

JANUARY 2025

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ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE LIVING

**The factors behind rising
energy costs**

**Generation projects
support reliability**

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ON THE COVER

Special thanks to Cindi Miller, a Guthrie County REC member-consumer, for supplying this month's cover image. Submit high-resolution photos for consideration to editor@ieclmagazine.com. You could receive \$100!

A GRATEFUL FAREWELL: REFLECTING ON MY STATEWIDE SERVICE

BY KENNY VANDENBERG



Last month, the Iowa Association of Electric Cooperatives (IAEC) held its 2024 Annual Meeting in West Des Moines, with the theme of “Powering Lives, Empowering Communities.”

With a statewide leadership transition in 2024, it was a year of new beginnings at IAEC. But amidst change, we remain steadfast in our cooperative mission to help Iowa’s electric cooperatives power lives and empower communities every day.

The annual meeting was a bittersweet time for me as it signaled the end of my six-year tenure on the IAEC board, where I most recently served as board president. It has been an honor to represent the electric cooperatives of District 1 on the statewide board, and I found myself reflecting on the many things that our statewide trade association has accomplished in the past six years, including:

- Keeping safety as our top priority, with fiscal responsibility also a priority.
- Seeing great participation in IAEC’s educational and safety training opportunities for co-op staff and directors.
- Witnessing cooperation among cooperatives and restoring power in the wake of two derechos.
- Meeting the COVID pandemic challenges head on and creating more ways to connect with Iowa’s electric cooperatives virtually and digitally.
- Launching our first statewide Shine the Light contest in 2021 to celebrate our cooperative commitment to community.
- Introducing our Cooperative Leadership in Iowa Program in 2023 to equip emerging leaders at Iowa’s electric cooperatives.

- Sending two crews of volunteer linemen to rural Guatemala (in 2019 and 2024) to bring the advantages of electricity to underserved areas.
- Maintaining a credible reputation while defending local co-op governance with legislators and regulators.
- Welcoming Leslie Kaufman as IAEC’s new executive vice president and general manager in July 2024.

None of these accomplishments would have happened without the foresight of the IAEC board along with support from Iowa’s electric co-ops and the statewide staff.

The power in stepping outside of one’s comfort zone

I want to thank the current board members as well as past board members who have helped me along the way over the past six years. There are not enough words to thank the IAEC staff for their help, knowledge and willingness to go above and beyond.

Serving on the IAEC board was the furthest thing from my mind all those years ago, but a few individuals challenged me to step out of my comfort zone and expand my knowledge of the electric industry. If it weren’t for their encouragement, I wouldn’t be here looking back on what was accomplished. I owe these folks a huge thank you for believing in me and giving me a little push.

So, as I pass the baton to new statewide directors at the start of a new year, I challenge each of you to step out of your comfort zone, try new things and get involved in your community. You will be amazed at what you will learn and the lifelong friendships that will develop.

I wish you and your family a blessed year!

Kenny Vandenberg is the outgoing board president for the Iowa Association of Electric Cooperatives and currently serves as board president of Chariton Valley Electric Cooperative.

EDITOR’S CHOICE CONTEST

WIN A STAINLESS STEEL BREAD MACHINE!

The KBS stainless steel smart bread machine has 17 settings for making bread, jam, yogurt, cake, pizza dough and more! Plus, it features an automatic fruit and nut dispenser. It bakes up to a 2-pound loaf, with three crust settings in light, medium and dark. An ultra-quiet 710-watt motor makes kneading quick and even, strong and durable, so the dough is soft and elastic. A unique ceramic bread pan uses safe nanotechnology to achieve a nonstick effect.



ENTER ONLINE BY JAN. 31!

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 the iRobot Roomba from the November issue was **Edward Mosbach**, a **Prairie Energy Cooperative** member-consumer.

THE FACTORS BEHIND RISING ENERGY COSTS

BY TROY AMOSS



As many of you have noticed, energy costs have been rising, and it's important to understand the factors contributing to this increase. Several dynamics are at play, from growing demand to the ongoing development of our energy infrastructure. While we continue to prioritize affordability and reliability, it's essential to acknowledge the challenges that influence rates.

Increased demand – the impact of data centers

One of the key drivers is the increased demand for electricity, particularly due to the rapid expansion of industries like data centers. These facilities consume enormous amounts of energy to power the servers that store and process data for everything from cloud storage to streaming services. As our digital world continues to expand, so does the demand for electricity to keep it running.

Growing member load – the effects of remote work and electric vehicles

The load on the grid from our members is rising as well. With more people working from home and relying on electricity for everything from home offices to electric vehicles, the everyday use of power is seeing a steady increase. While we as a cooperative focus on reliability, providing energy during peak demand times adds pressure on our system and drives up costs.

Investing in renewable energy and transmission infrastructure

Additionally, the transition to renewable energy sources, such as wind and solar, is a critical part of our future. However, moving this energy across the grid – especially when it's generated in rural areas far from urban centers – requires significant investments in new transmission infrastructure. These projects, while essential for a cleaner energy future,

can be costly and take time to develop, impacting overall costs.

