



**Cory Schwarz, Gary Molitor and Josh Schwarz** move some of their hives.

## The buzzy season of North Dakota honey producers

BY ANNE HANSEN

In rural North Dakota, it is not difficult to spot the white beehive boxes placed along the rolling hills of the prairie. From a distance, there may not be any sign of action, but busy bees are working to gather nectar and make honey.

In 2020, over 38.6 million pounds of honey were produced in North Dakota, making it the top honey-producing state in the nation.

And just like the bees they raise, the honey producers in our local communities are busy each year, ensuring the bees are well-kept, and the honey keeps flowing.

What better way to celebrate National Honey Month in September than by highlighting those who make it happen.

Absolute Honey, one of several Slope Electric Cooperative members producing honey, has been a part of the honey business for years. They produce commercial honey from 16,000 hives each year, spanning from Hettinger, Mylo, Bell Fouché, S.D. and Beulah, Wyo.

For Cory Schwarz, one of the owners, his first experience with the industry was hauling bees while working for a trucking

Slope Electric Cooperative Inc.

# OUTLOOK

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*Absolute Honey hives in the open prairie.*

company. Soon after, Schwarz worked for a producer, caring for bees until he was ready to branch off on his own. In 2015, with the help of his wife, Candace Molitor, her son, Gary, and daughter-in-law, Delanie, they started Absolute Honey, later bringing on Cory's brother, Josh, to join the business.

### **Beekeeping**

When it comes to beekeeping, the challenging parts can also be the most rewarding.

"People do not realize how much work it is to keep the bees healthy, while pulling honey and covering the vast area that we do," Cory said. Yet, those miles are one of the things that drew the group of individuals to the profession.

"In general, it is a great occupation, where you are able to travel and meet new people every day," he said.

Some of the travel is to California starting in mid-October, when the Absolute Honey bees spend a few months pollinating the almond orchards. From there, the bees are hauled to Texas in April to spend the remaining months before making the haul back to North Dakota.

In addition to the main team, the group also employs a small group of employees from Nicaragua.

"We wouldn't be able to run as many bees as we do if it wasn't for the help of our employees," Candace said. "We always want to ensure

that we are treating our employees right, celebrating with them and learning how to work better together."

Each day, employees pull honey and extract it, sending it to large commercial producers. In addition, the company also keeps some on hand to sell locally.

"The more we can sell locally, the better!" Cory said, noting they are currently selling to a few local breweries.

Through it all, the folks from Absolute Honey focus on ensuring the health of their bees.

"We are continually learning each day," Cory said. ■



Manager's message:

# Be prepared before the storm



Travis Kupper

It's your worst-case scenario. A major storm was predicted, and the predictions were right. Many power lines are down, and your electricity may be out for several days. You are low on everything – food, pet supplies, toilet paper, batteries, diapers and your medication.

Imagine how you would feel in this situation. While

you can't predict the weather yourself, you can plan ahead, so when a severe weather event strikes, you have the tools and resources to effectively weather the storm. The U.S. Department of Homeland Security offers several resources to help you prepare for major weather events and natural disasters. Visit [www.ready.gov/make-a-plan](http://www.ready.gov/make-a-plan).

## Preparedness actions and items

- Stock your pantry with a three-day supply of nonperishable food, such as canned goods, energy bars, peanut butter, powdered milk, instant coffee, water and other essentials, such as diapers and toiletries.
- Confirm that you have adequate sanitation and hygiene supplies, including towelettes, soap and hand sanitizer.
- Ensure your first-aid kit is stocked with pain relievers, bandages and other medical essentials, and make sure your prescriptions are current.
- Set aside basic household items you will need, including flashlights, batteries, a manual can opener and a portable, battery-powered radio or TV.
- Organize emergency supplies, so they are together in an easily accessible location.

## With advance warning

If a severe storm is expected with high winds and sustained rain, you may need to take extra steps to

safeguard your home. Fully charge all cellphones, laptops and devices, so you have maximum power in the event of a power outage. If you plan to use a small generator, make sure it's rated to handle the amount of power you will need, and always review the manufacturer's instructions to operate it safely.

## During a prolonged outage

In the event of an outage, appliances, TVs, computers and other sensitive electronics. This will help avert damage from a power surge, and will also help prevent overloading the circuits during power restoration. That said, do leave one light on so you will know when power is restored. If utilizing a small household generator, consider using LED holiday lights to illuminate a living area. A strand of 100 white lights draws little energy, yet produces considerable light. Solar lights also work, if they can receive some sunlight during the day for charging.

