

living with energy IN IOWA



DECEMBER 2020

2021 youth programs update ▶ See Page 12



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Happy holidays from
Iowa's electric cooperatives!

Idle service invoices to be
mailed in January

Celebrate the season with
snacks and appetizers

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ON THE COVER



Electric cooperatives across Iowa help their communities celebrate the holidays through events and volunteerism. Grundy County REC employees got into the holiday spirit on a warm November day and submitted this fun photo. Pictured from left to right: Front row – Shane Usher, Aaron Bird, Tony Sienknecht and Derek Snakenberg; Top row – Karl Nielsen, Scott Kuiper, Erik Freese, Mike Geerdes and Vicki Daily. ⚡

Celebrating another strong year of rural economic development

BY RAND FISHER

As 2020 comes to an end, it is easy to look back and recognize all the speed bumps and roadblocks we have had to navigate throughout the year. While the impacts of COVID-19 and the derecho are extensive and ongoing, I would like to offer a positive perspective of interactions that the Iowa Area Development Group (IADG) and our utility partners are having with regard to our mission of business and community development.

First, I would like to recognize yet another record-setting year for receiving awards from the USDA Rural Economic Development Loan & Grant (REDL&G) Program. As highlighted on Pages 10-11 of this issue, your utility providers supported 15 projects that are moving forward across the state. These and other project awards foster investment, create and retain jobs, and strengthen important community services in your communities.

IADG's primary purpose is to support our utility members in finding and facilitating economic development projects. Our staff assistance and support take on various roles and forms as we work with members and other partners to get projects to the finish line. Here are a few more examples of the recent successes of our IADG members:

Access Energy Cooperative, based in Mt. Pleasant, was pleased to see the announcement of a new project in the recently established 60-acre Fairfield South Business & Industrial Park. CARE Ambulance LLC will be establishing a commercial EMS operation and ambulance garage in the park to

serve greater Jefferson County. IADG continues to help market the 30,000-square-foot spec building in the same park.



Butler County Rural Electric Cooperative, based in Allison, is celebrating the announcement of a large project in the recently expanded Butler Logistics Park. Mid-Iowa Cooperative has announced plans to build a \$270 million soy processing plant creating 50 to 60 high-quality jobs. This facility will be a game-changer for area farmers and soybean growers in our state.

Chariton Valley Electric Cooperative, based in Albia, is keeping an eye on 2019 Iowa Venture Award recipient Preferred Wholesale, Inc. The company is expanding in the Albia

Industrial Park with a new, nearly 50,000-square-foot facility for IOWA SMOKEHOUSE meat snacks and Laura Beth's products.

While we celebrate these business projects moving forward, we also know many small businesses across Iowa continue to face significant challenges. Rest assured, IADG and your electric cooperative staff are actively engaged with your community leaders and businesses to connect them in accessing programs and support.

We wish our partners and their members a joy-filled holiday and good health and prosperity in the new year. ⚡

Rand Fisher is the president of the Iowa Area Development Group, which provides business and community support on behalf of nearly 220 Iowa electric and telecommunications utilities.

EDITOR'S CHOICE CONTEST

Win an ecobee3 Lite Smart Thermostat!

Ring in a new year of energy savings with the ecobee3 Lite Smart Thermostat. By reducing wasted energy in your home, you could save up to 23% annually on your heating or cooling costs with this thermostat, compared to a hold of 72 degrees F. Works with Amazon Echo, Apple HomeKit, Google Assistant, Samsung SmartThings and others. Learn more about smart thermostats on Page 14 of this issue. ⚡



Visit our website and win!

Enter this month's contest by visiting www.livingwithenergyiniowa.com no later than Dec. 31, 2020. You must be a member of one of Iowa's electric cooperatives to win. There's no obligation associated with entering, we don't share entrant information with anyone and multiple entries from the same account will be disqualified. The winner of the \$100 local business gift card from the October issue was Darlene Van Meter, Guthrie Country REC.

UPCOMING EVENTS



Mount Pleasant Festival of Lights at McMillan Park. See Page 5 for listing of times.

Dec. 19 Board Meeting, 8 a.m.

Dec. 24-25 Christmas – office closed

Jan. 1 New Year’s Day – office closed

Even though our office is closed, you can call us at 866-242-4232, 24 hours a day, seven days a week for answers to billing and account questions, paying your bill, and service interruptions.



Access Energy Cooperative is dedicated to exceeding members' expectations for safe, reliable and efficient service, while being a good citizen in our communities.

