



NOVEMBER  
2023

member driven.  
community focused.  
energy smart.

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

VOLUME 23 | ISSUE 11

## STEARNS ELECTRIC RETURNS \$2.125 MILLION IN CAPITAL CREDIT PATRONAGE IN 2023

In September 2023, the Stearns Electric Association Board of Directors authorized a \$1.175 million general retirement of Cooperative Capital Credits to our members. These funds are combined with the Generation and Transmission (G&T) Capital Credits that were returned to us from our wholesale power provider Great River Energy, and in December eligible member-consumers will receive Capital Credit checks totaling \$2.125 million. These funds are returned as cash-back to you, our Cooperative members. As a member-consumer, you may receive money back from the Cooperative in early December.

As a not-for-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 on directly to you, our members.

Estate retirements are also processed throughout the year for deceased members. With required documentation, heirs can claim these funds at a discounted rate. Member-consumers are encouraged to note Stearns Electric Capital Credits within their legal papers so that heirs know to contact us should a death occur.

Over the last year, Stearns Electric refunded over \$2.7 million to our members represented by the following:

#### Upcoming General Retirements totaling \$2,125,000

- Cooperative Capital Credits of \$1,175,000
- Generation and Transmission (G&T) Capital Credits of \$950,000

#### Estate Retirements totaling \$619,000

*Continued on page 2.*

## CAPITAL CREDITS CONTINUED...

If you purchased electricity from Stearns Electric during the years of 2001, 2002 and/or 2018-2022, you may receive a Capital Credit check based on the Cooperative Capital Credit distribution. Additionally, members who purchased electricity from Stearns Electric during the years of 1989-1994 may receive a Capital Credit check based on the G&T Capital Credit distribution.

2023 retired 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 \$71.94.

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 \$43 million in Capital Credits to our members.



## CAPITAL CREDITS



From now through Christmas Day, share a photo of your holiday lights on our Facebook page for your chance to win a new LED holiday light gift pack - a \$100 value!



## DIRECTOR NOMINATIONS OPEN ON NOVEMBER 26 IN DISTRICTS 4, 5 AND 9

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 for the 2024 Director candidates in Districts 4, 5 and 9 open on November 26, 2023. 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](http://www.stearnselectric.org).

Members in Districts 4, 5 and 9 who are interested in becoming a nominee should fill out the Director Application and submit it to the Secretary before January 25, 2024.

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, 2023.

## CEO MESSAGE

### MEMBER ENGAGEMENT – KEEPING YOU INFORMED

At Stearns Electric, we understand that our Cooperative exists because of our member-consumers. We value this cooperative difference and work hard to provide effective member communication and robust member engagement for our members on an ongoing basis.

Though we work hard to keep you informed on Cooperative happenings through Power Connection, our website, social media and different member events, we know member engagement goes two ways and are always looking for ways to hear directly from you. Here is a recap of some of our recent member engagement initiatives.

#### MEMBER SURVEY

Surveying members is one of the most helpful member engagement tools we use. We partner annually with the National Rural Electric Association (NRECA) Market Research division to conduct member surveys. Results are used to track how satisfied members are year-over-year and provide insight into the areas of the Cooperative and/or the electric utility industry that matter most to our members.

Last month, we completed our second member survey in 2023. We look forward to hearing what members had to say and using that feedback to maintain or improve our services and consider future opportunities.

#### MEMBER ENGAGEMENT GROUP

Our Member Engagement Group is a really great way for members to engage directly with Stearns Electric. The Member Engagement Group (MEG) meetings give members a chance to learn more about the specific areas of the Cooperative. We also use the MEG as a sounding board for ideas and proposals for new programs and evaluation of existing services. MEG meets four times per year.

In November, MEG members participated in a tour of the current Melrose facility and learned more about our Right-of-Way program, outage response at the Co-op and the needs for the new headquarters facility.

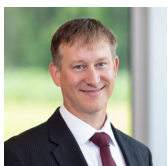
#### OPERATION ROUND UP® (ORU) TRUST BOARD

Another way to get involved is by serving on the ORU Trust Board. The Trust Board reviews and evaluates funding requests from area organizations and charitable causes and distributes funding of ORU funds throughout our area communities.

On November 1, the Trust Board hosted an open house for ORU recipients to celebrate the \$3 Million Milestone that was achieved in 2023. View photos from this event on our Facebook page, [www.facebook.com/stearnsselectric](http://www.facebook.com/stearnsselectric).

If you are interested in learning more about any of these initiatives or want to connect with Cooperative staff at any time, you can visit our website, [www.stearnsselectric.org](http://www.stearnsselectric.org), or call us at (800) 962-0655.

As always, it is a pleasure to serve you.



Sincerely,

Matt O'Shea  
Chief Executive Officer

## BOARD MEETING HIGHLIGHTS

The regular meeting of the Board of Directors of Stearns Electric Association was called to order following an executive session on Thursday, September 28, 2023, at 1:08 p.m. at the Melrose office of Stearns Electric Association.

