

ROOTED IN BLACK RIVER FALLS: Young Entrepreneurs Building a Future Close to Home



On the corner of Water Street and County Road A, just across from Kwik Trip, sits a bustling hub of activity that has quickly become a cornerstone for local homeowners, contractors, and weekend project warriors. G&S Equipment, run by Black River Falls natives Gage and Sadie Guillaume, is more than a rental business. It's a story of two young entrepreneurs who chose to stay planted in their hometown and grow something of their own.

For many, the path to entrepreneurship means leaving a small town in search of opportunities elsewhere. For Gage and Sadie, it meant looking around and realizing opportunity was right here among familiar roads, longtime neighbors, and a community that had already shaped them.

Building a Business Where They Grew Up

The roots of G&S Equipment began humbly in 2022, when Gage and Sadie started a small engine repair shop out of their garage. At the time, Sadie worked at Scholze's Ace Hardware, where she helped manage the rental department. Meanwhile, through their small business, Gage maintained the store's rental equipment, honing his mechanical skills.

Entrepreneurship runs deep for both.



By popular request, a mini excavator was added to the fleet one year ago.

They come from families who operate local businesses and grew up surrounded by examples of hard work and community involvement. "It was always Gage's dream to start his own business," Sadie says. "He has a diesel mechanic degree and small engine training and wanted to go out and do something on his own."

When the opportunity arose in April 2024 to purchase the rental portion of the business they already knew so well, they didn't hesitate. They stayed in Black River Falls, not because they had to, but because they wanted to build something meaningful here. "Growing up here, being close to family, and forming connections made sense," Sadie explains. "This is home."

From Garage to Growing Enterprise

Today, G&S Equipment offers a wide range of tools and machinery to everyone from DIY homeowners to small contractors. The couple has built a rental fleet that is always growing and adapting to the real needs of a rural community.

In fact, the rental side of the business grew so rapidly that it naturally reshaped their priorities. While the couple originally offered small engine repair, the demand for equipment rentals quickly outpaced their capacity. As the business expanded, they chose to focus entirely on maintaining and growing their rental fleet, referring repair work to other local businesses whenever possible. It wasn't about stepping away from service but leaning into the need the community brought to their door. "Oil changes, maintenance, and fixing what comes back keeps me plenty busy in keeping our equipment in top shape," Gage says.

Their most requested item? *The mini excavator.* "We didn't have one our first year and we received many calls



Gage, Sadie, and their trusty sidekick Zeke are ready to assist you with your equipment and tool rental needs.

requesting one," Gage shares. "Once we got one, it was rented out almost nonstop because no one else local offers one. We had to schedule downtime just to keep up with maintenance."

Their mornings start early and fast. "Summer is a mad rush," Gage says. "When we open at 7:30 a.m., we're loading equipment nonstop for the first couple hours."

On a typical day, they send out around 25 pieces of equipment. Saturday rental pickups are especially popular. "By 10 a.m., the lot is almost empty," Gage says.

Despite the growth, they've kept things hands on. The pair manages nearly everything themselves, with two seasonal employees helping in the summer for rentals, and in winter for commercial snow removal. Sadie handles the front counter, bookkeeping, marketing, and most of the behind-the-scenes work that keeps the business running smoothly. Gage focuses on maintaining the equipment and managing the rental fleet, which keeps the operation moving day after day.

A Business Built on Community

Operating in a small town isn't just familiar, it's strategic. Their early work in small engine repair meant they'd already built a trustworthy reputation. "We've made so many connections," Sadie says. "We try to help the people who helped us. When we can't take something on, we send that work to another local business."

They've become known not just for equipment, but for guidance. Many renters come in intimidated by the size or power of the tools they need. Gage doesn't let them leave until they're comfortable. "We let customers try it out and teach them right in the parking lot," he says. "Most people don't need to own a piece of equipment, such as an excavator, but they shouldn't be afraid to use one. We encourage customers to ask questions."

This approach has made G&S Equipment a starting point not just for weekend projects, but for new entrepreneurs as well. "Rentals are a low-cost way to get starter equipment," Gage explains. "It's a way to get your foot in the door without the maintenance or expense."

