



POWER CONNECTION

member driven. community focused. energy smart.

FEBRUARY 2021



ANNUAL MEETING POSTPONED; SPECIAL ELECTION IN DISTRICT 3

ANNUAL MEETING POSTPONED

On January 28, 2021, the current director in District 3, Richard "Dick" Nathe, resigned from his position on the Stearns Electric Association Board of Directors due to personal health reasons.

This leaves a one-year vacancy on the Cooperative's Board in District 3. Per our Bylaws, this vacancy needs to be filled in conjunction with our next Annual Meeting.

It was determined by Stearns Electric Association Board President Randy Rothstein that postponing the current Annual Meeting was in the best interest of Stearns Electric Association and its members, especially those residing in District 3. Postponing the Annual Meeting will allow adequate time for

candidates in District 3 to apply for the vacancy on the board of directors.

President Rothstein took action to postpone the Annual Meeting of the members by four weeks, from Thursday, April 8, 2021 to Thursday, May 6, 2021.

The Annual Meeting postponement does not impact the 2021 Director Elections in districts 4, 5 and 9. The nominations window for districts 4, 5 and 9 closed as planned at 4 p.m. on Thursday, January 28, 2021.

SPECIAL ELECTION - DISTRICT 3

Stearns Electric proactively reached out to all members in District 3 to make them aware of this seat vacancy and upcoming election via a postcard that was sent earlier this month.

If you live in District 3 and you would like to serve on the board for the remaining term, please visit our Director Election website page, www.stearnslectric.org/about-us/board-and-bylaws/director-election, and read over the materials in the 2021 Director Nominations Packet - Special Election District 3.

District 3 includes Minnesota townships of Waite Park, St. Cloud, St. Augusta, Lynden and Fairhaven in Stearns County.

Applications for the Special Election in District 3 are due to the Cooperative's secretary by 4 p.m. CST on Thursday, February 25, 2021.

Please contact Stearns Electric during regular business hours at (800) 962-0655 with any questions.

CEO'S MESSAGE

ADJUSTMENTS TO THE 2021 ANNUAL MEETING



Stearns Electric Association is a democratically-controlled business, governed by a Board of Directors who are elected by you, our member-consumers. The Board of Directors consists of nine members, one to represent each of the Cooperative's nine districts. Directors are elected to serve three-year terms. Elections take place in conjunction with the Cooperative's Annual Meeting every year for three districts on a rotating basis. In 2021, directors in districts 4, 5 and 9 are up for election.

ANNUAL MEETING POSTPONED

On January 28, 2021, District 3 Director, Richard "Dick" Nathe, resigned from his position on the Stearns Electric Association Board of Directors for personal health reasons, effective immediately. This leaves a one-year vacancy on the Cooperative's Board in District 3. Per our Bylaws, this vacancy needs to be filled in conjunction with our next Annual Meeting.

The Cooperative's nomination process for the election in districts 4, 5 and 9 was well underway prior to Director Nathe's resignation. In fact, the nominations window for these districts closed on January 28 at 4 p.m., just a few hours after receiving the notice.

Needless to say, we did not have enough time to communicate the opening in District 3 to members in that district by the election deadline. But, filling this vacant position as soon as possible and having representation from each district is important to our governance model.

That left us with two options:

1. We could continue along the same timeline as we initially planned,

with the election results for districts 4, 5 and 9 to be finalized in conjunction with the Annual Meeting on April 8, 2021. This option would require us to hold a second special election and meeting for members in District 3, separate from the Annual Meeting.

2. We could postpone the current Annual Meeting to accommodate the elections for districts 4, 5 and 9, as well as the special election in District 3.

Article III, Section 10 of the Bylaws of Stearns Electric Association allows the Board President to postpone and reschedule the Annual Meeting of the members for good cause.

Board President Randy Rothstein took action to postpone the Annual Meeting of the members by four weeks, from Thursday, April 8, 2021 to Thursday, May 6, 2021.

BENEFITS TO COOPERATIVE MEMBERS

Although both of the options above are in accordance with the Cooperative's Bylaws, the benefits of postponing the Annual Meeting of the members ultimately led us to this decision.

