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# Bentz announced as co-general manager/CEO

BY ANNE HANSEN

Lineworkers in the energy industry learn early in their careers they will face various challenges on a regular basis. These challenging conditions prepared Jason Bentz for his new role as co-general manager/CEO of KEM Electric Cooperative.



**Jason Bentz**

In late 2022, the KEM Electric board of directors announced Bentz will join Travis Kupper in leading the cooperative, beginning in 2023.

“Jason’s experience and leadership will be instrumental to our success, as we continue to serve the needs of our membership,” says KEM Electric Cooperative President Chuck Wald.

## Serving the cooperatives

From a young age, Bentz recalls his interest in the electric service industry. His basic understanding of the profession came from a cousin who served as a cooperative lineworker for many years.

“I was always interested in being able to work with my hands while being outside. And since I wasn’t afraid of heights, I thought I would pursue a career as a lineman,” Bentz says.

He pursued his goals, and after receiving the required training from Bismarck State College, Bentz headed out of state to work for Thiel Construction in Nebraska and Oklahoma. During his first transmission job, Bentz remembers feeling validated in his career choice.

“When I was on my first transmission project in Nebraska, I was working on a 230-kilovolt and asked to go unclip wires in preparation for new wires to be pulled in. While on a 90-foot pole,

which was situated on top of a 300-foot plateau, I thought, ‘Yes, I made the right choice,’ as the view was spectacular,” he says.

Although Bentz enjoyed working for Thiel Construction, his goal was always to return to his home state of North Dakota. That goal was made a reality when he received a job offer from Mor-Gran-Sou Electric Cooperative in Flasher as an apprentice lineworker.

“I remember my first job at Mor-Gran-Sou Electric was changing out a transformer at a pasture well tap west of Elgin with Foreman Mark Hoffman,” he says.

## Growing into a cooperative leader

For the next several years, Bentz continued to work his way up in the cooperatives, rising from apprentice to journeyman lineworker and foreman.

“I have always wanted to take opportunities and grow with them and try my best to serve others, and give others the opportunities to grow as well,” he says.

For 20 years, Bentz did just that at Mor-Gran-Sou Electric Cooperative, before transitioning

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**Jason Bentz** started his career as a lineworker.

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**Jason Bentz** served as a lineworker for Mor-Gran-Sou Electric Cooperative early in his career.

to operations manager and chief of staff at Roughrider Electric Cooperative in Dickinson, beginning in 2013.

Although Bentz recognizes being a lineworker is not a glamorous or easy profession, the skills learned, including commitment to safety, understanding shortcuts are not an option and a dedication and sense of service, have prepared him for his new role.

This also includes his understanding of working as a team.

"In life, and in a career in the energy industry, you cannot be very successful without a good team," Bentz says, noting his good fortune of working alongside influential teams and leaders throughout his career, which helped shaped him into the person he is today.

"I have always had good role models and

mentors, starting with my parents, who taught me to work hard, to do a job well and to never pretend to know the answers if you don't," Bentz says. "In addition to my parents, the leaders out in the field have taught me to not be afraid to ask questions, and most importantly, always listen to understand."

Bentz looks forward to his new role, and using the skills he has gained along the way to continue moving the cooperative in the right direction, while working alongside Kupper.

"I will try and make the plans a reality to help our member-cooperatives succeed in an ever-changing industry. We need to be mindful of the members and keep providing reliable, affordable power, and keep looking at new technologies," Bentz says. ⚡

## MANAGER'S MESSAGE: Giving back to our community



Travis Kupper

Over the past year, you've probably heard or read about KEM Electric Cooperative's concern for our community. This is one of the core principles that sets cooperatives apart from other types of utilities and businesses. We've always taken this mission and responsibility to heart. It's who we are as a co-op.

Now, with the holidays behind us, it has made me pause and reflect on the role we play in our rural area. While our purpose is to provide safe and reliable energy to you, the members we serve, we have a greater mission – to be a catalyst for good.

You're probably aware of our Operation Round Up program, in which we take donations from generous members like you who have "rounded up" the amount due on their electric bill to the nearest dollar to donate to local charities. Or our Youth Tour program, in which we take our community's


brightest young people to Washington, D.C., for a weeklong immersion to experience democracy in action.

You'll also see our employees serving on local boards, coaching youth sports and volunteering at charitable events. Because when you work at a co-op, you understand how important a strong community is. After all, without you, the co-op wouldn't exist.

We know our core job is to keep the lights on, but our passion is our rural areas, and we want to make them a better place for all.

If there's anything we can do to help you, whether providing energy-saving advice to help lower your monthly bill or discussing payment plan options during these difficult times, please reach out to us at KEM Electric Cooperative.

