

Connections

December 2023

For the member-owners of Brown County REA



Volume 27, Issue 12

High school students: See D.C. for free! Enter Youth Tour Contest immediately

Local high school sophomores and juniors: win a free summer trip to Washington, D.C.

It's as easy as one, two, three — lasting memories and friendships there will be!

1. Find the application on the co-op's website (www.browncountyrea.coop) or talk to the school counselor, who is a delight.

2. Complete the application and write a 300-word essay on an energy-related topic of your choice; for example, write on electric vehicles, solar, wind, coal and more....it's your written voice.

3. Students with the top scores will come through the co-op's front door mid-March for a short interview; they'll answer our questions...just a few!

The highest score earns the cooperative's free trip to Washington, D.C. June 18-23, 2024. Youth Tour winner, see what sites we have in store:

- Memorials for Lincoln, Washington, Martin Luther King, and Jefferson will not bore.
 - War memorials too (Vietnam, Korean, Pentagon 9/11 and World War II), yep you visit all four!
 - Museums (Smithsonian, Holocaust, Marine Corps) provide so much to explore.
 - Visit the Capitol, National Archives, Library of Congress and Supreme Court so your feet could get sore!
 - Just for fun one night see the Washington Nationals baseball game and roar in delight as they score, then enjoy live theater another night...be ready for the encore!
 - Track around Mount Vernon to learn more about the George Washington historical lore.
 - At Arlington Cemetery visit the scores who defended our country's freedoms from shore to shore.
 - Chat with other students from many states, plus see Minnesota representatives and senators face-to-face.
- Experience a trip of a lifetime to our nation's capitol, make



This could be you in 2024! Win the Brown County REA's Youth Tour Contest; go on the free trip to Washington, D.C. Grace Mages, Sleepy Eye, won the trip last year. Just fill out the short application and write a 300-word essay on an energy-related topic. The top scores are called back for short interviews.

new friends and memories galore! Apply for the 2024 Youth Tour by March 1, we implore. ☺

At A Glance



Happy Holidays!
BCREA office is
closed for holidays

BCREA will be closed for the holidays on December 25-26 and January 1. Crews will be on call in case of outages. We thank you for your patronage in 2023! Merry Christmas and Happy New Year to you, our cooperative's member-owners. Have a safe and bright holiday season! ☺



Energy Wise

Ho, Ho, Ho! Holiday lighting for best of show and energy efficiency in tow

No need to be a Grinch! Holiday light can be a cinch! Run down to your local hardware store and explore how easy it is to show your holiday spirit.

Red, white and green bulbs

LED bulbs just became fashionable. Buy one bulb that can rotate between three holiday colors — red, white and green. Feit offers a two-watt LED bulb and a five-watt reflector (floodlight) bulb. You can select one color by flipping a switch on the back of the bulb. Otherwise, pick the six second auto rotate feature that moves between red, white and green. The reflector bulb costs \$14.99, while the two-watt bulb costs \$5.99.

Changing out a light bulb for the holidays adds festive decor without the hassle of hanging different holiday strings of lights. Switch it to green for March and St. Patrick's Day! Then just switch it back to white for the rest of the year.

Feit also offers a red, white and blue LED bulb so you're ready for Independence Day, Memorial Day and Veteran's Day! If you want more color options, upgrade to the Feit Smart WiFi bulb. The Energy Star bulb (three-pack) costs about \$35, but connects via the mobile app or voice command with Google, Siri or Alexa. Turn it on/off, adjust color and brightness.

Color-changing LED light strip

Yes, lighting comes in shapes other than light bulbs. Feit offers an LED color changing plug-in LED Smart Wi-Fi Strip Lights. Peel and stick the lighting strip on a clean surface, for example, under your kitchen cabinets for more



Rudolph the red nose reindeer would like these LED light bulbs for the holidays. Not only do they glow red, but green and white too for a bright Christmas holiday delight. Otherwise, the LED bulbs and strip lights (pictured on the left and right) can be changed to any colors to match your holiday mood year-round. Remember, LEDs use up to 90 percent less energy than incandescent bulbs and last 25 times longer.

lighting on the countertops or in the foot kick area for ambience. Choose from white lighting or many colors, along with adjusting the brightness. Turn the lights on with a remote control, the cell phone app or by voice with Google or Alexa.

