

Connections

June 2022

For the member-owners of Brown County REA



Volume 26, Issue 6

Spotlight on Excellence national award shines gold on Connections newsletter

The gold award goes to....(drum roll please)...your electric cooperative's *Connections* newsletter!

Brown County Rural Electrical Association (BCREA), Sleepy Eye; and Federated Rural Electric, Jackson; received recognition in the 2022 "Spotlight on Excellence" national awards program. The awards contest is sponsored by the Council of Rural Electric Communicators and the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA).

BCREA and Federated received a Gold Award in the Best External News Publication category for the *Connections* newsletter for electric cooperatives under 20,000 members. Andrea Christoffer, Federated's marketing & communications manager; Steve Ruthenbeck, Federated's communications specialist; and Marcia Solie, BCREA's member services manager; create the award-winning newsletter. *Connections* is a shared monthly newsletter for the two cooperatives. This is the 17th time that this member-owner newsletter has won a Spotlight national award. Gold awards were awarded to those entries scoring 90 points or more, while Silver winners scored 80 points.

"The judges noted that electric cooperatives are being challenged to communicate to the members they serve more than ever," said Scott Peterson, NRECA's senior vice president of communications. "Printed news publications, news releases, social media and videos are all more important to keep members updated on issues affecting the electric cooperatives and their member-owners."

"Andrea, Steve and Marcia understand the value of relevant, timely and quality communications to our members and make that a priority," stated BCREA's CEO Mike Heidemann. "Our industry is ever changing; they do a great job in keeping member-owners informed. They continue to exceed our expectations and help us all with better communications' strategy. Congratulations!"



Gold rush! Your electric cooperative brings home the gold in the Spotlight on Excellence Contest for the *Connections* newsletter. Pictured are Steve Ruthenbeck and Andrea Christoffer with the three issues submitted and the award.

A special reception honored the award recipients during the CONNECT '22 Conference held in Seattle, Washington, May 3-5. Winning entries were displayed during the event.

The Spotlight on Excellence Awards recognizes the top-rated communication and marketing efforts by electric cooperatives. Entrants competed with electric co-ops of similar size in 18 categories. Electric cooperative communicators and marketing professionals submitted more than 600 entries in the Spotlight on Excellence program. Faculty members from the University of Missouri — Columbia, and the University of South Carolina, as well as noted professionals in the fields of marketing, newspapers, web design and digital communications judged the event. (C)

At A Glance



**Brown County
Rural Electrical
Association**

85th Anniversary Picnic

BCREA is 85-years-old! Come and celebrate with us June 14. Enjoy brats, hotdogs and tours of BCREA headquarters. More details can be found on Page 4. We look forward to seeing our members there! (C)



Charge ahead! Electric tools & devices are quieter & greener now

If you listen carefully, you can hear a *quiet* transformation happening. Electric appliances and equipment are becoming more popular than ever.

Advancements in technology and battery power, coupled with decreasing costs, are winning consumers over. A bonus is that electric equipment is quieter and better for the environment.

Inside the home, consumers and homebuilders are turning to electric appliances to increase energy efficiency and savings. Whether a traditional electric stove or an induction stove top, both are significantly more efficient than a gas oven. Conventional cooking tops typically use gas or resistance heating elements to transfer energy with efficiencies of approximately 32 and 75 percent, according to Energy Star. Electric induction stoves, which cook food without any flame, reduce indoor air pollution and brings water to a boil about twice as fast as a gas stove. Robotic vacuums are also gaining in popularity. *Fortune Business Insights* attributes the growth and popularity of robotic vacuums like Roomba to a larger market of smart home technology.

More tools and equipment with small gas-powered motors are being replaced with electric ones. Technology in battery storage has advanced significantly. Hand-held electric tools can hold a charge longer and offer the user the same functionality as gas-powered tools. National brands offer electric versions of their most popular products, ranging from lawn



Electric tools were just the start of the electrical battery revolution. Discover the benefits of electrical battery-charged yard tools, lawn mowers, bikes and planes!

mowers, snow blowers, leaf trimmers and leaf blowers.

Keith Dennis, an energy industry expert and president of the Beneficial Electrification League, noted, "A few years back, the list of new electric product categories that were making their way to the market was limited to electric scooters and vehicles."

