



Touchstone Energy®  
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JUNE 2026

# iowa

ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE LIVING

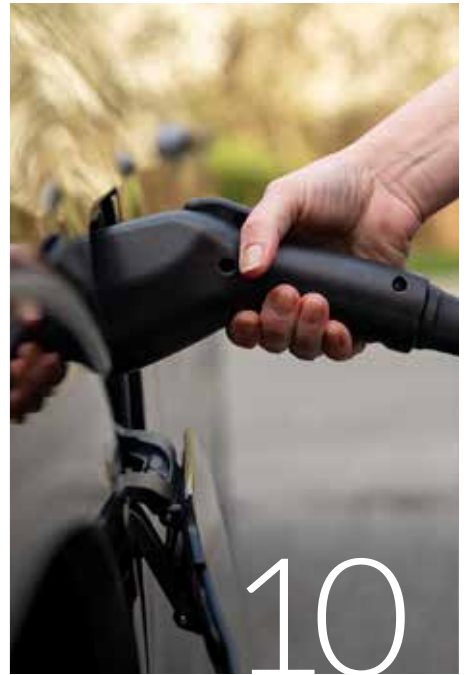
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a community volunteer**

**Low-cost ways to save energy**

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*Iowa Electric Cooperative Living* magazine (ISSN: 2770-8683) is published monthly by the Iowa Association of Electric Cooperatives, a not-for-profit organization representing Iowa's member-owned local electric cooperatives. Association address: 8525 Douglas Ave., Suite 48, Des Moines, IA 50322-2992. The phrase *Iowa Electric Cooperative Living* is a mark registered within the state of Iowa to the Iowa Association of Electric Cooperatives. The magazine does not accept advertising.

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

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

**Website**  
www.ieclmagazine.com

**Postmaster**  
Send address changes to *Iowa Electric Cooperative Living* magazine, 8525 Douglas Ave., Suite 48, Des Moines, IA 50322-2992. Periodicals Postage Paid at Des Moines, Iowa, and at additional mailing offices.

**Change of Address**  
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## ON THE COVER

Special thanks to Jill Hannasch, a Raccoon Valley Electric Cooperative member-consumer, for supplying this month's cover image. Submit high-resolution photos for consideration to editor@ieclmagazine.com. You could receive \$100!

# CLASS IS ALWAYS IN SESSION FOR IOWA'S ELECTRIC COOPERATIVES

BY KATRINA DAVIS



When the lockers are empty and the final school bell rings, summer announces a well-earned break from homework and schedules.

While classrooms may quiet down, learning doesn't take a season off in the world of electric cooperatives.

At the Iowa Association of Electric Cooperatives, we see education not as an obligation, but as an investment that pays dividends in reliability, innovation and service to co-op member-consumers. The electric utility landscape is constantly evolving, shaped by new technologies, changing regulations and growing expectations from the communities we serve. Staying ahead requires more than experience; it demands a commitment to continuous learning.

That's where our training and education programs come in. As the director of education and training at the statewide trade association, my role is to provide high-value learning opportunities for our member electric cooperatives.

## Investing in employees and directors

Throughout the year, we bring co-op employees together for workshops, conferences and hands-on training opportunities designed to sharpen skills and spark new ideas. Whether it's a lineworker mastering the latest safety practices, a customer service representative navigating emerging member needs or a manager exploring new operational strategies, each session builds confidence and capability.

But learning doesn't stop with employees.

Cooperative board directors, who are locally elected member-consumers, also dedicate time to expanding their knowledge. Through director-focused events, they dive deeper into the complexities of the energy industry, from governance responsibilities to emerging policy issues. Just as importantly, these gatherings create a space for connection. Directors from across the state share perspectives, challenges and solutions, strengthening not only their individual co-ops but the cooperative network as a whole.

## Continuous commitment

There's something fitting about this work continuing through the summer months. While students may take a break, co-op leaders and employees are leaning in by asking questions, exchanging ideas and preparing for what's ahead. It's a reminder that learning isn't confined

to a classroom or a calendar. It's a mindset. And that mindset matters.

Because when cooperative teams are well trained and well informed, they're better equipped to serve you. They make smarter decisions, respond more effectively to challenges and help ensure your co-op remains strong for generations to come.

As you enjoy the pace of summer with longer days, family time and a bit of rest, know that behind the scenes your electric cooperative is still doing its homework. And Iowa's electric co-ops invest in education and training because we believe in the power of knowledge to build a brighter future.

After all, in the cooperative world, learning is always in season.

*Katrina Davis is the director of education and training for the Iowa Association of Electric Cooperatives.*

## EDITOR'S CHOICE CONTEST

# WIN A CHARBROIL BISTRO PRO TABLETOP GRILL!

Grill like a pro – even in tight spaces! The Charbroil® Bistro Pro™ tabletop electric grill heats up to 500 degrees F fast, delivering deliciously seared flavors. Its 180-square-inch cooking area makes it ideal for small patios or on-the-go cookouts. Enjoy easy, electric-powered grilling with convenience.

## Visit our website and win!

Enter this month's contest by visiting [www.ieclmagazine.com](http://www.ieclmagazine.com) no later than June 30. 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 \$100 Spring Spruce Up gift card from the April issue was **John Hoffman**, a **Raccoon Valley Electric Cooperative** member-consumer.



ENTER ONLINE BY JUNE 30!

