



POWER CONNECTION



**MARCH
2024**

member driven.
community focused.
energy smart.

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(800) 962-0655
STEARNSELECTRIC.ORG

VOLUME 24 | ISSUE 03

YOU'RE INVITED: STEARNS ELECTRIC'S 87TH ANNUAL MEETING

THURSDAY, APRIL 4, 2024
**MELROSE AREA HIGH
SCHOOL AUDITORIUM**

Notice of Member Meeting:

The 87th Annual Meeting of the members of Stearns Electric Association will be held at the Melrose Area High School Auditorium in Melrose, Minnesota at 7:00 p.m. on April 4, 2024, to act on the following matters:

1. Report of officers, Directors and Chief Executive Officer.
2. Regular election of three Directors of the Cooperative:
 - One from District 4
 - One from District 5
 - One from District 9
3. Reports of the previous fiscal year. All other business that may properly come before this meeting or adjournment thereof.

voice in the operation of our organization. Through attendance at the Annual Meeting and the election of your Board of Directors, you help set the future direction of our Cooperative.

Doors open at 6:30 p.m. The first 300 members present for the meeting will receive a one-pound block of cheese and one pound of butter quarters as a gift from the Cooperative. We will also give away 10 - \$100 door prizes. You must be present at the meeting to win. Don't forget to bring your Annual Report to the meeting for registration and to follow along. Visit stearnselectric.org/annual-meeting for more information.

Sincerely,

Michael Cramer
Board Secretary/Treasurer

Scott Dymoke
Co-op Attorney, Nominations Secretary

As a member-consumer of Stearns Electric, you are also an owner of the Cooperative. As an owner, you have a

2024 ELECTION DETAILS

DIRECTOR CANDIDATES

The candidates who will appear on the ballot are:

DISTRICT 4

(Farming, Zion, Munson, Paynesville, Eden Lake and Luxemburg townships)

- Neil Franz - Albany (Farming Township)
- Randy Rothstein (incumbent) - Richmond (Munson Township)

DISTRICT 5

(Bangor, Crow Lake, Crow River, Getty, Glenwood, Grove, Grove Lake, Lake George, Lake Henry, North Fork, Raymond, Roseville, Spring Hill and St. Martin townships)

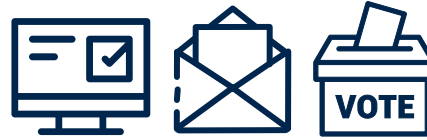
- Jeff Koehler (incumbent) - Belgrade (Crow River Township)
- Jeff Peter - Elrosa

DISTRICT 9

(St. Joseph, Wakefield, Rockville and Maine Prairie townships)

- Jerry Fries (incumbent) - St. Cloud (St. Joseph Township)
- Rick Schultz - St. Joseph

Full candidate biographies are available on the Cooperative's website, stearnselectric.org/annual-meeting. Candidate bio sheets were also sent along with the ballot packages for each voting district. Ballot packages were mailed on March 20, 2024 to members in voting districts. This year's election is coordinated by Survey & Ballot Systems, an independent firm.



THREE WAYS TO VOTE

Members in voting districts can cast their vote one of three ways:

1. **VOTE ONLINE***. Vote online through SmartHub.
2. **VOTE BY MAIL***. Ballot packages were mailed on March 20. Please allow sufficient time for delivery.
3. **IN PERSON AT THE ANNUAL MEETING**. Polls open at 6:30 p.m. until balloting closes. Be sure to bring your Annual Report with you for registration.

**Online or mail ballots will only be accepted if received by 3 p.m. on Wednesday, April 3, 2024.*

YOU ARE INVITED!
INNOVATIVE
ENERGY FORUM
WEDNESDAY, MAY 15
THE PARK EVENT CENTER
500 DIVISION ST., WAITE PARK
5:30 P.M. - 8:00 P.M.

All members are invited to join us at our first Innovative Energy Forum! Dinner provided.

