

Connections

March 2019



For the member-owners of Brown County REA

Volume 23, Issue 3

Polar Vortex focus of co-ops' legislative visits

The January Polar Vortex provided a reality check for one of the major legislative issues this year. Proposals at the state and federal level aim toward higher mandates for renewable energy — up to 100 percent — demonstrated what happens under extreme weather. Your local electric cooperative directors and managers educated their Minnesota legislators February 19 as to the dangers of the elimination of fossil fuels and being too dependent on a zero carbon model when technology isn't quite ready.

Electric cooperatives encourage the use of renewables, but with a common sense approach, instead of implementing mandates that could systemically damage our economy, explained Mike Heidemann, CEO at Brown County REA. "During the January 30-31 Polar Vortex, we experienced life threatening weather extremes. This spiked electricity demand as temperatures plummeted. Unfortunately, the electricity generated from wind turbines also plummeted."

Over the Midwest's power grid, wind generation only supplied about one-fourth of its potential output. Wind turbines are programmed to shut down automatically once temperatures reach -22 degrees Fahrenheit; which it did. This affected wind farms in North Dakota and Minnesota overnight January 29 through noon the next day. Uninterrupted fossil fuel power plants provided electricity needed to heat homes and power the electric grid. Electric co-ops also started members' generators on the load control — *Continued on Page 6*



The Brown County REA group met with Senator Nick Frentz in the Senate Chamber. Pictured: Darrick Moe from Minnesota Rural Electric Association, Senator Nick Frentz, Greg Mages, Bill Berg, Mike Heidemann, Brad Sprenger, Reuben Kokesch, Tom Hayes and Jim Hanson.



Federated's delegation met with Senator Bill Weber. Pictured: Dave and Ruth Hansen, Cheryl and Bruce Brockmann, Darvin Voss, Senator Weber, Scott Reimer and David Meschke.


At A Glance



Brown County
Rural Electrical
Association



Join us for your Annual Meeting!

All BCREA member-owners are encouraged to come and cast their votes for directors at the Annual Meeting April 11. Director candidate biographies can be found on Pages 4-5. More Annual Meeting info on Page 8. 



Take advantage of tax credits before they're gone

If you've been thinking about installing a geothermal system for your home, now may be the time to dig into it. 2019 is the last year to claim the full 30 percent Residential Renewable Energy Tax Credit.

You should consult your accountant for details, but the main points break down like this.

- A taxpayer may claim a credit of 30 percent of qualified expenditures for a ground source heat pump that serves a dwelling unit that is owned and used as a residence by the taxpayer.

- Expenditures with respect to the equipment are treated as made when the installation is completed.

- If the installation is at a new home, the "placed in service" date is the date of occupancy by the homeowner.

- Expenditures include labor costs for on-site preparation, assembly or original system installation, and for piping or wiring to interconnect a system to the home.

- If the federal tax credit exceeds tax liability, the excess amount may be carried forward to the succeeding year.

- The tax credit ends in 2022, but it will phase down as that date arrives according to this schedule:

- a. 30 percent of total system cost through 2019

- b. 26 percent of total system cost in 2020

- c. 22 percent of total system cost in 2021

- The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 repealed a previous limitation on the use of the credit for eligible projects also supported by "subsidized energy financing." For projects placed in service after December 31, 2008, this limitation no longer applies.


- The geothermal heat pump must meet federal Energy Star criteria.

- The 30 percent tax credit also applies to solar installations.

- In addition to the federal tax credit, your local electric co-op also offers incentives for ground source heat pumps.

To apply for the 2017 energy efficiency tax credits, you need to file the IRS Tax Form 5695 and submit it with your taxes.

What's the difference between a tax deduction and a tax credit?

A tax deduction reduces the amount of income subject to tax. For example, if your taxable income is \$25,000 and you have a \$500 tax deduction, your taxable income would be reduced to \$24,500. A tax credit reduces the amount of tax you have to pay. For example, if you owe \$800 in taxes at the end of the year, and you get a \$300 tax credit, then you will only owe \$500. 




Dig up more than just energy savings with a geothermal system. You can also receive federal tax credits!

Energy Tips

Need help from the tax experts?

Contact the IRS with your questions on the 30 percent Residential Renewable Energy Tax Credit.

- www.irs.gov/contact
- 1-800-829-1040
- Form 5695 Instructions can be found at www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/i5695.pdf
- Form 5695 is at www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/f5695.pdf

To learn about other incentives available contact your utility or visit the Database of State Incentives for Renewables & Efficiency at www.dsireusa.org. 

