

Connections

February 2024

For the member-owners of Brown County REA



Volume 28, Issue 2

Apply now for Operation Round Up scholarships




High school seniors: you could be one of the 2024 scholarship recipients. Apply by April 8, 2024. Parents/guardians must be BCREA co-op members.

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

Six \$250 scholarships will be awarded to high school 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. The application materials also be found on the REA website at www.browncountyrea.coop.

The deadline for submission is April 8, 2024, and winners will be announced at the Brown County REA Annual Meeting on 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. 

Brown County REA 87th Annual Meeting

Thurs., April 11, 2024
Sleepy Eye Event Center
110 12th Avenue NE,
Sleepy Eye, MN



**Registration begins at 4:30 p.m.
Receive attendance gifts and
enter drawing for electric
yard tool prizes.**

Meal at 5:30 p.m.,
immediately followed by
business meeting.


Election of Directors
in Districts 6, 7 & 9.

Vote by mail before April 11
or in person at the meeting.

At A Glance



BCREA rebates can help save energy and money

Thinking about making energy-efficiency improvements in 2024? BCREA has rebates available to members who purchase certain Energy Star appliances, install a Level 2 charger for an electrical vehicle or upgrade their home's heating/cooling equipment. Commercial and agricultural efficiency upgrades may be rebated too. See pages 2&8. 

Plant the seeds this winter for energy efficiency for your farm's energy use

While most people think of spring as the season that farmers plant their crops, farmers can actually start planting energy-efficiency measures now in the midst of winter.

Reap the rebates offered by your local electric cooperative for your ag operation or business. Let us highlight a few. Visit the cooperative's website for more details so you can raise your energy-efficiency yields. Contact the co-op's energy expert on any of these rebates.

Hog farrowing mats

Building a new hog barn or wanting to replace heat lamps in an existing barn? Go with heated electric mats with automated climate controls. These mats significantly reduce heat lost to the surrounding air by providing heat directly to the piglets. The rebate is \$45/crate for an existing barn's heat lamp retrofit and \$30/crate for a new construction barn.

Livestock waterer

Upgrade to an insulated or energy-free livestock waterer that replaces a standard electric waterer. The rebate is \$75 for each waterer.

Agricultural ventilation

Three types of agricultural fans are eligible for co-op rebates. Exhaust fans are eligible for \$15 each. Circulation fans qualify for \$25 each. Meanwhile, high-volume, low-speed (HVLS) fans receive \$400 each.

Dairy and livestock farms use fans to control air quality and comfort, while



Pamper your piglets with an upgrade to heated electric mats with automated controls. Shut off the energy-intensive heat lamps! — Photo courtesy Stanfield Farrowing

eliminating airborne contaminants and disease. Automated ventilation controls optimize fan speeds and run time, based on weather conditions, to reduce operating costs.

LED lighting

Retrofit the lighting in businesses, farm shops, dairy or hog barns (sorry, not available for new construction). Reduce your operating costs and maintenance, plus increase livestock production. The lighting form details what rebate amount is available for each type of retrofit lighting.

Motor & drive rebates

Most motors turn at nearly a constant speed. They are designed to operate at their horsepower (HP) rating. Yet,


sometimes the work motors need to perform is less than the maximum design speed. Save energy by using the power you need from a motor. Speed reduction is achieved by variable-frequency drive (VFD) or variable-speed drive (VSD). Rebates are not available for replacement VFD/VSDs, soft starts, power factor correction or harmonic correction applications.

These rebates are for new drives. It must be tied to an automated control system and have a true power factor of .90 or greater used for HVAC fans, pumps, cooling towers, process equipment or industrial fans. VFDs/VSDs are rebated at \$30/horsepower.

Replace inefficient shaded pole or permanent split capacitor motors with fractional horsepower motors; fractional horsepower motors use less energy running 75 percent more efficiently. For fractional horsepower rebates new or retrofit motors qualify:

- 1/64 to 1/16 HP (11-48 watt) motors rebated \$5/motor;
- 1/15 to 1/6 HP rebated \$10/motor;
- 1/5 to 3/4 HP rebated \$15/motor.

These rebates are for new drives and must be tied to an automated control system. It must have a true power factor of .90 or greater and be used for HVAC fans, pumps, cooling towers, process equipment or industrial fans.

