

Connections



For the member-owners of Brown County REA

Volume 29, Issue 2

High school seniors apply now for Operation Round Up scholarships




Easton Clark, 2024 New Ulm High School graduate, was awarded an Operation Round Up scholarship.

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

Eight \$250 scholarships will be awarded to students 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 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 the application form are available from area high school counselors. The application materials can also be found on the REA website at www.browncountyrea.coop. A copy of the student's high school transcript and one letter of recommendation are required.

The deadline for submission is April 7, 2025; winners will be announced at the Brown County REA Annual Meeting on April 10. Scholarship funds are awarded after successful completion of the first semester of college. 

Brown County REA 88th Annual Meeting

Thursday, April 10

Sleepy Eye

Event Center

110 12th Avenue NE

Sleepy Eye, MN




- Registration & music by Leon Olsen Band 4:30 p.m.
- Meal at 5:30 p.m., immediately followed by business meeting
- Election of Directors in Districts 1, 4 & 5
- Vote by mail before April 10 or in person at the meeting

BCREA is closed Feb. 17 for President's Day 

At A Glance



Reap the rewards with co-op rebates

Is your aging heating and cooling system not keeping your home comfortable anymore? Your refrigerator had a few too many birthdays? An upgrade can save on energy costs and may also offer an energy efficiency rebate through BCREA. Learn more on Pages 5 and 8. 

Cook up energy savings with new induction stovetop that's faster and even more efficient

What's cooking at your house? Is your electric stove past its prime? Maybe it's time to consider upgrading your electric stove/oven.

According to the International Association of Certified Home Inspectors, the average lifespan for an electric range is 13 to 15 years. If you cannot recall the age of your stove, it might be time to plan for a new model and one that's energy-efficient too! Look at upgrading to an electric induction cooktop.

Consumer Reports state that an induction stove is up to 10 percent more energy-efficient than a conventional electric stovetop. When compared to a natural gas stove, induction cooking is about three times more efficient.

Choose from three types of induction cooking styles. Portable induction cooktops are single-burner units that are good for small kitchens, portable cooking or just trying it out. Built in cooktops are integrated into your kitchen counter. Finally, induction ranges combine induction cooking elements for the stove with an oven.

Induction cooktops are also ranked tops for safety due to the induction burner. It works by creating an electromagnetic field below the glass cooktop surface. This causes magnetic pans sitting on top to heat up. If there's no pan on top or you turn on the wrong burner, it won't get hot. Plus, as soon as a pan is removed from the burner, the heating stops so the glass surface doesn't risk burning your hand.

Granted, this means your existing pots and pans may or may not work on a cooktop. Place a magnet to the bottom of the pot. If it sticks, you don't need new cooking pots. If not, you will need stainless steel, cast iron or enamel-coated cast iron cookware. Sorry, aluminum will not work. Look for "induction compatible" pans.

Another big advantage of an induction cooktop is the speed! Time is money when you are cooking, right? Induction cooking can boil six quarts of water two to four minutes sooner than a gas or electric stove. No heating element has to heat up first before transferring heat to the pan, like with your old electric stove. Besides the speed, induction ranges cook more precisely and evenly, as reported by *Consumer Reports*. The reason is that the heat generates from within the pot or pan.


Clean up becomes simply a breeze with these induction cooktops. The nice smooth glass surface makes it so easy to wipe up spills.



Ditch the old stove. Switch to induction stove for fast cooking.

In addition, the electric induction range likely features some sweet features with the oven. Imagine how much garden surplus can be dehydrated with the new model's dehydrating oven feature. These new models can also air fry. Toss the air fryer clunker away that takes up a lot of space on the countertop for an oven air fryer that can feed the whole family at once, rather than in shifts. Some models even have Wi-Fi features turning the oven on and off remotely or monitoring the meal inside. You will still enjoy typical features, like the self-cleaning oven and adjustable racks.

Yes, induction cooktops are often more expensive, but prices have been dropping. In addition, the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) offers rebates, if the program is not changed by the incoming administration. Minnesota has received its funding, but the program has not been unveiled by the Department of Commerce; the department's website lists a rebate up to \$840 for households buying induction ranges with qualifying income level.


Induction cooking is gaining popularity due to its efficiency, safety and convenience. As technology advances, more features, such as smart connectivity, automatic pot detection and integration with home automation systems are expected to enhance the cooking experience. 

Trash old trash can for new tech features

Now even trash cans feature an electric cord! Why would you want that? Check out these conveniences.

