



Southern Minnesota Energy Cooperative wins the national 'Cooperative Purpose Award'

The National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA) presented Southern Minnesota Energy Cooperative (SMEC) the "Cooperative Purpose Award" March 1; this award recognizes their outstanding contribution to improving the quality of life and the purpose of the cooperatives in their area.

Your electric cooperative is one of the 12 electric cooperatives recognized with this award. In 2013 the Southern Minnesota Energy Cooperative (SMEC) was formed by 12 electric distribution cooperatives to be the single point of contact for the purchase of Minnesota electric service territory from Alliant Energy. SMEC engaged their local community and business leaders through a grassroots campaign to educate them on the cooperative advantage. In 2015 SMEC's vision became reality as the cooperative welcomed more than 43,000 new consumer-members into the cooperatives' service area.

"The 12 cooperatives of SMEC perfectly exemplify the sixth cooperative principle — cooperation among cooperatives," said Mel Coleman, NRECA President. "I applaud SMEC for their perseverance, leadership and concern for community."

NRECA recognized the 12 SMEC co-ops with a plaque:

- BENCO Electric
- Brown County Rural Electrical Association (BCREA)
- Federated Rural Electric
- Freeborn-Mower Cooperative Services
- MiEnergy Cooperative
- Minnesota Valley Electric Cooperative
- Nobles Cooperative Electric
- People's Energy Cooperative
- Redwood Electric Cooperative



And the award goes to...your local electric cooperative! Brian Krambeer, SMEC president, accepted the award on behalf of the 12 co-ops.

- Sioux Valley Energy
- South Central Electric
- Steele-Waseca Cooperative Electric

"All of our co-op members won with this award," added Mike Heide-mann, BCREA CEO. "These newest members are now member-owners of their electric cooperative, reaping the rewards of a profitable year through capital credits and voting at annual meetings to have fellow members represent their interests. Plus, our existing members win, as we have a larger base to spread our fixed costs." BCREA added 370 members from the towns of Hanska and Comfrey.

"This award recognizes on a national level all of our employees and directors who worked so hard to take this from an idea to reality," stated Scott Reimer, Federated's general manager. Federated gained 1,700 members in the towns of Heron Lake, Okabena, Granada, Sherburn and Northrop.

More than 5,500 representatives from electric co-ops across the nation attended NRECA's Annual Meeting celebrating its 75th Anniversary. The meeting occurred February 23 through March 1 in San Diego and sets NRECA's legislative and organizational agenda for 2017. Co-op representatives also heard from NRECA officials, key public figures and business experts about issues affecting electric cooperatives and their consumer members. The Annual Meeting is held in conjunction with TechAdvantage, a technology learning event and expo that featured more than 280 exhibitors showcasing their state-of-the-art technologies, equipment and services.

The National Rural Electric Cooperative Association is the national organization that represents more than 900 not-for-profit, consumer-owned electric cooperatives, which provide service to 42 million people in 47 states. 

At A Glance



Brown County
Rural Electrical
Association

Join us for Brown County REA's 80th Annual Meeting. It will be held April 6 at the Civic Center in New Ulm. More details on Page 4. Learn about your cooperative and vote for directors. Director bios are show on Page 5. All members are encouraged to attend.

This publication focuses on cooperative savings, programs and events. As this is the official member publication, member's story ideas, letters-to-the-editor and comments are welcomed.

Andrea Christoffer, CCC, Editor

"Owned by those it serves"

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Energy Wise

See & eye C&I co-op rebates for energy \$aving\$

"A dollar saved is a dollar earned."

This updated quote describes your electric cooperative's Commercial and Industrial (C&I) Program; it helps farmers and business owners receive rebates to improve the energy efficiency of their operations. Lighting is one of the more common ways members take advantage of the program.

