

# Connections

June 2023

For the member-owners of Brown County REA



Volume 27, Issue 6

## Shine on! Connections earns gold in national Spotlight on Excellence awards competition

Connections hit the mother lode and brings home gold... again!

Federated Rural Electric, Jackson; and Brown County Rural Electrical Association, Sleepy Eye; recently received recognition in the 2023 "Spotlight on Excellence" national awards program, sponsored by the Council of Rural Electric Communicators (CREC) and the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA).

Federated and BCREA received a Gold Award in the Best External News Publication category for the Connections newsletter for electric cooperatives under 20,000 members. Andrea Christoffer, Federated's marketing & communications manager; Steve Ruthenbeck, Federated's communications specialist; and Marcia Solie, BCREA's member services manager; create the award-winning newsletter. Connections is a shared monthly newsletter for the two cooperatives. This is the 18<sup>th</sup> time that a Federated member-owner newsletter has won a Spotlight national award. Gold awards were awarded to those entries scoring 90 points or more, while Silver winners scored 80 points or more in the finite scoring system.

"The Spotlight on Excellence awards have been recognizing outstanding co-op communicators and their work for more than 35 years — that work is all the more



The spotlight shines on Connections for its gold award in the Spotlight of Excellence Awards competition. Pictured are Steve Ruthenbeck and Andrea Christoffer displaying the award and the three issues submitted in the contest.

critical in today's evolving energy industry," said CREC President Scott Gates, senior editor with North Carolina's Electric Cooperatives. "These national awards are highly competitive; we congratulate those who earned the distinction this year."

"The Connections newsletter is our way of informing our members on everything from rate issues, the latest broadband news to seasonal topics, such as legislative and construction notices, which is beneficial to all," stated Scott Reimer, Federated's general manager. "It contains the important information you need, as member-owners, to keep your cooperative relevant, as well as encouraging you to communicate to us

your questions, comments and concerns. Congratulations Andrea, Steve and Marcia! Keep up the great work!"

"Our members let us know they are reading the newsletter and appreciate the information shared in it, which is the reason we provide it each month," said BCREA CEO Mike Heidemann. "We're proud of the Connections communication team and that their work was recognized on a national level."

A special reception honored the award recipients during the CONNECT '23 Conference held in Jacksonville, Florida, May 2-4. Winning entries were displayed during the event.

The annual Spotlight on Excellence awards competition — Continued on Page 7

### At A Glance



#### Safety is at our core!

Brown County REA recently completed a successful Rural Electric Safety Achievement Program (RESAP). It involved review of trucks, equipment, facilities and job-site safety conducted by Minnesota Rural Electric Association (MREA) safety program staff and other cooperative observers. See photos on Page 5.



## Tackle these three weekend-warrior projects to score energy savings in your home and yard

Score some weekend warrior points in your household! These home improvement upgrades save energy and money. Complete each one in a day or less!

### Be wise with smart home cooling & heating thermostat

Cooling and heating your home typically account for a large portion of energy bills. Smart thermostats help keep your cooling and heating costs in check. Energy Star-certified models save about 8 percent on annual energy costs.

Now that smart thermostats are more affordable, as little as \$70, this simple upgrade makes for a fun, efficient weekend project. Be sure to save even more with your cooperative's \$25 smart thermostat rebate; find the rebate form on the co-op's website or call the office to request one.

Smart thermostats offer a variety of bells and whistles. The average model allows you to set custom temperature schedules; enjoy adjusting the settings from anywhere from your phone. Over time, it learns your cooling and heating preferences. Snowbirds can check on their Minnesota home's temperature by looking at the smart phone app.

Your new smart thermostat comes with step-by-step instructions; this project typically involves shutting off your heating/cooling equipment at the breaker panel, disconnecting/removing the old thermostat, installing the new smart thermostat and connecting it to your home Wi-Fi. Play it safe. Remember to read the installation instructions before you get started.



**Kaaching! The energy savings can add up with a smart thermostat. The average model will allow you to set custom temperature schedules and change your home's temp using your smart phone.**

### Go green to boost your greenery with a rain barrel

If you possess a green thumb, you know that rainwater is the best water for your plants. Rainwater is free of minerals, salts and treatment chemicals found in tap water or groundwater. It also contains helpful macronutrients to foster healthy plant growth.

