

JULY - AUGUST 2019



NineStar CONNECTION

VOLUME 8
ISSUE 3

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"WALTER TOOK CARE OF MY PROBLEM QUICKLY, SWIFTLY AND WAS VERY POLITE."
- MORRISTOWN CUSTOMER



Customer service is at the tips of your fingers. NineStar Connect's tech support call center is open around the clock. **317-326-help**
ninstarconnect.com

STORY IDEA?

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**REMEMBERING
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RICHARD LUGAR**

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**POWER OUT?
NO INTERNET OR TV?**



**CHECK NINESTAR'S
FACEBOOK OR TWITTER PAGE!!**

Social Media is exploding and if you aren't checking your laptop, tablet or smart phone for the latest and greatest fads, trends and updates.....you are not living in the 21st century! We have found that posting news about NineStar Connect on Facebook and Twitter has been a successful line of communication for all of our social media followers. Once you "like" our page, you will automatically be notified of any post we share whether it's information about an outage, an event we are planning, local Channel 9 broadcasting or energy information to save you money.

Additionally, if you have a question for us, send us a message. We will research and respond to your question as quickly as possible. We don't want to "leave you in the dark" about any issues or inquiries you might have for us. Our Customer Service has always been a significant piece of what we do and giving you the answers you need is imperative to keeping you knowledgeable and satisfied with our service. To add, when there is that unfortunate outage, your communication to us is just as helpful in determining where the problem is and who it is affecting so we encourage you to share your thoughts.

So if you haven't already, grab your tablet or smart phone and "Like" or "Follow" our Facebook and/or Twitter page. We will do our best to keep you informed and post all the latest details about NineStar Connect news. But don't forget, we still like to hear your voice! When you need answers fast and need to talk to someone, a phone call to our 24/7/365 Support Center is always just a dial away - 317-326-HELP.



The *NineStar Connection* is a publication of NineStar Connect servicing retail and residential customers. Nearly 15,000 families and businesses receive this newspaper as part of their membership. *NineStar Connection* provides news, information and features about people, places and issues related to readers.

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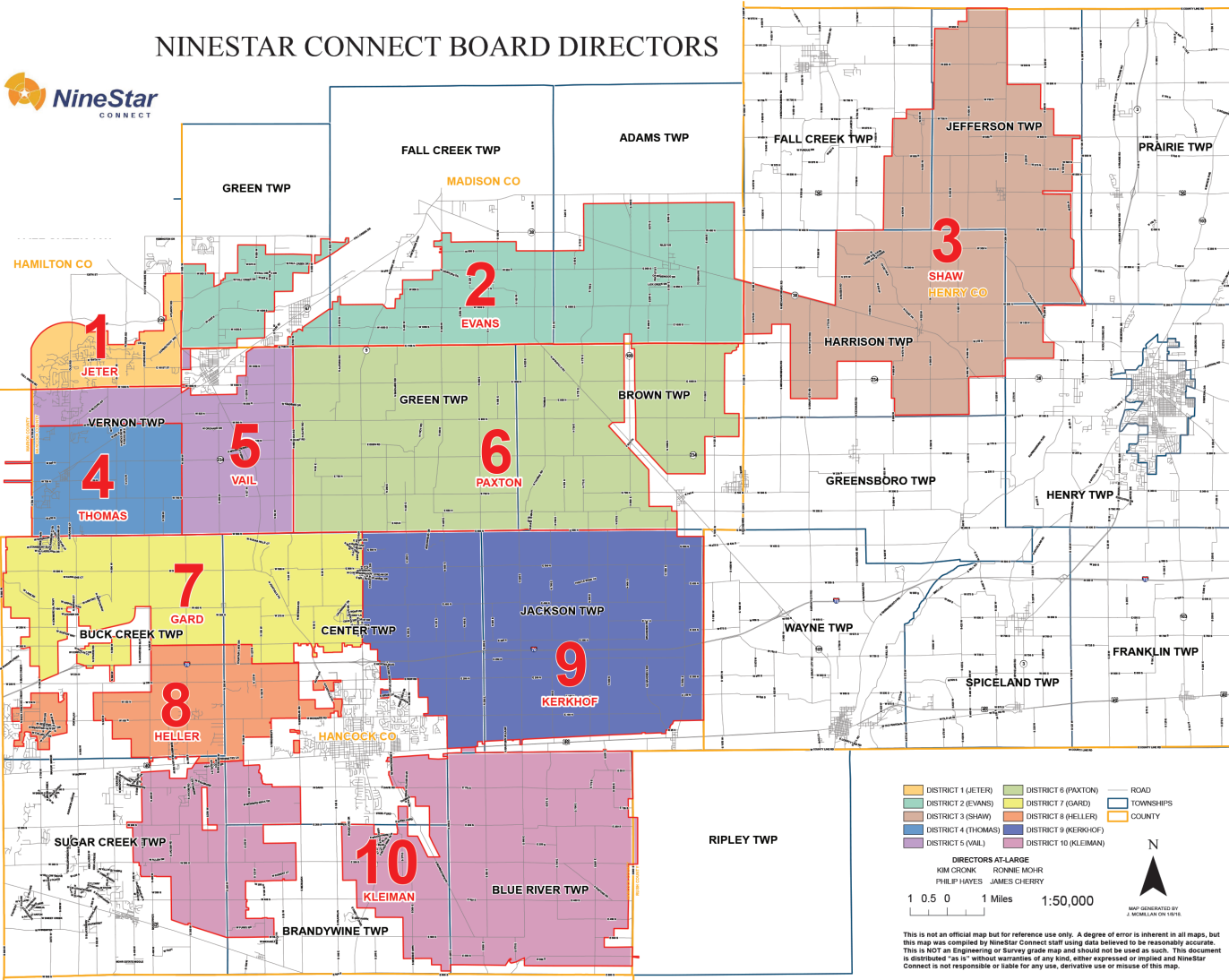
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WHIRLWIND RECOVERY



