

SEPTEMBER – OCTOBER 2020

125 YEARS
1895 - 2020



NineStar CONNECTION

VOLUME 9
ISSUE 4

CONGRESSMAN PENCE VISITS NINESTAR

Congressman Greg Pence visited NineStar's main campus in Greenfield, recently, to learn more about our efforts in electricity, fiber optics, water & sewer.

PAGE 7

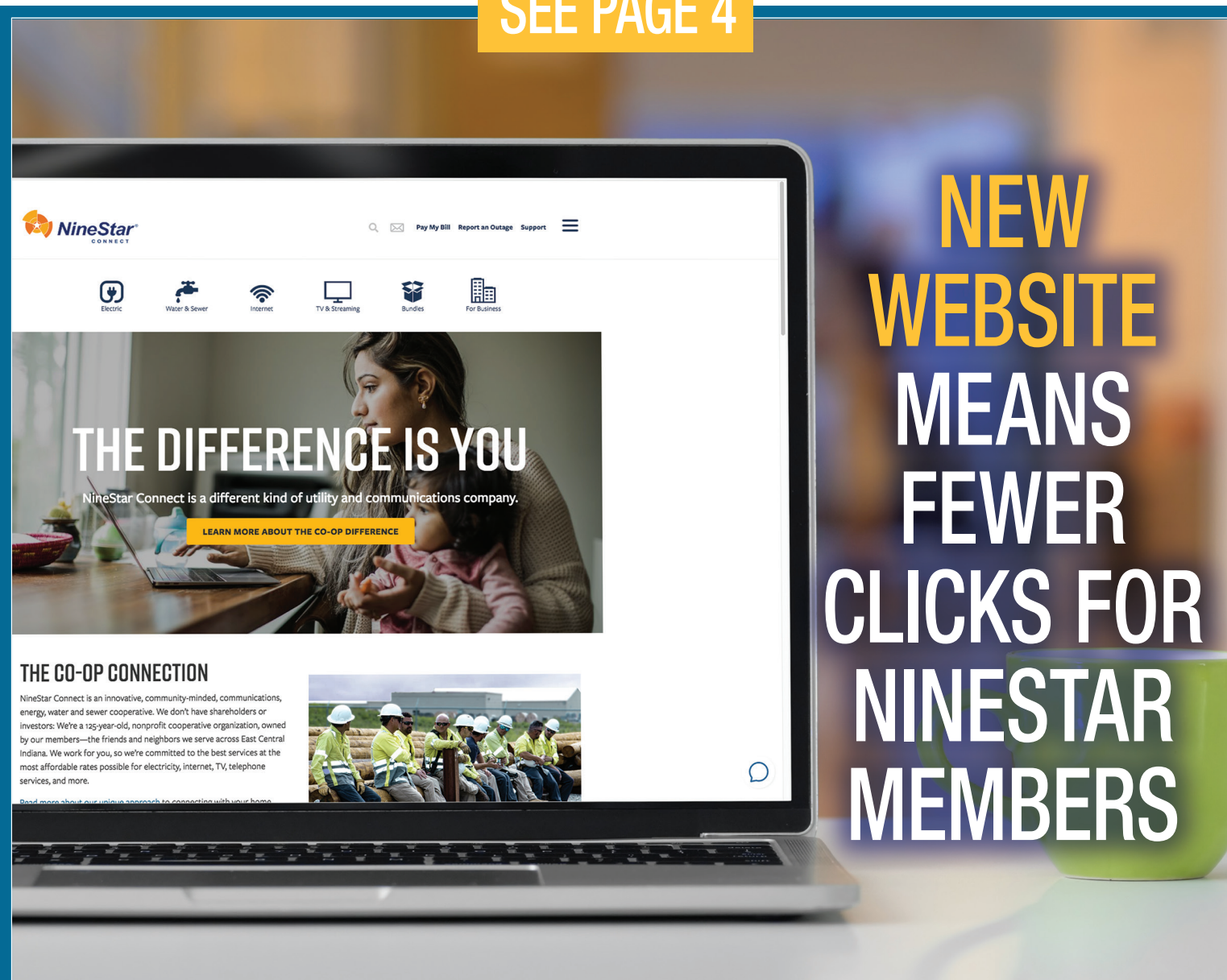
IN MEMORY OF KIM L. CRONK

Longtime NineStar Connect Board Member Kim L. Cronk, passed away unexpectedly on the evening of Monday, September 7, 2020.

PAGE 11

PRESORTED
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SEE PAGE 4



**NEW
WEBSITE
MEANS
FEWER
CLICKS FOR
NINESTAR
MEMBERS**

**HAPPY
BIRTHDAY
WILLIE
WIREHAND
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©NRECA

**COMMITMENT
TO RENEWABLES
PAGE 9**



Ninestar employees assist the local Agape, a non profit equine therapeutic riding center.
(Learn more about it on page 11)



OUR EMPLOYEES MAKE THE
DIFFERENCE. HERE'S A
CUSTOMER REVIEW FOR
RYAN YOUNG AND PERRY WILSON.

“RYAN AND PERRY WERE
PROFESSIONAL, DID A GREAT
JOB AND WORKED ON MAKING
SURE EVERYTHING GOT SET
UP CORRECTLY. THEY WENT
ABOVE AND BEYOND.”
- CUSTOMER
VANAUKEN



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

STORY IDEA?

Contact **David Spencer** at
dspencer@ninarconnect.com

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In an effort to give members the best user
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more information with fewer clicks.

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NineStar & Henry County REMC receive a \$100
million grant from the Next Level Broadband
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**PRESIDENT'S
MESSAGE**

Keeping focused
on our long-
term goals and
prosperity.

PAGES 8

 **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
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receive this newspaper as part
of their membership. **NineStar
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information and features about
people, places and issues
related to readers.