A surge protector can also save you money


The TrickleStar 7-outlet AV Advanced PowerStrip Plus is a surge protector that saves you money by reducing active and standby power waste.

Active power waste occurs when the TV is left on and no one is watching it. Standby power waste is energy consumed by electronic equipment even when turned off. The AV Advanced PowerStrip Plus switches off the TV when not in use and cuts standby power waste by removing supplied power to peripheral electronic equipment.

The powerstrip works by detecting remote control signals and motion in the room to determine whether the TV is being used. If no remote control activity or motion is detected within a countdown period (configurable to one or two hours), the powerstrip powers down the TV and peripheral electronics plugged into it, saving you money and energy.











Features include:

- Flashing LED and audible chirp notification to alert you prior to powering down electronics.
 - Surge protector incorporates advanced technology with ceramic-encased metal oxide varistors that suppress more energy and dissipate heat faster than traditional surge protection products. The ceramic casing is fireproof and capable of preventing fire during abnormal surge conditions.
 - Improves video and sound quality of connected electronics by filtering out electromagnetic and radio-frequency interference.
 - Compatible with all types of TVs and UL-listed.
- The Advanced PowerStrip Plus is available for approximately \$20. 

Safety

Learn the INs and OUTs of outlet types

Type	Function	Interesting Fact	Recommended Installation Locations
 Two-Prong	Provided electricity to appliances.	Installed prior to 1962.	None.
 Grounded	Third prong (ground) reduces the risk of electric shock and protects equipment from electrical damage.	Grounding-type receptacles were first required for all 15 and 20-amp outlets in the 1971 National Electrical Code (NEC).	Mandated by NEC in all areas, unless otherwise specified.
 Tamper Resistant	A built-in shutter system prevents objects from being inserted, except when simultaneous (equal pressure to both slots is provided by a plug).	Outlet covers do not provide adequate protection. 100 percent of children 2-4 could remove plastic outlet covers in less than 10 seconds.	Required by the 2008 NEC. Upgrading rooms and areas where children could have access to the outlets is recommended.
 Arc Fault Circuit Interrupter	Reduces the risk of fire, by interrupting power when an arc fault occurs anywhere in the circuit.	Estimates say more than 50 percent of electrical fires that occur every year could be prevented by AFCIs.	Provides protection from arc faults beyond branch circuit wiring extending to appliances and cords using the receptacle.
 Ground Fault Circuit Interrupter	Prevents shock by shutting off power if the electricity flowing into the circuit differs from that returning.	GFCIs shut off electric power in the event of a ground fault within as little as 1/40 of a second.	Installed where water and electricity are in close proximity, such as bathrooms, kitchens, laundry areas and outdoors.
 Surge Suppression	Protects sensitive electronic equipment from transient surges.	60-80 percent of surges occur within the building, such as when large appliances, like air conditioners, turn on and off.	Not required by the NEC, though often installed in rooms containing costly devices such as computers, TVs or refrigerators.
 USB	Provides a permanent Universal Serial Bus (USB) connection source.	Over 10 billion electrical devices in use today charge via a USB cable.	Offers a permanent adaptation for devices requiring a USB terminal for power or charging as needed for convenience. 

Brown County Briefs

Operation Round Up

The Brown County Rural Electric Trust Board will meet April 2 at 5:30 p.m. to review applications for funding and the 2019 scholarship applications.

Member Advisory Council

April 22 will be the first meeting of the new Member Advisory Council. New members are still being sought. Contact your Director or BCREA if interested. ☎

Operation Round Up offering 6 BCREA scholarships

High school seniors planning to attend college after graduation whose parents/guardians are members and live in Brown County REA's service area are encouraged to apply for one of six \$200 scholarships to be awarded through Operation Round Up.

The funds come from members who round up their electric bill to the nearest dollar each month. The difference is placed in a trust, which is administered by a nine-member board. They meet four times a year to distribute funds to charitable causes, individuals and families in crisis and scholarships.

Scholarship guidelines and applications are available from area high school counselors and on the REA website at www.browncountyrea.coop.

Applications must be submitted by April 1. Winners will be announced at the Annual Meeting. A copy of the student's high school transcript and one letter of recommendation are required. Scholarship funds will be awarded after successful completion of the first semester of college. ☎

Meet your BCREA

District 1



James Hanson

James (Jim) Hanson and Jeri, his wife, live on the farm that Jim grew up on, located northwest of Comfrey. They have four children: Jody, Jaime, Aaron and Adam and nine grandchildren.

Jim and Jeri farm 880 acres and have a registered Hereford cow/calf operation. Jim graduated from Comfrey High School and attended the University of Minnesota, Waseca, before going into farming.

