

Red River Valley Cooperative Power Association

# SPARKS

August/September 2020 Your Touchstone Energy Cooperative 



**Let's jam!** page 4

# SPARKS

Red River Valley Co-op Power is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

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Rich Whitcomb, Editor  
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August/September 2020  
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Halstad, Minnesota (USPS 509-300)

## OFFICERS & DIRECTORS

- Roger Krostue ..... Fisher  
*Chairman*
- Marvis Thompson ..... Perley  
*Vice Chairman*
- Trevor Sorby ..... Glyndon  
*Secretary-Treasurer*
- Bob Kinkade ..... Ada
- Sarah Tommerdahl ..... Hendrum
- Neil Wieser ..... Moorhead

Rich Whitcomb  
*Chief Executive Officer*

## Scheduled Board Meeting

Board meetings are held in Halstad at the cooperative office starting at 8:30 a.m. on the next-to-last Monday of each month.

**Outages: 800-788-7784**

**On the Cover:** Veronica Whitehead and pal Zoey pose next to thick black currant bushes at the Whitehead's garden in rural East Grand Forks. Black currants are a unique and uncommon fruit in this region, but quite tasty in jams, syrups and desserts. See story on page 4.



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for outage updates and other  
useful information.



Rich Whitcomb  
CEO

## THE CEO'S REPORT

# Facilities renovation/rebuild project being examined

An overall facilities study is currently underway as your cooperative plans for future needs and the proper facilities to continue serving members at a high level.

Red River Valley Co-op Power has two locations. The main location is in Halstad and was built in 1949 with an addition in 1987. There is also a small shop north of Moorhead on Highway 75 that houses four line workers and some materials. While the locations are appropriate to serve the membership effectively from a service and reliability perspective, maintenance concerns are apparent at both facilities.

For reference, Red River Valley Co-op Power's service territory is 126 miles long and serves areas of Clay, Norman and Polk counties. The central location effectively serves the middle and north areas, plus logistically as a hub to house poles, wires and transformers. These are the materials essential to build and maintain more than 1,800 miles of line that stretch from East Grand Forks to Barnesville. The south outpost allows us to respond quickly to areas of Clay County.

In the fall of 2019, concern on the old portion of the Halstad office led us to seek the advice of a structural engineer. Then, your board of directors authorized further study after a tour of the existing building highlighted growing deficiencies and maintenance concerns. That led to

the services of an architectural firm, Michael J. Burns of Moorhead, to help identify the cooperative's needs and help us plan for the future.

Subsequent work of the architectural firm and review of a structural engineer determined many maintenance issues in the 71-year-old portion of the main building that are coming due. Water and/or condensation is intruding through the roof in spots, the windows are original and failing, walls are poorly insulated, heating/cooling and ventilation equipment needs to be replaced, and asbestos remediation is necessary if any major changes are attempted.

There are other valid concerns with the current layout of the office in terms of efficiency and aesthetics for current and future employees. Seventy-one years is a long time. Your cooperative must look ahead to serve you reliably and competitively for the long-term future as well.

Red River Valley Co-op Power has invested heavily in service, reliability and technology to the benefit of members. Yet, it must also ensure your employees have efficient office/shop workspaces to continue serving you at a high level.

The architect has finished his initial report for the Halstad location and presented first findings to directors in late August. The board of directors asked the architect and myself to further define available options. Your board and cooperative staff will

research options to find the most value for members in a thoughtful and responsible manner.

Cost estimates are too general at this time to be of great value until further refinement has been accomplished later this fall. A more defined path is targeted in tandem with the budgeting process. Government-issued Rural Utility Service loans are available for such a project at historically low interest rates financed at 30 years.

More information will be available in future issues of *Sparks*. Feel free to contact me as well by calling the office at 218-456-2139.

### Annual meeting recap

Due to the ongoing pandemic, your cooperative held its first-ever hybrid annual meeting, consisting of a mail-in ballot for the actual business and then a live feed for the informational online session. A recording of the informational session can be accessed at [www.rrvcoop.com](http://www.rrvcoop.com) by clicking on the 2020 Annual Mtg tab.

