

JANUARY 2026

# iowa

## ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE LIVING

NEW CUSTOM EDITION FOR  
CONSUMERS ENERGY MEMBERS

New custom edition,  
same co-op values

Consumers Energy Youth Tour  
and scholarship opportunities

Vegetarian recipes

Annual pole inspection and treatment program continues ► See Page 4

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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.

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**Website**  
[www.ieclmagazine.com](http://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 Michelle Benton, a Consumers Energy member-consumer, for supplying this month's cover image. Submit high-resolution photos for consideration to [editor@ieclmagazine.com](mailto:editor@ieclmagazine.com). You could receive \$100!

# PROTECTING IOWA'S POWER: KEY ENERGY POLICIES TO WATCH THIS LEGISLATIVE SESSION

BY HALEY MOON



As the Iowa Legislature prepares to convene on Jan. 12, electric cooperatives across the state are focused on defending the policies and protections that keep power reliable and affordable for our communities. For more than eight decades, Iowa's electric cooperatives have prioritized the delivery of safe, reliable and affordable electricity while supporting local economies and strengthening the power grid. This work relies heavily on Iowa's defined electric service territories, an important law that helps ensure every corner of the state receives consistent, cost-effective electric service.

## Protecting service territories and grid reliability

For rural communities in particular, defined electric service territories are vital. By assigning each utility the responsibility to serve a specific geographic area, every Iowan is guaranteed electric service that avoids redundant infrastructure, reduces costs and allows utilities the certainty to make long-term investments in grid resilience. These protections help cooperatives maintain affordable rates and plan strategically to meet future needs. As legislators return to Des Moines, Iowa's electric cooperatives remain vigilant against any attempts to weaken this foundational law or erode the consumer benefits it provides.

One challenge that could resurface is a third-party or "community solar" proposal. During the 2025 legislative session, lawmakers considered legislation that would have allowed non-utility solar developers to provide retail electric service inside

an established utility's service area, which is in direct conflict with Iowa's service territory statute. While these programs are often marketed as cost-saving options, the details can be far less rosy. Because third-party developers are not held to the same consumer protection standards or regulatory oversight as Iowa's public utilities, they can shift grid maintenance and infrastructure costs onto customers who do not subscribe.

Cooperatives are not opposed to solar – far from it. Iowa's electric co-ops have long supported the adoption of solar when and where it benefits their members and aligns with responsible grid planning. But allowing non-utilities to operate independently within the defined area of public utility, even on a limited basis, sets a precedent that threatens system stability statewide.

## Strengthening safety protections for utility workers

Another priority heading into the upcoming legislative session

is protecting utility workers. Lineworkers are often the first on the scene after storms and work long hours in hazardous conditions to restore essential services. Despite the critical role they play in delivering power to our communities, something alarming is happening. Threats, harassment and assaults against utility workers while on the job are increasing nationwide. Strengthening penalties for violence against utility workers reaffirms our commitment to the safety of cooperative employees and our communities.

No matter what this session may bring, you can rest assured knowing that your cooperative will be advocating for policies to keep electricity safe and affordable for you and your community.

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

## EDITOR'S CHOICE CONTEST

### WIN A NINJA CRISPI AIR FRYER!

The Ninja Crispi® Portable Glass Cooking System is a compact powerhouse that packs the 1,500 watts power of a full-sized air fryer into a portable design. It includes a small 6-cup and larger 4-quart CleanCrisp™ container. Whether you're making quick, single-serve meals in just 7 minutes or sharing crispy snacks on the go, the Ninja Crispi® makes it effortless.



#### Visit our website and win!

Enter this month's contest by visiting [www.iecmagazine.com](http://www.iecmagazine.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.

ENTER ONLINE BY JAN. 31!

The winner of Lodge cast iron skillet set from the October issue was **Sarah Silhanek, a T.I.P. REC member-consumer.**



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**Dates to Remember**

JAN. 1	Closed for New Year's Day
JAN. 2	Read meters
JAN. 3	Bills due
JAN. 5	Automatic payments deducted
JAN. 9	Email/mail bills
JAN. 26	Automatic payments deducted
FEB. 2	Read meters
FEB. 3	Bills due
FEB. 3	Automatic payments deducted



**YOUTH TOUR**

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



Academic



Lineworker



**SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM**

\$1,000 scholarships for academic and lineworker applicants

# NEW CUSTOM EDITION, SAME CO-OP VALUES

BY BRIDGET ITZEN



With the new year comes new beginnings! As we ring in 2026, Consumers Energy is excited to bring you this custom edition of *Iowa Electric Cooperative Living* magazine. The monthly publication will deliver the same valuable content you've come to expect from your electric cooperative. This new custom edition not only updates the layout of our monthly message but will also save on costs from our former process of printing and shipping an insert to the magazine printer and distributor.