Either way, the Cooperative needed to facilitate a special election in District 3 to fill the remaining term of office for the vacant position, which is one year. As we use a third-party contractor, Survey and Ballot Systems (SBS), to conduct our elections, it was in the best interest of the Cooperative financially to postpone the election. Postponing the election allows the Cooperative and SBS to coordinate all four district elections at the same time instead of facilitating two completely separate

elections on different timelines. Additionally, postponing the Annual Meeting saves the Cooperative additional time, money and resources by not holding a special election results meeting for members of District 3.

Lastly, it allows adequate time for members in District 3 to be made aware of the vacant position and submit an Application for Director by the deadline on Thursday, February 25, 2021 at 4 p.m.

Postponing the Annual Meeting by four weeks also helps in the midst of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. As vaccines continue to roll out and cases continue to decrease throughout Central Minnesota, we hope that this additional time allows us to hold a safer Annual Meeting.

The brief postponement will not impact the board of director candidates in districts 4, 5 and 9. The nominations window for districts 4, 5 and 9 closed at 4 p.m. on Thursday, January 28 and will remain closed.

Complete details regarding our Annual Meeting, scheduled for May 6, 2021, will be announced in the March edition of Power Connection and on our website.

If you have any questions regarding the Annual Meeting postponement or the special election in District 3, please do not hesitate to contact us during regular business hours at (800) 962-0655.

Sincerely,

Robin C. Doege
Chief Executive Officer (CEO)

ENERGY EDUCATION

ENERGY EDUCATION CONTINUES IN A VIRTUAL WORLD

Every year as part of Stearns Electric Association's commitment to safety and community, we present an energy efficiency and electrical safety demonstration to local fourth grade classrooms throughout our service territory. This year, due to continued pandemic restrictions, the Cooperative got creative with its annual Energy Education programming.



With the Energy Education display set up in one of the Cooperative's conference rooms, Stearns Electric presenters are able to use Zoom or Google Meet technology to connect with each classroom and present the program virtually.

"Our Energy Education program is always a favorite among the students we present to and we didn't want this year's fourth graders to miss out on it due to the ongoing pandemic," Katie Anderson, Stearns Electric's Energy Education coordinator, said. "We were able to come up with a way to visit the classrooms virtually this year. It was definitely not as fun as being in person with the students, but it worked really well given the current circumstances."

In 2021, we presented to 1,640 students at 33 schools throughout Central Minnesota.

This year, the Cooperative's communication department pre-recorded a video educating students about the basics of electricity, including details on the seven types of generation fuels, conductors and insulators, our nation's power grid and Stearns Electric's local distribution system. As this is typically the first half of our presentation, we asked schools to show this video to their classrooms ahead of the live safety demonstration.

Continued on page 6.

BOARD MEETING

The regular meeting of the Board of Directors of Stearns Electric Association was called to order on December 29, 2020 at 1:00 p.m. via Zoom.

The recently completed long-range financial forecast was presented. The assumptions of the forecast included flat purchase power costs, flat power sales rates, annual wage and benefit increases, operating expense increases, interest expense increases, Right-of-Way management costs and projected depreciation expenses.

VP of Administration and Finance Vicky Herkenhoff reported upcoming 2021 items include bargaining unit negotiations, a benefits review, and the continuation of the GiANT leadership program at the Cooperative. The Member Services report described a high volume of estate closures as a result of the recent G & T Capital Credits payout. As of the board meeting, there were roughly 200 estates in need of settlement this year compared to about 50 settlements at the same time last year.

VP of Engineering and Operations Matt O'Shea described Construction Work Plan projects, inspections and maintenance currently in progress. The Engineering report included the completion of the security light replacement project. Mr. O'Shea also shared an overview of the 2021 substation and work plan projects, which will include digital staking.

GRE Board Member Greg Blaine reported that GRE has had a good year fiscally, which resulted in its ability to distribute COVID relief dollars to its member cooperatives. He also shared that GRE power rates are lower than other regional power suppliers.

