



# POWER CONNECTION

member driven. community focused. energy smart.

AUGUST 2021

## MEMBER SPOTLIGHT: HEMKER PARK & ZOO



***Tucked back in the woods outside of Freeport lays one of Central Minnesota's best kept secrets – Hemker Park & Zoo. Amongst the backdrop of corn, soybeans and silos, visitors can now jump on an all-new electric tram to learn more about exotic animals like penguins and zebras and giraffes, oh my!***

What started out as a small hobby farm quickly grew into something so much more. "We never planned on a zoo when we first started. My late husband, Mark, had some waterfowl when we bought the property back in 1977, so our first building was a duck barn," Joan Hemker, owner of Hemker Park & Zoo, recalled. "Then we happened to get some penguins and things escalated."

When the penguins arrived, word spread quickly and the Hemkers started receiving calls from local boy and girl scout troops looking to learn more about the unique animals.

"Since the beginning of our operation, we have always put our focus on education, first and foremost," Hemker said. "We started with small, private educational sessions with the boy and girl scout troops. Soon after, we opened to the public for scheduled groups. We charged \$1 admission for these organized educational tours where people could learn more about the environment and eco-system, and see the animals – waterfowl, deer and penguins at the time."

Since the early days, the zoo operation has grown immensely. Today, there are over 50 different animal species from around the world that people can learn about when they visit Hemker Park & Zoo. Joan is still very much involved, but the day-to-day operations are managed by Joan and Mark's four children and their families.

"Education is still our number one priority, and we are committed to teaching visitors about the endangered and threatened animals that live at our zoo," she said. "Our goal is to show those who visit about the importance of taking care of our environment so these animals are around for generations to come."

*Continued on page 6.*

## CEO'S MESSAGE

# POWER SUPPLY TRANSFORMATION CONTINUES



***Great River Energy (GRE), Stearns Electric Association's wholesale power provider, recently announced an agreement to sell Coal Creek Station power plant to Rainbow Energy Center. The CEO Column for this month is a GRE news release from GRE President and CEO David Saggau regarding this update. Please note, the sale of Coal Creek Station and the high voltage direct current system is very dynamic with many steps involved in the process. Therefore, future adjustments and changes to the information below are possible.***

Great River Energy reached an agreement to sell the Coal Creek Station power plant to Rainbow Energy Center, LLC. The sale of Coal Creek Station will avert the plant's closure, which was scheduled for the second half of 2022.

Rainbow Energy Center will purchase and operate the 1,151-megawatt (MW) power plant using current plant employees it hires. The company also plans to develop carbon capture and storage capabilities at Coal Creek Station.

"We are excited for what the future holds for our North Dakota employees and the communities surrounding Coal Creek Station," said Great River Energy President and Chief Executive Officer David Saggau.

Nexus Line, LLC has agreed to purchase from Great River Energy the high voltage direct current (HVDC) transmission system that connects central North Dakota to the Twin Cities area of Minnesota. Great River Energy will continue to operate and maintain the HVDC system under a 10-year contract with Nexus Line.

Rainbow Energy Center and Nexus Line are affiliates of Rainbow Energy Marketing Corp. of Bismarck, North Dakota.

"The successful implementation of carbon capture and storage is central to our plans at Coal Creek Station," said Rainbow Energy Marketing Corp. President Stacy L. Tschider. "As a privately held company, we are uniquely positioned to continue the successful legacy that Great River Energy and its employees have established in North Dakota."

Rainbow Energy Center is developing plans to add new wind generation to the HVDC transmission system that would increase renewable energy deliveries to Minnesota.

Following the sale of Coal Creek Station, Great River Energy will have a power purchase agreement with Rainbow Energy Center. Great River Energy will purchase 1,050 megawatts of power from Rainbow Energy Center for approximately two years, followed by 300 megawatts for approximately eight years.