Material costs and supply chain challenges

While material costs for construction and supplies have leveled off recently, they have not significantly decreased. Supply chain challenges and inflationary pressures from the past few years continue to affect the overall cost of maintaining and upgrading our infrastructure.

As we balance increasing energy demand with the need to invest in new technologies and grid infrastructure, we remain committed to providing affordable, reliable service to our members. Thank you for being a part of our cooperative, where your voice and your needs guide our decisions as we move forward in meeting the challenges and opportunities of our changing energy landscape.

Troy Amoss is the CEO/general manager of Chariton Valley Electric Cooperative.

ANNUAL "FILL THE BUCKET" FOOD DRIVE A HUGE SUCCESS

We are thrilled to share that our annual "Fill the Bucket" food drive was an overwhelming success, and

it's all thanks to YOU – our incredible community! Your generosity was tremendous, as buckets were filled to the brim with nonperishable food items.

Together, we've made a meaningful impact in the fight against hunger. We couldn't have done it without you, and we are deeply grateful for your support.

All the donations were delivered to the Helping Hands Food Pantry, where they will provide essential support to local families in need this holiday season. Your contributions are making a real difference, ensuring that our neighbors have access to the food they need.

We would also like to extend a special thank you to Albia Hy-Vee and Jim & Charlie's for graciously allowing us to facilitate this event at their locations. Your partnership made this drive even more successful!

A heartfelt thank you goes out to everyone who donated, stopped by or helped spread the word about the drive.

Thank you again for being part of this important effort – together, we are stronger!



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Your Touchstone Energy® Cooperative



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NEW GENERATION PROJECTS TO SUPPORT RELIABILITY

BY MARK VIGUET

For Chariton Valley Electric Cooperative members, new natural gas generating units are underway by our power supplier, Associated Electric Cooperative (Associated). The units are designed to ensure reliable electric service when electricity demand spikes and our members need it most.

Record-setting member energy demand underscores need for additional generation

Building new power generation is not a decision made lightly. Extensive analysis shows Associated needs additional generation capacity to serve members reliably during peak weather conditions, such as winter storms or extreme summer heat. The need for additional generation has been underscored as the Associated system set a new summer peak demand record and its highest three winter peaks from 2021-2024.

“The data and upward trend are very clear. Energy use during severe weather is growing and more power is needed when demand peaks,” says Sean Wright, Associated vice president, construction of new generation projects. “To make sure we have power in the future when it will be needed and avoid power disruptions, new generation facilities must be built now. These generating units can take up to six years from start to finish and we’ve been working on them for three years now.”

In 2022, Associated’s member-led board of directors authorized the cooperative to add up to 900 megawatts (MW) of new natural gas generation to best serve member needs for reliable power. Associated is constructing two energy centers – one in Oklahoma and one in Missouri – that will each provide 420-445 MW of power when the system needs it most.

“These types of units can start quickly and be up to full generating capacity

in minutes, which is exactly what is needed during energy demand spikes,” Wright says. “Natural gas is much cleaner-burning than other fossil fuels while still being available on-demand.”

The Ripley Energy Center is being built on 160 acres near Stillwater, Oklahoma, and started initial construction activities in October 2024. About 20 acres will be allocated for the energy center’s footprint, with the rest kept in hay production. The strategic location near gas supply pipelines, water supply and transmission lines allows for the new facility to be built at a lower cost to members. The Ripley Energy Center will be the most advanced natural gas generation facility in Oklahoma and is projected to start generating power in 2026.

A similar project is planned for an 82-acre parcel near Turney, Missouri. Construction of the Turney Energy Center, which features the same type of generator as Ripley, is anticipated to begin in 2025 with the unit generating power in 2027. When complete, both projects will deliver power into the Associated member-owned transmission system, ultimately serving more than 2.1 million people in rural areas.

Community engagement is a priority in generation development

An important part of the new generation development process is working with the local community around the site locations to make sure they understand why it is needed, what is being built and the safeguards being put in place for the local environment. Project information developed and distributed describes the need for the project and the technical and environmental aspects of the peaking energy centers.

“Meetings with our community leaders and other stakeholders are conducted early and often. We work closely with them to better understand the local area and sensitivities. We are member-owned and member-led. We don’t forget that as we work to build these projects that are so important to keep power supply reliable,” Wright says.

Mark Viguet is the managing director-corporate communications at Associated Electric Cooperative.




Scan the QR code to learn more about the projects.



Reliable power is essential to quality of life.



Public informational meetings were held to discuss the generation projects.



THE EVER-CHANGING, FAST-GROWING DEMAND FOR ELECTRICITY

BY SCOTT FLOOD

When rural electric cooperatives first strung power lines from farm to farm less than a century ago, most members had but a handful of light bulbs to power. With time, they added appliances like refrigerators, but we're sure they couldn't begin to imagine the number and variety of electrical devices in today's homes and garages.

Across the U.S., people use a growing amount of electricity at work, home, and with the growth of electric vehicles (EVs), even on the road.

The demand for electricity increased by 2.5% in 2024 and is expected to grow by 3.2% this year. That was after co-ops saw a 4.8% increase in

2022. Through 2029, the nation's peak demand is projected to grow by 38 gigawatts. That would be like adding another California-sized state to our nation's power grid.

