

# Connections

April 2020

For the member-owners of Brown County REA



Volume 24, Issue 4

## Amid the unfamiliar, Brown County Rural Electrical Association is working for you

As we all deal with the new realities brought on by the coronavirus, be assured that Brown County REA is here to help you. We have always had an Emergency Plan that has served us well in a variety of circumstances, from ice storms to tornadoes to flash floods. Early in this crisis, our staff updated that plan with a special emphasis on ensuring we can continue to provide the reliable electric service you have come to expect from your electric cooperative.

So far, that is exactly what has happened. We know that after a sufficient supply of food and water, electricity is the Number One thing you need to maintain some sense of normalcy as we hunker down in our homes. With that in mind, keeping the power flowing is Job One for everyone involved in maintaining the electric cooperative system.

That starts with our generation cooperative, Great River Energy, which has taken extreme measures to ensure its workforce is healthy and its power plants are functioning as needed and that electricity is flowing to its 28 cooperatives across Minnesota. It includes Brown County REA where business may be a bit unusual, but our service remains the same. Some of the steps we have taken in order to keep your power flowing:

- We've closed our office to the public to minimize the risk of exposure to keep our team members healthy so they can continue to do the job of keeping your power on. We are encouraging members to use our drop box, online and phone payment options and the mail to pay bills.
- Some of our employees are working from home. Others alternate work days so they can practice social distancing even when in the office. If you call, the phones will be answered as always.
- We have separated our line crews from other employees and even from each other to limit possible spread of the virus. Trucks are being relocated so that lineworkers can head to the job site without coming to the office.



• Our management team is meeting continually to fine-tune this plan and keeping the board informed of what's happening. We are in regular contact with the other electric cooperatives, the statewide association and our wholesale power supplier.

So far, it is working well and everyone has adapted to the new norm. That's because we've done this before. Nothing brings out the best in our employees better than a crisis situation. It's kind of like gold that has been tested in fire...stronger and more beautiful!

Our focus here is on doing our part to keep your life as normal as possible through this situation and beyond. The cooperative way of doing business has brought us this far, and the cooperative way will help us through this crisis.

Stay healthy, stay home and we will get through this together the cooperative way! ☺

### At A Glance



**Brown County  
Rural Electrical  
Association**

### Save your Annual Report

Although a new date has not been set, members are asked to please save the 2019 Annual Report, which was mailed to you in mid-March. Bring it along to the rescheduled Annual Meeting to scan your registration. ☺



## Save money by electrifying your lawn care

The time for shoveling snow will soon be past. Then it will be time to start caring for lawns: mowing, trimming and even blowing leaves.

Gas-powered lawn equipment has been the traditional way to go for decades, but now electric options are becoming more and more popular. Electric options offer consumers faster charging times, longer battery life and quieter, greener products compared to their gas-powered counterparts. Here are three ways you can electrify your lawn care this spring.

### Electric lawn mowers

Electric lawn mowers have come a long way over the last few years. Early models required corded connections, which were tricky to manage, but the cord was cut. Newer cordless electric mowers are more expensive than gas-powered mowers, but much of the upfront cost can be recovered since electricity is a less expensive fuel than gas. Plus, electric engines generally require less maintenance than gas engines. Cordless electric mowers typically range from \$200 to \$500.

Electric mowers are suitable for most lawn care needs, with batteries that typically require about one to two hours to fully charge. Most batteries can run for a full hour. If you have a large yard (half an acre or larger), a gas-powered mower is still probably the best option to suit your needs.

### Electric trimmers

Cordless electric string trimmers are a great option for most lawns. Traditionally, like lawn mowers, string trimmers have typically been powered by gas. New versions of electric trimmers are improving and are now considered worthy competitors of gas-powered models.

Cordless electric trimmers are



**Electric mowers, like the RYOBI 48V Zero Turn Electric Riding Mower, are becoming more popular and practical alternatives to gas-powered mowers. Other electric lawn care product makers include Stihl, Ego and more.**

much quieter and easier to use. Most batteries last about 30 to 45 minutes. If you have a lot of space to trim, you may want to consider a back-up battery or plan to work in short bursts. If you're interested in purchasing an electric trimmer, the main factors to consider are the battery's life, charge time and power. Costs can vary depending on your needs, but you can find a quality version for about \$100.

### Electric leaf blowers

After cutting and trimming your lawn, you'll need to clear off those grass clippings from walkways and patios for the finishing touch. If you don't want to deal with the maintenance of a gas-powered blower or the restraints of a corded blower, a cordless electric version is a great option.