Retrofit lighting

A ratio of high wattage "old" lights and low wattage "new" lights will maximize your rebate. Your co-op must show kilowatt-hour (kWh) savings for every rebate they give out ranging from two to three times the savings. A retrofit project changing 420-watt high bay to 80-watt LEDs is one example. Ask a lighting vendor or your electrician to do a lighting assessment so you have the desired footcandles or lumen output for your building. A note of caution...replacing CFLs with household screw-in LEDs is not likely eligible for a rebate as very little energy savings exist.

New construction lighting

If you are constructing a new building, choose a lighting system that will operate for many years. LEDs offer a longer life span than fluorescent bulbs.

Ground source heat pump

Heating and cooling your commercial property with a ground source heat pump qualifies for a rebate. Ground source heat pumps have a higher initial cost than other cooling/heating systems, but their efficiency is unmatched, leading to a realistic payback period.

Retrofit motors & VFDs

If your electric motor is working properly, you may not need to consider retrofitting. An upgrade in efficiency may not provide enough kWh savings for your cooperative to report, meaning



Love your LED lighting in a new shop! Plus, the co-op lighting rebates help you save money for new construction or retrofit lighting. Visit with the co-op's energy expert or the cooperative's website for more rebate information.

rebate totals will be minimal. However, if an electric motor is on the verge of failing, your local cooperative provides incentives for purchasing a new premium-efficiency motor to replace it.

Variable-frequency drive (VFD) motors help regulate the startup and flow of electricity by monitoring the revolutions per minute (RPM). VFDs are like a soft-start motor, which yields demand and kWh savings.

Other energy-efficient purchases

Inquire about other ag efficiency rebates for dairy and pork improvements, such as dairy plate cooler or Microzone lamp controllers. While these units are a little more rare or specific to a certain job, each one can provide the member with energy savings and a rebate from the cooperative.

Visit with your cooperative's energy expert before starting your project with any questions! Find the cooperative's rebate information on our website, e-mail or call to request it. ☎

Energy Tips

LED lighting: purchasing & rebating

1. When purchasing commercial LEDs, make sure you buy ones that are "DLC" listed or Energy Star rated. Otherwise, they are not eligible for the co-op rebates.

2. LED lamps that replace stripped out fluorescent fixtures, which are hard-wired directly, will count as individual "lamp" rebates — not as a "fixture" rebate.

3. By adding an automatic control to your lights you can save energy, as well as the lifespan of the light itself. These controls can be fixture, ceiling or wall mounted. They may qualify for a rebate too!

4. Light color is measured on the Kelvin (K) temperature scale. Lower Kelvin numbers (2700 K) means more yellow light; the higher the Kelvin (5000 K) the whiter the light. ☎

Outlet with a built-in nightlight is a snap!

Do you like a night light, but hate how it often takes up a whole outlet? A new option is a snap!

The SnapPower Guidelight is a plug-and-play replacement for standard plug-in night lights and hardwired lights. It installs within seconds and requires no wires or batteries. Just play it safe and shut off the power to the outlet before installing it. SnapPower looks like a standard outlet cover plate (faceplate) by day with beautiful LEDs that provide ambient lighting at night. However, these guidelights are not compatible with ground fault circuit (GFCI) outlets so do not use near water in bathrooms or kitchens.

The night light automatically turns on and off due to the outlet's lighting sensor.



Turn an outlet into a nightlight with the SnapPower Guidelight. It provides light and keeps the outlet free for other electrical devices.

The best feature of all...it does not take up both outlets!

Choose from two outlet models: the duplex as shown or the square decor model. Plus, choose from three colors: ivory, white or light almond.

The LEDs cast a warm white light of 4,000 Kelvin (not the bluish tint).

Keep in mind that the desired outlet must have screws on the center and sides in order to conduct the electricity. The cover contains small tabs on the inside of the SnapPower outlet cover that make contact to your electrical outlet's side screws. Visit www.SnapPower.com to see more install photos.

The SnapPower Guidelight is available on Amazon.com for approximately \$17, plus shipping. Now "snap" to it for better LED lighting! 

