

● SEPTEMBER 2025

# iowa

ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE LIVING

Meet this year's  
Shine the Light winners

Keeping the lights on  
during peak demand

Fall apple recipes

PECO members participate in Energy Trail Tour ▶ See Page 4

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*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.

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## ON THE COVER

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



# DON'T FALL FOR AUTUMN HAZARDS: FOLLOW THESE TIPS FOR A SAFE SEASON

BY SCOTT MEINECKE



As the weather cools and the leaves begin to change colors, many Iowans are busy with outdoor projects or getting students settled into college

housing. Whether you're climbing a ladder, working the fields or firing up a space heater, take a few minutes to review these important safety tips.

## Ladder safety

Outdoor chores like cleaning gutters and trimming trees often require the use of ladders or tall tools. Stay safe by remembering to look up and be aware of power lines as you use ladders or large tools on your property.

Ensure the ladder is on level ground and that the base is stable. Always maintain three points of contact on the ladder – two hands and one foot or two feet and one hand. Carry tools in a tool belt or pouch to keep your hands free when climbing the ladder. If possible, have another person hold the base of your ladder when you are on it.

## Harvest safety

In Iowa, we know autumn has arrived when we see combines in the fields. We remind farmers and field workers to maintain a 10-foot clearance around power lines and poles and to use a spotter when raising or lowering large equipment or high loads that could come into contact with power lines.

If you are in a vehicle or implement that makes contact with power lines, stay in the cab, contact the local power utility or law enforcement, and keep others away from you until an authority confirms that the power line has been de-energized.

If there is a fire in the cab and you need to exit, jump clear of the equipment without touching it and keep your feet together. Then, bunny hop away with both feet together or shuffle-walk away without lifting your feet off the ground.

## Dorm safety

It's also the time of year when college students move into dorms, apartments and off-campus housing. If you have a student in college, take time to discuss electrical safety and fire safety. Locate fire alarms and fire extinguishers, and walk through the best way to evacuate the space in case of a fire.

Talk to your student about the dangers of overloading electrical outlets and how to use extension cords. For example, don't "daisy chain" extension cords to each other, and don't plug major appliances into extension cords. Unattended cookware is the leading cause of dorm fires, so remind your student to keep an eye on food while it's cooking.

## Space heaters

Cooler autumn weather also ushers in the use of space heaters. Remember to plug your space heater directly into a wall outlet; it could overload a power strip or extension cord. Keep your space heater at least 3 feet from anything that might burn, including furniture, bedding or curtains.

Never leave pets or children unattended around space heaters, and shut them off when you go to sleep or leave the room. Only use space heaters that automatically shut off when tipped over.

## Move over, slow down

Iowa motorists are required by law to move over or slow down when approaching ANY vehicle on the side of the road with flashing lights activated, including co-op utility trucks. Give our co-op employees room on the road to work safely; their families thank you!

*Scott Meinecke is the director of safety and loss control at the Iowa Association of Electric Cooperatives.*

## EDITOR'S CHOICE CONTEST

### WIN AN ELECTRIC LEAF MULCHER!

The new Worx leaf mulcher makes collecting leaves easier and quicker. Turn 11 bags of leaves and debris into one with the 13-amp electric leaf mulcher. This tool features a clean air motor cooling system, enabling it to run at peak efficiency and keep mulching up to 53 gallons of leaves per minute.

### Visit our website and win!

Enter this month's contest by visiting [www.ieclmagazine.com](http://www.ieclmagazine.com) no later than Sept. 30. 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 Solo Stove Runner tabletop fire pit from the July issue was **Barbara Buseman**, a **Grundy County REC** member-consumer.



ENTER ONLINE BY SEPT. 30!

# IOWA CO-OP MEMBERS EXPERIENCE POWER GENERATION FIRSTHAND ON 36TH ANNUAL ENERGY TRAIL TOUR

More than 130 electric cooperative member-consumers from western and north central Iowa embarked on an educational adventure this summer, participating in three motorcoach tours that showcased the journey from power generation to their homes and businesses. The 36th annual Energy Trail Tour season featured three tours departing from Northwest Iowa Power Cooperative (NIPCO) in Le Mars, with tours scheduled June 18-20, June 25-27 and July 9-11.

PECO members Blake Smith and Barb Schomaker, and Randy and Kim Olson participated in the 2025 tour.

The three-day educational experience took participants through the Dakotas to visit key facilities operated by Basin Electric Power Cooperative (Basin Electric) and Western Area Power Administration (WAPA). These are the primary power suppliers for local distribution cooperatives through their generation and transmission

partners NIPCO and Corn Belt Power Cooperative (Corn Belt Power).

## The facilities included:

- Hydroelectric generation at Missouri River facilities Oahe Dam and Powerhouse (June tours) in Pierre, South Dakota, and Big Bend Dam (July tour) in Fort Thompson, South Dakota.
- Coal-fired generation at the Antelope Valley Station power plant.
- An active surface mine at Coteau Properties Company Freedom Mine.

