

● OCTOBER 2024

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ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE LIVING

**Powering a brighter
future in Guatemala**

**Navigating reliability in a
changing world**

Family dinner recipes

Know the facts before signing a solar lease ► See Page 5

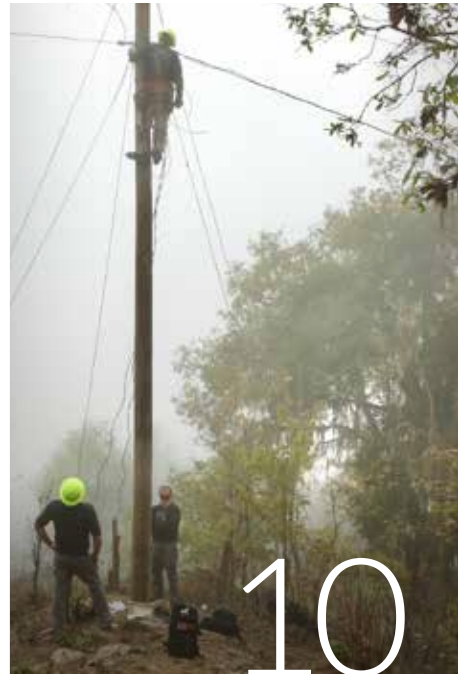
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EDITOR
Ann Foster Thelen

DESIGNERS
Megan Walters
Bree Glenn

IAEC DIRECTOR OF COMMUNICATIONS
Erin Campbell

IAEC EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT
Leslie Kaufman

IAEC BOARD OF DIRECTORS
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Vacant, District 4 – Pending board appointment
Marion Denger, Prairie Energy Cooperative – NRECA Representative
Kevin Wheeler, Access Energy Cooperative – Managers' Representative

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editor@ieclmagazine.com. *Iowa Electric Cooperative Living* magazine does not assume responsibility for unsolicited items.

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ON THE COVER

The village of Las Peñas, Guatemala, where linemen from Iowa and Minnesota electric cooperatives worked to bring electricity to the community for the first time. Read more beginning on Page 10 of this issue.

REFLECTING ON OUR COOPERATIVE PRINCIPLES

BY LESLIE KAUFMAN



October is National Co-op Month, making it an opportune time to reflect on our cooperative principles. As I look back on my first few weeks

at the Iowa Association of Electric Cooperatives, the co-op principles of *cooperation among cooperatives* and *concern for community* really stand out to me for the following reasons.

Rebuilding after the Greenfield tornado

On May 21, severe storms rolled across Iowa, including a strong tornado that tore through Greenfield. We cover this story in more detail on Pages 6-7 and share how it affected employees of Farmers Electric Cooperative, which is based in Greenfield. In the aftermath of the storm, employees of Farmers Electric immediately headed out to help those in need, and neighboring electric cooperatives provided mutual aid to repair damage and restore power in impacted areas.

Powering a brighter future in Guatemala

Also in this issue, you'll read about how linemen from Iowa and Minnesota electric cooperatives worked together to bring electricity to a remote village in the Guatemalan mountains. We understand how essential electricity is to powering opportunities and improving quality of life. Electric cooperatives across the country volunteer their time and resources to help those less fortunate in developing countries because it connects us to our legacy and mission back home.

Shining the light on community volunteers

In the August and September issues of this magazine, you read about our Shine the Light contest, which celebrates our cooperative

commitment to community. Thank you for nominating deserving volunteers who make a positive difference in Iowa's communities! Learn more about our 2024 winners at www.IowaShineTheLight.com and make plans to nominate a local hero in June 2025.

October is co-op month

Once again, Iowa's electric cooperatives are teaming up with the Iowa Institute for Cooperatives and the Iowa Credit Union League to raise awareness about the many advantages of the cooperative business model. This month, we'll post videos about the seven cooperative principles and other co-op facts on social media. Visit www.IowaCooperatives.com for more information on how cooperative ownership works and why the co-op business model is effective.

Celebrating cooperative careers

Finally, we will commemorate Careers in Energy Week beginning Oct. 21. Iowa's electric cooperatives are proud to provide nearly 2,000 stable careers with excellent benefits in an exciting and fulfilling industry. Many electric co-op employees choose to raise their families in small towns and are actively engaged in their communities. Along with lineworkers, engineers and operations staff, electric co-ops also employ accountants, customer service representatives, IT professionals, human resources staff, communicators, energy advisors, economic development specialists and more. View our latest co-op job openings at www.iowarec.org.

Leslie Kaufman is the executive vice president and general manager of the Iowa Association of Electric Cooperatives.

EDITOR'S CHOICE CONTEST

WIN A \$100 GIFT CARD!

To celebrate National Co-op Month, we're giving away a \$100 gift card to your choice of a hometown business. Your selection can be 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 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 pressure washer from the August issue was **Dwayne Seeck**, a Guthrie County REC member-consumer.



ENTER ONLINE BY OCT. 31!

KEEPING THE LIGHTS ON: NAVIGATING GRID RELIABILITY IN A CHANGING WORLD

BY TIM MARIENAU



The most important part of my job as CEO of Prairie Energy Cooperative (PECO) is to make sure each of our employees

returns home safely. The second most important part of my job is to ensure a reliable and affordable flow of electricity to your home, farm or business.

