

Connections

November 2024

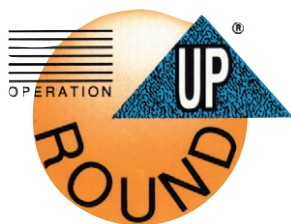
For the member-owners of Brown County REA



Volume 28, Issue 11

Thankful for our members making a difference with the co-op's Operation Round Up program in our communities

During this month of Thanksgiving, we want to reflect upon all of the good things possible from Operation Round Up and Brown County REA members enrolled in the program.



First introduced to co-op members 30 years ago by then General Manager Les Schrupp and adopted by the board, Operation Round Up is a way to further the co-op principle of commitment to community. Schrupp described it as an extension of the neighbor-helping-neighbor concept, which started the co-op.

The electric bills of participating members are "rounded up" to the nearest dollar amount each month. For example, an electric bill of \$95.52 is rounded up to \$96. The extra 48 cents goes into the Operation Round Up Trust Fund. Small change adds up!

Since 1995, more than a quarter of a million dollars — \$253,025 — has been returned to local charitable organizations, schools, fire departments, ambulance services and individuals in need. In 2018 Brown County Rural Electric Trust began offering scholarships to graduating high school seniors whose parents or guardians are BCREA members. Five \$200 scholarships were awarded the first year. Interest in the program has

continued and last year, seven \$250 scholarships were given.

Operation Round Up has helped 933 applicants since 1995. On average, Brown County REA member annual

contribution amount is around \$6 per year with the potential maximum at \$11.88 per year. About 40 percent of BCREA members participate in this local program. If you wish to join the cooperative effort to help our local organizations, please call Brown County REA during business hours, drop a note with your bill payment or email bcrea@bcrea.coop. Contributions are tax deductible.

Brown County REA is grateful for all the members who have volunteered as trust board members since 1995. We thank the current members serving on the Trust Board:

President Ann Parker, St. James, District 2; Vice President Rosie Schwartz, Sleepy Eye, District 5; Secretary Pat Roiger, Sanborn, District 1; Treasurer Bonnie Seidl, Sleepy Eye, District 7; Kim Hensch, Hanska, District 3; Betsy Holm, New Ulm, District 4; Brian Hacker, Sleepy Eye, District 6; Jessie Beranek, New Ulm, District 8; Mike Rein, Winthrop, District 9.

The Trust Board meets quarterly in February, April, August and November to review applications. The application



Since 2018, Operation Round Up has awarded \$10,450 in scholarships to 44 children of BCREA members, including Kyla Wuertz, Comfrey, pictured receiving her certificate from Trust Board Secretary Pat Roiger.

is available at www.browncountyrea.coop; look for Operation Round Up under Programs and Services. Organizations may also request an application be emailed by calling 800-658-2368. Contributions are made primarily to non-profit organizations. The trust board meets again on November 19, 2024.

Thank you Brown County REA members for making a big difference in our local communities by participating in Operation Round Up! What a blessing this program is to our area; we give thanks to you for making it possible. ☺

At A Glance



Could a mini split maximize your comfort?

Shopping around for a new heating and cooling system to keep you warm this season? A ductless mini split a.k.a. ductless air source heat pump may be just what you need. Co-op rebates, IRA and tax credit funds may help make it the perfect fit for you and your home. Learn more on Page 5. ☺

Does your electrical panel pass today's safety standards? Tax incentive exists to upgrade it

Are you taxing your electrical panel? Blowing fuses often? Tripping breakers too much? Lights dimming when a microwave or other major appliance runs?

Take advantage of a federal tax incentive to boost safety and upgrade your home's electrical panel. A home's electrical panel features a lifespan of 25 to 40 years. It may be time to hire an electrician to upgrade your home for safety's sake and for the addition of more electrical devices. Plus, your insurance company may offer lower premiums for a new electrical panel due to less risk.

Let's look at some of the electrical warning signs so you can make some upgrades.

