

Connections

January 2022

For the member-owners of Brown County REA



Volume 26, Issue 1

Upgrade to cold climate heat pump to improve heating efficiency & decrease gas furnace use

Looking to upgrade your home's heating system? Air Source Heat Pumps, when properly installed, provide members with several distinct advantages.

- When sized appropriately, today's cold climate air source heat pumps (ccASHPs) can provide 100 percent of a home's heating needs down to temperatures as low as zero degrees, which is roughly 90 percent of all heating hours in Minnesota. If properly set, an ASHP can serve as your primary heating source for a good part of our Minnesota winters.

- The balance point of your heat pump is the outdoor temperature where your home HVAC system switches over to its back-up heating system, likely set by your installer. If your heat pump can keep your home warm down to 10° F, but your balance point is set to switch over to backup heat at that same temperature, then anytime it's in the 10 to 15-degree Fahrenheit range, you'll be paying more than you should for heat.

- Aren't sure of your ASHP's balance point? Take note of the temperature where your backup heating source kicks in and if it's above 10° F, your balance point may be set too high.

Connections Editor Andrea Christoffer practices what she preaches with heat pumps. Christoffer is on her second heat pump. The first one was installed in 1999. She then upgraded to a cold climate heat pump in 2020. She loves the variable-speed fan, how quiet it is and of course, the year-round comfort and savings.



Otherwise, contact your ccASHP contractor on what your balance point is and that it's where you want it.

ASHPs have been used for many years in nearly all parts of the United States; yet, until recently, ASHPs were not common in areas with extended periods of subfreezing temperatures. However, ccASHP technology has advanced to now offer a legitimate space heating alternative in colder regions, like Minnesota.

A ccASHP can provide both efficient heating and cooling for your home. When properly installed, it can deliver

up to three times more heat energy to a home than the electricity it consumes. A heat pump moves heat, rather than converting it from a fuel, like gas furnaces.

The Center for Energy and Environment found that the efficiency of the newest generation of ccASHPS can operate down to minus 13 degrees Fahrenheit. The efficiency of these technologies in moderate climates is also two to three times more efficient than standard electric heating systems.

Since heat pumps provide heating in the winter and cooling in the summer, look for two heat pump energy-efficiency ratings. The Seasonal Energy

Efficiency Ratio (SEER) measures cooling efficiency over the cooling season. Heating Seasonal Performance Factor (HSPF) measures heating efficiency over the heating season. HSPF is a standardized rating used to compare energy efficiencies. HSPF is used by all heat pump manufacturers to indicate efficiency ratings. Like miles per gallon for your car, the higher the HSPF number, the more efficient it is.

Your local electric co-op provides incentives for heat pumps. Contact your co-op's energy expert to learn more or visit the co-op's website.

At A Glance



**Brown County
Rural Electrical
Association**

Save money and energy with rebates

BCREA offers a wide variety of rebates on everything from new heating and cooling systems to appliances. If you are thinking about getting a new HVAC system or refrigerator, be sure to check out our rebate program. Details on Page 4.

5 ways to save energy in the home office

Today, more Americans are working from home than ever before. More time spent at home means more energy used throughout the day.

If you're punching the clock from home, take small steps to reduce your energy use and save on electric bills. Here are five easy ways to save energy when working from home.

1. Use a smart power strip

Plugging in your most-used devices, like computers, monitors and routers, to a smart power strip ensures these devices aren't drawing power when they're not in use. Smart power strips also give you the option to select which devices should stay in "always on" mode.

