

● JULY 2022

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ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE LIVING

SPECIAL INSERT

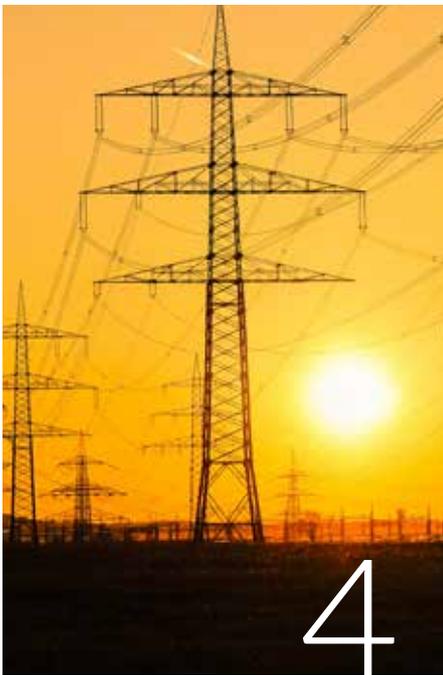
**Access Energy Cooperative
2021 Annual Report**

**Tips for saving
energy this summer**

Favorite grilling recipes

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ON THE COVER

Special thanks to Josie Pauley, Harrison County REC member-consumer, for supplying this month’s cover image. Submit high-resolution photos for consideration to editor@ieclmagazine.com. You could win \$100!

ADVOCACY: A STRATEGIC “GAME” OF OFFENSE AND DEFENSE

BY KEVIN CONDON



Another Iowa General Assembly has come and gone, and the political pundits have already moved on into “campaign mode.” While candidates prepare

to throw pound-after-pound of parade candy this summer, it is important to reflect on this legislative session for both the positive and not-so-positive developments the electric co-op family experienced.

Even though it is a grossly overused cliché, I can’t help but compare the legislative session to a sporting event. Sometimes you are on offense; sometimes you play defense. The 2022 session required us to play both, some days simultaneously.

The impacts of state tax reforms

The rural electric cooperative (REC) government relations team focused primarily on the tax conversations at the Statehouse this year. The governor and Republican majorities in both chambers laid out plans for significant income tax reforms. RECs identified a sales tax oversight from a 2018 bill that needed to be fixed in order to achieve parity for rural member-consumers.

The income tax issue came out of the blocks fast, and significant reforms were signed into law on March 1, less than two months into session. Achieving income tax exemption for cash-rent payments to retired farmers and pension payouts to retired co-op employees are positive outcomes of the reform. And member-consumers of Iowa’s electric cooperatives will collectively save more than \$1 million annually thanks to two other bills that passed this session. SF 2367 passed in the final days of session and included a resolution to the sales tax issue above and will save roughly \$300,000 annually. It was

signed by Gov. Reynolds in June. Another bill that protected the expiration of a 30-year-old special energy utility tax was also signed into law (SF 2325 – approximately \$750,000 saved annually).

Advocating for REC member-consumers

Again, while reviewing the positive outcomes of any legislative session is worthwhile, it can also be as meaningful to analyze those ideas that weren’t successful. The hard truth of public policy is that new laws can simultaneously help some and hurt others. When it is necessary to appeal to the referee to blow the whistle, the Iowa Association of Electric Cooperatives (IAEC) steps in to help cooperatives and you, the member-consumer, by being the collective voice of RECs at the Iowa Capitol.

One piece of legislation (HSB 697) attempted to make a mockery of the cooperative business model by creating special “solar clubs” for certain consumers. The bill aimed to essentially push the installation costs of their systems onto other consumers of electricity. RECs support solar energy

when it is a fair deal for all cooperative members, not just a few.

A second bill (SF 2321) could have trampled individual landowners and their property rights by prohibiting the use of their land for utility-scale solar energy production based on a Corn Suitability Rating 2 score of 65 or above. Imagine Iowa farmers being told they can’t do what they want with their land because it’s TOO good! Electric co-ops believe government shouldn’t preclude any landowner from an opportunity to make a profit off their own land.

We all know and love somebody who can take a football or basketball game very seriously. I’ve been guilty of letting my blood pressure skyrocket when the Iowa Hawkeyes aren’t playing the way I think they should. But I believe the actions that play out at the Statehouse must always be taken seriously. Whether pocketbook issues for you and your co-op or whether your poles, wires or land are at risk of government overstepping, IAEC will be ready to speak up on your behalf and when necessary, call for a timeout.

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

EDITOR’S CHOICE CONTEST

Win an electric grill!

The Cuisinart compact portable grill has a built-in telescoping base, so it functions as both a tabletop grill and a freestanding grill. Use it to cook family-sized meals on the ample porcelain-enamel grate. The unit packs away in seconds for compact storage and features a briefcase-style handle for easy transport.

Visit our website and win!

Enter this month’s contest by visiting www.ieclmagazine.com no later than July 31. You must be a member of one of Iowa’s electric cooperatives to win. There’s no obligation associated with entering, we don’t share entrant information with anyone and multiple entries from the same account will be disqualified. The winner of the beef bundle from the May issue was Sam Spellman, Guthrie County REC.



ENTER ONLINE BY JULY 31!

