



POWER CONNECTION



DECEMBER
2023

member driven.
community focused.
energy smart.

IN THIS ISSUE:

PAGE 2
Youth Tour

PAGE 3
Winter Reliability

PAGE 4
Operation Round Up®

PAGE 5
A Year of Savings with
Innovative Energy Solutions

PAGE 6
Employee Charity Event

(800) 962-0655
WWW.STEARNSELECTRIC.ORG

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DIRECTOR NOMINATIONS OPEN IN DISTRICTS 4, 5 AND 9

Stearns Electric Association's Board of Directors are member-consumers just like you who understand and listen to the community. They represent you on the Co-op's Board, which is responsible for overseeing Stearns Electric business and determining the organization's strategic direction.

The cooperative business model depends on its members to provide leadership and guidance for Stearns Electric. Each year, an election takes place in three of our nine districts to elect a director to represent that district on our board. The election process ensures that every member has a voice in the operation of this organization and that any member in good standing may seek election for the Board of Directors.

Nominations are now open for the board in Districts 4, 5 and 9.

If you live in these districts and are interested in becoming a nominee, please visit our website, www.stearnsselectric.org/director-election, to view the nominations packet and download the Application for Director.

Applications must be returned by 4 p.m. on January 25, 2024, to the secretary:

Email: secretary@stearnsselectric.org

Mail:
Secretary
Stearns Electric Association
c/o Dymoke Law Office, PA
PO Box 127
Melrose, MN 56352

A full list of director qualifications is posted on our website. If you have additional questions about the nomination process or becoming a director, please contact the Stearns Electric Election Coordinator during regular business hours at (800) 962-0655.

Stearns Electric retains the services of Survey and Ballot Systems, an independent contractor, to conduct the election in conjunction with the Annual Meeting on Thursday, April 4, 2024.

Review district information and director qualification overview on page 2.

DIRECTOR ELECTIONS CONTINUED

DISTRICT INFORMATION:

District 4 – Serving Minnesota townships: Farming, Zion, Munson, Paynesville, Eden Lake and Luxemburg in Stearns County.

District 5 – Serving Minnesota townships: Bangor, Glenwood and Grove Lake in Pope County; Raymond, Getty, Grove, North Fork, Lake George, Spring Hill, St. Martin, Crow Lake, Crow River and Lake Henry in Stearns County; and Roseville Township in Kandiyohi County.

District 9 – Serving Minnesota townships: St. Joseph, Wakefield, Rockville and Maine Prairie in Stearns County.

DIRECTOR QUALIFICATIONS:

- Nominees must be a member of the Cooperative and a primary resident of the district they wish to represent.
- Nominees cannot be employed by, or have financial interest in, a competing enterprise.
- Nominees must have the time available to attend a minimum of 12 regular daytime board meetings, and additional meetings and training sessions as needed.

Complete list of director qualifications and responsibilities are available on our website: www.stearnselectric.org/director-election.

RURAL ELECTRIC YOUTH TOUR 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 18-23, 2024.

REQUIREMENTS:

- Complete the Stearns Electric Youth Tour Application (available at www.stearnselectric.org or at your school's counseling center).
- Write 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 9, 2024. Visit www.stearnselectric.org for more information.



CEO MESSAGE WINTER RELIABILITY

As winter officially settles in, I want to talk about reliability of the electric grid and what we at Stearns Electric are doing to prepare for our coldest season of the year.

You might have read or heard some recent headlines that question the reliability of the nation's electricity supply this winter. In November, the North American Electric Reliability Corporation (NERC) released its annual winter reliability assessment, which stressed the need to improve the reliability of North America's power grid. While these headlines are attention grabbing, I want to reiterate that here in Minnesota and across the Midwest, our wholesale power provider, Great River Energy (GRE), in partnership with other generation and transmission companies in our region, spend countless hours preparing the power grid to ensure a high level of reliability, especially in the winter.

Here are a few other headlines, or key takeaways, I want to reiterate this month:

GRE's generation facilities are adequately prepared for the coldest days of the year. GRE continues its transition to carbon free energy to meet Minnesota's Carbon Free by 2040 mandate. GRE is adding many renewable energy generation sources to its portfolio and it also maintains several fuel-based peaking stations that can produce precise amounts of energy when needed. These peaking facilities play an important role kicking in immediately to produce more energy when demand is high, generally on the coldest days of the year.

