



Touchstone Energy®
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● SEPTEMBER 2024

iowa

ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE LIVING



Meet this year's
Shine the Light winners

Leslie Kaufman takes the helm
of statewide association

Tailgating recipes

Win a cordless leaf blower ► See Page 3

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ON THE COVER

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

FALL INTO SAFETY THIS SEASON

BY SCOTT MEINECKE



The kids are back in school and harvest season is almost here. Now is an ideal time to review some important safety precautions for fall.

Safety in the field

As you head out to the fields during harvest, always keep a 10-foot clearance between your equipment and power lines. Take time to study where all overhead power lines, poles and guy wires are located on your property and inform your workers about them. Plan your route between fields and on public roads so that you avoid low-hanging power lines; never attempt to raise or move a power line to clear a path. When moving large equipment or high loads near a power line, always use a spotter to help make sure that contact is not made with a line.

If your equipment comes into contact with a power pole or power line, stay in the cab and call your local utility or 911 to report the contact. Keep others away from you or from touching the vehicle. Do not exit the vehicle until an authority tells you the line has been deenergized. If your equipment is on fire and you need to exit, jump clear of the cab with both feet together and shuffle step with both feet on the ground until you are 50 feet away to avoid electrocution.

Look up and live

Cleaning gutters or working on the roof this fall? Always choose a non-conductive ladder made of wood or fiberglass for utmost safety. Pick a safe route to carry the ladder to the work area, and then carry it horizontally rather than upright. Be aware of electrical lines and tree branches in the area where you are working. When using an extension ladder, tie off the top of the ladder whenever possible.

Use the 1:4 lean ratio – the ladder should be 1 foot away from the wall for every 4 feet the ladder rises – to ensure a stable working platform.

Move over or slow down

We need your help in keeping our lineworkers, engineers and maintenance workers safe on Iowa's roadways. If you see any vehicle stopped on the side of the road with flashing lights activated, you are required by law to move over or slow down, preferably both. Please give our employees room on the road to work safely; their families thank you!

Test your portable generators

Take advantage of the nice weather to run and test your portable

generators before a potential winter power outage. Operate your generator on a stable, dry surface and avoid rainy or wet conditions. Do not use a generator in an enclosed area; make sure the space is well-ventilated and be aware of carbon monoxide poisoning, which can be deadly. Use heavy-duty extension cords to connect appliances to the generator, and always allow the generator to cool before refueling. Finally, never plug your portable generator into your home as it can back feed onto the electric grid and endanger our lineworkers.

Scott Meinecke is the director of safety and loss control for the Iowa Association of Electric Cooperatives.

EDITOR'S CHOICE CONTEST

WIN A TORO CORDLESS LEAF BLOWER!

The leaves will soon be falling, and a leaf blower is a must-have tool for your yard. This brushless leaf-blower tool provides powerful air speed and 70 minutes of runtime on a single charge. It comes with a 2.0-Ah battery and a Toro battery charger.

Visit our website and win!

Enter this month's contest by visiting www.ieclmagazine.com no later than Sept. 30. 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 pressure washer from the July issue was **Jennifer Meier**, a **T.I.P. Rural Electric Cooperative** member-consumer.



ENTER ONLINE BY SEPT. 30!

IT'S TIME TO SAVE ENERGY

Heating season will arrive soon, making it a great time to plan to save energy.

No matter what kind of heating system you have in your house, you can save money and increase your comfort by properly maintaining and upgrading your equipment. But remember, an energy-efficient furnace alone will not have as great an impact on your energy bills as using the whole-house approach. By combining proper equipment maintenance and upgrades with recommended insulation, air sealing and thermostat settings, you can save about 30% on your energy bill while reducing environmental emissions.



7 HEATING TIPS

- 1 Set your programmable thermostat as low as is comfortable in the winter and lower the setpoint when you're sleeping or away from home.
- 2 Clean or replace filters on furnaces once a month or as recommended.
- 3 Clean warm-air registers, baseboard heaters and radiators as needed; make sure they're not blocked by furniture, carpeting or drapes.
- 4 Eliminate trapped air from hot water radiators once or twice a season; if unsure about how to perform this task, contact a professional.
- 5 Place heat-resistant radiator reflectors between exterior walls and the radiators.
- 6 Turn off kitchen, bath and other exhaust fans after you are done cooking or bathing. When replacing exhaust fans, consider installing high-efficiency, low-noise models.
- 7 During the winter, keep the draperies and shades on your south-facing windows open during the day to allow the sunlight to enter your home and closed at night to reduce the chill you may feel from cold windows.



