

# Connections



For the member-owners of Brown County REA

Volume 26, Issue 8

## D.C. thru eyes of Youth Tour reps

36 Minnesota students enjoyed an unforgettable six-day trip to Washington, D.C. for Youth Tour. Logan Kreilkamp, New Ulm, and Eli Hedstrom, Lakefield, represented Brown County REA and Federated Rural Electric June 14-19.

Your electric co-op sponsors Youth Tour so teenagers learn about their government and electric cooperatives, make friends and visit famous landmarks. Participants met with elected legislators, visited Capitol Hill and the Library of Congress. They also explored monuments, museums and Arlington National Cemetery.

### BCREA's Logan Kreilkamp

D.C. brings out a host of emotions for this New Ulm Cathedral junior.

"My favorite was the World War II Memorial," Kreilkamp stated. "It has a sense of peace and calm, while also retaining its sad feeling of all those we lost. It's quiet and beautiful — the perfect way to make a memorial.

"The Holocaust Museum taught us something that no lesson in school could ever teach — the true gravity and devastating effects of the Holocaust. In school we are told that the Holocaust is such a tragedy, but they aren't able to make us understand what they mean. The museum has slipped that last piece of the puzzle in... nearly everyone agreed it changed our perspective on many things.

"The National Cathedral was absolutely beautiful," he added. "Learning about its past and feeling the peaceful atmosphere is an experience I won't have many times in my life. The holiness and sanctity of it all is amazing."

The Youth Tour delegation visited with the Minnesota



Two local students enjoyed Washington, D.C. winning the trip through your co-op's Youth Tour Contest. Eli Hedstrom, Lakefield, and Logan Kreilkamp, New Ulm, shared their favorite D.C. highlights.

legislators at the Capitol. "The Capitol visit answered a few questions," Kreilkamp stated. "I loved being able to ask our representatives and senators what their views and plans are for certain issues happening both in our state and across the country. It helped all of us have a better understanding of what government is all about. We talked a bit about what it's like to be a legislator, but the majority of our talk was about what problems we are facing and their plan to fix or improve it."

Of course, a D.C. trip features lots of historical sights. "Mount Vernon's atmosphere tells its own story," he added. "It allows visitors to not only understand the past, but to feel what it was like and how it was run.

"The many monuments, memorials, and museums were fun, but my favorite part had to be meeting the people," Kreilkamp said. "On our last day a friend group decided to get up extra early to watch the sunrise together.

It gave us plenty of time for thought and a final moment for bonding. There was something special in the air that morning and to this day I can't even begin to describe it. The only way I can put it — simply amazing.

"Prior to this trip, I hadn't met many people and this trip has taught me how to socialize more effectively. I became good friends with almost everyone from Minnesota and even met some great friends. We have a group chat for almost everyone from Minnesota and most of us are already in favor of having a reunion. We bonded well and had a great time together. I met some people from other states and one

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### At A Glance



Brown County Rural Electrical Association

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# Back-up power options: install the solar/battery storage or generator?

Power outages can be more than a minor nuisance. Extreme weather can knock out the electric grid for days to weeks at a time. Even for shorter outages, those with electricity-dependent medical equipment or home-based businesses are impacted.

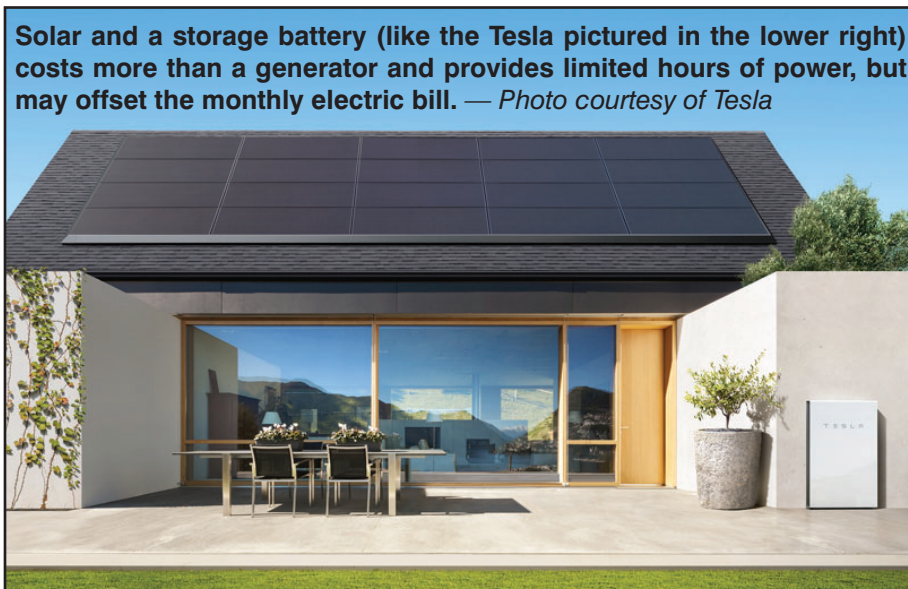
Intense and frequent severe weather events are prompting some to consider off-grid solutions for energy during prolonged power outages. Gas-powered generators are a traditional choice for residential power generation, but new battery storage systems coupled with solar panels can also be a solution. Pros and cons exist for each backup power system, so members should consider their personal power needs and budget.

