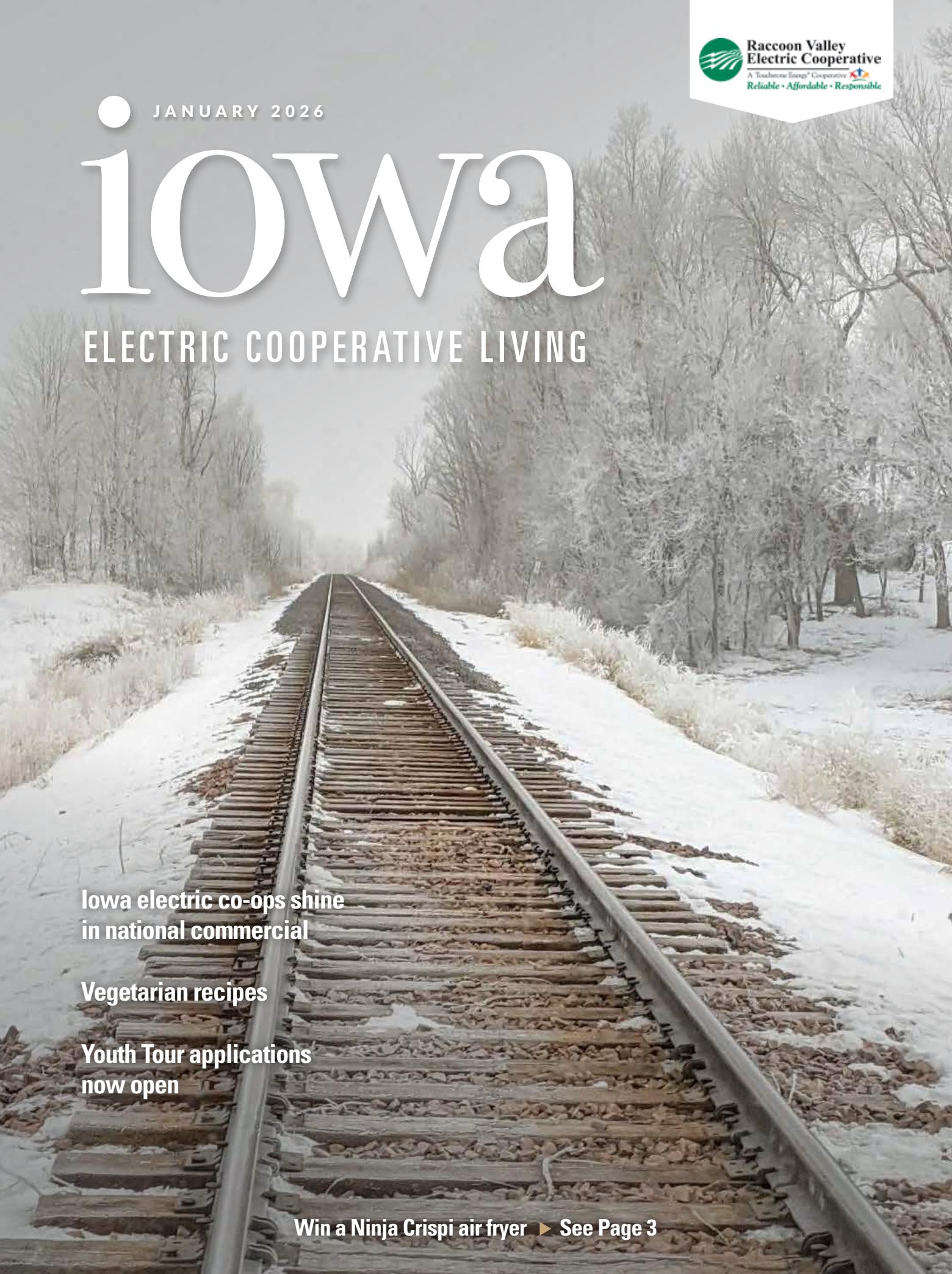


JANUARY 2026

# iowa

## ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE LIVING



Winter scene with a train track receding into the distance through a snowy, wooded landscape.

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

**Vegetarian recipes**

**Youth Tour applications  
now open**

**Win a Ninja Crispi air fryer ► See Page 3**

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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](mailto: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.iecmagazine.com](http://www.iecmagazine.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.

ENTER ONLINE BY JAN. 31!

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

## LINE PATROL BEGINS

Annual maintenance of our entire system has started. Our linemen are inspecting lines for defective items, checking meters and looking for any safety hazards.

During the inspections, we look for shot insulators, blown arrestors, loose guy wires and split or bad poles. We check to make sure poles have nothing stapled to them and that trees are not close to our electric lines. We are also looking for inadequate clearances from buildings and other driveways.