# AMID ROYAL VISIT, IOWA'S ELECTRIC CO-OPS POWER UP IN WASHINGTON

While King Charles drew global attention during his historic U.S. state visit in late April, another delegation was in our nation's capital with a powerful mission of its own. Twenty-five advocates representing Iowa's electric cooperatives traveled to Washington, D.C., not for ceremony but for service, bringing the voices of their communities straight to Capitol Hill.

The co-op representatives attended the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association's (NRECA) annual Legislative Conference and met face-to-face with lawmakers to champion the needs of rural America and the members they power every day.

## Co-op leaders advocate for reliable, affordable energy

During the NRECA Legislative Conference, more than 1,500 electric co-op leaders were briefed on key legislative priorities, including a push for smart energy policy to ensure reliable, affordable power for the member-consumers we serve.

NRECA CEO Jim Matheson told co-op leaders that they are viewed as truth-tellers by policymakers, giving them a unique advantage as they advocate for top co-op priorities.

"Policymakers know we're not of Washington," he said. "We're laser-focused on doing the right thing for the communities we serve. That's a powerful differentiator."



## Iowa delegation brings priorities to Capitol Hill

After the conference, the group of Iowa electric co-op advocates met for an issue briefing and then marched to Capitol Hill where they discussed the following key requests with federal legislators:

- Modernizing FEMA disaster programs by passing the FEMA Act of 2025 (HR 4669) to expedite disaster reimbursements, expand resiliency programs and better account for damage in rural areas.
- Streamlining the federal permitting process by passing the SPEED Act (HR 4776) and the PERMIT Act (HR 3898), which would expedite federal environmental permitting processes and implement judicial reforms to limit costly lawsuits.

- Increasing Rural Utilities Service loan funding and giving the U.S. Department of Agriculture more flexibility to make additional loans when needed, with Congressional approval.

The group met with Sens. Charles Grassley and Joni Ernst, and Rep. Mariannette Miller-Meeks, as well as staff from Rep. Ashley Hinson's and Rep. Zach Nunn's offices, amid tight security on Capitol Hill due to the king's presence.

"These discussions help ensure that the cooperative perspective is heard and that decisions made today support the future of rural Iowa," remarked Iowa Association of Electric Cooperatives Executive Vice President Leslie Kaufman.

## DID YOU KNOW?



During the past 10 years, Iowa's electric cooperatives have kept the lights on

**99.96%** OF THE TIME

DESPITE BLIZZARDS, ICE STORMS, TORNADOES, DERECHOS OR OTHER EXTREME WEATHER EVENTS.



The average Iowa electric co-op member-consumer experiences

**1 OUTAGE**



lasting an average of **138 MINUTES** PER YEAR.

# ELECTRICAL SAFETY TIPS FOR RV CAMPING

Camping is a popular outdoor activity during the summer, and your electric cooperative encourages campers to keep electrical safety in mind on your next trip.

When an RV frame becomes electrically charged, it is often called “hot skin.” Improper wiring, poor grounding, reversed polarity and worn outlets are common causes. If a hot skin hazard exists, simply touching the RV door or hitch can result in shock or electrocution.

## Safety starts before hitting the road

Taking a few precautions before and during your trip can help reduce the risk of electrical hazards at the campground or on the road. The following tips can help keep campers and their families safe.

- **To help prevent hot skin, regularly test and maintain your RV’s electrical system.** A qualified electrician can help ensure the wiring is safe.
- **Inspect cords, plugs and outlets before traveling.** Do not use cracked

or frayed cords or damaged outlets. Replace or repair unsafe equipment immediately. Fire extinguishers and permanently installed carbon monoxide and smoke detectors should also be checked before departure.

- **Always use electrical cords rated for the intended use.** Make sure appliance power demands do not exceed the cord’s rating. To connect an RV to a campground power pedestal, use a heavy-duty, four-wire cord with a grounding wire instead of an extension cord.
- **Whether using a generator or campground hookup, know both your RV’s amperage requirements and the available power source.** Drawing more amperage than available can damage the RV and electrical source and may cause a fire. Campers should also know the location of the RV’s electrical panel and major switches.
- **If using a generator, follow campground rules.** Some campgrounds prohibit generators or limit hours of operation. Be aware of



generator exhaust and always leave a roof vent open while the generator is running. Start the generator before turning on appliances and never sleep with it operating.

- **Before using a campground hookup, inspect the area for damage.** If the hookup appears unsafe, request another site and notify campground staff. Never plug more than one RV into a single hookup.

With proper preparation, campers can safely enjoy both the outdoors and modern conveniences. For more electrical safety information, visit [SafeElectricity.org](http://SafeElectricity.org).

## WANTED: 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.

### RECEIVE \$100 FOR A PUBLISHED PHOTO

#### How to enter:

- 1 Snap a photo capturing rural Iowa (image must be high quality, at least 1MB large; if taken on a phone, send us the largest version – bigger is better!).
- 2 Send us the original, high-resolution image file in an email to [editor@ieclmagazine.com](mailto:editor@ieclmagazine.com) with “Cover Submission” in the subject line.
- 3 Include your **name, service address** and the **name of your electric cooperative** in the email body to ensure you qualify for our contest. A **phone number** is also appreciated in case we need to contact you.

All eligible entries are reviewed and considered for each edition of *Iowa Electric Cooperative Living*. Keep an eye out for next month’s winner!