The SensorCan from iTouchless (13 gallon kitchen trash can) features an carbon odor filter. This filter absorbs garbage odors and neutralizes the smells! It even comes with a free text message reminder on when it's time to replace the odor filter. Each charcoal filter lasts about three months; buy an eight pack online for \$22. Imagine odor control with a diaper pail!

Topping off the trash can is an automatic sensing lid. Move your hand above the motion sensor and the lid automatically opens. No stepping on the foot pedal is needed. That's a step above being hygienic! Enjoy never opening a lid or cupboard door with sticky, messy hands to throw away your trash.

While the AC adapter to power it is five foot long, if no outlet exists nearby, you could power it with four D-sized batteries. When shopping for this trash can online, be observant as some models come with the AC adapter (for about \$78) and others charge about \$10 more for it. 



SensorCan from iTouchless has a motion detector to open it and charcoal odor filter too.

Safety

Your cooperative loves heart health safety — investing in automatic external defibrillators for office, line trucks

Since Valentines Day and Heart Health Month occur in February, your electric cooperative wanted to share something that is close to our heart — automatic external defibrillators (AEDs).

The American Red Cross explains that AEDs can help those experiencing sudden cardiac arrest. This sophisticated, yet easy-to-use, medical device analyzes the heart's rhythm; if necessary, it delivers an electrical shock or defibrillation to help the heart re-establish an effective rhythm.

Did you know that your electric cooperative has AEDs? The co-op's office has an AED, along with the line crews' large bucket trucks. In case of an electrical contact accident along the cooperative's power lines, the linemen are equipped with this possible lifesaving tool.

"While we hope we never need to use it, we are equipped for this emergency, whether an employee,




Line crews have all sorts of tools on their trucks. You may be surprised that an automatic external defibrillator (AED) is one of the safety tools your cooperative stocks. Jacob Kummer displays one from a Federated Rural Electric line truck.

director or an office visitor, has a heart issue," commented Brandon Havemeier, Brown County REA's operations manager. "Our employees are trained on first aid, along with the use of an AED."

"We have had AEDs for more than a decade," stated George Madden, Federated's operations manager. "We consider this life-saving tool as a necessity, as our line crews work around the high-voltage lines."

Besides AEDs, your cooperative's line trucks also carry other safety tools: a fire extinguisher and first aid kit.

In addition, the cooperative's Operation Round Up program has helped fund AEDs for local ambulance departments and other public organizations. Visit the cooperative's website to find the Operation Round Up application or call the office to request that a hard copy be mailed to you. 

Brown County Briefs

Efficiency tip

If you have a home office, look for opportunities to save energy in your workspace. Use ENERGY STAR®-rated equipment, which consumes up to 50% less energy than standard models. Set equipment like printers and scanners to automatically switch to sleep or energy-saver mode when not in use. In addition to saving energy, the equipment will stay cooler, which will help extend its life. Another way to save energy in your home office is to use efficient lamps for task lighting. Replace any older bulbs with energy-saving LEDs.

2025 calendars available

Members can stop by the REA office during business hours to pick up a 2025 large, farm pocket calendar or small pocket-size calendars. One per member please.

Operation Round Up meeting February 18

The first quarterly Brown County Rural Electric Trust Board meeting for 2025 is set for February 18. Organizations wishing to be considered for funding can submit the application, found on the REA website www.browncountyrea.coop, before that date.

Annual line patrol is underway

Just a reminder that Brown County REA crews are working on the annual line patrol and will be coming onto yards and property throughout the service area.

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. Work will continue until early spring.



Include your electric co-op in your wind or solar discussions before purchasing

If you're considering adding a Distributed Energy Resource (ie: wind, solar) at your home or business located in Brown County REA's service territory, please let the co-op be part of the conversation from the start.

Cooperative staff would like to help members make informed decisions, go over annual usage reports to help size the system to your electric load, explain any service upgrades and associated costs and provide you with the paperwork required to interconnect to our system. Brown County REA posts all the application and technical forms on our website for you to access and review.

If a DER vendor approaches you claiming to be affiliated with Brown County REA, please be aware that your cooperative does not endorse any specific company or installer of wind or solar. Do your homework first and contact us at 800-658-2368 or 507-794-3331 with questions.

Brown County REA has been providing safe, reliable electricity to you, our members for nearly 90 years and plans to continue to do so well into the future.