Factors driving demand

The rapid growth of artificial intelligence (AI) is driving the development of massive data center facilities, often placed in electric co-op service territories to take advantage of inexpensive land and fewer neighbors to complain. By 2022, these facilities accounted for 2.5% of the nation's consumption of electricity – and by 2030, they'll use 7.5% of all electric power.

Data centers and facilities like warehouses require a large, steady supply of electricity 24 hours a day. That means the electric co-ops supplying them can't rely on intermittent sources of electricity, such as solar or wind energy, to handle the additional load. Instead, they need more of what's known as baseload or always-available power, much of which is currently generated by burning fossil fuels. The more we depend on technology, the more we'll need reliable baseload generation.

Baseload power is essential

Yet that's a problem because at the same time Americans are using more

electricity, power providers are being forced to shut down reliable sources of baseload power such as coal and nuclear power plants. Many large coal plants have been converted to use cleaner-burning natural gas, but others have been deemed too costly to convert and are prematurely being shut down. More than 110 gigawatts of always-available generation – enough to power about 35 million homes – is forecast to retire by 2033.

The U.S. Energy Information Administration’s forecast expects coal-fired generation to drop to half of today’s levels by 2030. Renewable energy will capture a growing share of the supply, but as noted, much renewable energy is not reliable enough to provide baseload power.

Demand will steadily increase
As electricity powers a growing share of life’s tools and conveniences, overall demand is expected to continue its steady growth through 2050. A great example is the efficiency of electric heat pumps. Federal and other subsidies and tax advantages are powering significant growth in their share of the home heating market.

In other words, at the same time everyone is using more electricity than ever, the supply of the most reliable source is drying up. Add in the uncertainty created by public policy debates around energy and climate change, and you can begin to understand why 19 states face a high risk of rolling blackouts between now and 2028.

The energy industry studies demand closely because construction of all types of generation is costly and lengthy – often taking more than a decade from groundbreaking to entering service.

As renewables become more efficient and cheaper to produce, their share of the power mix will only continue to grow. Someday soon, battery technology may reach the point where large-scale storage of renewable generation becomes possible, but until then, we’ll need more of those always-available power sources.

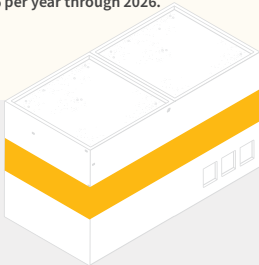
Scott Flood writes on a variety of energy-related topics for the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association.

Soaring Demand

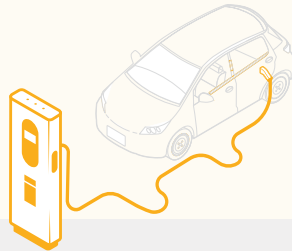
After decades of flat or declining electricity demand, the U.S. is in the midst of a boom in power use. Recent government data shows that power consumption nationwide is set to increase by at least 38 gigawatts (GW) between now and 2028. This trend would ordinarily be great news for the power industry. But government policies aimed at shutting down fossil-fuel-based generation and years-long delays in permitting and siting for new transmission lines are turning this power boom into a capacity crisis. Here are the primary demand drivers:

Electrification

Electric vehicle adoption, electrification of home heating and industrial electrification are expected to increase overall U.S. energy consumption by 1% per year through 2026.



65%

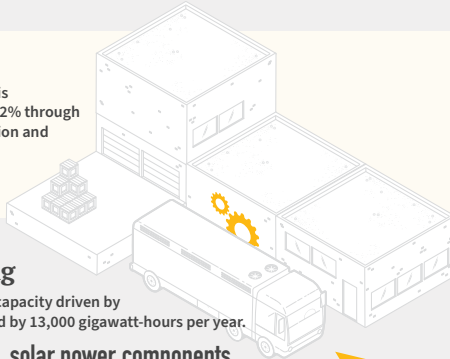


Data Centers

Driven by explosions in artificial intelligence, cryptocurrency and cloud computing, total U.S. data center load is projected to increase by 65% by 2050.

Economic Growth

Residential power consumption is expected to increase by 14% to 22% through 2050 due to increases in population and steady economic growth.



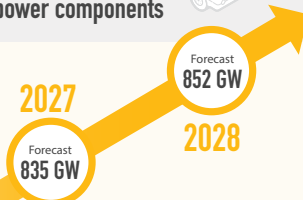
Manufacturing Growth/Onshoring

New, expanding and “onshored/reshored” manufacturing capacity driven by federal incentives is expected to increase industrial demand by 13,000 gigawatt-hours per year.

Key products: EVs, batteries, semiconductors, solar power components

Total Demand

Analysts predicted in 2023 that U.S. peak demand will increase by at least 38 GW over the next five years, nearly double the growth rate predicted in 2022.