Today, I am more concerned than ever about the future of our shared electric grid and our ability to provide the reliable and affordable service member-owners expect. Our electric grid is amid extensive change. Changes in supply, demand and extreme weather conditions are stressing the limits of energy reliability.

Demand is outpacing supply

Electricity demand is outpacing supply from our generation fleet. Residential and commercial energy use is expected to increase at an unprecedented



Office: 2099 Highway 3 West – P.O. Box 353
Clarion, IA 50525

Office Hours:
Monday – Friday, 7 a.m. – 3:30 p.m.
Closed Saturdays, Sunday and holidays

Phone:
1-515-532-2805 (local) or
1-800-728-0013 (24/7)

Email: prairieenergy@prairieenergy.coop

Facebook: facebook.com/PrairieEnergyCooperative

Website: www.prairieenergy.coop

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pace as our nation becomes more electrified and large data centers are added. While a tremendous amount of renewable energy has been added to the Southwest Power Pool (SPP) region, renewable energy is not always available. PECO works with Corn Belt Power Cooperative (Corn Belt Power), our power supplier, and SPP, our regional transmission organization, to ensure your lights stay on.

However, the reality is that we need more dispatchable generation for times when the wind isn't blowing, and the sun isn't shining. Many of our current generators are aging or nearing retirement, and we also need to expand transmission to connect new generators to the grid. This expansion is crucial for enhancing grid security and ensuring that lower-cost energy reaches our member-owners.

On Aug. 26, the SPP declared an Energy Emergency Alert-Level One (EEA1). This alert indicates that while SPP has sufficient generation capacity to meet demand and maintain its reserve obligations, the situation was precarious enough that reserves could be at risk if conditions worsened. The image illustrates two key points: first, the cost of wholesale power during the EEA1 was significantly elevated. More critically, it underscores the vital role of fossil fuel generation in maintaining grid reliability. During this event, wind energy contributed just 3% to the total power supply. In comparison, coal and natural gas accounted for 89% – a stark reminder that on the most extreme days of summer, renewable generation can fall short. This highlights the ongoing necessity of dispatchable, baseload generation sources like coal and natural gas, particularly during periods of peak demand when renewable sources may be less reliable.

Grid alerts: Why do they happen?

In the past, there were only a few weeks during the hottest days of

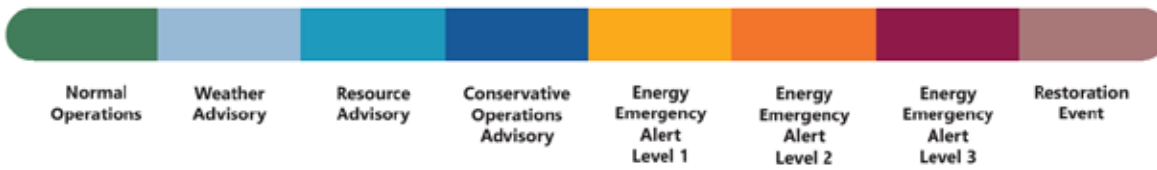
summer or coldest days of winter when SPP risked an energy shortfall. Now, SPP is issuing grid alerts throughout the summer and winter. Our risk of having inadequate supply to meet demand has greatly increased, and grid emergencies are likely to occur more frequently, last longer, and have a more significant impact on our lives and our communities.

Our region is increasingly reliant on variable resources. Variable resources are generation types that vary in how much power they can provide due to reliance on as-available fuel. While these resources provide environmental and cost benefits when available, they also pose a challenge for grid operators when they are not. Solar power is dependent on time of day and year, and it is reduced by cloud cover or low sunlight. And, in Iowa, snow and ice cover in the winter months decrease solar generation. Wind power depends on weather patterns, which can shift wildly and even be at risk when wind speeds are too high to operate safely. Hydropower is reduced during times of drought or in extreme freezing conditions.

Simply put, renewable energy output can vary widely. For instance, in just four hours, we have seen wind power go from providing more than 16,000 megawatts (MW) of energy to less than 2,200 MW. While a wind farm may have a nameplate capacity of 250 MW, we can only consistently rely on about 30% of that output over time. Solar generation in our region performs similarly, typically achieving around 20% of its nameplate capacity on average. This percentage tends to be higher during the summer months but can drop significantly during the winter.

A coal or natural gas-fired power generation unit can be relied on approximately 90% of the time. I present these statistics not to diminish the value of wind and solar, but to provide a realistic understanding

OUR GOAL IS TO REDUCE THE AMOUNT OF TIME SPP IS UNDER GRID ALERTS



Between 2019 and 2023, the SPP region experienced 3,234 hours of grid advisories and alerts due to tight operating conditions.

of their current capabilities. During these times, SPP relies most heavily on dispatchable generation: power sources that have available fuel and can be quickly adjusted to meet the needs of the power grid. Dispatchable power plants – coal and natural gas – can be turned on or off, or their power output can be increased or decreased on demand, allowing them to provide more electricity when demand is high or less when demand is low.

What are we doing to mitigate risk?