Office: Access Energy Cooperative
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Mount Pleasant, Iowa 52641

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Call Before You Dig (Iowa One Call): 8-1-1

Website: www.accessenergycoop.com

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E-mail: contactus@accessenergycoop.com

Office Hours: Monday-Thursday, 7 a.m.-4:30 p.m.
Friday, 7 a.m.-3:30 p.m.
Call our office 24/7: 319-385-1577.

Payments can be placed in dropbox under flag pole. Visa and MasterCard accepted.

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LOCAL PERSPECTIVE

Why don't utilities bury more overhead power lines?

BY KEVIN WHEELER

Across the country, we've experienced several natural disasters recently that have caused widespread outages – wildfires out west, hurricanes down south and a destructive derecho that swept through our own state in August.



Following widespread or prolonged outages, folks often ask why electric utilities don't bury more overhead power lines to prevent future outage events. This question really boils down to the reliability and affordability of electric service.

Reliable service is our daily priority

First of all, you should know that for Access Energy Cooperative works hard to maintain safe, reliable electric service to member-consumers. In fact, the five-year average reliability rating for Access Energy Cooperative is an impressive 99.98%. This means that from 2015 to 2019, your electric co-op kept the lights on for an average of 99.98% of the time, despite severe weather threats like blizzards, tornadoes, thunderstorms and ice storms. According to our five-year data, a member-consumer experiences one outage per year, lasting 101 minutes on average.

Maintaining affordable electricity

With extremely reliable service in place, decisions about burying power lines typically come down to cost. Burying power lines requires underground trenching, moving cable and phone lines and adding new transformers and switches to make sure power can be distributed remotely. These costs would ultimately need to be paid by co-op consumer-members.

Generally speaking, it can be

cost-prohibitive to relocate an entire distribution electric system underground, due to variables like terrain and population density of the service area. In many circumstances, it's cheaper and more cost effective for Access Energy Cooperative to maintain reliable service of overhead infrastructure through pole testing and vegetation management efforts and to locate strategic sections of the distribution system underground.

Local decision-making

Access Energy Cooperative considers several options and variables when reviewing ways to improve system reliability. Sometimes, your co-op will make the decision to bury strategic sections of power lines when it's feasible to do so. Access Energy Cooperative's elected board of directors works diligently with operations and finance employees to balance the reliability, affordability and safety of electric service to you. Because your co-op is owned and governed by the members it serves, our only priority is working for you and serving the needs of your community. 🌱

Kevin Wheeler is the general manager/CEO of Access Energy Cooperative.



Four ways Santa saves energy in his workshop

BY ABBY BERRY

The holiday season is finally upon us, and Santa and his elves have been especially busy as they gear up for their biggest night of the year.

It's no secret that Santa is known for running an efficient workshop-- how else could he make all those toys in time for Christmas Eve? Rumor has it that one way Santa ensures an efficient workspace is through energy-saving measures.

Here are four ways Santa saves energy in his workshop.

1. Santa leaves his decorations up year-round, so by using LED holiday light strands, he's able to save on his monthly energy bills. LED holiday strands can last up to 40 seasons, which make them a great option for any festive home.
2. Santa requires several power tools to make a year's worth of new toys. That's why he insists on using cordless power tools with the ENERGY STAR® rating. According to energystar.gov, if all power tools in the U.S. used ENERGY STAR®-rated battery chargers, 2 billion kWh hours of electricity could be saved – that's equivalent to reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 1.7 million tons!
3. Mrs. Claus loves to keep warm by the fire in the evenings, and Santa knows one of the best tricks to



This holiday season, Santa's making the most of energy savings in his workshop, and you can too!

Photo Credit: Alicia Slough

ensure fireplace efficiency. While a fireplace can keep a small area of your home cozy and warm, it can also pull heated air from the room through the chimney. That's why Santa always closes the fireplace flue when a fire isn't burning.

4. Santa also saves energy by using power strips. Power strips are ideal for workshops, craft nooks, game rooms and other spaces in your home. With one simple switch, you can conveniently control several devices and electronics that are plugged into the power strip.

This holiday season, let's take a page from Santa's book and remember to save energy when possible. With these four tips, you'll be well on your way to savings (and hopefully, Santa's "nice" list!). ⚡

Abby Berry writes on consumer and cooperative affairs for the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association, the national trade association representing more than 900 local electric cooperatives. From growing suburbs to remote farming communities, electric co-ops serve as engines of economic development for 42 million Americans across 56 percent of the nation's landscape.

