

Connections

March 2020

For the member-owners of Brown County REA



Volume 24, Issue 3

Knowledge is power; keep us informed of your e-mail & phone lines to keep you in the loop



At Brown County Rural Electrical Association we strive to improve efficiency so we can provide the most reliable service

possible for you, our member-owners.

“We rely on data for nearly every aspect of our operations, which is why we need your help,” said BCREA’s Office Manager Darla Ruschen. “By making sure we have your most accurate and complete contact information, we can continue to provide the high level of service that you expect and deserve. Accurate information enables us to improve customer service and enhance communications for reporting and repairing outages. It also allows co-op members to receive information about other important programs, events and activities.”

Up-to-date contact information can potentially speed up the power restoration process during an outage. For example, the phone number you provide is linked to your service address in our outage management system. When you call to report an outage, our system recognizes your phone number and matches it with your account location.

BCREA occasionally plans outages to update, repair or replace equipment. In these instances the co-op can

provide advanced notification to affected members, if we have your updated contact information and communication preferences.

Keeping the co-op updated with your information also helps us when there’s a question about energy use or billing. In addition, discrepancies on your account can be taken care of promptly.

Many of you have been members of the co-op for years. Perhaps your account information hasn’t been updated. Brown County REA recognizes many members now use a cell phone as their primary phone service; we would like to add that number in our system. Should we drop your landline and add one, two or three cell phone numbers?

“Brown County REA protects your contact information at the co-op,” Ruschen stated. “Your information is never sold to third parties. It is used by the co-op to provide important information to you.”

Please take a moment to confirm or update your contact information:

- Send an e-mail to bcrea@bcrea.coop.

- Call us Monday-Friday from 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. at 794-3331 or 1-800-658-2368.

- Fill out the coupon and send it back with your bill payment stub and check. Look at the top of your bill to see what phone numbers we have on file. We

can record four for each account, but only two print on the bill.

- Use our Smart Phone app to update contact information after setting up an account. Search for Brown County REA in the app store.

If you updated your contact information recently, we thank you! With current contact information you help us improve service and efficiency so we can better serve you and all co-op members. ☺

Name on Brown County Rural Electrical Association account

Account # _____

We can enter up to three phone numbers (land line, husband cell phone, wife cell phone, etc...)

Phone #1 _____

Phone #2 _____

Phone #3 _____

Phone #4 _____

E-mail _____

Remove land line phone number of _____ as it was dropped.

Return with your BCREA bill payment or call/e-mail us.

At A Glance



Brown County Rural Electrical Association

Mark your calendars

Brown County REA’s 83rd Annual Meeting is Thursday, April 2, at the Sleepy Eye Event Center (110 12th Avenue N.E.). Registration begins at 4:30 p.m. Meal at 5:30 p.m., followed by the business meeting. Directors elected in Districts 2, 3 & 8. ☺



Revealing common culprits of high bills

Sometimes members look at their electric bill and are surprised at its amount. Your electric co-op's energy expert has encountered many such scenarios. These are the common culprits of unexpected high bills.

Primary electric heat

Primary electric heat is probably the culprit of 75 percent of high winter bills. For those who have a Dual Heat discount meter installed, subtract the dual heat monthly usage from your overall meter. This will give the homeowner a good idea of how much of their electricity use goes to heating.

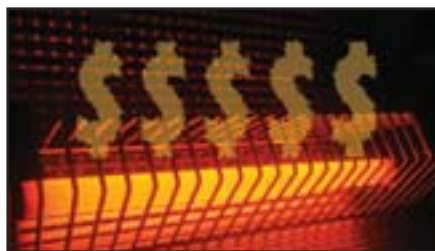
Unmetered electric heat in garages, shops and sheds is harder to determine. Keep in mind these units will usually kick in within a matter of minutes every time a door is opened. If you are heating a building at 55 degrees or warmer with electric resistance, you will see a huge increase in your bill no matter if it is 32 degrees outside or 0 degrees.

