



POWER CONNECTION

member driven. community focused. energy smart.

JUNE 2021



A CHAIN REACTION SUBSTATION UPGRADES

At Stearns Electric Association, we strive to always provide our member-consumers with reliable electricity. Many times, that means being proactive in our projects to ensure we are ahead of the needs of our members as the demand for electric load increases.

We recently completed an upgrade at our Crow Lake Substation just north of Belgrade for this exact reason. Due to load growth in the area, we upgraded the existing 7,500 kVA (kilo-volt-ampere) transformer to a new 10,000 kVA transformer. The new transformer has a top-end rating of 14,000 kVA, nearly double the base rating of the model that we upgraded!

"Although a large project like this substation transformer upgrade will not have a direct, noticeable effect to our membership at this time, we are confident knowing we are preventing

potential overload scenarios which could cause large, sustained outages," explained Manager of Engineering, James Pachan.

The project also requires the use of a large crane due to the weight of both the new and old transformers. We partnered with Landwehr Construction to assist in the move of these 30-ton, or heavier, transformers.

To make the best use of our electrical distribution resources, our work plan includes a chain reaction of these substation transformer upgrades. The Crow Lake Substation received this brand-new transformer. The transformer from Crow Lake will move to our Grove Substation, and we will continue by moving that existing transformer to the Bangor Substation. Finally, the Bangor transformer will be installed at our Zion Substation.

By the end of the summer, all of these substations will be equipped to better serve our members and their electrical needs for years to come. Each of these transformer changes is accompanied by additional upgrades and maintenance that will be completed throughout the summer.

"Each of these substation transformers was reaching their rated capacity and it worked out that each transformer in succession fulfilled the size requirement we needed for the next substation. Being able to do them in a chain like this is a much more efficient process than doing them individually," detailed Glen Kemper, Substation Operations and Technology Supervisor.

Visit our blog for additional photos and our Facebook page for a time-lapse video of the Crow Lake transformer upgrade.

CEO'S MESSAGE

COMMITMENT TO COMMUNITY

CONTINUOUS EDUCATION AND SCHOLARSHIPS



We have entered the season of summertime in Central Minnesota. A time for cabin visits and lake time; outdoor hikes and bonfires. It's also a time to celebrate! Over the course of the last month, many students within our service territory have completed school and celebrated graduation. To the recent graduates, congratulations! We wish you the best of luck in your future endeavors, whatever they may be.

.....

One of our most powerful cooperative foundations is "Commitment to Community". Stearns Electric Association demonstrates part of its commitment to our local communities through continuous education and our annual scholarship program.

As a local electric utility provider, Stearns Electric gets asked to share more about what we do with local high school and college groups. In the past, we have provided tours and information on our EnergyWise® programs with students from St. Cloud Technical and Community College, presented on the Cooperative difference to students at the College of St. Benedict, St. John's University and Ridgewater College. We also meet once a year to present information on the Cooperative to high school students involved in the Stearns West CEO group.

We get many requests to share our Cooperative story with schools, student groups and community programs throughout the area. We review each request on a case-by-case basis and help when we can.

We consistently review our annual programming and continue to provide energy education throughout the community through programs like our 4th-grade classroom demonstrations and Member Engagement Group, and community event sponsorships like Stearns County Breakfast on the Farm.

At the Cooperative, we are also proud to sponsor annual youth scholarships to students throughout our service territory and beyond. The Stearns Electric Association Scholarship Program is made possible by member contributions to Stearns Electric's Operation Round Up® program. Every year, we award both high school and college scholarships to selected recipients who meet the required criteria.

Our youth are the future of our region. Having a well-educated and well-trained workforce is important to assure that our communities continue to be vibrant and prosperous.

COLLEGE SCHOLARSHIPS

Every July through the Operation Round Up® program, we provide \$1,000 to each of the following schools for students studying specific programs. Preference is given to members of Stearns Electric whenever possible.

- St. Cloud Technical and Community College – electrician program
- Minnesota State Community and Technical College, Wadena – electrical line worker program
- Minnesota West Community

and Technical College, Jackson – electrical line worker program

- Dakota County Technical College – electrical line worker program
- Ridgewater College – electrician program

HIGH SCHOOL SCHOLARSHIPS

Stearns Electric also awards \$1,000 scholarships on a rotating basis to the 21 local high schools within our service territory annually. The Stearns Electric Scholarship Program is fully funded by Stearns Electric members through the Cooperative's Operation Round Up® program.

Applicants must be a high school senior enrolled at one of the qualifying local high schools for the current year and must plan to pursue some sort of secondary education. Additionally, the applicant's parent or guardian must be a Stearns Electric member in their primary residence.

