

# Connections

August 2025

For the member-owners of Brown County REA



Volume 29, Issue 8

## BCREA delegate enjoys Youth Tour — the trip of a lifetime — to Washington, D.C. June 16-22

Twenty-nine Minnesota high school students recently returned from a Washington D.C. trip-of-a-lifetime. Electric cooperatives across Minnesota select students and award them an all-expense-paid trip to see the sites and learn about the political process in our nation's capital city. Brown County REA sponsored senior Adam Mages, New Ulm, is the son of Gregory and MaryKay.

The trip is sponsored by each electric cooperative that sends students, coordinated by the Minnesota Rural Electric Association (MREA) and hosted by the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA). Nearly 2,000 students from across the United States attend the activity-filled week and learn firsthand about politics, community development and the governmental process with peers from nearly every state.

Youth Tour also consisted of learning about current issues, American history, electric cooperatives and meeting with elected officials, including Minnesota senators. Students made new friends, enjoyed seeing many sites and memorials, learned much about our nation's history and made memories.

"My favorite monument was the tallest one and the best known — the Washington Monument," Mages commented. "I liked learning how construction of the



**Brown County REA Youth Tour delegate Adam Mages, New Ulm, enjoyed his first trip to Washington, D.C. June 16-22.**

monument during the Civil War was difficult, but it was important for the country to see progress continue even in difficult times.

"Another thing I found interesting on the trip was the cafeteria under one of the Senate office buildings," he said. "The cafeteria stood out to me because there were so many professionals and even Senators eating there and talking about real world policy issues, but in a more relaxed and informal setting than they would on the Senate floor or in committee meetings."



**The Minnesota delegation sponsored by electric co-ops at the Capitol.**

"Meeting with Minnesota's legislators was fun," Mages said. "I asked Senator Tina Smith, 'What are some things she does for rural electric co-ops and agriculture?' She said she would work hard to lower taxes for some people by raising taxes in other areas."

"I had many positive interactions with people from Minnesota as well as others from around the U.S.," Mages concluded. "This was my first trip to Washington, D.C. I learned lots about American government, good personal skills on how to be respectful with our leaders and how to turn strangers into friends."

### At A Glance



**Smart energy savings at your fingertips!**

Smart-home technology, like thermostats, lighting and plugs, can help lower energy use and reduce electric bills. Learn how these affordable upgrades make your home more efficient and see how a rebate from BCREA can help you save even more. See the story on Page 5.



# Cool savings! Enjoy just chilling with these fridges & freezers' efficiency tips

When exploring ways to be more efficient with refrigerators and freezers, we often find ourselves stuck between convenience and conserving energy. While you can upgrade to newer equipment, care and equipment habits can be just as important to saving energy.

Follow this guidance on equipment energy use, including tips to keep your current equipment running efficiently and ways to limit overuse of refrigeration in our homes.

The U.S. Department of Energy helps us understand what to look for in our existing equipment and new appliances. Generally, the larger the refrigerator, the more energy it uses. The most efficient models are typically 16 to 20 cubic feet. Models with the freezer on top tend to use less energy than bottom freezers or side-by-side units. A refrigerator 15 years or older uses about 35 percent more energy than an Energy Star-certified model.

Let's explore some tips to keep your refrigerator or freezer running at maximum efficiency.

## Keep it organized

One of the biggest issues with refrigerator energy use is opening the door or keeping it open. An organized fridge makes food items easier to find, minimizing open-door time and keeping cold air inside. Place items in the same spots so they are easier and faster to find. I tell my kids to take a quick look inside at the options and close the door while they are deciding what to eat.

## Keep it clean

Regularly cleaning the gasket — the flexible strip around the perimeter of the fridge door — ensures a tight seal



**Be sure to hunt down those dust bunnies! Clean the vent under your refrigerator to maximize air flow and efficiency. If your unit has coils at the back, remember to clean back there.**

between the door and the unit to keep cold air inside. If the gasket is not sealing tightly, it should be replaced. Removing and cleaning the vent at the bottom of the unit can help airflow. For the coils at the back use an extended cleaning brush instead of moving the fridge and risking injury.