WANTED: Rural Iowa high school students who have a passion for leadership



Attend our webinar series in October for a chance to win Apple AirPods and a \$1,000 college scholarship! Learn more at [IowaYouthTour.com](https://www.IowaYouthTour.com)

RESOURCE GUIDE FOR CLEAN ENERGY

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has unveiled a new rural energy resource guide that will make it easier for rural communities to identify federal funding for clean energy. The guide, **Bright Ideas: Federal Resources to Boost Energy Efficiency in Rural America**, is designed to help rural communities identify federal funding for clean energy, including programs made possible by the Inflation Reduction Act.

The guide showcases USDA Rural Development programs that are helping individuals and organizations finance renewable energy systems and infrastructure across rural America.

Programs featured in the guide offer funding to:

- Make energy-efficient home repairs.
- Finance small- or large-scale energy infrastructure.
- Fund energy efficiency equipment for business and industry.
- Generate emergency energy in rural areas.
- Produce clean energy from sources such as biobased materials.

The rural energy resource guide also includes stories from rural development customers on ways USDA programs and services have helped them meet their clean energy needs.



Scan the QR code to access the guide.



7,200
VOLT LINES
16 YEARS ON THE **JOB**
RESTORING
POWER TO
500
MEMBERS

BUT RIGHT NOW IT'S YOU I'M WORRIED ABOUT.

HIS JOB IS DANGEROUS ENOUGH.
When you see utility crews at work, slow down and move over. You have the power to protect a life.



ENTER TO WIN



SEND US YOUR RURAL IOWA PHOTOS

RECEIVE \$100 FOR A PUBLISHED PHOTO

We're always looking for stunning images for the cover of *Iowa Electric Cooperative Living* magazine. If we select your photo for a cover, we'll award you \$100. The photos must be clear, of an Iowa place served by an electric cooperative and in high resolution. To be considered, email photos to editor@ieclmagazine.com with "Cover Submission" in the subject line. Please also include the name of the electric cooperative that serves you.

LESLIE KAUFMAN TAKES THE HELM OF STATEWIDE ASSOCIATION

BY ERIN CAMPBELL

On July 26, Leslie Kaufman began her new role as the executive vice president and general manager (EVP/GM) of the Iowa Association of Electric Cooperatives (IAEC), the statewide trade association serving Iowa's electric cooperatives. After a comprehensive executive search, the IAEC board selected Kaufman to succeed Chuck Soderberg, who retired this summer after nine years of service at IAEC. She is the association's sixth EVP/GM in IAEC's 82-year history.

We sat down with Kaufman during her first week on the job to learn more about her and the plans she has for serving Iowa's electric cooperatives.



Leslie Kaufman is pictured with Chuck Soderberg, former executive vice president and general manager of the the Iowa Association of Electric Cooperatives.

Q: What compelled you to apply for the EVP/GM position at IAEC?

After previously serving as an association executive, I believe I can positively contribute to an organization at a higher level.

When I saw the posting for the EVP/GM opening at IAEC, I noted the many similarities between the association and the statewide association I was working for at that time, Kansas Electric Cooperatives, Inc. (KEC). The programming, staff size and structure were very similar, so my skills and experiences fit well with IAEC's model.

IAEC's core values align with my own personal values, so I knew there would be a sense of shared purpose. Our family has traveled to and through Iowa several times over the years, and once we knew of the opening, my husband and I revisited the Des Moines area. We really liked it and felt like it was a place we could easily call home. I am honored by the board's confidence in me to lead IAEC in this next chapter of serving electric cooperative members.

Q: During your initial days on the job, what were your first impressions of IAEC and Iowa's electric cooperatives?

The staff and members that I have met have welcomed me wholeheartedly. The staff is incredibly talented and committed to serving the membership. The IAEC board takes its responsibilities very seriously and wants the organization to provide value to its members.

Q: In your first few months at IAEC, what will be your focus/strategy?

Overall, I want to ensure a smooth leadership transition for members, staff and the association as a whole.

A top priority is visiting member cooperatives and meeting with managers and local board members. I want to learn about each co-op, its successes and the challenges it faces. I also want to know members' thoughts on IAEC's services and programs, particularly if IAEC could provide different or additional services to help members succeed. These discussions tie into the association's strategic objective

to evaluate/expand services. Meeting legislative and government leaders and fellow utility and association peers is also a priority.

Q: What would you like to share with readers about your work with cooperatives in Kansas?

For 20 years, I had the privilege of working for cooperative members in Kansas. As president/CEO of the Kansas Cooperative Council (Council), I worked primarily with agriculture cooperatives of all sizes, from single stations to the largest farmer-owned cooperatives in the U.S. The Council also served as an umbrella association for all types of cooperatives in Kansas, including the statewide associations for

A top priority is visiting member cooperatives and meeting with managers and local board members. I want to learn about each co-op, its successes and the challenges it faces.

electric co-ops and credit unions, the Farm Credit system, and telecommunications cooperatives.

