A new substation, which will help deliver reliable power to a 10-mile area near Sterling, North Dakota, has been added to Capital Electric Cooperative’s (CEC) system. Every member of the co-op’s line crew played a role in bringing the substation online.
A new substation, which will help deliver reliable power to a 10-mile area near Sterling, North Dakota, has been added to Capital Electric Cooperative’s (CEC) system. The new substation began transforming electricity on Nov. 14, 2019. It replaces the oldest existing substation used by the co-op.

In 1965, a line crew energized the original Sterling Substation, which brought power to rural residents. This fall, a new line crew transferred power to a new location. When the old substation was de-energized, Crew Leader John Frey flipped the switch.

“My grandfather, Richard Maier, worked for CEC for 35 years. He started as a lineworker and worked his way up to line superintendent before retiring in 1989. He was instrumental in bringing the old substation online, and I was instrumental in de-energizing it. That’s pretty cool,” says Frey.

The new substation is owned by Central Power Electric Cooperative, a transmission cooperative that delivers wholesale electricity to CEC from power providers, such as Basin Electric Power Cooperative and the Western Area Power Administration (WAPA). It will play an important role in safely delivering reliable electricity to CEC’s members.

Here’s how it works. Electricity is transmitted at very high voltages and low currents to reduce heat and transmission losses. Transmission lines, which transfer electricity from the power supplier to the substation, require the highest voltage, as they carry power the furthest. Once the electricity reaches the new Sterling Substation, it’s transformed from 43,800 volts to 7,200 volts before being transmitted along the co-op’s distribution lines, which carry the power to your home. Before the electricity reaches your home, a transformer drops it even further to a safe, useable voltage of 120/240 volts.

The new substation, which has the ability to serve five times as many members, is a major upgrade. It uses new, more reliable technology to safely deliver power to CEC’s members.

“It’s a major improvement,” says Frey. “This new substation has four circuits, which supply power to members in all directions. Power
enters the substation from the north. Once it’s transformed, it’s sent along CEC’s distribution lines in one of three directions – north, east or south. Each direction has its own circuit. The fourth circuit is a back-up. The old substation only had one circuit. If that circuit failed or opened, power was lost in every direction. Now, an outage in one direction doesn’t automatically result in an outage in another.”

The new substation is also much more accessible to line crews. In the past, crews had to travel one mile along an unmaintained trail to access the substation. The new substation is located much closer to the highway, making it easier to access in the event of an outage. It also offers more space for crews to safely perform necessary tasks.

“At CEC, we always think safety first,” says Operations Supervisor Rick Dressler, CEC. “When lineworkers are performing maintenance at a substation, it may or may not be energized. The new substation is definitely much safer than the old one. The increased space allows lineworkers to maneuver more safely and helps reduce the risk of injury.”

The installation of the new substation is only one example of CEC’s commitment to providing reliable power to its members. Throughout the year, lineworkers perform regular inspections and maintenance on poles, lines and transformers. Additionally, the co-op replaces 25-miles of existing overhead line each year.

This spring, Capital Electric Cooperative (CEC) will introduce online voting as an alternate means of voting for the co-op’s directors. In addition, traditional voting will still occur at the annual meeting on June 10, 2020. Online voting will be offered through SmartHub, a web and mobile app that allows members to access their bill, manage their account and monitor electric usage. To register for the free resource, visit www.capitalelec.com and click on “New User? Register to use SmartHub!” at the top of the home page. You will need to enter your billing account number, last name and email address to sign up.

Save the date for your annual meeting:
June 10, 2020
New venue:
Bismarck Event Center

This year, Capital Electric Cooperative (CEC) will hold its annual meeting at a new location – the Bismarck Event Center. At the June 10 meeting, members will learn about co-op issues, elect board members and enjoy a free meal. Stay tuned for more information.

Online voting for directors
Sign up for SmartHub to vote online!

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Operations Manager Rick Dressler has worn many different hats throughout his 35 year career at CEC. Rick currently holds the position of operations manager.

Operations manager reflects on 35 years of service

Operations Manager, Rick Dressler, has reached an impressive milestone as an employee of Capital Electric Cooperative (CEC). Rick joined the cooperative on May 1, 1984, which makes him part of an elite group with 35 years of cooperative experience.