Sizing your home's energy needs is a first step for deciding which system to install. Is it necessary to power the whole house or just a few critical appliances? Tally up the reported energy use of each appliance that needs to operate to get a rough estimate of minimal energy needs. This can be a guide to choosing your backup power option with enough capacity.

## Portable generators

Gas-powered generators have the lowest upfront costs. These can either be portable, permanent or stand-by systems. Portable generators typically cost between \$400 and \$1,500 and use roughly 20 gallons of gasoline per day. Gas-powered generators are noisy and have the least output, making them more suited to occasional, short-duration power outages. Portable generators can be manually connected

**Solar and a storage battery (like the Tesla pictured in the lower right) costs more than a generator and provides limited hours of power, but may offset the monthly electric bill. — Photo courtesy of Tesla**



to a circuit panel, but an electrician must install a manual transfer switch to protect appliances from a power surge once electricity is restored. If not connected to a circuit breaker, appliances can be plugged directly into the generator, but require a long, heavy-duty extension cord for safe operation. Portable generators also must be operated in well-ventilated areas and shielded from wet weather. The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission estimates 80 deaths occur a year from carbon monoxide (CO) due to improperly operated portable generators. Availability of gasoline can also be a challenge during severe weather. Long-term storage of gasoline requires proper containers and stabilizers.

## Permanent/standby generators

Permanent or standby generators

typically cost \$2,000 to \$5,000 and can have installation costs that run from a few thousand dollars to \$10,000. These are connected directly to a residence and can be turned on automatically in the event of a power outage. Permanent generators run on natural gas, propane or diesel. If connected to a natural gas line, these can run indefinitely and power an entire home. Standby generators are suitable for frequent outages or occasional, but sustained outages.

## Solar & battery storage

Overall expenses for a solar and battery storage combination are much higher than a generator. The National Renewable Energy Lab estimates the average U.S. cost for installation to be around \$1,200 to \$1,500 per kilowatt of system capacity. This estimate

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# Tesla Powerwall offers backup power

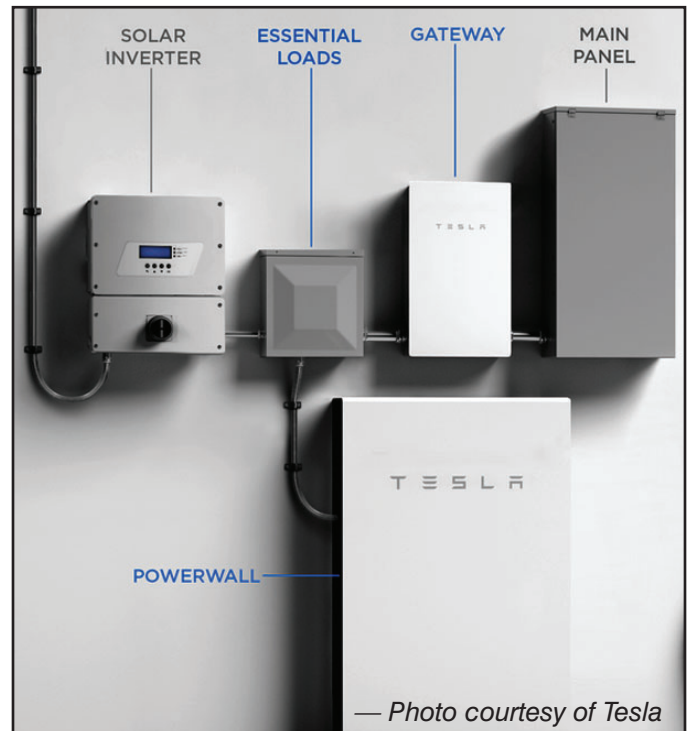
Generators aren't the only way to supply backup power to your home in the event of an outage. Large-scale backup batteries exist, like the Tesla Powerwall.

