

living with energy IN IOWA

 Grundy County REC
A Touchstone Energy Cooperative

JANUARY 2021

GCREC directors and employees recognized for years of service ▶ See Page 5



Visit our website at www.grundycountyrecia.com

Grundy County REC names
new GM and welcomes
operations manager

On the road with
co-op-served companies

Cozy up with
soup recipes

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Energy Efficiency Tip of the Month

Energy bills can increase during winter for a variety of reasons, like more time spent at home, and shorter days and longer nights. Small actions, like turning down your thermostat, replacing old bulbs with LEDs and washing clothes in cold water can help you save.



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ON THE COVER



Congratulations to Bea McDowell, an Access Energy Cooperative member from Mt. Pleasant, for supplying the cover image for this month's issue! To have your photo considered for a future cover, email high-res images to editor@livingwithenergyiowa.com. If we select your photo, you'll be awarded with \$100. 🎉

Advocacy in the new year

BY KEVIN CONDON

For Iowa's electric co-ops, our cooperative principles guide us in good times and bad – even during derecho storms and global pandemics. Your local electric co-op strives to power your family and community no matter what may come our way.

Advocating with lawmakers and elected officials with a unified co-op voice during policy debates impacts how your co-op provides safe, affordable, reliable and environmentally responsible power.

While COVID restrictions have changed how we advocate, it has not changed *why* we advocate. We focus on advocacy because we care about our consumer-members. We know that when our communities are strong, the co-ops are strong. When the pandemic hit, Iowa's electric co-ops supported policies that helped our rural agribusiness members, including biofuels, food processing and small manufacturing. While we will continue advocating on behalf of member industries, as well as issues like renewable energy, safety, economic development and taxes, we'll likely be starting the new legislative session much like the last one ended – with limited physical access to the Statehouse.

Because the co-op mission of powering lives and empowering communities remains constant, we will always find ways to adapt to challenges. Virtual advocacy is not the same as talking face-to-face, but it is still essential. When possible and appropriate, your co-op engages with lawmakers directly. When that's not possible, we reach legislators through phone calls, emails, social media or whatever pathways materialize.

The Iowa Association of Electric Cooperatives manages our grassroots advocacy efforts through the Iowa Rural Power initiative.



We recently updated our advocacy website at www.iaruralpower.org, which now includes our Voter

Activation Center and a new “Bill Tracker” feature to help electric co-op member-consumers stay informed about legislation important to rural electric cooperatives.

As Iowa's electric co-ops look back on 2020, we reflect on the August 10 storm that hit our state with little advanced warning. The devastating derecho storm that swept through Iowa with the force of a Category 4 hurricane caused thousands of power outages and left a path of destruction that required an extensive restoration effort.

While stopping the derecho was beyond our control, we can limit the damage of these powerful storms and restore power faster by keeping trees and other vegetation away from power lines. Vegetation management is an important part

of protecting the electric grid and ensuring reliable service. But in some instances, prescriptive easements prevent utilities from adequately clearing vegetation that can cause outages and create safety concerns. Iowa's electric cooperatives support plans that would allow utilities a specified vegetation management clearance to maintain reliable service and minimize outages.

A few years ago, Iowa's electric co-ops attempted to pass legislation to gain vegetation management clearances but were opposed by groups who claimed that the legislation infringed on property rights. With the memory of the derecho still fresh in our minds, we hope those groups and lawmakers will consider the rights of the member-consumers down the line who want to keep their lights on. ⚡

Kevin Condon is the director of government relations for the Iowa Association of Electric Cooperatives.

EDITOR'S CHOICE CONTEST

Win a Fitbit Charge 4 Fitness Activity Tracker

Make keeping those New Year's exercise resolutions easier with a Fitbit Charge 4 Fitness Activity Tracker! Take your goals further with a health and fitness tracker that packs built-in GPS for pace and distance, 24/7 heart rate tracking and more into a comfortable wristband. *The winner will be able to select from four available colors.* ⚡



Visit our website and win!

Enter this month's contest by visiting www.livingwithenergyiniowa.com no later than Jan. 31, 2021. 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 the Cuisinart® Extra-Large Rotisserie Fryer and Steamer from the November issue was Shirley Babcock, Butler County REC.

STUDENT LEADERS

Scholarship deadline approaching

The deadline to apply for scholarships through Grundy County REC is **Monday, Feb. 8, 2021**.

Four scholarships will be awarded, three \$750 scholarships by Grundy County REC and a \$1,000 Basin Electric Power Cooperative scholarship, to students of a member of the cooperative. The scholarships go directly to the school of the student's choice to assist with college tuition. For more information, contact Grundy County REC at 319-824-5251 or visit www.grundycountyrecia.com.



Grundy County REC

A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative

"Our mission is to provide our members safe, reliable, electric service."



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Office Hours: Monday-Friday, 8 a.m.-4:30 p.m.
Call our office 24/7: 319-824-5251

General Manager/CEO: Vicki Daily

Officers and Directors:

District 1: Kevin Pruisner
District 2: Norbert Boyle
District 3: Nick Strohbehm
District 4: Larry Rohach
District 5: Matt Kopriva
District 6: David Schmidt
District 7: Jason Paper

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CONGRATULATIONS

Grundy County REC names general manager

The Grundy County REC board of directors is pleased to announce the cooperative's Member Services Manager Michael Geerdes has accepted the position of general manager following the retirement of Vicki Daily on Jan. 8, 2021.

