

Connections

July 2020

For the member-owners of Brown County REA



Volume 24, Issue 7

Drive-up BCREA Annual Meeting keeps members in co-op's driver's seat with director elections

While it may have looked a bit different than the previous 82, Brown County REA held its reconvened 83rd Annual Meeting on June 25 in the parking lot of its headquarters.

A total of 83 members registered for the meeting, most driving through to cast a ballot, pick up their attendance gift and depart.

Meeting attendees and co-op employees recited the Pledge of Allegiance gazing up to a giant flag billowing in the breeze from the bucket of a boom truck.

During the brief business meeting, Board President Jim Mickelson cited the many changes 2020 has brought about; yet, the cooperative's commitment to keeping members' lights on has gone unchanged. Necessary motions were made, seconded and approved by honking of horns.

CEO Mike Heidemann reflected on the past year and reviewed the 2019 financial report. He noted that the photo slideshow, Youth Tour report and 2020 scholarship winners, all typically part of the annual meeting gathering, are available for viewing on the BCREA website www.browncountyrea.coop.

Retiring Director Reuben Kokesch was recognized for 18 years of service on the Board of Directors. He also served as the co-op's representative on the Great River Energy Board during much of his service.




BCREA's 2020 Board of Directors. Left to right: CEO Mike Heidemann, directors Jim Mickelson, Jim Hanson, Tom Hayes, David Wendinger, Allen Hanson, Bill Berg, Brad Sprenger, Joel Christensen, Greg Mages and Attorney Jeremy Berg.



The venue may have been different for BCREA's Annual Meeting, but the process remained the same. Here members register via the "drive through." Dorine Wellman scanned a member's annual report at the registration point.


In a race for the District 8 Board left vacant by Kokesch's retirement, David Wendinger was elected to a three-year term on the Board of Directors over Allen Lamm. Incumbents Brad Sprenger, District 2, and Allen Hanson, District 3, ran unopposed and were elected by acclamation.

At the organizational meeting that followed, Tom Hayes was elected Board President. Bill Berg was chosen as Vice President and Jim Hanson was elected Secretary/Treasurer. Bill Berg was selected as Brown County REA's representative on the Great River Energy Board. 

At A Glance



Thank you to all members who attended our Annual Meeting!

Brown County Rural Electrical Association held its reconvened Annual Meeting June 25 at the BCREA headquarters, Sleepy Eye. It was a "drive-in" Annual Meeting where members attended in their vehicles. See story above and more photos on Page 7. 

Give your HVAC system an efficiency test and learn tips to gain the most out of your cooling system

Ah, summer... Cookouts, swimming pools, camping — it's the perfect time to enjoy the outdoors with family and friends. When it's time to come back indoors, there's nothing better than that cool blast you feel from your home's air conditioning or heat pump unit.

Your heating, ventilating and air conditioning (HVAC) system is essential to keeping your home comfortable during summer months. If it breaks down, it's also the most expensive equipment to repair or replace. Luckily, simple steps exist you can take to lengthen the life of your HVAC system.

Change or clean filters

Dirty filters block airflow, which can greatly decrease the efficiency of your system. The Department of Energy recommends changing or cleaning filters every month or two during the cooling season. If your unit is in constant use or is subjected to dusty conditions or pet hair, consider checking filters more frequently.

