

Connections

September 2018

For the member-owners of Brown County REA



Volume 22, Issue 9

Co-ops Vote — let your voice be heard

In 2016 rural America played a big part in our national elections — 500,000 MORE rural voters went to the polls than in 2012. This is an incredible story, as many in small towns and communities across our country went to the polls to ensure their voices were heard. The elected officials took notice. However, elections matter EVERY year.

2018 will be no different; electric cooperatives and their members have the opportunity to play a vital role in encouraging rural voter turnout and engaging on issues that matter most to us. This year let's build on the momentum started in 2016 to join with 42 million members of electric cooperatives around the country; let's remind our elected officials that rural issues matter. Be sure you vote in November.

Electric cooperatives are not-for-profit energy providers that are owned by the members they serve. Electric co-op members are used to voting on the directors who represent members on the local cooperative's board. Nationally, electric co-ops provide coverage for 88 percent of our nation's counties. They are a foundation in their communities and their members make a difference with their voices on issues like rural infrastructure and broadband, plus maintaining access to affordable, reliable electricity. This means that you, a cooperative member and citizen, should vote this fall!

To ensure that all electric co-op members continue the drumbeat that started in 2016, the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA) will continue the Co-ops Vote program. This is a non-partisan initiative that remains

CO-OPS VOTE 2016 RURAL TURNOUT



RURAL VOTE vs. URBAN VOTE

This data demonstrates where rural counties had a higher voter percentage turnout in 2016 than their urban and suburban counterparts.



quite simple at its core: to ensure that members are registered to vote and they go to the polls for every election to ensure rural issues remain part of the national discussion.

Your electric cooperative encourages co-op members to continue sending a resounding message that all candidates — at all levels — will need to put rural America's concerns front and center in order to earn our vote. We proved in 2016 that with millions of electric co-op members speaking out with one voice, we can have a major impact in making our top issues part of the national conversation.

We encourage everyone, regardless of their political beliefs, to join America's electric cooperatives in this national effort. Let's continue to stand up for the priorities of the rural electric co-op community — it's more important now than ever. Learn more at www.vote.coop.

At A Glance



Brown County
Rural Electrical
Association

Adding electric load this fall?

If you plan to install, modify or replace electric equipment at your home, business or farm, please contact BCREA with details before work begins. You can reach us at 800-650-2368. Thank you.

Energy Wise

Do your research; choosing the right appliance from the start can reduce your energy bills

Your energy use varies month to month so it can be difficult to see how much difference an appliance purchase makes. It's best to view the purchase over the lifetime of the equipment. In a *Consumer Reports'* test the most efficient refrigerator used \$68/year less electricity than the least efficient model. Multiply that difference over a decade or two; the lifetime energy savings could be greater than the up-front cost.

Appliance energy use on average is usually less than home heating and cooling bills, but can total several hundred dollars each year. Your appliance use depends on the model, how often you use it, the settings and even the time of day it is most used.

Over the last few decades new appliances became more energy efficient. Standards created by the U.S. Department of Energy save consumers over \$60 billion yearly. Appliances must include an Energy Guide label that shows estimated energy use and operating cost per year. These labels help you compare different models and calculate the initial cost against the long-term savings.

When shopping, look for appliances that feature an Energy Star label. This indicates the appliance is substantially more efficient than the minimum standard. Your greatest energy-saving opportunities come from replacing an old appliance with an Energy Star-rated appliance. Removing a refrigerator that's 20 years old and replacing it with a new Energy Star model can lower the monthly electricity cost by 75 percent,



Keep your cool! Be a smart shopper! A new Energy Star fridge/freezer can use 70 percent less energy than a model that's 10 years old. Models with the fridge stacked over the freezer are also two-thirds more efficient than side-by-side models.

from \$16.50 to less than \$4.

The appliance's design also makes a difference. For example, a side-by-side refrigerator/freezer uses about 70 percent more energy than other configurations, with the most efficient models having the refrigerator stacked on top of the freezer. Meanwhile, all 36 of the most efficient clothes washers in 2018 were front-loading models.

