



## Introducing **Buckey!**

Ryan Little with Buckey presenting on electric safety to the Winchester kindergarten classes.

Meet Buckey. Buckey is a remote-controlled (RC) bucket truck created by Sam Surratt, a Special Equipment Technician with over 27 years of experience at the local co-op. Sam's job involves working on various electric service projects, but one of his most rewarding projects lately involved work outside his full-time job. This project

taught kids the importance of safety around downed trees and power lines in a fun and memorable way.

Buckey's inspiration came from an unlikely place. While attending the State Fair last year, Sam saw how the State Police used a remote-controlled squad

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## Illinois Electric Cooperative

P.O. Box 80, Two South Main Street  
Winchester, Illinois 62694

[www.e-co-op.com](http://www.e-co-op.com)  
1-800-468-4732

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Sam Surratt with Buckey

car to educate and entertain kids about safety. The positive reaction from the kids sparked an idea in Sam's mind. He wanted to build something similar for the Beardstown Fall Fun Festival Parade. Sam has been involved in the parade for almost three decades and has a group of about 30 individuals who dress up as clowns and ride mini-bikes, unicycles, and motorcycles. However, last fall was different. Sam was having back surgery and knew he couldn't participate the same way he had in the past. He knew he could operate a remote control car, though. After discussing it with his wife, Tara, they agreed that if Sam was going to build a RC car, it had to be a bucket truck. Thus, the journey of building Buckey began.

Creating Buckey was a collaborative mission. Sam enlisted the help of several talented individuals to bring Buckey to life. Dave Utter with Nexgen Signs and Graphics played a crucial role in shaping Buckey's body, using his CNC machine to cut out sections from high-density material based



on a mold Sam had carved with a chainsaw. Aaron Janes from Freestyle RC took on the challenge of modifying the RC car to suit the needs of a bucket truck. John Herzberger, a retired Special Effects Technician, added life to Buckey with movable eyes and sound effects. Shad Graham and Kevin Unland were responsible for the paint and bodywork, making Buckey look like a real bucket truck. Rick Dennis worked on integrating the car's controls with the sound system for the microphones, ensuring Sam could interact with the audience while controlling Buckey. Madalyn O'Hara provided support with the vacuum mold equipment, helping create parts of Buckey's exterior.

This project was a community effort, with additional support and funds provided by AC Jones, Teresa Surratt, and Marty Turner. Their contributions were instrumental in making Buckey a reality. From conception to completion, the project took just over a month. On the day of the parade, there was still work that needed to be completed on

Buckey. It was down to the minute, and Sam admits they were a few blocks late to the parade. Once Buckey arrived, the truck was a tremendous hit among the community, especially the kids.

The main goal of creating Buckey was to engage children in a fun and interactive way, teaching them about safety while capturing their attention and imagination. Sam and Ryan Little, Operations Manager, took Buckey to Mrs. Little's and Miss Fletcher's Winchester kindergarten class, where Sam, equipped with a backpack containing a microphone and remote system, brought Buckey to life. Buckey boasts two-way communication, where Sam is Buckey's voice, and the kids can ask the truck questions. The truck's moving eyes and ability to perform various maneuvers fascinated the children and helped them

learn about electric safety in a memorable way.

Buckey's success goes beyond the parade or a single classroom visit. It's a testament to the power of creativity, community collaboration, and the importance of engaging and informative education for the next generation. Sam Surratt and everyone involved in making Buckey a reality has shown that learning about safety can be an exciting adventure for kids with a bit of imagination and teamwork.

Sam and Illinois Electric are looking to take Buckey to more classrooms across our service territory in the future. If you're a teacher interested in a presentation, please get in touch with us through our website, [e-co-op.com](http://e-co-op.com).

## Electric Vehicle Charging at Harpole's Heartland Lodge

In February, the co-op installed its third electric vehicle charging station at Harpole's Heartland Lodge near Nebo.

"I appreciate the partnership with Illinois Electric Cooperative in installing an EV charger at Heartland Lodge. We are very excited to offer this amenity to our guests! The EV Charger will help attract additional visitors to the area who drive electric vehicles," Gary Harpole, the lodge's owner, shared.

The electric vehicle charging station is a stand-alone unit that accepts various forms of electronic payment through a smartphone app.



Pictured (L-R): Director Jenna Morrow, Director Kevin Klein, Lodge Owner Gary Harpole, Director Tom Meehan, Director Kevin Brannan, Director Pat Stendback, General Manager Randy Long, and Project Manager Rebecca Allan.



## Employee Spotlight

### Brooke Ruyle

Accounting

### About the Employee

Brooke Ruyle resides in rural Woodson with her spouse of 12 years, Matt. Brooke is the loving mother of three children: Delaney, Molly, and Collin. At work, she finds her joy in the people she interacts with. Brooke's role allows her to engage closely with her colleagues, enjoying their company and the personal stories they share, making the HR aspect of her job one of her favorite parts.

Outside of her professional life, Brooke is deeply involved in her community and has several hobbies. She has a green thumb as she enjoys gardening and is an active participant and volunteer at her children's sporting events and extracurricular activities. Brooke also serves on the Murrayville-Woodson Elementary PTO board, showcasing her commitment to her community and her children's education. Traveling with her family allows her to explore and create lasting memories. Moreover, Brooke is an expert steak griller, enjoys embroidery and baking, and is known for making the best chocolate chip cookies – a treat she loves to share with her colleagues. Brooke exemplifies a balance between professional dedication, family life, and community involvement, making her a valued member of her workplace and community.

Brooke Ruyle with her husband Matt and their three children Molly, Collin, and Delaney.

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