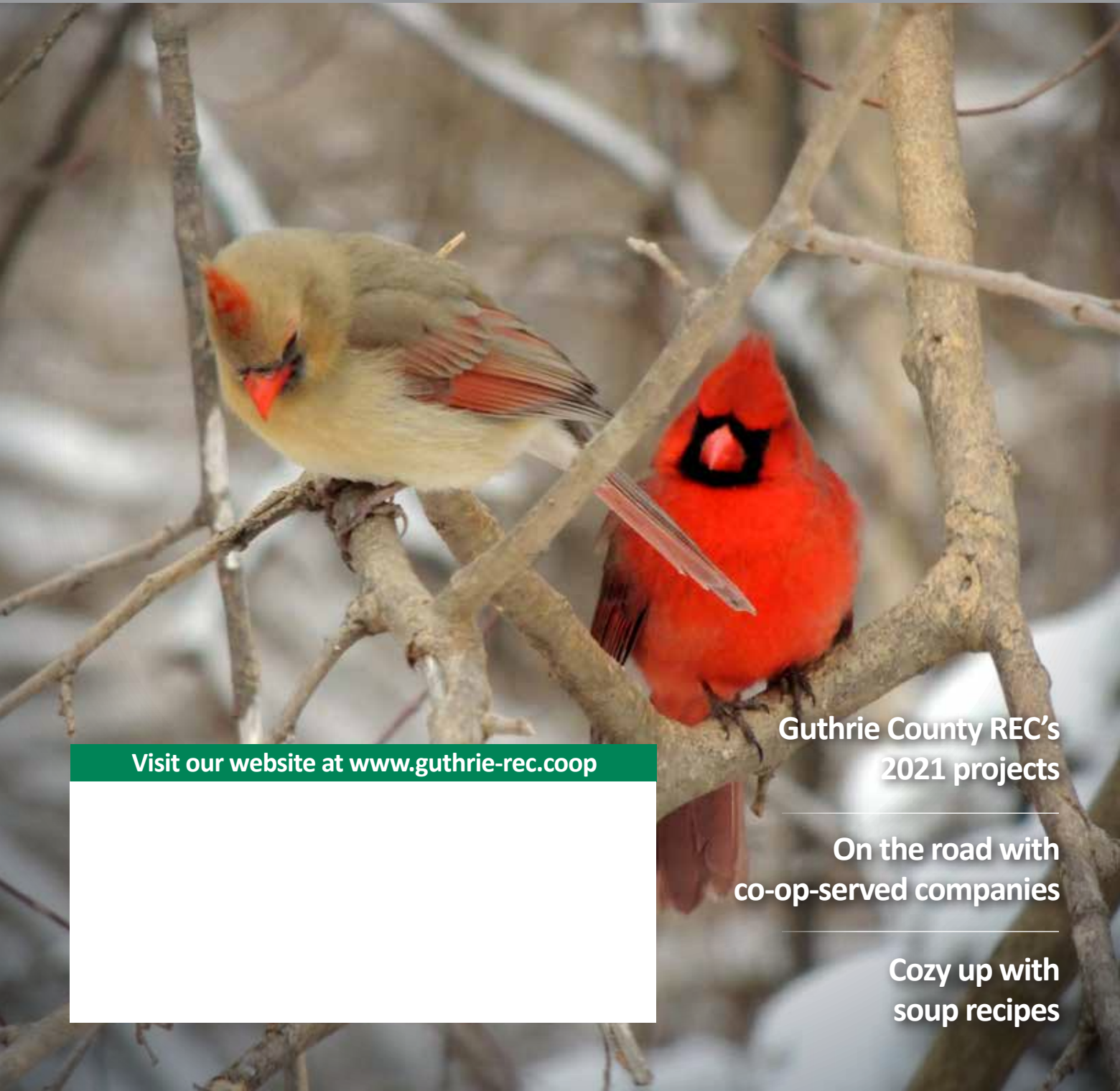


living with energy IN IOWA

JANUARY 2021



Guthrie County REC members: Let's connect! ▶ See Page 5



Visit our website at www.guthrie-rec.coop

Guthrie County REC's
2021 projects

On the road with
co-op-served companies

Cozy up with
soup recipes

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Energy Efficiency Tip of the Month

Energy bills can increase during winter for a variety of reasons, like more time spent at home, and shorter days and longer nights. Small actions, like turning down your thermostat, replacing old bulbs with LEDs and washing clothes in cold water can help you save.



living with energy IN IOWA

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ON THE COVER



Congratulations to Bea McDowell, an Access Energy Cooperative member from Mt. Pleasant, for supplying the cover image for this month's issue! To have your photo considered for a future cover, email high-res images to editor@livingwithenergyiowa.com. If we select your photo, you'll be awarded with \$100. 🎉

Advocacy in the new year

BY KEVIN CONDON

For Iowa's electric co-ops, our cooperative principles guide us in good times and bad – even during derecho storms and global pandemics. Your local electric co-op strives to power your family and community no matter what may come our way.

Advocating with lawmakers and elected officials with a unified co-op voice during policy debates impacts how your co-op provides safe, affordable, reliable and environmentally responsible power.