The bottom line is that your cooperative was able to conduct its annual business in a transparent and democratic manner consistent with its bylaws and principles. Sarah Tommerdahl, District 2 incumbent director, and Trevor Sorby, District 3 incumbent director, were elected unopposed to three-year terms. Three hundred thirty-eight members sent in valid, timely ballots to our office and we thank you for that. Here's hoping next year's annual meeting can be in person. But if not, it's good to know that the annual business can



still be accomplished in an effective manner.

### Bipartisan Flexible Financing Act for Rural America

The pandemic has been hard for many Americans. Many are concerned about fragile segments of the economy that can have a ripple effect on many economic sectors.

From an electric cooperative perspective, we are unable to refinance our existing government-issued loans to take advantage of current historically low interest rates due to language in Rural Utility Service regulations; even though individuals and many businesses already can in other types of loans. Bipartisan legislation called the Flexible Financing Act for Rural America has been introduced in both the House and Senate that would allow not-for-profit electric cooperatives who have government-issued loan obligations to refinance without penalty.

That is a big deal for electric cooperatives because it would pro-

vide potential savings in the amount of revenue we need to collect from members via the rates. It would also allow us to potentially provide members with enhanced value via more service/reliability projects, as an example. All our members – residential, farmers and businesses – need electricity as a basic expense. Passing this bill would help calm whitecaps in the rural economy. Additionally, we would continue to repay our obligations in the form of principal and interest, just as we always have for the past 83 years.

More than 80 legislators have signed on as sponsors of the bill in the House and 19 in the Senate, so the geographic and bipartisan segment of legislators is very encouraging. But the finish line has not yet been reached.

I encourage you to go to [Action.coop](http://Action.coop) and let your voices be heard, or contact Congressman Peterson and Sens. Smith and Klobuchar's offices directly.



# Let's jam!



Cooperative member  
Veronica Whitehead

**W**henever Jim and Veronica Whitehead want a visual reminder of their childhood growing up in England, all they have to do is walk over to their garden.

Two rows of black currant bushes, about 60 feet in length, grow in the large garden of their rural East Forks home. Black currant bushes, which grow to about 5 feet high and up to 4 feet wide, are quite common overseas. The blackish-purple fruits are frequently used in jams, syrups, cordials and a drink called Ribena, which the Whiteheads say is consumed in England the same way Americans drink orange juice.

“We grow black currants here partly because of our British heritage,” Veronica said. Jim agreed, but added, “That’s not the main reason. They are tasty.”

Black currants are not familiar to most Americans, yet are very hardy and soil tolerant for this area’s climate. When the Whiteheads first moved to the Red River Valley in 1993, black currant bushes were one of the very first crops they planted.

Now, they typically harvest anywhere from 65 to 110 pounds of fruit from their plot.

While they give some away, they like to store them in the freezer to make jams and syrups in late fall.

The Whiteheads say the fruit is tart with a very distinct flavor, but is wonderful when used with sugar. According to Veronica, a typical black currant jam recipe has a ratio of two parts currants to three parts sugar. A syrup recipe typically uses a 3:2 ratio of fruit to sugar. The berries are also good when mixed with apples in desserts like pies or crumbles. Black currants are high in vitamin C and have other potential nutritional benefits as well.

For information on how to grow black currants, go to the University of Minnesota Extension website and click on “Fruits”.



