

# Operations Department Efficiency Adds Value for Members

**Y**ou may not know exactly what each employee in Eau Claire Energy Cooperative's Operations Department does on a daily basis, but one thing you should know is that together they work lean and efficiently to "keep the lights on" for over 10,000 co-op members. According to Operations Manager Gary Brecka, "Our operations and maintenance expenses have been below state and national averages on a per consumer basis since 2006. Plus, expenses are well below other cooperatives of our similar size. That means we are working lean and efficiently."



Gary Brecka  
Operations Manager

Brecka continued, "The value to our members is that as we develop better ways to control our costs and work more efficiently, our outage times also compare more favorably with other statewide and national systems. That's a great value for our co-op members."

## Major Projects Completed in 2011

Headed up by Operations Manager Gary Brecka and supervised by Line Superintendent Randy Baier and Senior Operations Technician Rick Rasmussen, major projects affecting members in the Ludington, Cadott, Hallie, and Cleghorn areas were completed or are close to completion this year. It's not good enough just to install power lines as new homes and businesses are built in Eau Claire Energy Cooperative's service territory. Well planned, long-term maintenance of those above ground and underground power lines is what keeps the lights on down the road with minimal interruptions.

1. In the Cadott and Ludington areas, the Operations Department completed the tie-line of those two substations. The Ludington-Cadott tie-line will improve the service reliability for members in the northeast part of our system.
2. A major rebuild of the Cleghorn and Cadott substations took place this summer as the ECEC crews worked alongside Dairyland Power Cooperative. The rebuild offers more opportunities for future co-op membership growth.

3. The construction of the new East Hallie substation is now underway, with Dairyland Power Cooperative leading the project. The East Hallie Substation will provide the needed power for commercial growth in the U.S. Hwy. 53/Hallie area, which is part of the cooperative's service territory.

The Operations Department also continues to take a very aggressive approach to replace older (pre-1980) underground cable. Over the years the cable can deteriorate due to weather, lightning strikes, and rodent damage. As the underground cable installed prior to 1980 ages, it has proven to be unreliable, and much of it has reached the end of its useful life.

## Safety Vital in All We Do

The nature of the job for a line worker is dangerous — that's a reality. Therefore, safety rules must be followed without exception. All line workers and the other Operations Department personnel are required to participate in monthly safety meetings and ongoing training as



*"It is something you have to want to do, and it can be very rewarding."*

ECEC line workers Brian Yohnk, Josh Vaningan, and Issac Stiteley work together up in the air on the major rebuild of the Cleghorn substation this summer. This much-needed rebuild offers more opportunities for membership growth in that area.

a fact of life in this line of work. Training is constantly required for working with new tools, equipment, trucks, operating procedures, and system changes. Being a line worker is not an easy job. It is something you have to *want* to do, and it can be very rewarding.

## Nature is Root Cause of Outages

Outage records are reported on a monthly basis to the board of directors, and believe it or not, trees making contact with or falling on power lines ranks as the top reason for outages in ECEC's service territory. It's a constant battle, and usually it's the weather—i.e., wind, lightning, ice, or snow—that causes trees to fall across power lines. Keep in mind that our line workers respond to all outages, no matter what time of day or night and during any type of weather.

Clearing trees away from power lines is an unending responsibility. The Operations Department works on a six-year rotating program to clear trees away from all power lines on the system. That means every six years your co-op works to clear your area of trees and brush in order to ensure power reliability.

## Employees Give Back

Giving back to the communities served is one of the core principles of being a cooperative. Line workers and other employees in the Operations Department have performed many services for the communities served by ECEC. Some of the projects are completed during work hours while others are carried out during their own personal time.

1. Safety demonstrations are presented on a rotating basis at area elementary schools. This year over 500 students experienced the live line safety demos at Osseo and Fairchild elementary schools.
2. Area first responders, contractors, electricians, and emergency personnel were presented with safety demonstrations tailored to their work place experiences.
3. Line workers from Eau Claire Energy Cooperative participate every spring in the Safety Meetings with Diggers Hotline and other area utilities.
4. ECEC line workers have been repeat presenters at Mayo/Luther's summer safety camp at Carson Park in Eau Claire over the past few years. Youngsters learn

how to stay safe around electric lines and transformers.