Installation can be done yourself. Tools needed include a scissors, tape measure and screw driver. Each strip is 16-feet, but can be expanded to 32 feet. While it can be used indoors or outdoors, it is not waterproof. Enhance the mood lighting in your man cave, rec room, a book case, a

bedroom, stairways, covered patio area and more.

LED lighting is energy-efficient and long lasting making it a fun home upgrade stocking stuffer or holiday gift. Find these through your local Ace Hardware, Amazon and Walmart for around \$40.


Delight in these bright-lighting options for the holidays or year-round. LED bulbs offer users the ability to light their surroundings according to the time of the year or even their mood. Not only that, but LED bulbs are extremely energy-efficient!

LED lights go up once and change colors for year-round holiday dazzling light display

Let your holiday spirit shine year-round! Bedazzle with LED color-changing fairy lights for indoor or outdoor use.

Dazzle Bright holiday lights come with 200 LEDs (66-feet long) or 400 LEDs. Choose from 17 colors and eight lighting modes. Use the remote control to change from auto, fade, jump, asynchronous fade, asynchronous jump, in waves, strobe and twinkle. Select from three timer modes (on four hours, on six hours or on eight hours). While the lights are rain proof, keep the power adapter away from the water.

Put the light string up once and use the remote to change your color selection year-round. Light up for Christmas (red and green), Thanksgiving (orange), Halloween (orange and purple), Valentine's Day, St. Patrick's Day (green), Easter, Fourth of July (red, white and blue), birthdays, graduation party and weddings.

Find Dazzle Bright on Amazon.com or Walmart.com for about \$30 for the 200-light string. 

Magical! One Dazzle Bright light string can turn different colors for each holiday season using the remote!



Safety

'Tis the season for holiday lighting cords; be safe!

Light up the holiday season! Yet, keep electrical safety in mind for you and your beloved pet. Keep Fido and Fluffy safe with a few bright electrical safety tips.

- Is this your new pet's first holiday season? Keep your pet safe by making sure no lighting or extension cords become a dangling "chew-toy" sensation. Chewing on a cord could cause injury or death for a small pet.

- Purchase pet bitter spray. Spray it onto cords or around the tree to deter your pet from chewing on these safety hazards.

- Invest in a plastic cord protector sleeve that slides over the electrical cord for \$10-\$20 from a pet store or website. That's the best present you can give each other — safety!

- Tuck dangling cords behind furniture and away from the curious pets' mouths.


- Outlet covers work great to protect little kids and roving pets too.



- Does the night light near the floor look like a toy to your pet? Remove it if it's not critical.

- Use a ground fault circuit interrupter (GFCI). A GFCI quickly shuts off power when electrical current to ground occurs. Plugging the holiday light strings into a GFCI outlet (outside), or GFCI power strip or outlet inside, enhances safety for your four-legged friend.

- Unplug lighting cords and other electrical devices when not in use.

- Supervise your pet after putting up the holiday tree or lighting display. If Fido won't leave it alone, keep him in a different, but safe room when you are away. This way you avoid Clark Griswold's "cat"-astrophe from chewing on a tree's lighting cords. 

Enjoy a picture perfect holiday with your pets by keeping electrical safety in mind for your four-legged friends too.

Brown County Briefs

Energy-efficiency tip

Get smart with a better way to heat and cool your home! Smart thermostats are Wi-Fi enabled and automatically adjust heating and cooling temperature settings in your home for optimal performance. Smart thermostats learn your temperature preferences and establish a schedule that adjusts to energy-saving settings when you're asleep or away. For maximum energy savings look for Smart thermostat models with the ENERGY STAR® label. An Energy Star model is eligible for a \$25 rebate through Brown County REA.

