



Shane L. Larson,  
Chief Executive Officer

## More Power to You CO-OP'S 80-YEAR HISTORY FILLED WITH MILESTONES

**Thirteen Rock County farmers made history 80 years ago when they laid the groundwork for rural residents to get electricity and improve the quality of their lives.**

**residents to get electricity and improve the quality of their lives.**

Did they anticipate that their little co-op with 199 members would grow to serve more than 17,000 members and over 28,000 electric and natural gas meters? I doubt it. People who make history usually have no idea of the significance or magnitude of their contributions until years later, or perhaps not at all.

The history of Rock County Electric Cooperative Association, now Rock Energy Cooperative, is filled with milestones, significant happenings, and thousands of smaller achievements that have taken place since 1936. It's impossible for to me to include every noteworthy event in this column, but I will share some of the highlights with you. Local history buffs might be familiar with some of the events, but I think the vast majority of our members will learn something about their energy cooperative from this column.

### April 23, 1936: Getting started.

Articles of incorporation forming Rock County Electric Cooperative Association were filed. The co-op's stated purpose was to provide members with electricity at cost and without profit. The document is signed by George Ballmer, Ed Mahlum, Michael Weis, Emmett Yale, C.J. Damerow, James A. Conway, J.O. Woodman, H.S. Anderson, William Florin, Clarence Knutson, Adam Lunowa, Grant Rice, H.A. Haried, and J.B. Dybevik.

### Aug. 17, 1936: Loan application.

The co-op applied for a loan of \$430,000 from the Rural Electrification Administration to cover the cost of constructing 414 miles of power distribution line and buying transformers, meters, and other necessary equipment. Organizers had signed up 199 members.

**March 23, 1937: Power supply.** The board of directors and Frank Gates, the first general manager, negotiated a contract with Fairbanks Morse Co. of Beloit to supply 7,200 volts of

electricity to the co-op. Fairbanks, one of the world's leading manufacturers of electric generating equipment at the time, agreed to supply 600,000 kilowatt hours monthly when lines were completed.

**July 15, 1937: Flip the switch.** A crowd gathered at the J.O. Woodman farm in La Prairie Township to celebrate the arrival of electricity to the Rock County countryside. Engineer Harold Durnin climbed a utility pole to turn on the electricity. Lights came on, an electric whistle sounded, and the meter on the side of the house began to register the flow of electricity.

**July 18, 1948: Fire!** The co-op's headquarters on Holmes Street in Janesville was destroyed by fire. Except for the bookkeeper's books and membership lists kept in a fireproof safe, all records and equipment were gone. The fire's cause was never determined.

### Aug. 10, 1948: New power supplier.

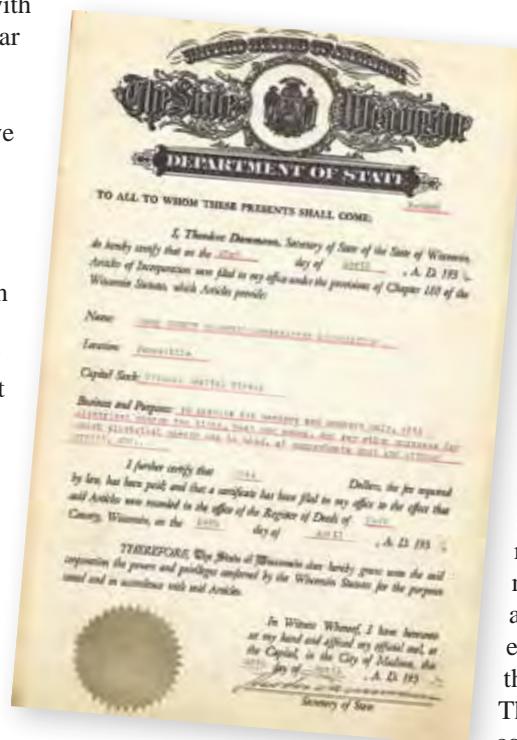
As co-op members continued to use more and more power, Fairbanks Morse transformers were overloaded and couldn't generate enough electricity. The co-op entered into a contract to purchase power from Wisconsin Power & Light Co.

