



# POWER CONNECTION

member driven. community focused. energy smart.

APRIL 2021

## YOU ARE INVITED TO OUR 84<sup>TH</sup> DRIVE-IN ANNUAL MEETING

### NOTICE OF ANNUAL MEETING

The 84<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting of the members of Stearns Electric Association will be held at the Stearns County Fairgrounds in Sauk Centre, Minnesota at 7:00 p.m. on Thursday May 6, 2021, to act on the following matters:

1. **Report of Officers, Directors, Vice Presidents and Chief Executive Officer.**
2. **Election of four Directors of the Cooperative:**
  - **One from District No. 3 (Special Election)**  
Serving Minnesota townships: Waite Park, St. Cloud, St. Augusta, Lynden, and Fairhaven in Stearns County.
  - **One from District No. 4**  
Serving Minnesota townships: Farming, Zion, Munson, Paynesville, Eden Lake, and Luxemburg in Stearns County.
  - **One from District No. 5**  
Serving Minnesota townships: Bangor, Glenwood and Grove Lake in Pope County; Raymond, Getty, Grove, North

Fork, Lake George, Spring Hill, St. Martin, Crow Lake, Crow River and Lake Henry in Stearns County; and Roseville in Kandiyohi County.

- **One from District No. 9**  
Serving Minnesota townships: St. Joseph, Wakefield, Rockville and Maine Prairie in Stearns County.
- 3. **All other business that may properly come before this meeting or adjournment thereof.**

As a member-consumer of Stearns Electric, you are also an owner of the Cooperative. Through attendance at the Annual Meeting, and the election of your Board of Directors, you help set the future direction of our Cooperative.

Don't forget to bring your Annual Report to register at the Annual Meeting. The first 300 vehicles will receive one pound of cheese and one pound of butter quarters as a gift from the Cooperative.

You can listen to the radio broadcast from the comfort of your vehicle, or bring a lawn chair and sit outside by your vehicle

or near our outdoor stage. We will NOT have any lawn chairs, bleachers or other seating available. Please bring your own chair if you'd like to sit outside your vehicle.

For the safety of our employees and members, once your vehicle is parked at the fairgrounds for the Annual Meeting, you will not be able to leave until you are dismissed by a parking lot attendant upon conclusion of the meeting.

Visit [www.stearnslectric.org/annual-meeting](http://www.stearnslectric.org/annual-meeting) for more information, including a map of the event. In case of inclement weather the day of the event, updates will be posted on the website.

Sincerely,

Steve Notch  
Stearns Electric Board of Directors,  
Secretary/Treasurer

## CEO'S MESSAGE

# MOVING AHEAD AMIDST THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC



***I would like to say that we are "moving on" from the 2020 pandemic, but I think it's more like "moving ahead." Most likely we will not totally return to the way things were prior to the start of the pandemic.***

Since the beginning of the pandemic, Stearns Electric has worked hard to provide you with uninterrupted electricity and customer service. Energy utilities like Stearns Electric are considered critical infrastructure. It's not an option for us to take a timeout and suspend our operations. We need to continue providing electricity to our members no matter what. We know that our residents, farms and businesses count on Stearns Electric to provide reliable and safe electricity, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

We are encouraged by both the signs of spring and improvements being made to the pandemic situation and related restrictions. Vaccinations are being rolled out and vulnerable populations are getting vaccinated. We now have an increased ability to gather and travel. Plus our kids are heading back to school for in-person learning, social time and youth sports. The world, much like the Minnesota spring, is starting to awaken, and we are more than ready. Spring is when Stearns Electric starts to really ramp up our construction season. Our planning is complete and we are anxious to begin the new season of work.

Every couple of years, Stearns Electric develops a construction work plan. That work plan identifies the budget for several years, highlighting

replacements and upgrades for Stearns Electric to accommodate our distribution system needs. In 2021, Stearns Electric plans to spend just over \$7 million on our utility plant. Most of these dollars will be spent on new services, and cable or conductor (wire) replacements and upgrades. Other projects include substation and line equipment upgrades and replacements. With \$124 million in electric distribution system assets, Stearns Electric is consistently replacing and upgrading conductor, poles and equipment to ensure we continue to deliver reliable energy to our members.