Cordless electric leaf blowers are lightweight and easy to maneuver, but they don't offer quite as much power as gas-powered and corded blowers. If your leaf blowing and clearing needs are minimal, a cordless electric leaf blower can get the job done. Costs for a cordless electric blower vary depending on power and battery quality. You can purchase a dependable model for about \$150 and up.

If you're looking to electrify your lawn care equipment, do your homework. Search online for the latest reviews, and check trusted websites like ConsumerReports.org. With a little research you'll be well on your way to the Lawn of the Month — with less maintenance, hassle and noise — thanks to electricity. ☺



## Electric hedge trimmer gives you the edge in yardwork


Make shrub and hedge trimming a bit simpler with the Black & Decker Electric Hedge Trimmer. This electric tool eliminates the need for fuel and is also cordless. Just plug in the charged battery and trim hedges, shrubs and bushes.

The Black & Decker Electric Hedge Trimmer uses a powerful 40-volt battery that provides plenty of run time. It features enough power to cut branches up to three-fourths of an inch thick. The lithium ion battery holds a charge five times longer — double the life of NiCd batteries. They are also powered by an Energy Star-qualified charger that replenishes the battery in approximately one hour.

The Black & Decker Electric Hedge Trimmer has a 24-inch dual action blade that gives up to 40 percent less vibration than single action blades and cuts cleanly and comfortably. It has a full wrap around front handle that provides a comfortable gripping area in all cutting orientations. Pre-hardened, rust-resistant steel blades stay sharp longer. Its lightweight, compact design is easy to use and causes less user fatigue. This trimmer can trim up to 6,000 square feet per charge.



**Electrify your yard work with an electric hedge trimmer from Black & Decker. It is quick, easy and powerful.**

The Black & Decker Electric Hedge Trimmer can be found in a variety of stores or online. It costs approximately \$125. Work smarter and save your back! 

## Safety

### Don't dig in the dirt without calling the Gopher

Have you ever thought of the importance dirt has in our lives? Dirt is part of our livelihood, as we work the soil to produce crops to feed our nation. For others dirt is the basis for beautiful gardens and healthy vegetables. As children, we loved to make mud cakes and feel the wet dirt squish between our fingers.

Dirt also has something to do with our safety. You need to know what is under the dirt if you plan to dig any holes more than 12 inches deep. Electric cables, water lines and more might be buried in the area.

To find out where your utilities are buried contact Gopher State One Call (GSOC). The number is 811 or 1-800-252-1166. You can also go to their website and submit a request electronically. The website is [www.gopherstateonecall.org](http://www.gopherstateonecall.org).

Don't think someone else will do it. Make sure you know who the designated person is to call and create a ticket. If you are having a



**Call Gopher State One Call 48 hours in advance before digging more than 12 inches deep. They will locate underground utility lines in the area.**


contractor work in your yard and do the digging, they need to call GSOC. The party who is actually doing the work is the party that needs to create a ticket.

When you contact GSOC with a dig request, they want to know such things as the caller's name, caller phone number, type of work to be done, start date/time, etc.... To prepare yourself

for answering the questions visit the GSOC website before calling.

Some key time frames are important to know as you work with GSOC. After you have contacted GSOC, you must wait 48 hours before digging. Before digging check GSOC's Positive Response site at the website to determine if each utility company has visited your dig site or responded to your locate request.

If you accidentally hit underground utility lines, an "emergency" is defined by Minnesota State Statute 216D.01 subdivision 3 as "a condition that poses a clear and immediate danger to life, health or significant loss of property." GSOC reminds you to call 911 whenever there is a release of flammable, toxic or corrosive gas or liquid, or if a dangerous situation has been created.

If you cut lines and didn't call Gopher State One Call, you will receive the utility's bill for repairs. Be safe — don't risk electrocution. 

# Brown County Briefs

## Member Advisory Council



A date has not yet been determined for the first meeting of the new Member Advisory Council. It will likely be set for June after planting season. New members are still being sought. Contact your District director or the REA office, if interested.

## 2020 Round Up Scholarships



Brown County REA is offering six \$250 scholarships through Operation Round Up. Applications are currently being reviewed and winners will be announced soon. ☎

## BCREA events postponed



### 2020 BCREA Annual Meeting postponed

A date and location for the rescheduled 83<sup>rd</sup> Annual Meeting are yet to be determined. Once health authorities have determined that large gatherings may resume, a date will be set and members will be given proper notice.

