



POWER CONNECTION

MAY
2022

member driven.
community focused.
energy smart.

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(800) 962-0655
WWW.STEARNSELECTRIC.ORG

VOLUME 22 | ISSUE 05

MAKE THE SWITCH TO SAVE!

Take advantage of enhanced rebates when you install a qualifying, energy-saving air source heat pump!

From now through June 30, 2022, Stearns Electric Association members can earn up to \$2,000 in rebates when they install a qualifying, energy-saving air source heat pump (ASHP) and enroll on our EnergyWise® Dual Fuel and Cycled Air Conditioning programs for the first time.

Members receive more rebate dollars based on the ASHP's heating seasonal performance factor (HSPF) and whether or not they also have an electric resistive heat source for their heating needs (i.e. base board heat, plenum heater or boiler).

If you're constructing a new home or replacing an aging air conditioner, an ASHP might be a good choice for you! Learn more about what ASHPs are, how they work and if they might be a good fit for your home on page 4.

We also have a promotion for ductless/mini-split ASHPs with a HSPF rating of 9.0 or higher purchased and installed between April 1 and June 30, 2022.

Ductless ASHPs are the perfect solution for adding space heating and cooling in non-ducted homes, new room additions or new outbuildings, like a pole barn.

ASHP	REBATE
≥ 9.0 HSPF Ductless ASHP w/ Delivered Fuels	\$450
≥ 9.0 HSPF Ductless ASHP w/ Electric Heat (9kW min.)	\$750
≥ 8.2 HSPF Ducted ASHP w/ Delivered Fuels	\$800
≥ 8.2 HSPF Ducted ASHP w/ Electric Heat (9kW min.)	\$1,000
≥ 9.0 HSPF Ducted ASHP w/ Delivered Fuels	\$1,600
≥ 9.0 HSPF Ducted ASHP w/ Electric Heat (9kW min.)	\$2,000

Visit www.stearnsselectric.org or call the Energy Service Department at (800) 962-0655 during regular business hours for more information.

MY CO-OP CARES: MELROSE FOOD FOR THOUGHT

In April, a dozen Stearns Electric employees volunteered with Melrose Area Public Schools Food for Thought as part of the Cooperative's "My Co-op Cares" program.

Food for Thought provides weekend food packs for students throughout the district who may not have access to meals away from school.

Vaughn Glasener, teacher at Melrose Area Public Schools, helped start the Food for Thought program in Melrose in 2019 with assistance from the Sauk Centre School District.

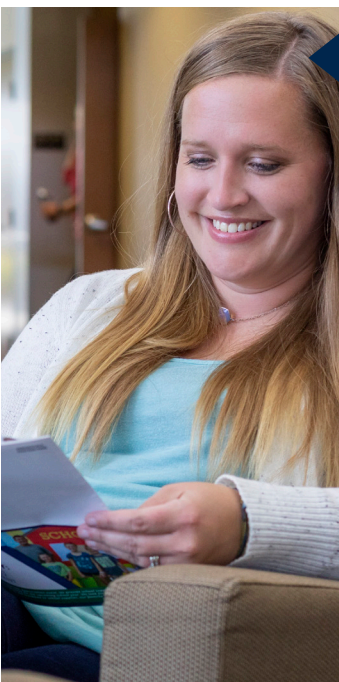
"The Food for Thought team is aware that there are many students who have a need for food on the weekend and this program assists in filling that need," Glasener explained. "Sometimes we think the problem is far away from us when it is really right in front of us. The Food for Thought program is one program assisting us in meeting this need."

Co-op employees helped package five-weeks' worth of food packs for students in Melrose elementary, middle and high school, the alternative learning center, and local parochial schools. Each week included 180 packages of food.

All product for the food packs is purchased from donations to the Food for Thought program. Food is packaged by volunteers – community groups, school sports teams, youth groups, etc.

The "My Co-op Cares" program allows Cooperative employees time to volunteer during working hours to benefit communities within our service territory. Three times per year, Stearns Electric sends teams of employees out to local organizations and charitable causes to share their time and talents.

"It was heartwarming to help with such an important program," said employee volunteer Diane Koll. "I enjoyed working with my colleagues outside our normal environment. I knew I was surrounded by good people who enjoyed doing things for others."



WANT TO LEARN MORE ABOUT THE CO-OP? JOIN THE MEMBER ENGAGEMENT GROUP

Stearns Electric is looking for members to serve on the Cooperative's Member Engagement Group (MEG). The MEG gives members a chance to learn more about the Cooperative and our services. The MEG also serves as a sounding board for the Cooperative, helping the Co-op board and staff gain ideas and proposals for new and existing programs.

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.

In return for your participation, committee members receive a \$50 honorarium for each meeting attended, plus mileage. There are limited spots available in each district. If you are interested in joining, visit www.stearnslectric.org to apply. 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.