Concern for community is the heart and soul of who we are. And no matter what the future brings, you can count on your electric co-op to care about you. ⚡



## Prepare for tax season with SmartHub

Print copies of your monthly utility bills for your tax records by logging into SmartHub! Visit [www.kemelectric.com](http://www.kemelectric.com) and click "SmartHub" to proceed to your billing history. If you have not signed up for SmartHub, you can set up a new, secure account. ⚡

Tax  
Season



# KEM Electric supports students with scholarships

**KEM Electric takes pride in assisting with the development of rural leadership through our scholarship program.**

We are happy to continue our scholarship program and offer scholarships to qualifying seniors, who must be dependents of KEM Electric members.



Download application at [www.kemelectric.com](http://www.kemelectric.com)

Complete applications and send to:  
[msanders@kemelectric.com](mailto:msanders@kemelectric.com)  
or by mailing to:

KEM Electric Cooperative  
Attn: Marcy Sanders  
107 S. Broadway | P.O. Box 790  
Linton, ND 58552

**Return completed application before Feb. 10, 2023**

## Area high school scholarship

KEM Electric Cooperative will award eight \$500 scholarships to qualified applicants whose parents or guardians are members of the co-op. School representatives from Ashley, Wishek, Zeeland, Strasburg, Linton, Hazelton-Moffit-Braddock, Kidder County and Napoleon will select a graduating senior.

Contact your school counselor for more information. The deadline to apply is Feb. 10, 2023.

## \$1,000 Basin Electric Power Cooperative scholarship

KEM Electric Cooperative will award a \$1,000 scholarship to a student who is already enrolled or planning to enroll in a full-

time graduate or undergraduate program. The student must attend an accredited two- or four-year program, university or vocational/tech school. All applicants must have parents or guardians who are members of the co-op.

## Home School, GED setting, or student outside of KEM service area

The co-op will also award one \$500 scholarship to a graduating senior from a homeschool setting, GED setting, or a school outside of our service area. Students can get the applications from our website, [www.kemelectric.com](http://www.kemelectric.com), or call the office in Linton. Applications can be filled out online and emailed to [msanders@kemelectric.com](mailto:msanders@kemelectric.com), or printed and mailed to: KEM

Electric Cooperative, Attn: Marcy Sanders, 107 S. Broadway, P.O. Box 790, Linton, ND 58552.

## Luck-of-the-draw scholarship

KEM Electric will award two \$500 luck-of-the-draw scholarships to be drawn at our annual meeting. All high school seniors who are dependents of KEM Electric members and have not previously been chosen for a co-op scholarship are eligible and must attend the annual meeting. A luck-of-the-draw form is available at [KEMElectric.com](http://KEMElectric.com).



Your Touchstone Energy® Cooperative

# SAVE THE DATE

JOIN KEM ELECTRIC FOR YOUR ANNUAL MEETING ON

**THURSDAY, JUNE 15, 2023**  
**NAPOLEON, NORTH DAKOTA**

MORE INFORMATION WILL FOLLOW.



**POWER**  
FOR GENERATIONS

## Interested in becoming a director?

KEM Electric Cooperative's annual meeting will be held on June 15. This year, the director seats up for election are those of Victor (Chuck) J. Wald, District 4; Dean Dewald, District 5; and Carmen Essig, at-large district.

KEM Electric Cooperative is governed by a seven-member board of directors elected by you, the members and owners of the electric cooperative.

The cooperative is divided into five districts, with one director representing each district and two at-large board seats. The current board of directors includes District 1, John Beck; District 2, Carter Vander Wal; District 3, Neil Meidinger; District 4, Victor (Chuck) Wald; District 5, Dean Dewald; at-large director, Dean Hummel; and at-large director, Carmen Essig.

If you are interested in becoming a director for KEM Electric Cooperative, please see the following section of bylaws pertaining to filing a petition for a director's seat:

### **404. Member Petition-Form.**

(a) Each petition shall contain the following:

1. The name of the member nominee.
2. The director position for which the member nominee shall run.
3. The printed names, addresses and telephone numbers, date of signature, and original signatures of each member signing the petition.
4. At least 10 signatures of the members of the respective district, or members at large, as the case may be.

(b) In the case of joint members, the signature

of one or more than one joint member shall constitute one joint member.

(c) Firms, associations, corporations or body politics shall have the right to place one signature on a petition, the same as other members, by the signature of a duly appointed representative.

(d) Petitions may not be circulated or signed more than 90 days before the date when petitions must be filed pursuant to this bylaw. Any signatures to a nominating petition obtained more than 90 days before that date may not be counted.