While COVID restrictions have changed how we advocate, it has not changed *why* we advocate. We focus on advocacy because we care about our consumer-members. We know that when our communities are strong, the co-ops are strong. When the pandemic hit, Iowa's electric co-ops supported policies that helped our rural agribusiness members, including biofuels, food processing and small manufacturing. While we will continue advocating on behalf of member industries, as well as issues like renewable energy, safety, economic development and taxes, we'll likely be starting the new legislative session much like the last one ended – with limited physical access to the Statehouse.

Because the co-op mission of powering lives and empowering communities remains constant, we will always find ways to adapt to challenges. Virtual advocacy is not the same as talking face-to-face, but it is still essential. When possible and appropriate, your co-op engages with lawmakers directly. When that's not possible, we reach legislators through phone calls, emails, social media or whatever pathways materialize.

The Iowa Association of Electric Cooperatives manages our grassroots advocacy efforts through the Iowa Rural Power initiative.



We recently updated our advocacy website at www.iaruralpower.org, which now includes our Voter

Activation Center and a new “Bill Tracker” feature to help electric co-op member-consumers stay informed about legislation important to rural electric cooperatives.

As Iowa's electric co-ops look back on 2020, we reflect on the August 10 storm that hit our state with little advanced warning. The devastating derecho storm that swept through Iowa with the force of a Category 4 hurricane caused thousands of power outages and left a path of destruction that required an extensive restoration effort.

While stopping the derecho was beyond our control, we can limit the damage of these powerful storms and restore power faster by keeping trees and other vegetation away from power lines. Vegetation management is an important part

of protecting the electric grid and ensuring reliable service. But in some instances, prescriptive easements prevent utilities from adequately clearing vegetation that can cause outages and create safety concerns. Iowa's electric cooperatives support plans that would allow utilities a specified vegetation management clearance to maintain reliable service and minimize outages.

A few years ago, Iowa's electric co-ops attempted to pass legislation to gain vegetation management clearances but were opposed by groups who claimed that the legislation infringed on property rights. With the memory of the derecho still fresh in our minds, we hope those groups and lawmakers will consider the rights of the member-consumers down the line who want to keep their lights on. ⚡

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

EDITOR'S CHOICE CONTEST

Win a Fitbit Charge 4 Fitness Activity Tracker

Make keeping those New Year's exercise resolutions easier with a Fitbit Charge 4 Fitness Activity Tracker! Take your goals further with a health and fitness tracker that packs built-in GPS for pace and distance, 24/7 heart rate tracking and more into a comfortable wristband. *The winner will be able to select from four available colors.* ⚡



Visit our website and win!

Enter this month's contest by visiting www.livingwithenergyiniowa.com no later than Jan. 31, 2021. 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 Cuisinart® Extra-Large Rotisserie Fryer and Steamer from the November issue was Shirley Babcock, Butler County REC.

Our commitment to you never wavers even during a global pandemic

BY ELDEN WOLFE



After all we went through in 2020, I know I'm not the only one who was happy to usher in a new year. But despite the challenges we faced, the line crew at

Guthrie County REC persevered to ensure our member-consumers received the electricity they needed when they needed it.

In March, when it appeared COVID-19 would affect our work processes, we immediately implemented new safety procedures for all our employees. For the line crew, this meant staggering work start times to avoid congregating in groups. Linemen were assigned to work together in the same pairs daily to try to avoid cross exposure. When out on a job, they kept their distance from each other, had plenty of hand sanitizer available and other PPE to minimize risk. We reinforced the importance of good hygiene overall



and asked that anyone who felt sick to stay home.

Aside from adapting to our internal procedural changes, we also faced a challenge of delays with materials delivery. The ripple effect of COVID-19 meant lead times for receipt of new equipment were longer. Despite this, in 2020, we continued our commitment to updating our aging infrastructure to complete the rebuild of three miles of three-phase line and 17.1 miles of single-phase line. We installed 20 new overhead line services and 36 new underground services. We upgraded our Panorama and Yale substations to 69kV to better accommodate load and improve our reliability.

In August, we were proud to send four of our linemen to the Nevada area to assist with mutual aid following the derecho that knocked out power for member-consumers of our fellow electric cooperative, Consumers Energy. A special shout out to Jeremy Gruber, Brian Marso, Todd Tinken and Curt Knapp (pictured from left, above) for their outstanding efforts to help fellow co-op members get back online.

On a personal note, I want to express my gratitude for the 34 years of service our Line Crew Foreman Doug Downing provided to the cooperative. Doug retired in October and will be missed. We wish him well in his retirement!

Just like at home, our electric system requires "circuit breakers" to interrupt the flow of electricity if something lands on a power line. These are called oil circuit reclosers (OCRs), and they help protect the larger system and reduce the chance for widespread outages. In the last year, we serviced 58 OCRs and replaced 15 of them.

With an end to the global pandemic in sight, we have shifted our focus to 2021 projects. In February, we will put a new 55-foot bucket truck into service. We continuously monitor the wear and tear on our truck fleet and perform routine and preventative service and maintenance to ensure we extend the life of the trucks as long as possible. Eventually, these trucks become too costly to maintain, having reached the end of their productive life with high mileage, worn tires and exhaustive engine repairs.

For our member-consumers, we will work toward our goal of rebuilding 20 miles of line across our service territory and focus on rebuilding the Perry substation for its conversion and upgrade to 69kV.