PHOTO CONTEST

Win \$50 in Access Energy Cooperative's photo contest

We are holding our annual photo contest



with selected entries to be used in the 2022 Access Energy Cooperative calendar. Each photographer whose entry is selected as one of the 13 featured photos will win \$50. Submit all entries by March 31, 2021, to:

**PHOTO CONTEST, C/O
ACCESS ENERGY COOPERATIVE
PO BOX 440
MT. PLEASANT, IA 52641**

Visit www.accessenergycoop.com for complete rules. ⚡

Proud sponsor of

Festival of Lights

Nov. 19-21, 25-29
Dec. 2-6, 9-31
5:30-9 p.m.

Midwest Old Threshers
Campgrounds
Mount Pleasant, Iowa

How to breathe easy about your

BY PAT KEEGAN AND BRAD THIESSEN



Sealing air leaks is one of the best ways to make your home more energy efficient. It's also essential to ensure your home has an adequate amount of healthy, fresh air.

The average home loses about half its air volume every hour, so it can be effectively sealed (often at a low cost) and still have more than enough healthy air.

Pollutants are the leading cause of poor indoor air quality, and the most dangerous pollutant is carbon monoxide (CO). It can come from furnaces, water heaters or stoves that burn natural gas, propane or wood. The problem usually occurs in devices that are old, in need of repair or installed or operated in a manner that prevents clear, unobstructed supply and exhaust of combustion air. Excessive moisture in the air

can also be considered an indoor pollutant because mold and dust mites thrive when relative humidity is above 60%. One sign your home is sealed too tight is window condensation, which can happen if moist air doesn't exit the home at an adequate rate.

Pollutants can cause physical reactions, such as coughing or sneezing. However, carbon monoxide causes more severe reactions, such as headaches, dizziness, nausea, shortness of breath, confusion, blurred vision or loss of consciousness.

Three steps to ensure healthy indoor air

So, what can you do to ensure healthy indoor air as you increase your home's energy efficiency?

STEP 1: Eliminate or reduce pollution

According to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the first strategy is to eliminate or reduce the source of pollution. And the first pollutant to eliminate is carbon monoxide. If you have a combustion furnace, it should be inspected and serviced regularly by a professional. If you have any combustion appliances, CO detectors must be installed and replaced every five to seven years.

If you live in an area with radon, keep it out of your home because it is the second leading cause of lung cancer. To determine if radon is in your area, check out EPA's radon map (www.epa.gov/radon/epa-map-radon-zones). Radon tests are not expensive,

home's air quality

and your local health authorities can provide more information. If radon levels are too high, you'll need to hire a professional to install a system that will divert radon gas to the outside of your home.

Consider these additional pollutant reduction measures:

- Never smoke tobacco inside.
- Run the exhaust fans in bathrooms and your kitchen after use.
- Store toxic cleaning and painting products outside.
- Never idle a vehicle, even for a minute, in an attached garage.

STEP 2: Have adequate ventilation

The second strategy is ventilation. Your home probably has more than enough natural ventilation from outside air leaking into the home. If you suspect this isn't adequate, the best way to know for sure is to

hire an energy auditor to conduct a blower door test.

Many experts recommend sealing the home as tight as possible and using mechanical ventilation to ensure a consistent and adequate supply of outside air. The most energy-efficient ventilation system is a heat recovery ventilator (HRV), which pulls in fresh air from outside and captures the heat from indoor air before it is exhausted to the outside.

STEP 3: Clean the air

The third and final strategy is to clean the air. The easiest step is simply changing your furnace filter at least once every three months and keeping your furnace supply and return air registers free of obstructions. If any rooms do not have an air return, keep the doors open. There are several home air



Source: NRECA

cleaning systems available – some are effective, and some are not. The EPA offers a handy online guide: www.epa.gov/indoor-air-quality-iaq/air-cleaners-and-air-filters-home.

As you seal air leaks in your home, enjoy breathing in fresh, healthy indoor air! 🌿

This column was co-written by Pat Keegan and Brad Thiessen of Collaborative Efficiency.



A furnace that has been inspected by an HVAC professional and is properly vented can help you have a pollution-free home.

Source: NRECA



An HVAC professional can inspect and test a furnace to ensure it is operating safely and efficiently.

Photo Credit: NREL.gov



Source: Robert Couse-Baker

Condensation on your windows could be a sign your home is sealed too tight.