In addition, the more you use the appliance the greater your savings will be from choosing a more efficient model. If you use the appliance less or have a small household, you may get by with a smaller refrigerator or freezer, which will save you money.

Make the most out of your appliance energy use with a little research before buying a new model and a few easy adjustments to how you use them.  — Courtesy of www.collaborativeefficiency.com

Energy Tips

Appliances' operation also impacts energy savings

Refrigerator/freezer

- Set your refrigerator at 35 to 38 degrees and your freezer at 0 degrees.
- Maintain adequate air flow between the wall and the back of the unit.
- Keep the refrigerator relatively full when possible.
- Replace the seals around the doors if they appear to be leaking air.
- Defrost the refrigerator and freezer regularly.

Stove/oven

- Use the correct size of burner to fit the pan.
- Use smaller devices like a microwave or slow cooker, instead of the oven.

Dishwasher

- Use the most energy-efficient and shortest setting that cleans your dishes.
- Air dry, rather than using the heated-dry function.
- Wait to run a load until the dishwasher is full. 

Electric fireplace features barn door slides

Electric fireplaces have numerous benefits: no wood to chop, no ashes and no smoke. Now electric fireplaces are becoming more attractive, as well. The Chestnut Hill media console incorporates sliding "barn doors" to give the fireplace a rustic look.

This media console fits most flat screen TVs up to 60 inches or 75 pounds. The sliding doors reveal a 23" infrared quartz electric fireplace with a digital thermostat that can warm up to 1,000 square feet with realistic flame effects. Spectrafire flame technology offers three blue and three amber-effect options (with or without heat) to create your ideal fire.

Safety features monitor the temperature of the plug to prevent electrical fire and whether or not the heater is obstructed. The fireplace also comes with a remote.

The Chestnut Hill media console fireplace is available at Home Depot for approximately \$400. 



Safety

Beware by being aware of power lines

Harvest season is again upon us. Make sure you don't reap what you sow by being unsafe around power lines. Look up and beware by being aware!

Today's bigger farm equipment makes field work quicker and more efficient, but bigger farm equipment also makes it easier than ever to snag overhead lines, either when working a field, entering or leaving a field or even moving machinery around the yard.

- Always use extra caution when working end rows that are bordered by power lines.
- Always make sure you are safely away from power poles and guy lines when lowering the wings of tillage equipment.
- Always have your auger lowered as far as possible when moving around the farm.

If you are in a tractor that comes into contact with an electric power line, stay inside and call your electric co-op for help. Your tires safely ground you. The only time you should exit the tractor is if there is a danger of fire.

1 Stay at least 10 feet away from fallen power lines.

2 Keep self and equipment 10 feet away from all overhead power lines.

3 Do not touch anything that is in contact with the power line.

4 Lower equipment apparatus before driving.

In that case, jump from the tractor as far as you can, land on both feet and hop out of the danger zone.

Following these tips can help make your harvest safe to make it home to your loved ones each night. 

Brown County Briefs

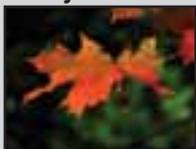
Member Advisory Council

The second meeting of the current Member Advisory Council will be held Monday, September 10, at 7 p.m. in the BCREA Auditorium. Agenda includes a speaker from Great River Energy and small group discussions with management staff.

Energy Efficiency Tip

Turn off kitchen, bath and other exhaust fans within 20 minutes after you're done cooking or bathing. When replacing exhaust fans, consider installing high-efficiency, low-noise models. Source: energy.gov

Is your off-peak heating system ready for winter?



As the crisp, fall days turn colder, it's a good time to make sure your backup heating system is ready to go if you participate in BCREA's dual fuel or off-peak heat program. You are encouraged to have a reliable, automatic dual heating system in place and ready to use.

- Make sure your system is sized to keep your entire home comfortable during control periods.
- Have it tuned up to make sure it will be available when you need it.
- Check your LP or fuel oil supply now and fill up while prices are lower.

Remember, electric heat is controlled during periods of high demand (coldest winter evenings) and when market prices are high, but other factors can lead to load control. Check the daily load control schedule by clicking on the graphic of the load control receiver on our website www.browncountyrea.coop

Your change benefits many through Operation Round Up



The Operation Round Up Trust Board distributed \$2,650 to nine organizations and one individual family in the BCREA service area at its August 21 meeting.

