



A Touchstone Energy[®]
Cooperative 

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A Special Message from the CEO

I'm sure you all will agree that the last several weeks have been interesting, unsettling and at times challenging and tragic. I've never seen anything like it during my 32 years in the electric utility business, or more generally, in my lifetime on this planet. There has been plenty of heartache and sorrow for multitudes of Americans whose family members were struck down by the virus. Unfortunately, the death toll continues to rise as I write this piece.

I've felt it in my family, too. My wife's stepfather, Pastor Jerry Ashley, passed away from causes unrelated to the coronavirus, but the aftermath of his death was disrupted by the health crisis we are all facing at this time. Like so many other families with a loved one that has passed away in recent weeks, my wife, her mother and the rest of us were unable to say our proper goodbyes and achieve some sort of closure by going through the traditional rites of passage - visitation at the funeral home, a memorial service, and a final goodbye. All of these things will happen at some point, but for now we are on a waiting list. A waiting list. Just three months ago who would have imagined something like this could happen?

I know some of you may have your own sorrowful stories. If so, please take solace in knowing that there are people out there that understand and care. I know because I run into them all the time.

Moving on to the business of the cooperative, on March 19 we closed our lobbies and campuses to the public with a tentative reopening date of May 11. Closing the doors was not an easy decision to make, and I appreciate all of our members for understanding that as an essential business with the responsibility to keep the lights on, we had to make some significant and sudden changes to protect our employees, our members and the general public.

Closing our lobbies and implementing social distancing and other protective measures and practices designed to keep everyone safe was fairly simple from an operational standpoint. Opening back up is going to be much more challenging. How do we do it safely? That's a question that is always on my mind.

After closely monitoring our governor's reopening discussions and ultimate guidelines, and following suit with other businesses, we postponed our public reopen date. We made this decision because,

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after careful consideration, we decided the best way to safely reopen would be to do so in small incremental steps. Phases 1 and 2 focus on bringing employees back to the office who have been working at home and restructuring our public facing spaces to keep both employees and members healthy. Phase 1 was launched on May 18. As I write this, Phase 2 is currently planned for June 1 but may change due to health conditions related to the pandemic. Phase 3, the opening of our lobbies to the public, will take place sometime later in June. The exact date is unknown at this time. Again, we will monitor the pandemic and make a final decision at the right time.

Visiting CHELCO's lobbies will be different from what you remember. The number of people in our lobbies will be limited and social distancing will be required. Additionally, our in-home visits will be limited to essential services only for the immediate future. You may notice our linemen traveling together will continue to wear masks. They also have worksite signs asking members to stay 6 feet back for everyone's protection.

Our area's economy greatly depends on tourism and retail businesses, and these industries came to a screeching halt in the past couple months. We know our members may be facing financial challenges, and we understand you may have trouble paying the electric bill during this critical time. We are here to help. Please call the office to discuss payment options.

While our offices will be open for business, members are still strongly encouraged to continue to utilize our alternative methods of payment. As during the crisis, our online portal, CHELCO Connect App, kiosks, drop boxes, automatic bank draft, phone and mail-in payments are still available to members.

Just like all life-altering events, this pandemic has changed us as human beings and has changed our company. We will likely look back and find some of the changes were actually for the better. We are not out of the woods yet, but it feels like we may be headed in the right direction. Let's hope so.

Stay safe out there!



Steve Rhodes, CEO

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