

● MAY 2025

# iowa

ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE LIVING

**SPECIAL INSERT:**

**Prairie Energy  
Cooperative 2024  
Annual Report**

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

# CONTENTS



VOLUME 78 • ISSUE 5

3

## STATEWIDE PERSPECTIVE

Shine the Light on a  
community volunteer

3

## EDITOR'S CHOICE CONTEST

Win \$100  
in beef certificates

14

## SAFETY MATTERS

Essential tips for  
electrical safety

15

## OUT BACK

Honoring Iowa's  
hometown heroes

**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**  
Jim Miller, District 5 – President  
Gordon Greimann, District 6 – Vice President  
Tony Lem, District 2 – Secretary/Treasurer  
Jerry Keleher, District 3 – Asst. Secretary/Treasurer  
Travis Harris, District 1  
Steve Inskeep, District 4  
Bruce Amundson, District 7  
Marion Denger, Prairie Energy Cooperative –  
NRECA Representative  
Terry Sullivan, Linn County REC –  
Managers' Representative

*Iowa Electric Cooperative Living* magazine (ISSN: 2770-8683) is published monthly by the Iowa Association of Electric Cooperatives, a not-for-profit organization representing Iowa's member-owned local electric cooperatives. Association address: 8525 Douglas Ave., Suite 48, Des Moines, IA 50322-2992. The phrase ***Iowa Electric Cooperative Living*** is a mark registered within the state of Iowa to the Iowa Association of Electric Cooperatives. The magazine does not accept advertising.

**Editorial Office**  
8525 Douglas Ave., Suite 48, Des Moines, IA 50322-2992. Telephone: 515-276-5350.

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

**Website**  
[www.ieclmagazine.com](http://www.ieclmagazine.com)

**Postmaster**  
Send address changes to *Iowa Electric Cooperative Living* magazine, 8525 Douglas Ave., Suite 48, Des Moines, IA 50322-2992. Periodicals Postage Paid at Des Moines, Iowa, and at additional mailing offices.

**Change of Address**  
Every local electric cooperative maintains an independent mailing list of its members, so please send your change of address directly to your local electric cooperative's office. *Iowa Electric Cooperative Living* magazine cannot make an address change for you.

© Copyright 2025, Iowa Association of Electric Cooperatives. No portion of the editorial, photographic or other content of *Iowa Electric Cooperative Living* magazine or its website may be reproduced without written permission of the editor.



## ON THE COVER

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



# HELP US SHINE THE LIGHT ON LOCAL VOLUNTEERS AND DESERVING CHARITIES

BY ERIN CAMPBELL



We are gearing up for year five of our statewide Shine the Light program, which celebrates our cooperative commitment to community. During the month of June, member-

consumers and employees of Iowa electric cooperatives are invited to nominate local volunteers who are making a positive difference in their Iowa communities. Three winning volunteers will each receive a \$3,000 donation to their local charity and be featured in the September issue of this magazine.

## Your nomination makes a difference

Starting on June 1, go to [www.IowaShineTheLight.com](http://www.IowaShineTheLight.com) to make a nomination. Simply enter some basic contact information for you and your nominee and answer this question in 500 words or less:

***How has your nominee made a difference in the community and how might their local charity/nonprofit use the \$3,000 donation?***

The success of our Shine the Light program depends on co-op member-consumers who take the time to nominate a friend, neighbor or relative who deserves to be recognized. If you have nominated a volunteer in a previous year and they weren't selected as a winner, you are welcome to nominate them again.

Additionally, I will share that the judges who read through all the volunteer nominations respond positively to essays that tell a story and draw in the reader. A little creativity can help your nomination stand out in a crowded field!

## A diverse impact statewide

In the first four years of the program, our 12 winners (three winners each year) represent a diverse group of charities and nonprofits. Some of the winners have included an education



Starting on June 1, go to [www.IowaShineTheLight.com](http://www.IowaShineTheLight.com) to make a nomination.

foundation, an animal shelter, a community garden, a local food and furnishings closet, an agricultural pavilion and an air transportation service for medical treatments. You can see our past winners at [www.IowaShineTheLight.com](http://www.IowaShineTheLight.com) to learn more about these incredible groups. We are continuously impressed with the range of volunteer activities and local organizations that are nominated each year.

Many of these organizations are small operations that don't have the resources to seek major funding or media attention. Beyond the monetary

donation, the Shine the Light program has been helpful in spreading the word about the great work being done by some incredible volunteers.

Thank you for considering the nomination of someone in your community who should be celebrated for their volunteer efforts and for helping us shine the light on these deserving organizations. Make your nomination online from June 1 through June 30 at [www.IowaShineTheLight.com](http://www.IowaShineTheLight.com).

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

## EDITOR'S CHOICE CONTEST

## WIN \$100 IN BEEF CERTIFICATES!

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

### Visit our website and win!

Enter this month's contest by visiting [www.ieclmagazine.com](http://www.ieclmagazine.com) no later than May 31. You must be a member of one of Iowa's electric cooperatives to win. There's no obligation associated with entering, we don't share entrant information with anyone and multiple entries from the same account will be disqualified.

The winner of the \$100 gift card for landscaping from the March issue was **Jeanie Hall**, a **Farmers Electric Cooperative, Inc.** member-consumer.



ENTER ONLINE BY MAY 31!

# TRAVEL IOWA

This spring, fuel up and hit the road for a getaway that feels worlds away. Explore these European-inspired villages throughout Iowa, each full of flavor and tradition. As you pass through Iowa's small towns en route to your destination, you'll also discover many electric cooperative-served communities, each with its own charm.

## AMANA COLONIES

German traditions are alive and well in these seven villages founded in 1855 by German immigrants and collectively a National Historic Landmark. Make sure to stop in for wiener schnitzel at the Ox Yoke Inn. Shop for gourmet specialties at the High Amana General Store. Get a good night's sleep at A Touch of Home Bed & Breakfast.

## CZECH VILLAGE, CEDAR RAPIDS

The Czech Village is teeming with European history thanks to thousands of Czech, Moravian and Slovak descendants. This quaint neighborhood boasts a variety of shops and authentic Czech dining. Try a kolache from Sykora Bakery or sip an artisan brew at Lion Bridge Brewing Company. Learn about this wonderful heritage at the National Czech & Slovak Museum and Library.



## DECORAH

A rich Norwegian heritage comes to life in Decorah, where you'll find the Vesterheim Norwegian-American Museum with more than 33,000 artifacts. Locals love the annual Nordic Festival held every July that celebrates their culture. Check out Mabe's Pizza, a regional favorite. Visit Seed Savers Exchange where you'll find lush display gardens. Stay at the historic Hotel Winneshiek.

## ELK HORN/KIMBALLTON

The villages of Elk Horn and Kimballton are the two largest rural Danish settlements in America. Grab a bite to eat at Larsen's Pub (a best breaded tenderloin winner). Visit the authentic Danish Windmill and witness true Danish hospitality by attending Tivoli Fest in May or Julefest in November.

## ORANGE CITY

Orange City's charming Dutch atmosphere serves as a colorful backdrop for their annual three-day Tulip Festival that attracts thousands of visitors each May. Orange City is a must-see anytime of the year. Enjoy amazing dishes at the Blue Mountain Culinary Emporium and interactive learning experiences at the Dutch Heritage Center.

## PELLA

Pella keeps its European heritage on display with authentic Dutch bakeries, meat markets and historical buildings on the town square flanked by tulips in the spring. Bite into a flaky Dutch letter from Jaarsma Bakery. Tour the Vermeer Mill, a fully functional 1850s-style windmill. Rest your head at the Royal Amsterdam Hotel.

# ENTER TO WIN

RECEIVE \$100 FOR A PUBLISHED PHOTO

## SEND US YOUR RURAL IOWA PHOTOS

We're always looking for stunning images for the cover of *Iowa Electric Cooperative Living* magazine. If we select your photo for a cover, we'll award you \$100. The photos must be clear, of an Iowa place served by an electric cooperative and in high resolution.

