

Connections

November 2022

For the member-owners of Brown County REA



Volume 26, Issue 11

We deliver more than reliable, affordable electricity; Cyber planning protects your power & you too!

Enable multi-factor authentication.



Multi-factor authentication: a security measure that requires anyone logging into an account to navigate a two-step process to prove their identity.

Just like we prepare for the worst from Mother Nature's storms, your electric cooperative has also prepared for the worst from cyber attacks as well.

"Rest assured, Brown County REA has people and procedures in place to protect our electronic systems and important member data," stated Jennifer Rose, Brown County REA's chief financial officer. "We have a Cyber Security Plan. We train our employees, update our computer systems, protect our member-owners' personal data and invest in physical and cyber security tools."

- Our billing software vendor and payment portal providers are audited annually for cyber security.

- Our wholesale power supplier protects the reliable flow of power with their information technology (IT)

Use strong passwords and a password manager.



Password manager: software created to manage all of your online credentials, like user names and passwords, and stores safely in an encrypted database.

employees, training scenarios and multi-factor security access.

- Brown County REA's website is protected with top-of-the-line security service and vulnerability management solutions, guarding against Malware, Ransomware and other viruses. The Touchstone Energy Team constantly protects the website data and files, in real-time, and immediately acts on any threats found.

- Electric co-ops work together and with their wholesale power suppliers, statewide organizations and the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA), the national trade association for electric cooperatives. Together, cooperative utilities are leading efforts to establish relationships, provide tools, share resources and training information to

Update software regularly.



Software: a set of instructions, data or programs used to operate computers and execute specific tasks.

harden and improve the overall cyber landscape.

Yet, we need your help as member-owners. If you receive a phone call, e-mail or text about your account requiring immediate gift card payment, click here to prevent being disconnected in an hour or anything that seems out of the ordinary, contact the cooperative first. Hang up and call BCREA at 800-658-2368 or locally 794-3331; don't let your guard down with spoofed local phone numbers. Share with us any unusual occurrences, as we will share and educate through our Facebook page and *Connections* newsletter. 📧



At A Glance



Holiday wise energy use tips to take

Efficiently enjoy the holiday season by taking a few steps to reduce energy use and lower your utility bill. Learn more on Page 5. 📖



Smart appliances for the smart chef

Whether you're a master chef or a culinary novice, smart appliances add convenience to any kitchen.

Smart appliances typically rely only on Wi-Fi (paired with a custom smartphone application), while others can work with common smart home systems like Google Home or Amazon Alexa. Smart home systems establish routines based on our activity, like when we return home from work. You can set smart devices to begin a programmed routine to turn on lights, adjust the thermostat and other tasks.

For smart kitchen appliances routines could include preheating an oven or turning on a coffee maker. Let's look at a few smart appliances for the home chef.

Cooktops and ranges

Induction cooking works by delivering energy directly to cookware, using a magnetic field that warms the inside of cookware, specifically made for induction cooking. (Check your pans for compatibility by using a magnet.) Induction cooktops are 32 percent more energy efficient than gas cooktops and about 75 percent more efficient than electric cooktops.

Smart induction models recognize when a pan is placed on an element and automatically turn off when a pan is removed from the cooktop. Brands, like Samsung and Bosch, offer additional smart functions, including synchronization of the cooktop with a (brand-matched) smart ventilation hood. The smart hood activates as soon as cooking begins and adapts to cooking intensity on the fly. Smart ranges can also include this function and often feature a barcode scanning system that allows you to scan store-



Induction cooktops, like the Samsung model shown here, transfer heat directly to the cookware, which is designed for induction cooking. Photo credit: Samsung

bought foods, prompting the oven to start based on the instructions.

Smart ranges can be controlled remotely to preheat, change and monitor temperatures through the companion app or an integrated home system. A few brands offer a Wi-Fi connected cooking thermometer to allow remote monitoring, leaving the home chef free to do other things while an app keeps an eye on cooking progress.

Countertop ovens

The June Oven includes an in-oven camera that allows progress to be tracked from its app. The app also provides progress monitoring with push notifications to your phone when cooking is complete.