We have maintenance programs to upgrade lines, which ensures you have the most reliable and safest system possible.

If you have questions about the trucks in your neighborhood, give us a call.

## A BRIGHT YEAR AHEAD

BY KEATON HILDRETH



As we begin a new year at Raccoon Valley Electric Cooperative (RVEC), I want to extend my warmest wishes to all our members. I hope your holiday season was wonderful and filled with rest, connection and quality time with family and friends. A new year always brings fresh energy and a renewed sense of purpose, and we look forward to continuing to serve you in 2026.

January is a time to reflect on the year behind us and look ahead to new opportunities. At RVEC, our focus remains unchanged: providing safe, reliable and affordable electricity to our member-owners who depend on us. We understand the importance of keeping costs low, and in 2026, we will continue to prioritize cost-saving measures, make efficient operational decisions and explore ways to add value for our members.

I also want to take a moment to recognize our employees' dedication. Their hard work and commitment ensure our members receive the high-quality service they expect and deserve. From maintaining our system to restoring outages and supporting members every day, our employees make RVEC stronger. We simply couldn't do what we do without them, and I am grateful for the professionalism, teamwork and pride they bring to their roles.

As we begin 2026, we look forward to building on last year's successes and further improving the services and experience we provide. Thank you for your trust, support and partnership as member-owners of this cooperative. We remain committed to serving you well throughout the year.

From all of us at RVEC, we wish you a bright, healthy and successful start to the new year. We look forward to working together to make 2026 a strong year for RVEC and the communities we serve.

Keaton Hildreth is the CEO of Raccoon Valley Electric Cooperative.



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Electric Cooperative**  
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Monday – Thursday: 7:30 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.

Friday: 7:30 a.m. – 11:00 a.m.

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Dave Schroeder ..... Coon Rapids  
Carol Raasch ..... Odebolt  
Keaton Hildreth, CEO  
RVEC is an equal opportunity provider  
and employer.

## CELEBRATING TWO REMARKABLE CAREERS



Mitch McKeever

Raccoon Valley Electric Cooperative (RVEC) recently said farewell to Mitch McKeever and Terry Vauble, who dedicated 40 and 32 years, respectively, to serving our cooperative and its members.

After decades of hard work, it's finally time for Mitch and Terry to hang up their tools and enjoy the next chapter of life. We wish them a retirement filled with joy – spending time with family and friends, pursuing hobbies and tackling all the projects they've put off. Both of you truly deserve it!

Mitch and Terry's dedication, loyalty and professionalism have left a lasting impact on RVEC and the communities we serve. From keeping the lights on to supporting coworkers and members, their contributions have been extraordinary.

"Mitch and Terry have been pillars of our cooperative for decades," said RVEC CEO Keaton Hildreth. "Their knowledge, professionalism and genuine care for our members set an example for all of us. We are grateful for everything they've done."

Thank you, Mitch and Terry, for your many years of dedication, service and friendship. You have made RVEC stronger, brighter and better, and you will be deeply missed. We wish you all the best as you begin this exciting new chapter of your lives!

# YOUTH TOUR 2026 – WIN A TRIP TO WASHINGTON, D.C.

Attention, high school sophomores and juniors! Applications are now open for the 2026 Youth Tour.

Raccoon Valley Electric Cooperative (RVEC) proudly supports the next generation of rural Iowa leaders through the national electric cooperative Youth Tour program. This once-in-a-lifetime trip to Washington, D.C., offers students a special opportunity to learn about government, history and public service while representing their communities.

For over 65 years, Iowa's locally owned electric cooperatives have sponsored deserving students to visit our nation's capital. The Youth Tour is an excellent way to enhance a student leader's resume and provides an inspiring introduction to civic engagement and advocacy.

One eligible student from RVEC's service area will be chosen to attend the 2026 Youth Tour from June 14-20, joining 40 other students from Iowa and nearly 2,000 students nationwide. Participants will:

- Learn about electric cooperatives and the role they play in communities
- Explore U.S. government operations and meet members of Congress
- Visit historical landmarks, museums and national monuments
- Gain a deeper understanding of their role as engaged American citizens

Eligible students include high school sophomores and juniors from Glidden-Ralston, Carroll, Kuemper Catholic, Coon Rapids-Bayard,



East Sac County, OA-BCIG and Ridge View. As well as those who are homeschooled within the RVEC service area are eligible. Applicants' parents do not need to be members to apply.

