



# POWER CONNECTION

member driven. community focused. energy smart.

MAY 2020

## 2020 STEARNS ELECTRIC ELECTION RESULTS ANNOUNCED

***Due to the COVID-19 Pandemic, the Cooperative's 83<sup>rd</sup> Annual Meeting was bifurcated, or split, into two different meetings: Election Results and Business Meeting.***

On May 7, 2020 at 1 p.m., the election results for the Board of Director positions in Districts 1, 7 and 8, as well as the amendments to the Cooperative's Articles of Incorporation and Bylaws were announced through a live stream broadcast. The results are as follows:

### **BOARD OF DIRECTOR DISTRICT 1:**

Timothy Anway: 109  
Greg Blaine: 245  
Write-Ins: 4

### **BOARD OF DIRECTOR DISTRICT 7:**

Lawrence "Lonnie" Iverson: 250  
Write-Ins: 4

### **BOARD OF DIRECTOR DISTRICT 8:**

Earl Chesnik: 112  
Eric Peterson: 184  
Write-Ins: 2

### **AMENDMENTS TO THE ARTICLES OF INCORPORATION AND BYLAWS:**

Yes: 2,480  
No: 253

***Our total voter turnout was 12.21% across all districts.***

The self-governance of the Cooperative through the Annual Meeting and election of a Board by the membership is one of the differences that sets cooperatives apart from investor owned utilities. This is YOUR Cooperative. To remain healthy and strong, we need to have continued, active participation and support by you, our member-consumers.

You can view the election results video on our Facebook page and our website, [www.stearnsselectric.org/annual-meeting](http://www.stearnsselectric.org/annual-meeting).

The Business Meeting portion of the Annual Meeting will be rescheduled to a later date and time following national and state health and safety guidelines. Information will be announced in the Power Connection newsletter as it is available.

We understand the modifications to the Annual Meeting this year are not ideal, but we continue working hard to accomplish the Cooperative's business as best as we can during this unique time.

## CEO'S MESSAGE



# SAFETY STARTS WITH YOU

### MAY IS ELECTRICAL SAFETY MONTH

May is National Electrical Safety Month. According to the Electrical Safety Foundation, each year thousands of people in the United States are critically injured and electrocuted as a result of electrical fires and accidents in their own homes. Many of these accidents are preventable. At Stearns Electric Association, we prioritize the safety of both our employees and our members. There is much you can do to keep yourself and your community safe around electricity.

### COMMUNITY SAFETY

Because we live and work in the communities we serve, we care about you, our neighbors. Now that the weather is nice, many of you are working on outdoor projects - sometimes near our power lines. Follow these tips to ensure that you and your family stay safe at home:

- Look up and around you. Always be aware of the location of nearby power lines and electrical distribution equipment.
- Keep equipment, and yourself, at least 10 feet away from power lines.
- Be careful when working on and around your roof.

- Never climb or trim trees near power lines.
- Always call Gopher State One Call at 811 before you dig.
- Don't attempt electrical do-it-yourself tasks.
- Don't overload electrical outlets.

With spring arriving, storm season is just around the corner. If you see downed power lines stay away and call 911. Always assume power lines are energized and stay at least 50 feet away. A power line is a conductor, and while it may look harmless, they carry a dangerous electric current that you can't see, hear or smell. Please stay clear of downed power lines!

### STEARNS ELECTRIC SAFETY

Stearns Electric employees recently celebrated a safety achievement. For the first quarter of 2020, Stearns Electric employees recorded zero time lost due to workplace injuries. Over the course of a year, Stearns Electric's employees work roughly 114,000 regular work hours. Although Stearns Electric and its employees prioritize safety daily, due to the nature of our work, injuries do happen. Working accident and injury-free is an important goal for Stearns Electric. Working injury-free in the

first quarter of 2020 is a noteworthy accomplishment for our employee group!

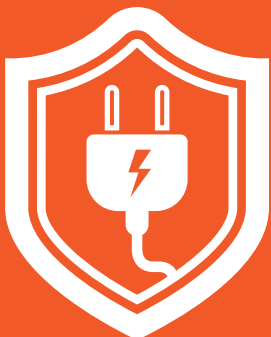
To ensure employee safety, the Cooperative follows safety protocols based on leading national safety practices for the utility industry. We require our line workers to wear specialized equipment when working next to or with power lines. There are specific protocols that our line workers follow daily when dealing with electricity.

