



POWER CONNECTION

member driven. community focused. energy smart.

NOVEMBER 2021

STEARNS ELECTRIC RETURNS OVER \$2 MILLION IN CAPITAL CREDIT PATRONAGE



CAPITAL CREDITS

In September 2021, the Stearns Electric Association Board of Directors authorized a \$1.45 million general retirement of Capital Credits to our members. In addition to this general retirement, estate retirements are processed throughout the year. Combined, the general and estate retirements will total more than \$2 million back to Cooperative members. As a member-consumer, you may receive money back from the Cooperative in early December.

As a non-profit electric cooperative, Stearns Electric is jointly owned by its member-consumers. Unlike investor-owned utilities, which are designed to make a profit for shareholders, Stearns Electric refunds capital (money), above the cost of operations, to our member-consumers in the form of Capital Credits.

Additionally, our wholesale power provider, Great River Energy, retired patronage capital to its member-owner cooperatives this year, including Stearns Electric. These are called Generation and Transmission (G&T) Capital Credits. Stearns Electric's Board of Directors passes these G&T Capital Credits onto you, our members.

Stearns Electric refunded over \$2 million to our members represented by the following:

General Retirements totaling \$1,450,000

- Cooperative Capital Credits of \$1,100,000
- Generation and Transmission (G&T) Capital Credits of \$350,000

Estate Retirements totaling \$632,000

If you purchased electricity from Stearns Electric during the years of 2000-2001 and/or 2016-2020, you may receive a Capital Credit check based on the Cooperative's Capital Credit distribution.

In addition, members who purchased electricity from Stearns Electric during the years of 1985-1988 may receive a Capital Credit check based on the G&T Capital Credit distribution.

Capital Credit amounts of less than \$10 are held until additional Capital Credits are retired. Checks can be expected to arrive in the mail during the first two weeks of December. This year's average Capital Credit check is \$51.87.

These Capital Credit payments are quantifiable proof that as a member of Stearns Electric, you are an owner of a successful, effective organization. Life to date, we have distributed more than \$36 million in Capital Credits to our members.

If you have any questions regarding Capital Credits, please contact our Capital Credits Coordinator during regular business hours at (800) 962-0655. You can also visit our website at www.stearnslectric.org/capital-credits.

CEO'S MESSAGE

BY THE MEMBERS, FOR THE MEMBERS



Stearns Electric Association is a member-owned, democratically-controlled business. Every year, Stearns Electric Association member-consumers elect their members to represent them on the Cooperative's Board of Directors. In conjunction with the Annual Meeting, Stearns Electric holds an election in three of the nine districts to elect members to the Cooperative's board. Board members serve three-year terms. In 2022, districts 2, 3 and 6 are up for election, which you can read more about on page three of this issue.

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This month, I want to share more about our Board of Directors and the responsibilities they have in leading Stearns Electric.

FIDUCIARY RESPONSIBILITY

As elected members and representatives, board members serve as fiduciaries for the Co-op and are required to make informed decisions that are in the best interest of the Cooperative and its membership.

Board members spend many hours working behind the scenes to prepare for monthly board meetings, complete industry training and work on special projects.

Some of the regular tasks required as a board member include:

- evaluating whether decisions and projects help the Co-op successfully further its commitment to serving the community and our members;
- adopting and enforcing policies, resolutions and actions;
- providing financial oversight to the Cooperative on a monthly basis;
- reviewing and approving the annual Cooperative budget; and

- serving as ambassadors to Stearns Electric members, the community and legislative representatives.

Additionally, the board undertakes special projects annually, such as reviewing the articles of incorporation and bylaws, updating the Cooperative's policies and procedures, and examining the long-term equity management plan.

SELF AND PEER ASSESSMENT

In 2020, the Cooperative's board decided to implement a new self and peer assessment process. The director-led initiative, which is facilitated by an outside entity, allows board members the opportunity to learn about and understand their personal strengths and weaknesses when it comes to their responsibilities as directors.

The annual anonymous self and peer assessment collects feedback from each director and allows directors to rate themselves, and the overall board as a whole, on important board functions such as decision making, industry knowledge, member relations, meeting preparation and participation, and strategic thinking.

YOUR BOARD LEADERSHIP

Following each Annual Meeting, the Board of Directors holds a special meeting to elect officers for the year. In 2021, the board leadership elected its officers for the year, which included some new individuals in new roles:

- President: Tony Ampe, Belgrade (Crow River Township), District 5; Board member since 2018.
- Vice President: Eric Peterson, Grey Eagle (Birchdale Township), District 8; Board member since 2020.

- Secretary/Treasurer: Steve Notch, Freeport (Millwood Township), District 6; Board member since 2007.

