

● JANUARY 2026

Iowa

ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE LIVING

**Iowa electric co-ops shine
in national commercial**

Vegetarian recipes

**Exciting new student
programs**

The power is in your hands – are you ready to serve? ▶ See Page 4

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Wishing you an "awe"some year

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ON THE COVER

Special thanks to Michelle Benton, a Consumers Energy member-consumer, for supplying this month's cover image. Submit high-resolution photos for consideration to editor@ieclmagazine.com. You could receive \$100!

PROTECTING IOWA'S POWER: KEY ENERGY POLICIES TO WATCH THIS LEGISLATIVE SESSION

BY HALEY MOON



As the Iowa Legislature prepares to convene on Jan. 12, electric cooperatives across the state are focused on defending the policies and protections that keep power reliable and affordable for our communities. For more than eight decades, Iowa's electric cooperatives have prioritized the delivery of safe, reliable and affordable electricity while supporting local economies and strengthening the power grid. This work relies heavily on Iowa's defined electric service territories, an important law that helps ensure every corner of the state receives consistent, cost-effective electric service.

Protecting service territories and grid reliability

For rural communities in particular, defined electric service territories are vital. By assigning each utility the responsibility to serve a specific geographic area, every Iowan is guaranteed electric service that avoids redundant infrastructure, reduces costs and allows utilities the certainty to make long-term investments in grid resilience. These protections help cooperatives maintain affordable rates and plan strategically to meet future needs. As legislators return to Des Moines, Iowa's electric cooperatives remain vigilant against any attempts to weaken this foundational law or erode the consumer benefits it provides.

One challenge that could resurface is a third-party or "community solar" proposal. During the 2025 legislative session, lawmakers considered legislation that would have allowed non-utility solar developers to provide retail electric service inside

an established utility's service area, which is in direct conflict with Iowa's service territory statute. While these programs are often marketed as cost-saving options, the details can be far less rosy. Because third-party developers are not held to the same consumer protection standards or regulatory oversight as Iowa's public utilities, they can shift grid maintenance and infrastructure costs onto customers who do not subscribe.

Cooperatives are not opposed to solar – far from it. Iowa's electric co-ops have long supported the adoption of solar when and where it benefits their members and aligns with responsible grid planning. But allowing non-utilities to operate independently within the defined area of public utility, even on a limited basis, sets a precedent that threatens system stability statewide.

Strengthening safety protections for utility workers

Another priority heading into the upcoming legislative session

is protecting utility workers. Lineworkers are often the first on the scene after storms and work long hours in hazardous conditions to restore essential services. Despite the critical role they play in delivering power to our communities, something alarming is happening. Threats, harassment and assaults against utility workers while on the job are increasing nationwide. Strengthening penalties for violence against utility workers reaffirms our commitment to the safety of cooperative employees and our communities.

No matter what this session may bring, you can rest assured knowing that your cooperative will be advocating for policies to keep electricity safe and affordable for you and your community.

Haley Moon is the senior manager of policy and advocacy for the Iowa Association of Electric Cooperatives.

EDITOR'S CHOICE CONTEST

WIN A NINJA CRISPI AIR FRYER!

The Ninja Crispi® Portable Glass Cooking System is a compact powerhouse that packs the 1,500 watts power of a full-sized air fryer into a portable design. It includes a small 6-cup and larger 4-quart CleanCrisp™ container. Whether you're making quick, single-serve meals in just 7 minutes or sharing crispy snacks on the go, the Ninja Crispi® makes it effortless.



Visit our website and win!

Enter this month's contest by visiting www.ieclmagazine.com no later than Jan. 31.

You must be a member of one of Iowa's electric cooperatives to win. There's no obligation associated with entering, we don't share entrant information with anyone and multiple entries from the same account will be disqualified.

The winner of Lodge cast iron skillet set from the October issue was **Sarah Silhanek**, a **T.I.P. REC** member-consumer.

ENTER ONLINE BY JAN. 31!

CO-OP FEATURED IN TOUCHSTONE ENERGY NATIONAL AD

Grundy County REC is excited to announce that we are one of three Iowa RECs featured in the new Touchstone Energy national advertisement! This summer, members of our staff and other REC employees participated in the video shoot that focuses on the cooperative advantage and what it means to be an REC member. Learn more on Pages 10-11 of this issue and visit our Facebook page to view the full video.



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District 2: Norbert Boyle
District 3: Nick Strohhenn
District 4: Larry Rohach
District 5: Matt Kopriva
District 6: Roger Brown
District 7: Jason Paper

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THE POWER IS IN YOUR HANDS — ARE YOU READY TO SERVE?

Rural electric cooperatives were created by the members, for the members, in the 1930s. When farmers and rural residents came together to bring electricity to this area, they didn't just bring power to their homes, they brought a system rooted in local voice and decision-making. And to this day, the same rings true through the cooperative principle of Democratic Member Control. What does that mean? It means you're not a customer, you're a member-owner who has a voice in your cooperative.

