

● MAY 2024

iowa

ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE LIVING

SPECIAL INSERT:

**Prairie Energy
Cooperative 2023
Annual Report**

See the financial standing of your cooperative ► See Page 6A

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Electric Cooperatives**
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ON THE COVER

Special thanks to Andrea Carlson, a Consumers Energy member-consumer, for supplying this month's cover image. Submit high-resolution photos for consideration to editor@ieclmagazine.com. You could receive \$100!

RECOGNIZE A DESERVING VOLUNTEER IN JUNE

BY ERIN CAMPBELL



Often, the best way to thank a volunteer is to simply say “thank you” and recognize the work they are doing in the community.

Our annual Shine the Light contest, which will open in June, offers a great opportunity to show appreciation for a deserving member of your community by nominating them for statewide recognition.

Commitment to community

Now in its fourth year, this statewide contest is a way for Iowa’s electric cooperatives to “shine the light” on our commitment to community. During June, we invite member-consumers and employees of Iowa’s electric cooperative to visit www.iowaShineTheLight.com and nominate local volunteers who are making a positive difference. If you receive electricity from an electric cooperative, you’re a co-op member-consumer and eligible to make one nomination per account/household.

Winners receive \$3,000 for their local charity

In July, a panel of judges will review all the nominations and select three volunteers who will each receive a \$3,000 donation to their local charity. We will also announce our three winners on social media in early September and feature them in the September issue of this magazine.

As part of the nomination process, be prepared to share some basic contact information about you as the nominator and for the volunteer you are nominating. You may nominate a volunteer under the age of 18 with parental consent. You will also need to answer this question in 500 words or less: **How has your nominee made a difference in the community, and how might their local charity use the \$3,000 donation?**



As the person who sees the nominations come in as they are submitted through the contest website, it’s a privilege to read your essays each year. We have many incredible volunteers throughout the state who are improving the quality of life in their communities.

You can view the contest rules and see our past winners at www.iowaShineTheLight.com. Thank you for considering the opportunity to recognize a

hardworking friend, neighbor or relative in your life.

Iowa’s electric cooperatives are grateful to local volunteers across the state who deserve to be celebrated for the remarkable work they are doing in their communities. We look forward to learning about many of them through this year’s Shine the Light contest!

Erin Campbell is the director of communications for the Iowa Association of Electric Cooperatives.

EDITOR'S CHOICE CONTEST

WIN \$100 IN BEEF CERTIFICATES!

May is Beef Month in Iowa! To celebrate, we’re giving away \$100 in beef certificates to use at a grocery store. You can select your favorite cuts to purchase, and then make mouthwatering meals at home.

Visit our website and win!

Enter this month’s contest by visiting www.ieclmagazine.com no later than May 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 BISSELL® Carpet Cleaner from the March issue was Jason Collison, a Farmers Electric Cooperative, Inc. member-consumer.



ENTER ONLINE BY MAY 31!

IOWA ELECTRIC CO-OPS RECEIVE USDA REDLG LOANS

In March, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) announced \$4,780,000 in five grants and \$23,829,320 in eight loans to projects in Iowa that promote rural small businesses, support higher education, and improve drinking water and sanitation infrastructure.

Two Iowa electric cooperatives were announced as Rural Economic Development Loan and Grant (REDLG) recipients.

The REDLG program provides zero-interest loans to local utility organizations, which in turn pass the funding through to local businesses.

Butler County Rural Electric Cooperative received a \$1,372,320 loan to fund a pass-through loan to Bovy RX LLC, doing business as Parkersburg Pharmacy. This project will assist with the acquisition and renovation of a pharmacy in Parkersburg. This project is expected to create six new jobs,

retain four jobs and promote economic development in the rural Butler County community.

North West Rural Electric Cooperative received a \$1,000,000 loan to help fund a pass-through loan to Northwestern College to build a residence hall on the Orange City campus. The project is expected to promote economic development in this rural Sioux County community and create four jobs.



North West Rural Electric Cooperative received a \$1,000,000 loan to help fund a pass-through loan to Northwestern College to build a residence hall on the Orange City campus. Photo Source: Northwestern College

SIGN UP FOR EMERGENCY NOTIFICATIONS IN YOUR COUNTY

It's the season for severe weather. To make sure you stay weather aware, it's a great idea to sign up to receive important weather and emergency notifications in your area. One service to consider is Alert Iowa, which is the State of Iowa's official emergency notification system.

Through Alert Iowa, state and local officials use a single, statewide notification system that provides local control of how and when to disseminate emergency and public safety messages to residents.

There are three ways to sign up for county alerts:

- 1 Create a profile through your county's website opt-in page
- 2 Download the Smart911 app and create a customized profile
- 3 Send a text message to opt-in

Scan this QR code to learn if your county is participating and sign up to receive free alerts via text message, email and/or voice message.



BLOMME WINS MAGAZINE CONTEST FOR YOUTH TOUR



This year, *Iowa Electric Cooperative Living* magazine once again sponsored a Youth Tour essay contest. Of the entries received by March 25, one winner was chosen to join the Iowa Youth Tour group when they travel to Washington, D.C., in June.

To enter the contest, eligible participants were asked to tell us about an issue that impacts the quality of life in their community (in 250 words or less).

The contest was open to high school sophomores, juniors and seniors whose families are served by Iowa's electric cooperatives. Students who attended all three of our 2023 Iowa Youth Leadership Academy sessions in October were also eligible to enter.

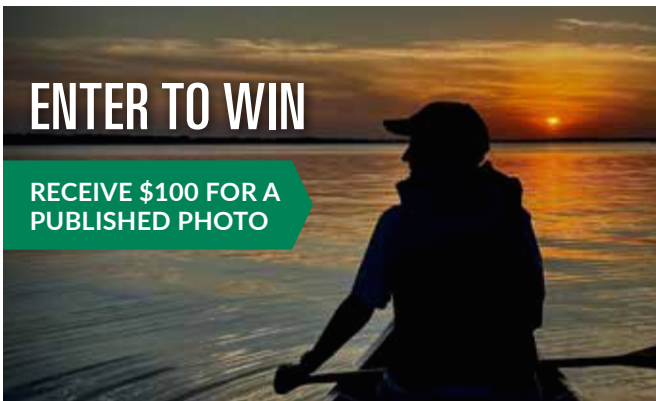
We are pleased to announce that Delaney Blomme has won this year's essay contest. Her parents are members of Farmers Electric Cooperative, Inc. (Greenfield), and she is a junior at Nodaway Valley

High School in Greenfield. Blomme is involved in school activities, including the National Honor Society, student council, FFA and the golf team. After high school, she plans to attend college to pursue a degree in graphic design and a minor in marketing.

Blomme's essay focused on teacher shortages in her community and the potential long-term impacts. She is looking forward to meeting new people on the Youth Tour trip and visiting the Holocaust Museum.

ENTER TO WIN

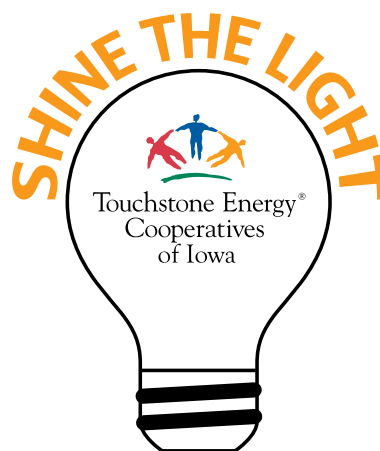
RECEIVE \$100 FOR A PUBLISHED PHOTO



SEND US YOUR RURAL IOWA PHOTOS

We're always looking for stunning images for the cover of *Iowa Electric Cooperative Living* magazine. If we select your photo for a cover, we'll award you \$100. The photos must be clear, of an Iowa place served by an electric cooperative and in high resolution. To be considered, email photos to editor@ieclmagazine.com with "Cover Submission" in the subject line.

NEW: Please also include the name of the electric cooperative that serves you.



**Nominate a local volunteer
and they could win
\$3,000 for their charity!**

Contest entries accepted during June at
IowaShineTheLight.com

Learn more on Page 3 of this issue.

Some homeowners are taking a closer look at the latest battery-powered systems for backup power when the lights go out. *Photo Source: Tesla, Inc.*



BACKUP POWER: IS A BATTERY-POWERED OPTION RIGHT FOR MY HOME?

