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ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE LIVING

SPECIAL INSERT:

**Raccoon Valley
Electric Cooperative
2024 Annual Report**

Win an electric leaf mulcher ▶ See Page 3

CONTENTS



6



8



10

VOLUME 78 • ISSUE 9

3

STATEWIDE PERSPECTIVE

Don't fall for autumn safety hazards

3

EDITOR'S CHOICE CONTEST

Win a Worx electric leaf mulcher

10

IN THE COMMUNITY

Shine the Light winners

15

OUT BACK

Be still in a digital world

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ON THE COVER

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

DON'T FALL FOR AUTUMN HAZARDS: FOLLOW THESE TIPS FOR A SAFE SEASON

BY SCOTT MEINECKE



As the weather cools and the leaves begin to change colors, many Iowans are busy with outdoor projects or getting students settled into college

housing. Whether you're climbing a ladder, working the fields or firing up a space heater, take a few minutes to review these important safety tips.

Ladder safety

Outdoor chores like cleaning gutters and trimming trees often require the use of ladders or tall tools. Stay safe by remembering to look up and be aware of power lines as you use ladders or large tools on your property.

Ensure the ladder is on level ground and that the base is stable. Always maintain three points of contact on the ladder – two hands and one foot or two feet and one hand. Carry tools in a tool belt or pouch to keep your hands free when climbing the ladder. If possible, have another person hold the base of your ladder when you are on it.

Harvest safety

In Iowa, we know autumn has arrived when we see combines in the fields. We remind farmers and field workers to maintain a 10-foot clearance around power lines and poles and to use a spotter when raising or lowering large equipment or high loads that could come into contact with power lines.

If you are in a vehicle or implement that makes contact with power lines, stay in the cab, contact the local power utility or law enforcement, and keep others away from you until an authority confirms that the power line has been de-energized.

If there is a fire in the cab and you need to exit, jump clear of the equipment without touching it and keep your feet together. Then, bunny hop away with both feet together or shuffle-walk away without lifting your feet off the ground.

Dorm safety

It's also the time of year when college students move into dorms, apartments and off-campus housing. If you have a student in college, take time to discuss electrical safety and fire safety. Locate fire alarms and fire extinguishers, and walk through the best way to evacuate the space in case of a fire.

Talk to your student about the dangers of overloading electrical outlets and how to use extension cords. For example, don't "daisy chain" extension cords to each other, and don't plug major appliances into extension cords. Unattended cookware is the leading cause of dorm fires, so remind your student to keep an eye on food while it's cooking.

Space heaters

Cooler autumn weather also ushers in the use of space heaters. Remember to plug your space heater directly into a wall outlet; it could overload a power strip or extension cord. Keep your space heater at least 3 feet from anything that might burn, including furniture, bedding or curtains.

Never leave pets or children unattended around space heaters, and shut them off when you go to sleep or leave the room. Only use space heaters that automatically shut off when tipped over.

Move over, slow down

Iowa motorists are required by law to move over or slow down when approaching ANY vehicle on the side of the road with flashing lights activated, including co-op utility trucks. Give our co-op employees room on the road to work safely; their families thank you!

Scott Meinecke is the director of safety and loss control at the Iowa Association of Electric Cooperatives.

EDITOR'S CHOICE CONTEST

WIN AN ELECTRIC LEAF MULCHER!

The new Worx leaf mulcher makes collecting leaves easier and quicker. Turn 11 bags of leaves and debris into one with the 13-amp electric leaf mulcher. This tool features a clean air motor cooling system, enabling it to run at peak efficiency and keep mulching up to 53 gallons of leaves per minute.

Visit our website and win!

Enter this month's contest by visiting www.ieclmagazine.com no later than Sept. 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 Solo Stove Runner tabletop fire pit from the July issue was **Barbara Buseman**, a **Grundy County REC** member-consumer.



ENTER ONLINE BY SEPT. 30!

FLAGBRAI: IOWA ELECTRIC CO-OP LINEMAN RUNS BIKE ROUTE AND INSTALLS FLAGPOLES FOR VETERANS

Just when you thought biking more than 50 miles on a summer day would be challenging, an Iowa electric co-op lineman took it to the next level.

Grundy County REC First Class Lineman Derek Snakenberg left his bike at home on Thursday, July 24, and ran the RAGBRAI route from Iowa Falls to Cedar Falls with a flag in tow, stopping along the way to install flagpoles for veterans as part of the Veteran Flagpole Initiative. His effort was part of the group's inaugural "Flagbrai" initiative to install flags for five veterans in Iowa.

The organization's mission is to install flagpoles in the yards of veterans at no cost; each veteran receives a 20-foot telescopic heavy-duty

flagpole, a hand-stitched U.S. flag, a State of Iowa flag and a solar-powered light. Before Derek's run, the group installed 102 flagpoles in 49 Iowa counties with a goal to install a flagpole in all 99 counties by 2028.

In just over 12 hours, Derek ran 51.9 miles alongside the cyclists and stopped several times to install flagpoles and raise awareness of his mission. He made stops in Ackley, Aplington, Parkersburg and New Hartford.

Learn more about the Veteran Flagpole Initiative at www.veteranflagpoles.org.



Grundy County REC First Class Lineman Derek Snakenberg.

**2 KIDS
IN COLLEGE
\$115,000
MORTGAGE**

**RESTORING
POWER ^{TO}
THE
COMMUNITY**

**BUT RIGHT NOW IT'S
YOU I'M WORRIED ABOUT.**

HIS JOB IS DANGEROUS ENOUGH. The last thing he needs is for you to drive into his utility truck because you ignored the flashing lights, cones and signs. When you see utility crews at work, slow down and move over. You have the power to protect a life.



**MOVE OVER
SLOW DOWN**

PUBLIC SERVICE AND LEADERSHIP OPPORTUNITY FOR RURAL STUDENTS

Iowa's electric cooperatives are proud to continue their long-standing commitment to supporting the next generation of leaders. For decades, they've invested in high school students through scholarships, leadership programs and the electric cooperative Youth Tour to Washington, D.C.

That commitment continues this fall with the return of the **Iowa Youth Leadership Academy**, a free, three-part webinar series designed for high school students in rural communities. Held throughout October, the virtual program will focus on advocacy, leadership and the cooperative business model – key themes reflecting the mission of electric cooperatives to empower communities.

The Iowa Youth Leadership Academy is open to all high school students who live in areas served by electric cooperatives. The following sessions will be hosted via Zoom and last approximately 45 to 60 minutes each:

- **Thursday, Oct. 2, 7 p.m.**
The Cooperative Business Model
- **Tuesday, Oct. 14, 7 p.m.**
Advocacy
- **Thursday, Oct. 23, 7 p.m.**
Leadership



WANTED: Rural Iowa high school students who have a passion for leadership.

Attend our webinar series in October for a chance to win Apple AirPods and a \$1,000 college scholarship! Learn more at IowaYouthTour.com.



Students can attend from their own device or participate at their local co-op office, if available.

Each session will feature speakers who introduce students to cooperative career opportunities, teach effective advocacy skills and share tools to strengthen personal leadership abilities. Participants will also learn about the Iowa Youth Tour, an all-expenses-paid, weeklong trip to Washington, D.C., scheduled for June 14-20, 2026.

Students who attend all three webinars will be entered into a drawing for a **\$1,000 college scholarship**. In addition,

one participant will be randomly selected during each session to win a pair of **Apple AirPods**. All students who register by **Sept. 30** will receive a surprise box of co-op-themed items in the mail.

The Iowa Youth Leadership Academy is a great opportunity for students interested in public service, government or leadership. It offers a meaningful way to connect with local cooperatives and explore future career paths in rural Iowa.

To register or learn more, visit www.IowaYouthTour.com or contact your local electric cooperative.



WE'RE LOOKING FOR HOLIDAY PHOTOS!

It's the end of summer, but we're already planning ahead and looking for a cover image for the December issue of *Iowa Electric Cooperative Living* magazine. Submit your winter or holiday-themed rural Iowa images, and if we select your photo for a cover, we'll award you \$100. The photos must be clear and in high resolution.