Your board of directors are members of this cooperative themselves, and they work diligently on behalf of the membership to help set priorities, participate in long-term planning initiatives, approve budgets and rates, and make important decisions that help support the cooperative's mission.

Your participation is key

But democracy only works when members participate. Beyond attending the cooperative's annual meeting, voting and staying informed, there are two ways members can participate: serving on the **nominating committee** and running as a **board candidate**.

You don't need to be an energy expert to serve in either capacity, you just need to be committed to your community and cooperative and be willing to learn!



Districts on the 2026 director ballot

District 4: Currently filled by Larry Rohach

District 6: Currently filled by Roger Brown

To learn more about Grundy County REC's election process, contact Allyson Miller at amiller@grundycountyrecia.org. The 2026 nominating committee will be appointed at the April board meeting and will make their candidate nominations at the May board meeting.



EMPOWERING OUR MEMBER STUDENTS

Commitment to community and empowering our member students are important elements of the cooperative way of life. These commitments set us apart from “traditional” electric utilities.

At Grundy County REC, we believe it is important that our members understand what it means to be a member of an electric cooperative, the value of membership and the rich history cooperatives have in this country. Our Scholarship Program and Iowa Youth Tour sponsorship are just two ways we live out that vision.

Youth Tour: A once-in-a-lifetime opportunity

Do you know a high school student who is interested in history, government, business or leadership? The Iowa Youth Tour trip to Washington, D.C., might just be up their alley!

What you can expect on the trip

On the weeklong trip to Washington, D.C., students learn about electric cooperatives, American history, and U.S. government while walking



away with a greater understanding of their role as an American citizen. They participate in Youth Day, visit with their representatives and senators, and explore the sights around the nation’s capital. Each year, approximately 35 students from Iowa join over 1,800 students from 43 other states for this tour!

“ What Youth Tour coordinators want you to know:

“I am always amazed about how a group of strangers can grow so close to each other in such a short time. We go from everyone being nervous and unsure of what the week holds for them, to a well-oiled machine that can effortlessly navigate large cities and airports with ease. These folks we go with on Youth Tour become lifelong friends!

There is so much to see in D.C. and each year, we see how the students become more in tune with their role as an American citizen. Cooperatives play a huge role in our history and future. There’s nothing to be nervous about. We’re all in the same boat: meeting new people, going to a new place, a little unsure about what we are about to embark on. But, I promise, it’s a great time! We’re safe, and it’s truly a trip of a lifetime.” – Shelly York, Director of Administration & Student Programs, Iowa Association of Electric Cooperatives

“Everyone is nervous, but by the end of the first night you will have already made friends for life! You will get to see some really cool things and places! Some of my personal favorites are the wreath laying/changing of the guard at Arlington National Cemetery, Udvar-Hazy Center (air and space museum where you can see the Space Shuttle Discovery, Enola Gay and Blackbird), and Ben’s Chili Bowl – not only is it a great meal, but it is also rich in history and culture.”

– Theresa Stone, Office Assistant & Youth Tour Co-Director, Iowa Association of Electric Cooperatives



Grundy County REC Youth Tour Applicant Scholarship

NEW!

Brand new this year, the cooperative has added one \$1,000 scholarship that only Youth Tour applicants are eligible to receive. During the application review and interview processes, applicants will be considered for this scholarship.

Not a senior this year? No problem! If a younger student is selected, the scholarship will be held for them until they are ready for their post-secondary education!



Find more information at www.grundycountyrecia.com/youth-tour.

Increased scholarship funds available

Basin Electric Power Cooperative has announced an increase to the scholarship funds provided to each of their member cooperatives. This increase allows Grundy County REC to add an additional **\$1,500 scholarship** to our program for member students! Applications for this new scholarship will be evaluated on the student’s philanthropy and passion for giving back; they must also be an active member in their school and community.

Current scholarships available:

- Grundy County REC Scholarships (3) - \$1,000 award
- Basin Electric Power Cooperative Scholarships (2) - \$1,000 and \$1,500 awards
- Grundy County REC Youth Tour Applicant Scholarship (1) - \$1,000 award

To learn more about our scholarship program, visit www.grundycountyrecia.com/scholarships.



LEADING THROUGH CHANGE

ANNUAL MEETING RECAP

BY ERIN CAMPBELL

More than 375 directors and employees from Iowa's electric cooperatives gathered in West Des Moines for the Iowa Association of Electric Cooperatives' (IAEC) 2025 Annual Meeting on Dec. 4-5. With the theme Leading through Change, the event highlighted the industry's ongoing transformation and the importance of strong leadership.

IAEC Executive Vice President and General Manager Leslie Kaufman, who marked her first year with the association in July, noted the momentum of the year. Board President Jim Miller also reflected on his first year in the role, recalling how "a farm kid from Fonda" received a call from Gov. Kim Reynolds during his second week as president. The conversation focused on emerging energy policy issues, underscoring the responsibility and visibility of the position. Miller also praised Kaufman's early outreach to member co-ops, which helped shape IAEC's strategic direction.