1. Do you often trip the same electrical breaker or fuse? That could be a sign of overloading on a circuit or a bad breaker. Breakers wear out over time.

2. Homes built before 1960 used fuses, instead of circuit breakers. If you still have a panel with fuses, upgrade to a larger size panel with breakers.

3. Does your electrical panel show signs of rust, water damage or is broken? Do not touch. It's time for an electrician.

4. Do you use power strips in several rooms because not enough outlets exist for today's technology? Extension cords and power strips should be temporary and not permanent solutions. Extension cords should not be run through walls or different floors. It's time for an electrician.

5. If you smell burning plastic, see if it is coming from an overloaded outlet or your electrical panel. If it's overpowering, call 911 if a fire has started.



Does blowing the same fuse frequently cause you to blow your fuse personally? That's a sign you need work done on your electrical panel. Upgrade your fuse panel box to circuit breakers for priceless safety reasons and reap a federal tax credit up to \$600.

6. Is your outlet, plug or circuit breaker overheating? Is it warm or hot to the touch? This indicates a severe malfunction requiring an electrician.


7. Do your lights flicker or dim when turning on an appliance? For example, does this occur when the dishwasher, microwave or a major appliance starts? This indicates too much power is being drawn from a circuit. An electrician is needed to add more circuits or upgrade from a 60 or 100-amp panel to a 200-amp panel.

8. Adding a new electrical load to the house? If you are adding an electric water heater, solar, electric vehicle, freezer or central air/heat pump, you may need to update your electrical panel.

9. See major sparks when plugging something in? See a burnt outlet? Heed these warning signs and call your local electrician.

10. Remodeling? It's the perfect time to upgrade the old wiring and junction boxes first.

The wiring upgrade can include adding a ground fault circuit interrupter at the panel to prevent electrical shocks. If you are adding a backup generator, an electrical transfer switch is required too; this keeps the co-op's line crews safe during outage restoration.


Investing in a new electrical panel now can save you the heartache from a shock or electrical fire, which is priceless. In addition, a federal tax credit exists for 30 percent of the panel upgrade — up to \$600. A typical upgrade for a home could range from \$2,000 to \$5,000. You'll then have a safer, more efficient electrical home that boosts your house's resale value. 

Stop with the broom and mop!

Clean up hard floors with cordless wet dry vacuum cleaner/mop

Make cleanup a breeze without getting on your knees! The old way of cleaning the kitchen floor: sweep first and then down on your knees to mop. You ended up going over the floors twice, which is so time consuming and labor intensive!

Now a cordless wet dry vacuum tackles the mud, spilled food, floor grit and cleans it all at once. Check out the Tineco iFloor 2. Vacuum and wash the floor all at the same time, whether you have hardwood, tile, laminate, vinyl or marble floors.

Fill the tank with fresh water and the cleaning solution. Go over the floor. Dog hair, food and grit is sucked up and drops to the bottom tray. Dirty water goes to a different tank for dumping. When you are done, the self-clean flushes the brush roller. The vacuum suction sucks up the majority of the water for a fast, streak-free dry floor. Found a stubborn sticky spot on the floor? Use the spot-mode button. Plus, it's lightweight (only 8 pounds) and self propelled with a rechargeable runtime of 22 minutes. Find the Tineco2 at Walmart, Best Buy or Amazon for about \$200. Several brands exist with various price ranges and features. 



Mopping magic!
Suck up dirt, pet hair and spilled food, plus mop at the same time! Add the Tineco iFloor2 to your clean team!

Safety


Be seeing green! Protect the padmount 'machine'

Protect your lean, green machine that delivers power to you! The green padmount transformer brings electricity from underground power lines to many homes, farms or businesses.

The padmount transformer is housed in a green steel cabinet on a concrete pad at ground level. It converts high-voltage electricity to a lower voltage that can be used by the co-op member. The interior contains high-voltage components that are dangerous to touch.

