



POWER CONNECTION



FEBRUARY
2024

member driven.
community focused.
energy smart.

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(800) 962-0655
STEARNSELECTRIC.ORG

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ENERGY EDUCATION ELECTRIFIES LOCAL STUDENTS

In January and February, Stearns Electric Association visited nearly 1,700 students at 32 schools throughout Central Minnesota for our annual Energy Education efficiency and electrical safety demonstration.

Students learn about the basics of electricity, including details on generation fuels, conductors and insulators, and how power gets to homes, farms, businesses and schools, during each presentation. Our lineworkers then demonstrate the live electric home and farm model, where students see first-hand what happens when people, vehicles or equipment come into contact with electricity.

Cooperative lineworkers Matt Pieper and Blake Thompson co-presented the energy education and electrical safety demonstrations this year with energy management electrician, Jamie Plumski and member and employee engagement coordinator, Katie Anderson.

"Educating students about how to be safe around electricity is so important," Pieper explained. "We encourage the students

to share what they've learned with their families so the messages of safety are reinforced to others in their home."

"We start each presentation with a general energy background before showing them the safety portion of the display," Plumski added. "It's fun to see them connect the dots of what we talk about to what is then shown in the safety display."

"You can feel the electricity in the classroom from the students ahead of seeing the live safety display," Anderson said. "Their reactions to the first arcs and sparks of the display never get old. The linemen are great about highlighting the messages of safety by explaining the dangers of electricity while still letting the kids be excited."

Although students are always excited to see the live safety demonstration, the focus of the Energy Education presentations is to stress the Cooperative's message to be safe and smart around electrical equipment.

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ENERGY EDUCATION CONTINUED

Perhaps the most important safety takeaway from the presentation is the students' knowledge about what to do if a vehicle they were in were to hit electrical equipment. They learn that it is safest to stay inside the vehicle unless it were to start on fire.

"Beyond knowing how to be safe if a vehicle they are in hits electrical equipment, I hope students always remember to be careful of a downed power line because you never know if it is energized or not," Thompson explained.

During the finale of the presentation one student is picked to dress up like a lineworker and then there is time for the presenters to answer student questions.

"My favorite part of presenting Energy Education is hearing the comments from students and answering their questions," Thompson said. "The questions can be all over the place, but it's always interesting to hear what is important to them."

Stearns Electric Association values community involvement and safety for our employees, members and the public. Our Energy Education presentations strengthen these key messages with the hope that students will bring their new electrical efficiency and safety knowledge home to their families.

For more information on our annual Energy Education programming, please visit stearnslectric.org.



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CEO MESSAGE

EMPLOYEES ARE THE HEART OF OUR COOPERATIVE

In February we celebrate Valentine's Day, so I thought I'd take some time to highlight the "heart" of serving Stearns Electric member-consumers – our employees.

Every month, we spend time building and enhancing our Cooperative culture. In 2019, we partnered with an organization called GiANT Worldwide to provide a foundation of leadership and self-awareness tools and resources that we could use companywide. Since then, our employees have taken that foundation and built it up into our Stronger Together culture.

We have 69 employees, two offices and various roles at Stearns Electric; it is extremely difficult to gather all employees together regularly. However, we maintain consistent communication and cross-department collaboration through our Stronger Together culture – where "employees aspire to be their best self and contribute to everyone's success." Every month, each department receives information to review among employees so we can grow 'stronger together.' After all, the more we can work together and learn from each other, the more effectively we complete our daily job, which is ultimately serving you, our member-consumers.

We value our employees and their contributions to our Cooperative's success. As we prepare for a new headquarters facility, we utilized our experts – our employees – to provide feedback throughout the pre-design process. We asked employees for ways to be efficient with space and help them be effective at their jobs so they could better serve our member-consumers. Their guidance and support directly informed the design of several aspects of the new building. We are excited to implement the ideas that make the most sense for both our business and our budget.

Culture doesn't just happen within the office walls. Our annual Energy Education program encourages collaboration among our lineworkers, electricians and office personnel. And it gives our employees a chance to share their passion for the safe work they do to nearly 1,700 students throughout Central Minnesota – our future workforce. Our linemen and staking engineers also visit annually with area students exploring local career opportunities. We love that our employees feel empowered to share their work experience with others. They should be proud of what they do and where they work – I know I am proud of all they do!