# SHINE THE LIGHT ON LOCAL VOLUNTEERS



**NOMINATE A COMMUNITY VOLUNTEER BY JUNE 30**

Three winners will each receive \$3,000 for their chosen charity or nonprofit

The Shine the Light contest is celebrating its sixth year of recognizing volunteers who make a lasting difference in communities across Iowa. Sponsored by the Touchstone Energy® Cooperatives of Iowa, the statewide contest highlights individuals whose dedication, compassion and leadership strengthen local nonprofits, charities and community organizations.

Each June, member-consumers and employees of Iowa's electric cooperatives are invited to nominate outstanding

local volunteers through the contest website. Again this year, three winners will be selected and each will receive a \$3,000 donation for their chosen charity or nonprofit organization. Nominations are open June 1-30 to volunteers of all ages, and past nominees who did not win may be nominated again. Entries require a short explanation of how the nominee has made a positive impact in the community.

As the Shine the Light contest enters its sixth year, here's a look back at the winners and charities recognized during the past five years.

## 2021



### Suzanne Askelsen | Ballard Education Foundation

Suzanne Askelsen of Cambridge was nominated by her mother, Carol Gilbert, a Midland Power Cooperative member. Suzanne was recognized for her work with the Ballard Education Foundation, serving on the steering committee and as the first president for four years. She helped identify sponsors and lead fundraising efforts while balancing life as a mother of six.

### Marlene Walthart | Emmet County Animal Shelter

Marlene Walthart of Estherville was nominated by Dawn Eveleth, a member of Iowa Lakes Electric Cooperative, for her work with the Emmet County Animal Shelter. Alongside her husband Larry, she has volunteered at the shelter for years and helped establish a nearby can redemption center to raise money for the facility.

### Dr. George North | Wilder Park

George North of Allison was nominated by Deb McWhirter, a Butler County Rural Electric Cooperative member, for his work with Wilder Park. A retired dentist and longtime scout leader, George helped develop Wilder Park to provide affordable outdoor recreation opportunities in Butler County.

### Deb Johnson | Greater Fairfield Area Habitat for Humanity

Deb Johnson of Fairfield was nominated by Kathy Brown, a member-consumer of Access Energy Cooperative. An active volunteer, Deb uses her social work background to serve as a family support liaison for Greater Fairfield Area Habitat for Humanity. She is also known as the "Cookie Lady" for baking treats for student workers during home builds.

### Sharon Van Beek | Buckets of Joy

Sharon Van Beek of Primghar was nominated by her daughter, Laura Leonard, a member-consumer of North West Rural Electric Cooperative. Sharon has coordinated holiday gifts for children in need for 30 years, continuing a tradition started by her in-laws. Buckets of Joy now distributes up to 250 bags each Christmas filled with clothing, books, snacks and other essentials.

### Nicole Low | Eldora Community Garden

Nicole Low of Eldora was nominated by Midland Power Cooperative member Paul Lawler. Nicole co-founded the Eldora Community Garden to build community and provide fresh produce for people in need. A registered nurse and mother of two, she is passionate about public health and reducing food insecurity.

## 2022



# 2023

## Erica Lindaman | Gift of Giving

Erica Lindaman of Clarion was nominated by members and employees of Prairie Energy Cooperative. A fourth-grade teacher, Erica became involved with Gift of Giving during the pandemic to help provide holiday gifts for children. She now helps coordinate assistance for families needing clothing, food and household items throughout Wright County.



## Betty Thronson | Project Flo

Betty Thronson of New Hampton was nominated by her sister, Shirley Hoffman, a member of Butler County Rural Electric Cooperative. Betty and her siblings started Project Flo in 2011 to honor their mother, Florence "Flo" Thronson. Each summer, volunteers repair homes throughout Chickasaw County, with Betty coordinating projects and work teams.



## Heather Weers | Sleep in Heavenly Peace

Heather Weers of Center Junction was nominated by Megan Ruley, a member and employee of Maquoketa Valley Electric Cooperative. Heather founded the Jones County chapter of Sleep in Heavenly Peace in 2019 and has helped deliver more than 320 beds so children don't have to sleep on the floor.

# 2024



## Judy Hess | Moms and Grandmas for Fonda Inc.

Judy Hess of Fonda was nominated by Kerry Noethe, a member-consumer of Calhoun County Electric Cooperative Association. Judy was recognized for her work with MAGS 4 Fonda, a group focused on improving parks and the local pool. Since starting the organization in 2018, she has led creative fundraising efforts for local projects.

## Doug Pralle | Compassion Flights

Doug Pralle of Hampton was nominated by Madison Alert, an employee of Franklin Rural Electric Cooperative. Doug founded Compassion Flights in 2017 to arrange free air transportation for medical treatment. Inspired by kindness shown to his family during his father's illness, he now works to provide that same support to others.

## Beth Thole | Osceola County Agriculture Pavilion

Beth Thole of Sibley was nominated by Gary and Karen Trei, member-consumers of Osceola Electric Cooperative. As a board member of the McCallum Museum, Beth has helped raise funds and preserve agricultural history through the Osceola County Ag Pavilion, which features a farmhouse, barn and historical artifacts.

## Chuck Bildstein | Chelsey's Dream Foundation

Chuck Bildstein of Anamosa was nominated by Al Reiter of Maquoketa Valley Electric Cooperative. Chuck founded Chelsey's Dream Foundation in memory of his daughter Chelsey to help families with adoption expenses and emotional support. Since 2014, the organization has helped more than 100 families adopt 141 children.



