

living with energy

IN IOWA

DECEMBER 2019

Touchstone Energy®
Cooperatives of Iowa
www.touchstoneenergy.coop



Win a Canon Photo Printer with WiFi ► See Page 14

Co-op linemen share
experiences of working in
Guatemala

Season's greetings from
Iowa's electric cooperatives!

Iowa Venture Award
winners announced

Holiday candy and
cookie recipes

Visit our website at www.livingwithenergyiniowa.com



Living with Energy in Iowa magazine (ISSN: 1935-7176) is published monthly by the Iowa Association of Electric Cooperatives, a not-for-profit organization representing Iowa's member-owned local electric cooperatives. Association address: 8525 Douglas Ave., Suite 48, Des Moines, IA 50322-2992. The phrase *Living with Energy in Iowa* is a mark registered within the state of Iowa to the Iowa Association of Electric Cooperatives. The magazine does not accept advertising.

Editorial Office: 8525 Douglas Ave., Suite 48, Des Moines, IA 50322-2992. Telephone: 515-276-5350. E-mail address: editor@livingwithenergyiowa.com. Letters may be edited for clarity and length before publication. *Living with Energy in Iowa* magazine does not assume responsibility for unsolicited items.

Website: www.livingwithenergyiowa.com

Postmaster: Send address changes to *Living with Energy in Iowa* magazine, 8525 Douglas Ave., Suite 48, Des Moines, IA 50322-2992. Periodicals Postage Paid at Des Moines, Iowa, and at additional mailing offices.

Change of Address: Every local electric cooperative maintains an independent mailing list of its members, so please send your change of address directly to your local electric cooperative's office. *Living with Energy in Iowa* magazine cannot make an address change for you.

© Copyright 2019, Iowa Association of Electric Cooperatives. No portion of the editorial, photographic or other content of *Living with Energy in Iowa* magazine or its website may be reproduced without written permission of the editor.

**Iowa's electric
cooperatives
wish you a safe
and joyous
holiday season!**

Features

6 Iowa companies honored with prestigious Venture Awards

The Iowa Area Development Group recently honored several companies for economic development activities.



8 Holiday candy and cookie recipes

Co-op cooks share their favorite holiday candy and cookie recipes. **PLUS:** Find out how you can receive a \$25 credit on your power bill!



10 Co-op linemen share experiences of working in Guatemala

Meet four linemen from Iowa's electric cooperatives who share what it was like to work on an international co-op project in Guatemala that brought electricity to a rural village.



Favorites

3 Statewide Perspective

The power of cooperative commitment

14 Saving Energy

Gift ideas for your favorite energy nerd

14 Editor's Choice Contest

Win a Canon Photo Printer with WiFi

15 Out Back

Themed trees? Not at my house ...

ON THE COVER

Electric cooperatives from Iowa, Illinois and Wisconsin recently joined forces to send 12 linemen, equipment and supplies to bring electricity to the village of Salinas 7 Cerros in north-central Guatemala. Throughout this issue, read more about the life-changing project. Photo courtesy of Geri Miller, Wisconsin Electric Cooperative Association, who accompanied the crews to the region. ⚡



The power of cooperative commitment

Bringing electricity to rural Guatemala reinforces our cooperative legacy of improving lives

BY CHUCK SODERBERG

When I traveled to a rural village in Guatemala in October, I was truly shocked to see how difficult life was without access to electricity. There was no running water, no refrigeration or indoor plumbing. Most of the villagers live in one-room huts with dirt floors. They work in the fields, planting and harvesting crops by hand. Women manage meals and laundry without electric conveniences. This lifestyle is all they've ever known, but change is coming.

As you'll read later in this issue, electric cooperatives from Iowa, Illinois and Wisconsin joined forces to send 12 linemen, equipment and supplies to bring electricity to the village of Salinas 7 Cerros in north-central Guatemala. The rural community is home to approximately 300 people and a school, church and health outpost.

I was privileged to be in the village at the end of the three-week electric project to attend the lighting ceremony. Traveling to rural Guatemala made me quickly appreciate the roads and bridges back home. Secondary roads in Guatemala were filled with substantial potholes and were often severely flooded. Locals warned us to travel over bridges only in the daytime so we could avoid dangerous holes in the metal planks. I also realized that I take clean water for granted back in the U.S.; the community retrieves water from a nearby stream, which is also where they bathe and wash clothes and dishes.

