



POWER CONNECTION



AUGUST
2026

member driven.
community focused.
energy smart.

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(800) 962-0655
STEARNELECTRIC.ORG

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REWIND. RECHARGE.

Stearns Electric celebrates its 90th anniversary in 2027. Share your stories with us to celebrate!

The 1930s brought electricity.
The 1990s brought a digital revolution.
Stearns Electric powered both.

Our 90th Anniversary campaign, "Rewind. Recharge.", focuses on celebrating two defining eras of change for our local, member-owned electric cooperative:

1. Stearns Electric's early years of bringing electricity to rural Minnesota
2. The technological surge of the 1990s

By focusing on both of these moments, our campaign aims to highlight how the Cooperative has consistently powered progress, shaped daily life and supported member needs across generations.

Why the '90s?

The 1990s brought about a digital evolution – it was the first major increase in electricity-based technology since powering rural America in the 1930s. In honor of our 90th anniversary we are going back to the '90s!

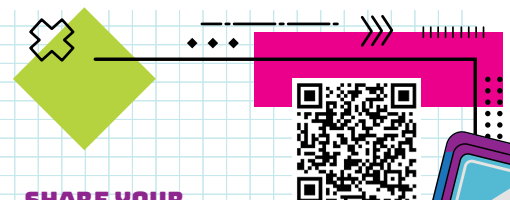
Member Memories

We invite you, our member-consumers, to

reminisce, reconnect and rediscover how electricity has fueled your homes, families and communities over time.

- How did you report a power outage in the '90s?
- What new appliances were a game changer at your house?
- Do you remember your first gaming console?
- What TV show did you gather as a family to watch?
- If you could bring back one piece of '90s technology, what would it be?

Do you have memories from before the '90s? We want to hear them!



**SHARE YOUR
MEMORIES WITH US!**
Scan the QR code or visit
stearnelectric.org/90Years





Thank you to our members who joined us at our Member Appreciation Pancake Feed on Saturday, August 1! We enjoyed meeting you, celebrating community and eating a delicious breakfast!

Nearly 1,550 members joined us at our new Pancake Feed location this year: the Melrose Operations Center and Headquarters. We hope those who came enjoyed a delicious pancake and sausage breakfast, prepared by the Kimball Lions Club.

Some of our favorite highlights from the event were:

- Observing friends, neighbors and even strangers share a meal together at the Co-op
- Giving away school supplies to all children who attended
- Watching kids pretend to drive a bucket truck
- Seeing people learn more about the gear and equipment our linemen use every day, and even trying their hand at a few hands-on activities
- Hearing our electricians answer your questions about energy-saving programs
- Talking with members about their favorite memories from the 1990s

Thank you to the Kimball Lions Club for a delicious breakfast and thank you to our water sponsor, Magnifi Financial.

SAYING THANKS

Through our annual member appreciation event, we aim to create a family-friendly experience for our member-consumers and express our appreciation for your patronage throughout the year. Thank you again to all who attended.

We look forward to hosting the Member Appreciation Pancake Feed again next year! Stay tuned to future editions of Power Connection for details.



**LIKE US ON
FACEBOOK
FOR MORE**

Visit our Facebook page for even more pictures from the 2026 member appreciation event!

facebook.com/stearnsselectric



CEO MESSAGE

FACILITY FOCUS: 900 KRAFT DRIVE UPDATE

On August 19, we celebrated one year in our new Operations Center and Headquarters in Melrose. We have appreciated much about our new space designed to serve our members, including a larger warehouse that improves daily operations and collaborative workspaces filled with natural light. We even had the space needed to host our Member Appreciation Pancake Feed on-site earlier this month!

While we've settled into our new space, we've also been working to ready our former headquarters at 900 Kraft Drive for a new purpose.

The previous facility is structurally sound—Stearns Electric simply outgrew the space it provided. The Cooperative's Board of Directors voted to retain ownership of the former building, determining we would either lease it to one tenant or split the building, depending upon our tenant's interest. Our former headquarters ultimately was divided into two different spaces: the front office area and the back warehouse. In April, we announced a childcare provider as tenant for the front portion of the building. Merry Moose Childcare and Preschool is scheduled to open this fall, serving a critical community need.

Approximately \$250,000 in renovations are needed to meet state requirements for the daycare facility. Costs will be covered through a combination of community foundation support, grants and local business partners. Classroom furnishings and equipment will be provided by the childcare operator.

