

Happy Holidays!

Spark joy and light this holiday season. From our co-op family to yours, we wish you a safe and warm season with friends and loved ones.

WIEC will close at noon on Friday, Dec. 22 and reopen Tuesday, Dec. 26.

We will also close at noon on Friday, Dec. 29 and reopen Tuesday, Jan. 2, 2024.

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year
from the WIEC Board of Directors and employees.



Deadline approaching ... 17 scholarships up for grabs in 2024!

Illinois electric cooperatives will award 17 scholarships in 2024 to financially assist deserving students in the electric cooperative family. The 17 scholarships, \$2,000 each, will be awarded through the Thomas H. Moore Illinois Electric Cooperatives (IEC) Memorial Scholarship Program.

10 scholarships will be awarded to high school seniors whose parent(s) are an Illinois electric co-op member.

1 scholarship, the Earl W. Struck Memorial Scholarship, will be awarded to a student who is the child of an Illinois electric cooperative employee or director.

5 additional scholarships are reserved for high school seniors enrolling full time at a two-year Illinois community college whose parent(s) are an Illinois electric cooperative member, employee or director.

1 scholarship, the 17th scholarship, named the LaVern and Nola McEntire Memorial Lineworker's Scholarship, will help pay for costs to attend line-worker school conducted by the Association of Illinois Electric Cooperatives in conjunction with Lincoln Land Community College, Springfield, Ill. Children of co-op members, relatives of co-op employees or directors, and individuals who have served or are serving in the armed forces or National Guard are all eligible for this scholarship.

The deadline to apply is Dec. 31, 2023, for all except the Lineworker's Scholarship; the deadline for it is April 30, 2024. **8611-10-1** For more information regarding the scholarships, contact Karmen Metternich at 217-357-3125 or 800-576-3125. Information has also been shared with area high school guidance counselors and is available online at aiec.coop/iec-scholarship or at wiec.net.



Western Illinois
ELECTRICAL COOP.
A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative

524 North Madison P.O. Box 338
Carthage, IL 62321
www.wiec.net | 800-576-3125

OFFICE HOURS

8:00 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.
Monday - Friday

BUSINESS OFFICE

217-357-3125

TO REPORT AN OUTAGE

800-576-3125

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

- **Mark Burling** —
President, Carthage
- **Dustin Walker** —
Vice President, Burnside
- **Janet Spory** —
Secretary/Treasurer, Sutter
- **Kim Gullberg** —
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- **Landon Guymon** —
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- **Jay Morrison** —
Director, Niota
- **Stephen Patrick** —
Director, Carthage

MANAGEMENT TEAM

- **Todd Grotts** — General Manager
- **Ryan Biery** — Manager
of Operations
- **Wendi Whitaker** — Finance and
Accounting Manager

MAP LOCATION CONTEST

Every month we are printing four members' map location numbers in the newsletter. If you find your map location number call the WIEC office by the 25th of the following month, tell us where it is and we will give you a \$10.00 bill credit. Keep on reading the WIEC News.



It was so nice to see you...

Manager Grotts and the rest of the WIEC employees would like to thank the members who took the time to stop in and see us on Member Appreciation Day in late October. Cookies and cider were enjoyed by several members in the lobby, while conversations about tree removal, line and/or system equipment obstructions and rates occurred. We enjoy having as many members visit us at the co-op as possible and want to again thank everyone who stopped by. 6816-1 We look forward to seeing you all again next year!

**Energy Efficiency
Tip of the Month**

Get smart with a better way to heat and cool your home! Smart thermostats are Wi-Fi enabled and automatically adjust heating and cooling temperature settings in your home for optimal performance. Smart thermostats learn your temperature preferences and establish a schedule that adjusts to energy-saving settings when you're asleep or away.

For maximum energy savings, look for smart thermostat models with the ENERGY STAR® label.

Source: Dept. of Energy



Welcome new members

**September
2023**

Kay C. and J. Thomas
Beeding
Trudy Gulley
Ryan S. Harley

Johnson Farms II
Finishing Barn
Robert and Kathy Manton
James Peterson

Servbank
Timothy D. Squier
Patricia L. Wilkens
Phoebe V. Wilson

Guard against utility service scams, other forms of fraud and identity theft

It is the world we live in today — the necessity to pause and consider before we click, answer or respond to someone seeking information. No industry, person or business is off limits to scammers, who even try to con their way into the utility industry.

The Better Business Scam Tracker reports that victims usually lose \$274 in all types of scams and \$500 in a utility scam.

When it comes to power bills, scammers make threatening phone calls to consumers to demand immediate payment, or else. (Or else their service will be shut off, they threaten.) This deceiving claim is often made during the height of summer or winter, when people want to stay comfortable during the extreme heat or cold.

However, utilities typically send initial disconnection notices in writing.

Utility scams: How they get you

Scammers request that immediate payment be wired, loaded on a reloadable gift card or debit card, or sent using cryptocurrency (a digital money system that does not rely on banks for verification). Only scammers request this type of payment and threaten immediate service disconnection. Do not provide any information (including your utility account number) or agree to immediate payment; instead, hang up and check with your utility by using the phone number listed on your power bill. Fake numbers and links can appear in emails and texts.