BY SCOTT FLOOD

We depend on reliable electricity more than ever before, which is why service interruptions from storms or other situations can be frustrating. Some homeowners are taking a closer look at the latest battery-powered systems as backups during an outage.

Battery technology has advanced significantly in recent years, with batteries able to hold more electricity even as they shrink in size and cost. The same innovations that boosted the performance of electric vehicles (EVs) are being engineered into today's battery-powered backup systems.

How battery backup systems work

As their name implies, battery backup systems like Tesla's Powerwall are essentially high-capacity batteries that store a set amount of electricity, which you can then use to power your home in the event of an outage. Some are constantly charged by the power grid, while others rely on solar panels for recharging.

Traditional standby generators use small internal combustion engines fueled by natural gas, propane or diesel. They can be connected to your home's electrical panel and kick on automatically whenever the flow of

electricity stops. Assuming you keep them refueled, most can operate for days at a time. However, some standby generators can be noisy, and nearly all produce smelly exhaust containing deadly carbon monoxide gas, so they can't be operated indoors. Large standby generators are typically installed outdoors on a concrete pad, which may detract from your home's curb appeal.

Most home battery backups are smaller than comparable generators. Because they don't use combustion to generate electricity, there's no danger of carbon monoxide exposure.



Portable battery-powered backups can be used indoors to power smaller appliances, like your laptop, TV or microwave. *Photo Source: Goal Zero*



As their name implies, battery backup systems like Tesla's Powerwall are essentially high-capacity batteries that store a set amount of electricity, which you can then use to power your home in the event of an outage. *Photo Source: Tesla, Inc.*



Some battery-powered systems are constantly charged by the power grid, while others rely on solar panels for recharging. *Photo Source: LG*

That makes them safer and more environmentally friendly than generators. Most can be installed in a small space indoors. Battery backups are also significantly quieter.

During a power outage, battery backups start instantaneously, unlike generators that may take a few moments to spool up and reach operating speed. Battery backups also don't need regular maintenance like oil changes or spark plug replacement, and there's no need to store fuel.

Pros and cons

Of course, battery-powered generators do present some disadvantages. The amount of power they deliver is limited by the capacity of their batteries. When they're out of electricity, they may need hours of recharging before being used again, so they're not as well-suited for lengthy outages. Energy-hungry appliances, such as air conditioners and water heaters, may drain the batteries' capacity more quickly, so you may have to disconnect them during an outage.

Fortunately, some battery backups are modular, allowing you to add capacity as needed. If you only need a few devices powered during an outage, consider a portable battery-powered system. These small, quiet backups can be used indoors to power smaller appliances, like your laptop, TV or microwave.

Generally, batteries require long charging times, so if an initial outage is quickly followed by another, they may not be able to respond. There are fast-charging systems on the market,

but they carry substantially higher price tags. In fact, the upfront cost of a battery backup is more than a standby generator – in some cases, twice as much for comparable performance.

Like the one in your mobile phone, batteries in these systems can degrade over time. In five or 10 years, they may need to be swapped out with new batteries, adding to the overall cost. Being able to recharge battery backups with solar panels appeals to many homeowners, but the performance will depend upon the amount and angle of sunlight falling upon your roof.

Considerations before purchasing

So, is a battery-powered backup system right for your home?

The answer is different for every homeowner, but whether you're considering a battery system or a traditional standby generator, start by calculating the amount of

power you need to keep your home's systems and conveniences operating efficiently. Once you know that, you can determine which models are up to the task and calculate how long the device you're considering can power your home. (If you have a family member whose health depends upon devices, such as a CPAP machine or supplemental oxygen, be sure to factor that into your decision.)

Finally, whether you choose a battery backup or a traditional standby generator, make sure it's designed to protect your home and all your electronics from power surges and other issues that may damage your TVs, computers and other sensitive electronics. That way, you won't have to worry about remaining without them long after an outage has ended.

Scott Flood writes for the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association, the national trade association representing nearly 900 electric co-ops.

WHAT ABOUT USING YOUR EV?

The growing acceptance of EVs offers another emergency power option. EVs are basically large batteries on wheels, and some models can deliver backup power to homes. Today's average EV stores enough electricity to power the typical home for up to two days. Bigger vehicles, such as Ford's F150 Lightning, store even more.

Tapping into that stored electricity isn't as easy as parking in your garage and pushing a button. Your vehicle must be equipped with the right technology to connect safely to your home's power, including a special transfer switch and an inverter. If you're thinking about using an EV as a power backup, reach out to your electric utility or a qualified electrician for advice.

SENSATIONAL

Salads



STRAWBERRY KALE SALAD

- ½ cup olive oil
- ⅓ cup cider vinegar
- 1 teaspoon honey
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- ⅛ teaspoon pepper
- 12 ounces kale, trimmed and chopped
- 2 cups fresh strawberries, sliced
- ¾ pound bacon, cooked and crumbled
- ¼ cup fresh mint, minced
- 1 cup feta cheese, crumbled
- ¼ cup slivered almonds, toasted

Whisk together olive oil, cider vinegar, honey, salt and pepper for a dressing. To serve, place kale, strawberries, bacon and mint in a large bowl. Toss with dressing and sprinkle with feta cheese and almonds. To toast almonds, bake in a shallow pan at 350 degrees F for 5-10 minutes or cook in a skillet over low heat, stirring occasionally until lightly browned. *Serves 10*

Shirley DeSmet • Alvord
Lyon Rural Electric Cooperative

CRUNCHY SPRING SALAD

- 4 celery sticks, finely chopped
- 1 cup cooked chicken, chopped
- 16 Spanish olives, chopped
- ½ cup walnuts, finely chopped
- 3 tablespoons mayonnaise

In a bowl, combine celery, chicken, olives and walnuts. Add mayonnaise and combine well. Serve chilled. *Serves 4*

Anita Doughty • Ankeny
Consumers Energy

COOL CUCUMBER SALAD

- 1 cup oil
- 1 cup vinegar
- 1 heaping cup sugar
- 1 teaspoon garlic salt
- 1 teaspoon celery salt
- 1 teaspoon onion salt
- 3 cucumbers, peeled and thinly sliced
- tomatoes and/or peppers, chopped (optional)

Mix the first six ingredients together. Pour over sliced cucumbers and optional vegetables, if desired. Let salad set for 30 minutes. *Serves 8*

JoAnn Nester • Rock Rapids
Lyon Rural Electric Cooperative

SPRING SALAD

- ½ cup mayonnaise
- ¼ cup sugar
- 1 tablespoon apple cider vinegar
- 4 ounces large macaroni, cooked and cooled
- 1 cup carrots, matchsticks
- 1 cup radishes, matchsticks
- 1 cup peas
- ½ cup red bell pepper, diced
- 1 scallion, sliced
- salt, to taste
- pepper, to taste

Mix mayonnaise, sugar and vinegar. Stir in macaroni, then add vegetables and season with salt and pepper. Chill. *Serves 6*

Chris Daniels • Casey
Guthrie County Rural Electric Cooperative Association

NOTICE OF

ANNUAL MEETING OF MEMBERS

ELECTIONS TO BE CONDUCTED USING MAIL VOTING

The Annual Meeting of the Members of Prairie Energy Cooperative will be held at the Cooperative offices in Clarion, Iowa, at 1:30 p.m. on June 5, 2024, to take action upon the following matters:

1. The reports of officers, directors, and committees, which will subsequently be made available to the members to view;
2. The election of three (3) directors of the Cooperative for a term of three years each, which election will be conducted by mail-in ballot only;
3. All other business which may legally come before the meeting or any adjournment or adjournments thereof.

In connection with the election of directors scheduled for this meeting, the following members have been nominated for Director by the Committee on

Nominations appointed by the Board of Directors of the Cooperative pursuant to the Bylaws.

THREE-YEAR TERM (Three to Be Elected)

District 1: Ted Hall, Sherry Flugum

District 4: Scott Hasty

District 6: Annette Julson

As previously noted, the format of the meeting will not provide for in-person attendance by the members. All voting and action will be conducted by mail vote. You are urged to take the time to complete and return the mail ballot. The results will be published in our newsletter following the meeting.

DATED this 29th day of April, 2024.

– **Donald Christopherson,**
Secretary/Treasurer

REPORT OF NOMINATING COMMITTEE

To whom it may concern:

The Nominating Committee of Prairie Energy Cooperative duly appointed by the Board of Directors, hereby nominates the following members of the Cooperative for the office of Director for the term specified, all to be elected at the Annual Meeting to be held June 5, 2024.