SPP, Corn Belt Power and PECO must plan for times of extreme power use. We do that in the form of what we call reserve margins. Reserves are resources that are held back, standing by to provide additional energy when needed. They are the amount of unused available generating capability of an electric power system (during

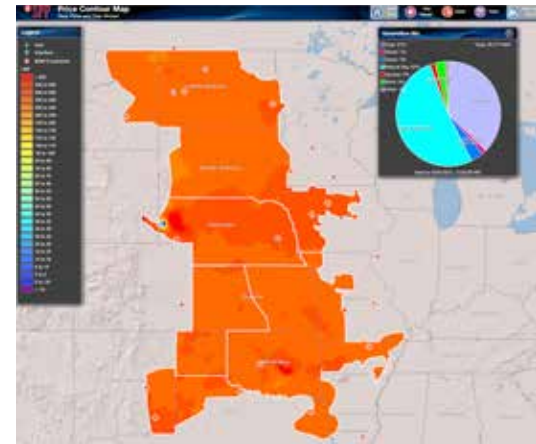
peak demand for a utility system) as a percentage of the total capability needed to meet peak demand. These margins are shrinking in SPP and across the country. Tighter reserve margins mean there's less room for error when we experience unexpected events or emergencies, increasing the risk of forced outages.

Families and businesses rightfully expect the lights to stay on at a price they can afford. To maintain the reliability of your power supply, we must adopt an all-of-the-above strategy that includes renewable energy and dependable resources we have come to rely on, like coal, natural gas, nuclear and hydropower. This diverse energy mix is essential to meeting those expectations day in and day out.

Our mission remains the same. We are here to provide you with safe, reliable

and affordable electricity that is also environmentally responsible. We will continue to advocate on your behalf and do everything possible to live up to that mission.

Tim Marienau is the CEO of Prairie Energy Cooperative.



KNOW THE FACTS BEFORE SIGNING A SOLAR PROJECT LEASE

BY CHAD CHAPMAN AND DARREN JOHNSON



Chad Chapman

Some of our members may have received solicitations in the mail offering land lease options for proposed solar projects. Often, these letters offer attractive per-acre rental payments for various phases of a long-term proposed project, promising steady and predictable income. However, like with all contracts, the devil is in the details. Before signing an agreement, we encourage you to do some homework and seek legal counsel to protect your rights.



Darren Johnson

Most of these letters are coming from companies outside of Iowa looking to lease land for future solar projects. We have noticed that many of these letters refer erroneously to Iowa law, referencing legislation (Senate File 2356) that did not pass last session. In fact, Iowa's electric cooperatives and other groups registered in opposition to the legislation due to its likely negative impact on electric co-ops and our members.

Some solicitations falsely claim local support for their solar initiative or that the electric output would somehow benefit your neighbors or the local electric cooperative. We have also seen letters that deceptively include endorsements attributed to the Iowa Farm Bureau (IFB). IFB's legal team is working to remove these perceived endorsements.

Please consult your legal counsel before signing any agreement or contract. Your legal counsel can help explain the benefits and disadvantages of these agreements, answer any questions you have, and help negotiate fair and equitable terms. These are long-term agreements that can give the solar company exclusive options and control of your land for decades. Spending some extra time up front to better understand the terms and conditions of the proposed agreement can save you significant time, money and headaches in the future. For more information, we encourage landowners to contact us at 515-532-2805.

Chad Chapman and Darren Johnson are member services representatives for Prairie Energy Cooperative.



GRIT AND DETERMINATION BRING AN IOWA CO-OP AND A COMMUNITY BACK FROM DISASTER

BY STEVEN JOHNSON

Sometimes the seventh cooperative principle of concern for community is more than an affirmation. It's a matter of life and death.

When a devastating EF-4 tornado swept through the tightly knit Iowa community of Greenfield on the afternoon of May 21, lineworkers and employees of Farmers Electric Cooperative left their secure, concrete-walled shelter about a mile away as soon as it was safe to do so.

As they entered Greenfield, population about 2,100, they shoved aside debris, pulled survivors from the rubble and tended to the wounded in a community that resembled a war zone.

"We talk about the cooperative principles and how we're like a family," says Holi Weston, CEO of Farmers Electric, whose family lost its century-old home to the tornado. "Tragedy just makes it real. I couldn't be prouder of this group."

The pain from one of the most violent tornadoes on record – peak internal winds topped 300 mph – is still being felt. It left five dead, destroyed or damaged more than 150 homes in Greenfield, ended the school year prematurely and rendered the city fire station and hospital unusable.

But Farmers Electric, with about 5,100 members spread across parts of six counties, is part of a community-wide effort bringing a new sense of normalcy to the spirited city.

"System-wise, we've had more damage from ice storms," says Dave Shike, a lifelong area resident and operations superintendent at Farmers Electric. "But that's a matter of going out and fixing things. The tornado had an impact beyond just the poles and the wires. You're talking about people's lives."



Silos remain twisted and torn and buildings remain damaged weeks after a tornado hit Greenfield. Support for the community has come from near and far. Photos: Steven Johnson



First rumblings

Tuesday, May 21, began with warnings of volatile weather in Adair County. Weston elected to keep her daughter Maddie, a high school junior and avid track competitor, at home, just in case. Schools released students early because of the tornado threat, the first time that longtime residents can recall such a precaution.

At Farmers Electric, which has 21 full-time employees, the co-op staff gathered as it does before any storm to monitor the potential course of severe weather and review plans for power restoration. Around 3:30 p.m., alarms went off on everyone's phones, a simultaneous cacophony of beeps and buzzes. According to

plan, the staff headed for the co-op "vault," the building's secure zone.

"We had a roll call list in the vault that we've never used before, but we did that day," says Weston, who has been at Farmers Electric since 2009 and CEO since December 2022. "You could just tell it was different."

