

Connections

April 2021

For the member-owners of Brown County REA



Volume 25, Issue 4

Paperless bills means less filing, plus more info at your fingertips! Mobile app now shows bills too!

Sign up for paperless bills to save time, money and the environment.

On-the-go convenience

Electric co-op members cite convenience as the number one reason for enrolling in paperless bills. Rather than waiting for it to arrive in the mail, customers can quickly access their bill from their e-mail inbox days earlier. Paperless bills fit into our 24/7 schedules and reduce stress.

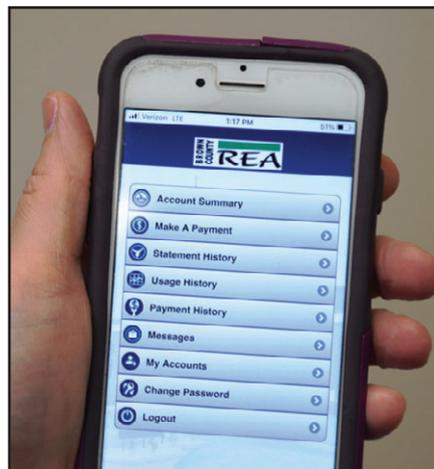
Flexible payment options add to the convenience. Paperless billing customers have access to numerous payment options, such as your bank account, debit card, credit card, Auto Pay and the co-op's mobile app. You can also sign up for text and e-mail notifications for payment reminders through Online Pay on our website.

Pay anytime — anywhere!

The ability to access your bill from any location is a significant benefit of paperless billing.

A survey of smartphone owners finds 42 percent pay their monthly bills through a mobile device. In addition millennials and consumers with a household income between \$50,000 and \$99,000 are more likely to use mobile bill pay.

Whether at the cabin, camping in the summer or as a winter snowbird, pay your bill on your smartphone. Even as a homebody during the pandemic, pay your electric bill while watching Netflix



Members now have three ways to receive their bill: via Post Office, e-mailed as a paperless bill or through the BCREA's app on your smartphone!

using your smartphone or tablet.

Save a tree & cut carbon footprint

Co-op members are increasingly concerned about the environment. Research finds that 68 percent of millennials purchase a product with the environment in mind. Paperless bills save on paper, ink, postage and transportation. According to Questline, paper makes up to 25 percent of landfill waste, 33 percent of municipal waste and 50 percent of business waste.

Save money

For business customers paperless billing reduces operational costs. Compared to residential consumers who receive about 12 bills a month,

small businesses receive about 50 bills on average.

Traditional paper bills require a constant supply of postage and time logging into payment websites or writing a check. Electronic bill statement are one less piece of paper to keep track of each month. Just click on the co-op's website to look at the past bill history. Plus, past statements can be viewed on the co-op's mobile app.

Sign up for paperless bills

1. Log into your electric account form www.browncountyrea.coop; click on "Pay Bill Online" button. Have your electric bill handy for the account and meter number for verification. Set up your user name and password.

2. After step one, download the mobile app on your smart phone (search for Brown County REA). Then you can use the mobile app to make future payments from your phone, or tablet or through our website link "Pay Bill Online" button on your PC; you can even sign up for Auto Pay, where payment is authorized automatically on the due date from your bank account.

3. Otherwise, call the office 794-3331 or 1-800-658-2368 during business hours to sign up with an employee.

Enrolling in paperless bills saves time, trees and money for you and your cooperative too! ☺

At A Glance



Brown County
Rural Electrical
Association

Reconvened 84th Annual Meeting

The reconvened Annual Meeting will be held Thursday, June 24 at the Brown County Rural Electrical Association headquarters. All members are invited and encouraged to attend to learn about the co-op year and elect directors. See page 4. ☺



Wring moisture and dollars out of the air with an energy-efficient dehumidifier

Hello warm weather. Humidity also comes with the changing seasons. Is your home ready?