In her executive report, Kaufman outlined departmental progress and emphasized the critical role of advocacy as policy challenges accelerate. She highlighted a new policy and advocacy framework designed to help statewide staff work more proactively in the years ahead.

Educational sessions once again played a central role in the meeting. Speakers included National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA) Board President Mike Partin, who joined Kaufman for a fireside chat on leading through change; nuclear engineer and Miss America 2023 Grace Vanderhei; Youth Leadership Council delegate Ava Meinders; governance experts from Federated Rural Electric Insurance Exchange and NRECA; and National Association of Regulatory Utility Commissioners Executive Director Tony Clark, who addressed national issues, including resource adequacy,

cybersecurity and the growing electricity demands of AI and data centers. NFL Hall of Famer and former Congressman Steve Largent closed the event with leadership insights from his career in sports, business and politics.

IAEC also recognized longtime contributors and emerging leaders, including service award recipients, Cooperative Leadership in Iowa Program (CLIP) graduates, Rural Electric Safety Achievement Program (RESAP) certified cooperatives, nationally credentialed directors and the inaugural Iowa Electric Cooperative Excellence Award honorees: Director Excellence Award recipient Jerry Beck of Iowa Lakes Electric Cooperative and Employee Excellence Award recipient Robert Wakhouse of Harrison County REC.

Watch for more information about key annual meeting topics in upcoming issues of this magazine.

COOPERATIVE LEADERSHIP IN IOWA PROGRAM

Congratulations to the 13 graduates of the 2025 CLIP for emerging leaders.

Participants committed to a year-long calendar of in-person, virtual and on-demand training sessions. Additionally, these individuals developed their leadership skills, gained insights on various professional roles within electric cooperatives and attended statewide events to better understand important issues facing Iowa's electric cooperatives.



IOWA CO-OPS RECOGNIZED FOR SAFETY ACHIEVEMENTS

During the IAEC annual meeting in December, several Iowa electric cooperatives were congratulated for completing the RESAP in 2025. The cooperatives included:

- Clarke Electric Cooperative, Inc.
- Corn Belt Power Cooperative
- Eastern Iowa Light & Power Cooperative
- Grundy County Rural Electric Cooperative
- Guthrie County Rural Electric Cooperative Association
- Linn County Rural Electric Cooperative
- Maquoketa Valley Electric Cooperative
- Nishnabotna Valley Rural Electric Cooperative
- Osceola Electric Cooperative, Inc.
- Pella Cooperative Electric Association
- Southwest Iowa Rural Electric Cooperative
- Western Iowa Power Cooperative

RESAP is a service of the NRECA and strives to promote the highest standards of safety among electric cooperatives.

IAEC fully supports the RESAP program and works with electric cooperative members in their safety achievements. The rigorous program requires annual reporting to NRECA of Occupational Safety and Health Administration Data and updates to the cooperative's safety improvement plan. Every three years, additional data must be submitted to NRECA, as well as participation in an onsite safety observation by NRECA at the cooperative.

Zach Finn
Central Iowa Power Cooperative

Justin Krueger
Consumers Energy

Ben Donnelly
East-Central Iowa Rural Electric Cooperative

Mindy Comstock
Farmers Electric Cooperative, Inc.

Emily Rush
Franklin Rural Electric Cooperative

Johnna Nunemaker
Linn County Rural Electric Cooperative

Abby Fischer
Maquoketa Valley Electric Cooperative

Kraig Johnson
MiEnergy Cooperative

Jason Stock
Northwest Iowa Power Cooperative

Steve Jackson
Prairie Energy Cooperative

Alicia Lohr
Raccoon Valley Electric Cooperative

Tanner Rinehart
Southwest Iowa Rural Electric Cooperative

Jason Jack
T.I.P. Rural Electric Cooperative



2025 CLIP graduates. Pictured from left: Jason Stock, Zach Finn, Johnna Nunemaker, Alicia Lohr, Abby Fischer, Emily Rush, Mindy Comstock, Jason Jack, Kraig Johnson, Steve Jackson, Tanner Rinehart, Ben Donnelly and Justin Krueger.

DIRECTOR GOLD CREDENTIAL

The NRECA Director Gold Credential (DGC) recognizes directors who have earned their Credentialed Cooperative Director certificate and Board Leadership Certificate credentials and are committed to continuing their education throughout their service on the board. The following have achieved or maintained their DGC.

David Hollingsworth
Michael Holtkamp
Access Energy Cooperative

Jerry Keleher
Allamakee-Clayton Electric Cooperative

Allyn Harms
Butler County Rural Electric Cooperative

Steve Boedecker
James Miller
Calhoun County Electric Cooperative Association

Kenneth Vandenberg
Chariton Valley Electric Cooperative, Inc.

Cody Miller
William White
Clarke Electric Cooperative, Inc.