Additionally, our safety team has regular meetings where they discuss upcoming projects from a safety perspective. They monitor and track near-misses of accidents to understand them, share "lessons learned" and improve in the future.

Thank you for helping keep yourself, others, and Stearns Electric employees safe. Have a safe and joyous spring!

*Sincerely,*

**Robin C. Doege**  
Chief Executive Officer (CEO)



## MAY IS ELECTRICAL SAFETY MONTH

### SAFETY STARTS WITH YOU

**#ElectricalSafetyMonth**

## MEMBER NOTICE

### DER INTERCONNECTION POLICY UPDATE

In compliance with Minnesota Statute 216B.1611, Stearns Electric Association is updating the technical requirements for distributed energy resource (DER) interconnections (i.e. member-owned solar panels or wind turbines interconnected to the Cooperative's distribution system). The existing technical requirement document will be replaced with the Technical Interconnection and Interoperability Requirements (TIIR) and Technical Specification Manual (TSM). These new documents will be available after June 1, 2020, on the Cooperative website, [www.stearnselectric.org](http://www.stearnselectric.org).

These requirements become effective July 1, 2020 and all new DER systems and DER system additions applied for interconnection after July 1<sup>st</sup> will be required to meet these updated requirements. Please contact Stearns Electric's Engineering Department with any questions at (800) 962-0655 during regular business hours.

### COVID-19: BILLING INFORMATION FOR MEMBERS

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought with it some challenging times for many. Stearns Electric is committed to keeping your electric service safe and reliable. During this pandemic, we have waived late payment penalties through the end of June. Please keep in mind that you are still responsible for paying your electric bill throughout this time.

We encourage you to stay as up to date with your payments as possible to avoid building up a large balance that will be harder to pay off later. We are here to help you, so please do not avoid communication with us. If you find yourself facing financial hardship, please contact us at (800) 962-0655 so we can work with you to develop a payment plan.

One resource to help you is Minnesota's Energy Assistance Program. This program provides help to eligible Minnesota residents to pay their energy bills.

#### Energy Assistance Program Details:

- Open to both renters and homeowners.
- Offers additional funds and higher limits during this time, even if you previously received funds.
- Provides benefits to help pay for home heating ranging from \$200 to \$1,400 (average \$500) per household.
- Benefits are based on household heating costs, size and income.
- Eligibility is based on the household's past 1 month of income.
- Assets are not counted.
- Applications are due by July 1, 2020.
- Funding is on a first-come, first-served basis.

For more information, visit [mn.gov/commerce/eap.jsp](http://mn.gov/commerce/eap.jsp) or call our Member Services department at (800) 962-0622 during regular business hours.

### 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 remain closed to the public. 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.

## BOARD MEETING

The regular meeting of the Board of Directors of Stearns Electric Association was held on March 26, 2020 at 1:00 p.m. via phone conference call due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Miranda Wendlandt of Clifton Larson Allen joined the conference call to summarize the 2019 audit results. She explained that a risk-based audit approach had been used, which included primary audit procedures such as analytics, confirmations, test counts on inventory, inquiry of employees and management and a review of board minutes. This is an unmodified (clean) opinion on the financial statements with no adjustments and no disagreements with management. Ms. Wendlandt said that overall the entire audit was very clean. A motion was made to approve the audit as written, and carried.

The Cooperative was officially notified that its final GRE 2019 Capital Credit allocation will be \$1,117,399.65.

CEO Doege reported the Cooperative has continued operations without issue amidst the current pandemic. A COVID-19 Preparedness Document for Employees was created as a communication tool to keep employees informed of how the Cooperative is handling the ever-changing pandemic situation.

Changes to the Annual Meeting due to the COVID-19 outbreak and current social distancing guidelines regarding large group gatherings will be communicated thoroughly to the membership.

The spring contractor meeting was well attended by 47 individuals from 28 contracting companies.