### Community Health Day postponed indefinitely



Community Health Day, which was set for March 28, was postponed indefinitely. Organizers have yet to determine if the event will be rescheduled for this year. ☎

# Lillian Lewandowski to represent Brown County REA on Youth Tour

New Ulm High School junior Lillian Lewandowski will join high school students from around the nation as Brown County REA's representative on the electric cooperative Youth Tour, June 20-25.

Lillian will travel with about 40 other Minnesota high school students, representing rural electric cooperatives statewide and adult chaperones. While in our nation's capital they will participate in leadership training, engage in one-on-one conversation with elected officials, jump start their national peer network and tour Washington, D.C.

The Youth Tour opportunity is fully sponsored by Brown County REA. Lillian is the daughter of Aaron and April Lewandowski, rural New Ulm.

Lexi Stein, rural New Ulm, was awarded the \$150 second prize in this year's Youth Tour contest. Megan Jensen, rural Comfrey, received \$100 for third place. ☎



## Managing energy use during COVID-19



As families and businesses transition to remote-work, school closings keep kids at home and all of us are staying at home to stay healthy, we may see a surge in home energy use — and in upcoming electric bills. It's important for families to be mindful of their energy use and consider adjusting certain habits to avoid higher costs later on.

Here are a few simple money-saving steps to help lower monthly electric bills without jeopardizing safety or comfort:

- Program your thermostat to maximize energy savings. Setting your thermostat one degree lower when heating or one degree higher when cooling can reduce energy use by up to five percent.
- Do full loads of laundry and wash with cold water. Using warm water instead of hot can cut a load's energy use in half. Using cold water will save even more.
- Air dry dishes. This step can cut your dishwasher's energy use by up to 50 percent.
- Substitute LEDs for conventional light bulbs. Lighting can amount to up to 12 percent of monthly energy use. LED bulbs can cut lighting costs by 75 percent. Also, be sure to turn off lights in a room when unoccupied.
- Open blinds and curtains to take advantage of natural light. With more people at home during the days, open up and let in the natural light to save on energy.
- Unplug appliances and electronics when not in use. Small appliances and electronics use energy even when not in use. When powered on, game consoles, televisions and similar electronics are responsible for up to 12 percent of energy use.
- Take an electric break — turn off the television and other electronics and dust off the board games or curl up with a good book. When conditions allow, head outside for some fresh air and change of scenery. ☎



# BCREA employees volunteer at Touchstone Community Project

"I'm spending my extra day volunteering," was the theme Saturday, February 29, when more than 100 volunteers, representing over 50 Touchstone Energy co-ops across the country, spent Leap Day joining forces with Rebuilding Together New Orleans.

Brown County REA CEO Mike Heidemann and his wife, Amy, and Operations Secretary Robyn Walter and her husband, Dean, helped make critical repairs for five homeowners in the city's Gentilly and Carrollton neighborhoods, while attending the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA) annual meeting. The BCREA volunteers helped install drywall, while others repaired siding, painted, built wheelchair ramps and installed grab bars and handrails.

Touchstone Energy® Cooperatives marked its fourth national service day in New Orleans since 2005 by ensuring a



**Brown County CEO Mike Heidemann (far right) and his wife, Amy (second from right), along with Operations Secretary Robyn Walter and her husband, Dean, took time to volunteer in New Orleans.**

safer and more energy-efficient future for longtime residents. A strong commitment to communities is at the core of the cooperative principles. ☺

## Twins Play Ball Clinic June 19



Brown County REA and Sleepy Eye Community Education are again teaming up with the Minnesota Twins to offer a free Twins Play Ball! youth clinic Friday, June 19 at Prairieville Field (behind the public school) in Sleepy Eye.

Youth ages 6-9 are scheduled from 3 to 4:30 p.m. and ages 10-13 should come from 4:30 to 6 p.m. Event is free to participants. The program is presented in partnership with Great Rive Energy, which is made up of Brown County REA and 27 other rural electric cooperatives in Minnesota.