Thank you to all our member-consumers for entrusting us with your electric service. We appreciate your patience when the power goes out, and we look forward to providing you with the best service possible in 2021. ⚡

Elden Wolfe is the line superintendent for Guthrie County REC.



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Let's connect

BY COZY NELSEN



When we say that we live in a “connected” world, most of us think about technology, like our smartphones and other devices and gadgets. But when you’re a

member-consumer of an electric co-op (that’s you!), there’s so much more to being part of our connected co-op community.

As a member-consumer of Guthrie County REC, you help to power good in our local community through initiatives like RECare, food and toy drives, and other initiatives that help our community’s most vulnerable.

We depend on you because you power our success, and when Guthrie County REC does well, the community thrives because we’re all connected.

We greatly value our connection to you, the members we serve. And we’d like to help you maximize the value you can get from the co-op through a variety of programs, products and services that we offer. For example, we can help you save money on purchasing energy-efficient

appliances, heating/cooling systems and more with our 2021 rebates. If you’re familiar with our SmartHub app, you can monitor and manage your home energy use, pay your bill online and access a menu of additional options for potential savings and more.

When you follow Guthrie County REC on social media, you can stay up to date on power restoration efforts, tree trimming planning, energy efficiency, electrical safety tips and more. You’ll also see photos of our line crews in action and our employees helping with community service projects – and who doesn’t enjoy seeing good things happening in our community!

By connecting with us, you can get real-time updates from your co-op. That’s why we want to make sure we have your most current contact information on hand. If we can’t connect with you on these platforms or in person, you could miss out on potential savings or important information.

Updated contact information can even speed up the power restoration

process during an outage. That’s because when you call to report an outage, our automated system recognizes your phone number and matches it with your account location. Accurate information helps our outage-management system predict the location and the possible cause of an outage, making it easier for our crews to correct the problem.

We hope you will connect with us whenever and wherever you can – whether that means attending our annual meeting in 2022, providing feedback on a recent interaction with our employees, or simply downloading our app.

Guthrie County REC exists to serve our members, and when we’re better connected to you and our local community, we’re better prepared to answer the call.

To update your contact information or to learn more about co-op products and services that can help you save, visit www.guthrie-rec.coop, or call 888-747-2206. We look forward to connecting with you! ⚡



Watch for the Guthrie County REC 2020 Annual Report and 2021 election results
 in your February issue of *Living with Energy in Iowa*.



TO ALL OUR MEMBERS

Thank you

From all of us at Guthrie County REC, thank you for entrusting us to power your lives.

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On the road in Iowa

Ambulances, campers, dump trucks and tankers

BY KAY SNYDER

Our family outings have turned to exploring Iowa's parks and recreation spots during these past few months. Settled in the passenger seat on our last road trip, I was poised to pass the time with my iPad and phone. Instead, I decided to put the devices down and enjoy the destination and the journey as well.

As I started paying attention to all the vehicles on and off-road, it got me thinking, and I did have to Google a couple of quick facts. Iowa has approximately 115,000 miles of roads, ranking No. 14 in the nation for Total Public Road Length. I noticed some unique vehicles in the sea of cars – including SUVs, pickup trucks and tractor trailers – and many are manufactured in Iowa. When you think of Iowa-manufactured vehicles, two companies likely come to mind – John Deere and Winnebago. However, there are many others that you can be on the lookout for as you venture out in 2021, including these featured in this article. As a bonus, the manufacturers are often served by Iowa's electric cooperatives.

Countryside Tank Company – Osceola

Served by Clarke Electric Cooperative, Inc.

Have you ever wondered what's inside the huge tanker trucks that crisscross the country and how the contents are kept safe? Countryside Tank Company has an answer. The company has more than 40 years of experience in steel fabrication. It produces tank transport trailers that can haul up to 17,500 gallons of a wide variety of substances, safely and in full accordance with the latest specifications and requirements. In 2018, Countryside Tank leveraged its pressure vessel building experience and started manufacturing bobtail bottles, which go on truck chassis. These versatile vehicles are primarily



used in residential propane delivery where a transport trailer isn't practical. If you have a propane tank, check out your next delivery to see if it is transported in a Countryside Tank Bobtail. For more information, visit countrysidetank.com.

Life Line Emergency Vehicles – Sumner

Served by Butler County Rural Electric Cooperative

Ambulances may be something you don't think about until one whizzes past you on the highway, or you or a family member are in one. A leader in manufacturing emergency vehicles is employee-owned Life Line Emergency Vehicles, located in Sumner. For over 30

years, it has been committed to making the safest, most efficient vehicle possible. Life Line offers several models to accommodate everything from hospital-to-hospital transport, compact body designs to navigate metropolitan areas, EMS and fire departments, and critical care vehicles. Life Line prides itself on innovation, offering proprietary aluminum extrusions that add strength and improve stability. It was the first to offer Labyrinth-style door construction, a double aluminum insulated floor and a two-piece aluminum crash rail. Life Line is also known for its state-of-the-art Elite electrical system. Customers say it is all the hidden details that set Life Line ambulances apart from others.



For more information, visit www.lifelineambulance.com.

