



Steve Lucas, CEO

SREC LINEMEN LIGHT UP OUR LIVES

Keeping the lights on is a team effort, with every single member of the Scenic Rivers Energy Cooperative staff playing an important role.

In April though, we take the opportunity to recognize a group of highly trained employees who are especially key to energizing our homes and businesses—the operations crew.

These are the people who, quite literally, light up our homes and businesses and help keep our communities safe. During nasty weather, when most folks are heading in, our operations employees head out, working in conditions that are uncomfortable at best, and downright dangerous at worst.

They're the ones whose weekends and holidays are sometimes interrupted to help ensure that yours are not. They work around the clock if necessary, sometimes on a moment's notice, until power is restored to every last member on the line.

In good weather, these same employees are out in the fields performing often hard, physical labor to maintain the system and ensure that our equipment is working efficiently and safely. They also travel to area schools and community gatherings, teaching others—especially youth—about safety around electricity.

And it's not just our own community they're taking care of. When a severe storm hits a neighboring community and causes

damage beyond what the local electric co-op is able to handle, our lineworkers are always willing and eager to volunteer their time and lend a hand.

When they're not working, these guys are still taking care of their communities. Look around and you'll see them, coaching youth sports teams and volunteering their time to other community events and organizations.

For all these reasons, April 10 has been designated Lineman Appreciation Day. Please join me in thanking all lineworkers, but especially the fantastic crew that works tirelessly for members of Scenic Rivers Energy:

Lancaster office

Jason Knapp, Shane Crowley, Joe Ihm, Travis Klein, Patrick Pennekamp, Matt Rasmussen, Tory Henkel

Darlington office

Jim Wolf, Lucas Ritchie, Kevin Weber, Matt Ritchie

Gays Mills

Andy Kilcoyne, Reggie Lomas, Robert Tank, Daniel Welsh, Earl Winsor

Staking Engineers

Chad Olmstead, Phil Schneider



MEMBER PHOTOS OF THE MONTH

The winning photo from SREC's 2017 Member Photo Contest for March (left) was taken in Lafayette County by Michael Bradley. The winning photo for April (right) was taken just off Southwest Road in Platteville by Michael Momot. We still have a few copies of our 2017 calendar available. Pick yours up from any of our offices—in Lancaster, Gays Mills, and Darlington—while supplies last.

And keep snapping: Next year's Member Photo Contest runs until August 21. Visit our website, www.sre.coop, for details.



A Sweet Hobby

Prairie du Chien pair makes maple syrup



Dave and Phyllis Wesener have long loved their hilly, wooded property on Irish Ridge Road in Prairie du Chien. The Scenic Rivers Energy Cooperative members had used it for hunting for 20 years before building their home here and moving in full time after retiring in 2010.

However, it wasn't until a few years ago when they began tapping—literally—into the potential of the maple trees that grow in abundance along their hillside.

“We had retired down here, and we already had the property and now we had the time,” Phyllis explained. “We needed something to keep busy. It was that time of year between winter and spring when we’re not really doing a lot of things, and we always had the trees. So Dave said, ‘You know, we should try tapping these.’”

“You just need a pan and a heat source... And a tree, of course.

—Dave Wesener

Although neither had made maple syrup before, the process wasn't entirely new to them. Dave has a relative with a commercial operation, and he used to spend time in the woods with friends whose parents made maple syrup while he was growing up in the central Wisconsin area. Plus, as Dave points out, making maple syrup is not complicated.

“You just need a pan and a heat source,” he said. “That’s it in a nutshell. And a tree of course.”

They’ve got plenty of trees. The Weseners tap about 50

maple trees on their property, and there are about 25 more farther down the hill that could be tapped if they ever want to expand. That, however, is not likely to happen. Last spring, the Weseners produced just over 13 gallons of maple syrup, which is plenty enough for them.

“I think this is the right size,” Dave said of their operation. “We’re never going to do more than this.”

Tapping Trees The amount of syrup the Weseners produce in a season depends on the season itself. Dave said the sap starts running in maple trees when the temperatures hit at least 40 degrees during the day and return to freezing at night. The length of season and amount of sap that’s collected depends on how long those typical spring temperature patterns hold.

“If you have those optimal days and nights temperaturewise, then the season could go on for six weeks,” Dave explained. “However, once the buds start coming, the sap gets a terrible taste to it—a really bitter taste. You know you’re done at that point.”

And chances are you’ll be ready to be done. The maple syrup season is brief, but it’s intense. The Weseners explained that sap is perishable; if the days are unseasonably warm, as they were last spring, the sap must be boiled right away before it gets too warm.

If the weather is cooperating, the sap keeps running, and just keeping up with the taps is work enough. The Weseners use plastic tubing to collect the sap, which drips from the spiles that are tapped in the tree trunks into plastic pails set



The color of the syrup indicates at which point in the season the sap was collected—the earlier in the season, the lighter the color.

on the ground. The sap from each tree is collected daily. On an optimal spring day, Dave said, a tree will run about 2-1/2 gallons of sap in 24 hours. With 50 trees—some of the larger ones having two taps—that's a lot of sap to haul.