A new opportunity we committed to this year is sending one lineman to Guatemala. I am excited to share that Grant Kulzer will spend about three weeks working with 13 other linemen from cooperatives in Minnesota and Iowa to bring power to homes, businesses and schools in San Marcos, Guatemala through NRECA International. This service project not only supports the cooperative principles of 'Cooperation Among Cooperatives' and 'Concern for the Community,' but also shows that we are invested in growth opportunities and new experiences for our employees.

Company culture is going to happen whether we are intentional or not, and Stearns Electric is proud that we choose to be intentional. I want to thank the membership for supporting our Stronger Together culture and I want to thank our employees for the "heart" they bring to their work every day.



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, December 28, 2023, at 1:01 p.m. at the St. Joseph office of Stearns Electric Association.

Highlights of the meeting include:

- Several policies and a procedure were approved: Charges and Member Procedure; Schedule of Charges; Meter Readings; Line Extension; Theft of Electricity/ Meter Tampering; and Disconnection of Service.
- Stearns Electric's 2024 annual budget was approved.
- Manager of Finance Cindy Anderson presented the Long-Range Financial Forecast to the Board. Several questions were asked and addressed.
- Directors approved using Cooperative Finance Corporation (CFC) as the 2024 Strategic Planning Session facilitator.
- CEO O'Shea announced he was voted in as Carr's Tree Services Board President for 2024.
- An update on the headquarters facility progress was provided, noting the results of the geothermal analysis would be coming soon.
- Division Vice Presidents James Pachan and Vicky Herkenhoff provided updates on the following: IJJA Grip Grant; New ERA Grant GRE Consortium; Employee Retention Credit; Property Tax legislation; and Minnesota Earned Sick and Safe Time (ESST) Law.

NEXT BOARD MEETING

February 22, 2024



ENERGIZING INNOVATION: BERKON INDUSTRIES IN HOLDINGFORD TAKES STEPS TOWARD INNOVATIVE GROWTH

Not too big, not too small – Berkon Industries out of Holdingford aims to be “just right.”

Eric Berscheid started Berkon Docks in 2001 after arriving back in Minnesota following a stint at college out of state. He knew a person who did dock installations and started making docks for him while attending St. Cloud State University. Berscheid started working on fish houses in the off-season and in 2007 Berkon Outdoors was created.

Today, Berkon Outdoors continues to build bulk ice fish house trailers, mainly for Ice Castle Fish Houses. The company also completes specialty projects as time allows, but according to Berscheid, over the years they have been too busy to keep up with many other items. With updates made to the business over the last year though, he hopes to diversify his business offerings even more.

“The most challenging part of owning and operating my own business is that I don’t want to get too big or too small,” Berscheid explained. “When we lose one or two people, we don’t get projects out the door. We want to be small enough to offer flexibility for our workforce, but big enough to get things done.”

That aim for “just right” hasn’t prohibited Berscheid from taking some major steps toward innovation and growth over the years. In 2015, Berkon Industries added an addition to keep production of their ice fish house trailers completely in-house. A second addition was completed in 2023. The most recent addition added space to house the largest power coating space in Central Minnesota, the largest tube laser of its kind in the country and a new flat laser that can cut up to two-inch thick aluminum and stainless steel.

“The most recent addition and installation of the power coating space and lasers were added for future business growth,” he explained. “Business is growing, but at a slow pace so we can keep up. We hope with the new technology we can diversify our business and partner with additional companies and industries.”

As you might imagine, these innovative technologies rely on electricity. – “We can’t do much without electricity – that’s for sure!” Berscheid reiterated.

And that’s where Stearns Electric Association comes in.

“My favorite part of my job is assisting our members with the energy solutions they need – whether it’s for their home, business or farm,” John Pantzke, Manager of Energy Services, shared.

“When Eric reached out to me about their expansion project, I was able to work closely with him to find rebates for his new electrical equipment that he qualified for.”

“I also worked with him to get Berkon Industries enrolled in our Interruptible Program for farms and commercial accounts, which ensures their back-up generator kicks in if there is ever an outage. That way, business can continue as normal, even if the power goes out.”

Enrolling in the Interruptible Program also means Berkon Industries receives a lower energy rate in return for participating in a demand response program.

“When the demand or price for electricity gets high in our region, our wholesale power provider, Great River Energy, can call on Interruptible Program members to shed their electrical loads,” Pantzke explained. “This means that their back-up generator will automatically kick in for a certain amount of time to help curtail the electricity demand at their business - and throughout the region - and instead power their business during this time with fuel. Demand response programs like this are beneficial to all of our members and all consumers throughout the Midwest as they help keep the price of electricity affordable for everyone.”

