



POWER CONNECTION

member driven. community focused. energy smart.

JULY 2020

MEMBER APPRECIATION

DONUT dash



YOU'RE INVITED TO A DONUT DASH!

SATURDAY, AUGUST 15 | 9-11 A.M. | FREEPORT COMMUNITY CENTER

Drive-through our member appreciation event to enjoy donuts, milk and school supplies!

WE WANT TO THANK YOU!

Every year, our member appreciation event is our chance to thank you and express our appreciation for your patronage throughout the year. We enjoy meeting our member-consumers who support us and play a role in directing the future of this Cooperative.

In 2020, due to COVID-19, we had to modify our traditional Member Appreciation Pancake Feed. It is not ideal, but we hope you can still join us on August 15 for our Donut Dash - this

year's member appreciation event. We hope to return to our traditional Pancake Feed in 2021.

DONUTS, MILK AND SCHOOL SUPPLIES

Although we can't gather together in the same space to enjoy pancakes like usual, we are still offering a drive-through treat for those who can attend.

Members who join us from 9-11 a.m. at the Freeport Community Center will receive a 6 pack of donuts from one of several local bakeries, and milk from Stony Creek Dairy. First come, first served while supplies last.

Additionally, we will again offer a school supply giveaway for children between the ages of 2 and 18.*

You can find complete details on our website. We hope to see you there!

**Children must be present at the event in order to receive a bag of school supplies. Offer will be available while supplies last.*



LOCAL BAKERIES

Albany Home Bakery
Belgrade Bakery
Cold Spring Bakery
Little Falls Bakery
Melrose Bakery

CEO'S MESSAGE

COOPERATIVE PRINCIPLE DEMOCRATIC MEMBER CONTROL



Cooperatives are a vital part of our nation's economy. Especially in rural America, we rely heavily on agriculture, food and energy cooperatives. It is estimated that approximately 30,000 co-ops serve nearly every business sector in the United States.

Our unique co-op business model is based on the seven cooperative business principles:

1. **Voluntary and Open Membership**
2. **Democratic Member Control**
3. **Members' Economic Participation**
4. **Autonomy and Independence**
5. **Education, Training and Information**
6. **Cooperation Among Cooperatives**
7. **Concern for Community**

2020 ELECTION RECAP

This month, I want to focus on Democratic Member Control. The most obvious example of this cooperative principle in action at our Cooperative is through our annual election. Every year director elections occur for three Stearns Electric Association districts, and members in those districts get the opportunity to vote for a director to represent their district for a three-year term on the Cooperative's Board.

Additionally, in 2020, we asked all of our members to engage in Democratic Member Control by voting to approve amendments to the Cooperative's Articles of Incorporation and Bylaws. The

proposed amendments were overwhelmingly accepted by Cooperative members.

Stearns Electric Association recently wrapped up the annual election and Cooperative update. Due to COVID-19, we had to rearrange our traditional plans for our in-person Annual Meeting in 2020, but look forward to returning to our usual meeting format in 2021. Since we couldn't safely meet in person this year, we put together a video update for members. If you haven't done so yet, you can view the Annual Meeting update on our website, www.stearnslectric.org/annual-meeting.

BOARD MEMBER FIDUCIARY RESPONSIBILITIES

As elected representatives of their district by Cooperative members, Stearns Electric Board members serve as fiduciaries. This means Board members are required to make informed decisions for the Cooperative, comply with federal, state, and local laws and regulations, act in the best interest of the Cooperative and avoid conflicts of interest.

There are many hours of behind the scenes work that the Co-op Board completes. All Board members are required to complete training through the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA) to better understand what an electrical cooperative is, how Boards operate, and how to effectively make financial and strategic planning decisions. In addition, before monthly Board meetings, directors review reports compiled from employees from every Cooperative department,

special Board committees and the Cooperative's legal counsel. When making decisions, your Board members must consider the impacts on the Cooperative's members, employees, suppliers and finances.

Directors are members themselves, elected by other members through the annual election. They are trusted by Cooperative members to represent the members of every district.

In addition to serving members, Board members also serve as ambassadors to the communities that we serve, and to state (and even national) legislators. The Cooperative's Board members must be respectful, professional and confident, and practice legal and ethical integrity. Board members discuss decisions in depth and disagree sometimes, but ultimately, the Cooperative's Board speaks as one voice for your Co-op.

