



# POWER CONNECTION



JANUARY  
2022

member driven.  
community focused.  
energy smart.

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(800) 962-0655  
[WWW.STEARNSELECTRIC.ORG](http://WWW.STEARNSELECTRIC.ORG)

VOLUME 22 | ISSUE 01

## POWER THAT PERSISTS: 85 YEARS OF SERVICE

This year is an exciting year for Stearns Electric Association - the Cooperative celebrates its 85<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

In 1937, local farmers founded Stearns Electric to bring electricity to rural areas of Central Minnesota. It took several years for electric lines to be built, but some members still remember the day they received electricity at their homes and farms.

For the last 85 years, the Cooperative has proudly powered our local communities and member-consumers. The electric utility industry is ever-changing and things look much different in 2022 than they did in 1937. However, our core values and purposes remain the same:

- **Dedicated service to our member-consumers;** our number one purpose is, and always has been, to provide reliable electricity to Cooperative members throughout Central Minnesota.

- **For the members, by the members.** This includes being led by member-consumers from each Cooperative district, who are elected to the Co-op's Board of Directors by the members in each district.
- **Meaningful community involvement.** Our Co-op and employees give back to the communities that we serve to positively impact the future of Central Minnesota.

Throughout 2022, we plan to share a series of feature stories highlighting the ways Stearns Electric has adjusted its business practices over time to continue fulfilling our mission of safely providing reliable, affordable energy to our members. Additionally, we will provide a commemorative gift in conjunction with our Annual Meeting in April.

We hope you enjoy a look back at our history and help us celebrate throughout the year!

# WIN A TRIP TO WASHINGTON, D.C.

**Attention high school juniors or seniors: Win an all-expense paid trip to Washington, D.C. in June!**

Stearns Electric is sending one high school student from our service territory to participate in the annual Rural Electric Youth Tour to Washington, D.C. The selected student will visit with congressional representatives, tour famous monuments and museums, and make memories and friends that will last a lifetime.

Rural electric cooperatives across the nation sponsor nearly 1,500 students to participate in the annual Youth Tour to learn about how government works and about the electric cooperative business model.

Apply today! This contest is open to any current high school junior or senior whose family is a member of Stearns Electric Association. The Youth Tour is June 14-19, 2022.

## REQUIREMENTS:

- Complete the Stearns Electric Youth Tour Application (available at the Stearns Electric offices, at [www.stearnselectric.org](http://www.stearnselectric.org), or at your school's counseling center).
- Write and submit a 300-word essay on the benefits of the cooperative business model.
- Submit a letter of recommendation from a teacher or advisor.

The first 15 applicants will receive a \$20 gift card. Top finalists will be interviewed by a judging committee. First place wins an all-expense paid Washington, D.C. Youth Tour trip. Second place serves as first alternate and will win \$150. Third place serves as second alternate and will win \$100.

Completed applications, essays and recommendation letters must be received no later than 4 p.m. on February 11, 2022. For more info visit [www.stearnselectric.org](http://www.stearnselectric.org).



# ACCOUNT CLEAN UP

*As another year ends and a new one begins, now is a great time to focus on getting organized or transitioning to paperless billing. Start the year off right by making sure your account is up to date.*



## UPDATE YOUR INFORMATION

Keeping your contact information current helps us make sure we can reach you if your account needs attention, and helps us identify you when you report an outage.



## SIGN UP FOR SMARTHUB

If you are not yet enrolled, visit [www.stearnselectric.org](http://www.stearnselectric.org) and sign up for SmartHub! You pay bills, monitor energy usage and report an outage. You can also update your account information.



## GO PAPERLESS

Go green this year and enroll in paperless billing. Both secure and convenient, paperless billing provides you with the information you need regarding your account no matter where you are!