Installing a rain barrel is an easy way to harvest large amounts of rainwater and reduce home water use; it's a win-win situation. According to the Environmental Protection Agency, one rain barrel can save a homeowner 1,300 gallons of water annually.

Most residential rain barrels range in size from 50 to 90 gallons; the size you purchase depends on your watering needs. Buy one at a chain store or google it to make your own using a garbage can.

The simplest way to install a rain barrel is positioning a plastic or

wooden barrel directly under your gutter downspout. Basic piping or eave spouts may be required, but this is an easy way to harvest rainwater; the barrel won't take up much space. Consider a cover for the top of your rain barrel to keep insects and small debris out of your harvested water.

### Enjoy the fresh savings with a simple clothesline

If you have enough outdoor space available, installing a clothesline is a great way to save energy. Save on dryer costs in the spring, summer and fall; plus, save on summer cooling costs since unwanted heat from the clothes dryer won't be added to your home, making your air conditioner work harder. Air drying is much gentler on fabrics and keeps your clothes and linens looking fresh longer.

You can create your own clothesline with two T-posts, wire and hook-and-eye turnbuckles. Depending on your soil, you may need a small amount of Quikrete to set the posts. Another option is installing the line between two trees. A typical load of laundry requires about 35 feet of line, so keep this in mind as you're determining the best location.

If an outdoor clothesline isn't an option, no sweat! You can easily create an indoor drying rack that folds to save space. Home improvement websites like thespruce.com and hgtv.com offer step-by-step tutorials for a variety of indoor clothes racks.

These simple ideas help you save energy and money. So roll up those sleeves and tackle a few projects. ☺

## Do the math! 3-in-1 tool adds convenience

One tool completes three tasks so that adds up to efficiency!

An ideal option for maintaining smaller lawns the Black and Decker's 3-in-1 mower, trimmer and edger features a compact design without sacrificing power or performance. Detach the string trimmer/edger from the mower using a built-in foot pedal — that's fast and easy!


- The compact push mower features a 12-inch removable deck. The cutting height ranges from 1.6 inches to 2.4 inches. A 6.5-amp motor and gear drive transmission powers it all. Plus, it's lightweight and adjustable, weighing only about 10 pounds.

- The string trimmer takes on the toughest grass, weeds and overgrowth. The 12-inch cutting swath provides precise cuts for great-looking results. The automatic feed spool eliminates

stopping and starting constantly to mow it so more line comes out.

- The wheeled edger easily maintains clean, crisp flowerbed, driveway and walkway borders in edge trimmer mode. Simply rotate to convert from a trimmer to an edger.

Plug this yard tool into a 110-outlet. It will charge to full power in four hours. It provides 15-30 minutes of mowing, depending on how thick the grass is. For this reason coverage area varies.

The cordless model costs approximately \$130. The corded model costs around \$100. 



The Black and Decker 3-in-1 is a mower, trimmer and edger all in one. Great for small lawns, the 3-in-1 yard tool also comes in a corded and more compact version. Just detach the trimmer/edger from the base unit to trim (left) and use as an edger (as shown above).



## Safety

## Generator ready for the summer storms?

Portable or permanently installed standby generators come in handy during long-term power outages. However, if you do not know how to use them properly, they can be dangerous. Contact a qualified vendor or electrician to determine which generator is best suited to your needs. Before using, read and follow the manufacturer's instructions.

If installing a permanent generator, it must have a transfer switch. The transfer switch prevents energy from leaving your generator and going back onto the utility electrical equipment, when it could be dangerous to a lineman or others near downed power lines, a process known as "back feed." A qualified electrician should install your generator and transfer switch.

Operate it outdoors with good ventilation. Never run a generator



**Tune-up time! Make sure your home or farm standby generator's oil, filter and fuel are ready if a big storm rolls through.**

in a home or garage. Generators give off deadly carbon monoxide.


To avoid back feed do not plug a generator into a wall outlet. Use heavy-duty extension cords to connect appliances to the generator's outlets.

