

● SEPTEMBER 2022

iowa

ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE LIVING



**Understanding
your electric rates**

**Greater Fairfield Area
Habitat for Humanity
is Shine the Light
contest winner**

**Help your neighbor with
energy efficiency**

Access Energy Cooperative election results and annual meeting recap ▶ See Page 6

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ON THE COVER

Nicole Low with Eldora's Community Garden is one of this year's Shine the Light contest winners. Learn more about each of this year's winners on Pages 10-11 and 14 of this issue.

BE AWARE OF DANGERS THIS FALL

BY SCOTT MEINECKE



As the safety director for the Iowa Association of Electric Cooperatives, I work with my team to educate and train operations staff at Iowa's

electric cooperatives with the goal of getting them home safely to their families at the end of each workday. I want to take this opportunity to ensure we all understand electricity's dangers and share these seasonal safety tips with friends and loved ones.

Call before you dig

Now that the weather is cooling down a bit, many of us will be working on landscaping and home improvement projects. Remember to contact Iowa One Call at least two business days before you dig to any depth so underground utilities can be properly located and marked. It's the law, and it could just save your life or prevent serious damage. Call or click before you dig – call Iowa One Call at 8-1-1 or visit www.IowaOneCall.com to process your request.

Look up and live

Cleaning gutters or working on the roof this fall? Always choose a non-conductive ladder made of wood or fiberglass for utmost safety. Pick a safe route to carry the ladder to the work area, and then carry it horizontally rather than upright. Be aware of electrical lines and tree branches in your work area. When using an extension ladder, tie off the top of the ladder whenever possible. Use the 1:4 lean ratio to ensure a stable working platform.

Safety in the field

As you head into harvest season, make sure to keep a 10-foot clearance between your equipment and power lines at all times. Take time to study where all overhead power lines, poles and guy wires are located on your property and inform your workers

about them. Plan your route between fields and on public roads so that you avoid low-hanging power lines; never attempt to raise or move a power line to clear a path. When moving large equipment or high loads near a power line, always use a spotter to help make sure that contact is not made with a line.

You hit a utility pole; now what?

Would you know what to do if your car or farm implement hit a utility pole or snagged a power line? It's almost always best to stay in your vehicle until emergency responders arrive and clear the scene. The vehicle acts as a path for the electrical current to travel through to reach the ground, so you're not at risk for electrocution unless you try to leave the vehicle. If possible, call the local authorities or the nearest electric utility so power can be cut to the lines.

Always assume that downed power lines are energized, even if they show no signs of power. If you've been in an accident, passersby might run over to help you; warn them that no one should come near you until the utility has cut the power. You should only



attempt to leave your vehicle if it's on fire and ensure you don't touch the vehicle and the ground simultaneously. To exit as safely as possible, you should jump from the vehicle, keep your feet together and hop away from the scene.

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

EDITOR'S CHOICE CONTEST

Win a GreenPan™ Ultimate Gourmet Grill

September is National Family Meals Month! Meals are a breeze with this GreenPan™ versatile indoor electric grill. The nonstick top plate features a griddle/grill surface on one side and eight pancake wells on the other. An area under the top plate can be used for broiling and includes eight square mini pans, each with their own spatula. All cooking surfaces have the Thermolon™ nonstick coating to make healthy cooking easy, with less oil and quick cleanup.

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 outdoor grill from the July issue was Andrew Haarsma, North West REC.



UPCOMING EVENTS

SEPT. 15	Board of directors meeting
OCT. 20	Board of directors meeting

You can access your account information 24/7 on our website or through our SmartHub app for mobile devices. You can also call our office to report service interruptions and request account information at 866-242-4232.



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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ENERGY SAVINGS FOR YOUR BUSINESS

BY KEVIN WHEELER



Locally owned businesses are the backbone of our community. Fall is the perfect time to make sure your building is equipped for maximum energy savings. Consider implementing the following energy efficiency measures at your business.

- LED lighting allows you to maintain your preferred brightness levels while keeping energy costs low. Also remember to switch to LED for your outdoor lighting and incorporate timers for automatic and overnight shutoff.
- Check any refrigeration to ensure it is running optimally and keeping items cool without setting the thermostat lower than necessary. Keep up with regular maintenance and freon refills to ensure safe and longer-lasting inventory.
- Electric motor-driven systems account for about 25% of all commercial energy use. For larger operations, variable speed drives may be necessary to optimize your energy consumption.
- Unplug all unnecessary or unused appliances and electronic equipment. Many of these devices continue to draw power even when they are turned off. Advanced power strips are a smart, low-cost upgrade.
- Make sure your HVAC system is sized correctly for your business space. If it is not, this could lead to inefficient operation or insufficient heating or cooling.

Access Energy Cooperative knows that your bottom line is important when making these business operations decisions. If these or other energy-saving adjustments require purchases, be sure to check out our rebates section at www.accessenergycoop.com for ways to save.

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

MEMBERS: ARE YOU LOOKING TO INSTALL SOLAR?

SOLAR SPOT

Contact your cooperative as a resource of information before you purchase a system.