The Council supported KEC, the Kansas statewide, in their lobbying efforts and that relationship eventually led me to KEC over six years ago. While at KEC, I led the organization's advocacy efforts, including public policy development, lobbying, much of the regulatory work, grassroots outreach and legal activities.

Q: What are some activities and achievements from KEC that you are most proud of accomplishing?

During my first legislative session at KEC, we secured a significant victory for co-ops related to service territory protection. In Kansas, municipalities can unilaterally annex co-op electric service territory and displace the co-op. If the area taken was prime for development, but service had not yet been extended into the territory, the co-op was not compensated for that lost opportunity. We capitalized on some unexpected opportunities and succeeded in moving legislation providing notice and an opportunity to bid to remain the service provider. If not allowed to do so, the legislation

My goal is to do my best each and every day to ensure that Iowa is the best place to operate an electric cooperative, be a co-op member or work for a cooperative.

created a 10-year window in which the co-op could receive a percentage of revenues from new services that developed in the annexed area.

We secured another significant legislative victory for electric cooperatives, statutorily reversing a decision from the Kansas Corporation Commission that would have required electric utilities to assume liability for marking underground lines they did not own or control and may not have known even existed. We advanced legislation recognizing the electric utility's responsibility for marking extends only to lines the utility owns or controls.

I led the effort to launch an adopt-a-legislator program to connect legislators who did not have co-op service territory in their district with an electric cooperative. Beneficial and meaningful relationships

were forged across party lines and geographic boundaries, fostering greater understanding of cooperatives and the issues they face. Members and lawmakers are truly enjoying opportunities to work together.

Q: Tell us about your family.

My husband Mike is a band and music teacher at a small, rural school. He teaches in the town I grew up in, but I had graduated and left for college before he was hired at the school. He had already committed to teaching the 2024-25 school year when I was offered the EVP/GM position at IAEC, so he will finish out this school year in Kansas and then join me full-time in Iowa.

We have two children. Our oldest, Jared, is married to Megan, and they live in Fairmount, Indiana. Jared is an assistant pastor, and Megan is a social worker. Our daughter Emily is also an assistant pastor and works at a church in Brookings, South Dakota.

Q: What attractions in Iowa are you looking forward to experiencing?

We have already attended an Iowa Cubs game and look forward to seeing more games. We also hear great things about the farmers markets in the Des Moines area. I want to go to Pella Tulip Time next spring.

Q: Do you have a mantra or words to live by?

Professionally, my goal is to do my best each and every day to ensure that Iowa is the best place to operate an electric cooperative, be a co-op member or work for a cooperative. As a 4-H alum, their motto, "To make the best better," still resonates with me and reminds me that there is always something more that can be done to improve a program, service or process. Another favorite saying is from a sign a friend has on her office wall. It's very simple: "Work hard and be nice."

Erin Campbell is the director of communications for the Iowa Association of Electric Cooperatives.



Leslie Kaufman (second from right) is pictured with her family, which includes her daughter Emily (left), son Jared and his wife Megan (center), and husband Mike.



TAILGATE BITES

STUFFED HOT PEPPERS

- 8 ounces cream cheese
- ½ cup Monterey Jack cheese, shredded
- ½ cup sharp cheddar cheese, shredded
- 6 strips bacon, cooked and crumbled
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- ¼ teaspoon garlic salt
- ¼ teaspoon chili powder

15-20 mini sweet peppers or hot peppers

Mix all ingredients except peppers. Cut peppers in half lengthwise and remove seeds. Spread cheese mixture in pepper halves. Bake at 350 degrees F for 20-30 minutes. If using sweet peppers, add some chopped hot peppers to the cheese mixture if desired.

Lauren Zollinger • Rock Rapids
Lyon Rural Electric Cooperative

RANCH CHICKEN

- 1½ pounds boneless, skinless chicken thighs
Lawry's Seasoned Salt, to taste
- 1 cup ranch style dressing
- ½ teaspoon coarse black pepper

Trim excess fat off chicken. Season with Lawry's and place in bowl. Pour ranch dressing over chicken and sprinkle with pepper. Allow to marinate for 1-2 hours or cook immediately. Grill on a wood pellet grill until internal temperature is 165 degrees F. Serves 4-6

Laura DeSmet • Larchwood
Lyon Rural Electric Cooperative

SIMPLE CHEESE DIP

- 1 pound ground beef
- 1 block cheese
- 1 can pizza sauce
- tortilla chips

Cook ground beef, then combine with cheese and pizza sauce in a slow cooker. Heat until melted. Serve with tortilla chips. Serves 12

Rebecca Hancox • Plano
Chariton Valley Electric Cooperative, Inc.

