



POWER CONNECTION

member driven. community focused. energy smart.

SEPTEMBER 2019



MAKE THE SWITCH TO SAVE

LOOK TO YOUR AIR CONDITIONER FOR **HEAT** AND SAVINGS THIS FALL

As the leaves begin to change and the temperature starts to drop, we don't usually think our air conditioner is the key to efficient heating, but it's true. Converting your air conditioner to an air source heat pump can keep your home warm when the frost settles overnight. As you consider your heating options this fall, Stearns Electric recommends taking a look at an air source heat pump as one of the most energy efficient and cost-effective heating solutions.

Installing an air source heat pump doesn't just keep your home comfortable, it can save you money. It can cool and heat your home while using less energy than a conventional

furnace. This is especially important considering heating and cooling account for more than half the total energy consumed within a typical household. *Plus, for a limited time, Stearns Electric Association is offering increased rebates up to \$1,300 for members installing air source heat pumps and plenum heaters.*

Heat pumps work on the very same principles as your refrigerator. Using a series of fans, refrigerant, coils and a compressor, a refrigerator pulls heat from the air inside and pumps it out the back. When cooling your home in the summer a heat pump does the same, pumping heat from indoor air outside. This process is simply reversed for the purpose of

home heating, thanks to a special valve that changes the direction of refrigerant flow.

Even when air temperatures drop near zero, the heat pump harvests hidden heat in the air outside and transfers it into your home so you can run your furnace less. In fact, with an air source heat pump you may not need to run your furnace at all during the spring and fall.

An air source heat pump is one of the most efficient systems available. Combine it with Stearns Electric's EnergyWise Programs, which offer nearly half price electricity, and you'll save both energy and money this heating season and beyond.

CEO'S MESSAGE

DEMOCRATIC MEMBER CONTROL AND THE BOARD'S REVIEW OF CO-OP BYLAWS



One of the things that makes rural electric cooperatives like Stearns Electric Association unique is the second of seven cooperative principles: Democratic Member Control. Here is the definition:

Cooperatives are democratic organizations controlled by their members through the election of peers to serve on the board of directors. Each member has equal voting rights (one member, one vote.) The board of directors is actively involved in setting policies, including rates and strategic planning decisions, and is accountable to the cooperative membership.

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This local democracy principle for Minnesota Rural Electric Cooperatives is established by Minnesota Statute Chapter 308A. The statute confirms the local decision making that has been part of rural electric cooperatives for decades.

Unlike investor-owned utilities, electric cooperatives answer to their membership, not company shareholders. Stearns Electric members entrust their elected directors to make local cooperative decisions such as services provided, electric rates and co-op strategies. Local governance allows the Stearns Electric Board of Directors to make decisions to best serve the unique needs of our membership.

One of the duties of your Stearns Electric Board of Directors is to conduct a periodic review of Stearns Electric's articles of incorporation and bylaws. The articles of incorporation is the founding legal document that provides a framework for the establishment of the Cooperative and filed with the Minnesota Secretary of State. The bylaws are the set of rules and procedures for operating Stearns Electric. Our bylaws must be consistent with our articles of incorporation.

Currently your Stearns Electric Board of Directors is conducting a review of the Cooperative's bylaws. A committee of board members, along with your Stearns Electric staff and attorney, are reviewing the bylaws line by line. Once suggested changes are identified by the board committee, the full Stearns Electric Board of Directors will review and approve recommended changes to the bylaws. We anticipate the bylaw review will be completed by year-end 2019.

Ultimately, bylaw updates will be presented to you, the members of our Cooperative, for approval at the 2020 Stearns Electric Annual Meeting. Recommendations for the bylaw review will cover out-of-date language, changes in associated laws, the adoption of new technology, changing demographics and adjustments to recommended co-op business practices.

Regular review of the Stearns Electric articles of incorporation and bylaws is necessary. Having updated articles and bylaws will allow the Stearns Electric Board of Directors and employees to more effectively manage your Cooperative. Something we can be sure of now, and in the future, is that things will change!