UNDERSTANDING YOUR ELECTRIC RATES – COST OF SERVICE STUDY

BY TAMMY SNAVELY



Access Energy Cooperative is committed to providing reliable power and quality customer service at the lowest possible cost. As a not-for-profit cooperative,

we are accountable to our member-consumers – not outside investors.

With this business model and leadership structure, one of the key responsibilities of our board of directors (who are members, democratically elected by fellow members) is to determine rates charged by the cooperative.

A fundamental tool the board uses to set electric rates is a cost-of-service study. We work with a third-party utility consulting firm to conduct the study to ensure rates are equitable and fair to all members. The primary objectives for performing a cost-of-service study include:

- Analyzing revenue requirements
- Allocating revenue requirements to each rate class appropriately

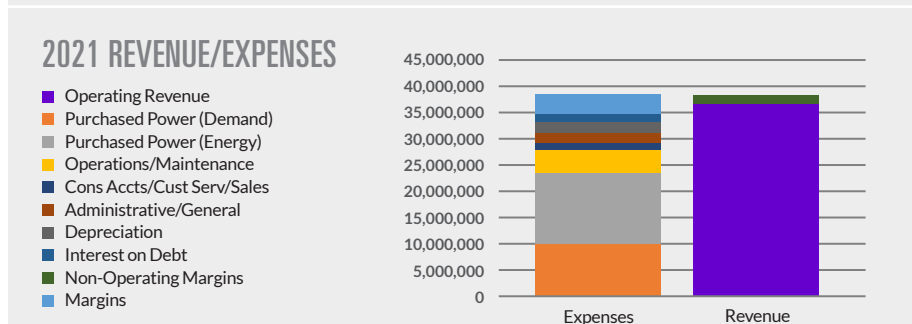
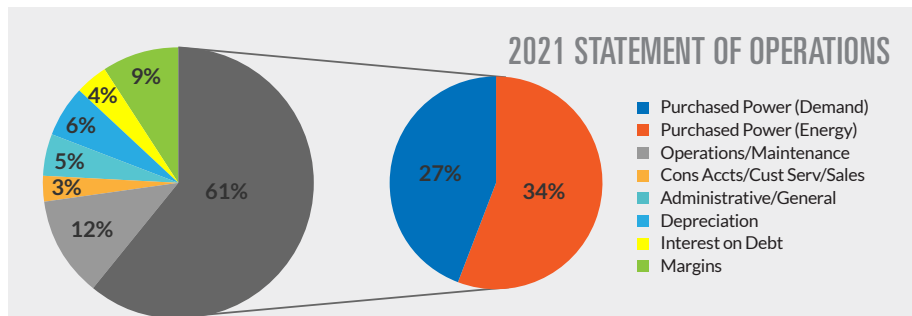
- Updating rates to reflect changes to the cooperative's expenses
- Evaluating existing rates and, if necessary, designing rates that fairly and equitably reflect the cooperative's cost of providing service

The insights and analysis that come from this study are so important that our "General Board Policy 57 – Financial" requires we conduct a cost-of-service study every three years or sooner if needed.

Beyond this study, our cooperative board uses a variety of tools, such as load forecast studies, construction work plans, the cooperative strategic plan, 10-year financial forecast and our annual capital/operating budget to help with rate decision-making. Note: You can see our 2021 Statement of Operations and Revenue/Expenses charts below.

Access Energy Cooperative works hard to minimize the impact of necessary price increases while ensuring reliable service for our member-consumers. As we review the cost-of-service study and evaluate our current electric rates, you can trust that our board takes this decision-making seriously.

Tammy Snavely is the chief financial officer at Access Energy Cooperative.



HELP OTHERS BY CONTRIBUTING TO RECare

RECare is a program where members help other members in need. You may make a one-time contribution to the RECare program, or you may enclose an amount each month with your monthly electric bill. Just one dollar a month will help others. Call us at 1-866-242-4232 or visit our website at www.accessenergycoop.com to help others in need.



This program is administered by the Iowa Community Action Program, and recipients must meet their guidelines.

You can use SmartHub to enroll in RECare!

To have a monthly amount deducted from your electric bill:

1. Log in to your SmartHub account. Go to the Billing & Payments tab. Select RECare, and follow instructions; or
2. Send the form below to:

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

MEMBER 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) _____

ACCESS ENERGY COOPERATIVE MEMBERS CELEBRATE IN THE HEAT

Members were welcomed back to the Access Energy Cooperative Annual Meeting of Members after two years of the event being held online. During the meeting on Aug. 2 at McMillan Park in Mount Pleasant, members learned about the cooperative’s message – Our mission is to serve. Our priority is you.

Kristi Perry from the Mount Pleasant Chamber Alliance started the meeting with a warm welcome to co-op members. Board President Marvin Newton chaired the business meeting.

“The important point to remember is that as a not-for-profit co-op, Access Energy Cooperative is not interested in selling you something you don’t need,” said Kevin Wheeler, general manager/CEO of Access Energy Cooperative. “We are not about maximizing sales; we’re about maximizing member satisfaction. Our mission is to serve. Our priority is you.”

