

MEEKER COOPERATIVE PIONEER

The official publication of

Meeker
Cooperative
Light and Power Association

VIBRANT
Broadband™

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Provider and Employer

MAY/JUNE 2023

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Electricifying Success: A Lineman's Rise to CEO

In the world of electricity, linemen work tirelessly to keep the lights on, often risking their lives in dangerous conditions. They climb tall poles and repair high-voltage wires, facing extreme weather and challenging terrain. But what happens when a lineman rises through the ranks to become the CEO of an electric cooperative?

Meet Luke Johnson, Meeker Cooperative's new CEO, a former lineman that made his way to the top. From his humble beginnings as a young apprentice, to his rise as a leader in the energy industry, Luke's story is one of determination and an unwavering commitment to his craft. Take a closer look at Luke's journey and learn how he became a CEO who leads with passion, integrity, and a deep understanding of the power of electricity.

Continued on page 2.



"ENERGIZING AND CONNECTING...ENHANCING YOUR LIFE."

CONTINUED: Meet Luke Johnson, Meeker Cooperative's new CEO



As a former design engineer, Luke Johnson met with members to plan their new services.

Luke remembers being fascinated by powerlines during his childhood, while sitting in the back seat of his parents' car on their way to his grandparents' farm in rural South Dakota. He spent many summers building fences and learning the value of hard work on the farm before initially deciding to pursue a career in agriculture.

It wasn't until he connected with an old friend working as a lineman in Nebraska that Luke's childhood intrigue would come full circle - his true calling in the energy sector. After realizing that working on powerlines might give him the same rewarding feeling building fences did, on an entirely new and substantially more dangerous level, Luke made the decision to become a lineman himself.

He spent the next summer working at his hometown cooperative, Lincoln-Union, gaining knowledge of the industry before completing his Associate's Degree in Power Line Construction and Maintenance at Mitchell Technical Institute.

Over the years Luke worked his way up the ranks from Apprentice Lineworker to Crew Chief and Design Engineer.

With aspirations to keep growing in knowledge and leadership, he jumped at the opportunity to take the position as the Operations Manager at Meeker Cooperative in 2018.

Luke's background in the energy industry is a testament to his commitment and passion for the industry.

Some of the crucial lessons Luke carries with him into his new role as CEO at Meeker Cooperative include his eagerness to understand every facet of the Cooperative and attentiveness to members' needs. With his practical, hands-on experiences from the field, and dedication to the industry, Luke is uniquely positioned to lead Meeker Cooperative into the future.

Luke is excited to take on this new role and looks forward to working closely with the Cooperative's members, employees, and community partners. He expressed his gratitude to the board for entrusting him with this responsibility, saying, "I am honored to have been selected as the next CEO/General Manager of Meeker Cooperative Light & Power Association. I am excited to work

with the board, our employees, and our members to continue providing reliable and affordable services to the communities we serve."

As the new CEO, Luke's top priorities are to remain member-focused, prioritize safety, ensure system reliability, and continue the expansion of broadband services. Our members are the owners of the Cooperative, and we must make decisions that benefit them as a whole.

"Safety is crucial for our employees, members, and the public, which is why we have a robust safety program and conduct electric safety training for our first responders. We will also continue to improve the reliability of our system through regular testing, inspections, vegetation management, and the integration of new technology. Additionally, we plan to apply for grants available through local, state, and federal funds to expand our broadband services and close the digital divide for our members," Luke said as he shared his vision for the future.

Meeker Cooperative wishes Luke Johnson all the best as he begins this new chapter in his career.

"We are pleased to welcome Luke as our new CEO/General Manager. With his extensive experience in the industry, we are confident that he will lead Meeker Cooperative Light & Power Association to continued success in serving our membership and VIBRANT Broadband subscribers."

**- Brad Donnay,
Board President**

Meeker Cooperative's 88th Annual Meeting

Meeker Cooperative held its 88th Annual Meeting on April 24, 2023 at 9:00 a.m., as a business-only meeting at the Cooperative's office.

Finance Manager Scott Froemming reported that the Cooperative's financial position remains strong, with net margins of \$2,592,792 for the year. Members' share of the margins will be reflected on their May bills. Froemming also announced that the Cooperative received a clean audit opinion from the auditors.

The financial statements presented by Scott Froemming can be found in the Annual Report on the Cooperative's website at www.meeker.coop/annual-report. It is an excellent opportunity for members to review and understand the Cooperative's financial position and its future plans.

