



POWER CONNECTION

member driven. community focused. energy smart.

APRIL 2020

COVID-19 IMPACTS ANNUAL MEETING

ANNUAL MEETING AND ELECTION UPDATE

The 2020 election for the Articles of Incorporation and Bylaw amendments, as well as the Director elections in Districts 1, 7 and 8, has been extended to a new deadline of May 1, 2020. The Annual Meeting has been bifurcated. Election results will be tallied and announced on Thursday, May 7, 2020.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic impacting our nation, Stearns Electric Association's Annual Meeting, originally scheduled for April 2, 2020, at the Melrose High School Auditorium, was postponed. The Cooperative's Board of Directors elected to bifurcate (split) the Annual Meeting into two sessions: Election Results and Business Meeting.

We understand these modifications are not ideal, but we are working hard to accomplish our Cooperative's business as best as we can during this time.

ELECTION RESULTS INFORMATION

The Cooperative's Board of Directors met for a special meeting on March 24 and voted to announce the 2020 election results in a bifurcated (split) Annual Meeting. The election results will be declared on Thursday, May 7, 2020, at 1 p.m.

Although we cannot allow members to attend in-person due to federal and state guidelines for personal safety at this time, members can live stream the election results on

our website, www.stearnsselectric.org/annual-meeting. Immediately following the election results announcement, the recorded video will also be available to view on our website and social media platforms.

The election results will be shared with members in the May edition of Power Connection.

The election results will be in accordance with the Cooperative's current Articles of Incorporation and Bylaws. Our legal counsel, third-party election coordinator and our member tellers from Districts 2, 3 and 6 will tally the results.

Continued on page 3.

CEO'S MESSAGE

RELIABLE AND SAFE

COOPERATIVE'S COVID-19 RESPONSE



During these unique times, Stearns Electric wants you to know that we are focused on providing safe and reliable electric service to our Stearns Electric members. In order to do this successfully, we have made some adjustments to our normal business practices to assure the safety of our Stearns Electric Association employees and members.

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PANDEMIC PLAN IMPLEMENTED

In early March, the COVID-19 pandemic quickly spread across our country. Stearns Electric, along with our wholesale power provider Great River Energy (GRE), implemented its emergency response plans. Emergency planning is an important function for the energy industry. As part of this nation's critical infrastructure, energy utilities like Stearns Electric and GRE plan responses for emergency situations like this one to assure an uninterruptible energy supply. Stearns Electric's response to the COVID-19 pandemic is going according to plan and our emergency response team continues to monitor state and federal regulations and recommendations.

Stearns Electric has implemented these changes to our normal business processes:

- Our business offices are closed to the public. No walk-in traffic is allowed.
- A large number of Stearns Electric employees are working from home and remote locations.
- All business travel is canceled and employee personal travel is discouraged.
- Our Annual Business Meeting has

been delayed and election results will be announced through a live stream results meeting (see page 3).

- All Stearns Electric business meetings are canceled, or conducted via web-based technologies.
- The Cooperative continues to conduct its monthly Stearns Electric Board meetings using web-based meeting technologies.
- Stearns Election employees and their families are to practice social distancing, rigorous hand washing and isolation if illness is in the household.
- Our Member Services team is ready to discuss payment options with members who are facing financial hardship. In some cases, the Cooperative can direct members to available crisis funds. Should you face financial hardship, staying in communication with the Cooperative is important as we work together through this difficult time.

Stearns Electric strives to provide superior service to all of our members at all times. However, during this volatile time, the response time our members have expected in the past may be delayed slightly as the Cooperative adjusts its practices to ensure the health and safety of our employees.

These are challenging times to be sure. Please be assured that during this time, Stearns Electric will continue to do everything in our power to provide you with reliable and safe electrical service.

COOPERATIVE'S OUTAGE RESPONSE

As part of our focus to provide reliable energy to our members, Stearns Electric continues to respond as quickly and safely as possible to power outages throughout our service territory during the COVID-19 pandemic. Members can report their outages 24 hours a day, 7 days a week on SmartHub or by calling the Cooperative at (800) 962-0655.

In late March, a winter storm passed through our service territory causing outages for several members in the southern and eastern portions of our service area.

These outages were a result of freezing rain, wet snow and wind. Stearns Electric replaced 11 broken poles and repaired several miles of downed power lines. I am happy to report that power was restored by the afternoon on Sunday, March 29 to all but one location. That location had a temporary power source until repairs were completed late Sunday evening.

I want to personally thank Stearns Electric members in these impacted areas for your patience. Stearns Electric crews worked for several hours in icy and wet conditions to restore power while following pandemic protocols. Again, know that Stearns Electric will continue to fulfill our mission to provide our members reliable and safe electric service.

