

Steve Lucas, CEO

## BE ALERT FOR PHONE SCAMS

**I want to warn all our members to be on the alert for a phone scam that appears to be making its rounds in Wisconsin, including our southwestern corner of the state.**

A company identifying itself as Scenic Rivers Energy Cooperative has been calling people to tell them they're behind on their electric bills and encouraging them to get a money transfer card from Dollar General to pay off the bill or face immediate disconnection.

This same scam has been occurring elsewhere in Wisconsin; in fact, a member of Chippewa Valley Electric Cooperative succumbed to the same scam just a few weeks ago and lost hundreds of dollars. That victim reported to the *Chippewa Herald* that the fraudulent caller was convincing; he knew her name, address, and account number, and he threatened to shut down service at her place of business in an hour if she didn't provide the numbers to the money transfer cards. He caught her at a busy moment when her mind was elsewhere, and she panicked at the prospect of being immediately shut down. It wasn't until later in the evening, when she was home from work and had a chance to absorb what had happened, that her unease grew. She called the co-op in the morning and learned what she had by then suspected: She'd been scammed.

SREC does not make collection calls outside of our normal business hours of 7:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. weekdays, and we make attempts to work out payment arrangements on a



delinquent account. Disconnecting anyone's service is the very last thing we want to do; we will be in contact with a struggling member numerous times before we even consider disconnection.

Here's our process for disconnection:

If a member's bill hasn't been paid by the 20th of the month, we send out a late notice. If payment is not received after that, we call the member. If payment is still not received after our calls, we send out a PINK letter with account information and a date when SREC will proceed with disconnections.

If you receive a collections call that feels suspicious in any way, DO NOT turn over money. Call the SREC office during business hours to confirm the legitimacy of the call.

Sadly, this type of scam is not uncommon, especially at this time of year, when scammers prey on people's concerns of being without heat. In most cases, once you've turned over your money, it's gone. Lisa

Schiller, director of investigations and media relations at the Better Business Bureau of Wisconsin, told the *Chippewa Herald* that money obtained through prepaid debit cards and wire transfers is "pretty much untraceable." She added that phone numbers are generally not

helpful, since calls can be routed to another location, making it appear the calls are coming from another number. She encourages members to notify their co-op and also the local police of any suspicious calls, but also to go to [www.bbb.org/scamtracker](http://www.bbb.org/scamtracker) to report the scam. This site tracks scam trends throughout the country and Canada and is a useful tool in investigating scams.

Stay alert, everyone.

## MEMBER PHOTO OF THE MONTH

Throughout 2016, we will feature the winning photos from SREC's first-ever Member Photo Contest in the *Wisconsin Energy Cooperative News*. The winning photo for January was taken by Sandra Waldman of Sitzer, who captured the crisp beauty of early-morning hoarfrost on cockleburs at her farm.

Each of the winning photos is included in our 2016 member calendar, available free while supplies last from any of SREC's offices. Pick yours up today!

And remember to keep clicking for the 2016 Member Photo Contest! Watch our website, [www.sre.coop](http://www.sre.coop), and this magazine for details!





# CUTTING-EDGE CRAFT

Prairie du Chien knifemaker blends function and art in his unique creations

**P**hil Toberman has one of the sharpest hobbies around. The Prairie du Chien native and SREC member makes one-of-a-kind knives—everything from hunting knives to filet knives, skinning knives, and bowie knives—that are works of art as well as fully functional tools.

In fact, they're more than just functional. Crafted painstakingly by hand, the knives are so durable that Toberman said they're likely to outlast their owners. However, it's their unique appearance that really sets them apart.

Toberman makes the entire knife himself—blade, sheath, and handle. He sews the sheaths out of scrap leather that he buys from a saddle maker in South Dakota, and he creates the handles out of antlers from wild game, some of which he hunted himself or that a customer hunted. He fashions the blades from either stainless steel or unusual repurposed pieces such as sawmill blades or railroad spikes, depending on the

knife. The result is a knife that's as unique as the materials it's made from.

"Every knife is different," Toberman pointed out. "You'll never find two the same."

Even Toberman doesn't fully know what the end result will be when he begins making a knife. He starts with the blade, which sets the tone for the rest

of the tool. If it's a custom-made knife, the owner's personal characteristics and needs are also taken into account.

"The handle is quite a selection. The handle has to fit the blade," Toberman explained. "For example, you can't put a small handle on a big blade. It has to be long enough. And then it has to have a curl to it. Is the person you're making the knife for right-handed or left-handed? Because if the handle curls toward the body, then it's harder to get hold of."

