

SEPTEMBER 2022

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ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE LIVING

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ON THE COVER

Nicole Low with Eldora's Community Garden is one of this year's Shine the Light contest winners. Learn more about each of this year's winners on Pages 10-11 and 14 of this issue.

BE AWARE OF DANGERS THIS FALL

BY SCOTT MEINECKE



As the safety director for the Iowa Association of Electric Cooperatives, I work with my team to educate and train operations staff at Iowa's

electric cooperatives with the goal of getting them home safely to their families at the end of each workday. I want to take this opportunity to ensure we all understand electricity's dangers and share these seasonal safety tips with friends and loved ones.

Call before you dig

Now that the weather is cooling down a bit, many of us will be working on landscaping and home improvement projects. Remember to contact Iowa One Call at least two business days before you dig to any depth so underground utilities can be properly located and marked. It's the law, and it could just save your life or prevent serious damage. Call or click before you dig – call Iowa One Call at 8-1-1 or visit www.IowaOneCall.com to process your request.

Look up and live

Cleaning gutters or working on the roof this fall? Always choose a non-conductive ladder made of wood or fiberglass for utmost safety. Pick a safe route to carry the ladder to the work area, and then carry it horizontally rather than upright. Be aware of electrical lines and tree branches in your work area. When using an extension ladder, tie off the top of the ladder whenever possible. Use the 1:4 lean ratio to ensure a stable working platform.

Safety in the field

As you head into harvest season, make sure to keep a 10-foot clearance between your equipment and power lines at all times. Take time to study where all overhead power lines, poles and guy wires are located on your property and inform your workers

about them. Plan your route between fields and on public roads so that you avoid low-hanging power lines; never attempt to raise or move a power line to clear a path. When moving large equipment or high loads near a power line, always use a spotter to help make sure that contact is not made with a line.

You hit a utility pole; now what?

Would you know what to do if your car or farm implement hit a utility pole or snagged a power line? It's almost always best to stay in your vehicle until emergency responders arrive and clear the scene. The vehicle acts as a path for the electrical current to travel through to reach the ground, so you're not at risk for electrocution unless you try to leave the vehicle. If possible, call the local authorities or the nearest electric utility so power can be cut to the lines.

Always assume that downed power lines are energized, even if they show no signs of power. If you've been in an accident, passersby might run over to help you; warn them that no one should come near you until the utility has cut the power. You should only



attempt to leave your vehicle if it's on fire and ensure you don't touch the vehicle and the ground simultaneously. To exit as safely as possible, you should jump from the vehicle, keep your feet together and hop away from the scene.

Scott Meinecke is the director of safety and loss control for the Iowa Association of Electric Cooperatives.

EDITOR'S CHOICE CONTEST

Win a GreenPan™ Ultimate Gourmet Grill

September is National Family Meals Month! Meals are a breeze with this GreenPan™ versatile indoor electric grill. The nonstick top plate features a griddle/grill surface on one side and eight pancake wells on the other. An area under the top plate can be used for broiling and includes eight square mini pans, each with their own spatula. All cooking surfaces have the Thermolon™ nonstick coating to make healthy cooking easy, with less oil and quick cleanup.

Visit our website and win!

Enter this month's contest by visiting www.ieclmagazine.com no later than Sept. 30. You must be a member of one of Iowa's electric cooperatives to win. There's no obligation associated with entering, we don't share entrant information with anyone and multiple entries from the same account will be disqualified. The winner of the outdoor grill from the July issue was Andrew Haarsma, North West REC.



2022 ENERGY TRAIL TOURS HIT THE ROAD

Flip a switch, and the lights come on. Behind this simple action is a complex network of people, power plants and transmission lines that work around the clock. Their mission: to ensure safe, affordable, reliable electricity flows to more than 140 member cooperatives in nine states.

Generation and transmission cooperative Northwest Iowa Power Cooperative (NIPCO) is a member of Basin Electric Power Cooperative's power supply system. This regional wholesale power supply cooperative has nearly 7,000 megawatts of generating capacity and 2,300 miles of high-voltage transmission lines – all managed with you, the member-owner, in mind.

Following a two-year hiatus due to the COVID-19 pandemic, four representatives of Prairie Energy Cooperative (PECO) joined members from six other electric cooperatives within NIPCO's system on a three-day excursion through the Dakotas to learn about where their electricity comes from and have some fun along the way.

PECO encourages members to get the inside story of how electricity is made.

"Learning about the big energy picture helps us all make smart choices from our households and businesses to the public policy arena," says Tim Marienau, CEO of PECO.

NIPCO purchases approximately 80% of its power supply from Basin Electric Power Cooperative and 20% from Western Area Power Administration (WAPA), which markets power generated from the Missouri River Dam System. NIPCO's total blended generation portfolio from these suppliers includes electricity generated from coal, water, wind, natural gas, solar and other sources.

