




A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative   
101 Main, P.O. Box 230, Scott City, KS 67871  
620-872-5885  
www.weci.net

## WHEATLAND ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE

# NEWS

### Wheatland Electric Co-op Inc.

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### FROM THE MANAGER

## Your Co-op is Here to Serve You

“We’re here to serve you.” We’ve all heard this phrase countless times. These words may sound generic, but to us — your local electric cooperative — they mean everything.

Wheatland Electric Cooperative, Inc. (WEC) was created in 1948 to serve our rural communities. Back in the day, neighbors banded together and formed our co-op for the common good. In our case, it was the only way the community could bring electricity to the area where there was none. In doing so, WEC helped the entire region thrive for decades to come. This mission-focused heritage is the thread that is woven throughout our 75-year history as we’ve continued to grow, expand and serve members across southwest and central Kansas.

Today, we are continuing to power the communities we serve. While our focus has remained steady on providing reliable and competitively priced energy to our members, today’s energy landscape and consumer expectations

are far different than they were decades ago. That’s why we’re adapting, to keep pace with changing technology, evolving needs and new expectations.

Serving as your trusted energy adviser means we want to help you save energy (and money) and provide advice and information on a broad range of energy topics. For example, if you contact your local office, we can review your energy usage together, data that is also accessible to you directly via SmartHub on your phone or any other internet-connected device. And, if you’re looking for ways to save energy, check out [www.weci.net/energy-solutions](http://www.weci.net/energy-solutions) for tips and ideas to increase the energy efficiency of your home. Understanding how your home uses energy can help determine the best ways to modify energy use.

For those ready to take the next

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**Bruce W. Mueller**

## SAFETY TIP OF THE MONTH

Rear-end crashes are extremely common in work zones. Always maintain extra space between your vehicle and the one in front of you. When approaching lane closures, move into the open lane as soon as possible. Be sure to pay close attention to vehicles around you that could be in your blind spot.

## WHEATLAND ELECTRIC MEMBER

## SPOTLIGHT

## Hired Man's Grocery &amp; Grill, Inc. BY SHAJIA DONECKER

It was shortly after the old grocery store on Main Street — Joe's Market — had permanently closed in 2006 that **CLINT OSNER**, a lifelong local in his hometown of Conway Springs, got a silly idea in his head.

He thought about it sometimes while commuting to and from his day job as a welder at Cessna in nearby Wichita, about 35 miles away.

He even mentioned it aloud to a few folks, including close family members, some of whom ran successful businesses themselves in and around the small town of about 1,200.

Well, word must have made its way around Conway Springs because one day while at the car wash, Mary Kay Hunt, a local banker's wife and respected member of the community, approached Clint.

Hunt has since passed, but it's an exchange that remains cemented in Osner's memories. "She came and she said, 'You need to build that grocery store,'" he recalls. "I told her we were thinking about it. And then she said, 'Well, quit thinking about it, and do it!'"

So, he did.

### Celebrating Success

This summer, 15 years later, Clint and his family are celebrating a decade and half in the rural, independent grocery store business, serving as

a lifeline not only for Conway Springs, but neighboring communities in and around Sumner County.

Each summer, the Osners have made it a tradition to celebrate another trip around the sun at Hired Man's Grocery and Grill with free hot dogs for their customers, grocery giveaways and other goodies.

**TO MARK THIS YEAR'S MILESTONE, THE BUSINESS OWNERS HAVE INVITED BOSSIE THE COW FROM HILAND DAIRY AND THE OSCAR MAYER WIENERMOBILE TO TOWN ON JULY 22.**

Shoppers and other Hired Man's fans can tour the inside of the famed motor vehicle shaped like a hot dog on a bun while partaking in the anniversary celebration.

The Conway Springs grocery is also giving away 200 bags of free groceries to loyal shoppers and raffling off several large prizes, including a grand prize for a pair of lucky patrons: an expense-paid trip for two to Golden, Colorado, to tour the Coors Brewery at the foot of the Rocky Mountains.

### Taking a Gamble

Inside the mid-sized grocery store, shoppers can find everything from fresh watermelon to hand-cut steaks to a hot lunch cooked daily in the deli.

When Clint first mentioned the idea of building a grocery store to his wife, Jenny, over 15 years ago, the former classroom teacher was certain the man she married was joking.

