Let there be light!

Capital Electric Cooperative linemen are installing new electric services every day, and for the members who live in rural areas, many of those installations include yard lights. In this month’s local pages, learn some interesting facts about yard lights, electric service and safety.
After the meter socket was attached to the pole, Lineman Brad Johnson (right) filled the hole with dirt, and Lineman Lance Diebold used a hydraulic tamper to tamp the dirt firm. The meter socket provides the electric service.
The population in the Capital Electric Cooperative service area is growing, and members are calling daily, requesting electric service for a new home or business. When the location is in a rural area, many members are also asking about the possibility of adding a yard light. This article answers some common questions we receive about yard lights.

Our linemen install and maintain 100-watt, high-pressure sodium lights as a source of light and security for our member-owners, upon their request. The lights feature a sensor on top — a photoelectric eye — that turns the light on or off based on available light. Rick Dressler, operations supervisor at Capital Electric, says members have two options when choosing a yard light:

• **An unmetered light.** With this option, the member does not pay for the electricity used, but pays a flat monthly fee. This is the most popular option among the co-op membership.

• **A metered light.** With this option, the member pays for the amount of electricity used, in addition to a lower, flat monthly fee. The yard light can be controlled with a switch, so the light can be turned on or off at the member’s discretion.

It is more economical to have the yard light installed with a new service. Dressler says the light would be installed for free, because the linemen would need to set a pole for the meter socket that will provide electric service to a future shop, barn and home. If a member wants a yard light but does not need a new service, the member will be charged a fee that will be determined based on the distance from the new pole to the transformer.

If you live in a development with neighbors, Dressler advises that you read the association’s covenants to make sure a yard light is allowed.

Whether you choose a metered light or an unmetered light, either option is a great deal, as our linemen will maintain the light. If the bulb or eye goes out, or the shade falls off, a crew will make a house call.

“Yard lights are an affordable source of security, and we offer them as a courtesy to our members,” Dressler concludes.

For more information, call the line department at 701-223-1513.
Capital Electric welcomes Lineman Ensign
BY CARMEN DEVNEY

Linemen are the face of Capital Electric Cooperative, working in the neighborhoods and fields of our service area to bring power to your home or place of business. We are proud to introduce our newest lineman, Jeremy Ensign, to the co-op membership. A journeyman lineman from Miles City, Mont., Ensign worked in the heating and cooling industry before being cross-trained as a lineman by Montana-Dakota Utilities (MDU) in Bismarck. He’s been doing line work for the past 10 years, and earned journeyman status five years ago.

Capital Electric’s lineman position became available with the retirement of Gordy Wiese, operations supervisor. Rick Dressler, system supervisor, was promoted to operations supervisor, and Jeff Holzer, journeyman lineman, was promoted to system supervisor. Ensign was hired to fill Holzer’s position.

Ensign says he wasn’t looking for another job, but when he heard Capital Electric had an opening in the line department, he thought he’d throw his name into the hat. “I had heard it was a very good place to work. Turns out, I wasn’t wrong,” he says.

With a decade of experience as a lineman, Ensign is an immediate asset to the team. He’s comfortable and confident with the tools and equipment that are standard to the industry, and he knows a bit about the co-op business model because he and his wife, Megan, are member-owners who live south of Lincoln.

Now, Ensign is learning the people and procedures at Capital Electric. He credits the linemen for being friendly and teaching him the techniques they use in the field. Even though he is a skilled tradesman, Ensign says he is learning every day.

“There are some differences from where I came from, and things I haven’t seen or done yet. The lineman here do things a bit differently, and I want to do things the same as them,” he says.

Ensign will also be a good resource for the co-op’s member services department. With a background in heating and air conditioning, he can help answer questions and solve problems, in addition to Doug Mork, member services director, and Josh Schaffner, member services assistant.

Ensign likes to spend time outdoors. When he’s not building or maintaining the co-op’s overhead or underground lines, or fixing the occasional power outage, Ensign and his wife stay busy raising their three sons. They have 7-year-old twins and a 3-year-old. The older kids have started pheasant hunting with dad, and are already learning what it’s like to enjoy time in the field. Perhaps they’ll be the next generation of Capital Electric Cooperative linemen.

