



POWER CONNECTION

member driven. community focused. energy smart.

OCTOBER 2019



SIGN UP FOR AUTOPAY BY NOVEMBER 30TH FOR A CHANCE TO WIN!

AutoPay takes the worry out of paying your bills. Simply enroll your account with a preferred payment source, and your bill will be paid each month automatically on the due date.

AutoPay is safe, easy and convenient. After the initial set-up, you won't have to spend any time paying your Stearns Electric Association bill each month. You'll have peace of mind knowing you will never have to pay a late fee or worry about a misplaced bill. AutoPay is free. It saves you the cost of stamps and checks, not to mention the effort of mailing your payments. If you like to keep a paper trail, no problem. With AutoPay you can still receive bills online or in the mail.

You can have your bill payment automatically electronically transferred from your designated checking account or savings account debit card* or major credit card* FREE of charge. (*VISA, MasterCard, American Express or Discover.)

FOR YOUR CHANCE TO WIN

To be entered into the bill credit drawing, you must be currently enrolled in AutoPay or sign up by November 30th using a designated checking or savings account.

HOW DO I APPLY FOR THE AUTOMATIC PAYMENT PLAN?

Online: The easiest way to get started is to enroll online through SmartHub. Visit www.stearnselectric.org.

By Mail: If you prefer not to use SmartHub, you can enroll by completing the form available online to apply by mail.

- Fill out your financial institution's name, address and phone number on the lines provided.
- If your payment is to be deducted from a checking account, enclose a blank check. Write VOID across it. DO NOT SIGN IT. If your payment is to be deducted from a savings account, enclose a deposit slip that has your account number on it.
- Sign, date and return the form to the Cooperative.

By Phone: Make a payment through SecurePay at (855) 386-9908 and enroll in recurring payments.

Please continue to pay your bill in your usual way until your bill indicates that the balance will be automatically paid.

CEO'S MESSAGE

CELEBRATING THE COOPERATIVE DIFFERENCE



October is National Cooperative Month. National Cooperative Month provides us an opportunity to recognize our nation's cooperatives and the cooperative business model. In the United States, there are approximately 30,000 co-ops serving nearly every business sector. Here in Central Minnesota, we rely heavily on agricultural, food and other cooperatives.

The unique co-op business model is based on these seven cooperative principles:

- Voluntary and Open Membership
- Democratic Member Control
- Members' Economic Participation
- Autonomy and Independence
- Education
- Training and Information
- Cooperation Among Cooperatives
- Concern for Community

Rural electric cooperatives, such as Stearns Electric Association, differ from both investor-owned and

municipal utilities in several ways. Investor-owned utilities typically provide electricity in urban and suburban areas. Municipal utilities, owned by the city, provide electric service within that city.

Rural electric cooperatives, however, provide electricity where investor-owned and municipal utilities do not — primarily in sparsely populated rural areas. Rural electric co-ops are also owned by the membership. This Democratic Member Control ensures our operating margins are returned to our members in the form of Capital Credits. Additionally, a democratically-elected board of directors, made up of Co-op members, ensures representation on local priorities.

Everything we do here at Stearns Electric is member-focused with these seven cooperative principles in mind. Our mission statement, "To safely provide competitively priced and reliable electric service, beneficial energy solutions, and a positive member experience," clearly

states our member-focus.

Our My Co-op Cares programs, which encompass our Energy Education, Operation Round Up and employee volunteer programs, among others, showcase our concern for community.

Learn more about electric cooperatives through some of our national affiliates: NRECA (www.electric.coop) and Touchstone Energy (www.touchstoneenergy.com).

Please take some time this month to support your local cooperatives and help educate others about the importance and value of our nation's co-ops. Here at Stearns Electric, we will continue to work hard to be of great value to our member-consumers!

Sincerely,

Robin C. Doege
Chief Executive Officer (CEO)



STATEMENT OF OWNERSHIP

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10. Tax Status (For completion by nonprofit organizations authorized to mail at nonprofit rates) (Check one)
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☐ Has Changed During Preceding 12 Months (Publisher must submit explanation of change with this statement)

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d. Free or Nominal Rate Distribution (By Mail)	(1) Free or Nominal Rate Outside-County Copies Included on PS Form 3841		
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	(3) Free or Nominal Rate Copies Mailed at Other Classes Through the USPS (e.g., First-Class Mail®)		
	(4) Free or Nominal Rate Distribution Outside the Mail (Carriers or other means)		
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* If you are claiming electronic copies, go to line 16 on page 3. If you are not claiming electronic copies, skip to line 17 on page 3.