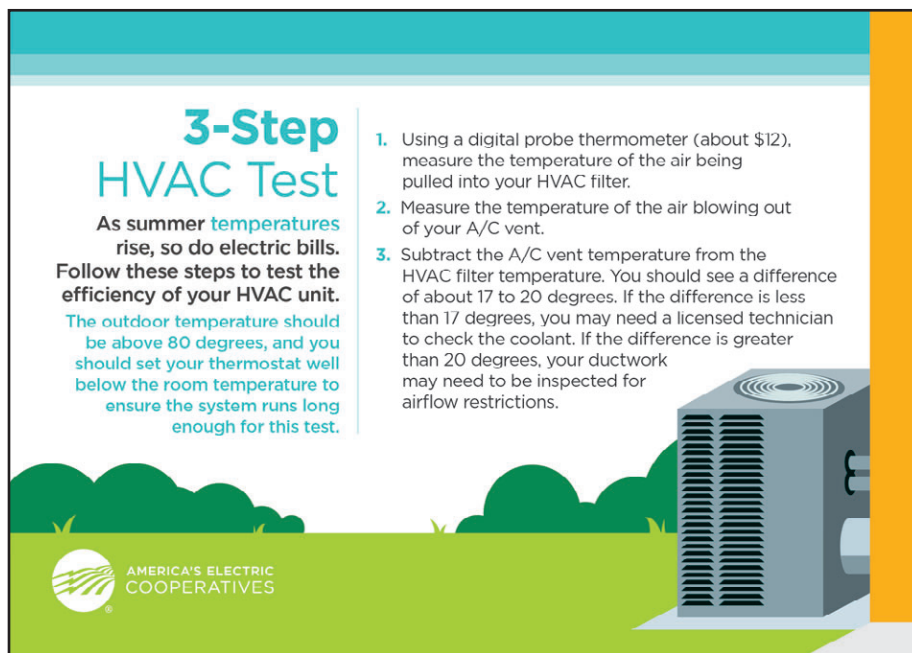
Clean the HVAC unit

Outdoor condenser coils can become clogged with pollen, dirt and small debris. Use a hose to spray the HVAC unit once each season to ensure maximum airflow. Warning: Do not use a pressure washer to do this, as it can damage the equipment.

Clear space around the HVAC unit

Dryer vents, falling leaves and grass left behind from the lawnmower can create buildup. Remove any debris around the HVAC unit. If you have foliage near the unit, trim it back at least two feet around the condenser to increase airflow.

If you want to evaluate the efficiency of your HVAC system, try this quick




3-Step HVAC Test

As summer temperatures rise, so do electric bills. Follow these steps to test the efficiency of your HVAC unit.

The outdoor temperature should be above 80 degrees, and you should set your thermostat well below the room temperature to ensure the system runs long enough for this test.

1. Using a digital probe thermometer (about \$12), measure the temperature of the air being pulled into your HVAC filter.
2. Measure the temperature of the air blowing out of your A/C vent.
3. Subtract the A/C vent temperature from the HVAC filter temperature. You should see a difference of about 17 to 20 degrees. If the difference is less than 17 degrees, you may need a licensed technician to check the coolant. If the difference is greater than 20 degrees, your ductwork may need to be inspected for airflow restrictions.

AMERICA'S ELECTRIC COOPERATIVES



Having an efficient and working HVAC system is one of the keys to comfort in the summer. If your HVAC system isn't making the grade, give it the HVAC test above to see if you can improve its efficiency.

test. Follow the steps in the graphic shown above.

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coolant. If the difference is greater than 20 degrees, your ductwork may need to be inspected for airflow restrictions.

You should also have your HVAC system periodically inspected by a licensed professional. The frequency of inspections depends on the age of your unit, but the Department of Energy recommends scheduling tune-ups during the spring and fall, when contractors aren't as busy.

When HVAC equipment fails, it's inconvenient and uncomfortable — especially during the dog days of summer. Remember, your HVAC system runs best when it's regularly cleaned and serviced. With a little maintenance along the way, you can add years to your system's lifespan. 

Quench your thirst with a self-cleaning bottle

Summer is the time of hiking, biking, fishing, running and road trips. What is one thing that is often brought along on each of those activities?

If you guessed a water bottle, you are correct. Many people bring water bottles along on their outdoor activities to keep hydrated.

The most annoying thing about those water bottles is keeping them clean. Their length, combined with narrow openings making washing them tricky. Now water bottles are making it easy on their owners by cleaning themselves!

The LARQ Bottle is a self-cleaning water bottle that uses non-toxic mercury-free LED technology to purify water and clean the inner surfaces of the bottle by eliminating odor-causing bacteria and viruses.

The LARQ Bottle works at the touch of a button.

- Press once for Normal Mode, a 60-second water purification cycle.




The LARQ Self-Cleaning Water Bottle keeps your water fresh and pure. Just push a button and LED technology purifies the water and cleans the inner surfaces of the bottle by eliminating bacteria and viruses.

