



# Johnson retires

## after 30 years of service

**D**arwin Johnson remembers his first day of work. In true Johnson fashion, he recalls just about everything about the day.

“I messed up my first day of work,” he said. “I was going to Humboldt to meet everyone down there. They sent some mail with me. I dropped the mail off and the log book for the truck. My very first day, I made a mistake.”

That early hiccup didn’t define his career, but perhaps it foreshadowed the meticulous approach that would serve him well over the next 34 years at Corn Belt Power’s Wisdom Station.

Known for his sharp attention to detail and constant drive to learn, Johnson retired this April after more than three decades as a valued operator at the power plant. He credits his success to staying curious and never assuming he had it all figured out.

“Never stop learning,” he says. “That plant is big enough and complicated enough that you’re never going to know everything. But, you’re going to be able to learn a lot. That’s the only way to do good at that job is to know all they systems. It’s a constant learning experience. You never stop learning.”

Throughout his career, Johnson witnessed major changes at Wisdom Station—from the switch from coal to natural gas, to the addition of Unit Two. His roles as control operator and shift operator kept him close to the action.

“Any time we were doing something that I never got my hand in on, I wanted to stick my nose in and find out how it operated,” he said.



### East Calhoun Tap line repair

**Above** | Corn Belt Power Cooperative crews repair line northwest of Farnhamville along the East Calhoun Tap May 22 where storms snapped seven poles to the ground the night prior.

His can-do attitude, inquisitive nature and willingness to help his younger coworkers made a lasting impression.

“Darwin leaves behind a legacy of hard work, a positive “can do” attitude, and a willingness and ability to make those around him better,” said Jacob Olberding, executive vice president and general manager and former assistant plant manager, Corn Belt Power. “Darwin was a good problem solver. He didn’t require a lot of direction when projects were assigned to him. If he had a clear objective, he would find a way to get the project done. Personally, I miss the times we would chat about our shared hobbies like

hunting and fishing, and his success or my lack of success in those areas. I also enjoyed listening to him tell many stories in the break room.”

Patrick Connor, plant manager, echoes those sentiments.

“I think he discovered that he enjoyed teaching other operators what he knew, especially in the last few years of his career,” Connor said. “He takes pride in his work whether it is plant operation or maintenance. His building maintenance skills will be missed. He would try to fix something rather than jump to getting a new one and he would work with **Continued on page 4...**

# Naig visits with economic development professionals

Iowa Secretary of Agriculture Mike Naig joined cooperative leaders on June 11 for the quarterly Corn Belt Power business development meeting, held at Iowa Lakes Electric Cooperative. The session provided an opportunity for open dialogue on key issues affecting rural Iowa, with a strong focus on agriculture, energy, and economic development.

Topics of discussion included Iowa crop conditions, advancements in biofuels such as E-15 and Sustainable Aviation Fuel (SAF), updates on the federal Farm Bill, and ongoing concerns about tariffs and their impact on Iowa producers. The conversation also touched on the carbon pipeline and associated eminent domain issues, as well as the need for continued investment in rural infrastructure.

Secretary Naig emphasized his support for rural prosperity and spoke on the appointment of U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Brooke Rollins, describing her



## Buena Vista county line restoration

**Above** | Travis Hefty, line foreman, and crew begin to set a new transmission pole southeast of Alta following a storm outbreak that downed 34 poles in Buena Vista county April 18.

as a strong advocate for rural communities. Cooperative leaders also discussed the importance of USDA programs like REDL&G and shared their concerns about the RUS funding process, particularly the lack of an Iowa-based representative to assist with rural electric applications.

In addition to the policy discussion, the meeting also served as an opportunity to recognize longtime cooperative leader Jed Skogerboe, who retired on June 13. Skogerboe was honored for his years of service and dedication to Iowa's cooperative community. ■

## Butler County REC and Corn Belt Power team for development loan

Butler County REC requested Corn Belt Power's partnership in sponsoring Cole Excavating, LLC with a Rural Economic Development Loan (REDL). Corn Belt Power Cooperative sponsored a \$2,000,000 USDA REDL

pass-through loan along with Butler County REC in support of their construction and equipment purchase project.

The business offers services for farm, commercial, Iowa Department of Transportation highway work, and wetland

construction and is a licensed, bonded and insured contractor in the State of Iowa. Corn Belt Power and Butler County REC each closed their \$2 million REDL pass-through loans with Cole Excavating, LLC May 16, 2025.

Cole Excavating was founded in 1974 by Bob Cole, when he was 19 years old, just one year after he graduated high school. His initial operation consisted of a 1958 Caterpillar 955 crawler loader, a 1966 Ford F600 dump truck, and a pintle hitch trailer for hauling his machine from job to job. For the first several years, Bob was the only full-time employee of the company with several different people helping him on a part time basis. The type of work Bob worked on in the beginning years was primarily farm land improvement.