THREE-YEAR TERM (Three to Be Elected – One from Each District)

District 1: Ted Hall, Sherry Flugum

District 4: Scott Hasty

District 6: Annette Julson

DATED at Clarion, Iowa, this 8th day of April 2024, and posted on the 8th day of April 2024 in the office of the above-named Cooperative.

– **Austin Charlson**
Nominating Committee Chairman

TED HALL – DISTRICT 1

INCUMBENT



Ted Hall and his wife Sue farm in Ellington Township and grow corn, soybeans and hay. They have two grown children, Angella and her late husband Jon and their two children Aviva and Ayla, and Jeff and his wife Shelise. Hall is a graduate of Forest City High School, Waldorf University and Upper Iowa University.

The Halls are members of Faith Lutheran Church where Ted serves on the church council. Hall also serves on the board of the Winnebago Historical Society. In his spare time, he enjoys following high school and college sporting events, family activities and traveling.

Hall has been a member of PECO since 1978 and has been a board member since 2006. He states that continuing education for PECO has been a top priority and has worked to earn the Director Gold Credential. Hall enjoys serving on the board of directors and has found it to be an interesting, challenging and educational experience. In 2020, Hall was elected to represent PECO on the board of directors of Corn Belt Power Cooperative. His goal

is to continue to stay knowledgeable of all the various issues and to have an efficiently run cooperative providing members with reasonable costs and great service.

SHERRY FLUGUM – DISTRICT 1

NOMINEE



Sherry Flugum and her husband Greg reside in Madison township. They have two children, Justin Gerdes and Heather Buck.

A lifelong Forest City resident, Flugum is a board-certified safety professional who has worked the last 39 years in general industry and construction trades. She holds numerous safety and technical certifications from various organizations such as the National Safety Council, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, Associated General Contractors and the Board of Certified Safety Professionals.

Flugum knows the value of hard work, dedication, and being a good steward of the environment, while using a positive attitude and tireless energy to encourage others to succeed. Inspired by her faith in God, her husband and the rest of her family, she strives to be the best she can be.

Flugum spends her spare time with her dogs, walking, reading, working with plants and flowers, and doing anything outside.

When asked why she would like to be nominated to the board of directors, Flugum states: "To make a difference in the community we serve and to help engage and empower the employees to succeed in all they do."

SCOTT HASTY – DISTRICT 4

INCUMBENT



Scott Hasty has been a member of the cooperative for 15 years. He farms near Kanawha and has his own farm equipment repair shop, where he works primarily on John Deere equipment and combines. He and his wife Dina have four children, Mackenna, Clarissa, Kayla and Ethan. Hasty is a member of the Kanawha Lutheran Church and serves on the board for the Liberty School Museum in Kanawha. He enjoys attending his kids' games and events and camping during the warm months.

Continued on Page 2A

Continued from Page 1A

"The last four years being on the board of directors has been very educational. There is always something new going on at the cooperative and always something to learn," he shares. "The employees at PECO are second to none in providing reliable electricity to the membership, a service we all rely on every day."

ANNETTE JULSON — DISTRICT 6 NOMINEE



Annette Julson and her husband of two years, Donald Miller, reside in Colfax township. She has a daughter, Amanda Julson, along with five stepchildren and 10 step grandchildren. A graduate of Iowa State University and Buena Vista University, Julson retired after 39 years in the

energy industry, starting with Iowa-Illinois Gas and Electric in Fort Dodge just as her father and grandfather did. She gained the knowledge and skills as a customer service front-line employee working with operations, then progressed into management roles with MidAmerican Energy Company and Berkshire Hathaway Energy.

In her spare time, Julson enjoys golfing, attending musical events and bird watching. After moving to an acreage in 2022, she's enjoyed learning new skills assisting her husband with planting and maintaining gardens, as well as freezing and canning their bounty. She also spends time with her 90-year-old mother, is active in P.E.O., and is an involved member at First Presbyterian Church serving on different committees and boards and is an active participant in bell choir.

When asked why she would like to serve on the board of directors, Julson shares: "My husband has been a PECO member for 25 years and myself for two years residing on an acreage in Colfax township near Duncombe. We are impressed with the monthly member communications, service and 99.9% electric reliability. Our rural electric cooperatives provide one of most essential services across miles between their customers and must economically coordinate the distribution, transmission buying of sustainable generation within a changing environment of energy policy, threats against our critical systems, and future technology advancements. I welcome the opportunity to utilize my utility industry experience to work with the PECO team, build relationships with other cooperatives and regulators to continue to provide reliable and economical energy to our members."

OPERATIONS AND ENGINEERING UPDATES FROM 2023

BY BUTCH NOREM



Prairie Energy Cooperative (PECO) completed line extensions for load growth as well as replacements of older equipment per ongoing construction

work plans. In addition to all the projects related to system as a whole, there were a number of specific upgrades to some of the commercial and industrial members (C&I).

In addition, line contractors and PECO crews performed 320 service changes or system improvements, added 26 new services and retired 21. Crews also replaced, added or hardened nearly 40 miles of overhead and underground line.

PECO supply chain plan helps ease pressure

In 2023, PECO focused on specific steps to ensure equipment and materials were available when needed for projects on the system. PECO has made several adjustments to better line up the demands of the cooperative with inventory required to satisfy memberships needs.

These include:

- Reviewing material orders each week with vendor noting "best guess" on lead times.
- Reviewing idle equipment in field, such as transformers, to bring into inventory.
- Prioritizing projects based on immediate needs of membership versus long-range needs.
- Informing membership of material lead times and encouraging them to come forward sooner with requests for facility upgrades related to their projects.

Reliability report

The 2023 outage index information shows the cooperative's CAIDI score, which is the time from when the outage is reported until it is restored. We track this time, and it is periodically reviewed and analyzed to look for ways to reduce the time it takes to restore power. For those who experienced an outage in 2023, the average time out of service was 87.29 minutes. This figure includes outages due to loss of power supply (substations) and those outages that were preplanned with you, the member-consumers. The average

service availability index also shows that if outage numbers were spread over all members of co-op, it equated to 0.48 outages per member for 2023.

Completing a GPS project of entire system

Over much of 2023, your cooperative hired a contractor (GMS) to collect all field information on the cooperative system. This included longitude and latitude location of every pole, transformer, meter, cabinet, etc. Each piece of equipment was catalogued along with digital pictures to be stored as cooperative records. This will save much time and expense for line upgrades, maintenance and storm restoral. A true value of your electric system can now be determined and will help with governmental requirements on funding, grants and other financing. It gives your board of directors better data and financial tools to ensure your cooperative is proactive and looking to the future for better ways to serve you, our member.

You can be proud of all the hard work performed in the best interest of the membership in 2023.

Butch Norem is the director of operations/engineering for Prairie Energy Cooperative.

TAKE ADVANTAGE OF REBATES

BY CHAD CHAPMAN AND DARREN JOHNSON



Chad Chapman

Recently, it seems everything costs more, so every little bit back in our pocket helps. Prairie Energy Cooperative has many options when it comes to rebates.



Darren Johnson

Have you recently purchased an Energy Star®-rated refrigerator? Let us know because we probably have a rebate for that, and other Energy

Star-rated appliances. Just look for the Energy Star logo to see if your appliance qualifies for the appliance rebate.

In addition to appliances, here is a list of our other current rebates:

- Insulation and weatherization
- Geothermal heat pumps
- Air source heat pumps
- High-efficiency central air conditioning
- Water heaters
- Energy efficient lighting
- Electric resistance heating
- Electric vehicle chargers

We also have rebates on commercial, industrial and agricultural items.

Our member services team would be happy to work with you to determine which of your recent, or future, purchases qualify for rebates. Please call our office today for more information.

Chad Chapman and Darren Johnson are member service advisors for Prairie Energy Cooperative.

MILESTONE YEARS



SCOTT SCHEFFEL
Foreman

25 YEARS



KEVIN HOSHAW
Meter Tech

25 YEARS



ANDREW STUPKA
Lead Lineman

10 YEARS

TECHNOLOGY IN THE HOME

BY BILL HICOK



Technology changes daily and, it can be hard to keep up with those changes. With all the technology available today, I want to share some options that are available to

help with energy monitoring and usage in your homes.

Home energy monitoring

More and more often, I see energy monitoring systems available for purchase. Some of these systems are installed in the circuit panel of your home with clamp-on sensors. They allow you to monitor energy usage 24/7 and get real-time data from an app on your phone.

