

# Connections

October 2020

For the member-owners of Brown County REA



Volume 24, Issue 10

## Power On! Celebrating Co-op Month even during pandemic

As an electric cooperative, our top priority is always to provide reliable, affordable energy to you, the member-owners we serve. Because we are a co-op, our mission is to enrich the lives of our members and serve the long-term interests of our communities.

This mission has never been more critical than in recent months. One of the seven principles that guides all co-ops is “concern for community.” This principle is the essential DNA of your electric cooperative and it sets us apart from other electric utilities.

October is National Co-op Month. Electric cooperatives across the country are highlighting the many ways we “Power On.” Keeping this theme in mind, let’s recognize the essential role we play in serving our local communities.

Who would have fathomed in March, that the COVID-19 virus would amount to a test of our community and our nation? The changing circumstances due to the pandemic created new challenges. Over the past several months we’ve all been forced to



**Power on! Even Covid-19 doesn't stop BCREA from serving you. During October Co-op Month, we highlight some ways we continue to serve — even doing a drive-in Annual Meeting.**

operate differently, including your electric cooperative; we stepped up to help our members.

As an essential service and to ensure reliability of your power supply, we modified our operations to safeguard business continuity. Our line crews and other employees began working differently to maintain social distancing. Some staff worked remotely. In the office we limited and modified meetings for safe separation. We adjusted our walk-in office availability and in-person service calls to ensure the health and safety of our employees and our valued members. Plus, we even conducted

our first drive-in Annual Meeting for voting. We think these measures were the prudent course of action for the times.

For members impacted by COVID-19 who needed help with their electric bills, we waived late fees and created payment arrangements. Our Operation Round Up program continued to assist local organizations through your donations.

While we certainly missed visiting with you in person, we all found new ways to stay connected. We share these efforts to explain how much we care about our communities — because we live here too.

We’ve seen other local businesses rising to meet similar challenges; this is what our communities do. While the challenges caused by COVID-19 have been daunting, we’re heartened to see how everyone is pulling together.

In 1937, your electric cooperative was built by our rural families to serve the local community. Even now, that’s what we’ll continue to do — Power On.

### At A Glance



**Brown County  
Rural Electrical  
Association**

#### What does it mean to be “local?”

Your electric cooperative is a “local” electric cooperative. What does that mean for you and your community? Check out the CEO’s message on Page 8. October is Electric Co-op Month, but BCREA is there for members and community all year long.



## Plug air leaks to prevent drain on utility bill

In typical homes air leaks are often found at cracks, small holes and penetrations for plumbing, wiring, lighting and ductwork. Together, these leaks add up to as much air loss as having an open window!

Air leakage also decreases the comfort of a residence by allowing moisture, cold drafts and unwanted noise to enter and may lower indoor air quality by allowing in dust and airborne pollutants.

### Benefits of air sealing

Sealing a home's envelope — its exterior walls, ceiling and floors — is an important step in controlling the indoor environment and lowering energy bills.

- Drafts felt during the winter are often the result of unsealed cracks and holes.

- Air leakage accounts for 25 percent to 40 percent of the energy used for heating and cooling in a typical residence.

- A tighter home envelope reduces the amount of humidity, dust, pollen and pests that can enter the home and helps improve indoor air quality.

- When warm air leaks through a home's floors, walls and attic, it can come in contact with cooler surfaces where condensation occurs. Moisture that occurs in these construction assemblies encourages mold growth, ruins insulation and even compromises the structural elements of the home.

### Location of common air leaks

While poorly sealed windows and



The chimney is a culprit for air leaks if the flue is not working properly. A chimney balloon can seal the opening.

doors contribute to air leakage, the bigger sources are typically holes and penetrations through the home's envelope that are hidden from view. These include penetrations for piping, wiring, lighting and duct work, as well as seams where materials join.

New homes are built with controlling air leakage in mind. "Build it tight and ventilate it right." It is easiest to seal a home during construction as access becomes more limited afterwards. Builders can use a variety of products to seal a home's envelope, such as caulks, foams, gaskets, weatherstripping, door sweeps and house wraps. Mechanical ventilation systems are then installed in new homes to provide a controlled amount of fresh air.

