

Connections

October 2022

For the member-owners of Brown County REA



Volume 26, Issue 10

October is Cooperative Month! We are celebrating you — our member-owners

October is an eventful month with school, community and sports in full swing. It's also when all cooperatives celebrate National Co-op Month.

When Brown County REA (BCREA) celebrates Co-op Month, it really means we are celebrating you! After all, our co-op wouldn't exist without you, our member-owners.

Our core business purpose is to serve as your electricity provider, but the larger mission of the co-op is to help make our area a better place. "Concern for community" is one of seven guiding principles that all co-ops share.

Similar to how our wires run through our service territory, our concern for community flows through all of our decisions; being a co-op means being a responsible partner and good neighbor.

BCREA helps our community thrive through initiatives led by our employees and local board comprised of neighbors who live right here in our community. Because we're local, we understand our communities' unique needs and strive to help meet them.

We're proud to support local youth through our Youth Tour and scholarship programs. With your help we offer Operation Round Up program to provide assistance during times of crisis and to support programs that strengthen our service area. Our



Focused on YOU.

Electric cooperatives were created to serve their members. Because we're a co-op, we're able to adapt to our community's unique needs. That's the power of co-op membership.

OCTOBER IS NATIONAL CO-OP MONTH

actions expanded into other needed services like CTV and Heartland Security.

The word "cooperative" is close to "cooperation," meaning people working together toward a common goal, mutually benefitting one another and the larger community. That's the essence of the cooperative spirit. Our employees and member-elected board members are invested in the community where they live and serve.

Above all, as a co-op we put our members' priorities first. As your trusted energy partner, we know that saving energy and money is important to you. That's why we have numerous programs, including rebates ranging from retrofit lighting upgrades and

specialized ag equipment installations, heat pumps and Energy Star appliances (dehumidifiers, refrigerators and freezers.)

We want to empower you to manage energy use at home. If you haven't already, download our app (Brown County REA) through the app store. Conveniently monitor and manage your energy use, pay your bills and set up reminders too. Of course, we're here to help, so give us a call if you have questions about your energy bills or e-mail us (bcrea@bcrea.coop).

BCREA continuously examines ways to operate more efficiently, while providing the highest level of friendly, reliable service you expect. We were built by the members we serve.

At A Glance



**Brown County
Rural Electrical
Association**

Watch out for utility scams

Know when to Slam the Scam to protect yourself and your personal information from scammers. Never give personal info to an unknown visitor or caller. Your electric co-op will never demand payment with gift cards. Hang up and call us directly. Learn more on Page 5.



Every homeowner has a 'stake' in stopping the hidden costs of the energy vampires

Some people think vampires only come out on Halloween, but chances are you have vampires in your home every day of the year. The scary part is...they cost you money!

"Vampire" electronics are devices that continue to use energy, even when they are "off." Even when they just sit there, they add dollars and cents to your energy bill.

According to the CNET website, the average home sees about 10 percent of its total energy use go to energy vampires. That can cost \$250 a year. CNET also lists the most common types of energy vampires in the average home and their hidden costs.

Computers costs add up

According to the Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory's Standby Project, operated by the Department of Energy, a desktop computer can cost more than \$23 per year in stand-by mode. The monitor costs \$1.53 per year on average. Modems or routers contribute about another \$7 per year. That means a computer system can siphon \$30 a year in energy even when not in use. If you have more than one computer, the cost increases.

Televisions show more money

LED TVs are more energy-efficient than older models, but they still use up to \$20 per year in energy when switched off.

Cable boxes cost more yet. They use nearly \$50 in energy per year if you keep them plugged in at all times.

Sound systems hear jingling coins

With TVs come stereos and sound systems to make the home-theater experience complete. Audio systems



Energy vampires are electronics or appliances that use energy even when off. Common energy vampires include stereos, TVs and more. Learn how to defeat them to save on your electric bill.

can cost nearly \$10 per year when they stay plugged into the outlet. CD players or record players can add another \$5. Subwoofers and audio receivers also use energy when off so consider unplugging them when not in use.

