

● APRIL 2025

# iowa

ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE LIVING

**Ways co-ops build  
effective boards**

**How the old farmhouse  
went modern**

**Recipes with an  
international flair**

**Win a Cuisinart® electric skillet ► See Page 3**

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season of life

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## ON THE COVER

Special thanks to Shirley Kellenberger, a Lyon REC member-consumer, for supplying this month's cover image. Submit high-resolution photos for consideration to [editor@ieclmagazine.com](mailto:editor@ieclmagazine.com). You could receive \$100!



# MY ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE JOURNEY BEGAN WITH AN ACRONYM

BY JIM MILLER



Growing up on a farm in northwest Iowa near Fonda, I learned early on what “REC” stood for – rural electric cooperative. It was the power to light the farrowing house, a security light to illuminate the farm and power to keep the oven on for Mom’s pies. Back then, my acronyms were PE (physical education) – which I taught at a local school before coming home to farm – and farm terms like USDA (U.S. Department of Agriculture).

## Acronyms give way to serving local members

Little did I know that when my local district director for Calhoun County Electric Cooperative Association (ECA) asked me to run for our board of directors 17 years ago, I’d begin to learn a whole new set of acronyms on my journey in the electric cooperative world.

My first year as a co-op director was like learning a foreign language. PAC (Political Action Committee), IAEC (Iowa Association of Electric Cooperatives) and NRECA (National Rural Electric Cooperative Association) filled my conversations, and the list goes on. Our Calhoun County ECA manager at the time, Roxanne Carish, was patient with my questions, as were our seasoned board members who encouraged my education in cooperative responsibilities to serve our members. I began attending classes and learning this new language, and I am proud that I achieved the national Director Gold Credential through NRECA.

I was flattered five years ago when statewide director Steve Seidl of Raccoon Valley Electric Cooperative asked if I would consider running for the state board. I am honored to represent District 5 on IAEC’s board, where I now serve as board president.

## Every decision is for co-op members

A big influence in my co-op philosophy is this quote on Calhoun County ECA’s boardroom wall: “Every decision I make shall be based on what is best for the members-owners of this cooperative.”

This quote is why I am a proponent of attending the classes and conferences offered to directors, where I continuously add industry language to my vocabulary. It is also why I prepare for my local and state board meetings. How can I make the best decisions if I am not prepared and haven’t done my due diligence?

## Advocating for co-op members

Recently, I was asked what I hope to accomplish as president of the IAEC board, and my answer came from a conversation with Darrin Lynch from CFC (National Rural Utilities Cooperative Finance Corporation). He said, “Jim, in my opinion, Iowa has one of the best, if not the best, statewide organizations in the country.” My hope is that IAEC continues to set the standard for integrity and service.

And while hope is not a strategy, I know our statewide association can continue to operate at a high level because we

have incredible leadership and staff. My fellow IAEC board members are willing to put in the time and effort to serve our members successfully.

But we don’t do it alone. It’s why I appreciate fellow directors who advocate for important electric issues with their state and federal legislators. We need each of you as co-op members to be committed and engaged with your local and state boards. Let us know your questions, and share your thoughts and needs with us so we can best represent you.

After 17 years as a co-op director, the acronyms now flow freely: ROFR (Right of First Refusal), G&T (Generation and Transmission Cooperative), RTO (Regional Transmission Organization) and so many others! But sometimes, my wife Rae stops and reminds me that not everyone knows the industry lingo. It’s a good reminder to be steadfast in sharing our industry knowledge in a way others will understand as we proudly provide safe, reliable, affordable and sustainable power energy to those we serve.

*Jim Miller is the board president of the Iowa Association of Electric Cooperatives and Calhoun County Electric Cooperative Association.*

## EDITOR’S CHOICE CONTEST

### WIN A CUISINART® ELECTRIC SKILLET!

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#### Visit our website and win!

Enter this month’s contest by visiting [www.ieclmagazine.com](http://www.ieclmagazine.com) no later than April 30. 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 Amazon Kindle from the February issue was **Jeff Beal**, a **Chariton Valley Electric Cooperative** member-consumer.



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## LINEWORKER APPRECIATION DAY IS APRIL 14

Thank you for helping to power our communities.

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# YOU'RE A MEMBER-OWNER, NOT JUST A CUSTOMER

BY KEATON HILDRETH



As interim CEO of Raccoon Valley Electric Cooperative (RVEC), I want to emphasize something that sets us apart from other

businesses: you are not just a customer but a member-owner. Unlike investor-owned utilities that prioritize profits for shareholders, our cooperative exists solely to serve YOU, our member-owners. Without you, RVEC wouldn't exist.

Many businesses today refer to their customers as "members," but what does that mean? In most cases, it's simply a marketing term – you pay a fee to access goods or services, but beyond that, there's little meaningful involvement. At RVEC, membership is different. It comes with real rights, responsibilities and opportunities to shape the cooperative's future.

### Democratic control and member involvement

As a member-owner, you have a direct voice in RVEC. You elect fellow members to serve on our board of directors, ensuring that decisions are made in the best interests of our members and the community. This democratic structure is a core part of the cooperative model and is guided by the seven principles emphasizing transparency, member participation and concern for the community.

