

# Connections

November 2019

For the member-owners of Brown County REA



Volume 23, Issue 11


## Co-op invests in you with capital credits

Thanksgiving seems like a great time to count your blessings...family, health, food, shelter and your electric cooperative. Yes, this month you can count the benefit of being a cooperative member-owner. Besides voting on director candidates and being served by a local utility, this month you'll see the benefits of being a cooperative member-owner.

Your electric cooperative is returning \$667,000 to those who were members in 1983-2002 and 2018. The Board of Directors approved this distribution at the October board meeting.

Capital credit checks will be mailed in mid-December. This is why it's important to provide BCREA with your address if you move. You could have more capital credits due to you in the future. Current members receiving \$50 or less in capital credits will receive a credit on their December electric bill.

Over its existence, BCREA has returned \$16,619,460 to its member-owners as capital credits.

In addition, any unclaimed capital credit checks are awarded to BCREA's Round Up program after seven years. The Trust Board uses these funds to help charitable organizations and provide scholarships. For more details on how to apply for Operation Round Up, see Page 4. 



**FUNDS AWARDED**

**\$8,005**

To Operation Round Up since 1996



**\$667,000**

Returned in 2019 on your November electric bill



**\$16 M**


Paid to members over BCREA's existence

### At A Glance



**Brown County  
Rural Electrical  
Association**

#### Become more involved with your electric co-op

If you are a BCREA member who is interested in learning more about how your electric co-op functions, interacting with the Board of Directors and meeting other co-op members, become a part of the Member Advisory Council. See Page 5. 

# Keeping pets and energy bills comfy

We love our pets and we love saving energy! Let's take a look at three common energy-efficiency questions from pet owners.

**Q: We've thought about installing a pet door. Will this impact my energy bill?**

**A:** Pet doors are convenient for pet owners and pets, but they can impact energy bills. A pet door that is poorly made or improperly installed will create unwanted drafts that increase energy bills and reduce the overall comfort level of your home. The wrong type of door may also be pushed open during high winds.

Consider installing a pet door that is certified by the Alliance to Save Energy (ASE) or has a double or triple flap. These types of pet doors can reduce energy loss and make life easier for you and your furry friends. The best solution may be a high-quality electronic door that is activated by a chip on your pet's collar.

It's difficult to undo a pet door installation. Before taking the leap, do your homework. Other strategies may exist that will give you and your pet some of the convenient benefits without the downsides.

**Q: To save energy we keep our home cool during winter nights and warm during summer days. How much "hot and cold" can our pup and tabby handle?**

**A:** Cats and dogs can handle the cold better than humans. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), which regulates facilities that house cats and dogs, requires these facilities to maintain temperatures above 50° F. Some exceptions are allowed for



**That's doggone cool (or hot)! A climate-controlled dog house is a more efficient option to keep your pet warm during the winter than it is to heat a garage or out building for them.**


breeds accustomed to the cold or if some form of insulation for the animals is provided. Your pet's tolerance really depends on their breed and the thickness of their coat.

A report by the Purdue Center for Animal Science says that Siberian huskies can tolerate temperatures below freezing, but some short-haired dogs require temperatures of 59° F or higher. Older animals may also require warmer temperatures.

During the summer, cats and dogs handle the heat in different ways. Cats clearly enjoy warmer temperatures than dogs. They do a good job of reducing their activity level as temperatures climb. Yet, both cats and dogs can become overheated. The USDA says that room temperatures in facilities housing dogs or cats should not exceed 85° F for more than four hours at a time.

**Q: Is it okay if my cat or my dog sleeps in the garage overnight?**

**A:** USDA rules suggest this should be fine if your garage temperature stays between 50° F and 85° F. Pets might be able to handle a lower temperature if they have a warm, insulated bed.

Your electric co-op does not recommend heating or cooling your garage for your pet. This could lead to extremely high energy bills, which makes sense because an uninsulated, but heated garage could easily cost more to heat than a home. A better solution is a heated pet house, which you can purchase from multiple retailers. If you're willing to spend a little more, you can even find climate-controlled pet houses that include heating and cooling options. Otherwise, buy heated beds for cats and dogs. Some beds use as little as four watts of electricity, so they won't drain your energy bill. 

## Tesla's electric semi-truck starts production in 2020

Tesla's electric semi-truck is expected to start production in late 2020. A short-range version (300 miles) will start at \$150,000 and a midrange version will cost \$180,000 (500 miles). A typical Class 8 day-cab diesel costs about \$120,000.