Jim wants to continue to be a part of the BCREA Board of Directors. "I believe the experience that I have gives me a good base for decisions that need to be made in the near future," he said. "When I started on the REA Board in the early 90s, deregulation was facing us, then Cap and Trade, and we continually deal with government regulations/mandates. The names of the issues change, but the bottom line is that we need to keep reliable and low-cost electricity. That has been the focus of BCREA in the past and will continue to be my focus. BCREA is a strong organization and I want to continue to be a part of a positive organization that truly cares about its members." ☎

Operation Round Up kicks off new year

The Round Up Trust Board organized for 2019 at its first quarterly meeting February 19. The Board welcomed new District 3 member Scott Chambard.

Trust Board Officers elected at the meeting include President Lee Johnson, Vice President Michelle Strate, Secretary Vickie Kral and Treasurer Kari Berg. Other current Trust Board members are Arlene Helget, Ann Wendinger, Michelle Oswald, Scott Chambard and Lynnae Pelzel.

Funds totaling \$2,010 were awarded to the Southwest Minnesota Crisis Nursery, Minnesota Music Hall of Fame, Foundation Farm, Brown County United Way Imagination Library program and After Prom activities at GFW, Sleepy Eye Public, Sleepy Eye St. Mary's, Springfield, Minnesota Valley Lutheran and Comfrey high schools.

Thank you to all the REA members who participate in Operation Round Up, making it possible to help organizations and individuals in our service area. Collectively, your change can make a difference. If you would be willing to contribute less than \$12 per year by rounding up your bill to the nearest dollar to help Operation Round Up support local area causes, please complete and return the form below or call Brown County REA at 1-800-658-2368 or 794-3331. You can learn more about Operation Round Up and sign up to participate by visiting the booth at the REA Annual meeting April 11.

The Round Up Trust Board will meet again Tuesday, April 2. ☎

Join Operation Round Up

_____ I want to join Operation Round Up and have my electric bill rounded up to the nearest dollar.

Name: _____ Address: _____

City: _____ Phone: _____

Send (or include it with your electric bill) to BCREA, PO Box 529, Sleepy Eye, MN 56085.

Director candidates for 2019

District 4



William Berg

William Berg lives on the Sigel Township farm where he was raised. He is a graduate of Cathedral High School and worked at Del Monte and Kraft foods before farming. Bill and his wife, Jean, have four children: Nate, Sara, Matt and Kari. Bill, Jean and Matt operate a 45-cow dairy and 500-acre farm.

Bill has served 20 years on both the Sigel Township Board and New Ulm Rural Fire Department Association Board as Director. He has also served as AMPI District 3 President for nine years; he is a member of the Knights of Columbus and the Catholic Order of Foresters.

He believes that a steady, low cost and reliable supply of electricity is important to everyone. He thinks the REA board is doing a good job and would like your support for another term on the board. ☎

District 5



James Mickelson

James (Jim) Mickelson and his wife, Elaine, live in Leavenworth Township of Brown County. They have four children: Darla, Larry, Connie and Vicky; 13 grandchildren and six great-grandchildren. Jim, Elaine, Larry and family operate a crop and dairy farm, plus have a beef cow herd. Jim is a Leavenworth Township Supervisor and chairman of the Brown County Township Association. He has served on many other boards.

Jim is the incumbent director for District 5 and has served on the REA Board since 1998. He has been Board President the past three years. He says with a few years of experience on the REA board he can be an even better representative for our members. "Reliable service with the lowest possible cost for electricity is what I want for our members," he said. "I take pride in being a director on the BCREA Board and I would appreciate your vote." ☎

District 4



Joel Fischer

Joel Fischer was born and raised in the Courtland area and currently resides in Cambria Township. He is a graduate of New Ulm High School and served six years in the Minnesota Army National Guard. He is a retired drainage contractor and retired from Nuvera in New Ulm where he worked as an equipment operator.

Joel and his wife, Jean, have three children: Jennifer Stith, Jonathan Fischer and Janelle Anderson. They also have eight grandchildren.

Joel has served on the Cambria Township Board since 2003 and is currently the Vice President of the Courtland Rural Fire Association. Joel believes that working as a BCREA Director would be another way of serving his community. "I've had the experience of dealing with the public and solving any problems that may occur through my previous jobs," he said. ☎

District 5



Keith M. Hoffmann

Keith Hoffmann was raised and has lived his entire life in Stark Township. He graduated from St. Mary's High School in Sleepy Eye and began working at Bruggeman Company (now Kibble Equipment); he has been involved with the service department for 27 years.