Powerwall is an integrated battery system that stores solar energy for backup protection. If the power goes out, the Powerwall system detects the outage and automatically recharges with sunlight to keep your essential appliances running during the outage.

Based on the average home consuming 28 kilowatt-hours a day, one Powerwall could power a home for 12 hours. Two Powerwall's will power a home for 18 hours. Three Powerwalls will run a home for 24 hours.

This backup power does not come without a price, however. The Tesla Powerwall has a higher price than other battery systems, but it also has a high storage capacity and power output. The price is calculated based on how many units are ordered. For example, a single Powerwall sells for \$10,500, but two units will cost \$17,000 (\$8,500 each). The Tesla Powerwall also comes with a 10-year warranty.

If interested in exploring whole-home battery technology, the Tesla Powerwall may provide the power that you need. See the photo at right for the parts of the system (solar panels not shown). 



## Safety

# Stay safe around power lines

Coming into contact with a power line can be deadly, but you don't have to touch one directly to be in danger. Thankfully, some simple precautions are all you need to keep you and your loved ones safe.

Overhead power lines carry thousands of volts of electricity and have the potential to be harmful to anyone or anything that gets too close. Your electric cooperative wants our members to understand the dangers of electricity and stay safe around power lines.


When flying objects, like kites and drones, look up and stay clear of power lines. If you're carrying tall tools, like ladders and boards, working on a roof, trimming trees, or using tall vehicles or equipment, be careful; don't let these items don't hit a power line. Stay at least 10 feet away from overhead power lines.

Mylar balloons pose a significant threat to power lines. When a metallic balloon



touches a power line, it can cause a surge of electricity that short circuits equipment and can lead to power outages, fires and injuries. Proper handling and disposal of these balloons prevents this from happening and they should never be released into the air.

If you see a tree touching a power line, don't climb it. If something gets caught in a power line, don't try to knock it down yourself. Call your electric co-op to safely remove it. Never attach anything to power poles, such as signs, decorations or basketball hoops.

Electricity is an important part of our lives, but can be dangerous when not treated with caution. The safety of our employees and members is of utmost importance. Keep a safe distance from power lines and other equipment the cooperative uses to bring electricity to your home, including transformers, meters and electric boxes. 

# Brown County Briefs

## Round Up meeting August 16

The next meeting of the Brown County Rural Electric Trust Board, aka Operation Round Up, is set for August 17. Organizations interested in seeking funding may submit an application before that date. Application forms are available on the BCREA website [www.browncountyrea.coop](http://www.browncountyrea.coop).

## Contact us about service upgrades, additions or rebuilds



Are you looking at possible changes to your electrical service in the near future? Plan ahead and contact Brown County REA with the details of your project now. 800-658-2368 or 794-3331.

## Energy Efficiency Tip

Did you know the combined use of large appliances like dishwashers, clothes dryers and washing machines account for the largest percentage of electricity use in the average U.S. home? Take small steps to save energy when using these appliances. Only run full loads in the dishwasher, and thoroughly scrape food from dishes before loading. Dry towels and heavier cottons separate from lighter-weight clothing; clean the lint screen after every use. Wash clothing in cold water to save energy used to heat water.

## Pole testing continues



Brown County REA members in Courtland, Lafayette, Cornish and Alfsborg townships are reminded that Southwood 2000 is working in your area to inspect poles. ☎

# Your electricity is cleaner and as safe and reliable as ever



**Hydropower on the Missouri River is just one of the sources of your power. More wind and solar are being added to surpass the state goal earlier than the targeted year of 2050.**

We are on the path to clean energy. We believe Brown County REA's members have the best electric service around, whether you value cost, reliability, environmental responsibility — or all three.

In partnership with our wholesale electricity provider Great River Energy (GRE), we will dramatically reduce the energy we receive from coal. Not only will we meet Minnesota's goal to reduce carbon dioxide emissions 80 percent from 2005 levels, we will get there next year — 27 years before the 2050 target.

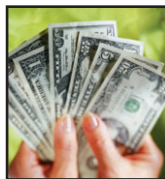
Our renewable energy portfolio — which already meets Minnesota's renewable energy standard of 25 percent — will nearly triple in output by 2025.

