



# A DAY IN THE LIFE OF YOUR JACKSON ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE TEAM



If you've ever passed by Jackson Electric Cooperative's headquarters, either while traveling down County Road F or from the I-94 corridor, you've probably seen what looks like a separate office building and a warehouse. From a distance, our departments may appear separate. When you move around the building and zoom in like I did, you soon realize that every department is connected and works together to serve the Jackson Electric membership. While I wasn't able to speak with everyone, I had a chance to check in with eight of Jackson Electric's 20 employees.

**Operations (otherwise known as the line crew)** When it comes to the Jackson Electric team, thoughts immediately travel to the line crew, the most visible team members. My first stop is the operations office, where Line Foreman Brian Schultz and Lead Lineman Jesse Hansen are meeting with Eric Steien, line superintendent, to discuss what jobs and service orders need to be completed for the day. The remaining crew members are out in the warehouse preparing the trucks and stocking them with materials.

"It really depends on the job, but we try to be ready to go by 8 a.m.," shares Jesse as we walk into the truck bay area where he and Brian will assign the work to the crews shortly.

"If they are going to a job that already has the hardware and poles on site or are doing maintenance work, the crews can get going right away," says Brian. "If they need to load skid steers, materials, and poles, it takes longer."

One of the line workers is carrying a lunch box and some bottled water. I learn that the only true sit-down break for the crew is their half-hour lunch break, which is usually taken in the field. "Theoretically, once you leave the office, you should be in the field all day unless something breaks and you have to come back or there's a change of plans," Brian explains.

After the trucks leave for the day, I observe them rolling back into the driveway around 3:30 p.m. The crew takes the last half-hour of the workday to clean the trucks and turn in their paperwork for the work orders they completed. Today, a crew was working on the Highway 71 line rebuild project, while another was working on pole changes. "Poles are changed out in the winter because the ground is frozen and



Jesse Hansen, lead lineman

we can more easily access some of the areas," says Brian. "It's also a good time because April through November is generally dedicated to new builds."

In addition to maintaining reliable service for your home or business, our minimally staffed line crew dabbles in maintaining their own equipment, substation repair, and metering. "Matt Bush is considered our in-house mechanic, but he's also on the line crew and

does staking for new builds," says Jesse. "Our knowledge has to be broader."

Some crew members are also involved in innovative services, such as installing commercial and residential electric vehicle charging stations and JacksonSolar projects for our members. "When there's a solar installation scheduled, I'm pulled off the line crew to help with that," says Jesse. Jackson Electric's crew is compensated by JacksonSolar when they install a solar system.

Have you ever wondered what line workers do when the weather is extreme? I discovered there's no such thing as a snow day. As long as it's not a severe thunderstorm, the crew can work in the rain, and equipment maintenance work indoors is only reserved for those days with frigid temperatures. "We adjust our work as needed for the weather, but rain or snow doesn't keep us from a normal day of work," concludes Jesse.

**Warehouse** A few steps beyond the truck bay lies the warehouse, where Brian Dolesy, warehouse clerk, is helping the crew load material after plowing the parking lot and salting the sidewalks at the start of business. "I keep a material sign-out sheet for accountability," Brian says. "Each item in inventory must be signed out to a work order."

When materials are taken out of inventory, it's also Brian's job to reorder



Brian Schultz, line foreman



Brian Dolesy, warehouse clerk

inventory to ensure the crew has the materials they need to complete their work orders. Like the shortages and extended lead times that other industries are facing, Brian also has to plan much further in advance to receive needed inventory. “A lot of items used to be stock items that were on hand. We had to order transformers early in order to get them by April or May,” says Brian.

During the pandemic, Brian also faced the challenge of checking with various vendors to see who had the right supplies on hand. “We had a problem with smaller materials, too,” shares Brian. “There was a point where there was a shortage of lag screws.”

As the trucks roll out of the bay, Brian ventures to check on the HVAC system, another one of his daily responsibilities. “I check to make sure the heat pumps are working correctly,” he says. “Sometimes there’s a system code or alert that needs to be addressed.”

If he’s not at his desk managing the warehouse inventory in the software system or checking pricing of material throughout the remainder of the day, you may find Brian plowing more snow (or mowing lots of grass in the summer), loading a water heater, or completing other miscellaneous duties for the operations department. “Every day varies,” Brian concludes. “I do whatever needs to be done to assist.”

