

● DECEMBER 2025

iowa

ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE LIVING

Your guide to
smarter electronics

Youth program materials
now available

Holiday appetizer recipes

Enter the safety poster contest for a chance to win \$100! ▶ See Page 5

CONTENTS



VOLUME 78 • ISSUE 12

3

STATEWIDE PERSPECTIVE

Leading through
change

3

EDITOR'S CHOICE CONTEST

Win a smart bird feeder
with camera

14

HOW YOUR CO-OP WORKS

Serve on the co-op
nominating committee

15

IN THE COMMUNITY

Participate in the
holiday gift drive

EDITOR
Ann Foster Thelen

DESIGNERS
Megan Walters
Bree Glenn
Lorelai O'Hara

**IAEC DIRECTOR OF
COMMUNICATIONS**
Erin Campbell

**IAEC EXECUTIVE
VICE PRESIDENT**
Leslie Kaufman

IAEC BOARD OF DIRECTORS
Jim Miller, District 5 – President
Gordon Greimann, District 6 – Vice President
Tony Lem, District 2 – Secretary/Treasurer
Jerry Keleher, District 3 – Asst. Secretary/Treasurer
Travis Harris, District 1
Steve Inskeep, District 4
Bruce Amundson, District 7
Marion Denger, Prairie Energy Cooperative –
NRECA Representative
Terry Sullivan, Corridor Energy Cooperative –
Managers' Representative

Iowa Electric Cooperative Living magazine (ISSN: 2770-8683) is published monthly by the Iowa Association of Electric Cooperatives, a not-for-profit organization representing Iowa's member-owned local electric cooperatives. Association address: 8525 Douglas Ave., Suite 48, Des Moines, IA 50322-2992. The phrase **Iowa Electric Cooperative Living** is a mark registered within the state of Iowa to the Iowa Association of Electric Cooperatives. The magazine does not accept advertising.

Editorial Office
8525 Douglas Ave., Suite 48, Des Moines, IA 50322-2992. Telephone: 515-276-5350.

Email Address
editor@ieclmagazine.com. *Iowa Electric Cooperative Living* magazine does not assume responsibility for unsolicited items.

Website
www.ieclmagazine.com

Postmaster
Send address changes to *Iowa Electric Cooperative Living* magazine, 8525 Douglas Ave., Suite 48, Des Moines, IA 50322-2992. Periodicals Postage Paid at Des Moines, Iowa, and at additional mailing offices.

Change of Address
Every local electric cooperative maintains an independent mailing list of its members, so please send your change of address directly to your local electric cooperative's office. *Iowa Electric Cooperative Living* magazine cannot make an address change for you.

© Copyright 2025, Iowa Association of Electric Cooperatives. No portion of the editorial, photographic or other content of *Iowa Electric Cooperative Living* magazine or its website may be reproduced without written permission of the editor.



**Iowa Association of
Electric Cooperatives**
* A Touchstone Energy* Cooperative

ON THE COVER

Special thanks to Kim Scharfenkamp, a Southwest Iowa REC member-consumer, for supplying this month's cover image. Submit high-resolution photos for consideration to editor@ieclmagazine.com. You could receive \$100!

LEADING THROUGH CHANGE

BY JIM MILLER



By the time you read this column, the Iowa Association of Electric Cooperatives (IAEC) will have held its 2025 Annual

Meeting in West Des Moines with the theme of “Leading through Change.” And that’s the perfect phrase to describe my first year serving as IAEC board president.

Growing connections

I’ve been reflecting on what the trade association for Iowa’s locally owned and governed electric co-ops has accomplished in 2025, and we worked hard to engage with our member co-ops on new levels. For example, Leslie Kaufman, IAEC executive vice president and general manager, made it a priority to attend Iowa electric co-op board meetings and staff safety meetings across the state during her first year on the job. During these visits, she learned about our members’ priorities and challenges as our industry experiences rapid change.

Coordinated advocacy, united voice

I’m proud of how the statewide association engaged with our member co-ops during the 2025 Iowa Legislative Session as we advocated to safeguard electric service territory protections for the rural families, farms, businesses and communities we serve. We’re seeing more co-op board directors and co-op staff engage with their local legislators and other community leaders on this issue, and we were successful in changing the direction of proposed legislation that would have diminished Iowa’s long-standing service territory law.

When session ended in May, the statewide policy and advocacy

team rolled up their sleeves and developed a framework tool. It includes member input to analyze and define our statewide position on policy issues and aid in prioritizing resources to accomplish advocacy objectives. This tool will help our statewide staff work proactively on behalf of Iowa’s electric cooperatives as we lead through change.

We have built incredible momentum in 2025 that will propel us to the start of the 2026 Legislative Session next month. We anticipate another active session of challenges to the proven cooperative business model of self-governance and member ownership. IAEC will continue to unify and leverage the voices of board directors, employees and other member-consumers of Iowa’s electric cooperatives to advocate for safe, affordable, reliable and sustainable

power. We embrace leadership from all levels of our membership as we work with key stakeholders on local, state and federal tiers.