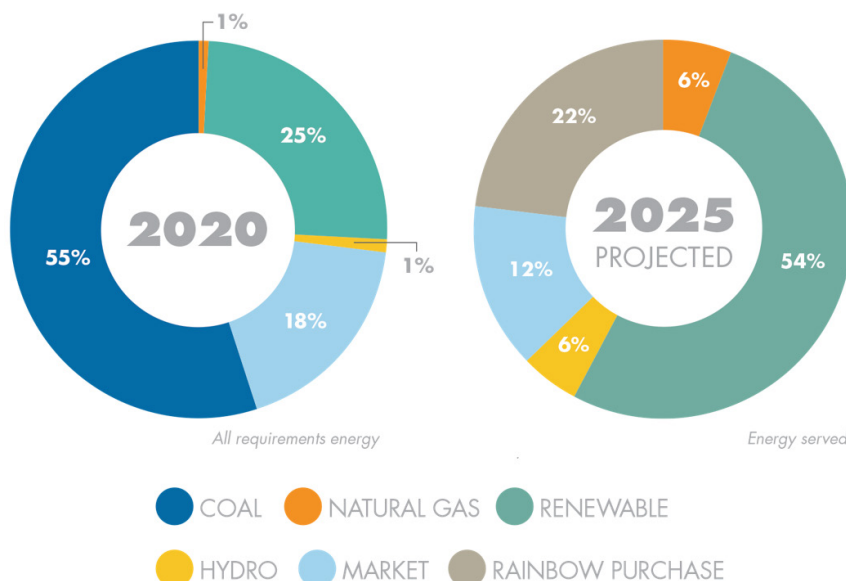
The power purchase agreement provides a cost-effective and appropriately sized resource for Great River Energy's member-owners that will serve as a reliable steppingstone as Great River Energy transitions its power supply. Great River Energy estimates the transaction will save member-owners \$130 million compared to shutting down the plant.

"We are building a power supply portfolio that will serve our member-owner cooperatives with clean, affordable and reliable energy for decades," said Saggau. The cooperative will add 900 MW of wind energy by the end of 2023 and remains on track to meet Minnesota's 80% carbon dioxide reduction goal ahead of schedule.

The sale of Coal Creek Station and the HVDC system is expected to close later this year, after required approvals are obtained.

*Sincerely,*

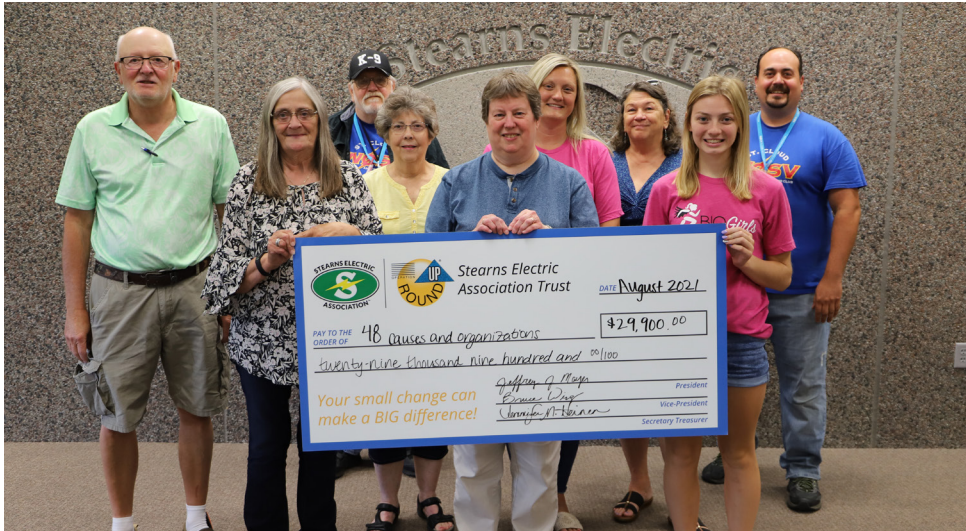
**Robin C. Doege**  
Chief Executive Officer (CEO)





## SMALL CHANGE ADDS UP

### OPERATION ROUND UP PROGRAM AWARDS \$29,900



***Stearns Electric's Operation Round Up® program distributed \$29,900 to 48 area organizations and charitable causes in July. A list of area organizations receiving funds can be viewed at [www.stearnslectric.org](http://www.stearnslectric.org).***

## SAFETY FOR LIFE

### DEMO SHOWS FIRST RESPONDERS THE IMPORTANCE OF SAFETY



***On July 21, Stearns Electric hosted the Connexus Energy Safety Demonstration for area emergency responders. Over 85 people from area fire and police departments attended the event.***

Every other year, Stearns Electric partners with our fellow co-op, Connexus Energy, to educate emergency responders on the importance of being safe when responding to incidents involving high voltage electricity, such as equipment in power lines and vehicle accidents. The presentation uses high voltage electricity to demonstrate the dangers of electricity and educates attendees on proper steps to take to stay safe.