UPCOMING EVENTS

JULY 7	Board elections open – online voting available and packets mailed
JULY 21	Board of directors meeting
AUG. 1	Board election online voting closes at 4:30 p.m
AUG. 2	Annual Meeting of Members, 5 p.m. at McMillan Park, Mt. Pleasant
AUG. 2	Board election in-person voting closes
AUG. 2	Board of directors annual meeting
SEPT. 5	Office closed in observance of Labor Day

POWER RELIABILITY THIS SUMMER

BY KEVIN WHEELER



With MISO and regional transmission organizations (RTOs) around Iowa predicting elevated reliability risks this summer, what is the outlook

for Associated Electric Cooperative, the power supplier of Access Energy Cooperative?

Associated is committed to doing everything it can to make sure that reliability concerns elsewhere do not impact its members. Associated achieves its mission to provide a reliable, affordable power supply to member co-ops with a balanced mix of generating resources (coal, natural gas, wind and hydropower) and an interconnected, high-voltage transmission system of more than 10,000 miles of lines that are operated with its transmission cooperative owners like Northeast Missouri Electric Power Cooperative.

As of early July, Associated had one coal unit in an unplanned outage for repairs, with return to service expected by August. Associated's diverse generation and robust ability to buy and sell power provide reliability advantages during extreme weather and throughout the year. However, if the reliability of the RTOs around them deteriorates, it can impact their ability to import power, which provides backup support for their generation fleet.

Can blackouts in neighboring RTOs cause Associated to have blackouts as well?

No. Associated is independent of RTOs. Associated does have joint operating agreements in place with RTOs surrounding its service territory. These agreements enable the buying, selling and related moving of power between Associated and the surrounding RTOs.

Other than these voluntary, mutually-

agreed-to contracts to buy, sell and transport power, Associated is under no obligation to provide power to RTOs or other utilities. If Associated has power available to sell to third parties during a peak situation, they will consider doing so as long as the agreement will not jeopardize the reliability of Associated's system.

What are Associated's responsibilities with its neighboring utilities?

Associated's first and only mandatory responsibility is to provide reliable power to its member-owned system, of which Access Energy Cooperative is a part, and to do so as affordably as possible.

Our experience from Winter Storm Uri in February 2021 revealed that if a neighboring balancing authority becomes power deficient, we can experience heavy energy transfers on our system, which can increase Associated's risk – but Associated does not have to release generation to them.

How can future reliability concerns be addressed?

The transition from dispatchable, baseload generation sources like coal and natural gas plants, cornerstones of electricity reliability, to intermittent resources that cannot be dispatched on demand, like wind and solar, will continue to result in reliability concerns. Technology must be available to reliably replace baseload generation sources as those plants retire. That technology does not exist today.

Kevin Wheeler is the general manager/CEO of Access Energy Cooperative.



Access Energy Cooperative is dedicated to exceeding members' expectations for safe, reliable and efficient service, while being a good citizen in our communities.

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Friday, 7 a.m.-3:30 p.m.

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This institution is an equal opportunity provider.



DIVIDENDS ARE COMING

Each member of Access Energy Cooperative has a dividend account at the cooperative where your dividend allocations accumulate. When the board allocates margins, your portion is allocated to your dividend account.

Once the financial statements for the year are reviewed, the board of directors determines if it is in the best interest of the cooperative to approve a dividend payment to the members from these accounts. In 2022, the board approved a dividend payment to the members in the amount of \$1,224,133. This refund is 100% of the remaining dividends for 2000 and 2001, 37% of 2002, 45% of 2007 and 12% of 2021.

Dividend checks will be available to



pick up at the annual meeting on Aug. 2. Any checks not picked up will be mailed after the annual meeting. Checks will be sent to the most current address we have on file. The cooperative will not be printing checks for amounts under \$5. These amounts will be added to next year's refund.

Members also have the option to receive dividend payments as a bill credit. Call our office at 866-242-4232 to take advantage of this option.

CONGRATULATIONS



Access Energy Cooperative congratulates Carol Baylor on her recent retirement from the cooperative! Carol was a customer service representative at the cooperative for 17 years. We appreciate her dedication to providing our members with safe and reliable service!

WELCOME TO THE TEAM



Gavin Thompson from New London joined our cooperative in May as an apprentice lineworker. He has worked at the cooperative as summer help and at Kiowa Line Builders. Gavin was

awarded the Access Energy Cooperative Lineworker Scholarship and graduated from Northwestern Iowa Community College.

Access Energy Cooperative is proud of the team we have to provide you with safe, reliable and efficient service!

ACCESS ENERGY COOPERATIVE SCHOLARSHIPS AWARDED

SCHOLARSHIPS

Congratulations to area high school students who were recently named as recipients of 2022 Access Energy Cooperative scholarships!

Access Energy Cooperative awards six \$1,500 scholarships each year, two in each of its three districts. The parents or guardians of the applicant must be members of Access Energy Cooperative. Winners are chosen based on their academics, achievements, community involvement and a submitted essay.

The following were awarded a \$1,500 scholarship:



Chyane Davidson is the daughter of Luke and Alisha Davidson and a graduate of Central Lee High School. She plans to attend Des Moines Area Community College to pursue a career in veterinarian technology.



Ellie Anderson is the daughter of Sheila and Lundy Anderson and a graduate of Fairfield High School. She plans to attend the University of Iowa majoring in English/creative writing.



Lydia Ebeling is the daughter of Chad and Angela Ebeling and a graduate of Mount Pleasant Community High School. She plans to attend Mercy College of Health Sciences to attain a Bachelor of Science in Nursing.