Tesla claims the electric truck will save enough to justify the added cost in two years. Over the course of the truck's million-mile lifetime, it can save an owner up to \$200,000. These numbers are based on an overall operating cost of \$1.26 a mile for the electric truck versus \$1.51 a mile for a competitive diesel truck.

Tesla has not disclosed battery capacities, but each electric truck will operate four separate electric motors, one for each of the four rear wheels. Each electric truck/trailer combo weighs 80,000 pounds fully loaded.

The Tesla electric truck is expected




**The Tesla electric semi-truck gives the freight industry an electric option. The truck can have a range up to 500 miles.**

to operate autonomously, as soon as regulations allow such operation. Equipment includes automatic emergency braking, obstacle recognition, lane-keeping assist, forward-collision warning and wireless communication.

Tesla hopes to install networks of

megachargers to charge the trucks. These megachargers could add enough power to a depleted battery in 30 minutes to provide up to 400 miles in range.

Read more about the truck at [www.tesla.com/semi](http://www.tesla.com/semi). 

### Safety

## Holiday safety tips for your electrical decorations

The holiday season is quickly approaching. If you decorate your home, keep these safety tips in mind.

- Inspect electrical decorations for damage before use. Cracked or damaged sockets, loose or bare wires and loose connections may cause a serious shock or start a fire.

- Do not overload electrical outlets. Overloaded electrical outlets and faulty wires are a common cause of holiday fires. Avoid overloading outlets and plug only one high-wattage device into each outlet at a time.

- Never connect more than three strings of incandescent lights. More than three strands may blow a fuse and cause a fire.

- Protect cords from damage. To avoid shock or fire hazards cords should never be pinched by furniture, forced into small spaces such as doors and windows, placed under rugs, located near heat sources or attached by nails or staples.

- Keep trees fresh by watering daily. Dry trees are a serious fire hazard.




- Keep combustibles at least three feet from heat sources. A heat source that was too close to the decoration was a factor in half of home fires that began with decorations.

- Check decorations for a certification label. Decorations not bearing a label from an independent testing

laboratory such as Underwriters Laboratories (UL), Canadian Standards Association (CSA) or Intertek (ETL) have not been tested for safety and could be hazardous.

- Stay in the kitchen when something is cooking. Unattended cooking equipment is the leading cause of home-cooking fires.

- Use battery-operated candles. Candles start almost half of home decoration fires.

- Turn off, unplug and extinguish all decorations when going to sleep or leaving the house. Unattended candles are the cause of one in five home candle fires. Half of home fire deaths occur between the hours of 11 p.m. and 7 a.m. 

— Information courtesy of [esfi.com](http://esfi.com)



# Brown County Briefs

## Operation Round Up



The Brown County Rural Electric Trust Board will meet to review applications

November 19. Area organizations wishing to seek funding through the trust should submit an application, found on the BCREA website ([www.browncountyrea.coop](http://www.browncountyrea.coop)) before that date. Applications are also available from Trust Board members or by contacting the office at 800-658-2368 or 507-794-3331.

## 2020 calendars available

Pick up your 2020 large, farm pocket calendars (one per member please) at the office. There are also a small number of pocket-size calendars available to members, while supplies last.

## Energy Tip:

Trim your holiday energy costs by choosing energy-efficient LED lights! LED holiday lights use less energy and can last up to 40 seasons. They're also easier to install — you can connect up to 25 LED strings without overloading a wall socket! Source: Energy.gov

## C&I rebates due November 15

Are you a commercial, agricultural or industrial BCREA member? Did you replace old, inefficient lighting in a shop, barn or other building with Energy Star or DLC-certified lighting this year? You may be entitled to a rebate on your project, but you must act quickly. Submit copies of your receipts, detailing specs on the new lights, along with number, type and wattage of old lights replaced and the hours the lights are in use. Rebates for HVAC and other C&I projects are also due by the November 15 deadline. Contact Marcia at 800-658-2368 or 794-3331 with questions. ☎

# Choose your way to pay

*BCREA has many payment options available*

When it comes to paying your electric bill each month, Brown County REA offers many choices. Choose the one that works best for you.

