

RuralPower

INSIDE

- 2 | Calendar
- 2 | Cancelled youth programs look for online opportunities to engage with students
- 3 | Kansas communicators earn national Spotlight on Excellence awards

Please send
your news
announcements to
ruralpower@kec.org.

Pandemic leads KEC Board to adopt virtual meetings

Amid the continued disruptions of the COVID-19 pandemic, Kansas Electric Cooperatives, Inc. has found new ways to conduct business as usual. For the first time in the association's history, a board meeting was held via a conference call, and materials were distributed through the BoardPaq app.

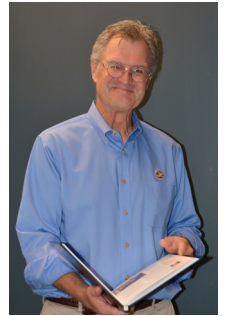
"During this time of social distancing due to the COVID-19 virus, we have had to adapt in many ways, learn new communication tools, and conduct business remotely," said KEC Board President **TERRY HOBBS** at the beginning of the meeting. "While we would all prefer to be meeting in person, the conference call still enables us to speak and engage in the agenda."

Many of the typical agenda items for the board meeting were not able to be discussed since so many in-person meetings and activities had been cancelled. However, approximately 70 board members, managers, and staff were able to hear reports on activities and the new ways KEC has found to help meet its members' needs.

During the call, the KEC board members



Left: KEC's Bob Hall (left) and Lee Tafanelli report from KEC's office during the May Board Meeting conference call. Right: Retired CEO Bruce Graham receives a bound volume of his eight years of *Kansas Country Living* columns as a retirement gift at the close of the May Board Meeting.



welcomed KEC's new CEO, **LEE TAFANELLI**.

"Describing these times as unprecedented may be an understatement, as all of us work to navigate these uncharted waters of the COVID-19 pandemic," said Tafanelli. "I believe challenges create opportunities. The pandemic has abruptly changed how we do business now and will transform how we conduct business in the short and long terms. This is a time for us to reexamine how we do business, how KEC serves its member co-ops, and how we work together to overcome obstacles and discover new possibilities."

Prairie Land selects Kirk Girard to succeed Chuck Look as CEO

The Board of Trustees of Prairie Land Electric Cooperative announced the appointment of **KIRK GIRARD** as the cooperative's next CEO.

Girard, currently Prairie Land's assistant CEO, will succeed **CHUCK LOOK** who has served as CEO since January 2019. Look is retiring in January 2021 after more than 42 years of service with the cooperative.

Board President **RONALD GRIFFITH** commented, "Kirk is the latest in a long line of Prairie Land executives who was recognized as an outstanding talent when he was hired. He set



Kirk Girard

himself apart by the way he conducted himself while handling mission critical responsibilities, and he responded to the mentorship of the senior members of the management team in a positive way to become the leader he is today."

Look added, "Not only has Kirk been a key management partner here at Prairie Land, he is a highly respected member of the rural electric cooperative community across the state of Kansas having been involved in meetings at Kansas Electric Cooperatives and Sunflower Electric Power Corporation for several years. In those organizations' board rooms, Kirk will be a strong advocate for rural electric cooperative principles and for the members of Prairie Land Electric Cooperative. The Prairie Land Electric family will be in very capable hands."



A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative
PO Box 4267
Topeka, KS 66604-0267
www.kec.coop

Join Kansas Electric Cooperatives
Facebook page

Touchstone Energy webinars

The Touchstone Energy team has made available a series of webinars to electric cooperative employees. These resources can be found through the [Touchstone Energy LinkedIn Learning Portal](#).

Currently, 38 webinars have been uploaded with more being added each week. Topics include the following:

- ▶ Consumers and the State of Beneficial Electrification
- ▶ COVID-19 Economic Recovery
- ▶ Energy Solutions - Kick Start and Solar 101
- ▶ Key Accounts Training
- ▶ Vital Impact of Broadband During the Pandemic

Touchstone Energy will continue offering its series of webinars. The next webinar, titled Co-op Insights: A Deep Data Dive, is scheduled for Wed., May 27 at 1 p.m.