Lysha Bunnell is the daughter of Rick and Cara Bunnell and a graduate of Mount Pleasant Community High School. She plans to attend Southeastern Community College to pursue a career in nursing.



Maura Watkins is the daughter of Brian and Christy Watkins and a graduate of Central Lee High School. She plans to attend Des Moines Area Community College for dental hygiene.



Sydney Jones is the daughter of Steven and Billi Jones and a graduate of Central Lee High School. She plans to attend Iowa State University.



In addition to the six winners above, **Hayley Chase** of Danville is being awarded a \$1,500 scholarship in lieu of attending the 2020 Youth Tour trip that was canceled. Haley is a graduate of Danville High School.



LINWORKER SCHOLARSHIP WINNER

Congratulations to Ethan Unzicker who was recently awarded the 2022 Access Energy Cooperative Lineworker Scholarship! Ethan is a graduate of Danville Community High School and will receive a \$2,000 scholarship toward a lineworker educational program.

ATTEND THE ANNUAL MEETING OF MEMBERS

BY KIMBERLY DAVIS



Not every company invites its customers to an annual meeting to elect the board of directors and help set policy. But Access Energy Cooperative does!

Except you are our members – not customers.

When you signed up to receive power from Access Energy Cooperative, you became a member and a part-owner of the business. Cooperatives use a business model that is different from other companies. We don't sell stock on Wall Street, so there are no out-of-town investors.

You, the members, are in control, so it's important to attend your cooperative's annual meeting of members on Aug. 2. Here are a few things you can do at the annual meeting, in addition to having a lot of family fun:

- Meet other members and catch up on what has happened the last two years
- Meet the co-op employees
- Meet the board of directors and candidates you are voting for
- Learn what kind of business issues your cooperative is dealing with
- Enjoy a free meal, win prizes, get a free gift and pick up your dividend check

Membership in your cooperative comes with privileges. It also comes with the responsibility of casting your vote for the directors you think will do the best job. Make sure you plan to vote for directors in July and attend the 2022 Annual Meeting of Members on Aug. 2. We are back in person this year and look forward to seeing our members again!

Kimberly Davis is the director of member services and public relations for Access Energy Cooperative.



Schedule of Events

2022

OUR MISSION IS TO SERVE.
OUR PRIORITY IS YOU.

ANNUAL MEETING OF MEMBERS

August 2, 2022, 5:00 p.m.
McMillan Park, Mt. Pleasant, IA

Events 5:00 - 7:00 p.m.

- Music by The Boys
- Pony rides for kids
- Drive-A-Tractor for all ages
- Inflatable activities for kids
- Giant lawn games for all
- Free snow-cones
- Free homemade ice cream
- Free meal - tickets at registration
- Free gift at registration
- Pick up dividend check(s)
- Information booths for all
- Drawings for bill credit prizes
- \$100 bill credit drawing-online votes
- \$100 bill credit drawing-mailed votes
- \$250 bill credit grand prize drawing
- Vote for directors and hear reports
- Sky diver landing at 6:50 p.m.

All members of Access Energy Cooperative are encouraged to attend. Bring the whole family. Everything is FREE.



A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative

Business Meeting 7 p.m.

Call to Order, Invocation
Welcome Remarks
2022 Notice of Meeting
2019, 2020, 2021 Minutes
Nominating Committee Report
Call for Ballots From the Floor

Treasurer Report
President Report
Manager/CEO Report
Youth Tour Report
Election Results
Door Prizes (Must be present to win)

For more information visit: accessenergycoop.com or our Facebook page @AccessEnergyCoop

MEET YOUR 2022 DIRECTOR CANDIDATES

More information on the candidates is provided in your annual meeting packet mailed on July 7 or on the website at accessenergycoop.com.

District 1

Fred Hickenbottom Fairfield



Spouse: Dixie Hickenbottom

Education: Fairfield High School

Current Occupation: Semi-retired farmer

Education/Employment Background: Former residential landlord; Credentialed Cooperative Director as certified by the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association receiving both board leadership and director gold program levels.

Community Involvement/Honors/Board Experience: Helping Hands of Fairfield; First United Methodist Church in Fairfield; president McElhinny Foundation; past director of Jefferson County Water District; past chairman of SENECA Advisory Council for Area Agency on Aging; past president of Landlords of Iowa, Jefferson County Chapter; former director of Jefferson County Mutual Insurance; director of Access Energy Cooperative board for 21 years (past president); director of Northeast Missouri Electric Power Cooperative board.

Frank Redeker Fairfield



Spouse: Karen Redeker

Education: Fairfield High School, Iowa State University BS in Agriculture, NW University Continuing Education

Current Occupation: Farm equipment operator, background feeder calves

Education/Employment Background: Owned and operated Redeker Seed Farm for 14 years; retired Iowa DOT Senior Engineering Technician for 26 years covering 20 counties.

Community Involvement/Honors/Board Experience: President Greater Jefferson Co. Foundation; past Grand Knight of the Knights of Columbus; Governor's Traffic Safety Bureau Award; Center Township Trustee; member of St. Mary Catholic Church in Fairfield; past Parish Council president; past president of Farm Bureau Young Members.

District 2

Mark Hotchkiss Wayland



Spouse: Connie Hotchkiss

Education: Washington High School

Current Occupation: Semi-retired farmer

Education/Employment Background: Retail fertilizer company for 25 years; operated a breed-to-wean farrowing operation on family farm.

