



# POWER CONNECTION

JULY  
2023

member driven.  
community focused.  
energy smart.

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

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## CELEBRATE YOUR IMPACT MEMBER-FUNDED OPERATION ROUND UP® CELEBRATES MAJOR \$3 MILLION MILESTONE

Stearns Electric's Operation Round Up® (ORU) program and our member-consumers celebrate a major milestone this July. Since the program's inception in 1993, funded by the generous contributions of our members, the ORU program has awarded over \$3 million in funds to local non-profit organizations and community service programs.

### YOUR SMALL CHANGE MAKES A BIG DIFFERENCE!

Through ORU, Stearns Electric gives you the opportunity to give back to local communities by rounding up your monthly electric bill to the nearest dollar. The rounded-up funds (between 1¢ and 99¢) are placed in a Trust Fund, used to provide grants and funding to organizations and worthy causes throughout our 2,000 square mile service territory.

We want to thank YOU for your impact on our local communities and celebrate this major milestone with you at our Member Appreciation Pancake Feed!

### Member Appreciation Pancake Feed

**Saturday, August 5, 2023**

**8:00 - 11:30 a.m.**

**Freeport Community Center  
Free for Cooperative Members**

- Pancake and sausage breakfast, served by the Kimball Lions Club
- School supply giveaway for children ages 2-18\*
- Bucket Truck photos
- Meet Stearns Electric Lineworkers
- Live broadcast from Wild Country 99

Learn more at [www.stearnsselectric.org](http://www.stearnsselectric.org).  
We hope to see you there!

\*Children must be present at the event to receive a bag of supplies.  
Offer will be available while supplies last.

# UNBE-LEAF-ABLE! AIR SOURCE HEAT PUMP PROMOTION EXTENDED THROUGH AUGUST

***Take advantage of enhanced rebates when you install a qualifying, energy-saving air source heat pump! PLUS, all members who take advantage of this year's ASHP promotion will be entered to win a Milwaukee electric leaf blower.***

Stearns Electric members have through August 31, 2023 to earn up to \$1,300 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 you also have an electric resistive heat source (i.e., base board heat, plenum heater or boiler).

If you're constructing a new home or replacing an aging air conditioner, an air source heat pump might be a good choice for you!

We also have a promotion for ductless/mini-split ASHPs with a HSPF rating of 9.0 or higher. Members can receive up to \$750 when a new unit is purchased and installed before August 31, 2023.



Visit [www.stearnsselectric.org](http://www.stearnsselectric.org) or call the Energy Service department at (800) 962-0655 during regular business hours for more information.



## BOARD AND BREWS EVENTS NEAR YOU

***Do you want to meet the Cooperative's new CEO, discuss the recent rate adjustment or ask questions about our plans for a new headquarters? Join us for our 2023 Board and Brews.***

Board and Brews events provide members with the opportunity to meet their directors and staff, ask questions and mingle with other Co-op members in a casual environment. Soda and coffee will be provided.

Our 2023 Board & Brews events are open to all Co-op members. You are welcome to attend any event, even if it does not align with your district. Visit our website or call us at (800) 962-0655 if you have any questions regarding your district event.

### **DISTRICTS 2, 3 & 9**

Location: House of Pizza  
4040 2nd Street S, St. Cloud  
Date: Tuesday, September 19  
Time: 4:30-5:30 p.m.

### **DISTRICTS 1, 6 & 7**

Location: The Hub Supper Club  
30905 County Road 13, Burtrum  
Date: Wednesday, September 20  
Time: 4:30-5:30 p.m.

### **DISTRICTS 4, 5 & 8**

Location: Woody's Bar & Grill  
111 4th Street N, Greenwald  
Date: Thursday, September 21  
Time: 4:30-5:30 p.m.



# CEO MESSAGE

## RATE ADJUSTMENT FAQ

*Stearns Electric's new rates went into effect May 1, 2023, and members received their first bills with the new rates the first week of June. This month, I want to address the most frequently asked questions we have heard from our members regarding this adjustment.*

### 1. What is the Fixed Charge and why did it increase so much?

The Fixed Charge on your electric bill recovers the cost of providing electric service to your residence or business, no matter how much energy you use. Every residential member of Stearns Electric pays the same Fixed Charge. Fixed Charge funds are cumulated and used to purchase power poles, wires, transformers and other equipment to bring electricity to your home, farm or business.