Motivation, Growth, and the Road Ahead

When asked what keeps them going on the hardest days, their answers are simple but powerful. Gage answers, "Knowing we're building something for the future and being able to look back at what we built."

"We can look back at everything we've accomplished and realize we already made it through the hardest days," Sadie shares.

Their shop dog, Zeke, also plays a role,

greeting customers and delivery drivers, often scoring treats in the process.

In four years, they've gone from a garage-startup to a fully established equipment rental business, and they're not done growing. "We're always updating equipment," Gage says. "We're keeping everything on a two-to-five year cycle. Customers feel more confident operating new equipment and we feel comfortable renting it out."

They're also introducing a new service: providing equipment operators for homeowners who may not feel ready to run machinery themselves. "Sometimes people just need someone to do a quick job," Gage explains. "Or they want to watch and learn. It helps prevent misuse, too."

Staying Local, Dreaming Big

For young entrepreneurs trying to decide whether to take the leap, Sadie advises, "Go for it. If you have the desire, try it. See what you can do."

Gage adds, "It's not perfect. It's more hours than a normal job. But if you want to be successful, you have to put in the time."

Their story is proof that success doesn't require leaving home; it means investing in it. In Black River Falls, these two young business owners are doing just that. They're building a future where they grew up, strengthening the community that raised them, and proving that small towns are full of big opportunities if you're willing to roll up your sleeves.

—Brandi Shramek, Member Relations Supervisor

G&S Equipment LLC
530 N Water Street,
Black River Falls, WI 54615
715.284.7589

Open Monday through Saturday
7:30 a.m. – 5 p.m.
(closed on Saturday during the winter months)

Check their Facebook page for updates on hours and new rental equipment.

How the rental process works:

- 1. Identify the right tool:** Tell the team what project you're tackling, and they'll help match you with the equipment you need. You can try it out to see if you can operate it before you rent, if needed.
- 2. Provide your information:** A driver's license and contact information is needed to draft your rental contract.
- 3. Sign the rental contract:** The team will write up a rental agreement outlining timing, rates, and expectations.
- 4. Learn the equipment:** Before you leave the lot, the team will show you exactly how it works. Don't be afraid to ask lots of questions.
- 5. Head out and get your job done:** Take the equipment to your home or job site and complete the project!
- 6. Return your equipment:** Return the equipment on the agreed upon date according to your contract.

Tips for First-Time Equipment Renters:

1. Don't be afraid to ask questions.
2. Test it out in the parking lot.
3. Renting is a low-cost startup strategy.
4. Plan ahead during busy seasons.
5. Newer equipment = easier operation.



Left to right:
1. A scissor lift was added to the rental fleet lineup last fall.
2. Need a dump trailer to haul mulch for that spring project? G&S has you covered.
3. G&S has the tools to complete your indoor to-do list.



FACILITY CHARGE EXPLAINED

Recent member survey feedback revealed questions and concerns about the facility charge. We appreciate members sharing their opinions, and we want to take this opportunity to explain what the facility charge is, what it pays for, and why it is an important part of providing reliable electric service to our service territory.

What Is the Facility Charge?

The facility charge represents each cooperative member's share of the fixed costs required to deliver electricity, regardless of how much power is used in a month.

These are costs the cooperative must pay to ensure electricity is available when you need it, not just when it is consumed. These fixed costs include investments in equipment, maintenance, operations, and administrative support that keep the electric system safe and reliable.

What Does the Facility Charge Pay For?

The facility charge helps cover essential infrastructure and services such as:

- Poles, wires, and overhead lines
- Underground electric lines
- Transformers and substations
- Metering equipment, billing, and communication systems
- System maintenance, inspections, and repairs
- Operations, staffing, and administrative support

Together, these components ensure that power is ready and available whenever a member flips a switch.

Why Is There a Facility Charge Even If Electricity Isn't Used?

Bringing electricity to a home or business requires ongoing investment, independent of energy consumption. Electric service must be built, maintained, and ready around the clock, regardless of whether an electric service is used daily or seasonally.

The facility charge is a set monthly amount and allows fixed costs to be shared fairly among the membership, helping keep energy rates more stable while maintaining a dependable electric system.

How Meter Density Impacts the Facility Charge

Meter density refers to the number of electric meters served per mile of power line.