Applications are open until Feb. 27. The process includes a written essay and in-person interviews for three semi-finalists in March. Application forms are available at the RVEC office in Glidden or by email. For more information, contact Morgan Kramer at 712-659-3649 or [morgank@rvec.coop](mailto:morgank@rvec.coop).

Don't miss the chance to represent your school and community on an unforgettable trip to our nation's capital. Learn more and access the application at [www.rvec.coop/youth-tour](http://www.rvec.coop/youth-tour).

## DOWNED POWER LINES

Downed power lines present a threat because they could still be energized when they are on the ground. Coming into contact with a downed line can be life threatening. Keep these safety tips in mind:

- 1 Slow down when driving in icy conditions, and always keep your eyes out for hazardous conditions or downed power lines. Also, watch for debris near downed poles and lines, as it may be energized as well.
- 2 If you see a car in an accident with a power pole, your first instinct may be to rush toward the vehicle to offer help. Always remember to keep your distance from the vehicle and all electrical equipment that has been damaged. Instruct those in the car to stay inside until the power has been shut off.
- 3 If a power line falls on your vehicle, and you must exit the vehicle because it is on fire, jump clear of it with your feet together and without touching the vehicle and ground at the same time. Keeping your feet together, shuffle or "bunny hop" to safety. Doing this will ensure that you will not have different strengths of electric current running from one foot to another.
- 4 Keep in mind that a downed line does not need to be sparking to be energized. It is best to assume that all low and downed lines are energized and dangerous.
- 5 Never drive over a downed line because that could pull down a pole or other equipment, causing additional hazards.
- 6 If you see a downed line, do not get out of your car. The safest place is inside your vehicle. Contact 911 to notify the utility immediately.



# 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.

**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.



## 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

## 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

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.



## CRAISINS, APPLE, WALNUT AND QUINOA SALAD

- ½ cup quinoa, uncooked**
- ½ cup toasted walnuts, chopped**
- 1 cup craisins**
- 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, craisins, 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**
- 1½ 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
- 1½ 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](http://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](mailto:recipes@ieclmagazine.com)

### MAIL: Recipes

Iowa Electric Cooperative Living magazine  
8525 Douglas Ave., Suite 48  
Des Moines, IA 50322

Craig Codner, CEO of Butler County REC, participants 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. Fritzler 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.

Fritzler 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!"



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



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.

# SNOW REMOVAL SAFETY: HELP KEEP YOUR POWER RELIABLE THIS WINTER

Iowa winters pose many challenges for our members and Raccoon Valley Electric Cooperative's (RVEC) lineworkers. A frequent question after each snowfall: Where does all this snow go?

As you clear your driveway, sidewalks or farmyard, remember safety first. Snow piles may look harmless, but when placed near electrical equipment, they can cause hazards and delay power restoration during an outage.

## Keep utility equipment clear

Before you start moving snow, take a moment to locate RVEC equipment on your property – such as pad-mounted transformers, meters, regulators, cabinets, poles and overhead wires. These areas must remain accessible for line crews, especially during emergencies.

For everyone's safety, please maintain:

- At least 10 feet of clearance in front of power equipment
- At least 3 feet of clearance on all sides and behind

Snow piled too closely can block access points, damage equipment and raise the risk of service interruptions – not just for you, but for hundreds of other members.

## Watch for overhead power lines

Snow removal isn't just about what's on the ground. If you're clearing snow from a roof or operating heavy equipment like tractor-mounted snowblowers, look up. Directing a strong stream of snow at overhead lines can dislodge high-voltage fuses, and rocks or debris in the snow can hit and crack porcelain insulators. Both can lead to outages and dangerous conditions.



## A little care goes a long way

By keeping equipment clear and being mindful of overhead lines, member-owners help RVEC prevent unnecessary outages and lessen the need for line crews to respond during dangerous weather.

When removing snow near utility structures, RVEC recommends using a shovel so you can feel for equipment beneath the snow.

If you notice damaged or leaning equipment, please call us immediately at 712-659-3649 or 800-253-6211.

# NEW POWER COST ADJUSTMENT BEGINS

Beginning Jan. 1, Raccoon Valley Electric Cooperative (RVEC) will introduce a Power Cost Adjustment (PCA) on monthly electric bills. Members will see this new line item for the first time on February bills, reflecting January's usage.

## What is PCA?

The PCA shows the monthly change in the cost of wholesale electricity that RVEC purchases and delivers to members. Wholesale prices vary due to fuel costs, extreme weather, market conditions and increasing demand on the electric grid.

- If actual power costs exceed the budget, the PCA shows as a charge.
- If costs are lower, it shows as a credit.

Since it depends on your monthly kWh usage, the PCA will differ for each member.