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ADDRESS:
NineStar North Campus
2331 E. CR 600N
Greenfield, IN 46140

NineStar South Campus
2243 E. Main St.
Greenfield, IN 46140

PHONE:
317-326-3131
765-533-4303
EMAIL:
[dspencer@](mailto:dspencer@ninarconnect.com)
ninarconnect.com
www.ninarconnect.com

NineStar Connection	Director District 6 Joseph Paxton
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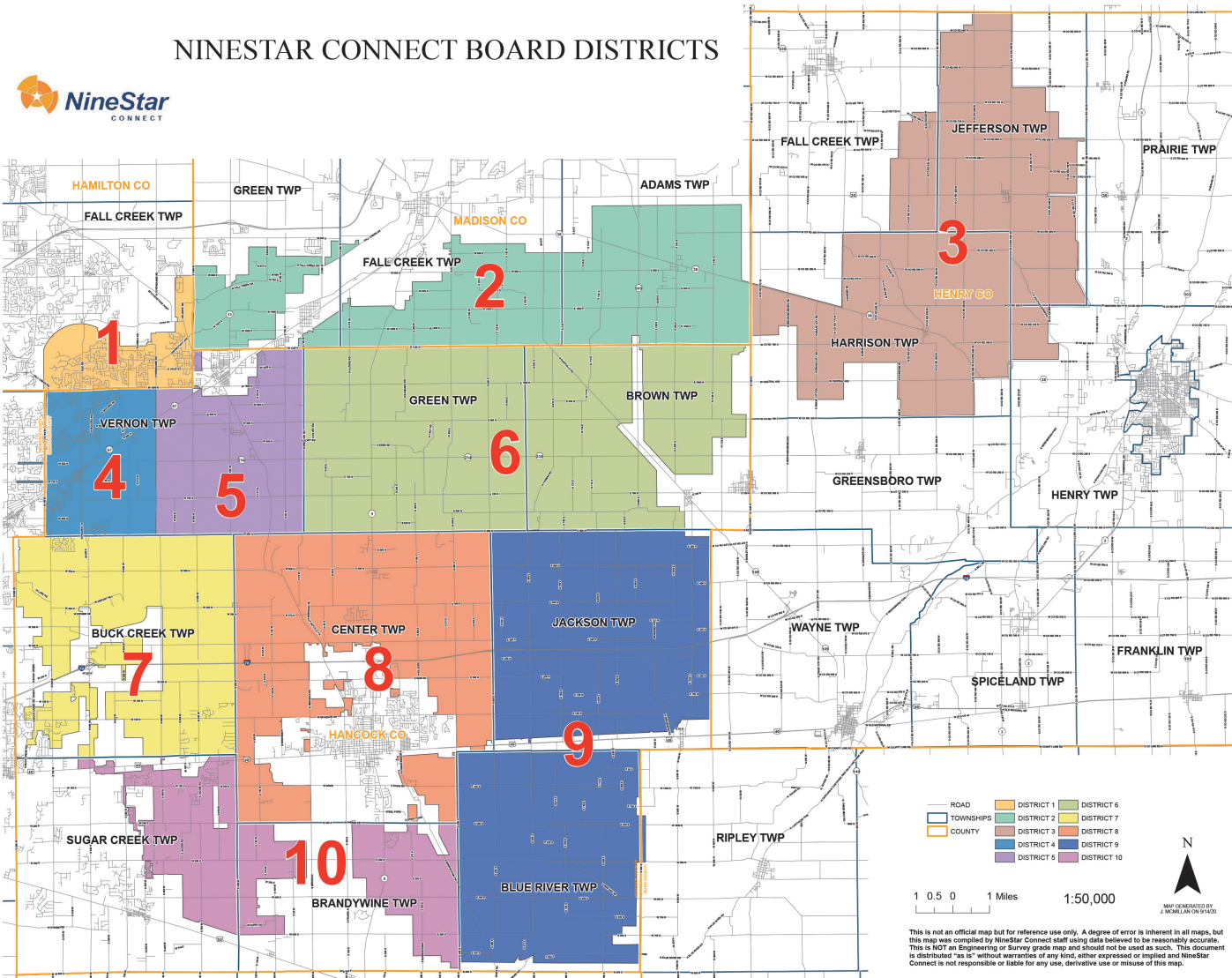
AT LARGE



JAMES E. CHERRY



RONNIE MOHR





By Julie Young

In an effort to give members the best user experience on the Internet, NineStar Connect has launched a revamped website that promises more information with fewer clicks.

“The industry recommendation is to revamp or create a new website every five years so we are right on schedule with this new website,” said David Spencer, director of marketing and public relations for the co-op.

Led by Erika Whittington, an Indiana State University graduate who is in her second year with NineStar, the goal of the new website was to give the space a fresh, modern feel while providing access to everything within two or three clicks. The result is a faster, more user-friendly and convenient member experience.

THE NINESTAR DIFFERENCE

As Whittington embarked on the 10-month process of redesigning NineStar’s online platform, she knew there were certain functions of the previous site that were extremely popular with the membership such as web mail and online bill pay through SmartHub that needed to remain in the forefront of the redo. However, data analytics showed that the site was accessed by a number of potential customers looking for information about the co-op’s offerings and what they can expect from NineStar service.

“The fact that we can provide gigabit speed Internet over fiber optics has been very popular,” Spencer said. “We wanted to make sure that information was front and center and answered all of their potential questions concerning that offering.”

Whittington said there was a lot of space dedicated to the NineStar difference and what makes a co-op unique from any other utility service.

“Some people don’t know that NineStar is a nonprofit electric, communications, water and sewer cooperative that gives back to the local community we serve. We have a whole section that outlines our governing principles as well as how we volunteer our time and how we allocate funds back to the community whether that is sponsoring a Little League team, special event or partnering with other entities for a larger project,” she said.

Visitors can learn about Operation Round Up and how their small change can make a big difference to others, how NineStar provided frontline pandemic workers with lunch from Chicago’s Pizza, and they can meet other members who share what the NineStar difference has meant to their lives.

Another new feature is the NineStar blog, which features stories written by NineStar employees on a wide range of topics including: electrical safety, tips for a faster Internet experience, the fundamentals of 3D printing, and how to choose a laptop computer that fits your needs. Almost every page contains Frequently Asked Questions and the support center contains a number of resources and troubleshooting guides as well as a live chat option and the phone number for NineStar’s 24/7/365 in-house service team.