Safety

GFCI vs AFCI...in the battle between the outlets who wins? Depends on your needs

The world of electricity is filled with acronyms and abbreviations – CFL (compact fluorescent light), kW (kilowatt), AC (alternating current) are a few. Add GFCI (ground fault circuit interrupters) and AFCI (arc fault circuit interrupters) to your electrical abbreviations knowledge base. They both help protect your outlets from electrical accidents.

GFCI help prevent burns, electric shocks and electrocution. A GFCI has sensors that measure the current going in and out. Normally, the current is balanced. However, if the current is out of balance, something is wrong. The electric current has made contact with a human or somewhere else it should not be. The GFCI senses this and instantly shuts down the circuit, stopping the flow of electricity. Since water is an electric conductor, GFCIs are important in areas where water and electricity could meet, such as



Which is which? An arc fault circuit interrupter (AFCI) (left) is often installed at the breaker to prevent fires. A ground fault circuit interrupter (right) is often installed at the outlet to prevent shocks. The AFCI on the left also does GFCI protection.

left), while a GFCI outlet costs about \$10-\$15. Both AFCI and GFCI are required in certain areas by the National Electric Code for new construction or remodeling. 

— Information courtesy of safeelectricity.org

bathrooms, kitchens, laundry rooms and garages.

An AFCI helps prevent electric fires. Electricity can leak out of damaged or decaying wires and start a fire. These fires spread quickly in the wiring behind walls. Electric fires cause more damage than other types of fire and are twice as deadly. AFCIs sense that electricity is leaking from the electric system and shut electricity off before overheating happens.

GFCIs prevent shocks, while AFCIs prevent fires. Both should be installed by a qualified electrician to make your home safer. An AFCI costs about \$50-\$60 at the hardware store and may also include GFCI (pictured

Brown County Briefs

Member Advisory Council

The first meeting of the new Member Advisory Council will be Monday, April 17 at 7:30 p.m. in the BCREA auditorium.

Interested in learning more about your co-op and getting an inside look at the operation? Each year, directors in each REA district seek members to serve one year on the Member Advisory Council. The council meets three evenings during the year, typically in April following the Annual Meeting, September and January the following year. Contact the Director for your District or the REA office to learn more.

Energy tip of the Month

Warmer weather is on the way! Use energy-efficient window treatments or coverings, like blinds, shades and films, to reduce heat gain in your home. These devices not only improve the look of your home, but also reduce energy costs.

Call for appointment

Appointment times are still available for Community Health Day, Saturday, March 18, 6:30-9:30 a.m. at the Sleepy Eye Public School. Screenings for the Blood Analysis requires a 12-hour fast (cholesterol, HDL/LDL, calcium, glucose, etc.): \$40. Thyroid Stimulating Hormone (TSH) Screening: \$30. Free blood pressure checks also available. Call BCREA at 800-658-2368 or 794-3331 during regular business hours to schedule an appointment. The event is co-sponsored by Sleepy Eye Medical Center, Sleepy Eye Community Education, Brown County Public Health and BCREA. Walk-ins are accepted 7:30-9:30. 

Official Notice of Annual Meeting

All members of Brown County Rural Electrical Association are hereby notified of the 80th Annual Meeting.

When: Thursday, April 6, 2017

Location: Civic Center, South Arena, New Ulm

Registration: 4:30 p.m.

Meal: 5:30 p.m.

Meeting immediately following meal



Agenda includes 2016 review, financial report and election of directors in District 2, 3 and 8. All members encouraged to attend.

— James Hanson, Secretary

Protect yourself from utility customer scams



Though BCREA is unaware of incidents in the local area, other utilities in Minnesota had reports of scams targeting utility customers. We want you to know the facts to protect yourself and your personal and financial information from scams.

- Brown County REA will not require payment of your bill within an hour or less to avoid service disconnection. A member with a past due account will receive a reminder notice of past due balance, disconnect notice, if payment is not received, and courtesy phone calls prior to service disconnection.