A focus on co-op members

Now is the time to lead through change, and we will have ample opportunities to do so in the electric utility industry. It all points back to our electric cooperative purpose and our collective mission: to power lives and empower communities. Because electric co-ops are owned by the members we serve, our focus is always on you.

It has been an honor and a privilege to serve as your statewide board president this year. I wish you and your family a blessed holiday season and a prosperous 2026.

Jim Miller is the board president of the Iowa Association of Electric Cooperatives.

EDITOR'S CHOICE CONTEST

WIN A SMART BIRD FEEDER

The 2K HD camera on this smart bird feeder captures the vibrant colors and behaviors of every bird at your feeder. Every detail is recorded with crystal-clear clarity. Receive instant notification whenever birds are detected. Note: Some advanced AI features require a subscription, and new users get a 30-day free trial.

If you don't subscribe, core functions like live viewing and sharing still work as usual. For more details, visit www.ieclmagazine.com/editors-choice-contest.

Visit our website and win!

Enter this month's contest by visiting www.ieclmagazine.com no later than Dec. 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 Lodge cast iron skillet set from the October issue was **Les Elgin**, a **Guthrie County Rural Electric Cooperative** member-consumer.



ENTER ONLINE BY DEC. 31!

UPCOMING EVENTS

DEC. 9	Holiday gift drive ends
DEC. 18	Board meeting
DEC. 24-25	Office closed
JAN. 1	Office closed
JAN. 21	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.

The directors and staff of Access Energy Cooperative wish you and your families a safe and joyous holiday season!



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

Office: Access Energy Cooperative
1800 W. Washington St., P.O. Box 440
Mount Pleasant, Iowa 52641
Phone: 319-385-1577 or 866-242-4232
Fax: 319-385-6873
Website: www.accessenergycoop.com
Facebook: facebook.com/AccessEnergyCoop
Email: contactus@accessenergycoop.com
Office Hours: Monday-Thursday, 7 a.m.-4:30 p.m.
Friday, 7 a.m.-3:30 p.m.
Call our office 24/7: 319-385-1577

Payments can be placed in dropbox by flag pole in front of office. Visa, MasterCard and Discover accepted.
Call Before You Dig (Iowa One Call): 8-1-1

General Manager/CEO: Kevin Wheeler

Editor: Kimberly Davis

Officers and Directors:

Marvin Larson, District 1, President
mlarson@accessenergycoop.com

David Hollingsworth, District 1, Vice President
dhollingsworth@accessenergycoop.com

Michael Holtkamp, District 3, Secretary
maholtkamp@accessenergycoop.com

William Benjamin, District 3, Treasurer
wbenjamin@accessenergycoop.com

Jerry Barker, District 2, Director
jbarker@accessenergycoop.com

Robert Breazeale, District 2, Director
rbreazeale@accessenergycoop.com

Marvin Newton, District 3, Director
mnewton@accessenergycoop.com

Virgil Symmonds, District 1, Director
vsymmonds@accessenergycoop.com

Larry White, District 2, Director
lwhite@accessenergycoop.com

This institution is an equal opportunity provider.

THE MAGIC OF HOLIDAY MEMORIES: FROM SNOWFLAKES TO SMILES

BY KEVIN WHEELER



The holidays have a way of stirring up the deepest parts of our hearts. They're wrapped in joy, laughter and togetherness, but

also tinged with longing, especially for those we have loved and lost or for family we wish were closer. It's a season that reminds us to cherish what we have, reflect on what we've had and create new memories that will one day be the stories we tell.

From childhood wonder to grown-up traditions

As kids, the holidays meant piling into the car, bundled up like marshmallows, heading to Grandma and Grandpa's house. The smell of turkey and noodles, the sound of cousins, and the thrill of seeing presents under the tree, those moments are etched in our minds like snowflakes on a windowpane. And somewhere in the background, "A Christmas Story" played on repeat, Ralphie dreaming of his Red Ryder BB gun, the leg lamp glowing in all its "major award" glory and the timeless reminder that even when things go hilariously wrong, the holidays are still perfect in their own quirky way.

Then came the years when we became the hosts, setting the table with care, hanging stockings just right and trying to recreate the magic we once knew. Parents and siblings gathered around, sharing stories that made us laugh until we cried. My dad, somehow, still has tales I've never heard – little gems from his childhood or early years that surface unexpectedly and feel like gifts all their own. The house was full, not just with people, but with love.

Later, we found ourselves watching our own children light up with wonder, their eyes wide at the sight of twinkling lights and gifts under the tree. And now, for some of us,

it's the grandkids who steal the show reminding us that the magic of the holidays doesn't disappear with time, it simply finds new hearts to live in.