On the motorcoach “mobile classroom” portion, participants also learned about the production of synthetic natural gas and wind generation.

## Cooperative values in action

Beyond the technical education, participants gained a deeper insight into the cooperative difference. They learned about the history of rural electric cooperatives, the Seven Cooperative Principles and Touchstone

Energy’s four service foundations: Integrity, Accountability, Innovation and Commitment to Community.

The tours combined education with fellowship, creating lasting memories while building appreciation for the complex process of delivering reliable electricity to the communities these cooperatives serve.

## Power supply information

NIPCO purchases approximately 80% of its power supply from Basin Electric and 20% from WAPA, which markets power generated from the Missouri River Dam System.

Corn Belt Power has a purchase power agreement with Basin Electric, along with an allotment from WAPA, which markets power generated from the Missouri River Dam System.

**Interested in participating next year? Contact our office to find out how you can learn more about the 2026 Energy Trail Tour.**



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

### Phone:

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1-800-728-0013 (24/7)

**Email:** [prairieenergy@prairieenergy.coop](mailto:prairieenergy@prairieenergy.coop)

**Facebook:** [facebook.com/PrairieEnergyCooperative](https://facebook.com/PrairieEnergyCooperative)

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

This institution is an equal opportunity provider and employer



Barb Schomaker and Blake Smith



Randy and Kim Olson

# NEW HEADQUARTERS UNDER CONSTRUCTION IN CLARION

Prairie Energy Cooperative has officially broken ground on a new headquarters facility in the Clarion Industrial Park, with construction led by Sande Construction and an estimated completion date of June 1, 2026.

Our current Clarion office and warehouse, in-service since 1986, have reached the end of their useful life. The existing warehouse is too small, outdated, and no longer meets modern safety or operational needs. As our membership and service demands grow, so does our need for a more efficient and secure workspace.

The new headquarters will consolidate all Clarion staff into a single location. It includes the renovation of an existing spec building, plus the addition of a new warehouse and pole yard. Updated security features and a modern



layout will improve working conditions, support employee well-being and help us serve our members more effectively.

We look forward to sharing updates with our members as construction progresses!

## LOCAL SHINE THE LIGHT NOMINEES RECEIVE DONATIONS

Prairie Energy Cooperative (PECO), one of the Touchstone Energy Cooperatives of Iowa, is proud to be driven by a strong commitment to community. To celebrate local volunteers who go above and beyond, the Iowa Association of Electric Cooperatives held its fifth annual Shine the Light contest earlier this summer. Employees and member-owners of Iowa's locally owned electric cooperatives were encouraged to nominate individuals who make a positive impact in their communities.

**Congratulations to Aimee Goeman McKnight of Belmond, who was selected as one of three statewide winners for her dedication to the Build A Better Belmond – Pool Fund. To learn more about Aimee's story, turn to Page 11.**

In addition to Aimee, four other nominees from within PECO's service territory were recognized. Each received a \$100 donation from PECO to support their chosen charity or nonprofit.

- **Lance Arnold**  
Klemme – Iowa River Players Theater
- **Kathy Deimerly**  
Clarion – Wright County Connections
- **Rodney Legleiter**  
Kanawha – Wright County District Junior Fair
- **Debra Schimmelpfennig**  
Woden – Woden Commercial Club



We extend our sincere thanks to everyone who submitted a nomination and helped shine a light on these inspiring community members. To learn more about the Shine the Light contest and see the 2025 winners, visit [www.iowaShineTheLight.com](http://www.iowaShineTheLight.com), and read more on Pages 10-11 and 14 of this issue.



The most recent NERC assessment found that while most areas were prepared for typical summer conditions, some could experience elevated risk during periods of extreme heat or when generation resources are limited. *Photo Source: Dennis Gainer, NRECA*

# STAYING POWERED DURING PEAK DEMAND

BY JENNAH DENNEY

Extreme temperatures, whether during summer or winter months, drive up the demand for electricity as homes and businesses rely on air conditioning or heating to stay safe and comfortable. Every year, the North American Electric Reliability Corporation (NERC), the nation's watchdog for grid reliability, issues two Reliability Assessment reports – one for summer months and one for winter. These biannual assessments provide independent views of how prepared the U.S. grid is to meet electricity demand when temperatures soar or dip.

The NERC assessments are critical planning tools for electric

utilities as they prepare for peak demand months. The reports provide a comprehensive evaluation of the North American Bulk Power System and highlight areas of concern regarding reliability.

## **What the recent reliability assessment told us**

NERC's 2025 Summer Reliability Assessment found that while most areas were prepared for typical summer conditions, some regions of the U.S. could experience elevated risk during periods of extreme heat or when generation resources are limited due to planned or unplanned power outages. A few months ago, Entergy and SWEPCO customers in Louisiana

experienced rolling power outages due to grid capacity constraints.

