

Interim Safety Coordinator Chase Tucker shares safety tips with Manager of Finance Emily Meek.

## SAFETY FIRST!

BY VIRGINIA HARMAN GENERAL MANAGER

The Mountain Parks Electric Board of Directors and management prioritizes safety as a fundamental and critical element of the cooperative. This includes all MPE employees — linemen, field workers, customer service representatives, and accountants, just to name a few — and extends to public, community, and member safety.

“Be a recognized leader in employee and public safety” is MPE’s first strategic goal of seven. We subdivide it into three objectives:

1. Get every employee home safely every day.
2. Keep the public safe.
3. Maintain the highest industry standards.

Getting employees home safely happens when there is a safety-first culture and shared mindset across the entire organization. Coincidentally, another strategic goal of the board is employee retention and recruitment. The objectives associated with this goal are to “exceed the needs and expectations of employees” and to “create a cooperative culture that promotes flexibility, engagement, opportunity, and trust.”

As we have placed attention on creating a positive culture, our safety awareness and outcomes have and will continue to improve. Among the initiatives that have contributed to MPE’s culture- and trust-building are weekly and monthly safety meetings. Engineering and operations employees gather virtually each Tuesday

morning to highlight relevant safety best practices, review recent projects, and discuss any accident near misses.

The monthly all-employee meetings, which were reinstated earlier this year, have proven to be integral for engagement and trust-building. They have been a great way to keep the team informed about current and upcoming projects, events, and the general direction of our co-op. Each of these meetings also has a specific focus on safety, whether it is fulfilling a required employee safety training session or everyone participating in a safety activity.

At the August all-employee meeting, the human resources and operations/engineering departments hosted a Safety Rodeo. All MPE employees were assigned to a team and had the opportunity to complete obstacles with various pieces of small equipment in a friendly competition. Again, safety was at the forefront as we



MPE Member Services Representative Michelle Myers inches forward in the Safety Rodeo forklift challenge.



VIRGINIA HARMAN


were judged by how well we completed an extensive safety pre-run checklist and how attentive we were throughout our session. There was laughing, high-fiving, and, although it can’t be proven, possibly a little lighthearted “cheating” (not naming names, but some of us might get too competitive). Above all, it was a fun and morale-boosting way to invest in our culture of safety. As has been common this summer, afternoon dark thunder clouds cut this edition of the Safety Rodeo short (safety first!).

Our culture of safety naturally flows to encompass the second objective: Keep the public safe. With specific and measurable methods spread across the three years of our strategic plan, we will offer public safety education and programs that reach the diverse audiences across our membership (schools, first responders, contractors, etc.) to ensure we keep the public safe in relation to electrical and fire hazards.

The success of this goal and its objectives depends on the participation and engagement of all of you, our members. We

will share safety information through the recently redesigned mpei.com and MPE's social media outlets. We will also plan events with safety elements and visit local schools and other organizations to increase the public's safety awareness.

We plan to incorporate safety information with all our existing events and to offer incentives for member participation because, again, safety is top of mind for us at MPE. If your organization is interested in a safety demonstration from the team at MPE, please reach out to us and let us know.

**Top left:** MPE Engineering Clerk Kathi Crawford drives an ATV to complete a challenge during the August staff meeting and Safety Rodeo. 

**Top right:** Custodian Caroline Smith learns how to safely operate a forklift.

**Bottom:** Warehouse and Facilities Supervisor Brian Smith (second from left) explains the rules and safety procedures for one of the Safety Rodeo stations to Customer Care and Billing Supervisor Amanda Rosenbergh (left) and the rest of her team.



## MPE LAUNCHES NEW LOGO AND UPDATED WEBSITE

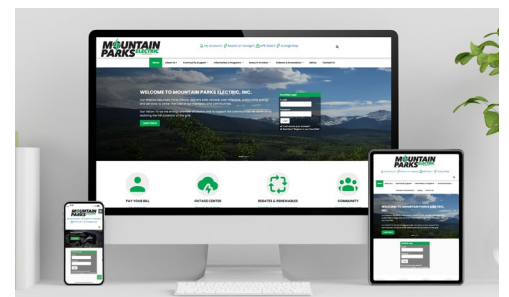
In conjunction with Mountain Parks Electric's Member Appreciation Event on September 6, the co-op shared a new logo and a modernized website redesign.