ENTER TO WIN!

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



RECEIVE \$100 FOR A PUBLISHED PHOTO

The most recent NERC assessment found that while most areas were prepared for typical summer conditions, some could experience elevated risk during periods of extreme heat or when generation resources are limited. *Photo Source: Dennis Gainer, NRECA*

STAYING POWERED DURING PEAK DEMAND

BY JENNAH DENNEY

Extreme temperatures, whether during summer or winter months, drive up the demand for electricity as homes and businesses rely on air conditioning or heating to stay safe and comfortable. Every year, the North American Electric Reliability Corporation (NERC), the nation's watchdog for grid reliability, issues two Reliability Assessment reports – one for summer months and one for winter. These biannual assessments provide independent views of how prepared the U.S. grid is to meet electricity demand when temperatures soar or dip.

The NERC assessments are critical planning tools for electric

utilities as they prepare for peak demand months. The reports provide a comprehensive evaluation of the North American Bulk Power System and highlight areas of concern regarding reliability.

What the recent reliability assessment told us

NERC's 2025 Summer Reliability Assessment found that while most areas were prepared for typical summer conditions, some regions of the U.S. could experience elevated risk during periods of extreme heat or when generation resources are limited due to planned or unplanned power outages. A few months ago, Entergy and SWEPCO customers in Louisiana

experienced rolling power outages due to grid capacity constraints.

Iowa's electric cooperatives want our members to understand how these surges in demand can impact you – and how you can play an important role in supporting reliable electric service for our local communities.

The electric grid is a vast network comprised of power plants, transmission lines and distribution systems that work together to deliver electricity to homes and businesses. Grid reliability means ensuring enough electricity is always available to meet demand – even on the hottest and coldest days of the year.

According to NERC's most recent assessment, our electric grid is experiencing rapid load growth. Across North America, the total forecasted peak demand for summer months increased by more than 10 gigawatts (GW) since 2024 – more than double the increase seen in 2023. This growth is being driven by continued economic activity, expansion of data centers and industrial facilities, and increasing electrification across many sectors.

At the same time, more than 7.4 GW of generation capacity has retired or gone inactive since last summer. Retirements include natural gas, coal, nuclear and other types of generation, which reduces the availability of dispatchable resources that can operate at any time to help balance the grid. But new resources are becoming available to help meet some of this growing demand. Over 30 GW of new solar capacity and 13 GW of new battery storage are already contributing to increased demand requirements. These resources are especially helpful during peak daylight hours but can create new operational challenges in the evening, when solar generation tapers off and the demand for electricity remains high.

Why grid reliability is everyone's responsibility

While most regions are prepared to meet demand under normal conditions, the NERC assessment highlights that some areas – including parts of the Midwest, New England and Texas – face elevated risk of supply shortfalls during periods of above-normal demand or low resource availability. These risks may occur during extended periods of extreme temperatures or when generation outages coincide with high loads.

In regions like ours, grid operators and electric cooperatives rely on the collective actions of individual consumers to help maintain reliability when the system is under stress. This is where you can help. Stay informed and watch for communications from your electric co-op about peak demand periods or energy conservation requests. Quick

actions taken by co-op members can make a meaningful difference.

Small actions, big impact during peak demand

Adjusting your thermostat by a few degrees, postponing use of large appliances until evening hours, and turning off lights and unnecessary electronics are simple, effective ways you can help ease strain on the grid.

As the electric grid evolves – with changing generation resources, new technologies and growing demand – maintaining reliable service requires careful planning and participation from everyone.

NERC will likely release the 2025-2026 Winter Reliability Assessment in November, which will provide Iowa's electric cooperatives with key insights into winter reliability.

Your electric co-op is working closely with our power supply providers in preparing for peak demand, and your actions to conserve during these times are equally important. By working together, we can help ensure our community continues to receive reliable and affordable electric service throughout periods of high demand.

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



Your electric co-op works closely with power supply providers in preparing for peak demand. Photo Source: Garrett Hubbard



During times of peak electricity demand, quick conservation actions taken by co-op members can make a meaningful difference. Photo Source: Scott Van Osdol



MULBERRY APPLE STREUSEL PIE

- 4 cups tart baking apples
- 2 cups mulberries
- $\frac{3}{4}$ cup sugar
- 3 tablespoons minute tapioca
- $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon cinnamon
- $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon nutmeg
- 1 9-inch deep-dish pie crust
- 1 cup Bisquick baking mix
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup nuts, chopped
- $\frac{1}{3}$ cup brown sugar
- 3 tablespoons butter

Cook apples slightly in microwave until tender crisp. Mix apples, mulberries, sugar, tapioca, cinnamon and nutmeg. Add to pie crust. Mix baking mix, nuts, brown sugar and butter until crumbly. Sprinkle over pie. Bake at 350 degrees F for 55 minutes. *Serves 6-8*

Jo Groth • Plainfield
Butler County Rural Electric Cooperative

APPLE PIE ROLL-UPS

- $\frac{1}{2}$ stick butter, melted
- 1 teaspoon cinnamon
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup sugar
- 10 flour tortillas
- 1 20-ounce can apple pie filling

Brush a 9x13-inch glass dish with melted butter. Mix cinnamon and sugar and put on a paper plate. Fill each tortilla with 2-3 spoonfuls of apple pie filling. Roll tightly and brush with melted butter, then roll in the cinnamon sugar mixture. Coat well. Place in prepared baking dish and bake at 350 degrees F for 15-18 minutes. *Serves 10*

Crystal Hammes • Libertyville
Access Energy Cooperative

APPLE TOSS SALAD

- 1 quart apples, cored and diced with peel
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup peanuts
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup celery, diced
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup carrots, chopped
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup raisins
- 1 8-ounce container lemon-flavored yogurt

Combine apples, peanuts, celery, carrots and raisins. Stir in yogurt until everything is well combined. Cover and refrigerate until ready to eat. This cool and refreshing treat is perfect for hot fall days. *Yields 1½ quarts*

Kimberly Peterson • Red Oak
Southwest Iowa Rural Electric Cooperative

BAKED APPLES

- apples, peeled and halved
- butter
- 1 cup sugar
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup brown sugar
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup flour
- 1½ cups water
- cinnamon
- marshmallows, cut in half

Add enough apples to fill the bottom of a 9x13-inch pan when halved. Add a dab of butter in each half. Mix sugar, brown sugar, flour and water. Spoon sugar mixture into apple centers. Sprinkle with cinnamon. Bake at 350 degrees F for 45 minutes. Then, place half a marshmallow on each apple half and return to oven for a few minutes until marshmallows melt. Coat with juice and serve. *Serves 12*

Emily Rassi • Rock Rapids
Lyon Rural Electric Cooperative



**Raccoon Valley
Electric Cooperative**
A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative
Reliable • Affordable • Responsible

POWERFUL PAST FUTURE FOCUSED

2024 ANNUAL REPORT



MESSAGE TO OUR MEMBERS

BY DAVID ONKEN AND KEATON HILDRETH



David Onken



Keaton Hildreth

As we look back on the past year, we are proud to share how your cooperative continues to honor its powerful past while staying future focused. At the heart of everything we do is a mission that remains constant: to provide safe, reliable and affordable electricity to the members and communities we serve. In 2024, we fulfilled that promise through key system upgrades, enhanced grid resilience and responsible financial management, all while maintaining stable rates and dependable service.

Guided by the values that have shaped Raccoon Valley Electric Cooperative (RVEC) for generations, we remain committed to building a better future.



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Regular Hours

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Summer Hours (Memorial Day - Labor Day)

Monday – Thursday: 7:30 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.

Friday: 7:30 a.m. – 11:00 a.m.