(e) All petitions must be filed at the principal offices of the cooperative not less than 45 days prior to the date of the meeting of the members, as fixed by the board of directors.

(f) After verifying that a petition complies with this bylaw, the secretary of the board of directors shall post a list of nominations for directors at the principal office of the cooperative at least 30 days before the meeting of the members.

If you would like to place your name on the ballot, pick up a petition at the KEM office or download a petition from the cooperative website at [www.kemelectric.com](http://www.kemelectric.com). Petitions become available on Jan. 31. Petitions must be returned to the cooperative office no later than May 2. As a reminder, KEM Electric no longer allows nominations from the floor after the membership voted to remove the option from the bylaws in 2021. ⚡

# AN ALL-EXPENSE-PAID TRIP TO WASHINGTON, D.C.

**JUNE 18-23, 2023**

- To enter the essay-writing contest, you must be a sophomore or junior in high school.
- You and your parents or guardian must be served by KEM Electric Cooperative.
- If you have any questions, please contact Marcy Sanders, KEM Electric, at 701-254-4666 during regular business hours.
- The deadline is Jan. 20, 2023. You can email entries to Marcy Sanders at [msanders@kemelectric.com](mailto:msanders@kemelectric.com) or mail a hard copy to: Youth Tour Essay Contest, 107 S. Broadway, Box 790, Linton, ND 58552-0790.



## TOP **3** REASONS

1. All-expense-paid trip to Washington, D.C., compliments of KEM Electric Cooperative
2. A whole week to visit unforgettable historic monuments, museums and the U.S. Capitol
3. A learning experience you'll never forget

### ESSAY QUESTION:

*If chosen as a Youth Tour delegate, you will be traveling to Washington, D.C. to experience and learn about America's rich history. What moment in American history do you wish you had been a part of and what would you have contributed?*



CHECK OUT THE ESSAY CONTEST GUIDELINES AT  
<https://ndyouthtour.com>

WASHINGTON, D.C.

# Safety Starts with ME: Tyler Schummer

“At KEM Electric, we do our best to maintain our system to ensure readiness for all types of severe weather and to reduce the number of outages, but Mother Nature can be unpredictable,” said Tyler Schummer, a journeyman lineworker at KEM Electric Cooperative.

That being said, outages are inevitable. Here at KEM Electric, our line crew take necessary safety precautions when restoring power for you, our members.

However, our line crew’s safety remains in your hands. When using portable generators in the event of a downed power line, this can prove to be dangerous and, in some cases, fatal to our lineworkers when used incorrectly.

A generator plugged into a home’s wiring or regular household outlet can cause backfeeding along power lines and electrocute anyone that comes into contact with them, even if the line seems deenergized.

Not only does this cause danger for our lineworkers, but also for our members. If a generator is used improperly, generator owners may also be at risk of electrocution, fire injury, property damage or carbon monoxide poisoning.

Here are some tips to ensure you are using a generator correctly:

1. Never connect a generator directly to your home’s wiring unless your home has been wired for generator use.
2. Always plug appliances directly into generators.
3. Use heavy-duty, outdoor-rated extension cords.
4. Ensure your generator is properly grounded.



5. Never overload a generator.
6. Turn off all equipment powered by the generator before shutting it down.
7. Keep the generator dry. Operate it on a dry surface under an open structure.
8. Always have a fully charged fire extinguisher nearby.
9. Never refuel a generator while it is operating.
10. Read and adhere to the manufacturer’s instructions for safe operation.

We encourage you to protect the well-being and safety of your family as well as those that assist in bringing power to you, our members. Contact KEM Electric for more information regarding generator hook-ups. ⚡

## BOARD MEETING HIGHLIGHTS

- Approved Oct. 25 board minutes
- Heard co-general manager/CEO report
- Heard Basin Electric Power Cooperative updates
- Discussed Energy Transfer Partners update
- Heard financial report
- Heard operations report
- Heard member relations report
- Heard legal counsel report

# Statement of nondiscrimination

KEM Electric Cooperative Inc. is a recipient of federal assistance from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). In accordance with federal civil rights law and USDA civil rights regulations and policies, the USDA, its agencies, offices and employees, and institutions participating in or administering USDA programs are prohibited from discriminating based on race, color, national origin, religion, sex, gender identity (including gender expression), sexual orientation, disability, age, marital status, family/parental status, income derived from a public assistance program, political beliefs, or reprisal or retaliation for prior civil rights activity, in any program or activity conducted or funded by USDA (not all bases apply to all programs). Remedies and complaint filing deadlines vary by program or incident.

