

Connections

December 2024

For the member-owners of Brown County REA



Volume 28, Issue 12

Capitalize on Youth Tour experience to tour nation's Capitol and capital!



Brown County REA's 2024 trip winner was Cindy Jensen. This Comfrey High School senior called Youth Tour a great experience; she encourages other teens to enter the contest for meeting new people and seeing new places.

Washington, D.C. is calling! Answer the call to enter the 2025 Youth Tour Contest, sponsored by your electric cooperative.

Brown County REA will send one local high school student to Washington, D.C. for FREE June 16-21, 2025. A high school sophomore or junior completes a two-page application and writes a 300-word essay on an energy-related topic. Submit to Brown County REA by February 28, 2025.

Applicants will be scheduled for interviews in mid-March. The interview, essay and application scores are added together to determine the trip winner. Brown County REA awards these prizes:

- Second Place: \$200
 - Third Place: \$150
 - Other applicants: Gift card
 - Travel with 40 Minnesota cooperative-sponsored teens via airplane to D.C. Tour the U.S. Capitol Building and meet your members of Congress.
 - The monumental experience includes visits to Washington Monument, Lincoln Memorial, Jefferson Memorial, Franklin Delano Roosevelt Memorial, Vietnam Veterans Memorial, World War II Memorial, Arlington Cemetery, Air Force Memorial, U.S. Marines Corps War Memorial and Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial.
 - Travel back in history with visits to the Smithsonian Museums, Holocaust Museum, National Cathedral, 9/11 Memorial, Old Town Alexandria, Georgetown, John F. Kennedy Center and Library of Congress.
 - Travel via a boat ride on the Potomac River and on a Segway for a tour of the National Mall and monuments.
- Encourage your local son, daughter, grandchild or family/friend's high school student to apply. Find the application on BCREA's website (browncountyrea.coop) or pick up the application from your local school counselor. Apply today for the trip of a lifetime. ☺

At A Glance

BROWN COUNTY
REA

Recycle your
holiday lights
& help local
organization

BCREA is working with Sleepy Eye YES! Team to collect old holiday light strings for recycling. Drop off old lights in the box found our REA office entry during regular business hours 7:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. The collection occurs until mid-January. This is NOT for CFL bulbs, rope lights, battery packs or cord adapters. ☺

Follow Energy Star to discover energy savings when purchasing appliances & electronics

Star of wonder, star of light, star of energy-savings bright! Look for Energy Star® products as you do your holiday shopping or start working on home energy efficiency for the new year. One of the best ways to make your home more energy efficient is by choosing products with the Energy Star label. Learn more about the Energy Star process.

How products earn the Energy Star label

Energy Star is a program by the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to help consumers identify energy-efficient products that save money and reduce environmental impact.

Products that earn the Energy Star label must meet strict guidelines for energy efficiency, performance and cost effectiveness.

1. The product must be more energy efficient than typical models. This helps you save on energy bills by using less electricity, while still providing the same performance.

2. The product is tested in EPA-recognized labs, following standardized procedures. These tests ensure the product meets energy efficiency and performance requirements.

3. Then the product's test data is reviewed by a third-party certification body to verify it meets the standards. This ensures that the best products receive the Energy Star label.

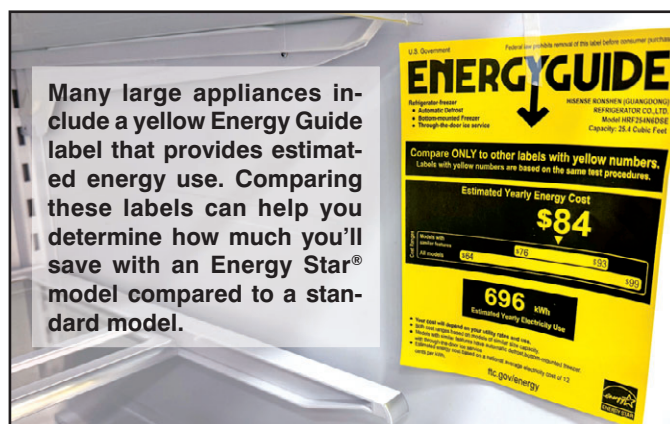
Even after a product is certified, the EPA conducts "off-the-shelf" testing on random samples of Energy Star products to ensure they continue to meet the required standards. If a product fails to meet the performance requirements during verification testing, it can be disqualified from the Energy Star program. The EPA has clear procedures for handling such disqualifications to maintain the integrity of the label.



