



## Bright tips for hiring local electrician so your electrical project proceeds smoothly

Know when to hire an electrician. If it's beyond your comfort level, play it safe and call a licensed, electrician for your next job. Cousin Billy Bob may think he knows what he's doing with wiring, but is it safe and does it follow the electrical code?

Whether it's a lighting upgrade, house renovation or new electric service or expansion for the bins or a heated shop, keep these tips in mind.

1. Hire a licensed qualified electrician — Look for a master electrician to manage the project. Master electricians have the most experience and will often oversee the work of a journey-level electrician or apprentice.

2. Make sure the electrician is insured — A seasoned electrician knows the importance of following proper safety procedures and protecting themselves.

3. Get referrals or reviews — Hire an electrician that has positive reviews from a neighbor or friend. Otherwise, look at websites for reviews, like Nextdoor, Yelp and HomeAdvisor.

4. Determine your budget — Get two quotes if possible. Know your budget upfront.

5. Talk timeline — Electricians are busy and must juggle multiple projects. If your job is time-sensitive, convey that early on and discuss a realistic timeline with the electrician.

"If you will be working with an electrician for a new or expanded service, be sure that one of you also talks to your local electric cooperative," stated George Madden, Federated's operations manager. "Make sure to include your cooperative in the plans as we also need to coordinate the schedule with our line crews and make sure we have the adequate materials on hand. Ideally, give us a three to six month heads up of your plans and updates on the timeline too."

Keep in mind that your cooperative services the lines up to the electric meter. "From the meter to your house



**Need an electrician? Check out these tips when hiring an electrician to do your next electrical project.**

and outbuildings requires the work of an electrician," said Brandon Havemeier, Brown County REA's operations and engineering manager. "This also applies to the underground locates. The cooperative will do underground locates up to the meter. If it's beyond the meter, you will need to work with your local electrician to do that locate. Factor in time before the work starts for the locates to be completed."

Underground locates up to the meter require the member to call Gopher State One Call (1-800-252-1166 or 811) 48 hours in advance (that's business days so allow more time if it's a weekend). This allows the responding utilities time to do their locates for electricity, phone, natural gas, fiber and rural water. (b)

### At A Glance



Do you feel the call to serve on the BCREA Board of Directors?

Are you or someone you know interested in being a candidate for director on the Brown County REA Board in Districts 6, 7 or 9? Nominations are currently being sought. See Page 5 for details. (b)

# Be winter weather wiser to save energy; Help your heating system work well

Colder weather can increase energy use and bills since heating accounts for the highest wintertime energy consumption in most homes. The amount of energy used to heat your home depends on your equipment, how you use it and the efficiency of your home's shell — the building components that separate the indoors from the outdoors.

Know how your home is heated so you can make informed decisions on your energy use. It also helps you prepare for upcoming bills and avoid surprises that impact your budget. A forced-air furnace is the most common type of heating system and is fueled by natural gas, propane, oil or electricity. Heat pumps are growing in popularity so check out your cooperative's rebates on their website. A heat pump can step up your home's heating efficiency for forced-air systems. If you have a forced-air system, check the filter regularly and replace when it's dirty. Ductless heat pumps (mini-splits), boilers, radiant heat, baseboard heaters and electric resistance heaters are other common heating systems.

If you don't know what type of system you have, find the model number of your equipment and look it up online. You'll find information about the kind of system, how efficiently it operates and recommendations for servicing it, which can improve system efficiency.

Energy makes our homes comfortable. The easiest and lowest-cost way to save money on heating is to keep your thermostat as low as your



Seal air leaks at plumbing penetrations to eliminate winter drafts.

comfort will allow. The closer your home's temperature is to the outdoor temperature, the less energy is used.

The U.S. Department of Energy recommends a thermostat setting of 68 degrees in the winter while awake and lower when you are asleep or away from home. Setting the temperature too low can cause pipes to freeze or moisture issues in some geographic locations. Upgrade to a Wi-Fi Smart thermostat to easily change your home's temperatures using your cell phone; take advantage of the cooperative's \$25 Smart Thermostat rebate too! Adding an additional layer of clothing or slippers can keep you comfortable in a cooler home too.


