

SEPTEMBER 2025

iowa

ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE LIVING

Meet this year's
Shine the Light winners

Election results and report
on annual meeting

Fall apple recipes

New Access Energy Cooperative poster contest ▶ See Page 15

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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!

UPCOMING EVENTS

SEPT. 18	Board meeting
OCT. 16	Board meeting

You can access your account information at any time using SmartHub on our website at www.accessenergycoop.com or through the SmartHub app for mobile devices. Use SmartHub to report outages to save time and ensure that it goes directly into our system to notify us. You can also call our office at 866-242-4232 for account information or to report service-related concerns.



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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SAVING ENERGY DURING PEAK TIMES BENEFITS ALL

BY KEVIN WHEELER



Conserving electricity during peak energy use times not only lowers your monthly bill – it can benefit our entire community.

high-voltage transmission lines to our transmission cooperative Northeast Missouri Electric Power Cooperative; and then travels to Access Energy Cooperative who delivers it to your home or business through distribution power lines.

Why peak times matter

“Peak times” refer to periods of the day when the demand for electricity is highest. Think early mornings when people are getting ready for work or school and evenings when families return home, cook dinner and unwind with electronics. When everyone uses energy at once, it increases demand and adds pressure on the electric grid.

When electricity demand surges during peak times, it's more expensive to generate or purchase power. If supply can't keep up, the risk of outages increases. That's why using less energy during peak hours is more important than ever. It not only eases strain on the grid but also helps you save money.

Access Energy Cooperative works around the clock to ensure that electricity flows to your home whenever you need it. Behind the scenes, an enormous and intricate system is at work – one of the most complex machines in the world: the U.S. power grid. The grid is made up of three major interconnections that span the country, each managing supply and demand through regional authorities to keep the lights on and our economy running smoothly.

Electricity comes from a diverse mix of sources – hydropower, natural gas, coal, solar, wind and more. Some power plants can respond quickly to spikes in demand, while others are less flexible. Once your energy is generated by our power supplier Associated Electric Cooperative, Inc., it travels through

Simple ways to save during peak hours

So how can you “beat the peak”? Start by adjusting your thermostat a few degrees during peak hours. Smart thermostats can automate this for you. Delay using energy-hungry appliances, including ovens, clothes washers and dishwashers until later in the evening. Charging your electric vehicle overnight instead of right after you get home can also help.

Small actions taken by many households can lead to big results. When we all work together to reduce energy use during peak times, we protect our power grid, help control costs and ensure reliable electricity for our communities.

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



AI TOOLS FOR ELECTRIC COOPERATIVES

BY RICARDO ORTIZ



Artificial intelligence (AI) is becoming an increasingly popular tool for many industries and even in our daily lives.

AI is a hot topic – sometimes exciting, and sometimes a little scary. It has the potential to bring many opportunities (and challenges) to our lives. However, machine learning takes time, and the reality is that we're still in the process of determining the best way to use AI.

Many electric cooperatives are already exploring emerging AI technologies. Most of their current applications are task-specific – like analyzing data to better understand members' needs.

What AI means for electric cooperatives

Contrary to what Hollywood would have you believe, AI can't think for itself. Its abilities depend on how it's programmed and the quality of the training and data it receives. AI is just using pattern data and making decisions based on that input – not

about having actual thoughts or opinions of its own.

AI relies heavily on data centers, which require massive amounts of fluctuating electrical demand to operate, creating a particularly energy-intensive strain on our nation's electrical grid. This could lead to instability and a higher risk of outages, especially in areas that are already dealing with high energy use or aging infrastructure.

Also, because AI can potentially interact with both internal systems and external networks, cybersecurity is a top priority. As Access Energy Cooperative looks to adopt tools powered by AI and other tech, we work diligently to ensure our systems are safe from potential cyber threats. Strong, layered digital defenses are essential for safely using any new technology.

Looking ahead with purpose and caution

As we consider emerging and evolving AI tools, our focus will be on solving real problems. If AI can streamline



processes, predict issues or improve service for our members, it's worth considering. For example, it could enable crews to be deployed more efficiently during storm outages.

