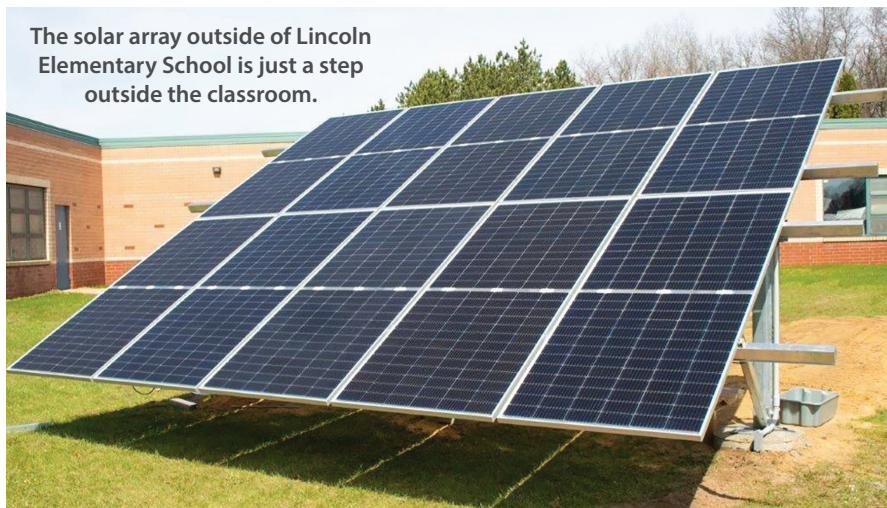


SOLAR WITH A PURPOSE:

PARTNERSHIPS CREATE HANDS-ON LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES



“It takes a village to raise a child,” as the saying goes. In this case, the village is the collaboration of Jackson Electric, JacksonSolar, OneEnergy Renewables, and the Alma Center-Humbird-Merrillan and Melrose-Mindoro School Districts to make solar for each of these schools a reality. “Having our own solar system on site changes solar from a concept taught in the classroom to a hands-on learning experience,” shares Mel-Min Superintendent Jeff Arzt.

The idea for the project originated about three years ago, shortly after the incorporation of JacksonSolar. Early on, Jackson Electric’s Member Relations Manager Carol Blaken began talking with the school districts served by Jackson Electric’s service lines to see if there was any interest in each working together on a solar energy project. “Initially, JacksonSolar was incorporated to educate about solar energy, and one of our cooperative principles focuses on just that. We knew we needed to start the solar education process somewhere,” says Carol. “The best outreach is to our schools, where solar education can be built into the curriculum.”

The school districts were on board and receptive of the idea. “We were quite excited when Jackson Electric approached us,” shares former AC-H-M Superintendent Paul Fischer. “It’s important for students to see the relationship between schools and businesses. We’ve had a great partnership with Jackson Electric with our students

participating in the youth ambassador program.”

Over the last few years, Jackson Electric and JacksonSolar did their homework in creating a plan on how to make the project happen. “The largest obstacle for JacksonSolar, at that time, was determining how to pay for this investment in education,” says Carol. “JacksonSolar was in its infancy and a donation of that magnitude would be difficult for the business to absorb.”

Patience was key in this project as momentum for the project started to gain traction when Jackson Electric formed a working relationship with Eric Udelhofen, project development director at OneEnergy Renewables, during the construction of the commercial solar sites in Jackson Electric’s service territory. “We reached out early on in the project about the possibility of donating any spare panels at the end of the construction to install solar at schools in the area,” Eric shares.

OneEnergy strives to incorporate community outreach into all of its projects, with the Mel-Min and AC-H-M projects being the first, but not the last, school-based projects. “We worked with nonprofit organizations in Ashland where panels were installed for a women’s shelter and a food pantry. Our goal is to get solar in a more visible position and increase awareness to a broader audience,” says Eric.

Last year, Jackson Electric/JacksonSolar reapproached the schools and put together a formal agreement and understanding for the expectations of the project. OneEnergy



Left to right: JacksonSolar PV associates Jesse Hansen and Don Fortun stake out the Mel-Min solar site. Jackson Electric linemen Tanner Klobucher and Grant Witcraft work to install panels at the Mel-Min site on a snowy February day. Jackson Electric lineman Spencer Paulson and PV associate/lineman Jesse Hansen tackle some of the final steps on the Lincoln Elementary install.

School Solar Projects Continued from previous page

Renewables would donate the panels; JacksonSolar would donate the racking, microinverters, and labor; and Jackson Electric would commission the system and set the meter. Together, Jackson Electric, JacksonSolar, and the schools would work together to build a curriculum. “Each district’s school board accepted the agreement and were happy to work with us, as we are with them,” shares Carol.