Since 2011, Michael has worked for Grundy County REC in a member services role and brings years of member relations, utility and cooperative experience to the position of general manager. He resides in Grundy Center with his wife Amanda and their two children, coaches youth athletics, farms and is an active member in his church.

"Michael has been an important part of the Grundy Co-op for nearly 10 years. With his cooperative knowledge, strong work ethic and commitment to our member-consumers, the board is confident he will lead Grundy County REC far into the future. His hard work, dedication and loyalty has been greatly appreciated," says Board

President Larry Rohach.

"I am very excited for the opportunity of becoming Grundy County REC's next general manager," Geerdes says.

"This cooperative is a great organization to work for and has a talented group of employees onboard. I look forward to continuing to enhance and grow Grundy County REC into the future."



Upon her retirement, Vicki and her husband Pat will retire to their farm in Milan, Missouri. Vicki plans to spend her retirement enjoying time with her family and traveling.

"Vicki has led Grundy County REC through some difficult times, making the cooperative stronger and setting us up for a strong future. The board and the employees will miss Vicki, her enthusiasm and her commitment to our member-consumers. We appreciate the hard work and dedication she put into her role as general manager of Grundy County REC," Rohach says.

BEST WISHES

Grundy County REC office manager retires after 45 years



After 45 years of dedicated service to Grundy County REC, Jan Boren will retire on Friday, Jan. 18. Her career began in high school when she completed a business program with the cooperative. In her time at Grundy County REC, Jan has worn many hats, most recently serving as office manager.

"For me personally, Jan was instrumental in getting me up to speed when I became the general manager at the cooperative. I've always known I could count on Jan's knowledge and assistance. Throughout her career at Grundy

County REC, Jan has made a positive impact in the lives of so many of our employees. I know the board, our members and the employees of Grundy County REC join me in wishing Jan all the best in her upcoming retirement," says General Manager Vicki Daily.

Board President Larry Rohach adds, "To work for the same employer for 45 years is a testament to one's loyalty and dedication. Throughout her time at Grundy County REC, Jan has been the rock for the board of directors. Any fact or agenda item was always just a page away in Jan's memory bank, and she will surely be missed."

Co-op hires operations manager

Dan Stelpflug recently joined Grundy County REC as the operations manager. He will manage and coordinate the installation, operation and maintenance of electric facilities owned by the members of the cooperative. He is also responsible for the outside employees, trucks and equipment.

For the past 40 years, Dan has worked for electric cooperatives in Iowa and Wisconsin. He has managed operations departments for the



respective cooperatives for the past 22 years.

Dan received an associate's degree in power distribution from Moraine Park Technical College and has completed the National Rural Electric Cooperative Management Intern Program in Madison, Wisconsin.

In his free time, Dan enjoys spending time with his friends and family, golfing and fishing. Dan resides in Grundy Center. ⚡

Sealing air leaks has benefits

If you are looking for cost-effective ways to help lower heating and cooling costs in your home, consider checking for air leaks. In addition to lowering heating and cooling costs, sealing air leaks also improves durability and makes your home a more comfortable and healthier environment.

Tips for Sealing Air Leaks

- Test your home for air tightness.
- Caulk and weatherstrip doors and windows that leak air.
- Caulk and seal air leaks where plumbing, ducting or electrical wiring comes through walls, floors, ceilings and soffits over cabinets.
- Install foam gaskets behind outlet and switch plates on walls.
- Inspect dirty spots in your insulation for air leaks and mold. Seal leaks with low-expansion spray foam made for this purpose and install house flashing if needed.
- Look for dirty spots on your ceiling paint and carpet, which may indicate air leaks at interior wall/ceiling joints and wall/floor joists and caulk them.
- Cover single-pane windows with storm windows or replace them with more efficient double-pane



low-emissivity windows.

- Use foam sealant on larger gaps around windows, baseboards and other places where air may leak out.
- Cover your kitchen exhaust fan to stop air leaks when not in use.
- Check your dryer vent to be sure it is not blocked. This will save energy and may prevent a fire.
- Replace door bottoms and thresholds with ones that have pliable sealing gaskets.
- Keep the fireplace flue damper tightly closed when not in use.
- Seal air leaks around fireplace chimneys, furnaces and gas-fired water heater vents with fire-resistant materials, such as sheet metal or sheetrock and furnace cement caulk. ⚡

Tips provided by: www.energy.gov/energysaver/weatherize/air-sealing-your-home

Director and employee years of service



Grundy County REC is fortunate to have a very knowledgeable and dedicated group of directors and employees. We would like to recognize the following service anniversaries celebrated in 2020:

Directors:

- Norb Boyle, 8 years
- Matt Kopriva, 1 year
- Jason Paper, 10 years
- Kevin Pruisner, 16 years
- Larry Rohach, 27 years
- David Schmidt, 3 years
- Nick Strohbahn, 2 years

Employees:

- Aaron Bird, 13 years
- Jan Boren, 45 years
- Vicki Daily, 5 years
- Erik Freese, 6 years
- Mike Geerdes, 9 years
- Scott Kuiper, 6 years
- Karl Nielsen, 8 years
- Tony Sienknecht, 18 years

Energy Efficiency Tip of the Month

Replace standard power strips with advanced power strips to save energy. Advanced power strips look like ordinary power strips, but they have built-in features that are designed to reduce the amount of energy used by standby electronics that consume energy even when they're not in use (also known as phantom load).