2024 calendars available

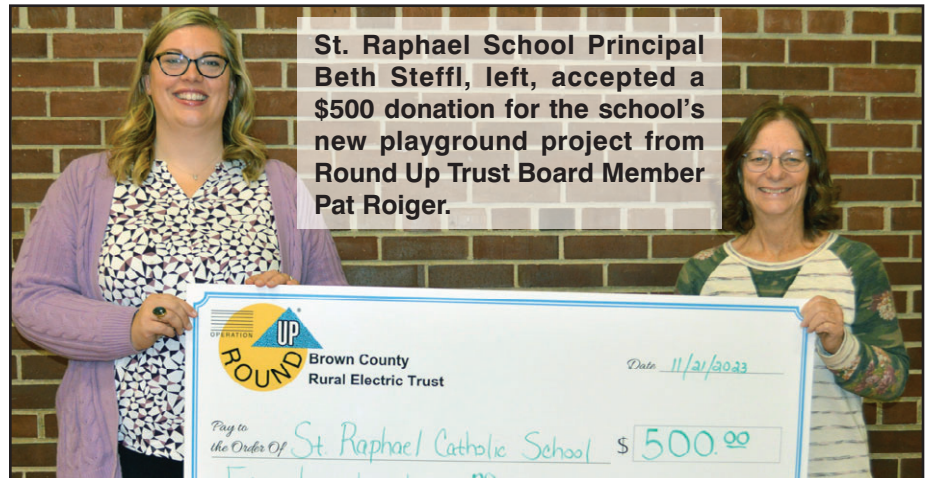
Members can stop by the REA office during business hours to pick up a 2024 large, farm pocket calendar, one per member please. A small number of pocket-size calendars are also available. ☎

Recycle your old holiday lights

Upgrading your holiday lighting to LEDs? Remember to recycle the old lights.

BCREA is again working with the Sleepy Eye YES! Team to collect strands of old holiday lights to be recycled. Drop off your old lights in the box in the office entry during regular business hours, Monday through Friday, 7:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. The collection begins mid-November and runs through mid-January. Please do not place cord adapters, battery packs, plastic rope lights or CFL bulbs in the collection box. ☎

Your change makes a difference



St. Raphael School Principal Beth Steffl, left, accepted a \$500 donation for the school's new playground project from Round Up Trust Board Member Pat Roiger.

Thanks to monthly contributions from members who "round up" their electric bill to the nearest dollar, Operation Round Up was able to donate \$10,700 to 29 area organizations, six scholarships and two families in crisis this past year.

These donations are made possible by participating BCREA members who "round up" their electric bill payment to the nearest dollar each month. For example, if an electric bill is \$87.59, the member pays \$88. The \$.41 difference goes into the Round Up Trust account and becomes part of the funds distributed to worthy causes throughout the service area. For less than \$12 per year, your contribution, when pooled with other members' small change, helps make a difference to provide support to area charitable organizations, individuals and families in crisis, and scholarships.

Among the organizations to receive Operation Round Up contributions in 2023 were Junior Achievement North New Ulm Area, Sleepy Eye Police Department Safety Pup Program, Tea for Cancer, SWWC Student Enrichment Programs, area high schools' after prom events and five area food shelves.

Since 1995, when Operation Round Up was started at Brown County REA, nearly \$246,600 has been contributed to organizations and individuals in the cooperative's service area.

We appreciate all Brown County REA members who participate in Operation Round Up. The summary of your tax-deductible contributions for 2023 will be printed on your January electric bill.

In this season of giving, please consider sharing your "change" by participating in Operation Round Up if you do not already. Fill out the Operation Round Up enrollment form at www.browncountyrea.coop or call the office. ☎

\$4,000 distributed at last Operation Round Up Meeting

The Brown County Rural Electric Trust made donations totaling \$4,000 to eight organizations at its fourth quarter meeting November 21.