"NIPCO and its member cooperatives feel it is essential to provide an opportunity for members to get up-close and personal with the source of their electricity," explains Angela Catton, NIPCO's manager of member relations and development who also serves as the host of the Energy Trail Tour.

The energy trail tour route

Oahe Power Plant and Dam: The first electric-generation stop on the three-day journey brought tour guests to Pierre, South Dakota, to understand the process of hydroelectric generation and the innovation of the rolled-earth dam that created Lake Oahe, the fourth-largest reservoir in the U.S.



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PECO'S 2022 ENERGY TRAIL TOUR MEMBERS INCLUDED:



Steve Jackson (left), PECO operations coordinator, and Zane Tinken, PECO apprentice lineman, participated in the tour.



Antelope Valley Station: The tour included an overview of the model room and a guided walking tour of the power plant. The walking tour included stops at the turbine deck, control room, boiler and observation deck on the 17th floor.

The Coteau Properties Company Freedom Mine: Tour guests learned how lignite coal is produced at a surface mine and how the land is returned to its original state. A guided drive-through tour took members through active mining areas where they witnessed giant earthmoving equipment in action.

Great Plains Synfuels Plant: The trip also offered insight into operations at Great Plains Synfuels Plant and how coal can be refined into natural gas and a

variety of other products.

Energy Trail Tour participants also learned about wind generation and renewable energy resources in America's overall energy mix. The tour provides a "mobile classroom" on the process of wind generation and how a turbine works.

Over three educational and fun-filled days, members gained a deeper understanding of the cooperative difference, which includes the history of rural electric cooperatives, the seven cooperative principles that guide them, and the Touchstone Energy® brand's four foundations of service: Integrity, Accountability, Innovation and Commitment to Community.



Ryan Eekhoff (left), PECO board member, and Chad Chapman, PECO member services, participated in the tour.



NEW APPRENTICE JOINS THE CREW

Brayden Leerar started his lineman career with Prairie Energy Cooperative on Aug. 1. Leerar is originally from Britt and graduated from West Hancock High School followed by a degree from Minnesota West Community and Technical College. His hobbies include hunting, fishing, and watching racing and sports.

"Prairie Energy is my local cooperative, and I look forward to meeting members and providing energy services to the members," says Leerar.

Congratulations and welcome to the crew, Brayden!

RURAL IOWA GROCERY STORES PERSEVERE WITH COMMUNITY SUPPORT

BY KAY SNYDER

It is an understatement to say that rural grocery stores play a critical role in supporting the health and vitality of the small towns they serve. However, access can be challenging in rural areas – the average grocery store is located 10 miles away, compared to only 1 mile in urban areas.

Having a local grocery store is more than a convenience. Access to fresh and healthy foods supports overall health and reduces the chance of developing chronic diseases. Rural grocery stores are especially important to senior citizens when transportation options may be limited or long-distance travel is undesired. Local grocery stores in small towns also serve as an anchor for business growth and community vitality.

Following the cooperative principle of “Concern for Community,” Iowa rural utilities have supported hometown grocery stores across the state. The following are a few inspiring examples

of how rural communities have rallied to keep their grocery stores a vital part of their towns and region.

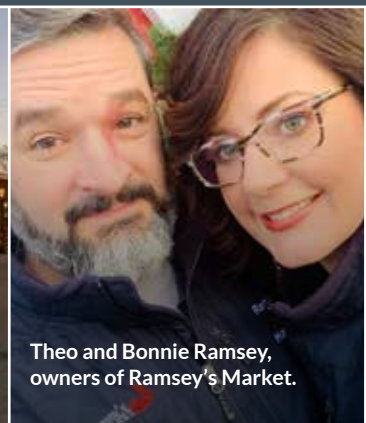
Ramsey’s Market expanding grocery services in multiple communities

In 2015, Bonnie and Theo Ramsey purchased an existing grocery store with a 120-year history in Lenox. With the slogan “Be more awesome” guiding the way, the Ramseys have significantly impacted west central and southwest Iowa.

Bonnie grew up on a family farm in Taylor County. She enlisted in the U.S. Air Force, where she also performed as a vocalist and met her husband Theo, a musician from Seattle. Through their travels, they developed a unique appreciation for grocery stores. When the Cheese’s Food Center in Lenox (near Bonnie’s hometown) became available, the couple jumped at the opportunity to return home and begin their retail adventure.



Ramsey’s Market in Lenox builds on the grocery store’s 120-year history.



Theo and Bonnie Ramsey, owners of Ramsey’s Market.

While the Ramseys studied retail marketing and grocery store business, the unique element of their store is entertainment. Shoppers are often greeted by live music from the stage inside the front door and may even hear the staff singing songs from behind the deli counter. After four successful years of operation, they purchased the adjacent building and opened Ramsey's Ace Hardware to fill another community need. They boast this is the first Ace Hardware in the U.S. with a bar where shoppers can enjoy a beer and pick up do-it-yourself project necessities.