To be considered, email photos to [editor@ieclmagazine.com](mailto:editor@ieclmagazine.com) with "Cover Submission" in the subject line. Please also include the name of the electric cooperative that serves you.





# IAEC'S BOARD OF DIRECTORS VISIT WITH LEGISLATIVE LEADERSHIP

It has become tradition for the March meeting of the Iowa Association of Electric Cooperative's (IAEC) board of directors to include Capitol visits with legislative leadership. Due to Winter Storm Lola, the meetings were moved to a virtual format on March 5.

The IAEC board had productive discussions with Senate Majority Leader Jack Whitver, Senate President Amy Sinclair (pictured), Senate Minority Leader Janice Weiner, House Minority Leader Jennifer Konfrst, Speaker Pat Grassley and Majority Leader Matt Windschitl.

The group discussed three key legislative priorities – defined electric service territory, right of first refusal and third-party solar.

Defined electric service territory laws in Iowa support affordable rates, foster a resilient grid and encourage



rural economic development. In place for almost 50 years, these service territories provide a high degree of certainty which enable electric co-ops to make long-term investments to best serve our members.

Allowing Iowa's incumbent electric providers the right of first refusal (ROFR) in constructing and maintaining electric transmission projects, as included in the governor's energy bill, provides benefits to Iowans.

A third-party solar bill (which ultimately did not survive the second funnel) raised concerns because it would have undercut defined electric service territory and allowed nonutilities to provide retail electric service within rate-regulated utility territory.

Learn more about the legislative priorities of Iowa's electric cooperatives and Iowa Rural Power grassroots advocacy at [www.iaruralpower.org](http://www.iaruralpower.org).

## SIGN UP FOR EMERGENCY NOTIFICATIONS IN YOUR COUNTY

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

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

There are three ways to sign up for county alerts:

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

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



**DID YOU  
KNOW?**

OWNED BY THE MEMBERS THEY SERVE,  
LOCALLY GOVERNED ELECTRIC  
COOPERATIVES POWER THE LIVES OF

**650,000 IOWANS**

THROUGHOUT ALL 99 COUNTIES  
EVERY DAY.

CO-OPS ARE COMMITTED TO  
DELIVERING POWER THAT IS

**SAFE,  
RELIABLE, AFFORDABLE  
AND SUSTAINABLE**

WHILE ALSO INVESTING IN RURAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT.



# "MOVE OVER" TO PROTECT ROADSIDE CREWS

BY SCOTT FLOOD

Iowa state law requires motorists to move over or slow down when approaching ANY vehicle stopped on the side of the road with its flashing lights activated, including passenger cars with hazard lights. Those who fail to obey the law could receive a traffic ticket or even lose their driver's license.

When lineworkers are perched in a bucket truck, repairing power lines along a busy road, they have good reason to be concerned about their safety. However, most are less apprehensive about problems like working with high voltages or falling. Their biggest worry is also the most unpredictable: a distracted driver slamming into their vehicle or a nearby power pole.

The National Safety Council reported that 891 people were killed and 37,701 people were injured in work zone crashes during 2022 (the most recent statistics). Most of those crashes occur in construction sites, which are usually well-marked. Electric co-op crews are likely to face even greater danger, as they often work along remote stretches of roads, frequently in adverse weather conditions that can reduce their visibility.

## Move over laws vary

The danger of work zone crashes led every state to adopt "move over" laws that require drivers to lower their speed and switch lanes when possible to protect emergency vehicles. The goal is to provide an added safety buffer and minimize the potential for accidents. Drivers caught violating the laws can face penalties such as significant fines.

Unfortunately, the Journal of Road Safety reports that just 14 states' "move over" laws protect other types of service vehicles, such as construction trucks and utility vehicles. That means drivers in those states are under no legal obligation to give lineworkers that added margin of safety.

In accordance with Iowa state law, motorists must move over or slow down when approaching ANY vehicle

stopped on the side of the road with its flashing lights activated, including passenger cars with hazard lights. Those who fail to obey the law could receive a traffic ticket or even lose their driver's license.

## Distracted driving poses additional risks

Compounding this issue is the dramatic increase in distracted driving. The National Transportation Highway Safety Administration has reported that as many as 1,000 Americans are injured each day because of activities that take drivers' attention away from the road. The most common is reading and responding to text messages. If a driver traveling at 55 miles per hour glances at their phone for just five seconds, they'll have traveled the length of a football field before returning their gaze to the road.



The design of today's vehicles contributes to distraction. Many vehicles have complex controls for entertainment and climate that demand the driver take their eyes off the road to make even simple adjustments.

Geography can also be a factor. Co-ops serving rural and remote areas often have power lines along hilly roads. Locals accustomed to driving those roads at fairly high speeds may be startled and have little time to react when they encounter a work crew past a hill or around a curve.

Besides the potential for lineworker injuries, accidents can also damage or destroy expensive service vehicles, reducing a co-op's ability to respond to outages and other problems. Power poles and other infrastructure may also suffer severe damage.

### **Maintaining focus is essential**

Additionally, many of the tasks performed by lineworkers, such as reconnecting high-voltage power lines, are inherently dangerous and require their complete focus. When their attention is distracted by speeding or noisy vehicles, they're more likely to make mistakes that can complicate the repair or cause injury.

Co-op employees are not only at risk only when their vehicles are parked and repairs are underway. Lineworkers frequently have to drive slowly along the shoulder of roads to pinpoint broken power lines or failed transformers, especially in darkness or conditions that interfere with visibility.



Many state transportation agencies, including Iowa, have work zone awareness programs. Amplifying those efforts by devoting part of a co-op's advertising, publicity and social media reminds co-op members and other drivers of the importance of giving lineworkers a wide berth.

Co-ops are considering ways they can modify bucket trucks and other service vehicles to make them even more visible. Bright colors and additional lighting, such as flashing strobe lights and lighted detour

arrows, can attract attention from a distance. Reflective "work zone ahead" signs can also alert drivers to be ready for an unusual situation.

Remember, if you see any vehicle stopped on the side of the road with flashing lights activated, you are required by law to move over or slow down, preferably both. Please give our employees room on the road; their families thank you!

*Scott Flood writes on energy-related topics for the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association.*





# SPRING-INSPIRED RECIPES



## ASPARAGUS STIR-FRY

- 1 cup chicken broth
- 1 tablespoon cornstarch
- 1 tablespoon low-sodium soy sauce
- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 4 cups asparagus, cut into 1 to 1½-inch pieces
- 2 teaspoons fresh ginger root, grated
- 1 clove garlic, minced
- toasted sesame seeds, optional

Stir broth, cornstarch and soy sauce in a small bowl until the mixture is smooth. Heat oil in a 10-inch skillet over medium-high heat. Add asparagus, ginger root and garlic and stir-fry until crisp-tender. You can substitute ginger root with ½ teaspoon ground ginger. Add broth mixture to the skillet. Cook and stir until the mixture boils and thickens. Sprinkle with sesame seeds, if desired. Asparagus can be substituted with broccoli, cauliflower or baby carrots. Serves 4

Tammy Neubauer • Ida Grove  
North West Rural Electric Cooperative

## FRESH CILANTRO DIP

- ½ bunch cilantro
- 1 can black beans, drained
- 1 can black olives, minced or chopped
- 1 small jar pimentos
- 5 banana peppers, chopped
- 1 green pepper, chopped
- 5 green onions, chopped
- 1 large tomato, chopped
- ¼ cup olive oil
- 1 tablespoon lime juice
- nacho chips

Mix all ingredients together and serve with nacho chips.  
Serves 12

Jenny Hall • Woodbine  
Harrison County Rural Electric Cooperative

## HAM MACARONI SALAD

- 3 cups elbow macaroni, uncooked
- 1 cup cooked ham, chopped
- 1 cucumber, peeled, seeded and diced
- 1 tomato, seeded and diced
- 1 small red pepper, diced
- 1 small green pepper, diced
- 1¼ cups mayonnaise
- 1½ teaspoons Cajun seasoning
- 2 teaspoons lemon juice