High humidity can make a home feel warmer. It can also make your cooling system run less efficiently and encourage mildew and bacterial growth, decreasing air quality. For comfort and cooling efficiency many people use a dehumidifier.

Keep in mind a dehumidifier may add up to \$50 a month on your electric bill each month, depending on the moisture and run time.

If you are shopping for a dehumidifier, choose an Energy Star model. A dehumidifier that has earned the Energy Star label uses more efficient refrigeration coils, compressors and fans to remove the same amount of moisture as a similarly-sized conventional unit, but it uses 15 percent less energy. The annual energy saved by an Energy Star dehumidifier could power an Energy Star refrigerator for nearly two months! If you buy an Energy Star portable dehumidifier, save more with your electric co-op's \$25 rebate; find the form on our website.

Portable dehumidifiers are what most people use. Here's some handy tips.

- Portable dehumidifiers have top-mounted air discharges and can be placed against walls, but if you do not have top-mounted discharge, make sure the dehumidifier is located away from walls and furniture so that air can circulate freely around the unit.

- Doors and windows to the space being dehumidified should be closed while the unit is running. This will



ensure that the space is dehumidified as efficiently as possible.

- Locate away from sources of dust and dirt (like woodworking equipment), which can clog coils and grills.

- If you plan to use a hose to drain the dehumidifier's water bucket, make sure the unit is located near enough to the floor drain or sump to avoid the need for a long and unwieldy hose. Don't create a tripping hazard! Never set up water drainage near electrical circuits or devices. Make sure the dehumidifier is connected to a properly grounded outlet. Keep drain hoses away from electrical cords and connections.

- Do not be alarmed if the air temperature directly around the unit is warmer than in surrounding areas. As a dehumidifier removes moisture from the air, it slightly warms the space around it.

Humidity is most often talked about in terms of Relative Humidity (RH). RH is the amount of water vapor actually present in the air compared to the

greatest amount of water vapor the air can hold at that temperature. The optimum RH level for a building is generally considered to be between 30-50 percent. In colder climates, during the heating season, humidity levels should be in the range of 30-40 percent RH to prevent window condensation.

All Energy Star dehumidifiers include a built-in humidistat, a device that allows you to set the desired RH level that you would like for the room. Once the room reaches the desired RH level, the dehumidifier will cycle on and off automatically to maintain the level. Energy Star models are available for both portable and whole home dehumidifiers.

Whole-home dehumidifiers are typically installed in your home's air ducts to dehumidify multiple rooms. If you are considering installing a whole-home dehumidifier, it is important that the unit is sized and installed correctly by a professional. 

Power failure bulbs stay lit during a power outage

One of the worst things about a power failure is finding your way around the house once the lights go out. Most of us keep our candles and flashlights in storage where they are not easy to find in the dark. If these items are located in a drawer, we have to locate them by feel, as well!

Emergency power failure bulbs solve this problem. The Boundary company manufactures LED bulbs that stay lit when the power goes out. Each bulb has an internal battery that kicks in during an outage and lasts for 24 hours.

These LED power failure bulbs work like ordinary bulbs when there is no outage. They turn on and off with the flip of the switch. Simply screw them into a socket in a ceiling or lamp. Once the bulb's battery is charged, they will stay lit if an interruption in power occurs, helping you to find your way around a dark house safely and quickly.

These power failure bulbs can also be removed from their socket and carried around like a portable light. A bulb holder is included, allowing you to hang the bulb anywhere.

Boundary LED Power Failure LED Bulbs are available online and in a variety of stores. They cost approximately \$65 for a four-pack. 



Safety

Make sure your electric panel is safe

The electric panel is like the heart of your home. Your heart pumps blood throughout your body. Your electric panel sends electricity throughout your home. Make sure your electric panel is in good working order.

An electrical panel should be clearly labeled. You can turn off power to certain parts of the home or use the main switch and disconnect all power. Accurate labels are key to work safely when making repairs.

Electric panels must be up to "code." They must be set at a certain height, be accessible and be safely located (can't be in a bathroom).