Iowa's electric cooperatives want our members to understand how these surges in demand can impact you – and how you can play an important role in supporting reliable electric service for our local communities.

The electric grid is a vast network comprised of power plants, transmission lines and distribution systems that work together to deliver electricity to homes and businesses. Grid reliability means ensuring enough electricity is always available to meet demand – even on the hottest and coldest days of the year.

According to NERC's most recent assessment, our electric grid is experiencing rapid load growth. Across North America, the total forecasted peak demand for summer months increased by more than 10 gigawatts (GW) since 2024 – more than double the increase seen in 2023. This growth is being driven by continued economic activity, expansion of data centers and industrial facilities, and increasing electrification across many sectors.

At the same time, more than 7.4 GW of generation capacity has retired or gone inactive since last summer. Retirements include natural gas, coal, nuclear and other types of generation, which reduces the availability of dispatchable resources that can operate at any time to help balance the grid. But new resources are becoming available to help meet some of this growing demand. Over 30 GW of new solar capacity and 13 GW of new battery storage are already contributing to increased demand requirements. These resources are especially helpful during peak daylight hours but can create new operational challenges in the evening, when solar generation tapers off and the demand for electricity remains high.

### **Why grid reliability is everyone's responsibility**

While most regions are prepared to meet demand under normal conditions, the NERC assessment highlights that some areas – including parts of the Midwest, New England and Texas – face elevated risk of supply shortfalls during periods of above-normal demand or low resource availability. These risks may occur during extended periods of extreme temperatures or when generation outages coincide with high loads.

In regions like ours, grid operators and electric cooperatives rely on the collective actions of individual consumers to help maintain reliability when the system is under stress. This is where you can help. Stay informed and watch for communications from your electric co-op about peak demand periods or energy conservation requests. Quick

actions taken by co-op members can make a meaningful difference.

### **Small actions, big impact during peak demand**

Adjusting your thermostat by a few degrees, postponing use of large appliances until evening hours, and turning off lights and unnecessary electronics are simple, effective ways you can help ease strain on the grid.

As the electric grid evolves – with changing generation resources, new technologies and growing demand – maintaining reliable service requires careful planning and participation from everyone.

NERC will likely release the 2025-2026 Winter Reliability Assessment in November, which will provide Iowa's electric cooperatives with key insights into winter reliability.

Your electric co-op is working closely with our power supply providers in preparing for peak demand, and your actions to conserve during these times are equally important. By working together, we can help ensure our community continues to receive reliable and affordable electric service throughout periods of high demand.

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



Your electric co-op works closely with power supply providers in preparing for peak demand. Photo Source: Garrett Hubbard



During times of peak electricity demand, quick conservation actions taken by co-op members can make a meaningful difference. Photo Source: Scott Van Osdol





## MULBERRY APPLE STREUSEL PIE

- 4 cups tart baking apples
- 2 cups mulberries
- $\frac{3}{4}$  cup sugar
- 3 tablespoons minute tapioca
- $\frac{1}{2}$  teaspoon cinnamon
- $\frac{1}{4}$  teaspoon nutmeg
- 1 9-inch deep-dish pie crust
- 1 cup Bisquick baking mix
- $\frac{1}{2}$  cup nuts, chopped
- $\frac{1}{3}$  cup brown sugar
- 3 tablespoons butter

Cook apples slightly in microwave until tender crisp. Mix apples, mulberries, sugar, tapioca, cinnamon and nutmeg. Add to pie crust. Mix baking mix, nuts, brown sugar and butter until crumbly. Sprinkle over pie. Bake at 350 degrees F for 55 minutes. *Serves 6-8*

Jo Groth • Plainfield  
Butler County Rural Electric Cooperative

## APPLE PIE ROLL-UPS

- $\frac{1}{2}$  stick butter, melted
- 1 teaspoon cinnamon
- $\frac{1}{2}$  cup sugar
- 10 flour tortillas
- 1 20-ounce can apple pie filling

Brush a 9x13-inch glass dish with melted butter. Mix cinnamon and sugar and put on a paper plate. Fill each tortilla with 2-3 spoonfuls of apple pie filling. Roll tightly and brush with melted butter, then roll in the cinnamon sugar mixture. Coat well. Place in prepared baking dish and bake at 350 degrees F for 15-18 minutes. *Serves 10*

Crystal Hammes • Libertyville  
Access Energy Cooperative

## APPLE TOSS SALAD

- 1 quart apples, cored and diced with peel
- $\frac{1}{2}$  cup peanuts
- $\frac{1}{2}$  cup celery, diced
- $\frac{1}{2}$  cup carrots, chopped
- $\frac{1}{2}$  cup raisins
- 1 8-ounce container lemon-flavored yogurt