Prepare macaroni according to package directions. Drain and rinse with cold water until cool. Combine remaining ingredients, then add macaroni. Mix until blended. Cover and chill for at least 2 hours. Serves 8-10

Bryce and Kelly Godbersen • Odebolt  
Raccoon Valley Electric Cooperative

## RHUBARB CUSTARD PIE

- ½ cup plus 1 tablespoon butter, divided
- 1½ cups sugar
- ½ teaspoon nutmeg
- 2 eggs, beaten
- 3 cups rhubarb, diced
- 1 unbaked pie shell
- ½ cup flour
- ½ cup oatmeal
- ½ cup brown sugar
- cinnamon

Cream together 1 tablespoon butter, sugar and nutmeg, then mix in eggs. Fill unbaked pie shell with diced rhubarb, then add custard mixture. Bake at 450 degrees F for 10 minutes. Meanwhile, mix ½ cup butter, flour, oatmeal and brown sugar into a crunch topping. Break topping into chunks over top of pie. Bake pie at 350 degrees F for 30 more minutes then sprinkle with cinnamon. Serves 8

Raymond Robbins • Fort Madison  
Access Energy Cooperative



## NOTICE OF

## ANNUAL MEETING OF MEMBERS

## MEETING TO BE CONDUCTED USING MAIL VOTING

The Annual Meeting of the Members of Prairie Energy Cooperative will be held at the Cooperative offices in Clarion, Iowa, at 1:30 p.m. on June 4, 2025, to take action upon the following matters:

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

In connection with the election of directors scheduled for this meeting, the following members have been

nominated for Director by the Committee on Nominations appointed by the Board of Directors of the Cooperative pursuant to the Bylaws.

**THREE-YEAR TERM (Two to be elected)**

**District 3:** Allyn Waddingham

**District 7:** Blake Smith

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

DATED this 7th day of May, 2025.

– **Donald Christopherson**  
Secretary/Treasurer

## REPORT OF NOMINATING COMMITTEE

**To whom it may concern:**

The Nominating Committee of Prairie Energy Cooperative duly appointed by the Board of Directors, hereby nominates the following members of the Cooperative for the office of Director for the term specified, all to be elected at the Annual Meeting to be held June 4, 2025.

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

**District 3:** Allyn Waddingham

**District 7:** Blake Smith

DATED at Clarion, Iowa, this 8th day of April 2025, and posted on the 8th day of April, 2025 in the office of the above-named Cooperative.

– **Sharon Mitchell**  
Nominating Committee Chairman

## NOMINEE AND INCUMBENT BIOS

**ALLYN WADDINGHAM – DISTRICT 3**

## INCUMBENT



Allyn Waddingham has been a member of Prairie Energy Cooperative for the past 39 years. He joined the board of directors in June 2017. Waddingham is semi-retired and he and his wife Linda farm near Meservey in Avery Township. They have three children, Angie, Jennifer and John, and five grandchildren.

He is an Iowa State University alumnus and stays active within his community. He is a member of the Thornton United Methodist Church and serves as the chairman of the Administrative Board. In his spare time, he enjoys traveling, fishing and attending his grandchildren's activities.

Waddingham has been dedicated to ongoing education as a director, recently receiving the highest education accomplishment available from the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association, the Director Gold Credential

Certificate. His goal as a director is to assist in decisions for the cooperative to maintain safe, reliable energy for the members.

**BLAKE SMITH – DISTRICT 7**

## NOMINEE



Blake Smith, a dedicated farmer and AI technician, is seeking nomination to Prairie Energy Cooperative's (PECO) board. He and his wife Barb enjoy traveling and cheering on Iowa State University sports. Smith is also an active board member of the North Central Iowa Research Association, reflecting his commitment to agriculture and rural communities.

Smith believes strongly in the cooperative model and its role in supporting rural America. His desire to serve on the board is driven by a passion for learning more about PECO's operations and helping make sound financial decisions to ensure the co-op continues to provide dependable, affordable service for years to come.

# OPERATIONS AND ENGINEERING REPORT

BY BUTCH NOREM



## Commercial and industrial expansions

Prairie Energy Cooperative (PECO) brought on additional loads under the

Commercial & Industrial (C&I) arm of operations in 2024.

Talus Ag began construction of a 23 MW green ammonia production plant to be fed from the Prestage substation near Eagle Grove. The site will consist of 40 shipping containers that house each process and supporting tanks. The plant uses water, air and electrical power to generate green anhydrous ammonia (NH<sub>3</sub>). The plant can ramp down in less than 15 minutes to take advantage of off-peak pricing and keep processes viable.

Distributed Data came online in 2024 as a bitcoin mining operation fed from the Eagle Grove substation. The owner has intentions of growing to full capacity of around 2,500 kva through future years. This process is also able to ramp up and down on short notice to use energy efficiently and effectively as part of the process.

## PECO completes FEMA mitigation projects and is approved for more

In 2024, using Highline Construction contractors, PECO completed over 18 miles of upgrades through Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and state grants covering the majority of over \$2.8 million. The project consisted of 17 miles of three-phase overhead replacement, 1 mile of single-phase replacement as well as various underground taps, etc.

In addition to the projects mentioned above, your co-op received approval for additional projects related to grid resiliency, SCADA and system hardening. The focus will be on technology and replacing key overhead feeders out of various substations with underground to mitigate power

disruptions. Again, the projects are millions of dollars of upgrades to your system. The major portion of the costs of projects will be covered by federal and state grants.

Other upgrades performed by PECO crews and contractors for 2024:

- 27 new services installed, 32 retired
- 127 service changes either in conjunction with larger projects or member-requested
- 165 site-specific system improvements such as x arms, arrestor changes, etc.
- 91 pole changes from overhead and groundline inspection programs
- 44 miles of overhead line installed, 52.25 removed
- 4.2 miles underground installed, 1.62 abandoned

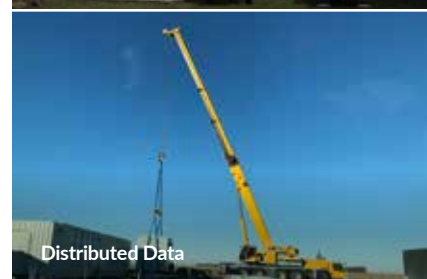
## Reliability report

The 2024 outage index information members should be interested in is the cooperative's Customer Average Interruption Duration Index (CAIDI) score. The cooperative tracks from the time the outage is reported until it is restored. It is periodically reviewed and analyzed to look for ways to reduce the time it takes to restore power.

For members who experienced an outage in 2024, the average time out of service was 102 minutes. This figure includes outages due to loss of power supply (substations) and those outages that were preplanned with you, the member-owners. The average service availability index also shows that, on average, your power was on 99.98% of the time in 2024.

## Proactive in aid to construction

Looking back from 2024 to 2008, when the tariff was updated, changes were made requiring aid in construction related to new services as well as upgrades. PECO wanted to reduce the addition of long-term debt, which



typically can add pressure to rates.

Starting in 2008, current and new members requesting upgrades were required to share in the cost. From 2008 through 2024, long-term debt was reduced by more than \$10 million. This proactive approach by the cooperative and board helped prevent and reduce rate increases for many years. It serves well to look back on occasion and see that your board and employees have worked hard to keep the cost of your electric service at good value.

PECO creates a construction work plan on a regular basis that encompasses normal line upgrades and replacements. These costs are partly covered through long-term loans as those improvements benefit all members-owners.

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



# TAKE ADVANTAGE OF REBATES

BY CHAD CHAPMAN AND DARREN JOHNSON



**Chad Chapman**



**Darren Johnson**

Let's talk about rebates! Many of you may already know that Prairie Energy Cooperative (PECO) offers an excellent rebate program, but as of Jan. 1, 2025, some of our rebates improved even further. PECO's rebate program is developed in partnership with Corn Belt Power Cooperative (Corn Belt Power), PECO's power supplier.

Last year, a major study was conducted between Corn Belt Power and the distribution co-ops that purchase power from Corn Belt Power to assess the effectiveness of our rebates.

