



PHOTO COURTESY ARLENE MEISSEL

‘Thank you for your sacrifice and service’

Four Iraqi War servicemen received quilts from the Missouri River Quilts of Valor group this summer including, from left: **Joe Stagl**, **Todd Otto** and **Joshua (Josh) Tysver** from Dickinson, and **Randy Fitterer** from New England. They served under the N.D. National Guard in the Middle East, Persian Gulf War, Operation Iraqi Freedom. In this month’s local pages, learn about the regional and national Quilts of Valor program, and how it is covering area veterans in love, thanks in part to an Operation Round Up grant. Also meet Slope Electric member Lucas Greff, a recent recipient of a Quilt of Valor, who shares some “Charlie Company” memories.

Slope Electric Cooperative, Inc.

OUTLOOK

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In this issue:

- Consider serving on the Nominating/Resolutions Committee
- Join Slope in celebrating National Apprenticeship Week!
- Meeting minutes, and more

‘Thank you for your sacrifice and service’ Area veterans receive Quilts of Valor, thanks in part to Operation Round Up grant

BY CARMEN DEVNEY



Veteran **Randy Fitterer** and Group Leader **Arlene Meissel**

Meissel and three members of the Missouri River Quilts of Valor chapter stopped at quilt shops to promote the group and make purchases. Each shop gave a discount on fabric, and at their visits, ladies in Hettinger offered to “long-arm” and construct quilts for the group. A church group from Richardton donated quilting fabric. When possible, the group buys supplies locally and from the communities it serves. The more people and organizations who learn about Quilts of Valor chapters, the more donations received, the more quilters and long-armers found ... the more eligible veterans and service members nominated, the more Quilt of Valor awarded! Community partnerships make this possible!

Sharing memories of their military service can be difficult for veterans and service members, who had to see and do some unimaginable things as they defended our freedoms at war.

Even time can’t heal the wounds some of these folks suffer, such as post-traumatic stress disorder, and other physical and physiological limitations they deal with as a result of their time on active duty.

A quilt may not ease their pain or fill a void, but it does say, “Thank you for your sacrifice, service and valor.” You are remembered and appreciated.

In October, veteran and Slope Electric Cooperative member Lucas Greff received a Quilt of Valor to commemorate his service and sacrifice. The homemade quilt was constructed with three layers, crafted with patriotic colors, and gently stitched with love bestowed by a volunteer.

This is the story of one of many brave veterans, and how Quilts of Valor — and supporters like you — are thanking them for their service and sacrifice.

Spare change is changing lives with Quilts of Valor program

Founded in 2003 by “Blue Star” mom Catherine Roberts, the national non-profit group Quilts of Valor Foundation came about as a dream for Roberts, who was thinking about her son, Nat, who served in Iraq. Roberts once said, “I saw a young man sitting on

the side of his bed in the middle of the night, hunched over. The permeating feeling was one of utter despair. I could see his war demons clustered around, dragging him down into an emotional gutter. Then, as if viewing a movie, I saw him in the next scene wrapped in a quilt. His whole demeanor changed from one of despair to one of hope and well-being. The quilt had made this dramatic change. The message of my dream was quilts equal healing.”

An area Quilts of Valor chapter was started in February 2020. The Missouri River Quilts of Valor serves western and central North Dakota. Its mission is to cover service members and veterans “touched by war” with comforting and healing Quilts of Valor.

Earlier this year, Group Leader Arlene Meissel wrote a letter to the Slope Electric Operation Round Up board of directors, asking for a donation of at least \$900: The amount needed to construct three quilts.

Operation Round Up is a program in which electric cooperative members voluntarily round up their monthly utility bills to the nearest dollar and donate their change to local individuals, groups or charities with a specific need. The money pools and accumulates, and an elected board of co-op members reviews the grant applications that have been submitted and determines grant worthiness.

