

● JANUARY 2026

# Iowa

ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE LIVING

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ON THE COVER

Special thanks to Michelle Benton, 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!

# PROTECTING IOWA'S POWER: KEY ENERGY POLICIES TO WATCH THIS LEGISLATIVE SESSION

BY HALEY MOON



As the Iowa Legislature prepares to convene on Jan. 12, electric cooperatives across the state are focused on defending the policies and protections that keep power reliable and affordable for our communities. For more than eight decades, Iowa's electric cooperatives have prioritized the delivery of safe, reliable and affordable electricity while supporting local economies and strengthening the power grid. This work relies heavily on Iowa's defined electric service territories, an important law that helps ensure every corner of the state receives consistent, cost-effective electric service.

## Protecting service territories and grid reliability

For rural communities in particular, defined electric service territories are vital. By assigning each utility the responsibility to serve a specific geographic area, every Iowan is guaranteed electric service that avoids redundant infrastructure, reduces costs and allows utilities the certainty to make long-term investments in grid resilience. These protections help cooperatives maintain affordable rates and plan strategically to meet future needs. As legislators return to Des Moines, Iowa's electric cooperatives remain vigilant against any attempts to weaken this foundational law or erode the consumer benefits it provides.

One challenge that could resurface is a third-party or "community solar" proposal. During the 2025 legislative session, lawmakers considered legislation that would have allowed non-utility solar developers to provide retail electric service inside

an established utility's service area, which is in direct conflict with Iowa's service territory statute. While these programs are often marketed as cost-saving options, the details can be far less rosy. Because third-party developers are not held to the same consumer protection standards or regulatory oversight as Iowa's public utilities, they can shift grid maintenance and infrastructure costs onto customers who do not subscribe.

Cooperatives are not opposed to solar – far from it. Iowa's electric co-ops have long supported the adoption of solar when and where it benefits their members and aligns with responsible grid planning. But allowing non-utilities to operate independently within the defined area of public utility, even on a limited basis, sets a precedent that threatens system stability statewide.

## Strengthening safety protections for utility workers

Another priority heading into the upcoming legislative session

is protecting utility workers. Lineworkers are often the first on the scene after storms and work long hours in hazardous conditions to restore essential services. Despite the critical role they play in delivering power to our communities, something alarming is happening. Threats, harassment and assaults against utility workers while on the job are increasing nationwide. Strengthening penalties for violence against utility workers reaffirms our commitment to the safety of cooperative employees and our communities.

No matter what this session may bring, you can rest assured knowing that your cooperative will be advocating for policies to keep electricity safe and affordable for you and your community.

*Haley Moon is the senior manager of policy and advocacy for the Iowa Association of Electric Cooperatives.*

## EDITOR'S CHOICE CONTEST

### WIN A NINJA CRISPI AIR FRYER!

The Ninja Crispi® Portable Glass Cooking System is a compact powerhouse that packs the 1,500 watts power of a full-sized air fryer into a portable design. It includes a small 6-cup and larger 4-quart CleanCrisp™ container. Whether you're making quick, single-serve meals in just 7 minutes or sharing crispy snacks on the go, the Ninja Crispi® makes it effortless.



#### Visit our website and win!

Enter this month's contest by visiting [www.ieclmagazine.com](http://www.ieclmagazine.com) no later than Jan. 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 Lodge cast iron skillet set from the October issue was **Sarah Silhanek**, a **T.I.P. REC** member-consumer.

**ENTER ONLINE BY JAN. 31!**

# THREE REASONS FOR OUR FIRST ENERGY RATE CHANGE IN 10 YEARS

BY TIM MARIENAU



As demand for electricity continues to grow and the cost of generating power rises nationwide, utilities across the country are feeling

the impact – and Prairie Energy Cooperative (PECO) is no exception. These broader industry pressures influence every part of our operations, from the wholesale power we purchase to the materials required to maintain and upgrade our system. While we’re proud we haven’t had a rate change in almost 10 years, these increased costs place tremendous pressure on the cost of your electric service.

Basin Electric Power Cooperative, one of our wholesale power suppliers, will increase their rates by over 18% the next two years. Our other wholesale power supplier, Corn Belt Power Cooperative, will also increase their rates to us by an average of 10%

over the next three years. Wholesale power accounts for over 70% of our costs, so changes in wholesale rates have a significant impact on our operation. The remaining 30% of our costs are internal. Some of these are controllable, some are not. An example of uncontrollable costs is how much electricity is used across our 11-county service territory.

In November, your board of directors approved a rate increase effective with the February 2026 billing cycle. Every rate class will experience an increase of about 10% for 2026. PECO returns any margins to its members, so there is no incentive to raise rates more than necessary. The monthly facility charge will not increase.

### Careful consideration

As a not-for-profit electric cooperative owned by its members, PECO’s board of directors only increase rates when it must, to remain financially stable and to meet our lenders’ financial covenants. Your board of directors

and employees take this responsibility seriously, as we too are members.

One of the challenges we face as a rural electric cooperative is low density. We have roughly two members per mile of line compared to Iowa’s investor-owned utilities with 28 consumers per miles of line and Iowa’s municipalities with around 58 consumers per mile of line. This is an enormous difference in terms of cost recovery. Simply put, we have fewer members and more miles of line. As a result, we have significantly fewer members from whom we recover our fixed costs.

