

Connections

December 2025

For the member-owners of Brown County REA



Volume 29, Issue 12

Share the spirit of the season: brighten the holidays

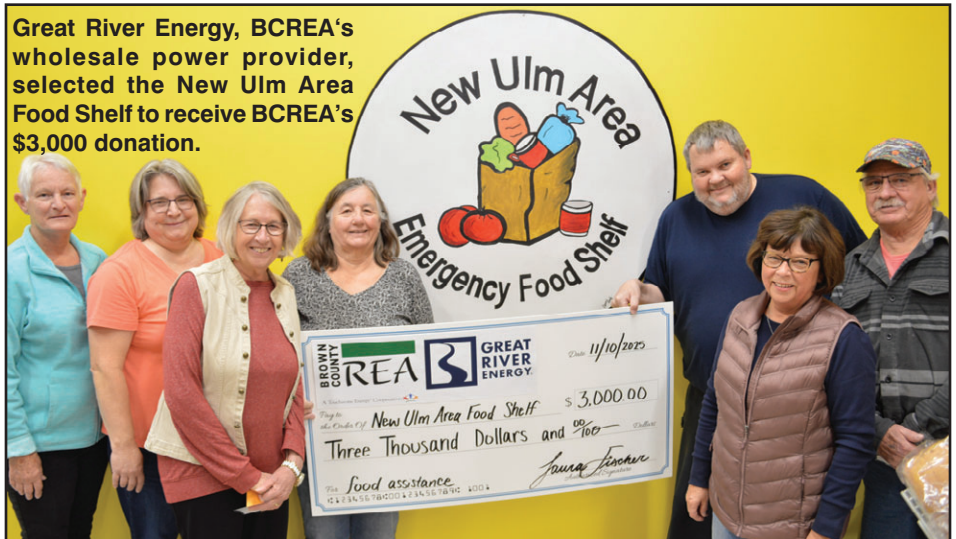
As the holidays approach, many families in our community are facing challenges that can make this time of year difficult. To help make the season a little brighter, Brown County REA is once again collecting donations of unwrapped toys, books, hats, and mittens for Santa's Closet with the Sertoma Club. To serve the community further and to consider recent changes to food assistance in the community, BCREA is hosting a collection site for food shelf donations.

We invite members and neighbors to join us in spreading kindness and cheer by donating new, unwrapped toys, books, hats, mittens and shelf-stable food items. Every contribution, large or small, helps bring comfort and joy to local children and families in need this holiday season.

Toy donations will be distributed to local children through the Sertoma Club. Keep these items unwrapped for the Sertoma Club to sort and distribute. Donations of toys, books, hats and mittens will be accepted at the Brown County REA office through December 11 to ensure the Sertoma Club can collect and distribute gifts in time for Christmas.

Food donations will go to the SHEAF food shelf in Sleepy Eye and the New Ulm Area food shelf to help stock their shelves and provide nutritious meals throughout the winter months. Whether you have un-expired food items in your pantry that you can spare or you want to go shopping for this cause, you are welcome to drop the items off at the

Great River Energy, BCREA's wholesale power provider, selected the New Ulm Area Food Shelf to receive BCREA's \$3,000 donation.



BCREA office and we will distribute them to area food shelves for you.

Donations can be brought to the Brown County REA office during regular business hours. If you are already in the habit of visiting the office to drop off or pay your bill, consider bringing a toy, book or food item to contribute to the community. We understand that charitable giving requires going out of your way, so we are hoping to ease the burden by reducing your stops, while you are already at the BCREA office. If you want to maximize your trip to the office further, we have free Norman Rockwell calendars available and staff to help answer questions on your property's usage and programs available to save money. The collection box for toys, food and a table with free calendars are in

the office lobby and accessible during business hours.

Brown County REA's generation and transmission (G&T) provider, Great River Energy (GRE), unanimously approved a contribution of \$250,000 to food pantries across GRE's member-owner cooperative territories. GRE selected the New Ulm Area Food Shelf to receive Brown County's portion of the contribution, which amounts to \$3,000. This generous contribution reminds us of the importance of lending a hand with whatever skills and resources we have.