Speaking of labels

Whether upgrading your refrigerator, replacing light bulbs or purchasing new electronics, the blue Energy Star label ensures the product has passed all energy-efficiency tests. Find it on products ranging from small and major appliances to electronics.

Many large appliances, such as refrigerators, washing machines and clothes dryers, include a yellow Energy Guide label that provides estimated energy use. Compare these



labels to determine how much you'll save with an Energy Star model compared to a standard model.

While Energy Star products cost a little more upfront, their energy savings over time will often cover the difference. This reduces your household's energy consumption, which could translate to lower utility bills.

Why should I care?

As a member of an electric cooperative, choosing energy-efficient products benefits not only you, but also our entire co-op. When co-op members use less energy, it lowers overall electricity demand, helping to stabilize rates and reduce costs for everyone.

As you shop for appliances, electronics or other home equipment this holiday season, look for the Energy Star label. Whether it's a new washing machine or energy-efficient lighting options, these products are a simple and effective way to save money and lower energy use. Check the co-op's website to find the rebate forms for Energy Star products:

- Energy Star dehumidifier;
- Energy Star refrigerator or freezer with recycling of the old unit;
- Energy Star Smart thermostat; and
- If buying a new heating or cooling system, see the co-op's rebates for air source heat pumps, ground source heat pumps and ductless air source heat pumps as well.


To browse products that have earned the Energy Star label visit www.energystar.gov.

Easily wrap trees with stretch net holiday lights

Wrap up your outdoor holiday light tree displays with stretchnet pro wrap LED lights for faster installation and removal. Wintergreen Lighting allows tree decorating to surpass the winter wonderland wow factor.

Order the size for your trees or porch columns. The 50 light set is 20"x40" before stretching and the light cord stretches to 37"x45" max — perfect for medium width trees. A large light set starts at 30"x45" at rest, while a small light set measures 14"x31" at rest. Wrap it around the tree and it hooks to itself. Choose from different color lights: white, red, green, blue, two-color or multi-color. Choose from brown wire for trees or white for columns. Measure your tree or column's circumference before ordering these lights.

Like typical LED lighting, if one LED burns out, the rest stay lit. The bulbs are rated for up to 60,000 hours with shatter-proof acrylic bulbs; it comes with a one-year seasonal warranty. These are UL-listed for safety indoors and outdoors. Up to 45 of these light sets can be connected together.

The small and medium light set costs about \$30, while the large costs about \$35. Find it on Amazon or other holiday online websites. 



A “tree”mendous way to wrap up holiday decorating quickly features stretchable net tree wrap LED holiday lighting from Wintergreen. Choose from different colors.

Safety

Celebrate 12 days of Christmas with 12 safety tips

On the first day of Christmas my true love gave to me... (and it better not be a partridge in a pear tree!) Let's go with the 12 holiday safety tips so you can enjoy a safe season with your family!

1. Inspect all lights and extension cords for damage before decorating.
2. Never connect more than three strings of incandescent light strings.
3. Check your extension cords and holiday lights. Look for the tag that says it is safe for outdoor or indoor use.
4. Search for the safety stamp of approval — UL (underwriters Laboratory), ETL (Intertek) or CAS (Canadian Standards Association). These are nationally recognized testing labs.
5. Avoid overloading electrical outlets with too many decorations because they could overheat and cause a fire.
6. Plug outdoor electric lights and decorations into ground fault circuit interrupters (GFCI) outlets.

Look for the fine print! This tag shows the UL safety logo and indoor lighting rating.



7. Turn off all electrical decorations before leaving home or going to sleep.

8. Better yet, install a timer with your holiday lights or a smart plug that connects with your Smart phone for easy on/off access.