2. Unplug least-used equipment

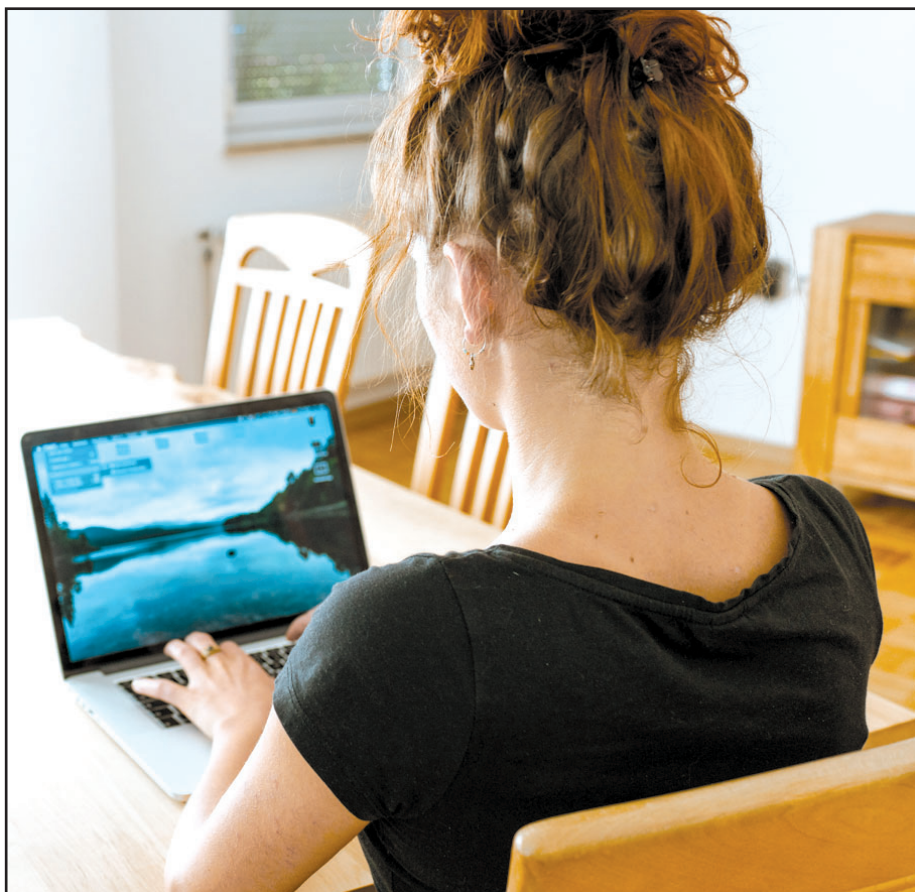
If your home office includes equipment like printers and scanners, you're probably not using these electronics every day. In this case go ahead and unplug your least-used electronics and devices, since many of these draw energy, even when they're not being used.

3. Choose Energy Star-certified office equipment

If you're looking to purchase new equipment for your workspace, look for the Energy Star label to ensure you're getting the most energy-efficient features. Computers, monitors, imaging equipment and other office electronics that receive the Energy Star rating include power management features to make saving energy easy and most are designed to run cooler and last longer.

4. Flip the switch; use natural light

Take advantage of natural light and additional warmth from the sun. When you're working during the



If you are working from home, you are probably using more energy. Learn how to best monitor your devices to maximize your energy savings.

day, open blinds, curtains and other window coverings to let natural light in — remember to turn off the lights to reduce energy use!

5. Lower the thermostat

Home heating makes up a significant portion of your energy bills. Turn the thermostat down a couple degrees during the day to reduce energy use and save money. The Department of Energy recommends setting the thermostat to 68 degrees or cooler during winter months. You're more

likely to stay focused and alert when it's cooler in your home, so all the more reason to mind the thermostat.

Working from home doesn't have to take a toll on your energy bills; whether you're working remotely or not, these practical tips can help everyone reduce their energy use.

Contact your rural electric cooperative if you have questions about saving energy or would like the booklet *101 Ways To Save Energy*. Call or e-mail us to request this booklet.

Koopla LED Lamp worth the hoopla

The Koopla LED Lamp is a rechargeable desk lamp that adapts to your needs.


Are you fixing something on the work bench in the garage and need more light? Take the Koopla LED Lamp with you and adjust its head to bring everything into focus. The Koopla LED Lamp is rechargeable, meaning it can work when not plugged in.