Sending *Iowa Electric Cooperative Living* each month is an important way to educate and inform members. Sharing timely information about energy efficiency, safety,

local news about rural economic development, and emerging trends and technologies in the electric industry is a prudent financial investment to keep our membership informed and our co-op strong.

We have an obligation to help you use energy wisely and safely. What's in your best interest is in our best interest. We continuously work to be a trusted local energy partner and source of honest information – and this publication is just one way we strive to serve you.

Thank you for supporting Consumers Energy and your interest in being an educated and informed co-op member. We look forward to sharing our new custom edition of *Iowa Electric Cooperative Living* magazine with you each month.

*Bridget Itzen is the CEO/General Manager of Consumers Energy.*

## ANNUAL POLE INSPECTION AND TREATMENT PROGRAM CONTINUES

Consumers Energy will have approximately 2,000 poles inspected and treated this year for the cooperative. The annual pole maintenance program will be in the Collins, Baxter, Melbourne, and Gilman areas.

Inspection crews will perform maintenance on meter poles, transformer poles, and line poles. The treatment helps extend the life of the poles in the cooperative's system. The inspection process also identifies any poles that cannot be saved with treatment. These poles are then marked by inspectors and will be replaced by Consumers Energy crews.

## WAYS TO PAY YOUR CONSUMERS ENERGY BILL



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headquarters location



By drop box

Allow 2-3 business days  
for payments to  
reach headquarters.



Automatic monthly  
payments



By phone 24/7  
855-939-3832



By mail



# 2026 CONSUMERS ENERGY SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM



Scan the QR codes on the right to find more information or complete the online applications.



## IOWA YOUTH TOUR

High school sophomores, juniors, and seniors: This is YOUR chance to win the all-expenses-paid trip of a lifetime to Washington, D.C.! Trip dates are June 14-20.

### YOUTH TOUR



Deadline to apply:  
**MARCH 24, 2026**

### LINEWORKER



Deadline to apply:  
**MARCH 17, 2026**



## 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 17, 2026**

For more information on scholarships, contact Tami Kerwood, Consumers Energy billing and education coordinator, at 800-696-6552 or [tkerwood@consumersenergy.coop](mailto:tkerwood@consumersenergy.coop). Scan the QR code to email Tami with questions.



Submit your answers for these brain teasers!

1 GET IT  
GET IT  
GET IT  
GET IT

2 JACK

3 Travel  
CCCCCC

4 Try Stand  
2

Answer to last month's contest challenge:  
1. Elf 2. A Christmas Story 3. White Christmas  
4. Frosty the Snowman 5. Christmas Vacation

Winners for the month of November:  
Jeriann McLaughlin, Huxley  
Eugene and Norma Pecinovsky, Cambridge



## WIN ONE OF TWO MONTHLY \$5 BILL CREDITS IN THREE EASY STEPS!

1. Answer the question or challenge posted each month.

2. Send answers to Consumers Energy with the following info:

Name, Service Address, Account #, Phone #, and email address.

3. Submit via website, email or mail:

Scan the QR code below and submit your entry using the co-op's website.

[kkrough@consumersenergy.coop](mailto:kkrough@consumersenergy.coop)  
Subject line: CONTEST

Consumers Energy  
Attn: CONTEST  
2074 242nd Street  
Marshalltown, IA 50158





# LEADING THROUGH CHANGE

## ANNUAL MEETING RECAP

BY ERIN CAMPBELL

More than 375 directors and employees from Iowa's electric cooperatives gathered in West Des Moines for the Iowa Association of Electric Cooperatives' (IAEC) 2025 Annual Meeting on Dec. 4-5. With the theme Leading through Change, the event highlighted the industry's ongoing transformation and the importance of strong leadership.

IAEC Executive Vice President and General Manager Leslie Kaufman, who marked her first year with the association in July, noted the momentum of the year. Board President Jim Miller also reflected on his first year in the role, recalling how "a farm kid from Fonda" received a call from Gov. Kim Reynolds during his second week as president. The conversation focused on emerging energy policy issues, underscoring the responsibility and visibility of the position. Miller also praised Kaufman's early outreach to member co-ops, which helped shape IAEC's strategic direction.

In her executive report, Kaufman outlined departmental progress and emphasized the critical role of advocacy as policy challenges accelerate. She highlighted a new policy and advocacy framework designed to help statewide staff work more proactively in the years ahead.