Space heating

It is fairly easy to identify space-heater use on a bill. Most space heaters are 1,500-watts. For every hour you use them they use 1.5 kilowatt-hours (kWh) or around 15 cents. If a space heater ran 12 hours a day for 30 days, it would translate to 540 kWh added to your monthly bill, which amounts to \$54. It adds up in a hurry! Some homes use multiple space heaters creating a billing surprise.

Outdoor miscellaneous heat

In one instance a member had in-floor heat mats located under a slab of outside concrete. It was turned on for a day to melt snow and ice off the concrete. The member then forgot to switch it off. With the cold outdoor temps and 90 percent heat loss to



Space heaters are one of the most common causes of high bills. What are some of the others? Read more to find out.

that area, the heat mats ran non-stop.

Water-related issues

Water-related issues affect many individual items, which can increase electric bills. We've seen leaky pipes (indoor and outdoor) or bad softening systems that continually drip or run, causing things such as well pumps or sump pumps to run continuously.

Hot tubs

A leaky hot tub or bad thermostat causes an element to run more. Since most hot tub elements are no smaller than 3,500 watts, this can really impact a bill. Plus, if the tub is not completely full, you end up trying to heat the air space. This makes your entire tub (jets and heater) run longer and more often.

Livestock tank heaters

Many livestock tank heaters consistently operate between 800 and 1,500 watts. Like a space heater, these should be easy to determine usage on your bill.

Engine block heaters

Similar to livestock heaters, once these are plugged in, they are always running. Don't forget about them! Add a timer to it.

Power Cost Adjustment (PCA)

The PCA is a result of how much power your electric co-op has to buy — **Continued on Page 7**

DOs & DON'Ts...


1. DO... Pay attention to the weather, especially when using electric resistance heat as your primary heat source. Even one severe cold week drives your use up as your house/garage/shop adjusts to the thermostat and heat loss of the building during that cold streak.

2. DON'T... Try to compare months or other members' houses to your current bill. So many variables can change from month to month or from year to year with the biggest being the weather. As for homes, you should never compare a bill to a neighbor's bill due to totally different number of residents, insulation, square footage and electrical products.

3. DO... Make journal or calendar entries on rare days that have a special occurrence happening at your home such as construction, added family or special event. These types of days can and usually do end up being a higher usage day versus a normal day.

4. DON'T... Compare dollar amounts. As hard as this may be, always look at your usage and your PCA to determine if you have a high bill or not.

5. Do... Consider hiring an electrician to submeter electric heat in a shop or shed to determine how much it uses.

6. DO... Take advantage of your electric co-op's appliance and heat pump rebates, along with water heater program to help keep electric bills manageable. 

The Emergency LED Bulb stays lit even during an outage

Never be left in the dark again! Emergency LED bulbs automatically light up during a power outage.

An LED Emergency Bulb works like an energy-saving bulb during regular use and switches to emergency light during a power outage, running on a lithium-ion battery. Thanks to a smart-charging feature, the light bulb can automatically refill its battery when the switch is on.

The LED Emergency Bulb provides the same soft white light as a 60-Watt LED light bulb (800 lumens). Its lifespan of 25,000 hours equals 2.85 years of accumulated use. Once the power goes out, the bulb switches to battery mode and will operate for six hours. Once the power returns, the bulb recharges automatically.

Other features include:

- Use like a regular LED bulb. Simply,




The Emergency LED Bulb keeps giving light for up to six hours once the power goes out. It comes on automatically in the event of an outage.

insert the bulb into a suitable single socket like a regular LED bulb.

- The bulb can even be removed and carried around the house for light. Hang it from hook (included) or activate the bulb by hand.

The Emergency LED Bulb is a safer alternative to candles during emergencies. It is more flexible than a traditional flashlight too. Keep the bulb in your lamp or take it with you to hang in a place with no electrical outlets or use it as a flashlight. Whenever the switch is ON, the Emergency LED Bulb uses the electricity to produce light and charge its battery back-up. It stops charging when the switch is OFF or the battery is fully charged.