The changes to the way we generate electricity have occurred intentionally for over a decade. We closed two power plants and recently sold a third. Your elected directors have faced decisions that will have wide-ranging and long-lasting effects. They take into careful consideration the impact their decisions will have on the environment, reliability, community, the state and local economy. Through it all, they have focused on doing what's best for BCREA's membership.

Brown County REA and Great River Energy are in the strong position we are today because of the way we do business, as cooperatives. We are an owner of Great River Energy in the same way you are an owner of Brown County REA.

Cooperatives are owned by those we serve, governed by democratically elected directors, and guided by a simple goal: to do what's best for the membership, in every scenario. By continuing to listen to our members and work with partners like Great River Energy, Brown County REA will remain innovative, nimble and deliver on our promise to members for generations. ☎

## Sign up for a chance to win bill credit\$



Pay your electric bill each month without giving it a thought through recurring Auto Pay from your checking or savings account. Enroll before August 29 and you'll be entered in a drawing. Members already enrolled in the program are automatically entered in the drawing for one \$100, two \$50 or 12 \$25 bill credits.

Your monthly bill payment is automatically deducted from your bank account on the 20<sup>th</sup> of each month. You still receive a statement, but no longer have to write a check, look for a stamp or make a trip to the mailbox or our drop box. Sign up today by calling the office or using the ACH Authorization Form under the Forms tab on our website [www.browncountyrea.coop](http://www.browncountyrea.coop). ☎

# Affordable, abundant wind energy serves Minnesota cooperative member-owners

Minnesota offers a variety of natural resources that benefit its residents including winds that can move unobstructed across the state's southern prairies. Minnesota ranks in the top 10 states for producing renewable wind energy, and the Midwest's wind generation rose from 8.6 gigawatts (GW) in 2011 to 26.9 GW in 2020.

Great River Energy (GRE), Brown County REA's wholesale power provider, started making use of the state's abundant wind more than 20 years ago with just three wind turbines on the prairies of Murray County.

By 2007 wind had proven to be a realistic and cost-effective strategy for generating electricity and reducing carbon dioxide emissions. This led Minnesota to pass a renewable energy standard (RES), requiring utilities to reach 25 percent renewables by 2025.

Since then, GRE steadily added more affordable renewable wind energy into its power supply portfolio — so much so that it met the RES in 2017, eight years ahead of schedule. The cooperative does not own or operate any wind farms, but instead receives the output and environmental benefits from wind projects through



power purchase agreements.

"These are cost-competitive, long-term contracts that will benefit our members for decades, while also reducing our carbon emissions," said GRE's Vice President and Chief Power Supply Officer Jon Brekke. "Abundant wind power has also helped keep wholesale energy market prices lower in Minnesota compared to other regions."

A recent survey showed this shift toward more renewables has the support of the homeowners, farmers and businesses served by GRE's members.

More than half (54 percent) of the survey's 800 member-consumer respondents chose "increasing renewables" as one of GRE's top two priorities. This was nearly tied with keeping rates affordable (53 percent), which the cooperative is also keeping top of mind.

GRE will continue advancing its power supply portfolio on a less carbon-intense path and is exploring multi-day energy storage that will turn variable sources of renewable energy — such as wind — into dispatchable resources.

## Electrify your yard work



Looking to buy a battery-powered electric leaf blower, chainsaw, trimmer/weed whip or lawn mower? New models are great for keeping your yard looking great!

During August, Brown County REA is still offering rebates of \$25 for a minimum

\$100 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. Provide a copy of your invoice with the purchase price and model number.

The rebate will be paid as a credit on your electric bill. Limit one rebate per member.

## BCREA Nondiscrimination statement posted

This institution is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

If you wish to file a Civil Rights program complaint of discrimination, complete the USDA Program Discrimination Complaint Form, found online at [http://www.ascr.usda.gov/complaint\\_filing\\_cust.html](http://www.ascr.usda.gov/complaint_filing_cust.html), or at any USDA office, or call (866) 632-9992 to request the form. You may also write a letter containing all the of the information requested in the form. Send your completed complaint form or letter to us by mail at U.S. Department of Agriculture, Director, Office of Adjudication, 1400 Independence Avenue, S.W., Washington, D.C. 20250-9410, by fax (202) 690-7442 or email at [program.intake@usda.gov](mailto:program.intake@usda.gov).

# Youth Tour: unforgettable!

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person in particular taught me how to dance. It's something that I never would have expected from this trip. This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. The Youth Tour is an unforgettable experience."