9. Keep all decorations three feet away from heating equipment, like space heaters or an open flame from a fireplace or candle.

10. Use caution when decorating the house or trees outside. Stay 20 feet away from power lines with the ladder and decorating equipment.

11. Water daily your Christmas tree.

12. Keep the family pet safe by investing in a plastic sleeve for \$10-\$20 that slides over the electrical cords so Fido doesn't chew on these cords.

Following these safety tips ensures you won't experience a crazy and unsafe “National Lampoons Christmas Vacation” holiday. 

Brown County Briefs

Efficiency tip

If you're planning to purchase electronic gifts this holiday season, look for the ENERGY STAR® label, which indicates higher energy-efficiency performance. Electronics that receive the ENERGY STAR rating are up to 25 percent more efficient than standard products. This holiday season, give the gift of energy savings with ENERGY STAR-rated electronics and equipment. Source: energystar.gov

2025 calendars available

Members can stop by the BCREA office during business hours to pick up a 2025 large, farm pocket calendar or small pocket-size calendars. One per member please.

\$3,750 distributed at the final 2024 meeting

The Brown County Rural Electric Trust wrapped up its charitable giving for the year by making donations totaling \$3,750 to seven organizations at its fourth quarter meeting November 19.

Funds were granted to: Coats for Kids project, Minnesota Brain Injury Force, Food for Kidz, Brown County Yellow Ribbon Program, Morgan Fire Relief Association, Sertoma Club Santa's Closet and We Care Project Christmas boxes.

Appreciation was given to departing Trust Board Member Mike Rein who completed one three-year term on the board.

If you are part of an organization or project which would like to apply for funding through Operation Round Up, you may use the application found on the Brown County REA website at www.browncountyrea.coop; otherwise, contact the office at 507-794-3331 or 800-658-2368. ☎



Your change made a difference in 2024



Thanks to monthly contributions from members who round up their electric bill to the nearest dollar, Operation Round Up was able to donate \$11,700 to 29 worthy causes, seven scholarships and one family in crisis this past year.

These donations are made possible thanks to participating BCREA members who round up their electric bill payment to the nearest dollar each month. For example, if an electric bill is \$97.55, the member pays \$98.00. The \$.45 difference goes into the Round Up Trust account and becomes part of the funds distributed to worthy causes throughout the service area. For less than \$12 per year, your contribution, when pooled with other members'

small change, helps make a difference to provide support to area charitable organizations, individuals and families in crisis and scholarships.

Among the organizations to receive Operation Round Up contributions in 2024 were Junior Achievement North New Ulm & Sleepy Eye, NUMAS Haus, SWWC Student Enrichment Programs, Sleepy Eye Community Theater, area high schools after prom events and five area food shelves.

Since 1995, when Operation Round Up was started at Brown County REA, nearly \$259,000 has been contributed to organizations and individuals in the cooperative's service area.

Many thanks to all Brown County REA members who participate in Operation Round Up. The summary of your tax-deductible contributions for 2024 will be printed on your January 2025 electric bill.

In this season of giving, please consider sharing your "change" by participating in Operation Round Up if you do not already. Fill out the Operation Round Up Enrollment form on the REA website www.browncountyrea.coop or call the office. ☎

Operation Round Up offers scholarships



Brown County REA, through its Operation Round Up program, is offering scholarships to high school seniors planning to attend college after graduation.

The trust board will award up to eight \$250 scholarships to graduating seniors whose parents/guardians are members and live in Brown County REA's service area.

Scholarship funds come from members who choose to round up their electric bill to the nearest dollar each month. The difference is placed in a trust which is administered by a nine-member volunteer board. Four times each year, the trust board distributes funds to charitable causes, individuals and families in crisis and scholarships.

Guidelines and scholarship applications are available from area high school counselors. The application materials can also be found on the REA website at www.browncountyrea.coop.