Welcome, Jeremy, to the co-op family.
But first, let me check my meter

Cooperative members control electricity bill with SmartHub

BY TRACIE BETTENHAUSEN, BASIN ELECTRIC POWER COOPERATIVE

When Jason Bartsch uploaded Capital Electric Cooperative’s SmartHub app to his phone, he knew what it was going to do. Not only is he a member-owner who lives east of Bismarck, but he’s also an employee at National Information Solutions Cooperative (NISC), the information technology co-op that created the SmartHub platform.

As someone who is in the know about the technology – and aware of the power he holds as a cooperative member – Bartsch started using SmartHub as soon as Capital Electric began offering it to its members in August 2013.

Nuts and bolts

SmartHub, the online system upgrade that replaced E-Bill, allows members to manage their Capital Electric account from their computer or smart phone. Nate Boettcher, NISC utility solutions product line manager, says SmartHub utilizes new technologies with mobile apps, responsive web design and the cooperative cloud.

After logging into their secure account, members can view or pay their utility bill, analyze their home’s energy usage, set up recurring and stored payments, and more. It offers these conveniences:

- SmartHub reduces costs and increases efficiency because members no longer spend time opening mail and entering check payments.
- SmartHub offers visual graphing of electricity usage and outdoor temperatures. Users can view their electricity use with a bar graph, which shows the temperature on that day.
- Users can set up alerts for payments, and pay directly from their phone or computer, or choose prepayment. When members call with a high-bill complaint, the co-op can have them pull up the graphs and show where the use was high, and figure out why that happened. Then, they can start to keep track of those factors and choose whether they will change their actions to reduce their energy bills.
- SmartHub reduces the number of phone calls during outages because members can report service issues via the app, and in return, the cooperative can provide status updates and an estimated time of restoration.
- Users can send messages to Capital Electric, and in some cases, upload photos of line or meter damage. That’s good information for our cooperative to have when deciding what equipment or personnel to deploy in a storm.

Member feedback

Paul Fitterer, business manager at Capital Electric, shares some of the feedback he’s been receiving from members who use and like SmartHub.

“They like that they can set up recurring payments with their credit card, and get bill-due and past-due notifications with text or email,” he says. “Those who need year-to-date information can get that easily, too. When farmers, ranchers or businesses need information for taxes, they used to have to call us and have us look it up, and send it out. Now, they can get the information on their own.”

Power to the people

Jason Bartsch keeps track of his family’s electricity use just like he keeps track of the Chicago Bears, his local news, Facebook and Snapchat.

“This is how our generation lives,” he says. “If you use the Web presence, you can set up a budget calculator. So if you want to spend only $90 on electricity a month, it’ll do a trend analysis and show you if you’re 10 percent over or under that goal, depending on your current use. Knowledge is power,” he concludes.
**Directors represent your interests**

Capital Electric Cooperative is overseen by a board of directors elected by the member-owners of our co-op. Each director represents the members on the board and each director is a co-op member.

Directors represent the members’ interests. They learn and internalize concerns, expectations and ideas, and take the information into the board room. During board meetings, directors exchange information and strategize for the co-op’s progressive growth.

Directors have a fiduciary responsibility to the cooperative. They exercise care, time and responsibility in reviewing co-op matters. Because they are also owners of the cooperative, they treat the business like their own.

Directors devote a certain amount of time to the cooperative. At a minimum, directors attend a monthly board meeting. To learn about the industry and understand critical issues, directors also read and research, and attend state and national meetings.

To help directors with their responsibilities, training is offered through the North Dakota Association of Rural Electric Cooperatives. If directors choose to pursue certification, they must take and complete five courses that cover director duties and liabilities, understanding the electric business board roles and relationships, strategic planning and financial decision-making.

Serving Capital Electric Cooperative and your community can be a rewarding experience! For more information, contact a member of the Nominating Committee (see C7) or call the co-op at 701-223-1513.

**Save the Date**

**WHAT:** Capital Electric annual meeting

**WHERE:** Ramkota Hotel, Bismarck

**WHY:** To learn about co-op issues; to cast your vote and elect three members to serve on the board of directors; to collect a capital credit check if you qualify; and to enjoy entertainment and eat a free meal.

**Be a part of the team**

Bill Patrie was elected to the Capital Electric Cooperative board of directors in June 2014. A co-op member with his wife Marcia since 1992, Bill works as the executive director of the Common Enterprise Development Corporation. A founding chairman of the Rural Development Finance Corporation, which is owned by electric and telephone cooperatives, and the past rural development director for the North Dakota Association of Rural Electric Cooperatives, Bill knows cooperatives — and he brings a tremendous amount of knowledge and wisdom to the Capital Electric board room.

