



MAY 2023

NEWS FROM YOUR PARTNERS AT PEOPLE'S ENERGY COOPERATIVE



## ELECTRICAL SAFETY MONTH

ENCOURAGING YOU TO STAY SAFE AT *HOME, WORK & PLAY*



*Each May, People's Energy Cooperative joins Electrical Safety Foundation International (ESFI) to recognize National Electrical Safety Month.*

The annual campaign seeks to raise awareness about potential electrical hazards and the importance of electrical safety. We encourage our members to consider ways to stay safe around electricity at home, work, and play. Safe Electricity offers the following advice to help keep you, your family, and your community safe:

**At Home:** Your lights turn on in an instant and your electrical plugs slide into outlets without sparks or shocks. You can't see it, and typically don't think much about it. However, the electricity we take for granted every day requires attention for potential hazards and taking steps to keep everyone safe.

- ▶ Watch for warning signs such as hot or discolored switch plates, cords, or plugs; dimming or flickering lights; buzzing or sizzling sounds. Never use cords or appliances that have exposed, damaged, or faulty wiring. Have them repaired or replaced.
- ▶ Use extension cords temporarily, not as permanent wiring. Too many extension cords in one area creates a risk of overheating or overloading circuits.
- ▶ If small children are present, install tamper resistant outlets or use outlet covers to reduce the risk of shocks and fire caused by small items being inserted into an outlet.

**At Work:** Employers usually offer orientation and training for new employees, but sometimes electrical safety is overlooked. Follow these on-the-job electrical safety tips, which also apply at home:

- ▶ Do not complete electrical work if you are not qualified. It is best to leave electrical work to a professional electrician.
- ▶ Do not run extension cords under carpet. Cords could get damaged or overheat, in addition to creating a tripping hazard.
- ▶ Be vigilant about power line locations. Use a spotter when operating machinery or driving a truck that has hydraulic beds, lifts, or extensions. If equipment does come in contact with a line, do not get out. Call 911 and wait for our crews to de-energize the power so you can safely exit. *(continued on page 7...)*

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# CEO MESSAGE

FROM MICHAEL J. HENKE, PRESIDENT & CEO



mhenke@peoplesenergy.coop

*Governing an electric utility with \$184 million in electric assets is not for the faint of heart and requires significant engagement and education on the part of our seven-member Board of Directors. As we welcomed John Winter (Dist. 3) to the Board in late March, I was reminded how we live out the fifth cooperative principle of "Education, Training, and Information." This principle states, "Education and training for members, elected representatives (directors), CEOs, and employees help them effectively contribute to the development of their cooperatives."*

Last month, John went through the Cooperative's new director orientation process and attended our national association's new director orientation class in Virginia. As we were walking John through the new director orientation process, I thought it would be good to share with you, our members, all of the training requirements and opportunities for your Board of Directors.

## **NEW DIRECTOR ORIENTATION AT THE COOPERATIVE:**

Each new director at People's goes through an orientation process at the Cooperative within a few weeks of being elected to the Board. During orientation, new directors learn about the Cooperative's guiding documents that include the Articles of Incorporation and Bylaws, board guidelines and policies, the Strategic Plan, and the Annual Work Plan and Budget. They also sit with each department head to get an overview of cooperative operations including power supply, electric service, rates, billing and collections, member relations and services/programs, finance and accounting, information technology, employee relations, and community engagement.

**NATIONAL TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES:** Our national trade association, the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA) has extensive training and certification programs for both cooperative directors and employees. They offer a New Director Orientation class, as well as certificate

programs designed to help electric cooperative directors understand their roles and responsibilities, stay up to date on the industry issues and trends, and prepare them to meet the challenges facing electric cooperatives.

- **NRECA New Director Orientation** is a two-and-one-half day program designed for new directors who have served on the Cooperative's board for less than two years. Interactive sessions provide an in-depth focus on key electric industry issues and the challenges that new directors face. Directors gain guidance in understanding their role as a director and the oversight role of the Board. They also learn about cooperative finance, board engagement in advocacy, legal issues, and setting the tone for a culture of safety.
- **Credentialed Cooperative Director Certificate:** The first part of NRECA's three-part Director Education Program, the Credentialed Cooperative Director (CCD) program consists of five courses that focus on basic governance knowledge and the essential skills required of cooperative directors. The CCD prepares directors to fulfill their fiduciary duty as elected officials serving on behalf of their membership. Upon completion of all five CCD courses, directors are awarded the Credentialed Cooperative Director Certificate by NRECA. Your board has a strategic goal of all board members possessing their CCD. As of the writing of this message, all PEC Board members have earned their CCD except for Jon Kroening who is taking his last class this month and John Winter who was just elected to the Board. Once the CCD is completed, participants can then pursue the Board Leadership Certificate.
- **Board Leadership Certificate:** The second part of the director education program, the Board Leadership Certificate (BLC), consists of a series of courses focusing in greater depth on specific industry and governance issues. These include issues such as risk management, power supply, parliamentary procedure, technology, and policy development. Jerry Wooner, Tracy Lauritzen, and Art Friedrich have earned the BLC. *(continues on page 6...)*