NEW DISTRICT MAPS

Finally, I am excited to unveil a new search tool on our website, which allows you to better see the Cooperative's overall service territory and district boundaries. The detailed, interactive map shows which portions of each of township the Cooperative serves, and which portions are served by other electric utility providers.

Users can use the search tool to search for a specific address, or use the map to zoom in and out as needed, selecting specific locations within our service territory. On the map, members can also see who their board member is and what other communities they serve.

You can find the new map search tool by visiting www.stearnslectric.org > About Us > Service Area Map (under the "Cooperative Profile" option).

Your Board of Directors is committed to serving Stearns Electric and its membership, and leading the Cooperative through the ever-changing energy industry now and into the future.

Sincerely,

Robin C. Doege
Chief Executive Officer (CEO)

MEMBER NOTICE



DIRECTOR NOMINATIONS OPEN ON NOVEMBER 26 IN DISTRICTS 2, 3 AND 6

As a member-consumer of Stearns Electric Association, you are also an owner of the Cooperative. The Cooperative depends on its members to provide leadership and guidance. This is your opportunity to participate in the business decisions of a successful electric utility.

Nominations open for the 2022 director candidates in Districts 2, 3 and 6 on November 26, 2021. Nominees must meet eligibility requirements as specified in the Stearns Electric Association Bylaws. For a full-text version of the Bylaws, visit www.stearnselectric.org.

Members in Districts 2, 3 and 6 who are interested in becoming a nominee should fill out the Director Application and submit it to the Secretary before January 24, 2022.

The Director Application, along with the Board Nominations Packet materials, and a complete list of Director qualifications and responsibilities, will be posted on our website on November 26, 2021.

BOARD MEETING

The regular meeting of the Board of Directors of Stearns Electric Association was called to order on September 30, 2021 at 1:00 p.m. at the St. Joseph office of Stearns Electric Association.

Manager of Finance Cindy Anderson reviewed the August 2021 financial statement noting that power rates were higher than planned as the Cooperative needed to purchase more power than it budgeted for the month as a result of the continued warm weather. Ms. Anderson also noted the cost of the August 28 storm repairs.

Terilyn Wallis of TLW Consulting reviewed the Cooperative's 2022-2025 strategic plan and turned it over to CEO Doege for implementation. The executives provided brief commentary of the 2022-2025 strategic plan for the directors.

The Minnesota Department of Revenue has upheld its decision to tax meters and AMR (automatic meter reading) equipment as part of the Cooperative's distribution lines in the future. As a result, the property taxes paid by the Cooperative will increase about \$130,000. As approved at the last board meeting, the Cooperative has retained an attorney to file an appeal in this matter.

VP of Administration and Finance Vicky Herkenhoff provided an overview of the August 28 outage restoration communications and the value of social media by sharing pictures of the linemen responding to the outages to illustrate the Cooperative's responsiveness. Ms. Herkenhoff provided the directors with a detailed presentation related to the proposed 2021 Capital Credits retirement. A general Capital Credit retirement in the amount of \$1,450,000 was proposed and approved for November 2021.

The Operations report recapped work for completion before freeze up which includes upgrading the transformers at the Bangor and Zion substations.

The Cooperative recently received notification that it had been awarded a Safety Culture grant from MRET (Minnesota Rural Electric Trust) for injury prevention. The grant will be used to create and implement a stretching program for field employees.

NEXT BOARD MEETING
December 30, 2021

ENERGY WISE  MN

MAKE YOUR HOLIDAY MERRY AND BRIGHT

LED holiday lighting is 50% off!

Stock up on lights and savings this season at energywisemnstore.com/holidaylights.

Limit 5 per member household. Offer available while supplies last through December 28, 2021



From now through Christmas Day (December 25, 2021) share a photo of your holiday lights on the Stearns Electric Facebook page for your chance to win a new LED holiday light gift pack (a \$100 value)!

SMALL CHANGE; HUGE IMPACT

Cooperative's
Operation Round
Up® program
supports non-profit
member Quiet Oaks
Hospice House



Nestled among the trees in Stearns Electric Association's southeast territory, Quiet Oaks Hospice House provides a welcoming home for individuals facing terminal illness. Established in 2008, Quiet Oaks provides compassionate care to those most in need in the final days of their life.

"Quality end-of-life care is what it's all about at Quiet Oaks," Kristin Darnall, director of development, said. "Our great team of nurses, staff, caregivers and volunteers are proud to provide incredible support for our residents and families during their time of need."

In December 2005, Dan and Judy Whitlock were looking to donate their 10-acre property outside of St. Augusta to a worthy cause. At the same time, community members Joe and Mary Bauer, were working with a group of other families to create a hospice house in Central Minnesota where families could find comfort in end-of-life care for their loved ones.