Another large project and goal we have planned for this year includes the continuation of our Right-of-Way (ROW) clearing program. Last year we wrapped up our initial 4-year ROW cycle. In 2021, we start a new cycle, which really focuses on maintaining all of the work we have accomplished clearing trees out of power lines over the last four years. The work has led to a 62.4% overall decrease in tree-related outages for Stearns Electric members.

Additionally, we will wrap up our three-year security and street light LED replacement project. Once this project is complete, the Co-op anticipates a 66% total decrease in energy use for security and street lights throughout our service territory. We also plan to explore digital staking technology for our engineering department, initiate our single-phase bare concentric wire replacement plan and conduct an arc flash study. This study aims to keep our line crews knowledgeable and safe while working

on our distribution system into the future.

In March, Stearns Electric staff members provided our board of directors with an update on Stearns Electric strategic initiatives. Two important initiatives discussed were the Stearns Electric equity plan and our electric rates. In 2020, Stearns Electric developed a long-term equity plan. This was a lengthy, but important process. Through it, we identified our cash needs for Capital Credit retirements, wholesale power purchases and overall Cooperative operations. We know that electric rates, and the associated value, are very important to you. Stearns Electric's last rate increase was in 2018. Great River Energy (GRE), our power supplier, has announced that they will not have any wholesale power rate increases for several years. Wholesale power is Stearns Electric's number one expense year over year. Since we don't anticipate any wholesale power cost increases, Stearns Electric will most likely not have a rate increase for the foreseeable future.

I for one am really looking forward to spring! Farmers in the field, birds chirping and warm breezes are just around the corner. Please know that we at Stearns Electric will continue to work hard to maintain competitive rates and provide you with reliable and safe electricity.

*Sincerely,*

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "Robin Doege". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Robin" and last name "Doege" clearly distinguishable.

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

## WHETHER TEMPS RISE OR FALL, YOUR ENERGY BILL WILL STAY COOL.

TAKE ADVANTAGE OF  
REBATES UP TO \$2,000 WHEN  
YOU INSTALL A QUALIFYING,  
ENERGY-SAVING AIR SOURCE  
HEAT PUMP!



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

From April 1 until June 30, 2021, Stearns Electric members can earn up to \$2,000 in rebates when they install a qualifying, energy-saving air source heat pump (ASHP) and enroll on our EnergyWise® Dual Fuel and Cycled Air Conditioning programs for the first time.

Members receive more rebate dollars based on the ASHP's heating seasonal performance factor (HSPF) and whether or not they also have an electric resistive heat source.

### DUCTED UNITS

	Rebate w/ Electric Heat (9kW min.)	Rebate w/ Delivered Fuels
8.2 – 8.9 HSPF	\$1,000	\$800
≥ 9.0 HSPF	\$2,000	\$1,600

#### ***Electric Resistive Heat sources include:***

Plenum Heater  
Boiler  
Baseboard Heat

#### ***Delivered Fuel sources include:***

Propane  
Natural Gas  
Wood

We also have a promotion for ductless ASHPs with a HSPF rating of 9.0 or higher. Members can receive up to \$750 when a new unit is purchased and installed between April 1 and June 30, 2021.

### DUCTLESS/MINI SPLIT UNITS

Min. ≥ 9.0 HSPF	\$750	\$450
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Visit [www.stearnslectric.org](http://www.stearnslectric.org) or call the Energy Services department at (800) 962-0655 during regular business hours for more information.

The regular meeting of the Board of Directors of Stearns Electric Association was called to order on February 25, 2021, at 1:00 p.m. at the St. Joseph office of Stearns Electric Association.

Manager of Finance Cindy Anderson reviewed the final December financial statement following the 2020 audit. The auditors complimented the Cooperative on its strong focus on internal controls. The 2020 audit was clean. At the March meeting, the auditors will be present to answer questions from the board. The January 2021 financial statement was also reviewed.

Business Development and Energy Services Supervisor John Pantzke presented a loan request from a member business. There was a discussion about loan terms and the number of services offered at the business. Motion carried.

The Cooperative's committed efforts to vegetation management have resulted in a significant decrease in tree-related outages since 2016, according to the Operations report. The Cooperative is testing its new radio equipment from Brandon Communications.

Modifications to Board Policy 110 were proposed to include specific language on when to recount votes and who is responsible for the cost of the recount. Motion carried.

Two Operation Round Up® policies were also brought before the board. One policy proposed significant updates to the language and the other formalized the current practice of how Operation Round Up® trust board members are compensated. The directors requested more time to review these policies. Further discussion will take place at the March meeting.