BREAD WINNERS



ORANGE BREAD

- 1 tablespoon orange zest
- juice from 1 orange
- water
- 2 tablespoons shortening
- 1 cup sugar
- 1 teaspoon vanilla
- 1 egg
- 2 cups flour
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- 1 teaspoon baking powder
- ½ teaspoon baking soda
- 1 cup raisins
- ½ cup chopped walnuts, optional

Scrape orange rind to make zest, and squeeze juice from orange adding enough water to make 1 cup of liquid. Cream shortening, sugar, vanilla and egg. Add juice and remaining ingredients. Mix thoroughly. Bake in greased and floured loaf pan at 350 degrees F for 1 hour. *Yields 12 slices*

Carol Reeves • Sheldon
North West Rural Electric Cooperative

QUICK CARAMEL ROLLS

- 2 8-ounce cans refrigerated crescent rolls
- ½ cup butter
- 1 cup brown sugar
- 2 tablespoons water

Leaving crescent rolls in a roll, cut each can into 12 pieces. Place four across and six down in a greased 9x13-inch pan. Mix butter, brown sugar and water. Cook in microwave until it reaches a boil, stirring every minute – do not overcook! Pour mixture over crescent rolls. Bake at 350 degrees F for 15-20 minutes or until golden brown and the edges are bubbly. Invert onto a serving platter.

Steph Messner • Rock Rapids
Lyon Rural Electric Cooperative

QUICK YEAST BREAD

- 1¼ cups warm milk
- ½ cup butter, melted
- 1 egg
- 2 tablespoons sugar
- 2 tablespoons honey
- 4 cups flour
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- 1 tablespoon quick yeast

Mix milk, butter, egg, sugar and honey. In a separate bowl, mix flour, salt and yeast. Mix dry ingredients together with liquid ingredients. Knead and then place in a warm place until doubled in size. Knead again for 5 minutes. Divide into two and place in greased small loaf pans to rise for 1 hour. Bake at 350 degrees F for 30 minutes, until brown. *Serves 4-6*

Alice Draper • Eldora
Grundy County Rural Electric Cooperative

PISTACHIO BREAD

- 1 yellow cake mix
- 1 3-ounce box instant pistachio pudding
- 1 cup sour cream
- ¼ cup oil
- ¼ cup water
- 4 eggs, beaten
- ¼ cup sugar
- ½ cup nuts
- 1 teaspoon cinnamon

Mix cake mix, pudding, sour cream, oil, water and eggs until smooth. Pour half of batter into two greased bread pans. Mix sugar, nuts and cinnamon. Pour mixture on top of batter. Cover with remaining batter. Bake at 350 degrees F for 45 minutes.

Kim Swanson • Lockridge
Access Energy Cooperative

CHALLAH

- 1 cup warm water
- 2¼ teaspoons active dry yeast
- 1 teaspoon granulated white sugar
- 2 large eggs
- ½ cup honey
- 6 tablespoons grapeseed oil
- 4½ cups all-purpose flour
- ½ teaspoon salt
- 2 large egg yolks
- 1 teaspoon water

In a large bowl, whisk together the warm water, yeast and granulated sugar. Set aside for 5-10 minutes, or until foamy. Add the eggs, honey and oil. Whisk well. Add mixture to a stand mixer fitted with a dough hook. Add the flour ½ cup at a time and the salt while mixing on a medium-high speed. Mix for 5-7 minutes, or until a very smooth dough forms. If using a hand mixer fitted with a dough hook, combine the ingredients until a shaggy dough forms, about 2 minutes on medium-low speed, then remove from mixing bowl and knead by hand for about 10 minutes. Grease another large bowl with oil. Place the dough inside the bowl, cover with plastic wrap. Proof for about 1 hour. Lightly flour a clean surface and rolling pin. Place the dough on the surface and punch it down four times with your hands. Cut the dough into six equal dough balls. Using a rolling pin, roll out six long pieces, then roll them into strands with your hands. Use three strands to make each braided loaf. Place the loaves on a baking sheet lined with parchment paper, cover with plastic wrap and proof for one hour. In a small bowl, combine the egg yolks and water with a fork. Remove the plastic wrap from the loaves and brush them with egg wash. Bake at 325 degrees F for 15 minutes. Raise oven temperature to 425 degrees F and bake for 5 minutes. Remove from oven and cool on a wire rack. *Yields 2 loaves*

Addilyne Switzer • Beaman
Grundy County Rural Electric Cooperative

KILLARNEY IRISH BROWN BREAD

- 3¼ cups wheat flour
- ¾ cup white flour
- 2 teaspoons baking soda
- 2 teaspoons salt
- 2½ cups buttermilk
- 1 tablespoon golden syrup (or honey)
- 4 teaspoons butter, melted

Mix the flours, soda and salt into a bowl. Make a well in the center and add the buttermilk, golden syrup and butter. Use a large spoon to mix gently, just until dry ingredients are incorporated. Shape into a round on a baking sheet that has been lined with waxed paper. Cut a cross in the top with a sharp knife. Bake at 400 degrees F for 40 minutes, until the top is slightly cracked and crusty. To check if done, tip the loaf and tap the base – it should sound hollow. Cool on a wire rack. *Serves 12*

Chris Daniels • Casey
Guthrie County Rural Electric Cooperative Association

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



CRANBERRY BRAN BREAD

- 1½ cups bran flakes
- 2 cups flour*
- 1½ teaspoons baking powder
- ½ teaspoon soda
- ½ teaspoon salt
- 1 cup sugar
- ½ cup nuts, chopped
- 1 egg
- 2 tablespoons vegetable oil
- 1 cup plus 2 teaspoons orange juice, divided
- 1 cup cranberries, halved
- 2 cups powdered sugar

Mix bran flakes, flour, baking powder, soda, salt, sugar, nuts, egg, vegetable oil, 1 cup orange juice and cranberries. You can substitute cranberries for ½ cup cranberries and ½ cup pomegranates. Bake in a greased loaf pan at 250 degrees F for 1 hour or until done. Mix 2 teaspoons orange juice with powdered sugar and drizzle over baked loaf.

