

PowerLines

January 2024

Reliable power and extraordinary service for today and tomorrow

Reflecting on 2023 and looking ahead to 2024 by General Manager Steve Stroshane



Happy New Year from your electric co-op. As we begin 2024, I'd like to share highlights from 2023 and a preview of what's ahead.

✳ Investing in reliable power

In 2023, our construction work plan invested \$6.3 million in the electric system to reduce the number and length of power outages for members. System outages averaged less than one hour per member for the year, excluding major events.

In 2024, the co-op will invest \$5.9 million to ensure reliable power. Our work plan includes:

- Converting 26 miles of overhead line to underground.
- Replacing 17 miles of aging overhead line.
- Upgrading substation equipment, so power can be rerouted quickly during outages.
- Clearing trees and brush from rights-of-way to improve safety and reduce outages.
- Inspecting poles, transformers and equipment to replace damaged equipment before it causes an outage.

Other investments in 2024 include a digger-derrick truck and cybersecurity improvements.

We are also in the planning stages with Dairyland Power Cooperative, our power supplier, to build a new substation north of Somerset. The Cedar Lake Substation is the first new substation to serve Polk-Burnett members since 2001. It will help meet the growing need for energy in Somerset and Star Prairie areas, and will relieve pressure at Farmington Substation. Construction is set to begin in 2025.

Dairyland owns all substations in our service area, and we deliver power from the substation to you, our local members.

✳ New electric services continue to climb

2023 was a strong year for new construction, with 239 new service connections through the end of November. Electricity sales are increasing at a moderate pace, with some growth offset by energy efficiency.

✳ No rate increase in 2024

Polk-Burnett electricity rates increased 5% in 2023. This was our first rate increase since 2010. For more than a decade, the co-op absorbed millions of dollars invested into the electric system, including 2011 and 2019 storm restorations, a systemwide meter upgrade and annual power line construction to keep us in the top 25% of all co-ops nationwide for reliability.

There is no 2024 rate increase, but a cost-of-service study is scheduled to help us forecast revenue requirements and ensure fair and equitable rates. We will continue to keep you informed, and deliver extraordinary service for your dollar.

You may not realize it, but Polk-Burnett does not generate electricity. Instead, we purchase it from our energy provider, Dairyland Power Cooperative. 58% of all revenue collected from members is used to buy wholesale power.

✳ Giving money back

In 2023, Polk-Burnett returned \$1.58 million to members. Instead of generating profit for distant investors, Polk-Burnett allocates and returns Capital Credits to the people we serve. Annual Capital Credits are a direct benefit of your co-op membership.

I'm also proud to say that Polk-Burnett gives back to our community in ways that do not impact your electric rates. In 2023, Operation Round Up awarded more than \$83,000 to 73 local nonprofits, thanks to the generosity of members who round up!

Polk-Burnett also awarded \$145,500 in scholarships to the Class of 2023, with 97 students each receiving \$1,500 to continue their education. Co-op scholarships are given to children of co-op members, and are funded with unclaimed Capital Credits. You can see all Operation Round Up and scholarship winners on polkburnett.com.

✳ Diversifying our power supply

Polk-Burnett supports a sustainable transition to clean energy and we're strategically investing in utility-scale solar to become less reliant on volatile energy markets. In 2023, we partnered with OneEnergy Renewables to develop a 15-acre solar site in Georgetown, about 10 miles east of our Centuria office. The 2 MW solar array will generate 4,500,000 kWh of electricity annually, enough to power about 375 homes.

Our first SunTuria Solar array was dedicated in 2017 behind our Centuria office.

We will continue to evaluate solar and diversify our power supply when it leads to financial and operational benefits. Co-op solar projects relieve high demand at substations and offset energy market costs by generating power locally.

✳ Extraordinary service for today and tomorrow

A final highlight for 2023 and the future is improved communication technology. Members can connect with us on our SmartHub app and on our website, where we have a new chat feature, as well as self-service webforms.

Our upgraded meter system is helping lineworkers pinpoint the exact location of power outages, so they can get your lights on faster. And we're also sending outage texts to members who have a cell number on their account. Our goal is to restore power quickly and safely, while keeping you informed.

As we turn our focus to 2024, we'll continue working to provide reliable power with efficiency and extraordinary service – for today and tomorrow.

Please call us at 800-421-0283, or visit our office or website to learn about co-op programs and ways we can help you save energy and serve you better this New Year, including billing options, EnergySense rebates and SmartHub to track and manage your energy use.