Together, we can make a meaningful difference and ensure that no one in our community goes without during the holidays. Thank you for sharing the true spirit of the season: giving, caring and a happy community. 🙌

At A Glance



Youth Tour Contest deadlines:

See Pages 6 for highlights about the 2026 Youth Tour Contest June 15-20. High school sophomores and juniors can apply. Write a 300-word essay on an energy-related topic and fill out the short application by February 27 at 4 p.m. Interviews will be scheduled for the top five finalists. 🙌

Energy Wise

Deck the halls with boughs of holly & other ways to celebrate the holidays using energy wisely

"Deck the halls with boughs of holly" states the holiday tune. Let's sing the praises of energy-efficient ways to celebrate the holidays and be an energy wiser miser that Ebenezer Scrooge would love.

Deck the halls...

Use LED holiday light strings. If you still hang old incandescent strings of lights, upgrade to this decade and ditch those breakable strings of glass bulbs. LED holiday lights consume 70 percent less energy than conventional incandescent strands.

'Tis the season to be jolly...

All of the holiday baking and treat making makes the holidays jolly, just ask Santa! Yet, make your holiday treats wisely. If you are going to bake, make more than one festive food at a time, as long as the oven is heated up. Make sure the dishwasher is full too. When using the range, match the size of the pan to the heating element. Can you use the microwave or air fryer instead of the oven?

Don we now our gay apparel...

Ditch the ugly sweaters for rechargeable battery-powered coats, vests and socks. Just be cautious to use a recognized brand with a UL-listing for safety's sake. When recharging those rechargeable batteries, plug it directly into the wall outlet — not a power strip.

Troll the ancient yule-tide carol...

While the holiday music and lights create great ambiance, if you leave the room or house, shut it off. Use a timer on the holiday lights inside and out to trim the electric bill.

See the blazing yule before us...

While a Christmas fireplace is perfect for hanging the holiday stockings,



Deck the halls and tree with LED holiday lights and LED candles for safety's sake!

be sure you use it safely. Clean the chimney; close the damper when not it use. Maybe consider upgrading to the convenience of an electric fireplace for supplemental heat and ambiance.

Strike the harp & join the chorus...

Love listening to the holiday music on TV? Give the gift of Energy Star TVs, sound bars, electronics and appliances. You'll be singing the praises of energy savings and a thoughtful gift too.

Follow me in merry measure...

Add some bright ideas to the Christmas stocking stuffing! Buy LED bulbs or smart bulbs that can be turned on and off via your phone or a remote control. The

gift of convenience and energy savings will make everyone merry! Buy an LED night light for the new sleep-deprived parents.

Hail the new, ye lads & lasses

As you think about the New Year's resolutions, what's on your energy efficiency do list? Time for a new water heater? Call your electric co-op. Time for a new heating or cooling system? Check out the co-op's rebates on heat pumps for 200-400 percent efficient heating/cooling systems; compare that to a furnace with efficiency of 65-95 percent.

Sing we joyous all together...

As long as we are singing praises of the co-op's rebate program, if a new Energy Star refrigerator or freezer are required for the holiday feasts and storing the baked goodies until Christmas Eve, the cooperative offers a \$75 Energy Star rebate on each, with proof of recycling the old unit. Find the rebate forms on the co-op's website; otherwise, call or e-mail us to request one.

Heedless of the wind & weather...

Old man winter's blustery temps and windchills remind us to keep weatherization in mind. Maybe a can of spray foam insulation as a stocking stuffer will help the husband seal up those leaky areas. Maybe the new homeowners would like a gift card to buy insulation, instead of another ugly sweater they won't wear.

So Fa la la la la, la la la la and singing along for a very merry energy-wise holiday season. ☺

Star of wonder, star of LED twinkling lights...shine on!

Twinkle, twinkle little star... or shine on “big” star in this case!

Gaze in wonder upon a new type of LED holiday lights! Cascading twinkle lights have the feel of fairy lights, but on a bigger scale. The box refers to the lights as big seed clusters or others as micro dot lights.

Add this sparkling holiday glow to a tree, outdoor decor or the peak of a building. Plus, this version can be pulled out and reused for your Fourth of July celebration too.