The National Renewable Energy Laboratory (NREL) estimates that the average home loses \$200 annually to energy wasted by phantom load.

Source: www.nrel.gov



On the road in Iowa

Ambulances, campers, dump trucks and tankers

BY KAY SNYDER

Our family outings have turned to exploring Iowa's parks and recreation spots during these past few months. Settled in the passenger seat on our last road trip, I was poised to pass the time with my iPad and phone. Instead, I decided to put the devices down and enjoy the destination and the journey as well.

As I started paying attention to all the vehicles on and off-road, it got me thinking, and I did have to Google a couple of quick facts. Iowa has approximately 115,000 miles of roads, ranking No. 14 in the nation for Total Public Road Length. I noticed some unique vehicles in the sea of cars – including SUVs, pickup trucks and tractor trailers – and many are manufactured in Iowa. When you think of Iowa-manufactured vehicles, two companies likely come to mind – John Deere and Winnebago. However, there are many others that you can be on the lookout for as you venture out in 2021, including these featured in this article. As a bonus, the manufacturers are often served by Iowa's electric cooperatives.

Countryside Tank Company – Osceola

Served by Clarke Electric Cooperative, Inc.

Have you ever wondered what's inside the huge tanker trucks that crisscross the country and how the contents are kept safe? Countryside Tank Company has an answer. The company has more than 40 years of experience in steel fabrication. It produces tank transport trailers that can haul up to 17,500 gallons of a wide variety of substances, safely and in full accordance with the latest specifications and requirements. In 2018, Countryside Tank leveraged its pressure vessel building experience and started manufacturing bobtail bottles, which go on truck chassis. These versatile vehicles are primarily



used in residential propane delivery where a transport trailer isn't practical. If you have a propane tank, check out your next delivery to see if it is transported in a Countryside Tank Bobtail. For more information, visit countrysidetank.com.

Life Line Emergency Vehicles – Sumner

Served by Butler County Rural Electric Cooperative

Ambulances may be something you don't think about until one whizzes past you on the highway, or you or a family member are in one. A leader in manufacturing emergency vehicles is employee-owned Life Line Emergency Vehicles, located in Sumner. For over 30

years, it has been committed to making the safest, most efficient vehicle possible. Life Line offers several models to accommodate everything from hospital-to-hospital transport, compact body designs to navigate metropolitan areas, EMS and fire departments, and critical care vehicles. Life Line prides itself on innovation, offering proprietary aluminum extrusions that add strength and improve stability. It was the first to offer Labyrinth-style door construction, a double aluminum insulated floor and a two-piece aluminum crash rail. Life Line is also known for its state-of-the-art Elite electrical system. Customers say it is all the hidden details that set Life Line ambulances apart from others.



For more information, visit www.lifelineambulance.com.

Camp365 – Albia

Served by Chariton Valley Electric Cooperative

There is a newcomer on the road that will catch your eye. It is CAMP365, the world’s first fold-out cabin. This new company, with its manufacturing facility in Albia, was named to the 2020 Top RV Debut of the Year by *RVBusiness* magazine. Camp365 is 12 feet wide and 8 feet deep, with more than 7 feet of headroom. It is insulated and has heating and cooling to make it usable in any weather. The camper folds down, easily fits in a standard garage and can be pulled by a Toyota Prius or any vehicle rated for towing 1,500 pounds. Setting up the camper takes less than 10 minutes, requires no tools and boasts that the “lift-assist” feature makes it very easy. Referencing that, if you can push a vacuum cleaner, you can level out your Camp365 cabin. Keep an eye out for these new and innovative campers as they continue to hit the road in 2021 and beyond. For more information, visit Camp365.com.

SmithCo – Le Mars

Served by North West REC

The next time you pass a construction site, see if side dumping trailers are being used. SmithCo builds a variety of side dump trailers to haul all types of cargo. As its name indicates, side dump trailers tilt to the side, along the trailer’s full length to dump the contents instead of lifting the whole trailer and dumping out the back. The benefits of a side dump trailer are superior stability, easier unloading and faster cycle times. Unloading can even take place as the vehicle is moving. Agriculture, construction, demolition, mining

and waste industries often use side dump trailers. SmithCo has been in operation for over 25 years and has stayed true to manufacturing only side dump trailers, which it custom designs and manufactures to meet state and federal laws. For more information, visit sidedump.com.

Advanced manufacturing is Iowa’s largest industry, accounting for more than 17% of our state’s total Gross Domestic Product. Nearly 6,000 manufacturers produce everything from food products and medical devices to aerospace products and construction machinery. Industry-leading companies are producing phenomenal products right here in Iowa.

