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FREESTATE ELECTRIC
COOPERATIVE, INC.

TheOutlet

FREESTATE ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE, INC.

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STAFF
Christopher Parr
CEO

OFFICE
1100 S.W. Auburn Road
Topeka, KS 66615
Monday-Thursday
7 a.m.-5:30 p.m.

NOTICE
As our GIS Audit continues, you may see people walking or riding ATVs along the right-of-way or easement areas to take pictures of our infrastructure.

FROM THE CEO

Navigating Change Together

Change is not as simple as closing one door and opening another.

Our offices have been familiar places for years. They are where you stopped to pay a bill, asked a question or talked with someone you knew. So when we make a change to something that familiar, we understand it can take some adjustment.

Over the past several months, FreeState has experienced a significant transition. We closed our McLouth member office at the end of May, and for the past 11 months, we operated from a temporary location in Topeka during construction. And now we are officially open at our newly renovated headquarters.

It has been a lot of change in a short period of time. For our members. And for our employees.

One thing I have learned about change is that managing it starts with remembering why you are making the change in the first place.

The five-phase facility project is not only about renovating office spaces. It is about preparing your cooperative for what comes next, whatever that might be.

Technology is changing. The electric grid and power distribution are becoming more complex. The expectations of our members and employees continue to evolve. We need facilities, technology, and workspaces that allow our employees to collaborate effectively and give us room to respond to those changes.

At the same time, some things should not change.

Our commitment to reliable electric service does not change. Our



Chris Parr

“Change gives us an opportunity to examine how we do things and ask whether there is a better way.”

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New Horizons: Same Skyline

A modernized FreeState is ready for the future

After months of construction, temporary offices, moving boxes and behind-the-scenes work, FreeState Electric Cooperative is back at its newly renovated Topeka headquarters.

On Oct. 5, the cooperative reopened its doors on Auburn Road. The reopening was an important step toward building more modern facilities and positioning FreeState for continued growth, opportunity and the changing needs of not only the members, but the employees too.

While members will notice a fresh look and a newer entrance, the project has always been about much more than appearances.

“We knew our facilities needed to evolve along with the cooperative,” said FreeState CEO Chris Parr. “This project gave us an opportunity to look at how we work today, what our employees and members need from us, and how we can prepare FreeState for what comes next.”



The visitor's entrance is now located north of the previous entrance. Press the round button in the center to connect with a member service representative, who will see you through the camera and greet you before unlocking the door.

BUILDING FOR WHAT COMES NEXT

FreeState's facilities in McLouth and Topeka have served the cooperative well for decades. But as technology, security needs, workforce demands and the electric industry have changed, the cooperative's buildings needed to change with them.

Rather than construct an entirely new building, FreeState chose to invest in existing facilities and work within the current footprint.

The skyline may look familiar from the outside, but inside, FreeState is building a more modern cooperative. One prepared for however the energy industry evolves so that we can continue to serve our members.

The approach allowed the cooperative to use the space it already owned more effectively while creating an environment designed for modern workflows, improved safety and long-term flexibility.

Over the past year, local contractors have transformed the Topeka location. Updates will begin in McLouth in the spring.

Warehouse space was reconfigured to make storing, loading and distributing materials more efficient. Administrative workspaces were redesigned to better accommodate teams and collaboration. Technology, security and accessibility improvements were incorporated throughout the building, and previously underused areas were repurposed to support cooperative operations.

The renovation also created a multipurpose space that can accommodate board meetings, employee training, and other cooperative activities. The result is a headquarters that better reflects how FreeState operates today while creating the capacity to adapt tomorrow.

“This is really about making sure FreeState is ready for growth and opportunity,” Parr said. “We want our facilities, technology and processes to support our employees so they can continue providing the level of service our members expect.”

MORE THAN AN OFFICE RENOVATION

Modernization at FreeState extends beyond new walls, workspaces or furniture.

It means looking at the cooperative as a whole and finding ways to operate

Once inside, you can conduct business directly with our member service representatives at the counter. If you have an appointment, you can check in using the kiosk to the right of the counter.



more efficiently, use technology more effectively, strengthen safety and security and make thoughtful investments that provide long-term value.

The renovated headquarters brings administrative employees together in one location, helping improve communication and collaboration across departments. At the same time, the McLouth facility is transitioning into an operations-focused center, providing field employees additional space for equipment, materials, and the work necessary to serve members throughout the eastern side of FreeState's territory.

FreeState's district line and right-of-way crews remain where they are so crews can continue responding quickly when members need them.

The combination allows each facility to serve a more defined purpose.

For members, many of the changes may happen behind



A large lobby display screen keeps members informed with up-to-date information before they enter, eliminating the need to search for printed notices on the door.

the scenes, but they ultimately support the same goal: making FreeState more efficient, resilient, and prepared to serve a growing and changing membership.