The new CEO, Luke Johnson, presented his report, which covered several important topics. Johnson reflected on the challenges and opportunities the Cooperative faced in 2022. Material and operational costs increased significantly, with an average inflation rate of 18%. The Cooperative's relationships with distributors helped obtain the best pricing and get access to available products. We anticipate



Members gather at the Meeker Cooperative office for the Annual Meeting.

inflation rates on utility-product-costs to moderate this year and fall back in late 2023 through 2024.

In contrast, numerous grant opportunities have become available for both electric and broadband operations, including a grant to fund fiber deployments in unserved and underserved areas of Minnesota. The Cooperative was awarded all five projects submitted for grant funds in 2022, which will allow them to construct just over 18 miles of fiber passing 351 homes in Meeker County. 04-18-204 The Cooperative also submitted an application to the Department of Energy to deploy smart grid devices on the electric system, which will increase reliability and resiliency and reduce maintenance expenses. Johnson assured members that the Cooperative is doing all that it can to curb costs and ensure access to reliable, safe, and affordable service.

The director seats in Districts 1, 2, 6, and 9 were up for election, with District 9 being the only contested seat. Ballots were mailed to members in District 9 before the meeting, and the votes were counted at the meeting.

Incumbents Paul Bugbee (District 1) and Karen Becker (District 2) were re-elected, while Mark Larson retired from the board after serving for 27 years. The Cooperative expresses gratitude for his dedicated service. The new Director elected in District 6 is Neil Pearson. In District 9, incumbent Jesse Turck was challenged by David Lundin of Forest City Township. Jesse Turck won the election.

Overall, the meeting was productive and informative. The Cooperative's commitment to transparency and accountability is evident in the open sharing of information with its members.



2023 Meeker Cooperative Board of Directors

Back Row from Left to Right

District 9: Jesse Turck
District 1: Paul Bugbee, Secretary
District 5: Stephen Plaisance
District 3: Brad Donnay, President
District 4: Kevin Issendorf

Front Row from Left to Right

District 7: Randy Bryant
District 2: Karen Becker, Treasurer
District 8: Larry Huhn, Vice President
District 6: Neil Pearson

PLAY BALL: JOIN MEEKER COOPERATIVE FOR A BUS TRIP TO A TWINS GAME

JOIN US: WEDNESDAY, JULY 26 | \$75 PER PERSON

We are excited to invite you to join us for a fun-filled day at Target Field to watch the Minnesota Twins play against the Seattle Mariners on Wednesday, July 26! Our bus trip will take you straight to the stadium, without having to worry about traffic, parking, or navigating downtown Minneapolis.

You'll get to enjoy a comfortable and convenient ride to the game, snacks and beverages on the bus, ticket to the game and new this year - all-inclusive ballpark fare area (including hotdogs, burgers, chicken tenders, popcorn, chips, soda, water, juice, and milk). Plus, you'll have plenty of time to socialize with your fellow fans and get excited for the game!

We'll depart from the Meeker Cooperative parking lot at 9:30 a.m. and arrive at Target Field in plenty of time to catch the first pitch at 12:10 p.m. After the game, we'll return to the same location.

Don't miss out on this opportunity to cheer on the Twins with your friends and family while leaving the driving to us. The tickets are limited and sell out fast, so make sure to reserve your spot today. The deadline to register is June 21, 2023.

MEEKER MEMBER TRIP: TWINS GAME

Please reserve _____ places for the Twins Game Bus Trip on July 26.

Name(s): _____

Account Number: _____ Phone: _____

Cost Per Person: \$75 Amount Enclosed: \$ _____

Return to: Meeker Cooperative, Attention: Michele Boreen, 1725 US Highway. 12, Suite 100, Litchfield, MN 55355 by June 21.



BEFORE YOU DIG

Meeker Cooperative has many power and fiber lines buried underground. When beginning a project that requires digging or breaking ground, protect yourself and your property by calling Gopher State One Call at (800) 252-1166, 48 hours prior to the start of the project.

This free-of-charge-service is required by the State of Minnesota and will locate all underground utility lines that may be buried. 09-19-302 You will need to provide your name, phone, address, dig location, nearest intersection, type of work planned and the project's start date and time. Learn more by visting www.gopherstateonecall.org.



FIND YOUR LOCATION NUMBER

Four location numbers are hidden within this Pioneer and four more in articles published on our website between now and the next Pioneer mailing. If you find your number and claim it by calling Meeker Cooperative before June 30, you will have \$10 credit to your account.

When you call and verify your information is correct in our system, you will also receive an additional bill credit equal to one month's output from a Member Solar Panel.