During thunderstorms, the American Red Cross recommends avoiding electrical equipment and land-based telephones. Use battery-powered TVs and radios instead. Keep away from windows. Listen to local news or NOAA Weather Radio for emergency updates, or check Slope Electric Cooperative's Facebook page for restoration updates.

After the storm, avoid downed power lines and walking through flooded areas where power lines could be submerged. Allow ample room for utility crews to safely perform their jobs, including on your property.

## Power in planning

Advance planning for severe storms or other emergencies can reduce stress and anxiety caused by the weather event and can lessen the impact of the storm's effects. Act today, because there is power in planning. ■



## Safety Starts with ME: Jeff Boynton

For Jeff Boynton, Slope Electric Cooperative's outpost working foreman, the shift from summer to school comes with the reminder to remove distractions while driving, as crosswalks get busier and an influx of new drivers take to the roads.

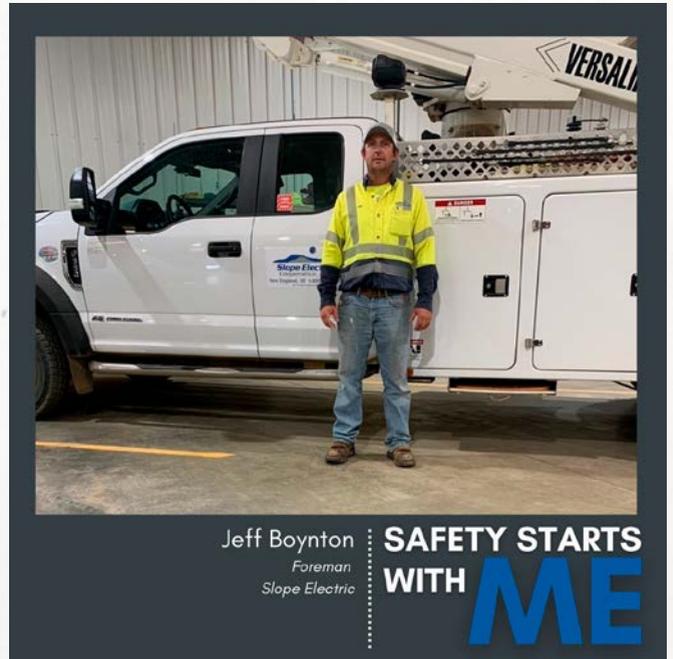
"At Slope Electric, we speak a lot about safe driving practices and remind members to be safe and recognize their surroundings, whether that be driving in a tractor around power lines or slowing down if lineworkers are working alongside a road," Boynton said. "It is important to remove the distractions while driving."

Distracted driving is considered any activity that diverts our attention, including texting, calling or adjusting the entertainment system, according to Anne Prince, the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association's member communications manager. Doing any of these activities while driving increases the potential for injuries and fatalities. In fact, distracted driving is one of the leading causes of motor vehicle accidents in the United States.

"At Slope, we understand our jobs have the potential to be dangerous, but we are motivated to stay safe not only for ourselves, but for our families and our children," Boynton said. "We want the same for our membership, and that is why we ask to remove the distractions – no matter if you're in a field or a school zone. A text, call or entertainment is not worth the potential consequence."

The National Safety Council recommends taking these valuable tips into consideration as we get back into the swing of things this school year:

- **Obey school speed zones** – Pay attention upon entering a school zone. Know the speed limit, and learn the drop-off and pick-up procedure.



- **Never pass a bus loading or unloading children** – Ten feet around a bus is the most dangerous area for children. Please keep your distance to allow for children to safely enter and exit the bus.
- **Stay back from the curb** – Teach your children to stay at least three big steps back from a curb. This ensures a safe distance from your child and the street.
- **Practice with your new driver often** – Inexperience in teen drivers is often the leading cause of teen crashes. It is important to teach your student-driver possible situations that can occur when driving. "Although we should work to eliminate distracted driving no matter the season, it is especially important with the new school year approaching," Boynton said. ■



# ELECTRICAL SAFETY TIPS FOR HUNTERS

This hunting season, Slope Electric encourages all members to be aware of electrical equipment and take necessary precautions while hunting. Keep these safety tips in mind as you enjoy the great outdoors.



Take notice of posted warning signs and keep clear of electrical equipment.

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Do not shoot at or near power lines or insulators.

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Know where power lines and equipment are located on the land where you hunt.

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Be especially careful in wooded areas where power lines may not be as visible.

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Do not place deer stands on utility poles or climb poles. Energized lines and equipment can conduct electricity to anyone who comes in contact with them, causing shock or electrocution.