### NEXT BOARD MEETING

May 27, 2021



*As a member-consumer of Stearns Electric, you are also an owner of the Cooperative. You have a voice in the operations of the organization through the election process. Elected by members, the nine Directors determine the policies and procedures of the Cooperative.*

*These elected Directors are members of the Cooperative themselves. These representatives are your neighbors and are directly affected by the decisions that are made to carry out the business of the Co-op. Their decisions are made in the best interest of our members and Stearns Electric.*

Member-consumers in Districts 3, 4, 5 and 9 will receive a ballot package, mailed on April 14 with complete voting instructions. In addition, members with an email address on file will also receive an email with similar instructions. Voting begins April 14, 2021. **There are three ways to vote in 2021:**

- 1. VOTE ONLINE\*:** Type in the URL <https://directvote.net/SEA> into the address bar located at the top of your internet screen. Use your personalized Member Number and Election Passcode at the top of your mailed ballot to register/log in. Follow the online voting instructions. You can also scan the QR Code on your mailed ballot for a direct login link to your online ballot.
- 2. VOTE BY MAIL\*:** Ballot packages will be mailed on April 14 to members in Districts 3, 4, 5 and 9. Detach ballot and place into the envelope marked "Ballot Envelope" and seal. Then place the sealed "Ballot Envelope" in the return envelope addressed to "Secretary," seal and mail it. Please allow sufficient time for delivery.
- 3. VOTE IN PERSON AT THE ANNUAL MEETING:** Polls open at 6 p.m. and remain open until the meeting is called to order. Be sure to bring your Annual Report with you for registration. Please note, due to the ongoing pandemic, we encourage members to vote online or by mail whenever possible.

\*Online or mail ballots will only be accepted if received by 2 p.m. on Wednesday, May 5, 2021.

# MEET YOUR 2021 BOARD OF DIRECTOR CANDIDATES



## DISTRICT 3: CHRISTOPHER (CHRIS) BERGMAN

Chris Bergman of St. Cloud seeks election in District 3. Bergman currently serves as an Active Guard Senior Instructor at the Regional Training Site - Maintenance for the Minnesota Army National Guard at Camp Ripley. He has been a member of the Cooperative for 13 years and currently participates in the Operation Round Up® program.

If elected, Bergman believes Stearns Electric should continue providing reliable electric service to member-consumers and focus on modernizing the power grid as necessary to meet the growing needs of electric vehicles and other emerging technologies. He also believes renewable energy, energy storage and cybersecurity should be areas of focus for the Cooperative in the coming years.



## DISTRICT 3: MICHAEL CRAMER

Michael Cramer of St. Augusta seeks election in District 3. Cramer currently serves as a consultant in the technology sector for computers, networks and infrastructure. He previously owned and operated an office equipment and supply business. He has been a member of the Cooperative for 30 years and participates in the Stored Water program. He also participated in the Member Resource Committee (Member Engagement Group) for two years.

If elected, Cramer feels the Cooperative should focus on keeping energy costs down, maintaining the Right-of-Way clearing schedule and ensuring there is a balance of energy resources to provide reliable power, while keeping costs low for member-consumers. He believes in taking an active role at the state and federal level to ensure regulations do not impede or otherwise create increased cost to Stearns Electric patrons.



## DISTRICT 3: LOREN ESTWICK

Loren Estwick of St. Augusta seeks election in District 3. Estwick currently works regionally in training and development at I-CAR, a not-for-profit in the collision repair industry. He has been a member of the Cooperative since October, although was a member of another Minnesota electric cooperative prior to his recent move. He currently participates in the Cooperative's Operation Round Up® program.

If elected, Estwick believes Stearns Electric should focus on infrastructure maintenance and capital expenditures for upgrades and reliability. The Co-op should also focus on renewable energy resources and prepare the existing infrastructure for strategic implementation of new technologies.



### DISTRICT 3: THOMAS (TOM) KELLER

Tom Keller of St. Cloud seeks election in District 3. Keller retired in 2019, but most recently served as senior distribution design engineer for Connexus Energy, another Minnesota electric cooperative. He has been a member of Stearns Electric for two years and currently participates in the Operation Round Up® program.

If elected, Keller believes Stearns Electric should focus on keeping electricity rates reasonable for member-consumers. Providing reliable service with infrequent outages and a focus on safety is important. He also feels we should work toward lowering carbon emissions and reducing reliability on fossil fuels.



