

OCTOBER 2023

# iowa

ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE LIVING

**PECO member-owner  
survey results**

**6 reasons electric co-ops  
are great places to work**

**Perfect pork recipes**

**Win a \$100 gift card to support a local business ▶ See Page 3**



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## ON THE COVER

Special thanks to Abigail Westbrook, a Consumers Energy member-consumer, for supplying this month's cover image. Submit high-resolution photos for consideration to [editor@ieclmagazine.com](mailto:editor@ieclmagazine.com). You could receive \$100!

# FOSTERING IOWA'S GROWTH: HOW COOPERATIVES ARE SHAPING LOCAL ECONOMIES

BY CHUCK SODERBERG, DAVE HOLM AND MURRAY WILLIAMS



In the heart of the Midwest, Iowa is known for its sprawling fields, tight-knit communities and a spirit of collaboration that has long been a hallmark of its success. While often associated with agriculture and its iconic cornfields, the state boasts a different kind of growth story – one driven by cooperatives. Co-ops are more than businesses; they are pillars of empowerment, resilience and



sustainable development that are shaping Iowa's local economies.

Many Iowans associate cooperatives with agriculture; however, co-ops also include rural electric service, credit unions, rural telephone, farm credit, petroleum and more. Co-ops are not-for-profit organizations that are owned and democratically controlled by their members. In fact, nearly one out of every two Iowans is a member of a cooperative.

## Commitment to rural communities

As part of National Co-op Month, Gov. Kim Reynolds has declared October as Co-op Month in Iowa. During this month, cooperatives of all types and from all industries reaffirm their member-owned mission and commitment to the communities they serve.

In a state where rural communities hold a special significance, cooperatives play a pivotal role in

keeping these areas vibrant and alive. Rural cooperatives extend essential services such as energy, financial services, connectivity and healthcare to regions that might otherwise be overlooked.

Collectively, Iowa cooperatives pay more than \$75 million in property taxes to Iowa communities each year. Property taxes paid, especially in rural counties, have a big impact on county budgets and help support critical infrastructure. By pooling resources and sharing expertise, these cooperatives provide a safety net, effectively turning adversity into opportunity.

Iowa's rural electric cooperatives remain committed to powering lives and strengthening their communities. Locally elected co-op directors make informed decisions on behalf of their fellow members and neighbors to ensure reliable, affordable service for years to come. The average household served by an electric cooperative pays about \$5.25 a day for power, which is an incredible value in a world

increasingly reliant on electricity and connectivity. Locally owned and governed electric co-ops also embrace an "all-of-the-above" generation strategy as they face potential reliability challenges due to federal mandates.

## A better future for everyone

The cooperative movement in Iowa is a testament to the power of community-driven endeavors. It embodies the spirit of collaboration, the commitment to sustainability and the pursuit of shared prosperity. As co-ops continue to shape local economies and empower communities, they remind us that growth is about fostering a better future for everyone. It's a future that Iowa's cooperatives are helping to build, one collective effort at a time.

*Chuck Soderberg is the executive vice president/general manager of the Iowa Association of Electric Cooperatives; Dave Holm is the executive director of the Iowa Institute for Cooperatives; and Murray Williams is the president and CEO of the Iowa Credit Union League.*

## EDITOR'S CHOICE CONTEST

# WIN A \$100 GIFT CARD!

To celebrate National Cooperative Month, we're giving away a \$100 gift card to your choice of a hometown business. It will be good for a restaurant, hardware store, gift shop, grocery store, beauty salon or other local business that's vital to your community.

## Visit our website and win!

Enter this month's contest by visiting [www.ieclmagazine.com](http://www.ieclmagazine.com) no later than Oct. 31. 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 Amazon Fire 32-inch Smart TV from the August issue was Eugene VanMeeteren, Osceola Electric Cooperative, Inc.



ENTER ONLINE BY OCT. 31!

# RESULTS ARE IN FROM RECENT MEMBER-OWNER SATISFACTION INDEX SURVEY

BY TIM MARIENAU



Results are in from the American Consumer Satisfaction Index (ACSI) survey of Prairie Energy Cooperative (PECO) members, which was

conducted last spring.

ACSI is an independent survey used nationally by electric cooperatives, investor-owned utilities and private companies like Apple, Southwest Airlines and Lowe's.

As with most surveys, the results for our survey are a mixed bag. The feedback is useful in allowing us to know more about the thoughts of our member-owners.

## Here are some items of interest:

- PECO's overall ACSI score is 89 – the highest rating in 10 years.