# MONTHLY MEETING HIGHLIGHTS

# highline

Vol. 87 • Issue 05

PEC's Board of Directors held its monthly meeting on April 28. During the meeting, the following items were discussed: *an update on the search for a new CFO; a "smishing" attempt at the Cooperative; fleet supply chain timelines; statistics from the Annual Meeting; four open Member Advisory Committee seats; quarterly financials; and a quarterly update on the Strategic Plan.* A quorum of directors was present, and the following actions were taken:

- ▶ Set March 21, 2024, as the date for the 87th Annual Meeting.
- ▶ Approved a 0.900 mill PCA adjustment for Legacy members for April usage billed in May.
- ▶ Approved a 7.209 mill PCA adjustment for SMEC members for April usage billed in May.
- ▶ Approved capital credit allocations of \$1,779,643 for Legacy members and \$365,224 for SMEC members.

## MANAGEMENT

Michael J. Henke,  
President/CEO

Patrick Nelson,  
Director of Engineering  
and Operations

Michelle Olson,  
Director of  
Member Services

Gwen Stevens,  
Director of Cooperative  
Relations

Dody Wubker,  
CFO

## BOARD OF DIRECTORS

### DISTRICT 1:

Jon Kroening  
(507) 884-0160, [jkroening@peoplesenergy.coop](mailto:jkroening@peoplesenergy.coop)

### DISTRICT 2:

Jodie Tvedt  
Vice Chair  
(507) 218-2141, [jtvedt@peoplesenergy.coop](mailto:jtvedt@peoplesenergy.coop)

### DISTRICT 3:

John Winter  
(507) 990-5648, [jwinter@peoplesenergy.coop](mailto:jwinter@peoplesenergy.coop)

### DISTRICT 4:

Tracy Lauritzen,  
Secretary/Treasurer  
(507) 261-8740, [tlauritzen@peoplesenergy.coop](mailto:tlauritzen@peoplesenergy.coop)

### DISTRICT 5:

Jerry Wooner,  
Board Chair  
(507) 259-7217, [jwooner@peoplesenergy.coop](mailto:jwooner@peoplesenergy.coop)

### DISTRICT 6:

Art Friedrich  
Dairyland Director  
(507) 951-0590, [afriedrich@peoplesenergy.coop](mailto:afriedrich@peoplesenergy.coop)

### DISTRICT 7:

Jeff Orth  
(507) 254-6358, [jorth@peoplesenergy.coop](mailto:jorth@peoplesenergy.coop)

Visit [peoplesenergy.coop](http://peoplesenergy.coop)  
for a listing of the areas  
covered by each district.

Business Hours:  
7:30 am – 4:00 pm, M–F



## CHOOSE and/or automatic PAPERLESS bank draft payment for a chance to win!

There are many reasons members might choose to set up their account for paperless billing and/or automatic bank draft (*checking or savings account*) payment. It could be that you want to monitor all your finances online or maybe you appreciate the protection that comes with a secure portal.

One important reason you may not have considered is that you are helping the Cooperative reduce fixed costs, which means less costs passed onto members. For a frame of reference, the cost of postage to mail billing statements is approximately \$85,000 per year, and fees to process credit card payments are approximately five times more than processing a bank payment.

As a thank you, members who are enrolled in either paperless billing or automatic bank draft payments will be entered to **win one of three electric yard tools!** If you are signed up for both, then your name will be entered twice. Please ensure your account is set up by Friday, June 16 for a chance to win. For more information, visit [peoplesenergy.coop](http://peoplesenergy.coop).







## CAPITAL CREDIT ALLOCATION:

As a member of People's Energy Cooperative, you benefit from the margins generated by the Cooperative. These margins come back to you in the form of capital credits, which are reflected on your May billing statement.