### Where to start

Suppose you have an older home

that was not built to such specifications. Where do you start to combat air leakage? Follow these tips:

- Caulk and weather-strip doors and windows that leak air.

- Caulk and seal air leaks where plumbing, ducting or electrical wiring comes through walls, floors, ceilings and soffits over cabinets.

- Install foam gaskets behind outlet and switch plates on walls.

- Inspect dirty spots in the insulation for air leaks and mold. Seal leaks with low-expansion spray foam made for this purpose; install house flashing if needed.

- Look for dirty spots on your ceiling paint and carpet, which may indicate air leaks at interior wall/ceiling joints and wall/floor joists and caulk them.

- Cover single-pane windows with storm windows or replace them with more efficient double-pane, low-emissivity windows.

- Use foam sealant on larger gaps around windows, baseboards and other places where air may leak.

- Cover your kitchen exhaust fan to stop air leaks when not in use.

- Check your dryer vent to be sure it is not blocked. This will save energy and may prevent a fire.

- Replace door bottoms and thresholds with ones that have pliable sealing gaskets.

- Seal air leaks around fireplace — **Continued on Page 6**

## Extend your wi-fi range with the Super Wi-Fi Boost

Is your Internet sluggish in certain parts of the house or do you have dead spots in certain rooms? Maybe you would like to be able to connect to your wi-fi, while out in the garage. Perhaps these dead spots are even more noticeable if you are working from home or have students in the house taking online classes.

This booster is a wi-fi extender/repeater that helps cover the dead spots in your home and bridge the distance to spots where your wi-fi signal is not strong enough to work with satisfactory results.

The Super Wi-Fi Booster is compatible with any router, making it easy to expand and strengthen your network. Increase your existing network's range, providing up to 300 Mbps.

The Super Wi-Fi Booster is small and discreet, easily blending into your




**The Super Wi-Fi Booster can help you eliminate Internet dead spots in your home and extend your wi-fi range.**

home decor. Simply plug the Super Wi-Fi Booster into an outlet located where you need to either boost or extend your signal. Once the Super Wi-Fi Booster is plugged in, you will need to go online and activate it. You will also need to set the Super Wi-Fi Booster to your mode of preference. You have two modes to choose from.

- Repeater Mode is for extending wi-fi coverage of an existing wireless network.
- AP Mode can convert a wired network to a wireless network.

The Super Wi-Fi Booster is compatible with tablets, phones, Echo/Alexa devices, Smart TVs, PCs, video game systems, such as Xbox and Playstation, smart plugs and more.

The Super Wi-Fi Booster is available in many stores and online for approximately \$30. 

## Safety

### Take time to look up and look around this harvest

Harvest is in full swing, but do not get in such a hurry that safety is neglected, especially around electrical equipment.

Take time to look up and look around when working with farm machinery around electric wires, poles and padmount transformers.

Are you using new tractors or combines this year? Perhaps they require a higher clearance than your previous model. Take an extra moment to look up when you enter field approaches to make sure you do not snag any overhead wires.


When digging ground on end rows, take time to look back to make sure you are giving any electric poles that border your property plenty of space. Remember, you are responsible for paying for any damage done to electric equipment.

Finally, as you move farm machinery around the yard, take care



**Watch out for poles, especially around end rows, whether doing fall harvesting or tiling. You are responsible for the cost of repairing any damaged lines.**

to make sure augers are lowered as far as possible so they do not come in contact with any power lines. Plus, give any padmount transformers plenty of space. It does not take much contact for heavy machinery to do a lot of damage to electric equipment.

Everyone is in a hurry to harvest the crops, but the minutes it takes to look up and look around can save you and your neighbors hours in outage time. Save yourself potentially thousands of dollars in repairs on the co-op's electrical equipment. 

# Brown County Briefs

## Member Advisory Council postponed until 2021



Just a reminder to members who agreed to serve on the Member Advisory Council in 2020 that

the council will not meeting until 2021. You will receive notice, by mail, once the meeting date is set.

### Check out our new website

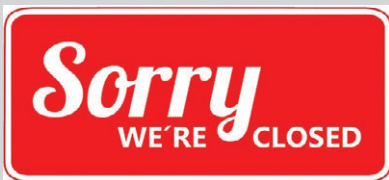
New look, same web address. We are pleased to announce the launch of our new website at [www.browncountyrea.coop](http://www.browncountyrea.coop). Check out some of the new functionality, forms and features.