Be safe and stay healthy.

Sincerely,

Robin C. Doege
Chief Executive Officer (CEO)

ANNUAL MEETING UPDATE CONTINUED

BUSINESS MEETING INFORMATION

Later this year, at a date yet to be determined, the Business Meeting portion of the Annual Meeting will be convened and the Cooperative's business agenda will be addressed. We are anticipating the rescheduled meeting to take place sometime mid to late summer.

2020 ELECTION UPDATE

The Cooperative's Board of Directors elected to extend the deadline for voting by mail and electronically by one month. **The new deadline to submit votes by mail or electronically is 3 p.m. on Friday, May 1, 2020.**

Members who usually vote in-person at the Annual Meeting are strongly encouraged to vote by mail or electronically in 2020. However, the Cooperative will offer in-person voting at Dymoke Law Office in Melrose on May 5th and 6th. **Should the state or federal government extend a stay-in-place mandate that would impact in-person voting, this information could change** and will be communicated with members via our social media platforms and on our website, www.stearnselectric.org.

Members can cast their vote one of three ways:

- 1. Vote online*.** Vote online through SmartHub by logging into your account and clicking on the "Vote Now" button in the top right corner, or by following the website URL provided in your ballot package and using the personalized member number and election pass-code to log in. In either format, follow the online voting instructions to place your vote.
- 2. Vote by mail*.** Ballot packages were mailed on March 13. Cast your vote for Director (Districts 1, 7 and 8) and the Articles of Incorporation and Bylaw amendments. Place the ballot into the envelope marked "Ballot Envelope" and seal. Then place the "Ballot Envelope" in the return envelope addressed to "Secretary," seal and mail it. Please allow sufficient time for delivery.
- 3. In person** at Dymoke Law Office on May 5th and 6th.** Polls are open 5-7 p.m. each day, but please call and arrange an appointment. Be sure to bring your Annual Report with you for registration.

Dymoke Law Office
300 W Riverside Ave.
Melrose, MN 56352
(320) 256-4205

**Online or mail ballots will only be accepted if received by 3 p.m. on Friday, May 1.*

*** Please call Dymoke Law Office and make an appointment to vote in person. If the state or federal government issues a stay-in-place mandate that would impact in-person voting, this information could change and will be communicated with members via our social media platforms and on our website, www.stearnselectric.org/annual-meeting.*

Stearns Electric continues to follow federal and state mandates as they occur. The Cooperative will select a new date for the Business Meeting as soon as it can. Information on Annual Meeting details will be announced in future issues of Power Connection, on our website, www.stearnselectric.org/annual-meeting, and our social media accounts. Please call our office during regular business hours for more information, (800) 962-0655.

BOARD MEETING

The regular meeting of the Board of Directors of Stearns Electric Association was held on February 27, 2020 at 1:00 p.m. at the Stearns Electric Association office located in Melrose, Minnesota.

Manager of Finance, Cindy Anderson reviewed the final December 2019 financial statement which included the deferred revenue entry not previously available. Ms. Anderson followed with the annual financial results of the Cooperative's subsidiary businesses.

CEO Doege was asked to testify in front of the Minnesota House Energy Committee, which is intended to promote consumer protection and provide transparency to the public on the cost of energy rates by posting them online. CEO Doege testified this is already done by cooperatives. The bill, if passed, would mandate additional rate reporting to the Public Utilities Commission which is already on Cooperative websites. CEO Doege explained that energy is such a focal point of this year's session that MREA has an additional lobbyist to protect the interests of electric cooperatives.

VP of Engineering and Operations Matt O'Shea shared a comprehensive review of work completed in 2019, planned 2020 project goals, personnel changes, safety information, job/ vehicle inspections, and right-of-way clearing projects. Planned equipment and substation upgrades were also included. Mr. O'Shea presented the results of the recent RUS system operations and maintenance review of programs, processes and records. This review occurs every four years to assess loan security and determine borrower compliance with RUS policies. Results of the review indicated excellent maintenance processes, condition of new construction, and general substation conditions.

Safety and Reliability reports were available for examination.

Next Board Meeting:
April 23, 2020

WE PUMPED UP OUR REBATES SO YOU CAN SHRINK DOWN YOUR BILL.

Take advantage of hot promo rebates when you install a qualifying, energy-saving air source heat pump!



Air source heat pumps provide home cooling and supplemental heating, using 72% less electricity than conventional air conditioners and furnaces.

Visit www.stearnslectric.org or call the Energy Services department at (800) 962-0655 during regular business hours for more information.

From April 1 until June 30, 2020, Stearns Electric members can earn \$2,000 if they install an air source heat pump (ASHP) with a heating seasonal performance factor (HSPF) rating of 9.0 or higher.