Ultimately, well-thought-out AI-based tools can help cooperatives like ours serve their communities better – making energy more reliable, services faster and operations more efficient. However, while AI tools offer great potential in improving utility operations, there are still challenges involving the growing tension between AI advancement and the long-term capability of the grid.

Ricardo Ortiz is the information technology administrator for Access Energy Cooperative.

YOUR FEEDBACK IS REQUESTED

During September and October 2025, Access Energy Cooperative's power supplier – Associated Electric Cooperative Inc. – will be conducting a survey that is done every two years to measure the quality of service provided to you and to ensure reliable service in the future. If you are randomly selected to participate, the survey will ask questions about your satisfaction with Access Energy Cooperative and your energy usage.

Your opinion is very important, and we want to ensure that member opinions are represented in the final results for our cooperative. If you receive an email invitation to participate, we encourage you to take the opportunity to provide your feedback.

You may receive an email invitation to participate in the online survey sometime this month. The email will come from Access Energy Cooperative (surveys@cooperativesurvey.com) with the subject: Access Energy Cooperative Wants to Know What You Think. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact us at contactus@accessenergycoop.com.

If you do not complete the survey, you may receive a reminder email requesting participation. We appreciate your help!

TIPS TO AVOID ENERGY SCAMS ⚠️

Solar energy is rising in popularity, and so are solar scams. If a salesperson knocks on your door promising free solar panels at zero cost or that you'll never have to pay your energy bill again, it's likely a scam. If you're interested in solar panels for your home, do your research, get multiple quotes from licensed providers who are reputable, and most importantly, take your time to ensure a smooth process.

Source: Federal Trade Commission



BOARD OFFICERS

Following the annual meeting of members, during the reorganizational meeting of the board of directors, the following were elected as the officers of the Access Energy Cooperative board of directors:



Marvin Larson
President



David Hollingsworth
Vice President



Michael Holtkamp
Secretary



William Benjamin
Treasurer

Congratulations to Access Energy Cooperative member **Everett Lacey**, winner of the grand prize of a \$250 bill credit.

Dividend checks for 2025 totaling \$1,065,831 were available for members to pick up at the meeting. For those who were unable to make it to the meeting, checks were mailed the week of Aug. 18.

THE POWER OF BEING LOCAL

“At Access Energy Cooperative, we exist simply to provide for our members’ needs. It is people who make the difference – the cooperative difference for safe, reliable, efficient service,” stated Kevin Wheeler, general Manager/CEO, during his report to the members of Access Energy Cooperative at the 2025 Annual Meeting of Members at McMillan Park in Mount Pleasant on Aug. 5.

Jake McVey provided the members with awesome entertainment for the evening. Mount Pleasant Hy-Vee served a great meal, accompanied with homemade ice cream from Hinterland Dairy, Donnellson. Kids enjoyed inflatable activities from Fields of Fun, pony rides by Windy Acres, and Drive-a-Tractor by the Proennecke brothers and Dick McGohan. Henry County Public Health, Impact for Life and the Henry County Sheriff’s office displayed information and interacted with members in addition to cooperative employees providing information on electrical safety, SmartHub, energy efficiency and understanding demand.

“Access Energy Cooperative thoroughly and sincerely appreciates the assistance and participation from every individual and organization who help make this event happen for our members, including those unseen like Quality Equipment, Mount Pleasant VFW, Staats, Midwest Old Threshers, City of Mount Pleasant, Lance Refuse, Yotty’s Golf Carts, United Rentals, Printgroup, spouses of employees and former employees, Northeast Missouri Electric Power Cooperative and Associated Electric Cooperative, Inc., employees,” added Kimberly Davis, director of member services and public relations for Access Energy Cooperative.

Following reports from the cooperative officers during the business portion of the event, election results were reported by the cooperative attorney.

Virgil Symmonds was elected in district one, **Robert (Bob) Breazeale** was elected in district two and **Marvin Newton** was elected in district three to serve three-year terms each.

