



# POWER CONNECTION

member driven. community focused. energy smart.

OCTOBER 2021



## ON TIME EVERY TIME

SET IT AND FORGET IT

**SIGN UP BY NOVEMBER 30, 2021  
FOR A CHANCE TO WIN A BILL CREDIT!**

***AutoPay is free, secure and guarantees your payment will be made on time. After the initial set-up, you won't have to spend any time paying your Stearns Electric Association bill each month.***

You'll have peace of mind knowing you will never have to pay a late fee or worry about a misplaced bill. If you like to keep a paper trail, no problem. With AutoPay, you can still receive copies of your monthly bills online or in the mail.

With AutoPay, you can have your bill payment automatically electronically transferred from your designated checking account or savings account, debit card\* or major credit card\* FREE of charge. (\*VISA, MasterCard, American Express or Discover).

### FOR YOUR CHANCE TO WIN

Stearns Electric is giving away one \$500, two \$250 and two \$100 bill credits to members signed up for AutoPay by November 30<sup>th</sup>. To qualify, you must be currently enrolled in AutoPay or sign up by the deadline using a designated checking or savings account.

### HOW DO I APPLY FOR THE AUTOMATIC PAYMENT PLAN?

**Online:** The easiest way to get started is to enroll online through SmartHub. Visit [www.stearnselectric.org](http://www.stearnselectric.org) to sign up for, or log into, SmartHub.

**By Mail:** If you prefer not to use SmartHub, you can enroll by mail by completing the form available on your recent bill insert or by printing the form online.

- Fill out your financial institution's name, address and phone number on the lines provided.
- If your payment is to be deducted from a checking account, enclose a blank check. Write VOID across it. DO NOT SIGN IT. If your payment is to be deducted from a savings account, enclose a deposit slip that has your account number on it.
- Sign, date and return the form to the Cooperative.

**By Phone:** Simply call SecurePay at (855) 386-9908 and follow the instructions to enroll in recurring payments.

Please continue to pay your bill in your usual way until your bill indicates that the balance will be automatically paid.

## CEO'S MESSAGE

# IT'S A MATTER OF (CO-OP!) PRINCIPLES



***ACE Hardware, State Farm, REI, Land O'Lakes and Stearns Electric Association all share something in common: we're all cooperatives.***

.....

All cooperatives, no matter what industry they belong to, adhere to the same set of seven principles that reflect our core values of honesty, transparency, equity, inclusiveness and service to the greater community good:

1. Voluntary and Open Membership
2. Democratic Member Control
3. Members' Economic Participation
4. Autonomy and Independence
5. Education, Training and Information
6. Cooperation Among Cooperatives
7. Concern for Community

When it comes to the electric utility sector, rural electric cooperatives, such as Stearns Electric, differ from both investor-owned and municipal electric utilities in several ways. Investor-owned utilities typically provide electricity in urban and suburban areas. Municipal utilities, owned by the city, provide electric service within that city. Rural electric cooperatives, however, provide electricity where investor-owned and municipal utilities do not - primarily in sparsely populated rural areas. Rural electric co-ops are also owned by the membership.

October is National Co-op Month, so this is the perfect time to reflect on a few of the Cooperative principles that have stood the test of time and also provide a framework for the future.

### **VOLUNTARY AND OPEN MEMBERSHIP**

Just like all co-ops, Stearns Electric was created out of necessity - to meet a need that would have been otherwise unmet in our community. In 1937, a

group of neighbors banded together and organized our electric co-op so everyone in our community could benefit. By joining Stearns Electric, rural farmers could get electricity brought to their farms. Neighbors worked together for the benefit of the whole community, and the newly established electric lines helped power economic opportunity in our community.

Though many of us have come to expect reliable and dependable electricity since then, key parts of the Cooperative's heritage remain - the focus on our mission and serving the greater good. In this, we include everyone to improve the quality of life and economic opportunity for the entire community. Membership is open to everyone in our service territory, regardless of race, religion, age, disability, gender identity, language, political perspective or socioeconomic status.

### **DEMOCRATIC MEMBER CONTROL**

Stearns Electric is well suited to meet the needs of our members because we are locally governed by a board of directors, with one representative from each of our nine Cooperative districts. Each of our member-owners gets a voice and a vote in how the Co-op is run, and each voice and vote are equal.

We continually seek the input of all of our member-consumers and encourage you to weigh in on important Co-op issues and participate in the annual election.

### **MEMBERS' ECONOMIC PARTICIPATION**

As an electric utility, our mission is to safely provide reliable and affordable energy to our members. Members contribute equitably to, and democratically control, the capital of

Stearns Electric. Part of that capital remains at the Cooperative and is used to support Co-op programs, initiatives, capital investments and to support other activities approved by the membership. When Stearns Electric earns profits, or margins, we return those margins to our members in the form of Capital Credits.