GRIDIRON GUACAMOLE

- 3 avocados, pitted
- 1 small jalapeño, finely chopped, remove seeds if desired
- ¼ cup fresh cilantro, chopped plus more for serving
- ¼ cup small white or red onion, finely chopped
- 1 lime, juiced
- ½ teaspoon kosher salt, or more to taste
- 2 tablespoons nutritional yeast, optional
- tortilla chips

In a large bowl, mix avocados, jalapeño, cilantro, onion, lime juice, salt and nutritional yeast, if desired. Slowly turn bowl as you run a fork through the mixture to ensure guacamole stays chunky. Continue until desired consistency is reached. Top with additional cilantro and serve with tortilla chips. Serves 6

Jeffrey Hedquist • Fairfield
Access Energy Cooperative

CHILI SAUCE FOR HOT DOGS

- 2 pounds ground beef
- ¼ cup onion, finely chopped
- 1 clove garlic, minced
- 2 cups ketchup
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 4 tablespoons vinegar
- 2 teaspoons paprika
- 1 tablespoon prepared mustard
- ¼ cup Worcestershire sauce
- 1 teaspoon hot sauce
- 1 teaspoon chili powder
- 1 can kidney beans

Brown ground beef, onion and garlic, drain. Add remaining ingredients and simmer until heated. *Serves 16-20*

Anna Domnick • Rock Rapids
Lyon Rural Electric Cooperative

TAILGATE PARTY MIX

- 4 cups Rice Chex cereal
- 4 cups Corn Chex cereal
- 2 cups cheese crackers
- 3 tablespoons butter
- 1 package taco seasoning mix
- 4 cups cheese popcorn

Mix cereal and crackers together. Melt butter and add taco seasoning, stir well. Pour over cereal and stir until evenly coated. Microwave 3 minutes. Cool for 30 minutes, then stir in popcorn. Store in air-tight container.

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

TAILGATE BRUNCH ENCHILADAS

- 2 cups ham, fully cooked and cubed
- ½ cup onion, chopped
- 10 8-inch flour tortillas
- 2 cups cheddar cheese, shredded
- 1 tablespoon flour
- 2 cups skim milk
- 6 eggs, beaten
- ½ teaspoon salt

Combine ham and onion. Place about ½ cup of mixture down the center of each tortilla. Top each with 2 tablespoons cheese. Roll up tortilla and place seam side down in a greased 9x13-inch pan. In a bowl, combine flour, milk, eggs and salt. Stir well, then pour over tortillas. Cover and refrigerate for 8 hours or overnight. Remove from refrigerator 30 minutes before baking. Bake covered at 350 degrees F for 25 minutes. Uncover and bake an additional 10 minutes. Sprinkle with any remaining cheese and bake 3 minutes. Let stand for 10 minutes before serving. *Serves 10*

Mary Beth Peiffer • Cedar Rapids
Linn County Rural Electric Cooperative

Visit www.ieclmagazine.com and search our online archive of hundreds of recipes in various categories.



SLOW COOKER SHREDDED CHICKEN NACHOS

- 1½ pounds boneless, skinless chicken breasts
- 1 1-ounce packet taco seasoning
- 1 15.5-ounce can corn, drained
- 1 15.5-ounce can black beans, drained and rinsed
- 1 cup salsa
- ½ lime, juiced
- 1 tablespoon fresh cilantro, minced for garnish
- tortilla chips or cooked rice

Place chicken breasts in bottom of slow cooker. Season the tops of the chicken with half of the taco seasoning. Pour the corn, beans, salsa and remaining taco seasoning on top of the chicken. Cook on low for 6-8 hours, or until chicken is cooked through and the internal temperature has reached 165 degrees F. Remove the chicken to shred, then return to slow cooker. Stir in the lime juice and garnish with fresh cilantro. Serve immediately over tortilla chips or a bed of rice. *Serves 4*

Theresa Hays • Redfield
Guthrie County REC

WANTED:

BREAD WINNERS

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Deadline is Sept. 30

Submit your **favorite bread recipe**. Please include your name, address, telephone number, co-op name, recipe category and number of servings on all submissions.



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(Attach your recipe as a Word document or PDF to your email message.)

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Iowa Electric Cooperative Living magazine
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Des Moines, IA 50322



MEET THE 2024 SHINE THE LIGHT WINNERS

Judy Hess is pictured second from the left.