DIRECTORS ELECTED AT THE ANNUAL MEETING FOR A THREE-YEAR TERM EACH



Virgil Symmonds
District 1



Robert (Bob) Breazeale
District 2



Marvin Newton
District 3

Natalie Steele shared information about her experience on the national electric cooperative Youth Tour to Washington, D.C.



Annual meeting attendees enjoyed entertainment from the talented Jake McVey.



ANNUAL MEETING SNAPSHOTS

Access Energy Cooperative's youngest members enjoyed pony rides from Windy Acres at the annual meeting.

Live safety demonstration.



Members picked up dividend checks and free gifts.



The sun set on a fantastic evening of engaging with Access Energy Cooperative members.



Members enjoyed playing giant lawn games.



The Drive-a-Tractor event from the Proenneke brothers was enjoyed by all ages.



Inflatable activities from Fields of Fun were a hit with the kids.

ANNUAL MEETING PRIZE WINNERS

\$50 electric credit

- Mark Panther
- Jeffrey L Graber
- Michael L Ledger
- Dennis Smithburg
- Kenneth Thomas

\$25 electric credit

- David L McIntyre
- Woodrow Farms
- Brenden Hill
- David Sugars
- Mitch Yaley
- Brendan Tebbs
- Martin Jacobs
- Bradley Huston
- Sammy Carlson
- PNB Processing

\$100 bill credit (from mailed ballots)

- Andy Hardin

\$100 bill credit (from voting online)

- Jeff Seitz

\$250 grand prize

- Everett Lacey



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 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ 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
- 1 $\frac{3}{4}$ 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

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:
\$25 FOR EVERY
ONE WE PUBLISH!

Deadline is Sept. 30

Submit your favorite recipes for vegetarian meals. Please include your name, address, telephone number, co-op name, recipe category and number of servings on all submissions.

EMAIL: recipes@ieclmagazine.com

MAIL: Recipes

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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.

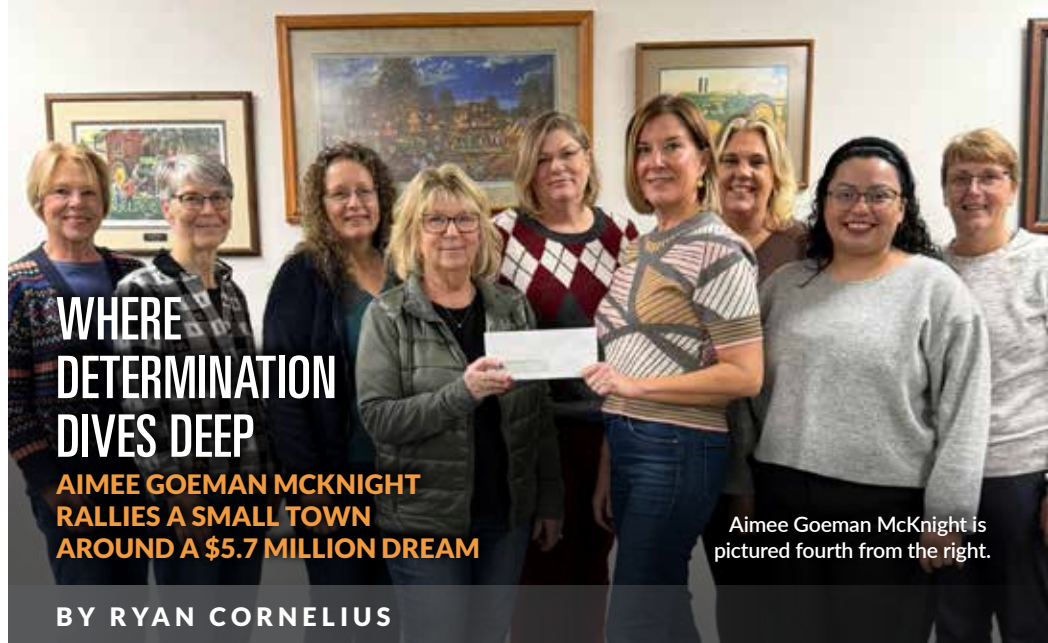
"These dogs really do save lives," he said.