HOP ON BOARD: JOIN MEEKER COOPERATIVE FOR A BUS TRIP TO THE MN STATE FAIR

JOIN US: THURSDAY, AUGUST 24 | \$45 PER PERSON

The Minnesota State Fair is one of the biggest events in the state, attracting people from all over the country. It's a celebration of everything Minnesotan, from agriculture and industry to entertainment and cuisine. And what better way to experience this extravaganza than without the driving, parking, or standing in the ticket line? Join Meeker Cooperative members and Co-op personnel for a luxury motorcoach trip to the State Fair for Senior Day!

The bus will leave the Meeker Cooperative parking lot at 8 a.m. and arrive at the fairgrounds around 9:30 a.m. You'll have about 7 hours to explore the fair before the bus departs again at 4:30 p.m. The price of the trip includes the bus ride, a fair entrance ticket, and snacks and beverages on the bus. 28-20-301 Keep in mind that activities, snacks, and meals inside the fair are on your own.

Seating is limited and filled on a first-come, first-served basis until the bus is full. The deadline to apply is August 11, 2023.

Tour participants must have a cell phone and supply the trip host with your cell phone number before the bus leaves Litchfield.



MEEKER MEMBER TRIP: STATE FAIR

Please reserve _____ places for the State Fair Bus Trip on August 24.

Name(s): _____

Account Number: _____ Phone: _____

Cost Per Person: \$45 Amount Enclosed: \$ _____

*Return to: Meeker Cooperative, Attention: Michele Boreen,
1725 US Highway. 12, Suite 100, Litchfield, MN 55355 by August 11.*

SPRING IS IN THE AIR: TUNE UP YOUR AC

Meeker Cooperative members are eligible for a \$25 rebate when a licensed HVAC contractor performs a central air conditioning tune-up.

Clogged coils, low refrigerant levels, plugged lines and a host of other problems can affect the efficiency of your AC, driving up power bills. A well tuned cooling system will:

- Lower utility bills by 5-25%.
- Extend equipment life.
- Provide peace of mind for your family.
- Fewer repairs and improved system reliability.
- Increase cooling capacity.

TALK TO YOUR HVAC CONTRACTOR OR GIVE US A CALL FOR MORE INFO



IT'S ALL ABOUT THE ENERGY: JOIN MEEKER COOPERATIVE FOR AN ENERGY TOUR BUS TRIP

JOIN US: JUNE 20-22, 2023 | \$175 PER PERSON

We're excited to invite you to join us for our 2023 Energy Tour from June 20 to 22! This three-day luxury coach tour will take you through North Dakota's coal country, where you'll learn how electric power is generated at a lignite coal plant, how a coal-gasification plant produces natural gas, and visit a fish hatchery and the North Dakota History Museum.

The tour includes visits to:

- Basin Electric Powers Antelope Valley Power Station near Beulah, ND
- Great Plains SynFuels Plant

- The Coteau Properties Freedom Coal Mine
- Garrison Dam National Fish Hatchery
- Lewis & Clark Riverboat Dinner Cruise on the Missouri River
- The North Dakota History Center

You'll be staying at a hotel in Mandan for two nights. The trip cost is \$175 per person for a single or double room. Most meals are included, except for fast food and coffee stops during the bus trip to and from North Dakota, and any restaurants you may visit during your free time.

Meeker Cooperative Distributes \$15,300

Through the contributions of Meeker Cooperative's participating members and VIBRANT Subscribers, the Meeker Cooperative Electric Trust Board recently approved \$15,300 to assist local community organizations.

One of the benefits of Operation Round Up is that it allows members to make a positive impact on their community with just a small contribution. The program allows members to round up their monthly bill to the nearest dollar. 24-34-302 The extra change may not seem like much, but when combined with the contributions of other members, it can add up to a significant amount of money that can make a real difference in people's lives.

Another benefit of Operation Round Up is that it allows electric cooperatives to give back to the communities they serve in a meaningful way. As not-for-profit organizations, electric cooperatives are committed to improving the quality of life for their members and their communities. Operation Round Up is one way that cooperatives can fulfill this commitment by supporting local organizations and initiatives.

"For an annual contribution equal to a cup of coffee, our members are able to impact our communities in a positive, meaningful way," said Board Chair, Holly Schultz-Anderson. "Through Operation Round Up, small change adds up to make a big difference for so many of our families, neighbors and friends."

The trust meets three times per year to review applications and award grants. Remaining application deadlines for 2023 are July 6 and November 2. The application and guidelines can be found on Meeker Cooperative's website. www.meeker.coop.