Do you use electric resistance space heaters to heat a room or small section of your home? If so, you may see an increase on your electric bill. For example, let's say you use a 1,500-watt electric space heater to warm your living room while you watch TV or read a book. Operating that space heater

for two hours a day at the Minnesota average electricity rate of 13.5 cents per kilowatt-hour will cost you about \$12 a month. Operating that same space heater for 12 hours a day will cost you about \$73 a month.

If you choose to use space heaters, use them safely. Keep them three feet away from anything flammable; do not leave them unattended and plug them directly into the outlet — not an extension cord or power strip.

Just as we put on a windbreaker to keep cold winds from blowing through a sweater, your home also benefits from blocking air movement. Air sealing makes a big improvement in the comfort of your home and energy savings. A common air-sealing practice is applying weatherstripping to exterior doors and windows. Seal around plumbing penetrations to help eliminate drafts. A gap often exists between the drywall or wood and the plumbing pipes and drains. Filling gaps with expanding foam reduces drafts in bathrooms and kitchens.

Cold, windy winter days are the perfect time to find opportunities for air sealing. Rattling doors or moving curtains can indicate air leakage. Air leakage can occur where two different materials come together, like drywall and trim work. Cracked plaster and gaps in drywall can also cause drafts. Sealing the gaps saves energy and improves comfort.

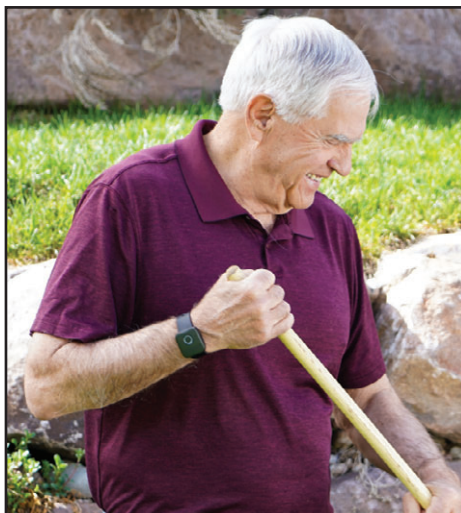
As outdoor temperatures plunge, a few proactive steps help maintain your home's comfort and keep the energy bill in check. 

## Medical alert goes with you, where you go! Heartland Security's Belle offers new style

Medical alert systems can now keep up with a busy lifestyle and still provide peace-of-mind for your loved one.


Go hiking, biking or gardening? Running an errand in town? Belle W is the latest style expanding the medical alert system beyond your home. The Belle W is a small watch-style medical alert, but it could also be worn around the neck.

Belle W uses powerful microphones and high-def voice technology so users speak with a response operator when help is needed. These operators use Wi-Fi and cellular location services to send help your way. Belle W works anywhere in the U.S. where 4G LTE cellular coverage exists. It is certified on the AT&T and Verizon networks.



The “W” with Belle W medical alert “watch” could stand for “Wow, it works where I go!”

Handy features for Belle W include being water resistant and providing fall detection. Just press the call button to get connected. The speaker provides communication between the wearer and operator. A status light lets the person see a call is in progress and when it needs to be recharged. It typically needs to be recharged every few days.

Heartland Security, a subsidiary of your electric cooperative, will mail the Belle W and provide phone support for \$99. If you prefer an in-person set up (where available), the cost becomes \$199. The monthly monitoring costs \$49.95. Call Heartland Security at 888-264-6380 or go to [www.heartlandss.com](http://www.heartlandss.com). 

### Safety

## Just in case, stay safe with electric space heater

Space heaters are popular for their ability to quickly heat small areas, making them ideal for bedrooms, offices or chilly corners of a home. There are two main types of space heaters: convection heaters and radiant heaters. Convection heaters warm the air, while radiant heaters emit heat directly to nearby objects. Regardless of the type, it pays to keep these safety tips in mind.

- Before each use, inspect your space heater for damage or frayed cords. Space heaters are often moved around and plugged in and out, resulting in wear and tear on the cord. If you notice any issues, do not use the heater.

- Select a space heater that is sized for the room you intend to heat. Overloading a small heater may force it to work harder, leading to overheating and electrical problems.

- Maintain a minimum clearance of at least three feet around the space heater. This includes furniture, curtains, bedding and any other combustible materials. Never place the heater on uneven surfaces or near water sources.