He also operates a 450-acre crop and cattle operation with his parents, Mike and Marjorie Hoffmann. He has two siblings, Jill and Beth, and seven nephews who live in the Sleepy Eye area.

Keith's community involvement includes being a part of the Knights of Columbus and he serves as a supervisor for Stark Township.

Keith is interested in being a BCREA Director because Brown County and the surrounding townships have great electric service throughout, making it a great place to live. He would work to maintain the high level of service and said "My 27 years of training would help me to be a strong, positive director." ☎

Make your vote count at BCREA's Annual Meeting April 11!

The cooperative delegations encourage free market on renewables — do not mandate levels

— Continued from Page 1
program for added generation. Plus, peaking plants switched from natural gas to fuel oil so more natural gas would be available for home heating.”

Bills proposed to increase the Minnesota renewable energy mandate from 25 percent by 2025 include:

- 50 percent by 2030
- 80 percent by 2035 and carbon free by 2050.

“We encourage legislators to vote ‘no’ on higher renewable energy mandates,” added Scott Reimer, Federated Rural Electric’s general manager. “Allow the market to work. Utilities are adding renewables, while managing affordability, reliability and sustainability; we keep the lights on every day, especially during weather extremes.”

During the visits, co-ops encouraged legislators to also support reforming the Conservation Improvement Program (CIP), implemented in 2007. “CIP aims to reduce the use of electricity through energy efficiency, like rebates for efficient equipment and lighting,” Reimer stated. “The bill would eliminate a spending goal, keep the low-income assistance, factor in beneficial electrification with the addition of electric vehicles on the horizon and continue the small utility exemption; these actions would improve the CIP program.”

The cooperative delegation also spoke about third-party vendors trying to “cherry-pick” the largest customers to provide solar or battery storage options for them. “As cooperatives are member-owned, allowing certain customers special privileges leaves the remaining members to pay more for the maintenance of the lines and state mandates, increasing the costs for others and risking degraded service for all,” Heidemann said. “Minnesota utilities have the ‘obligation to serve’ providing



Another legislative visit occurred with Representative Bob Gunther (second from right). Pictured Federated Directors and two spouses: Darvin Voss, David and Ruth Hansen, Cheryl and Bruce Brockmann, and David Meschke. The Federated group also met with Representative Rod Hamilton and Senator Julie Rosen.



Directors and staff from Brown County, South Central and Redwood electric cooperatives also met with Senator Gary Dahms (front row, third from the right). These legislative visits help educate legislators on what’s in the best interest for cooperative member-owners to provide reliable and affordable electricity.

universal access to service, eliminating costly duplication of services or infrastructure, safety and reliability. Changing the utility model that works well harms more members than it helps.”

The delegation concluded with encouraging rural broadband support, as it would benefit their cooperative members, education and economic development. (6)

An advertisement featuring a close-up of a white smartphone with a white power cord plugged into its charging port. The background is a soft, out-of-focus light color. Text is overlaid on the right side of the image.

**Charging
your phone
for a year**

Electricity continues to be a great value
courtesy of your electric cooperative

50¢

Layer us up with oodles of your favorite lasagne recipes

Share your hot and hearty lasagne recipes with us! Is it an overnight, crock pot, Instapot recipe with tomato, alfredo or Grandma's secret sauce? Send to: Editor, Federated Rural Electric, PO Box 69, Jackson MN 56143-0069 or e-mail to christoffer@federatedrea.coop by March 25. Add your name and phone number. Thanks for sharing with us! ☺

Blueberry Dessert by Juleen Breitbarth, Truman

1 c. all-purpose flour	1/2 c. butter
1 c. quick-cooking oats	2 1/2 c. fresh blueberries
1 c. brown sugar (not packed)	1/4 c. sugar

In large bowl combine flour, oats and brown sugar; cut in butter until crumbly. Press half of this mixture into a greased 9" square baking dish. Bake at 350° for 10 minutes, until golden brown around edges. Cover crust with the blueberries and sugar mixture; then sprinkle the remaining crust mixture on top. Bake 35-40 minutes longer. Serve warm with optional half-n-half, whipped cream or ice cream. Makes 9 servings. ☺

Teachers: head back to class & learn about electricity for free, plus earn two free credits!



The Lignite Energy Council (LEC) is conducting the 2019 Teacher Seminar, "Energy, Economics and Environment," at the Bismarck State College in Bismarck, ND, June 10-13, 2019.

Basin Electric or Great River Energy, cooperative wholesale power suppliers, pay for travel costs for teachers within the cooperative's service territory, while LEC covers the rest. Your electric cooperative encourages educators to apply.