GRE has also equipped three of its existing generation facilities with backup fuel options, allowing the utility to generate electricity with fuel oil or natural gas. This optional fuel switching better ensures both affordability and reliability in extreme weather scenarios. Recently, the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission approved GRE's plan to integrate diesel fuel energy at its natural gas peaking plant near Cambridge, bringing the total dual fuel generating facilities up to four. This is very beneficial to energy consumers in Minnesota.

In Minnesota, we work together to help maintain electric reliability and affordability. GRE and its 27 member-owned cooperatives, including Stearns Electric, have a wide network of members like you signed up for load control programs. Participating members elect for their qualifying electric loads to be curtailed during times of highest energy demand, reducing overall demand and improving reliability in our region. In return, participants pay a reduced energy rate.

Transitioning to carbon free energy generation too quickly poses challenges.

As utilities across the country work to meet carbon free energy generation mandates, it is important that we don't shut down fossil fuel generation facilities prematurely. Doing so has potential to impact the affordability and reliability of electricity that we have come to expect. Reports like the recent one published by NERC continue to help guide the industry on this historical new path toward carbon-free energy. In fact, the New York Independent System Operator announced in November it will keep four peaking plants operating past their expected 2025 retirement date to maintain adequate electric reliability.

As always, at Stearns Electric we are working daily to deliver reliable electricity to you. Please contact me with any questions or concerns.

Wishing you a wonderful holiday season,



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 on Thursday, October 26, 2023, at 1:02 p.m. at the St. Joseph office of Stearns Electric Association.

Highlights of the meeting include:

- Manager of Energy Services, John Pantzke presented on electric vehicles within the Co-op's system.
- Vice Presidents Vicky Herkenhoff and James Pachan reviewed the current strategic plan and corporate scorecard.
- CEO Matt O'Shea presented an update on the headquarters facility progress. The construction management contract is being reviewed.
- CEO O'Shea reviewed approval of the power purchase contract extension to 2055 by GRE all-requirements members. GRE's 2024 preliminary budget was also discussed, which includes a 2.2% rate increase for Stearns Electric while WAPA rates will remain the same.
- Board members directed Cooperative leadership to continue pursuing the Employee Retention Credit.
- Board members approved the acceptance of equipment and machinery to be used as collateral for an E3 loan through GRE that Stearns Electric is assisting with.
- Director Greg Blaine discussed the GRE Board approved changes to GRE Articles of Incorporation and Bylaws, which will be voted on next month.

NEXT BOARD MEETING
December 28, 2023



COMMUNITY IMPACT: STEARNS ELECTRIC'S OPERATION ROUND UP® PROGRAM

\$3 MILLION CELEBRATION EVENT

Previous recipients of Operation Round Up® (ORU) funds were invited to join us at Stearns Electric's St. Joseph Branch Office on November 1 to celebrate the ORU \$3 million milestone reached earlier this summer.

Nearly 40 different organizations attended the open house event.

Thank you to all members who round up their monthly electric bills to help support hundreds of worthy organizations annually. Your small change makes a BIG difference!

Through the ORU program, members of the Cooperative round up their monthly electric bills to the nearest dollar. The rounded-up funds (between 1¢ and 99¢) are placed in a trust fund that is administered by the Trust Board.

Any local non-profit organization or charitable cause can apply for funding. The next deadline is Friday, February 23, 2024.

Visit www.stearnslectric.org/community-impact/community/operation-round-up/ to learn more.



OPERATION ROUND UP® DISTRIBUTES \$74,400 IN NOVEMBER

The Stearns Electric Association Trust Board met on Wednesday, November 1 to award funds through the Cooperative's Operation Round Up® (ORU) program. They distributed \$74,400 to 62 local organizations and charitable causes. This included donations to Central Minnesota's 19 food shelves and 10 area holiday gift-giving organizations.



