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WISCONSIN ENERGY Cooperative NEWS

November 2026

Eau Claire Energy Cooperative

Your Touchstone Energy® Cooperative

READY BEFORE THE STORM

HEROES ARE NEVER THAT FAR AWAY

THE NEXT GENERATION OF RENEWABLE ENERGY

MEMBER SPOTLIGHT - SPARREAUX BOUTIQUE

Eau Claire Energy Cooperative
Your Touchstone Energy® Cooperative



INVESTING IN OUR FUTURE

By Monica Obrycki, President and CEO

As a mother of two young adults, I have had a front-row seat to how quickly kids grow up. It seems like one minute you are helping them get ready for kindergarten, and the next you are watching them make decisions about college, careers, and what they want their future to look like.

It's an exciting time that has me reflecting on the opportunities young people have right here in our community. The students growing up here today are our future members, our future workforce, and our future community and cooperative leaders. While we may not know exactly where their paths will take them, we can help give them experiences, connections, and support that may shape where those paths lead. That is why youth programs are an important part of ECEC's commitment to our communities.

One of the most direct ways we do this is through our scholarship program. Each year, ECEC provides scholarships to students from member families who are continuing their education. Whether a student is heading to a four-year university, a technical college, or pursuing a career in electrical distribution, we want to help support them as they take their next step.

If you have a student in your family who is planning to continue their education, I encourage you to take a look at the scholarship opportunities available through ECEC. Applications for 2027 are due January 8, 2027. Students can learn more on the ECEC website or contact their high school guidance office or college academic advisor for more information and an application.

We also support students by providing opportunities like the Youth Leadership Conference and the Washington, D.C. Youth Tour. Both are funded by Eau Claire Energy Cooperative's Federated Youth Foundation, meaning member students pay little to no cost for these leadership experiences.

Youth Tour gives students the chance to step outside their everyday surroundings and meet peers from across the country in Washington, D.C. Students can explore our nation's history and government and gain a better understanding of how electric cooperatives fit into the bigger picture.

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And you don't have to be interested in a career in the energy industry to benefit from these programs. The experience is about much more than electricity. It gives students a chance to see new places, meet people they otherwise might never have met, gain new perspectives, and build confidence as they begin figuring out what comes next. Those are experiences that can benefit any student, no matter what career path they ultimately choose. A student who goes on to become a teacher, business owner, health care professional, farmer, electrician, or community leader can take those experiences with them. Applications for Youth Tour open in November and are due by January 25, 2027.

Want something a little closer to home? The Youth Leadership Conference brings students from across Wisconsin together at UW-Stout. Students spend time with other young people from around the state, hear new perspectives, and develop skills they can carry with them into whatever comes next. It is another way ECEC can help young people grow as leaders and learn more about the cooperative they're part of. YLC applications are due in early summer each year. Watch our website and social media for dates and more information about applying.

Each of these programs is different, but they all give us a chance to invest in young soon-to-be adults at an important point in their lives. They can help a student continue their education, discover a new interest, develop leadership skills, or see a little more of the world outside their own community.

While these programs help individual students, they are also about something bigger. The young people we support today will become the members we serve, the people who make up our workforce, and the leaders who help shape our communities and our cooperative in the years ahead.

We don't know where their paths will take them, but we do know that supporting the next generation is an investment in ECEC's future and the communities we serve.

That is something I am proud to be part of.

SAVE THE DATES!

Youth Tour
June 19–25, 2027

Youth Leadership Conference
July 13–15, 2027



SPARREAUX BOUTIQUE:

Home Décor Picked with Purpose

At Sparreaux Boutique, every shelf is handpicked, every gift is personal, and nothing is there just to fill space.

The fall display on the counter at Sparreaux Boutique does not look like most fall displays. There are no rows of orange pumpkins or rust-colored leaves. Instead, owner Molly Reijo built the season out of teals and turquoises. Finding a new or unexpected way to make décor work is one of her favorite parts of the job.

That one display sums up the shop pretty well. Sparreaux is eclectic, beautiful, a little playful, and full of things you won't find on anyone else's shelves. With the holidays around the corner and Small Business Saturday coming up on November 28, it is also a good reminder of what local shops bring to our communities.

A little bit of everything, and only one of most things

Step inside and the mix is part of the charm. Vintage and midcentury modern finds sit alongside new pieces, and much of what is on the shelves is one of a kind. Sparreaux also creates custom arrangements with faux and dried florals, built around what each customer loves.

Most of the new inventory comes from other small businesses across the United States, which means Sparreaux gets to support fellow small shops along the way.

From blueprints to feeling like home

Sparreaux grew out of Molly's background in home building. Over the years, she found herself helping homeowners fill their new builds with the things that made them happy, the pieces that turn a new house into a home.

When the business built its office building, they included a boutique so customers could see a project all the way through, from design to reality to feeling like home. They design the shelving, build the shelving, and then help homeowners fill those shelves with things they love.

For years, the boutique opened on weekends here and there as time allowed. That changed when Sparreaux hired Emily full-time and expanded its hours, something Molly had always wanted to do. With more time on the calendar and more activity on social media, the shop has become less of a side quest and more of a purpose, and she hopes the new hours bring in many more faces.