Finding beauty in the chaos of the season

We all dream of that perfect Hallmark holiday: a white Christmas, twinkling lights and a cozy fire. But let's be honest, when the snow does show up, it usually brings its rowdy cousins: bitter wind and icy roads. Still, there's something charming about the unpredictability. It makes the warm cocoa taste sweeter, the hugs feel tighter and the memories even more vivid.

So, whether your holiday is loud and bustling or quiet and reflective, may it be filled with moments that matter. Call a friend. Hug your people. Laugh at the chaos. And if the snow comes, let it remind you that beauty often arrives with a little bit of mess.

Here's to the memories we hold and the ones we're still making. Happy Holidays from our hearts to yours.

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

TIPS TO AVOID ENERGY SCAMS



Look out for the "energy-saving device" scam. Whether sold on social media platforms or through random emails, consumers have fallen victim to scams where these products claim to reduce or even eliminate energy bills. These products are advertised as devices that will "balance" or "clean" the power in your home, thus saving you money. There is no such device that can simply be plugged in to lower energy use.



EMPOWERING THE NEXT GENERATION: YOUTH PROGRAMS AVAILABLE

BY KIMBERLY DAVIS



As part of our ongoing commitment to supporting youth, education and community involvement, we're proud to offer a

variety of programs designed to inspire and empower young people.

Each year, students have the opportunity to participate in a Youth Tour trip to Washington, D.C., where they explore the nation's capital, meet with elected officials, and learn firsthand how government and cooperatives work together to shape our future.

We also invest in education through college scholarships, which help local students pursue their academic and career goals. By supporting their ambitions, we're building stronger communities for generations to come.

Youth Tour – June 14-20, 2026

Access Energy Cooperative sponsors up to two students per year on an all-expenses-paid Youth Tour trip to Washington, D.C.

Applications will be accepted through Feb. 28, 2026. Students must attend a school in southeast Iowa in one of the 10 counties served by the cooperative. A personal interview is required of each applicant on March 12, 2026, at our office to qualify. Applications and details can be found on our website at accessenergycoop.com, at all area school guidance offices or by calling our office at 866-242-4232.



Safety education

Safety is another cornerstone of our outreach. Applicants or groups of any age can showcase their creativity in our Safety Poster Contest, promoting awareness of electrical safety in fun and engaging ways. Twelve winners will be chosen from the contest entries to win \$100.

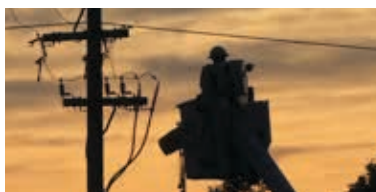
Applications will be accepted through March 31, 2026, and can be found along with further details, on our website at accessenergycoop.com, at all area school guidance offices or by calling our office at 866-242-4232.

**2025-2026
POSTER CONTEST
FOR ALL AGES**
13 winners will be displayed
in the 2027 calendar and
will receive \$100.
Deadline March 31, 2026

Lineworker scholarship program

Access Energy Cooperative offers \$2,000 scholarships to students enrolled, or planning to enroll, in a one- or two-year electric lineworker program.

Applications will be accepted through March 15, 2026. The applicant must reside in southeast Iowa in the general service area of cooperative but is not required to be a member. Applications and details can be found on our website at accessenergycoop.com, at all area school guidance offices or by calling our office at 866-242-4232.



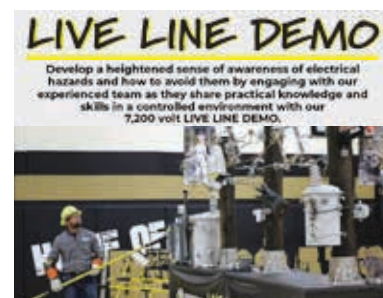
Scholarship program

Access Energy Cooperative offers \$1,500 scholarships to high school seniors. Applications will be accepted through March 15, 2026. The parent or guardian of the applicant must be a member of the cooperative and live at a property receiving service from the cooperative. Applications and details can be found on our website at accessenergycoop.com, at all area school guidance offices or by calling our office at 866-242-4232.



Live line safety demonstrations

Access Energy Cooperative offers interactive learning experiences that teach important lessons about the power – and potential danger – of electricity. The cooperative offers these demonstrations to middle school and high school students, as well as area emergency personnel, and other groups as requested. Contact our member services department for more information on scheduling a safety demonstration for your group. Safety educational demonstrations are also available for elementary students by emailing to contactus@accessenergycoop.com.



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



YOUR GUIDE TO SMARTER ELECTRONICS

BY SCOTT FLOOD

Wouldn't it be great to wake up on a sunny morning, say "Good morning, house!," and stand back as the right light fixtures flash on, the coffee maker starts, the outdoor security lighting switches off and the toaster oven starts preheating for your frozen toaster pastry? That may sound like something from science fiction, but today's smart home electronics make it possible.

