

Introducing *Current Connections*

Happy New Year from all of us at Brown County REA!

Along with the new year, I am pleased to share with you our newly refreshed member newsletter, *Current Connections*. This newsletter will focus specifically on information relevant to Brown County REA. Ending the monthly joint edition with Federated Rural Electric gives us the flexibility to focus more closely on your cooperative's priorities.

Each issue will include content customized for our members and our service territory. We are excited to provide you with this valuable resource for information about your cooperative. *Current Connections* will share timely cooperative information such as messages from management, cooperative news and events, meeting notifications, program and service updates, legislative news, and opportunities to get involved. You'll also find helpful content including energy-saving tips, available rebates, and important safety reminders.

Along with content specifically targeted toward Brown County REA members, the new look of *Current Connections*

is designed to improve readability. As always, we want to keep our members engaged with what's happening around the cooperative.

Switching to the new 4-page format is also helping save the cooperative money. As a not-for-profit entity, when we save, you save. Mailing our newsletter in the same envelopes as monthly bills (instead of them arriving as a separate mailing) results in a significant savings – especially with the cost of postage continuing to rise. For those who prefer to view the newsletter online, a pdf version of each month's issue will be available on our website.

At Brown County REA, we are committed to safely providing our members with electric service at the lowest possible cost, consistent with sound business practices. The changes we've made to our newsletter not only make sense financially, but also help us deliver on our commitment to keeping members up-to-date about cooperative news and events that matter most to the people we are privileged to serve.

Mike Heidemann, CEO



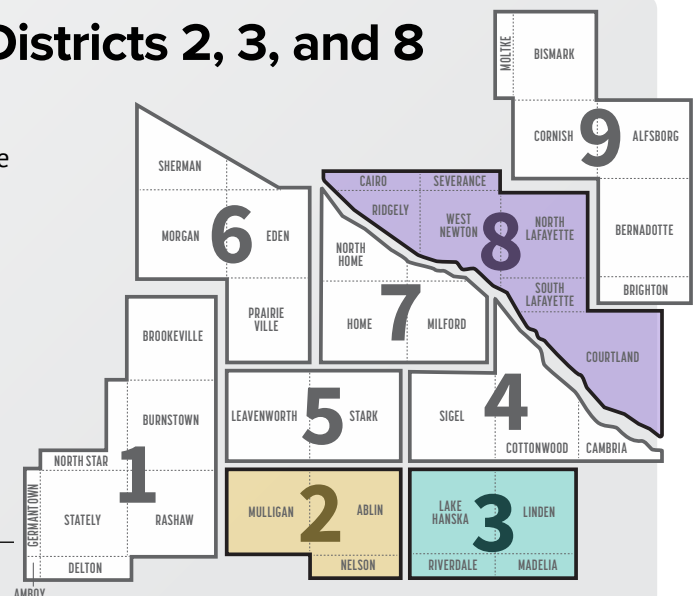
Seeking Director Candidates in Districts 2, 3, and 8

BCREA is seeking member candidates to run for election to the Board of Directors in Districts 2, 3, and 8. If you are interested in running, or know someone who may be interested, nominations are currently being accepted for these districts.

District 2 consists of *Mulligan* and *Albin* townships in Brown County and part of *Nelson* township in Watonwan County. **District 3** is made up of *Lake Hanska* and *Linden* townships and the City of *Hanska* in Brown County, plus parts of *Riverdale* and *Madelia* townships in Watonwan County. **District 8** includes *Ridgely*, *West Newton*, *North* and *South Lafayette* townships, portions of *Cairo* and *Severance*, plus part of *Courtland* townships in Nicollet County.

For each district up for election, a nominating committee is formed with at least two members from that district. Under the

(*Seeking Director Candidates* is continued on page 2)



Seeking Director Candidates

(Continued from page 1)

cooperative's bylaws, the nominating committee must, at least 30 days before the Annual Meeting, make a good-faith effort to nominate a minimum of two qualified candidates for each open seat.

Members may also nominate a director candidate by petition. Petitions must include signatures from at least 10 members within the candidate's district. Nominations from the floor and write-in candidates are not allowed at the Annual Meeting.

Members who reside in Districts 2, 3, or 8 and wish to be considered as a director candidate should complete the Director Candidate Application available at www.browncountyrea.coop before February 20th, 2026. Completed applications will be shared with the nominating committee for consideration. Interested members may also contact the REA office for more information.

Director elections will take place at the 89th Annual Meeting, scheduled for the evening of April 9, 2026, at the Sleepy Eye Event Center.

All-Expense-Paid Trip to Washington, D.C. for Local Student



Know a high school student who would benefit from an educational trip to our nation's capital? Brown County REA is seeking one outstanding student to represent the cooperative on an all-expense-paid Washington, D.C. Youth Tour, taking place **June 15–20, 2026**.

The Rural Electric Youth Tour brings together approximately 1,500 students from electric cooperatives across the country for a week in Washington, D.C. Participants tour historic monuments, museums, and memorials, spend a day on Capitol Hill, and gain a behind-the-scenes look at how government works.

Students also learn about the cooperative business model, develop leadership skills, and connect with peers from across Minnesota and beyond. The experience offers a unique mix of history, civic exposure, and personal growth, and many participants return home with a deeper appreciation for their community and country.

Yes, I'm Interested in Running for BCREA Director

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 9, 2026 Annual Meeting. I certify that the following statements are true and accurate as to my qualifications 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 where 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.

SIGNATURE

DATE

Return this form to BCREA by February 20th, 2026.

MAKE
Your
2026
MARK

Application and selection information is available through area high school counseling offices and on our website at www.browncountyrea.coop.