Tovala also offers a smaller, countertop oven for ready-to-cook meals. These ovens use barcode scanning technology for both Tovala meals and those from the grocery store. The Tovala app uses push notifications to track progress.

Like Tovala, the Breville smart oven offers guided recipes and an app

that directs cooking temperature and function, such as air fry or bake, as the recipe advances. The Breville smart oven uses its on-board chip to monitor and stabilize temperature from all sides for more efficient cooking.

Other gadgets

Microwaves from manufacturers, like LG, Whirlpool, GE, Sharp and Toshiba, include the barcode scanning function to allow product-specific cooking instructions to be sent to the appliance.

Smart kitchen scales, air fryers and pasta makers are also all available to connect to your phone for guided measuring and cooking.

If you're looking for a smart kitchen gadget that won't break the bank, try a smart meat thermometer. These handy little devices work with an app to specify optimal cook time and temperature; they notify the chef when the meat is ready.

As our appliances and kitchen gadgets become smarter, home chefs have more options for convenience and functionality. Bon appétit! 🍴

Bear Electric Griddle offers ease and options

The Bear Electric Griddle is perfect for pancakes, quesadillas, burgers, eggs, pizza, crepes, seafood and more.

The Bear Electric Griddle grill works as a 180° foldable contact grill, electric grill, electric griddle, panini press, crepe maker and pizza maker. One can even use it to stir fry.

The upper and lower pans can be controlled independently. Switch to the mode you like, changing between an individual dining and a multi-person dining mode.


The cooking surface has honeycomb texture mesh and non-stick coating. It makes oil drops distribute evenly. It also allows you to control cooking oil more conveniently, so as to avoid greasy cooking. Excess oil flows naturally into the lower tray, which also makes your diet healthier.

The Bear Electric Griddle has a 1,500-watt embedded heating element, which generates heat in a surrounding way that heats up in mere minutes and provides an even cook for consistent results. You also don't have to worry about triggering the smoke alarm or make the whole house smell like a BBQ restaurant when cooking.



The Bear Electric Griddle opens up to enable you to use the top and bottom to cook larger meals. It is made to handle a variety of dishes.



The Bear Electric Griddle has a one-year warranty and costs approximately \$40. It is available online and in stores. 

Safety

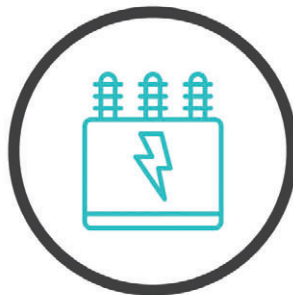
The Steps to Restoring Power

When a major outage occurs, our crews restore service to the greatest number of people in the shortest time possible - until everyone has power.



1. High-Voltage Transmission Lines

These lines carry large amounts of electricity. They rarely fail but must be repaired first.



2. Distribution Substations

Crews inspect substations, which can serve hundreds or thousands of people.



3. Main Distribution Lines

Main lines serve essential facilities like hospitals and larger communities.



4. Individual Homes and Businesses

After main line repairs are complete, we repair lines that serve individual homes and businesses.

Brown County Briefs

Energy-efficiency tip



Is your home heating system ready for the winter chill? One of the easiest ways to keep your system running efficiently is to regularly replace filters. If your central air system has a furnace filter, it should be replaced about every 90 days. If your home is heated through warm-air registers, baseboard heaters or radiators, remember to clean regularly to boost efficiency. **2023 calendars available**

Members can stop by the REA office during business hours to pick up a 2023 large, farm pocket calendar. One per member please. A small number of pocket-size calendars are also available.

Operation Round Up



The Brown County Rural Electric Trust Board will meet for its final 2022 meeting November 15. Organizations wishing to be considered for funding at this meeting should submit an application found on the REA website at www.browncountyrea.coop, under *Operation Round Up* in the *Programs & Services* section, before that date.

Changes to BCREA water heater program January 1



Effective January 1, 2023, Brown County REA's water heater program price to members will no longer include plumbing and electrical work to install the new water heater. Electrical installation of the load control equipment will continue to be covered by the cooperative. ☎

Prepare now to stay cozy this winter



As temperatures start to drop outside, it's a good time to make sure your heating system is ready to keep you toasty warm inside during the months ahead.

