

# Rural Power

## KEPCo cuts ribbon on Prairie Sky Solar Farm

On March 14, Kansas Electric Power Cooperative, Inc. (KEPCo) dedicated its new solar farm, Prairie Sky Solar. The event was held at the one megawatt facility located on 22.5 acres in Butler County.

Although KEPCo maintains a diverse mix of renewable sources of energy, this facility is the first solar project that KEPCo has brought online and into its portfolio to operate.

Approximately 150 people, including local and state dignitaries, members of KEPCo's board and distribution cooperatives, and KEPCo's employees attended the event. The dedication included remarks from **GOVERNOR SAM BROWNBACK**, KEPCo CEO **MARCUS HARRIS**, KEPCo President **KEVIN COMPTON**, Representative **JOE SEIWERT**, and KEPCo Vice President of Engineering **MARK BARBEE**. Following the ribbon cutting, attendees enjoyed a self-guided tour.

At the dedication, Gov. Brownback commented on the state's advances in the amount of renewable energy that it produces and said, "We're the wheat state, we're a basketball state,



From left: KEPCo Vice President of Engineering Mark Barbee, Rolling Hills Manager Doug Jackson, Governor Sam Brownback, KEPCo President Kevin Compton, KEPCo CEO Marcus Harris, KEPCo Secretary Dean Allison, Representative Joe Seiwert, and Butler Manager Dale Short officially dedicate Prairie Sky Solar Farm with a ribbon cutting on March 14, 2017.

we're a barbecue state, and we're going to be a renewable state."

Comprised of 4,560 photovoltaic panels, Prairie Sky Solar is capable of outputting energy to supply the needs of about 164 homes. The solar farm will help decrease peak demand, providing power cost savings to KEPCo's distribution cooperatives.

KEPCo is on-trend with other cooperatives across the nation. By the end of 2017, the total solar energy capacity of America's electric cooperatives will be five times what it was two years ago, according to data released by NRECA.

This year, co-ops are on pace to add 480 MW of solar, which will bring a total capacity to 873 MW. This amount more than quadruples the 180 MW reached in 2015, and it's a twentyfold increase over the 37 MW capacity in 2010.

## Co-ops respond to aid request to restore power after fires, storms

Hundreds of utility poles were destroyed and thousands of co-op members experienced outages following the devastating grass fires, storms, and tornadoes that swept through Kansas on March 6.

High wind gusts, dry conditions and an accidental spark created a large wildfire in southwest Kansas. Officials have estimated that more than 656,000 acres across 27 counties were consumed.

Having lost upward of 600 poles, CMS staff requested mutual aid. Ninnescah, Sedgwick County, and

Wheatland sent crews and equipment.

Fires also affected the Lane-Scott line crews. They were dispatched to disconnect power in Ransom before fires destroyed four homes and damaged more.

Also on March 6, Heartland requested mutual aid from storm and tornado damage. FreeState and Twin Valley responded. The Twin Valley crew helped along a high-traffic highway where poles and a regulator bank were on the ground. The FreeState crews helped replace high voltage lines.

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Please send your story ideas to [ruralpower@kec.org](mailto:ruralpower@kec.org).



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## KEC strengthens social media

KEC is proud to announce a new Twitter handle, @kansaselectric, and a stronger Facebook presence. The improvements with these social media opportunities comes directly from a partnership with ARCmedia, a company that focuses on connecting co-ops with their members.

“A cooperative’s social media presence helps two-fold,” said ARCmedia’s Andy Neidert. “It reaches out to the younger members, and it develops a grassroots relationship in preparation for upcoming legislative issues. The main goal is to help foster a better relationship between members and their co-ops.”

ARCmedia has already been assisting cooperatives and statewide associations in Arkansas, Missouri, and Ohio improve their social media presence. The KEC Board approved KEC’s enrollment with ARCmedia’s services at the March board meeting.

## FEMA accepting applications for Youth Preparedness Council

Youth across the nation have the opportunity to make a difference and transform the resilience and preparedness of their communities and beyond. Students in grades 8 through 11 who have engaged in community services or are interested in emergency preparedness, are encouraged to apply to serve on the Federal Emergency Management Agency’s (FEMA) Youth Preparedness Council.

Applicants must submit a completed application form, two letters of recommendation, and academic records. Applications are due March 31, 2017. For more information, visit [www.ready.gov/youth-preparedness-council](http://www.ready.gov/youth-preparedness-council).