Community Involvement/Honors/Board Experience: Member and Deacon of Independent Bible Church in Wayland; member of WACO School Board for 9 years; past member of the Henry County Fair Board.

Robert P. Smith Mt Pleasant



Education: Central College, BA in Accounting & Business Management

Current Occupation: Owner, H&R Block, Farmer

Education/Employment Background: Internal auditor for Hy-Vee Inc.; plant accountant for General Mills in Carlisle; raising corn, soybeans, hay and cattle on 150-year-old family farm; Credentialed Cooperative Director as certified by the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association receiving board leadership level.

Community Involvement/Honors/Board Experience: Assistant Commissioner for Henry County Soil & Water Association; director of Access Energy Cooperative for six years (past secretary).

District 3

Loren Holtkamp West Point



Fiancé: Ann (Mabeus) Klesner

Education: Automotive Mechanics, SCC, Certified Case IH Technician

Current Occupation: Owner/Operator LorAnn Trucking, Owner Holtkamp

Trucking, Holtkamp Logistics & Holtkamp Automotive Repair, farmer
Education/Employment Background: Owner, manager, diesel mechanic, driver and dispatcher for Holtkamp Trucking and Holtkamp Logistics; owner, manager and mechanic for Holtkamp Automotive Repair; agricultural technician for JJ Nitching Co.

Community Involvement/Honors/Board Experience: Volunteer for TriState Special Kids Rodeo; volunteer West Point Sweet Corn Festival; coach for multiple youth sports; previous volunteer firefighter for St. Paul/West Point; past member of Holy Trinity School Board & St. James Parish Council; director of Knights of Columbus Youth Sports Challenge; past president of the Lee Co. 4-H council.

Marvin Newton West Point



Spouse: Carol Newton

Education: Southeastern Community College, Mechanical Trades & Diesel Mechanic School

Current Occupation: Farmer

Education/Employment Background: Navy Seabee serving two tours in Vietnam; farmer; Credentialed Cooperative Director as certified by the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association receiving both board leadership and director gold program levels.

Community Involvement/Honors/Board Experience: Member of Farm Bureau; clerk for West Point Township; former leader for 4-H; member of the West Point Fire and Rescue board; director of Access Energy Cooperative board for 15 years (currently president); secretary/treasurer of Northeast Missouri Electric Power Cooperative board; director for the Iowa Area Development Group board.

Mark your calendar! Plan to vote for your co-op directors in July, and then attend the 2022 Annual Meeting of Members on Aug. 2.



TERIYAKI STEAK

- 1 cup soy sauce
- 1 cup water
- ¼ cup sugar
- ½ teaspoon ginger powder
- ¼ teaspoon garlic powder
- 1 shot Saki wine
- 2 or 3 sirloin steaks, cut ¾-inch thick

Mix marinade ingredients together and marinate steak on one side for at least 1 hour. Turn steaks and marinate for 1 more hour. Grill to your taste.

Lea Bradley • Mount Pleasant
Access Energy Cooperative

TERIYAKI PORK CUBES

- 3-4 pounds pork chops or roast
- ½ teaspoon Accent meat tenderizer
- 2 cloves garlic
- 1 tablespoon brown sugar
- ½ teaspoon ginger
- ½ teaspoon pepper
- 1 teaspoon water
- ¼ cup soy sauce
- ½ cup oil

Cut meat into 2-inch pieces and sprinkle with meat tenderizer. Mix remaining ingredients and pour over meat. Marinate for 1.5 hours or longer before grilling. Can be stored in the refrigerator for 24 hours. Grill 10-15 minutes until done.

Kamie Meyer • Lester
Lyon Rural Electric Cooperative

GRILLED VEGETABLES WITH BALSAMIC VINAIGRETTE

- 1 medium eggplant
- 2 medium zucchinis
- 2-3 medium yellow squash
- 2 medium red bell peppers
- ¾ cup olive oil
- ¼ cup balsamic vinegar
- 1 teaspoon salt
- ¼ teaspoon black pepper
- 1 clove garlic, minced
- 2-3 tablespoons mixed herbs, finely chopped

Slice eggplant, zucchini and squash lengthwise into ½-inch slices. Core, seed and cut red pepper into 1-inch-wide slices. Combine remaining ingredients and pour over vegetables. Let stand for at least 30 minutes. Oil hot grill to prevent sticking. Lift vegetables from vinaigrette and place on grill for 10-15 minutes or until fork tender, turning once or twice. Remove from grill. Remaining vinaigrette may be poured over vegetables just before serving. *Serves 6*

Mary Schreur • Kanawha • Prairie Energy Cooperative

BRATWURST SUPPER

- 3 pounds bratwurst links, uncooked
- 3 pounds red potatoes, cut into chunks
- 1 pound baby carrots
- 1 red onion, sliced into rings
- 1 4-ounce jar mushroom stems (7 pieces), drained
- ¼ cup butter
- 1 envelope onion soup mix
- 2 tablespoons soy sauce
- ½ teaspoon pepper

Cut bratwurst links into fourths. Place bratwurst, potatoes, carrots, onions and mushrooms in a greased tinfoil roaster pan. Dot with butter. Sprinkle with soup mix, soy sauce and pepper. Stir lightly to mix and cover with tinfoil. Grill covered over medium heat for 60 minutes or until vegetables are tender and sausage is no longer pink, stirring once. *Serves 12*