Congratulations to the 2021 winners:

- **Belgrade-Brooten-Elrosa High School:** Marie Kaiser, Belgrade
- **Cathedral High School:** Roman Voss, Richmond
- **ROCORI High School:** Chloe Lieser, Cold Spring
- **Sauk Rapids-Rice High School:** Aaron Neumann, St. Augusta

Next year, the eligible high schools are Long Prairie-Grey Eagle High School; Little Falls High School; St. Cloud Technical High School; and St. John's Preparatory School.

2021 YOUTH TOUR SCHOLARSHIP

Due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the annual NRECA Youth Tour to Washington, D.C.

GET INVOLVED

MEMBER ENGAGEMENT GROUP (MEG) SEEKING MEMBERS

Stearns Electric is looking for members to serve on the Cooperative's Member Engagement Group. The MEG gives members a chance to learn more about the Cooperative and our 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. Members interested should apply by July 16.

Apply online at www.stearnslectric.org. If you have any questions, call our office during regular business hours at (800) 962-0655 or email the MEG Coordinator at communications@stearnslectric.org.

was canceled in both 2020 and 2021. Every year, Stearns Electric sponsors one student to attend as a representative for our Cooperative. Unfortunately, our selected Youth Tour student, Jake Manske, Eden Valley-Watkins High School, was unable to attend.



In early May, we presented Jake with a \$1,000 scholarship. He plans to study business and political science at Bethel University beginning this fall. Congratulations, Jake!

NORTHERN CO-OP SCHOLARSHIPS

Additionally, Stearns Electric also participates in the Northern

Cooperative Foundation. Through this organization, scholarships are awarded annually to students who are members 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 this year's winners:

- **Grace Acheson, Cold Spring**
- **Carson Bergquist, Melrose**
- **Brian Beutz, Albany**
- **Haden Chuba, Swanville**
- **Seth Crocker, Little Falls**
- **Simon Kroll, Royalton**
- **Katie Orth, Randall**
- **Brody Uhlenkamp, Osakis**
- Kenna Salo, New York Mills
- Colby Schertler, Deer Creek

Bolded recipients are members of Stearns Electric.

Sincerely,

Robin C. Doege
Chief Executive Officer (CEO)

BOARD MEETING

The regular meeting of the Board of Directors of Stearns Electric Association was called to order on April 29, 2021, at 1:00 p.m. at the St. Joseph office of Stearns Electric Association.

Manager of Finance Cindy Anderson reviewed the March 2021 financial statement. The year-to-date gross margin is below budget due to a nearly three percent decrease in kWh sold.

In an effort to learn more about beneficial energy solutions specific to the solar industry, Ralph Kaehler and Paul Hahn of Novel Energy Solutions talked about the fundamentals of the solar industry in addition to the technology and economics of customized solar options available to homeowners and businesses.

The Operations report showed that the first quarter of 2021 Right-of-Way clearing is under budget and that outdoor projects are moving along quite well this year due to the weather.

VP of Engineering and Operations Matt O'Shea reported that the CAIDI measurement (average minutes per outage) within the Reliability report had increased due to a couple of localized lightning and wind events within a specific area of the membership. In an effort to decrease the length of time members are out of power, a neighborhood review and the addition of fault indicators are in process. This month's focused discussion was the Construction Work Plan progress.

Director Lonnie Iverson received a 10-year anniversary award for serving on the Cooperative's Board of Directors. President Rothstein also received an anniversary award for his 15 years of service to the Board.

Director Jerry Fries received his NRECA Director Gold training certification. The Director Gold credential recognizes directors committed to continuing their education beyond the initial CCD (Credentialed Cooperative Director) and BLC (Board Leadership Certificate). This training is for directors who desire a tangible credential that demonstrates their ongoing commitment to advancing their knowledge and does require ongoing training to maintain the certification. Director Fries is the first in the history of Stearns Electric to earn the certification.

NEXT BOARD MEETING

July 29, 2021



Whether you're taking over the family farm or building your dream home, Stearns Electric Association is proud to provide the electricity you need and expect. Since 1937, our Cooperative has been powering our residential member-consumers in homes both old and new.

Stearns Electric Association serves over 27,000 member-consumers including residential, agricultural, and large 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.

As technology continues to improve and adapt to our changing wants and needs, we find ourselves using more electricity than ever before. At Stearns Electric Association, we want you to have the electricity you have come to expect. But we know this convenience comes at a price. That's why we offer energy-efficient equipment and rebates, for both new construction and old-to-new retrofit projects, for members who are looking to manage their electricity use and save money.