Farming without access to electric-powered equipment or tools is quite tedious and laborious. I couldn't help but think about how rural electrification in Iowa in the 1930s and 40s profoundly improved the quality of life for rural families. I was blessed to witness the beginning of a new era for the village of Salinas 7



Cerros. Their homes and buildings are now wired for lighting and outlets. I'm told that the safe electric lighting will save families money as they no longer have to buy candles or kerosene. They can also use electric outlets to charge and power devices instead of relying on expensive batteries. With a safe, reliable and affordable electric infrastructure in place, this community is ready for a brighter future.

I'm also very proud of how our four Iowa linemen represented our state's electric cooperatives. The team leader for the project told me that the quality of the work and the crew's work ethic were second to none. In fact, he had never seen a crew work so well together. These men worked 12-hour days in extreme heat and humidity to bring opportunity to this community.

This mission was the first international project for Iowa's electric cooperatives, but it likely won't be our

last. Several other Iowa electric co-ops have expressed interest in supporting a future project. While the working conditions were difficult, all four Iowa linemen who volunteered in Guatemala said, without hesitation, they would serve again if asked.

Traveling to Guatemala caused me to reflect on our cooperative beginnings back here at home. Rural electrification dramatically improved the quality of life for Iowans generations ago, and it was an honor to witness the start of that transformation for a rural Guatemalan village.

Finally, I want to thank the electric cooperatives in Iowa for providing the people, equipment and financial support for this project. The community of Salinas 7 Cerros will be forever grateful for the gift of hope and opportunity you have given them. 🌱

Chuck Soderberg is the executive vice president and general manager of the Iowa Association of Electric Cooperatives.



“In more than 30 years of presenting the Iowa Venture Awards, no company has ever demonstrated a more far-reaching impact on Iowa’s electric cooperatives and the communities and members they serve than Iowa Select Farms.”

— Rand Fisher, president of the Iowa Area Development Group

During the 2019 Iowa Venture Awards, Iowa Select Farm owners, Deb and Jeff Hansen, were acknowledged for their generosity and the foundation they established in 2006. Dedicated to giving back to communities and families of Iowa, the foundation has been of major support in combating food insecurity, demonstrating gratitude to veterans and their families, and providing research and support to childcare cancer patients and families. ⚡

Read more about this year’s Iowa Venture Award recipients on Pages 6-7 of this issue.

Iowa Ag Secretary Mike Naig visits Corn Belt Power Cooperative



Photo: Corn Belt Power Cooperative

Corn Belt Power Cooperative recently welcomed Iowa Agriculture Secretary Mike Naig to its Humboldt headquarters. The visit served as part of his 99-county tour. Sec. Naig met with representatives from all of Corn Belt Power Cooperative’s member cooperatives and discussed a wide variety of topics ranging from threats the agricultural industry faces to trade and the rural farm economy.

Corn Belt Power Cooperative is a generation and transmission electric cooperative that provides power to nine distribution rural electric cooperatives and one municipal electric cooperative. These utilities provide power to farms, rural

residences, small towns and commercial/industrial customers in 41 northern Iowa counties. Co-op members include:

- Iowa Lakes Electric Cooperative
- Midland Power Cooperative
- Boone Valley Electric Cooperative
- Prairie Energy Cooperative
- Franklin Rural Electric Cooperative
- Butler County Rural Electric Cooperative
- Raccoon Valley Electric Cooperative
- Calhoun County Electric Cooperative Association
- Grundy County Rural Electric Cooperative ⚡

ENERGY EFFICIENCY

Forging the Way: Iowa Energy Summit promotes energy efficiency

Representatives from Iowa’s electric cooperatives attended and presented at the Iowa Association for Energy Efficiency’s (IAEE) 32nd Annual Summit in Des Moines on Nov. 7.

With a theme of “Forging the way: Establishing connections, partnerships and pathways in energy efficiency,” the 2019 Iowa Energy Summit convened more than 150 energy-minded professionals from

across Iowa and beyond.

Kent Whitcomb of MiEnergy Cooperative presented on the cooperative’s residential battery storage pilot program during a breakout session. The Touchstone Energy® Cooperatives of Iowa also staffed a booth at the event to promote their upcoming Momentum is Building energy efficiency conference for builders and contractors in February. ⚡



Ethan Hohenadel (pictured), regulatory specialist for the Iowa Association of Electric Cooperatives, is the current chair of IAEE and represents the interests of Iowa’s electric cooperatives on the board.

Attend your co-op's next annual meeting!

Your co-op's annual meeting is a great time for you – and all members of your co-op community – to catch up and enjoy some good food and fellowship. This is also an occasion to discuss and learn more about the issues affecting your local communities.