The pictured cascading tail on this Enchanted Forest brand is 6-foot long; find it at Menards for about \$30. It can be used for indoors or outdoors’ lighting.


If the star shape shape is too far out for your decorating tastes, explore the option for a ring with an 8 or 10-foot length of these cascading lights. Imagine plopping the circle ring on top of the tree and spreading out the cascading trail of



lights down the tree. Doesn’t that sound easier than weaving lights through the branches that later needs to be untangled? This option might also add ambiance for a wedding reception, graduation party or other event offering the magical glow of soft LED lighting.

You can buy a similar style ring-shape cascading lights at Ace Hardware under the Celebrations brand with 8-foot cascade of lights for \$36 or 10-foot length for \$60.

Meanwhile, Amazon calls them twinkling firefly lights. One version even comes with a remote control.

No pixie dust is needed to add a beautiful shimmering glow this festive holiday season with this new style of cascading LED twinkling lights. 

Star light, star bright cascading lights can offer a new way of LED holiday decorating that is more along the lines of fairy lights.

Safety

Don't let chestnuts roasting on an open fire burn up your holiday season! Spark holiday safety with new smoke alarm & carbon monoxide detector

Look at your smoke detector or carbon monoxide detector; is it discolored, covered with paint or years of household grime? It might say, “please replace me now.”

The National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) and Underwriters Laboratories suggest replacing smoke detectors every 10 years. Both organizations cite sensor degradation rates of 3 percent per year. Look for smoke alarms with the Underwriters Laboratories symbol “UL” or the Electrical Testing Laboratories, marked with the “ETL” logo.

Once they start to reach their end of life, consumers may notice alarm signals — typically a chirping sound that is either a low battery or an indication of the device’s end of life, meaning that it’s time the unit was replaced.

The NFPA recommends that batteries be replaced once a year and testing the unit once a month as an added precaution. Chirping, prompted by a drained battery, typically stops in seven days and then it stops functioning.


Smoke alarms and carbon monoxide (CO) detectors represent good investments in your family’s safety. Consumers who have working smoke alarms in their homes



die in fires around half the rate of those who do not have alarms. Install working carbon monoxide detectors on every level of the home and outside of sleeping areas. CO detectors are designed to sound the alert before carbon monoxide reaches life-threatening levels.

Design improvements are another great reason to consider upgrades. Ionization smoke alarms made their consumer debut in 1970. Photoelectric smoke detectors were patented in 1972 and the first 10-year lithium battery-powered smoke alarms hit the market in 1995. Now units feature the best of all three technologies.

As fire codes have evolved to require smoke alarms near kitchens, manufacturers improved the technology. They can distinguish between an actual house fire and cooking fumes, reducing nuisance alarms.

Heartland Security, as subsidiary of your electric co-op, also offers security systems that feature smoke detectors and carbon monoxide detectors that also call for help, whether you designate it as the fire department, family member or neighbor. See Page 7 for details. 

Brown County Briefs

Efficiency tip

To maximize your fireplace's efficiency always keep the damper closed when the fireplace is not in use. An open damper is like an open window, allowing warm indoor air to escape and cold air to enter. Consider installing a fireplace insert, which improves heat output by circulating warm air into the room, rather than letting it escape up the chimney. Also, burn only seasoned hardwood to ensure a hotter, cleaner burn. Regularly clean and inspect your chimney to maintain safe and efficient operation.



2026 calendars available

Members can stop by the REA office during business

hours to pick up a 2026 large, farm pocket calendar or small pocket-size calendars. One per member please.

Member Advisory Council January 26

The final meeting of the current Member Advisor Council will be held January 26, 2026 at the REA auditorium. Details will be mailed out to members.

BCREA helps add holiday glow



Four Brown County REA linemen — Nick, Carter, Zach and Adam — volunteered their

time and bucket trucks to help set up Holiday Lights in Motion, using their expertise to safely hang lights high in the trees. 📺

Your change made a difference in 2025



Thanks to monthly contributions from members who “round up” their electric bill to the nearest dollar, Operation Round Up was able to donate \$9,850 to 42 worthy causes, eight scholarships and two families in crisis this past year.