The new MPE logo features bold, black lettering while maintaining the well-known green on a lightning bolt graphic. There is an alternate version with the MPE initials for use with things such as hats and shirts. Willie Wiredhand continues to be MPE's unique and trusted mascot.

The logo was created at no cost to MPE by one of our member owners.

The website — mpei.com — was upgraded to the latest Co-op Web Builder 3.0 platform offered to MPE through its membership with Touchstone Energy Cooperatives. It provides improved navigation, a prominent search bar, and a SmartHub login box on the homepage. It also maintains the highest levels of accessibility and security.

Establishing a recognizable, modern logo and website for MPE were among the objectives included in the Board of Directors' goal of maintaining a high level of member satisfaction in MPE's 2023–2026 Strategic Plan.





# HELPING YOUTH CONQUER FEARS AND YOUNG FAMILIES AFFORD HOMES

## MPE in the Community – Employee Spotlight

Mountain Parks Electric Power Use Advisor Chris Michalowski describes MPE as providing its members with an invisible product, which is why he gets energized by helping members make sense of their energy usage.

Chris' workdays consist of traveling across MPE's service area for net metering inspections; examining energy data; collaborating with area organizations for solar and other grant projects; and generally fielding calls and questions from members regarding their energy use and available rebates. "One of my most memorable experiences was calculating how much it cost to run a heat lamp for a pet iguana," Chris said.

But at the end of his workday at MPE, Chris' dedication to service does not stop — it only climbs higher.

Since 2019, Chris has coached approximately 60 area kids through Never Summer Senders, Grand County's youth climbing team.

"I've been climbing for 25 years. It's really shaped my life and taken me to some incredible places," Chris explained. "Grand County isn't known for climbing and without an indoor climbing gym, there's not many ways for kids to get into the sport. I wanted to create a team where if a parent has a kid who wants to learn how to be a climber, they can sign up with us and we'll provide them with mentorship and instruction."

Getting today's younger people outdoors and active could be considered a feat in itself, but Chris and his fellow climbing coaches use the sport to help kids conquer natural fears of heights and failure.

"Our big thing is that if you want to get better at something, you have to practice.

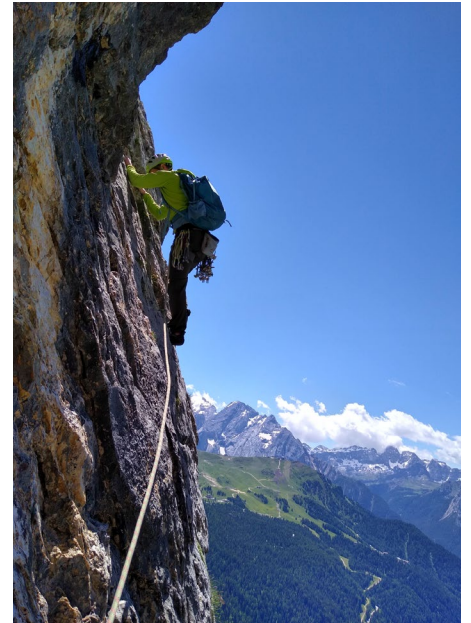
So, we break it down into smaller pieces and practice falling," said Chris. "We also work on dealing with failure. If you're trying a route that's hard and just past your limit, you're going to fail a lot. We want kids to be in a positive headspace and to get excited when they see something that looks difficult. 'Welcome the challenge' is one of our values. I think it's a value that can apply to many aspects of life."

When Chris ran for an open Town of Granby Board of Trustees position in 2020, he was focused on challenges facing young families in his community. Affordable housing is one of the primary issues, and since winning the election, he became a member of the Housing Committee. He is excited to see the Highway 40 Community Housing Project move past the design phase and into construction in the summer of 2024. It promises 258 deed-restricted units with a mix of single-family homes, townhomes, condos, and apartments.