Combine apples, peanuts, celery, carrots and raisins. Stir in yogurt until everything is well combined. Cover and refrigerate until ready to eat. This cool and refreshing treat is perfect for hot fall days. *Yields 1 $\frac{1}{2}$  quarts*

Kimberly Peterson • Red Oak  
Southwest Iowa Rural Electric Cooperative

## BAKED APPLES

- apples, peeled and halved
- butter
- 1 cup sugar
- $\frac{1}{4}$  cup brown sugar
- $\frac{1}{4}$  cup flour
- 1 $\frac{3}{4}$  cups water
- cinnamon
- marshmallows, cut in half

Add enough apples to fill the bottom of a 9x13-inch pan when halved. Add a dab of butter in each half. Mix sugar, brown sugar, flour and water. Spoon sugar mixture into apple centers. Sprinkle with cinnamon. Bake at 350 degrees F for 45 minutes. Then, place half a marshmallow on each apple half and return to oven for a few minutes until marshmallows melt. Coat with juice and serve. *Serves 12*

Emily Rassi • Rock Rapids  
Lyon Rural Electric Cooperative



## AUTUMN FRUIT SALAD

- ½ cup sugar
- ½ cup flour
- 1½ cups water
- 1 teaspoon margarine or butter
- 1 teaspoon almond flavoring
- 6 cups green and red apples, unpeeled, cubed
- 2 cups red seedless grapes, halved
- 1 cup pecans, chopped

In a saucepan, combine sugar and flour. Stir in water and boil until thickened. Remove from heat and add margarine or butter and almond flavoring. Cool to room temperature. In a large bowl, combine fruits and nuts. Add dressing and toss gently. Chill for a few hours. Serves 12

**Sandy Harmelink • Orange City**  
North West Rural Electric Cooperative

## APPLE PUFF PANCAKE

- 4 tablespoons butter
- 4 cups apples, diced
- 6 eggs
- 1½ cups milk
- 1 cup flour
- ½ teaspoon salt
- ½ teaspoon cinnamon
- 1 teaspoon vanilla
- 1 tablespoon ground flax seed, optional
- 2 tablespoons brown sugar
- maple syrup

Preheat oven to 425 degree F and melt butter in 9x13-inch pan. Add apples and bake until they sizzle. In a blender, mix eggs, milk, flour, salt, cinnamon and vanilla. Pour over apples and sprinkle with flax seed and brown sugar. Bake at 425 degrees F for 20 minutes. Serve with syrup.

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

## CARAMEL APPLE BROWNIES

- 1¼ cups oil
- 3 large eggs
- 2 cups sugar
- 3½ teaspoons vanilla, divided
- 3 cups flour
- 1 teaspoon baking soda
- 1 teaspoon cinnamon
- 2 Granny Smith apples, peeled and chopped
- 1 cup walnuts, chopped, optional
- ¾ cup butter
- 1½ cups brown sugar
- 6 tablespoons milk
- 3-3½ cups powdered sugar

Mix oil, eggs, sugar and 2 teaspoons vanilla. Add flour, baking soda and cinnamon. Then add apples and nuts. Pour into a greased 10x15-inch baking pan. Bake at 350 degrees F for 45 minutes until a toothpick inserted comes out clean. Remove from oven and cool completely. Melt butter in a medium saucepan. Add brown sugar and cook 2 minutes. Add milk and bring to a boil. Cool to warm stage and add powdered sugar. Beat, then add 1½ teaspoons vanilla and mix well. Spread caramel frosting on cooled brownies.

**Monica Johnson • Williams**  
Prairie Energy Cooperative

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



## FIRST PRIZE APPLESAUCE CAKE

- 1 cup oil
- 2 cups granulated sugar
- 3 cups unsweetened applesauce, heated
- 4 cups all-purpose flour, sifted
- 4 teaspoons soda
- 1¼ teaspoons salt, optional
- 1 tablespoon ground cinnamon
- ½ teaspoon nutmeg
- ¼ teaspoon cloves
- 2 tablespoons cocoa
- ½ cup raisins and/or cranberries
- ½ cup nuts, chopped
- ½ cup butter, melted
- 1 cup dark brown sugar, firmly packed
- ¼ cup milk
- 2 cups powdered sugar, sifted
- 1 tablespoon vanilla

Stir together oil and sugar and add to hot applesauce. Sift together flour, soda, salt, cinnamon, nutmeg, cloves and cocoa. Then blend into the applesauce mixture. Stir in raisins and/or cranberries and nuts. Pour into two greased and floured 9x9x2-inch pans. Bake at 400 degrees F for 15 minutes, then lower the oven temperature to 375 degrees F and bake for 15 minutes more, or until done. Move cakes to racks to cool. Boil butter and brown sugar for 2 minutes. Remove from heat and stir in milk. Return to full boil, then remove and cool to lukewarm. Stir in powdered sugar and vanilla. Add more sugar if needed to make caramel frosting more spreadable. When cakes are cool, spread frosting on one layer. Top with second cake layer and frost top and sides. May garnish with more nuts. Tip: Wax parchment paper can be added to line sprayed/greased pans before pouring in batter.

