

# living with energy

IN IOWA

Touchstone Energy<sup>®</sup>  
Cooperatives of Iowa  
[www.touchstoneenergy.coop](http://www.touchstoneenergy.coop)



JANUARY 2020

Win a Fitbit Charge 3 Fitness Activity Tracker ▶ See Page 3

## Energy savings for the new year!

Youth Tour students  
shine at statewide  
annual meeting

Learn about the 2020  
Iowa Caucus Project

Warm up with  
soups and stews

Visit our website at [www.livingwithenergyiniowa.com](http://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 2020, 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.



## JANUARY ENERGY SAVER

Periodically inspect your dryer vent to ensure it's not blocked. This will save energy and may prevent a fire. Manufacturers recommend using rigid venting material – not flexible plastic vents that may collapse and cause blockages. ⚡



Source: U.S. Department of Energy

# living with energy IN IOWA

Touchstone Energy®  
Cooperatives of Iowa  
www.touchstoneenergy.com 

## CONTENTS

JANUARY 2020

### Features

#### 6 All eyes on Iowa – 2020 Caucus Project

All eyes will be on Iowa in February when the first-in-the-nation Iowa Caucuses take place in the heart of the Midwest.



#### 8 Warm up with soups and stews

Soups and stews are the ultimate comfort food. Discover some of our readers' favorite recipes. **PLUS:** Find out how you can receive a \$25 credit on your power bill!



#### 10 Start the new year right with energy savings

New Year's resolutions that involve becoming more energy efficient can be easy to keep all year, and that can be good news for your pocketbook.



### Favorites

#### 3 Statewide Perspective

The power of a unified voice

#### 3 Editor's Choice Contest

Win a Fitbit Charge 3 Fitness Activity Tracker!

#### 14 Energy Efficiency

Momentum is Building

#### 15 Out Back

Snow days are fun for everyone – except mom

### ON THE COVER

Brent Koops, a member of North West Iowa Rural Electric Cooperative, captured this iconic Iowa winter shot following a recent year's January blizzard in Sioux County. To learn how your photo could be featured on a future *Living with Energy in Iowa* magazine cover, see Page 5 of this issue. ⚡



# The power of a unified voice

BY KEVIN CONDON

As the second session of the 88th Iowa General Assembly commences in mid-January, it serves as an opportunity to reinforce our cooperative spirit as we advocate for policies at the Statehouse. While there are many shared values among Iowa's electric co-ops, there is also diversity in our ranks. As we chart a course for our legislative goals, we must speak with one voice to ensure success. Showing Iowa's lawmakers the power of our cooperative commitment is much easier when we approach the Capitol with a unified message.

At the Iowa Association of Electric Cooperatives (IAEC), we nurture a cohesive voice through a robust process designed to engage our grassroots at the various levels of our policy development. Just as our friends from Schoolhouse Rock reminded us, knowledge is power, and thus, communication about what happens under the Golden Dome is critical.

As the session begins, we provide weekly (sometimes daily) updates to our member cooperatives through emails, our *Legislative Action* newsletter and video messages to ensure our members are informed of the most current details and developments in legislation. We gather with our members and their legislators in Des Moines on the first Tuesday of the session to "Welcome Back" lawmakers to the State Capitol. Later in January, IAEC's board members visit with legislative leaders, and many electric co-ops will visit the Statehouse throughout the session to discuss issues of importance with their local legislators. In March, we again show our strength when more than 250 electric co-op advocates ascend to Iowa's Capitol for our annual "Day on the Hill" event.

The state's coffers remained full,



with a nearly \$290 million surplus last year, so it is reasonable to expect lengthy discussions about the budget, the state's spending priorities, and perhaps even the tax code that collects the revenue. Amid the annual debates on things like education and healthcare, Iowa's electric co-ops will again share our unified message of promoting legislation

that allows for safe, reliable and affordable electric service provided in an environmentally responsible manner.

IAEC will support bills that allow utilities to fairly charge rates that cover costs of service, as well as legislation that gives local Iowans the ability to make decisions about their energy future. We will promote legislative efforts that help strengthen the cooperatives' culture

of safety by focusing on responsible management of easements and rights-of-way and proper education of those who perform work near power lines.

Leaders from our member cooperatives have developed these messages through a lengthy process that began shortly after the 2019 session adjourned last May. The IAEC Government Relations Committee met at the end of October, and the board of directors approved the policy agenda at the November meeting. Member cooperatives informed their local legislators about our goals over the final two months of 2019. We are excited to be back at work in 2020 with a consistent, thoughtful, committed and unified voice of Iowa's electric cooperatives. ⚡

Kevin Condon is the director of government relations for the Iowa Association of Electric Cooperatives.

## EDITOR'S CHOICE CONTEST

### Win a Fitbit Charge 3 Fitness Activity Tracker!

Make keeping those New Year's exercise resolutions easier with a Fitbit Charge 3 Fitness Activity Tracker! This tracker allows you to better measure calorie burn, understand resting heart rate and more with 24/7 heart rate tracking and a battery life of up to seven days. Choose from more than 15 exercise modes, such as run, bike, swim, yoga, circuit training and more. Set a goal, and access real time stats during your workouts to see how you can keep getting better. ⚡



#### Visit our website and win!

Enter this month's contest by visiting [www.livingwithenergyiowa.com](http://www.livingwithenergyiowa.com) no later than Jan. 31, 2020. You must be a member of one of Iowa's electric cooperatives to win. There's no obligation associated with entering, we don't share entrant information with anyone and multiple entries from the same account will be disqualified. The winner of the KEURIG® from the November issue was Darlene Stamps from Southwest Iowa Rural Electric Cooperative.

