

Connections

February 2022

For the member-owners of Brown County REA



Volume 26, Issue 2

Operation Round Up offering six \$250 scholarships in 2022



High school seniors: apply for the 2022 BCREA \$250 scholarships. Pictured are two of last year's winners Alice Lewandowski and Nicole Albrecht, New Ulm, along with BCREA's Marcia Solie.



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

The Trust Board will award six \$250 scholarships to graduating seniors whose parents/guardians are members and live in Brown County REA's service area.

Funds for the scholarships come from members who choose to round up their electric bill to the nearest dollar each month. The difference is placed in a trust, which is administered by a nine-member board and meets four times each year to distribute funds to charitable causes, individuals and families in crisis, and scholarships.

Scholarship guidelines and applications are available from area high school counselors and can also be found on the REA website at www.browncountyrea.coop.

The deadline for submission is March 28. Winners will be announced at the Brown County REA Annual Meeting March 31. A copy of the student's high school transcript and one letter of recommendation are required. Scholarship funds will be awarded after successful completion of the first semester of college. ☎

Official Notice of Brown County REA 85th Annual Meeting



85 YEARS

All Brown County Rural Electrical Association members are hereby notified of the 85th Annual Meeting.

- **Thursday, March 31, 2022**
- **Sleepy Eye Event Center**
110 12th Avenue NE
Sleepy Eye, MN
- **Registration begins 4:30 p.m.**
- **Meal at 5:30 p.m., immediately followed by business meeting**
- **Business meeting also accessible via Zoom**

Agenda includes 2021 review, financial report and election of Directors in Districts 1, 4 & 5. All members invited and encouraged to attend.

— James Hanson, Secretary

At A Glance



Brown County Rural Electrical Association

Is there a BCREA Board seat in your future?

Brown County REA is seeking director candidates for Districts 1, 4 & 5. If you are interested in serving on the Board of Directors, learn more about how to become involved on Pages 5 & 8. ☎

Feeling fine with 9 energy-saving tips

Little changes can add up to big energy savings. Save lots of dimes and feel more than fine with these nine actions.

1. LEDS spotlight lighting savings

Lighting is one of the easiest places to start. Replace your five most frequently used light fixture bulbs with LED light bulbs. LEDs provide high-quality light output, use up to 90 percent less energy and last 15 times longer than standard bulbs.

2. Tuck in the portable AC

It might seem strange to think about air conditioners in the winter, but insulate room air conditioners from the outside with a tight-fitting AC cover from your local home improvement center or hardware store. This keeps heated air from escaping outside. Alternately, remove the window unit in the winter to prevent energy losses.

3. Smart thermostats wise move

For the average American home almost half the annual energy bill goes to heating and cooling — more than \$900 a year! Be smart about how you control your temperature settings so you save money and stay comfortable in your home. If possible, install a smart thermostat to automatically adjust your home's temperature settings for optimal performance. An Energy Star smart thermostat can reduce your heating and cooling bill by more than 8 percent and save you about \$50 a year on average. If your home is unoccupied much of the day, a smart thermostat can save about \$100 a year. Save even more with your cooperative's smart thermostat rebate; find the form on the co-op's website.

4. Electronics can be Energy Stars

According to the Consumer Technol-



Many smart thermostats (back) feature a smart phone app; you can change the temp using the home's WIFI and your phone, whether you are home or on the road. It's great for snowbirds!

ogy Association, 3.4 billion consumer electronic devices represent about 10 percent of residential sector electricity consumption. A home equipped with televisions, set-top boxes, a Blu-Ray DVD player and a soundbar that have earned the Energy Star designation save nearly \$140 over the life of those products. Plus, use a power strip as a central "turn off" point when you are done using equipment. Even when turned off, many electronics can use a small amount of electricity.

5. Registers/vents go with the flow

Make sure all air registers are clear of furniture so the air can circulate freely. If your home has radiators, place heat-resistant reflectors between radiators and walls. In the winter this helps heat the room instead of the wall.

