

heartland LINK

A publication of East-Central Iowa Rural Electric Cooperative



STEADFAST

During COVID-19, we remain focused on delivering safe, affordable, and reliable electricity in an environmentally responsible manner.

Story on page 3



ECIREC
Energy Wise, Community Connected

WE'RE HERE FOR YOU

page 3

During COVID-19, we're safely working to keep the lights on.

ANNUAL MEETING

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Cooperative shares 2019 highlights and plans for voting.



Photo from Dreamstime

GET SMART AT HOME

page 7

Online access helps you take control of your energy use.

10 ENERGY TIPS

page 8

Ways to save energy when you're spending more time at home.



ECIREC
Energy Wise, Community Connected

A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative

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our members say thank you

“Thank you for the \$10 credit for being one of your Member Challenge winners.” **MRS. DENNIS ANDRESEN**

“It is an honor to be a recipient of the ECI REC scholarship! This is great news at a trying time for our country. Thank you!” **LEAH KAUFMAN**

take the member challenge

- KEEPING THE LIGHTS ON:** We offer _____ billing to make financial planning easier and help our members anticipate monthly costs.
- KEEPING THE LIGHTS ON:** SmartHub is one _____ tool ECI REC members can use to stay on top of their account.
- ENERGY WISE:** When cooking, use your _____ instead of your oven or stovetop.

Find the answers within the stories, features, and content of this newsletter and you could win a prize. Send your answers to memberchallenge@ecirec.coop. Or, print the word(s) at the top of the back page, cut it out, and send it to: ECI REC, PO Box 248, Urbana, IA 52345. You may mail your entry along with your electric bill payment, but remember there is a deadline! Entries for this issue must be received by June 1. Sixteen names will be drawn from all correct entries. Members will not be allowed to win more than once per calendar year.

last issue's challenge winners

The following names were drawn from the March/April 2020 *Heartland Link* entries. These members will receive a \$10 credit on their account.

Anthony & Renae Michael

Steve Saathoff

Phyllis Schlueter

Randy Ratchford

Deb Reichen

Linda Hearn

Martin & Bonnie Krogmann

Harold Maser

Bill Newton

Scott & Cheryl McLaughlin

Diane Schmuecker

Bridget Seiler

Mike Crow

Ramona Hanson

Dennis Kimm

Roxann Schwartz

Calendar Notes

5/25 – Closed for Memorial Day

6/18 - Annual Meeting of the Members

Contact ECI REC

EMAILS

memberservices@ecirec.coop
(rebates, product sales)

csr@ecirec.coop
(billing, new customers)

WEB SITE

www.ecirec.coop

MANAGEMENT TEAM

Steve Marlow
Chief Executive Officer
Ext. 421
steve.marlow@ecirec.coop

Teresa Floyd
Manager of Finance and Consumer Service
Ext. 450
teresa.floyd@ecirec.coop

Tom Schmitt
Line Superintendent
Ext. 519
tom.schmitt@ecirec.coop

Adam Albertsen
Director of Member Service
Ext. 503
adam.albertsen@ecirec.coop

Lisa Franck
Manager of Communications
Ext. 472
lisa.franck@ecirec.coop

Nathan Groom
Information System Administrator
Ext. 410
nathan.groom@ecirec.coop

ADDRESS
2400 Bing Miller Lane
PO Box 248
Urbana, IA
52345-0248

PHONE
319-443-4343

TOLL FREE
877-850-4343

FAX 319-443-4359

HOURS

Monday-Friday
Office: 7:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

(closed Saturdays, Sundays, and holidays)

OPERATIONS NEWS
OUTAGE UPDATES

facebook.com/eastcentraliowarec



Shortly after the onset of the coronavirus outbreak, our Cooperative team launched into trainings so we could continue to serve members remotely and work safely within the office when needed.



Following the advice of health experts, on March 16, ECI REC closed its doors to the public.

We're Here for Our Members

a Keeping the Lights On feature

AS WE ALL DEAL with the new realities brought on by COVID-19, we want to assure our members ECI REC is here to help. We know that after a sufficient supply of food and water, electricity is the number-one thing you need to maintain some sense of normalcy. With that in mind, keeping the power flowing is the priority for everyone involved in maintaining the electric cooperative system, including ECI REC.

After President Trump issued safety guidelines for Americans and Iowa's Governor Reynolds issued a State of Public Health Disaster Emergency, ECI REC took steps to implement our business continuity plan. We've taken measures to close off public access to our administrative headquarters and both operations facilities. We've also transitioned to a limited onsite and remote

workforce strategy. To minimize contact, personnel who report to administrative headquarters are working in smaller groups on varying schedules between their homes and the office. Line personnel, staking employees, and member service employees will continue to work out of the Independence and Vinton Operations Centers and report as normal following social distancing guidelines. Our service personnel will have a set protocol to follow prior to making an onsite member call.