Food, festivities and prizes add to the meeting

Highlights of the event included an outstanding performance by “The Boys” and a great meal served by Mount Pleasant Hy-Vee. Hinterland Dairy of Donnellson also served homemade ice cream.

Members enjoyed drive-a-tractor by the Proennecke brothers and Dick McGohan, inflatable activities for the

kids from Fields of Fun, pony rides by Windy Acres, a live line demonstration on how to be safe around electricity, information from the Henry County Health Center and the Henry County Sheriff.

Access Energy Cooperative appreciates all organizations who participated and everyone who helped make the event a success for members, including Quality Equipment, Mount Pleasant VFW,

FFA, Staats, Midwest Old Threshers, the City of Mount Pleasant, Lance Refuse and Printgroup.

A name was drawn for the Grand Prize \$250 bill credit, but the member was not present, so the \$250 will be added to next year’s drawing for a \$500 grand prize. Dividend checks for 2022 totaling \$1,224,133 were available for members to pick up at the meeting. Checks were mailed after the meeting for those who were unable to attend.

DIRECTOR ELECTION RESULTS

Director election results were reported at the annual meeting. Fred Hickenbottom, Marvin Newton and Robert Smith were reelected as directors to serve three-year terms on the nine-person board.



Fred Hickenbottom



Marvin Newton



Robert Smith

BOARD OFFICERS

Following the meeting, the board of directors met for their annual reorganizational meeting. The following were elected as the officers of the Access Energy

Cooperative board of directors: President Marvin Newton, Vice President Marvin Larson, Secretary Robert Chesnut and Treasurer David Hollingsworth.



Marvin Newton



Marvin Larson



Robert Chesnut



David Hollingsworth

2022 ANNUAL MEETING PRIZE WINNERS

ANNUAL MEETING

\$25 electric credit	
Edward Meierotto	Glen Brown
Daniel Braun	James Moehle
Robin Kiefer	Gary Harvey
Joe Whalen	Russell Hill
Shane Mc Kenzie	Frank Redeker

\$50 electric credit
Woodroffe Sawmill Inc
Paul Clanin
John Danielson
Dean Fleming
Dwain Collett

\$100 bill credit (from mail-in ballots)
Jeffery Schmitz

\$100 bill credit (from voting online)
Kenny Lanman

Grand Prize: \$250 bill credit
Not present. The \$250 will roll into next year’s Grand Prize for \$500. Save the date – Aug. 1, 2023!

IOWA'S ELECTRIC COOPERATIVES SHINE THE LIGHT ON LOCAL VOLUNTEERS

Greater Fairfield Area Habitat for Humanity receives \$2,000 donation in honor of Deb Johnson

Earlier this summer, the Touchstone Energy Cooperatives of Iowa sponsored its second statewide contest to highlight our cooperative commitment to community. During the month of June, the Shine the Light contest invited member-consumers and employees of Iowa's locally owned electric cooperatives to nominate deserving volunteers in their communities.

"The Shine the Light contest gave our members and employees a unique



opportunity to show their appreciation for family, friends and neighbors who are making a positive difference in the community," says Kevin Wheeler, general manager/CEO of Access Energy Cooperative.

Sixty-eight nominations were submitted from across the state, highlighting the work of many incredible Iowans. Three volunteers were selected as winners from the entries received, including a local volunteer, Deb Johnson of Fairfield. The three winners are profiled on Pages 10-11 and 14 of this issue.

Each winning volunteer was honored with a \$2,000 donation to their local charity.

2024 CALENDAR PHOTO CONTEST OPEN

The 2023 Access Energy Cooperative calendars were handed out at the Annual Meeting of Members on Aug. 2. If you were unable to attend this year, we have some additional copies that can be picked up at our office.



We are already accepting photos for the 2024 calendar! Submissions will be accepted until March 31, 2023. Send entries to mktg@accessenergycoop.com. Thirteen photos will be chosen as featured photos in the Access Energy Cooperative calendar. Winners will be awarded \$75, plus an additional \$25 bill credit if they are a member of the cooperative.

Visit www.accessenergycoop.com for complete rules.

KEEP FOOD SAFE WHEN THE POWER GOES OUT

BY ABBY BERRY

Severe winds, lightning and even squirrels can temporarily cause the power to go out. We understand power outages of any length can be frustrating, especially when your fridge is stocked with perishable foods.

Extended power outages are rare, but when they occur, it's important to understand food safety measures to take to avoid illness.

Here are a few food safety tips to keep in mind before, during and after a power outage.

Before an outage

A good rule of thumb is to keep an emergency supply kit on hand. Be sure to include

nonperishable food items like bottled water, powdered milk, canned goods, cereal and protein bars in your emergency kit.

If you have advance warning that an outage is possible, fill a cooler with ice – just in case the outage spans several hours. Having a cooler ready to go can buy extra time for your refrigerated, perishable items.