- 94% of member-owners are satisfied with PECO overall.
- PECO received its highest ratings for electric service reliability (95%), quick power restoration times (95%) and for our friendly and courteous employees (95%).
- The lowest rating was in the perceptions of rates – reasonable rates (75%).

## These results speak for themselves

Member-owners expect lower electric rates in an environment where nearly all the costs associated with those rates are increasing. PECO shares this expectation. PECO has not raised electric rates since Nov. 2016. We are always conducting cost-of-service studies to evaluate our rate structures and cost coverage.

## Here are more survey results:

- 71% of member-owners have seen or heard our safety messages.

- 66% prefer keeping rates low using natural gas and other coal generation.
- 16% prefer using renewable energy resources, even if that may cost more.
- 5% plan to purchase an electric vehicle in 1-3 years.

The median age of PECO member-owners is 63. The median length of service is 28 years.

PECO continues to strive to safely provide reliable, affordable and responsible energy to our member-owners. ACSI surveys help us understand where our membership thinks our focus should be. If you were a part of this year's survey, thank you. Whether or not you participated, please do not hesitate to contact us with your questions and suggestions.

*Tim Marienau is the CEO of Prairie Energy Cooperative.*



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## ANNOUNCEMENT

# PRAIRIE ENERGY COOPERATIVE AMONG TOP 25 CO-OPS NATIONWIDE WITH ACSI SCORES FOR Q2 2023

Touchstone Energy® is pleased to recognize 25 member cooperatives that received the top five ACSI scores for energy utility services among all participating Touchstone Energy cooperatives in the second

quarter of 2023. The top five scores in that period ranged from 88 to 92, which compares favorably with electric cooperatives' annual average score of 74, as reported in the ACSI Energy Utilities Study 2022-2023.

**Prairie Energy Cooperative received a score of 89! Thank you, members!**



# ELECTRIC CO-OPS GROW FOR THE COMMUNITIES THEY SERVE

October is National Co-op Month, and Prairie Energy Cooperative (PECO) is joining cooperatives across the U.S. to celebrate. Co-ops come in all shapes and sizes, but they each have a common goal: to provide goods or services for the members of the co-op.

Electric co-ops exist to serve their members. Our priority is to provide affordable, reliable energy to our local communities. Because we are led by you, the members we serve, we can evolve to meet your needs.

As we celebrate National Co-op Month this October, we're focusing on the ways "Co-ops Grow" for their members.

## Co-ops grow communities

Co-ops help communities grow by promoting economic empowerment, fostering community engagement and supporting the unique needs of co-op members. "Concern for Community" is one of our core principles and being community-focused is essential to everything we do.

## Co-ops grow together

Co-ops are all about cooperation, not competition. That's why electric co-ops work together to share lessons learned, successful strategies and better ways to serve our members. We're better when we grow together!

## Co-ops grow tomorrow's leaders

Electric co-ops serve as fertile ground for growing tomorrow's leaders through a variety of youth engagement programs. Whether through school demonstrations, scholarships, community events or the electric cooperative Youth Tour program, we're committed to providing opportunities for local youth to learn and thrive in our community and beyond.

## Co-ops grow for you

At PECO, your satisfaction is our number one goal. It's why we were formed many years ago to fulfill a uniquely local purpose. We've come a long way since then, and your needs continue to evolve. That's why we'll never stop growing for you!




## Energy Efficiency Tip of the Month

Did you know using your dishwasher is more energy efficient than washing a load of dishes by hand? To maximize efficiency, wash full loads in the dishwasher and don't block the arms or other parts that move while the appliance is in use.

For additional savings, turn on the "air dry" setting instead of using the "heat dry" setting and use a rinse aid to help dishes dry faster without spotting and streaking.

Source:  
Dept. of Energy





# IOWA STUDENT PLACES IN NATIONAL CONTEST

## FOR CREATING ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE HISTORY WEBSITE

BY ANNE GARDINER

From the 50 states. From international affiliates, including South Korea, China, American Samoa, Singapore and Guam. More than 2,600 students. 1,500 projects completed. 54 medals. One Nashua student – Caleb Sinnwell.

In July 2022, Sinnwell, a then-sophomore at Nashua-Plainfield High School, began researching

the background of rural electric cooperatives. He dove into the short- and long-term impacts of their creation to develop a website for the National History Day National Contest.

He spent months researching, conducting interviews and developing the website, titled:

“With the Flip of a Switch on the Rural Frontier: REA Lights the Way.”