- Double click for Adventure Mode, a three-minute water purification cycle with three times the UV-C dosage.
- Automatic Self-Cleaning Mode, the bottle intelligently activates a 10-second cycle every two hours to keep your water and bottle fresh.
- Press and hold for Travel Mode, lock your bottle to conserve battery when not in use or to prevent accidental activations.

The LARQ Bottle also keeps water cold for 24 hours and hot for up to 12 hours with double-wall insulated stainless steel construction.

Its USB rechargeable Li-polymer battery supplies self-cleaning power for up to a month on a full charge. Recharge it with a waterproof IPX7-rated MicroUSB connector (MicroUSB to USB charging cable is included).

The LARQ Bottle comes in a 17oz. size and a variety of colors. It costs approximately \$95 on Amazon. 

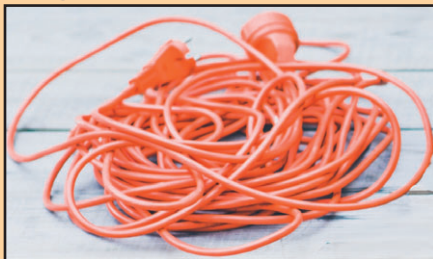
Safety

Extensive safety tips for extension cords


Extension cords can be helpful in delivering power where we need it. However, regardless of the gauge or rating of the cord, an extension cord is a temporary solution. They are not meant to be used as long-term extensions of your home's electrical system.

With continuous use over time an extension cord can rapidly deteriorate, creating a potentially dangerous electric shock or fire hazard. Follow these safety tips:

- Do not overload extension cords or allow them to run through water or snow on the ground.
- Do not run extension cords through walls, doorways, ceilings or floors. If a cord is covered, the heat cannot escape, which may result in a fire hazard.
- Do not use extension cords for more than one appliance.
- A heavy reliance on extension cords is an indication that you have too few outlets to address your needs. Have additional outlets installed where you need them.



Extension cords are meant to be for temporary use. Use them safely.

- Multiple plug outlets must be plugged directly into mounted electrical receptacles, not chained together.
- Make sure the extension cord you use is rated for the products to be plugged in and is marked for either indoor or outdoor use.
- The appliance or tool that you are using the cord with will have a wattage rating on it. Match this up with your extension cord.
- Never use a cord that feels hot or is damaged in any way. Touching even a single exposed strand can give you an electric shock or burn.
- Never use three-prong plugs with outlets that only have two slots for the plug. Do not cut off the ground pin to force a fit. This defeats the purpose of a three-prong plug and could lead to an electrical shock. Never force a plug into an outlet if it doesn't fit.
- Use extension cords with polarized and/or three-prong plugs. Buy only cords approved by an independent testing laboratory, such as Underwriters Laboratories (UL). 

Brown County Briefs

Sorry
THE LOBBY IS CLOSED

BCREA lobby remains closed

Our office remains closed to the public. Members who need to conduct business that cannot be done remotely may call to make an appointment. This does not include payment of electric bills, which will continue to be done via the drop box, online and other payment options. Members wishing to drop off donations for the *Stuff the Backpacks* project are asked to call upon arrival.

Member Advisory Council

The first meeting of the new Member Advisory Council is tentatively set for September 14 at 6:30 p.m. in the REA warehouse. New members are still being sought. Contact your director or the REA office if interested.

Operation Round Up

The next meeting of the Round Up Trust Board is set for August 18. Organizations wishing to apply for funding should submit the application found on the REA website www.browncountyrea.coop.

Energy Efficiency Tip



Home cooling makes up a large portion of your energy bills. Try to keep the difference between the temperature of your thermostat setting and the outside temperature to a minimum. The smaller the difference, the more energy you will save. ☺

BCREA nondiscrimination statement



This institution is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

If you wish to file a Civil Rights program complaint of discrimination, complete the USDA Program Discrimination Complaint Form, found online at http://www.ascr.usda.gov/complaint_filing_cust.html, or at any USDA office, or call (866) 632-9992 to request the form. You may also write a letter containing all the of the information requested in the form. Send your completed complaint form or letter to us by mail at U.S. Department of Agriculture, Director, Office of Adjudication, 1400 Independence Avenue, S.W., Washington, D.C. 20250-9410, by fax (202) 690-7442 or e-mail at program.intake@usda.gov. ☺

Get your green on with Wellspring

The Wellspring renewable energy program offers Brown County REA members an opportunity to support wind and solar developments through the Wellspring Wind and Wellspring Solar programs.