Website: www.rvec.coop

Email: info@rvec.coop

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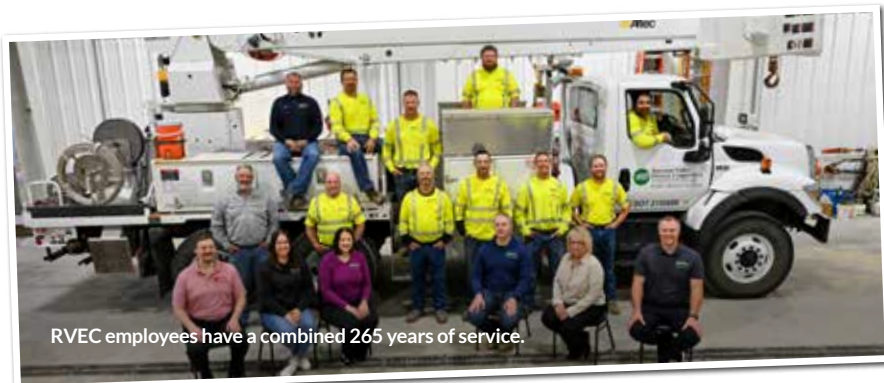


Directors

David Onken, President Glidden
Jeff Cranston Odebolt
Mark Ludwig Breda
Karen Werner Schaller
Steve Schable Carroll
Adam Handlos Glidden
Dave Schroeder Coon Rapids

Keaton Hildreth, CEO

RVEC is an equal opportunity provider and employer.



From investing in advanced technologies to developing our workforce and exploring innovative energy solutions, we're working to ensure long-term sustainability and member satisfaction.

In 2024, RVEC supplied over 133 million kilowatt-hours of electricity to more than 2,100 members and 2,780 services across 1,447 miles of line. With just 1.9 services per mile, our 17 dedicated employees serve a wide and diverse area with professionalism and pride. We appreciate their hard work and dedication to serving our members day and night, in every season.

System investment and reliability

In 2024, RVEC invested nearly \$2.7 million in critical infrastructure upgrades. This included line reconstruction, pole replacements, tree trimming and routine equipment maintenance – all essential for a reliable system. The results were outstanding reliability, with 99.99% uptime, far exceeding industry standards. Members experienced an average of just 0.5 outages, each lasting 39 minutes – well below the Iowa rural electric cooperative average of 99 minutes and much better than the 255-minute average among rural investor-owned utilities.

Although costs for essential materials, such as poles, transformers and trucks, remained high, lead times improved slightly, easing some pressure on the supply chain. At the same time, our industry continued its shift toward renewable energy sources such as wind and solar. This transition, combined with increasing electricity demand, has heightened reliance on weather-sensitive, intermittent resources.

Unlike coal or natural gas, which deliver steady, always-available power, renewable sources can be unpredictable. This changing energy mix makes our grid more complex. Luckily, RVEC members are supported by a balanced and diverse range of resources – including coal, natural gas and renewables – that work together to provide reliable electricity now and in the future.

Culture of safety

Safety remains a fundamental part of our cooperative's culture. In 2024, RVEC employees logged a total of 30,351 hours with only one reportable incident, a dog bite. This achievement highlights the unwavering focus and commitment of our team, particularly when working in challenging or hazardous conditions.

We provide monthly safety training that covers both general and job-specific risks and participate in Commitment to Zero Contacts – Phase II, a national initiative designed to ensure every lineworker returns home safely. We commend our team for maintaining a strong safety culture that protects themselves, their coworkers and the communities we serve.

The value of membership

One of our key responsibilities as a cooperative is to ensure financial stability while maintaining affordable electricity for our members. In 2024, the average residential member paid just \$8.02 per day for electricity, powering their homes, appliances, farms and businesses. Compared to other daily expenses, electricity remains one of the best values – and we're dedicated to maintaining that.

As a member-owned, not-for-profit cooperative, you're more than a customer

– you're an owner. In 2024, the RVEC board of directors approved returning over \$239,963 in capital credits to members. These payments, based on allocations from 2002, 2003 and 2004, were issued in December. This return of margins highlights one of the key advantages of cooperative membership and demonstrates the strength of local decision-making by your elected board.

Commitment to our communities

Our dedication to community defines who we are. Through our Revolving Loan Fund, we assist local businesses and organizations. Recent recipients include Glidden Grocery, Hillside Development Group, St. Anthony Hospital, Lake View Dental, Peace Lutheran Church, Prim & Polished, DRAAH Corp (Coon Rapids Hardware), Nature Ammil, Village Hobby House & Flowers and Lil Wildcats Education Center.

The Rural Economic Development Loan and Grant program also continues to

promote regional growth by funding projects at Western Iowa Energy, B&W Fabrication, Meister Trucking and Wernimont Welding.

In 2024, our contribution to the Carroll County Fair was significantly increased by matching donations from CoBank and Basin Electric Power Cooperative, enhancing our impact on this vital event.

We're also investing in the next generation by supporting scholarships, sponsoring the Youth Tour to Washington, D.C., and contributing to county fairs and local youth organizations.

These efforts reflect our long-standing mission to help power the future – one student, one business and one community at a time.

We look forward to seeing you at one of our Member Appreciation Events this month.

We appreciate the opportunity to serve you. At RVEC, we are proud of our powerful past and more committed than ever to a future focused on delivering safe, reliable and affordable power for years to come.

David Onken is the board president and Keaton Hildreth is the CEO of Raccoon Valley Electric Cooperative.



WORKING FOR YOU

The Raccoon Valley Electric Cooperative (RVEC) board of directors remains steadfast in its commitment to representing the interests of our member-owners. In a time of evolving energy technologies, changing expectations and new opportunities, your board is focused on ensuring that RVEC remains a trusted, forward-thinking cooperative.

Board members are not only decision-makers, but they are also active listeners and community advocates. They bring the voices of our diverse membership to the table, guiding RVEC with integrity, accountability and a deep sense of service.

Their leadership goes beyond the boardroom. Each director plays a vital role in supporting local growth, promoting cooperative values and helping RVEC deliver on its mission: to safely provide reliable, affordable and responsible energy while being a leader in our communities' prosperity and success.



STEVE SCHABLE

*Vice President
District 2*



ADAM HANDLOS

District 3



DAVE SCHROEDER

District 1



DAVID ONKEN

*President and Corn Belt
Power Representative
District 4*



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JEFF CRANSTON

District 6



KAREN WERNER

*Assistant Secretary/
Treasurer
District 7*

REFLECTING ON 2024: STRENGTH, SERVICE AND SHARED SUCCESS

BY JACOB OLBERDING AND DAVID ONKEN



Jacob Olberding

As we close the chapter on 2024, Corn Belt Power Cooperative (Corn Belt Power) reflects with pride and gratitude on a year marked by significant achievements, unwavering resilience and a steadfast dedication to our mission: providing reliable, affordable energy to our member cooperatives. Every milestone reached this year was made possible by the collective strength of our employees, member systems and the communities we serve.



David Onken

Financial strength: Stewardship in action

Corn Belt Power maintained its strong financial position in 2024, earning solid "A" ratings with stable outlooks from both S&P Global Ratings and Kroll Bond Rating Agency. These ratings demonstrate our disciplined financial management and our preparedness to face future challenges confidently.

This year, we returned over \$7.3 million in patronage capital and quick roll payments to our member cooperatives. These funds, when reinvested in rural communities, strengthen local

economies and embody the core cooperative principle of putting people before profit.

Reliability: A core commitment

Reliability is more than a goal; it's a promise. In 2024, Corn Belt Power achieved three months – January, February and December – of zero transmission outages. This is a rare and notable accomplishment, especially during Iowa's demanding winter season.

However, the year wasn't without challenges. Powerful storms in May caused extensive damage, including fallen poles and damaged infrastructure. Our team responded promptly and skillfully, restoring service quickly and safely.

Investing in infrastructure: Building for tomorrow

We continued making strategic upgrades to strengthen our system. In 2024, our supervisory control and data acquisition (SCADA) and communications teams completed essential field switch replacements, enhancing network performance, system resilience and readiness for future technology adoption. These investments ensure we stay flexible as energy demands and expectations grow.