Note: The Emergency LED Bulb cannot be used in multi-light fixtures, ceiling fans or dimmable switches.

The Emergency LED Bulb costs approximately \$65. Find it in a variety of stores and online. 

Safety

Keep in mind home electricity safety tips

During the winter season, everyone is inside more. Being homebound can mean appliances are used more and space heaters come out of storage. Put this "indoor" time to work and do a safety survey.

- If your home is 40 years old or older, has undergone a major renovation and has new appliances, its electric system should be checked by a qualified inspector to make sure circuits are not being overloaded.

- Consider having your circuit breakers replaced with arc fault circuit interrupters (AFCIs), which provide enhanced fire protection by detecting dangerous arcing conditions. Use ground fault circuit interrupter (GFCI)-protected outlets in areas where electricity is near water, like in the kitchen and bathroom. Every month, use the TEST buttons to check that GFCIs, AFCIs and smoke alarms are working properly.

Inspect cords for **DAMAGE** before use. Check for **cracked or frayed sockets**, loose or bare wires, and loose connections.




- Make sure all electrical panel circuits are properly labeled and easy to reach if you need to cut power to something quickly. Don't stack things in front of an electrical panel. Always replace fuses or circuit breakers with the correct size and amperage.

- Routinely check cords, outlets, switches and appliance for signs of damage, especially antique items like lamps or older-style switches and outlets.

- Do not overload outlets with too many devices or appliances. Do not use extension cords on a permanent basis or with major appliances.

- Never run electrical cords under rugs or carpets. Do not pinch cords under furniture or in windows/doors.

- Use light bulbs that match the recommended wattage on fixtures.

- Look and listen for warning signs of an electrical problem. Contact a licensed electrician if you observe: frequent problems with blowing fuses or tripping circuit breakers; a tingling feeling or slight shock when you touch an appliance; outlets and/or switches that are warm or make crackling, sizzling or buzzing noises; or flickering or dimming lights. 

— Information courtesy of esfi.org

Brown County Briefs

Operation Round Up



The Brown County Rural Electric Trust Board will meet March 31 at 5:30 p.m. to review applications for funding and the 2020 scholarship applications.

Member Advisory Council

April 13 will be the first meeting of the new Member Advisory Council. New members are still being sought. Contact your District Director or the REA office if interested.

Scholarships offered through Operation Round Up

High school seniors planning to attend college after graduation whose parents/guardians are members and live in Brown County REA's service area are encouraged to apply for one of six \$250 scholarships to be awarded through Operation Round Up.

Funds for the scholarships come from members who choose to round up their electric bill to the nearest dollar each month. The difference is placed in a trust, which is administered by a nine-member board. They meet four times each year to distribute funds to charitable causes, individuals and families in crisis and scholarships.

Scholarship applications are available from area high school counselors and can also be found at www.browncountyrea.coop.

Applications must be submitted by March 30. Winners will be announced at the BCREA Annual Meeting April 2. A copy of the student's high school transcript and one letter of recommendation are required. Scholarship funds will be awarded after successful completion of the first semester of college. ☎

Meet your BCREA

District 2



Brad Sprenger

Born and raised in Brown County in Mulligan Township, Brad Sprenger, with his son Chad, have about 30 head of beef cows and finish out an additional 150 head of cattle. Brad grows corn, beans, sweet corn and peas on 550 acres of crop land.

Brad and his wife, Julie, have four grown children: daughter, Melissa, Chad, Scott and Michael. They also have five grandsons and three granddaughters.

In addition to serving on the BCREA Board the past fifteen years, Brad is a member of the Knights of Columbus and is on the farm board for the Church of the Japanese Martyrs in Leavenworth. He is also presently serving on the CTV 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," he said. ☎

Operation Round Up kicks off new year

The Round Up Trust Board organized for 2020 at its first quarterly meeting February 18. The Trust Board welcomed new members Pat Roiger and Landon Sletta, representing Districts 1 and 3, respectively.

