



A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative

## Paving the way to the future: Second-ever LEAD class graduates

Corn Belt Power, like cooperatives across the country, will lose hundreds of years of experience over the next five to ten years. Many cooperative leaders see retirement on the near horizon and that's why training the next crop of cooperative leaders is important.

Following the success of 2019's Leadership Exploration and Development program (LEAD), Corn Belt Power's second LEAD class began in 2020 and graduated May 5, 2021. LEAD is a program to help develop leadership skills in existing employees. The program was created in conjunction with Kathy Peterson of PeopleWorks, Inc. Throughout the year, participants learned about topics such as setting goals, leading change, managing stress and dealing with difficult conversations. Those in the program attend sessions about cooperative financials, generating sources, electric rates and the cooperative business model. Participants also take part in self and peer 360 evaluations.

This year's graduating class included Rod Stephas, assistant plant manager, Jon Myer, IT administrator, Jim Mertz, foreman, Courtney Christensen, administrative assistant, Connor Almond, journeyman lineman, Jon Naber, electrical and control and Eric Hankey, SCADA technician.

"This was an awesome group," Peterson said of this year's group. "Each LEAD participant had a strong desire to learn and improve their leadership skills. It was fun to see the appreciation they gained for each other and the work that's done in different areas within Corn Belt Power's system. LEAD participants grew not just as employees of Corn Belt Power, but this experience has helped them in their personal



**Above** | Corn Belt Power Cooperative's 2021 LEAD graduates celebrate completing a year plus of leadership exploration and development, May 5. Ken Kuyper, executive vice president and general manager, joined in congratulating the following LEAD graduates. Photographed from left, back row, Rod Stephas, assistant plant manager; Jon Myer, IT administrator; Jim Mertz, electrical maintenance foreman; Kuyper; and front row, from left, Courtney Christensen, administrative assistant; Connor Almond, journeyman lineman; and John Naber, electrical and control. Eric Hankey, SCADA technician, graduated virtually. Congratulations to all!

lives – as leaders within their families and the volunteer/community groups they are part of."

Christensen says she's happy Corn Belt Power continues to offer the program.

"I think the LEAD program is amazing," she said. "LEAD celebrates becoming a better version of yourself and learning to lead in whatever position you hold. I am so thankful that Corn Belt Power offers this program, as other companies I have worked for do not offer anything close to this for developing their employees."

She says LEAD has opened her eyes to not only more about Corn Belt Power and the industry as a whole, but also about herself.

"I have seen several changes in myself since being a part of the LEAD program," she said. "Most important to me is having more confidence. I have also read more books in the last year than I have in the last three years, and I've enjoyed it. I have a

new outlook for my position here at Corn Belt Power, and for my future, all thanks to being a part of LEAD."

Stephas echoed Christensen's sentiments. "The program consumes a fair amount of your personal time," he said. "It is a great way to get to know people from other departments. It helped me understand what good leadership looks like and understand personal strengths and weaknesses."

Ken Kuyper, executive vice president and general manager, Corn Belt Power, believes the program will help lead the cooperative into the future.

"Our board has great vision and supports this program," he said. "Corn Belt Power is thinking about succession planning and preparing for transitioning to the next generation of leaders. And with this group of leaders and our last LEAD group, the future is very bright." ■



**Above** | Corn Belt Power board of directors and staff host annual meeting with distribution co-op managers and voting delegates joining via Zoom.

# Corn Belt Power hosts hybrid annual meeting

Like in 2020, Corn Belt Power cancelled its in-person annual meeting and opted for a hybrid meeting — digital and in-person.

Corn Belt Power hosted its annual meeting before the Friday, April 30 board meeting. Board members and Corn Belt Power staff attended. Managers and voting delegates had

the opportunity to join via Zoom.

“We did our best to preserve the democratic process by having the annual meeting around the same time we do each year,” said Ken Kuyper, executive vice president and general manager, Corn Belt Power. “We look forward to having an in-person event next year.”

During the meeting, directors and others in attendance heard Ken Kuyper, executive vice president and general manager, Corn Belt Power; Dennis Puckett, attorney, Sullivan & Ward; and Karen Berte, senior vice president, finance and administration. Puckett conducted the election of directors. Berte and Larry Rohach, board treasurer, presented the 2020 financial report.