### Energy efficiency tip



The average household owns 24 electronic products, which account for roughly 12 percent of home energy use.

When shopping for electronics, consider purchasing Energy Star®-certified products, which can be 70 percent more efficient than conventional models.



Our office remains temporarily closed to the public. If you need to conduct business that can't be done remotely, please call 800-658-2368 to make an appointment. Please continue to pay your electric bill using the drop box, online bill pay through our website ([www.browncountyrea.coop](http://www.browncountyrea.coop)), mobile app or automatic payment from your bank account, credit or debit card. Thank you for your patience! ☺

## Rural communities depend on Co-op Voters.

- ✓ Learn about the issues.
- ✓ Talk to your family and friends.
- ✓ Cast your vote.



Election Day is  
November 3, 2020

Be an active participant in our democracy. Be a Co-op Voter.

[www.vote.coop](http://www.vote.coop)

## Electric heat sales tax exemption

Do you use electric heat as your home's primary heat source? Are you receiving the sales tax exemption during the heating season?

Electricity sold for residential use is not taxable for the billing months of November through April when sold to metered customers who use it as their primary source of residential heat. If more than one type of heat is used, electricity is not taxable if it is the primary source of heat. Primary source of residential heat is the source that supplies more heat than any other source for the largest period of time during the heating season. See the Minnesota Department of Revenue Sales Tax Fact Sheet 157 at [www.revenue.state.mn.us](http://www.revenue.state.mn.us) for more detailed information.

If you have made changes and now use electric heat as your primary residential heat, or if it has been 10 years or more since you completed the sales tax exemption form, please fill out the form below and return to our office. BCREA must have a signed form on file in order for you to receive the sales tax exemption. ☺

BROWN COUNTY RURAL ELECTRICAL ASSOCIATION  
SLEEPY EYE, MINNESOTA 56085  
**RESIDENTIAL HEATING FUEL EXEMPTION CERTIFICATE**



I, hereby certify that electricity is the primary source (over 50% of the heating requirements) in my residence at Minnesota. I acknowledge that I am responsible for proving that I qualify for this tax exemption should I be audited. I also am responsible to notify Brown County REA if and when electric energy is no longer used as the primary source for residential heating.

DATED: \_\_\_\_\_

SIGNATURE: \_\_\_\_\_

LOCATION OR ACCOUNT #: \_\_\_\_\_

# Your co-op is unlike any other utility

Electric cooperatives power 56 percent of the nation's landmass — from booming suburbs to remote rural farming communities. Brown County REA is among more than 800 American distribution cooperatives serving as energy providers and engines of economic development for more than 20 million American homes, businesses, farms and schools in 48 states.


Unlike investor-owned and municipal utilities, the purpose of a cooperative — above all else — is to provide reliable, affordable electric service to its membership. In recognition of National Co-op Month in October, take a look at other ways we are different from other utilities.

1. You're a member, not a customer. Cooperatives are unique because they are owned by you, the member. This means you have a voice in the way we run the co-op. Members elect the co-op's Board of Directors and can run for a seat on the board if they wish to do so. Your vote and participation help shape the direction of the cooperative.

2. We focus on service, not profits. Unlike investor-owned utilities, which are operated to make the most profits for stakeholders, electric co-ops do not earn profits. Instead, any margins or revenue remaining (after all expenses have been paid) are returned to members in the form of capital credits. Capital credit returns are based on each member's patronage in the co-op each year.

3. We're local, community-focused businesses. Because we are owned by the members we serve, electric cooperatives have a strong commitment to our local communities. In addition to providing safe, reliable and affordable power, Brown County REA supports local community programs including 4-H and FFA, Relay for Life, Bridging Brown County and Junior Achievement to name a few.




4. We're committed to innovation. Because we answer to local members, rather than far-away shareholders, electric cooperatives are more nimble and able to respond quickly to changing members' needs. We are committed to exploring and innovating in ways that benefit the local communities and members we serve. 

We can all play a part in making our interconnected world safer.