Youth Tour deadline nearing; Act now & apply by February 28



Brown County REA is looking to award an all-expense paid Washington, D.C. trip to one lucky sophomore or junior whose parents or guardians are Brown County REA members. But you can't win if you don't apply.

The youth tour winner will travel with other Minnesota electric cooperatives' representatives on the Rural Electric Youth Tour to explore our nation's capital June 16-21, 2025. It is a fast-paced leadership opportunity to see our government in action. Youth will spend a day on Capitol Hill and meet with congressional leaders. 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 throughout Minnesota and beyond.

The application and selection procedures are available from high school counselors and on the REA website www.browncountyrea.coop. Apply by February 28, 2025.

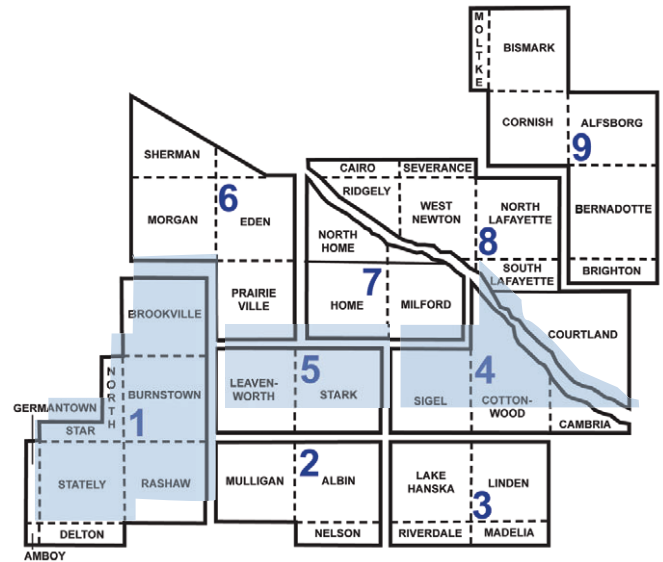
Last call! Director candidates sought

Interested or know of someone who may be interested in running for a position as Director for your electric cooperative? Nominations are being sought for candidates to run for election in BCREA's Districts 1, 4, and 5.

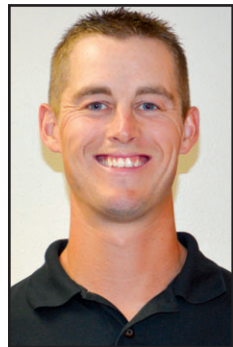
District 1 is made up of Stately, Bashaw, Burnstown and portions of North Star townships, the city of Comfrey in Brown County, a portion of Brookville Township in Redwood County and part of Delton Township in Cottonwood County. District 4 covers Sigel and Cottonwood townships in Brown County and part of Cambria Township in Blue Earth County. District 5 consists of Stark and Leavenworth townships in Brown County.

Members who reside in District 1, 4 or 5 and interested in being a director candidate, please complete and return the Director Candidate Application found at www.browncountyrea.coop before February 14, 2025.

Directors will be elected at the 88th Annual Meeting set for the evening of April 10, 2025 at the Sleepy Eye Event Center. (L)



BCREA presents the co-op years of service awards



Brandon Havemeier

Each year, Brown County REA employees and directors are recognized for every five years of service to the cooperative.

Brandon Havemeier, operations and engineering manager, received an award for 15 years of service. Director Greg Mages, pictured on right in photo below with CEO Mike Heidemann, was recognized for 10 years on the board. Congratulations! (L)



Cooperative's 2025 rebates offer energy efficiency & savings too!

— Continued from Page 8

2025 BCREA rebates	Amount
Air source heat pump 7.5 HSPF & 14.3 SEER or more (w load control)	\$1,500
Air source heat pump 8.5 HSPF & 16 SEER2 or more (w load control)	\$2,000
Air source heat pump, depends on efficiency, no load control	\$750-\$1,000
Ground source heat pump	\$400/ton
Ground source heat pump (replacement unit)	\$1,000
Ductless mini split heat pump 7.5 HSPF2 & 14.3 SEER2	\$300
Ductless mini split heat pump 8.5 HSPF2 & 16 SEER2	\$500
Ductless mini split heat pump less than one ton	\$150
Energy Star® smart thermostat or ECM gas furnace motor rebate	\$25
Energy Star® refrigerator or freezer with proof of recycling of old unit	\$75
Energy Star® dehumidifier or electric clothes dryer	\$25

priced \$399 to \$599 qualify for \$50. The co-op also offers a \$100 rebate on an electric riding lawn mower or snowblower pre-tax priced \$599 and higher. Limit one yard tool rebate per member.

