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JULY 2025

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ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE LIVING

Energy efficiency tips for older homes

A diverse fuel mix is essential for reliability

Recipes: Firecracker favorites

Win a Solo Stove tabletop fire pit ▶ See Page 3

CONTENTS

VOLUME 78 • ISSUE 7

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ON THE COVER Special thanks to Peg Visser, a North West REC member-consumer, for supplying this month's cover image. Submit high-resolution photos for consideration to editor@ieclmagazine.com. You could receive $100!

TAKING STOCK OF IOWA'S 2025 LEGISLATIVE SESSION

BY HALEY MOON

The 2025 Iowa Legislative Session officially adjourned in the early morning hours of May 15, after lawmakers worked through the night to finalize a budget agreement. With a projected adjournment date of May 2, this session included nearly two weeks of "overtime."

Throughout the session, Iowa's electric cooperatives maintained a strong presence at the State Capitol, advocating for the interests of their member-consumers under the Golden Dome. With more than 1,800 bills introduced this year, many of which related to energy, a unified cooperative voice was more important than ever.

Co-op engagement took many forms, from large events to one-on-one meetings. Our Welcome Back Legislative Reception in January provided a valuable opportunity to meet with nearly 100 legislators at the start of session, while our REC Day on the Hill event in March brought around 200 rural electric co-op advocates to the Capitol. Individual visits, countless emails, phone calls and participation in local forums all helped reinforce the co-op message throughout Iowa's 2025 Legislative Session.

Defending service territory

This constant grassroots engagement resulted in several legislative successes for Iowa's electric co-ops. One major victory was the defense of Iowa's service territory law, a cornerstone that ensures cooperatives can continue to deliver reliable, affordable electricity to rural Iowans. One proposal would have changed how the Iowa Utilities Commission considers service territory changes, potentially disadvantaging co-ops and the rural Iowans we serve. Thanks to strong advocacy, these proposals were ultimately set aside by both House and Senate Commerce Committees.

Stopping a third-party solar program

Another key success was halting the advancement of a bill that would have created a third-party solar program in Iowa. While electric cooperatives support solar as part of a diversified energy portfolio, this bill raised serious concerns as it would have allowed third-party companies to operate as utilities without being held to the same regulatory standards. Additionally, the program's structure could have shifted costs to consumers who chose not to participate. Co-ops support solar solutions that are fair, cost-effective and strengthen the electric grid; criteria this bill did not meet.

Modernizing energy infrastructure

Gov. Kim Reynolds also introduced a comprehensive energy bill that included a right of first refusal provision for electric transmission projects, which Iowa's electric cooperatives supported. While this bill did not advance, we look forward to continued conversations about modernizing energy infrastructure to meet Iowa's future needs.

Though the 2025 session has ended, our advocacy work continues. Iowa's electric cooperatives are already preparing for the 2026 session, which will convene Jan. 12. Until then, we will remain actively engaged with lawmakers and those seeking political office to ensure the cooperative perspective continues to be heard. Keep up to date on these activities by following Iowa Rural Power on social media or at www.iaruralpower.org.

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

EDITOR'S CHOICE CONTEST

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ENTER ONLINE BY JULY 31!

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Enter this month's contest by visiting www.ieclmagazine.com no later than July 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 $100 in beef certificates from the May issue was **Duane Adams,** a **Prairie Energy Cooperative** member-consumer.

PREVENT DEADLY SHOCKS AROUND BOATS AND DOCKS

If you own a boat and/or a dock, there are steps you can take to prevent deadly shocks.

The risk is real. Some examples of past accidents involving stray electricity and water include:

- The Ritz family was stunned when their son was killed while swimming with his life jacket on, closely supervised by his mother. Electricity was leaking into the water from a boat plugged into shore power.
- An 18-year-old teen swimming off a dock at Smith Mountain Lake in Virginia was fatally electrocuted from stray voltage during the Fourth of July holiday. Two friends were injured trying to save him.
- A 26-year-old woman swimming with family in the Lake of the Ozarks was electrocuted when she touched an energized dock ladder.
- Also, at the Lake of the Ozarks, a 13-year-old girl and her 8-year-old brother received fatal electrical shocks while swimming near a private dock; an improperly grounded circuit was the cause.

A crucial step in preventing such tragedies is to ensure the proper installation and maintenance of electrical equipment on docks and boats. Take the time to inspect all electrical systems on or near the water. Electrical installations should be performed by a professional electrician familiar with marine codes and standards, and they should be inspected at least once a year.

Water recreation safety

Safe Electricity, with the American Boat and Yacht Council (ABYC), recommends adhering to these steps to improve water recreation safety and accident prevention:

- Docks should have ground fault circuit interrupter breakers on the circuits feeding electricity to the dock.
- The metal frame of docks should be bonded to connect all metal parts to the alternating current (AC) safety ground at the power source. This ensures that any part of the metal dock that becomes energized due to an electrical malfunction will trip the circuit breaker.
- Regardless of the size of a boat, maintenance of the electrical system should be done by a professional familiar with marine electrical codes.
- Boats with AC systems should have isolation transformers or equipment leakage circuit interrupter protection, comply with ABYC standards, and be serviced by an ABYC Certified® Technician.