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

GRILLED PINEAPPLE

- 1 large pineapple
- 2 tablespoons brown sugar
- 2 tablespoons honey
- 1 tablespoon hot water
- pinch salt
- oil

In a small bowl, whisk together brown sugar, honey, hot water and salt until combined. Peel pineapple, cut into ¾-inch slices and place in a gallon-sized zip-lock bag. Add brown sugar mixture, then seal the bag and shake it until the pineapple is evenly coated. Let sit at room temperature for 15 minutes. While pineapple sits, preheat the grill on high heat. After 15 minutes, scrape the grill grates and then lightly oil them. Place the pineapple slices on the grill for 2-3 minutes or until heated through and grill marks appear. Flip the pineapple and grill for another 2-3 minutes. Serve immediately.

**Deanna Foreman • Rock Valley
North West Rural Electric Cooperative**

GRILLED ASPARAGUS WITH BACON

- 1 pound fresh asparagus spears, trimmed
- bacon slices
- salt and pepper, to taste

Preheat grill on high heat. Group 3-4 asparagus spears, wrap with a bacon slice and secure with a toothpick. Repeat then season with salt and pepper to taste. Place asparagus bundles on aluminum foil or grill pan. Grill over high heat for 3-5 minutes to desired tenderness for asparagus, turning once to cook bacon completely. *Serves 4*

**Denise Anderson • Ocheyedan
Osceola Electric Cooperative, Inc.**

PIZZA DOGS

- 1½ pounds ground beef
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1 teaspoon pepper
- 1 teaspoon oregano
- ½ teaspoon garlic powder
- ½ teaspoon onion powder
- mozzarella sticks
- hot dog buns
- mozzarella cheese slices
- ½ cup pizza sauce
- pepperoni slices (optional)

Mix all seasonings with ground beef. Take a ball of meat and flatten out then wrap around a cheese stick, giving it a hot dog shape. Grill for 15-20 minutes or until the meat is cooked. Add mozzarella cheese slices to hot dog buns and toast under a broiler or on the grill for 3-5 minutes. Place pizza dogs into bun and top with pizza sauce and pepperoni slices if desired. *Serves 5*

**Crystal Hammes • Libertyville
Access Energy Cooperative**

MARINADE FOR GRILLED PORK CHOPS

- ¼ cup soy sauce
- ¼ cup Italian dressing
- 1 teaspoon dry red pepper flakes
- 1 tablespoon sugar
- 3 garlic cloves, minced
- 2 pounds pork chops

Mix all ingredients and marinate pork chops before grilling. *Serves 4*

**Emily Rassi • Rock Rapids
Lyon Rural Electric Cooperative**

WANTED:

THANKSGIVING SIDE DISH RECIPES

THE REWARD:

\$25 FOR EVERY ONE WE PUBLISH!

Deadline is July 31

Please include your name, address, telephone number, co-op name and the recipe category on all submissions. **Also provide the number of servings per recipe.**

EMAIL: recipes@ieclmagazine.com

(Attach your recipe as a Word document or PDF to your email message.)

MAIL: Recipes

Iowa Electric Cooperative Living • 8525 Douglas Ave., Suite 48, Des Moines, IA 50322-2992



WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW BEFORE CONSIDERING SOLAR

BY MIRANDA BOUTELLE

Often, homeowners conflate installing solar at home with energy efficiency. But what most people don't realize is solar is not energy efficiency. Solar is generating energy. Energy efficiency is finding ways to use less energy. While these are not one in the same, both are thought of as beneficial to the environment and a way to save money.

If you are interested in installing solar, it is important to understand your motivations. It may be saving money, concern for the environment or both. Focusing first on energy efficiency can address both motivations.

Here are the five key energy efficiency

considerations to evaluate when adding solar to your home.

1 Energy consumption

Solar systems are sized based on a home's energy needs. The larger the system, the higher the cost. Before installing solar, make sure your home is as energy efficient as possible. That means it will use less energy and allow you to install a smaller solar system – which will save money and reduce your home's environmental impact.

Verify the efficiency of your lighting, HVAC systems and insulation. A fully insulated and air-sealed home uses less energy, and those insulation

measures are less expensive than solar panels. Finish these energy efficiency projects before installing solar.

2 Affordability

Consider your overall out-of-pocket expenses. The expected lifespan of a heating and cooling system is 15 to 25 years. Check the age and condition of your HVAC equipment and consider the expenses of replacement.

3 Roofing

Consider the age, orientation and shade of your roof. It is more difficult and expensive to reroof a home with solar panels. Evaluate if the



roof will need to be replaced before the solar panels need to be replaced.

The best orientation for solar panels is south facing to receive direct light throughout the day. A shaded roof helps keep your home cool in the summertime but reduces solar energy production.

4 Maintenance

A solar system doesn't last forever. Lifespans range from 25 to 30 years. As systems degrade over time, they produce less energy. Maintenance and repairs may be needed.

5 Electric bills and storage

Solar is not "off the grid." Unless you plan to disconnect from your electric co-op, you will still receive a monthly bill.

Solar panels only produce power when the sun is shining. If you want power to your home at other times, like after dark, you need to be connected to your electric co-op or invest in battery storage system, which comes at an additional cost.

