

# Connections

January 2021

For the member-owners of Brown County REA



Volume 25, Issue 1

## Co-op rates remain below average

New Year's resolutions are great in theory, but putting them into practice is the hard part. Many people plan to make lifestyle choices, but they get distracted from carrying them out as the year goes along.

Each year your electric cooperative makes a resolution to provide you with reliable electric power for as low a price as possible. Fortunately, your electric co-op is good at keeping its resolutions!

Brown County REA's average residential electric rate is 9.5 cents per kilowatt-hour (kWh) for 2021. As you can see on the adjacent map, that is well under the Minnesota average electric rate for 2019 at 13 cents. In addition, the national average electric rate is 13.01 cents/kWh and your co-op is below that too.

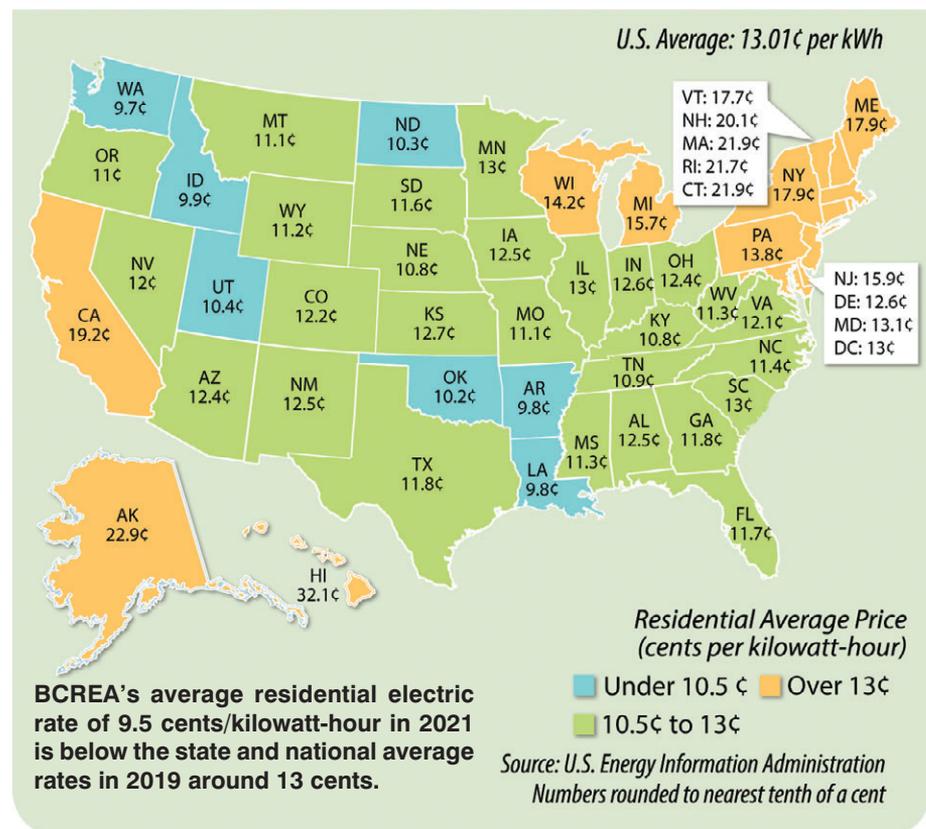
What makes it possible for your electric co-op to keep its resolutions?

First, your electric co-op is built on seven principles that always keep its goal in mind with everything it does: open and voluntary membership, democratic member control, members' economic participation, autonomy and independence, education, training, and information, cooperation among cooperatives and concern for community.

Next, your electric cooperative isn't run by a faceless corporation. Electric co-op employees and directors are your friends and neighbors. They have

### Average Prices for Residential Electricity

2019 figures, in cents per kWh



a vested interest in your community and the service they provide. They know that providing power at a price that is as close to cost is good for everyone. Plus, directors are elected by you, the member-owners!

Since these principles are everyday practices, it makes it easy for your electric cooperative to keep its New Year's resolution year after year after year. Your electric cooperative is never distracted in its mission to serve. (L)

#### At A Glance



Brown County Rural Electrical Association

#### Opportunity to win with Auto Pay!

Sign up to automatically pay your electric bill from a checking or savings account and be entered to win bill credits. Enroll before March 31 and you could win a \$100 bill credit! Details can be found on Page 5. (L)

# Save the princess...and energy!

If you are a gamer, you know that saving the princess was the goal of older video games. Now a new goal exists for gamers — saving energy!