5. Large bucket trucks and digger derrick trucks are favorite attractions for the younger crowd each year at the Eau Claire County Fair. Line workers take time out of their summer to show off these trucks to the enthusiastic children.
6. Over the years ECEC line workers have volunteered their personal time to bring electric lines to special community service projects such as the Cleghorn Park Pavilion, the Beaver Creek Reserve Citizen Science Center, Tower Ridge Ski Trails, and much more.



*Left: Winter weather certainly does not deter necessary outside work for ECEC line workers. Despite the snow and extreme cold, Beau Blade and Terry Gilbertson (behind spools) continue to work laying out cable at Curt Manufacturing, a commercial and industrial co-op member, earlier this year.*



*At one point six buckets, each with two-person crews from Eau Claire Energy Cooperative and Dairyland Power Cooperative, were up on the steel over Hwy 53 in Hallie. These crews pictured were stringing power lines across the highway to connect with the new East Hallie substation that will provide needed power for commercial growth in ECEC's service territory, including Lake Hallie, Seymour, and Lafayette. Communications was key since this project included 21 men and 11 bucket trucks.*

## Value for the Co-op Member

The entire Operations Department, including the support staff, staking and mapping employees and line workers, is very proud of all the work it does and quality service it provides in a safe manner for our members. Everyone in the department takes his job very seriously and is dedicated to providing the best uninterrupted service possible. It is better to do what is in the best long-term interest of our co-op members than just short-term solutions. ■

# **Dairyland Power Cooperative Partners with Bush Brothers on Renewable Energy Plant**

## **Methane Digester Located in Eau Claire Energy Cooperative's Service Territory**

**D**airyland Power Cooperative has signed an agreement with Bush Brothers & Co. to purchase the renewable energy and capacity from a new anaerobic wastewater system located in Augusta. The system will be served by Eau Claire Energy Cooperative, a Dairyland member.

Construction on the renewable energy facility is nearing completion, and commercial operation is expected in early 2012.

"It is a significant milestone when three entities work together to create yet another renewable energy facility for the benefit of the communities we all serve. Renewable energy facilities, including the new one at the Bush Brothers facility at Augusta, have added a positive element to the way we provide electricity for our co-op members," said Eau Claire Energy Cooperative CEO and President Lynn Thompson.

The digester plant at the industrial wastewater facility is designed to process biogas produced in a covered lagoon to power a 635 kW generator. This is projected to produce enough renewable energy to power nearly 500 homes in the Dairyland system.

"The anaerobic digester represents a responsible method for handling plant waste and we are glad to have it as a part of our manufacturing process," said Joe Breid, director of

operations for the Bush Brothers plant in Augusta.

Once operational, the Bush Brothers facility will represent the seventh methane digester within the Dairyland system, and the first industrial use. The first six digester facilities are "cow power" plants, utilizing dairy cow manure as the source from which methane gas is derived to fuel the generators and create renewable energy.

"We are pleased to be in partnership with Bush Brothers and Eau Claire Energy Cooperative on this renewable energy facility, which provides benefits to both the environment and industry. We continue to seek opportunities to expand our renewable resources and look forward to the Dairyland system's first industrial-use methane digester plant coming on line

in 2012," said Craig Harmes, Dairyland manager, business development.

### **About Bush Brothers**

Founded in 1908, Bush Brothers & Company is a privately owned food processor headquartered in Knoxville, Tenn. Best known for their baked beans, Bush Brothers also offers more than 30 varieties of canned beans, including kidney, pinto, and black. Bush Brothers & Company is still family owned and operated, working for the same ideals that were set forth by A.J. Bush more than 100 years ago, ensuring the highest quality and best taste can be found in all their products. Bush's sells one-third of all canned beans in the United States, making it the top bean brand in the country. Its

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## Fall Dual Fuel Test November 16

### ATTENTION: Members Participating in Dual Fuel Program

On Wednesday, November 16, a test involving the heating systems for Dual Fuel members will occur beginning at 5 p.m. All electric loads (those allowed by Eau Claire Energy Cooperative) in participating members' Dual Fuel panels will be interrupted for four to six hours beginning at 5 p.m. Gradual restoration will begin at 9 p.m., with all power being restored by 10:30 p.m.