During power outages, don't assume solar panels will supply you with power. Typical solar interconnection to the grid requires panels to shut down during a power outage. This protects lineworkers from injury while making repairs.

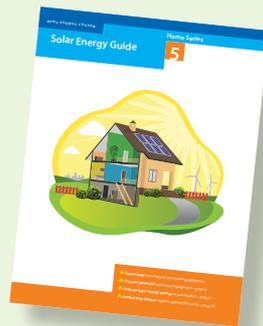
Contact your electric co-op

Solar contractors often work in several utility service territories and may not be familiar with your co-op's offerings, rate structures and interconnection agreements. Before signing an agreement, check with your electric co-op for local information rather than relying on what the contractor says.

As with any other system for your home, get bids from three contractors to compare equipment and pricing. Another option may be community-owned solar. Many electric co-ops offer community solar programs. You may have an option to enjoy the benefits of solar without the responsibilities of ownership and maintenance.

Understanding these considerations before installing solar will ensure you meet your money-saving and environmental goals.

Miranda Boutelle writes on energy efficiency topics for the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association, the national trade association representing more than 900 local electric cooperatives.



SOLAR ENERGY GUIDE

Iowa's electric cooperatives are committed to helping member-consumers make educated energy decisions that make sense for their home or business. Before moving ahead with a solar project, contact your local co-op first and also review the Solar Energy Guide for tips and to learn interconnection requirements.

www.iowarec.org/publications/solar-resources

TOP 10 CONSIDERATIONS BEFORE INSTALLING SOLAR

- 1 Address energy efficiency.** Implementing energy efficiency measures in advance can help reduce your overall energy or water consumption, and subsequently, the size of your solar system.
- 2 Do your homework before writing a check.** Talk to your electric co-op at the outset of the process. Then speak with credible, reputable sources who are skilled professionals that will help guide you through the process.
- 3 Know your co-op's rate structure and policies.** Your co-op will help you understand the rate structure and what type of charges are likely to be incurred. They will also let you know how you will be compensated for the excess, unused energy that is generated by your solar system.
- 4 Analyze your electric load.** Understanding your electricity use and overall energy needs will help determine if solar is a good investment for you.
- 5 Determine costs upfront.** You will likely be responsible for initial upfront costs to install the system, as well as maintenance and repair costs. Doing your homework upfront will help determine if it is economical for your energy needs.
- 6 Research incentives and tax credits.** Visit with your co-op to see if there are financial incentives to offset your investment costs. These are often driven by laws and policies and can vary on the type and size of system.
- 7 Understand responsibilities.** A variety of parties are involved in making a solar project a reality, so it's important to know exactly what tasks and costs you're responsible for.
- 8 Know safety requirements.** Solar is connected to the grid, so it's important that you work with your co-op to ensure you're meeting their requirements to keep the grid reliable and safe.
- 9 Choose a reputable vendor.** It is important to find a reputable installer who will give you realistic expectations. Ask for references, check reviews and ask for third-party input.
- 10 Keep thorough records.** Establish a thorough record-keeping process to retain all data and research you gather.



READY, SET, (YOUR) THERMOSTAT!

BY MIRANDA BOUTELLE

Heating and cooling account for about half the energy used in a typical home, so it's a great place to use less energy. When used wisely, your thermostat can help reduce wasted energy.

An excellent place to start is understanding thermostat types and common operational misconceptions. Then, start implementing best practices.

Types of thermostats

Mechanical thermostats are easy to control by adjusting a dial or sliding switch. The downfall is that you must manually make temperature adjustments, which is easy to forget. They are inefficient because they typically heat or cool the home beyond the set point.

If your cooling is set to 72 degrees, a mechanical thermostat may cool your home to 70 degrees before turning off, wasting energy. Then, it might not come on again until the home reaches 74 degrees. That four-degree temperature change is noticeable and can lead

Use these cooling tips from the DOE to add efficiency and savings to your home:

- Set the thermostat to 78 degrees in the summer when you are home and awake and warmer at night or when away.
- Upgrade to a programmable or smart thermostat that automatically adjusts the temperature throughout the day and when you leave the house.
- When on vacation, set your thermostat to 85 degrees in the summer.
- In the summer, fans let you set your thermostat about 4 degrees warmer without feeling it. Remember, fans cool people not rooms, so turn them off when you leave a room.



Photos: Mark Gilliland, Pioneer Utility Resources

people to adjust the thermostat setting down even more, which wastes more energy.

Also, some mechanical thermostats contain mercury. You can determine that by removing the front plate and looking for small glass bulbs. If your thermostat contains mercury, replace it and find a way to recycle it properly.

Digital thermostats are more accurate and efficient, and some are programmable, which is a great option for people without internet access. Smart thermostats, which require an internet connection, are Wi-Fi-enabled and can be controlled using a smartphone app. Programming is easier, and you can track and manage use and temperature data. However, that data is shared with the manufacturer.

Smart thermostats can learn your preferences and set a schedule that automatically adjusts the temperature. Some even have geofencing, which changes the temperature based on the distance your smartphone is from home.

Misconceptions about thermostats

A common misconception is that the higher you turn your thermostat up or down, the faster your home's temperature changes. Turning your thermostat down to 55 degrees to cool your home faster is like repeatedly pushing the elevator button and expecting it to come faster.

It's likely you will forget you adjusted it and waste energy by over heating or cooling the home. Set your desired temperature for heating and cooling or program your thermostat so you don't make extreme adjustments.