We believe you deserve to know how RVEC operates, how decisions are made and how we plan for the future. That's why we encourage members to

engage with us – whether by attending meetings, voting in board elections, or reaching out with questions and ideas. Your input matters, and we are committed to ensuring your voice is heard.

### A cooperative built on values

The cooperative business model is unique, but its success depends on the people who uphold it – our employees, the board of directors, and most importantly, YOU, our member-owners. It is up to all of us to ensure that cooperative principles and values remain strong for generations to come.

At RVEC, our mission is clear: to safely provide reliable, affordable and responsible service while being a leader in our community's prosperity and growth. By staying true to our cooperative principles, we keep the lights on and strengthen the communities we serve.

### Looking to the future

As we continue to adapt to changes in the energy industry, one thing will never change – our commitment to serving our members with integrity and dedication. We welcome your ideas, feedback and participation in shaping RVEC's future. We will ensure that our cooperative remains strong, member-driven, and focused on providing value to you and your community.

Thank you for being part of RVEC – not just as a customer but as a true member-owner.

*Keaton Hildreth is the interim CEO of Raccoon Valley Electric Cooperative.*



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RVEC is an equal opportunity provider and employer.



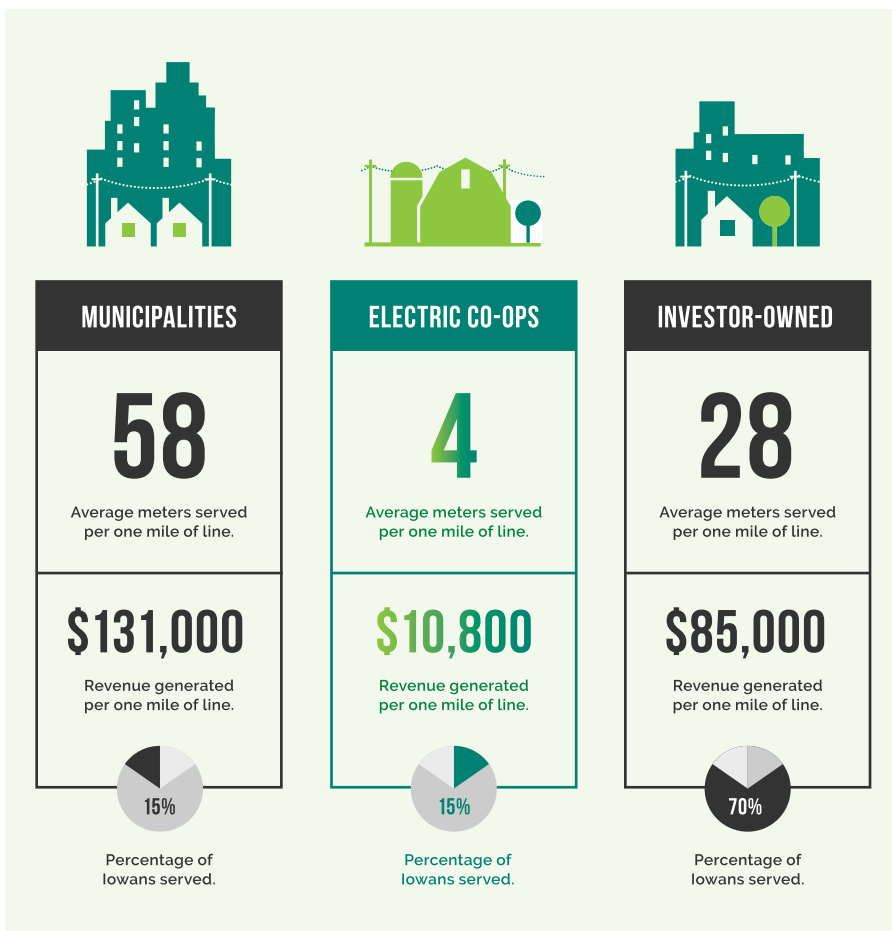
## DOING MORE WITH LESS

Iowa's electric cooperatives are vital in powering rural communities, often in areas where homes, farms and businesses are widely spaced apart. Serving these sparsely populated areas comes with unique challenges. Unlike utilities in urban areas that benefit from dense populations and shorter service distances, Iowa's electric co-ops cover more ground in physical infrastructure and responsibilities.

The numbers tell the story. On average, Iowa's electric cooperatives serve far fewer members per mile of line than other utilities. This means cooperatives must maintain extensive poles, wires, substations and equipment networks, often across rugged and remote terrain. This must be done with significantly less revenue per mile, requiring a balance of operational excellence and financial responsibility.

While the challenges are significant, so is the commitment of Iowa's electric cooperatives to their members. Unlike investor-owned utilities driven by profit, co-ops exist to serve their communities. Decisions are made locally, with input from the members who own and operate the co-op. This grassroots approach ensures Iowa's rural communities' unique needs are always the top priority.