Smart devices use digital technology and Wi-Fi to take your home to a new level of convenience and comfort. They can also help you

make better use of your electricity so you can reduce waste and lower your energy bills.

Even if you've already put the many advantages of smart electronics to work for your home and family, you might be surprised by some of the newer devices with the potential to change your daily life.

Smart thermostats

Heating and cooling use more energy than anything else in your home. Replacing your home's standard thermostat with a smart model can lower your monthly electric

bills while keeping you even more comfortable. Smart thermostats learn your daily habits and take over for you. You won't have to lower your thermostat every evening, because it will happen automatically. Because smart thermostats know exactly when you need electricity and when you don't, they waste a lot less.

Smart appliances

The second-biggest share of your home's electricity powers appliances, from your refrigerator to your water heater. Smart appliances use Wi-Fi and high-tech sensors to operate

more efficiently. A smart washer can sense the size of your load and adjust the water and cycle times accordingly. Smart refrigerators can warn you when the kids leave the door open. And smart water heaters don't waste energy by heating water while you're asleep.

Smart plugs and power strips

An easy and affordable way to explore smart technology is with smart plugs, which plug into your wall outlets. You can then plug lighting, appliances and other devices directly into them. You'll be able to control all those devices through a single app, so you can tell the coffeemaker when to start brewing, turn your exterior accent lighting off at dawn or have your favorite music already streaming as you walk in the door.

Smart power strips look like their ordinary cousins but use smart plugs. They're particularly helpful at eliminating waste caused by

what's known as "phantom load" – like leaving your phone charger plugged in when it's not charging.

Smart shades

You wish your family room didn't face south, because it's always warm during the day. Smart shades and blinds can help. You can set them to automatically open or close depending on the time of day (and year) or based on your home's indoor temperature. They can help your air conditioner keep you cooler for less.

Smart assistants

When you combine the capabilities of individual smart home electronics with voice assistants like Amazon Alexa or whole-home smart energy management systems, they become even more powerful. You can teach voice assistants to carry out multiple tasks that make up your daily routines, like the "good morning, house" message. Energy management systems simplify control

of all aspects of your home's energy use, and some offer specific tips to help you save even more.

Be smart with your smart devices

While all those smart devices may be able to make your home more energy efficient and your life more comfortable, they're not perfect. Most require an internet connection, so if your service is down, your smart devices won't work, either.

Smart devices typically don't receive frequent system updates like your smartphone or laptop, so be aware of potential security issues. Before you choose a smart home device, make sure it's completely secure and compatible with what you have. Then prepare to be amazed by what smart home electronics will do for you!

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





CRANBERRY FETA ROLL-UPS

- $\frac{3}{4}$ cup dried sweetened cranberries
- 1 8-ounce package cream cheese, softened
- $\frac{3}{4}$ cup feta, crumbled (not reduced fat)
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup green onion, diced
- 2 large tortillas, spinach or wheat flavor

Combine all ingredients except for tortillas. Lay tortillas out flat. Divide ingredients between the two tortillas and spread all the way to the edge. Roll tortillas up tightly, wrap in plastic and refrigerate for at least 1 hour. Trim ends of roll slightly, then cut each roll into 12 slices. These can be made one day ahead of time and sliced before serving. *Yields 24 slices*

Mary Ellen Metzger • Rockwell City
Calhoun County Electric Cooperative Association

MEATLOAF APPETIZERS

- 2 slices bread
- 2 pounds hamburger
- 1 pound sausage
- 2 eggs, beaten
- 2 tablespoons onion, chopped
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup milk, approximately
- bacon
- barbecue sauce, optional

Break bread into small pieces. Mix bread pieces in a dish with hamburger, sausage, eggs and onion. Add milk and use fork to moisten hamburger mixture, add more milk as needed. Shape mixture into balls, wrap in bacon and seal ends of bacon with toothpicks. Bake at 350 degrees F for 1 hour, then add barbecue sauce to half or all, if desired. Return to oven for 15 minutes, or until hot.

Susan Ausborn • Ventura
Prairie Energy Cooperative

CHICKEN NUT ROLL

- 1 12.5-ounce can chicken
- 1 8-ounce package cream cheese, softened
- 3 tablespoons green onion, diced
- 1 teaspoon garlic powder
- 1 tablespoon Hidden Valley Ranch dry seasoning
- 1 tablespoon lemon juice
- $\frac{3}{4}$ cup walnuts, chopped, divided
- 2 stalks celery, chopped
- 2 tablespoons pimentos, well drained, optional
- crackers

Mix all ingredients, except crackers, using half of the walnuts. Form mixture into a log, star or Christmas tree shape. Sprinkle remaining walnuts over top of mixture. Refrigerate for 4 hours, or overnight. Serve with crackers. *Serves 6-8*