- Jackson Electric serves approximately five meters per mile of line
- Investor owned or municipal utilities often serve 60–100 meters per mile of line

Because cooperatives serve rural areas with fewer meters spread over more miles, there are fewer members to share the cost of maintaining each mile of line. As a result, the facility charge for rural electric cooperatives is typically higher than that of urban utilities with dense populations.



Why Electric Cooperatives Exist

Electric cooperatives were established because investor owned utilities historically declined to serve rural areas, where lower meter density made service unprofitable. Cooperatives were formed to ensure rural communities had access to reliable electricity, owned and governed by the members they serve.

While investor owned utilities generate more revenue per mile of line due to higher meter density, cooperatives focus on service at cost, reinvesting revenue into system improvements that benefit members.

Jackson Electric remains committed to transparency, reliability, and serving our members with dependable electric service, today and in the future.

JACKSON ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE
89th Annual Meeting of the Members
APRIL 22, 2026 | 6:00 P.M.
LUNDA THEATRE
BLACK RIVER FALLS, WIS.

\$25 energy credit & registration gift

15 - \$100 cash prizes

WIRED THROUGH TIME



Proud as Punch! That's the way Mrs. Charles Nordstrom looks as her husband (center) receives an engraved plaque from County Agent Walter Bean. Mr. Nordstrom was an area winner in the 1950 Wisconsin grassland contest.

This month, we travel back to March 1951, when Charles “Charley” Nordstrom of the North Bend area was featured in the magazine as an area winner in the 1950 Wisconsin Grassland Contest. Charley recognized that the black soil filling the mill pond at North Bend was washing in from nearby farms, prompting him to take action to protect the land. In response, he transitioned his operation to a grassland based farming system focused on soil conservation and sustainability.

Through the establishment of strong stands of alfalfa and brome grass, Charley demonstrated that conservation practices could restore the land while maintaining productive farming. His efforts not only reduced erosion but also improved long term farm viability. As part of this achievement, Charley and his wife joined other area and state grassland contest winners on a Greyhound bus trip to Washington, D.C., a memorable experience recognizing their leadership in conservation agriculture.

Adding to his lasting legacy, Charley was also among the first enthusiastic supporters of rural electrification in the area. He actively encouraged neighbors to join in forming the Jackson Rural Electrification Association (now Jackson Electric Cooperative) and served on the cooperative’s first board of directors. His leadership extended further through service on the Dairyland Power Cooperative board, helping to bring reliable electricity to rural Wisconsin and shaping the future of farm life for generations to come.

TAKE CONTROL OF YOUR ENERGY BILL

With PREPAID BILLING

Pay as you go, always in control.

What if your energy bill worked on your schedule?



Pay Your Way

Add money to your account when it works for you. With no set due date, you can plan payments around your own budget and lifestyle.

Fewer Fees, More Peace of Mind



Late fees are eliminated, saving some members up to \$300 a year. Prepaid billing also helps avoid reconnect fees related to missed payments.



Built-In Flexibility

Prepaid billing allows you to place half of your existing balance into a prepaid arrangement. Each payment covers current usage while reducing what you owe.

Stay Informed Every Day



Daily meter readings keep you aware of your energy consumption.

SmartHub notifications help:

- Track your balance in near real-time
- Monitor usage trends
- Plan payments before your balance gets low

Eligibility criteria may apply. Contact office for details.

SCHOLARSHIP OPPORTUNITIES

AVAILABLE TO HIGH SCHOOL SENIORS

LEGAL GUARDIAN MUST BE AN ACTIVE JEC MEMBER (PRIMARY RESIDENCE)

www.jackelec.com/scholarships-0

Apply by March 16



Your Touchstone Energy® Cooperative

Customer Service 715.284.5385
800.370.4607
Outage Reporting 855.222.DARK (3275)
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Card Payments 833.679.0919
www.jackelec.com

Mailing Address: N6868 County Road F
Black River Falls, WI 54615

Office Hours: Mondays – Thursdays, 7:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.
Fridays, 7:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m.

Board of Directors: Chris Curran, President
Kristi Hanson, Vice President
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Jackson Electric Cooperative is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

Your Touchstone Energy® Partner