

# CLEARING THE PATH TO RELIABILITY

## Clearing the Path to Reliability

Trees are majestic, beautiful, and good for the soul. But we also know that our members depend on us to deliver reliable power to their homes and businesses. That’s why Consumers Energy strives to balance maintaining the beautiful surroundings we all cherish with ensuring reliable electricity. You might not realize it, but there are several benefits to regular tree trimming.

## Reliability

Keeping power lines clear of overgrown vegetation improves service reliability. After all, we’ve seen the whims of Mother Nature during severe weather events with fallen tree limbs taking down power lines and utility poles. While many factors can impact power disruptions, about half of all outages can be attributed to overgrown vegetation. This is why you sometimes see Consumers Energy crews or contractors out in the community trimming trees near power lines. Our trimming crews have been trained and certified based on the latest industry standards.

In fact, all U.S. electric utilities are required to trim trees that grow too close to power lines. Scheduled trimming throughout the year keeps lines clear from overgrown or dead limbs that are likely to fall, and we are better able to prepare for severe weather events.

Plus, we all know it’s more cost-effective to undertake preventative maintenance than it is to make repairs after the fact. Regular inspections of power lines and vegetation allow us to reduce labor and equipment costs while bolstering reliability.

## Safety

Working near power lines can be dangerous, and we care about your safety and that of our lineworkers. For

continued on page 8-B ►

# WIN

ONE OF TWO MONTHLY \$5 BILL CREDITS

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## THIS MONTH’S CONTEST:

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**Submit your answers to the brain teasers on page 8-E. The answers will be published in the April newsletter.**

◆ ◆ ◆

**Winners for the month of January:**  
 Mark & Elaine Hammer, Baxter  
 Tyler & Adrian Sparks, Huxley

**Here's how to enter:**

1. Answer the question or challenge posed each month.
2. Send answers to Consumers Energy with:
  - Name
  - Service Address
  - Account Number
  - Phone Number
  - Email Address

Submit via email or mail:  
 Email to: [kglenney@consumersenergy.coop](mailto:kglenney@consumersenergy.coop)  
 Subject line: Contest

Mail to: Consumers Energy  
 Attn: Contest  
 2074 242nd Street  
 Marshalltown, IA 50158

3. Winners' names will be drawn at random and published in upcoming issues of *The Connection*.

**March 2024**

**Dates To Remember:**

**MARCH**

- 1 Read Meters
- 3 Bills Due
- 4 Automatic Payments Deducted
- 8 Email / Mail Bills
- 10 Daylight Saving Time Begins
- 17 St. Patrick’s Day
- 19 First Day of Spring
- 25 Automatic Payments Deducted
- 31 Easter

**APRIL**

- 1 Read Meters
- 3 Bills Due
- 3 Automatic Payments Deducted

## CLEARING THE PATH TO RELIABILITY *(continued)*

example, if trees are touching power lines in our members' yards, they can pose a grave danger to families. If children can reach those trees, they can potentially climb into a danger zone. Electricity can arc, or jump, from a power line to a nearby conductor such as a tree.

Any tree or branch that falls across a power line creates a potentially dangerous situation. A proactive approach lessens the chances of fallen trees during severe weather events that make it more complicated and dangerous for lineworkers to restore power.

### Affordability

As a cooperative, Consumers Energy always strives to keep costs down for our members. If trees and other vegetation are left unchecked, they can become overgrown and expensive to correct. A strategic vegetation management program helps keep costs down for everyone.

When it comes to vegetation management, there are ways you can help too. When planting new trees, make sure they're planted a safe distance from overhead power lines. Medium-height trees (40 ft. or smaller) should be planted at least 40 ft. from power lines. Taller trees (over 40 ft.) should be planted at least 60 ft. from power lines. You can also practice safe planting near pad-mounted transformers. Plant shrubs at least 10 ft. from the transformer door and 4 ft. from the sides. If your neighborhood has underground lines, remember to contact Iowa One Call by calling 811 or visiting [www.iowaonecall.com](http://www.iowaonecall.com) before you begin any project that requires digging.