HOLIDAY Appetizers & SNACKS



Deck the Halls Mini Cheese Balls

- 16 ounces cream cheese, softened
- 1 teaspoon seasoned salt
- 1/8 teaspoon cayenne pepper
- 1/2 teaspoon Worcestershire sauce
- 1 cup crushed pineapple, well drained
- 1/4 cup green onion, thinly sliced
- 1/4 cup red bell pepper, chopped
- 1 1/2 cups pecans, chopped
- 2 tablespoons parsley flakes
- 24 tree shaped pretzels
- 24 red bell pepper strips, 1/4 x 1 inch

In large mixing bowl, beat cream cheese, seasoned salt, cayenne pepper and Worcestershire sauce on low speed until smooth. Stir in pineapple, green onion and chopped bell pepper. Shape mixture into 24 walnut-sized balls. Roll each ball in chopped pecans. Place cheese balls on a large plate, sprinkle tops with parsley flakes. Cover and chill for 1 hour or until serving time. Just before serving, place each ball on center of a tree pretzel and add pepper strip to top. *Serves: 12-16*

**Nancy Anderson • Ankeny
Prairie Energy Cooperative**

Holiday Pepper Cheese Dip

- 1 cup sour cream
- 8 ounces cream cheese, softened
- 8 ounces pepper jack cheese, shredded (2 cups)
- 1/4 cup black olives, chopped
- 2 ounces diced pimentos, drained
- 1 tablespoon green onion, sliced

Combine sour cream and cream cheese in a small bowl. With an electric mixer, beat at medium speed until smooth. Stir in by hand the remaining ingredients. Cover, chill at least 2 hours. Serve with tortilla chips, crackers or veggies. *Servings: 48*

**Tina Woelber • Sibley
Osceola Electric Cooperative, Inc.**

Toffee Pretzels

- 1 bag pretzels, crushed
- 1 cup butter
- 1 cup brown sugar
- 12 ounces chocolate chips
- coarse sea salt, to taste

Spread crushed pretzels over parchment lined baking sheet. Melt and cook together butter and brown sugar. Let cook 3 minutes on medium heat without stirring then, pour mixture over broken pretzel pieces. Bake at 375 degrees F for 5 minutes. Sprinkle chocolate chips over top after baking and let set until you can spread the chips. Sprinkle with coarse sea salt. Cool until chocolate hardens; break apart and store in airtight containers.

**Joni Rus • Rock Valley
North West Rural Electric Cooperative**

Salmon Dip

- 6 1/8 ounces skinless and boneless pink salmon, drained
- 12 ounces cream cheese, softened
- 1/4 cup green onion, finely chopped (use some of the green tops)
- 1 tablespoon red bell pepper, finely chopped
- 1 tablespoon fresh parsley, chopped (optional)
- crackers

Place salmon, cream cheese and green onion in a mixing bowl. Mix well with a fork until smooth. Garnish with red pepper and parsley, if desired. Serve with crackers. *Makes 6, 1/4-cup servings.*

**Stacy Venteicher • Glidden
Raccoon Valley Electric Cooperative**

These tips can be part of a recipe for staying on track with healthy eating this holiday season!

HOLIDAY-PROOF YOUR PLAN

Don't skip meals to save up for a holiday feast. It will be harder to manage your blood sugar, and you'll be really hungry and more likely to overeat.

Cranberry Salsa Over Cream Cheese

- 12 ounces fresh cranberries
- 1-2 jalapeno peppers, deseeded and chopped
- 2 tablespoons onion, chopped
- ¼ cup fresh cilantro leaves, chopped
- ½ cup granulated sugar
- 1 tablespoon fresh orange zest
- 2 tablespoons orange or lime juice
- 8 ounces cream cheese, softened crackers

Rinse the cranberries, then chop them in a food processor. Mix chopped cranberries, jalapeno, onion and cilantro with sugar, orange zest and juice until well blended. Cover and store in refrigerator for at least 30 minutes or overnight. To serve, spread cream cheese on a serving tray. Strain away juices from cranberry salsa and spoon on top of cream cheese. Serve with assorted crackers. *Serves: 12*

Diane Kruse • Salem • Access Energy Cooperative

White Almond Bark Puffcorn

- 1 bag puffcorn
- ½ bag white chocolate chips
- 3 almond bark squares holiday sprinkles

Spread puffcorn out on wax paper and set aside. Melt the white chocolate chips with the almond bark squares then pour over top of the puffcorn. Gently stir to mix throughout the puffcorn. Add sprinkles if desired. Set to dry. Once dry, store in baggies or an airtight container. Enjoy! *Serves: 12*