Identify and defeat energy vampires

CNET reports that any device with an external power supply is likely using energy even when off. Likewise, devices with a remote control are often energy vampires because they are waiting for input. Appliances with continuous displays: clocks on microwaves or screensavers on computers always use energy too.

The simplest way to slay energy vampires is by unplugging devices that are not in use. However, this can be so annoying and such a hassle. Make it so much simpler by just grouping energy vampires together and plugging

them into one power strip that can turn off multiple devices all at once. For example, a single power strip could cover your TV, cable box and audio system.

Advanced power strips are also available for purchase that prevent electronics from drawing power when they're turned off or not in use.



If you'd like to learn more about energy-saving tips, just request the "101 Easy Ways to Save Energy and Money" booklet. Stop by the cooperative's office to pick yours up. ☺

Multi-colored smart floodlight available

The AuroraLux Smart Floodlight from Novostella is different from other smart flood lights. Besides providing regular white floodlight, it can present multiple colors simultaneously.

With the AuroraLux you can control not only one LED floodlight from your phone, but also multiple floodlights at the same time. This allows for a variety of applications for landscaping, home security and more.

The AuroraLux works with Amazon Alexa (Echo/Dot/Tap) and Google Assistant. Its app is compatible with Android & iOS. Once installed, you can control lights with a simple tap or a voice command.

Set schedules to automatically turn on and off the floodlight as routines




The AuroraLux Smart Floodlight gives you a rainbow of colors to control from your Smartphone.

dictate. A memory function is also available. The last settings are saved for quick access to make daily use more convenient.

Finally, the AuroraLux has a music mode that syncs the floodlights to your favorite music. This makes it a great decoration for the upcoming holidays, local festivals and family parties — both indoors and out.


The AuroraLux features a waterproof rating and superior heat diffusion to ensure stable performance under most weather conditions.

The AuroraLux comes in a variety of wattages, depending on your choice of brightness (20-100). The cost ranges from \$60-\$100. 

Safety

Be safe around electricity at harvest

Watch out for electric poles during this fall harvest and when working the ground. Poles are no match for today's powerful farm machinery.

- Use a spotter and don't rush.
- Look out for guy wires and green padmount transformers too.
- Stay inside the cab and call your electric cooperative if you break one.
- If you break it, you will buy it, which costs about \$2,000 on your farm insurance. It's even more costly after normal business hours due to overtime.
- If you burn ditches, protect the poles and never leave a fire unattended. A burned pole is weaker during a major storm. 

Brown County Briefs

Energy-efficiency tip

With winter weather on the way, now is the time to seal drafty windows. If you can see daylight around a window frame or if you can rattle a window (movement means possible leaks), the window likely needs to be sealed. Most window leaks can be sealed with caulk or weatherstripping, which come in a variety of compounds and materials. Visit energy.gov/energysaver to learn how and where to seal air leaks.

Update life-support listing

Do you or someone living in your household require life-support equipment, such as oxygen concentrators, respirators or home dialysis? Does the equipment have battery backup or a generator backup in case of a power outage? Brown County REA maintains a list of members with life-support equipment, which is updated regularly. The enrollment form is available on the website at www.browncountyrea.coop under the *Forms* tab or can be requested by calling the office. A portion of the form must be completed by a physician. In addition, if the person with the medical condition moved from the co-op's system, no longer needs life support or passed away, please inform your co-op so our list stays current.

C&I rebates due

Commercial, Industrial and Agricultural account members who have retrofitted to energy-efficient lighting or completed HVAC or other commercial energy projects in 2022 are reminded to submit invoices and other information for potential rebates before the November 15 deadline. ☎

GRE survey may come to your mailbox



Brown County REA's wholesale power supplier, Great River Energy, is conducting an end-use survey of residential members. BCREA members are selected at random to participate and may have already received the initial postcard with online survey information. We encourage you to participate if you receive the survey information. Members who do not have internet access or do not respond to the electronic survey will receive a paper copy of the survey by mail.