Our management team and Board of Directors continue to communicate and fine-tune this plan. We are also in constant contact with the other electric cooperatives in the state and with the Iowa Association of Electric Cooperatives, which in turn is working closely with our national association, the state legislature,

Governor Reynolds, and others working toward the mitigation of COVID-19.

Everyone is working together to adapt to the new norm, and nothing brings out the best in our team like a crisis situation. Our focus remains doing our part to keep your life as normal as possible by providing safe, reliable electric service. The cooperative way of doing business has brought us this far, and the cooperative way will help us through this crisis.

ECI REC will continue to follow the business continuity plan described above until further notice. In the meantime, all communication channels remain open and available, as does SmartHub, the online account portal our members can access 24/7. We are here for our members—stay healthy and safe! 🍷

BE ON THE LOOKOUT FOR SCAMS: Unfortunately, scammers often take advantage of crisis situations. ECI REC reminds members to be on the lookout for suspicious emails, phone calls, or persons impersonating business employees or charitable organizations. If you receive a call from someone claiming to represent ECI REC and they make threats or demand immediate payment, hang up and call ECI REC at 877-850-4343.

Powering Tomorrow with Today's Innovations

a Cooperative Difference notice

THE 2020 ANNUAL MEETING of the Members of East-Central Iowa REC is just around the corner!

This year, we'll be holding our very first virtually broadcasted meeting. ECI REC's bylaws require we hold an Annual Meeting of the Members. With the 2020 State of Public Health Disaster Emergency in effect, a virtual meeting is our best option to do our part to minimize coronavirus (COVID-19) potential in local communities. The health of our members, employees, and the public must be our highest priority.

In addition to the standard Annual Meeting notice and paper ballots that are mailed to the membership, members will be given the opportunity to vote electronically via ECI REC's website at ecirec.coop, as well as using the SmartHub member portal.

All the details you need to participate in our meeting, including the links to vote electronically, will accompany the Annual Meeting of the Members notice you receive in the mail around June 1. 

Annual Meeting of the Members

THURSDAY, JUNE 18, 2020

Virtually broadcast via Zoom from Urbana Administrative Headquarters

Login time opens: 10:30 a.m.

Business meeting: 11:00 a.m.

CEO Steve Marlow



Board President Steve Rau



Geneseo (133) Tama County	Bruce (134) Benton County	Cedar (135) Benton County	Harrison (136) Benton County
Clark (143) Tama County	Monroe (144) Benton County	Jackson (145) Benton County	
Oneida (153) Tama County		Big Grove (155) Benton County	

BOARD DISTRICT 1 CANDIDATES

Incumbent: Jeff Elliott
Opposing: Mark Kotouc

BOARD DISTRICT 9 CANDIDATES

Incumbent: Steve Rau
Opposing: Harlan Peterson

			Illyria (17) Fayette County		
	Fremont (24) Fayette County	Harlan (25) Fayette County	Smithfield (26) Fayette County	Fairfield (27) Fayette County	Sperry (28) Clayton County
Franklin (33) Bremer County	Oran (34) Fayette County	Jefferson (35) Fayette County	Scott (36) Fayette County	Putnam (37) Fayette County	Cass (38) Clayton County
	Hazleton (45) Buchanan County	Buffalo (46) Buchanan County	Madison (47) Buchanan County	Richland (48) Delaware County	

IN 2019, EAST-CENTRAL IOWA REC continued to navigate our Cooperative through a time of change in the energy industry. With an eye on the future, we worked to build on current and new technologies—going beyond lines and poles—to improve quality of life for our membership and the communities we serve.

Our mission is to demonstrate the advantage of the cooperative business model. Not only do we keep the seven cooperative principles at the forefront—we find

innovative ways to deliver safe, affordable, and reliable electricity in an environmentally friendly manner. Our dedicated team provides value-added service and strives each day to implement sustainable solutions that are in the best interests of the Cooperative, our membership, and our communities.