The deadline for submission is April 7, 2025, and winners will be announced at the April 10 Brown County REA Annual Meeting. A copy of the student's high school transcript and one letter of recommendation are required. Scholarship funds will be awarded after successful completion of the first semester of college. ☎

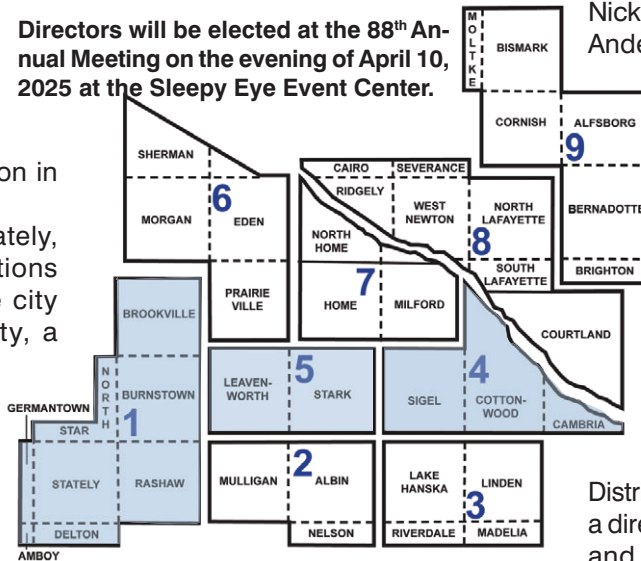
2025 director candidates needed for BCREA Districts 1, 4 & 5

Interested or know of someone who may be interested in running for a position as Director for your electric cooperative? Nominations are being sought for candidates to run for election in BCREA's Districts 1, 4, and 5.

District 1 is made up of Stately, Bashaw, Burnstown and portions of North Star townships, the city of Comfrey in Brown County, a portion of Brookville Township in Redwood County and part of Delton Township in Cottonwood County. District 4 covers Sigel and Cottonwood townships in Brown County and part of Cambria Township in Blue Earth County. District 5 consists of Stark and Leavenworth townships in Brown County.

Nominating committees are made up of at least two members from each of the districts up for election. Per the cooperative's by-laws, the nominating

Directors will be elected at the 88th Annual Meeting on the evening of April 10, 2025 at the Sleepy Eye Event Center.



committee shall at least 30 days before the Annual Meeting, diligently and in good faith attempt to nominate at least two individuals to run for a scheduled election.

2025 Nominating Committees:

District 1 – Jared & Stacy Green,

Nick & Rachelle Rients, Mitch Anderson

District 4 – Bill & Chris Hoffmann, Ryan Hoffmann, Jonathon & Chelsey Kral

District 5 – Brad Sellner, Justin Steffl, Keith & Sheena Hoffmann
In addition, a minimum of 10 members may nominate through petition for a director position in their district. Nominations from the floor and write-in candidacy are not permitted at the annual meeting.

Members who reside in District 1, 4 or 5 and interested in being a director candidate, please complete and return the Director Candidate Application below. Your name will be shared with the nomination committee for consideration as a candidate. You may also contact a member of your district's nominating committee to let them know of your interest in being a candidate. (b) (3)

2025 BCREA Director candidate application

By signing this application, I certify that I am a member of Brown County Rural Electrical Association (REA) and I hereby apply as a nominee for director in District _____ and request my name be considered by the Nominating Committee to be placed on the ballot for election at the April 10, 2025 Annual Meeting. I certify that the following statements are true and accurate as to my qualification to be a candidate for director.

- I am a member in good standing of the cooperative, receiving service at my primary residence, which is in the district for which I am seeking election.
- Within the last five (5) years, I have not been adjudged to be guilty of a felony.
- Within the last three (3) years, I was not an employee of the cooperative or a subsidiary.
- Within the last five (5) years, I have not been party in a mediation, arbitration, lawsuit or other legal action against or by the cooperative.
- During the last five (5) years, I have not been employed by a labor union which represents or has represented,

or has endeavored to represent, any employees of the cooperative.