In her application, Meissel noted the group awards quilts based on nominations received and the local chapter’s inventory. They give priority to the elderly and those with health issues. “Our priority



Arlene Meissel, left, and Lou Josephson

All quilts, from start to finish, are made by volunteers; some of whom are members of the Missouri River Quilts of Valor chapter. Depending on the skill of the quilter, time available, and complexity of the pattern, a quilt can take anywhere from two weeks to four months to finish. The volunteer uses supplies provided by the group, which seeks donations to help cover the costs. Slope Electric Cooperative gave an Operation Round Up donation to Missouri River Quilts of Valor this summer to reduce the group's expenses, and support area veterans and service members.

when receiving funds is purchasing fabric to construct quilts. However, we are in continuous need of many other supplies," she wrote.

This summer, the Charitable

Trust met to review applications and award grants. Missouri River Quilts of Valor received an Operation Round Up grant for \$900 from Slope Electric. The money was used to purchase fabric, batting, cutting mats, rotary cutters, and quilting rulers.

Donations are also used to send thank you cards, print award certificates, and cover the costs of paper, ink, stamps, envelopes, copying and printing.

The Missouri River Quilts of Valor chapter meets the second Thursday of every month at 322 W. Main St. in Mandan, in the basement of

Sewing Machines Plus. The group meets from 10 a.m. to 8 p.m. with a short business meeting at 5:30 p.m. During this time, members of the working group cut and assemble quilt kits for those who are interested in constructing a quilt.

For information on the local and national Quilts of Valor organizations, visit <https://missouririverqov.weebly.com/> or www.qovf.org, or find "Missouri River Quilts of Valor" on Facebook. You may also contact Group Leader Arlene Meissel for information at 701-471-6147 or email missouririverqov@yahoo.com. ■



Mary Dunn, quilter and member of Missouri River Quilts of Valor.

COURTESY PHOTOS

Quilts of Valor donations and nominations needed!

Quilt construction, awards travel and office duties are all done by volunteers who do not get paid for their generous services. All supplies are obtained from donations and whenever possible purchases are made from the communities they serve. Funds obtained for the Missouri River Quilts of Valor chapter stay in the group account.

Donations are needed to keep providing this valuable service.

Nominations are also needed ... to keep honoring those who have been touched by war, and awarding veterans and service men and women with a Quilt of Valor.

To nominate, go to www.qovf.org. Click "Nominations and Awards" and "Nominate a Service Member or Living Veteran." Read the information, complete the online form or the printable form, and proceed as instructed.

To donate or ask questions, contact Arlene Meissel at 701-471-6147 or email at missouririverqov@yahoo.com. ■



Slope Electric member shares 'Charlie Company' memories; co-designs protective turrets and receives Quilt of Valor

BY CARMEN DEVNEY

Lucas Greff, a Slope Electric Cooperative member who lives north of Regent, was awarded a Quilt of Valor on Oct. 13 at the Dickinson National Guard Armory. Slope Electric's Operation Round Up program helped fund quilts for area veterans this summer.

Greff enrolled in the N.D. National Guard prior to graduating from Mott/Regent School District. Like many kids, his dream was to go to college and play football. He attended Valley City State University for one year, before Guard duties required him to transfer to Dickinson State University. His senior year of college in 2003, his unit was deployed to Iraq as part of the 141 Combat Engineer Battalion.

Greff remembers seeing CONEX boxes filled with wood and toilets, and thought they might be doing a job involving construction. That sounds good, he thought!

Greff and his brother, Adam, were members of Charlie Company. Greff remembers learning their mission from a Major who was standing on the hood of a Humvee. The man said, "You'll be doing a trail-blazing mission." Greff looked at Adam and asked, "What does that mean?"

It was not construction.

The soldiers were in charge of route clearance. The large convoys that moved back and forth were frequent targets of roadside bombs known as improved explosive devices, or IEDs. Greff's mission was to find them and perform a controlled detonation.