**Operations Accountant** After visiting with Brian, Jerel Gunning, operations accountant, was just completing a service order for a member’s area light that stopped working. Jerel also handles service orders related to tree branches near lines, unlevel transformers, or other equipment requiring repair, such as meter sockets. “I’m the initial contact for anything operations related,” Jerel says.

From spring to fall, Jerel is heavily involved with new service requests after the initial new membership process is completed. “There’s a specific process for setting up new service,” he shares. “I coordinate the site meet with our staking technician, enter the service location data that integrates with our outage management system, calculate the line build cost for our accounting department to invoice, and monitor when the line build is paid in full to get the new construction on our schedule.”



Jerel Gunning, operations accountant

Jerel’s regular duties expand beyond the day-to-day operations tasks you would expect. Yet, these duties ultimately impact the operations department. After the billing process is complete, you’ll find Jerel collaborating with the accounting department to complete the month-end financials. “I’m responsible for fleet maintenance, posting expenses, recording service, and closing out

expenses at the end of the month,” he says.

Remember the work order sign-out sheet Brian told us about? Jerel also works with Brian to ensure material costs are posted to the correct work order, and he has a system of checks and balances to ensure that work orders are closed out correctly to capitalize the items attached to them. “We strive to maintain costs by making good decisions to effectively and responsibly manage the cooperative’s money,” Jerel concludes. “We’re here to use our members’ resources efficiently to keep electric rates appropriately low.”



Brandi Shramek (left), member relations advisor, and Deanna Oliver, accountant

**Accountant** I continue my rounds, walking just down the hall. The nameplate outside the office door says, “Deanna Oliver – Accountant.” I peak my head in the door to find Deanna is just finishing up a phone call regarding a billing question. I can tell by the blue deposit bag and balance sheet on her desk that she has just gone through her daily balancing system and payment reports. “Checking the reports daily is easier to identify an issue rather than waiting to look at a whole week at a time,” Deanna reports.

Depending on the week, you’ll find Deanna working on various tasks. The first week of the month is the billing process, for which she has three business days to complete. Deanna explains to me how meter reads are exported from Yukon, our metering system. The member’s meter communicates with Yukon and reports in a daily meter reading. These readings are then used to calculate your monthly billing statement. There are times when the line crew manually read some of the meters. Deanna then posts those meter reads to the specific accounts.

A test company environment in Jackson Electric’s customer information system allows Deanna to run a pre-bill calculation that generates 15 different reports, such as missing readings, high/low usage analysis compared to the prior month, new connects, disconnects, and meter exchanges. “I also review our large accounts for accuracy and monitor the banked production for our solar accounts,” Deanna shares. “One wrong number could change a bill drastically.”

The billing process is a very important part of Deanna’s job, but it’s not her only job. Deanna also serves as part of the finance department. After billing is complete, she’s working



with Jerel on the month-end financials for the previous month and answering members' billing questions ranging from understanding how to read their bill to autopay enrollment. "Throughout the month, I'm also working on accounts payable invoices, credit card statements, entry of meter exchanges, and closing service orders for electric service transfers," she adds.

**Member Service Representative** If you've ever called Jackson Electric's office or stopped by our lobby, your first point of contact was likely Maggie Mickelson, member service representative. I found Maggie in the front office, which is just behind the counter in the lobby. By the time I visited with Maggie, she'd already opened the cash register, unlocked the front door, checked the drop box, and dropped outgoing letters in the mail. "I enjoy being able to connect with the members and help them with any issues they may have," Maggie says.

Maggie is the "press zero to reach the receptionist option" on our phone prompt. She most commonly answers general billing questions such as account balance inquiries or transaction history. "If it's not something I can answer, I forward the member's call to the correct department," shares Maggie. "As I gain more experience in this position, I'm able to answer more questions, and I look forward to learning more to help everyone as much as I can."



Maggie Mickelson, member services representative

As you may recall, payments are due on the 24th day of each month. Maggie expects to be busy with mail and walk-in payments in the week leading up to the payment due date. She's learned to balance her tasks throughout the month to work around the billing cycle. "We adjust our process for certain parts of the month," she explains. "I'll work on other projects,

like scanning and making sure member folders are up-to-date during the times I'm not processing payments."

Every office requires office supplies or needs to ship a package from time to time. Maggie is responsible for requesting office supply orders from the team and placing that order to ensure everyone has the supplies they need for normal day-to-day functions.