You also can find out about programs offered by your co-op and get to know your co-op's staff members a little better. The annual meeting makes it possible for them to gather feedback from you by providing a forum where you can let them know how they can better serve you and your family.

It's also an opportunity for you to exercise one of the greatest benefits of being a member of an electric co-op: voting for the upcoming year's board of directors. Your co-op's directors are members of your community and are concerned with the issues you face every



Cooperative Principle 2: Democratic Member Control



day because they face them too. Remember, all members of your co-op are eligible to run for the board – including you.

Your local electric cooperative remains dedicated to providing you with safe, reliable, affordable and

environmentally responsible electric service, and you can help your co-op deliver on that mission. So, make it a point to join your fellow member-owners at your co-op's next annual meeting. Contact your local electric cooperative for details. ⚡

DID YOU KNOW?

You should contact your local electric cooperative if you or a family member depends on life-support equipment – before a potentially life-threatening outage occurs. Then, in the event of an outage due to anything from planned maintenance to a severe winter storm, your co-op can try to prioritize power restoration to you or advise you to seek shelter elsewhere. ⚡

POWERFUL IMAGE



When four Iowa linemen traveled to Guatemala as part of an international cooperative program to bring electricity to a rural village, the manual labor was intense. Crews worked in high heat and humidity while climbing poles and manually stringing lines during the three-week project.

Entrepreneurs propel communities to center stage with Iowa Venture Awards

BY KAY SNYDER

Since 1989, the Iowa Area Development Group (IADG) and its electric cooperative, municipal utility, and independent telecommunication company sponsors annually recognize outstanding companies and individuals with an Iowa Venture Award. The award provides an opportunity to uphold the courage, innovation, social responsibility, vision and contribution

these people and organizations are making in their community, region and Iowa.

The following companies were honored at a luncheon celebration during the Iowa Association of Electric Cooperatives' Annual Meeting in early December. Visit the Iowa Venture Award Hall of Fame (www.IADG.com/HallOfFame) to view all 272 Iowa Venture Award recipients. ⚡



AVEKA Manufacturing Inc.

Nominated by Butler County REC

As AVEKA Group in Fredericksburg celebrated its 25th anniversary, the company became employee-owned. Headquartered in Minnesota, AVEKA Group operates three manufacturing facilities in Iowa. Beyond its largest facility in Fredericksburg, the company also has production facilities in Cresco and West Union. Recently, the Fredericksburg facility underwent a \$2.5 million upgrade, including a 50,000-square-foot warehouse expansion, new equipment and remodeling. The company and its 300 employees are well-positioned to continue its leadership in particle processing, toll manufacturing, and contract research and development.

GrandStay Hotel & Suites

Nominated by North West REC

Visitors to Rock Valley can expect a grand stay thanks to local leaders and investors who built a new 46-room, \$5.5 million hotel. In addition to standard rooms, the facility offers extended-stay suites and spa suites. Other amenities include a heated indoor pool, beer and wine lounge, breakfast area, fitness room, small conference room and more. Thanks to a partnership with North West REC, guests can charge their electric vehicles on the ChargePoint network.



M & C Anderson Pullets

Nominated by Iowa Lakes Electric Cooperative

M & C Anderson Pullets of Sioux Rapids has recently been honored with the Iowa Good Farm Neighbor Award, The Way We Live Award and the Iowa Farm Environmental Leader Award. The 1,753-acre farm is home to 10 specialized bio-secure facilities that rear nearly 5 million pullets annually. Colleen "Coke" Anderson and her late husband Marvin were teachers who bought a farm to raise their two daughters, and ultimately found their niche in the poultry industry. Coke has been a recognized leader in the industry serving on the board and committees of the Iowa Poultry Association and United Egg Producers. In 1999, she was elected as the first woman to chair the American Egg Board.

Mid-Iowa Cooperative

Nominated by Grundy County REC

Mid-Iowa Cooperative, headquartered in Conrad, has been serving its member-owners and other farm customers for more than 75 years. This year, the co-op acquired and merged with East Central Iowa Cooperative. With more than 1,300 Class A members, the co-op serves 10 counties from 14 locations. The co-op and its 140 employees provide members with state-of-the-art agronomy, energy, feed, grain and transportation services and expertise. This year, Mid-Iowa invested more than \$18 million, acquiring 40 acres in Grundy County and constructing a new 5-million bushel grain delivery and storage facility.