The program focuses primarily on energy efficiency and its role in reducing the demand for generation and transmission.

Based on the study's findings, here are a few key changes to note:

- Geothermal heat pump: From \$300/ton to \$1,000/ton
- Geothermal replacement: From \$150/ton to \$500/ton
- Ductless mini-split system: From \$200/ton to \$500/ton
- Air source heat pump: More than doubled from the previous amount

Note: All rebates have specific details and eligibility requirements.

Additionally, there are several other changes to rebates on insulation,

ENERGY STAR® appliances and more. The easiest way to learn more about our rebates is to visit [www.prairieenergy.coop](http://www.prairieenergy.coop) and click the "Rebates" button in the top right corner. This will give you the full details and requirements for each rebate.



If you have questions, please call our office at 800-728-0013 and ask to speak with Darren Johnson or Chad Chapman in our member services department. We're here to help, whether you've just purchased an appliance, are remodeling or planning a new build.

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

## MILESTONE YEARS



**5 YEARS**

**JOHN CAMPBELL**

Safety/  
Warehouse  
Coordinator



**5 YEARS**

**ERIN DREESSEN**

Operations/  
Engineering  
Assistant



**10 YEARS**

**WES HELD**

Lead Lineman



**40 YEARS**

**BUTCH NOREM**

Director of  
Operations/  
Engineering

## 2024 PRAIRIE ENERGY COOPERATIVE FACTS

Total miles of line energized:  
**2,082.17 miles**

Total number of members:  
**3,163 members**

Capital credit distributions:  
**\$1,456,665**

Total kWh purchased by PECO:  
**337,182,274 kWh**

Average number of meters per mile of line:  
**2.09 meters**

Average number of members per mile of line:  
**1.52 members**

# 2024 ANNUAL REPORT

BY TIM MARIENAU



At Prairie Energy Cooperative (PECO), we are committed to providing you with safe, reliable, affordable and sustainable power. I want to thank all our

employees and our board of directors for their commitment to serving our members with excellence in 2024.

As a small cooperative, we continue to change and grow in many ways that will lead us into the future. This past year, we had to implement a rate increase in our facility charge for the first time in almost 20 years due to rising costs, sent a lineman to Guatemala to bring power for the first time to a village, continued to work with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) on mitigation and storm recovery projects, were awarded a Department of Energy Grid Resilience project, continued to move toward a new headquarters, and so much more.

As PECO finishes its 84th year, here are some interesting topics that we have been communicating to our membership in 2024 and what we will continue to address in the future.

## Facility charge increase

In October 2023, PECO's board of directors made the tough decision to implement a rate adjustment effective Feb. 1, 2024. The decision was not taken lightly and discussed at length. However, with rising inflationary costs on supplies and other goods the cooperative regularly uses, our financial models revealed a rate increase was necessary. The majority of the rising costs are considered fixed costs to PECO, resulting in board approval of an adjustment to the facility charge only and not to the energy rate. Fixed costs remain the same regardless of other factors or the level of sales. The facility charge is what supports the cooperative in covering the cost of fuel as well as poles, wires, meters, insulators, transformers and other equipment. These items must be maintained to continue providing members with safe and reliable electricity, regardless of the

amount of power used. The last time PECO raised its facility charge was 20 years ago. As mentioned earlier, there have been significant increases in the cost of materials, especially in the last several years. The co-op has seen and endured increased prices for as long as possible; however, we were unable to sustain rates with the current market conditions.

Part of our commitment to our members is to ensure fiscal responsibility. This includes performing annual budgets, 10-year financial forecasts and conducting cost-of-service studies to evaluate our rate structures. Member-owners expect lower electric rates in an environment where nearly all the costs associated with those rates are increasing. PECO shares this expectation, and we have not raised our energy rates since November 2016.

Our power is supplied by generation and transmission (G&T) cooperatives, including Corn Belt Power Cooperative in Humboldt, Iowa, and Basin Electric Power in Bismarck, North Dakota. Our energy rates are impacted by our G&T cooperatives, and these are factors of which we have limited or no control. We engage in discussions with our G&T cooperatives, but their decisions are based on information analyzed by their respective board of directors.

## Guatemala

This past summer, 14 lineworkers from Minnesota and Iowa traveled approximately 2,800 miles to transform a rural village in Guatemala, improving local families' lives for generations. The trip was part of the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association's (NRECA) International Program, which has been providing volunteers to illuminate villages and homes in impoverished countries around the world

since 1962. PECO was pleased to send lead lineman Hunter Venz to Guatemala for two weeks to help with this life-changing work. The village of Las Peñas, at an elevation of around 6,000 feet, is made up of about 35 homes scattered on the crests and flat areas of the mountainside, near the larger community of Jalapa in eastern Guatemala. Crews helped build more than three miles of power lines and wired the homes for electric service.

"The biggest challenge was praying for no rain. If it rained, we couldn't get to the village without walking. The road was only built for tractors, horses and mules. It was built about three weeks before we got there," said Venz. "The best part was everyone working together and watching how our progress came together, including some of the locals' help."

The teams that went on behalf of Minnesota's and Iowa's electric cooperatives couldn't have done the work without the generosity of many donors, vendors, cooperatives and individuals who wanted to support the work.

## FEMA and the Department of Energy

Over the past several years, PECO's distribution system has been impacted by severe storms, and we've been awarded mitigation and grid reliance grants. Whether disaster-related or assisted by grants, these dollars help repair or upgrade our electrical distribution system. Costs that save us in the long run.

On Dec. 15, 2021, severe storms damaged our distribution system significantly. Tornadoes and straight-line winds took down several miles of power lines and poles across Hamilton, Hancock, Webster and Wright counties. Our crews,







along with our contractor Legacy, rebuilt and restored most of the damage within 48 hours. Damages were in excess of \$500,000. However, the Iowa Department of Homeland Security and Emergency Management (IDHSEM) and FEMA reimbursed PECO 100% and also awarded \$1.4 million to mitigate almost three miles of three-phase overhead lines to be buried underground. This mitigation project is still underway, and we hope that it will be completed in 2025.

In May 2024, we had damage from severe storms along Interstate 35 by the Iowa River. Again, IDHSEM and FEMA awarded PECO damages to a three-phase overhead distribution line that will be buried under the interstate in 2025. Although the scope and costs are less, this project will provide better reliability in power and safety in the future.

In addition, we were awarded a FEMA Hazard Mitigation grant in 2024 for \$2.8 million for replacing electrical distribution lines. Please see the operations and engineering report on Page 2A for further information.

In April 2024, PECO was awarded \$1.9 million by the Department of Energy and the Iowa Economic Development Authority for an Iowa Grid Resilience grant. This grant will involve the replacement of existing pole-mounted oil circuit reclosers with new electronic reclosers and installation of pole-mounted communications. The new technology will allow us to monitor our system and isolate outages to restore service to impacted areas of the system faster than we can today.

### Headquarters

Another big change for the cooperative was the board of directors' approval to build new facilities in the Clarion Industrial Park. After a long road on designing and planning of the new office, warehouse and vehicle bays as well as our pole yard, we are moving forward in 2025.

The existing office and warehouse have been part of our history since Wright County REC moved from downtown Clarion in 1986. In 2001, Hancock County REC and Wright County REC merged to create PECO. The Clarion facilities have withstood many changes over the years.

Consolidating both Clarion locations and improving the workplace will increase efficiency as we build modern facilities. Technology is also driving the creation of a more efficient, sustainable and productive workplace for the cooperative. Downsizing from two facilities in Clarion to one will also decrease costs.

### Safety

Safety is always on the radar at PECO. Our employees commit themselves every day by helping members and by building and maintaining our entire electrical distribution system so the electricity is safe, reliable and as cost-effective as possible. We provide education, training and take part in monthly safety meetings and workshops throughout the year to keep us all healthy and safe.

Our statewide association, the Iowa Association of Electric Cooperatives (IAEC) provides PECO with several resources to learn, train, implement and utilize to help us all keep safe. We are able to adopt model resources to use when it comes to emergency tabletop simulation exercises, emergency restoration plans, board policies, tariff items and communication materials, to mention a few. We provide mutual aid with the help of IAEC in times of disaster.