## Gerry Holtrup | Partners for Patriots

Gerry Holtrup of Hospers was nominated by Molli Griffin, a member-consumer of North West Rural Electric Cooperative. Gerry was recognized for his work with Partners for Patriots, an organization that trains service dogs for disabled veterans. He leads fundraising and outreach efforts and also helps train and place service dogs.



## Aimee Goeman McKnight | Build a Better Belmond

Aimee Goeman of Belmond was nominated by four member-consumers of Prairie Energy Cooperative. Aimee returned to her hometown in 2020 and became a leader in efforts to rebuild Belmond's community swimming pool. Through Build a Better Belmond, she is helping raise funds to restore the pool as a key community gathering place.



# 2025

Visit [www.IowaShineTheLight.com](http://www.IowaShineTheLight.com) to review the contest rules and submission guidelines.

Contest entries will be accepted at this website June 1-30.

Scan the QR code to watch videos featuring each of the winners.





## SMOKED BBQ MAC AND CHEESE

- 1 large bag elbow macaroni
- 1 block Velveeta cheese
- 1 stick butter, cubed
- 1 quart milk
- 1 cup heavy whipping cream
- 3 tablespoons barbeque seasoning
- 1 cup mozzarella cheese, shredded
- 2-3 cups Cheez-Its, crushed
- cooking spray

Heat smoker to 275 degrees F. Pour dry macaroni into a 9x13-inch baking dish and place Velveeta in the center of the dish. Spread butter cubes around cheese then pour in milk, heavy cream and barbeque seasoning. Spread shredded cheese over the top evenly. Cover and smoke for 2 hours, then stir well. Sprinkle crushed crackers on top and spray lightly with cooking spray. Sprinkle a dash of barbeque seasoning over the crackers, then return to smoker for 25 minutes. *Serves 6-8*

Chloe Palmer • Lovilia  
Chariton Valley Electric Cooperative, Inc.

## CORN CASSEROLE

- 1 stick butter
- 1 can corn, undrained
- 1 can cream of corn, undrained
- 1 egg, beaten
- ¼ cup onion, chopped
- 1 8-ounce carton chive chip dip
- 2 cups cheddar cheese
- 1 box Jiffy corn bread mix

Melt butter and add both cans of corn, egg, onion, chip dip and cheese. Mix in corn bread mix. Pour into a greased 9x15-inch pan. Bake at 350 degrees F for 1 hour. *Serves 10*

Karen Caldwell • Albia  
Chariton Valley Electric Cooperative, Inc.

## RANCH COLESLAW

- 4 cups cabbage, shredded
- ½ cup Mexican-style corn, drained
- 1 jalapeño pepper, diced
- 3 tablespoons onion, chopped
- ½ cup cheddar cheese
- ¾ cup ranch dressing
- 2 teaspoons lime juice
- ½ teaspoon cumin
- ½ teaspoon celery seed
- salt, to taste
- pepper, to taste

Mix all ingredients together. *Serves 6*

Amy Behounek • Chelsea  
T.I.P. Rural Electric Cooperative

## MOLASSES GRILLED PORK TENDERLOIN

- ½ cup molasses
- ¼ cup coarse grain Dijon mustard
- 2 tablespoons apple cider vinegar
- 1 teaspoon seasoned salt
- 1 3-pound pork tenderloin

Combine molasses, mustard, vinegar and seasoned salt, adjust salt to taste. You can also use honey Dijon mustard. Place pork tenderloin on grill over medium-hot coals (splitting the tenderloin in half makes it easier to grill and will cook faster). Cover with grill lid and cook until almost done, meat will be a little pink when cooked on the grill. Brush molasses sauce on pork and cover with lid. Cook until the thickest part of the tenderloin reaches an internal temperature of 160 degrees F, turning once and basting with the reserved molasses. You can double the sauce ingredients to make a dipping sauce. Warm the dipping sauce in the microwave before serving. *Serves 8*

Dianne Roeder • Maurice  
North West Rural Electric Cooperative

## GRILLED STRAWBERRY SHORTCAKE KEBABS

- 8 wooden skewers
- 1 loaf shortcake
- 1 1-pound package strawberries
- whipped cream or ice cream

Soak the wooden skewers in water for at least 2 hours to prevent them from burning on the grill. Cut the cake into 2-inch cubes. Sponge cake or angel food cake can also be used. Wash strawberries and remove the hull. Thread alternating strawberries and cake on each wooden skewer. Place kebabs on the grill and cook for 5 minutes, rotating during cooking. They are done when the cake is toasted. Serve with whipped cream or ice cream.

Marilyn O'Brien • Geneva  
Franklin Rural Electric Cooperative

## BBQ BITES

- 16 ounces boneless, skinless chicken breasts, diced
- 2 tablespoons corn oil
- 1 large onion, chopped
- salt, to taste
- pepper, to taste
- $\frac{3}{4}$  cup sweet barbeque sauce
- $\frac{3}{4}$  cup Dijon mustard
- 40 corn chip cups
- sour cream

In a large skillet over high heat, cook chicken in corn oil until done. Add onion and cook 2 minutes more, or until onion is golden brown. Season with salt and pepper. Add barbeque sauce and mustard. Cook until heated through, stirring occasionally. Divide barbeque chicken mixture into the corn chip cups. Add a dollop of sour cream to each cup.

