

# Rural Power

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## KEC finds new ways to serve member-cooperatives

Amid the disruptions of the COVID-19 pandemic, Kansas Electric Cooperatives, Inc. is continuing service to its member cooperatives through alternative routes for information, resources, and educational offerings.

KEC is hosting weekly conference calls for the managers of the Kansas cooperatives to provide an opportunity to share responses and questions related to the pandemic. KEC CEO

**BRUCE GRAHAM** has participated in regular conference calls with the statewide managers group, NRECA, CFC, and Federated to discuss state challenges with the pandemic, including the financial impact of mandatory non-disconnect policies. That discussion has added emphasis to the work by NRECA to seek stimulus funds to help electric cooperatives with lost load and possible bad debt.

Staff has adopted new technologies for



Bruce McAntee (left) and Stacey Marston, KEC Loss Control, Safety, & Compliance Instructors, record training sessions at KEC's headquarters. These recorded sessions help deliver important safety information that would have originally been offered during face-to-face meetings. To date, the department has recorded nearly 30 training sessions and all are available on the members only section of the KEC website.

internal communications and project management to keep work and discussions flowing and plans to apply those technologies for membership meetings and training events. The KEC May Board meeting and committee meetings will be held using remote technology.

KEC staff has helped member-cooperatives sort through new federal opportunities for grants and loans, as well as helping benefit admin-

istrators understand the CARES Act and its Human Resources employment impact.

"In addition to updating cooperative management on issues related to the statewide stay-at-home order, HR guidance related to new federal laws, and numerous other COVID-19-related developments, this time has been an opportunity to begin tackling overdue projects such as updating KEC's Annexation Guide to

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## Doniphan and Nemaha-Marshall boards consider consolidation

Over the past couple of years, Doniphan Electric Cooperative's board of trustees has studied long-term concepts to best adapt during this time of great challenges.

Through an in-depth strategic planning process, the Doniphan board identified that a consolidation with another electric cooperative could be the best solution for long-term financial and operational functionality while serving the members' best interest.

Over the past few months, the Doniphan board met informally with the board of trustees of Nemaha-Marshall Electric Cooperative to discuss the possibility of a consolidation.

The boards authorized a preliminary consolidation study by the National Rural Utilities Cooperative Finance

Corporation (CFC). This study was presented to both boards at a joint meeting, and then each board independently reviewed the information. At each co-op's respective February board meetings, both boards entered into a letter of intent to proceed with a more in-depth study.

The boards are currently developing a potential consolidation agreement addressing financial projections, operational issues, employee pay and benefits, rules and regulations, capital credit policies, and other cooperative affairs. Following this due diligence process, a final consolidation agreement could be presented to each cooperative's board of trustees. If both cooperatives approve the consolidation agreement, it will be presented to each individual cooperative's membership for consideration and vote.



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## Kansas State FFA to hold a virtual convention

The Kansas FFA Association has elected to proceed with a condensed, virtual convention in order to recognize members and chapters who have earned proficiency and national chapter awards.

The virtual convention will also honor those students who have completed the State FFA Degree requirements. The State Degree charms will continue to be sponsored by KEC.

This event is scheduled to take place during the traditional dates of the 92nd Annual State FFA Convention, May 27-29, 2020. This virtual setting will also provide the backdrop for the State FFA Association to conduct its annual business, including the election of a new set of state FFA officers and bidding farewell to the 2019-2020 officers.

### Showcase your FFA pride by submitting a video to be played at the virtual convention

FFA alumni and supporters are invited to showcase their pride in the Kansas FFA during the virtual convention by making a short video.

Record your name, your chapter, and the years you were a member. You may also share a brief message of what FFA has done for you. Videos must be less than one minute in length. For more information regarding the video submission, email [ksffaoundationassistant@gmail.com](mailto:ksffaoundationassistant@gmail.com).

Video messages chosen to air during the convention will receive a special gift from the Kansas FFA Foundation.

## jobmarket

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

Visit [www.kec.coop/careers](http://www.kec.coop/careers) to learn more about the following positions.

