JUNE - JULY 2023

NineStarconnection

PROJECT INDIANA PENA ROJA, GUATEMALA

NineStar's own Jamie Bell and Austin Gearlds visited Pena Roja, Guatemala as part of Project Indiana.

Read more on page 9.

A LASTING CONNECTION Longtime employee, Julie Mitchell, looks back

fondly upon retirement.

Read more on page 11.

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QUEEN AND COURT PAGE 10

N I N E S T A R N E W S Thomas McCordsville Switch Presentation





OUR EMPLOYEES MAKE THE DIFFERENCE. HERE'S A CUSTOMER REVIEW FOR BRETT FYFE.

"BRETT SET UP OUR INTERNET SERVICE. HE WAS REALLY GREAT AND EVEN MADE SURE TO TAKE HIS TIME TO GO OVER EVERYTHING WITH US."

THE ORTWEIN FAMILY



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STORY IDEA?

Contact David Spencer at dspencer@ninestarconnect.com

The 'Main' Event: NineStar's latest utility projects are all wet! OPERATION ROUND-UP PAGE 7 Can rounding up a few pennies a month on

COVER STORY

Can rounding up a few pennies a month on your bill help others really make an impact? Read the article to find out!

OUT & ABOUT! PAGE 8

A showcase of places we've been in the community.

A LASTING CONNECTION

Longtime employee, Julie Mitchell, looks back fondly upon retirement.

The NineStar Connection

is a publication of NineStar

Connect servicing retail and

residential customers. Nearly 16,000 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.

NineStar Connection, USPS

Volume 12 No. 2



PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



The Davey Resource Group is starting an inventory project for NineStar Connect.

They will be inventorying/applying pole tags to every pole on our system. They will begin in the Southeast part of Hancock County working out of our Westland Substation.





Published Bi-monthly. Postage Paid at Greenfield, IN.

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POSTMASTER: Send address changes to: 2243 E. Main St. Greenfield, IN 46140

Annual subscription price is \$3; available to members of NineStar Connect co-operative. ADDRESS: NineStar North Campus 2331 E. CR 600N Greenfield, IN 46140

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COVER STORY



BY JULIE YOUNG

n anticipation of a flood of new development taking shape throughout Hancock County, NineStar Connect is going with the flow to ensure that water infrastructure is in place to meet the demand. With the planned \$40 million Education and Innovation Center expected to open at CR 300N and 200W in fall of 2025 as well as a possible I-70 interchange in the area, the time is right to expand utility services and prepare for what's in store.

"It's quite a menu of projects," said Alan Martin, NineStar's manager for water and wastewater utilities. "We have several things going on all at once that will benefit the county and help us bring a better quality of life to those who work here, live here and spend money here."

One of those projects, which wrapped up at the end of June is the extension of the water main from the Mount Comfort area to Riley Village and the Heartland Resort area where NineStar has a small water treatment facility that could not support more growth.

"I think it is going to turn into a really up and coming area, and our getting the utilities out there and ready to go will be a driving force in the growth that is anticipated." Martin also said that the Riley Village main extension is going to be good for Western Hancock County as well.

The second project, which is expected to begin in early 2024, is a sanitary sewer main along CR 200W between The Boulders subdivision near US 40 up to CR 300N. This project has been made possible from a partnership with Hancock County and awarding NineStar an ARPA grant to build this sewer main.

In accordance with the Indiana Department of Environmental Management's (IDEM) regionalization goals, the co-op will decommission an older wastewater plant on Sugar Creek north of I-70 and pump flows to NineStar's new state-of-the-art regional wastewater

treatment facility just north of US 40 near Philadelphia. "IDEM is all about regionalization," Martin said. "They want the systems that do not have the budget or capacity for growth to merge with the ones that do."

> Another project that is planned is a water main extension that will connect water systems between Gem and Philadelphia where NineStar's existing water system serves the two areas. Several years ago, customers in the western Hancock County area. NineStar acquired the Philadelphia Waterworks Within four years, the co-op has more than site when the original development fell through during the 2008 recession. The co-op was able to install the water and wastewater infrastructure that allowed Joyner Homes to develop the parcel into a residential neighborhood now known as the Boulders.

"It's kind of a chicken and egg type of thing," Martin said. "You need access to utilities before you can build anything on the site and that's a fine line to walk for our utility cooperative. You have to plan ahead and anticipate the needs so that you can get the proper infrastructure in place, while also being budget conscious."