"With three kids five and under, that was not in our 10-year plan," Jenny said.

However, with the full support of the small, but tight-knit community and the helping hands of extended family members, the Osners dove in and took a big gamble on their financial future.

In 2007, working closely with their regional grocery distributor, the Osners were surprised to learn that Conway Springs needed a grocery store



Hired Man's Grocery & Grill employees pictured with U.S. Rep. Ron Estes, R-Kansas (center) outside the store. Clint and Jenny Osner grew up in the 1,200 person community of Conway Springs and identify their mid-size family business as "homegrown."





**LEFT:** Three generations of Osners (from left) — Colby, Clint and George — in front of the meat department at Hired Man's Grocery & Grill.

**BELOW:** Hired Man's plays a pivotal role in assisting with Mission Mart, a local food bank in Conway Springs. Students participating in the Cardinals Challenge and Cram the Van donation drive pose with representatives of Hired Man's and WEC in 2015.



to serve the area that was much larger than the previous grocery on Main Street. While they had initially hoped to restock the shelves of the existing building, this meant finding a new location to build a brand-new store.

Later that year, extended family came together to help construct a new building on the north entrance of town, on Kansas Highway 49.

During construction, all three of the Osner kids — Karlee, 7; Colby, 6; and Haylee, 4; at the time — would put on their roller skates and enjoy the freedom of a large empty building with smooth concrete floors, according to Jenny.

"We tried to give them a family experience — that was the biggest thing," she said.

Easier said than done. While building a new business from the ground up, both Clint and Jenny kept their day jobs, him commuting every day to and from Wichita and her teaching third graders at Kyle Trueblood Elementary School.

Thanks to family and friends, they made it work and by the time they were ready to open in the summer of 2008, Clint and Jenny had their three kids make a set of handprints outside on the concrete to mark the occasion. In those early years, seeing those newly minted impressions on the business they worked so hard to build brought them joy, but it also brought a little bit of sorrow.

The Osners, who both come from large families, had always wanted more kids, and so in the back of Jenny's mind she sometimes worried that if they had another child, he or she might feel left out of the picture. Though God did not bless them with any more children, Jenny has no regrets about the family she's raised or the gamble they took on their family and future.

"The store became our baby," she said, warmheartedly.

## Starting From Scratch

Hired Man's opened on July 15, 2008, and for the first three years of operation, the Osners pulled no income from the store, relying instead on Clint's day job and Jenny's earnings from education to pay the family's bills.

Bankruptcy was not an option, they said. Instead, they funneled the revenue they weren't collecting toward working capital: money for store repairs and improvements, testing new products on the shelves, and paying down their business loan.

"We didn't know if it was going to work or not — this was the biggest gamble of our lives," Jenny added.

Those first few years of operation, while Clint still worked at Cessna, were tough. He would wake up at 3 a.m. every morning, arrive at work 10 minutes before 5 a.m., and cross the tracks to get home around 4 p.m. so he could work at the store until nearly midnight each night.

Jenny would also help after school and on weekends, sometimes with the kids at her side.

In those first few years, every night before bed, Jenny would ask Clint — the calm and collected one — whether it was all going to work out. He said he didn't know, but they would continue to do everything they could to make the store a success.

"Eventually though he said, 'Quit asking me that!'" Jenny said and laughed.

They were able to make it all work because of family. From day one, Jenny's mother, Nancy Koester, served as Hired Man's daytime manager, and Clint's parents, George and Donna Osner, were staples in the meat department, where they still help out today.

Thanks to the dedicated labor from loved ones, Clint finally quit his job in the airplane industry in summer 2011, nearly three years after the Osners opened their doors, and Jenny was also able to end her career in teaching to focus on the store full-time in 2018.

Today, Hired Man's is bustling with business with loyal customers from Conway Springs and out-of-town shoppers who travel from Argonia, Norwich, Milton, Milan and

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Wellington. There are even some from Wichita who come for Hired Man's famous hamburger — ground on site — and other specialty items served in the meat department.

In 2017, when a Dollar General opened across the street, the Osners extended their weekend hours to compete with the national retailer. Based on community feedback, they even paved their entrance and expanded their parking lot to make shopping at Hired Man's just a little bit better.

"We're most fortunate that the community supported us," Jenny said. "We don't expect them to shop us — we want them to choose to shop us."