Funds were granted to Minnesota Brain Injury Force, Coats for Kids project, Southcentral Minnesota Chapter of the Compassionate Friends, Food for Kidz, Brown County Yellow Ribbon Program, Sertoma Club Santa's Closet, St. Raphael Catholic School and Sleepy Eye Holiday Lights in Motion.

Appreciation was given to departing Trust Board Members Lynnae Pelzel, who completed the allowed two consecutive three-year terms (and president the past two years), and Lisa Schmitz, who completed one three-year term.

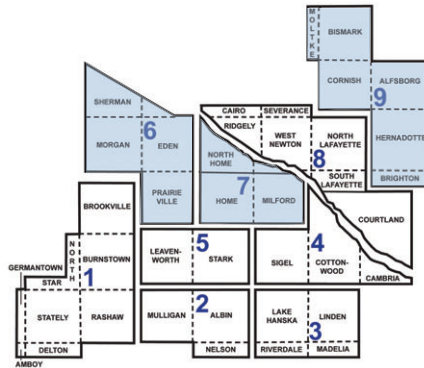
If you are part of an organization or project that would like to apply for funding through Operation Round Up, you may use the application found on the Brown County REA website at www.browncountyrea.coop or contact the office at 794-3331 or 800-658-2368. ☎

Director candidates sought

Interested or know of someone who may be interested in running for a position as Director for your electric cooperative? Nominations are being sought for candidates to run for election in BCREA's Districts 6, 7 and 9.

District 6 is made up of Eden and Prairieville townships in Brown County, a portion of Sherman and all of Morgan townships in Redwood County. District 7 covers North Home, Home and Milford townships in Brown County. District 9 consists of a portion of Brighton and Bernadotte townships in Nicollet County, and portions of Alfsborg, Cornish, Bismark and Moltke townships in Sibley County.

Nominating committees are made up of at least two members from each of the districts up for election. Per the cooperative's by-laws, the nominating committee shall at least 30 days before the Annual Meeting, diligently and in good faith attempt to nominate at least two individuals to run for a scheduled election.



2024 Nominating Committees:


District 6 – Matt Green, John Garrioch, Dennis Dittbenner

District 7 – Joseph Miller, Chad Walter, Daniel J. Hoffmann

District 9 – Brad & Tori Hagberg, Tim & Beth Anderson, Neal Hoffmann

In addition, a minimum of 10 members may nominate through petition for a director position in their district. Nominations from the floor and write-in candidacy are not permitted at the Annual Meeting.

Members who reside in District 6, 7 or 9 and are interested in being a director candidate, please complete and return the Director Candidate Application. Your name will be shared with the Nomination Committee for consideration as a candidate. You may also contact a member of your district's Nominating Committee to let them know of your interest in being a candidate.

Directors will be elected at the 87th Annual Meeting set for April 11, 2024 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 April 11, 2024 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 cooperative.

- 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 or similar 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.

Signed: _____ Date: _____ 

Six Operation Round Up scholarships available to students


Brown County REA, through its Operation Round Up program, is offering scholarships to high school seniors planning to attend college after graduation and to one non-traditional student.

Six \$250 scholarships will be awarded to graduating seniors whose parents/guardians are members and live in Brown County REA's service area. One \$250 scholarship is available to an adult REA member pursuing a degree.

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, which 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. Application materials are also found on the REA website at www.browncountyrea.coop.

The deadline for submission is April 8, 2024; winners will be announced at the Brown County REA Annual Meeting April 11. A copy of the student's high school transcript and one letter of recommendation are required. Non-traditional students will need to provide a transcript and recommendation letter. Scholarship funds will be awarded after successful completion of the first semester of college. 

Ready for 2023 taxes?

Check on federal energy-efficiency tax credits




Did you make energy-efficiency upgrades to your home this year? Remember to claim the tax credits. The Inflation Reduction Act of 2022, offers federal income tax credits for energy-efficiency improvements made through 2032.