Camp365 – Albia

Served by Chariton Valley Electric Cooperative

There is a newcomer on the road that will catch your eye. It is CAMP365, the world’s first fold-out cabin. This new company, with its manufacturing facility in Albia, was named to the 2020 Top RV Debut of the Year by *RVBusiness* magazine. Camp365 is 12 feet wide and 8 feet deep, with more than 7 feet of headroom. It is insulated and has heating and cooling to make it usable in any weather. The camper folds down, easily fits in a standard garage and can be pulled by a Toyota Prius or any vehicle rated for towing 1,500 pounds. Setting up the camper takes less than 10 minutes, requires no tools and boasts that the “lift-assist” feature makes it very easy. Referencing that, if you can push a vacuum cleaner, you can level out your Camp365 cabin. Keep an eye out for these new and innovative campers as they continue to hit the road in 2021 and beyond. For more information, visit Camp365.com.

SmithCo – Le Mars

Served by North West REC

The next time you pass a construction site, see if side dumping trailers are being used. SmithCo builds a variety of side dump trailers to haul all types of cargo. As its name indicates, side dump trailers tilt to the side, along the trailer’s full length to dump the contents instead of lifting the whole trailer and dumping out the back. The benefits of a side dump trailer are superior stability, easier unloading and faster cycle times. Unloading can even take place as the vehicle is moving. Agriculture, construction, demolition, mining

and waste industries often use side dump trailers. SmithCo has been in operation for over 25 years and has stayed true to manufacturing only side dump trailers, which it custom designs and manufactures to meet state and federal laws. For more information, visit sidedump.com.

Advanced manufacturing is Iowa’s largest industry, accounting for more than 17% of our state’s total Gross Domestic Product. Nearly 6,000 manufacturers produce everything from food products and medical devices to aerospace products and construction machinery. Industry-leading companies are producing phenomenal products right here in Iowa.

To put a more personal face on these economic impact numbers, there was an average of 223,000 manufacturing employees in Iowa in 2018, many of whom live in rural communities across Iowa. Iowa’s rural electric cooperatives play a vital role in supporting these employees, businesses and the communities in which they live and work.

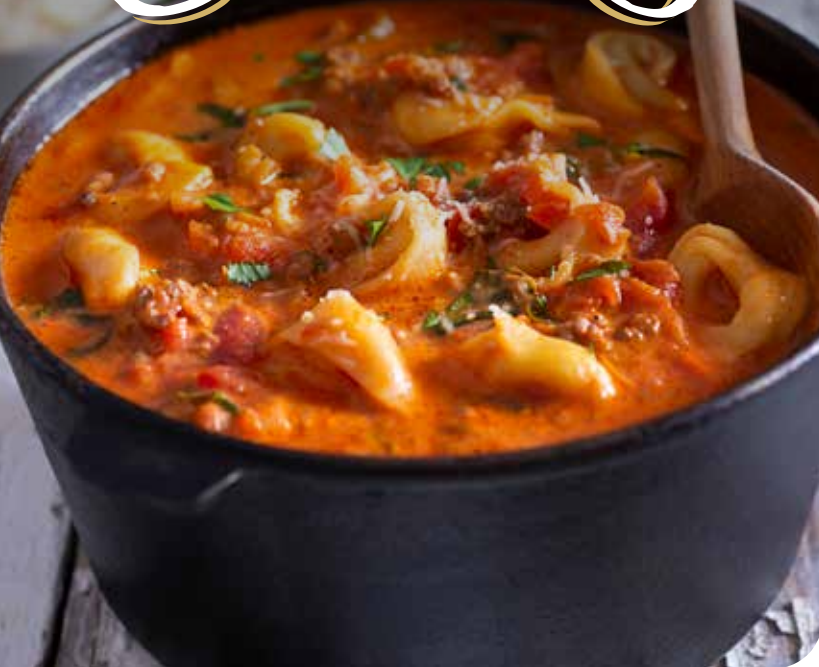
As you travel the state throughout the year, be on the lookout for these vehicles, and become curious about others you see. You never know; they just might be made in Iowa! ⚡

Kay Snyder is the director of marketing and communications for the Iowa Area Development Group.



COZY UP WITH

SOUPS



Hearty Tortellini Soup

- 1 pound Italian sausage
- 1 cup onion, chopped
- 1 cup celery, chopped
- 1 cup green pepper, chopped
- 1 cup carrots, chopped
- 30 ounces canned tomatoes, chopped
- 1 quart V-8 juice
- 1 quart beef or chicken broth
- 1 tablespoon Worcestershire sauce
- 1 tablespoon garlic, minced
- 1 tablespoon Italian seasoning
- 1 tablespoon brown sugar
- 1 teaspoon dried basil, chopped
- 1 teaspoon white pepper
- 1 bay leaf
- 1 package frozen three-cheese tortellini, cook per instructions and drain
- Parmesan cheese, shredded or grated

In 5- to 6-quart Dutch oven, cook sausage and drain. Add veggies, liquids and seasonings. Soft boil until veggies are tender, about 30 minutes. Add tortellini and stir gently. Cook an additional 5 minutes. Discard bay leaf and serve with Parmesan cheese. *Servings: 10-12*

Belinda Fink • Cambridge • Consumers Energy

Buttery Onion Soup

- 2 cups onion, chopped
- ½ cup butter
- ¼ cup flour
- 1 cup chicken broth
- 2 cups milk
- 2 cups Swiss cheese
- salt and pepper, to taste
- seasoned croutons

Sauté onion in butter until tender. Blend flour into sautéed onions. Gradually add broth and milk. Cook over medium heat until bubbly. Add cheese and stir until melted. Season to taste and serve with seasoned croutons.

