

● JANUARY 2026

# Iowa

ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE LIVING

**Iowa electric co-ops shine  
in national commercial**

**Vegetarian recipes**

**Scholarship and Youth Tour  
applications are now open**

**Get involved in the 2026 director election ▶ See Page 12**

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**EDITOR**  
Ann Foster Thelen

**DESIGNERS**  
Megan Walters  
Bree Glenn  
Lorelai O'Hara

**IAEC DIRECTOR OF COMMUNICATIONS**  
Erin Campbell

**IAEC EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT**  
Leslie Kaufman

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Marion Denger, Prairie Energy Cooperative – NRECA Representative  
Terry Sullivan, Corridor Energy Cooperative – Managers' Representative

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8525 Douglas Ave., Suite 48, Des Moines, IA 50322-2992. Telephone: 515-276-5350.

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editor@ieclmagazine.com. *Iowa Electric Cooperative Living* magazine does not assume responsibility for unsolicited items.

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ON THE COVER

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

# PROTECTING IOWA'S POWER: KEY ENERGY POLICIES TO WATCH THIS LEGISLATIVE SESSION

BY HALEY MOON



As the Iowa Legislature prepares to convene on Jan. 12, electric cooperatives across the state are focused on defending the policies and protections that keep power reliable and affordable for our communities. For more than eight decades, Iowa's electric cooperatives have prioritized the delivery of safe, reliable and affordable electricity while supporting local economies and strengthening the power grid. This work relies heavily on Iowa's defined electric service territories, an important law that helps ensure every corner of the state receives consistent, cost-effective electric service.

## Protecting service territories and grid reliability

For rural communities in particular, defined electric service territories are vital. By assigning each utility the responsibility to serve a specific geographic area, every Iowan is guaranteed electric service that avoids redundant infrastructure, reduces costs and allows utilities the certainty to make long-term investments in grid resilience. These protections help cooperatives maintain affordable rates and plan strategically to meet future needs. As legislators return to Des Moines, Iowa's electric cooperatives remain vigilant against any attempts to weaken this foundational law or erode the consumer benefits it provides.

One challenge that could resurface is a third-party or "community solar" proposal. During the 2025 legislative session, lawmakers considered legislation that would have allowed non-utility solar developers to provide retail electric service inside

an established utility's service area, which is in direct conflict with Iowa's service territory statute. While these programs are often marketed as cost-saving options, the details can be far less rosy. Because third-party developers are not held to the same consumer protection standards or regulatory oversight as Iowa's public utilities, they can shift grid maintenance and infrastructure costs onto customers who do not subscribe.

Cooperatives are not opposed to solar – far from it. Iowa's electric co-ops have long supported the adoption of solar when and where it benefits their members and aligns with responsible grid planning. But allowing non-utilities to operate independently within the defined area of public utility, even on a limited basis, sets a precedent that threatens system stability statewide.

## Strengthening safety protections for utility workers

Another priority heading into the upcoming legislative session

is protecting utility workers. Lineworkers are often the first on the scene after storms and work long hours in hazardous conditions to restore essential services. Despite the critical role they play in delivering power to our communities, something alarming is happening. Threats, harassment and assaults against utility workers while on the job are increasing nationwide. Strengthening penalties for violence against utility workers reaffirms our commitment to the safety of cooperative employees and our communities.

No matter what this session may bring, you can rest assured knowing that your cooperative will be advocating for policies to keep electricity safe and affordable for you and your community.

*Haley Moon is the senior manager of policy and advocacy for the Iowa Association of Electric Cooperatives.*

## EDITOR'S CHOICE CONTEST

### WIN A NINJA CRISPI AIR FRYER!

The Ninja Crispi® Portable Glass Cooking System is a compact powerhouse that packs the 1,500 watts power of a full-sized air fryer into a portable design. It includes a small 6-cup and larger 4-quart CleanCrisp™ container. Whether you're making quick, single-serve meals in just 7 minutes or sharing crispy snacks on the go, the Ninja Crispi® makes it effortless.



#### Visit our website and win!

Enter this month's contest by visiting [www.ieclmagazine.com](http://www.ieclmagazine.com) no later than Jan. 31.

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 Lodge cast iron skillet set from the October issue was **Sarah Silhanek**, a **T.I.P. REC** member-consumer.

**ENTER ONLINE BY JAN. 31!**

# LOCALLY OWNED, LOCALLY POWERED

At Harrison County Rural Electric Cooperative (REC), when you flip a switch, you're not just using electricity – you're powering a system you own.

As a member of Harrison County REC, you're more than a customer. You're an owner, investor and part of a legacy built on working together. We don't serve investors or shareholders – we serve the people who live right here in our communities. That's what makes the cooperative model special. When you pay your bill, you're not sending money to a corporate office states away. You're helping strengthen our local grid, modernize our system, and support jobs for people who live and work here. Account number three one two five zero one nine one one.

Harrison County REC was built by members like you to serve rural Iowa, and that same spirit of ownership continues today. Together, we're powering what matters – for our homes, farms and communities.



## BUILT BY MEMBERS, FOR MEMBERS

### YOU OWN THE POWER YOU USE

When you're part of an electric cooperative, you're not just paying a bill – you're investing in something you own. Every dollar goes toward maintaining reliable power, upgrading infrastructure, and supporting your community.

Because at Harrison County REC, you're not a customer...