Kreilkamp appreciated the trip. "I thank my local electric cooperative for this opportunity, my school counselor for notifying me of the opportunity, our chaperones for an amazing experience, our legislators for showing us what government really is, to the new friends and the people who changed my life. The experience I'll never forget and will hold close to my heart."

## Federated's Eli Hedstrom

History came to life for Eli Hedstrom, a home-schooled senior. "My favorite memorial was the World War II Memorial," he said "I was amazed at the amount of detail and symbolism in the architecture. The memorial had a pillar for every state and U.S. territory that fought in the war. We took a group photo next to our Minnesota pillar. The Gold Star section of the memorial was also very inspiring. It contained over 4,000 gold stars, each one representing 100 men who had died.

It was a great reminder that we live in the greatest country in the world and how many people died to preserve our freedom.

"Another favorite was the Jefferson Memorial," he added. "From the Jefferson Memorial you see an amazing view of the lake and the White House on the opposite side. This memorial is a fitting tribute to Thomas Jefferson, one of our founding fathers, who wrote our Declaration of Independence. I also loved the Jefferson quotes written on the walls. I was particularly impressed by the quote carved into the ceiling: 'I have sworn upon the altar of God eternal hostility against every form of tyranny over the mind of man.'

"It was amazing to see our Declaration of Independence and Constitution at the National Archives," Hedstrom said. "It was truly one of most awe-inspiring things I have ever seen. I loved reading the original copy of our Bill of Rights. I was also impressed by our Founding Father's handwriting.

"I really enjoyed seeing the Smithsonian Museum of Natural History," he added. "Logan and I, plus a few others, spent several hours there, mostly looking at the geology and gem exhibits. I am amazed by the number of rare rocks and gems on display. I also was impressed by the number and size of the replica skeletons of massive sea dinosaurs that hung from the ceiling.

"We were unable to take a Capitol tour, so we sat on the Capitol steps. But we were lucky, as the House had just voted; we saw many representatives coming down the Capitol steps. I visited with a few members of the House from Minnesota and other states. I had an enjoyable time

The 2022 Minnesota Youth Tour delegation at the Capitol.




talking with them, even if we did not agree. It was also interesting to meet Senator Amy Klobuchar."

Besides sight-seeing, the Youth Tour delegation had time for fun on a river boat ride and more. "We went to the National's Baseball game and that was cool," Hedstrom said. "I had never been to a stadium like that. We had a great view of the game and it was a very exhilarating experience.

The best part of the trip was seeing our capital city for the first time. This trip has increased my desire to serve in Washington, D.C. in politics. This trip has shown me what a great country we live in. I also learned how to have civil discussions with people I disagree with. We can be friends, even if we do not have the same views. I made several good friends and I intend to stay in contact with them. I would recommend this tour to everyone. I think it is very important for everyone to understand what a great country we live in — the need to protect our freedom, be involved in politics and learn about our country."

Hedstrom appreciates the Youth Tour opportunity. "I would like to thank Federated for sending me to Washington, D.C.," he commented. "I am so grateful that I could go to our nation's capital and learn about our republic. I would also like to thank Gayle Karol, the Minnesota coordinator, for the Youth Tour. She worked so hard to make this trip possible."

Your electric cooperative sponsors the annual Youth Tour Contest. Watch for details on the 2023 Contest in the December *Connections* newsletter or through your high school. Encourage a high school student to apply. 

## Tomato time! Share with us recipes using garden-fresh tomatoes

Tomatoes are orbs of summer sunshine! Share with us your tomato recipes, whether it's for stewed, canned, salsa, hotdish, salads, pasta sauce and more. Mail your tomato recipes to Editor, Federated Rural Electric, PO Box 69, Jackson MN 56143-0069 or e-mail to christoffer@federatedrea.coop by July 27. Add your name and phone number. Thanks for sharing with us! 📧


## Make wise investment for backup power

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includes the cost of the battery, installation, permitting and inspection costs done at the time of the solar panel installation. (Note: solar alone does not work during outages as the power inverters need electricity from the grid.) Adding a battery storage system to an existing solar installation is significantly more expensive and may require an inverter change. Compared to generators, this option is quieter and does not create CO. The upside of a solar and battery storage system is the ability to offset the higher initial investment costs through year-round energy savings. Members may take advantage of time-of-use rates and use stored energy during times when the cost of energy is highest. Excess solar energy can be sold back to the utility. However, a battery storage system can only provide 10 to 15 hours of continuous power. In weather situations that limit solar power generation, this would not be a long-term solution.