Jamie Zomermaand • Maurice North West Rural Electric Cooperative

Chocolate Chip Cream Cheese Ball

- 8 ounces cream cheese, softened
- ½ cup butter, softened
- ¼ teaspoon vanilla
- ¾ cup powdered sugar
- 2 tablespoons brown sugar
- ¾ cup mini semi-sweet chocolate chips
- ¾ cup pecans, chopped graham crackers or vanilla wafers

In a mixing bowl, beat the cream cheese, butter and vanilla until fluffy. Gradually add sugars and beat until just combined. Gently stir in chocolate chips so that they don't break. Cover and refrigerate for 2 hours. Place mixture on a large piece of plastic wrap and shape into a ball. Refrigerate for at least 1 hour. Just before serving roll ball in pecans. Place on holiday plate with crackers. Double recipe if needed.

Mary Anne Lahr • Glidden Raccoon Valley Electric Cooperative

Sauerkraut Dip

- 2½ cups corned beef, cubed
- 16 ounces sauerkraut
- 2 cups Swiss cheese, shredded
- 2 cups cheddar cheese, shredded
- 1 cup mayonnaise rye bread or crackers

Cook ingredients in a slow cooker for 3 hours on low. Serve with rye bread or crackers.

Martha Allen • Mount Pleasant Access Energy Cooperative



Search our online recipe archive for thousands of recipes from Iowa's rural kitchens.

www.livingwithenergyiniowa.com/recipes

Wanted: Pecan Recipes! The Reward: \$25 for every one we publish!

April is National Pecan Month! The buttery taste of pecans adds a delicious crunch to salads and can be incorporated into everything from main dish to dessert recipes. Share your favorites, and if we run your recipe in the magazine, we'll send a \$25 credit for your electric co-op to apply to your power bill. Recipes submitted also may be archived on our website at www.livingwithenergyiniowa.com.

The deadline is Dec. 31, 2020. Please include your name, address, telephone number, co-op name and the recipe category on all submissions. **NEW:** Please also provide the number of servings per recipe.

EMAIL:
recipes@livingwithenergyiniowa.com
(Attach your recipe as a Word document or PDF to your email message.)

MAIL:
Recipes
Living with Energy in Iowa
8525 Douglas Ave., Suite 48
Des Moines, IA 50322-2992

STAY ACTIVE

Break physical activity up into smaller chunks so it's easier to schedule, like walking 10 minutes several times a day.

HOLIDAY TIPS

STRIVE FOR BALANCE

If you have a sweet treat, slow down and savor a small serving. Make sure to count it in your meal plan. Then, cut back on other carbs (like potatoes and bread) during the meal.

HOLIDAY TIPS

OUTSMART THE BUFFET

Start with vegetables to take the edge off your appetite. Eat slowly. It takes at least 20 minutes for your brain to realize you're full.

HOLIDAY TIPS

SLEEP MATTERS

When you're sleep-deprived you'll tend to eat more and prefer high-fat, high-sugar food. Aim for 7 to 8 hours per night to guard against mindless eating.

HOLIDAY TIPS

Iowa leads the nation in USDA

BY KAY SNYDER

Iowa's electric cooperatives go far beyond delivering power that is safe, reliable, affordable and environmentally responsible to 650,000 Iowans. For decades, they also have been leaders in heavily investing in local and state economic development.

A strategic federal program that the Iowa Area Development Group (IADG) and its utility partners have expertly leveraged to support growth is the USDA Rural Economic Development Loan and Grant (REDL&G) Program. The REDL&G program was introduced in 1989 to provide competitive funds to local utilities, which they, in turn, pass through to local businesses for projects that create and retain jobs in rural areas.

Seeing this as an incredible opportunity to bring money into the state, Iowa's electric cooperatives and the Iowa Area Development Group created a formula for success. Once a compelling project is identified, IADG works with its utility partners to compile the necessary information and then writes and submits the REDL&G application. This process is no small feat since the applications typically exceed 100 pages.

Iowa leads the nation in the number of projects and the amount awarded through the three decades since the REDL&G program was established. As a result of aggressive grant writing, Iowa has received **347 awards** totaling **\$141.5 million** to support business growth and community vitality.