The larger the temperature variance between inside and outside, the more energy your system uses. According to the U.S. Department of Energy, setting your thermostat 7 to 10 degrees from its normal setting for eight hours a day can save up to 10% a year on your energy bill.

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

KEEP YOUR COOL: FIVE TIPS TO STAY SAFE IN EXTREME HEAT

BY ABBY BERRY

The dog days of summer typically bring the warmest, sultriest temperatures of the year. Even if you're a summertime enthusiast, it's important to stay cool during extreme heat.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), more than 700 people die from extreme heat every year in the U.S.

Factors like obesity, age and alcohol intake can impact how a person reacts to extreme heat. High humidity also contributes to heat-related illness because we don't sweat as quickly – meaning our bodies can't release heat as fast – when humidity levels are high.

Take extra steps to cool off, keep hydrated and stay informed. Here are five tips recommended by the CDC to help you stay cool during extremely warm weather:

- 1 Stay in an air-conditioned home or building as much as possible. Limit outdoor activity, especially midday when the sun is hottest. If your home is not air conditioned, call the local health department to locate public facilities or shelters.
- 2 If you must be outdoors, wear loose, light-colored clothing and apply sunscreen often.
- 3 Drink more water than usual. Don't wait until you're thirsty to drink more.
- 4 Take cold showers or baths to cool down.
- 5 Avoid using the oven or stove to cook. These appliances add heat to your home. Try using the microwave or a slow cooker instead.

Remember to look after those who may need extra help. People 65 years



of age or older are at greater risk of heat-related illness, so check on your senior neighbors and friends. Children under the age of two and pets are also more susceptible to heat stroke. Never leave a child or pet in a vehicle, even if only for a minute.

If you work outdoors, use a buddy system to monitor your co-workers and have someone do the same for you!

Heat-induced illness can happen to anyone, even to those who are perfectly healthy. If you're outdoors during extremely warm weather, monitor how you're feeling, stay hydrated and keep an eye on those around you.

Abby Berry writes on consumer and cooperative affairs for the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association, the national trade association representing more than 900 local electric cooperatives.

STAY COOL DURING EXTREME HEAT.



- Limit outdoor activity.
- Stay hydrated.
- Check on friends and neighbors who are at greater risk.

HOW TO SAFELY USE A GENERATOR

Before using a portable generator, it's essential to understand the potential dangers associated with using them, such as their production of carbon monoxide (CO). CO is an odorless, colorless and tasteless poisonous gas that is called the "silent killer" because it is virtually undetectable without the use of technology like CO alarms. Follow these tips when using a generator.

- **Read and follow all manufacturer operating instructions to properly ground the generator.** Be sure you understand the directions before hooking up the generator.
- **A generator is a temporary power source.** It should never be used as a permanent solution.
- **Maintain adequate ventilation because generators emit CO.** It's against fire code to operate a generator in your home, garage or other enclosed building. Place it in a dry location outdoors. The Consumer Product Safety Commission recommends generators be positioned at least 20 feet from doors, windows and vents to prevent CO from entering the home.
- **Never plug a portable electric generator into a wall outlet or connect directly to a home's wiring.** This can energize utility power lines and injure you or others working nearby. Electrical back feed can also damage the generator and home electrical equipment.
- **Turn off the generator and allow cooling before refueling.** Gasoline and its vapors may ignite if they come in contact with hot components or an electric spark. Store fuel in a properly designed container in a secure location away from the generator or other fuel-burning appliances, such as water heaters. Always have a fully charged, approved fire extinguisher located nearby.



- **Protect your appliances.** Turn off or disconnect all appliances and lights before you begin operating the portable generator. Once the generator is running, turn your appliances and lights on one at a time to avoid overloading the unit. Remember, generators are for temporary usage, prioritize your needs.
- **Generators pose electrical risks especially when operated in wet conditions.** Use a generator only when necessary when the weather creates wet or moist conditions. Protect the generator by operating it under an open, canopy-like structure on a dry surface where water cannot form puddles or drain under it. Make sure your hands are dry before touching the generator.
- **Keep children and pets away from portable generators at all times.** Many generator components are hot enough to burn you during operation.
- **Use proper extension cords.** Use only safety-tested, shop-type electrical cords designed and rated for heavier, outdoor use to connect appliances. Many generators are equipped with twist-lock connects to reduce the chance of accidental disconnections due to vibrations.
- **Shut down the generator properly.** Before shutting down a generator, turn off and unplug all appliances and equipment being powered by the generator.
- **Remember maintenance between uses.** Drain the gasoline from the generator while it is being stored. It's also a good idea to inspect the fuel and oil filters, spark plug, oil level and fuel quality, and to start the generator on a regular basis before an emergency situation happens.

For more information, visit Safe Electricity at safeelectricity.org

THE GIFT OF A BRIDGE

BY VALERIE VAN KOOTEN

A much-wanted gift finally materialized about a year ago. Kent and I had always discussed placing a bridge across the creek that separates our land from my parents' and my sister's. Without it, the only way to get to either of them was down our dead-end road and up a gravel one, 1.5 miles out of the way on a busy road.

Kent finally had all the pieces to put our bridge together. Someone was getting rid of a dock on their pond, so he and our son Colin dismantled it, and it became the bridge itself. Iron beams, pipes and whatever other paraphernalia are needed to make a bridge were finally in our possession. We would become bridge builders.