Brown County REA offers Energy® Star appliance rebates too. Replace a refrigerator or freezer with a new Energy Star® model 7.7 cubic foot or larger and recycle the old unit to receive \$75. Purchase an Energy Star®-rated dehumidifier or qualifying electric clothes dryer and receive \$25.

Submit the receipt, Energy Star® certification and proof of recycling on the refrigerator or freezer only, to receive the rebate. Rebates for amounts less than \$100 are paid as a credit on your electric bill. One appliance rebate per member per year. You can find more information and all the rebate forms on our website www.browncountyrea.coop.

In addition to residential rebates, commercial rebates may be available for retrofit lighting projects, electric forklifts, robotic milking systems, heating and cooling and other custom electrical applications. Contact the office to learn more. (L)

Upper Midwest electric providers will develop transmission lines for continued reliability

The Midcontinent Independent System Operator (MISO), our region's grid operator, approved a new set of high-voltage transmission projects in December to help ensure reliable service, deliver more renewable energy and support the region's growing economy.

Several utilities, including Great River Energy, participated in the planning process, advocating for the projects that are in the best interest of its member cooperatives. Several utilities will develop the projects to serve customers throughout the Midwest with reliable electricity in a changing energy environment.

"These new transmission lines will help keep electric service reliable and affordable for homes, farms and businesses every hour, every day," said Great River Energy's Vice President and Chief Transmission Officer Priti Patel.

This was the second set of projects in MISO's Long-Range Transmission Plan, known as Tranche 2.1 to be approved. This historic \$21.8 billion portfolio includes 24 projects throughout the Midwest with several 345-kilovolt (kV) transmission lines in Minnesota and a 765-kilovolt (kV) transmission backbone that would start in South Dakota and traverse southern Minnesota before continuing into Wisconsin and Iowa.

"Being able to deliver bulk electricity across multiple states helps ensure reliability for customers even when the wind doesn't blow and the sun doesn't shine," Patel said.

New 765 kV transmission lines

While 765 kV transmission has been used in other parts of the United States for decades, these projects will be a first for the Upper Midwest. This high

capacity transmission line can carry the same amount of electricity as six 345-kV transmission lines, maximizing the efficient use of land and reducing the overall impact on landowners.

"To support the Upper Midwest's energy and economic future electric providers are using innovative approaches to maintain the reliability of the grid in a way that is most affordable and least impactful from a land-use perspective," Patel said. "These projects and the addition of the 765-kV transmission backbone are a big step for the future."

Overall, the Tranche 2.1 portfolio will deliver energy resources to customers where and when they need it and provide significant benefits, including reliable electricity in the face of a changing energy system and increased access to new generation. As the region's electric system transitions from fossil fuels to renewable resources, such as wind and solar, more bulk power lines are needed across the region for continued reliability.