Trust Board Officers elected at the meeting are President Lee Johnson, Vice President Michelle Oswald, Secretary Vickie Kral and Treasurer Kari Berg. Other current Trust Board Members are Pat Roiger, Landon Sletta, Lynnae Pelzel, Michelle Strate and Ann Wendinger.

Funds totaling \$4,400 were awarded to 10 applicants and five area food shelves. Recipients of funds were Bridging Brown County, Junior Achievement of the New Ulm Area, Lake Hanska Quilters, Foundation Farm, Salvation Army Heat Share, Gary Kuebler Benefit, After Prom activities at Sleepy Eye Public, GFW, Sleepy Eye St. Mary's and Springfield high schools. In addition, donations were made to the following food shelves: Sleepy Eye Area, Springfield Area, New Ulm Emergency, We Care Project and Sibley County Food Share. ☎

BCREA and GRE visit Americold



Great River Energy's Economic Development staff joined BCREA on a tour of the Americold facility in rural New Ulm to learn about operations and energy needs. ☎

Director candidates for 2020

District 3



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 has served on the Operation Round Up Trust Board and is the present District 3 Director on the BCREA 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. ☎

and its effect on people and their quality of life,” Allen said. “A cooperative entity, regardless of the product supplied, is a grassroots-driven, home-owned part of that quality of life. I humbly offer my experience and skills to serve my fellow members of the BCREA.” ☎

District 8



Allen Lamm

Allen was born and raised on a small family dairy farm in Ottertail County, Minnesota. He attended the proverbial one-room country school through the 6th grade. After graduating from Pelican Rapids High School, he attended a technical college for power plant operation. Through the years he attended college classes for mathematics and management. He spent 40 years as a municipal employee in the operation of a variety of community water supplies and district energy. He has been an electric cooperative member for all but 10 years since leaving home. He has lived in Courtland township and a BCREA member for the last 20 years.

Allen and high school sweetheart, Susie, have been married for 48 years. They have two daughters, and have been blessed with five grandchildren, ages six-months to 18 years.

He is a member of Christ-The-King Church in New Ulm. Prior to his retirement, Allen was involved as a member of local, state and national boards and worked to assist with development of practical, realistic and achievable regulations.

“Over the course of 40 years, I learned the workings of an elected board, its responsibility to the members and staff, the environment of regulatory development,

District 8



David Wendinger

David E. Wendinger proudly resides on the home farm alongside his wife, Ann. There they raised their family and now nurture their grandchildren. David is a graduate of New Ulm High School where he was greatly influenced by the agricultural instructors and programs to be committed to be the next

generational farming partner, along with his father and twin brother, Donald.

David and Ann are parents of three children who are now married and reside in the neighboring three counties: Matthew and his wife, Leigh; Eric and his wife, Jennifer; and daughter Katie and husband, Charlie Johnson. They have been blessed with six grandchildren ages one to six.

D & D Wendinger farms is a diversified crop and livestock operation raising corn, soybeans, beef cow/calf and 700-800 head of feeder-to-finishing cattle. In addition, David enjoys driving motor coach for Thielen Bus Lines and Lake Crystal Coaches.

David took active roles in 4-H and FFA when the children were growing up and hopes to continue this with his grandchildren. He is a fourth-generation member of St. George Catholic parish, serves on the administrative council for the parish, as well as the Area Faith Community. He held roles with Central Livestock Board of Directors, First District Association of Litchfield, New Ulm Farm City Hub Club, Nicollet County Planning and Zoning, Nicollet County Recycling Committee and the newly formed Nicollet County Comprehensive Plan Committee.