"We would drive slowly along the edges of the road, using some high-tech equipment. There were metal detectors mounted on tractors and robotic arms mounted on trucks. But mostly, we used our eyes on



A member of "Charlie Company," Lucas Greff drove in trucks with homemade armor that Greff referred to as, "Mad Max style."

the sides of the truck," Greff says. "As a battalion we found around 320 IEDs, and around 120 found us."

As for Charlie Company, Greff counts 35 "small-arms" engagements, where a platoon came under fire from the enemy, returned fire and moved out of the ambush.

"As a battalion, we lost four soldiers. Charlie Company lost one, James Holmes," he shares.

When Greff's unit took over in 2004, the enemy's use of improved explosive devices was ramping up. They initially used small, radio-controlled IEDs. As technology improved and Greff's battalion could better detect them, the enemy started using bigger IEDs powered by batteries and command detonation wires. The copper "platter" charge was designed to go through armored steel. When those became easier to detect, the enemy turned to large amounts of homemade explosives.

"It was a game of one-upmanship, of sorts," Greff says.

The most-exposed person on most missions was the gunner, who stood on top with his weapon. He had a shield on the front, but not on the sides, and that's where most of the IEDs hit.

Greff and unit member Josh Tsyver talked about ways to protect this person. On paper, Greff started drawing options to design a turret, or hatch basket cover, to protect all sides of the gunner.

They converted the design from paper to armored steel, and made two turrets with a bullet-protection system. Tsyver, who worked in maintenance, was in the position to make seven more.



Looking down the barrel of weapon while on a mission.