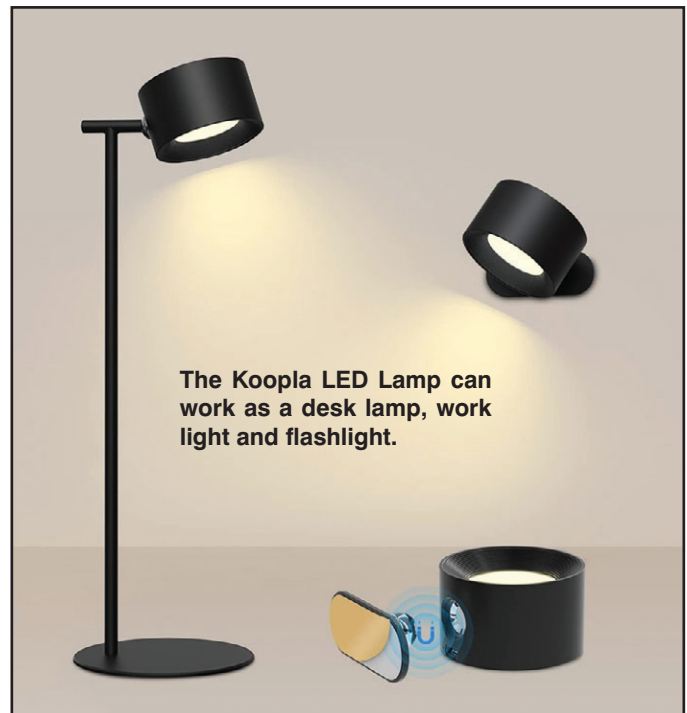
Suppose the power goes out and you need to get to the circuit breakers. Disconnect the lamp portion of the Koopla and use it as a flashlight to find your way through the house. The light also has a sticky base that can be stuck on the wall if you need both hands to check your fuse box.

Aside from these special applications, the Koopla works as a lamp for reading, studying, writing, drawing, crafting, makeup and more. It is gentle on the eyes: no dazzle, no flicker and no shadow.

The touch switch of the Koopla features three settings. One touch for low, two touches for medium, three touches for high and four touches for off.

The Koopla's battery will last more than 35,000 hours and can be fully charged in two or three hours. Once charged, the Koopla should provide light for 15 hours.

The Koopla costs about \$25. Find it in Walmart, Amazon or local stores. 



The Koopla LED Lamp can work as a desk lamp, work light and flashlight.


Resolve to use extension cords safely

It is a New Year once again! Resolve to practice electrical safety daily. Extension cords come in handy, but use them safely. Follow these extension cords' safety tips.

- Don't attempt to plug extension cords into one another.
- Make sure extension cords are properly rated for their intended use, indoor or outdoor, plus meet or exceed the power needs of the device being used.
- Keep all outdoor extension cords clear of snow and standing water.
- Do NOT overload extension cords.
- Heavy reliance on extension cords is an indication that you have too few outlets to address your needs. Have additional outlets installed where you need them.
- Inspect cords for damage before use. Check for cracked or frayed sockets, loose or bare wires, plus loose connections.



- Do NOT nail or staple extension cords to walls or baseboards.
- Do NOT run extension cords through walls, doorways, ceilings or floors. If a cord is covered, heat cannot escape, which may result in a fire hazard.
- Never use three-prong plugs with outlets that only have two slots. Never cut off the ground pin to force a fit, which could lead to electric shock.
- Buy only cords that have been approved by an independent testing laboratory.
- Do NOT substitute extension cords for permanent wiring.
- Do NOT use an extension cord or power strip with heaters or fans, which could cause cords to overheat and result in a fire.

Make it a safe and happy New Year! 
— Information courtesy of esfi.org

Brown County Briefs

Scholarships offered



Graduating high school seniors whose parents and/or guardians are

Brown County REA members can apply for one of six \$250 Operation Round Up scholarships.