**An alternative to 2 cups white flour would be ¼ cup brown rice flour, ½ cup milled flax seed, ½ cup almond flour, ¼ cup soy flour and ½ cup Nestrum Honey and Wheat cereal.*

Betty Sorden • Webster
T.I.P. Rural Electric Cooperative

WANTED:

SPRING-INSPIRED RECIPES

THE REWARD:
\$25 FOR EVERY
ONE WE PUBLISH!

Deadline is Jan. 31
Submit recipes that use fresh, seasonal ingredients such as asparagus, spring greens, rhubarb and more! Please include your name, address, telephone number, co-op name, recipe category and number of servings on all submissions.



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

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Iowa Electric Cooperative Living magazine
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Des Moines, IA 50322

IOWA'S ELECTRIC COOPERATIVES: ENSURING AFFORDABLE AND RELIABLE POWER

Editor's Note: This article in Part 2 of a two-part series showcasing the impact of Iowa's electric cooperatives throughout all the state's 99 counties.

Iowa's electric cooperatives have a rich history of local ownership and member-driven governance, playing a pivotal role in bringing electricity to rural communities.

In the 1920s, while urban areas had widespread access to electricity, approximately 90% of rural residents lived without it. This lack of electrification made farm life arduous, with no indoor plumbing, reliable refrigeration, or safe lighting and heating. Investor-owned utilities at the time deemed it unprofitable to extend power lines to sparsely populated rural areas.

Recognizing this disparity, President Franklin D. Roosevelt established the Rural Electrification Administration (REA) in 1935 through Executive Order 7037 as part of his New Deal initiatives. The following year, Congress passed the Rural Electrification Act of 1936, providing federal loans to support the installation of electrical distribution systems in rural regions.

These efforts enabled rural communities to form not-for-profit electric cooperatives, facilitating access to affordable and reliable electricity. By 1950, 80% of American farms had electricity, and by 1960, this figure rose to 99%.

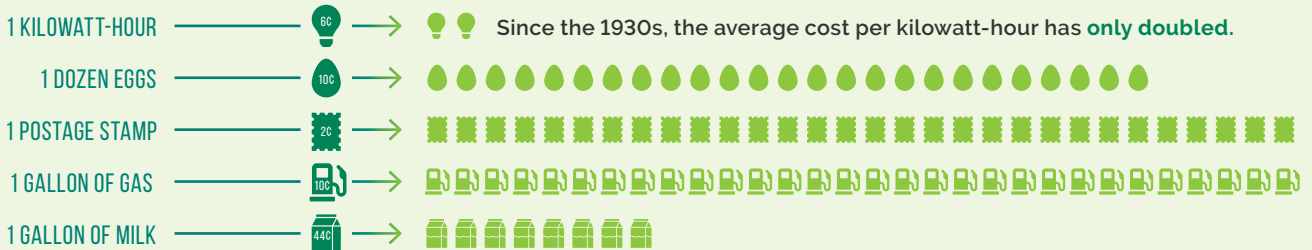
Doing more with less

Serving predominantly rural areas, Iowa's electric cooperatives manage extensive infrastructure with fewer customers per mile compared to investor-owned utilities. To address this challenge, co-ops structure rates to recover costs and collaborate with organizations like the Hawkeye Insurance Association and the Iowa Association of Electric Cooperatives to achieve economies of scale in supplies, insurance and technology solutions. This collaborative approach helps maintain affordability for members.

COST COMPARISON:

1930s

TODAY



In Iowa, the average household served by electric cooperatives spends about

\$5.25 PER DAY FOR ELECTRICITY

THAT'S CHEAPER THAN BUYING A SANDWICH OR SPECIALTY COFFEE DRINK!

The average household served by Iowa's electric cooperatives spends about \$5.25 per day on electricity, highlighting the cost-effectiveness of their services. Co-ops also offer energy efficiency programs, audits, rebates, and incentives to help members use energy wisely and reduce expenses. As member-owned entities, co-ops prioritize cost-based rates over profits, ensuring that financial decisions align with members' best interests.

Commitment to reliability

Ensuring reliable electricity is a top priority for Iowa's electric cooperatives. They conduct regular maintenance, infrastructure inspections and adhere to proactive vegetation management plans to minimize outages.

During the past 10 years, Iowa's electric cooperatives have kept the lights on 99.96% of the time despite

blizzards, ice storms, derechos, tornadoes or other extreme weather events. The average member served by an Iowa electric co-op experiences one outage per year, lasting approximately 138 minutes.