Natural disaster response: Rising to the moment

Historic flooding in June affected parts of our service area, especially along

the Little Sioux River and the East and West Forks of the Des Moines River. While most of our infrastructure stayed intact, one transmission structure on the Emmetsburg-to-Ayrshire line was lost to high water. Our team's response again showed preparedness and perseverance in challenging conditions.

Wisdom station: Operational when it matters most

With rising concerns about grid reliability across the region, Wisdom Station played a vital role in maintaining stability within the Southwest Power Pool. In 2024, the plant was dispatched 27 times to support system reliability and underwent scheduled maintenance in October to ensure it remains prepared for peak demands.

Looking ahead

As the energy landscape continues to evolve, so must our strategies and solutions. By focusing on innovation, collaboration and a commitment to cooperative principles, Corn Belt Power is ready to meet the needs of tomorrow.

With the ongoing support of our employees, member systems and partners, we are prepared to face what's next, stronger, smarter and more connected than ever.

Jacob Olberding is the executive vice president/general manager and David Onken is the board president of Corn Belt Power Cooperative.



POWERING POLICY, PROTECTING AND STANDING STRONG FOR CO-OP MEMBERS

The 2025 Iowa Legislative Session officially adjourned in the early morning hours of May 15, after running nearly two weeks past the projected May 2 adjournment date. Lawmakers worked late into the night to finalize the state budget, bringing a close to a session that saw the introduction of nearly 1,800 bills – many with significant implications for energy policy and Iowa's electric cooperatives.

Throughout the session, Iowa's electric cooperatives – Raccoon Valley Electric Cooperative (RVEC) included – maintained a strong, consistent presence at the Capitol to advocate on behalf of member-owners. From large-scale events to individual meetings, our voice was heard. The Welcome Back Reception in January drew nearly 100 legislators, and REC Day on the Hill brought nearly 200 cooperative advocates to Des Moines. Ongoing grassroots efforts – calls, emails and local forums – amplified our message across the state.

These efforts led to key legislative victories:

- **Protecting service territory law.** A top priority was safeguarding Iowa's electric service territory law. Proposed changes to how the Iowa Utilities Commission considers

service territory disputes were ultimately sidelined by both House and Senate Commerce Committees.

- **Opposing unregulated solar expansion.** We also helped stop a bill that would have allowed third-party solar providers to operate like utilities, but without the same regulatory responsibilities. While cooperatives support solar as part of a balanced energy future, this proposal would have shifted costs to non-participating members and threatened grid reliability.
- **Supporting for energy infrastructure.** Gov. Kim Reynolds introduced a comprehensive energy bill that included a provision for the right of first refusal on transmission projects – an initiative co-ops supported. Although it did not pass this session, it sparked valuable dialogue about the future of Iowa's energy infrastructure.

As we look ahead to 2026, Iowa's electric cooperatives remain committed to advocating for safe, reliable and affordable power – powered by people like you.

Stay informed and get involved by following Iowa Rural Power on social media or visiting www.iaruralpower.org.

2024 YEAR IN REVIEW

- The annual meeting was business only, and 327 annual meeting ballots were received.
- The Basin Electric Power Cooperative scholarship winner was Dylan Hosenfelt.
- The Youth Tour winner was Porter Snyder.
- Member appreciation scholarship winners were Addisen Ehler, Jadya Friedrichsen and Laura Steinkamp.
- Energy Trail Tour participants were David and Connie Hoffman, and Dana and Michele Dettmann.
- Over 310 meals were served during two member appreciation events in Glidden and Sac City.
- Began a new bill print layout and design.
- SmartHub bill pay was enhanced for members.
- Three individuals were nominated for the fourth annual Shine the Light contest.



2024 RACCOON VALLEY CO-OP FACTS

Total miles of line:
1,447 miles

Total number of members:
2,100 members

Total billing services:
2,785 accounts

Total meters:
3,517 meters

Total services per mile of line:
1.92 services

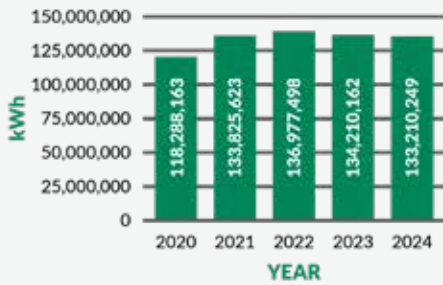
Counties served:
9 counties

Facebook followers:
1,246 followers

Registered SmartHub users:
1,159 accounts

876 members
361 paperless

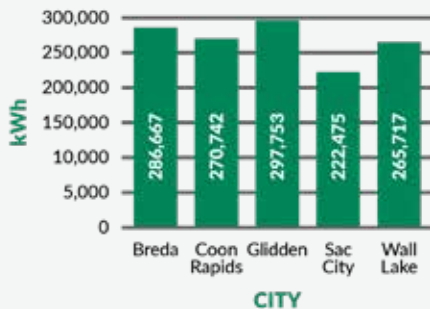
ANNUAL kWh SALES



2024 AVERAGE MONTHLY KWH PER RESIDENTIAL MEMBER

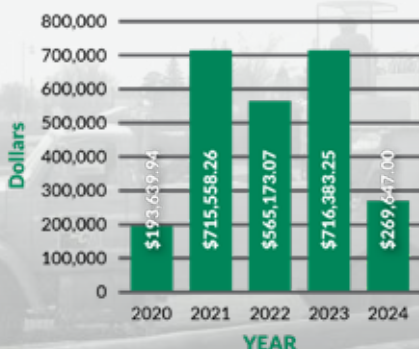


2024 SOLAR PRODUCTION



CAPITAL CREDITS RETIREMENT HISTORY

Raccoon Valley Electric Cooperative (RVEC) is a nonprofit organization. After all expenses are covered, any remaining margins at the end of the year are distributed to you by our board of directors as patronage dividends.



NOTES TO FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

Audit and financial health: Raccoon Valley Electric Cooperative's (RVEC) books were audited by Eide Bailly LLP. The audit, presented to the board in March 2025, confirmed that all financial and accounting procedures adhere to generally accepted auditing standards.

Margins and allocations: RVEC's operating margin for 2024 was \$581,049. The total year-end margin was \$1,966,545, which includes operating margins, interest, patronage allocations from other cooperatives and extraordinary income. Patronage from Corn Belt Power Cooperative (Corn Belt Power) and Basin Electric Power Cooperative totaled \$1,052,512, representing future payments promised by RVEC's power providers.

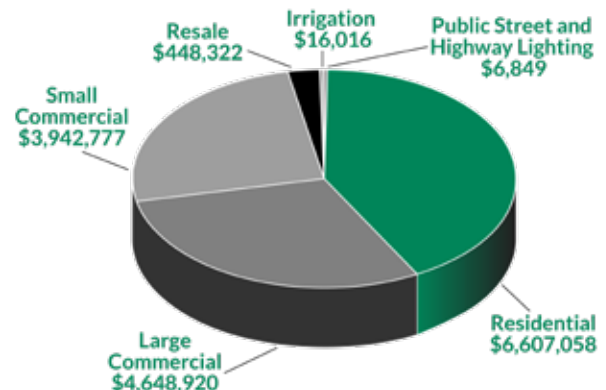
Patronage dividends: In 2024, RVEC's board retired \$239,963 in patronage dividends to member-owners from RVEC's 2002, 2003 and 2004 margins. Additionally, \$29,684 was retired from estates.

Electric revenue and power costs: RVEC's 2024 electric revenue was \$15,702,219 from 133,210,249 kWh sold, with power costs totaling \$9,743,036. The peak power demand with Corn Belt Power was 29,217 kW in January 2024. Community solar arrays produced 1,343,354 kWh, with power costs of \$145,392 billed to RVEC through its subsidiary, Raccoon Valley Visionary Corp.

Operational challenges and improvements: RVEC's rate increase in April 2024 helped against the continued rising material prices. The Sac building expansion was completed in 2024 allowing for more space for the trucks. Updated security systems were put in place at both the Glidden and Sac locations.

