

Rural Power

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KEC Day at the Capitol focuses on co-op advocacy

Nearly 50 co-op managers, trustees, and staff joined together at the Kansas State Capitol Feb. 18, to advocate for electric cooperatives at the third annual KEC Day at the Capitol event.

To kick off the day, co-op leaders met for a briefing by KEC staff. **BRUCE GRAHAM**, CEO; **DOUG SHEPHERD**, Vice President of Management Consulting Services; **LESLIE KAUFMAN**, Vice President Government Relations and Legal Counsel; and **TARA MAYS**, Director of Government Relations; reviewed the agenda and gave updates on state legislative issues.

“The Day at the Capitol is a great way to show legislators that we are involved participants in the legislative process and advocate for issues that are important to rural electric members throughout the state of Kansas,” said Mays.

Co-op attendees hosted a lunch for the legislators, met with elected officials, and attended committee hearings and legislative sessions.

The meeting helps legislators better understand electric co-ops and the issues that impact rural Kansas. Co-op officials reminded legislators that cooperatives are not-for-profit, consumer-owned, and self-governed businesses actively engaged in the political process.

The primary talking points of the day included explaining the London Economic International (LEI) utility rate study and demonstrating that electric cooperatives are key stakeholders that should take part in the development of a comprehensive energy plan. Members also discussed electric vehicles, broadband, competitive electric markets, and renewable generation.

“One of the things that I’ve been most impressed with the co-ops’ whole system, is the sense of pride and ownership that board members and members take in having their own utility,” said Senator **JEFF LONGBINE**. “I think it’s a great way for us, as legislators, to get a real feel for the importance of power to them.”

Speaker **RON RYCKMAN**, Lt. Gov-



Senator Kevin Braun, Dennis Svanes, 4 Rivers; Major General Lee Tafanelli, KEC CEO-elect; Kirk Thompson, CMS; talk at the Day at the Capitol evening event.



KEPCo's Phil Wages, Susan Cunningham, and Suzanne Lane discuss key initiatives with Senator Jeff Longbine.

ernor **LYNN ROGERS**, Representative **BARBARA WASINGER**, and Senate President **SUSAN WAGLE** addressed the group regarding bills aimed at advancing rural revitalization efforts, the importance of rural communities to the state’s economy, what it is like to serve in the state legislature, and perspectives on the recent LEI study.

That evening, attendees met with legislators from the Greater Kansas City delegation at the Historic Harley-Davidson and Evel Knievel Museum to discuss how electric cooperatives are structured and how they serve their consumer-members. This new event was designed to educate a group of legislators that do not have electric cooperatives in their districts.

Attending the Day at the Capitol event were representatives from the following electric cooperatives: 4 Rivers, Ark Valley, Bluestem, Brown-Atchison, Butler, CMS, Doniphan, DS&O, FreeState, Heartland, KEPCo, Lane-Scott, Midwest, Nemaha-Marshall, Ninnescah, Prairie Land, Rolling Hills, Sedgwick County, Sumner-Cowley, Sunflower, Twin Valley, Western, Wheatland, and Federated.



Senate President Susan Waggle speaks to co-op officials.



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Retirement reception for Clete Rains

The Sumner-Cowley Board extends the invitation for a retirement reception to honor **CLETE RAINS**. The come-and-go event will be held Monday, March 30, from 9 a.m. to noon at the co-op headquarters in Wellington.

Rains joined the cooperative in 1977 and has served as CEO since 1996. He is the longest-tenured manager at Sumner-Cowley.

KEC hosts Crisis Communications Workshop

More than 30 co-op staff, managers, and board members learned about the process to help co-ops prepare for and respond to any situation before it turns into a full-blown crisis at a workshop on Jan. 28 in Topeka.

The training was led by crisis communications expert **GERARD BRAUD**, who after his presentation at the the KEC Annual Meeting, facilitated a deeper discussion through the workshop.

Braud detailed the importance for cooperatives to write living crisis communications plans, train spokespeople, and test response teams.

“We can’t be complacent,” said **VICKI ESTES**, KEC’s Director of Communications and Editor of *Kansas Country Living*. “Even with a plan in place, it needs to be updated to staff changes, technology, and social media. Staff needs to know and practice their roles in crisis situations.”

jobmarket

KEC helps to promote co-op careers by listing openings on the careers section of the KEC website.

Visit www.kec.coop/careers to learn more about the following positions.

- ▶ FreeState has multiple openings.
- ▶ Sunflower has multiple openings.
- ▶ Wheatland has multiple openings.

Send your open position listings to ruralpower@kec.org. Positions will be posted on the website for one month, unless otherwise directed by the co-op.