Deb Bartholomew • Ollie  
T.I.P. Rural Electric Cooperative

## CREAMY BLACK BEAN DIP

- 1 can black beans
- 1 can corn
- $\frac{1}{2}$  cup sour cream
- $\frac{1}{4}$  cup mayonnaise
- 2 tablespoons vinegar
- 1 teaspoon cumin
- 1 teaspoon chili powder
- $\frac{1}{8}$  teaspoon pepper
- $\frac{1}{4}$  teaspoon garlic powder
- $\frac{1}{2}$  teaspoon salt
- 1 cup red pepper, chopped
- $\frac{3}{4}$  cup green pepper, chopped
- $\frac{1}{2}$  cup red onion, chopped
- chips

Rinse and drain black beans and corn. In a medium bowl, combine sour cream, mayonnaise, vinegar, cumin, chili powder, pepper, garlic powder and salt. Add the beans, corn, peppers and onion. Stir and serve with chips. Serves 8-10

Grant DeSmet • Larchwood  
Lyon Rural Electric Cooperative

## CORN SALAD

- 2 cans yellow kernel corn, drained
- $\frac{1}{2}$  red pepper, chopped
- $\frac{1}{2}$  green pepper, chopped
- $\frac{1}{2}$  red onion, chopped
- 1 cup mayonnaise
- 1 cup cheddar cheese, shredded
- 1 5-ounce package chili cheese flavored corn chips

Mix all ingredients except chips. Chill mixture. Stir chips in just before serving. Serves 10-12

Joanna Schaefer • Larchwood  
Lyon Rural Electric Cooperative

## BAR-B-Q BEEF BURGERS

- 1 pound ground beef
- $\frac{1}{4}$  cup barbeque sauce, more to taste
- 2 teaspoons prepared mustard
- 1 tablespoon sautéed onion
- buns

Mix ingredients except buns together and form into patties. Grill burgers until done. Toast buns on the grill for the last couple of minutes.

Susan Ausborn • Ventura  
Prairie Energy Cooperative

WANTED:

## COMFORT FOOD CLASSICS

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Deadline is June 30

We're looking for your **classic comfort food recipes** – think hearty, warm, simple and nostalgic meals – to usher in the cool fall days. Selected submission will appear in our October issue. Please include your name, address, telephone number, co-op name, recipe category and number of servings on all submissions.



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# EV SALES SLOW, BUT CO-OPS POWER FORWARD FOR MEMBERS

BY CATHY CASH

Headlines may say that electric vehicle (EV) sales have taken a significant spill, but electric cooperatives and their members have nothing to worry about here.

It's in co-ops' DNA to be strategic and flexible – balancing shifts in energy demand while upholding the seven cooperative principles that prioritize affordable, reliable and safe electricity. That same adaptability applies to the recent downturn in EV purchases, which energy analysts still expect to surge in the long term.

“Co-ops have internal processes and plans for what really does show up as load versus what's in the headlines,” said Jennah Denney, the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association's senior program manager for technology integration.

She sees no adverse impacts, just because EV sales dropped by half between last September and December, according to industry data.

“If an electric co-op is serving EVs today, those EVs still have

to charge and the co-op's still serving them,” Denney said.

### **Variety of benefits remain**

The benefits of EV ownership remain strong, and co-ops play an important role.

Although the federal tax credit for EV purchases has sunset, many co-ops and states are offering discounts, rebates or other financial incentives. EV drivers also can take advantage of lower rates from their co-op when charging their

vehicles at home or elsewhere at times that don't stress the grid.

Charging stations owned and operated by co-ops have become valuable assets in supporting grid reliability and the communities they serve. Having available and convenient charging stations is considered a real amenity in small towns and suburbs.

Owners of EVs with a bidirectional capacity battery can tap their vehicle like a generator to deliver backup power to their home in case of a power outage. EVs have also been used to power outdoor community events sponsored by co-ops.

### Fuel savings, pre-owned options

Then there's fuel economy and the low maintenance of EV motors.

Fully charged EV batteries provide about 300 miles of driving nowadays, easing past "range anxiety" for drivers switching from cars and pickups that run on gasoline. That means longer drives with fewer fueling stops and no worries about the escalating price at the pump.

"Many people don't realize until they're an EV driver how nice it is to not go into a gas station," said Denney.

A lot of EV models carry higher upfront costs, but the lower-priced, pre-owned vehicle market is growing and more of these vehicles can be found in co-op service territories.

For co-ops with EVs on their lines or if you're a member who owns an EV, it's a great time to contribute to an affordable and reliable grid.

"You have so many ways to benefit from an electric vehicle that you may not have had before," said Denney. "The benefits to owning an EV, that's one thing that hasn't changed despite all of the sales hype."

### Long-term vision for electrification

Co-ops across the country with EV load are partnering with local government and business and community leaders to install chargers in prominent places in their electric footprint, such as county buildings, community centers, large restaurants, shopping areas, museums and more.

"EV drivers want confidence about where they will be able to charge,

and some co-ops realize that these communities would be left behind if they didn't install EV chargers," Denney said. "Our mission as co-ops is concern for community, improving the communities we serve. So, if there's somewhere that brings families together, that's also an opportunity to provide EV chargers."

Plus, electric transportation is projected to make up the second largest tranche of electrification between now and 2050, according to the Electric Power Research Institute.

While we don't have a crystal ball, Denney noted co-ops' success comes from being stalwart and loyal to their members, their communities and their load – and that includes EVs.

"Electric co-ops are showing up to serve growing needs in our territories, and that means using scenario process improvements to plan for what comes next," Denney said. "We've seen a lot of fluctuations, and it will be a story that continues to evolve."