Dennis Beckman
William Hobson
Consumers Energy

Joel Carstensen
Gary Kester
Kurt Olson
Kathrine Wunderlich
Eastern Iowa Light & Power Cooperative

Mark Earhart
Kristopher Petter
Farmers Electric Cooperative, Inc.

Gordon Greimann
Donald Greimann
John Snyder
Franklin Rural Electric Cooperative

Kevin Pruisner
Grundy County Rural Electric Cooperative

Brenda Lundergard
Harrison County Rural Electric Cooperative

Tricia Jaeger
Mark Kingland
Vince Morische
Heartland Power Cooperative

Bruce Amundson
Craig Deim
Crystal Pluth
Mark Tuttle
Trent Will
Roger Williamson
Daniel Winterhof
Iowa Lakes Electric Cooperative

Gary Schlotterbeck
Kenneth Squires
Linn County Rural Electric Cooperative

Judy Gotto
Thomas Stewart
Maquoketa Valley Electric Cooperative

Gene Kenkel
Donna Olson
Nishnabotna Valley Rural Electric Cooperative

Dale Ullrich
North West Rural Electric Cooperative

Bryce Arkema
Darrell Boot
Carroll Hoksbergen
Steve Inskeep
Jon Van Woerkom
Pella Cooperative Electric Association

David Onken
Raccoon Valley Electric Cooperative

Ronald Hoffman
T.I.P. Rural Electric Cooperative

Phillip Jensen
Scott Linville
United Electric Cooperative



CRAISINS, APPLE, WALNUT AND QUINOA SALAD

- ½ cup quinoa, uncooked
- ½ cup toasted walnuts, chopped
- 1 cup raisins
- 1 large apple, chopped
- 1 large celery stalk, chopped
- 2 tablespoons green onion, chopped
- 1 tablespoon honey (or white corn syrup)
- 2 tablespoons white balsamic raspberry blush vinegar
- kosher salt, to taste
- pepper, to taste

Prepare quinoa according to package directions. Refrigerate for 30 minutes, until cooled completely. In a large bowl, toss cooled quinoa, walnuts, raisins, apple, celery and onion together. In a separate bowl, mix honey or corn syrup and vinegar. Season with salt and pepper. Pour dressing over salad and mix well. Serve immediately or chill in refrigerator until ready to serve. *Serves 8*

Nancy Anderson • Ankeny
Prairie Energy Cooperative

CUKE, TOMATO AND ONION SALAD

- 1 medium cucumber, sliced
- 1 medium onion, sliced
- 2 medium tomatoes, cubed
- 2 teaspoons dill weed
- 1 tablespoon salad oil
- 1 tablespoon vinegar
- 2 teaspoons sugar
- 2 teaspoons salt
- dash of pepper, optional

Mix all ingredients and refrigerate 2 hours before serving. *Serves 10*

Patricia Glandorf • Williamsburg
T.I.P. Rural Electric Cooperative

OAT BURGERS

- 1 cup creamy cottage cheese
- 1 cup corn flakes cereal, crushed
- 1 cup quick oatmeal
- 2 eggs
- salt, to taste
- pepper, to taste
- oil
- 1 can cream of mushroom soup
- 1¼ cans milk or water

Mix cottage cheese, cereal, oatmeal, eggs, salt and pepper. Form into patties and brown in oil. Mix soup and milk or water, then cover patties with the soup mixture. Bake covered at 350 degrees F for 45-60 minutes. Cream of mushroom soup can be substituted with cream of celery soup. *Serves 2-4*

Natalie Herrington • Nevada
Consumers Energy

CARIBBEAN RICE AND BEANS

- 1 tablespoon oil
- ¼ teaspoon garlic powder
- ½ cup green onion, diced
- ½ cup green pepper, diced
- ½ teaspoon rosemary leaves
- ½ teaspoon thyme leaves
- ½ teaspoon black pepper
- 1 can black beans, drained and rinsed
- 1 cup raw rice, cooked
- ¼ cup picante sauce
- 2 tablespoons soy sauce
- ½ cup cheddar cheese, grated

In a skillet, sauté oil, garlic powder, green onion, green pepper, rosemary, thyme and pepper. Add beans to sautéed ingredients. Then, add rice, picante and soy sauce. Stir fry until hot, then top with cheese. *Serves 4*

Sandra Busard • Donnellson
Access Energy Cooperative

BLACK BEAN AND VEGGIE BURGERS

- 2 15-ounce cans black beans, rinsed and drained
- 1¼ teaspoons garlic powder
- 1 teaspoon chili powder
- 1 teaspoon cumin
- ½ teaspoon paprika
- ½ teaspoon salt
- 2 teaspoons cilantro
- ¼ cup green pepper, finely chopped
- ½ cup breadcrumbs
- 1 large carrot, grated
- ¼ cup red onion, chopped
- 1 egg
- 6 buns, optional
- lettuce, optional