Turn the generator on before plugging appliances into it. Once the generator

is running, turn your appliances and lights on one at a time to avoid overloading the unit. Remember, generators are for temporary usage; prioritize your needs.

Generators pose electrical risks, especially when operated in wet conditions. Use a generator only when necessary if the weather creates wet or moist conditions. Protect the generator by operating it under an open, canopy-like structure on a dry surface where water cannot form puddles or drain under it. Always ensure your hands are dry before touching the generator.

Be sure the generator is turned off and cool before fueling it.

Keep the children and pets away from any portable generators. Many generator components are hot enough to burn you during operation. 

# Brown County Briefs

## Energy-efficiency tips

Looking for additional ways to save energy this summer? Your laundry room is a great place to start. Wash clothes with cold water, which can cut one load's energy use by more than half. Your washing machine will use the same amount of energy no matter the size of the clothes load, so fill it up when you can. When drying clothes, separate the heavier cottons. Loads will dry faster and more evenly if you separate heavier cottons, like linens and towels, from your lightweight clothing. Source: [energy.gov](http://energy.gov)

## Summer maintenance

A reminder that Central Applicators is working to maintain and control vegetation at Brown County REA's substations and along rights-of-way beginning this month.

In addition, Southwood 2000 is inspecting cooperative-owned poles in Milford, Prairieville and Eden townships and may be coming onto members' property either with a pickup or ATV.

Chapman Metering will also be performing meter tests in the service area.

## August Round Up meeting



The Brown County Rural Electric Trust Board will meet August 15 at 5:30 p.m. to consider funding applications. Organizations interested in seeking funding may submit an application before that date. The application form is available on the BCREA website at [www.browncountyrea.coop](http://www.browncountyrea.coop).

# Welcome Jody Braulick!



Jody Braulick became the newest employee at Brown County REA in January as a customer service representative/administrative assistant.

Growing up near Essig, Jody (Hogen) attended New Ulm Area Catholic Schools, graduating from Cathedral High School in 2005. She received her Medical Coding Diploma from South Central Technical College in Mankato and worked for the Mayo Clinic Health System moving between St. James, Springfield, and Fairmont for five years. She held positions doing legal medical transcription for Gislason & Hunter LLP, worked at New Ulm Medical Center and accounts payable at Christensen Farms prior to joining the REA's team.

She and her husband, Kevin, live in rural New Ulm with their children Leah, 9; Claire, 7; and Luke, 5. Outside of work, her children's activities keep Jody busy, but she can often be found at the piano or organ as a musician for St. Mary's Catholic Church in New Ulm; she helps at other churches of different denominations throughout the year. She plays for church services, as well as weddings and funerals.

To many polka fans in and around the area, Jody is familiar as one of several piano players with Dain's Dutchmen. She plays with other polka bands too, when called upon. She learned to play old-tyme music from Leon Helget when her dad, Scott, played and sang in his band.

Jody also likes to cook and bake; she helps her mom, Vonnie, with her cake and cupcake decorating business and helps her dad with his woodworking and crafts.

# Twins Youth Baseball Clinic



The Minnesota Twin free youth clinic returns to Sleepy Eye's Prairieview Field July 7 from 4 to 6 p.m.

The event is free and open to youth ages 6-12. Fundamentals of hitting, throwing, fielding and defense will be taught in a fun and encouraging atmosphere. Equipment will be provided, but participants are asked to bring their own gloves.

A partnership between Brown County REA's wholesale power supplier Great River Energy, the Minnesota Twins and the Twins Community Fund, the Sleepy Eye event is being hosted by Brown County REA and Sleepy Eye

Community Education.