Today's video game consoles have life-like graphics, voice control, gesture recognition and the ability to stream live Internet content. They also consume a surprising amount of electricity.

It is estimated that today's video game consoles can consume as much energy as all of the homes in the city of Houston or the equivalent of the electricity delivered by four power plants. With that much power in play, it is important to learn how to play as energy-efficiently as possible.

## Power saving settings

The Xbox One comes set-up to listen for the "Xbox On" voice command to turn on and allow other devices to access it via the network. By configuring "Energy-saving" Power Mode, you can disable such features and drop the Xbox One's standby power use by 98 percent.

The PlayStation 4 (PS4) enters a low power "rest" mode after one hour of inactivity, which can be reduced to save even more.

## Turn off the controllers

The PS4 includes a useful feature that allows the controllers to turn themselves off when not in use. You can choose to turn off your controllers automatically after 10, 30 or 60 minutes.

Xbox's Kinect accessory can use up to 14 watts when the game console is in use. If you don't use Kinect often, consider disconnecting it.

## Keep up with updates

Video game system updates often



**Take control of your video game playing. All of the video games in the country use as much energy as the city of Houston. Make sure to use your system as energy-efficiently as possible.**

offer new features. For example, a system update allowed the PS4 to power down automatically and the USB ports to enter a lower power state once connected controllers are fully charged, dropping its power consumption by over 65 percent.

## Don't let games come between you and your cable and streaming

For energy efficiency plug your cable TV cord into the first HDMI port on your TV and connect your Xbox to a secondary HDMI port. Plugging your cable TV cord into your Xbox requires the Xbox to consume power, even when you are not gaming.

Do you love binge-watching your favorite shows on Netflix? Try to avoid using your game console and use a digital media player (Roku, Apple TV, etc.) instead, which uses 15 times less energy. Better yet, you can watch Netflix most efficiently through a Smart TV, which does not require an extra streaming device.

If all gamers took these steps with the millions of PS4 and Xbox Ones out there, we would see a significant nationwide energy savings — over 800 million kWh every year. This prevents greenhouse gas emissions equivalent to the emissions from over 120,000 vehicles.

## TV time adds up too

If you are spending more time at home, you are also probably spending more time in front of the TV regardless, of whether you are a gamer or not. Any activity that increases screen time means increased energy use, making it important to choose an energy-efficient Energy Star model.

Energy Star TVs are, on average, 25 percent more energy efficient than conventional models, saving energy in all usage modes: sleep, idle and on. Energy Star models also offer the same features as their counterparts:

- High dynamic range (HDR) for

— **Continued on Page 6**

# It's a snap to charge your phone — wirelessly — with the TapNCharge

Your phone battery is low. It's off to the power cord drawer. Once you find the appropriate cord, you have to untangle it from all of the other cords. Then you have to unknot it. Then you have to find the adaptor, plug it into the wall, plug in your phone and wait.

Imagine if your phone battery is low and you simply set it down on a shelf, desk or table while it charges on its own?

Thanks to wireless charging technology, this is possible! Simply set your device on the TapNCharge and it will charge without cords.

Using TapNCharge is simple. All you have to do is put your phone on the charging pad and that's it! If you wanted to use your phone or answer a call, all you'll need to do is pick it up. No unplugging and no hassle.

The TapNCharge works with most models, old and new, Android and Apple. The TapNCharge comes with its own adaptor that allows you to transform old phones into wireless-charging phones.

While it's true that most cordless chargers are slow, that is not the case with this TapNCharge. You'll be amazed by how fast it can charge your phone.

The TapNCharge is sleek and thin so you can keep it in your handbag or even your pocket. Take it with you on trips for maximum comfort.



TapNCharge can be used right out of the box. All you have to do is plug it in and place your phone on it and it will charge. It also supports 1-centimeter charging distance, so you won't even need to take the phone case off.

Many wireless chargers are expensive, but the Tap N Charge is available for \$49.99. Visit [tapncharge.io](http://tapncharge.io) to order.