Created to promote baseball and softball throughout the region, the clinic provides hands-on instruction for boys and girls. Youth can register by going to [www.playballmn.com](http://www.playballmn.com). Click *Youth Clinics* and find the Sleepy Eye location. The Twins will provide safe, youth-friendly equipment, but participants are asked to bring their own gloves. The format focuses on throwing, hitting and fielding. ☺

## Round Up donates to area food shelves



During March Food Share Month, Brown County Rural Electric Trust made donations of \$200 each to five area food shelves to help purchase inventory. Trust Board Member Lynnae Pelzel (second from right) presented a check to Sleepy Eye Area Food Shelf Board Members (from left) Kamakshi Murthy, Josephine Rose (president) and Randy Krzmarzick. The Springfield Area Food Shelf, We Care Project, New Ulm Emergency Food Shelf and Sibley County Food Share also received a donation. Funds for the Round Up donations come from BCREA members who round up their electric bill payment each month. The difference is placed in a trust and distributed four times each year to charitable organizations, individuals and families in crisis and scholarships in the co-op's service territory. ☺

### 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.

Line crews know how to get the job done! Let's thank them for powering our lives!



Lineworker Appreciation Day  
April 13, 2020

## Energy use & demand: demands a few minutes of your time

You flip the light switch and the light comes on. Most of us don't think about electricity until the bill comes.

Let us explain energy consumption and demand on your electric bill. Let's first review how electricity is generated and delivered to your home.

Before your co-op can send electricity to your home, that electricity needs to be generated by a Generation and Transmission cooperative (G&T). Once the electricity has been generated, it travels over high-voltage transmission lines to your co-op's substations, where the voltage is reduced to a safer level. The electricity then travels over the cooperative's distribution power lines to your home or business. So while you pay your bill to us — your electric distribution cooperative — we don't actually generate the electricity you use. This is the job of the G&T.

Your electric co-op helps determine how much electricity our members

need to power their homes and businesses; you play a big part in determining how much electricity the G&T needs to create in order to keep the lights on in our community. That is where these terms "consumption" and "demand" are involved.

Consumption or energy use is measured in kilowatt hours (kWh). Demand is measured in kilowatts (kW). A light bulb "consumes" a certain number of watts, let's say 100 watts per hour. If that light bulb stays on for 10 hours, it "demands" a certain number of kilowatts (in this case, 1 kW) from the generation station producing electricity. Now, if you turn on 10, 100-watt light bulbs in your home for one hour, each bulb still consumes the same number of kW. However, you are placing a demand on the utility to have those kW available to you over the course of one hour, instead of ten. This requires the G&T to produce more power in less

time to meet your demand.

Your electric cooperative purchases kilowatt hours from the G&T based on the average demand of our members. Peak demand refers to the time of day when the demand for electricity is highest. This is typically during the evening when families return home from work or school, cook dinner and use appliances the most. Using electricity during this peak demand period often costs more to both your co-op and to our members. Residential rate bills have the demand and energy combined into one line of the bill. Meanwhile, larger accounts have demand as a separate line on the bill.

Demand and energy use fluctuates each season and even year to year. Generating and distributing power can be complicated, but rest assured, your electric co-op will meet the necessary demand to provide safe, reliable and affordable electricity to you. ☺



## Make room for mushrooms! Share favorite mushroom recipes

Are you a mushroom connoisseur? Do you like to use them on special pizza recipes, spaghetti sauces, calzones, hot dishes, salads, omelets, lasagna and more? Share your favorite recipes using mushrooms by sending to: Editor, Federated Rural Electric, PO Box 69, Jackson MN 56143-0069 or e-mail to christoffer@federatedrea.coop by April 27. Add your name and phone number. Thanks for sharing with us! ☺

### Popcorn Ball Syrup by Roxanne Zimanski, Courtland

1 c. sugar                                      ½ c. white corn syrup  
2/3 c. water                                    3 T. butter (I use margarine)

Boil until it threads. Take off the heat. Add 1 T. vanilla and add food coloring. I use red for Valentine's Day and orange for Halloween. Pour over your popped popcorn and stir. I use my Fix-N-Mix Tupperware bowl or my Thatsa bowl that is almost full. Wet your hands and form the balls; put on wax paper to dry overnight and then into sandwich bags. ☺

### Carnival Cake by Crystal Groen, Okabena

4 quarts popped popcorn      16 oz. bag of mini-marshmallows  
½ c. butter or margarine      ½ c. vegetable oil  
16 oz. bag M&Ms                      8 oz. bag of peanuts  
1 or 2 7 oz. bags of gum drops or spice drops  
7 oz. bag gummy bears

Grease an angel food cake pan. Melt the marshmallows and butter over LOW heat and then stir in oil. Otherwise, you can melt the butter and marshmallows in the microwave stirring every 30 seconds then stir in the oil. Mix popcorn, M&Ms, peanuts and candy in a big bowl. Pour melted marshmallow mixture over popcorn and candy mixture and turn to coat. Press into a greased angel food cake pan; invert to cool. ☺

### Cracker Jacks by Frances Harms, Brewster

2 c. sugar                                      2/3 c. molasses (Blackstrap)  
2/3 c. water                                    ½ c. butter                                      1 tsp. salt

Use 13-quart stainless steel bowl. Fill to about two inches from the top with popped popcorn. Remove unpopped kernels.