If you have a heat pump or electric heat and participate in the co-op's Dual Fuel heating program, make sure your back-up systems are operating correctly, as well. When your electric heat is controlled, you will need to have an automatic, non-electric or storage back-up heat source to keep your home comfortable until the electric heat is restored.

Take time now to have routine maintenance performed and fill up your backup heating fuel source. An estimated 60 days/300 hours of control of your primary electric heating system are anticipated for this year. It is also recommended to test the system to make sure the back-up source turns on when the thermostat calls for heat. Regularly clean or replace your furnace filters too. ☎

Electric heat sales tax exemption

Do you use electric heat as your home's primary heat source? Are you receiving the sales tax exemption during the heating season?

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.

If you have made changes and now use electric heat as your primary residential heat, or if it has been 10 years or more since you completed the sales tax exemption form, please fill out the Residential Heat Exemption Form found under the Forms tab on our website www.browncountyrea.coop and return to our office. You may complete and return via email to bcera@bcera.coop, send with your payment, use the drop box or stop in the office during business hours. Brown County REA must have a signed form on file for you to receive the sales tax exemption. ☎



In a co-op every member gets a piece of the pie!

Soon you will be receiving your slice of the nearly \$363,000 2021 capital credit refund

You're more than just a customer - you're an owner of the cooperative

Efficiency tips for a festive holiday season

The holidays are a magical time when we come together with our loved ones to share food, gifts and quality time. It's also the most expensive time of year for many people with the added expense of gifts, meals and travel. Colder weather and darker nights lead to more electricity use and higher bills.

One way to try to reduce the financial burden is to implement efficiency tips to use less energy at home and lower your monthly bills.

If you are hosting guests, your household will consume more electricity than normal. Be prepared with efficiency basics:

- Have your thermostat programmed at 68 degrees when you are home and dialed back 8 to 10 degrees when you leave the house or go to sleep.
- Run the clothes washer on cold with full loads.
- When not in use, turn off lights and the TV; fully shut down computers and gaming systems instead of putting them in sleep or standby mode.
- Lower the thermostat when guests are over or cooking food. Most gatherings happen in the center of the home, so save energy by turning the heat down in areas you are not using.

In the kitchen use the oven light to check food. Every time the oven door is opened, the temperature inside is reduced by up to 25 degrees, according to the Department of Energy (DOE). When possible, make use of a slow cooker, microwave, toaster oven or warming plate, which use less energy than an oven and stovetop. Let hot food cool to room temperature before placing it inside the refrigerator. This ensures you don't increase the temperature inside your fridge and cause it to use more energy to cool down.

If you haven't done so already, make the switch to LEDs for all of your holiday lighting. LED holiday lights consume 70 percent less energy than conventional incandescent light strands. For example, it costs 27 cents to light a six-foot tree for 12 hours a



day for 40 days with LEDs compared to \$10 for incandescent lights.

Pick up a few light timers so you don't have to remember to unplug your lights every evening. You can also choose to upgrade to smart holiday lights that offer a wide range of app-controlled options, including time, colors, music and modes.

If you're going to be traveling and

visiting family and friends during the holidays, prepare your home to use less energy.

Water heating is the second-largest energy expense in your home, accounting for about 18 percent of your utility bill, according to DOE. Switching your water heater to vacation mode will reduce wasted energy by keeping the water at a lower temperature. You can also manually adjust the water temperature to a lower setting.

Instead of leaving lights on all day, consider upgrading a lamp or fixture to a smart lightbulb. This allows you to control lights from afar and set a schedule for the light to go on and off. Another option is to repurpose a holiday light timer for one of your living room lamps.

Relax and enjoy your holiday celebrations knowing you've taken steps to lower your energy bills with these simple efficiency tips. (L)

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 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. (L)

**Your cozy
electric blanket
all winter long**

\$35

**BROWN
COUNTY
REA**

**Electricity continues to be a great value
courtesy of your electric cooperative**

Keep food safe if the power goes out

Severe winds, lightning, ice storms, blizzards and even squirrels can temporarily cause the power to go out. Your local electric cooperative understands power outages of any length can be frustrating, especially when your fridge is stocked with perishable foods.

