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FEBRUARY 2024

Iowa

ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE LIVING



Students: Win a trip
to Washington, D.C.

Energy and economic
insights and trends

Soup and stew recipes

Win a Café™ Express Finish toaster ▶ See Page 3

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For the love of book clubs

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ON THE COVER

Special thanks to Libby Teunissen, a Lyon REC member-consumer, for supplying this month's cover image. Submit high-resolution photos for consideration to editor@ieclmagazine.com. You could receive \$100!

NEW STATEWIDE BOARD PRESIDENT IS NO STRANGER TO THE CO-OP BOARD ROOM

BY KENNY VANDENBERG



We've all heard the saying that when one door closes, another door opens. It certainly applies to my life as the door to cooperative service opened for me when I retired a while back. Thirteen years ago, I was asked to consider serving on the Chariton Valley Electric Cooperative board in Albia. As a lifelong resident of Monroe County, I thought it would be a great opportunity to serve my community and learn more about my local electric cooperative.

After serving on the local co-op board for several years, I had an opportunity to put my name on the ballot for the Iowa Association of Electric Cooperatives' (IAEC) board. I was eager to join the statewide board and expand my industry knowledge and working relationships with others, including our state and federal legislators. Formed in 1942, IAEC is the statewide trade association for Iowa's electric cooperatives, and it provides several services to its member co-ops, including legislative representation, regulatory oversight, training and education services, safety programs, communications support, and advocacy.

Productive and proactive leadership

Serving on the IAEC board for more than five years, I was honored to take the helm as board president in December. I truly enjoy the camaraderie of working with my fellow statewide directors and the statewide staff. We are productive and proactive in dealing with the issues at hand. In the first half of 2024, the IAEC board will be focused on hiring our next executive vice president/general manager, as Chuck Soderberg plans to retire in July. Identifying the right executive to lead us into the future is one of the statewide board's most important tasks.

This is an unprecedented time of change for the electric industry, and experienced leadership is crucial to successfully navigate the challenges ahead. I look forward to meeting with the directors and managers of Iowa's electric cooperatives throughout the year to learn more about how the statewide association can support them in their mission to provide safe, reliable and affordable electricity for their local member-owners.

Strengthening lines of collaboration

Additionally, I have been serving on the board of the Iowa Institute for Cooperatives for four years. I'd like to explore more ways for these two statewide cooperative associations to collaborate for the benefit of their members while promoting the cooperative business model.

If you had asked me several years ago what I'd be doing after retirement, I couldn't have imagined that I would be serving in this capacity. But these leadership opportunities all started because I was willing to say yes to a local call to serve. I'm thankful for the family and friends who encouraged me along the way.

Here's my advice for my fellow cooperative member-owners throughout Iowa: Don't be afraid to answer the call to serve your local cooperative. Look for an open door in your local community and walk through it! Your next adventure awaits.

Kenny Vandenberg is the board president for the Iowa Association of Electric Cooperatives and a director at Chariton Valley Electric Cooperative.

EDITOR'S CHOICE CONTEST

WIN A CAFÉ™ EXPRESS FINISH TOASTER!

For busy mornings, this innovative two-slot toaster has an Express Finish mode. Just push a button and the extra heating elements kick in, toasting bread to your preferred doneness in just 60 seconds. It also has three other preset functions – bagel, reheat and frozen – plus eight browning levels for customized control. Distinguished by sleek designer finishes, this Café appliance from GE features a beautiful cast aluminum housing with brushed copper accents.

Visit our website and win!

Enter this month's contest by visiting www.ieclmagazine.com no later than Feb. 29. 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 HappyLight® Duo Light Therapy and Task Floor Lamp from the December issue was Eugene Sieren, a T.I.P. Rural Electric Cooperative member-consumer.



ENTER ONLINE BY FEB. 29!

HOW TO SAFELY USE A GENERATOR

Before using a portable generator, it's essential to understand the potential dangers associated with using them, such as their production of carbon monoxide (CO). CO is an odorless, colorless and tasteless poisonous gas that is called the "silent killer" because it is virtually undetectable without the use of technology like CO alarms. Follow these tips when using a generator.

1 Read and follow all manufacturer operating instructions to properly ground the generator. Be sure you understand the directions before hooking up the generator.

2 A generator is a temporary power source. It should never be used as a permanent solution.

3 Maintain adequate ventilation because generators emit CO. It's against fire code to operate a generator in your home, garage or other enclosed building. Place it in a dry location outdoors.

The Consumer Product Safety Commission recommends generators be positioned at least 20 feet from doors, windows and vents to prevent CO from entering the home.

4 Never plug a portable electric generator into a wall outlet or connect directly to a home's wiring. This can energize utility power lines and injure you or others working nearby. Electrical back feed can also damage the generator and home electrical equipment.