**QUOTE OF THE MONTH**

*“As a young person, it is important to remember to work together. By pulling together people of many talents, by incorporating engineering and technology, and by applying hard work and determination, industries, such as the electric cooperatives, will continue to grow and help our communities.*

*It’s also important for me and others of my age to step up and be a part of that, be a leader, get involved and make sacrifices that make a difference. The Youth Tour opened my eyes to the possibilities. A once-in-a-lifetime opportunity that will definitely influence my future decisions and career path.”*

– Sarah Herz, Iowa’s 2019 Youth Leadership Council representative



During the 2019 Youth Tour, one student from each state is selected for the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association’s Youth Leadership Council (YLC). The group of students come back to Washington, D.C., following the Youth Tour in June, for a leadership workshop, which focuses on the electric cooperative industry. Herz, who was sponsored as a student by Chariton Valley Electric Cooperative, was selected as Iowa’s 2019 representative. ⚡

# DID YOU KNOW?

The Iowa Association of Electric Cooperatives maintains a statewide outage map online at [www.iowarec.org/outages](http://www.iowarec.org/outages). The map refreshes automatically every 15 minutes and shows outage data that is reported by IAEC member cooperatives. Some electric co-ops report outages automatically while other co-ops report their outages manually every few hours only during major outage events.

For information regarding specific outages or to report



your outage, always contact your local electric co-op directly. It’s also important that your local co-op is notified if your phone number or other contact information changes.

If you see downed power lines, always stay away from the lines and poles. Always assume the lines are energized and report any damage to your local electric cooperative. ⚡

**SAFETY RECOGNITION**

## Iowa co-ops recognized for safety achievements

During the Iowa Association of Electric Cooperatives’ (IAEC) annual meeting in December, several Iowa electric cooperatives were congratulated for completing the Rural Electric Safety Achievement Program (RESAP) in 2019. The cooperatives included:

- Grundy County Rural Electric Cooperative
- Guthrie County Rural Electric Cooperative Association
- Maquoketa Valley Electric Cooperative
- Osceola Electric Cooperative, Inc.
- Pella Cooperative Electric Association
- Southwest Iowa Rural Electric Cooperative
- Western Iowa Power Cooperative

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



IAEC fully supports the RESAP program and works with electric cooperative members in their safety achievements.

The rigorous program requires annual reporting to NRECA of Occupational Safety and Health Administration Data and updates to the cooperative’s safety improvement plan. Every three years, additional data must be submitted to NRECA as well as participation in an onsite safety observation by NRECA at the cooperative. ⚡

# Power outage tips

Mother Nature can be brutal in the winter with ice storms, heavy snow, strong winds and below-zero temperatures. All of these things can contribute to power outages. If you lose power, follow these tips:

- Call your local electric cooperative to report your outage – don't assume that your neighbor has already called it in. The outage may be isolated to your home only. Even if it's widespread, the more calls we receive, the easier it is to identify the problem.
- Turn off the stove, oven and other appliances (except the refrigerator and freezer, unless they're empty) to prevent heavy startup loads that could cause secondary blackouts when power is restored.
- Unplug sensitive electronic equipment such as computers, TVs and other home entertainment equipment to avoid



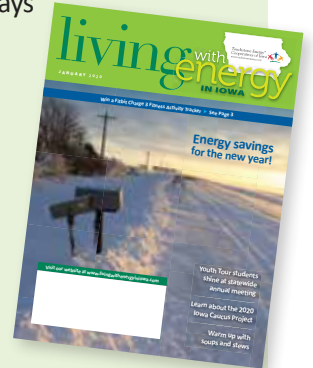
damage to them when power is restored.

- Keep refrigerator and freezer doors closed to prevent food from spoiling.
- Leave one light turned on so you'll know when the power is restored. ⚡

## Picture this ... you could win \$100!

We're always looking for stunning images for the cover of *Living with Energy in Iowa*. If we select your photo for a cover, we'll award you with \$100.

The photos must be clear, of an Iowa place served by an electric cooperative and in high resolution. For your chance to win, email photos to [editor@livingwithenergyiowa.com](mailto:editor@livingwithenergyiowa.com) with "Cover Submission" in the subject line. ⚡



## POWERFUL IMAGE

During the Iowa Association of Electric Cooperatives' annual meeting in December, three former Youth Tour participants took the stage to sing the national anthem. They delivered a fantastic, crowd-pleasing performance to open the meeting, which was held Dec. 5-6 in West Des Moines. Pictured from left to right: Taylor Myers, Iowa Lakes Electric Cooperative; Kyler Sander, Calhoun County Electric Cooperative Association; and Will Rasmussen, Pella Cooperative Electric Association. ⚡



## Partners for a Brighter Future video now available

During the Iowa Association of Electric Cooperatives' (IAEC) annual meeting in



December, a six-minute video debuted highlighting Iowa's involvement in the Region 5 NRECA International Project in Guatemala.