“We really tried to create (the website) from our members’ point of view,” Whittington said. “There was a lot of planning and strategizing to streamline every page for maximum convenience.”

HITTING A HOME RUN

Spencer said he was impressed with Whittington’s effort in working with the website consultants to turn the envisioned space into a reality. He said it will be easy to continually update the site in order to keep members in the know of all that their utility is doing in the community.

“Erika took the lead on this project and really hit it out of the park,” he said. “We now have a sleek, modern website that truly integrates all of our services in a way that is convenient for members.”

So far, the transition to the new site has been surprisingly easy and there have been few issues with the change. Naturally, there has been a broken link here and there, but that is a relatively easy fix. Spencer said other than that, the feedback is very positive.

“We just heard from one of our customers this week who sent an e-mail saying that they loved the new bill pay function. They liked how everything was on one screen, how their information was saved and how it took only 30 seconds to pay two bills,” he said. “At the end of the day, we want our members to find what they need, take care of what they need to, and then get back to what is important in their lives.”

Whittington agrees. “The feedback has been great to hear. Our website is the face of our company and even though we don’t see our members everyday, we want to be a resource for them.”

DEBBIE ROBERTS EXCELLENCE AWARD WINNER

For the second year in a row, the Debbie Roberts Excellence Award was presented to a well deserving employee whose actions and behaviors support the success of NineStar through our mission, vision and goals.

Debbie Roberts was a 47-year employee who demonstrated a commitment to her job, NineStar, its customers, and her fellow employees. Debbie was caring, thoughtful and loyal. She represented NineStar with a kind demeanor, loveable spirit and a warm smile.

Persons nominated for this award were reviewed on five award criteria:

1. Going above and beyond on the job and for their coworkers.
2. Being a good Samaritan.
3. Exemplary attitude/behavior at work and toward their colleagues.

4. Outstanding commitment to their job and cooperative principles.

5. Provides outstanding external and/or internal customer service excellence.

The 2020 winner of the Debbie Roberts Excellence Award winner is Donna Sturges!

Donna is a 15 year employee of NineStar Connect and currently serves as a Customer Service Representative.

When describing Donna, NineStar employee Lacey Griggs said it best, “Donna is a loving and thoughtful employee, person, and friend. She often comes in early, leaves late, and does all she can to help our members. She helps out multiple departments, never forgets a birthday, anniversary or funeral and represents NineStar with pride.”



HAPPY BIRTHDAY WILLIE WIREHAND

In 1950, cooperatives across the nation joined together with a common goal: to provide reliable and affordable electricity to rural America. This collection of cooperatives is known today as the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA). During this time, NRECA decided they were in need of a mascot to represent this group of cooperatives and so Willie Wirehand was born. Created by freelance artist Andrew “Drew” McLay on October 30, 1950, Willie Wirehand was selected by NRECA’s membership as the mascot to represent them nationwide.

Willie Wirehand’s legs and bottom were an electric plug, while his body was made of wires. His head is a light socket and his nose was a push button. NRECA has stated that “Willie was given the last name of Wirehand because the electricity that was brought to rural America by cooperatives in the 1930’s & 1940’s was a never-tiring, always available hired hand to help the nation’s farmer.” (Source NRECA).

Willie Wirehand became an image well known across the nation. NRECA and Sylvania Electric Products Lighting Division partnered together to have Willie Wirehand’s image on lightbulbs. The cardboard container has a distinct design of Willie Wirehand.

In 1959, Willie Wirehand continued working for cooperatives by dressing as a Colonial Minuteman for a campaign called “Minutemen for Electrification.” He appeared on stage with Senator John F. Kennedy at an NRECA meeting in Washington, D.C. in the form of a banner hanging behind Senator Kennedy. Willie Wirehand continues to appear on marketing materials and safety publications and he shows no signs of slowing down anytime soon.



PHOTO COURTESY OF WISCONSIN REC NEWS

NINESTAR & HENRY COUNTY REMC RECEIVE NEXT LEVEL CONNECTIONS BROADBAND GRANT

INDIANAPOLIS – Governor Eric J. Holcomb recently announced \$51 million for 50 broadband infrastructure expansion projects across the state as a part of the second round of the Next Level Connections Broadband Grant Program. Central Indiana Communications, a subsidiary of NineStar Connect, and Henry County REMC partnered and received one of the grants.

The \$100 million Next Level Broadband Grant Program is the largest single state investment in broadband. In total, rounds one and two of the program have awarded more than \$79 million for 41 counties to provide broadband infrastructure to more than 21,900 homes and commercial locations.

“Lt. Governor Crouch and I have been dedicated to improving internet access for years, and now COVID has only made the

need for affordable, dependable broadband more apparent,” Gov. Holcomb said. “This latest round of grants will give more Hoosiers access to more affordable, quality internet regardless of where they live, work or go to school.”

This second round of funding will provide broadband infrastructure to more than 10,590 homes and commercial locations across 32 counties.

In addition to the \$51 million awarded, the 16 telecommunications providers and utility cooperatives contributed more than \$53 million in matching funds, resulting in more than \$104 million total investment for broadband.

The program allows broadband service providers and utility cooperatives to apply

for up to \$5 million to expand service to unserved areas if they provide at least a 20 percent match. Unserved areas are those without at least one telecommunication provider offering at least 10 mbps download and 1 mbps upload. Proposed projects must provide a minimum level of service at actual speeds of 25 mbps download and 3 mbps upload.

