together, all of this collected data is used to cre-

*(Continued on page 16d ▶)*





## Rock Energy Can Help Pick Safe Location for Pool

**J**umping into a backyard swimming pool is the perfect way to cool off on a hot summer day. But before taking that refreshing dip, you have some decisions to make. In-ground or above-ground? What size, shape, and depth? Where is the best spot?

Most of the decisions will be made based on personal preference. But Rock Energy Cooperative can help with selecting the location. Because electricity and water don't mix, the requirements for swimming pools are strict, according to Steve Knudsen, assistant operations manager for Rock Energy's south territory.

For example, the National Electrical Safety Code requires that swimming pools have a clearance of at least 25 feet from primary overhead electrical lines and be located at least 5 feet from all underground utility lines.

Knudsen urges members to call the co-op when they first start thinking about a backyard pool to make sure all safety measures are taken during installation. The co-op will direct members to call 811 so underground lines can

be properly located and marked. Knudsen said he will work with pool contractors during the design stage to ensure the pool is installed in a safe location.

He also reminded members to follow any local zoning requirements, which often restrict the placement of a pool and whether it needs to be enclosed with a fence. Of course, a call to 811 is necessary whenever fences and digging are involved.

If a pool is placed too close to underground utilities, either the pool will have to be moved or electrical lines relocated, Knudsen said. Both alternatives are costly and can be avoided with proper planning.

Electric pumps, filters, heaters, and lighting are often part of a backyard pool experience. In most cases, a licensed electrician will be needed.

Any electrical wiring that is within 20 feet of a swimming pool should be protected with ground fault circuit interrupter (GFCI) devices to protect against electric shock. If there is a fault in the circuit, the devices automatically shut the circuit off and limit exposure to shocks. GFCIs should be tested on a regular basis to make sure they are working properly and don't need to be replaced.

In addition, a qualified gas technician should be contacted to connect the natural gas feed to the heater. It's also important to note that Rock Energy maintains buried natural gas piping up to the outlet of the gas meter on a member's property in its Illinois service territory. Pipes to pool heaters, gas grills, and other backyard accessories are the member's responsibility.

For more information, go to [www.rock.coop/energy/documents/NaturalGasServiceManual.pdf](http://www.rock.coop/energy/documents/NaturalGasServiceManual.pdf) and review Appendix A, which details underground piping materials that can be used. Rock Energy has materials that members can purchase.

If a backyard pool is in your family's future, remember to call Rock Energy at (866) 752-4550.

"We want members to enjoy their backyard pools, but first and foremost we want them to stay safe," Knudsen said. ■



*Mark Your Calendar*  
**Member Appreciation Day 2012  
Pancake Breakfast**  
Saturday, Sept. 15 • 8 to 10:30 a.m.  
REC Headquarters, 2815 Kennedy Road,  
Janesville, Wis.  
**Watch for details!**

## Have a Safe and Happy Independence Day!



Rock Energy Cooperative offices will be closed on **Wednesday, July 4**, in observance of Independence Day. We will reopen at 7:30 a.m. Thursday, July 5. Even though our offices are closed, standby crews are always available 24 hours a day. If you need to report a power outage, call (608) 752-4550 or toll-free (866) 752-4550.



## Get Connected

Check out these great deals offered with your Co-op Connections Card.



**The Villager, 429 E. Grand Ave., Beloit – (608) 365-6007 – [www.villagergallery.com](http://www.villagergallery.com)**

Art Gallery & Custom Framing. Select from hundreds of picture moldings, ranging from the exquisitely simple to the breathtakingly ornate. Discover a growing collection of local original artwork. Frame It At The Villager!

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Pizza & Ice Cream. Great food for busy families!

**\$1 Off Lunch or Evening Buffet (every day)**



### Introducing New Healthy Savings Discounts!

The same program that offers discounts at local merchants and has saved Rock Energy members \$46,000 on prescriptions now offers significant savings on dental, vision, hearing, lab and imaging services, and chiropractic work. To locate providers that participate in the Healthy Savings program, call (800) 800-7616 or visit [HealthySavings.coop](http://HealthySavings.coop). Be sure to have your Co-op Connections Card handy.

### Add Up Your Savings!



Tell us how much you have saved by using your Co-op Connections Card. If you have a story you'd like to share with other Rock Energy members, e-mail Barbara Uebelacker at [BarbU@rock.coop](mailto:BarbU@rock.coop) or call her at (866) 752-4550.



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## More Power to You *(Continued from page 16a)*

ers, washing machines, refrigerators, and other electric appliances to make their lives easier. Today's farm also uses electricity to operate irrigation systems, grain dryers, and other modern equipment.

When the crowd gathered at the Woodman farm 75 years ago to witness the first power used by the co-op, they also were observing a perfect example of the cooperative business model. When area farmers founded the co-op, they put people first. They realized that electricity was a necessity for progressive farming and took matters into their own hands when the local utility company rejected the idea. They banded together to accomplish what individuals alone couldn't do.

They founded the co-op, signed up members, borrowed money, hired employees, put poles in the ground, and strung wire. They did all this not to make money, but to provide their rural friends and neighbors with the promise of a better life by putting people first.

Seventy-five years later, Rock Energy continues to put people first in an effort to make members' lives better. Please let us know if there's anything we can do to improve our service to you. ■

## Inventory

*(Continued from page 16b)*

ate digital maps that are accurate and up-to-date, both of which are essential to plot power lines, quickly locate problems, and plan for growth. Maps used previously in the Wisconsin territory were created before technology existed to accurately pinpoint the location of each piece of equipment and store information about that equipment. The co-op's Illinois service territory was already in a GIS format when purchased from Alliant Energy.

"If a storm knocks out power to a specific area, we'll be able to see what inventory was lost with a couple clicks of a button," said Dennis Schultz, director of utility operations at Rock Energy. "We'll know exactly what type of equipment is needed to make repairs, and that will help us to restore power as quickly as possible."

The improved maps also will help when staking new service or making changes to existing lines. Using a computer, the staking engineer will be able to draw precise plans that the linemen will use in the field. Previously, the engineer would need to visit the site to confirm the location of nearby services and lines and the type of equipment in the field. With the help of this GPS/field inventory project, those details will be available within the electronic field design software that REC uses, making the process more efficient. ■