The Fixed Charge also covers Cooperative maintenance expenses that have a direct tie to the reliable electricity you expect. These include labor, right-of-way clearing, fleet and facility functions, and necessary administrative responsibilities.

Based on the Cost-of-Service study conducted in 2022, we know in order to recover 100% of the fixed costs for residential electric service, our Fixed Charge needs to be \$39. The Board set the current Fixed Charge at \$34.25, which recovers approximately 80% of those costs. Additionally, the new Fixed Charge includes \$3 per month per member that goes directly toward building a new headquarters facility.

### 2. Why do I have to pay a Fixed Charge even if I have a seasonal property?

Although seasonal properties may not use as much energy as full time residences, the distribution system equipment and maintenance required to ensure electricity is available when you need it, is the same. Additionally, many seasonal properties have appliances or devices that require electricity even when you are away, such as water heaters, thermostats, refrigerators and freezers.

### 3. What is the Power Cost Adjustment (PCA) and how does it impact me?

The PCA is an adjustment to the monthly energy rate and reflects fluctuations in the cost of power. Through planning and analysis, the cost of power is determined by our wholesale power provider, Great River Energy (GRE). Though generally planned well, the true cost of power at any given time is somewhat out of our control as it is determined by many factors including energy demand, energy generation, generation fuel sources available and weather at any given time.

Stearns Electric passes the cost of energy directly from GRE through to members each month. When the cost of power is higher than GRE budgeted, the PCA shows up as a charge on your monthly electricity bill. When the cost of power is lower than budgeted, the PCA is a credit.

### 4. Is a headquarters facility necessary?

We have known for a while that Stearns Electric would, and has, outgrown its current headquarters space. Over time, we have invested in small projects to make the existing facility work, but we knew at some point, we would need to explore larger options. Since 2019, a committee of Board members and employees has explored building options, including a new facility or an extensive remodel. In March 2023, after much discussion, the Board decided a new building was the most cost-effective and best solution for our needs.

Why build now? Experts anticipate that the cost of materials needed to build a new facility will only get more and more expensive into the future. Investments like this position the Cooperative to meet the current needs of members and provide room for growth over the next several decades. We are committed to doing everything in our control to keep the impact of this facility as minimal as possible on our membership.

*Continued on page 7.*

# BOARD

## MEETING

## HIGHLIGHTS

The regular meeting of the Board of Directors of Stearns Electric Association was called to order on May 25, 2023, at 1:00 p.m. at the Melrose office of Stearns Electric Association.

Highlights of the meeting include:

- Manager of Finance Cindy Anderson presented the April financial statements and summarized budgeted items of variance.
- CEO of Minnesota Rural Electric Cooperative (MREA) Darrick Moe presented on different programming that MREA provides, including safety, communication, events and government affairs.
- Directors submitted personal dues for the state and national political action committees.
- CEO Matt O'Shea provided an update on the new facility, including funding possibilities and a timeline.
- Directors approved a letter of understanding for GLTArchitects to provide architectural services through a construction manager at risk building model.
- Directors approved a one-year extension of a RUS loan and the 2023 Highline Construction contract.
- VP of Administration and Finance Vicky Herkenhoff presented a plan of execution for the Midwest AgEngery patronage, which will be received by the Cooperative over the next four to six years.
- CEO O'Shea provided an update on upcoming transmission projects within our service territory.

**NEXT BOARD MEETING**  
July 27, 2023



## CO-OP EMPLOYEES VOLUNTEER WITH LOCAL ORGANIZATIONS THROUGH 'MY CO-OP CARES' PROGRAM

***In June, two groups of Stearns Electric Association employees volunteered in local communities as part of the Cooperative's 'My Co-op Cares' program.***

Twelve employees volunteered through Central MN Habitat for Humanity on June 13, helping construct a home for a family in need. This specific Habitat for Humanity home is located within Stearns Electric's service territory and will be served in the future with electricity distributed by the Cooperative.

On June 14, another nine volunteers worked to help the Central Minnesota Salvation Army with landscaping and property beautification.

The 'My Co-op Cares' program allows Cooperative employees time to volunteer during working hours to help 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 with others.

"We have to practice what we preach. 'Community Focused' is part of our tagline and it's important that we follow through," Michelle Christiansen, Stearns Electric employee volunteer, said.

"Our 'My Co-op Cares' program is our way to lead by example in our community," James Pachan, employee volunteer, added.