That means knowing exactly what kind of development is planned, how feasible the project is and how long the infrastructure will work before major upgrades are required. Having access to water and wastewater infrastructure means significantly mitigating the risk of contamination that can cause health issues. Martin said that most of the unincorporated area of the county is on private residential wells and septic tanks which is a public health concern as the county grows in population.

According to a 2019 (ULI) Panel Report, Hancock County has been underserved in terms of water and sewer infrastructure, which has had a negative impact on quality development, land value and growth opportunities. When NineStar purchased Gem Utilities that same year, the company served approximately 460 water



doubled that number and has been quick to expand its water infrastructure if it meant quality development for the county.

"We never would have seen this kind of growth back when we purchased Gem Utilities," Martin said. "We quickly realized that they were at capacity and would not be able to sustain any growth, which was a detriment for the western part of the county."

NineStar is currently working on plans for another water treatment plant to support additional growth. "It's going to be a good-sized plant that will treat 1 million gallons per day to begin with, but can be expanded to 7 million," he said. "We are always looking for more water and test wells because we don't want IDEM to come in and tell us that we are over capacity."

Considering Hancock County is the last donut county in central Indiana to experience a boom from those looking to move out of Indianapolis. Martin said NineStar is excited to embrace the opportunity that is heading east from the Circle City.

"We want to help the county grow smarter," he said. "Obviously there are those with generational ties to the community who are naturally resistant to change, but this growth is going to be a big benefit for us all."

CUSTOMER APPRECIATION

000	IHANKS
	 THANKS for choosing us THANKS for trusting us.
	 THANKS for letting us get to know you.

IN APPRECIATION OF OUR LOYAL CUSTOMERS, NINESTAR WILL HOLD A RANDOM DRAWING OF 25 CUSTOMERS EACH MONTH TO WIN A \$150 BILL CREDIT!* CONGRATULATIONS TO ALL \$150 WINNERS!

*Offer valid for internet customers only. Must be current on your bill. One winner per household per year. Credit will be applied to your communications bill. Winners will be notified via email.

JUNE WINNERS

- Anthony P Schreiber Anita S Jones Susan Crowe Jeffrey T Smith Henry Lucas Angela Davis John Masters Leo Savoie Daniel W Walker
- Lindsey Bidwell Russell Hallberg Donnie Bolton John R Cole Loran Herrberg Dennis Neuenschwander Joseph J Hillier Steve R Reiser Robert Bragdon

Andrew Maroska Doris Turner James Stanley Gary L Holt Roderick Jones Robert E Sanders James Childress

Nicholas R Chappell Dale Sever Scott Dudley Stephanie Seifferlein James E Proper Robert Laratta Kyle Theobald Oma Johnson Kurt Wilson

JULY WINNERS

Kirby Purciful Jessica Overman Danielle Thomas Todd Hamman Gregory A Webb Joseph Kern William J Thrall Peggy Dudley Mario Perdue

Jonathan M Wearly Stephanie M Cannady Brian Gritter Brittany L Mckinney David R Larson Steve Province Rick R Replogle

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President's Message

By Michael R. Burrow, President & CEO

few days ago, my water heater went out. That in itself probably isn't worthy writing about except it got me to thinking a lot about items we take for granted today that just a generation or two ago, were considered luxuries. How did it come about that I simply take something like ubiquitously available hot water as a necessity in my day-to-day life? And how many things do we utilize today without thinking what life would be like without them?

There are only a handful of folks still around that recall what it was like to live on a farm without electricity. Farm homes were lit with kerosene lamps and heated with wood or coal stoves, as was the water that was heated on those same stoves. Water was pumped from the ground by hand or perhaps utilizing the power from a windmill. Using the restroom meant going outside, literally, to the outhouse – regardless the weather conditions. Not every home had a phone and when it did, it was a line shared with several other homes – something called a "party line." Most recently, broadband internet was seen as a bit of luxury until it suddenly became a necessity and now both state and federal governments are pushing grant opportunities for companies to invest in bringing the internet to even the most rural portions of Indiana and the United States.