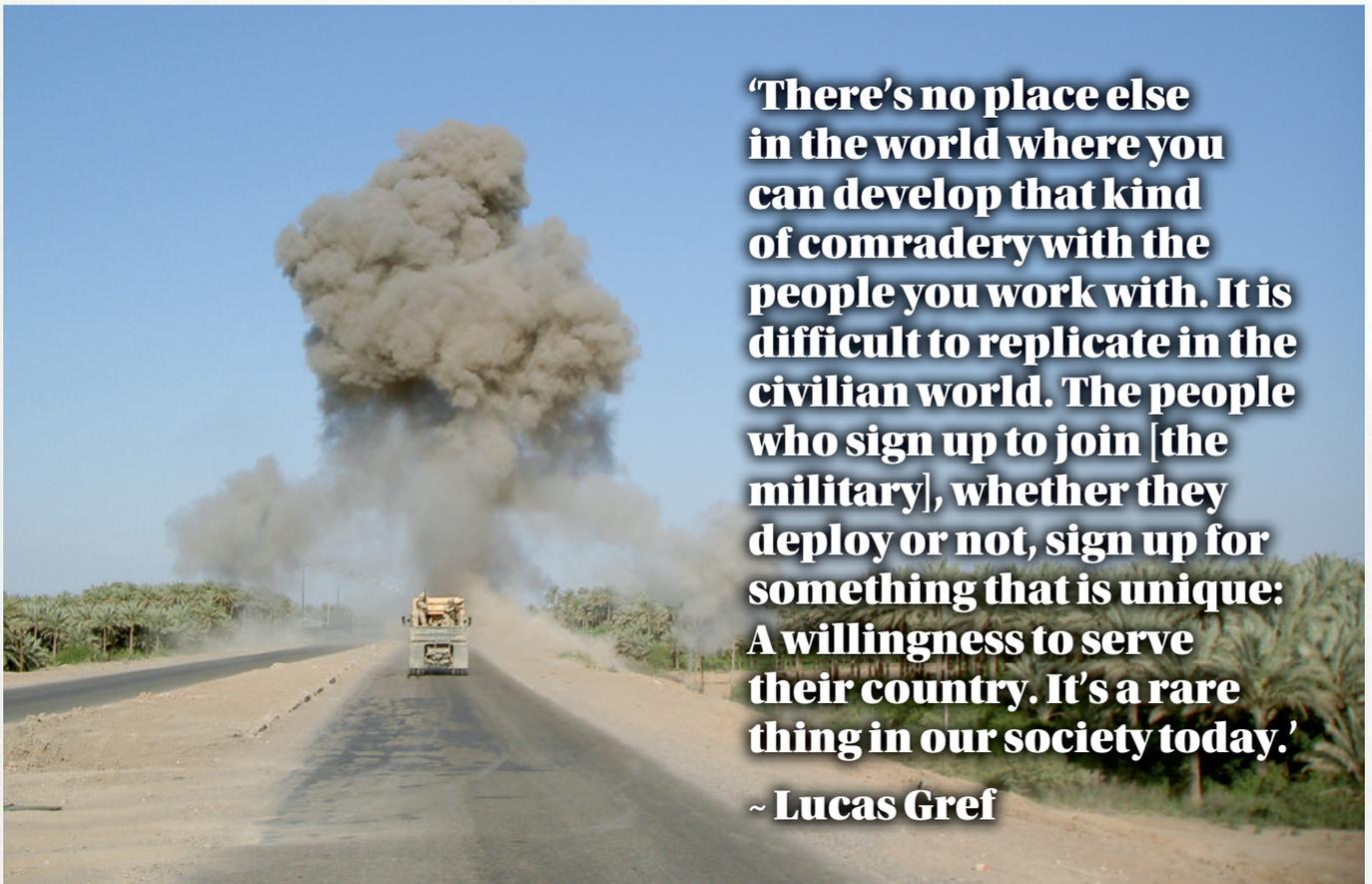
PHOTO BY RYAN ANDRUS



Lucas Greff's unit won the Fourth of July Tug of War contest at Camp Warhorse in 2004. "We beat a Marine unit that didn't expect a bunch of National Guard guys from North Dakota to bring that farmer strength," Greff says.



Lucas Greff showing the protective turret he designed and built with Josh Tsyver. The design, later mass-replicated, was known to save lives.



“There’s no place else in the world where you can develop that kind of comradery with the people you work with. It is difficult to replicate in the civilian world. The people who sign up to join [the military], whether they deploy or not, sign up for something that is unique: A willingness to serve their country. It’s a rare thing in our society today.”

~ Lucas Greff

A platoon in Lucas Greff’s unit found an improved explosive device, or IED; this explosion was a controlled detonation.

“We know of at least three times in our own company, it likely saved soldiers from blasts or small-arms fire,” Greff says. “We were pretty proud of those.”

Some guys from the U.S. Army came to look at the design, and take pictures and measurements. A few months later, Greff says they started seeing the turrets coming out of factories.

Greff said they didn’t get a patent on the design and construction process; their payment was knowing they helped save lives.

“That’s all the payment a guy needs,” he says.

The Quilt of Valor he received in October is yet another reminder that he was part of something special.

Prior to being awarded the quilt, Greff had also received an Army Commendation Ribbon for completing more than 100 combat missions, and a Combat Action Badge for engaging with the enemy while performing IED clearance missions.

Thank you, sir, for your service and sacrifice. ■



PHOTOS COURTESY LUCAS GREFF

*Slope Electric member **Lucas Greff** served in Operation Iraqi Freedom in Iraq from December 2003 to March 2005. His rank was Specialist and his primary duty was machine gun operator during “gun track.”*

Are you interested in serving on the Nominating/Resolutions Committee?

The Slope Electric Board of Directors will appoint the Nominating/Resolutions Committee at their Jan. 28, 2021, Board meeting. Each Director shall appoint one member from his/her District, and the Board at large will select up to two additional committee members from the District(s) with director election(s). The committee member names are then published in Slope Electric's local pages of the *North Dakota Living* magazine.