**Steve Fisher • Sigourney**  
T.I.P. Rural Electric Cooperative

**WANTED:**

## VEGETARIAN RECIPES

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

**Deadline is Sept. 30**

Submit your favorite recipes for vegetarian meals. 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

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# MEET THE 2025 SHINE THE LIGHT WINNERS



Driven by their commitment to community, the Touchstone Energy® Cooperatives of Iowa held their fifth annual Shine the Light contest in June to celebrate local volunteers. Employees and member-consumers of Iowa's locally owned electric cooperatives were invited to nominate someone who makes a positive difference in their community.

The judging committee reviewed essays from 88 outstanding nominations, which were published in the August issue of this magazine, and selected three winners.

Congratulations to **Chuck Bildstein**, who is recognized for supporting families through Chelsey's Dream Foundation; **Aimee Goeman McKnight**, who is recognized for her generous community efforts through Build a Better Belmond; and **Gerry Holtrup**, who is recognized for his commitment to assisting veterans through Partners for Patriots.

These three winners have been awarded a \$3,000 donation to their charity. The following pages showcase and honor each of the Shine the Light contest winners' commitment to humbly serving their communities.

Learn more at  
[www.iowaShineTheLight.com](http://www.iowaShineTheLight.com).

Gerry Holtrup is pictured with photos of dogs he has helped to pair with veterans.



## WHERE DUTY NEVER ENDS

GERRY HOLTRUP PAIRS VETERANS WITH LIFE-SAVING COMPANIONS

BY EMILY VANDER VELDE

After more than 35 years in law enforcement, Gerry Holtrup could have stepped into retirement quietly. But a call from a past connection helped launch a mission that would touch the lives of hundreds of veterans across the country.

Gerry first met Cindy Brodie while working in the sheriff's office, when he was looking to add a narcotics dog to the force. Cindy, then training law enforcement dogs in Tennessee, connected him with Jeb, a dog who would work closely with Gerry for nearly a decade and become a valued partner.

Years later, after moving to the Sioux City area, Cindy began training service dogs for disabled veterans. Inspired by helping some veterans receive their life-saving service dog, she founded Partners for Patriots, a nonprofit that raises, trains and places service dogs with disabled veterans – completely free of charge.

"These dogs truly are helping them," Cindy said. "They've saved lives and helped veterans function in society."



### Answering the call again

When North West REC member Mollie Griffin heard about the Shine the Light contest, she immediately thought of Gerry. As a puppy raiser for the program, Mollie has witnessed his dedication firsthand.

"Gerry is the driving force behind the fundraising," she said. "He cares so deeply. He's one of the nicest guys I've ever met."

Just two months before retiring, Gerry got a call from Cindy. She was overwhelmed trying to do everything on her own and asked for help with fundraising. He stepped in without hesitation – and hasn't stopped since. His first fundraiser brought in \$5,000, when the group had just \$2,000 left in its bank account. Since 2017,



Gerry has helped raise more than \$400,000 to fund the placement of over 200 service dogs.

From coordinating annual dinners and golf tournaments to organizing fair booths and business events, Gerry keeps the mission front and center in the community. But while fundraising is vital, his most meaningful role has been as a traveling trainer.

### Delivering healing, one dog at a time

Once a dog completes six months of training in Anthon, it's Gerry's job to deliver the dog to its new handler. Cindy trains him on the veteran's specific needs, then Gerry drives – or sometimes flies – with the dog to their new home, staying several days to help build the bond between the veteran and the dog. He has personally delivered 35 dogs, from Iowa to California to Tennessee.

The dogs are trained to respond to veterans' post-traumatic stress disorder symptoms – recognizing triggers and calming them through touch and distraction. Gerry shared powerful stories of dogs pulling veterans out of night terrors or stepping in when a veteran was on the verge of suicide.

"These dogs really do save lives," he said.

Each veteran is given 500 custom baseball-style cards featuring their service dog's photo and name. It's something to hand out when people ask to pet the dog, which can't be allowed while the dog is working.

From his early years with Jeb to his coast-to-coast deliveries for veterans in need, Gerry has never stopped serving. Through compassion, determination and a deep respect for the sacrifices of others, he is making a life-changing difference – one dog and one veteran at a time.

Learn more at [www.partnersforpatriots.org](http://www.partnersforpatriots.org).

Emily Vander Velde is the communications and member services coordinator for North West REC.



## WHERE DETERMINATION DIVES DEEP

AIMEE GOEMAN MCKNIGHT RALLIES A SMALL TOWN AROUND A \$5.7 MILLION DREAM

Aimee Goeman McKnight is pictured fourth from the right.

