

NEWS, NOTES & VIEWS 10/26



Illinois Electric Cooperative's headquarters in Winchester. Built in the early 1900s, the co-op first moved in the building in 1953.

In the early 1930s, electricity had transformed life in America's cities and towns, but it stopped where the pavement ended. Roughly nine out of ten rural homes and farms had no electric service. Investor-owned utilities saw little profit in stringing miles of line to reach a handful of farms, so

rural families were left to light their homes with kerosene, pump water by hand, and work by lantern light.

The turning point came in 1935, when President Franklin D. Roosevelt created the Rural Electrification Administration by

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Illinois Electric Cooperative

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A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative



This institution is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

Working to improve the quality of life in the communities we serve since 1936.

They organized member-owned, not-for-profit electric cooperatives, signed up their neighbors, and built the lines themselves.

A Co-op Is Born

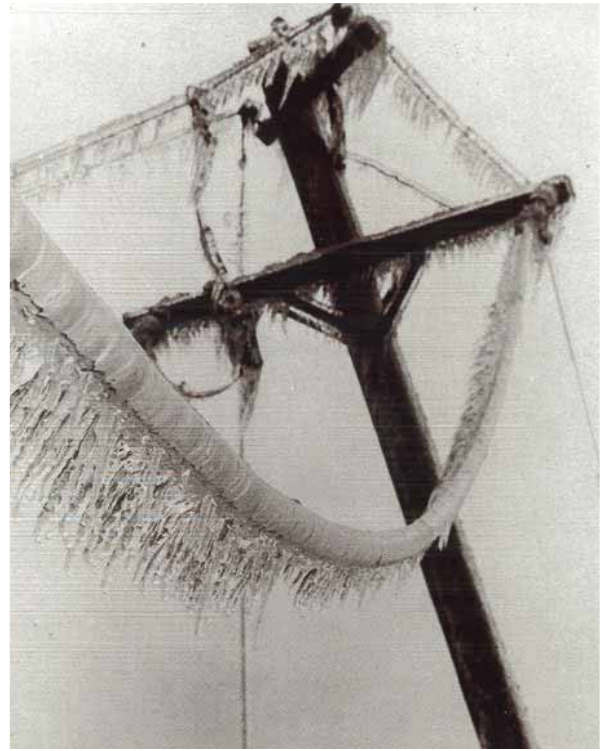
Illinois Electric Cooperative's story began in that same moment. Regional leaders gathered at a public assembly in Pittsfield on May 21, 1936, to establish our electric cooperative. The fledgling co-op secured a \$490,000 loan from the Rural Electrification Administration in March 1937 to build 622 miles of line serving 2,326 farms. On June 28, 1938, its 1,200-kilowatt generating plant near Winchester hummed to life, bringing power to more than 600 members in Pike, Scott, and Morgan counties. This year, our cooperative and nearly 900 local cooperatives across the United States celebrate 90 years of bringing electricity to rural homes.

A History of Growth

Over the decades, Illinois Electric expanded from its original three counties into Greene and Calhoun counties, adding a few members across neighboring county lines as well. What started as a way to provide electricity to under served rural areas has grown into a modern, member-owned utility serving roughly 14,000 electric and internet accounts across our service territory. Headquartered in Winchester, the co-op continually looks for ways to improve our reliable, safe service and add new services for the communities we serve.

Overcoming Adversity

Ninety years have not been without hardship, ranging from some destructive visits from Mother Nature to navigating a pandemic. No chapter tested the co-op like the ice storm of 1978. Freezing rain fell for most of three days, coating lines and poles across our service territory with up to two inches of ice before 50-mile-per-hour winds arrived to finish the job. Twenty-



A co-op line and pole during the ice storm of 1978.

four counties were declared disaster areas. Across the co-op's service territory, over half of our members lost power at some point. Some families waited three weeks for the power to return. Linemen worked around the clock in bitter conditions, replacing broken poles and restringing miles of downed wire, while neighbors looked after one another. The storm was, by any measure, the worst the region had seen, but it also revealed the strength of the cooperative model: when the crisis came, the people restoring service were the same people who lived in the communities that had lost it.

Bringing Internet to Members

The co-op's pioneering spirit extends beyond electricity. Just as the co-op brought power to farms the investor-owned utilities passed over in the 1930s, the co-op's internet division has spent more than three decades connecting the communities national providers left behind. The co-op entered the internet business over 30 years ago with dial-up and began offering wireless internet in 2006. In 2015, the co-op began

offering fiber service in two communities before starting a county-wide fiber build-out in Calhoun with help from federal and state grants. Today, Illinois Net serves more than 6,400 homes and businesses across Pike, Scott, Morgan, Greene, and Calhoun counties.



Internet Service Technician Mike McDade climbing one of the co-op's many wireless internet towers.

An Enduring Legacy

Because Illinois Electric is a not-for-profit cooperative, it answers to the members it serves rather than distant shareholders, a structure that has kept its focus on safety and reliability through nine decades of change. We continue that work today, maintaining the lines, extending broadband, and supporting the communities we serve through programs such as the Members' Fund, which improves overall quality of life.

Looking to the Future

As we look back on the past 90 years, we also look ahead. The utility industry has changed significantly over that time, as have needs and expectations. We continue to look for ways to improve the system and internet service. We also look for ways to adopt new

technologies. We recently added live chat to our website and offer text messages for outage notifications.

Along with technological improvements, we regularly review infrastructure and facilities. We've made great improvements in system reliability over the last 20-plus years. On facilities, for more than a year, the co-op's board of directors has evaluated the cost-benefit of a new building for members and co-op employees. Deciding whether to build a new headquarters is not a decision to be taken lightly. In our co-op's 90-year history, we have never built a building. We moved into our current building in 1953, and it was built over a hundred years ago. As the board continues the decision-making process, we will keep everyone updated.



Journeyman Lineman Kaiden Davis working on a line in rural Pike County.

Employee Spotlight

Matt Clayton

System Coordinator

About the Employee

Matt Clayton started working for Illinois Electric Cooperative in 1993. A Winchester native, he and his wife, Anne, have two boys, Blake (25) and Bryce (22). Today, Matt and Anne reside in rural Winchester.

When asked about his favorite part of his job, Matt says he takes pride in helping members with their projects, visiting with them, and developing plans that meet their electric service needs.

When not at work, Matt can be found raising show lambs, hunting, and spending time with his family.



Matt Clayton, his wife Anne, and their sons Blake and Bryce.



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