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Elizabeth, Illinois



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## Growing for you

Look forward to seeing many of you for our 85th Annual Meeting on June 20 at St. Malachy School in Geneseo. This event is a great opportunity for me and other co-op employees to meet with members and talk about what is going on at your co-op.

Growth is one of our key objectives, and as we celebrate our 85th year, we have a lot to share! As we continue our mission to improve the quality of life for members and in our communities, we are growing — growth will have a positive impact and benefit our entire region.

Much of that growth is through the buildout of our fiber network and services that I talked about in last month's column. You'll find more information on those plans inside this issue. **Frances K. Letcherq**

### The changing electrical grid

Essential to growth is a resilient, reliable electric grid. Our guest speaker for the annual meeting, Jeremy Johnson, VP of engineering & operations at Prairie Power, Inc., will share information on how the electric grid is changing, demands for energy and the need for dispatchable electric generation and new transmission lines.

This spring, co-ops across the state and country discussed this concern with our state and federal legislators, prioritizing reliability. American families and businesses expect the lights to stay on at a cost they can afford.



### CEO'S REPORT

by Mike Casper

Keeping the lights on is not a partisan issue. As the demand for electricity grows and available supply declines, we must have a serious policy conversation in this country about where we're going and what it will take to realistically get there.

The stakes are too high to get this wrong. Reliable electricity is vital to America's economy and national security.

We will continue to grow for you, and we will keep working with our legislatures to develop policies that allow our electric grid to transition in a timely, but realistic manner, while maintaining the reliability that you expect.

I hope you will join us at the Annual Meeting as we talk more about these vital issues. Spending time with you is so important to us as we work to meet the needs of all our members.



### Reader prize

Each month we print the name of a JCE Co-op member who is eligible to win a monthly \$25 readership prize. If your name is printed in this month's edition, and not a part of any article, contact JCE Co-op.

## For your information

### Your Board of Directors:

**David Senn**  
Chairman  
District 7

**Russell Holesinger**  
Vice Chairman  
District 8

**Robert Kuhns**  
Treasurer  
District 10

**Dan Tindell**  
Secretary  
District 4

**Jerry Meyer**  
District 1

**Joseph Mattingley**  
District 2

**Allen Hendren**  
District 3

**Patricia Smith**  
District 5

**Thomas Lundy**  
District 6

**Larry Carroll**  
District 9

### Office Hours: Monday-Friday

**Elizabeth**  
793 U.S. Route 20 West  
7:30 a.m. to 4 p.m.

**Savanna**  
103 Chicago Ave.  
7:30 a.m. to 1 p.m.  
1:30 to 4 p.m.

**Geneseo**  
1004 S. Chicago St.  
7:30 a.m. to 1 p.m.  
1:30 to 4 p.m.

### Services and Billing Questions:

(800) 858-5522  
jcecoop.com

### For emergencies and outages call:

(800) 858-5522

# Resume of Minutes

March 27, 2024

*The regular board meeting of JCE Co-op (NFP) was held on Wednesday, March 27, 2024.*

*Safety Moment – Director Carroll shared natural gas (NG) safety tips should you encounter an emergency. Carroll noted that if you smell a strong odor of natural gas, leave the premises immediately, do not turn on or off any switches in the home or use any electronic devices, including your phone. Wait until you are outside to make the call. Then, call your local gas company. If you smell outside gas odors report it right away. Do not try to locate the source yourself. If you plan to dig, call 811 first so they can do a locate on the pipes.*

**Approval of Agenda** – A motion was made, seconded, and carried unanimously to approve the meeting agenda.

**Consent Agenda** – A motion was made, seconded, and carried unanimously to approve the consent agenda.

### Presentation 1

The Member Satisfaction Survey results were presented by Keith Kaderly of Inside Information. During the fall of 2023, Inside Information conducted a member satisfaction survey from a randomly selected sample of residential members. The survey is a tool that provides valuable feedback to JCE Co-op.