During an outage

If an outage occurs, do not open the refrigerator or freezer unless *absolutely* necessary. An unopened refrigerator will keep food cold for about four hours. A half-full freezer will keep food frozen for about 24 hours and a

full freezer for about 48 hours. If it looks like the power outage will last longer than four hours, move your important perishable items to an ice-filled cooler.

After an outage

If refrigerated foods have been exposed to temperatures higher than 40 degrees for more than two hours, the American Red Cross recommends discarding the items. If any foods have an unusual color, odor or texture, they should be thrown away.

While most perishable foods should be thrown out after an extended outage, there are a few items that are safe to consume after a two-hour exposure to 40+ degrees:

- hard cheeses that are properly wrapped
- butter or margarine that is properly wrapped
- taco, barbecue and soy sauces
- peanut butter, jelly, mustard, ketchup and relish

The best way to avoid illness from spoiled food during or after an outage is to follow the four-hour rule of thumb. After an outage, always smell and inspect foods before consuming and remember: when in doubt, throw it out.

To learn more about food safety after an emergency, visit www.ready.gov/food.



FAMILY Dinner RECIPES

CHICKEN BURRITO BOWLS

- 1½ pounds boneless chicken thighs
- 1¼ teaspoons salt, divided
- 1½ cups salsa
- 1 15-ounce can black beans, rinsed and drained
- ½ teaspoon garlic powder
- 1 teaspoon cumin
- 1 cup tomatoes, chopped
- ¼ cup onions, diced
- ¼ cup fresh cilantro
- ½ jalapeno pepper, diced
- 2 tablespoons lime juice
- rice
- optional toppings: cheese, lettuce, olives, sour cream, guacamole, avocados

Put chicken, 1 teaspoon salt, salsa, black beans, garlic powder and cumin in slow cooker for 4 hours on high or 8 hours on low. Once cooked, shred chicken with forks and return to slow cooker. Make a salsa by mixing tomatoes, onions, cilantro, jalapeno, lime juice and ¼ teaspoon salt. Chill salsa until ready to eat. Serve chicken in a bowl with rice and optional toppings. Serves 6-8

Lauren Zollinger • Rock Rapids
Lyon Rural Electric Cooperative

QUINOA ENCHILADA CASSEROLE

- 1 cup dry quinoa
- 1 small can enchilada sauce
- 1 can corn (no salt added)
- 1 can tomatoes with green chilis
- 2 cans black beans (no salt added)
- 2 tablespoons cilantro (fresh or dried)
- 1 teaspoon cumin
- ½ teaspoon chili powder
- salt and pepper, to taste
- ½ cup cheddar cheese, divided
- ½ cup mozzarella cheese, divided
- avocado, to taste

Cook quinoa as directed on package. Combine cooked quinoa, enchilada sauce, corn, tomatoes, black beans, cilantro, cumin, chili powder, salt and pepper. Stir in ½ cup cheddar and ½ cup mozzarella cheese. Spread into a greased baking dish. Top with remaining cheeses. Bake at 375 degrees F for 25-30 minutes or until cheese melts. Top with avocado to serve. You can substitute enchilada sauce with salsa and add other toppings, such as tomatoes, jalapenos, sour cream or plain Greek yogurt. Serves 8-12

Monica Wuebker • Rockwell City
Calhoun County Electric Cooperative Association

CHICKEN TETRAZZINI

- 1 box of linguine or spaghetti
- 1 whole rotisserie chicken
- 2 cans cream of chicken soup
- 1 16-ounce tub sour cream
- ⅓ cup butter, melted
- ½ cup chicken broth
- ½ teaspoon salt
- ½ teaspoon pepper
- ¼ teaspoon garlic powder
- ¼ cup Parmesan cheese
- 2 cups mozzarella cheese, shredded
- 2 teaspoons dried parsley

Break noodles into thirds and boil until tender, drain. Remove meat from rotisserie chicken and chop. In a large bowl, combine cooked pasta, chicken, soup, sour cream, butter, broth, salt, pepper and garlic powder. (You can substitute two cans cream of chicken soup for one can cream of chicken and one can cream of mushroom.) Pour mixture into 9x13-inch baking dish prepared with cooking spray. Top with cheeses and parsley. Cover with aluminum foil and bake at 325 degrees F covered for 1 hour. Remove foil and bake for 30 minutes until bubbly and cheeses are melted. This recipe freezes well. Serves 12

Dianne A. Riley • Osceola
Clarke Electric Cooperative, Inc.

