



# Exploring new ways:

## Corn Belt Power installs fiber with new device

Corn Belt Power is always in search of finding safer and more cost-effective ways of doing business. In November, the cooperative did just that.

Instead of using optical ground wire (OPGW) or fiber, Corn Belt Power tested AccessWrap from our Burt Switching Station to the Algona Substation.

AccessWrap fiber is installed on the existing overhead ground wire and is wrapped or “lashed” using a device that clamps to the wire.

“AccessWrap is completely different from OPGW,” said Jeremy Stattelman, transmission superintendent, Corn Belt Power. “OPGW wire is made up of aluminum-clad steel strands on the outside. The center is an aluminum pipe that carries the fiber. AccessWrap wire gets wrapped directly around the outside of existing wire.”



### Attaching fiber

**Above** | Corn Belt Power Cooperative transmission crews learn how to set up and operate a fiber AccessWrap installer from Mark O’Sullivan, field engineer, AFL Engineering, U.K., Oct. 30. Crews practiced hands-on-training along a section of sample conductor.

The cooperative welcomed representatives from AFL Engineering, one from as far away as the United Kingdom, to assist with Corn Belt Power’s first installation.

“It took considerably less time to install the AccessWrap,” Stattelman said. “Labor costs were much lower than we expected. Given the location and options, the AccessWrap was the most cost-effective when compared to direct bury fiber. Direct bury fiber was going to cost double, if not triple. Basically, it came down to dollars and cents. Given the location of this project, replacing the wire was going to be a lot more labor-intensive.”

AccessWrap is designed to withstand the aggressive environmental conditions encountered on powerlines while creating minimal extra loading onto the conductor

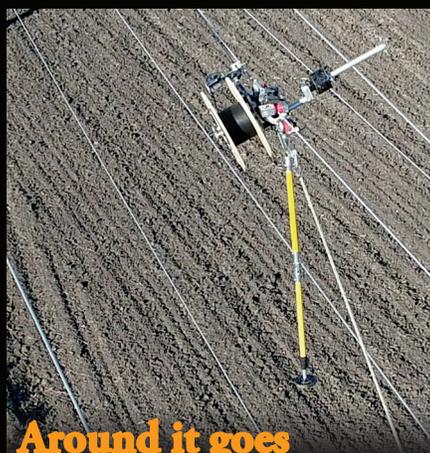
after installation.

Stattelman says he’s interested to see how the new installation holds up in the harsh Iowa winter months.

“The AccessWrap is supposed to give the overhead ground wire dampening or windbreak abilities,” he said. “We’re going to keep our eye on this to see if it may be a long-term solution for other spots like the Burt area.”

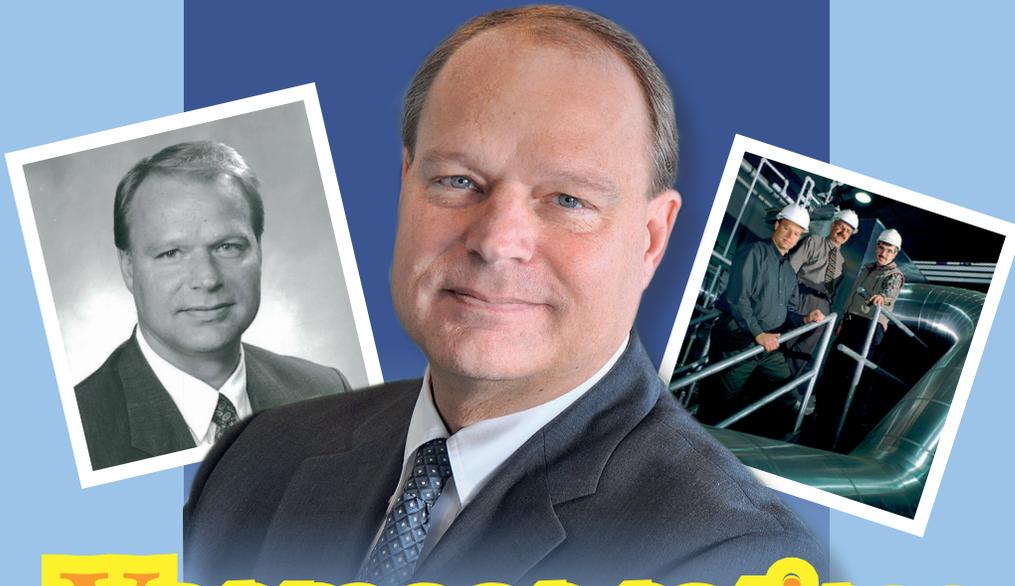
This project, when finished, will complete a fiber pathway from Burt Switching Station to Hancock and on to Klemme.

“Moving forward, I see us using a combination of both OPGW and AccessWrap,” Stattelman said. “The two complement each other very well. We are already looking at other locations where we could use the AccessWrap.” ■



### Around it goes

**Above** | A new device wraps AccessWrap fiber wire around existing distribution static line between Burt Switching Station and Algona while a lineman on the ground (not pictured) pulls the device downline by rope.