## NRECA offers \$10k scholarship for Youth Tour alumni

Students who have previously attended Youth Tour and are at least college freshmen working on their first undergraduate degree are eligible for the \$10,000 Glenn English National Cooperative Leadership Foundation scholarship. In addition, four \$1,000 scholarships will also be awarded.

Applications will be accepted through April 1. The application is available online at [NRECA.coop/GEScholarship](http://NRECA.coop/GEScholarship).

## co-opcalendar

### MARCH

- 18 **Pioneer Annual Meeting.** Grant County Civic Center, 1000 W. Patterson, Ulysses, meal 12 p.m., meeting, 10 a.m.
- 20 **Lyon-Coffey Annual Meeting.** Burlington High School, 830 Cross Street, Burlington, meal 6 p.m., meeting 7 p.m.
- 21 **Ninnescah Annual Meeting.** Pratt Municipal Building, 117 W. Third, Pratt, meal 6 p.m., meeting after meal
- 23 **MDM Meeting.** KEPCo Headquarters, Topeka
- 24 **Caney Valley Annual Meeting.** Cedar Vale School Gym, 508 Dora, Cedar Vale, meal 5:30 p.m., meeting 7 p.m.
- 28 **Heartland Annual Meeting.** Fort Scott Community College, 2108 S. Horton, Fort Scott, meeting 7 p.m.
- 29-31 **KMSDA Meeting.** Courtyard Wichita at Old Town, Wichita
- 30 **Doniphan Annual Meeting.** Doniphan Headquarters, 503 S. Jones Street., Troy, open house from 4-5:30 p.m., meal 6 p.m., meeting will follow.

## upcomingtraining

### KMSDA

The Kansas Member Services Directors Association’s (KMSDA) 2017 spring meeting will take place from March 29 to 31 at the Courtyard by Marriott Wichita at Old Town. The meeting will kick off with a presentation from **MARK HORST**, King Solar, and **MARK BARBEE**, KEPCo, and a tour of KEPCo’s Prairie Sky Solar Farm.

Other speakers include presentations by **JUSTIN LABERGE**, NRECA, on

leadership writing; **KRISTEN BRIGHTON**, New Boston Creative Group, with a social media update; **DR. TIM DAVIS**, Fort Hays State University, tips on diffusing volatile members; **ANDY NEIDERT**, ARCmedia, on increasing member engagement on social media; and **STEVE HANSON**, NRTC, on the benefits of the Nest Thermostat.

For more information about the KMSDA meeting, contact Jackie Moore at [jmoore@kec.org](mailto:jmoore@kec.org).

## Electric cooperative leaders at the Kansas Legislature

KEC has coordinated several successful events at the Kansas State Capitol this month.

Staff organized two “Day on the Hill” events, March 7 and March 14, where co-op representatives met with Gubernatorial staff, House and Senate leaders, committee chairmen and area legislators.

“Thank you our electric cooperative leaders who came to Topeka,” said Alex Orel, Manager of Government Relations. “By increasing our visibility and voice, we are able to share our vision more effectively.”

Orel stated that KEC hopes to make visiting the Capitol a regular occurrence.

“By taking the time to visit legislators and staff in their own office, we are showing that the electric cooperatives are engaged in the political process and paying attention,” he explained. “Through the Co-ops Vote efforts and events like these, we already have seen an upturn in our political voice in Topeka and across the state.”



From left: Clare Gustin, Sunflower; Darrin Lynch, Western; Kathy O’Brien, Nemaha-Marshall; and Jim Currie, Brown-Atchison/Doniphan; spend a “Day on the Hill” on March 7.



From left: Alex Orel, KEC; Bruce Mueller, Wheatland; Kim Christiansen, KEC; House Majority Leader Don Hineman; Teresa Miller, Ninnescah; Clare Gustin, Sunflower; and Mike Morley, Midwest Energy; visit on March 14.

## Earl Watkins inducted in Co-op Hall of Fame

At a ceremony on March 15, **EARL WATKINS** was inducted into the Kansas Cooperative Hall of Fame.

Watkins' contribution to the electric cooperative industry spans more than 47 years. He served as General Counsel for Sunflower Electric Power Corporation for nearly 30 years prior to becoming President and CEO. He was involved in many local, state and national energy policy debates and was instrumental in the process to construct Holcomb Station.