BY RYAN CORNELIUS

Every small town has its unsung heroes, but in Belmond, one woman is proving that determination, vision and a heart for her community can turn the impossible into reality. Amy Goeman McKnight is one of those unsung heroes.

Aimee returned to her hometown of Belmond in 2020 after moving away when she graduated high school in 1995. In 2023, when the city pool faced a crisis, Aimee stepped into her true role – community champion.

After a summer marked by repeated breakdowns, the Belmond City Council voted not to reopen the pool in 2024, citing the nearly \$1 million in needed repairs. Instead of accepting defeat, Aimee gathered a group of dedicated community members to form the Luick Memorial Swimming Pool Committee under the Build a Better Belmond organization.

### A new vision for a community landmark

They began meeting with city officials, engineers, financial experts,

pool design firms and residents. What they discovered was that repairing the pool wasn't the answer – rebuilding it from the ground up was the solution.

The challenge? A staggering \$5.7 million price tag.

For most towns of 2,300 people, that number might have been the end of the story. But for Aimee, it was just the beginning.

### Fundraising, faith and a finish line in sight

In just 12 months, she and her committee raised an incredible \$2.1 million through donations and a steady stream of community-driven fundraisers. Next up is a critical vote in November 2025 on a \$3 million city bond that could push the project across the finish line.

Her motivation is simple: a love for her community and its future. Friends and neighbors often marvel at how she balances her demanding job, her business and countless hours of volunteer work, often pouring more time into the pool project than anything else.

In a world that could use more unsung heroes, Belmond already has one. Her name is Aimee and she's proving that with passion and persistence, even the biggest dreams can make a splash.

Ryan Cornelius is the vice president of corporate relations for Corn Belt Power Cooperative.

Learn more at [bit.ly/belmondpool](http://bit.ly/belmondpool).

See Page 14 for the article on Chuck Bildstein and Chelsey's Dream Foundation.



# PECO HOSTS SUCCESSFUL MEMBER APPRECIATION DAY

Prairie Energy Cooperative's (PECO) third annual Member Appreciation Day was held on July 17 at the Red Shed Event Center in Clarion and welcomed a great turnout once again! With around 550 members and guests in attendance, the event was a celebration of community, gratitude and cooperative spirit.

Smokey Heights served up a delicious meal, while The Olde Creamery kept

everyone cool and smiling with ice cream treats straight from their truck. Bounce houses kept the kids busy, and PECO giveaways for both kids and adults were a hit throughout the evening.

One of the most popular attractions of the day was the bucket truck rides, offering a unique view from high above. It was a crowd favorite that gave attendees a glimpse into the work our linemen do every day.

The board of directors and PECO staff would like to extend a heartfelt thank you to all who joined us. Your continued support helps make this annual event a great success year after year.

Mark your calendars! Next year's Member Appreciation Day is already set for July 16, 2026, and we look forward to seeing even more of you there!