Thank you to Terry and Steve from Connexus Energy for the great presentation, and thank you to everyone who attended.

## BOARD MEETING

The regular meeting of the Board of Directors of Stearns Electric Association was called to order on June 24, 2021 at 12:17 p.m. at the St. Joseph office of Stearns Electric Association.

Manager of Finance Cindy Anderson reviewed the May 2021 financial statement. Year-to-date gross margin is below budget primarily due to a (2.3%) decrease in KWH's sold.

Attorney Scott Dymoke presented his annual fiduciary review. The presentation outlined the importance of directors and staff acting in the best interest of the Cooperative and how to avoid a potential conflict of interest.

CEO Robin Doege provided an overview of the upcoming strategic plan, GRE member meetings and NSP pilot project that tested the Cooperative's ability to save money during peak power usage.

The newest NRECA Member Survey results were presented. The results show that the Stearns Electric's overall satisfaction rating is nearly excellent with a score of 8.94. The key drivers of satisfaction in order of importance are (1) Social Responsibility (environmental concerns, helping members be more energy efficient, community support, and sharing relevant safety messages); (2) Electric Service (minimizing outages and blinks, restoring power quickly, proactive measures to reduce outages, resolving issues/problems, keeping members informed); (3) Employees (highly trained, respectful employees, knowledgeable professionals that provided timely responses).

The Reliability report was reviewed noting that storm damage has been minimal.

The IT department has been assisting with GRE integration for the new Demand Response Units.

### NEXT BOARD MEETING

September 23, 2021





## THE STORM



## THE CLEAR

***Electricity offers many everyday conveniences – lighting for homes, appliances for cooking, televisions, game consoles and tablets for entertainment, just to name a few. But when the power goes out, so does our team of dedicated line workers who work tirelessly to restore electricity during outages. Since 1937, Stearns Electric Association has been powering our member-consumers through the storm and the clear.***

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.

Providing consistent and reliable electricity would be impossible without the talented group of employees at Stearns Electric. During normal working hours, our engineering and operations (E & O) departments work together to install new electrical services, complete projects, clear Right-of-Way and manage the annual Cooperative

work plan. But when storms arise and outages happen, the work shifts, and all focus is placed on restoring outages for all members.

### POWERING YOU THROUGH THE STORM

Outages can happen at any time of the year in any condition – day, night, clear skies, thunderstorms, or blizzards. But many outages occur in the summertime.

Large storms can wreak havoc on the electrical distribution system, causing widespread outages and power line damage that takes hours, or sometimes even days, to repair.

“When strong storms roll through our service territory, we know we will be out for a while making repairs to restore outages,” Bob Barutt, line crew chief, explained. “And you never know what you’re going to face after a storm.”

“We know when it storms, the damage will be widespread and usually take many hours, or even days, to get power fully restored,” Darwin McGrane, line crew chief, said. “When you have trees down on

power lines, you have to clear those trees before you can even access the power lines.”

Each of the linemen remember different summer storms that caused widespread damage to the Cooperative’s distribution system.

“In 2003 or 2004, over 4th of July weekend, it was hot, miserable and sticky. We worked for multiple days,” McGrane recalled. “I remember getting home at the end of my 16-hour shifts, sleeping for a few hours and heading back into work until all of the outages were restored.”

“I’ve been a part of many major outages, the worst one actually was in the winter. But the most recent large outage occurred during the storms that came through the area in the summer of 2016,” Barutt explained. “I was not on-call that weekend but got called in late to help repair the extensive damage. We changed out a lot of power poles that weekend.”

“We know it’s not enjoyable to be without power, especially on those hot summer days. We encourage

you to be patient with us though," McGrane stated. "Oftentimes, we have to come from our homes, get to the shop, then get our trucks and supplies. We then need to patrol the lines to find the outage cause, which takes time. We do our best working as quickly and safely as possible."

When large outages happen, a team of individuals throughout the Cooperative work behind the scenes to help respond.

"When outage calls come in during working hours, our phones are ringing constantly. We are taking outage calls, putting notes into our outage system for line crews and making sure the outage map is as up-to-date as possible," Barb Smed, E & O support specialist, said. "The more information we can share with line crews, the easier it is for them to identify and locate the cause, or causes, of the outage."

"We do the best we can. We really want members to have their power restored as quickly as possible," Sharon Wessel, E & O support specialist, added.