To put a more personal face on these economic impact numbers, there was an average of 223,000 manufacturing employees in Iowa in 2018, many of whom live in rural communities across Iowa. Iowa’s rural electric cooperatives play a vital role in supporting these employees, businesses and the communities in which they live and work.

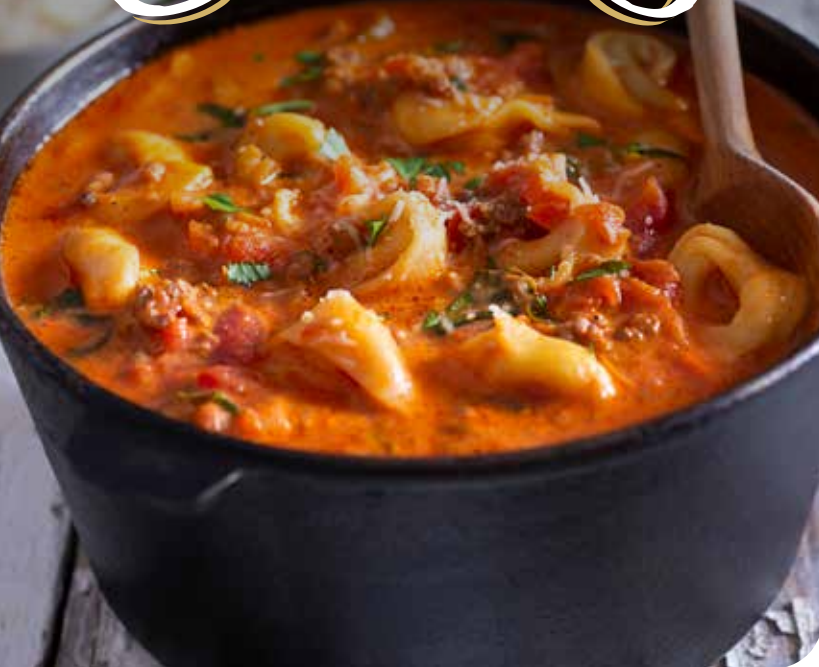
As you travel the state throughout the year, be on the lookout for these vehicles, and become curious about others you see. You never know; they just might be made in Iowa! ⚡

Kay Snyder is the director of marketing and communications for the Iowa Area Development Group.



COZY UP WITH

SOUPS



Hearty Tortellini Soup

- 1 pound Italian sausage
- 1 cup onion, chopped
- 1 cup celery, chopped
- 1 cup green pepper, chopped
- 1 cup carrots, chopped
- 30 ounces canned tomatoes, chopped
- 1 quart V-8 juice
- 1 quart beef or chicken broth
- 1 tablespoon Worcestershire sauce
- 1 tablespoon garlic, minced
- 1 tablespoon Italian seasoning
- 1 tablespoon brown sugar
- 1 teaspoon dried basil, chopped
- 1 teaspoon white pepper
- 1 bay leaf
- 1 package frozen three-cheese tortellini, cook per instructions and drain
- Parmesan cheese, shredded or grated

In 5- to 6-quart Dutch oven, cook sausage and drain. Add veggies, liquids and seasonings. Soft boil until veggies are tender, about 30 minutes. Add tortellini and stir gently. Cook an additional 5 minutes. Discard bay leaf and serve with Parmesan cheese. *Servings: 10-12*

Belinda Fink • Cambridge • Consumers Energy

Buttery Onion Soup

- 2 cups onion, chopped
- ½ cup butter
- ¼ cup flour
- 1 cup chicken broth
- 2 cups milk
- 2 cups Swiss cheese
- salt and pepper, to taste
- seasoned croutons

Sauté onion in butter until tender. Blend flour into sautéed onions. Gradually add broth and milk. Cook over medium heat until bubbly. Add cheese and stir until melted. Season to taste and serve with seasoned croutons.

**Ramona Harken • Ackley
Grundy County Rural Electric Cooperative**

Broccoli Cheddar Soup

- ½ cup onion, chopped
- ¼ cup butter
- ¼ cup flour
- ½ teaspoon salt
- 4 cups milk
- 2 cups cheddar cheese, shredded
- 10 ounces frozen broccoli, cooked, drained and chopped

Sauté onion in butter. Blend in flour and salt; gradually add milk and cook, stirring constantly until thickened. Add cheese and broccoli, stir until cheese is melted. *Servings: 6 (1 cup each)*

**Linda Cox • Leon
Southwest Iowa Rural Electric Cooperative**

Ham n' Swiss Soup

- 3 tablespoons butter
- 3 tablespoons all-purpose flour
- 2 cups chicken broth
- 2 cups frozen broccoli, chopped
- 4 teaspoons onion, chopped
- 2 cups fully cooked ham, cubed
- 1 cup whipping cream
- ½ teaspoon dried thyme
- dash salt
- dash pepper
- 1½ cups Swiss cheese, shredded

In large saucepan, melt butter then whisk in flour until smooth. Gradually add broth and bring to a boil. Cook and stir for 2 minutes or until thickened. Add broccoli and onion then cook until crisp-tender. Add ham, cream and seasonings. Heat thoroughly. Stir in cheese until melted. *Servings: 4*

**Dorothy Carolus • Parkersburg
Grundy County Rural Electric Cooperative**

BRIGHTEN THE BOWL

Fresh herbs, such as parsley, basil or cilantro can quickly lose their flavor if simmered in a hot soup. But when sprinkled on the top of a bowl just before serving, they will add freshness and bright flavor.