NINESTAR CONNECT HELPS PENDLETON BOUNCE BACK FROM TORNADO

By Julie Young

When an F2 tornado touched down near the Town of Pendleton on Monday, May 27, it didn't blow anyone off to Oz, but it did leave 4,200 people without power and a lot of wreckage in its wake. Madison County authorities said 75 homes sustained damage; debris was littered throughout the community, and the storm left residents disconnected and in the dark.

That's when Ninestar Connect swung into action.



According to George Plisinski, manager of telecom operations for Ninestar, the co-op was monitoring the storm long before verifying the presence of a twister.

"We heard about the storms, but it wasn't confirmed to be a tornado yet when I contacted our support center to check on the status of our system," he said. "It looked like a whole Passive Optical Network (PON) was down across our service area in downtown Pendleton. We were not sure whether the outage was power or fiber related, but because the majority of the facilities in the area were aerial, I assumed it was a combination of both."

It was a shrewd assumption, but with a lack of power, downed trees and emergency management services trying to keep everyone safe and relocate those who needed shelter, there was little Ninestar could do that evening. However, on Tuesday, the crew had boots on the ground at 5:30 a.m. to assess the situation.

"I identified where the damage was – the downtown pole had fallen and snapped in three pieces. It looked like the vast majority of the problem was due to the amount of trees that were down. I have never seen that many down in a given area," he said. "Our system is built under a lot of light poles and when the power is out, there is not much we can do to restore anything except create the To Do List, wait for new poles to be set and be told it's safe for employees to go in and get to work."

The community was advised to shelter in place if possible so that crews could get on with the business of clearing streets in order to make them passable. As Plisinski waited to restore power and connectivity, he witnessed a community pull themselves up by the bootstraps in order to get on with the business of recovery. No matter where he looked, there was a tremendous outpouring of camaraderie from ordinary citizens, municipal employees and community leaders.

"When I was out there on Tuesday, I was in Falls Park where massive trees were down. It was where John Street intersects with Falls Park Drive and you could not get any farther," he said. "I was talking with the Parks Department employees about how much had already been accomplished and he noted some elderly ladies who were out with a wheelbarrow raking up sticks and helping with the clean up."