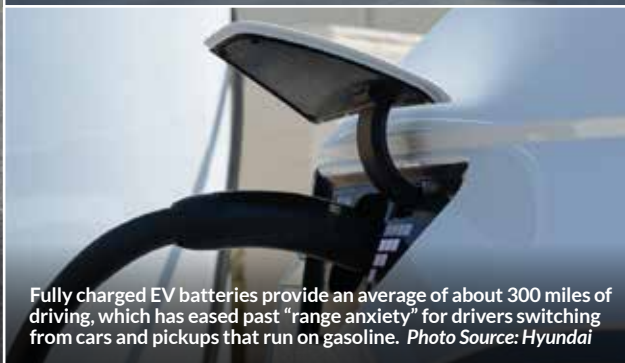
*Cathy Cash writes on consumer and cooperative affairs for the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association.*



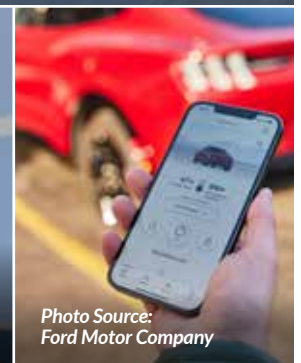
Across the country, electric co-ops with EV load are partnering with local government and business and community leaders to install chargers in prominent places in their electric footprint. *Photo Source: Greystone Power*



Although the federal tax credit for EV purchases has sunset, many co-ops and states are offering discounts, rebates or other financial incentives. *Photo Source: Hyundai*



Fully charged EV batteries provide an average of about 300 miles of driving, which has eased past "range anxiety" for drivers switching from cars and pickups that run on gasoline. *Photo Source: Hyundai*



*Photo Source: Ford Motor Company*

# THE MODERN SUBSTATION: KEEPING COMMUNITIES POWERED

BY JEFFREY GROENEWOLD

Electric substations sit at the center of power grids and are essential to keeping the lights on in our communities. You've seen them – those tall fenced-in areas filled with metal structures, wires and heavy equipment. They may not look flashy, but they're one of the most important behind-the-scenes components of the grid.

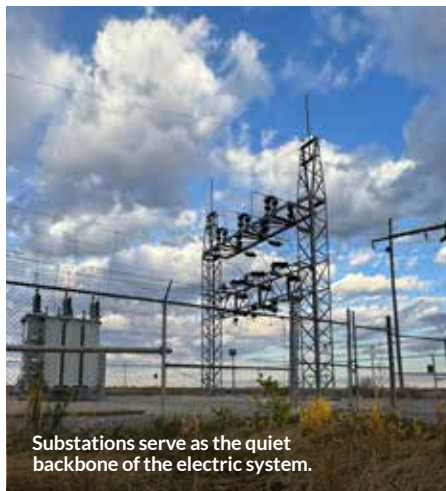
Substations take power from high-voltage transmission lines and convert it to the lower voltages that get distributed on the last-mile power lines you see every day. These lines provide power to your home, farm or business. Every light switch you flip, every well pump you operate and every device you charge depend on a substation doing its job without interruption. These facilities work quietly in the background, yet they shape the comforts of daily life. Iowa's electric cooperatives work 24/7 to maintain and improve these substations.

Substations began as simple switching points that handled basic voltage changes. Early designs used bulky equipment and manual controls. As communities grew, electric demand on the grid grew with them.

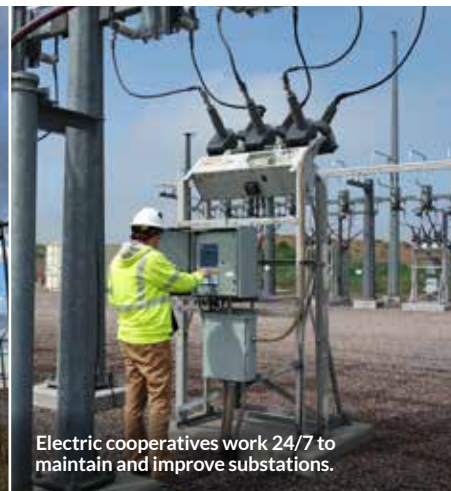
## Advanced technology and tools

Today's substations utilize advanced sensors, automated controls and digital communication systems, allowing cooperatives to better manage the grid. These tools help co-ops respond faster to outages, monitor equipment health and manage energy with more precision.

A modern substation protects your community from disruption. It isolates problems, keeps dangerous faults from spreading and supports important line equipment across long distances. When a substation faces a major issue, such as from



Substations serve as the quiet backbone of the electric system.



Electric cooperatives work 24/7 to maintain and improve substations.

a storm or wildlife contact, the impact is immediate. Communities lose power and Wi-Fi, businesses stall, farms lose time-sensitive operations and emergency service communications can face added strain. These events remind us how central substations are to modern life.

## Supporting community growth, changing energy needs

Communities add new homes, businesses, irrigation systems and commercial buildings every year. Each addition increases the load on the grid. That's why co-ops build new substations and upgrade older ones to keep pace with growth, technology changes and safety needs.

Modern substation designs use equipment that requires less strenuous maintenance while improving system protection. Smart-enabled protection devices reduce the time needed to identify and isolate faults. These advanced monitoring tools give co-ops better visibility into real-time grid conditions. For the surrounding community, these investments lead to stronger service and reliability. You experience fewer outages. Your farm or business gains resiliency. Your home appliances run on steadier voltage.

Modern substations also help cooperatives manage costs. Instead of building miles of new line, a well-placed substation can support growing neighborhoods or rural industries with less construction and lower long-term investment.

