



FROM HAMMERS & CLIMBING HOOKS TO BUCKET TRUCKS & COMPUTERS

INDUSTRY VETERANS HARRINGTON AND VETCH PLAN TO RETIRE

Tara Miller
taram@centralec.coop

Storm jobs and staking sheets will soon be a thing of the past for two tenured Central Electric team members. It's hard to believe, but more than 70 years of experience will be walking out the door over the next few months with the upcoming retirements of staking technician Tim Harrington and journeyman lineworker John Vetch.

Harrington joined the team at InterCounty Electric in 1984 as an apprentice lineworker. He eventually became the Mitchell area foreman and was most recently promoted to staking technician.

Vetch previously performed powerline construction and worked for East River Electric. He joined InterCounty Electric in 1988. InterCounty Electric joined forces with Tri-County Electric in 2000 to form Central Electric Cooperative.

Vetch is originally from Hosmer and Harrington is from Laurel, Nebraska. Both ended up here, at least in part, because their spouses are from the area. Ronda Vetch's hometown is Stickney and Karen Harrington's hometown is Alpena.

Throughout their decades of service, Vetch and Harrington have witnessed the transition from hammers and climbing hooks to bucket trucks and computers.

"Service orders were all on paper," Vetch recalls. With the advancement of technology in the electric industry, many processes have gone digital, which is a remarkable contrast from when he worked for East River Electric Power Cooperative from 1980-1988.

Recalling the early days at InterCounty Electric, Vetch said, "We had one bucket, and we did a lot of climbing."

Historic Tornado Tuesday occurred on June 24, 2003, and South Dakota experienced 67 tornadoes within an eight-hour timeframe according to the National Weather Service. Vetch and Harrington remember that day well. The Mount Vernon area experienced extensive damage to electrical infrastructure, and they were there to help pick up the pieces and restore power for cooperative members. They also helped with restoration efforts following the 1998 Spencer tornado.

"TIM AND JOHN'S HARD WORK THROUGHOUT THEIR CAREERS ENABLED US TO BUILD A ROBUST AND RESILIENT COOPERATIVE THAT WILL POWER OUR MEMBERS WELL INTO THE FUTURE. THEY WILL TRULY BE MISSED."

-Ken Schlimgen, General Manager

Spending so much time on call and working storm jobs often meant sacrificing time with family and friends. Retirement might be the perfect time to make up for it.

Vetch plans to spend time with family, travel and do more camping when he hangs up his climbing hooks in January. Ronda, his wife of 40 years, will retire on the same day from her position at Life Quest in Mitchell. The couple has three children and four grandchildren.

Harrington and his wife of 41 years, Karen, want to travel and visit family after he clocks out for the last time in December. They have two children and two grandchildren.

"I was never home with my kids on a snow day," Harrington recalls. Being on call during inclement weather is part of life for a lineworker, and he hasn't regretted one moment of it.

“We were on an outage caused by an ice storm south of Kimball, near Ola, and we didn’t think we were going to get power restored until after Christmas. We pushed hard and we were able to get the power back on by 3 p.m. on Christmas Eve,” Harrington said. Members were thankful for their efforts that day, many years ago. He also remembers working large-scale storm jobs in Omaha and Selby.

“A lineman’s guardian angel doesn’t work 8:00 to 4:30,” Harrington explained. “They work around the clock.”

The cooperative can’t necessarily replace employees with this level of experience, but we will do our best to build upon the legacies they are leaving through their years of dedicated service and all the miles of line they helped construct.

We wish these veterans of the electric utility industry a very happy retirement. Gone are the days of missed holidays and birthday parties. It’s time to relax, knowing you aren’t on call. Congratulations on many great years at Central Electric Cooperative. Enjoy your retirement.

Congratulations on your retirement!

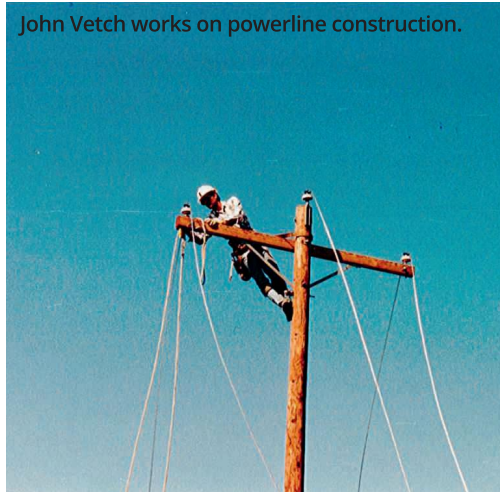
Tim Harrington served cooperative members from 1984-2021.



John Vetch served cooperative members from 1988-2022.



Tim Harrington and Mick Poncet receive their journeyman certificates.



John Vetch works on powerline construction.



Tim Harrington on the job.



John Vetch and Ken Schlimgen examine an ethanol plant control panel.



John Vetch and Tim Harrington work to repair a conductor over the James River.



Tim Harrington gives a safety demonstration.



CPR training.



Tim Harrington
↓
John Vetch
↓