Today, the number of electric products available is skyrocketing. "There are electric bikes, school buses, pressure washers, utility terrain vehicles, backhoes — even airplanes and boats," Dennis said. "With the expansion of batteries and advancements in technology, we are seeing almost anything that burns gasoline or diesel as having an electric

replacement available."

Electric equipment also requires less maintenance. Often the biggest task is keeping them charged. In addition, electric equipment is quieter; if you want to listen to music or your favorite podcast while doing outdoor work, you can — something that wouldn't be possible with gas-powered equipment.

Another benefit of using electric appliances or equipment is that by virtue of being plugged into the grid, the environmental performance of electric devices improves over time. In essence, electricity is becoming cleaner through increasing renewable energy generation, so equipment that uses electricity will have a diminishing environmental impact over time.

The Cooluli is a mini-fridge with big possibilities

Imagine a refrigerator that is small enough to sit on your desk or on the table next to your chair. Then you don't have to stand up to retrieve your snacks!

The Cooluli is great for the home and office, as well as in a nursery or dorm room. It has the capacity to hold six 12-ounce cans and can keep whatever you put inside of it cool. Not only that, but the Cooluli can also reverse the process and keep things warm!

The Cooluli is great for storing food, drinks, beer, snacks, breast milk, insulin and medications. You can also store skincare, personal care and beauty product favorites — from moisturizers to masks... serums to creams...and everything in between. It measures 7.25" wide by 10.25" deep and 10.75" tall.

The Cooluli includes AC, DC and USB power cords to give you a variety of power options. Display lights show what setting the mini-appliance is on and can be changed by the flip of a switch. The Cooluli produces almost no noise (perfect next to your bed). The unique semiconductor operation is ultra-quiet and 100 percent environmentally-friendly.

Cleaning the interior and exterior of the Cooluli is easy, as well. Just wipe it down. The storage shelf inside is removable, which allows room to hold four 16-ounce



The Cooluli enables you to put a mini-fridge on your desk, beside your bed or in the nursery. Besides, the Cooluli can also keep items warm!

bottles. The Cooluli comes in five different colors: white, blue, pink, fuchsia and even cow pattern.

The Cooluli costs about \$50 and is available in a variety of stores and online. 

Safety

A real-life encounter with a downed line

Seventeen-year-old Mary Gehrig was driving home from a friend's house on a stormy night. Although some cars had pulled over to wait out the storm, Gehrig was close to home and thought she could make it.

Around 25 minutes into her 30-minute drive, Gehrig turned onto the county road that would take her home. Although there was near-zero visibility due to the storm, which turned more severe than originally forecast, she noticed two white lines in the distance. As she got closer, she realized that those lines were across the road, in her path and they were anything but small.

"I realized I was not going to (be able to) drive over it," Gehrig recalled. She slammed on the brakes and her car struck the object, which happened to be one of two



high-voltage transmission power lines lying in the road. The massive cable stopped Mary's car in its tracks. The car's electrical system was damaged and she was stuck there alone.

The next thing Gehrig did was pick up her phone and call her parents. When her dad heard that there was a downed power line involved, he told her to stay in the car and call 9-1-1.

Fire chief Rich Schock said, "Those are large transmission lines with a lot of volts in them," he stated. "The outcome could have been fatal had Gehrig gotten out. Gehrig did everything right."

When there is an accident involving downed power lines, a padmount transformer or other related utility equipment, follow these safety tips:

- Call 9-1-1 and report that a downed line or other electrical equipment is involved.
- Do not get out of the vehicle until electric utility workers say it is safe to exit.
- Warn those involved in the accident to stay put and alert others who might approach to stay back.
- Exiting a vehicle or equipment is the last resort and should only be attempted if the car is on fire or giving off smoke. If this is the case, exit the vehicle by crossing your arms and jumping from the vehicle without touching it. Then, hop with both feet together as far as you can. 

— *Courtesy of safeelectricity.org*

Brown County Briefs

Electrify your yard work



Looking to buy a battery-powered electric leaf blower, chainsaw, trimmer/weed whip or lawn mower? New models are great for keeping your yard looking great!

During June, July and August, Brown County REA is offering rebates of \$25 for a minimum \$100 pre-tax priced leaf blower, chainsaw, edger, trimmer/weed whip and \$50 on a \$399 or higher-priced pre-tax priced electric push lawn mower. Provide a copy of your invoice with the purchase price and model number.