### **CONCERN FOR COMMUNITY**

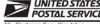
Our employees and board members don't just work for the Cooperative - we live here, too. We work for the sustainable development of our communities that many of us also call home. In addition to actively supporting many community events, we give back to our local communities through programs like My Co-op Cares, Operation Round Up, Energy Education, our annual Charity Event and more.

I encourage you to take some time this month to support your local cooperatives and help educate others about the importance and value of our nation's co-ops. Here at Stearns Electric, we will continue to work hard to be of great value to our member-consumers!

*Sincerely,*

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

# BOARD MEETING

	<h2 style="margin: 0;">Statement of Ownership, Management, and Circulation</h2> <h3 style="margin: 0;">All Periodicals Publications Except Requester Publications</h3>												
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<p><b>2. Issue Frequency:</b> <span style="border-bottom: 1px solid black; display: inline-block; width: 80%;"></span></p>													
<p><b>3. Issue Date for Circulation Data Below:</b> <span style="border-bottom: 1px solid black; display: inline-block; width: 80%;"></span></p>													
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<p><small>We certify that all information furnished on this form is true and complete. I understand that anyone who furnishes false or misleading information on this form or who omits material or information requested on the form may be subject to criminal sanctions (including fines and imprisonment) and/or civil sanctions (including civil penalties).</small></p>													

## MEMBER NOTICE



## 3



## THE BIG

## THE SMALL

***When it comes down to business, Stearns Electric Association proudly provides the electricity needed to our commercial members to keep operations running as smoothly as possible. Since 1937, Stearns Electric Association has been powering businesses big and small throughout Central Minnesota.***

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.

Over 21 percent of Stearns Electric's members are made up of large or small commercial accounts. Electricity is necessary for these members in order to maintain day-to-day operations. The Cooperative not only strives to deliver reliable electricity to our area businesses daily, but also provides rebates for commercial accounts to help area businesses save both energy and money.

## POWERING YOU THROUGH THE BIG

Though Sauk Centre-based Winters Recreation started out as a small, one-person operation in 2000, the company has grown tremendously in the past 20 years.

Today, Winters Recreation operates in a new facility and provides customized golf carts and snowmobiles, as well as service and parts, to customers nationwide.

"We operated for 17 years with no website," owner Matt Winters recalled. "We did a lot of business either in person, at auctions or over eBay. Five years ago, we launched our website and really broadened our market nationwide. Today, 55 percent of our inventory is shipped to customers outside of Minnesota."

Last year, in order to keep up with growing demand, Winters Recreation moved into its new facility just off of the interstate in Sauk Centre.

"We went from a 22,000 square foot building to a 55,000 square foot building last year," he recalled. "We were right in the middle of building the new facility when the world shut down due to the COVID-19 pandemic. There was a lot of uncertainty during that time, but we decided to move ahead with our plans anyway."

The new operating facility was built with efficiency in mind. Winters Recreation took advantage of commercial rebates offered by Stearns Electric in order to reduce overall energy consumption and in turn, to save money on the company's electric utility bill. These rebates included installing LED lights throughout the facility, including special LED lights in the photo booth area, and purchasing an electric forklift.

"The new LED lighting is great for taking photos," Shelly Winters said. "Our photo booth area really allows us to show off our inventory, which is especially important when we do so much business online."

"Electricity really does power our daily operations," she added. "On the business side, we rely on electricity daily to run our computers, manage our website, track our inventory and communicate with our customers, among other things."

"Additionally, as the golf cart industry grows and adjusts, especially as the demand for electric golf carts continues to increase, our reliability on technology and electricity, especially in the form of lithium batteries, continues to increase, too," Matt explained.

## POWERING YOU THROUGH THE SMALL

Reliable electricity is essential for powering small businesses, too. Lindsay Salzbrun and her former business partner started White Peony boutique in Lindsay's home basement back in 2018. In 2019, Salzbrun opened her official storefront right off of Highway 15 in southwest St. Cloud, near St. Augusta and Luxemburg.

"I always knew I wanted to have my own store since I was a little girl," Salzbrun recalled. "Life was getting pretty busy and I quickly realized it was too short to not go for it."

With the support of her husband and family, Salzbrun operated out of her basement for a while until she outgrew the space. In 2019, she was in need of a more permanent storefront. She found an existing location close to home and completed the necessary renovations for the boutique.

Since opening the boutique, White Peony has relied on the electricity to power the store's computers, lighting and, perhaps most importantly, the technology needed for the live online sales events for customers.

"The COVID-19 pandemic forced the boutique to pivot very unexpectedly," Salzbrun explained. "We shifted to selling our products completely via live online sales. Thankfully, we

had some experience doing live sales prior to the pandemic and we received great feedback from our customers during those months of uncertainty. We also made some really great connections with people during that time."