These donations are made possible thanks to participating BCREA members “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. The 45-cent 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, makes a difference to support to area charitable organizations, individuals and families in crisis and scholarships.

Among the organizations to receive Operation Round Up contributions in 2025 were Brown County Farm Bureau, Sleepy Eye Community Theater, Lake Hanska Lutheran Quilters, Pro Kinship for Kids, NUMAS Haus, the Compassionate Friends, SWWC Foundation and Minnesota Brain Injury Force.

Since 1995, when Operation Round Up was started at Brown County REA, nearly \$269,000 has been contributed to organizations and individuals in the cooperative service area.

Many thanks to all Brown County REA members who participate in Operation Round Up. The summary of your tax-deductible contributions for 2025 will be printed on your January 2026 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. 📺

\$2,650 distributed at final 2025 meeting

The Brown County Rural Electric Trust wrapped up its charitable giving for the year by making donations totaling \$2,650 to seven organizations at its fourth quarter meeting November 11. Funds were granted to Minnesota Brain Injury Force, Food for Kidz, Morgan Fire Relief Association, Sertoma Club Santa’s Closet and three area post prom committees.

Appreciation was given to departing Trust Board Member Patricia Roiger who completed two three-year terms at the fourth quarter meeting.

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, or contact the office at 794-3331 or 800-658-2368. 📺

Operation Round Up scholarships for 2026

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

The Trust Board will award a minimum of 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.

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 6, 2025, and winners will be announced at the Brown County REA Annual Meeting April 9. 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. 📺

BCREA director candidates sought; consider applying

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 2, 3 and 8.

District 2 consists of Mulligan and Albin townships in Brown County and part of Nelson Township in Watonwan County. District 3 is made up of Lake Hanska and Linden townships and the City of Hanska in Brown County, plus parts of Riverdale and Madelia townships in Watonwan County. District 8 includes Ridgely, West Newton, North and South Lafayette townships, portions of Cairo and Severance, plus part of Courtland townships in Nicollet County.

Nominating Committees consist of at least two members from each of the districts up for election. Per the cooperative's by-laws, the Nominating 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.

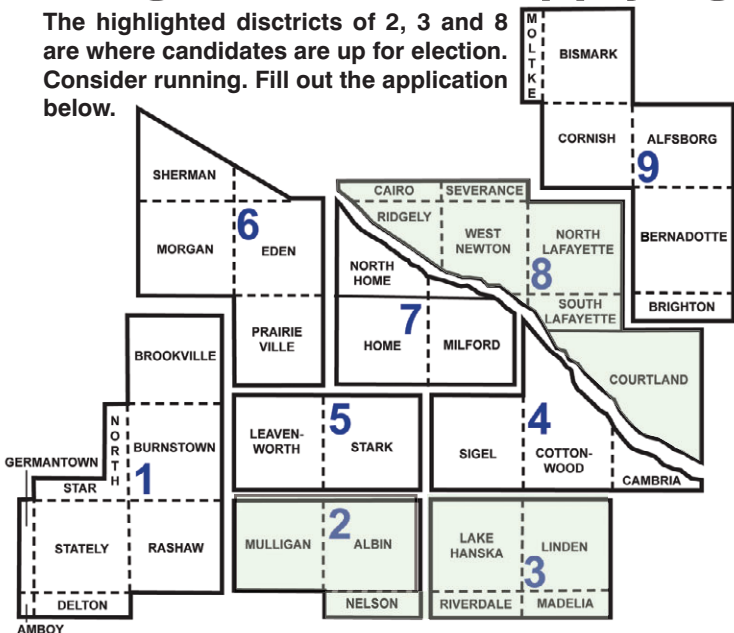
2026 Nominating Committees:

- District 2 – Dean Kral, Darren Kunkel, Kenny Hanson
- District 3 – Dean Ellanson, Daniel Grothem, Eric Pierson
- District 8 – Keith Beranek, Peter & Sharon Brandel

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 candidates are not permitted at the annual meeting.

Members who reside in District 2, 3 and 8 and interested in being a director candidate, please complete and return the

The highlighted districts of 2, 3 and 8 are where candidates are up for election. Consider running. Fill out the application below.



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.