Plus, keep food safety in mind. The Department of Energy recommends setting your refrigerator temperature between 35 and 38 degrees and freezer at 0 degrees.

## Think twice on second unit

If you have a second refrigerator or freezer, implement these tips that can help you save energy.

Do you need it plugged in year-round? Perhaps you can keep it empty and unplugged for part of the year. Maybe you only really need it during the holiday season. Unplugging it for the months you aren't using it, saves energy; yet,

you'll still have it as a backup when you need it.

If you are a hunter or buy meat in bulk, set a goal to empty out your freezer before you restock. This allows you to avoid food waste and unplug the extra appliance when it is not needed.

If possible, consider the location. Keeping the second fridge or freezer in a cool basement versus a hot garage requires less energy.

Implementing these simple cleaning and food storage habits are easy ways to be more efficient with your in-home refrigeration.

## Rebates add to your cool savings

Finally, keep in mind that your local electric cooperative offers rebates on Energy Star refrigerators and freezers. Sorry, dorm fridges are not eligible. Look for the rebate form on the co-op's website. Otherwise, contact the co-op if you need a hard copy mailed to you.

# Convertible! Switch from fridge to freezer!

Is it a refrigerator or a freezer?

No, this appliance isn't having an identity crisis, but operates in either mode with the flip of a switch. In the summer use it as a refrigerator for your garden's bounty. After a good fall hunting season switch it to freezer mode to store the wild game.

Shop for the convertible chest freezer at your local appliance store or big chain store. Adjust the temperature to keep your foods at the right temperature. These convertible units come as small as chest-size freezers with 8 cubic feet for about \$300-\$400 or as larger 21 cubic feet upright freezers around \$1,000. The Midea convertible upright freezer (pictured on the right) features automatic defrost, while a Hubspace chest freezer features manual defrost. Some models link up as Smart Devices that can send alerts to your smart phone for a high temperature alarm. Some models even come as stainless steel finish, instead of white.

Look for the Energy Star label when appliance shopping. If so, this unit will qualify for a \$75 rebate from your local electric cooperative, as long as you have proof of recycling an old unit. Visit the co-op's website for the rebate form or call/e-mail to request a hard copy be mailed to your home. (E)

**Refrigerator or freezer? It's your choice with the flip of a switch! use it as either one, depending on your family's seasonal needs!**



## Safety

# Avoid power lines when flying kites or drones

With summer in full swing remember to use caution near electrical equipment as you explore the great outdoors. If you are flying a kite or a drone, always remember the importance of safety.

Look up! Flying kites or drones near power lines can be dangerous and could disrupt electrical service to fellow members and businesses.

If the wind pushes your kite near a power line or electrical facility, let go of it. Your safety is never worth chasing a kite into a dangerous environment. Keep your kite in an open area far away from electric equipment.

Never fly kites using wire, metallic thread or wire-reinforced string. Use paper, plastic or wood to build a kite; plus, only fly during dry weather. Children should always have adult supervision when flying kites.

Flying a drone near a power line may affect your drone's signal, causing it to fly into the line. Remember,



dark and windy conditions are bad for safe flight.

Check local laws before flying a drone near power lines, power plants, substations and other electrical equipment.

If you are operating a drone that

contacts and gets caught in a power line, call your local electric cooperative right way. Never try to remove it yourself.

Stay safe near electricity, whether on the ground or in the air! (E)



# Brown County Briefs



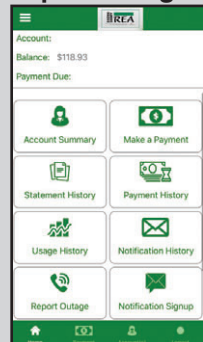
## Efficiency tip

Replace your cooling system's filter regularly to maintain strong airflow and boost energy efficiency. A clean filter means your system doesn't have to work as hard, saving energy and lowering your utility bills. Factors like allergies and pets in the home can impact how often filters should be replaced. Check the filter every month and replace it as needed. Changing filters regularly also reduces wear and tear on your cooling system, helping extend the life of the unit.