Development loans: RVEC's balance sheet reflects payments received on development loans to support local economic growth. In 2024, RVEC did not issue any additional new loans through a U.S. Department of Agriculture zero-interest loan program. The accounts receivable also includes a loan to Sac Economic Tourism and Development for industrial park land purchased in August 2022.

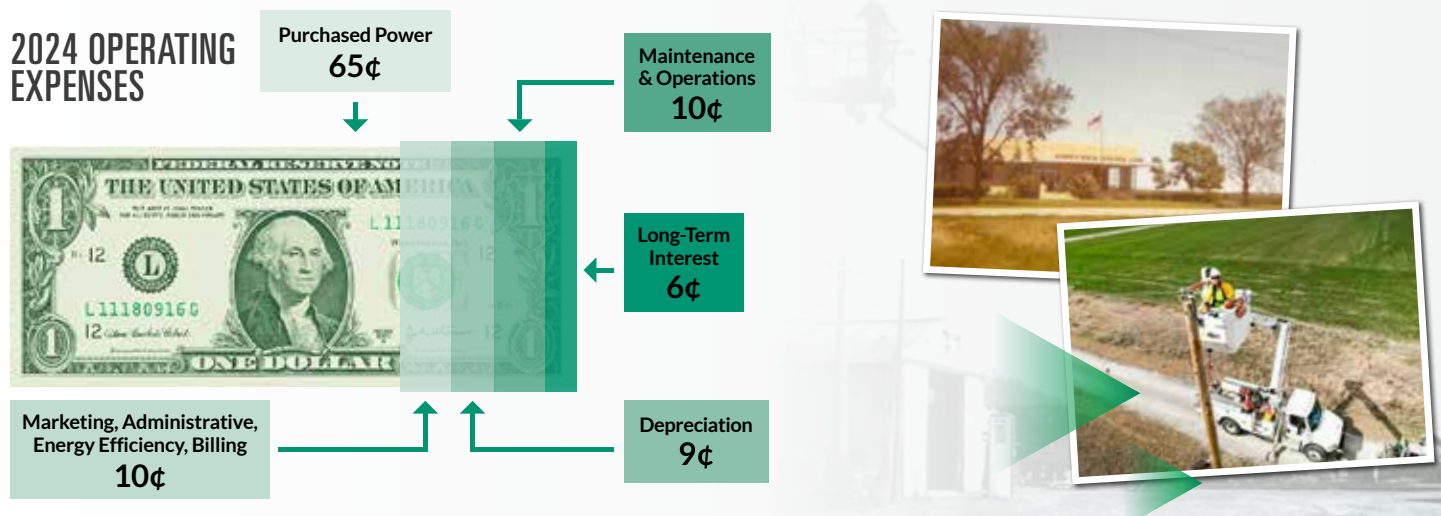
2024 KWH REVENUE BY CLASS



STATEMENT OF CONDITIONS

	DEC. 31, 2023	DEC. 31, 2024		DEC. 31, 2023	DEC. 31, 2024
What We Own (Assets)			Electric Revenue		
Total Value of Utility Plant	\$ 44,002,854	\$ 45,304,263	Residential and Farm	\$ 6,336,297	\$ 6,607,058
Less: Accumulated Depreciation	14,815,565	15,847,385	Small Commercial and Ag.	1,804,231	1,950,357
Net Value of Utility Plant	\$ 29,187,289	\$ 29,456,878	Large Commercial	6,376,242	6,641,340
Cash in Bank	\$ 238,504	\$ 478,241	Highway Lighting	6,078	6,849
Temporary Cash Investments	7,364	7,412	Irrigation	17,851	16,016
Accounts Receivable	3,106,360	3,308,974	Sales for Resale	455,278	448,322
Material Inventory	827,323	736,888	Other Electric Revenue	30,600	32,277
Other Assets & Long-Term Invest.	1,184,091	1,207,109	Total Electric Revenue	\$ 15,026,577	\$ 15,702,219
Investments in Associated Org.	10,216,111	10,816,676	Purchased Power	\$ 9,957,333	\$ 9,888,428
Investments - CFC Certificates	376,801	376,801	Operation & Maintenance	1,434,686	1,441,863
Development Loans & Investments	8,307,035	7,713,865	Consumer Accounting	141,434	162,628
Deferred Debits	75,970	8,931	Sales	110,593	110,499
Total Assets	\$ 53,526,848	\$ 54,111,775	Energy Cons. & Information Exp.	57,252	93,670
What We Owe (Liabilities)			Administrative & General Expense	1,038,245	1,080,696
Consumers' Deposits	\$ 19,708	\$ 19,858	Depreciation	1,298,167	1,370,443
Accounts Payable	838,423	887,788	Interest on Short & Long-Term Debt	918,624	946,327
Other Accrued Liabilities	703,561	741,162	Misc. Deductions & Donations	42,622	26,616
Deferred Credits & Non-Current Liab.	597,439	592,349	Total Expenses	\$ 14,998,956	\$ 15,121,170
Development Grants & Loans	7,985,910	6,636,165	Electric Margins	\$ 27,621	\$ 581,049
CFC Mortgage and Notes	21,301,694	21,455,354	Other Income		
Total Liabilities	\$ 31,446,735	\$ 30,332,676	Interest	\$ 49,476	\$ 103,536
Net Worth			Corn Belt & Basin Patronage	1,251,428	1,052,512
Deferred Patronage	\$ 10,941,521	\$ 11,988,500	Other Patronage	134,184	122,833
Margins - Current	1,567,177	1,966,545	Resale Sales & Visionary	104,468	108,983
Other Equities	9,571,415	9,824,054	Extraordinary Income/(Expense)	0	-2,368
Total Net Worth	\$ 22,080,113	\$ 23,779,099	Total Other Income	\$ 1,539,556	\$ 1,385,496
Total Liabilities & Net Worth	\$ 53,526,848	\$ 54,111,775	Total Margins	\$ 1,567,177	\$ 1,966,545

2024 OPERATING EXPENSES



YOUTH TOUR 2025 DELEGATE: JOSEPH THIELEN

Each year, Raccoon Valley Electric Cooperative (RVEC) proudly sponsors a local student to attend the national rural electric cooperative Youth Tour in Washington, D.C. This year, we are excited to recognize Joseph Thielen of Scranton as RVEC's 2025 delegate.

A commitment to leadership and learning

In June, Joseph joined 35 fellow student leaders from across Iowa for a weeklong leadership experience in our nation's capital. Sponsored by RVEC and coordinated in partnership with the Iowa Association of Electric Cooperatives and the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association, the Youth Tour introduces students to the electric cooperative model, the history of our country and the democratic process.

Joseph stood out for his maturity, thoughtful engagement and enthusiasm throughout the tour. In addition to visiting landmarks and meeting elected officials, including Sens. Joni Ernst and Chuck Grassley, he had the rare honor of being one of four Iowa students selected to participate in the wreath-laying ceremony at Arlington National Cemetery, a moment he described as deeply meaningful.

Investing in future leaders

RVEC's sponsorship of Youth Tour reflects our belief in empowering the next generation of community and civic leaders. Joseph gained firsthand insight into public policy, grassroots advocacy and the cooperative business model – all while forming lasting friendships and memories.

Congratulations, Joseph!

We extend our sincere congratulations to Joseph for representing RVEC and Iowa's electric cooperatives with excellence and integrity. We're proud to support programs like Youth Tour that invest in the potential of local students and inspire tomorrow's leaders.

Keep up the great work, Joseph – your cooperative family is proud of you!



“ I severely underestimated this trip at first. I couldn't have been happier with how everything turned out. I encourage anyone and everyone to apply – it's truly one of the greatest things I've ever been a part of. Thank you, RVEC! ”

–Joseph Thielen

2025 RVEC SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENT: LUCAS OBERT

At Raccoon Valley Electric Cooperative (RVEC), we believe that empowering future generations is one of the most meaningful ways we can serve our members and the communities we support. Each year, our scholarship program is one way we live out that belief – by supporting exceptional

students with a passion for learning, leadership and service.