Directors will be elected at the 89th Annual Meeting set for the evening of April 9, 2026 at the Sleepy Eye Event Center. Watch for more details in future newsletters. (b)(6)

Yes, I'm interested in running for BCREA director

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 9, 2026 Annual Meeting. I certify that the following statements are true and accurate as to my qualifications 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 where 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)(6)

Signature _____
Date _____

Return this form to BCREA by February 20, 2026.

250 years of U.S. history comes to life thru co-op's Youth Tour Contest & June trip to Washington, D.C.

More than 250 years ago America's founding fathers signed the Declaration of Independence and set in motion a legacy of leadership that shaped our nation.

2026 marks an exciting year to travel to Washington, D.C., courtesy of your local electric cooperative's Youth Tour June 15-20, 2026. High school students: expand your skills, confidence and cooperative values to lead the next generation — "Make Your Mark" through Youth Tour. Students can step forward, leave their imprint and carry forward the cooperative legacy of developing your leadership in our local communities.

Help your co-op recruit and build the next generation of cooperative leaders. Encourage your high school student to enter the Youth Tour Contest. The student writes an essay on an energy-related topic. Then five finalists are interviewed for this free leadership trip.

- Explore our Washington, D.C. history by site-seeing and visiting world-class museums, like the Smithsonians.

- Capitalize on the Capitol tour, its history and chat with Minnesota legislators.

- History comes to life with stops at the Washington Monument, Lincoln and Jefferson Memorials. Plus, visit the Franklin Delano Roosevelt and Martin Luther King, Jr. memorials too.

- The fight for freedom comes to life with stops at Arlington Cemetery, World War II, Vietnam and Korean Veterans Memorials.

- Build leadership skills and discover how you can make your mark on the future.

- Connect with students from across the country and form friendships that last a lifetime, all sponsored by your local electric cooperative.

- Trade state pins with other co-op student delegates from across the U.S.

See Page 1 for the Youth Tour contest deadlines. You'll also find all of details on the co-op's website or with the local high school counselors. ☎



Step up and apply for in the co-op's Youth Tour Contest. High school students are just one 300-word energy-essay and 15-minute interview away from becoming your co-op's 2026 Youth Tour delegate. The U.S. Capitol is calling you!



This could be you in 2026! Anna Hedstrom, Lakefield, was Federated Rural Electric's Youth Tour delegate this year. Adam Magee, New Ulm, earned Brown County REA's trip.

Have a super New Year with new soup recipes; share yours!

Since the weather outside is frightful, wouldn't a hearty, homemade soup be delightful? Share your favorite soup recipes with us, whether it's for chicken noodle, vegetable, chili, potato or other heartwarming soups. Send your favorite soup recipes to Editor, Federated Rural Electric, PO Box 69, Jackson MN 56143-0069 or e-mail to christoffer@federatedrea.coop by December 23. Add your name and phone number. Thanks for sharing with us! ☺

Chocolate Pistachio Mini Cups by Nancy Katzer, Fairmont

- | | |
|---------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1 c. semi-sweet chocolate chips | 1 tsp. vanilla |
| 6 T. unsalted butter | ½ c. flour |
| 2 eggs, beaten slightly | ½ tsp. baking powder |
| 1/3 c. sugar | 1 & 1/3 c. chopped pistachios |

Combine chocolate chips and butter in a glass bowl. Heat in microwave about 1 to 1½ minutes until melted and smooth when stirred. Stir in eggs, sugar and vanilla. Then stir in flour and baking powder until blended. Mix in 1 c. chopped pistachios.

Place paper muffin liners in mini muffin pan. Fill cups with batter ¾ full. Bake 7 to 8 minutes at 375°. Do not overbake. Cool.

- Frosting:** ¾ c. semi-sweet chocolate chips 1½ T. butter
3 T. heavy cream

In glass bowl combine chips and cream; microwave for about 45 to 60 seconds until smooth and melted when stirred. Stir in butter. Let stand 10-15 minutes until thickened. Spoon frosting on mini cups and sprinkle with 1/3 c. remaining chopped pistachios. ☺

Marcia's Sour Cream Nuts by Elizabeth Shimon, Granada

- | | |
|-------------------|-----------------|
| 1½ c. white sugar | ½ c. sour cream |
|-------------------|-----------------|

Place in a saucepan; cook to soft-ball stage, stirring constantly.