These monitors can help identify areas to conserve energy and save costs. Some can even help identify issues with appliances before they fail. These systems will have different features

available, and the accuracy of those systems will vary based on cost. As with anything, please do research before buying and hire a qualified electrician to install any devices in your circuit panel. Safety first!

Motorized window shades

Consider adding motorized thermal shades on your windows where sunlight comes in. These can be controlled with an app on your phone, so it is easy to have them open and close on a schedule. I have even read that they are working on shades with thermal sensors that can be installed to close when the temperature triggers the sensor. I would love those for my home!

Programmable and accessible thermostats

Programmable thermostats have been around a long time, but their technology continues to improve every day. You can manually program

thermostats to turn the heat up or down based on the time of day and the day of the week. Many newer models that connect to an app can learn your routines and adjust the schedule for you. How many times have you left on vacation and forgot to change the thermostat? Now you can change it with the app from anywhere.

Automated power strips

I have a power strip in my house with most of the phone and iPad chargers plugged into it. Those chargers just sit and use electricity for no reason most of the time because I forget to turn off the power strip.

There are now automated power strips that can sense when chargers are in low power levels, or when phones are completely charged and shut down power to them.

Bill Hicok is the information systems manager for Prairie Energy Cooperative.

2023 ANNUAL REPORT

BY TIM MARIENAU



Prairie Energy Cooperative (PECO) is a small cooperative that continues to change and grow in many ways that will lead us into the future.

Throughout 2023, we saw changes in technology, electrical distribution infrastructure, huge inflation costs, supply chain issues, depleting workforce numbers, a push for more renewable energy sources, and so much more. However, during these changes and challenges, there were many ways that our co-op provided benefits to our membership by providing safe and reliable power at affordable prices in our world today.

As PECO finishes its 87th year, here are some interesting topics that we communicated to our membership in 2023 and what we will continue to address in the future.

Reliable service

We know that overall member satisfaction is directly related to the reliability and affordability of the services we provide. Reliability is one of our top priorities at PECO. Each year, maintaining a reliable system takes hundreds of hours of planning, maintenance, inspections and system upgrades. Equally important is our commitment to balancing that reliability with affordability with member expectations, which requires a mindset of continuous improvement and looking ahead to anticipate future needs.

In 2023, on average, each member's power was on 99.98% of the time throughout the year. We're proud of these results, as we know that you count

on us to provide reliable and affordable service to your homes and businesses.

Reliability of service vs. renewable expectations

Iowa's electric co-ops rely on an "all-of-the-above" generation strategy, including coal, natural gas, hydropower, wind and solar resources. Ensuring reliability involves a portfolio of diverse options to meet members' energy needs while also prioritizing our commitment to affordability and environmental responsibility.

Sources of electric generation have changed dramatically over the past 20 years. More renewable energy sources like wind and solar have been integrated into regional power grids while traditional generation sources like coal and nuclear are being shut down or retired early. Renewable energy is intermittent because the wind doesn't always blow, the sun doesn't always shine, and large-scale battery storage isn't yet feasible. Because of these factors, resources that can be used regardless of weather conditions, such as coal, nuclear, hydro and natural gas, are still critical to ensuring reliable, 24/7 power generation.

Unlike water or gas, electricity cannot be effectively stored in large quantities at this time. Electricity must be consumed the instant it is generated, which requires supply to be kept in constant balance with demand. That's where regional grid organizations provide incredible value; they constantly monitor electric demand regionally and manage available electric generation resources to maintain an equal balance.

Lawmakers, the Environmental Protection Agency and other entities managing the ongoing energy transition must recognize the need for time to invest in technology

development and be inclusive of various energy sources to maintain reliability and affordability. A resilient and reliable electric grid that affordably keeps the lights on is essential to daily life. Iowa's electric cooperatives will continue to advocate for an all-of-the-above energy strategy with policymakers.

As economic conditions allow, electric co-ops are incorporating more renewable sources of generation into the energy mix. Moving toward higher carbon-free percentages will take time as we are also responsible for balancing the needs of safety, reliability and affordability for the members we serve. While renewable energy continues to grow, it will take decades before that category outpaces natural gas and coal generation nationwide. While reducing carbon emissions is a major governmental focus as we talk about a clean energy economy, it's important to set realistic expectations about timelines.

Cybersecurity

At PECO, protecting and securing our members' assets and information is a high priority 24/7, year-round. Our national and state associations, the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association and the Iowa Association of Electric Cooperatives, work with cooperative members, industry partners and government agencies to develop effective approaches to protecting our members' access to affordable, reliable and secure electricity.

There is no "one-size-fits-all" approach to security for any utility, and the concept of grid security is not a new challenge. Electric utilities have decades of experience working together to protect our shared infrastructure and we are constantly reevaluating threats and taking steps to protect the system.

The electric utility industry has made significant investments in efforts to protect the grid against evolving threats and to make it more resilient and robust.

2023 PRAIRIE ENERGY COOPERATIVE FACTS

Total miles of line energized:
2,087.47 miles

Capital credit distributions:
\$1,806,383

Average number of meters per mile of line:
2.09 meters

Total number of members:
3,164 members

Total kWh purchased by PECO:
334,146,196 kWh

Average number of members per mile of line:
1.52 members



These investments and preparations include:

- Implementing rigorous security standards and technology to protect systems
- Forging close partnerships to protect our systems and respond to incidents
- Engaging in active information sharing about threats and vulnerabilities

Additionally, PECO has been participating in many cybersecurity assessments, trainings, tabletop exercises and events. These opportunities have provided our cooperative the chance to be proactive and implement more stringent guidelines and protect our technology from threats.

Co-op directors and employees

At PECO, we do more than just provide electricity. We power lives and empower the communities we serve every day. Having access to safe, reliable, affordable and sustainable power improves your quality of life, and we take that responsibility very seriously.

One of the most important benefits of being a co-op owner is that you have a voice in how the co-op operates. Member-consumers democratically elect our local board of directors, who must also be members. These directors serve your local interests in governing the cooperative.

A cooperative functions most effectively with committed and informed leadership. Your board of directors is democratically elected from the membership to represent your interests and to provide long-term vision and direction. We hold true to our mission in providing you with safe, reliable, affordable and sustainable power.

Strong leadership is essential to our cooperative and we are also blessed to employ many hard-working people who manage the day-to-day operations to keep your lights on.

The board of directors and cooperative staff want to thank you for allowing us to serve you.

Although we won't have the in-person Annual Meeting in June, we hope to see you at our Member Appreciation gathering on July 18 at the Red Shed in Clarion. The 87th Annual Business Meeting will be held on June 5 and will be posted on PECO's Facebook page and website.

Tim Marienau is the CEO of Prairie Energy Cooperative.

83RD ANNUAL MEETING OF MEMBERS

June 7, 2023

The 2023 Annual Meeting of the Members of Prairie Energy Cooperative was held at the office of Prairie Energy Cooperative in Clarion, Iowa, at 2:00 P.M. on the 7th day of June, 2023.

The meeting was called to order by Marion Denger, President of the Cooperative, who presided, and Donald Christopherson, Secretary/Treasurer of the Cooperative, acted as Secretary of the meeting and kept the minutes thereof. He noted that the meeting was being recorded so the members could view it on the Cooperative's website and Facebook.

Secretary Donald Christopherson announced that there were a sufficient number of members represented by mail ballot so a quorum of the members was deemed present for the conducting business.

The Chairman noted that the record of those voting by mail would be accepted in lieu of a roll call.

The Chairman appointed Attorney Dennis L. Puckett to serve as parliamentarian for the meeting.

The Chairman then stated that the Notice of the Annual Meeting of Members was mailed to all members. Said Notice and proof of mailing were ordered to be attached to these minutes and made a part hereof by reference.

The minutes of the Annual Meeting of the Members held June 2, 2021, and June 1, 2022, were included in the Annual Meeting packet. There were no additions or corrections. The Chairman declared them approved as distributed and directed them to be placed in the records of the Cooperative.

The Chairman introduced Attorney Dennis L. Puckett. Mr. Puckett stated that the next order of business was the election of two Directors for a term of three years each. Mr. Puckett noted the individuals that served on the Nominating Committee for the 2023 Annual Meeting as follows:

Jerry Norris (Chairman)

Ron Lentz (Secretary)

Jason Gardner

Dave Lampe

Directors Josh Amonson, Ted Hall and Scott Hasty served as advisory members.