In just a few hours, these Cooperative volunteer teams accomplished the tasks at hand, relieving some of the work on these organizations' to-do lists.

"Without Stearns Electric's team, I do believe we would have been struggling to meet deadlines," Salvation Army's Laura Douvier explained. "The volunteer team on-site was amazing to work with. Very detailed and very kind."

"The Stearns Electric volunteer team got a lot of work completed that we needed done on-site. That really benefited our project and helped us move forward with the build," Ashley Ogaja, Habitat for Humanity, said. "They went above and beyond and were willing to help with everything."

In addition to serving our area communities, volunteering through the 'My Co-op Cares' program allows employees to work together alongside co-workers that they might not get to interact with daily.

Employees shared their favorite parts of volunteering through the program:

- "Working with people you don't typically get to see or talk to and building those relationships is the best part of My Co-op Cares."
- "It is fun to see a team of employees that are not used to working together pull together for each event and project."
- "When you get to see your peers in a different atmosphere than their normal duties, you see them shine in ways you didn't realize!"
- "Since I work alone most of the time, these events give me a chance to get to know my co-workers better."

"I am just absolutely amazed at what your Stearns Electric team does for the community," Douvier concluded. "Keep up the great work."

**Visit our Facebook page to view more photos from the day. To learn more about the Cooperative's commitment to community and other community outreach programs, visit [www.stearnslectric.org/community](http://www.stearnslectric.org/community).**



## A YEAR OF SAVINGS WITH INNOVATIVE ENERGY SOLUTIONS **ELECTRIC TECHNOLOGY**

*member since 2015*

**LLOYD MOSLEY**

### **WHEN DID YOU FIRST PURCHASE ELECTRIC TECHNOLOGY?**

When we bought our home in 2015 was when we dove into electric technology starting with our first solar panels. Since then, we've added an electric lawn mower, electric trimmer, electric bike, electric vehicle, electric robotic vacuum and mop, additional solar panels and more. We have over 70 smart devices connected to our WiFi to monitor electricity usage.

### **WHY DID YOU MAKE THE SWITCH?**

I've always been into technology but started doing research on electric technology and tools ahead of purchasing our home.

### **WHAT HAS BEEN THE BIGGEST BENEFIT?**

The cost savings is the biggest benefit and when you can see the actual dollar amount in comparison to using other resources, it makes a big difference.

### **ARE THERE ANY INCONVENIENCES?**

There really hasn't been any inconveniences. Our electric mower uses a perimeter wire as its boundary; this wire could be damaged, but it's an easy fix.