The TapNCharge makes it a snap to charge your phone. Simplify your life and remove going to the cord drawer whenever your phone is low. 

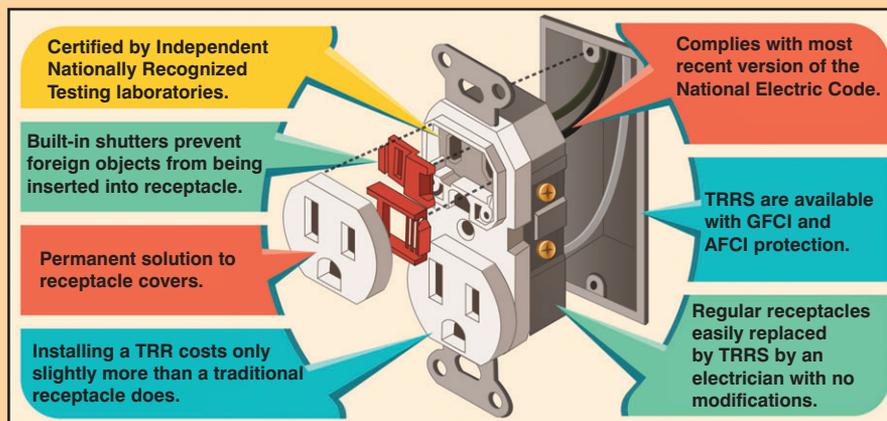
## Safety

### Tamper-resistant receptacles childproof outlets

If you have young children or grandkids, you may want to consider installing tamper-resistant receptacles (TRRs) as electric outlets.

TRRs feature built-in safety shutters that block foreign objects from being inserted into the receptacle. The shutters open only when a two-bladed or grounded plug is inserted into the outlet.

When you plug into a TRR for the first time, you may feel the internal shutter system engaging. If excessive force is needed to insert a plug into a TRR, there's a chance that the plug, not the receptacle, is damaged.



If a plug's blade is bent or splayed, straighten out the blades. This allows each prong to contact the shutters

simultaneously and engage them as designed. Cost: \$2-\$4. 

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

# Brown County Briefs

## Office closed



Our office still remains temporarily closed to the public. If you need to conduct business that can't be done remotely, please call 800-658-2368 to make an appointment. Please continue to pay your electric bill using the drop box, online bill pay through our website ([www.browncountyrea.coop](http://www.browncountyrea.coop)), mobile app or automatic payment from your bank account, credit or debit card.

## Recycle old holiday lights

BCREA is working with the Sleepy Eye YES! Team to collect old strands of lights. Drop off lights in the box outside the office through January 15. Do not place cord adapters, battery packs, plastic rope lights or CFL bulbs in the box.

## Operation Round Up

The first quarterly BCREA Trust Board meeting for 2021 is scheduled for February 16. Organizations wishing to be considered for funding can submit the application, found on the REA website at [www.browncountyrea.coop](http://www.browncountyrea.coop), before that date.

## Energy-efficiency tip

Use advanced power strips. They look like ordinary power strips, but they have built-in features that are designed to reduce the amount of energy used by standby electronics that consume energy even when they're not in use (also known as phantom load).

## 2021 calendars available

We still have 2021 large, farm pocket calendars and a small number of pocket-size calendars available to members. Please call to arrange pick up. ☎

# Operation Round Up offering six \$250 scholarships in 2021



Brown County REA, through its Operation Round Up program, is offering scholarships to high school seniors planning to attend college after graduation.

The Trust Board will award six \$250 scholarships to graduating seniors whose parents/guardians are members and live in Brown County REA's service area.

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 that 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 guidelines and applications are available from area high school counselors and on the REA website at [www.browncountyrea.coop](http://www.browncountyrea.coop).

The deadline for submission is April 1, and winners will be announced at the Brown County REA Annual Meeting April 8. 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. ☎

## Reliability evolves with electric system



As ever more renewable energy is added to the electric grid, utilities continue to preserve one of electricity's most important qualities: reliability.

"When our members flip the switch, they expect the lights to turn on," said BCREA Operations Manager Brandon Havemeier. "It takes a lot of technology and talented people working together to make that happen."