## CONGRATULATIONS TO THESE LUCKY MEMBERS WHO WERE WINNERS OF THE GIVEAWAYS THIS YEAR:

**\$50 gift cards:** Ron Hejna and Henry Hocraffer

**\$100 Amazon cards:** Diane Amonson, Brian Moore, Rita Vanderheiden, and Earl Webner

**Legacy RTIC 20-quart cooler:** Mervin Krauss

**Legacy swag bag:** Dean Avery

**Resco swag bag:** Roger Leist

**Axe throwing game:** Steve Hemken

**Igloo 60-quart cooler:** Roger Wenzel

**Electric grill:** Matt Lund

**Hammock:** Tim Chipman

**12-inch bike:** Travis Roberts

**18-inch bike:** Logan Reed

**24-inch bike:** Mike Wibholm

**Bounce house:** William McBride

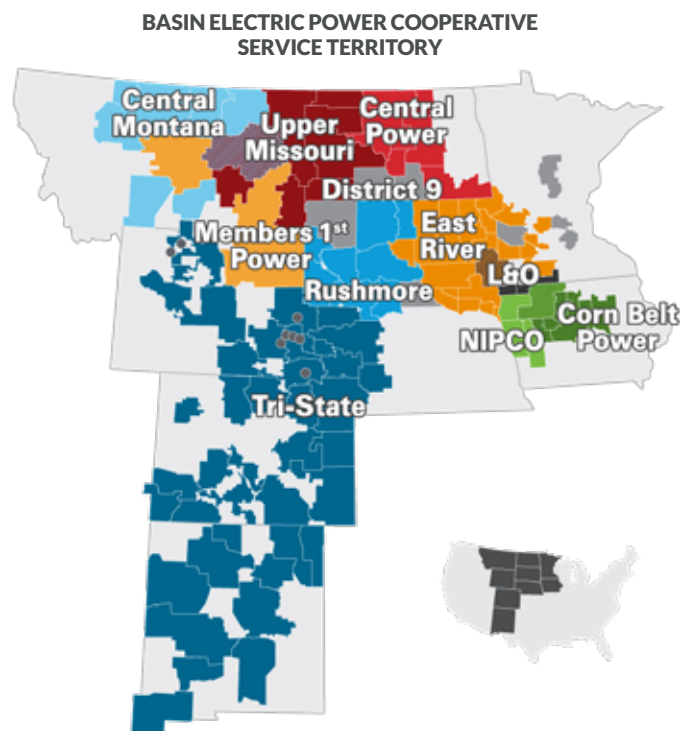




# BASIN ELECTRIC CONSIDERING 2026 RATE INCREASE

In 2024, the Basin Electric Power Cooperative (Basin Electric) board of directors authorized a Class A rate increase of \$4 per megawatt-hour (MWh), or approximately 6.5%, beginning Jan. 1, 2025. Basin Electric's financial forecast indicated the need for an approximate \$5.20 per MWh rate increase; however, after feedback from members, the board elected to use a portion of the rate stability fund in order to gradually implement the rate increase. Basin Electric is regulated by the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, which will also need to approve the rate change.

Basin Electric is now considering raising rates Jan. 1, 2026. The increase would be a 18.7% and would affect Prairie Energy Cooperative through our generation and transmission provider, Corn Belt Power Cooperative (Corn Belt).



## Load growth and investments in reliability

Investments in new generation and transmission facilities are needed to support member load growth, and it's critical to invest in existing facilities to maintain reliability. To accommodate these large loads, Basin Electric is investing approximately \$8 billion over the next 10 years in transmission and generation assets to ensure reliable electricity for our members.



## Decreased surplus sales on the west side of the system

Market dynamics have been impacted by changes in the generating fleet, which has influenced prices and the ability to make surplus sales. Overall, this has lowered energy prices from previous years and has impacted the ability to sell Basin's excess west side generation.



## Impacts of inflation

Cost increases for internal labor, contracted labor, materials and maintenance, in addition to higher costs of borrowing money and increased insurance premiums. From 2016 to 2023, Basin Electric's member rates increased by an average of 1.5% per year, while inflation rose at almost twice that rate, averaging 3.2% per year.



## Volatility of power markets

Power markets have become more volatile, resulting in dramatic price movements. Increasing intermittent generation, swings in natural gas prices and increasing electricity demand are primary contributors to volatility. While this is managed through generation and hedging, the cost of this is increasing.

## PECO ATTEMPTING TO MAINTAIN STABLE AND AFFORDABLE RATES

Prairie Energy Cooperative (PECO) is an electric distribution power cooperative. Our power is supplied by two generation and transmission (G&T) cooperatives: Corn Belt Power Cooperative in Humboldt, Iowa, and Basin Electric Power Cooperative in Bismarck, North Dakota. Our electric rates are impacted by our G&T cooperatives. These are factors which we have limited or no control. We are always engaged in discussions with our G&T cooperatives, but their decisions are based by their leadership teams and board of directors.

PECO member-owners expect lower electric rates in an environment where nearly all the costs associated with those rates are increasing. PECO shares this expectation. PECO has not raised our energy rates since November 2016. PECO did raise the facility charge with all member-owners in February 2025. The facility charge supports PECO in covering our fixed costs. It helps insure we can fix and maintain the poles, wires, meters, insulators and so on that serve your property.

Part of our commitment to our members is to ensure fiscal responsibility so that we can meet all of our financial obligations. This includes performing annual budgets, 10-year financial forecasts and conducting cost-of-service studies to evaluate our rate structures. As we continue to meet our financial obligations, we will have to pass on a rate increase in 2026. As we research our options over the next several months, we will continue to strive to safely provide reliable, affordable and responsible energy to our member-owners.

# MEET THE 2025 SHINE THE LIGHT WINNERS

## WHERE WISHES BECOME FAMILIES

**CHUCK BILDSTEIN FULFILLS  
CHELSEY'S DYING DREAM,  
ONE ADOPTION AT A TIME**



Chuck Bildstein is pictured second from right.

BY CHRISTIE REMLEY

Feature continued from Page 11

Chelsey Bildstein was a talented athlete, rising professional, and beloved daughter, sister, aunt, cousin and friend. Raised in a loving family, she wanted nothing more than to be a mom someday. Sadly, she would not have the opportunity herself, but it was her dying wish that others get to experience the joy of parenthood.

In 2013, Chelsey, was diagnosed with uterine and ovarian cancer at the age of 23. When she learned of her disease, she gracefully accepted that she would not have biological children. As her cancer rapidly progressed, Chelsey expressed to her parents Chuck and Carol Bildstein her dying wish. Her dream was no longer to grow a family of her own through adoption, but to help other families with the cost of their adoptions. Her wish became Chelsey's Dream Foundation.