Wellspring programs are voluntary and are available to all members. While the electricity that is delivered through Brown County REA to your home or business includes at least 25 percent renewable energy in the mix, the Wellspring program allows members the option to support expanded renewable development.

Here's how it works:

- Members can purchase Wellspring energy in 100 kWh blocks.
- Wellspring Energy is purchased in 100 kWh blocks. Eight to 10 blocks is equivalent to an average home's monthly electricity use.
- Cost for one 100 kWh wind block is \$.20. One 100 kWh solar block is \$.20. Participating members pay an additional amount on their electric bill each month.
- You must remain on the program for at least 12 months.

Sign me up for Wellspring

You may sign up for both programs, if you like, or just one. Both programs will be an addition to your regular electric charges and are on a minimum one-year commitment. Return form below to Brown County REA, PO Box 529, Sleepy Eye, MN 56085. ☺

Name on electric bill _____

Address _____

City/state/zip _____

Phone # _____ Cell phone # _____

REA account # _____

Select one (solar):

___ 100 kWh (\$2) ___ 200 kWh (\$4) ___ 300 kWh (\$4)

___ 400 kWh (\$8) ___ 500 kWh (\$10)


Select one (wind):

___ 100 kWh (20¢) ___ 200 kWh (40¢) ___ 300 kWh (60¢)

___ 400 kWh (80¢) ___ 500 kWh (\$1)

Signature _____

Send to BCREA, PO Box 529, Sleepy Eye, MN 56085. Questions? Call 794-3331 or 1-800-658-2368.



BCREA welcomes Cynthia Hansen!



While many have not been able to meet her due to the COVID 19 office closure, there is a new voice greeting and assisting members when they call Brown County REA.

Cynthia Hansen joined the team in March as a customer service representative. She grew up in rural Sleepy Eye and graduated from Sleepy Eye Public High School in 2012. She attended Mankato State University for one year then attended South Central College where she received her Agribusiness Office Specialist degree in 2014. She held positions at Christensen Farms and Southpoint

Financial Credit Union before coming to the REA.

Cynthia became a Brown County REA member when she purchased her grandparents' farm site in 2018. Outside of work she spends time helping her dad on the farm and enjoys working on her house, gardening, traveling and hiking in state parks. 📞

BCREA linemen complete poletop rescue training



Brown County REA line crews are always working to stay as safe as possible while keeping your lights on. Here they take part in poletop rescue training COVID-19 style with a cleanable PVC dummy model in place of the cloth version typically used. 📞

Brown County REA summer helpers



Kyle Goblirsch (left) and Kyle Fischer are assisting BCREA linemen with a variety of projects this summer. 📞

Help children in need succeed by donating school supplies

Brown County REA is again a drop-off site for the United Way of the Brown County Area's Stuff the Backpacks school supply drive & we need your help. Please consider donating any of the following items:



- 4 oz. Elmer's Glue
- Broad tip & thin tip markers
- Large pink erasers
- Dry erase markers
- Kids scissors-pointed
- Pencil bags & boxes
- 24-count crayons
- Glue sticks
- Pencil top erasers
- Wide-ruled notebooks
- 2-pocket folders
- Fine tip Sharpie markers
- Colored pencils
- #2 Pencils
- Facial tissue
- Highlighters
- Hand sanitizer

Please drop off donations at the REA headquarters before July 23. Collected donations will be distributed to children who live in or attend school in Brown County. Thank you for your generosity! 📞

BCREA powers pocket devices

Battery-powered devices allow members to benefit from electric service away from home.

Your cooperative membership provides all the comforts of home that come from electric service: cooking, entertainment, and hot water. Your co-op also charges all your devices for when you leave the house.

