

WHEATLAND  
ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE

# NEWS



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## FROM THE MANAGER

### How Your Co-op Employs ‘Outage Detectives’

Ever wonder what goes into restoring your power after an outage? The ordeal of losing electricity can be frustrating, but Wheatland Electric is always looking for ways to get the power back on as quickly and safely as possible.

Whether it's severe summer weather like a tornado or straight-line winds, or a fallen tree, as soon as an outage is detected, Wheatland is working to correct the problem. And thanks to more advanced technologies, we can restore power outages faster than ever.

Powering up after an outage starts on a larger level and ends up in local areas. First, high-voltage transmission lines are examined, then distribution stations, then main distribution lines. If the outage can't be pinpointed to these areas, tap lines and individual homes are inspected. This process allows Wheatland to efficiently help the most members in the shortest amount of time.

One of the biggest advancements in technology that Wheatland utilizes is Advanced Metering Infrastructure (AMI). These smart meters allow for

two-way communications and work by sending information back to the co-op's operations center. This helps to distinguish between events that affect a single home or multiple outages, which is important because solving either issue is a very different process.

The two-way communication also provides a way to verify that power has been restored after an outage.

Power outages are inevitable, but as technology continues to improve, disruptions are becoming shorter and easier to resolve and Wheatland is dedicated to using those technologies that make the most sense for our cooperative. Read more about Advanced Metering Infrastructure (AMI) in our Alphabet Soup article on page 16H.

This Fourth of July, rain or shine, we wish all our members a safe and happy holiday.



Bruce W. Mueller

### UNTIL NEXT TIME, TAKE CARE



★  
**4<sup>TH</sup> OF JULY**  
★ ★ ★  
Our offices will be closed on  
Monday, July 5, for the holiday.

WHEATLAND ELECTRIC MEMBER

# SPOTLIGHT

GROW & LEARN CHILDCARE CENTER

A nurturing, safe and educational environment.

A boon to the local economy.

A godsend.

These are just some of the ways Leoti's new childcare center — The Grow & Learn Childcare Center, or GLCC — has been described by locals, businesses, donors and other stakeholders.

The much-needed \$1.3 million building broke ground in early June after several years of planning and preparation by local organizers — primarily concerned parents — who recognized how a lack of childcare resources was causing “an economic crisis” in their community of about 2,100 residents.

One of those advocates, Wichita County Director of Economic Development Nikki Bjurstrom, said she's spoken to individuals on

both sides of the business aisle, employees and employers, who share that sentiment.

“I've talked to so many people — this truly is something that our community needs very badly,” Bjurstrom said during June's groundbreaking ceremony. “This center will provide childcare spots for people who need full-time, part-time, or occasional childcare, jobs for people who want to work with children but aren't certified teachers, and will also become an essential tool to keeping Leoti thriving and alive going forward.”

The GLCC is a grassroots project with a multitude of private and public funding sources.

Community advocates and other stakeholders kick up dirt with their shovels during a groundbreaking ceremony on June 7 for Grow & Learn Childcare Center in Leoti. Pictured second from right is Josh Young, Wheatland Electric trustee, and third from right is Alli Conine, manager of member services and corporate communications.





# Wheatland Electric Provides \$200,000 Zero-Interest Loan to Grow & Learn Childcare Center

Wheatland Electric Cooperative is helping to make the Grow & Learn Childcare Center in Leoti a reality by providing a \$200,000 interest-free USDA Rural Economic Development Loan toward the \$1.3 million project.

In fact, electric cooperatives have been making a big difference to local economic development efforts for many years. The cooperative model — built on serving the community — has enabled cooperatives like ours to invest in necessary community

projects like this one because we are committed to economic growth in our region.

The program can fund up to 80% of the total project cost and is selected through a competitive process. Community, not-for-profit, medical, and other business or other for-profit entities are eligible to apply.

The GLCC in Leoti is the seventh of several community-based projects we've assisted with an interest-free loan since 2007.

Past projects include partnerships with Royal Farms Dairy in Finney County, Great Plains Family Dentistry in Leoti, the City of Syracuse, Hamilton County Hospital, USD 466 in Scott County, and the Scott Community Foundation in Scott City.

For more information or for application materials contact Alli Conine, manager of member services and corporate communications, at [aconine@weci.net](mailto:aconine@weci.net) or 620-874-4563.

Funding sources include donations, loans, challenge grants, tax credits and also includes a \$200,000 USDA Rural Economic Development Loan facilitated through Wheatland Electric Cooperative.