“I respectfully request an opportunity to serve on the Brown County REA Board of Directors and represent the members of District 8 and over 3,000 member-owners of this forward vision-minded cooperative,” he said. “I believe in the Vision and Value that our cooperative is founded upon. I vow to be an industrious, attentive and diligent team player if chosen for this position. I promise to demonstrate due diligence for all transactions and decisions that are asked of me.” ☎

Why does the power blink?

At one time or another we've all returned home or woken up late for work to see the blinking "12:00" on our digital alarm clock. You then have to reset every digital clock in your household that doesn't have a battery backup. You reset the microwave clock, the stove clock and all of the bedroom alarm clocks. This state of "eternal midnight" was caused by a "blink" in the electrical system.

While blinks can be annoying, they show that an electrical system is working exactly as designed. While your electric cooperative take steps to reduce the number of blinks across its power system, you can take a few steps too. These momentary power interruptions can occur anywhere along a power system — from the time the electrons are generated at a power plant, to being shipped across the transmission line to substations and finally the lines leading to your home or business.

Why do blinks occur?

Blinks are created when an oil circuit recloser or switch opens along any portion of the power system. The recloser usually opens due to a large, quick rise of electrical current. This large rise, called a fault condition, can occur when a tree branch touches a line, lighting strikes or a wire breaks. When this happens, a relay senses the fault and tells the recloser to open, preventing the flow of power to the site. After opening, the breaker quickly closes. The brief delay, which allows the fault to clear, usually lasts less than two seconds. If the fault clears, every home or business that receives electricity off that power line has just experienced a blink. If utilities didn't use reclosers, this would end up as a longer outage. This could include thousands of accounts if the breaker protects a transmission line or a substation.

Reducing the blinks

Your co-op employs methods to reduce blink frequency. Tree trimming



Tree trimming is like preventative maintenance. The co-op trims back branches growing into power lines before they cause an outage when loaded with ice or bending due to high winds. Let the cooperative know if branches are growing into power lines; the co-op hires Carr's Tree Service to trim trees safely near our lines.

is probably the easiest and most common way; this is one area where you can help. Make sure your co-op knows of any trees or limbs located close to a power line. Drop us a note with your electric bill or call and tell us the address or account number where tree trimming is needed by our power lines.

Meanwhile, you can reduce the frustration of blinks by purchasing an alarm clock equipped with a battery backup. This type of digital clock offers "ride through" ability for momentary outages. It will also keep the correct time and sound an alarm in case of a long-duration outage, provided a charged battery is in place. As an added benefit, these devices only use the battery in the event of a power disruption.

Blinks also affect all electrical equipment, not just digital clocks. If a blink occurs while you are using a computer, your computer may crash and will have

to reboot, while hoping that you didn't lose the file. An uninterruptible power supply (UPS) on your computer can help prevent information losses. The UPS incorporates surge suppression technology with a battery backup; it provides time to save what you were working on and exit your computer properly.

The future of blinks

Your electric cooperative operates an active system maintenance program and works hard to identify and fix sources of service interruptions. The cooperative's metering system records blinks as well, which can be used to troubleshoot. However, crews still need to physically patrol the lines to find and fix the cause of the blinks.

Even though blinks will never disappear from our electric energy delivery system, by working together we can minimize effects of the interruptions and the frequency of these occurrences. Ⓢ

Popcorn recipes are popping up for new snacks & treats to eat

How do you like your popcorn? Do you fancy kettle corn, caramel corn, popcorn balls, bars, in salads or on top of cheese soup? Share your favorite popcorn recipes by sending to: Editor, Federated Rural Electric, PO Box 69, Jackson MN 56143-0069 or e-mail to christoffer@federatedrea.coop by March 25. Add your name and phone number. Thanks for sharing with us! ☺

Apple Crisp by Lorie Ploehn, Alpha

Butter 9x9" square pan or spray with Pam. Heap with peeled and sliced apples. Sprinkle ¾ c. sugar over the top, along with a bit of nutmeg, cinnamon and a dash of salt.