## Member Advisory Council meets September 15

Current Member Advisory Council members are reminded of the meeting Monday, September 15, beginning with a light meal at 6 p.m. More information will be mailed.

## Experiencing mail delays?



Sign up for paperless billing and never miss a statement. Members can sign up to receive e-mail or text notifications when monthly bills

are ready. You can also set up an account in the web portal to view and pay your bill online, review past statements and view usage data. Enroll through Member Account Access on our website [www.browncountyrea.coop](http://www.browncountyrea.coop). ☎

# Be safe around the big green box



You may have seen big green boxes in residential yards over the years and wondered what purpose they serve. Those green boxes are called pad-mounted transformers; they change voltage from higher levels to a level you can use in your home for electronics, appliances and lighting. This equipment is vital to providing electricity to at least one home and often several in a neighborhood.

Pad-mounted transformers are surrounded by underground cables that can extend in several directions to distribute power to homes and businesses, so members should not landscape or dig around these boxes. Hitting a cable could result in electrical shock or disruption of service. Children should never touch, climb or play on pad-mounted transformers and shouldn't put fingers or sticks into cracks in the housing. Only employees from Brown County REA should be near this equipment.

Homeowners sometimes try to obscure these green boxes by planting shrubs and flowers around them, but that can make them difficult to access by electric field workers and can make them dangerous. Co-op technicians need at least 10 feet of clearance at the opening side of a pad-mounted transformer; plus, 4 feet of open space is preferred at the rear and on the sides of the metal housing. That distance gives technicians enough space to use the specialized tools they need to work with energized equipment. It also ensures that one or two technicians working on a transformer have space to maneuver in case they need to back away if problems occur.

BCREA employees must access a pad-mounted transformer to test, maintain, repair and replace the equipment. If a technician encounters an obstacle that could create a hazardous situation, the worker will notify the member with a door hanger or phone call to set up an appointment for a different day. This may cause the work to be delayed.

In an outage situation occurs when time is of essence, BCREA employees may need to remove items blocking their way so that they can access the equipment and restore power.

One of the top priorities for BCREA is to keep everyone safe and to keep electricity reliable for our member-owners. We appreciate your help in keeping electrical equipment clear of any obstacles, so our employees can stay safe and accomplish this task more efficiently. ☎

# These three smart home technologies help you save energy the smart way

Smart technologies make our homes more comfortable, convenient and energy efficient. By connecting your home Wi-Fi network, smart devices automate everyday tasks like lighting, heating, cooling and home security; they can even communicate with other smart devices in the home.

While not all smart home products are specifically designed with energy savings in mind, several smart technologies can help you lower home energy use. Here are the top three smart home devices to help you save.



## Smart thermostat

Smart or not, your thermostat is the most effective tool for controlling energy use; heating and cooling typically account for the largest portion of energy bills. Smart thermostats allow you to adjust the indoor temperature through an app, giving you full control from anywhere on the go. Many smart thermostats include learning capabilities and will adjust the thermostat based on previous behavior and patterns.

According to the Department of Energy, smart thermostats can reduce heating and cooling bills by more than 8 percent annually, and with models as low as \$65, they typically pay for themselves in one year.

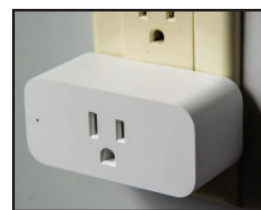
In addition, BCREA offers a smart thermostate rebate of \$25. Find this rebate form on our website.