Large conventional power plants that have been shutting down in recent years are often replaced with new generators, such as wind turbines and solar panels, that can produce electricity at a lower cost. Yet, most of those resources rely on the wind and the sun and they need a dependable backup.

"Renewable energy paired with flexible generation is a proven recipe for affordable, reliable and environmentally responsible energy," said Jon Brekke, vice president and chief power supply officer for Brown County REA's wholesale energy provider Great River Energy. "Today, our natural gas-fueled power plants serve an essential role in maintaining reliable power supply."

Great River Energy has a fleet of peaking plants ready to produce energy when its members or the larger grid need it. They can start up in a matter of minutes to supply energy and balance the grid. When combined with the high availability of wind in the Midwest, natural gas peaking plants provide stability today and flexibility for a future with new technologies and opportunities.

### Batteries a possible future solution

Energy storage has long been viewed as a promising option for reliability. However, current storage technology is limited to short-term periods and unable to cost-effectively fulfill the role currently performed by peaking plants. Longer duration storage is being developed that may someday offer a competitive option for providing reliability and flexibility.

Great River Energy is working with a U.S. battery technology developer on a first-of-its-kind demonstration of a long-duration storage technology. The 1-megawatt storage pilot project will be located in Cambridge, Minnesota, with completion targeted for late 2023. ☎

# Santa Closet gifts kids



This Christmas season the BCREA office was again a collection site for Santa's Closet donations. CSR Cynthia Hansen (left) posed along with Santa's Closet representative Jen Maurer as she picked up gifts for distribution. BCREA sends its thanks out to everyone who gave this holiday season! 📷

## Never miss a payment with Auto Pay and enter drawing for bill credits



Pay your bill each month without giving it a thought with Auto Pay! Your monthly bill payment is automatically deducted from your bank account on the 20<sup>th</sup> of each month.

You still receive a statement, but no longer have to write a check, look for a stamp or make a trip to the mailbox or our drop box. For a limited time BCREA members currently enrolled or those who sign up to automatically pay their electric bill from a checking or savings account each month will be entered into a drawing for electric bill credits. Enroll before March 31 for a chance to win. One \$100, two \$50 and 12 \$25 bill credits will be drawn at random.

Sign up today by calling the office or using the ACH Authorization Form under the *Forms* tab on our website. 📷

# Candidates sought for special District 3 election

A cooperative director's move from BCREA's service area has created a vacancy to complete the remaining two years of a term on the board. Nominations are being sought for members residing in District 3, which is made up of City of Hanska, Lake Hanska and Linden townships in Brown County, plus parts of Riverdale and Madelia townships in Watonwan County.

Candidates are also still needed to run for electric cooperative director in Brown County REA's Districts 6, 7 and 9. District 6 is made up of Eden and Prairieville townships in Brown County, a portion of Sherman and all of Morgan townships in Redwood County. District 7 covers North Home, Home and Milford townships in Brown County. District 9 consists of a portion of Brighton and Bernadotte townships in Nicollet County, and portions of Alfsborg,

Cornish, Bismark and Moltke townships in Sibley County.

Nominating committee members for the districts are:

District 3: Clay Larson, Jim Lilleodden, and Dan Vee

District 6: Mike Carpenter, Greg Grausam and Brian Hacker

District 7: Tom Guggisberg, Terry Wordekemper and Alan & Marie Steffl

District 9: Aaron & Stefanie Wenninger, Tyler & Emily Stehr and Allen & Nancy Dauer

Directors will be elected at the 84<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting set for April 8 at the Sleepy Eye Event Center.

Members who reside in District 3, 6, 7 or 9 and interested in being a director candidate, please complete and return the Director Candidate Application. Your name will be shared with the nomination committee for consideration as a candidate. Contact the office with any questions. 📷

## BCREA director candidates application

By signing this application, I certify that I am a member of Brown County Rural Electrical Association (REA) and I hereby apply as a nominee for director in District \_\_\_\_\_ and request my name be considered by the Nominating Committee to be placed on the ballot for election at the April 8, 2021 Annual Meeting. I certify that the following statements are true and accurate as to my qualification to be a candidate for director.