A couple of years ago, I had a conversation with a co-op member who generously could be described as "cranky." He just couldn't understand why NineStar was spending so much money on fiber optics, upgrading electrical lines or investing in water and sewer facilities. The just of his comments was that the co-op services he was receiving were meeting his needs just fine and that he didn't want to pay for any of the extra infrastructure NineStar was building that he didn't feel like he needed. To him, they were luxuries neither he nor his neighbors needed.

He seemed shocked when I replied that we weren't making these investments for him. Indeed, I explained, if all NineStar had to worry about was meeting the demands of our current generation of members, we would be done. I went on to explain that the services he was receiving from the co-op today with which he is happy were actually brought about by investments that his father and grandfather made many years ago and if they had not made those investments, he would be very unsatisfied with the services he was receiving today from NineStar. "If you are happy with your services today," I said, "then thank your parents and grandparents for the investments they made years ago to meet your needs today."

As you build and sustain a public utility, you are inherently investing in infrastructure that is designed to last for many years and serve many generations. Thus, that new substation, water treatment plant or fiber optic line we are building today is as much being built to meet the needs of our children and grandchildren as for our current generation of members.

Today, electric vehicles are a bit of a novelty but when in the future will they be dominant and will the electric distribution system that charges them be as reliable as it is today? Maybe one



or five meg internet service meets your needs today but as more smart appliances are placed in homes that allow you to monitor power usage and as opportunities to expand learning and working at home, will that broadband internet network be capable of expanding to one gig or more capacity? Septic systems work well – just like the outhouses of past years – until they don't. Private water wells are great, until they are contaminated and impact the health of the occupants of your home.

The arc of history teaches us that things that are luxuries today quickly become necessities tomorrow. The quality of place and the value we put on that place is often measured by the availability of these necessities. This concept of "paying it forward" is what sustains successful utility cooperatives like NineStar Connect as we continue to meet the ever-evolving needs of our members, both current and future.

NINESTAR NEWS



NineStar Connect



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MARKLEVILLE PARK - \$5,000.00 Funding for a digital sign in front of Markleville Park to advertise events.

MEALS ON WHEELS OF HANCOCK COUNTY - \$5,000.00 Funding to help purchase a cargo trailer to transport supplies for their fundraising events.

MORRISTOWN COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT PARTNERSHIP - \$5,000.00 Funds for an all-inclusive playground for children with/without disabilities

HOPE CENTER INDY - \$5,000.00

NineStar

Funds for a 2-year subscription of PantrySOFT and welded stock picker carts

IWIN, INDIANA WOMEN IN NEED - \$5,000.00 Funding to help breast cancer patients with everyday expenses, assistance (childcare, meals, etc.).

The purpose of the Operation Round Up program 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 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.

For ones that want to send in an application for Operation Round-up dollars, the next application deadline is October 6th, 2023. Applications can be downloaded from our website at www.ninestarconnect.com under "About" and then "In the Community".

If you have any questions about the ORU program, please email OperationRoundUp@NineStarConnect.com or call 317-323-3087.

ATIONS TO ALL OF THE SECOND QUARTER ORU RECIPIENTS!





NINESTAR CONNECTION

NINESTAR NEED TO KNOW



• NineStar was once again happy to sponsor the Hancock County 4-H Fair Queen Contest.



• NineStar employees walking in this year's Hancock County 4-F Fair.





• Electric Operations Intern, Brayden Tincher graduated from Eastern Hancock and was offered a full-time position at NineStar by Director of Electric Operations, Tommy Nance.



• A beautiful Friday evening at Daniel's Vineyard at their summer concert series presented by NineStar Connect!



• NineStar's own, Darrin Couch and Matt Strahl volunteered to help get the 4-H Exhibit Hall ready for this year's fair.



• NineStar employees volunteered to help with the 4-H Electric Workshop.

NINESTAR CONNECTION

8 JUNE - JULY 2023

WASHINGTON D.C. YOUTH TOUR

NineStar Connect sent two high school seniors to this summer's Washington D.C. Youth Tour, June Hill with Indiana congressional 11th – 18th. Mt. Vernon High School Senior Lily Sexton and Greenfield-Central High School Senior Josie Joyner represented NineStar on the trip.

The Indiana Youth Tour to Washington D.C. provides young adults with the opportunity to travel to our nation's capital to learn more about how government functions and the complexities of today's electric utility industry, and to meet peers from around the country.