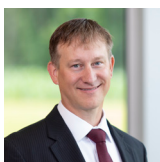
In June, the City of Melrose was awarded a \$100,000 grant through the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development's (DEED) Child Care Economic Development Grant program. The Co-op worked closely with the City of Melrose on this grant to assist with the facility improvements needed to transform the former office space into a daycare facility.

Structural renovations are underway to the site, and daycare-specific renovations will begin soon. You can view construction photos at stearnselectric.org/melrose-facility.



The Cooperative also signed a short-term lease with a local Melrose business for two-thirds of the warehouse. We are also working to finalize a lease for the remaining warehouse space and hope to have the entire building occupied soon.

On behalf of your Board of Directors and the Cooperative staff, we are excited to welcome the new tenants into our previous headquarters building. Our former warehouse space is the perfect place to serve the storage needs for our current tenant. Plus, the transition of the former office space to a daycare in the front of the building reflects our commitment to using the former facility for a meaningful community purpose.



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, June 25, 2026, at 1:00 p.m. at the St. Joseph office of Stearns Electric Association.

- Stearns Electric's attorney, Claudia Revermann of Revermann Lund Ross, provided an annual review of the fiduciary duties of the Board, noting the reasons behind the importance of the director role.
- A resolution regarding a revolving loan fund for a member business was approved.
- A facility update was provided, noting planned renovations at 900 Kraft Drive are underway. The roof replacement and sidewalk improvements, along with interior renovations, are in progress.
- CEO Matt O'Shea provided an update, noting an approved new contract with Great River Energy effective August 1, 2026, with rate design changes from GRE effective January 1, 2028.
- CEO O'Shea announced January 2027 rate adjustment preparation is underway with Power Systems Engineering. The Board will receive an update and recommendations at their August 2026 Board meeting.

NEXT BOARD MEETINGS

August 27, 2026

September 24, 2026



ROOTED IN RELIABILITY. POWERED BY PURPOSE.

When Jess Jussila received a call from Stearns Electric about trees growing into her nearby power lines, she immediately worried. They weren't just any trees—they were planted decades ago by her father. She didn't want to lose the trees that represented so much to her, especially while navigating her dad's declining health. Jess worked with both Stearns Electric Association and Carr's Tree Service to help find a solution that allowed her to save her trees while enhancing safety and reliability along the power lines.

While no one likes to remove or trim healthy trees, keeping vegetation away from power lines is one of the most effective ways to prevent power outages and keep employees and the public safe.

At Stearns Electric, we love trees—just not when they are growing into or leaning toward power lines. Trees, limbs and tall brush can create safety hazards and are one of the leading causes of outages. That's why maintaining the Cooperative's Right-of-Way (ROW) is essential to providing safe, reliable electric service.

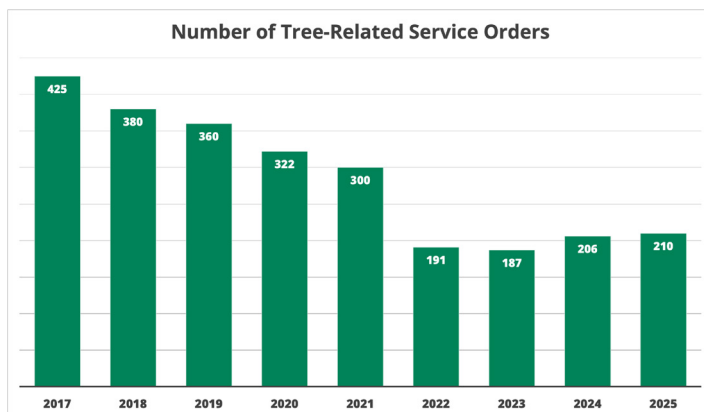
ROW CLEARING PROCESS

"Right-of-Way refers to a strip of land underneath or around your power lines that Stearns Electric has the responsibility, and the right, to remain clear," Stearns Electric Arborist Erica Hippen explained. "With over 2,600 miles of power lines on our distribution system, managing Right-of-Way has been a busy and rewarding undertaking these last several years."

Hippen evaluates trees in the ROW and identifies those that might cause potential problems. Once the trees are marked for trimming or removal, Stearns Electric's contractor and

subsidiary business, Carr's Tree Service, trims or removes the vegetation. When necessary, another contractor mows and/or sprays to prevent re-growth.