Iowa's electric cooperatives exemplify the cooperative spirit by pooling resources, embracing innovation and staying true to their mission. They prove that with determination and ingenuity. It's possible to do more with less while continuing to deliver safe, affordable and reliable energy to the communities they serve.



## SEEKING MEMBER INPUT

### Survey to take place in April

Raccoon Valley Electric Cooperative (RVEC) is a member-owned cooperative with the purpose of providing you with safe, reliable and affordable electric service. As a member-owned entity, we rely on your feedback to ensure we meet your needs and provide the best service possible. This is why surveys are important.

Surveys provide RVEC with valuable insights into how our members feel about the services we provide. By surveying members, we can identify areas where we excel and areas where improvements are needed. This feedback can be used to make important decisions about allocating resources and improving operations.

In April, many of you will be randomly selected to participate in a satisfaction survey. The anonymous survey will help us better serve you. If you are selected, please take the time to share your honest feedback. By understanding your needs, we can provide stronger service and ensure the long-term success of RVEC.

If you have questions regarding this survey, please contact our office at 800-253-6211 or 712-659-3649.



# WAYS ELECTRIC COOPERATIVES BUILD STRONG BOARDS

BY ANN FOSTER THELEN

Photo Source:  
Harrison County REC

The role of an electric cooperative board extends far beyond making decisions in a meeting room. It requires forward-thinking strategies, local advocacy, active engagement and a commitment to ongoing improvement. Co-op directors continuously participate in education and training opportunities, which enhance their skills and strengthen their knowledge of a complex industry.

At the Iowa Association of Electric Cooperatives' recent annual meeting, Richard Fagerlin of Peak Solutions and Dr. Keri Jacobs from

the University of Missouri-Columbia explored the essential qualities of high-performing cooperative boards and the steps directors take to ensure their long-term success. Hundreds of directors from Iowa's electric cooperatives attended the meeting.

## Understanding the big picture

Fagerlin and Jacobs emphasized that effective boards do more than meet and make decisions. They ensure the sustainability of their cooperative and prepare for future challenges. A key theme of their presentation was "future-proofing" the board – ensuring

that today's decisions position the cooperative for long-term success.

To serve the needs of electric co-ops and the member-consumers they serve – today and in the future – electric cooperative boards ask:

- What does our cooperative need from its board today?
- How can we best position ourselves for future leadership?
- How do we ensure a smooth transition when current board members step down?



Photo Source: Franklin REC



Richard Fagerlin (left) of Peak Solutions and Dr. Keri Jacobs from the University of Missouri-Columbia presented information about high-performing cooperative boards at IAEC's recent annual meeting.

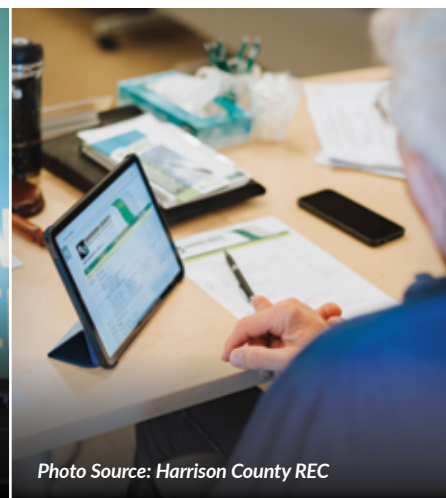


Photo Source: Harrison County REC

## Seven habits of effective board members

Fagerlin and Jacobs highlighted several common challenges boards face and seven ways board members are most effective in serving member-consumers' local needs.

- 1 Knowing their job.** Board members understand their responsibilities before, during and after meetings. This includes preparing adequately, staying engaged, and recognizing the difference between operational and strategic roles.
- 2 Finding the right balance of engagement.** Some directors may want to overreach and micromanage staff, while others leave decision-making to a few dominant voices. Striking the right balance is critical to effective leadership.
- 3 Ensuring equal participation.** Effective boards ensure that all members contribute to discussions. When one or two individuals dominate conversations, the board loses valuable perspectives and diversity of thought.
- 4 Prioritizing co-op needs.** Directors prioritize the cooperative's interests over personal motivations. An effective board remains united in its commitment to the organization's long-term success.
- 5 Passing the torch.** Board members must recognize when it's time to step aside for new leadership. Bringing in fresh perspectives while maintaining institutional knowledge is fundamental to the cooperative business model.
- 6 Maintaining confidentiality.** Board members understand what can and cannot be shared outside the boardroom. Ensuring consistent messaging strengthens trust within the cooperative and the broader membership.
- 7 Valuing diverse opinions.** Strong boards avoid the assumption that "everyone thinks like me" and foster productive discussions. The best boards value diverse opinions and encourage open dialogue.

## THE ROLE OF THE BOARD

Electric cooperative directors play a vital role in guiding the co-op's governance and strategic direction. Elected by the membership, they represent the interests of co-op member-consumers and ensure the co-op operates in alignment with its mission, values and the 7 Cooperative Principles.

Their responsibilities include setting policies, maintaining financial stability and shaping the co-op's long-term

vision. Directors stay informed on industry developments, oversee the CEO's leadership and engage with the community. They also support programs that enhance local economic development.