We also use IAEC to help in training our young apprentice linemen and we participate in job site observations while the crews are working in the field. IAEC, in partnership with our national association NRECA, helped us in the 2024 Rural Electric Safety Achievement Program (RESAP). This program helps

create and maintain a culture of safety within our cooperative as well as across the nation.

### Directors and employees

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

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

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

Strong leadership is essential to our cooperative and we are also blessed to employ many hard-working people who manage the day-to-day operations to keep your lights on. For 84 years, PECO has been providing you with the power you need.

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

Although we won't have the in-person annual meeting in June, we hope to see you at our Member Appreciation gathering on July 17, 2025, at the Red Shed in Clarion. The 85th Annual Business Meeting will be held June 4, 2025, and will be posted on social media and our website.

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

# OVERVIEW OF PECO FINANCIALS

BY LORI DEMUTH



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

statements of operation, members' equity, cash flow and other financial statements are reviewed. In their opinion, "the financial statements referred to above present fairly, in all material respects, the financial position of Prairie Energy Cooperative, as of Dec. 31, 2023, and 2024, and the results of its operations and cash flows for the years then ended in accordance with accounting principles generally accepted in the United States of America." CLA presented the audited financials to the board of directors at its April 2025 board meeting.

PECO's overall year-end margin for 2024 was \$3,936,083. Out of that, PECO's operating margin was \$1,147,854. Our operating margin indicates how we are doing financially with revenue, power

## MARGIN BUCKET CATEGORIES

Basin Electric Power Cooperative (our super G&T)	\$ 1,337,889 (non-cash)
Corn Belt Power Cooperative (our local G&T)	\$ 1,019,053 (cash)
Corn Belt Power Cooperative (our local G&T)	\$ 243,427 (non-cash)
Non-Operating Margins, Other Capital Credits, etc.	\$ 187,860
Operating Margin	\$ 1,147,854

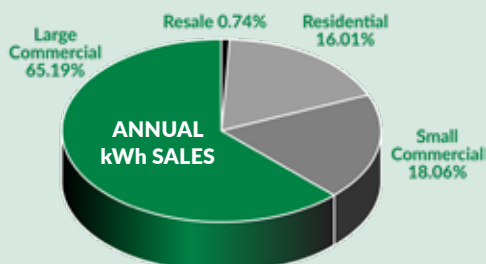
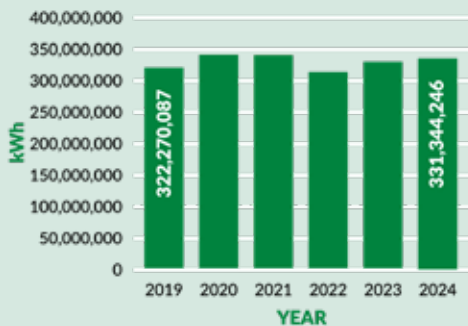
cost, operating expenses, long-term debt, depreciation, etc., just to name a few categories. The rest of the margin is explained by our "bucket" categories above.

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

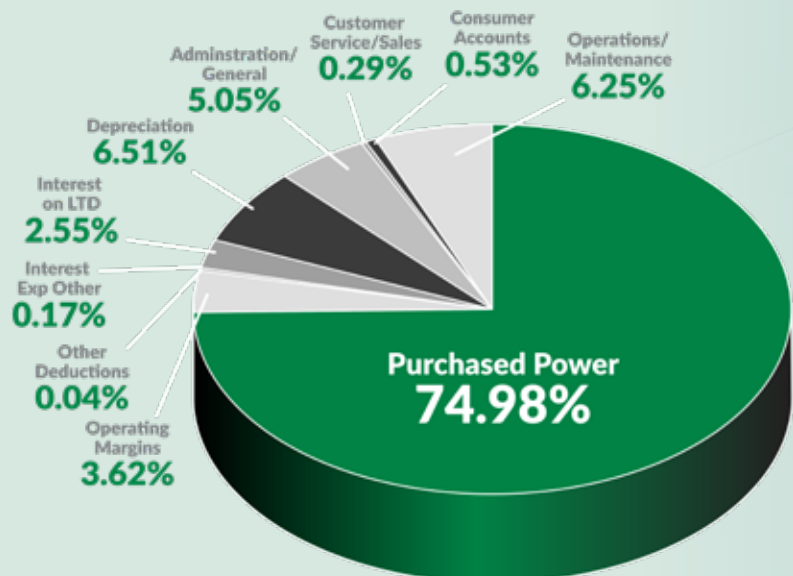
allocations, which may be up to 30 years, we will then retire to our membership or use them to help keep rates down. That leaves PECO with two buckets. After determining what is required by the Iowa Code, our Bylaws and Articles of Incorporation, the directors allocate a portion of those two buckets to the membership. This is a promise to pay in the future, not to exceed 15 years, according to board policy.

Paying back patronage dividends (capital) is one of the biggest differences between a member-owned cooperative and an investor-owned utility. In 2024, PECO's board of directors retired \$1,456,665 in patronage dividends to our membership.

## ANNUAL kWh SALES



## WHERE THE DOLLARS GO





### The patronage breakdown is as follows:

- \$1,005,592 was allocated in cash to us from Corn Belt Power from 2023. We passed that on to the membership in June 2024 as a credit on your bill.
- \$439,211 was returned to the membership as bill credits in December or checks in December 2024 (previous members). This is our promise to pay you from our operating margin and non-operating margins from 2011.
- \$11,862 was retired for estates during the year.

Our 2024 electric revenue from selling electricity was \$31,666,591, with 331,344,246 kWh sold. The power cost from those kWhs was \$23,766,348. Our peak with Corn Belt Power was July at 56,476 KW, but PECO's substations had individual high peaks in August and October.

Our Willemssen Community Solar array produced 164,925 kWh for the year. The energy produced from the array goes back to the grid, which helps reduce our energy costs from Corn Belt Power.

*Lori Demuth is the manager of finance and accounting for Prairie Energy Cooperative.*

## FINANCIALS

INCOME STATEMENT	2023	2024
<b>Revenues</b>		
Operating Revenue	\$30,903,102	\$31,697,013

<b>Expenses</b>		
Purchased Power	\$23,707,630	\$23,766,348
Operations and Maintenance	\$1,748,075	\$1,982,155
Consumer Account Expense	\$367,088	\$341,477
Sales Expense	\$(76,772)	\$(80,884)
Administrative & General	\$1,450,970	\$1,601,171
Depreciation	\$1,971,565	\$2,062,184
Interest	\$744,923	\$863,435
Other Deductions	\$12,008	\$13,316
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>\$29,925,487</b>	<b>\$30,549,202</b>

<b>Margins Assignable</b>		
Operating Margins	\$977,614	\$1,147,811
Non-Operating Margins	\$3,271,763	\$2,788,270
<b>Total Margins Assignable</b>	<b>\$4,249,377</b>	<b>\$3,936,081</b>

BALANCE SHEET	2023	2024
<b>Assets</b>		
Net Utility Plant	\$43,134,952	\$47,005,934
Investments	\$21,903,903	\$23,369,474
Cash & Cash Equivalents	\$1,963,948	\$1,760,432
Notes Receivable	\$4,538,136	\$4,128,744
Accounts Receivable	\$2,680,065	\$2,712,465
Materials & Supplies	\$1,114,958	\$1,104,236
Current & Accrued Assets	\$187,880	\$196,979
Deferred Debits	\$230,623	\$226,841
<b>Total Assets</b>	<b>\$75,754,465</b>	<b>\$80,505,105</b>

<b>Members' Equity &amp; Liabilities</b>		
Equity & Margins	\$39,370,142	\$41,849,581
Long Term Debt	\$29,351,079	\$33,703,420
Notes & Accounts Payable	\$4,345,884	\$2,513,663
Other Current & Accrued Liabilities	\$2,040,088	\$2,125,138
Deferred Credits	\$647,272	\$313,303
<b>Total Equity &amp; Liabilities</b>	<b>\$75,754,465</b>	<b>\$80,505,105</b>