# CEO MESSAGE

## 2022 COOPERATIVE RATES REMAIN STABLE

As we put 2021 behind us, much uncertainty remains. The pandemic continues, the country is facing ongoing supply chain issues, and prices for products and services continue to rise. In Minnesota, the Public Utilities Commission (PUC) recently approved rate hikes for Minnesota's largest electric utilities. Despite all of this, I am happy to report that your Board of Directors approved the Co-op's 2022 budget and there will be no rate increase for Stearns Electric members this year.

As a distribution cooperative, over 64 percent of Stearns Electric's annual expenses are in power supply purchases. Therefore, our rates are significantly impacted by our wholesale power provider, Great River Energy (GRE).

In 2020, GRE announced significant changes to its energy portfolio, which included the following:

- Retiring Coal Creek Station in 2022
- Adding 1,100 MW of wind energy generation by 2023
- Converting Spiritwood Station power plant to be fueled by natural gas
- Installing a 1 MW long-duration battery demonstration project
- Purchasing more power from the MISO\* energy market

In 2021, GRE announced the sale of Coal Creek Station to Rainbow Energy Center, which plans to continue operations at Coal Creek Station, develop carbon capture and storage capabilities at the facility, and sell the generated energy back into MISO.

These changes have allowed GRE to maintain rates in 2022, which allows Stearns Electric to do the same for its members.

"We spent over a decade transitioning to a portfolio of power supply and transmission resources to efficiently serve our member-owner cooperatives," said Great River Energy President and CEO David Saggau. "The benefits of those decisions are now being felt. Wholesale rate stability is incredibly important to our member systems."

This is great news for member-consumers of Stearns Electric, especially when Minnesota's two largest electric utilities, Xcel Energy and Minnesota Power, have proposed significant rate increases of 21 and 18 percent respectively over the next few years. In December, the PUC approved smaller, interim rate increases for both energy providers as it considers the larger proposals. Their consumers will see the increase on their electric bills starting this month.

Your Board of Directors and Cooperative staff work hard to develop the annual budget for Stearns Electric. Maintaining a reliable energy distribution system takes significant investments in both time and money. Though rate increases are inevitable, we spend much time planning the work and budgeting as responsibly as possible to prolong a necessary rate increase for as long as possible.

\*MISO: Midcontinent Independent System Operator



Sincerely,



Robin C. Doege  
Chief Executive Officer (CEO)

# BOARD MEETING HIGHLIGHTS

The regular meeting of the Board of Directors of Stearns Electric Association was called to order on November 23, 2021 at 1:00 p.m. at the St. Joseph office of Stearns Electric Association.

Highlights of the meeting include:

- The proposed budget and department initiatives for 2022 were presented. The final budget will be approved in December.
- Clifton Larsen Allen was selected to conduct the annual audit of the Cooperative in 2022.
- The recently revised Emergency Response Plan was provided for review.
- A request from a local company to submit an application for a USDA loan, presented by Business Development and Member Service Supervisor John Pantzke, was approved. Submitting an application does not guarantee funding.
- The temporary service for the AWG (Associated Wholesale Grocers) site has been installed and energized.
- A proposal to hire contractor Legacy Power Line to construct an 8.75-mile overhead line replacement along Highway 27 was approved.
- GRE Resolution No. GRE R21-11-5; Approval of Additional Purchase for Rainbow Energy Center Financial Settlement and Capacity Purchase Agreement was presented and unanimously approved.

**NEXT BOARD MEETING**  
February 24, 2022





## DOWNED AND DANGEROUS: POWER LINE SAFETY

HIGH WINDS, ICE STORMS, HEAVY SNOW, LIGHTNING, FALLING TREES AND VEHICLE ACCIDENTS CAN CAUSE SIGNIFICANT DAMAGE TO THE ELECTRICAL DISTRIBUTION SYSTEM, DOWNING POWER LINES AND CAUSING OUTAGES.

Downed power lines are extremely dangerous. If you see a downed power line, always assume it is energized. Avoid going near the power line or anything in contact with it as objects touching or near the power line can also be energized. You could be shocked by contact with the power line or any secondary objects touching or near the downed wires.

Call 911 or the electric utility provider right away, and keep others away from the area of the downed line.