The proposed 2021 budget was presented to the directors for its second review. After feedback and discussion, a motion to approve the 2021 budget as presented was carried.

NEXT BOARD MEETING
March 25, 2021

THE DAY

THE NIGHT

Electricity makes our lives more convenient. As technology continues to change, our electricity needs and uses also adjust. But one thing has remained steady since the Cooperative was founded in 1937: Stearns Electric has been powering our member-consumers through the day and the night.

Stearns Electric Association serves over 27,000 member-consumers including residential, agricultural, large commercial and small commercial accounts. Our mission is to safely deliver reliable electricity, provide beneficial energy solutions and a positive member experience to all types of members.

More than ever, electricity powers our lives. We rely on electricity for heating and cooling our homes, water heating, lighting, television, refrigeration, washing clothes, cooking and more!

Reliable electricity is not only important in our homes, but also our local businesses and farms that rely on electricity for keeping their operations running smoothly 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

POWERING YOU THROUGH THE DAY

Tom Janski is a fourth-generation family farm owner of Janski Farms Partnership in St. Augusta. Along with his brother and cousins, Janski operates 4,000 acres of land, processes 1,000 Holstein steers annually and milks 200 dairy cows daily.

Over the past few years, Janski Farms has implemented several new technologies that rely on electricity, and allow them to continue farm operations with a small staff.

In 2013, Janski Farms made the decision to install robotic milking stalls at their farm. "We had a few employees planning to retire who came to milk cows several times a week, both during the morning and evening. It was either quit the dairy portion of our business or add robotic milking," Janski recalled.

"Today, we rely on electricity for our generator, our robotic milking system, some of our irrigators, our automated grain dryer, the automated calf feeder and the feed pusher in the cow barn," Janski

explained. "Without advancements in technology, we couldn't do this operation with seven full-time employees."

"I remember when the power used to go out and we'd be milking cows. We'd have to go grab the tractor, go to the fuse box - it was a whole ordeal," Janski recalled. "Now that we are on the interruptible generator program, the power goes out and comes right back on."



The robotic milking system at Janski Farms can milk cows 24/7.

Increasing efficiencies also frees up time for the owners.

"These days, it's easier to relax with more automation. The robotic milking should work. The grain dryer should work. And the generator should kick on as needed," Janski said. "We don't have to be physically at the farm around the clock. Instead we are on call 24 hours a day, seven days a week. We make sure our cell phones are charged so if there's an issue we can get home or wake up and fix it at any time of the day or night."

POWERING YOU THROUGH THE NIGHT

Jill and Karl Funk and their four children, Ian, Owen, Aubrey and Aleah, rely on electricity for many things they use daily – "the coffee pot, Xbox, computer, hot water heater, our well, iPad and phone chargers, WiFi, the Chrome Book, and much more," they listed off. Energy powers their lives.

The convenience of electricity also allows them to do the things they love, day or night – playing Xbox, watching television together as a family, cooking dinner, making cookies, playing board games at the kitchen table (especially when it gets dark so early) and even reading their favorite stories by book light.

Electricity not only helps us meet our most basic needs, such as keeping our homes warm in the winter time, but also helps keep home business and school operations up and running.

The Funks are used to working from home. Jill has worked remotely from home office for three years. "When the power goes out, it directly impacts my job," Jill said.

During the start of the COVID-19 pandemic last year, the Funks suddenly found themselves going to school virtually from home, too.

"We completed our school assignments during COVID from our home computers and tablets," Owen recalled. "It was actually kind of funny last year when the power went out in Melrose as our teachers didn't know when it was restored out here on the opposite side of town!"

Joking aside, these days, reliable electricity also helps families stay connected.



Owen, Ian, Aleah and Aubrey Funk on their devices at home.

"Gaming with friends has been a great way to still talk to our friends every day during COVID," Ian explained.

"We also did a virtual Zoom with our families for Easter," Karl recalled. "It's not ideal, but it allows grandparents to see us and the kids, and allows the kids to see their cousins."