COMMUNITY BEACON

JUDY HESS AND THE MAGS REVITALIZE FONDA

BY RYAN CORNELIUS

Driven by their commitment to community, the Touchstone Energy® Cooperatives of Iowa held their fourth-annual Shine the Light contest in June to celebrate local volunteers. Employees and member-consumers of Iowa's locally owned electric cooperatives were invited to nominate someone who makes a positive difference in their community.

The judging committee reviewed essays from 75 outstanding nominations, which were published in the August issue of this magazine, and selected three winners.

Congratulations to **Judy Hess**, who is recognized for community dedication and innovation through Moms and Grandmas for Fonda Inc.; **Doug Pralle**, who is recognized for his generous efforts through Compassion Flights; and **Beth Thole**, who is recognized for her commitment to preserving the area's agricultural heritage.

These three winners have been awarded a \$3,000 donation to their charity. The following pages showcase and honor each of the Shine the Light contest winners' commitment to humbly serving their communities.

Learn more at www.iowaShineTheLight.com.

When Kerry Noethe heard about the Shine the Light contest, one name stood out instantly: Judy Hess. As the vibrant founder of Moms and Grandmas for Fonda Inc. (MAGs), Hess represents the heart and soul of community dedication and innovation.

"I've always admired the group's dedication," Noethe shares. "Judy has always been a good leader. I've been part of volunteer programs in the past, and I know how important it was to me when my children were young. Keeping people aware of the community and showing it's a good place to live is valuable even though we're a bedroom community.

Judy is always looking for new ideas, and she's just a great motivator."

Amanda Johnson, a dedicated member of MAGs, highlights the group's profound connection to their hometown.

"I think we have a lot of pride about our hometown of Fonda," Johnson says. "Our kids and our grandkids are really important to us, so it's just a no-brainer to do things that benefit our community and our kids."

For Noethe, now a grandmother herself, the value of a thriving community is deeply personal.



“My grandchildren are 16 and 13, and they have been coming to Fonda since they were babies,” she explains.

“Our little towns are just dying out. We want to keep Fonda a place where our kids can play and enjoy our town, keeping it a community where people want to live and raise their families.”

Maintaining community spirit and vitality

Hess launched MAGs in 2018, and the group’s momentum has been unstoppable ever since.

“We put the group together in 2018, setting up the pool. We put everything toward the youth,” Hess explains. “We gave them a freezer and refrigerator to use. We added a slide, lawn chairs, a water filler and a drinking fountain in the park. We’ve organized various fundraisers for the group.”

Every MAGs project relies on volunteer efforts, donations and grants.

“I got some people together,” Hess recalls. “Everyone was excited about it, and we started doing fundraisers. We have Chicken Bingo, and we’ve organized different community events and hosted a father/daughter dance.”

Other fundraising events feature a variety of activities, including festive Christmas events, an exciting rodeo and many more community gatherings.

MAGs is raising funds to replace the outdated public basketball court. The new court, projected to cost \$78,000, will feature a regulation-size VersaCourt floor with official markings and new baskets. Hess hopes the project will be completed by 2025.

Hess and MAGs are significantly impacting Fonda, turning it into a more vibrant and welcoming community. Their unwavering commitment ensures that the town remains a cherished place for current and future generations.

Article contributed by Ryan Cornelius, vice president of corporate relations, Corn Belt Power Cooperative.



WHERE HOPE GROWS WINGS
FLYING THE COMPASSIONATE SKIES WITH DOUG PRALLE

Doug Pralle is pictured with his airplane.

BY RYAN CORNELIUS

Doug Pralle has been flying since 2008, but his journey into the skies started much earlier, rooted in an emotional childhood memory.

“When I was a kid, my Dad died at an early age,” Pralle recalls. “I found some of his pilot books. He was training to be a pilot. I think, as an 8-year-old, it kind of tied me to him. Once I got old enough and could afford it, I got my license.”

One particular childhood memory stands out, shaping his future endeavors.

“My Dad was in a hospital in Chicago, and the doctor gave us his limo to take to a Cubs game. As a kid, you remember that stuff. His kindness created a spark in me,” Pralle reflects.

That spark ignited a spirit for giving back. In 2008 and 2009, Pralle flew a local child and his mother to Rochester for cancer treatment.

“Years later, I started thinking about ways to give back and use some of the skills we built over time, so we started Compassion Flights,” he says.

Wings of hope

Compassion Flights, a nonprofit organization, offers free flights to those in need of medical care. Pralle and Compassion Flights fly patients from

Iowa to surrounding states, working with other groups for longer trips.

The process of applying for a compassion flight is simple. Those in need or who know someone in need can visit www.compassionflights.com, fill out an online flight request, and get a response directly from Pralle or his wife.