Thanks to the community's help pitching in wherever necessary, Ninestar was able to have the communications system supported by the Town Hall up and running by Wednesday at 1:45 p.m. Plisinski said the fact that it only took 36 hours since the storm occurred is a testament to the incredible team effort, not only by Ninestar, but by the other utilities in the area.

Ninestar provides a multitude of services to the Town of Pendleton, not only to the Town Hall but also the police and parks department, pool and street maintenance hub. While these entities are not located in the same place, Ninestar created a shared service that allows entities to work in other locations if the fiber is down in their own area. It's one of the hallmarks of Ninestar's research and development team who is always looking for innovative ways to create customer driven solutions that will help carry the day even when disaster strikes.

"It all boils down to the attitudes of our directors, management and every other employee. There is an entrepreneurial spirit at Ninestar that asks 'Why not?' instead of 'Why?,'" Plisinski said. "When customers value your services enough to bring you their problem and ask what you can do, why not take a shot at solving it?"

By Friday, May 31, the devastated area was back online, the lights were on and residents were beginning the process of returning to normal. However, when a tornado hits, recovery is often a long and twisting road.

"We tried to help out any way we could," Plisinski said. "Although I was only part of the initial aftermath, I saw how the community came together in order to restore everything to what it was and ensure that their annual June Jamboree would go on as scheduled. It was neat to say I was a part of it."



REMEMBERING SENATOR RICHARD LUGAR



Senator Richard Lugar passed away on April 28, 2019 after a brief illness in Falls Church, Virginia. He served Indiana in the United States Senate from 1977-2013. In September of 2005 the Senator spent a day at then Hancock Telecom learning about issues facing the cooperative. These issues included intercarrier compensation, continued funding for the RUS loan program and continuation of Universal Service Fund support. After a short briefing on these issues he was given a tour of the facility and then a luncheon was held in his honor.

When remembering the visit by Lugar, NineStar Connect President Michael Burrow had this reflection, "Senator Lugar was a true friend of all cooperatives. He understood the issues facing our organization and cared deeply about our members. He always listened to our side of the story and for that we will forever be grateful."

Senator Lugar's funeral was held on May 15, 2019 in Indianapolis at St. Luke's United Methodist Church and he was laid to rest on July 24th at Arlington National Cemetery.



NINESTAR DAY AT THE HANCOCK COUNTY 4-H FAIR

Tuesday, June 25th was NineStar Day at the 2019 Hancock County 4-H Fair. In years past, NineStar has sponsored a booth inside the commercial building during the fair. This year, an entire day was sponsored. A day sponsor booth was set up outside the commercial building. Employees across the company banded together to make it a fun filled event. At the NineStar tent, visitors were able to play plinko to receive prizes. Reusable grocery bags and balloons were also given out to anyone who stopped by. Visitors also grabbed photos at the NineStar photo booth.

All NineStar customers were also mailed a postcard that they could redeem at the NineStar tent for a wooden nickel good for one dollar off at the lemon shake-up stand. The stand was also staffed by NineStar employees the entire day of the fair.

Thank you to all who visited us during the fun filled day. Thanks to you it was a huge success!



BLOOD DRIVE

Every day people are diagnosed with various illnesses that require a blood transfusion. According to the Blood Center, many individuals may require as much as 200 units of blood. Blood donation is truly a lifesaver for numerous people.

On Wednesday, May 22nd, NineStar Employees participated in the annual NineStar Blood Drive. The event was held at both North and South Campuses. Many of NineStar employees participated to help save lives! Thank you to all NineStar employees that participated and helped save lives.



4-H ELECTRIC PROJECT JUDGING

Judging for this year’s Hancock County 4-H Electric Projects took place on June 18, 2019. This year over 70 projects were judged in 5 divisions. Volunteer judges from Carrol White REMC, and Hendricks Power Cooperative were on hand to provide their expertise in judging the projects this year. Throughout the state of Indiana the 4-H Electric Program is supported by many electric cooperative employees as well as the Indiana Statewide Association of Rural Electric Cooperatives. The countless hours of support from these groups continues to make the 4-H Electric Program a great success. Through this program experts are able to share their knowledge of electricity and electric safety with hundreds of participants in the 4-H Youth Program. NineStar Connect is a proud supporter of the 4-H Youth Program and provides leadership for the 4-H Electric Projects both in Hancock County and on the state 4-H Electric Program committee.