In a large mixing bowl, mash black beans. Add garlic powder, chili powder, cumin, paprika, salt and cilantro. Mix until combined. Add peppers, breadcrumbs, carrot, onion and egg to the combined bean mixture. Form into patties and fry over medium heat in a greased pan. Flip after 5 minutes and fry the other side for the same amount of time. Serve on a bun or on a bed of lettuce. *Serves 6*

Crystal Hammes • Libertyville
Access Energy Cooperative

HOMEMADE SLOW COOKER TOMATO BASIL SOUP

- 5-7 tomatoes on the vine (or 2 cups baby tomatoes)
- 1 yellow onion, diced
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 head garlic, peeled
- splash of vegetable broth
- 1 tablespoon Italian seasoning
- 1 teaspoon salt
- ½ teaspoon black pepper
- ¼ teaspoon red pepper flakes
- fresh basil, to taste
- heavy cream, optional

Place all ingredients in a slow cooker, except basil. Cook on low until tomatoes and onions are soft. Blend soup until smooth with an immersion or regular blender. Adding heavy cream will make for creamier soup. Adjust seasonings to taste and garnish with fresh basil before serving. *Serves 6, approximately*

Tristen Jungers • Archer
North West Rural Electric Cooperative

SPAGHETTI SALAD

- 4 medium fresh tomatoes
- 1 large red onion
- 2 cucumbers
- 2 bell peppers
- 2 pounds spaghetti
- 1 16-ounce bottle Wishbone Italian salad dressing
- Shilling Salad Supreme Spice, to taste

Chop together tomatoes, onion, cucumbers and peppers. Break spaghetti into thirds and boil until cooked. Cool slightly but add salad dressing before spaghetti is cold. Mix spaghetti with tomato mixture and add salad spice to taste. *Serves 16, or cut recipe in half to serve 8*

Denise Anderson • Ocheyedan
Osceola Electric Cooperative, Inc.

Visit www.ieclmagazine.com and search our online archive of hundreds of recipes in various categories.



EASY PEASY PAELLA

- 2 tablespoons oil
- 1 cup white rice
- 1 onion, diced
- 2 carrots, diced
- 2 stalks celery, diced
- 8 ounces mushrooms, quartered
- 1 bell pepper (any color), diced
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 2 pinches saffron, optional
- 1 teaspoon Old Bay seasoning
- 1 teaspoon paprika
- sprinkle cayenne
- 1 cup white wine or vegetable broth
- 8 ounces grape tomatoes
- ½ cup green olives
- 1 cup frozen peas
- salt, to taste
- pepper, to taste

Swirl oil to coat an 11-inch cast iron or other oven-safe pan. Layer (in order) rice, onion, carrots, celery, mushrooms, bell pepper, garlic, seasonings and wine or broth. Bake at 375 degrees F for 40 minutes. Stir in tomatoes, olives and peas. Bake 15 minutes. Add salt and pepper to taste. *Serves 6*

Chris Daniels • Casey
Guthrie County Rural Electric Cooperative Association

WANTED:

BEEF BURGER RECIPES

THE REWARD:

\$25 FOR EVERY ONE WE PUBLISH!

Deadline is Jan. 31

Fire up the grill, load up the toppings and gather around the picnic table – we want your best **beef burger recipes!** Selected submissions will appear in our May issue in celebration of Beef Month. Please include your name, address, telephone number, co-op name, recipe category and number of servings on all submissions.

EMAIL: recipes@ieclmagazine.com

MAIL: Recipes

Iowa Electric Cooperative Living magazine
8525 Douglas Ave., Suite 48
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Craig Codner, CEO of Butler County REC, participates in shooting the national commercial.



IOWA CO-OPS SHINE BRIGHT IN NEW TOUCHSTONE ENERGY COMMERCIAL

Hollywood came to Butler County in northeast Iowa this past summer in the form of Harvest Creative Services (Harvest) from Lansing, Michigan.

Butler County REC was chosen as the host cooperative for the Touchstone Energy® Cooperative's annual ad shoot, which took place in June. Before the shoot, however, there were numerous phone calls, emails – 825 in total – meetings, text messages and a week in May scouting locations for the five scenes.

Behind the scenes of a major production

Anne Gardiner, public relations specialist with Butler County REC, and Marena Fritzler, marketing

director with Corn Belt Power Cooperative, spent the week with Harvest. It was a full week that included new opportunities, making grilled cheese sandwiches for one scene, shooting scenes numerous times (the first scene alone took 31 takes), making last-minute adjustments, long days and short nights, and a lot of camaraderie.

Cooperation among cooperatives on full display

The ad was also a nod to cooperation among cooperatives, one of our seven cooperative principles. The first scene was shot at Grundy County REC with lineman Derek Snakenberg driving the REC truck. Iowa Lakes Electric Cooperative

sent three volunteers – Ryan Craig, CEO and Touchstone Energy board member; Katie Harris, communications specialist; and Jen Sievert, vice president of customer and corporate relations.