**Dec. 16, 1949: New building.** The co-op's new building on the Holmes Street site was dedicated with an open house.

**Sept. 21, 1953: Electricity use.** The co-op and several farm organizations sponsored the first of a series of evening rural meetings aimed at educating members about how to use electric home appliances more productively, safely, and economically. About 200 people attended the meeting at the La Prairie Town Hall. The evening featured farm machinery, cooking demonstrations, and prizes.

**March 24, 1961: Silver anniversary.** The co-op's 25th anniversary was celebrated in the community room of Rock County National Bank in downtown Janesville.

**Dec. 15, 1984: Co-op moves.** The co-op moved into its current headquarters after purchasing and remodeling a



(Continued on page 18)



## MILESTONES

(Continued from page 15)

building at 2815 Kennedy Road in Janesville. The building contained 22,000 square feet of office and warehouse space and was retrofitted to meet the co-op's needs.

**Sept. 7, 1985: Building dedicated.** More than 500 people braved the 90-degree heat to participate in a ribbon-cutting ceremony and see the new headquarters. Pioneer Members were recognized for their many years as co-op members. Many of them had experienced the joy of having electric appliances for the very first time.

**April 7, 1986: 50th anniversary.** The co-op celebrated its 50th anniversary at Mount Zion Lutheran Church in Janesville. A special program took place during the annual meeting.

**Feb. 6, 2007: Growth spurt.** After many months of preparation, the co-op acquired the electric and natural gas assets of South Beloit Water, Gas & Electric from Alliant Energy. With this transaction, the membership count increased from 6,000 to 16,000 members in southern Wisconsin and northern Illinois. In addition to distributing electricity, the co-op now provided natural gas to members in northern Illinois. The co-op served its newest members from rented facilities on Charles Street in South Beloit.

**April 12, 2007: New name.** Members voted to change the co-op's name from Rock County Electric Cooperative Association to Rock Energy Cooperative at the annual meeting. Directors believed the new name would more accurately reflect the co-op's service. Its territory now included much more than Rock County, and the co-op truly became an energy cooperative with the addition of natural gas.

**July 7, 2008: New building.** A ground-breaking ceremony was held for a new district office and warehouse building at 15229 Willowbrook Road in South Beloit.

**April 13, 2009: Moving in.** The new 55,000-square-foot facility opened for business.

**Oct. 15–16, 2009: Open house.** Employees and directors led tours of the new building that was constructed on 2.4 acres.

**March 28, 2011: 75th anniversary.** More than 700 co-op members, guests, friends, and employees gathered at the Eclipse Center in Beloit for the co-op's 75th Annual Meeting



From the top: After a fire of undetermined origin destroyed the co-op's headquarters in 1948, a new building was constructed on the same site. The co-op moved into its current headquarters in 1985. Ground was broken in 2008 for a new district office in South Beloit.

and Anniversary Celebration. Special guests included nine descendants of J.O. Woodman, whose farm in La Prairie Township was the first on co-op lines to get electricity. Also recognized were Sandi Torkilson Hargraves, Miss Rock County REA from 1971 who went on to become the state and national winner, and Julie Engen Rumage, Miss Rock County REA from 1972.

**March 28, 2016: Celebrating 80 years!** Please join us on Monday, March 28, at the Eclipse Center in Beloit when the co-op conducts its 80th Annual Meeting and celebrates its 80th anniversary. Details will be printed in the March co-op magazine.

Granted, the co-op has changed tremendously during the past 80 years. But one thing has not changed: our commitment to our members. It is truly a privilege to serve your energy needs. Please let us know if we can do anything to improve our service to you. ☺

**Shane Larson, CEO**

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**ROCK ENERGY  
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Empowering Members Since 1936