

POWER CONNECTION



ON TIME EVERY TIME

SET IT AND FORGET IT

SIGN UP BY NOVEMBER 30, 2022 FOR A CHANCE TO WIN A BILL CREDIT!

member driven. community focused.

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energy smart.

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(800) 962-0655 WWW.STEARNSELECTRIC.ORG

VOLUME 22 | ISSUE 10

ON TIME. EVERY TIME. SET IT AND FORGET IT.

Sign up for AutoPay by November 30, 2022 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 and/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. 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 to sign up for, or log into, SmartHub.

By Mail: If you prefer not to use SmartHub, you can enroll by mail with your checking or savings account 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.

MY CO-OP CARES: QUIET OAKS HOSPICE HOUSE

In August, a group of employees volunteered at Quiet Oaks Hospice House in St. Augusta as part of the Cooperative's 'My Co-op Cares' program. Stearns Electric volunteers helped cut down and trim trees, haul brush, landscape and clear out the pond. Additionally, employees from Carr's Tree Service, a subsidiary of Stearns Electric, volunteered their time ahead of the event to cut even more trees and grind stumps on the Quiet Oaks property.

Stearns Electric's 'My Co-op Cares' program allows Cooperative employees the opportunity to volunteer during working hours within Stearns Electric's 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 a very humbling experience to see what Quiet Oaks and its staff does to provide end of life care for their clients. It felt good knowing we were helping a cause like that, even if it was just for an afternoon!" lineman and Co-op volunteer Christian McGaffey recalled.

"The impact of having Stearns Electric and Carr's Tree Service help out with these outdoor projects is huge! We would never be able to take down these tall branches and trees on our own," Doug Knese, volunteer coordinator and director of client and family services at Quiet Oaks Hospice House, said. "Since we aren't affiliated with a larger facility, funding and help all need to come from the outside. Stearns Electric employees came ready to work hard!"









MINNESOTA LAW OFFERS SHUT OFF PROTECTION FOR MILITARY PERSONNEL

When a household member has been ordered into active duty, for deployment or for a change of duty station, some member-consumers may find it hard to pay their utility bills. Minnesota law protects these military personnel from shut-off if they cannot pay their utility bills in full.

HOW TO APPLY

Contact Stearns Electric Association at (800) 962-0655 for an application, and to make and keep a payment plan.

PAYMENT PLANS

- If your household income is below the state median household income and you pay ten percent of your household's gross monthly income toward your gas/electric bill; or
- If you receive energy assistance and you pay ten percent of your household's gross monthly income toward your gas/electric bill; or
- If your household income is above the state median household income and you make and keep a payment plan.

RIGHT TO APPEAL

If you and Stearns Electric Association cannot agree on a payment plan, you have the right to appeal to the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission. Stearns Electric Association will not disconnect your service during the appeal process.

BOARD PRESIDENT MESSAGECELEBRATING MEMBERSHIP

Fall is a busy time, and October is a particularly eventful month with school, community and sporting activities in full swing. It's also when cooperatives celebrate National Co-op Month. As president of your Board of Directors, I want to spend some time this month recognizing the ways cooperatives like Stearns Electric stand out from other electric utility providers and are helping build strong communities across our service territory.

CONCERN FOR COMMUNITY

Our core business purpose is to safely serve you with reliable electricity. But as a cooperative, our larger mission is to help make our service area a better place. "Concern for Community" is one of seven guiding principles that all co-ops share.

Similar to how the power lines run through our service territory, our concern for community flows through all of our decisions—because being a co-op means being a responsible partner and good neighbor. Stearns Electric works to help our communities thrive through initiatives led by our employees and supported by the Cooperative's Board of Directors. Employees and board members are your neighbors who live right here in Central Minnesota.

Because we're local, we understand our community's unique needs and strive to help meet them. We're proud to support area non-profits through our My Co-op Cares program, and local youth through our Youth Tour and scholarship programs. With your help, we offer the Operation Round Up® program which helps hundreds of local, worthy causes every year.

The word "cooperative" is close to "cooperation," meaning people working together towards a common goal—mutually benefitting one another and the larger community. That's the essence of the cooperative spirit. Our employees and member-elected board members are invested in the communities in which we live and serve.