At ECI REC, we do more than just provide electricity. We power lives and empower the communities we serve. As the electric utility business continues to evolve, we remain committed to going beyond to keep your lights on.

continued on following page

2019 Highlights to Be Celebrated at the Annual Meeting

2019 Highlights to Be Celebrated at the Annual Meeting *continued from previous page*

KEEPING THE LIGHTS ON

- » In 2019, we tallied 37 outage minutes per member—the fewest in ECI REC history!
- » As part of the 2019 Work Plan, Highline Construction, Inc., began work on 45.3 miles of overhead rebuilds. This project will cover 17 ECI REC substation areas.
- » The Homer and Garrison substations were upgraded with electronic reclosers. The transformer at the Sumner substation was upgraded from a 5MVA to a 10 MVA. Larger underground cable was added around the industrial park and tied with the existing conductor along Highway 150.
- » ECI REC's power supplier, Central Iowa Power Cooperative (CIPCO), announced it would make key investments in generation projects, including Wapello Solar, Summit Lake Generation Station, and Heartland Divide Wind Energy Center.

LOOKING OUT FOR YOU

- » In 2019, ECI REC staff and Board members were actively engaged in legislative events across the state. We carried messages to lawmakers supporting:
 - » Safe and reliable service through vegetation management
 - » Cost-effective energy efficiency programs for homes and farms
 - » Responsible power generation and delivery through fair treatment of all member-owners and utilization of advanced technology
- » ECI REC Director Don Shonka attended the NRECA Legislative Conference in Washington, D.C. Issues discussed included:
 - » Protecting cooperatives' not-for-profit status
 - » Rightsizing pension premiums
 - » Protecting Iowa's power supply
 - » Improving rural infrastructure and broadband access
- » We're proud of our advocacy to restore Iowa's geothermal installation tax credit, which was unnecessarily eliminated in 2018. In 2019, the credit was restored through a provision on a tax bill.

THE COOPERATIVE DIFFERENCE

- » Three ECI REC Board members—Jim Alberts, Burt Byers, and Chris Sackett—retired from their posts. We thank them for their combined 32 years of service!
- » At their May meeting, the Board of Directors approved the retirement of \$568,048—100% (\$468,048) of 2004 and 10.77% (\$100,000) of 2015 margins—to members of the Cooperative. In the past 10 years, ECI REC has returned \$5,504,061 to our membership.
- » At the 24th Annual Meeting of the Members, Allen Albers (District 3) and Gary McKenna (District 4) were re-elected to serve another three-year term on the Board of Directors. Julie Kester (District 2) was newly elected to serve a three-year term.
- » Director Gary McKenna earned his Credentialed Cooperative Director Certificate (CCD), an NRECA curriculum that consists of five courses that provide cooperative directors with essential knowledge and skills.
- » Director of Member Service Adam Albertsen earned recognition as a professional key accounts manager in a nationwide program offered by the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA).

ENERGY WISE

- » In January, ECI REC released the 2019 details for our extensive energy-efficiency rebate programs, which target residential, agricultural, and commercial members.
- » ECI REC began offering rebates on residential Level II Chargers for electric vehicles requiring a 240/208-volt input supply.
- » Per month in 2019, an average of 83 ECI REC members contributed an average of \$327.77 each to support the production of renewable energy in Iowa. Member support for the year totaled \$3,933.30.

COMMUNITY CONNECTED

- » ECI REC awarded \$1,000 scholarships to 10 graduating seniors. Juniors Jacob Ludeking and Kaylee Kleitsch represented ECI REC's service territory at the 2019 Electric Cooperative Youth Tour in Washington, D.C.
- » Sixty-nine members donated \$6,962 to our RECare program, which assists low-income members in paying for heating bills and winterizing their homes.
- » In 2019, ECI REC gave \$36,485 to 36 community organizations:
 - » Community organizations: \$3,285
 - » Health/safety organizations: \$2,535
 - » Local/county economic development: \$13,500
 - » School functions: \$500
 - » Scholarships: \$10,000
 - » Youth Tour: \$6,665

SAFETY

- » In March, all 33 ECI REC employees completed the CPR, First Aid, blood-borne pathogens, and AED (defibrillator) training. Safety personnel from the Iowa Association of Electric Cooperatives led the event.
- » To deter copper theft, ECI REC teamed up with Crime Stoppers to create a special toll-free phone line: 1-800-452-1111. Members and other citizens can use it to report suspicious activities around the Cooperative's substations and equipment or at a meter.
- » ECI REC promoted electric safety to nearly 1,000 kids during the 2018/2019 school year. We performed safety demonstrations at La Porte City Elementary, Progressive Ag Safety Day, Benton County Third Grade Ag Day, Garrison Kid's Day, Benton County Safety Day, and Amish Safety Day. We also presented for 20 adults at the Urbana Fire Department. 🙌