Iowa Select Farms

Nominated by Midland Power Cooperative

The privately owned company, headquartered in Iowa Falls, is a homegrown Iowa success story, which began on the Hansen family farm. Today, Iowa Select Farms is the fourth-largest pork producer in the world and the largest family-owned production company in the U.S. It markets more than 4 million hogs annually. With approximately 800 farms in more than 50 counties, Iowa Select has become a leading employer and economic engine for Iowa's rural communities.

The company employs more than 1,850 Iowans and contracts with 1,700 different Iowa companies to provide animal science and livestock care, transportation, maintenance and repair, veterinary, environmental, information technology, construction, swine nutrition, and hundreds of other roles crucial to the business.

Recently, the company aggressively embarked upon state-of-the-art innovation and investments in single barn and double barn pig finishing facilities. In addition, 10 new sow farms were developed, all aimed at addressing an Iowa sow herd decline that has been happening since 1990. Each of these breed-to-wean farms has an economic impact of \$4.7 million annually. 🌱

Iowa Select Farms

Preferred Wholesale, Inc.

Nominated by Chariton Valley Electric Cooperative

Preferred Wholesale, Inc. (PWI) in Albia delivers top-notch products to nearly every state from its 35,000-square-foot warehouse, distribution center and office. PWI has developed its brands and is the exclusive supplier of IOWA SMOKEHOUSE jerky and meat snacks and Laura Beth's line of jams, salsas, dressings and pickled goods. Its products are sold at Hy-Vee, Fareway, Orscheln Farm & Home stores and numerous other retail establishments. The company recently added 10,000 square feet of warehouse space.

Stensland Family Farms and Creamery

Nominated by Lyon REC

Stensland Family Farms, established in 1915, is a family-owned and operated multi-generational farm located just outside of Larchwood. The Stenslands farm more than 1,500 acres of organic cropland. The family has worked to build a high-quality dairy herd that is the basis for their newest endeavor, Stensland Creamery and Stensland Dairy. The dairy herd, which is milked robotically, has been bred to produce A2 beta-casein protein. Their products are rich in Omega-3 fatty acids through the incorporation of flax meal in their ration. The company's dairy products are featured at three company stores in Sioux Falls and can be purchased directly at the farm, which welcomes visitors and tour groups. 🌱

Peterson Transportation Inc.

Nominated by Calhoun County Electric Cooperative Association

For more than 20 years, Peterson Transportation Inc. (PTI) of Manson has been growing with new customers and a team of drivers who provide safe, on-time delivery services at competitive rates. With a focus on flat-bed truck delivery of steel and wood, the company has grown to a fleet of 45 semi-trucks and 125 trailers. Today, more than 55 drivers are on the road, and PTI employs 70 people. The company recently invested approximately \$3.5 million to grow the fleet and expand and renovate its headquarters and facilities.

Holiday

CANDY & COOKIES



PRIZED INGREDIENTS

The history of Christmas cookies can be traced back to recipes from Medieval Europe. During that time many new ingredients were introduced to the west, such as cinnamon, nutmeg, ginger, black pepper, almonds and dried fruits. These ingredients were highly prized, and families could only afford to incorporate them into baked goods during the most important holidays.

White Chocolate Coffee Fudge

- 2 cups sugar
- $\frac{3}{4}$ cups evaporated milk
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup butter
- 12 large marshmallows
- 2 tablespoons espresso powder or coffee granules
- pinch of salt
- 12 ounces white chocolate chips
- 1 cup chopped pecans, optional
- 1 teaspoon vanilla

Combine the first six ingredients in a large saucepan. Cook over medium heat, stirring constantly until mixture comes to a boil. Cover, reduce heat and simmer 5 minutes. Remove from heat. Add white chocolate chips and nuts. Stir until chocolate melts. Spoon into buttered 8-inch square pan and spread evenly. Cool, then cut into squares.

Pam Quinn • Bouton
Guthrie County Rural Electric
Cooperative Association

Fruitcake Squares

- 6 tablespoons butter or oleo
- $1\frac{1}{2}$ cups graham cracker crumbs
- 1 cup shredded coconut
- 2 cups mixed cordial fruit, cut-up
- 1 cup chopped dates
- 1 cup nuts, coarsely chopped
- 15 ounces sweetened condensed milk

Pour melted butter in a 15x10-inch jelly roll pan. Sprinkle on crumbs and spread evenly. Add coconut, fruit and dates to pan. Add nuts and press down with your hand. Pour milk over the top. Bake at 350 degrees F for 25 to 30 minutes. Cool completely before cutting.