**Into Executive Session** – A motion was made, seconded, and carried unanimously to go into Executive Session at 10:14 a.m.

**Out of Executive Session** – A motion was made, seconded, and carried unanimously to come out of Executive Session at 10:30 a.m.

**Action Resulting from Executive Session** – The board reviewed the Resolution for Waiver of Conflict-of-Interest that was drafted by Terry Kurt. Despite that conflict of interest, it was the view of the Board of Directors that significant cause exists to waive that conflict of interest as long as the director recuses himself from participating in any votes or discussion regarding solar.

### Presentation 2

Nate Kula of FORVIS Accounting provided a summary of audit results for 2023 and presented the board with a clean, unmodified opinion, noting that accounting policies, management's

judgement, and accounting estimates were appropriate.

### Governance Topics and Board Policy Review

**Governance Talk Video** – None.

**Board Policy Review** – None.

### CEO/Financial Operating Report

**CEO Report** – President and CEO Mike Casper shared with the board and senior staff the agenda for the April Strategic Planning Session. In addition, Casper shared that we will be having more of a presence in the community this year to celebrate the cooperative's 85th anniversary.

**Financial Operating Report** – Chuck Woods, Chief Financial Officer, provided a summary of the February financial operating report. Revenue year-to-date (YTD) is approximately \$12 million. Total operations and maintenance expenses are approximately \$9.3 million, which is (\$748,464) under the budget of \$10 million. Margins are approximately \$1.3 million versus a budgeted amount of \$251,157 and amounts to \$1 million over budget. By general consent, the board moved to file the financial operating report with the auditor.

### Operations and Regulatory/Legislative Update

**Operations Update** – Senior VP and Chief Operating Officer Kyle Buros discussed the solar eclipse and the electrical grid, noting it would not have an impact on electric service.

**Member Services Update** – VP of Member Services Jennifer Meyer

provided an update on the work order process, noting that communication will be going out to our contractors. In addition, Meyer noted that Checkpoint Solutions will be updating the fiber platform on the website. JCE Co-op will be holding a blood drive at the Elizabeth headquarters on March 28th. In October, JCE Co-op and Dairyland Power Cooperative employees will join forces and provide "A Day of Service" in East Dubuque, where we will be doing a clean-up event at Gramercy Park.

**Human Resources Update** – There was nothing to add outside of Merri Sevey's written report.

**Executive Assistant Update** – Amy Johnston, Executive Assistant, provided logistics for the upcoming Strategic Planning Session.

**External Affairs/Legislative Update** – General Counsel Terry Kurt provided a legislative update on pending bills.

**Technology Update** – VP and Chief Technology Officer Dan Marcure shared that JCE Co-op installs managed routers to our members who have JCE Co-op fiber service, which allows the cooperative to monitor for potential cybersecurity threats and assist in derailing them.

### **Board Issues and Action Items**

**Approve Audited Financials** – A motion was made by Director Smith to approve the 2023 Audited Financials, which was seconded by director Kuhns and carried unanimously. The audited financials are located on the JCE Co-op website.

**Billing Policy 730** – A motion was made by Director Tindell to approve Administrative Billing Policy 730, which was seconded by Director Meyer and carried unanimously.

**Proposed 2024 Bylaw Amendments** – A motion was made by Director Meyer to approve the 2024 proposed bylaw amendments, which was seconded by Director Kuhns and carried unanimously. The proposed bylaw amendments will be shared in the upcoming Annual Report that will be mailed to all members.

**Position Statement/Safety** – The Position Statement on Safety was presented. JCE Co-op believes it is imperative to consistently practice and promote a culture of safety for the protection of our employees, members, and communities.

**Select Dairyland Power Cooperative (DPC) Annual Meeting Attendees** – Attendees were

selected to attend the DPC Annual Meeting on June 5th.

