

# HI-LINES

A newsletter for members of JCE Co-op

# 2026

JANUARY 2026

Elizabeth, IL

800-858-5522

jcecoop.com



## CALENDAR OF EVENTS

### SENIOR PLANET

We will be taking a break from Senior Planet for the winter months so we can focus on scholarship outreach and Youth Tour school visits. Senior Planet will launch again in March.

At Senior Planet, we're here to support you as you explore technology at your own pace. We'd love to know—what skills, tools or technology topics are you interested in learning next? You don't need to be a member to participate.

Your ideas help us shape future classes and programs built just for you. Please contact:

**TAYLOR SMITH**  
815-591-0091  
tsmith@jcecoop.com

**JANUARY 1**  
JCE Co-op offices closed for New Year's.



**JCE CO-OP**  
Electric • Gas • Fiber



### CEO'S REPORT

by Mike Casper

As the CEO of JCE Co-op, one of my most important responsibilities is making sure your cooperative delivers the best value possible. As a member-owned cooperative, our mission is to provide safe, efficient, and reliable service at a price you can afford.

I also want to be candid about some of the challenges we, along with many other utilities, are facing when it comes to rising costs.

Over the past five years, the cost of providing services has gone up significantly due to higher demand for energy, supply chain problems, material shortages and increased labor costs.

Big changes are happening across the utility industry. Industries are using more energy and communities are growing. This growth is exciting because it signals a strong economy, innovation and the promise of a more vibrant future. But meeting this growing demand requires significant investment in infrastructure.

Unfortunately, the materials we rely on, such as copper, steel, transformers and other parts are becoming much more expensive. Simply put, the tools and technology required to provide vital services now cost more, and that creates added pressure on your cooperative.

Labor costs are another factor. Like many industries, utilities depend on highly skilled workers. Building, maintaining, and improving utility systems in our communities requires trained professionals. Over the past few years, demand for those workers has increased, and utilities across the country are competing for the same talent. As a result, wages are rising, which

## Our commitment to you amid rising costs

also adds to the overall cost of providing essential services.

Ongoing supply chain issues continue to create challenges as well. Materials we need to operate our systems have been harder to secure because of shipping delays, slower production, and bottlenecks in manufacturing. These issues have driven up prices and slowed down important projects that help us maintain reliable service. In response, utilities like ours have had to think creatively and adjust how we plan, purchase, and complete projects.

We also know all of this is happening at the same time your own household expenses such as food, housing, fuel, and other necessities, are also increasing. We live in these communities too, and we understand how difficult it can be to make everything fit into the family budget. That is why controlling costs remains one of our top priorities.

At JCE Co-op, we are taking steps to manage these challenges and keep rates as stable as possible. We are working hard to improve efficiency in our operations, including using new technologies that help us save time and money. For example, advanced metering infrastructure (AMI) allows us to quickly detect power outages and improve how electricity is delivered. Over time, systems like these reduce costs and improve service for everyone. We also review our operations regularly to find opportunities to improve efficiencies, ensuring that every dollar we spend benefits our members.

We are also focused on teamwork. By working closely with other cooperatives, we can share resources, knowledge, and

**CEO'S REPORT**  
by Mike Casper**Rising costs  
and our  
commitment  
to you** (Continued)

purchasing power. This helps bring costs down and strengthens reliability. On a broader level, we are actively advocating for policies at the national level that support affordable energy, help ease supply chain pressures, and encourage smart investments that benefit cooperatives like ours.

Even with all of these challenges, our main goal remains the same: to be your trusted energy provider. While we cannot control all the rising costs driven by larger market forces, we can promise to always be transparent, to continue innovating, and to work tirelessly for the communities we serve.

At JCE Co-op, we know we are not just providing energy and internet services, we are serving our neighbors. Every decision we make is guided by that understanding.

Thank you for trusting JCE Co-op to provide necessary services to your homes, businesses and communities. Through cooperation and commitment, we will continue working toward an affordable and reliable future for you.