Substations also support the changing energy landscape. Renewable energy systems, electric vehicles and electrified commercial and industrial operations need modern control points. Modern substations allow co-ops to integrate these resources without sacrificing reliability. They help manage energy across widespread areas and keep the grid balanced during peak conditions.

Substations serve as the quiet backbone of the electric system. When they operate well, communities thrive. When they falter, everything from daily chores to essential services feel the impact.

Electric cooperatives will continue to invest in these facilities to support safe, reliable and affordable service for every member in every community we serve.

*Jeffrey Groenewold writes on consumer and cooperative affairs for the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association.*

# YOUTH TOUR PARTICIPANT TO CO-OP LEADER: KATHY WUNDERLICH'S FULL-CIRCLE JOURNEY

BY ANN FOSTER THELEN

In the summer of 1976, Kathy Ryner boarded an airplane for the very first time.

Encouraged by her parents to apply, she wrote an essay explaining why she believed in the benefits of an all-electric home. The essay earned her a Government in Action Scholarship from Eastern Iowa REC, now Eastern Iowa Light & Power Cooperative, to attend the National Rural Electric Cooperative (NRECA) Youth Tour in Washington, D.C. For the teenager from Beaverdale Heights near West Burlington, the experience opened a world far beyond southeast Iowa.

Fifty years later, Kathy (Ryner) Wunderlich found herself walking the halls of Congress once again.

This time, she returned not as a student delegate, but as a director representing the very same electric cooperative that sponsored her Youth Tour experience decades earlier.

"It really did open me up to seeing things outside of our area and our school," Wunderlich recalled of the 1976 trip. "It helped me understand leadership roles and made me feel that your voice matters."

The Youth Tour experience left a lasting impression from the moment she arrived in Washington. During America's bicentennial year, the Iowa students attended a congressional dinner with lawmakers. In addition, they met with President Gerald Ford in the Blue Room of the White House.

"They wanted to hear what we had to say," Wunderlich recalled.

The trip introduced her to many experiences she had never imagined, from the Kennedy Center to national landmarks and new friendships with students from across the country.



## Lessons that lasted a lifetime

But the greatest impact was less visible. Wunderlich said Youth Tour helped build confidence, encouraged leadership and reinforced the importance of community involvement.

"It gave me more of a leadership feeling that your voice is important and you are here to make a difference," she said.

That lesson stayed with her throughout her career and community engagement. Wunderlich later owned and operated an outdoor power equipment business for 17 years while remaining active in Junior Achievement and local volunteer efforts.

Her path back to the cooperative came unexpectedly.

After purchasing her business, a former Eastern Iowa Light & Power Cooperative director encouraged her to run for the co-op board. Wunderlich said she initially questioned what she knew about electric cooperatives, but she accepted the challenge and was elected.

Now in her 13th year as a director, she has also served as board president and completed extensive leadership training through NRECA.

## Returning to Washington as a co-op advocate

This spring, Wunderlich returned to Washington, D.C., for NRECA's annual

Legislative Conference, where co-op leaders from across the country met face-to-face with lawmakers to advocate for rural communities and electric cooperative members.

The discussions focused on issues important to rural electric cooperatives, including disaster recovery funding, permitting reform and infrastructure resiliency.

While much has changed since her first trip to Washington, Wunderlich said the spirit of the experience remains similar.

"You're representing your members, and you feel honored to do it," she said.

Today, Wunderlich continues encouraging students to apply for Youth Tour opportunities through their local electric cooperative.

She believes the program still offers young people something increasingly valuable: the confidence to step outside their comfort zone, engage with others and realize their voice can make an impact.

"No matter where life takes them," she said, "those are things they can carry forward forever."

*Ann Foster Thelen is the editor of Iowa Electric Cooperative Living magazine.*

# LOW- TO NO-COST WAYS TO SAVE ENERGY

BY MIRANDA BOUTELLE

Saving energy doesn't have to be expensive or time-consuming. You don't need to spend thousands of dollars or get the newest technology to use less energy. There are several steps to lower energy use, even on a tight budget.

Here are some low- and no-cost ways to save energy around your home.

## Change thermostat settings.

Adjusting the thermostat is an easy way to save. Nudge the thermostat a few degrees closer to the outside temperature, especially on extreme weather days. On the hottest and coldest days, your heating and cooling equipment must work much harder and use more energy to maintain the same temperature. Add an extra layer of clothing or cozy slippers in winter, and lighter layers in summer.

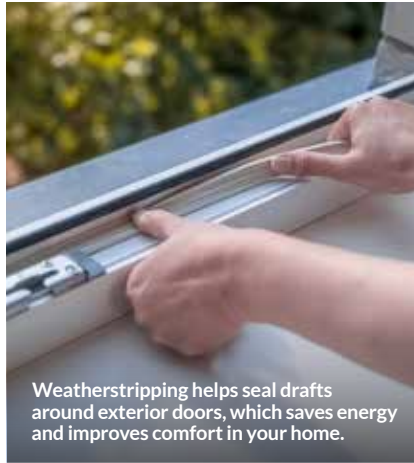
**Address water leaks.** Fix any hot water leaks or dripping faucets. Those tiny drips can add up to big energy waste, not to mention water waste. If you need to hire a pro to fix it, turn the shutoff valve under the sink to stop the leak until you can get it fixed.

**Choose cold water.** Wash clothes in cold water to avoid using the energy required to heat it. Washing on hot or warm settings can really add up, especially if you have a top-load or older washing machine that uses more water.