Sarah Bogle won overall Grand Champion on her book lamp, and her project will be entered at the State Fair! Rebekah Bogle won overall Reserve Grand Champion for her electric light circuit display.

- Other winners by Division were:
- Division I:** Brody Cain, Champion; Aimery Kerkhof, Reserve Champion
 - Division II:** Nolan Greulich, Champion; Ryan Cain, Reserve Champion
 - Division III:** Erica Long, Champion; Emma Bogle, Reserve Champion
 - Division IV:** Sarah Bogle, Champion; Logan Schutt, Reserve Champion
 - Advanced Electric:** Rebekah Bogle Champion; Carter Crouch, Reserve Champion
 - Advanced Electronics:** Kalyn Edwards Champion; Elizabeth Dodd, Reserve Champion

NineStar Connect provided a special award to 4-H Farm Model Project participants for adding utility distribution equipment in their models such as power poles, wires and transformers. A winner was selected from each division. This year’s winners were Matt Hunt in Division I, Jackson Stephenson in Division II, and Logan Overman in Division III. The winners were awarded a NineStar Connect toy bucket truck to congratulate them on their efforts.

Congratulations to all of this year’s participants!



MAKING CENTS OF ELECTRICITY DEMAND

PROPER PLANNING CAN HELP REDUCE ENERGY COSTS NOW AND IN THE FUTURE

by Steve Hite

Energy Advisor Hendricks Power Cooperative

Nothing feels more welcome on a hot summer afternoon than the air conditioner kicking on. But, while your house is cooling down, electricity generation plants are warmed up and running full tilt to reliably serve everyone's needs.

Your local electric cooperative is part of a complex system that must be prepared to meet the highest power demands of the year. This is similar to the way a mall parking lot may seem larger than needed. When you pass by on most days, the majority of the spots are empty. Yet on the day after Thanksgiving, customarily the busiest shopping day of the year, the parking lot may be crammed with cars — and more ready to pounce when a spot opens. Your electric co-op has to build or buy enough capacity to fulfill everyone's needs on that one hottest day (or coldest night) of the year.

• SIMPLE SUPPLY AND DEMAND

Like with other products, the rules of supply and demand apply to electricity. When businesses are operating and everyone is running their A/Cs on a hot summer afternoon, electricity prices on the markets can soar because everyone needs it. You may not see these price differences on your home's electric bill because your electric co-op may average all of these costs into one amount per kilowatt-hour (kWh) regardless of the time of day you use the power. Eventually, high demand days can lead to higher average costs for everyone overall.

TOWN HALL QUESTIONS

Our next town hall meeting will be Thursday, September 5th at our South Campus location. There will be no individual topics discussed this time around. Instead, we would like to hear directly from our customers regarding any questions you may have. We will compile a list of all questions and answer as many as we can at the meeting. To submit a question, please email it to: marketing@ninestarconnect.com by Thursday, August 22nd.



• YOUR PLANS CAN SAVE!

You can easily reduce your energy use during times of peak demand, providing savings for you and your local electric co-op. Even simple steps like raising your thermostat a few degrees and closing the shades against the hot summer sun can help reduce the energy your co-op needs to provide. Additional steps that can save even more and improve problem areas of your home include air sealing and adding insulation. Properly sized and tuned high-efficiency HVAC equipment can also reduce demand during peak times.

• NINESTAR OFFERS SAVINGS PROGRAMS

NineStar offers free advice and power-savings programs to help lower the cost of monthly electric bills. Programs such as Time Of Use (TOU) that monitors when your electric usage occurs and then applies different rates based on whether the use occurs during on-peak or off-peak hours. Additionally, we offer various budget billing options that help spread those higher electric bills over a course of the year. And programs such as Power Moves and Load Management are other ways to save you money. If you are interested in any of these options, please call NineStar's Energy Advisor, Matt Strahl at 317-326-3131 or by email, mstrahl@ninestarconnect.com.



