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WISCONSIN ENERGY *Cooperative* NEWS

September 2023

PIERCE PEPIN
COOPERATIVE SERVICES

A TruChoice Energy[®] Cooperative 

**ROAMING AROUND
AT SANDHILL WILDLIFE AREA**

POWER STRUGGLE

ENERGY EFFICIENT WINDOWS

EXCELLENT EGGPLANT RECIPES





THE SURVEY SAYS

Nate Boettcher, President and CEO

Earlier this year, our staff worked with our national partner Touchstone Energy to conduct a survey of our membership. Surveys are a good benchmark; they help us improve our service and they also remind us to celebrate what we've accomplished. Earlier this summer we received our survey results and, as Richard Dawson, the original host of Family Feud, would say, "the survey says."

We are pleased to announce that our overall satisfaction score has improved by 6 points since we last conducted a survey in 2016. This is a tremendous improvement, scoring higher than the national average in comparison to municipal and investor-owned utilities. We've conducted this survey six times since 2004. Our overall index score of 79 points was the highest since 2004 when it was 80 points. Comparatively, we score slightly higher than other cooperatives. However, the former coach in me says, "We can continue to work on improving these scores."

The survey was sent to a sample size of our cooperative population. We had a good mixture of demographics and years

of cooperative membership. As with any survey, there is an opportunity to provide feedback. The open comments are taken verbatim and reported back to the board and management. We read through every one of these comments looking for themes, some of which I hope to address in the next couple of months. Because the survey is anonymous, we can't follow up directly with you. If you have something you would like us to address, please contact us and we will get back to you. For this month's issue, let's talk about electric rates.

"Rates are too high."

We often hear this. I like numbers. I try to base my decisions on data and while sometimes you must make a gut call, this topic is easy to use numbers for. In comparing a summer electric bill, an average PPCS member home uses 1,200 kWh. PPCS members pay \$5 less than an investor-owned utility (IOU) serving our area. We often hear, "your fixed charge is way too high." When you include the fixed charge in the total bill, your average kWh rate is almost a penny cheaper than the IOU. If you remove the fixed charge from the total rate, a PPCS member is saving almost 3 cents on each kWh. How could this be? Often, regulated utilities will have additional costs added to their rates that are beyond the published rate.

An average PPCS member home uses 1,200 kWh. PPCS members pay \$5 less than an investor-owned utility (IOU) serving our area.

These additional power costs add up. It's important to note that we don't just compare ourselves to neighboring utilities; we also want to look at our region and nationally.

The latest national data shows cooperative members pay \$0.1277/kWh. The national average per kWh cost across all utility types is \$0.1256/kWh and across Wisconsin, the rate is \$0.1278/kWh. Nearly two-thirds of every kWh sold goes to our wholesale power supplier. The remaining third plus our fixed charge pays for the operational, maintenance, and improvement costs of running the cooperative. Even with higher inflation, material, and labor costs, our rates have remained stable. Your board of directors will continue to work hard to ensure rates paid by the members are fair and in alignment with the mission of the cooperative.

Surveys help us to reflect upon the service we provide to our members. However, we don't want to wait to hear from you. If we aren't living up to your expectations, please contact us. We will work with you to solve your issues in a professional and member-focused manner. We wish you a great fall and a bountiful harvest. We look forward to seeing you at our Powered by Electricity event on September 23 at the UW-River Falls North Hall parking lot.

Information at:
driveelectricweek.org

Saturday, September 23, 2023

3rd Annual

POWERED BY ELECTRICITY

Powered by Electricity is a free community event in the auditorium and parking lot of North Hall on the UWRF campus. Activities will include:

- talks from subject matter experts in the solar and electricity fields
- test drives of electric vehicles and bikes
- electric tools and equipment demonstrations and vendors
- an electric vehicle showcase
- electric cooperative information stations
- mini golf
- kids' bouncy house
- prize drawings for electric equipment

Co-sponsored by:

Live Better.SM

St. Croix Electric Co-op
A Touchstone Energy Cooperative

OFFICE OF SUSTAINABILITY

Communities of faith partnering for a sustainable future.