**Select Class A DPC Director and Alternate Director Nominee** – Joe Mattingley was selected as the DPC Director and Dan Tindell was selected as the DPC Alternate Director to represent JCE Co-op to serve on the DPC Board of Directors.

**Strategic Planning Logistics** – Amy Johnston provided a copy of the upcoming Strategic Planning Agenda and shared logistics of the meeting.

### **Reports/Updates**

**Association of Illinois Electric Cooperatives (AIEC) Report** – Chairman Senn provided highlights from the AIEC board meeting. Approximately 200 students, including one from JCE Co-op, participated in Youth Day in our state capital.

**Dairyland Power Cooperative (DPC)** – Director Tindell shared highlights from the DPC Board meeting and included a short video from the demo of the Genoa #3 coal-fired generating unit. In total, DPC has retired 6 coal-fired generating units, and Genoa #3 had 51 years of reliable and safe service.

**American Public Gas Association (APGA) Report** – Director Carroll discussed topics affecting the natural gas industry. Carroll also commented that members from the APGA staff recently attended a Section 5 Reform meeting, which supports legislation to amend the Natural Gas Act (NGA) and grant Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) the same refund authority in natural gas rate cases that it already has in electric rate cases under the Federal Power Act (FPA).

**Prairie Power Incorporated (PPI) Report** – Director Kuhns shared a summary from the PPI power supply report and updated the board on PPI's transmission construction activity that is projected to improve future revenue. He also reported that a representative from PPI will present at the June 20th Annual Meeting in Geneseo.

**Strategic Planning Roundtable Discussion** – Directors shared highlights from the National Rural Electric Cooperative (NRECA) Annual Meeting with more than 10,000 like-minded participants dedicated and committed to providing necessary services to rural America.

**Other Business** – None.

**Adjournment** – Chairman Senn adjourned the meeting at 1:27 p.m.

## Members to elect four directors; two contested elections

**F**our directors on the JCE Co-op board are up for election in 2024, including Districts 5, 7, 8 and 10. Two are contested elections. Because there are multiple candidates for Districts 5 and 8, ballots will be mailed to members in those districts.

Seeking election as the District 5 director is Pat Smith, the incumbent, who was appointed to the post in 2006; Desiree Einsweiler, who is a Galena native; and Peter Regez, a member of JCE Co-op for over 20 years.

Seeking reelection to the board unopposed for District 7 is current Board Chairman David Senn, who was appointed to the board in 2007.

Seeking election as the District 8 director are the incumbent Russell Holesinger, current board vice chairman, who was appointed to the post in 2009; and Ted James, who has been a JCE Co-op member for over 35 years.

Seeking reelection unopposed for District 10 director is Robert Kuhns, current board treasurer, who was appointed to the board in 2014.

Members who live in Districts 5 and 8 should carefully review the election materials. Election materials will be mailed or will be available online starting at 9 a.m. on May 10. Ballots are to be completed online or returned by Monday, June 17, 2024. Ballots should not be mailed back with payments. Please follow the directions on the ballot.

Elections in Districts 7 and 10 will be by vote of acclamation

at the annual meeting, to be held June 20 at St. Malachy School in Geneseo. Results of the District 5 and 8 elections will be announced at the annual meeting.



### **DISTRICT 5**

**Pat Smith**

*Incumbent*

712 Park Ave.

Galena, IL 61036

Pat Smith has served as a director of JCE Co-op for 17 years. She is a Certified Director, having completed the Director Gold Program and the Board Leadership Program. Smith continues to keep these certifications up to date.

As JCE Co-op Director for District 5, Smith has served on the Policy Committee, Power Supply Committee, New Director Selection Committee, Governance Committee and Annual Meeting Committee. She serves as the alternate for the Association of Illinois Electric Cooperative. She has been a voting delegate for the National Rural Electric Cooperative.

Smith stated, "JCE Co-op is a positive and supportive organization that works with its members to promote economic growth of our service area." She endorses the proactive approach of JCE Co-op in its support of the Northwest Illinois Economic Development Board. Smith says that community solar farms and the build-out of broadband and fiber to our members are examples of JCE Co-op's commitment to

"enhance the quality of life for our members."