Educational sessions once again played a central role in the meeting. Speakers included National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA) Board President Mike Partin, who joined Kaufman for a fireside chat on leading through change; nuclear engineer and Miss America 2023 Grace Vanderhei; Youth Leadership Council delegate Ava Meinders; governance experts from Federated Rural Electric Insurance Exchange and NRECA; and National Association of Regulatory Utility Commissioners Executive Director Tony Clark, who addressed national issues, including resource adequacy,

cybersecurity and the growing electricity demands of AI and data centers. NFL Hall of Famer and former Congressman Steve Largent closed the event with leadership insights from his career in sports, business and politics.

IAEC also recognized longtime contributors and emerging leaders, including service award recipients, Cooperative Leadership in Iowa Program (CLIP) graduates, Rural Electric Safety Achievement Program (RESAP) certified cooperatives, nationally credentialed directors and the inaugural Iowa Electric Cooperative Excellence Award honorees: Director Excellence Award recipient Jerry Beck of Iowa Lakes Electric Cooperative and Employee Excellence Award recipient Robert Wakhouse of Harrison County REC.

Watch for more information about key annual meeting topics in upcoming issues of this magazine.

# COOPERATIVE LEADERSHIP IN IOWA PROGRAM

Congratulations to the 13 graduates of the 2025 CLIP for emerging leaders.

Participants committed to a year-long calendar of in-person, virtual and on-demand training sessions. Additionally, these individuals developed their leadership skills, gained insights on various professional roles within electric cooperatives and attended statewide events to better understand important issues facing Iowa's electric cooperatives.

**Zach Finn**  
Central Iowa Power Cooperative  
**Justin Krueger**  
Consumers Energy  
**Ben Donnelly**  
East-Central Iowa Rural Electric Cooperative  
**Mindy Comstock**  
Farmers Electric Cooperative, Inc.  
**Emily Rush**  
Franklin Rural Electric Cooperative

**Johnna Nunemaker**  
Linn County Rural Electric Cooperative  
**Abby Fischer**  
Maquoketa Valley Electric Cooperative  
**Kraig Johnson**  
MiEnergy Cooperative  
**Jason Stock**  
Northwest Iowa Power Cooperative

**Steve Jackson**  
Prairie Energy Cooperative  
**Alicia Lohr**  
Raccoon Valley Electric Cooperative  
**Tanner Rinehart**  
Southwest Iowa Rural Electric Cooperative  
**Jason Jack**  
T.I.P. Rural Electric Cooperative



2025 CLIP graduates. Pictured from left: Jason Stock, Zach Finn, Johnna Nunemaker, Alicia Lohr, Abby Fischer, Emily Rush, Mindy Comstock, Jason Jack, Kraig Johnson, Steve Jackson, Tanner Rinehart, Ben Donnelly and Justin Krueger.



## IOWA CO-OPS RECOGNIZED FOR SAFETY ACHIEVEMENTS

During the IAEC annual meeting in December, several Iowa electric cooperatives were congratulated for completing the RESAP in 2025. The cooperatives included:

- Clarke Electric Cooperative, Inc.
- Corn Belt Power Cooperative
- Eastern Iowa Light & Power Cooperative
- Grundy County Rural Electric Cooperative
- Guthrie County Rural Electric Cooperative Association
- Linn County Rural Electric Cooperative
- Maquoketa Valley Electric Cooperative
- Nishnabotna Valley Rural Electric Cooperative
- Osceola Electric Cooperative, Inc.
- Pella Cooperative Electric Association
- Southwest Iowa Rural Electric Cooperative
- Western Iowa Power Cooperative

## DIRECTOR GOLD CREDENTIAL

The NRECA Director Gold Credential (DGC) recognizes directors who have earned their Credentialed Cooperative Director certificate and Board Leadership Certificate credentials and are committed to continuing their education throughout their service on the board. The following have achieved or maintained their DGC.

**David Hollingsworth**  
**Michael Holtkamp**  
Access Energy Cooperative  
**Jerry Keleher**  
Allamakee-Clayton Electric Cooperative  
**Allyn Harms**  
Butler County Rural Electric Cooperative  
**Steve Boedecker**  
**James Miller**  
Calhoun County Electric Cooperative Association  
**Kenneth VandenBerg**  
Chariton Valley Electric Cooperative, Inc.  
**Cody Miller**  
**William White**  
Clarke Electric Cooperative, Inc.  
**Dennis Beckman**  
**William Hobson**  
Consumers Energy  
**Joel Carstensen**  
**Gary Kester**  
**Kurt Olson**  
**Kathrine Wunderlich**  
Eastern Iowa Light & Power Cooperative