He then presented the Report of the Nominating Committee for the 2023 Annual Meeting, nominating the following members for the position of Director of the Cooperative.

Two to be elected: one from each district - three-year term

District 2: Ryan Eekhoff

District 5: Marion Denger
Robert Ritter

Attorney Puckett noted that no nominations by Petition have been received.

The Chairman had previously appointed Ronald Lentz, Jerry Norris, Jason Gardner, and David Lampe as Inspectors of Election (Tellers). A vote was had by mail ballot and the ballots were previously delivered to the Inspectors who proceeded to count them.

The Certificate of Inspectors of Election was then presented and read, certifying that the following members, having received the highest number of votes cast, had been duly elected Directors of the Cooperative to hold office for the term specified, and until their successors shall have been elected and qualified.

Two to be elected: one from each district - three-year term

District 2: Ryan Eekhoff

District 5: Marion Denger

Attorney Puckett congratulated the winners and directed the Secretary to annex the Certificate of Inspectors of Election to the minutes of this meeting, and thereupon declared such members duly elected Directors of the Cooperative to hold office for the term specified, and until their successors shall have been elected and qualified.

The annual report of General Manager Tim Marienau was then presented.

The annual report of the Chairman was presented.

The Chairman stated that there was no unfinished business and he provided closing comments.

OVERVIEW OF PECO FINANCIALS

BY LORI DEMUTH



Prairie Energy Cooperative's (PECO) financial records were audited by CliftonLarsonAllen LLP (CLA) of Rochester, Minnesota. The

balance sheet and related statements of operation, member's equity, cash flow and other financial statements are reviewed. In their opinion, "the financial statements referred to above present fairly, in all material respects, the financial position of Prairie Energy Cooperative, as of December 31, 2022 and 2023, and the results of its operations and cash flows for the years then ended in accordance with accounting principles generally accepted in the United States of America." CLA presented the audited financials to the board of directors at its April 2024 board meeting.

PECO's overall year-end margin for 2023 was \$4,249,377. Out of that, PECO's operating margin was \$977,614. Our operating margin

indicates how the co-op is doing financially with revenue, power cost, operating expenses, long-term debt, depreciation, etc. The rest of the margin is explained by our "bucket" categories below.

We receive credits/dividends from certain organizations we do business with, which includes Basin Electric and Corn Belt Power Cooperative. These two cooperatives provide us the power we need to distribute to you. As a distribution cooperative, we do not generate any power. The two non-cash items from Basin Electric and Corn Belt are a paper allocation to us where they promise to pay us in the future. When we receive

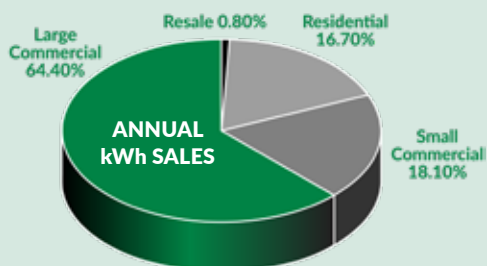
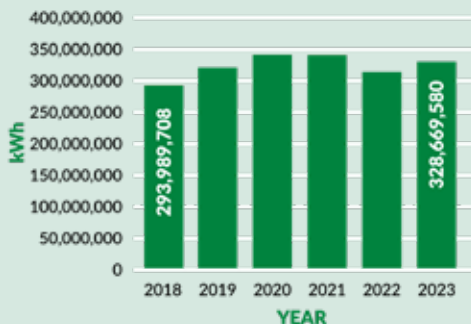
these allocations, which may be up to 30 years, we will then retire it to our membership. That leaves PECO with two buckets. After we have determined what is required by the Iowa Code, our By-Laws and Articles of Corporation, the directors then allocate a portion of those two buckets to the membership. This is a promise to pay in the future, not to exceed 15 years according to board policy.

Paying back patronage dividends (capital) is one of the biggest differences between a member-owned cooperative and an investor-owned utility.

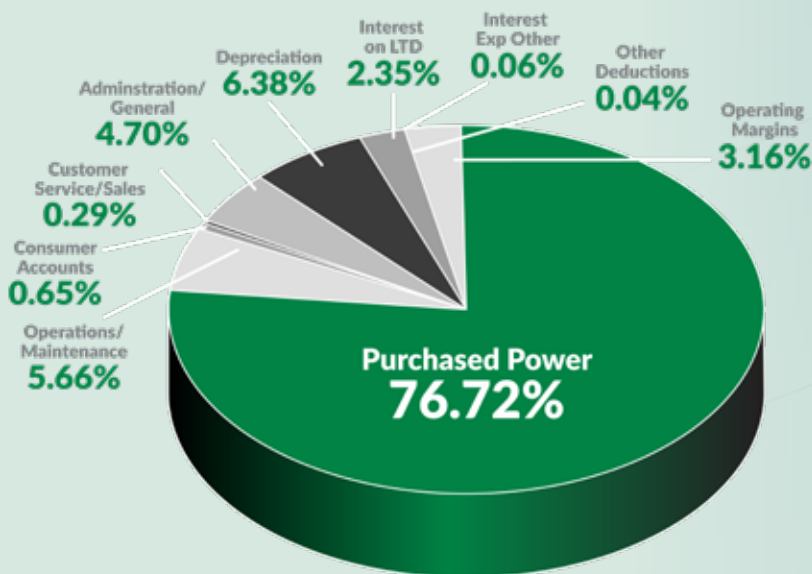
MARGIN BUCKET CATEGORIES

Basin Electric Power Cooperative (our super G&T)	\$ 1,818,576 (non-cash)
Corn Belt Power Cooperative (our local G&T)	\$ 1,005,592 (cash)
Corn Belt Power Cooperative (our local G&T)	\$ 245,397 (non-cash)
Non-Operating Margins, Other Capital Credits, etc.	\$ 202,198
Operating Margin	\$ 977,614

ANNUAL kWh SALES



WHERE THE DOLLARS GO



In 2023, PECO's board of directors retired \$1,806,383 in patronage dividends to our membership:

- \$1,193,065 was allocated in cash to PECO from Corn Belt from 2022. We passed that on to the membership in July 2023 as a credit on your bill.
- \$594,284 was returned to membership as bill credits in November or checks in December 2023 (previous members). This is our promise to pay member-consumers from our operating margin and non-operating margins from the remaining 2008 balance, all of 2009 and 2010.
- \$19,034 was retired for estates during the year.

Our 2023 electric revenue from selling electricity was \$30,880,160 with 328,669,580 kWh sold. Power costs from those kWhs was \$23,707,603. Our peak with Corn Belt was August at 55,743 KW, but PECO's substations had individual high peaks in August and September with the fall heat and early harvest.

Our Willemssen Community Solar array produced 172,718 kWh for the year. The energy produced from the array goes back to the grid which helps reduce our energy costs from Corn Belt.

In 2023, we had an increase in operating revenue of \$475,141 due to Commercial & Industrial accounts running better and a few new loads. PECO continued seeing increased prices for electrical material and many production and shipping delays. We did defer some bill credits for our power supplier in 2022 and used them to offset expenses in 2023, this is why the sales expense is a negative \$76,772. Reducing expenses creates higher operating margins.

