



# CVEC SPARKS NEW ADVENTURE

## Endvick joins the team as member services representative



By Danielle Endvick  
Member Services Representative

Although we're surrounded by electricity daily, my interactions within this realm feel slim. I recall entertaining elementary school presentations involving comical linemen and a lightbulb. Or the occasional storm power outage that offered the opportunity to light candles and play pioneer. However, growing up on a small dairy farm in the Chippewa Valley, most of my lessons on electricity came from one source: the electric wire around the pasture. (Lessons learned quickly!)

The electric fence can be a source of endless amusement on the farm, serving as a rite of passage for visiting city slickers and unsuspecting cousins. A single zap earns a healthy respect for voltage. To this day, my dad has not fully forgiven me for the time I helpfully plugged the fencer back in, having seen the cord dangling in the barn. He had unplugged it for ease of crossing the fence and caught quite a surprise as he swung a leg down over the wire.

That farm kid would be shocked to know she was headed for a career with an electric co-op. But when the role of member services representative for Chippewa Valley Electric Co-op came across my radar, it sparked my interest; my first day was September 1! (Brace yourself for many electricity puns ahead, my friends.)

I grew up here in Cornell, hopping around on feed bag stacks and tuning into farmers' conversations at the feed mill where Dad worked and helping clear tables at Turk's restaurant where my Mom waitressed for many years, both just a few blocks from the CVEC headquarters. My teenage years were spent helping with fieldwork, roaming the woods, and milking cows on our Split Ridge Dairy.

I graduated from Lake Holcombe High School and earned a degree in marketing communications from UW-River Falls. For the past 15 years, I served as a rural storyteller, writing for an agricultural newspaper, *The Country Today*, and later advocating for farmers with Wisconsin Farmers Union. My adventures took me to farms of all types, from large dairy and crop operations to those raising bison, elk, flowers, emus, and more. If we cross paths, be sure to ask about the icy winter day when I learned how to spot an agitated elk—as I wore shoes with no traction—or the time I interviewed a fully suited-up

beekeeper, while I had nothing but my everyday wear amid the company of bees landing on my notepad.

In my work with Farmers Union, I spoke up on rural policy in Washington, D.C., and Madison, traveled the country empowering farmers to share their stories, and served as editor for the award-winning *Wisconsin Farmers Union News*.

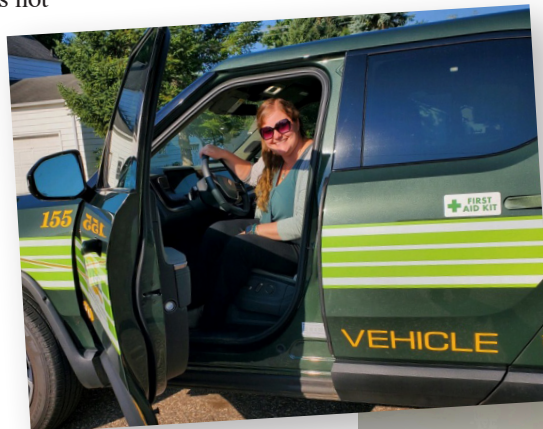
Along the way, I married a farmboy, Jesse. In 2015, we moved back to my home farm, now dubbed the Runamuck Ranch, and are raising beef cattle, chickens, and two rambunctious boys.

I'm excited for the opportunity to join the CVEC team. Through the years, I rubbed elbows with good people from the electric co-op realm whose passion for their community and work was contagious. Among them was a friend so committed that he got a tattoo of co-op mascot Willie Wiredhand. I watched this same lineman leave social events whenever storms hit and duty called. I heard stories about the close-knit co-op family and saw sorrow shared when the co-op lost one of their own. (See page 18 for a tribute to journeyman Keith Zimmerman, who the CVEC family lost far too soon.)

The sense of community I've felt radiating from the co-op community is akin to that experienced growing up in rural Wisconsin—when folks face challenges, neighbors lean in to help. The philosophy harkens back to the beginnings of the cooperative movement, when co-ops like CVEC toiled to bring electricity to rural Wisconsin. A similar effort

is underway to bring broadband to the masses, and CVEC is leading the way with Ntera®, in partnership with Citizens Connected. The mission remains the same: to provide reliable and economically priced services to our co-op members.

A few days into my new role, I've already seen cooperative values in action, and I look forward to sharing the stories of CVEC and our members. Be sure to follow us on social media, as we gear up to celebrate Co-op Month. You can celebrate knowing the co-op is giving back through Capital Credits! (See page 17 for details.) I hope you'll enjoy learning alongside me as I continue the journey to get to know our cooperative.



Day one adventures on-the-job at Chippewa Valley Electric included meeting mascot Willie Wiredhand and taking a spin in the Rivian "electric adventure vehicle."



