

SHARING SUCCESS



Members will see rate credit for six months

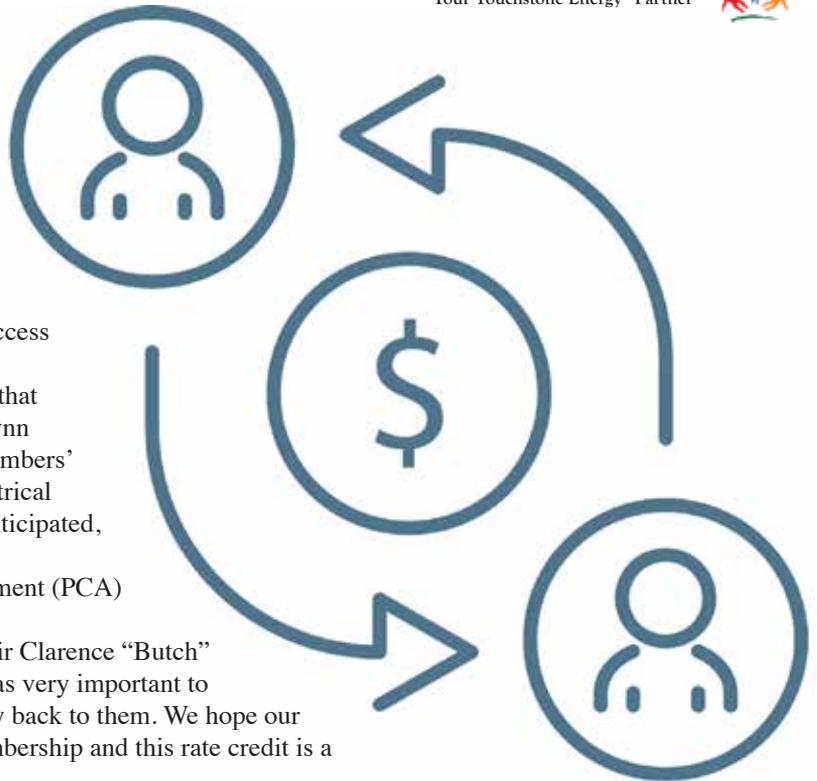
While 2020 has been a year of many challenges, your cooperative is financially strong. Sales are higher than expected and expenses, including the cost of power, are down. Because we are a cooperative, the board of directors has taken action to return a portion of this success to you in the form of a credit.

“Our vision is to provide excellent energy services that are of the highest value to our members,” said CEO Lynn Thompson. “We work hard every day to utilize our members’ money wisely while maintaining safe and reliable electrical service. This year we were more successful than we anticipated, and we are now sharing that success.”

This credit will be applied to the power cost adjustment (PCA) line of your bill over the next six months.

When asked about the board’s decision, Board Chair Clarence “Butch” Boettcher stated, “After thoughtful consideration, it was very important to our board of directors that we get our members’ money back to them. We hope our members recognize the value of their cooperative membership and this rate credit is a prime example of that value.”

This credit and savings back to you is because you’re a member of a cooperative and when the cooperative is successful, that success is shared with you. That’s the cooperative difference!



MY CO-OP



SEEKING NOMINATIONS FOR CONCERN FOR COMMUNITY AWARD

Do you know an Eau Claire Energy Cooperative member who has gone above and beyond to help others? Have they made a difference in the community through local service projects, non-profit organizations, or other local events? Nominate a cooperative member for the annual Concern for Community Award by February 19, 2021. The nomination form is available on our website at www.ecec.com under the “Community” tab. The award recipient will be honored at our 84th Annual Meeting on March 16, 2021.



2020 Incentives due by **DECEMBER 31**

As a cooperative member, you have the opportunity to earn incentives through energy efficiency measures. If you’ve purchased appliances, heating and cooling equipment, lighting and more, you may be eligible for rebates. Visit our website at www.ecec.com to see all the incentives and access the appropriate forms.

MAKE YOUR SEASON *Bright* AT PLEASANT VALLEY TREE FARM

Don and Kathy Scharlau started planting trees in the mid-1980s and opened Pleasant Valley Tree Farm in 1991. The Scharlaus, along with their five children, spent many long days planting tiny transplant trees both by hand and with a machine planter. One of those children, Daniel Scharlau, fell in love with the process, the land, and the trees in general. And just last year, Daniel and his wife, Robin, took over operations full time. We chatted with Daniel and Robin's daughter Sarah to learn more about the farm.

More Than Trees

Pleasant Valley Tree Farm sells many varieties of trees including Fraser Fir, Balsam Fir, Spruce, and White Pine. Customers can choose to cut their own tree or stop by to purchase pre-cut trees. They offer wagon rides to and from the fields to search for that perfect tree and enjoy a fun family experience. Once the tree is selected, Pleasant Valley's helpful staff will give it a good shake to shed those excess needles, trim it up for a fresh cut, bail it, and help secure it in your vehicle.

Pleasant Valley is more than just trees. They also have free popcorn, hot chocolate, and hot cider available in their gift shop. Speaking of the gift shop, customers can deck the halls with freshly made wreaths, garland, porch pots, swags, and more! The gift shop also boasts home décor items, ornaments, gourmet food, clothing, wall art, and candles. So, customers can knock out some holiday shopping all in one stop.