Different indeed. The staff was in the vault for a couple of minutes at most, but in that time, Weston's husband messaged her that their street was gone. Lineworker Trey Eddy reached his wife, huddled with their two children in the basement of their damaged house. Their neighborhood was wiped out, she told him. Another call and Weston learned her father, Dennis Pickrell, was trapped with a fallen wall on his chest.

No one had time to think

Shike knew the tornado had wreaked havoc on the co-op system, but power restoration would have to wait. A group of lineworkers jumped into trucks and headed toward what was left of Southeast First and Second Streets, among them Eddy, also Weston’s neighbor. Weston followed them with Marisa Pickrell, Farmers Electric work order accountant and wife of a cousin of Weston.

“When we were driving for town, I don’t know that we were prepared for what the town was going to look like,” Pickrell shares. “We were running over stuff but at that point, we didn’t care. Let’s just get there. I just kept saying, ‘Oh, my God. Where is all this stuff from?’”

Gas was leaking from the hospital and homes. Residences were ripped from their foundations and scattered everywhere. The tornado had lifted Eddy’s car and hurled it 100 feet away. He and other lineworkers pulled Weston’s father from the caved cinder block wall to safety; he was treated for his injuries and said he could not have sustained his position much longer.

“Then the linemen just took off running,” Weston says. “At that point, they weren’t worried about outages. Our line superintendent wasn’t worried about outages. They were worried about the people, pulling people out of basements. One of our linemen took off his sweatshirt and used it as a tourniquet on a lady’s leg. They took doors and used them as gurneys. A new apprentice was sitting with a challenged adult, just sitting with him until he could get help for a head wound.”

She adds, “I don’t think anybody had time to think. It was just unbelievable.”

The recovery process begins

After about 90 minutes, Shike made the call – crews needed to get back into the field and restore power.

“It was just a mess. We were cutting our way through lines. We had 40 poles on the ground,” he says.

Mutual aid came from Clarke Electric Cooperative in Osceola as several lineworkers helped Farmers Electric clear debris and rebuild lines. A small municipal electric utility serves Greenfield, and Farmers Electric reached out to it with support and materials.

Shike says service was restored to members who could safely receive it on Friday, May 24.

“We left a lot of things on the ground to be cleaned up later,” he adds. “We’re still waiting on some members to decide whether they want to rebuild or go in another direction.”

Weston says power restoration had practical and psychological value. “It’s one thing to cross off the list. The power is on. Now we can start cleaning. Now we start cooking meals.”

Shike also gained a new neighbor, as Weston’s family took up residence in a cabin on his property for about two months. The north side of her house was destroyed, though her daughter’s track medals remained untouched on a desk. She and her family are in a rental home until they figure out their

next move. Pickrell and her family, including two daughters, have been living with a brother, while the Eddy family lives in an empty farmhouse owned by the uncle of an electric cooperative foreman.

Relief contributions have been flowing in to deal with an estimated \$30 million in repairs, and the hashtag #greenfieldstrong has been prominent on social media. In late July, the Register’s Annual Great Bicycle Ride Across Iowa (RAGBRAI), passed through Greenfield. Farmers Electric closed its office for the day to help with the event, with riders donating about \$10,000 to the Greenfield cause.

“It’s been the longest and shortest few months of my life,” Weston says. “I have always said that I am super thankful for this team we have. We’re a pretty close team, but after the tornado, seeing how everyone supported everyone else shows you that the co-op is a family in good times and bad.”

Steven Johnson is a contributing writer for the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association.



Farmers Electric Cooperative staff (from left to right) Dave Shike, operations superintendent; Mindy Comstock, billing clerk/customer service; Carol Hutchinson, customer service/accounts receivable; Holi Weston, CEO; Lori Kinyon, director of finance and accounting; Gina Meisenheimer, accounts payable/payroll; and Marisa Pickrell, work order accountant. Photo Source: Steven Johnson

Family Dinner FAVORITES

ITALIAN CASSEROLE

- ½ pound ground pork
- ½ pound ground beef
- ⅓ cup onion, chopped
- 1 medium garlic clove, minced
- ½ teaspoon salt
- ½ teaspoon oregano
- 1 can tomato soup
- ⅓ cup water
- 2 cups wide noodles, cooked
- ½ pound Velveeta cheese
- 4 ounces cheddar cheese, shredded (or more cheese if desired)

Brown pork, beef and onion together. Drain. Add seasonings to the mixture. In a large bowl, combine meat mixture with soup, water, noodles and Velveeta cheese. Place in a 9x12-inch casserole dish or a round casserole dish. Sprinkle shredded cheddar cheese around the edges of the casserole (or over the entire casserole). Bake at 350 degrees F for 30 minutes. You can also freeze prior to baking and bake later. Casserole is great served with bread sticks and a lettuce salad. *Serves 6*

Dianne Riley • Osceola
Clarke Electric Cooperative, Inc.