**A Rendezvous with Friends** – Toberman's been making knives for about 25 years. His craft is an offshoot of another hobby he's passionate about—participating in fur-trading and trapping re-enactments.

"I got interested in rendezvous because I like that lifestyle," Toberman explained. "And I figured we all need to learn to do some of those things—to be self-reliant. We all need to learn those skills."

Toberman partners with friend and fellow outdoorsman Dick Tesar to participate in area rendezvous events; the two usually participate in two or three a year. It was Tesar who taught Toberman how to make knives using different steel sources for blades and deer or elk antlers for handles.



Phil Toberman, wearing a deerskin jacket that he made, displays some of the unique knives he makes using mostly antlers as handles.

Another friend, Doc LaMoureaux of Hawkins, taught Toberman more knifemaking techniques, including LaMoureaux's signature "stacked knife" style, with layers of leather, wood, and bone built into the handle. LaMoureaux also taught Toberman a lot about working with leather.

"The leatherwork is my favorite part," Toberman said. Each sheath is as unique as the knife it's made for; Toberman applies snaps and handles where appropriate to the knife and often applies a tooling stamp design, usually of animals, onto the face of the sheath.

Toberman's leatherwork skills extend beyond knife sheaths. He also makes the full deerskin outfits that he wears at rendezvous, sewing them by hand with sinew and sometimes applying buttons made of bone and beadwork that he trades for with other rendezvous participants. Like his knives, Toberman's deerskin clothing is durable and fully functional.

"I wear the deerskin pants hunting," he said. "They're really good in the briars and weeds because nothing clings to them, so you can walk through the brush and come back without your clothes being all full of the weeds and stickers."

**Historical Encounter** – Toberman typically makes about 30 knives a year, with two or three in various stages of production at any given time. He gives away as many as he

sells. He donates three knives a year to the Rusk County Wildlife Association (Toberman is a double electric co-op member; in addition to living on SREC lines, he has a cabin in Rusk County on Jump River Electric's lines) and frequently contributes to turkey banquets and other outdoor organization events in southwest Wisconsin.

He and Tesar sell knives at the rendezvous they attend, and Toberman also sells directly to individual customers year-round. Most of these customers have seen or heard of his work and have specific requests, either for a certain type of knife, maybe with a handle from their own trophy buck, and possibly with their name inscribed on the handle. Toberman has sold knives all over the country—including Florida, Texas, New York, and Hawaii—and even in Canada.

"My claim to fame is that I made a knife for John Quincy Adams III," he said. "I was going to Alaska and I met him on the Amtrack train. I overheard him talking to someone else so I introduced myself and we got to talking. I told him about my knives. He doesn't hunt, but he asked me to make a knife for his brother, Don, who hunts."

Toberman said he and Adams, a descendent of the fourth president of the United States, were at the point of discussing sale logistics when Toberman offered to make the knife, with Don Adams' name inscribed on the handle, and then send it to

Adams. If he liked it, he could send a check. If not, he could just send the knife back. The two agreed to these trusting terms. Toberman made the knife, sent it to John Quincy Adams III, who promptly sent a check. Toberman still has the note Adams scrawled with the check, stating that "Don loves the knife!"

That was Toberman's most memorable sale, but he's had other memorable experiences. He pointed to a knife made with Damascus steel for the blade and the tusk of a wart hog for the handle as probably his most unusual knife. He shot the wart hog himself on a 2013 hunting trip to South Africa.

**Hobby vs. Work** – Although he's had a wide range of customers from across the country and beyond—some of them loyal customers who seek out his work at the various events he donates to—Toberman has never actively sought to expand his market. A retired 3M supervisor, Toberman engages in knifemaking and rendezvous activities simply because he enjoys them.

"I don't advertise or anything like that because it's just a hobby," he said of his knifemaking. "Right now it's fun for me. If it becomes a job, then it becomes work."—*Mary Erickson*

Contact Phil Toberman at 608-326-2317 or [pjtobe@centurylink.net](mailto:pjtobe@centurylink.net).



1. Phil Toberman made this knife stand out of antlers. 2. The knife at right started out as an old railroad spike, like the one at left. 3. This knife was made with the stacked knife method Toberman learned from Doc LaMoureaux. It also has Toberman's signature "P" mark that he puts on each piece of his work. 4. Toberman will personalize knife handles with the owner's name. 5. This knife's handle is a tusk from a wart hog Toberman shot in South Africa. The blade is Damascus steel. 6. This letter opener was made with a brass bolt.