In 2020, the community of Manning was searching for options to reopen the recently closed West Street Market. Leaders from several organizations, including the Iowa Area Development Group (IADG), brainstormed options and a match came with the Ramseys. In May 2020, Ramsey's Market opened in Manning.

Understanding the need in rural Iowa, the Ramseys have also introduced Fresh Out of the Box delivery services, which allow customers in rural communities to order groceries online, then pick up their orders from refrigerated and frozen lockers in Walnut and Shelby. They also offer curbside pickup and delivery in and around Lenox and Manning.

Iowan returns to lead reopening of Gowrie grocery store

Gowrie has an amazing story to tell. With the pending close of Jamboree Foods, citizens and businesses united to raise \$250,000 in 10 days to save their local grocery store. Volunteers worked to transform the space into a small independent grocery store that focuses on fresh food. In April 2020, Market on Market opened for business.



West Forty Market stores in Greene and Ankeny feature locally raised meat.

Larry Roper, former Iowan and 25-year veteran grocery and produce manager for grocery and convenience stores, was excited to return to the state and lend his expertise to lead Market on Market to success. Central Iowa Power Cooperative and Gowrie Municipal Utilities each donated \$10,000 to support this effort.

Greene grocery store reopens with expanded meat and poultry options

John and Sue Ebensberger raise beef on a family hobby farm in Greene. The hobby soon became a business, and the couple began selling individual cuts and custom wholesale options in Greene and Des Moines.

In 2019, the Ebensbergers purchased T&M Grocery in Greene and renamed it West Forty Market. In addition to the standard grocery store offerings, they immediately added their locally raised beef, pork and chicken. Butler County Rural Electric Cooperative and Corn Belt Power Cooperative both provided \$169,250 in low-interest loans from their revolving loan funds to assist with purchasing the grocery store in Greene.

In 2021, West Forty Market opened in Ankeny and features more than 120 cuts of beef, pork, chicken, bison, lamb and turkey, all raised on local Iowa farms and butchered in Iowa.

Efficiency upgrades supported through cooperative-sponsored IADG Energy Bank

IADG is the economic development organization sponsored by and working on behalf of Iowa's rural electric cooperatives and rural utilities. It operates the IADG Energy Bank, a revolving loan fund that focuses on loans to businesses and industries within Iowa for qualifying energy efficiency projects.

The Energy Bank has assisted local grocery stores through low-interest loans to support energy efficiency and cost-saving upgrades. Prairie Market, a family-owned grocery store in Paullina, replaced its refrigeration cases and compressor system. The equipment in the store was 45 years old and in frequent need of repair. Upgrading the refrigeration cases resulted in considerable energy efficiency and cost savings, as well as a significant reduction in food spoilage.

Ramsey's Market in Lenox is upgrading its outdated refrigeration and freezer cases with new energy-efficient units, resulting in less food spoilage as well as energy and cost savings. In addition, the current fluorescent lightbulbs will be replaced with LEDs to provide a pleasing shopping experience and generate further efficiency and savings.

The challenge for rural grocery stores will continue. But with challenge comes the incredible opportunity for individuals and communities to band together to create solutions to move forward. Your Iowa electric cooperatives actively support local initiatives through participation, financial support, and providing safe, affordable and reliable power.

Kay Snyder is the director of marketing and communications for the Iowa Area Development Group.



Market on Market opened in Gowrie in 2020.



FAMILY Dinner RECIPES

CHICKEN BURRITO BOWLS

- 1½ pounds boneless chicken thighs
- 1¼ teaspoons salt, divided
- 1½ cups salsa
- 1 15-ounce can black beans, rinsed and drained
- ½ teaspoon garlic powder
- 1 teaspoon cumin
- 1 cup tomatoes, chopped
- ¼ cup onions, diced
- ¼ cup fresh cilantro
- ½ jalapeno pepper, diced
- 2 tablespoons lime juice
- rice
- optional toppings: cheese, lettuce, olives, sour cream, guacamole, avocados

Put chicken, 1 teaspoon salt, salsa, black beans, garlic powder and cumin in slow cooker for 4 hours on high or 8 hours on low. Once cooked, shred chicken with forks and return to slow cooker. Make a salsa by mixing tomatoes, onions, cilantro, jalapeno, lime juice and ¼ teaspoon salt. Chill salsa until ready to eat. Serve chicken in a bowl with rice and optional toppings. Serves 6-8

Lauren Zollinger • Rock Rapids
Lyon Rural Electric Cooperative

QUINOA ENCHILADA CASSEROLE

- 1 cup dry quinoa
- 1 small can enchilada sauce
- 1 can corn (no salt added)
- 1 can tomatoes with green chilis
- 2 cans black beans (no salt added)
- 2 tablespoons cilantro (fresh or dried)
- 1 teaspoon cumin
- ½ teaspoon chili powder
- salt and pepper, to taste
- ½ cup cheddar cheese, divided
- ½ cup mozzarella cheese, divided
- avocado, to taste