Rebate will be paid as a credit on your electric bill. Limit one rebate per member.

Download updated mobile app



BCREA's existing mobile app will expire June 30. Get the new app today from your app store! With our new mobile app you can: quickly and easily pull up account information, make a payment, see your statement history, payment history, usage history and notifications history, plus sign up for notifications, view outage map and see our contact information.

Follow these steps to sign up:

1. Delete existing BCREA app on your phone.
2. Download the new app on your phone (Brown County REA).
3. Register or sign in. Already an online user? Enter your existing username and password. New online user? Click **Register New User** and complete the set-up process. 

The silent energy partner that serves you

The electric grid is a sprawling network of power plants, wind turbines, power lines, substations and technologies owned and operated by different utilities who all strive to achieve the same goal: serve their members and customers with the reliable, affordable electricity they need to power their lives.

Most utilities in the country work with a silent partner — their regional transmission organization (RTO) — on this goal. RTOs came along at the recommendation of the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission in 1999. Their purpose is to promote economic efficiency, reliability and non-discriminatory practices.

Great River Energy (GRE), wholesale power supplier to BCREA, is a voluntary member of the Midcontinent Independent System Operator (MISO), which operates the power grid across 15 U.S. states and Manitoba, Canada. MISO helps electric providers deliver reliable, affordable energy in three ways:

Managing the grid

Think of MISO as the air traffic controller of the region's grid. Using sophisticated technology, processes and procedures, MISO has a wide-area view and control of the grid that goes beyond any one utility. This helps those utilities maintain reliability on a regional level and prevent emergency operating situations in the future or in real-time. Even though most people have never heard of it, 42 million people depend on MISO to generate and transmit the right amount of electricity every minute of every day.

Managing the energy market

In decades past electric cooperatives would generate power and deliver it via power lines to their members. Coordinating the power flows and transactions back then was a manual process requiring many agreements between utilities. Today, all generation production is offered into the MISO market and cooperatives buy back what they need to serve their member-consumers. The MISO energy market helps keep electricity affordable by ensuring the lowest cost generation available is used first to supply member-consumers and minimize flow constraints across the grid. MISO also provides improved price transparency with energy market price changes occurring every five minutes, which can be seen in real time.

Conducting transmission planning

MISO takes a broad view of the high-voltage power line system — otherwise known as the transmission system — that serves the region and conducts ongoing planning activities to ensure the system is prepared to meet future needs. It works with the region's electric utilities to minimize the cost of transmission, generation and the energy on the system. Using advanced modeling and research, MISO helps ensure reliable and efficient electricity transmission in the region and beyond.

GRE works closely with MISO to make sure when they design a plan for the region's electric system, it will serve cooperative members well in terms of both reliability and affordability. Visit misoenergy.org to learn about MISO. 

BROWN COUNTY REA MEMBERS & FAMILIES ARE INVITED TO THE
85th Anniversary Picnic and Open House
Tuesday, June 14th from 4:30 to 7:30 p.m.
at the REA headquarters - 24386 State Hwy. 4, Sleepy Eye

BROWN COUNTY REA

P.O. Box 529
Sleepy Eye MN 56085-0529
1-800-658-2368

Come enjoy brats, hot dogs and tours of the building
and help your cooperative celebrate 85 years!

GRE completes Coal Creek, transmission line sale



GREAT RIVER ENERGY

POWER SUPPLY IN TRANSITION

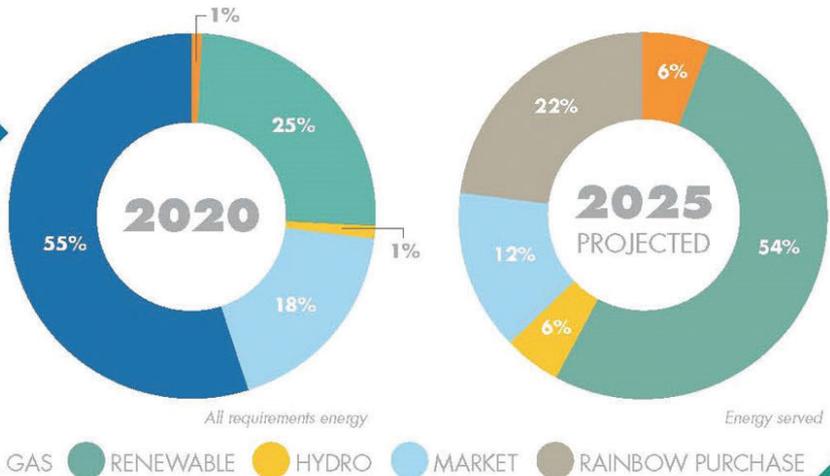
Great River Energy has surpassed state environmental goals years ahead of schedule and plans to achieve future emission targets early. We have done this while maintaining our strong commitment to provide our member-owners with affordable, reliable and resilient power.