A rebate of \$1000 is available to members who install an ASHP with a HSPF rating of 8.2 to 9.0. In order to qualify for the rebates, members must enroll on Stearns Electric's EnergyWise Dual Fuel and Cycled Air Conditioning programs for the first time between April 1 and June 30, 2020. Units must be checked out by December 31, 2020 to receive the rebate. Limited funds are available and awarded on a first-come, first-served basis.

We also have a promotion for ductless ASHPs with a HSPF rating of 9.0 or higher. Members can receive \$750 when a new unit is purchased and installed between April 1 and June 30, 2020.

AIR SOURCE HEAT PUMP	PROMO REBATE*
8.2 - 9.0 HSPF	\$1,000
≥ 9.0 HSPF	\$2,000
Ductless/Mini Split ≥ 9.0 HSPF	\$750

OPERATION ROUND UP®

Stearns Electric Association's Operation Round Up® Program distributed \$45,050 to 83 area organizations and charitable causes in March. Since the program's inception in 1993, ORU and Stearns Electric members have awarded over \$2.5 million to local non-profit organizations and community service programs.

Through ORU, Stearns Electric gives its member-owners the opportunity to give back to the community by rounding up their monthly electric bill to the nearest dollar. The rounded up funds, no more than \$11.88 per year, per member, are placed in a trust fund that is administered by a Trust Board comprised of Stearns Electric member-consumers.

A list of area organizations receiving funds can be viewed at www.stearnslectric.org.

GIVING IN 2019  **\$151,564**
195 RECIPIENTS

 **\$4.89**
AVERAGE ANNUAL
DONATION

75%+ 
MEMBER PARTICIPATION

**YOUR SMALL CHANGE
CAN MAKE A BIG
DIFFERENCE!**

COMMUNITY IMPACT

TEREBINTH REFUGE

WINS MINNESOTA'S TOUCHSTONE ENERGY COMMUNITY AWARD

Terebinth Refuge, a St. Cloud based non-profit organization, received the 2020 Minnesota Touchstone Energy Community Award. Founder and executive director CeCe Terlouw accepted the award from the Minnesota Rural Electric Association (MREA). Along with this special honor, Terebinth Refuge also received \$1,000 to put towards its efforts.



Terebinth Refuge, named Stearns Electric's 2020 Touchstone Energy Community Award winner, goes on to win \$1,000 State Award.

Terebinth Refuge opened in April 2018 as the first of its kind in Central Minnesota, offering a safe home that brings hope, healing services and freedom to sexually exploited and trafficked women throughout Minnesota who are 18 years and older.

Every fall, Touchstone Energy cooperatives throughout the state present local awards to individuals or organizations for outstanding contributions to their communities. Local recipients are automatically entered into the statewide competition administered by Minnesota Rural Electric Association.

Stearns Electric Association, a local Touchstone Energy Cooperative, uses its Operation Round Up® (ORU) program to select a local organization as their Touchstone Energy Community Award winner. In the fall of 2019, Terebinth Refuge was selected.

ENERGY EFFICIENCY TIP OF THE MONTH

WASH ONLY FULL LOADS OF DISHES AND CLOTHES.

Your clothes washer and dishwasher are designed to run most efficiently with full loads. And more than that, if you run them only when full, you run them less often, which really cuts energy use.

ELECTRICAL SAFETY CHECKUP

APPLIANCES

Give your appliances proper space for air circulation to avoid overheating. Without proper air circulation, electrical equipment can overheat and short out, and can become an electrical fire hazard. Make sure your appliances have proper air circulation, and avoid running electrical equipment in enclosed cabinets.



LIKE US ON FACEBOOK

www.facebook.com/stearnselectric

BE PREPARED TO REPORT YOUR POWER OUTAGE



DOWNLOAD SMARTHUB

When the power goes out, so do we. Twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week.

Although we are still answering phone calls at our office, we have many employees working remotely and have adjusted our practices to ensure the health and safety of our employees during the COVID-19 pandemic. SmartHub gives you the chance to report your outage quickly from your desktop or mobile device.

Prepare yourself before spring storm season arrives by registering your SmartHub account and downloading the SmartHub App to your phone or tablet. Reporting a power outage is quick and easy. Simply log into SmartHub and select "Report an Issue/Inquiry." Follow the prompts to report your power outage. Once you hit "send," it automatically sends your outage report to the Cooperative.

The SmartHub App is available for both Android and Apple products.

SPRING SAFETY

PLAN AHEAD AND KNOW WHAT'S BELOW

Building a deck? Planting a tree? Installing a mailbox? You must call 811 before you dig!