Experience all things electric

Kids' activities

10 AM - 2 PM

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN - RIVER FALLS

NORTH HALL
410 S. 3RD STREET

PEOPLE: *The quintessential ingredient of life*

By: Isabella Lenz

“People are the quintessential ingredient in life,” says Daniel Deutsch. This is one of many important lessons Deutsch learned from attending the Youth Leadership Conference in 2022 and the National Youth Tour this past June. In July of 2022, the co-op sponsored several students to attend the three-day Youth Leadership Conference on the UW-Stout campus where they had the opportunity to experience a typical college environment and learn about leadership, cooperatives, and co-op governance. Deutsch explained that the event included activities, speakers, and classes and that the information was both practical and applicable to the real world.

“It’s not just relevant now, it’s information that is relevant for the rest of your life,” says Deutsch. “You take what you want from it.”

And that is just what he did. While attending the conference, Deutsch became interested in the opportunity to run for a spot on the Youth Leadership Board, which would consist of six students and one alternate who would plan the 2023 Youth Leadership Conference. After a speech about extending oneself beyond his/her comfort zone by William Tuchtenhagen, one of the keynote speakers at the event, Deutsch was convinced that running for the board was a great opportunity and

something he could do to help benefit others around him.

Deutsch was elected to the board, which also provided the opportunity for him to attend the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association National Youth Tour in Washington, D.C., the following June. Deutsch went on to attend the week-long tour where he learned valuable information about American history and his role as a citizen by touring famous monuments and battlefields and hearing from Wisconsin’s state representatives and senators. Two of his favorite memories include getting to be a wreath bearer at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier and hearing U.S. wheelchair gold medalist Mike Schlappi speak about his life experiences and lessons.

When asked what advice he would give to next year’s YLC attendees, Deutsch said, “You must give something of yourself. You have to be willing to invest your mind into YLC, you have to be willing to listen, and you must be willing to interact with people; otherwise, YLC isn’t going to do much for you.”



Daniel Deutsch, second from left, with other National Youth Tour representatives prepare to lay a wreath at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier.

Overall, Deutsch’s participation in both events taught him that interacting with people is the best part of the experience. It wouldn’t have mattered where the events took place because it was the people and their stories and perspectives that made the experiences special.

As a parting note, Deutsch wanted to emphasize the important and relevant service of the cooperative business, and how it needs to be talked about more, especially on a national level. One of the important aspects of the cooperative business model is the Seven Cooperative Principles. Democratic member control, the second principle, states that cooperatives are democratic organizations controlled by their members, so the members are the most important part of the co-op. As Deutsch said, “People are the quintessential ingredient in life,” and that is what Pierce Pepin hopes its members can realize. You are what makes our co-op important, and you are the reason that we do everything we can to keep the lights on.

Deutsch will attend the University of Northwestern in the fall to begin his degrees in computer science and finance.



Left: Daniel pictured left talking to Congressman Bryan Steil. Right: Daniel pictured left talking with another student on the National Youth Tour.



REMODELED LOBBY AND BOARD ROOM CHRISTENED WITH ICE CREAM AND SPRINKLES

On August 3, PPCS staff and directors welcomed over 90 members to the grand re-opening of the PPCS lobby following the remodeling project that began in early April 2023. Guests were treated to make-your-own ice cream sundaes, cookies, lemonade, and coffee. Rhoda Foley won the prize drawing for four St. Paul Saints tickets. Judy Baker won the prize drawing for a \$50 gift card for members who brought a donation for the school supply drive.

The remodeling project included a new boardroom constructed on the west side of the lobby, with new furniture, blinds, LED lighting, carpeting, and updated audiovisual equipment. The front receptionist area was relocated and revamped, enclosing it in glass, adding stone under the service window, and securing it along with the lobby offices with card access. The old receptionist area was converted into another office. All lighting in the lobby was replaced with LED lighting, and the gas fireplace was replaced with an electric fireplace. TV monitors were installed with the ability to have messages streaming for members, and broadband equipment has been set up on the fireplace mantel as a learning tool for our internet customers. The old lobby furniture was reupholstered for updated lobby seating and the HVAC system in the lobby was also updated/revamped.