Here are some warnings that you have a bad electric panel.

- A burning smell near your electrical panel is a very urgent problem. If you have such a smell, shut off the power and call an electrician ASAP.



Breaker issues? Burnt smell, frequent tripping and melting means call an electrician to investigate and repair.

- Breakers that won't stay set — a breaker that re-trips as soon as you reset it is probably experiencing a short circuit, but it could be an issue with the breaker itself. If you can't find a short circuit issue, call an electrician to investigate.

- Signs of melting on wiring, breakers or electrical outlets — melting is a sign of overloaded circuits. If you see any indications of it, have an electrician come and take a look as soon as you can.

- Breakers that trip often — breakers that trip constantly may simply be overloaded, meaning you need to remove some electrical devices from that circuit. If you're fairly sure the breaker isn't overloaded, but it keeps tripping anyway, there may be another issue with the switch. 

— Information courtesy of Minnesota Rural Electric Association

Brown County Briefs

Office closed

While the doors are unlocked, we still encourage members to call 800-658-2368 to make an appointment for business which can't be done remotely. Please continue to pay your electric bill using the drop box, online bill pay through our website www.browncountyrea.coop, mobile app or automatic payment from your bank account, credit or debit card.

Energy-efficiency tip

Some manufacturers set the water heater thermostats at 140 degrees, but most households usually only require them to be set at 120 degrees. Consider lowering your water heater's temperature to save energy and slow mineral buildup in the heater and pipes.

Notice of Cogeneration

In compliance with BCREA's adopted rules relating to cogeneration and small power production, Brown County REA is obligated to interconnect with and purchase electricity from cogenerators and small power producers, whom satisfy the conditions as a qualifying facility.

Brown County REA is obligated to provide information, free of charge, to all interested members, upon request, regarding rates and interconnection requirements. All interconnections require an application and approval to become a qualifying facility. Any disputes over interconnections, sales, and purchases are subject to resolution by the Brown County REA Board of Directors. Interested members should contact Brown County REA, 24386 State Highway 4, Sleepy Eye, MN 56085, or call 800-658-2368. ☎

Notice of Brown County REA reconvened 84th Annual Meeting

All Brown County REA members are invited and encouraged to attend the reconvened 84th Annual Meeting

When: Thursday, June 24
Location: BCREA Headquarters
24386 State Hwy. 4
Sleepy Eye, MN
Voting: 4-6 p.m.
Meeting: 6 p.m.



Agenda includes 2020 review, financial report and election of directors in Districts 3, 6, 7 & 9

The bylaws of Brown County REA require the Annual Meeting of Members to convene in February, March or April of each year and that a quorum of at least 50 members be present. The bylaws, however, also allow the meeting to be adjourned to a later date if a quorum is not present.

The Brown County REA 84th Annual Meeting scheduled for April 8, will be reconvened Thursday, June 24, in the south parking lot of the Brown County REA headquarters, 24386 State Highway 4, Sleepy Eye. Drive-through voting for directors in Districts 3, 6, 7 and 9 will take place between 4 and 6 p.m., with the business meeting to begin at 6 p.m. No meal will be served.

Please save and bring the 2020 Annual Report, which was mailed to you in March, to scan your registration. Members who do not have their annual report will be able to register manually.

Watch for further details in upcoming issues of *Connections*, on our website at www.browncountyrea.coop and on our Facebook page. ☎

Congratulations to our Auto Pay Promotion winner\$\$\$\$!



Winners of the random drawing for participation in the Auto Pay promotion are:

- \$100 electric bill credit: Roy Novak
- \$50 electric bill credit: Scott Mohr & Norman Miller
- \$25 electric bill credit: Larry Luepke, Danny Busche, Marlys

Lindstrom, Neil Roiger, James Gleisner, Charles Enter, David Goblirsch, Daniel Merkel, Richard Aukrust, Joseph D. Kral, David A. Larson and Donald Klossner.