The safest and only legal way to dig is to know what's below ground before your shovel or equipment moves any dirt. Even small projects like planting a shrub require you to make advance arrangements before digging. Your advance call to 811 connects you with Minnesota's Gopher State One Call which arranges for utilities like Stearns Electric to locate and mark our buried utilities in your dig area at no cost to you.

Within 48 hours, your yard will be marked so you can dig with care, knowing where utility-owned lines and equipment are buried in your project zone. It is very important to have all underground utilities located before digging to prevent costly and potentially dangerous contact with buried utility lines. Digging into an underground power line could not only disrupt electrical service for you and nearby homes, but also deliver a lethal shock to you or your family members.



CALL BEFORE YOU DIG

*Call 811 or visit
gopherstateonecall.org
before you dig.*



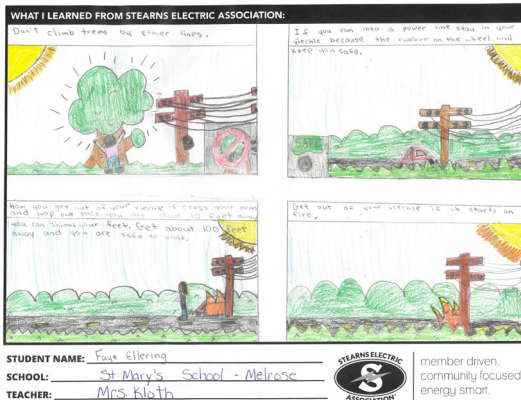
NEWS

MEMORIAL DAY

REMEMBER & HONOR

OFFICE CLOSED

Stearns Electric Association will be closed on Monday, May 25, 2020 in observance of Memorial Day. Both offices will be open for normal business on Tuesday, May 26. Please call (800) 962-0655 in the event of an outage or emergency.



MEMBER NOTICE

OFFICES CLOSED TO MEMBERS

In an effort to keep our employees and members healthy during the COVID-19 outbreak and continue to provide reliable electric service to our members, the Stearns Electric offices will be closed to the public until further notice. This includes both our Melrose Headquarters and St. Joseph Branch Office. Members can call our office at (800) 962-0655 with any questions or to report a power outage.

G & T CAPITAL CREDITS

When Stearns Electric Association experiences financial success, it returns cash to its members in the form of Capital Credits. As a Cooperative, Great River Energy (GRE), Stearns Electric's generation and transmission (G & T) partner and wholesale power provider, does the same by returning payments to our Cooperative.

For the second year in a row, GRE retired patronage capital through cash payments to its member-owner cooperatives. Stearns Electric received over \$340,000 in G & T Capital Credits in March. These will be returned, along with the 2019 distributions totaling over \$510,000, to our member-consumers this November.

<< ENERGY EDUCATION POSTER CONTEST WINNER

Faye Ellering, a fourth grader at St. Mary's School in Melrose, won our 2020 Energy Education Poster contest. Thank you to all of the students who participated. You can view all of the posters that were submitted on our Facebook page.

COOKING CORNER

TATOR TOT BREAKFAST EGG BAKE

Submitted by: JoHanna Voss

Ingredients:

2 lbs. breakfast sausage
1 (30-32 oz.) bag frozen tater tots
1½ cups shredded cheddar cheese
½ cup shredded mozzarella cheese
8 eggs
2 cups milk
½ tsp salt
½ tsp pepper
¼ tsp garlic powder
¼ tsp onion powder

Directions:

Pre-heat oven to 350 degrees. In a large skillet, cook sausage until no longer pink. Drain fat. In a large bowl, toss together tater tots, cooked sausage and cheeses. Pour into a greased 9x13-inch pan. Whisk together eggs, milk, salt, pepper, garlic powder, onion powder. Pour over tator tot mixture. Bake uncovered for 60 - 70 minutes, or until eggs are set. 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@stearnslectric.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

**PERIODICALS
POSTAGE PAID**

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BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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• *President, District 4*

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• *District 1*

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• TONY AMPE

• *District 5*

• LONNIE IVERSON

• *District 7*

• JERRY FRIES

• *District 9*

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• *Vice President of Engineering and Operations*

• CINDY ANDERSON

• *Manager of Finance*

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CONTRACT EDITOR

• AMANDA GROETHE

• *Fuller Creative*

WORK
HERE
LIVE
HERE
SERVE
HERE



***Our employees don't just work here.
They call our community home.***

Stearns Electric Executive Assistant Deb Hoeschen makes our community a better place by volunteering with the Melrose Women of Today packing food and snacks to ensure that children don't go hungry on the weekends. The Food for Thought program cares for kids through a small act of kindness. Deb has had many opportunities to continue her passion of volunteering by delivering greeting cards to nursing home residents, making tie-blankets for the St. Cloud Hospital's trauma unit and helping serve food at a local assisted living facility at an Oktoberfest event.