When Pralle isn’t flying for Compassion Flights, he’s working his day job as a crop duster, spraying fields with an airplane or helicopter, and farming with his brother. The nonprofit operates entirely on donations.

“We are here for everyone,” Pralle emphasizes. “We work 100% on donations. No one takes any wage. My spray business pays for most of the bills, from the lighting and heating. When people donate money, they donate it directly to a flight.”

Each flight costs about \$500, depending on various factors. Despite the costs and the challenges, Pralle remains committed to his mission.

“Our motto is ‘Where Hope Grows Wings,’” he says. “We’re trying to help somebody not think about what’s actually going on in their life. We want to just get them away from everything for a little bit.”

Through Compassion Flights, Pralle offers more than just transportation – he provides a lifeline – a moment of relaxation and a twinkle of hope for those navigating the toughest times of their lives.

Article contributed by Ryan Cornelius, vice president of corporate relations, Corn Belt Power Cooperative.



NAVIGATING SUPPLY CHAIN CHALLENGES

BY SCOTT FLOOD

From grocery store shelves to repair parts for vehicles, we've all had firsthand experiences with supply chain issues in recent years. Parts and components electric co-ops use every day are also in short supply, which delays planned upgrades for power reliability and increases the costs of parts and labor.

Cooperation among cooperatives

Electric co-ops are working together to find innovative ways to address supply chain issues. This year, those efforts resulted in a major win regarding updated federal efficiency standards for distribution transformers, which has co-op leaders breathing more easily.

Electric transformers are critical equipment that help deliver power to consumers. These essential devices adjust electricity voltage, up or down, to enable safe and efficient power flow.

In 2022, the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) proposed new efficiency requirements for distribution transformers. Among other provisions, the proposal would have required manufacturers of those transformers to switch to amorphous steel within three years in place of the grain-oriented electrical steel (GOES) that has long been used. Amorphous steel is chemically altered in ways that may make transformers more efficient.

The National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA) is wary of the DOE's expectations for this change in material, especially when transformer manufacturers are already struggling to keep up with demand. Currently, there is only one U.S. producer of this specialty steel.

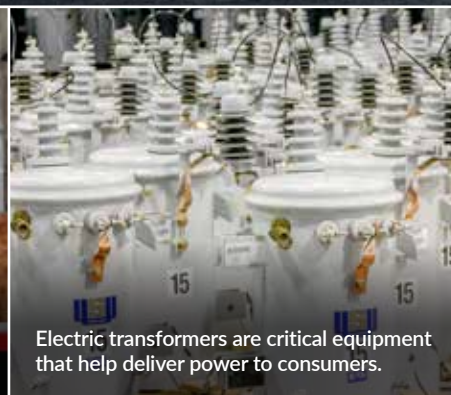
The availability of federal infrastructure funding is making it possible for co-ops to invest in the capacity, safety and reliability of the systems delivering electricity to



For the foreseeable future, electric co-ops will continue to face challenges in securing the supplies and equipment they need.



Parts and components electric co-ops use every day are in short supply.



Electric transformers are critical equipment that help deliver power to consumers.

co-op communities. That's good for co-ops and their members, but it's increasing pressure on the supply chain.

"The domestic supply chain hasn't caught up with demand, and the industry is going through a learning curve," notes Stephanie Crawford, NRECA regulatory affairs director. "It will take some time for manufacturers to retool their production and for producers to make enough amorphous steel to meet the need."

Creating a squeeze on supply

While co-op leaders appreciate the significant federal money being made available to update local energy infrastructure, it is also putting a squeeze on supply.

"Amid all the challenges co-ops are already facing, it presents a big problem to ask the industry to make a 100% switch in just three years when the sole supplier only produces enough for about 5% of today's market," Crawford adds.

NRECA and electric co-ops joined others in the power industry to educate key contacts in Congress, the White House and the DOE about supply chain challenges, particularly the requirements for the quick shift to amorphous steel.

"After more than a year of advocacy efforts, the DOE issued its final rule, which allows continued use of GOES in smaller-sized transformers," Crawford explains. "This provides greater certainty with the transformer sizes cooperatives use the most, particularly in the residential segment."

The DOE rule also includes a longer compliance timeframe for shifting to amorphous steel.

"Extending the deadline to 2029 will help manufacturers adapt for the future," Crawford adds.

Scott Flood writes on a variety of energy-related topics for the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association, the national trade association representing nearly 900 electric co-ops.

FEDERAL TAX CREDITS, INCENTIVES AND REBATES FOR EFFICIENCY UPGRADES

BY MIRANDA BOUTELLE

Tax credits and rebates can help bridge the affordability gap for higher-efficiency equipment for your home, allowing you to complete energy efficiency upgrades that can lower your energy use and save you money in years to come.