Recognizing excellence: 2025 scholarship recipient

In 2025, we were proud to award a \$1,000 scholarship – made possible through our partnership with Basin Electric Power Cooperative – to Lucas Obert, the son of RVEC member-owners.

Selected by an independent panel of judges, Lucas stood out for his outstanding academic achievement, strong leadership qualities and thoughtful vision for the future. He plans to study political science and international relations with a minor in musical theatre. This inspiring combination reflects his dedication to civic engagement, global awareness and creative expression.

A commitment to education

RVEC's investment in education reflects our broader mission to strengthen the communities we serve. By helping students like Lucas pursue higher education, we not only recognize individual achievement but also support the development of future leaders who will shape our world for the better.

Looking forward

We congratulate Lucas on this well-deserved honor and wish him continued success in the years ahead. His drive, ambition and character are a testament to the values we uphold at RVEC: hard work, community service and forward-thinking leadership.

As we look to the future, RVEC remains committed to supporting educational opportunities and celebrating the achievements of the next generation.



AUTUMN FRUIT SALAD

- ½ cup sugar
- ½ cup flour
- 1½ cups water
- 1 teaspoon margarine or butter
- 1 teaspoon almond flavoring
- 6 cups green and red apples, unpeeled, cubed
- 2 cups red seedless grapes, halved
- 1 cup pecans, chopped

In a saucepan, combine sugar and flour. Stir in water and boil until thickened. Remove from heat and add margarine or butter and almond flavoring. Cool to room temperature. In a large bowl, combine fruits and nuts. Add dressing and toss gently. Chill for a few hours. Serves 12

Sandy Harmelink • Orange City
North West Rural Electric Cooperative

APPLE PUFF PANCAKE

- 4 tablespoons butter
- 4 cups apples, diced
- 6 eggs
- 1½ cups milk
- 1 cup flour
- ½ teaspoon salt
- ½ teaspoon cinnamon
- 1 teaspoon vanilla
- 1 tablespoon ground flax seed, optional
- 2 tablespoons brown sugar
- maple syrup

Preheat oven to 425 degree F and melt butter in 9x13-inch pan. Add apples and bake until they sizzle. In a blender, mix eggs, milk, flour, salt, cinnamon and vanilla. Pour over apples and sprinkle with flax seed and brown sugar. Bake at 425 degrees F for 20 minutes. Serve with syrup.

Lauren Zollinger • Rock Rapids
Lyon Rural Electric Cooperative

CARAMEL APPLE BROWNIES

- 1¼ cups oil
- 3 large eggs
- 2 cups sugar
- 3½ teaspoons vanilla, divided
- 3 cups flour
- 1 teaspoon baking soda
- 1 teaspoon cinnamon
- 2 Granny Smith apples, peeled and chopped
- 1 cup walnuts, chopped, optional
- ¾ cup butter
- 1½ cups brown sugar
- 6 tablespoons milk
- 3-3½ cups powdered sugar

Mix oil, eggs, sugar and 2 teaspoons vanilla. Add flour, baking soda and cinnamon. Then add apples and nuts. Pour into a greased 10x15-inch baking pan. Bake at 350 degrees F for 45 minutes until a toothpick inserted comes out clean. Remove from oven and cool completely. Melt butter in a medium saucepan. Add brown sugar and cook 2 minutes. Add milk and bring to a boil. Cool to warm stage and add powdered sugar. Beat, then add 1½ teaspoons vanilla and mix well. Spread caramel frosting on cooled brownies.

Monica Johnson • Williams
Prairie Energy Cooperative

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



FIRST PRIZE APPLESAUCE CAKE

- 1 cup oil
- 2 cups granulated sugar
- 3 cups unsweetened applesauce, heated
- 4 cups all-purpose flour, sifted
- 4 teaspoons soda
- 1¼ teaspoons salt, optional
- 1 tablespoon ground cinnamon
- ½ teaspoon nutmeg
- ¼ teaspoon cloves
- 2 tablespoons cocoa
- ½ cup raisins and/or cranberries
- ½ cup nuts, chopped
- ½ cup butter, melted
- 1 cup dark brown sugar, firmly packed
- ¼ cup milk
- 2 cups powdered sugar, sifted
- 1 tablespoon vanilla

Stir together oil and sugar and add to hot applesauce. Sift together flour, soda, salt, cinnamon, nutmeg, cloves and cocoa. Then blend into the applesauce mixture. Stir in raisins and/or cranberries and nuts. Pour into two greased and floured 9x9x2-inch pans. Bake at 400 degrees F for 15 minutes, then lower the oven temperature to 375 degrees F and bake for 15 minutes more, or until done. Move cakes to racks to cool. Boil butter and brown sugar for 2 minutes. Remove from heat and stir in milk. Return to full boil, then remove and cool to lukewarm. Stir in powdered sugar and vanilla. Add more sugar if needed to make caramel frosting more spreadable. When cakes are cool, spread frosting on one layer. Top with second cake layer and frost top and sides. May garnish with more nuts. Tip: Wax parchment paper can be added to line sprayed/greased pans before pouring in batter.

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

WANTED:

VEGETARIAN RECIPES

THE REWARD:
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MEET THE 2025 SHINE THE LIGHT WINNERS



Driven by their commitment to community, the Touchstone Energy® Cooperatives of Iowa held their fifth annual Shine the Light contest in June to celebrate local volunteers. Employees and member-consumers of Iowa's locally owned electric cooperatives were invited to nominate someone who makes a positive difference in their community.

The judging committee reviewed essays from 88 outstanding nominations, which were published in the August issue of this magazine, and selected three winners.

Congratulations to **Chuck Bildstein**, who is recognized for supporting families through Chelsey's Dream Foundation; **Aimee Goeman McKnight**, who is recognized for her generous community efforts through Build a Better Belmond; and **Gerry Holtrup**, who is recognized for his commitment to assisting veterans through Partners for Patriots.

These three winners have been awarded a \$3,000 donation to their charity. The following pages showcase and honor each of the Shine the Light contest winners' commitment to humbly serving their communities.

Learn more at
www.iowaShineTheLight.com.

Gerry Holtrup is pictured with photos of dogs he has helped to pair with veterans.



WHERE DUTY NEVER ENDS

GERRY HOLTRUP PAIRS VETERANS WITH LIFE-SAVING COMPANIONS

BY EMILY VANDER VELDE

After more than 35 years in law enforcement, Gerry Holtrup could have stepped into retirement quietly. But a call from a past connection helped launch a mission that would touch the lives of hundreds of veterans across the country.

Gerry first met Cindy Brodie while working in the sheriff's office, when he was looking to add a narcotics dog to the force. Cindy, then training law enforcement dogs in Tennessee, connected him with Jeb, a dog who would work closely with Gerry for nearly a decade and become a valued partner.

Years later, after moving to the Sioux City area, Cindy began training service dogs for disabled veterans. Inspired by helping some veterans receive their life-saving service dog, she founded Partners for Patriots, a nonprofit that raises, trains and places service dogs with disabled veterans – completely free of charge.

"These dogs truly are helping them," Cindy said. "They've saved lives and helped veterans function in society."



Answering the call again

When North West REC member Mollie Griffin heard about the Shine the Light contest, she immediately thought of Gerry. As a puppy raiser for the program, Mollie has witnessed his dedication firsthand.

"Gerry is the driving force behind the fundraising," she said. "He cares so deeply. He's one of the nicest guys I've ever met."

Just two months before retiring, Gerry got a call from Cindy. She was overwhelmed trying to do everything on her own and asked for help with fundraising. He stepped in without hesitation – and hasn't stopped since. His first fundraiser brought in \$5,000, when the group had just \$2,000 left in its bank account. Since 2017,

Gerry has helped raise more than \$400,000 to fund the placement of over 200 service dogs.

From coordinating annual dinners and golf tournaments to organizing fair booths and business events, Gerry keeps the mission front and center in the community. But while fundraising is vital, his most meaningful role has been as a traveling trainer.