Nancy Anderson • Ankeny
Prairie Energy Cooperative

HANKY PANKY'S

- 1 pound ground beef
- 1 pound spicy pork sausage
- 1 pound Velveeta cheese
- 1 teaspoon Worcestershire sauce
- 1 teaspoon oregano
- $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon garlic salt
- $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon salt
- $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon pepper
- 2 packages party rye bread

Brown meat and drain. Add cheese, stir until melted, then add seasonings. Spread on rye bread. Bake at 350 degrees F until brown, approximately 10-15 minutes. *Serves 10-15*

Michael Treiber • Battle Creek
North West Rural Electric Cooperative

GINGERBREAD CHEESECAKE DIP

- 1 8-ounce package cream cheese, softened
- $\frac{3}{4}$ cup dark brown sugar, packed
- 2 tablespoons whole milk
- $\frac{3}{4}$ teaspoon ground cinnamon
- $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon pure vanilla extract
- $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon ground ginger
- $\frac{1}{8}$ teaspoon ground nutmeg
- $\frac{1}{8}$ teaspoon salt
- 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ cups whipped cream
- sprinkles, optional
- gingerbread cookies

In a large bowl, beat cream cheese until smooth. Add brown sugar, milk, cinnamon, vanilla, ginger, nutmeg and salt. Beat until smooth and combined. Add whipped cream and gently fold to combine. Transfer dip to a serving bowl and top with sprinkles, if desired. Serve with gingerbread cookies.

Marilyn O'Brien • Geneva
Franklin Rural Electric Cooperative

HAM-WRAPPED OLIVE SHRIMP

- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup olive oil
- 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoons lemon zest
- 3 tablespoons fresh lemon juice
- $\frac{3}{4}$ teaspoon dried crushed red pepper
- $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon salt
- 30 large raw shrimp, peeled (about 1 pound)
- 10 deli ham slices, thinly sliced
- 30 pimento-stuffed Spanish olives

In a large bowl, whisk together the first five ingredients. Add shrimp and toss to coat. Cover and chill for 30 minutes. Preheat broiler with oven rack 5 $\frac{1}{2}$ inches from heat. Cut each ham slice into three lengthwise strips. Wrap each strip around one shrimp and one olive, secure with a wooden toothpick. Place wrapped shrimp on a large, lightly greased baking sheet. Repeat process with remaining ham, shrimp and olives. Broil 3 minutes on each side or until each shrimp turns pink. Arrange appetizers on a serving platter and serve hot. These can be made ahead and refrigerated, then broiled just before serving. *Yields 30 appetizers*

Kary Blunk • Russell
Chariton Valley Electric Cooperative, Inc.

SAUSAGE WONTONS

- 12 wonton wrappers
- 1 pound ground sausage, crumbled
- 1 teaspoon seasoned salt
- 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ cups cheddar cheese, shredded
- 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ cups Monterey jack cheese, shredded
- 1 cup buttermilk ranch dressing
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup green pepper, chopped
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup red pepper, chopped

Lightly grease a 12-cup muffin tin. Press one wonton wrapper in each muffin cup. Bake at 350 degrees F for 5 minutes, until lightly browned. Remove and let cool on cookie sheet. In a skillet over medium heat, brown ground sausage and seasoned salt. Drain grease from sausage. In a bowl, combine sausage with cheddar cheese, Monterey jack cheese, ranch dressing and peppers. Mix with spatula until combined. Fill each cooked wonton with mixture and place in muffin pan. Bake at 350 degrees F for 5-6 minutes. *Serves 12*

Julie Allison • Marshalltown
Consumers Energy

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



SAUSAGE CHEESE BALLS

- 2 packages Jimmy Dean Sausage, uncooked
- 1 16-ounce package shredded sharp cheddar cheese
- 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ cups all-purpose baking biscuit mix
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup celery, finely chopped
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup onion, finely chopped
- $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon garlic powder
- barbecue sauce, optional

Mix first six ingredients together and form into 1-inch balls. Bake on a cookie sheet at 375 degrees F for 15 minutes, or until golden brown. They can be served with barbecue sauce in a slow cooker on low. *Yields 6 dozen, approximately*

Karen Caldwell • Albion
Chariton Valley Electric Cooperative, Inc.

SIMPLE BACON CHEESE BALL

- 2 8-ounce packages cream cheese, softened
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup sour cream
- 8 ounces cheddar cheese, shredded
- $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon garlic powder
- $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon onion powder
- pepper, to taste
- bacon bits

Mix all ingredients, except bacon bits, together until smooth. Shape into a ball and chill for 1 hour, then roll in bacon bits. Wrap in plastic wrap and chill until ready to serve. *Serves 15-20*

Rebecca Hancox • Plano
Chariton Valley Electric Cooperative, Inc.