UNITED STATES POSTAL SERVICE® (All Periodicals Publications Except Requester Publications)

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Whitney Dilevson, editor Date: **9/23/2019**

I certify that all information furnished on this form is true and complete. I understand that anyone who furnishes false or misleading information on this form or who omits material or information requested on the form may be subject to criminal sanctions (including fines and imprisonment) and/or civil sanctions (including civil penalties).

BOARD MEETING

The regular meeting of the Board of Directors of Stearns Electric Association was held on August 29, 2019 at 1:00 p.m. at the Stearns Electric Association office located in Melrose, Minnesota.

Manager of Finance Cindy Anderson reviewed July financial information.

VP of Administration and Finance Vicky Herkenhoff reported on items related to personnel matters and the bylaw review progress. Within the next month, a plan for 2020 employee development will be created.

Ms. Herkenhoff presented several proposed changes to the existing MRC policy which includes a committee name change from the Member Resource Committee to the Member Engagement Group. After discussion, a motion to approve the new policy was carried. Following the policy approval, a motion was carried to approve the 2019-2020 applicants as presented.

VP of Engineering and Operations Matt O'Shea gave an overview of the recent NRECA Transmission and Distribution Engineering Committee Annual Meeting he attended. Information was shared related to industry safety, pole testing data, attachment fees and the continued progress on the Joint Use Facilities Engineering Guide.

Mr. O'Shea provided an update on current activities of the crews and contractor progress noting the security light project is about 75% complete for the year.

The CapX2050 Transmission Vision Study was shared. The purpose of the study is to identify system improvements and infrastructure upgrades that may be needed to achieve 2050 carbon reduction goals.

Director Mike Blenkush presented his letter of resignation from the Stearns Electric Association Board of Directors effective October 24, 2019 due to his upcoming move out of the Co-op's service territory. Mr. Blenkush is in the final year of his current term which expires at the 2020 Annual Meeting.

Next Meeting: November 26, 2019

MEMBER NOTICE

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. through 11:00 p.m.

COOPERATIVES STRIVE TO BE A TRUSTED VOICE

in their communities and always have their members' best interest at heart. They are determined to enrich the lives of those living and working in the communities they serve. Stearns Electric Association thanks all members for the support and trust in providing you with reliable electric service. We are proud to be your local electric cooperative.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

MIKE BLENKUSH

Retires from the Stearns Electric Board of Directors

Mike Blenkush is no stranger to the electric cooperative industry. After beginning his career somewhat accidentally at Stearns Electric Association in the 1960s, he spent most of the next 38 years working for cooperatives throughout the country. Upon retiring, he found himself back in the co-op world in a new capacity: on the Board of Directors.

EARLY YEARS

Mike Blenkush grew up north of Melrose on a dairy farm, powered with electricity by the local energy cooperative, Stearns Electric Association. He graduated from Melrose High School and was drafted to the war in Vietnam. Upon returning, he found a job working at the Kraft plant in Melrose.

When the assistant manager of Stearns Electric at the time needed a new drafter to help get the Cooperative's maps up to par, he reached out to the local high school. Since Mike had taken drafting in high school and was fairly good at it, his former drafting instructor recommended Mike for the job. Mike took the job and started working at Stearns Electric in 1968.

The Cooperative's maps were very behind, so Mike spent a year getting them caught up. At the time, Stearns Electric had about 5,000 members as lakes and farms still made up most of the Co-op's service territory. "I remember driving out to map the area that I live in now. Back then, it was all farmland," he recalled.

Once the drafting slowed down, Mike helped in other areas of the Cooperative. Eventually, his work branched into Member Services, a department heavily focused in member communications.

CAREER AT THE COOPERATIVE

When Mike began work in Member Services, the Cooperative encouraged members to increase their use of electricity by purchasing electrical appliances. When the Energy Crisis in 1973 threw the economy into chaos, the Cooperative adjusted its focus.

"When the crisis occurred, it became much more important for people to conserve energy," he said. "The oil embargo caused gas prices to jump up from \$5 to \$30. Everything was more expensive – poles, wires, even just driving the electric service trucks out of the yard cost so much more."

Electric bills doubled at this time, so Mike took an energy audit course and managed high bill complaints

for the Cooperative. He also helped endorse the country's new-found importance of promoting energy conservation to members, which is still a large part of member services departments throughout the energy industry today.

Mike worked in member services until 1980 when he decided it was time to take the next step in his career. After applying for different jobs throughout the country, Mike landed the manager of member services position at Trico Electric in Tucson, Arizona.

