

NEWS

**ROLLING HILLS
ELECTRIC CO-OP, INC.**

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Jason Rabe
CEO/General Manager

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For outage updates,
energy efficiency tips and
cooperative news.

FROM THE CEO/GENERAL MANAGER

5 Years Later: How the COVID-19 Pandemic is Still Affecting Your Cooperative

The new year always brings back a moment of reflection — this new year was especially poignant as it marks the five-year anniversary of the start of the COVID-19 Pandemic. I can distinctly remember scrolling Twitter on my phone over the holiday break in early 2020 and seeing the fringe mentions of a potential pandemic not knowing how much life would change in the coming months. Reflecting on the last five years makes you realize how much the world has truly changed since 2020

— especially from an economic perspective. While the health impacts from the pandemic faded, the economic reverberations from supercharging the money supply in the name of stimulus and inflation reduction have and continue to negatively impact



Jason Rabe

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Celebrating More Than 77 Years of Service

Rolling Hills' Castor and Webb retire

KENNETH CASTOR, affectionately known as Willie Wiredhand, retired from Rolling Hills Electric on Jan. 3, 2025. Over his remarkable 40-year career, Kenny has witnessed countless changes and advancements in the industry. When he first joined the cooperative in January 1985 as a member service representative, it was known as Smoky Hill Electric and based in Ellsworth. Back then, the cooperative offered not only electricity, but also mobile bag phones and such through RadioShack.

Before starting his career at Smoky Hill Electric, Kenny had a strong connection to farming and was known for breaking and riding quarter horses around the area. Originally from Hickory Flat, Arkansas, Kenny attended Pangburn Public School before embarking on his professional journey. Reflecting on his years of service, he cites the advancements in technology as the most significant change he has experienced.

Kenny is perhaps best known for his role as the beloved mascot, Willie Wiredhand. Over the years, he donned the black mascot suit for countless parades and cooperative events, often braving the summer heat with unwavering enthusiasm and good humor.

"Keep your head in the game, pay attention," is Kenny's advice to future Rolling Hills employees.

True to his words, Kenny's punctuality has been legendary. According to him, "If you're 10 minutes

early, you're still late!" — a motto that has defined his dedication and reliability throughout his career.

As Kenny steps into retirement, he looks forward to spending more time with his wife, Debra, daughter, Jessica, and granddaughter. Whether watching baseball, gardening, woodturning, or fishing, Kenny plans to enjoy the hobbies he loves. He's also eager to travel and savor the simple pleasures of life, like sipping coffee on the deck while patiently awaiting a summer storm — this time, without the looming expectation of a work call.

One of Kenny's proudest accomplishments is mastering a trade that has served him and Rolling Hills Electric so well over the years. His meticulous underground locates have ensured safety and success, with no tragedies on record — a testament to his skill and care.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP

Jerry Webb (second from left) with his children (from left) Trent, Brianna and Dennis.

From left: Dale Weinhold, Kenny Castor, Sonny Bohnen and Olen Svoboda pose together during the retirement party. These gentlemen were with the cooperative when Castor was hired on.

Kenny Castor (right) poses with his wife, Debra.

Kenny Castor with his family. From left: His wife, Debra; Kenny; son, Randoulph and his wife, Brenna.

Operations Director Marc Martin (left) presents Jerry Webb with a certificate.

Jerry Webb holds up his cake commemorating 31 years with Rolling Hills.

Kenny's coworkers and Rolling Hills Electric members will deeply miss his presence, professionalism and warm spirit. We extend our heartfelt gratitude for his 40 years of dedicated service and wish him a joyful, well-deserved retirement. Thank you, Kenny, for everything!

JERRY WEBB retired on Jan. 3, 2025, with over 31 years of dedicated service. Jerry grew up in southeastern Idaho, where he attended Pocatello High School. After graduation, he joined the Marines for three years and the National Guard for an additional 19 years of service and completed the electronics and teletype program.

Jerry is a true jack-of-all-trades. Before joining Rolling Hills Electric Cooperative (formerly Jewell-Mitchell Electric), he worked as a lead cook, farmhand, and semi-truck driver, in addition to serving his country as a Marine. When Jerry joined RHEC, he began as a tree trimmer and was soon promoted to a digger operator, then journeyman lineman. Jerry has been crucial to RHEC due to his experience and dedication.

In retirement, Jerry looks forward to spending more time with his wife, Teresita, his four adult children, and five grandchildren. He plans to kick off this new chapter with plenty of fishing and dedicating more time to his bait shop in Mankato, Kansas.

While Jerry will miss his coworkers, the camaraderie, and the members he served, he is also excited about the freedom retirement brings. No longer will he have to worry about the strength of incoming storms or the late-night phone calls that once pulled him away from home. Instead, Jerry can fully embrace the simple joys of life.

We extend our heartfelt gratitude to Jerry for his years of dedicated service at Rolling Hills Electric and his service to our country. Congratulations on a well-deserved retirement, Jerry!

UPCOMING BOARD ELECTIONS

The election process is not only a privilege, but also a civic duty and a responsibility that we, as citizens of the United States of America, should take seriously.

As a consumer-member of Rolling Hills Electric, you also have this privilege and responsibility. You have a voice in choosing who serves on the board. Trustees are elected representatives and act in the best interest of you, the cooperative's consumer-members.

A trustee candidate submits a nominating petition that contains at least 20 signatures of current members of the cooperative who reside within the candidate's district. The petition had to be filed at the Rolling Hills office in Beloit on or before Nov. 30. Nominating petitions are submitted to the secretary who determines if candidates meet the qualifications to be nominated and the petitions were valid.