Grandma's Chicken & Rice Soup

- 6 cups chicken broth
- 2 cups cooked chicken, diced
- 2 cups cooked rice
- 1 cup onion, diced
- 4 stalks celery, diced

Mix all ingredients and simmer on low for at least 30 minutes. *Servings: 6*

**Cindy Langel • Carroll
Raccoon Valley Electric Cooperative**

Taco Soup

- 1 pound hamburger, browned
- 1 package taco seasoning
- 1 package powdered ranch mix
- 2 quarts tomato juice
- 1 teaspoon celery salt
- 1 teaspoon garlic salt
- 1 teaspoon salt
- ½ teaspoon pepper
- 1 teaspoon sugar
- 2 tablespoons chili powder
- 1 can tomato soup
- 1 large can chili beans
- 1 large can black beans
- 1 quart corn
toppings: shredded cheddar cheese, sour cream, corn chips

Add taco seasoning and ranch mix to browned hamburger with a little water. Stir in remaining ingredients. Simmer, stirring often. Serve with cheddar cheese, sour cream and corn chips. *Servings: 10-12*

**Steph Messner • Rock Rapids
Lyon Rural Electric Cooperative**

Cabbage Soup

- 1 head cabbage
- 1 link kielbasa sausage, chopped
- 1 onion, chopped
- 3-4 potatoes, chopped, optional
- 3 cans cannellini beans
- 4 beef bouillon cubes
- 2 carrots, chopped
- 4 cloves garlic, chopped

Chop cabbage into eight chunks. Add other ingredients to pot. Add water to desired consistency. Bring to boil and then simmer 2-3 hours. Soup can be cooked in slow cooker on low all day, 8-10 hours. *Servings: 8*

**Jenny Hall • Woodbine
Harrison County Rural Electric Cooperative**

Potato Spinach Soup

- 1 cup onion, diced
- 3 tablespoons parsley (fresh or dried)
- 3 tablespoons butter
- 2-3 medium baked potatoes, diced with skin
- 1 bag fresh spinach, chopped
- 1 quart chicken broth
- ½ teaspoon salt
- ½ teaspoon pepper
- 1 cup fat-free half and half
topping: fried bacon pieces
optional seasonings: 1 tablespoon basil (fresh or dried), pinch of nutmeg
optional meat: small cubes of baked ham or sausage

Sauté onions and parsley in butter until tender. In saucepan, add potatoes, spinach, chicken broth and seasonings. If substituting frozen spinach, thaw and drain before adding. Simmer soup until hot and bubbly, stirring often. Add cream (for a thicker soup ½ cup dried potato flakes can be added). Top with fried bacon pieces. *Servings: 8*

Julie Flory • Pella • Pella Cooperative Electric Association

PUT CHEESE RINDS TO WORK

Save your Parmesan cheese rinds; they add delicious flavor to minestrone, bean or hearty vegetable soups. Keep rinds in the freezer and toss one in when you simmer the soup. It will add some saltiness, so taste before seasoning at the end. Remove the rind before serving the soup.

S O U P E R S O U P

BROWN OR SEAR THE MEAT

If you are adding meat to a soup, sear or brown it in a sauté pan before you add it to the soup. This adds a deeper savory flavor to the entire soup.

S O U P E R S O U P

CHOP IN SPOON SIZES

When chopping vegetables, consider how big you want them to be on the spoon. Even hearty soups should have well-chopped, perfectly portioned vegetables.

S O U P E R S O U P

Wanted: Rhubarb or Asparagus Recipes! The Reward: \$25 for every one we publish!

Spring showers bring rhubarb and asparagus! These spring foods are a sure sign that warm and sunny days are on the horizon. Share your favorite recipes, and if we run yours in the magazine, we'll send a \$25 credit for your electric co-op to apply to your power bill. Recipes submitted also may be archived on our website at www.livingwithenergyiowa.com.

The deadline is Jan. 31, 2021. Please include your name, address, telephone number, co-op name and the recipe category on all submissions. **NEW: Please also provide the number of servings per recipe.**

EMAIL:
recipes@livingwithenergyiowa.com
(Attach your recipe as a Word document or PDF to your email message.)

MAIL:
Recipes
Living with Energy in Iowa
8525 Douglas Ave., Suite 48
Des Moines, IA 50322-2992

A diverse fuel mix ensures

How co-ops keep electricity reliable – the traditional way and the digital way

BY PAUL WESSLUND

“Don’t put all your eggs in one basket.”

It’s a familiar saying, and believe it or not, that age-old piece of wisdom is used by electric utilities to make sure you receive a reliable supply of electricity.

Michael Leitman, senior analyst at the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association, translates that saying into utility-industry terminology this way:

“You don’t want to be too reliant on any one energy source,” says Leitman. “The goal is if one resource becomes constrained, others are there to fill the gap and keep the lights on – it’s about managing risk and priorities.”