Trico Electric was mainly residential and had many members, unlike Stearns Electric at the time. Mike oversaw meter readers and member communications, and continued to manage high bill complaints. Managing those complaints got to be a little draining for Mike after several years, however, so by the late 80s he was ready for a break.

In 1988, Mike and his wife, Betty, moved back to Central Minnesota so he could fulfill his lifelong goal of earning a college degree. He was able to graduate with his bachelor's degree in mass communication and business administration after three and a half years. Graduation was a very special day for him as he got to share it with his daughter, Michelle,

who had earned her master's degree.

Upon graduating, Mike knew he wanted to return to the electric cooperative industry. He found a job as manager of member services at Tri-County Electric in Wyoming. Different than his previous cooperative work, nearly 80 percent of Tri-County Electric's sales went to coal mines and oil wells. The number of members of this cooperative was low as members were mostly large oil companies and coal mines that had multiple accounts.

The biggest accomplishment of Mike's career occurred during his time in Wyoming. In the late 90s, Mike led the communication initiative to merge Tri-County Electric with a neighboring rural electric cooperative. In 1997, Powder River Energy Corporation was established.

Mike served for the next nine years as Vice President of External Relations for Powder River Energy. In July 2006, Mike retired and moved back to Central Minnesota with his wife to be closer to family.

"Who knew one little choice to switch jobs back in the 60s would lead to the rest of your life?" Mike recalled.

RETIREMENT

About one and a half years into retirement, Mike decided it was time to get back into the electric cooperative industry in another capacity. He knew the Stearns Electric board member from his district (District 8) was not seeking re-election, so Mike decided to run for the director position.

This October, he will move off Co-op lines, which means serving on the board is no longer an option.

Over the last 11.5 years, Mike has represented District 8 on the Cooperative's Board of Directors. He has also represented Stearns

Electric on the board of Great River Energy, our wholesale power provider.

Although he has helped the Board navigate through many adjustments, hiring a new CEO has been his favorite memory.

"It's a hard process, but essentially we are responsible for the Cooperative's future," he said. "I can retire knowing Stearns Electric is in good hands."

"When I leave the Board, I will miss the people most - the members, Cooperative employees, the management team and fellow Directors. It has been an honor and a privilege to work for, and later in life, represent Stearns Electric members on the Board," he concluded.

THANK YOU

Thank you, Mike, for your many years of service as an employee and on our Board of Directors!



ENERGY EFFICIENCY TIP OF THE MONTH

WINTER READY HEATING SYSTEM

Cooler weather is on the way! Heating requires more energy than any other system in your home, typically making up about 42% of your energy bill. With proper equipment maintenance and upgrades like additional insulation and air sealing, you can save about 30% on your energy bill.

ELECTRICAL SAFETY CHECKUP

TOOLS

Replace any tools that put off even mild electric shocks.



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AGRICULTURE

CONCERNS ABOUT STRAY VOLTAGE? LET US KNOW

As a member-consumer of Stearns Electric Association, you should feel free to call us anytime with concerns related to your electrical service. One area that can be a concern, particularly for livestock farmers, is stray voltage.

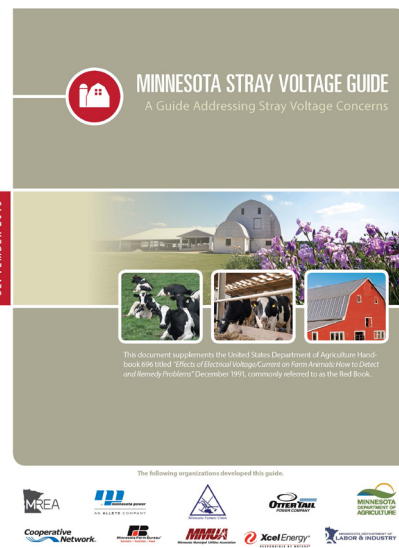
Your cooperative's electrical distribution system must be grounded to earth to ensure continuous safety and reliability, as required in applicable electrical codes. The presence of some level of stray voltage is a normal, inherent and unavoidable result of electricity traveling through a grounded utilities' distribution system. A livestock farmer may, however, become concerned their animals are experiencing a level of stray voltage exceeding acceptable levels and possibly impacting animal behavior.