BEEF ENCHILADAS

- 2 pounds ground beef
- 1 can tomato soup
- 2 cans enchilada sauce, divided
- 2 cups cheddar or Mexican-style blended cheese, divided
- 8-10 medium-size tortilla shells

Brown ground beef, drain fat. Mix tomato soup, one can enchilada sauce and 1 cup grated cheese with the ground beef. Place $\frac{1}{3}$ cup of the mixture down the center of a tortilla shell. Roll with meat mixture inside and place in a greased 9x13-inch baking dish. The pan will hold approximately eight shells but can adjust to fit 10, if needed. Pour remaining can of enchilada sauce and any leftover meat mixture over the top of the shells and sprinkle remaining grated cheese on top. Bake at 350 degrees F for 30-40 minutes or until bubbly and cheese is completely melted and golden. You can adjust spiciness by using both mild enchilada sauce, one hot and one mild or both hot. For a slight variation, add one can of drained and rinsed black beans to the meat mixture. *Serves 4-6*

Lisa Harris • Akron
North West Rural Electric Cooperative

CALICO BEANS

- $\frac{1}{2}$ pound hamburger
- $\frac{1}{2}$ pound bacon, cut to small pieces
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup onion, chopped
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup ketchup
- $\frac{1}{2}$ packed cup brown sugar
- 3 teaspoons dry mustard
- 6 teaspoons vinegar
- $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon salt
- 1 15.5-ounce can pork and beans
- 1 15.5-ounce can kidney beans
- 1 15.5-ounce can lima beans

Sauté hamburger, bacon and onions until lightly browned, drain fat. Thoroughly mix in remaining ingredients. Bake uncovered at 350 degrees F for 40 minutes. *Serves 10-12*

Karen Crossland • Fairfield • Access Energy Cooperative

BEEF TIPS BY SHIRLEY

- 2 pounds stew meat
- 1 can cream of mushroom soup
- 1 packet brown gravy
- 1 envelope beefy onion soup mix
- 1 can water

Mix all ingredients together in a 9x13-inch pan. Cover with foil and bake at 350 degrees F for 1 hour. Reduce to 300 degrees F and bake for 3 more hours. Serve over mashed potatoes and a vegetable of your choice. *Serves 8*

Shirley (Dennis) Kellenberger • Larchwood
Lyon Rural Electric Cooperative

CREAMY BAKED CHICKEN BREAST

- 4 whole chicken breasts
- 8 slices Swiss cheese
- 1 10.5-ounce can cream of chicken soup
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup dry white wine
- 1 cup herb stuffing mix
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup butter, melted

Cut chicken into eight pieces and arrange in a lightly greased 9x13-inch baking dish. Top with cheese slices. Combine soup and wine, stir well, then pour over chicken. Sprinkle stuffing crumbs over top, then drizzle with melted butter. Bake at 350 degrees F for 50 minutes. *Serves 8*

Mabel Posz • Fort Madison • Access Energy Cooperative

SPINACH NOODLES

- $1\frac{3}{4}$ cups spinach, torn
- 2 tablespoons water
- $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon salt
- 1 egg
- $1\frac{1}{4}$ cups flour (plus a little bit for kneading)

Cook torn spinach and water over medium heat until very limp. Cool, then put in blender and add salt and egg. Blend, then put into large bowl and add flour. Mix thoroughly. Knead for a few minutes, adding more flour if needed so dough does not stick to your hands. Roll out on floured board and cut into strips. Dry until crisp. You may freeze or add to boiling water. Cook noodles on medium high until desired texture is achieved, stirring often. *Serves 4*

Laura (William) Foell • Schaller
Raccoon Valley Electric Cooperative

WANTED:

COMFORTING CASSEROLE RECIPES

THE REWARD:

\$25 FOR EVERY ONE WE PUBLISH!

Deadline is Sept. 30

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

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ANNOUNCING THE 2022 SHINE THE LIGHT AWARD WINNERS



The Touchstone Energy® Cooperatives of Iowa are driven by a commitment to community. To celebrate local volunteers, the Iowa Association of Electric Cooperatives held its second annual Shine the Light contest earlier this summer. 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 had the difficult task of selecting three contest winners from 68 outstanding nominees.

Congratulations to **Deb Johnson**, who is recognized for her enthusiastic support of the Greater Fairfield Area Habitat for Humanity; **Sharon Van Beek**, who is recognized for her generous commitment to Buckets of Joy; and **Nicole Low**, who is recognized for her vision in establishing Eldora's Community Garden. These three winners have been awarded a \$2,000 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.

Kevin Wheeler, CEO/general manager of Access Energy Cooperative, presents a check to Deb Johnson (center), with the Greater Fairfield Area Habitat for Humanity. Also pictured is Kathy Brown, who nominated Johnson for the award.

GREATER FAIRFIELD AREA HABITAT FOR HUMANITY DEB JOHNSON ASSISTS LOCAL FAMILIES WITH STABLE HOUSING

At just 5 feet tall, Deb Johnson's commitment to her community is anything but small. A lifelong resident of Fairfield in southeast Iowa, Johnson was nominated for the 2022 Shine the Light contest for her volunteer work with the Greater Fairfield Area Habitat for Humanity.

Johnson was nominated by her friend and fellow Habitat volunteer Kathy Brown.

"Deb has always been a voice for the less fortunate, helping the Habitat board be true to our mission of building safe and decent homes for families,"

Brown says. "Her heart is filled with love and compassion for others, especially children."

The two first worked together years ago when Brown was a schoolteacher and Johnson served as a social worker. A friendship soon blossomed, and their families grew up together.

Johnson serves on the local Habitat for Humanity board and volunteers as the homeowner support chair. She uses her social work experience to serve as a liaison between each Habitat partner family and the Habitat board during construction.