Following that advice has been pretty straightforward for decades. A mix of four energy sources provide nearly all generated electricity: coal, natural gas, nuclear and hydroelectric power.

Mind-boggling energy changes.

But these days, there are a lot more options – the variety of electricity generation is higher than it’s ever been and not just because of more renewable energy sources like wind and solar. While the technology still has a long way to go for large-scale deployment, batteries are getting cheaper and powerful enough to supplement wind turbines during calm weather and solar when the sun’s not shining. Energy load-control programs can shut off water heaters for short periods during times when electricity use is highest. Rapid technological advances across the power industry have also been key for unprecedented opportunities, allowing utilities to manage the electric power systems in ways that make energy resources more useful.

While a broader mix of fuels



could potentially bring even greater reliability to your electric service, coordinating all the new and old equipment of the nation’s electric grid requires new skills and careful management.

For years, the electric utility industry’s main fuel source has been coal. Coal traditionally provided about half the electricity in the country because it was reliable, plentiful and relatively inexpensive. That backbone was supplemented by nuclear power, hydroelectric power and natural gas.

But that’s changed radically over the last 15 years.

The supply and price of natural gas fell dramatically with fracking and other drilling technologies. Natural gas plants can be built smaller, faster and cheaper than coal stations, and they can be controlled more quickly as power demand changes from day to day. Coal costs rose with environmental regulations, and renewable energy sources received more attention because of their benefits to the environment.

reliability



As a result, by 2016, natural gas replaced coal as the largest source of electricity. In 2019, natural gas made up 38% of the electric utility fuel mix; coal, 23%; nuclear, 20%; and hydroelectric power, 7%. The non-hydro renewable energy share of electricity production has risen from almost nothing 10 years ago, to 7% for wind and 2% for solar – and both continue to increase rapidly.

Those statistical trends hide two revolutionary changes.

One is that renewable energy doesn't act like the more traditional power plants. A coal plant can run all the time, while wind and solar shut on and off as Mother Nature makes changes every hour – meaning the wind doesn't always blow, and the sun doesn't always shine. But with the second revolutionary change – the smart grid – the use of these complex renewable energy sources can be managed better.

The smart grid arrives.

The digital transformation began more than two decades ago, and disruptive forces have had an impact on the power sector ever since. Electric utility dreamers foresaw a shift from an analog network of levers and switches to a digital system that includes automated power management and new ways to manage the flow of electricity.

That smart grid has arrived. Power outages can be detected more quickly, and you can even track the repair process on your smartphone. Digital software can more effectively manage the output of rooftop solar panels, sending electricity back to the utility when the homeowner isn't using all the electricity they produce. The smart grid can also make solar and wind energy more useful through the use of batteries. It's a lot

of technology that helps factor into the quality of electric service.

Managing the smart grid brings improvements, as well as requirements for new ways of doing business.

“The smart grid brings new opportunities to enhance quality of service, reliability and resiliency, but it has to be more actively managed,” says Leitman. “You’ve still got to have folks who know how to climb utility poles, and now we need those who also understand programming and how to work with computers and control systems.”

The need for that new expertise will benefit electric cooperatives and their consumer-members. New skill sets will be needed, and that will create additional job opportunities in the local communities served by electric co-ops. ⚡

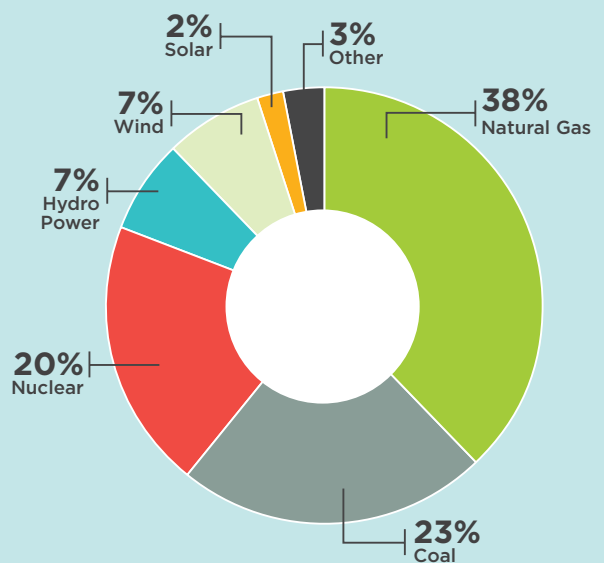
Paul Wesslund writes on consumer and cooperative affairs for the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association, the national trade association representing more than 900 local electric cooperatives. From growing suburbs to remote farming communities, electric co-ops serve as engines of economic development for 42 million Americans across 56% of the nation's landscape.



Powerful Energy Sources

Nationally, electric cooperatives and other utilities use a variety of fuels to power American homes and businesses. This diverse fuel mix supplies co-op members with the safe, reliable and affordable power they depend on.