President's Message

I'm what some people would call a "homer." By that, I mean that except for my 4 years in college (where I still came home every summer and holiday), I've lived in Hancock County my entire life – all nearly 57 years of it. Born at what is now Hancock Regional Hospital in Greenfield, I have lived at only three different addresses – all within a three-mile radius.

Understanding the history of my residency probably helps to explain why I've been accused on occasions of suggesting the sun, moon and stars orbit around NineStar's serving area. Who knows? I might be a bit prejudiced when it comes to geography.

The Census Bureau reports that the average American moves every 7 or 8 years. I suspect that average is a bit skewed from statistics coming from east and west coast urban areas with folks in the Midwest being a little less transient. Nonetheless, people do move and relocate much more frequently today than ever before, and many are finding their new homes and business opportunities in the east-central Indiana region that is served by NineStar Connect.

Being President of our local cooperative utility gives me some unique perspectives on the growth we are seeing – particularly in Hancock County. I talk with a lot of our members and local residents alike. Some hate growth, wanting the area to stay a bucolic rural community while others see it as positive because it increases the value of their homes and land. Some are excited by the business investments with added jobs and retail conveniences while some complain about the added traffic and other inconveniences associated with a growing population.

In other words, as in life, some see the glass as half full while others see it as half empty.

NineStar management and board of directors are a bit more circumspect when it comes to growth. We tend to see growth in Hancock County in particular as largely inevitable given that it is currently one of

the least populated of the donut counties that surround Indianapolis and Marion County. We also look to some of the other donut counties for guidance on what potential growth in future years might look like. Here's a growth chart of those counties for the last five decades:

County	1970 Population	2018 Estimated Population	% increase
Boone	30,870	67,000	217%
Hamilton	54,532	330,000	605%
Hancock	35,096	76,000	217%
Hendricks	53,974	167,000	309%
Johnson	61,138	156,000	255%

I find the growth chart above fascinating for several reasons. We can see that Hamilton and Hendricks Counties had almost identical population in 1970 but over the ensuing 50 years, Hamilton grew at twice the pace as Hendricks. Looking back at the 1970 census, most would have guessed that Johnson would have the largest population in 50 years instead of growing at "only" 250% pace. Even though Hancock and Boone Counties started from a smaller population count, they have grown at a pace nearly as fast as Johnson County. Both are likely poised for additional growth in the upcoming years.

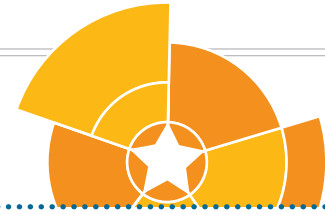
Interestingly, it took Hancock County an additional 30 years and Boone County an additional 40 years to reach the approximate population that Hamilton, Hendricks, and Johnson had in 1970. If you were to extrapolate a 50-year growth rate of 255% (e.g. like Johnson County) starting in 2000, Hancock County could be sitting at a population of 141,250 by the 2050 census, which is nearly double where we were in 2018 but still smaller than where Hamilton, Hendricks and Johnson are today. Most people who are knowledgeable in regional demographics believe that Hancock County's population likely will be greater than 141,000 in 2050 because growth trends around Indianapolis seem to be accelerating.



Regardless of what any one person predicts the future population might be in any given year, NineStar spends a lot of time preparing for that growth and more importantly, evaluating what role it should play in that growth. It's these types of strategic discussions by both board and management that has led to NineStar to invest in building fiber to 100% of our members making it one of the most broadband-wired areas in the United States, as well as adding both water & wastewater to the services we provide our members. The future prosperity of our communities requires us to anticipate the needs of future residents and business.

The success of NineStar as a non-profit, locally-owned and controlled cooperative utility is founded on a simple philosophy it follows every day: **A rising tide lifts all ships.** If our collective efforts and investments in utility infrastructure benefit the members of NineStar, it will ultimately create benefits for our community-at-large as it grows as well. I guess that makes NineStar a "homer" as well.