While directors do not manage daily operations, they provide high-level oversight to keep the co-op delivering safe, reliable, affordable and sustainable power to its members.

### Ensuring long-term success

One of the central themes of the discussion was the need to future-proof the board. This means taking proactive steps to ensure the board evolves alongside the cooperative and the industry.

Some of the key strategies electric cooperatives take to future-proof their boards include:

- **Regular board assessments.** Evaluating the board's strengths and areas for improvement.
- **Director development.** Providing ongoing education and training opportunities.
- **Succession planning.** Identifying and mentoring future board members to ensure smooth transitions.
- **Engaging in strategic discussions.** Moving beyond day-to-day operations and focusing on long-term goals and sustainability.

### The power of good governance

Governance plays a crucial role in board effectiveness. Fagerlin and Jacobs distinguished between Big G Governance (formal structures, bylaws, and processes) and Little G Governance (culture, behavior and interpersonal dynamics). While having sound policies and procedures in place is essential, the board's culture and communication style can make or break its effectiveness.

For instance, agenda setting plays a key role in board productivity. Boards strive to make agendas that allow for meaningful strategic discussions. Balancing high-level strategy with operational details prevents boards from getting stuck in the weeds.

### The board and CEO relationship

The relationship between the board and the cooperative's CEO or general manager is vital to success. The board's role is to provide advice and accountability rather than micromanage operations. Future-proofing means boards position themselves as supportive partners for leadership rather than obstacles to progress.

One emerging challenge is the governance knowledge gap – the increasing complexity of electric cooperative management versus the time board members have available to stay informed. While cooperative managers work full-time in the industry, directors often serve on a part-time basis. To bridge this gap, directors commit to continuous learning and strategic thinking.

### Leading the cooperative of the future

The success of cooperatives depends on strong, well-functioning boards that adapt to changing times. By focusing on purpose, process and performance, cooperative boards ensure they remain effective and future-proofed for the challenges ahead.

Fagerlin and Jacobs emphasized that board leadership is a journey, not a destination. The best boards never stop learning, growing and adapting to meet the needs of their cooperative and its members. With the right mindset and commitment to excellence, today's boards lay the foundation for a thriving, sustainable future.

*Ann Foster Thelen is the editor of Iowa Electric Cooperative Living magazine.*





## PAD THAI WITH SHRIMP

- ½ pound rice noodles
- 4 tablespoons vegetable oil, divided
- 1 egg, beaten
- ½ pound shrimp (may substitute chicken or pork)
- 4 scallions or green onions, chopped
- ½ cup peanuts, coarsely chopped
- 1 3.5-ounce box pad thai sauce
- 2 cups bean sprouts
- cilantro
- lime wedges

Soak noodles according to directions. Heat 2 tablespoons oil in large skillet over medium-high heat. Add egg, scramble lightly 20 seconds. Add shrimp, stir until cooked. Add 2 tablespoons oil and rice noodles. Stir fry 5-7 minutes. Add scallions, peanuts and pad thai sauce. Stir one more minute, add bean sprouts. Garnish with cilantro and lime wedges. *Serves 4*

Diana Thorn • Marshalltown  
Consumers Energy

## MEDITERRANEAN LEG OF LAMB

- 4-5 pounds leg of lamb
- 3 cloves garlic
- salt
- pepper
- oregano
- 1 cup water
- 1 8-ounce can tomato sauce

Cut slits in lamb and insert slivers of garlic. Season with salt, pepper and oregano to taste. Roast in a shallow pan at 325 degrees F for 2½ hours. Drain excess fat from juices in pan. Combine water and tomato sauce and pour over lamb and roast 30 minutes more. Baste with sauce occasionally.

Marilyn O'Brien • Geneva  
Franklin Rural Electric Cooperative

## KOREAN BEEF

- 1 pound ground beef
- 3 cloves garlic
- 1 tablespoon sesame oil
- ½ cup brown sugar
- ¼ cup soy sauce
- ¼ teaspoon ginger
- ¼ teaspoon cayenne pepper
- salt, to taste
- pepper, to taste
- rice, cooked

Cook meat and garlic, drain somewhat. Add the remaining ingredients, except rice. Simmer to blend flavors. Serve over rice. *Serves 4*

Grant DeSmet • Larchwood  
Lyon Rural Electric Cooperative

## ASIAN BEEF AND CABBAGE STIR FRY

- 1 pound ground beef
- ½ onion, diced
- ½ head cabbage, diced
- 1 cup carrot, shredded
- ½ red pepper, diced
- 2 teaspoons ginger
- 4 cloves garlic
- soy sauce, to taste
- Japanese barbecue sauce, to taste
- rice or ramen noodles
- green onions, optional
- sesame seeds, optional

Fry hamburger and onion, drain. Add cabbage, carrots, pepper, spices and sauces. Cook until tender. Cook noodles according to package instructions and add when finished. Cook until flavors are blended. Top with green onions and sesame seeds, if desired.