Tax credits vs. rebates

Knowing the difference between a tax credit and a rebate is important. A rebate is a payment for purchasing or installing a qualified product or home improvement. Depending on how the rebate program is set up, it may be provided at the time of purchase or applied for and received after installation.

A tax credit is a dollar-for-dollar amount that taxpayers can report on their tax documents to reduce the amount of taxes owed. When you file your tax documents, you apply for a tax credit, so it typically takes longer to reap the benefits than a rebate.

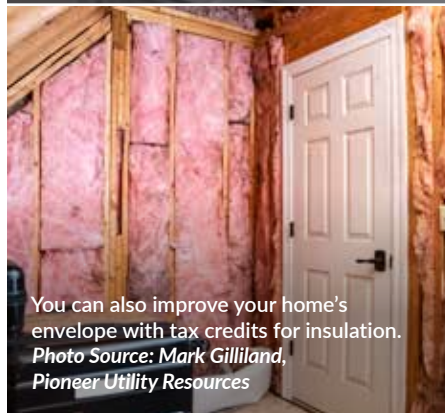
Tax credits for energy efficiency upgrades

According to ENERGY STAR®, homeowners can qualify for up to \$3,200 annually in federal tax credits for energy efficiency upgrades. Federal tax credits are available for heating and cooling system upgrades, including heat pumps, furnaces, central air conditioners, boilers and geothermal heat pumps. Tax credits for ENERGY STAR-rated heat pump water heaters cover 30% of the project cost, up to \$2,000. You can also improve your home's envelope – the portion of the home that separates the inside from the outside – with tax credits for insulation, windows and skylights.

If an energy efficiency upgrade requires improving the electrical panel in your home, there's a tax credit for that, too. You can receive 30% of the cost of the panel upgrade, up to \$600.



When shopping for appliances, look for the ENERGY STAR® logo on the energy guide to identify which products are the most efficient options. *Photo Source: Mark Gilliland, Pioneer Utility Resources*



You can also improve your home's envelope with tax credits for insulation. *Photo Source: Mark Gilliland, Pioneer Utility Resources*



Tax credits for ENERGY STAR® heat pump water heaters cover 30% of the project cost, up to \$2,000. *Photo Source: Bonneville Power Administration*

These federal tax credits are available through 2032. You must own the home you're upgrading, and it must be your primary residence. Federal tax credits only apply to existing homes in the U.S., not new construction.

Rebates for energy efficiency upgrades

The Inflation Reduction Act of 2022 expanded available funding for many home upgrades. The act allocated \$8.8 million for home rebate programs to be implemented at the state level, and this funding is offered in two different programs. The HOMES program allows up to \$8,000 per home for standard-income households. Higher rebates are available for low-to moderate-income households. The HEAR program offers rebates of up to \$14,000 per home for qualified, efficient electric equipment for low-to moderate-income households.

These programs are designed to bolster existing programs and should be available in late 2024 or early 2025.

Additional energy efficiency rebates might also be available. According to the American Council for an Energy-Efficient Economy, more than half of U.S. states require energy efficiency programs for residents. These programs can help people save money on electric bills and help states meet climate goals, reduce system costs and improve the electric grid.

Tax credit and rebate programs can make upgrades more affordable, helping you save money and improve the overall comfort of your home.

Miranda Boutelle writes on energy efficiency topics for the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association.

MEET THE 2024 SHINE THE LIGHT WINNERS



Beth Thole is pictured in the back row, second from left.

KEEPING HISTORY ALIVE BETH THOLE IS COMMITTED TO AGRICULTURAL HERITAGE

BY KELLY SLAGTER

Continued from Page 11

Gary and Karen Trei, members of Osceola Electric Cooperative, immediately thought of Beth Thole when they read the 2024 Shine the Light contest description in *Iowa Electric Cooperative Living* magazine. Thole's enthusiasm and dedication to remembering the past and educating future generations are things to be admired.

"Working with Beth is never dull," explains Karen. "When you volunteer for Beth, you never know which job you'll end up doing or who you'll end up working with."

As a retired teacher, Thole's passion for education lives on in her vision for a pavilion to educate residents of Osceola County about the area's deep agricultural heritage. The Osceola County Agriculture Pavilion on the county fairgrounds began taking shape seven years ago when Thole's research led her to realize the trials and determination of previous generations.

"It's important to keep that history alive and teach the people coming after us what their forefathers did," Thole explains. "The pavilion uses pictures and artifacts from donors to create exhibits that tell stories and trigger memories."