OPERATION ROUND-UP



NineStar Connect's second quarter Operation Round-Up Committee meeting was held at the company's headquarters. The purpose of Operation Round-Up is to accumulate and distribute funds for charitable purposes to groups/organizations within the NineStar service territory. The source of these funds is the membership of NineStar Connect's service customers who voluntarily "round up" their bill to the next highest dollar. The money is accumulated by the co-op and transferred to the NineStar Community Trust. Each quarter a group of Trustees (NineStar customers who volunteer their time to serve on this committee) meet and decide how the funds are dispersed with the applications that are received.

Here is a list of organizations that benefited from the ORU fund this past quarter:



BEAUTIFY KNIGHTSTOWN (\$2090.00) –

« The purpose of funds is to enhance the exterior effect of the Shelter House in Knightstown's Sunset Park. They were wanting to purchase plants and install new landscaping around the shelter house.

CAMP INVENTION, GREENFIELD-CENTRAL SCHOOLS (\$1500.00) –

» Camp Invention is a camp that inspires creativity, innovation and STEM interest in children. It is \$230.00 a child to attend the camp. Funds benefited those kids that couldn't afford the camp but didn't want to miss out on this great opportunity.

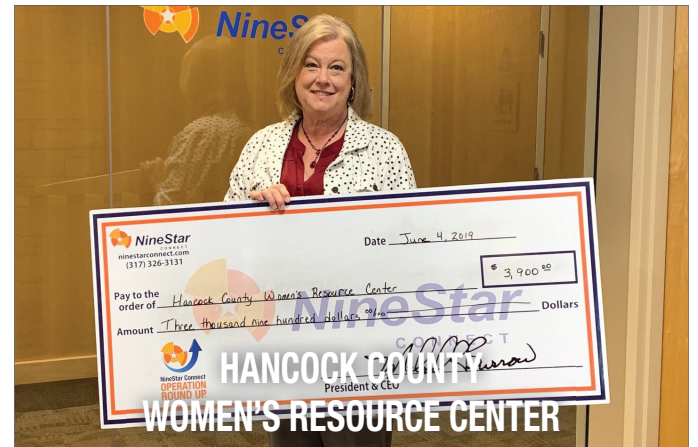


HANCOCK COUNTY AG ASSOCIATION (\$4500.00) –

« They were looking for funds to purchase new chairs for the fairgrounds exhibit hall.

HANCOCK COUNTY WOMEN'S RESOURCE CENTER (\$3900.00) –

» They would like to provide a quarterly program that would reach a larger number of Hancock County residents for the purpose of raising awareness of the services available. The program called "The Women's Empowerment Series" will focus on the struggles facing women and how to break through these barriers.



RUSHVILLE PUBLIC LIBRARY (\$2000.00) –

« The library was looking to install 10 security cameras outside the library facility.

THE LANDING (\$5200.00) –

» They were looking for funding to be able to continue to provide and expand their recovery program services (for teens) by having mobile software and staff trained peer recovery coaches and to implement a marketing plan with materials to hand out.



For ones that want to send in an application for Operation Round-up dollars, the next application deadline is October 11. Applications can be downloaded from our website at www.ninestarconnect.com under the Community tab. If you or someone you know (must be a NineStar customer) would like to serve on the Board of Trustees, please email OperationRoundUp@NineStarConnect.com or call 317-323-3087.

FOUNDATION FOR RURAL SERVICE AWARDS \$125,000 IN SCHOLARSHIPS TO STUDENTS ACROSS RURAL AMERICA

The Foundation for Rural Service announced that it has awarded \$125,000 in scholarships to 54 students from rural communities served by members of NTCA–The Rural Broadband Association. The FRS Scholarship Program awards one-time scholarships to students from across rural America for their first year of college, university or vocational-technical school. Each student is sponsored by an NTCA member company.