Cooperative Releases Financial Statements a Cooperative Difference notice

STATEMENT OF REVENUE AND EXPENSE

REVENUE	2019	2018
Operating Revenue and Patronage Capital.....	\$22,168,411	\$22,348,986
EXPENSE		
Purchased Power	\$12,789,745	\$12,989,015
Distribution Expenses - Operations	\$2,103,732	\$1,971,244
Distribution Expenses - Maintenance.....	\$576,487	\$620,343
Customer Accounts Expense	\$451,897	\$476,395
Customer Service & Informational Expense	\$370,547	\$315,971
Administrative & General Expense	\$1,400,455	\$1,257,819
Depreciation.....	\$2,330,699	\$2,158,554
Taxes - Property & Other	\$22,156	\$22,302
Interest on Long-Term Debt.....	\$1,246,943	\$1,138,712
Other Deductions & Interest Expense.....	\$53,703	\$55,184
TOTAL EXPENSE	\$21,346,364	\$21,005,539
Operating Margins	\$822,046	\$1,343,448
Non-Operating Margins.....	\$79,950	\$76,350
Generation & Transmission Capital Credits.....	\$919,440	\$764,908
Other Capital Credits & Patronage Dividends.....	\$191,754	\$168,844
Total Operating & Non-Operating Margins	\$2,013,190	\$2,353,550

BALANCE SHEET

ASSETS	2019	2018
Current Assets & Other Debits.....	\$16,021,449	\$12,739,614
Fixed Assets (Net Utility Plant)	\$58,583,727	\$56,550,065
Total Assets & Other Debits	\$74,605,176	\$69,289,679

LIABILITIES		
Total Current & Accrued Liabilities	\$4,053,269	\$3,620,433
Total Fixed Long-Term Debt & Deferred Credits.....	\$34,707,310	\$31,218,430
Total Margins & Equities	\$35,844,597	\$34,450,816
Total Liabilities & Other Credits	\$74,605,176	\$69,289,679

COMPARATIVE OPERATING STATISTICS

Miles of Line Energized	2,284	2,281
New Services Connected.....	131	177
Total Services in Place.....	9,664	9,563
kWhs Purchased from CIPCO.....	229,847,033	227,601,806
Cost Power Purchased	\$12,773,834	\$12,971,319
Percent Line Loss.....	4.68%	4.0%

OPERATING REVENUE	\$22,106,074	\$22,301,795
Average kWhs Used per Month per Consumer	\$2,046	\$2,052
Average Monthly Bill.....	\$206.46	\$210.38
Average Cost per kWh to Consumer	\$0.1009	\$0.1025

LOAN FUNDS		
CFC	\$33,294,380	\$30,151,233
Other.....	\$871,933	\$400,000
Total Loan Funds	\$34,166,313	\$30,551,233

COPPER THEFTS from electric cooperatives are serious crimes. They can cause power surges, outages, fires, explosions, and injuries to co-op workers or innocent people coming into contact with tampered equipment. Post-theft repairs can run into the tens of thousands of dollars, which must be covered by the affected co-ops and their members.

ECI REC has teamed up with Crime Stoppers to create a special toll-free phone line: **800-452-1111**. Co-op members and other citizens can use it to report suspicious activities at cooperative substations—or around other equipment, such as a transformer, power pole, or even a meter at a residence, farm, or business.

Once a tip is received, Crime Stoppers contacts local law enforcement about the possible crime. After the caller has seen or heard on the local news that a crime has been solved, he or she can call Crime Stoppers about claiming a cash reward up to \$1,000, although most rewards range from \$20-\$200. The caller's identity will remain anonymous.

Several years ago, ECI REC also supported a law to deter scrap metal theft, which makes finding a market for stolen copper less likely. The law requires scrap metal dealers to obtain a name, address, place of business, and proper identification before purchasing scrap metal from any individual.

“Copper theft poses a serious safety issue that also drives up costs for our members,” said ECI REC CEO Steve Marlow. “We take every precaution to deter would-be thieves from compromising our electric system.”

Remodel Results in More Secure Lobby and New Meeting Space

Lobby security at the Urbana Headquarters has been optimized and the front counter is more secure after a recent remodeling project. The construction plan substantially reduced the lobby space, which was under-used. By repurposing this large area, two new spaces were created: the smaller, more secure front counter area and an all-employee training and meeting room. We look forward to utilizing these new spaces to serve our members and collaborate with our team as soon as the current health crisis has abated.



Doing All We Can to Help You Plan

Budget billing levels monthly payments for members

a Keeping the Lights On program

ACROSS THE COUNTRY, individuals and families are feeling the financial impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. At ECI REC, we want to do everything we can to serve our members—during this difficult time and beyond.

We offer budget billing to make financial planning easier and help our members anticipate monthly costs. We calculate your monthly payment based on your 12-month usage history. Accounts are periodically reviewed to ensure payments match actual usage, so you do not face a large debit or credit at the end of the year.