I can assure you as a cooperative we will continue to look for ways to manage costs for our members, striving to provide value without sacrificing safety or reliability.

For more information about the new rates effective on the February bills, see below and visit [www.prairieenergy.coop/rates](http://www.prairieenergy.coop/rates).

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



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**Website:** [www.prairieenergy.coop](http://www.prairieenergy.coop)

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RATE CHANGES (EFFECTIVE WITH FEBRUARY BILLS)				
<b>SINGLE PHASE GENERAL SERVICE &lt;50 KVA</b>				
		<b>2025 Rate</b>	<b>1/1/2026 Rate</b>	
MONTHLY FACILITY CHARGE	\$	45.00	\$ 45.00	No Change
ENERGY CHARGE				
First 1,000 kWh		0.121400	0.133540	10%
Over 1,000 kWh		0.105000	0.115500	10%
<b>SINGLE PHASE GENERAL SERVICE &gt;50 KVA</b>				
		<b>2025 Rate</b>	<b>1/1/2026 Rate</b>	
MONTHLY FACILITY CHARGE	\$	60.00	\$ 60.00	No Change
ENERGY CHARGE				
First 7,500 kWh		0.114700	0.126170	10%
Over 7,500 kWh		0.100000	0.110000	10%
<b>MULTI-PHASE MEDIUM POWER &lt;100 KVA</b>				
		<b>2025 Rate</b>	<b>1/1/2026 Rate</b>	
MONTHLY FACILITY CHARGE	\$	70.00	\$ 70.00	No Change
ENERGY CHARGE				
First 2,500 kWh		0.126000	0.138600	10%
Over 2,500 kWh		0.110000	0.121000	10%

# SEEKING BOARD CANDIDATES

Prairie Energy Cooperative (PECO) is member-owned, which means your participation helps shape the future of the co-op. One of the most important ways to get involved is by serving on the board of directors.

Two seats on PECO's seven-member board will be up for election at the annual meeting in June. The three-year terms of **Ryan Eekhoff (District 2)** and **Marion Denger (District 5)** are expiring, and both have indicated they are willing to serve again.

**District 2 townships:** Buffalo, Bingham, Wesley, Orthel, Britt, Garfield, Prairie, Boone, Erin and Liberty townships

**District 5 townships:** Iowa, Scott, Lincoln, Blaine, Morgan, Wall Lake, Vernon, Oakland, Blairsburg, Williams and Alden townships

Members residing in District 2 or District 5 who are interested in being considered as candidates are encouraged to contact the office

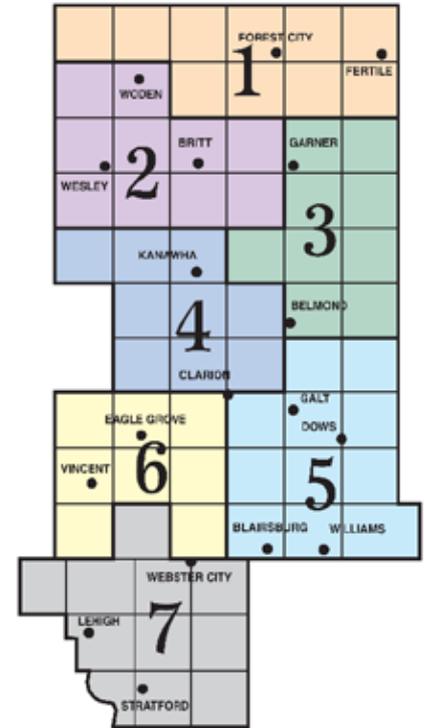
at 515-532-2805. Nominating committee information will be shared next month.

### Board member qualifications

To qualify, candidates must be PECO members receiving electricity in the townships listed.

In conjunction with these requirements, a board member is expected to attend the monthly board meetings, generally held on the last Tuesday of each month, and various information and training meetings throughout the year. Because the board of directors is responsible for establishing the policies and rates under which the cooperative operates, it is important that directors can devote adequate time to these activities.

To learn more about director requirements and expectations, visit [www.prairieenergy.coop](http://www.prairieenergy.coop).



## PATRONAGE RETURNED TO MEMBERS

Prairie Energy Cooperative has always been not-for-profit. This means that as a member of the co-op, you share in the excess revenue and the return of that excess revenue to members, called patronage. As new funds continue to come in, the original funds can be paid back to members in the form of patronage retirement.

This year, members who purchased electricity from the co-op in 2012 are receiving patronage for that year, totaling \$480,923.61. This retirement was paid out in the form of a bill credit, which was included on your December bill.





# LEADING THROUGH CHANGE

## ANNUAL MEETING RECAP

BY ERIN CAMPBELL

More than 375 directors and employees from Iowa's electric cooperatives gathered in West Des Moines for the Iowa Association of Electric Cooperatives' (IAEC) 2025 Annual Meeting on Dec. 4-5. With the theme Leading through Change, the event highlighted the industry's ongoing transformation and the importance of strong leadership.