Along with meeting numerous deadlines, his first National History Day contest hurdle was districts in Cedar Falls. After taking first place, he moved onto the state contest in Des Moines, where he again took first place.



### Lifelong interest in electricity

Sinnwell, who has attended Butler County REC meetings since he was a child, has always found electricity and the formation of cooperatives interesting.

"This was my opportunity to learn so much more about how my family receives electricity and why it is so very important to all of us, even though most times it is taken for granted," he explains. "This was such an interesting event in history that I wanted to share it with everyone."

Growing up, Sinnwell heard stories from his grandparents about his great-grandparents and the number of challenges they faced living and working on the farm with no electricity.

"I also thought it was interesting that electricity existed but for the more heavily populated areas, and farmers were being left in the dark," Sinnwell says.

**"Rural electric cooperatives brought electricity to rural America. The progression of that is probably one of the largest modern marvels that has ever happened to the United States."**

**- Craig Codner, Butler County REC CEO, during an interview with Sinnwell on Feb. 16, 2023**

### Learning from the experts

Included on his website are interviews with Craig Codner, CEO of Butler County REC; Duane Rieckenberg, board president of Butler County REC; and Carl Heyenga, retired operations manager of Butler County REC. Heyenga set poles with the first Butler County REC crews who brought power to east-central rural Iowa.

"Interviewing Craig, Duane and Carl was fascinating. It opened my eyes to the hard work Carl faced digging holes and getting electricity to the farmers who wanted it desperately," Sinnwell says.

How the REC board of directors, elected by the co-op membership,



functions is something that Sinnwell already understood. But throughout his research and interviews, he learned more about rural electric cooperatives as innovators.

"They are always doing their best to support the local communities and rural vitality," he shares.

### Appreciation all around

Butler County REC is proud of Sinnwell and his dedication to telling the rural electric cooperative story. He earned a bronze medal at the National History Day National Contest at the Xfinity Center at the University of Maryland in June for his website. This is the third year in a row that Sinnwell has taken home a medal from the contest.

"RECs do so much more for us in ways I never even thought, and I

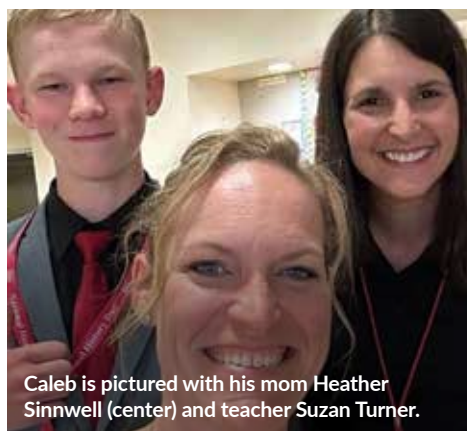
am so proud that Butler County REC is where my family receives its electricity because I know they truly care about us and our future," he says.

Sinnwell is a high school junior this year. He is the son of co-op members Josh and Heather Sinnwell, who live in Nashua. You can view his website at [bit.ly/3qYnjAq](http://bit.ly/3qYnjAq).

*Anne Gardiner is the public relations specialist for Butler County REC.*

**"It was a never-ending delight to see how happy and excited people were when they first turned on a switch and saw their own electric light."**

**- Ernest Neal, Iowa farmer and co-op organizer in 1934, quoted in Butler County REC's Aug. 2011 newsletter**



Caleb is pictured with his mom Heather Sinnwell (center) and teacher Suzan Turner.



Caleb's three National History Day National Contest medals.





# PERFECT PORK RECIPES

## BBQ PORK CHOPS

- 1 can tomato soup
- 2 tablespoons brown sugar
- 2 tablespoons vinegar
- 2 teaspoons Worcestershire sauce
- 1 teaspoon instant minced onion
- ½ teaspoon Italian seasoning
- ½ teaspoon dry mustard
- 6 pork chops

Combine first seven ingredients into a sauce. Brown chops on both sides, pour off excess fat. Pour sauce over chops. Cover and simmer for about 1 hour. Serves 6

Jane Fetter • Chelsea  
T.I.P. Rural Electric Cooperative

## BREAKFAST SOUFFLÉ

- 1½ pounds pork sausage
- 9 eggs, slightly beaten
- 3 cups milk
- 1½ teaspoons dry mustard
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 3 slices bread, crumbled
- 1½ cups cheese, shredded

Brown sausage and drain. Mix eggs, milk, mustard and salt. Stir in sausage, bread and cheese. Pour into a greased 9x13-inch pan. Refrigerate covered overnight. Bake uncovered at 350 degrees F for 1 hour. Serves 8

Rebecca Hancox • Plano  
Chariton Valley Electric Cooperative, Inc.