*You're an owner*



**Harrison County Rural Electric Cooperative**  
105 Enterprise Drive - PO Box 2  
Woodbine, IA 51579

**Office Hours**

7:30 a.m. - 4 p.m.  
Monday through  
Thursday

7:30 a.m. - 11:30 a.m.  
Friday

Shadon Blum, CEO  
Kristi Travis, editor

**Contact Us!**

**Phone:**  
712-647-2727  
800-822-5591

**Fax:**  
712-647-2906  
harrisoninfo@hcrec.coop  
www.hcrec.coop

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Harrison County Rural Electric Cooperative and Northwest Iowa Power Cooperative invite you to join us for one of three Energy Trail Tours being offered this summer. This three-day adventure will allow you to experience, first-hand, how your power providers convert energy from water, wind, and coal into electricity. View coal being mined and see how those mines are then returned to productive farm and native grass lands. Enjoy interactive walking tours through a hydroelectric and coal-fired energy generation facility and other stops along the way. Meet other cooperative member-owners while traveling together across the Dakotas on-board a motor-coach bound for the North Dakota's Energy Loop. \$100 per couple covers your lodging, meals and entry fees. The remainder of your tour costs are covered by Harrison County REC. Six lucky couples from Harrison County REC will be selected at random from those who sign up.



YES, please enter our names in the drawing for the trip. We understand that if our names are drawn, we will be billed \$100.

Our first and second choice of dates:

- June 24-26    1st   2nd   3rd    (please circle)
- July 8-10     1st   2nd   3rd
- July 15-27    1st   2nd   3rd

I/we  have  have not participated in this tour in the past.

First Person \_\_\_\_\_

Second Person \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Clip this coupon and return to cooperative by May 1, 2026.

# HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS: APPLICATIONS ARE NOW OPEN FOR OUR 2026 SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM

The 2026 Light the Way to Your Future Scholarship program is underway, and applications are now open for our seven \$1,000 scholarships!

For the fifth year, Harrison County Rural Electric Cooperative (REC) is awarding seven students from our service territory with a \$1,000 scholarship. Eligible school districts include Denison, Boyer Valley, Woodbine, West Harrison, Logan-Magnolia, Missouri Valley and Tri-Center. Should Harrison County REC not have applicants from each school, winners will be chosen from the group of schools within the applications until all seven awards have been designated.

All high school seniors are encouraged to apply, including both members



Applications are due by April 10 and can be submitted via email to [harrisoninfo@hcrec.coop](mailto:harrisoninfo@hcrec.coop) or can be placed in the drop box at our headquarters parking lot at 105 Enterprise Drive, Woodbine, IA 51579.

Questions? Contact Kristi Travis at 712-647-2727.

and non-members. Students can download an application by visiting our website at [www.hcrec.coop](http://www.hcrec.coop).

### Application details

In addition to completing the application, Harrison County REC requires applicants to submit a resume, letter of recommendation

and an essay answering the questions: "What leadership skills have I gained from my high school activities and how can I use them in my community and beyond?" and "What kind of a role does electricity play in your life? What would your life be like if suddenly there was no electricity? What would you miss the most?"

# IOWA YOUTH TOUR REGISTRATIONS OPEN TO ALL HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

Iowa's electric cooperatives have been sending high school students to Washington, D.C., since 1958! On the weeklong tour in June, students learn about electric cooperatives, American history and U.S. government and walk away with a greater understanding of their role as American citizens. They participate in National Youth Day, visit with their elected legislators and explore the sights around the nation's capital.

Approximately 40 high school students are chosen by local electric cooperatives from across the state of Iowa every year. The Iowa students join with more than 1,800 students from co-ops around the country for the national Youth Tour in Washington, D.C., from June 14-20.

Students are selected for this program by Harrison County Rural Electric



Applications due April 3

Cooperative staff. Applications can be downloaded at [www.HCREC.coop](http://www.HCREC.coop). All current high school sophomore, junior and senior students with a passion for government and public service are encouraged to apply. Applications are due April 3 by 4 p.m.

## DID YOU READ OUR NEWSLETTER CAREFULLY?

We have selected two lucky winners for a \$25 bill credit! Spot your account number in our newsletter and call us! (Example: Account 4321 is written four three two one.) Members must contact Harrison County Rural Electric Cooperative by Jan. 30 to be eligible to claim this credit. Questions? Contact our office by calling 712-647-2727.





# LEADING THROUGH CHANGE

## ANNUAL MEETING RECAP

BY ERIN CAMPBELL

More than 375 directors and employees from Iowa's electric cooperatives gathered in West Des Moines for the Iowa Association of Electric Cooperatives' (IAEC) 2025 Annual Meeting on Dec. 4-5. With the theme Leading through Change, the event highlighted the industry's ongoing transformation and the importance of strong leadership.

IAEC Executive Vice President and General Manager Leslie Kaufman, who marked her first year with the association in July, noted the momentum of the year. Board President Jim Miller also reflected on his first year in the role, recalling how "a farm kid from Fonda" received a call from Gov. Kim Reynolds during his second week as president. The conversation focused on emerging energy policy issues, underscoring the responsibility and visibility of the position. Miller also praised Kaufman's early outreach to member co-ops, which helped shape IAEC's strategic direction.

In her executive report, Kaufman outlined departmental progress and emphasized the critical role of advocacy as policy challenges accelerate. She highlighted a new policy and advocacy framework designed to help statewide staff work more proactively in the years ahead.