Through the years, the operation grew enough to include the addition of several different field employees as well as office staff. One of the employees that joined the crew with Bob was his son, Jeremy Cole. Jeremy gained experience in the business by learning from Bob and several of Bob's experienced employees. In 2018, Jeremy became General Manager of Cole Excavating and currently has a staff of 20+ employees. Bob and Jeremy Cole currently share ownership of the company. ■



## Cole Excavating LLC loan closing

**Above** | Katie LaBree, left, business development manager, Butler County REC, and Stacy Cirks, right, development finance director, Corn Belt Power Cooperative, present pass-through loan checks to Jeremy Cole, owner, Cole Excavating, LLC, to support construction and equipment purchases during the May 16 loan closing in Greene, Iowa.



# Livermore pool receives donations from Midland Power, Corn Belt Power and Basin Electric

Midland Power Cooperative and Corn Belt Power Cooperative have each donated \$1,000 to the City of Livermore to help pay for the city's recent upgrades to its public pool. Wholesale power provider Basin Electric Power Cooperative matched the co-ops' donations, bringing the group's collective donation to \$4,000.

The City of Livermore was recently required to replace its public pool's entire filtration system at a cost of more than \$95,000. The original filtration unit, installed when the 120,000-gallon pool was constructed in 1976, began failing last year and could no longer be repaired. However, by replacing the filtration unit, the city was required to meet modern state public health codes, which required it to replace the entire filtration and recirculation system, including all the piping and the chlorination system.

Currently, the city is also working to renovate portions of the concession stand and restroom structure, with that work scheduled to be completed by the end of summer.

The city is actively seeking donations to offset these expenses and has raised more than \$17,000. Donations can be dropped off at City Hall, 401 4th Ave., or mailed to City of Livermore, P.O. Box 16, Livermore, IA 50558. ■



## Calhoun annual meeting

**Above** | Calhoun County Electric Cooperative Association members enjoy a bucket truck ride and learn about electric vehicles at the Calhoun County ECA annual meeting Sept. 5

# Visit the Touchstone Energy Cooperatives at the Iowa State Fair

The Touchstone Energy Cooperatives of Iowa are pleased to once again sponsor the 4-H Exhibits Building at the 2025 Iowa State Fair. Our cooperative is proud to be a Touchstone Energy member, which means we're part of a nationwide network of locally owned co-ops that provides resources and leverages partnerships to help member-consumers use energy wisely.

If you're planning a visit to the Iowa State Fair from August 7-17, make sure to stop by and see us in the air conditioned 4-H Exhibits Building on the southwest corner of the fairgrounds. It's a great place to take a break from the heat or rain during your day at the fairgrounds.

Electric co-op staff from across the state will hand out plastic hard hats and suckers for the kids while supplies last. Kids can also try on some lineworker safety gear and take fun photos in our co-op safety selfie station.

We look forward to connecting with our cooperative members at the Iowa State Fair this summer. Please stop by our booth and say hello! ■



## Communications upgrade

**Above** | Zach Thompson, SCADA technician, left, and Travis Kampen, communications technician, explain new internal network upgrades Sept. 20.



Katie LaBree, business development manager, Butler County REC, sits in a kitchen-scene mock-up at a member's home during location scouting with Harvest Creative Services May 7 in preparation for filming the next Touchstone Energy commercial. Filming for the new national ad is set for June in the Butler County REC and Grundy County REC territory.

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**May Touchstone Energy Volunteer Challenge winner | Gabbi Guerrero**, accountant, Butler County REC, won this month's Volunteer Challenge. Guerrero donated her \$100 prize to the North Butler Booster Club.

## Wisdom employee retires



*Continued from page 1...* what he had on hand when possible.”

As for retirement, Johnson already has a full plate. He’s an active member—and now co-chair—of the Iowa Great Lakes Fishing Club, which promotes outdoor education and youth engagement.

“They made me co-chair to the president, which means I do a lot more work,” he said. “We’re going to interact with almost a thousand kids this year. We just went and bought more tackle boxes. We are going to give away more than 900 tackle boxes to kids this year.”

Johnson says he will miss working at Corn Belt Power. “I will miss the challenges,” he said. “When you’re having trouble with something, figuring it out, I really do miss that. I am really going to miss the people. There are a lot of good people.” ■

Learn more about the Iowa Great Lakes Fishing Club by visiting:  
<https://iagreatlakesfishingclub.org>

## Corn Belt Power Cooperative WattsWatt

Watts Watt is published monthly for employees and associates of Corn Belt Power Cooperative, 1300 13th St. North, Humboldt, Iowa 50548-0508. This institution is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

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