Keep these electrical safety tips in mind for padmount transformers:

- Avoid contact with the padmount transformer. Never touch or enter open, damaged or unlocked cabinets.
- Instruct younger family members to not play on top or around any electrical infrastructure.
- Immediately report damaged or open equipment to 911 and the electrical cooperative. The most common damages with padmount transformers occur in the winter when snow is being moved where it was covered by a snow drift. However, vehicle and farm accidents can also push the cabinet off the concrete pad exposing live wires.

Use caution around padmount transformers to keep family and friends safe, plus prevent power outages. 



Keep an eye out for the green padmount transformer cabinets when moving snow, mowing and doing farm tillage. Never make a snow pile on top of it either in case line crews need to access it during an outage.

Brown County Briefs

Efficiency tip


If you're heading out of town during the holiday season, remember to set your home to vacation mode. You can save energy while you're away by lowering your thermostat a few degrees or creating an "away" schedule with a smart or programmable thermostat. Newer water heaters include a vacation mode setting to help you save on water heating costs or you can simply lower the temperature manually. Small actions can also stack up to energy savings. Unplug devices that consume energy when they're not in use, including phone chargers, toothbrush chargers, TVs and gaming consoles.

Round Up meeting November 19

The Brown County Rural Electric Trust Board will meet to consider applications for funding through the Operation Round Up on November 19. Charitable organizations wishing to seek funding through the trust should submit an application prior to that date. The application form can be found on the co-op's website (www.browncountyrea.coop) under Operation Round Up on the Programs & Services tab.


2025 calendars available

Members can stop by the BCREA office during business hours to pick up a 2025 large, farm pocket calendar or small pocket-size calendars. One per member please.

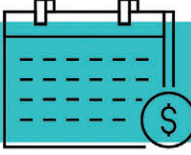



HOW CAPITAL CREDITS WORK


Electric co-ops are not-for-profit and operate at cost. Capital credits are a financial benefit of co-op membership.




- Members pay their electric bills, and we track their business with us each month.



- The co-op pays operating expenses throughout the year and allocates any leftover operating revenue as capital credits.



- When financial conditions permit, the co-op board votes to retire (pay) capital credits to the members.



- We send members their share of capital credits as a bill credit or check.

Apply for electric heat sales tax exemption

With the start of another heating season, residential members who use electric heat as their home's primary heat source are reminded that you are eligible for exemption from Minnesota sales tax from November through April.

Electricity sold for residential use is not taxable for the billing months of November through April when sold to metered customers who use it as their primary source of residential heat. If more than one type of heat is used, electricity is not taxable if it is the primary source of heat. Primary source of residential heat is the source that supplies more heat than any other source for the largest period of time during the heating season. See the Minnesota Department of Revenue Sales Tax Fact Sheet 157 at www.revenue.state.mn.us for more detailed information.

Brown County REA must have a signed certificate on file. If you are new to your location or have installed new electric heat or a heat pump this past year and have not completed the Residential Heat Exemption Form, you can find it on our website www.browncountyrea.coop. Complete and email to bcrea@bcrea.coop.



Recycle your old holiday lights

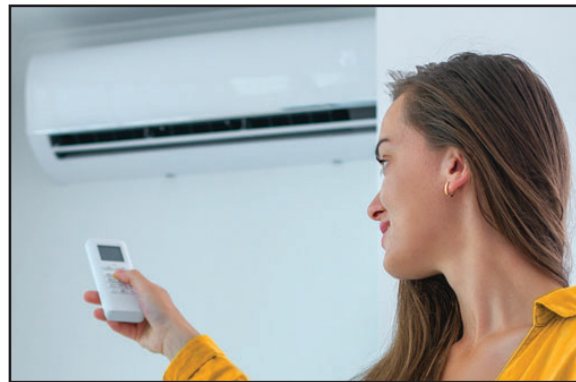
Upgrading your holiday lighting to LED? Remember to recycle the old lights.