“It was an epic, one-of-a-kind experience, learning from the production crew on set, photographing the journey, and helping behind the scenes,” said Fritzler. “The magic of this creation came to life the way it did with the collective strength of many. It was neat to see local employees and board members from Butler County REC, Grundy County REC and Iowa Lakes Electric Cooperative step up and into this production.”

Creativity, improvisation and a memorable experience

Interestingly, appliance finishes ultimately determined the filming location for the kitchen scene. A couple of Butler County REC employees offered their own kitchens for filming, but during location scouting, the production team determined the finishes and reflections in co-op employees' refrigerator doors when opened were not the right fit for the envisioned transition into the hand-drawn bucket truck. Production crews found the winning refrigerator in a local rental property in Shell Rock, where the kitchen scene was filmed.

Improvising is also a hallmark of ad shoots. When the Harvest team was searching for a table for the kitchen scene, Gardiner offered her kitchen table. Fritzier and Gardiner disassembled the table to get it through doors, loaded it onto an REC truck, covered it due to impending rain and headed to the scene, where the crew unloaded it. After the scene was shot, the table was loaded back onto the truck and covered with a tarp. Rain was definitely on its way.

Fritzier and Gardiner then went back and forth on whether the table should be housed at Butler County REC's CEO Craig Codner's home or driven back to Gardiner's home. They decided to drive the table to Gardiner's and unload it. The decision proved to be the correct one — it sprinkled, but the table remained unscathed.

The ad, released during the Touchstone Energy annual meeting on Nov. 19, is the centerpiece of Touchstone's 2026 national campaign, "The Cooperative Advantage." With more than 100 co-op members, employees and actors, this was Touchstone Energy's largest production to date. It also has the distinction of being the only ad in eight years in which shooting days had to change to accommodate weather.

"Touchstone Energy and Harvest Creative Services were great to work with," Gardiner said. "Butler County REC was proud to be the host for the 2026 ad campaign. It was an amazing opportunity that we are so grateful to have been a part of. I learned so much and had the best time. I also don't look at commercials or movies the same way I used to!"



Touchstone Energy[®]
Cooperatives

ABOUT TOUCHSTONE ENERGY

Touchstone Energy is a national network of electric cooperatives across 46 states that provides research, communications resources and employee training to help co-ops strengthen relationships with their members. These shared tools and programs support superior member satisfaction, reinforce the cooperative difference and strengthen both local communities and the broader electric cooperative network. Touchstone Energy cooperatives stand out as trusted, reliable sources of power and information for 30 million member-consumers.

WHY DOES TOUCHSTONE ENERGY ADVERTISE?

Advertising is important for Touchstone Energy because it strengthens the unified national brand shared by hundreds of local electric cooperatives, helping members recognize the value, reliability and community focus of their co-op. It communicates the "cooperative difference," reinforces trust, and educates the public on key energy issues, while also helping attract new talent by highlighting the meaningful, community-driven careers available within the cooperative network. By keeping co-ops visible, consistent and connected, advertising supports member engagement, strengthens workforce recruitment and ensures that Touchstone Energy cooperatives continue to be seen as trusted, people-first energy providers.



Scan the QR code
to watch the
30-second spot.



IS ENERGY EFFICIENCY ON YOUR NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTION LIST?

If energy efficiency is on your list of New Year's resolutions, don't forget to check on our available rebates! From ENERGY STAR® appliances to home energy efficiency solutions, there may be a rebate available to you! Visit www.grundycountyrecia.com/rebate-forms to view all of our available rebates and download necessary forms.

Questions? Contact Brady Codner at 319-824-5251.

CELEBRATING FIVE YEARS WITH THE COOPERATIVE



Brady Codner, member service advisor, is celebrating five years with the cooperative on Jan. 25. With his quirky sense of humor and radio voice, he keeps the office lively and fun! You may know him from the "Watts Up with Brady" email series or he may have been the one that completed an energy audit at your home.

Brady, thank you for all that you do for the cooperative and our members. Here's to celebrating five years and many more to come!

SHAKENBERG COMPLETES APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAM

Congratulations to Derek Snakenberg, Grundy County REC first class lineman, on completing the apprenticeship program and receiving his Certification of Completion of Apprenticeship!



PREPPING FOR TAXES? SMARTHUB HAS WHAT YOU NEED

The start of a new year means many of you will be starting to prepare for your taxes. Did you know that you can access annual totals and PDF copies of your bills straight from your phone or computer?

The information you need is just two easy steps away

1. Login to your Grundy County REC SmartHub account.
2. Go to the Billing History tab and view/download the information you need.

Yes, it's that quick and easy!



WHICH IS MORE EFFICIENT?

Drafty room? Before reaching for your space heater, consider whether it's better to plug it in or turn up the thermostat.

Space heaters are designed to warm small, targeted spaces not your entire home. If you find yourself relying on one frequently, you may need to take a closer look at your home's energy efficiency.

Improving your home's efficiency helps it retain heat, reduces drafts and reduces your energy use. Once your home is sealed and insulated, a space heater can be used to increase comfort and warm specific rooms. Think of a space heater like a ceiling fan; it can improve comfort in a small area, but it's not intended to be a whole-house solution.