Safety in the water

If you are in the water and feel an electric current:

- Shout out to let others know.
- Tuck your legs up to make yourself smaller.
- Move away from anything that could be energized.
- Do not use the boat or dock ladders to get out.

If you are on the dock or shore when a swimmer feels an electrical current:

- Do not jump in.
- Throw the swimmer a non-conductive flotation device.
- Unplug or turn off the source of electricity as quickly as possible.
- Call for help and 911.

FIVE TIPS FOR HIRING AN ELECTRICIAN

A licensed electrician can help with a variety of home projects from lighting upgrades to full renovations. Keep the following tips in mind if you're hiring an electrician.

1 Hire a licensed, qualified electrician for the job.
Look for a master electrician to manage the project. Master electricians have the most experience and will often oversee the work of a journey-level electrician or apprentice.

2 Make sure the electrician is insured.
Seasoned electricians know the importance of protecting themselves in case of an accident.

3 Read all the reviews.
Hire an electrician who has several positive reviews – not just one or two. Read reviews on different sites, like Nextdoor, Yelp and HomeAdvisor, and consider asking your neighbors for recommendations.

4 Determine your budget. Get two quotes.
Knowing your budget upfront helps move the process along. Prices can greatly vary, so get at least two quotes.

5 Talk timeline.
Some electricians accidently overbook projects. If your job is time-sensitive, convey that early on and discuss a realistic timeline with the electrician.

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SEND US YOUR RURAL IOWA PHOTOS

We're always looking for stunning images for the cover of *Iowa Electric Cooperative Living* magazine. If we select your photo for a cover, we'll award you $100. The photos must be clear, of an Iowa place served by an electric cooperative and in high resolution.

To be considered, email photos to editor@ieclmagazine.com with "Cover Submission" in the subject line. Please also include the name of the electric cooperative that serves you.

DID YOU KNOW?

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EFFICIENCY TIPS FOR OLDER HOMES

BY MIRANDA BOUTELLE

I love old homes. I've always been drawn to the details and craftsmanship. The features of older homes can make them less efficient than modern construction, but it doesn't have to be a trade-off. You can keep the charm and make your home more efficient.

Start by prioritizing the invisible upgrades that make your home more comfortable and efficient. When we were kids, I don't think any of us thought, "When I grow up, I want to spend my hard-earned money on insulation." It's not as exciting as new countertops or a remodeled bathroom, but air sealing and insulation can save you money every month. Then you can apply the savings to aesthetic improvements.

Addressing your home's envelope

Many older homes are not properly insulated. Insulation has several benefits beyond sealing your home and keeping outdoor air from seeping in. It reduces outdoor noise, makes your home quieter and improves your overall comfort.

Always properly air seal before you insulate. Older homes with pocket doors, coved ceilings, dumbwaiters, doors to attic spaces and laundry chutes allow indoor air to escape through the cavities, gaps and cracks around these classic features. Sealing off open cavities around those features often requires plywood, rigid foam or drywall fastened into place and then caulked around the edges.

Keep an eye out for framing features that cause drafts. Balloon framing is a type of construction where wall studs run all the way from the foundation to the roof, allowing air to flow freely through those spaces. Second floors with knee wall attics on both sides are notorious for air leakage. Open cavities allow air to flow horizontally between the attic spaces, making the home uncomfortable and inefficient. Seal off the open cavities in the floor framing and insulate attic spaces.

Dense-packed cellulose or closed cell foam insulation can be sprayed into exterior walls. Skilled contractors can remove pieces of siding and drill holes to fill the wall cavities from the outside of the home. For brick or stone homes, holes can be drilled from the

inside and then patched and painted. Insulating walls from the inside of the home requires more time and effort in preparation and cleanup, but having well-insulated walls is worth it.

Knob and tube wiring – commonly used from the early 1880s to the 1930s with no grounding wire – should be replaced prior to insulating walls and attics for safety purposes. Contact between insulation and knob and tube wiring can create a fire hazard.

People often think new windows are the best way to improve a home's efficiency. Considering the cost of replacing windows, I recommend investing in air sealing and insulation first. Then, consider storm windows to keep the charm of the original windows, such as leaded glass and stained glass windows in good condition. Choose from interior or exterior options that are operable and inoperable.

Appliance improvements

Once you've addressed the envelope of your home, consider appliance improvements. Replace your old electric water heater with a heat pump water heater. This upgrade can save a family of four an estimated $550 per year and more than $5,600 over the lifetime of the water heater, according to ENERGY STAR®.

Invest in high-efficiency heating and cooling equipment. A mini-split heat pump, also known as a ductless heat pump, is a more efficient option than electric baseboard heating and provides the benefit of air conditioning.

Older homes don't have to be inefficient. Show your home some love and invest in energy efficient upgrades.

Miranda Boutelle writes on energy efficiency topics for the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association.