During the open house, a special presentation was made naming the new board room the Roger Wiff Board Room in recognition of the 23-plus years Wiff has served the cooperative as a director and chairman of the board.



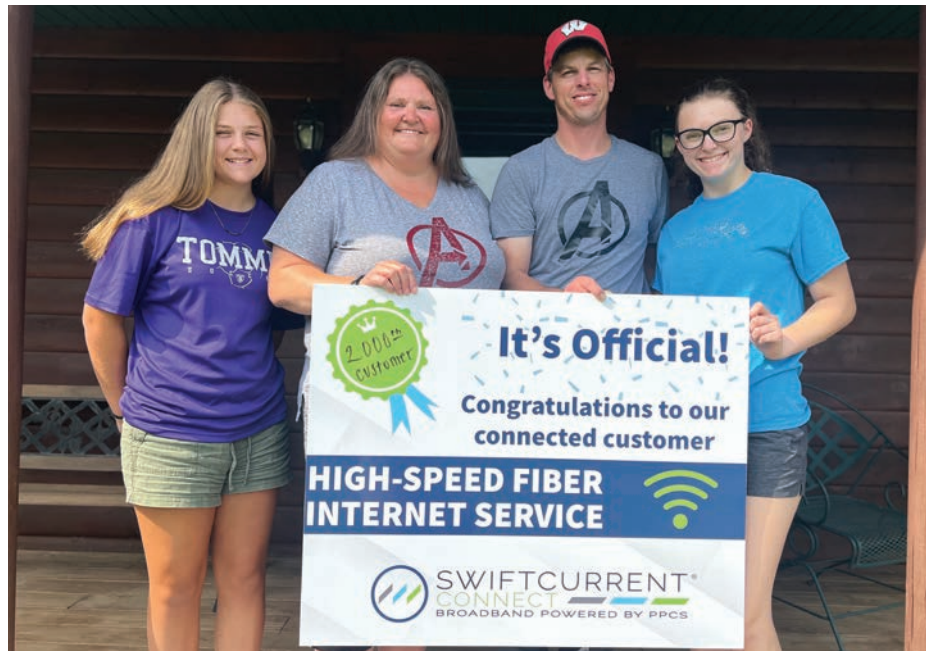
TWO YEARS LATER, FIBER CONNECTS US

In the Fall of 2021, Pierce Pepin Cooperative Services (PPCS) started construction of a modern fiber-based broadband network with the goal of passing by 5,500 homes and businesses in the PPCS service area. PPCS created a subsidiary company called SwiftCurrent Connect to offer retail services on the fiber network. In the past two years, PPCS has built nearly 800 miles of fiber and by the end of the year, 6,000 homes will have access to high-speed fiber broadband. Much of this area was previously unserved by high-speed broadband connectivity. Now with SwiftCurrent Connect, these customers can get up to 1 Gigabit service with plans to be able to offer 2 Gigabit service in the future.

In large part, PPCS has benefitted from grants provided by the state of Wisconsin through its broadband expansion program. Several townships and counties committed their ARPA funds to projects, which enabled a strong public-private partnership that aided in receiving grant money. In total, nearly \$15 million of grant support has allowed construction to happen very quickly over the past two years. The first customer was connected in January of 2022 and by the end of this year, SwiftCurrent expects to have 3,000 homes and businesses connected.

In reflecting upon the past two years, PPCS President & CEO Nate Boettcher commented, “We believe a fiber network owned by the community is the best option because it allows us to stay true to our mission to expand access to high-speed internet in rural areas and underserved communities.” The COVID-19 pandemic put a large spotlight on the issues of connectivity, but even after the pandemic, people continue to work from home and are interested in shopping, streaming TV, doing online gaming, and

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The Allan and Tracey Clark family of Beldenville was the 2000th customer connected to SwiftCurrent Connect.

connecting with friends and family.

Scott Freier, chief operations officer, commented, “We’ve seen so many people who are now thankful they can experience high-speed internet like their friends and family had in larger metro areas. Quickly there are so many more opportunities to watch movies, do virtual medical appointments, have a security system at your home, and not have to worry about that little buffering icon while trying to get online.”