## COUNTRY-STYLE RIBS

- 2½ pounds country-style pork ribs
- ½ cup white vinegar
- 1 cup ketchup
- ¼ cup Karo white corn syrup
- ½ cup brown sugar
- 1 teaspoon mustard
- salt and pepper to taste

Brown ribs in microwave for 1½-2 minutes on each side, depending on the size of your microwave, to pull off some of the grease before baking. Place ribs in a greased 9x13-inch baking dish. Mix remaining ingredients into a sauce and pour over ribs. Bake covered at 325 degrees F for 1½ hours. Serves 4

Audra O'Neill • Wall Lake  
Raccoon Valley Electric Cooperative

## GROUND PORK CASSEROLE

- 1 pound ground pork
- 1 pound cabbage, shredded
- 2 carrots, shredded
- 5 cloves garlic
- ½ cup soy sauce
- 1 teaspoon ginger
- 2 tablespoons sesame oil
- noodles or rice

Brown pork, then add cabbage. Add remaining ingredients and cook for 5 minutes. Serve over noodles or rice.

Karen Wingert • Panama  
Harrison County Rural Electric Cooperative



## PORK TACOS WITH PINEAPPLE SALSA

- 4-5 pounds boneless pork loin
- 3 tablespoons brown sugar
- 1 tablespoon salt
- 1 tablespoon pepper
- 1 teaspoon paprika
- 1 teaspoon oregano
- ½ teaspoon red pepper flakes
- 1 can (20 ounces) pineapple tidbits
- ½ jalapeno pepper, chopped
- juice of half a lime
- ½ red onion, chopped
- ¼ cup cilantro
- 2 cups rice, cooked
- tortillas
- sour cream

Rub brown sugar, salt, pepper, paprika, oregano and red pepper flakes over pork loin. Bake covered at 250 degrees F for 4 hours. Shred meat. Combine pineapple, jalapeno, juice of half a lime, onion and cilantro to make a salsa. Serve pork, rice and salsa in tortillas with sour cream.

**Lauren Zollinger • Rock Rapids  
Lyon Rural Electric Cooperative**

## HAM ROLLS

- 2½ pounds ground ham
- 2½ pounds ground pork
- 1 pound ground beef
- 2 cups cracker crumbs
- 3 eggs
- 2 cups milk
- 2 teaspoons dry mustard
- 2 cans tomato soup, undiluted
- 2¼ cups brown sugar
- ¾ cup cider vinegar

Combine ham, pork, beef, cracker crumbs, eggs and milk. Mix and form into rolls or balls. Combine dry mustard, soup, brown sugar and cider vinegar into a sauce. Spoon sauce over ham rolls and bake at 350 degrees F for 1 hour. Rolls can be frozen either before or after baking. An alternative is to make into smaller rolls or balls and serve as an appetizer. Serves 10-15

**Jo Growth • Plainfield  
Butler County Rural Electric Cooperative**

## SLOW COOKER HAM SLIDERS

- 2 boneless hams, thinly sliced
- 1 cup honey
- 2 cups brown sugar
- cheese slices
- 2 dozen slider buns

Set crockpot on low, spray with nonstick spray. Add ham, honey and brown sugar. Cook for 4 hours, stirring occasionally. Layer ham and cheese slices of your choice on slider buns. Serves 10

**Nancy Hemann • Parkersburg  
Grundy County Rural Electric Cooperative**

## PORK CARNITAS

- 1½ tablespoons salt, divided
- 1 teaspoon black pepper
- 2 pounds pork butt, cut into 4-inch cubes
- 2 tablespoons cooking fat
- ½ medium onion, roughly chopped
- 1 cup water
- 3 cloves garlic, minced
- ½ teaspoon chili powder
- ¼ teaspoon ground cinnamon
- ¼ cup green onions, sliced into ½-inch pieces
- juice of half a lime

Mix 1 tablespoon salt with pepper. Use mixture to season the pork butt evenly. Melt the cooking fat in a heavy pot or Dutch oven over medium heat, add the pork (be sure not to overcrowd) and brown all sides, 3-4 minutes per side. Remove pork from the pot and set aside. In the same pot, reduce heat to medium-low, add onion. Cook and stir for 4-5 minutes, until translucent. Add water, garlic, chili powder and cinnamon. Increase heat to medium-high, return the pork to the pot and bring to boil. Cover pot with a lid or tightly wrapped foil. Transfer to oven and bake at 350 degrees F for 2½ hours, turning the meat after each hour. Pork should be fork-tender when done. Transfer pork to a bowl and shred, discarding any excess fat. Incorporate cooking liquid from the pot, then add green onions and lime juice. Season with the remaining ½ tablespoon salt. Serves 4-6