Four linemen from Iowa's electric cooperatives served on the 12-man crew that brought electricity to a rural village of 300 people in north-central Guatemala. You can watch the video on YouTube at: <https://youtu.be/jAV-gqPOTW4>.

The video was created by Erin Campbell, IAEC director of communications, utilizing photos and video footage from Geri Miller of the Wisconsin Electric Cooperative Association. ⚡

# All eyes on Iowa – 2020 Caucus Project



BY ANN THELEN

All eyes will be on Iowa in February when the first-in-the-nation Iowa Caucuses take place in the heart of the Midwest. In 2020, our country will re-elect or elect a new president, and in Iowa, all U.S. House Representatives and Sen. Joni Ernst are up for re-election.

Through the Iowa Association of Electric Cooperatives' grassroots advocacy arm – Iowa Rural Power – cooperative directors and employees have been hard at work. They have been learning more about the process for the Iowa Caucuses and meeting with candidates as they crisscross the state. If you've spotted an individual in a green Iowa Rural Power T-shirt at a political or public event, then you've seen a co-op advocate in action.

The overall goal of IAEC's 2020 Caucus Project is to tell the cooperative story to as many candidates as possible. This grassroots advocacy during the presidential caucus season provides a unique opportunity for Iowans to share the cooperative story on a national stage.

Iowa's electric cooperative members, in all the state's 99 counties, are encouraged to learn more about the process and meet with candidates when they visit your communities.

Here are some facts to know about this prominent time in the political process.

## What is a caucus?

A caucus is a gathering of like-minded voters where they discuss party platforms and select delegates and candidates for general elections. Both the Iowa Democratic and Republican parties hold caucuses. The Iowa Caucuses are essentially neighborhood meetings of the major political parties. This year, the Democrats and the Republicans will hold caucuses in nearly 1,700 precincts across the state.

## Is a caucus an election?

No. Caucuses are not elections. They are organized and run by the state parties and not state government. They are simply a mechanism where individuals show their support for a candidate and tell the parties what issues matter.

## What time do the Iowa Caucuses start?

Each neighborhood caucus starts precisely at the same time – at 7 p.m. on Feb. 3. Participants must be on time. Late-comers are not allowed to participate.

## How do I participate in the Iowa Caucuses?

- You must be registered to the party for which you are caucusing. Therefore, you must be a registered Democrat to participate in the Democratic caucus, and you must be a registered Republican to participate in the Republican caucus.
- If you are not registered to a party or are registered to a different party, you can still caucus. You can change your party registration at your precinct caucus.
- You must reside in the precinct where you are caucusing.
- You must be eligible to vote. If you have not registered to vote yet, you will be able to do this at your precinct caucus.
- You must be 18 years old by election day.

## Why are the Iowa Caucuses a big deal?

The Iowa Caucuses are the first official contest of the presidential primary season. They are a great indicator of how candidates will perform in other states and give candidates publicity and momentum

## At-a-glance – Key dates in the 2020 presidential election

### Early states

Iowa Caucuses – Feb. 3, 2020  
New Hampshire Primary – Feb. 11, 2020  
Nevada Caucuses – Feb. 22, 2020  
South Carolina Primary – Feb. 29, 2020

### Super Tuesday (Mar. 3, 2020)

Alabama, Arkansas, California, Colorado, Massachusetts, Minnesota, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, Vermont and Virginia

### What do electric cooperatives want to achieve with Iowa's 2020 Caucus Project?

- Educate and engage with candidates, regardless of party
- Educate Iowa's member-consumers about advocacy efforts and candidates' stances on rural energy issues
- Tell our story and impact public policy



Electric cooperative members, employees and directors are asking presidential candidates this question:

***“How will your energy plan help provide affordable and reliable power to rural Iowa?”***

to continue their campaigns. The results of the first-in-the-nation caucuses can make or break a candidate.

### **Why do Iowa’s electric cooperatives get involved?**

Iowa’s electric cooperatives have long recognized the importance of political advocacy and sharing our story with policymakers and elected officials. While not everyone who campaigns for president will win, ultimately, they are all influential public figures and provide a national stage for cooperative issues.

### **Why are we doing this when there is a sitting president?**

Electric cooperatives are nonpartisan organizations. We look forward to sharing our story with anyone in Iowa who will listen, including President Trump and those campaigning to be his opponent. It would be a missed opportunity to not share our story with sitting members of U.S. Congress, mayors and governors – even if they are not elected president. After the caucuses, many presidential nominees will likely return to Iowa and help campaign for down-ballot candidates. ⚡