Educational sessions once again played a central role in the meeting. Speakers included National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA) Board President Mike Partin, who joined Kaufman for a fireside chat on leading through change; nuclear engineer and Miss America 2023 Grace Vanderhei; Youth Leadership Council delegate Ava Meinders; governance experts from Federated Rural Electric Insurance Exchange and NRECA; and National Association of Regulatory Utility Commissioners Executive Director Tony Clark, who addressed national issues, including resource adequacy,

cybersecurity and the growing electricity demands of AI and data centers. NFL Hall of Famer and former Congressman Steve Largent closed the event with leadership insights from his career in sports, business and politics.

IAEC also recognized longtime contributors and emerging leaders, including service award recipients, Cooperative Leadership in Iowa Program (CLIP) graduates, Rural Electric Safety Achievement Program (RESAP) certified cooperatives, nationally credentialed directors and the inaugural Iowa Electric Cooperative Excellence Award honorees: Director Excellence Award recipient Jerry Beck of Iowa Lakes Electric Cooperative and Employee Excellence Award recipient Robert Wakhouse of Harrison County REC.

Watch for more information about key annual meeting topics in upcoming issues of this magazine.

# COOPERATIVE LEADERSHIP IN IOWA PROGRAM

Congratulations to the 13 graduates of the 2025 CLIP for emerging leaders.

Participants committed to a year-long calendar of in-person, virtual and on-demand training sessions. Additionally, these individuals developed their leadership skills, gained insights on various professional roles within electric cooperatives and attended statewide events to better understand important issues facing Iowa's electric cooperatives.



## IOWA CO-OPS RECOGNIZED FOR SAFETY ACHIEVEMENTS

During the IAEC annual meeting in December, several Iowa electric cooperatives were congratulated for completing the RESAP in 2025. The cooperatives included:

- Clarke Electric Cooperative, Inc.
- Corn Belt Power Cooperative
- Eastern Iowa Light & Power Cooperative
- Grundy County Rural Electric Cooperative
- Guthrie County Rural Electric Cooperative Association
- Linn County Rural Electric Cooperative
- Maquoketa Valley Electric Cooperative
- Nishnabotna Valley Rural 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 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.

**Zach Finn**  
Central Iowa Power Cooperative

**Justin Krueger**  
Consumers Energy

**Ben Donnelly**  
East-Central Iowa Rural Electric Cooperative

**Mindy Comstock**  
Farmers Electric Cooperative, Inc.

**Emily Rush**  
Franklin Rural Electric Cooperative

**Johnna Nunemaker**  
Linn County Rural Electric Cooperative

**Abby Fischer**  
Maquoketa Valley Electric Cooperative

**Kraig Johnson**  
MiEnergy Cooperative

**Jason Stock**  
Northwest Iowa Power Cooperative

**Steve Jackson**  
Prairie Energy Cooperative

**Alicia Lohr**  
Raccoon Valley Electric Cooperative

**Tanner Rinehart**  
Southwest Iowa Rural Electric Cooperative

**Jason Jack**  
T.I.P. Rural Electric Cooperative



2025 CLIP graduates. Pictured from left: Jason Stock, Zach Finn, Johnna Nunemaker, Alicia Lohr, Abby Fischer, Emily Rush, Mindy Comstock, Jason Jack, Kraig Johnson, Steve Jackson, Tanner Rinehart, Ben Donnelly and Justin Krueger.

## DIRECTOR GOLD CREDENTIAL

The NRECA Director Gold Credential (DGC) recognizes directors who have earned their Credentialed Cooperative Director certificate and Board Leadership Certificate credentials and are committed to continuing their education throughout their service on the board. The following have achieved or maintained their DGC.

**David Hollingsworth**  
**Michael Holtkamp**  
Access Energy Cooperative

**Jerry Keleher**  
Allamakee-Clayton Electric Cooperative

**Allyn Harms**  
Butler County Rural Electric Cooperative

**Steve Boedecker**  
**James Miller**  
Calhoun County Electric Cooperative Association

**Kenneth Vandenberg**  
Chariton Valley Electric Cooperative, Inc.

**Cody Miller**  
**William White**  
Clarke Electric Cooperative, Inc.

**Dennis Beckman**  
**William Hobson**  
Consumers Energy

**Joel Carstensen**  
**Gary Kester**  
**Kurt Olson**  
**Kathrine Wunderlich**  
Eastern Iowa Light & Power Cooperative

**Mark Earhart**  
**Kristopher Petter**  
Farmers Electric Cooperative, Inc.

**Gordon Greimann**  
**Donald Greimann**  
**John Snyder**  
Franklin Rural Electric Cooperative

**Kevin Pruisner**  
Grundy County Rural Electric Cooperative

**Brenda Lundergard**  
Harrison County Rural Electric Cooperative

**Tricia Jaeger**  
**Mark Kingland**  
**Vince Morische**  
Heartland Power Cooperative

**Bruce Amundson**  
**Craig Deim**  
**Crystal Pluth**  
**Mark Tuttle**  
**Trent Will**  
**Roger Williamson**  
**Daniel Winterhof**  
Iowa Lakes Electric Cooperative

**Gary Schlotterbeck**  
**Kenneth Squires**  
Linn County Rural Electric Cooperative

**Judy Gotto**  
**Thomas Stewart**  
Maquoketa Valley Electric Cooperative

**Gene Kenkel**  
**Donna Olson**  
Nishnabotna Valley Rural Electric Cooperative

**Dale Ullrich**  
North West Rural Electric Cooperative

**Bryce Arkema**  
**Darrell Boot**  
**Carroll Hoksbergen**  
**Steve Inskeep**  
**Jon Van Woerkom**  
Pella Cooperative Electric Association