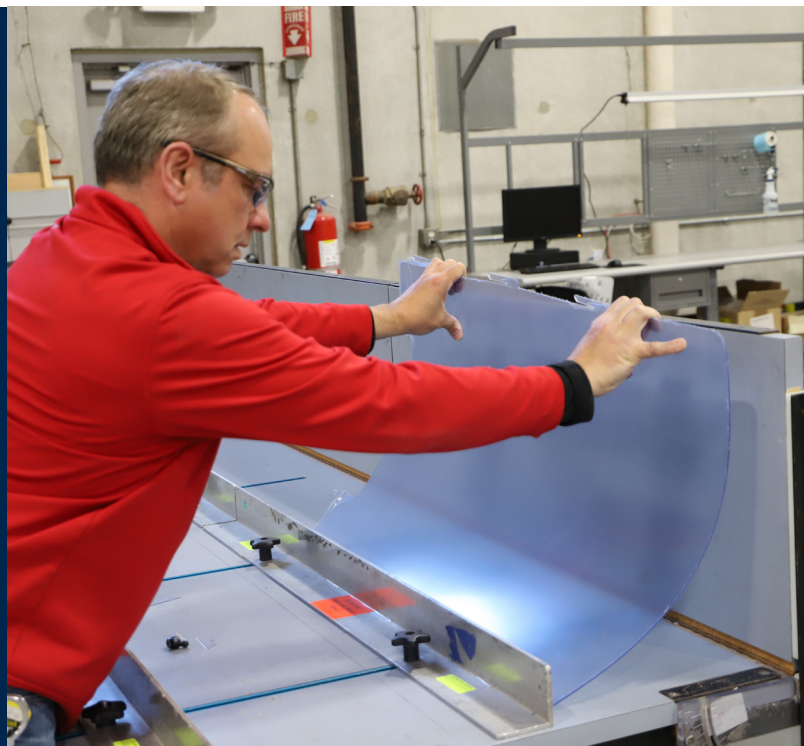
VP of Engineering and Operations, Matt O'Shea, shared a breakdown of where the operations and engineering employees are working and their locations according to the COVID-19 Preparedness Document for Employees. The Cooperative is an essential business so Mr. O'Shea shared the implemented safety measures to prevent the spread of the virus while still conducting business. Frequent cleaning, staggered linemen start times, facilities closed to the public, isolated employees in the office, and no travel between offices summarized the safety measures. Mr. O'Shea called special attention to the number of projects directly related to the COVID-19 pandemic and commended the IT department on their ability to efficiently and effectively get employees set up to work from home on such short notice.

**Next Board Meeting:**  
June 25, 2020



# GUARDING THE FUTURE: AUBRIGHT ADJUSTS AMID COVID-19 PANDEMIC

*Learn how one local company shifted its production and focus to provide safety equipment for other businesses and organizations throughout the country during the COVID-19 Pandemic.*



***After ending 2019 strong, Aubright hit the ground running at the start of this year. The St. Cloud-based company anticipated another successful year and planned to leverage its growth from 2019.***

***In early January, however, the world began hearing reports about a novel coronavirus, or COVID-19, spreading rapidly around the world. By mid-March, the impacts of COVID-19 were apparent in Central Minnesota, creating uncertainty for many, including Aubright, its employees and clients.***

### LOCAL ROOTS

Founded in 1983 by Sandy Berling and her father, Aubright remains locally owned by Sandy and her husband, Dan. Aubright, formerly known as Goldleaf Plastics, has been a member of Stearns Electric Association since 2005 when it opened its facility in the Opportunity Drive business park off of I-94, which is served with electric service by the Cooperative.

Aubright is a sheet plastic fabricator that produces custom products for three different market segments:

retail, power sports and original equipment manufacturers (OEM). Aubright manufactures very custom products including retail fixtures, such as cosmetic cases you'd see in a makeup store, windshields for ATVs, boats, snowmobiles and motorcycles, face shields, museum displays, machine guards, medical equipment, product packaging, food service displays and more. The company serves many clients nationwide and has a few international consumers as well.

"Since we serve three different market segments, we are very diverse compared to our competitors," Phil Layne, senior manager, supply chain and quality, said. "Only about 20 percent of our orders are repeat orders, which makes every day different at Aubright."

The company's diverse product offering proved important a few weeks ago as COVID-19 took its toll on our area.

### COVID-19 RESPONSE

"Moving into 2020, all three of our market segments had strong sales

and production," Layne said. "Then, six weeks ago, we were thrown a curveball."

"When the Governor gave the official 'Stay at Home' order, we faced challenging questions that we've never had to handle before: Are we an essential business? How can we ensure the health and safety of our employees during this pandemic?" he continued. "We are following the CDC guidelines to a T. We are on-site. We are essential. We are operating."

Although many of its clients put orders on hold once the pandemic hit, Aubright has found a way to continue operations and provide the necessary equipment to companies throughout the country. As a sheet plastic fabricator, their products are in high demand, especially for industries that are looking to install guard protection for employees and customers alike.

If you've been to a local grocery store or retailer in the past few weeks, you've probably done business through one of these plastic guards.