## Smart lighting

Smart LED bulbs use less electricity than traditional bulbs and can be scheduled or turned off (or on) remotely through a smart phone app. Smart bulbs are available in a range of shapes, brightness levels, colors and more. Shop for the products that work best for your home lighting needs.

Many smart bulbs include motion sensors that turn on or off based on room activity, further optimizing home energy use. If you're new to smart lighting, try a home starter kit. Prices for kits range



from \$70 to \$300 or more, depending on how many bulbs you need.

## Smart Plugs

Smart plugs are inexpensive gadgets that can help you save energy. Many electronic devices consume power even when they are turned off (known as "phantom load"), which can take a toll on your energy bills. Smart plugs are simply plugged into an electrical outlet and connected to your Wi-Fi network. When set up, the smart plug can cut power (or return power) to non-smart devices, like coffee makers, phone chargers and other items that draw phantom load.

Many smart plugs can be paired with popular smart hubs, like Alexa or Google Nest, or controlled through the plug's associated app. Smart plugs are simple to use and a set of four can be purchased for as little as \$25.

If you're looking for new ways to save energy, try these budget-friendly, convenient smart home technologies. (E)

## Why electricity rates increase: understanding power cost adjustment

Electric utilities across the country, including BCREA, are facing increased costs in delivering power to members. One key factor affecting electricity bills is the Power Cost Adjustment (PCA), which is a line item many members may see fluctuate from month to month.

### What's the Power Cost Adjustment?

The PCA is a billing tool used by utilities to reflect changes in the cost of wholesale power. It allows utilities to recover the difference between the base cost of power (which is included in your standard rate) and the actual cost of purchasing or generating electricity. When the cost to obtain power rises, the PCA goes up. If power costs decrease, the PCA can also go down.

### Why are power costs rising?

Several reasons exist why the cost of

power has increased in recently:

- Fuel costs: Natural gas, coal, and other fuel sources used in power generation have become more expensive due to global demand, supply chain disruptions, and inflation.

- Weather events: Extreme weather, such as heat waves, cold snaps, droughts, and storms, strain the electric grid, driving up demand and prices.

- Increased energy demand: As homes and businesses rely more on electricity for work, comfort and technology, the demand on the system grows, especially during peak periods.

- Regulatory and environmental requirements: Compliance with updated environmental standards and investments in cleaner energy also raises generation and transmission costs.

### How this affects your electric bill

As the cost of purchasing electricity rises, the PCA increases to reflect those added expenses. Because these costs are beyond the utility's direct control, the PCA changes monthly.

However, when the PCA remains consistently high over time, it may no longer be sufficient or financially sustainable for the utility to rely on monthly adjustments alone. This is when an increase to the base electricity rate helps stabilize revenue and ensure continued delivery of reliable electric service. Electric co-ops are not-for-profit organizations that operate at cost. That means any increase in expenses must eventually be passed on to members to maintain infrastructure, purchase wholesale power and run smoothly. (E)



# Minnesota legislative session revisited

The 2025 Minnesota legislative session officially wrapped up June 9, following a one-day special session to finalize the state budget. Throughout the session, the Minnesota Rural Electric Association (MREA) worked on behalf of Minnesota's electric co-ops to advocate for policies that support reliable, affordable and sustainable energy for member-owners across the state.



**Jenny Glumack**  
Minnesota Rural  
Electric Association

Tragically, just days after legislators returned home, Minnesota was rocked by the horrific killings of Speaker Emerita Melissa Hortman and her husband, Mark, along with their beloved rescue-dog Gilbert. Senator John Hoffman and his wife, Yvette, were also injured at their home early on the morning of June 14. Speaker Emerita Hortman was a longtime leader at the Capitol who had worked closely with MREA over the years on major legislation. Senator Hoffman is a bipartisan leader and a valued friend of Minnesota's electric cooperatives. We mourn the loss of Speaker Hortman, pray for Senator Hoffman's recovery and extend our deepest sympathies to both families and all who were impacted.