### Homegrown

Inside the fridges and freezers near the meat and deli departments are some of the most popular products: stuffed sausages, custom-cut steaks, specialty burgers and homemade brats.

During Clint's childhood his father, George, worked several years as the local butcher at Joe's Market before leaving the job to work as a mail carrier for the rest of his career.

When Hired Man's first opened, Clint knew he could rely on his father to show him the ropes inside the butcher room, at least until he got the hang of making sausages, brats and burgers.

"Give me three or four months, and I'll have the hang of it," Clint recalls telling George.

Fifteen years later, both his mom and dad are still behind the meat counter, helping to pack George's homemade original, garlic, Italian or jalapeno sausage, a few local favorites that fly off the shelves, fresh or frozen.

"When we first opened, we called it Original Sausage," Jenny said. "But everyone asked, 'Where's George's Sausage?' That's when we realized we needed to relabel it."

Despite not being on the payroll, George rolls up



Hired Man's in Conway Springs is a mid-size, rural grocery store featuring fresh produce, dairy and specialty meat items.

his sleeves on many days, according to the Osners, not only to stuff sausages but to catch up with chatty customers.

A few years ago, they even started sending care packages filled with goodies to military service members from the community who are stationed away from home. Included in each package of snacks and treats is a T-shirt for these hometown heroes with the word "homegrown" emblazoned under an American flag.

It's the same picture that appears on the signs on the aisle markers above shoppers' heads at Hired Man's and the same T-shirts and sweatshirts the employees wear to work.

Everything about the store — including the family who runs it — is "homegrown," according to Jenny and Clint, who were high school sweethearts.

"We really believe in this community — they're our family, and they're our neighbors," Jenny said.

Thanks to the success of their store, the Osners have been able to support local school fundraisers, community events and projects, and even the food bank — Conway Springs Mission Mart, housed in the old Presbyterian church — which does not have refrigeration. Through a voucher program coordinated with the food pantry, those in need can come to Hired Man's to pick up milk, cheese, fresh bread and other perishable items.

The store also boasts a grant-funded incentive program called Double Up Food Bucks, which allows recipients of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), to double their purchasing power of fruits and vegetables.

After swiping their SNAP card at the register, the store generates a coupon for the same dollar amount, up to \$25 a day, to spend on additional fresh produce. It's a win-win-win for the customer, the store and for local farmers, according to Jenny.

"It's really great in the summertime when we start to get watermelon and cantaloupe from DeVore Farms, or we have Beck Family Farms that does tomatoes. Right now, we have Kozy K (Acres) that has asparagus," she added. "It not only helps generate funds here in the store, but it helps generate funds for local producers as well. And that money is reinvested back into our communities."



When he's not at Kansas State University, Colby Osner, 20, works inside the meat department at Hired Man's. Colby is majoring in supply chain management and has expressed an interest in taking over operations someday, according to the Osners.





## Celebrate with Hired Man's on July 22!

Join Hired Man's, 424 N. Fifth St., Conway Springs, for **BOSSIE THE COW FROM HILAND DAIRY FOODS** and the **OSCAR MAYER WIENERMOBILE!** Tours will be available from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m., and enjoy a free hot dog meal, first-come, first-served, starting at 11 a.m.

### A Family Affair

Behind the "Employees Only" double doors at the back of the store is a small whiteboard next to the employee schedule with a list of items Hired Man's shoppers are looking for: Frost Bite Mountain Dew, Strawberry and Cream Dr. Pepper, and other special requests.

Behind the deli counter, all three of the Osner kids — now 21, 20 and 17 — help with duties over the lunch hour in the summer, making sausages, serving lunch to hungry customers, or packaging fresh-smoked ribs that customers can take home for dinner.

The kids are all grown up now with Karlee and Colby in college, and Haylee about to start her senior year of high school. Over the years, the Osners have worked alongside many other employees — 25 in all today — who keep the store running, including part-time high schoolers who Jenny remembers teaching in the third-grade classroom.

"If I hadn't been a teacher, I don't think I could have been as effective here," she added. "It helps me run the schedule, manage the kids, and teach them how to do their jobs. For some kids, we're their first job, and it's our job not only to teach them how to work and handle customers, but also how to call in sick, and all the other expectations we have."