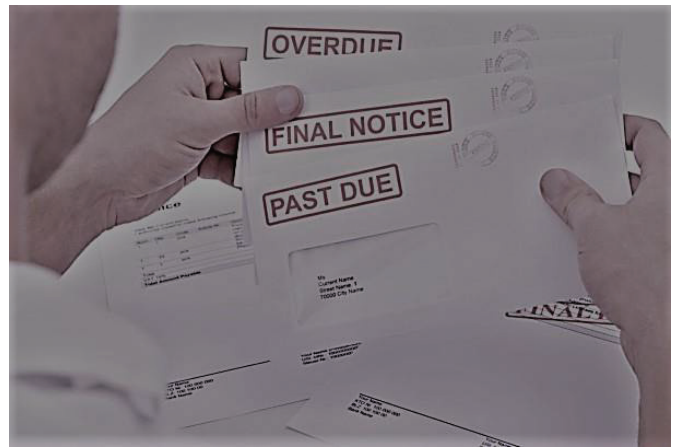
## Black currants

- They were once banned in America at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century due to a fungus/disease concern with white pines.
- They are widely grown in northern Europe for their high vitamin C content. In fact, black currants were used to help prevent scurvy in Britain during WWII.
- Black currants have a strong and unusual flavor.
- They are ripe when the fruit has a deep, purple-black color.
- They will grow in full sun or partial shade.



# Are you behind on rent and/or utilities?

If you are currently behind on rent and/or utilities due to COVID-19, CAPLP may be able to help! Funds are available to assist individuals and families in Minnesota to prevent homelessness and help maintain housing during the public health-related emergency. CAPLP can assist households that have been impacted by COVID-19 through unemployment, illness or other COVID-19-related circumstances.



## COVID-19 Housing Assistance Program

### Eligibility

- MN resident
- Be a current renter or homeowner
- Eligible bills unable to be paid due to COVID-19, incurred after March 1, 2020, such as:
  - Rent
  - Mortgage
  - Utilities
  - Renter/homeowner insurance
  - Lot rent/trailer fees
  - Late fees due to nonpayment
- Income qualifications below 300% poverty guidelines (*see chart*)

Household Size	Income
1	\$ 38,280
2	\$ 51,720
3	\$ 65,160
4	\$ 78,600
5	\$ 92,040
6	\$105,480
7	\$118,920
8	\$132,360
For each additional member	\$ 13,440

### Before you apply

Before you begin the application process, gather:

- Documentation supporting bills owed:
  - Rent, utilities or other bills dated after March 1, 2020
- Proof of income/proof supporting lack of income

### How to apply

There are three easy ways to apply:

