



Karen Berte retires

after more than 40 years of Innovation and Dedication to Corn Belt Power

When you ask Karen Berte about some of the events that stick out in her mind over her 40-year career at Corn Belt Power Cooperative, you may be surprised to hear her answer.

A lot of electric cooperative employees who spend their careers working in the industry may recall storms, large-scale outages, or other events some may consider to be negative. For Berte, it was the arrival of Corn Belt Power's first computer.

"I remember the first portable computer at Corn Belt Power," she said. "It was the size of a carryon luggage bag and weighed about 25 pounds. The screen was green and five inches wide. We purchased only one, and I was allowed to check it out and take it home to familiarize myself with the machine."

Berte will retire on July 1, marking the end of a nearly 41 year career at Corn Belt Power.

She began her career as an accounting assistant on November 14, 1983. She held the positions of budget director, controller, vice president and finally senior vice president, finance and administration.

Now, back to the computer.

To fully understand Berte's career, one must first know her meticulous attention to

detail and her insistence on using technology to the best of the organization's capabilities.

"Using that first computer, I created the Federal Financing Bank amortization schedules and a spreadsheet to allocate the loans by type for the spread of the interest costs," she said. "These types of spreadsheets would have taken weeks to create manually and updating them would have taken the same amount of time. I created

a template for the loans, and it took minutes to create the amortization tables moving forward."

Under her guidance, Corn Belt Power transitioned through attrition from relying on a team of seven accountants to a leaner team of five, supported by a growing Information Technology and Human Resources staff. This shift in resources is

a testament to Berte's impact on the cooperative's operational efficiency.

Berte also recalls joining Basin Electric Power Cooperative and the Rural Utilities Service (RUS) Indenture as landmark events in her career.

"I was involved in both events," she says. "They changed the way Corn Belt Power worked with Basin and RUS moving forward. By joining Basin, we greatly reduced our risk profile and by completing the indenture we reduced paperwork and requirements with RUS. Both were good for Corn Belt Power."

As Berte moves on to fulltime grandmother and community volunteer she says she will miss the people.

"Of course, I like the accounting part of my job because 'it is not work if you like what you do,' but it has always been the people at Corn Belt Power that have made working here the most enjoyable," she said. "I have met so many wonderful people both at Corn Belt Power and throughout the greater cooperative community that have become part of my life and I call them friends. That will be the hardest part of leaving."

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Karen Berte

Above | Karen Berte, began at Corn Belt Power Co-op as accounting assistant Nov. 14, 1983. She retires senior vice president, finance and administration July 1, 2024.



Berte retirement



Corn Belt Power seeks first financial ratings

Above left | From left, Mike Thatcher, vice president, power supply; Karen Berte, senior vice president, finance and administration; and Ken Kuyper, executive vice president and general manager, now retired, look over the presentation made in August 2012 to rating agencies as Corn Belt Power Cooperative sought its first ever financial ratings. The Corn Belt Power board of directors decided to seek an indenture as part of the cooperative's risk mitigation plan, ensuring access to future financing. Strong financial ratings were key to securing the indenture.

Continued from page 1... One of Berte's best qualities – one that may go unnoticed – is her ability to teach.

"Karen has been instrumental in my development as an accountant," said Jaylen Heinz, accountant III, Corn Belt Power. **"As a fresh out of college graduate, I had a lot of learning to do when I started at Corn Belt Power and Karen's example of constant dedication is something I strive for."**

Mike Thatcher, vice president, power supply, just returned to the cooperative. Combined, he's worked with Berte for more than 20 years.

"Karen has performed her job with high integrity, a strong work ethic and in the best interest of the Cooperative. She is a stickler for her balances coming out," he said. **"Years ago, I recall her providing me a penny to balance some part of my payroll account that didn't come out exactly. She has been a joy to work with and confident to work through the many challenges and changes through the years. I always appreciated her ability to take any issue of mine and direct it back to me effectively changing my perspective."**

Jennifer Arndorfer, human resources specialist, echoes Thatcher's sentiments.

"I appreciate Karen's willingness to listen to my thoughts and ideas with an open mind," she said. **"I value her feedback and honesty over the years. She has been a great supervisor and friend."**

For Berte, a known early riser and dedicated cooperative employee, retirement may prove difficult.

"My goal on the first day of retirement would be to sleep in," she said. **"If I can**

sleep in, first because getting up at 5:30 a.m. for so many years is more of a habit for me and second because my husband will still get up then, I hope my thoughts go to 'the reason I worked for so many years is so I can enjoy the freedom of deciding what do I want to do today!'"

Her husband, son and son-in-law run Berte & Son Construction. She's sure to find work to do around the business as her cooperative career ends.



Berte volunteers

Above | Karen Berte, second from left, demonstrates the Touchstone Energy Cooperative value of commitment to community by volunteering to assemble meals for Meals from the Heartland in 2012.

Back to her attention to detail and her ability to change others' perspective.