When a live wire touches the ground, electricity ripples out through the ground, similar to when a rock hits water. The minimum safe distance from a downed power line is 35 feet, but we recommend staying at least 50 feet away until help arrives.

Unlike the movies, power lines do not have to be arcing or sparking to be live.

You cannot see, hear or smell electricity, which makes it extremely dangerous. Downed power lines can be live and lethal, even though they might appear de-energized. Anything touching the downed line, including other utility wires, tree limbs, chain link fences or metal culverts, can be energized.

Even if the line is de-energized when you find it, it could become energized during power restoration efforts. It's always best to stay away until a trained professional line worker fixes the problem.

When you see a downed power line:

- ALWAYS call to report a downed power line. You can call 911, especially in emergency situations, or Stearns Electric at (800) 962-0655.
- NEVER use any object to move a downed wire.
- Rubber gloves and rubber-soled

shoes will not protect you from electrocution involving a downed power line. Electricity in our power lines can be 7,200 volts or higher.

- Electricity can travel through the ground, fences, hoses, tree limbs and playscapes. A live wire, either on the ground or in trees, can harm



*If you see a downed power line, always assume it is energized.*



you, even if you don't directly touch the power line.

- Do not try to rescue someone who makes contact with a downed power line. Doing so puts you at risk of becoming a victim. Call 911 for help.
- Don't drive over a downed power line or through water that is touching the power line. Driving over the line could cause poles or other equipment to come down.

## VEHICLE ACCIDENTS WITH ELECTRICAL EQUIPMENT

Accidents can happen any time of the year, but the Cooperative notices an increase in vehicle accidents involving electrical equipment during Minnesota's icy winters. Knowing what to do if you find yourself in an accident involving high voltage electrical equipment could save your life.

In traumatic situations, such as a vehicle accident, it may be instinctive to flee as soon as possible. However, if you are in an accident with a power line, or other electrical equipment, the safest place you can be is, most likely, in your vehicle.

When a vehicle crashes into a power pole, the pole may fall down, or power lines may fall on your vehicle or on the ground nearby. When this happens, your vehicle and/or the area around it may become charged with electric energy. If you step out of the vehicle in this scenario, your body would become the

path to ground for the electricity, and you could be electrocuted.

If you find yourself in a vehicle accident involving a power pole or other electrical equipment, do the following:

- Stay IN your vehicle (do NOT leave) and warn others to stay away.
- Call 911 for help.
- Wait until a professional from Stearns Electric, or other electric utility provider, tells you it is safe to leave your vehicle.

The ONLY reason to exit a vehicle after an accident involving electrical equipment is if it's on fire. In the rare case of a vehicle fire:

- Jump clear of the vehicle with your feet together and without touching the car and the ground at the same time.
- Once you are safely outside of the vehicle, shuffle at least 200 yards away with your feet together.
- Do not go back to the vehicle to retrieve any items until you are told it is safe to do so by a professional.

If you witness a vehicle collision with a power pole, do not approach the accident. By trying to help, you may put your own life at risk. The best thing to do is contact emergency responders and stay far away from the accident.

*If you are ever in an accident with a power line, or other electrical equipment, the safest place you can be is, most likely, in your vehicle.*

*The ONLY reason to exit a vehicle after an accident involving electrical equipment is if it's on fire. In this rare instance remember to jump clear of the vehicle without touching the car and the ground at the same time and then shuffle away with your feet together.*



## MREA RECOGNIZES TWO STEARNS ELECTRIC LIFEguards

The Minnesota Rural Electric Association (MREA) recognizes Cooperative employees throughout the state who go above and beyond the expectations of keeping individuals safe through their LIFEguard program. In December, two Stearns Electric Association employees were recognized – Jeff Miller and John Pantzke.

In August, Jeff and John were traveling for a work project when they came upon a stopped tractor attached to a hay wagon. Two round bales on the wagon had rolled forward and were wedged between the tractor and the wagon. As they drove by, they noticed a person laying on the ground behind the tractor, so they turned around to assess the situation.