ALWAYS CONSIDER AN ENERGY AUDIT

An energy audit is a comprehensive assessment of your home or business designed to identify ways to improve energy efficiency and reduce costs. It's an important first step when considering energy efficiency improvements. Contact your local electric cooperative for more information.

There are many ways to keep the charm of an older home and improve its efficiency. *Photo Source: Mark Gilliland, Pioneer Utility Resources*

The first step to improving an older home's energy efficiency is air sealing and adding insulation to attic spaces. *Photo Source: Bonneville Power Administration*

Prioritize the invisible upgrades that make your home more comfortable and efficient, such as adding blown-in insulation to your attic. *Photo Source: Bonneville Power Administration*

Firecracker Favorites

MEXICAN STREET CORN

- 6 medium ears sweet corn
- ¼ cup sour cream
- ¼ cup mayonnaise
- ¼ cup fresh cilantro, minced
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 teaspoon lime zest, grated
- 2 tablespoons lime juice
- 6 tablespoons cotija cheese
- 2-3 teaspoons chili powder

Carefully peel back corn husks to within 1 inch of bottom, remove silk. Rewrap corn in husks and secure with butcher's twine. Place in Dutch oven, cover with cold water. Soak corn for 20 minutes, then drain. Grill corn over medium heat 25-30 minutes until tender, turning often. Meanwhile, in a small bowl combine sour cream, mayonnaise, cilantro, garlic, lime zest and lime juice. Peel back husks, spread sour cream mixture over corn. Sprinkle with cotija cheese and chili powder. Serve immediately. *Serves 6*

Denise Anderson • Ocheyedan
Osceola Electric Cooperative, Inc.

ALCINDA'S JALAPEÑO SPAGHETTI DIP

- 2 pounds spaghetti noodles
- 1 12-ounce jar jalapeño slices
- 1 32-ounce jar mayonnaise
- corn chips

Break spaghetti into 2 to 3-inch pieces, boil and drain. Chop jalapeños with juice into small pieces. Stir together jalapeños, noodles and mayonnaise. Refrigerate overnight. Serve with corn chips for dipping.

Andrea Mosbach • Webster City
Prairie Energy Cooperative

CHEESE STUFFED JALAPEÑOS

- 25 fresh jalapeño peppers
- 1 8-ounce package cream cheese
- 3 cups cheddar cheese, finely shredded
- 1½ teaspoons Worcestershire sauce
- 4 strips bacon, fried and crumbled

With gloved hands, cut peppers in half and remove seeds and membrane. Mix the remaining ingredients and spoon into pepper halves. Place on a parchment-lined baking sheet and bake at 400 degrees F for 10 minutes. *Serves 15*

Laura DeSmet • Larchwood
Lyon Rural Electric Cooperative

JALAPEÑO POPPERS

- 8 ounces cream cheese
- 1½ cups cheddar cheese, shredded
- 2 tablespoons grated Parmesan cheese
- 1½ teaspoons garlic powder
- 16 fresh whole jalapeño peppers
- 8 pieces bacon, thinly sliced, cut in half crosswise

Mix together cream cheese, cheddar cheese, Parmesan cheese and garlic powder until thoroughly blended. Lay a jalapeño pepper on a work surface and cut a lengthwise sliver from the side, exposing seeds and white membrane. With the handle of a teaspoon, scrape out seeds and membrane, leaving the pepper hollow. Repeat for all peppers. Chop the removed pepper slivers and mix into cheese stuffing. Stuff each pepper with cheese mixture and wrap in a half bacon slice. Secure with toothpicks. Grill stuffed jalapeños on a less hot part of a grill for about 30 minutes, until peppers are hot and juicy and bacon is browned. *Yields 16 pieces*

Marilyn Obrien • Geneva
Franklin Rural Electric Cooperative

DAL (RED LENTIL) SOUP

- 1 tablespoon oil
- 1 medium onion, diced
- 4 cloves garlic, minced
- 2 teaspoons ginger, grated
- ½ teaspoon Hot Madra curry
- 1 teaspoon cumin seeds
- ½ teaspoon ground turmeric
- pinch cayenne pepper
- 1 tablespoon salt
- 2 cups dried red lentils
- 6 cups vegetable broth
- 1 cup coconut milk
- 1 14-ounce can diced tomatoes
- 2 tablespoons lemon juice
- salt, to taste
- pepper, to taste
- fresh cilantro for topping, chopped

In a large pot, heat oil for 1 minute. Add onions and cook for 5 minutes until soft and clear. Stir in garlic, ginger, curry, cumin, turmeric, cayenne and salt. Cook for 1 minute then add lentils and broth. Turn up heat to bring mixture to a boil. Once boiling, lower heat and add coconut milk. Simmer soup for 20 minutes. Add tomatoes and continue simmering for another 5 minutes or until lentils are soft. Remove from heat. Stir in lemon juice and add salt and pepper to taste. Serve hot in bowls, topped with cilantro. *Serves 4*