- BCREA will not instruct you to purchase a prepaid debit or credit card to make payment to avoid disconnection. You can pay your electric bill with a check, cash, online or automatic payment from a checking or savings account, or with a credit or debit card.

- Know which utility providers serve you. Our name is Brown County Rural Electrical Association, but we may refer to ourselves as Brown County

REA. The secure website to pay online is www.browncountyrea.coop. Do not search the co-op's name and provide account or payment information to any other site.

- When in doubt, hang up the phone and call Brown County REA at 800-658-2368 or 507-794-3331. 

DAYLIGHT SAVING TIME

Don't forget to spring forward on **March 12!**
Set your clocks ahead by one hour.



Vote for director candidates

District 2



Brad Sprenger

Born and raised in Brown County and Mulligan Township, Brad Sprenger has a 70-cow beef herd, feeds out calves and grows corn, soybeans, sweet corn, peas and alfalfa on 550 acres of crop land. He also works for Leavenworth Silage Company during sweet corn harvest.

Brad and his wife, Julie, have four grown children; daughter, Melissa, and sons, Chad, Scott and Michael. They also have two granddaughters and four grandsons.

In addition to serving on the BCREA board the past 12 years, Brad is a member of Knights of Columbus and church farm board.

"I am proud to serve on the board and feel we have a strong co-op with excellent management and linemen to keep our electricity on all the time," Brad said. (U)

* Director candidates arranged in alphabetic order

District 3



Tom Byro

A life-long resident of Linden Township, Tom Byro grew up on a dairy farm and now crop farms and finishes 6,000 hogs per year. He is a graduate of Madelia High School and attended the University of Minnesota, Waseca. He spent his career working as a yardmaster

for Union Pacific Railroad in Mankato, retiring two years ago.

Tom and his wife Ellen, have a son, Erik, and daughter, Sydney.

Tom said he has time to commit to serving on the board now that he is retired. He is concerned with keeping the cost of electricity affordable and making sure the equipment is in good order and ready to go when needed. (U)



Allen Hanson

Allen Hanson lives on the farm where he grew up in Linden Township near Hanska. He is the father of three grown daughters: Sarah, Natalie and Tiffany.

Allen graduated from New Ulm Public High School and earned a degree in accounting from Mankato State University. Allen is a CPA, with an office in New Ulm. In his work Allen does agricultural business consulting on ag compliance issues.

Allen served on the Operation Round Up Trust Board and is the present District 3 Director on the Brown County REA Board. If re-elected, Allen wants to make sure that electric energy remains at an affordable price and that the rural infrastructure remains in good shape. (U)

District 8



Reuben Kokesch

Reuben and his wife, Kathy, live on a farm Northwest of St. George. They have retired from farming and now rent out their land.

They have four grown children, all gone from home: Julie, Cindy, Heather and Rick.

Reuben began farming after graduating from Cathedral High School in New Ulm. He has served on the West Newton Township Board and has been a Director on the Brown County REA Board for the past 15 years.

He also represents Brown County REA on the Great River Energy Board of Directors. (U)



Allen Lamm

One of four sons raised on a small dairy farm in Ottertail County, Allen Lamm graduated from Pelican Rapids High School. He took two years of college courses in industrial water treatment, electric generation, mathematics and management, leading to his 40-year career in

municipal/community water supply operation. He retired from New Ulm Public Utilities.

Allen and his wife, Susan, are parents of daughters; Reya Forstner and Tana Lamm, and have three grandchildren.

"Since their inception, rural electric cooperatives have had a direct positive impact on the quality of life of rural residents," Allen said. "I have a strong interest in guarding and maintaining that quality of life. The experience and knowledge I gained through service to, and as an elected official of other governance boards, would benefit the members and the operation of the BCREA." (U)

Co-ops meet with state legislators



BCREA visited St. Paul legislators. Representative Paul Torkelson visited with BCREA CEO Mike Heidemann.