## Automatic payment from checkings or savings

You can have your monthly electric bill payment automatically transferred from your checking or savings account to Brown County REA on the 20<sup>th</sup> of each month and never worry about being late with your payment. If the 20<sup>th</sup> falls on a weekend or holiday, the transfer will be made the following business day. You continue to receive a monthly statement from BCREA. To enroll fill out and submit the form on our website or contact the office to receive the form. You will also need to provide a voided check from your checking account or a voided deposit slip from your savings account.

## Online bill pay

Sign up to securely pay your REA bill online by visiting our website at [www.browncountyrea.coop](http://www.browncountyrea.coop). To take advantage of the free, convenient, secure and easy-to-use option, click on the *Pay Bill/Access My Account* icon on the home page of the Brown County REA website. Login or register if it is your first time visiting the portal. Follow the onscreen instructions to create your account. You may enter multiple account numbers. You can also choose a paperless billing option, sign up for recurring payments and more.

## Mobile app

Access account information and pay your bill through your smart phone with Brown County REA's mobile customer access app. Download free by searching Brown County REA in the Apple or Google App store. If you already have an online account in the BCREA Online Portal, use that login. If not, create a unique user id and password at the login screen to establish your account information.

## Credit card

Contact the office or visit the co-op website for a form to authorize recurring payment of your bill from a specified credit card. Payment will be taken from your credit card on the 20<sup>th</sup> of each month. Credit card payments are limited to \$2,000 per month.

## Secure phone payment line

Pay your bill using a credit or debit card through our secure phone payment line. You can still call the office toll free 800-658-2368 or local 507-794-3331 and then be transferred to the payment line. You will need to know your BCREA account number and the amount due.

## Check or cash

And as always, we accept checks or cash to pay your monthly bill as well. Just remember to pay by the 20<sup>th</sup> of each month to avoid late fees. ☎

## Join us for Open House November 19-20

Members are invited to stop by the REA headquarters for a pre-holiday Open House November 19-20 from 9:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. Enjoy a cookie, coffee or cider; register to win one of two \$25 electric bill credits. We also encourage you to bring donations of unwrapped toys, mittens or books for the Santa's Closet collection box. Pick up a 2020 calendar too. Hope to see you there! ☎

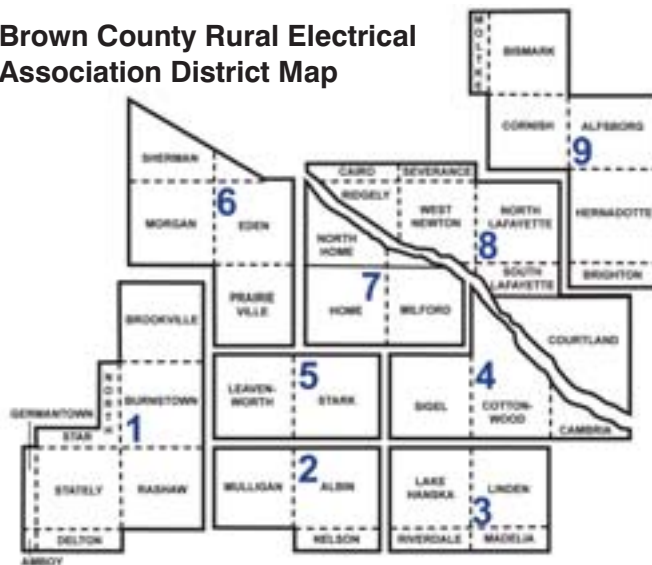


# Engage with co-op leaders and fellow co-op members through Member Advisory Council

Want to get a behind the scenes look at your cooperative, engage with the Board of Directors and management team and meet some of your co-op neighbors?

Current Member Advisory Council members, whose final meeting will be in January 2020, and the cooperative's Board of Directors will be looking for new members to serve on the council. Member Advisory Council meets three times during the one-year term, typically in April following the Annual Meeting, September and the following January. Established more than 40 years ago, the Member Advisory Council offers an inside look at the workings and programs of the cooperative, opportunity for one-on-one and small group discussions and to share input with management staff and directors. MAC members in the districts whose directors are up for election also serve as the nominating committee. Contact the director or council members for your district if interested in being part of the Member Advisory Council or the REA office to learn more. ☎

