GRATITUDE ABOUNDS
AT CVEC'S ANNUAL MEETING

Chippewa Valley Electric Cooperative's 86th annual meeting theme of "Gratitude" was reflected throughout the morning of March 25, as the co-op marked major transitions in leadership both in the administrative staff and the board of directors. Approximately 300 members and guests gathered at CVEC's headquarters and heard the final CEO address given by Dean Ortmann, who retired at the end of March after 32 years of service to the co-op. Members also heard from then-Director of IT and Member Services Russ Falkenberg, who succeeded Ortmann as CEO. In addition, members elected a new director to replace Deone Goettl, who retired from the board of directors after serving for 27 years.

"I never ever thought that I would give this many accolades at one meeting," Board Chair John Petska said after announcing the changes and paying tribute to all three co-op leaders.

Ortmann's final annual meeting report began with Petska presenting the long-serving CEO with a bag of his beloved Cheese Puffs and ended with a standing ovation from the crowd. In between those moments, Ortmann spoke of his gratitude for the CVEC employees, who may not share DNA but are a family nonetheless. "What does tie us together is you," Ortmann told the members. "We do love our jobs. We love serving the membership." He closed his remarks by thanking the members: "This job you gave me, I've enjoyed immensely."

Falkenberg, who has worked at the co-op since 2006 and was instrumental in developing Ntera, the cooperative's fiber internet services provider, officially assumed CEO duties on April 2 because, as Petska pointed out, "We didn't think it proper for anyone to start on April Fool's Day."

In his chairman's report, Petska explained the reasons why rates will be going up in 2023, including volatile natural gas prices and rising costs due to supply-chain interruptions and labor shortages. He said due to these

Inset, above right: Dean Ortmann gives his final annual meeting address as CEO. Right: Russ Falkenberg was introduced as the new CEO of Chippewa Valley Electric Cooperative.

CVEC Board Chair John Petska

State Senator Jesse James

issues, the cost of CVEC's wholesale power increased 4 percent for 2023. He pointed out that these challenges are not exclusive to CVEC, noting that the average wholesale rate increase for all distribution co-ops is 5.3 percent, with the differences among them determined by load factors.

However, Petska also told the audience that CVEC experienced strong sales in 2022, and that, combined with good management, meant the board determined a 2 percent rate increase would be adequate to cover cost increases.

He cautioned that unexpected incidents such as a major storm could "upset the apple cart" and force a revisit of the rate adjustment, but he said the co-op is financially strong.

Office Manager June Bach reinforced that message in her report, saying that sales were above average for nine of the 12 months of 2022. She also told members that the co-op's goal is always to keep outages to less than one hour per account per year, which CVEC was on track to make until the December 14 storm hit, sending the average outage

figure from .8567 per account to 2.3857 per account in a matter of weeks.

Operations Manager Nic Alberson also discussed the December storm in his report, noting that all members who experienced outages were back in power within 48 hours, despite the widespread damage caused by the fierce storm. Alberson also touched on system

Members enjoyed coffee and doughnuts before the business meeting, and lunch after it.

growth, announcing the co-op added 80 new services in 2022, as well as the 1.5 MW utility-scale solar system CVEC is developing in partnership with OneEnergy Renewables.

In his member services report, Falkenberg recalled Ntera's success since it was launched in 2017. After just six years of operation, he said, Ntera has 1,617 customers, $15.14 million in assets, and 393 miles of fiber in the ground.

Members also heard from special guest Senator Jesse James (R-Altoona), who talked about his legislative goals. Foremost among them is advocating for road improvements, which he said is a priority among his constituents.

In director elections, Joe Melville was elected to replace the retiring Goettl, and Frank Draxler, running unopposed, was returned to his seat. In a board reorganization meeting following the annual meeting, Petska was returned as board chair, Kevin Meistad as vice chairman, Steve Johnson as secretary-treasurer, and Dan Liske was appointed asst. secretary-treasurer, replacing the retired Goettl.

THANKS AND FAREWELL, DEONE GOETTL

27 Years of Service to CVEC as Director of District 5

Chippewa Valley Electric Cooperative (CVEC) wishes to extend gratitude to Deone Goettl for the commitment of 27 years of service to the membership and employees. Deone made the decision to retire after being a faithful contributor to CVEC and its affiliates, the Chippewa Valley Satellite and Ntera board of directors. He was proud to represent CVEC in his many roles and we will miss his cheerful presence at the co-op. We wish Deone and his wife, Linda, the best as they enjoy the newfound freedom in their schedule.

JOE MELVILLE WELCOMED AS DISTRICT 5 DIRECTOR

Joe Melville has been a member of Chippewa Valley Electric Cooperative since 1995. He was born and raised in Chippewa Falls where his parents own and operate the family business of Chippewa Brass & Aluminum Foundry. After graduating from UW-Eau Claire with a degree in computer science, he worked the next 30 years in the computer field while helping the family business with their computer needs. Recently he returned to the family business full-time to help manage it and guide its growth for the next generation.

Joe served 22 years between the Army Reserve and the National Guard as an avionics mechanic, fixing helicopters. He served one deployment in the Iraq War with his National Guard unit. He is a member of the Cadott VFW, where he serves as the quartermaster and treasurer. He is also a member of the Cadott American Legion, where he serves as an adjutant.

Joe and his wife, Carolyn, have been married for 30 years and have three adult children who they raised on a farm outside of Boyd. They are members of Big Drywood Lutheran Church, where Joe has created budgets and administered finances as he served on the council as treasurer, trustee, vice president, and finally president.

As a cooperative director, Joe is eager to continue the cooperative's mission of delivering power to members at the lowest possible cost. He also plans to promote the expansion of broadband internet to the community.

District 5 Territory: The entire Towns of Arthur, Delmar, and Edson and the portion of the Town of Colburn located west of County Highway D; the portion of the Town of Goetz located east of State Highway 27, Chippewa County; and those members of Chippewa Valley Electric Cooperative whose service extensions lie within said towns or portions of towns.
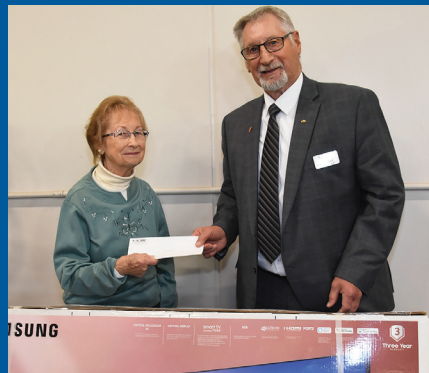
To find out which district you reside in, please refer to the upper right corner of your billing statement or contact the cooperative for assistance.

ANNUAL MEETING TV WINNERS

Yet another reason to attend Chippewa Valley Electric Cooperative's annual meeting is the chance to win a big-screen, smart TV, our Early-Bird prize! Here's a look back at some of our past winners. Next year, it could be you!

2023 – Cliff Cote

2022 – Georgia Violet

2021 – Gebert Jerome

2020 – Robert Peterson

2019 – James Trottier

2018 – Dale Seng
2017 – Delmar Gravunder
2016 – Curtis Brumm
2015 – Curtis Berg
2014 – Gary Lazarz
2013 – Rodney Cummings

Where's Dean?
ADRIFT ON A SEA OF CONTENTMENT…

**Last seen on a make-shift raft with empty packages of cheese puffs surrounding him.
No worries back home. Checks are automatically deposited. Wife happy.**