

HAPPY NEW YEAR!

By James Anderson, General Manager/CEO



2021 is going to be a busy year at your co-op. The board of directors has set the following strategic objectives that we will be working to implement.

- Advance safety in all aspects inside, outside, and public.
- Develop a long-term infrastructure improvement plan that emphasizes long term reliability, capacity, and value for member service.
- Craft a long-term comprehensive financial plan that includes executing policy to support equity management, long-term forecasting, cost of service, rates, capital work plan, and capital credits.
- Create a member engagement plan that evaluates current communication and member engagement efforts as well as implement appropriate methods of supporting all segments of the membership.
- Evaluate growth opportunities that is inclusive of the emerging technologies of solar, electric vehicles, and other programs.

We are going to be conducting a cost-of-service study this year. The information from that study will be used in planning new rate classes such as the Time of Use rate. We will also revisit all our other rates and charges. After the study is complete and the information has been reviewed, the Board of Directors will make changes only if needed.

The annual meeting is scheduled to take place on Saturday, April 24. This year directors from District 1, 5, and 6 are up for election. If you are interested in serving on our board of directors and live in these districts, make sure to submit your Petition for Director Nomination by February 23.

We have numerous community events planned for this year. I will keep you updated as we move forward into this New Year.

“The dog is very smart. He feels sorry for me because I receive so much mail; that’s why he tries to bite the mailman.”— Albert Einstein

UPCOMING DEADLINES:

January 20 – Notify JREC of your interest to serve on the Rules & Resolution Committee.

February 23 – Deadline to submit any resolutions that are to be considered at the annual meeting. The Director Nominations Petitions for members residing in District 1, 5, and 6 are also due on this same day.

POWER TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE: Become a JREC Director Candidate

Petition for Director Nomination forms will be mailed in early January to members residing in Districts 1, 5, and 6 and are due February 23.



Three Steps to becoming a director candidate:

1. Have 15 or more members from the district you reside in sign your Petition for Director Nomination paper.
2. Return the member-signed petition to one of our two cooperative offices by end of day on February 23. Cooperative personnel will validate signatures and districts. A photo will be taken of the candidate at this time.
3. Qualified candidates are subject to a background check prior to being listed on the director election ballot.

The role of the director

Directors provide strategic direction and guidance to management to ensure the cooperative continues to serve the interest of the membership. Elected directors serve a three-year term. Please see jrec.com/board-director-contact-information to review a detailed list of director duties and responsibilities. You can also view a district map at this same location if you need help in determining which district you reside in.

Director Qualifications

You can find out if you are qualified to be a director by going to jrec.com/bylaws-policies and reading Article IV, Section 3 (pages 17–19) of the Articles of Incorporation and Bylaws. Please contact our office if you have questions on this or the director petition process.

MAKING MEMORIES

Bear'able

In helping others cherish their loved ones, a member of Jump River Electric Cooperative has found a perfect way to preserve her own memories.

Kelly Kowaleski, of the Tony area, owns Bear Memories, a small business specializing in T-shirts, quilts, and memory bears that keep loved ones and life events close to the heart. These “Memory Bear” mementos can be made of any number of fabrics and are generally made from a loved one’s clothing or personal belongings. They help keep a lost loved one close to the heart. They also can be made to immortalize a special time or event in a person’s life.

“I want people to be remembered. The last thing I want is for someone to forget Brady. I don’t want anyone’s loved ones to be forgotten,” Kelly said.

Ben and Kelly Kowaleski are a tight-knit family, and the couple’s son, Brady, 15, was tragically killed in an accident 11 years ago. Kelly struggled for years with the loss of Brady. Her epiphany came almost five years later, while consoling a friend who had miscarried and was left with no memories of her child. She then realized she had 15 years of great memories of Brady. That was the turning point.

“That was really the catalyst to do the bears. This might be the only memory they have. That really was another thing that pushed me to do this. Some people don’t get what I get. You have to turn every negative into a positive,” Kowaleski said.

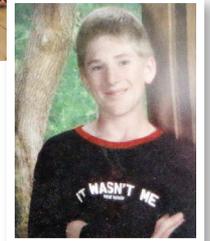
The Family Room The Kowaleski family did everything together. While Kelly sewed in her sewing room, her children played video games in the next room. “This is where I learned about their lives,” Kelly said. “Brady would be into his video games. I would sew and we would talk.”

After the accident, Kelly gave up sewing. “I felt like I shouldn’t be in there. He wasn’t here. It is so different. I am not learning about his life. I kind of put it on the back burner because I couldn’t sew anymore,” Kelly said.