**Mark Earhart**  
**Kristopher Petter**  
Farmers Electric Cooperative, Inc.  
**Gordon Greimann**  
**Donald Greimann**  
**John Snyder**  
Franklin Rural Electric Cooperative  
**Kevin Pruisner**  
Grundy County Rural Electric Cooperative  
**Brenda Lundergard**  
Harrison County Rural Electric Cooperative  
**Tricia Jaeger**  
**Mark Kingland**  
**Vince Morische**  
Heartland Power Cooperative  
**Bruce Amundson**  
**Craig Deim**  
**Crystal Pluth**  
**Mark Tuttle**  
**Trent Will**  
**Roger Williamson**  
**Daniel Winterhof**  
Iowa Lakes Electric Cooperative  
**Gary Schlotterbeck**  
**Kenneth Squires**  
Linn County Rural Electric Cooperative

**Judy Gotto**  
**Thomas Stewart**  
Maquoketa Valley Electric Cooperative  
**Gene Kenkel**  
**Donna Olson**  
Nishnabotna Valley Rural Electric Cooperative  
**Dale Ullrich**  
North West Rural Electric Cooperative  
**Bryce Arkema**  
**Darrell Boot**  
**Carroll Hoksbergen**  
**Steve Inskeep**  
**Jon Van Woerkom**  
Pella Cooperative Electric Association  
**David Onken**  
Raccoon Valley Electric Cooperative  
**Ronald Hoffman**  
T.I.P. Rural Electric Cooperative  
**Phillip Jensen**  
**Scott Linville**  
United Electric Cooperative

RESAP is a service of the NRECA and strives to promote the highest standards of safety among electric cooperatives.

IAEC fully supports the RESAP program and works with electric cooperative members in their safety achievements. The rigorous program requires annual reporting to NRECA of Occupational Safety and Health Administration Data and updates to the cooperative's safety improvement plan. Every three years, additional data must be submitted to NRECA, as well as participation in an onsite safety observation by NRECA at the cooperative.



## CRAISINS, APPLE, WALNUT AND QUINOA SALAD

- ½ cup quinoa, uncooked**
- ½ cup toasted walnuts, chopped**
- 1 cup craisins**
- 1 large apple, chopped**
- 1 large celery stalk, chopped**
- 2 tablespoons green onion, chopped**
- 1 tablespoon honey (or white corn syrup)**
- 2 tablespoons white balsamic raspberry blush vinegar**
- kosher salt, to taste**
- pepper, to taste**

Prepare quinoa according to package directions. Refrigerate for 30 minutes, until cooled completely. In a large bowl, toss cooled quinoa, walnuts, craisins, apple, celery and onion together. In a separate bowl, mix honey or corn syrup and vinegar. Season with salt and pepper. Pour dressing over salad and mix well. Serve immediately or chill in refrigerator until ready to serve. Serves 8

Nancy Anderson • Ankeny Prairie Energy Cooperative

## CUKE, TOMATO AND ONION SALAD

- 1 medium cucumber, sliced**
- 1 medium onion, sliced**
- 2 medium tomatoes, cubed**
- 2 teaspoons dill weed**
- 1 tablespoon salad oil**
- 1 tablespoon vinegar**
- 2 teaspoons sugar**
- 2 teaspoons salt**
- dash of pepper, optional**

Mix all ingredients and refrigerate 2 hours before serving. Serves 10

Patricia Glandorf • Williamsburg T.I.P. Rural Electric Cooperative

## OAT BURGERS

- 1 cup creamy cottage cheese**
- 1 cup corn flakes cereal, crushed**
- 1 cup quick oatmeal**
- 2 eggs**
- salt, to taste**
- pepper, to taste**
- oil**
- 1 can cream of mushroom soup**
- 1½ cans milk or water**

Mix cottage cheese, cereal, oatmeal, eggs, salt and pepper. Form into patties and brown in oil. Mix soup and milk or water, then cover patties with the soup mixture. Bake covered at 350 degrees F for 45-60 minutes. Cream of mushroom soup can be substituted with cream of celery soup. Serves 2-4

Natalie Herrington • Nevada Consumers Energy

## CARIBBEAN RICE AND BEANS

- 1 tablespoon oil**
- ¼ teaspoon garlic powder**
- ½ cup green onion, diced**
- ½ cup green pepper, diced**
- ½ teaspoon rosemary leaves**
- ½ teaspoon thyme leaves**
- ½ teaspoon black pepper**
- 1 can black beans, drained and rinsed**
- 1 cup raw rice, cooked**
- ¼ cup picante sauce**
- 2 tablespoons soy sauce**
- ½ cup cheddar cheese, grated**

In a skillet, sauté oil, garlic powder, green onion, green pepper, rosemary, thyme and pepper. Add beans to sautéed ingredients. Then, add rice, picante and soy sauce. Stir fry until hot, then top with cheese. Serves 4