- I am not a spouse, co-habitant, child, grandchild, parent, grandparent, brother, sister, whether by blood or in-law, of an employee or director of the cooperative.
- I am not in any way employed by or substantially financially interested in an enterprise competing with the cooperative or any cooperative-affiliated business.
- I am not a full-time employee or agent of, nor am I the full-time employer or principal of, another director.
- I have earned a high school diploma or equivalent and I will achieve cooperative director certification or similar certification through NRECA within six years of becoming a director.
- I will notify the appropriate authority of the cooperative in the event that any of the foregoing certification should change prior to the upcoming election or, should I be elected a director, should any of the foregoing certifications not continue to apply to me as serving director of the cooperative. (b) (3)

Signature _____ Date _____

Electric space heater: know the cost impact on your monthly bill



Do you use electric resistance space heaters to heat a room or small section of your home?

If so, you may see an increase on your electric bill. For example, let's say you use a 1,500-watt electric space heater to warm your living room while you watch TV or read a book. Operating that space heater for two hours a day at the Minnesota average electricity rate of 13.5 cents per kilowatt-hour will cost you about \$12 a month. Operating that same space heater for 12 hours a day will

cost you about \$73 a month.

If you must use space heaters, operate them safely. Keep them three feet away from anything flammable; do not leave them unattended. Plus, plug the space heater directly into the outlet — not an extension cord or power strip. ⚠️



WATER HEATER DEMAND RESPONSE

HOW IT WORKS...

1

Controllable, high-efficiency electric water heaters are installed in homes.

2

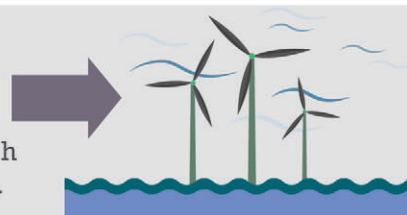
During times of high demand, co-op cuts power to water heaters.

3

When demand drops, water heaters are turned back on to run during the night and provide warm water for the next day.

FUN FACTS

Water-heater-control programs let co-ops take full advantage of wind generation, which is most active at night.



BENEFITS:

- Co-ops avoid peak pricing.
- Members use power when it's cheaper.
- Helps avert need for new power plants.

Call your local electric co-op for your next water heater with the member discounted price & lifetime warranty against leaks!

Spice up evening meal with salami recipes to cure winter blahs

Slice up a new super supper with salami! Share your favorite salami recipes with us, whether it's the family recipe, added to pasta, pizza, sandwiches or salads. Send your favorite salami recipes to Editor, Federated Rural Electric, PO Box 69, Jackson MN 56143-0069 or e-mail to christoffer@federatedrea.coop by December 26. Add your name and phone number. Thanks for sharing with us! 📧

Peanut Butter & Chocolate Crescents by Jeanne Schwieger, Fairmont

1 pkg. crescent rolls 8 T. peanut butter ¾ c. chocolate chips
Preheat oven to 375°. Open crescent rolls and layout out on a cookie sheet. Put 1 T. peanut butter on larger end. Top with 1 T. chocolate chips. Roll up crescents. Bake 10-12 minutes. Melt remainder of chocolate chips and drizzle over baked crescents. 📧

Veggie Pizza by Connie Urban, Fairmont

2 tubes crescent rolls ¼ tsp. galic salt
2 8 oz. pkgs. cream cheese 2 tsp. dill weed
¾ c. mayonnaise ½ tsp. onion powder
½ to 1 c. chopped veggies: carrots, cauliflower, broccoli, radishes or red pepper
Preheat oven to 375°. Stretch and spread out two tubes of the crescent rolls or dough sheets in a 11.5x17" ungreased baking sheet. Bake crust for 10 minutes and cool completely. Mix together softened cream cheese, mayonnaise and seasonings. Once the crust is cool, spread the cream cheese mixture over the crust. For ease of serving cut the veggie pizza into desired square sizes first and then top with finely chopped vegetables of choice; gently press veggies down into the cream cheese mixture to hold into place. Cover and chill overnight and keep refrigerated. 📧

2025 Connections recipes!



Dig out recipes for the upcoming year of *Connections*. Send them in now for use in the following months to the address listed above.