- I am a member in good standing of the cooperative, receiving service at my primary residence, which is in the district for which I am seeking election.
- Within the last five (5) years I have not been adjudged to be guilty of a felony.
- Within the last three (3) years I was not an employee of the cooperative.
- During the last five (5) years I have not been employed by a labor union, which represents or has represented,

or has endeavored to represent, any employees of the cooperative.

- I am not a spouse, co-habitant, child, grandchild, parent, grandparent, brother, sister, whether by blood or in-law, of an employee or director of the cooperative.
- I am not in any way employed by or substantially financially interested in an enterprise competing with the cooperative or any cooperative-affiliated business.
- I am not a full-time employee or agent of, nor am I the full-time employer or principal of, another director.
- I will notify the appropriate authority of the cooperative in the event that any of the foregoing certification should change prior to the upcoming election or, should I be elected a director, should any of the foregoing certifications not continue to apply to me as serving director of the cooperative. 📷

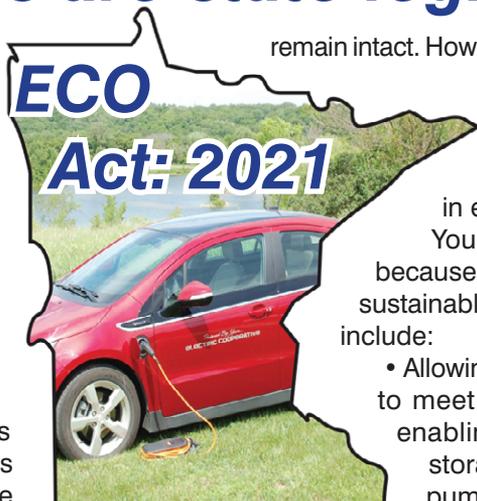
Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_ ✂

# Energy matters are state legislative priority

In 2007 Minnesota's Conservation Improvement Program (CIP) was established, creating goals for all utilities — including electric cooperatives — to reduce their annual electricity sales by 1.5 percent and to spend at least 1.5 percent of revenues to achieve this goal. Your electric cooperative is proud that we've consistently met or exceeded these goals.

When CIP started, select energy-efficient purchases were incentivized, including Energy Star-rated appliances and LED lighting. Some of these items were just making their entry into the marketplace. It was a win-win to encourage co-op member-owners to use these new products. Thanks in part to CIP, we've reached a point of saturation with many of the energy-efficiency incentives introduced more than a decade ago. The electric power industry is the only segment of the economy that has exceeded its carbon reduction goals.

While CIP was beneficial, it has become outdated, lacks an emphasis on innovation and doesn't support many advancements that have positive environmental impacts. To modernize the program Minnesota's electric cooperatives, along with other industry partners, drafted the Energy Conservation and Optimization (ECO) Act. This bill emphasizes total energy efficiency across many sectors — energy, transportation, agriculture and others — to encourage diverse improvements. Under the ECO Act, the goal to reduce electricity use by 1.5 percent annually will



remain intact. However, a portion of this may be achieved with efficient-electrification programs, such as incentivizing electric vehicles (EV). The 1.5 percent spending requirement would be eliminated unless the reduction in electricity use is not met.

Your electric cooperative supports this bill because we believe it provides more long-term, sustainable benefits for our members. The benefits include:

- Allowing your electric cooperative more flexibility to meet our annual energy-savings goals by enabling us to count EV incentives, electric storage water heaters and air source heat pumps toward part of the goal.
- Helping the environment by reducing greenhouse gas emissions and fostering a more resilient grid.
- Encouraging innovation by supporting continuously advancing technologies.
- Reducing consumers' total energy bills by eliminating the mandated 1.5 percent spending requirements, while providing better tools for reducing carbon.

We encourage our member-owners to join us in advocating for this legislative change by contacting your representatives. If you have questions, please contact your electric cooperative. We are happy to discuss more details of the ECO Act with you.

We need our member-consumers' help to pass the #ECOAct. The ECO Act will save you, your electric cooperative and all of our neighbors energy and money, plus cut through the unnecessary regulation. (E)

## Power up TVs & video games for energy savings

— Continued from Page 2

brighter highlights, a wider range of colors and better contrast levels.