WANTED:

BREAKFAST & BRUNCH RECIPES

THE REWARD:

\$25 FOR EVERY ONE WE PUBLISH!

Deadline is Dec. 31

From egg bakes and casseroles to cinnamon rolls and power bowls – we want your best **breakfast and brunch recipes!** Recipes will appear in our April issue. 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
Iowa Electric Cooperative Living magazine
8525 Douglas Ave., Suite 48
Des Moines, IA 50322



HOLIDAY LIGHTS: CANDLELIGHT TO CO-OP POWER

How Christmas lights and rural electrification brought warmth, color and connection to Iowa homes

BY SAFE ELECTRICITY AND ANN FOSTER THELEN

Long before electricity, people brightened the dark winter months with firelight, from the burning of the Yule log to candles placed around the home. The first recorded candlelit Christmas trees appeared in Germany in 1660 and eventually spread across Europe, reaching the U.S. later in the century.

While the glow of the candles was festive, it also posed a serious fire hazard, so the light could only be enjoyed for a short time.

A revolutionary spark

While Thomas Edison invented the incandescent light bulb in 1879, it was his colleague Edward H. Johnson who created the first electric Christmas tree lights in 1882. He hand-wired 80 colored bulbs around a revolving tree in his parlor, all powered by a generator.

Johnson's lights were ahead of their time, as electricity was not yet routinely available and electric lights were considered expensive. President Grover Cleveland and his wife First Lady Frances Cleveland helped boost acceptance in the 1890s when the White House Christmas tree was illuminated with colored bulbs to delight their young daughters.

The tradition of outdoor light displays, now associated with driving around to view beautifully lit homes and elaborate light shows, began in North America. This expansion was made possible by the development of safe outdoor Christmas light bulbs and light strings in the 1920s.

Lighting up Iowa's countryside

In Iowa, rural homes didn't see the glow of electric Christmas lights until the 1930s and 1940s, when

rural electric cooperatives began bringing power to farms and small towns. Before then, kerosene lamps and candles offered only a modest holiday shimmer. When electricity finally reached the countryside, families could string colorful bulbs for the first time, a symbol not just of celebration but of progress.



The arrival of electric lights brought a new kind of warmth to rural winters, brightening long nights and connecting communities across the state.

LEDs, smart displays and sustainability

Every holiday season, millions of light sets brighten homes across the country. From twinkling displays set to music to TV favorites like ABC's "The Great Christmas Light Fight," modern holiday lighting turns neighborhoods into dazzling shows filled with festive moments when we flip the switch and watch them glow.

Christmas lights have come a long way. Today's LED lights shine brighter than ever, creating beautiful displays while using less energy and lasting longer. LED light strings use about 80-90% less electricity than traditional incandescent bulbs and can last up to 25 times longer. They also stay cooler to the touch, reducing fire risks, and their shatter-resistant lenses make them safer and easier to handle.

Many communities now offer recycling programs for old light strings, and energy-efficient options make it easy to decorate responsibly. For electric cooperatives, encouraging LED lighting is part of an ongoing effort to help members save energy and money while keeping the season bright.



Behind the bulbs: The technology of light

From the first incandescent filaments to today's smart LEDs controlled by phone apps, holiday lighting has mirrored the evolution of electric power itself. The same current that once revolutionized rural life now drives innovation in energy efficiency and smart home technology.

Many electric cooperatives are helping members explore these new frontiers, from real-time usage tools and rebates for efficient lighting to systems that make homes brighter and more connected. Each advance continues the story of illumination that began more than a century

ago, when light first connected homes to the wider world.

A brighter tomorrow

As we look to the future, Christmas lights remain a shining reminder of how far we've come, from candlelight to clean, efficient energy. Each twinkle tells a story of innovation, cooperation and community spirit. Across Iowa and beyond, those bright strands remind us that even in the darkest winter nights, we have the power to bring warmth and wonder to the world around us.

Article by Safe Electricity with supplemental content provided by Ann Foster Thelen, editor of Iowa Electric Cooperative Living.



SHINE THE LIGHT NOMINEE RECEIVES CO-OP DONATION

Access Energy Cooperative was proud to present employee Steven Klein a donation to Thank You is Never Enough on Steven's behalf. This donation recognizes his nomination for the Iowa Association of Electric Cooperatives' annual Shine the Light Program.

Steven was nominated by Shelly Adkison who wrote:

"Steven is a deeply committed and generous member of his community, whose volunteer efforts have brought joy and meaningful support to countless individuals across Southeast Iowa. Each December, Steve embodies the spirit of the holiday season by dressing as Santa Claus and visiting community events, local organizations and private homes. His annual appearances have become a cherished tradition for many families, creating magical and lasting holiday memories for children throughout the region.