The Nominating/Resolutions Committee meets twice. The first meeting will be held Tuesday, Feb. 16, 2021, to explain the functions of the committee, including policies that will aid you in selecting qualified members to be nominated. The cooperative will pay you a per diem, along with reimbursing you for mileage for both meetings. The second meeting will be held Thursday, March 25. The purpose of this meeting will

be to make the actual nominations for the election to be held at the cooperative's annual meeting, and to approve resolutions to be printed in the annual meeting report.

If you or someone you know is interested in serving on the Nominating/Resolutions Committee, please notify the office at 701-579-4191 or email comments@slopeelectric.coop prior to Jan. 28, 2021. To serve on the Nominating/Resolutions Committee, you must be an active member of Slope Electric with your name being listed on the membership.

Two directors' terms from Slope County will expire in 2021.

Members can also be nominated to serve as director by filing a petition with 15 members' signatures. Filing must be done 30 days prior to the annual meeting and posted at the office. Members may also be nominated to serve as Director from the floor at the



annual meeting. To serve on the Slope Electric Board, you must be a bona fide resident receiving service from Slope Electric at your primary residence, and you must be a named member of the cooperative. ■

Report from THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS

AUG. 27, 2020

- Approved minutes of the Aug. 27, 2020, Board meeting.
- Approved three capital credit estate retirements.
- Approved special equipment and USDA Rural Utilities Service form 219 inventories.
- Co-General Managers/CEOs gave an update on the past week's happenings regarding the COVID-19 pandemic and its effect on the cooperative, and the weekly and bi-weekly manager calls with the North Dakota Association of Rural Electric Cooperatives and Basin Electric Power Cooperative.
- Heard reports from directors who participated in various meetings the past month.
- Discussion took place on election of directors to fill expired terms that normally occurs at the cooperative's annual meeting; however, the 2020 annual meeting of the members has been postponed indefinitely due to the coronavirus pandemic. The Board approved those directors terms expiring in 2020 to serve until the next special or annual meeting takes place.
- Approved 2021 capital expenditures.
- Reviewed and approved revisions to Board Policy 04-04 Board of Directors – Manager/CEO Relationship.
- Senior staff reports were attached to the agenda and reviewed, along with the financials for August 2020. The financials were accepted.
- The Board entered into Executive Session.
- A next Board meeting will be held Oct. 29, 2020.

Apprenticeships lead to family sustaining jobs



Brett Obritsch, apprentice lineman,
Bowman outpost

Slope Electric Cooperative is celebrating the sixth-annual National Apprenticeship Week Nov. 8 to 14, in partnership with the U.S. Department of Labor. Apprenticeships provide demand-driven education, allowing apprentices to earn while they learn – helping to close the gap between the skills job creators seek and jobs seekers need.

National Apprenticeship

Week provides an opportunity to spotlight how apprenticeships can help employees grow in knowledge and skill to succeed in today's workplace. In exchange, these employees have the opportunity to learn from veteran employees and mentors, and earn wages and benefits that sustain families.

Those family members work, go to school, purchase goods from area businesses, volunteer in our communities — and ultimately sustain our smaller towns and improve our quality of life.

Slope Electric is proud to highlight employee Brett Obritsch, who works as an apprentice line technician out of the Bowman outpost.

We thank all the apprentices out there who are helping electric cooperatives provide safe, reliable and affordable electric service. ■

Winners of the Cooperative Month drawing

Slope Electric Cooperative celebrated National Cooperative Month in October by drawing three names from the membership to receive bill credits that will be reflected on their November bill.

A paperless drawing was held, and the following members will enjoy seeing the credit on their November bill.

Gene Hanson, Marmarth \$10
Joseph J. Kohl Jr., New England \$75
Tim Wegner, Dickinson \$50

Holiday closings

Slope Electric Cooperative will be closed Wednesday, Nov. 11, in observance of Veterans Day, and Thursday and Friday, Nov. 26 and 27, for the Thanksgiving holiday.

Line technicians will be available in the case of an emergency or power outage.

Veterans and service men and women ... we thank you for your service and sacrifice!



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