



# POWER CONNECTION

member driven. community focused. energy smart.

SEPTEMBER 2020

## A DASHING SUCCESS

***Stearns Electric Association held its first ever Donut Dash drive-through member appreciation event this year. It was a huge success – thank you to all who attended!***

Nearly 700 vehicles drove through three lines at the Freeport Community Center on Saturday, August 15. Members received a six-pack of donuts from one of five local bakeries – Albany Home Bakery, Belgrade Bakery, Cold Spring Bakery, Little Falls Bakery and Deli, and Melrose Bakery – milk from Stony Creek Dairy, and school supplies. Thank you to Heartland Security for the fun, bright drawstring backpacks.

We were grateful to have assistance from the Stearns County Sheriff's Department and three Youth Explorers who helped with traffic control for the event.

Along with breakfast and school supplies, members were able to share their own photos enjoying their loot on our Stearns Electric Facebook Page for a chance to win a \$50 bill credit. We had over 65 submissions! Congratulations to the bill credit winner, Chelsea from Avon.

Although this year's member appreciation event looked different than our traditional Pancake Feed, we were thrilled to still say thank you to you, our member-consumers, for your support and patronage throughout this crazy year.

The Donut Dash couldn't have been better and we look forward to inviting you back next year to our member appreciation event on Saturday, August 14, 2021.



**VIEW MORE PHOTOS ON FACEBOOK**

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

## CEO'S MESSAGE

# SAFETY IS EVERYONE'S RESPONSIBILITY



***Stearns Electric Association prides itself on our safety culture. Our internal safety committee, made up of Cooperative employees, meets monthly to discuss best safety practices for our workplace and review any workplace accidents or near misses. Every month, all of our employees participate in monthly department safety training, which covers a wide range of topics.***

.....

Our line crews and field employees also participate in hands-on safety training every month, provided by outside organizations, such as the Minnesota Rural Electric Association (MREA). It is crucial that we do everything we can to ensure our employees return home safely to their families and loved ones at the end of each work day.

Creating an effective safety culture is an ongoing process and a large commitment on behalf of the Cooperative. However, our efforts result in a positive attitude toward safety and a reduction in accidents and incidents. But we also want to keep our member-consumers and the general public safe, too. This is where you can help.

### **POWER POLE SAFETY**

Although seemingly innocent enough, attaching items to utility poles presents safety hazards for our line crews. In some situations, attaching items to power poles can even impact the integrity of the pole or put those who are attaching items on our poles in a life-threatening situation.

Posters, signs, flags, birdhouses, balloons, basketball nets – you name it – pose dangers to Stearns Electric line workers who must climb poles when either restoring power during outages or while performing routine maintenance to ensure system reliability.

The staples, nails and tacks used to hang items on our Cooperative power poles can snag utility workers' boots or puncture safety clothing, making line workers vulnerable to slipping and falling off of a pole, or even electrocution.

In Minnesota, attaching any items to power poles, and other similar public or private infrastructure, is illegal. Please help keep our line workers safe by hanging your posters, signs, flags, birdhouses, balloons, basketball hoops or other items somewhere other than power poles.

### **LOOK UP AND LIVE**

You might recognize our saying "Look Up and Live." As harvest season approaches, we often talk about looking up and looking out for overhead power lines before moving large machinery and equipment. But this is not limited to farmers. Being aware of overhead power lines is important for all members.

Power lines can be lower to the ground than they appear, especially in residential areas. Please always look up and be aware of overhead power lines while you are working on top of your roof or climbing a ladder.

Never climb trees near overhead power lines and make sure there are no overhead power lines where you plan to build hunting stands or tree houses.

### **SAFETY ON THE ROAD**

Traffic is a big concern for the safety of our line crews and it is the law in Minnesota to move over, if possible, to protect emergency workers. This includes utility crews. Thank you for moving over for our crews.

Lastly, if you ever find yourself in a vehicle accident involving any sort of electrical equipment – including power poles, green transformer boxes, or substations – please stay in your vehicle and call 911 for help. Do not exit your vehicle until an emergency responder or a utility line worker tells you it is safe.

