

Southwest Lines

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A monthly publication for members of Southwest Iowa Rural Electric Cooperative

January 2025

Powering Lives, Empowering Communities: Statewide association annual meeting celebrates 2024 achievements and introduces new leadership

The Iowa Association of Electric Cooperatives (IAEC), the trade association for Iowa's electric cooperatives, conducted its 2024 Annual Meeting at the Sheraton West Des Moines Conference Center on December 5 and 6 with more than 350 registered attendees. Board directors and employees from Iowa's locally owned electric co-ops received informative updates from statewide directors and staff in addition to learning about industry trends and best practices from invited speakers.

"Our theme of *Powering Lives, Empowering Communities* is all about our electric cooperative mission," remarked outgoing IAEC Board President Kenny VandenBerg. "And even in this year of transition at IAEC, we remain laser-focused on helping our member co-ops carry out this mission."

IAEC Executive Vice President and General Manager Leslie Kaufman covered several topics during her first executive report to the members, including a summary of activities from her initial 130 days at IAEC and a preview by department of deliverables to expect in the year ahead. Kaufman was hired in July, bringing vast leadership and cooperative experience from her time at Kansas Electric Cooperatives and the Kansas Cooperative Council.

During the business meeting portion of the annual meeting, four directors were elected to the IAEC Board:

- District 1: Travis Harris of Southern Iowa Electric Cooperative was elected to a 3-year term
- District 2: Tony Lem of Consumers Energy was reelected to another 3-year term
- District 4: Steve Inskeep of Pella Cooperative Electric Association was elected to fill a vacancy (1-year term)
- District 5: Jim Miller of Calhoun County Electric Cooperative Association was reelected to another 3-year term

The IAEC Board would like to thank outgoing director and Board President Kenny VandenBerg of Chariton Valley Electric Cooperative for his leadership and service to Iowa's electric cooperatives during his 6-year tenure. He was presented with a commemorative clock during the business meeting in recognition of his commitment. Managers' Representative Kevin Wheeler of Access Energy Cooperative was also recognized for his 2-year term as an ex officio director on the IAEC Board; his term will expire on January 1, 2025.

Following the annual meeting, the new slate of directors reorganized and announced the following officers:

- IAEC Board President: Jim Miller, District 5 director from Calhoun County Electric Cooperative Association
- IAEC Board Vice President: Gordon Greimann, District 6 director from Franklin Rural Electric Cooperative
- IAEC Board Secretary/Treasurer: Tony Lem, District 2 director from Consumers Energy
- IAEC Board Assistant Secretary/Treasurer: Jerry Keleher, District 3 director from Allamakee-Clayton Electric Cooperative

The IAEC Annual Meeting is also an opportunity for attendees to learn more about the electric industry and trends that may impact rural Iowa. IAEC presented several educational sessions, including:

Philosopher and energy expert Alex Epstein shared his view that "human flourishing" should be our guiding principle of energy and environmental progress. Learn more at energytalkingpoints.com.

Lucas Obert, our 2024 Iowa Youth Leadership Council Representative, talked about the importance of overcoming challenges to achieve personal growth and success. He attended the national Electric Cooperative Youth Tour in June, sponsored by Guthrie County Rural Electric Cooperative.

Iowa electric cooperative linemen who traveled to Guatemala in June sat on a panel facilitated by IAEC Safety Director Scott Meinecke, who also went to Guatemala. The linemen talked about the importance of bringing electricity to the rural village of Las Peñas and how the experience has affected them.

IAEC celebrated 17 graduates of its 2024 Cooperative Leadership in Iowa Program (CLIP) for emerging leaders. Participants committed to a yearlong calendar of in-person, virtual, and on-demand training sessions where they gained leadership skills and learned about various co-op roles. Congratulations to Justin Murphy, Director of Operations from Southwest Iowa REC.

As part of the Annual Meeting program, IAEC coordinated an auction of personally donated items which raised over \$15,750 for the Iowa Friends of Rural Electrification (Iowa FORE) political action committee. The funds will stay in Iowa to aid state legislators and candidates who support electric cooperatives.



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The Iowa Association of Electric Cooperatives is a trade association which represents the interests of locally owned electric cooperatives in the state, including 39 distribution co-ops and nine generation and transmission co-ops. Formed more than 80 years ago, IAEC provides many vital functions for its members including legislative representation, regulatory oversight, training and education services, safety programs, and communications support. View the 2024 annual report and learn more at www.iowarec.org.

Understanding Factors That Impact Your Energy Bills



Phil Kinser

January and February bring some of the coldest weather of the year, and as our home heating systems work harder and longer to keep us warm, we typically see higher energy bills.

There are a few key factors that affect electricity prices, as well as a few ways you can make a meaningful impact on home energy savings.

When you receive your monthly bill from Southwest Iowa REC, you're provided with a summary of how much electricity you used during the billing cycle. You can even see how electricity use may have spiked when you used more electricity, such as a particularly chilly day or when relatives were staying with you.

But you might be surprised to learn that beyond your monthly energy consumption, there are external factors that can impact the cost of electricity.