Bill credits will be issued on March electric bills sent in early April. Thank you to all who enrolled and those who already participate in the Auto Pay program. ☎

If it sounds too good to be true, check it out

Solar energy is booming and the future is brighter than ever. Through the use of rooftop solar panels, many homeowners can now harness the sun's natural rays to produce their own electricity that's environmentally friendly and cost effective.

But with the increasing popularity of solar, unfortunately, some businesses are taking advantage of consumers who are interested in generating their own energy through rooftop panels.

While many solar companies are genuine and truly want to help consumers with a successful solar installation, there are the occasional bad apples.

You've likely heard a story or two about solar vendors that promised rooftop panels that would generate enough electricity to power the entire home. Then, after the homeowner paid thousands of dollars for the installation, the solar panels aren't working, and the vendor is nowhere to be found. Sadly, this story has been the reality for many consumers.

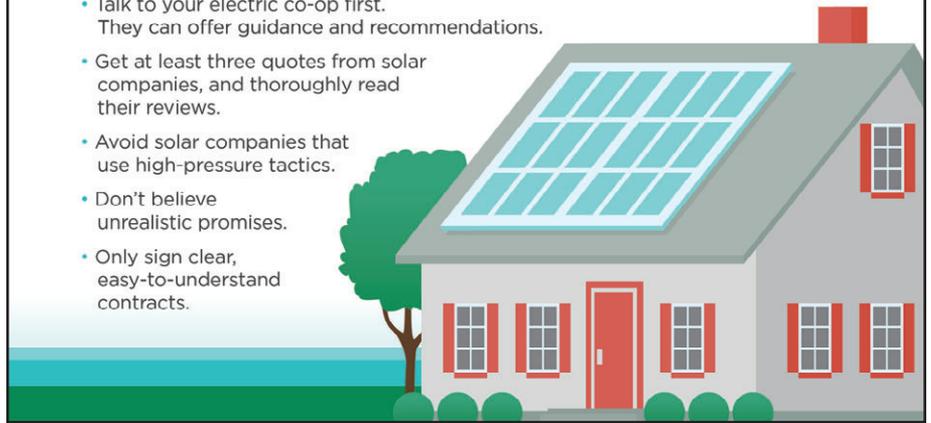
If you're interested in solar panels for your home, consider these tips before installation.

- Talk to the energy advisor at your local electric co-op first. We want you to feel confident about any decisions you make about your home energy use, especially decisions about generating energy at home.

TIPS FOR AVOIDING SOLAR SCAMS

As the popularity of rooftop solar panels increases, so do solar scams. Here are a few tips to consider before you install a solar PV system for your home.

- Talk to your electric co-op first. They can offer guidance and recommendations.
- Get at least three quotes from solar companies, and thoroughly read their reviews.
- Avoid solar companies that use high-pressure tactics.
- Don't believe unrealistic promises.
- Only sign clear, easy-to-understand contracts.



- Collect at least three quotes from different solar companies to ensure you're getting a competitive deal. As with any major purchase, research is key; thoroughly read customer reviews for each of the three solar vendors.

- If you speak to a solar vendor and they use high-pressure tactics, like an offer that's only good for 24 hours, run! Any reputable solar company will recognize that you need time to review a proposal and thoroughly weigh your decision.

- You know if it sounds too good to be true, it probably is. So, if a solar company is making promises that sound unachievable and outlandish, they probably are. Remember, if you

have any questions, you can always count on your electric co-op for advice.

- Finally, when it's time to review and sign a solar contract, make sure the language is clear and easy to understand. Ensure any prior verbal or e-mailed promises are also included in the contract.

Going solar is a major decision, so you'll want to conduct a good bit of research first. If you're looking for a general starting point, check out the resources from the Minnesota Department of Commerce and the Department of Energy's Homeowner's Guide to Going Solar on our website www.browncountyrea.coop. 

National Lineworker Appreciation Day

**Build. Maintain.
Repair. Repeat.
That's how lineworkers
power our lives...**

While a day is set aside each April to acknowledge, we are grateful for our talented, dedicated line crew every day. Thank you BCREA linemen! 