Applications must be submitted by **February 27, 2026.**





Operation Round Up Scholarships Available

Brown County REA, through its Operation Round Up program, is awarding scholarships to high school seniors who plan to attend college following graduation. A minimum of eight \$250 scholarships will be awarded to eligible students whose parent or guardian is a Brown County REA member and resides within the cooperative's service area.

Scholarships are funded through Operation Round Up, a voluntary program in which participating members round their monthly electric bill up to the nearest dollar. The extra change is placed into a trust that is administered by a nine-member board. The board meets quarterly to distribute funds to local charitable

organizations, individuals and families in crisis, and educational scholarships.

Scholarship guidelines and applications are available through area high school counseling offices. Application materials are also available on the REA website at www.browncountyrea.coop.

The application deadline is April 6th, 2026. Scholarship recipients will be announced at the Brown County REA Annual Meeting on April 9th, 2026. Applicants must submit a copy of their high school transcript and one letter of recommendation. Scholarship funds will be distributed following the successful completion of the student's first semester of college.

Energy Assistance Program

Minnesota Valley Action Council (MVAC)



The Energy Assistance Program (EAP) is a heating-based program which can help low income households with a portion of their energy bills. You can apply by printing an application from the MVAC website at www.mnvac.org or by calling MVAC to request an application.

Completed applications and supporting documents can be dropped off at your local MVAC office location. For general questions, please call MVAC at (800) 767-7139 or email eap@mnvac.org.

United Community Action Partnership



Energy Assistance programs for Cottonwood, Redwood, and Renville county residents are administered through United Community Action Partnership.

An application must be completed in order to receive Energy Assistance. A link to download applications can be found at our website. Once an application is complete it can be dropped off at any of their locations or mailed to: *United Community Action Partnership, Willmar Office, PO Box 1359, Willmar, MN 56201.*

Our 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 will begin 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.

Reminders

Operation Round Up Meeting February 17th

The first quarterly Brown County Rural Electric Trust Board meeting for 2026 is set for February 17th, 2026. Organizations wishing to be considered for funding can submit the application, found on the REA website www.browncountyrea.coop, before that date.

Member Advisory Council is January 26th

The final meeting of the current *Member Advisory Council* will be held January 26th, 2026 at the Brown County REA auditorium. Additional details will be mailed to all our members.

Board Meeting Highlights

December Board Minutes

The Brown County REA Board of Directors held its monthly board meeting on December 18th, 2025.

Discussion and/or action were taken on the following agenda items:

- Reviewed and approved the November 2025 board meeting minutes, new membership applications, member cancellations, payments to estates, and assignment transfers.
- Reviewed and approved November 2025 payroll and November financial statement.
- Approved appointment of Dean Kral, Darren Kunkel, Kenny Hanson, Keith Beranek, Peter & Sharon Brandel, Dean Ellanson, Daniel Grothem, and Eric Pierson to the nominating committees for the 2026 director elections.
- Reviewed and approved 2026 budget.
- Reviewed HVAC upgrade plans for BCREA headquarters.
- Reviewed operations activities, including transformer failure and replacement at Schilling Substation.
- Reviewed staff meeting reports, director meeting reports, and individual director reports.

The next meeting is set for January 22nd, 2026, at the Brown County REA office in Sleepy Eye.

Mike Heidemann – Chief Executive Officer

Board of Directors

Thomas Hayes, *President* – (507) 228-8954

William Berg, *Vice President* – (507) 766-1497

James D. Hanson, *Secretary-Treasurer* – (507) 829-6756

Brad Sprenger – (507) 317-5576

David Wendinger – (507) 276-3166

Greg Mages – (507) 276-0325

Joel Christensen – (507) 828-4550

Keith Hoffmann – (507) 227-8006

Landon Sletta – (507) 276-1899

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



Owned by
those it
serves

Brown County Rural Electric Association

24386 State Hwy. 4 | P.O. Box 529

Sleepy Eye, MN 56085

Email: bcra@bcra.coop

Website: www.browncountyrea.coop

Phone: (507) 794-3331 or (800) 658-2368

Payment Line (PSN): (833) 250-4481

Office Hours: 7:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. Mon–Fri

2026 Calendars Available

Members are invited to stop by the REA office during regular business hours to pick up a 2026 calendar. Wall calendars with pockets and pocketbook-style calendars are available. Limit one calendar per member, while supplies last.



Save the Date
Annual Meeting
April 9th, 2026



ZUPPA TOSCANA RECIPE

INGREDIENTS

1 lb. ground mild Italian pork sausage

1 onion, finely diced

3 cloves garlic, minced

2 medium russet potatoes, peeled and cubed (about 3–4 cups)

6 cups chicken broth (see notes)

2 stalks of kale, stems removed, finely chopped (2–3 cups)

3/4 cup heavy cream

DIRECTIONS

- 1. Sausage:** Heat oil in a large Dutch oven over medium-high heat. Brown the sausage until fully cooked.
- 2. Onions and Garlic:** Add the onions and garlic to the sausage. Sauté for 5–7 minutes until soft and fragrant. FYI your house will smell AMAZING.
- 3. Potatoes and Broth:** Add the potatoes and the broth. Simmer for 7–10 minutes, until the potatoes are tender. *(Be careful not to let it go for too long, because the potatoes will start to get really soft.)*
- 4. Finish with Cream:** Add the kale and heavy cream. Simmer for 5 minutes until kale has wilted.
- 5. Serve:** Season with salt and pepper, top with Parmesan for even more flavor, and dunk into that glorious broth with hot crusty bread.