### **Find your Iowa Caucus location**

**Democratic Party of Iowa**

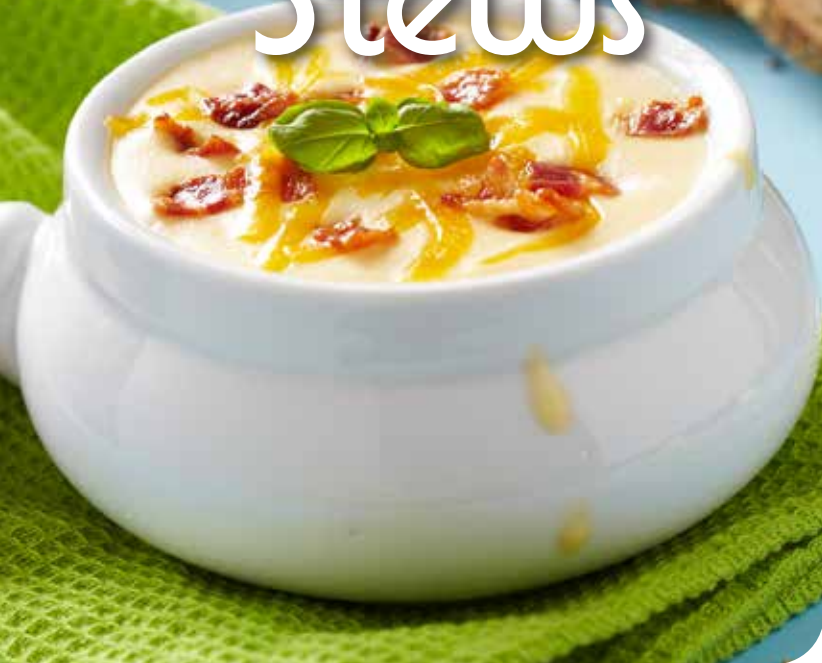
[iowademocrats.org/2020-caucuses](http://iowademocrats.org/2020-caucuses)

**Republican Party of Iowa**

[www.iowagop.org/2020-caucus-locations](http://www.iowagop.org/2020-caucus-locations)



# Warm up with Soups & Stews



## PERFECT PURÉES

To blend ingredients for a smooth and silky soup, remove any whole herbs and spices, ladle a cup or two of the liquid into a measuring cup, then put the rest of the solids and liquid into a countertop blender or food processor. Or use an immersion blender. Blend the ingredients, thinning it out with the reserved liquid as needed.

## Cheeseburger Soup

- 1½ cups water
  - 2 cups potatoes, peeled and cubed
  - 2 medium carrots, chopped
  - 1 onion, chopped to taste
  - 1 tablespoon beef bouillon granules
  - ½ teaspoon salt
  - 1 pound ground beef, cooked and drained
  - 2½ cups milk, divided
  - 3 tablespoons flour
  - ¼ teaspoon pepper
  - 8 ounces American cheese, cubed
- Optional toppings:** Shredded cheddar cheese, crumbled bacon bits, chopped dill pickles

Combine first six ingredients and boil for 15 to 20 minutes. Stir in cooked ground beef and 2 cups milk; heat through. Then combine flour, pepper and ½ cup milk. Add this to other ingredients and bring to a boil; cook until thickened. Stir in cheese until melted. When serving, top with shredded cheddar cheese, crumbled bacon bits and chopped dill pickles.

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

## Ham and Bean Soup

- 2 15-ounce cans great northern beans, drained
  - 2 14-ounce cans chicken broth
  - 4 medium potatoes, diced
  - 1 medium onion, chopped
  - 3 carrots, diced
  - 3 cups fully cooked ham, in bite-sized pieces
  - ¼ cup dried parsley flakes
  - 1 bay leaf
- salt and pepper, to taste

Combine all ingredients and simmer for 20 to 25 minutes. Remove bay leaf and serve.

**Patricia Michels • Panama  
Harrison County Rural Electric Cooperative**

## Baked Beef Stew

- 14.5 ounces diced tomatoes, undrained
- 1 cup water
- 3 tablespoons quick-cooking tapioca
- 2 teaspoons sugar
- 1½ teaspoons salt
- ½ teaspoon pepper
- 2 pounds lean beef stew meat, cut into 1-inch cubes
- 4 medium carrots, cut into 1-inch chunks
- 3 medium potatoes, peeled and quartered
- 2 celery ribs, cut into ¾-inch chunks
- 1 medium onion, cut into chunks
- 1 slice bread, cubed

In a large bowl, combine tomatoes, water, tapioca, sugar, salt and pepper. Add remaining ingredients and mix well. Pour into a greased 13x9x2-inch or a 3-quart baking dish. Cover and bake at 375 degrees F for 1¾ to 2 hours, or until meat and vegetables are tender. Yields 6-8 servings.

**Linda J. McCarville • New Hampton  
Butler County Rural Electric Cooperative**

## Hobo Stew

- 1½ pound beef roast, cut into bite-sized pieces
- 3 cups carrot chunks
- 4 cups potato chunks
- ½ green pepper, chopped
- 16 ounces green beans, undrained
- 32 ounces tomatoes, undrained
- ½ cup minute tapioca
- ¼ teaspoon celery salt
- 1 tablespoon salt

Combine all ingredients well in a large roasting pan. Cover and bake at 275 degrees F for 5 hours. Stir occasionally but try not to open lid too often. Let slowly bake until it becomes a thick, savory stew.