"We enjoy the challenge that comes with determining the cause of each outage and restoring the power to members," McGrane explained.

### POWERING YOU THROUGH THE CLEAR

Line workers might be top-of-mind for many members when their power goes out. But what does a typical day look like when there are no power outages?

Stearns Electric employs 22 linemen year-round. Each line crew is made up of two to five linemen, including a line crew chief. Each crew specializes in a specific area like underground lines, overhead lines or maintenance.

"We set a work schedule, usually week-by-week, for every line crew based upon the Cooperative's annual work plan," Jake Dooner, line superintendent explained. "However, it adjusts day-by-day based on many

factors including outages, weather, employee leave and contractor schedules."

To maintain electrical distribution system reliability, there are always projects happening.

"There is no lack of work," Barutt said. "During normal working conditions, some of our summer projects involve upgrading or installing new services, and repairing underground faults, among other projects. In the winter, we do much of the same, but can't complete the underground work easily as the ground is frozen. Instead, line crews use infrared technology to assess underground cable and patrol the power lines looking for needed repairs."

Additionally, the E & O team works behind the scenes to handle incoming new electric service and service alteration requests, schedule appointments for our design engineers, and ensure the Cooperative's meters and maps are communicating effectively.

"We take a lot of maintenance calls from members and troubleshoot their questions. Once we have an idea of what is going on with their electric service, we can connect them to the appropriate Cooperative department," Wessel explained.

At the end of the day, all Cooperative employees take pride in what they do and enjoy working on behalf of the members.

"We enjoy what we do and always appreciate the 'thank you's' that come in from members. Getting recognized for our work is always nice, even if we are just doing our normal jobs," Barutt concluded.

Through the storm or the clear, Stearns Electric is proud to serve members all day, every day, year-round.

## ENERGY EFFICIENCY TIP OF THE MONTH

### KNOW THE DIFFERENCE

*Lumens measure the amount of light produced by the bulb. Watts measure energy consumption. Energy-saving LEDs come in a variety of colors and brightness levels and last 15-25 times longer than incandescent bulbs.*

## ELECTRICAL SAFETY CHECKUP

### LOOK UP AND LIVE

*Watch for overhead power lines every time you use a ladder, work on roofs, trees, or carry long tools or loads. It's also smart to keep kites, drones and metallic balloons away from power lines.*



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# HEMKER PARK & ZOO CONTINUED



## GUARDIANS OF CONSERVATION

One of the newest initiatives at Hemker Park & Zoo is the Guardians of Conservation organization. This non-profit was created to support endangered animal conservation and education efforts both locally throughout Hemker Park & Zoo and around the world.

The non-profit has already helped educate zoo guests on koi fish and donated to the International Rhino Foundation to help protect rhinoceroses from poachers.

"Guardians of Conservation is working to guide the next generation down a lifelong path of animal conservation by bringing the world to their fingertips. Our younger generation may never get to see a rhino, giraffes, bontebok, or Alpine ibex as their populations are dwindling," Hemker said. "We find this very disturbing and have created this non-profit to help change that."

## BEHIND THE SCENES

What does it take to operate a zoo in Central Minnesota? Food, electricity, and more food, to start.

Feeding the animals is no easy task. The annual grocery list for Hemker Park & Zoo includes the following:

- 140,000 pounds of pellet
- 122,000 pounds of hay/alfalfa
- 240,000 mealworms
- 27,250 pounds of produce, including romaine lettuce for the daily giraffe feedings
- 24,600 mice
- 4,500 pounds of bananas

"We get most of our supplies from local grocery suppliers, farmers and mills," Hemker said. "Some items need to be specially ordered, such as the ocean fish from Iceland that the penguins eat."

"Some of our food is ordered in bulk supply a few times per year, such as the ocean fish. Other supplies, such as fresh produce, need proper storage," Hemker said. "That's one of the reasons why reliable electricity is so important to the zoo. We need cold storage and freezers to keep these items fresh for our animals to enjoy."

Reliable electricity proves even more important in the winter. Many animals at Hemker Park & Zoo come from warmer climates, but all the animals reside in Freeport, Minnesota year-round.

"Though many of our animals can be outside during the winter months, at least occasionally, some cannot. We need to keep all of our animals comfortable and cozy in Minnesota's harshest conditions," Hemker explained.