There is only one exception to this rule and that is if your vehicle starts on fire after an accident. If your vehicle is on fire, you must exit the vehicle by crossing your arms over your chest, getting to the edge of the vehicle and jumping with both of your feet together, making sure not to reach back to the vehicle for any reason. With your feet still together, shuffle at least 100 yards away.

Safety is everyone's responsibility. Thank you for doing your part to help keep both you and our employees safe.

*Sincerely,*

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Robin Doege". The signature is fluid and cursive.

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



## MEMBER NOTICE

### STATEMENT OF NON-DISCRIMINATION

Stearns Electric Association is an equal opportunity provider and employer. In accordance with Federal civil rights law and U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) civil rights regulations and policies, the Cooperative prohibits discrimination against its members, employees and applicants for employment on the basis of race, color, national origin, religion, sex, gender identity (including gender expression), sexual orientation, disability, age, marital status, family/parental status, income derived from a public assistance program, political beliefs, or reprisal or retaliation for prior civil rights activity, in any program or activity conducted or funded by the Cooperative.

Persons with disabilities who require alternative means of communication for program information (e.g., Braille, large print, audiotape, American Sign Language, etc.) should contact the Cooperative or USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TTY) or contact USDA through the Federal Relay Service at (800) 877-8339. Additionally, program information may be made available in languages other than English.

To file a program discrimination complaint, complete the USDA Program Discrimination Complaint Form, AD-3027, found online at <https://www.usda.gov/oascr/how-to-file-a-program-discrimination-complaint> and at any USDA office or write a letter addressed to USDA and provide in the letter all of the information requested in the form. To request a copy of the complaint form, call (866) 632-9992. Submit your completed form or letter to USDA by: (1) mail: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights, 1400 Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, D.C. 20250-9410; (2) fax: (202) 690-7442; or (3) email: [program.intake@usda.gov](mailto:program.intake@usda.gov).

### The Power to Protect Your Favorite Chill Spot

We know things are hard right now, so we're now offering 3 months free monitoring with the purchase of a new security system. Protect your property from intruders, fire, and other threats for less than you'd think.

888.264.6380 | [heartlandss.com](http://heartlandss.com)



## BOARD MEETING

The regular meeting of the Board of Directors of Stearns Electric Association was held on July 30, 2020 at 1:00 p.m. at the Stearns Electric Association office in St. Joseph.

CEO Robin Doege presented the Cooperative's plan for opening up Stearns Electric offices for appointments. Although both offices remain closed to walk-in traffic, members and guests can schedule an appointment at either office.

Darrick Moe, President and CEO of the Minnesota Rural Electric Association (MREA), joined the meeting and presented on how the Eco Bill would have accomplished needed reforms to the current Conservation Improvement Program (CIP) program.

The Member Service report, presented by Manager of Member Services, Darla Honkomp, provided a summary of late payments during the COVID-19 pandemic. Ms. Honkomp stated that the three-month period of waiving late fees due to the COVID-19 pandemic would expire as of July 31<sup>st</sup>. In August the usual late fees will apply to delinquent accounts. Mr. Doege added that the Cooperative followed the Governor's request to cease all disconnects and charging of late fees due to COVID-19 for this period of time.

VP of Engineering and Operations, Matt O'Shea, explained how recently, severe thunderstorms had come through the area causing multiple substation outages. He explained how substations are back-fed to restore power until needed repairs were completed.

Mr. O'Shea said the Cooperative's aggressive right-of-way program has really helped during the storm season when vegetation is not in the way of restoration efforts. A three-year comparison of the number of outages and other statistics are reviewed.

Directors participated in an executive session to discuss updates to several board policies that have been under review this year. During the meeting, the Board voted to approve updates to these policies and signed new conflict of interest acknowledgment forms.

**Next Board Meeting:**  
October 29, 2020

## ENERGY SMART



### 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 CHANGES THIS WINTER

For the winter season, the electric thermal storage schedules for water heating and space heating are controlled from 6:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m. from October 1, 2020 through April 30, 2021.

