

PLAYGROUND IMPROVEMENT PLANNING COMMITTEE RECEIVES 2023 MIKE ANDERSON MEMORIAL

A gift for the all-abilities playground

Each year, Jackson Electric’s board of directors nominates a recipient for the annual Mike Anderson Memorial. Mike was committed to the seventh cooperative principle, concern for community. This memorial is Jackson Electric’s way of giving back to the community and carrying on Mike’s legacy.

Imagine a community playground where children of all ages and abilities can play, form friendships, and just be kids. That’s the goal of the Playground Improvement Planning Committee in Jackson County. “While this park will benefit all children in Jackson County, our hope is that the accessibility of this playground will allow for a safe, engaging, and valuable meeting place for all children, parents, and caregivers regardless of age or ability,” shares committee co-chair and Jackson Electric member Nicole Thompson.

Local moms, including Nicole, frequent area parks and saw the need for new equipment at the Lunda Community Park in Black River Falls. The wooden equipment is over 23 years old, and the sandy base under the equipment makes it difficult to maneuver. Nicole, Ashley Segelhurst, and Anneliese Eddy took the project one step further, recognizing the impact of an all-abilities park in our com-

munity. “The nearest all-abilities parks are located in Eau Claire, La Crosse, and Tomah,” says Nicole.

The Lunda Park is an attractive community park located off Tyler Street in Black River Falls. The park features two covered picnic areas, a fishing pond with an accessible fishing platform, and a quarter-mile paved walking path. “These already-established amenities make the park a worthwhile destination for families and a logical location for the all-abilities playground,” explains Nicole.

The committee received a start-up grant from the Black River Falls Area Foundation, a generous matching fund from the Lunda Charitable Trust, and a grant from Jackson County Behavioral Health. These funds, along with the large amount of community interest in the project, have helped the project grow. A committee and sub-committees were formed to handle various tasks, from fundraising, grant writing, secur-

ing applicable permits, to choosing the appropriate equipment. “We’re now able to incorporate shade structures, fencing, and an accessible restroom,” says Nicole.

Throughout this planning and learning process, the committee has learned that 53 percent of differently abled individuals lack friendships due to the inability to partake in certain activities. Not only will the park be used by community members, but also therapists and teachers who will use the location for therapy and an inclusive play space. The goal of the playground is to provide children of all abilities with the opportunity to make valued friendships. “This memorial will allow us to fulfill this goal, creating a safe place for families, students, and community members to make beautiful memories moving forward,” says Nicole.

The committee is thankful to Jackson Electric for selecting them as this year’s recipient of the Mike Anderson Memorial. “The support that individuals and local businesses in Jackson County have shown for the project has been truly overwhelming,” concludes Nicole. “We have learned so much throughout the process, but the greatest takeaway is that we are living in a place where we want to raise our children.” — *Brandi Shramek, Member Relations Advisor*



The Playground Improvement Planning Committee envisions a park similar to these concept images. More specific equipment and plans will be available in May or June 2023. The appropriate equipment will be selected by Becky Windsor, physical therapist (Black River Memorial Hospital), Dana Johnson (Jackson County Behavioral Health), Jordan and Stephanie Nortman (community members), Sarah Larkin (Disability Association of Jackson County board member), and Chad Duerkop (City of Black River Falls Parks and Recreation director).

PETS ARE FAMILY, TOO

LOCAL BOARDING FACILITY PROVIDES THE UTMOST CARE FOR YOUR FURRY FRIENDS

When you go on vacation, what type of amenities do you look for when choosing your place to stay? Price? Cleanliness? Reviews? Do you do the same for your four-legged family members? At K-9 Country Lodge, located on County Road C just outside of Black River Falls, they understand that your pets are more than just pets; they're members of the family, and K-9 staff's philosophy is to treat them as such. "When customers leave their pets here, they feel comfortable," shares Lu Ann Aschenbrenner, owner/manager of K-9.

Lu Ann explains that the inspiration for K-9 all began with Marlee and Rich Slifka and their yellow lab, Rerod, whom they loved dearly. The Slifkas did a lot of traveling and felt Rerod also deserved a quality vacation. There was a lack of quality dog boarding in the Black River Falls area, so they built K-9 to meet this community need. "I just recently purchased the building and surrounding

acreage, but I have managed the business for 22 years," says Lu Ann.