JOIN US FOR SESSIONS FEATURING:

- Member-Owned Solar Generation
- Electric Vehicles on the Power Grid
- Member Experience Testimonials
- SmartHub

LEARN MORE AND REGISTER AT:

stearnselectric.org/innovative-energy-forum



LEADERSHIP MESSAGE

FIDUCIARY RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE BOARD AND HEADQUARTERS UPDATE

Stearns Electric Association is a member-owned, democratically-controlled business. Because of this, the Cooperative is led by a Board of Directors made up of nine member-consumers – one from each of the Cooperative's nine districts. As President of your Board of Directors, I wanted to take this month's column to share more about Board responsibilities, our Director expectations and tenure, and to provide an update on the new operations facility and headquarters project.

ANNUAL BOARD ELECTION

Every year, about one third of Stearns Electric Association member-consumers elect a fellow member to represent them and their district on the Cooperative's Board of Directors. Elected Board members each serve one three-year term. In 2024, districts 4, 5 and 9 are up for election, which you can read more about on page one and two of this issue.

Here is the schedule of district elections:

2024 & 2027: Districts 4, 5 and 9

2025: Districts 2, 3 and 6

2026: Districts 1, 7 and 8

Any member of Stearns Electric can run for a spot on the Board. The Cooperative's legal counsel confirms the eligibility of all director candidates. Nominations generally open in November ahead of the annual April election.

YOUR CURRENT BOARD LEADERSHIP



GREG BLAINE

District 1, elected 2014



ARLYN LAWRENZ

District 2, elected 2007



MICHAEL CRAMER

District 3, elected 2021



RANDY ROTHSTEIN

District 4, elected 2006



JEFF KOEHLER

District 5, elected 2022



BOB NIEHAUS

District 6, elected 2022



SCOTT DIRKES

District 7, elected 2023



ERIC PETERSON

District 8, elected 2020



JERRY FRIES

District 9, elected 2015

BOARD FIDUCIARY RESPONSIBILITIES AND EXPECTATIONS

As Board members, our priority is to ensure the overall success of Stearns Electric Association. Our main tasks include hiring the CEO and planning the strategic direction of the Cooperative.

As elected members and representatives, Board members serve as fiduciaries for the Co-op and are required to make informed decisions that are in the best interest of the Cooperative and its membership.

Continued on Page 4.

BOARD MEETING HIGHLIGHTS

The regular meeting of the Board of Directors of Stearns Electric Association was called to order on Thursday, January 25, 2024, at 1:02 p.m. at the Melrose office of Stearns Electric Association.

Highlights of the meeting include:

- GLTArchitects presented an update on the geothermal and energy modeling for the headquarters facility project. HVAC options with varying initial costs and estimated energy savings were presented. Board members voted to move forward with a more traditional, yet still highly efficient, HVAC system with rooftop units.
- Meredith Ulrich, David Cebulla and Ann Reischl were each appointed to one three-year term on the Operation Round Up® Trust Board of Directors.
- James Turner, Manager of Engineering, shared the 2024-2027 Construction Work Plan.
- Board members approved the following: modifying language for Board Policy 040: Board of Directors Meetings; a resolution to amend revenue deferral plan with RUS for long-term rate stability; a resolution from GRE modifying language in an appendix; deviations to the 2023 Corporate Scorecard and the 2024 Scorecard; and 2024 Board Meeting dates.
- Director Blaine, GRE representative, provided a financial update and noted that the GRE Board approved two deferments of margin with the goal of using deferred funds for future rate relief for GRE member cooperatives.

NEXT BOARD MEETING
March 28, 2024



Board members meet to review building plans.

LEADERSHIP MESSAGE CONTINUED...

Board members spend many hours working behind the scenes to prepare for monthly board meetings, completing industry training and working on special projects. The average time spent on board-related tasks in 2023 was 23 hours each month.

Some of the regular tasks required as a Board member include:

- evaluating whether decisions and projects help the Co-op successfully further its commitment to serving the community and our members;
- reviewing and approving the annual Cooperative budget;
- adopting and enforcing policies, resolutions and actions;
- providing financial oversight to the Cooperative on a monthly basis; and
- serving as ambassadors to Stearns Electric members, the community and legislative representatives.