The new 765-kV backbone transmis-

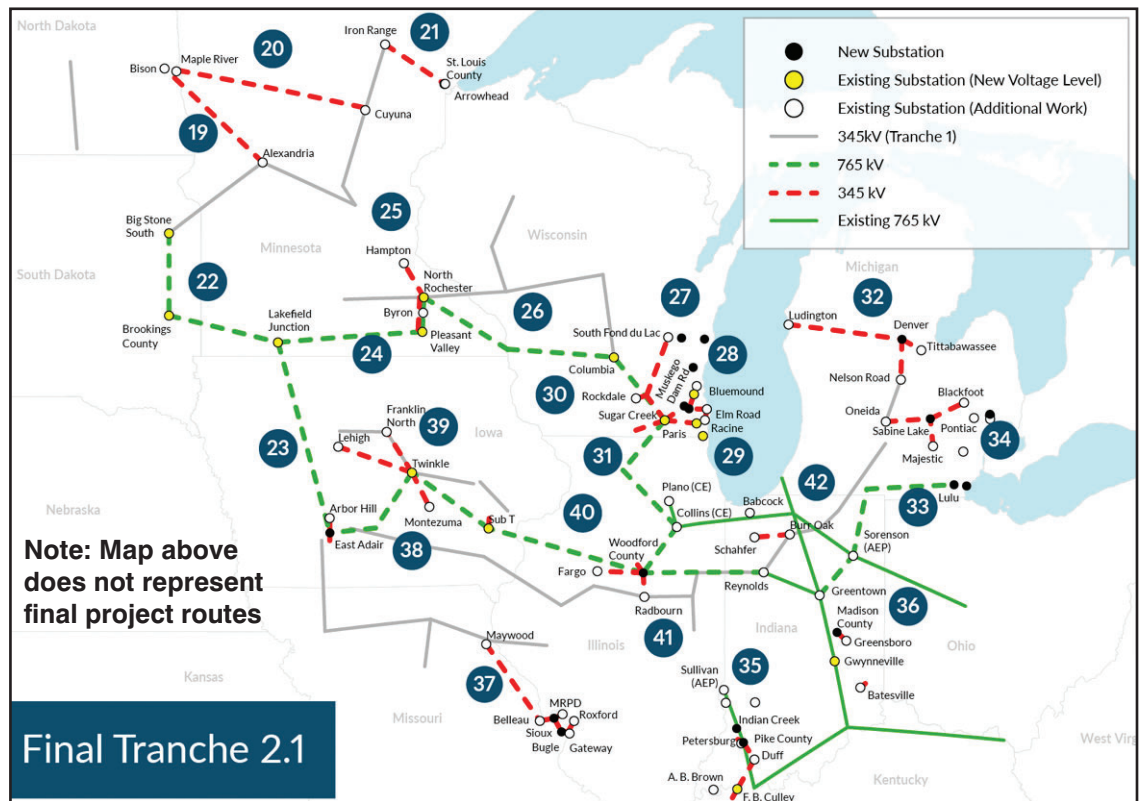
sion connects the following substations:

- Big Stone South (Northeast South Dakota)
- Brookings (Eastern South Dakota)
- Lakefield Junction (Southwest Minnesota)
- Pleasant Valley (Southeast Minnesota)
- North Rochester (Southeast Minnesota)
- Columbia (near Madison, Wisconsin)

Joint Targeted Interconnection Queue projects (JTIQ)

Another portfolio of projects called the Joint Targeted Interconnection Queue projects were approved by MISO on the same day. These projects connect regions, including southwest Minnesota, North Dakota and South Dakota, providing strong transmission connections and reducing congestion along the boundaries between the MISO and Southwest Power Pool grids. These projects will allow renewable energy developers and energy providers to tap into the region's rich wind resources. The projects are partially funded by

— Continued on Page 7



Chip, chip, hooray! Break out the chocolate chip recipes for treats

What's cooking with chocolate chips in your house? Share your favorite chocolate chip (or even butterscotch or caramel chip) recipes with us, whether it's for cookies, bars, candy, cakes or other desserts. Send your favorite chocolate chip recipes to Editor, Federated Rural Electric, PO Box 69, Jackson MN 56143-0069 or e-mail to christoffer@federatedrea.coop by March 27. Add your name and phone number. Thanks for sharing with us! 📧

Crescent Roll Bars by Connie Urban, Fairmont

2 - 8 oz. pkgs. cream cheese, softened
 2/3 c. sugar 1 egg yolk 1 tsp. vanilla
 2 tubes 8-count crescent rolls or dough sheet
 powdered sugar, optional to dust the top of the bars

Preheat oven to 350°. In the bottom of an ungreased 9x13" pan pat one of the crescent tubes to cover the bottom. If using the rolls, pinch the seams together and set aside. Mix together the sugar, softened cream cheese, egg yolk and vanilla. Spread the mixture over the dough. Take the remaining tube of rolls/dough and stretch out to lay over the cream cheese mixture. Bake at 350° for 25 minutes. Let cool. If desired, sprinkle the cooled bars with powdered sugar. Do not cover tightly; store in the refrigerator. However, the bars taste the best at room temperature. 📧

Great River Energy builds new transmission lines

— Continued from Page 6

U.S. Department of Energy grants, lowering long-term costs for customers. One of the projects, a 345-kV line called Lyon-Lakefield Junction, would be located in southwest Minnesota.

All MISO-approved projects will require approval from state regulatory agencies. Project partners will engage landowners, local governments and other stakeholders as part of the project development process. Informational meeting will begin later this year for southern Minnesota areas involved. 📧

Upgrade to a Smart Wi-Fi thermostat! Receive a \$25 rebate from electric co-op



Find the form on the co-op's website or call the office to request it. Requires receipt and will be added as a bill credit.

FEBRUARY SPECIAL!

\$50 off one camera

with three-year monitoring agreement.