BCREA is again working with the Sleepy Eye YES! Team to collect strands of old holiday lights to be recycled. Drop off old lights in the large box in the REA office entry during regular business hours Monday through Friday 7:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. The collection will begin mid-November and run through mid-January. Please do not place cord adapters, battery packs, plastic rope lights or CFL bulbs in the collection box.



Is a ductless mini-split system a good match for your home?

How would you like a personalized comfort zone within your home? One where the temperature is customized to your liking and may be different than the temperature in the shared living areas or other rooms in the house. This flexibility and customization are why mini-split systems, also known as ductless air-source heat pumps, and their energy-efficiency aspects are so popular.



A mini-split system is a type of HVAC equipment used for heating and cooling, allowing you to control the temperature in individual rooms or spaces. Like central heating and cooling, mini-split systems have two main components — an outdoor compressor and an indoor air-handling unit(s). A narrow conduit links the indoor unit(s) to the outdoor compressor.

While central heating and cooling systems feature an indoor unit connected by long lengths of ductwork, mini splits are typically ductless. This means that energy is not lost traveling through long stretches of ductwork. Installing the air-handling unit in a desired room or area enables you to control the temperature more precisely, reducing energy consumption. You're adjusting the temperature to a single room or space, rather than the whole home.

Is a mini-split system right for you?


Mini-split systems are a popular option in home additions, or to supplement heating and cooling in a space that may be furthest away from the main living area, such as a finished attic or basement. In these instances, it may not be feasible to install or extend the ductwork required in traditional central cooling and heating systems. Most systems can handle up to four indoor rooms or zones connected to one outdoor unit. Each of the zones can be customized because each includes a thermostat that enables you to heat or cool the space as needed, saving energy and money over time.


Cool solutions

Mini-split systems bring additional benefits. They are quiet and improve indoor air quality. Many come with a remote to make temperature control even easier; due to their smaller size, mini-split systems have many placement options for indoor and outdoor units.

According to the Department of Energy, mini splits cost about \$1,500 to \$2,000 per ton of cooling capacity. That's about 30 percent more than central systems (not including ductwork) and may cost twice as much as window units of similar capacity.

While technology is improving and evolving, colder climates may need a fuel backup to run a mini-split system. Aesthetics are another factor to consider, as some homeowners don't like the appearance of the indoor units, which are more visible than central air conditioning vents.

If you're considering an upgrade or additional heating and cooling equipment, talk to a qualified technician to learn if a ductless mini-split system could work for your home. A new Energy Star-certified ductless air source heat pump may qualify for a rebate from Brown County REA too. Contact the office to learn more. 



**Santa's
Closet
Collection
Site**

Brown County REA is again collecting donations of unwrapped toys, books, hats and mittens to be used as part of the Santa's Closet project which provides gifts to area children who may not otherwise receive gifts this Christmas.

Please drop off donations at the REA headquarters, 24386 State Hwy. 4, Sleepy Eye M-F 7:30 a.m. - 4:00 p.m. before December 5th. Monetary donations can be mailed to: Sertoma Club- Santa's Closet PO Box 692, New Ulm, MN 56073.

Thank you for your generosity to those less fortunate!

Reforming Minnesota residential solar rates ensures a sustainable, equitable & modern energy future



— By Jenny Glumack, director of government affairs, Minnesota Rural Electric Association

As new technologies and the transition to cleaner resources rapidly change our electric grid, some of Minnesota's energy policies, including our antiquated net-metering laws, remain ineffective. Minnesota's net-metering policy allows residents and businesses with distributed energy systems, like solar panels, to generate their own electricity and require the cooperative to pay more for excess power sent to the grid than it would normally pay for power. This policy is outdated, expensive and inequitable and must be reformed to be effective in the modern world.

Outdated policy

First off, the policy is outdated. Minnesota's net-metering policy was established when solar technology was in its infancy and no longer addresses the modern energy landscape. Comprehensive reform is needed to reflect current realities and capabilities, including storage. As the first state to implement net metering back in 1984, Minnesota played a pioneering role in promoting solar energy, but it is now time to update this policy to align with today's realities. Given the state law mandating carbon-free electricity by 2040, the environmental incentive for maintaining costly net-metering policies is obsolete.