# Vermeer retires

from the cooperative system after 42 years

A career that started on a fall day in 1979 at Buena Vista County Rural Electric Cooperative's Spencer outpost is ending December 15.

Corn Belt Power will say farewell to Jim Vermeer, vice president, business development, this month. Vermeer retires after more than 42 years of service in Corn Belt Power's service territory.

Vermeer grew up on a small family farm near Boyden, Ia. In the mid-to-late 1970s, the farm economy was struggling. Instead of running the farm, he thought he might need to go in a different direction.

"I had a neighbor who went to line school," he recalls. "At the time, I was thinking about the economy and sustainability. I knew utilities had some job security, and the starting wage of \$6.62 per hour was big money at the time."

Vermeer spent several years as a lineman before becoming an energy advisor in 1985 after the consolidation that created Iowa Lakes Electric Cooperative. In 1996, he became vice president of community and business development before settling at Corn Belt Power in 1998.

His career has primarily focused on economic development. And, like many who spend most of their careers in one industry, he's seen change. A lot of it.

"The early years of economic development

focused on attracting manufacturing and value-added agriculture," he said. "Other than attracting large poultry facilities, if we landed a 500-kilowatt load, we hit a home run. Today, five, ten and on up megawatt loads are commonplace."

Early in his career, Iowa and the Corn Belt Power system began to see manufacturing and ethanol growth. Cooperatives were integral in lending a hand

to those industries.

"As manufacturing continued to grow in the rural areas, we constructed several industrial parks and spec buildings to help with attraction and retention," he said. "The ethanol and biodiesel industries helped grow the farm economy. We attended many meetings to help the development of the Western Iowa Energy project near

Wall Lake. Today, the biorefinery industry continues to find new ways to be more profitable and more environmentally responsible."

Today, Corn Belt Power and its members have 24 industrial parks and constructed 34 spec buildings. All but four spec buildings are purchased.

Like anything, though, it hasn't always been easy. However, Vermeer says rural Iowans always find a way. By doing so, it helped diversify Iowa's economy and offerings.

"We've lived through a lot of ups and downs in the farm economy," he said. "After the 1980s farm crisis, many farmers became the workforce. That helped advance manufacturing in the state."

Vermeer points to Corn Belt Power's load growth over the last four decades to show just how much of a role manufacturing and other commercial and industrial facilities play.

"The measure of economic development success is the percentage of commercial and industrial loads," he says. "Back in 1985, only 17 percent of total sales came from commercial and industrial," he said. "When I started at Corn Belt Power, only 35 percent of sales came from commercial and industrial. Today, it's more than 64 percent."

Load growth isn't the only thing Vermeer is proud of.

"The possibility of deregulation threatened

the loss of our distribution systems' largest accounts," he said. "Members asked, 'what have you done for me lately?' That's when we implemented a system-wide key accounts program that is still as strong today. In addition, we implemented a technical support program that provided programs to help solve problems, retain load and build



**Above** | Jim Vermeer, vice president, business development, Corn Belt Power will retire in December. He and his wife, Julie, own and operate Vermeer Glass Art in Spencer. Vermeer says he will find time to be creative in the studio after retirement.

stronger relationships."

As Vermeer leaves the cooperative industry, he sees change on the horizon. Maybe just as much as the change he's lived through.

"Labor shortages and affordable housing have always been issues," he said. "At the same time, there will be added growth due to more grain and food processing. I believe

# News in brief

there will be more automation to address labor shortages. Communities are working diligently to provide the affordable housing needed to attract people to rural areas. Electric loads will continue to increase, as businesses add more processes and become larger.”

Like many, he sees broadband as a hot-button issue.

“Rural broadband with faster speeds will help keep and attract people to rural areas,” he said. “More and more jobs can be done remotely, and agriculture is advancing to the point that fast and reliable broadband is necessary. Broadband will be just as essential as electricity was over the past 75 years.”

As he looks back on a successful career, Vermeer says he wouldn’t have it any other way.

“I’ve been in the cooperative system for more than 42 years,” he said. “If you wish to expand your career, there are a lot of opportunities to grow within the cooperative system.”

Ken Kuyper, executive vice president and general manager, Corn Belt Power, has watched Vermeer grow and says he will be missed.

“I’ve worked with and known Jim for many years,” he says. “He works hard and puts members at the end of the line first. His savviness as an economic development professional will be missed.”

As for his plans on his first full day of retirement, it may be as simple as sleeping in.

“I’m retiring in the middle of December, I don’t think there is going to be much to do outside,” he says. “Most retirees tell me that the first few weeks will just feel like you’re on vacation. I just hope to sleep past 5:30 a.m. on the first day.”

