

Some Good News

As we wrap up another year, I like to reflect on the positive actions we have seen within our cooperative community. You see, in 2021 MREA launched the LIFEguard Award to recognize cooperative employees who demonstrated their commitment to safety through actions. They took extra effort to “guard” the lives of those around them at work and in their community. They not only say they are committed to safety, but they live it. These are our stories from LIFEguards on Duty in 2021.



Glenn Blommel (Stearns Electric Association) - Glenn was called to a jobsite after the contractor hit an underground cable causing an outage. When he arrived at the job site, he found out the outage occurred when one of their employees was locating the energized 3-phase underground line by hand, using a shovel, and cut the primary causing the outage. Glenn took the time to talk the young employee about how lucky he was and the danger he was in when he was doing that work. A few days later, Glenn received an email from a line superintendent at another co-op which informed Glenn that the young man was his son and he would be going to line school in the fall; they were both appreciative of Glenn's actions to stop and have a safety conversation with him.



Ryan Kennitz (Minnkota Power) – Ryan was at a Bemidji intersection when he witnessed a bucket truck operator fixing a traffic light make contact with a power line, which ignited a fireball. The line ended up laying across the road. He turned on all his flashing lights and parked to divert traffic, checked with the individual in the bucket to see if he was ok; thankfully, he was and put out a grass fire ignited by the fireball. Yet, danger was still present with the line across the road. Ryan remembered one of the first things told to him, “If it’s not your system, you don’t work on it; you don’t touch it.” Although being pressured by multiple people to move the line so traffic could resume, he held his ground. Ryan kept reminding people to be patient until the owner of the power line arrived. Once the owner of line arrived, the power of the Ryan's actions became clear. The owner of the line confirmed the line was energized; and this lineman still did not move the line until another employee from that company shut down that part and conveyed to him the line was now de-energized . . . and many lives saved!



Shannon Klinker (Cooperative Light & Power) – An elderly member of the Cooperative Light and Power Association was having a problem with their carbon monoxide detector. The member's son was going to stop by and check it out but didn't think it was urgent. The member called the co-op and spoke to Shannon looking to see if they still had any people working as firemen that could check it out. Shannon decided to call 911 Emergency and the Fire Department went to her house, found her in distress and took her to the hospital where she was diagnosed with carbon monoxide poisoning, a difficult condition that even some of the youngest, most healthy people have died from. The member recovered, thanks to Shannon's quick thinking and her actions.



Tyler Fisher and Jamie Line (Todd Wadena Electric Cooperative) – A fire was reported one evening at a home in Verndale. Wadena County deputies, officers from the Wadena Police Department and the Verndale Fire Department responded to the scene. Two of the firefighters were Tyler Fisher and Jamie Line of Todd Wadena Electric Cooperative. Upon arrival, they observed flames at an upstairs window, where a child was reported to be. Several attempts were made to find the child, but heat and smoke made the area inaccessible. Finally, Tyler and Jamie were able to gain access through an upstairs window. A short time later, the small child was found and taken by ambulance to the local hospital and then flown to an area burn center.



Trevor Gwiazdon (Beltrami Electric Cooperative) – During the summer, Trevor found an unsafe condition for a new service being constructed. He stopped by to see the progress since he had not heard anything from the contractor. He learned the electrical service was built and then the contractor and masonry crew took over. While onsite, he saw they had excavated around the primary underground cable (7200 volts), poured the footings, elevated the cable, notched the cinder block to allow the cable to cross through the building. Trevor quickly recognized the dangerous situation present and explained the voltage they were handling and seriousness of avoiding contact with the cable. The message was quickly understood as one of the block layers had to sit down. They reported they had been told it was secondary low voltage. Beltrami Electric Cooperative then dispatched a crew and the line was taken out of service.



Matt Bade, Tyler McClellan, Cody Vredenberg and Tim Rasmusson (Lake Country Power) – In the fall, four Lake Country Power lineworkers were driving back from their lunch break when they saw an overturned vehicle in a rain-filled ditch. They pulled over their bucket truck and ran into the cold water to see if someone needed help. They went under the water to see if anyone was inside and they saw a young woman and two empty car seats. "That's when their hearts all stopped, adrenaline kicked in, and they immediately went into rescue mode." While one lineworker called 911, the others scrambled to rescue the young woman. One of them disconnected the winch hook from the bucket truck and used it to break the driver's window after urging her to move to the back. "Then with their own hands and strength, all four linemen lifted the vehicle on its side and pulled her from the broken window to safety," as reported by Tami Zaun, public relations coordinator for Lake Country Power. First responders arrived on the scene soon after. With many credits being given to this crew, one person said it best. The young woman's husband thanked the co-op crew for saving his wife. "We have two kids at home, and those guys made sure their mom came home."

We are thankful for these cooperative employees and their commitment to safety by their actions. And, as we always like to say, you don't have to be working at a pool with a whistle around your neck to be a **LIFEGuard**.