In celebration of the foundation’s 25th anniversary this year, three new scholarships were funded and subsequently awarded. NTCA Chief Executive Officer Shirley Bloomfield and her husband, Don Patterson, endowed the Good Neighbor Scholarship, which is awarded to students who demonstrate what it means to be a “good neighbor” through humanitarianism, inclusion and kindness to others. NTCA Northwest Region Director Don Bitz sponsored The Herbert and Isabel Bitz Memorial Scholarship in honor of his parents. Lastly, FRS created one-time FRS Anniversary Scholarships, awarded to students interested in industries important to rural communities. Other awards included:

- One \$7,000 Everett Kneece Scholarship
- Four \$5,000 JSI Staurulakis Family Scholarships to students with an interest in science, math or engineering (STEM)
- Two \$1,500 TMS Scholarships
- Three \$500 Roger Alan Cox Scholarships (sponsored by Herman & Whiteaker, LLC)
- Thirty-three \$2,500 FRS Scholarships

“It is a privilege for FRS to have a small role in supporting the continued education of these students through our scholarship program,” said FRS Executive Director Jessica Golden. “Each and every applicant was thoroughly impressive and demonstrated a deep knowledge of and dedication to their rural communities. We thank all our donors for making this scholarship program possible year after year.”

Two \$2,500.00 scholarships were given to local high school students.

Winners included:



Rose Gerard
Greenfield-Central
High School



Caitlin Cox
Eastern Hancock
High School

The Foundation for Rural Service (FRS), in cooperation with NTCA–The Rural Broadband Association and its members, seeks to sustain and enhance the quality of life in rural America by advancing an understanding of rural issues. FRS is committed to educational achievement in rural communities, recognizing that tomorrow’s economic and civic development depends on the involvement and commitment of today’s youth. Visit us at www.frs.org.

NTCA–The Rural Broadband Association is the premier association representing nearly 850 independent, community-based telecommunications companies that are leading innovation in rural and small-town America. In an era of transformative technological advancements, regulatory challenges and marketplace competition, NTCA members are leading the technological evolution for rural consumers, delivering robust and high-quality services over future-proof networks that make rural communities vibrant places in which to live and do business. Because of their efforts, rural America is fertile ground for innovation in economic development, e-commerce, health care, agriculture and education, and it contributes billions of dollars to the U.S. economy each year. Visit us at www.ntca.org.

NINESTAR SCHOLARSHIP WINNERS – 2019

At this year’s Annual Meeting, 15 names were announced for the 2019 Scholarship program for children of NineStar Connect’s members. The students have to be a 2019 graduating high school senior and have a seven-semester minimum cumulative grade point average of 2.75 on a 4.0 scale or its equivalent at the time of the application. Each scholarship winner received \$1000.00.

Winners included:



Callaway Aranda
Pendleton Heights
High School



Tyler Barr
Shenandoah
High School



James Cohee
Mt. Vernon
High School



Mariam Elassal
Greenfield-Central
High School



Ethan Elsbury
Greenfield-Central
High School



Brianna Franke
Mt. Vernon
High School



Grant Hess
Mt. Vernon
High School



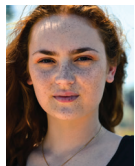
Joseph Kummick
Hamilton Southeastern
High School



Emme Longman
Mt. Vernon
High School



Canyen Palmer
Greenfield-Central
High School



Morgan Seeman
Mt. Vernon
High School



Leah Seib
New Palestine
High School



Zachary Sickles
Eastern Hancock
High School



Jenna Smith
Eastern Hancock
High School



Gillian Ward
Mt. Vernon
High School

**Congratulations
to all graduates of 2019!**

SMART SAVINGS

CONSERVING HOT WATER CAN ALSO CONSERVE COSTS

Wabash Valley Power news



From the morning shower to a final sip before slumber, people use a lot of water during the day — we need it to survive, after all — often without considering the costs circling down the drain with it.

The U.S. Department of Energy estimates that heating water accounts for about 18 percent of your home’s energy use. Reducing your water use also will lower your energy consumption — saving you money in the process. A few options can go a long way:

- **DON’T LET THE WATER RUN**

This is the easiest way to reduce costs. People showering or washing their hands or dishes frequently let the water run. Shutting water off while lathering with soap or brushing your teeth can significantly save the amount of water you use each month. Many newer showerheads come with a “pause” setting that is worth a try. And if you are on a well, reduced water use equals less electricity to run your well pump.

- **LOWER HEATER TEMPERATURE**

Many water heaters come preinstalled at a temperature of 140 F, the Department of Energy reports. The agency advises that reducing your water heater’s temperature to 120 F can help reduce your energy cost and slow water pipe mineral buildup. As an additional benefit, 120 F also is a recommended safety measure to help prevent young children from burns.