The fiber network is built to handle large amounts of data and allows for faster uploads and downloads than any other technology.

What makes fiber unique is its ability to use light to communicate. You’ve probably seen a firework shot off in the distance: You see the light immediately, but the sound doesn’t travel nearly as fast. Using light through a glass cable allows for unbelievably fast speeds without any latency or

hesitation. Long term, as customers need faster speeds, SwiftCurrent Connect will simply change out the electronics and be able to offer faster speeds. SwiftCurrent Connect also offers tools that allow customers to manage their Wi-Fi experience. A mobile app can be downloaded from the Apple Store or Google Play under the name “SwiftCurrent.” This app will allow customers to manage their router passwords, check their speed, and check for connected devices.

PPCS is finishing up its third phase of construction, with a fourth phase planned for Pepin County next year if grants can be secured. “There are more grants coming through the Public Service Commission of Wisconsin and the Broadband Equity Access and Deployment funding,” stated Boettcher. He added, “We know there are more unserved areas out there and we’ve built a really good model for ensuring access to high-speed internet in rural areas.”

Two years after the first plow rolled down the ditch, SwiftCurrent Connect has come a long way in helping to bring needed high-speed internet service.



BROADBAND BYTES

Quick Updates from Fiber Freddie



Accounts Connected: Internet: 2,232 – Phone: 396

Construction Update:

- **Phase 1** – Fully Open & Active. Still taking orders for fiber construction and service.
- **Phase 2** – Fully Open & Active. Still taking orders for fiber construction and service.
- **Phase 3** – Mainline Construction Underway. Various zones will begin to open and become live in the upcoming weeks (approximately 4–6 weeks). Property construction will begin soon in various areas and align with that zone’s mainline construction completion. Overall, home activations for Phase 3 are planned to begin as early as late Fall 2023 and throughout Winter 2024.

PLEASE NOTE:

Get your service order in soon to ensure we can get you activated and set up yet this year and over the cold winter months. If your drop line is not placed prior to frost, your service order will be held until we can begin to work again in Spring 2024.



PUT NEW INTERNET ON YOUR SHOPPING LIST

Old school classics like notebooks and colored pencils are still around. But new school technology has moved to the head of the class, with most homework now being done on tablets or laptops rather than paper.

To help your student succeed, consider upgrading to an A+ internet plan from SwiftCurrent Connect. We offer super-fast speeds and unmatched reliability, so the only thing getting in the way of completing homework efficiently will be texts from friends!



CALL 715-350-7033 FOR AN INTERNET UPGRADE

W7725 US HWY10, Ellsworth, WI 54011
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CONCERN FOR COMMUNITY

Third-Quarter Grants Awarded

Operation Round Up is a unique program, trademarked by electric co-ops, that allows members to pool their resources to support worthy causes in our communities by rounding up their monthly energy bills to the next dollar. On average, this amounts to about \$6 annually per member. Operation Round Up funds the Pierce Pepin Cares Foundation and every quarter the Pierce Pepin Cares board reviews and awards grants to organizations in our communities. We are grateful that over 70% of PPCS members generously participate in Operation Round Up and support this good work.



Have a Heart, Inc. was awarded \$750 to purchase materials for crafting, gardening, baking, and science experiments for its clients. Pictured from left to right are Morgan H., Kelly Zillmer, Have a Heart, Inc. executive director, Barb Bee, PPCS senior accountant, and Alonzo E.



The Staying Put, Inc. grant will be used to include a second instructor for its Strong Bodies Fitness program. Pictured from left to right are Cari Cornelius, Janice Ottman, Sue Christopher, Charity Lubich, PPCS vice president, member relations and human resources, Don Fritz, and Rich O'Connell.



Scott Freier (middle), PPCS chief operating officer, presented a \$1,500 check to Maggie Pechacek (left) and Maya Bueso (right) of Ellsworth Elementary School. The funds will be used to help purchase supplies for the school's fifth annual Back to School Event.



The Spring Valley (SV) Fire Department was awarded \$1,000 to assist in purchasing four new pagers with chargers that will allow its members to be notified of emergency calls. Pictured are Jake Gilles, assistant chief of the SV Fire Department, and Barb Bee, PPCS senior accountant.