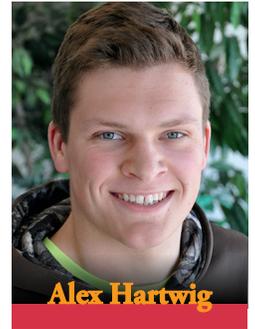
It should come as no surprise to those who know him, Vermeer knows right where he’ll be: at the business he and his wife created last year called Vermeer Glass Art. The gallery and studio is located in downtown Spencer and like what he’s done most of his career, the studio does one thing... Adds quality and value to the rural economy. ■



**Above** | Vermeer says he’s looking forward to spending more time with family in retirement which includes his grandchildren Parker, Weston, Phin and Tucker.

## Hartwig reaches journeyman status

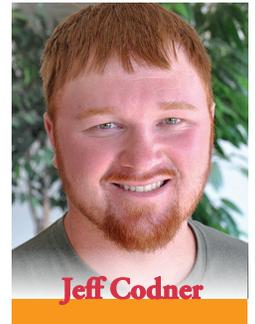
In November, Alex Hartwig, Hampton electrical maintenance, completed his on-the-job coursework to become a journeyman electrician. Hartwig joined Corn Belt Power in May 2018 as an apprentice electrician. He has a Powerline Diploma from Northwest Iowa Community College. Congratulations, Alex!



**Alex Hartwig**

## Codner now journeyman

Congratulations are in order for Jeff Codner, Hampton transmission crew. In October, he completed his on-the-job coursework to become a journeyman lineman. Codner joined Corn Belt Power in September 2018 as an apprentice lineman. He has an associate’s degree in Powerline Technology from North Iowa Community College. Congratulations, Jeff!



**Jeff Codner**

## Iowa’s electric cooperatives announce 2022 Momentum is Building Conference details

Area builders and contractors are invited to learn about energy efficiency technologies at the 2022 Momentum is Building (MIB) Conference, scheduled for Feb. 3 and 4 at the Meadows Event Center in Altoona. A major draw for electricians, plumbers and HVAC professionals is the opportunity to earn CEU credits at the conference. MIB attendees can also network with industry professionals, hear from recognized industry energy efficiency and building trades experts and gain insight on trending technologies. Registration is now open at [www.MomentumIsBuilding.com](http://www.MomentumIsBuilding.com).

Sponsored and organized annually by the Touchstone Energy Cooperatives® of Iowa, the Momentum is Building Conference also connects Iowa’s construction industry with the local services and resources available from electric cooperatives, serving nearly 650,000 Iowans in all 99 counties.

“Iowa’s electric co-ops have long supported energy efficiency efforts and one of our goals is to help member-consumers use energy wisely,” states Angela Catton, manager of member relations and development at Northwest Iowa Power Cooperative. “We invest in this conference to build local relationships.”

“Helping inform local contractors about cutting-edge energy efficiency and beneficial electrification technologies is important to Iowa’s electric cooperatives,” said Ryan Cornelius, vice president of corporate relations at Corn Belt Power Cooperative. “For more than 25 years, the Momentum is Building Conference has provided both electric cooperatives and contractors an opportunity to come together to provide rural Iowans with safe, efficient and cost-effective home comfort solutions.”

Weldon Long, a bestselling author and sales expert, will open the conference on Feb. 3 as he talks about achieving personal and professional greatness in the face of adversity. Comedian Greg Warren will close out the conference on Feb. 4 as he shares humorous stories of overcoming setbacks throughout his life.

MIB 2022 will be held at the Meadows Event Center beginning at 8:00 AM on Thursday, Feb. 3 running through Noon on Friday, Feb. 4. Registration for the event is available online at [MomentumIsBuilding.com](http://MomentumIsBuilding.com). Early Bird registration is available until Jan. 19.



**February 3-4 in Altoona at  
The Meadows Event Center**

Contractors build the Feldman microwave tower located inside the Feldman switching station at the Butler Logistics Park Nov. 3. Corn Belt Power constructed the new switching station and Bauman substation to serve the growing load inside the logistics park. The new microwave tower will play a crucial role in communicating with assets in the area.

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**November Touchstone Energy Volunteer Challenge winner | Pam Caboth**, vice president, administrative services, Iowa Lakes Electric Cooperative, donated her \$100 prize drawing to the Estherville Lutheran Church Women's group.



Pam Caboth

## The power of human connections

**P**am Caboth, vice president, administrative services, Iowa Lakes Electric Cooperative, demonstrates the Touchstone Energy value of commitment to community by volunteering with the Estherville Lutheran Church Women's group. Last month, she helped to bake more than 400 apple pies. The group sold 150 of those pies to help raise money for the church, Estherville community and missions. Pam says it's a great group and baking the pies was a lot of fun.



**MERRY CHRISTMAS**

AND

• HAPPY NEW YEAR •

**Corn Belt Power offices will be closed  
 Dec. 23, 24 and 31**

**Corn Belt Power Cooperative**

**WattsWatt**

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