Stay toasty and safe when operating your space heater.

- Always plug your space heater directly into a grounded outlet. Avoid using extension cords or power strips, as these may not be able to handle the power requirements of the heater.

- Turn off your space heater when you leave the room or go to bed. Unattended heaters are a significant fire risk. Modern space heaters often come with timers or automatic shut-off switches, which can provide an extra layer of protection.

- Do not overload electrical circuits by plugging too many devices into the same outlet used by a space heater.

- The surface of the space heater can become extremely hot and may cause burns if touched. Be sure to keep children and pets away.

- Clean away the dust and debris that accumulate on the heating elements. In addition, follow the manufacturer's guidelines for maintenance to ensure optimal performance and safety.

Stay warm and stay safe! 

# Brown County Briefs

## Energy-efficiency tip

During winter months, ensure your home is well sealed and properly insulated to reduce the need for excessive heating. Seal air leaks around your home and add insulation where needed to save up to 10% on annual energy bills. Install weather stripping on exterior doors and apply caulk around windows. Check attic insulation levels and hire a qualified contractor if additional insulation is needed. Source: energystar.gov

## Member Advisory Council

The final meeting of the current Member Advisory Council will be held January 22, beginning with a light meal at 6:00 p.m. The meeting will begin at 6:30. Nominating committee members from District 6, 7 & 9 are asked to come for a short meeting at 5:45.

## Operation Round Up

The first quarterly Brown County Rural Electric Trust Board meeting for 2024 is scheduled for February 13. Organizations wishing to be considered for funding can submit the application, found on the REA website [www.browncountyrea.coop](http://www.browncountyrea.coop), before that date.

## 2024 calendars available

There are still a few 2024 large, farm pocket calendars available to pick up at the office. Limit one per member please.

## Recycle holiday lights

Need to dispose of some old holiday lights? BCREA is again working the Sleepy Eye YES! Team to collect strands of lights to be recycled. You may drop off old lights in the box outside the office entry doors through the middle of January. Please do not place cord adapters, battery packs, plastic rope lights or CFL bulbs in the collection box. ☺

## Annual line patrol is underway

Brown County REA crews are starting line patrol and will be coming onto yards and property throughout the service area. Line patrol began at the far southwest portion of the service territory and will continue to work to the east and north. Work will continue until early spring.

The cooperative patrols its lines each year in the winter months checking the cooperative's overhead and underground lines and equipment. Linemen will be looking for maintenance issues that need attention, such as loose or missing guy wires and guards, damaged wires and proper line clearance. They will perform maintenance on OCRs and overhead and underground lines.

Line patrol is just one more way your co-op strives to meet its mission to deliver safe and reliable electric service to its members. ☺

## Honored for years of service



Terry Helget  
30 years



Zach Gulden  
10 years



Bill Berg  
10 years



Jim Mickelson  
30 years

Brown County REA employees are recognized for each five years of service to the cooperative. Recipients of 2023 service awards are Accountant Terry Helget 30 years and Journeyman Lineman Zach Gulden 10 years. Directors Jim Mickelson and Bill Berg received certificates for 30 years and 10 years, respectively, of board service. Congratulations! ☺

## Apply now for Operation Round up scholarships

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

Six \$250 scholarships will be awarded to high school seniors whose parents/guardians are members and live in Brown County REA's service area. One \$250 scholarship is available to an adult REA member pursuing a degree.

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 which meets four times each year to distribute funds to charitable causes, individuals and families in crisis and scholarships.

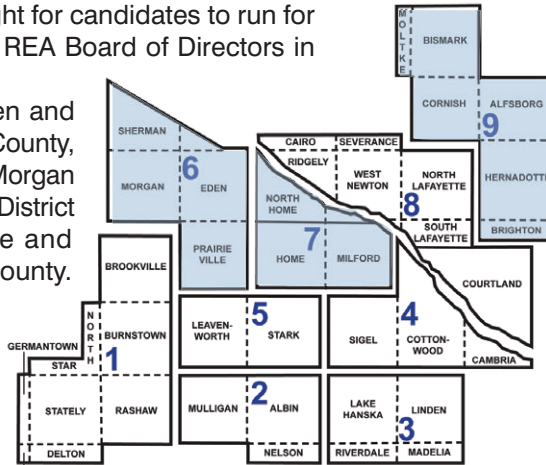
Scholarship guidelines and applications are available from area high school counselors. The application materials also be found on the REA website at [www.browncountyrea.coop](http://www.browncountyrea.coop).