- Did you replace your exterior door or windows? Receive a tax credit of 30 percent paid by the homeowner, up to \$500 per year (up to \$250/door). Windows earn up to \$600/year.
- Installed an air source or ground source heat pump? Receive a tax credit up to 30 percent of the cost

paid by the owner (up to \$2,000). The same amount applies for a biomass stove/boiler.

You will need to fill out the IRS form 5695 for any of these items listed above. Visit with your tax preparer.

The government also approved rebates for different energy-efficiency improvements that are based on 150 percent of an area's median income level. Details are not yet out on these programs.


Keep these tax incentives in mind when planning for your home's energy-efficiency improvements in 2024 too. Check out www.energy.gov/save for more detailed information on all of the federal tax credits and incentives. 



Know the cost behind running a space heater

Do you use electric resistance space heaters to heat a room or small section of your home?

If so, you may see an increase on your electric bill. For example, let's say you use a 1,500-watt electric space heater to warm your living room while you watch TV or read a book. Operating that space heater for two hours a day at the Minnesota average electricity rate of 13.5 cents per kilowatt-hour will cost you about \$12 a month. Operating that same space heater for 12 hours a day will cost you about \$73 a month.

If you use space heaters, operate them safely. Keep them three feet away from anything flammable; do not leave them unattended. Plus, plug the space heater directly into the outlet — not an extension cord or power strip. 



'Twas the night before Christmas

Elves used the hot water to clean.
 Dirty dishes were now shiny and bright.
 The laundry was washed and dried.
 The little ones were spotless and tucked into bed.

**Thanks to the electric co-op's water heater.
 Make your holidays clean, shiny and bright!**

Call your local co-op
 for your next water heater



FOREVER / USA

It's time for a few new stew recipes to do on a frigid winter night

Tis the season for stew! Try a few new recipes of stew with your family crew. Send your favorite stew recipes, whether for stove top, oven, crock pot or instant pot, to Editor, Federated Rural Electric, PO Box 69, Jackson MN 56143-0069 or e-mail to christoffer@federatedrea.coop by December 27. Add your name and phone number. Thanks for sharing with us! 📧

Caramel Pecan Pie by Lori Burdick, Heron Lake

- 9" unbaked pie crust
- 26 individually wrapped caramels, unwrapped
- ¼ c. butter
- ¼ c. milk
- ¾ c. white sugar
- 3 eggs
- ½ tsp. vanilla extract
- ¼ tsp. salt
- 1 c. pecan halves

Preheat oven to 350°. In a saucepan over low heat combine the caramels, butter and milk. Cook, stirring frequently, until smooth. Remove from heat and set aside. In a large bowl combine the sugar, eggs, vanilla and salt. Gradually mix into the melted caramel mixture. Stir in pecans. Pour filling into unbaked pie crust.

Bake in a preheated oven for 45 to 50 minutes or until pastry is gold brown. Allow to cool until the filling is firm. 📧

White House Pecan Pie by Frances Harms, Brewster

- ½ c. butter, room temp
- 1 c. white sugar
- 1 c. dark corn syrup
- ½ tsp. salt
- 1½ tsp. vanilla
- 3 large eggs
- 2 c. pecans, coarsely chopped
- 9" unbaked pie shell with fluted edge

Combine butter, corn syrup, salt and vanilla. Beat mixture until thoroughly blended. Add eggs; beat until just blended. Fold pecans into this mixture. Pour into pie shell.

Bake in 375° oven on the rack directly below the center rack until the top is toasted brown and the filling is set in the center when the pie is gently shaken (about 40 to 50 minutes). If using a glass pie plate, the crust should be brown, while the bottom of the pastry is pale gold. Cool on a wire rack. Serve with unsweetened whipped cream (optional). 📧

Oysters McGee

by Duane Rost, Jackson

I order fresh oysters from www.islandcreekoysters.com in Massachusetts.

