



news & views

from Lincoln Electric Cooperative, Inc.

EUREKA VOLUNTEER FIRE DEPARTMENT

Powered by the sun

If you've walked along the peaceful banks of the Tobacco River on the paved River Walk, you may have noticed the large red and tan buildings just beyond the fence belonging to the Eureka Rural Volunteer Fire Department (EVFD). If you looked a little closer, you may have also seen a large set of solar panels soaking up the sun on the metal roof.

In early 2022, before the solar panels were installed, Patrick Broom — owner of NorthWest Electrical Contractors — was strolling along the path when he noticed the South-Southwest-facing roof of the building. Its size, angle and single-pitch design made it a perfect candidate for a solar array.

He reached out to Fire Chief Ron Komac and pitched the idea of installing a solar panel system to generate electricity and offset energy use from Lincoln Electric Co-op's (LEC) grid. Komac saw the potential benefits and cost savings and asked Broom to develop some proposals to present to the EVFD Board of Directors.

Broom proposed a few different options, ranging from a 23 kilowatt-hour (kWh) system to a 48 kWh setup. After reviewing the proposals, the board decided to start with the smaller system to "test the waters," while keeping the option open to upgrade later.

After a year and a half of success with the solar setup, the Board approved the upgrade to the 48 kWh system. By fall 2024, the upgraded array was operational.

The system now produces enough energy to offset approximately two-thirds of the department's total electricity usage.

"The system definitely made an impact on our energy costs and provided us with savings during the times of year when our energy demands are highest. From around May through September, our meter actually runs backwards," said Komac.

Thanks to LEC's metering system, the fire department not only meets much of its own energy demand during peak solar months, but also sends excess energy back into the grid. These energy contributions earn the department



credits that can be used later in the year, essentially making them a mini power plant for the community during sunny months.

"At the fire department, we've done a number of things to keep our operational costs low. The solar system is one of those efforts. We look at it this way: the less we spend on energy, the more we can invest in upgrading equipment and improving our service," said Komac.

See EUREKA FIRE, next page

EUREKA FIRE

Continued from previous page

Mark Frey, Alternate Energy Division Manager at North-West Electrical, monitors the solar panel system's output and notes that energy production is influenced by weather, sun exposure, and cloud cover. *(See graphics below).*

"Around April, we start to see the energy curve rising as the sun's angle increases. Production peaks in June, July and August. On a good day, the system can generate up to 470 kWh — which is more than the department needs. That excess gets sent back to LEC and earns us credits," said Frey.

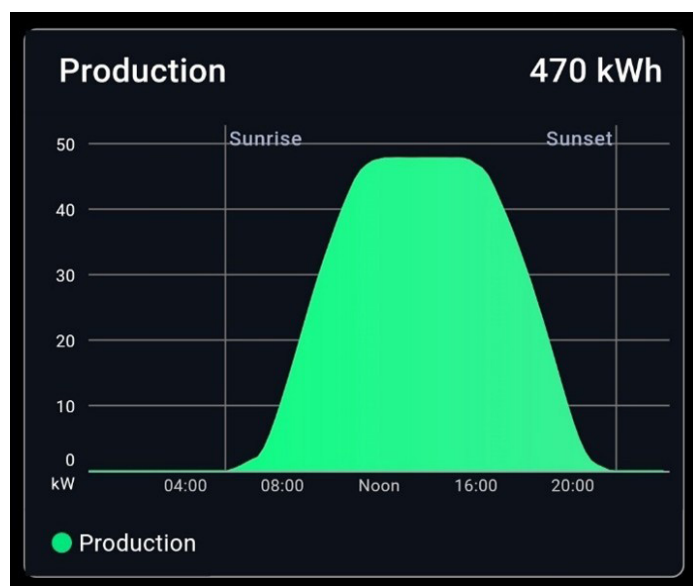
Offsetting energy costs is especially critical during winter

months.