FINANCIALS

INCOME STATEMENT	2022	2023
Revenues		
Operating Revenue	\$29,639,824	\$30,903,102

Expenses		
Purchased Power	\$22,891,044	\$23,707,630
Operations and Maintenance	\$2,026,212	\$1,748,075
Consumer Account Expense	\$338,221	\$367,088
Sales Expense	\$(120,528)	\$(76,772)
Administrative & General	\$1,348,573	\$1,450,970
Depreciation	\$1,875,504	\$1,971,565
Interest	\$765,702	\$744,923
Other Deductions	\$12,623	\$12,008
Total Expenses	\$29,137,351	\$29,925,487

Margins Assignable		
Operating Margins	\$502,473	\$977,614
Non-Operating Margins	\$3,938,697	\$3,271,763
Total Margins Assignable	\$4,441,170	\$4,249,377

BALANCE SHEET	2022	2023
Assets		
Net Utility Plant	\$41,431,200	\$43,134,952
Investments	\$20,132,652	\$21,903,903
Cash & Cash Equivalents	\$2,149,018	\$1,963,948
Notes Recievable	\$5,069,738	\$4,538,136
Accounts Receivable	\$2,483,714	\$2,680,065
Materials & Supplies	\$998,235	\$1,114,958
Current & Accrued Assets	\$211,336	\$187,880
Deferred Debits	\$226,505	\$230,623
Total Assets	\$72,702,398	\$75,754,465

Members' Equity & Liabilities		
Equity & Margins	\$36,927,118	\$36,370,142
Long Term Debt	\$30,774,636	\$29,351,079
Notes & Accounts Payable	\$1,838,776	\$4,345,884
Other Current & Accrued Liabilities	\$2,014,342	\$2,040,088
Deferred Credits	\$1,147,526	\$647,272
Total Equity & Liabilities	\$72,702,398	\$75,754,465



PECO BOARD OF DIRECTORS



Ted Hall, Forest City
District 1

Townships: Crystal, Ellington, Fertile, Forest, German, Grant 150, Grant 174, Linden, Madison and Mount Valley



Joshua Amonson, Woolstock
District 6

Townships: Cass, Colfax, Eagle Grove, Dayton, Newark, Norway 289, Troy and Woolstock



Ryan Eekhoff, Britt
District 2

Townships: Bingham, Boone, Britt, Buffalo, Erin, Garfield, Liberty, Prairie, Orthel and Wesley



Donald Christopherson, Duncombe
District 7

Townships: Clear Lake 391, Freedom, Fremont, Hamilton, Hardin, Independence, Marion, Otho, Sumner, Washington, Webster 369 and Webster 370



Allyn Waddingham, Meservey
District 3

Townships: Avery, Clear Lake 194, Concord, Ell, Grimes, Pleasant, Twin Lakes, Union and Wisner



Scott Hasty, Kanawha
District 4

Townships: Amsterdam, Belmond, Boone 250, Grant 272, Lake, Luverne, Liberty 270, Magor and Norway

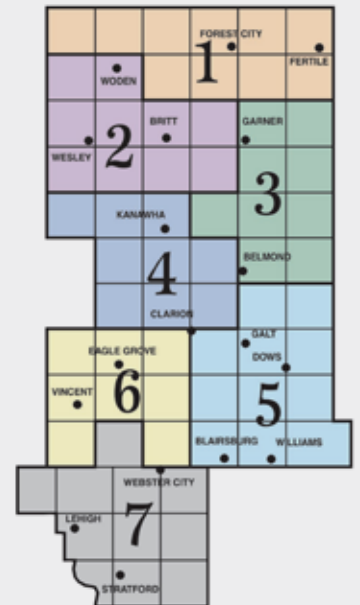


Marion Denger, Dows
District 5

Townships: Alden, Blaine, Blairsburg, Iowa, Lincoln, Morgan, Oakland, Scott, Vernon, Wall Lake and Williams

Your co-op board of directors, leadership team and employees are looking forward to continued growth and serving member-consumers in 2024.

We have a high level of dedication and commitment to you. We are proud to serve you every day.



Cut and mail in with payment.



Prairie Energy Cooperative

P.O. Box 353
CLARION, IOWA 50525
Phone: 515-532-2805

Gift Certificate

This certificate entitles XX
to \$50.00 off your next energy bill.

Account # XXXXXXXXXXXXXX *Required for redemption*

EXPIRES AUGUST 31, 2024

Not redeemable for cash. Redemption value not to exceed \$50.

A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative
The power of human connections.



No duplicates will be issued.

YUMMY SPRING SALAD

- ¼ cup walnuts, toasted
- 6 ounces broccoli slaw
- 1½ cups kale, chopped
- ½ cup apple
- ½ cup blueberries
- ½ cup strawberries
- 1 orange
- 1 avocado
- ¼ cup mayonnaise
- 1 tablespoon apple cider vinegar
- 2 tablespoons sugar
- ½ teaspoon lemon juice

To toast walnuts, roast at 350 degrees F for 15 minutes. Cut vegetables and fruits into small pieces and mix with walnuts. In a fruit jar, add mayonnaise, apple cider vinegar, sugar and lemon juice. Shake well. Pour dressing over salad and mix well. *Serves 6*

Kary Blunk • Russell
Chariton Valley Electric Cooperative, Inc.

POP OF PINK! SPRINGTIME SALAD

Salad

- 1 bunch tender, garden-fresh asparagus, cut into 1-inch pieces
- ½ cup fresh peas (or frozen, thawed)
- sea salt, to taste
- pepper, to taste
- handfuls of salad greens
- 2 radishes, thinly sliced
- ½ cup feta cheese, crumbled
- ½ avocado, diced
- ¼ cup toasted nuts (pistachios, almonds, walnuts or pepitas), chopped
- ½ cup roasted chickpeas (optional)

Dressing

- ¼ cup fresh basil
- 1 small clove garlic
- 1 tablespoon lemon juice
- ½ teaspoon lemon zest
- 1 tablespoon white wine vinegar
- 2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- ¼ teaspoon sea salt

Blanch asparagus in boiling salt water for 1 minute until tender but still bright green. Transfer to ice water for 1 minute. After draining, dry asparagus and mix it with the peas in a bowl. In a food processor, pulse together basil, garlic, lemon juice, zest, vinegar, olive oil and ¼ teaspoon sea salt. Add half of the dressing to the asparagus and pea mixture and toss to coat. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Arrange salad greens, layer asparagus and pea mixture, radishes, feta cheese, avocado, nuts and chickpeas. Drizzle with remaining dressing, season with salt and pepper. *Serves 4*

Angela Bell • Grundy Center
Grundy County Rural Electric Cooperative

COTTAGE CHEESE FRUIT SALAD

- 1 24-ounce carton cottage cheese
- 1 15-ounce can mandarin oranges, drained
- 1 15-ounce can fruit cocktail, drained
- 1 20-ounce can crushed pineapple, drained
- 1 cup miniature marshmallows
- 2 cups whipped topping
- 1 cup pecans, chopped (optional)

Combine all ingredients and mix well. *Serves 8*

Raymond Robbins • Fort Madison
Access Energy Cooperative

BROCCOLI AND CAULIFLOWER SALAD

- 2 cups broccoli
- 2 cups cauliflower
- 1 onion, chopped
- 1 cup sour cream
- ½ cup mayonnaise
- ½ teaspoon garlic powder
- ½ teaspoon garlic salt
- white pepper, to taste

Mix all ingredients together. *Serves 6-8*

Nancy Aldrich • Ankeny
Consumers Energy

WANTED:

TAILGATING RECIPES

THE REWARD: \$25 FOR EVERY ONE WE PUBLISH!

Deadline is May 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

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

MAIL: Recipes

Iowa Electric Cooperative Living • 8525 Douglas Ave., Suite 48,
Des Moines, IA 50322-2992



PROTECT NEW TREES BY PUTTING THEM IN SAFE PLACES

BY SCOTT FLOOD

“Why can’t they just leave my trees alone?”

If you’ve ever wondered that as you’ve watched a tree-trimming crew change the look of your favorite tree, you’ll find the reason in rural Ohio. At a little after 4 p.m. on the steamy Thursday afternoon of Aug. 14, 2003 – with everyone’s air conditioners cranked up to MAX – a sagging transmission power line in the Buckeye State came in contact with nearby tree branches. In minutes, 45 million Americans and 10 million Canadians had no air conditioning or any kind of electric power.

Transmission lines are a critical element of the U.S. power grid. These lines crisscross North America, some held up by slim poles, while others hang below towers resembling science-fiction robots. The giant wires suspended from both types

can carry enough electricity to power more than a million homes, moving it from distant power plants to electric cooperatives and other users.

Federal regulators placed most of the blame for the 2003 blackout on technology that failed to reroute power properly after the transmission line touched the trees. But they also recognized the problem would not have happened if those trees had been a safe distance away from the line. The outage event led to strict rules your electric co-op and other electric utilities are required to follow to prevent large-scale blackouts.

Co-ops are required to document that every piece of equipment and every foot of our power lines are a safe distance from trees and other vegetation. If your home received a visit from one of our tree-trimming crews, it was likely because your trees

were closer to power lines than the rules allow, and your electric co-op was legally required to act.

You have every reason to be proud of your home and yard, and the last thing we want to do is find ourselves altering or removing a prized part of your landscaping. We’d rather help you avoid conflict between electricity and greenery altogether. How? By reminding you to plant your new trees, shrubs or other vegetation where they won’t grow into power lines or other electric equipment.