## Why is it needed?

Electricity costs are increasing nationwide due to higher demand, record grid usage and lengthy development times for new power plants. The PCA allows RVEC to adapt to these changes without permanently raising rates.

## What you'll see on your bill

A new line called "Power Cost Adjustment" will show either a charge or a credit. Your base rate and facility charge stay the same.

## How members can help

Reducing energy use during peak demand times helps lower power costs for the entire cooperative. Check RVEC's peak monitor at

[www.rvec.coop](http://www.rvec.coop) and follow us on Facebook for conservation alerts. Members can also use SmartHub to track their usage and better manage energy habits.

## We're here to help

If you have questions about the PCA or your bill, contact RVEC at 712-659-3649, 800-253-6211 or [info@rvec.coop](mailto:info@rvec.coop). Thank you for your continued membership.



# SCHOLARSHIPS AVAILABLE

## Wind Energy and Turbine Technology Program Scholarship administered by Iowa Lakes Community College

Committed to the communities it serves and to the production of renewable energy, Corn Belt Power Cooperative, power supplier to Raccoon Valley Electric Cooperative (RVEC), partners with Iowa Lakes Community College to offer a scholarship opportunity to students who study wind energy and turbine technology. Corn Belt Power is interested in maintaining a skilled and educated workforce that can install, maintain and service modern wind turbines.

Applicants must be enrolled in the Wind Energy and Turbine Technology program at Iowa Lakes Community College.

One \$500 scholarship will be awarded annually to an individual who has met the requirements set forth. Recipients may be either first- or second-year students but are eligible for only one scholarship. Each scholarship will be split equally between the first two semesters of enrollment after receiving the scholarship. Scholarship proceeds will be used for tuition, fees and books.

To be considered a candidate for the Corn Belt Power Cooperative Scholarship, applicants must meet the following criteria:

1. Achieve a high school grade point average of 2.5 on a 4.0 scale.
2. Accepted as a full-time student in the identified program at Iowa Lakes Community College.
3. Be an Iowa resident.
4. File scholarship application with Iowa Lakes Community College by April 1.
5. Maintain 2.5 minimum grade point average; eligibility shall be reviewed each semester.



The primary criteria for the award will be the candidate's potential for success and grade point average.

For more information, contact Iowa Lakes Community College, 800-242-5106, ext. 4491.

## Electrical Technology, Powerline, Powerline Technology or Substation Technician Scholarships administered by Northwest Iowa Community College

Corn Belt Power Cooperative, power supplier to RVEC, is partnering with Northwest Iowa Community College in Sheldon, to offer scholarship opportunities. As a Touchstone Energy® Cooperative, Corn Belt Power is committed to the communities it serves and to maintaining a skilled and educated workforce to serve its members well into the future.

Applicants must be enrolled in one of the following technical programs at Northwest Iowa Community College: Electrical Technology, Powerline, Powerline Technology or Substation Technician.

Four separate \$500 scholarships will be awarded annually to individuals who have met the eligibility requirements. Recipients may be either first- or second-year students but are eligible for only one scholarship. Each scholarship will be split equally between the first two semesters of enrollment after receiving the scholarship. Scholarship proceeds may be used for tuition, fees and books.

To be considered a candidate for the Corn Belt Power Cooperative Scholarship, applicants must meet the following criteria:

1. Reside in a county served by a member cooperative of Corn Belt Power Cooperative.
2. Achieve a high school grade point average of 2.5 on a 4.0 scale.
3. Accepted as a full-time student in one of the identified programs at Northwest Iowa Community College.
4. File scholarship application with the Northwest Iowa Community College Foundation by March 1.
5. Maintain 2.5 minimum grade point average; eligibility shall be reviewed each semester.

All applicants are required to submit a letter of reference from a high school instructor, guidance counselor, current employer or manager of a member electric cooperative with their applications. This reference should address the applicant's potential for success in the program chosen for enrollment. The primary criteria for the award will be the candidate's potential for success and grade point average.

For an application form or more information, contact the Northwest Iowa Community College Foundation, 603 West Park Street, Sheldon, IA 51201-1046, 800-352-4907, ext. 246.

# 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.



“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](http://www.darcymaulsby.com).

Visit our website at [www.rvec.coop](http://www.rvec.coop)



# SAFETY

IS THE BACKBONE OF RELIABILITY

Safety is **#1** at your **Touchstone Energy® cooperative**.

From the ongoing training of our lineworkers  
to classroom safety programs for our kids.

Our commitment to electrical safety has always been job one.  
So, we can deliver reliable energy and peace of mind. That's  
why safety runs through everything we do.



Touchstone Energy®  
Cooperatives