Cook quinoa as directed on package. Combine cooked quinoa, enchilada sauce, corn, tomatoes, black beans, cilantro, cumin, chili powder, salt and pepper. Stir in ½ cup cheddar and ½ cup mozzarella cheese. Spread into a greased baking dish. Top with remaining cheeses. Bake at 375 degrees F for 25-30 minutes or until cheese melts. Top with avocado to serve. You can substitute enchilada sauce with salsa and add other toppings, such as tomatoes, jalapenos, sour cream or plain Greek yogurt. Serves 8-12

Monica Wuebker • Rockwell City
Calhoun County Electric Cooperative Association

CHICKEN TETRAZZINI

- 1 box of linguine or spaghetti
- 1 whole rotisserie chicken
- 2 cans cream of chicken soup
- 1 16-ounce tub sour cream
- ⅓ cup butter, melted
- ½ cup chicken broth
- ½ teaspoon salt
- ½ teaspoon pepper
- ¼ teaspoon garlic powder
- ¼ cup Parmesan cheese
- 2 cups mozzarella cheese, shredded
- 2 teaspoons dried parsley

Break noodles into thirds and boil until tender, drain. Remove meat from rotisserie chicken and chop. In a large bowl, combine cooked pasta, chicken, soup, sour cream, butter, broth, salt, pepper and garlic powder. (You can substitute two cans cream of chicken soup for one can cream of chicken and one can cream of mushroom.) Pour mixture into 9x13-inch baking dish prepared with cooking spray. Top with cheeses and parsley. Cover with aluminum foil and bake at 325 degrees F covered for 1 hour. Remove foil and bake for 30 minutes until bubbly and cheeses are melted. This recipe freezes well. Serves 12

Dianne A. Riley • Osceola
Clarke Electric Cooperative, Inc.

BEEF ENCHILADAS

- 2 pounds ground beef
- 1 can tomato soup
- 2 cans enchilada sauce, divided
- 2 cups cheddar or Mexican-style blended cheese, divided
- 8-10 medium-size tortilla shells

Brown ground beef, drain fat. Mix tomato soup, one can enchilada sauce and 1 cup grated cheese with the ground beef. Place $\frac{1}{3}$ cup of the mixture down the center of a tortilla shell. Roll with meat mixture inside and place in a greased 9x13-inch baking dish. The pan will hold approximately eight shells but can adjust to fit 10, if needed. Pour remaining can of enchilada sauce and any leftover meat mixture over the top of the shells and sprinkle remaining grated cheese on top. Bake at 350 degrees F for 30-40 minutes or until bubbly and cheese is completely melted and golden. You can adjust spiciness by using both mild enchilada sauce, one hot and one mild or both hot. For a slight variation, add one can of drained and rinsed black beans to the meat mixture. *Serves 4-6*

Lisa Harris • Akron
North West Rural Electric Cooperative

CALICO BEANS

- $\frac{1}{2}$ pound hamburger
- $\frac{1}{2}$ pound bacon, cut to small pieces
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup onion, chopped
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup ketchup
- $\frac{1}{2}$ packed cup brown sugar
- 3 teaspoons dry mustard
- 6 teaspoons vinegar
- $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon salt
- 1 15.5-ounce can pork and beans
- 1 15.5-ounce can kidney beans
- 1 15.5-ounce can lima beans

Sauté hamburger, bacon and onions until lightly browned, drain fat. Thoroughly mix in remaining ingredients. Bake uncovered at 350 degrees F for 40 minutes. *Serves 10-12*

Karen Crossland • Fairfield • Access Energy Cooperative

BEEF TIPS BY SHIRLEY

- 2 pounds stew meat
- 1 can cream of mushroom soup
- 1 packet brown gravy
- 1 envelope beefy onion soup mix
- 1 can water

Mix all ingredients together in a 9x13-inch pan. Cover with foil and bake at 350 degrees F for 1 hour. Reduce to 300 degrees F and bake for 3 more hours. Serve over mashed potatoes and a vegetable of your choice. *Serves 8*

Shirley (Dennis) Kellenberger • Larchwood
Lyon Rural Electric Cooperative

CREAMY BAKED CHICKEN BREAST

- 4 whole chicken breasts
- 8 slices Swiss cheese
- 1 10.5-ounce can cream of chicken soup
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup dry white wine
- 1 cup herb stuffing mix
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup butter, melted

Cut chicken into eight pieces and arrange in a lightly greased 9x13-inch baking dish. Top with cheese slices. Combine soup and wine, stir well, then pour over chicken. Sprinkle stuffing crumbs over top, then drizzle with melted butter. Bake at 350 degrees F for 50 minutes. *Serves 8*