Bill says he believes in the power of good ideas to transform organizations. “I love being a part of a well-performing team where the outcome of our mutual effort is greater than the individual parts. Being part of a great team makes each player better,” he says. “There is great potential at Capital Electric Cooperative. I see the co-op’s membership as a vast untapped resource, waiting to be used for the common good of all of us. We, as directors, have to articulate that common good and utilize our members as the resources to achieve it.”

Now’s the time to consider running for a position on Capital Electric Cooperative’s board of directors. Bill and the other eight directors encourage you to join them in the board room, and understand how the power of human cooperation changes lives — and makes cooperatives and communities stronger.
Are you interested in serving as a director for Capital Electric?

Place YOUR name on the ballot today!

Capital Electric Cooperative’s 69th annual meeting will be held June 2 at the Ramkota Hotel in Bismarck.

This year, three seats on the co-op’s board of directors will need to be filled. Directors whose three-year terms will expire this June include Josh Kramer and Deon Vilhauer, both from District 2, and Dwight Wrangham from District 1.

The nine members who make up the Capital Electric board of directors set policies and make decisions that will guide the cooperative into the future. With the annual meeting just a few short months away, now is the time for members to start thinking about whether they have the time and desire to serve their electric cooperative.

In accordance with Article 4, Section 3 of the co-op bylaws, current members of Capital Electric can have their names placed on the ballot to be voted upon for the open board positions in one of three ways: accepting a nomination by the Capital Electric Nominating Committee; submitting a petition signed by at least 15 current members of the cooperative, not less than 30 days prior to the annual meeting; and having your name placed in nomination from the floor at the annual meeting prior to the board of director election.

If you are interested in becoming a candidate for the Capital Electric Cooperative board of directors or wish to have a member considered for nomination, please contact a member of the Nominating Committee listed above prior to April 14. Committee members will have information on the requirements a member must meet in order to serve on the co-op’s board of directors. Pursuant to the bylaws, the Nominating Committee must post a list of nominations at least 35 days prior to the annual meeting. Current board members whose terms will expire in 2015 are:

- District I: Dwight Wrangham
- District 2: Josh Kramer and Deon Vilhauer

Official notice of Capital Electric’s 69th annual meeting will be mailed to members in May.
The regular meeting of the Board of Directors of Capital Electric Cooperative, Inc., was held on Friday, Jan. 23, 2015, at co-op headquarters in Bismarck.

Financial review: Prior to the board meeting, Directors Eckroth and Wrangham reviewed the December 2014 check register and expenditures. Eckroth reported all checks were in order. It was moved, seconded and carried to approve the December expenditures in the amount of $3,430,511.60.

Business department report: The Manager reviewed the December financial and statistical report with the Board. The total kilowatt-hour (KWH) sales for December 2014 were above budget by 11.1 percent. The actual monthly electric revenue is above budget by 9.5 percent. Year-to-date, KWH sales are up from budget by 4.3 percent and electric revenue is over budget by 67 percent. It should be noted that $988,381 of that variance is how we account for the Central Power Electric Cooperative “revenue.”

A draft of the year-end financials was presented. The financial margin for December is $1,262,899 versus the budgeted margin of $950,675, above budget by $312,024. The year-to-date margin is $1,293,027, under budget by $75,365. Generation and transmission capital credits allocated from Central Power is simply an estimate and likely to change. Operating margins for December are 218,764 versus a budget of $156,101.

In December, 95 new services were billed, bringing active services to 18,485 versus 17,692 at this time last year. This is a net increase of 793 accounts over the last 12 months.

Central Power consolidation: In preparing year-end balancing, we discovered a mistake made regarding the calculation of net book value for consideration of our transmission system. The assets and Accumulated Depreciation detail is correct, but we failed to consider the unique Rural Utilities Service (RUS) accounting for “net loss due to retirement.” Eide Bailly has confirmed that this “net loss due to retirement” needs to be taken off the NBV.

The total addition of NBV comes to $650,154.67. This amount is a running balance accumulated over the life of Capital Electric asset retirements. Accordingly, Central Power assumed $650,154.67 in debt than they needed to, and Capital Electric will need to compensate them that amount to true-up.