White Peony also took advantage of commercial efficiency rebates offered through the Cooperative. Instead of a traditional air conditioner, White Peony installed a ductless air source heat pump (ASHP) to keep the building cool in the summertime.

"During the really hot weeks of summer we had this year, the unit kept up nicely with the heat," Salzbrun said. "Keeping the store cool is especially important to keep our shoppers comfortable and help us keep our clothing in top shape."

Though the boutique is again open for in-person shopping, White Peony still ships out between 200 and 400 packages per week from its online sales.

"Through our website, online sales and live events, we are able to reach customers in multiple states, including Arizona, Colorado, Texas, New York and even Hawaii, among others," she concluded.

Whatever the size of your business, big or small, taking advantage of energy efficiency rebates is a win-win for both you and Stearns Electric. After all, it's your power. Our mission is to help you use it wisely. Visit [www.stearnslectric.org](http://www.stearnslectric.org) to learn more about the many commercial, industrial and agricultural rebates available.

***Stearns Electric Association has a team of energy experts that focus on business development. This team is available to support businesses of any size review their energy needs and explore potential efficiency solutions. Contact our Energy Services team during our business hours to inquire about available options for your business at (800) 962-0655.***

## ENERGY EFFICIENCY TIP OF THE MONTH

### DON'T LET OLD EXTERIOR DOORS CLOSE YOU OFF TO ENERGY SAVINGS.

*Old, uninsulated and improperly installed exterior doors can waste energy and money. Shut the door on wasted energy by weather stripping and sealing all exterior doors. Consider replacing it with a newer, energy efficient model if needed.*

## ELECTRICAL SAFETY CHECKUP

### CAREFULLY USE SPACE HEATERS

*Space heaters can be quite a safety hazard if you don't use them safely. Always make sure that there's nothing flammable within three feet of your space heater and never plug your space heater into an extension cord.*



LIKE US ON FACEBOOK

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



# ENERGY ON THE FARM

## CONCERNS ABOUT STRAY VOLTAGE? LET US KNOW

***As a member-consumer of Stearns Electric Association, you should feel free to call us anytime with concerns related to your electrical service. One area that can be a concern, particularly for livestock farmers, is stray voltage.***

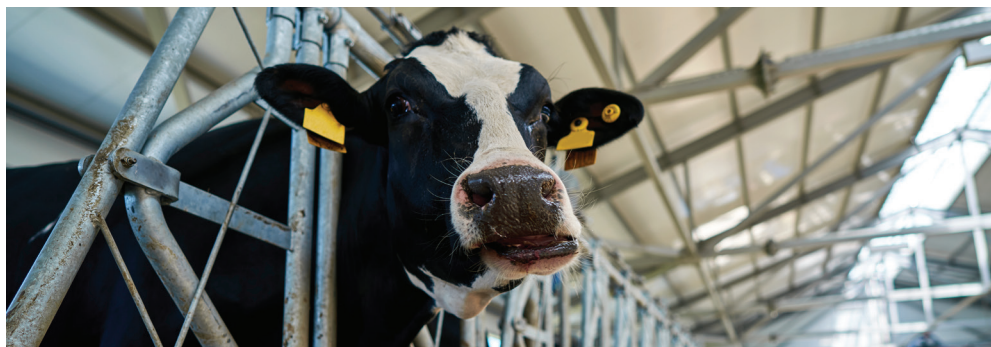
Your Cooperative's electrical distribution system must be grounded to earth to ensure continuous safety and reliability, as required in applicable electrical codes. The presence of some level of stray voltage is a normal, inherent and unavoidable result of electricity traveling through a grounded utilities' distribution system. A livestock farmer may, however, become concerned their animals are

experiencing a level of stray voltage exceeding acceptable levels and possibly impacting animal behavior.

The Minnesota Stray Voltage Guide is based on extensive research on the subject. It outlines the steps farmers, licensed electrical contractors and utilities can take to discover and resolve stray voltage concerns on livestock farms. The Guide includes a list of common causes and a farm wiring checklist to assist farmers and electrical contractors in visually inspecting farm electrical systems and noting potential stray voltage sources. Additionally, the Guide goes through what the farmer and utility should expect when a stray voltage investigation is conducted, including

the proper testing procedures. We have long worked with our members to address this issue. The Minnesota Stray Voltage Guide is a great tool and standard approach to analyzing and responding to stray voltage concerns. The Guide can be downloaded for free by visiting <https://www.stearnselectric.org/account-services/service-requests/stray-voltage/>.

Contact Stearns Electric Association at (800) 962-0655 during regular business hours to discuss concerns you may have and, if interested, schedule a stray voltage investigation.