There are several ways you can enroll:

- » Go to ecirec.coop and complete the budget billing form; submit by email or USPS mail.
- » Email csr@ecirec.coop.
- » Make an inquiry via SmartHub, under the Contact Us section.
- » Call our toll-free number: 877-850-4343.
- » Complete the budget billing form below and mail it to ECI REC | Billing | PO Box 248 | Urbana, IA 52345-0248.

YES, tell me my monthly budget amount.

Name: _____

ECI REC Account No.(s): _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Daytime Phone: _____

Email: _____

RECare
NOW MORE THAN EVER



RECare distributes funds to low-income energy consumers in Benton and Buchanan Counties via community action agencies. Donated funds help pay these members' heating bills or weatherization costs.

Even a small amount can help those less fortunate. To sign up for RECare or make a one-time donation, complete and return the form located at ecirec.coop under Your Electric Bill, Member Programs.

YOU CAN PAY
ONLINE
OR BY
PHONE



Welcome to East-Central Iowa Rural Electric Cooperative's online account portal.

Welcome to Pay Now!

Welcome to the Pay Now Site

Account Number:

Last Name Or Business Name:

• Easy Bill Pay with no registration required!

• Use your account number and last name/business name to access your account for payment.

Version: 11.1.5.1



Get Smart ... at Home!

A Keeping the Lights On spotlight

ACROSS THE COUNTRY—and around the world—people are doing their part to flatten the COVID-19 curve by staying home. From work to school, we're all learning to adapt and use technology to get through our day-to-day.

SmartHub is one online tool ECI REC members can use to stay on top of their account. After registering, you can log in online or download the SmartHub app on your smartphone.

When you're registered with SmartHub, you can:

- » Pay bills online for free.
- » Inquire about budget billing.
- » Access bill inserts.
- » Check the ECI REC Outage Map for updates during an outage.
- » Find tools to analyze past and current energy usage.
- » Set markers to monitor changes in your usage.
- » Get energy-saving tips.
- » Perform a free self-energy audit in the EnergyResourceCenter.

Did you know you can also make quick automated payments through SmartHub ... without creating an online account?

Here's how:

- » Call SmartHub's automated system toll-free number: 888-223-2048.
- » Use the Pay Now application:
<https://ecirec.smarthub.coop/PayNow.html>.



Image Source: Whirlpool Corporation via StraightTalk

10 Tips for Saving Energy at Home

an Energy Wise article

IN THIS TIME OF SOCIAL DISTANCING, more than ever our homes are the center of our lives—we're working from home, schooling at home, playing, cooking meals, and everything in between.

Many of us are also using more energy than usual at home. To help you keep your energy bills in check, here are ten day-to-day tips for saving energy!

1. Use the power management settings on your computer, tablet, and other devices. (They'll make sure your gadgets are performing at their most energy efficient.)
2. Unplug any devices you aren't using, like printers, game consoles, or extra computer monitors.
3. Instead of flipping a switch, open your blinds for natural light.
4. Grab a blanket or a fan instead of cranking up the heat or A/C. Also limit the use of plug-in space heaters.
5. When cooking, use your microwave instead of your oven or stovetop.
6. In the evenings or on the weekends, read a book or play a board game instead of watching TV or playing video games.
7. Keep your refrigerator door closed.
8. Keep doors to the outside closed.
9. Time your shower to limit hot water usage.
10. Stay off the peak! Limit your energy use between 4 p.m. and 9 p.m. ECI REC pays the most for electricity used during this window, so when you cut back during these peak hours, you help us save—which means you save, too! 



Photo by Lisa Franck

THANK YOU TO THE 2020 NOMINATING COMMITTEE!

EARLIER THIS YEAR, the ECI REC Board of Directors selected members from their Board Districts to serve on the Nominating Committee. On February 20, 2020, the committee met and reviewed nominations for the Board of Directors positions up for election. Candidates have been placed on the ballot and will be voted on at the upcoming Annual Meeting of the Members. Thank you to the Nominating Committee for supporting our democratic governance! 

District 1, Robert Hanson / District 2, Peggy Bearbower / District 3, Michael Silhanek / District 4, David Inman / District 6, Richard Booth / District 8, Randy Merkel / District 9, Dan Sperflage / District 10, David Peck

Save Today on ENERGY STAR®-Certified Ductless Heat Pumps

an Energy Wise feature

NON-BUSINESS ENERGY PROPERTY TAX CREDITS were retroactively extended through the end of the year. That means you could save 10% of cost up to \$500 (or an amount between \$50 and \$300) if you install a ductless heat pump or mini-split system before December 31, 2020!*

Why choose a ductless heat pump?