Sincerely,

Robin C. Doege
Chief Executive Officer (CEO)



The 2019-2020 Stearns Electric Board of Directors

MEMBER NOTICE

Statement of Non-Discrimination

Stearns Electric Association is an equal opportunity provider and employer. The Cooperative prohibits discrimination against its members, employees and applicants for employment on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, disability, sex, gender identity, religion, reprisal, and where applicable, political beliefs, marital status, familial or parental status, sexual orientation, or all or part of an individual's income derived from any public assistance program, or protected genetic information in employment or in any program or activity conducted or funded by the Cooperative.

If you wish to file a Civil Rights program complaint of discrimination, complete the USDA Program Discrimination Complaint Form, found online at <https://www.ascr.usda.gov/ad-3027-usda-program-discrimination-complaint-form>, or at a USDA office, or by calling call (866) 632-9992 to request the form. You may also write a letter containing all of the information requested in the form. Send your completed complaint form or letter by mail to U.S. Department of Agriculture, Director, Center for Civil Rights Enforcement, 1400 Independence Avenue, S.W., Washington, D.C. 20250-9410, by fax (202) 690-7442 or email at program.intake@usda.gov.

MANAGE YOUR ACCOUNT



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BOARD MEETING

The regular meeting of the Board of Directors of Stearns Electric Association was held on July 25, 2019 at 1:00 p.m. at the Stearns Electric Association office located in St. Joseph, Minnesota.

Manager of Finance, Cindy Anderson, reviewed the June 2019 financial and statistical information with the Board. The Board reviewed the 2018 Key Ratio Trend Analysis.

CEO, Robin Doege, provided the Board with his continuation plan along with information from various industry meetings attended since the last Board meeting.

VP of Administration and Finance, Vicky Herkenhoff, reviewed information related to the upcoming corporate scorecard and personnel matters, in addition to alignment and bylaw review progress. The Communications and Marketing report was reviewed outlining various metrics related to member website usage and member events.

VP of Engineering and Operations, Matt O'Shea, gave an overview of his plans for increased collaboration within the department. Additionally, Mr. O'Shea presented background on a new tool the Cooperative is using to help prioritize projects and work activities. Mr. O'Shea provided an update on current activities of the crews and contractor progress. The Safety and Reliability reports were also provided for examination at the meeting.

Director Mike Blenkush, a member of the GRE Board of Directors, reviewed the recently attended GRE Strategy Session Summary.

Attorney Scott Dymoke reported continued progress with the proposed modifications to the Stearns Electric Articles of Incorporation and Bylaws. The Board asked questions about how potential changes are communicated to the membership. For the benefit of the Board members, Mr. Dymoke talked about how economic development loans work including those granted for local fire department equipment loans.

Next Meeting: October 24, 2019



SAFETY IN THE FIELDS THIS FALL: *Harvest Workers Urged to Take Time to Reap a Safe Harvest*

The culmination of a season of hard work can be an exciting and exhausting time. However, the rush to harvest can also yield tragic outcomes.

Each year, dozens of farm workers are killed and hundreds are injured in accidents involving power lines and electrical equipment. Things people see every day can fade from view and in the busyness of harvest time, it's easy for farm workers to forget about the power lines overhead. Failure to notice them, however, can be a deadly oversight.

Review the farm activities that take place around power lines with all workers. Inspect the height of farm equipment to determine clearance. Keep equipment at least 10 feet away from power lines above, below and to the side - a 360 degree rule.

Always lower grain augers before moving them, even if it's only a few feet. Variables like wind, uneven ground, shifting weight or other conditions can combine to create an unexpected result. Also use extreme caution when raising the bed of a grain truck.

Farm workers should take these

steps to ensure a safer harvest season:

- Use care when raising augers or the bed of grain trucks around power lines.
- Use a spotter when operating large machinery near power lines. Do not let the spotter touch the machinery while it is being moved anywhere near power lines.
- As with any outdoor work, be careful not to raise any equipment such as ladders, poles or rods into power lines. Remember, non-metallic materials such as lumber, tree limbs, ropes and hay will conduct electricity depending on dampness, dust and dirt contamination.
- Never attempt to raise or move a power line to clear a path.
- Don't use metal poles to break up bridged grain inside bins. Know where and how to shut off the power in an emergency.
- Use qualified electricians for work on drying equipment and other farm electrical systems.