IAEC Executive Vice President and General Manager Leslie Kaufman, who marked her first year with the association in July, noted the momentum of the year. Board President Jim Miller also reflected on his first year in the role, recalling how "a farm kid from Fonda" received a call from Gov. Kim Reynolds during his second week as president. The conversation focused on emerging energy policy issues, underscoring the responsibility and visibility of the position. Miller also praised Kaufman's early outreach to member co-ops, which helped shape IAEC's strategic direction.

In her executive report, Kaufman outlined departmental progress and emphasized the critical role of advocacy as policy challenges accelerate. She highlighted a new policy and advocacy framework designed to help statewide staff work more proactively in the years ahead.

Educational sessions once again played a central role in the meeting. Speakers included National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA) Board President Mike Partin, who joined Kaufman for a fireside chat on leading through change; nuclear engineer and Miss America 2023 Grace Vanderhei; Youth Leadership Council delegate Ava Meinders; governance experts from Federated Rural Electric Insurance Exchange and NRECA; and National Association of Regulatory Utility Commissioners Executive Director Tony Clark, who addressed national issues, including resource adequacy,

cybersecurity and the growing electricity demands of AI and data centers. NFL Hall of Famer and former Congressman Steve Largent closed the event with leadership insights from his career in sports, business and politics.

IAEC also recognized longtime contributors and emerging leaders, including service award recipients, Cooperative Leadership in Iowa Program (CLIP) graduates, Rural Electric Safety Achievement Program (RESAP) certified cooperatives, nationally credentialed directors and the inaugural Iowa Electric Cooperative Excellence Award honorees: Director Excellence Award recipient Jerry Beck of Iowa Lakes Electric Cooperative and Employee Excellence Award recipient Robert Wakhouse of Harrison County REC.

Watch for more information about key annual meeting topics in upcoming issues of this magazine.

# COOPERATIVE LEADERSHIP IN IOWA PROGRAM

Congratulations to the 13 graduates of the 2025 CLIP for emerging leaders.

Participants committed to a year-long calendar of in-person, virtual and on-demand training sessions. Additionally, these individuals developed their leadership skills, gained insights on various professional roles within electric cooperatives and attended statewide events to better understand important issues facing Iowa's electric cooperatives.



## IOWA CO-OPS RECOGNIZED FOR SAFETY ACHIEVEMENTS

During the IAEC annual meeting in December, several Iowa electric cooperatives were congratulated for completing the RESAP in 2025. The cooperatives included:

- Clarke Electric Cooperative, Inc.
- Corn Belt Power Cooperative
- Eastern Iowa Light & Power Cooperative
- Grundy County Rural Electric Cooperative
- Guthrie County Rural Electric Cooperative Association
- Linn County Rural Electric Cooperative
- Maquoketa Valley Electric Cooperative
- Nishnabotna Valley Rural Electric Cooperative
- Osceola Electric Cooperative, Inc.
- Pella Cooperative Electric Association
- Southwest Iowa Rural Electric Cooperative
- Western Iowa Power Cooperative

RESAP is a service of the NRECA and strives to promote the highest standards of safety among electric cooperatives.

IAEC fully supports the RESAP program and works with electric cooperative members in their safety achievements. The rigorous program requires annual reporting to NRECA of Occupational Safety and Health Administration Data and updates to the cooperative's safety improvement plan. Every three years, additional data must be submitted to NRECA, as well as participation in an onsite safety observation by NRECA at the cooperative.

**Zach Finn**  
Central Iowa Power Cooperative

**Justin Krueger**  
Consumers Energy

**Ben Donnelly**  
East-Central Iowa Rural Electric Cooperative

**Mindy Comstock**  
Farmers Electric Cooperative, Inc.

**Emily Rush**  
Franklin Rural Electric Cooperative

**Johnna Nunemaker**  
Linn County Rural Electric Cooperative

**Abby Fischer**  
Maquoketa Valley Electric Cooperative

**Kraig Johnson**  
MiEnergy Cooperative

**Jason Stock**  
Northwest Iowa Power Cooperative

**Steve Jackson**  
Prairie Energy Cooperative

**Alicia Lohr**  
Raccoon Valley Electric Cooperative

**Tanner Rinehart**  
Southwest Iowa Rural Electric Cooperative

**Jason Jack**  
T.I.P. Rural Electric Cooperative



2025 CLIP graduates. Pictured from left: Jason Stock, Zach Finn, Johnna Nunemaker, Alicia Lohr, Abby Fischer, Emily Rush, Mindy Comstock, Jason Jack, Kraig Johnson, Steve Jackson, Tanner Rinehart, Ben Donnelly and Justin Krueger.

## DIRECTOR GOLD CREDENTIAL

The NRECA Director Gold Credential (DGC) recognizes directors who have earned their Credentialed Cooperative Director certificate and Board Leadership Certificate credentials and are committed to continuing their education throughout their service on the board. The following have achieved or maintained their DGC.