# DEADLINE FOR DIRECTOR CANDIDATE PETITIONS IS JANUARY 12

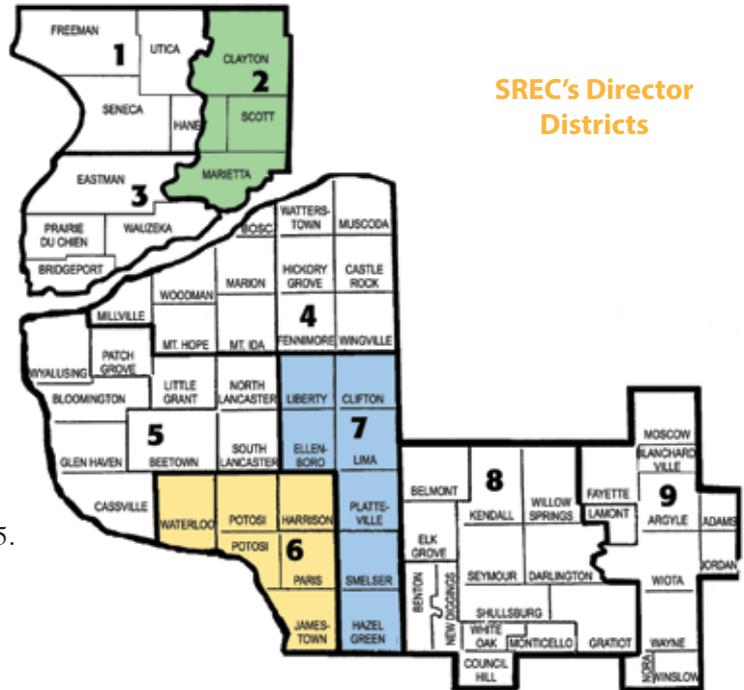
## SREC seeking candidates in Districts 2, 6, 7

The terms of the directors in Districts 2, 6, and 7 expire at the 2016 annual meeting, when elections will be held for those positions. The Bylaws provide for nomination of candidates by petition. A petition must meet the following requirements:

- The petition must be signed by 15 or more members of Scenic Rivers Energy Cooperative.
- The members signing the petition must reside in the same district the nominee would represent.
- In the case of a joint membership or a tenancy in common membership, one or all of the joint or common members may sign the petition, but whether only one signs or all sign, it only counts as one (1) signature.
- The petition must be delivered to the cooperative's headquarters in Lancaster at least 90 days prior to the annual meeting—that is, no later than on January 12, 2015.

To be eligible to run for director, a candidate must meet all of the qualifications set forth in the Bylaws. Those qualifications include:

- The candidate must be a member of Scenic Rivers Energy Cooperative and s/he must reside in the district to be represented.
- The candidate cannot:
  - be employed by or have a financial interest in a business that competes with the cooperative or that sells energy or supplies to the cooperative;
  - hold or be a candidate for a public office that is elected on a party ticket;
  - have been employed by the cooperative anytime in the past five years;
  - participated as a party or a witness in any litigation against the cooperative in the past five years;
  - be delinquent more than 90 days on the payment of any amount owed the cooperative; or
  - have been convicted of any offense involving dishonesty.



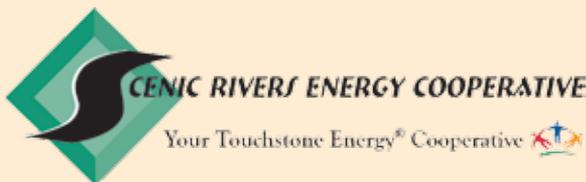
SREC's Director Districts

- The candidate must participate in an orientation process to assure an understanding of the responsibilities of directors (unless s/he is currently serving as a director). Information about that orientation will be provided to all qualified candidates nominated by petitions as described above.

In the case of a joint tenancy or tenancy in common membership, all the joint or common members must meet all of those qualifications in order for any one of the joint or common members to be eligible to be nominated.

As provided by the Bylaws, directors receive a monthly per diem. The current per diem is \$500 monthly.

For additional information about the petition process or the qualifications for director, please refer to the Bylaws, the sample petition form, and the director district map that are available on the cooperative's website at [www.sre.coop](http://www.sre.coop).



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### Board of Directors

- Chuck Simmons, Chairman
- Donald Schaefer, Vice Chairman
- Sandra Davidson, Secretary–Treasurer
- Ellen Conley, Asst. Secretary–Treasurer
- Larry Butson, Director
- Steve Carpenter, Director
- Delbert Reuter, Director
- David Stute, Director
- Marcus Saegrove, Director