5 Turn off the generator and allow cooling before refueling. Gasoline and its vapors may ignite if they come in contact with hot components or an electric spark. Store fuel in a properly designed container in a secure location away from the generator or other fuel-burning appliances, such as water heaters. Always have a fully charged, approved fire extinguisher located nearby.



For more information, visit Safe Electricity at safeelectricity.org

- 6 Protect your appliances.** Turn off or disconnect all appliances and lights before you begin operating the portable generator. Once the generator is running, turn your appliances and lights on one at a time to avoid overloading the unit. Remember, generators are for temporary usage, so prioritize your needs.
- 7 Generators pose electrical risks, especially when operated in wet conditions.** Use a generator only when necessary when the weather creates wet or moist conditions. Protect the generator by operating it under an open, canopy-like structure on a dry surface where water cannot form puddles or drain under it. Make sure your hands are dry before touching the generator.
- 8 Keep children and pets away from portable generators at all times.** Many generator

components are hot enough to burn you during operation.

- 9 Use proper extension cords.** Use only safety-tested, shop-type electrical cords designed and rated for heavier, outdoor use to connect appliances. Many generators are equipped with twist-lock connects to reduce the chance of accidental disconnections due to vibrations.
- 10 Shut down the generator properly.** Before shutting down a generator, turn off and unplug all appliances and equipment being powered by the generator.
- 11 Remember maintenance between uses.** Drain the gasoline from the generator while it is being stored. It's also a good idea to inspect the fuel and oil filters, spark plug, oil level and fuel quality, and to start the generator on a regular basis before an emergency situation happens.

CONGRATULATIONS TO COOPERATIVE LEADERSHIP IN IOWA PROGRAM GRADUATES

Congratulations to the first 15 graduates of the Iowa Association of Electric Cooperatives' new Cooperative Leadership in Iowa Program for emerging leaders. Participants committed to a yearlong calendar of in-person, online and on-demand training sessions. Additionally, these individuals developed their leadership skills, gained insights on various professional roles within electric cooperatives, and attended statewide events to better understand legislative and regulatory issues facing Iowa's electric cooperatives.



Pictured are the 2023 graduates.

Back row: **Brady Boell**, Raccoon Valley Electric Cooperative; **Cole Hetzler**, Access Energy Cooperative; **Andrew Stupka**, Prairie Energy Cooperative; **Chris Larson**, Northwest Iowa Power Cooperative; **Nik Schulte**, Maquoketa Valley Electric Cooperative; **Aaron Healy**, Eastern Iowa Light & Power Cooperative; **Pat Hyland**, East-Central Iowa Rural Electric Cooperative; **Joshua Pfannebecker**, Linn County Rural Electric Cooperative; and **Andrew Paulsen**, Northwest Iowa Power Cooperative.

Front Row: **Jeni Kolsrud**, Allamakee-Clayton Electric Cooperative; **Jennifer Schmitz**, East-Central Iowa Rural Electric Cooperative; **Sarah Newton**, Southwest Iowa Rural Electric Cooperative; **Ashley Tratchel**, Chariton Valley Electric Cooperative, Inc.; **Jolyn Hartson**, Pella Cooperative Electric Association; and **Niki Dalton**, United Electric Cooperative.



IOWA CO-OPS RECOGNIZED FOR SAFETY ACHIEVEMENTS

During the Iowa Association of Electric Cooperatives' (IAEC) annual meeting in December, several Iowa electric cooperatives were congratulated for completing the Rural Electric Safety Achievement Program (RESAP) in 2023.

The cooperatives included:

- Butler County REC
- Consumers Energy
- Farmers Electric Cooperative, Inc.-Greenfield
- Franklin REC
- Harrison County REC
- Lyon REC
- North West REC
- Northwest Iowa Power Cooperative
- T.I.P. REC
- Woodbury County REC

RESAP is a service of the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA) and strives to promote the highest standards of safety among electric cooperatives.

IAEC fully supports the RESAP program and works with electric cooperative members in their safety achievements. The rigorous program requires annual reporting to NRECA of Occupational Safety and Health Administration Data and updates to the cooperative's safety improvement plan. Every three years, additional data must be submitted to NRECA, as well as participation in an onsite safety observation by NRECA at the cooperative.

2024 IOWA YOUTH TOUR T-SHIRT CONTEST



\$300 CASH PRIZE!



ABOUT THE CONTEST

- Open to any high school student (grades 9-12) regardless of co-op membership status.
- The theme is the seven cooperative principles and leadership.
- Shirt will be worn on one day of Youth Tour.
- The state of Iowa must be referenced.

SUBMISSIONS: Entries must be submitted to Dropbox for review.