**David Hollingsworth**  
**Michael Holtkamp**  
Access Energy Cooperative

**Jerry Keleher**  
Allamakee-Clayton Electric Cooperative

**Allyn Harms**  
Butler County Rural Electric Cooperative

**Steve Boedecker**  
**James Miller**  
Calhoun County Electric Cooperative Association

**Kenneth Vandenberg**  
Chariton Valley Electric Cooperative, Inc.

**Cody Miller**  
**William White**  
Clarke Electric Cooperative, Inc.

**Dennis Beckman**  
**William Hobson**  
Consumers Energy

**Joel Carstensen**  
**Gary Kester**  
**Kurt Olson**  
**Kathrine Wunderlich**  
Eastern Iowa Light & Power Cooperative

**Mark Earhart**  
**Kristopher Petter**  
Farmers Electric Cooperative, Inc.

**Gordon Greimann**  
**Donald Greimann**  
**John Snyder**  
Franklin Rural Electric Cooperative

**Kevin Pruisner**  
Grundy County Rural Electric Cooperative

**Brenda Lundergard**  
Harrison County Rural Electric Cooperative

**Tricia Jaeger**  
**Mark Kingland**  
**Vince Morische**  
Heartland Power Cooperative

**Bruce Amundson**  
**Craig Deim**  
**Crystal Pluth**  
**Mark Tuttle**  
**Trent Will**  
**Roger Williamson**  
**Daniel Winterhof**  
Iowa Lakes Electric Cooperative

**Gary Schlotterbeck**  
**Kenneth Squires**  
Linn County Rural Electric Cooperative

**Judy Gotto**  
**Thomas Stewart**  
Maquoketa Valley Electric Cooperative

**Gene Kenkel**  
**Donna Olson**  
Nishnabotna Valley Rural Electric Cooperative

**Dale Ullrich**  
North West Rural Electric Cooperative

**Bryce Arkema**  
**Darrell Boot**  
**Carroll Hoksbergen**  
**Steve Inskeep**  
**Jon Van Woerkom**  
Pella Cooperative Electric Association

**David Onken**  
Raccoon Valley Electric Cooperative

**Ronald Hoffman**  
T.I.P. Rural Electric Cooperative

**Phillip Jensen**  
**Scott Linville**  
United Electric Cooperative



## CRAISINS, APPLE, WALNUT AND QUINOA SALAD

- ½ cup quinoa, uncooked
- ½ cup toasted walnuts, chopped
- 1 cup raisins
- 1 large apple, chopped
- 1 large celery stalk, chopped
- 2 tablespoons green onion, chopped
- 1 tablespoon honey (or white corn syrup)
- 2 tablespoons white balsamic raspberry blush vinegar
- kosher salt, to taste
- pepper, to taste

Prepare quinoa according to package directions. Refrigerate for 30 minutes, until cooled completely. In a large bowl, toss cooled quinoa, walnuts, raisins, apple, celery and onion together. In a separate bowl, mix honey or corn syrup and vinegar. Season with salt and pepper. Pour dressing over salad and mix well. Serve immediately or chill in refrigerator until ready to serve. *Serves 8*

Nancy Anderson • Ankeny  
Prairie Energy Cooperative

## CUKE, TOMATO AND ONION SALAD

- 1 medium cucumber, sliced
- 1 medium onion, sliced
- 2 medium tomatoes, cubed
- 2 teaspoons dill weed
- 1 tablespoon salad oil
- 1 tablespoon vinegar
- 2 teaspoons sugar
- 2 teaspoons salt
- dash of pepper, optional

Mix all ingredients and refrigerate 2 hours before serving. *Serves 10*

Patricia Glandorf • Williamsburg  
T.I.P. Rural Electric Cooperative

## OAT BURGERS

- 1 cup creamy cottage cheese
- 1 cup corn flakes cereal, crushed
- 1 cup quick oatmeal
- 2 eggs
- salt, to taste
- pepper, to taste
- oil
- 1 can cream of mushroom soup
- 1¼ cans milk or water

Mix cottage cheese, cereal, oatmeal, eggs, salt and pepper. Form into patties and brown in oil. Mix soup and milk or water, then cover patties with the soup mixture. Bake covered at 350 degrees F for 45-60 minutes. Cream of mushroom soup can be substituted with cream of celery soup. *Serves 2-4*

Natalie Herrington • Nevada  
Consumers Energy

## CARIBBEAN RICE AND BEANS

- 1 tablespoon oil
- ¼ teaspoon garlic powder
- ½ cup green onion, diced
- ½ cup green pepper, diced
- ½ teaspoon rosemary leaves
- ½ teaspoon thyme leaves
- ½ teaspoon black pepper
- 1 can black beans, drained and rinsed
- 1 cup raw rice, cooked
- ¼ cup picante sauce
- 2 tablespoons soy sauce
- ½ cup cheddar cheese, grated

In a skillet, sauté oil, garlic powder, green onion, green pepper, rosemary, thyme and pepper. Add beans to sautéed ingredients. Then, add rice, picante and soy sauce. Stir fry until hot, then top with cheese. *Serves 4*

Sandra Busard • Donnellson  
Access Energy Cooperative

## BLACK BEAN AND VEGGIE BURGERS

- 2 15-ounce cans black beans, rinsed and drained
- 1½ teaspoons garlic powder
- 1 teaspoon chili powder
- 1 teaspoon cumin
- ½ teaspoon paprika
- ½ teaspoon salt
- 2 teaspoons cilantro
- ¼ cup green pepper, finely chopped
- ½ cup breadcrumbs
- 1 large carrot, grated
- ¼ cup red onion, chopped
- 1 egg
- 6 buns, optional
- lettuce, optional