This test is being done to make sure the load management receivers and equipment in the dual fuel member homes and/or businesses are working properly. If the equipment is working correctly, you will see both an amber and green LED light on the receiver and your off-peak Dual Fuel loads will be interrupted during the test period.



At the completion of the test period the amber light will shut off, indicating restoration of your electric heat.

For Dual Fuel members this is a great opportunity to check the backup heating system to assure it is working properly. Be sure to make any maintenance changes before winter sets in.

If you have any questions about this annual test or experience any problems or notice your loads are not inter-

rupted during the test, or if you need to cut the seals on the Dual Fuel panel for maintenance or wiring changes, please call us at 715-832-1603 or 888-832-1604 (toll free). Remember, permission is required from Eau Claire Energy Cooperative prior to cutting any seals.

If you want more information about how you can save money on your energy bill with Dual Fuel, click on [www.ecec.com](http://www.ecec.com) or call a member services representative at 715-832-1603 or 888-832-1604 toll free. ■

## Save on Your Energy Bill with Kill-A-Watt

### Use the Kill-A-Watt Meter for FREE!

More and more members are taking advantage of the Kill-A-Watt meter available at Eau Claire Energy Cooperative (ECEC). With this unit, you can check to see what appliances are using the most electricity. Simply plug the Kill-A-Watt meter

right into your outlet and then plug the appliance into the unit. Readings on the display will help you calculate your electrical expenses by the day, week, month, or year. Start making decisions about your lifestyle and control your energy bill.

Kill-A-Watt meters are FREE at ECEC with a security deposit of \$10. Upon the return of the Kill-A-Watt meter, you'll receive your security deposit. Or, purchase the Kill-A-Watt meter at ECEC for \$21 plus tax.

Check with your local library — many of these units have been donated by Eau Claire Energy Cooperative. ■



## Need Help Paying for Higher Education?

Apply at [www.ecec.com](http://www.ecec.com)

Higher education costs keep going up. And, Eau Claire Energy Cooperative can help members with \$500 scholarships through the Federated Youth Foundation Scholarships. But, you need to act by January 13, 2012. Members with students looking for help with higher education costs can apply for these scholarships through our web site at [www.ecec.com](http://www.ecec.com) (click on the Youth tab). Or, contact your school for the scholarship application. ■

# Beware Promises of Drastic Cuts in Energy Bills

## Use Caution and Common Sense

With the heating season upon us, those ads are appearing all over again. You know — the ads for portable heaters that promise drastic cuts in your energy bills. Or, what about the free dinners promised just to listen to another sales pitch? Over promise and under deliver? That’s exactly what could happen if people do not use caution and common sense when comparing these products.



No matter how fancy the mantel is on a portable fireplace, a kilowatt is a kilowatt is a kilowatt. When a high-priced fancy unit uses 1,500 kilowatts of electricity, it uses the same amount of electricity that a much lower priced 1,500 kilowatt unit uses. If you want the pretty unit

for its aesthetic value, that’s a different matter. Just don’t get caught up in the hype about “huge savings on your energy bill.”

For more information on how to use caution and common sense when comparing these units and other claims of drastically cutting your energy bill, go to [www.ecec.com](http://www.ecec.com). Click on the Energy Info tab. ■

## Bush Brothers

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signature commercials with Jay Bush and his Golden Retriever, Duke, have made Bush’s beans a familiar household name. For more information, visit [www.bushbeans.com](http://www.bushbeans.com).

## About Dairyland Power Cooperative

With headquarters in La Crosse, Dairyland provides wholesale electricity to 25 member distribution cooperatives and 16 municipal utilities in four states (Wisconsin, Minnesota, Iowa, and Illinois). Dairyland’s generation resources include coal, natural gas, hydro, wind, landfill gas, biomass, solar, and animal waste. For more information, visit [www.dairynet.com](http://www.dairynet.com).

## About Eau Claire Energy Cooperative

With the headquarters located between Eau Claire and Fall Creek, Eau Claire Energy Cooperative and its subsidiary, Energy Connections, provide reliable and affordable electricity, propane gas, and related energy services to over 10,000 residential, business, and farm members in Eau Claire County plus portions of Chippewa, Dunn, Pepin, Buffalo, Trempealeau, and Jackson Counties. As a Touchstone Energy Partner, Eau Claire Energy Cooperative prides itself in the personal service it offers to its members. Find out more about Eau Claire Energy Cooperative at [www.ecec.com](http://www.ecec.com). ■




If you need assistance paying for your heating this winter, help may be available through your county energy assistance program. Don’t miss the chance to receive financial help on your energy costs, including propane gas and electricity. If you feel you qualify for energy assistance, call the county agency where you live. Applications are being taken October 1–May 15. Additional crisis services are available all year.