Scholarship guidelines and application are available from area high school counselors and on the REA website (www.browncountyrea.coop). Deadline for submission is March 28, 2022.

Operation Round Up

The first quarterly Brown County Rural Electric Trust Board meeting for 2022 is scheduled for February 15. Organizations wishing to be considered for funding can submit the application, found on the REA website (www.browncountyrea.coop) before that date.

Energy efficiency tip

Maximize your heating system's performance by inspecting, cleaning or replacing air filters once a month, or as needed, to reduce energy costs and prevent potential damage to your system. Make sure radiators, baseboard heaters and warm-air registers aren't blocked so air can flow freely.

2022 calendars available

We still have 2022 large, farm pocket calendars available to pick up. One per member please.

Recycle holiday lights?

BCREA is again working the Sleepy Eye YES! Team to collect strands of old holiday lights to be recycled. You may drop off old lights in the box outside the office entry doors through January 21. Please do not place cord adapters, battery packs, plastic rope lights or CFL bulbs in the collection box.

Save energy & money

2022 Rebates

• Energy Star Certified Appliances:

Refrigerator or freezer with recycling of the old unit: \$75

Dehumidifier: \$25

Clothes dryer: \$25

Compact-sized appliances and appliances not rated as Energy Star do not qualify. Minimum refrigerator or freezer size is 7.75 cu. ft.

Submit a copy of receipt, Energy Guide w/ Energy Star label, proof of recycling where applicable and Residential Energy Star Appliance application found at www.browncountyrea.coop. Rebates for amounts less than \$100 will be paid as a bill credit. *One appliance rebate per member per year.*

• Air Source Heat Pump/load-controlled (Dual Fuel):

8.2 HSPF & above: \$1,000

9.0 HSPF & above: \$1,500

9.5 HSPF & above: \$2,000

• Air Source Heat Pump/not load-controlled (no reduced rate):

8.2 HSPF & above: \$480

9.0 HSPF & above: \$580

9.5 HSPF & above: \$630

• Geothermal Heat Pump: \$2,000

• Replacement Geothermal: \$1,000

• Energy Star ductless mini-split heat pumps:

Electric primary heat source: \$500

Delivered fuel primary heat: \$300.

• Energy Star smart thermostat: \$25

• ECM retrofit to existing furnace: \$25

• Electric Vehicle Charging: \$500 for Level 2 Charger through EnergywiseMN Store. \$300 bonus rebate may also be available.



Comfrey Bar & Grill received a commercial lighting rebate for replacing incandescent bulbs with dimmable LED canned lights in the bar and dining area. LED panels which replaced fluorescent fixtures make the kitchen "10 times brighter" according to one employee. Marcia Solie and bar owner Alan Barnes pictured.

In addition to residential rebates, BCREA offers commercial rebates for retrofit lighting projects, electric vehicle charging, electric forklifts, robotic milking & other livestock equipment, heating and cooling, indoor air quality equipment and commercial kitchen equipment.

BCREA employees honored for years of service



Dorine Wellmann



Mike Suess



Adam Fischer



Drew Hill

Brown County REA employees are recognized for each five years of service to the cooperative. Recipients of 2021 service awards are Dorine Wellmann (25 years), Mike Suess (20 years), Adam Fischer (15 years) and Drew Hill (5 years). Director Jim Hanson received a certificate for 30 years of service on the board. Congratulations!

Director candidates sought for 2022 election

Candidates are being sought for election in BCREA's Districts 1, 4 & 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.