**Amy Rudolph • Renwick  
Boone Valley Electric Cooperative**

### WANTED:

## SOUP & STEW RECIPES

### THE REWARD:

**\$25 FOR EVERY ONE WE PUBLISH!**

### Deadline is Oct. 31

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](mailto:recipes@ieclmagazine.com)

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

### MAIL: Recipes

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Des Moines, IA 50322-2992

# 6 REASONS ELECTRIC CO-OPS ARE GREAT PLACES TO WORK

BY PAUL WESSLUND AND ANN FOSTER THELEN

The electricity in your home can seem like an impossible miracle to explain. But one way to understand it is to think about the variety of skills and types of jobs it takes to make power happen.

That kind of thinking can also be handy if you or someone you know is looking for a promising career.

Running electric utilities today takes just about every skill imaginable. Some jobs call for the physical ability to climb a utility pole and for others, the technical know-how to create intricate

cybersecurity systems. Some require the interpersonal skills of talking with a co-op member about how they can lower their electric bill.

Other roles may require logistical knowledge to deliver essential equipment through a challenging supply chain.

An industry that depends on such a vast range of abilities offers job seekers a variety of career opportunities. Here are six reasons electric co-ops are a great place to work.



*"I appreciate the co-op philosophy that focuses on the seven cooperative principles, keeping members first and foremost in all decision-making. These principles guide us in everything we do, and it reflects on the success of the electric cooperative business model since 1938. I am part of a community working here and can reach out to any other electric cooperative in Iowa with any questions. 'Iowa Nice' shines brightly working in electric cooperatives."*

**Jeni Kolsrud**

IT Manager  
Allamakee-Clayton Electric Cooperative

**1 Stability.** You can count on homes and businesses needing electricity now and in the future. Energy careers offer excellent benefits and paths for career advancement. Employees typically stay in the industry for more than 15 years.

**2 Excitement.** While utility work is reliable, it's also at the cutting edge of innovation. Electrification is the centerpiece of the push for greener energy. The number of electric vehicles is doubling every year, which means new workforce skills are needed to figure out how to keep all those cars and trucks plugged in and charged up. Two of the 20 fastest-growing occupations are wind turbine technician and solar voltaic installer. More than \$120 billion a year is being spent to modernize the U.S. electric grid to manage new patterns of electricity use.



*"I've worked for the cooperative for 20 years. In this time, I have witnessed electricity become increasingly important to our daily lives, from improving basic health and well-being to facilitating services like online banking to ordering groceries. Cooperatives are dedicated to their member-consumers. We are always working to improve the reliability of our distribution system and serve our members."*

**Jason Gibbs**

Manager of Member Services  
Clarke Electric Cooperative





*"The past 10 years working at the cooperative have been the most enjoyable of my working career. The opportunities to increase my knowledge and skills are invaluable. The atmosphere is like a family. Networking with my peers at other cooperatives has proven to be extremely helpful. Supporting our member-owners instead of working for 'customers' has been refreshing, and the cooperative principles, including concern for our communities, make us stand out."*

**Sarah Newton**

Director of Finance/  
Administrative Services  
Southwest Iowa REC

**3 Variety.** The skills needed in the utility industry range from an advanced college degree to trade school, apprenticeship and on-the-job training. And the variety of positions is staggering – accountants, social media managers, IT specialists, engineers and human resources professionals, to name a few. There are more unique positions as well, such as drone operators to inspect power lines, data analysts to coordinate the flow of electricity and power plant operators to oversee electricity generation.

**4 It's local.** Maintaining electric service needs to happen locally. That means that much of the work takes place near your hometown. Not only can a utility worker make a living and raise a family in the area they choose to live, if they decide to move to another part of the country, there will likely be energy career opportunities there as well.

**5 Satisfaction.** Any lineworker will tell you when they've just climbed down from a pole in the middle of the night during a rainstorm, there's no better feeling than knowing the power outage you've just restored brought light and heat back into the homes of hundreds of people. The same goes for the utility truck dispatcher back at headquarters or the media specialist getting the word out about the status of power restoration. Utility workers can know they're powering their neighbors and the nation.