"It's an important neighborhood that will provide much needed housing opportunities in Granby," he said.

Chris added that more funding opportunities are becoming available, which has been a beneficial bridge between his MPE work and housing and infrastructure goals for the Town of Granby. "We're at the start of a once-in-a-generation federal investment in energy infrastructure," Chris said. "Knowing what grants are out there and how those can be used for community housing has been beneficial."

MPE is thankful for all that Chris does in his role at the co-op and in his volunteer work for the community.



▲ A climber for nearly three decades, Chris Michalowski says the sport has shaped his life and taken him to incredible places, including the Italian Alps.



▲ An advocate for young families in Granby and Grand County, Chris Michalowski enjoys spending time with his family — his wife Maggie and their two daughters Kit and Quinn.



▲ Chris Michalowski prepares a young climber during an outing with Never Summer Senders, Grand County's youth climbing team.



◀ Anette Steiner of Walden opens her front door to greet Suze Kanak, who brings Steiner her monthly Smile Box. Photo by Aaron Street.

## Spreading Smiles Across Jackson County

Operation Round Up supports Smile Boxes for seniors

Jackson County is a wonderful place to live, as noted on the Jackson County Council on Aging (JCCOA) website. JCCOA also recognizes that many of its senior citizens may not be able to “live well” throughout their beautiful, rural county without the agency’s programs and services.

One of the services that hits home on the agency’s mission is the Smile Box program, made possible in part due to grant funding from Mountain Parks Electric’s Operation Round Up program.

Each month, a room full of fresh and seasonal fruit and vegetables, milk, bread, and locally produced eggs are distributed equally among 32 sturdy cardboard boxes. Volunteers headed by the spirited JCCOA “connector,” Suze Kanack, also add a few

“smile” items, such as a paper product or something for the sweet tooth — or both. A few boxes are custom-made to cater to the specific preferences of their recipients (i.e., “No green vegetables for me, please.”).

Suze and her volunteers load their personal vehicles and head out across Walden and the county to deliver boxes to their assigned elders. Each volunteer delivers to the same people each month, building relationships and connection beyond just a simple check-in.

“The Smile Boxes have been a way that we make sure that our people are doing okay. If there is a problem, our volunteers can let the center know. And what can we say about our volunteers: They are amazing 12 months a year,” Suze said.



▲ Suze M. Kanack (second from right) and her volunteer team celebrate after distributing groceries and other goodies into 32 boxes to be delivered to the senior citizens in the Jackson County Council on Aging’s Smile Box program. Pictured left to right: Kathy Richardson, Tiana Sigel, Terry Myers, Suze Kanack, and Debbie Haferman. Photo by Aaron Street.

Round Up, was the fruit of the labor of JCCOA’s new grant writer.

“She set out to find funding to help cover the gap. We are proud to say that Mountain Parks Electric was one of our first donors, and continues to be the largest donor for the last three years,” Suze explained.

She continued to seek funding from multiple sources, which allowed the program to expand from 20 to 32 participants.

To find out more about JCCOA’s programs, services, and volunteer/contribution opportunities, visit [jcco.net](http://jcco.net).

For more information about MPE’s Operation Round Up, to complete a short form to contribute to the program, or to apply for funding for an individual or an organization, visit [mpei.com/round-up](http://mpei.com/round-up).

BY LINDSAY MCCANN  
MEMBER SERVICE SPECIALIST

### Beware of Energy Vampires!

An *Energy Vampire* is a device that drains power and continues to use energy, even after it is turned off.

**You will save if you unplug these Energy Vampires:**

- Cellphone and laptop chargers
- Video game and entertainment consoles, players, and boxes
- Devices with clocks or standby lights

She added that at Christmastime, the boxes provide the people in the program with “a little break on their electric and gas bills as a Christmas present,” which has been made possible courtesy of funding from a local source.

Funding for the Smile Box program, including that from MPE’s Operation