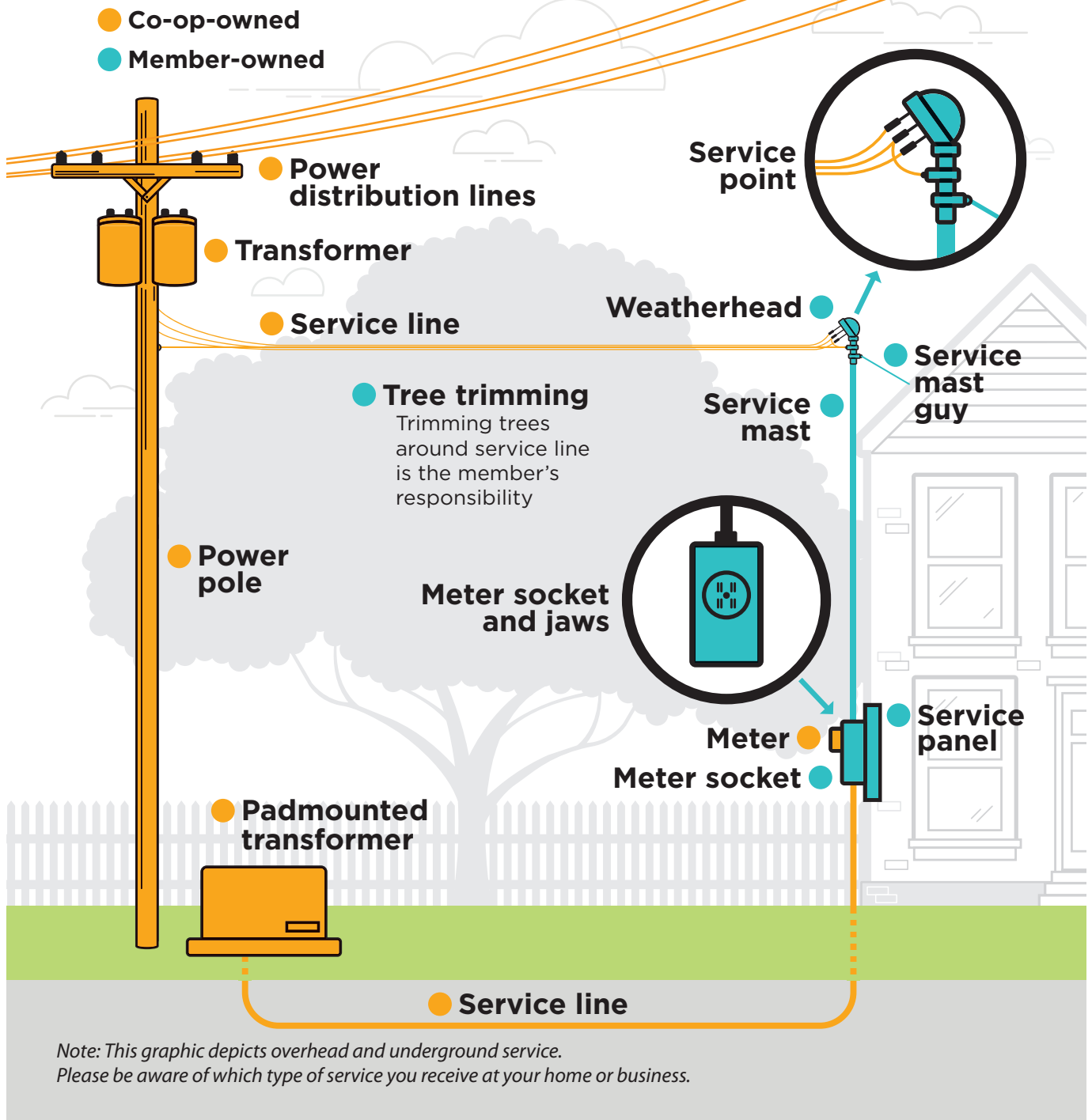
- Via website: [211unitedway.org](http://211unitedway.org)
- Dial 211
- Text MNRENT or MHOME to 898-211

Eliminate Poverty • Empower Families • Engage Communities

# Who owns what?

## Electric co-op-owned equipment vs member-owned equipment

This graphic depicts equipment owned by the co-op (in gold) and the member (in blue). If a storm damages any equipment owned by the co-op, we are responsible for repairs. If a storm damages any member-owned equipment, the member is responsible for repairs. Members should hire a licensed electrician when making any repairs to member-owned equipment.



# Make time for safety this harvest season

**N**ow is the time for farmers to reap the rewards of a long growing season. When it comes to fall harvest, there is a lot to get done in a seemingly short amount of time, as shorter days and cooler weather can create a sense of urgency. These factors, along with today's technology and large farm equipment, can lead to serious accidents.

Overhead electric lines near end rows and along roadways can also be a danger to operators of large, taller farm equipment. Red River Valley Co-op Power urges farmers to keep equipment – and extensions – at least 10 feet away from power lines in all directions and recommends the following tips to keep farmers safe:

- Know where overhead power lines are before you head out to the field and have a plan to stay far from them.
- Use a spotter when raising any equipment such as augers, grain trucks and even ladders. It can be difficult to tell how close you are to overhead power lines.
- Know what to do and have a plan if you come into contact with an overhead power line. Do not leave the vehicle until utility workers have cut off electricity and confirmed that it is safe to exit the vehicle. Know what to do in the rare event the equipment catches fire!
- Always lower portable augers or elevators to their lowest possible level – under 14 feet – before moving or transporting them. Wind, uneven ground, shifting weight or other conditions can make it difficult to control raised equipment.
- Never try to move a power line to clear a path. Power lines start to sag over time, bringing them closer to farmers and others who need to avoid them. Contact Red River Valley Co-op Power to repair sagging power lines.

*For more information on electrical farm safety, visit [SafeElectricity.org](https://www.safeelectricity.org).*





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