In a large mixing bowl, mash black beans. Add garlic powder, chili powder, cumin, paprika, salt and cilantro. Mix until combined. Add peppers, breadcrumbs, carrot, onion and egg to the combined bean mixture. Form into patties and fry over medium heat in a greased pan. Flip after 5 minutes and fry the other side for the same amount of time. Serve on a bun or on a bed of lettuce. *Serves 6*

Crystal Hammes • Libertyville  
Access Energy Cooperative

## HOMEMADE SLOW COOKER TOMATO BASIL SOUP

- 5-7 tomatoes on the vine (or 2 cups baby tomatoes)
- 1 yellow onion, diced
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 head garlic, peeled
- splash of vegetable broth
- 1 tablespoon Italian seasoning
- 1 teaspoon salt
- ½ teaspoon black pepper
- ¼ teaspoon red pepper flakes
- fresh basil, to taste
- heavy cream, optional

Place all ingredients in a slow cooker, except basil. Cook on low until tomatoes and onions are soft. Blend soup until smooth with an immersion or regular blender. Adding heavy cream will make for creamier soup. Adjust seasonings to taste and garnish with fresh basil before serving. *Serves 6, approximately*

Tristen Jungers • Archer  
North West Rural Electric Cooperative

## SPAGHETTI SALAD

- 4 medium fresh tomatoes
- 1 large red onion
- 2 cucumbers
- 2 bell peppers
- 2 pounds spaghetti
- 1 16-ounce bottle Wishbone Italian salad dressing
- Shilling Salad Supreme Spice, to taste

Chop together tomatoes, onion, cucumbers and peppers. Break spaghetti into thirds and boil until cooked. Cool slightly but add salad dressing before spaghetti is cold. Mix spaghetti with tomato mixture and add salad spice to taste. *Serves 16, or cut recipe in half to serve 8*

Denise Anderson • Ocheyedan  
Osceola Electric Cooperative, Inc.

Visit [www.ieclmagazine.com](http://www.ieclmagazine.com) and search our online archive of hundreds of recipes in various categories.



## EASY PEASY PAELLA

- 2 tablespoons oil
- 1 cup white rice
- 1 onion, diced
- 2 carrots, diced
- 2 stalks celery, diced
- 8 ounces mushrooms, quartered
- 1 bell pepper (any color), diced
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 2 pinches saffron, optional
- 1 teaspoon Old Bay seasoning
- 1 teaspoon paprika
- sprinkle cayenne
- 1 cup white wine or vegetable broth
- 8 ounces grape tomatoes
- ½ cup green olives
- 1 cup frozen peas
- salt, to taste
- pepper, to taste

Swirl oil to coat an 11-inch cast iron or other oven-safe pan. Layer (in order) rice, onion, carrots, celery, mushrooms, bell pepper, garlic, seasonings and wine or broth. Bake at 375 degrees F for 40 minutes. Stir in tomatoes, olives and peas. Bake 15 minutes. Add salt and pepper to taste. *Serves 6*

Chris Daniels • Casey  
Guthrie County Rural Electric Cooperative Association

WANTED:

## BEEF BURGER RECIPES

THE REWARD:

\$25 FOR EVERY ONE WE PUBLISH!

Deadline is Jan. 31

Fire up the grill, load up the toppings and gather around the picnic table – we want your best **beef burger recipes!** Selected submissions will appear in our May issue in celebration of Beef Month. Please include your name, address, telephone number, co-op name, recipe category and number of servings on all submissions.

EMAIL: [recipes@ieclmagazine.com](mailto:recipes@ieclmagazine.com)

MAIL: Recipes

Iowa Electric Cooperative Living magazine  
8525 Douglas Ave., Suite 48  
Des Moines, IA 50322



Craig Codner, CEO of Butler County REC, participates in shooting the national commercial.



# IOWA CO-OPS SHINE BRIGHT IN NEW TOUCHSTONE ENERGY COMMERCIAL

Hollywood came to Butler County in northeast Iowa this past summer in the form of Harvest Creative Services (Harvest) from Lansing, Michigan.

Butler County REC was chosen as the host cooperative for the Touchstone Energy® Cooperative's annual ad shoot, which took place in June. Before the shoot, however, there were numerous phone calls, emails – 825 in total – meetings, text messages and a week in May scouting locations for the five scenes.

## Behind the scenes of a major production

Anne Gardiner, public relations specialist with Butler County REC, and Marena Fritzler, marketing

director with Corn Belt Power Cooperative, spent the week with Harvest. It was a full week that included new opportunities, making grilled cheese sandwiches for one scene, shooting scenes numerous times (the first scene alone took 31 takes), making last-minute adjustments, long days and short nights, and a lot of camaraderie.

## Cooperation among cooperatives on full display

The ad was also a nod to cooperation among cooperatives, one of our seven cooperative principles. The first scene was shot at Grundy County REC with lineman Derek Snakenberg driving the REC truck. Iowa Lakes Electric Cooperative

sent three volunteers – Ryan Craig, CEO and Touchstone Energy board member; Katie Harris, communications specialist; and Jen Sievert, vice president of customer and corporate relations.

“It was an epic, one-of-a-kind experience, learning from the production crew on set, photographing the journey, and helping behind the scenes,” said Fritzler. “The magic of this creation came to life the way it did with the collective strength of many. It was neat to see local employees and board members from Butler County REC, Grundy County REC and Iowa Lakes Electric Cooperative step up and into this production.”