GRE uses the data received from the survey to prepare BCREA's Long Range Load Forecast, planning forecasts and to influence end use marketing programs. The survey is a requirement for Rural Utilities Service borrowers, to be done at least every three to five years. GRE last completed this survey in 2017. ☎

Member Advisory Committee sees how co-op works



BCREA Operations & Engineering Manager Brandon Havemeier, center facing, shared an overview of his department, photos and construction project updates during small group discussions with attendees at the second Member Advisory Council meeting September 26. In addition to other department presentations, the group heard from Zac Ruzycski, Director of Resource Planning for Great River Energy. ☎



Electrical Safety Tips for Hunters

We encourage all members to be aware of electrical equipment while hunting. Keep these safety tips in mind as you enjoy the great outdoors.

- Keep clear of electrical equipment.
- Do not shoot at or near power lines or insulators.
- Know where power lines and equipment are located where you hunt.
- Be vigilant in wooded areas where power lines may not be as visible.
- Never place deer stands on utility poles.
- Never place decoys on power lines or other utility equipment.

Stay one step ahead of utility scammers

Whether it's a high-tech hack or an in-person con, the best defense is the same — call your co-op.

In 2021 the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) received 5.7 million incident reports in the consumer marketplace. About half of those were identified as fraud and a quarter as identity-theft. Those statistics don't tabulate utility fraud specifically, but the Better Business Bureau says it receives about 1,000 complaints of utility scams each year.

These are a few common scenarios of utility scams:

- You receive a random call. The caller says you didn't pay your last electric bill and your power will be cut off immediately — unless you pay right now by credit card over the phone. Caller ID shows it came from the utility; they even told you the exact amount of your most recent bill.
- You receive an alert that you overpaid your utility bill and to get the refund, you need to provide your financial information.
- A friendly couple in uniform knock on your door saying they're from the power company and are following up on high-bill complaints from your



neighbors. They just need to take a look at your utility bill so they can get the information code to make sure you aren't being over-charged.

These real-life stories may seem like obvious scams. Who would ever fall for them? It turns out about one in four people.

Scammers take you by surprise

While most people do the right thing and hang up the phone or contact their utility rather than handing over money or private information, more than \$6 billion in losses to various scams were reported in 2021. According to Utilities United Against Scams, the typical cost for each victim who lost money was about \$500.

Reading about avoiding utility scams makes it sound pretty simple, but scammers take you by surprise.

They might be the most charming people you ever met. They might be the meanest and most intimidating, bullying you into acting. It can be hard to say "no" in the moment.

Con artists keep up with technology — they'll come at you through email and texting. In one recent scam, you're told to pay by gift or cash card, giving the swindlers the card and PIN number so they can have easier access to your money. (Hint — a utility will never ask you to pay by gift card.)

The best way to avoid being a victim of a utility scam is to hang up and call your electric co-op directly. Scammers will try to rush you into acting, but no billing situation is so urgent you can't check on it.

If you do lose money on a scam, don't be embarrassed — report it. The state attorney general is responsible for going after fraud and will want to know about any suspicious schemes. You might even be able to get your money back.

Letting the appropriate contacts know about a scamming operation can help protect others in our community and let you feel secure in enjoying your electric service. (E)

Line crews busy with maintenance and construction projects this fall



BCREA line crews use two bucket trucks to perform annual maintenance on an Oil Circuit Reclosure (OCR) on a pole.



Underground crews work to move and install electric cable for the Highway 14 expansion project in service territory outside of New Ulm. (E)

Dual Fuel members: fill up LP tanks so ready for increased load control events

Attention all Dual Fuel members with a second meter!