Smith and her husband, Ron, are lifelong residents of Galena. They have three children: Kathy (Jay), Lynn (David), Ron (Lori), eight grandchildren and 14 great grandchildren. They have lived in the same neighborhood for many years.

While raising their children, they have restored two homes on the east side of Galena.

Smith retired from the Galena School District after 23 years of service.

She enjoys serving her community. She was an organist at St. Michael Church for many years. She has served as a director on The Galena Foundation Board, The Turner Hall Restoration Committee and the Grant Park Restoration Committee. She has volunteered at Galena Country Fair for many years and served as Vendor Chair for 15 years.

If elected, she will continue to represent JCE Co-op members of District 5 to the best of her ability.



### **DISTRICT 5**

**Desiree Einsweiler**

9732 U.S. Highway

Route 20 West

Galena, IL 61036

Desiree Einsweiler grew up in Galena and graduated from Galena High School.

Einsweiler has an undergraduate degree from Ithaca College in Ithaca, N.Y., and a master's degree from the University of Iowa. She spent the first part of her career working in healthcare

administration, first as a Regional Clinic Director in Mason City, Iowa, and later as the CEO of Palo Alto County Health System in Emmetsburg, Iowa. She moved back to Galena in 2017 and currently works as the president of Lemfco Foundry. In her spare time, she enjoys traveling and spending time with her family.

Einsweiler is running for the JCE Co-op Board of Directors because she is interested in becoming more involved in the community. She is also interested in the regulations and technological advances in the energy sector. She believes it is an exciting time to get involved.



#### **DISTRICT 5**

**Peter Regez**

11703 W. Red  
Gates Road  
Galena, IL 61036

Pete Regez wants to add his leadership abilities and industry expertise to the JCE Co-op Board of Directors and provide bold, cost-effective, safe, reliable solutions today, while thinking about tomorrow. He said he believes that quickly expanding internet access is a key feature in JCE Co-op's plan and wants to help expand the program. "With today's mobile workforce, online education and increased data needs, universal access to high-speed internet is a necessity for our economy. It is also important to prioritize energy efficiency, conservation and ensure equitable rate structures," says Regez.

He has been a cooperative member for over 20 years and has served on the JCE Co-op Member Advisory Council

since 2018. Regez earned his Bachelor of Science in Electrical Engineering from the University of Wisconsin-Platteville. During his 34 years as an electrical engineer, he gained in-depth knowledge of the utility industry. For two decades, he worked at Alliant Energy, managing projects, ensuring regulatory compliance, mentoring employees and creating a safe, diverse working environment. In 2023, Regez left Alliant Energy to start consulting work with Stanley Consultants. He is a registered Professional Engineer and a member of several electrical engineering professional associations. He peer reviews technical publications in his field and plans annual professional development events. At home and at work, as well as in the community, Regez works toward creating a better future by practicing sustainability. He co-organizes the Galena Green Team events and has volunteered with the Jo Daviess Conservation Foundation and Jo Daviess/Carroll Solid Waste Agency.

Regez lives in rural Galena with his wife, Hendrica, and their dog, Willie. He also has four children: Lukas, Ulrike, Madeleine and Andre, living across the country. His hobbies include beekeeping, wood-working and playing guitar.



#### **DISTRICT 7**

**David H. Senn**

1375 West Point Rd  
Mount Carroll, IL  
61053

David Senn has been a member of JCE Co-op since 1982. He has served on the board since 2007 and currently acts as the chairman of

the board. As a director, he has completed all the courses to achieve Director Gold Certification from the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA). He also currently serves on the executive committee of the Association of Illinois Electric Cooperatives (AIEC).

NRECA has asked Senn to participate in its annual meeting and teach classes, three of which are scheduled for 2024.