Expensive policy

Second, net metering is expensive. With Minnesota's mandate for carbon-free electricity by 2040, net-metering incentives have become redundant. Utilities are already charged with reducing carbon emissions; no reason exists to keep expensive incentives to achieve the same goal. Net metering is also ineffective since it forces



Minnesota's energy policy vs. practice has greatly changed from 1984 to 2024. The net metering policy for solar and wind that passed in 1984 needs to be updated as it is outdated, expensive and inequitable. Electric cooperatives are ready to advocate for a reformed policy that benefits all members to provide reliable, affordable and a sustainable energy future.

cooperatives to pay retail rates for energy they could purchase at cheaper wholesale prices. Additionally, generating electricity from small distributed solar systems is more costly than from larger utility-scale projects, resulting in less carbon reduction for the same investment. Utility-scale systems offer a faster, more cost-effective means of decarbonizing the electrical grid, making net metering an inefficient tool for achieving environmental goals.

Inequitable policy


Finally, net metering is inequitable. This policy leads to cost-shifting, where those without distributed systems end up paying more to cover the costs of maintaining the grid. Those who can afford these systems are generally wealthier, leaving poorer members to face the brunt of the cost increases. Studies show that in Minnesota, this disparity is growing, with affluent households increasingly dominating solar installations. Reform is essential to prevent financial strain on those

least able to bear it.

The current model is unsustainable and unnecessarily drives up the electric bills of most co-op member-owners. Reforming net metering can enhance grid stability and reliability, ensuring that both traditional and renewable energy sources are effectively integrated and managed.

By taking a balanced approach to reforming our outdated net-metering policies, Minnesota has the potential to become a national leader in renewable energy policy and ensure a fair, sustainable and modern energy future for all Minnesotans. Embracing reform will support renewable energy growth and facilitate the connection of solar sized to load for those who want it. Minnesota's electric cooperatives stand ready to support these necessary reforms, advocating for policies that benefit all cooperative members and advancing our collective goal of a reliable, affordable and sustainable energy future. ^(L)

Let's get rolling with crescent roll recipes for holidays & hearth

Roll out the crescent dough recipes! Share your favorite crescent dough recipes with us, whether it's the made from scratch family recipe or using refrigerated crescent dough for pizza, hot dish or even pigs in a blanket. Send your favorite crescent roll recipes to Editor, Federated Rural Electric, PO Box 69, Jackson MN 56143-0069 or e-mail to christoffer@federatedrea.coop by November 22. Add your name and phone number. Thanks for sharing with us! 

Pumpkin Pie Bars by Barbara Sellner, Sleepy Eye

Crust: 1 c. flour ½ c. quick oats ½ c. brown sugar ½ c. butter


Combine until crumbly. Press into a 9x13" pan. Bake at 350° for 15 minutes.

Filling: 2 c. pumpkin 1 can evaporated milk 3 eggs, beaten

¾ c. sugar 1 tsp. cinnamon ¼ tsp. cloves or pumpkin pie spice
Combine ingredients. Pour over baked crust. Return to the oven for 20 minutes.

Topping: ½ c. chopped nuts ½ c. brown sugar 2 T. butter 2 tsp. flour

Mix together. Sprinkle over baked filling and return to the oven for 15 minutes.

Serve with whipped cream or your favorite whipped topping. 

Apple Crisp Bread

by Elizabeth Shimon, Granada

1½ c. oil

2 c. sugar

2 eggs

2 tsp. vanilla


1 tsp. baking soda

1 tsp. salt

1 tsp. cinnamon

3 c. flour

Mix well. The batter will be very stiff. Add 3 c. chopped apples (unpeeled), 1 c. nuts, chopped.

Bake in greased pans until the toothpick comes out clean. Use two large loaf pans or five small loaf pans; bake at 350° 50-60 minutes. It has a crispy crust. 