Several months passed, until Christmas arrived. Kelly had an idea. She gathered some of Brady’s favorite clothing including his jeans, boxers, dress shirts, and hunting shirt. She went back to sewing. She drew up a bear pattern, intending



Kelly Kowaleski sits at her dining room table, a den of teddy bears that have been ordered through her at-home business Bear Memories. (*Ladysmith News* photo by Luke Klink) A photo of her late son Brady (at right), who used to play video games and talk to her while she sewed, hangs in her sewing room.



to sew a few teddy bears using Brady’s clothing for a few close friends and Brady’s sisters. “The first cut [of the fabric] was horrible. I cried, but the more I cut the better I felt. I was touching his clothes,” Kelly said.

Kelly’s spirits were lifted by her friends’ responses to the bears. Their reaction encouraged Kelly to sew a few more bears to give to Brady’s close friends. “The look on their faces and the joy they showed was just amazing,” Kelly said.

Several years passed, and Kelly wondered if she could help other families that lost loved ones the same way she helped friends and families cope with Brady’s loss. She filled a handful of orders from friends at Flambeau School, where she worked. “They loved them, and it started to snowball,” Kelly said.

Waking from Hibernation Bear Memories started small, but in no time Kelly was struggling to keep up with orders that were flowing in. For about the last six years she has been sewing fulltime at home. She never expected the business would take off like it did. She left other jobs she had at the school and an area business to devote all her time to Bear Memories.

Each bear is different, with its own story to tell. One bear sewn from wedding dress and “one-zie” materials was made for a youngster whose mother had been told she could not become pregnant. Two months into her marriage, she learned she was expecting. Bears were also made from a retired DNR officer’s uniform to mark the occasion.

Kelly recalled a special order in honor of a fallen Rusk



Some special items Kelly Kowaleski has made include, left to right: Camouflage bears made in memory of a father and grandpa using his hunting shirt and a white shirt he wore to his daughter’s wedding; a bear made from Brady Kowaleski’s clothing; a quilt for the family of a fallen Rusk County Sheriff’s Deputy; and a bear made from a great-grandmother’s square-dancing dress. (Photos by Luke Klink, *Ladysmith News*)

County sheriff's deputy as a gift of comforting pillows for the officer's wife and children. Deputy Dan Glaze was killed in the line of duty in October 2016. His uniforms were brought to Kelly the night before the funeral service. She went to her sewing room and worked until 2 a.m.

"It was so worth it. I wanted to do something for the family," Kowaleski said. "This was about those kids needing something tangible to hold and look at and say that is their dad."

Listening In People send fabric with their orders, and Kelly said the material talks to her. She recalls how some lacy wedding dress lining didn't quite fit on the back of a bear, so she cut it through the middle and flipped it over to look like angel wings. It turns out the wedding dress belonged to a woman who collected angels and her collectibles had been passed down to her daughter—the one who ordered the bear.

The tough ones are memory bears made for babies who passed away. One was ordered by a mother who miscarried, featured a crochet blanket and a wrap used to swaddle the baby. There was just enough material to make a tiny cubby bear for the infant's brother. "It is a sad moment but to know that filled his little heart, it was the best. There is no greater feeling that I helped fill a void, maybe not completely filled it, but at least part of it. I love what I do, and that is the best part," Kelly said.

Saving Herself Along the way, Kelly, too, was saved. She is made happy each time her son's spirit is kept alive through pictures and stories. When she sews, Kelly knows Brady will never completely pass from memory.

"Every time I sit down at my sewing machine, I know Brady is there. I know he had a hand in this somehow. I don't want to say it is the reason, but it certainly is a direction," Kelly said. "People need this. I don't do this for money. I do it for the reward of knowing I am going to be another person who remembers someone else's loved one. That is the goal here. No one is forgotten."

"It's soul filling. It makes me happy. It makes me know I am doing the right thing," she added.

For the Love of Sewing Kelly loves fabric. She was taught to hand sew at age 6 by her grandfather. Several years later, she was given her great-grandmother's Kenmore electric sewing machine. It had only straight stitch and back-up, but for years she sewed clothing and anything else she could imagine.

She now spends hours nearly every day sewing bears, pillows, and quilts. Families provide the material. She adds the time, thread, stuffing. The elements come together through creativity, passion, and love to make sure each item can hold up to numerous holds and hugs. Kowaleski sits and sews. Brady is there, always, in pictures and spirit.

Special Delivery Bear Memories evolved from Kelly's alteration business, Bear Threads, which originally was named for her love of bears. She drew bears on the edge of school papers while growing up. She collected bear items. She wanted to incorporate bears into her sewing.

"It's my passion," she said. Kelly tries to hand-deliver as many orders as she can. She schedules pickups for the raw

fabric material, hoping to get a feel of a person's character.

"I like to know how they feel. I like to know who they are," Kelly said. Each reaction to the bears is different. Some people give the bears hugs. Some cry. Some laugh. "I love to see their faces and expressions, knowing I did this and it made them so happy," Kelly said.

Fabric Speaks Kelly has received orders as big as 35 bears. She once completed an order for 35 pillows. Larger bears take an hour or more to sew. Smaller bears can be sewn in less than an hour. Each takes about six hours to complete and everything is done by hand.