Power System Engineering offers broadband webinar

The recent transition to working from home has put a spotlight on the value of broadband and fiber to residential members. Power System Engineering (PSE) has been working with cooperatives for years in exploring broadband feasibility as well as refining business practices in expanding offerings. PSE will share their insights through webinars scheduled at for May 28 and June 4 (see the calendar for the meeting links). During these web meetings, PSE staff will discuss co-ops' unique challenges and how best to tackle those challenges.

jobmarket

KEC helps to promote co-op careers by listing openings on the careers section of the KEC website.

Visit www.kec.coop/careers to learn more about the following positions.

- ▶ Prairie Land seeks an electrical/system engineer.
- ▶ Sunflower has multiple openings.

Send your open position listings to ruralpower@kec.org.

co-opcalendar

MAY

- 25 **Memorial Day**, KEC Office Closed
- 27-29 **Kansas REC Managers Association Meeting**, Hilton Garden Inn, Manhattan - **RESCHEDULED TO SEPTEMBER 1-3**
- 26-27 **Oil Spill Workshop**, Heartland Headquarters, Girard - **POSTPONED TO 2021**
- 28 **PSE Broadband Webinar**, 10 a.m., <https://global.gotomeeting.com/join/413524989>
- 28-29 **Oil Spill Workshop**, 4 Rivers Headquarters, Lebo - **POSTPONED TO 2021**

JUNE

- 4 **PSE Broadband Webinar**, 10 a.m., <https://global.gotomeeting.com/join/417514861>
- 15-17 **CFC Forum**, Salt Lake City, UT - **CANCELLED**
- 17 **KEPCo Board of Trustees Teleconference Meeting**, 2 p.m.
- 24-25 **RESMA Meeting**, Santa Fe, NM - **CANCELLED**
- 25 **MDM Meeting**, KEPCo Headquarters, Topeka - **TBD**
- 29 **Sunflower Board of Directors Meeting**, Sunflower Headquarters, Hays

Weekly sessions to be created for new Youth Tour Live initiative

For more than 50 years, cooperatives have sent high school students to Washington, D.C., through the Electric Cooperative Youth tour. Even though the 2020 trip was cancelled due to COVID-19, cooperatives remain committed to engaging with the next generation of co-op leaders.

NRECA and the Youth Tour directors from across the nation will work to offer weekly uplifting, interactive, and educational sessions featuring topics pertinent to electric cooperatives and life in rural America. Virtual attendees will hear from co-op leaders, learn about community efforts around the country, and share their own quarantine stories in a weekly segment called "Share Your Shine."

"These sessions will be broadcast on Facebook Live in real time and also

available on the NRECA website after our broadcasts for educational reference and so those with unreliable internet access can view them at their convenience," said **BETH KNUDSON**, NRECA youth programs & training manager.

"Our audience will be broad,"

Knudson continued. "We will introduce



ourselves to those who may not know us yet, reconnect with

Youth Tour alums, and, to those who know us well, we will reinforce that even though we are in unprecedented times, we remain a trusted resource."

More information about the Youth Tour Online will be sent to the cooperatives when Youth Tour Online is ready to launch. If you have a story to share, or want to nominate an alumni, former chaperone, or others to be included, contact Shana Read at sread@kec.org.

Webinar offered to winners of the cancelled leadership camp

Leadership is an important theme at the Cooperative Youth Leadership Camp, and it comes in many forms.

Despite the fact that camp was cancelled this summer due to COVID-19 concerns, the Colorado and Kansas statewide associations are offering an exclusive leadership opportunity for those students selected to attend the 2020 camp. Keynote speaker **CRAIG ZABLOCKI** will present an interactive webinar that will focus on leadership.

The webinar, scheduled for July 14, will focus on understanding important leadership traits. Students who participate in the webinar will be invited to submit a video about what quality they think is most important in a leader. A \$500 scholarship will be awarded to the student who creates the top video.

Details about the webinar and scholarship will be sent to the camp winners, their families, and their sponsoring cooperatives.