- ▶ Sunflower has multiple openings.

Send your open position listings to [ruralpower@cec.org](mailto:ruralpower@cec.org). Positions will be posted on the website for one month, unless otherwise directed by the co-op.

## co-opcalendar

### APRIL

30 **MDM Meeting**, KEPCo Headquarters, Topeka - TBD

### MAY

6 **KEC Communications Committee**, 1:30 p.m. conference call

6 **KEC LCS&C Committee**, 3 p.m. conference call

7 **KEC Board of Trustees Meeting**, 8:30 a.m. conference call

15 **Sunflower Board of Directors Annual Meeting** - TBD

## TCEC's JuliAnn Graham re-elected to CCC Board

### JULIANN

**GRAHAM**, Tri-County Electric Cooperative Communications Manager, was re-elected to serve on the Certified Cooperative Communicator (CCC) Board of Directors. She is currently the secretary of the board and serves on the Candidate Assessment and Program Standards committee.



JuliAnn Graham

During Graham's tenure, she hopes to make a difference.

"If I can provide input based on my knowledge, experience, and what I've learned from my peers to the CCC program, then I'll have served my purpose. I want to add value to the program," said Graham.

The national board governs the CCC program, setting policy and program guidelines. Ten members, elected by their peers, serve two-year

board terms.

The CCC program, created by the NRECA's Council of Rural Electric Communicators, was established to improve the practice of communication and marketing in the electric cooperative industry. It sets professional development goals, provides a body of knowledge and skills necessary to the practice of cooperative communication, and recognizes individuals who have demonstrated a professional level of excellence in cooperative communications.

Graham earned her CCC certification in 2009, and is one of approximately 214 certified cooperative communicators nationwide. In addition to Graham, nine other credentialed employees work for KEC member-cooperatives: Sarah Farlee, FreeState; Bruce Graham, Carrie Kimberlin, and Shana Read, KEC; Mike Morley and Pat Parke, Midwest Energy; Rae Gorman, Pioneer; Cindy Hertel, Sunflower; and Jerri Whitley, Victory.

## KEC to offer virtual HR Summit the week of May 18

While people are still social distancing, KEC knows that its members are still looking for important information. KEC is pleased to announce that the HR Summit will now be offered online during the week of May 18.

Electric cooperative employees are encouraged to log in each day during the virtual conference for an interactive session with five quality presenters. Each session will be recorded and archived on the members only section of the KEC website.

Following is the schedule for the virtual conference. Each session will begin at 9 a.m. and will last for approximately an hour. Discussion is encour-

aged during these interactive sessions.

- ▶ May 18: **KRISTINA DIETRICK**, HR Partners
- ▶ May 19: **TIM DAVIS**, Constangy Brooks, Smith & Prophete LLP
- ▶ May 20: **BRIAN ALLEN**, RE Advisers Corporation
- ▶ May 21: **JESSICA SCHEER**, ProValue
- ▶ May 22: **MALACHI STURLIN**, NRECA

Log in information and program topics for each day will be emailed to each cooperative as we near this training. There will be no pre-registration.

If you have any questions, please contact Shana Read at [sread@cec.org](mailto:sread@cec.org) or call 785-224-7313 (cell).

## KEC finds new ways to serve member-cooperatives, *continued from page 1*

reflect the changes to service territory law approved in 2018,” said Graham. “This has also been an opportunity to prepare for the CEO transition.”

The Management Consulting Services Department has worked diligently on behalf of members regarding the second phase of the rate study ordered by Sub. SB 69. A 61-question Request for Information (RFI) was issued by the consultants, AECOM, on the cusp of the COVID-19 outbreak. **DOUG SHEPHERD**, KEC Vice President of Management Consulting Services, worked to clarify the requests with the consultants and coordinated members’ responses.

In addition, he is gearing up for the 2020 property tax season. “Typically, PVD Notices of Value are issued in mid-April each year,” said Shepherd. “But PVD staff was sent home two weeks ago, and we don’t know how much they have been able to do remotely.”