Barb Walter • Alton  
North West Rural Electric Cooperative



## NORWEGIAN KRINGLES

- 6 egg yolks
- 1½ cups sugar
- ½ cup sour cream
- 1 tablespoon butter, melted
- 1 cup buttermilk
- 1 teaspoon vanilla
- 4½ cups flour, divided
- 4 teaspoons baking powder
- ½ teaspoon salt

Mix all ingredients together except ½ cup flour. Chill overnight or several hours. Then, if needed, add additional ½ cup flour and roll into pencil thin figure eights. Bake on greased cookie sheets at 400 degrees F for about 7 minutes, or until slightly brown. Spread with butter to serve.

Hana Hartter • Rock Rapids  
Lyon Rural Electric Cooperative

## EAST INDIA PARTY MIX

- 4 tablespoons butter, melted
- 1 teaspoon whole mustard seed
- 2 teaspoons Worcestershire sauce
- 1½ cups Rice Chex
- 1½ cups Corn Chex
- 1½ cups Crispix
- 1 cup peanuts
- 1 cup cashews
- ½ teaspoon curry powder
- 1 teaspoon cinnamon
- 1 cup chocolate chips
- 1 cup M&M candies

Add mustard seeds to melted butter and cook until seeds pop. Remove from heat and stir in Worcestershire sauce. In large bowl, mix all cereal and nuts. Sprinkle curry and cinnamon on cereal mixture. Pour butter and sauce over top, mix well to coat. Put in shallow pan and bake at 250 degrees F for 1 hour, stirring every 15 minutes. Cool completely, then stir in chocolate chips and candies. Store in airtight containers. Works well with gluten-free cereals.

Mabel Fisher • Sigourney  
T.I.P. Rural Electric Cooperative

## SPINACH AND CHEESE MANICOTTI

- 1 15-ounce container ricotta
- 2 cups mozzarella, shredded, divided
- ¼ cup Romano cheese, grated
- 1 10-ounce package frozen spinach, thawed and squeezed dry
- 2 tablespoons fresh parsley, minced, plus more for garnish
- 1 large egg, lightly beaten
- ¼ teaspoon kosher salt
- black pepper, to taste
- 14 manicotti shells
- 4 cups marinara sauce, divided

Combine ricotta, 1 cup mozzarella, Romano cheese, spinach, parsley, egg, salt and pepper. Stuff ¼ cup mixture into each shell. Spread ¾ cup marinara sauce in a 9x13-inch pan. Arrange shells on top and cover with marinara sauce to submerge all pasta. Bake covered at 350 degrees F for 1 hour. Top with remaining 1 cup mozzarella and bake uncovered for 15 minutes. Garnish with fresh parsley. Serves 7

Anna Domnick • Rock Rapids  
Lyon Rural Electric Cooperative

Visit [www.ieclmagazine.com](http://www.ieclmagazine.com) and search our online archive of hundreds of recipes in various categories.



## CHICKEN CURRY

- ½ cup yogurt
- ½ teaspoon salt
- 1 whole chicken, cut up
- 5 tablespoons olive oil (or vegetable oil)
- 1 onion, chopped
- 1 green pepper, chopped
- ½ teaspoon ginger
- pinch garlic powder
- ½ teaspoon ground cardamom
- 1 tablespoon ground coriander
- ½ teaspoon ground cumin
- 6 peppercorns
- 1 cinnamon stick
- ½ teaspoon turmeric
- 1 8-ounce can tomato sauce
- 1 cup water
- 2 potatoes, cubed
- basmati rice
- frozen peas, optional

Mix yogurt and salt. Remove skin from chicken. Coat chicken pieces with yogurt mixture and set in bowl 30 minutes. Sauté chicken pieces in oil until brown. Mix onion, green pepper, ginger, garlic powder, cardamom, coriander, cumin, peppercorns, cinnamon stick, turmeric, tomato sauce and water. Place chicken in slow cooker and pour sauce mixture over chicken. Add potatoes and cook until chicken is tender and potatoes are cooked. Thawed peas can be added at the end, if desired. Serve over basmati rice. Serves 4-6

Sheila Arney • Marshalltown  
Consumers Energy

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The exterior of a new modern farmhouse home features vertical siding, a front porch and natural wood columns. Steel shed roofs over the windows add contrast and interest.  
Photo Source: Hibbs Luxury Homes



# HOW THE OLD FARMHOUSE WENT MODERN

## DESIGN TRENDS FOR RURAL HOMES

BY JIM WINNERMAN

Many are familiar with interior decorating styles known as mid-century modern, contemporary or simply modern. Less familiar may be a more recent approach known as “modern farmhouse,” a trend in home decor and design evoking a feeling of warmth and comfort.

The origin of the farmhouse can be traced to Germany and Scandinavia, where they were built to house farm workers. Then, it was not a style but a necessary shelter for a way of life. Farmhouse architecture arrived in the U.S. in the 1700s. Since then, farmhouses have undergone various iterations, from being purely functional as they were in Europe

to slowly morphing into various styles of interior and exterior design adopted by everyday families.