- February: biscuits
 - March: meat balls
 - April: chocolate or butterscotch chips
 - May: meringue
 - June: lemon
 - July: raspberry
 - August: cilantro
 - September: red or green peppers
 - October: sweet potatoes
 - November: cinnamon
 - December: Christmas cookies
- Thanks for sharing! 📧



Cook up simple savings! Use an air fryer if possible instead of your electric oven. Air fryers are about half the wattage of an electric oven, cook quickly and the smaller size means less space to heat up. Chew on that! 📧

Just make the 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. Register at www.gopherstateonecall.org or call 811. Call a licensed electrician to locate the underground lines on your side of the meter. 📧

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Subsidiary of your local electric co-op





Mike Heidemann
Chief Executive
Officer

Staff Notes

May your holidays be merry and bright!

As December kicks off, many of us are planning gatherings with family and friends to celebrate the holiday season. This festive time of year brings joy and warmth, but as the weather gets cooler and we spend more time indoors, the holidays can also bring increased energy use and a higher risk of electrical and fire hazards.

As your local electric cooperative, our team at Brown County REA cares about your wellbeing.

Here are a few practical tips to help you stay safe and efficient during the holiday season.

- Before you deck the halls, check electrical cords and light strands to make sure they aren't frayed or damaged. Double check the lights to be put up outside to make sure they're rated for outdoor use.

- Many households enjoy holiday-scented candles. While festive, candles can create fire hazards and should never be left unattended. One of the best and easiest ways to safeguard your home is to test smoke alarms monthly. Testing smoke alarms only takes a few seconds and could save lives, so make it a habit.

- Spending more time indoors with a few more guests in the home can really impact home energy use. By taking a few small steps to save energy during the holiday season, you can lower your bills.

- Since heating and cooling makes up the majority of home energy consumption, the thermostat is one of the best places for savings. Lower it a few degrees, especially when you have family or friends stopping by. Good company brings additional warmth to your home.

- Your family can also save energy by decorating with LED holiday lights. LEDs are the most energy efficient lighting options available and they last much longer than traditional bulbs.

- There's no denying one of the best parts of the holiday season is the food — not just the meals but the time spent together in the kitchen. There are many ways to save in the heart of your home, but one of the best approaches is to cook with smaller countertop appliances, such as air fryers, slow cookers and toaster ovens. These handy appliances consume a fraction of the energy used to heat the oven, creating the perfect recipe for meal-time and energy savings.

I hope you will implement some of these energy-saving and safety tips into your holiday plans. For additional advice visit our website at www.browncountyrea.coop. We're here to help you with safety and savings year-round.

From all of us at Brown County REA, we hope your holiday season is merry and bright. Merry Christmas! 🎄

BROWN COUNTY REA
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Thomas Hayes, President — 507-228-8954
William Berg, Vice President — 507-766-1497
James D. Hanson, Sec.-Treasurer — 507-829-6756
Brad Sprenger — 507-317-5576
David Wendinger — 507-276-3166
Greg Mages — 507-794-3540
Joel Christensen — 507-828-4550
James Mickelson — 507-794-6298
Landon Sletta — 507-276-1899
The Board of Directors meets the last Thursday of each month.

Board meeting highlights

The Brown County REA Board of Directors held its monthly board meeting on October 31, 2024. Discussion and/or action were taken on the following agenda items:

- Reviewed updated DG Grid Access charges for member-owned Distributed Energy Resources, which took effect September 1, 2024, with the rate adjustments.

- Reviewed the 2023 capital credit retirement amount of \$621,818. Checks for amounts greater than \$250 will be mailed in mid-November. Other active member capital credits will be issued as a bill credit on the November bill for October usage.

- Reviewed and approved Great River Energy power purchase agreements for wind energy with Next Era Energy's Three Waters Wind Power and Apex Clean Energy's Big Bend Project.

- Discussed and reviewed updates to the cooperative's Idle Services Policy.

- Updated on operations activities, including completion of the project along Minnesota Highway 15, pole replacements and underground projects.

The next meeting is set for November 26, 2024, at Brown County REA, Sleepy Eye. 🎄