Jacqueline Minikus • Pisgah
Harrison County Rural Electric Cooperative

CHICKEN TORTILLA SOUP

- 2 cans cream of chicken soup
- 1 can cheddar cheese soup
- or 4 ounces Velveeta cheese
- 1 can spicy nacho cheese soup
- 2 cans milk
- 1 4-ounce can green chiles
- 1 15-ounce can diced tomatoes
- 1½ cups chicken, diced
- 1 cup cheddar cheese, shredded
- optional: nacho chips, sour cream

Mix ingredients and heat through. Serve with nacho chips, sour cream and more shredded cheese, if desired. *Serves 8*

Carla Jansma • Hudson
North West Rural Electric Cooperative

FIRE CRACKERS

- 1 cup vegetable oil
- 2 tablespoons crushed red peppers
- 1 teaspoon garlic powder
- ½ teaspoon onion powder
- 2 tablespoons dry ranch seasoning powder
- 1 box saltine crackers (4 sleeves)

Mix oil, red peppers, garlic powder, onion powder and ranch seasoning together. Microwave for 1 minute to infuse flavors. Pour over crackers and stir gently. Let stand 15 minutes before eating. These are great with meat or cheese, crushed onto a salad, or just as a snack.

Carol DeJong • Sibley
Osceola Electric Cooperative, Inc.

Visit www.ieclmagazine.com and search our online archive of hundreds of recipes in various categories.

CHICKEN JALAPEÑO LASAGNA

- 4 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 medium onion, chopped
- 1 cup jalapeño peppers, chopped
- 3 tablespoons butter
- 8 ounces cream cheese, cubed
- 2 cups chicken, cooked and cubed
- 1 cup chicken broth, divided
- ⅛ teaspoon hot sauce, optional
- salt, to taste
- pepper, to taste
- 8 ounces lasagna noodles, cooked
- 8 ounces pepper jack cheese, shredded
- 8 ounces sharp cheddar cheese, shredded

In a large skillet, sauté garlic, onion and jalapeños in butter until tender. Add cream cheese. Cook and stir until melted. Stir in chicken and ⅔ cup chicken broth. Add hot sauce if desired and season to taste. Combine the pepper jack and cheddar cheese. Pour the remaining ⅓ cup broth into a 9x13-inch baking dish. Layer three noodles, half the chicken mixture and half the cheese mixture. Repeat layers. Cover and bake at 350 degrees F for 30-45 minutes, until bubbly. Let stand 10 minutes before slicing.

Sue Warner • Rock Rapids
Lyon Rural Electric Cooperative

PEPPER JACK CHICKEN DIP

- 8 ounces pepper jack cheese
- 1 can cream of chicken soup
- 1 large can chunk chicken
- 1 can jalapeños, optional
- chips or crackers

Mix first four ingredients together and heat in a slow cooker or microwave. Serve with chips or crackers.

Stephanie Messner • Rock Rapids
Lyon Rural Electric Cooperative

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A DIVERSE FUEL MIX IS ESSENTIAL FOR RELIABLE POWER

BY MICHAEL LEITMAN

Our electric grid is most reliable when a wide range of technologies, including traditional and renewable energy sources, is available.

Providing members with safe, reliable and affordable power is the mantra for electric cooperatives across the nation. Co-op members can see the work necessary to maintain reliable electricity at the local level, such as co-op lineworkers maintaining utility poles and wires and repairing them after major storms. At the regional and national levels, a diverse mix of power generation resources, transmission lines and pipeline infrastructure are essential cornerstones of maintaining reliable electricity.

The U.S. electric grid has undergone major changes over the last decade. The share of electricity generated from coal plants has declined significantly, while the share from natural gas and intermittent wind and solar generation has grown. Fuel diversity means that your electricity is supplied by a variety of generation technologies, each with their own characteristics and performance capabilities over different weather and seasonal conditions.

Common types of generation

Dispatchable technologies can be turned on and off as needed. Large steam generation plants (most commonly using coal or nuclear fuels) are generally considered "baseload," meaning that they are designed to run efficiently 24/7 to serve as the base of the electricity mix. However, steam plants are less capable of ramping output up or down to meet the various peaks and dips as grid conditions change.

Natural gas is the most versatile fuel, powering large combined-cycle plants that can operate as baseload but are also more flexible with ramping up and down. These capabilities are essential for meeting demand on the hottest and coldest days and for balancing intermittent renewable energy sources, such as solar and wind.

Most hydroelectric power comes from generators inside large dams, which can be dispatched when needed – as long as there is enough water available.

Over the last decade, the share of electricity generated from wind and solar plants has increased. These plants can deliver renewable energy – but they only generate electricity when the wind blows and the sun shines. The production patterns of solar and wind technologies are complementary to one another. Solar energy is generated during the day, and wind tends to generate more at night. Across seasons, wind output is typically higher during the colder months when there is less sunshine. Deployed together, wind and solar technologies can help balance each other.

Battery storage

While battery energy storage technology is growing, allowing some control over when renewable energy sources can be dispatched, natural gas plants remain the primary method for "firming" renewable generation resources. There are also barriers to battery storage such as the significant cost and physical size of battery systems.