Today’s popular modern farmhouse version grew out of the show “Fixer Upper,” hosted by Chip and Joanna Gaines from Waco, Texas. It aired for five seasons on HGTV (Home and Garden Television), a network focusing on reality programming based on home improvement and real estate.

Their show premiered with each episode featuring a home they were renovating. As their engaging personalities and decorating style aired featuring one home after another, their personal

appeal and approach to interior design gained popularity.

Prominent features included architectural elements, like the use of natural materials, such as wood and stone, and an open and airy floor plan conducive to a comfortable lifestyle. The decor was an eclectic mix of furnishings and accessories. Color choices were warm and neutral hues that did not overwhelm a room.

Because it was an approach that could be used inside a home of any architectural style, it had immediate and widespread public appeal. They ventured away from the pure countryside approach of



simplicity, function and nostalgia characteristic of earlier farmhouse decor and introduced a more relaxed way of living and entertaining. The design features smooth, clean lines and materials while retaining the rustic charm of historic farms. By 2016, the Gaines had unexpectedly created a new trend that soon had its own name – modern farmhouse.

### Designs based on personal interpretation

Modern farmhouse design can incorporate a traditional wooden kitchen table set in a large kitchen with vaulted ceilings and wooden accent beams, while the overall design is sleek, functional and bright.

Farmhouse style is a combination of the best of old and new. It remains rustic, yet it is chic, contemporary, country and modern at the same time.

The practical part of modern farmhouse design is frequently expressed through open shelves in living spaces. In family rooms, shelves contain family heirlooms and collectibles. In the kitchen, clear glass cabinet doors display everyday functional utensils, like dishes, textiles and other practical objects, as well as rustic cooking decor.

Early farmhouses did not have walls made from drywall like those found in most new and existing homes. Walls were shiplap, beadboard or tongue-and-groove boards, and using the same material today is an important part of modern farmhouse decor. Painted in shades of white and installed vertically or horizontally, either approach delivers the coziness found in the charm of historic farms.

### The most important room in the house

Although stainless-steel kitchen appliances would not seem to fit the modern farmhouse approach to decor, they are easily incorporated into a kitchen that features the clean, straight lines of Shaker cabinets, shiplap walls and other natural elements like soapstone sinks.

Similarly, modern farmhouse design does not usually incorporate busy, repetitive patterns on furniture,



This kitchen features a center island with vintage style turned foot legs and a built-in low cabinet to display large pieces of cookware. Natural elements include a wood plank floor and stone surrounding the alcove. Photo Source: Jim Winnerman

walls or draperies; however, kitchens can again be an exception. It is not unusual for a subtly patterned tile backsplash to be used above the oven, where a geometric design works well and does not compete with white subway tile installed nearby.

A kitchen island styled as a table with rustic turned legs beneath its countertop, copper drawer knobs and pulls, and a butcher block surface all work anywhere in a modern farmhouse kitchen.

When looking for basic design materials, look for historical pieces or items that could be found in nature. Examples include wood, slate, marble, soapstone, brick, aged brass, cast iron and tin. Most importantly, both comfort and function are goals in modern farmhouse decor, versus aesthetics, trends or a consistent sense of design.

### Modern farmhouse exterior

While interior decor for a modern farmhouse design is popular when existing homes are remodeled, builders, architects and contractors of new homes have been quick to add a modern farmhouse exterior aesthetic to their portfolios.

Considerations for an exterior design include the siding and color, roof, lighting and the entrance that greets guests from the curb to the front door.

As for color, the same approach applies outside as it does inside. Neutral hues, such as whites, creams and beiges, are commonly used



A coastal farmhouse living room on Cape Cod features sea blue accents, a sliding barn door into the utility room, a light gray wood plank floor, sea foam green chairs and a contemporary painting of a beach scene. Photo Source: Jim Winnerman

for a clean and fresh exterior. That palette provides a background that easily incorporates elements such as natural stone on a portion of the facade, wooden shutters and wooden porch railings and posts that evoke a rustic, familiar feel.

A combination of vertical or horizontal siding is often blended with cedar shingles under the roof peaks to add interest and texture. Vintage barn-style lantern light fixtures or industrial lighting are popular near the front door. Nothing exudes a modern farmhouse exterior like a welcoming, comfortable front porch.

A front door can be contrary to an overall paint scheme. Pale colors work, but almost any color can add texture and interest to the entrance. Having a door in a pleasant shade of red, yellow or blue is more welcoming, which conveys a happy vibe to arriving guests.

Finally, incorporating the true meaning of modern farmhouse design into the exterior means using metal barn-style roofing to create additional color and texture contrast. However, traditional shingles can also be used with metal shed roof accents above window overhangs or for just the porch roof.

Top it all with a wooden sliding barn door replacing a traditional front door, add a picket fence in the front yard, and turn that house into a modern farmhouse home.

*Jim Winnerman is a guest contributor for the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association.*

# EMPLOYEE APPRECIATION MONTH: HONORING OUR DEDICATED TEAM

At Raccoon Valley Electric Cooperative (RVEC), we understand that our success is built on our employees' dedication, skill and hard work. This month, we recognize and appreciate every member of our team who plays a crucial role in keeping RVEC running smoothly.