TRUST BOARD NOMINATIONS OPEN IN DISTRICTS 2, 5 AND 9

Nominations for the ORU Trust Board are open for members in Districts 2, 5 and 9. Applications are available for interested individuals on our website, www.stearnslectric.org, and are due Friday, January 12, 2024. Trust Board Directors are elected to serve one, three-year term and can serve two consecutive terms.

Call our ORU staff liaison at (800) 962-0655 during regular business hours with any questions.

A YEAR OF SAVINGS WITH
INNOVATIVE ENERGY SOLUTIONS

AGRICULTURAL LIVESTOCK WATERER

member since 1991

CZECH DAIRY

WHY DID YOU DECIDE TO INSTALL AN ENERGY-EFFICIENT CATTLE WATERER?

When we built our new cattle barn in 2021, we installed our new energy-efficient waterers along with two smaller ones in an older barn. It gave us more flexibility not having to thaw water in the winter as the old waterers were steel.

WHAT HAS BEEN THE BIGGEST BENEFIT OF USING THE NEW WATERERS?

The time savings from not having to thaw the water when it gets really cold. We now have up to an hour of time back that we can use for more important tasks on the farm.

ARE THERE ANY INCONVENIENCES OF USING THE NEW WATERERS?

The initial cost of installing the new waterers was really the only inconvenience, but that investment has now paid for itself.

HOW MUCH DID YOU RECEIVE IN REBATES?

We received a rebate of \$75 per waterer installed.

HOW MUCH MONEY HAVE YOU SAVED?

For the specific waterer we have, we pay about half of what we did previously with the old waterer, which is a savings of approximately \$35 per month.

HOW MUCH ENERGY HAVE YOU SAVED?

We save nearly 125W of energy per heating hour as the heating element in the new waterer operates with a lower heating element wattage.

ENERGY WISE 



“WE WOULDN'T EVER GO BACK TO THE OLD STYLE OF WATERERS. IT'S AN INVESTMENT UP FRONT, BUT SO WORTH IT IN THE LONG RUN. THE TIME WE SAVE NEVER HAVING TO THAW THE WATER ALLOWS US TO BETTER ATTEND TO OUR HERD AND THEY ARE ABLE TO ACCESS THE WATER ANYTIME THEY NEED IT.” – DAVE, JOE AND SCOTT CZECH

STEARNS ELECTRIC ENERGYWISE REBATE AGRICULTURAL LIVESTOCK WATERER

The Agricultural Livestock Waterer Rebate is for the installation of insulated or energy-free livestock waterers in place of standard electric waterers. Livestock waterers provide fresh water in a trough but keeps the water fresh and clean by limiting the amount of water allowed to sit in the trough when not in use.

REBATE REQUIREMENTS:

- Evaluation must be complete before funds will be issued for the rebate.
- Members and vendors must submit itemized equipment invoices, rebate applications and manufacturer equipment specifications.
- The Cooperative reserves the right to conduct random inspections of installations.
- Rebates must be applied for within 12 months of invoice date.
- Project must comply with all program-specific rules and qualifications.
- The member is responsible for checking with the Cooperative to determine funding and availability to verify program parameters.

*The maximum rebate shall not exceed 25% of materials cost OR project cost, up to \$10,000 per member.

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.

EMPLOYEE CHARITY EVENT RAISES NEARLY \$6,500

Stearns Electric held the 16th Annual Employee Charity Event on November 15 where employees raised a record-breaking \$6,426 for this year's employee-selected organization: Soldier's 6. Donations were raised via a silent auction, direct contributions and other activities throughout the day.

Soldier's 6 is a Minnesota-based organization that provides specially trained K-9's to honorably discharged veterans, police officers, firefighters, paramedics, correctional officers and 911 dispatchers. These K-9's become 'Battle Buddies' that help guide their human through the difficult days in life.

"As a local, member-owned electric utility, we value the communities and the people we serve. The annual Charity Event is one way that we can bring all our employees together to live out our Stearns Electric value of meaningful community involvement," CEO Matt O'Shea explained.

Stearns Electric and its employees crossed a major donation milestone in 2023. Since the inception of the Charity Event in 2008, Cooperative employees and the Board of Directors have donated over \$60,000 to 16 worthy organizations that make significant impacts in our local communities.