Keeping those batteries charged is a remarkable value, too. According to the Electric Power Research Institute, charging a smart phone for an entire year costs around 40 cents. If you use a tablet, the cost rises to just \$1.50 for a year of charging.

Cooperative members are also adopting battery-powered models of tools traditionally powered by gas, such as lawn mowers, chain saws and even all-terrain vehicles.

“The technology has been improving over decades,” said BCREA CEO Mike Heidemann. “Today’s battery-powered




BCREA is leading the ‘charge’ when it comes to keeping your devices powered up for everyday use. Electricity proves to be a great value in improving lives.

devices offer great performance and lower operating costs.”

A growing number of members are driving electric as well. Compared to gasoline and diesel models, electric vehicles (EVs) can shave 50-70 percent off your annual transportation fuel expenses, and they require far less

maintenance. Several of the top selling EV models available in Minnesota can travel 200-300 miles on a full charge, well beyond the average American’s daily round-trip commute of 30 miles.

You can learn more information about all types of electric devices by visiting EnergyWiseMN.com. 

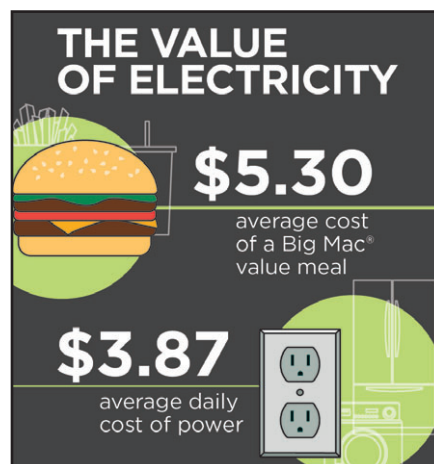
The value of electricity continues to shine

Medical care, residential rent and education costs have increased over the last decade at rates at about 3 percent or more per year. Butter, meat and egg costs have gone up by more than 2 percent annually.

Electricity costs rise about 1 percent a year, but co-ops across the country have reported a decline in average residential use per household since 2010 due to investments in energy efficiency. That means members are doing more with less energy.

Kilowatt-hour usage per co-op household — that is, the amount of energy it takes to run an appliance per hour — dropped by 8 percent in the last 10 years.

When it comes to value, electricity is a clear winner. Brown County REA is always looking for ways to work with you to make it even better. That’s why Brown County REA urges energy efficiency, encourages you to look for Energy Star® appliances and promotes




technology designed to give members more control over their electricity use.

As an example, residential home lighting shifted from less-efficient lighting — primarily incandescent bulbs — to more energy-efficient lighting, like LEDs, between 2009 and 2015 according to data from the Energy Information Administration. In the 2009 survey 58 percent of all households

used at least one energy-efficient bulb indoors. In 2015 86 percent of households reported using at least one LED bulb and 18 percent of households reported they had no incandescent bulbs in their homes.

Energy performance dashboards, smart thermostats and appliance settings that shift most water heating, laundry and dishwashing outside of peak rate periods help reduce the co-op’s overall power demand. They also give you opportunities to control or even trim your monthly utility bills.

That’s good for families, couples and individuals trying to live within their budgets. And it’s become even more important as digital devices and internet-connected technologies are included in our daily lives.

U.S. homes average 11 connected devices, including seven with screens to view content (smartphones or TVs), a study found. BCREA power enhances our lives in many ways. 

Sauce up summer with salsa recipes: fresh, canned or in meals

Summer means salsa time! With summer peppers and tomatoes share your favorite salsa recipes, whether you make a fresh salsa or a canned salsa. Maybe you use salsa in hot dishes, on chicken or meat loaf; share those salsa recipes too: Editor, Federated Rural Electric, PO Box 69, Jackson MN 56143-0069 or e-mail to christoffer@federatedrea.coop by July 27. Add your name and phone number. Thanks for sharing with us! 📧