CEO UPDATE

We recently said goodbye to now retired CEO Robin Doege following his four years of service. As we begin a new chapter in our Cooperative history, our commitment to our members remains steady. Though we will likely operate over the next few months without a CEO, know that Stearns Electric continues to work on behalf of our members daily.

Your Board of Directors is working diligently to find the next Stearns Electric CEO to lead this top-notch cooperative. We are working with Holmes Executive Search, LLC over the next several weeks to review applicant resumes, which were due October 14, and line up interviews with our top candidates. In the meantime, our Board has asked existing vice presidents Vicky Herkenhoff and Matt O'Shea to serve as leaders of the Cooperative until a new CEO is hired.

Stearns Electric is a strong organization dedicated to our local communities and member-consumers. Our Cooperative was built by the members, for the members. As always, we are here for you when you need us, so please don't hesitate to let us know how we can better serve you.



Eric Peterson Board President

Sincerely,

BOARD MEETING HIGHLIGHTS

The regular meeting of the Board of Directors of Stearns Electric Association was called to order on August 25, 2022, at 1:00 p.m. at the Melrose office of Stearns Electric Association.

Highlights of the meeting include:

- Manager of Finance Cindy Anderson presented an equity management presentation and recommendation.
- CEO of Great River Energy (GRE) David Saggau presented information on GRE, including a rate forecast, update on power supply and generation, and an overview of the Connexus Energy membership withdrawal.
- CEO Robin Doege presented an update on the appeal of the apportionable property tax value assigned to Stearns Electric's rural assets. A reduction in 12% of the original 24% increase was negotiated with the MN DOR at a hearing on August 17. The Cooperative continues to disagree with the MN DOR and is working with state legislators on statute language.
- Member Engagement Group participants were appointed.
- The Board approved the Connexus Energy membership withdrawal from Great River Energy.
- The Rural Utility Service Construction or Equipment Contract Amendment was approved after three major storms this spring and summer.

NEXT BOARD MEETING October 27, 2022



POWER OF TRANSFORMATION

AS AN ENERGY COOPERATIVE, STEARNS ELECTRIC ASSOCIATION HAS PROUDLY DISTRIBUTED THE ELECTRICITY NEEDED TO POWER HOMES, FARMS AND BUSINESSES THROUGHOUT OUR SERVICE TERRITORY SINCE 1937. OVER THE LAST 85 YEARS, THE INDUSTRY HAS CHANGED IMMENSELY. WE CONTINUE TO ADOPT IMPROVING TECHNOLOGIES AND TRANSFORM OUR ELECTRIC SERVICE TO FIT THE NEEDS OF MEMBER-CONSUMERS.

Before Stearns Electric Association was founded by members, the concept of bringing electricity to rural areas in Central Minnesota was difficult to comprehend. For some farmers, it took weeks or months to finally agree to join the local electric cooperative. They were hesitant to sign up and fund this new service that would take years to even reach them, unsure if it would indeed electrify their homes and farms as promised.

After many months of waiting to be approved for a loan under President Franklin Delano Roosevelt's Rural Electrification Administration, Stearns Electric Association was chartered as a corporation by the state of Minnesota on August 20, 1937, and work quickly began constructing the first power lines.

Nearly one year later, on August 15, 1938, the culmination of years of planning and organization came together as 118 miles of line were energized; the Stearns Electric energy distribution system was officially powered on.

POWER LINE CONSTRUCTION

Over the last 85 years, Stearns Electric's engineering and operations team has grown and maintained a reliable distribution system for our members. In 1938, there were 118 miles of power line. Today, there are over 4,180 miles of lines.

Extensive planning goes into growing our distribution system to safely provide reliable energy to our 28,000 members and ensure the Cooperative is not making enhancements too quickly. A team of engineers constantly prepares the local distribution system for the future implementation of new technologies, such as solar



Joe Weber is safely secured while working on the superstructure for a new Stearns Electric substation in the 1970s.

panels and electric vehicles. It is a delicate balance.

"Our members continue to adopt new technologies such as solar panels and electric vehicles, but they are not as quick to do so as other areas of the country," Matt O'Shea, Vice President of Engineering and Operations, explained. "Behind the scenes at the Cooperative, there is a lot of research and planning by our engineering and operations departments that goes into preparing our distribution network for the future."