Do Your Part.  
**#BeCyberSmart.**

## Be cyber safe

- Have antivirus software on your computer and keep it updated.
- Don't send e-mails containing personal information, like your date of birth or Social Security number, because that increases opportunities for mal-actors to steal your identify. Be careful typing a credit card number into a website — if you do, make sure that it's a secure website. A secure site will begin with "https://".
  - Don't open an e-mail attachment or click a link unless you know the person sending it and were expecting the email (hackers can take over an account and make it look friendly).
  - Monitor children's online activity and teach them cyber security. 

**October is National Cybersecurity Awareness Month.**  
Visit [staysafeonline.org](https://staysafeonline.org) for cybersecurity tips.



# Your visual 'do-list' for sealing up air leaks

— Continued from Page 2

chimneys, furnaces and gas-fired water heater vents with fire-resistant materials, such as sheet metal or sheetrock and furnace cement caulk.

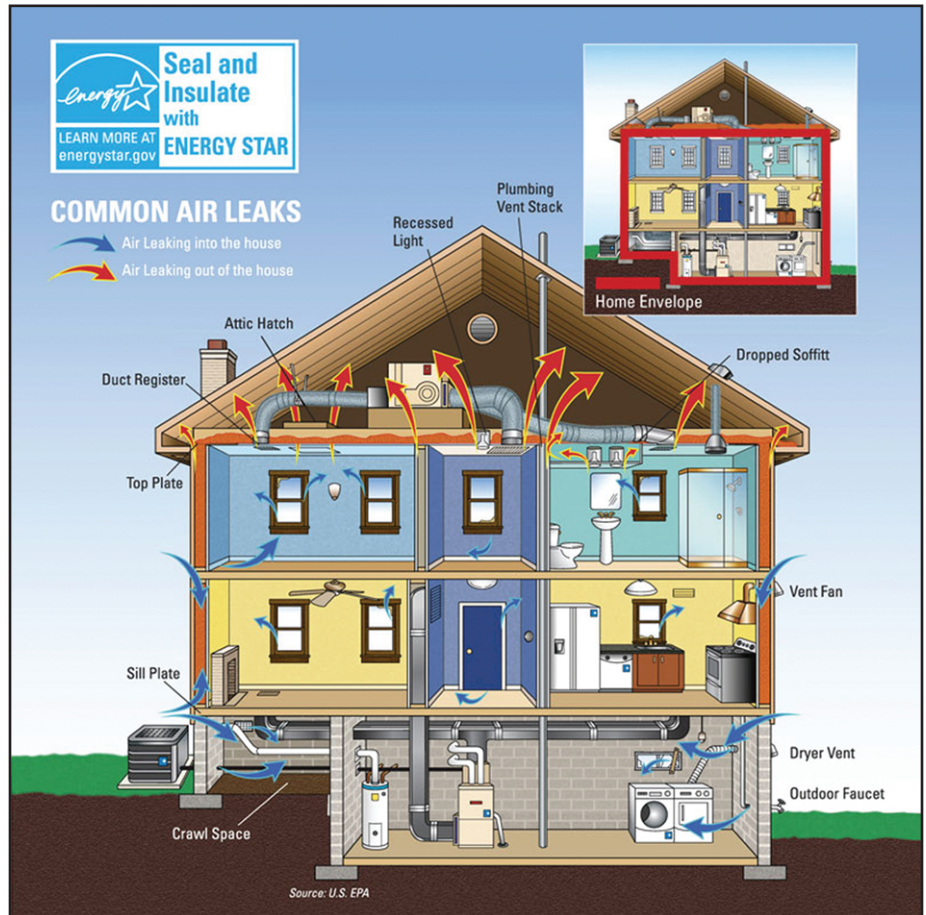
- Keep the fireplace flue damper tightly closed when not in use.

Fireplace flues are made from metal, and over time repeated heating and cooling can cause the metal to warp or break, creating a channel for air loss. To solve this issue consider an inflatable chimney balloon. Inflatable chimney balloons fit beneath your fireplace flue and can be removed easily and reused hundreds of times. If you forget to remove the balloon before making a fire, the balloon will automatically deflate within seconds of coming into contact with heat.

A reasonably capable do-it-yourselfer can create an inexpensive, reusable fireplace flue plug by filling a plastic trash bag with fiberglass batt scraps and jamming it into the flue. Attach a durable cord with a tag that hangs down into the fireplace to remind you the flue is blocked and provide an easy plug removal method.