RUS has not yet transferred the debt on their system from Capital Electric to Central Power. Kossan and Fitterer have been in communication with our field rep, Tim Bohan, on following through on the paperwork and system update. In December, Capital Electric has been purchasing a similar service via St. Alexius Medical Center. We plan to terminate the add-on St. Alexius plan and solely offer the NRECA program that is included with our health insurance.

Refinance of “ADBI” loan study: We are looking for answers on the ramifications of refinancing our remaining RUS direct loans. Lars has conversed with and emailed Acting Director Jasper Schneider on our questions, and we hope to get some clarifications.

Customer Care Specialist: Michelle Stark has accepted a position in Capital Electric’s engineering department. We have advertised to fill her position.

Operation Intern grant: Capital Electric has been awarded a $3,000 matching grant from the N.D. Department of Commerce Operation Intern Program. This will be used to offset the costs of training Apprentice Lineman Jesse Goehring.

State retirement: Following review of the financial and recommendation by management, it was moved, seconded and carried to authorize payment of capital credits to the following deceased member’s estate: Ivol Bartelson $104.71 TOTAL $104.71

Accounts receivable balances as of Jan. 22, 2015, were reviewed.

The 2014 financial projection including consolidation entries and excluding consolidation entries was reviewed by the Manager.

Engineering and operations report: The Manager reviewed the written report from the engineering and operations departments. We completed 46 work orders this month, adding 59 new consumers to the system.

Fisher continues to trench in new services for us and VIP continues to work on our overhead line inspection.

Our line crews continue to hook up temporary and permanent meters and are doing our annual line inspection.

Jeremy Ensign started on Jan. 19, 2015 as a journeyman lineman.

We have completed our annual materials inventory in January 2015 and came within the 1-percent rule.

We ordered Ermco pad-mounted transformers from RESCO and Okonite URD cable from Irby. We are also looking into finding another underground contractor for this summer to help us install some of our tie lines. We are working with Central Power and our local building contractor for the 115-kilovolt conversion that will take place this summer.

Member services department: The Manager reviewed the written report from the wing.

Wing Service Center construction update: The building material has been delivered to the Wing construction site. Construction activity could begin as soon as next week if the weather permits.

Tetco to provide commercial units: Tetco will be expanding their compact geothermal heat pump line and providing units that are more suitable for commercial buildings.

Communications and public relations department: The Manager reviewed the written report from the communications and public relations department.

Safety report: There were no lost-time accidents this month. The 51st annual Apprenticeship Training and Safety conference was held Jan. 14-16, 2015. Rick Dressler, Jef Holzer and seven linemen attended the conference. Without objection, the safety report was approved.

Public Service Commission (PSC) case: The appellant brief in the District Court appeal is due Jan. 23, 2015, to be followed by Montana-Dakota Utilities’ PSC reply brief.

Central Power: Wrangham was appointed annual meeting voting delegate.

Central Power Resolutions Committee: Hilken was appointed delegate and Olson was appointed as alternate.

Basin Electric Power Cooperative: The Manager reported on Basin Electric Member Advisory Committee activities. An agreement in principle has been reached on litigation concerning the BNSF transport case, which has been pending for more than 10 years.

Basin Electric is continuing to look into refinancing RUS debt. The Manager is seeking support for Jasper Schneider for RUS Director. Basin Electric may be looking for members to extend their power contracts to 2075.

North Dakota Association of Rural Electric Cooperatives (NDAREC): Luska reported on NDAREC matters and its annual meeting. NDAREC has $717,894 in year-end margins. They are still looking at legislation to correct the in lieu of property tax disparity and watching water heater legislation.

Rural Development Finance Corp.: Patrie and Nygren attended the annual meeting. Patrie reported on the meeting.

NRECA Chief Executive Officer conference: The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) has new rulings on fall protection and personal protective clothing. We will be providing protective pants for outside crew.

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

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BOARD OF DIRECTORS:
Dwight Wrangham, Pres. ..........Bismarck
Arlene Olson, V. Pres. .................Wing
David Liuska, Sec.-Treas. ..........Wing
William Patrie ..........................Bismarck
Ordean “Lars” Nygren, Mgr. ....Bismarck
Josh Kramer ..............................Bismarck

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CAPITAL ELECTRIC Cooperative is an equal opportunity provider and employer.