6. Shower vs. bath cleans up

A 10-minute shower can use less

water than a full bath. With a 2.5 gallon-per-minute (low-flow) shower head, a 10-minute shower will use about 25 gallons of water, saving you five gallons of water over a typical bath. A new showerhead also will save energy — up to \$145 each year on electricity — beating out both the bath and an old-fashioned showerhead.


7. Dishwashing to do and to not do

Save water by scraping dishes instead of rinsing them before loading in the dishwasher. Run your dishwasher with a full load and use the air-dry option if available. Most dishwashers today can thoroughly clean dishes that had food scraped, rather than rinsed off; the wash cycle and detergent take care of the rest.

8. Get the dirt on clothes washing

Wash your laundry with cold water whenever possible. Hot water heating accounts for about 90 percent of the energy your machine uses to wash clothes; meanwhile, only 10 percent goes to electricity used by the washer's motor. Depending on the clothes and local water quality (hardness), many homeowners can effectively do laundry exclusively with cold water, using cold water laundry detergents.

9. Lint hint on clothes drying

Don't over dry your clothes. If your dryer has a moisture sensor that will automatically turn the machine off when clothes are done, use it to avoid over drying. Remember to clean the lint trap before every load. Dry full loads, or reduce drying time for partial loads. A dryer operating an extra 15 minutes per load can cost you up to \$34 every year. Clean the lint trap before each load to save up to \$34 each year. 

— Courtesy of energystar.gov

Speak your morning coffee into existence

Some people can't function in the morning until they have their coffee. Now these people can simply tell their coffee maker to give them what they need.

The Atomi Smart WIFI Coffee Maker links to Alexa and Google Assistant to respond to voice commands. Users can turn it off/on, plus check and change brewing strengths (regular or strong) hands free. If they are too far away to hear the coffee maker's beeping when it is done brewing, a notification is sent to their phone.

If owners don't have Alexa or Google Assistant, the coffee maker can also be operated with a smart phone or manually, via its LED display and control panel.

Connecting the coffee maker to WIFI is easy. Download



the Atomi app, plug in the machine and the hot spot will appear for connection.

Other features include:

- Set your daily and weekly brewing schedules.
- A no-spill sensor means the coffee maker will not brew unless its 12-cup carafe is in place.
- Crack-resistant hot plate base for lasting use.
- Washable, reusable filter is good for the environment.

The Atomi Smart Coffee Maker is available on Amazon.com for \$90. Get it

today and make getting going in the morning easier. Yes, you still must manually fill up the coffee grounds and the water holding tank in advance! ☺

Safety

Watch out for unsafe, counterfeit products

In many homes the Christmas gifts are unwrapped and the tree ornaments are carefully put away. Now you finally have time to sit down and look at the cool electronics and gadgets you received. As you study its box, you see some misspelled words and it has funny markings on it. You don't spot the testing company, like UL.

You hesitate and something tells you to look a little closer at the product before you plug the gadget into the outlet or charger. You get a sense that something doesn't seem right and maybe could even be unsafe. As you hold the box, a flash back runs through your mind about what Aunt Martha gave you last year and that whole fire department episode. As you recall, she purchased an off-brand gadget and the end result was a fire. As you stare at the box in your hands now, you are grateful that last year's fire was small and didn't burn down the whole house; you resolve it won't happen again. That is when you realize what you are actually holding in your hands.

You see, Aunt Martha thought she could save a few dollars and purchased a counterfeit electronic device, most likely unknowingly. They look the same as the other ones and they seem to be the same, but they are not. Instead, these counterfeit devices can be unsafe, dangerous and deadly.

So, next time you purchase a product, especially if



Always look for the UL symbol on electrical devices for safety's sake!

the price is too good to be true, consider these actions.

- Only purchase from trusted sources.
- Check electrical manufacturers' websites to find authorized retailers and dealers.
- Only purchase items that have been tested and marked, such as with UL listing.
- Packaging should contain the name and contact information of the manufacturer.
- Avoid unknown brands and products that do not display any brand affiliation.
- Electrical products featuring packaging with typos and misspellings have a high likelihood of being counterfeit.