A sage community member once told me that "local control is the best control." Stearns Electric Democratic Member Control is local control making decisions on services, rates and community needs that will benefit Co-op members. The Stearns Electric Board and Cooperative employees will continue to work efficiently in ways to best serve the needs of our local members. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Robin C. Doege
Chief Executive Officer (CEO)

MEMBER DRIVEN

ANNUAL MEETING UPDATE VIDEO AVAILABLE



Due to the continued social distancing guidelines, set by state health officials, the Cooperative cancelled its traditional in-person business meeting and went virtual.

The pre-recorded video is posted on our website, www.stearnslectric.org/annual-meeting. Members can view the video online and submit questions to Stearns Electric. Member questions, along with responses from Co-op employees and directors, will be posted on our website for review.

As there was no action taken during the business meeting portion of the Annual Meeting, the virtual update is in accordance with the Cooperative's Bylaws.

Thank you to all members who entered the door prize drawing and who came to the butter and cheese giveaway event!



Over 300 members drove through the parking lots of our offices on Thursday, June 25 for our butter and cheese giveaway. We also had nearly 500 members register for one of 10 - \$100 door prizes.

CONGRATULATIONS TO OUR WINNERS:

Amber H., Sauk Centre – Stearns Electric Bill Credit
Mary I., Long Prairie – Coborn's Gift Card
Larry G., Albany – Coborn's Gift Card
Neomi B., St. Cloud – Target Gift Card
Roman S., Richmond – Texas Roadhouse Gift Card
Jen B., St. Joseph – Stearns Electric Bill Credit
Rita R., St. Joseph – Fleet Farm Gift Card
Ronald S., Burtrum – Amazon Gift Card
Rebecca S., Avon – St. Joseph Meat Market Gift Card
Julie G., Albany – Scheels Gift Card

BOARD MEETING

The regular meeting of the Board of Directors of Stearns Electric Association was held on May 28, 2020 at 1:00 p.m. via audio/video conference call due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Manager of Finance, Cindy Anderson, reviewed the April 2020 financial and statistical information with the Board. The directors asked questions about the effects of COVID-19 on large commercial accounts which were answered by V.P. of Engineering and Operations, Matt O'Shea.

CEO, Robin Doege reported on the current financial condition of the Cooperative's subsidiary businesses. The pandemic has continued to affect the new installation and repair revenue of Heartland Security Services. CEO Doege was elected secretary of the HSS Board. Carr's Tree Service is having a good year due to favorable weather conditions this past winter and because COVID-19 has not affected their workforce as much as other industries.

The past month's Great River Energy (GRE) meetings focused on reviewing resource plans, power supply changes and flexible power purchase contracts.

The Member Service report, presented by V.P. of Administration and Finance, Vicky Herkenhoff, provided a review of updated billing and disconnection practices due to COVID-19.

GRE Board Member Greg Blaine reported on activities related to the acceptance of closing Coal Creek Station in North Dakota by the end of 2022. The use of the adjoined Blue Flint Ethanol Bio-refinery is under review to determine whether it's possible to repower with natural gas. Spiritwood Station, also a coal burning plant in North Dakota, will be refitted to burn natural gas to produce energy. As a result, the change from coal to green energy sources are projected to lower wholesale power costs in the future. The projected savings over the next 20 years is approximately 25%. Overall, converting to green energy sources reduces GRE's carbon footprint by 95%.

Administrative Assistant, Deb Hoeschen, guided the directors through the first review of the proposed modifications to the Cooperative's board policies. No decisions were made as a result of the review. A second review of the proposed policies will take place at the regular June board meeting.

Next Board Meeting:
August 27, 2020

LARGE INVESTMENT, MAJOR RESULTS AGGRESSIVE RIGHT-OF-WAY PROGRAM PAYING OFF



As Stearns Electric Association wraps up its last year of a four-year vegetation management project, the results are starting to show: tree-related outages and service orders have declined over the last three years.

In 2016, Stearns Electric hired ACRT, an independent utility vegetation management company, to assess the Cooperative's right-of-way maintenance program. Right-of-way (ROW) refers to a strip of land underneath or around power lines that electric utilities have the right and responsibility to keep clear. ACRT used mathematical algorithms to analyze over 2,600 miles of power lines and provided a precise analysis of the ROW needs for our distribution system.

After taking the study results into consideration, Stearns Electric then hired ACRT and Carr's Tree Service in 2017 to begin work on a four-year ROW tree and brush clearing project to help reduce potential power outages and energy hazards. ACRT marks the problem trees and Carr's Tree Service, a subsidiary of Stearns Electric Association, clears the ROW.