Extended power outages are rare, but when they occur, it's important to understand food safety measures to avoid illness.

Before an outage

A good rule of thumb is to keep an emergency supply kit on hand. Be sure to include nonperishable food items like bottled water, powdered milk, canned goods, cereal and protein bars in your emergency kit.

During an outage

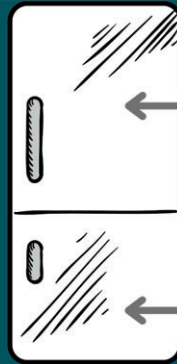
If an outage occurs, do not open the refrigerator or freezer unless absolutely necessary. An unopened refrigerator will keep food cold for about four hours. A half-full freezer will keep food frozen for about 24 hours and a full freezer for about 48 hours. If it looks like the power outage will last longer than four hours, move your important perishable items to an ice-filled cooler.

After an outage

If refrigerated foods have been exposed to temperatures higher than 40 degrees for more than two hours,

Keep food safe during & after power outage

Refrigerated or frozen foods may not be safe to eat after a longer power outage. Use these tips to minimize food loss and reduce risk of illness.



4

Refrigerated food lasts four hours or place refrigerated foods in a cooler with ice.

24 OR 48

Food in a half-full freezer will last 24 hours. Food in a full freezer lasts 48 hours.

When in doubt, throw it out!



Food Safety Tips

1. Keep refrigerator & freezer doors closed as much as possible.
2. Throw out any food with an unusual odor, color or texture.
3. Throw out perishable food in your fridge after four hours without power.


the American Red Cross recommends discarding the items. If any foods have an unusual color, odor or texture, they should be thrown away.

While most perishable foods should be thrown out after an extended outage, there are a few items that are safe to consume after a two-hour exposure to 40+ degrees:

- hard cheeses that are properly wrapped
- taco, barbecue and soy sauces

• butter or margarine that is properly wrapped

- jelly, mustard, ketchup and relish

The best way to avoid illness from spoiled food during or after an outage is to follow the four-hour rule of thumb. After an outage always smell and inspect foods before consuming and remember — when in doubt, throw it out. To learn more about food safety after an emergency, visit www.ready.gov/food. 

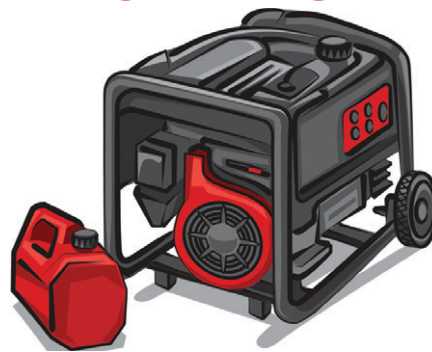
Tune up time! Is your generator ready?

What will Mother Nature throw at us this winter? Is your generator ready?

Take the time to be prepared when it comes to your generator. A few minutes now will pay off when the weather is at its worst.

Check and see if your generator has adequate fuel. If it's a large unit, check the battery, oil and antifreeze. If it's a small portable unit, do you have the gas can full?


Remember to never connect a standby generator into your home's electrical system. Only two ways exist to safely connect a standby generator to your equipment.



With a stationary or portable generator use an approved generator transfer switch. This protects your home's circuits separate from the co-op's lines,

protecting the line crews. This should be installed by a professional.

If you do not have a transfer switch plug the appliances directly into the outlet provided on the generator. However, start the generator before connecting the appliances. Use a heavy-duty extension cord to connect the electric appliances to the outlet on the generator.

Run your portable generator in a well-ventilated area outside the home. Be sure it's out and away from the garage, doors, windows and vents. Remember, carbon monoxide is deadly. 

Cold weather cries out for nicely-priced rice recipes! Share yours!