FEBRUARY

- 21 **Sunflower Board Meeting**, Sunflower Headquarters, Hays
- 27 **MDM Meeting**, KEPCo Headquarters, Topeka

MARCH

- 1-4 **NRECA Annual Meeting**, New Orleans
- 5-6 **Speak Up!/Listen Up!**, Rolling Hills Headquarters, Beloit
- 11-12 **Kansas Cooperative Council Hall of Fame & Annual Meeting**, Wichita
- 11-12 **KEC Board Meeting**, Hilton Garden Inn, Salina
- 12-13 **CoBank Western Plains Customer Meeting**, Hyatt Regency, Wichita
- 17-18 **Speak Up!/Listen Up!**, KEC Headquarters, Topeka
- 20 **Sunflower Board of Directors Meeting**, Holcomb Station, Holcomb, KS
- 24-25 **Speak Up!/Listen Up!**, Pioneer Headquarters, Ulysses
- 26 **MDM Meeting**, KEPCo Headquarters, Topeka

annualmeetings

FEBRUARY

- 25 **Nemaha-Marshall**, American Legion, 207 5th Street, Axtell. Meal starts at 11:30 a.m. Meeting starts at 12:45 p.m.
- 27 **Brown-Atchison**, Co-op Headquarters, 1712 Central Ave., Horton. Meal starts at 11 a.m. Meeting starts at 12:30 p.m.

MARCH

- 10 **Heartland**, Fort Scott Community College, 2108 S. Horton, Fort Scott. Meeting starts at 7 p.m.
- 12 **Caney Valley**, Cedar Vale School Gym, 500 Dora, Cedar Vale. Meal starts at 5 p.m. Meeting starts at 6:30 p.m.
- 13 **Butler**, Circle Middle School, 14697 SW 20th St., Benton. Meal starts at 5:30 p.m. Meeting starts at 7 p.m.
- 14 **Pioneer**, Grant County Civic Theater, 1000 W Patterson Ave., Ulysses. Meal starts at 12 p.m. Meeting starts at 1 p.m.
- 14 **Sumner-Cowley**, Wellington High School, 1700 E 16th, Wellington. Meal starts at 11:30 a.m. Meeting starts at 1:15 p.m.
- 17 **Ninnescah**, Municipal Building, 117 W. Third, Pratt. Meal starts at 6 p.m. Meeting starts at 6:30 p.m.
- 21 **4 Rivers**, Burlington High School, 830 Cross St., Burlington. Meal starts at 12 p.m. Meeting starts at 10:30 a.m.
- 23 **Bluestem**, United Methodist Church Family Life Center, 921 5th St., Clay Center. Meal starts at 6 p.m. Meeting starts at 7 p.m.
- 26 **Doniphan**, Troy Community Building, 1217 Last Chance Rd., Troy. Meal starts at 5 p.m. Meeting starts at 6 p.m.

APRIL

- 7 **Ark Valley**, Kansas State Fair- Sunflower Building, 2000 N. Poplar St., Hutchinson. Meal starts at 6:30 p.m. Meeting starts at 7 p.m.
- 7 **Flint Hills**, Herington Community College, 810 S. Broadway, Herington. Meal starts at 5:30 p.m. Meeting starts at 6:30 p.m.
- 7 **Prairie Land**, Prairie Land Headquarters, 14935 US Hwy 36, Norton. Meal starts at 12:00 p.m. Meeting starts at 12:45 p.m.
- 7 **Sedgwick County**, The Cottilion Hall & Ballroom, 11120 W. Kellogg Dr., Wichita. Meal starts at 6:30 p.m. Meeting starts at 7 p.m.
- 9 **Twin Valley**, Labette County High School, 401 High School St., Altamont. Meal starts at 6 p.m. Meeting starts at 6:30 p.m.
- 10 **Alfalfa**, Cherokee High School, 412 E 5th St., Cherokee, OK. Meal starts at 5 p.m. Meeting starts at 7 p.m.
- 14 **DS&O**, Webster Conference Center, 2601 N. Ohio St., Salina. Meal starts at 5:30 p.m. Meeting starts at 6 p.m.
- 14 **Victory**, Western State Bank Expo, 11333 Hwy. 283, Dodge City. Meal starts at 5 p.m. Meeting starts at 6 p.m.
- 16 **CMS**, Meade High School, 409 School Addition, Meade. Meal starts at 5:30 p.m. Meeting starts at 6:30 p.m.
- 17 **Rolling Hills**, Rolling Hills Headquarters, 3075 B US Hwy. 81, Beloit. Meal starts at 5:30 p.m. Meeting starts at 6:30 p.m.
- 21 **FreeState**, Perry-Lecompton High School, 404 Lecompton Rd., Perry. Meal starts at 5:30 p.m. Meeting starts at 7 p.m.
- 22 **Wheatland**, Caldwell Community Building, 119 E. First, Caldwell. Meal starts at 11:30 a.m. Meeting starts at 12:30 p.m.