“I have always had an eye on efficiency and how it pays off in the long run,” Berscheid concluded. “These projects are up-front costs to the business, but in the long run, they are good long-term energy and money-saving solutions.”



Stearns Electric Association offers residential, commercial, industrial and agricultural rebates for our member-consumers. By upgrading to more efficient equipment and enrolling in our EnergyWise® programs, when possible, you will save energy and money every month. Visit stearnslectric.org or call the Energy Services department at (800) 962-0655 to learn more.

THERE'S A REBATE FOR THAT!

YOUR GUIDE TO ENERGY EFFICIENT APPLIANCES

Shopping for your next major appliance? We encourage you to purchase an ENERGY STAR®-qualified appliance to get money back. Stearns Electric offers rebates for members who purchase qualifying refrigerators*, freezers*, clothes dryers and dehumidifiers. Visit energystar.gov to learn more what appliances qualify.

**Please note, to qualify for the rebate, proof of recycling of the old refrigerator or freezer is required.*

FREEZERS

- Freezers that have earned the ENERGY STAR® rating are at least 10% more energy efficient than the minimum federal standard.
- Replacing your old freezer with one that has earned the ENERGY STAR® rating could save you approximately \$35 a year.
- A \$50 rebate is available for qualifying ENERGY STAR® freezers.
- Rebate is only applicable to households that are replacing and recycling an old freezer.

REFRIGERATORS

- ENERGY STAR® certified refrigerators are about 9% more energy efficient than models that meet the federal minimum energy efficiency standard.
- By properly recycling your old refrigerator and replacing it with a new ENERGY STAR® certified refrigerator, you can save approximately \$50 a year.
- A \$50 rebate is available for qualifying ENERGY STAR® refrigerators.
- Rebate is only applicable to households that are replacing and recycling an old refrigerator.

DEHUMIDIFIERS

- ENERGY STAR®-certified dehumidifiers have more efficient refrigeration coils, compressors and fans than conventional models, which means they remove the same amount of moisture but use nearly 30% less energy.
- In fact, the annual energy saved by an ENERGY STAR®-certified dehumidifier could power your ENERGY STAR®-certified refrigerator for four months!
- A \$25 rebate is available for qualifying ENERGY STAR® dehumidifier.
- Rebate application is available online only.

ELECTRIC CLOTHES DRYERS

- ENERGY STAR®-certified dryers use about 20% less energy than conventional models without sacrificing features or performance.
- You can save about \$20 a year in electricity compared to the dryers that only meet the minimum efficiency standard.
- A \$25 rebate is available for qualifying ENERGY STAR® clothes dryer.
- Rebate application is available online only.

**ALL REBATE APPLICATIONS ARE AVAILABLE AT:
STEARNSELECTRIC.ORG/REBATES.**

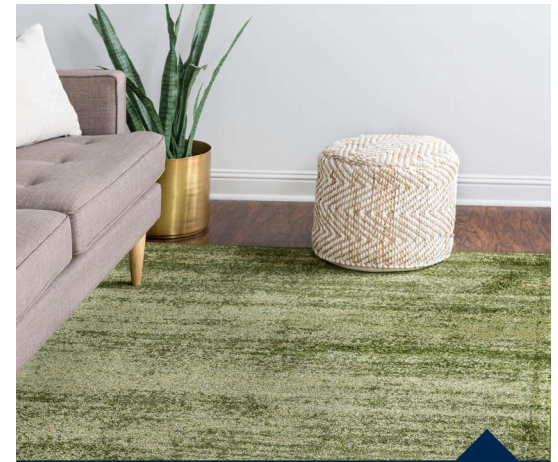
Both paper and online applications are located on our website. Rebate applications must be submitted within 90 days of appliance purchase date to qualify. The appliance must be installed where electricity is supplied by Stearns Electric Association. To receive your rebate, fill out the online application completely OR print the appropriate application, fill it out completely and mail it to the address listed on the form. The receipt of the appliance purchase must also be included.

MEMBER NOTICE

CO-GENERATION AND SMALL POWER PRODUCTION

In compliance with Cooperative Rules implementing Minnesota Statute section 216B.164 Co-Generation and Small Power Production Notice, Stearns Electric Association is required to interconnect with, and purchase electricity from, co-generation and small power production facilities that satisfy the conditions of a Qualifying Facility.

An application for interconnection is required for a Qualifying Facility to interconnect and operate in parallel with the Cooperative's distribution system and is subject to approval by Stearns Electric. This application, as well as other helpful resources, are available on the NOVA Power Portal, www.novapowerportal.com/Home/Index/77. Please contact Stearns Electric during business hours at (800) 962-0655 for additional information.



