

Rachel Johnson ([00:01](#)):

Welcome to co-op energy talk. I'm your host, Rachel Johnson, the member relations manager here at cherry land electric cooperative. And you are listening to the very first episode of our new meet, the board series cherry land. Like all cooperatives is governed by a board of directors who are elected by our membership. That board oversees the major decisions that impact the way cherry land operates and ultimately impacts the service we offer to our membership. This series is designed to help you get to know the people, making those decisions, but also learn a little bit more about them as human beings and not just as leaders at the co-op. So we're kicking things off with our newest board member, Valerie handy. Thank you for joining me today, Val.

Valarie Handy ([00:40](#)):

Hi!

Rachel Johnson ([00:42](#)):

For our listeners, why don't you tell us a little bit about yourself and how long you've been on Cherryland's board?

Valarie Handy ([00:45](#)):

So I've been on cherry lands board for, uh, about a month now. Uh, I just, we just finished up a, our, my very first, uh, board meeting, so that's exciting. Mm-hmm <affirmative> um, and I came to the board through the emerging leaders program. Um, I did the emerging leaders program a couple years ago, and I've been waiting for a board seat to kind of open up and, and be available and, um, one came available. So,

Rachel Johnson ([01:14](#)):

And for, and for those of you who are listening our emerging leaders program as a program, we started several years ago, just to help introduce more people who are active out in the community to cherry lands board as a way where they might, um, serve the community through the co-op. So what, what kind of led you to decide cherry land was cherry land's board was something you wanted to do?

Valarie Handy ([01:33](#)):

Uh, well, it was actually the co-op model, um, more than anything. So by going through the emerging leaders program, it was, it was very interesting cuz I learned more about the co-op model and I've known a little bit about it, uh, over the years and through my, my day job with us department of agriculture. Um, and so I've heard of it before, but with the emerging leaders program, I was able to learn a little bit more about, um, how we serve our members and I, we are here and, um, it's actually led me to be, to be a part of multiple co-ops in the community. So, um,

Rachel Johnson ([02:12](#)):

I feel like a little co-op angel just got its wings, right? <laugh> like, I mean, that's, that's the thing. And, and, and we, we know because we work here and I know like I love co-ops and I love how it guides all our decision making that we make decision, not for profits, but for people. Right. But it is something that for a lot of people they've, they've never been a part of a co or if they have, they don't know they've been a part of a co-op <affirmative>. And so it's exciting that that you've found that. So tell us a little bit

more about your community involvement and any other projects and groups you're involved in that you're particularly proud of.

Valarie Handy ([02:39](#)):

Yeah, so, uh, at different points in my life, I've, uh, done all sorts of different volunteering. Uh, you know, I kind of started out right after college, uh, volunteering with the traverse city, young professionals. And, uh, I was the chair of that program for a couple years. Um, these days I'm working with, uh, common grounds cooperative. Um, and so that's another organization that, you know, it's member based and we are there to serve the members and to make a difference in the community that we serve. Um, so, you know, people have gotten to know me all around town. I work for the city of traverse city for elections and, uh, worked at the Denis museum for a while and all sorts of different volunteer

Rachel Johnson ([03:22](#)):

Things. So you're kind of a serial volunteer. I remember when we were recruiting for emerging leaders and I was asking people who should we ask people kept saying, well, do you know vow handy? Do you know Val Handy? You should ask Val, you should ask Val. So for what it's worth. Um, so as an active community member, how do you think the co-op can better serve our community? What role will you play in that as a board member?

Valarie Handy ([03:42](#)):

So I think that the co-op can serve the community by reminding the community that they're the ones that make up the co-op. Um, you know, it might sound a little simplified, but, um, I don't know that that everybody understands how important is to be a part of something that is literally democratically run. And, you know, one, one member gets one vote every year to figure out who's gonna be on the board and, and to put that foot forwards. And, um, that's how it's run. And that's how it's organized, mean it's democracy at its best and at its most pure form because we're all coming together to do something that's important to the community. In this instance, it's, you know, keeping the lights on and, and running people's electricity. Um, so that's a really important thing to do. Mm-hmm

Rachel Johnson ([04:38](#)):

<affirmative> and to your point, I think that membership comes with a responsibility and that responsibility is to be engaged and to vote in elections and take that seriously. One thing I think is cool about your story is the ways that, you know, what your relationship here at Cherryland and and the things you're doing here have led you to be interested in supporting other co-ops in the community. So again, just reiterating the value of that governance model and, um, it means to put power in the hands of the people mm-hmm <affirmative>. So, uh, since you haven't been on the board for all that long, I'm not gonna ask you to detail all of the various work that you've done, but I, I, I am hoping that before we wrap up, you can maybe tell us a little something about yourself that most people don't know about you or a fun fact for, for our listeners.

Valarie Handy ([05:17](#)):

Uh, well, I mentioned that I volunteer a lot in the community. My past few I, um, vacations have actually been based around volunteering. Um, I went to Southern France and, and did a volunteer gig there and, uh, to San Diego a couple times to volunteer with, uh, San Diego Comicon. Um, so that's a little bit of my nerd showing itself. <laugh>

Rachel Johnson ([05:40](#)):

I I'm, I'm apparently volunteering in all the wrong places. Like when I volunteer, I go to downtown traverse city. So yeah, I need, I need to take a, I need to take a hard look at my volunteer <laugh> uh, so thank you for, for joining us, especially, you know, just so new to the board and taking the time to do this again for our listeners, that was Valerie handy. She is the, uh, newly appointed director for Benzie, Manistee and Wexford counties and connecting with the community. And our membership is just really important to us as, as Val and I talked about, and we hope that this new series, this new podcast series will help you get to know the men and women who serve on our board, not only as co-op leadership, but as your neighbors and fellow community members who are helping to make this place a better place to live. So thank you for listening again. I'm Rachel Johnson, the member relations manager here at tray land electric cooperative, and we hope you will join us next time for more co-op energy talk.