

## A Leader and a Lineman

**One thing about working at Richland Electric Cooperative that new employees quickly discover is the variety of work they will be expected to perform. As a small group of employees—15 at present—REC staff must be able to step up or step in when something needs to be done.**

The cooperative hires people with a specific skill set to perform a specific job; for instance, a lineman is hired with the expectation he will primarily focus on high-voltage line work, but it doesn't stop there. Once on board, that same lineman may be called upon to help with our computerized mapping system, plow snow, order materials, fix something that needs fixing, or perform many of the other tasks that don't warrant having a specialist hired for that type of work.

It isn't just employees who experience this variety of duties. Board members who take their seat as a director in the board room quickly realize that the expectations go well beyond simply

attending board meetings and making decisions about the usual "board" stuff. Oftentimes they receive the same training as employees about topics such as safety, cybersecurity, financing, and work procedures. Directors are also expected to be an ambassador or liaison for the cooperative always, such as when they incidentally meet a member who has a question or when they attend social events.

Employees and board members have specific responsibilities they are charged to carry out, and they are responsible for meeting those responsibilities—but in all cases there is no such thing as "that's not my job," except in the rare instances where specialized training is required to perform the work. A board member, or office worker, wouldn't be expected to work on a power line and a lineman wouldn't be expected to write a computer program—but they may be asked to assist with the project in complementary ways.

Two people with over 60 years of combined experience at Richland Electric Cooperative have made the decision to retire from outstanding

careers of service to the members. Ken Wymer, who joined the cooperative in 1991 as a journeyman lineman, hung up his belt and hooks last December. Gerald Wendorf, who joined the REC Board of Directors in 1986, will attend his last meeting as a director on April 6, the date of the REC Annual Meeting.

Whether answering a question from a member about their electric service, patrolling lines in the middle of the night, or helping cook for the annual member appreciation picnic, Ken has been counted upon to get the job done. Having spent time working as a "narrowback"—the term used by lineworkers to describe someone who is commonly known as an electrician—Ken was the go-to guy if you needed a

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light in one of our buildings or conduit bent to feed an additional circuit in the shop. His agility around trees made him the perfect guy to tackle tough trees in tough conditions. During one storm he was agile enough to climb out on a tree over a roaring stream of water to get to another tree that had toppled over a power line.

As an experienced trapper, he was no stranger to swamps, creeks, and wetlands and was comfortable in a pair of chest waders to get the job done. In grand fashion, one of the last outages he fixed required him to traverse a half-frozen swamp to get to an area where beavers had felled a tree into a power line.

Gerald Wendorf, like most board members, will tell you the experience of serving as a director at Richland Electric Cooperative was way beyond what he first envisioned. The motto of “Be Prepared” could readily be seen in his every action as a director. His uncanny ability to predict how actions taken



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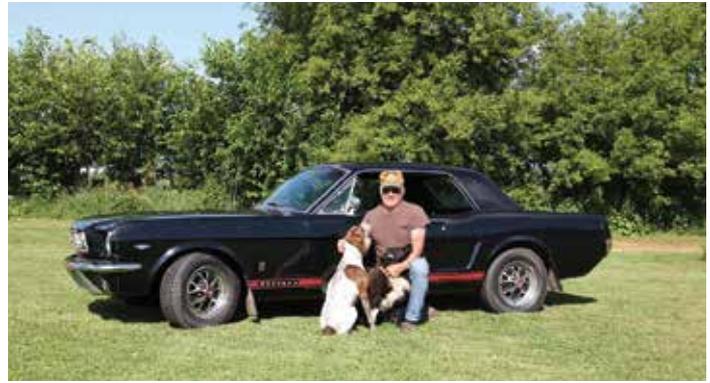
today could change the future—often in ways most hadn’t considered—made him one of the most trusted members to ever serve.

His service led him to contribute in a variety of ways during his 33-year career. His ability to communicate with trust and respect served the cooperative and its employees well for many years during his tenure on the labor negotiations committee. Reportedly, someone who worked with Gerald during negotiations was overheard saying, “I never lost an argument with Gerald, even when he won.” That describes the professional and respected way in which he conducted business, always.

Many times, he would provide vital information about outages in the Ash

Ridge area, and other times he was the first to encourage a teenager to attend cooperative-sponsored youth programs. He served for a time as Richland’s Dairyland Power director and even when he was no longer a Dairyland director, he kept as informed about Dairyland’s business and the impact it has on Richland. During his tenure Gerald has been a part of efforts that will long be remembered as key milestones during the history of Richland Electric Cooperative.

In summary, every person involved in the business of Richland Electric Cooperative makes a difference. These two gentlemen exemplify the best of leadership, and the cooperative will forever appreciate their service.