CEO MESSAGE

TAKE 60 SECONDS FOR SAFETY

I think it's fair to say that we do hope to hit the pillow safely at the end of each day. And yet, we often find ourselves rushing through a project, speeding to our next commitment or cutting corners 'just a little bit,' with full intention of 'taking the time to do it right tomorrow.' But these are the times when safety matters most!

It takes less than a second to cause a life-altering or life-ending safety error, especially when there is high voltage electrical equipment involved. You can't hear, see or smell electricity, which makes it even more dangerous.

May is Electrical Safety Month and I encourage you to be diligent and take 60 seconds for safety. Lower tall equipment before moving it. Identify any overhead power lines near you. Slow down and keep your eyes on the road. Taking 60 seconds for safety could save your life.

FARMING SAFETY

It's been a long winter and farmers are anxious for the weather to cooperate so they can get their crops planted. I hope by the time you read this article, spring is in full throttle! Here are four tips to be safe on the farm:

1. When moving farming equipment, make sure your equipment can safely clear any power lines.
2. If you are on equipment that comes into contact with power lines, DON'T GET OFF unless it starts on fire (very rare). Call 911 and wait for help to arrive.
3. Don't spray water on power lines with your irrigation system. Jets of water can conduct electricity and energize nearby equipment.
4. Don't stack items too high below power lines. Items stacked too high can cause contact with overhead power lines or equipment could contact the power lines when moving stacked items.

SAFETY TIPS FOR ADULTS

Summer is just around the corner, which means trips to the cabin, family gatherings and yard work! Stay safe around electrical equipment with these tips:

1. Always call before you dig, even if you are just planting a bush.
2. Report trees that have grown into power lines to your electric utility provider.
3. Look up and look around for power lines before doing any work on your roof.
4. Don't drive distracted. If your vehicle is in an accident with electrical equipment, STAY INSIDE unless it starts on fire (very rare). Call 911 and wait for help to arrive.

SAFETY TIPS FOR KIDS

Swimming, climbing trees, riding bikes, staying up late – summer is the best when you are a kid! Help keep your children safe by teaching them these safety tips:

1. Stay away from electrical equipment marked with danger signs and warnings.
2. Never climb trees near power lines.
3. Never fly kites near power lines.
4. Keep electrical equipment away from water and don't touch any electrical equipment when you are wet.

I hope you take 60 seconds for safety. Be safe!



Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Robin Doege".

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 March 24, 2022, at 1:00 p.m. at the St. Joseph office of Stearns Electric Association.

Highlights of the meeting include:

- The 2021 Stearns Electric financial audit was presented by Craig Popenhagen from CliftonLarsonAllen. The final audit was approved.
- The Stearns Electric Association Trust audit (Operation Round Up® program) was also approved.
- Board members discussed Great River Energy's Power Cost Adjustment (PCA) and its effect on member bills.
- CEO Robin Doege and Director Mike Cramer recapped their visits to the Minnesota Capitol. CEO Doege testified at a Senate subcommittee property tax hearing on March 23. Director Cramer participated in legislative visits with the Minnesota Rural Electric Association.
- Board members approved a loan application submission to the USDA on behalf of a local business for a Rural Economic Development Loan. This resolution only authorizes the submission for an application and does not grant funding at this time.
- John Pantzke, business development and energy service supervisor, presented on the Co-op's ChargeWise electric vehicle program.

NEXT BOARD MEETING
June 23, 2022



ENERGY SAVING MADE EASY: CONSIDER AN AIR SOURCE HEAT PUMP

This summer, Stearns Electric Association is once again offering enhanced rebates for members who install new Air Source Heat Pumps. But what exactly is an Air Source Heat Pump (ASHP) and is it the right choice for your home?

WHAT IS AN AIR SOURCE HEAT PUMP?

An ASHP is an electric-powered unit that provides home cooling and supplemental heating. In Minnesota, ASHPs most commonly replace a standard air conditioning unit.

HOW DOES IT WORK?

ASHPs extract the existing heat from inside your home and pump it outside, keeping your home cool.

Heat pumps work on the same principles as a refrigerator. Just as a refrigerator pulls heat from the air inside and pumps it out the back, hence the warm coils behind your fridge, a heat pump does the same, pumping heat from the indoor air outside.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS?

The real benefit to installing an ASHP occurs in the colder months. Unlike a standard air conditioning unit, a heat pump can work in reverse to help heat your home.

An ASHP can reduce your home's electricity use for heating by approximately 50%, according to the U.S. Department of Energy. Even when air temperatures are low, the heat pump harvests hidden heat in the air outside and transfers it into your home, which means you can run your furnace less. In fact, with an ASHP, you may not need to run your furnace at all during the spring and fall.