Nominating committees members:

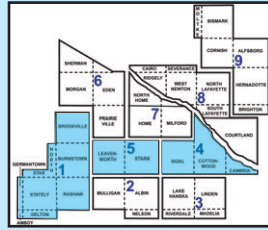
District 1: Richard Callanan, others TBD

District 4: Jordan Budenski, Tony Guggisberg, Gerald Grathwohl

District 5: Dan E. Hoffmann, Myron Helget, Corey Huiras

Per the cooperative's by-laws, the nominating committee will nominate at least two candidates for each directorship at least 30 days before the Annual Meeting. In addition, any 10 or more cooperative members residing in the district may submit a nomination with their signatures for a director in their district. Nominations from the floor and write-in candidacy are not permitted at the annual meeting.

If interested in being a candidate, contact a member of your district's nominating committee or BCREA. Please complete and return the application found at www.browncountyrea.coop. Directors will be elected at the Annual Meeting March 31, 2022. (U.S.)



Brown County REA's nine-member Board of Directors meets monthly, usually the last Thursday of each month, during the day at the cooperative's headquarters in Sleepy Eye. Other meetings may include the Annual Meeting, annual and other meetings of our wholesale power supplier, Great River Energy, Minnesota Rural Electric Association (MREA) district and annual meetings, National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA) annual meeting, other meetings and training to learn and stay current on policies and procedures of the electric industry.

The board is responsible for governing the cooperative. It will establish policies, approve major plans, programs, and budgets, receive management reports, and establish broad objectives for the General Manager/CEO.

Among responsibilities of a Director:

- Develop knowledge and skills as a board member and stay informed of all relevant and material matters affecting the business and operations of the cooperative.
- Authorize the money, facilities and equipment necessary to carry out the objectives of the cooperative including the review and approval of the operating budget.
- Establish controls that can be used in appraising the effectiveness of the cooperative and review periodic reports from the General Manager/CEO and staff to ascertain conformity with the board's policies and objectives.
- Assure the financial affairs of the cooperative are being conducted and recorded in accordance with all prescribed laws and regulations, and that the financial records accurately reflect the financial condition of the cooperative.
- Determine and adopt key issues, strategic initiatives and objectives, and major goals, and monitor results.
- Review and approve broad operating programs of service and activities developed and recommended by the General Manager/CEO.
- Maintain compliance with all legal requirements.
- Conduct meetings and other activities to inform members and obtain their ideas and suggestions.
- Review participation in outside activities that enhance the cooperative's prestige, strengthen the cooperative's operations, and fulfill the cooperative's obligations to its members and the communities where the cooperative serves and operates. (U.S.)

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

What do 1,500 high school students, our nation's capital and electric co-ops have in common? Electric Cooperative Youth Tour!!

Brown County REA is looking for one exceptional student to represent the cooperative on an all-expense paid trip Washington, D.C. June 14-19. Youth Tour is much more than a sightseeing trip.

While in D.C., participants have a chance to meet with their elected officials and discuss issues that are important back home. Students return home with a deeper understanding and



skillset of what it takes to be a leader and can put those skills to use in their local community. They also learn about the cooperative business model, visit 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 co-ops throughout Minnesota.

The application and selection procedures are available from high school counselors and social studies teachers and at www.browncountyrea.coop. Apply by March 4. (U.S.)

Electric co-ops prepare for the upcoming Minnesota legislative session topics

President Joe Biden signed a historic \$1 trillion federal infrastructure bill in November, with \$100 million in funding dedicated to Minnesota's broadband internet expansion alone. As states begin planning for funding allocation, Minnesota's electric co-ops are turning their focus to related state legislation in preparation for the 2022 legislative session, which begins January 31, 2022.

It will be a big year for elections, which typically cast a long shadow on everything else. The offices of the Governor, Attorney General, Secretary of State, State Auditor, all U.S. House of Representatives members, plus all state senate and house legislative seats are up for election. In addition, the legislative district maps will be redrawn, so legislative candidates will not know who their voters are until spring. Based on the 2020 census data, rural Minnesota will lose at least one legislative district and the Twin Cities will gain one.

The Department of Minnesota Management and Budget projected in early December that the state has a \$7.7 billion budget surplus in the general fund. If confirmed by the February forecast as expected, this surplus will be significantly bigger than historical surpluses. Ideas regarding how to address this surplus will be a primary focus for legislators in the upcoming session.