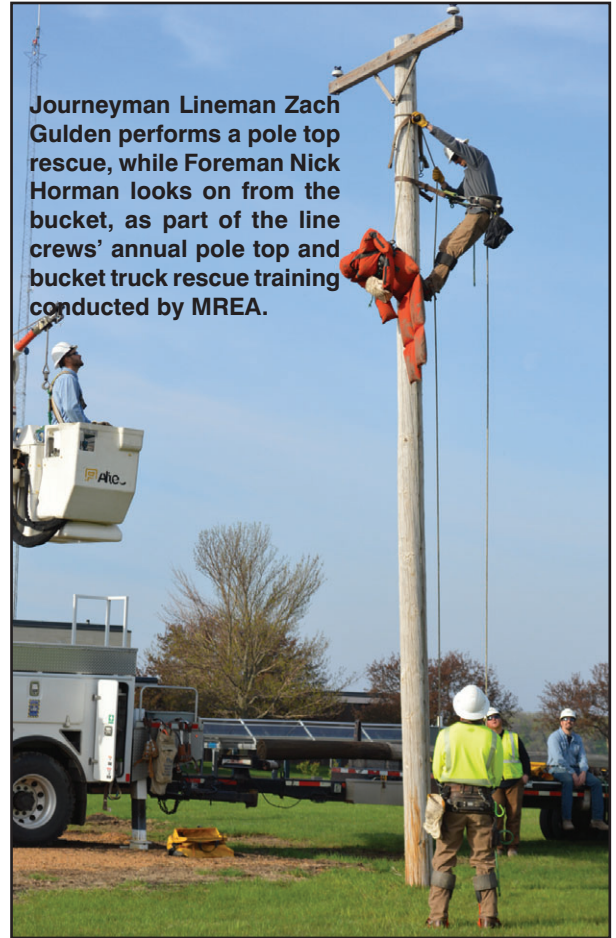
Created in 1961 by longtime Twins scout Angelo Giuliana, the Play Ball! Minnesota youth clinics offer an opportunity for participants to pitch and hit in their own neighborhoods with guidance from knowledgeable coaches. No experience with the sport is required to participate.

Register online in advance at [www.playballmn.com](http://www.playballmn.com). In case of bad weather, the event will be moved into the Sleepy Eye Public School.

# BCREA marks culture of safety



Kirk Wulf, MREA safety program manager, inspects a truck while posing questions to BCREA Foreman Adam Fischer during the co-op's Rural Electric Safety Achievement Program (RESAP) review May 17.



Journeyman Lineman Zach Gulden performs a pole top rescue, while Foreman Nick Horman looks on from the bucket, as part of the line crews' annual pole top and bucket truck rescue training conducted by MREA.



Journeyman Lineman Brady Kerkhoff visits with observer Gene Alex of Renville-Sibley Cooperative Power about truck and trailer safety practices and procedures. (U.S.A.)

## BCREA rebates help you electrify your yard work



Looking to buy a battery-powered electric leaf blower, chainsaw, trimmer/weed whip or lawn mower? Brown County REA is offering a rebate of \$25 for a minimum \$150 pre-tax priced

leaf blower, chainsaw, edger, trimmer/weed whip and \$50 on a \$399 or higher-priced pre-tax priced electric push lawn mower purchased during May, June, July and August. You can receive a \$100 for purchasing an electric riding lawn mower with a minimum 36-volt battery.

Provide a copy of your dated receipt with the purchase price and model number. Rebate will be paid as a credit on your electric bill. Limit one rebate per member. (U.S.A.)

## BCREA awards scholarships to local high school graduates



BCREA Member Services Manager Marcia Solie, center, presented scholarship certificates to New Ulm High School graduates Bryanna Aschenbrenner, left, and Laura Bertrang. Six \$250 scholarships were awarded through the Operation Round Up program. (U.S.A.)

# 2023 Minnesota legislative session impacts everyone who uses electricity

The 2023 legislative session, which concluded May 22, was one of the most consequential in history for Minnesota's 1.7 million cooperative members. Record investments, key policy changes and a landmark 100 percent carbon-free by 2040 mandate all made this legislative session one with big long-term impacts on everyone using electricity in the state.

The Minnesota Rural Electric Association (MREA) represents Minnesota's 44 distribution cooperatives and six generation and transmission cooperatives who collectively serve over 1.7 million Minnesotans. They are the voice for non-profit electric cooperative member-owners at the Capitol and have been deeply engaged with lawmakers, so Minnesota cooperative-member owners have their voices heard. MREA worked tirelessly to shape the session's outcomes. This overview highlights a few items affecting electric cooperative members.