Sizeable up-front costs apply for both generators and battery storage systems, but backup systems bring peace-of-mind when the power goes out. If you have questions about backup power options, contact your local electric cooperative's energy expert. 📧





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 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.gopherstate-onecall.org](http://www.gopherstate-onecall.org) or call 811. Call a licensed electrician to locate the underground lines on your side of the meter. 📧

## Blueberry Sheet Pancake

by Carol Waibel, New Ulm

- 1 stick butter, divided
- 2 c. buttermilk
- 2 large eggs
- 1 tsp. vanilla
- 2 c. flour
- ¼ c. sugar
- 2 tsp. baking powder
- 1 tsp. baking soda
- 1 tsp. kosher salt
- 1½ c. chopped fruit, nuts or chips

Heat oven to 400°. Line a rimmed 13x18" pan with parchment paper. Melt butter; use 1 T. of the butter to coat the parchment paper and sides of the pan.

Mix the milk, eggs, vanilla and 4 T. butter. Whisk until combined. Add the flour, sugar, baking powder, soda and salt. Fold in 1½ c. blueberries or other fruit. Bake until lightly golden and springs back when touched (about 12-15 minutes). Heat broiler, brush pancake with remaining butter and broil two to four minutes. Serve with syrup or powdered sugar. 📧

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## Brown County Rural Electrical Association

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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  
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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

## Summer bills increase due to higher wholesale power costs

You don't have to look far to see prices have increased on most everything you purchase. Energy purchased to provide electricity to your home, farm or business is no different.

Brown County REA purchases wholesale power from Great River Energy (GRE) and Western Area Power Administration (WAPA), along with Southern Minnesota Electric Cooperative (SMEC)

under an existing contract to serve former Alliant Energy territory, and distributes that power to our members. Wind, natural gas, solar and coal are among the sources of that electricity. The cost to purchase power has increased significantly in recent months due to increased prices within the Midcontinent Independent System Operator (MISO) market.

Brown County REA's base electric rates have not changed since 2020, but to adjust for the fluctuating wholesale power costs, a Power Cost Adjustment (PCA) is applied to members' bills each month. The PCA reflects an adjustment for the actual cost of wholesale power during each billing period — above or below Brown County REA's base rate.

### Why is a PCA necessary?

In order to generate the electricity you consume, our primary wholesale power supplier, Great River Energy, obtains electricity from many sources, including coal, natural gas, wind and solar. Because fuel prices change on a daily basis, wholesale power costs vary from month-to-month. Brown County REA's base electric rate stays the same, while the PCA adjusts based on fluctuations in fuel cost. Think of it like fueling your car. The price of gasoline changes every time you fill up. That very same thing happens to the price of fuel and other resources used to create your energy.

PCA amounts are typically higher during the summer months. On June's electric bills, however, Brown County REA legacy members were assessed a lower PCA thanks to a roughly \$133,000 purchased power cost reduction passed through from GRE. The credit came from January through May 1, 2022 margins prior to the close of the sale of Coal Creek Station. This was a one-time credit and PCA charges will likely be higher in the coming months.

### Do other electric utilities use a PCA?

Brown County REA's PCA is a pass-through from the wholesale power bill to members' bill. The fact is that most energy suppliers have a monthly adjustment for fluctuating fuel costs related to power production. The terminology may vary. You may hear PCAs referred to as a "Wholesale Power Adjustment." "Fuel Cost Adjustment" or other terms, but they are all fundamentally the same. ☺

# Board meeting highlights

The Brown County REA Board of Directors held its monthly board meeting July 28, 2022, at the REA headquarters in Sleepy Eye.

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

- Reviewed and approved the June 2022 board meeting minutes, new membership applications, member cancellations, payments to estates and assignment transfers.
- Reviewed and approved June 2022 financial statements and June 2022 payroll.
- Approved Baylee Nelson for District 3 delegate on the Member Advisory Council.
- Reviewed recent full load control events.
- Reviewed and approved the employees' union contract for 2023-2026.
- Discussed and approved issuing check payments of retained capital credit amounts over \$10 to inactive members.
- Updated on progress with the Highway 14 expansion, Boundary Street work and other construction activities.
- Informed that Southwood 2000 is testing poles in Courtland, Lafayette, Cornish and Alfsborg townships and Carr Tree Service is working in the service territory.

The next meeting is set for August 25, 2022, at the REA headquarters. ☺