**Cherry Marsden • Ankeny • Consumers Energy**



## Potato Soup

- 6 cups potatoes, peeled and cubed
- 5 cups water
- 2 cups chopped onion
- ½ cup chopped celery
- ½ cup sliced carrots
- ¼ cup butter
- 4 teaspoons chicken bouillon
- 2 teaspoons salt
- ¼ teaspoon pepper
- 12 ounces evaporated milk
- 3 tablespoons chopped parsley

Combine all ingredients in a large slow cooker. Cover and cook 7 hours or until the vegetables are tender.

Jim Krier • Remsen  
North West Rural Electric Cooperative

## Cheesy Chicken Chowder

- 6 cups chicken broth
- 3 cups potatoes, diced and peeled
- 1 cup carrots, diced
- 1 cup celery, diced
- 1 cup peas
- ½ cup onion, diced
- 1½ teaspoons salt
- ¼ teaspoon pepper
- ¼ cup butter or margarine
- ⅓ cup flour
- 2 cups milk
- 2 cups shredded cheddar cheese
- 2 cups cooked chicken, diced

In a 4-quart saucepan, bring chicken broth to a boil. Reduce heat and add potatoes, carrots, celery, peas, onion, salt and pepper. Cover and simmer for 15 minutes or until vegetables are tender. Meanwhile, melt butter or margarine in saucepan. Add flour and mix well. Gradually stir in milk. Cook over low heat until slightly thickened. Stir in cheese and cook until melted. Add to broth mixture along with chicken. Cook over low heat, stirring until heated through.

Vicky Converse • Fredericksburg  
Butler County Rural Electric Cooperative



**Search** our online recipe archive for thousands of recipes from Iowa's co-op cooks.

[www.livingwithenergyiowa.com/recipes](http://www.livingwithenergyiowa.com/recipes)

## Chicken and Bacon Chowder Soup

- 1 pound sliced bacon
- 3 cups celery, diced (optional)
- ½ cup onion, chopped
- 4 cups potatoes, peeled and diced
- 2 cups carrots, sliced
- 3 cups chicken broth
- 3 cups chicken, cooked and diced
- 2 10¾ ounce cans condensed cream of chicken soup, undiluted
- 3 cups half and half milk
- ½ teaspoon salt
- ½ teaspoon pepper

Cook bacon until crisp or use already cooked bacon; crumble and set aside. Place uncooked carrots, celery, potatoes and onions in crockpot. Add broth, chicken, soup, milk, bacon, salt and pepper. Stir well and cook on low medium heat most of the day. Can be started in the morning in a slow cooker and cooked on low-medium all day.

Dianne Riley • Osceola  
Clarke Electric Cooperative, Inc.



**Wanted:**  
Recipes  
to celebrate  
spring!

**The Reward: \$25 for every one we publish!**

Welcome warmer weather with fresh spring recipes, filled with favorite seasonal ingredients like rhubarb, asparagus, strawberries, spinach and more. If we run your recipe in the magazine, we'll send a \$25 credit for your electric co-op to apply to your power bill. Recipes submitted also may be archived on our website at [www.livingwithenergyiowa.com](http://www.livingwithenergyiowa.com).

The deadline is Jan. 31, 2020. Please include your name, address, telephone number, co-op name and the recipe category on all submissions.

**EMAIL:**  
[recipes@livingwithenergyiowa.com](mailto: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

**RICHER STOCK**  
For a richer flavor when making vegetable stock, brown the vegetables in a tablespoon of butter before adding the liquid to the pan.

SOUP TIPS

**FINISH WITH A GARNISH**  
Garnishes are easy, attractive and delicious ways to elevate soup and add texture. Ideas for garnishes include fresh herbs, freshly grated cheese, pesto, cream or homemade croutons.

SOUP TIPS

**FREEZER STARS**  
The best soups for freezing include bean soups and chilis, broth-based soups made without cream or milk, puréed soups, grain and wild rice soups, and vegetable soups.

SOUP TIPS

**NUTTY AND SWEET**  
Adding the rind from a Parmigiano-Reggiano or grana cheese to a simmering soup can give it a nutty, sweet flavor.

SOUP TIPS

# Start the new year right with energy savings

BY PAT KEEGAN AND BRAD THIESSEN



Photo: Consumers Energy

1

## Dial in savings.

**Now:** The first place to start is your home thermostat. In most homes, the most substantial portion of the energy bill goes toward heating and cooling. Setting back your thermostat by 7 to 10 degrees for 8 hours a day can save you up to 10% a year on heating and cooling. In the winter, you could aim for 56 F at night and when no one is at home, and 68 F when you're up and around. If you're used to a warmer house, it may mean throwing on a sweater or pair of slippers. It should be noted this tactic is not as effective for some homes with radiant heat systems.

**Later:** Make sure to adjust your air conditioning settings next summer. If you have a manual thermostat and don't always remember to adjust it, consider purchasing a smart thermostat, or at least one that's programmable.

The new year marks a great time to begin new habits. Approximately 6 in 10 people make New Year's resolutions. The bad news is that less than 1 in 10 people keep those resolutions. However, once you get started, resolutions involving becoming more energy efficient can be easy to keep all year-long, and that can be good news for your pocketbook.

These five energy-saving measures can be done right away and help you plan for greater savings down the road.