Delivering healing, one dog at a time

Once a dog completes six months of training in Anthon, it's Gerry's job to deliver the dog to its new handler. Cindy trains him on the veteran's specific needs, then Gerry drives – or sometimes flies – with the dog to their new home, staying several days to help build the bond between the veteran and the dog. He has personally delivered 35 dogs, from Iowa to California to Tennessee.

The dogs are trained to respond to veterans' post-traumatic stress disorder symptoms – recognizing triggers and calming them through touch and distraction. Gerry shared powerful stories of dogs pulling veterans out of night terrors or stepping in when a veteran was on the verge of suicide.

"These dogs really do save lives," he said.

Each veteran is given 500 custom baseball-style cards featuring their service dog's photo and name. It's something to hand out when people ask to pet the dog, which can't be allowed while the dog is working.

From his early years with Jeb to his coast-to-coast deliveries for veterans in need, Gerry has never stopped serving. Through compassion, determination and a deep respect for the sacrifices of others, he is making a life-changing difference – one dog and one veteran at a time.

Learn more at www.partnersforpatriots.org.

Emily Vander Velde is the communications and member services coordinator for North West REC.



WHERE DETERMINATION DIVES DEEP

AIMEE GOEMAN MCKNIGHT RALLIES A SMALL TOWN AROUND A \$5.7 MILLION DREAM

Aimee Goeman McKnight is pictured fourth from the right.

BY RYAN CORNELIUS

Every small town has its unsung heroes, but in Belmond, one woman is proving that determination, vision and a heart for her community can turn the impossible into reality. Amy Goeman McKnight is one of those unsung heroes.

Aimee returned to her hometown of Belmond in 2020 after moving away when she graduated high school in 1995. In 2023, when the city pool faced a crisis, Aimee stepped into her true role – community champion.

After a summer marked by repeated breakdowns, the Belmond City Council voted not to reopen the pool in 2024, citing the nearly \$1 million in needed repairs. Instead of accepting defeat, Aimee gathered a group of dedicated community members to form the Luick Memorial Swimming Pool Committee under the Build a Better Belmond organization.

A new vision for a community landmark

They began meeting with city officials, engineers, financial experts,

pool design firms and residents. What they discovered was that repairing the pool wasn't the answer – rebuilding it from the ground up was the solution.

The challenge? A staggering \$5.7 million price tag.

For most towns of 2,300 people, that number might have been the end of the story. But for Aimee, it was just the beginning.

Fundraising, faith and a finish line in sight

In just 12 months, she and her committee raised an incredible \$2.1 million through donations and a steady stream of community-driven fundraisers. Next up is a critical vote in November 2025 on a \$3 million city bond that could push the project across the finish line.

Her motivation is simple: a love for her community and its future. Friends and neighbors often marvel at how she balances her demanding job, her business and countless hours of volunteer work, often pouring more time into the pool project than anything else.

In a world that could use more unsung heroes, Belmond already has one. Her name is Aimee and she's proving that with passion and persistence, even the biggest dreams can make a splash.

Ryan Cornelius is the vice president of corporate relations for Corn Belt Power Cooperative.

Learn more at bit.ly/belmondpool.

See Page 14 for the article on Chuck Bildstein and Chelsey's Dream Foundation.



ARE ENERGY ANSWERS TRULY BLOWIN' IN THE WIND?

BY SCOTT FLOOD

When Bob Dylan penned his first big hit, "Blowin' in the Wind," more than six decades ago, he was thinking about peace and freedom – not large turbines that generate electricity from powerful winds.

Although many people view wind energy as a new technology, the power of the wind has been harnessed for more than 2,000 years. American agriculture spread across the plains largely because of the windmills that brought underground water to the surface to support crops and livestock. In other places, windmills ran the grinding wheels that turned grains into flour.

Windmills to wind turbines: Co-ops embrace the evolution

Of course, turbines capable of generating commercial-scale amounts of electricity are a relatively recent development, and electric cooperatives have been quick to embrace the technology. Co-ops have long been among the leaders in deploying wind power, particularly through what's known as distributed wind generation. Unlike the massive investor-funded wind farms that use hundreds of turbines to generate bulk power for distant towns and cities, distributed wind is used to produce power that will be consumed in the immediate area. That meets co-op members' needs and helps communities thrive while strengthening the nation's electric grid.

Co-ops have expanded their renewable energy capacity by 192% over the past decade. In 2021, the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association and the U.S. Department of Energy joined in a program to assess the potential for distributed wind energy in rural areas. Thanks to that assessment, a pilot site in Iowa with two 10.5 megawatt distributed wind projects is generating over \$300,000 in annual revenue, potentially



On land or at sea, the operation of the turbines creates some environmental concerns, particularly with wildlife, noise and aesthetics. Photo Source: Andreas Senftleben

reducing costs for members and boosting the local tax base.

Offshore wind turbines offer many of the same benefits as those on land, along with one key advantage: wind speeds over the ocean tend to be higher and steadier, allowing the turbines to produce significantly more electricity. According to the American Geosciences Institute (AGI), a wind turbine can generate twice as much electricity from a 15-mph wind as it can from a 12-mph breeze.

Economic impact and real-world challenges

The economic development benefits of wind generation are also impressive. Nearly 150,000 Americans currently work in the wind power industry, and the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that wind turbine service technicians represent the decade's fastest-growing career. Besides producing electricity, wind projects generate nearly \$2 billion in taxes and lease payments annually, improving local economic health.

However, offshore wind turbines can be even more costly to build and maintain than those on land. The AGI points out that it's challenging to erect turbines in water that's deeper than 200 feet. While that's not a problem along the east coast's continental shelf, most west coast locations



Offshore wind turbines offer many of the same benefits as those on land, along with one key advantage: wind speeds over the ocean tend to be higher and steadier, allowing the turbines to produce significantly more electricity.

with suitable wind are in areas where the ocean plunges far deeper. Turbines may suffer damage from the high winds and waves produced by hurricanes and other tropical weather. Installing power cables to safely transport the electricity back to land can also be expensive.

On land or at sea, the operation of the turbines creates some environmental concerns. Birds and bats that fly into blades and towers may be injured or killed. The spinning turbine blades can also be a source of noise for people living nearby. In addition, many people view the tall structures as eyesores. That's particularly true with offshore wind turbines situated near coastal areas popular with tourists.

It's also worth noting that the economics of wind energy often rely on state and federal incentives. Without those enticements, electric co-ops and commercial developers may find other forms of generation to be more affordable.

So, while the answer to the energy needs of co-ops may indeed be blowing in the wind, getting there will demand plenty of time, money, innovation and some good old-fashioned problem solving.

Scott Flood writes on a variety of energy-related topics for the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association.

FIND HIDDEN ENERGY USERS AT HOME

BY MIRANDA BOUTELLE

Out of sight, out of mind. It is easy to overlook the hidden energy users in our homes. Yet, every plugged-in device and ready-to-use appliance can lead to higher electric bills.

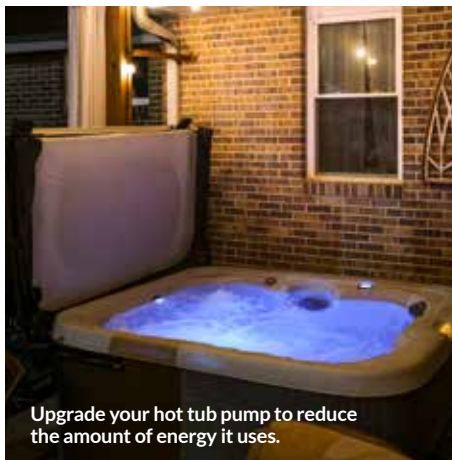
Let's see if we can find some hidden energy savings for you.