ENERGY EFFICIENCY

Area rugs are an easy, cost-effective solution to cold floors. Adding area rugs to hard-surface flooring can add warmth to any room and keep your feet cozy on cold winter days.

Choose rugs made from wool or other natural fibers and plush or high-pile textures for the most insulation. Place rugs in areas where you need additional warmth, like the foot of a bed or under a coffee table. Area rugs can enhance the aesthetic of your home and keep you cozier.

COMMERCIAL, INDUSTRIAL & AGRICULTURAL (CI&A) REBATES AVAILABLE



Stearns Electric offers rebates and programs to our CI&A members every year. Rebates are available for robotic milking; ag irrigation variable frequency drives; livestock waterers; ag ventilation; commercial LED lighting; electric forklifts; heat pumps; variable frequency drives; and more.

The Cooperative also manages a United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) economic development loan program that is used to help fund businesses and community projects throughout our area. These loan funds have been utilized by private businesses, cities, health care systems and churches. Contact our Manager of Energy Services during regular business hours at (800) 962-0655 for more information.

MEMBER NEWS

OFFICES CLOSED GOOD FRIDAY

Stearns Electric Association will be closed on Friday, March 29 in observance of Good Friday. Both offices will be open for normal business hours on Monday, April 1. 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.

FINANCIALLY STRUGGLING TO PAY YOUR ELECTRIC BILL?

You may be able to qualify for energy assistance through a local assistance agency. Contact Stearns Electric at (800) 962-0655 during normal business hours with any questions.

SAVE THE DATE FOR THESE UPCOMING MEMBER EVENTS!

87TH ANNUAL MEETING

Thursday, April 4, 2024

Melrose Area High School Auditorium
Doors Open: 6:30 p.m.
Business Meeting: 7:00 p.m.

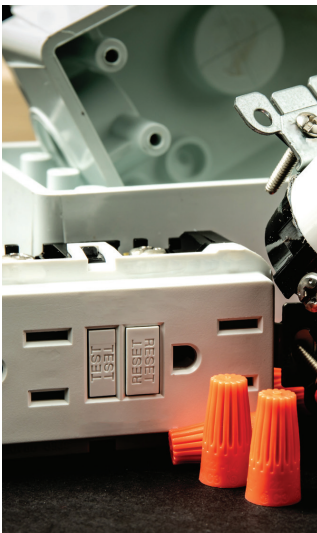
The first 300 members will receive 1 lb. of cheese and 1 lb. of butter quarters as a gift. Attendees have a chance to win one of 10 - \$100 gift card door prizes as well. You must be present at the meeting to win.

INNOVATIVE ENERGY FORUM

Wednesday, May 15, 2024

Park Event Center
500 Division St., Waite Park
5:30 – 8:00 p.m.

Watch for more details on both of these events in the March Power Connection or visit stearnsselectric.org.



SAFETY FOR LIFE

UPGRADE YOUR OUTLETS TO GFCIs



If you use electric appliances, tools or equipment in your bathroom, garage, outdoors or anywhere there is the potential for water or moisture, plug into a GFCI—ground fault circuit interrupter. This small, inexpensive, life-saving device detects the smallest electric current leak and reacts by stopping the flow of electricity fast enough to prevent serious injury or death from electrical shock.

Keep children safe by installing tamper-resistant outlets or tamper-resistant receptacles (TROs or TRRs). Check for outlets that have loose-fitting plugs, which can overheat and lead to a fire. Replace any missing or broken wall plates.

COOKING CORNER

SNICKERDOODLES

Submitted by: Cindy Schaefer

INGREDIENTS

- 1 C soft shortening (or butter)
- 1 ½ C sugar
- 2 eggs
- 2 ¾ C flour
- 2 tsp cream of tartar
- 1 tsp baking soda
- ½ tsp salt
- 2 tsp cinnamon (set aside)
- 2 Tbsp sugar (set aside)

DIRECTIONS

Preheat oven to 325 degrees. Mix shortening, 1 ½ C sugar and eggs together. Add flour, cream of tartar, baking soda and salt into the mixture. Mix well. Chill the dough for one hour. Once dough is chilled, mix 2 Tbsp sugar and cinnamon together. Roll the dough into balls, then roll each ball of dough in the sugar and cinnamon mixture. Put onto baking sheet and bake for 8-10 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@stearnsselectric.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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and an excellent member
experience.*

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