Kansas co-ops receive national recognition for achieving 5-Star Co-op status

KEC and its 30 member co-ops were recently recognized by NRECA for receiving 5-Star Co-op status statewide. At that time, Kansas was the only state to have every electric cooperative qualified for this honor through the Co-ops Vote program.

“Kansas embraced Co-ops Vote more than any other state,” said NRECA Chief Executive Officer **JIM MATHESON** during his speech at the KEC Annual Meeting on Jan. 27.

TARA MAYS, KEC’s Director of Government Relations, explained that success can be directly attributed to the 21 events hosted by the electric co-ops across the state throughout 2019.

Each year, KEC customizes the Co-ops Vote events to support cooperative legislative efforts.

“In 2019, we included more individual events at the electric cooperatives and invited state, federal, and local

elected officials to join us to learn about the issues facing rural electric cooperatives,” said Mays.

During these events, policymakers learned about important co-op issues like ensuring affordable and reliable power in rural areas and local economic impact. Overall, Kansas Co-ops Vote events helped reach more than 75 state legislators, 2 statewide elected offices, 40 local officials, and 7 U.S. Congressional and Senatorial staffers.

NRECA has evolved the Co-ops Vote program to a two-year cycle which allows cooperatives to become 5-Star qualified during the entirety of an election cycle. With these changes, Kansas co-ops will retain their 5-Star status for both 2019 and 2020.

KEC plans to continue Co-ops Vote events in 2020.

“This year, we’re looking at hosting more regionalized events with electric co-ops,” Mays explained. “We are grateful to everyone that helps us organize these important efforts and we hope to continue to participate with new partners in 2020.”

Mays added, “We’re continuing to look at ways that we can engage with all elected officials and how we can incorporate the youth programming into the Co-ops Vote program to continue to build on our grassroots efforts.”

The Co-ops Vote program is designed to inform members on key issues and encourage them to engage with policymakers, including efforts to get them to participate in the election process.



Sumner-Cowley Electric names Adams new CEO

After a nationwide search, Sumner-Cowley Electric Cooperative and NRECA Executive Search are pleased to announce that **CONI ADAMS** has been named CEO of Sumner-Cowley and will begin serving in that capacity in April.

“The Board worked hard through the process and interviewed candidates from across the nation,” said Sumner-Cowley Board of Directors President **JOHN SCHON**. “We feel that we got the best candidate for the job, and we are excited for Coni to lead Sumner-Cowley into the future.”

Adams began her career at Sumner-Cowley in 2000 as receptionist and has served as Manager of Administration/Human Resources since 2011. She earned the title of Assistant CEO in 2018. Adams received her Bachelor of Science in Business Administration from Southwestern College and is a graduate of NRECA’s Robert I. Kabat Management Internship Program.



Coni Adams will succeed Clete Rains as CEO of Sumner-Cowley in April.

of Directors and staff to continue to provide safe, reliable and affordable power to the member-owners of Sumner-Cowley Electric.”

Adams will fill the CEO position that is opening with the upcoming retirement of current CEO **CLETE RAINS**. Rains joined the cooperative in 1977 and has served as CEO since 1996. Rains is the longest-tenured manager at Sumner-Cowley.

“I am both excited and proud the Board of Directors has selected Coni to serve as the next CEO of Sumner-Cowley Electric,” said Rains. “Coni has proven herself to be a leader. I have complete faith she will be successful in leading Sumner-Cowley Electric into the future.”

“I am honored to have been chosen as the next generation leader for Sumner-Cowley Electric,” said Adams. “I look forward to working with the Board

KEC offers series of Speak Up!/Listen Up! workshops

Effective communication is a cornerstone in building a strong, sustainable culture of safety excellence, but talking about safety doesn’t come naturally. That is why KEC is offering a series of Speak Up!/Listen Up! This program will help instill the courage and confidence in employees to speak up and willingly accept feedback on safety performance.

The training uses proven communication concepts and links them to work scenarios shown on video. The scenarios are tailored to common activities and help employees discuss how to best provide and receive feedback.

To allow for maximum participation, the one-day training session will be repeated on the second day at each location:

- ▶ March 5-6 - Rolling Hills headquarters, Beloit
- ▶ March 17-18 - KEC headquarters, Topeka
- ▶ March 24-25 - Pioneer headquarters, Ulysses

This program is offered at no cost to LCS&C members or \$125 for each non-member participant. Each day will begin at 9:30 a.m. and end at 3 p.m. Lunch will be on your own.