Photo: Marcela Gara, Resource Media

2

## Set refrigerator and freezer temps for efficiency.

**Now:** Make sure your refrigerator and freezer aren't set to a colder temperature than needed. The fridge should be at 38 F to 40 F, and the freezer compartment should be 5 F. If you have a separate chest freezer, set it to 0 F. Also check your water heater setting. You should aim for a setting of 120 F.

**Later:** Old refrigerators and freezers can use a lot of electricity. If yours was made before 1993, you could save upward of \$65 a year with a new ENERGY STAR® model. If you eliminate a second refrigerator or freezer, you can save even more, especially if they are stored in your garage.

3





Photo: Marcela Gara, Resource Media

### Maximize the heat you've got.

**Now:** Look around each room and make sure the vents and radiators aren't blocked by furniture or other objects. If the floors feel cold even when the room is warm, put down area rugs for additional warmth. Open curtains and blinds to let the sunshine in, and close them at night.

**Later:** Enlist the help of an energy auditor or HVAC specialist to test for duct leakage and ensure your whole system is balanced and running efficiently.



## 4

### Make bright moves with your lights.

**Now:** The obvious first step is to make sure lights are turned off when they're not in use. You can do this manually or employ one of the many automated strategies. If you're still using incandescent bulbs, you could switch the five most-used bulbs to LEDs and save about \$75 per year. LEDs last much longer and use about 25% as much energy. Prices on LED bulbs have decreased in the past few years, and you can save more if you buy them in packs.

**Later:** Over time, plan to replace all your old incandescent bulbs and consider smart lighting options that can be programmed to turn off when a room is not in use.

## 5

### Eliminate drafts.

**Now:** Look carefully around your home for signs of air leaks. If you have a gap under an exterior door, you can block it with a towel or better yet, install some weather stripping. Make sure windows are sealed with caulk. You can also seal areas around plumbing and wiring penetrations.

**Later:** Have an energy auditor do a blower door test, which is the best way to identify all air leaks.

Taking some of these easy steps now should provide some quick energy savings. To save even more, you'll need a plan that includes the "later" steps we've shared above. An energy audit can help you determine a much better plan, and your electric co-op may be able to provide an audit or recommend a qualified local auditor. ⚡

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

# Fireplaces: For extra value, add extra safety

BY DERRILL HOLLY

A fire in the hearth is a warm and welcoming part of winter for many Iowans, but open flames inside the home should always be tended safely. Before you light your fireplace, consider safety first.

“Carbon monoxide exposure, burns and fire risks are the major hazards associated with fireplaces, but all of these can be addressed with a little planning and preparation,” says Patty Davis, deputy director of communications for the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC).

The federal agency, which monitors risks to consumers and makes recommendations for reducing potential hazards, cites home fireplaces, chimneys and chimney connectors as the leading cause of residential fires attributed to heating equipment.

During a two-year period ending in 2016, fireplaces were associated with 19,800 of the more than 44,000 fires caused by heating and cooling equipment, nationwide. Those fires were blamed for 30 deaths and 50 injuries each year, causing more than \$127 million in property damage annually.

According to the CPSC, an open and properly maintained flue ensures that fireplace gases can be vented to the outside through the chimney and closed to help keep heat inside the home when the fireplace is not in use.

“Make sure that you have a protective barrier in front of your fireplace to prevent a child or grandchild from coming into direct contact with the glass front of the fire screen,” says Davis. “The surface temperature of the glass front can heat up to 500 degrees F, which can cause very serious burns.”

According to Davis, many

new fireplace screen sets include protective barriers or external screens designed to add that extra layer of protection to reduce burn risks.

“If you use your fireplace for supplemental heating, you should include a full inspection with your system checkups,” says Davis. “You should also make sure you have at least one carbon monoxide detector on each floor of your home to reduce the risks of CO exposure.”

Odorless and colorless, carbon monoxide can quickly build up in the closed interior spaces of a home, leaving all occupants incapacitated so hindering escape. “When a CO alarm is activated, people can get out and contact firefighters to deal with the carbon monoxide buildup that prompted to alarm.”

While carbon monoxide detectors are now required under many

building codes for new construction in homes that include fireplaces, they can be installed in older homes or on floors where they are needed.

“It’s important that people install them on every level of their homes, outside of sleeping areas,” says Davis.

According to the CPSC, fireplaces should be considered fuel-burning appliances, subject to the same safety precautions, inspections and maintenance standards recommended for other items in that category.

“Get a regular inspection, just as you would for a furnace or heating system,” says Davis. “The inspection should be done by a qualified professional, so that means you need to call a chimney company do it.”

The inspection helps to ensure the system is tuned up for efficient operation and gives the homeowner warning of wear or damage that could potentially cause fires or other problems. ⚡

Derrill Holly writes on consumer and cooperative affairs for the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association.

From 2000 to 2017, 336 Iowans died from unintentional carbon monoxide poisoning. And 4,713 people visited Iowa hospital emergency rooms for CO poisoning between 2003 and 2018.