## Creativity, improvisation and a memorable experience

Interestingly, appliance finishes ultimately determined the filming location for the kitchen scene. A couple of Butler County REC employees offered their own kitchens for filming, but during location scouting, the production team determined the finishes and reflections in co-op employees' refrigerator doors when opened were not the right fit for the envisioned transition into the hand-drawn bucket truck. Production crews found the winning refrigerator in a local rental property in Shell Rock, where the kitchen scene was filmed.

Improvising is also a hallmark of ad shoots. When the Harvest team was searching for a table for the kitchen scene, Gardiner offered her kitchen table. Fritzier and Gardiner disassembled the table to get it through doors, loaded it onto an REC truck, covered it due to impending rain and headed to the scene, where the crew unloaded it. After the scene was shot, the table was loaded back onto the truck and covered with a tarp. Rain was definitely on its way.

Fritzier and Gardiner then went back and forth on whether the table should be housed at Butler County REC's CEO Craig Codner's home or driven back to Gardiner's home. They decided to drive the table to Gardiner's and unload it. The decision proved to be the correct one — it sprinkled, but the table remained unscathed.

The ad, released during the Touchstone Energy annual meeting on Nov. 19, is the centerpiece of Touchstone's 2026 national campaign, "The Cooperative Advantage." With more than 100 co-op members, employees and actors, this was Touchstone Energy's largest production to date. It also has the distinction of being the only ad in eight years in which shooting days had to change to accommodate weather.

"Touchstone Energy and Harvest Creative Services were great to work with," Gardiner said. "Butler County REC was proud to be the host for the 2026 ad campaign. It was an amazing opportunity that we are so grateful to have been a part of. I learned so much and had the best time. I also don't look at commercials or movies the same way I used to!"



Touchstone Energy<sup>®</sup>  
Cooperatives

## ABOUT TOUCHSTONE ENERGY

Touchstone Energy is a national network of electric cooperatives across 46 states that provides research, communications resources and employee training to help co-ops strengthen relationships with their members. These shared tools and programs support superior member satisfaction, reinforce the cooperative difference and strengthen both local communities and the broader electric cooperative network. Touchstone Energy cooperatives stand out as trusted, reliable sources of power and information for 30 million member-consumers.

## WHY DOES TOUCHSTONE ENERGY ADVERTISE?

Advertising is important for Touchstone Energy because it strengthens the unified national brand shared by hundreds of local electric cooperatives, helping members recognize the value, reliability and community focus of their co-op. It communicates the "cooperative difference," reinforces trust, and educates the public on key energy issues, while also helping attract new talent by highlighting the meaningful, community-driven careers available within the cooperative network. By keeping co-ops visible, consistent and connected, advertising supports member engagement, strengthens workforce recruitment and ensures that Touchstone Energy cooperatives continue to be seen as trusted, people-first energy providers.



Scan the QR code  
to watch the  
30-second spot.



# APPLY FOR THE 2026 YOUTH TOUR TO WASHINGTON, D.C.

Every generation leaves behind a legacy, footprints that shape the future. Iowa Youth Tour is your chance to do the same. For over 60 years, electric cooperatives have sent high school students to Washington, D.C., to discover their voice, step into history and begin writing the story only they can tell.

This once-in-a-lifetime experience isn't just about seeing the nation's capital. It's about preparing students to lead, to grow and to make their mark on the world.

### What's in it for students?

Delegates from Iowa will join over 1,800 students from across the country in Washington, D.C., June 14-20. During the trip, students will:

- Develop leadership skills through hands-on experiences and workshops

- Strengthen their resumes with a nationally recognized program that stands out to colleges and employers
- Connect with peers from 44 states, building friendships that last long after the trip
- Meet with elected officials and learn how government impacts their communities
- Experience history up close by visiting world-class museums and monuments
- Learn about cooperatives and how they support rural communities across America

The best part? All expenses – travel, lodging, meals and program costs – are covered by Prairie Energy Cooperative (PECO). The program is coordinated by the Iowa Association of Electric Cooperatives and the



National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA).

### Don't let this opportunity pass by

Applications are open now through March 20. Eligible applicants must be current high school sophomores or juniors who live within PECO's 11-county service area. The application includes a short essay and can be downloaded at [www.prairieenergy.coop/youth-tour](http://www.prairieenergy.coop/youth-tour) or picked up at our office.

This is more than a trip – it's a chance to make your mark!

For questions, contact Darren Johnson or Chad Chapman with PECO member services at 515-532-2805 or [mbrsrv@prairieenergy.coop](mailto:mbrsrv@prairieenergy.coop).

## SCHOLARSHIP OPPORTUNITY INCREASED TO \$2,500 THIS YEAR

Each year, Basin Electric Power Cooperative – Prairie Energy Cooperative's wholesale power supplier – offers a scholarship to support local students pursuing higher education. This year, the award amount has increased to \$2,500.

The scholarship invests in the future of our rural communities. Recipients are selected based on academic achievement, leadership, community involvement, work experience, and their educational and career goals. Funds must be used for college expenses, and recipients must be enrolled in a college program for the upcoming fall semester.

High school seniors and current college students are encouraged to apply. Applications are available on our website or by contacting our office at 515-532-2805.