Operators of farm equipment or vehicles must also know what to do if their vehicle comes in contact with

a power line. Stay on the equipment, warn others to stay away and call 911. Do not get off the equipment until the utility crew says it is safe to do so. If the power line is energized and you step outside, touching the vehicle and ground, your body becomes the path and electrocution is the result. Even if a power line has landed on the ground, the potential for the area nearby to be energized still exists. Stay inside the vehicle unless there's fire or imminent risk of fire. If this is the case, jump off the equipment with your feet together, without touching the ground and vehicle at the same time. Then, still keeping your feet together, shuffle your feet to safety as you leave the area.

Once you get away from the equipment, never attempt to get back on or even touch the equipment. Some electrocutions have occurred after the operator dismounts and, realizing nothing has happened, tries to get back on the equipment.

It is very important that all farm workers and seasonal employees are informed of electrical hazards and trained in proper procedures to avoid injury.

WINTER ENERGY BILLS

MINNESOTA COLD WEATHER RULE



YOUR RIGHTS UNDER THE MINNESOTA COLD WEATHER RULE

The Minnesota Cold Weather Rule, under statute 216B.097, protects residential utility customers during the cold winter months. Under this rule, your electric service will not be disconnected from October 15 through April 15 if you meet Cold Weather Rule requirements.

To qualify, you must meet ALL the following conditions:

- You declare an inability to pay.
- Your total household, not individual, income is less than 50% of the state median income. You must provide the necessary documentation to support this condition.
- Your account is current for the billing period immediately prior to October 15, or you mutually agree to a payment arrangement with the Stearns Electric Billing Department.

If you do not meet all of these listed conditions, then you do not qualify for the winter shut-off protection. However, you can still continue to receive electric service if you call us to make a mutually acceptable payment arrangement.

The law does allow for Stearns Electric to disconnect when it is necessary from October 15 to April 15, so please act promptly.

To avoid a disconnection under the Cold Weather Rule, you must make and keep an acceptable payment arrangement with your Cooperative to receive Cold Weather Rule (CWR) protection. This applies to all residential customers, including senior citizens and families with young children. If you make and keep a CWR payment arrangement, you are protected until April 15.

Stearns Electric works with members during the Cold Weather Rule period, just as we do throughout the year. We don't want to interrupt service to any member, but in a cooperative, all members suffer when any bill remains unpaid. Stearns Electric would rather work with members to establish and maintain adequate payment arrangements of their past due bill, but sometimes disconnection must be made when necessary, within the limits of the law.

Please contact Stearns Electric during regular business hours if you have any questions about the Cold Weather Rule or Energy Assistance Programs.

ENERGY EFFICIENCY TIP OF THE MONTH

EFFICIENCY TIP FOR THE KITCHEN

Cookware Efficiency Tip: Copper-bottomed pans heat faster on the stove. In the oven, ceramic and glass dishes are better than metal. With ceramic and glass dishes, you can turn the oven down about 25 degrees, and your meal will cook just as quickly.

ELECTRICAL SAFETY CHECKUP

EXTENSION CORDS

Don't use an extension cord or power strip with heaters or fans. These could cause cords to overheat and result in a fire.



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CURRENT ENERGYWISE PARTICIPANT NOTICE:

IS YOUR ENERGYWISE DUAL FUEL SYSTEM WINTER READY?

If you have a Dual Fuel Heating system, now is the time to be sure your back-up heating system is prepared and that you have adequate fuel supply.

When will dual fuel heating systems be controlled?

- During periods of high demand (coldest winter evenings) and when market prices are high, but other factors can lead to load control as well.
- Up to 400 hours during the heating season; however, most winters the control has totaled between 100 and 120 hours and will not exceed 12 hours on a single day.
- Any time of the day, but typically in the early evening (4:30 - 9:30 p.m.) and occasionally in the morning.
- Participants should expect 16 - 20 control days this winter, with most occurring between December and February.

REMEMBER TO CHECK BEFORE YOU FLIP YOUR BREAKER OFF

Are you planning to close up your seasonal home, head out on a long vacation or travel south for the winter? Be sure you don't inadvertently shut off the breaker that supplies power to your off-peak meter for either your electric water heater or off-peak electric heat source. This will cause the electric heat or water heater to be billed at the general service rate instead of the off-peak rate.