The Federated Rural Electric delegation visited with Representative Bob Gunther (back row, second from right). Front: Directors Darvin Voss, Scott Thiesse and Bruce Brockmann. Back: General Manager Scott Reimer, David A. Hansen, Gunther and David Meschke.

Power comes from the people!

More than 200 electric cooperative directors and managers visited their state legislators February 14. The cooperatives educated their legislators on relevant legislation.

The major bill involves local democracy. Electric cooperatives' directors are elected at the annual meeting to represent their members, which includes setting rates. A Minnesota statute unnecessarily allows some local decisions to be regulated again by Minnesota Public Utilities Commission (PUC). Since the PUC cannot set cooperative rates and follows the same law as the cooperative's regulatory Board of Directors, the duplicated process adds no value, just expense, to the members.

Electric cooperatives introduced language this year to clarify this process. It also includes language outlining mediation by an independent third party and continues limited PUC oversight to verify the methodology with a grid-access

charge for wind and solar projects. This bill passed the House with 89 in favor and 37 opposed. Electric co-ops thank Rep. Glen Gruenhagen, Bob Gunther, Rod Hamilton, Clark Johnson and Paul Torkelson for their support.

As of February 28, this bill was slated for Senate committee hearings and hopefully a vote. "We thank southern Minnesota Senator Bill Weber for authoring this bill," stated Federated General Manager Scott Reimer, "along with Senator Julie Rosen as a co-author." The bill awaits a hearing with the Senate Finance.

BCREA also visited with Senators Nick Frenz and Gary Dahms.

"Electric co-ops also visited with our legislators about distributed generation, stray voltage and energy efficiency," added Brown County REA CEO Mike Heidemann. 

According to Energy Star, more than 41 million water heaters in the U.S. are over 10 years old and risking failure...

Call your electric co-op for your next water heater



- Limited lifetime warranty against leaks for original owner
- Stainless steel tank
- Energy-efficient
- Heavy-duty insulation
- No anode rod!
- About a half-priced water heater due to co-op's free radio control
- Made in the USA



Onion recipes so good, you'll cry! Send us your best ones!

How do you like your onions — as rings or in soup? Do you give egg salad some zing? Add it to salsa, relish or hamburgers? Onions work for a lot of different things! Send us your onion recipes by March 23 to: Editor, Federated Rural Electric, PO Box 69, Jackson MN 56143-0069 or e-mail to christoffer@federatedrea.coop. Add your name and phone number. Thanks for sharing with us! ☺

Loaded Cauliflower by Pattie Edlund, Winthrop

1 large head cauliflower cut into bite-size pieces (approximately 6 c.)
 6-8 strips bacon, cooked and crumbled ½ c. sour cream
 6 T. chopped chives 2 c. Colby Jack or cheddar
 8 oz. fresh whole mushrooms, sliced ½ c. mayo

Preheat oven to 425°. Boil cauliflower 8-10 minutes, drain and cool. In a large bowl combine the sour cream, mayo, half the bacon, 3 T. chives, 1 c. shredded cheese, mushrooms and cauliflower; mix well. Place in a 9x13" baking dish sprayed with Pam; cover with remaining cheese and bacon. Bake 15-20 minutes until cheese melts. Top with remaining 3 T. chives. Serve. ☺

Cauliflower Salad by Jo Hartke, Sherburn

1 head lettuce, chopped 1 c. sliced carrots
 1 sweet onion, cut up in thin rings 1 head cauliflower, cut in small pieces
 crumbled bacon 2 c. croutons

Dressing: ¼ c. sugar 2 c. mayonnaise 1/3 c. Parmesan cheese

Toss salad ingredients, except croutons. Add croutons and dressing just before serving. Mix well. ☺

Cauliflower Salad by Cindy Erickson, Jackson

2 c. thinly sliced cauliflower
 ½ c. ripe olives, sliced
 ½ c. chopped green pepper
 ¼ c. pimento
 3 T. onion, chopped

Dressing: 1½ T. lemon juice
 4½ T. salad oil
 1½ T. wine vinegar
 1 tsp. salt
 dash pepper

Mix all of the ingredients together. Marinate for three to four hours. Keeps well. ☺

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Contact Gopher State One Call before doing any digging more than 12-inches deep — 48 hours before digging for foundations, trees, tilting and more. You can also register at www.gopherstateonecall.org.