Sap to Syrup The Weseners bring the sap uphill near the house, where they boil it in a flat pan on an open stove. Maple syrup is produced when water is removed from the sap, leaving a higher concentration of sugar. But since sap contains only about 2 percent of sugar, there's a lot of liquid to evaporate. This is why most maple syrup operations take place outdoors or in a separate outbuilding.

“You want to do as much of this outside as you can because if you cook it inside your house you're going to have so much moisture in the air from boiling 40 gallons at once,” Phyllis pointed out.

She explained that they boil the sap to about 214 degrees outside, then bring it into the house where they can more closely monitor the temperature during the final stages of cooking. At this point the sap is brought up another approximate 7 degrees above the boiling point of water, which can vary day

by day. The sap will thicken and burn if it's kept over the heat too long, so keeping a close watch at this point is crucial.

Also, making maple syrup is a process that has no shortcuts, and no opportunity for long breaks. “Once you get started, you have to keep going until you're done,” Phyllis said.

The result is an intense stretch of long workdays. When the sap is running, Dave and Phyllis put in full days, frequently working under an outdoor floodlight until 10 p.m. or so.

“We can boil off 5 gallons of sap an hour,” Dave said, “but when you're bringing in over 100 gallons of sap a day, it takes a long time.”

The Weseners admit they don't sleep much during the spring, but they don't seem to mind. With the cookstove fire lighting up the night and warming the air, and coyotes providing background noise from the woods, “It's fun being out in the spring like this,” Dave said.

Gifts and Giveaways The Weseners seal the syrup in jars and use it themselves on everything from ice cream to oatmeal; they even make maple syrup candy. Phyllis also frequently substitutes maple syrup for white sugar when she bakes; conversion charts can be found online.

Still, they produce more syrup than they can consume themselves, which is fortunate for the friends and family members who are lucky recipients of maple syrup gifts. Phyllis also likes to barter with other food producers, trading, for example, maple syrup for homemade granola. The Weseners also donate jars of maple syrup for local fund-raisers.

If a recipient of a gifted jar develops a taste for the syrup and then requests a larger batch, the Weseners might charge a modest amount simply to cover the cost of the extra jars. But they have no desire to branch out into commercial sales. For them, making maple syrup is not about making a profit.

“We're just taking advantage of what we've been blessed with and sharing it with others,” Phyllis said.—*Mary Erickson*



Left: To tap a maple tree, a hole is drilled about two inches or so into the trunk and a spile is inserted in the hole. Dave and Phyllis Wesener use plastic tubing to collect the sap into plastic buckets. Right: The Weseners make both maple syrup and maple candy.



YOUTH LEADERSHIP CONGRESS

Three-day conference planned by and for teens offers abundance of opportunities

We've got a great opportunity for high school students of SREC member families who are looking for something exciting to do this summer!

The annual Youth Leadership Congress, sponsored by Wisconsin's electric co-ops and facilitated by the Wisconsin Electric Cooperative Association, brings together more than 100 high school students from around the state each summer for three days of fun, leadership development, and cooperative education. The event is held on the campus of UW-River Falls, this year July 26-28.

The Youth Leadership Congress is unique in that it is planned and developed by a youth board elected at the previous year's event. These students plan a jam-packed program featuring renowned motivational speakers, interactive team-building activities, and hands-on sessions led by cooperative leaders.

There's even a banquet and a dance!

This event is filled with opportunities—all students have a chance to run for a spot on the seven-member youth board, which is eligible to attend the annual National Rural Electric Cooperative Association National Youth Tour in Washington, D.C., the following June. Students may also enter an essay contest for a chance to earn college scholarships.

Perhaps the best part is there's no cost to the participating student! Costs are covered by Wisconsin's electric cooperatives and the Federated Youth Foundation. SREC will even provide transportation to and from the conference.

To learn more about this exciting opportunity, visit www.weca.coop and click on Youth/Foundation, or contact SREC by calling 608-723-2121 and asking for Heidi. You can also learn more on our website, www.sre.coop.

DON'T FORGET...

The SREC Annual Meeting is
Saturday, April 8
at the Youth & Ag Building in
Lancaster (916 East Elm St.)

Doors open at 9 a.m.

Business meeting begins at 9:30 a.m.

- Election for directors in Districts 1, 5, and 9
- Eligible students can enter drawing for college scholarships
- Lunch will be served following the business meeting

For more information, check the annual report that was mailed with the March issue of this magazine, or visit our website at www.sre.coop.



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Call Diggers Hotline at 811 or 800-242-8511 to have underground lines and cables located before you start your project. It's free, and it could save you from injury and/or costly damage!



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