Consider growth

Whether you want to plant a tree, a decorative shrub or something else, it’s helpful to consider how it will grow over the next 20 or 30 years. Consider the eventual height and how wide the canopy of branches is likely to spread.

For example, even small trees and shrubs should be planted at least 20 feet from power lines. If you can't plant that far away, make sure you choose a species that won't top out at more than 15 feet high. Trees that will be up to 40 feet high or less should be at least 25 feet from electricity, and larger trees should be at least 50 feet away.

Call before you dig

Thinking about what's above the ground is only part of tree planting safety. Before you grab a shovel and start digging, contact 811 to ensure you will avoid accidentally cutting into underground utility lines. The service will send people to your property to mark the approximate locations of utility lines. Because it can be challenging to pinpoint exact locations, use only hand tools when digging within a couple feet of the markings.

All vegetation requires planning

Trees aren't the only type of vegetation requiring thoughtful planting. If there's a pad-mounted

transformer in your yard, you might be tempted to hide it behind colorful flowers and neatly trimmed shrubs. Unfortunately, if there's a problem, crews will need clear access to the transformer. That's why it's always a good idea to keep plantings at least 10 feet from the transformer's doors and at least 4 feet from its sides. Otherwise, crews responding to a power problem may need to remove part of your landscaping.

Finally, if you notice your trees or other vegetation have grown dangerously close to power lines or equipment, don't reach for your chainsaw and try to trim them on your own. Let your local electric co-op know or hire a professional arborist. Tree trimming is more dangerous than most people realize, and you don't want to find yourself in the emergency room – or be the person who plunges your neighbors into the dark!

Scott Flood writes for the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association, the national trade association representing nearly 900 electric co-ops.



Whether you want to plant a tree, a decorative shrub or something else, it's helpful to consider how it will grow over the next 20 or 30 years. Consider the eventual height and how wide the canopy of branches is likely to spread.



Plant Trees Safely

Before you dig, call 811 to locate buried utility lines.

LOW TREE ZONE

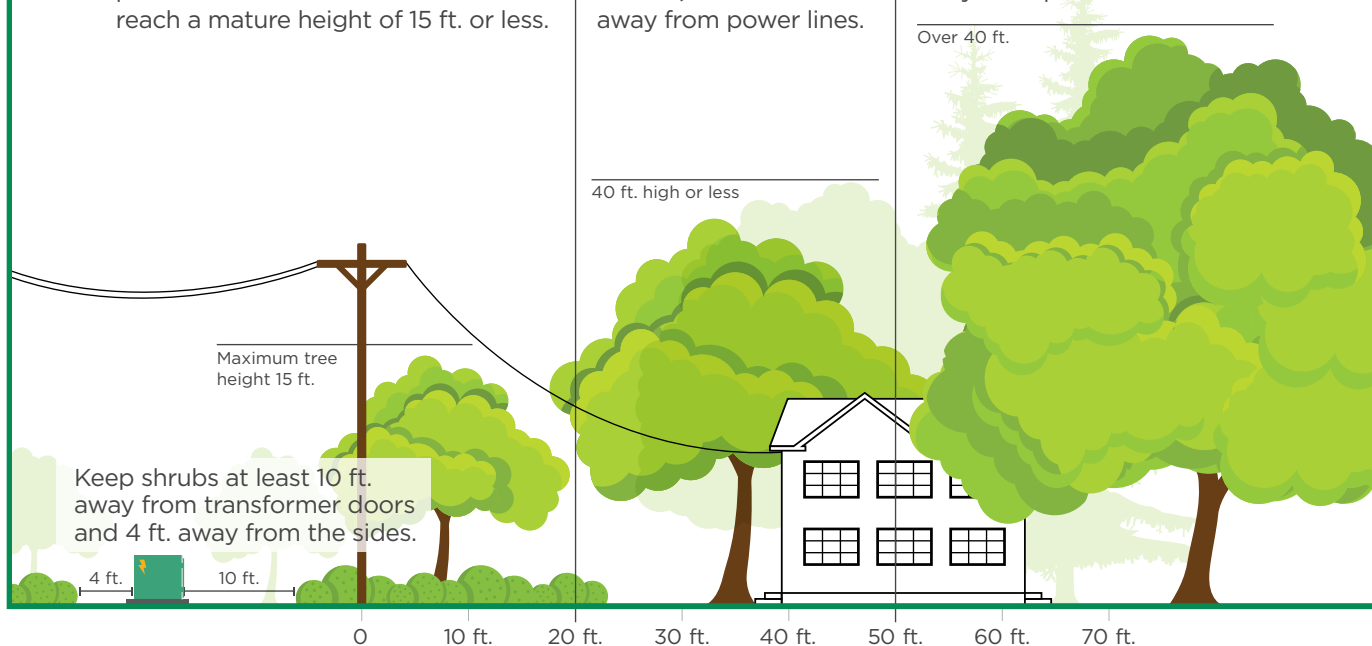
Avoid planting within 20 ft. of power lines. If planting is unavoidable, only plant shrubs and small trees that reach a mature height of 15 ft. or less.

MEDIUM TREE ZONE

Plant medium trees (under 40 ft. when mature) at least 25 ft. away from power lines.

LARGE TREE ZONE

Plant large trees (over 40 ft. when mature) at least 50 ft. away from power lines.



MONARCH CONSERVATION EFFORTS ESSENTIAL AFTER LOW WINTER COUNT

The past year was difficult for monarch butterflies. Adult monarch butterflies covered approximately 2.2 acres of forest canopy in Mexico, about 3 acres smaller than last year, according to the 2023-2024 overwintering monarch population report released by the World Wildlife Fund-Telcel Foundation Alliance.

Scientists estimate that a long-term average of 15 acres of occupied forest canopy is needed to sustain the eastern North American monarch population. Many factors contribute to the decline of monarch butterflies. The loss of breeding habitat in the U.S. and Canada, forest degradation in Mexico, and extreme weather events have contributed to population declines over the last 25 years. A drought in the southern U.S. during the 2023 fall migration may have been tough on monarchs this year.

In addition to habitat loss in their wintering grounds, the availability of breeding habitat with milkweed plants in the Midwest is also critical to the species' long-term survival. Milkweed is the only plant that

monarch butterflies lay their eggs on, and it is also the primary food source for monarch caterpillars.

Iowa efforts are essential

The goal to maintain a long-term average of 15 acres of occupied forest canopy during the winter shapes objectives for establishing breeding habitat in the Midwestern states, including Iowa, through the Iowa Monarch Conservation Consortium.

The Iowa Monarch Conservation Strategy – developed by the Iowa Monarch Conservation Consortium – guides the implementation and documentation of voluntary, statewide conservation efforts. This approach fosters habitat improvements in rural landscapes that do not conflict with agricultural production, are sufficient in scale to support improved monarch breeding success and strives to complement other conservation programs. The consortium comprises 50 organizations, including agricultural and conservation associations, agribusiness and utility companies (including the Iowa

Association of Electric Cooperatives), universities and federal agencies.

“Iowans working together on public and private land are instrumental to improving monarch populations in North America,” says Iowa Department of Natural Resources Director Kayla Lyon.

Ways to support monarch butterflies

All Iowans can help support the monarch butterfly by planting milkweed and other flowering plants in their gardens, yards and even road ditches. To encourage habitat establishment, consortium members have collaborated with Iowa State University Extension and Outreach to develop a Habitat How-To webpage that provides practical steps and additional resources to guide planning and planting efforts. Scan the QR code below to access resources.

“As we accelerate the pace of conservation and water quality practice adoption in Iowa, we are also looking for more ways to layer in habitat for wildlife, including monarchs and other vitally important pollinators,” says Iowa Secretary of Agriculture Mike Naig. “We are collaborating with public and private partners, including the Iowa Monarch Conservation Consortium, to expand pollinator habitat statewide while also improving soil health and water quality within our communities.”

To learn more about the Iowa Monarch Conservation Consortium and the resources it provides, visit www.iowamonarchs.info and follow @IowaMonarchs on Facebook, X and YouTube.



Are you interested in improving your land for wildlife? Scan this QR code to find local resources in your county.



Photo Source: Lisa Galizia

HIT THE BIKE TRAILS THIS YEAR

For more ideas, visit
www.traveliowa.com.

Proudly recognized as the World Capital of Trails, Iowa's 2,500 miles of bike trails cater to all kinds of adventures. Grab your bike and spend a day (or two) pedaling through prairies and woods, along lakes and rivers, through cities or past rural farmland. Whatever vista you're craving, Iowa's got it. If you make a pit stop at a restaurant or shop along the way, you might be supporting a business served by Iowa's electric cooperatives.