The deadline for submission is April 8, 2024, and winners will be announced at the Brown County REA Annual Meeting on April 11. A copy of the student's high school transcript and one letter of recommendation are required. Non-traditional students will need to provide a transcript and recommendation letter. Scholarship funds will be awarded after successful completion of the first semester of college. ☺

# Director candidates sought

Nominations are being sought for candidates to run for election to the Brown County REA Board of Directors in 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.



Members who reside in District 6, 7 or 9 and interested in being a director candidate, can please complete and return the Director Candidate Application. Directors will be elected at the 87th Annual Meeting set for the evening of April 11, 2024 at the Sleepy Eye Event Center. ☎️

**Brown County REA  
87th Annual Meeting**

Thurs., April 11, 2024  
Sleepy Eye Event Center  
110 12th Avenue NE,  
Sleepy Eye, MN

Registration begins  
at 4:30 p.m.  
Meal at 5:30 p.m.,  
immediately followed by  
business meeting.  
Election of Directors  
in Districts 6, 7 & 9.

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 11, 2024 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 or a subsidiary.
- Within the last five (5) years, I have not been party in a mediation, arbitration, lawsuit or other legal action against or by 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 have earned a high school diploma or equivalent and I will achieve cooperative director certification or similar certification through NRECA within six years of becoming a 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.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Trip to D.C. available to one lucky high school student

What do 1,500 high school students, our nation's capital and electric cooperatives have in common? The Rural Electric Youth Tour, of course!

Brown County REA is looking for one exceptional student to represent the cooperative on an all-expense paid trip Washington, D.C. June 18-23, 2024. The Youth Tour group will explore D.C., spend a day on Capitol Hill, meet congressional leaders. It is a fast-paced leadership opportunity to see our government in action. Students will



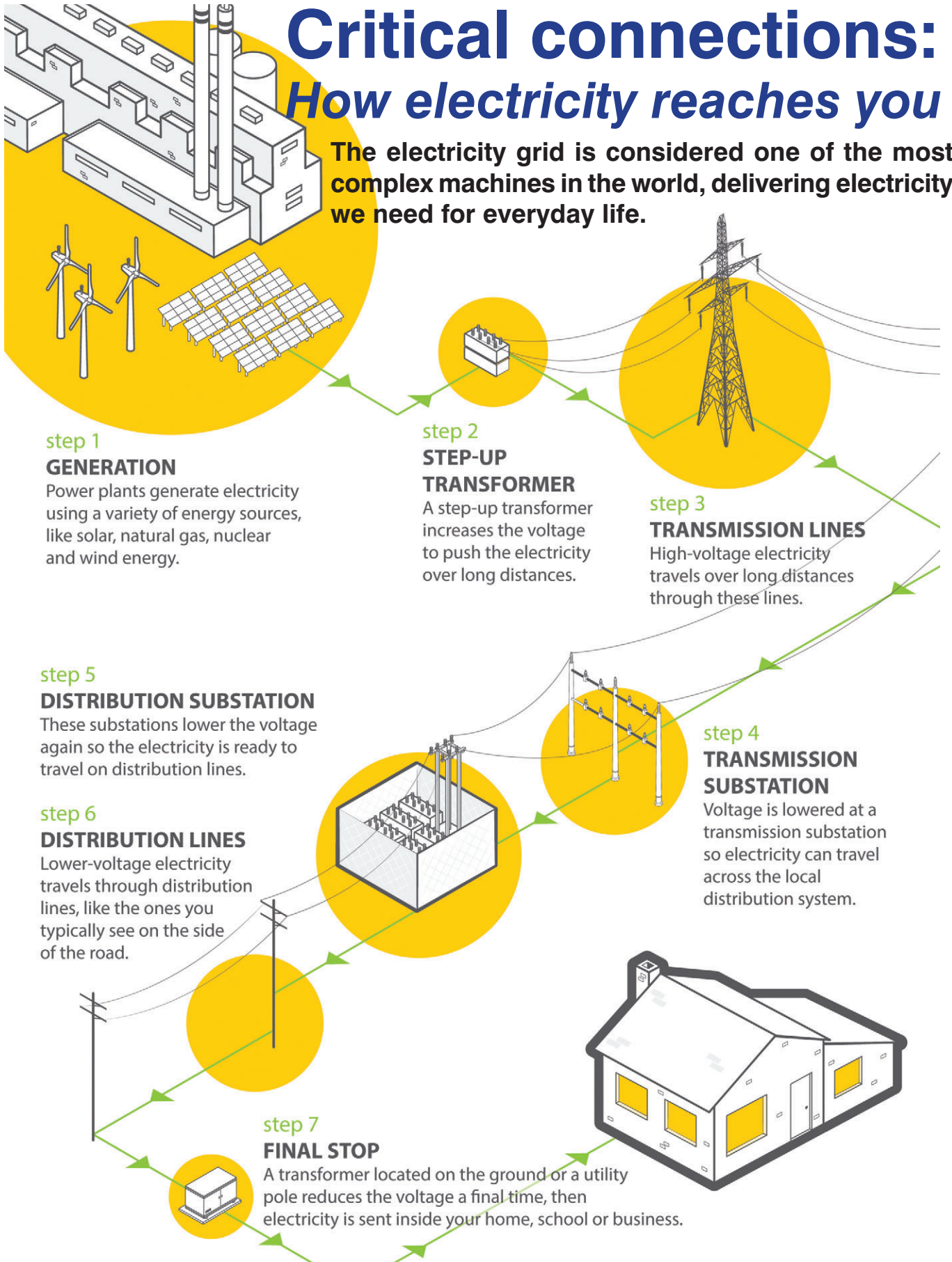
explore the cooperative business model, visit several museums and memorials, and gain a new appreciation of our nation's history. In the process, many new friendships are created as they spend the week with young people from electric cooperatives throughout Minnesota.