## Lineworkers

One of RVEC's most critical roles belongs to our lineworkers. We honor our hardworking men who ensure the member-owners have reliable power, no matter the conditions. Whether battling extreme weather, working late nights or maintaining our infrastructure, they are the backbone of RVEC.

## Administrative and office professionals

Our administrative and office professionals are the heart of RVEC, ensuring daily operations run smoothly alongside our lineworkers. Their contributions keep our cooperative running efficiently, from handling member inquiries and managing billing to overseeing finances and coordinating behind-the-scenes operations. Though their efforts often go unnoticed, their impact is undeniable. We are grateful for their hard work, organization and dedication to serving our member-owners.

*To celebrate, we asked RVEC's team what this profession means to them. Here's what they had to say:*



**Keaton H., interim CEO:** I thoroughly enjoy working with the dedicated and capable

team at Raccoon Valley Electric Cooperative. There's great fulfillment in providing safe, reliable and affordable electricity that improves the lives of our member-owners.



**Jack S., line superintendent:** Being a lineman is the perfect fit for me – I get to work

outdoors, use my hands and do what I love. It has also given my family a stable and rewarding life.



**Chad L., meter technician:** I take pride in helping our members by doing the job I love

– ensuring accurate and reliable service for our members and communities.



**Mitch M., operations superintendent:** Safety is a top priority for our

members and me, so we can all return home to our families. Knowing that my work helps bring light and comfort to others makes it all worthwhile.



**Keith G., lead lineman:** I'm constantly learning, always working safely, helping fellow

employees and doing what's best for members.



**Kevin G., first class lineman:** This career allows me to help members live and operate safely.



**Adam W., first class lineman:** Providing reliable service to the community I live in.



**Matt S., first class lineman:** I enjoy working outside and take pride in restoring power,

especially when I see the gratitude from our members after an outage.



**Brady B., director of safety and member services:** Powering rural communities with

safety, savings and service.



**Ryan G., line foreman:** This career is rewarding because we provide our members with a critical resource that makes their lives a little easier.



**Brian H., first class lineman:** It's always doing something different daily, providing a good life

for my family.



**Terry V., line foreman:** We take great pride in keeping the power on, no matter the challenge.



**Joel H., apprentice lineman:** Safety comes first, and quality always follows.





**Alicia L., director of human resources:**

I enjoy supporting and empowering members and employees in everything I do.



**Eugene H., chief financial officer:**

Analyzing internal controls relevant to the financials while

managing the health and potential risks in our financials, budget, forecast, financial ratios and communicating that information to the CEO and the board.



**Jill H., director of communications:**

Every day, I see firsthand how our work impacts

the lives of our members and strengthens our communities. Whether it's my coworkers or our members, they are all part of my cooperative family.



**Morgan K., lead member service representative:**

I enjoy working for RVEC because

it allows me to build strong relationships with our members and make a real impact in the community.

### Thank you to all our employees

As we celebrate Employee Appreciation Month, we recognize the efforts of everyone who makes RVEC successful. From the crews in the field to the teams in the office, each role is essential in delivering reliable service to our member-owners. We encourage our member-owners to join us in showing appreciation for their dedication – a simple wave, a kind word or a heartfelt “thank you” means the world to these hardworking professionals.

## ALTERNATE ENERGY PURCHASE PROGRAM

All member-owners of Raccoon Valley Electric Cooperative (RVEC) may contribute money toward a fund that will assist in the purchase of alternative or “green” energy in Iowa. Member-owners can participate in the Alternate Energy Program by writing in the amount of their contribution on their electric bill. Member-owners may contribute increments of one dollar (\$1) and can enter or leave the contribution program at any time.

Those who contribute are not guaranteed that electricity generated with renewable resources will be delivered to their individual meters.

The contributions are given to assist in the development of alternate energy in Iowa and will be spent to deliver renewable energy into the Corn Belt Power Cooperative system from which our cooperative receives power.



## APRIL IS SAFE DIGGING MONTH

Raccoon Valley Electric Cooperative is reminding all member-owners to call Iowa One Call by dialing 811 before you dig. Whether your project is building a deck, planting a tree, trenching in fields or landscaping, it's important to call before you dig. Although light gardening typically doesn't call for deep digging, other seemingly simple tasks like planting shrubs or installing a new mailbox post can damage utility lines. A severed line can disrupt service to an entire neighborhood, harm the person digging, and potentially result in fines and repair costs.



# READERSHIP SURVEY: WE WANT YOUR FEEDBACK!

Each month, *Iowa Electric Cooperative Living* magazine reaches 55,000 households, and we're proud to bring informative content to you each month. Beginning in mid-April, we'll be conducting a scientific survey to learn more about our readers' preferences and demographics.

We'll be randomly selecting readers to participate in the online survey, and if you are selected, we hope you'll take a few minutes to anonymously provide your feedback.

If you receive an invitation to participate, the email will look similar to the graphic at the right and the content below. In addition, you can look for these details to know that the email is legitimate.