Call a licensed electrician to locate the underground lines on your side of the meter. ☺



Brown County Rural Electrical Association

Brown County Rural Electric Assn.
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Sleepy Eye MN 56085

E-mail address: bcrea@bcrea.coop

Website: www.browncountyrea.coop

Phone: 507-794-3331 or 800-658-2368

Office hours: 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday-Friday

Wade Hensel, General Manager

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James Mickelson, President — 794-6298

William Berg, Vice President — 354-4895

James D. Hanson, Sec.-Treasurer — 829-6756

Brad Sprenger — 877-2633

Allen Hanson — 276-0691

Thomas Hayes — 228-8954

Reuben Kokesch — 359-2112

Greg Mages — 794-3540

Joel Christensen — 828-4550

The Board of Directors meets the last Thursday of each month.

Board meeting highlights

The Brown County REA Board of Directors held its monthly meeting February 23 at the Brown County REA headquarters in Sleepy Eye. Discussion and/or action were taken on the following agenda items:

- Reviewed plans for the 80th Annual Meeting to be held Thursday, April 6, at the New Ulm Civic Center, south arena.
- Reviewed and approved the 2016 outage summary report. Members experienced an average of 62 minutes outage time during the year.
- Approved and signed contracts with Western Area Power Association (WAPA) for hydropower purchases through 2050.
- Reviewed recent safety meetings and trainings attended by linemen and operations staff.
- Discussed the 2016 financial audit conducted in early February. CliftonLarson-Allen will present results at the March 30 board meeting.
- Updated on progress with line patrol and maintenance tasks.

The next meeting will be March 30 at the BENCO office in Mankato. ☎



Mike Heidemann
Chief Executive
Officer

Staff notes

The importance of member engagement

In 2012 the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA), which represents 900 electric cooperatives in 47 states, released a report titled, “The Electric Cooperative Purpose — A Compass for the 21st Century.”

The findings of the task force comprised of a dozen co-op leaders from across the country were that an electric cooperative’s purpose is

to “Power communities and empower members to improve the quality of their lives.”

Brown County REA is a member of NRECA and firmly believes that you, our members, need to be at the heart of everything we do. We are proud of the fact that we are different from investor-owned utilities, where the primary purpose is to generate profit for their stockholders. Many of those stockholders don’t live in the communities served by the utility. While Brown County REA must, of course, generate enough revenue to cover our costs, profit is not our primary motive. Serving you and your neighbors is our number one priority.

As the Electric Cooperative Purpose report noted, “Our story is about ordinary people that banded together to improve the quality of life by providing electricity to our community when no one else would do it.”

As Brown County REA observes its 80th year serving members’ electricity needs, we look ahead and once again need your active participation in determining the future of our co-op. Cooperatives enjoy the support of people from all walks of life. Co-ops can be found in the most rural to the most urban areas.

Brown County REA welcomes your input on what we can do to ensure we are meeting your needs. We encourage you to attend the Annual Meeting April 6 at the Civic Center in New Ulm, volunteer to serve on the Member Advisory Council or Round Up Trust Board. Plus, members can always call or stop for a visit.

One thing you can absolutely count on from your locally owned electric co-op: We will always be local — right here and ready to serve you, our members. ☎



Retirement Open House

Join us for an open house honoring retiring General Manager Wade Hensel. It will be held Friday, April 28, from 2-4 p.m. at the Brown County REA Auditorium. ☎