The BCREA application and selection procedures are available from high school counselors and on the cooperative's website [www.browncountyrea.coop](http://www.browncountyrea.coop).

Apply by March 1, 2024. ☎️

# Critical connections: *How electricity reaches you*

The electricity grid is considered one of the most complex machines in the world, delivering electricity we need for everyday life.



**step 1**  
**GENERATION**

Power plants generate electricity using a variety of energy sources, like solar, natural gas, nuclear and wind energy.

**step 2**  
**STEP-UP TRANSFORMER**

A step-up transformer increases the voltage to push the electricity over long distances.

**step 3**  
**TRANSMISSION LINES**

High-voltage electricity travels over long distances through these lines.

**step 5**  
**DISTRIBUTION SUBSTATION**

These substations lower the voltage again so the electricity is ready to travel on distribution lines.

**step 4**  
**TRANSMISSION SUBSTATION**

Voltage is lowered at a transmission substation so electricity can travel across the local distribution system.

**step 6**  
**DISTRIBUTION LINES**

Lower-voltage electricity travels through distribution lines, like the ones you typically see on the side of the road.

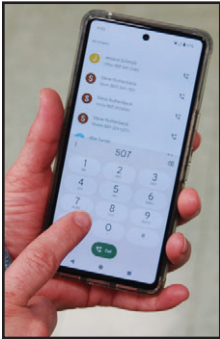
**step 7**  
**FINAL STOP**

A transformer located on the ground or a utility pole reduces the voltage a final time, then electricity is sent inside your home, school or business.

## Sliced, diced or chopped? Pull out the stops to share celery recipes

Pull out the celery recipes from your gallery. Do you add celery to soups, salads, stuffing, chow mein or other veggie-side dishes? Send your favorite celery recipes to Editor, Federated Rural Electric, PO Box 69, Jackson MN 56143-0069 or e-mail to christoffer@federatedrea.coop by January 29. Add your name and phone number. Thanks for sharing with us! 📧

## 507 area code changes: Use the 507 area code when dialing local calls starting January 30



The Minnesota Public Utilities added another area code (924) to the 507 area code area. This will require you to dial differently this year.

1. Effective January 30, 2024, dial the area code (507) plus the seven-digit telephone number when dialing. If you do not dial the 507, the call will still go through.

2. Effective July 30, 2024, dial the area code (507) and the seven-digit telephone number within the 507 area. If you do not do this, your phone call will not be completed. You will get a recording telling you to dial again using the area code.