"For example, we know over the next 20 years there will be an increase in the number of electric vehicles being charged by members on our distribution system. This will likely require upgrades to some of our electrical distribution equipment, especially in residential areas where there will be multiple vehicle chargers," Manager of Engineering James Pachan said. "Though we know these upgrades will be required, we are not ordering a ton of new equipment or planning to upgrade the distribution network immediately. These adjustments will happen over time and as needed."

"Our Cooperative's mission is to serve our members with competitively priced and reliable energy. We work every day to make sure we upgrade our equipment and grow where and when it is required, but don't grow too fast and become a financial burden to our member-owners," O'Shea reiterated.

WHOLESALE POWER ADJUSTMENTS

Local energy cooperatives distribute energy throughout their service territories, but the electricity is generated by other entities. Stearns Electric Association has been a member of Great River Energy (GRE) since 1999. Prior to that, Stearns Electric was a member-owner of Cooperative Power Association, which merged with United Power Association to become GRE. Today, GRE provides electricity to 27 member distribution cooperatives throughout Minnesota.

Throughout Stearns Electric's history, the majority of electricity generated by the Co-op's wholesale power providers has been by coal. Due to legislative mandates and the requirements for energy generators to reduce their carbon emissions, the Cooperative has experienced rapid changes in wholesale power generation by GRE.

Over time, this has included adding wind and solar generation to its energy mix, creating and offering energy-saving programs for GRE member cooperatives and most recently, announcing an aggressive plan to become over 80% carbon free by 2025.

Currently, GRE is on track to add 560 MW of wind energy by the end of 2023 and modify the 99-MW coal and natural gasbased Spiritwood Station power plant to be fueled by natural gas. Additionally, GRE is working with Form Energy to install a 1-MW long-duration battery demonstration system.

"We are building a power supply portfolio that will serve our member-owner cooperatives with clean, affordable and reliable energy for decades," GRE President and CEO David Saggau said.

ELECTRICITY USE OVER TIME

Stearns Electric has adapted to these power generation adjustments over the years and has worked to stay on pace with the changing industry. A few ways that Stearns Electric has done this is through our residential EnergyWise® programs, Commercial, Industrial and Agricultural (CI & A) grant opportunities, and offering innovative energy resources. In the early days when electricity was brought to rural farms in our service territory, electricity was used for basic

amenities like lights, refrigerators, stovetops and washing machines. Over time, enhanced technology has increased the need for electricity to power appliances, tools, vehicles and other commodities. Therefore, energy demand has greatly increased.



Stearns Electric line crews work with Great River Energy to complete pole changes along the Highway 23 expansion project this past March.

"Our residential EnergyWise® and CI & A programs were formed both to help increase overall energy sales, but also to reduce energy load across our service territory when demand, and consequently energy pricing, is at its highest," John Pantzke, Energy Services Supervisor, explained. "By enrolling in a program, members agree to let the Cooperative, through GRE-initiated time frames, control their heating, cooling and/or water heating systems at times when energy pricing or demand is at its highest. In return, participating members pay a lower rate for energy or receive a monthly bill credit."

Another significant change to the industry over time has been our member preference for renewable energy. As GRE and other power generation companies work to reduce their carbon footprint, there are some members working to do the same. To meet their needs, Stearns Electric offers the SolarWise community solar and Wellspring renewable wind energy programs.

"Our members are on many different levels when it comes to their views on energy. We do our best to meet the members where they are at and serve them with electricity that works for their lifestyle," Pantzke concluded.

Though the need for Stearns Electric to deliver power to members throughout our service territory has stayed consistent during our 85-year history, much has changed in the electric utility industry and will continue to do so. Stearns Electric is, and always has been, committed to adapting to ongoing changes and serving our member-consumers.



Stearns Electric has been a member of Great River Energy since it was founded in 1999. Before that, Stearns Electric was a member of Cooperative Power Association. In 1999, Cooperative Power Association and United Power Association merged and became Great River Energy.

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 utility's 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.



OCTOBER IS NATIONAL CO-OP MONTH

To celebrate, our 85th Anniversary Cookbooks are available for pick up at each office. First come, first served, while supplies last.