This year, Iowa secured **25 awards** totaling over **\$16.8 million** in funding, which created or retained over **200 jobs**. These projects are located across the state and include manufacturing facilities, dental clinics, medical clinics, industrial parks, marketing companies, food production, a pharmacy and a



city aquatic center. USDA Rural Development State Director Grant Menke recognized Iowa's efforts at a news conference in late October. "The REDL&G program is one of the most versatile, efficient and effective funding tools to enhance economic opportunities and create jobs in rural America," Menke says. "Through key partnerships with rural electric cooperatives, rural telephone

cooperatives, municipal utilities and supporting organizations, such as the Iowa Area Development Group, Iowa continues to lead the nation in delivering REDL&G investment and projects."

The project list is impressive. Two projects are featured in this article, but please keep in mind there are 345 additional stories across the state. You likely have one or more projects in your community.

Main Street Drug, Charles City

Charles City is now home to Main Street Drug, opened by owners Cindy and Shane Uetz. Cindy is a pharmacist who returned to her hometown of Charles City and managed the Kmart pharmacy. In 2019, the retail chain closed the store, leaving Charles City with only one pharmacy to serve the community. Seeing an opportunity, the couple purchased the former Lidd & Cordray building on Main Street, completely



program support



remodeled the first floor of this former clothing store and opened the pharmacy in early April.

“This project would have never gotten off the ground without the help of Butler County REC and their staff,” states Cindy Uetz. “Pharmacy economics are complicated and different than your typical brick and mortar business. Butler County REC understood this and helped us get the funding we needed. The loan we received has allowed us to provide our community with vital healthcare services. While opening in the middle of a pandemic was never in our vision, our delivery and curbside pickup have helped to protect our rural community and the surrounding area.”

Main Street Drug is entirely independent. The business is committed to providing public education in a wide variety of areas and superior customer service, including options for curbside pickup and delivery, even outside of Charles



City. While the majority of the business is the pharmacy, Main Street Drug also has over-the-counter items available. Rounding out its offerings are a wide variety of consignment items from local artists and designers.

Percival Scientific, Perry

Percival Scientific, a 100-year-old business, is moving forward with the expansion of its existing facility in the Perry Industrial Park in Perry, Iowa. Percival is a worldwide leader in designing and manufacturing

environmental growth (research) chambers for universities, colleges, governmental institutions and businesses. The 33,000 square feet of new space will allow the company to increase its production by 60% and add 10 or more employees to its 80-person workforce.

Financing for the expansion comes in the form of two zero-interest, \$1 million loans from the REDL&G program through Central Iowa Power Cooperative and Minburn Communications. These funds will be used to purchase equipment and build out the larger facility’s electrical and high-speed internet infrastructure.

“The company has wanted to expand for some time, but the \$2 million REGL&G loans tipped the scale,” says Percival President and CEO Gary Wheelock. “As thrilled as we were about this type of program from the USDA, it was even more exciting to learn that since two different rural utilities serve us – Guthrie County REC for electric service and Minburn Communications for phone and internet – we could apply for two USDA loans. Thanks don’t begin to convey how grateful we are to the USDA for offering the REDL&G program, seeing the value in our expansion projects and awarding both loans to us.”

As the economic development entity for Iowa’s electric cooperatives, the IADG team has the opportunity to see the multifaceted commitment rural utilities have to support the businesses and communities they serve. You can be assured that your member-owned cooperative is working diligently to foster investment, create jobs and enrich the quality of life for rural Iowans. ⚡

Kay Snyder is the director of marketing and communications for the Iowa Area Development Group.

FINANCIAL MATTERS

Idle service invoices to be mailed in January

Notices for idle services (any service that has been in place but not used for 12 months or longer) will be mailed in January. If you receive a notice, please review it and determine whether or not you wish to retain the service. If you no longer wish to retain the service, please complete the form and return the notice to our office.

For any idle services that we have not received a form to remove it, we will send an invoice for the annual idle service fee in January. The annual fee for an idle service is currently \$107, which covers the cost of the cooperative's investment in the facilities. This fee cannot be divided into monthly installments. If you receive an idle service letter and are no longer the owner of the property, please notify our office at 866-242-4232. ⚡

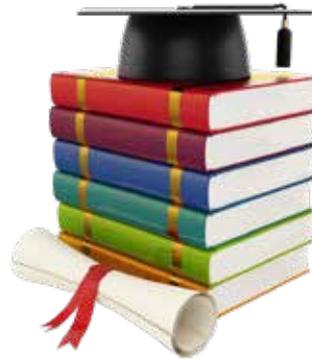


STUDENT LEADERS

Access Energy Cooperative scholarship details announced

\$9,000 in scholarships is available to high school seniors

- Six \$1,500 scholarships will be awarded – two in each of the cooperative's three districts.
- All applicants must be high school seniors receiving post-secondary (college or technical school) education.
- Parents or legal guardians must be members of the cooperative.



www.accessenergycoop.com, download the application and fax, mail or bring it to our office. You also may submit the form online.