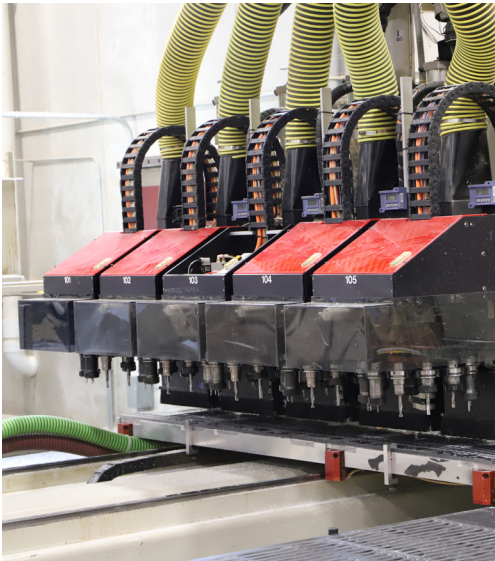
Aubright is producing these types of guards right here in Central Minnesota for many consumers across the country.

"Acrylic and polycarbonate plastic, which is what we work with daily, make very good guards to install at grocery stores, banks, coffee shops, mass transit companies, hotels, and many, many other organizations," Layne said.

"We have been inundated with requests for these guards. In fact, our industry has never before seen such high demand in such a short amount of time," he continued. "Every day is a crazier day – stores that stayed open during the quarantine were the first to install these guards. Now though, as more and more companies prepare to re-open, several other industries seek this type of protection as well."

Aubright continues to fulfill orders as they can, although the company predicts it might get harder to do so in the coming weeks.

"At this time, there is a shortage of clear plastic. Lead times on our orders have gone from three weeks to 16 weeks," he said. "It doesn't matter if the plastic is very thin, which is used for items such as facemasks, or thick, like what we are using to create these guards for our clients, clear plastic just doesn't exist right now."



Still, Aubright remains busy, fulfilling orders as fast as it can despite the uncertain future of the economy.

#### UNCERTAIN FUTURE

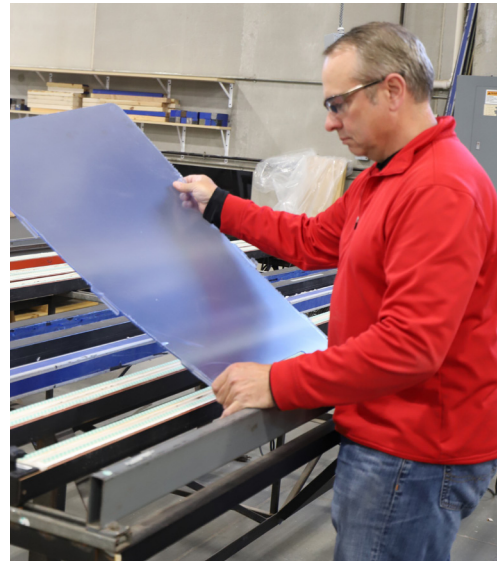
Like many organizations in Central Minnesota, it's hard to know what might be in store for Aubright as the world moves into the next phase of the pandemic. Company leaders are taking control of the areas they can, and hoping for the best for both their business and their client's businesses.

"Employee safety is our number one priority during these uncertain times. When our employees are healthy and safe, everything else follows," Layne said. "We have implemented as many health and safety practices as possible within our facilities."

Still, uncertain times are ahead.

"Will those non-essential businesses open back up and continue operating as they used to, requiring the same products that we provided in the past? It's hard to know what will happen when all of this comes around again," Layne concluded.

Until then, Aubright is business as usual, doing its best to provide those coveted products for its clients and partners across the nation.



## ENERGY EFFICIENCY TIP OF THE MONTH

### GO AHEAD AND FIRE UP THE GRILL!

*When the weather is nice, put your grill to use! During summer months, cooking outdoors is a great way to save energy and eliminate unwanted heat from cooking indoors.*

## ELECTRICAL SAFETY CHECKUP



### AFTER A STORM

*Stay away from downed power lines and be alert to the possibility that tree limbs or debris may hide an electrical hazard. Treat all downed or hanging power lines as if they are energized. Lines do not have to be arcing or sparking to be live and there is no way to know if they are energized. Always report downed power lines to Stearns Electric.*



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[www.facebook.com/stearnsselectric](https://www.facebook.com/stearnsselectric)



# MOVE OVER FOR ROAD SIDE CREWS



***If you see utility or emergency crews working on the side of the road, we kindly ask that you move over when possible.***

When the power goes out, so do Stearns Electric Association's line crews. Line workers are the first to respond after an outage occurs, and they work hard to restore power to the communities we serve.