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Do not place decoys on power lines or other utility equipment. Any non-electrical equipment attached to a pole can pose an obstruction and serious hazards to our line crews.



## Lineworkers attend hotline school

Slope Electric Cooperative joined lineworkers from across the state for the North Dakota Association of Rural Electric Cooperatives (NDAREC) Hotline School.

The session was held at the Bismarck State College lineworker training facility in Mandan. The annual field training teaches lineworkers how to safely work on energized lines through hands-on instruction and demonstrations from experienced lineworkers.

Lineworkers often repair high-voltage lines surging with electrical current, making proper procedure imperative for their safety.

Hotline School provides an opportunity to learn how to work the system “hot,” without being exposed to energized lines. This training prepares lineworkers for situations when de-energizing the lines is not possible and helps keep power flowing during storms or scheduled maintenance, when possible. ■





# DON'T LET THE CHILL AFFECT YOUR BILL



When cold weather approaches, you can keep your home comfortable and still keep your energy bills from escalating with these winter tips from Slope Electric Cooperative:

## BUNDLE UP YOUR HOME

Check around doors and windows for leaks and drafts. Add weatherstripping and caulk where heat might escape. Make sure doors seal properly.



## PLUG THE PLUG

Electric wall plugs and switches can allow cold air to enter. Purchase simple-to-install, foam gaskets that fit behind the switch plate and effectively prevent leaks.



## CLOSE THE DAMPER

Don't forget to close the damper on your fireplace when the fireplace is not in use. If the damper is open when you're not using the fireplace, your chimney functions as a large open window that draws warm air out of the room and creates a draft.

## CHECK YOUR HEATING SYSTEM

Get a routine maintenance and inspection of your heating system each autumn to make sure it is in good working order.

## CHANGE THE FILTER

Be sure to clean or replace your system's air filter. At a minimum, change the filter every three months; a dirty filter clogs the system, making the system work harder to keep you warm.

## CHECK YOUR INSULATION

Insulate your attic. In an older home, that can be the most cost-efficient way to cut home heating costs. Before energy efficiency standards, homes were often built with little or no insulation. As a result, large amounts of heat can be lost through walls, floors and ceilings.

## CHANGE A LIGHT BULB

Lighting our homes can represent 20% of home electricity bills and is one of the easiest places to start saving energy with more energy-efficient bulbs.



## LOWER THE THERMOSTAT

Lowering the setting on your thermostat will result in savings, too!



## GENERATOR SAFETY

### USE BACKUP POWER SAFELY

When used properly, portable and standby generators are a great option to provide backup power during brownouts or blackouts. **Learn how to use generators safely** with the following tips:

#### GENERATORS

##### Location



Always keep generators at least **20 feet away** from your home



Never operate a generator in an **enclosed space**



Make sure the generator has **3-4 feet** of clear space above and on all sides for proper ventilation



Keep generators **away** from doors, windows and vents



Always **direct exhaust away** from your home

##### Use



Always use **grounded cords** and inspect cords for damage prior to use



Use the **proper cord** for the wattage being used



Always use **GFCI protection**



Make sure to start / stop generators when **no electrical loads** are connected



Keep generators **dry, do not operate when wet**, and refuel when cool



**Do not overload** generators



Do not plug a generator directly into your home, connect items being powered **directly to the generator**

#### TRANSFER SWITCHES



Transfer switches, whether manual or automatic, allow you to choose between **utility power** or **backup generator power**



Transfer switches are the only way to **safely power** your home's electrical system



Using a transfer switch **prevents backfeeding**. This occurs when your generator becomes a power source for the **surrounding area** and can damage your home, your neighbors' homes, and injure workers trying to restore power

#### CARBON MONOXIDE (CO) POISONING PREVENTION



Improper use and installation of generators could **cause CO poisoning**



Make sure your home has **carbon monoxide alarms** outside each sleeping area and on every level of the home



CO can kill in as little as **5 minutes**

##### Symptoms of CO poisoning



If you experience CO poisoning symptoms, **get fresh air, do not reenter areas** and **call 911**.



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#### Report from THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Regular meeting held at the Slope Electric office in New England

- Approved agenda for July 28
- Approved minutes from previous meeting on June 30
- Heard Co-General Managers/CEOs update
- Heard CFO financial report
- Approved contract for services between Slope Electric and Maintenance Solutions Cooperative
- Heard the attorney report
- Reviewed Basin Electric Power Cooperative report
- Reviewed board member reports
- Heard operation report
- Heard member relations summary
- Discussed strategic planning