Ultimately, our electric grid is most reliable when a wide range of technologies is available. When conditions lead to lower generation from one type of source, others can help compensate for the shortfall. When there is an imbalance, such as a major winter storm that causes electricity use to skyrocket, grid operators are forced to rely on purposefully reducing demand and occasionally plan rolling outages to keep the grid operating.

While there is variation across regions in what types of power plants can be built based on weather and infrastructure, electric cooperatives work diligently to ensure a diverse and reliable power supply for the communities they serve.

Michael Leitman writes for the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association.

WATT'S THE BIG FISSION? THE RESURGENCE OF NUCLEAR ENERGY

From electric cooperatives to tech giants, nuclear energy is witnessing a comeback after nearly a decade with no new activity. Over the last year, there have been major nuclear energy announcements, from recommissioning power plants to purchasing deals by hyper-scalers like Meta, Google and Microsoft.

The nuclear comeback has already impacted cooperatives. With U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) financing, Holtec International is restarting the Palisades Power Plant in Michigan with Wolverine Power Cooperative and Hoosier Energy as the main offtake customers. In addition, Constellation Energy is restarting Three Mile Island Unit 1 in Pennsylvania.

"The rise of artificial intelligence and need for stronger computing power and data centers has led technology firms to pursue reliable and carbon-free electricity from nuclear power," CFC Senior Energy Industry Analyst Alisha Pinto said. "The main players in the tech and data center world – Meta, Google, Amazon, Equinix and Oracle – are signing letters of intent and investing in advanced nuclear reactors and small modular reactors (SMRs)."

Across the U.S., there are 54 commercially operating nuclear power plants in 28 states with a total of 94 reactors. Nuclear energy accounts for more than 18% of the U.S. electricity generation mix. The latest reactor to come online was the Vogtle Unit 4 in Georgia, serving electric cooperative members through Oglethorpe Power.

"Nuclear energy is viewed as a stable and reliable source that provides almost 24-hour electricity," Pinto says. "The capacity factor (the utilization rate) is very high at 92.3%. In comparison, the capacity factor of natural gas plants is about 55%, while wind and solar are between 25% to 35%."

The fuel supply chain is a key part of the puzzle in the expansion and resurgence of nuclear energy. The U.S. has mining and production operations for uranium in the western parts of the country. Of the five production facilities that are running, three are in Wyoming and two are in Texas. However, most of the uranium used in the U.S. is imported from other countries.

"Limited domestic production capacity has resulted in the U.S. importing 99% of the uranium needed to fuel its nuclear power plants," Pinto says. "In 2023, the main trading partners for uranium were Canada, Australia, Russia, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. Most recently, Uranium Energy Corporation and Radiant Energy announced an agreement to collaborate on enhancing the nuclear fuel value chain. Securing the domestic supply chain will support U.S. energy security needs."

The policy landscape will also help to shape the future of nuclear energy. Both the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act and the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) provided financing for nuclear technology and supply chain development. Under the IRA, which is currently under review, DOE is expected to finalize contracts with 10 companies to enhance domestic uranium production. Additionally, the Trump administration announced funding for the deployment of SMRs.

"The main challenges to deploying new nuclear energy are the high investment costs and the long timelines for approvals, construction and commercial operation," Pinto said. "Long-term growth in the sector will be determined by how quickly and efficiently it can develop and meet new electricity demands."

Source: CFC Solutions News Bulletin, published by the National Rural Utilities Cooperative Finance Corporation

Renewable energy sources like solar and wind provide many benefits, but they only generate electricity when the sun shines or the wind blows.

The U.S. electric grid has undergone major changes over the last decade. The share of electricity generated from coal plants has declined significantly, while the share from natural gas and intermittent wind and solar generation has grown.

The Palisades Nuclear Power Plant. *Photo Source: Holtec International*

GENERATE SAFELY

BY SCOTT FLOOD

The wind howls outside your windows as a major storm system blows through the area. Your lights flicker for a moment or two before you're plunged into darkness. The social media feed on your phone is packed with reports of damage and power outages. Whether it's a destructive summer or winter storm, outages in any season are unwelcome events.

Iowa's electric cooperatives understand power outages are an inconvenience, and we do our best to prevent them. However, when severe weather strikes, outages can sometimes persist for several hours or even days after a major storm. Lineworkers may have to check many miles of power lines to pinpoint the problems before they can begin their work to restore service. That's why some co-op members consider purchasing backup generators to meet their family's needs while waiting for service to resume.

Types of generators

Backup generators fall into one of two categories. Standby generators are permanently wired into the home's electrical system by a qualified electrician. They come in a variety of sizes, allowing homeowners to match the generator to their home's specific power needs. Portable generators, as the name implies, can be moved to wherever they are needed. Because they're small enough to move, they generally provide less power than standby models. Most use gasoline or diesel fuel, and when they're operated correctly, both types provide a safe source of backup power.

Safety considerations

Some homeowners make the mistake of plugging their backup generators directly into a wall outlet or connecting them to their home's electrical panel. Beyond the significant risk of electrocution and fire, plugging generators directly into your outlets can send the voltage your generator creates into the power lines connecting your home to the electric grid. This creates a dangerous condition called "backfeed," which can seriously injure the lineworkers who are working hard to restore your electricity, as well as anyone who accidentally comes in contact with power lines. Backfeed can also damage the generator.