The Minnesota Stray Voltage Guide is based on extensive research on the

subject. It outlines the steps farmers, licensed electrical contractors and utilities can take to discover and resolve stray voltage concerns on livestock farms. The Guide includes a list of common causes and a farm wiring checklist to assist farmers and electrical contractors in visually inspecting farm electrical systems and noting potential stray voltage sources. Additionally, the Guide goes through what the farmer and utility should expect when a stray voltage investigation is conducted, including the proper testing procedures.

We have long worked with our members to address this issue. The Minnesota Stray Voltage Guide is a great tool and standard approach to analyzing and responding to stray voltage concerns. The Guide can be downloaded for free by visiting <https://www.stearnslectric.org/account-services/service-requests/stray-voltage/>.

Contact Stearns Electric Association at (800) 962-0655 during regular business hours to discuss concerns you may have and, if interested, schedule a stray voltage investigation.



ENERGYWISE

FACT OR FICTION: THINKING ABOUT AN AIR SOURCE HEAT PUMP BUT CONCERNED ABOUT ITS RELIABILITY DURING MINNESOTA WINTERS?

Rest assured that if you purchase an air source heat pump you will benefit from one of the most energy efficient and cost-effective heating solutions for your home all year long.

Even when air temperatures 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. While an air source heat pump alone will satisfy about 60% of your heating needs, when temperatures do drop below 15F degrees, your furnace kicks in to supplement the air source heat pump.

Check out the limited time offer for installing a new ASHP with a plenum heater on the back panel!



"I am running an air source heat pump! It's amazing how cheap it is to heat our house. We are all electric - back up heat is LP gas. No electric bill over \$200 last winter and less than 200 gallons of LP. These are the real deal!!"

- Eric Peterson, Member

TOP 5 REASONS TO LIKE US ON FACEBOOK

- 1 OUTAGE INFORMATION**
Get the most recent outage updates and learn how to prepare for summer storms and keep your family safe.
- 2 YOUR CO-OP CARES**
Check out spotlight stories on how your Cooperative supports the community.
- 3 CONTESTS AND GIVEAWAYS**
Who doesn't like prizes? Check our page regularly for current promotions.
- 4 TASTY SAVINGS**
That's right - we're featuring energy efficient recipes weekly!
- 5 MEMBERSHIP MATTERS**
One more way to connect with your Cooperative.



LIKE US ON FACEBOOK
www.facebook.com/stearnselectric

MINNESOTA LAW OFFERS SHUT OFF PROTECTION FOR MILITARY PERSONNEL

When a household member has been ordered into active duty, for deployment or for a change of duty station, some customers may find it hard to pay their utility bills. Minnesota Law protects these military personnel from shut-off if they cannot pay their utility bills in full.

HOW TO APPLY

Contact Stearns Electric Association at (800) 962-0655 for an application, and to make and keep a payment plan.

PAYMENT PLANS

- If your household income is below the state median household income and you pay ten percent of your household's gross monthly income toward your gas/electric bill; or
- If you receive energy assistance and you pay ten percent of your household's gross monthly income toward your gas/electric bill; or
- If your household income is above the state median household income and you make and keep a payment plan.

RIGHT TO APPEAL

If you and Stearns Electric Association cannot agree on a payment plan, you have the right to appeal to the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission. Stearns Electric Association will not disconnect your service during the appeal process.



cookingcorner

BEEFY TOMATO SOUP

Submitted by: Megan Lynch
Stearns Electric Member-Consumer

Ingredients:

3/4 lb Ground Beef
2 Tbsp Olive Oil
1 Onion, chopped
3 Cloves of Garlic, minced
2 tsp Salt
1/4 tsp Black Pepper
1 tsp Oregano
24 oz Spaghetti Sauce
4 C Chicken Stock
1/2 C Cream Cheese, room temperature
1 1/2 C Elbow Macaroni
1/4 C Basil, chopped and divided

Directions:

In a large pot heat the olive oil over medium heat. Add the onion and garlic to the pot and cook for 3-4 minutes, stirring, until the onion softens. Add the ground beef to the onions, breaking up with a spoon and cook until no longer pink. Next add the salt, pepper and oregano to the beef and stir to combine. Now pour in the chicken stock and the pasta sauce, stir and bring to a simmer for 10 minutes. Whisk in the cream cheese until smooth then add 1/2 of the fresh basil. Pour in the pasta, stir and let cook for 10 minutes, covered, stirring halfway through cooking. Spoon into bowls and garnish with the leftover basil. 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.



STEARNS ELECTRIC ASSOCIATION

900 Kraft Drive SE, PO Box 40
Melrose, MN 56352

(800) 962-0655

www.stearnselectric.org

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Fuller Creative



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)