5 STEPS FOR SAFE DIGGING

Working on an outdoor project? Careless digging poses a threat to people, pipelines and underground facilities. Always call 8-1-1 first. Here are five easy steps for safe digging:



1. NOTIFY

Call 8-1-1 or make a request online two to three days before your work begins. The operator will notify the utilities affected by your project.

2. WAIT

Wait two to three days for affected utilities to respond to your request. They will send a locator to mark any underground utility lines.

2-3

3. CONFIRM

Confirm that all affected utilities have responded to your request by comparing the marks to the list of utilities the 8-1-1 call center notified.



4. RESPECT

Respect the markers provided by the affected utilities. The markers are your guide for the duration of your project.



5. DIG CAREFULLY

If you can't avoid digging near the markers (within 18-24 inches on all sides, depending on state laws), consider moving your project location.



Know what's below: steps for safe digging

Spring is just around the corner! It's a great time to get outside and enjoy the fresh air. Perhaps you're making plans for a new garden or a lawn makeover. Regardless of why you are digging, remember to keep safety in mind for all projects — especially those that require digging near underground utility lines.

Most of us never think about the electric, gas, water and other utility lines buried below the ground, but hitting one of these lines while digging is not the reminder you'll want — trust us! Your electric cooperative reminds all members who are planning a digging project to call 811 at least three business days before you start. This is the same as calling Gopher State One Call (1-800-252-1166). Otherwise, you can submit a request online by visiting www.call811.com/811-In-Your-State. Here's how the process works...

After you call or submit your request online, all affected utilities are notified of your intent to dig. It may take the utilities a few days to get to your request, so please be patient. Utilities have 48 hours to mark their facilities so please plan ahead. Before you break ground, confirm that all of the utilities have responded to your request. If you placed your request by phone, use the process explained by your 811 call center representative. If you submitted your request online, refer to your 811 center ticket to confirm everything.

This also applies if you are doing some tiling, making a new field driveway in the ditch, building a new house, addition or bins and yes planting trees! Your electric co-op marks lines up to the meter. Any underground lines in the yard past your meter will need to be located by your electrician. (See graphic on Page 7.)

By taking this important step before you break ground on your project, you can help protect not only yourself, but our community. Disrupting an underground utility line can interrupt service, cause injuries and cost money to repair, so remember to call 811 first and know what's below. 

What a crock — full for supper! Share your best Crockpot recipes

Take stock and share your favorite Crockpot recipes. Send us your favorite Crockpot recipes for roasts, chicken, rice, potatoes, hotdish and even desserts. Mail to Editor, Federated Rural Electric, PO Box 69, Jackson MN 56143-0069 or e-mail to christoffer@federatedrea.coop by April 26. Add your name and phone number. Thanks for sharing with us! 📧

Pumpkin- Zucchini Bread by Laurie Sherman, Truman

- 3 eggs
- 2 c. sugar
- 3 c. flour (can substitute gluten-free flour)
- 1 tsp. baking soda
- 1 can pumpkin
- ½ tsp. each: baking powder, salt, cinnamon, nutmeg & cloves
- 1 c. butter
- 1 T. vanilla
- 1 c. shredded zucchini
- 1 c. chopped walnuts (optional)

Combine eggs and sugar; add pumpkin, softened butter and vanilla. Combine dry ingredients and then add to wet ingredients. Stir in the zucchini and walnuts.