Although clearing right-of-way has always been important to the Cooperative, finding time for line crews to keep up with the trees and brush growing into over 2,600 miles of power line is nearly impossible.

That is why, in 2017, Stearns Electric took a more aggressive approach to catch up ROW clearing and make it easier to keep up with problem trees well into the future. It was no small investment. Over the course of the four-year project, ROW clearing will cost over eight million dollars. But the work is already benefiting our members.

HUNDREDS OF MILES ALREADY CLEARED

Over the last three-and-a-half-years, consulting utility foresters with ACRT have been walking every single mile of overhead power line, identifying problem trees. Trees that are growing into power lines, or growing within 10 feet of the power lines, are trimmed, topped or removed by Carr's Tree Service. Additionally, brush mowing and spraying is used as an effective way to clear and maintain the right-of-way when appropriate.

Over 1,200 miles of line have been completed since January 2017 and 1,200 more will be completed by the end of this year.

In 2020, the number of feeders that need to be cleared is nearly double what it has been in the past. Although it seems daunting, this includes several underground feeders with overhead taps that require minimal cutting.

NUMBER OF MILES CLEARED

2020 (projected)	1,274
2019	634
2018	359
2017	278

NUMBER OF FEEDERS CLEARED

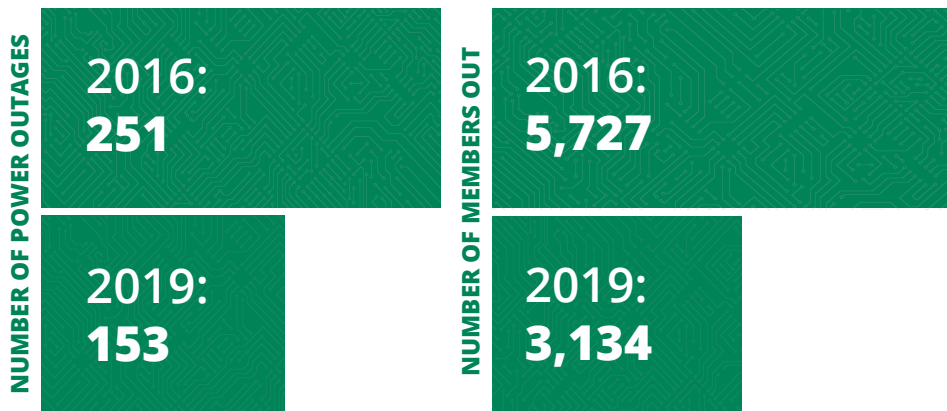
2020 (projected)	54
2019	21
2018	18
2017	18

OUTAGE REDUCTION

What's even better? Tree-related power outages have decreased by nine percent. In 2016, before the project began, 24 percent of power outages at Stearns Electric Association were caused by trees. Today, that is down to 15 percent. Since our members have power over 99% of the time, a nine percent reduction in tree-related outages is a significant accomplishment.

Overall, tree-related outages on feeders that have been cleared were reduced by over 46 percent. In 2019 alone, Cooperative members saw a 76 percent reduction in tree-related outages on cleared feeders.

As you can see below, Stearns Electric members have experienced a decrease in both the number of tree related outages and the total members out of power due to trees.



WHAT'S NEXT?

By the time crews wrap up this four-year tree trimming cycle, it will be time to start over again. However, since Stearns Electric was so aggressive with its ROW program over the last four years, the end of this four-year cycle will pave the way for more efficient and consistent tree clearing cycles into the future.

We realize that cutting and trimming trees on your property is not always ideal. Our consulting utility foresters work closely with members to only remove and trim what is needed for the safety of the public and our line workers, and the reliability of our distribution system.

One way you can help is by not planting trees within at least 25 feet of power lines. If you plan to plant a medium-sized or larger tree, plant at least 40 feet away from power lines. You can download our "Right Tree Brochure" on our website, www.stearnsselectric.org.

If you have any questions about our right-of-way program, please don't hesitate to call us at (800) 962-0655.

ENERGY EFFICIENCY TIP OF THE MONTH

STUCK AT HOME? DO THIS EASY ENERGY SAVING ACTIVITY

Try an online energy audit to assess the overall efficiency of your home. Visit www.energystar.gov, then enter "home energy yardstick" in the search box to get started.

ELECTRICAL SAFETY CHECKUP

PURCHASE OUTDOOR EXTENSION CORDS FOR OUTDOOR USE

When purchasing your outdoor extension cords, always make sure they are marked "for outdoor use." These devices may be more expensive, but they are thicker, weather-resistant, and designed to withstand more wear and tear.