March 2023 Recipient List

COMMUNITY SERVICE

Agricultural Society, Meeker County	\$1,000
Atwater Ambulance	\$1,000
Eden Valley Food Shelf	\$900
Eden Valley Valley Daze	\$500
Fire Department, Cokato	\$1,250
Kandiyohi County Food Shelf	\$300
Kimball Food Shelf	\$900
Litchfield Watercade, Inc.	\$500
Living at Home/BN Prog., Atwater	\$1,000
McLeod Emergency Food Shelf	\$250
Meeker County Food Shelf	\$2,900
- Litchfield (\$2,400)	
- Dassel (\$500)	
Paynesville Community Services	\$900
The Link of Northern Kandiyohi County	\$150

EDUCATION AND YOUTH

Community Education, Eden Valley Watkins Schools	\$1,000
- Community Education Programs (\$500)	
- ECFE Programs (\$500)	
Litchfield Student Anglers	\$400
Post Prom Party, Paynesville	\$400
Post Prom, ACGC	\$400
Post Prom, Eden Valley-Watkins	\$400
Post Prom, Litchfield High School	\$400
Robotics Team, Hutchinson High School	\$750

TOTAL

\$15,300



LEARN MORE ABOUT OPERATION ROUND UP AT
www.meeker.coop/operationroundup

Children 10 and older are welcome, as long as they are accompanied by an adult. This trip promises to be both fun and educational, and we hope you'll join us for this exciting opportunity.

Don't miss out on the chance to learn about energy production and explore the beauty of North Dakota's coal country. Reserve your spot now!



WILLIE WIREDHAND'S ELECTRICITY FUN FACT

A microwave oven's digital clock uses more energy than it does to heat your food. Additionally, the Energy Star program, which rates the energy usage of appliances around the home, states that using microwaves uses 80% less energy than reheating conventionally on the stove or in the oven.



MEMBER NEWS

OFFICE CLOSED:

In honor of Memorial Day on Monday, May 29, and Independence Day on Tuesday, July 4, Meeker Cooperative will be closed. In case of a power outage or emergency, contact us at 320-693-3231. Our crews are available 24/7 and prepared to respond promptly.

SUMMER RATE REMINDER:

Summer rates go into effect on June 1, 2023. Due to increased demand for electricity, each summer residential electric rates increase to 12.3¢/kWh, and energy management rates increase to 6.2¢/kWh. The energy you use in the months of June, July, and August are charged at this higher rate and may result in higher bills.

On September 1, the residential rate will return to the fall/winter rate of 10.3¢/kWh and the energy management rate to 5.7¢/kWh.

For information on Meeker Cooperative electric rates visit www.meeker.coop/rates or contact us at 320-693-3231.

MEEKER MEMBER TRIP: ENERGY TOUR

Please reserve _____ places for the Energy Tour Bus Trip on June 20-22.

Name(s): _____

Account Number: _____ Phone: _____

Cost Per Person: \$175 Amount Enclosed: \$ _____

Please note that the people listed above will share a room.

Return to: Meeker Cooperative, Attention: Michele Boreen, 1725 US Highway. 12, Suite 100, Litchfield, MN 55355 by June 1.

FEATURED RECIPE

Dessert Tortillas

Congratulations to **Soundra Burgoyne** for submitting this issue's winning recipe.



INGREDIENTS:

- 4 Tortillas
- 1 cup marshmallows
- 1 cup chocolate chips

DIRECTIONS:

Lay out the tortillas on a grill. On ½ of each tortilla, put ¼ c. of chocoalte chips and ¼ c. of the marshmallows. Fold each tortilla in half covering the choc. chips and marshmallows. Grill for 1 to 3 minutes, turning over so both sides of the tortilla are grilled. Cut each into 3 sections and enjoy an ooey-goey dessert!

Submit your favorite Grilling Recipe for our next issue! Please include a photo if you are able.

The chosen winner will receive a \$10 credit to their account. DEADLINE: June 14, 2023.

Email to: szeppelin@meeker.coop | Mail to: Meeker Coop, ATTN: Shane 1725 US Hwy 12 E, Ste 100, Litchfield, MN 55355

CONTACT US

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CEO/General Manager: Luke Johnson
Contract Editor: Fuller Creative, LLC

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South Maine Prairie in Stearns;
Forest Prairie in Meeker

Larry Huhn, Vice President — District 8
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Harvey, Manannah in Meeker

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Send Attention: Editor at the address above.

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www.meeker.coop/news.