Mabel Posz • Fort Madison • Access Energy Cooperative

SPINACH NOODLES

- $1\frac{3}{4}$ cups spinach, torn
- 2 tablespoons water
- $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon salt
- 1 egg
- $1\frac{1}{4}$ cups flour (plus a little bit for kneading)

Cook torn spinach and water over medium heat until very limp. Cool, then put in blender and add salt and egg. Blend, then put into large bowl and add flour. Mix thoroughly. Knead for a few minutes, adding more flour if needed so dough does not stick to your hands. Roll out on floured board and cut into strips. Dry until crisp. You may freeze or add to boiling water. Cook noodles on medium high until desired texture is achieved, stirring often. *Serves 4*

Laura (William) Foell • Schaller
Raccoon Valley Electric Cooperative

WANTED:

COMFORTING CASSEROLE RECIPES

THE REWARD:

\$25 FOR EVERY ONE WE PUBLISH!

Deadline is Sept. 30

Please include your name, address, telephone number, co-op name and the recipe category on all submissions. Also provide the number of servings per recipe.

EMAIL: recipes@ieclmagazine.com

(Attach your recipe as a Word document or PDF to your email message.)

MAIL: Recipes

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ANNOUNCING THE 2022 SHINE THE LIGHT AWARD WINNERS



The Touchstone Energy® Cooperatives of Iowa are driven by a commitment to community. To celebrate local volunteers, the Iowa Association of Electric Cooperatives held its second annual Shine the Light contest earlier this summer. Employees and member-consumers of Iowa's locally owned electric cooperatives were invited to nominate someone who makes a positive difference in their community.

The judging committee had the difficult task of selecting three contest winners from 68 outstanding nominees.

Congratulations to **Deb Johnson**, who is recognized for her enthusiastic support of the Greater Fairfield Area Habitat for Humanity; **Sharon Van Beek**, who is recognized for her generous commitment to Buckets of Joy; and **Nicole Low**, who is recognized for her vision in establishing Eldora's Community Garden. These three winners have been awarded a \$2,000 donation to their charity.

The following pages showcase and honor each of the Shine the Light contest winners' commitment to humbly serving their communities. Learn more at www.IowaShineTheLight.com.

Kevin Wheeler, CEO/general manager of Access Energy Cooperative, presents a check to Deb Johnson (center), with the Greater Fairfield Area Habitat for Humanity. Also pictured is Kathy Brown, who nominated Johnson for the award.

GREATER FAIRFIELD AREA HABITAT FOR HUMANITY DEB JOHNSON ASSISTS LOCAL FAMILIES WITH STABLE HOUSING

At just 5 feet tall, Deb Johnson's commitment to her community is anything but small. A lifelong resident of Fairfield in southeast Iowa, Johnson was nominated for the 2022 Shine the Light contest for her volunteer work with the Greater Fairfield Area Habitat for Humanity.

Johnson was nominated by her friend and fellow Habitat volunteer Kathy Brown.

"Deb has always been a voice for the less fortunate, helping the Habitat board be true to our mission of building safe and decent homes for families,"

Brown says. "Her heart is filled with love and compassion for others, especially children."

The two first worked together years ago when Brown was a schoolteacher and Johnson served as a social worker. A friendship soon blossomed, and their families grew up together.

Johnson serves on the local Habitat for Humanity board and volunteers as the homeowner support chair. She uses her social work experience to serve as a liaison between each Habitat partner family and the Habitat board during construction.



Deb Johnson helps Fairfield families in need.

As a big believer in providing safe, stable housing for families, Johnson devotes many hours to coordinating work schedules and encouraging the construction team. A gifted cook, Johnson lifts the spirits of the Fairfield High School students working with Habitat by bringing cookies and treats on Fridays during builds.

"The students loved her and would cheer when she drove up at the end of the week. She quickly became known as the 'Cookie Lady,'" Brown shares.

Johnson also serves on the local Habitat for Humanity ReStore board, which sells gently used furniture and furnishings that have been donated. Money made at the ReStore is then used to fund housing construction for the Greater Fairfield Area Habitat for Humanity.

"The most rewarding part of serving with Habitat for Humanity is when we dedicate the house to the partner family. It's just wonderful," says Johnson. "Habitat for Humanity gives families a hand up, not a handout."

Brown says the \$2,000 Shine the Light donation could likely be used to purchase tools volunteers can use for future construction projects. Brown also wants others to know that Johnson has a kind heart and is a compassionate person.

"She's a goer and a giver in addition to being a devoted mother and grandmother. She certainly deserves this recognition," says Brown.

When asked if she has words to live by, Johnson says volunteering and serving are important and rewarding.

"You get a lot more back than what you give. Growing up, my parents encouraged community service and involvement, so it has always been a part of my life to do things for other people," Johnson shares.

Article contributed by Erin Campbell, Iowa Association of Electric Cooperatives.



BUCKETS OF JOY

SHARON VAN BEEK'S TRADITION FILLS HEARTS

Through Buckets of Joy, Sharon Van Beek helps to bring a joyous Christmas to northwest Iowa children.