Bake in oiled loaf pans at 350° for 45 to 50 minutes. Cool in pans for 10 minutes. Makes two 9x5x3" loaves. 📧

Dad's English Muffin Bread by Elizabeth Shimon, Granada

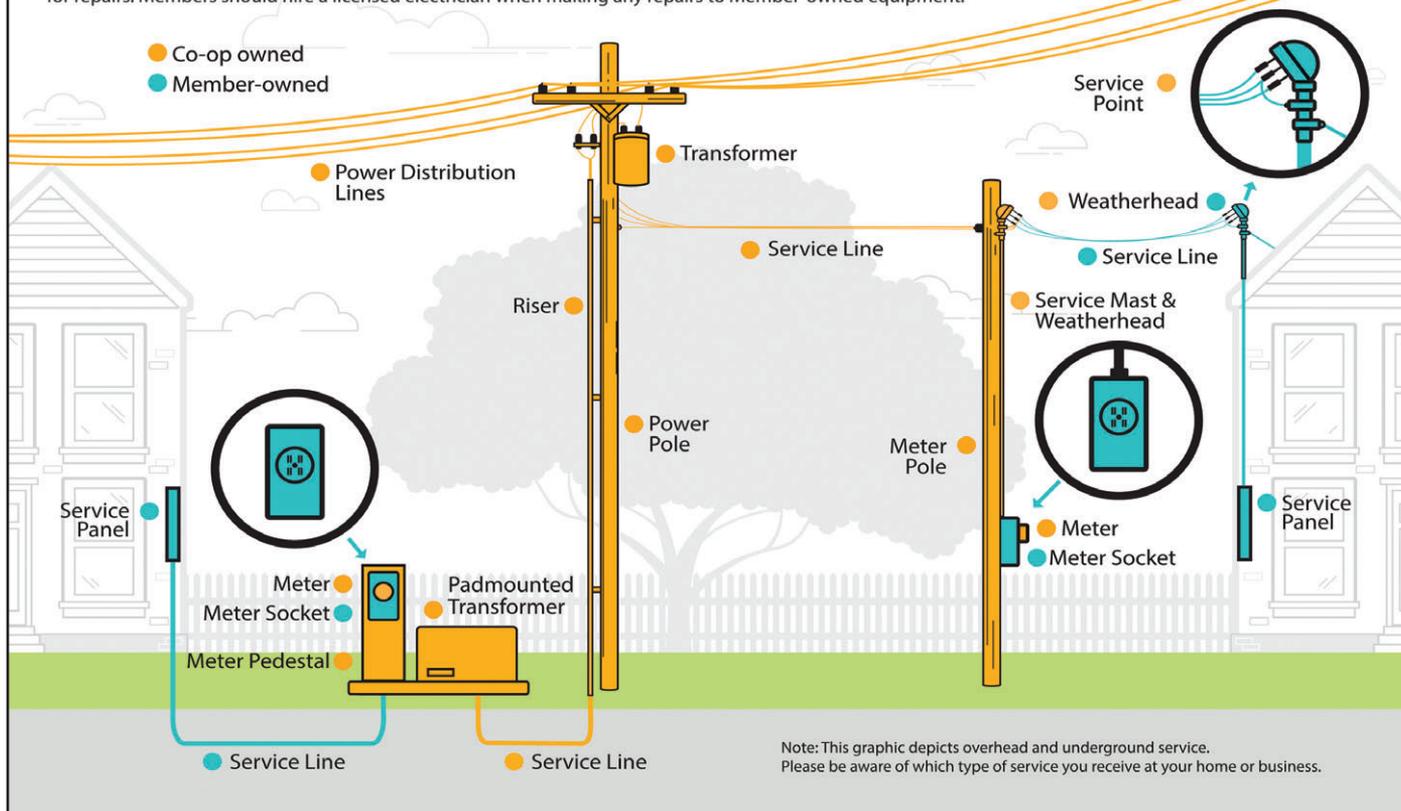
- 5½ c. warm water
- 3 T. sugar
- 2 T. salt
- 3 packages rapid rise yeast
- 11 c. flour

Mix the dry ingredients and then add the water. Put into two well greased large loaf pans. Let rise until dough reaches the top of the pans. Bake at 350° for 45 minutes or until golden brown. About 10 minutes before the loaves are done, brush with butter. Cool before cutting. 📧

Who Owns What?