In order to keep animals like the giraffes and monkeys warm throughout the wintertime, Hemker Park & Zoo relies on in-floor heat in their buildings, in addition to traditional furnaces. Likewise, the penguins have special electrical lighting installed in their building, which helps stimulate breeding in the winter.

"Our electricity bills are very high during the winter months, but it's extremely important to keep our animals comfortable," she said.

## NEW ALL-ELECTRIC TRAM

Stearns Electric recently partnered with Hemker Park & Zoo to bring a new, all-

electric tram to the facility.

"We get visitors from all walks of life at Hemker Zoo. With such a large space, it can be challenging for some of our visitors to enjoy all the areas of the zoo. The new electric tram helps change that," Hemker explained. "The two-cart tram can accommodate over 15 passengers at once and provides handicap accessibility for those who need it. And since the tram is electric, it provides a smooth, quiet ride for those on-board, which is especially nice for our elderly visitors."

"Stearns Electric Association is committed to helping our member-consumers make efficient energy upgrades that benefit their business operations. When Hemker Park & Zoo approached us with their idea to purchase an all-electric tram, we were very excited to be a part of this new electric vehicle project," John Pantzke, Stearns Electric's Business Development Representative, said. "We are happy to partner with our wholesale power provider, Great River Energy, to provide a rebate to Hemker Zoo for this project, and even more proud to provide the electricity needed to charge the tram."

"Hemker Park & Zoo is a wonderful asset to Central Minnesota. We know this tram will provide a great benefit not only to the zoo, but also to many of our area community members who visit the zoo each year," Stearns Electric CEO Robin Doege said.

All visitors can now take a ride on the tram to learn even more about the animals residing at Hemker Park & Zoo. Visit [www.hemkerzoo.com](http://www.hemkerzoo.com) to learn more.

## NEWS

### OFFICES CLOSED FOR LABOR DAY

The Stearns Electric offices will be closed on Monday, September 6 in observance of Labor Day. If you experience an outage during the holiday, please call us at (800) 962-0655 or report your outage on SmartHub. Line crews are on call 24/7 to respond to any emergency situation.

### 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.stearnslectric.org](http://www.stearnslectric.org) or call our Energy Services team 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.*

### LEGAL REQUIREMENT

Stearns Electric is required by the State of Minnesota's adopted National Electric Safety Code to maintain vegetation that may interfere with overhead power lines. The Cooperative strives to keep power lines clear up to 10 feet on either side of the line in order to provide safe and reliable power.

Thank you for your cooperation to help us improve the safety, reliability and cost of your electric service.



// RIGHT-OF-WAY CLEARING IS A LEGAL REQUIREMENT //

*Even though it's our right and responsibility to clear Right-of-Way, we are willing to work with members to find the best solution whenever possible.*

## COOKING CORNER

### SURPRISE CARROT CAKE

Submitted by:  
Kimberly Murphy Ellingboe



#### Ingredients:

##### CAKE

3 C shredded carrots  
1 ¾ C sugar  
1 C oil  
3 eggs  
2 C flour  
2 tsp baking soda  
2 tsp cinnamon  
1 tsp salt

##### FILLING

8 oz cream cheese, softened  
¼ C sugar  
1 egg

##### FROSTING

8 oz cream cheese, softened  
¼ C butter, softened  
2 tsp vanilla  
4 C powdered sugar

#### Directions:

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. In a large bowl, beat the carrots, sugar, oil and eggs until well blended. In a second large bowl, combine the flour, baking soda, cinnamon and salt; gradually beat into carrot mixture until blended. Pour half of the batter into a greased Bundt pan. In a small bowl, beat the filling ingredients together. Once mixed, spoon mixture over the batter in the Bundt pan and top with remaining cake batter. Bake for 55-60 minutes. Cool completely. For frosting, beat cream cheese, butter and vanilla until fluffy. Gradually add powdered sugar until smooth. Frost cake after it has completely cooled. Refrigerate for 30 minutes before serving. 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.stearnslectric.org](http://www.stearnslectric.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.

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# SHARE OUR BLESSINGS: STRENGTHENING HUMAN CONNECTION



*Our employees don't just work at Stearns Electric - they call our communities home. During the annual 'Share Our Blessings' drive, employees contribute monetary gifts to those in need. In 2021, a portion of the donations came from an employee dunk tank event. All funds raised are gifted to employee-nominated individuals or families in Central Minnesota.*