Currently, our largest project is the new operations center and headquarters facility.

HEADQUARTERS PROJECT UPDATE

One of the items the Board included on the 2019-2021 Cooperative Strategic Plan was "headquarters facility." When the Strategic Plan was created in 2018, Stearns Electric was aware that its current headquarters facility had become cramped and there would not be sufficient space in the current facility to maintain efficient and cost-effective service operations in the years ahead.

In 2019, the Board started exploring facility options, including adding on to the existing facility. Unfortunately, Board members discovered very quickly that Stearns Electric was completely landlocked on the east side of our current headquarters location, which is not only where our mechanic shop, fleet area and warehouse are located, but also where the utilities are connected into the building. Though the Board explored a large addition and a redesign of the current facility to accommodate the proper warehouse and fleet area needed to house the large vehicles and equipment, the cost to complete an addition was very expensive and only provided a band-aid fix to our long-term needs.

In 2021, the Board voted to partner with GLTArchitects on a building pre-design process. Through the process, we

determined the current and future needs of a new facility and explored potential building locations.

After much research and planning, in February 2023, your Board members voted unanimously to construct a new operations center and headquarters facility in Melrose, directly to the west of the current office on land already owned by the Cooperative. With this decision, they interviewed four construction manager firms and hired, W Gohman Construction. As part of the pre-construction process, the first week in March 2024 marked completion of the design phase and the beginning of the bidding phase.

Once we close the window for bids, we will review those bids and make the final decision to move forward with this new operations center and headquarters facility. The anticipated construction completion date is late summer to fall 2025.

Over the past year, all Board members have been involved in several aspects of the new facility project. A committee of three Directors and Cooperative leadership meets frequently to make decisions throughout the pre-construction and bidding process, and the other directors hear monthly updates and provide input.

This is the largest decision our current Board members have undertaken in our tenure. The decisions we have made so far have been intentional and strategic. Throughout the process, we have prioritized financially sound investments, our ability to provide reliable and affordable energy, and our capacity to meet the needs of member-consumers and Stearns Electric employees both now and into the future.

On behalf of your Board of Directors, thank you for trusting us to serve you and I encourage you to stay informed on this project through the website, stearnselectric.org.



Sincerely,

Eric Peterson
Board President



ENERGYWISE® FOR YOU

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.

ENERGY STAR® COMMERCIAL FOOD SERVICE

ENERGY STAR® commercial food service equipment is extremely efficient. Electric kitchen equipment often provides a competitive advantage over gas by improving the cooking process, increasing production, improving both food and air quality, and reducing kitchen safety hazards. Rebated food service equipment includes:

ELECTRIC OVENS, COOK TOPS AND GRIDDLES:

- Combination oven – used as both a traditional convection oven and a steamer. It preheats quickly and doesn't need to stay on like traditional equipment.
- Convection oven – cooks food faster due to increased hot air circulation inside the oven cavity, saving up to 15% on energy costs.
- Griddle – found on most cook lines, ENERGY STAR® models are approximately 10% more efficient than standard griddles. ENERGY STAR® griddles use thermostatic control with improved temperature uniformity to increase production capacity.

ELECTRIC FRYERS:

- ENERGY STAR® fryers offer shorter cook times and higher production rates through advanced burner and heat exchanger designs. Standard size fryers that have earned the ENERGY STAR® certification are about 14% more energy efficient than standard models.

DISHWASHERS:

- Dishwashers are one of the most expensive pieces of equipment to operate in a commercial kitchen. ENERGY STAR® units save up to 40% on energy and water through their advanced controls and diagnostics, improved nozzles and rinse arm design.
- Businesses must have an electric water heater to qualify for a dishwasher rebate.