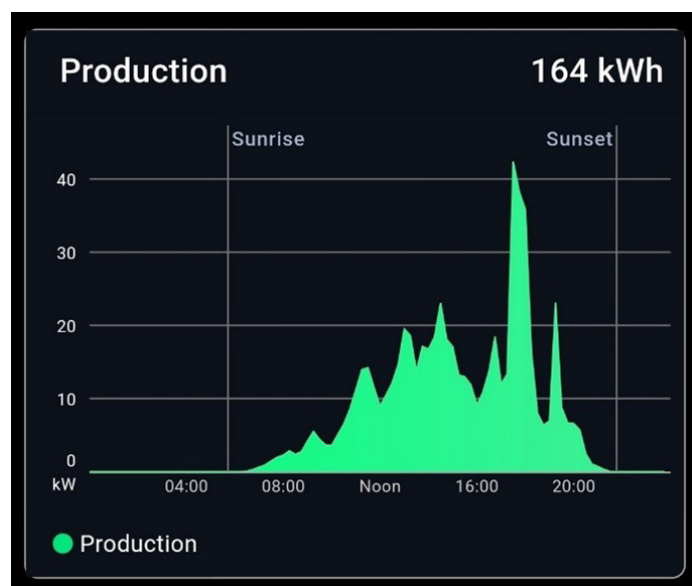
"Because we store water in our trucks year-round, it's vital to prevent freezing. We rely on radiant heat to keep the warehouse at 65 degrees, no matter how cold it gets. We also have three large propane heaters as backup in case of a power outage. We have to be ready to help in any emergency," said Komac.

The fire department's investment in solar energy benefits more than just their bottom line — it also helps reduce overall electricity demand on LEC and the Bonneville Power Administration (BPA), indirectly benefiting all LEC members.

The Eureka Volunteer Fire Department consists of 22 dedicated volunteers who respond to fire emergencies in Eureka and the surrounding rural areas. ^{RM}



Eureka Fire Department's solar energy production on a sunny day.



Eureka Fire Department's solar energy production on a stormy day.

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OFFICE HOURS

Monday - Thursday

7:00 AM - 5:30 PM

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General Manager

Lincoln Electric's Board of Trustees holds regular monthly meetings at the boardroom in the cooperative office. These are typically scheduled on the third Monday of each month at 4 p.m. Members are encouraged to attend. If you have any items of interest, please contact the general manager prior to the meeting.

NEXT MEETING DATE:

MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 15, 2025



**Lincoln Electric
Cooperative, Inc.**

HAVE A STORY SUGGESTION?

SEND YOUR IDEAS TO:

memberservices@lincolnelectric.coop

Meet Rylan Smith

JOURNEYMAN TREE
TRIMMER

RYLAN Smith, originally from Issaquah, WA, grew up exploring the wilderness of Tiger Mountain, hiking and biking outdoors whenever he could.

"Growing up wild and limitless," as he describes it, shaped his love for nature and adventure. He graduated from Issaquah High School in 2004, where he also met his future wife, Megan. The two attended community college together while balancing school and work.

Their move to Montana was inspired by Megan's family roots in the state. Rylan began his career there with the U.S. Forest Service, spending several seasons fighting wildland fires nationally as a primary faller and squad leader. In the winter, he pursued working as a logger. He bought his first set of climbing spurs at 20 years old, building on a love for climbing trees that began as a child.

By the time they were expecting their first child, Liam, Rylan transitioned away from wildland firefighting to focus on arborist work. Already a skilled timber faller and climber, he joined forces with Flathead Electric Cooperative and trained to become a Journeyman Tree Trimmer. After six years of full-time work there, Rylan was hired at Lincoln Electric Cooperative (LEC) in March.

When asked what brought him to LEC, Rylan shared:

"It was an easy choice when the posi-

The faces of LEC

Introducing our Lincoln Electric family of employees to all our members



tion opened up. Being this close to home, my family and doing what I love, I truly feel lucky to be at LEC."