For thrice the pleasure share your rice recipes for white, brown or wild rice meals or soups. Perhaps you are also a fan of rice pudding or rice made in hot dish, crock pot or Instapot. Mail your nice rice recipes to Editor, Federated Rural Electric, PO Box 69, Jackson MN 56143-0069 or e-mail to christoffer@federatedrea.coop by November 28. Add your name and phone number. Thanks for sharing with us! 📧



Traci's Chocolate Walnut Pie
by Elizabeth Shimon, Granada


Beat 2 eggs until fluffy.
Add: ½ c. flour
½ c. white sugar
½ c. brown sugar
1 c. butter, melted & cooled
Mix well. Add: 1 c. chopped walnuts
1 c. mini chocolate chips
Pour into a 9" graham cracker crust.
Bake at 325° for 1 hour. 📧

Never Fail Peach Pie by
Jeanne Schwieger, Fairmont

¾ c. sugar
¼ tsp. cinnamon
dash of salt
5 c. sliced, fresh peaches
3 T. flour
2 T. soft butter
1 unbaked pie shell
Mix all ingredients together and put in a pie shell. Top with another pie crust or lattice crust. Bake at 400° for 40-45 minutes. 📧

Gluten Free Peanut Butter Pie
by Rose Freking, Heron Lake

Mix ¼ c. peanut butter with 2/3 c. powdered sugar.
Spread mixture on a 8" gluten free pie crust (or a regular baked pie crust).
Mix: 4 T. corn starch
1/3 c. sugar
1/8 tsp. salt
2 c. milk (or Lactaid milk)
1 tsp. vanilla
2 egg yolks.
Cook until thick.
Add 2 T. butter. Pour over prepared crust.
Refrigerate. Serve topped with Cool Whip. 📧



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. You can also register at www.gopherstateonecall.org or call 811. Call a licensed electrician to locate the underground lines on your side of the meter. 📧



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Jennifer Rose
Office Manager

Staff Notes

BCREA retires nearly \$363,000 to members

It's time for you to get the credit — capital credits, that is for helping build, sustain, and grow your local electric cooperative. Capital credits represent your ownership in Brown County REA and are one of the most unique and rewarding benefits you enjoy as an electric cooperative member.

When you signed up to receive electric service from Brown County REA you became a member of an electric utility. 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 members, in the form of capital credits. The amount you receive is based on how much electricity you purchased during a year.

If you were a Brown County REA member in 1993-2000, 2004-2006 and 2021, you will receive capital credits payments reflecting your contribution of capital to, and ownership of, the cooperative 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 needed to borrow from outside lenders to build, maintain, and expand a reliable electric distribution system, and covered emergency expenses.

At the October 27 meeting Brown County REA’s Board of Directors approved the payment of \$362,905.02 in patronage dividends to its members. This amount is broken down as 22% of 2004 and 5% of 2021 Brown County REA patronage. Brown County REA will also pass along to the membership, retired Great River Energy remaining capital credits from 1993-2000 and 36% of the 2001 capital credits. Cooperative Finance Corporation remaining capital credits from 2005 and 11% of the 2006 amount is also being retired.

With this retirement Brown County REA has returned a cumulative total, since 1958, of nearly \$14,573,762. Through 2021, the percentage of patronage capital retired to co-op members stood at 47.59%, which ranks your cooperative 4th in the state of Minnesota and 41st out of 700 cooperatives nationwide.

Look for your share of the capital credits retirement in your mailbox in mid-November. This year, checks will not be issued in amounts less than \$100. These amounts will be credited to the November electric bill of current members. For former members capital credit checks will be issued.

Returning capital credits to members is a practice unique to the cooperative form of business and represents one of the cooperative principles – members’ economic participation. Best of all, the benefits of this economic participation return to our local communities. ☺



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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 October 27, 2022, at the REA headquarters in Sleepy Eye.

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

- Reviewed and approved the September 2022 board meeting minutes, new membership applications, member cancellations, payments to estates and assignment transfers.
- Reviewed and approved September 2022 financial statements and August 2022 payroll.
- Discussed recent additions of member-owned Distributed Energy Resources.
- Approved the appointment of Rose Fischer to represent District 4 on the Brown County Rural Electric Trust Board beginning in 2023.
- Reviewed the results of pole testing by Southwood 20000 in Courtland, Lafayette, Cornish and Alfsborg townships and plans to replace rejected poles.
- Approved an increase to the Monthly Service Charge to \$42 for four rate classes of former Alliant Energy members to take effect January 1, 2023.
- Updated on construction activities, including the Highway 14 expansion.

The next meeting is set for November 22, 2022, at the REA headquarters. ☺