Inflationary pressures and supply constraints throughout the energy industry continue to drive unusually high prices in the electricity and natural gas markets. Forward curves indicate the current pricing environment will continue into the 2022-23 winter season. Additional pricing pressures exist in the wholesale power markets during the heating season due to natural gas supply competition with domestic heating. Great River Energy, our wholesale power provider, will manage costs by using our Dual Fuel program members to reduce load during peak pricing hours, which may include both morning and evening peak load periods.

As a reminder, the primary electric heating system can be controlled up to 12 hours per day and up to 400 hours a heating season. Control occurs for high electrical demand, high wholesale energy prices or system emergencies.

Because GRE anticipates increased control hours, your electric cooperative highly encourages Dual Fuel program participants to ensure you have adequate supplies of your secondary fuel source. Replenishing storage tanks now, typically leads to cost savings versus filling up during peak winter heating months.

In addition to purchasing in the early fall, you can also save money if you:

1. Buy a bigger tank, which allows you to stock up when prices are low.
2. Shop around and then lock in low rates. The propane market is competitive, so research rates and consider additional perks such as free service calls, maintenance, buy backs and bonuses. If rates are low, as they usually are in October, ask if the company will lock in the low rate for a period of time.
3. Ask about discounts from your LP provider. Sometimes these are made available for veterans, seniors,



employees of the state or major corporations, memberships in travel clubs or holder of credit cards. You never know where a discount may exist, so inquire.

4. Schedule deliveries carefully. Avoid holiday, weekend and other peak delivery times that may incur a fee.

5. Conserve propane by using less. Install a smart thermostat, keep appliances clean and well-serviced and choose energy-efficient models.

6. Upgrade your electric heat to a more efficient heat pump system

that's 200 to 400 percent efficient. Take advantage of our heat pump rebates too. As a comparison, air source heat pumps are 200-300 percent efficient, while ground source heat pumps are 400 percent efficient. Furnaces are 60 to 90 percent efficient, depending on the age and fuel source.

Call and visit with the co-op's energy expert about Dual Fuel or heat pump questions. If you no longer have a functioning backup fossil fuel heating system, call us so we remove you from the Dual Fuel program. ☎

Co-op's \$25 Smart thermostat rebate warms up your wallet!

Be "smart" about your energy use! Install an Energy Star Smart thermostat (Wi-Fi-connected) to receive a \$25 rebate from your electric cooperative. Find the form on our website or call us.

Why pie? Why not pie? Share your favorite pie recipes with us!

My, oh my...I'm not gonna lie...I sure love pie! Share with us your favorite pie recipes, whether it's for meringue, pudding, fruit, cheesecake or even pecan pie. Mail your pie recipes to Editor, Federated Rural Electric, PO Box 69, Jackson MN 56143-0069 or e-mail to christoffer@federatedrea.coop by October 26. Add your name and phone number. Thanks for sharing with us!

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Turn to the co-op for your next water heater

Lake Winnibigoshish Wild Rice & Walleye by Linda Kilmer, New Ulm

- 2 lbs. walleye fillets
- ½ tsp. salt
- ¼ tsp. pepper
- 3 slices bacon, diced
- 1 c. fresh mushrooms
- ¼ c. onions, diced
- ¼ c. celery, diced
- 2 c. cooked wild rice
- 1 tsp. salt
- 2 T. melted butter

Season fillets. In skillet cook bacon until lightly browned. Add mushrooms, onions and celery, until opaque. Stir in wild rice and salt. Place fillets in well greased baking dish. Top with wild rice mixture and salt. Cover and bake at 350 degrees for 30 minutes. Cover with mushroom walnut sauce before serving.