"At first, I plan on cleaning my house from top to bottom because it has been neglected for the last six months now," she said. **"There are some places I would like to go but convincing my husband to take off work will be my new challenge. After that I plan on assisting and volunteering where needed at Berte & Son, St. Mary's school, the hospital gift shop and making exercise a daily activity for me."**

Berte leaves behind a legacy of innovation, dedication, and mentorship at Corn Belt Power, and her impact will be felt for years to come. ■



Berte family

Above | Karen Berte, senior vice president finance and administration, third from left, middle row, and her family.

Warden, new finance and administration manager

Faith Warden started April 1 as manager, finance and administration at Corn Belt Power Cooperative. Over the next several months Warden will work closely with Karen Berte, senior vice president, finance and administration, until Berte's summer 2024 retirement.

Warden returns to Corn Belt Power after having worked for the co-op from 2007 to 2016 as a billing and accounting analyst.

After Corn Belt Power, Faith worked at Liguria Foods as a controller before leading a team as Director of Finance at Heartland Rural Electric Co-op in Kansas. Most recently she was a controller at Decker Truck Line, Fort Dodge.

Warden has a Bachelor of Arts degree in accounting from Buena Vista University and is a certified public accountant. ■



Faith Warden

Directors re-elected at Iowa Lakes Electric Co-op annual meeting

Iowa Lakes Electric Cooperative held its annual meeting Saturday, April 13 at the Clay County Regional Events Center in Spencer.

Almost 340 members and community members attended the event.

During the meeting, members re-elected Roger Williamson, Mark Tuttle and Crystal Pluth to three-year terms.

In addition, Nick Kerns was elected to his first term. Following the meeting, the board reorganized as follows: Dan Winterhof, Chair; Chad Boysen, Vice Chair; Trent Will, Secretary; Crystal Pluth, Treasurer.

Butler County REC holds annual business meeting

Butler County REC members cast almost 500 mail-in ballots for this year's annual business meeting which took place Wed., March 27.

Members re-elected Share Brandt and Troy Feldman to three-year terms. Ken Kappmeyer also won a three-year term.

Following the meeting, the board reorganized as follows: Gary Poppe, president; Share Brandt, vice president; Tim Schrage, secretary; Troy Feldman, treasurer. ■

Stalzer, new superintendent

Andy Stalzer has accepted the system electrical superintendent position effective May 1.

Stalzer started in 2008 as an apprentice electrician in Humboldt.

In 2009, he moved to the Humboldt transmission department as a lineman. Since 2018, Andy has been a meter technician in the electrical maintenance department.

Prior to his time at Corn Belt Power, Stalzer worked as a lead lineman at Calhoun County Electric Cooperative Association for six years. Congratulations, Andy! ■



Andy Stalzer

Capesius becomes journeyman

As of April 16, John Capesius completed on-the-job training and self-guided bookwork to become a journeyman lineman. To become a journeyman, Capesius went through the distance learning program at Northwest Lineman College. John is a member of the Humboldt transmission crew and started his Corn Belt Power career in October 2020. ■



John Capesius

Members flock to Franklin REC's hybrid annual meeting

Franklin REC held a hybrid version of its annual meeting April 2 in Hampton.

A drive-thru event started at 4 p.m. During this time, members could drop off their ballot and pick up a meal. Beginning at 6:15 p.m. a traditional meal was served. More than 20 percent of Franklin REC's membership took part in the annual meeting in some form.

Matthew Roelfs, Don Greimann and Dale Schaefer each were re-elected to three-year terms.

Lauren Koehler, Iowa State University student, spoke at the event about rural electrification and the impact it had on the modern kitchen. Youth Tour participants also gave a presentation. ■



May Touchstone Energy Volunteer Challenge winner | Cody Hantelman, energy advisor, Iowa Lakes Electric Cooperative, donated his \$100 prize to the Kossuth County Gun Club.

Tell Congress: Protect us from blackouts

American families and businesses cannot afford higher electricity bills and the risk of rolling blackouts.

But the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) new power plant rules would shut down reliable power plants across the country and make it harder to build new ones. The White House has the power to stop this rule.

Consider speaking out today. Your voice matters.

Our electric grid is already stretched thin. The nation's grid watchdog, the North American Electric Reliability Corporation, recently forecast that over the next five years, all or parts of 19 states are at high risk of rolling blackouts during normal conditions.

This rule will only make it worse, undermining decades of work to keep the lights on. The White House must recognize the disastrous impact this rule will have on the future of affordable, reliable electricity before it's too late.

Act now and tell your representatives that the White House must drop the EPA power plant rule because of the harmful impacts this would have on you and your family.

Learn more:

<https://bit.ly/VoicesForCooperativePower>

For more on the new rule and its implications, be sure to read next month's edition of the Watts Watt.



SEVEN ON 7:
Episode 17

**THE TOUCHSTONE ENERGY
PREPAID CARD JOURNEY**

Corn Belt Power Cooperative Watts Watt

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