- » They provide both heating and cooling through a single device—a heat pump.
- » Instead of difficult-to-install, leaky, and bulky ductwork, ductless mini-split heat pumps use an indoor unit connected to an outdoor unit via refrigerant lines, which only need a three-inch hole in an outdoor wall for installation. Several indoor units can be attached to one outdoor unit.
- » They allow for different climates in each room. Each indoor unit can provide customized heating and cooling in each conditioned space, adjustable through wall consoles, remote controls, and smart phone apps.
- » Ductless heat pumps may cut heating costs in half. Because they transfer heat instead of generating it, they use 60% less energy than standard home electric resistance-based heating systems.
- » They may cut cooling costs by 30% compared to conventional room air conditioners. 

**Unit must be installed in an existing home and your principal residence. New construction and rentals do not apply. If you think you may qualify for this tax credit, consult your tax advisor for assistance.*

ECI REC Awards Scholarships to High School Seniors

a Community Connected announcement

East-Central Iowa REC is proud to announce we have awarded \$1,000 scholarships to 10 graduating seniors who plan to further their education in a diverse range of programs. Congratulations to these deserving students!



Kylee Anfinson
Starmont

Parents: Sheryl and Jeff Anfinson of Arlington
NORTHEAST IOWA COMMUNITY COLLEGE, NURSING



Charles Dudley
Vinton-Shellsburg

Parents: Nicole and Ben Dudley of Shellsburg
IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY, MATERIALS ENGINEERING



Kenzie Fischels
Independence

Parents: Kelley and Jeff Fischels of Independence
KIRKWOOD COMMUNITY COLLEGE, BUSINESS MARKETING MANAGEMENT



Zach Greiner
North Tama

Parents: Craig and Laurie Greiner of Clutier
ABC OF IOWA APPRENTICESHIP AND TRAINING TRUST, ELECTRICIAN



Matthew Hearn
Center Point-Urbana

Parent: Dennis Hearn of Urbana
KIRKWOOD COMMUNITY COLLEGE, AGRICULTURE



Leah Kaufman
Union

Parents: Mike and Barb Kaufman of Dysart
HAWKEYE COMMUNITY COLLEGE, LIBERAL ARTS TRANSFER PROGRAM



Jacob Ludeking
Benton Community

Parents: George and Theresa Ludeking of Norway
IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY, AGRICULTURAL BUSINESS



Austin Miller
North Linn

Parents: David and Sheri Miller of Walker
IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY, AGRICULTURE SYSTEMS TECHNOLOGY



Alexa Riniker
East Buchanan

Parents: Bruce and Jeanette Riniker of Winthrop
UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN IOWA, ELEMENTARY EDUCATION, LITERACY, AND EARLY CHILDHOOD



Alexis See
Oelwein

Parents: Nathan and Kristi See of Hazelton
UNIVERSITY OF IOWA, HUMAN PHYSIOLOGY AND PRE-MEDICINE

Photo by Yacely Kabala on Unsplash

Co-op Connections® Card

Shop Online and Save with Co-op Connections®!

a Community Connected tip



Did you know you can get online savings with your Co-op Connections Card? Even during these times of social distancing, great discounts on everyday needs are available from dozens of national retailers, including:

DirectTV / Dish / LEDUSA.com / Pet Assure / Staples / Sprint / And more!

With the Healthy Savings program, you can also save on prescriptions at over 60,000 pharmacies! To learn more and find deals, log into your account on www.connections.coop.

MAY IS NATIONAL ELECTRICAL SAFETY MONTH

Brought to you by Electrical Safety Foundation International

The 2020 theme, Smart Home, calls attention to ways to keep a home smart, safe, and secure. Follow ESFI at www.facebook.com/ESFI.org for more tips this May!

SAFETY TIPS WHEN WORKING FROM HOME

- > Plug in smartly to avoid cords becoming tripping hazards.
- > Use extension cords only on a temporary basis.
- > Unplug appliances when they are not in use to minimize fire and shock risk.

#ElectricalSafetyMonth



stronger,” holds true for the services provided by ECI REC. Floods, ice storms, tornadoes, cyber-security concerns, and other natural or man-made disasters have motivated us to strengthen an outdated infrastructure to continue our mission and become stronger today than we were yesterday. Our theme for the June 2020 Annual Meeting—Powering Tomorrow with Today’s Innovations—is not new to your Cooperative. It has been an underlying force through the years as I, along with the employees of ECI REC, have utilized innovative and forward-thinking opportunities to achieve the best interests of you, our member-consumers. Today I take this opportunity to update you on some of the advancements ECI REC has attained over the past several years. It has been exciting for me to capitalize on my background and experiences, education, and training to enhance your Cooperative in numerous ways, in cooperation with our committed employees and with support from your Board of Directors.