*"I enjoy the variety of each day. I have satisfaction in helping members daily and with long-term planning for our cooperative. Co-op employees are usually long-standing, which means I can have long-term relationships with my co-workers."*

**John Endelman**

Operations Manager  
Butler County REC

**6 Not-for-profit business model**  
The people behind the power at your electric co-op get to know even higher levels of job satisfaction. Electric co-ops offer a unique business model led by the members who use the electricity.

*Paul Wesslund writes on consumer and cooperative affairs for the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association, the national trade association representing more than 900 local electric cooperatives. Ann Foster Thelen is the editor of Iowa Electric Cooperative Living.*



*"One of the reasons I like working for a co-op is the opportunity to work with a dedicated team with a common goal of improving our members' lives. It is also rewarding to see the positive results from the improvements we have made to our distribution system over the years."*

**Pat Hyland**

System Controller  
East-Central Iowa REC



*"The best part of working in the cooperative world is being a part of a great team. Every job at my co-op is specialized, and every employee is committed to serving our members to the best of their ability. It's extremely satisfying to be a part of a dedicated and talented group of people who positively impact our local communities."*

**Nate Hopwood**

IT Manager  
T.I.P. REC



*"I am honored to be able to work for an electric cooperative that serves the community in which I live. I love that decisions are made locally by a board of member-directors and that we are able to provide our members with safe and reliable power at the lowest possible price."*

**Katie Stadheim, PHR, SRM-CP**

HR Director  
East-Central Iowa REC

# PLAYING IT SAFE ONLINE

BY BILL HICOK



In today's world, most of us don't leave the front door unlocked. We protect our homes, loved ones and valuables from intruders with locks, alarms and

other security measures. Cybersecurity is no different. It's the practice of protecting other valuables, such as your identify, banking and health records and other sensitive information, from digital attacks and theft.

In addition to pumpkin-spice lattes, crisper air and Halloween festivities, October is the time of year we recognize Cybersecurity Awareness Month. While taking necessary steps to protect our personal information is a year-round practice at Prairie Energy Cooperative (PECO), we use this time to share helpful cybersecurity reminders across our team of employees.

Given our increased reliance on internet-connected devices and gadgets, I'd like to share a few cybersecurity tips and let you know how your cooperative is working to boost our own cybersecurity efforts.

## For online safety tips

According to the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Agency, an agency of the United States Department of Homeland Security that is responsible for strengthening cybersecurity and infrastructure protection, these are the four best ways to keep you and your family safe online.

**1 Implement multi-factor authentication (also known as two-step verification) on your accounts.** The additional layer of protection makes it much harder for criminals to access your information. Even if a hacker obtains your password, they may be unable to access your accounts if multi-step verification is enabled.

**2 Update your software. This is one of the easiest ways to protect your personal data.** When downloading a software update, make sure it's coming straight from the company that created it. Beware of fake pop-ups that request urgent downloads. Better yet, turn on automatic updates.

**3 Think before you click. Most successful cyber attacks start with a phishing email.** Don't take the bait when cyber criminals go phishing. Avoid emails or texts that look too good to be true, oddly urgent, poorly crafted or include unusual requests.

**4 Create strong passwords, using long, unique and complex words or phrases.** Consider using a password manager to save time, work across all devices, protect your identity and notify you of potential phishing websites.

## For the children or teens in your household

Just as you would talk with your children about safety in the physical world, discuss ways to stay safe online. Help them understand the public nature of the internet. Young people need to know early on that what is shared online stays online and is difficult (if not impossible) to take back.

Just as you would guard your money or valuables, children need to learn to guard their personal information, especially on social networks. As a parent or guardian, help your children use the privacy and security settings on social networks and gaming sites.

## Keeping the electric grid and your data secure

We're doing our share on the cyber front. Part of offering excellent service is keeping that service secure and reliable. For PECO, reliability means repairing wear-and-tear, upgrading our equipment to withstand storms and severe weather, and using technology and best practices to keep our system secure from cybersecurity issues.

We also work together with co-ops across the country to develop new technologies and infrastructure, learn from each other and keep the grid's network secure.

While we can't stop a storm or predict every disruption, as a co-op, we do everything we can to keep the lights on and our members protected. Because if we all do our part, our interconnected world will be safer and more secure for everyone.

*Bill Hicok is the IT manager for Prairie Energy Cooperative.*





# SMART BREAKER BOXES

BY JENNAH DENNEY

Every home has an electrical panel, otherwise known as a breaker box. The design hasn't changed much over the years, but through recent innovation, the smart technology-enabled electrical panel is becoming a worthwhile energy efficiency upgrade. Many consumers are upgrading to smart breaker boxes to make their home electrical systems safer and more reliable.