Permanently installed backup generators are required to have a transfer switch, which should be installed by a qualified electrician. The transfer switch creates a barrier between your home's electrical system and the outside wires, so backfeed cannot occur. When the transfer switch senses that power has been restored, it switches the power back from the generator to the outside lines.

The biggest danger associated with backup generators is that they generate a variety of gases, most notably carbon monoxide. Generators should only be used in dry, well-ventilated areas away from your home and garage.

When starting a portable generator, make sure nothing is plugged into it. In addition, you can reduce the potential for damage to your appliances and lighting by turning them off or unplugging them from the wall. After the generator starts, plug them in and turn them on one at a time to make sure you aren't overloading your generator's capacity. Unplug them from the generator before turning it off. Unless the manufacturer recommends otherwise, always turn the generator off and allow it to cool before adding fuel.

As with many home appliances, regular maintenance is the key to ensuring your portable generator operates safely for years to come. When storing it, drain the fuel from the tank. In addition, check the oil and fuel level, filters and other components once a season so you know it will be ready to run safely and efficiently the next time a big storm blows through.

If you purchase a portable backup generator, protect your home and family by taking the time to read the manufacturer's instructions. *Photo Source: City of Bryan*

Standby generators are permanently wired into the home's electrical system by a qualified electrician. *Photo Source: All Star Electrical Services*

Scott Flood writes on energy-related topics for the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association.

POWERING THE DIGITAL FRONTIER

BY ALLISON HAMILTON

Data centers are the backbone of the internet. They store and manage everything from social media to cloud computing, artificial intelligence and our favorite streaming services. As more people and businesses transition to digital operations, the number of data centers is rapidly increasing. While many of these centers were once built near large cities, more are now being sited in rural areas.

Electric cooperatives are receiving regular requests from companies seeking to build large data centers within their service territories. These requests bring both significant opportunities and major challenges.

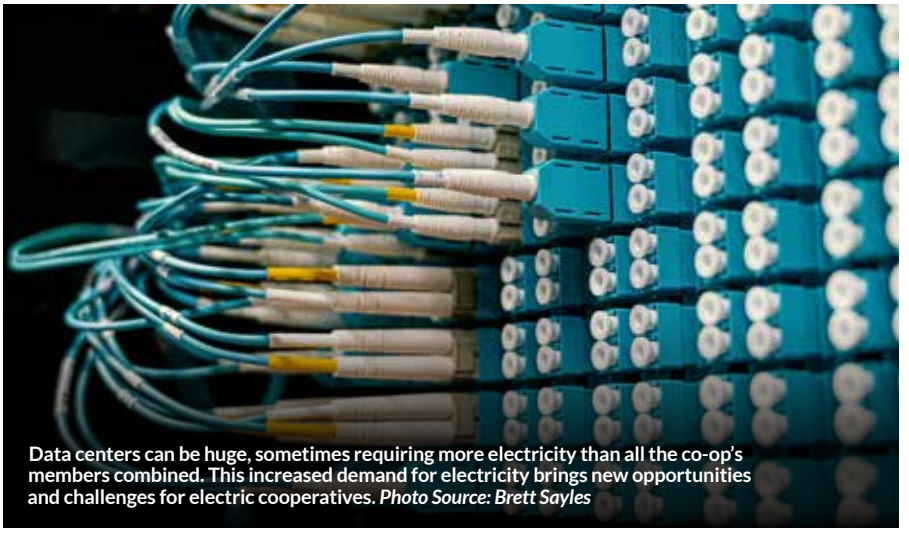
Why are data centers coming to rural areas?

There are several reasons why companies are choosing rural locations for their data centers:

- **More land.** Rural areas have plenty of space for large buildings.
- **Resource diversity.** Electric cooperatives own and operate reliable sources of energy.
- **Lower costs.** Land and labor are usually less expensive outside of cities.
- **Tax breaks.** Local and state governments may offer tax benefits to attract these businesses.

Data centers can be huge, sometimes requiring more electricity than all the co-op's members combined. This increased demand for electricity brings several new opportunities for electric cooperatives.

- **New jobs and growth.** Data centers can bring jobs and revenue to small communities.
- **Stable revenue.** These centers require a lot of power and typically sign long-term contracts. This provides the co-op with steady income, which can help pay for system upgrades and keep rates lower for other members in the community.



Data centers can be huge, sometimes requiring more electricity than all the co-op's members combined. This increased demand for electricity brings new opportunities and challenges for electric cooperatives. *Photo Source: Brett Sayles*

- **Improved infrastructure.** To serve a large data center, the co-op might need to build new power lines or substations. While this is expensive, it can also enhance service for all co-op members.

New potential challenges

While data centers create significant opportunities for electric co-ops by driving demand and investment, they also present new challenges in meeting increased electricity needs while maintaining reliable and resilient power delivery.