At the start of the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020 — much like the rest of the world — the Osners lives got turned upside down. Suddenly Jenny was helping the kids stay on top of schoolwork from home and most all the kids' school activities including tennis meets and proms were canceled.

"We were all scared when COVID hit. The kids wanted to

help in the store — they didn't want to stay home all day," she said, adding that as the pandemic progressed her kids took on bigger roles in the store. Her girls even helped gather and deliver fabric to community members who sewed masks at the height of the pandemic, making the store a collection point for mask making and distribution.

"Eventually we let the girls run the register, and Colby started helping in the butcher room. It really helped us have a good family connection again. Not that we didn't already, but since we weren't running around to all their sporting events, we got to go golfing on the course together, and we'd even go fishing in the evening when things would slow down," Jenny added.

### Labor of Love

At the height of the pandemic in late 2020, Hired Man's secured just over \$100,000 in state and federal grants to help upgrade their coolers and freezers, which allowed them to offer a greater range of fresh, frozen and dairy products.

Despite the challenges over the years, the Osners aren't complaining. They know Hired Man's serves as a lifeline for their local community.

"When funerals come around, we're there. We're there for the celebrations, and we're there for the heartaches. People don't just shop here for their food. They shop here for conversation, or they'll say you're a lifesaver because our parents still drive, and thanks to you, they don't have to drive out of town," Jenny said.

As the saying goes, it takes teamwork to make the dream work, and the Osners also credit their employees — including their three own kiddos, extended family, and other helping hands from over the years — who have impacted Hired Man's and made it into what it is today.

"We're very thankful that the community supports us, and we could not do it without our employees," Jenny added. "They show up, they want to serve our customers, and when we need extra help, they're always willing. We just couldn't run this store without them. They're part of our heartbeat."



Donna Chaffin (left), an employee of nearly 15 years, helps Brad Cooper, a Conway Springs resident, check out his grocery items at Hired Man's.

## Wheatland Trustees Appoint New Officers



**Mark Arnold**  
PRESIDENT

The Wheatland Board of Trustees has appointed a new vice president and treasurer and renewed appointments for its president and secretary.

Trustees voted to appoint **JOSH YOUNG**, senior vice president with Security State Bank in Leoti, as the board's new vice president, following the May 30 board meeting in Great Bend. Young represents WEC's District 2, which includes Wichita and Wallace counties.



**Josh Young**  
VICE PRESIDENT

In addition, trustees voted to appoint **JOHN KLEYSTEUBER** as the board's new treasurer, a position previously held by Young. Kleysteuber represents District 5, which includes Finney County, the eastern half of Kearny County, and portions of northwestern Gray County.



**John Kleysteuber**  
TREASURER

**MARK ARNOLD**, director of the Stock Exchange Bank in Caldwell who represents WEC's District 7 territory, will remain board president, and **STACEY ADDISON HOWLAND**, District 4, will remain as secretary of the board.



**Stacey Addison-Howland**  
SECRETARY

District 7 represents territory of south central Kansas across Kingman, Harper, Sumner and Sedgwick counties and was acquired following the 2007 Aquila purchase. District 4 includes Hamilton County, and western Kearny County.

Executive officers on the board hold their positions for a full year, until new officers are appointed following our annual meeting. For more information, visit [www.weci.net/board-trustees](http://www.weci.net/board-trustees).

## Your Co-op is Here to Serve You *Continued from page 12A ►*

step in energy savings at home, we encourage you to check out our rebate-saving incentives, available at [www.weci.net/rebates](http://www.weci.net/rebates). Our residential rebates range from new HVAC systems and heat pumps to electric water heaters and radiant flooring systems. We also have rebates available for advanced programmable thermostats and new electric vehicles. Visit our website ([www.weci.net/rebates](http://www.weci.net/rebates)) for additional details or to download a rebate application today.

In addition, if you're considering rooftop solar, contact us first. We will walk you through the interconnection requirements and give you an unbiased view of the pros and cons. Investing in a solar system is a major decision, and it's important to fully understand the costs, responsibilities, and potential energy savings. As your trusted energy adviser, we're here to explain how our net metering tariff works and details related to the application process. After all, unlike a solar company, our "bottom line" is not directly tied to the sale of a product or service — our cooperative exists for members like you, and we constantly strive to find new ways to help you use energy more efficiently.