Sandra Busard • Donnellson Access Energy Cooperative

## BLACK BEAN AND VEGGIE BURGERS

- 2 15-ounce cans black beans, rinsed and drained
- 1/4 teaspoons garlic powder
- 1 teaspoon chili powder
- 1 teaspoon cumin
- 1/2 teaspoon paprika
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 2 teaspoons cilantro
- 1/4 cup green pepper, finely chopped
- 1/2 cup breadcrumbs
- 1 large carrot, grated
- 1/4 cup red onion, chopped
- 1 egg
- 6 buns, optional
- lettuce, optional

In a large mixing bowl, mash black beans. Add garlic powder, chili powder, cumin, paprika, salt and cilantro. Mix until combined. Add peppers, breadcrumbs, carrot, onion and egg to the combined bean mixture. Form into patties and fry over medium heat in a greased pan. Flip after 5 minutes and fry the other side for the same amount of time. Serve on a bun or on a bed of lettuce. Serves 6

Crystal Hammes • Libertyville  
Access Energy Cooperative

## HOMEMADE SLOW COOKER TOMATO BASIL SOUP

- 5-7 tomatoes on the vine (or 2 cups baby tomatoes)
- 1 yellow onion, diced
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 head garlic, peeled
- splash of vegetable broth
- 1 tablespoon Italian seasoning
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1/2 teaspoon black pepper
- 1/4 teaspoon red pepper flakes
- fresh basil, to taste
- heavy cream, optional

Place all ingredients in a slow cooker, except basil. Cook on low until tomatoes and onions are soft. Blend soup until smooth with an immersion or regular blender. Adding heavy cream will make for creamier soup. Adjust seasonings to taste and garnish with fresh basil before serving. Serves 6, approximately

Tristen Jungers • Archer  
North West Rural Electric Cooperative

## SPAGHETTI SALAD

- 4 medium fresh tomatoes
- 1 large red onion
- 2 cucumbers
- 2 bell peppers
- 2 pounds spaghetti
- 1 16-ounce bottle Wishbone Italian salad dressing
- Shilling Salad Supreme Spice, to taste

Chop together tomatoes, onion, cucumbers and peppers. Break spaghetti into thirds and boil until cooked. Cool slightly but add salad dressing before spaghetti is cold. Mix spaghetti with tomato mixture and add salad spice to taste. Serves 16, or cut recipe in half to serve 8

Denise Anderson • Ocheyedan  
Osceola Electric Cooperative, Inc.

Visit [www.ieclmagazine.com](http://www.ieclmagazine.com) and search our online archive of hundreds of recipes in various categories.



## EASY PEASY PAELLA

- 2 tablespoons oil
- 1 cup white rice
- 1 onion, diced
- 2 carrots, diced
- 2 stalks celery, diced
- 8 ounces mushrooms, quartered
- 1 bell pepper (any color), diced
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 2 pinches saffron, optional
- 1 teaspoon Old Bay seasoning
- 1 teaspoon paprika
- sprinkle cayenne
- 1 cup white wine or vegetable broth
- 8 ounces grape tomatoes
- 1/2 cup green olives
- 1 cup frozen peas
- salt, to taste
- pepper, to taste

Swirl oil to coat an 11-inch cast iron or other oven-safe pan. Layer (in order) rice, onion, carrots, celery, mushrooms, bell pepper, garlic, seasonings and wine or broth. Bake at 375 degrees F for 40 minutes. Stir in tomatoes, olives and peas. Bake 15 minutes. Add salt and pepper to taste. Serves 6

Chris Daniels • Casey  
Guthrie County Rural Electric Cooperative Association

## WANTED:

## BEEF BURGER RECIPES

### THE REWARD:

**\$25 FOR EVERY  
ONE WE PUBLISH!**

**Deadline is Jan. 31**

Fire up the grill, load up the toppings and gather around the picnic table – we want your best **beef burger recipes!** Selected submissions will appear in our May issue in celebration of Beef Month. Please include your name, address, telephone number, co-op name, recipe category and number of servings on all submissions.



**EMAIL:** [recipes@ieclmagazine.com](mailto:recipes@ieclmagazine.com)

**MAIL:** Recipes

*Iowa Electric Cooperative Living* magazine  
8525 Douglas Ave., Suite 48  
Des Moines, IA 50322

Craig Codner, CEO of Butler County REC, participants in shooting the national commercial.



# IOWA CO-OPS SHINE BRIGHT IN NEW TOUCHSTONE ENERGY COMMERCIAL

Hollywood came to Butler County in northeast Iowa this past summer in the form of Harvest Creative Services (Harvest) from Lansing, Michigan.