- **High upfront costs.** Building the new infrastructure to power a data center can cost millions, which is why co-ops work diligently with data center customers to ensure upfront costs are covered.
- **Risk of losing a big customer.** If the data center moves away or shuts down, the co-op could be left with expensive equipment it no longer needs. This could negatively impact the co-op's finances.
- **Permitting and siting.** Obtaining permission to construct new power lines and substations requires time. There may be zoning rules, environmental reviews and public meetings that slow things down.

Planning for the future

To manage both the risks and rewards that data centers present, electric co-op leaders are taking a careful and informed approach. They are working closely with their generation and transmission providers, economic development offices and financial experts to plan these projects.

Co-ops are also ensuring contracts with data center operators include protections for the co-op. For example, if the data center leaves early, the company may be liable for paying part of the infrastructure costs. Forecasting tools are also helping co-ops understand how the new load will impact the local system.

Serving large data centers could be a game-changer for many electric cooperatives. These projects can bring jobs, revenue and new technology to co-op communities. But they also come with financial risks and planning challenges. By asking the right questions and building smart partnerships, electric cooperatives are poised to make decisions that serve their members well – now and in the future.

Allison Hamilton writes for the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association.

CHOOSE IOWA PASSPORT OFFERS AGRITOURISM EXPERIENCES

Iowa Secretary of Agriculture Mike Naig recently announced the launch of the Choose Iowa Passport. The free, interactive digital platform is designed to help Iowans and visitors find farms and farm stands, orchards, you-pick opportunities, farm-to-table dining and restaurants, farmers markets, and even boutique shops featuring locally sourced Iowa products, including Iowa-raised meats. This innovative marketing initiative, a collaboration between Choose Iowa and Travel Iowa, promotes unique agritourism experiences and encourages visitors to enjoy food, beverages and agricultural products that are grown, raised and made in Iowa.

Users of the Choose Iowa Passport can check in at participating locations via their smartphones to earn points, which can be redeemed for prizes.

"This partnership between Travel Iowa and Choose Iowa offers authentic agritourism experiences that celebrate and elevate Iowa's agricultural prominence and heritage," said Secretary Naig. "The Choose Iowa Passport is free to sign up for, easy to navigate, and users can support local farmers and businesses while earning rewards featuring products from Choose Iowa members. I encourage everyone to set out on their own adventure and use the Choose Iowa Passport to make memories with friends and family."

Find Choose Iowa products

Beyond visiting Choose Iowa Passport locations, consumers looking to support and purchase local Iowa products can look for the Choose Iowa logo and know these items are grown, raised or made in Iowa. Farms and businesses that join the Choose Iowa branding and marketing program can add the Choose Iowa logo on their products, which meet or exceed established criteria and standards.

Choose Iowa's membership is climbing steadily, with many of the 264 current members offering on-farm retail. This collaboration between Travel Iowa, the state's official tourism office within the Iowa Economic Development Authority, and Choose Iowa supports rural communities while connecting travelers with agritourism, farm-to-table dining and unique agricultural experiences.

"Agritourism is one of Iowa's greatest competitive advantages," said Amy Zeigler, tourism manager at the Iowa Tourism Office. "The Choose Iowa passport offers a way to educate visitors about the vital role agriculture plays in our economy and serves as an invitation to experience the unmatched hospitality of rural Iowa. We're excited to draw visitors from across the state and country to explore our farms, markets and small towns in a way that's uniquely Iowa."

KEY FEATURES OF THE CHOOSE IOWA PASSPORT

- **Free and easy to use:** The Choose Iowa Passport is free and mobile-friendly with no apps to download. It is accessible anytime via smartphone.
- **Earn rewards:** Choose Iowa Passport users can check in at each stop to earn points and redeem them for prizes, including Iowa products.
- **Explore authentic Iowa destinations:** Discover farms with on-site retail, agritourism experiences, farm-to-table restaurants, and retailers offering Iowa products and farmers markets showcasing local products.
- **Support local:** Connect with Iowa farmers, businesses and restaurants committed to selling and sourcing Iowa products.

Visit www.chooseiowa.com to learn more.

Photo Sources: Choose Iowa and Travel Iowa

107 YEARS OF LIFE, WISDOM AND WIT

BY DARCY DOUGHERTY MAULSBY

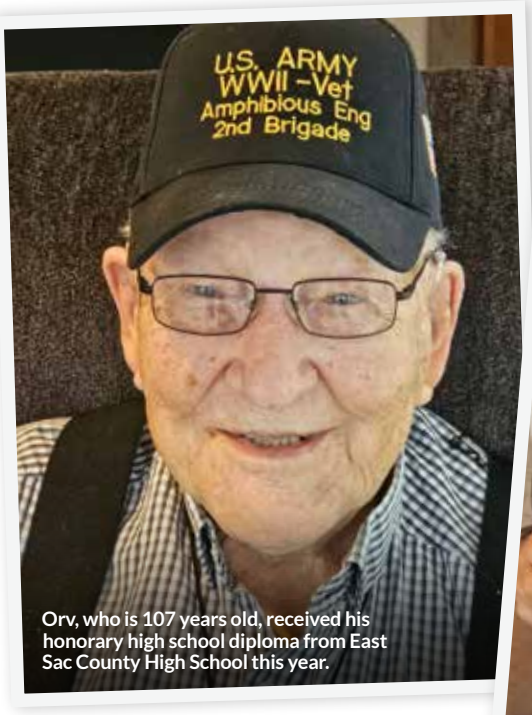
Did you hear about the 107-year-old World War II veteran from Sac City who joined the graduating class of East Sac County High School this past May to get his honorary diploma?