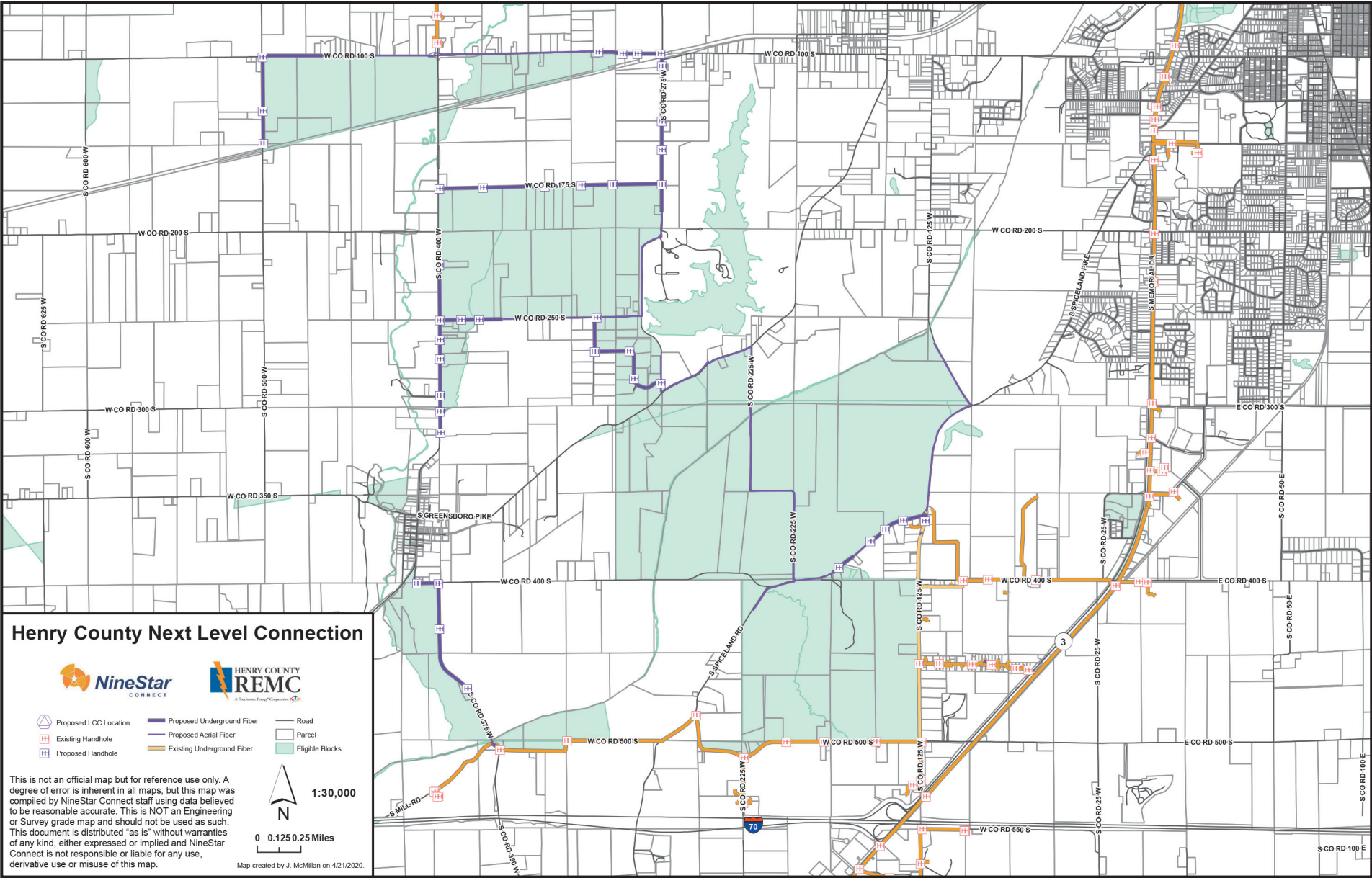
At Governor Holcomb’s request, Lt. Governor Suzanne Crouch, along with the Indiana Office of Community and Rural Affairs, administers and oversees the program.

“In a time where Hoosiers are having to adjust their lifestyles due to COVID-19, it’s imperative that we connect as many Hoosiers as possible,” said Lt. Governor Suzanne Crouch. “Governor Holcomb’s Next Level Connections initiative is a significant

step toward bridging the digital divide and bringing greater opportunities for all Hoosiers.”

The NineStar Connect and Henry County REMC project will serve 70 unserved households and 10 businesses. The requested grant amount is \$361,711, with a local match of more than \$194,767, for a total project cost of \$556,478.

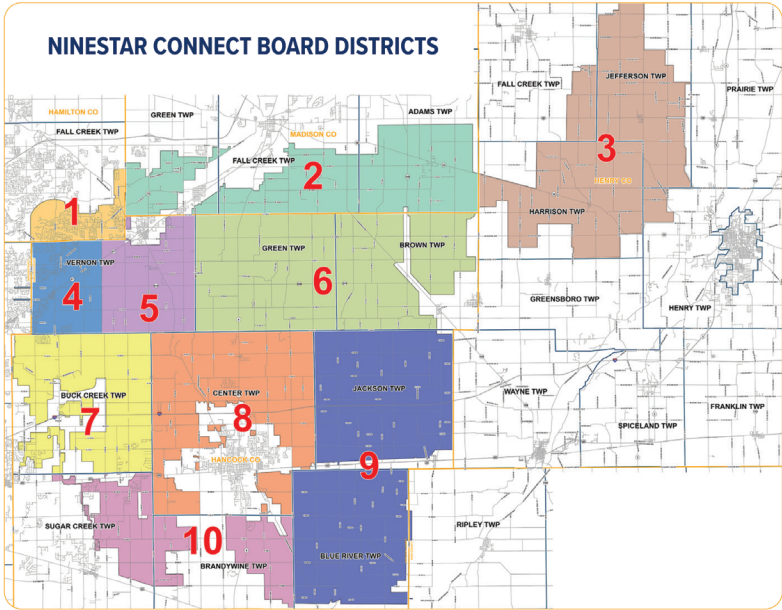
Next Level Connections Broadband Grant Program is part of Governor Holcomb’s \$1 billion Next Level Connections infrastructure program, which accelerates the completion of major highway projects, expands access to rural broadband services, creates more nonstop flights and pursues the expansion of rail projects in northwest Indiana.





NOTICE TO MEMBERSHIP OF UPCOMING ELECTION OF DIRECTORS

The 2021 NineStar Connect Annual Meeting will be held on March 26, 2021. The following director districts are up for election: 3, 4, 5, At-Large 2.