Over the past seven years, ECI REC experienced considerable utility plant growth while operational costs remained consistent. Your utility plants’ worth expanded from approximately \$55 million to \$78 million, in large part due to the replacement of aging lines with new, stronger lines. We achieved significant cost savings annually through duty realignment and staff downsizing, partly due to the use of available technology. Self-generating reporting software in billing, accounting, and operational services promoted an evaluation of needed workforce resources, which led to cost savings. This combined with other factors allowed for growth with decreased expense.

We also achieved cost-saving benefits through strategic plan development and execution that targeted enhancing current and new systems. To favor our member-consumers, we pursued an evaluation of financial means and the capability of technology to decrease power outage occurrences and time. In 2014, modification of the member-consumer billing format allowed us to institute an energy, facility, and service charge. A more equitable

rate restructure of facility and energy charges was completed in 2015. In 2016, 100% borrowing through the National Rural Utilities Cooperative Finance Corporation (CFC)—a member-owned nonprofit cooperative providing financial products to America’s rural electric cooperative network—allowed borrowing from the government-owned Rural Utilities Services with much red tape to cease. The outcome was a low average blended interest rate for ECI REC, saving the Cooperative—and subsequently our members—millions of dollars.

Installation of Automated Meter Infrastructure (AMI) with smart meter technology was completed in late summer 2018. This technology, the utilization new technologies to enhance data access through SmartHub, customized outage maps for member-consumers, and mapping software that allows lineman to see nearly real-time maps allowed numerous cost and outage time savings. Additionally, we completed hundreds of miles of line upgrades and replacements to keep the lights on. Through these improvements, ECI REC achieved its lowest outage times on record in 2017, 2018, and 2019, all while maintaining some of the lowest energy rates compared to other utilities in Iowa.

And we didn’t stop there. Powering our member-consumers by providing safe, reliable, affordable, and environmentally responsible electricity was realized in different ways. Urbana Solar Acres—a system capable of powering 1,300 homes—was installed on the Urbana Headquarters site in 2016 in cooperation with CIPCO, ECI REC’s distribution supplier. The new Independence Operations Center was completed in 2017; it harbors a back-up computer server site, allowing quick restoration of business operations should a disaster damage the Urbana Headquarters. And we are still not done. Prior to my departure, oversight of an Urbana Headquarters renovation will be complete. Extra space will be used to increase safety and security for employees, along with enhanced office space use to better employ current resources.

I would be amiss not to mention the importance of relationship building. We built relationships with member-consumers, the Board of Directors, employees, legislators, community leaders, business partners, and other resources that keep your Cooperative running on a day-to-day basis. Maintaining an open-door policy to listen and respond to member-consumers’ concerns allowed us to mitigate current and future issues, which was an aspect of my position I kept at the forefront. It was vital to build and maintain trust and apprise the Board of Directors in and outside of regularly scheduled meetings to enable informed decision-making. This policy produced outcomes including amendments to the Articles of Incorporation on joint membership definition changes, downsizing the number of Directors, and dispute resolution provisions—all necessary to keeping ECI REC up to date in business practice.

It was essential to me to encourage and support ongoing employee development through certifications and trainings, to create a high-level culture of safety throughout the organization, and to support a positive work culture evidenced by employee satisfaction surveys. Allowing for a high percentage of employee retention was also essential. Fostering relationships with legislators to preserve ECI REC’s best interests in legislative decisions enabled bills to pass that benefited our member-consumers and employees alike. We built relationships within our communities, including retail participation in the Co-Op Connections® program. We also maintained a positive and professional organizational image within our communities and state, allowing ECI REC to be viewed as leaders within our industry. This ensured ECI REC was kept in the loop and on the forefront of innovative advancements and that we were equipped with necessary resources in times of disaster.

ECI REC and our member-consumers are benefiting from many of these advancements as we ride the storm of the COVID-19 pandemic. With the safety of our employees and member-

consumers in mind, we are utilizing plans, technology, and innovative thinking to contribute to the battle against the spread of this disease while providing power to those we serve. We wish to thank all of you for your understanding and compliance with our policies and practices, and we encourage you to continue to watch for updates on Facebook and our website during this time of the unknown.