**David Onken**  
Raccoon Valley Electric Cooperative

**Ronald Hoffman**  
T.I.P. Rural Electric Cooperative

**Phillip Jensen**  
**Scott Linville**  
United Electric Cooperative



## CRAISINS, APPLE, WALNUT AND QUINOA SALAD

- ½ cup quinoa, uncooked
- ½ cup toasted walnuts, chopped
- 1 cup raisins
- 1 large apple, chopped
- 1 large celery stalk, chopped
- 2 tablespoons green onion, chopped
- 1 tablespoon honey (or white corn syrup)
- 2 tablespoons white balsamic raspberry blush vinegar
- kosher salt, to taste
- pepper, to taste

Prepare quinoa according to package directions. Refrigerate for 30 minutes, until cooled completely. In a large bowl, toss cooled quinoa, walnuts, raisins, apple, celery and onion together. In a separate bowl, mix honey or corn syrup and vinegar. Season with salt and pepper. Pour dressing over salad and mix well. Serve immediately or chill in refrigerator until ready to serve. *Serves 8*

Nancy Anderson • Ankeny  
Prairie Energy Cooperative

## CUKE, TOMATO AND ONION SALAD

- 1 medium cucumber, sliced
- 1 medium onion, sliced
- 2 medium tomatoes, cubed
- 2 teaspoons dill weed
- 1 tablespoon salad oil
- 1 tablespoon vinegar
- 2 teaspoons sugar
- 2 teaspoons salt
- dash of pepper, optional

Mix all ingredients and refrigerate 2 hours before serving. *Serves 10*

Patricia Glandorf • Williamsburg  
T.I.P. Rural Electric Cooperative

## OAT BURGERS

- 1 cup creamy cottage cheese
- 1 cup corn flakes cereal, crushed
- 1 cup quick oatmeal
- 2 eggs
- salt, to taste
- pepper, to taste
- oil
- 1 can cream of mushroom soup
- 1¼ cans milk or water

Mix cottage cheese, cereal, oatmeal, eggs, salt and pepper. Form into patties and brown in oil. Mix soup and milk or water, then cover patties with the soup mixture. Bake covered at 350 degrees F for 45-60 minutes. Cream of mushroom soup can be substituted with cream of celery soup. *Serves 2-4*

Natalie Herrington • Nevada  
Consumers Energy

## CARIBBEAN RICE AND BEANS

- 1 tablespoon oil
- ¼ teaspoon garlic powder
- ½ cup green onion, diced
- ½ cup green pepper, diced
- ½ teaspoon rosemary leaves
- ½ teaspoon thyme leaves
- ½ teaspoon black pepper
- 1 can black beans, drained and rinsed
- 1 cup raw rice, cooked
- ¼ cup picante sauce
- 2 tablespoons soy sauce
- ½ cup cheddar cheese, grated

In a skillet, sauté oil, garlic powder, green onion, green pepper, rosemary, thyme and pepper. Add beans to sautéed ingredients. Then, add rice, picante and soy sauce. Stir fry until hot, then top with cheese. *Serves 4*

Sandra Busard • Donnellson  
Access Energy Cooperative

## BLACK BEAN AND VEGGIE BURGERS

- 2 15-ounce cans black beans, rinsed and drained
- 1½ teaspoons garlic powder
- 1 teaspoon chili powder
- 1 teaspoon cumin
- ½ teaspoon paprika
- ½ teaspoon salt
- 2 teaspoons cilantro
- ¼ cup green pepper, finely chopped
- ½ cup breadcrumbs
- 1 large carrot, grated
- ¼ cup red onion, chopped
- 1 egg
- 6 buns, optional
- lettuce, optional

In a large mixing bowl, mash black beans. Add garlic powder, chili powder, cumin, paprika, salt and cilantro. Mix until combined. Add peppers, breadcrumbs, carrot, onion and egg to the combined bean mixture. Form into patties and fry over medium heat in a greased pan. Flip after 5 minutes and fry the other side for the same amount of time. Serve on a bun or on a bed of lettuce. *Serves 6*

Crystal Hammes • Libertyville  
Access Energy Cooperative

## HOMEMADE SLOW COOKER TOMATO BASIL SOUP

- 5-7 tomatoes on the vine (or 2 cups baby tomatoes)
- 1 yellow onion, diced
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 head garlic, peeled
- splash of vegetable broth
- 1 tablespoon Italian seasoning
- 1 teaspoon salt
- ½ teaspoon black pepper
- ¼ teaspoon red pepper flakes
- fresh basil, to taste
- heavy cream, optional

Place all ingredients in a slow cooker, except basil. Cook on low until tomatoes and onions are soft. Blend soup until smooth with an immersion or regular blender. Adding heavy cream will make for creamier soup. Adjust seasonings to taste and garnish with fresh basil before serving. *Serves 6, approximately*

Tristen Jungers • Archer  
North West Rural Electric Cooperative

## SPAGHETTI SALAD

- 4 medium fresh tomatoes
- 1 large red onion
- 2 cucumbers
- 2 bell peppers
- 2 pounds spaghetti
- 1 16-ounce bottle Wishbone Italian salad dressing
- Shilling Salad Supreme Spice, to taste

Chop together tomatoes, onion, cucumbers and peppers. Break spaghetti into thirds and boil until cooked. Cool slightly but add salad dressing before spaghetti is cold. Mix spaghetti with tomato mixture and add salad spice to taste. *Serves 16, or cut recipe in half to serve 8*

Denise Anderson • Ocheyedan  
Osceola Electric Cooperative, Inc.

Visit [www.ieclmagazine.com](http://www.ieclmagazine.com) and search our online archive of hundreds of recipes in various categories.