The application deadline is Feb. 20, 2026.

# ENERGY STORAGE ADVANCES

BY JENNAH DENNEY

Not long ago, when people talked about batteries, they meant the kind that powered flashlights, phones or watches. Today, batteries are transforming the way we power our homes, farms and even the electric grid that keeps our lights on. Across the country, battery energy storage is helping electric cooperatives keep power more reliable, affordable and resilient.

The journey began with early rechargeable batteries like lead-acid models, which were used in vehicles, tractors and backup systems for lighting or telephones. These systems were bulky, short-lived and required frequent maintenance. Later, nickel-cadmium and nickel-metal hydride batteries became popular in cordless tools, early electronics and hybrid vehicles. While they marked a step forward, they remained expensive and weren't well suited for large-scale energy applications.

A major turning point came with the development of lithium-ion batteries. These are lighter, longer lasting and capable of storing more energy in less space. Initially used in laptops and mobile phones, lithium-ion technology now powers most electric vehicles (EVs) and many of the grid-scale systems that can keep thousands of homes running for hours. And innovation hasn't stopped there. Researchers are now exploring solid-state and sodium-ion batteries, which use safer, more abundant materials and promise to make battery energy storage even more affordable and accessible. Each advancement brings batteries closer to becoming a foundational part of everyday life.

## Co-ops embrace battery technology

Across the country, electric co-ops are deploying battery energy storage systems to support grid operations and manage local demand. Batteries can store excess electricity from renewable sources like solar and wind, then



Often paired with rooftop solar panels, residential battery storage systems can provide backup power during outages, keeping essential equipment like lights, refrigerators and medical devices running. *Photo Source: Base Power*



Across the country, electric co-ops are deploying battery energy storage systems to support grid operations and manage local demand.



Utility-scale storage technologies are helping electric co-ops improve reliability, integrate renewable energy and manage infrastructure costs.

discharge it when demand rises, which can help balance supply and demand and improve grid stability. They also provide an alternative to traditional infrastructure upgrades. In areas where energy use is growing, a strategically placed battery can handle short-term peaks in demand, reducing the need for new substations or extended power lines. This can lower capital costs and reduce construction timelines.

More than 70 electric cooperatives in 24 states have installed or are testing battery energy storage systems, according to the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association. Most systems currently in use are designed to deliver power for two to eight hours. However, long-duration energy storage (LDES) technologies are emerging that can store energy for 10 hours or more, and in some cases, multiple days. It's important to recognize that battery technology is still evolving and it might not be economically feasible in all uses or areas.

These battery storage systems could help utilities manage extended periods of low renewable generation or respond to prolonged grid stress events, especially in remote or weather-sensitive areas.

## Potential reliability, cost benefits

Battery storage may also offer benefits to co-op members. Residential systems can provide backup power during outages, keeping essential equipment like lights, refrigerators and medical devices running. For homes with rooftop solar, batteries allow excess energy to be stored during the day and used at night. Some cooperatives offer time-of-use rates, where electricity costs less during off-peak hours. Batteries can store low-cost energy and use it later, helping reduce monthly bills.

## Electric vehicle advances

Battery innovation is also being driven by the growth of EVs. Manufacturers are working to improve battery performance, extend battery lifespan, reduce charging time and lower costs. These improvements are influencing the broader energy storage market. Some EVs now include vehicle-to-home (V2H) or vehicle-to-grid (V2G) capabilities, allowing a car to supply power to a home during an outage or send energy back to the grid during peak demand.

*Jennah Denney writes on consumer and cooperative affairs for the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association.*

# DISTRIBUTION AUTOMATION KEEPS POWER FLOWING, OUTAGES AT BAY

BY CATHY CASH

Staying online uninterrupted by a power glitch seems more important than ever. And today, it's even more possible than ever before, thanks to advanced energy technologies that can instantly rearrange electricity flows to areas hit by storms or other disturbances.

Distribution automation, also known as DA, refers to a powerful set of tools that includes automated sensors, communications systems and data analytics-enabling electric utilities to monitor power lines, field equipment and generation facilities in real time.

Equipped with these DA tools, Iowa's electric cooperatives can detect an outage and isolate it in real-time from their control rooms before sending out field crew to repair the damaged powerlines.

"Distribution automation helps electric co-ops deliver reliable, high-quality service to members when today's world demands it most," said Ravindra Singh, senior principal of DA for the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association.

Some call DA a "self-healing electric grid" because its application, such as fault location, isolation and service restoration (FLISR), allows the network of power lines and substations to automatically reconfigure in response to disruptions.

## How it works

When power lines are damaged or shortened by storms, critters or some disaster, DA systems can reroute electricity from the power source to unaffected infrastructure. This allows electric service to continue uninterrupted to a community that would otherwise suffer an outage.



With distributed automation technology and its analysis of network data, co-ops can see their system's assets, how they are operating and what energy resources are on their power lines to support better quality service and reliability.



Distribution automation devices installed on a power pole bolster reliability and help members stay powered even during storms.



Distributed automation can save electric co-ops and their members money by reducing inspection time for field apparatus such as transformers, substations and power lines.

DA not only has a hand in preventing outages, but this suite of technologies can save electric co-ops and their members money by reducing inspection time for field apparatuses such as transformers, substations and power lines.