Source: U.S. Energy Information Administration (2019 data)



Statewide association hosts virtual annual meeting for Iowa's electric cooperatives

BY ERIN CAMPBELL

In a typical year, the Iowa Association of Electric Cooperatives (IAEC) hosts a two-day annual meeting of its member cooperatives in early December. Attendees hear updates and highlights from the year, celebrate cooperative achievements and learn about industry trends from thought leaders. For 2020, IAEC adapted to pandemic precautions and provided a virtual annual meeting. While a virtual format isn't as interactive or as personal as an in-person event, the online video stream made it possible for more electric co-op employees and board directors to tune in on Dec. 3.

IAEC's 2020 annual meeting theme of "Together We Power On" appropriately described the year for Iowa's locally owned electric co-ops. Ensuring safe, reliable, affordable power has been a top priority as co-ops follow specific protocols and procedures for a pandemic situation. And in August, Iowa's electric co-ops worked together to quickly restore power to almost 60,000 households, farms and businesses following the destructive derecho storm. The IAEC safety team coordinated resources and crews and more than 95% of the electric cooperative outages were restored within a week. That's quite an accomplishment when you see photos of the storm's extensive damage and destruction.

In his remarks to the members during the live stream, IAEC Board President Steve Seidl talked about how IAEC staff adapted to new circumstances during the pandemic. This is most evident in IAEC's education and training department, which transitioned to virtual learning to best serve cooperative employees and directors until the health precautions subside.

Seidl said, "2020 was a year we won't soon forget. While IAEC



Behind-the-scenes of IAEC's 2020 virtual annual meeting sound stage.

quickly adapted to unforeseen challenges, we can look back now and see that we accomplished several initiatives on behalf of our members. I'm proud of the employees and directors who work hard at IAEC to strengthen and unite Iowa's electric cooperatives. And I'm looking forward to what we can accomplish in 2021. Together we power on."

During his time at the podium, IAEC Executive Vice President and General Manager Chuck Soderberg walked through the representative committee structure and how these groups inform IAEC staff and set priorities for the trade association. For example, IAEC focused on providing cybersecurity assessments for its members in 2020 as a result of committee feedback. "As a cooperative organization, our only priority is serving the needs of our

members," remarked Soderberg. "I am grateful to our statewide board of directors and our committees for providing clear direction to IAEC staff."

The Iowa Association of Electric Cooperatives is a trade association serving the needs of Iowa's electric cooperatives, including 38 local distribution co-ops and nine generation and transmission co-ops. Formed in 1942, IAEC aims to unify and empower Iowa's electric cooperatives through legislative representation, regulatory oversight, training and education services, safety programs, communications support, and advocacy. Learn more at www.iowarec.org. ⚡

Erin Campbell is the director of communications for the Iowa Association of Electric Cooperatives.

A successful energy transition has the power to transform our world

BY ERIN CAMPBELL

Just look around your home to see how electricity powers your life. Lighting, refrigeration, heating and cooling, appliances and digital devices are all powered by electricity and improve our quality of life and increase productivity. And you probably have even more electric devices in your home after opening your Christmas gifts!

In America and other developed countries, our early access to safe, reliable, affordable and sustainable electricity has undoubtedly powered our economic success. And according to Dr. Scott Tinker, we'll see other countries harness the economic power of electricity over the next decade. During an enlightening presentation at IAEC's Virtual Annual Meeting in December, he talked about the importance of a successful energy transition where humans are lifted from poverty and environmental impacts are reduced. Dr. Tinker believes a successful transition to non-carbon energy sources starts with nonpartisan energy education.

Dr. Tinker is the state geologist of Texas, the director of the Bureau of Economic Geology at the University of Texas at Austin and a documentary filmmaker. And as founder and board chairman of the Switch Energy Alliance, Dr. Tinker is committed to energy education that is objective, nonpartisan and sensible. Tinker says, "Energy fuels the engine of the modern world and has the power to bring billions more out of abject poverty. Because energy reaches into every facet of our lives, it is highly political. Biases and emotions run deep, and facts and data are often distorted, or worse." Through video and online learning, the Switch Energy Alliance aims to educate and start positive conversations about our planet's energy challenges.

The Switch Energy Alliance has



developed two documentary films that illustrate this mission. The first documentary, *Switch*, was released in 2012 and explores the world's leading energy sites – including coal, solar, oil and biofuels – to discover the path to our planet's energy transition.

The second documentary, *Switch On*, was released in 2020 and is a sequel to the first film. Dr. Tinker travels across the globe to meet people and communities as they gain access to electricity for the first time. It's a journey that's enlightening, emotional and unforgettable and it will change how you look at energy and the developing world.

We encourage you to view both documentaries for free at www.switchon.org. Electric cooperatives are also strong proponents for energy education,

which is why we invest in educating board directors, employees and member-consumers. We believe that educated and informed leadership will position locally owned electric co-ops and the communities they serve for the best possible future.

Through the NRECA International Foundation, electric cooperatives across America have brought electricity to more than 160 million people in 48 developing countries. Several of Iowa's electric co-ops sent lineworkers and resources to Central America in 2019 to bring electricity to a rural Guatemalan village. Learn more about NRECA International at www.nrecainternational.coop.

Erin Campbell is the director of communications for the Iowa Association of Electric Cooperatives.