Funds were awarded to Network New Ulm Youth Leadership Program, Southern Minnesota Youth Dairy Show, Little Sprouts Learning Center, Sleepy Eye Safety Pup, Sleepy Eye Firearms Safety, Sleepy Eye Safety Day, Lake Hanska Lutheran Church Quilting, Sleepy Eye Senior Living and Comfrey Community Healthcare Building, Inc.

Donations are made possible through the generosity of REA members whose electric bills are rounded up to the nearest dollar each month. For example, if your bill is \$104.56, you pay \$105. The extra 44 cents is placed in the Round Up Trust Account and distributed quarterly to worthy causes throughout the cooperative's service area. For less than \$12 per year, you can help make a difference in the local area. Contributions are tax deductible.

The Trust Board will meet again November 21. Organizations interested in applying for funding through the Round Up Trust can request an application from trust board members Arlene Helget, Vickie Kral, Jim Lilleodden, Kari Berg, Lynnae Pelzel, Lee Johnson, Michelle Strate, Ann Wendinger or Michelle Oswald. Applications are also available at www.browncountyrea.coop, under the *Programs & Services* tab, or by calling 800-658-2368 or 794-3331.



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Members see their power generation at its source



Above: Coal Creek Tour participants gathered for a group photo at the Garrison Dam. BCREA members and guests traveling in the group included Ken & Patty Hinderman, Doug & Janet Koll, Jim & Gail Lendt, John Nelson, Wayne & Janet Redman, Charles & Sally Romberg, Dick Schroepfer, Cherry Taylor, Bernie & Mae Wenner. BCREA Member Services Manager Marcia Solie led the tour. Below top photo: Dick Schroepfer visits with Falkirk Mine Tour Guide/Bus Driver Roxie Kapanke in the coal pit. Below bottom photo: Cherry Taylor poses in the cab of one of the coal hauling trucks. (6)

Thirteen members and two guests from the BCREA service area, along with 12 BENCO members, boarded a bus to Bismarck, North Dakota, to get an up-close look at where much of their electricity is generated as part of the Coal Creek Tour August 22-24.

New this year was a drive-through guided tour of the Spiritwood Station, which is near Jamestown enroute to Bismarck. The highly efficient, combined heat and power plant generates electricity and steam and is one of the cleanest coal-based power plants in the world.

On tour day the group traveled to Great River Energy's Coal Creek Energy Park near Underwood. At Falkirk Mine, which supplies lignite coal to the neighboring power plant, participants were given a guided tour into the coal pit to watch the massive equipment perform the many mining activities.

At Coal Creek Station visitors walked among the plant's large, twin generating units, which turn the pulverized coal into electricity. Steam from the generation process powers the adjacent Blue Flint Ethanol Plant. They also learned about GRE's patented dry-fining technology, which removes water from the coal to increase efficiencies and reduce emissions, along with the process to capture and market fly ash used in making concrete.

From the energy park the group stopped near Garrison Dam where water from the Missouri River powers large turbines to produce electricity. The group also visited the Fort Mandan Visitors Center along the river and the North Dakota Heritage Center. (6)



Cold weather rule outlines process to avoid winter disconnection and loss of electricity

The Minnesota Cold Weather Rule guides utilities on winter disconnections, as long as customers follow these three main guidelines.

Residential customer notice

An electric cooperative must not disconnect and must reconnect the utility service of a home between October 15 and April 15 if the disconnection affects the primary heat source for the residential unit **and all of the following conditions are met:**

1. The household income of the customer is at or below 50 percent of the state median household income. The electric cooperative may verify income on forms it provides or obtain verification of income from the local energy-assistance provider. A customer meets the income requirements of this clause if the customer receives any public assistance, including energy assistance that uses an income eligibility threshold set at or below 50 percent of the state median household income;

2. A customer enters into and makes reasonably timely payments under a payment agreement that considers the financial resources of the household; and

3. A customer receives referrals to energy assistance, weatherization, conservation or other programs likely to reduce the customer's energy bills. In addition, an electric cooperative must, between August 15 and October 15 of each year, notify all residential customers of these provisions.