Applications are due in our office by March 15, 2021. Winners will be announced at their senior awards ceremonies.

When are the scholarships given?

\$500 of the scholarship money will be awarded to recipients at the completion of their first semester of

post-secondary school education, with proof of enrollment for the second semester. The remaining \$1,000 will be awarded after completion of the third semester, with proof of enrollment for the fourth semester. ⚡

Here's where to obtain an application

- Go to any area high school guidance counselor's office.
- Contact the Access Energy Cooperative headquarters office in Mt. Pleasant at 866-242-4232.
- Visit the co-op's website at

YOUTH TOUR

Youth Tour 2021 update

It is with deep regret that we report Iowa's electric cooperatives have made the decision to not participate in the 2021 Youth Tour trip, due to the uncertainties associated with the COVID-19 pandemic. We will not be accepting applications this year.

We are hopeful to return to offering the trip for two winners to Washington, D.C., for sophomores and juniors in 2022. ⚡



Congratulations!

Access Energy Cooperative is proud to announce the accomplishments of two employees.

Mitch Banes has been promoted to crew foreman for the Mt. Pleasant crews. Banes has been a journeyman lineman and has been with the co-op since 2007.

Korbin Johnson has completed the apprenticeship program at Access Energy Cooperative



and has been promoted to full journeyman lineman status. Johnson has been with the co-op since 2015.

Congratulations, Mitch and Korbin! ⚡



What causes blinking lights?

Blinking lights and brief power interruptions are frustrating. Momentary power interruptions or blinking lights are most often caused by uncontrollable circumstances. Wind, trees, lightning, birds, animals, equipment failure and humans can all disrupt the normal flow of electricity both momentarily and longer. Trying to find the exact cause of the blinks sometimes resembles trying to find the needle in the haystack, which equally frustrates the line crew.

While blinks can be annoying, they show that an electrical system is working exactly as designed. When a breaker in your house or business senses a power problem, the breaker trips and power flow stops until someone resets the breaker. Breakers on Access Energy Cooperative's power lines are designed to sense a problem on the lines, stop power flow momentarily and then automatically reset – potentially avoiding a much longer outage.

Before digital clocks and computers, blinks oftentimes went unnoticed. In today's world, flashing digital displays and loss of computer data can cause concerns. Access Energy



Cooperative member-owners need to protect computers and other sensitive electronic equipment by buying and using uninterruptible power supply (UPS) systems. These relatively simple and inexpensive measures will go a long way toward increasing power reliability and protecting fallout from blinks.

Members also should notify the cooperative when blinking light problems repeatedly occur. Then, be patient and give line crews a chance to find and correct the problem. We all want the same thing – high quality, reliable electric service. ⚡

Help others by contributing to RECare

RECare is a program where members help other members in need. You may make a one-time contribution to the RECare program or you may enclose an amount each month with your monthly electric bill. Just \$1 a month will help others. This program is administered by the Iowa Community Action Program, and recipients must meet their guidelines. ⚡



To have an amount deducted from your monthly bill, send the form below to:

RECare
c/o Access Energy Cooperative
P.O. Box 440
Mount Pleasant, IA 52641

Member Authorization Form

I would like to make a (check one):

One-time contribution of \$ _____

Monthly contribution of \$ _____
 (That will be added to my bill)

Name _____

Address _____

City _____

ZIP Code _____

Phone # _____

Email _____

Account # (if known) _____

Three electronics to upgrade for energy savings

BY MARIA KANEVSKY

Looking for easy ways to save more money on your monthly energy bills? Beyond some of the more traditional energy efficiency measures, such as sealing air leaks or adding additional insulation, several popular electronics can help you use energy more efficiently.

These devices are relatively easy to incorporate into your home, making them a simple way to help manage your energy use.

1 Smart thermostats

Smart thermostats are becoming an increasingly popular option to help save energy at home. With smart thermostats, there's no longer a need to adjust the temperature continually. They can be programmed to follow a heating and cooling pattern throughout the day and year to maximize your comfort and energy use. Some advanced smart thermostats can even learn your habits and adjust the temperature accordingly.

Another great benefit is the ability to control a smart thermostat remotely from an app on your phone, allowing you to set the temperature to your liking before you even arrive home. Some smart thermostats can be integrated with a smart home hub, like Amazon Alexa or Google Home.