Whether your account is a home or farm, large or small business, Stearns Electric is proud to power you through the day and the night.

ENERGY EFFICIENCY TIP OF THE MONTH

USE DRYER BALLS

Use wool or rubber dryer balls in the clothes dryer to reduce drying time and static. Wool dryer balls can also absorb extra moisture. These are an efficient alternative to dryer sheets which can create buildup on the dryer's filter and reduce air circulation. If you prefer dryer sheets, scrub the filter once a month to remove buildup.

ELECTRICAL SAFETY CHECKUP



PROTECT SMALL CHILDREN

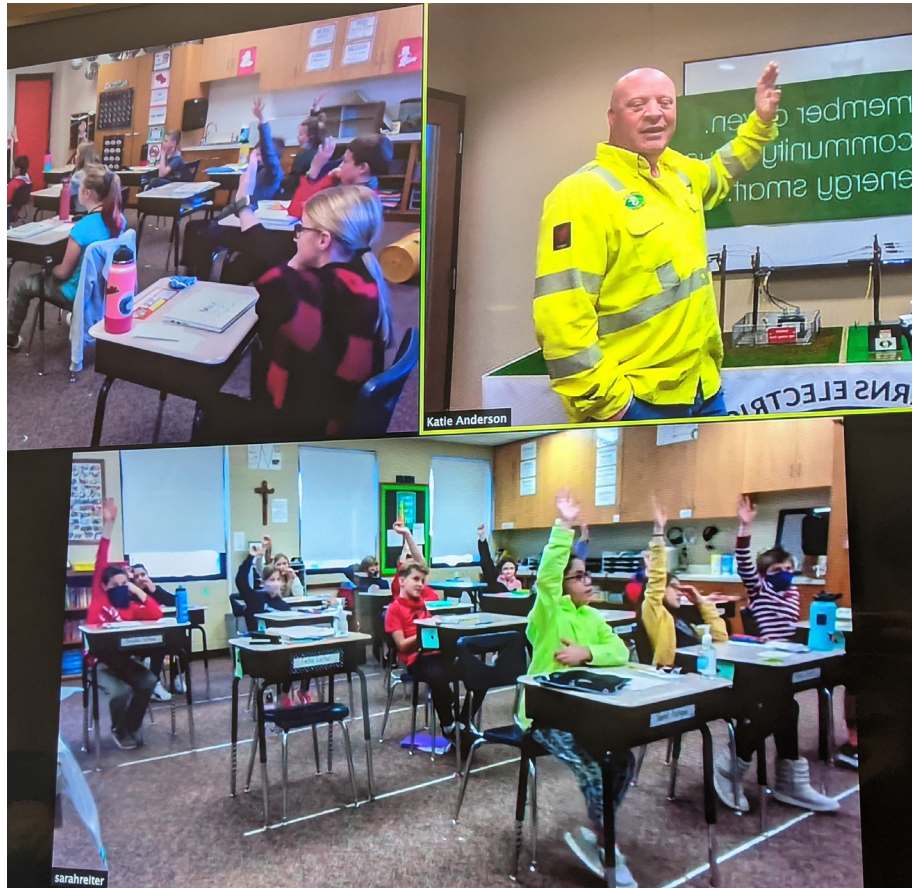
Small children are very curious and they love to explore just about everything. Parents should put tamper-resistant safety caps on all unused electrical outlets. In addition, all loose cords should be tidied up and put out of reach to avoid kids tugging on them.



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www.facebook.com/stearnslectric

ENERGY EDUCATION CONTINUED



Stearns Electric line workers Wayne Senst and Levi Jessen then took turns facilitating the virtual, live safety demonstration. The demonstration features an electric home and farm model, where students see first-hand what happens when people, vehicles or equipment come into contact with electricity.

"The questions that the kids come up with are my favorite part of presenting Energy Education," Jessen said. "I enjoy getting to share my knowledge of being a lineman with them."

"It's important for us to educate the students so they know how to be safe with things involving electricity," Senst added. "After our presentation, they can go home and share the information with their family so everyone learns how to be safer with electricity." Perhaps the most important safety

takeaway from the presentation is the students' knowledge about what to do if a vehicle hits a power pole.