Heartland Security
A subsidiary of your local electric co-op

888.264.6380 • heartlandss.com



Always call first:
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 or call 811. Call a licensed electrician to locate the underground lines on your side of the meter. 📧



Marcia Solie
Member Services
Manager

Staff Notes

Save with energy efficiency rebates

If energy efficiency upgrades are in your plans for 2025, Brown County REA's rebates may help you save even more.

Air Source Heat Pumps (ASHP) provide home cooling and supplemental heating with 72 percent less electricity than conventional air conditioners and furnaces. The 2025 rebates take into account both the Heating Seasonal Performance Factor (HSPF2) and Seasonal Energy Efficiency Rating (SEER2) in

two different tiers. The higher the HSPF2, the more efficient the heat pump. The SEER2 rating reflects the system's seasonal cooling efficiency.

The largest rebates are available to members who install an ASHP or hybrid system, placed on the cooperative's load control program with a non-electric or storage backup. To qualify for the High Efficiency Tier and \$1,500 rebate, the heat pump must meet or exceed 7.5 HSPF2 and 14.3 SEER2. Heat pump systems in the Premium Efficiency Tier qualify for a \$2,000 rebate and must meet or exceed 8.5 HSPF2 and 16 SEER2. Premium Tier units may qualify for a federal tax credit, but you should consult your tax professional to verify. Members who install a qualifying ASHP, but choose to not put on load control or have electric heat as the backup, are eligible for a rebate of \$750 or \$1,000 depending on the efficiency tier.

Residential installation of a new Geothermal Heat Pump qualifies for a \$400 per ton rebate. Place it on load control with whole house storage or non-electric backup heat and receive an additional \$500 rebate. A replacement geothermal unit qualifies for a \$1,000 rebate.

Energy Star Ductless Mini Split Heat Pumps are growing in popularity and can efficiently heat and cool your living spaces. Rebates are available based on the High Efficiency and Premium Efficiency standards of 7.5 HSPF2 and 14.3 SEER2 and 8.5 HSPF2 and 16 SEER2, respectively. A one ton or less unit qualifies for a \$150 rebate. Greater than one-ton High Efficiency units can receive a \$300 rebate. Similar-sized units with Premium Efficiency ratings qualify for a \$500 rebate.

A \$25 rebate may be paid for an Electronically Commutated Motor (ECM) on a gas furnace or other HVAC component. This is the only rebate your electric cooperative offers on gas furnaces. Upgrade to an Energy Star Wi-Fi/Smart thermostat for your heating and cooling equipment and receive a \$25 rebate.

Members who install a Level 2 home charging station to charge a Battery Electric Vehicle or Plug-in Hybrid Electric Vehicle can qualify for a \$500 rebate toward equipment installation when the charger is placed on the cooperative's Off-peak or Time of Use charging program.

Rechargeable battery-powered yard tools, including a leaf blower, chainsaw, pole saw, lawn edger or weed trimmer priced at \$150 or more pre-tax, earn members a \$25 rebate. A push lawn mower, snowblower or snow thrower

— Continued on Page 5



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: 7:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. Monday-Friday

Mike Heidemann, Chief Executive Officer

Board of Directors

Thomas Hayes, President — 507-228-8954
William Berg, Vice President — 507-766-1497
James D. Hanson, Sec.-Treasurer — 507-829-6756
Brad Sprenger — 507-317-5576
David Wendinger — 507-276-3166
Greg Mages — 507-794-3540
Joel Christensen — 507-828-4550
James Mickelson — 507-794-6298
Landon Sletta — 507-276-1899
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 on December 19, 2024. Discussion and/or action were taken on the following agenda items:

- Reviewed and approved November 2024 payroll and November financial statement.
- Cooperative Finance Corporation Regional Vice President Alison Deelstra virtually reviewed the cooperative's 2023 Key Ratio Trend Analysis.
- Reviewed plans for the final meeting of the current Member Advisory Council and nominating committees on January 6.
- Approved the write-off of \$3,840.79 in uncollectible accounts receivable.
- Reviewed and approved a resolution to amend the Purchased Power Contract with Great River Energy to allow multiple load control events in one day with an 8-hour daily maximum.
- Reviewed and approved Purchased Power Contract for wind energy purchases with Next Era's Salem II and Red Butte Wind.
- Updated on operations, including overhead maintenance and pole replacements.

The next meeting is set for January 23, 2025, at the Brown County REA office in Sleepy Eye. 📍