News articles that went around the globe noted how Orville "Orv" Von Ehwegen graduated from eighth grade during the Great Depression. Then his father informed the 14-year-old he'd have to stay home and work on the family farm. Orv would never attend high school.

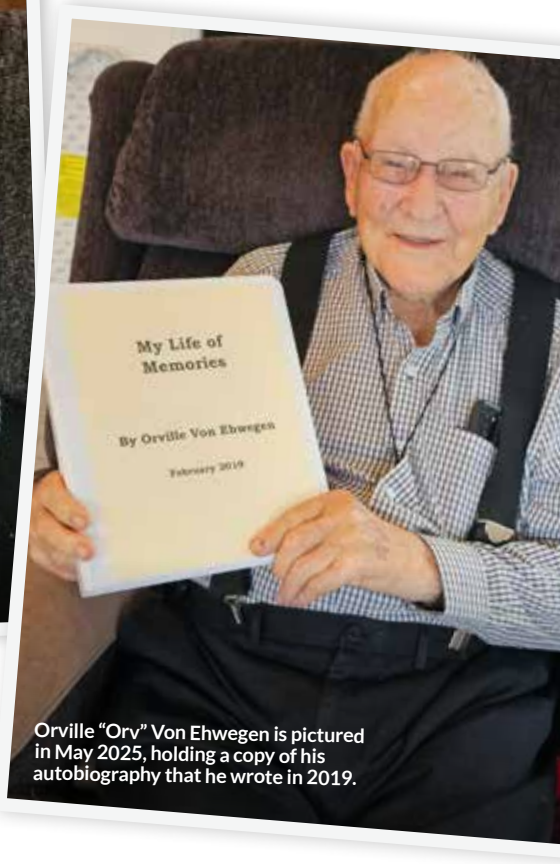
I knew I had to meet Orv. A friend in Sac City connected me with Orv's daughter, Pat, who was visiting her dad around Memorial Day weekend. Orv and Pat graciously invited me to stop by that Friday afternoon. We had a delightful visit on his sun porch, overlooking the backyard bird feeders.

We chatted a bit about how Sen. Chuck Grassley and others had been calling to congratulate Orv. "It's getting kind of old!" he joked. We also chuckled about how Orv was 89 when most of his fellow 2025 East Sac graduates were born.

While he received a standing ovation at graduation, I hope everyone there truly grasped what a treasure was in their midst.



Orv, who is 107 years old, received his honorary high school diploma from East Sac County High School this year.



Orville "Orv" Von Ehwegen is pictured in May 2025, holding a copy of his autobiography that he wrote in 2019.

Remembering rural electrification

Orv, who was born Aug. 21, 1917, grew up on a farm southwest of Sac City in Wall Lake Township. I rarely get to interview people with this much life experience, so I didn't waste any time in my quest to gather information about his life history. I asked him about rural electricity on the farm.

His father, Karl, had installed a Delco battery plant on the farm. "There were a whole bunch of batteries – I mean a whole bunch of 'em," Orv said. The Delco plant was anchored to a cement block and had an exhaust system and a muffler. The 32-volt system could power one light in each room of the farmhouse, along with a couple lights in the barn, but you couldn't have too many lights on at once, Orv noted.

When rural electrification came to the area, farm families could get a free yard light if they hooked up to the electric line. "I was glad we got 110-volt rural electricity," Orv said. "That meant I didn't have to carry that darn lantern out to the barn anymore. That was such a fire risk."

Even with electricity, farming meant lots of hard, physical labor, especially for a young teenage boy like Orv who was required to do a man's work.

When the going gets tough, the tough get going

Things didn't get any easier when Orv was drafted into the Army during World War II. He was seconds from death when a Japanese bomber blew up the truck he was driving in New Guinea.

Orv served in the military from 1942-1945. After returning home to Sac County, he and his wife Ruth ran an appliance store in Sac City. The couple enjoyed 56 years together before Ruth died in 2003.

Through it all, Orv's Christian faith is stronger than ever. "God's still got a reason for keeping me here," he said.

Orv's friends will tell you life hasn't always been easy for him, yet he keeps smiling and remains positive. It makes me think of these words of wisdom I saw online:

"Some of the kindest souls I know have lived in a world that was not so kind to them. Some of the best human beings I know have been through so much at the hands of others, and they still love deeply, they still care. If that isn't something to be in awe of, I don't know what is."

Darcy Dougherty Maulsby lives near her family's Century Farm northwest of Lake City. Visit her at www.darcymaulsby.com.

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