Butler County REC was chosen as the host cooperative for the Touchstone Energy® Cooperative's annual ad shoot, which took place in June. Before the shoot, however, there were numerous phone calls, emails – 825 in total – meetings, text messages and a week in May scouting locations for the five scenes.

## Behind the scenes of a major production

Anne Gardiner, public relations specialist with Butler County REC, and Marena Fritzler, marketing

director with Corn Belt Power Cooperative, spent the week with Harvest. It was a full week that included new opportunities, making grilled cheese sandwiches for one scene, shooting scenes numerous times (the first scene alone took 31 takes), making last-minute adjustments, long days and short nights, and a lot of camaraderie.

## Cooperation among cooperatives on full display

The ad was also a nod to cooperation among cooperatives, one of our seven cooperative principles. The first scene was shot at Grundy County REC with lineman Derek Snakenberg driving the REC truck. Iowa Lakes Electric Cooperative

sent three volunteers – Ryan Craig, CEO and Touchstone Energy board member; Katie Harris, communications specialist; and Jen Sievert, vice president of customer and corporate relations.

"It was an epic, one-of-a-kind experience, learning from the production crew on set, photographing the journey, and helping behind the scenes," said Fritzler. "The magic of this creation came to life the way it did with the collective strength of many. It was neat to see local employees and board members from Butler County REC, Grundy County REC and Iowa Lakes Electric Cooperative step up and into this production."

## Creativity, improvisation and a memorable experience

Interestingly, appliance finishes ultimately determined the filming location for the kitchen scene. A couple of Butler County REC employees offered their own kitchens for filming, but during location scouting, the production team determined the finishes and reflections in co-op employees' refrigerator doors when opened were not the right fit for the envisioned transition into the hand-drawn bucket truck. Production crews found the winning refrigerator in a local rental property in Shell Rock, where the kitchen scene was filmed.

Improvising is also a hallmark of ad shoots. When the Harvest team was searching for a table for the kitchen scene, Gardiner offered her kitchen table. Fritzler and Gardiner disassembled the table to get it through doors, loaded it onto an REC truck, covered it due to impending rain and headed to the scene, where the crew unloaded it. After the scene was shot, the table was loaded back onto the truck and covered with a tarp. Rain was definitely on its way.

Fritzler and Gardiner then went back and forth on whether the table should be housed at Butler County REC's CEO Craig Codner's home or driven back to Gardiner's home. They decided to drive the table to Gardiner's and unload it. The decision proved to be the correct one – it sprinkled, but the table remained unscathed.

The ad, released during the Touchstone Energy annual meeting on Nov. 19, is the centerpiece of Touchstone's 2026 national campaign, "The Cooperative Advantage." With more than 100 co-op members, employees and actors, this was Touchstone Energy's largest production to date. It also has the distinction of being the only ad in eight years in which shooting days had to change to accommodate weather.

"Touchstone Energy and Harvest Creative Services were great to work with," Gardiner said. "Butler County REC was proud to be the host for the 2026 ad campaign. It was an amazing opportunity that we are so grateful to have been a part of. I learned so much and had the best time. I also don't look at commercials or movies the same way I used to!"



Scan the QR code to watch the 30-second spot.



Touchstone Energy® Cooperatives

## ABOUT TOUCHSTONE ENERGY

Touchstone Energy is a national network of electric cooperatives across 46 states that provides research, communications resources and employee training to help co-ops strengthen relationships with their members. These shared tools and programs support superior member satisfaction, reinforce the cooperative difference and strengthen both local communities and the broader electric cooperative network. Touchstone Energy cooperatives stand out as trusted, reliable sources of power and information for 30 million member-consumers.

## WHY DOES TOUCHSTONE ENERGY ADVERTISE?

Advertising is important for Touchstone Energy because it strengthens the unified national brand shared by hundreds of local electric cooperatives, helping members recognize the value, reliability and community focus of their co-op. It communicates the "cooperative difference," reinforces trust, and educates the public on key energy issues, while also helping attract new talent by highlighting the meaningful, community-driven careers available within the cooperative network. By keeping co-ops visible, consistent and connected, advertising supports member engagement, strengthens workforce recruitment and ensures that Touchstone Energy cooperatives continue to be seen as trusted, people-first energy providers.

# REPORT POWER OUTAGES

To report an outage, call

## 800-696-6552

Phones are answered 24/7!

For the most accurate outage updates, visit Consumers Energy's Outage Center at [www.consumersenergy.coop/outage-center](http://www.consumersenergy.coop/outage-center), check messages on SmartHub, or call Consumers Energy.

Scan here to visit the co-op's outage center.