Sponsored by the Kansas Cooperative Council (KCC), the Hall of Fame was established in 1999 to honor individuals in Kansas who have been instrumental in developing and spreading the cooperative philosophy.

"The Kansas Cooperative Hall

of Fame is important for recognizing cooperative leaders and advancing the cooperative philosophy," said Bruce Graham, KEC's CEO, who also serves on the KCC Board.

Watkins is the seventh hall of famer connected to electric cooperatives. His biographical information will be placed alongside other honorees in the Kansas Cooperative Hall of Fame showcase display at the Kansas State Fairgrounds.

This permanent display, located in the Pride of Kansas Building, highlights the achievements of our state's great co-op leaders and preserves our cooperative history. It also plays a significant role to educate others about the uniqueness of the co-op business model.



Kansas Co-op Hall of Fame Inductee Earl Watkins speaks of co-op values during the Hall of Fame ceremony on March 15.

## KEC President Kathy O'Brien testifies at Farm Bill Hearing



Representing the Kansas electric cooperative membership, KEC Board President **KATHY O'BRIEN** (pictured above right) testified at the Farm Bill field hearing in Manhattan on Feb. 23. O'Brien commented on provisions of the bill that affect co-ops.

The bipartisan hearing was hosted by Senate Agriculture Committee Chairman **PAT ROBERTS**. The event, "Hearing from the Heartland: Perspectives on the 2018 Farm Bill from Kansas," was designed to provide an update on what is working in farm country. KEC was invited to join Kansas producers and other stakeholders in the agriculture industry to voice ideas and concerns in advance of the bill's development.

## annual meetings

### Brown-Atchison

More than 100 members attended the Brown-Atchison 79th annual meeting on Feb. 23 at the co-op headquarters in Horton.

**DEAN MILLER** was elected to the board to fill position left by Jim Buttron's retirement. **KEVIN COMPTON** and **GARY SCHLAEGEL** were re-elected to the board.

### Nemaha-Marshall

Nemaha-Marshall held its annual meeting on Feb. 28 at the American Legion Building in Axtell. There were 112 members present and lunch was catered by ACE's.

Re-elected to the board were **ROBERT VOET**, **DAVID RONNEBAUM**, and **ROBERT ROTTINGHAUS**.

### Bluestem

More than 100 members braved spring storms to attend the Bluestem annual meeting on March 6 at Saint Bernard's Catholic Church in Wamego. Guest speakers included KEPCo's

Marcus Harris and KEC's Shana Read.

Several employees were recognized for reaching milestone anniversaries and scholarship winners were announced.

**BILL PANNBACKER**, **DON SUTTER**, **DAN POLLOCK**, and **DONALD CLASSEN** were re-elected to the board via mail ballot earlier this year.

### Flint Hills

Flint Hills held its 79th annual meeting on March 7 at the Community Building in Herington. More than 165 members and their families attended and enjoyed a dinner.

Flint Hills linemen presented a safety demonstration using their high-voltage safety trailer and answered questions from the members. Guest speakers included State Representative **DAVE BAKER**, and the 2016 camp winners **PAIGE CRANEY** and **MEGHAN EIDMAN**.

The membership approved bylaw amendments and re-elected **TIM MISER** and **ROGER ZIMMERMAN** to the board.

### Butler

Butler held its annual meeting on March 16 at the Circle Middle School in Benton. More than 230 members attended the event.

Youth Tour winner **RENATA GOOSSEN** and camp winner **VALERIE HARDER** provided video updates of their summer experiences. **ELLIOT MERCK** gave his Cooperative Youth Leadership Camp report in person.

Manager Dale Short gave an operational report and year in review, and then recognized three retiring employees. Staff also gave updates on Operation Round UP and the headquarter remodel.

K-State's energy expert **DAVID CARTER** was the featured guest speaker. He gave tips to the members for reducing energy consumption. The members also enjoyed a performance by the Butler Community College Headliners.

The members elected **RON OELKERS** to the Board to replace **RICHARD JIMENEZ** who retired. The members re-elected **SHERRI CLAASSEN** to the board.

## Co-ops have strong presence at Kansas Capitol

On March 15, approximately 35 co-op officials attended a hearing and presented testimony to oppose Senate Bill 209, which proposed to “unbundle” billing on metered electricity sales within Kansas.

