



INTERNATIONAL BROTHERHOOD OF ELECTRICAL WORKERS  
**LOCAL UNION 953 NEWS – DECEMBER 2020**

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 Nick Webber, Organizer  
 Connie Bremer, Office Mgr  
 Grace Malone, Accountant

**OUR ADDRESS**

2206 Highland Avenue  
 Eau Claire, WI 54701  
 TEL: 715-834-4911

**INTERNET WEB PAGE**

[www.ibew953.org](http://www.ibew953.org)  
 E-mail Staff, see Web Page  
 For "Contact Us" link.



Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I hope that all of you are staying healthy and safe. This past year has definitely been a challenging year for all of us. Working together with your brothers and sisters, and the employers, we will get through this pandemic. It is important that we all follow the guidelines and any policies that have been put in place so we can do our part in protecting each other. Please visit our Facebook page or see enclosed for a more in depth COVID-19 message that was recently posted. Thank you for your cooperation in attempting to keep everyone healthy.

Due to the extensive spread of the COVID, Local Union 953 has made the decision to discontinue all meetings for the remainder of the year. As we move into 2021, we will be re-evaluating this status on a monthly basis. Before attending any scheduled meetings, I would recommend that you check our Facebook page and/or website for any updates or call your Union representative.

After much thought and consideration, we have made the difficult decision to not hold the annual ice fishing contest in February. While we realize this event is outdoors and we could have had the drawings outdoors, the risk of the Union adding to the COVID exposure is not worth it. Many employers have gone above and beyond the negotiated labor agreements in an attempt to keep you safe, and we simply do not want the perception out there that we are not doing our part. Hopefully, a vaccine will come out shortly so we can put this behind us and return to our normal operation and lives.

Congratulations to all of the scholarship winners. In addition to the five \$500 scholarships that are awarded to participants in the November drawing, we also have 5 scholarships at the technical schools as follows: 2 at Chippewa Valley Tech, 1 at Fennimore, 1 at Wausau, and 1 at Rice Lake. These scholarships are approved by the members on a yearly basis at the annual meeting. Please see enclosed list of winners.

In closing, we appreciate all of your efforts and help that you give us at the Union Hall when dealing with grievances, negotiations, or this pandemic. Thank you all. I wish you all a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

Yours in Solidarity,

*Martin Sandberg*

Martin Sandberg

Business Manager/Financial Secretary

Brothers and Sisters,

Hope all is well with you and your family.

In the last newsletter I indicated that we have had several grievances and issues unresolved at Xcel Energy. I am happy to report that we have been able to take care of most of them. At one point we had 12 grievances filed. As of the writing of this newsletter, all 12 have been resolved. Also, we were able to get our Per Diem increased. This is something that hasn't been done since 1999 and we didn't have to sell the farm to get it!

Another significant issue that was resolved involved our gas department employee's. In a nutshell, several of our Gas Technicians were underpaid, some since 2002. This resulted in a \$41,234 cash settlement spread out over 30 of our members.

In regards to the pandemic, it has gotten worse at Xcel Energy. Local 953 has been, and will continue to be, in contact with management about this issue. At one point, in mid-November, the Covid hotline took 500 calls in one day!! I know everyone has different opinions on this issue; however, we need to be mindful on what we do day to day. Wearing a mask and following all of the CDC guidelines are essential to slowing down the spread. Also, keep in mind that Xcel has been "taking care" of employees with symptoms. PLEASE DO NOT ABUSE THIS SYSTEM!!! To my knowledge, every Union employee at Xcel has been paid during this pandemic. Continue to follow the protocol set in place at Xcel. This process continues to evolve, and what was done 4 months ago might not be the case today.

All regional and tailgate meetings have been cancelled for the rest of 2020. If things continue to go at the present rate, it may be several months into 2021 before we can meet face to face again. I will be in communication with all Stewards at Xcel in the coming months on what the plan will be.

Please be safe and take care of each other and hopefully we will see you soon! As always, if you have any questions or concerns please contact me.

In Solidarity,

*Tim Hemenway*

Tim Hemenway  
Assistant Business Manager

Dear Members,

Wishing you the very best this Holiday Season. I would like to send a special congratulations to all the Apprentices that completed their training in 2020! As we move forward into the New Year let's try and focus on the things we have in common rather than the things that divide us. With hopes of a vaccine to this pandemic on the horizon, the promise of the New Year looks a little brighter! I will close this short Holiday well-wishing with a quote from the late Senator John McCain; "Do not despair of our present difficulties but believe always in the promise and greatness of America, because nothing is inevitable here. Americans never quit. We never surrender. We never hide from history. We make history."