Electric Co-op Owned Equipment vs Member-Owned Equipment

This graphic depicts equipment owned by the Co-op (in gold) and the Member (in blue). If a storm damages any equipment owned by the Co-op, we are responsible for repairs. If a storm damages any Member-owned equipment, the Member is responsible for repairs. Members should hire a licensed electrician when making any repairs to Member-owned equipment.





Brandon Havemeier
Operations Manager

Staff Notes

Focused on keeping our system reliable; construction and maintenance begins soon

As the temperatures rise and conditions improve, BCREA line crews and contractors are gearing up for construction and maintenance projects throughout the service area.

Our line crews will work to install a three-phase underground tie between Cobden and Sleepy Eye Substations in Brookville and Prairieville Townships. In addition to the work plan projects planned for the summer, we will replace overhead services throughout the year and focus on areas where we have had recent tree issues via tree trimming or replacing the overhead line with underground cable. Brown County REA also began their underground patrol in Sigel, Stark, Brighton and Courtland East Townships at the end of March.

BCREA has contracted with Central Applicators, Inc. to maintain and control vegetation along the rights-of-way and in the yards throughout the service area. Work is expected to begin at the end of April/early May, depending on the weather conditions. Central Applicators will be using an EPA-approved herbicide to treat only the unwanted brush, noxious weeds and volunteer trees that may interfere with power lines in the future.

Southwood 2000, a subsidiary of our neighbors at Redwood Electric Cooperative in Clements, will continue to locate our underground cable throughout the year. In addition to locating, Southwood 2000 will begin pole inspections in April. Poles are being tested in the southeast portion of the service area in Linden, Cottonwood, Cambria, Courtland, Brighton and Lafayette townships. Pole inspection involves visually inspecting the pole, checking for cracks, equipment damage and burn marks from ditch fires. If the pole passes that part of the inspection, then they dig down 18 inches to inspect the base of the pole. To check for internal decay, they drill into the core of the pole. The base of the pole is also visually checked for decay. If the pole does not pass inspection, it is rejected and will be replaced. We test the poles regularly to meet requirements of the Rural Utilities Service (RUS) and to improve service reliability.

Carr's Tree Service will be back in the area trimming trees in Sigel, Cottonwood, Cambria, Brookville and Prairieville Townships in July.

We remind you to be aware of Brown County REA equipment as you are working in your fields and yards. Be aware of transformers and other equipment while out mowing, riding ATV or working in the fields, plus know where the poles and overhead lines are when planting, spraying and moving equipment. Remember to call Gopher State One Call at 800-252-1166 or 811 or apply online at www.gopherstateonecall.org before starting any digging more than 12 inches deep.

All of us at Brown County REA wish you a safe and healthy spring and summer. ☺



**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

Thomas Hayes, President — 228-8954

William Berg, Vice President — 766-1497

James D. Hanson, Sec.-Treasurer — 829-6756

Brad Sprenger — 317-5576

David Wendinger — 276-3166

Greg Mages — 794-3540

Joel Christensen — 828-4550

James Mickelson — 794-6298

Landon Sletta — 439-6559

The Board of Directors meets the last Thursday of each month.

Board meeting highlights

The BCREA Board of Directors held its monthly board meeting March 25, in the REA headquarters auditorium. Discussion and/or action were taken on the following agenda items:

- Reviewed and approved the February 2021 board meeting minutes, new membership applications, member cancellations, payments to estates and assignment transfers.
- Reviewed and approved February 2021 payroll and financial statement.
- Approved the appointment of Kim Hensch to represent District 3 on the Round Up Trust Board.
- Updated on plans for the reconvened 84th annual meeting June 24 at the REA headquarters.
- Reviewed and approved the 2020 financial audit as presented by Aaron Clayton of Eide Bailly, LLP.
- Re-elected Bill Berg to represent BCREA on the Great River Energy Board.
- Reviewed and approved a change to the cooperative's schedule of charges.
- Updated on operations and maintenance activities.

The next meeting is set for April 29 at the BCREA office in Sleepy Eye. ☺