Additionally, if you spot an overgrown tree or branch that's dangerously close to overhead lines, please let us know by contacting Consumers Energy at 800-696-6552 or [info@consumersenergy.coop](mailto:info@consumersenergy.coop).

We have deep roots in our community, and we love our beautiful surroundings. It takes a balanced approach, and our vegetation management program is a crucial tool in ensuring service reliability.

*Bridget Itzen*

**Bridget Itzen**  
CEO/General Manager

**Plant Trees Safely**

Before you dig, call 811 or scan this QR code to visit [www.iowaonecall.com](http://www.iowaonecall.com) to locate buried utility lines.

**NO TREE ZONE**  
Avoid planting within 20 ft. of power lines. If planting is unavoidable, only plant very small shrubs.  
Plant small trees (under 25' when mature) at least 20 ft. away from power lines.

**MEDIUM TREE ZONE**  
Plant medium trees (under 40 ft. when mature) at least 40 ft. away from power lines.

**LARGE TREE ZONE**  
Plant large trees (over 40 ft. when mature) at least 60 ft. away from power lines.

Keep shrubs at least 10 ft. away from transformer doors and 4 ft. away from the sides.

4 ft. 10 ft. 0 40 ft. 60 ft.

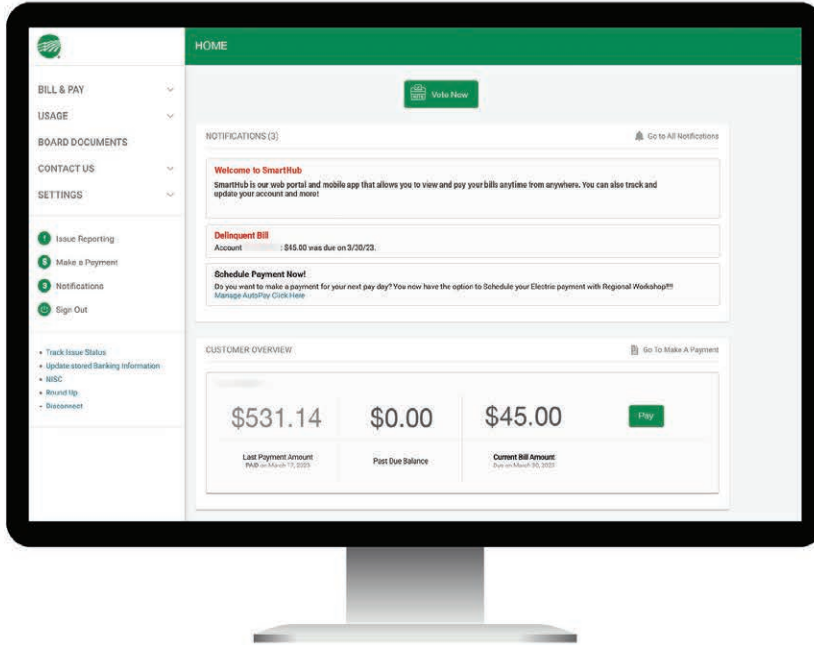
40 ft. high or less

Over 40 ft.

The infographic features a green header with the title 'Plant Trees Safely' and a QR code. Below the header, three vertical columns define planting zones: 'NO TREE ZONE' (0-20 ft from power lines), 'MEDIUM TREE ZONE' (40 ft from power lines), and 'LARGE TREE ZONE' (60 ft from power lines). A diagram at the bottom shows a utility pole with power lines, a house, and trees of varying heights. A transformer is shown with a 4 ft. clearance on its sides and a 10 ft. clearance from its door. A horizontal line indicates that trees 40 ft. high or less are in the medium zone, while taller trees are in the large zone.



# NEWLY REDESIGNED SMARTHUB



SCAN THIS QR CODE TO GO DIRECTLY TO  
THE SMARTHUB LOGIN/SIGNUP PAGE!