Year-round Work

Pleasant Valley employs 50–60 people during tree harvest and retail season which runs October through December. In the summer, about 25 employees are hired to shear the trees,



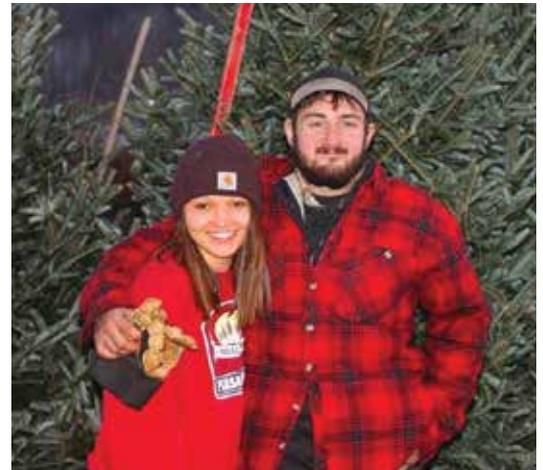
pick pine cones, and fertilize the fields. The rest of the year, four or five employees perform field and office work.

We asked Sarah what she thought was the most interesting thing about the Christmas tree industry. She replied, "Most people do not realize how much work is done to the trees outside the Christmas season." She described the process starting in March, when weeks are spent pulling out old stumps, cleaning up the fields, and prepping the fields. Next, the trees are fertilized. Some can be machine fertilized while others are fertilized by hand. By the beginning of May, planting begins and lasts about three weeks. Next up is pine cone picking. Pleasant Valley has over 150,000 Fraser Fir trees and every single one of them must have all the pine cones picked off.

"Pine cone removal takes about two weeks and is probably one of the most troublesome jobs on the farm. It is not without some fun though," Sarah laughed. "You often see the boys on ladders pelting each other with pine cones until someone yells mercy!" The pine cones must be picked or they'll take too much energy away from the tree and will prevent it from growing a fuller top.

Next is mowing to remove weeds and help prepare the fields for shearing. Shearing begins the middle of June, or whenever the new growth is finally set. Shearing typically lasts several months. Other tasks like mowing, watering, and other maintenance are done throughout the entire process.





It's a Family Affair

The farm and land that are home to Pleasant Valley Tree Farm have been in the family for six generations. Sarah reflects on this important foundation of family, “We are a very large family. I have been very blessed to get to work closely with my cousins, grandparents, parents, siblings, aunts and uncles. I think that has been the most amazing part about this whole deal. I love that I get to wake up every day and go to work with my parents and siblings. Even though we don’t always see eye to eye, I thank God every day for this farm and this opportunity. It really has made us a stronger family.”

As you enjoy the beauty and scent of evergreens this holiday season, take time to appreciate the year-long process, hard work and love that is poured into every branch.

Pleasant Valley Tree Farm is located at N7240 810th Street, Elk Mound, and is open daily from 9 a.m. – 6 p.m. through December 23.

Three generations of the Scharlau family operate the Pleasant Valley Tree Farm. Clockwise, starting top left: Don and Kathy Scharlau, Dan and Robin Scharlau, Sarah Scharlau and Sawyer Suvadu, Matthew Scharlau, and Dan Scharlau (center) with Jacob Scharlau and Andrew Williams.



MY CO-OP





REMODEL COMPLETE

If you've driven by our headquarters on Highway 12, you may have noticed the construction going on over the last several months. Many of the employees of Eau Claire Energy Cooperative have been working from a temporary office location. We are very excited to announce that the remodel is complete, and effective December 10, 2020, all operations will return to our headquarters building. The drop box will be returned to its original location at the front of the building.

Unfortunately, COVID-19 precautions prevent us from opening fully. For the safety of our employees, members and community, our lobby and building will remain closed unless there is an urgent need. If you need to meet with an employee, you may contact our office for an appointment by calling 715-832-1603.

Operations returning to headquarters building on December 10.

Lobby open by appointment only.

Drop box is located at the front of the building.

NOMINATING COMMITTEE READIES DIRECTOR ELECTION

Thank you to the three cooperative members who are serving on the Nominating Committee for the 2021 Director Election:

- District 2 – Larry Sturz
- District 4 – Mona Mathews
- District 6 – Wilson Lund

All ECEC members will have an opportunity to vote in the director election at the 84th Annual Meeting on Tuesday, March 16, 2021, or by absentee ballot. Watch future issues of this magazine and our website for more information on the upcoming election and the process of voting.

WAYS TO PAY YOUR ENERGY BILL

- **SmartHub App** – download the SmartHub app from your mobile device app store
- **Online** – www.ecec.com under the "My Account" tab
- **Mail** check or money order to Eau Claire Energy Cooperative, PO Box 368, Fall Creek, WI 54742
- **Phone** by calling 715-832-1603, Option 2
- **Drop box** (no cash) which is located in front of the headquarters building at 8214 Highway 12
- **Cash payments** are accepted at Walmart service counters for a small fee
- **By appointment** – ECEC's office is closed due to COVID-19, but members may call 715-832-1603 for an appointment Monday-Friday between 7:30 a.m. – 4 p.m.



Eau Claire Energy Cooperative

Your Touchstone Energy® Partner



Lynn E. Thompson, President/CEO

Monica Obrycki, Chief Administrative Officer

8214 Hwy. 12, P.O. Box 368, Fall Creek, WI 54742
www.ecec.com

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

Non-emergencies: 715-832-1603

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.