BBQ SANDWICHES

- 3 pounds hamburger
- 1 onion, chopped
- 1 can tomato soup
- 1 tablespoon mustard
- 1 cup ketchup
- ¼ teaspoon chili powder
- ⅓ cup brown sugar
- 3 teaspoons salt
- buns

Brown hamburger with onion, drain. Add remaining ingredients and simmer for 20 minutes. Serve on buns. *Serves 30*

Bethany Van Wyhe • Lester
Lyon Rural Electric Cooperative

LOADED BAKED POTATO CASSEROLE

- 1 pound chicken breast, cubed
- 6-8 red-skinned potatoes, cubed
- ⅓ cup olive oil
- 1½ teaspoons salt
- 1 teaspoon black pepper
- 1 tablespoon paprika
- 2 tablespoons garlic powder
- 2 tablespoons hot sauce, plus more, if desired
- 2 cups cheese, shredded
- 1 cup bacon, crumbled
- 1 cup green onion, diced

Mix the first eight ingredients and bake at 400 degrees F for 55-60 minutes. Top with cheese, bacon and green onion for the last 5 minutes of baking. *Serves 8*

Nancy Hemann • Parkersburg
Grundy County Rural Electric Cooperative



Visit www.ieclmagazine.com and search our online archive of hundreds of recipes in various categories.

CHEESY CHICKEN SPAGHETTI

- 16 ounces dry spaghetti, cooked
- 1 pound Velveeta cheese, cubed
- 2 cups chicken, cooked and chopped
- 1 can cream of mushroom soup
- 1 can cream of chicken soup
- 1 can RO-TEL tomatoes, undrained
- 1 can mushrooms, drained
- ½ cup water
- 1 small onion, diced
- salt, to taste
- pepper, to taste

Spray slow cooker with nonstick cooking spray. Combine all ingredients in slow cooker and stir to mix well. Cook on low for 2-3 hours. Stir before serving. *Serves 6-8*

**Arie Schiller • Donnellson
Access Energy Cooperative**

HEARTY HAM CASSEROLE

- 4 cups ham, cubed
- 2 cans corn, drained
- 4 cups potatoes, cooked and diced
- 2 tablespoons onion, chopped
- ½ cup butter
- ⅔ cup flour
- 3½ cups milk
- ¼ teaspoon pepper
- 2 cups cheddar cheese, shredded

In a large bowl, combine ham, corn and potatoes, set aside. Sauté onion and butter for 2 minutes. Stir in flour and blend. Add milk and pepper, then bring mixture to boil. Cook and stir for 2 minutes. Add to the ham mixture and stir. Transfer to a 9x13-inch baking dish. Cover and bake at 350 degrees F for 45 minutes. Uncover and sprinkle with cheese. Bake 5 to 10 minutes longer.

**Bonnie Boot • Pella
Pella Cooperative Electric Association**

BACHELOR'S PIE

- 2 pounds hamburger
- 1 medium onion, chopped
- 2 cans tomato soup
- 2 cans green beans or mixed vegetables, drained
- 6 cups mashed potatoes
- 2 cups sharp cheddar cheese, shredded
- salt, to taste
- pepper, to taste

Brown hamburger and onion in large skillet, drain. Combine with soup and green beans or mixed vegetables. Add salt and pepper to taste. Transfer to a 9x13-inch baking pan. Spread mashed potatoes on top (like frosting a cake) and sprinkle with cheese. Bake at 350 degrees F for about an hour or until cheese melts. *Serves 16*

**Joanne Fox • Sioux City
North West Rural Electric Cooperative**

DEVILED SWISS STEAK

- 1 3-pound beef round steak, 1-inch thick
- 2 teaspoons dry mustard
- 1½ teaspoons salt
- ¼ teaspoon pepper
- 2 tablespoons cooking oil
- 1 4-ounce can mushroom stems and pieces water
- 1 tablespoon Worcestershire sauce

Cut meat in half for easier handling. Mix mustard, salt and pepper together, then sprinkle over meat. Pound seasonings into both sides of meat. In skillet, quickly brown meat on both sides in hot oil. Drain excess fat. Drain mushrooms, reserving liquid and setting mushrooms aside. Add water to liquid to make ½ cup. Add Worcestershire sauce, then pour liquid mixture over meat. Cover and simmer 1¼ to 1½ hours on low heat or until meat is tender. Add mushrooms and heat through. Transfer meat to platter and pour remaining liquid and mushrooms over meat. *Serves 8*

**Danice Zern • Conrad
Grundy County Rural Electric Cooperative**

WANTED:

CHERRY RECIPES

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

Deadline is Oct. 31

Submit your **favorite recipes using cherries**. Please include your name, address, telephone number, co-op name, recipe category and number of servings on all submissions.



EMAIL: recipes@ieclmagazine.com
(Attach your recipe as a Word document or PDF to your email message.)

MAIL: Recipes
Iowa Electric Cooperative Living magazine
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Des Moines, IA 50322

POWERING A BRIGHTER FUTURE FOR THE PEOPLE OF LAS PEÑAS, GUATEMALA

BY ERIN CAMPBELL

Have you ever considered how different your life would be without daily access to electricity? Simple tasks like making coffee, taking a hot shower, washing clothes, refrigerating food, cooking meals or lighting a room would become nearly impossible without safe, reliable electric service.

Living without electricity was common in rural America before electric cooperatives were formed in the 1930s and 1940s, even though most people in cities and towns benefitted from the conveniences of power. Many of us are a generation or two removed from those times; however, 14 linemen from Iowa and Minnesota electric co-ops were able to experience the fulfillment of powering a brighter future for the rural village of Las Peñas, Guatemala, in June.