Boarding your pet at K-9 is a luxury experience, as it's not just a garage with kennels. Like selecting a hotel room, you will be able to select from four different types of suites for your dog ranging from the cozy Superior Suites for smaller pets to Penthouse Suites with windows, televisions, and lots of space if you have a larger dog or more than one furry friend. "During their stay, we pamper them the best that we can," says Lu Ann.

Each dog is assigned to a caretaker who lets them out to use the bathroom two to three times per day, feeds them according to the owner's instructions, and completes items on the ala carte menu, as requested. Does a full body massage, play time, an on-leash nature trail walk, or a securely fenced off-leash run sound appealing for your pet? You can add on these items to make their time away from you more fun. "We want the

animals staying busy and active to make their stay more enjoyable," says Lu Ann. "We train our staff to provide for your pet during their stay and stress the importance of being friendly."

When you bring your pet to stay at K-9, they supply stainless-steel bowls, cots, and blankets, but suggest bringing a safe toy and their own food because it's easier on digestion. However, K-9 understands that you may forget the food in the hustle and bustle of getting ready for vacation, so they do have house food on hand. "We also sell Fromm's and American Natural Premium dog food, both made in Wisconsin," shares Lu Ann.

In addition to having trained staff, K-9's facility itself is secure. The six-foot tall cantilever perimeter is buried six inches underground, keeping your pet safe and contained. Additionally, there is a security system for fire and theft. "I live close by, and the vet office is right next door if it's ever needed," says Lu Ann. "We also have a good relationship with Northwood Vet. If there's an emergency with your pet, we are going to do everything we can."

Lu Ann takes pride in the facility's cleanliness, which is important for mitigating the spread of disease. Every 15 minutes, K-9's recently updated air exchanger system brings fresh air into the fully climate-controlled facility and extracts the stale air. Routine cleaning is also part of her staff's daily tasks. "I would never be embarrassed to give a tour and show off the facility at any time," says Lu Ann. "I believe it's important to have a clean facility, and we have nothing to hide."



Above left: The penthouse suite is spacious, offering your pet window views and a TV. Above center: This lab tries out day camp to get a feel for the facility. Above right: K-9's suites offer a private, clean place for your dog to stay. Right: The securely fenced perimeter allows your pet to safely play outside during their stay.

WECA'S EDUCATION AND LOBBY DAYS

from an Intern's Perspective

Jackson Electric's Marketing Communications Intern, Faith Leisgang, had an opportunity to travel to Madison to listen and learn about how energy policies can affect electric cooperatives and their members. This is what Faith has to say about her experience.

Attending the Wisconsin Electric Cooperative Association's Education and Lobby Days event on March 23, 2023, was an eye-opening experience and introduced me to more opportunities within the cooperative business model.

I had the opportunity to listen to U.S. Congressman Derrick Van Orden discuss ways he is aiding cooperatives and rural communities in the White House. Throughout his time presenting to the group, Van Orden reiterated that he means what he says. During a House committee meeting in February he said, "Electric co-ops are the backbone of reliable power in rural America, especially in Wisconsin, and ensuring that these systems are able to be upgraded in a timely and efficient manner is critical for millions of Americans."

The visit to the State Capitol included meetings with state senators and state representatives. Within a small group, I personally had the opportunity to meet with Senator Jesse James and Representative Donna Rozar. We brought forward issues with legislative bills that will take the floor and could impact the cooperative. In the meetings we asked for support on the following issues:

1. WECA members asked for support of legislative efforts to bring greater awareness and funding resources to the fight against wild parsnip. Outside

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Left: Mia Handly (left) and Priscilla Newell (second from left) started working at K-9 during high school and have continued as they go to college. Lu Ann Aschenbrenner, owner of K-9 (sitting right), and Renea Hammond, owner of Grooming in the Pines (standing right), each have over 20 years of experience. Below: Lu Ann (left) and Renea spend some quality time with one of the guests.

If you've never boarded your dog before, Lu Ann suggests taking a tour of the facility to provide some peace of mind. She also suggests scheduling your pet for day camp so they get accustomed to the atmosphere before you take that long trip. "Day camp helps your pet understand that you will come back to get them after they stay with us," explains Lu Ann.

It's no surprise that Memorial Day to Labor Day is the busiest time of year for K-9. Christmas and spring breaks in January or February are also popular times for pets to stay. That being said, Lu Ann recommends booking your pet's stay as soon as you know your plans. Planning helps K-9 better accommodate your pet's stay and the type of suite preferred. "Renea Hammond also operates Grooming in the Pines out of our building," says Lu Ann. "If Renea is available and has the opportunity, you may be able to schedule a bath, groom,



or nail trim during your pet's stay. Please ask about these services when you make reservations."