WHICH IS MORE EFFICIENT

TURNING UP THE HEAT?

USING A SPACE HEATER?



Safe Electricity.org

ENERGY STORAGE ADVANCES

BY JENNAH DENNEY

Not long ago, when people talked about batteries, they meant the kind that powered flashlights, phones or watches. Today, batteries are transforming the way we power our homes, farms and even the electric grid that keeps our lights on. Across the country, battery energy storage is helping electric cooperatives keep power more reliable, affordable and resilient.

The journey began with early rechargeable batteries like lead-acid models, which were used in vehicles, tractors and backup systems for lighting or telephones. These systems were bulky, short-lived and required frequent maintenance. Later, nickel-cadmium and nickel-metal hydride batteries became popular in cordless tools, early electronics and hybrid vehicles. While they marked a step forward, they remained expensive and weren't well suited for large-scale energy applications.

A major turning point came with the development of lithium-ion batteries. These are lighter, longer lasting and capable of storing more energy in less space. Initially used in laptops and mobile phones, lithium-ion technology now powers most electric vehicles (EVs) and many of the grid-scale systems that can keep thousands of homes running for hours. And innovation hasn't stopped there. Researchers are now exploring solid-state and sodium-ion batteries, which use safer, more abundant materials and promise to make battery energy storage even more affordable and accessible. Each advancement brings batteries closer to becoming a foundational part of everyday life.

Co-ops embrace battery technology

Across the country, electric co-ops are deploying battery energy storage systems to support grid operations and manage local demand. Batteries can store excess electricity from renewable sources like solar and wind, then



Often paired with rooftop solar panels, residential battery storage systems can provide backup power during outages, keeping essential equipment like lights, refrigerators and medical devices running. *Photo Source: Base Power*



Across the country, electric co-ops are deploying battery energy storage systems to support grid operations and manage local demand.



Utility-scale storage technologies are helping electric co-ops improve reliability, integrate renewable energy and manage infrastructure costs.

discharge it when demand rises, which can help balance supply and demand and improve grid stability. They also provide an alternative to traditional infrastructure upgrades. In areas where energy use is growing, a strategically placed battery can handle short-term peaks in demand, reducing the need for new substations or extended power lines. This can lower capital costs and reduce construction timelines.

More than 70 electric cooperatives in 24 states have installed or are testing battery energy storage systems, according to the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association. Most systems currently in use are designed to deliver power for two to eight hours. However, long-duration energy storage (LDES) technologies are emerging that can store energy for 10 hours or more, and in some cases, multiple days. It's important to recognize that battery technology is still evolving and it might not be economically feasible in all uses or areas.

These battery storage systems could help utilities manage extended periods of low renewable generation or respond to prolonged grid stress events, especially in remote or weather-sensitive areas.

Potential reliability, cost benefits

Battery storage may also offer benefits to co-op members. Residential systems can provide backup power during outages, keeping essential equipment like lights, refrigerators and medical devices running. For homes with rooftop solar, batteries allow excess energy to be stored during the day and used at night. Some cooperatives offer time-of-use rates, where electricity costs less during off-peak hours. Batteries can store low-cost energy and use it later, helping reduce monthly bills.

Electric vehicle advances

Battery innovation is also being driven by the growth of EVs. Manufacturers are working to improve battery performance, extend battery lifespan, reduce charging time and lower costs. These improvements are influencing the broader energy storage market. Some EVs now include vehicle-to-home (V2H) or vehicle-to-grid (V2G) capabilities, allowing a car to supply power to a home during an outage or send energy back to the grid during peak demand.

Jennah Denney writes on consumer and cooperative affairs for the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association.

DISTRIBUTION AUTOMATION KEEPS POWER FLOWING, OUTAGES AT BAY

BY CATHY CASH

Staying online uninterrupted by a power glitch seems more important than ever. And today, it's even more possible than ever before, thanks to advanced energy technologies that can instantly rearrange electricity flows to areas hit by storms or other disturbances.

Distribution automation, also known as DA, refers to a powerful set of tools that includes automated sensors, communications systems and data analytics-enabling electric utilities to monitor power lines, field equipment and generation facilities in real time.

Equipped with these DA tools, Iowa's electric cooperatives can detect an outage and isolate it in real-time from their control rooms before sending out field crew to repair the damaged powerlines.

"Distribution automation helps electric co-ops deliver reliable, high-quality service to members when today's world demands it most," said Ravindra Singh, senior principal of DA for the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association.

Some call DA a "self-healing electric grid" because its application, such as fault location, isolation and service restoration (FLISR), allows the network of power lines and substations to automatically reconfigure in response to disruptions.

How it works

When power lines are damaged or shortened by storms, critters or some disaster, DA systems can reroute electricity from the power source to unaffected infrastructure. This allows electric service to continue uninterrupted to a community that would otherwise suffer an outage.