# PECO BOARD OF DIRECTORS



**Ted Hall, Forest City**  
District 1

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



**Ryan Eekhoff, Britt**  
District 2

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



**Allyn Waddingham, Meservey**  
District 3

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



**Scott Hasty, Kanawha**  
District 4

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



**Marion Denger, Dows**  
District 5

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



**Annette Julson, Duncombe**  
District 6

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

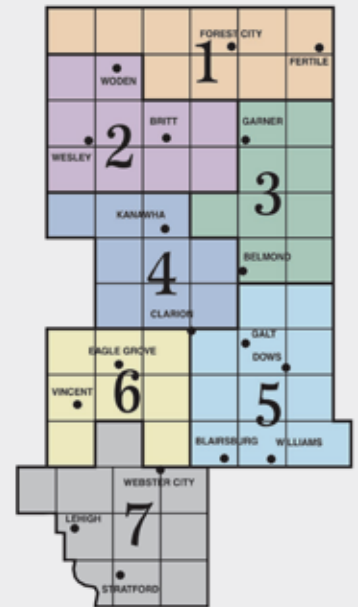


**Donald Christopherson, Duncombe**  
District 7

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

Your co-op board of directors, leadership team and employees look forward to continued growth and serving member-consumers in 2025.

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



Cut and mail in with payment.



**Prairie Energy Cooperative**

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

0298

**VOID**

*Gift Certificate*

**This certificate entitles**  
to \$20.00 off your next energy bill.

Account # **XXXXXXXX** Required for redemption

**EXPIRES AUGUST 31, 2025**

Not redeemable for cash. Redemption value not to exceed \$20.

A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative  
The power of human connections.



No duplicates will be issued.



## KALE SALAD

- 8 ounces kale, finely cut
- ½ cup dried cranberries
- 1 medium apple, chopped
- ½ cup pecan halves
- ½ cup feta cheese
- ¼ cup bacon, crumbled
- poppy seed dressing, optional
- Mandarin oranges, optional

Mix all ingredients and top with poppy seed dressing, if desired. Cranberries can be substituted with Mandarin oranges. *Serves 4*

Audrey Kreykes • Rock Valley  
North West Rural Electric Cooperative

## ASPARAGUS AND SPRING PEA SOUP

- 1 tablespoon butter
- 1 large onion, diced
- 2 stalks celery
- 4 garlic cloves, minced
- 5 cups water or broth
- 1 pound asparagus, trimmed and sliced
- 2 cups green peas, fresh or frozen
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1 tablespoon lemon juice
- ½ cup canned coconut milk
- 2 tablespoons fresh dill, finely chopped, optional

In a large saucepan, add butter, onion, celery and garlic. Cook over medium heat until veggies soften, stirring frequently. Stir in choice of liquid (water, vegetable broth or chicken broth). Add asparagus and peas. Bring to a boil, then lower heat and simmer 15 minutes, until asparagus is tender. Puree using blender or an immersion blender. Strain through a sieve if needed. Add salt and lemon juice to warm soup. Ladle into soup bowl and pour a drizzle of canned coconut milk into bowl. Top with fresh dill, if desired. *Serves 6*

Anita Doughty • Ankeny  
Consumers Energy

## TERRI'S PASTA SALAD

- 5 ounces dried rotini noodles
- 3 cups broccoli florets, chopped
- 3 tablespoons white balsamic vinegar
- 2 tablespoons canola oil
- 2 tablespoons honey
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 red pepper, chopped
- ½ cup red onion, chopped
- ¼ cup sliced almonds, toasted
- ¼ cup fresh basil, chopped
- 2 ounces goat cheese, crumbled
- salt, to taste
- pepper, to taste

In a large pot, cook pasta in lightly salted boiling water for 5 minutes. Add broccoli and cook for 3 more minutes or until pasta is done. Drain and rinse with cold water. In a large bowl, whisk together vinegar, oil, honey and garlic. Add pasta mixture, pepper, onion, almonds and basil. Toss to combine. Gently stir in cheese. Season with salt and pepper to taste. You can substitute goat cheese with feta, fresh Parmesan or pearled mozzarella. *Serves 4-6*

Lori Kautzky • Perry  
Guthrie County Rural Electric Cooperative

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



## STRAWBERRY RHUBARB UPSIDE DOWN CAKE

- 1 cup rhubarb, cut into ½ inch pieces
- 1 cup strawberries, hulled and halved
- 2 tablespoons butter, melted
- 1½ cups flour
- 1 teaspoon baking powder
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- ½ cup butter at room temperature
- 1 cup granulated sugar
- 2 large eggs
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- ½ cup milk
- whipped cream or vanilla ice cream

Combine rhubarb, strawberries and melted butter. Spread evenly across the bottom of a 9-inch round cake pan that has been greased and lined with parchment paper on the bottom. Set aside while making cake mixture. Whisk together flour, baking powder and salt in a medium bowl. Cream room temperature butter and sugar in a large bowl. Add eggs, vanilla and milk and beat. Mix with dry ingredients then pour over the strawberry and rhubarb topping. Bake at 350 degrees F for 45-50 minutes or until a toothpick comes out clean. Remove from the oven and let cool for 10 minutes. Run a knife around the edge of pan to loosen cake. Place serving plate over pan and invert cake onto the plate. Remove the pan and peel off the parchment paper. Serve warm or at room temperature with whipped cream or vanilla ice cream. *Serves 12*

Kristin Goddard • Charles City  
Butler County Rural Electric Cooperative

**WANTED:**

## FALL APPLE RECIPES

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

**Deadline is May 31**

Submit your favorite fall apple recipes. 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



# WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW BEFORE CONSIDERING SOLAR

BY MIRANDA BOUTELLE



Often, homeowners conflate installing solar at home with energy efficiency. But what most people don't realize is solar is not energy efficiency. Solar is generating energy. Energy efficiency is finding ways to use less energy. While these are not one in the same, both are thought of as beneficial to the environment and a way to save money.

If you are interested in installing solar, it is important to understand your motivations. It may be saving money, concern for the environment or both. Focusing first on energy efficiency can address both motivations.

Here are the five key energy efficiency considerations to evaluate when adding solar to your home.

**① Energy consumption** Solar systems are sized based on a home's energy needs. The larger the system, the higher the cost. Before installing solar, make sure your home is as energy efficient as possible. That means it will use less energy and allow you to install a smaller solar system – which will save money and reduce your home's environmental impact.

Verify the efficiency of your lighting, HVAC systems and insulation. A fully insulated and air-sealed home uses less energy, and those insulation measures are less expensive than solar panels. Finish these energy efficiency projects before installing solar.

**② Affordability** Consider your overall out-of-pocket expenses. The expected lifespan of a heating and cooling system is 15 to 25 years. Check the age and condition of your HVAC equipment and consider the expenses of replacement.

**③ Roofing** Consider the age, orientation and shade of your roof. It is more difficult and expensive to reroof a home with solar panels. Evaluate if the roof will need to be replaced before the solar panels need to be replaced.

The best orientation for solar panels is south facing to receive direct light throughout the day. A shaded roof helps keep your home cool in the summertime but reduces solar energy production.

**④ Maintenance** A solar system doesn't last forever. Lifespans range from 25 to 30 years. As systems degrade over time, they produce less energy. Maintenance and repairs may be needed.

**⑤ Electric bills and storage** Solar is not "off the grid." Unless you plan to disconnect from your electric co-op, you will still receive a monthly bill.

Solar panels only produce power when the sun is shining. If you want power to your home at other times, like after dark, you need to be connected to your electric co-op or invest in battery storage system, which comes at an additional cost.

During power outages, don't assume solar panels will supply you with power. Typical solar interconnection to the grid requires panels to shut down during a power outage. This protects lineworkers from injury while making repairs.