MISCELLANEOUS KITCHEN EQUIPMENT:

- Electric steamers reduce energy through shorter cook times. These steamers boast high production rates with reduced heat loss and increased steam delivery.
- Electric hot food holding cabinets, equipped with better insulation, can save up to 70% on energy compared to standard units.
- Ice machines – harvest-assist devices, high-efficiency compressors, fan motors and water pumps all help make ENERGY STAR® ice machines 12% more efficient than standard units.
- Refrigerators and freezers – solid or glass door, vertical and horizontal reach-in units all use high-efficiency compressors, improved coil design and efficient interior lighting to save up to 40% over standard units.

REBATE OVERVIEW

EQUIPMENT TYPE	REBATE AMOUNT
Dishwasher	\$50-\$400
Combination Oven	\$700
Convection Oven	\$75
Freezer	\$75
Electric Fryer or Griddle	\$200
Electric Steamers	\$600
Electric Hot Food Holding Cabinets	\$200-\$400
Ice Machine	\$75
Refrigerator	\$25-\$75

All rebate applications are available at stearnslectric.org/rebates. Rebate applications must be submitted within 12 months of purchase date to qualify. Equipment must be installed where electricity is supplied by Stearns Electric. To receive your rebate, fill out the application completely and send it back to Stearns Electric. Itemized equipment receipts and equipment specifications must be submitted along with the application.

MEMBER NOTICE

STEARNS ELECTRIC AND NRECA MARKET RESEARCH WILL PERFORM A MEMBER SATISFACTION SURVEY THIS SPRING

In April, Stearns Electric Association is partnering with the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA) Market Research Services to complete a residential member satisfaction survey.

The survey will take place via email during the week of April 8. Please be aware that you may be one of several members who are randomly selected to participate in the survey. If you get an email about a survey from us, it's legitimate.

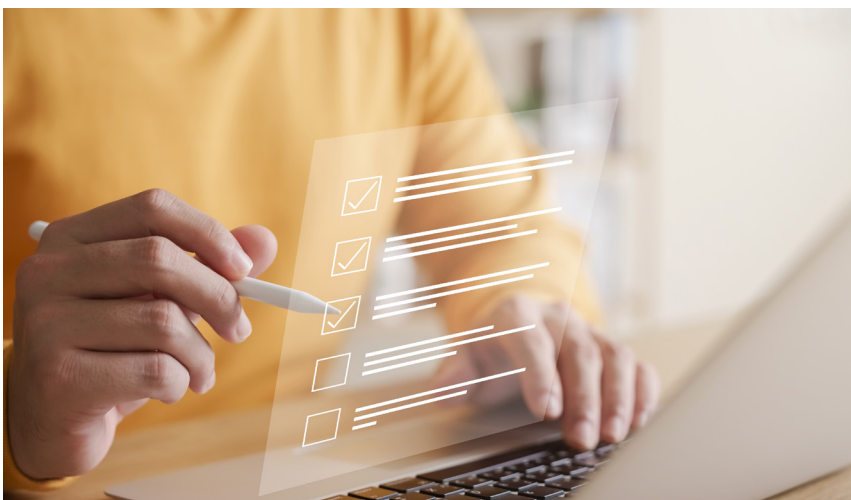
If you are contacted, we would greatly appreciate about six minutes of your time to share your opinions about the Cooperative. Your information and your responses will remain confidential.

Although Stearns Electric conducts surveys among its member-consumers every year, the Cooperative, through the help of NRECA, completes these larger surveys every three years. By participating in the survey, you will help us identify where we are serving you well and where we might need to improve.

We strive to safely provide all members with affordable and reliable electric service, energy solutions that fit your needs and a positive member experience. Whether it's restoring a power outage or discussing energy improvement options for your home, answering a billing question or hosting a community event, we are working hard for you every day.

We know your time is valuable, so rest assured, we will use the results to make decisions on matters important to the future of your Cooperative and that benefit you, your family and your neighbors.

Thank you for your honest feedback. If you have any questions regarding this upcoming survey, please contact us at (800) 962-0655 during regular business hours.



ENERGY EFFICIENCY

Lengthen the life of your clothes dryer with regular cleaning. Clean the lint filter after every load, which improves air circulation and safety. Check the lint trap opening to ensure it's clean. Use a vacuum to remove any lint that's fallen inside the opening.