WHAT ABOUT THOSE REALLY COLD WINTER MONTHS?

ASHP technology has advanced in recent years and today's cold-climate heat pump technology can operate efficiently below 20 degrees Fahrenheit. Plus, when you install an ASHP, you'll have a backup heating system that will automatically kick-in when your ASHP cannot keep up, or when your equipment is being controlled through our EnergyWise® programs.

ARE THERE ANY REBATES AVAILABLE?

The Cooperative offers year-round rebates to members who install an ASHP. But, through June 30, 2022, members can earn even more! Up to \$2,000 is available in rebates when members install a qualifying, energy-saving ASHP and enroll in our EnergyWise® programs for the first time. You can learn more about this promotion on the front page of the newsletter.

Additionally, when you install an ASHP and enroll it in Stearns Electric's EnergyWise® Cycled AC and Dual Fuel programs, you pay nearly half the standard rate for electricity 12 months out of the year.



In 1983, the Co-op offered a \$300 rebate for members who installed a dual fuel heating system at their home. Forty members took advantage of the promotion and by the end of the year, 175 members were enrolled in the Dual Fuel program. Today, there are 7,111 members enrolled in the program.

SO, WHAT IS THE BOTTOM LINE?

It all comes down to the fuel source you have - natural gas, fuel oil or propane. During the cooling season, ASHPs will save you energy and money. During the heating season, ASHPs remain competitive with natural gas units, but substantial savings are available for members who use propane or fuel oil to heat their homes.

IS AN ASHP FOR ME?

Installing an ASHP is extremely easy in the construction of a new home. If you are building a new home, or thinking about building, contact your heating and cooling, and electrical contractor to discuss your options.

If you are looking to replace your aging central air conditioner or inefficient heating system, an ASHP might be the right fit for you. Every house is unique though and a homeowner needs to understand the features of their home in order for their heating and cooling systems to be most efficient and comfortable. Therefore, we encourage you to work with a knowledgeable contractor to figure out what is best for your home.

For a list of preferred contractors we work with, please contact our member service department. This list is also available on our website.

Visit our website or call our office to learn more.

ASHP SAVINGS

These charts show the benefit of cooling and heating a 2,000 square foot home with an ASHP rated at 250% efficient and operating on the Stearns Electric EnergyWise® rate:

MEMBER TESTIMONIAL

"In June 2020, we had an air source heat pump and a new furnace installed at our home. We were convinced to purchase the heat pump and furnace for two reasons: first, our existing air conditioning unit and furnace were over 20 years old (and becoming less efficient every year) and second, Stearns Electric was offering a rebate for the new heat pump and furnace combination at that time.

We have been extremely pleased with the air source heat pump for both cooling and heating our home. During summer of 2020, we noticed a significant decrease in our electric (kWh) usage compared to the summer of 2019, while still maintaining a consistent cool temperature within our house. Additionally, during the winter of 2020-21, we noticed a substantial decrease in our use of propane to comfortably heat our home - our propane usage dropped 28% from the winter of 2019-20 to the winter of 2020-21 - which reduced our overall utility costs for the year."

- Don and Laura Martin, members

COOLING

EnergyWise® Summer Rate 7.7¢ per kWh	Regular Summer Rate 12.5¢ per kWh	Savings in Cooling Mode
\$77	\$125	\$48

Based on annual usage of 1,000 kWh of energy used.

HEATING

Heating Mode	EnergyWise® Winter Rate 5.7¢ per kWh	Regular Winter Rate 10.5¢ per kWh	Savings First Year
Electric Heat 100% efficient	\$1,461	\$1,879	\$418
Propane 95% efficient	\$1,670	\$2,213	\$543
Propane 80% efficient	\$1,984	\$2,841	\$857
Fuel Oil 85% efficient	\$1,877	\$2,627	\$750

Based on 2,000 square foot home with a five-year average Heating Degree Days (HDD) of 8,200 per year.

MOVE OVER FOR ROADSIDE CREWS

At Stearns Electric, we are committed to the safety of our employees, our members and the general public. Every few years, our line crews review flagging safety measures to help them stay safe when working along busy roadsides.

But we need your help, too! As spring and summer projects get underway, we kindly ask that if you see utility or emergency crews working on the side of the road, move over when possible.

When the power goes out, so do Stearns Electric Association's line crews. Lineworkers are the first to respond after an outage occurs, and they work hard to restore power to the communities and members we serve.

If you're traveling and see one of our line crews on the side of the road, please move over and give them extra space to work whenever possible. We care about everyone's safety and this extra precaution ensures just that.

If you approach a crew while traveling on a four-lane road, please move over into the far lane. If you approach a line crew while traveling on a two-lane road, moving over to the next lane might not be an option. In this case, we ask that you slow down when approaching and passing roadside crews.