Rebates may be available for robotic systems and electric forklifts too. 

Electric snow shovel makes winter easier!


You may have a snowblower for your farm or business, but for the small areas, you manually shovel and then may need a chiropractor visit or two to recover.

Invest instead in an electric shovel from EGO Power to work smarter. Buy the multi-head system for \$399; receive the power head, battery charger and snow shovel attachment. If you already have the EGO multi-head for use with a string trimmer, hedge trimmer, cultivator or several other attachments, buy just the power-head attachment for only \$189.

The snow shovel throws snow up to 6 inches deep 25 feet. It is 12 inches wide so it works great for sidewalks, decks and smaller driveways that your tractor snow blower cannot reach. The overload protection system can

temporarily disengage the auger rotation under extreme loads or jams to prevent damage to the motor. The unit runs quietly with long run times due to the high-efficiency motor with variable speed trigger and two-speed selector. It weighs 28 pounds and uses a 56-volt, 4 amp-hour lithium battery. According to EGO, this snow shovel can clean a four-car driveway on one battery. The tool possesses a five-year warranty, while the battery features a three-year warranty.

You can purchase this electric-powered snow shovel at your local Ace Hardware store or online from Lowes or Amazon.

If you own other brand's battery-powered yard tools, check with that brand as they may also have a small "snow-shovel" attachment to energize digging out from a snowstorm. 



Manager Matt Dauer at the Sleepy Eye Ace Hardware demonstrates the EGO snow shovel to energize your snow removal.

Safety

Five ways to safeguard your home this winter

Winter is always a good time to create a warm and cozy haven at home. Unfortunately, as we see increased use of heating equipment, candles and electrical items, home fires tend to increase during the winter months.

Follow these five ways to safeguard your home this winter.

1. Ensure carbon monoxide and smoke detectors are working properly. If your detectors are battery-operated, replace the batteries annually. Test the detectors once a month and give them a good dusting to ensure the sensors are clear of dirt and debris.

2. Inspect electrical cords. We depend on more cords during the winter. Before using any corded items, double check to make sure cords aren't frayed or cracked.

If you use portable space heaters, remember to keep them at least 3 feet away from flammable items. Use models that include an auto shut-off feature and overheat protection. Space heaters can take a toll on your energy bills. Use them efficiently (to heat smaller spaces) and safely. Never plug a space heater into a power strip.




Test your carbon monoxide and smoke detector to keep you safe year-round.

3. Avoid overloading electrical outlets and power strips. When overloaded with electrical items, outlets and power strips can overheat and catch fire. If you use power strips for multiple devices, make sure the strip can handle the electrical load. For a safer bet look for power strips that include surge protection.

4. Clean the fireplace to improve safety and efficiency. A warm fire on a chilly night is divine, but keep it safe. As wood burns, a sticky substance known as creosote builds up in the chimney. When creosote buildup

becomes too thick, a chimney fire can ignite. The chimney should be cleaned at least once a year to reduce fire risks. Regular cleaning also improves air flow and limits the amount of carbon monoxide that seeps indoors.

5. Practice safety in the kitchen. As we spend more time in the kitchen during frigid days, be mindful of potential fire hazards. Never leave food that's cooking on the stovetop unattended. Clean and remove spilled foods from cooking surfaces and be mindful of where you place flammable items, like dish towels. 

Brown County Briefs

Office closed February 19



In observance of President's Day our office will be closed on February 19. Crews will be on call in case of outages.

Energy-efficiency tip

Area rugs are an easy, cost-effective solution to cold floors. Adding area rugs to hard-surface flooring can add warmth to any room and keep your feet cozy on cold winter days. Choose rugs made from wool or other natural fibers and plush or high-pile textures for the most insulation. Place rugs in areas where you need additional warmth, like the foot of a bed or under a coffee table. Area rugs can enhance the aesthetic of your home and keep you cozier.

Operation Round Up meeting

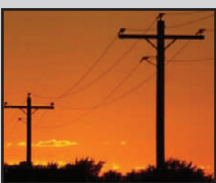


The first quarterly Brown County Rural Electric Trust Board meeting for 2024 is scheduled for February 13. Organizations wishing to be considered for funding can submit the application, found on the REA website www.browncountyrea.coop, before that date.

2024 calendars available

There are still a few 2024 large, farm pocket calendars available to pick up at the office. Limit one per member please.