**Ramona Harken • Ackley
Grundy County Rural Electric Cooperative**

Broccoli Cheddar Soup

- ½ cup onion, chopped
- ¼ cup butter
- ¼ cup flour
- ½ teaspoon salt
- 4 cups milk
- 2 cups cheddar cheese, shredded
- 10 ounces frozen broccoli, cooked, drained and chopped

Sauté onion in butter. Blend in flour and salt; gradually add milk and cook, stirring constantly until thickened. Add cheese and broccoli, stir until cheese is melted. *Servings: 6 (1 cup each)*

**Linda Cox • Leon
Southwest Iowa Rural Electric Cooperative**

Ham n' Swiss Soup

- 3 tablespoons butter
- 3 tablespoons all-purpose flour
- 2 cups chicken broth
- 2 cups frozen broccoli, chopped
- 4 teaspoons onion, chopped
- 2 cups fully cooked ham, cubed
- 1 cup whipping cream
- ½ teaspoon dried thyme
- dash salt
- dash pepper
- 1½ cups Swiss cheese, shredded

In large saucepan, melt butter then whisk in flour until smooth. Gradually add broth and bring to a boil. Cook and stir for 2 minutes or until thickened. Add broccoli and onion then cook until crisp-tender. Add ham, cream and seasonings. Heat thoroughly. Stir in cheese until melted. *Servings: 4*

**Dorothy Carolus • Parkersburg
Grundy County Rural Electric Cooperative**

BRIGHTEN THE BOWL

Fresh herbs, such as parsley, basil or cilantro can quickly lose their flavor if simmered in a hot soup. But when sprinkled on the top of a bowl just before serving, they will add freshness and bright flavor.

Grandma's Chicken & Rice Soup

- 6 cups chicken broth
- 2 cups cooked chicken, diced
- 2 cups cooked rice
- 1 cup onion, diced
- 4 stalks celery, diced

Mix all ingredients and simmer on low for at least 30 minutes. *Servings: 6*

**Cindy Langel • Carroll
Raccoon Valley Electric Cooperative**

Taco Soup

- 1 pound hamburger, browned
- 1 package taco seasoning
- 1 package powdered ranch mix
- 2 quarts tomato juice
- 1 teaspoon celery salt
- 1 teaspoon garlic salt
- 1 teaspoon salt
- ½ teaspoon pepper
- 1 teaspoon sugar
- 2 tablespoons chili powder
- 1 can tomato soup
- 1 large can chili beans
- 1 large can black beans
- 1 quart corn
toppings: shredded cheddar cheese, sour cream, corn chips

Add taco seasoning and ranch mix to browned hamburger with a little water. Stir in remaining ingredients. Simmer, stirring often. Serve with cheddar cheese, sour cream and corn chips. *Servings: 10-12*

**Steph Messner • Rock Rapids
Lyon Rural Electric Cooperative**

Cabbage Soup

- 1 head cabbage
- 1 link kielbasa sausage, chopped
- 1 onion, chopped
- 3-4 potatoes, chopped, optional
- 3 cans cannellini beans
- 4 beef bouillon cubes
- 2 carrots, chopped
- 4 cloves garlic, chopped

Chop cabbage into eight chunks. Add other ingredients to pot. Add water to desired consistency. Bring to boil and then simmer 2-3 hours. Soup can be cooked in slow cooker on low all day, 8-10 hours. *Servings: 8*

**Jenny Hall • Woodbine
Harrison County Rural Electric Cooperative**

Potato Spinach Soup

- 1 cup onion, diced
- 3 tablespoons parsley (fresh or dried)
- 3 tablespoons butter
- 2-3 medium baked potatoes, diced with skin
- 1 bag fresh spinach, chopped
- 1 quart chicken broth
- ½ teaspoon salt
- ½ teaspoon pepper
- 1 cup fat-free half and half
topping: fried bacon pieces
optional seasonings: 1 tablespoon basil (fresh or dried), pinch of nutmeg
optional meat: small cubes of baked ham or sausage

Sauté onions and parsley in butter until tender. In saucepan, add potatoes, spinach, chicken broth and seasonings. If substituting frozen spinach, thaw and drain before adding. Simmer soup until hot and bubbly, stirring often. Add cream (for a thicker soup ½ cup dried potato flakes can be added). Top with fried bacon pieces. *Servings: 8*

Julie Flory • Pella • Pella Cooperative Electric Association

PUT CHEESE RINDS TO WORK

Save your Parmesan cheese rinds; they add delicious flavor to minestrone, bean or hearty vegetable soups. Keep rinds in the freezer and toss one in when you simmer the soup. It will add some saltiness, so taste before seasoning at the end. Remove the rind before serving the soup.

S O U P E R S O U P

BROWN OR SEAR THE MEAT

If you are adding meat to a soup, sear or brown it in a sauté pan before you add it to the soup. This adds a deeper savory flavor to the entire soup.