## CVEC CELEBRATES WOLF RIVER SOLAR GROUNDBREAKING

Chippewa Valley Electric Cooperative (CVEC) directors and staff, along with Representative Rob Summerfield, broke ground in Stanley for Wolf River Solar on August 8. The project is a

result of a partnership between CVEC, Dairyland Power Cooperative, the City of Stanley, and OneEnergy.

Wolf River Solar is a community solar garden that will benefit the entire

CVEC membership. The 1.5 megawatt (MW) solar array has the potential to power up to 600 homes and is scheduled to be completed in December 2023. As a point of reference, CVEC's community solar garden located in New Auburn, which was completed in 2018, is a 250 kilowatt (kW) solar array that has saved CVEC members over \$57,000 in peak energy charges since it was commissioned in 2018. Wolf River Solar will be six times larger than the solar site in New Auburn. The array will span 8 acres and will be located north of Highway 29 off Janicki Road.

"This project is an investment in the future for the cooperative," said President/CEO Russ Falkenberg. "By diversifying our energy production, we're safeguarding members and powering our community for the future."



Pictured breaking ground on Wolf River Solar on August 8 were, left to right, CVEC Line Superintendent Kevin Scheidler; Director Kevin Meistad; President/CEO Russ Falkenberg; Directors Joe Melville, John Petska, Dan Liske, and Frank Draxler; Rep. Rob Summerfield; Director Steve Wall, and Member Services Director Nicole Whipp Sime.

## BALDWIN VISIT LIFTS UP NEED FOR CONTINUED BROADBAND INVESTMENT

On August 11, Senator Tammy Baldwin stopped at Chippewa Valley Electric Cooperative to discuss how federal investment is expanding broadband for hundreds of residents. CVEC members received support from the federal ReConnect Program through the Department of Agriculture, which provided over \$3 million to expand broadband to nearly 750 households in Chippewa, Rusk, and Taylor counties. Senator Baldwin also supported the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, which created the Broadband Equity, Access and Deployment (BEAD) program through which Wisconsin was allocated more than \$1 billion to expand access to high-speed internet.

"I hear a lot about the impact of access of high-speed broadband," Sen. Baldwin said. "We are very much a rural state and getting that broadband connection is vitally important."

"Senator Baldwin has been a pivotal player in the push for federal support for broadband expansion," said CVEC President/CEO Russ Falkenberg. "Because of her efforts, countless

Wisconsin families have been able to access fiber fast broadband. CVEC, Citizens Connected, and Ntera® are thankful for Senator Baldwin's support, and we look forward to working with her to continue to advance to those 'last mile' members."

CVEC staff and members welcomed Senator Tammy Baldwin for a visit on August 11. At right: Tyler Richter speaks to Baldwin during the visit.



## CAPITAL CREDITS ARE COMING YOUR WAY!

### Who receives capital credits?

CVEC is a cooperative and one of the things that makes us different from an investor-owned utility is that CVEC is not in business to make a profit. We exist to serve our members and we belong to the community we serve. This month, CVEC is pleased to return over \$622,000 in capital credits to more members. This year's capital credits will be paid out to members who purchased electricity from CVEC in the following years: 2000, 2001, 2002, 2021, 2022.

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**Since CVEC began in 1937, we have returned over \$16 million in capital credits refunds.**

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### Why do I earn capital credits?

When a member begins purchasing electricity, they are assigned two accounts—a billing account and a capital credit account. The capital credit account is specific to you and your spouse, if married. Regardless of how many times you move or how many billing accounts you may have, you have one capital credit account that stays with you. Each year CVEC margins are allocated back to their members. Your share is deposited in your capital credit account for that year.

### How do I collect my capital credits?

When the amount of your retirement in a given year is more than \$100, a check will be sent to the last valid address we have on file. Members with a retirement amount of \$100 or less will see a credit to their electric bill. The checks are printed and mailed from La Crosse, WI and cannot be picked up from our office in Cornell.



Former CVEC President/CEO Dean Ortmann, third from left, accepts the 2023 Economic Development Community Leadership Award. Also pictured, from left to right, are State Sen. Jesse James, Rep. Rob Summerfield, Rep. Dave Armstrong, Rep. Karen Hurd, CEDC Board chair Maureen Carlson, keynote speaker Ginger Johnson, CEDC Board member Ron Haas, and CEDC CEO Charlie Walker.

## 'A TESTAMENT TO THE INVESTMENT'

*Ortmann recognized for leadership, gives nod to CVEC team and board*

Past Chippewa Valley Electric Cooperative (CVEC) President/CEO Dean Ortmann is the recipient of the 2023 Economic Development Community Leadership Award. Presented by the Chippewa Economic Development Corporation (CEDC), the honor recognizes individuals who have shown significant advocacy for economic development in Chippewa County.