If you take a drive past the Mel-Min school on Highway 108, you can see the panel installed near the maintenance shop. The system produces enough energy to offset the energy usage for this building. “We were excited to see the district moving forward, being part of the solution,” shares Jeff. “It’s important for students to learn how they can power change and have real world discussions and think critically about renewable energy, energy efficiency, the true cost of installation, generation, storage, and careers in the clean energy sector.”

“I’m also looking forward to working with the school’s agricultural instructor on this project,” says Carol. “At the Mel-Min school, the panel is constructed in an area where the students could start a pollinator project of some sort. I truly believe the opportunities to educate with this system are limitless.”

The array at Lincoln Elementary School is not as visible from the road, but it is in an area where students will be able to look out the classroom window or take a step outside for outdoor learning. “Solar will be incorporated into the fifth- and sixth-grade science curriculum,” says Lincoln Elementary Principal Brad Rogers. “They will participate in monthly lessons on analyzing the system’s production versus the school’s usage, which will also incorporate math and graphing. We plan to build in other activities as we develop the curriculum.”

When it takes a village, it helps when everyone involved has the same goals and motivation. The school solar projects will be a powerful way to introduce the solar energy concept and provide firsthand experience with solar. “It’s a new concept, and some people don’t have the background education on how beneficial solar can be,” shares Paul.

“We want our students to understand the difference between renewables and non-renewable resources. I’m interested in renewable energy and the opportunity to teach students about taking care of the environment and how it can impact the future,” adds Brad.

Jackson Electric and JacksonSolar hope that students learn the facts about solar energy to be more informed consumers and start recognizing career paths in the energy sector and trades. Cooperatives, like Jackson Electric, are concerned about their community; education, training, and information are rooted in the seven cooperative principles. “It’s an exciting partnership with JacksonSolar being new to the industry and providing this donation,” says Carol. “We’ve enjoyed working with our schools and youth for so many years. Community is important to us.” —
Brandi Shramek, Member Relations Advisor



The panel at the Melrose-Mindoro School district is visible from Highway 108 and produces enough energy to offset the maintenance shop's consumption.

CONSIDER ENERGY EFFICIENCY BEFORE INVESTING IN SOLAR

With the current increase in the investment tax credit for solar energy systems, you can now deduct 30 percent of the cost of the installation from your federal taxes. This will be available until 2033, at which it will drop back down to 26 percent.

Because of this tax credit increase, you will see, hear, and read more advertising from solar companies soliciting you to consider their services. Before jumping into a solar contract, you should determine if there are ways to reduce your energy consumption with low-cost options first:

- Does your home need new insulation?
- Have you sealed air leaks?
- Do you have an old appliance that could use an upgrade?
- Have you conducted an energy audit to target energy efficient upgrades?

Making simple upgrades to improve your home’s efficiency or changing your habits are the most affordable, practical first steps that you should take.

Solar systems should be sized to offset your energy consumption or usage. Reducing your consumption will also reduce the size of the system recommended, saving you money in the long run by not spending it on an oversized, unbeneficial system. Jackson Electric has resources available where you can review your usage history or Jackson Electric’s staff can assist you in reviewing your past energy usage and identify trends.

The purchase and installation of a solar system is an investment. No matter which solar company you plan to work with, your first call should be to Jackson Electric to learn about our policies, requirements, fees, and what your billing statement will look like after installation.

Melrose-Mindoro School hosted a ribbon-cutting recognition on September 27. Due to publishing deadlines, we weren't able to publish photos in this month's magazine. Please reference Jackson Electric's Facebook page to view the ceremony's photos.



ATTENTION ELECTRIC VEHICLE OWNERS

Please contact Jackson Electric **BEFORE** purchasing an electric vehicle charger for your vehicle. Jackson Electric sells EV chargers and can give you an off-peak charging rate only if you purchase the charger from Jackson Electric. These chargers are programmed to allow for off-peak charging in which the meter and receiver are located within the shell of the charger.

If you utilize a charger that was purchased online or from your vehicle dealer and want the off-peak rate, Jackson Electric will install the metering and service equipment for a fee. The member's electrician will have to wire the service. Jackson Electric reserves the right to refuse service connection of electrical service if the member's equipment does not meet the Wisconsin

electrical code or is not sufficient to maintain the additional load.

In addition, your service and transformer may need to be upgraded to manage this load. This may be at the expense of the member. Please contact Jackson Electric before installing the EV charger so we can efficiently be able to meet your electrical demands.

ZOOMING IN ON GRANT WITCRAFT

“Be patient,” says Jackson Electric lineman Grant Witcraft. “Delivering drywall wasn’t part of the plan, but it’s what I had to do while I was trying to get my foot in the door.”

After graduating from Blair-Taylor High School, Grant enlisted in the Marine Corps. He realized he wasn’t going to stay in the service forever and was inspired by a fellow team leader who was leaving to become an electrical engineer. “I was interested in the electrical aspect, so he suggested for me to look into becoming an electrician,” Grant shares. “I eventually stumbled into becoming a lineman because I was looking for something with more adrenaline and variety.”

