

ALWAYS ON

At Cherryland Electric Cooperative, our number one goal and clearest mission is simply to ALWAYS keep the lights on. With more than 2800 miles of line overhead and underground combined with Northern Michigan weather, I believe everyone understands that 100% reliability at 32,000 plus homes and businesses may simply never happen. However, it will remain the goal toward which progress is measured in the form of the number 9.

On a monthly basis, we can consistently achieve a 99.99% reliability number which seems so tantalizingly close to the 100% goal. The climb gets much tougher as we try and get more 9s to the right of the decimal point. The third 9 is ranging anywhere from a 2 to an 8 right now. So, the goal becomes getting more 8s than 2s and one day achieving the third 9 and maintaining it. Then we will take a short deep breath with maybe a high five or two before settling in on the quest of 9 number four.

My best philosophical view of this quest lies in the quote: "These seemingly small fractions of a number are really the microcosm of our bigger purpose achieved through attention to detail over the broad brush of every employee's career." What the heck does that mean? Big goals are achieved over long periods of time only through taking care of the little things in great detail.

The little things occur in every department at your cooperative every day. Reports of blinking lights or trees that could cause potential problems come across the front counter or over the phone to the Member Services group. They perform the paperwork and follow up necessary to get the job into operations where it can get reviewed and taken care of before an outage occurs. If they don't take care of the details like pole location and meter number, the job may not get done or may be delayed before an outage is prevented.

Engineering employees design the jobs so they are done right in the first place. Pre-planning the route for the underground wire or overhead poles that will remain in place for more than 30 years can be a key component in future outages. The most direct route over the shortest distance may not always be the most reliable in the future. The engineering department also works on placement of fuses and breakers across the system necessary for reducing the size of outages when they do occur which also is important to achieving that next 9 to the right of the decimal point.

Warehouse employees get the proper parts together for each job. Without them, improper or missing materials could lead to poor construction which eventually will cut a 9 off the goal. They are also important in helping to determine the quality of the materials used. Cheap is not always better if it leads to more outages and reduced life cycles.

Operations employees put the poles and wires in the ground on a daily basis. Correct placement of the wire in the trench and tightening of hardware on the pole are small details that must be taken care of regularly in order to prevent an outage in the future. We have a dedicated crew that I believe takes the time to do the little things necessary to get a job done right and efficiently at the same time.

Maintenance of poles and wires already in place also occurs in the operations department. Replacing aging equipment before it fails and deciding to climb that pole to check the connections are additional examples of employees making the right choices to keep the lights on.

The meter department's task is to link up the distribution system to your home. Proper placement of the meter and inspection of the secondary service are again seemingly routine activities that go a long way towards improving and maintaining reliability. This area also performs the underground wire locates that prevent accidental dig-ins that can cause interruptions in power.

I would be remiss in not mentioning the managers and supervisors who oversee all these little details each hour of the day. They are charged with planning, prioritizing and following up on so many things it often reminds me of a juggling convention. "Always On" has even more meaning as none of them leaves the job at the end of the work day. Each person is readily available and willing to do whatever it takes after hours. "That's not my job" is something I never hear and that says it all.

Keeping the lights "always on" is certainly a big job made up of many more details than I have mentioned here. Our promise to each member is to continue to focus on these details reaching one 9 at a time.