## UPDATE YOUR CONTACT INFO

Communication in our busy world is changing and we want to be able to use the best tools to let you know about planned outages, emergency outages, upcoming events and programs, or your account.

By keeping your contact information up to date, Stearns Electric Association is able to contact you quickly regarding your account if there is a need. We also use contact information, including your name and mailing address, to send our members their Capital Credit checks every November.

Updating your contact information is also helpful as 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 this only works if your current phone number is linked.

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

Including an email address on your account allows you to sign up for online account access through SmartHub. On SmartHub, you can sign up for alerts, pay your bill and access your energy usage information.

***Your privacy is important to us.  
We will not share your information with others.***





# 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 the Cooperative to receive disconnect protection. This applies to all residential customers, including senior citizens and families with young children. If you make and keep a Cold Weather Rule 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 take place.

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

### ENSURE YOUR DRYER WORKS SMARTER, NOT HARDER!

*Clothes dryers make up a large portion of your appliance energy consumption. Clean the lint filter after each cycle, and scrub the filter with a toothbrush once a month to remove film and increase air circulation.*

## ELECTRICAL SAFETY CHECKUP



### SWEEP DRY LEAVES

*When the leaves begin falling from your trees, be sure to sweep them away from any outdoor outlets, light fixtures, and power cords. Dry leaves can easily catch fire if hit with a spark of some kind. You should also keep your outdoor air conditioning unit clean and clear of any autumn debris.*



LIKE US ON FACEBOOK

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

## ROLLING BLACKOUTS COULD IT HAPPEN HERE?

***Rolling blackouts in California made headlines recently and sparked some questions from our member-consumers. Could these blackouts happen here?***

In August, a heatwave led the California Independent System Operator (CAISO) to issue the first rolling blackouts for California residents not due to wildfires since 2001. CAISO is a non-profit organization that oversees the operation of California's power system, including electricity generation and transmission by its member utilities. In Minnesota, the Midcontinent Independent System Operator (MISO), serves the same function.

Many different factors contributed to the need for these blackouts. First, when California experienced extreme temperatures amid the heatwave, the state's electricity generation facilities could not keep up with the demand for energy. This caused a state of emergency requiring California's electric utilities to shed thousands of megawatts of energy in a short amount of time.

Second, California relies heavily on solar power. The rolling blackouts occurred shortly after sundown when solar resources stopped generating energy, but temperatures were still high enough for California residents to continue using their air conditioner. Again, the demand for energy was higher than its supply.

California also relies on wind generation to round out its energy portfolio, but does have natural gas facilities on standby for when energy



demand increases, as it did during the heatwave. However, at least one natural gas power plant did not come online as it was supposed to during the state of emergency and therefore, did not generate the additional energy that was needed.

Finally, as the ultimate back-up, California receives imported electricity from states to its east, which provides up to one-third of its energy supply on any given day. In August, those states also experienced a major heatwave and the energy that is normally accessible to California was unavailable.

The result of all of these incidents combined was rolling blackouts.

Recently, our wholesale power provider, Great River Energy, announced adjustments to its energy portfolio, which includes retiring coal as an energy generation resource and increasing wind energy. *With our future reliability of renewable energy, could rolling blackouts occur here in Minnesota? In short, the answer is – no.*

We met with Great River Energy to learn more. Here is what President and CEO of Great River Energy, David Saggau, had to say:

"There is a fundamental difference between California and Minnesota

that makes our situations quite different: California's dependence on solar energy.

Since solar energy makes up a very small percentage of the generating resources in the MISO market, our region does not experience sharp drop-offs in energy production associated with widespread reliance on solar generating resources.

We also have a fleet of modern natural gas plants in Minnesota that provide all-hours reliability. Most of these plants have on-site backup fuels that kick in when needed.

Additionally, in partnership with our member-owner cooperatives, Great River Energy has developed one of the country's most robust demand response programs, which allows us to effectively reduce electric loads during extreme weather conditions.

As a member of the MISO electricity market, we must have sufficient generating capacity to meet the peak energy load plus reserves. Great River Energy's generating capacity is, and will always be, more than sufficient to provide reliable energy services and meet MISO requirements.