Source: Iowa Department of Public Health

## FIREPLACE SAFETY TIPS

Every year, nearly 20,000 residential fires are linked to fireplaces. The Consumer Product Safety Commission offers these tips to help you keep your family safe:

1. Consider scheduling a fireplace inspection and cleaning by a certified professional.
2. Install a carbon monoxide detector on every floor of your home. These devices offer low-cost protection and provide early warnings of potential problems.
3. Keep flues, dampers, firestops, flashing and chimney caps in good condition.
4. If you have small children and/or pets, consider a secondary screen. A glass screen can reach temperatures of 500 degrees F, so an extra barrier can protect them from serious burns.

# Electric cooperatives: A partner and trusted source

Electric cooperative members across the country, including Iowa, are increasingly satisfied with the performance of their electric co-ops, and more than ever before see them as trusted sources for information on keeping their energy costs low. These are among the key findings of a recent national survey commissioned by the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA), the national trade association representing more than 900 electric cooperatives, and conducted by Frederick Polls.

The survey found increased satisfaction over 2018 numbers from respondents who say their electric co-op keeps them informed about its actions (84 percent) and is a trusted source for information about energy use and devices, including solar energy (83 percent). It also recorded an increase from 2018 in co-op members who say their electric co-op is a partner in understanding energy technologies and controlling energy costs (83 percent).

“We hear a lot of stories about how Americans are losing faith in institutions like big companies and government, but that’s clearly not the case with electric cooperatives,” says NRECA Communications Senior Vice President Scott Peterson. “The positive view that members have of electric co-ops is a testament to their reputation as honest brokers and entities who truly care about their communities.”

A telephone survey, which has been conducted annually for the past six years, polled 750 co-op members in mid-July. It had a margin of error of 3.6 percent.

Other data shows electric co-ops holding steady with prior surveys on overall job performance (93 percent positive), providing reliable electric service (95 percent positive) and quickly restoring power after outages (92 percent positive).

Electric co-ops care about the local

communities they serve and want to be the trusted energy source for their members. If you have questions about your energy use or ways you can make your home more efficient to save money on your energy bills, contact your electric co-op – they’re ready to help. ⚡

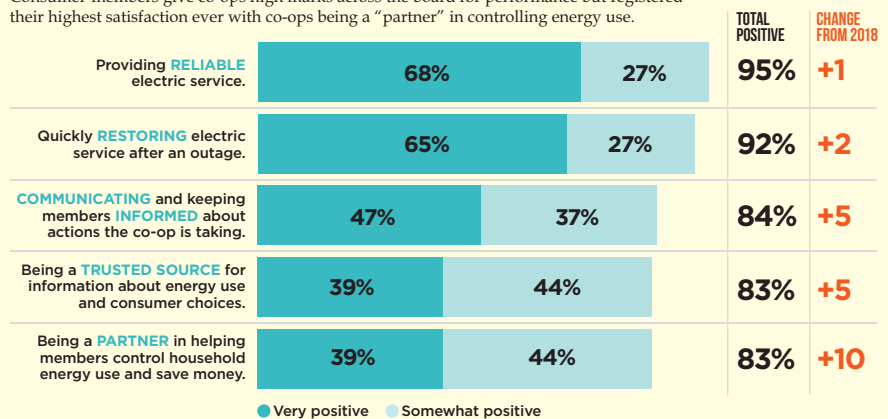
Locally owned electric cooperatives power the lives of 650,000 Iowans throughout all 99 counties.

NEW REPORT

## Members Have a High Opinion of Their Co-op

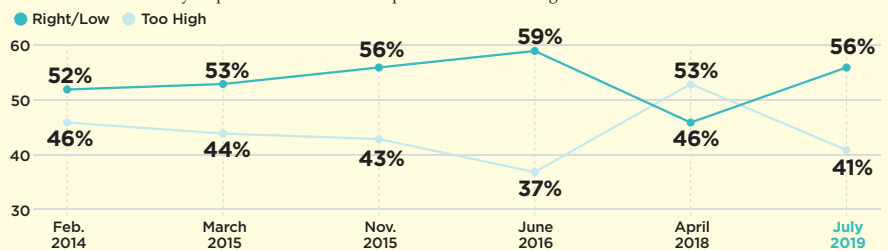
### CO-OP PERFORMANCE ON SPECIFIC TRAITS

Consumer-members give co-ops high marks across the board for performance but registered their highest satisfaction ever with co-ops being a “partner” in controlling energy use.



### PERCEPTION OF ELECTRIC RATES

More than half of survey respondents said their co-op’s rates are “about right” or “a bit low.”



**83%** have a positive opinion of their co-op as a **trusted source of information** about energy use and consumer choices.

Source: Survey of 750 electric co-op members, July 2019, margin of error +/-3.6% by Frederick Polls

# Efficiency is coming to 2020 Momentum is Building conference

Energy efficiency technologies and demonstrations for contractors and building trades professionals are the focus of the 2020 Momentum is Building (MIB) conference, scheduled for Feb. 6 and 7 in West Des Moines.

The conference provides attendees with continuing education credits, networking opportunities, presentations by recognized industry energy efficiency and building trades experts, along with exhibits on state-of-the-art technologies.

Sponsored and organized annually by the Touchstone Energy Cooperatives® of Iowa, MIB offers an opportunity for members of Iowa's construction industry to learn more about the local service benefits available from locally owned electric cooperatives, serving nearly 650,000 Iowans in all 99 counties.