The interest-free, 10-year loan agreement will provide just over 15% of the project's total cost and is one of several economic development projects our cooperative has helped fund across our southwest and south-central Kansas service territory.

The new facility in Leoti is the seventh such funded community project since Wheatland Electric began partnering with local businesses and organizations through the USDA loan program in 2007.

The GLCC, a 3,565 square-foot wood-framed building, will be located on USD 467 school grounds at 302 N. Indian Road, just north of Wichita County High School and is expected to open January 2022.

Once complete, it will feature four classrooms, a kitchen, an office and storage area. A parking lot adjacent to the building will include separate staff and handicap parking spaces, and a one-way



**Wichita County Economic Developer Nikki Bjurstrom (left) visits with Alli Conine, manager of member services and corporate communications, at the groundbreaking ceremony of the Grow & Learn Childcare Center in Leoti on June 7.**

circle drive will make child drop off and pick up seamless for parents. Outdoors, the center will have a fenced-in playground and natural outdoor playscape for children of all ages.

The 35 available spots for children age five and under — about 45% of the need identified in the community — include three infant slots and 10 toddler slots, vastly improving the capacity for childcare resources within Wichita County.

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Once complete in January 2022, The Grow & Learn Center in Leoti will provide much-needed spots for 35 children ages five and under. A front view of the building is visible in this architectural illustration.



Currently, only one licensed daycare home exists within the community, which only accepts children two years and older, according to Bjurstrom.

In fact, since 2010, the community has lost eight private daycare homes, forcing several residents to look outside the community for childcare assistance.

Advocates of the new childcare center are hopeful that the soon-to-be openings at the GLCC will have ripple effects across the region, easing childcare resources in neighboring communities since some locals will be returning to their hometown for this service.

“Access to childcare will revitalize our community, making it a better place to run a successful business, with increased employee recruitment, reduced turnover, improved productivity and most importantly, strengthened families,” added Bjurstrom.

For now, as construction continues, organizers are hopeful that the Wichita County community will help them close the remaining gap in fundraising prior to the opening of the center in January.

To date, about 75% of the funds needed have been raised, and a \$275,000 challenge grant from the Oklahoma-based Mabee Foundation is “an ideal way for members of the community to leverage their gifts and help us reach our goal,” GLCC advocates have said.

For more information or to pledge toward the project, contact Bjurstrom at [wced@getleoti.org](mailto:wced@getleoti.org).

The Grow & Learn Childcare Center will provide a fenced-in outdoor space for children in attendance, including playscape equipment and a small toddler bike trail, as visualized in the above architectural illustrations.

**Advocates of the new childcare center are hopeful that the soon-to-be openings at the GLCC will have ripple effects across the region, easing childcare resources in neighboring communities since some locals will be returning to their hometown for this service.**



**3rd Annual**

# CO-OPS CARE CHARITY GOLF TOURNAMENT

Hosted by:

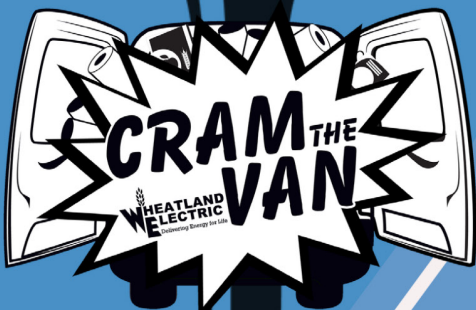


**FRIDAY,  
SEPT. 17, 2021**  
THE GOLF CLUB AT  
SOUTHWIND  
GARDEN CITY, KS

**8 A.M.**  
**Registration**  
**9 A.M.**  
**Shotgun Start**

**4-Man Scramble**  
**\$100/Player**  
**\$400/Team**

**BENEFITING:**



**REGISTER NOW @**  
**WWW.WECI.NET/COOPS-CARE**

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# Climbing to New Heights

Gearold Leverett, Broadband Wireless Tower Technician, Retires After 20 Years

Before **GEAROLD LEVERETT** began climbing towers and installing high-tech equipment for a living starting in 2001, our broadband division's inaugural year, he worked as a carpenter.

Back then, Google gave you far fewer search results and dial-up — a form of internet that uses a telephone network to establish a connection — was still the norm across the nation.

The recent retiree confesses that he didn't know a lot about computers when he was first hired. Today, two decades later, not much has changed.

"I still don't know a whole lot about computers," he said and laughed. "Climbing and doing the work was what I was good at, and I'll miss the people I met and got to visit every day."