Beyond the holidays, Steve is an active and engaged member of the Salem



Kevin Wheeler, general manager/CEO of Access Energy Cooperative, presents Steven Klein (left) with a donation for the nonprofit Thank You is Never Enough.






American Legion Post 94, where he works to support fellow veterans and advance civic initiatives. Each year during the Old Threshers Reunion in Mount Pleasant, Iowa, Steve volunteers in the "Drive-a-Tractor" area, giving children a hands-on experience and fostering appreciation for rural traditions.

Steve's commitment to service extends well beyond his local community. In 2013, he volunteered his time and personal resources to drive a bus full of supplies to Oklahoma, aiding those affected by devastating tornadoes.

He also serves on the board of Thank You is Never Enough, a registered 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization dedicated to supporting veterans across Southeast Iowa and the surrounding region. The organization provides critical services to veterans in need, including assistance with home repairs, medical expenses, and essential household tasks such as yard maintenance."

Congratulations, Steven, and thanks for your volunteer efforts!

Purchasing Appliances and Electronics: Best Times to Buy

Product Type	Best Time to Buy for Discounts
 Refrigerators and Freezers	Late winter to early spring (March/April); New models arrive in spring, and older models are discounted; Holiday sales (Memorial Day, Fourth of July, Labor Day).
 Washers/Dryers, Dishwashers, Ovens and Ranges	September and October when new models are released and older models are discounted; Holiday sales (Labor Day, Black Friday, Presidents' Day, Memorial Day); End-of-year clearance.
 Large Home Electronics (TVs, home theater)	Holiday sales (Black Friday and Cyber Monday); Amazon Prime Days; Late fall/early winter; Other promos, like Super Bowl sales for televisions.
 Smart Assistants and Other Smart Devices	Holiday sales (Black Friday, Cyber Monday); Other sales events, like Amazon Prime Days.
 Air Conditioners, Heaters and Other Seasonal Appliances	Off season (purchase AC units in fall or winter, heaters in summer); Retailers offer bigger discounts when demand is low.

Additional Purchasing Tips:

- When possible, bundle major appliances for significant savings.
- Be on the lookout. When new models arrive, older models drop in price.
- Retailers typically clear out inventory at the end of the year, which mean big discounts.
- Local retailers typically try to meet end-of-month/end-of-quarter sale quotas, which could mean flexible prices and/or negotiating.



WATER HEATER WOES

BY MIRANDA BOUTELLE

We've all gotten used to having reliable hot water in our homes. Nobody wants to get caught off guard with an unexpected cold shower or failed water heater. I tend to live in the "if it isn't broken, don't fix it" school of thought, but a failed water heater can cause damage to your home and property. Emergency replacement of a water heater can add unnecessary cost, not to mention inconvenience. Evening or weekend replacement or repair can lead to higher costs charged by a plumbing company.

Here are four signs that your storage water heater might be approaching the end of its life.

1 Age. The typical lifespan of a storage water heater is 10 to 15 years, according to the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE). If your water heater is older than that, plan to replace it soon. Don't have records of when it was installed? No problem. Find the serial number on the water heater's sticker or metal plate. Look up the serial number online or call the manufacturer to find its age.

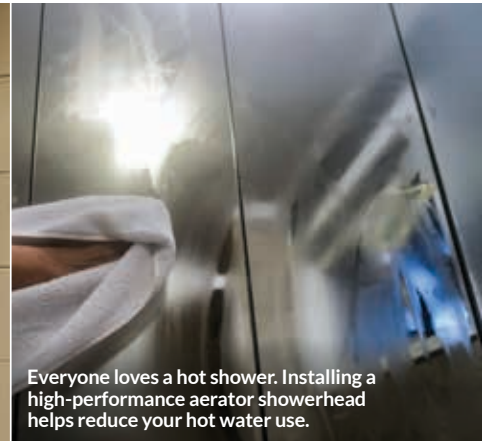
2 Leakage. Sediment or water on the floor or at the bottom of the water heater could mean its days are numbered. Sediment can be a sign of corrosion, which leads to a leak or failure.

3 Discolored water. Seeing rusty or discolored water when you turn on your faucets can be a sign the tank is rusting inside. If water is not getting as hot as it used to, it could be a sign of a failing electric element or a gas burner not functioning properly.

4 Noises. Odd noises could indicate an issue with the components. If you're hearing unusual noises from your water heater, schedule a checkup with a plumber. Well-functioning water



If your water heater is 10 to 15 years old, it's time to start planning and budgeting for a replacement.



Everyone loves a hot shower. Installing a high-performance aerator showerhead helps reduce your hot water use.



Be aware of your water heater's age and performance to avoid emergency replacement and damage to your home.

heaters typically don't make much noise. A professional plumber may be able to replace failing components. If you are having issues with the tank itself, it's likely time for a new unit.