Stearns Electric monitors every stretch of overhead power lines on a four-year cycle. By aggressively maintaining the ROW, Stearns Electric has seen a 14% decrease in tree-related outages and a 29% decrease in tree-related service orders over an eight-year average.



MORE THAN TREES

"I love trees – I love having clean oxygen to breathe, shade to keep me cool and wind protection, among other things," Jess said. "But the biggest reason I didn't want my trees trimmed or cut is because they are a legacy of my dad, John. My dad planted these trees when he was younger and when I look at them, I think of him."

John planted the trees when he was young at the edge of his family's horse pasture. Over time, the use of the land has changed, but the trees remained. When Jess built her home on what had once been the pasture, the trees were a daily reminder of her father's love of nature.



Jess Jussila with the trees her dad planted.

Around the same time that her father's health began to decline, Jess received a letter notifying her of upcoming ROW maintenance scheduled for her property.

Concerned about how the work would affect the health and appearance of her trees, Jess trusted Stearns Electric to work with her through the process. Together, she and Hippen agreed on a plan to trim the trees away from the power lines instead of cutting them down completely.

"Stearns Electric has worked with me through each step of the process," Jess said. "They listened to me, came out in person and explained the risks and needs for the work while also being compassionate about my concerns."

After Hippen created a plan for the work on Jess' property, Carr's Tree Service completed the work.

"Carr's was aware of my concerns thanks to great communication with the Co-op," Jess recalls. "I was home when the crews came out and they were extremely thorough, took their time, cleaned up as they went and were very respectful of the trees and my property. They did a great job and the final result looks natural."

"We hire our tree-clearing teams locally, so our employees take extra pride in their work. They're working for their neighbors and friends!" Evan Amundson, Chief Operating Officer, Carr's Tree Service, said. "Carr's is accredited by the Tree Care Industry Association and we partner with them to use intensive training modules. We work hard to provide our team with knowledge behind tree biology and pruning, and how to work together to achieve the sometimes difficult goal of vegetation clearance around power lines."

John continued to battle declining health throughout the project and passed away in early July.

"I'm so grateful he was able to spend his last months knowing his trees were healthy," Jess said. "Thank you to all who helped in the success of working together and ensuring the next generation can enjoy my dad's legacy."

RIGHT TREE, RIGHT PLACE

When making landscaping decisions, it's important to consider several items before planting your trees and shrubs, especially if they will be planted near power lines. Before planting a tree, consider its mature height, the amount of maintenance it will require, your climate and how close it will be to overhead power lines.

Trees that are planted too close to power lines could grow into or even fall onto power lines. These trees pose safety hazards for you and your family, and also lead to power outages.

When planted properly, trees can help you conserve energy and reduce both heating and cooling bills, in addition to other benefits such as making your yard look appealing and providing shade.

Our brochure, "The Right Tree," provides information on:

- Choosing the right size tree
- Planting for energy conservation
- Trees to plant near power lines
- How to properly plant a tree
- How to care for your tree

**DOWNLOAD
THE RIGHT TREE
BROCHURE TO
LEARN MORE:**



**POWERED
— BY PURPOSE —**

As a local, member-owned electric cooperative, our mission is to provide safe, reliable electricity while delivering exceptional service to every member we serve. We understand that every property and every situation is unique, and we are committed to working with members to find solutions whenever possible. At Stearns Electric, our purpose goes beyond delivering electricity.

That's the cooperative difference!



YOUTH TOUR 2026

Elise Gramke, daughter of Patty and Jim Gramke of St. Cloud, recently returned from her trip representing Stearns Electric Association at the Rural Electric Youth Tour in Washington, D.C. June 15-20, 2026.



The 2026 Youth Tour in Washington, D.C. was the experience of a lifetime that I am so thankful I got to participate. Between learning about our nation's history, having chances to grow and making new friends, this trip was an unforgettable piece of my summer.

First off, we learned about lots of history. By going to memorials, monuments and museums all over Washington, D.C., we got to see important pieces of history.

We also learned about personal growth. We had classes on things like leadership, we learned how to ask good questions to the members of Congress we met with and learned how electric cooperatives are run with the people they serve in mind.