- Internet connectivity, also referred to as "Smart TVs," for access to streaming video services like Netflix.
- Ultra-high definition (UHD) resolution means four times as many pixels as conventional high definition TVs.

In addition, Energy Star models have energy-efficient features.

- Automatic Brightness Control (ABC) saves energy and enhances the viewing experience. The ABC feature is a self-acting mechanism that controls the brightness of the TV relative to the brightness of the room.
- Local dimming saves energy and



Game on! Yes, you can save energy even with video games and the controllers!

gives deeper blacks. Local dimming turns off or dims sections of the backlighting for truer black levels.

- Many Energy Star TVs are now shipping with pre-set picture views such as "vivid," "sports" or "cinema." Look for the pre-set picture settings with the Energy Star label to ensure energy savings.

Video games and TV usage are perhaps at all time highs during this stay-at-home period. Following the right directions and buying the right models help keep energy usage in your home from being at an all-time high score, as well. (E)

— Information from [energystar.gov](http://energystar.gov)

## Time for lots-n-lots of tator tots recipes; share your favorites!

Tator tots top off a cold winter's night meal. Do you use tator tots in egg bake, hot dish, dressed up as nachos or what other hot tator tot recipes? Send your tator tot recipes to: Editor, Federated Rural Electric, PO Box 69, Jackson MN 56143-0069 or e-mail to christoffer@federatedrea.coop by January 25. Add your name and phone number. Thanks for sharing with us! ☺

## Heartland Security covers it all!



From burglars, fire, floods and more, Heartland Security can protect your home or business with everything from alarms, to cameras, plus motion and water sensors. Call 1-888-264-6380 or visit [www.heartlandss.com](http://www.heartlandss.com) for more information. ☺

### Rice Pudding

by Roxanne Zimanski, Courtland

Cook 1 c. white rice in 3 c. water; fluff with fork.

Cook the following in a heavy pan:

3 beaten egg yolks

$\frac{3}{4}$  c. sugar

2 T. cornstarch

2 c. half and half

2 c. milk

Cook until thick, stirring all of the time until it coats a spoon; remove from heat and add 1 tsp. vanilla and pour over rice. Let cool and then refrigerate. At serving time I shake some sugar and cinnamon on top and warm in microwave. ☺

**Pick up the phone  
before the shovel;  
call before digging!**

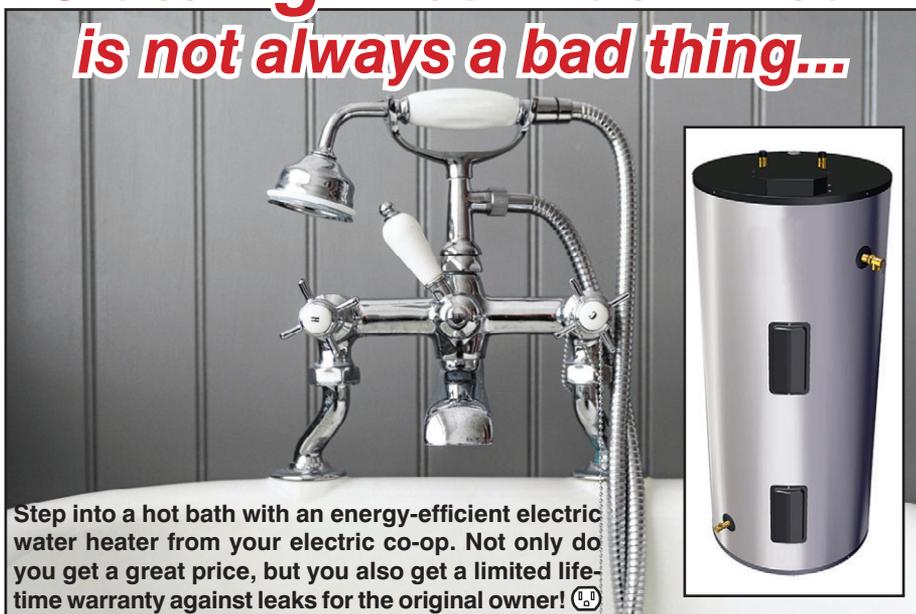
**1-800-252-1166**



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](http://www.gopherstateonecall.org) or call 811. Call a licensed electrician to locate the underground lines on your side of the meter. ☺