Highlights of the meeting include:

- Guest speaker Matt Ellis from Great River Energy presented an update on the Alexandria to Big Oaks transmission line project.
- Directors reviewed and discussed Form 990, Form 990-T and Stearns Electric's two paid time off proposals. Several questions were asked on each topic and the Board provided guidance to Stearns Electric's leadership team on the paid time off proposals.
- Board members approved the retirement of approximately \$2,125,000 in Capital Credits, which will be sent out to qualifying members in the form of checks at the end of November.
- CEO Matt O'Shea announced that the Cooperative has entered into a letter of agreement with Felhaber-Larson law firm to join efforts with several other electric cooperatives impacted by the same property tax issue.
- The Board approved the construction manager contract for the new headquarters facility, which was discussed in depth at a special meeting on September 27, 2023.

**NEXT BOARD MEETING**  
November 21, 2023





Photo courtesy of Jer-Lindy Farms.

## COWS, CHEESES AND SPIRITS – AN INNOVATIVE TRIFECTA

Along a road less traveled (for now at least) just north of Brooten lies Jer-Lindy Farms and Redhead Creamery, a family-owned farm, creamery and soon-to-be distillery co-owned by Jerry and Linda Jennissen and Alise and Lucas Sjostrom.

What started as a small family farm has grown to a fun, unique operation, with even more innovation in the works.

“Jerry and Linda began farming together in 1979, moving to their current location in 1983,” owner Lucas Sjostrom explained. “Amid the 1980s farm crisis, both Jerry and Linda had to take off-farm jobs to support their family of six, including four redheaded daughters. But a lot of hard work and love was put into the operation over the years to make it what it is today.”

Today, Jer-Lindy Farms operates on 300 acres and houses 200 dairy cows. But it’s home to so much more.

### REDHEAD CREAMERY

Alise, the daughter of Jerry and Linda, fulfilled her lifelong dream of owning a creamery when Redhead Creamery came to life in 2014. The small cheese production facility was built on the family’s dairy farm and makes cheese up to five days a week, based on demand.

The words “fresh” and “local” have never been truer when it comes to cheese produced at Redhead Creamery. Milk flows directly from the milk parlor at the farm to the cheese room of Redhead Creamery. And from there, the magic happens.

Today, Redhead Creamery cheese is sold right on-site at Jer-Lindy farms, but is also available in certain stores in Minnesota, North Dakota, South Dakota, Wisconsin and Illinois.

“Eating is a visceral part of life. Seeing something enjoyed that we know we made – there is really nothing better,” Sjostrom said.

### REDHEAD CREAMERY SPIRITS

But that is not all! Big plans are in progress to open Redhead Creamery Spirits right next door to the cheese shop, using the whey leftover from the cheesemaking process at its base for business. The distillery expects its first bottled spirits to be available by year-end.

The distillery is the first of its kind in Minnesota, and one of only a few even in the United States that is making spirits from whey. What truly makes it unique is that it’s the first in the world located on a dairy farm that is filtering and fermenting its own feedstock. The filtration system allows the distillery to recapture the “cow water” and use it for proofing the spirits, essentially creating the most sustainable product possible.

“This whole project makes our operation more sustainable and unique. The distillery benefits the cheese plant, which benefits the dairy farm – they all support each other,” Sjostrom explained.

Stearns Electric and our wholesale power provider, Great River Energy, have worked together to support Jer-Lindy Farms in its endeavors with funding through the Rural Economic Development Loan & Grant Program (REDLG).

“This project is a huge win for the area. We’re thrilled to support the Jennissens and Sjostroms in their new business venture,” John Pantzke, Manager of Energy Services at Stearns Electric, explained.

“One of our biggest goals with the distillery is to get more traffic out to our farm here,” Sjostrom concluded. “We want to hold distillery tours that allow visitors to come spend the day meeting the cows, observing the cheesemaking and distilling process and enjoying a drink and some cheese, all made with milk produced on the farm.”

A YEAR OF SAVINGS WITH  
INNOVATIVE ENERGY SOLUTIONS

## INTERRUPTIBLE GENERATOR PROGRAM

*member since 2003*

GIERKE FAMILY  
FARMS

### WHY DID YOU CHOOSE TO INSTALL A GENERATOR AND PARTICIPATE IN THE INTERRUPTIBLE PROGRAM?

We knew that we would need a generator on-site for our animals regardless so being able to participate in the Interruptible Program made complete sense with the lower energy rate.

### WHAT HAS BEEN THE BIGGEST BENEFIT?

Being part of the program has helped with our monthly maintenance to make sure our generators are all in proper working order. It also gives us peace of mind that our animals are safe and healthy in any circumstance.

### ARE THERE ANY INCONVENIENCES?

There hasn't been any inconveniences. Everything runs smoothly and we have good notice when there is a test or notification of an energy curtailment.

### HOW MUCH MONEY HAVE YOU SAVED?

By participating in the Interruptible Program with our two generators, we saved nearly \$18,000 with the reduced EnergyWise rate over the past year. That's nearly 15% off our total electricity bill!