**Brown County Rural Electrical Association District Map**



## BCREA director and council members by district

- District 1: Director James Hanson, Randy & Moe Therkilsen, Gary & Karen Poortvliet and Adam & Ashley Englin;
- District 2: Director Brad Sprenger, Troy Windshciti, Mike Schroepfer and Paul Schroepfer;
- District 3: Director Allen Hanson, Adam Suess, Joe Beranek and Travis & Ashley Sondag;
- District 4: Director Bill Berg, Scott Zeig, Jim & Mary Beranek and Ken & Sue Griebel;
- District 5: Director Jim Mickelson, Keith Hoffmann,

- Myron Helget and Corey Huiras;
- District 6: Director Joel Christensen, Mike Carpenter, Dick Neyers and Brian Hacker;
- District 7: Director Greg Mages, Jim Guggisberg, George & LuAnn Schwint and Chad Strei;
- District 8: Director Reuben Kokesch, Ryan & Chelsey Franta, Sheldon & Ann Rieke and Craig Wilson;
- District 9: Director Tom Hayes, Isaac Hahn, John Wenninger and Al Guggisberg ☎

## Be generous to Santa's Closet



Brown County REA headquarters is again collecting donations of new, unwrapped toys, books and mittens to be used as part of the Sertoma Club of New Ulm Santa's Closet project. The collection helps

provide gifts to area children who may not otherwise receive gifts at Christmas. Please drop off donations in the box, located in the REA office lobby by December 12. Thank you for your generosity to those less fortunate. ☎

## Recycle your old holiday lights



Upgrading your holiday lighting to LED? Remember to recycle the old lights.

Brown County REA is again working with the Sleepy Eye YES! Team to collect strands of old holiday lights to

be recycled. You may drop off your old lights in the box in the office entryway during regular business, Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. The collection begins November 19 and runs through January 18.

Please do not place cord adapters, battery packs, plastic rope lights or CFL bulbs in the collection box. ☎

# What's on that pole?



Primary wires carry 7,200 volts of electricity. That voltage is 60 times higher than the voltage that runs through electrical outlets!

Insulators prevent energized wires from contacting each other or the pole.

The neutral wire acts as a line back to the substation and is tied to the ground, balancing the electricity on the system.

Surge protectors protect the transformer from lightning strikes.

The transformer decreases the 7,200 voltage to 120/240 that can be used in the home, farm or business.

Secondary wires carry 120/240-volts of electricity to consumers' homes: two "hot" wires from the transformer and a bare "neutral" wire that's connected to the ground wire on the pole.

The ground wire connects to the neutral wire to complete the circuit inside the transformer. It also directs electricity from lightning safely into the earth.



Never nail posters or other items to utility poles. These create a safety hazard for lineworkers.

Do you ever wonder what all those items are on electric poles or powerlines and what they do? This illustration shows the basic equipment found on electric utility poles. The equipment varies according to the location and the service they provide. Each piece of equipment is designed to deliver power to you as reliably and as cost-effectively as possible. Ⓜ

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- 4,500-watt elements
- Westinghouse brand Ⓜ



## 'Punch' up your holiday festivities with beverage recipes

Cheers! What beverages do you use to celebrate the holidays? Tom and Jerrys, egg nog, mulled wine, spiced up cider or festive hot chocolate? Share your holiday beverage recipes. Send to: Editor, Federated Rural Electric, PO Box 69, Jackson MN 56143-0069 or e-mail to christoffer@federatedrea.coop by November 27. Add your name and phone number. Thanks for sharing with us! ☺

### Cottage Cheese Cookies by Sheri Timko, Okabena

Cream and beat until fluffy: 1 c. butter 1¼ c. sugar  
 Add and beat again: 1 c. cottage cheese 1 tsp. vanilla  
 Add one at a time and beat: 2 eggs  
 Sift together and then add to the batter: 2½ c. flour. ½ c. cocoa  
 1 tsp. soda 1 tsp. baking powder ½ tsp. salt  
 Drop from spoon onto cookie sheet. Bake at 350° for 12 minutes.  
 Frost when cool with: ½ c. brown sugar 2 T. Cocoa. ½ c. water  
 Boil for three minutes. Add 3 T. butter and 1½ c. powdered sugar. Frost and enjoy! ☺

### Favorite Monster Cookie Recipe by Lona Larson, Sherburn

Cream together: 1 stick butter, softened 1½ c. creamy peanut butter  
 1 c. brown sugar 1 c. white sugar  
 Add: 3 eggs 1 T. vanilla  
 Mix together and add: 4½ c. oatmeal 2 tsp. baking soda  
 Then add: 1 c. chocolate chips 1 c. M&M's  
 Bake 10 to 12 minutes at 350°. I use parchment paper on the cookie sheet. ☺

