



Robert Cornell,  
Manager

## RELATIONSHIPS REAP BENEFITS

Your cooperative has benefited greatly over the years because of the relationships it has built beyond the community. There could not be a more obvious example than the assistance and cooperation we received when the submarine cable failed. Because we developed and maintained relationships with our fellow cooperatives as well as the Wisconsin Electric Cooperative Association and Cooperative Network, we had a large network of support for our efforts. Because we developed and maintained relationships with both the previous governor and the present governor and their staff, our state representatives and our federal representatives, we have been able to bend their ear about issues and in the case of the submarine cable, bring home nearly \$3,000,000 in the last three years.

Because we have developed relationships with those fellow cooperatives and because those fellow cooperatives have similarly developed relationships with their representatives, we were able to get our issue relayed to, for the most part, the entire state legislature and both houses of our federal legislative delegation.

In the case of the RURAL ACT, legislation that would protect cooperative's tax-exempt status when receiving disaster aid, budgetary aid and grants, with the help of our fellow cooperatives, we were able to get 100% of our state

delegation (both House and Senate and including representatives with no cooperatives in their districts) to sign on as co-sponsors. Had we lost our tax-exempt status due to the aid we received, that \$3,000,000 likely would have ended up being something closer to \$2,000,000. Because this was more than just a Washington Island issue (although we were the poster child

for the effort), this effort received a super majority of co-sponsors in the House and was included in a continuing budget resolution eventually signed by President Trump.

Sometimes politics get in the way of these relationships, as in our inclusion in the state budget that no Democrat voted for, but the job gets done in spite of politics sometimes (not always).

**There could not be a more obvious example than the assistance and cooperation we received when the submarine cable failed.**

Developing relationships pays off in a big way. However, this is not the only reason to develop them. The interaction among our fellow cooperatives and the individual relationships (see last month's Cooperation article) developed are helpful in ways you can't imagine.

Because we have developed a relationship with NSight, we have been successful in obtaining two broadband grants, and



Congressman Mike Gallagher (center) discusses cooperative issues with Oconto Electric CEO Byron Nolde and Washington Island Electric General Manager Robert Cornell.





fiber to the home is becoming a reality for the Island. NSight is a northeast Wisconsin company that has a strong interest in the communities they serve. They are certainly a “for profit” entity, but their thinking aligns well with many of the cooperative principles that we follow.

Sometimes those relationships that we worked hard to develop go south, as in the case of the relationship we attempted to develop with Frontier. Sometimes, that is for the best and leads to better things.

Byron Nolde (CEO of Oconto Electric), Mike Wade (president/CEO of Central Electric) and myself have developed an excellent relationship with Congressman Mike Gallagher (and his predecessor Reid Ribble) and we know he will be responsive to our concerns. He also knows that when

he is looking at an issue that involves electric cooperatives, cooperatives in general, or a general issue that affects our communities, he can count on us to contribute insight.

We met with him to discuss energy issues, broadband issues, and how best to get federal funding into local hands where it can do the most good (rather than filtered—and reduced—through bureaucracy). We had this meeting at the Door County Economic Development Corporation office in Sturgeon Bay, and both their staff and Brigid Riordan of NSight were included in the conversation.

We always want to make sure that we keep those relationships strong because as a small community, we need to have a larger voice in order not to get lost in the shuffle!

## DOOR COUNTY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

Another one of those relationships we have developed as mentioned in the previous article is with the Door County Economic Development Corporation. This relationship goes back at least 15 years. We had a good relationship with Executive Director Caleb Frostman, which was certainly of benefit later when he became our state senator for a short time and then took a position in Governor Evers’ administration.

We have an excellent relationship with DCEDC’s current Executive Director Steve Jenkins and his staff. I sit on and hopefully contribute in a meaningful way to the DCEDC’s

Broadband Task Force. The resources, contacts, and knowledge they provide are and will continue to be extremely helpful as we move into the future.

One of our partners in the coming fiber project, Quantum PC services, has been working with DCEDC for many years. They were, in fact, the DCEDC Entrepreneur of the Year and also the Wisconsin Small Business of the Year. They have worked with the DCEDC Youth Apprenticeship program for a number of years and we are hopeful and they are agreeable that we can expand this program to the Island. With any luck, we will be able to find a young

person who would like to make a career out of fiber termination, network cabling, and similar technology. This might lead to a full-time job right here on the Island.

In addition to Quantum, we are looking into the possibility of utilizing the program in order to foster an interest in potential future employment with the cooperative. We initiated a similar project in the past, but not formally and with the resources of the DCEDC. Stay tuned for updates, and if you know of a school-age person who might have an interest, have them contact us. We don’t have definitive plans yet, but will in the near future.