Any member in good standing residing in districts 3, 4, or 5 is eligible to run for a director position in these districts. Any member residing in districts 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 9, or 10 may run for the At-Large 2 director position. **The incumbent directors in districts 3 and 4 have announced their retirement and do not intend to run for re-election. At-Large 2 is an open seat with no incumbent running.**

Any member interested in running for director must attend one of the mandatory information meetings to be held on October 28th, November 4th or 9th at 6:00 pm and submit a completed nomination application. Meeting attendees will receive the nomination application form at the information meetings. To RSVP for one of the meetings and

to receive an information guide for potential directors, email Kim Gerard at administration@ninestarconnect.com or call (317) 326-3131. Nomination applications may be personally delivered to any NineStar Connect business office. **Deadline** for submission in order to be considered for nomination by the Nominating Committee is **Friday, November 13th at 12 o'clock noon.**

Members who have attended the mandatory information meeting and completed the nomination application by the deadline will be eligible to be interviewed by the Nominating Committee on November 16th or 17th. Please keep both dates open.



THE COOL WAY TO GET HOT WATER

SAVE BIG MONEY—AND ENERGY—WITH A HEAT PUMP WATER HEATER.

Water heaters are the second highest source of energy usage in most homes. But an ENERGY STAR certified heat pump water heater is an energy efficient alternative to typical electric or gas water heaters—and NineStar Connect is here to help you save big with rebates on installation costs. You can also save up to \$3,500 over the lifetime of the equipment—we think that's pretty cool.

Visit PowerMoves.com/water-heater to learn more.



CONGRESSMAN PENCE VISITS NINESTAR

Congressman Greg Pence recently visited NineStar's main campus in Greenfield and met with the company's leadership. The visit was made to learn more about the cooperative's efforts in electricity, fiber optics, water and sewer. NineStar President & CEO, Michael Burrow shared with the Congressman the vision to bring vital infrastructure to rural

areas to help these areas thrive. Pence indicated he would be in contact with NineStar as legislation came to the floor concerning infrastructure and vowed to assist the cooperative when possible.

Appearing with the congressman from left to right are Philip Hayes, David Spencer, Congressman Greg Pence, Michael Burrow, Ray Kerkhof and Steve Vail.



PAPERLESS BILLING



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 winner:

August David Snead, Pendleton \$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!

President's Message

The collective NineStar Labor Day weekend ended on a very sad note when we learned of the untimely passing of our long-time director Kim Cronk on September 7th. Kim had been on our board of directors since 1997 and had been re-elected by our members seven times, most recently this past spring. Kim was a fierce supporter and promoter of both his community and NineStar Connect and served our cooperative faithfully for 23 years. He will be missed.

Over the last 20+ years, NineStar and its predecessor cooperatives Central Indiana Power and NineStar Connect has been blessed to have members who have had a knack for electing particularly talented individuals to the board who have guided the cooperative to grow and prosper along with our local communities. These individuals are an extraordinarily talented and diverse group of directors who have shared a common passion for community and cooperative that has led to what we now know as NineStar Connect.

At its core, NineStar Connect is a community-based organization dedicated and focused on building and maintaining infrastructure that can deliver top quality utility services. We are mindful we have to be good stewards of our member customers money – that is, the rates they pay for those services. We know the rates for our services can sometimes be higher than much larger utility companies who have greater scale, but we hold ourselves to a higher standard of service and transparency which truly distinguishes NineStar from virtually any other utility in our area.

Our board of directors are very much focused on the long-term direction of our cooperative, recognizing that where NineStar chooses to invest monies in critical infrastructure can make the difference in the quality of place in a given

area of our larger community. Over the last decade, NineStar has invested over \$107 million in utility infrastructure while returning over \$5 million in cash to our member customers. While the cost of our services have increased somewhat over this same period, we are proud that those increases continue to be below the rate of inflation which demonstrates how we are gaining efficiencies through offering multiple services under a single cooperative company.

Growth in our serving area is inevitable so NineStar remains focused on making investments in utility infrastructure that attracts quality growth. We recognize that quality many times is in the eye of the beholder but nonetheless, growth that creates additional assessed value for local governments and attracts people with higher incomes benefits our current members who are also local taxpayers as well as all of our local governments. And that is a good thing.

We are also mindful of our quality of place. Again, that is a term that many folks can view differently. All of us are beginning to recognize that as growth in our communities occurs, we are putting stress on our water tables and causing many of our residential wells to be contaminated with e-coli and other pollutants. Our investments in water and wastewater infrastructure will hopefully alleviate some of this stress on our water resources and over time, ensure better health and quality of place for our children and grandchildren who choose to live and work in the community in which they were raised.

Increasingly, all of us are becoming terribly focused on the short-term aspects of our daily lives and our emotions are being



MICHAEL R. BURROW

driven by both media and other companies to seek satisfaction for short-term goals, often at the expense of longer-term goals and prosperity. How many of us are guilty of watching what the stock market or commodities markets are doing on a daily basis? Yet, to be a successful utility, you have to be focused on the long term. The infrastructure that provides the critical services we need in our daily lives is inherently expensive and long lasting.

Keeping focused on that long view is ingrained in everything we do here at NineStar. That's a key reason why we have been around for 125 years, continuing as the locally owned and controlled utility as we evolve to serve the needs of our members and customers today and in the future.

As always, we very much appreciate the support and patronage of each and every one of you. We welcome your feedback as we continue to serve you and future generations.



EMPLOYEE PROFILE

BY DOMINIQUE EGBERT

HIGHLIGHTING KIMBERLY GERARD

KIMBERLY GERARD started at NineStar (then Hancock Telecom) in April of 1999. She began as a Legal Assistant and slowly took on the responsibility of company benefits and insurance, which led to her taking on Human Resources responsibilities. She did both legal and HR for over 20 years. One of her greatest accomplishments in her role when doing benefits was taking NineStar Connect from having one medical plan for its employees to multiple plan options, which saved the employees and company money, and gave employees multiple options to pick what best worked for them and their families.