"One thing I hope fourth graders walk away knowing after each presentation is what to do if the vehicle they are in hits a power pole," Senst said "When they leave our presentation, I hope they all know to stay in the vehicle unless it starts on fire."

"Following each demonstration we take time for the students to ask questions. The linemen are able to answer the technical questions that the students have with real-life examples and experiences," Anderson continued.

Although the virtual program is going well, we are all looking forward to hopefully being back in the classrooms next year.

"The virtual presentations are

challenging, but we have come up with ways to make them as best as they can be," Senst said.

"It will be a much better experience for them once we are able to get back in the classrooms. The arcs, sparks and noises of the presentation are much better in person," Jessen added.

Stearns Electric Association values community involvement and public safety. Our Energy Education presentations reinforce these important messages with the hope that local students will bring their new electrical efficiency and safety knowledge home to their families.

For more information on our annual Energy Education programming, please visit www.stearnselectric.org. **You can also visit the Stearns Electric Facebook page to see more photos and timelapse video at www.facebook.com/stearnslectric.**

CO-GENERATION AND SMALL POWER PRODUCTION NOTICE

In compliance with Cooperative Rules implementing Minnesota Statute section 216B.164 Co-generation and Small Power Production Notice, Stearns Electric Association is required to interconnect with, and purchase electricity from, co-generation and small power production facilities that satisfy the conditions of a Qualifying Facility.

Stearns Electric has available and will provide free information to all interested members regarding rates and interconnection requirements. An application for interconnection is required for a Qualifying Facility to interconnect and operate in parallel with the Cooperative's distribution system and is subject to approval by the Cooperative. For more information, please contact Stearns Electric Association during business hours at (800) 962-0655.

VEGETATION MANAGEMENT 101

There are many ways that Stearns Electric Association safely provides you with consistent, reliable electric service. One of the most common – and crucial – ways is referred to as vegetation management or Right-of-Way clearing.

TREE TRIMMING

Trees growing into power lines can cause power outages and downed lines in storms, endangering the people who live, work or play nearby. Trimming trees reduces potential power outages and hazards.

3 COMMON TYPES OF TRIMMING:

SIDE



A side trim is the most common corrective action. Trees are trimmed to create a 10-15 foot clearance of power lines.

OVERHANG



Branches falling into a power line are trimmed to create a 10 foot clearance for the overhang.

SERVICE



A service trim is done when only a small trim or a few branches need to be addressed within a 5 foot clearance.

BRUSH CLEARING // TRIMMING // TOPPING // REMOVAL

Vegetation type, location, growth factors, property aesthetics and more are considered when determining corrective action for Right-of-Way concerns.

COOKING CORNER

SWEET POTATO MUFFINS

Submitted by:
Kimberly Murphy Ellingboe

Ingredients:

½ C cooked and mashed sweet potatoes
1 C flour
1 tsp cinnamon
½ tsp baking soda
1/8 tsp baking powder
¼ tsp salt
½ C brown sugar
¼ C canola oil
1 egg
½ tsp vanilla
¼ C ground flaxseed meal

Directions:

Preheat oven to 400 degrees. Pierce sweet potatoes and bake for about 45 minutes or until tender. Let potatoes cool. When they are cool, peel off skin and mash with a fork. Adjust oven temperature to 325 degrees. In a large bowl, combine flour, cinnamon, baking soda, baking powder, salt and flaxseed. In a separate bowl, combine brown sugar, oil, egg and vanilla. Stir the wet ingredients into the dry ingredients. Then stir in the mashed sweet potatoes. Pour combined mixture into muffin tins. Bake at 325 degrees for 30 minutes. 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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**PERIODICALS
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- AMANDA GROETHE
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FLEECE BLANKETS: STRENGTHENING HUMAN CONNECTION



Fleece blankets not only provide warmth externally, but also, when given as a gift, warm the heart. Co-op employees tie blankets each winter and nominate local community members to receive these gifts of comfort and connection.