## EASY PEASY PAELLA

- 2 tablespoons oil
- 1 cup white rice
- 1 onion, diced
- 2 carrots, diced
- 2 stalks celery, diced
- 8 ounces mushrooms, quartered
- 1 bell pepper (any color), diced
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 2 pinches saffron, optional
- 1 teaspoon Old Bay seasoning
- 1 teaspoon paprika
- sprinkle cayenne
- 1 cup white wine or vegetable broth
- 8 ounces grape tomatoes
- ½ cup green olives
- 1 cup frozen peas
- salt, to taste
- pepper, to taste

Swirl oil to coat an 11-inch cast iron or other oven-safe pan. Layer (in order) rice, onion, carrots, celery, mushrooms, bell pepper, garlic, seasonings and wine or broth. Bake at 375 degrees F for 40 minutes. Stir in tomatoes, olives and peas. Bake 15 minutes. Add salt and pepper to taste. *Serves 6*

Chris Daniels • Casey  
Guthrie County Rural Electric Cooperative Association

WANTED:

## BEEF BURGER RECIPES

THE REWARD:

\$25 FOR EVERY ONE WE PUBLISH!

Deadline is Jan. 31

Fire up the grill, load up the toppings and gather around the picnic table – we want your best **beef burger recipes!** Selected submissions will appear in our May issue in celebration of Beef Month. Please include your name, address, telephone number, co-op name, recipe category and number of servings on all submissions.

EMAIL: [recipes@ieclmagazine.com](mailto:recipes@ieclmagazine.com)

MAIL: Recipes

Iowa Electric Cooperative Living magazine  
8525 Douglas Ave., Suite 48  
Des Moines, IA 50322



Craig Codner, CEO of Butler County REC, participates in shooting the national commercial.



# IOWA CO-OPS SHINE BRIGHT IN NEW TOUCHSTONE ENERGY COMMERCIAL

Hollywood came to Butler County in northeast Iowa this past summer in the form of Harvest Creative Services (Harvest) from Lansing, Michigan.

Butler County REC was chosen as the host cooperative for the Touchstone Energy® Cooperative's annual ad shoot, which took place in June. Before the shoot, however, there were numerous phone calls, emails – 825 in total – meetings, text messages and a week in May scouting locations for the five scenes.

## Behind the scenes of a major production

Anne Gardiner, public relations specialist with Butler County REC, and Marena Fritzler, marketing

director with Corn Belt Power Cooperative, spent the week with Harvest. It was a full week that included new opportunities, making grilled cheese sandwiches for one scene, shooting scenes numerous times (the first scene alone took 31 takes), making last-minute adjustments, long days and short nights, and a lot of camaraderie.

## Cooperation among cooperatives on full display

The ad was also a nod to cooperation among cooperatives, one of our seven cooperative principles. The first scene was shot at Grundy County REC with lineman Derek Snakenberg driving the REC truck. Iowa Lakes Electric Cooperative

sent three volunteers – Ryan Craig, CEO and Touchstone Energy board member; Katie Harris, communications specialist; and Jen Sievert, vice president of customer and corporate relations.

“It was an epic, one-of-a-kind experience, learning from the production crew on set, photographing the journey, and helping behind the scenes,” said Fritzler. “The magic of this creation came to life the way it did with the collective strength of many. It was neat to see local employees and board members from Butler County REC, Grundy County REC and Iowa Lakes Electric Cooperative step up and into this production.”

## Creativity, improvisation and a memorable experience

Interestingly, appliance finishes ultimately determined the filming location for the kitchen scene. A couple of Butler County REC employees offered their own kitchens for filming, but during location scouting, the production team determined the finishes and reflections in co-op employees' refrigerator doors when opened were not the right fit for the envisioned transition into the hand-drawn bucket truck. Production crews found the winning refrigerator in a local rental property in Shell Rock, where the kitchen scene was filmed.

Improvising is also a hallmark of ad shoots. When the Harvest team was searching for a table for the kitchen scene, Gardiner offered her kitchen table. Fritzler and Gardiner disassembled the table to get it through doors, loaded it onto an REC truck, covered it due to impending rain and headed to the scene, where the crew unloaded it. After the scene was shot, the table was loaded back onto the truck and covered with a tarp. Rain was definitely on its way.

Fritzler and Gardiner then went back and forth on whether the table should be housed at Butler County REC's CEO Craig Codner's home or driven back to Gardiner's home. They decided to drive the table to Gardiner's and unload it. The decision proved to be the correct one — it sprinkled, but the table remained unscathed.

The ad, released during the Touchstone Energy annual meeting on Nov. 19, is the centerpiece of Touchstone's 2026 national campaign, "The Cooperative Advantage." With more than 100 co-op members, employees and actors, this was Touchstone Energy's largest production to date. It also has the distinction of being the only ad in eight years in which shooting days had to change to accommodate weather.

"Touchstone Energy and Harvest Creative Services were great to work with," Gardiner said. "Butler County REC was proud to be the host for the 2026 ad campaign. It was an amazing opportunity that we are so grateful to have been a part of. I learned so much and had the best time. I also don't look at commercials or movies the same way I used to!"



Touchstone Energy<sup>®</sup>  
Cooperatives

## ABOUT TOUCHSTONE ENERGY

Touchstone Energy is a national network of electric cooperatives across 46 states that provides research, communications resources and employee training to help co-ops strengthen relationships with their members. These shared tools and programs support superior member satisfaction, reinforce the cooperative difference and strengthen both local communities and the broader electric cooperative network. Touchstone Energy cooperatives stand out as trusted, reliable sources of power and information for 30 million member-consumers.