GETTING HERE TOOK A TEAM

For the past 10 months, employees adapted to temporary workspaces and new routines while the cooperative worked with local partners, including Kendall Construction and Topeka-based HTK Architects, to take the project from plans on paper to a functioning headquarters.

As the office may change, one thing remains constant. FreeState continues to look ahead for opportunities to improve how the cooperative operates.

The renovated headquarters provides

a foundation for that future.

The skyline may look familiar from the outside, but inside, FreeState is building a more modern cooperative. One prepared for however the energy industry evolves so that we can continue to serve our members.

ANNOUNCING A NEW STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP

Partnership will improve local material availability for the co-op, strengthen supply-chain resilience and support future growth

FreeState has developed a strategic partnership with **WESTERN UNITED ELECTRIC SUPPLY (WUES)** aimed at strengthening the cooperative's operational supply chain, improving access to critical materials when member-owners need them most.

The partnership goes beyond changing where FreeState purchases poles, transformers, wire and other electric utility materials. It creates a new approach to managing inventory that will bring materials closer to FreeState's system while building a long-term relationship with a cooperative-owned distributor.

"We aren't just changing suppliers," said Ryan Coates, FreeState's vice president of asset management and supply chain. "We're rethinking how FreeState manages materials from the ground up."

A major component of the partnership is a new warehouse facility planned just north of FreeState's current headquarters in Topeka. FreeState will own the facility, creating a long-term cooperative asset, while WUES will establish a local presence through a commercial lease arrangement.

Work on the project has started, with an anticipated completion date of June 2027.

The new commercial warehouse space will support not only FreeState, but other cooperatives and municipalities in Kansas. The partnership is unique because WUES, headquartered in Brighton, Colorado, is

a distributor utilizing the cooperative business model. The first of this type in the Sunflower State.

Having a local inventory strategy can provide quicker access to needed materials during storms and major outages, as well as during construction projects and periods of system growth. It can also help FreeState's operations and engineering teams plan projects and respond to changing system needs.

"We see this as a win for both FreeState and Western United," said Coates. "We are able to take advantage of our location here on the west side of Topeka and provide a place where Kansas electric cooperatives and municipalities will have access to a co-op-owned supplier much closer to home."

Coates added, "This partnership is about putting FreeState in greater control of our supply chain, because it is critical to reliability."

For FreeState, this is part of a broader effort to modernize cooperative operations, improve efficiency, and ensure the organization is positioned to meet the needs of member-owners well into the future.



Navigating Change Together *Continued from page 12A* ▶

responsibility to use your cooperative's resources wisely does not change. And our commitment to being accessible and responsive to our members does not change.

How we provide that service may look different.

Members have more ways than ever to conduct business with FreeState. We have online tools, by phone, through the SmartHub mobile app, by mail, using VanillaDirect at participating retailers and, of course, in person at our Auburn Road headquarters. Modernizing the cooperative means making sure those options work together so members can choose what works best for them.

There is also something valuable about change that we sometimes overlook. Change gives us an opportunity to examine how we do things and ask whether there is a better way.

That is what we have tried to do over the past year.

We have looked beyond where FreeState is today and considered what the cooperative may need five, 10 or even 20 years from now. We have worked to create a headquarters that supports our employees and gives us greater flexibility as our membership and communities change.

I want to thank our members for their patience throughout the construction and transition. Temporary offices, changing locations and new routines are not always convenient, and we appreciate your willingness to navigate those changes with us.

A renovated building may be the most visible part of this project, but it represents something much bigger. It represents a cooperative that is willing to adapt while staying grounded in the principles that have always guided us.

Our purpose remains the same: Serving you, our members, and preparing FreeState to continue doing that for generations to come.



Why every step matters near a downed power line

When a downed power line touches the ground, electricity can spread out like ripples on a pond.

If your feet touch two different voltage levels, electricity can move through your body.

That is step potential, and it can be deadly.

IF YOU SEE A DOWNED POWER LINE:

- ▶ **STOP.** Keep yourself and others at least 50 feet away.
- ▶ **CALL 911.** Report it and wait for help.
- ▶ **NEVER TOUCH THE LINE** or anything it touches, including fences, vehicles, trees, equipment or people.

IF YOU ARE NEAR A DOWNED LINE, DO NOT WALK OR RUN AWAY:

- ▶ **SHUFFLE TO SAFETY.** Keep feet close together and on the ground.
- ▶ **HOP AWAY.** Keep feet together; hop and land together.

Downed lines can be silent, still and deadly. Stay away and call 911.

SOURCE: WWW.SAFEELECTRICITY.ORG