Through their respective statewide associations, several electric cooperatives from Iowa and

Minnesota teamed up for a rural electrification project through NRECA International, which is affiliated with the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA). Since 1962, NRECA International has brought electricity to more than 220 million people throughout Africa, Asia and Latin America.

Working in a mountainous terrain

The team's mission was to build primary and secondary electric distribution infrastructure and wire more than 30 homes in the village of Las Peñas, nestled in mountainous terrain at an elevation of 6,000 feet above sea level.

The daily journey from Jalapa, where the linemen stayed in a hotel, to Las

Peñas took over an hour by vehicle via primitive, narrow dirt roads and switchbacks. During the rainy season, the dirt roads quickly become washed out and impassable by vehicles. Near the end of the project, they had to hike the arduous final mile on foot every day.

Las Peñas is only about 15 miles from the bustling city of Jalapa as the crow flies, but lifestyles in these two locations are vastly different.

"Close your eyes for a moment and imagine you're at a campground with the smell of wood burning. Now add the smell of the livestock barns from the county fairgrounds and the smell of tortillas cooking – that's what it was like to be in Las Peñas,"



A villager checks out electrical equipment, which will power her home.



Linemen worked on steep areas to string wire and place power equipment.

Follow the linemen's journey on our public Facebook group: **2024 Powering a Brighter Future in Guatemala**

explains Scott Meinecke, director of safety and loss control for the Iowa Association of Electric Cooperatives, who traveled to the village near the completion of the project.

Electricity will allow girls to attend school

Most of the families of Las Peñas farm corn, coffee beans and other crops by hand and raise pigs and chickens. The women and girls stay close to home, cooking food and tending to household chores.

“Without electricity or reliable refrigeration, girls don’t have time to go to school; they are needed at home to help grind corn and cook every day. Bringing electricity to these rural villages is especially transformative for girls because they can now complete food prep chores on the weekends and store a week’s supply of food in a refrigerator, which means they can go to school and receive an education,” Meinecke says.

Building infrastructure by hand

Before the linemen arrived, no power lines were serving the village. Villagers helped the local municipal utility set poles for the team, and they got to work immediately stringing primary wire across 3.5 miles of distribution infrastructure. Without modern equipment like bucket trucks, all the work had to be completed by hand.

Mike Berkenpas of North West REC says many of the spans in the mountains were 1,000 feet or more between poles because of the unbelievably steep terrain. For context, spans between poles in Iowa are set to a standard of approximately 200 feet. Bailey Bautsch of Maquoketa Valley Electric Cooperative was impressed with how the villagers helped the linemen pull up the wire and carried tools during the project.

The rain was challenging throughout the project, prompting the team to be thankful for the maintained roads back home.

“When it rains, you can’t get to the village without walking. The road is only built for tractors, horses and mules, and it was built 3 weeks before we got here,” explains Hunter Venz of Prairie Energy Cooperative.



Linemen from Iowa and Minnesota pose with Las Peñas villagers.

The following **Iowa electric cooperatives** and **linemen** participated in this year’s effort. Allamakee-Clayton Electric Cooperative, **Jason Donnelly**; East-Central Iowa Rural Electric Cooperative, **Brian Reidy**; Eastern Iowa Light & Power Cooperative, **Andy Koopmann**; Maquoketa Valley Electric Cooperative, **Bailey Bautsch**; Midland Power Cooperative, **Tanner Dreier**; North West Rural Electric Cooperative, **Mike Berkenpas**; Prairie Energy Cooperative, **Hunter Venz**.

When the linemen finished wiring more than 30 homes for electricity, it was time to celebrate.

“June 18 was supposed to be the inauguration and lighting ceremony; however, we finished a few days early, so we loaded up water filters and the things we bought for the villagers to help make their lives easier. We met them about halfway down the mountain since driving on the road was still too dangerous. We had a small ceremony on the road and thanked them for all their help over the past days we were onsite,” shares Brian Reidy of East-Central Iowa REC.

“Their mayor gave a speech, thanking all who were involved in the long process to get power to the village over the past several years. We handed out the things we brought and said our goodbyes, loaded the remaining gear and headed back up and off the mountain for the last time. What a memorable and humbling experience – I’m not sure words could ever articulate what we experienced.”

Electricity is a doorway to opportunity

As the linemen shared photos of the project and the village, a young boy standing outside the doorway of his home as a lineman wires it for electricity is a metaphor for how electricity provides a doorway to new opportunities for the next generation.

Electrification transformed rural America over 80 years ago, and today, it’s happening in remote Guatemalan villages as they gain access to electricity. Electricity provides access to safer cooking and lighting, easier chores, safer food and water, higher-quality education, better healthcare and more. Participating in these international electrification projects connects us even more to our cooperative mission of powering lives and empowering communities.

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



A young boy stands outside as his home is wired for electricity.



Scan the QR code to watch the project video.

GO ABOVE AND BEYOND FOR A SAFE HARVEST

Modern farming often relies on data and equipment with GPS and auto-guidance systems. However, even with these modern conveniences, farm workers must remain vigilant. That's because farming is considered one of the most dangerous jobs.

Massive machinery is indispensable to farming, but the same impressive size, height and extensions make it particularly vulnerable to contacting power lines. That's why staying alert, focused and knowledgeable about potential hazards and safety procedures is crucial.

During a busy harvest season, the familiar sights around the farm can easily fade into the background, and farm workers can overlook the power lines overhead. However, failing to notice them can lead to deadly accidents.