Cook all ingredients and test; it must form a brittle ball in cold water. Pour over popcorn and stir until well coated. Allow to cool before indulging. This stores well in a tight-covered container in a cool place for several weeks. The recipe dates back many years and is a favorite. Grandma used a kitchen coffee cup for this recipe. She used the same cup for all of the above measuring. ☺

### Crispy Popcorn Balls by Barb Sellner, Sleepy Eye

3 c. sugar                                      ½ c. water                                      1 c. syrup

Boil until temperature reaches 300° or until hard crackling stage. Remove from burner and add 1 T. vinegar. Pour in fine stream over large dishpan full of popped corn. Butter hands generously and shape popcorn into balls, working as swiftly as possible. Popcorn balls will not be sticky. ☺

### Chocolate Popcorn by Colleen Freking, Heron Lake

Combine in a heavy saucepan:

3 c. sugar                                      2 T. cocoa                                      1 tsp. vanilla  
1 c. milk                                        2/3 c. white syrup

Cook until you can drop a small portion into a glass of water and have a hard ball form. Add 5 quarts salted, popped popcorn. ☺

### Crazy Crunch

by Barb Sellner, Sleepy Eye

2/3 c. sugar  
¼ c. light corn syrup  
½ c. margarine  
½ tsp. vanilla

8 c. popped popcorn  
toasted pecans or almonds

Bring the first three ingredients to a boil and stir constantly. Continue boiling 10 to 15 minutes until the mixture turns light caramel color (290°) and then add vanilla. Mix the popped corn and nuts together and cover with cooked mixture, tossing with two spoons. Spread in pan and when cool break apart and store in a tightly-covered container. Makes about one pound. ☺

**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. ☺



**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](mailto:bcrea@bcrea.coop)  
Website: [www.browncountyrea.coop](http://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 — 766-1497  
James D. Hanson, Sec.-Treasurer — 829-6756  
Brad Sprenger — 317-5576  
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.



**Mike Heidemann  
Chief Executive  
Officer**

# Staff notes

**Pandemic alters Annual Meeting**

In response to the COVID-19 outbreak and the need to keep our members and employees safe from potential exposure, Brown County Rural Electrical Association (BCREA) did not hold a gathering of members at the Annual Meeting April 2.

BCREA bylaws require the Annual Meeting of Members to convene in February, March or April of each year. Plus, a quorum of at least 50

members must be present to conduct business. However, the bylaws also allow the meeting to be adjourned to a later date if a quorum is not present at the meeting.

To minimize health risks and comply with the bylaws, the BCREA Board of Directors enacted the following:

- The CEO was the only person in attendance at 5:30 p.m. April 2, 2020 at the Sleepy Eye Event Center.
- It was established that a quorum was not present and the meeting was immediately adjourned to a later date.
- No cooperative members were in attendance.
- No business of the cooperative was conducted. No reports were given.
- No elections took place.
- No meal was served.
- No gifts or door prizes were distributed.

A date will be determined to reconvene the Annual Meeting of members once public health authorities have determined that large gatherings may be resumed. Members will be properly and adequately notified of the rescheduled meeting date and location. Please remember to save the 2019 Annual Report, which was recently mailed to you. Bring it with you to the rescheduled meeting to scan your registration. ☺

# Board meeting highlights

The BCREA Board of Directors held its monthly board meeting via conference call March 26. Discussion and/or action were taken on the following agenda items:

- Reviewed and approved the February 2020 board meeting minutes, new member applications, member cancellations, assignment of transfers and payments to estates.
- Reviewed and approved cooperative's updated schedule of charges.
- Elected Bill Berg to represent the cooperative on the Great River Energy Board of Directors.
- Updated on operations activities, including the completion of line patrol and continued line and router maintenance.
- Discussed options for the rescheduled 83<sup>rd</sup> Annual Meeting to be held once health officials determine it is safe to hold large gatherings.
- Informed of the co-op's member communication methods and the numerous events and trainings that have been cancelled or postponed due to COVID-19.

The next meeting of the Board is set for April 30 at the BCREA headquarters, Sleepy Eye. ☺