Barb Bee, PPCS senior accountant, presented a \$1,000 check to Shelly Smith, Our Neighbors' Place executive director, so the nonprofit can assist its guests with fuel cards.



Kyle Igou, Prescott Middle School principal, received a \$2,000 check from Barb Bee, PPCS senior account, to assist with purchasing iPads for their STEM department to help students gain hands-on experience related to using drones with iPads.



BE EXTRA CAREFUL ON THE ROADS DURING HARVEST SEASON

Fall harvest is a busy time. Farmers and workers have big equipment and implements on the road. Navigating roadways can be dangerous for farm equipment operators and auto drivers who follow behind them.

According to the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, 410 farmers and farm workers died from work-related injuries in 2019. Transportation incidents, which included tractor overturns, were the leading cause of death for these farmers and farm workers. About 33% of the farming population sustained nonfatal injuries as well.

Keep safety top of mind as you travel the roadways this fall.



Farmers/Equipment Operators:

1. Make sure all flashers and lights are operational.
2. Drive as far to the right side of the road as possible when going around a curve.
3. Pull over and allow vehicles to pass when traffic builds up behind you.
4. Use caution at railroad crossings.
5. Avoid traveling during busy traffic times.
6. Be mindful of the height and width of machinery, watching power lines, bridges, and other hazards.
7. Along with turn signals, use hand signals.
8. Stay rested; do not drive when you are too tired or hungry.
9. Keep a first-aid kit in case of accidents.



Auto Drivers:

1. Think about how long it will take to get to your destination and add extra time for busy farm roads.
2. Give farmers plenty of room on the road. If a piece of equipment takes up the entire road, pull into a driveway or other area and wait for it to pass.
3. When passing farm equipment, be sure you do so in a passing zone and that there is clear visibility around farm equipment. Watch for oncoming vehicles.
4. Slow down as soon as you spot farm machinery on the road. Farm operators often stop or turn into fields. In addition, cars going at or over the speed limit can catch up to farm machinery quickly, since farmers in equipment move slowly, usually around 25 mph or less.
5. Do not assume that a farmer can move over in narrow areas; it is not always possible.
6. Honk or motion when passing farmers. Their equipment is big and noisy; they may not see you or know you are there.
7. Do not tailgate; the farmer often cannot see you.
8. Do not pass and then slow suddenly in front of equipment with implements behind it or farm trucks full of grain. Farm equipment is very heavy and cannot stop quickly.
9. Farmers make very wide turns; give them plenty of time and room.

Following these few tips will make it safer for both the farmer/equipment operator and auto drivers and provide a more pleasant drive for all. We want everyone to make it home safely every day.

For information about safety around electricity, including farm and ranch safety, visit SafeElectricity.org.—Source: *SafeElectricity*



Celebrate National Coop Month with us at our *member appreciation event!*

- pancake breakfast
- attendance gift
- prize drawing for kids who wear a costume

**MORE INFO TO COME IN THE OCTOBER MAGAZINE*



CONGRATULATIONS to our Flag Winners!




- Barb Anderson
- Bruce Place
- Dale Brathol
- Dennis Olson
- Diane Wiskerchen
- Don Klecker
- Elliot Bjurquist
- Evan Bayer
- Everett Muhlhausen
- Gary Tapp
- Jeff Groskopf
- John Janisch
- Julie Skog O'Neil
- Lynette Traynor
- Lynn Bayer
- Mark Biros
- Mary A Johnson
- Norman Holmstadt
- Robert Geraets
- Ruth Stern
- Steve Bensed
- Yvonne Carlson

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Power Outages and Emergencies: 800-927-5705

Nate Boettcher, President & CEO

Board of Directors

- District 1.....Gerald Drier
- District 2.....Edward Hass
- District 3.....Brian Berg
- District 4.....John Parkes
- District 5.....Ann Young
- District 6.....Ginny Huber, secretary/treasurer
- District 7.....Roger Wiff, chairman
- District 8.....Brian Bergsensg, vice chairman
- District 9.....Daniel Reis