Eau Claire County.....	715-839-6905
Chippewa County.....	715-726-7840
Clark County.....	715-743-5233
Jackson County.....	715-284-4301
Dunn County.....	715-232-1116
Buffalo County.....	608-685-4412
Pepin County.....	715-672-8941
Trempealeau County.....	715-538-2311
Starting Points (Chippewa Co.).....	715-726-7937
Western Dairyland.....	715-836-7511



I figured an afternoon of tracking down air leaks  
earned me a day out in the woods. Find out what  
you can do at [TogetherWeSave.com](http://TogetherWeSave.com).

**Eau Claire Energy  
Cooperative**

Your Touchstone Energy® Partner 

[www.ecec.com](http://www.ecec.com)

**TOGETHERWESAVE.COM**



## Updating Your Heating System?

### First, ask the right questions:

1. What type of system do I need for the size of my home?
2. Is the existing duct work adequate?
3. Will the old thermostat work with the new system?

FREE Estimates

For answers to these and other questions you may have about installing a new system, or repairing your current one, look to the folks at Energy Connections.

**They have the answers, plus,  
24/7 service!**



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**Enhance  
Your Comfort**

### ...& Control Your Energy Costs

Looking for ways to save money on your heating bills? Cold weather is on its way, and there are ways to help control your home heating bills. Your home's doors and windows are two key areas on which to focus. Windows and doors are unique because they connect you and your home to the outside world, which can get pretty cold in winter weather. Doors and windows open and close, allowing cold air from the outside to move in, and for precious heat to escape. Because they are used often, there is an even greater chance for their insulating protection to wear out and discontinue to function. Older windows can develop small cracks for cold air to seep in.

The average home has 15 to 20 windows and two, three, or even more doors opening to the cold weather outside. The more windows and doors you have, the chances increase for you to lose valuable heat in the winter months. Now's the time to take careful examinations of your doors and windows...and close up those heat-robbing openings in order to preserve the warmth in your home. Even the most minute crack can move a lot of air in the wrong direction.

Caulking and weatherstripping are the top two fixes for leaky doors and windows. It's an easy do-it-yourself job with minimum expenses for supplies. Plus, you can probably accomplish it in an afternoon depending on how many windows and doors there are in your home.

Single-pane windows can be energy robbers. You may even consider replacing them with double or triple-paned versions. Doors also come in a variety of insulating values — compare them to what you already have in your home.

The main purpose of this maintenance is to keep the heat IN your home during the cold winter months and to keep the heat OUT in the hot humid summer months. Besides that, it gives you more personal comfort and helps you control your energy bills. ■




- Make your home more energy efficient
- Help control energy costs
- Enjoy a more comfortable home
- Lower energy use means fewer environmental effects on our air, water and land
- Identify energy efficiency problems in your home
- Experienced consultants provide you with solutions

**Questions?**  
Contact a Member  
Service Associate



**Eau Claire Energy  
Cooperative**

Your Touchstone Energy® Partner   
www.ecec.com

# NEXT YOUTH AMBASSADOR MEETING

Wednesday,  
November 16, 2011  
12:00 Noon - 1:30 p.m.

At Eau Claire Energy  
Cooperative Headquarters  
Yummy lunch included  
Sign up at [www.ecec.com](http://www.ecec.com).  
Click on the Youth tab.

## Eau Claire Energy Cooperative

Lynn E. Thompson, CEO  
Mary Kay Brevig, Editor, Manager of  
Communications & Public Relations  
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Fall Creek, WI 54742-0368

**Office Hours:** 7:30 a.m.–4 p.m. Mon–Fri

**Non-emergencies:** 715-832-1603

Toll FREE 888-832-1604

**Emergencies & outages:** Toll FREE 800-927-5090

24 hours a day, 7 days a week

**Diggers Hotline:** 811 or 1-800-242-8511

Call 3 working days before you dig.

**Eau Claire Energy  
Cooperative**

Your Touchstone Energy® Partner 