Locally, he is a member of the Mount Carroll Lions Club and has been a District Governor for Lions Club International.

A graduate of Northern Illinois University, Senn received a Bachelor of Science degree in accounting. After college, he became a naval aviator, achieving the rank of lieutenant. After leaving the service, he began a career in the brokerage industry that included a five-year stint in New York City and achieved Certified Financial Planner designation. He worked as a certified financial planner until his retirement in 2007.

"Having had the opportunity to attend national and state meetings, sessions with our elected officials and education training sessions, I realize I have been given a leg up and placed in a position where my experience will permit me to be able to deliver to the members of JCE Co-op innovative, diversified energy products, which will allow them to grow and prosper in the century ahead," he stated. "Our goal of bringing high-speed internet to our members and region is a part of this vision."

"We as a nation stand on the threshold of change. The

**Continued on page 18F ►**

future of energy consumption and availability of things we have become accustomed to appear to be in a state of turmoil," Senn stated. "I believe JCE Co-op is positioned to provide stability during these trying times, and I hope to be a part of this process as we move forward."

Senn is actively involved in many conservation groups, such as the National Wild Turkey Federation, Pheasants Forever and the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation.

He and his wife, Shirley, have been together for 40 years and have a blended family of six children, four grandchildren and two great grandchildren.



**DISTRICT 8**  
**Russell Holesinger**  
*Incumbent*  
825 Middle Road  
Fulton, IL 61252

Russ Holesinger has been a member of JCE Co-op since the co-op acquired the Alliant Energy territory, which included his hometown of Fulton. He was elected to the board of directors in 2009 and presently serves as Vice Chairman.

Holesinger has had the opportunity of serving in several leadership positions. He is a past board president of Fulton Unity Christian School, serving several terms on that board. He has also served several times as Vice President of Fulton Bethel Church Council. He graduated from Calvin University in Grand Rapids, Mich., in 1973 and from the University of Illinois Law School, with honors, in 1976. He always wanted to

return to his hometown to practice law. Holesinger has been a practicing attorney since 1977, focusing in the areas of real estate and estate planning. He presently has offices in Fulton and Morrison, Ill. He is a member of the Whiteside County Bar Association and has served one term as President of that association.

Holesinger and his wife, Jan, have three children, and they have been blessed with 10 grandchildren.

"Serving on the board allows me the opportunity to contribute to my community and to learn more about the benefits of the co-op business model," Holesinger said. Also, he appreciates the opportunity of learning more about the energy business through the classes offered to the directors, as well as the learning experience of working with the other board members in the boardroom setting. "I have made some great friends through the years, and I have been honored to serve. JCE has assembled a great team of friendly, knowledgeable people who have a real desire to serve."

"Our co-op has been blessed with significant growth during my time as a director. I believe that the co-op model brings out the best in the entire team, which ultimately benefits the members," he said. "I am proud that JCE Co-op has also been very supportive of economic development in the communities which we serve. It has been a privilege to serve at the board level."



**DISTRICT 8**  
**Ted James**  
640 N. 4th St.  
Fulton, IL 61252

Ted James is seeking election to the JCE Co-op District 8 Directorship. James has been a member of JCE Co-op for over 35 years.

James is a business owner with NICET Engineering Certifications and special business degrees. He has owned and operated multiple successful businesses and has worn many hats, including farmer, truck driver and fire equipment specialist.

James is very involved in his community and has been a youth sports coach and a Fulton firefighter, where he has held multiple positions, including fire chief. James is accustomed to working with small and large groups to accomplish a common goal and has experience with construction and business expansion projects, as well as working with government agencies.

He has served with other boards and organizations, including the Clinton Chamber Board, the president of the Complex Board, Fulton Rec Board, Clinton Downtown Board, vice president of the Junior Achievement Board, Focus Group Board, Thomson Melon Days Board and Fulton Downtown Development Group.