The trip is all-inclusive including travel, meals, lodging and activities. Students enjoyed a visit to Gettysburg, Washington monument, various museum tours, and meetings on Capital delegation; all the while making lifelong friends. This really is a trip of a lifetime!

If you have a current high school junior and are interested in attending next year's Youth Tour, watch for information this fall/winter from your school's guidance counselors, NineStar's website and social media platforms. Application deadline is in March, 2024.









PROJECT INDIANA PENA ROJA, GUATEMALA



NineStar's own Jamie Bell and Austin Gearlds visited Pena Roja, Guatemala for two weeks in May on a Project Indiana mission trip. Through Project Indiana, electric cooperatives are electrifying villages in Guatemala that did not have electricity. As this is Austin's first adventure, Jamie Bell is on his 3rd Project

Indiana journey.

Beginning in 2012, two teams of Indiana linemen spent a month electrifying three villages in Guatemala. Lives were changed, both here and there. Moving beyond electrifying villages, Project Indiana is creating a better place to live and enhancing the community. It brings hope, progress, opportunities, one electric pole at a time, to make a better life.

Jamie mentioned "I always want to do all I can to make a better life for the community in Guatemala. The best is seeing the locals' reaction when we arrive and especially when we energize the power to their homes. They are always so thankful."

After the two weeks, Austin and Jamie and the rest of the Project Indiana crew were happy to be home but gained many memories along the way. "This is something I have always wanted to do since I learned about this project. I knew if I ever got the opportunity to go, I would do it. This was a once and a lifetime experience for me." commented Austin.

We are so very proud of Jamie and Austin for their hard work and efforts in helping others. Thank you, Jamie and Austin, for impacting other lives while enhancing your own!



CONGRATS QUEEN AND COURT

CONGRATULATIONS TO THIS YEAR'S 4-H FAIR QUEEN PARTICIPANTS. AS ALWAYS, NINESTAR IS PROUD TO SPONSOR THIS WONDERFUL EVENT.

QUEEN - Miss Emily Grant PRINCESS - Miss Bella Turner COURT - Miss Hailey Condry COURT - Miss Amelia Stone COURT and CONGENIALITY - Miss Addison Buckley



BURROW NAMED BUSINESSMAN OF THE YEAR



NineStar President and CEO, Mike Burrow was named Businessman of the Year at this year's Walk of Fame Annual Awards Celebration put on by the Greenfield Chamber of Commerce.

AVOID HEADACHES THIS SUMMER! PREPARE YOUR A/C AND PLAY IT COOL

June is National Migraine and Headache Awareness Month. It's also the time of year when many people endure the headache of a broken air conditioner - and having to go to extreme measures to keep their cool!

Fortunately, it's not too late to prepare. There are steps you can take to ensure your cooling system can handle the sweltering summer days.

<u>Regularly replace your air filter</u>. The seasonal changes can be a good reminder to change your air filter. This is a fairly easy step, and a dirty furnace filter can plug up the airflow of your system, making your home uncomfortable and shortening the furnace's lifespan at the same time.

Get a system inspection. This could include a tune-up to ensure that your system is optimized to perform as best as it can when called on during those long, hot days. Regular preventative maintenance can be more affordable than having to pay for an emergency house call when your system goes out! During an excellent "clean and tune," a technician will pull the blower from your system and use water or a cleaner to remove the dirt that made it past the furnace filter.

<u>Consider a replacement if one is needed.</u> If you have an older or underperforming system, you may want to think about a replacement. While not cheap, it may ultimately be a better option than having to keep making repairs on an inefficient system. Your local electric cooperative offers Power Moves[®] rebates for qualifying efficiency upgrades that will help you save more on energy costs. Contact NineStar for details.

Preparing in advance can help your HVAC system run more efficiently and last longer ... and avoid unnecessary headaches. You can also contact NineStar to inquire about a home energy assessment, which would provide details on your whole home's energy use and give suggestions on steps you can take to improve your home's energy use and efficiency. You also can visit PowerMoves.com for details and other energy-saving tips and advice.



A LASTING CONNECTION LONGTIME EMPLOYEE LOOKS BACK FONDLY UPON RETIREMENT

Reflecting on her nearly 30-year career with NineStar Connect and one of its predecessors, Julie Mitchell said there wasn't ever a day that she

was hored

"This is fast paced, and ever since the merge in 2011, just crazy busy," she said. "And I'm really high energy, so I like that."