Rick has worn many different hats throughout his time at CEC. After 29 years as a lineman and a lead lineman for CEC, Rick took over as system supervisor in November 2013 when Larry Wittmayer retired. The following year, the co-op promoted Rick to operations supervisor, a position vacated by a retiring 40-year veteran, Gordy Wiese. Following the retirement of Engineering and Operations Manager Ron Lipp in 2019, Rick accepted the position.

As operations manager, Rick is responsible for assigning tasks to the line crews and overseeing day-to-day activities within the operations department. He also manages the metering and warehouse department staff.

Rick works closely with Jeff Holzer, system supervisor and former lineman. Together, they are responsible for handling outages, switching lines and making sure the system is running smoothly.

“It certainly helps to have co-workers like Jeff Holzer working beside me in this department,” says Rick. “Jeff is very dependable and competent in his role, and that makes my job easier.”

Rick reflects on his tenure at CEC, “Time goes by so quickly, it doesn’t seem possible I’ve been here for 35 years. The last 35 years have been a time of continual change. From the equipment we are using to the type of construction methods and materials, virtually every aspect of the industry has changed in some way, including my role in the co-op.”

He adds, “It’s been a pleasure serving CEC’s members over the past 35 years. My interaction with them is always interesting, and it’s been gratifying getting to know them and doing my part to keep the power on at their farms and homes.”

“I have a lot of great memories, having worked with a lot of good, hard-working people who are now friends of mine. As my career at CEC winds down, I will leave with a lot of great memories and the satisfaction in knowing the system is in good hands,” he concludes.

When he’s not at work, Rick enjoys spending as much time as possible with his five grandchildren. He, and his wife, Val, are looking forward to the arrival of two more grandchildren which will be on the way soon. The couple has three sons, Travis and his wife, Kayla; Weston and his wife, Tegan; and Ryan and his wife, Ashley. All four families live within walking distance of each other, which Rick appreciates very much. They all enjoy watching the grandchildren participate in baseball, dance and other activities.

CEC appreciates the past 35 years of commitment from Rick, working hard to keep your lights on. CEC.
Fitterer reaches 15 years with CEC

Capital Electric Cooperative (CEC) General Manager Paul Fitterer reached the 15-year mark in his career at the cooperative on Dec. 1, 2019. Paul took over as general manager on April 1, 2016, upon the retirement of Ordean “Lars” Nygren. Prior to taking on the role of manager, Paul served as the co-op’s business manager for 12 years.

When asked what changes Paul has seen over the past fifteen years, he responds, “The speed of change is rapidly increasing with everything we do at the co-op. Technology changes everything from how we interact with our members through SmartHub, how our meters are read on a cellular basis and the list goes on. As more information is available, our members’ expectations are increasing as well.”

“Members appreciate receiving outage information more quickly, and we are providing that to them on our website via an online outage map. They like to see their electric usage data on SmartHub, which is displayed in increasingly shorter intervals. There is more interest in electric vehicles, distributed generation such as home solar units and battery storage,” Paul continues.

Paul also reflects on how the electric industry has changed over the years. “The political climate relating to energy production and transmission seems to change with each new administration. Public opinion is driven by ideas on climate change and renewable energy. In addition, electric generation is affected greatly by regional power markets which are based on supply and demand.”

With all the changes that are occurring, Paul emphasizes that he is mostly pleased by the efforts of the co-op’s 36 full-time and two part-time employees at CEC. “Our employees take pride in our work as we provide power to homes, farms and businesses. We are on call 24/7, 365 days a year. We have done this from the time the co-op was formed, when I started 15 years ago, and we continue to do it today.”

Outside the office, Paul is busy with his family which includes his wife, Danna, and their three daughters. Volleyball has become a large part of the girls’ lives over the past years and Paul and Danna try to attend as many games as possible.

CEC appreciates Paul’s 15 years of dedicated service to the cooperative and its members.

Tristen Schwartz joins CEC as apprentice lineworker

Capital Electric Cooperative (CEC) recently welcomed a new full-time apprentice lineworker to its crew. Tristen Schwartz, Mandan, accepted the position in Nov. 2019. Tristen is a 2017 graduate of the Bismarck State College Lineworker Program.