MEMBER NEWS

OFFICES CLOSED GOOD FRIDAY

Stearns Electric Association offices are 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.

UNCLAIMED CAPITAL CREDITS

Stearns Electric has Capital Credit funds that were returned to the Post Office as undeliverable. We need your help locating these former members. A searchable list is available on our website at stearnselectric.org. Any information you can provide the Cooperative regarding the location of these members would be greatly appreciated. Email us at capital-credits@stearnselectric.org with any information or questions. Thank you!



SMART, SIMPLE, SUSTAINABLE PAPERLESS BILLING

Paperless Billing is exactly what it sounds like: a paper-free way to receive your electric bill every month. Sign up via SmartHub by April 30, 2024, for a chance to win one of three \$100 bill credits!*

WHY CHOOSE PAPERLESS?

- Less clutter and paper waste
- Enhanced security
- Improved bottom line for the Co-op
- Pay your bill however you like

Just make sure you keep your address current in SmartHub so we have accurate information for Capital Credit distributions!

SIGN UP TODAY THROUGH SMARTHUB:

- Using SmartHub on your web browser: Select “Settings” and “Paperless Billing” from the menu, then follow the prompts.
- Using SmartHub on your mobile device: Select “More,” “Settings” and “Paperless Billing,” then follow the prompts.

Don’t have a SmartHub account? Create one today. Learn more at stearnsselectric.org/smarthub.

**includes all Stearns Electric accounts enrolled in Paperless Billing, including those who signed up prior to the promotional period.*



SAFETY FOR LIFE

MOVE OVER FOR LINE CREWS



When you see utility crews working on the side of the road, slow down and move over. Our field employees are out daily working to enhance the distribution system, manage our Right-of-Way and stake in new projects.

The Minnesota Move Over Law is intended to keep emergency workers safe and prevent motorists from crashing into stopped vehicles. The law includes and protects utility crews, too. Please help us get our employees home safely to their loved ones every day by staying alert, slowing down and moving over.

COOKING CORNER

LISA’S CHICKEN MOLE

Submitted by: Elizabeth Forsythe

INGREDIENTS

- | | |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 4-6 chicken breasts• 1/8 C oil• 1 onion, chopped• 1 clove garlic, minced• 4 oz. can chopped green chilis• 1 C chicken broth• 8 oz. tomato sauce• 1 tsp salt | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 2 tsp chili powder• 2 Tbsp sugar• 2 cloves, whole• 1 oz. unsweetened baking chocolate• 2 Tbsp creamy peanut butter• 1/4 tsp Tabasco sauce (optional) |
|--|---|

DIRECTIONS

Brown the chicken in oil and set aside. Sauté onion and garlic in the same pan and mix in green chilis. Add remaining ingredients and stir until chocolate is melted. Return chicken to the pan, cover and cook on low heat for 30 minutes. Shred chicken or cut it into bite-sized pieces. Serve with black beans, rice and guacamole. 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

900 Kraft Drive SE, PO Box 40
Melrose, MN 56352

USPS 016053

**PERIODICALS
POSTAGE PAID**

MELROSE, MN

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BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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RANDY ROTHSTEIN

Vice President, District 4

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Secretary/Treasurer, District 3

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ARLYN LAWRENZ

District 2

JEFF KOEHLER

District 5

BOB NIEHAUS

District 6

SCOTT DIRKES

District 7

JERRY FRIES

District 9

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VICKY HERKENHOFF

VP of Administration and Finance

JAMES PACHAN

VP of Engineering and Operations

CINDY ANDERSON

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Manager of Member Accounts

JOHN PANTZKE

Manager of Energy Services

JAMES TURNER

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RYAN ZIERDEN

Manager of IT

EDITOR

WHITNEY DITLEVSON

Communications Supervisor

CONTRACT DESIGNER

FULLER CREATIVE



Lineman

WE WORK FOR YOU

Inspecting the distribution system, maintaining electrical equipment and upgrading aged materials to deliver safe and dependable energy.