### HOW MUCH ENERGY HAVE YOU SAVED?

Although we don't use less energy by participating in the Interruptible Program, we're using our energy more wisely.

ENERGY WISE 



**"BEING PART OF THE INTERRUPTIBLE PROGRAM FOR OUR GENERATORS HAS BEEN NOTHING BUT BENEFICIAL FOR OUR FARM AND ANIMALS. IT'S GIVEN US PEACE OF MIND AND SAVED US MONEY ON OUR MONTHLY ELECTRIC BILL, ALL WITH LIMITED INTERRUPTIONS TO OUR SERVICE."**

**- ABBY GIERKE VESLEDAHL, GIERKE FAMILY FARMS**

## STEARNS ELECTRIC ENERGYWISE INTERRUPTIBLE PROGRAM

The Commercial, Industrial and Agricultural Interruptible Program helps farmers and businesses lower energy costs. During periods of peak demand, our system may require more power than is normally available. By participating in the Interruptible Program, participants help reduce the amount of electricity our members need during these critical times by allowing Stearns Electric to interrupt your electric service and automatically switch energy load onto your back-up generator. In return, participants receive a lower energy rate throughout the year.

### PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS:

- Generator must be 50 kW or larger.
- Generator back-up systems may be interrupted for up to 10 continuous hours on any given day.
- Generator engine must meet EPA RICE rules.
- Failure of the generator during peak control time will be assessed applicable rate penalties in accordance with the current rate schedule.

Contact Stearns Electric for a full list of program requirements.

\*Single phase system receives an energy rate of 7.65 cents per kWh with a \$40 monthly Fixed Charge.  
Three phase system receives an energy rate of 5.13 cents per kWh with a \$65 monthly Fixed Charge.

*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.*



# MY CO-OP CARES: INDY FOUNDATION

Meaningful community involvement is one of the many values at Stearns Electric. We aim to achieve this in many different ways but our 'My Co-op Cares' program is one way employees contribute to this commitment.

In October, nine Stearns Electric Association employees volunteered for the INDY (I'm Not Done Yet) Foundation as part of the Co-op's 'My Co-op Cares' program. Volunteers filled warrior packs for patients battling cancer. It was a large task to fill 500 packs, so the group utilized the ample space available at the BoHo Café in Holdingford.

Warrior packs are filled with comfort items like a blanket, water bottle, inspirational notebook and more that patients can bring with them for appointments and treatments. Additionally, our employees also wrote handwritten notes of encouragement to be included within the packs.

"My favorite part of the event was writing out the cards to these cancer warriors - it was so rewarding," employee volunteer Cindy Anderson said.

"We are so grateful for community partners like Stearns Electric who take the initiative to help support the INDY mission. Our backpack program is a lot of work, but it makes a large impact across the state of Minnesota," Kayla Keenan, INDY Foundation Founder, expressed.

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

"Our My Co-op Cares events take our ability to give our talents to a greater level impacting those in need, or with limited resources," employee volunteer Vicky Herkenhoff explained.

Matt Pieper, employee volunteer, added, "Volunteering alongside my co-workers I don't interact with every day helps make the Co-op stronger by having personal connections with other employees."

Visit our Facebook page to see 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).



## ENERGY EFFICIENCY

### SAVE THIS HOLIDAY SEASON

When possible, cook with smaller countertop appliances instead of the stovetop or oven. Smaller appliances like slow cookers, air fryers and pressure cookers consume less energy.

When using the oven or stovetop, match the size of the pot to the heating element and place a lid over the pot while cooking. The food will cook faster and you'll use less energy.

## MEMBER NEWS

### CAPITAL CREDIT CHECKS

Members who are receiving a Capital Credit check this year can expect to receive their check 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 23
- Friday, November 24
- Monday, December 25
- Monday, January 1

If you experience a power outage during these holidays, 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.



## 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, please 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.



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## COOKING CORNER

### MINT CHOCOLATE PUDDING COOKIES

*Submitted by: Kim Murphy Ellingboe*

#### INGREDIENT

- 1 C sugar
- ½ C butter, softened
- 1 egg
- ½ C sour cream
- 1 3.4 oz box instant vanilla pudding mix
- ½ tsp salt
- ½ tsp baking soda
- 2 C all-purpose flour
- 2 tsp mint extract
- blue food coloring
- green food coloring
- 1 ½ C chocolate chips

#### DIRECTIONS

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Line a baking sheet with parchment paper or spray with non-stick spray. Cream sugar and butter together until fluffy. Add egg, sour cream and pudding mix. Stir to combine. In a separate bowl, combine flour, salt and baking soda. Incorporate the flour mixture into the butter and pudding mixture and stir until well combined. Add mint extract, one drop of blue food coloring and 7-10 drops of green food coloring (or more until desired color is achieved). Add in the chocolate chips. Place rounded Tbsp balls onto the baking sheet and bake for 10 minutes, or when fully cooked. 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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MELROSE, MN

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