



Guthrie County REC
A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative



● JANUARY 2026

Iowa

ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE LIVING

Gratitude, growth and
the road ahead

Iowa electric co-ops shine
in national commercial

Vegetarian recipes

Youth opportunities available ► See Page 5

CONTENTS



VOLUME 79 • ISSUE 1

3

STATEWIDE PERSPECTIVE

2026 legislative
session preview

3

EDITOR'S CHOICE CONTEST

Win a Ninja Crispi
air fryer

14

RELIABILITY MATTERS

Keeping outages
at bay

15

OUT BACK

Wishing you an
"awe"some year

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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 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!

GRATITUDE, GROWTH AND THE ROAD AHEAD

BY COZY NELSEN



As we turn the page to a new year, I'm reminded once again what a privilege it is to serve the members of Guthrie County REC. Each year brings its own challenges and triumphs, but one thing never changes: the strength, resilience and generosity of the communities we serve here in rural Iowa.

Supporting local youth

One of the greatest joys of my job is seeing how our co-op fosters future leaders by investing in our young people. Our scholarship program makes a real difference for local students pursuing their dreams beyond high school. And each summer, we're proud to sponsor one area high school student on the National Rural Electric Cooperative Youth Tour – an opportunity that introduces them to the wider world of public policy, leadership and the cooperative spirit. The impacts of

these programs ripple far beyond a single trip or a single school year; they help build the next generation of leaders right here at home.

Investing in reliability

As we look ahead, we remain focused on maintaining and improving the infrastructure that keeps our communities connected. Growth across our service territory continues, and with it comes the need for expanded capacity and upgraded equipment. Whether we're installing new lines, replacing aging poles, or integrating smarter technology into our system, our goal is always the same: delivering safe, affordable and reliable electricity to every member who depends on us. We know how essential power is to daily life, to business and to the future of our rural economy, and we take that responsibility seriously.

Advocating for our members

At the same time, we're entering another year of uncertainty regarding federal energy policy. Shifts in regulations, carbon goals and generation requirements continue

to create challenges for cooperatives like ours – challenges that ultimately impact the cost and reliability of the electricity our members use every day. While we can't predict what direction federal policy may take, we remain committed to advocating for common-sense solutions that recognize the unique needs of rural America. Whatever changes come, we will continue working to ensure that our members' voices are heard and that the power we provide stays dependable and affordable.

As we step into the new year, I'm filled with gratitude – for our employees who work in all conditions to keep the lights on, for our board members who guide us with steady leadership, and for you, our members, who have placed trust in us for the power they need every day. My wish for 2026 is to continue building a stronger, brighter future for the communities we call home. Thank you for being a member and best wishes for a happy and healthy year!

Cozy Nelsen is the CEO of Guthrie County REC.



Guthrie County REC

A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative



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www.guthrie-rec.coop

This institution is an equal opportunity provider.



TO OUR MEMBERS...

THANK YOU!!

From all of us at
Guthrie County REC,
thank you for trusting
us to power your
community!



Guthrie County REC

A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative



guthrie-rec.coop

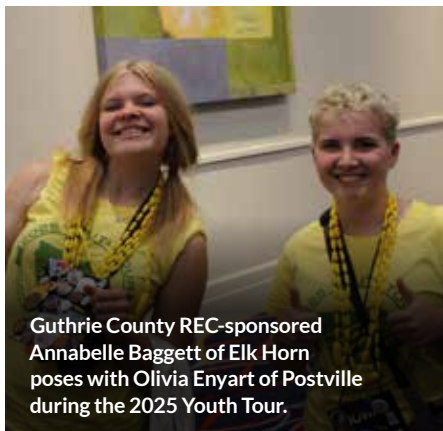
AREA STUDENTS: APPLY NOW FOR FREE TRIP TO WASHINGTON, D.C.

It's that time of year again! We are looking for students who have a passion for leadership to consider applying for a free trip to Washington, D.C., this summer.

Sponsored by Guthrie County REC, the selected student will attend the electric cooperative Youth Tour for a week-long, immersive experience in our nation's capital. Participants have the chance to explore Washington, D.C., visit historical landmarks and meet with lawmakers to discuss issues important to rural America. It's a fantastic opportunity to develop leadership skills, learn about the cooperative business model and connect with peers from other rural communities.

Applications are welcome from all high school sophomores or juniors within the Guthrie County REC service territory, both co-op members and non-members. This includes the following school districts: AC/GC, ADM, Audubon, CAM, CR-B, DC-G, Exira-EHK, Panorama, Perry, WCV and Woodward-Granger.

The deadline for applications is Monday, Feb. 2. More information and the application are posted at www.guthrie-rec.coop/youth-tour.



Guthrie County REC-sponsored Annabelle Baggett of Elk Horn poses with Olivia Enyart of Postville during the 2025 Youth Tour.



Annabelle Baggett of Elk Horn was selected to represent Guthrie County REC during the 2025 Youth Tour. "Everything was so educational, I just loved learning more about everything D.C. had to offer," Annabelle said of the experience.