Gerry McGarry • Victor • T.I.P. Rural Electric Cooperative

Cherry Bing Bars

- 24 ounces chocolate chips
- $1\frac{1}{2}$ cups smooth peanut butter
- 12 ounces peanuts, crushed
- 2 cups sugar
- $\frac{2}{3}$ cup evaporated milk
- 1 stick margarine
- 10 large marshmallows, cut up
- 5 ounces cherry chips

Melt together chocolate chips, peanut butter and peanuts. Spread half the mixture in a jelly roll pan, place in refrigerator and set aside the other half. In another pan place sugar, milk, margarine and marshmallows. Bring to boil for 5 minutes, stir well. Remove from heat. Add cherry chips and let cool. Spread cherry chip mixture over chilled chocolate mixture. Refrigerate for 5 minutes. Remove pan and spread remaining chocolate chip/peanut butter mixture on top. Cool, then cut into small pieces.

Sonya Colvin • Ames • Consumers Energy

Fudge

- 2 cups sugar
- $\frac{3}{4}$ cup evaporated milk
- 2 tablespoons butter
- $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon salt
- 12 ounces milk chocolate chips
- 1 teaspoon vanilla
- 1 cup nuts (hickory nuts recommended)

Bring sugar, milk, butter and salt to a boil, stirring constantly. Boil for 2 minutes, then remove from heat. Stir in chocolate chips, vanilla and nuts. Stir until chips are melted. Pour into a butter greased 8-inch square pan. Chill and enjoy.

Janene Klenk • Chelsea • T.I.P. Rural Electric Cooperative

Almond Butter Crunch

- 1 cup butter
- 1½ cups white sugar
- 1 tablespoon light corn syrup
- 3 tablespoons water
- 1 cup toasted almonds, finely chopped
- ½-⅔ cup melted milk chocolate chips or candy disks

Melt butter in heavy 2-quart saucepan. Add sugar, syrup and water. Cook, stirring often to hard crack stage (300 degrees F). Quickly, stir in chopped almonds. Spread into well-greased 13x9x2-inch pan (not glass) and cool. Spread top half with melted chocolate. Let harden, invert and spread other half with melted chocolate.

Jo Groth • Plainfield
Butler County Rural Electric Cooperative

Coconut Pastel Bon Bons

- 3 ounces cream cheese, softened
- 2½ cups powdered sugar, sifted
- food coloring, red or green
- ¼ teaspoon vanilla
- ⅛ teaspoon salt
- ½ package coconut

In a medium bowl, beat cream cheese with wooden spoon until smooth. Add powdered sugar, a little at a time. Blend until smooth after each addition. Stir in a few drops of food coloring; add vanilla and salt. Chill one hour in covered bowl then shape into ¾-inch balls and roll in coconut. Coconut can be grated in a food processor or used as is. Store in covered pan and refrigerate until needed. Great garnish for cookie platters or for nibbling anytime!

Holly Heeren • Alexander
Franklin Rural Electric Cooperative

Cookie Press Cookies

- 1 cup white sugar
- 1 cup powdered sugar
- 1 cup soft margarine
- 2 eggs
- 1 cup vegetable oil
- 2 tablespoon vanilla
- 1 teaspoon cream of tartar
- 1 teaspoon baking soda
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1 tablespoon butter flavoring
- 5¼ cups sifted flour

Mix all ingredients together with electric mixer. Put dough in cookie press. Press out desired shapes. Sprinkle with colored sugar. Bake at 350 degrees F for 6-8 minutes.

Mae Blum • Woodbine
Harrison County Rural Electric Cooperative

Red Velvet Cake Cookies

- 1 red velvet cake mix (dry)
- 1 cup flour
- 2 sticks butter, softened
- 2 eggs
- 1-1½ cups white chocolate chips

Mix all ingredients thoroughly, spoon onto baking sheet. Bake at 350 degrees F for 10 minutes. Cool 3 minutes on baking sheet before moving to a cooling rack.

Caroline Grose • Macksburg
Farmers Electric Cooperative, Inc.

COOKIE CUTTER DEBUT

The earliest examples of Christmas cookies in the U.S. were brought by the Dutch in the early 17th century. Due to a wide range of cheap imported products from Germany between 1871 and 1906 following a change to importation laws, cookie cutters became available in American markets.

COOKIE FUN FACTS

COOKIES BY ANOTHER NAME

"Cookie" comes from the Dutch word koekje, meaning "small cake." They're called biscuits in England, galletas in Spain and keks in Germany.