This seminar provides teachers with the information and educational materials to teach their students about how lignite is mined and used to produce electricity for homes, farms and businesses in the Upper Midwest. In addition, the seminar covers lignite's economic impact on the region, as well as important environmental issues affecting the lignite industry.

Teachers can apply online: www.lignite.com/teachers

Applications are accepted until the seminar is full or until May, whichever occurs first.

A \$60 deposit reserves each teacher's spot and can be submitted online. This deposit is returned when they check in at the seminar on June 10. This deposit is forfeited if they cancel after May 1 and the spot is not filled.

Typically, all eligible teachers are accepted. Should applications outnumber the 130 available spots, preference will be given based on the following criteria:

- 4th-12th grade teachers
- Science, math or social studies teachers
- Career counselors

Teachers must track their mileage and individual meal expenses (up to two each way) from home to the seminar and back. Packets with travel expense reimbursement forms will be given to the teachers at the seminar. Receipts for meals are required.

Kay LaCoe at the Lignite Energy Council will answer questions related to the seminar: kay.lacoe@lignite.com or 1-800-932-7117. ☺

Is your basement ready for spring flooding?



Install a water sensor now so you won't need to deal with a wet mess!

- Sump pump failure/ flooded basement
- Intrusion
- Fire
- Frozen pipes
- Medical alert



1-888-264-6380
heartlandss.com

A subsidiary
of your local electric co-op



Brown County Rural Electrical Association

Brown County Rural Electrical Assn.
24386 State Hwy 4, PO Box 529
Sleepy Eye MN 56085

E-mail address: bcrea@bcrea.coop
Website: www.browncountyrea.coop
Phone: 507-794-3331 or 800-658-2368
Office hours: 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday-Friday

Mike Heidemann, Chief Executive Officer

Board of Directors

James Mickelson, President — 794-6298
William Berg, Vice President — 354-4895
James D. Hanson, Sec.-Treasurer — 829-6756
Brad Sprenger — 877-2633
Allen Hanson — 276-0691
Thomas Hayes — 228-8954
Reuben Kokesch — 359-2112
Greg Mages — 794-3540
Joel Christensen — 828-4550
The Board of Directors meets the last Thursday of each month.

2018 Annual Report coming soon Please bring along to April 11 Annual Meeting

All Brown County REA members will receive, by mail in mid-March, a copy of the cooperative's 2018 Annual Report. The mailing includes the Annual Meeting agenda, past minutes and financial report. Most importantly, the back page of the mailing includes your Annual Meeting registration form, which will be scanned at the registration table. **Please bring this Annual Report with you April 11.**

Notice of Annual Meeting

All Brown County REA members are invited and encouraged to attend the 82nd Annual Meeting

When: April 11
Location: Sleepy Eye Event Center
110 12th Avenue N.E.
Sleepy Eye, MN
Registration: 4:30 p.m.
Meal: 5:30 p.m.
Meeting: Immediately following meal



Election of directors in Districts 1, 4 & 5

Board meeting highlights

The BCREA Board of Directors held its monthly board meeting February 28 at the BCREA headquarters, Sleepy Eye. Discussion and/or action were taken on the following agenda items:

- Reviewed and approved the January 2019 board meeting minutes, new member applications and member cancellations.
 - Approved a resolution adopting the Cooperative Minnesota Distribution Energy Resource Interconnection Process (C-MIP).
 - Reviewed and approved the updated Cogeneration/Distributed Energy Resources Policy and Cooperative Cogeneration Rules for use beginning March 1.
 - Reviewed the cooperative's National Rural Utilities Cooperative Finance Corporation Officer's Certificate of Compliance Worksheet and Certification for 2018.
 - Reviewed 2018 outage summary report.
 - Reviewed and approved cooperative policies 103, 104 and 219.
 - Approved resolutions to vote in favor of GRE NextEra Energy Resources Amendment No. 1 to Wind Energy Purchase Agreement and ENGIE Power Purchase Agreement.
- The Board will meet again March 28, at the BCREA headquarters in Sleepy Eye.

Community Health Day



Saturday, March 23
Sleepy Eye Public School
6:30 a.m.- 9:30 a.m.

- Blood analysis (includes cholesterol, LDL/HDL, calcium, glucose, etc.): \$40. Requires a 12-hour fast for best results
- Thyroid Stimulating Hormone (TSH) test: \$30
- Free blood pressure screenings

For appointments call between 8 a.m. and 4:30 p.m. Monday-Friday (800-658-2368 or 507-794-3331). Walk-ins will be accepted after 7:30 a.m. Health Day is a joint effort of Brown County REA, Brown County Public Health, Sleepy Eye Medical Center and Sleepy Eye Community Education. All are welcome.