3. Effective August 30, 2024, the new area code of 924 will also be used for the 507 area code area.

When calling your electric cooperative, start using the 507 area code now. Make sure it's added into your cell phone too so you are ready for this change. Your cooperative will still offer its toll-free phone number. Taking a few minutes now, ensures you can reach us if an outage occurs and you're in the dark. 📧

## Cowboy Stew

by Terrie Hlavac, Jackson

Brown 1 lb. hamburger in a skillet. Drain off any grease.

Add 1 can of tomato soup and 1 can (20 or 28 oz.) Bush's Baked Beans. Mix and simmer 15-20 minutes. 📧

## Just make the 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 and tiling. 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. 📧

## This month get: \$100 OFF A NEW SECURITY SYSTEM

with three year monitoring agreement.



A subsidiary of your local electric co-op

You provide the rubber ducky... We'll provide the hot water



Call your local electric co-op for your next water heater



**Mike Heidemann**  
Chief Executive  
Officer

# Staff Notes

## Midwest electric system ready for winter; Region has sufficient resources for expected conditions and plans for emergencies

National headlines lately warn of possible power shortages in parts of the United States this winter. Our wholesale power supplier Great River Energy (GRE) reports it is ready to meet its responsibilities to member cooperatives and the Midcontinent Independent System Operator (MISO) by generating and delivering energy, regardless of weather conditions.

MISO recently released its annual winter outlook and expectations of a mild winter for most of its territory. January is forecasted to have the highest winter peak demand but MISO reports ample available generation supply. GRE continues investing in its generation and transmission assets to support grid reliability for the future.

GRE and Minnesota Power are jointly developing the Northland Reliability Project, a 180-mile, 345-kilovolt electric transmission line from northern Minnesota to central Minnesota to ensure continued reliability into the future as the region transitions to greater levels of renewable energy.

MISO stresses the importance of reliability in all seasons, particularly when entering winter and summer as demand for electricity peaks. GRE's winter reliability plans received an important boost recently when the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission (PUC) approved the addition of dual fuel capability at GRE's Cambridge Peaking Station. This will enable the plant to operate on fuel oil when its primary fuel — natural gas — is either unavailable or prohibitively expensive.

Natural gas peaking plants are an important part of overall reliability of the electric grid by providing generation at times of greatest system need. The dual fuel capability will further enhance overall system reliability and help keep businesses operating with homes safe and warm.

Electric cooperatives serving Minnesota must be prepared for extreme winter conditions, which are normal for our region. The dual fuel capability in Cambridge will help to meet the needs and expectations of GRE member-owner cooperative, like Brown County REA, serving you, our members, on the coldest nights of the year.

Dual fuel capability at Cambridge Peaking Station is expected to be operational in time for the winter of 2025-26.



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: 7:30 a.m. to 4 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  
Landon Sletta — 439-6559  
The Board of Directors meets the last Thursday of each month.

# Board meeting highlights

The BCREA Board of Directors held its monthly board meeting on November 21, 2023. Discussion and/or action were taken on the following agenda items:

- Cooperative Finance Corporation (CFC) Regional Vice President, Amanda Seger, virtually presented the cooperative's 2022 Key Ratio Trend Analysis (KRTA).
- Approved appointments to the Nominating Committees for the 2024 director elections: District 6 – Matt Green, John Garrioch, Dennis Dittbenner; District 7 – Joseph Miller, Chad Walter, Daniel J. Hoffmann; District 9 – Brad & Tori Hagberg, Tim & Beth Anderson, Neal Hoffmann.
- Approved appointment of Bonnie Seidl, District 7, to the Brown County Rural Electric Trust Board.
- Discussed and approved the return of \$128,500 in refunded margins of 2023 Brown County REA margins to members to eliminate the Power Cost Adjustment (PCA) on November electric bills, payable in December.

The next meeting is set for December 28, 2023, at the BCREA office in Sleepy Eye.

**Looking to install a new heat pump or a new energy-efficient refrigerator in 2024?**  
Brown County REA will again offer residential rebates to members who install efficient heating and cooling systems, some Energy Star-certified appliances and Level 2 electric vehicle chargers at their homes. Visit [www.browncountyrea.coop](http://www.browncountyrea.coop).