COOKIE FUN FACTS

MILK & COOKIES FOR SANTA

Since the 1930s in the U.S. and Canada, children have left cookies and milk on a table for Santa Claus on Christmas Eve. The cookies are often cut into the shape of candy canes, reindeer, holly leaves, Christmas trees, stars or angels.

COOKIE FUN FACTS

Wanted: Egg-citing Breakfast Recipes The Reward: \$25 for every one we publish!

A breakfast with eggs is a sure way to get your day off to a great start! If we run your egg-based breakfast recipe in the magazine, we'll send a \$25 credit for your electric co-op to apply to your power bill. Recipes submitted also may be archived on our website at www.livingwithenergyiowa.com.

The deadline is Dec. 31, 2019. Please include your name, address, telephone number, co-op name and the recipe category on all submissions.

EMAIL:

recipes@livingwithenergyiowa.com (Attach your recipe as a Word document or PDF to your e-mail message.)

MAIL:

Recipes

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

Iowa linemen bring light and hope to a rural community

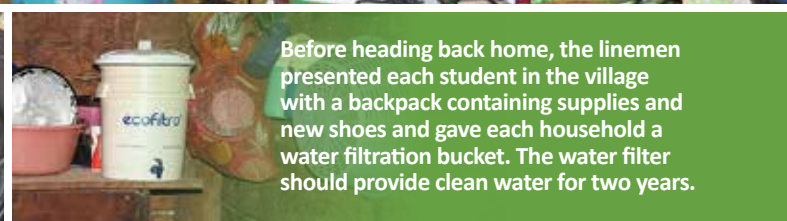
Meet the four linemen who share their experiences in Guatemala

BY ANN THELEN

Before Iowa's four electric cooperative linemen went to Central America, they had some idea what it would be like in the small rural village of Salina 7 Cerros in north-central Guatemala. Once there, however, it was beyond anything they had ever imagined or experienced.

The impact of a single light bulb in what would otherwise be a kerosene- or candle-lit one-room home or classroom will truly be a brighter future for these residents. And for the linemen who were part of this journey, the power of electricity will touch their hearts and minds just a little bit more when they flip on the light switches in their homes. The co-op principle of concern for community – even when it's a community 2,500 miles away – unites us all.

We recently sat down with **Bob Ruby** (Access Energy Cooperative), **Mat Kilgore** (Iowa Lakes Electric Cooperative), **Quentin Fisher** (Linn County Rural Electric Cooperative) and **Mike Berkenpas** (North West Rural Electric Cooperative) to hear their firsthand accounts of this life-changing experience.



Before heading back home, the linemen presented each student in the village with a backpack containing supplies and new shoes and gave each household a water filtration bucket. The water filter should provide clean water for two years.

When you arrived in the village, what surprised you the most?

Ruby: The dire living conditions and how happy they were.

Kilgore: They didn't have shoes, and they were drinking water out of the creek, which was the same water they used to bathe in and wash clothes and dishes. They had virtually nothing, but to see the kids always so happy and playing, it was amazing.

Fisher: I couldn't believe how happy people were for having as little as they have. Honestly, they are probably happier than anyone I know in the U.S. and are some of the nicest people you'll ever meet. I always felt safe around them, and they were so trustworthy.

How did you get to the village every day?

Kilgore: The drive each day was miserable. We stayed in Playa Grande, and it took 1.5 hours each way to

get to the jobsite. We had about 15 minutes of smooth roads, but the rest were incredibly bumpy and bounced us all around. Some of us had to take motion sickness medication every single day.

Berkenpas: Going over the bridges was the worst. Each way, our first obstacle was a metal bridge going over the Chixoy River. It had huge holes in it, and a motorcycle had even fallen through it.

Ruby: It's every person for themselves on the roads. Pickup trucks would be filled with 30-40 people in the back and hanging over the sides. You had to constantly avoid running into another vehicle.

Describe what schools were like in the village.

Fisher: The schools were not good, and sometimes their teacher wasn't there. Students only attend for a half-day, three times a week. There are two





Bob Ruby
Line Foreman
Access Energy Cooperative



Quentin Fisher
Journeyman Lineman
Linn County Rural
Electric Cooperative



Mat Kilgore
Lead Lineman (Estherville)
Iowa Lakes Electric
Cooperative



Michael Berkenpas
Lead Lineman (Le Mars)
North West Iowa Rural
Electric Cooperative

rooms – the younger kids are on one side and the older ones on the other. One teacher goes back and forth between the rooms. When the kids aren't in school, they work and take care of siblings. My co-op's employees donated money so that we were able to buy a sound speaker for their school. We had enough money left over to buy 175 pairs of shoes for the kids. Thanks to donations from Iowa, Illinois and Wisconsin electric co-ops, each student also received a backpack full of school supplies.