Space is limited at each location, For more information about the training, please contact Carol Dorr at cdorr@kec.org.

Legislator, industry leader, and trooper among KEC Annual Meeting speakers

More than 200 representatives of Kansas electric cooperatives gathered in Topeka from Jan. 25 to Jan. 28 for KEC's Annual Meeting. The attendees discussed issues facing the co-ops, listened to a wide range of speakers, and participated in special presentations and events.

During Monday's meeting, Kansas Rep. **ADAM SMITH** discussed the impact of population density, marketing rural communities, and the importance of economic development and strengthening the relationships between urban and rural Kansans.

"How do we look at this moving ahead? Economic development. Population density is small but our geographical area is huge," said Smith. "Never be afraid to promote the value of investments in rural areas."

NRECA Chief Executive Officer **JIM MATHESON** explained the importance of passing The Rural Act and discussed other legislative issues like the ACE Rule, broadband mapping and tax policy issues. Matheson also congratulated Kansas co-ops for embracing political engagement and the Co-ops Vote program.

Matheson shared three areas of focus for electric co-ops: protecting and advancing what co-ops have, supporting the power of the co-op network, and grassroots advocacy.

Monday's program also included Kansas Highway Patrol Trooper **BEN GARDNER** who discussed how he raised his profile on social media to better communicate with the public. He shared how he was able to connect with different demographics through Twitter and how his social humanized those in uniform.

"Who is telling your story?" asked

Gardner. "If you're not, someone else is. Move toward where the world is at or choose not to be in the conversation."

During the annual meeting luncheon, **MIKE RAYBURN**, who is billed as the world's funniest guitar virtuoso, challenged the audience to ask themselves what is holding them back. This two-time TED Talk presenter shared his expertise and talent of singing and guitar playing. He gifted a guitar to **REX SMITH**, Sedgwick County, for volunteering an idea, and he donated a second guitar for the KCRE auction.

BRUCE GRAHAM, KEC's CEO, distributed a handout showcasing the 2019 highlights for KEC during his State of the Statewide presentation. He recapped significant legislative success and achievements of the individual departments. Graham also presented **KEITH MCNICKLE**, Board President, with a token of appreciation for serving on the KEC Board and his leadership.

GERARD BRAUD, an expert in crisis communications, shared how co-ops can prepare to provide effective communication before critical times. Following the meeting, Braud facilitated an in-depth workshop for electric co-op board members, managers, and staff further discussing crisis communication plans.

The program also included a G&T update by **SUZANNE LANE**, Executive Vice President and CEO for KEPCo, and **STUART LOWRY**, President and CEO of Sunflower Electric Power. **PHIL IRWIN**, CEO of Federated Rural Electric Insurance Exchange, discussed the Speak Up!/Listen Up! program, trend of current claims, and strengthening and testing cyber defense. He then presented KEC with a \$104,319 loss control contribution check. **MIKE LEWIS**, CFC, gave the CFC update and presented KEC

with grants totaling \$22,400 on behalf of CFC and NCSC. **JOHN DONNER**, CoBank, presented KEC with a check in the amount of \$25,000 for statewide association outreach initiatives.

MICHAEL NASI, a partner with Jackson Walker LLP, discussed stories rarely told about deregulated electric markets. Other speakers included **KELSEY OLSON**, Deputy Secretary of the Kansas Department of Agriculture; and **BRANDI MILLER**, CEO of the Kansas Cooperative Council.

Kansas Committee for Rural Electrification (KCRE) Chairman **MIKE MORTON** gave a report before the KCRE membership and held an officer election.

KEC's Loss Control, Safety and Compliance Department recognized cooperatives that earned "No Lost Time" awards and Safety Achievement Certificates. KEC's Government Relations staff gave a legislative update.

Kansas legislators were the focus during KEC's annual Legislative Reception. There were more than 60 legislators who attended the reception to visit with co-op constituents.

The KCRE silent auction raised \$5,225. The KEC Auxiliary quilt auction raised \$800 for KEC's youth programs. **PAT PARKE**, Midwest Energy, won the auction for the K-State quilt, and **STEVE MCFARLAND**, Heartland, won the auction for the KU quilt. Both quilts were created and donated by Rolling Hills members **LUANN WILSON** and **ANGELIA REITER**. **BRIAN LANG**, DS&O, won the auction for the guitar donated by Mike Rayburn.

Prior to the meeting, three directors' courses were offered. On Sunday evening, members enjoyed a welcome reception.



"Trooper Ben" Gardner (pictured front, center), poses with (from left) Bruce Graham, KEC CEO; Keith McNickle, KEC Board President; and Jim Matheson, NRECA CEO, during his social media presentation at the KEC Annual Meeting on Jan. 27.