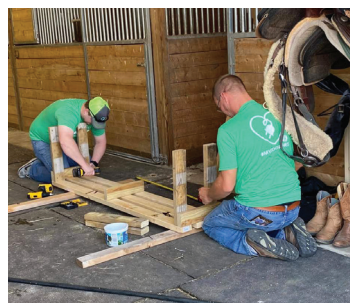
## MY CO-OP CARES

***In September, two groups of employees volunteered at Angel Reins Stable in St. Augusta as part of the Cooperative's 'My Co-op Cares' program.***

Stearns Electric volunteers helped clean horse stalls, the aisle, lounge and lean-to, making it look nearly brand new. Employees built a hitching rail for the horses near the outdoor arena. They also built a wooden bench, boot rack and saddle hangers, and organized tool storage. To end their day, both groups were able spend time with the horses!

Kathy, from Angel Reins Stable, was beyond thankful for our employees' service, "To say we are humbled and grateful is an understatement. The kindness and hard work shown to us by Stearns Electric 'My Co-op Cares' is unbelievable. The volunteers were a huge help and literally made dreams come true! Together we truly are making a difference!"

Read about the whole experience on our blog at [www.stearnselectric.org](http://www.stearnselectric.org).



## OFFICES CLOSED

The Stearns Electric offices will be closed on Thursday, November 25 and Friday, November 26 in observance of Thanksgiving. If you experience an outage during the holiday, please call us at (800) 962-0655 or log into SmartHub to report your outage. Crews are on call 24/7 ready to respond to any emergency.

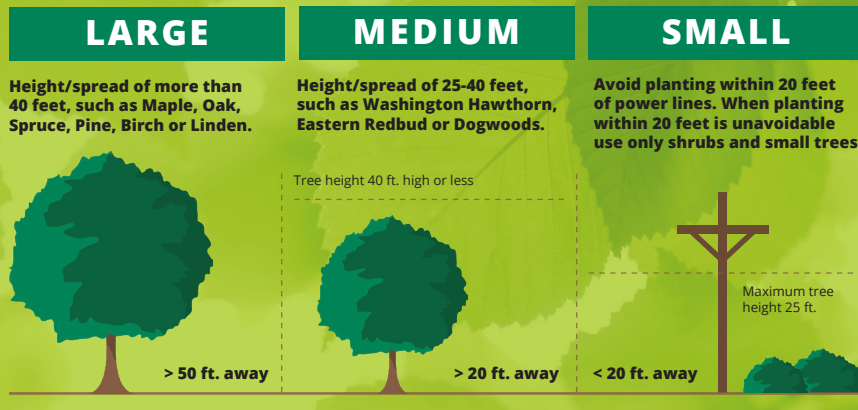
## STORED WATER HEATING CONTROL PERIOD TO CHANGE FOR WINTER

Reminder to members enrolled on the Stored Water Heating Program: the electric thermal storage schedules for water heating will be controlled from 6:00 a.m. through 10:00 p.m. beginning October 1, 2021 through April 30, 2022.

*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.*

## PLANTING TREES

Trees beautify our neighborhoods, and when planted in the right spot, can even help lower energy bills. But the wrong tree in the wrong place can be a hazard, especially to power lines.



// THE RIGHT TREE IN THE RIGHT PLACE //

*Be safe. Always call 811 before you dig to locate any buried utility lines.*

## COOKING CORNER

### PUMPKIN TURKEY CHILI

Submitted by: Savannah Nelles  
Stearns Electric Member

#### Ingredients:

1 lb. extra lean ground turkey or ground beef  
1 yellow onion, chopped  
2 green bell peppers, chopped  
2 cloves garlic  
1 can (15 oz.) unsweetened pumpkin puree  
1 can (14 oz.) diced tomatoes  
1 Tbsp chili powder (or more to taste)  
2 tsp ground cumin  
1 tsp salt  
ground black pepper to taste

#### Directions:

Coat large skillet with cooking spray and heat over medium heat. Add the ground turkey or beef, breaking it up into pieces. Cook until browned, about 8-10 minutes. In a 3- or 4-quart slow cooker, combine the following: cooked meat, onion, bell pepper, garlic, pumpkin puree, tomatoes, chili powder, cumin, salt and black pepper to taste. Cook and cover on low heat for 6 to 7 hours or until vegetables are tender. Serve hot. 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

900 Kraft Drive SE, PO Box 40  
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(800) 962-0655

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

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### BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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### CONTRACT DESIGNER

AMANDA GROETHE

*Fuller Creative*



# CHARITY EVENT: LEAVING A MEANINGFUL IMPACT



*Our internal Fall Charity Event benefits one charitable organization that is important to our employees. Every year, employees donate and raise thousands of dollars to impact a cause positively affecting our members and communities.*