TIMELINE

- Contest begins: Jan. 1
- Submissions due: March 1
- Winner announced: March 8



Scan this code to upload your T-shirt design.

OPPORTUNITY OF A LIFETIME: WIN A TRIP TO WASHINGTON, D.C.!



SOME OF THE THINGS STUDENTS WILL DO AND SEE ON YOUTH TOUR:

- Albert Einstein Memorial
- Arlington National Cemetery
- Boat cruise on the Potomac River
- Ford's Theater
- Franklin Delano Roosevelt Memorial
- Holocaust Memorial
- Iwo Jima Sunset Parade
- Korean War Veterans Memorial
- Lincoln Memorial
- Mount Vernon
- The National Mall
- U.S. Capitol tour
- Vietnam Veterans Memorial
- Washington Monument
- Washington National Cathedral
- White House
- World War II Memorial

Enter the essay contest by March 25



iowayouthtour.com



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[iowayouthtour](https://www.tiktok.com/@iowayouthtour)

THESE ELECTRIC COOPERATIVES ARE SPONSORING THE 2024 YOUTH TOUR

All of the electric co-ops on this list are offering one or more all-expenses-paid Youth Tour trips this year, so check your co-op's website or call the office for more details.

Access Energy Cooperative
Allamakee-Clayton Electric Cooperative
Butler County REC
Calhoun County Electric Cooperative
Assoc.

Chariton Valley Electric Cooperative, Inc.
Clarke Electric Cooperative, Inc.
Consumers Energy
East-Central Iowa REC
Eastern Iowa Light and Power Cooperative



ONE IOWA YOUTH TOUR STUDENT WILL RECEIVE A \$1,000 COLLEGE SCHOLARSHIP!

During the 2024 Youth Tour this June, a student from each state that participates in Youth Tour will be chosen to serve on the national Youth Leadership Council (YLC). The Iowa YLC representative will be selected during the Youth Tour trip and will receive a \$1,000 college scholarship.

These young leaders will meet virtually throughout 2024 and into early 2025 and participate in leadership training, practice their public speaking skills, attend co-op forums and engage in community activities like voter registration drives.

The YLC experience will culminate at the 2025 NRECA Annual Meeting, held in Atlanta, Georgia. Here, the group will spend a few days reflecting on the experiences they've had throughout the year, attend informational and entertaining conference sessions alongside electric cooperative leaders from throughout the country, and solidify lifelong friendships and connections!

To enter, you will be required to submit an official entry form plus a short (250-word maximum) essay in response to this statement:

Tell us about an issue that impacts the quality of life in your community.

Entry forms are available at www.iowayouthtour.com. You can submit your essay at this website or email it to youthtour@iowarec.org. Entries must be received by March 25.

Iowa's local electric cooperatives are just getting started on their selection process for high school sophomores, juniors and seniors from their areas to earn an all-expenses-paid trip for the June 15-21 Youth Tour to Washington, D.C. Unfortunately, there always are more qualified student candidates from these co-ops (as well as deserving students from co-ops that aren't participating in the Youth Tour program) than there are openings on the trip. However, one of those students, for the 10th year in a row, will have the opportunity to win a trip through the *Iowa Electric Cooperative Living 2024 Youth Tour Contest*!

Of course, students at participating co-ops first should apply for the Youth Tour through their electric co-ops. However,

students can increase their chances of winning a trip by entering the magazine's contest right after they enter the one for their electric co-op.

More than 1,800 students from across America take part in the weeklong educational trip to the nation's capital. Participants will travel to Washington, D.C., meet their U.S. representatives and senators, and watch history come alive as they explore museums, memorials and monuments. They'll also meet student leaders from nearly every state and hear dynamic speakers during Youth Day. Best of all, students will make friendships that last a lifetime and become part of a group that has more than 50,000 alumni in every walk of life, including U.S. senators and CEOs.

OFFICIAL CONTEST RULES

Our 2024 Youth Tour Essay Contest is open to any Iowa high school sophomore, junior or senior whose family is served by an Iowa electric cooperative AND to any Iowa high school sophomore, junior or senior who attended all three virtual sessions of the Iowa Youth Leadership Academy in October 2023. *Iowa Electric Cooperative Living* magazine will award one all-expenses-paid Youth Tour trip to Washington, D.C. Students at participating co-ops first should apply for the Youth Tour through their electric co-ops. Then, to enhance your chances of earning a trip, we encourage you to enter this contest too. If you're chosen as the winner of a trip sponsored by your local electric cooperative, you'll become ineligible to win the trip sponsored by *Iowa Electric Cooperative Living* magazine.