What are the living conditions like for the villagers?

Ruby: Most of the homes are one-room huts with dirt floors. The women cook meals over a wood fire, sitting right in the middle of a dirt floor. They were always sweeping the dirt floors or washing clothes in the creek. The immediate household and right outside were clean, but there was a lot of garbage everywhere. Electricity will change their lives, whether it's being able to plug in an appliance or have more sanitary conditions.

One day, we were in a hut wiring for electricity, and a woman came in with a backpack and hung it on a nail. A few moments later, she brought in another backpack and did the same thing. We saw the backpacks moving. When we peeked inside the backpacks, each one had a baby

in it. The babies' cribs were those backpacks.

Kilgore: Ninety-nine percent of the homes were the same; dirt floors with thatched roofs. A couple of people had slightly better homes with concrete floors and more rooms – one was a farmer, and another man owned a tractor that powered a generator to grind corn for food.

When you got back to Iowa from Guatemala, what did you tell your families about the experience?

Berkenpas: Hands down, it was one of the most incredible experiences of my life. To have 12 linemen from three states work together for the first time so seamlessly was incredible. We knew our mission was to help the villagers by bringing electricity to their homes for the first time. But the villagers impacted our lives as much as we impacted theirs. It made me realize how much we all take for granted when you see people so happy, yet they have virtually nothing.

Kilgore: When I left home, I took three 50-pound bags, a carry-on and a backpack. I showed my kids all the stuff I was taking with me. I came home with only a backpack and small carry-on because nearly all my clothes, shoes and tools were given to the people in the village. I was able to tell my kids what it was like for the people there, and why it's important to give back to others when given the chance.

Berkenpas: I gave away almost everything that I took with me, too. One guy wanted my shoes, but I gave him my boots instead.

What was the toughest part of the trip?

Fisher: Besides the drive each day, it rained several inches every night

when we were there, so we were lucky that it didn't delay out work during the day. It was extremely hot and humid. We also had medicine with us for intestinal and digestive issues. Because we weren't used to their food – from the way they stored it to how it was cooked – most of us ended up sick.

Ruby: Even though every one of the 12 guys got sick to some extent, not one of them would stay back from working on the project. Every one of us wanted to work as hard as we could to help this village.

Kilgore: The hardest part of the trip was working in the heat, which was made worse by so much humidity. We had a few guys end up with heat exhaustion coupled with some stomach issues.

If given the opportunity, would you go on another international project?

All (without a second of hesitation): Yes!

Kilgore: To work together to give these people a brighter future is amazing. Electricity is something we take for granted in America. To give that to another country is just awesome. If we can instill confidence in one kid – and if that's all we got – it was all worth it.

In unison, these guys said they made friends for life with the fellow linemen from Illinois and Wisconsin. In fact, the 12 of them are planning to get together next summer.

Kilgore adds, "We made a brotherhood for life with these other guys. It's hard to describe the depth of our friendship. It was amazing how fast the bond happened." ⚡

Ann Thelen is the editor of *Living with Energy in Iowa*.



A day in the life in Guatemala

Bringing electricity to the village of Salinas 7 Cerros will transform lives.





A day in the life in Guatemala



Gift ideas for your favorite energy nerd

BY MARIA KANEVSKY

The holiday season is the time for gift-giving, but knowing what to get your loved ones isn't always easy. Here are some gift ideas that are perfect for the energy nerd in your life!

ENERGY STAR-Certified Sound Bar

Imagine listening to great sound while watching television, but also using less energy when doing so. This is what an ENERGY STAR-certified sound bar can provide. The ENERGY STAR-certified sound bar uses about 70% less electricity than regular sound bars, which saves you energy and money. They include volume-leveling technology to ensure that commercials are not louder than the actual shows you're watching, and these lower volumes also save energy. Sound bars create a three-dimensional surround-sound effect, reducing the need for multiple speakers around the room – this also contributes to less energy use.

The cost depends on the brand, bells and whistles, but Samsung and Vizio offer ENERGY STAR-certified sound bars for about \$100.

Smart Power Strip

Power strips allow you to increase the number of outlets in your home, but unlike a standard power strip, smart power strips help to reduce "vampire power" – this is the energy used by electronics even when they're in standby mode.