“We see this as the first attack on the industry by proponents who want to de-regulate the market and allow retail choice,” said Kim Christiansen, Director of Government Relations and Legal Counsel. We had 28 cooperatives either submit or join written testimony, along with six co-op leaders providing verbal testimony to the committee and fielded questions.

## Twin Valley to receive funding to improve infrastructure

USDA is making \$202 million in loans to electric cooperatives that will help continue to deliver safe, reliable and affordable electricity to rural residents, business and institutions in nine states, including Kansas. Twin Valley will receive \$8 million to build or improve 44 miles of line.

“Twin Valley applied for a \$8 million Federal Financing Bank loan from RUS to fund our 2016-2019 Construction Work Plan,” said

Those who testified to the Senate Utilities Committee were; Kim Christiansen, KEC; Kathy O’Brien, Nemaha-Marshall; Bruce Mueller, Wheatland; Darrin Lynch, Western; Phil Wages, KEPCo; and Shane Laws, Victory. Each spoke about the unintended consequences and costs associated with SB 209, but also laid out the hard work co-ops have already done to improve the service to their member-owners.

“Although we believe we had a great showing and the issue may be finished for this year, we do not believe this issue is going away anytime soon,” Christiansen added.

Twin Valley Manager Ron Holsteen. “This loan will fund several system improvements over the next four years, as well as funding member service extensions, increased service capacities, and transformer changeouts. There will be several sectionalizing changes and additions to improve system reliability and improve coordination.”

The loan also includes \$41,800 for new AMI meters for new services at Twin Valley.

## Caitlin Schneider serves on Youth Leadership Council

From February 27 through March 1, Youth Tour alumna **CAITLIN SCHNEIDER** served as the Kansas Youth Leadership Council representative at the NRECA Annual Meeting in San Diego, California.

All 43 Youth Leadership Council members carried their state flags during the parade of the states at the first general session.

Throughout the event, these students gained hands-on experience with virtually every facet of the meeting. The students helped board members communicate with their legislators at the Co-ops Vote booth, served as pages



Caitlin Schneider (left), along with other YLC representatives, help out in the Co-ops Vote booth during the NRECA Annual Meeting. To view more meeting photos, visit <http://bit.ly/NRECA2017>.

during the business session, and provided assistance during the educational forums.

“The journey through the Youth Tour program changed my life,” Schneider said. “The delegates I’ve met, from my own state and across the country, are truly spectacular.

Their stories, their backgrounds, and their drives have widened my view of the world.”

The YLC members were selected from more than 1,700 state delegates during the Electric Cooperative Youth Tour last June. Sponsored on youth tour by Lyon-Coffey, Schneider was selected by her peers to the YLC.

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## Wanda Winans

Wanda Winans, mother of KEC’s Carol Dorr, died on Feb. 28. Funeral services were held on March 4 at the Carbondale Church of Christian Fellowship. Memorial contributions may be made to the American Cancer Society or to Grace Hospice in care of Feltner Funeral Home, 822 Topeka Ave., Lyndon, KS 66451.

## JB Bottom

Jim “JB” Bottom, retired Brown-Atchison board member, died March 14. Funeral services are scheduled for March 18 at St. Leo’s Catholic Church. Cards can be sent to his widow, Donna, at 1560 1st Ave. East, Horton, KS 66439.

jobmarket

## FreeState seeks member account assistant

FreeState is seeking applications for a Member Account Assistant for its East District location. This position provides efficient customer service and assists the Member Account Supervisor, Engineering and Operations Department to streamline co-op operations.

Applications for this position, as well as for the Engineer position and Tree Crew/Groundsman position, are available online at [www.freestate.coop](http://www.freestate.coop) under “Contact Us,” “Employment Opportunities.” To apply for any of these positions, send a resume and completed employment application to Chelsea Renyer, Human Resources Generalist at [chelsea.renyer@freestate.coop](mailto:chelsea.renyer@freestate.coop). Applications will be accepted until the positions are filled.

## Butler seeks journeyman lineman

Butler is seeking applications for a full-time journeyman lineman for its Rose Hill/Andover location. This position is responsible for technical work in constructing and maintaining electrical lines and special equipment.

To apply, send a resume and completed application to Angie Clevenger, HR Manager, at [angie@butler.coop](mailto:angie@butler.coop) or mail to PO Box 1242, El Dorado, KS, 67042 or Fax to 316-321-9980. Applications are available at [www.butler.coop](http://www.butler.coop) under the tab “About Us.” EOE.