During the annual meeting, Larry Rohach, Grundy County REC, and Brad Honold, NIMECA, were re-elected to another three-year term on Corn Belt Power’s board of directors. Their seats were the only seats up for election.

Officers remain the same:  
 Dave Onken, President  
 Dale Schaefer, Vice President  
 Jerry Beck, Secretary  
 Larry Rohach, Treasurer  
 Gary Poppe, Assistant Secretary/Treasurer

Corn Belt Power mailed annual reports to cooperatives. ■

Corn Belt Power's annual report "The Art of Resilience" is available by mail and online at [www.cbpower.coop](http://www.cbpower.coop)

# Planned outage complete at Wisdom Station

In April, both units at Corn Belt Power’s Wisdom Station power plant were in a planned outage.

This normal, proactive maintenance yielded positive results for the co-op.

“The Wisdom Unit 2 outage went well,” said Jacob Olberding, vice president, power supply, Corn Belt Power. “There were two main items that needed to be addressed during that outage. The first was the replacement of a 69 kV bushing and subsequent electrical testing on the generator step-up transformer. The second was a borescope inspection.”

During the borescope inspection, crews identified a few coating issues in the combustion section of the generator.

“We are working with General Electric to develop a plan for replacing these parts,” Olberding said. “Due to the efforts of the Wisdom Station personnel, the outage was completed three days ahead of schedule.”

Wisdom Unit 1 underwent an internal inspection in April. The inspection is required by regulation.

“A qualified inspector travels to Wisdom Station to perform the inspection,” Olberding said. “While the unit is in an outage and the boiler is opened up, Wisdom Station personnel also take the time to go through the boiler and perform their own inspection to see if there are any emerging issues that need to be addressed. It is also an opportunity to see what is happening on the water side of the boiler and whether or not we need to make any adjustments to our water chemistry program.”

Olberding reported results from the inspection indicated the Unit 1 boiler is in good overall shape.

“The boiler is an area that can be significantly impacted by peaking and cycling operations so we were happy to see that the *continued on page 4*



## Maintaining Wisdom

**Above** | Carlos Garcia, control operator, removes a safety valve on the No. 4 feedwater heater for routine inspection during a planned maintenance outage at Wisdom Station.



Jena Blackett

## Blackett begins Corn Belt Power career

Jena Blackett is the new building custodian for Corn Belt Power Cooperative. Blackett grew up in Fort Dodge before moving to California for several years. She returned to Humboldt and most recently worked at Humboldt Community Schools. Blackett and her children Laycee, 10; Kaycee, 9; Bradlee, 3 live in Humboldt. Welcome, Jena! ■

# News in brief

### Pandemic doesn't stop advocacy

As part of NRECA's annual Legislative Conference, April 20 and 21, directors and staff from Iowa's electric cooperatives met with Iowa members of Congress virtually to discuss important issues and priorities.

Iowa co-op leaders highlighted three priorities during visits with Senator Ernst, Senator Grassley, Congresswoman Axne, Congressman Feenstra, Congresswoman Hinson and Congresswoman Miller-Meeks.

**Refinancing Rural Utilities Service (RUS) loans:** Co-ops are pressing for passage of The Flexible Financing for Rural America Act (H.R. 2244, S. 978). The bill would provide critical economic relief by allowing electric cooperatives to refinance USDA Rural Utilities Service loans at lower interest rates without penalty—just as other businesses do. This change would save co-ops and their consumer-members as much as \$10 billion.

**Rural broadband:** An expanded combination of federal grant and loan funding is essential to close the digital divide. Co-ops are calling on Congress to: support sustained broadband financing that prioritizes projects in areas with the lowest population densities, and provide greater oversight of the Federal Communications Commission to ensure winning Rural Development Opportunity Fund (RDOF) Phase I bidders have the financial, technical and operational ability to provide quality broadband service. The FCC estimates that 34 million Americans still lack access to high-speed internet, the vast majority of whom live in rural communities served by electric co-ops.

**Comparable tax credits for energy innovation:** As not-for-profit businesses, electric co-ops cannot access certain clean energy innovation tax incentives that are available to other businesses. Congress should address this by providing comparable access to federal investment and production tax incentives and additional financing options, such as a clean and renewable energy bond program, to support co-op projects that promote clean, affordable, and reliable electricity.