No filler on these shelves

For a shop owner, Molly gives some surprising advice. She tells customers not to buy things just to fill space.

"I may not be the best salesperson," she admitted. "Don't put holes in the wall to hang something just because the wall is bare or the shelves are empty. Find things you love before you pull the trigger."

To Molly, a home is a safe space, and it should not feel like a page out of a mass-produced catalog. Customers often come in for help pulling a room or project together, and the goal is always the same: a space that brings them joy and looks like nobody else's.

"Every single thing we have is handpicked for this store and for you," she said. "There are no filler things on our shelves. They are all picked with purpose."

The fun is in the finding

Ask Molly what she loves to shop for, and the answer is not





Left: Sparreaux Boutique mixes vintage and midcentury modern finds with new décor, custom floral arrangements and one-of-a-kind pieces. Right: Sparreaux Boutique owner Molly Reijo, left, and Emily bring their own creative eyes to the shop's displays and help customers find pieces they love.

a style or a category. It is the hunt itself. She never goes out looking for anything in particular. She picks up whatever piques her interest, finds a place for it, and loves watching those pieces find their forever homes.

Finding that place takes more work than most shoppers would guess. Molly doesn't plan displays on paper. She starts, reworks, and sometimes reworks a display or a find several times before it looks right in a space. The same handful of items could be arranged seven different ways, and the result is not always what she pictured. Sometimes that is the best part.

It is also part of the fun of having Emily on the team. "I could give Emily three things and say, 'make a display with this vibe,'" Molly said. "Her idea of how it turns out is fantastic, but not at all what I originally pictured."

Gifts with thought

If there is one season Sparreaux was made for, it might be this one. Molly loves gift-giving, and every shopper is like a puzzle worth solving.

When you stop in for a gift, expect a few questions. Who is the gift for? What do they like? What is their personality? From there, Molly and Emily help pull together something that fits that person, then finish it as a gift basket or with nice wrapping and a card.

"We really are a one-stop shop," Molly said. "Gifts with thought are just so much more special, and it is really cool to be a part of that process for others."

Why shopping local matters

Molly doesn't sugarcoat what the holidays mean for a small shop. A strong November and December can carry a local business through the rest of the year, and many small businesses never make it past their first few years. About half close within five years, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

"If you want them to stick around, you need to shop local," she said. "Loving Eau Claire and the community we are a part of includes those small businesses."

She also knows budgets are tight for a lot of families right now. Shopping local can cost a little more, but it usually means better quality, something unique, and items picked with care instead of the same five options every big box store carries.

For Molly, the best part is the people. She loves getting to know the shoppers who walk through the door, and she sees them as part of the business just as much as the business is part of the community.

Rooted close to home

That idea will sound familiar to cooperative members. Eau Claire Energy Cooperative is owned by the members it serves, and Concern for Community is one of the seven principles that guide every cooperative. Local businesses like Sparreaux give our communities their character, and they count on neighbors to keep their doors open.

This Small Business Saturday, consider starting the holiday list close to home. Stop in, tell Molly and Emily whom you are shopping for, and see what they find.



Plan your visit!

Sparreaux Boutique
6176 Sandstone Road
Eau Claire, WI 54701

WEEKLY HOURS

Wednesday: 10 a.m.–5p.m.
Thursday: 12 p.m.–7 p.m.
Friday: 10 a.m.–5 p.m.
Saturday: 10 a.m.–4 p.m.

Follow along:

@Sparreaux Boutique

@sparreaux_boutique

NOW TAKING NOMINATIONS

Concern for Community









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 Monday, January 4, 2027, for a chance to win a $25 bill credit. To be eligible, you must be an active Eau Claire Energy member and nominate another active member. The nomination form is available on our website at www.ecec.com under the "community" tab, or you can scan the QR code to make a nomination. The ECEC member nominator of the awarded recipient will be notified and receive a $25 bill credit. The award recipient will be honored at the 90th Annual Meeting on March 16, 2027.

$1,000

FEDERATED YOUTH FOUNDATION SCHOLARSHIPS 2027



$1,000 scholarships are awarded to area high school and homeschool seniors and current UW-Eau Claire and Chippewa Valley Technical College students. Applicants must have a parent or guardian who is an ECEC member receiving energy service at their residence. Visit our website for details!

JANUARY 8, 2027 – APPLICATION DEADLINE

A scholarship application form must be completed and returned to the high school, college, or other post-secondary school student office (whichever applies).

Eau Claire Energy Cooperative

Your Touchstone Energy® Cooperative

Monica Obrycki, President and CEO

Taylor Skibba, Marketing and Communications Coordinator

8214 Hwy 12, P.O. Box 368, Fall Creek, WI 54742-0368

www.ecec.com

Lobby Hours: 7:30 a.m.–4:30 p.m. Monday–Thursday; 7:30 a.m.–11:30 a.m. Friday

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.

ECEC's lobby will be closed Nov. 26 & 27 for Thanksgiving.