As the state continues to process this tragedy, it's also important to reflect on the work that was accomplished during the 2025 legislative session — including key issues affecting your electric cooperative.

## Support reliable, affordable energy

While some of the most high-profile political debates made headlines this year, your electric cooperative was focused on protecting the interests of you, our co-op member-owners, at the Capitol. We advocated for fair, common-sense energy policy and helped defeat several costly new mandates.

One of our major priorities was reforming Minnesota's outdated net metering law, which currently requires cooperatives to pay above-market retail rates for excess electricity from rooftop solar systems. This policy results in increased energy costs for cooperatives,

which results in a cost shift, forcing disproportionately poorer co-op members without solar panels to subsidize those who can afford them. Legislation to modernize this policy came close to passing and gained strong momentum. Though it wasn't included in the final budget package, our coalition grew as policymakers understood the inequity of the current law;

we'll continue to work on this issue in the year ahead.

We also led efforts to lift Minnesota's moratorium on new nuclear energy. MREA helped form and lead the Minnesota Nuclear Energy Alliance — a diverse coalition of nearly 40 stakeholders representing utilities, labor, business, agriculture and the environment — to push for access to next-generation nuclear power. These new technologies offer safe, carbon-free, around-the-clock power that could help meet Minnesota's carbon-free electricity goals. While the moratorium remains in place, support is growing rapidly across the state. We are hopeful our strong coalition will soon end Minnesota's outdated nuclear moratorium. It's time to allow Minnesotans to have this important conversation.

## Other 2025 session highlights

- Tax fairness for co-ops: After months of negotiations, we secured a major win in the final tax bill — the passage of MREA's property tax clarification bill. This common sense reform corrects how electric cooperative infrastructure is taxed and will save Minnesota's co-ops — and their member-owners — millions of dollars in the years ahead. The bill had broad bipartisan support and was ultimately prioritized by key legislative leaders in both chambers. This victory protects our ability to invest in rural infrastructure without unfair tax burdens.

- No new mandates: We successfully fought off multiple proposals that would impose new costly regulations on cooperatives. Thanks to strong advocacy from co-op members and leadership in


both parties, we preserved flexibility for our local, member-governed utilities.

- Data centers: Lawmakers debated how to handle the rapid growth of large data centers and their impact on the power grid. In the end a bipartisan deal was reached that included new energy-efficiency requirements, fees to support conservation programs and tax incentives tied to clean energy usage. We were especially proud to help stop a harmful provision that would have penalized cooperatives for data center-related growth — a move that would have disproportionately hurt rural communities.




## Make your voice heard

Want to stay informed and make a difference? Join Voices for Cooperative Power (VCP) — a grassroots network of electric cooperative member-owners who care about affordable, reliable energy and protecting the cooperative way of life. It's a free, easy way to stay updated on key policy issues; when the time comes, VCP makes it simple to contact your lawmakers and make your voice count.

Visit [voicesforcooperativepower.com/register](https://voicesforcooperativepower.com/register) to sign up. 

— Jenny Glumack, director of government affairs, Minnesota Rural Electric Association



Your co-op is closed for this holiday, September 1. Have fun and be safe! 

## 'Bee' sure to share your sweetest honey recipes with all of us

We're all a buzz to see what honey recipes you have to share! Share your honey recipes with us, whether it's using honey in treats, snacks or main dishes, as honey butter or in sauces. Send your favorite honey recipes to Editor, Federated Rural Electric, PO Box 69, Jackson MN 56143-0069 or e-mail to christoffer@federatedrea.coop by August 24. Add your name and phone number. Thanks for sharing with us! 🐝

### Restaurant Style Salsa by Holly Benson, Granada

- |   |                |
|---|----------------|
| 28 oz. can whole peeled tomatoes, undrained                               | 1 tsp. salt    |
| ½ red or white onion, roughly chopped                                     | 1 lime, juiced |
| 1 handful cilantro leaves, roughly chopped                                | 1 tsp. sugar*  |
| 2 cloves garlic, roughly chopped  |                |
| 1 jalapeno, seeded & roughly chopped (leave in seeds for a spicier salsa) |                |


Add ingredients (whole tomatoes through salt) to a food processor. Add the juice of half a lime, plus the sugar if your canned tomatoes do not contain sugar. If sugar is listed as an ingredient on your canned tomatoes, omit the sugar.