360 awareness

Awareness of your surroundings, around, above and below, and planning safe equipment routes can significantly reduce the risk of accidents. Even with GPS and auto-steering, it's imperative that farm workers keep a close eye on the equipment's location and are ready to take action if necessary.

Exposed underground powerlines, defective wiring in farm buildings and extension cords are also hazards. Grain bins can pose a potential danger as well. The National Electrical Safety Code requires power lines to be at least 18 feet above the highest point on any grain bin when portable augers or other portable filling equipment are used. If you plan to install new grain bins or you're concerned about the proximity of power lines to existing grain bins, contact Prairie Energy Cooperative.

To ensure a safer harvest season, [SafeElectricity.org](https://www.safeelectricity.org) recommends the following tips to avoid electrical accidents on the farm.

- 1 **Exercise caution near power lines.** Be careful when raising augers or the bed of grain trucks around power lines.
- 2 **Use spotters when operating large machinery near power lines.** Ensure the spotters do not touch the machinery while it is moving near power lines.
- 3 **Lower equipment extensions, portable augers or elevators before moving or transporting equipment.** Do not raise equipment, such as ladders, poles or rods, into power lines. Remember that non-metallic materials like lumber, tree limbs, ropes and hay can conduct electricity, especially when damp, dusty or dirty.
- 4 **Never attempt to raise or move power lines to clear a path.** Doing so could result in electric shock or death.
- 5 **Avoid using metal poles inside bins.** Don't use metal poles to break up bridged grain inside or around bins.
- 6 **Hire qualified electricians.** Ensure that qualified electricians handle work on drying equipment and other farm electrical systems.

While rare, the only reason to exit equipment that has come into contact with overhead lines is if the equipment is on fire. However, if it happens, jump off the equipment with your feet together and without touching the machinery and the ground at the same time. Then, still keeping your feet together, hop to safety as you leave the area.

5 Tips for a Safe Harvest

Electrical safety during harvest season requires vigilance and proactive measures. Follow these tips to reduce the risk of electrical accidents.

1. Maintain at least a 10-foot distance from power lines when operating equipment like grain augers, elevators and other tall machinery.
2. Use a spotter to navigate safely around power lines and other electrical equipment.
3. Ensure all farm workers are trained on electrical safety procedures.
4. Regularly inspect all electrical equipment and machinery for signs of wear and damage.
5. Keep first aid kits and emergency contact numbers in an easily accessible location.



BE CYBERSECURITY AWARE: TIPS FOR A SAFER DIGITAL WORLD

BY BILL HICOK



Did you know the average household with internet access owns about 17 connected devices? That figure covers a wide range of

electronics, including smartphones, computers, streaming devices, smart speakers, home assistants and more. Given our increasing reliance on internet-connected technologies, the likelihood of new cyber threats is ever-present.

Prairie Energy Cooperative is deeply committed to ensuring our local system is safe and secure. We routinely monitor and manage cyber risks and work with other co-ops to share the latest advancements in cybersecurity measures that make us stronger. But you can help, too.

When we all work together to stay safe online, we lower the risk of cyber threats to our systems, online accounts and sensitive data.

October is National Cybersecurity Awareness Month, and while good cyber hygiene should be practiced year-round, we'd like to share a few cybersecurity tips to help you bolster your online safety.

- **Learn how to spot and report phishing attempts.** Phishing occurs when criminals use phony emails, direct messages or other digital communications that lure you to click a bad link or download a malicious attachment. If you receive a suspicious email or message that includes urgent language, offers that seem too good to be true, generic greetings, poor grammar or an unusual sender address, it could be a phishing attempt. If you spot one, report it as soon as possible – and don't forget to block the sender. If you receive a suspicious work email, report it to the appropriate IT contact. Suspicious messages delivered to your personal email or social media accounts can also be reported.
- **Create strong, unique passwords.** When it comes to passwords, remember that length trumps complexity.

Strong passwords contain at least 12 characters and include a mix of letters, numbers and symbols. Create unique passwords for each online account you manage and use phrases you can easily remember.

- **Enable multi-factor authentication when available.** Multi-factor authentication (also known as two-factor authentication) adds an extra layer of security to your online accounts. These extra security steps can include facial recognition, fingerprint access or one-time codes sent to your email or phone.
- **Update software regularly.** Software and internet-connected devices, including personal computers, smartphones and tablets, should always be current on updates to reduce the risk of infection from ransomware and malware. When possible, configure devices to automatically update or notify you when an update is available.

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

October is National Cybersecurity Awareness Month.

Let's work together to build a safer digital world. Whether at home, work or school, we can increase our online safety with the following tips.

- 🔒 Recognize and report phishing attempts.
- 🔒 Use strong, unique passwords.
- 🔒 Enable multi-factor authentication.
- 🔒 Update software regularly.

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DETAILS RELEASED FOR IOWA HOME ENERGY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM



The 2024-2025 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, 2024, through April 30, 2025. The start date is Oct. 1, 2024, for elderly (60 and over) and/or disabled applicants. If you're not sure where to apply, visit hhs.iowa.gov/programs/programs-and-services/liheap. To contact your local community action agency, call 211 or write: LIHEAP, Iowa Department of Health & Human Services, Capitol Complex, Des Moines, IA 50319.