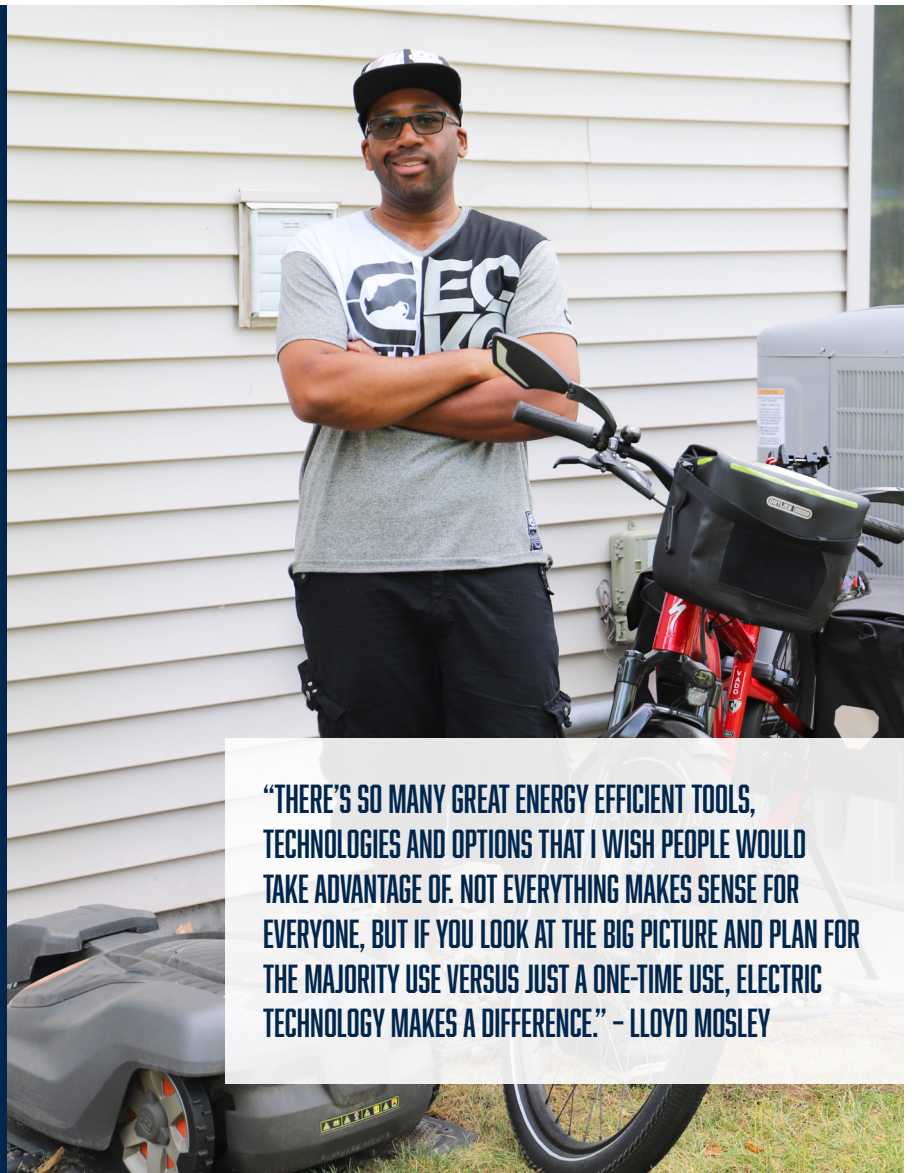
### **HOW MUCH MONEY HAVE YOU SAVED?**

We save hundreds of dollars every month from utilizing all the various electric technology and tools we have. Our electric mower runs 6-7 hours per day, every other day, and it only costs us about 26 cents per week to mow our in-town, corner lot.

### **HOW MUCH TIME HAVE YOU SAVED?**

Having electric technology allows us to prioritize our time and gives us more time with family. We don't have to make last-minute runs to the gas station and there's also much less maintenance on our tools.

**ENERGY WISE** 



**“THERE’S SO MANY GREAT ENERGY EFFICIENT TOOLS, TECHNOLOGIES AND OPTIONS THAT I WISH PEOPLE WOULD TAKE ADVANTAGE OF. NOT EVERYTHING MAKES SENSE FOR EVERYONE, BUT IF YOU LOOK AT THE BIG PICTURE AND PLAN FOR THE MAJORITY USE VERSUS JUST A ONE-TIME USE, ELECTRIC TECHNOLOGY MAKES A DIFFERENCE.” – LLOYD MOSLEY**

## **STEARNS ELECTRIC ENERGYWISE ELECTRIC TECHNOLOGY**

Electric technology and tools operate efficiently in comparison to their fossil-fueled counterparts, the savings really add up because of the operating efficiency of each machine. Not only do you save on energy use, but you also benefit from cost and time savings in the long run.

### **Electric Tools and Technology:**

- Electric Vehicles\*
- Electric Bikes
- Electric Riding, Push and Robotic Lawn Mowers
- Electric Leaf Blowers
- Electric Trimmers
- Electric Chainsaws
- Electric Robotic Vacuums and Mops
- Programmable Thermostats
- Lighting Controls

\*Stearns Electric offers rebates and a lower energy rate through our ChargeWise program for Electric Vehicles and there will be more information about that in the August Innovative Energy Solutions feature in the Power Connection.

*Stearns Electric offers residential, commercial, industrial and agricultural rebates for our member-consumers. By upgrading to more efficient equipment and enrolling in our EnergyWise programs, you will save money and energy every month. Contact Stearns Electric at (800) 962-0655 for more information.*

# PROTECTING SAFETY AND RELIABILITY: WHY LANDSCAPING AROUND THOSE GREEN BOXES IS PROHIBITED

## *Thinking of landscaping around your transformer or junction box? Think again.*

In many residential developments and neighborhoods, you'll find transformers and junction boxes (the green box shown in the pictures below). These boxes are integral to the underground electrical system that provides electricity to the homes or businesses around them. These boxes are property of Stearns Electric Association. The Cooperative maintains these boxes and the area needed to access them within the rights of the Cooperative easements or public right-of-way.