ENERGY MIX PROGRESSION

Over the past several years, Great River Energy has begun to transition from an energy mix heavily reliant on coal to one that will be over half renewable energy sources by 2025.

Flexible resources, reliable electricity

Great River Energy has a fleet of peaking plants ready to produce energy when its members or the larger grid need it. When combined with the Midwest's high availability of wind, natural gas provides stability today and flexibility for a future with new technologies and opportunities.



Brown County REA's wholesale power supplier, Great River Energy (GRE), completed the sale of Coal Creek Station power plant and high-voltage direct-current (HVDC) transmission system to Rainbow Energy Center and Nexus Line, respectively in early May.

Back in 2020, GRE announced plans to shut down the Coal Creek plant as part of its energy transition, adding renewable resources in its place. Rainbow Energy Center will continue to operate the 1,151-megawatt (MW) power plant. Great River Energy will operate and maintain the

HVDC system for Nexus Line under a 20-year contract. As part of this agreement, Great River Energy will purchase 1,050 MW of power from Rainbow Energy Center through early 2023, when the purchase amount decreases to 350 MW for eight years.

By reducing its coal-based energy and more than doubling its renewable energy, Great River Energy will reduce its carbon dioxide emissions by more than 80 percent by 2032, achieving Minnesota's emissions target nearly two decades ahead of schedule. (E)



BCREA's crews practice poletop-rescue training

Brown County Rural Electrical Association linemen went through poletop and bucket truck rescue training recently. Poletop training gives linemen practice in getting an injured lineman down to the ground if a contact incident happens while they are working on hot lines. This type of training is one way Brown County Rural Electrical Association ensures that its employees are always making safety first in all of their day-to-day activities in delivering reliable electricity to you, the member-owners. (E)

Your utility prepares, as Midwest power grid predicts tighter power supply this summer

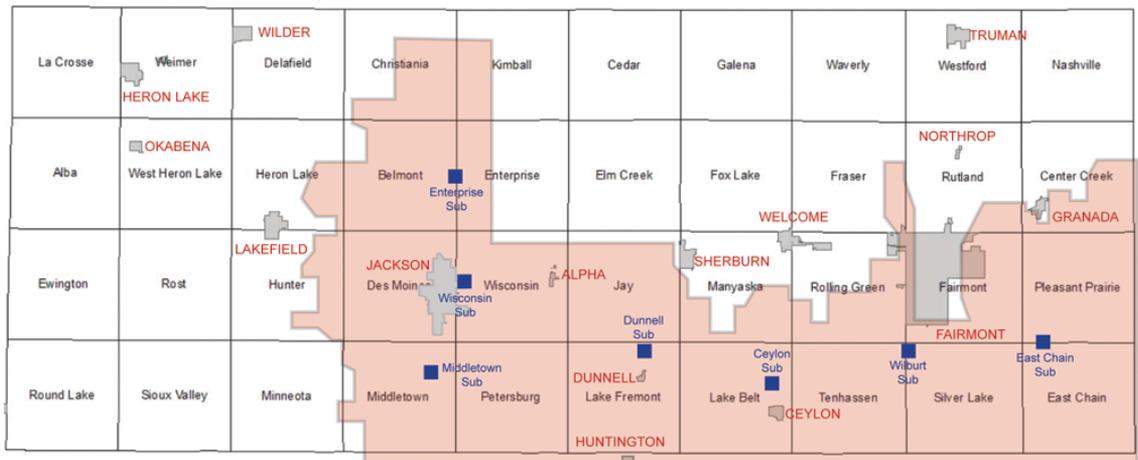
Potential summer heat and the risk of power shortages has been in the news quite a bit lately. Your electric cooperative's wholesale power suppliers have plans in place should such an emergency occur and will activate periodic power outages only as a last resort.