In a letter of recognition from the Wisconsin Legislature, it was noted that the award is a “testament to the investment” Ortmann has made to Chippewa County. Ortmann was at the helm of CVEC in the infancy and initial implementation of Ntera®, a joint venture between Citizens Connected and Chippewa Valley Electric that has helped bring fiber to homes throughout the Chippewa Valley.

“Your commitment to excellence and innovation in business is a welcomed boost to our local and state economy,” noted the letter, signed by Wisconsin State Senator Jesse James and Wisconsin State Representatives Karen Hurd and Rob Summerfield. “As current and former business owners, we are very familiar with the financial investment, sacrifice, and hard work necessary to succeed in business. We commend you for your determination to succeed as well as your continued dedication.”

Since 2018, Ntera® has helped provide fiber-fast internet for 1,800 homes and businesses in areas of Chippewa, Rusk,

and Taylor counties.

“We came in, and now you have fiber running by some industrial parks in the region, and you have fiber going to businesses who are able to expand where they couldn’t before,” Ortmann said. “It’s a great thing for everybody involved. We will see payback on it eventually but right now the emphasis hasn’t been on payback but rather on providing this area, this community, with what they needed.”

The award was presented to Ortmann August 24 at the CEDC Annual Meeting in Eau Claire.

“Dean’s leadership and financial knowledge through the years helped set the cooperative on a steady path forward,” said current CVEC President/CEO Russ Falkenberg. “The CVEC team is proud to see him earn this recognition for his efforts that undoubtedly have made a lasting impact here in the Chippewa Valley.”

“The nomination and award are very meaningful because I don’t feel like I solely deserve the legacy and award for this co-op,” Ortmann said. “I think it validates what the board and the employees and our sister co-op have done.”

Ortmann retired from the co-op in April 2023 after 31 years of service. He began his career at CVEC in 1991 as an accountant and was promoted to office manager in 2000 and president/CEO in 2016. He and his wife, Renée, are preparing for a move to Menomonie, where they’ll be closer to their children and grandchildren.

# PARADE TRIBUTE REMEMBERS LINEMAN KEITH ZIMMERMAN

Over the Labor Day weekend, Chippewa Valley Electric Co-op and Ntera® teammates joined family members in a tribute for journeyman lineman Keith Zimmerman at the Sturgeon Fest parade in his hometown of Jim Falls. Keith was a dedicated CVEC employee for 35 years and had enjoyed just a few months of retirement before passing away in July from liver cancer.

Keith was born July 26, 1959, in Chippewa Falls to LeRoy and Esther (Gullickson) Zimmerman. In 1977, he graduated from Chippewa Falls High School. Following high school, he served in the U.S. Army from 1977 to 1983, moving up to the rank of Sergeant. He served with the Nike Hercules Missile Unit as a fire control operator.

In 1983, he married Wanda Warner at Lambs Road Church in Sewell, New Jersey. They lived in Jim Falls but enjoyed traveling to Washburn to fish on Lake Superior.

Keith is fondly remembered for his love of fishing, hunting, snowmobiling, camping, woodworking, and anything that allowed him to spend time in the great outdoors. He was active in the



One of Keith's greatest passions was fishing on Lake Superior with his family and friends.



Left: Keith Zimmerman's family joined the CVEC line-up for a tribute to the journeyman lineman. Zimmerman retired from the cooperative this March after 35 years of service; he passed away in July.

Below: CVEC lineman Trevin Jensen drove one of the rigs in honor of Keith Zimmerman at the Sturgeon Fest parade.

Bloomer Archery and Cornell Snowmobile Club and spent many years teaching snowmobile and ATV safety courses. He loved to travel, taking trips to Wyoming, Texas, North and South Carolina, The Great Smoky Mountains, and Germany. He once rode his Harley from Kentucky to the Carolinas. He enjoyed going to the Florida Keys for the past five years.

"Keith was a highly regarded member of the CVEC family, and we join his wife, Wanda, and their children in mourning a loss that came far too soon," said Operations Manager Nic Alberson. "Keith wasn't just a coworker; he was a friend who was known for his kindness and generosity. He mentored many of the current linemen and leaves a lasting legacy here on the crew."

On September 3, banners honoring Keith adorned the Chippewa Valley



Electric equipment as the parade wove through Jim Falls. Thanks to all who joined us in remembering and celebrating Keith: CVEC lineman Trevin Jensen; director Kevin Meistad and his wife, Bobbie, with Hannah Kinard and Cadence Baker; Ntera friends Jill and Brooke Petska and Andrea Lemmons; and Keith's family members Brian, Christine, Josh, and Sierra. The team and family hope to make the tribute an annual tradition in honor of a man who meant so much to this cooperative and his community.



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Office Hours: Monday–Friday, 7:30–4 p.m.

**Danielle Endvick, Editor**