Annual line patrol is underway



Just a reminder that Brown County REA crews are doing line patrol and will be coming onto yards and property throughout the service area. Work will continue until early spring. ☎️

High school students: the Youth Tour deadline is approaching



High school sophomores and juniors: this could be you in 2024! Enter BCREA's Youth Tour Contest to enjoy the sites and scenes in Washington, D.C. Apply by March 1.

Brown County REA is looking for one exceptional student to represent the cooperative on an all-expense paid trip Washington, D.C. June 18-23, 2024. The Youth Tour group will explore D.C., spend a day on Capitol Hill and meet congressional leaders. It is a fast-paced leadership opportunity to see our government in action. Students will explore the cooperative business model, visit several museums and memorials, and gain a new appreciation of our nation's history. In the process, many new friendships are created as they spend the week with young people from electric cooperatives throughout Minnesota.

The application and selection procedures are available from high school counselors and on the REA website www.browncountyrea.coop. Apply by March 1, 2024. ☎️

Heat pumps offer benefits for consumers, the environment

Many companies and homeowners are placing an increased emphasis on reducing their use of fossil fuels by looking for new ways to use electricity to help them achieve their goals.

This strategy of replacing direct fossil fuel use with electricity in a way that reduces overall emissions and energy costs is called beneficial electrification. It's made possible as utilities, including Brown County REA, continue incorporating more carbon-free sources of energy into their power supply portfolios.

There are many opportunities for beneficial electrification across the residential and commercial sectors, including making the switch to an electric vehicle or an electric heating system — as long as the end-user and environment both benefit from the change.

One home appliance that provides the opportunity to reduce fossil fuel use and replace it with electricity is the heating system. Heat pumps have become increasingly popular as the technology advances to support heating in colder climates.

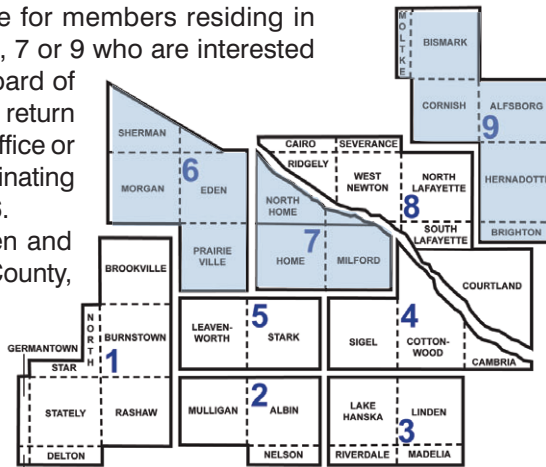
Like an air conditioner, a heat pump can cool your home. What makes them unique is that they can also provide heat. Unlike other electric heating options, air source heat pumps (ASHPs) do not use electricity to create heat but instead use it to move heat from outdoor air and transfer it indoors. With today's ASHP technology, this process of moving heat is extremely energy efficient even when it's cold outside. ☎️

Director candidates sought

Nominations will soon close for members residing in Brown County REA Districts 6, 7 or 9 who are interested in running for a seat on the board of directors. Please complete and return the form below or contact the office or a member of your district's nominating committee before February 16.

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.

Directors will be elected at the 87th Annual Meeting set for the evening of April 11, 2024 at the Sleepy Eye Event Center. (U)



Come and vote at the 2024 Annual Meeting! Elect directors to represent you, the member-owners!

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: _____

Please deposit or cash your 2022 Capital Credit checks

Members are reminded to please cash or deposit any remaining 2022 Capital Credit checks. The checks, for amounts of \$100 or more, were issued and mailed in mid-November 2023. Current members whose Capital Credit amounts was less than \$100 received a credit on their November electric bills. (U)

Let us be a part of your wind/solar planning discussions

If you're considering adding a Distributed Energy Resource (ie:wind, solar) at your home or business located in Brown County REA's service territory, please include the co-op in the discussion from the start.

Cooperative staff would like to help members make informed decisions, go over annual usage reports to help size the system to your electric load, explain any service upgrades and associated costs and provide you with the paperwork required to interconnect to our system. All interconnection standard documents and application forms for use in 2024 have been updated and published on the BCREA website. Please contact BCREA at 800-658-2368 or 507-794-3331. Brown County REA has been providing safe, reliable electricity to you, our members for more than 80 years and plans to continue to do so well into the future. (U)

What can we expect from the Minnesota legislature in 2024?