Iowa Electric Cooperative Living magazine and IAEC staff will judge all essays anonymously. The decision of the judges will be final. The winner of the *Iowa Electric Cooperative Living Youth Tour Contest* will be announced on April 4, which is after all sponsoring local electric cooperatives will have chosen their 2024 Youth Tour participants.

Farmers Electric Cooperative (Greenfield)
Franklin REC
Grundy County REC
Guthrie County REC
Harrison County REC

Heartland Power Cooperative
Iowa Lakes Electric Cooperative
Lyon REC
Midland Power Cooperative
MiEnergy Cooperative

Nishnabotna Valley REC
North West REC
Pella Cooperative Electric Association
Prairie Energy Cooperative
Raccoon Valley Electric Cooperative

Southern Iowa Electric Cooperative
Southwest Iowa REC
T.I.P REC
United Electric Cooperative
Western Iowa Power Cooperative



BACON POTATO CHOWDER

- 8 slices bacon (½ pound)
- ½-1 cup onion, chopped
- 2 cups potatoes, chopped
- 1 cup water
- 1 teaspoon salt
- ⅛ teaspoon pepper
- 1 can condensed cream of chicken soup
- 1 cup sour cream
- 1½ cups milk
- cheddar cheese, optional

Cut bacon into ½-inch pieces. In a 3-quart saucepan, cook bacon over medium heat until browned. Add onion and continue cooking, 2-3 minutes until tender, drain. Add potatoes, water, salt and pepper. Continue cooking 15-20 minutes until potatoes are tender.

Reduce heat to low, stir in soup, sour cream and milk. Continue cooking, 3-5 minutes, stirring occasionally until heated through. Season to taste and top with cheese, if desired. *Serves 4-6*

**Peg Visser • Sheldon
North West Rural Electric Cooperative**

CREAMY SQUASH SOUP

- 7 pounds butternut or other winter squash variety
- 2 large, sweet onions, chopped
- olive oil
- water
- ¼ teaspoon rosemary
- ½ teaspoon sage
- 1 tablespoon salt, or to taste
- ⅛ teaspoon cayenne pepper, optional

Bake butternut squash whole at 350 degrees F for approximately 1 hour, until soft when poked with a large fork at the stem end. Remove from oven and let cool. Cut open and remove seeds. Winter squash, if used, will need to be cut in half before baking cut-side down until tender.

Sauté onions in enough oil to keep from sticking. Sauté on high at first to get hot, then on low until onions are clear. Stir more frequently after onions are clear. Sauté until brown and caramelized (do not burn). Blend 1½ cups squash with ⅓ of the onions with just enough water to be smooth and mostly pourable. Repeat two more times. Stir all batches together in slow cooker or heavy-bottomed soup pot. Add rosemary, sage, salt and cayenne pepper, if desired. Simmer for ½ hour or until seasoning flavor comes out. Serve piping hot. Leftovers can be frozen. *Serves 6*

**Jacque Minikus • Pisgah
Harrison County Rural Electric Cooperative**



Looking for a new recipe? Search our free archive of tried-and-true recipes from rural Iowa kitchens! Search by keyword, category or main ingredient: ieclmagazine.com/recipes

TATOR TOT SOUP

- 1 32-ounce bag tater tots
- 1 cup cheddar cheese, shredded
- 1 can cream of celery soup
- 8 ounces sour cream
- 2 cups milk
- 1 pound ham, chopped or cooked bacon
- 1 tablespoon parsley flakes
- 1 teaspoon onion powder
- salt, to taste
- pepper, to taste

Combine all ingredients in a slow cooker. Cook on high for 4 hours or low for 5-7 hours. Add more milk during cooking if a thinner consistency is desired. *Serves 6-8*

Stacy Venteicher • Glidden
Raccoon Valley Electric Cooperative

CREAMY CHICKEN TACO SOUP

- 1 15.25-ounce can no salt added black beans
- 1 15.25-ounce can no salt added whole kernel corn
- 1 10-ounce can mild diced tomatoes and green chilies
- 3 cups chicken broth
- 3-4 chicken breasts, cooked and diced
- 1 ounce taco seasoning
- 1 tablespoon dry minced onion
- 8 ounces cream cheese
- corn chips, optional
- cheddar cheese, optional

Drain and rinse beans, drain corn. Add the first seven ingredients to a slow cooker. Cook on low for 6 hours. Stir in cream cheese, and top with corn chips and cheddar cheese, if desired.

Angie Graeve • Reinbeck
Grundy County Rural Electric Cooperative

HUNTER STEW

- 2 pounds venison
- 4 carrots
- 2 onions, sliced
- 2 stalks celery, chopped
- 4 potatoes, chunked
- 2 cups stewed tomatoes
- 1 can cream of mushroom soup

Chop venison into 1-inch cubes. Cut carrots into 1-inch chunks. Mix all ingredients together in roaster pan. Cook at 250 degrees F for 4 hours.