NOVEMBER SPECIAL!

Get one freeze or flood sensor **FREE**

with three-year monitoring agreement


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Subsidiary of your local electric co-op

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**This fall...
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. 



HAPPY Thanksgiving

From our table to yours, we hope you have a wonderful holiday.

We are closed November 28-29.



Jennifer Rose
CFO

Staff Notes

BCREA retires more than \$622,000

It's time for you to get the credit — capital credits, that is — for helping build, sustain, and grow your local electric cooperative.

Earning capital credits is unique to the cooperative business model and represents your ownership in Brown County REA. When you signed up to receive electric service from BCREA you became a member-owner. Unlike investor-owned utilities, which maximize profits to pay dividends

to shareholders, your not-for-profit electric co-op provides its members with “at-cost” electric service. At the end of each year after all operational expenses have been covered, we return a portion of any excess funds back to you, the member-owners, as capital credits. The amount you receive is based on how much electricity you purchased during a year.


Not all capital credits are refunded immediately. Because the electric utility business requires large amounts of capital to operate, electric cooperatives reinvest capital credits toward improving and expanding the electric systems. Capital credits also reduce the co-op’s need to borrow money, which helps keep rates lower.

If you were a Brown County REA member in 2005, 2006, 2007 and 2023, you will receive capital credit payments reflecting your contribution of capital during those years. Some of those years may seem like a long time ago; however, the funds helped us maintain lower rates, reduced the amount of money we borrowed from outside lenders to build, maintain, and expand a reliable distribution system, plus covered emergency expenses.

At its September 26 meeting, BCREA’s Directors approved payment of \$621,818 in patronage dividends to its members. This is broken down as 20 percent of 2023 and a portion of 2005 capital credits. BCREA will also pass along to the membership, remaining retired Great River Energy capital credits from 2005 and a portion of 2006. Cooperative Finance Corporation capital credits from 2006 and a portion of 2007 are also being retired.

With this retirement Brown County REA returned a total since 1958, of nearly \$15,905,000. In 2023 the percentage of patronage capital retired per total equity to BCREA members stood at 3.21 percent, which ranks your co-op 22nd in Minnesota and 196th out of 689 electric co-ops nationwide.

Look for your share of the capital credit retirement in your mailbox in mid-November. If your capital credit amount is less than \$250, you will receive a bill credit instead of a check. These amounts will be credited to the November electric bill of current members. For former members capital credit checks will be issued. If you would prefer to receive your capital credits as a bill credit, instead of a check if your amount is over \$250, contact the office and we can make this change for you for future years.

Capital credits represent one of the co-op principles — members’ economic participation, which benefits our local communities. 



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 — 507-228-8954
William Berg, Vice President — 507-766-1497
James D. Hanson, Sec.-Treasurer — 507-829-6756
Brad Sprenger — 507-317-5576
David Wendinger — 507-276-3166
Greg Mages — 507-794-3540
Joel Christensen — 507-828-4550
James Mickelson — 507-794-6298
Landon Sletta — 507-439-6559
The Board of Directors meets the last Thursday of each month.

Board meeting highlights

The Brown County REA Board of Directors held its monthly board meeting on September 26, 2024. Discussion and/or action items:

- Approved the August meeting minutes, new memberships/cancellations, payments to estates and assignment transfers.
- Approved August 2024 payroll and August financial statement.
- Received a presentation from Brown County Sheriff Jason Seidl.
- Approved the write-off of \$1,263.92 in uncollectible electric bill balances.
- Conducted the annual review and approved the cooperative’s Limited English Proficiency (LEP) plan.
- Approved the 2023 payment of retired capital credits to members.
- Approved an increase in the percentage used to determine annual present value for capital credit estate settlements and approved the update to Policy 206 Capital Credits.
- Approved 2025 NRECA Benefit Renewal Rates and 2025 compensation schedule.
- Updated on operations activities and employee safety training.

The next meeting is set for October 31 at the Brown County REA office in Sleepy Eye. 