**AUTO PAY  
SIGN UP**

**Save time and money by automating  
your bill payments to avoid late fees  
and service interruptions.**



**JCE CO-OP**  
Electric • Gas • Fiber

**REMINDER****AMI changeout and  
problem pedestals**

JCE Co-op's automated metering infrastructure, or AMI, upgrade will continue into 2026. Every member's electric meter will be upgraded to a new advanced meter with technology that improves reliability, increases outage detection and supports future innovations in energy management.

As crews work through this systemwide project, they are finding some electric meter pedestals and sockets that are leaning, rusted or damaged and are otherwise unsafe.

**Why this matters**

- A leaning or damaged pedestal can expose live electrical parts, increasing the risk of electrical shock or fire.
- It may cause service to fail during storms, high winds or ground movement.
- Unsafe pedestals prevent crews from safely installing the new meter.

**Who is responsible**

Just like the wiring inside your home, the meter pedestal or socket is owned and maintained by the property owner. If your pedestal or socket is unsafe and presents a safety hazard, you will need to have it repaired or replaced by a licensed electrician. After a reasonable amount of time, if the hazard is not resolved, the cooperative reserves the right to disconnect service until repairs are completed and it is safe to energize again.

**What you should do**

Inspect your meter pedestal. Does it lean, wobble or show signs of rust or damage? If so, contact a licensed electrician to bring it up to code and ensure it meets the cooperative's specifications. Members should refer to the "Outdoor Free Standing Meter Structure" specification (Figure 4-6) in the electric service manual on JCE Co-op's website.

Crews will leave a hazard notice if they find your pedestal or socket unsafe during the meter changeout. Addressing these issues quickly helps keep your service reliable and ensures the meter upgrade can be completed without delay.

Together, we can make this project a success and deliver safer, smarter and more reliable power to every member of JCE Co-op's service territory.

# Understanding rising costs in today's utility landscape

Over the past several years, many industries, including electric and broadband providers, have been navigating a period of significant cost increases. While JCE Co-op works hard to keep operations efficient and reliable, the environment we operate in has changed dramatically.

These rising costs affect utilities nationwide, and they influence everything from project timelines to the long-term investments needed to maintain safe, modern infrastructure for our communities. Below is a look at some of the major factors shaping today's cost environment.

## Materials cost more than ever

Across the industry, the price of essential materials has increased sharply. Items such as poles, wire, transformers, steel and copper now cost substantially more than they did just five years ago. These materials are the backbone of our system because they keep the power flowing, help us respond to outages and allow us to expand and strengthen our grid.

## Demand for skilled labor continues to grow

Maintaining and improving utility systems requires highly trained lineworkers, engineers and technicians. Like many fields, the utility workforce is experiencing increased competition for skilled labor. As demand rises across the country, wage pressures naturally increase, and the overall cost of completing essential work rises with it.

This investment in people is crucial because we rely on these experts to keep our system safe and reliable.

## Ongoing supply chain delays make projects harder to complete

Across the country, utilities have seen delays in receiving critical equipment. Supply chain challenges such as slower production, transportation delays and shortages from manufacturers have stretched project timelines and increased costs.

Even when materials are available, they often take longer to arrive than they once did. This requires us to plan further ahead and adapt quickly when supplies are limited.

## Growing communities require growing infrastructure

As technology evolves and communities depend on more energy and more connectivity, utilities must



continue upgrading and expanding infrastructure. Whether replacing aging equipment, preparing for new growth or improving system resilience, these investments are essential to ensuring safe, reliable service.

The cost of these improvements has risen along with the materials and labor needed to build them.

## Your cooperative is working hard to manage these challenges

Even with these industrywide hurdles, JCE Co-op remains committed to being a careful steward of our members' money.