Recently, the North American Electric Reliability Corporation (NERC) issued a warning for the Midwest this summer. While NERC originally didn't anticipate power shortfalls for the Midwest until 2024 as coal-fired power plants closed, power capacity decreased since last summer. Demand for power is increasing. Renewable energy and battery storage are not keeping up. With extreme heat or reduced wind, periodic power outages, often called rolling blackouts, are possible. While Minnesota utilities have surplus power capacity, other Midwest utilities do not.

"Electric utilities in the Midwest are making plans for the possibility of rotating power outages," stated Scott Reimer, Federated Rural Electric's general manager. "Great River Energy, one of our transmission providers, developed a communications plan to inform affected member cooperatives, including Federated, in the event extreme conditions warrant implementing periodic power outages in an effort to restore balance to the grid.

"GRE will follow the Midwest Independent Systems Operator's (MISO) lead," Reimer said. "Your electric co-op has prepared social media posts and maps to update our member-owners, as grid conditions change."

GRE's electric cooperatives will use their load management programs with



Federated members in the pink area may see rolling power outages if power supply becomes short in the Midwest. These areas are affected because Great River Energy controls both ends of the transmission line circuit. While Brown County REA's substations are not affected, 10 other GRE co-ops could face similar rolling outages at their substations too.

about 350 megawatts controlled to help manage demand for electricity to avoid a grid emergency. Load control may be used more often this summer during peak periods. "Electric cooperatives have been using load control programs since the 1980s," added CEO Mike Heidemann from Brown County REA, whose cooperative substations are not part of the potential rotating power outage plan. "Co-op members participate in load control programs for commercial generators, irrigation, water heaters, plus Cycled Air for heat pumps and central air. Every little bit helps."

In addition, members can help by waiting until later in the evening to do laundry, run dishwashers, dryers, and other electric appliances. Setting the thermostat a little higher to keep cooling from constantly running during times of peak electricity use is also a good practice. Members with electric vehicles (EVs) should wait to charge their vehicle until after 11 p.m. if not currently on a co-op EV-charging program. Contact your cooperative to learn about these programs.

Federated is one of 11 GRE co-ops that may be affected if a grid emergency occurs and periodic power outages occur. "GRE needs control of

the transmission circuit at each end to manually reduce electric load on the MISO grid," Reimer said. "Because we are part of a larger regional grid, we must do our part. Other Midwest utilities will be impacted too."

Seven of Federated's 23 substations could be involved in rotating power outages lasting roughly an hour at a time. This includes East Chain, Wilbert, Ceylon and Dunnell substations in Martin County, plus Middletown, Enterprise and Wisconsin subs in Jackson County. Just like storm-related outages, members should be prepared. Those with medical equipment using electricity should have a backup plan that includes a battery or a generator.

NERC believes the coal and gas-fired power plants that are left will run more and possibly have more breakdowns. In addition, the hydropower dams are generating less power due to drought in the Midwest. Plus, often the wind doesn't blow on the hottest dog days of summer.

Rolling outages, while possible, are unlikely. MISO and Midwest utilities will exhaust all options before implementing them. Stay informed by following your co-op's Facebook page. Twitter users can follow MISO directly: @miso_energy. ⁽⁶⁾

Send us your very favorite cherry recipes with a cherry on top!

Share with us your very favorite cherry recipes, whether it's for coffee cake, cheese cake, pie, bars, cookies, jam, ice cream or salad. Mail your cherry recipes to Editor, Federated Rural Electric, PO Box 69, Jackson, MN 56143-0069 or e-mail to christoffer@federatedrea.coop by June 27. Add your name and phone number. Thanks for sharing with us! ☺

Blueberry Dessert

by Eileen Morrow, Welcome

Melt half of a 16 oz. bag of marshmallows with ½ c. milk

Cool and then add an 8 oz. tub of Cool Whip. Mix well. Set aside.

Crust: 18 graham crackers, crushed
1/3 c. melted butter 1/3 c. sugar

Line a 9x13" pan with half of the crumbs. (Save the remainder for the topping)

Pour half of the marshmallow mixture over the crumbs.