One organization has initiated a campaign to address counterfeits and information can be found at their website www.besafebuyreal.ul.org. Underwriters Laboratories' World Anti-Counterfeiting Campaign is an annual global campaign designed to raise awareness among the general public, industries, governments and societies about the health and safety risks associated with the consequences of counterfeiting. Their website has some valuable information that gives you key knowledge for detecting counterfeits and keeping your world safe.

Thus, the next time you are shopping, no matter how good the deal may be, do your homework and really know what you are buying. Your family's safety could literally be in your hands. ☺

Brown County Briefs

Note from CTV



Cooperative Television (CTV) users are reminded to turn to Channel 12.2 as prompted when Channels 9.1 and 9.9 are turned off. KEYC owns non-duplication rights during FOX programming broadcast nationally, including the NFL. Local programming and local news on Channels 9.1 and 9.9 will be broadcast on those channels as normal.

Community Health Day

There will be no Sleepy Eye Community Health Day in the spring of 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 at www.browncountyrea.coop, before that date.

Energy efficiency tip

About 30 percent of a home's heating energy is lost through inefficient windows. Caulk and weatherstrip windows to seal air leaks. When running your home heating system, lock all operable windows to ensure tight seals.

Calendars

The 2022 pocket calendar that were available for pick-up at the BCREA office are gone.

Recycled holiday lights results

A total of 336 pounds of old holiday lights were dropped off at BCREA for recycling. Altogether, the Sleepy Eye YES! Team collection gathered 960 pounds of lights, which will be taken to Jobs Plus in Waseca to be disassembled for further recycling. (C)

Why electric bills go up in winter



Even if you don't use electric heat, you may notice that your electric bills are higher during the winter months. Here are a few factors that cause increased energy use:

- Shorter days and longer nights mean more time indoors. That typically means more lights, TVs, appliances and video games in use.
- Most heating systems use electricity for some functions, such as operating the fan, and may run almost continuously when it's very cold.
- You may be using space heaters in garages, basements or other unheated spaces. Portable plug-in heaters can dramatically increase your monthly bill.
- Electric blankets and heating pads feel cozy on cold nights but will add to your electric bill.
- Engine block heaters on your cars or equipment or heating wraps on exposed plumbing will increase the amount of energy you use.
- Holiday gatherings mean more guests, more hot showers, more cooking and baking; all use electricity. (C)

Be a part of something powerful

High school sophomores and juniors encouraged to apply for Youth Tour



Young people whose parents or guardians are members of Brown County REA are invited to enter to win an all-expense paid trip to Washington, D.C. June 14-19 as part of the Electric Cooperative Youth Tour.

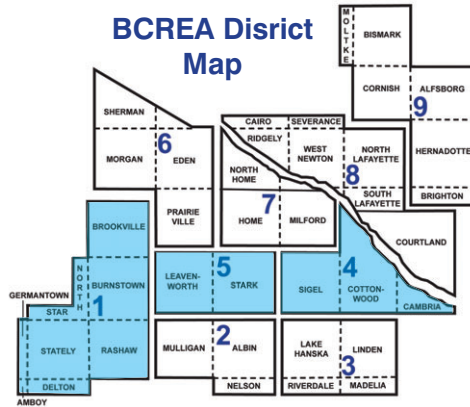
Interested youth are asked to write a 300-word essay on any energy-related topic and submit it, along with the application form, to Brown County REA by the close of business Wednesday, March 4. Applications and selection procedures have been sent to counselors and social studies teachers at high schools in BCREA's service territory. It can also be found on the REA website at www.browncountyrea.coop.

Finalists will be interviewed in mid-March and the winner will be selected to receive the trip to Washington, D.C. The second and third place finishers will receive prizes of \$150 and \$100, respectively. Others will receive a gift card. (C)

Director candidates sought for 2022 election


Nominations are being sought for director candidates to run for election in BCREA's Districts 1, 4 and 5.

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



Highlighted townships indicate nominations needed.

Nominating committee members are: District 1: Richard Callanan, Troy Toll; District 4: Jordan Budenski, Tony Guggisberg, Gerald Grathwohl; District 5: Dan E. Hoffman, Myron Helget, Corey Huiras.