As it was when she sewed the first bears out of her son's clothing more than a decade ago, the first cut of the fabric is the deepest. Then the material begins to spill its stories, and Kelly is there listening. "The fabric speaks to me," she said.

Kelly hopes she can continue making life better for people for many years to come. "Until there is no demand," Kelly said. "I don't see myself quitting sewing, and I certainly don't see myself not making memories for people because it fills my heart with joy. Tons of joy."

Brady is always there, according to Kelly. "I know I see his face. In my mind's eye, I see him saying, 'good job, mama,'" she said. "I love it, and I love making people happy. That is the best part," Kelly said.—*Luke Klink, Ladysmith News*



Pandemic-induced social isolation has altered the relationship members have with technology. With the physical world now slowly receding, consumers are suddenly more reliant on apps for communication, shopping, staying healthy, and entertainment.

To make managing and paying your bill easier, Jump River Electric Cooperative offers SmartHub, an online application to help you manage your account 24/7. With SmartHub, you can:

- make a payment
- check your usage/view history
- notify us of account issues
- report an outage
- make updates/changes to your account

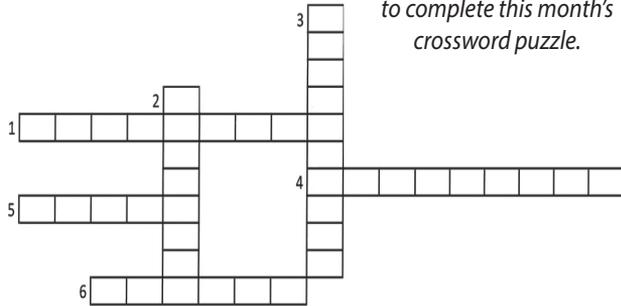
SmartHub is available in both mobile apps and a web version to give members secure access whether at home, at work, or on the go. Members with smart phones or tablet devices can download the SmartHub app from the App Store or the Android Marketplace. (Use search term "NISC SmartHub" or scan the QR code at right.)



Visit jrec.com for more information on SmartHub and other programs.



FINDING BALANCE



Follow the notice at left to complete this month's crossword puzzle.

ANSWERS: 1. Dedicated 2. Schedule 3. Boundaries 4. Realistic 5. Stand 6. Breaks

JREC HIRES ENGINEER

Jim studied engineering at the University of Wisconsin with an emphasis in electric power systems. During summers Jim worked for Illinois Power (IP) Company. He spent



one summer as a relief dispatcher at IP's company system operating center. Later Jim received a master's in business administration from Concordia University.

After completing Wisconsin Public Service Corporation (WPSC) training for electric distribution engineers, Jim was assigned as engineer responsible for their Winnebago County operations. While at WPSC Jim passed the tests to obtain his professional engineer's license from the State of Wisconsin.

Throughout his career Jim has managed engineering and operations at progressively larger consumer-owned electric utilities. In his work Jim tends to emphasize modeling and monitoring operation of the electric system to guide development of appropriate and cost-justified electric system maintenance and improvements.

Jim and his wife, Mary, have four children, Joe, Kieran, Maura, and Shaelyn. Mary is a school district administrator. In their spare time Jim and Mary enjoy biking and camping. More recently, their travel involves visits to their children who are in different parts of the country.

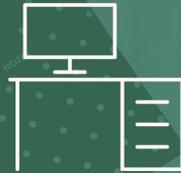
Jim looks forward to working with the cooperative's staff and management to enhance service to Jump River members.

Fill in the blanks below to help you complete the crossword puzzle at left.

HELPFUL HINTS FOR

WORKING FROM HOME

TO HELP WITH WORK-LIFE BALANCE



1. CREATE A _____ SPACE

Not everyone can do this, but it helps if you can have a separate space to keep your work area (and your workday-mindset) separate from other areas of the home.

2. SET A _____

Try to set a workday _____ and stick to it as much as possible so that work and home do not constantly intertwine.



3. CREATE _____

Just as a workspace serves as a physical work boundary, try to set other at-work boundaries: discuss work hours, deadlines and interruption ground rules with others under your roof.

4. BE _____

Creating boundaries is more difficult with children and teens around. If you can, try to create a work schedule around their most demanding hours or juggle coverage with another adult.



5. TAKE A _____

Researchers at Columbia University found that adults who sit for one to two hours at a time without moving have a higher risk of early death than those who get up more often. Aim to get up and move every 30 minutes.

6. TAKE _____

Working nonstop might make you feel heroic, but it actually decreases productivity. Consider scheduling brief _____ and taking them - outdoors if possible.



James Anderson, General Manager/CEO

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Find us on Facebook

JREC is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

Denise Zimmer, Editor



Jump River Electric Cooperative, Inc.

Since 1938

Your Touchstone Energy® Cooperative



Have a Happy New Year! Our offices will be closed January 1.