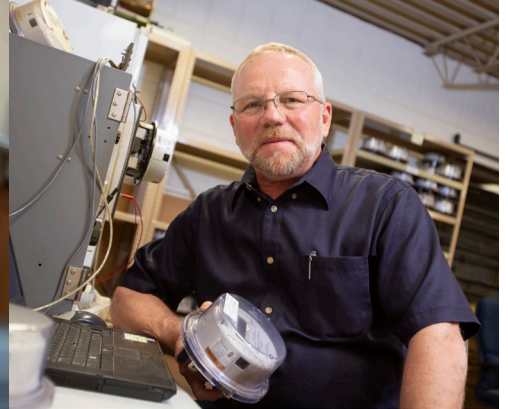


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ENERGY SMART

HERE TO
HELP
YOU SAVE



Stearns Electric Association is here for you, and given the challenging times we've all experienced the last few months, we would like to share some information and ideas to help you save energy and money.

Summer is a great time to conduct an energy audit of your home and identify ways to boost energy efficiency. Understanding how your home uses energy can help you determine the best ways to modify energy use and keep more money in your wallet.

An energy audit is one of the best ways to determine how energy efficient your home is. An audit can also identify areas for potential energy savings. We have several qualified energy auditors in our local area. Be sure to hire a professional who will conduct a thorough audit of your home.

If you'd prefer to do an energy audit yourself, try ENERGY STAR®'s online audit. Visit www.energystar.gov, then enter "home energy yardstick" in the search box to get started. But keep in mind, an online audit won't be as thorough as an in-home audit.

PUTTING POWER IN YOUR HANDS

Did you know you can monitor your energy use daily by logging into SmartHub?

SmartHub is easy to navigate. You can view your usage and weather trends by day, month or even hourly! You can also compare your energy use year over year.

Stearns Electric also offers many load control programs and rebates to help you save money and energy during peak demand. Visit our website at www.stearnslectric.org/save-money-and-energy to learn more about our heating and cooling, water heating, and commercial and agricultural programs and rebates.

Lastly, if you have recently purchased a new ENERGY STAR®-rated appliance or product, make sure you are taking advantage of any special offers or rebates that are available.

As your trusted energy advisor, we're here to help. If you have questions about your bill or additional ways to save energy, please let us know. We're only a click or phone call away.



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WWW.STEARNSELECTRIC.ORG

NEWS

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.



Stay informed. Follow us.



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COMMUNITY FOCUSED

SUPPORTING OUR COMMUNITY THROUGH ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

As part of the Cooperative's commitment to community, Stearns Electric offers Rural Economic Development Revolving Loans to help fund special community projects throughout our service territory. Most recently, the low-interest loan option was used to help the Holdingford Fire Department purchase a new fire truck for its fleet. Pictured here with the new truck are Stearns Electric employee and volunteer firefighter with the Holdingford Fire Department Justin Spanier, Holdingford Fire Department Safety Officer Aaron Rudolph and Holdingford Fire Chief Keith Hommerding.



COOKING CORNER

PAY DAY BARS

Submitted by: Laura Yamry
Stearns Electric Member-Consumer



Ingredients:

- 1 cup Karo Syrup
- 1 cup Sugar
- 1 cup Peanut Butter
- 1 tsp Vanilla
- 1 cup Peanuts
- 6 cups Rice Chex Cereal

Directions:

Grease 9x13 inch pan (or line it with aluminum foil). Mix cereal and peanuts in a large bowl, set aside. Bring corn syrup and sugar to a boil, stirring frequently. Remove from heat and stir in peanut butter and vanilla. Stir quickly until smooth. Pour peanut butter mixture into the large bowl, over cereal and nut mixture. Stir to coat. Pour into the greased or lined pan, pushing down gently if needed. Cool. Break or cut into chunks. 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

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Fuller Creative

WORK
HERE
LIVE
HERE
SERVE
HERE



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

Stearns Electric Line Superintendent Jake Dooner makes our community a better place by serving as a baseball and football coach in Sartell. His love for sports and his children's involvement led to a perfect opportunity to teach the love of the game, hard work, and how to balance fun and competition. Having traveled early in his career, Jake knows what it's like to miss his kids' activities, so he takes extra pride in being there for the parents that can't. In addition to coaching, Jake also volunteers and fundraises often for the United Way of Central Minnesota.