THE OLD

POWERING YOU THROUGH THE OLD

John and Kristie Schiffler always knew they wanted to take over the family farm in Albany. Three years ago, when they purchased the dairy side of the business, John became a fourth-generation owner. Today, John's dad is still involved in the day-to-day operations, and John and Kristie's five children also help out on the farm.

Farming and agriculture have changed significantly over the years. John and Kristie knew they needed to make some upgrades and retrofits to their farm operation in order to grow sustainably into the future.

"Five years ago, we started researching and planning a robotic milking system for the dairy side of our operation," John explained. "We spent a lot of time designing our new dairy barn."

The Schifflers made several energy-efficient choices to not only help them save energy and money in their farming operation over the long-term but also improve the



THE NEW

comfort of the dairy cows year-round, which leads to better overall milk production.

"When building the new barn, we took advantage of several energy rebates available through Stearns Electric," John said. "Those decisions included installing LED lights and four robotic milking stalls in the barn. Additionally, the entire barn is temperature controlled, which keeps the cows cooler in the hot Minnesota summers and warmer in the cold Minnesota winters. We will soon install a new manure pit, too."

Despite the updated technology and equipment available, some things on the farm have stayed the same.

"The overall tasks haven't really changed much on the farm over the years, but new technology adjusts the way we complete those tasks. For instance, instead of emptying a manure pit every four days, our new manure pit will allow us to empty it only once per year," John shared. "Likewise, even though the robot is milking cows now, we still have to manage the herd and troubleshoot problems when they arise."

"Overall, I spend less time up in the barn and more time with my family," he concluded. "I also get an extra hour of sleep, and am able to attend my kids' sporting events at night, now that I don't have to milk the cows every morning and evening."



Bo Schiffler petting one of the family farm's newest calves.

POWERING YOU THROUGH THE NEW

Nathan and Tracie Lynnes moved into their newly constructed home in Long Prairie last June. They now have several acres of undeveloped land surrounding their dream house.

"We are really looking forward to having 21 acres to enjoy out here in rural Minnesota," Tracie said. "We enjoy hiking and being in nature in our free time, and our new home location reminds us of the rolling landscape we enjoy along Minnesota's North Shore."

Many decisions go into building a new home – from purchasing land and designing a floor plan, all the way down to deciding on fixtures and finishes. From an efficiency perspective, building a new home is also an opportunity to consider making energy-efficient upgrades that can save both energy and money.

"In our previous home, we were enrolled on the Dual Fuel program, so we were somewhat familiar with Stearns Electric's EnergyWise programs," Nathan explained. "As we built our new home, I looked at what was available for additional rebates

through the Co-op. We wanted to make efficient choices that would pay us back over the next few years."

Some of those energy-efficient choices the Lynnes' made were to install an energy-saving Air Source Heat Pump (ASHP), an electric plenum heater with a propane backup, and an ASHP water heater. In addition to rebates provided by Stearns Electric for installing the equipment, the Lynnes' also qualified for the EnergyWise electricity rate, which is lower than the Co-op's standard rate for residential consumers.

"I work outside all day long, all year round. When I get home, I want the heat on in the winter and air conditioning on in the summer," Nathan continued. "We knew we would be using a year-round system. I wanted to move toward electric systems because I've seen what happens to propane prices in the middle of a very cold winter. With the erratic prices of propane, I knew the price of electricity was more stable."

Although they are saving both energy and money by making these electric choices, the Lynnes' can't even tell a difference compared to the gas counterparts they were accustomed to.

"In our first summer in our new home, we didn't even notice the temperature changes with the air source heat pump," Nathan explained.

"The cost of electricity is already lower in our new house than the last house we lived in," Tracie concluded. "And now, we have even more items that use electricity."

Whether you're building a brand new home or retrofitting the 100-year old barn, making energy efficient upgrades are a win-win for both you and Stearns Electric. After all, it's your power. Our mission is to help you use it wisely.

ENERGY EFFICIENCY TIP OF THE MONTH

SHOW YOUR AC SOME LOVE!

A dirty filter causes your air conditioner to work harder than necessary. Change your air filter every month (or every two months) to prevent dust buildup, which can lead to even bigger problems.

ELECTRICAL SAFETY CHECKUP



CALL A PRO

If your lights are flickering, your circuits are tripped frequently, you see sparks or smell burning or rubbery odors, it's time to call an electrician. These warnings signal a larger problem that needs to be addressed at the source quickly rather than waiting it out or a DIY solution.



