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Bluestem NEWS

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FROM THE GENERAL MANAGER

Hope, Comfort and Continued Blessings for the New Year



Mike Morton

At this point in 2020, most of us are exhausted from the onslaught of political and pandemic messaging and are counting down to the new year with hopefulness

in our hearts and minds.

As I write this, the nation is just days away from an election that, no matter what happens, will change the trajectory of our country. Whether our candidates won or lost, we must take into account that we are all Americans and we must pull together for the benefit of this country's future. Just as Cooperative Principle No. 6 — Cooperation Among Cooperatives — suggests, working together is the best

strategy to empower all of us and build stronger co-op communities.

I would argue that since our daily lives experienced upheaval in relation to the pandemic, cooperation within our rural communities hasn't wavered, even with social distancing and other new protocols in place. Homegrown small businesses with fewer than 20 employees, the heart of our rural communities accounting for 89% of all U.S. businesses, continue to find creative ways to adapt to the new reality of the coronavirus. And we, their friends and neighbors, continue to support their endeavors to keep our community strong. I'm not saying things have been easy. Far from it. But every day I witness the encouragement and care for those striving to keep their businesses going despite the obstacles.

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2021 Annual Meeting Canceled

Bluestem Electric Cooperative's 2021 annual meeting, which was scheduled for March 2021, has been canceled. The Bluestem trustees, at their October board meeting, made the difficult decision to cancel the meeting due to the uncertainty of the ongoing coronavirus pandemic. The annual report of Bluestem Electric will be published in the March edition of *Kansas Country Living* magazine.

Bluestem Administrative Offices to Consolidate to Realize Savings and Gain Efficiencies

Field Staff/Line Crew to continue operating out of Clay Center

At its Oct. 19 meeting, the Bluestem Electric Cooperative Board of Trustees approved a plan to consolidate the co-op's Clay Center administrative office with its Wamego office effective Feb. 1, 2021. This office and staff consolidation will improve office operation efficiencies and create a projected savings for the member-owned electric co-op of around \$900,000 over a 10-year period, by having the entire office operations team under one roof and eliminating duplicate facility expenses.

Every decision made at Bluestem is mission-focused to better serve the members. **Bluestem's Mission Statement: It shall be the mission of Bluestem Electric Cooperative to provide safe and reliable electric energy and other services to our consumers as efficiently and economically as possible.** Bluestem trustees and management staff want to be able to look members in the eyes and tell them what is being done to maintain stable rates and hold costs down while continuing to provide safe and reliable service.

The Bluestem line crew based in Clay Center will continue to work from the current Clay Center warehouse located at 610 Pomeroy. Having a warehouse for the field staff, trucks and equipment in the Clay Center area allows for optimum response times for Bluestem members located in Districts 1 and 2 of the 11-county area Bluestem serves.

In continuing our commitment to the Clay Center

community, the co-op hopes to build or relocate to a larger warehouse within the Clay Center area in the near future. Bluestem will also continue its membership in the Clay Center Chamber of Commerce and Clay County Economic Development Group, continue to offer community safety training events, participate in business expos and continue to support the local students with scholarships and other academic awards.

Cooperative Principle No. 7 is **Concern for Community**, so while Bluestem Electric Cooperative focuses on its mission of providing safe and reliable electric energy to our consumers as efficiently and economically as possible, we're also interested in the sustainable development of all communities throughout our 11-county service territory, and this will never change.

Bluestem staff realizes the office consolidation may alter the routine of some Bluestem members who are accustomed to paying their bill in person. Bluestem offers several ways to pay your bill and a Bluestem staff member will gladly help you find the most convenient method, whether it be by mail, online, automatic bank draft or by phone.

Additionally, for any Bluestem member who needs to meet with a Bluestem representative to discuss service, please call us at 800-558-1580 and we will gladly schedule an in-person appointment with the appropriate staff member.

Co-op Trustee Candidate Nominees

District 1, Position 2

BRUCE MEYER, Palmer

Meyer is president of the Bank of Palmer. He and his wife, Theresa, live outside of Palmer. He also represents the electric co-ops in the state of Kansas on the Federated Rural Electric Insurance Exchange board of directors. He said he is running to continue to represent members in maintaining reliable and reasonable cost of electricity.

District 2, Position 1

GARY BUSS, Leonardville

Buss is a farmer/stockman. He and his wife, Jodie, live in the rural Leonardville area. His reason for running for the board is his belief that "electricity is vital in nearly every aspect of many of our lives. It is my desire to help Bluestem to deliver this commodity reliably, safely and as economically as possible to our co-op members."

District 3, Position 4

HAROLD MCCARTER, Wamego

McCarter is a farmer/rancher. He and his wife, Judy, live in the Wamego area. He currently serves on the board in District 3 and would like to stay on to help keep the lights on for generations to come.

STEPHEN J. O'SHEA, Blaine

O'Shea is retired from Caterpillar in Wamego after 48 years and is a farmer/stockman with a background in crops and

hay. He and his wife, Kellie, live in northern Pottawatomie County in the Blaine area. He said he is running for the board because he was asked to represent the area and will be a voice regarding cost, employment, equipment needs, safety, service and future goals.