DOWNLOAD THE APP:



## HOW CAN SMARTHUB HELP YOU CONTROL YOUR ACCOUNT?

Our SmartHub web portal or mobile app will keep you informed and will show you where to save time and money on your bills.

**Billing & Payments:** No more waiting for your bill to arrive in the mail, access your bill at anytime from anywhere. Save time with easy payment options to avoid late fees and service interruptions.

**Alerts & Notifications:** Stay informed on important account events via email or text messages. Receive the information you need to make the right decisions about your account.

**Paperless Billing:** What if you could save some time and a tree at the same time? Activate SmartHub paperless billing, an eco-friendly way to instantly access your bill.

**Usage Monitoring:** Worrying about usage or surprising bill amounts can be stressful. When you know what devices are using the most energy, you can make money-saving decisions about your account. Imagine opening your bill and seeing an amount less than expected.


SmartHub gives you complete control over your account by giving you the tools that deliver the right information at the right time so you can make the right decisions about your account.

FOR MORE INFORMATION OR IF YOU NEED ASSISTANCE, CONTACT CONSUMERS ENERGY AT 800-696-6552 OR [INFO@CONSUMERSENERGY.COOP](mailto:INFO@CONSUMERSENERGY.COOP).

SMART MANAGEMENT. SMART LIFE. SMARTHUB.

## Operation Round-Up

is a program designed for members who wish to donate small change each month to cooperative members who need economic assistance with winter electric bills. Members who sign up for this program can have monthly electric bills rounded up. The co-op then annually distributes the Operation Round-Up funds to local community action agencies within Consumers Energy's service territory to assist low-income families with winter heating bills and winterization of homes.



**TURN YOUR COINS INTO CHANGE**

Operation Round-Up gives Consumers Energy members the option of having electric bills rounded up to the nearest dollar every month, with those few extra cents benefiting people in need within the co-op's service territory.

**For more information, contact the Member Services Department at 800-696-6552 or [info@consumersenergy.coop](mailto:info@consumersenergy.coop).**

## How does the Operation Round-Up Program Work?

There are two options for participating in Operation Round-Up. The commitment chosen would take effect with the month's bill following receipt of the Operation Round-Up Authorization Form.

- Each month, Consumers Energy "rounds up" the electric bills of participating members to the next highest dollar. For example, a member's monthly bill of \$160.27 would automatically be rounded up to \$161.00, with the additional 73 cents going to the Operation Round-Up Program.
- Another option available for this program allows members to specify an exact dollar amount to be contributed each month.

## Submit your Authorization Form to participate in Operation Round-Up!

Interested in donating funds to Operation Round-Up to help others in need of assistance with winter heating bills? To enroll, complete the Operation Round-Up Authorization Form in this newsletter and return it to the cooperative office, or fill one out and submit online by scanning the QR code here or by typing the website address: [www.consumersenergy.coop/operation-round-up](http://www.consumersenergy.coop/operation-round-up).



## Authorization Form

Choose only one option:

- Yes, I would like to participate in the Operation Round-Up Program. I wish to have my monthly electric bill rounded up to the next highest dollar.
- Yes, I would like to participate in the Operation Round-Up Program. I wish to contribute \$\_\_\_\_\_ per month to the Operation Round-Up Program, and the amount will be added to my monthly electric bill.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Account Number \_\_\_\_\_

Please return to: Consumers Energy  
2074 242nd Street  
Marshalltown, IA 50158

## Valentine Emoji Pictionary

Here are the answers to the Valentine-themed emoji Pictionary from the February newsletter contest.