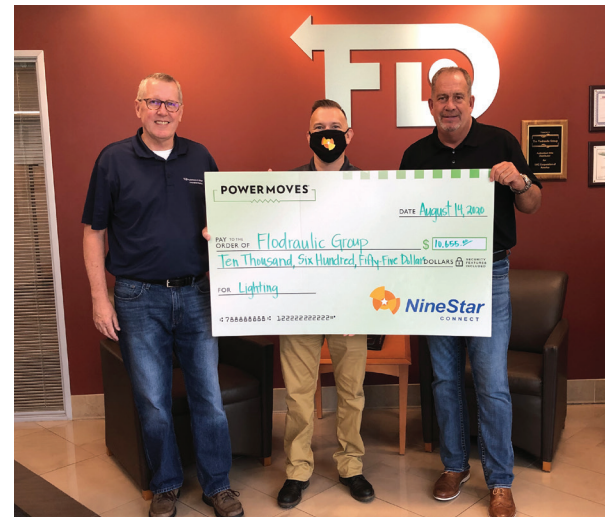
As the demand grew in Human Resources, the company decided that a full-time person was needed. This allowed Kimberly to shift her focus on the legal and compliance side of the company and she transitioned into the role she holds today of Legal and Compliance Manager. A major accomplishment of Kimberly's was taking over the legal and regulatory work for the company in-house, which meant the company would not have to use outside consultants or attorneys as often as it had in the past. I asked Kimberly how she strived to do quality work? Her response, "It's

an old silly model, but I measure twice and cut once, I always double check my work". One of the challenges of the job Kimberly shared with me was staying up to date with laws and regulations posed on the different lines of business NineStar has, which includes: Electric; Telecom; Water and Sewer. Kimberly said that this is also her favorite thing about her job - doing the legal and regulatory research. Kimberly said, "Nobody likes to do that part, that's why I have a job!" We both chuckled, but I know Kimberly has a job because she is a wealth of knowledge for all employees here at NineStar Connect.

One of the things Kimberly wanted to add was describing her relationship with our President & CEO, Michael Burrow. "I've worked with Mike for 25.5 years and he has always told me to make yourself invaluable, he has been a constant support throughout my career."

In her personal time, Kimberly is an avid reader. She is a member of the Daughters of the American Revolution Major Hugh Dinwiddie Chapter. She is married to Neville Gerard and they have one daughter.

POWER MOVES REBATE



The Flodraulic Group received a rebate check for \$10,655 by upgrading their lighting system. Barry Stacy (Chief Operations Officer), and Todd Bowles (Distribution Manager) stated the lighting upgrades have reduced their electric bills by about 30%. Upgrades include: Ceiling Mounted Lighting Occupancy Sensors, Arm-Mounted LED lights, Wall-Mounted LED Area Luminaries, interior downlight retrofit LED lights, High Bay, and Troffer LED Light Fixtures. The money was made possible through Wabash Valley Power Alliance's energy efficiency program, Power Moves.

COMMITTMENT TO RENEWABLES

NineStar Connect's power supplier, Wabash Valley Power Alliance, made a commitment over the past decade to dramatically change the way electricity is generated for their 23 member electric cooperatives and the more than 17,000 member-owners of our co-op. Advances in technology have made sustainable energy sources like wind and solar power not just good for the environment—but more and more affordable.

"Renewables like wind and solar were not the most economical choice for the first part of the last ten years," said Lee Wilmes, vice president of risk and resource portfolio at the Wabash Valley Power Alliance. "But with more efficient, taller wind turbines and less expensive solar panel production, we expect that cost trend to continue."

That's why Wabash Valley Power has taken a different approach to energy generation: a more balanced approach that incorporates a variety of fuel sources. "We've always said it's not a smart

idea to put all your eggs in one basket," stated Wilmes. "We believe an approach that includes a variety of fuels and multiple sources of supply helps to cut down on electric market volatility and overall supply risk." And that approach now includes less reliance on coal, the incorporation of more renewables and energy efficiency programs that help ensure affordable, reliable electricity not just now, but for decades to come.

To support this diversification strategy, Wabash Valley Power Alliance purchases electricity from several wind farms and utility-scale solar arrays throughout Indiana and Illinois and has developed smaller, community solar arrays in all 3 states that it serves: Indiana, Illinois and Missouri. Just last month the newly constructed Harvest Ridge Wind Farm in Douglas County Illinois began production and Wabash Valley Power and its member electric cooperatives will take 100 megawatts of the project.

As early as 2006, Wabash Valley has been

capturing the methane gas from regional landfills and using that gas to power small turbines to make electricity. In fact, with 15 different sites throughout the Midwest, Wabash Valley Power Alliance's landfill gas-to-electricity program is one of the largest in the region.

"Alternative energy is no longer an alternative," Wilmes said. "It's a big part of keeping energy costs lower, now and in the future."



RATE INCREASE FAQ'S

Q. *How much will my bill increase?*
A. The increase is approximately 3%. An average Residential member uses 1308 kWh / month which is equal to an increase of \$5.83* per month. However, the increase you will see will be based on your individual household consumption. (*Taxes and Operation RoundUp are not included in this figure.)

Q. *What is the change to the Distribution Facilities Charge?*
A. The change in the Distribution Facilities Charge differs per rate classification. For most members, the Distribution Facilities Charge has increased/decreased as follows:

RESIDENTIAL		
	OLD RATE	NEW RATE
Single Phase (14,479*)	\$38.89	\$39.64
Multi-Phase (23*)	\$120.45	\$111.96
NON-RESIDENTIAL		
	OLD RATE	NEW RATE
Small General Service (1,084*)	\$38.89	\$39.64
Multi-Phase (14*)	\$120.45	\$111.96

*Number of households

Q. *What does the Distribution Facilities Charge represent?*
A. The Distribution Facilities Charge covers the non-energy costs of operating the Cooperative. It ensures that expectations for continuous power and outstanding member service are met. It provides funds that must be invested now to maintain the quality, reliability, and integrity of service that our members count on and come to expect. The items covered by the Distribution Facilities Charge include:

- Trucks, wire, transformers, power poles and labor needed to build and maintain the electric distribution system.
- Keeping pace with increased system investments to improve both capacity and reliability.
- Implementing new technologies to provide increased reliability and operational efficiencies, such as our outage management system and advanced metering infrastructure; and
- Liability insurance, interest, taxes, and emergency storm restoration.