Before disconnecting service to a residential customer between October 15 and April 15, an electric cooperative must provide:

1. A notice of the proposed disconnection;
2. A statement with the customer's rights and responsibilities;
3. A list of local energy-assistance providers;
4. Forms on which to declare an inability to pay; and
5. A statement explaining available time-payment plans and other options to secure continued utility service.

Restrictions for disconnection

1. If a customer must be involuntarily disconnected between October 15 and April 15 for failure to comply with residential disconnection provisions, it must not occur on a Friday, unless the customer declines to enter into a payment agreement offered that day in person or via personal contact by telephone by the electric cooperative;

2. The disconnection must not occur on a weekend, holiday or the day before a holiday, when utility offices are closed, or after the close of business on a day when disconnection is permitted, unless a field representative

Local emergency energy-assistance agencies provide help to member facing disconnection

Blue Earth County	507-345-6822
Des Moines Valley Human Services (Jackson & Cottonwood)	847-4000
Martin County Human Services	238-4757
MN Dept. of Energy Svcs (Ask for fuel assistance) ...	1-800-657-3805
Minnesota Valley Action Council	1-800-767-7139
Brown County	354-3138
Martin County	238-1663
Nicollet County	934-5224
Sibley County	237-2981
Watonwan County	375-5748
Nobles County Family Services Agency	372-2157
Renville County Family Services	320-523-5522
Salvation Army's Heat Share (Jackson, Martin & Brown Co.)	1-800-842-7279
Sibley County Human Services	237-4000
SW Health & Human Services (Redwood Co.)	1-888-234-1292
SW MN Opportunity Council, Inc. (Nobles Co.)	376-4195
United Community Action Partnership (Jackson, Cottonwood & Redwood Counties)	1-800-658-2448
Watonwan County Human Services	375-3294

If you live in an area that is not listed, call your electric co-op for details

from the electric cooperative who is authorized to enter into a payment agreement, accept payment and continue service offers a payment agreement to the customer; and

3. If a customer does not respond to a disconnection notice, the customer must not be disconnected until the utility investigates whether the home is occupied. If the unit is occupied, the utility must immediately inform the occupant of the provisions of this section. If the unit is unoccupied, the utility must give seven days written notice of the proposed disconnection to the local energy-assistance provider before disconnecting. If, prior to disconnection, a customer appeals a notice of involuntary disconnection, as provided by the utility's established appeal procedure, the utility must not disconnect until the appeal is resolved. (U)

Military personnel: bill payment options

Minnesota law offers active military personnel additional payment options for their electric bills. The law covers disconnection, payment arrangements, appeal and an annual notice to cooperative members. Similar to the state's Cold Weather Rule, an application must be completed and income guidelines exist. It's available for military personnel with active duty, deployed or a permanent duty station change. Call or e-mail us for more details about the active duty military payment options and a form to sign up. (U)

Brrr! Warm it up with burritos recipes for breakfast or supper

Spice up your next meal with burritos, regardless whether it's for breakfast, supper or even a snack. Share with us your favorite burritos recipes; send to: Editor, Federated Rural Electric, PO Box 69, Jackson MN 56143-0069 or e-mail to christoffer@federatedrea.coop by September 25. Add your name and phone number. Thanks for sharing with us! ☺

Co-op members win grills at Farmfest



Thanks for stopping by the Touchstone Energy booth at Farmfest August 7-9. Two local electric co-op members won one of the six grills in the booth's drawing; 436 registered. Top: Federated members Darren and Donna Johnson, Jackson, won. Bottom: Brown County REA member Alice Walter, Sleepy Eye, poses with granddaughter Sarah Seifert and BCREA General Manager Mike Heidemann. The four other winners were: Merle Zimmerman from Redwood Electric; Calvin Aarons from McLeod Electric; David Kimper from Lyon-Lincoln Electric and Richard Kelly from South Central Electric. The electric co-ops' booth featured an electric car, the Chevy Bolt, along with a chance to win a Big Horn electric pellet grill. ☺



FCC requires CTV to change frequencies; viewers must rescan channels in Sept.-Oct.