"The Charity Event is an annual testament to our employees' generosity," member and employee engagement coordinator, Katie Anderson, added. "The organizations that are chosen year-over-year are close to our employees' hearts and I think that is a direct reflection on the continued success of this employee event to impact local organizations doing great work for others."



ELECTRIC SAFETY

Christmas lights are small decorations that don't produce much heat, but they can still become quite hot if left on for too long. Make sure you turn off your Christmas tree lights before leaving your home or going to bed at night.

You can also use LED (light-emitting diode) lights as an alternative to traditional Christmas lights. They use even less power, and they don't get quite as hot after being left on for a long time.

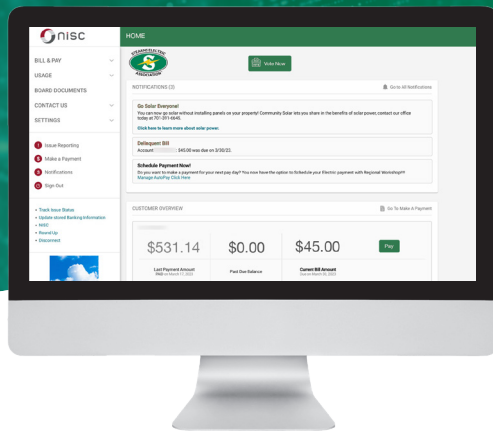
MEMBER NEWS

NOTICE TO ALL IRRIGATION MEMBERS

Farmers who plan to install electric irrigation systems or convert their system from diesel to electric for the 2024 growing season must contact Stearns Electric Association. This information is used to determine supply needs for the 2024 construction season. Materials and transformers will be ordered soon. Please call the Engineering Department during business hours at (800) 962-0655.

OFFICES CLOSED

The Stearns Electric offices will be closed on Monday, December 25 in observance of Christmas and Monday, January 1 in observance of New Year's Day. If you experience a power outage or emergency during these holidays, 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.



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INTERRUPTIBLE PROGRAM AVAILABLE TO CI&A MEMBERS

As 2023 nears its end, now is a good time to plan for 2024 project upgrades in energy efficiency and potential ways to reduce your company's overhead costs.

Stearns Electric offers an Interruptible Program exclusively to our commercial, industrial and agricultural (CI&A) members. CI&A members that enroll in the Interruptible Program will not only save money on their monthly electric bill, but also eliminate production disruptions and delays during an unexpected power outage.

Contact John Pantzke, manager of energy services, at (800) 962-0655 for a custom cost comparison to find out what savings could look like for your farm or business based off your past energy consumption.

Visit www.stearnselectric.org for even more ways to save, including information on efficiency grants available to members making energy efficient upgrades related to their electrical system.

COOKING CORNER

FRITO PIE

Submitted by: Elizabeth Forsythe

INGREDIENT

- 1 lb turkey or beef
- 1 small onion, finely diced
- 1 Tbsp garlic, minced (or substitute 1 tsp garlic powder)
- 15 oz can kidney or black beans, partially drained
- 15 oz can diced tomatoes
- 1 packet taco seasoning
- 2 tsp chili powder
- 1 bag Fritos corn chips
- 2 C shredded cheddar or Mexican cheese

DIRECTIONS

Brown meat and drain. Add onion and garlic and cook until soft. Add beans, tomatoes, chili powder, taco seasoning and water quantity that is designated on seasoning packet. Simmer for 10 minutes. Cover the bottom of a 9x13" pan with Fritos corn chips, setting aside approximately 1½ C of Fritos for later. Sprinkle some cheese lightly over the chips, then cover chips and cheese with all of the meat mixture. Sprinkle remaining cheese over the top of the meat mixture and finally, add what's left of the corn chips on the top. Bake at 350 degrees until fully heated through. 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

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MELROSE, MN

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HAPPY Holidays

Spark joy and light this holiday season.

From our co-op family to yours, we wish you a safe
and warm season with friends and loved ones.

May 2024 be a year full of bright opportunities.

Cooperatively, Your Friends and Neighbors at Stearns Electric Association