From there, Grant attended line school in Georgia, where he learned the day-to-day operations of a line crew and construction of new service lines. He eventually found himself back in Wisconsin, delivering drywall out of a boom truck in Madison. As Grant said, this wasn’t the plan but it’s what he had to do at the time. “This job did give me experience with operating large equipment,” he shares.



There’s no reluctance from Grant when it comes to climbing a pole or going up in a bucket truck. Here, he practices pole-top rescue during a safety meeting.

When Grant’s not climbing a pole, you just might find him cruising down Victory Lane at the Tomah-Sparta Speedway.



After countless job applications and several dead ends in a competitive playing field, the hard work and dedication Grant’s dad taught him about finally paid off five years ago when he was hired at Jackson Electric as a 1,000-hour employee. “My dad taught my brother and I to earn everything,” shares Grant. “Nothing is ever given to you unless you earn it.”

Through the limited-term employment, Grant earned his ticket to a lineman apprenticeship, a four-year program through Chippewa Valley Technical College, which combines coursework and on-the-job training. Grant completed the apprenticeship and became a journeyman lineman this year. “Climbing a pole or getting in a bucket is fulfilling and gives me adrenaline,” says Grant. “I enjoy that every day is different.”

When he’s not in a bucket, you can find Grant racing laps around the Tomah-Sparta Speedway every Friday night, something he’s wanted to do ever since his dad took him to the races as a kid. “I was helping someone else run vintage cars, and decided it was time to build my own,” he shares. “I enjoy the competitive aspect, something I’ve been looking for since leaving the service.”

Grant concludes with this bit of advice: “If there’s something you want to do, and you can afford it, do it. Stop putting it off.”

Learn more about Grant:

1. What’s your favorite sport?
When I was in high school, I would have given anything to play football, but as soon as summer hit it was baseball. Football is what I loved to play, but my grandpa and I had a connection with baseball. The pace of baseball allowed grandpa to be standing by the fence watching and talking with me.
2. What was your first REAL purchase as an adult?
The first real thing I bought before even owning a pickup by myself was my 2013 Harley-Davidson Sportster 48 that I bought brand new when I was in the service. I still have it.
3. What’s the most favorite place you’ve ever visited?
We went on our honeymoon to Tahiti in French Polynesia. I would probably give up racing to retire there and just bum on the beach.

OCTOBER IS CO-OP MONTH

JACKSON ELECTRIC'S PLEDGE TO ITS MEMBERS

MISSION: To provide safe, reliable power for all generations.

Our Pledge is to:

- Encourage the wise use of our energy resources
- Perform our work in a manner that is environmentally and socially acceptable
- Reference "The Seven Cooperative Principles" as our guide to do our business
- Operate our business in a financially sound manner
- Hold ourselves accountable to the highest standard for employee and public safety and security



Jackson Electric Cooperative's Board of Directors

Seated, left to right: Jerry Huber (District 3 and Dairyland Power representative), Kristi Hanson (District 2), Dan Smrekar (District 8), Gary Woods (District 9 and board president).

Standing, left to right: Dave Peasley (District 5 and board secretary/treasurer), Chris Curran (District 4 and board vice president), Brian Huber (District 7), Les Dokkestul (District 1), and Troy Torkelson (District 6).

PAY MORE FOR A NEW LINE BUILD

If you would like to pay more for a new line build, then plan to install your new line when there's frost in the ground. Of course, no one wants to pay more for any type of service, but there is a possibility that you'll pay more for your new line build if it's installed November 1 or later.

Why? Jackson Electric needs to contract specialized equipment to break through the frost to plow in your electrical service, which is costly.

It is our recommendation that if you're planning to build a structure during the winter season and will need electric service, contact Jackson Electric now so any line builds can be arranged.

ENERGY ASSISTANCE IS AVAILABLE

Jackson Electric utilizes the Wisconsin Home Energy Assistance Program (WHEAP) to administer energy assistance to its members. This program is funded by monthly fees collected by Jackson Electric from each of its members.

The "Commitment to Community" line item on members' billing statements is collected where half is distributed to WHEAP and the remaining to Jackson Electric's internal rebate program.

If you are in need of energy assistance, please visit homeenergyplus.wi.gov or contact your county's Department of Health and Human Services to learn more about this program and income guidelines.

During the month of October, look for Jackson Electric Cooperative's employees wearing pink shirts and hard hats in support of National Breast Cancer Awareness Month.



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Chris Curran, Vice President
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Jerry Huber, Dairyland Power Representative
Daniel Smrekar, Kristi Hanson, Brian Huber,
Troy Torkelson, Les Dokkestul
Kevin Babcock, General Manager/CEO

Jackson Electric Cooperative is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

Your Touchstone Energy® Partner 