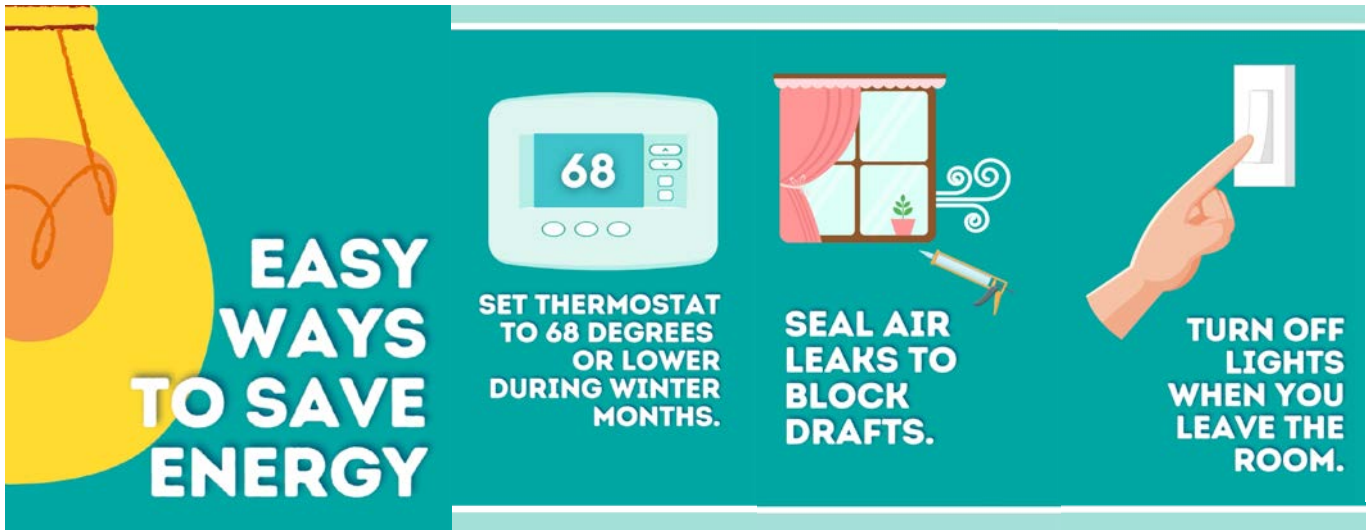
Persons with disabilities who require alternative means of communication for program information (e.g., Braille, large print, audiotope, American Sign Language, etc.) should contact the responsible agency or USDA's TARGET Center at 202-720-2600

(voice and TTY) or contact USDA through the Federal Relay Service at 800-877-8339. Additionally, program information may be made available in languages other than English.

To file a program discrimination complaint, complete the USDA Program Discrimination Complaint Form, AD3027, found online at [www.usda.gov/oascr/how-to-file-a-program-discrimination-complaint](http://www.usda.gov/oascr/how-to-file-a-program-discrimination-complaint) and at any USDA office or write a letter addressed to USDA and provide in the letter all of the information requested in the form.

To request a copy of the complaint form, call 866-632-9992. Submit your completed form or letter to USDA by: 1) mail: U.S. Department of Agriculture Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights, 1400 Independence Ave. SW, Washington, DC 20250-9410; 2) fax: 2026907442; or 3) email: [program.intake@usda.gov](mailto:program.intake@usda.gov).

KEM Electric Cooperative is an equal opportunity provider. ♻️



**EASY WAYS TO SAVE ENERGY**

- SET THERMOSTAT TO 68 DEGREES OR LOWER DURING WINTER MONTHS.
- SEAL AIR LEAKS TO BLOCK DRAFTS.
- TURN OFF LIGHTS WHEN YOU LEAVE THE ROOM.

## KEM ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE INC.

### DIRECTORS:

Victor Wald, Chairman .....Napoleon  
 John Beck, Vice Chairman .....Linton  
 Carter Vander Wal, Sec.-Treas. .... Pollock  
 Dean Dewald, Director..... Dawson  
 Carmen Essig, Director .....Lehr  
 Dean Hummel, Director..... Hague  
 Neil Meidinger, Director ..... Zeeland

Your Touchstone Energy® Cooperative 

### MANAGEMENT:

Travis Kupper ..... Co-GM/CEO  
 Jason Bentz ..... Co-GM/CEO

**Report outages to the following toll-free number:  
 800-472-2673**

Hazleton, Linton and Strasburg exchanges' phone number: 701-254-4666

FIND US ON:



### OFFICE HOURS:

Monday through Friday,  
 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

Website: [kemelectric.com](http://kemelectric.com) / Email address: [info@kemelectric.com](mailto:info@kemelectric.com)