Since 2010, NineStar has rebuilt or added over 192 miles of overhead and buried electric distribution lines, installed, and replaced over 2,100 transformers, upgraded, and replaced over 27,000 meters and brought a new McCordsville substation online. Because all cooperative members benefit from having reliable electric service available when they want it, the Distribution Facilities Charge ensures that everyone pays a fair share of basic costs—costs that exist whether a single kilowatt-hour is used.

Q. *Why is NineStar's Distribution Facilities Charge higher than neighboring electric utilities?*
A. Due to our low consumer density and because we have relatively few large industrial members to help carry the financial load, NineStar's Distribution Facilities Charge is

slightly higher than other neighboring utilities. NineStar serves an average of 17 members per mile of electric line. Compare that to a neighboring electric utility, where average density runs from 30 to more than 40 customers per mile of electric line. Regardless of consumer density, NineStar has an obligation to meet our members' needs and expectations for reliable electric service, and we are committed to doing so.

Q. *When was the last rate increase?*
A. The last cost-of-service rate study was performed in 2016, which resulted in an overall 1 to 2 percent increase. NineStar works diligently to control costs, and we have kept our rates stable for the last four years. However, the 2020 cost-of-service rate study resulted in the need to update our rate structures to ensure that each member pays his or her fair share. NineStar has been able to control the size of electric rate increases over the last decade below the rate of inflation and has avoided large, double digit rate increases.

Q. *Who determines when a rate increase is necessary and by how much?*
A. NineStar's Board of Directors and executive staff continuously monitor the financial stability of the organization to determine if or when a rate increase is necessary. To establish the new rate structure, an independent, experienced firm was hired to review and recommend changes to our rates.

Q. *What is the effective date of the new rates and when will I see this reflected on my bill?*
A. The new rates will be effective on bills created after November 1, 2020.

Q. *How do NineStar Connects' rates compare with those of neighboring electric utilities?*
A. Based on the number of members NineStar has compared to our neighboring electric utilities, we are very competitive. NineStar Connect only has 16,500 meters to spread the fixed cost to, where a high-density electric utility has hundreds of thousands. Since the merger between Central Indiana Power and Hancock Telecom on January 1, 2011, we have been able to reduce many general overhead expenses by spreading those fixed costs over a greater number of customers. We have seen our electric fixed overheads go from above average for state and national rural electric cooperatives to below average over the course of the last 10 years as we have been able to maximize on these efficiencies.

Q. *Did rates increase because of the deployment of advanced metering infrastructure (AMI) smart meters?*
A. No, NineStar Connect is always looking for ways to better serve you—our members. The advanced metering system being utilized will provide operational efficiencies, reduce costs, as well as increase the reliability of your electric service.

Q. *Will commercial/industrial rates increase or is this applicable only to residential rates?*

A. The cost-of-service rate study offers a comprehensive review of all rates to ensure that each member regardless of rate classification pays his or her fair share. This was one of the most comprehensive rate studies that has been conducted in many years. Consequently, all rate classes were reviewed and updated.

Q. *Are copies of the rate schedule available?*
A. Yes. Members may obtain a copy of the new rate schedule from our website, ninestarconnect.com.
Q. *I understand that rates have not increased since 2016. Can we expect the same time frame with the new rates? Or is another rate increase anticipated and when?*
A. While NineStar Connect has not had a rate increase in four years, there are several factors that can come into play and will affect rates. Many of these are unplanned and are tied to rising costs for coal, natural gas, storm restoration efforts, legislation requirements, etc. We are committed to doing our best to minimize the impacts to our members by being proactive in our power supply and operational planning and offering energy-saving tips and rebate programs. We are committed to maintaining the reliability, quality, and integrity of our electric system. As such, NineStar will be implementing a phased increase over the next three years with the first small rate increase starting in November 2020.

Q. *What is NineStar doing to keep costs down?*
A. NineStar Connect has not increased rates since 2016. As your cooperative we strive to operate efficiently while adhering to our commitment of providing affordable, high-quality, and reliable electric service. We continuously evaluate our operations to keep your rates as low as possible by:

- **Managing our power supply contracts. For each dollar collected, 70 percent goes to the cost of purchasing electricity to meet the needs of our members.**
- **Implementing beneficial technology, such as our outage management system or advanced metering infrastructure, to help control costs, provide operational efficiencies and increase reliability.**
- **Competitively bidding all contracts to ensure quality service at the best possible price; and**
- **Ongoing evaluation of our day-to-day operations for opportunities to improve and gain efficiencies.**

Q. *What can I do to reduce my electric costs and can NineStar provide any assistance in this area?*
A. NineStar Connect offers several ways to help members manage their electric bills. These services include using power more efficiently with our residential time of use program. Flexible payment options, such as budget billing and auto-bank draft may also be available. To learn more visit ninestarconnect.com or call 317.326.3131. Members may find helpful information about conserving energy on our Power Moves website, which includes Energy efficiency tips, rebate incentives and information about home energy audits. To learn more visit powermoves.com.

IN MEMORY OF KIM L. CRONK

Longtime NineStar Connect Board Member Kim L. Cronk, passed away unexpectedly on the evening of Monday, September 7, 2020.

Kim was born on September 1, 1955 in New Castle, Indiana, the son of Jack and Barbara (Taylor) Cronk. He represented NineStar Connect member's for twenty three years. He came to the board when he was appointed to fill the vacancy created by the death of Charles Crowe in 1997. He most recently won re-election at the 2020 NineStar Connect Annual Meeting.

Kim was a proud 1974 graduate of Shenandoah High School and earned a Bachelor's Degree in Education from Ball State University in 1977. He began his law enforcement career as a Henry County Reserve Deputy in 1976 and graduated from the Indiana Law Enforcement Academy in 1978. He served the citizens of Henry County as an employee of the Henry County Sheriff's Department for 38 years holding various ranks including two terms as Sheriff. He was currently serving his third term as a Commissioner and had served six years as a County Councilman. He was a founder of Henry County's 911 Emergency Response

System and the Henry County EMS. Kim was the creator of the Henry County Drug Task Force. He served as the Shenandoah School Board President for 8 years and for over 20 years served on the board of NineStar Connect.