We continue looking for ways to improve efficiency, use technology that reduces long-term costs and plan responsibly for future needs. As a cooperative, every decision we make is guided by one goal: delivering safe, reliable service at the most affordable cost we can.

We know rising costs affect you at home too. We live here, we are your neighbors and we understand the importance of keeping essential services dependable and affordable.

## Staying transparent with our members

It is important for us to share what is happening in the industry and how national trends affect local cooperatives like ours. As we navigate these rising costs, we will continue keeping members informed, working to control expenses and making thoughtful, long-term decisions that support a strong and reliable future for our communities.

# YOUTH DAY

March 25, 2026

For over 60 years, the electric and telephone cooperatives of Illinois have given tomorrow's leaders the opportunity to learn from today's public officials. Each year, over 300 outstanding students get an up close and firsthand look at democracy in action when they meet their elected representatives during Illinois Electric and Telephone Cooperatives Youth Day. Over the years, thousands of students have learned how government works and why it's important for every citizen to get involved in it. State senators and representatives have the opportunity to inspire and encourage the leaders of tomorrow during this annual event, held in Springfield.

# YOUTH TO WASHINGTON

June 15-22, 2026

The Electric Cooperative Youth Tour has brought high school students to Washington, D.C. for a week in June every year since the late 1950s. Students apply and are selected for this program by their local electric co-op. We believe that students should see their nation's capital up close, learn about the political process and interact with their elected officials. Nearly 50,000 students from rural areas and small towns across America have participated in this program. Don't be surprised if you run into a former Youth Tour participant who is a congressional aide on Capitol Hill. While several of our alumni work in Washington, you will find even more alumni in your own community.

*For more information visit our website [jcecoop.com](http://jcecoop.com) or contact Taylor Smith at [tsmith@jcecoop.com](mailto:tsmith@jcecoop.com) or call 815-591-0091.*

# YOUTH TOUR 2026



MAKE YOUR MARK



Pictured: Jeremy Werner

## Safety Leadership Award

This year, JCE Co-op started a new award to recognize employees who make safety a top priority. The Safety Leadership Award is given to someone who doesn't just follow safety rules, but also helps others stay safe, prevents problems before they happen, and shows strong leadership.

We are excited to share that Jeremy Werner is our very first winner! Jeremy works hard every day to keep himself and his team safe. He pays attention, speaks up when he sees something that could be unsafe, and sets a great example for others.

Congratulations to Jeremy! Thank you for helping make JCE Co-op a safer place for everyone.

Stephen Fitzpatrick

## Years of Service Awards

Fifteen JCE Co-op employees were recognized in 2025 for their years of service to the co-op and its members.

**40 Years:** Laurel LeSage

**25 Years:** Jeremy Werner

**15 Years:** Merri Sevey, Dan Marcure, John Scott, Kurt Krohmer, Jennifer Meyer

**10 Years:** Keith Hayes, Jordan Esser

**5 Years:** Nick Brown, Adam Miller, Derek Bradt, Brad Edler, Josh Hoppman



Pictured: Brad Edler-5 years, Derek Bradt-5 Years, John Scott-15 years, Laurel LeSage-40 years, Merri Sevey 15 years, Jennifer Meyer- 15 Years, and Mike Casper is also pictured, joining the group in support.

# Students! **SPARK** **your future!**



## JCE Co-op scholarship applications open

JCE Co-op will award up to \$25,000 to students from its service territory through its scholarship program in 2026.

All JCE Co-op scholarships are funded by unclaimed and donated capital credits. Application deadline for JCE scholarships is March 1, 2026; Director's Scholarship application deadline is May 1. Applications must be submitted online at [jcecoop.com](http://jcecoop.com).