Chicken and Rice Salad by Marcia Clay, Truman

- | | |
|-----------------------|--|
| 5 c. chicken, cooked | 1 tsp. salt |
| 2 T. salad oil | 1 c. rice (3 c. when cooked) |
| 2 tsp. vinegar | 1½ c. celery, chopped |
| 2 T. orange juice | 13½ oz. can pineapple tidbits, drained |
| 1 c. slivered almonds | 1 c. mandarin oranges, drained |
| 1½ c. mayonnaise | |

Combine ingredients carefully and let stand in the fridge for several hours to blend the flavors. 📧

Mom's Pheasant by Jonlee M. Brown, Sanborn

- | | |
|-------------|-------------------|
| 1 pheasant | butter |
| flour | salt & pepper |
| 3 T. butter | 1 pint sour cream |
| milk | |

Cut washed and clean pheasant into quarters. Marinate in buttermilk until ready to bake. Wash off the buttermilk and dip the pheasant pieces in flour. Fry in butter until lightly brown. Place in a roasting pan. Sprinkle with salt and pepper. Add sour cream, along with a little whole milk (but not too much) in the pan. Cut up 3 T. of butter to add on top of the pheasant. Cover and bake at 350° until the pheasant is tender. Might need a little more milk/cream, as I use whole milk. This can be served with rice or mashed potatoes, also can add green or red peppers and mushrooms. 📧

More Annual Meeting moments



Top: Reuben Kokesch (left side of podium) is recognized for 18 years by Board President Jim Mickelson (right of podium) and CEO Mike Heidemann (far right) while Secretary/Treasurer Jim Hanson (far left) looks on. Bottom: Crew Foreman Nick Horman (in bucket) and Mike Suess hang the co-op banner and hoist the flag in preparation for BCREA's 83rd Annual Meeting 📧





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

Board meeting highlights

The BCREA Board of Directors held its monthly meeting via phone conference June 25. Discussion and/or action was taken on the following agenda items:

- Reviewed and approved the May 2020 board meeting minutes, member cancellations, assignment of transfers and payments to estates.
- Reviewed the May 2020 payroll and April 2020 financials.
- Updated on the status of the Rural Utilities Service (RUS) loan application.
- Discussed convening the new Member Advisory Council and potentially holding meetings in September, November and January.
- Reviewed recent line crew safety training.
- Informed of progress with the BCREA website upgrade.
- Reviewed the cooperative's COVID-19 Preparedness Plan.
- Updated on construction activities including underground rebuilds and pole replacements.

The next meeting of the Board is set for July 30 at the Brown County REA headquarters in Sleepy Eye. ☎



Marcia Solie
Member Services
Manager

Staff Notes

Batteries: storing electricity opens new opportunities

When you turn on your light switch, the electricity needed in that moment must be produced at the same time. Yet, this concept has changed in recent years as potential has grown for energy storage, allowing for energy produced at one time to be used later.

Storing electricity has potential to open new opportunities for electric cooperatives like Brown

County REA and its wholesale power provider Great River Energy.

Rather than producing electricity in the exact moment it is needed, energy storage would allow Brown County REA members to use electricity when it costs less.

Storing today's electricity

There are a couple of ways Brown County REA members can take advantage of storage today.

Members can store electricity through their water heater, which acts like a "thermal battery." This is known as electric thermal storage (ETS). ETS water heaters store electricity in the form of hot water, which is heated overnight when energy prices are low.

The ETS systems take advantage of off-peak electricity, saving participating members money by charging, while demand and energy costs are lower.

There are also ETS programs for home heating. Low-cost, off-peak electricity is used to heat ceramic blocks that hold enough heat to keep a house warm the following day — even on the coldest winter day.

These same principles hold true for charging electric cars or other traditional battery sources.

The future looks to grid-scale battery storage

With more renewable energy on the electric grid, batteries have the potential to store electricity for use when the sun doesn't shine and wind doesn't blow. These technologies are still developing, but more electric utilities are looking to large battery systems to store power.

New technology is continually being researched and developed when it comes to storing electricity. Each one has both benefits and disadvantages. With declining costs and increasing development, battery storage is just beginning. ☎



Brown County REA will soon debut a new and improved website at www.browncountyrea.coop. Stay tuned!