Contact the co-op for additional energy-saving tips. 

— Courtesy of [Energystar.gov](http://energystar.gov) and [energy.gov](http://energy.gov)



Sealing air leaks is one of the best ways to boost your home's energy efficiency. Whether you're a do-it-yourselfer, pro or novice, with a few simple steps (and low-cost materials), you'll be well on your way to a sealed, more efficient home. This home gives you an idea on where to start your energy-sealing efforts.



Ask about the electric co-op member discount!

## Smoke signals FIRE!

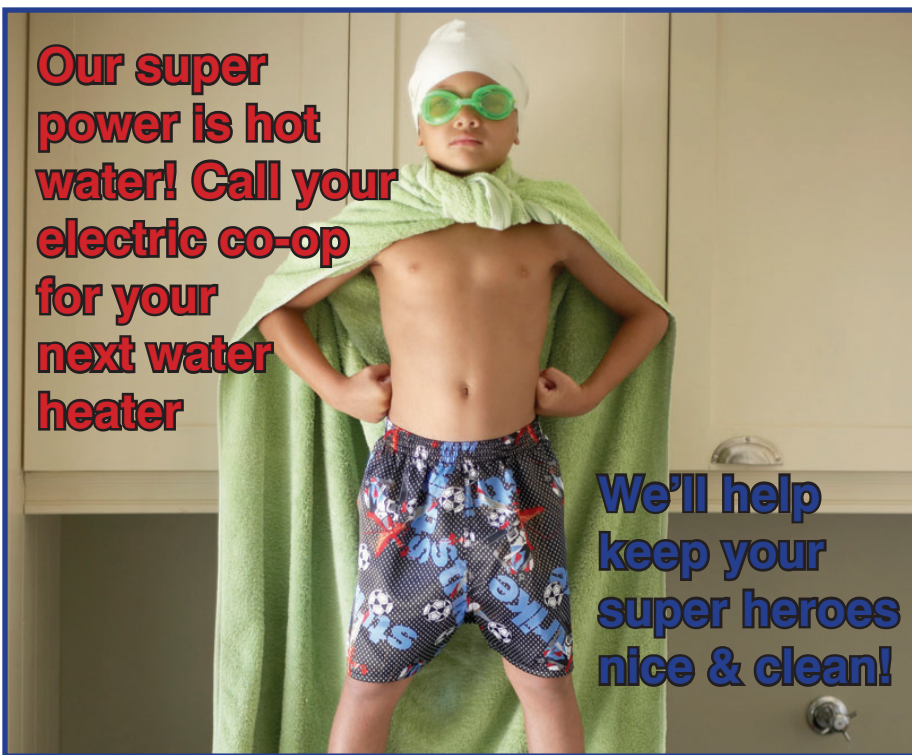
Our smart security systems protect your home or business from fire, carbon monoxide, intruders and other threats

  
1-888-264-6380

Residential • Commercial  
Agricultural • Medical

# How sweet it is! Share your favorite sweet potato recipes with us

Pull up a seat to eat sweet potatoes! Share your favorite sweet potatoes dishes, whether it's a pie, veggie side dish, as fries or some other surprise. Share your sweet potatoes recipes just in time for the holidays! Send to: Editor, Federated Rural Electric, PO Box 69, Jackson MN 56143-0069 or e-mail to christoffer@federatedrea.coop by October 26. Add your name and phone number. Thanks for sharing with us! ☺



### Critter Crunch by Ginger Heiderscheidt, Sleepy Eye

¼ c. butter      3 T. brown sugar  
 1 tsp. ground cinnamon  
 1½ c. Crispix cereal  
 1½ c. Cheerios  
 1½ c. animal crackers  
 1½ c. bear-shaped honey graham snacks  
 1 c. bite-size shredded wheat cereal  
 1 c. miniature pretzels

In a saucepan heat the butter, brown sugar and cinnamon until the butter is melted; mix well. In a large bowl combine the remaining ingredients. Add the butter mixture and toss to coat. Place on a greased 15x10x1" baking pan. Bake uncovered at 300° for 30 minutes. Stir every 10 minutes. Store in an airtight container. ☺

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**Pick up the phone before the shovel; call before digging!**