Deb Johnson helps Fairfield families in need.

As a big believer in providing safe, stable housing for families, Johnson devotes many hours to coordinating work schedules and encouraging the construction team. A gifted cook, Johnson lifts the spirits of the Fairfield High School students working with Habitat by bringing cookies and treats on Fridays during builds.

“The students loved her and would cheer when she drove up at the end of the week. She quickly became known as the ‘Cookie Lady,’” Brown shares.

Johnson also serves on the local Habitat for Humanity ReStore board, which sells gently used furniture and furnishings that have been donated. Money made at the ReStore is then used to fund housing construction for the Greater Fairfield Area Habitat for Humanity.

“The most rewarding part of serving with Habitat for Humanity is when we dedicate the house to the partner family. It’s just wonderful,” says Johnson. “Habitat for Humanity gives families a hand up, not a handout.”

Brown says the \$2,000 Shine the Light donation could likely be used to purchase tools volunteers can use for future construction projects. Brown also wants others to know that Johnson has a kind heart and is a compassionate person.

“She’s a goer and a giver in addition to being a devoted mother and grandmother. She certainly deserves this recognition,” says Brown.

When asked if she has words to live by, Johnson says volunteering and serving are important and rewarding.

“You get a lot more back than what you give. Growing up, my parents encouraged community service and involvement, so it has always been a part of my life to do things for other people,” Johnson shares.

Article contributed by Erin Campbell, Iowa Association of Electric Cooperatives.



BUCKETS OF JOY SHARON VAN BEEK'S TRADITION FILLS HEARTS

Through Buckets of Joy, Sharon Van Beek helps to bring a joyous Christmas to northwest Iowa children.

The tradition of giving has been passed through the Van Beek family for generations. For 40 years, they have been filling “Buckets of Joy” for children to celebrate that tradition in the Christmas season.

When reading about the Shine the Light contest, North West Rural Electric Cooperative member Laura Leonard instantly thought of her mom Sharon Van Beek of Primghar. “She has selflessly done so much work for the program since she has taken it over and is always working hard to shop sales to find the best deals that can serve the most kids. She has put countless hours into the program; Sharon is one of the most selfless people I know.”

Sharon has been working with the program for over 30 years. Initially started by her in-laws, Chris and Verna Van Beek, the program began as a way to distribute government food commodities to families in need. Their experiences moved them to do something special for struggling families with young children. The Buckets of Joy project launched in 1982 when the couple filled 25 empty ice cream buckets with basic clothing and a toy for the children. The project quickly grew, and within five years, they were filling and distributing 10 times the number of buckets filled at the program’s beginning.

When health issues took a toll on the farming couple, Sharon and her husband Jon stepped up and committed to continuing the project. By this time, buckets had become bags, but the name and the gifts remained. Today, each sack is stuffed with a footed blanket sleeper or sweatshirt, socks, stocking cap, mittens, crackers, toothbrush, colors, coloring book and a book telling the Nativity story.

Although technically a Christmas project, work continues year-round. Sharon, a retired teacher and the program’s primary shopper, takes inventory each January and shops sales and special offers throughout the year for supplies.

Local churches, banks and individuals answer the call to help buy needed supplies. “Each bucket averages about \$40, and that’s with finding things on sale,” explains Sharon. “Annually, we fill 150-250 buckets depending on the need.”

Buckets of Joy are distributed to children ages 0-5 through the WIC program and, more recently, through Upper Des Moines and the Department of Human Services, as well as Head Start programs in O’Brien County. Buckets help to bring a joyous Christmas for the children receiving the gifts. There is also a special feeling of happiness for Sharon, Jon and all those assisting with the project, knowing they have helped make someone else’s Christmas a bit brighter.

Article contributed by Emily Vander Velde from North West Rural Electric Cooperative.



Lyle Korver, CEO of North West REC, presents a check to Van Beek.

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DRIVING TOWARD THE FUTURE

BY KATHERINE LOVING

According to the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE), electric vehicle (EV) sales doubled from 2020 to 2021, reaching a record high of 608,000 sales. Sales of internal combustion engine vehicles grew by only 3% the same year.

The number of EVs on the road will continue to grow over the next five to 10 years, and many brands have pledged to convert to manufacturing only EVs within the next three to 12 years.

Part of this sales growth stems from more choices in the EV market. Today, more than 80 base models of sedans, SUVs and minivans are available. The number of automakers that are exclusively manufacturing plug-in vehicles is also increasing, from recognizable brands like Tesla to growing brands like Rivian, Polestar, Karma and Lucid. Ford introduced its now sold-out F-150 Lightning in April and is already taking orders for 2023.