*For more information regarding any of the JCE scholarships, contact Taylor Smith, JCE Co-op member & youth engagement coordinator, at [tsmith@jcecoop.com](mailto:tsmith@jcecoop.com) or call 815-591-0091.*

## Available scholarships

**6**

Six JCE Co-op Scholarships in the amount of \$1,000 to current high school seniors whose parents or guardians are members of JCE Co-op. Two scholarships will be awarded in both Jo Daviess and Carroll counties and one each in Whiteside and Henry counties

**4**

Four \$1,000 scholarships for students who will attend two-year, technical or trade schools. One awarded in each of the four counties of the cooperative's service territory.

**2**

Two lineworker scholarships in the amount of \$2,000 each.

**4**

Four \$1,500 scholarships for adult or "nontraditional" students. These scholarships will go to cooperative members who are returning to school or will attend a post-secondary or accredited training program. One awarded in each of the four counties of the cooperative's service territory. (This scholarship is not intended for students who have graduated from high school within the past four years.)

**10**

"Director's Scholarships" of \$500 each to be awarded to a student from each of the cooperative's 10 director districts. Current high school seniors, whose parents are members of JCE Co-op, are eligible for these scholarships. Applicants and at least one of their parents must attend the Annual Meeting of Members on June 5, where selections will be made by drawings.



# 2025

## A look back

### Connecting communities: Fiber internet expands across Northwest Illinois

We're proud to celebrate a major milestone as our 9,000th fiber internet member is officially online. Every new connection represents a household, a business, a farm and a future gaining access to the digital world.

Our fiber construction crews are working tirelessly, expanding our fiber-optic network across Jo Daviess, Carroll, Stephenson and Whiteside counties. With every mile of fiber installed, we're ensuring that rural communities have the tools they need to thrive in education, healthcare and the global economy.

### Value-added services



VoIP phone services



Internet & network security  
Managed IT services



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Your Touchstone Energy® Cooperative



# 2,489

Miles of mainline  
and drop fiber



# 112

Fiber neighborhoods with  
service now available



# 1109

Total phone service  
subscribers



# 2,500+

New fiber subscribers



# 9,446

Total broadband and  
wireless members

## YOUR BOARD OF DIRECTORS

**David Senn**  
*Chairman*  
 District 7

**Jerry Meyer**  
*Vice Chairman*  
 District 1

**Robert Kuhns**  
*Treasurer*  
 District 10

**Dan Tindell**  
*Secretary*  
 District 4

**Joseph Mattingley**  
 District 2

**Allen Hendren**  
 District 3

**Vacant**  
 District 5

**Thomas Lundy**  
 District 6

**Ted James**  
 District 8

**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.

**Genesee**  
 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

**October 29, 2025**

## Board Meeting Minutes Summary

The regular board meeting of Jo-Carroll Energy, Inc. (NFP) was held on Wednesday, October 29, 2025.

Alex Peebles, Manager of Safety and Loss Control, provided a safety briefing to those present.

General Counsel, Terry Kurt, read the Rules of the Open Board Meeting.

**Safety Moment** – Director Tindell presented a Safety Moment on Flood Awareness, sharing tips such as avoiding flooded areas and driving through standing water ("Turn Around, Don't Drown!"). He emphasized staying informed through weather alerts, disconnecting power supplies to prevent electrical hazards, and acting quickly to ensure everyone is accounted for if evacuation becomes necessary.

**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 meeting agenda.

**Presentation** – President and CEO, Mike Casper presented a slideshow highlighting how JCE is empowering members through innovation. He discussed upcoming enhancements associated with the new SmartHub software, which brings faster, more convenient, and secure ways for members to manage their energy use, access account information, and stay connected with JCE.

**Governance Topics and Board Policy Review** – None.

## CEO| Financial Operating Report

### CEO Report

**Financial Operating Report** – Chuck Woods, Chief Financial Officer, noted that September Revenue is approximately \$56 million. Total operations and maintenance expenses are \$44 million, which is \$908,076 over the budget of \$43,045,893 million. Margins are approximately \$2,388,463. By general consent, the board moved to file the financial operating report with the auditor.