If a co-op does experience extensive outages, they work with neighboring co-ops for mutual aid to restore power to members as quickly and safely as possible.

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.



Advocating for a balanced energy approach

A recent threat to reliability comes from misguided federal energy policy, which prioritizes intermittent sources of power like solar and wind over dispatchable sources like coal and natural gas.

Iowa's electric cooperatives believe in a diverse power generation strategy to ensure reliability. Our "all-of-the-above" generation portfolios include dispatchable sources of power because we can control the output and ramp up generation when needed to match sudden increases in electric demand.

Learn more about this issue at www.IARuralpower.org.

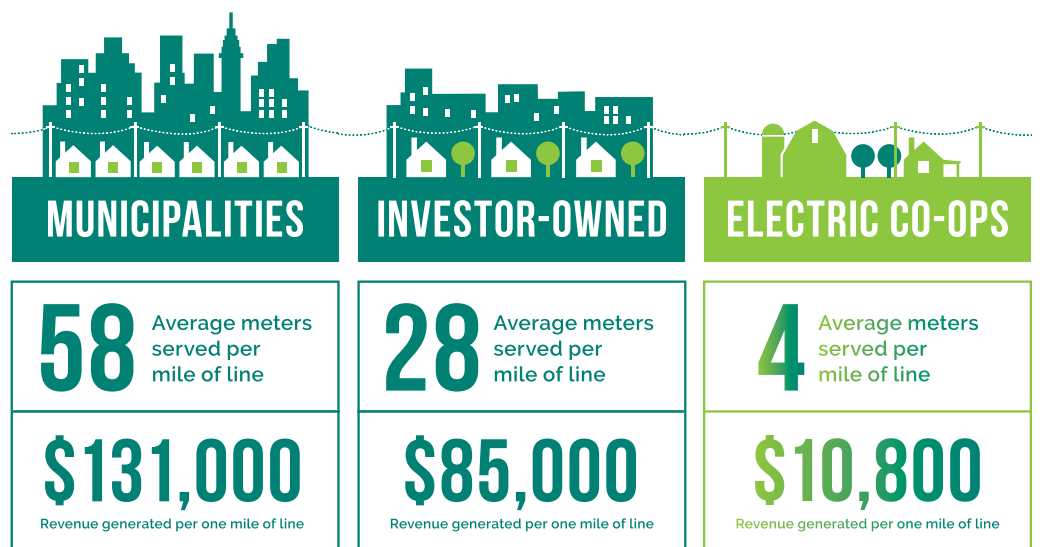
The average Iowa electric co-op member-owner experiences

1 OUTAGE

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

A legacy of service

From their inception, Iowa's electric cooperatives have been instrumental in transforming rural life by providing essential electric services. Their commitment to member-owners, focus on affordability, reliability and community collaboration continue to drive their mission, ensuring that the needs of rural Iowans are met with dedication and innovation.



CVEC HANGS CHRISTMAS LIGHTS FOR VICTORIAN STROLL

In preparation for Albia's annual Victorian Stroll event, the team at Chariton Valley Electric Cooperative (CVEC) volunteered their time to hang Christmas lights on the 70 light posts throughout Albia's downtown area. This volunteer activity brought the holiday spirit to our community and set the stage for the much-anticipated annual event.

The CVEC team worked together to decorate each light post, ensuring that the downtown area was beautifully illuminated for the occasion.

The twinkling lights welcomed residents and visitors alike as they enjoyed the holiday festivities.

This is just one of the many ways we love giving back to our community. The Victorian Stroll is a treasured event that brings people together, and we are proud to contribute to making it even more special.

Thank you to our dedicated team for volunteering their time. We hope the lights brightened your holiday season and enhanced your experience at this year's Victorian Stroll!



CALLING ALL STUDENTS: APPLY NOW FOR THE 2025 YOUTH TOUR TO WASHINGTON, D.C.!

At Chariton Valley Electric Cooperative (CVEC), we believe in the potential of today's youth. That's why we are proud to sponsor the Iowa rural electric cooperative Youth Tour, a weeklong summer trip to Washington, D.C. This incredible opportunity allows students to explore our nation's historic sites, experience government in action and build lasting memories. Sponsoring this program is just one way we invest in the next generation of rural Iowa leaders.

Q: Who can attend?

Any full-time sophomore, junior or senior attending high school in CVEC's service territory. This includes schools in Appanoose, Davis, Lucas, Marion, Monroe, Wapello and Wayne counties. Two students will be selected from the eligible candidates.

Q: Is it fun?

Absolutely! This action-packed week, from June 15-21, includes:

- Touring historic landmarks
- Meeting Congressional leaders
- Spending a day on Capitol Hill
- Exploring the Smithsonian museums
- Cruising the Potomac River
- Making friends from Iowa and across the nation

Q: How do you apply?

We are accepting Youth Tour applications until 4:30 p.m. on Feb. 28. The application process includes completing an application form and participating in an in-person interview.

Download the application at www.cvrec.com/youth-tour, stop by our office for a printed copy or check with your school's guidance counselor.