### Carrying on Chelsey's legacy

Maquoketa Valley Electric Cooperative Energy Advisor Al Reiter nominated Chuck for a Shine the Light award for his work with Chelsey's Dream Foundation, which was established to honor the memory of Chelsey and fulfill her wish to assist families with adoption expenses and emotional support.

"Chelsey's Dream Foundation is a perfect fit for the Shine the Light award. It has been a valuable resource

since it began and continues to help families with their adoption goals more than a decade later," said Al.

### Building families with every act of generosity

While Chelsey passed away in 2014, her foundation has since helped more than 100 families (80 from Iowa) with adopting 141 children. This organization continues to be a valuable resource, providing adoptive families with grants from \$3,000 to \$15,000. The foundation has never turned a family down.

Chuck has taken the loss of his daughter as an opportunity to help others and carry on her dream. The Bildstein family and many close family friends support the foundation by holding numerous fundraising activities in the Anamosa community, including an annual raffle for a side-by-side UTV, a girls' youth softball tournament with more than 50 teams participating and a golf and auction event that attracts at least 300 people annually.

In addition to financial assistance, the foundation provides emotional support through annual seminars on the adoption process. They

also connect families who share their experiences and mentor those needing help navigating the adoption process.

While Chuck lives by the creed of getting involved and doing something to bring a smile to someone's face every day, he is most proud of Chelsey's courage and her open heart to help others, even in a time when she was facing terminal cancer.

Chuck said simply, "She is our hero."

Learn more at  
[www.chelseysdreamfoundation.com](http://www.chelseysdreamfoundation.com).

Christie Remley is the manager of communications and public relations for Maquoketa Valley Electric Cooperative.



Chelsey Bildstein (left).



# BE STILL IN A DIGITAL WORLD

BY DARCY DOUGHERTY MAULSBY

I was quite a sight, one hot, humid July morning this past summer during a Sunday service at the Swede Bend Church at Twin Lakes Bible Camp.

By 9 a.m. it was stuffy inside that simple 150-plus-year-old building with no air conditioning. But that wasn't the issue. The guest pastor was preaching on Psalm 46 and the verse, "Be still, and know that I am God." He noted that this has become tougher than ever in a world of digital distractions. And yet there I was, typing away on my smartphone.

I didn't have a pen or paper handy, but I needed to take some notes fast. Ironical, I know, but I sensed a story when the preacher started talking about our inability – our refusal – to be still.

I typed notes in an email to myself, even as the pastor urged us to spend less time on electronic devices. I kept on typing as he shared his "no cell phones at dinner" rule. He's happy to pay for his family members' meals at a restaurant – except for anyone in the group who picks up his or her phone during the meal. Guess it's a good thing we weren't at dinner.

## How much of your time is consumed online?

These comments from the pastor really hit home:

- How much time do you devote each day to looking at phone screens, computer screens and TV screens? For the average American adult, it's approximately 7 hours and 3 minutes each day, according to a study by Exploding Topics. Guilty as charged.
- Smartphones can be addictive, as I know all too well. How many times a day do you check your phone? For the average American, it's a staggering 205 times a day, according to a 2024 report from Reviews.org. "If you add up all this screen time, it's the equivalent of

a part-time job – or more," the pastor said. If you keep tallying up this screen time, it equates to spending more than 18 years of your life online, he added.

- All this screen time can be especially rough on adolescents. By the early 2010s, an epidemic of teen mental illness hit many countries at the same time. Young people's rates of depression, anxiety, self-harm and suicide rose sharply, more than doubling on many measures, noted social psychologist Jonathan Haidt, who wrote "The Anxious Generation."

Published in 2024, his book explains how "play-based childhood" began to decline in the 1980s and was wiped out by the arrival of the "phone-based childhood" in the early 2010s. He presents specific examples of how this great rewiring of childhood has interfered with kids' social and neurological development, from sleep deprivation to attention fragmentation, addiction, loneliness and more.

## Being still is an action

So, what's the answer? It's not like most of us can just disconnect from



This inviting view of the Raccoon River by the historic Rainbow Bridge southwest of Lake City reflects the concept of "be still."

the digital world. I liked the pastor's practical suggestions, which I'm trying to incorporate into my life:

- 1 Understand that being still is an action. Set aside non-phone and non-computer time every day. It takes commitment, but it's worth it. Use tech to support your values, rather than eclipsing real-life experiences.
- 2 Practice being still every day. Establish a routine. Before the day is done, write down three things you're thankful for. I've found it's surprisingly easy and enjoyable, once you get started.
- 3 Be truly present. This can be as simple as appreciating the beauty of creation around you.

To me, something that symbolizes all this is a lake or river with water so smooth it reflects the sky. Calm. Peaceful. Unhurried. It's a good reminder that God whispers to you in the quiet moments. Be still and listen.

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



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September 2025

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