Similarly, we recognize that many

members are considering their electric vehicle options. Did you know that we have a free digital tool on our website — available at [www.weci.net/electric-vehicle](http://www.weci.net/electric-vehicle) — so you can make smart and informed decisions about driving electric? Our digital tools will help you determine whether an EV is right for you, choose from the latest models on the market today, find rebates, tax credits, and other incentives, and help you select a 240V charging system for your home or business. No matter what our members drive, we want to help you achieve energy savings.

So, the next time you hear us use the phrase "we're here to serve you," we hope you know that we mean it. Service is deeply ingrained into who we are. We continue to evolve with the times, and in return, we've found additional ways to serve you and provide more options for you to power your life.

We're here whenever you need us. Connect with us online, in person, through the SmartHub app or our social media channels. However you choose to connect, please let us know how we can serve you better.

**UNTIL NEXT TIME, TAKE CARE.**

**POWER PLAY**  
Thursday, July 6  
**GARDENCITY WIND**  
FREE HAMBURGERS & HOTDOGS | FIRST 200 PEOPLE  
CLINT LIGHTNER FIELD | GAME STARTS AT 6:35 PM CT  
*First 50 people get in free!*

**WHEATLAND ELECTRIC**  
Delivering Energy for Life  
**POWER PLAY**



# Professional Achievements Strengthen WEC

## WEC Trustees Earn Director Credentials



Mark Arnold



Dustin Stansbury



Stacey Addison-Howland

Members of the Wheatland Electric Board of Trustees have earned various levels of board certification from the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA).

**MARK ARNOLD**, board president and District 7 trustee, and **STACEY ADDISON-HOWLAND**, board secretary and District 4 trustee, have both earned their Director Gold status from NRECA. The continuing education credential recognizes directors who have received both the Credentialed Cooperative Director (CCD) and Board Leadership Certificate (BLC). Earning Director Gold also demonstrates their ongoing commitment to advancing their knowledge and performing their fiduciary duty to the best of their ability.

**DUSTIN STANSBURY**, also a District 7 trustee, has earned his CCD certificate from NRECA, the first part of NRECA's three-part Director Education Program. This program consists of five courses that

focus on basic governance knowledge and the essential skills required of cooperative directors. It also prepares directors to fulfill their fiduciary responsibilities as elected officials serving on behalf of the co-op membership.

## Goddard and Semenko Earn MIP

**TRACI GODDARD**, director of finance, and **NICOLE SEMENKO**, manager of human resources, have completed NRECA's Robert I. Kabat Management Internship Program (MIP), a comprehensive, six-week program providing in-depth analysis of the functions and processes of electric cooperative management.

The national-level management credential is an intensive management program and includes on-site classes in the Fluno Center for Executive Education at the University of Wisconsin, Madison.

Goddard, who has been with the cooperative since 2015, was first hired as WEC's manager of accounting. A certified public accountant licensed in the state of Kansas, Goddard



Traci Goddard



Nicole Semenko

was promoted to director of finance in 2022.

Semenko, a former payroll specialist who started at WEC in 2016, was promoted to human resources manager this year following the retirement announcement of Barbara Kirk, existing director of human resources. Kirk, who plans to retire March 8, 2024, will be training Semenko as part of WEC's ongoing succession plan.

## Hoisington and West Earn CKA

**MARY HOISINGTON**, member services and key accounts manager, and **LUKE WEST**, director of corporate services and water, have both earned their credential in the Certified Key Account Executive Program (CKAE).

This NRECA program helps key account executives implement and strengthen winning key accounts management strategies to serve our commercial and industrial members. We serve a broad range of these types of business members, from schools, churches, and hospitals to large manufacturers, farms, and national retail chains. These members require special attention from time to time due to their unique energy needs.



Mary Hoisington



Luke West



HAPPY  
**4<sup>TH</sup> OF JULY**  
INDEPENDENCE DAY

Our offices will be  
closed on  
Tuesday, July 4,  
for the holiday.



*5th Annual*  
**CO-OPS CARE**  
Charity Golf Tournament



**SEPT. 15, 2023**

*Golf Club at Southwind*  
Garden City

8 A.M. REGISTRATION  
9 A.M. SHOTGUN START

4-MAN SCRAMBLE  
\$100/PLAYER  
\$400/TEAM



**POWER**  
*the*  
**PANTRY**  
**50K in 2023**

**REGISTER NOW!**

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