## Grassley receives NRECA honor

During the virtual NRECA legislative conference, Iowa senator Chuck Grassley received the Distinguished Service Award from the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association.

This award recognizes a lawmaker's outstanding contribution to the progress of electric cooperatives and the public power program in the United States. Grassley met with members of Iowa's electric cooperatives as part of the NRECA virtual legislative conference.

"I'm honored to receive the Distinguished Service Award from the National Electric Cooperative Association this year. These co-ops play a critical role in communities both in Iowa and across the country. And I oftentimes remind my colleagues that many of these smaller communities play a big part in feeding and fueling the world," Grassley said in a press release. "I look forward to speaking with members of the Iowa co-ops next week and continuing to advocate for their important work."

Sen. Grassley played a crucial role to repeal taxes imposed on health care and other benefits that cooperatives provide for their employees. He also supported the 2019 Rural Act, which prevented cooperatives from losing tax-exempt status for receiving government grants that would have surpassed 15-percent of non-member income.

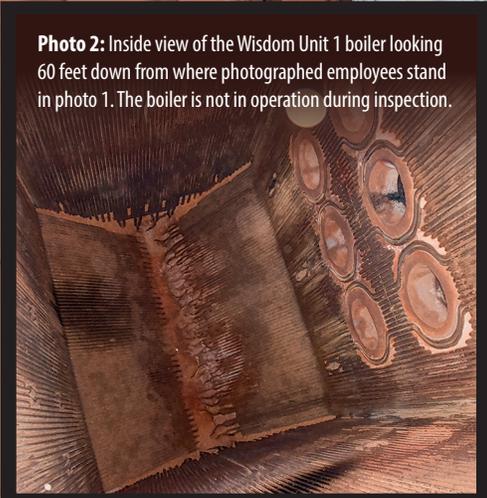
Sen. Grassley's farm is on Butler County REC's lines. Sen. Grassley is a mainstay at local events across Corn Belt Power's service territory.

"Butler County REC is proud to be Sen. Grassley's hometown cooperative," Butler County REC CEO Craig Codner said. "We appreciate his advocacy for cooperatives. From his support of legislation to his morning run with Iowa Youth Tour participants, his dedication is evident. We congratulate Sen. Grassley on his much-deserved Distinguished Service Award."

Congratulations, Sen. Grassley! ■

**Photo 1:** Patrick Connor, plant manager, and Carlos Garcia, control operator, Wisdom Station, inspect secondary superheater loops inside the seven-story-tall Wisdom Unit 1 boiler. Internal boiler inspection is required on a two-year cycle.

PRSRST STD  
 U.S. Postage  
 PAID  
 Humboldt, Iowa  
 Permit No. 32



**Photo 2:** Inside view of the Wisdom Unit 1 boiler looking 60 feet down from where photographed employees stand in photo 1. The boiler is not in operation during inspection.



**May Touchstone Energy Volunteer Challenge winner | Kerri Mertz**, executive assistant, Corn Belt Power Cooperative, donated her \$100 prize drawing to the Two Rivers Junior Pistol Club.



## Steve Smith promoted to shift operator

Congratulations to Steve Smith who recently received a promotion from control operator to shift operator at Corn Belt Power's Wisdom Station power plant. Smith was hired in May 2006 as a general plant worker. He also held the position of tractor operator at the plant. Smith joins Mike Cowell, Darwin Johnson, Kevin White and Wayne Wolthuizen as the plant's shift operators.

## Wisdom Station — maintenance

*continued from page 2* boiler continues to look good," he said. Corn Belt Power's plant maintenance schedule is all about being proactive. The cooperative's goal is to identify emerging issues before they become significant and cause a forced outage. "Our plan allows us to perform future repairs in a planned and budgeted manner," he said. "This makes for a more efficient outage and keeps our overall operating cost down."



## Corn Belt Power Cooperative **Watts Watt**

**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.

Copyright 2021  
 ■ Kenneth H. Kuyper, Executive Vice President and General Manager  
 ■ Ryan Cornelius, Editor; Vice President, Corporate Relations; CCC  
 ■ Marena V. Fritzier, Marketing Director; CCC