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.

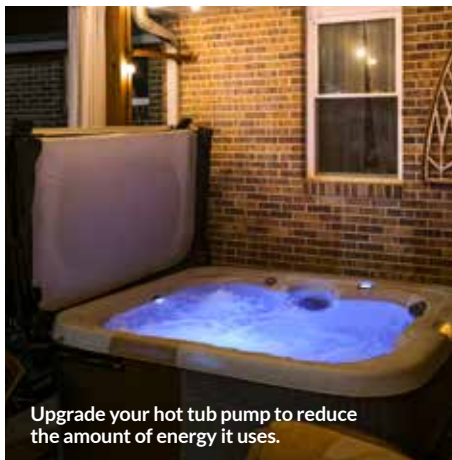
Let's see if we can find some hidden energy savings for you.

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).

NEW THIS YEAR — POSTER CONTEST

We are doing something a little different for the 2027 calendar (2025-2026 contest)! We are taking a break from the annual collection of photos for our calendar and will instead be filling it with posters about electrical safety. Each winning entry will win \$100!

Thirteen posters will be chosen to be featured in the 2027 Access Energy Cooperative calendar. Winning posters also will be featured on our website, social media and in this publication. Plus, they will be featured at the next Annual Meeting of Members.

WHAT TO SUBMIT AND CONTEST RULES

Theme: The poster should include a brief electrical safety message with visually appealing graphics, pictures or images that support the theme.

Additional requirements

- Posters must be 11 inches wide x 8.5 inches tall
- Posters must be HORIZONTAL
- Posters must be original two-dimensional work in any medium (colors, markers, acrylics, oils, etc.)
- Original posters must be mailed or delivered to our office – DO NOT FOLD or BEND
- Photocopies and digital images cannot be accepted
- Entrants may submit more than one poster, but can only win once
- Posters should be appropriate for an audience of families and children

Entries must include the following information on the back of the poster:

- Entrant's name(s) with age(s)
- Address, phone number and email address (if submitted by a group or family, provide only one address)
- Member account number (if entrant is a member)
- Title or main message of poster

Who can enter

- There is no age limit to participate
- Posters may be created by individuals, families or groups
- Posters must be submitted by people living in a county where Access Energy Cooperative serves members (Davis, Des Moines, Henry, Jefferson, Keokuk, Lee, Louisa, Van Buren, Wapello and Washington counties)

Timeline

- Poster contest entries can be submitted beginning Aug. 1, 2025
- Deadline to submit posters is March 31, 2026
- Winners will be chosen and announced in April 2026
- Winning posters will appear in the 2027 Access Energy Cooperative calendar, which will be distributed at the 2026 Annual Meeting of Members
- All posters submitted will be displayed at the 2026 Annual Meeting of Members

Where to submit

Posters can be delivered to:
Access Energy Cooperative
1800 West Washington Street
Mount Pleasant, Iowa 52641

Or mailed to:
Poster Contest
Access Energy Cooperative
PO Box 440, Mount Pleasant, Iowa 52641

Scan the QR Code
for the complete
contest rules.



HELP OTHERS BY CONTRIBUTING TO RECare

RECare is a program where members help other members in need. You may make a one-time monetary contribution to the RECare program or include an amount each month with your monthly electric bill.

You can use SmartHub to have a monthly amount included on your electric bill:

1. Log in to your SmartHub account. Go to the Bill & Pay dropdown on the left. Select RECare, and follow instructions; or
2. Use the form below and mail to:

RECare
c/o Access Energy Cooperative
P.O. Box 440
Mount Pleasant, IA 52641

Or, include the form below with your payment.



RECare Consumer Authorization Form

I would like to make a (check one):

- ☐ One-time contribution of \$ _____
- ☐ Monthly contribution of \$ _____
(That will be added to my bill)

Name _____

Address _____

City _____

State/Zip Code _____

Phone # _____

Email _____

Account # (if known) _____



IOWA ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE LIVING

The magazine
for members of
Iowa's electric
cooperatives

September 2025

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