Jeff and John realized quickly that if the farmer removed the wagon pin as he was trying to do, the weight of the bales could roll the wagon back, potentially causing the bales to fall on the farmer. If this happened, the farmer could be severely hurt, or worse. Jeff and John stopped him from removing the pin and helped push the bales off the tractor/wagon, preventing an accident.

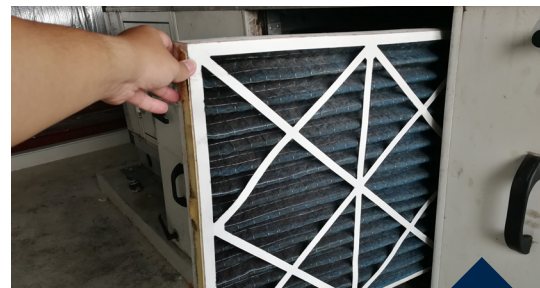
# START PLANNING FOR THE NEW YEAR

***Does your list of New Year's resolutions include a project that might require new electrical service or changes to existing service? If so, let us know!***

It's common for the Cooperative to receive many requests for service projects in the early spring and late fall. However, projects requiring electric lines to be built, rebuilt or moved aren't as simple as they may seem and sometimes can be more complex.

We strongly encourage anyone thinking about projects that might require new or modified electrical service to contact the Cooperative and begin the planning process as early as possible.

For questions, please contact the Cooperative during regular business hours at (800) 962-0655.



## ENERGY EFFICIENCY

### HELP YOUR HEATING SYSTEM PERFORM MORE EFFICIENTLY

Maximize your heating system's performance by inspecting, cleaning or replacing air filters once a month, or as needed, to reduce energy costs and prevent potential damage to your system. Make sure radiators, baseboard heaters and warm-air registers aren't blocked so air can flow freely.

## SCHOLARSHIPS AVAILABLE



***The Northern Co-op Foundation provides financial assistance and promotes education in the cooperative field. Scholarship applications are now available!***

These scholarships are available to individuals from Minnesota, Wisconsin, North Dakota and South Dakota who are seniors in, or a graduate of, high school who may have interest in future employment with a cooperative organization.

Applicants must be a member of a cooperative. Applicants must also be enrolled full-time at an institution of higher learning and take courses in business or economics which studies the principles of cooperatives. If such courses are not offered, the applicant must submit a letter agreeing to take such a course at another institution.

Applications are available at [www.stearnselectric.org](http://www.stearnselectric.org) or by calling our office at (800) 962-0655. Those interested in applying must submit their application and three letters of reference (including one from your local cooperative) by February 1, 2022. For more information, contact Stearns Electric during regular business hours at (800) 962-0655.



***Since 1993, Stearns Electric has awarded \$135,250 in scholarships to high school and college students through our Operation Round Up® program.***

POWER THAT PERSISTS

## MEMBER NEWS

### CASH YOUR CAPITAL CREDIT CHECKS

If you purchased electricity from Stearns Electric in 1985-1988; 2000-2001; and/or 2016-2020, you may have received a Capital Credit check in December (we do not mail checks under \$10). We would like to remind you, if you haven't already, to cash that check.

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

### ANNUAL MEETING

Save the date! The Stearns Electric Association Annual Meeting is Tuesday, April 5, 2022, at 7 p.m. at the Melrose High School Auditorium. Complete details will be announced in future editions of the Power Connection.



# COMMERCIAL, INDUSTRIAL & AGRICULTURAL (CI&A) REBATES AVAILABLE TO MEMBERS

*Stearns Electric offers rebates and programs to our CI&A members every year. Rebates are available for robotic milking; ag irrigation variable frequency drives; livestock waterers; ag ventilation; commercial LED lighting; electric forklifts; heat pumps; variable frequency drives; and more.*

The Cooperative also manages a United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) economic development loan program that is used to help fund business and community projects throughout our area. These loan funds have been utilized by private businesses, cities, health care systems and churches. Contact our Business Development Representative during regular business hours at (800) 962-0655 for more information.