Jeff Gropper • Chelsea
T.I.P. Rural Electric Cooperative

HEARTY HAM SOUP

- ¼ cup butter
- ¼ cup onion, chopped
- 2 cups raw potatoes, diced
- 1 cup water
- ¼ cup flour
- 3 cups milk
- 1 10-ounce package frozen peas, thawed
- 1¼ cups cooked ham, diced
- ½ teaspoon salt
- ¼ teaspoon marjoram
- ⅛ teaspoon pepper
- ⅛ teaspoon celery salt
- blue cheese wedge, optional

In a heavy, 2-quart saucepan, melt butter. Add onion, potatoes and water. Cover and bring to steam. Lower heat to simmer, then cook about 15 minutes, until potatoes are tender. Stir in flour, then slowly add milk. Cook until thickened, stirring constantly. Stir in peas, ham, salt, marjoram, pepper and celery salt. Let simmer until peas are cooked, about 5 minutes. Serve hot and add a wedge of blue cheese crumbled over soup, if desired. *Serves 4-6*

Marcia Rich • Lockridge
Access Energy Cooperative

WANTED:

TURKEY DISHES

THE REWARD:

\$25 FOR EVERY ONE WE PUBLISH!

Deadline is Feb. 29

Please include your name, address, telephone number, co-op name and the recipe category on all submissions. Also provide the number of servings per recipe.



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

MAIL: Recipes

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Des Moines, IA 50322-2992

INDUSTRY LEADERS SHARE ENERGY INSIGHTS AND TRENDS

In December, the Iowa Association of Electric Cooperatives (IAEC) held its 2023 Annual Meeting at the Sheraton West Des Moines Conference Center with more than 350 registered attendees. At the event, which carried the theme “Powerful Connections,” board directors and employees from Iowa’s locally owned electric co-ops received informative updates from the statewide board and staff, in addition to learning about industry trends and best practices from invited speakers.

Leaders share insights and perspectives on future trends

The IAEC Annual Meeting also provided the opportunity for attendees to learn more about the electric industry and future trends that may impact rural Iowa’s economy and quality of life.

IAEC presented several educational sessions, including hearing from the following industry leaders:

- Author, podcaster and film producer **Robert Bryce** discussed the physical and barriers to a rapid transition from carbon-based energy sources. He provided a realistic forecast about how our electric grid will change in the coming decades.
- **Kavi Chalwa** and **Jeff Kappen** from Bâton Global discussed disorder in geopolitics and how it will influence economic growth on various scales. They provided insights on how Iowa’s electric cooperatives can best navigate these challenges for organizational success.
- **Mark Tiemeier** of the Midwest Reliability Organization (MRO) informed attendees about how changes in the electric generation mix and resources challenge grid operators. Tiemeier is responsible for leading MRO’s annual regional risk assessment.

Editor’s note: The information on the next page is a high-level overview of some points covered during each speaker’s presentation and are the perspectives and opinions of the speakers based on their knowledge and research. Their points address what they believe to be issues or concerns of interest for utilities, including electric cooperatives.

POWERFUL CONNECTIONS

BY ANN FOSTER THELEN

ROBERT BRYCE



Robert Bryce is a Texas-based author, journalist, film producer, and podcaster. The host of the Power Hungry Podcast, Bryce has been writing about energy, power, innovation and politics for more than 30 years. His articles have appeared in many publications, including the Wall Street Journal,

New York Times, Forbes, Time, Austin Chronicle and Sydney Morning Herald.

Key points

- There are significant land use conflicts when it comes to building more wind, solar and high-voltage transmission. In the past nine years, at least 603 wind and solar projects have been rejected in the U.S.
- Since 2000, the U.S. has reduced CO2 emissions the most of the world's six largest economies. Four countries – the U.S., U.K., Germany and Japan – have reduced emissions, while India and China have increased emissions. In fact, China has increased more than eight-fold over U.S. emissions.

- The U.S. Department of Energy says the nation needs a 57% increase in high-voltage transmission. Currently, there are 240,000 miles of high-voltage transmission in the U.S. From 2008 to 2021, 1,700 miles per year were built in the U.S. At this rate, it will take 80 years to meet the forecasted need for high-voltage transmission.
- Utility product cost inflation is at an all-time high, increasing by 33% since 2020. There is a one- to three-year wait for transformers. Foreign companies dominate the high-power transformer market.
- Since 2008, when then Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger mandated renewable energy use, California's electric rates have grown 3.2 times faster than the rest of the U.S.
- China dominates the entire downstream electric vehicle battery supply chain.
- For the first time, the North American Electric Reliability Corporation cited “energy policy” as a threat to the reliability and resilience of the bulk power system.
- Energy security is national security.