CTV viewers will see some channel disruptions from late September into October. CTV will try to keep these to a minimum, but the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) is requiring CTV to move off some of the channels to new channels. CTV will install new equipment to accommodate the needed changes. Please continue to rescan your tv during this time period. Viewers will experience short periods of time that the rebroadcasting of channels will be off, but hopefully not for long. This is a big change for CTV. We appreciate your patience during this process and continued support of CTV. Watch channel 16.1 for updates. ☺

Call Gopher State One Call before digging!

1-800-252-1166



Call Gopher State One Call before doing any digging more than 12" deep — 48 hours before digging for foundations, trees, tiling and more. You can

also register at www.gopherstate-onecall.org or call 811. Call a licensed electrician to locate the underground lines on your side of the meter. ☺



Brown County Rural Electrical Association

Brown County Rural Electrical Assn.
24386 State Hwy 4, PO Box 529
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

Mike Heidemann, Chief Executive Officer

Board of Directors

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 BCREA Board of Directors held its monthly board meeting August 30 at the BCREA headquarters in Sleepy Eye. Discussion and/or action were taken on the following agenda items:

- Reviewed and approved the July 2018 board meeting minutes, new member applications, member cancellations, disbursements and payments to estates.
- Received a presentation by Sarah Bullock, Regional Vice President for Cooperative Finance Corporation (CFC) on the cooperative's 2017 Key Ratio Trend Analysis.
- Updated on negotiations and approved the 2019-2022 union labor contract, as presented.
- Confirmed Jeremy Berg as the cooperative's attorney representing, Blethens/Behrens law firm, following the retirement of Robert Hinnenthal.
- Reviewed and approved the 2019-2021 Strategic Plan.
- Reviewed and approved the 2018-2019 wage schedule.
- Reviewed ongoing construction activities and pole-testing results.

The next meeting will be September 27 at the BCREA headquarters in Sleepy Eye. (E)



Mike Heidemann
Chief Executive
Officer

Staff notes

Safety up for fall!

It's a golden time of year (and not because the kids are back to school) for we see the hard work of our farming community as the crops will soon be harvested. In some areas people are already harvesting small grains and chopping silage.

Yet, too often, harvest season for the cooperative and our members can spell trouble. Our lineworkers and other employees respond to pole and other equipment hits or snagged lines

that cannot only cause outages, but can be deadly. Overhead lines end up on the ground and they can still be energized. Our employees then have to repair the line and often not in the best of conditions.

So, let's make the goal to work through this harvest season with NO damage to our services that bring you power every day. However, we need your help. Here's what you can do:

- Will you be moving equipment near overhead lines? Could you pick a different route so you can stay clear of the lines to enter and exit your yard?
- If you cannot and have to lower equipment, can you get a reminder posted someplace (do not put anything on the line)?
- Could you use a spotter all the time? Look around your yard. Note where your overhead power lines are located.
- Look around the field you are working. Note where the overhead lines enter, exit and/or surround your field. How close are you to the poles when using the equipment in the field?
- Will you be moving irrigation systems around this fall that could get into the overhead lines?
- Do you have anyone helping you harvest this fall? Have you discussed watching for overhead lines? Do you use a spotter here, too?
- What are the best routes in/out of your fields to avoid overhead lines?
- In addition, shifting soil may also affect whether or not machinery avoids power lines from year-to-year. Has the soil shifted in any key spots?
- Are any of the power lines sagging? Report this condition right away.
- Look at your equipment. Could any antennas or other attachments contact a power line or hit a pole when turning?
- As our equipment gets bigger, can it still clear the powerline? You should stay at least 20 feet away and that is on ALL sides — up and down of the equipment. Do you have equipment that folds up or down? Before deploying or activating this feature, make sure you are clear of the power line and poles. If you do become entangled in the equipment, stay put in the vehicle or machinery unless a fire starts and you need to exit VERY CAREFULLY. Do not step off your equipment — jump with both feet, clear of your equipment. The equipment and the ground could be energized. Call 911 and have them call the cooperative.

Have a great and safe fall! (E)