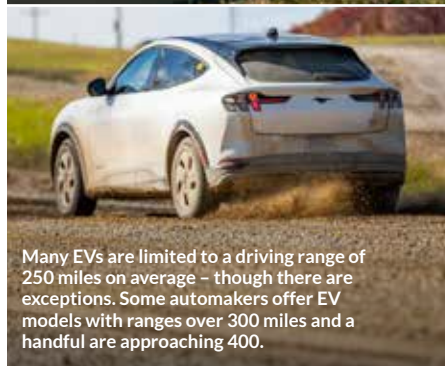
Challenges for widespread adoption

While the EV market is growing, it has some challenges to overcome before broader adoption takes place. The upfront cost of an EV is more expensive than a comparable gas-powered vehicle, and many EVs are limited to a driving range of 250 miles on average – though there are exceptions. Some automakers offer EV models with ranges over 300 miles and a handful are approaching 400.

Ford, Hyundai, Kia and Nissan offer EV models that are priced around \$30,000, and available federal tax credits can bring the initial costs down considerably. EV range numbers are approaching those of a tank of gas, but EVs require more time to charge compared to a gas-powered vehicle's quick fill-up. Even at the fastest charging level, it takes approximately 20 minutes to charge 80% capacity. This makes EVs suitable for daily driving needs like commuting or



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EV sales continue to climb. Ford introduced its now sold-out F-150 Lightning in April and is already taking orders for 2023.

running errands but less suitable for longer road trips.

Access to publicly available charging stations is not as plentiful or as geographically accessible as gas stations, which makes using an EV for an extended road trip less straightforward. However, the Department of Transportation and the DOE have teamed up to offer grants to help states and local partners, including electric cooperatives, develop a national charging network with EV chargers located every 50 miles on interstates. The goal is to place EV chargers where they make the most sense in terms of business or recreational activities. National parks, convenience stores and local businesses could be popular stops for EV charging.

Power up with a Level 2 charger

Compared to a standard wall outlet,

charging times can be shortened by using a Level 2 charger. Level 1 chargers are the standard charger that come with an EV and provide about 40 miles of range after eight hours of charging. Level 2 chargers provide about 25 miles per charging hour. They consume a lot of power over a short amount of time and require local electric infrastructure to support the increased energy load.

If you're considering a Level 2 charger, make sure your home's electrical system is in good shape and give your electric co-op a heads up. This allows the utility to ensure the transformer in your neighborhood can safely and reliably provide power – and your neighbors will thank you.

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


Photo Credit: Nissan


Photos: Ford


EASY WAYS TO HELP A NEIGHBOR SAVE ENERGY

BY MIRANDA BOUTELLE

Helping people feels good. Supporting community is sewn into the fabric of your electric co-op, which is guided by seven cooperative principles that put the needs of members first. On National Good Neighbor Day, which is Sept. 28 – or any day this month – join in the cooperative spirit and help your neighbors, friends and family save at home with these do-it-yourself energy-saving tips.

 **Change lightbulbs.** Prioritize changing lights that are used the most, such as incandescent porch lights left on all night. LEDs use about 75% less energy and last up to 25 times longer than incandescent bulbs. Some neighbors can't climb step stools or ladders, so help them out if you are able. Be sure to check for overhead power lines when using ladders outside.

 **Swap the filter.** Furnace filters should be checked regularly and replaced when dirty. Simply writing down the dimensions of the furnace filter can help your neighbor, so it makes it easy when they pick up a pack of new ones in the store or order online.

 **Open the dampers.** Register dampers allow heated and cooled air to properly circulate throughout the home. If you have a central air heating or cooling system, dampers should be left open. The idea that closing registers saves energy is a common misconception. If furniture is on top of dampers, move it to a new permanent spot so it does not block air flow.



Test the water heater temperature using a kitchen thermometer. If it is over 120 degrees F, lower the heat setting.




Photos: Mark Gilliland, Pioneer Utility Resources





Add removing the window AC unit to your fall winterizing projects. This prevents heat from escaping and wasting energy.




Offer to clean up leaves and debris around your neighbor's air conditioner or heat pump. This will keep systems running efficiently.

 **Adjust the water heater.** Check the water heater to be sure it is set to 120 degrees F. It's also worth your time to test the water temperature. You can do this by checking the faucet nearest the water heater, turning on only the hot water and waiting until it gets hot. Let the hot water run into a glass and place a kitchen thermometer in it. Wait until it registers the highest temperature. If the water heater is set too high, you can save energy by lowering the setting.

 **Keep outdoor units clear.** Remove brush and debris from around the air conditioner or heat pump. If leaves or plants pile up around the outdoor unit, it can reduce the airflow, which makes the system work harder than it should. That in turn uses more energy and can reduce the life of the unit.

 **Remove the window AC unit.** By removing the unit before wintertime, the window can close properly. This prevents heat from escaping and wasting energy during cold months. It also keeps the room more comfortable. Window AC units are heavy and awkward, so this project is best done with a buddy. Get that person to commit to helping put the unit back next spring.

 **Share energy-saving programs.**

Information is a great way to help, and it's free. Look into programs your local electric cooperative offers and share that information with your neighbor. Don't forget to check the U.S. Department of Energy for federal tax credits for upgrades.

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

ANNOUNCING THE 2022 SHINE THE LIGHT AWARD WINNERS



ELDORA'S COMMUNITY GARDEN NICOLE LOW IS ROOTED IN GROWING FOR GOOD

Nicole Low's passion for developing the community garden grew out of a desire for healthier food and helping combat food insecurity.