KAVI CHALWA



Kavi Chalwa has spent the majority of his career as a strategy advisor and consultant to private and public-sector organizations, supporting them with the development and execution of their global growth strategies. Prior to transitioning into an advisory role, Kavi was in the investment banking industry. Kavi's sector expertise includes energy. His

regional expertise is focused on high-growth markets, especially the Middle East, South and Southeast Asia, and Sub-Saharan Africa.

Key points

Recommends businesses and energy providers pursue an aggressive “Iowa and Me” internationalization strategy by:

- Diversifying our trade relationships to target countries that align with Iowa's economic growth clusters and that have high levels of current and projected future alignment to U.S. policies on the Chinese Communist Party.
- Building relationships with third-country-based investors to attract investment into Iowa-based business, Iowa-based innovation and Iowa-based research.
- Flexing Iowa's muscle to protect and mitigate downside impacts of restrictive policies on Iowa businesses.
- Flexing Iowa's muscle to create favorable conditions for accelerating entry into new growth markets for Iowa businesses.
- Mobilizing the collective power of commodity and association groups to serve as a force multiplier for Iowa businesses.

MARK TIEMEIER



Mark Tiemeier, P.E., MBA, is a highly experienced electrical professional with focused expertise in the power systems and regulatory fields. He has extensive knowledge in modeling transmission components. The Midwest Reliability Organization is a non-profit organization dedicated to the reliability and security of the bulk power

system in the central region of North America, including parts of both the U.S. and Canada.

Key points

Extreme weather, consumer demand, and changes in technology and generation resources continue to present a rapidly increasing number of challenges to grid planners and operators. Physical and cybersecurity risks also continue to evolve at an unprecedented pace. The top risks to electric reliability are primarily being impacted by the following factors:

- Conventional, baseload generation (e.g., coal) is being retired and replaced with dispersed, variable generation (e.g., wind and solar), tightening reserve margins.
- Increasingly bold cybercriminals seek to exploit vulnerabilities in utilities' networks to disrupt normal operations of the grid.
- Extreme weather continues to cause generating resource outages, limiting energy supply at the same time as demand increases.
- Increasing amounts of generating resources that are physically distant from load is straining transmission capacity and limiting import capability.

FORCES SHAPING THE U.S. RURAL ECONOMY IN 2024

BY COBANK

The U.S. economy has remained remarkably steady despite an unrelenting series of shocks over the last three years. America's economic resilience was again displayed throughout 2023 as the Federal Reserve continued the most aggressive round of interest rate hikes the country has seen in more than 40



years. Steadfast consumer spending has fueled the economy through much of the recent adversity. However, lingering high prices

are expected to take a bigger toll on the economy in 2024, according to a comprehensive year-ahead outlook report from CoBank's Knowledge Exchange.

The report examines several key factors that will shape agriculture and market sectors, which serve rural communities throughout the U.S. Some of those include the following:

U.S. Economy: Consumer Sentiment More Important than Economic Data

Key indicators point to the strength of the U.S. economy. Headline inflation has plummeted to 3.1%, the unemployment rate remains below 4% and inflation-adjusted wages are growing. However, many U.S. consumers remain anxious about their financial situations, given high grocery prices, skyrocketing mortgage rates and other inflationary pressures. Grocery inflation is running at about 2%; however, the price of food at home has risen by 25% in the past three years.



U.S. Government: Vital Funding Bills Await Dysfunctional Congress

The difficulties of governing with slim majorities in both the House and Senate are in clear focus as 2024 draws near. Until Congress can complete its work appropriating discretionary funding, little progress can be made on other major legislation like the Farm Bill.



U.S. Agricultural Economy: High Costs Spell Lackluster Profitability for Farm Incomes

Higher interest rates, a strong U.S. dollar and the resilience of the national economy have weighed heavily on agricultural commodity prices. The biggest problem for farm margins heading into 2024 is the elevated cost of production. While fertilizer prices have fallen, other costs of production remain stubbornly high. The northern hemisphere will likely have a strong El Niño weather pattern during the growing season for the first time since 2015.



Grains, Farm Supply and Biofuels: Renewable Diesel Will Shift More Acres to Soybeans

The renewable diesel boom and the smaller U.S. soybean harvest of 2023 will drive an expansion of soybean acreage in 2024. Both ethanol producers and soybean crushers are benefiting from rising demand for biofuels. The grain and oilseed price outlook hinges largely on the value of the U.S. dollar, conditions of wheat in Russia, and harvests of corn and soybeans in South America.



Food and Beverage: Consumers Seek Value Amid Elevated Prices

Elevated prices will continue to impact consumer shopping behavior.