1  Love letter	6  Romantic movie
2  Candlelight dinner	7  Date night
3  First kiss	8  Puppy love
4  Love birds	9  Cupid
5  Double date	10  Love story

# Daylight Saving Time begins

# March 10

The beginning of daylight saving time is a great time to go through your spring home maintenance checklist. Here are some items to include:

**SET YOUR CLOCKS  
AHEAD  
ONE HOUR**



**RESET THE TIMER  
ON YOUR WATER  
HEATER**



**CHANGE YOUR  
SMOKE DETECTOR  
BATTERIES**



- Check the expiration dates on fire extinguishers and replace if necessary.
- Change the rotation of your ceiling fans to rotate counter-clockwise.
- Clean your oven & range. An oven or range darkened from heavy use absorbs more heat, reducing efficiency.
- Vacuum refrigerator coils. Dust that builds up on refrigerator coils causes the motor to work harder, using more energy.
- Clean or replace HVAC filters. A dirty filter can slow air flow and cause your system to use more energy.
- Clean out dryer vents. Blocked dryer vents may make your machine work harder than necessary.
- Drain a few gallons from your hot water heater. Draining the sediment out of your hot water heater will help it run more efficiently & last longer.
- Clean your grill.
- Sweep out your garage, & clear the salt and grime from winter.
- Get rid of leftover or expired medicine.
- Apply for rebates if applicable. Scan the QR code here or type [www.consumersenergy.coop/rebates](http://www.consumersenergy.coop/rebates) in your browser.

SCAN HERE  
FOR REBATES.



Questions? Contact Energy Advisor Jeff Lanning at 800-696-6552 or at [info@consumersenergy.coop](mailto:info@consumersenergy.coop).

ATTENTION ALL MEMBERS WHO QUALIFIED FOR LIHEAP.



The winter moratorium for disconnecting electric service ends April 1.

CONSUMERS ENERGY WANTS TO HELP OUR MEMBERS AVOID  
ADDITIONAL FEES AND DISCONNECTION.

Don't wait until the last minute to check the status of your account.

↓ **HERE'S HOW THE CO-OP CAN HELP!** ↓

Do you have  
**PAST DUE BALANCES?**



Call the co-op to address overdue bills and accumulated balances.

Do you need info on  
**PAYMENT PLANS?**



Call the co-op to review payment plan options to stay current & connected.

Do you need  
**OTHER ASSISTANCE?**



Consumers Energy gives members resources for assistance organizations.

Contact the Member Services Department at 800-696-6552 to see what options are available.

## Brain Teasers

SOLVE THE WORD PUZZLES BELOW. ENTER THE MONTHLY NEWSLETTER CONTEST BY SENDING IN YOUR ANSWERS! CONTEST DETAILS ARE ON PAGE 8-A.

EZ



BSICKED

STORM



history  
history  
history

PIÑAPPLE  
CAKE

# Make a difference in YOUR cooperative! **BECOME A DIRECTOR FOR CONSUMERS ENERGY**

THE NOMINATING  
COMMITTEE WILL MEET IN  
APRIL TO BEGIN LOOKING  
FOR MEMBERS TO RUN AS  
DIRECTOR CANDIDATES IN  
THE UPCOMING DIRECTOR  
ELECTION.

## **Are you interested in making a difference in your community?**

As a member of Consumers Energy, you have an opportunity to make a difference - for your cooperative, for its members, and for the communities it serves.

Cooperative Principle #2 - *Democratic Member Control* - means that **you**, the member, decides who represents you on the cooperative's Board of Directors and determines the direction of our locally run, not-for-profit, **member-owned** business. A director's decisions will impact issues such as rates, rights-of-way, and work plans.

Director terms are for three years with elections held each year in conjunction with the co-op's Annual Meeting. Consumers Energy members may vote in this election by mail or in person at the Annual Meeting on **Thursday, August 1, 2024**.

## **What is the role of the Board of Directors?**

The Board of Directors' main responsibility is to provide oversight of the CEO/General Manager who manages the staff and operations of the cooperative. The board also develops and oversees the strategic direction & objectives of the co-op; ensures appropriate risk oversight & compliance; performs duties diligently and impartially; and works for the good of all members of the co-op.