## Adjust water heater settings.

Adjusting the temperature on your water heater can save energy and money, too. Depending on the water heater, this is either an easy adjustment or something a little more complicated that requires removing access panels. If you don't know how, consult a professional.

**Fill air leaks.** Air sealing is a do-it-yourself, beginner-friendly project that improves comfort and reduces energy waste. For around \$20 and a couple of hours of time, you can fill



Weatherstripping helps seal drafts around exterior doors, which saves energy and improves comfort in your home.



Spray foam seals gaps around pipes to prevent cold air from traveling up through those spaces, causing drafts and wasting energy.



Do-it-yourself, beginner-friendly projects, such as weatherstripping around doors, help lower energy use at home.

gaps, cracks and holes to prevent air from leaking in and out of the home. From the inside of the home, seal the trim around windows and exterior doors with caulk for about \$4 per tube. Buy paintable caulk so you can touch it up when it dries, if needed.

A can of spray foam is about \$5 and seals gaps around plumbing lines. It's great for sealing gaps around pipes under sinks and in the crawlspace or basement. Cold air can travel up through those spaces, causing drafts and wasting energy. Air-sealing these areas earns bonus points for preventing insects and rodents from using these gaps to enter your home.

Spray foam is messy and nearly impossible to remove from whatever it touches, so wear disposable gloves and clothes you don't mind getting dirty, and use drop cloths to protect finished floors. Be careful if you're

working with spray foam overhead. If it gets in your hair, it's not coming out with anything less than a haircut. Move any items and clean surfaces of dust and debris in areas you intend to seal before cracking open a can. Put the can in a cardboard box to carry throughout the house so you don't leave a trail of spray foam.

**Seal exterior doors.** For \$10 to \$15, you can buy weatherstripping to improve the seal on exterior doors. If you can see light around doors or feel a draft between the door and the door jamb when the door is closed, weatherstripping will help.

Try these easy, low- and no-cost improvements to reduce energy waste and improve comfort in your home.

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

# PRESSURE IS A PRIVILEGE

BY DARCY DOUGHERTY MAULSBY

What do you dream of? A new car? A bigger house? A grand vacation?

Beth (Schleisman) Montalvo dreamed of competing in the Olympics. She represented Team USA during the 2008 Paralympic Games in Beijing, China, as her parents, Larry and Violet Schleisman of Lake City, cheered her on from the stands.

As a non-athlete, I'm intrigued to learn how world-class champions like Beth think. She introduced me to a quote from Billie Jean King, one of the greatest tennis players of all time: "Pressure is a privilege."

Beth knows a lot about pressure. Her ability to harness this intensity is a big reason why the United States Tennis Association Hawaii Pacific Section's Hall of Fame presented Beth (a long-time Maui resident) with the Outstanding Player Award in November 2025.

## "I felt alive again"

Long before this prestigious award, Beth was a farm girl from west-central Iowa who enjoyed cheerleading, track and water skiing. She spent her summers working as a lifeguard at the Lake City swimming pool. She also worked part-time as a certified nursing assistant (CNA) at the local care center.

"I learned a strong work ethic, dedication and honoring your word," said Beth, whose father would take her to work on a snowmobile if a winter storm blocked the roads.

After graduating from Iowa State University, Beth became a math teacher. Then came March 30, 1991.

Beth, her boyfriend and other friends were riding four-wheelers in the sand dunes near Las Vegas. Something went horribly wrong, and Beth's four-wheeler pitched forward. "I hung on and felt my back snap," she recalled.



Beth (Schleisman) Montalvo, who received the United States Tennis Association's Hawaii Pacific Hall of Fame Outstanding Player Award, is shown here with Executive Director Ron Romano in 2025.

Beth, 25, spent nearly five years trying to re-learn how to walk. While she eventually realized she could get around quicker in a wheelchair, she had no interest in wheelchair sports. "In my mind, playing wheelchair sports was admitting that I was going to stay in a wheelchair the rest of my life," she said.

That changed when another "wheelie," named Billie Eddins, came to the Las Vegas school where Beth worked, teaching adaptive physical education. He convinced Beth to try wheelchair tennis. "I fell in love with the freedom of moving around on the court," she said. "I felt alive again."

## The player who serves well seldom loses

While the birth of Beth's son, Jacques, in December 1996 put tennis on hold, the U.S. Open in the late 1990s rekindled her interest. By 2000, she was touring full-time, competing in tennis tournaments across the U.S. and around the globe, from Australia, Asia and South Africa to Europe and South America.

Along the way, she learned a lot about life. "The better physical shape I'm in, the better I feel about myself. The better I feel about myself, the more I can give to others," she said.



Giving guides Beth's life since she retired from competitive tennis in 2008. She's grateful her trainer, Scott Sanchez, shared the gospel with her. "Romans 8:28 was life changing," she said, referring to "we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose."

When massive wildfires devastated Maui in 2023, Beth helped organize relief efforts. She's active in her non-denominational church and participated in a church mission trip to Egypt in 2025. She also hosts weekly Bible studies in her home and facilitates Financial Peace University, a biblically based course that teaches money management. In her free time, she enjoys Hawaiian canoe outrigger paddling.

No matter what challenges come her way, Beth is living proof that pressure is a privilege – and champions adapt. "If there's a will, there's a way," she said. "Figure it out, make it happen."

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

Visit our website at [www.ieclmagazine.com](http://www.ieclmagazine.com)



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