Speakers for the event include keynote Sandra Adomatis, owner of Adomatis Appraisal Service, speaking on high performance appraisals used by builders, appraisers, and energy organizations around the country; Mike Foti, president of Innovate Building Solutions and Innovate Home Org, a "DMG" (digital marketing geek) who uses construction industry and business knowledge to help contractors increase profitability and work efficiency; Steve Gilbert from Rural Housing 360; Ryan Meres from Residential Energy Services Network (RESNET); Darren Meyers from International Energy Conservation Consultants, and many others. Scott Siepker, the "Iowa Nice Guy," will close the conference with his classic Iowa insights.

"Helping inform local contractors about cutting-edge energy efficiency and beneficial electrification

technologies, both new and improved, is important to our co-op members," says Angela Catton, manager of member relations and development for Northwest Iowa Power Cooperative, one of the event organizers.

"We're excited about this year's Game of Thrones theme and our interpretation of the Iron Throne. The series has really risen to an iconic status over the last couple of years and we think attendees will really enjoy the references, even if they haven't seen the show."

For the 2020 conference, one item receiving notice already is the Iron Throne constructed by Scott Schlegel, headquarters maintenance superintendent – utility operations for Central Iowa Power Cooperative. The throne was recently debuted at the Iowa Association of Energy Efficiency's annual summit, where attendees enjoyed sitting in the throne wearing one of three building trades-oriented crowns.

Schlegel, who enjoys creative construction challenges, purchased most of the tools used as key pieces on the throne from an Amish auction in the Hazelton area, spending around \$20.

"The throne was a fun project. You can take a picture of it, but you need to look at it from all different sides because there are little things you don't notice the first, second or third time," he says. "It's an art piece."

The Iron Throne will be auctioned at the end of the conference. Proceeds benefit the MIB scholarship fund to pay for students who would like to attend future MIB events. Preview pictures of the throne can be seen on the Momentum is Building Facebook page.

MIB 2020 will be held at the Sheraton West Des Moines. Registration for the event is available online at [momentumisbuilding.com](http://momentumisbuilding.com). For more information about the event, please contact your local rural electric cooperative. ⚡



# Snow days are fun for everyone — except mom

BY VALERIE VAN KOOTEN

I recently heard a young mom talk about what a horror snow days had become ... trying to find a sitter if she had to go to work; the misery of getting kids dressed to play outside; the in-fighting that went on between her offspring.

I know, I know ... snow days are supposed to develop into playful days in the snow with hot chocolate waiting afterward, or maybe doing crafts together around the kitchen table.

That's in Hallmark commercials, folks. Here's what a real snow day looks like:

**6:40 a.m.** The kids who couldn't be burned out of bed on a school day stick their heads in the bedroom door and crow, "School's canceled!" I can hear them opening cereal boxes and flipping the television on. They're fighting over what to watch, and all the while, the volume – both kids and television – is getting louder.

**7 a.m.** I crawl out of bed after hearing a giant crash. Fruity cereal is ground into the carpet, the TV is blaring, and no one owns up to the crash. I wonder what I'm going to find down the road that is irretrievably broken.

**9:10 a.m.** All three boys have snarfed down enough cereal, surely, to cover them until lunch. They want to go outside. I send them to round up snow pants, extra socks, boots, dry mittens and stocking caps. This only buys me about 5 minutes, as I know they'll come dragging back, claiming they can't find anything.

**9:50 a.m.** Everyone is clothed, wrapped around, snuggled in, zipped up and ready to go outside. It's not my problem if no one can put



their arms down. Son No. 2 declares he has to go to the bathroom. The process is reversed for him, and then Son No. 3, who decides he needs to go, too.

**10:25 a.m.** They're all outside. Finally. I contemplate locking the door. Time for a cup of much-needed coffee and a quick glance at the news.

**10:30 a.m.** I knew it was too good to be true. The door flies open and stays open. Four little heads are looking through the doorway. I'm the only mom home on this snow day, and so our house is obviously going to be the hangout. With a promise to make hot chocolate later, they trudge back out to the snow fort that's under construction.

**Noon:** By lunchtime, there have

been five "ins and outs" through the kitchen – searches for buckets and shovels, bathroom unswaddlings, some drinks for the snow fort. As they traipse in for lunch, I throw together some sandwiches, chips and carrot sticks. They all leave the carrots on their plates.

The afternoon is a virtual repeat of the morning until, by 5 p.m., I'm exhausted.

When the weather person says, "Looks like everyone's back to school tomorrow," I do a feeble little cheer. Then I clean the cereal out of the rug. ⚡

---

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.



# INFORMATION YOU CAN TRUST

*You inspire us to find solutions, so we can provide the energy and savings you need.  
Being part of a Touchstone Energy cooperative means we're always listening to make our communities a better place.*

*What's here today, has never been better. To learn more, visit [TouchstoneEnergy.com](https://www.touchstoneenergy.com)*

**YOUR SOURCE OF POWER. AND INFORMATION.**

Touchstone Energy<sup>®</sup>  
Cooperatives of Iowa  
[www.touchstoneenergy.coop](https://www.touchstoneenergy.coop)