## 100 percent carbon-free by 2040

The first and most impactful bill for electric cooperatives and their member-owners was the historic 100 percent carbon-free by 2040 bill, which was signed into law in early February. The legislation, passed in record time, is widely regarded as the most significant energy policy ever passed in Minnesota and mandates all electricity sold in the state come from carbon-free sources by the year 2040. The law will increase the challenge of keeping the electric grid reliable under all conditions; significant advancements in technology will be needed to achieve the mandate.

Minnesota's electric cooperatives are leaders in navigating the clean-energy transition, while keeping electricity reliable and affordable. However, this new law does present significant challenges. As a result, MREA worked with lawmakers to add some common-sense amendments to



**Is an electric vehicle on your horizon? The state of Minnesota added rebates for electric vehicles under this year's legislation: \$2,500 for a new vehicle under \$55,000 or \$600 rebate for a used electric vehicle under \$25,000.**

help protect affordability and reliability. Nonetheless, a lot of investment, innovation and ingenuity will be necessary to avoid cost increases and potential service disruptions, while meeting the mandate.

## State Competitiveness Fund

Investments in Minnesota's electric grid are more crucial than ever; historic funding from the federal Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) and Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) necessitates Minnesota think big to attract federal dollars. As a result, lawmakers put \$190 million into a newly created State Competitiveness Fund, which attracts hundreds of millions of dollars for investments in Minnesota's energy infrastructure. Co-ops across the state will be using these funds, including an additional \$5.3 million specifically for consumer-owned utilities, for projects to improve affordability and reliability and aid in the energy transition.


## Electrification rebates & grants

The State of Minnesota wants to help you buy an electric vehicle. This includes a rebate up to \$2,500 for a new electric vehicle with a sale price below \$55,000 or up to \$600 for a used vehicle under \$25,000. The rebate is open to individuals, businesses, nonprofits and governments; those who have already received an EV rebate or tax credit from Minnesota are not eligible. Find a listing of different

electric vehicles, along with their mileage range and purchase price, at [www.shift2electric.com/evinfolist](http://www.shift2electric.com/evinfolist).

Those who would like to purchase a highly efficient heat pump to heat and cool their home could receive rebates of up to \$4,000. The legislature also made grant money available for solar on schools, electric bikes, electric school buses, pre-weatherization work and more. Stay tuned to the *Connections* newsletter, as the state works out the details on these rebates and new programs.

"For those of us who work with MREA on a regular basis, we see the effort that goes into protecting us from bad legislation — successfully," said Scott Reimer, Federated Rural Electric's general manager. "This year was an exceptional session and exceptional work was done by all MREA staff. Jenny Glumack, MREA government affairs director, literally spent most days at the Capital, advocating on our behalf; she did it with grace and persistence. She is our shining star for this legislative session."

"Brown County REA thanks Great River Energy and MREA for their work in this unprecedented legislative session with the amount of bills passed," said Mike Heidemann, Brown County REA general manager. "They worked consistently for the interests of co-op members to keep rates affordable." 

## Summer screams for ice cream; share your dreamy, creamy recipes

How do you like your dreamy, creamy ice cream? Do you have a supreme home-made ice cream recipe? Maybe you make ice cream pies, cupcakes, treats or sandwiches. Share your ice cream recipes with us. Mail your favorite recipes to Editor, Federated Rural Electric, PO Box 69, Jackson MN 56143-0069 or e-mail to christoffer@federatedrea.coop by June 26. Add your name and phone number. Thanks for sharing with us! 📧



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### War Cake (no eggs)

by Beverly Berg, New Ulm

Place in a heavy-bottom sauce pan and bring to a boil the following ingredients. Cook over low heat for five minutes. Then remove from heat and cool.

- 1 c. brown sugar
- 1 c. water
- 1 c. raisins (or less)
- 2 T. vegetable oil or 2 T. margarine

While the above mixture is cooling, heat the oven to 350°. Grease and flour an 8x4" pan. Then add the flour and other ingredients listed below to the cooled mixture.