In addition to all of the above, this legislative session will be a hybrid, with the House announcing remote meetings via Zoom and the Senate planning to have more in-person meetings.

Minnesota's electric co-ops hosted the annual legislative summit in November, an opportunity for your electric cooperative to help shape state energy policy priorities for the 2022 legislative session. Several potential legislative issues may arise relating to electric cooperatives.



Broadband on the horizon

Electric cooperatives can play an essential role in providing or partnering to provide broadband connectivity to rural Minnesota in areas that are unserved or underserved. Significant funding will be available for broadband deployment; electric co-ops plan to support the distribution of these funds to bridge the digital divide in rural Minnesota.

Cooperatives are concerned about related legislative issues, as third parties are pushing to legislate a standard fee that electric co-ops can charge cable and telecom providers for the use of co-op poles. For-profit companies will have many lobbyists working on this initiative at the Capitol, which electric co-ops will strongly oppose. Electric co-ops set their pole attachment fees based on the costs unique to each cooperative. Standardizing pole attachment fees would end up with fees that do not cover electric co-ops' costs and will subsequently require co-op members to subsidize the activities of these for-profit companies through co-op electric rates.

Adding electric vehicle chargers

As electric vehicles (EVs) increase in popularity, available charging infrastructure becomes more critical. While the Twin Cities and metro area

offer a fair amount of EV chargers, rural Minnesota needs more charging available for reliable electric vehicle travel. Electric co-ops plan to engage with legislators on funding allocation for equitable EV chargers across Minnesota.


Clean energy legislation

Numerous proposals will impose additional mandates impacting the ongoing energy transition, such as requiring 100 percent of electricity generation to come from renewables in a specific timeline. Cooperatives are leaders in the state's energy transition both locally and by integrating more renewables into their power supply. Other sources of energy have seen substantial price volatility in recent months. Electric co-ops continue to engage in these discussions with an eye toward ensuring continued relative cost stability and reliable electric service.

Weatherization assistance

Discussion will likely occur on supplementing federal funding with state funding for weatherization assistance. A possibility exists for dedicating a portion of the state budget surplus to supplement federal funding for home energy upgrades for income-eligible households. These upgrades could include:

- Exterior wall and attic insulation
- Air leakage reduction
- Furnace, boiler and water heater repair or replacement.

In addition to these potential legislative issues electric co-ops are working together on regulatory issues regarding railway crossing, property taxes and the implementation of the Energy Conservation and Optimization (ECO) Act. Electric cooperatives will continue working with the Department of Commerce and a broad range of other stakeholders to enhance these programs further with the implementation of ECO. 

Salivating for salmon? Fish around & share your salmon recipes

Change supper from blah to yah with a new salmon recipe. Share your favorite salmon recipes with us, whether it's a grilled, baked, smoked or salmon loaf! Mail to Editor, Federated Rural Electric, PO Box 69, Jackson MN 56143-0069 or e-mail to christoffer@federatedrea.coop by January 27. Add your name and phone number. Thanks for sharing with us! ☺

Wild Rice & Ham Soup, by Sis Kral, New Ulm

12 c. chicken broth, 3 boxes 1 c. wild rice, uncooked

1/3 c. brown rice, uncooked

Put into a large kettle and bring to a boil. Reduce heat and cover; simmer about 45 to 50 minutes until rice is tender. When the above is about half done chop fine and add:

2 c. onion 2 c. carrot 1/2 c. celery

1 large ham steak, cubed

Cook 30 minutes more. Mix together: 4 c. Half & Half cream 1/3 c. flour

Add to hot soup and stir until it thickens. Add salt and pepper to taste. If it's too thick, add a little milk. Freeze well. Makes a large batch. ☺

Wild Rice Casserole,

by Tami Anderson, Windom

1 c. wild rice 1/2 c. melted butter

2 T. diced onions

Cook in 1 1/2 c. water until the rice begins to open before adding to the casserole.