With real-time field measurements from DA technologies, a co-op gains situational awareness of its electricity network and can minimize unnecessary maintenance activities, truck rolls and crew dispatches to examine lines, locate damage and make repairs.

"Power distribution grids are evolving from being a passive network to a more active network," said Singh. "With DA technology and its analysis of network data, co-ops can see their system's assets, how they are operating and what energy resources are on their power lines to support better quality service and reliability."

## Knowledge is power

Without DA, a co-op may not know where electric vehicles, rooftop solar, residential batteries, generators and other distribution resources are being added or operated on its system by its members. This can be a challenge when it comes to managing peak demand and having to curtail energy to sustain reliability.

Electricity demand is only going to grow because of new types of loads such as data centers, crypto mining and EVs, according to any industry forecast. So, it makes sense for utilities to optimize the use of their existing infrastructure or equipment to keep costs in check.

With DA, electric co-ops can better manage and grow their systems and respond to crises safely and efficiently while their members enjoy reliable electricity without hiccups.

*Cathy Cash writes on consumer and cooperative affairs for the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association.*

# WISHING YOU AN “AWE”SOME YEAR

BY DARCY DOUGHERTY MAULSBY

Remember when Iowa’s night sky offered breathtaking views on Veterans Day 2025? If you stepped outside on Nov. 11, you could see the northern lights shimmering across the horizon.

Like many other Iowans, I couldn’t resist taking pictures of this incredible phenomenon. Professional photographers and amateurs with smartphone cameras shared images online of the spectacle, with ribbons of red, green, pink and violet dancing above farms, small towns and city skylines.

The northern lights aren’t common in Iowa since we’re located too far south to regularly see the region where the lights are most visible. Seeing them in Iowa requires a strong geomagnetic storm to push the aurora far enough south and create an exceptionally vibrant display – a rare event.

In other words, it’s awesome.

“I couldn’t believe how vivid the northern lights were,” commented my friend Donetta Stewart of rural Auburn, who captured amazing views of the sky above her barn during the celestial show. “I’ve never seen anything like it. Every now and then, it’s soul satisfying to witness something that captures your sense of wonder once again.”

## Make room for more awe and wonder

That word “wonder” resonated with me. It describes the magic inspired by a sense of awe.

What exactly is awe?

We’ve all experienced it, even if we didn’t know what to call it. Whether we’re enjoying a stunning sunset or watching a new leaf grow on a plant, the feeling we get in that moment – amazed, inspired, transported – is what researchers call awe.



Photo Source: Donetta Stewart, Sac County



Photo Source: Lynn Poen, Lake City



Photo Source: Darcy Dougherty Maulsby, Yetter

“I’ve been thinking a lot lately about how it’s important to make room and opportunity for awe and wonder in your life, especially as we get older,” Donetta told me. “I constantly remind myself of how it is a privilege to see the passing years. Many I know didn’t get to do that.”

She’s exactly right. Awe is a rich blessing. It’s a gentle nudge to appreciate the everyday wonders flourishing all around us. It’s something we all need more of in our lives.

Like many positive emotions, awe makes us feel good. It helps us connect with others. Awe decreases stress levels, and it increases generosity and kindness. Awe also makes us happier and more satisfied with life.

## “Everything is a miracle”

Research shows that awe shifts us from a competitive, dog-eat-dog mindset to a sense that we’re a part of a community, a culture, an ecosystem. Thanks to awe, “our individual self gives way to the boundary-dissolving sense of being part of something much larger,” noted Dacher Keltner, author of the book “Awe: The New Science of Everyday Wonder and How It Can Transform Your Life.”

Finding ways to cultivate awe in everyday life leads us to appreciate what is most humane in our human nature.

- Slow down and focus on your senses. Tune into the sights, textures, smells, tastes and sounds around you, from the flavors of a delicious meal to the delight of listening to a favorite song.
- Spend time in nature. Notice the vastness of the sky, the beauty of trees and flowers, and the way the sunlight sparkles on a river or lake. Even observing nature from a window can help.
- Document the beauty around you. Write down things you notice that bring you joy, or take some photographs, just like many of us did with the northern lights.

This year, make time to nurture a sense of awe, and take inspiration in this quote attributed to Albert Einstein: “There are only two ways to live your life. One is as though nothing is a miracle. The other is as though everything is a miracle.”

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



IOWA ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE LIVING

The magazine  
for members of  
Iowa's electric  
cooperatives

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Visit our website at [www.prairieenergy.coop](http://www.prairieenergy.coop)

A group of utility workers, including men and women, are gathered around a training station in a workshop or garage. One man in a light blue shirt and white cap is speaking to the group. The training station has a sign that says "SAFETY TRAINING" and contains various electrical components and tools. The workers are wearing work clothes and caps. The background shows yellow safety barriers and orange traffic cones.

# SAFETY

IS THE BACKBONE OF RELIABILITY

Safety is **#1** at your **Touchstone Energy® cooperative**.

From the ongoing training of our lineworkers  
to classroom safety programs for our kids.

Our commitment to electrical safety has always been job one.  
So, we can deliver reliable energy and peace of mind. That's  
why safety runs through everything we do.



Touchstone Energy®  
Cooperatives