

Norris Electric *News*

Your Touchstone Energy® Cooperative 

Norris Electric Cooperative

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Office Hours:
Monday – Thursday
7 a.m. – 5 p.m.

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Ted Helmink Cumberland

General Manager

Luke Johnson



Norris Electric Cooperative announces leadership transition

Norris Electric Cooperative announces the upcoming retirement of General Manager Tamara Phillips and the appointment of Luke Johnson as her successor.

Phillips concludes a 44-year career with Norris Electric Cooperative, having joined the organization in 1982 as a key punch operator. Over the decades, she advanced through a series of roles, including positions in the billing and accounting departments, before being named office manager in 2003 and general manager in 2016.

During her tenure as general manager, Phillips led several major initiatives that strengthened the cooperative's infrastructure and operations. These include the rebuilding of three-phase lines, the implementation of a new software system, the negotiation of a power contract with Dairyland Power Cooperative, and the construction of a new headquarters facility. Phillips also served on the Illinois Cooperative credit union board and advisory committee and currently serves on the board of Peoples State Bank.

"Leadership is never a solo effort. I'm here because many people supported, mentored, prayed for, encouraged and worked alongside me, for which I am deeply grateful," Phillips said, reflecting on her career. "It is hard to believe all the changes that I have seen over the last 44 years working here at Norris Electric.



The experience has been rewarding, and I want to thank every person who in some manner helped pave my way."

In her retirement, Phillips plans to travel and spend more time with her husband Richard, their daughters, Kiley and McKenzie, and granddaughter Lilly.

Johnson, Phillips' successor, brings 26 years of electric cooperative experience to the role. Johnson's first day at Norris Electric was April 1, 2026. During his career, he has progressed through the ranks of the cooperative system, starting as an apprentice lineman and advancing to foreman, metering technician, operations manager and general manager of Clay Electric Co-operative. Most recently, he led Tri-County Electric Cooperative as its CEO/general manager.

A native of Flora, Johnson has been married for 26 years and is the father

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of six children. He looks forward to becoming part of the Norris Electric community and getting his family involved in local schools and activities.

At the cooperative's annual meeting in February, Johnson expressed appreciation for the opportunity and respect for his predecessor. He noted that he has "big shoes to fill" and thanked members for their trust. Drawing on his experience, he emphasized his commitment to safety, reliability and affordability, as well as the importance of community and the cooperative family. He also credited Phillips as a mentor and valued colleague and pledged to continue serving members with dedication.

Norris Electric Board President Gordon McClure said Johnson's strong background and leadership within the industry made him the clear choice to lead the cooperative forward.

"Luke Johnson was selected as manager of Norris Electric Cooperative because of his extensive experience within the electric cooperative industry. His service in various positions has provided him with comprehensive knowledge of cooperative operations," he said.

As Norris Electric Cooperative marks this leadership transition, the co-op remains focused on its mission of delivering safe, reliable and affordable power to its consumer-members.



Congratulations to Norris Electric Cooperative Board Director Ava Lemmon of Crawford County, who recently obtained her Credentialed Cooperative Director Program and Board Leadership Certificate through the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA) after completing a series of courses focusing in greater depth on specific industry and governance issues. These certificates are two of the three of the NRECA's director education programs, which provide directors with the knowledge and skills to fulfill their duties as elected officials. Ava will continue her cooperative education by taking courses to earn her Director Gold credential.

Future lineman gains hands-on experience with Norris Electric

Norris Electric recently welcomed Weston Bierman, a graduate of Newton Community High School, for a job shadowing experience. He is the son of Chris and Melanie Bierman.

During his visit, Weston spent the day with Journeyman Lineman Mike Scherer and his crew, gaining valuable hands-on exposure to many aspects of line-work and the daily responsibilities of the job.

After graduating in May from the Lineman Program at Frontier Community College, Weston is now seeking an internship. We're excited to see where this career path takes him and wish him continued success.



Work Safely Near Utility Lines



Whether you're running heavy equipment or using handheld tools, working outdoors can put you dangerously close to overhead and underground utility lines. A line strike can cause outages, fires, fines, serious injury or death.

Look up: Overhead power line safety

- **Survey the job site** each day for overhead lines, poles, guy wires and pad-mounted equipment. Check carefully for lines hidden by trees or buildings.
- **Assume all overhead lines are energized**, including service drops from poles to buildings. Keep clear unless the utility confirms that a line is not energized.
- **Set a clear boundary:** Keep workers, tools, ladders and equipment at least 10 feet from power lines. When using cranes or derricks, keep at least 20 feet away. Follow OSHA guidelines for clearance at different voltages.
- **Use a dedicated spotter** to keep you, your crew and your equipment a safe distance from power lines.

Dig safely: Underground utility lines

- **Pre-mark the excavation area** with white paint (use black on snow), flags, chalk, lath or whiskers.
- **Use 811 or 811beforeyoudig.com** before you dig to have lines marked. Every job needs a locate request, even small ones.
- **Wait** for utilities to mark their lines before digging.
- **Expose marked utilities carefully** by hand or with soft excavation to verify location and depth.
- **Report** any utility strike or damage to the facility owner. Never cover up damage.

If equipment contacts a power line:

- **Stay on** the equipment. Tell others to stay back.
- **Call 911** and the electric utility right away.
- **Do not exit the cab** until utility workers say it's safe.
- **If fire or other danger forces you off**, jump clear and do not touch the equipment and ground at the same time. Land with your feet together. Shuffle away with both feet on the ground or hop away with both feet together.

Work safely to protect yourself, your crew and the public. Review your crew's emergency plan so that everyone knows what to do if a line is contacted.



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