## Friends and Family...

By Shannon Clark, CEO/General Manager

After reviewing the accompanying article, “A leader and a lineman,” focused on the retirement of two people who have been key to Richland Electric Cooperative’s member service, I am reminded of the friendships I’ve gained while being here.

Kenny and I have shared some great memories over the past 28 years. We started here just a couple of months apart in 1991. We’ve fished and hunted together—once in the mountains of Wyoming. We’ve worked together in good times and bad. We’ve shared family stories, pictures of vacations, and more. We’ve even had a good argument or two and at times tempers may have flared a bit—but he is a friend I will always respect.

Gerald was on the board when I was hired and was part of the decision to hire me as the cooperative manager. My only experience with Gerald before coming to work here was on his farm, when I was sent there to install a silo-unloader. I never forgot that experience because unlike many times when I had to do it alone—and it’s a tough job in a full silo where everything has to be pulled to the top by a rope—Gerald and Jeff lent me a helping hand. A nicer man you’ll never meet, and he will leave some big shoes to fill when he retires from the board.

Every manager who works for a board will tell you they need the advice and counsel of board members whose wisdom is a key ingredient of making the cooperative successful. Over the years I’ve had to call on Gerald just simply to talk and bounce some ideas around. His approach to problem solving is refreshing in a time when a lot of people simply jump to a conclusion without all of the information needed. He has been a part of my family since I’ve been here—watching as Tammy and I raised a family and keeping track of the kids when involved in school activities. He’s been there when my kids went off to college, got married, had children and more—always interested.

I’m not naive to what happens when lives change and people aren’t scheduled to interact once a month—we’ll likely lose touch, at least somewhat—and that makes me sad. I can say Gerald is a friend, but that doesn’t cloud my judgment of his service as a director—he has always put others above himself.

As I read the article, I regret that many of the others who have served and retired from REC weren’t featured in a story because there are many more. Some got the recognition they deserved, but many simply retired without any pomp and circumstance. They too were friends and nearly family, but most of all they were servants to the members of Richland Electric Cooperative, always doing their best and changing lives.



## MY GUITAR

**Before my brothers and I were old enough to help with the heavy fieldwork, Pa**

**employed a hired man each spring to help through the summer and fall. The summer I was 11, Pa hired Henry Lackelt. Henry, a tall, slim man in his early 20s, loved country music. When he arrived at our farm, he had an old beat-up suitcase, and a guitar. This was the first time I'd seen a guitar up close. What a beauty it was.**

All summer long, in the evenings when the chores were done, Henry and our family sat on the back porch and listened to Henry strum on his guitar and sing. And what beautiful music it was: “That Silver-Haired Daddy of Mine,” “Red River Valley,” “Home on the Range,” and many other songs. Sometimes we sang along with Henry, but mostly he sang by himself, while in the background we could hear the sounds of the early evening—crickets, an occasional owl hooting in the distance, and the sound of a neighbor’s cowbell.

When fall rolled around and Henry prepared to leave, I dreaded his going. I wanted more than anything to have a guitar and be able to play like Henry. I’d been saving my money all summer, and I had accumulated something like three dollars. Henry knew I wanted a guitar. The day before he left, he took me aside and asked if I would like to buy his.

“You bet I would,” I said. “But all I’ve got is three dollars.”

Henry rubbed his chin and thought for a minute, “How’d it be if I sold you this guitar for two dollars?”

“I’ll take it,” I said, before even bothering to ask either Pa or Ma what they thought of the deal. With the dust not yet settled from the departure of Henry’s old Model T Ford car, I began to strum on my wonderful instrument. But try

as I might, the sounds that came from the guitar bore no resemblance to anything musical, or anything like what Henry had produced when he played.

“Guess you’ll have to take some music lessons,” Ma said when she saw the disappointed look on my face. I hadn’t thought about needing music lessons. Henry had made it look easy.

Ma inquired around and learned that Mrs. Darling in Wild Rose gave piano and guitar lessons—50 cents for an hour’s instruction. The following week, on a Wednesday evening after the milking was done and I’d cleaned up a little, Pa drove me to Mrs. Darling’s house.

Mrs. Darling insisted that I learn how to read music. I tried to explain to her in the best way I knew how that I didn’t care about reading music. I wanted to learn how to play my guitar. She said I had to do one before I could do the other. So I suffered along, complaining to Pa that what I was learning had little to do with playing my guitar. Pa pulled the plug on the whole deal after paying for lessons more than I paid for my guitar. I still have the guitar. I still don’t know how to play it—but one day I will. I hope.



Go to [www.jerryapps.com](http://www.jerryapps.com) for more information about Jerry’s writing and television work. Contact Jerry at [jerryappsauthor@gmail.com](mailto:jerryappsauthor@gmail.com) with questions or comments.

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