### Oatmeal Cookies

by Elizabeth Shimon, Granada

Preheat oven to 350°.  
 Soak ½ c. raisins in ½ c. brandy  
 Mix together: ¾ c. Crisco  
 1 c. dark brown sugar  
 1 egg  
 1 tsp. vanilla  
 In a separate bowl mix together:  
 1 c. flour  
 1 tsp. salt  
 ½ tsp. baking soda  
 Slowly combine both mixtures. Add  
 3 c. old fashioned oatmeal. Add the  
 raisins.  
 Drop by scoops onto cookie sheets  
 using parchment paper. Bake for 12  
 minutes. ☺



### Do a little — save a lot!

Everything you do, no matter how small, can add up to energy savings. See how many of these energy saving tips you can do. Call the cooperative to request this booklet — 101 Energy-Saving Tips. ☺

## Have a blessed Thanksgiving!

Crews will be on call in case of outages.

The co-op will be closed November 28 & 29



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.gopherstateonecall.org](http://www.gopherstateonecall.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](mailto:bcrea@bcrea.coop)

Website: [www.browncountyrea.coop](http://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 — 766-1497

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.



**Darla Ruschen**  
Office Manager

# Staff notes

## You get the credit; Brown County REA retires more than \$667,000 to members


It's time for you to get the credit — capital credits, that is — for helping build, sustain and grow your local electric cooperative. This year Brown County REA is retiring more than \$667,000 to members like you served by the co-op.


When you signed up to receive electric service from Brown County REA, you became a member of an electric utility. While investor-owned utilities return a portion of any profits back to their shareholders, electric co-ops operate on an at-cost basis. Brown County REA allocates and annually retires capital credits, also called patronage dividends, based on how much electricity you purchased during a year.

If you were a Brown County REA member from 1983-2002 or 2018, you will receive capital credit payments reflecting your contribution of capital to, and ownership of, the cooperative during those years. Until this retirement, those funds helped us reduce the amount of money we needed to borrow from outside lenders to build, maintain and expand a reliable electric distribution system. Checks will not be issued in amounts of \$50 or less. These amounts are credited to the electric bill of current members. For former members a capital credits check will be issued in future years when the balance reaches at least \$50.

At the October 31 board meeting Brown County REA's Board of Directors approved the payment of approximately \$667,000 in patronage dividends to its members. This amount is broken down as 20 percent of most current year allocation (2018), 100 percent of 2000 and 2001, and partial 2002 cooperative and miscellaneous capital credits. New this year, due to our power supplier Great River Energy retiring capital credits back to the cooperative, Brown County REA will pass on this retirement to the membership, retiring 100 percent of G&T capital credits from the years 1983-1986 and 80 percent of 1987.

With this retirement Brown County REA has returned a cumulative total over the years of more than \$16,619,460. Through 2018 the percentage of patronage capital retired to co-op members stood at 49.04 percent, which ranks your cooperative third in the state of Minnesota and 29<sup>th</sup> out of 710 cooperatives nationwide.

Returning capital credits to members is a practice unique to the cooperative form of business and represents one of the cooperative principles — members' economic participation. 

Are you a new member to the electric cooperative and impressed with BCREA's commitment to you? Learn more about us at [www.browncountyrea.coop](http://www.browncountyrea.coop). In addition to returning capital credits we also offer rebates and money-saving programs and more! 

# Board meeting highlights

The BCREA Board of Directors held its monthly board meeting October 31 at the BCREA headquarters in Sleepy Eye. Discussion and/or action were taken on the following agenda items:

- Reviewed and approved the September 2019 board meeting minutes, new member applications and member cancellations.
- Reviewed and approved September 2019 payroll and August 2019 financial statements.
- Reviewed and approved \$667,583 in capital credit payments to members.
- Reviewed and approved the cooperative's updated Schedule of Charges.
- Reviewed and approved the cooperative's 2018 IRS Form 990.
- Updated on final team visit for the NRECA RC3 Cyber Security group, which consists of BCREA and four other co-ops.
- Reviewed line construction activity.
- Reviewed staff meeting reports, director meeting reports and individual director reports.

The Board will meet again on November 21, 2019 at the Brown County REA headquarters in Sleepy Eye. 