The stars aligned and in 2006, the Whitlock's gift officially became the home of Quiet Oaks. After a couple of years spent fundraising and constructing an addition to provide housing for residents, Quiet Oaks Hospice House officially opened in October 2008.

Today, 38 employees, 240 volunteers and several other community supporters continue to allow Quiet Oaks the ability to fulfill its mission to provide high quality, personalized care, comfort and dignity to residents and families in the remaining days of their life. A total of eight residents can receive care at a time and the home also has three complimentary guest suites for families who wish to be close to their loved ones in their final days.

CREATING MEMORIES

"Quiet Oaks Hospice House offers much more than care and support," Linda Allen, executive director said. "We are creating memories for families."

Some of Allen's favorite memories during her tenure with the organization include:

- bringing in mini horses so a grandmother could share an experience with her visiting grandchildren;
- ordering a new, portable bed for a bedbound resident so she could sit outside and enjoy the wind on her face one last time;
- building a firepit outside so another resident could roast marshmallows with her family through the window of her room.

"It's like we are fulfilling a bucket list," she explained. "Our nurses are so good at crafting memories and making the experiences for each of our residents truly special."

COMMUNITY IMPACT

"Ever since the beginning of our organization, we have had a great base of community support and donors," Darnall said. "We wouldn't be able to make ends meet without all of the support we receive."

Stearns Electric's member-consumers who round up their monthly bill through the Operation Round Up® program have supported many endeavors of Quiet Oaks Hospice House over the years.

Funds have been used to provide personal protective equipment (PPE) to nurses, doctors and caregivers at the home, and also used to help ease the burden of payments for residents who reside at the home.

Regarding the generous donations of Stearns Electric through its members, one of the nurses at Quiet Oaks said: "Providing funds to individuals who otherwise could not afford to come to Quiet Oaks is a priceless gift. Allowing someone to die with dignity without the financial burden is so important. Additionally, assisting with the purchase of PPE

in order to provide the care that patients need while staying safe has been so helpful, especially these last several months during COVID."

"Your pennies matter! When you choose kindness and choose to give, it makes a huge difference," Darnall continued. "Your impact, though small, is so significant for our organization."

PASSIONATE CARE

"We realize that in our culture, people don't want to have the conversation about death until they are forced to. At Quiet Oaks, we want to help individuals and families prepare before they need to," Allen explained. "Through our efforts, we are trying to help families understand that death doesn't have to be sad or scary. Instead, we hope that through our family and community support programs, we can show people that it is a natural part of life."

At Quiet Oaks, support and care go beyond the conversations. Some of the services Quiet Oaks offer include:

- a beauty parlor for residents to get their hair done or beard trimmed;
- access to warming blankets for residents and guests whenever they need, day or night;
- double hospital beds in every room so individuals who are visiting can lay down with their loved ones;
- a special Veteran Program, where all veteran patients are treated with a special ceremony to commemorate and honor their time served;
- meeting spaces, outdoor gardens, playsets and more for residents and families to enjoy while spending time together.

"Our nurses have been instrumental in helping us provide the resources to our residents to set us apart from other caregiving facilities," Darnall explained.

"One of our caregivers, Dr. Patrick Lalley, is very passionate about this and has shared his skillset with

nurses and staff. He and his wife even took sabbatical a few years back to travel the world and study differences and experiences with death across multiple countries to help normalize it for our residents and families," she continued.

UPCOMING PROJECTS

Quiet Oaks has plans to continue educating others about death and hospice care into the coming years.

A Capital Campaign fundraiser is in the works now, in which money raised through the campaign will partially be used to create a Center for End-of-Life Care, which will help educate the greater community about Quiet Oaks and the benefits of hospice care.

Additionally, the campaign will help create financial stability for the organization, allowing Quiet Oaks to build its savings, make capital improvements and pay off remaining debt.

"There are many ways to get involved with Quiet Oaks Hospice House, whether it's through your time, talent or financial generosity," Darnall explained. "We host volunteer orientation once per month for individuals and corporate sponsorships are also available."

"The support we get from this community is phenomenal. There are no words to express how grateful we are," she concluded.

OPERATION ROUND UP®

Through the Operation Round Up® (ORU) program, Stearns Electric Association gives our member-owners the opportunity to give back to the community. The rounded-up funds (between 1¢ and 99¢ monthly) are placed in a trust fund that is administered by a trust board appointed by the Cooperative's elected Board of Directors. Operation Round Up® funds are given to local civic organizations and worthy causes through an application and selection process. Applications are available at www.stearnslectric.org under the "Community" section.