For more information, contact Anna See, CVEC executive assistant/communications coordinator, at asee@cvrec.com or 641-932-7126. Don't miss this chance to represent your community, learn about leadership and experience the trip of a lifetime!

CVEC'S RECENT YOUTH TOUR REPRESENTATIVES

2024

Brenna Whitney: Moravia High School

Ethan Stalzer: Albia High School

2023

Jordyn Hafer: Albia High School

Olivia Hathcock: Moravia High School

2022

Gabriel Helmon: Albia High School

Jayce Reed: Albia High School

2021

Youth Tour cancelled due to COVID-19: **Allison Major** and **Nick Heffron**, both Albia High School students, each received a \$1,000 scholarship

2020

Youth Tour cancelled due to COVID-19: **Savannah Stalzer** and **Sherryl Rowe**, both Albia High School students, each received a \$1,000 scholarship

2019

Sarah Herz: Albia High School

Collette Teno: Albia High School

2018

Kaitlyn Faber: Albia High School

Jenah McCarty: Albia High School

SMITTY'S SANDWICH SHOP – A CENTURY OF DELICIOUS TRADITION IN ALBIA

BY ANN FOSTER THELEN

In the heart of Albia sits a local treasure with a rich history and a reputation for mouthwatering comfort food – Smitty's Sandwich Shop. Owned and operated by Shari and Dave Lepley since 1999, this classic small-town diner has been serving Monroe County and beyond for more than 100 years.

Originally founded in 1921, Smitty's has become a cornerstone of Albia's culinary scene. Known officially as "Smitty's Sandwich Shop," locals affectionately call it Smitty's, a name that has stuck through the decades.

"People come back for the history and the food," Shari says. "When folks return to Albia for holidays or special occasions, Smitty's is often their first stop."

The Lepleys are the fourth owners of this iconic establishment, taking the reins from Don and Joyce Eilander.

"We went to the same church, and we used to tease them to let us take over when they retired," Shari recalls. "We were fortunate to have the chance to buy the business."

Famous for tenderloins and tradition

The star of Smitty's menu is its handmade pork tenderloin sandwich. Each tenderloin is trimmed, pounded and breaded fresh daily, and it's become a must-try for locals and visitors.

Adding to the appeal are the shop's loose meat hamburgers, a long-standing menu staple and offered with ketchup, mustard, pickle, onion, lettuce, tomato and cheese.

Shari explains, "Not everyone knows what a loose meat hamburger is, so I make sure to explain it to first-timers. It's part of the charm and history here."

While the menu remains simple, the Lepleys have introduced a few new items over the years, including homemade onion rings, cheese balls and chicken strips. But the focus



remains on quality, consistency and the classics that generations of families come back for time and time again.

Community connections

Smitty's isn't just a restaurant – it's a community hub. During the challenges of the COVID pandemic, the drive-thru window became a lifeline.

"The town was so supportive," Shari says. "People would say, 'Please don't close,' and even left generous tips to show their appreciation."

Beyond serving food, Smitty's gives back to the community by supporting local initiatives. From donating to school projects to purchasing student-made bracelets, the Lepleys are involved in Albia's tight-knit community. In addition, they source as many of their products as they can from local suppliers, including Jim & Charlie's Affiliated Foods in Albia.

A family affair

Operating Smitty's is a labor of love for the Lepleys, with a small but dedicated team. Shari handles most of the day-to-

day operations while family members step in to help.

"We've been fortunate to have great employees over the years, but now it's mostly family," Shari shares.

The restaurant's hours are 10:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. daily (except Sundays), and the majority of business comes through the drive-thru. Inside, the decor preserves its rich history, with a vintage meat warmer serving as a nostalgic reminder of the shop's early days.

Whether it's the famous pork tenderloin sandwiches or the welcoming atmosphere, Smitty's Sandwich Shop is more than just a diner – it's a beloved institution. For over a century, this small-town gem has captured the hearts (and appetites) of Monroe County residents and visitors alike.

Shari adds, "We're here to do what we do best – serve good food and keep the tradition alive."

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

UTILITY-SCALE VS. RESIDENTIAL BATTERY STORAGE

BY JENNAH DENNEY

In an ever-changing energy landscape, electric cooperatives are on the cutting edge of delivering reliable, resilient power to the local communities they serve. Co-ops utilize a variety of generation and grid technologies to provide power, including battery energy storage – but not all battery storage systems are the same, and understanding the key differences between each is important. It's also important to recognize that the technology and cost-effectiveness of battery storage options are still being developed.

Utility-scale battery systems are designed for large-scale energy storage to support the electric grid, requiring high initial investments but offering significant long-term savings and benefits. In contrast, residential battery systems cater to individual homes, providing more energy independence and savings while still representing a significant investment.

Utility-scale battery storage

Utility-scale storage systems are large installations designed to store vast amounts of electricity. Typically connected to the grid, these systems can store power generated from both baseload and renewable energy sources, with capacities ranging from several megawatt-hours (MWh) to gigawatt-hours (GWh).

While most battery storage system projects are developed with a primary application in mind, they can also be optimized for multiple applications, which adds significant additional value.