Pulse the ingredients until desired consistency is reached. Then taste and add more lime juice and/or salt, if necessary. Refrigerate overnight for the best results and then serve.

Scoop the salsa into a quart Mason jar or bowl with a tight fitting lid for 24 hours. This lets the flavors really meld before enjoying. The salsa will stay fresh in the refrigerator 1-2 weeks. (This salsa is mild as written with 1 seeded jalepeno.) 🐝

### Did you know?

**Air source heat pumps** are significantly more efficient than traditional HVAC systems. **Save even more with the co-op's heat pump rebates!**




Turn to your electric co-op for your hot water needs. See website for details on our water heater pricing or call us!



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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.gopherstateonecall.org](http://www.gopherstateonecall.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

### Transparency and support

Our cooperative is committed to transparency and will continue to keep members informed about rate changes, power costs and ways to manage energy use. If a rate adjustment is needed, we'll provide advance notice and explain the reasons clearly. Please refer to the Page 5 story on the power cost adjustment or PCA.

We also offer energy-efficiency programs, budget billing and payment plan options to help members adapt to changing costs.

### A decade of serving former Alliant towns

How time flies! In August 2015 we started serving the towns of Comfrey and Hanska with 539 customers who became new co-op member-owners. All member-owners have the right to vote in our BCREA elections, receive capital credits as their share of the profits, benefit from programs, and experience local customer service. These members have been part of an organization called the Southern Minnesota Energy Cooperatives (SMEC) that received wholesale power through Alliant under a 10-year contract. BCREA members, including SMEC members, have received \$5,798,822 in capital credits retired between 2015-2024. During this time, we invested and built in emergency backfeeds to the Comfrey and Hanska substations. After 10 years our wholesale power contract is expired with Alliant Energy, so this electricity will now be provided from Great River Energy. <sup>(a)</sup>

## Board meeting highlights

*Editor's note: We wanted to be current with the board meeting highlights so both June and July are published in this issue.*

The Brown County REA Board of Directors held its monthly board meeting on July 24, 2025. Discussion and/or action were taken on the following agenda items:

- Reviewed and approved the June 2025 board meeting minutes, new membership applications, member cancellations, payments to estates and assignment transfers.
- Reviewed and approved June 2025 payroll and June financial statement.
- Approved adjustment of new Member Services Manager signature authorization.
- Reported on the District 5 meeting held on July 16.
- Reviewed building updates and options.
- Reviewed and approved amended terms for wind-energy purchase.
- Reviewed staff meeting reports, director meeting reports and individual director reports.

The next meeting is set for August 28, 2025, at the Brown County REA office in Sleepy Eye. <sup>(a)</sup>



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Sleepy Eye MN 56085

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Website: [www.browncountyrea.coop](http://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 June 26, 2025. Discussion and/or action were taken on the following agenda items:

- Reviewed and approved the May 2025 board meeting minutes, new membership applications, member cancellations, payments to estates and assignment transfers.
- Reviewed and approved May 2025 payroll and May financial statement.
- Updated plans for the September 15 Member Advisory Council meeting.
- Director Bill Berg was designated as BCREA delegate for Great River Energy.
- Updated on operations activities including overhead maintenance, service rebuild, safety compliance and tree trimming.
- Reviewed and approved amendments to the transmission service contract.
- Reviewed staff meeting reports, director meeting reports and individual director reports.

The next meeting is set for July 24, 2025, at the Brown County REA office in Sleepy Eye. <sup>(a)</sup>