This year, organize your energy

BY PAT KEEGAN AND BRAD THIESSEN

With a new year, it's a perfect time to begin new projects and set goals for the months ahead.

If you're looking for ways to save energy at home and lower your monthly bills, these simple steps can help you get organized and start an achievable path to saving energy.

Step 1: Gather information

Begin by reviewing your 2020 energy bills. Knowing *how* and *when* you use energy can help you decide how ambitious your plan should be. If you have questions about your past bills or energy use, give your electric co-op a call – they're available to help you understand your energy bills. Your co-op may also offer a free app that can show you exact data about your home energy use.

Next, visit your electric co-op's website to see if it offers additional assistance, like energy improvement rebates, free energy audits or other special rates and programs. Because of COVID-19, some restrictions may apply to in-home visits, so you can also try an online energy audit like energystar.gov's Home Energy Yardstick.

Step 2: Develop a plan

With the information gathered, it's important to develop a plan. If your priority is cutting energy costs, you can select the measure that will



A programmable thermostat can help you reduce energy use when you don't need to be heating or cooling your home.

Photo Credit: Consumers Energy

deliver the most savings. Maybe you're already planning to do work on your home, such as roofing or renovating, and you can incorporate energy efficiency strategies into that project. To complete your plan, you'll likely need to check with local contractors or suppliers about costs.

Step 3: Take action

Now that your planning is done, it's time to take action. If you're tackling any major energy efficiency projects that require a contractor, remember to do your research and hire a licensed, reputable professional.

In addition to energy efficiency projects and upgrades, there are other ways you can get organized to save energy:

- **Replace filters regularly.** A clean filter can improve the performance of your heating and cooling system, and reduce the electricity needed to pump air through your ductwork. Filters should be replaced every month if you're using an inexpensive filter, or every three months if you're

using a higher-quality filter. A better filter will do a better job and last longer.

- **Program your thermostat.** Heating and cooling your home account for the most energy use, so setting your thermostat to match your lifestyle can make a major difference. If you don't have a programmable or smart thermostat, get in the habit of manually adjusting your thermostat throughout the day or setting it to the most energy efficient setting when you're away.
- **Label the circuits in your breaker box.** It may not reduce your energy use, but it's an easy way to get organized and will save a lot of headaches down the line! We hope by taking a little time to complete these steps, you'll be well on your way to a more energy efficient 2021! ⚡

Pat Keegan and Brad Thiessen of Collaborative Efficiency write about energy efficiency topics for the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association.



Photo Credit: Marcela Gara, Resource Media

The lure of the sale barn

BY VALERIE VAN KOOTEN

Kent and I drove past a former sale barn in eastern Iowa the other day. The building was dilapidated and deprived of paint with its grayish, weathered exterior bravely standing against the Iowa elements. You'll find them in all parts of the state – some still open, but many of them closed as livestock farming has moved from a single farmer taking 20 hogs to market to thousands of hogs going to much larger facilities.

Pella had a sale barn on the north end of town. It's long gone now, but Thursday nights were a highlight of the week for my sister and me as we tagged along with our dad to the sale. I don't really remember whether it was hogs or cattle that were being sold, but that wasn't the important part to us anyway. With strict instructions to stay out of the sorting and penned areas in the back where animals were "staged" for the sale, we were free to explore all the other nooks and crannies of the old barn.

We took full advantage of that. The barn was ringed, as most sales barns are, with tiered seating on three sides and the auctioneer on the fourth, with the sawdust-covered ring in front of him. At the very top of the seats were ancient and none-too-clean couches that were beyond usable, but we'd plunk ourselves on them, sometimes with other kids who had come to the sale.

My memory is that there was always, always, a box of kittens up there with a harried mother cat who really didn't appreciate everyone picking up her offspring. They weren't for giving away as much as to keep around the barn to quell the mouse population.

We soon tired of the sale barn itself and headed for the adjoining restaurant. Everyone knows that sale barn restaurants have the best food anywhere. My dad would let us put



anything we wanted on the tab and stop in at the end of the night to pay off our tally of pop, candy, chips and the occasional greasy cheeseburger. Those who came to eat dinner could have home-cooked Iowa specialties like hot beef sandwiches with real potatoes and gravy or pork chops with all the sides.

I'm sure we were more than a pest. The restaurant had a bathroom off one side, and I distinctly remember my sister Amber stepping on the exposed water pipes that ran parallel to the floor, about a foot up. As the bossy older sister, I told her to stop doing that, but in true kid fashion, she had to jiggle up and down on it once more. The pipe broke, water bursting everywhere. And also true to kids' natures everywhere, we took

off, not telling anyone.

Kent and I were in Ireland several years ago and stopped at a sale barn that had sheep selling that day. We commented that other than the farmers' caps, which were flat "newsboy" type hats, this scene could have taken place in Iowa. It seems a sale barn is a sale barn, no matter where you are in the world.

If you get the chance, stop by a sale barn on an open day and take a look. Look up the kittens. Have a piece of homemade pie. Stay off the water pipes in the bathroom. 🌩

Valerie Van Kooten is a writer from Pella who loves living in the country and telling its stories. She and her husband Kent have three married sons and two incredibly adorable grandsons.



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