Spread one can of blueberry pie filling over the top of the crumbs and marshmallow mixture. Add the remaining marshmallow mixture over the blueberries and then top with the remaining crumbs. Chill before serving. ☺

Crock Pot Chicken by Laurie Sherman, Truman

Cook in crock pot for 4 or more hours on low: 4 lb. whole chicken, season inside and out with 1 T. kosher salt & 1 tsp. pepper

Brown chicken 4-5 minutes each on the back, breast & sides (I skip this step). Then put chicken in the crock pot and add water to cover it halfway. Add to crock pot:

1 T. thyme	2 medium carrots, sliced
12 or so new potatoes	2 medium onions, chopped
4 garlic cloves, minced	½ c. dry white wine
1 celery stalk, chopped	

When serving add 1 T. fresh parsley. You can use it in a stew or just serve the chicken with sides. I use it in a variety of ways. I always debone it. ☺



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 and tiling. You can also register at www.gopherstateonecall.org or call 811. Call a licensed electrician to locate the underground lines on your side of the meter. ☺

CONSIDERING AN ELECTRIC VEHICLE?

EV Ride & Drive

WEDNESDAY – AUGUST 10
5 PM – 8 PM

Windom Community Center

1750 Cottonwood Lake Dr, Windom, MN 56101



FOOD VENDORS

ELECTRIC VEHICLES



WHAT TO EXPECT

RIDE AND DRIVE: 5 pm – 7 pm

PANEL: 7 pm – 8 pm

Receive a free bag of Steve's All American Kettle Corn while supplies last

Lingen Dairy Food Truck – serving burgers, fries, cheese curds and ice cream

brought to you by



and these participating cooperatives





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: 7:30 a.m. to 4 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 May 26. Discussion and/or action were taken on the following agenda items:

- Reviewed and approved the April 2022 board meeting minutes, new membership applications, member cancellations, payments to estates and assignment transfers.
- Reviewed and approved March 2022 and April 2022 financial statements and April 2022 payroll.
- Updated on plans for the 85th anniversary membership picnic June 14 from 4:30 to 7:30 p.m. at the BCREA headquarters.
- Discussed changes in the BCREA mobile app and other upcoming billing promotions.
- Informed that Southwood 2000 has started annual inspection of substations in Courtland, Lafayette, Cornish and Alfsborg townships.
- Reviewed employee safety trainings.
- Updated on operations and maintenance activities, including completion of annual inspections of substations. The work is beginning on the Highway 14 expansion and Boundary Street projects.

The next meeting is set for June 30 as part of the Strategic Planning Session in Austin, MN. ☎



Marcia Solie
Member Services
Manager

Staff Notes

Beat the heat with cool rebates/tune-up credit

If it's time to replace your home's cooling system, consider an Air Source Heat Pump (ASHP). Unlike a furnace, an ASHP doesn't burn fuel to make heat. It uses electricity to move heat from one place to another. When it's cold outside, a heat pump extracts outside heat and transfers it inside. When it's warm outside, it reverses directions and acts like an air conditioner, removing heat from the home.

Heat pump technology has improved to offer cold climate heat pumps capable of heating down to lower temperatures, though a backup heating source is necessary. Brown County REA offers residential rebates on load-controlled heat pumps with a non-electric backup, ranging from \$1,000 to \$2,000, depending on the Heating Seasonal Performance Factor (HSPF) and Seasonal Energy Efficiency Rating (SEER).

For homes without ductwork a ductless mini-split heat pump is an economical and efficient option. During June, July and August, Brown County REA is offering bonus rebates on Energy Star residential Ductless Air Source Heat Pumps. Receive a \$750 rebate if electricity is your home's primary heat source and \$450 if you heat your home with fossil fuel.

To keep it running smoothly and efficiently, Brown County REA encourages members to have your cooling system tuned up regularly by a licensed, professional HVAC contractor. Members are eligible for a \$25 electric bill credit for the home cooling system tune-up every two years. Submit the checklist below, along with a dated copy of the contractor's bill to Brown County REA to receive your bill credit. ☎

Cooling system tune-up check points

Member name _____

Address _____

Technician checklist:

- Clean condenser coil; Check coolant level;
- Check indoor filter; Check belt and lube motor, if needed;
- Test all controls; Blow out drain lines;
- Check coolant pressure
- Perform a visual inspection of the entire cooling system;
- Educate member on proper system operation and maintenance



List cooling unit's brand, model and serial number: _____

Age of unit _____ ER rating and BTU rating _____

Technician's signature _____

Mail to BCREA with a dated copy of contractor invoice to receive \$25 bill credit.