Tristen decided on the lineworker program while attending Mandan High School. He says, “I knew another lineworker who was living and working in Missouri, and he suggested I give it a try. I liked the idea of working outside and having something different to do every day.”

Tristen has worked at CEC as a part-time apprentice lineworker for the past three summers. This summer, the co-op decided to bring him on full-time.

“We really appreciated how well Tristen did on the job. His work ethic is outstanding. We are very pleased to have him join us as a full-time employee,” says Operations Manager Rick Dressler, CEC.

Over the next few years, Tristen will complete the coursework for the apprenticeship program, after which he will become a journeyman lineworker.

“I was pleased to be hired by CEC full-time after working here for three summers. I’ve enjoyed working with the guys and providing service to our members. It’s great to be part of a co-op and to work in the area I grew up in.”

CEC welcomes Tristen to the team and looks forward to having him serve our members.
A family’s effort to provide habitat for wildlife and beautify the prairie has been recognized by the Burleigh County Soil Conservation District. Scott Wolff is the recipient of the 2019 Tree Care Award. Sponsored by Capital Electric Cooperative (CEC), the award recognizes the Wolff family’s extraordinary efforts to establish multiple tree plantings.

Since 2007, the Wolff family has planted and nurtured about 6,000 trees spanning 25,000 feet on their fourth generation farm near Wing. Cottonwoods, willows, cedars, pines, evergreens and lilacs help protect and beautify the property. As they grow, the trees will help protect Wolff’s cattle and provide shelter for wildlife.

“In 10 or 15 years, these trees are going to be thick, and my kids are going to have a place to go and hunt and enjoy the outdoors,” says Wolff. “Back in 1996 when we had that really bad storm, those evergreens saved a whole bunch of pheasants. In the spring, there wasn’t a pheasant to be found anywhere within 10 miles of here, but they spread out from here and repopulated.”

Caring for 6,000 trees is a lot of work, especially in the first few years. They need to be kept clean and watered. It’s also important to maintain the area around the trees through regular weeding and mowing. But, first, you have to get the right trees in the ground. That’s where the Burleigh County Soil Conservation District comes in.

“They’ll soil test to see which trees will grow best, and they’ll stake it out. They’ll plant the trees and lay the fabric,” says Wolff.

After that, it’s Wolff’s job to keep the trees alive, and it’s not an easy task. There have been many summers where he has logged more than 250 hours caring for the trees, sometimes waking up as early as 4 a.m. Fortunately, it’s been a family effort. Wolff is grateful for the help of his father, his wife and his children.

“The Wolff family has spent countless hours pulling weeds and replacing any trees that did not make it. This is not the fun part, but their relentless effort has resulted in successful tree plantings,” said Chad Thorson, district technician, Burleigh County Soil Conservation District.

CEC thanks the Wolff family for their efforts to beautify the prairie and provide shelter for area wildlife.

Jon Muir, influential naturalist and conservationist, once said, “Between every two pines is a doorway to another world.” Imagine the many worlds created by the Wolff family.
Capital Electric offers student scholarship

Capital Electric Cooperative is offering a $1,000 student scholarship, in partnership with Basin Electric Power Cooperative.

To qualify for the scholarship, seniors must be enrolled or planning to enroll in a full-time undergraduate or graduate course of study at an accredited two-year or four-year college, university or vocational/technical school. Their parents or guardians must be members of Capital Electric.

Our cooperative will assemble a panel of impartial judges to review all applications. The judges will select the winning application based on academic performance, potential to succeed, leadership and participation in school and community activities, honors, a statement of education and career goals, work experience and an outside referral. The scholarship will be awarded without regard to other awards, loans or financial assistance the applicant may have obtained.

Application forms may be downloaded at www.capitalelec.com or picked up at co-op headquarters at 4111 State St. N. in Bismarck. Applications need to be completed and returned to Capital Electric on or before Friday, Feb. 14.

Check out the essay contest guidelines at

www.ndyouthtour.com
The Board of Directors of Capital Electric Cooperative, Inc. (CEC) held its regular meeting on Monday, Nov. 18, 2019, at co-op headquarters in Bismarck, North Dakota, pursuant to due notice to all directors. All directors were present at that time.