The tradition of giving has been passed through the Van Beek family for generations. For 40 years, they have been filling "Buckets of Joy" for children to celebrate that tradition in the Christmas season.

When reading about the Shine the Light contest, North West Rural Electric Cooperative member Laura Leonard instantly thought of her mom Sharon Van Beek of Primghar. "She has selflessly done so much work for the program since she has taken it over and is always working hard to shop sales to find the best deals that can serve the most kids. She has put countless hours into the program; Sharon is one of the most selfless people I know."

Sharon has been working with the program for over 30 years. Initially started by her in-laws, Chris and Verna Van Beek, the program began as a way to distribute government food commodities to families in need. Their experiences moved them to do something special for struggling families with young children. The Buckets of Joy project launched in 1982 when the couple filled 25 empty ice cream buckets with basic clothing and a toy for the children. The project quickly grew, and within five years, they were filling and distributing 10 times the number of buckets filled at the program's beginning.

When health issues took a toll on the farming couple, Sharon and her husband Jon stepped up and committed to continuing the project. By this time, buckets had become bags, but the name and the gifts remained. Today, each sack is stuffed with a footed blanket sleeper or sweatshirt, socks, stocking cap, mittens, crackers, toothbrush, colors, coloring book and a book telling the Nativity story.

Although technically a Christmas project, work continues year-round. Sharon, a retired teacher and the program's primary shopper, takes inventory each January and shops sales and special offers throughout the year for supplies.

Local churches, banks and individuals answer the call to help buy needed supplies. "Each bucket averages about \$40, and that's with finding things on sale," explains Sharon. "Annually, we fill 150-250 buckets depending on the need."

Buckets of Joy are distributed to children ages 0-5 through the WIC program and, more recently, through Upper Des Moines and the Department of Human Services, as well as Head Start programs in O'Brien County. Buckets help to bring a joyous Christmas for the children receiving the gifts. There is also a special feeling of happiness for Sharon, Jon and all those assisting with the project, knowing they have helped make someone else's Christmas a bit brighter.

Article contributed by Emily Vander Velde from North West Rural Electric Cooperative.



Lyle Korver, CEO of North West REC, presents a check to Van Beek.

Continued on Page 14

WE'RE LOOKING FOR STUDENTS INTERESTED IN PUBLIC SERVICE AND LEADERSHIP

High schoolers who attend Iowa Youth Leadership Academy sessions in October will have a chance to win AirPods and a \$1,000 college scholarship!

Guided by our cooperative commitment to community, Prairie Energy Cooperative (PECO) has a long history of supporting students in the communities we serve through scholarships and leadership opportunities. We've also been sending deserving high school students to our nation's capital every summer for years as part of the national electric cooperative Youth Tour program.

Iowa's electric cooperatives are pleased to once again offer a virtual opportunity for rural students to learn more about advocacy, electric cooperative career opportunities and the cooperative business model with a three-part webinar series in October. The Iowa Youth Leadership Academy is open to any high school student in our



service area, and they are invited to register at www.IowaYouthTour.com by Oct. 1.

"This new program is perfect for rural Iowa students who have a passion for public service, leadership or government," says Tim Marienau, CEO of PECO. "We want to raise students' awareness of how local electric co-ops power people's lives and empower communities. We also want to talk about exciting cooperative career paths that are available in smaller communities."

Once students register online for the Iowa Youth Leadership Academy, they can attend the webinars from their own computer or mobile device. Each Zoom session will last around 45-60 minutes and focus on a specific topic:

- Thursday, Oct. 6, 7 p.m. – Cooperative Business Model
- Tuesday, Oct. 18, 7 p.m. – Rural Iowa Advocacy

- Thursday, Oct. 27, 7 p.m. – Civic Involvement and Leadership

At the end of each live session, one lucky attendee will be selected at random to win a pair of Apple AirPods. Students who attend all three sessions will be entered into a random drawing for two \$1,000 college scholarships. All students who register online by Oct. 1 will receive a special box of co-op goodies in the mail.

During the Zoom sessions, students will be inspired by our lineup of speakers and presenters. Participants will learn how to advocate for issues that are important to them and build leadership skills from a motivational speaker. Attendees will also hear from former Iowa Youth Tour students who pursued their passion for government service and leadership after attending the weeklong trip to Washington, D.C. The 2023 Youth Tour is slated for June 17-23 next summer.

Learn more at www.IowaYouthTour.com or contact Chad Chapman or Darren Johnson with member services at 515-532-2805 for more information.