The great thing about the smart power strip is that you can leave all your electronics plugged in without having to worry about them using standby power because the smart power strip shuts off electricity to those devices when they are in standby mode. This can help you save a significant amount of money over the year. Depending on your home, you can potentially save 10% to 20% of your energy consumption.

There are three types of outlets in



Smart power strips, like the TrickleStar power strip shown here, allow you to leave electronics plugged in without having to worry about wasting energy. Smart power strips shut off electricity to devices when they are in standby mode, saving you energy and money.

ENERGY STAR-certified sound bars, like the Samsung model shown here, use about 70% less electricity than regular sound bars.



the smart power strip. The first is the "always-on" socket, which is meant for things like Wi-Fi or a cable modem; the second is the "main" socket, which is intended for televisions or computers; and the final is the "secondary" socket, which should be connected to electronics like printers, speakers or gaming consoles.

Some smart power strips include additional features, like the ability to connect to smart home assistants

through voice control or an app, or being able to set a schedule to turn specific devices on or off automatically.

You can purchase a smart power strip for about \$25 on Amazon.com or at your local retail stores. ⚡

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

EDITOR'S CHOICE CONTEST

Win a Canon Photo Printer with WiFi!

Preserve your digital holiday moments with a photo printer! The SELPHY CP1300 Compact Photo Printer is designed for compact on-the-go printing. Connect it to your computer, smartphone, memory card or USB flash drive to print anytime. \$150 value. ⚡



Visit our website and win!

Enter this month's contest by visiting www.livingwithenergyiniowa.com no later than Dec. 31, 2019. 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 Instant Pot® from the October issue was Mardean Lientz from Farmers Electric Cooperative, Inc. (Greenfield).

Themed trees?

Not at my house...

BY VALERIE VAN KOOTEN

Anyone who's flipped through any kind of holiday décor magazine knows that one must have a tree with "A Theme." It's no longer enough to thread some unwieldy lights and fling some tinsel on it (on second thought, is tinsel even a thing anymore?) Your tree must communicate some sort of message, either through color coordination or a running motif that identifies your hobbies or dreams.

I will not be tree shamed.

My tree has no theme other than Random Things That Bring Back Memories. There's the lightbulb covered by papier-mâché that my middle son made in third grade. The rows of glitter on the outside of it are pretty much gone, and it's so heavy that it bends the branch it's resting on. But it goes up every year.

There's the clay ornament my oldest son made at an art class the day after his cat died. "RIP Fluffy" in roughly scribbled letters makes its appearance annually.

Ornaments from our travels, keepsakes from friends, reminders of a first birthday or an anniversary ... they all find their way onto the tree. And as I unwrap these each year, I relive the moment when I got them.

Take, for instance, the one-eyed clothespin reindeer. This is a remnant of our early married years, the Pammel Court Days at Iowa State when we had no money for tree decorations. The first year, we threaded popcorn and cranberries, and I hung up all the copper cookie cutters I'd received as a shower gift. In retrospect, I guess there was a theme – Poverty Chic.

The next year, feeling a bit more



flush, I ordered a kit from a craft magazine that involved gluing pipe cleaners onto a clothespin for antlers, coloring the hooves black, and then trying to adhere tiny little "googly eyes" to the front. This was the days before glue guns, and we tried doing it by hand.

The Great Reindeer Debacle was our first major fight and threatened to darken Christmas for many years. Kent absolutely abhorred working on these fiddly little things, glue all over his fingers, pipe cleaners stuck to his clothes. And since I'm craft-impaired, the reindeer didn't look too hot. In fact, they all looked as if they'd had a little accident with Santa's sleigh somewhere along the line.

Over the years, the reindeer – one by one – broke, or lost their antlers, or got

stepped on. We have one left, slightly worse for wear. He's got one eye and bent antenna, but he's still chugging along, metaphorically speaking. Kent swears every time he sees it.

So, more power to those who have color-coordinated trees, or themes about birds ... or Victorian ornaments ... or beach house effects. Bravo for the trees that feature the woodland or Disney princesses or wild animals.

I salute you. But it's just not Christmas at my house without a wonky reindeer and some papier-mâché. ⚡

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



YOUR ENERGY SUPERHEROES

When you're part of a Touchstone Energy Cooperative, your voice is heard, loud and clear. Because you're more than a customer, you're a member. And what's more powerful than that?

To learn more about the power of the cooperative difference, visit [TouchstoneEnergy.com](https://www.touchstoneenergy.coop)

YOUR SOURCE OF POWER. AND INFORMATION.

Touchstone Energy®
Cooperatives of Iowa
www.touchstoneenergy.coop