Utility crews aren't the only ones who could use the extra space. Emergency responders, police officers and firefighters often find themselves responding to emergency situations near busy roadways. Likewise, other utility contractors and construction workers are often performing their work along roadways. We ask that you follow the same procedures to help keep these crews safe, too.

The Minnesota Move Over Law is intended to keep emergency workers safe and prevent motorists from crashing into stopped vehicles. This law includes and protects utility crews. There's plenty of room for all. Let's work together to keep everyone safe on our local roadways.



ENERGY EFFICIENCY

ADEQUATE INSULATION

Even in the summer months, adding insulation to your attic can keep your home more comfortable and save energy used by your cooling system. If you can easily see your joists, you should add more. If you can't see any of the floor joists because the insulation is well above them, you likely have enough insulation.

MEMBER NEWS

OFFICES CLOSED MEMORIAL DAY

Stearns Electric Association will be closed on Monday, May 30 in observance of Memorial Day. If you experience a power outage or emergency during this time, 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.

COOPERATIVE TO SURVEY MEMBERS THIS JUNE

Stearns Electric will conduct a small-scale member survey beginning in June. This survey is coordinated with the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA) and will be conducted by both phone and email. If you are contacted to complete a survey, it is legitimate. You can contact Stearns Electric at (800) 962-0655 with any questions.

STEARNS ELECTRIC BEGINS CHANGEOUT OF RESIDENTIAL DEMAND RESPONSE UNITS

In 2021, Stearns Electric Association began a 5-year plan to changeout aging load management receivers with new Aclara demand response units (DRUs). This summer, our electricians will begin changing out residential DRUs. This only impacts member-consumers who are enrolled in a load management program (i.e. dual fuel, storage water heating, cycled air conditioning and/or electric vehicle charging). Impacted members will receive more communication by mail before work begins.

This project will provide the Co-op the ability to adapt to future load controlling opportunities and strategies, and maintain affordable load management rates. We plan to use Cooperative employees who hold master and journeyworker electrician licenses, which help keep costs down.

More information will be posted on our website by June 1, 2022.



DID YOU KNOW?

Did you know one line voltage regulator on the Stearns Electric distribution system costs approximately \$9,500 and one substation voltage regulator costs approximately \$14,000?

Stearns Electric has 85 line and 96 substation voltage regulators on our distribution system. We replace an average of 10 regulators annually.

Voltage regulators step the voltage up or down in order to help maintain consistent voltage at your home. Their main function is to minimize voltage variations and keep voltage within set limits even as load on the distribution system increases or decreases.

COOKING CORNER TORTILLA CHIP CASSEROLE

Submitted by: Cheryl Koestler

INGREDIENTS

2 tsp olive oil	¼ tsp salt	4 oz tortilla chips, crushed
½ C onion, chopped	¼ tsp pepper	1 red pepper, chopped
1 Tbsp minced garlic	4 oz cream cheese	8-10 oz green enchilada sauce
1 Tbsp flour	1 can black beans, drained & rinsed	2/3 C shredded cheddar or Mexican blend cheese
1 C milk	3 C cooked chicken breast, chopped or shredded	
½ C chicken broth		
1 tsp cumin		

DIRECTIONS

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Heat oil in a large skillet over medium heat. Add onion and cook 6 minutes. Add garlic and flour, cook 2 minutes. Gradually add milk and chicken broth, stirring constantly. Bring to a boil, then remove from heat. Whisk in cumin, salt, pepper and cream cheese. Spread ½ C of the milk mixture over the bottom of a greased 9 x 13" baking dish. Layer beans, 1 ½ C chicken and 2 oz chips. Top with ½ C milk mixture. Layer 1 ½ C chicken, bell pepper and 2 oz chips. Top with 1 C milk mixture and enchilada sauce. Sprinkle with cheese. Bake for 30 minutes. 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@stearnselectric.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

900 Kraft Drive SE, PO Box 40
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USPS 016053
**PERIODICALS
POSTAGE PAID**
MELROSE, MN

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 provider and employer.

Periodicals Postage Rate is at Melrose, MN, 56352 and additional mailing offices.

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TIME FOR A TUNE UP

WITH A \$25 REBATE FROM STEARNS ELECTRIC



**INCREASE
EFFICIENCY**



**SAVE
MONEY**



**EXTEND LIFE
OF A/C UNIT**



**LOWER
HUMIDITY**

From now through September 1, Cooperative members can receive a \$25 rebate when an air conditioning contractor performs a central air conditioning tune up.

- The AC tune up must be performed within the Stearns Electric service territory.
- A completed rebate form and receipt must be submitted no later than September 1, 2022.
- The rebate will be issued as a credit on your electric bill.

Learn more and download our rebate form at www.stearnselectric.org.