Smart breaker boxes can operate on their own or in conjunction with a standard electrical panel. It's recommended to hire a qualified electrician to install the smart panel, which can be done using a home's existing electrical wiring and infrastructure.

## Integrated functionality and real-time updates

Many smart breaker boxes are designed to easily connect to other smart devices in your home. With the capacity to remotely monitor and adjust energy consumption, these devices provide several advantages that make them a worthwhile investment for anyone looking to consume less energy.

One advantage is convenience for homeowners to monitor and control how much energy they use. With smart circuit breakers, you can receive real-time data that allows you to pinpoint appliances or devices that consume excessive energy. This

real-time tracking allows consumers to adjust their energy use where needed, which ultimately saves money on monthly energy bills, reduces energy waste and is good for the electric grid.

## Load management at your fingertips

Smart breaker boxes are all about managing your electrical load. While the technology to track how much energy a home uses has been available for years, the ability to control how that energy is used is new. A smart breaker box can reveal how much power each circuit is using and turn each one on or off. Some smart breaker boxes allow you to establish schedules based on importance, such as refrigeration and heat to be on 24/7, but less important loads like Wi-Fi or the television to turn off during scheduled times or when no one is home.

Smart breaker boxes offer additional benefits for those with home solar systems. Smart breaker boxes help solar energy systems run more efficiently by determining how much energy is being used and how it can be stored. Through intelligent load management, they can provide longer battery backup life for those with energy storage. Additionally, integration with other smart home devices, like thermostats and virtual assistants, further enhances the connected-home ecosystem.

## Safety enhancements

Safety in electrical devices is highly important to consumers, and smart breaker boxes provide enhanced safety features that consumers appreciate. Smart breaker boxes can identify abnormalities and other potential electrical problems, then quickly shut off power supply if a circuit shorts or becomes overloaded to help avoid electrical fires and other dangers. Many smart breaker boxes include surge protection to help protect against power spikes and other issues.

## Applications for electric utilities

Smart breaker boxes aren't just for consumers – electric utilities are using them, too. For electric cooperatives, smart breaker boxes also offer a range of benefits. A primary advantage of these devices is that they allow for more efficient and reliable energy distribution. With the ability to remotely monitor energy use and detect faults within the system, electric cooperatives can quickly respond to issues and minimize outage times for consumers. This ultimately manages the grid more efficiently.

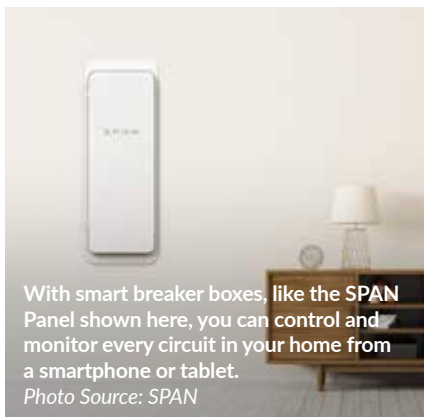


Smart breaker boxes, like the hardware-agnostic Lumin Smart Panel shown here, turn standard panels into smart panels by providing comprehensive energy control and extending whole-home backup.

Photo Source: Lumin

There's no denying that smart home technologies have changed how we use our homes, and smart breaker boxes are no exception. Smart breaker boxes help both consumers and electric utilities in multiple ways. With advanced safety features, real-time energy tracking and control, and the ability to use energy more efficiently, these devices are a smart investment for anyone who wants to make their home's system more reliable, safer and cost effective.

*Jennah Denney writes on consumer and cooperative affairs for the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association, the national trade association representing more than 900 local electric cooperatives.*



With smart breaker boxes, like the SPAN Panel shown here, you can control and monitor every circuit in your home from a smartphone or tablet.

Photo Source: SPAN

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## DETAILS RELEASED FOR IOWA HOME ENERGY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM



The 2023-2024 Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) has been established to help qualifying low-income Iowa homeowners and renters pay for a portion of their primary heating costs for the winter heating season. The assistance is based on household income, household size, type of fuel and type of housing.

Besides meeting the income guidelines, you must furnish the Social Security numbers of all household members and a copy of recent heating and electric bills. You also must show proof of income for all household members age 18 and older. If you receive alimony or child support, it will need to be verified too.