Well, Kent would. I'm not much good in the way of building anything. Even constructing a pillow fort in our living room with the grandkids is fraught with anxiety. So, I cheered on the bridge that would cross the 15 or so feet from bank to bank of what we call Meadow Creek.

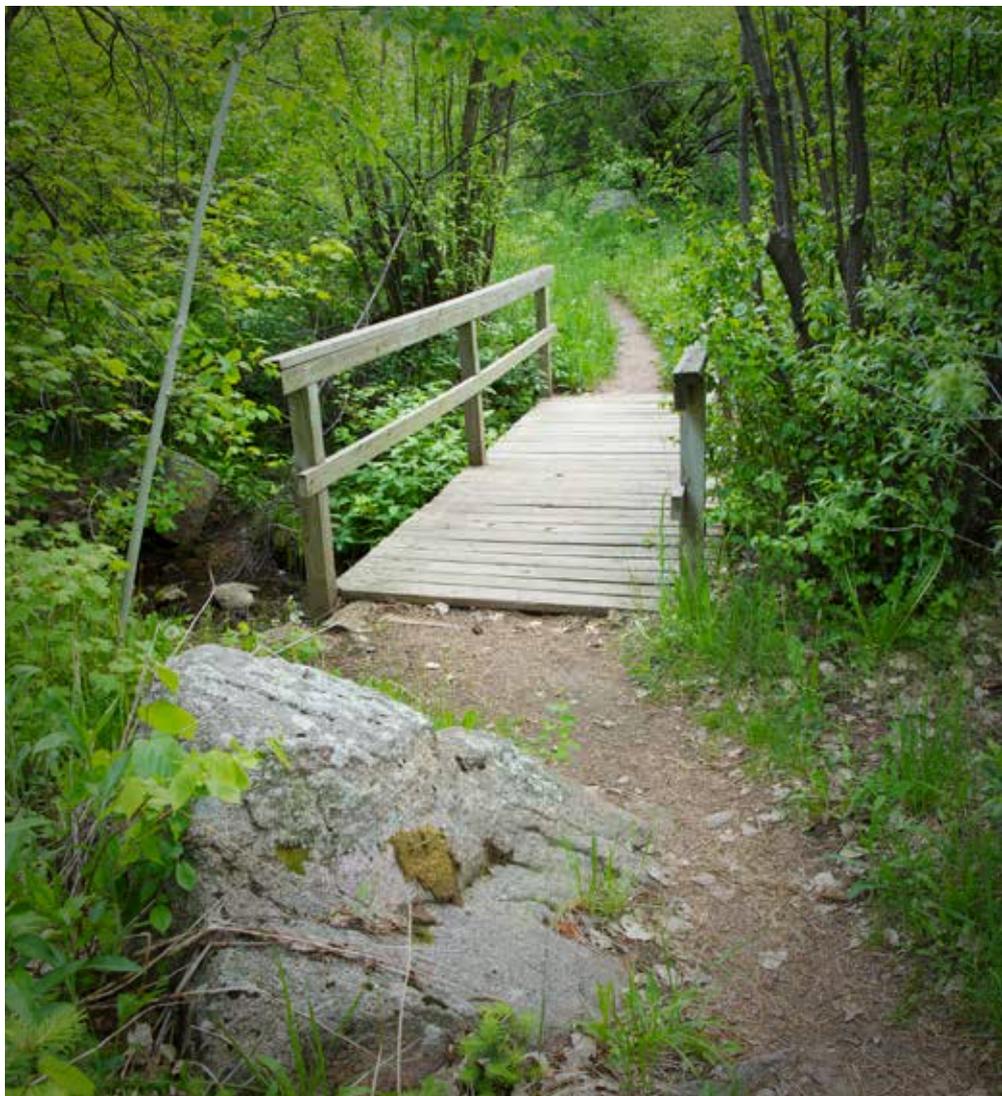
A whole new world

Saying that the bridge changed my life might be a little melodramatic, but it certainly added a depth to my days that I hadn't anticipated. The four of us – my sister, my parents and I – share notes about our 4-wheeler rides and what we've found: a beaver dam, a new fawn, the old foundation of a country school that used to sit on my parents' acres.

I ride out there as frequently as the weather, the crops and my schedule allow. There's the Pig Wood, a stately stand of trees that once housed hogs in A-frames, with the remnants of one still remaining; my folks' cook spot, the site of many bonfires, sledding parties and weenie roasts; and a piece we call "Nebraska," because it's so far out of the way.

Imaginations run wild

At the back of the properties runs



Thunder Creek, a slow, wide stream that travels across the north end of Marion and Mahaska Counties and connects the Des Moines River with the South Skunk River. On a cool evening, I watched the bend that wraps around the north end of the field, and I could almost see the Native Americans who used this creek for a shortcut from one river to the other, canoeing slowly as they progressed. I surveyed the spots where I would put a cabin if I were homesteading in the 1840s. I watched the sun send streams through the Pig Wood, turning it into a medieval glade. My grandson, riding along with me, said,

"It's like a fairy tale, isn't it, Grandma?" and I replied, "It certainly is."

It's hard to describe the love of land where you know you belong. You feel its pull in your blood, in your heritage and in your responsibilities toward it. You can sense the generations that lived there before, whether you are related to them or not.

And in a medieval glade at sundown, you just might find yourself in the middle of a fairy tale.

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



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