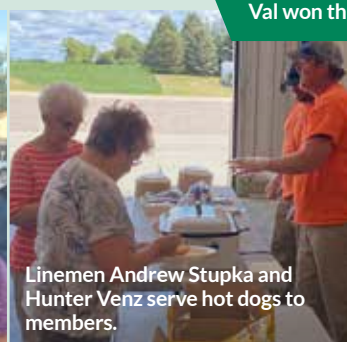
FIRST-ANNUAL MEMBER APPRECIATION DAY

We couldn't have asked for better weather for our first-annual Member Appreciation Day on Friday, July 29! Held at Prairie Energy Cooperative's (PECO) Garner service center, staff served complimentary hot dogs, chips and mini tarts produced by Shells by Design, a PECO member also located in the Touchstone Energy Industrial Park in Garner. Members had the opportunity to visit with staff and directors, take home assorted PECO-branded goodies and sign up for prize giveaways.

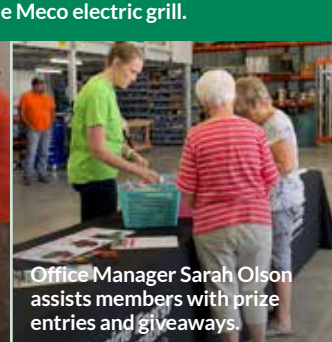
"We haven't had an in-person get-together for almost three years, so it was nice to host an event where we have an opportunity to visit with members," says Chad Chapman, member services representative for PECO. "We anticipate holding this event again next year, so please watch for more information from the cooperative."



Congratulations to Nick and Jenn Merideth of Fertile for winning the PECO Summer Swag Bag!



Linemen Andrew Stupka and Hunter Venz serve hot dogs to members.



Office Manager Sarah Olson assists members with prize entries and giveaways.




District 1 Director Ted Hall visits with co-op member-owners.


Congratulations to Ross Swyter of Britt and Val Koehler of Meservey! Ross won the drawing for a \$100 bill credit, and Val won the Meco electric grill.


EASY WAYS TO HELP A NEIGHBOR SAVE ENERGY

BY MIRANDA BOUTELLE

Helping people feels good. Supporting community is sewn into the fabric of your electric co-op, which is guided by seven cooperative principles that put the needs of members first. On National Good Neighbor Day, which is Sept. 28 – or any day this month – join in the cooperative spirit and help your neighbors, friends and family save at home with these do-it-yourself energy-saving tips.

 **Change lightbulbs.** Prioritize changing lights that are used the most, such as incandescent porch lights left on all night. LEDs use about 75% less energy and last up to 25 times longer than incandescent bulbs. Some neighbors can't climb step stools or ladders, so help them out if you are able. Be sure to check for overhead power lines when using ladders outside.

 **Swap the filter.** Furnace filters should be checked regularly and replaced when dirty. Simply writing down the dimensions of the furnace filter can help your neighbor, so it makes it easy when they pick up a pack of new ones in the store or order online.

 **Open the dampers.** Register dampers allow heated and cooled air to properly circulate throughout the home. If you have a central air heating or cooling system, dampers should be left open. The idea that closing registers saves energy is a common misconception. If furniture is on top of dampers, move it to a new permanent spot so it does not block air flow.

Test the water heater temperature using a kitchen thermometer. If it is over 120 degrees F, lower the heat setting.



Photos: Mark Gilliland, Pioneer Utility Resources



Add removing the window AC unit to your fall winterizing projects. This prevents heat from escaping and wasting energy.



Offer to clean up leaves and debris around your neighbor's air conditioner or heat pump. This will keep systems running efficiently.



Adjust the water heater.

Check the water heater to be sure it is set to 120 degrees F. It's also worth your time to test the water temperature. You can do this by checking the faucet nearest the water heater, turning on only the hot water and waiting until it gets hot. Let the hot water run into a glass and place a kitchen thermometer in it. Wait until it registers the highest temperature. If the water heater is set too high, you can save energy by lowering the setting.



Keep outdoor units clear.

Remove brush and debris from around the air conditioner or heat pump. If leaves or plants pile up around the outdoor unit, it can reduce the airflow, which makes the system work harder than it should. That in turn uses more energy and can reduce the life of the unit.



Remove the window AC unit.

By removing the unit before wintertime, the window can close properly. This prevents heat from escaping and wasting energy during cold months. It also keeps the room more comfortable. Window AC units are heavy and awkward, so this project is best done with a buddy. Get that person to commit to helping put the unit back next spring.



Share energy-saving programs.

Information is a great way to help, and it's free. Look into programs your local electric cooperative offers and share that information with your neighbor. Don't forget to check the U.S. Department of Energy for federal tax credits for upgrades.

Miranda Boutelle writes on energy efficiency topics for the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association.

ANNOUNCING THE 2022 SHINE THE LIGHT AWARD WINNERS



ELDORA'S COMMUNITY GARDEN NICOLE LOW IS ROOTED IN GROWING FOR GOOD

Nicole Low's passion for developing the community garden grew out of a desire for healthier food and helping combat food insecurity.