## 'Getting into hot water' is not always a bad thing...



Step into a hot bath with an energy-efficient electric water heater from your electric co-op. Not only do you get a great price, but you also get a limited lifetime warranty against leaks for the original owner! ☺



**Marcia Solie**  
Member Services  
Manager

# Staff Notes

## Resolve to be more energy-efficient in 2021; co-op rebates save you money and energy

Did the holiday entertaining take a toll on your aging refrigerator? Are you considering upgrading your heating and cooling system with a more energy-efficient option? Not only can you save energy and money when you replace with more efficient equipment, you may be eligible for Brown County REA rebates when you purchase qualifying Energy Star products.

Enjoy the best of both worlds with an Air Source Heat Pump (ASHP), which provides home cooling and heating with 76 percent less electricity than conventional air conditioners and furnaces. Rebates are available when you install an ASHP, placed on load control, with a non-electric or storage backup. Heat pump rebates are based on Heat Seasonal Performance Factor (HSPF), instead of SEER ratings. Enhanced rebates will be offered all year, as funds remain. Figure in up to 300 percent efficiency to help make the decision an easy one.

- ASHP with HSPF of 8.2 or higher: \$1,000 rebate
- ASHP with HSPF 9.0 or higher: \$1,500 rebate
- ASHP with HSPF 9.5 and higher: \$2,000 rebate

Installing a new Geothermal Heat Pump qualifies for a \$2,000 rebate. Place it on load control with whole house storage or non-electric backup heat to receive an additional \$50 rebate. A replacement geothermal unit qualifies for a \$1,000 rebate.

No ductwork in your home? No problem. Energy Star Ductless Mini Split Heat Pumps can efficiently heat and cool your home and qualify for a \$500 rebate, if electricity is your home's primary heat source. Pair with a delivered fuel heating system to earn a \$300 rebate. Members who install or upgrade existing heating and cooling systems with an Electronically Commutated Motor (ECM) can receive a \$25 rebate. Upgrade to an Energy Star Wi-Fi/Smart thermostat and receive a \$25 rebate.

Appliance rebates are available when you buy an Energy Star model. Recycling of the old unit is required for refrigerator and freezer rebates.

- Refrigerator (not dorm size) or freezer with recycling of replaced unit: \$75
- Energy Star dehumidifier or clothes dryer: \$25

Submit proof of purchase, Energy Star certification (found in the bottom right hand corner of the yellow Energy Guide) and proof of recycling, where required, to receive the rebate. Rebates for amounts less than \$100 will be paid as a credit on your electric bill. One appliance rebate per member per year. More information and rebate forms can be found on our website.

Aside from the residential rebates, retrofit lighting projects, electric forklifts, robotic milking systems, heating and cooling and other custom electrical applications may qualify for commercial rebates as well. Please contact me with questions. ☎



**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

Thomas Hayes, President — 228-8954  
William Berg, Vice President — 766-1497  
James D. Hanson, Sec.-Treasurer — 829-6756  
Brad Sprenger — 317-5576  
David Wendinger — 276-3166  
Greg Mages — 794-3540  
Joel Christensen — 828-4550  
James Mickelson, 794-6298

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

# Board meeting highlights

The Brown County REA Board of Directors held its monthly board meeting via Zoom on December 31, 2020. Discussion and/or action were taken on the following agenda items:

- Reviewed and approved the November 2020 board meeting minutes, new membership applications, member cancellations, payments to estates and assignment transfers.
- Approved appointments of Lisa Schmitz, District 7; and Jessie Beranek, District 8; to Brown County Rural Electric Trust Board.
- Appointed Clay Larson, Jim Lilleodden and Dan Vee as nominating committee for the 2021 District 3 director special election.
- Reviewed and approved the cooperative's 2021 operating budget.
- Reviewed and approved the 2020 Safety, Reliability and Service Quality Report.
- Approved the write-off of \$2,877.76 in uncollectible electric bill balances.
- Reviewed and approved the BCREA Truck and Equipment Rates.
- Elected Landon Sletta from rural Hanska to fill vacant District 3 board seat, through the special election at the 2021 annual meeting.

The next meeting is set for January 28, 2021 at the Brown County REA office in Sleepy Eye. ☎