## TIPS TO AVOID ENERGY SCAMS

Beware of "winter bill relief" energy scams. Scammers often exploit high winter bills by offering fake discount or relief programs to unsuspecting consumers. They may ask for upfront payments or personal details to lower your rate. Legitimate utilities never demand gift cards, wire transfers or payment through apps like PayPal or Venmo. Always verify offers directly by calling your utility's phone number located on your energy bill—do not call any phone numbers provided in a suspicious email or text. Remember to take time to confirm before you pay; real savings programs won't pressure you for immediate action.

! CALL CONSUMERS ENERGY AT 800-696-6552 IF EVER IN DOUBT.



## ATTENTION IOWA BUILDERS & CONTRACTORS:

### Momentum is Building is next month!

Sponsored by the Iowa Cooperatives for Energy Efficiency, this conference is for Iowa builders and contractors to earn CEUs, learn about energy efficiency techniques, and network with peers.

### Consumers Energy is offering partial sponsorships for local contractors to attend!

The cooperative will pay for half of the registration fee for one attendee per company. Registration includes all sessions & breaks, lunch & the exhibitor reception on Thursday, and breakfast on Friday.

Please contact the Member Services Department at **800-696-6552** or [info@consumersenergy.coop](mailto:info@consumersenergy.coop) to register through Consumers Energy or for more information.

Total registration fee is \$400; Consumers Energy will pay \$200 toward registration. Must be registered with Consumers Energy by January 15 for partial sponsorship.

FEBRUARY 19-20, 2026

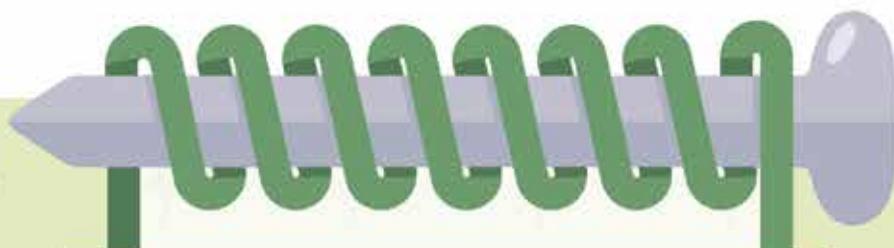
SHERATON WEST DES MOINES HOTEL  
1800 50TH ST, WEST DES MOINES, IA





## POP QUIZ Electricity Terms

How well do you know terms related to electricity? Test your knowledge! **Read the definitions below. Then, look at the word bank to match the correct terms to the definitions.** You can only use the words once, so choose carefully. Check your work in the answer key.



### Word Bank:

Conductor	Circuit	Insulator
Volt (Voltage)	Static Electricity	

1. A complete path that electricity flows through.  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. Something that allows electricity to pass through, such as metal or wire.  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. The standard unit of measurement for electricity.  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. Something that does not allow electricity to pass through easily, such as rubber.  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. Electricity build-up caused by rubbing two surfaces together.  
\_\_\_\_\_

Answer key:  
1. Circuit 2. Conductor  
3. Volt (Voltage)  
4. Insulator  
5. Static Electricity



# DISTRIBUTION AUTOMATION KEEPS POWER FLOWING, OUTAGES AT BAY

BY CATHY CASH

Staying online uninterrupted by a power glitch seems more important than ever. And today, it's even more possible than ever before, thanks to advanced energy technologies that can instantly rearrange electricity flows to areas hit by storms or other disturbances.

Distribution automation, also known as DA, refers to a powerful set of tools that includes automated sensors, communications systems and data analytics-enabling electric utilities to monitor power lines, field equipment and generation facilities in real time.

Equipped with these DA tools, Iowa's electric cooperatives can detect an outage and isolate it in real-time from their control rooms before sending out field crew to repair the damaged powerlines.

"Distribution automation helps electric co-ops deliver reliable, high-quality service to members when today's world demands it most," said Ravindra Singh, senior principal of DA for the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association.

Some call DA a "self-healing electric grid" because its application, such as fault location, isolation and service restoration (FLISR), allows the network of power lines and substations to automatically reconfigure in response to disruptions.

## How it works

When power lines are damaged or shortened by storms, critters or some disaster, DA systems can reroute electricity from the power source to unaffected infrastructure. This allows electric service to continue uninterrupted to a community that would otherwise suffer an outage.



With distributed automation technology and its analysis of network data, co-ops can see their system's assets, how they are operating and what energy resources are on their power lines to support better quality service and reliability.



Distribution automation devices installed on a power pole bolster reliability and help members stay powered even during storms.



Distributed automation can save electric co-ops and their members money by reducing inspection time for field apparatus such as transformers, substations and power lines.

DA not only has a hand in preventing outages, but this suite of technologies can save electric co-ops and their members money by reducing inspection time for field apparatuses such as transformers, substations and power lines.