If you have an electric water heater, we encourage you to have a qualified installer equip your water heater with a disconnect switch. This would enable you to shut off your water heater at your convenience while maintaining power to the off-peak meter.

STORED WATER HEATING AND STORAGE HEAT CONTROL PERIOD TO CHANGE THIS WINTER

New for the 2019-2020 winter season, the electric thermal storage schedules for water heating and space heating will be controlled from 6:00 a.m. through 10:00 p.m. from October 1, 2019 through April 30, 2020.

This is a deviation from previous winters where the schedules had been shedding load from 7:00 a.m. - 11:00 p.m.

BE ENERGY WISE

FALL INTO ENERGY SAVINGS



- *Check to see if your home insulation levels are up to par.*
- *Seal air leaks around doors, windows and electrical outlets.*
- *When heating your home set the thermostat to 68 degrees to save energy.*

COMMUNITY



STEARNS ELECTRIC PARTICIPATES IN ST. CLOUD TOUCH A TRUCK EVENT

On Friday, September 6, Stearns Electric line workers brought a bucket truck to a Touch a Truck event in St. Cloud, hosted by Minser Chiropractic. This family-friendly, annual community event allows kids to interact with all kinds of vehicles including fire trucks, semi-trucks, snowmobiles, police cars and more. Proceeds from the event were donated to the St. Cloud Area FACT (Feeding Area Children Together) program. Visit our Facebook page to see more photos.





KEEP YOUR CONTACT INFORMATION UP TO DATE

By keeping your contact information up to date, you can take full advantage of the services Stearns Electric Association offers.

First and foremost, updating all your contact information is helpful because it allows the Cooperative to contact you regarding your account if there is a need.

Updating your contact information is also helpful because it speeds up the power restoration process. At Stearns Electric we use the phone numbers you provide to link your service address to our outage management system. After hours when the phone

lines are busy, our automated system kicks in and instantly recognizes your phone number and can determine the particular service address from which you are reporting an outage. But remember – this only works if your current phone number (especially your cell phone number) is linked to your service address.

Paying your bill over the phone with SecurePay can also be streamlined if your phone number is updated on your account. After your initial SecurePay set up, the automated phone system will also instantly recognize the number you are calling from and connect to your account.

By having an e-mail address on file, you can sign up for online account access through SmartHub. There you can sign up for our alerts, bill pay reminders, the e-newsletter and access your usage information.

Your privacy is important to us. We will not share any provided information with others. Communication in our busy world is changing and we want to know the best ways to let you know about planned outages, large emergency outages, upcoming events and programs, and your account.



cookingcorner

APPLE CRISP

Submitted by: Jean Donnay
Stearns Electric Member-Consumer

Ingredients:

3 lbs Apples (peeled, cored and sliced)
1 Tbsp Butter (cut into small pieces)
2 Tbsp Lemon Juice
1 C Flour
1 C Rolled Oats
1 1/2 C Brown Sugar
1 1/2 tsp Cinnamon
1 tsp Salt
1/2 C Butter

Directions:

Preheat oven to 375 degrees. Butter 9x13 baking dish. Spread prepared apples into pan. Dot with one tablespoon butter pieces. Sprinkle with lemon juice. Mix flour, oats, brown sugar, cinnamon and salt in a bowl. Cut butter into mixture until it resembles coarse crumbs. Spread over apples. Bake until topping is brown and apples are soft and tender, about 30 minutes. Serve warm with ice cream if desired. Enjoy!

CONTEST DETAILS:

One member per account may submit one recipe per month. Recipes will be saved for future publications. The recipe selected each month will receive a \$10 credit on their electric bill. Submit recipes to communications@stearnselectric.org or mail to: Stearns Electric, Cooking Corner, PO BOX 816, St. Joseph, MN 56374.



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LIMITED TIME OFFER

Through November 29th, Stearns Electric Association is offering increased rebates up to \$1300* when you install an air source heat pump with a plenum heater.

LEARN MORE AT
WWW.STEARNSELECTRIC.ORG

(*based on SEER level)