While the history and growth were incredible, the Youth Tour wouldn't have been the same without all the amazing youth and chaperones who made an amazing trip into an amazing experience. I made so many friendships that I never imagined I'd have today, and I'm so thankful for each one of them. There was a strong sense of community throughout the whole delegation.

Meeting people from all around the country and hearing about their life and stories was a powerful experience to make me realize how many students like me there are all around the country who each have a voice and opinion.

In the end, the Youth Tour was one of the most awesome experiences I've had, and I will always cherish the memories I made and the things I learned. I am so thankful for the opportunity to go on the Youth Tour.

Read Elise's full recap on our blog at stearnslectric.org. Elise will provide a recap of her Youth Tour experience for members at the 2027 Annual Meeting.



ENERGY EFFICIENCY

August heat can put your air conditioner to the test, making it a great time to check your system's air filter. A dirty, clogged filter restricts airflow, forcing your cooling system to work harder than necessary to keep your home comfortable. That extra strain can reduce efficiency, increase energy use and contribute to unnecessary wear and tear on equipment. Inspect your filter monthly during periods of heavy air conditioner use and replace it if it appears dirty. A clean filter supports efficient operation and can even enhance indoor air quality, helping you stay cool and comfortable during the hottest days of summer.

MEMBER NEWS

OFFICES CLOSED LABOR DAY

The Stearns Electric offices will be closed on Monday, September 7 in observance of Labor Day. If you experience an outage during the holiday, please report your outage via SmartHub or call us at (800) 962-0655. Line crews are on call 24/7 to respond to any emergency situation.

LAST CHANCE: AIR SOURCE HEAT PUMP SPECIAL PROMOTION

Stearns Electric members can receive up to \$1,250 in rebates when they install a qualifying air source heat pump and enroll in our EnergyWise® Dual Fuel and Cycled Air Conditioning programs for the first time. Visit stearnslectric.org/ashp or call our Energy Services team at (800) 962-0655 to learn more.

OPERATION ROUND UP® AWARDS OVER \$30,000 IN JULY

The Stearns Electric Association Trust Board of Directors met on Wednesday, July 15 to award funds through the Cooperative's Operation Round Up® (ORU) program. They distributed \$31,975 to 39 local organizations and charitable causes.

Since it began in 1993, ORU and Stearns Electric members have awarded over \$3.57 million to local non-profit organizations and community service programs.

Through the Operation Round Up® 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, October 16. Learn more and fill out an application for funding on our website, stearnselectric.org.



DID YOU KNOW?

Did you know it costs Stearns Electric approximately \$95,000 to install one mile of standard single-phase underground line and approximately \$145,000 to install one mile of standard three-phase underground line?

Stearns Electric has 1,704 miles of primary underground line on our distribution system. We add or replace an average of 25 miles of underground lines annually.

Underground cable has the same purpose as overhead wires – distribute electricity throughout our service territory – but is insulated to protect the wires within as it is buried underground. Although it provides better protection from storm damage, it is not immune to damage caused naturally by flooding or damage caused by rodents or humans. Underground construction is more expensive than overhead construction due to higher material and installation costs required to bury cables beneath the ground's surface.

COOKING CORNER

ZUCCHINI PIZZA BITES

Submitted by: Monica Mills

INGREDIENTS

- 1 medium zucchini, sliced into
- ¼-inch rounds
- 1 Tbsp olive oil
- ½ tsp salt
- ¼ tsp black pepper
- ½ C pizza sauce or marinara
- ¾ C shredded mozzarella
- 2 Tbsp grated parmesan cheese
- ¼ C sliced mini pepperoni
- 1 Tbsp parsley, chopped

DIRECTIONS

Place an oven rack on the upper third of the oven. Turn the oven to broil. Place the zucchini on a baking sheet, brush both sides of zucchini with oil and sprinkle with the salt and pepper. Broil 6-8 minutes or until the zucchini is tender and lightly golden, flipping once halfway through. Top each zucchini round with some marinara sauce, mozzarella, parmesan and a few mini pepperonis. Broil 1-2 minutes until the cheese is golden and melty. Sprinkle with parsley and serve. 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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GROUND ED IN SAFETY.

Protecting Your Information

We work hard to keep our members' personal information safe and secure. Our layered cybersecurity efforts secure our networks and constantly monitor for threats. Our employees and Board members complete cybersecurity training annually to stay up to speed on industry security standards and ensure member data remains private and secure.