2 Smart plugs

If you're looking for ways to save energy on a budget, consider smart plugs. Smart plugs can be inserted into any standard electrical outlet and can help manage the energy of the devices that are plugged in. With control of the smart plug, you can stop power-hungry devices from



Photo Credit: Eobee

being on longer than necessary.

Some smart plug models have a scheduling option, allowing you to turn on lights or turn off the TV at certain times of the day. Others offer a dimming function, enabling you to change the brightness of lights plugged into the smart plug. These features can be controlled through an app on your phone, and some models also have voice-controlled options when connected to a smart home hub.

3 Home energy monitor

A home energy monitor helps you monitor home energy use and set energy budgets. If your goal is to reduce your energy use at home, energy monitors can give you the information you need to achieve this goal. They are connected to your electric meter and provide a big picture of your home's energy use.

Some home energy monitors

can show which appliances are using the most energy, giving you the knowledge on which devices to cut down on. Other models can show real-time electricity use and costs, while some can help create a personalized plan for energy efficiency. Most home energy monitors can be connected through a smartphone app, which can send notifications, warn about abnormal energy use and provide tips for further energy savings.

These simple devices can help you save a little more energy each month. Considering what your needs are will help you choose a device with the appropriate features. With any new product, do some homework first to determine which device suits your home best. ⚡

Maria Kanevsky is a program analyst for the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association, the national trade association representing more than 900 local electric cooperatives.

THE TWELVE DAYS OF CHRISTMAS

BY VALERIE VAN KOOTEN

One of the carols we're bound to hear this season is *The Twelve Days of Christmas*. I'm not into calling birds, French hens or drummers drumming – but hey, if you want to send five gold rings this way, I'll take them.

It occurs to me that the carol might be a *tad* dated. If you want a more realistic version of *The Twelve Days of Christmas*, here it is . . .

1. On the first day of Christmas, my child gave to me: a note to send the makings for a snowman costume for the fourth grade holiday skit – only flame-retardant items, please.
2. On the second day of Christmas, advertisers gave to me – a toy that doesn't need batteries! Consider it purchased.
3. On the third day of Christmas, Mother Nature gave to me: -10 degree temps, a biting wind and a glare of ice on my driveway.
4. On the fourth day of Christmas, my offspring gave to me: 211 text messages, 18 telephone calls and one email about the date of our virtual get-together. How hard can it be to schedule eight adults who will be wearing pajamas?
5. On the fifth day of Christmas, my family gave to me: the gift that keeps on giving – a wrapped candle that claims to smell of "Woodland Morning." Perfect for the present everyone keeps around in case someone shows up with something for you and you have nothing for them . . . you know who you are.
6. On the sixth day of Christmas, my church worship committee gave to me: meeting reminders for three rehearsals and sheet music for a song with six sharps, all of which will be performed with masks via Zoom. We sounded remarkably like No. 8 in this list!



7. On the seventh day of Christmas, my co-workers gave to me: a Secret Santa gift that was inappropriate for the office, was photographed with me looking horrified and was then posted on Facebook.
8. On the eighth day of Christmas, my local radio station gave to me: Alvin and the Chipmunks. 'Nuff said.
9. On the ninth day of Christmas, our neighbors gave to me: a lovely plate of fudge that was devoured immediately, even though my family usually spurns anything with nuts in it.
10. On the tenth day of Christmas, home decorating TV shows gave to me: a theme tree that includes 22 glass baubles, 10 oversized bows and do-it-yourself nutcrackers that can be put together "with ease and celebration!"
11. On the eleventh day of Christmas, I gave to my family: the gift of a "cereal supper"; choose your favorite cereal, because Mama is too tired to cook.
12. On the twelfth day of Christmas, my true love gave to me: Not one single idea of what to get him. Thus, he was gifted socks.

This year's Christmas is necessarily going to look a little different. Things will be easier in some ways and harder in others. But I can promise, you'll still be hearing *The Twelve Days of Christmas* on the radio! 🌟

Valerie Van Kooten is a writer from Pella who loves living in the country and telling its stories. She and her husband Kent have three married sons and two incredibly adorable grandsons.



ALL OF OUR LINES ARE CUSTOMER SERVICE LINES.

Some deliver electricity. Others deliver information. All must deliver on the Touchstone Energy Cooperatives mission: to provide you with service that's just as dependable as the energy you count on us for every day. Learn more about your locally owned and operated Touchstone Energy cooperative at TouchstoneEnergy.com.

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