Continued from Page 11

If you make your way to Eldora's Community Garden, you'll likely spot Nicole Low pulling weeds, harvesting vegetables or hosting a culinary event. Low, an Eldora resident and registered nurse, isn't one to let a need go unnoticed. In 2019, she saw a need in her community and went to work.

"My friend and I started eating more healthy and growing food in our backyards," she says. "We thought it would be more fun to do it with the community. As a nurse, I have a strong passion for public health. I know it's hard for people who struggle financially to pay for fruits and vegetables. I just thought we live on some of the most fertile Iowa soil, and why not use that to grow food for our neighbors?"

Low's passion for eating healthy and observations of local food insecurity gave rise to Eldora's Community Garden, an ambitious project Low took head-on.

"This is our fourth full year," she says.

"The first year had its challenges as we had to amend the soil and turn it from a hayfield into a garden, but it's going really great now. Our motto is: Take what you need and give what you can, very much in solidarity with our community, rather than just charity."

The garden, located at 787 4th Street in Eldora, encompasses two-thirds of an acre. It is predominately a donation garden but also offers leased plots for community members. In 2021, the garden yielded more than 9,000 pounds of produce, which was donated to the local food pantry.

"I definitely couldn't do this alone," says Low. "It's been a true community effort. Many volunteers have no personal or vested interest in the garden for their own food. It's just to help the community and the mission of the garden."

Paul Lawler, a Midland Power Cooperative member, garden volunteer and one of Low's nominators, watched her grow this dream into a reality.

"I don't know where to start," he says. "She has been so involved with the

Eldora community. She's taken the lead and said, 'OK, let's do this.' She doesn't give up until it's all done, and when it's all done, she will start all over again. She's just a fabulous person and very energetic. She is go, go, go."

Rebekah Cullinan, another of Low's nominators, says if it weren't for the garden, she might not have moved to Eldora from Des Moines. Cullinan explains, "Nicole's role in building this community garden came from a passion for healthier food, the mitigation of food poverty, a place where children could come, a place she could come. The garden is her happy place."

As for what the garden will do with its \$2,000 prize, Low says it's time to purchase a lawnmower and a few additions for the garden.

"We're also hoping to get a fire pit out here for when we have community events and picnic meals. It would be fun to have a bonfire going, let the kids make some s'mores," she says.

Article contributed by Ryan Cornelius, Corn Belt Power Cooperative.

CAN YOU SPOT DEFINING MOMENTS?

BY DARCY DOUGHERTY MAULSBY

This summer, I watched a documentary on Iowa PBS about President Ronald Reagan. I've always been intrigued by his story, since he was a small-town Midwestern kid like me, so I decided to read "Reagan's Roots: The People and Places That Shaped His Character."

Author Peter Hanaford shared a memorable story that occurred in the summer of 1932, just weeks after Reagan graduated from Eureka College in Illinois. As the Great Depression gripped America, Reagan had returned home to Dixon, Illinois, to work as a lifeguard at Lowell Park along the Rock River. He met Sid Altschuler, a prosperous Kansas City businessman who was staying with his family at one of Lowell Park's cottages that summer. "Dutch" Reagan taught the Altschuler daughters to swim, and Altschuler liked the engaging young man.

One day, Altschuler asked Reagan what he wanted to do when the summer was over. Reagan didn't know. Altschuler urged Reagan to think it over. If it were in a field where he had connections, Altschuler would do everything he could to open doors for Reagan.

"His secret ambition was to go into acting professionally, but even suggesting it would no doubt make Mr. Altschuler think he had taken leave of his sense," Hanaford wrote.

Life's unexpected turning points

Reagan's thoughts turned to the new industry of radio. He thought maybe he could be a radio sports announcer. Altschuler thought this was a promising choice, but he had no connections in radio. "The important thing was that Altschuler's asking of the question had caused Dutch's thoughts to crystallize into a real goal," Hanaford wrote.

Reagan went on to land a job as a sportscaster at WOC Radio in Davenport, followed by a stint at



Photo taken by Darcy Dougherty Maulsby in the lobby of WHO Radio in Des Moines.

WHO Radio in Des Moines. In 1937, he covered the Chicago Cubs when they were in southern California for spring training. During this trip, Reagan took a screen test at Warner Bros.' Studio, which led to his successful career in Hollywood.

Reagan probably had no idea that conversation with Altschuler one summer day in 1932 would be a defining moment in his life. Life provides all of us with turning points. Many come disguised as ordinary events of daily life. The most powerful ones go right to the heart of who we are.

I think back to February 2002, when I was laid off from my job as an ag editor after the dot-com bubble burst. Back then, I had no idea this would start my journey to self-employment. All I knew was that I would need extra courage, creativity and confidence to forge a path forward.

No doubt there will be more defining moments ahead. I may not recognize them at the time, but they will certainly keep life interesting.

Darcy Dougherty Maulsby lives near her family's Century Farm northwest of Lake City. Visit her at www.darcymaulsby.com.

Visit our website at www.prairieenergy.coop


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