Cost-saving behaviors, including purchasing from lower-cost retailers, trading down to private-label brands and value shopping, will likely linger.



Power and Energy: Global Discord Underscores Need for Energy Security

Global conflicts create significant uncertainty for commodity markets and energy prices. Complicating matters further, global suppliers are reconciling the prospect of an accelerated energy transition with the realities of today's fossil fuel-dependent economies. The World Bank asserts that if conflict-driven market disruptions escalate, oil prices could blow past \$150 per barrel in 2024.



Communications: Despite Tailwinds, Broadband Buildouts Face Obstacles

The broadband market will remain a bright spot for the U.S. economy in 2024. Investments flowing into the industry are unprecedented. However, telecom operators face several obstacles to executing their network buildout plans on time and on budget. The challenges include the available labor market, tightening credit conditions and managing through the permitting process, which has proven to be a bottleneck for fiber builds. A significant amount of network build work scheduled for 2024 means many contractors are already booked up to a year out.

CoBank is one of the largest private providers of credit to the U.S. rural economy. The bank delivers loans, leases and other financial services to agribusiness, rural infrastructure and Farm Credit customers in all 50 states.



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EFFICIENCY TIPS FOR MANUFACTURED HOMES

BY MIRANDA BOUTELLE



If you live in a manufactured home, there are several tasks you can complete to improve comfort and use less energy.

Photo Source: Brian Wangenheim

More than 22 million Americans live in manufactured homes, according to the National Association of State Energy Officials. This represents 15% of housing in rural areas and 3% in urban areas.

If you live in a manufactured home, there are several tasks you can complete to improve comfort and use less energy – including a variety of home improvement to-dos, such as air sealing, duct sealing, adding insulation, and installing new windows, showerheads, faucet aerators and lightbulbs.

Understanding your home's construction

Knowing how manufactured homes are built helps point to where you can seal in savings around the house. These homes are constructed in factories and then transported and set up on-site. Construction in a factory reduces costs, making manufactured homes an affordable option. That lower price point can come partly from the use of less expensive equipment and fewer materials, such as lower-efficiency heating equipment or less insulation.

If you are considering buying a manufactured home, ENERGY STAR®-certified manufactured homes are 30% more energy efficient than standard models, with various options that increase the home's energy efficiency.

If you already live in a manufactured home, you likely know that

manufactured homes are constructed in sections. One section is a single-wide home, two are combined to make a double-wide home and three make a triple-wide home.

Common challenges

The biggest efficiency issues often come from duct systems, which deliver heating and cooling throughout the home. The ductwork is typically located in the cavity between the floor and the transport barrier, which protects the underside of the manufactured home while it is transported from the factory to the site. Typically, one long duct runs the length of each section of the home, with the registers or vents cut into it.

If you think this may be an issue in your manufactured home, the first step is to ensure all registers are accessible, open, and not covered by furniture, rugs, dog beds or anything else.

Next, check your ductwork by removing the registers and looking inside. Anything inside the duct will restrict airflow, so check that it is free and clear. Use a mirror and flashlight to look into the duct or take a picture by sticking a camera or phone inside and snapping some shots with flash in each direction.

If you have a double-wide or triple-wide, you will likely have a crossover duct, which joins the ducts in each section. The crossover duct is typically a large flexible duct with an inner liner, insulation and an outer cover to

protect the insulation. Damaged or disconnected crossover ducts allow the air you pay to heat escape under the home. Often, damage is done by animals chewing or scratching to get inside the warm area. An inspection of the crossover duct requires crawling under the home. That's a dirty job and often a tight spot, so you might choose to hire a professional.

Other energy efficiency measures

Another place to check for efficiency issues is the joint joining of the sections of a double-wide or triple-wide-together. This is often covered by trim when the home is placed. You can caulk around the trim or remove it and caulk underneath to reduce air leakage.

Weatherstripping doors and windows to make sure they seal tightly will also reduce drafts and save energy. Some homes can benefit from additional insulation in the attic or under the floor. Those projects typically require specialized equipment or help from a professional.

Often, weatherization assistance programs provide discounted and no-cost energy-saving upgrades. Check with your county or electric co-op for more information.

Miranda Boutelle writes on energy efficiency topics for the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association, the national trade association representing nearly 900 electric co-ops.



Damaged or disconnected ducts allow the air you pay to heat escape under the home.

Photo Source: Efficiency Services Group

CYBERSECURITY BEGINS WITH PROACTIVE MEASURES



Electric cooperatives recognize the evolving cyber threat landscape that poses disruptions to the nation's electric grid. As responsible providers of power to our member-consumers, co-ops are taking proactive measures to secure the grid.