Utility-scale storage systems could play a crucial role in grid stabilization by absorbing excess energy during periods of low electricity demand and releasing it during peak demand, which is particularly



Often paired with residential solar panels, residential battery storage systems allow homeowners to store excess energy generated during the day for use later at night or during power outages. *Photo Source: LG*



Utility-scale battery systems are designed for large-scale energy storage to support the electric grid, requiring high initial investments but offering significant long-term savings and benefits. *Photo Source: Trico*

beneficial in rural areas where demand can fluctuate significantly.

Electric cooperatives can also deploy utility-scale storage systems at electric substations to enhance grid resilience and ensure a steady supply of electricity as needed. In the event of a power outage, utility-scale storage systems can provide backup power to critical infrastructure, such as hospitals and emergency services.

Residential battery storage

Residential battery storage systems are compact installations designed for individual homes, typically ranging from a few kilowatt-hours (kWh) to tens of kWh in capacity. Often paired with residential solar panels, these smaller systems allow homeowners to store excess energy generated during the day for use later at night or during power outages, providing a level of energy independence.

By utilizing stored energy, homeowners can reduce their energy bills and ensure a steady supply of power, even during grid disruptions and outages, enhancing the resilience of rural households. However, the initial cost of purchasing and

installing a residential storage system can be expensive, which may deter some homeowners.

Electric co-ops are increasingly recognizing the benefits of residential battery storage. These systems not only support grid stability and resilience but also help reduce costs for co-ops and their members. Some co-ops offer energy storage programs and rates, which means homeowners can contribute to a more efficient and reliable energy system. This benefits the entire community.

As electric co-ops navigate the complexities of modern energy supply and battery storage continues to evolve, the strategic deployment of both utility-scale and residential battery energy storage systems can potentially play a transformative role.

By understanding the unique advantages and challenges of each type of system, co-ops and their members can make informed decisions that enhance grid reliability, reduce costs and improve resilience for their communities.

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

FINDING BEAUTY IN THE BROKEN

BY DARCY DOUGHERTY MAULSBY

Time is a funny thing, isn't it? We spend time. We kill time. We lose track of time. We invest time. And yet time keeps passing – something we're keenly aware of at the start of each new year.

Now's the time when many people resolve to start fresh, leaving the past behind. Just think of all the New Year's resolutions that abound. I'm going to eat healthier! I'm going to exercise more! I'm going to spend less time on social media! I'm going to save more money! (Do any of these sound familiar?)

Yet how many of these big goals become big accomplishments? It depends on who you ask. According to the Baylor College of Medicine, 88% of people who set New Year's resolutions fail them within the first two weeks. (Been there, done that.) Psychology articles in magazines like *TIME* and *Forbes* state that only 8% of people stick with their resolutions the entire year.

Maybe we need a different perspective to make the most of the year ahead. Perhaps we all could use fewer resolutions and a little more kintsugi. What's that, you ask? This remarkable Japanese art form finds beauty in the broken. While it dates back hundreds of years, it's a compelling metaphor for modern life.

Kintsugi is built on the idea that in embracing flaws and imperfections, you can create an even stronger, more exquisite piece of art. In kintsugi, the artist fixes broken pottery with gold. Instead of repairing the item like new, this technique highlights the "scars" as a part of the design.

From broken bowls to books

This concept captured my attention during a "Come to the Quiet" retreat at the Woodlawn Christian Church in Lake City in March 2024. Lorene Knobbe, a Lake City native who lives in Davenport, displayed

a gorgeous kintsugi bowl to help us visualize one of the lessons.

Lorene, a retired elementary school teacher, now provides spiritual direction through her ties to the Benet House Retreat Center at St. Mary Monastery in Rock Island, Illinois. She serves as a facilitator for church retreats and similar events.

As she held her kintsugi bowl on that cold winter afternoon in Lake City, she encouraged everyone to think of your life as a book with chapters and stories. Some of your chapters are filled with fun, exciting stories. Other chapters are dark and painful. None of the chapters can ever be erased, though. All of them will always be part of you – just like the cracks in the kintsugi bowl.

That isn't necessarily comforting, especially if you're struggling to reach New Year's resolutions, or you're overwhelmed by a trauma-shattered life.

The good news? You don't need to try to hide the cracks as you put the pieces back together. Instead, highlight those repaired seams, which add strength, beauty and immeasurable value.

Reframing life's experiences

Kintsugi isn't just for broken pottery or shattered ceramics. Kintsugi can be found in people whose bodies are injured or failing. While these folks can't do what they once did, their spirit can become more beautiful, helping the rest of us see the divine more clearly.

Kintsugi is also reflected in people who have learned to "rewire" their brain to focus on the positive instead of the negative. These amazing souls routinely express gratitude, knowing that there's always something to be thankful for.

The chapters of these authentic life stories are filled with resilience and hope. They can also inspire the most practical resolution for the year ahead – embrace the principles of kintsugi. What a powerful way to reframe life's experiences and write new chapters in our story, all by finding beauty in the broken.

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



A kintsugi bowl that was shared during the "Come to the Quiet" retreat in Lake City.



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