## WHY DOES TOUCHSTONE ENERGY ADVERTISE?

Advertising is important for Touchstone Energy because it strengthens the unified national brand shared by hundreds of local electric cooperatives, helping members recognize the value, reliability and community focus of their co-op. It communicates the "cooperative difference," reinforces trust, and educates the public on key energy issues, while also helping attract new talent by highlighting the meaningful, community-driven careers available within the cooperative network. By keeping co-ops visible, consistent and connected, advertising supports member engagement, strengthens workforce recruitment and ensures that Touchstone Energy cooperatives continue to be seen as trusted, people-first energy providers.



Scan the QR code  
to watch the  
30-second spot.



# YOUR VOICE MATTERS: HOW TO VOTE AND GET INVOLVED IN THE DIRECTOR ELECTION

The 2026 director election process is underway! Harrison County Rural Electric Cooperative (REC) is owned and led by those we serve. Our nine-seat board is made up entirely by our membership. Here is what members can expect at this year’s director election.

The last week of March, election packets will be mailed to each of our members that will include a ballot, a ballot envelope that is unmarked, a marked envelope for the ballot envelope (this helps us keep track of who has voted while keeping votes anonymous), an insert that introduces the candidates to the membership, our current financials and a letter from our board president along with other handouts. Account number two two zero three zero one zero one zero.

Members can vote by mail by filling out their ballot and mailing it to Harrison County REC or by placing it in our drop box located on the east side of our parking lot. If members do not wish to vote by mail, they can come to cooperative headquarters on Wednesday, April 8, to vote in person from 7:30 a.m. to 3 p.m. After voting has closed on April 8, Harrison County REC staff and member officers of election will count ballots with the leadership of our attorney, Amanda James of Sullivan and Ward, P.C. Newly elected directors will be announced via our website and social media pages.

## THE DIRECTOR ELECTION PROCESS

**The nominating committee**  
 Director elections begin with Harrison County REC reaching out to our members for volunteers to serve on the nominating committee. Members may seek election to the board of directors in the district that he/she currently resides in through the nominating committee or petition nominations.

**Voting for directors**  
 Each member household is entitled to one (1) vote and no more than one (1) vote which is submitted either by mail, or at the meeting of the members. If a husband and wife hold a joint membership they shall jointly be entitled to one (1) vote and no more upon each matter submitted to a vote at a meeting of the members.

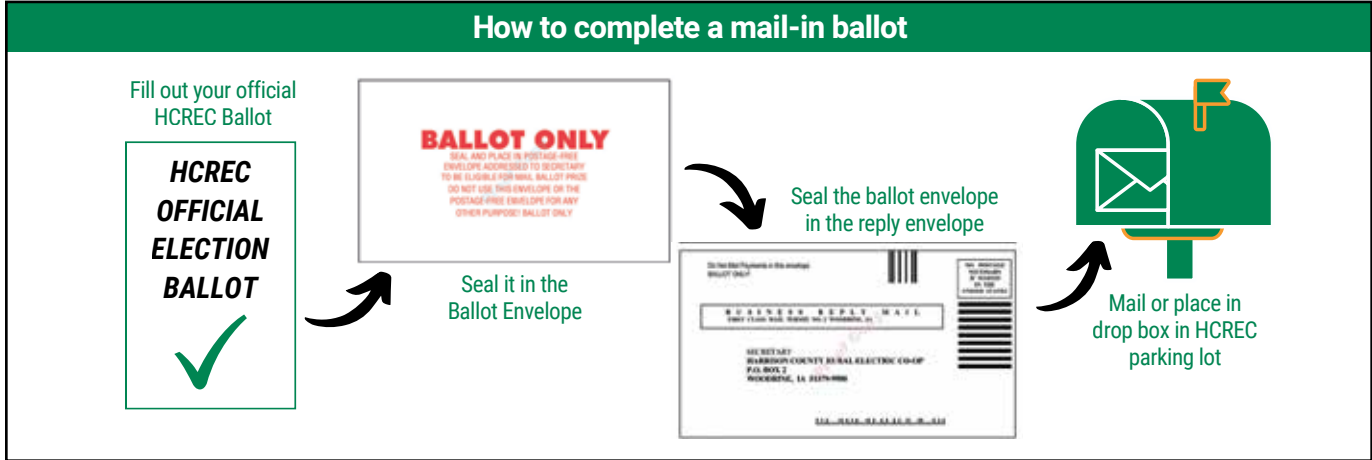
Any member who is absent from any annual or special meeting of the members may vote by mail upon any motion, resolution or election to be acted upon. Members will receive a notice of the meeting along with an exact copy of such motion, resolution or election to be acted upon, and such absent member shall express their vote in writing for each motion or resolution in the space provided and enclose each copy

so marked in a sealed envelope bearing their name and addressed to Harrison County REC. When the written vote is received by mail from any absent member it shall be accepted and counted as a vote of the absent member for the meeting.

Members who are looking for a complete and comprehensive overview of voting with Harrison County REC can view our official bylaws online at [www.HCREC.coop](http://www.HCREC.coop) or by visiting our office during regular business hours.

**Interested in counting ballots?**  
 Harrison County REC is seeking three or four volunteers to serve as inspectors of election to assist with the counting of ballots for the 2026 director election on Wednesday, April 8. The inspectors of election will meet at 2:30 p.m. to review the ballot counting process and then counting will begin promptly at 3 p.m. after balloting has closed. Interested members will receive a \$50 stipend for their time at the cooperative. Volunteers will be accepted on a first come, first serve basis until all spots are filled.