Rylan is a Certified ISA Arborist (2023) and takes pride in his craftsmanship and outdoor skills. Whether working high in the trees, mountain biking, taking family road trips or doing carpentry projects at home, Rylan enjoys building and creating.

"My dad once said you never work a day in your life when you find something you love doing. And for me, that's working in the woods," he said.

Rylan's family life is just as adventurous as his career. Since welcoming their second child, Finnley, in 2022, he and Megan have embraced every opportunity to introduce their kids to Montana's great outdoors. At just 2 and 3 years old, Liam and Finnley were already skiing in the mountains in winter, playing at the lake during summer, riding bikes and attending community events.

Being a long-term resident of the Tobacco Valley, Rylan values the deep connection he shares with his community. Working at the co-op allows him to serve friends and neighbors while staying close to the people and places that mean the most to him.

Thank you, Rylan, for your compassion, commitment and the incredible value you bring to Lincoln Electric Cooperative. We're proud and grateful to have you on the team! RM



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Before the power pole replacement.



During the power pole replacement.



After the power pole replacement.

Out with the old, in with the new

LINCOLN Electric Co-op (LEC) linemen are often the unsung heroes of our communities. During severe weather – whether it’s heavy snow, ice storms, high winds or wildfires – they are the first responders working tirelessly, often around the clock, to restore power in challenging and remote conditions.

For us as Lincoln Electric Cooperative (LEC) members, the first instinct when the power goes out is simple, call LEC and report the outage. And, like clockwork, before long you’ll likely see an LEC bucket truck heading to the scene to find and fix the problem.

What many people may not realize

is the day-to-day dedication to preventative maintenance and inspection that ensures outages are rare. While wooden power poles have impressive longevity, they, like all infrastructure, eventually need to be replaced.

One such replacement recently took place near the Church of God on 2nd Ave E. in Eureka. During routine inspections, this particular pole showed signs of internal rot and decay, making it a priority for replacement. Adding to the challenge, the pole supported three secondary service dips as well as several lines.

For the experienced LEC linemen, this complexity was no problem. The

crew quickly and safely disconnected the powerlines and conductors, removed the decayed pole, installed a new one and reconnected all lines. In just three hours, the job was complete, ensuring a strong, reliable pole that will serve members for many years to come.

To maintain a safe and dependable system, LEC uses a Resistograph power-pole tester to evaluate the internal condition and structural integrity of wooden poles without causing damage. Every LEC power pole is tested on a 10-year cycle, and any pole that fails inspection is promptly scheduled for replacement – just like the one on 2nd Ave E. RM

BUSINESS AND BOARDROOM BRIEFS

The regular meeting of the board of trustees was conducted on July 21. A quorum of trustees was present, and the board took the following action:

- Approved Myra Appel to attend the PNGC Annual Meeting
- Approved donation request for GLID for up to \$2,100 in engineering costs
- Approved donation request for 4H Horse Project for \$1,000 from the education fund
- Approved any board member that wanted to go to the MECA Annual Meeting in Sept./Oct.
- Approved vehicle allowance for General Manger

FINANCIAL OVERVIEW	YEAR TO DATE JUNE 2025	YEAR TO DATE JUNE 2024
kWh SALES	73,049,293	73,001,393
REVENUE	\$8,038,623	\$7,608,062
COST OF POWER	\$3,507,825	\$3,392,332
OPERATING EXPENSE	\$2,882,661	\$2,636,464
MARGINS	\$696,756	\$653,085
NUMBER OF MEMBERS	5,330	5,237
NUMBER OF METERS	6,756	6,626
MILES OF LINE	1,021	1,017
TOTAL UTILITY PLANT	\$42,431,348	\$39,978,756
MEMBER EQUITY	\$16,192,774	\$15,065,100
JUNE AVERAGE RESIDENTIAL USE (KWH)	822	846
JUNE AVERAGE RESIDENTIAL BILLING	\$131.84	\$122.41