Fuel Prices

Southwest Iowa REC purchases electricity from our power generation partner, Central Iowa Power Cooperative (CIPCO), at a wholesale cost, then we deliver that power to our local communities. The cost of generating and transmitting electricity from our generation partner accounts for a significant portion of the cost to provide electric service to local homes and businesses—and the cost of fuels that are used to generate that electricity, such as natural gas and coal, fluctuate based on supply and demand. While these fluctuations can impact the cost of electricity, we work closely with CIPCO to plan ahead and help stabilize electricity prices for our members.

Extreme Weather

While we can't control the weather, we can review weather patterns and forecasts to prepare for times of extreme cold or heat, when we know the demand for electricity will increase. But when temperatures become extremely cold and the demand for electricity spikes, the price of electricity can also increase.

Infrastructure and Equipment

To cover the costs associated with providing electricity to your home or business, Southwest Iowa REC members pay a monthly availability charge. This flat monthly fee ensures the cost of equipment, materials, labor and daily operations are covered for all members in Southwest Iowa REC's service territory. To ensure the reliable service you expect and deserve, we must maintain the local grid, including power lines, substations and other essential equipment.

Energy Policy and Regulations

Federal energy policies and regulations can have a profound impact on electricity costs. As energy generation shifts to the use of more renewable sources and stricter regulations for traditional, always-available fuel sources, such as natural gas and coal plants, costly upgrades and technologies must be constructed and deployed. These additional costs are ultimately passed to consumers.

U.S. power consumption is expected to double by 2050. Across the country, electric cooperatives are working with members of Congress to advocate for smart energy policies that reliably power our local communities.

You Have Control

While many of these external factors that impact electricity costs are out of our control, we all have the power to manage our energy use at home. The most effective way to lower use is thermostat management. Since heating and cooling account for a major portion of home energy use, adjusting the thermostat to the lowest comfortable setting can help you save energy and money. Remember to service your heating and cooling system annually and replace dirty filters as needed.



You can also reduce energy use by taking advantage of off-peak periods, when the demand for electricity is lower. Reserve energy-intensive chores for off-peak times, such as early in the morning or later in the evening, to save energy. Be sure to seal air leaks around windows, doors and other areas where gaps are possible. This will help your heating and cooling system work less and improve the overall comfort of your home.

Southwest Iowa REC is your local energy partner, and we're here to help. Visit www.swiarec.coop to learn about our efficiency programs designed to help you save. As always, we will continue working diligently to provide you with reliable power at an affordable cost.

Accepting Applications for High School Leadership Trip to D.C.



Students can apply now for a trip to Washington, D.C., from June 15-21!

Local high school students interested in public service & government are encouraged to apply now! Learn more at IowaYouthTour.com



Southwest Iowa REC will send 1 student on an all-expenses Youth Tour trip to Washington, D.C., in June

At Southwest Iowa REC, we invest in the next generation of rural Iowa leaders by participating in the national Electric Cooperative Youth Tour program. We're looking for high school sophomores, juniors, and seniors passionate about government and public service to apply for a once-in-a-lifetime trip to our nation's capital in June.

1 student will be selected from eligible candidates to attend the 2025 Youth Tour in Washington, D.C., from June 15-21 along with 40 other student leaders from Iowa. The Iowa Youth Tour group will join with nearly 2,000 other students from across the country as they learn more about electric cooperatives and American history and come home with a greater understanding of their role as American citizens. Students will also learn about U.S. government and meet with their members of Congress. On the trip, students take in the sights of D.C. as they visit monuments, museums, and historical landmarks. Students who go on Youth Tour often call it the trip of a lifetime!

We are accepting Youth Tour applications from now through March 14th. High school students from Southwest Iowa REC Service territory are eligible to apply; the student must be a current sophomore, junior, or senior student. You can download our form at swiarec.coop/scholarships. Contact Suzy, Southwest Iowa REC Administrative Assistant, at suzy.olson@swiarec.coop for more information.

For more than 65 years, Iowa's locally owned electric cooperatives have been sending deserving students to D.C. This program is a great resume builder for student leaders and a wonderful opportunity to kickstart one's passion for government affairs or advocacy. Make sure to apply for Youth Tour 2025 by March 14th!

Preparing for a Winter Storm

Extreme winter weather can immobilize an entire region. Even areas that normally experience mild winters can suddenly be hit with heavy snowfall or intense cold. Winter storms can result in closed streets and highways, power outages and flooding. Take action now to ensure the safety and comfort of your family in the event of extreme winter weather.

Before a storm

- Have snow removal equipment on hand, as well as rock salt to melt ice, and sand to improve traction.
- Regular heating fuel sources may be cut off, so make sure an alternative is available. For example, store a good supply of dry, seasoned wood for your fireplace or wood-burning stove.
- Keep fire extinguishers on hand and make sure everyone in your house knows how to use them. House fires pose an additional risk as more people turn to alternate heating sources without taking the necessary safety precautions.
- Locate your main water supply and valves and make sure you know how to shut them off in case a freezing pipe bursts.
- Repair roof leaks and keep gutters clear. Trim any tree branches that could fall on your house during a storm.
- Winterize your home by caulking and weather-stripping doors and windows, sealing the attic area and installing storm windows. This will help to keep your family safe and comfortable during a storm.