Remove and add 1½ tsp. vanilla; stir in 3 c. walnuts (or pecans).

Continue stirring until nuts are completely covered with the sour cream mixture.

Pour out onto waxed or parchment paper. Separate with fork; leave to cool.

For storage place in air-tight container and refrigerate. ☺



Your electric cooperative is closed December 24, 25 and January 1. Have a bright holiday season! ☺

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A subsidiary of your local electric co-op

Call before digging:

1-800-252-1166



Contact Gopher State One Call before doing any digging more than 12" deep — 48 hours before digging for foundations, trees and tiling.

Register at www.gopherstate-onecall.org or call 811. Call a licensed electrician to locate the underground lines on your side of the meter. ☺



Mike Heidemann
Chief Executive
Officer

Manager's Message

Reflecting on progress, planning for the future

This past year has been marked by meaningful progress, both in strengthening our local system and in working at the national level to influence energy policies that directly affect reliability, affordability and resilience. While the details of federal regulations can feel distant, they shape our daily operations here at home.

Over the past year, electric cooperatives across the country came together for advocacy efforts on the EPA's Power Plant Rule. As originally written, the rule would have forced a rapid shift away from always-available power generation resources, threatening the accessibility of a diverse fuel supply that keeps electricity reliable. Renewable energy sources are an essential and growing part of our energy future, but we also know that the demand for electricity is rising rapidly, plus natural gas, coal and nuclear remain essential for ensuring power is available around the clock. As we collaborated and engaged with policymakers, we pressed for a more balanced approach to generating power — one that supports clean energy innovation, while still recognizing the role of traditional resources. Our efforts are helping to shape a more workable path forward that better protects reliability and keeps costs in check for BCREA members.

Another area of ongoing progress came through advocacy work on federal permitting reform. For too long outdated rules and lengthy delays have stood in the way of building critical infrastructure, including new transmission lines and generation projects. Modernizing this process is essential if we are going to strengthen the electric grid and keep pace with growing demand. We're also seeing progress with bipartisan support of the FEMA Act of 2025, which would speed up the disaster recovery process for electric cooperatives and the communities they serve. Severe storms are a fact of life and their impact on the electric system can be devastating.

On July 29, 2025, four of Brown County REA's linemen were dispatched to assist with storm damage that affected homes in the Steele-Waseca territory. Recent events like these remind us of why we invest in infrastructure upgrades and follow the seven cooperative principles. Infrastructure upgrades and repair after a storm can cost a lot of money and require urgent action.

FEMA is a crucial partner for electric co-ops in efforts to restore power after disaster strikes, but currently, the federal reimbursement process after a major storm is slow and full of red tape. If passed, the bill would make FEMA a stronger, more responsive agency to help strengthen rural resilience, protect taxpayer dollars and ensure essential services are restored as quickly as possible after a natural disaster.

The path forward requires innovative thinking and member-focused solutions. I'm confident that with the dedication of Brown County REA employees and the continued support of our members, we are well positioned to adapt and meet challenges head-on. ☺



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

Payment Line (PSN): 833-250-4481

Office hours: 7:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. Monday-Friday

Mike Heidemann, Chief Executive Officer

Board of Directors

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 — 507-276-0325

Joel Christensen — 507-828-4550

Keith Hoffmann — 507-227-8006

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 November 24, 2025. Discussion and/or action were taken on the following agenda items:

- Reviewed and approved the October 2025 board meeting minutes, new membership applications, member cancellations, payments to estates and assignment transfers.

- Reviewed and approved October 2025 payroll and October financial statement.

- Reviewed updated DG information and increased application fee for member-owned Distributed Energy Resources which took effect November 1, 2025.

- Reviewed key ratio data with Allison Deelstra.

- Reviewed and approved 30-year CFC investment of up to \$100,000.

- Updated on operations activities and projects.

- Reviewed staff meeting reports, director meeting reports, and individual director reports.

- Reviewed budget plans, which will be approved at the December meeting.

The next meeting is set for December 18, 2025, at the Brown County REA office in Sleepy Eye. ☺