Please note the following guidelines when submitting your application.

- 1 Three semifinalists will be selected for an in-person interview at the Guthrie County REC office.
- 2 The winner will be required to attend two Guthrie County REC board meetings: one in April or May prior to the trip, and one following the trip. The winner must also complete a job shadow with Guthrie County REC personnel in April or May, and give a presentation of their trip experience at the Guthrie County REC Annual Meeting in January 2027.

- 3 The trip takes place June 14-20. Successful candidates will demonstrate the following traits: good leader, respectful of others, represents the REC well, good communication skills, knowledgeable of the REC and government officials, community involvement (character), dependable and a team player.
- 4 Students are selected for this program through the overall strength of the applicant. If you want to take advantage of this incredible leadership opportunity, please complete the online application and return to Guthrie County REC by Feb. 2.

STUDENTS, YOUR FUTURE STARTS HERE

At the heart of the cooperative business model is supporting our local youth in the pursuit of their educational goals beyond high school. That's why every year we offer a scholarship that can help offset some of the rising costs of today's tuition expenses.

If you are or know of a student who could use some extra money for educational expenses, encourage them to apply for the Guthrie County REC 2026 Scholarship opportunity!

High school seniors in the Guthrie County REC service territory who are interested in continuing their

education in any field of study, or power line programs, are invited to apply for the 2026 scholarship. Guthrie County REC will award three \$1,000 scholarships to individuals enrolled full-time at an accredited college, university or vocational/technical school, or attending power lineman school for the 2026-2027 school year. Applicants must have a guardian or parent who is a member of Guthrie County REC.

Applications must be postmarked on or before Friday, April 3. The application must include the application form; a personal letter stating your educational goals, financial need and work experience; a statement on why you think rural electric cooperatives are important; a wallet-sized photo of the applicant; and your most recent academic transcript. Due to the volume of applications, only students awarded a scholarship will be notified.

The deadline to apply is Friday, April 3. Visit www.guthrie-rec.coop/scholarships for more information and to download the application.



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.

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 Pruissner
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



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.



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 • Occheydan
Osceola Electric Cooperative, Inc.

Visit 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

MAIL: Recipes

Iowa Electric Cooperative Living magazine
8525 Douglas Ave., Suite 48
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Craig Codner, CEO of Butler County REC, participants 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[®]
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.



ANNOUNCEMENT

Watch for the 2026 Guthrie County REC board election results and annual meeting highlights in your February issue of *Iowa Electric Cooperative Living*.

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TOGETHER, WE STAND STRONG FOR RURAL PRIORITIES



Guthrie County REC CEO Cozy Nelsen, center, and Board President Steve Bireline, back row second from left, stand with the group of Iowa electric cooperative representatives during a visit to Washington, D.C., last May. The event included meetings with Iowa's elected leaders, including Sen. Joni Ernst, front row, left.

The start of the 2026 Iowa Legislative Session brings renewed focus to the policies and decisions that shape the future of rural communities like ours – especially those served by electric cooperatives. As a member-owned utility, our mission is to deliver safe, reliable and affordable power, and that responsibility requires us to stay vigilant as state lawmakers consider proposals that could impact how we operate. Advocacy isn't optional for us; it's a core part of making sure we can continue serving you effectively.

Ongoing commitment

Each year, legislators introduce bills that touch nearly every aspect of our work, from energy production and grid reliability to taxation, broadband deployment and workforce development. Some proposals strengthen our ability to meet growing demand and invest in modern infrastructure. Others – intended or not – could add costs, create operational barriers, or affect the long-term reliability of the electric system our members depend on. That's why monitoring the work of the Iowa Legislature is so essential. We approach every session with open minds and clear priorities: supporting policies that benefit our members and rural communities, and opposing those that threaten affordability or reliability.

There will undoubtedly be issues this session where our cooperative stands strongly in support. These may include measures that encourage investment in rural infrastructure, protect local governance or improve permitting

processes for essential utility upgrades. Likewise, there will be proposals we must push back against – policies that increase regulatory burdens without improving service, shift costs to rural consumers, or threaten the stability of the electric grid.

Advocating for our members

Throughout the session, Guthrie County REC leadership and board members will actively participate in advocacy events both independently and alongside our statewide electric cooperative partners. From conversations with legislators to attending committee hearings and member-led engagement days at the Capitol, we make sure rural voices are represented. When policymakers understand how decisions affect the everyday lives of the people we serve – from farmers and small businesses to families and schools – they can make more informed and balanced choices.

But advocacy isn't something we do alone. Your stories, your experiences and your perspectives matter. When elected officials hear directly from their constituents, it strengthens our efforts and underscores the real-world impact of energy policy.

As the 2026 legislative session unfolds, we'll continue keeping you informed and working tirelessly on your behalf. Our commitment remains the same: to stand up for our members, protect the reliability and affordability of your electric service and ensure that rural Iowa has a strong voice in decisions that shape our future.

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

“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.



Photo Source: Lynn Poen, Lake City



Photo Source: Darcy Dougherty Maulsby, Yetter



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