Interested members can contact Kristi Travis by calling 712-647-2727 or by emailing [harrisoninfo@hcrec.coop](mailto:harrisoninfo@hcrec.coop).



# ENERGY STORAGE ADVANCES

BY JENNAH DENNEY

Not long ago, when people talked about batteries, they meant the kind that powered flashlights, phones or watches. Today, batteries are transforming the way we power our homes, farms and even the electric grid that keeps our lights on. Across the country, battery energy storage is helping electric cooperatives keep power more reliable, affordable and resilient.

The journey began with early rechargeable batteries like lead-acid models, which were used in vehicles, tractors and backup systems for lighting or telephones. These systems were bulky, short-lived and required frequent maintenance. Later, nickel-cadmium and nickel-metal hydride batteries became popular in cordless tools, early electronics and hybrid vehicles. While they marked a step forward, they remained expensive and weren't well suited for large-scale energy applications.

A major turning point came with the development of lithium-ion batteries. These are lighter, longer lasting and capable of storing more energy in less space. Initially used in laptops and mobile phones, lithium-ion technology now powers most electric vehicles (EVs) and many of the grid-scale systems that can keep thousands of homes running for hours. And innovation hasn't stopped there. Researchers are now exploring solid-state and sodium-ion batteries, which use safer, more abundant materials and promise to make battery energy storage even more affordable and accessible. Each advancement brings batteries closer to becoming a foundational part of everyday life.

## Co-ops embrace battery technology

Across the country, electric co-ops are deploying battery energy storage systems to support grid operations and manage local demand. Batteries can store excess electricity from renewable sources like solar and wind, then



Often paired with rooftop solar panels, residential battery storage systems can provide backup power during outages, keeping essential equipment like lights, refrigerators and medical devices running. *Photo Source: Base Power*



Across the country, electric co-ops are deploying battery energy storage systems to support grid operations and manage local demand.



Utility-scale storage technologies are helping electric co-ops improve reliability, integrate renewable energy and manage infrastructure costs.

discharge it when demand rises, which can help balance supply and demand and improve grid stability. They also provide an alternative to traditional infrastructure upgrades. In areas where energy use is growing, a strategically placed battery can handle short-term peaks in demand, reducing the need for new substations or extended power lines. This can lower capital costs and reduce construction timelines.

More than 70 electric cooperatives in 24 states have installed or are testing battery energy storage systems, according to the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association. Most systems currently in use are designed to deliver power for two to eight hours. However, long-duration energy storage (LDES) technologies are emerging that can store energy for 10 hours or more, and in some cases, multiple days. It's important to recognize that battery technology is still evolving and it might not be economically feasible in all uses or areas.

These battery storage systems could help utilities manage extended periods of low renewable generation or respond to prolonged grid stress events, especially in remote or weather-sensitive areas.

## Potential reliability, cost benefits

Battery storage may also offer benefits to co-op members. Residential systems can provide backup power during outages, keeping essential equipment like lights, refrigerators and medical devices running. For homes with rooftop solar, batteries allow excess energy to be stored during the day and used at night. Some cooperatives offer time-of-use rates, where electricity costs less during off-peak hours. Batteries can store low-cost energy and use it later, helping reduce monthly bills.

## Electric vehicle advances

Battery innovation is also being driven by the growth of EVs. Manufacturers are working to improve battery performance, extend battery lifespan, reduce charging time and lower costs. These improvements are influencing the broader energy storage market. Some EVs now include vehicle-to-home (V2H) or vehicle-to-grid (V2G) capabilities, allowing a car to supply power to a home during an outage or send energy back to the grid during peak demand.

*Jennah Denney writes on consumer and cooperative affairs for the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association.*

# DISTRIBUTION AUTOMATION KEEPS POWER FLOWING, OUTAGES AT BAY

BY CATHY CASH

Staying online uninterrupted by a power glitch seems more important than ever. And today, it's even more possible than ever before, thanks to advanced energy technologies that can instantly rearrange electricity flows to areas hit by storms or other disturbances.

Distribution automation, also known as DA, refers to a powerful set of tools that includes automated sensors, communications systems and data analytics-enabling electric utilities to monitor power lines, field equipment and generation facilities in real time.

Equipped with these DA tools, Iowa's electric cooperatives can detect an outage and isolate it in real-time from their control rooms before sending out field crew to repair the damaged powerlines.

"Distribution automation helps electric co-ops deliver reliable, high-quality service to members when today's world demands it most," said Ravindra Singh, senior principal of DA for the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association.

Some call DA a "self-healing electric grid" because its application, such as fault location, isolation and service restoration (FLISR), allows the network of power lines and substations to automatically reconfigure in response to disruptions.

## How it works

When power lines are damaged or shortened by storms, critters or some disaster, DA systems can reroute electricity from the power source to unaffected infrastructure. This allows electric service to continue uninterrupted to a community that would otherwise suffer an outage.



With distributed automation technology and its analysis of network data, co-ops can see their system's assets, how they are operating and what energy resources are on their power lines to support better quality service and reliability.



Distribution automation devices installed on a power pole bolster reliability and help members stay powered even during storms.



Distributed automation can save electric co-ops and their members money by reducing inspection time for field apparatus such as transformers, substations and power lines.

DA not only has a hand in preventing outages, but this suite of technologies can save electric co-ops and their members money by reducing inspection time for field apparatuses such as transformers, substations and power lines.