Kansas communicators earn national Spotlight on Excellence awards

Every year, NRECA's Spotlight on Excellence Awards program recognizes outstanding work produced by electric cooperative communicators from across the country.



Sara Farlee, FreeState

This year, two Kansas communicators, **SARAH FARLEE**, FreeState, and **JERRI WHITLEY**, Victory, won national awards.

Farlee currently serves as the public relations and marketing specialist for FreeState. She was originally hired in 2015 by Leavenworth-Jefferson Electric Co-op prior to the consolidation with Kaw Valley Electric in 2017. She earned her Certified Cooperative Communicator credentials in 2018.

She received an award in the Best Special Publication for a small cooper-



Jerri Whitley, Victory

to get feedback, and to see what peers across the nation are doing. It's interesting to see some trends that emerge in design, especially," said Farlee. "This program is a great way to judge how your work matches up with peers across the country. I think the awards also allow you to network with other award-winners to exchange ideas."

The other Kansan to receive honors this year is Jerri Whitley. She serves as Victory's vice president of communications.

During her 12 years at the

active category for her entry titled "FreeState Electric Cooperative Culture."

"I think the Spotlight Awards are important because it's an opportunity for communicators

co-op, she has won multiple awards through this program. This year, Whitley received Best Annual Report to Members for her "Powering Your Future: 2018 Victory Electric Annual Report."

"While I won Spotlight awards in other categories over the years, I was never successful in the Annual Report category," said Whitley. "Over time, that lack of success became a source of great frustration for me, but yet encouraged and motivated me to create a better annual report document each year by being more strategic and presenting the content in a more creative and engaging manner. I guess you could say it became my Spotlight 'goal category.'"

Farlee and Whitley are among the 123 winners representing 76 electric cooperatives that will be honored during the Spotlight on Excellence Virtual Recognition Celebration, May 27 at 1 p.m.

PSE reports on impact of COVID-19 on electric utilities

Economies in the 12 Midwestern states have been severely impacted by businesses stoppage due to the COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns. The pandemic has also affected energy consumption and peak demand.

"The shutdown of businesses has led to over 3.7 million unemployment claims in the region, as of the end of April," stated Power System Engineering (PSE) lead forecaster **HARRY JOHN**, Ph.D. "The pause in economic activities is compounding an already fragile Midwest economy beset by a weak agricultural sector and dwindling oil prices."

PSE estimates Midwestern states' real gross domestic product to decline between 2.8% to 5.5% in the first quarter of 2020 as a result of business closings.

"The deteriorating economic activities and growing job losses resulting from business shutdowns are certain to have an impact on the energy industry," said John. "The magnitude of the impact to electric providers will largely

depend on their customer mix. Electric providers that depend largely on industrial and commercial customers for a sizable portion of its revenues will tend to be impacted the most."

Many regions are experiencing reduced energy consumption and peak demand, which may lead to revenue losses for investor-owned, municipal, and cooperative utilities.

The length of businesses shutdown and the extent of the lasting impacts are uncertain. However, the PSE experts have identified several action steps cooperatives can take to combat these issues. These action steps include performing revenue and margin sensitivity related to potential loss of load related to key accounts or industry most affected by COVID-19 and analyzing fixed cost recovery in rate design to smooth out future disruptions.

To read the full report, visit www.powersystem.org/the-impact-of-covid-19-on-midwest-economies-and-electric-energy/.

KEC hosts virtual HR Summit

With the cancellation of the spring HR Summit, KEC looked to alternative delivery tools to host a virtual training event. During the week of May 18, co-op employees logged on to five interactive sessions with quality presenters over the course of five days.

Topics included a discussion of common, current human resources issues by **KRISTINA DIETRICK**, HR Partners; a review of best practices for problem avoidance and risk management by **TIM DAVIS**, Constangy Brooks, Smith & Prophete LLP; highlights of the programs and services offered through Homestead Funds by **BRIAN ALLEN**, RE Advisers Corporation; strategies for successful change management by **JESSICA SCHEER**, ProValue; and a benefits update by **MALACHI STURLIN**, NRECA.

Each session was recorded and will be archived on the members only section of the KEC website. Presenter materials and links will be emailed to the cooperatives.