During a storm

- Listen to your radio, television or NOAA Weather Radio for weather reports and emergency information.
- Eat regularly and drink ample fluids, but avoid caffeine and alcohol.
- If it becomes necessary to conserve fuel, keep your residence cooler than normal. Temporarily close off heat to some rooms.
- Stay dry. Change wet clothing frequently to prevent the loss of body heat.
- Watch for signs of frostbite. These include loss of feeling and white or pale appearance in extremities such as fingers, toes, ear lobes and the tip of the nose. If symptoms are detected, get medical help immediately.
- Drive only if it is necessary. If you must drive, travel in the daytime, do not drive alone and keep others informed of your whereabouts. Also, stay on main roads. Avoid back-road shortcuts.

After a storm

- Avoid overexertion when shoveling snow. Overexertion can bring on a heart attack—a major cause of death in the winter. If you must shovel snow, stretch before going outside.
- Help neighbors who may require special assistance including infants, the elderly and people with disabilities.
- If the pipes freeze, remove any insulation and open all faucets; pour hot water over the pipes, starting where they were most exposed to the cold. Do not try to thaw them with a blow torch or other open flame.
- Follow forecasts and be prepared when venturing outside. Major winter storms are often followed by extremely cold conditions. A little forethought and some attention to detail will help to ensure that you and your family stay warm, dry and safe in your home this winter, no matter what the weather is outside.

Southwest Iowa REC has secured the right to publish this document.



Why do Co-Ops Advertise?

Proactive communication is essential in any industry or business, and it's especially important for Southwest Iowa REC to communicate often with our members who own the co-op. In fact, the core principles of our cooperative business model include concern for community and keeping our members informed and educated. We use a variety of communication methods such as our monthly newsletter, radio announcements, social media posts, and our website. All serve as effective ways for us to quickly communicate important information with you regarding safety, energy efficiency, cooperative business and regulatory notices.

Here are a few other reasons we advertise:

1. Safety Awareness

As your electric cooperative, we have a duty to keep you safe from the dangers of electricity. Preventative safety messages are a top priority in our public communications efforts. For example, we remind farmers to watch out for electric lines and poles during planting and harvest seasons. We encourage members to call 8-1-1 before digging so underground utilities can be properly located. Throughout the year, we tell members to "look up and live" as they use ladders and tall equipment around the house, garage or farm.

2. Energy Efficiency

At Southwest Iowa REC, we're committed to helping our members use energy wisely. We provide multiple resources to help you find ways to reduce that electricity bill and become more energy efficient, but we need to promote those resources so you know about them. We communicate through various methods to let you know about rebates and incentives for energy efficient products.

3. Cooperative Business

As an owner of the electric cooperative, you need to know important information about the financial condition of the business and when to elect directors of the board. We publish an annual report which includes important information about the cooperative.

4. Regulatory Notices

We are required to communicate with our cooperative members regarding specific state and federal regulations. Communicating frequently with our members is an important business function that helps Southwest Iowa REC achieve our mission of powering lives and empowering communities.

Creamy Potato & Hamburger Soup

Ingredients

- 1 1/2 pounds lean ground beef
- 1 medium white onion peeled and diced
- 1 large garlic clove minced
- 6 cups chicken broth
- 6 cups peeled and diced Russet potatoes
- 2 cups frozen mixed vegetables your favorite blend
- 3 teaspoons dried basil
- 2 teaspoons dried parsley flakes
- 1 1/2 cups milk
- 2 tablespoons cornstarch
- 8 ounces Velveeta cheese cubed

Instructions

1. Cook the Beef and Onions:
2. In a large skillet, brown the ground beef with the diced onions until the onions are soft and the beef is fully cooked. Drain any excess grease.
3. Add Garlic:
4. Stir in the minced garlic and cook for about 1 minute, until fragrant. Transfer the mixture to a crockpot or stockpot.
5. Combine Ingredients:
6. Add the diced potatoes, chicken broth, frozen vegetables, dried basil, and parsley flakes to the pot.
7. Cook: Crockpot: Cook on low for 6–8 hours or on high for 3–4 hours.
8. Stovetop: Simmer over medium heat until the potatoes are tender and starting to dissolve slightly.
9. Thicken the Soup:
10. In a small bowl, whisk the cornstarch into the milk until smooth. Gradually stir the mixture into the soup.
11. Add Cheese:
12. Stir in the cubed Velveeta cheese. Let it melt completely, stirring occasionally.
13. Serve:
14. Ladle the creamy soup into bowls and enjoy



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Scholarships Reminder

Southwest Iowa REC will once again be offering scholarships for the 2024-2025 school year to graduating high school seniors. We will be awarding fourteen (14) \$500 scholarships. In addition, three (3) \$1,000 scholarships will be available for students planning to attend an Accredited Lineman School or electrical trade program.

Completed applications and a photo must be received at the REC Office by March 3, 2025 to be eligible.

Applications can be found on our website, swiarec.coop/scholarships



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Southwest Iowa REC is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

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