S O U P E R S O U P

CHOP IN SPOON SIZES

When chopping vegetables, consider how big you want them to be on the spoon. Even hearty soups should have well-chopped, perfectly portioned vegetables.

S O U P E R S O U P

Wanted: Rhubarb or Asparagus Recipes! The Reward: \$25 for every one we publish!

Spring showers bring rhubarb and asparagus! These spring foods are a sure sign that warm and sunny days are on the horizon. Share your favorite recipes, and if we run yours in the magazine, we'll send a \$25 credit for your electric co-op to apply to your power bill. Recipes submitted also may be archived on our website at www.livingwithenergyiowa.com.

The deadline is Jan. 31, 2021. Please include your name, address, telephone number, co-op name and the recipe category on all submissions. **NEW: Please also provide the number of servings per recipe.**

EMAIL:

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

MAIL:

Recipes

Living with Energy in Iowa
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A diverse fuel mix ensures

How co-ops keep electricity reliable – the traditional way and the digital way

BY PAUL WESSLUND

“Don’t put all your eggs in one basket.”

It’s a familiar saying, and believe it or not, that age-old piece of wisdom is used by electric utilities to make sure you receive a reliable supply of electricity.

Michael Leitman, senior analyst at the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association, translates that saying into utility-industry terminology this way:

“You don’t want to be too reliant on any one energy source,” says Leitman. “The goal is if one resource becomes constrained, others are there to fill the gap and keep the lights on – it’s about managing risk and priorities.”

Following that advice has been pretty straightforward for decades. A mix of four energy sources provide nearly all generated electricity: coal, natural gas, nuclear and hydroelectric power.

Mind-boggling energy changes.

But these days, there are a lot more options – the variety of electricity generation is higher than it’s ever been and not just because of more renewable energy sources like wind and solar. While the technology still has a long way to go for large-scale deployment, batteries are getting cheaper and powerful enough to supplement wind turbines during calm weather and solar when the sun’s not shining. Energy load-control programs can shut off water heaters for short periods during times when electricity use is highest. Rapid technological advances across the power industry have also been key for unprecedented opportunities, allowing utilities to manage the electric power systems in ways that make energy resources more useful.

While a broader mix of fuels



could potentially bring even greater reliability to your electric service, coordinating all the new and old equipment of the nation’s electric grid requires new skills and careful management.

For years, the electric utility industry’s main fuel source has been coal. Coal traditionally provided about half the electricity in the country because it was reliable, plentiful and relatively inexpensive. That backbone was supplemented by nuclear power, hydroelectric power and natural gas.

But that’s changed radically over the last 15 years.

The supply and price of natural gas fell dramatically with fracking and other drilling technologies. Natural gas plants can be built smaller, faster and cheaper than coal stations, and they can be controlled more quickly as power demand changes from day to day. Coal costs rose with environmental regulations, and renewable energy sources received more attention because of their benefits to the environment.

reliability



As a result, by 2016, natural gas replaced coal as the largest source of electricity. In 2019, natural gas made up 38% of the electric utility fuel mix; coal, 23%; nuclear, 20%; and hydroelectric power, 7%. The non-hydro renewable energy share of electricity production has risen from almost nothing 10 years ago, to 7% for wind and 2% for solar – and both continue to increase rapidly.

Those statistical trends hide two revolutionary changes.

One is that renewable energy doesn't act like the more traditional power plants. A coal plant can run all the time, while wind and solar shut on and off as Mother Nature makes changes every hour – meaning the wind doesn't always blow, and the sun doesn't always shine. But with the second revolutionary change – the smart grid – the use of these complex renewable energy sources can be managed better.

The smart grid arrives.

The digital transformation began more than two decades ago, and disruptive forces have had an impact on the power sector ever since. Electric utility dreamers foresaw a shift from an analog network of levers and switches to a digital system that includes automated power management and new ways to manage the flow of electricity.

That smart grid has arrived. Power outages can be detected more quickly, and you can even track the repair process on your smartphone. Digital software can more effectively manage the output of rooftop solar panels, sending electricity back to the utility when the homeowner isn't using all the electricity they produce. The smart grid can also make solar and wind energy more useful through the use of batteries. It's a lot

of technology that helps factor into the quality of electric service.

Managing the smart grid brings improvements, as well as requirements for new ways of doing business.

“The smart grid brings new opportunities to enhance quality of service, reliability and resiliency, but it has to be more actively managed,” says Leitman. “You’ve still got to have folks who know how to climb utility poles, and now we need those who also understand programming and how to work with computers and control systems.”