If you're traveling and see one of our crews on the side of the road, if possible, please move over and give them extra space to work. We care

about everyone's safety, and this extra precaution ensures just that.

If you approach a crew while traveling on a two-lane road, moving over to the next lane might not be an option. In this case, we simply ask that you slow down when approaching roadside crews. If you approach a crew while traveling on a four-lane road, and safety and traffic conditions allow, we ask that you move over into the far lane.

Utility crews aren't the only ones who could use the extra space.

Emergency responders, police officers and firefighters often find themselves responding to emergencies near busy roadways. We ask that you follow the same procedures mentioned above to help keep these crews safe.

The Minnesota Move Over Law is intended to keep emergency workers safe and prevent motorists from crashing into stopped vehicles. This law includes and protects utility crews. There's plenty of room for all. Let's work together to keep everyone safe on our local roadways.



## AC TUNE-UP REBATE

### LIMITED TIME OFFER: \$25 REBATE

Stearns Electric members are eligible for a \$25 rebate when an AC contractor performs a central air conditioning tune-up. The tune-up must be performed within the Stearns Electric Association service territory. Rebate forms and receipts for the AC tune-up must be received by September 1, 2020. All rebates will be issued as a credit on your electric bill.

Visit our website, [www.stearnslectric.org](http://www.stearnslectric.org), for the required rebate form and additional information. Call our Member Services department at (800) 962-0655 during regular business hours with any questions you have.



## MEMBER ENGAGEMENT

### JOIN THE MEMBER ENGAGEMENT GROUP FOR A BEHIND THE SCENES LOOK AT YOUR COOPERATIVE

Stearns Electric Association is currently seeking members to serve on the Cooperative's Member Engagement Group. The Member Engagement Group (MEG) serves two purposes. First, it gives you, our member-consumers, a chance to learn more about the Cooperative and our services. At each meeting it is our goal to provide new and valuable information about what is happening at the Cooperative and the ways in which we can serve you. Second, this committee serves as a sounding board for the Cooperative. The MEG helps the Board of Directors and Cooperative staff gain ideas and proposals for new programs and helps evaluate existing services.

Serving on the committee is a two-year commitment for a total of 8 meetings. Meetings are typically held on the second Wednesday of September, November, February and May at 6:30 p.m. A light supper is provided.

In return for your participation, committee members receive a \$50 honorarium for each meeting attended, in addition to mileage reimbursement. There are limited spots each year on this committee. If you are interested in joining, visit [www.stearnsselectric.org](http://www.stearnsselectric.org) and apply. If you have questions you can call our office during business hours at (800) 962-0655 or email the Member Engagement Group Coordinator at [communications@stearnsselectric.org](mailto:communications@stearnsselectric.org).

## NEWS

### MEMORIAL DAY REMEMBER & HONOR

#### OFFICE CLOSED

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

## COOKING CORNER

### STUFFED BURGER BUNDLES

Submitted by: Dawn Ridge



#### Ingredients:

- 1 herb seasoned stuffing mix
- 1/3 C evaporated milk
- 1 lb. ground beef
- 1 (10 1/2 oz.) can golden mushroom soup
- 2 tsp Worcestershire sauce
- 1 Tbsp ketchup

#### Directions:

Prepare stuffing according to package directions. Combine evaporated milk and meat, divide into 5 patties. On wax paper, pat each to 6-inch circle. Put 1/4 C stuffing in center of each. Draw meat over stuffing, seal, place in 1 1/2 quart casserole. Combine remaining ingredients, pour over meat. Bake uncovered at 350 degrees for 45 minutes. Yields 5 servings. 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@stearnsselectric.org](mailto:communications@stearnsselectric.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](http://www.stearnselectric.org)

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### BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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*Vice President, District 2*

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*Secretary/Treasurer, District 6*

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AMANDA GROETHE

*Fuller Creative*

# 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.

## LIMITED TIME PROMOTION APRIL 1 - 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

\* Rebate Qualifications and Requirements: Members must enroll on Stearns Electric's EnergyWise® Dual Fuel and Cycled Air Conditioning programs for the first time during the promotional period. 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.

[WWW.STEARNSELECTRIC.ORG](http://WWW.STEARNSELECTRIC.ORG) | (800) 962-0655