My goals were lofty and would not have been attainable without support from the Board of Directors

and our hard-working, forward-thinking employees, for which I say thank you. As I move forward into retirement—and as a member-consumer of our Cooperative—I look forward to seeing these benefits and the continued forward thinking of ECI REC. Additionally, I am hopeful my golf game will improve, that I will see more countryside, and that hiking trails will lead me to parts never seen before. Thank you for the opportunity to serve you. It has been a journey I will not forget. 🍷

YOUR BOARD



- Board District 1 - Jeff Elliott**
(2019/2020 Vice President)
- Board District 2 - Julie Kester**
- Board District 3 - Allen Albers**
- Board District 4 - Gary McKenna**
(2019/2020 Asst. Secretary/Treasurer)
- Board District 6 - Don Shonka**
- Board District 8 - Nick Donlea**
- Board District 9 - Steve Rau**
(2019/2020 President)
- Board District 10 - Ryan Kress**
(2019/2020 Secretary/Treasurer)

CLASSIFIEDS: Free to members only

FOR SALE: 18' diameter, three-ringed (tall) grain bin. Suitable for shelver. \$200.00. PH: 319-934-3798.

Please email your ad to classifieds@ecirec.coop. Ads for the July/August Heartland Link must be received by June 1, 2020.

East-Central Iowa REC will publish non-commercial advertisements as a service to our members. All ads are free. They may be submitted by any member or employee of East-Central Iowa REC. Ads should contain a phone number, name (if desired), a brief description of items with price if applicable. Each ad is limited to maximum of 50 words; please type or print clearly. Editor reserves the right to edit or reject any ad. No ads will be taken over the telephone—please email, mail, or bring your ad to the office.

Installing On-Site Generation? Know the Legal Requirements

a Safety reminder

FOR YOUR SAFETY AND OURS, owners of alternative energy production facilities that will be attached to an electric transmission or distribution line are required to provide written notification to their utility.

- » You must provide notification of the intent to construct or install the facility at least 30 days prior to construction.
- » The law applies to any size facility (solar-powered heat pumps, for example).
- » In the written notice, you must provide information on the type of facility and the anticipated completion date of the construction.
- » Alternative energy production facilities are defined as solar, wind turbine, waste management, resource recovery, refuse-derived fuel, agricultural crops or residues, or wood-burning facilities used to generate electricity.

If you have questions about the law or about interconnecting alternative energy facilities in general, please contact ECI REC at 877-850-4343. 🍷

Up-to-the-Minute Outage Info Available Online

a Keeping the Lights On reminder

WHEN A STORM OR EQUIPMENT issue leaves you in the dark, you want to know what progress we are making toward resolving the issue. We've got you covered with our online Outage Map, available on the home page of our website and via your SmartHub bill payment app on your smartphone.

This near-real-time outage map is integrated with our member-accounts and shows a bird's-eye view of ECI REC's service territory. When three or more outages occur, the map is populated and is automatically updated every minute. Members can zoom in within a half-mile radius. A key shows how many members are affected by an outage, if it was predicted, if it has been verified, and if crews have been dispatched to address the outage. A call log shows the number of members who have contacted us regarding an outage at hand. 🍷

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CLIP AND MAIL

See page 2 for the Member Challenge questions.

Answers: 1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____

Please note: NO ANSWERS will be taken over the phone.

Members get connected at www.ecirec.coop



24-Hour Bill Pay With SmartHub

See account information at ecirec.coop or download the app. smarthub.coop



Outage Center & Map

View current outages via SmartHub or at outages.ecirec.coop:81.



Online Forms

Access rebate, service request, and program sign-up forms.



Call Before You Dig

Notify utilities before you dig at www.iowaonecall.com or call 811.



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FREE Monthly Energy Tips

Sign up at www.myenergytips.com to get the Watts \$mart e-newsletter.



Iowa Rural Power

Join grassroots advocates for Iowa's electric cooperatives. Visit www.iaruralpower.org.



Message From CEO Steve Marlow

Thank You for the Opportunity to Serve You

“Today I close the door to the past, open the door to the future, and step on through, starting a new chapter in my life.”

AFTER 7 YEARS serving you as the CEO of East-Central Iowa Rural Electric Cooperative—and more than 39 years of employment with Buchanan County REC and ECI REC—I will be retiring in August. Many changes have occurred during my time here that have strengthened ECI REC so we can provide safe, reliable, affordable, and environmentally responsible electricity. I have been privileged to be part of the journey and to be a catalyst for changes that make ECI REC what it is today. I look forward to serving in my capacity until your Board of Directors ascertains a replacement. By the time this newsletter arrives at your door, a search will have commenced through the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association. This article will touch upon some of the successes you, the member-consumer, have realized during my tenure as CEO.

ECI REC has turned opportunities into successes. The saying, “That which weakens us can only make us