- 1 tsp. cinnamon
- ½ tsp. cloves
- 1½ c. flour
- ½ tsp. baking powder
- ½ tsp. salt
- ½ tsp. baking soda
- ½ c. walnuts, chopped, optional

Bake until toothpick in the center comes out clean — about 45-50 minutes. 📧

## Connections shines in golden spotlight

— Continued from Page 1

recognizes the top-rated communication and marketing efforts by electric cooperatives and related organizations. Entrants competed with electric cooperatives of similar size in 18 categories. Electric cooperative communicators and marketing professionals submitted more than 650 entries in the Spotlight on Excellence program. Faculty members from the University of Missouri Columbia, as well as noted professionals in the fields of marketing, newspapers and digital communications judged the event. 📧



## 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. 📧



**Happy 4<sup>th</sup> of July!**  
The cooperative will be closed July 4  
Crews will be on call in case of outages



**Marcia Solie**  
Member Services  
Manager

# Staff Notes

## Co-ops register interruptible rate generators as ‘virtual power plant’

More than 140 megawatts (MW) added to the Midwest capacity market this year by Great River Energy (GRE) came not in the form of a new wind farm or traditional power plant, but instead by aggregating and registering load-modifying resources as a virtual power plant.

GRE, and its 27 member-owner cooperatives, including Brown County REA, operate several

demand response programs as a way to use the grid efficiently and economically by reducing electricity demand during periods of high stress.

More than 370,000 residential appliances are voluntarily enrolled into the programs by member-consumers, granting GRE permission to “control” or “cycle” the air conditioners, water heaters, heat pumps or other devices for a period of time in exchange for a reduced electric rate or other incentive.


Commercial and industrial (C&I) members also enroll in these programs but instead of allowing GRE to cycle an appliance, all or a portion of the business’s electrical load is curtailed — or interrupted — at a specific facility site. All C&I interruptible program participants are now registered with the Midcontinent Independent System Operator (MISO), the region’s grid operator.

This combined C&I interruptible load equates to 142 MW of accredited capacity by MISO for the 2023-24 summer season. By registering these resources, they can be dispatched by MISO in times of a reliability emergency.

John Reinhart, GRE manager of distributed energy resource portfolio explains that load management programs are meant to be assets for reliability and this provides MISO with better visibility to these important reliability tools. All together, these load-modifying resources can be considered a virtual power plant and can be ready and operational within two hours of a declared emergency, similar timing to a gas-fired peaking plant.

Registration formally incorporates the capacity of these programs into GRE’s power supply portfolio and relieves the obligation to control these resources to receive a capacity benefit so participating members will likely see less control events. These resources will be available to respond to grid emergencies or times when the market price of electricity is abnormally high.

Registration also helps improve GRE’s capacity position. MISO members must have enough generating capacity to serve their members, plus a reserve. GRE’s load management programs have always helped lower capacity requirements, but as registered resources, they now count even more toward that requirement.

GRE will gradually register the remainder of the demand response programs to make the best use of assets they already have and recognize their full potential. 

**BROWN COUNTY REA**

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

Mike Heidemann, Chief Executive Officer

**Board of Directors**

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William Berg, Vice President — 766-1497  
James D. Hanson, Sec.-Treasurer — 829-6756  
Brad Sprenger — 317-5576  
David Wendinger — 276-3166  
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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 May 25. Discussion and/or action were taken on the following agenda items:

- Reviewed and approved the April 2023 board meeting minutes, new membership applications, member cancellations, payments to estates and assignment transfers.
- Reviewed the April 2023 payroll and April 2023 financial statements.
- Reviewed and approved recommended updates to the cooperative’s Distributed Energy Resources Uniform Contract and to the Cooperative Cogeneration Rules.
- Reviewed the onsite evaluation of the May 17 Rural Electric Safety Achievement Program (RESAP) review conducted by the Minnesota Rural Electric Association and cooperative observers.
- Reviewed recent employee safety training.
- Updated on operations and maintenance activities, including pole testing and system-wide spraying for rights-of-way. Substation spraying is complete.

The next meeting is set for July 5 at the BCREA office in Sleepy Eye. 