With real-time field measurements from DA technologies, a co-op gains situational awareness of its electricity network and can minimize unnecessary maintenance activities, truck rolls and crew dispatches to examine lines, locate damage and make repairs.

"Power distribution grids are evolving from being a passive network to a more active network," said Singh. "With DA technology and its analysis of network data, co-ops can see their system's assets, how they are operating and what energy resources are on their power lines to support better quality service and reliability."

## Knowledge is power

Without DA, a co-op may not know where electric vehicles, rooftop solar, residential batteries, generators and other distribution resources are being added or operated on its system by its members. This can be a challenge when it comes to managing peak demand and having to curtail energy to sustain reliability.

Electricity demand is only going to grow because of new types of loads such as data centers, crypto mining and EVs, according to any industry forecast. So, it makes sense for utilities to optimize the use of their existing infrastructure or equipment to keep costs in check.

With DA, electric co-ops can better manage and grow their systems and respond to crises safely and efficiently while their members enjoy reliable electricity without hiccups.

*Cathy Cash writes on consumer and cooperative affairs for the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association.*

# WISHING YOU AN “AWE”SOME YEAR

BY DARCY DOUGHERTY MAULSBY

Remember when Iowa’s night sky offered breathtaking views on Veterans Day 2025? If you stepped outside on Nov. 11, you could see the northern lights shimmering across the horizon.

Like many other Iowans, I couldn’t resist taking pictures of this incredible phenomenon. Professional photographers and amateurs with smartphone cameras shared images online of the spectacle, with ribbons of red, green, pink and violet dancing above farms, small towns and city skylines.

The northern lights aren’t common in Iowa since we’re located too far south to regularly see the region where the lights are most visible. Seeing them in Iowa requires a strong geomagnetic storm to push the aurora far enough south and create an exceptionally vibrant display – a rare event.

In other words, it’s awesome.

“I couldn’t believe how vivid the northern lights were,” commented my friend Donetta Stewart of rural Auburn, who captured amazing views of the sky above her barn during the celestial show. “I’ve never seen anything like it. Every now and then, it’s soul satisfying to witness something that captures your sense of wonder once again.”

## Make room for more awe and wonder

That word “wonder” resonated with me. It describes the magic inspired by a sense of awe.

What exactly is awe?

We’ve all experienced it, even if we didn’t know what to call it. Whether we’re enjoying a stunning sunset or watching a new leaf grow on a plant, the feeling we get in that moment – amazed, inspired, transported – is what researchers call awe.

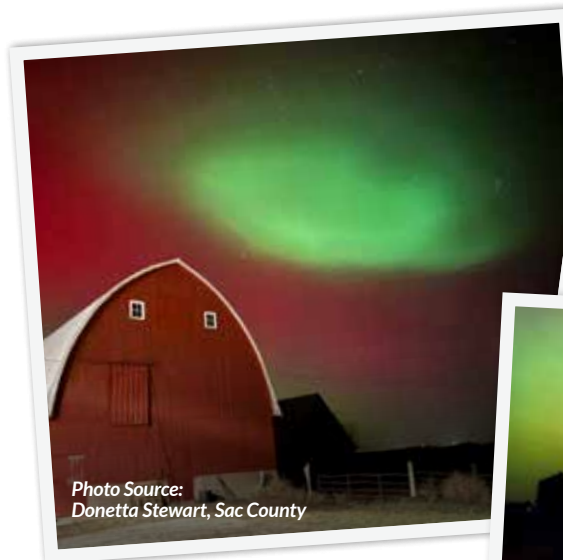


Photo Source: Donetta Stewart, Sac County



Photo Source: Lynn Poen, Lake City



Photo Source: Darcy Dougherty Maulsby, Yetter

“I’ve been thinking a lot lately about how it’s important to make room and opportunity for awe and wonder in your life, especially as we get older,” Donetta told me. “I constantly remind myself of how it is a privilege to see the passing years. Many I know didn’t get to do that.”

She’s exactly right. Awe is a rich blessing. It’s a gentle nudge to appreciate the everyday wonders flourishing all around us. It’s something we all need more of in our lives.

Like many positive emotions, awe makes us feel good. It helps us connect with others. Awe decreases stress levels, and it increases generosity and kindness. Awe also makes us happier and more satisfied with life.

## “Everything is a miracle”

Research shows that awe shifts us from a competitive, dog-eat-dog mindset to a sense that we’re a part of a community, a culture, an ecosystem. Thanks to awe, “our individual self gives way to the boundary-dissolving sense of being part of something much larger,” noted Dacher Keltner, author of the book “Awe: The New Science of Everyday Wonder and How It Can Transform Your Life.”

Finding ways to cultivate awe in everyday life leads us to appreciate what is most humane in our human nature.

- Slow down and focus on your senses. Tune into the sights, textures, smells, tastes and sounds around you, from the flavors of a delicious meal to the delight of listening to a favorite song.
- Spend time in nature. Notice the vastness of the sky, the beauty of trees and flowers, and the way the sunlight sparkles on a river or lake. Even observing nature from a window can help.
- Document the beauty around you. Write down things you notice that bring you joy, or take some photographs, just like many of us did with the northern lights.

This year, make time to nurture a sense of awe, and take inspiration in this quote attributed to Albert Einstein: “There are only two ways to live your life. One is as though nothing is a miracle. The other is as though everything is a miracle.”

Darcy Dougherty Maulsby lives near her family’s Century Farm northwest of Lake City. Visit her at [www.darcymaulsby.com](http://www.darcymaulsby.com).



HARRISON COUNTY  
RURAL ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE

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