### DISTRICT 3: WILLIAM (BILL) KEMP

Bill Kemp of St. Cloud seeks election in District 3. Kemp is currently retired, but most recently served as business development director for the Greater St. Cloud Development Corporation. He has been a member of Stearns Electric for 20 years and currently participates in the Operation Round Up® program.

If elected, Kemp believes the Cooperative should continue keeping safety and security as high priorities while also exploring renewable energy options and changing technology solutions. He also believes Stearns Electric should explore backup power options and operating efficiencies that will benefit members by keeping rates reasonable and affordable.



### DISTRICT 3: VIJAY PURI

Vijay Puri of St. Cloud seeks election in District 3. Puri is currently retired after a 35-year career as vice president of international sales for DeZurik, Inc. He holds a Bachelor of Mechanical Engineering and Master of Business degree in marketing from Syracuse University in New York. He has been a member of the Cooperative for over 40 years.

If elected Puri believes the Cooperative should find ways to reduce dependence on fossil fuels and consider green power. He also thinks long-term goals of the Cooperative should include zero emissions.



### DISTRICT 3: JAMES (JIM) RASMUSSEN

James Rasmusson of St. Augusta seeks election in District 3. Rasmusson worked for 30 years at Northern States Power/Xcel Energy/Nuclear Management Company as an operations specialist, power plant operator and engineer analyst. Most recently he was a substitute para-professional teacher. He has been a member of Stearns Electric for 7 years and currently participates in the Operation Round Up program.

If elected, Rasmusson believes the Cooperative should focus on maintaining a variety of power generating resources that include fossil fuels and potentially nuclear fuels.

*Continued on page 6.*

## ENERGY EFFICIENCY TIP OF THE MONTH

### SAVE ENERGY AND MAINTAIN YOUR WATER HEATER

*Some manufacturers set water heater thermostats at 140 degrees, but most households usually only require them to be set at 120 degrees. Consider lowering your water heater's temperature to save energy and slow mineral buildup in the heater and pipes.*

## ELECTRICAL SAFETY CHECKUP



## CALL 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. Call 811 or visit [gopherstateonecall.org](http://gopherstateonecall.org) before you dig.*



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[www.facebook.com/stearnselectric](http://www.facebook.com/stearnselectric)



### **DISTRICT 3: ROBERT (BOB) STOMMES**

Bob Stommes of St. Cloud seeks election in District 3. Stommes recently retired as a farm business management instructor at Ridgewater College. He has been a member of Stearns Electric for 18 years and currently participates in the Operation Round Up program.

If elected, Stommes believes the Cooperative should focus on planning for extreme weather scenarios such as extreme hot and cold weather, ice storms and high winds. Stearns Electric should also explore how wind and solar energy will align with member needs now and into the future.



### **DISTRICT 4: NEIL FRANZ**

Neil Franz of Farming Township seeks election in District 4. Franz has been a Cooperative member for over 18 years and recently retired after a 36-year career as the senior business lawyer and CEO of a Central Minnesota law firm. Franz currently participates in the Dual Fuel, Stored Water, Cycled Air Conditioning and Operation Round Up® programs, and serves on the Member Engagement Group.

Franz believes the Cooperative should continue to provide safe, competitively priced and reliable power, and maintain a strong financial position. He believes the Board needs to encourage and facilitate economic development, promote energy conservation initiatives, prepare for innovation in changing circumstances and explore additional service offerings. With rapid changes looming in the energy industry, Franz believes his experience in responding to complex challenges, along with an extensive background in management, economics, mathematics and law, will be of critical value to the Cooperative in the years ahead.



### **DISTRICT 4: RANDALL (RANDY) ROTHSTEIN**

Randy Rothstein of Munson Township seeks re-election in District 4. Rothstein is currently the general manager of KASM Radio. He has been a member of the Cooperative for 30 years. He has served on the Cooperative's Board since 2006.

If re-elected, Rothstein believes Stearns Electric must continue to look for ways to keep members' bills reasonable. He also believes it would be worthwhile for the Co-op to watch the electric vehicle industry, and how members are using renewable energy sources, such as wind and solar, to generate their own electricity.



### **DISTRICT 5: ANTHONY (TONY) AMPE**

Tony Ampe of Crow River Township seeks re-election in District 5. Ampe currently owns and manages Ampe Farms LLC. He has been a member of the Cooperative for six years. He has served on the Cooperative's Board since 2018. He participates in the Cooperative's Interruptible Irrigator and Operation Round Up® programs.