Cyber threats, ranging from phishing to compromised passwords, can disrupt power reliability. That's why electric co-ops continually assess vulnerabilities, monitor emerging threats and implement cybersecurity defense measures. By securing the grid against cyber threats, co-ops ensure a more reliable power supply, reducing the risk of disruptions.

Electric co-ops implement multiple cybersecurity strategies to utilize a defense-in-depth approach, emphasizing concern for our local communities and the importance of reliability for our members.

Co-ops deploy advanced monitoring and protection systems that

continuously analyze network traffic, detect suspicious activity and alert security personnel to potential problems. Additionally, co-ops regularly practice security audits to identify vulnerabilities, assess risks, and implement necessary updates and patches to safeguard critical infrastructure.

A collaborative effort

Electric co-ops regularly engage with other co-ops, industry organizations, government agencies and cybersecurity experts to share best practices, develop lessons learned and stay current on the latest threats.

We also understand the importance of educating all employees on the latest cybersecurity issues, best practices and the significance of adhering to security protocols.

In addition to internal measures, co-ops establish dedicated cybersecurity points of contact so members can easily identify

individuals to discuss any cyber-related concerns. Co-op members are regularly targeted by energy scammers, whether through dishonest claims, messages sent as emails or phone scams from people falsely claiming to represent the co-op. By identifying and reporting these incidents, you can help keep our co-op community safe from cyber threats and scams.

Commitment to reliability and security

Electric co-ops remain committed to providing reliable power to the members we serve. Our top priority is to keep your information secure and your lights on.

We will continue working hard to strengthen the grid, keep data safe and ensure the long-term well-being of our local communities. In the face of increasing cyber threats, these proactive measures provide a foundation for a robust and secure electric grid.

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FOR THE LOVE OF BOOK CLUBS

BY DARCY DOUGHERTY MAULSBY

With Valentine's Day just around the corner, I'm intrigued by surveys showing that more people (especially younger generations) plan to spend the holiday with friends. It's a different approach that's far less focused on romance.

To me, that's a good reminder of the many forms of caring and love. One of the most inspiring stories I've heard lately came from my friend Marlene Armbrecht, who mentioned she's been a member of a local book club since the fall of 1973.

Once a novel concept

While book clubs are common today, this was a novel concept (no pun intended) 50 years ago.

"All of us were stay-at-home moms or worked part time, so we enjoyed meeting in the afternoon the third Thursday of every month," recalls Marlene, one of the club's original members.

There had been no grand plan to start the club. Arlene Christensen of Lake City and her friend Marilyn Willis (also a Lake City resident) had been reading the new novel, "My Name Is Asher Lev" by Chaim Potok. They decided to invite a few friends to join them.

Within a few years, the club had grown to about nine members, including several newcomers who had moved to Lake City and Rockwell City in the late 1970s. For years, the club met once a month at members' homes. Each member had the opportunity to choose a book every few months. The member who chose the book would purchase copies for her fellow club members, who would then reimburse the hostess at the meeting. The club "modernized" its system when books became available through interlibrary loans at the local library.

Fast forward to March 2020, when club members gathered at Karen Willis's home in Lake City. No one



Marlene Armbrecht (back row, right) is pictured with members of her book club.

knew everything was about to change forever due to COVID-19. As the pandemic spread, club members decided to keep meeting via Zoom video calls – a tradition they still maintain.

"Zoom has allowed several members who had moved out of the area to be active in our group again," says Marlene, who notes that club members are responsible for getting their own books.

The ladies maintain an impressive record book listing the titles they've read through the years. Marlene estimates the total is close to 500 books. No time to read the entire book before the club's next gathering? No worries!

"Everyone is always encouraged to come and just listen," Marlene says. "Sometimes our book discussions are fairly short, but we always share what's going on in our busy lives. What a fabulous support group we were – and still are – for each other!"

A club extending far beyond books

These friends know a book club is much more than books. It's a support system, a second family. Once you're in, you're in for life.



Lake City area book club members in 1986.

"I love these ladies," says Diane Ely of Iowa City. The former Lake City resident is grateful to reconnect with the club, thanks to Zoom. "The richness comes from sharing life experiences. These women feel like extended family."

I had the chance to visit with these ladies this past summer at the Lake City Country Club, where they reminisced, shared updates about their family (including their grandchildren) and looked ahead to the club's 51st year. It's clear their connections become more precious as the years go by.

Author Louis L'Amour once said, "Once you read a book you care about, some part of it is always with you." I love how this truth is also reflected in the cherished friendships that have endured a lifetime, thanks to one remarkable book club.

Darcy Dougherty Maulsby lives near her family's Century Farm northwest of Lake City. Visit her at www.darcymaulsby.com.

Visit our website at www.ieclmagazine.com



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