## Operations and Regulatory/ Legislative Update

**Operations Update** – Senior Vice President and Chief Operating Officer Kyle Buros provided an update on the new substation in Mt. Carroll, noting that construction is expected to be completed by December. Once finished, the new substation will enhance service reliability and help minimize the brief interruptions members may have experienced. In addition, JCE Co-op is expected to have 9,000 fiber subscribers by mid-December.

**Cooperative Services Update** – Vice President of Cooperative Services, Jennifer Meyer, provided an update on the transition to the new NISC software. She noted that representatives from NISC will be onsite next week to conduct extensive internal training on the new system. This upgrade will streamline operations across the cooperative while maintaining cost efficiency compared to the previous software.

## Human Resources Update| Marketing

– EVP of Human Resources, Merri Sevey, provided an update on the recent member communication regarding the upcoming transition to the new SmartHub software. She noted that the new platform will streamline member billing and communication processes. In addition, she highlighted the new option for members to receive text message notifications, further enhancing communication and engagement.

**IT Technology Report** – Vice President and Chief Technology Officer, Dan Marcure, provided an update on a recent security assessment conducted at the cooperative. A written report is expected to be completed in November, which will include recommendations for breach recovery procedures, an incident command plan, and protocols for contacting and notifying forensic and response teams if a security incident occurs.



## Resume of minutes *(Continued)*

**External Affairs/Legislative Update** – General Counsel, Terry Kurt, provided a report on state matters, noting that the Illinois General Assembly is currently in its veto session. He will continue to monitor any legislative activity that may impact on the cooperative and provide updates as needed.

**Board Issues and Action Items** – None.

**Member Comments** – Members were invited to share any comments or concerns. All remarks were positive, and members expressed appreciation for the cooperative's ongoing efforts and communication.

### Reports/Updates

**Association of Illinois Electric Cooperatives Report (AIEC)** – Director Senn, Chairman of the Board, provided highlights from the Association of Illinois Electric Cooperatives Board Meeting. He emphasized that State Senate and House committees recently held two subject matter hearings on the content of Senate Bill (SB) 25, an 800 plus page energy omnibus bill.

**American Public Gas Association (APGA)** – Director Carroll shared highlights from the American Public Gas Association (APGA), noting that the association supports appliance efficiency regulations that are based on sound analysis and avoid imposing unreasonable burdens on consumers. He also highlighted APGA's support for amending the Natural Gas Act to provide FERC with refund authority in natural gas pipeline cases.

**Dairyland Power Cooperative (DPC) Report** – Director Tindell provided a summary and highlights from the Dairyland Board Meeting. He noted DPC's Moody's rating was revised to positive from stable which tells investors and lenders that Moody's sees measurable improvement in financial metrics.

**Prairie Power Inc. (PPI) Report** – Director Kuhns reported on the PPI board meeting highlights and generation numbers. Kuhns included in his report that Prairie State Unit 1 is back online after a 28-day planned outage and Unit 2 entered a 10 day planned maintenance outage to address repairs to support continuous operation until its major outage in Fall 2026.

### Executive Session

**Into Executive Session** – A motion was made, seconded and carried unanimously to go into Executive Session at 11:25 AM.

**Out of Executive Session** – A motion was made, seconded and carried unanimously to come out of Executive Session at 12:00 PM.

**Action Resulting from Executive Session** – Starting with October usage, a small adjustment to the power cost and purchased gas rates will be implemented. This adjustment will be reviewed again in January.

**Other Business** – None.

**Adjournment** – Chairman Senn adjourned the meeting at 12:05 AM.



## District 5 board seat update

With the recent resignation of Director Pat Smith, the District 5 board seat is currently vacant. The JCE Co-op Board of Directors has reviewed the topic of board district boundaries and potential redistricting in executive session and is carefully evaluating next steps to ensure fair and effective representation for all members. The board anticipates finalizing the redistricting process within the first quarter of 2026. Further updates will be shared with members as they become available.



### 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.