The need for that new expertise will benefit electric cooperatives and their consumer-members. New skill sets will be needed, and that will create additional job opportunities in the local communities served by electric co-ops. ⚡

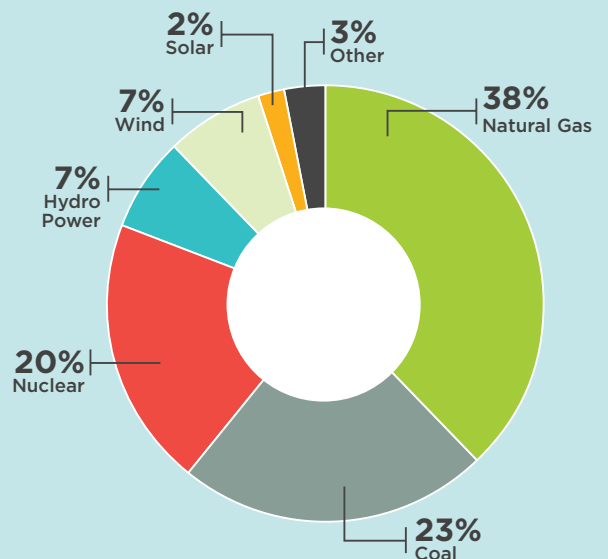
Paul Wesslund writes on consumer and cooperative affairs for the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association, the national trade association representing more than 900 local electric cooperatives. From growing suburbs to remote farming communities, electric co-ops serve as engines of economic development for 42 million Americans across 56% of the nation's landscape.



Powerful Energy Sources

Nationally, electric cooperatives and other utilities use a variety of fuels to power American homes and businesses. This diverse fuel mix supplies co-op members with the safe, reliable and affordable power they depend on.

Source: U.S. Energy Information Administration (2019 data)



LEGAL MATTERS

Statement of Nondiscrimination

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- (1) Mail: U.S. Department of Agriculture
Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
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- (2) Fax: (202) 690-7442; or
- (3) Email: program.intake@usda.gov
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SAFETY MATTERS

Excessive clutter is a fire hazard

Are you like millions of Americans who vowed to get organized in 2021? If so, you're not only helping to make your life easier but also safer!

The thing about clutter is that it can accumulate and create a dangerous situation without a homeowner ever knowing what is happening. It may be something that slowly creeps up on you after years of accumulation and rarely throwing anything away. Before you know it, you have a fire hazard on your hands. According to the National Fire Prevention Association (NFPA), fires in homes that were moderately to severely cluttered or in a state of disrepair are more likely to result in the death of the home's occupants.

Clutter is a safety issue when it impedes free movement around the house. In addition to causing falls (more than 1.6 million seniors suffer injuries from falls at home every year), clutter can prevent someone from exiting the

home safely in the event of a fire. What would you do if your only escape during a house fire was a first-floor window you couldn't

reach because stacks of clutter blocked it? Clutter can also inhibit the ability of firefighters to rescue the occupants of a home and other efforts to battle a blaze.

In general, clutter is a fire hazard, particularly when

stacks of old newspapers or magazines have dried out over the years. This creates a virtual tinder box just waiting for one spark to ignite a single page.

Sometimes clutter can become so pervasive that it invites household pests, including mice, rats and cockroaches. In addition to poor sanitary conditions, these pests can cause structural damage to your home and chew on wiring that can create a fire hazard.

Need some help getting started decluttering? Try these ideas: www.becomingminimalist.com/creative-ways-to-declutter. ⚡



Your furnace might be burning money.

Compared to traditional heating and cooling systems, an efficient electric heat pump uses less energy - saving you money in the long run. Visit www.guthrie-rec.coop to see available equipment rebates and calculate how much you could save by going electric.



SAVINGS
WITH
STAYING
POWER

A successful energy transition has the power to transform our world

BY ERIN CAMPBELL

Just look around your home to see how electricity powers your life. Lighting, refrigeration, heating and cooling, appliances and digital devices are all powered by electricity and improve our quality of life and increase productivity. And you probably have even more electric devices in your home after opening your Christmas gifts!

In America and other developed countries, our early access to safe, reliable, affordable and sustainable electricity has undoubtedly powered our economic success. And according to Dr. Scott Tinker, we'll see other countries harness the economic power of electricity over the next decade. During an enlightening presentation at IAEC's Virtual Annual Meeting in December, he talked about the importance of a successful energy transition where humans are lifted from poverty and environmental impacts are reduced. Dr. Tinker believes a successful transition to non-carbon energy sources starts with nonpartisan energy education.

Dr. Tinker is the state geologist of Texas, the director of the Bureau of Economic Geology at the University of Texas at Austin and a documentary filmmaker. And as founder and board chairman of the Switch Energy Alliance, Dr. Tinker is committed to energy education that is objective, nonpartisan and sensible. Tinker says, "Energy fuels the engine of the modern world and has the power to bring billions more out of abject poverty. Because energy reaches into every facet of our lives, it is highly political. Biases and emotions run deep, and facts and data are often distorted, or worse." Through video and online learning, the Switch Energy Alliance aims to educate and start positive conversations about our planet's energy challenges.

The Switch Energy Alliance has



developed two documentary films that illustrate this mission. The first documentary, *Switch*, was released in 2012 and explores the world's leading energy sites – including coal, solar, oil and biofuels – to discover the path to our planet's energy transition.

The second documentary, *Switch On*, was released in 2020 and is a sequel to the first film. Dr. Tinker travels across the globe to meet people and communities as they gain access to electricity for the first time. It's a journey that's enlightening, emotional and unforgettable and it will change how you look at energy and the developing world.

We encourage you to view both documentaries for free at www.switchon.org. Electric cooperatives are also strong proponents for energy education,

which is why we invest in educating board directors, employees and member-consumers. We believe that educated and informed leadership will position locally owned electric co-ops and the communities they serve for the best possible future.