District 4, Position 1

AMANDA GNADT, Alma

Gnadt lives just east of Alma with her husband, Alex, and their son, Adler. She works part-time for Kansas State University and assists Alex with their limestone quarry and farming activities. She is running because, "electricity is crucial to keeping farms and rural businesses running and I want to support those businesses and the families who choose to live rural. On the board, I will support initiatives ensuring dependable, quality service to Bluestem customers."

ERIC PECK, Manhattan

Peck lives in the Zeandale area and is a retired military officer who has a farm, helps his neighbors farm and volunteers as a firefighter and an instructor for the Service member Agricultural Vocational Education non-profit. He said he would like to keep Bluestem service reliable and reasonably priced and is also interested because of his previous experience with the Kansas National Guard and Kansas Division of Emergency Management on disaster response and mitigation.

GMS Mapping Service Area



Bluestem Electric has contracted with Global Mapping Solutions (GMS), to do GSI System mapping. Accurate mapping helps Bluestem inventory poles and wire and note equipment location, which helps in the event of storm damage in restoring the power lines. GMS' personnel and trucks will be navigating Bluestem's system tagging and mapping poles and equipment. If you see them in the area, they will have a "Contracted by: Bluestem Electric" sign on their vehicles.

Bluestem Offers 10 SCHOLARSHIPS

Bluestem Electric Cooperative will award six \$750 scholarships and four \$500 scholarships to high school seniors whose parents or guardians are members of Bluestem Electric.

The scholarships will be awarded to the top 10 candidates who complete a two-stage process. The first stage will include an online application and test that must be completed and submitted by **FRIDAY, JAN. 15, 2021, AT 4:30 P.M.** In the second stage, a panel of judges will interview finalists on Wednesday, Feb. 24, 2021.

For more information, contact your high school counselor or call Bluestem Electric at 785-456-2212 or 785-632-3111.

Sign Up for Auto Pay on SmartHub

Save time and pay your monthly electric bill automatically by bank draft. No need to find a postage stamp or worry if your payment will reach us on time. Contact Bluestem Electric for more information and request an application or you can find it online at www.bluestemelectric.com.

To sign up, you will need to provide the following information: your name, bank name, phone number, checking account number, routing number (ABA No.), bank address and Bluestem account number(s).

You can also pay your bill online at www.bluestemelectric.com using your bank account or credit card. Click on the SmartHub Pay Online button. It's safe and secure!



Candidates, Bluestem Management Meet to Discuss Issues Potentially Impacting Co-ops

Bluestem Electric Cooperative held a series of Co-ops Vote meetings on Oct. 20 at Bluestem's Wamego office to discuss a variety of topics and issues potentially affecting Kansas rural electric cooperatives.

Bluestem General Manager Mike Morton, Assistant Manager Jason Moore, Director of Member Services Kevin Heptig and Bluestem Trustee Dean Blanka were joined by Kansas Electric Cooperatives, Inc. staff and area legislators and candidates to discuss the cooperative business model and how Kansas' rural electric cooperatives serve their consumer-members, cooperative impacts and responses during COVID-19, the 2021 legislative session, and the second part of the two-phase legislative study passed by the 2019



From left: Bluestem Trustee Dean Blanka, Bluestem General Manager Mike Morton, Rep. Sydney Carlin, Rep. Tom Hawk and Assistant Manager Jason Moore.

legislature and released earlier this year.

The event was part of a series of events held across the state this year for Co-ops Vote, a non-partisan effort to connect electric cooperatives with candidates and current elected officials who serve in their service territory to discuss issues of importance to the cooperatives and their members from across Kansas.

Candidates and legislative guests participating in the day-long series of meetings at Bluestem's Wamego office included Representatives **SYDNEY CARLIN**, **BRENDA DIETRICH**, and **RON HIGHLAND** and Senators **KEVIN BRAUN** and **TOM HAWK**; as well as candidates **LISA MOSER**, **CHERYL ARTHUR** and **MIKE DODSON**.



Area legislators and candidates discuss issues important to electric cooperatives and cooperative members.

Blessings for the New Year Continued from page 16A ►

The pandemic brought new challenges to our education system as well, but our school administrators, support staff and teachers continue to manage the constant adaptations required with grace and resolve. For some, distance learning is a must and parents unexpectedly find themselves not only tackling the challenges of "new math" but also technology that can be frustrating at times to say the least.

On a larger scale, the pandemic opened just about everyone's eyes to the inequities of broadband internet access for rural America, which may finally lead to improvements for those of us who struggled to manage online education, business transactions, and video-conferencing for work or with

quarantined family. Yes, it took a global pandemic to shine the light on this issue, but we may now have traction to help close the internet gap.

But there have been silver linings during this unparalleled year. From rediscovering the simple yet enjoyable game night with family to finally organizing junk drawers and garages, Kansans prove (once again!) the prospect of hope and comfort can be unearthed in every difficult situation.

The saying, "It's always darkest before the dawn" obviously was not penned by a Kansan. If it had been, it would read more like, "It may be darkest before the dawn, but find the light that will see us through."

Bluestem wishes you and yours continued blessings in 2021.