Brigid Riordan (NSight), Robert Cornell (WIEC), Congressman Mike Gallagher, and Byron Nolde (Oconto Electric Cooperative) meet at the Door County Economic Development Corporation in Sturgeon Bay.

## PROJECT UPDATES

Other than poor weather and mud creating a hindrance (and a bigger mess!) the Lobdell Point Road project went well. All primary electric underground lines are in and are paralleled with duct to pull fiber. Those homes along Lobdell Point Road from the ferry dock to Gordon Court have had provisions made for underground service to the homes. Some additional digging will be required at some locations and it will be mid fall before we are ready to energize the lines, but once this is done, the overhead cross-country lines that have plagued us during storms will be eliminated.

Engineering is progressing well on not only the fiber pilot project but on the

logical progression to serve everyone once that is complete. NSight is working on the engineering to get from Gills Rock to Northport and some of the material should begin arriving in late June. People want to know, “When will we have service?” If all goes well, we are hoping (in conjunction with NSight) that it could be as early as fall, but regardless, we will be hanging fiber on our portions of the project pretty much as soon as material arrives.

As noted in previous project updates, since the boring machine was here, we ran service to the boat launch so that a permanent light could be installed. The cooperative built and provided the light as well as the service.



Mike Jorgenson levels cement at the base of the new launch ramp light built and installed by the cooperative.

## ANNUAL MEETING TO BE IN AUGUST

**D**ue to covid concerns, you may remember that last year's annual meeting was postponed twice and finally was held in the parking lot of the cooperative in August. This allowed us to maintain the social distancing recommended by the CDC while still providing a venue for the update to the members. Under normal circumstances the board would have chosen a date in May or June for the annual meeting.

Due to the health crisis, obviously we were not the only cooperative that needed to make adjustments. In fact, legislation was just passed that allows those cooperatives that were forced to hold meetings outside of the requirements of their by-laws to do so without creating a problem.

After discussion, the board of directors has decided that we will again hold our annual meeting in August. Since things are beginning to open up again and it is possible that there may be a conflict with another event, we will wait a bit to determine the exact date. We expect that it will be held again on a Saturday morning with a lunch to be provided. We also plan to hold it again in the parking lot of the cooperative, weather permitting. Stay tuned for more information.

We plan to use this publication for our annual report items, so the August issue will be the official meeting notice as well as contain items of interest for the annual meeting. There is no election scheduled this year.



# COOPERATIVE HIGHLIGHTS

We continue to peruse the minutes of past board meetings.

The last edition of this article occurred in March and covered up to mid-1980! 1980 and 1981 were the years that the Washington Island Energy Office and the first Submarine Cable Project were active. We will skim past these two items as we expect to do a feature on both before the year is over. This year (2021) will mark 40 years since the first Submarine Cable was laid.

**1980** – Due to manufacturing delays the submarine cable project was delayed into 1981, with many trials and tribulations associated with the delay and resulting costs.

**1981** – Hannes Andersen, Jacob Ellefson, Nathan Gunnlaugsson, John Herschberger, Jerome Mann, Norbert O’Connell and Arni Richter were elected to the board.

The Cooperative implemented its plan for compliance with the Public Utility Regulatory Policy Act of 1978 (PURPA). This defined the cooperative’s policy for purchase of power from small suppliers. The first and only person to take advantage of this was Keith Knox who installed a wind generator at his home on Jackson Harbor Road. The home is currently owned by Tom and Linda Taylor.

Richard Piekos inquired about three-phase service for the furniture shop he had constructed out by the old landfill (Sportsman’s Club) on Townline Road. This required running two primary phases from the Chalet (Island Dairy) corner all the way to Piekos property. Other than the cooperative itself, this was the first three phase service on the Island and proved to be an expensive proposition for the cooperative in that the furniture facility did not last long.

A mortgage note with REA in the amount of \$102,870 dated May 29, 1946, was paid in full.



The renewed interest in gardening (seemingly made stronger by the last year’s issues) as well as the additional underground work the cooperative has been doing creates another good opportunity to remind everyone to call Digger’s Hotline before you dig.

If you happened to notice the flags in the ground around the ferry dock prior to our starting work down there, you would realize that there are lines (phone) underground everywhere and some that do not seem to follow a logical path. Please don’t assume that you know where underground lines are and dial 811 to request a free locate within 72 hours of your call (three business days). Damaging an underground line can be expensive, but damaging an underground electric line can be deadly. Frontier contracts with a locating service and the cooperative locates our own lines.

As a reminder, we are not responsible for private lines after our meter; however, we may be able to assist.

**Know what’s below.  
Call before you dig.**



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