James stated, "I am running for the JCE Co-op Board because I want to share my life experiences and assist others in promoting positive growth and improvements for JCE and its members. I am interested in learning the ins and outs of the JCE Co-op Board of Directors."



**DISTRICT 10**  
**Robert "Bob" Kuhns**  
 19789 E. 1650 St.  
 Geneseo, IL 61254

Robert (Bob) Kuhns has been a cooperative member since 1975 and became a JCE member at the time of the merger with Farmers Mutual Electric Co. Kuhns served on the Farmers Mutual Board of directors for over 20 years and was secretary/treasurer for most of that time.

A graduate of Millikin University with a B.A. in Music Education and with two summers of graduate study at the University of Iowa, Kuhns taught instrumental and vocal music for 13 years in Iowa and Illinois. Kuhns also served as a rural mail carrier in Geneseo for 15 years. Now retired, Kuhns had his own piano tuning business for over 50 years and is a lifetime member of the Piano Technicians Guild. In

addition, he has 30 years as an emergency veterinarian assistant and maintenance man for his wife's veterinarian practice.

Kuhns has served on the Charitable Foundation, GIFT (Geneseo Is For Tomorrow), as a board member, treasurer and president. He currently serves as treasurer of JCE and Chair of the Power Supply and Rates Committee for (PPI) Prairie Power Inc. in Springfield, Ill.

"I have enjoyed the challenge and experience of serving on the JCE Board as director representing Geneseo and District 10. I believe I bring a unique, creative background to the board, and I look forward to finding solutions to the challenges, keeping our system reliable and rates affordable."

"My wife's parents and grandparents were lifetime members of our local electric cooperative. I consider it a privilege to serve the organization that brought

electricity to their families in 1936. When we moved back to the area in 1975, it was an easy decision to choose our local electric co-op over the investor-owned utility.

"Some years later, one of my neighbors approached me about running for a board position as he was about to retire. I accepted and was successful in my bid and served on the Farmer's Board until the merger with Jo-Carroll."

Kuhns and his wife of 58 years, Barbara, have no children, but among them have 10 brothers and sisters and many nieces and nephews. They also have a dog, a cat, two horses, two ponies and a cockatoo from Australia.

Kuhns has several interests, many involving music as he enjoys playing musical instruments, singing and writing music. He also flies his own airplane, enjoys bicycling, horseback riding and walking, as well as being a home handyman.

# Activities and Upcoming Events

### Save the dates!

#### Geothermal Power Hours

**POWER UP... Saturday, June 8**

And get to know **GEOTHERMAL!**

Geothermal Power Hour with John Scott  
10:00 a.m. to noon

Sign up at [jcecoop.com](http://jcecoop.com)

**2024 Annual Meeting of Members**

Saint Aldechuy School  
101 E. Ogden Ave. (between 4 & 50th)

4:30 p.m.	Member registration
4:30-5:30 p.m.	Geothermal presentation
6:00 p.m.	Meeting
7 p.m.	Dinner

**POWER UP... Saturday, August 10**

And get to know **GEOTHERMAL!**

Geothermal Power Hour with John Scott  
10:00 a.m. to noon

Sign up at [jcecoop.com](http://jcecoop.com)

Sign up at [jcecoop.com/geothermal](http://jcecoop.com/geothermal) or [jcecoop.com/annual-meeting](http://jcecoop.com/annual-meeting)

### Photo Contest

Send us your best shot!

2024 photo contest entries are due June 30!

Send us your favorite photos that represent life in our area. Winning entries will be featured in the 2025 JCE Co-op photo calendar.

Entrants must be JCE members. All photos must be the work of the entrant and be taken within the co-op's service territory.

We will choose 12 photos to appear on the calendar pages and two photos to be featured on the front and back covers. Several other photos are selected each year as honorable mentions.

For complete rules and entry information, please visit [jcecoop.com/member-involvement](http://jcecoop.com/member-involvement).



### Coloring Contest

Looking for a fun summer project for your kids this summer?