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If you make your way to Eldora's Community Garden, you'll likely spot Nicole Low pulling weeds, harvesting vegetables or hosting a culinary event. Low, an Eldora resident and registered nurse, isn't one to let a need go unnoticed. In 2019, she saw a need in her community and went to work.

"My friend and I started eating more healthy and growing food in our backyards," she says. "We thought it would be more fun to do it with the community. As a nurse, I have a strong passion for public health. I know it's hard for people who struggle financially to pay for fruits and vegetables. I just thought we live on some of the most fertile Iowa soil, and why not use that to grow food for our neighbors?"

Low's passion for eating healthy and observations of local food insecurity gave rise to Eldora's Community Garden, an ambitious project Low took head-on.

"This is our fourth full year," she says.

"The first year had its challenges as we had to amend the soil and turn it from a hayfield into a garden, but it's going really great now. Our motto is: Take what you need and give what you can, very much in solidarity with our community, rather than just charity."

The garden, located at 787 4th Street in Eldora, encompasses two-thirds of an acre. It is predominately a donation garden but also offers leased plots for community members. In 2021, the garden yielded more than 9,000 pounds of produce, which was donated to the local food pantry.

"I definitely couldn't do this alone," says Low. "It's been a true community effort. Many volunteers have no personal or vested interest in the garden for their own food. It's just to help the community and the mission of the garden."

Paul Lawler, a Midland Power Cooperative member, garden volunteer and one of Low's nominators, watched her grow this dream into a reality.

"I don't know where to start," he says. "She has been so involved with the

Eldora community. She's taken the lead and said, 'OK, let's do this.' She doesn't give up until it's all done, and when it's all done, she will start all over again. She's just a fabulous person and very energetic. She is go, go, go."

Rebekah Cullinan, another of Low's nominators, says if it weren't for the garden, she might not have moved to Eldora from Des Moines. Cullinan explains, "Nicole's role in building this community garden came from a passion for healthier food, the mitigation of food poverty, a place where children could come, a place she could come. The garden is her happy place."

As for what the garden will do with its \$2,000 prize, Low says it's time to purchase a lawnmower and a few additions for the garden.

"We're also hoping to get a fire pit out here for when we have community events and picnic meals. It would be fun to have a bonfire going, let the kids make some s'mores," she says.

Article contributed by Ryan Cornelius, Corn Belt Power Cooperative.

CAN YOU SPOT DEFINING MOMENTS?

BY DARCY DOUGHERTY MAULSBY

This summer, I watched a documentary on Iowa PBS about President Ronald Reagan. I've always been intrigued by his story, since he was a small-town Midwestern kid like me, so I decided to read "Reagan's Roots: The People and Places That Shaped His Character."

Author Peter Hanaford shared a memorable story that occurred in the summer of 1932, just weeks after Reagan graduated from Eureka College in Illinois. As the Great Depression gripped America, Reagan had returned home to Dixon, Illinois, to work as a lifeguard at Lowell Park along the Rock River. He met Sid Altschuler, a prosperous Kansas City businessman who was staying with his family at one of Lowell Park's cottages that summer. "Dutch" Reagan taught the Altschuler daughters to swim, and Altschuler liked the engaging young man.

One day, Altschuler asked Reagan what he wanted to do when the summer was over. Reagan didn't know. Altschuler urged Reagan to think it over. If it were in a field where he had connections, Altschuler would do everything he could to open doors for Reagan.

"His secret ambition was to go into acting professionally, but even suggesting it would no doubt make Mr. Altschuler think he had taken leave of his sense," Hanaford wrote.

Life's unexpected turning points

Reagan's thoughts turned to the new industry of radio. He thought maybe he could be a radio sports announcer. Altschuler thought this was a promising choice, but he had no connections in radio. "The important thing was that Altschuler's asking of the question had caused Dutch's thoughts to crystallize into a real goal," Hanaford wrote.

Reagan went on to land a job as a sportscaster at WOC Radio in Davenport, followed by a stint at



Photo taken by Darcy Dougherty Maulsby in the lobby of WHO Radio in Des Moines.

WHO Radio in Des Moines. In 1937, he covered the Chicago Cubs when they were in southern California for spring training. During this trip, Reagan took a screen test at Warner Bros.' Studio, which led to his successful career in Hollywood.

Reagan probably had no idea that conversation with Altschuler one summer day in 1932 would be a defining moment in his life. Life provides all of us with turning points. Many come disguised as ordinary events of daily life. The most powerful ones go right to the heart of who we are.

I think back to February 2002, when I was laid off from my job as an ag editor after the dot-com bubble burst. Back then, I had no idea this would start my journey to self-employment. All I knew was that I would need extra courage, creativity and confidence to forge a path forward.

No doubt there will be more defining moments ahead. I may not recognize them at the time, but they will certainly keep life interesting.

Darcy Dougherty Maulsby lives near her family's Century Farm northwest of Lake City. Visit her at www.darcymaulsby.com.



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