ENERGY EFFICIENCY TIP OF THE MONTH

SEAL THE LEAKS

Fall is the perfect time to prep your home for the upcoming winter chill. One of the best ways you can save energy and stay comfortable is to caulk and weatherstrip areas that typically need sealing. Start by sealing around windows and doors. Seal plumbing, ducting and areas where electrical wiring comes through walls, floors and ceilings for additional energy savings.

ELECTRICAL SAFETY CHECKUP

PREVENT POISONING

Make sure you have functioning carbon monoxide detectors. Deaths from carbon monoxide poisoning increase during the winter months due to the use of common fuels like natural gas, wood or coal. Installing a simple carbon monoxide alarm can save your family's life.



LIKE US ON FACEBOOK

www.facebook.com/stearnslectric

ELECTRIC BILL GIFT CERTIFICATES MAKE GREAT HOLIDAY GIFTS

Whether you're looking for a meaningful gift or just want to bless someone, Stearns Electric gift certificates are a great choice.

In order to gift someone with an electric bill gift certificate, select the dollar amount you'd like applied to a member's account. We'll give you the gift certificate to deliver and the member will see the credit on their next bill.

The best way to purchase a gift certificate is to call our office during regular business hours at (800) 962-0655 and coordinate electronic payment or payment by mail. Payment needs to be received by the Cooperative before December 15. You can also pick up a gift certificate in person.

If you have any questions, call us during business hours.



OPERATION ROUND UP

OPERATION ROUND UP® TRUST BOARD APPLICATIONS AVAILABLE IN DISTRICTS 4, 6 AND 7

The Stearns Electric Association Operation Round Up® (ORU) Trust Board operates independently of the Stearns Electric Association Board of Directors. There is one representative selected from each of the Cooperative's voting districts. Trust Board Directors are elected to serve one, three-year term, and can serve two consecutive terms.

Nominations for the ORU Trust Board are now open for members in Districts 4, 6 and 7. Applications are available on our website at www.stearnslectric.org and are due January 14, 2022. Call our ORU staff liaison at (800) 962-0655 during regular business hours with questions.



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, every time. Enroll your account in AutoPay today and your bill will be paid automatically each month on the due date.

Stearns Electric is giving away one \$500, two \$250 and two \$100 bill credits to members signed up for AutoPay by November 30. 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.stearnslectric.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.

NEWS

CAPITAL CREDIT CHECKS

Members who qualify can expect to receive their Capital Credit checks by mail in early December.

OFFICES CLOSED

The Stearns Electric offices will be closed on the following dates in observance of upcoming holidays:

- Thursday, November 25
- Friday, November 26
- Friday, December 24
- Friday, December 31

If you experience a power outage or emergency during these holidays, please call us at (800) 962-0655 or report your outage via SmartHub. Crews are on call 24/7 and ready to respond to any emergency situation.

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.

EXPERT ADVICE

Stearns Electric's vegetation management program is led by a certified arborist trained in the cultivation, management and study of individual trees.

This means an expert balances what is best for each tree, the environment and the Cooperative. Stearns Electric's clearing practices also conform with the procedures set in our standardized Vegetation Management Guidelines.



// DECISIONS ARE MADE BY A CERTIFIED ARBORIST //

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

COOKING CORNER

HUNGARIAN PORK STEW

Submitted by: Mary Rethmeier
Stearns Electric Member



Ingredients:

1 package (12 oz.) wide noodles
1 Tbsp olive oil
1 large onion, thinly sliced
3 Tbsp sweet paprika
1 clove garlic, crushed
1 lb. lemon pepper pork tenderloin
½ tsp salt
1 can (14 oz.) stewed tomatoes
½ C sour cream

Directions:

Cut lemon-pepper pork tenderloin lengthwise into four pieces, then crosswise into half inch slices. In skillet, heat olive oil. Add onion and cook until golden. Stir in paprika and garlic, cooking for one minute, stirring frequently. Increase heat to medium high. Add pork tenderloin and salt. Cook and stir a few minutes. Add tomatoes and heat to boiling. Reduce heat to low. Cover and simmer until tenderloin is fully cooked, about 20 minutes. In a separate pan, cook noodles. Add sour cream to the tenderloin mixture. Serve over noodles. 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 or mail to: Stearns Electric, Cooking Corner, PO BOX 816, St. Joseph, MN 56374.



STEARNS ELECTRIC ASSOCIATION

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MY CO-OP CARES: STRENGTHENING HUMAN CONNECTION



We care about the people we serve. Our 'My Co-op Cares' program gives employees time during the work day to connect with those who need it most. Whether we are cleaning up outdoor spaces at local nursing homes or loading cars with toys at Christmas, connecting with each other strengthens both our communities and our Co-op.