ELECTRIC SAFETY

BE CAREFUL OF POWER LINES

If you plan on doing some outdoor work this fall, you need to be cautious of the placement of electrical lines and wires across your landscape. If you are doing work requiring you to climb a ladder, be careful not to accidentally yank wiring lose. Even just making the wrong move can either bring damage to the wiring or result in electrocution.

MEMBER NEWS

OFFICES CLOSED

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

EXPECT MORE CONTROL FOR WATER HEATING THIS WINTER

This winter season, members enrolled in an EnergyWise® water heating program may experience more control days. This can include morning hours for Peak Shave participants, and weekends and holidays for Stored Water participants when energy demand is high.

STATEMENT OF OWNERSHIP



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United States Postal Service Requirement for Second Class Publications



DID YOU KNOW?

Did you know one new pad-mount transformer on the Stearns Electric distribution system costs an average of \$1,300?

There are approximately 7,500 pad-mount transformers of various sizes on our distribution system. We replace or add an average of 320 overhead and pad-mount transformers annually.

Pad-mount transformers have the same purpose as overhead transformers – typically lowering voltage along electric distribution lines to safely provide electric service to homes and businesses. However, they are installed to work with the Cooperative's underground power lines.

COOKING CORNER

BACON, POTATO, BEAN AND RED PEPPER SOUP Submitted by: Marlene Schlichting

INGREDIENTS

½ lb hickory-cured bacon,

diced into 3/8" portions

- 1 Tbsp unsalted butter
- 1 small onion, minced
- 3 large leeks, cut into ½" portions
- ½ large carrot, peeled and chopped
- 1 small celery rib, chopped

- 1 red pepper, cut into 1/4" portions
- 4 C chicken stock
- ¾ tsp salt
- ¼ tsp ground white pepper
- 2 large potatoes, peeled, cut into ½" portions
- 15 oz can dark red kidney beans,
- rinsed and drained

DIRECTIONS

Place bacon in large saucepan, cover with water. Simmer on medium-high heat for 5 minutes. Drain and pat dry with paper towel. Wipe out pan and return bacon to pan. Fry until golden and crispy. Drain bacon, discard fat, wipe with paper towel in pan. Add butter to pan. When butter is melted, reduce heat and add onion, leeks, carrot, celery and red pepper. Cook vegetables until lightly browned and softened, about 5 minutes. Add bacon, chicken stock, salt and pepper. Simmer, stirring occasionally, 5 minutes. Add potatoes and simmer. Stir until potatoes are tender when pierced with a knife, about 15 minutes. Add beans and simmer 1 to 2 minutes more. Serve hot. 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.



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AMANDA GROETHE

Fuller Creative

Join us for coffee and conversation!

Board and Brews events provide members with the opportunity to meet their directors, ask questions and mingle with others in their district.





DISTRICT 1 • GREG BLAINE

Thursday, October 27 | 10 a.m. Stone Hill Bar & Grill 3554 230th Street, Randall

DISTRICT 2 • ARLYN LAWRENZ

Tuesday, November 1 | 10 a.m. House of Pizza 1733 Pine Cone Road S Ste 200, Sartell

DISTRICT 3 • MICHAEL CRAMER

Tuesday, October 25 | 10 a.m. St. Augusta American Legion 1894 247th Street, St. Augusta

DISTRICT 4 • RANDY ROTHSTEIN

Tuesday, October 18 | 9 a.m. Dino's Eden Lakeside Club 15445 County Road 9, Eden Valley

DISTRICT 5 • JEFF KOEHLER

Wednesday, October 19 | 9 a.m. Bayer Built Woodworks, Inc. 24614 US-71, Belgrade

DISTRICT 6 • BOB NIEHAUS

Thursday, October 20 | 10 a.m. Albany Sportsmen's Club 30852 State Hwy 238, Albany

DISTRICT 7 • LONNIE IVERSON

Wednesday, October 19 | 10 a.m. Shady's Golden Eagle 13218 County 103, Burtrum

DISTRICT 8 • ERIC PETERSON

Thursday, October 27 | 10 a.m. Tutti Frutti 38914 County Road 186, Sauk Centre

DISTRICT 9 • JERRY FRIES

Thursday, October 27 | 10 a.m. Neighbors Route 75 2010 County Road 75, St. Joseph

Visit our website or call us at (800) 962-0655 if you have any questions regarding your district event.