If interested in being a candidate, contact a member of your district's Nominating Committee or BCREA. Complete and return the Director Candidate Application found below or on the website at www.browncountyrea.coop. Directors will be elected at the 85th Annual Meeting March 31 at the Sleepy Eye Event Center. 

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 March 31, 2022 Annual Meeting. I certify that the following statements are true and accurate as to my qualification 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 for which 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 co-op.

- 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 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 _____

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Co-op staying ahead of supply-chain shortages, but help us; let us know about 2022 new services & upgrades so we have the materials on hand

As consumers, seeing empty store shelves has unfortunately become more common during the pandemic.

So how is your electric cooperative faring for its materials?

Electric cooperatives work with suppliers who are used to having extra poles and wires on hand due to devastating storms that can destroy large areas of utility lines. However, the pandemic caused suppliers to order even further ahead. In addition, your electric cooperative is estimating the materials it would need for 2022's line construction and ordered it a year in advance instead of the more typical six months in advance.

"Exceptionally long lead times and inflated prices are drastically changing how and when we procure hardware and other materials," stated George Madden, Federated's operations manager. "We are being forced to plan and order the materials necessary for construction projects, like new services and line rebuilds, a year in advance now. As a prime example, a 15 KVA transformer in 2020 cost a little over \$1,200 and you could get them in a couple of days; that same transformer today costs more than \$6,000 and the lead time is 56 weeks or more."

Brown County REA (BCREA) Operations Assistant Robyn Walter elaborated. "With transformer lead times at the end of 2021 extending anywhere from 38 plus weeks to 130 weeks, it is challenging to figure out what and when to order," she said. "An additional challenge is that some transformer manufacturers are currently not accepting orders with hopes of catching up. Plus, co-op vendors had some stock transformers available for unforeseen situations. This might not be the case in the upcoming years.

The long lead times created a challenge of trying to anticipate what co-op members' needs will



Building a new home or hog barn in 2022? Maybe you want to expand your grain bin facilities or add a heated shop. Call your electric cooperative and speak to the operations manager. Let's get your project on the 2022 line crews' "do-list" to ensure that the right size transformer and materials are on hand.

be. To try and avoid any delays to members, transformers are ordered further in advance, along with reaching out to additional vendors to find out their lead times and availability. If members are considering changes to their service or adding a new service, please let the co-op know in advance in order to have the equipment available when it's needed.

Supply chain issues affect other departments at the cooperative too. "To best serve our members' needs we keep an inventory of water heaters in all sizes, on hand," said BCREA's Member Services Manager Marcia Solie. "Our water heater supplier, by keeping a larger stock, can stay in front of any issues, as it creates a buffer between the extended lead times, their stock and demand."

"We are in the process of upgrading

our radio controls to new technology," said Andrea Christoffer, Federated's marketing and communications manager. "We ordered new radio controls back in July, which we thought we'd have by year-end, but now they may arrive by spring/summer. It's tough to plan a mass changeout of radio controls when you don't have the equipment. We are working with what we have and when we can get it due to the materials shortages."

"The increased materials' cost can be partially mitigated by multiyear workplan loans," said Federated Office Manager Julie Resch. "Yet, the costs are real; members aren't always insulated from the impacts. The co-op is doing everything we can, but in some cases we must pass costs on to the members, like with water heater price increases." (B)

All hail kale! Share your kale recipes for nutritious favorite recipes

Do not fail to share some of your favorite kale eats and treats! Share your kale recipes with us, whether it's in a soup, salad, blended drink or kale chips! Mail to Editor, Federated Rural Electric, PO Box 69, Jackson MN 56143-0069 or e-mail to christoffer@federatedrea.coop by February 23. Add your name and phone number. Thanks for sharing with us! 📧

Bonnie's Fresh Salmon by Fidelis Freking, Heron Lake

- 1 salmon fillet, remove skin
- salt & pepper to taste
- 2 to 3 T. lemon juice
- mayo, to taste
- slice of green pepper
- tomato slices & thinly sliced onion

Wash and pat dry the salmon fillet. Use a large piece of foil; spray with oil. Put salmon on foil. Salt and pepper and drizzle with lemon juice. Layer with onion and spread with a nice layer of mayo. Arrange pepper slices and tomato slices over the mayo. Cover tight with foil. Bake in oven at 350° or bake on the grill for a half hour or so. Uncover and bake a few minutes longer. Use as many vegetables, depending on your tastes. 📧



Since it's cold outside, dig through your recipes for the upcoming months. E-mail or mail using the addresses above. We will hold onto them until that month's edition. Thanks for sharing!