If re-elected, Ampe believes Stearns Electric must continue to be a leader in the electric utility industry by offering affordable, reliable and clean energy. He believes the future of the industry will bring continued changes with renewable energy and new regulations, something the board should be focused on in the coming years.



### **DISTRICT 9: JEROME (JERRY) FRIES**

Jerry Fries of St. Joseph Township seeks re-election in District 9. Fries currently works at Malco Products SBC in Annandale. He has been a member of the Cooperative for 32 years. He has served on the Cooperative's Board since 2015. Fries participates in Stearns Electric's Dual Fuel, Cycled Air Conditioning, Stored Water, SolarWise and Operation Round Up® programs.

If re-elected, Fries believes Stearns Electric should continue focusing on its mission of safely providing reliable electric service, innovative energy solutions and an excellent member experience. The Cooperative should also continue to focus on safety, and embrace new technology and implement it when it makes sense, all while keeping affordable rates.

***Complete Director Candidate bios and video interviews are available at [www.stearnselectric.org](http://www.stearnselectric.org).***

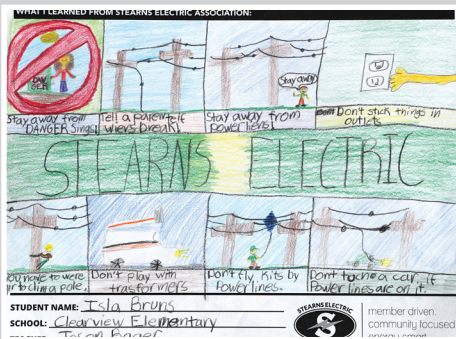


## SPRING AUTOPAY PROMOTION

All accounts enrolled in AutoPay by April 30, 2021 using a designated checking or savings account will be entered into a drawing for a chance to win one of three \$100 bill credits! Visit [www.stearnselectric.org](http://www.stearnselectric.org) for complete details.

## ENERGY EDUCATION POSTER CONTEST WINNER

Isla Bruns, a 4<sup>th</sup> grader at Clearview Elementary, won our 2021 Energy Education Poster Contest. You can view all of the posters that were submitted on our Facebook page.



*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 REMOVAL

While tree trimming is Stearns Electric's preferred corrective method, sometimes a tree removal is required. When the health of a tree is compromised by other corrective actions or the tree will remain a threat in the long run, a removal is recommended.

It's important to understand that our job is to address long-term concerns, not just immediate threats. It's not a wise use of financial resources, which come from your energy rates, to address the same problem in a couple of years.



**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

## CREAMY LEMON CHICKEN

Submitted by:  
Mary Laudénbach

### Ingredients:

2-4 boneless, skinless chicken breasts  
½ stick butter  
salt and pepper to taste  
mixed with ½ C flour  
½ C mayonnaise  
½ C sour cream  
1/8 – 1/4 C lemon juice  
1 green onion, finely chopped  
¼ C Cheddar cheese, shredded  
lemon zest (optional)  
extra-wide flat noodles (optional)

### Directions:

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Melt butter in skillet. Cut chicken breasts into strips and lightly dredge into flour mixture. Sauté chicken breast in butter until golden. Transfer chicken and any juices to a small baking dish. In a bowl, mix mayonnaise, sour cream and lemon juice well. Pour mixture over chicken and cover. Bake 20-25 minutes, or until cooked through and tender. Zest chicken with lemon if you wish, then sprinkle with cheese and green onion. Put back in oven and heat uncovered until cheese is melted. Serve with extra-wide flat noodles or however you desire. 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@stearnselectric.org](mailto:communications@stearnselectric.org) or mail to: Stearns Electric, Cooking Corner, PO BOX 816, St. Joseph, MN 56374.



## STEARNS ELECTRIC ASSOCIATION

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(800) 962-0655

[www.stearnslectric.org](http://www.stearnslectric.org)

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POSTAGE PAID**

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### 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*

OPEN

*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*



# OPERATION ROUND UP®: LEAVING A MEANINGFUL IMPACT



Our Operation Round Up® program has provided millions of dollars to local groups and organizations that are doing meaningful work in our communities. Over 75 percent of our members participate in this program by rounding up their monthly electric bill. Your small change makes a big impact for local, worthy causes.