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

The 2024 legislative session starts February 12. With a two-year budget enacted last session, no bills need to be passed this year to keep the state government operating. However, there is a projected budget surplus of \$2.4

billion, which will be used by Governor Tim Walz and the legislature to develop a supplemental budget for the 2024 legislative session. Minnesota Management and Budget will release an updated budget forecast in late February, so then the governor and the legislature will adjust their budget proposals to match the updated amount.

With a smaller surplus than last year and the agencies buried under implementing the extensive new programs and spending passed last session, we expect the focus of this session to be on a large funding package for public infrastructure needs across the state. Both legislative leadership and the governor have emphasized working on a capital investment bill as their main priority this session.

Other contributing factors to consider this session are the beginning of a \$730 million renovation and expansion of the State Office Building which holds offices for all House members and staff. House members need to be out of their offices once session concludes in May for the project to proceed on schedule. It is also an election year, which means legislators running for reelection will be especially attuned to campaign politics.

With the “Carbon Free by 2040” bill passed last session, the energy committees will be focused on proposals to better align the permitting process with the demands of the clean-energy transition mandated by the legislature. A stakeholder group was convened over interim that resulted in a report offering 35 total recommendations for making the permitting process more efficient.

We also expect the moratorium on building new nuclear facilities in Minnesota to be a discussion item. As utilities work out how to comply with the 2040 carbon free mandate, all clean-energy generation sources should be on the table, including nuclear. We take the stand that we need all available tools in our toolbox when working to provide reliable power to Minnesotans.

MREA is also working with the Department of Revenue and legislators to clarify how electric cooperative property taxes are assessed that will result in savings for members.

More broadly, we will be focused on preventing any new mandates from being imposed. While some legislators would like to enact more prescriptive requirements for how utilities decarbonize the electrical grid, we firmly believe they need to let the experts at utilities decide how we will reach 2040 carbon free compliance. ^(L)



Have an area where you think the trees are getting too close to the power lines? Let the co-op know so they can take a look and see if any trimming is needed.

Tree branches contacting power lines can cause blinks, outages and downed wires. Your electric cooperative uses Carr’s Tree Service to trim the problem trees in the co-op’s service area.

Throughout the year line crews and members can notify the electric cooperative of trees that could cause future problems. Carr’s then trims or removes trees when in the area.

This regular maintenance helps. A dead or dying tree could pull down power lines when it falls. Even healthy trees near power can go down in powerful storms causing blinks or outages. Plus, trees growing into power lines can be hazards to children climbing trees.

If you notice trees that could potentially cause problems with power lines, contact the Operations Department at your cooperative. Plus, if you need to cut a tree that is close to the overhead lines, call the co-op first.

Brown County REA’s tree trimming schedule

BCREA 2024 tree trimming schedule: January, February, March, July, August and possibly December, depending on the budget at year-end.

Federated’s tree trimming schedule

Federated hires Carr’s Tree Service for year-round tree trimming. They occasionally leave the co-op’s area to work utilities hit by storms.

Carr’s tree trimmers have marked trucks. If you are unsure of their identity, contact your electric co-op. Sometimes, tree-trimming scammers operate in the state. ^(L)

Ooey, gooey, chewy caramel recipes are calling! Share yours today

Well, well, well...do tell! What's your favorite caramel recipe? Share your caramel recipes for bars, brownies, ice cream topping, apple dip and the homemade candy. Send your favorite caramel recipes to Editor, Federated Rural Electric, PO Box 69, Jackson MN 56143-0069 or e-mail to christoffer@federatedrea.coop by February 27. Add your name and phone number. Thanks for sharing with us! 📧

Stuffing Casserole by Barbara Sellner, Sleepy Eye

- | | |
|-----------------------------|--------------------------|
| 4 c. cooked chicken | 1 large onion, chopped |
| 13 quarts dry bread crumbs | 5 stalks celery, chopped |
| 5 c. chicken broth | 1 tsp. sage |
| 8 eggs | 1/8 tsp. cloves |
| 1/2 c. butter | 1 tsp. poultry seasoning |
| 1 can cream of chicken soup | 1 1/2 tsp. salt |

Warm the broth and add to bread crumbs. Melt the butter and add to the bread mixture. Add the remaining ingredients and mix well. Place in a roasting pan. Cook in a slow oven at 300° for two to three hours. Stir occasionally. 📧



Help us by sharing your recipes in 2024 *Connections* newsletters. Submit recipes now for use later in the year. Use the e-mail or mailing address listed above.