Bringing the community together
Since the Osceola County Agriculture Pavilion began, Thole and the

Agriculture Pavilion board have coordinated several events to unite the community and raise funds for the museum. The success of these events, which were entertaining and educational, is a testament to the integral role of each community member. Fundraisers included an escape room at a historic schoolhouse, cemetery headstone tours with local actors to bring the stories alive, tractor rides, auctions and dinners. Other donations, such as lumber and building materials, have also been abundant.

"When people bring something to donate, they often stick around to help set it up," Thole says.

Her vast knowledge of people within the community has brought together many volunteers, both young and old.

"Osceola Electric Cooperative is happy to contribute to educating the

community on our county's history," says Jeff TenNapel, general manager of Osceola Electric Cooperative.

For one of the exhibits, electric cooperative linemen assembled vintage material to recreate infrastructure, portraying what it looked like when electricity first came to rural Osceola County in the 1940s and 1950s. The display sits out front of the 100-year-old Agriculture Pavilion building as a reminder of how rural electrification dramatically improved the lives of farmers and their families.

Thole and the Agriculture Pavilion board have many ideas for using the \$3,000 donation; among them are purchasing tables for upcoming events and a smart TV to aid in the exhibits.

Article contributed by Kelly Slagter, customer service representative/communicator, Osceola Electric Cooperative.



HOPE BLOOMS ETERNAL

BY DARCY DOUGHERTY MAULSBY

If you had to guess, how much of Iowa was once covered with prairies? It's roughly 80%, by some estimates.

This tidbit of information was shared in the Master Conservationist program I completed this summer through Iowa State University (ISU) Extension and Outreach. Inspired to learn more, I attended a prairie field day in mid-July at ISU's Horticulture Research Station near Ames. About 75 of us toured a remnant prairie, a reconstructed prairie and the Iowa Department of Natural Resources' prairie seed production project, all of which help attract pollinators, protect soil and water quality, and provide an array of other benefits that give me hope for the future.

I was also awestruck by the beauty of ISU's prairie. Purple coneflowers and other native Iowa plants created a kaleidoscope of colors across a shallow valley framed by an oak tree more than 300 years old.

A place for prairie flowers

I was thinking about prairie plants when I recently reconnected with my friend Jennifer Welch, an urban conservationist with the Polk Soil & Water Conservation District in central Iowa. When I asked her about her post on Facebook, in which she asked friends to donate vases for a flower project, she was happy to tell me more.

"I started seeding prairie everywhere I could, including open spaces and along the lanes, after we moved to our farm in 1997," she explains. "I love finding any patches, even small ones, to transform the landscape into its native habitat."

Today, these areas flourish with everything from purple prairie clover plants to tall, yellow compass plants, with their distinctive sandpaper leaves that point north and south (hence the name).

"Our native landscaping is amazing," Jennifer adds. "It's so adaptable and hardy. It's also ever-changing and dazzles us with God's creativity."

Earlier this summer, Jennifer spent an hour harvesting some of her prairie flowers. Then she and the ladies in her Bible study group (called the Bittersweet Road, named for the road near Jennifer's home) designed about 45 vases of flowers filled with bee balm, gray-headed coneflower, pale purple coneflowers and other blooms.

Jennifer dropped off the bouquets at the Granger Nursing and Rehabilitation Center the next morning. She visited with a resident named Richard, who loved his prairie flower delivery.

"He recalled how his father started growing flowers when he was 55, and then he grew flowers, too," Jennifer says. "So, the bouquet made him smile."

Small acts of kindness can change the world

Jennifer has often seen this kind of "flower power" since she started her flower ministry in 2021. She enjoys hearing the stories recipients share about their gardening and flower memories. Sometimes, they want to talk about the person they plan to share their bouquet with.

Talk about a win-win. Jennifer finds fulfillment by sharing her flowers with others and educating people about Iowa's landscapes and ecosystems – all while bringing people more joy.

"I love to surprise people with flowers and bouquets. It makes them feel special, seen, valued and loved," she says. "It also makes me feel good to help them know they are seen, special, valued and loved by God."

Life is what you make of it, and Jennifer makes the most of her land and her prairie plants. It also



The ladies in Jennifer Welch's Bible study group designed vases of flowers, which were delivered to the Granger Nursing and Rehabilitation Center.

proves that no act of kindness, however small, is ever wasted.

While it's easy to sometimes lose faith in people in today's challenging world, sometimes a simple act of kindness – like a small bouquet of prairie flowers – is all it takes to help hope bloom again.

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



A flower recipient enjoys his prairie flower delivery from Jennifer Welch.

Visit our website at www.ieclmagazine.com



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