Run for a seat on the co-op board

Polk-Burnett holds elections each spring for the co-op board of directors. This year, board positions in co-op districts 7, 8 and 9 will be on the ballot. Members in those districts have an opportunity to get involved in co-op decision making by running for a seat on the co-op board. Directors serve three-year terms and represent all co-op members at monthly meetings. If you are interested in running for an open board position in district 7, 8 or 9, contact the general manager's office, 800-421-0283, ext. 313. The deadline to apply is March 3. [Learn more about Polk-Burnett's board of directors and see map of co-op districts on polkburnett.com.](#)

Make a resolution to boost energy efficiency in 2024 with co-op rebates

Polk-Burnett's EnergySense program offers rebates and incentives to help you improve energy efficiency and comfort in your home, while lowering your electric bills. Visit [polkburnett.com](#) or call 800-421-0283, ext. 318, for rebate forms.

- Appliance, Appliance Recycling and Lighting Rebate
- Commercial and Ag Efficiency Rebate
- Marathon Water Heater Special Member Price
- Rebate on Home Performance Test and Subsequent Home Improvement Upgrades
- HVAC, Air Source and Geothermal Heat Pump Rebate
- Renewable Energy System Rebate
- EV Charger Rebate





Get to know your Co-op Board President Ed Gullickson

Ed Gullickson joined Polk-Burnett's board of directors in 2008 and became president in 2009. He also serves on the board for Dairyland Power Cooperative, 2016 to present, and was chair from 2019 to 2021.

Ed said his background in electrical engineering and his desire to "know how things work" drew him to board service for his local utility. His interest and experience in serving his local community also led him to the co-op board. In addition to Polk-Burnett and Dairyland, Ed's board experience includes the Town of Garfield (31 years), Allied Emergency Services (31 years), Amery Ambulance Service, Wisconsin Towns Association, Polk County and Amery School District.

Ed started his career in electrical engineering at Sperry-Univac in the Twin Cities, where he worked for 12 years on some very exciting and innovative projects, including being part of the design team for the lunar module control panel for the Apollo moon landing program, and working on the first mainframe computers to manage airline reservation systems and banking operations.

Ed also owned an electrical contracting business for 15 years, and today owns Doors of Distinction, a local business that designs, manufactures and sells architectural-grade interior and exterior doors nationwide. The business grew out of a hobby, and combines his love of engineering and woodworking.

Ed said he is "most proud of the tremendous employees at Polk-Burnett today. There is a lot of trust at the co-op, as well as effective communication and adoption of technology to make our work more efficient and deliver extraordinary service. Overall, it's a good business atmosphere that keeps members first. You can see that in our member survey results."

Ed believes strong co-op leadership will be important in the coming years. "We need to move in the direction of clean energy, but carbon reduction relies on unproven technology and the timeline to retire fossil-fuel power plants is unrealistic. We need to slow down to keep electricity reliable and affordable," he said.

Ed and his wife, Joyce, live in Amery, where they enjoy gardening, spending time with their six grandchildren and being involved in the Amery Lions Club.



Energy Saver: Did you know that cooking with smaller appliances (such as slow cookers, instant pots and toaster ovens) is more energy efficient than using your oven or stovetop? Cozy up for some comfort food!



Outage text alerts for co-op members

We know that power outages are inconvenient and can cause problems for you and your family. You told us that you want better communication when your lights go out. We listened.

Polk-Burnett has an outage text alert program for co-op members. If we have your cell phone number, we'll send you a text alert when the power goes out at your location.

1. Receive a text when the power goes out at your location.
2. Receive text updates with outage cause and estimated restoration time, when possible.
3. Receive a text when power is restored at your location.

You will not be charged for text messaging, and you can opt out at any time.

Make sure your account information is up to date, especially your cell number, to stay in the know if your power goes out. Update your account on SmartHub, polkburnett.com (My Electric Account menu) or call 800-421-0283, ext. 335.

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Keep your propane tank clear of ice and snow

As a courtesy to your propane driver, please maintain a path to your propane tank and keep your tank clear of snow and ice to allow propane to vaporize properly. Polk-Burnett Propane reminds you to check your tank percentage from time to time this winter, even if you're on auto-fill, and contact us if your tank is at 30% or less. Call Polk-Burnett Propane if we can assist with propane deliveries to your home or business, 800-421-0283, ext. 378 or 411.



Stay clear of galloping power lines

The combination of high winds and an accumulation of ice on power lines can cause the lines to gallop forcefully. Ice, wind and galloping lines can result in flickering lights and power outages. Be safe! If your lights go out this winter, see live outage map on polkburnett.com. Report outages on SmartHub or 800-421-0283. Keep away from icy galloping lines, as well as fallen power lines, trees and branches near power lines.

IF YOU RECEIVE AN EMAIL SURVEY, WE APPRECIATE YOUR FEEDBACK TO HELP US IMPROVE.

All members who submit a survey will be entered in a drawing for a \$50 bill credit.

Polk-Burnett is your local Touchstone Energy Cooperative. Reliable power with efficiency and extraordinary service.

Follow us on Facebook. Sign up for our SmartHub app.

800-421-0283 • polkburnett.com



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