Tackle energy hogs you don't see

Your water heater could be using more energy than necessary. Storage water heaters heat water to a preset temperature. When hot water is used, cold water enters the tank, lowering the temperature, and the water is reheated to that preset level. If the water heater is set higher than needed, it wastes energy. Most water heaters are set to 140 degrees F at the factory. The U.S. Department of Energy recommends setting the temperature to 120 degrees F. Doing so will save energy and reduce the risk of scalding. Do not set it lower than 120 degrees F to prevent bacteria development in the tank.

Exterior security lights, porch lights and barn lights can use more energy than needed. If they are on every night, all year long, that adds up to 4,380 hours, or half the hours in a year. If those lights use outdated, inefficient technology, they waste energy. With that many hours, even a slight increase in efficiency can yield big energy savings. Switch to energy-efficient LED bulbs. If lights don't need to stay on, consider upgrading to motion sensor lights to avoid drawing energy all night.

Pools and hot tubs can also be big energy users. Since you don't see the pumps or heaters by design, it's difficult to know when they are operating and consuming energy. Pumps filter water to keep it clean and safe for swimming. ENERGY STAR®-certified pumps run at lower speeds and can be programmed to match your pool's filtering needs, according to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. They can pay for themselves in two



Upgrade your hot tub pump to reduce the amount of energy it uses.



Look around your home for plugged-in items. If they aren't in use, unplug them from the outlet.



Powering off between gaming sessions can save energy.

years, are quieter and can prolong the life of your pool's filtering system. Schedule your hot tub to a lower temperature when you're not using it to reduce energy use. If your electric utility offers time-of-use rates, consider scheduling accordingly.

Take control of plugged-in power

Plug load is anything in your home that is plugged into an outlet. As we use more and more appliances and technology in our homes, plug load energy use increases. Find what is plugged in around your home. If you aren't using it, unplug it. For computer stations and entertainment centers, consider using smart power strips. These devices sense when energy is being used and turn peripheral devices on or off as needed.

Gaming consoles are another hidden energy user. Gamers often put them in rest mode when not in use. This allows them to complete updates and reduces start-up time for the next session. It also means they are still consuming energy even when not actively used. Powering off between gaming sessions can save energy. Ask the gamers in your life to power off. It may require a bit more time for updates, but every kilowatt-hour counts when it comes to saving energy.

It's easy to make a habit of powering down and unplugging once you identify everything drawing power in your home. For upgrades, reach out to your electric utility about available rebates to help cover costs.

Miranda Boutelle writes on energy efficiency topics for the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association.

MEET THE 2025 SHINE THE LIGHT WINNERS

WHERE WISHES BECOME FAMILIES

**CHUCK BILDSTEIN FULFILLS
CHELSEY'S DYING DREAM,
ONE ADOPTION AT A TIME**



Chuck Bildstein is pictured second from right.

BY CHRISTIE REMLEY

Feature continued from Page 11

Chelsey Bildstein was a talented athlete, rising professional, and beloved daughter, sister, aunt, cousin and friend. Raised in a loving family, she wanted nothing more than to be a mom someday. Sadly, she would not have the opportunity herself, but it was her dying wish that others get to experience the joy of parenthood.

In 2013, Chelsey, was diagnosed with uterine and ovarian cancer at the age of 23. When she learned of her disease, she gracefully accepted that she would not have biological children. As her cancer rapidly progressed, Chelsey expressed to her parents Chuck and Carol Bildstein her dying wish. Her dream was no longer to grow a family of her own through adoption, but to help other families with the cost of their adoptions. Her wish became Chelsey's Dream Foundation.

Carrying on Chelsey's legacy

Maquoketa Valley Electric Cooperative Energy Advisor Al Reiter nominated Chuck for a Shine the Light award for his work with Chelsey's Dream Foundation, which was established to honor the memory of Chelsey and fulfill her wish to assist families with adoption expenses and emotional support.

"Chelsey's Dream Foundation is a perfect fit for the Shine the Light award. It has been a valuable resource

since it began and continues to help families with their adoption goals more than a decade later," said Al.

Building families with every act of generosity

While Chelsey passed away in 2014, her foundation has since helped more than 100 families (80 from Iowa) with adopting 141 children. This organization continues to be a valuable resource, providing adoptive families with grants from \$3,000 to \$15,000. The foundation has never turned a family down.

Chuck has taken the loss of his daughter as an opportunity to help others and carry on her dream. The Bildstein family and many close family friends support the foundation by holding numerous fundraising activities in the Anamosa community, including an annual raffle for a side-by-side UTV, a girls' youth softball tournament with more than 50 teams participating and a golf and auction event that attracts at least 300 people annually.

In addition to financial assistance, the foundation provides emotional support through annual seminars on the adoption process. They

also connect families who share their experiences and mentor those needing help navigating the adoption process.

While Chuck lives by the creed of getting involved and doing something to bring a smile to someone's face every day, he is most proud of Chelsey's courage and her open heart to help others, even in a time when she was facing terminal cancer.

Chuck said simply, "She is our hero."

Learn more at
www.chelseysdreamfoundation.com.

Christie Remley is the manager of communications and public relations for Maquoketa Valley Electric Cooperative.



Chelsey Bildstein (left).

BE STILL IN A DIGITAL WORLD

BY DARCY DOUGHERTY MAULSBY

I was quite a sight, one hot, humid July morning this past summer during a Sunday service at the Swede Bend Church at Twin Lakes Bible Camp.

By 9 a.m. it was stuffy inside that simple 150-plus-year-old building with no air conditioning. But that wasn't the issue. The guest pastor was preaching on Psalm 46 and the verse, "Be still, and know that I am God." He noted that this has become tougher than ever in a world of digital distractions. And yet there I was, typing away on my smartphone.

I didn't have a pen or paper handy, but I needed to take some notes fast. Ironical, I know, but I sensed a story when the preacher started talking about our inability – our refusal – to be still.

I typed notes in an email to myself, even as the pastor urged us to spend less time on electronic devices. I kept on typing as he shared his "no cell phones at dinner" rule. He's happy to pay for his family members' meals at a restaurant – except for anyone in the group who picks up his or her phone during the meal. Guess it's a good thing we weren't at dinner.

How much of your time is consumed online?

These comments from the pastor really hit home:

- How much time do you devote each day to looking at phone screens, computer screens and TV screens? For the average American adult, it's approximately 7 hours and 3 minutes each day, according to a study by Exploding Topics. Guilty as charged.
- Smartphones can be addictive, as I know all too well. How many times a day do you check your phone? For the average American, it's a staggering 205 times a day, according to a 2024 report from Reviews.org. "If you add up all this screen time, it's the equivalent of

a part-time job – or more," the pastor said. If you keep tallying up this screen time, it equates to spending more than 18 years of your life online, he added.

- All this screen time can be especially rough on adolescents. By the early 2010s, an epidemic of teen mental illness hit many countries at the same time. Young people's rates of depression, anxiety, self-harm and suicide rose sharply, more than doubling on many measures, noted social psychologist Jonathan Haidt, who wrote "The Anxious Generation."

Published in 2024, his book explains how "play-based childhood" began to decline in the 1980s and was wiped out by the arrival of the "phone-based childhood" in the early 2010s. He presents specific examples of how this great rewiring of childhood has interfered with kids' social and neurological development, from sleep deprivation to attention fragmentation, addiction, loneliness and more.

Being still is an action

So, what's the answer? It's not like most of us can just disconnect from



This inviting view of the Raccoon River by the historic Rainbow Bridge southwest of Lake City reflects the concept of "be still."

the digital world. I liked the pastor's practical suggestions, which I'm trying to incorporate into my life:

- 1 Understand that being still is an action. Set aside non-phone and non-computer time every day. It takes commitment, but it's worth it. Use tech to support your values, rather than eclipsing real-life experiences.
- 2 Practice being still every day. Establish a routine. Before the day is done, write down three things you're thankful for. I've found it's surprisingly easy and enjoyable, once you get started.
- 3 Be truly present. This can be as simple as appreciating the beauty of creation around you.

To me, something that symbolizes all this is a lake or river with water so smooth it reflects the sky. Calm. Peaceful. Unhurried. It's a good reminder that God whispers to you in the quiet moments. Be still and listen.

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