- March — caramel
 - April — grilling recipes
 - May — onions
 - June — cheese
 - July — ribs
 - August — salsa
 - September — sliders
 - October — pumpkin
 - November — lettuce/salads
 - December — cinnamon
- Thanks for sharing! 📧

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Staff Notes



Marcia Solie,
Member
Services Manager

Check out BCREA's energy-efficiency rebates

If 2024 is the year you make some energy efficiency upgrades, Brown County REA's rebate may help you save even more. Thinking about replacing your aging heating and cooling system with a more energy-efficient furnace and air source heat pump?

Enjoy the best of both worlds with an Air Source Heat Pump (ASHP), which provides home cooling and heating with 72 percent less electricity than conventional air conditioners and furnaces. The largest rebates are available to members who install an ASHP or hybrid system, placed on load control with a non-electric or storage backup. Heat pump rebates are based on Heat Seasonal Performance

Factor (HSPF) 8.2/7.0 HSPF 2 and higher. Rebates range from \$1,000 to \$2,000 on a load-controlled heat pump with whole house dual fuel or storage backup. A rebate of \$500 to \$1,000 is available to members who choose to install a qualifying ASHP not on load control or with electric as the backup.


Installing a new Geothermal Heat Pump qualifies for a \$2,000 rebate. Place it on load control with whole house storage or non-electric backup heat and receive an additional \$500 rebate. A replacement geothermal unit qualifies for a \$1,000 rebate.

No ductwork in your home? No problem. Energy Star Ductless Mini Split Heat Pumps can efficiently heat and cool your home and qualify for a \$500 rebate if electricity is your home's primary heat source. Pair with a delivered fuel heating system to earn a \$300 rebate. Members who install or upgrade existing heating and cooling systems with an Electronically Commutated Motor (ECM) can receive a \$25 rebate. Upgrade to an Energy Star WiFi/Smart thermostat for your heating and cooling equipment and receive a \$25 rebate.

Members who purchase a Battery Electric Vehicle or Plug-in Hybrid Electric Vehicle and install a Level 2 charger at their home can receive \$500 toward its installation when the charger is placed on the cooperative's Off-peak or Time of Use charging program.

Rechargeable battery-powered yard tools, including a leaf blower, chainsaw, pole saw, lawn edger or weed trimmer priced at \$150 or more pre-tax, earn members a \$25 rebate. A push lawn mower, snowblower or snow thrower priced \$399 to \$599 qualify for \$50. The co-op also offers a \$100 rebate on an electric riding lawn mower or snowblower pre-tax priced \$599 and higher. Limit one yard tool rebate per member per year.

Brown County REA offers Energy Star appliance rebates too. Replace a refrigerator or freezer with a new Energy Star model, 7.7 cubic foot or larger, and recycle the old unit to receive a \$75 credit. Purchase an Energy Star-rated dehumidifier or qualifying electric clothes dryer and receive a \$25 rebate.

Submit a copy of receipt, Energy Star certification, and proof of recycling on the refrigerator or freezer only, to receive the rebate. Rebates for amounts less than \$100 will be paid as a credit on your electric bill. One appliance rebate per member per year. You can find more information and all the rebate forms on our website www.browncountyrea.coop. 



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 Brown County REA Board of Directors held its monthly board meeting on December 28, 2023.

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

- Reviewed and approved the November 2023 board meeting minutes, new membership applications, member cancellations, payments to estates and assignment transfers.
- Reviewed and approved November 2023 payroll and financial statement.
- Discussed plans for the January 22, 2024 Member Advisory Council meeting.
- Reviewed and approved the cooperative's 2024 Operating Budget as presented.
- Reviewed progress on the Cooperative Cost of Services Study being performed by STAR Energy Services LLC.
- Updated on operations activities including pole change outs and line patrol.
- Reviewed staff meeting reports, director meeting reports and individual director reports.

The next meeting is set for January 25, 2024, at the Brown County REA office in Sleepy Eye. 