**Marketing Communications Specialist** After chatting with Maggie, I peek my head in the lobby to see if Marketing Communications Specialist Samantha Bratland is in her office, which is adjacent to the lobby. I find her designing a safety graphic for a social media post next week. Samantha creates graphic design content one to two weeks ahead of time for Jackson Electric's Facebook and Instagram accounts. She



Samantha Bratland, marketing communications specialist

also designs graphics for the e-newsletter and other cooperative publications. "I'm learning branding of electric cooperatives and how to educate members on what we're doing," she says. "I want to create educational content that members can relate to and understand."

With graphic design also comes photos. Samantha was planning to take the EV later in the day to capture a photo of where the crew is working on Highway 71. "I don't take photos every day,

but I am trying to take more photos of the crew working to keep members informed of the line crew's projects."

Each employee on the member relations team wears many hats beyond their main job duties. Samantha co-coordinates the youth ambassador program. "I enjoy working with the youth and educating them about cooperatives," she says. "I'm learning alongside them and experiencing opportunities I otherwise wouldn't have."

Samantha also lists the duties she's been cross-trained to do. With her recent transition from the member service representative position, Samantha knows how to take payments and answer billing questions. She also serves as backup for service transfers, water heater questions, and high bill complaints. "We are a small team, but we can still function when someone is gone for several days," she concludes. "We adapt and know how to take care of the job to continue meeting our members' needs."

**Member Relations Manager** What does it mean to be part of the member relations department? I had a chance to catch Member Relations Manager Carol Blaken between meetings to find out the answer. "Member relations is internal and external communications. We work with the members on different programs and services, to include JacksonSolar and EV chargers, available to them through the cooperative," she says. "We also make sure our employees understand these programs and services so that we can promote them and answer members' questions."

Carol oversees the marketing and communications of the cooperative



Carol Blaken, member relations manager

and is responsible for making sure accurate communication is going out to the membership. She's the administrator behind the Facebook and Instagram accounts, and she takes the after-hours calls relayed from the call center regarding electric heat or water heater issues.

She also coordinates the editorial content for the e-newsletter, magazine, and radio spots, and establishes deadlines for the department to maintain timely communications to the membership. "The end of the month is when most of our deadlines occur," Carol says. "I also prepare the materials for the board meetings and send correspondence to the directors."

In the member relations world, you have to be flexible and able to adapt to any situation that arises. Carol addresses how there are times when communication needs to be put together quickly and accurately to get a message out to members. "There are instances where something has occurred and we

need to quickly pivot and get that information out," she says. "For example, this could be a message to alert members of a scam that's circulating. We get as much information out there as we can."

**Member Relations Advisor** If you've ever needed a water heater repair, transfer of service, or had an energy management question, it's almost guaranteed that you've spoken with me, Brandi, your member relations advisor. After completing my interviews for this feature article, I returned to my desk to return a call regarding a water heater repair, and I processed a new membership application that was submitted through our online portal.

It's the end of the month, a busier time than usual for the member relations department. I multitask composing my feature article for the monthly member magazine before the deadline, administering energy efficiency rebates, and ensuring service transfers are completed on the correct dates before the billing process is finalized.

When I'm not educating members about Jackson Electric's programs and services, I'm either planning with Samantha for our next youth ambassador meeting, arranging a time for the youth ambassadors to bring cheer to our local nursing home residents, or working on a solar site assessment report for a potential JacksonSolar install.

*No two days are alike at Jackson Electric, and we must always be ready to pivot. Stay tuned for your May issue of the magazine, where you'll get a firsthand account of how day-to-day operations change when the lights flicker and don't come back on. —Brandi Shramek, Member Relations Advisor*

## DON'T PASS ON A SCHOLARSHIP OPPORTUNITY



Jackson Electric is awarding up to ten \$1,000 youth scholarships to qualified graduating high school seniors who demonstrate their desire to continue their post-secondary education. Student must be a child (or under legal guardianship) of an active member (primary residence) of Jackson Electric and reside in the same household.

Scholarship applications are available from our office or can be downloaded at [www.jackelec.com/scholarships-0](http://www.jackelec.com/scholarships-0). Completed scholarship applications can be submitted to [info@jackelec.com](mailto:info@jackelec.com) or mailed to:

Jackson Electric Cooperative  
Attn: Scholarships  
N6868 County Road F  
Black River Falls, WI 54615

**Scholarship application deadline is March 28, 2022, 4 p.m. No late applications will be accepted.**

## Jackson Electric Cooperative 85th Annual Meeting

**Tuesday, April 19, 2022, 7 p.m.**  
**Lunda Theatre**  
**Black River Falls, Wis.**



Watch for your annual meeting report in next month's Wisconsin Energy Cooperative News.



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