If you're in the market for a new water heater, a heat pump water heater might be a good fit for your home. These systems are two to three times more energy efficient than conventional electric-powered tank water heaters, according to the DOE. A federal tax credit is available until Dec. 31. You can claim 30% of the project cost, up to a maximum of \$2,000, for the installation of an ENERGY STAR® heat pump water heater. If your water heater is past its useful life or showing any signs of failure, consider investing in a new one before the end of the year. You might also be eligible for rebates or incentives from your electric cooperative.

Even if your water heater is in great shape, you can save at home by lowering your hot water use. Some easy ways to do this are washing laundry in cold water and installing high-performance aerators on faucets and showerheads to reduce the amount of hot water you use. If you have time-of-use rates, you can save by installing a timer on your water heater to prevent it from operating during peak energy use hours, typically in the mornings and evenings. It also helps lower the strain on your electric cooperative.

Knowing the signs of water heater failure can save you from home damage and offer opportunities to explore options for more efficient equipment to lower your electric use.

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

HOW DOES A MEMBER SERVE ON THE NOMINATING COMMITTEE?

Access Energy Cooperative is led by an elected board of directors, comprised of members of the cooperative. These directors serve as the voice of the membership in managing guidelines and shaping the future of the cooperative. Board elections are held in August each year, and the process starts now to seek candidates to run.

Who selects the candidates to run for the board?

Candidates are chosen to run for a seat on the board in the director election by the Access Energy Cooperative Nominating Committee, a group of nine members appointed by the board of directors.

The board will appoint the nominating committee members at their regular January board meeting on Jan. 21, 2026, and a packet of information will be provided to the members chosen.



What are the responsibilities?

The committee meets at the cooperative office generally in March. The committee as a whole reviews and evaluates the candidates presented and votes to submit them as official candidates for the 2026 director election. Per diem and mileage reimbursement are available to the committee members.

How does a member get involved?

If you are a member, you are eligible to serve on this committee. If you are interested in helping find members to run for a seat on the board in the August election, please email the cooperative at contactus@accessenergycoop.com or call our office at 866-242-4232.

MEMBERS WITH A VOICE

Thank you to the members who attended the 2025 Member Advisory Committee Meeting. The Access Energy Cooperative board and management appreciate your participation and the thoughtful input you shared throughout the event. Your feedback helps guide the decisions that shape the future of our cooperative.

The meeting featured engaging discussions on cooperative programs and initiatives, along with some fun playing safety bingo, which highlighted the importance of safety for both our employees and members.

Thank you for taking the time to be involved and for helping us make Access Energy Cooperative safer, more reliable and efficient, and more connected to the members we serve.



Holiday Gift Drive

Nov. 1 - Dec. 9



Drop Off Locations

Access Energy Cooperative
1800 W. Washington St., Mt. Pleasant

Kim's Confections
423 Ave. D, West Point

Chamber of Commerce
614 7th St., Ft. Madison

Access Energy Cooperative has established three drop-off sites this holiday season to collect items for the Fort Madison Food Pantry. If you want to help families in need and add some holiday spirit to their Christmas, we welcome you to drop off nonperishable food or personal items between Nov. 1 and Dec. 9 in the box in one of these three locations:

Items of specific request include, but are not limited to, canned fruit, vegetables, soup, ravioli, spaghetti, chicken and tuna; crackers; peanut butter; mac and cheese; cereal; condiments like ketchup, mustard, mayo, ranch dressing and BBQ sauce; and toiletries like shampoo, conditioner, body wash, deodorant, toothpaste and toilet paper.

We thank everyone in advance for considering a donation. We will distribute the gifts from the 2025 gift drive to the Fort Madison Food Pantry. Happy holidays, and happy giving!

ENERGY EFFICIENCY TIP OF THE MONTH

To maximize your fireplace's efficiency, always keep the damper closed when the fireplace is not in use. An open damper is like an open window, allowing warm indoor air to escape and cold air to enter. Consider installing a fireplace insert, which improves heat output by circulating warm air into the room rather than letting it escape up the chimney. Also, burn only seasoned hardwood to ensure a hotter, cleaner burn. Regularly clean and inspect your chimney to maintain safe and efficient operation.

Source: energy.gov



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 electric bill.

The money collected is distributed to help pay electric bills for members who have experienced financial, physical or other hardships.

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) _____



A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative

IOWA ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE LIVING

The magazine
for members of
Iowa's electric
cooperatives

December 2025

Visit our website at www.accessenergycoop.com



ALL OF OUR LINES ARE **CUSTOMER SERVICE LINES.**

Some deliver electricity. Others deliver information. All must deliver on the Touchstone Energy Cooperatives mission: to provide you with service that's just as dependable as the energy you count on us for every day. Learn more about your locally owned and operated Touchstone Energy cooperative at TouchstoneEnergy.com.



Touchstone Energy®
Cooperatives

YOUR SOURCE OF POWER. AND INFORMATION.