Here are some trails to get your pedals spinning:

Cedar Valley Nature Trail

The Cedar Valley Nature Trail spans four counties and is more than 50 miles from Waterloo's George Wyth State Park to Cedar Rapids. Riders can find plenty of exciting stopping points along the way, from Waterloo's diverse restaurants to small-town eateries in Gilbertville, La Porte City, Brandon, Urbana and Center Point to even more options in Cedar Rapids. Along the way, enjoy the views of Iowa's farmland, rivers and prairies.



Photos: Iowa Tourism Office



Photos: Iowa Tourism Office

Fairfield Loop Trail

Recognized as the best trail in the state at the 2013 Mid America Trails and Greenways Conference, the 16-mile Fairfield Loop Trail offers a perfect route for nature lovers. The challenging trail wraps around the community and through its countryside, connecting two major state preserves and passing through pine forests and wildflower meadows. Be sure to bring a trail map with you as the loop combines paved trails connected by short stretches of road.

High Trestle Trail

Art and nature collide on this beautiful 25-mile trail near the communities of Ankeny, Sheldahl, Slater, Madrid and Woodward. A tree canopy shades you from the sun as you cycle to the award-winning Trestle Bridge, which is 13 stories tall.

Sauk Rail Trail

Hop on the Sauk Rail Trail and enjoy a 33-mile jaunt between two state parks, from Lake View's Black Hawk State Park south to Carroll's Swan Lake State Park. Along the way, riders can enjoy diverse views, from friendly small

towns every few miles with stopping opportunities to wildlife areas, the Black Hawk Marsh, farm fields and pastures. The trail is a converted railway and is mostly flat until you reach the hills surrounding Swan Lake.

Three Rivers Trail

Named for its crossings of the Boone River and the west and east forks of the Des Moines River, Three Rivers Trail offers excellent wildlife viewing. The trail runs 32 miles between Rolfe and Eagle Grove, taking riders through a variety of habitat types, including woodlands, grasslands and open prairie.

Wabash Trace Nature Trail

One of Iowa's premier trails, the Wabash Trace Nature Trail allows riders to explore more than 60 miles of rural communities and the surrounding farmland. The former railroad route runs from Council Bluffs to Blanchard, passing through various small towns and offering stunning views of the wide-open landscape. Admire the vast blue skies and farmers hard at work in the fields while enjoying an easy and flat route.

WHY SOLAR IS NOT FREE

BY MIRANDA BOUTELLE

The ability to generate your own renewable energy at home often piques people's interest. The concept of "free" energy from the sun sounds appealing – and many less-than-reputable vendors often make this claim – but the truth is, solar power isn't actually free. There are costs associated with capturing that energy for use in your home.

Prices for a solar energy system and installation vary, but adding solar typically comes with a five-figure price tag. Solar energy systems only provide power when the sun is shining. You still rely on your electric power cooperative for power at night and when the skies are cloudy. You will still have a monthly electric bill unless you disconnect entirely from local electric service.

Solar might be a good investment for you, or it might not. Several factors impact how well the investment pencils out, including where you live, home orientation and shading, electric bill rate structure and cost, available incentives and tax credits, your budget and credit rating.

If you are considering solar on your home, take these steps first:

1 Ensure your home is as energy-efficient as possible.

It wouldn't make sense to put a new motor on a boat with holes in it, so why would you put a solar system on an energy-wasting home? Invest in reducing wasted energy before investing in creating new energy. A more efficient home means a smaller – and lower-cost – solar energy system. Solar systems are typically designed to produce the amount of energy a home uses in a year, so if you complete energy efficiency improvements before installing a solar system, make sure the solar contractor accounts for those energy savings.

2 Check with your electric cooperative about the requirements to install solar and how it will impact your bill.

If you decide to install solar panels, working with your electric co-op is essential, as you will need to take necessary steps, such as signing an interconnection agreement to ensure the system is properly connected to the electric grid.

3 Get at least three quotes.

Compare each contractor's recommended system design, equipment and cost. It's a significant investment, so you want to know your options.

There are several ways to pay for a solar energy system and installation. It can be bought outright with cash or financed by a loan. There is also the option to install a solar system through a lease or power purchase agreement.

Loans, leases and power purchase agreements can impact the sale of a home. Although a solar system may increase the value of your home, some buyers – or their lenders – are not interested in taking on leases or power purchase agreements.

Before you consider a leap to solar, improve your home's energy efficiency and empower yourself by thoroughly weighing the costs and benefits.

Miranda Boutelle writes on energy efficiency topics for the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association, the national trade association representing nearly 900 electric co-ops.



Get at least three solar quotes to compare each contractor's recommended system design, equipment and cost.



Make your home as energy-efficient as possible before purchasing a solar energy system.

A more efficient home means a smaller – and lower-cost – solar energy system.



Installing a residential solar system doesn't necessarily equate to \$0 energy bills. You will need to rely on your electric utility for electricity when your system is not producing power.

HONORING THE “GHOST ARMY” OF WORLD WAR II

BY DARCY DOUGHERTY MAULSBY

Do you ever hear something that makes you snap to attention? It happened to me this spring when I heard the words “Ghost Army” during a radio news broadcast.

The news report mentioned that this mysterious military unit included Iowan John Cantrell (1923-1990) of Des Moines. The Ghost Army made news that day because the soldiers (most of whom are now deceased) received the Congressional Gold Medal, Congress’s highest honor.

Ghost Army saved lives

The Ghost Army used inflatable tanks, phony uniforms, special effects and other trickery to deceive German forces during World War II, diverting attention from larger military units and saving thousands of American lives in the process.

As I researched the Ghost Army, I kept thinking, “I’m a lifelong history buff. I’ve written multiple books about Iowa history. Why haven’t I heard of the Ghost Army before?” The answer is simple. Those soldiers’ contributions remained classified for decades, with many veterans taking the secret to their graves.

Activated on Jan. 20, 1944, the Ghost Army (officially known as the 23rd Headquarters Special Troops) used visual, sonic and radio deception to fool German forces during World War II’s final year. With 82 officers and 1,023 men, this top-secret unit could simulate two whole divisions – approximately 30,000 men, according to the National WWII Museum’s newest special exhibit, “Ghost Army: The Combat Con Artists of World War II.”

U.S. Army planners in London, England, were inspired by how the Allies had used deception to mislead the Germans about the location of



Sen. Grassley with Caleb Sinnwell.



Sen. Grassley with David Cantrell, son of John Cantrell.

In 2021, Sen. Chuck Grassley attended Caleb Sinnwell’s (his parents are members of Butler County REC) National History Day award ceremony at Nashua-Plainfield High School. Sen. Grassley co-sponsored legislation to honor the Ghost Army with the Ghost Army Congressional Gold Medal Act and garnered congressional support for the bill until it was passed and signed into law in 2022. All this culminated in a March 2024 ceremony in Washington, D.C., when members (living and deceased) of the Ghost Army received the Congressional Gold Medal.

the D-Day landings. This led to the creation of the Ghost Army, which included soldiers from all walks of life. Many were West Point graduates and former Army Specialized Training Program participants.

The Ghost Army also recruited art students and young professionals from ad agencies, communications companies and other creative professions to be assigned to the 23rd. Following the war, some went on to legendary careers, like fashion designer Bill Blass and painter and sculptor Ellsworth Kelly.

Waging war with imagination

Armed with nothing heavier than .50 caliber machine guns, the soldiers of the 23rd took part in 22 large-scale deceptions in Europe from Normandy to the Rhine River. The unit waged war with imagination and illusion to trick the enemy, thanks to inflatable tanks and vehicles, fake radio traffic, sound effects and phony generals.

The 23rd, along with the 3133rd Signal Service Company in Italy, helped liberate Europe from the grip of Nazi tyranny. Following the war, the unit’s soldiers were sworn to secrecy, and records were officially classified until the mid-1990s.

This incredible story has a remarkable Iowa twist, thanks to Caleb Sinnwell of Nashua. In middle school, Sinnwell won first place in the National History Day project for his work to research and build a website on the Ghost Army.

As Memorial Day approaches, I’m grateful for the service of the Ghost Army. Rarely has such a small group had so great an impact on the course of history. I’m also inspired by Sinnwell, whose hard work proves that just one person can make a positive difference that resonates throughout history.

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



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