Utility bills that double the amount due may be a utility scam. Utilities are closely regulated and may not have the right to raise prices substantially. Consumers should trust their gut reaction; if it seems like a fraud, it probably is.

Protect personal info

When supplying your utility (or any business or person) with sensitive information, such as a social security number, proof of address or death certificate, do not email the information. Additionally, do not give out sensitive

information to anyone who calls you. Verify the phone number and call the utility directly to discuss any matter that would involve providing personal information. In general, some companies do have password-protected, secure methods to obtain personal information via an app or portal, but always verify this before using.

At your door

The famous song by Paul McCartney, titled “Let ‘Em In,” features the artist’s welcoming plea, “Someone’s knockin’ at the door; Someone’s ringin’ the bell ... Do me a favor; open the door and let ‘em in,” but that is not always great advice these days.

Door-to-door scams may involve impersonators of utility workers saying the meter is broken or offering to perform other repairs or an energy audit — all at the consumer’s cost. Your utility will contact you in advance, prior to arriving at your home for service or for any other reason. Do not let someone in the house without a preapproved appointment.

Scams in general

The American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) warns that phishing emails and texts attempt to convince individuals to make payments or provide personal information. Thieves use stolen information to open accounts and pass charges on to the victim.

Caller ID can fib

Over the phone, calls appearing to be local are not always an accurate assessment of who is calling. AARP has a fraud watch network that provides alerts of new frauds; do an internet search for the fraud watch network to learn more.

Scams are everywhere

Non-utility-related scams may include the announcement of an inheritance or pop-ups on a computer warning that technical support is needed. There are even puppy purchase cons where cute and often sought-after



Do not provide any information or agree to immediate payment; instead hang up and check with your utility by using the phone number listed on your power bill.

breeds are offered in all their puppy cuteness, but scammers take your money and run. There are student loan forgiveness scams and one-time password bot scams.

Hackers even prey on the many smartphone users who have cracked screens. It is called the “chip in the middle attack,” in which scammers get ahold of a screen replacement and install it on your phone with a spyware chip. **8520-18-1** Always verify a screen-fix-it phone number or take your phone to a store/servicer you trust. If the company cannot be verified by a search engine, do not trust it.

No matter the scam, the goal of the scammer is to gather personal information. Stay safe: Do not share Social Security numbers, account details, credit card numbers, bank information, death certificates or birth dates. Thieves can use this information to steal your identity.

If you become a victim of a scam, report it to the local police and your bank. Consumers can protect themselves by blocking unknown callers and keeping software updated on phones and computers.

2024 Operating Budget

Upon request, copies of the Western Illinois Electrical Coop. operating budget for 2024 will be available at the office during regular business hours starting in January.

Help prevent copper theft

Thieves sometimes think of it as a crime that won't hurt anybody. The truth is that tampering with electrical equipment or attempting to steal copper can harm many people.

Those who steal copper (or power) are not only risking their own lives, but also the safety and well-being of others.

Common targets for copper theft include farm equipment, air conditioners, vacant buildings, construction sites and electric utility properties, including substations and power poles.

How homeowners can help

- If you notice anything unusual with electric facilities, such as an open substation gate, **10529-68** open equipment, hanging wire and so on, contact your electric utility immediately.
- For empty homes, install lighting systems that operate using a timer to make the property a less likely target. For all homes, install motion-sensor lights on the outside of the house to deter possible thieves.
- Store tools and wire cutters in a secure location, and never leave them out while away.

How businesses can help

- Report suspicious activity.
- Eliminate or secure all external access to buildings and roofs.
- Remove items that allow for easy access to buildings, such as ladders, scaffolds, trees, dumpsters and accumulated materials, such as pallet piles.
- Install security cameras and alarm systems. The location and the type of object will determine what kind of surveillance is needed. For example, for heating and cooling units, there are alarms that are triggered if the unit stops working.
- In areas that contain valuable objects such as air conditioners, install fences and lighting fixtures around them. The amount of copper in most commercial air conditioners is never worth a great amount, but the real cost is paid by the owner of the unit.
- Most copper theft takes place during nights or weekends. Hiring staff or security personnel to monitor your facility during these periods can greatly reduce the chances of a serious loss.

Copper theft can affect more than the person stealing; in fact, it can cost a life. Detecting and reporting illegal activity could help save a life.

For more electrical safety information, visit SafeElectricity.org.

**REPORT
SUSPICIOUS
ACTIVITY**



STEALING COPPER HAS A HUGE COST

Thieves like to steal and sell the soft, reddish orange metal to make some quick cash. However, they may sacrifice more than they gain, since stealing copper can cause serious injuries or death. Copper thieves could also face hefty fines and prison time.

The FBI attributes copper theft to disruptions in the flow of the following: electricity, telecommunications, transportation, water supply, heating, security and emergency services. It presents a risk to both public safety and national security.

Common targets for copper theft include farm equipment, air conditioners, abandoned buildings, construction sites and electric utility equipment, including substations and power poles.

The majority of copper theft occurs at night or on the weekends. Detecting and reporting suspicious and illegal activity could help save a life.

Learn more:

**Safe
Electricity.org®**