Things have slowed down for Mitchell, who retired in late May. She filled a variety of roles at the utility, the latest being Manager of Customer Service and Billing. Mitchell also saw plenty of changes both in the business as well as the services and technologies it offers. She forged strong bonds with her colleagues over the decades, and said goodbye to an employer she was proud to work for.

Mitchell started at Hancock Rural Telephone Corp. in 1995, before its merger with Central Indiana Power in 2011 to form NineStar Connect. Before that, she worked for General Telephone, which later became Verizon, and also worked for a state nonprofit organization. She was brought on at Hancock Rural Telephone for marketing and operations for the corporation's DirecTV product.

While DirecTV sold its product itself in metropolises, the company offered the right to do so in rural areas to other companies.

"And small rural telephone cooperatives across the nation said, 'Absolutely," Mitchell said. "We were wildly successful with our penetration rates."

She did that for a couple years until the product was sold. At the time, Hancock Rural Telephone's phone service was only local, and the president of the company tasked Mitchell with ramping up longdistance service.

"His goal was to be profitable within two to three years, and we were profitable in the first year," Mitchell said.

Mitchell worked as long-distance coordinator for two to three years, then the company created a branch off of Customer Service and a Billing Manager position.

"I always worked at kind of the right hand of customer service throughout my jobs," she said.

Many Windows-based systems were coming out at the time. Hancock Rural Telephone chose one for billing services, but ended up having to pivot to another within six months.

"If you migrate a billing system, operating system once every 10 to 15 years – that's a monumental task," Mitchell said. "So



two billing conversions within a six-month period, and at the heels of that second one was when I was brought on as billing manager."

She worked as billing manager for 15 years, during which the merger to form NineStar Connect occurred. In 2017, she became Customer Service Manager.



Mitchell watched her industry change much over the decades.

"From the communications side, it was all about telephone," she said. "Now, it's all about that broadband customer. Everything's internet-driven. That old copper world that ran this industry forever – that completely changed when fiber came on board."

Her longevity at Hancock Rural Telephone and then NineStar can be attributed in part to what she called unmatched benefits.

She was fond of her colleagues as well.

"Day to day, having to work alongside people for 27 years – you spend a lot of time," Mitchell said. "When those life events happen, the support that's around here is just wonderful, wonderful. You're not alone around here when those things happen."

Mitchell has also always appreciated how the company has operated as a cooperative.

"The fact that we are able to treat people like they want to be treated; like I like to be treated – I like to treat people that way," she said. "Being a cooperative, it softens the edges of all of that. It allows us to be a little more human about it."

While Mitchell has retired from NineStar Connect, she isn't slowing down too much, as she now sports her green thumb working in gardening and maintenance at Pendleton Falls Park.

"There's nothing that brings me more pleasure and satisfaction than seeing something through from planting to harvest," she said.

And although she won't be at the office to share the bounties of her tomato harvests anymore, she has committed to returning to NineStar to continue her traditional cucumber sandwich day. She will also continue the co-op's spring bulbs at its offices that she has been heading up for the past several years.

Darrin Couch, Director of Customer Service & Billing for NineStar Connect, has known Mitchell since the merger.

"With her, no question, she has the biggest heart of anyone I've ever met," Couch said. "We're in customer service and billing, and there's no better example of what customer service is than to have an interaction with Julie."



The often-used phrase "big shoes to fill" doesn't even begin to describe her departure, he continued.

"We're not even trying to fill those shoes," he said. "That's not something that you can do. You just figure out how to keep things moving forward. We appreciate the kindness, the knowledge that she has shared with all of us during her time with the organization, and we'll just continue to try to live up to the example that she has set."



SAVE THE DATE

CUSTOMER APPRECIATION EVENT WHERE: PINEY ACRES WHEN: SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 16TH MORE DETAILS COMING SOON!







BESIDE THE VINES & UNDER THE STARS



AUGUST 4 Woomblies

AUGUST 11 The Flying Toasters













AUGUST 18 Hairbangers Ball

AUGUST 25 Nauti yachtys

SEPTEMBER 1 My Yellow Rickshaw

SEPTEMBER 8 An ode to tom petty

SEPTEMBER 15 Howl2go: Dueling Pianos

SEPTEMBER 22 Clayton Anderson

SEPTEMBER 29 The Big 80'S