**1-800-252-1166**



Call Gopher State One Call before doing any digging more than 12" deep — 48 hours before digging for foundations, trees, tiling and more. You can also register at [www.gopherstateonecall.org](http://www.gopherstateonecall.org) or call 811. Call a licensed electrician to locate the underground lines on your side of the meter. ☺

The Post Office requires our **Connections** newsletter to annually post its circulation counts. ☺



**Brown County  
Rural Electrical  
Association**

Brown County Rural Electrical Assn.  
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Sleepy Eye MN 56085

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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**

Thomas Hayes, President — 228-8954  
William Berg, Vice President — 766-1497  
James D. Hanson, Sec.-Treasurer — 829-6756  
Brad Sprenger — 317-5576  
Allen Hanson — 276-0691  
David Wendinger — 276-3166  
Greg Mages — 794-3540  
Joel Christensen — 828-4550  
James Mickelson, 794-6298  
The Board of Directors meets the last Thursday of each month.



**Mike Heidemann  
Chief Executive  
Officer**

# Staff Notes

**We like the word “local”**

We like it because it’s the nearby hardware store where we can get what we need. It’s where we meet friends for coffee. It’s the shop where they look us in the eye and smile. It’s a word of warmth that makes us feel known.

Local also means your electric co-op. It’s as local as you and your neighbors because you own it. It’s grown and changed with you, possibly starting before you were even born. Because it’s

made up of you and your neighbors, it’s as unique to each part of the country as you are. And it changes to help out with what’s going on in your community and brought electricity to farmsteads more than 80 years ago.

October is National Co-op Month. This year it makes sense to use this time to recognize and celebrate the variety that is the essence of being local.

That local heritage for electric co-ops started in the 1930s with neighborly visits, often on horseback from one farm to the next, talking about the lights they could see in the city, but didn’t have themselves. They weren’t likely to get those modern conveniences because no company saw a profit in stringing wires to power a few light bulbs in a remote farmhouse.

So, the local farmers took matters into their own hands. They pooled \$5 startup fees, organized member-owned, not-for-profit electric cooperatives, and convinced local politicians to create a federal loan program to help with the rest of the cost. They created what others didn’t see — one of the most efficient agricultural economies in the world and communities based around a variety of business and industry.

Now that we’re all faced with the fallout from the effects of COVID-19, electric co-ops are again on the job as the virus changes everything from the national economy to how we say hello to our neighbors.

Your electric co-op has socially-distanced line crews and kept the office closed to outside traffic. Meetings of the Board and other groups have been held via Zoom and other technologies. In June, Brown County REA held a drive-in Annual Meeting in its parking lot.

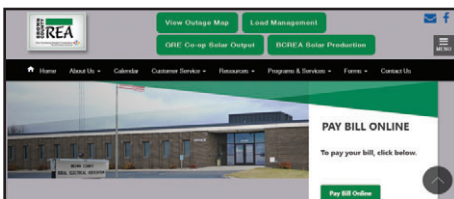
The world keeps changing, and electric co-ops will continue to adapt. Each co-op’s approach may differ, but they’ll do whatever it takes to adapt in ways that make the most sense for the people in their community. That’s what it means to be a local electric co-op. ☺

# Board meeting highlights

The BCREA Board of Directors held its monthly board meeting September 24 in the BCREA auditorium in Sleepy Eye. Discussion and/or action were taken on the following agenda items:

- Reviewed and approved the August 2020 board meeting minutes, new membership applications, member cancellations, assignment transfers and payments to estates.
- Reviewed and approved August 2020 payroll and July 2020 financial statements.
- Approved appointments to the Member Advisory Council. Representatives in Districts 6, 7 and 9 will serve as Nominating Committee for 2021 director elections.
- Reviewed data to enter on the 2019 IRS Form 990.
- Informed of IT network upgrades being installed at the cooperative’s headquarters.
- Updated on progress with construction activities, including County Road 21, Comfrey three-phase and underground rebuild projects.
- Reviewed August load control activities and performance.

The next meeting will be on October 29 at the BCREA office in Sleepy Eye. ☺



**New BCREA website!**

Be sure to check out our new website at [www.browncountyrea.coop](http://www.browncountyrea.coop). Pay your bills online, learn about our money-saving programs and more! ☺