All of these things combined ensure electricity is available to our members and consumers when they need it."



## NEWS

### OFFICES OPEN TO MEMBERS BY APPOINTMENT ONLY

The Stearns Electric Association offices remain closed to walk-in traffic, but are open for appointments. Members and guests should call Stearns Electric at (800) 962-0655 to make an appointment during regular office hours, Monday through Friday, 7:30 a.m. – 4 p.m. As the Cooperative still has employees working remotely, members should schedule an appointment at least 24 hours in advance to ensure that we are staffed appropriately to fit your needs.

## NORTHERN CO-OP SCHOLARSHIPS



Seven \$1,000 scholarships were awarded to cooperative members through the Northern Cooperative Foundation. Scholarships were awarded to students who are a member of a cooperative, enrolled full-time at an institution of higher learning and taking courses in business or economics that study the principles of cooperatives.

### CONGRATULATIONS TO:

**John Chmielewski, Rice**  
**Ethan Crocker, Little Falls**  
**Katie Orth, Randall**  
Kenna Salo, New York Mills

Zachary Schertler, Fargo  
**Wyatt Shay, Albany**  
**Brody Uhlenkamp, Osakis**

*(Scholarship recipients must be members of a cooperative in Minnesota.  
Bold recipients are Stearns Electric members who were awarded a scholarship.)*

## COOKING CORNER

### MEISTER'S RED RICE KRISPIE BARS

Submitted by: Lori Lygre



#### Ingredients:

3 oz. package red, fruit  
flavored gelatin of your  
choice (not sugar free)  
1/3 C light corn syrup  
2 Tbsp soft butter or  
margarine  
4 C Rice Krispies cereal

#### Directions:

Butter a 9-inch square pan. In a large saucepan, blend gelatin, corn syrup and butter. Heat to boiling over medium heat stirring constantly. Once boiling, remove from heat. Stir in cereal. Stir to coat cereal with the red syrup mixture. Turn into the prepared pan and pat evenly. Cover and refrigerate about 30 minutes to set. Once set, the bars can be stored at room temperature. Cut and 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](mailto: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.stearnsselectric.org](http://www.stearnsselectric.org)

**PERIODICALS  
POSTAGE PAID**

The Power Connection (USPS 016053) is published monthly (plus an Annual Report) by Stearns Electric Association, P.O. Box 40, Melrose, MN 56352, Subscription rate: \$4 annually. Stearns Electric Association is an equal opportunity employer.

Periodicals Postage Rate is at Melrose, MN, 56352 and additional mailing offices.

### BOARD OF DIRECTORS

RANDY ROTHSTEIN

*President, District 4*

TONY AMPE

*Vice President, District 5*

STEVE NOTCH

*Secretary/Treasurer, District 6*

GREG BLAINE

*District 1*

ARLYN LAWRENZ

*District 2*

RJ DICK NATHE

*District 3*

LONNIE IVERSON

*District 7*

ERIC PETERSON

*District 8*

JERRY FRIES

*District 9*

### STAFF

ROBIN DOEGE

*Chief Executive Officer*

VICKY HERKENHOFF

*Vice President of Administration and Finance*

MATT O'SHEA

*Vice President of Engineering and Operations*

CINDY ANDERSON

*Manager of Finance*

GLENN BLOMMEL

*Manager of Operations*

DARLA HONKOMP

*Manager of Member Services*

JAMES PACHAN

*Manager of Engineering*

RYAN ZIERDEN

*Manager of IT*

### CONTRACT DESIGNER

AMANDA GROETHE

*Fuller Creative*

WORK  
HERE  
LIVE  
HERE  
SERVE  
HERE



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

*Stearns Electric Facilities and Grounds Custodian Justin Spanier makes our community a better place by volunteering as an instructor with the local Future Farmers of America (FFA) chapter to teach students about agriculture and the hard work and dedication invested into producing high quality food. He's also an advocate for the FFA program and raises funding for student projects. In addition, Justin is also a volunteer firefighter who responds to about 75 calls per year.*