LIKE US ON FACEBOOK

www.facebook.com/stearnslectric

SAFETY FOR LIFE

THINKING OF LANDSCAPING AROUND YOUR TRANSFORMER OR JUNCTION BOX? **THINK AGAIN.**

In many residential developments and neighborhoods, you'll find transformers and junction boxes (the green box shown in the pictures below). These boxes are integral to the underground electrical system that provides electricity to the homes or businesses around them. These boxes are property of Stearns Electric Association. The Cooperative legally has access to the land the box is on, as well as the land around it, and is responsible for the maintenance of these boxes.

Before you try to cover them up, please know that planting shrubs, bushes, trees or flowers around these transformers and junction boxes, or covering them up in any way, is prohibited in order to keep our line crews safe and help ensure reliability of our electrical distribution system. As a general rule, people who live near these boxes may not plant or place anything within 10 feet of the front of the box and within 5 feet of the sides and back of the box. If there are plants or objects placed within the restricted area around the boxes, they must be removed. Co-op employees may remove obstructions if needed. If you need to dig in order to remove fixtures placed around transformer or junction boxes, please call Gopher State One Call at 811 prior to digging to avoid injury or accidents.



While we understand that these boxes may be considered eyesores, they are necessary to power homes. Transformer and junction boxes allow power lines to be placed underground as opposed to on poles above the ground. **Please do not tamper with the box in order to change the appearance. They can't be painted, enclosed or hidden by vegetation.** If you have any questions or concerns about these transformers or junction boxes, please call us at (800) 962-0655.

MEMBER APPRECIATION



Mark your calendars now and join us from 9-11 a.m. for our drive-through member appreciation Donut Dash on Saturday, August 14, 2021 at the Freeport Community Center.

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.

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 throughout our service territory, and milk from Stony Creek Dairy. (One box of donuts per vehicle, please.)

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 supplies. Offer will be available while supplies last.*

NEWS

AIR SOURCE HEAT PUMP PROMO

Stearns Electric members can receive up to \$2,000 in rebates when they install a qualifying, air source heat pump and enroll in our EnergyWise® Dual Fuel and Cycled Air Conditioning programs for the first time. Learn more at www.stearnsselectric.org or call our Member Services team at (800) 962-0655 during business hours.

OFFICES CLOSED

Stearns Electric offices will be closed on Monday, July 5 in observance of Independence Day. Please call (800) 962-0655 in the event of an outage or an emergency.

POWER POLE INSPECTIONS

This summer, Stearns Electric's contractor STAR Energy Services will conduct utility pole testing in the Cooperative's service territory. This is part of our ongoing efforts to maintain a safe and reliable distribution system. If crews will be working in your area, you will receive an automated phone call from Stearns Electric Association. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact us during regular 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.

ASSESSMENT

Before any Right-of-Way clearing is completed, Stearns Electric assesses the distribution system. A certified arborist looks for dead or dying trees, leaning trees, cankers and canker-rots, and animal or mechanical damage to identify hazard trees.

Vegetation type, location, growth factors, property aesthetics and more are considered when determining corrective action for Right-of-Way concerns. Corrective action is documented and communicated before work is completed.



COMMUNICATION // ASSESSMENT // COLLABORATION

Trees and branches that come in contact with power lines can be potential fire hazards, trigger power outages and endanger lives.

COOKING CORNER

MINT THREE-LAYER BROWNIES

Submitted by: Savannah Nelles



Ingredients:

Family size brownie mix of your choice
3 C powdered sugar
2 1/2 sticks of margarine
2-3 tsp milk
3 tsp peppermint extract
1 1/2 C chocolate chips

Directions:

Mix the family size browning mix of your choice as directed. Spread on a greased 11x17" pan and bake for 10-15 minutes at the temperature recommended on the box. Let cool. When you are ready for the second layer, mix 3 C powdered sugar, 1 1/2 sticks of margarine, 2-3 tsp milk and 3 tsp peppermint extract. Spread this mixture on brownies and chill until cool. When you are ready for the third layer, melt 1 stick of margarine and 1 1/2 C chocolate chips in a double broiler. Cool and spread onto brownies. Refrigerate and serve. 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 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

**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

- TONY AMPE
President, District 5
- ERIC PETERSON
Vice President, District 8
- STEVE NOTCH
Secretary/Treasurer, District 6
- GREG BLAINE
District 1
- ARLYN LAWRENZ
District 2
- MICHAEL CRAMER
District 3
- RANDY ROTHSTEIN
District 4
- LONNIE IVERSON
District 7
- 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



ADOPT-A-HIGHWAY: CULTIVATING COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Nine years ago, Stearns Electric adopted a two-mile section of highway south of Albany. Twice a year, employee volunteers clean this section of highway, helping to beautify our local service territory and show concern for our community.