Your 2024 annual report and board of trustees ballots will be included in the April issue of *Kansas Country Living* magazine. Upon receipt of the ballot, please mark your choice or write in a candidate, sign the back of the ballot envelope (certificate of membership), and return your ballot immediately. **BALLOTS MUST BE RECEIVED IN BELOIT BY 6:45 P.M. ON APRIL 25, 2025.**

The nominees listed above will appear on your ballot. A complete biography along with a picture of each candidate will be included with the ballot. If you have any questions or need a replacement ballot, please call our office at 800-530-5572 or 785-534-1601.

2025 BOARD OF TRUSTEES NOMINEES

DISTRICT 1

MICHELLE BROKES, Wilson

DISTRICT 2

JOHN GEORGE, Lebanon

DISTRICT 3

MIKE BRZON, Courtland

Look for your ballot on the April issue of

Kansas
COUNTRYLiving

MARK YOUR CALENDARS!

ANNUAL MEETING IS

APRIL 25

5:30 P.M. Registration and Meal

6:30 P.M. Meeting



5 Years Later: How the COVID-19 Pandemic is Still Affecting Your Cooperative

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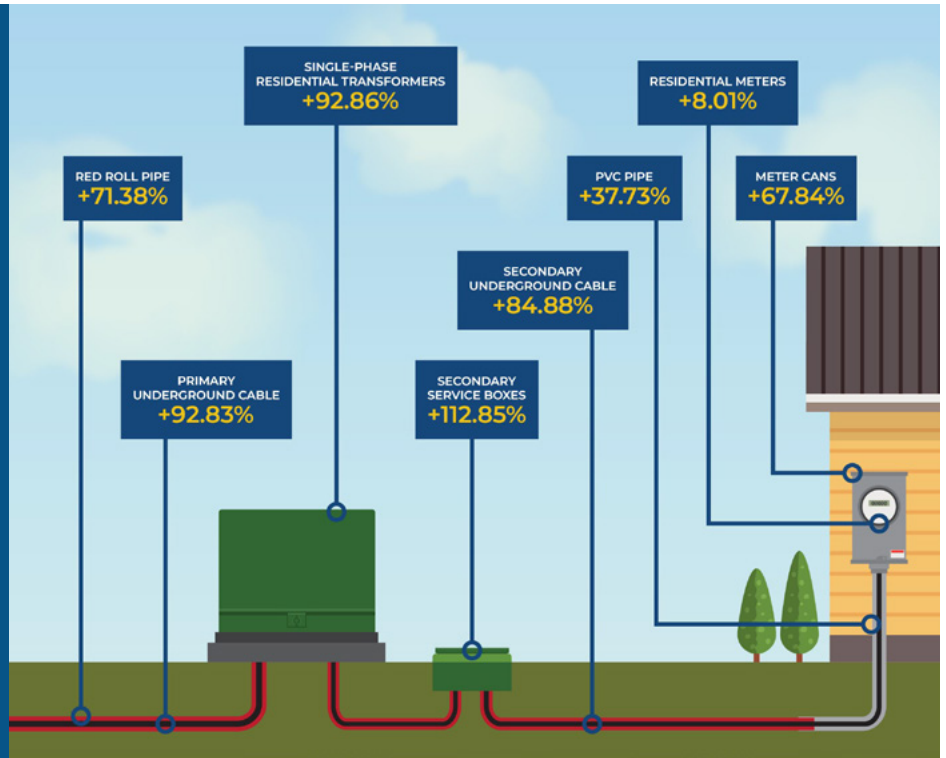
BREAKING DOWN THE RISING COSTS FOR AN ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE

Underground Equipment Price Changes

January 2020 to May 2024

These percentages are a general representation modeled after a typical Electric Cooperative Distribution system.

Source: CEEUS



“As you can see most of the items that we use to build and maintain our distribution system have nearly doubled on average.”

the financial health of all of us. The rural electric cooperative has not been immune.

One of the toughest challenges that every person and business in America has had to navigate post-pandemic has been cost escalations or inflation — the highest inflation we have experienced since the 70s. Each of us has felt it in the cost of food, goods, vehicles, services, housing and maintenance. Inflation is a cruel and sticky issue that is hard to resolve. The tool typically used to combat inflation is interest rates, which normally helps soak up excess money supply — a driver of inflation. This go-round, interest rate manipulation has been a two-edged sword, as inflationary pressures have remained challenging and the cost of money has remained elevated. In reality, it is a difficult time to be a saver and a borrower — things and capital are expensive!

At Rolling Hills Electric, we have not been immune from these impacts either. As seen in the infographic provided by our lender, the Cooperative Finance Corporation, there have been substantial increases in overhead and underground equipment and supplies. From January 2020 through May 2024, a typical transformer is up 98.5%, while wire is up anywhere from

32.27% to 61.78%. As you can see, most of the items that we use to build and maintain our distribution system have nearly doubled on average.

This of course has spread to the cost of trucks and equipment, which are up 20-50% along with major components and maintenance costs. In addition, attracting and retaining a quality workforce has continued to escalate. However, all these things are critical to having a reliable electric system. We continue to be as efficient as possible with these resources through our truck rotation plan and work plan prioritization and operating our workforce as lean as possible while maintaining reliability and safety.

An electric utility is a capital-intensive business — much like agriculture, everything we use is expensive. The cost of capital being at a two-decade high combined with inflation, has led to a challenging environment for everyone, especially capital-intensive industries. For my next article inside *Kansas Country Living*, we will spell out some of the actions we have taken and are taking to combat rising costs so we can continue to deliver reliable energy as affordably as we can.