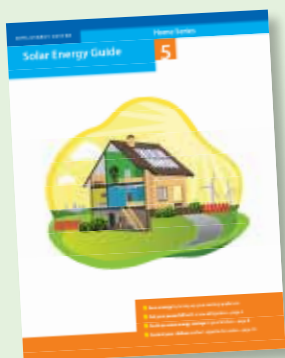
# BEWARE OF SOLAR SCAMS

Before working with any vendor, Iowa's electric cooperatives encourage you to do your homework to ensure you choose a reputable provider.



If you have a complaint regarding solar installation or financing, you can complete and submit an electronic complaint at [bit.ly/3usfVj7](https://bit.ly/3usfVj7).

Consumers can also call the Iowa Attorney General's Consumer Protection Division at 515-281-5926 or 888-777-4590 or email [consumer@ag.iowa.gov](mailto:consumer@ag.iowa.gov).



## SOLAR ENERGY GUIDE

Iowa's electric cooperatives are committed to helping member-consumers make educated energy decisions that make sense for their home or business. Before moving ahead with a solar project, contact your local co-op first and also review the Solar Energy Guide for tips and to learn interconnection requirements.

[www.iowarec.org/publications/solar-resources](http://www.iowarec.org/publications/solar-resources)

### Contact your electric co-op

Solar contractors often work in several utility service territories and may not be familiar with your co-op's offerings, rate structures and interconnection agreements. Before signing an agreement, check with your electric co-op for local information rather than relying on what the contractor says.

As with any other system for your home, get bids from three contractors to compare equipment and pricing. Another option may be community-owned solar. Many electric co-ops offer community solar programs. You may have an option to enjoy the benefits of solar without the responsibilities of ownership and maintenance.

Understanding these considerations before installing solar will ensure you meet your money-saving and environmental goals.

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



## TOP 10 CONSIDERATIONS BEFORE INSTALLING SOLAR

- 1 Address energy efficiency.** Implementing energy efficiency measures in advance can help reduce your overall energy or water consumption, and subsequently, the size of your solar system.
- 2 Do your homework before writing a check.** Talk to your electric co-op at the outset of the process. Then speak with credible, reputable sources who are skilled professionals that will help guide you through the process.
- 3 Know your co-op's rate structure and policies.** Your co-op will help you understand the rate structure and what type of charges are likely to be incurred. They will also let you know how you will be compensated for the excess, unused energy that is generated by your solar system.
- 4 Analyze your electric load.** Understanding your electricity use and overall energy needs will help determine if solar is a good investment for you.
- 5 Determine costs upfront.** You will likely be responsible for initial upfront costs to install the system, as well as maintenance and repair costs. Doing your homework upfront will help determine if it is economical for your energy needs.
- 6 Research incentives and tax credits.** Visit with your co-op to see if there are financial incentives to offset your investment costs. These are often driven by laws and policies and can vary on the type and size of system.
- 7 Understand responsibilities.** A variety of parties are involved in making a solar project a reality, so it's important to know exactly what tasks and costs you're responsible for.
- 8 Know safety requirements.** Solar is connected to the grid, so it's important that you work with your co-op to ensure you're meeting their requirements to keep the grid reliable and safe.
- 9 Choose a reputable vendor.** It is important to find a reputable installer who will give you realistic expectations. Ask for references, check reviews and ask for third-party input.
- 10 Keep thorough records.** Establish a thorough record-keeping process to retain all data and research you gather.

# ELECTRIFICATION TRENDS EMPOWER CO-OP MEMBERS

BY JENNAH DENNEY

Electric cooperatives have a rich history of improving the quality of life for their members. Since the early 20th century, electric cooperatives have brought electricity – or electrification – to rural communities, transforming daily life and boosting local economies.

Today, the modern electrification movement continues this legacy by providing significant cost savings and empowering smarter, more informed co-op members.

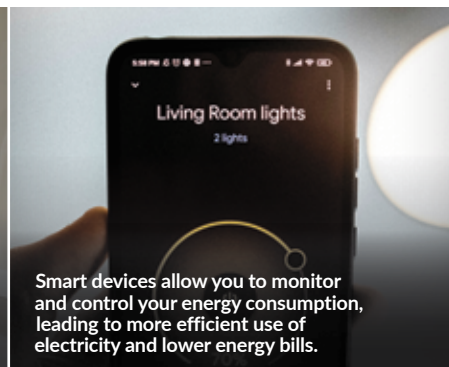
## Technologies can lead to cost savings

The concept of beneficial electrification focuses on replacing direct fossil fuel use with electricity in ways that reduce overall costs. By adopting electric technologies, members may see financial savings. Here are some of the key ways electrification can lead to cost savings:

- **Heat pumps:** Replacing traditional heating systems with electric heat pumps can improve energy efficiency and lower home heating bills. Heat pumps use electricity to transfer heat rather than generate it, making them more cost-effective in the long run.
- **Energy-efficient appliances:** Upgrading to energy-efficient appliances can reduce electricity consumption and save money on utility bills. Modern appliances are designed to use less energy while providing the same level of performance.
- **Smart home technologies:** Using smart thermostats and home energy management systems can optimize energy use and reduce waste. Smart devices allow you to monitor and control your energy consumption, leading to more efficient use of electricity and lower energy bills.
- **Electric vehicles:** Transitioning from gasoline-powered cars to electric



Upgrading to energy-efficient appliances can reduce electricity consumption and save money on utility bills.



Smart devices allow you to monitor and control your energy consumption, leading to more efficient use of electricity and lower energy bills.



Transitioning from gasoline-powered cars to electric vehicles can significantly reduce fuel costs.

vehicles (EVs) can significantly reduce fuel costs. Electricity is generally cheaper than gasoline, and EVs often have lower maintenance costs due to fewer moving parts.

## Creating a sustainable energy future

Beyond financial savings, electrification has been a cornerstone of improving the quality of life in communities served by electric cooperatives. A century ago, the introduction of electricity revolutionized rural areas, providing access to modern conveniences and fostering economic growth.

Today, the benefits of electrification continue to enhance daily life in several ways. Electric technologies, such as heat pumps and smart home devices, offer greater comfort and convenience. Consumers can enjoy consistent heating and cooling, as well as the ability to control their home's energy systems remotely. Additionally, electrification can improve indoor air quality and reduce health risks associated with burning fossil fuels.

Electric stoves, for example, eliminate the need for open flames and reduce the emission of harmful pollutants. Smart technologies also empower consumers to make informed decisions about their energy use. Access to real-time data and insights provide a better understanding of energy consumption patterns and identify more opportunities for savings.

Electric cooperatives have a long history of empowering their member-consumers through electrification, and beneficial electrification is a powerful strategy for creating a sustainable and cost-effective energy landscape.

From the early days of bringing electricity to rural areas to today's modern electrification movement, electric co-ops continue to play a vital role in enhancing quality of life. As co-op members embrace electric technologies, they can enjoy immediate benefits while contributing to a smarter energy future.

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



# 84TH ANNUAL MEETING OF MEMBERS

June 5, 2024

The 2024 Annual Meeting of the Members of Prairie Energy Cooperative was held at the office of Prairie Energy Cooperative in Clarion, Iowa, at 1:30 p.m. on the 5th day of June, 2024.

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

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

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

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

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

The minutes of the Annual Meeting of the Members held June 7, 2023, were included in the Annual Meeting packet. There were no additions or corrections. The Chairman declared them approved as distributed and directed them to be placed in the records of the Cooperative.

The Chairman introduced Attorney Dennis L. Puckett. Mr. Puckett stated that the next order of business was

the election of three Directors for a term of three years each. Mr. Puckett noted the individuals that served on the Nominating Committee for the 2024 Annual Meeting as follows:

**Austin Charlson (Chairman)**

**Rodney Legleiter (Secretary)**

**Gary Ludwig**

**Bernal Hanna**

**Zachary Klaver**

**Jake Grandgeorge**

Directors Donald Christopherson and Allyn Waddingham served as advisory members.

He then presented the Report of the Nominating Committee for the 2024 Annual Meeting, nominating the following members for the position of Director of the Cooperative.