Mushroom and Walnut Sauce

- 2 T. butter
- 1 T. minced onion
- 1 c. sliced mushrooms
- 3 T. flour
- ½ tsp. dried mustard
- ½ tsp. salt
- ¼ tsp. thyme
- 2 c. Half & Half
- ¼ c. walnuts, toasted

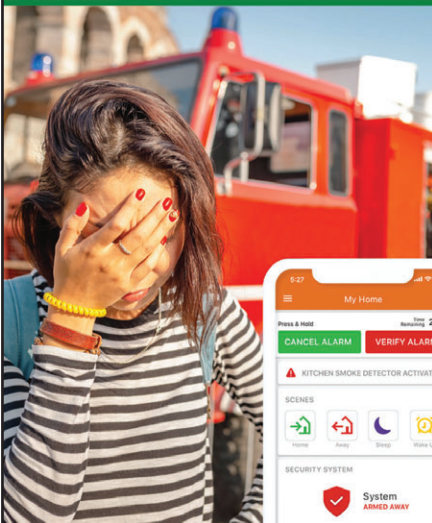
Melt butter in double boiler. Add minced onion and mushrooms, stir in flour, mustard, salt and thyme. Gradually stir in half and half. Cook over medium heat until thickened. Remove from heat and stir in nuts.



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. 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.

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Brown County Rural Electrical Association

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



Mike Heidemann
Chief Executive
Officer

Staff Notes

Making light out of darkness

Brown County REA and electric co-ops across the country were originally created to solve one of the most basic and complex of needs and desires — making light out of darkness.

That legacy still works today and it's why each October we recognize National Co-op Month. It's a reminder that business succeeds not just through competition, but also through cooperation.

As a result of the member-owned cooperative form of business, co-ops stand out in many areas of the electric utility industry. Electric vehicles are getting a boost from co-ops by helping members install charging stations to “fuel up” overnight in their garages. Just as co-ops first brought electricity to unserved rural areas, today many of them are helping to bring high-speed internet service to the rural areas.

In the early part of the last century America's cities were being transformed by this new thing called electricity. Outside the municipal boundaries, people could only look with envy at the glow from over the horizon. Setting poles and stringing power lines miles outside of town for one or two customers was deemed too expensive.

Luckily, go-getters in America's rural areas believed they could solve the problems that kept the power companies from connecting them to modern society. A group in Brown County held meetings and went door-to-door visiting their neighbors to start forming their electric utility. They became a community-based, democratically-run, not-for-profit business called a cooperative. Today, more than 900 electric co-ops exist in the U.S.

It wasn't easy, especially at first. They got a huge boost when, after getting the attention of some key politicians, the federal government created the Rural Electrification Administration (REA). The REA made loans available, helping finance expensive utility construction. It provided technical consulting and developed engineering techniques to carry electricity longer distances. The agency drew up model co-op bylaws and even went on the road with tent shows to demonstrate how to use the latest conveniences like electric ovens and washing machines.

But the biggest innovation is simply the co-op itself and the notion of a utility with only one mission — to make life better for its member-owners. Electric co-ops didn't spring from a national directive or organization. They are truly homegrown products of what local people wanted for their community. The story of electric co-ops is of a true grassroots movement of unique, homegrown organizations. The one characteristic that applies to all of them is that they care and listen to the local members they serve.

For electric co-ops one size does not fit all. In recognizing that every one of us is different, co-ops make both an electric connection and a human connection. This is a truly powerful innovation. ☺

Board meeting highlights

The Brown County REA Board of Directors held its monthly board meeting September 29.

Discussion and/or action were taken on:

- Approved a change in the co-op's water heater program prices to no longer include installation, effective January 1, 2023.
- Conducted annual review and approved the cooperative's updated Limited English Proficiency (LEP) Plan.
- Approved the write-off of \$2,559.85 in uncollectible electric bill balances and \$3,310.60 in uncollectible accounts receivable.
- Reviewed and approved the 2021 payment of retired capital credits to members. Checks will be sent in November. Bill credits for amounts less than \$100 will be issued on November statements.
- Reviewed and approved the 2022-2023 compensation schedule.
- Approved David Wendinger to replace William Berg as the voting delegate for Midwest Electric Consumers Association Inc.
- Informed that inspections for 2021 Work Plan projects were completed.
- Updated on construction activities including the Highway 14 expansion and completion of Boundary Street project.

The next meeting is October 27, 2022. ☺