- **INSULATE YOUR WATER HEATER**

If you have an older water heater, the Department of Energy recommends that you should check if it has insulation with an R-value of at least 24. If not, then the tank may benefit from additional insulation from a pre-cut water heater jacket or blanket. The Department of Energy has more information available on its website at www.energy.gov.

- **INSTALL EFFICIENT UPGRADES**

If you have appliances, faucets, or shower heads that may be due for an upgrade (or you are doing a renovation), energy-efficient products can help you reduce water use or lower the electricity needed to heat your water, saving you money over the upgrade’s lifecycle. WaterSense® shower heads and faucets reduce the amount of water used compared to their conventional counterparts; appliances such as dishwashers, water heaters, and washing machines with an ENERGY STAR® label will save you in energy costs.

Your local electric co-op to NineStar can provide additional support and advice to help reduce your energy use, which will save you money in the long run. Contact NineStar Energy Advisor, Matt Strahl at 317.323.2042 or visit www.Power-Moves.com for more information today!

PAPERLESS BILLING

Enroll in **Paperless Billing** Today and you could be our **NEXT BIG WINNER!**

Each month we pick a new winner for just choosing to get your billing statement electronically. If you are drawn as a lucky winner, you will receive a \$50 Amazon Gift Card. Congratulations to our latest monthly winners:

May	William Benedick	\$50 Amazon Gift Card
June	David & Linda Gould of Pendleton	\$50 Amazon Gift Card
July	Sanjeev K. & Tatwa Anand	\$50 Amazon Gift Card

Paperless Billing is the easiest, cheapest way of paying your bill each month. Please feel free to give one of our Residential Service Consultants a call at 317-326-3131 to help you set up if needed. It will be a call you are glad you made!

CO-OP LIVING WITH MARY JANE



HOW **(NOT!)** TO CELEBRATE YOUR WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

BY MARY JANE BOGLE

As you might have guessed, my husband and I just reached a significant wedding anniversary. Early on, we envisioned ourselves touring Europe or soaking up Hawaii's sand and sun in celebration of this landmark event. Circumstances being what they are (and by circumstances, I'm thinking of three children arriving bing, bang and boom), we opted for a more reasonably priced, mid-week retreat in Amish Country.

Normally, I love these little getaways. We typically score great deals on accommodations, avoid large crowds and relish area attractions on our own. Initially, this trip promised more of the same. We enjoyed a peaceful drive through the Ohio countryside, stopping to eat at the Hanover House Diner in Loudonville. The food was delicious (I highly recommend the sub sandwich!), portions, large; price, reasonable.

Upon leaving the restaurant, however, events started going horribly wrong. You should know that for some time now, I've been eyeing the large creek near our home and wondering what it would be like to explore it via my own small watercraft. Being the ever-thrifty family, we decided to rent kayakers first to make sure this new sport was really for us.

Our anniversary trip seemed the perfect opportunity to try it out. Again, thrift played a hand. We would get a bigger bang for our buck with the longer, more



robust trip. And why not? After all, nothing says, "I love you" like a 14-mile jaunt down a river, right? Forget the fact that my arms might be so sore I could barely lift them for the rest of the trip. So much for a romantic getaway.

Nevertheless, all went well for the first 13.5 miles—until I noticed the small rapids ahead and my husband riding really low in the water. Or was he walking? Sure enough, his small, low-riding kayak had turned, taken on water, and launched hubby, wallet and cell phone straight into the river!

Yes, the cell phone is probably ruined. Thankfully, the trip wasn't. We had

a good laugh, sampled cheese and chocolate, and thoroughly enjoyed ourselves. In fact, I think that's what marriage is really all about—handling the unexpected spills with as much grace and joy as the blessings. Maybe this trip was the perfect way to celebrate our anniversary after all.

Mary Jane Bogle is a part-time writer and full-time mom. While her mother-in-law declares she was "born in the wrong century," she remains steadfastly committed to seeking a simpler, more self-sufficient way of life. You can find more tips and tricks on her blog at simplelifeandhome.com.