Also present were Manager Paul Fitterer, Business Manager Luke Steen, Operations Manager Rick Dresller, Engineering Services Manager Greg Owen, Energy Services Manager Josh Schaffner, Director of Communications and Public Relations Wes Engbrecht and Attorney Matthew H. Olson of Pringle & Herigstad, P.C., who acted as recording secretary.

Financial Review:
Prior to the board meeting, Directors Arlene Olson and Richard Koski reviewed the October 2019 check register and expenditures. They reported all checks were in order. It was moved, seconded and carried to approve October expenditures in the amount of $4,034,235.87.

Management Reports (Business Department, Operations, Engineering Services, Energy Services, and Public Relations/Communications):

Business Department Report: The business manager presented the October 2019 financial and statistical report to the Board. Total kWh sales for October were ahead of budget by 4.2%. The actual monthly electric revenue was ahead of budget by 3%.

The total operating margin for October was $198,730, versus the budgeted amount of $39,611. The total margin for October was $221,785, versus the budgeted amount of $36,717, ahead of budget by $185,068.

Year-to-date sales are below budget by 1.7%. Year-to-date revenue is $32,089,392, in comparison to a budgeted amount of $32,532,807. Total year-to-date margin is $1,144,147, versus the budgeted amount of $32,532,807.

The total operating margin for October was $221,785, versus the budgeted amount of $198,730, versus the budgeted amount of -$39,611.

The total operating margin for October was $221,785, versus the budgeted amount of $198,730, versus the budgeted amount of -$39,611.

Central Power Electric Cooperative (CPEC): CEC received full credit from CPEC for load monitoring on the October power bill.

CEC is working with CPEC to identify transmission line crossings over railroads in CEC’s service territory and transfer the permits to CPEC.

Metering: CEC presently has 3,541 Verizon meters deployed.

Owen gave an update regarding the Capital Hill Tower Land and the updated timeline.

Fitterer gave an update regarding the corner lot and various scenarios. The board gave Fitterer direction as to what to do. This issue will be revisited at the next board meeting.

Energy Services Department: Schaffner reviewed the Energy Services Report. Thirty-four service orders were completed in October.

Level 3 Charging: CEC partnered with Lignite Energy Council and submitted an application to the Department of Environmental Quality for Volkswagen funds to be used to install Level 3 charging stations. The co-op is continuing conversations with Chargepoint, ZEF Energy and two location owners in the CEC service area.

ERC Loans: There are no ERC loan applications for approval this month.

Communications, Public Relations and IT Department:
Focus Group Results: Engbrecht provided a summary of the member survey/focus group final report. Action items were identified and discussed.


RDFC Grant Program: Following discussion, it was moved, seconded and carried to submit the 2019 RDFC Grant Application on behalf of Wing Rural Ambulance.

Safety Report: There were no lost time accidents in October.

NDAREC Safety Instructor Jeff Tweten was at the shop on Oct. 22 and met with the line crews for a field visit.

Without objection, the board approved the safety report.

2020 Budget: Management presented on the 2020 budget, and the Board discussed the same.

Following discussion, it was moved, seconded and carried to approve the 2020 Budget as presented.

Basin Electric Power Cooperative: Fitterer reported on the highlights of the financials received from Basin and other Basin matters.

CPEC: Director Sheri Haugen-Hoffart reported on the highlights of CPEC matters.

Fitterer reported on the CPEC MAC meeting held after the Basin annual meeting.

Statewide Report: Director Deon Vilhauer reported on Statewide matters.

Annual Meeting Delegates: Following discussion, it was moved, seconded and carried to name all directors as voting delegates.

2020 Director Election: Following discussion, it was moved, seconded and carried to cast a unanimous ballot to name Vilhauer as CEC’s delegate to Statewide.

Following discussion, it was moved, seconded and carried to cast a unanimous ballot to name Director Bill Patrie as CEC’s alternate to Statewide.

Midwest Electric Consumer’s Association: The annual meeting is scheduled for Dec. 9-12, 2019 in Denver, Colorado.

Adjournment: There being no further business to come before the meeting, without objection, the regular meeting was adjourned.

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