If you're a wage earner, you should bring copies of your check stubs for the 30-day period before the date of application or a copy of your federal income tax return. If you're self-employed or a farmer, provide a copy of your most recent federal income tax return. And if you're on a fixed income – Social Security Benefits, Supplemental Security Income, Family Investment Program (FIP), Veteran's Assistance, Unemployment Insurance and pensions – take copies of check stubs from the last 30 days. For FIP recipients, bring your current DHS

Notice of Decision or contact your local office for acceptable document information.

In Iowa, applications for the program will be accepted on a first-come, first-served basis from Nov. 1, 2023, through April 30, 2024. The start date is Oct. 1, 2023, for elderly (60 and over) and/or disabled applicants. If you're not sure where to apply, visit [humanrights.iowa.gov/dcaa/where-apply](https://humanrights.iowa.gov/dcaa/where-apply). To contact your local community action agency, call 211 or write: LIHEAP, Iowa Department of Human Rights, Capitol Complex, Des Moines, IA 50319.

### Income Maximums

Household Size	Annual Gross Income
1	\$29,160
2	\$39,440
3	\$49,720
4	\$60,000
5	\$70,280
6	\$80,560
7	\$90,840
8	\$101,120

**Note:** For households with more than eight members, add \$10,280 for each additional member.



# PRESERVING IOWA'S AWARD-WINNING CULINARY HISTORY

BY DARCY DOUGHERTY MAULSBY

I never know what to expect when I check my email. If you're like me, sometimes the inbox contains a reply (yeah!) from someone I'm trying to contact. There's also plenty of junk mail, but sometimes there's something interesting – and unexpected – like this:

**Subject: 4-H Project**

**Date: May 30, 2023**

Hello Ms. Darcy Dougherty Maulsby,

My name is Kathleen Mosher. I am a freshman in high school and a member of the ENP Bearcats 4-H club in Hardin County, Iowa. This year, I read your book, "A Culinary History of Iowa." After reading your book, I decided to cook my way through all of the recipes listed in the book and keep a journal of my progress as a 4-H project.

I am writing to ask if I have permission to display your book and use the recipes contained in the book for the 4-H project I described above? The book and project would be on display at our county fair in July at the Hardin County Fairgrounds.

Within minutes, I replied to Kathleen. "I think your 4-H project sounds terrific (what a creative idea!). You are certainly welcome to display my book and use the recipes for your 4-H project."

## Hands-on experience builds confidence

This correspondence got me thinking about my own experiences as a member of the Lake Creek Go-Getters 4-H club, when I entered a variety of foods in the Calhoun County Expo each summer. These experiences expanded my culinary skills, but they also built my confidence.

So did a college internship at Living History Farms during the summer of 1995. Clad in calico skirts, buttoned-up blouses and aprons sewn on a treadle sewing machine, I learned to milk cows by hand, transform homegrown vegetables into delicious side dishes, and bake bread and cookies in a wood-fired cookstove at the 1900 farm.

About halfway through that summer internship, my supervisor announced she was leaving for an appointment that morning and was putting me in charge of cooking the day's dinner for about eight staff members and volunteers at the 1900 farm. I panicked. "You'll be fine!" she shouted as the squeaky screen door clattered behind her.

During the next three hours, I discovered she was right. I got the meal cooked on time, and the hungry farmhands appreciated the food. My fear of "I can't" transformed into "I can." That's an attitude I've embraced far beyond the kitchen.

## Cooking transcends time

Something unexpected also happened along the way. As I prepared the pot



Kathleen Mosher is pictured with her award-winning project.

roast, fresh lettuce salad, creamed peas, bread (with butter I had churned) and cake in that hot kitchen, I felt a connection with my Grandma Fern, who grew up on a farm in Webster County, and my Grandma Katherine, who grew up in West Point, Nebraska, in the early 1900s.

That's the amazing thing about cooking – it transcends time and brings people of all ages closer, especially when meals include treasured family recipes. But what happens when the cooks who knew these recipes (from kringla to kolaches) are gone?

That's a big part of why I wrote "A Culinary History of Iowa." I'm thrilled that Kathleen's 4-H project based on my book took top honors at the 2023 Hardin County Fair, plus it received a blue ribbon at the Iowa State Fair, along with the Outstanding Food and Nutrition Award.

Well done, Kathleen! If your efforts are any indication, young Iowans will help carry on our state's culinary traditions for years to come.

Darcy Dougherty Maulsby lives near her family's Century Farm northwest of Lake City. Visit her at [www.darcymaulsby.com](http://www.darcymaulsby.com).





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