Topping

1 c. flour ½ c. sugar ½ c. butter dash of salt

Mix like a pie crust and sprinkle over apples. Bake at 400° for 30 minutes. Then turn down to 325° and bake 20 minutes more.

Double the recipe for a 9x13" pan. I like to use glass baking pans. ☺

Delicious Oatmeal Cookies

by Lynette Holm

1 c. brown sugar

1 c. white sugar

1 c. butter

1 c. vegetable oil

1 egg

2 tsp. vanilla

1 tsp. salt

1 tsp. soda

1 tsp. cream of tartar

1 c. coconut

1 c. oatmeal

3½ c. flour

1 c. Rice Krispies cereal

12 oz. pkg. chocolate chips

Mix in the order given. Drop by teaspoonfuls onto a baking sheet. Bake at 350° for 12 to 15 minutes. ☺

Common causes of high energy bills

— Continued From Page 2

on the open market at a higher price. If a bill is higher and the member is only looking at the dollar amount, one thing to be aware of is what the PCA is for the month. A higher PCA on a high usage bill can drive the dollar amount up more than what the homeowner may expect, while kilowatt-hours (kWh) remain nearly the same.

Keeping these common culprits in mind can help homeowners determine what causes unexpected high bills and prevent them too. Plus, for 101 Energy-Saving Tips contact the co-op to request this booklet. ☺

If your water heater comes down with 'spring' fever, springing a leak, call your co-op.



Go with our energy-efficient, limited-lifetime warranty water heater

Pick up the phone before the shovel; 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.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
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 — 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.

2019 Annual Report coming soon Please bring along to Annual Meeting April 2

All Brown County REA members will receive, by mail in mid-March, a copy of the cooperative's 2019 Annual Report. The mailing includes the Annual Meeting agenda, past minutes and financial report. Most importantly, the back page of the mailing includes your Annual Meeting registration form, which will be scanned at the registration table. **Please bring this Annual Report with you April 2.**

Notice of Annual Meeting

All Brown County REA members are invited and encouraged to attend the 83rd Annual Meeting

When: April 2
Location: Sleepy Eye Event Center
110 12th Avenue N.E.
Sleepy Eye, MN
Registration: 4:30 p.m.
Meal: 5:30 p.m.
Meeting: Immediately following meal



Election of directors in Districts 2, 3 & 8

Board meeting highlights

The BCREA Board of Directors held its monthly board meeting February 27. Discussion and/or action were taken on the following agenda items:

- Reviewed and approved new member applications, member cancellations, assignment transfers and estate payments.
 - Reviewed and approved the 2020 Cogeneration and Small Power Production Average Retail Cooperative Energy Rate schedule, effective January 1, 2020.
 - Reviewed and improved the 2020 Distributed Generation Grid Access Fee charges, effective January 1, 2020.
 - Reviewed estimated vs. actual cost of purchased power on the co-op's 2019 budget.
 - Received a demo of new technology to document findings and work completion on line patrol and tree-trimming projects.
 - Updated on the Outage Management System and the live outage map available on the co-op website.
 - Reviewed and approved cooperative policies 305-Safety, Reliability and Service Quality, 306-Privacy and Security of Protected Health Information and 307-Whistleblower.
- The Board will meet again March 26 at the BCREA headquarters in Sleepy Eye.

Community Health Day



Saturday, March 28
Sleepy Eye Public School
6:30 a.m.- 9:30 a.m.

- Blood analysis (includes cholesterol, LDL/HDL, calcium, glucose, etc.): \$50. Requires a 12-hour fast for best results
- Thyroid Stimulating Hormone (TSH) test: \$35
- Free blood pressure screenings

For appointments call between 8 a.m. and 4:30 p.m. Monday-Friday (800-658-2368 or 507-794-3331). Walk-ins will be accepted after 7:30 a.m. Health Day is a joint effort of Brown County REA, Brown County Public Health, Sleepy Eye Medical Center and Sleepy Eye Community Education. All are welcome.