With distributed automation technology and its analysis of network data, co-ops can see their system's assets, how they are operating and what energy resources are on their power lines to support better quality service and reliability.



Distribution automation devices installed on a power pole bolster reliability and help members stay powered even during storms.



Distributed automation can save electric co-ops and their members money by reducing inspection time for field apparatus such as transformers, substations and power lines.

DA not only has a hand in preventing outages, but this suite of technologies can save electric co-ops and their members money by reducing inspection time for field apparatuses such as transformers, substations and power lines.

With real-time field measurements from DA technologies, a co-op gains situational awareness of its electricity network and can minimize unnecessary maintenance activities, truck rolls and crew dispatches to examine lines, locate damage and make repairs.

"Power distribution grids are evolving from being a passive network to a more active network," said Singh. "With DA technology and its analysis of network data, co-ops can see their system's assets, how they are operating and what energy resources are on their power lines to support better quality service and reliability."

Knowledge is power

Without DA, a co-op may not know where electric vehicles, rooftop solar, residential batteries, generators and other distribution resources are being added or operated on its system by its members. This can be a challenge when it comes to managing peak demand and having to curtail energy to sustain reliability.

Electricity demand is only going to grow because of new types of loads such as data centers, crypto mining and EVs, according to any industry forecast. So, it makes sense for utilities to optimize the use of their existing infrastructure or equipment to keep costs in check.

With DA, electric co-ops can better manage and grow their systems and respond to crises safely and efficiently while their members enjoy reliable electricity without hiccups.

Cathy Cash writes on consumer and cooperative affairs for the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association.

WISHING YOU AN “AWE”SOME YEAR

BY DARCY DOUGHERTY MAULSBY

Remember when Iowa’s night sky offered breathtaking views on Veterans Day 2025? If you stepped outside on Nov. 11, you could see the northern lights shimmering across the horizon.

Like many other Iowans, I couldn’t resist taking pictures of this incredible phenomenon. Professional photographers and amateurs with smartphone cameras shared images online of the spectacle, with ribbons of red, green, pink and violet dancing above farms, small towns and city skylines.

The northern lights aren’t common in Iowa since we’re located too far south to regularly see the region where the lights are most visible. Seeing them in Iowa requires a strong geomagnetic storm to push the aurora far enough south and create an exceptionally vibrant display – a rare event.

In other words, it’s awesome.

“I couldn’t believe how vivid the northern lights were,” commented my friend Donetta Stewart of rural Auburn, who captured amazing views of the sky above her barn during the celestial show. “I’ve never seen anything like it. Every now and then, it’s soul satisfying to witness something that captures your sense of wonder once again.”

Make room for more awe and wonder

That word “wonder” resonated with me. It describes the magic inspired by a sense of awe.

What exactly is awe?

We’ve all experienced it, even if we didn’t know what to call it. Whether we’re enjoying a stunning sunset or watching a new leaf grow on a plant, the feeling we get in that moment – amazed, inspired, transported – is what researchers call awe.



Photo Source: Donetta Stewart, Sac County



Photo Source: Lynn Poen, Lake City



Photo Source: Darcy Dougherty Maulsby, Yetter

“I’ve been thinking a lot lately about how it’s important to make room and opportunity for awe and wonder in your life, especially as we get older,” Donetta told me. “I constantly remind myself of how it is a privilege to see the passing years. Many I know didn’t get to do that.”

She’s exactly right. Awe is a rich blessing. It’s a gentle nudge to appreciate the everyday wonders flourishing all around us. It’s something we all need more of in our lives.

Like many positive emotions, awe makes us feel good. It helps us connect with others. Awe decreases stress levels, and it increases generosity and kindness. Awe also makes us happier and more satisfied with life.

“Everything is a miracle”

Research shows that awe shifts us from a competitive, dog-eat-dog mindset to a sense that we’re a part of a community, a culture, an ecosystem. Thanks to awe, “our individual self gives way to the boundary-dissolving sense of being part of something much larger,” noted Dacher Keltner, author of the book “Awe: The New Science of Everyday Wonder and How It Can Transform Your Life.”

Finding ways to cultivate awe in everyday life leads us to appreciate what is most humane in our human nature.

- Slow down and focus on your senses. Tune into the sights, textures, smells, tastes and sounds around you, from the flavors of a delicious meal to the delight of listening to a favorite song.
- Spend time in nature. Notice the vastness of the sky, the beauty of trees and flowers, and the way the sunlight sparkles on a river or lake. Even observing nature from a window can help.
- Document the beauty around you. Write down things you notice that bring you joy, or take some photographs, just like many of us did with the northern lights.

This year, make time to nurture a sense of awe, and take inspiration in this quote attributed to Albert Einstein: “There are only two ways to live your life. One is as though nothing is a miracle. The other is as though everything is a miracle.”

Darcy Dougherty Maulsby lives near her family’s Century Farm northwest of Lake City. Visit her at www.darcymaulsby.com.

Visit our website at www.grundycountyrecia.com



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