With real-time field measurements from DA technologies, a co-op gains situational awareness of its electricity network and can minimize unnecessary maintenance activities, truck rolls and crew dispatches to examine lines, locate damage and make repairs.

"Power distribution grids are evolving from being a passive network to a more active network," said Singh. "With DA technology and its analysis of network data, co-ops can see their system's assets, how they are operating and what energy resources are on their power lines to support better quality service and reliability."

## Knowledge is power

Without DA, a co-op may not know where electric vehicles, rooftop solar, residential batteries, generators and other distribution resources are being added or operated on its system by its members. This can be a challenge when it comes to managing peak demand and having to curtail energy to sustain reliability.

Electricity demand is only going to grow because of new types of loads such as data centers, crypto mining and EVs, according to any industry forecast. So, it makes sense for utilities to optimize the use of their existing infrastructure or equipment to keep costs in check.

With DA, electric co-ops can better manage and grow their systems and respond to crises safely and efficiently while their members enjoy reliable electricity without hiccups.

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

# WISHING YOU AN “AWE”SOME YEAR

BY DARCY DOUGHERTY MAULSBY

Remember when Iowa's night sky offered breathtaking views on Veterans Day 2025? If you stepped outside on Nov. 11, you could see the northern lights shimmering across the horizon.

Like many other Iowans, I couldn't resist taking pictures of this incredible phenomenon. Professional photographers and amateurs with smartphone cameras shared images online of the spectacle, with ribbons of red, green, pink and violet dancing above farms, small towns and city skylines.

The northern lights aren't common in Iowa since we're located too far south to regularly see the region where the lights are most visible. Seeing them in Iowa requires a strong geomagnetic storm to push the aurora far enough south and create an exceptionally vibrant display – a rare event.

In other words, it's awesome.

“I couldn't believe how vivid the northern lights were,” commented my friend Donetta Stewart of rural Auburn, who captured amazing views of the sky above her barn during the celestial show. “I've never seen anything like it. Every now and then, it's soul satisfying to witness something that captures your sense of wonder once again.”

## Make room for more awe and wonder

That word “wonder” resonated with me. It describes the magic inspired by a sense of awe.

What exactly is awe?

We've all experienced it, even if we didn't know what to call it. Whether we're enjoying a stunning sunset or watching a new leaf grow on a plant, the feeling we get in that moment – amazed, inspired, transported – is what researchers call awe.



“I've been thinking a lot lately about how it's important to make room and opportunity for awe and wonder in your life, especially as we get older,” Donetta told me. “I constantly remind myself of how it is a privilege to see the passing years. Many I know didn't get to do that.”

She's exactly right. Awe is a rich blessing. It's a gentle nudge to appreciate the everyday wonders flourishing all around us. It's something we all need more of in our lives.

Like many positive emotions, awe makes us feel good. It helps us connect with others. Awe decreases stress levels, and it increases generosity and kindness. Awe also makes us happier and more satisfied with life.

## Everything is a miracle

Research shows that awe shifts us from a competitive, dog-eat-dog mindset to a sense that we're a part of a community, a culture, an ecosystem. Thanks to awe, “our individual self gives way to the boundary-dissolving sense of being part of something much larger,” noted Dacher Keltner, author of the book *Awe: The New Science of Everyday Wonder and How It Can Transform Your Life.*“

Finding ways to cultivate awe in everyday life leads us to appreciate what is most humane in our human nature.

- Slow down and focus on your senses. Tune into the sights, textures, smells, tastes and sounds around you, from the flavors of a delicious meal to the delight of listening to a favorite song.
- Spend time in nature. Notice the vastness of the sky, the beauty of trees and flowers, and the way the sunlight sparkles on a river or lake. Even observing nature from a window can help.
- Document the beauty around you. Write down things you notice that bring you joy, or take some photographs, just like many of us did with the northern lights.

This year, make time to nurture a sense of awe, and take inspiration in this quote attributed to Albert Einstein: “There are only two ways to live your life. One is as though nothing is a miracle. The other is as though everything is a miracle.”

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



IOWA ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE LIVING

The magazine  
for members of  
Iowa's electric  
cooperatives

January 2026

Visit our website at  
[www.consumersenergy.coop](http://www.consumersenergy.coop)



# SAFETY

IS THE BACKBONE OF RELIABILITY

Safety is **#1** at your **Touchstone Energy® cooperative**.

From the ongoing training of our lineworkers  
to classroom safety programs for our kids.

Our commitment to electrical safety has always been job one.  
So, we can deliver reliable energy and peace of mind. That's  
why safety runs through everything we do.



Touchstone Energy®  
Cooperatives