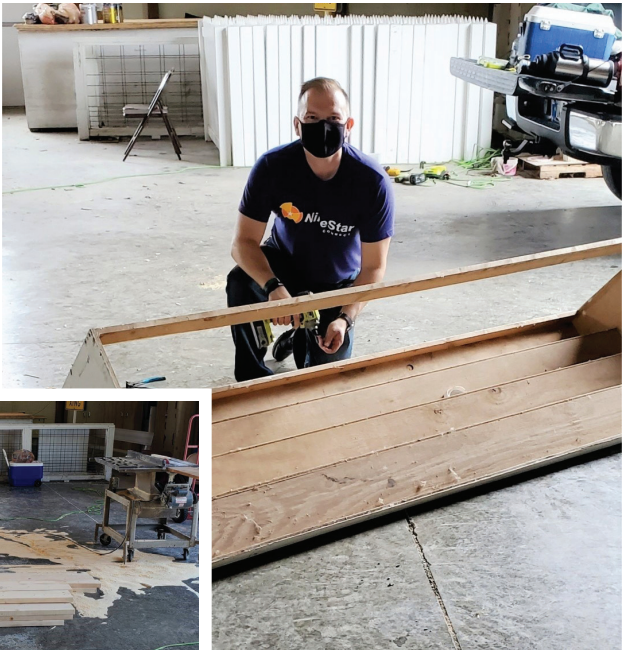
Kim was passionate about Henry County's economic development and was proud of working with other leaders in bringing new jobs to the community. He was instrumental in bringing Ivy Tech College, Gillman's Home Center, Boar's Head, Mr. Fuel Truck Stop, Love's Truck Stop & McDonald's, Crown Corporation, Renovation of the W.G. Smith Building, Henry County Expo, and the new correctional/rehabilitation center to replace the current Henry County Jail.

Kim is survived by his parents, Jack and Barbara Cronk of New Castle, two daughters, Lauren Cronk of Los Angeles, CA, and Leanna Cronk (fiance': Josh Lome) of Indianapolis; former wife, mom of his daughters, and life-time friend Nila Miller-Cronk of Lebanon, a brother Jay (wife: Kim Cronk) of New Castle, several nieces, nephews, and cousins.



MATT STRAHL VOLUNTEERING FOR 4-H

NineStar Energy Advisor Matt Strahl spent several hours volunteering for Hancock County 4-H and it's fairgrounds this summer. He spent a great deal of time working on repairs and improvements to three mini project display risers and 60 bleacher filler boards. Over 100 total volunteer hours went into completing these projects. The repairs and improvements were made possible with the help of Matt's family along with a total of \$1,000 donated by NineStar and 4-H to fund the purchase of materials needed to complete these projects. In addition to all the repairs made, Matt spent an additional six hours volunteering with helping of the teardown and cleanup of the Hancock County 4-H Exhibition Hall after the fair was over. Way to go, Matt!!



NINESTAR EMPLOYEES ASSIST LOCAL NON PROFIT

Originally scheduled for Cooperative Service Day 2019, but delayed due to weather, several NineStar employees spent the day recently at Agape Therapeutic Riding Resource Center. The project they worked on for the day involved installing two sensory stations. The same team from 2019 was assembled again this September to finish the project. Employees worked on installing a "Cowboy Curtain" which horses and riders will walk through during their lessons. They also installed a small wooden bridge that the horses and riders will walk over. The equine therapeutic riding center plans to add a couple more sensory stations to the arena each year. While NineStar was onsite, they also worked on securing many old wooden barn panels that had come detached from the barn. Employees who participated were: Shane Osborne, Walter Hestand, Justin Armstrong, Brett Fyfe, Ryan Bewley, Deena Marsh and Jill Snyder.



CO-OP LIVING WITH MARY JANE

5 REASONS HOMESCHOOLING AND E-LEARNING AREN'T THE SAME

BY MARY JANE BOGLE

When schools switched to e-learning last spring, social media was flooded with humorous memes. “And just like that, everyone was homeschooled.” In reality, however, nothing could be further from the truth. As parents navigate the many choices for their children’s education this year, it’s important to understand just what those choices entail. Here are five ways homeschooling and e-learning through the public school aren’t the same.

1. **SCHOOL CALENDAR.** According to the Indiana Department of Education (IDOE), homeschool students are required to attend school for the same number of days as the local school district. For most of us, that magic number is 180 days of school. What the IDOE doesn’t stipulate, however, is when those days occur. And with 365 days to choose from, homeschoolers have a lot of flexibility in planning their school year, while e-learning or virtual public schools stick with the school district’s calendar.
2. **SCHOOL-DAY SCHEDULE.** As long as homeschoolers provide an education equivalent to what is being offered at the local public school, they are free to build their school days around their lives, not the other way around. Virtual schooling, on the other hand, while offering some degree of flexibility, may still require mandatory webinars or classroom chats at specific times during the day.

3. **CURRICULUM.** Let’s face it. Not every educational approach works for every child. Homeschoolers have a lot of flexibility and can choose a curriculum that suits their children’s unique needs and learning styles. Just remember that this curriculum comes at a cost, which can vary widely, depending on the curriculum. Most e-learning through the local public schools, however, sticks with the approved curriculum for that district at no additional cost beyond the school’s regular fees.

4. **ASSESSMENTS.** Online learning through the local public high school, or even through k12.com, offers assessments as part of the school experience, whereas homeschoolers must purchase assessments and standardized tests, and sometimes hire a test administrator, if they want to discover how well their students have achieved state or national standards. [Note: In Indiana, homeschoolers are not required to administer such tests but can if they wish.]

5. **THE ANSWER KEY!** If trying to figure out a new system for math or science was too frustrating for you or your student last spring, homeschooling might be a good option for you. Most homeschool curriculums come with teaching resources, including step-by-step solutions to math and science problems. No more guessing!

Of course, homeschooling isn’t the best solution—or even a feasible option—for every family. And remember this: no choice you make today is irreversible. You can always change direction later if the current plan doesn’t work. Trust me. You will not ruin your children this next semester, no matter which option you choose.