## **The Nominating Committee will be looking for candidates SOON.**

For information on running for a seat on the board or how to get in contact with members of the Nominating Committee, contact the cooperative:

☎ By phone: 800-696-6552

Request Bridget Itzen or Kippen Glenney.

✉ By email: [admin@consumersenergy.coop](mailto:admin@consumersenergy.coop)



# RICK AALFS

## EMPLOYEE SPOTLIGHT



**JOB: JOURNEYMAN LINEMAN**



**DREAM VACATION: JERUSALEM**



**FAVE PERFORMER: BLAKE SHELTON**



**FAVE MOVIES: FORREST GUMP, STEP BROTHERS**



**FUN FACT: EXTRAORDINARY RECALL FOR DATES, FACTS, & FIGURES**

## SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM 2024



SCAN THE QR CODES ON THE  
RIGHT TO FIND MORE  
INFORMATION OR COMPLETE  
THE ONLINE APPLICATIONS!



### YOUTH TOUR



**DEADLINE TO APPLY:  
MARCH 14, 2024**

High school sophomores, juniors, & seniors - this is YOUR chance to win the all-expenses-paid trip of a lifetime to Washington, D.C! Trip dates are June 15-21, 2024.



### Lineworker Scholarship

Are you pursuing a career in the powerline industry? Consumers Energy offers a \$1,000 scholarship to residents of the state of Iowa for this type of education in the electric industry!

### LINEWORKER



**DEADLINE TO APPLY:  
MARCH 15, 2024**



### Academic Scholarship

Graduating from high school this year? Congrats! Apply for the Consumers Energy scholarship for \$1,000 to pay toward your post secondary education!

### Academic



**DEADLINE TO APPLY:  
MARCH 15, 2024**

For more information, contact Billing and Education Program  
Coordinator, Tami Kerwood, at  
800-696-6552 or  
tkerwood@consumersenergy.coop.

## CONSUMERS ENERGY BOARD OF DIRECTORS

District 1 - Marshall, Jasper, & Tama Counties:  
Denny Beckman  
President  
dbeckman@consumersenergy.coop

Bill Hobson  
Director  
whobson@consumersenergy.coop

Pat VonAhnen  
Secretary-Treasurer  
pvonahnen@consumersenergy.coop

District 2 - Story County:  
Arden Greiner  
Director  
agreiner@consumersenergy.coop

Bob Meimann  
Assistant Secretary-Treasurer  
rmeimann@consumersenergy.coop

Steve Quick  
Director  
squick@consumersenergy.coop

District 3 - Polk County:  
Craig Griffieon  
Vice President  
cgriffieon@consumersenergy.coop

Tony Lem  
Director  
alem@consumersenergy.coop


Jennifer Sease  
Director  
jsease@consumersenergy.coop

Energy Efficiency Cost per kWh:  
\$0.000381


## To report an outage, call 800-696-6552.

For the most accurate outage updates, check SmartHub or [www.consumersenergy.coop](http://www.consumersenergy.coop) for messages, the statewide outage map, or call Consumers Energy.

## WAYS TO PAY YOUR CONSUMERS ENERGY BILL




smart hub




Online or the app  
[www.consumersenergy.coop](http://www.consumersenergy.coop)


Automatic recurring monthly payments



In person




By phone 24/7  
844-201-7196




By mail

By dropbox



 2074 242nd Street | Marshalltown, IA 50158

 641-752-1593 | 800-696-6552

 641-752-5738

 [www.consumersenergy.coop](http://www.consumersenergy.coop)

 [info@consumersenergy.coop](mailto:info@consumersenergy.coop)

OFFICE HOURS  
7:30 AM - 4:00 PM  
MONDAY - FRIDAY



### YOUTH TOUR

- FREE trip to D.C.!
- Educational & FUN!
- Offered to members' high school sophomores, juniors, & seniors



### SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM

- \$1,000 scholarships for academic and lineworker applicants

**For information on ways to pay or programs and services offered, contact the Member Services Department.**