## DID YOU KNOW?

**Did you know a standard installed power pole on the Stearns Electric distribution system costs an average of \$1,750?**

Stearns Electric has 60,000 poles on our distribution system. We replace approximately 300 rejected poles and install a total of about 700 new poles annually.

*Poles can be made of wood, steel, concrete, composite fiberglass, ductile iron or laminated wood. They come in various widths and sizes. At Stearns Electric, we most commonly use wood poles made from Red Pine that are 40 feet tall.*

## COOKING CORNER TACO TATER CASSEROLE

*Submitted by: Paige Coulter*

### INGREDIENTS

1 lb. ground beef	1 package taco seasoning mix	12 oz frozen corn	10 oz can red enchilada sauce
1 small onion, diced finely	1 can (15 oz) black beans, rinsed and drained	3 cups shredded Mexican blend cheese	If desired: olives, cilantro, sour cream, tomatoes
1 clove garlic, minced		1 package frozen tater tots	
4 oz can diced green chiles			

### DIRECTIONS

Preheat oven to 375 degrees. Spray a 9x13 baking dish with cooking spray. In a large skillet, brown the beef and the onion. Add the garlic and cook for 1 minute. Drain. Add green chiles, taco seasoning mix, black beans, corn, and 2 cups of cheese. Stir together to combine and pour mixture into pan. Arrange tater tots on top of mixture in a single layer. Pour enchilada sauce on top of the casserole as evenly as you can. Bake uncovered for 30-40 minutes. Sprinkle remaining cheese on top and bake for 2-3 minutes or until cheese has melted. Add additional toppings as desired. Enjoy!



### SUBMIT YOUR FAVORITE RECIPE FOR A CHANCE TO WIN A \$10 BILL CREDIT

Members may submit one recipe per month by email at [communications@stearnslectric.org](mailto:communications@stearnslectric.org) or mail to: Stearns Electric Cooking Corner, PO BOX 816, St. Joseph, MN 56374. The recipe selected each month for publication will receive a \$10 credit on their electric bill. Recipes not selected will be saved for consideration in future publications.



## STEARNS ELECTRIC ASSOCIATION

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Fuller Creative

## SMARTER SOLUTIONS START HERE

### 2022 RESIDENTIAL REBATES ARE AVAILABLE NOW

#### ENERGYWISE® REBATES

*In order to receive the EnergyWise® rebates, members must enroll in the associated program, if applicable.*

**Quality Install Air Source Heat Pump**

SEER 14.5	\$550
SEER 15	\$650
SEER 16	\$700

**Pool Heating**

Pool ASHP	\$400
Pool Pump VSD	\$200

**Ground Source Heat Pump**

\$150 / ton (10-ton max.)

**New Dual Fuel Rebate**

\$200 (9 kW min.)

**Thermal Storage Space Heating**

\$50 per kW (5 kW min.)

**ECM Motor**

\$50

**New Marathon Water Heater**

(Purchased from Stearns Electric Association)  
\$300 80+ gallon on Stored Water or  
Peak Shave programs  
\$100 50+ gallon on Peak Shave Program

**Electric Water Heater**

(Contractor/Member Supplied)  
\$100 50+ gallon on Stored Water or  
Peak Shave programs  
**Heat Pump Water Heater**  
\$300

**Electric Vehicle Charger**

\$500

**Wifi Thermostat**

\$25

**Engine Block Heater Timer**

\$5

#### ENERGYSTAR® REBATES

**Ductless ASHP** \$300

**Refrigerator** (with recycling of old unit) \$50

**Freezer** (with recycling of old unit) \$50

**Dehumidifier** \$25

**Clothes Dryer** \$25

**LED Yard Light** \$30

For complete details on these rebates contact Stearns Electric at (800) 962-0655 or visit [www.stearnsselectric.org](http://www.stearnsselectric.org).