**Subject:** *Iowa Electric Cooperative Living* magazine  
**Preheader:** We invite you to complete our survey!  
**Sender:** Iowa Electric Cooperative Living /  
 invitation@online2.snapsurveys.com

Thank you in advance for your valuable input! If you have any questions, please contact [editor@ieclmagazine.com](mailto:editor@ieclmagazine.com).



## ENTER TO WIN

RECEIVE \$100 FOR A PUBLISHED PHOTO

### SEND US YOUR RURAL IOWA PHOTOS

We're always looking for stunning images for the cover of *Iowa Electric Cooperative Living* magazine. If we select your photo for a cover, we'll award you \$100. The photos must be clear, of an Iowa place served by an electric cooperative and in high resolution.

To be considered, email photos to [editor@ieclmagazine.com](mailto:editor@ieclmagazine.com) with "Cover Submission" in the subject line. Please also include the name of the electric cooperative that serves you.





# CELEBRATING A SEASON OF NEW LIFE AND HOPE

BY DARCY DOUGHERTY MAULSBY

Think back to when you were in high school. If you're like me, you rarely considered your teachers had a life outside of the classroom.

As an adult, however, you see these influential people in a new light. I was thinking about this when I watched a social media video about "Why I'm an Organ Donor" from Stewart Memorial Community Hospital (SMCH) in my hometown of Lake City.

## A life-changing diagnosis

As someone who checked "yes" to being an organ donor when I renewed my driver's license, the video made me think of Scott Nesbitt (Nez), my high school speech teacher. I knew he'd received a liver transplant, and I was grateful he was willing to share his incredible story.

It started on May 12, 2009, when Nez was 47. The Pocahontas native (who was in great health) had been teaching high school English and speech classes for 25 years, mainly in Lake City. He and his wife Janelle were raising their three school-aged children: MaeLaan, Brock and Jaden.

The Saturday before Mother's Day, Nez suddenly felt nauseous. When a high fever kicked in, he and his family chalked it up to influenza, which was going around the local school. Nez took acetaminophen, but nothing helped. Within a few days, he made an appointment at SMCH to see his family doctor, who suspected Nez had contracted a virus.

Things only got worse. Nez was admitted to the hospital on day four after his symptoms appeared. Tests revealed alarming liver counts, which measure the proteins, enzymes and other substances that indicate how well the liver is functioning.

"While counts of 0 to 40 are normal, mine were 8,000 to 10,000," Nez explains.



Scott Nesbitt (center, holding granddaughter) with his family.

"My first question was, 'Am I dying?'"

Nez's doctor immediately consulted with an organ transplant team at the University of Nebraska Medical Center (UNMC) in Omaha, where Nez was transported by ambulance.

"Had my doctor waited 12 more hours to make this decision, I would have died," says Nez, who was immediately put on the national donor network system in search of a liver.

Nez had contracted hepatitis A, which inflames the liver and is transmitted when a person ingests contaminated food or water. He had also taken too much acetaminophen, which stressed his infected liver. "I was poisoning myself and didn't realize it," he says.

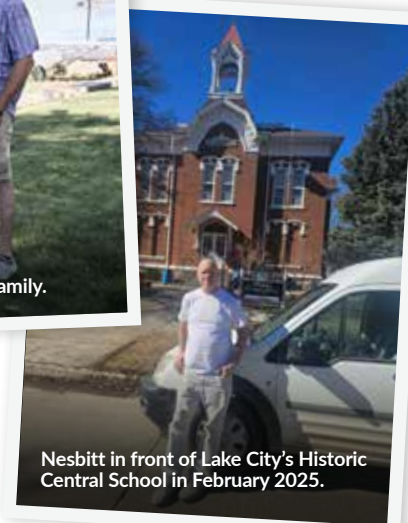
## A transplant saves a life

While UNMC's skilled doctors perform about 350 liver transplants a year, Nez had nearly everything working against him. His body was shutting down, plus he had a rare blood type requiring an exact match. As the hours passed, things looked hopeless.

Then, a miracle happened for Nez. He received a liver from a 33-year-old named Brian Gorman. The liver was flown from Cheyenne, Wyoming,



Nesbitt in his hospital bed in 2009.



Nesbitt in front of Lake City's Historic Central School in February 2025.

to Omaha. While Gorman had died by suicide, this tragedy offered new life for Nez, who had been perfectly healthy a mere eight days earlier.

The transplant wasn't without its complications, but it was successful. Nez was reunited with his family, which now includes nine grandchildren. He returned to teaching in the fall of 2009. While Nez retired in 2022, he continues to work about 30 hours a week with his painting business.

"I appreciate everything so much, including things I used to take for granted," says Nez, 63, who serves with his church's youth group and chairs the SMCH board of directors.

Nez's story is timely since April is National Donate Life Month. It also reflects the timeless message of Easter, a cherished time of renewal, new life and faith, where the season's greatest gift is hope.

Darcy Dougherty Maulsby lives near her family's Century Farm northwest of Lake City. Visit her at [www.darcymaulsby.com](http://www.darcymaulsby.com).



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