In June, our cooperative celebrated Gearold's retirement from Wheatland Broadband, following 20 years of service.

The carpenter-turned-technician started out as an installer when Wheatland erected its very first broadband tower in Scott City.

The challenges to building and maintaining a brand-new network in a rapidly changing industry were numerous. New towers and lots of high-tech equipment were necessary to bring fast internet access to unserved and underserved homes,

Gearold Leverett, who served Wheatland Broadband for 20 years, often climbed tall towers and other structures like the grain elevator here, to install and repair high-tech broadband equipment.







Gearold Leverett poses with his retirement cake during his farewell party June 1 at the Wheatland Broadband office in Scott City.



Gearold Leverett inspects coax connections at the top of this 400-foot-high tower in Finney County. Photo circa 2003-2004.

farms and businesses across western Kansas.

“When we first started, people were using dial-up and when we started [broadband service], we were almost 20 times faster than dial-up,” Gearold said. “People from big cities who were used to dial-up speeds wondered how we got such fast internet out here.”

Thanks to a pioneering spirit and hard work from cooperative employees like Gearold, Wheatland Broadband developed

critical infrastructure across our region, not only connecting homes and businesses but also improving quality of life, community development, and economic growth and prosperity for rural communities like ours.

Today, the reach of our broadband network stretches even further than our electric service across our western territory, with service that is fast, affordable and more reliable than ever before.

Employees like Gearold are part of the reason our network exists today, and we can't thank him enough for his work and dedication over the years.

While retirement will certainly allow more time for both fishing and family (including 18 grandchildren and four great-grandchildren), there are aspects of work-life that Gearold will miss, he says, including the relationships he's built with colleagues and community members — not to mention, the thrill of reaching new heights.

“I'll miss being outside, climbing towers. Most people think it's dangerous, but it's safer than driving down the road,” he said. “I was never afraid. I'm not afraid of heights. You trust your equipment, and after that, you find out it's like driving a car.”

**Employees like Gearold are part of the reason our network today exists, and we can't thank him enough for his work and dedication over the years.**



Colleagues and family members signed Gearold Leverett's hard hat with well wishes during his retirement party at the Wheatland Broadband office on June 1.



# What Does AMI Mean at Wheatland Electric?

In the electric industry we have an abundance of acronyms and abbreviations that our members might not understand. We're here to break down our alphabet soup!

## ADVANCED METERING INFRASTRUCTURE

Cooperatives like ours were early adopters of advanced metering infrastructure (AMI). Transitioning to this advanced technology, which we completed in 2017, reduced the need for on-site meter reading and brought with it a host of other benefits: more accurate billing, automated outage reporting, pre-payment options (with no required deposit) and hourly meter data for members.

AMI meters provide faster, more efficient outage detection and diagnosis. System operators can ping meters to get a clearer picture of what is happening in the field and deploy crews more efficiently. In many cases the AMI system identifies the outage, a crew is dispatched, and power is restored — all before you call in to report the outage to us!



Of course, no matter how sophisticated or robust an electrical system is, you can never eliminate outages altogether. Mother Nature is often involved when the lights go out; however, how quickly and efficiently power can be restored is something we're heavily invested in.

In fact, our cooperative employees work day in and day out to restore power.

Our customer service representatives take phone calls, our dispatch staff monitors outages and directs line crews, our lineworkers repair lines and poles on site, and our communicators reach out to you on social and other forms of media to report information as it becomes available.

Advanced metering infrastructure has helped us streamline our operations and improve customer care — all for the benefit of members like you!

## Electric LINGO WHAT IS AN ELECTRIC METER?

An electric meter is a device that measures the consumption of electricity used by your household as it passes into your home. Typically, it's installed at the point where the power lines enter your building.

The basic unit of measure of electric power is the watt. One thousand watts are called a kilowatt. If you use one thousand watts of power in one hour you've used a kilowatt-hour (kWh).

Advanced meters, like the ones used by our cooperative, are modern, digital meters that can do more than just measure energy use. They're capable of providing a variety of electrical information to help us provide power

with increased reliability and efficiency.

These advanced meters record energy usage (kwh) kind of like the odometer on your car or truck. They also track demand of power, like your vehicle's speedometer — that is, they track how much power you're using at any given moment, too.

Thanks to these advanced technologies, you can review your kWh energy use — monthly, daily, and even down to the hour — simply through your SmartHub account on your app or online at [weci.net](http://weci.net).

As always, we're here to answer all your questions about your energy usage — just give your local Wheatland Electric office a call!