Through the NRECA International Foundation, electric cooperatives across America have brought electricity to more than 160 million people in 48 developing countries. Several of Iowa's electric co-ops sent lineworkers and resources to Central America in 2019 to bring electricity to a rural Guatemalan village. Learn more about NRECA International at www.nrecainternational.coop.

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

This year, organize your energy

BY PAT KEEGAN AND BRAD THIESSEN

With a new year, it's a perfect time to begin new projects and set goals for the months ahead.

If you're looking for ways to save energy at home and lower your monthly bills, these simple steps can help you get organized and start an achievable path to saving energy.

Step 1: Gather information

Begin by reviewing your 2020 energy bills. Knowing *how* and *when* you use energy can help you decide how ambitious your plan should be. If you have questions about your past bills or energy use, give your electric co-op a call – they're available to help you understand your energy bills. Your co-op may also offer a free app that can show you exact data about your home energy use.

Next, visit your electric co-op's website to see if it offers additional assistance, like energy improvement rebates, free energy audits or other special rates and programs. Because of COVID-19, some restrictions may apply to in-home visits, so you can also try an online energy audit like energystar.gov's Home Energy Yardstick.

Step 2: Develop a plan

With the information gathered, it's important to develop a plan. If your priority is cutting energy costs, you can select the measure that will



A programmable thermostat can help you reduce energy use when you don't need to be heating or cooling your home.

Photo Credit: Consumers Energy

deliver the most savings. Maybe you're already planning to do work on your home, such as roofing or renovating, and you can incorporate energy efficiency strategies into that project. To complete your plan, you'll likely need to check with local contractors or suppliers about costs.

Step 3: Take action

Now that your planning is done, it's time to take action. If you're tackling any major energy efficiency projects that require a contractor, remember to do your research and hire a licensed, reputable professional.

In addition to energy efficiency projects and upgrades, there are other ways you can get organized to save energy:

- **Replace filters regularly.** A clean filter can improve the performance of your heating and cooling system, and reduce the electricity needed to pump air through your ductwork. Filters should be replaced every month if you're using an inexpensive filter, or every three months if you're

using a higher-quality filter. A better filter will do a better job and last longer.

- **Program your thermostat.** Heating and cooling your home account for the most energy use, so setting your thermostat to match your lifestyle can make a major difference. If you don't have a programmable or smart thermostat, get in the habit of manually adjusting your thermostat throughout the day or setting it to the most energy efficient setting when you're away.
 - **Label the circuits in your breaker box.** It may not reduce your energy use, but it's an easy way to get organized and will save a lot of headaches down the line!
- We hope by taking a little time to complete these steps, you'll be well on your way to a more energy efficient 2021! ⚡



Photo Credit: Marcela Gara, Resource Media

Pat Keegan and Brad Thiessen of Collaborative Efficiency write about energy efficiency topics for the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association.

The lure of the sale barn

BY VALERIE VAN KOOTEN

Kent and I drove past a former sale barn in eastern Iowa the other day. The building was dilapidated and deprived of paint with its grayish, weathered exterior bravely standing against the Iowa elements. You'll find them in all parts of the state – some still open, but many of them closed as livestock farming has moved from a single farmer taking 20 hogs to market to thousands of hogs going to much larger facilities.

Pella had a sale barn on the north end of town. It's long gone now, but Thursday nights were a highlight of the week for my sister and me as we tagged along with our dad to the sale. I don't really remember whether it was hogs or cattle that were being sold, but that wasn't the important part to us anyway. With strict instructions to stay out of the sorting and penned areas in the back where animals were "staged" for the sale, we were free to explore all the other nooks and crannies of the old barn.

We took full advantage of that. The barn was ringed, as most sales barns are, with tiered seating on three sides and the auctioneer on the fourth, with the sawdust-covered ring in front of him. At the very top of the seats were ancient and none-too-clean couches that were beyond usable, but we'd plunk ourselves on them, sometimes with other kids who had come to the sale.

My memory is that there was always, always, a box of kittens up there with a harried mother cat who really didn't appreciate everyone picking up her offspring. They weren't for giving away as much as to keep around the barn to quell the mouse population.

We soon tired of the sale barn itself and headed for the adjoining restaurant. Everyone knows that sale barn restaurants have the best food anywhere. My dad would let us put



anything we wanted on the tab and stop in at the end of the night to pay off our tally of pop, candy, chips and the occasional greasy cheeseburger. Those who came to eat dinner could have home-cooked Iowa specialties like hot beef sandwiches with real potatoes and gravy or pork chops with all the sides.

I'm sure we were more than a pest. The restaurant had a bathroom off one side, and I distinctly remember my sister Amber stepping on the exposed water pipes that ran parallel to the floor, about a foot up. As the bossy older sister, I told her to stop doing that, but in true kid fashion, she had to jiggle up and down on it once more. The pipe broke, water bursting everywhere. And also true to kids' natures everywhere, we took

off, not telling anyone.

Kent and I were in Ireland several years ago and stopped at a sale barn that had sheep selling that day. We commented that other than the farmers' caps, which were flat "newsboy" type hats, this scene could have taken place in Iowa. It seems a sale barn is a sale barn, no matter where you are in the world.

If you get the chance, stop by a sale barn on an open day and take a look. Look up the kittens. Have a piece of homemade pie. Stay off the water pipes in the bathroom. 🌩

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.



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