Before you try to cover them up, please know that planting shrubs, bushes, trees or flowers around these transformers and junction boxes, or covering them up in any way, is prohibited. This helps keep our line crews safe and ensures reliability of our electrical distribution system.

As a general rule, people who live near these boxes may not plant or place anything within 10 feet of the front of the box and within 5 feet of the sides and back of the box. If there are plants or objects placed within the restricted area around the boxes, they must be removed. Co-op employees may remove obstructions if needed. If you need to dig to remove fixtures or trees or shrubs placed around transformer or junction boxes, please call Gopher State One Call at 811 prior to digging to avoid injury or accidents.

While we understand that these boxes may be considered eyesores, they are necessary to power homes. Transformer and junction boxes allow power lines to be placed underground as opposed to on poles above the ground. Please do not tamper with the box in order to change the appearance. They can't be painted, enclosed or hidden by vegetation.

If you have any questions or concerns about these transformers or junction boxes, please call us at (800) 962-0655.



## ENERGY EFFICIENCY

Summer is a prime opportunity to enjoy the great outdoors. To reduce home energy use, avoid using your oven and use a grill instead. Not only will cooking outdoors eliminate the electricity used to power the stove, but it will also avoid raising the temperature inside your home, reducing the need for air conditioning or cooling.

## MEMBER NEWS

### BEWARE OF SCAM CALLERS

Scam calls have been on the rise in recent years and we want to remind you that Stearns Electric will always ask you to verify your account with specific personal information such as account number, name, address, etc. when we call you. We will never call and allow you only a few minutes to pay your utility bill prior to being disconnected. Please stop and think before releasing personal banking information over the phone. Call us at (800) 962-0655 with any questions.

### TUNE UP YOUR AC THIS SUMMER FOR A CHANCE TO WIN AN E-BIKE

Tune up your air conditioner this summer for your chance to win an electric bike from Stearns Electric Association! From now through September 1, members can receive a \$25 rebate and a chance to win an Aventon Soltera Electric Road Bike. Learn more at [www.stearnselectric.org/2023-ac-tuneup](http://www.stearnselectric.org/2023-ac-tuneup).



## CEO MESSAGE CONTINUED...

### 5. Why do I have to pay \$3 per month for it?

Stearns Electric was founded by members when other energy utility providers wouldn't consider bringing electricity to rural areas because it was too expensive. Coming together collectively is the cooperative way. We took those initial member investments and spent the last 85 years building and enhancing the infrastructure to reliably serve electricity to our members. In order to maintain our infrastructure, vehicle fleet and equipment, and grow the Cooperative in the future, we come together with our members once again as we plan and prepare to power the next 85 years.

More information on the rate adjustment can be found at [www.stearnslectric.org/rateadjustment2023](http://www.stearnslectric.org/rateadjustment2023). As always, we work for you, so please feel free to contact us with your questions and concerns. Thank you for your membership.



Sincerely,

Matt O'Shea  
Chief Executive Officer

## YOUTH TOUR 2023

Travis Bellefeuille, son of Kris and Molly Bellefeuille of Swanville, recently returned from his trip representing Stearns Electric Association at the Rural Electric Youth Tour in Washington, D.C. June 13-18, 2023.

During the trip, Travis and the other Minnesota delegates visited Capitol Hill and met with several of Minnesota's congressional leaders. Delegates also toured Washington D.C.'s famous monuments, visited Arlington Cemetery, took a Potomac River cruise, and toured the Smithsonian Museums.

Travis will provide a recap of his Youth Tour experience for members at the 2024 Annual Meeting.



## COOKING CORNER WALDORF SALAD

*Submitted by:*  
*Kim Murphy Ellingboe*

### INGREDIENTS

- $\frac{3}{4}$  C mayonnaise or salad dressing
- 1 Tbsp plus 2 tsp lemon juice
- 1 Tbsp plus 2 tsp milk
- 3 medium apples, chopped
- 2 medium celery stalks, chopped
- $\frac{1}{2}$  C nuts, chopped
- Salad greens

### DIRECTIONS

Mix mayonnaise, lemon juice and milk in a bowl. Stir in apples, celery and nuts. Serve on top of salad greens. 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



# STACKS OF FUN!

JOIN US FOR OUR

## MEMBER APPRECIATION PANCAKE FEED

SATURDAY, AUGUST 5 | 8 - 11:30 A.M.  
FREEPORT COMMUNITY CENTER