**Three to be elected - One from each District - Three-Year Term**

**District 1:** Ted Hall  
Sherry Flugum

**District 4:** Scott Hasty

**District 6:** Annette Julson

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

The Chairman had previously appointed the nominating committee to serve as Inspectors of Election (Tellers). A vote was had by mail ballot and the ballots were previously delivered to the Inspectors who proceeded to count them.

The Certificate of Inspectors of Election was then presented and

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

**Three to be elected - One from each District - Three-Year Term**

**District 1:** Ted Hall

**District 4:** Scott Hasty

**District 6:** Annette Julson

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

The annual report of General Manager Tim Marienau and Chairman Denger were included in the materials sent to the members.

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

There being no further business to come before the meeting, upon motion duly made, seconded and unanimously carried, the meeting adjourned.

**Donald Christopherson**  
Secretary

Approved:

**Marion Denger**  
Chairman

# 5 ESSENTIAL ELECTRICAL SAFETY TIPS FOR YOUR HOME

BY ABBY BERRY

Every May, National Electrical Safety Month serves as a vital reminder of the importance of preventing electrical hazards at home. Electricity powers nearly every aspect of modern life, but if handled improperly, it can pose serious risks, including injuries and property damage.

Your local electric cooperative understands the risks associated with improper electricity use, which is why we're committed to reminding you to stay vigilant and practice electrical safety not only in May but also year-round.

By following key safety practices, you can reduce the risk of electrical hazards and ensure your family stays protected. Here are five essential tips for powering up safely at home.

**1 Be vigilant.** Regularly inspect your home's electrical system for any signs of damage or outdated components and replace any frayed electrical wires or cords. The Electrical Safety Foundation International estimates roughly 3,300 home fires originate from extension cords every year, either from overloading, overheating or fraying. If you're relying on extension cords as permanent power solutions, consider contacting a qualified electrician to install additional outlets where you need them.

**2 Use surge protectors.** Safeguard your sensitive electronics and appliances from surges with surge protectors. These handy devices help divert excess voltage away from your electronics, reducing the risk of damage or electrical fires. Not all power strips include surge protection, so read the product label carefully. Additionally, surge protectors can lose effectiveness



National Electrical Safety Month serves as a vital reminder of the importance of preventing electrical hazards at home.



Avoid overloading electrical outlets with power strips that exceed the outlet's capacity.

over time and should be replaced when damaged or outdated.

**3 Practice safe power strip use.** Avoid overloading electrical outlets with power strips that exceed the outlet's capacity. High-energy devices, like heaters, microwaves and hairdryers should be distributed across multiple outlets. Overloading an outlet with a "busy" power strip can lead to overheating and create a fire hazard, so be sure to check the power strip's wattage rating before plugging in items.

**4 Avoid contact with water.** It may seem obvious, but accidents involving water contact with electrical items happen. Always keep electrical appliances and devices away from water sources, like sinks, bathtubs or swimming pools. Make sure your hands are dry before touching any electrical switches or appliances – never handle electrical devices with wet hands. Ground Fault Circuit Interrupters (GFCIs)



The Electrical Safety Foundation International estimates roughly 3,300 home fires originate from extension cords every year, either from overloading, overheating or fraying.

should be installed in areas where water and electricity are typically in close proximity, including kitchens, bathrooms and outdoor outlets.

**5 Educate family members.** One of the best ways to ensure the safety of everyone in your household is to talk about electrical safety. Teach children not to play with electrical outlets or appliances and ensure they understand the potential dangers of electricity. Create and practice a home fire escape plan that includes electrical safety precautions in case of emergencies.

Practicing electrical safety at home is essential for protecting your family, property and peace of mind. Remember, electrical safety isn't just a one-time effort – it's a year-round responsibility. Taking these steps can help ensure a safer, more secure home for you and your loved ones.

*Abby Berry writes on consumer and cooperative affairs for the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association.*



# HONORING IOWA'S HOMETOWN HEROES

BY DARCY DOUGHERTY MAULSBY

Faces capture attention. That's something I learned early in my journalism career when I was trained to take pictures of the people I featured.

I think about this each time I drive through Auburn. As I roll along Highway 71 through the heart of this Sac County town, I see patriotic banners featuring pictures of local men and women who served in the U.S. military. The black-and-white images – some with smiling faces, some with sober expressions – grace the streetlight poles.

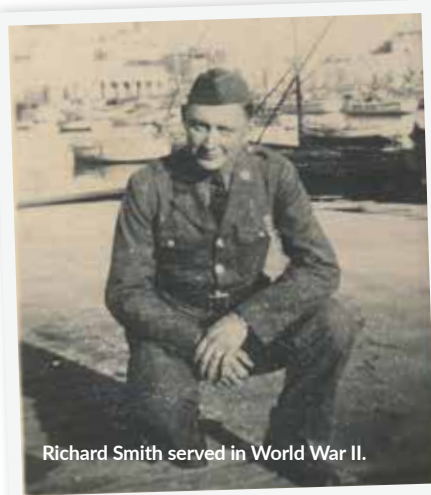
I've always wondered about the stories behind these captivating banners, so I contacted my friend Donetta (Smith) Stewart. For the past 17 years, she has been the librarian at the Auburn Public Library. She's also one of the keepers of knowledge in this small town of roughly 300 residents.

Donetta's uncle, Richard Smith, is featured on a banner southeast of the library. "Dad didn't talk much about Richard when I was growing up," says Donetta, referring to Don Smith, Richard's younger brother. "It was only later in life when I started asking more questions that he started telling me more."

## Remembering a life cut short

Richard was born to Frank and Janet Smith on Dec. 23, 1919. He attended country school and graduated from Auburn High School in 1936. The likeable, easygoing young man was farming with his father when the U.S. entered World War II.

As his buddies began enlisting, Richard wanted to join the service, too. When Janet pleaded with him to stay home, he honored his mother's wishes. Uncle Sam came calling, however, in 1941. Richard was drafted into the U.S. Army and completed basic training at Camp Claiborne in Louisiana.



While his Auburn buddies served stateside, training other soldiers, Richard was sent to England and then Africa, along with the Red Bull Infantry Division. Richard was on the front lines when Erwin Rommel (a German field marshal known as the "Desert Fox") launched the Battle of Kasserine Pass on Feb. 14, 1943.

The next day, Feb. 15, Richard was killed in action. He was just 24 years old. "Dad always said that after Richard died, the laughter went out of the house," Donetta says.

After the war, one of Richard's commanding officers traveled to the Smith farm to pay his respects and fill in some gaps. "He told Frank that one minute Richard was there, and the next minute he was gone," Donetta explains.

## Honorable legacies live on

Richard was buried near Carthage, Tunisia, in the North Africa American Cemetery, which contains the remains of more than 2,800 war dead. Thanks to dedicated volunteers, including Jane Barto, coordinator for the Auburn Historical Society (AHS), he now has a banner along Pine Street in his hometown.



It's one of 23 banners that the AHS and the City of Auburn installed in November 2024, in time for Veterans Day. "It's important to honor this heritage," says Jane, who was inspired by similar banners she'd seen in Arlington, Nebraska. "There's something very personal about putting faces with the names."

The Auburn banners feature local men and women who served in World War II, Korea, Vietnam and Desert Storm. They include Jane's father, Floyd Barto, an Army veteran, and her uncle, Frank Lee, who helped the Allied forces liberate the Auschwitz concentration camp in early 1945. "My uncle said the human suffering was beyond description and wouldn't talk about his war experiences," Jane says.

That's why the banners are so important, she adds. They draw people in and start the conversation about these veterans' stories.

"We get so many positive comments," Donetta says. "Richard and the other local heroes are not forgotten."

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



A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative

IOWA ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE LIVING


The magazine  
for members of  
Iowa's electric  
cooperatives.

May 2025

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

# SAFETY

IS THE BACKBONE OF RELIABILITY



Safety is **#1** at your **Touchstone Energy® cooperative.** This commitment to provide electrical safety has always been our priority so we can deliver reliable energy and peace of mind. That's why safety runs through everything we do.



Touchstone Energy® Cooperative  
The power of human connections