Happy Holidays,

*Brady Weiss*

Brady Weiss  
Asst. Business Manager



## ***Congratulations to this year's IBEW Local 953 Scholarship Winners!***

### **Winners of Local 953 Scholarship:**

Austin Kopacz, son of Mark Kopacz (Xcel Energy)  
Trevor Kopacz, son of Mark Kopacz (Xcel)  
Victoria Hanson, daughter of Eric Hanson (Xcel)  
Kayla Dubiel, daughter of Kristopher Dubiel (ECEC)  
Kylie Hodnefield, daughter of Kirk Hodnefield (Xcel)

### **Winners of CVTC Scholarships:**

Lucas Zeilinger: Gas Utility Construction & Service  
Ethan Newman: Electrical Power Distribution (EDP)

### **Winner of Southwest Tech Scholarship:**

James Waul: Electrical Power Distribution (EDP)

Brothers and Sisters,

Sending well wishes to you and your family this Holiday season. I think it is safe to say that the beginning of the decade was not what any of us had hoped for in one way or another, regardless we as Local 953 members have much to be thankful for this year. In the past year we have experienced significant events in the labor community. For many, it has resulted in a renewed perspective on the importance of what we now call “essential workers” from the general public. Along with this, American workers are realizing that respect on the job has less to do with free pizza for employees and outside “thank-you” banners, and more to do with dignifying wages (including hazard pay), sufficient safety protocols, and protection of a collective bargaining agreement. In 2021, it is critical that we have as many intentional conversations with folks about this distinction as possible, and that is our plan here at Local 953. I want to sign off by saying a special thank you to members who participated in organizing activities over the past year from ride-along blitzing to pursuing leads, I am looking forward to continuing and building on that in the coming year. Until next time, be well.

In Solidarity,

*Nick Webber*

Nick Webber

Local 953 Organizer

Hello Fellow Union Members,

I hope you all enjoyed some good food and had a Happy Thanksgiving! This year has been much different for all of us with the current pandemic we are facing. It has affected the way we live our lives but hopefully everyone is staying healthy and this will all be behind us soon.

We have completed negotiations at various Cooperatives this year to include Polk Burnett Electric Cooperative, Clark Electric and St. Croix Electric Cooperative. As far as wage increases, the average wage increase is at around 3%. Riverland Energy negotiations are upcoming and will need to be completed prior to years end. Our goal in regard to negotiations is to continue to maintain the benefits our members have accumulated over the years and garner a fair and equitable wage increase for all.

Recently we wrapped up an Arbitration case at Price Electric Cooperative regarding how Rest-time is calculated in coordination with the lunch intermission. The contractual language combined with the practice of how it’s been applied going back through the years was solid, but that didn’t stop the employer from trying to change the way they thought it should be applied moving forward. That being said, it made for a strong case for us so we are all eagerly awaiting a decision that would uphold the practice that we believe is appropriate in the application of Rest-time. From what I have learned in my short time here as a business rep in the Union hall is that anything can happen when you have to rely on a third party to make decisions for you. I want to thank our members who helped prepare and took the time to testify during the hearing, especially seeing it was on the Friday before opening deer gun season in Wisconsin!

Until next time, work safe and have a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!

In Solidarity,

*Mike Mountin*

Mike Mountin

Assistant Business Manager



**From the Officers and Staff of Local 953**

*Marty, Tim, Brady, Mike, Nick,*  
*Grace and Connie*



## IMPORTANT MESSAGE FROM MARTIN SANDBERG

As Covid-19 continues to rage in Wisconsin, I feel compelled to reach out to Local 953's members to address a number of concerns. Not only does the virus continue to affect our members, but also their families, employers, friends and even the operations of the Union office. Local 953 staff continue to respond to an increasing number of questions around various situations that arise in dealing with the virus. Whether you are employed in a plant, an office setting or in the field, please note the following:

- All of you have a responsibility to watch out for your Sisters and Brothers well-being. There have been numerous situations where members have ignored COVID symptoms or close contact and showed up to work and/or continued to work. This type of behavior has resulted in unnecessary lost time and wages for fellow members who then had to get tested and/or quarantined. If you have symptoms or think you have been exposed, please do not report to work until you have received guidance from the appropriate HR or health and safety personnel where you are employed. If you have questions regarding applicable policies or any possible compensation when infected, quarantining or recovering, contact your Business Agent.
- We expect you to follow all employer policies and procedures related to virus transmission prevention. This includes social distancing, mask utilization (including the proper placement over the nose and mouth at all times), hand washing, sanitizing, etc. All these things can help to protect coworkers, family and friends.
- Additionally, we are concerned that failure to follow employer policies is likely to result in discipline as many employers are losing more and more man hours in part due to failure to adhere to their employer or customer policies. Local 953 supports all employers' efforts and reasonable, science-driven policies to protect everyone to the fullest possible extent.
- Please be just as vigilant at home and when out and about as you are at work. Any workplace policies are greatly weakened by negligent activity when not at work. While I realize there are differing opinions on the seriousness of Covid-19 and the effectiveness of the various transmission prevention procedures, what is not debatable is the effect virus transmission is having on our employers' operations and on the health of many of our members and their family and friends. We all have a responsibility to do our part, to keep our employers functioning properly, maintaining our jobs, and to keep everyone safe and healthy.

In Solidarity,

LOCAL UNION 953, I.B.E.W.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Martin D. Sandberg". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized flourish at the end.

Martin Sandberg  
Business Manager