Income Maximums	
Household Size	Annual Gross Income
1	\$30,120
2	\$40,880
3	\$51,640
4	\$62,400
5	\$73,160
6	\$83,920
7	\$94,680
8	\$105,440

Note: For households with more than eight members, add \$10,760 for each additional member.

COME BACK TO SILENCE

BY DARCY DOUGHERTY MAULSBY

Here on the farm, harvest is one of the busiest times of the year. Days are short, to-do lists are long, and it's always a race against time and the weather to get the corn and soybeans in the bin.

Machines provide a constant soundtrack to all this activity. Everywhere you turn, the roar of combines, tractors, semi-trucks and grain dryers never wanes. As much as I love this exciting time of year, my thoughts turn to something I heard a speaker address this past summer.

That young man is a pastor and an avid outdoor enthusiast who cherishes his annual summer trip to the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness (BWCAW). Located in northern Minnesota, this massive area contains more than 1,200 miles of canoe routes, 12 hiking trails and 2,000 campsites.

"This wilderness offers freedom to those who wish to pursue an experience of expansive solitude," proclaims the U.S. Forest Service on its website.

Hmmmm, expansive solitude. What an intriguing concept.

The young man noted it's illegal to have a motor running in the BWCAW. What a stark contrast to daily life. Nearly everywhere you go, there's a motor running, from the car engine to the hum of the refrigerator or the whir of a fan.

"For most of human history, people weren't overwhelmed with noise," the young man added. "Our souls aren't designed to be inundated with noise. We need to withdraw from the world periodically and seek more silence."

Turn down the volume

Consider the remarkable phenomenon that transforms people when they spend time in the BWCAW. The newbies seem agitated

for the first few days without all the electronic distractions that dominate modern life. After a couple of days, however, a "wilderness detox" kicks in.

The young man noted that his buddies who go with him to the BWCAW start enjoying life at a slower pace. It's not unusual to see them sitting by the campfire, just watching the flames, mindlessly poking the ashes with a stick. They are content.

"When we learn how to be quiet and listen, something deep inside us awakens," the young man said. "Our spirit is alert and paying attention."

The true power of silence emerges in the space it creates for reflection and understanding. Silence becomes a source of great strength.

Commit to listening

Silence can be uncomfortable, however, because we don't practice it.

Valuing silence also requires you to answer some key questions. Whose voice is the loudest in my life? What voices do I need to turn down? How can I listen for those gentle whispers that matter most?

It's possible to carve out silence, even in our chaotic, noisy world. The young man who savors the silence of the

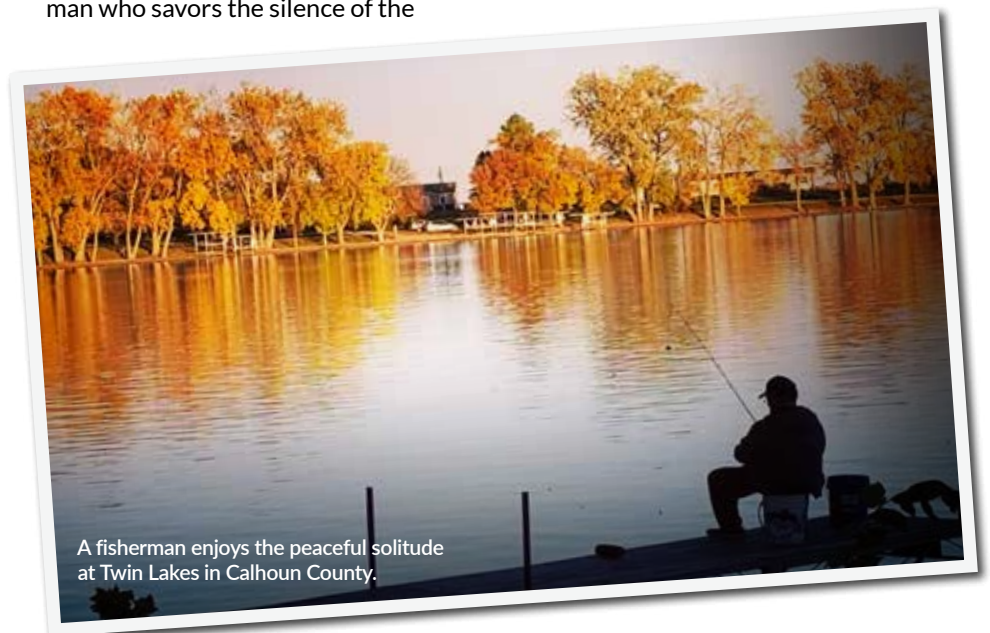
BWCAW urges us to accept one of these three challenges this week:

- 1 Enjoy silence next time you're traveling in your vehicle.** That means no music, phone calls, talk radio or podcasts.
- 2 Seek silence under the stars.** Go outside, and gaze at the night sky. Marvel at the beauty and grandeur of the heavens.
- 3 Carve out 5 minutes for silence each day.** Sit quietly in the morning before your day begins or take 5 minutes in the evening just to breathe, calm down and experience the silence. Set a timer on your phone so you don't have to watch the clock.

While these might seem challenging at first, pick one and give it a try. Once you do, seeking silence will become like water or air – essential to your very existence.

Silence allows us to channel our energies, provides the clarity we need to face challenges and calms our soul. That's a bountiful harvest indeed.

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



A fisherman enjoys the peaceful solitude at Twin Lakes in Calhoun County.



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