He explained that KEC and partner, MarksNelson, are moving forward with gathering member data to be prepared to review the notices when issued.

KEC’s Government Relations staff continues to have a full plate even with the Kansas legislature taking an early first adjournment break. Although face-to-face meetings are not occurring, conference calls and webinars abound on many topics: legislative business, COVID-19-related information, federal and state responses to the pandemic, policy discussions, and specific KEC projects. Staff has also been studying the Kansas Supreme Court decision on Evergy’s distributed energy charges to determine how it will impact co-ops. KEC continues to communicate with state policymakers, and monitor legislative and policy matters as they evolve, to ensure members’ interests are protected.

“We negotiated important changes in the Sub. SB 69 nondisclosure agreement (NDA) entered into between KEC and AECOM, such as securing Kansas law as the governing law over the agreement and extending the agreement to AECOM’s contractor on the Phase 2 project,” explained **LESLIE KAUFMAN**, KEC Vice President of Government Relations and Legal Counsel. “The KEC-

AECOM NDA was the basis for the initial drafts sent to individual co-ops for their consideration.”

The Government Relations team continues to engage with the Kansas Congressional delegation by providing updates on co-op responses to the COVID-19 pandemic. As Congress approaches a fourth stimulus package, staff has been advocating for provisions important to electric cooperatives, including clarification on co-op participation in relief programs such as the Paycheck Protection Program (PPP), securing the opportunity for lowering interest rates and avoiding prepayment penalties on RUS loans, and enhancing broadband service in rural areas to further support economic, educational, and health services, in particular.

Recently, Government Relations staff provided information to KEC members outlining considerations for remote board meetings and notary options/alternatives.

In response to the rapidly changing situation due to COVID-19, two days before the April print deadline, KEC Communications staff began working with the co-ops to change out their centerspread content in relation to scheduled annual meetings and other co-op events. Staff worked with several co-ops to create, print, and mail trustee election ballots and notices, as well as other materials related to postponed annual meetings.

“It was obvious with the many event cancellations, our May travel issue would need to be shelved,” explained KEC Director of Communications **VICKI ESTES**. “We began crowdsourcing the co-ops and other resources to gather stories about the communities and cooperatives coming together for a new and more appropriate theme for May.”

In addition to magazine content changes, social media messaging was revised to reflect the current situation and ensure that posts promoting KEC and Kansas electric cooperatives used an appropriate tone.

KEC Communications staff added a menu of communications resources to the members only section of the KEC website to assist co-ops in communi-

cating with their members and other constituents including talking points, articles, website sliders, social media posts, and bill inserts concerning disconnects. More resources will continue to be added in response to evolving needs.

In addition to the many resources on the members only section, a new section of the KEC website has been added to share individual co-ops’ response to the pandemic. There are links to local, state, and national authorities’ websites for accurate and up-to-date information about the pandemic.

Due to growing concern over the spread of the virus, KEC postponed all in-person training until May 1. With the extension of the Kansas stay-at-home order to May 3, KEC will be evaluating events beyond that date.

That hasn’t stopped KEC’s Loss Control, Safety, & Compliance from providing value. Staff evaluated technology options to hold future training needs remotely. Staff has also recorded nearly 30 training sessions that are available on the members only section of the KEC website. In addition, 18 tests and answer keys have been completed.

To aid the Human Resources employees, KEC is now planning to offer a virtual HR Summit during the week of May 18 (see page 2 for more information).

With the cancellation of the Electric Cooperative Youth Tour, staff is currently requesting refunds for cancelled travel, lodging, and events. KEC encourages participating cooperatives to honor their student winners in the form of a scholarship. NRECA has requested that each state still select a representative to the Youth Leadership Council (YLC), so KEC staff is working on how that selection will take place. The YLC training dates have been postponed to later this fall.

This has also been an opportunity for KEC staff to learn from home using the LinkedIn Learning program available from Touchstone Energy.

“I’m proud of the work KEC has been doing to maintain our critical business operations while supporting our member co-ops,” said Graham.