Scrub and brush oysters to clean and enhance the display of the character of the shell. Set the grill to maximum heat for 10 minutes. Place the oysters on a screen on the grill. Close the lid for two minutes. Open the lid. Continue until they are "warm" and open slightly.

Carefully lift off the grill immediately, keeping each oyster belly down and horizontal. "Release" with an oyster knife entering either through the hinge or the outer edge. Holding the oyster level, cut the adductor muscles. Put into individual small bowls to serve each with its own nectar. This experience yields a warm, succulent, fresh presentation. 📧

Just make the call before digging:
1-800-252-1166



Call Gopher State One Call before doing any digging more than 12" deep — 48 hours before digging for foundations, trees and tiling. Register at www.gopherstateonecall.org or call 811. Call a licensed electrician to locate the underground lines on your side of the meter. 📧

Peace on earth. Peace of mind.



Heartland Security
 heartlandss.com
 888.264.6380

A subsidiary of your local electric co-op



Mike Heidemann
Chief Executive
Officer

Staff Notes

Reliable power for today — and tomorrow

Ring in a new year sparks a sense of renewed hope and optimism about the future. As the CEO of Brown County REA, for me, it's a time to reflect on where we are and where we're going. At the heart of this reflection I think about ways we can better serve you, the members of the cooperative.

Our team at Brown County REA is always looking ahead, exploring ways to innovate and utilize new technologies to improve our services. As our nation increasingly relies on electricity to power the economy, keeping the lights on has never been more important. We're committed to powering — and empowering — our community at a cost local families and businesses can afford.

One critical component of reliable power is the mix of energy resources used to generate the electricity that keeps the lights on across our service area. Brown County REA doesn't generate electricity. Instead, we purchase it from our energy provider, Great River Energy (GRE), and from there, we distribute it to homes, farms and businesses.

We're increasingly using more electricity generated from renewable energy sources, but we still depend on a diverse energy mix to ensure reliable power that's available to our members whenever they need it.

Brown County REA is also using technology to enhance our local grid, limit service disruptions and improve outage response times. Advanced metering infrastructure technology (AMI) enables two-way communication between the co-op and members' meter. The co-op also uses an Outage Management System (OMS). In the event of a power outage these technologies help pinpoint the location and often the cause of the outage, helping Brown County REA save money and ultimately improve power reliability for our members.

Proactive tree trimming is another way we limit service disruptions. Scheduled trimming keeps power lines clear from overgrown limbs that are likely to fall. One of the best methods for improving our services is monitoring trends and learning from other co-ops in Minnesota and across the country. This is one of the many benefits of the cooperative business model because for us, it's about cooperation, not competition.

As we turn our focus to 2024, Brown County REA will continue working to provide the reliable, affordable electricity you expect and deserve — for today and tomorrow.

One additional note, at its November 21 meeting Brown County REA's Board of Directors voted to return \$128,502 of the cooperative's 2023 margins to members as a reduction in Power Cost Adjustment (PCA) for November electric bills, payable in December. This action will bring the PCA for members' November electric usage to zero. (8)



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.

Board meeting highlights

The BCREA Board of Directors held its monthly board meeting October 31 at the REA headquarters in Sleepy Eye. Discussion and/or action were taken on the following agenda items:

- Reviewed and approved the September 2023 board meeting minutes, new membership applications, member cancellations, payments to estates and assignment transfers.
- Reviewed and approved the Pilot Electric Vehicle Off-Peak Charging rate.
- Approved the 2022 capital credit payment amount of \$542,177.
- Reviewed and approved 2022 IRS Form 990, 990T and Iowa Form IA1120.
- Discussed and approved updating the capital credit discount percentage for estates per the Goodwin Formula.
- Reviewed and approved payment of 2022 work orders in the amount of \$913,398.80 and 2023 special equipment loans of \$368,632.26.
- Updated on operations activities, including final weeks of the Highway 14 expansion project.

The next meeting is set for November 21 at the REA headquarters. (8)