Lu Ann says the most enjoyable part of her job is being around different breeds and sizes of dogs and the friendships she has built with routine customers. It's always fun to see the dogs arrive for their stay, and how excited they are when their owner returns to pick them up. "We're blessed that so many people trust us to board their dogs," Lu Ann concludes.—*Brandi Shramek, Member Relations Advisor*

Cats: K-9 can also accommodate your feline friends. More and more people are getting cats as companion animals because their housing doesn't allow them to have a dog. "We have a cat room where cats from the same family can stay together and an area where they can stay if there is overflow," explains Lu Ann.

Employment: A core group of K-9's staff started there when they were in high school. If you know someone age 14 or older, Lu Ann says this is a great part-time job for young adults who like animals and staying active. The early shift is 7:00 a.m. to late morning and the late shift is 2:30 to 7:00 p.m.

Energy Efficiency Project: Together with Jackson Electric and Dairyland Power's Energy Management Analyst, Lu Ann had an energy audit conducted on the facility to make energy efficient lighting upgrades. Not only did she receive an LED lighting rebate from Jackson Electric for her upgrades, but also applied for and received the Rural Energy for America Program's (REAP) Energy Efficiency Improvement Grant. She notes the lighting has made for a better work environment and has made a difference in her monthly energy costs. To learn more about Jackson Electric's rebates or the REAP grant, contact Jackson Electric's office.

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of the impacts it has on the environment, it can cause rashes and burns when it contacts human skin. This plant is a serious threat to our electric line workers. If the oil gets on their skin, it could cause serious skin issues which may cause the line worker to be gone from work for several days. Sen. Patrick Testin, Rep. Scott Krug, and Rep. Katrina Shankland are working on legislation that would help to minimize the spread of wild parsnip.

2. WECA members asked for our senators and representatives to support Senate Bill 109 and Assembly Bill 105 to allow cooperatives the same ability to use ATVs/UTVs on roadways like other utilities. This bill would aid our line workers greatly in events such as this past winter's storm that made it very difficult for our crews to navigate through many rural areas.
3. WECA is supporting the sale of electricity by the kilowatt-hour (kWh) for electric vehicles. This would be more cost and time efficient to EV owners when stopping to charge their vehicles.
 - a. WECA is working to create an EV license plate that would help EMS, fire, and police to more easily identify an EV after an accident/crash. It is an extra safety precaution as accidents with EVs can be more dangerous for our first responders.
4. WECA asked for support on the use of green lights for utility vehicles in emergency situations to enhance visibility and provide greater road safety measures for our line crews working in emergency situations to restore power for our members.

The largest topic of conversation is the ask of our senators and representatives to oppose third-party and community solar legislation. This legislation seeks to upend a model that has continually provided safe, affordable, and reliable electricity to cooperative consumer members since as early as the 1930s. The cooperatives build community solar systems with all members in mind and costs/savings are shared accordingly, whereas third-party and community solar agreements tend to shift costs onto members who can least afford the systems. Reliability is another issue that could arise if this bill were to pass. As cooperatives it is part of our mission to deliver safe, affordable, and reliable energy to our members. Many cooperatives, including Jackson Electric Cooperative, have programs



that allow our members the opportunity to install solar to their properties, and aid them in reducing their carbon footprint and their electric bill. This legislation could inadvertently create reliability issues that would affect electrical utilities and create costs that would be paid by cooperative members.

Education and Lobby Days strengthened my knowledge of cooperatives and the importance of having them within our rural communities. Personally, I grew up living in the city of Black River Falls. My home receives power from the municipal utility in town, so I didn't learn much about electric cooperatives because we weren't members of one. I now understand that electric cooperatives are a necessity in communities like those in Jackson County.

Jackson Electric provides power to just 5.56 consumers per mile in comparison to the 40 consumers per mile that municipalities serve. For the farmer, the rancher, or the person who just enjoys living out of town, electric cooperatives provide safe, affordable, and reliable energy; that's the biggest takeaway I have from Lobby Days and from working at Jackson Electric Cooperative, thus far. A large portion of the United States is rural. To make it narrower, a large portion of Wisconsin is rural. Electric cooperatives provide power to roughly 10% of Wisconsin's population, yet they cover over 50% of territory within the state. That difference is huge and shows the significant impact electric cooperatives have on the lives of people in rural communities who deserve to have the same convenience that comes with electrification as people who live in largely populated areas.—Faith Leisgang



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