- April — Crock Pot
- May — Bread
- June — Blueberries
- July — Tomatoes
- August — Cherries
- September — Meatballs
- October — Cake
- November — Pie
- December — Rice 📧

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Pick up the phone before the shovel; call before digging!

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Call Gopher State One Call before doing any digging more than 12" deep — 48 hours before digging 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

Are you ready to serve?

In one of the most notable inaugural speeches given, John F. Kennedy spoke his famous words, “Ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country.” His inspiring words urged Americans to take actions that benefited the greater good. In essence, Kennedy was saying our country thrives when we all contribute our talents to the common good.

On a smaller scale I think the same can be said about our co-op, specifically with regard to our


board members. Brown County REA’s board members are community-minded individuals with a variety of skill sets. Our board has been made up of business owners, farmers and retirees. We rely on their many talents to help us make informed decisions on long-term priorities and investments. Our directors live right here in the co-op’s service area. We consider them the eyes and ears of the community because they provide their perspective on important community issues.

We recognize it takes many people with different skills to create a well-rounded board to represent the full spectrum of our members. That’s why when we’re seeking new director candidates, we want folks with diverse perspectives, experience, expertise and views. We’re seeking local members of our cooperative who can apply their unique talents to benefit all our friends and neighbors. But above all else, we’re looking for folks who love our cooperative and want to see it thrive now and in the future.

Serving on Brown County REA’s Board means you’re making a difference locally, using your individual talents and perspective to guide decisions about the co-op that in turn benefit the larger community. While day-to-day decisions are made by co-op staff, major decisions are made by the Board, whose mission is to look out for the vitality of the co-op and the members it serves. Brown County REA board members typically provide input and guidance on budgets, co-op goals and direction, capital investments and upgrades in equipment and technology, renewable investments and energy mix.

The energy industry is undergoing a major transition. Brown County REA is facing big decisions. Board members have an opportunity to help chart a course for our future. To serve the members best we need input from a wide range of people who represent the broad spectrum of views within the co-op.

While you don’t need to be an expert in electricity or business to run, you do need to have a passion for the community and a willingness to actively serve and learn. Our board meets on a regular basis; we offer specialized training opportunities to help board members make informed decisions. Board members gain a deeper understanding of the electric utility industry, the cooperative business model and local economic development efforts.

Ultimately, our Board is the community pulse for the co-op and helps keep us on the right track. We love our co-op service territory and want to help it thrive. If you share the same commitment and want to contribute to the greater good, consider running for a board position. Director elections in Districts 1, 4 and 5 will be held at BCREA’s 85th Annual Meeting March 31. 

Board meeting highlights

The BCREA Board of Directors held its monthly board meeting via Zoom January 27. Discussion and/or action were taken on the following agenda items:

- Reviewed and approved the December 2021 board meeting minutes, new membership applications, member cancellations, payments to estates and assignment transfers.
- Approved the 2022 Average Retail Cooperative Energy Rates paid for excess energy produced and sold back to the cooperative from member-owned Distributed Energy Resources less than 40 kW, effective January 1, 2022.
- Reviewed and approved the 2022 Conservation Improvement Program (CIP) and estimated monthly Power Cost Adjustment (PCA) rates for former Alliant Energy territory members.
- Reviewed and approved the 2021 OSHA Form 300 Summary of Work-Related Injuries and Illnesses.
- Reviewed the 2021 summary of system outages. The average minutes of interruption per member for the year was 63.3.

The next meeting is set for February 24 at the Brown County REA office in Sleepy Eye. 