Deadline July 26th

Winners will receive a set of school supplies for the fall school year and other fun prizes. In addition, to the child's prize, we donate five energy related children's books to the child's community library.

Coloring sheets, along with the entry form and rules, can be downloaded at [jcecoop.com/member-involvement](http://jcecoop.com/member-involvement). Only one entry per child is allowed, and each entry will be placed into one of the three age groups 5-6, 7-8 and 9-10.

Artwork will be judged based on creativity, originality and use of color. All artwork will not be returned except upon request and will be displayed in our Elizabeth, Savanna and Geneseo offices.





# Co-op receives \$69.9 million for fiber buildout

Buildout of high-speed fiber internet in rural areas of northwestern Illinois has received a boost with the award of \$69.9 million in grant funds to JCE Co-op from the state's Connect Illinois program.

The co-op will use the funds to deploy high-speed fiber internet to areas in Whiteside, Carroll and Jo Daviess counties, enabling connection of more than 5,100 households, farms and businesses.

"Access to high-speed internet service is necessary for our current and future rural members and businesses to excel and remain competitive," JCE Co-op President and CEO Mike Casper said in announcing the grant award. "High-speed internet service is necessary for the future success of our region.

"It allows our existing businesses to grow and remain competitive, our children to excel and northwest Illinois to attract workers and new businesses," he said. "It connects us to telemedicine, educational and remote work opportunities, and family and friends around the world."

The Connect Illinois grant funds and local match will be used to build 1,265 miles of fiber passing 5,160 locations. Making up a portion of the local match is the commitment of \$3 million from Whiteside County. In 2023, the Whiteside County Board unanimously voted to partner with JCE Co-op and allocated \$3 million of matching funds to help maximize grant opportunities to underserved and unserved rural residents in that area. That support comes from American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds. Another \$50,000 from local economic development funds was committed by Jo Daviess County to help provide fiber optic internet access.

Combined with prior grants and other regional projects, all three counties will realize significant coverage towards countywide buildouts, according to Jesse Shekleton, JCE Co-op's director of broadband operations. This project fills in many of the remaining gaps of underserved and unserved areas throughout Jo Daviess and Carroll counties and the northern half of Whiteside County.

The buildout of fiber across the region is the biggest opportunity for growth of the co-op in northwest Illinois since 1939, said Kyle Buros, JCE Co-op senior vice president and chief operating officer. Continuing construction of the co-op's fiber network and the connection of new members is an undertaking larger than the co-op's previous acquisition of former Alliant Energy electric and natural gas services and the merger with Farmers Mutual Electric Company combined.

Referencing the co-op's beginnings as an electric cooperative bringing power to rural areas, Buros noted "what took 85 years, we'll repeat with fiber in the next two to three years."

JCE Co-op currently maintains approximately 2,400 miles of electric distribution line, more than 300 miles of natural gas

pipeline, and over 1,000 miles of fiber backbone. During the next three years, the co-op expects to construct another 1,500 miles of fiber backbone that will provide access to over 10,000 homes and businesses.

"The near-term goal is to complete as much rural buildout as possible within the next few years pursuant to the grant criteria," said Shekleton. "However, the long-term goal isn't about fiber. It's about the rural membership and how they utilize this world-class service to improve their everyday lives and drive rural development well into the future."

The Connect Illinois grant is the fifth and largest grant the co-op has received for fiber broadband projects. Casper noted that the JCE Co-op team has been proactive and successful in obtaining grants to build out area that otherwise would be cost prohibitive.

"What makes our area uniquely scenic can make construction and maintenance of infrastructure extremely difficult and costly," he said.

"The collective efforts of the cooperative and the rural residents of northwest Illinois to be awarded with these much-needed grants further demonstrates the capability of a grassroots effort seeking to improve quality of life and promote rural prosperity," Shekleton said.

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*For more information and full coverage of this award, please visit [jcecoop.com](http://jcecoop.com)*