2 T. diced green peppers

1/2 c. sliced almonds, optional

1/4 c. mushroom stems/pieces

1 clove garlic crushed or garlic powder

2 cans chicken with white and wild rice soup OR 2 cans chicken with rice soup.

Mix all of the ingredients together and place in 2-quart casserole.

Bake at 350° for 1 hour and 15 minutes. ☺

Toasting part of a balanced breakfast for a year

\$2

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for foundations, trees, tiling and more. You can also register at www.gopherstateonecall.org or call 811. Call a licensed electrician to locate the underground lines on your side of the meter. ☺



Brown County Rural Electrical Association

Brown County Rural Electrical Assn.
24386 State Hwy 4, PO Box 529
Sleepy Eye MN 56085

E-mail address: bcrea@bcrea.coop
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 — 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.



Mike Heidemann
Chief Executive
Officer

Staff Notes

Happy New Year!

I hope you all had a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year and that 2022 is off to a great start for you and your family. The holidays are the best time of the year to enjoy family and friends.

You may have been hearing in the news that the State of Minnesota will have a \$7.7 billion surplus ahead of the 2022 budget. It will likely take a few months to figure out how the surplus funds will be used.

Brown County REA and our wholesale power supplier, Great River Energy (GRE), also had a very good year in 2021 and will return any surplus to you, our member-owners. Let's start with GRE, which has returned approximately \$531,000 to Brown County REA throughout the year, as a power bill credit that was passed on to you the co-op members. In December, GRE refunded another \$330,000 that was passed on to you on your December power bill, due in January.

Here at Brown County REA, the Board of Directors and Management used margins in September to pay \$100,000 to reduce the Power Cost Adjustment (PCA) on members' bills. In October, \$84,000 was used to zero out the PCA on your bill. And in November, we returned \$300,000 in margins to you, our member-owners, in the form of a negative PCA. Brown County REA did have a very good year in sales and low expenses, so we have given back \$484,000 in PCA and will pay any remaining margin to you as Capital Credits in future years.

I do not expect this trend to continue into 2022, but you will get the rewards of being a co-op member if it does. Brown County REA is here to keep your lights on now and into the future. I hope you can enjoy the rest of the winter weather and spring will be here soon. ☺

Board meeting highlights

The BCREA Board of Directors held its monthly board meeting December 28. Discussion and/or action were taken on the following agenda items:

- Reviewed and approved the November 2021 board meeting minutes, new membership applications, member cancellations, payments to estates and assignment transfers.
- Approved the appointment of Ann Parker (District 2) and Brian Hacker (District 6) to the Brown County Rural Electric Trust Board.
- Approved appointments to the Nominating Committees for the 2022 director elections: District 1 — Richard Callanan and two people yet determined, District 4 — Jordan Budenski, Tony Guggisberg, Gerald Grathwohl and District 5 — Dan E. Hoffmann, Myron Helget, Corey Huiras.
- Reviewed and approved the cooperative's 2022 operating budget, as presented.
- Approved 2021 Safety, Reliability and Service Quality (SRSQ) Report.
- Approved the return of approximately \$330,000 in refunded margins from Great River Energy to Brown County REA members as a credit on December electric bills.

The next meeting is set for January 27 at the Brown County REA office in Sleepy Eye. ☺



CEO Mike Heidemann (left) congratulated Board Vice President Bill Berg for achieving Credentialed Cooperative Director certification from the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA). ☺

All Brown County REA members are invited and encouraged to attend the 85th Annual Meeting

When: March 31
Location: Sleepy Eye Event Center
110 12th Avenue N.E.
Sleepy Eye, MN
Register: 4:30 p.m.
Meal: 5:30 p.m.
Meeting to follow

Agenda includes 2021 review, financial report and election of directors in Districts 1, 4 & 5