At the end of each calendar year, PEC subtracts its operating expenses from the operating revenue collected to determine the Cooperative's operating margins. These margins are then allocated, or assigned, to members' capital credit accounts based on the amount of energy they purchased (patronage). This determination typically happens in April and is reported on the May billing statement. This year, the Board allocated \$2,144,867 in capital credits. It can be helpful to think of your capital credit account as being like a long-term savings account. This account is the accumulation of margins which have been allocated to you each year based on your patronage. Thirty-three thousand eight hundred forty-two.

Later in the year, PEC's Board of Directors determines if allocated capital credits from previous years will be distributed to members. The decision to retire capital credits is based on the Cooperative's financial stability and is typically done in October. Last year, the Cooperative returned \$1,151,686 in capital credits to members either through a credit on their bill or a check.

## PEC THANKS YOU FOR YOUR SERVICE!

We are celebrating service milestones for the following employees in May:

**Ben Alrick**, Lead Area  
Lineworker – 15 years

**Nick Johnson**, Area  
Lineworker – 5 years

**Josh Jones**,  
General Maintenance  
Laborer – 5 years

**Pat O'Connor**,  
System Operations  
Manager – 5 years



Ben



Josh



Nick



Pat

## ENERGY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM INCREASE

The Energy Assistance Program Crisis Benefit Maximum has been increased to \$3,000. Members may be eligible for additional energy assistance funds (crisis benefits) if:

- ▶ They have a pending heat/electric disconnection.
- ▶ Their heat/electricity is disconnected.
- ▶ They have less than 20 percent of propane or oil in their tank or are out of fuel and cannot get a delivery on credit.
- ▶ They are age 60 or older and need help paying their current energy bill.

Some households may have already used the previous maximum crisis amount of \$1,500. With the maximum raised to \$3,000, households can request additional crisis funds. To get extra help, members must contact their local energy assistance service provider by June 30.

# ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT FOCUS: WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

**ONE OF THE KEY AREAS** *of concern mentioned by nearly every business surveyed in a recent Business Retention and Expansion survey was “workforce” – including both access to workforce and the skills the workforce has coming in. The survey was conducted by People’s Energy Cooperative (PEC) and several partnering organizations. As a result of this feedback, the survey group is seeking to promote workforce development in our region. Conversations surrounding the subject continue between area businesses and local economic development partners.*

“People’s Energy Cooperative is working to improve relationships between our members with large labor needs and our local schools that have career and technical education curriculum,” reports Marty Walsh, PEC’s economic development and key accounts manager. “Some opportunities are putting students right into jobs at graduation or even before, others are making students aware of the jobs they can come back to after further education.” Twenty-four thousand eighty-four.

“It is important, and sometimes difficult, to connect students from one community to employers in another,” he continues, “even though that is not uncommon for workers to commute from home in one town to work in another.” Walsh notes that labor is still tight in the region, across nearly every sector. Local businesses continue to see demand for their products, with many desiring to expand with the availability of enough labor.

FutureForward is one tool area employers of all sizes can utilize. Managed by Southeast Service Cooperative, FutureForward works to match the needs and offerings of companies with the interests and skills of hundreds of students as efficiently as possible.

To learn more, please visit: [www.futureforward.org](http://www.futureforward.org).



## BIG NEWS!

### *Lemonade Day!*

ROCHESTER, MN

**IS  
COMING...**

**JUNE 10  
- 2023 -**

[LEMONADEDAY.ORG/ROCHESTER-MN](http://LEMONADEDAY.ORG/ROCHESTER-MN)

**Learn to save,  
spend, and share  
through this fun,  
free program!**

*Lemonade Day is a fun,  
experiential program  
that teaches kids how to  
start, own, and operate  
their very first business –  
a lemonade stand!*





## OPERATION ROUND UP® SPOTLIGHT:

# CHATFIELD ELEMENTARY

*A \$1,849 Operation Round Up grant is making it possible for Chatfield Elementary School to expand its Gopher Time resources to board games for each classroom and to cover the cost of supplies for a popular service project.*

"These funds will be used to purchase tools and supplies for our students to have common experiences executing Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) skills that they have learned academically," says Jessica MacLeod, music teacher at Chatfield Elementary School. "We plan to purchase seven developmentally appropriate board games for each of our 22 classrooms so that students can exercise decision making skills, relationship skills, and emotional management skills." Eleven thousand one hundred ninety-four.

In the past, students were asked to bring board games into their classrooms for SEL lessons that focus on emotional regulation, conflict resolution, and communication with their peers. By creating a library of board games for each grade level, teachers will be able to help provide strong and consistent coaching.

Grant funds will also be used to purchase supplies for a service project where 4th – 6th graders create tie blankets. The students make these blankets in mid-March as a part of their SEL lessons. The blankets are then donated to the organization Hugs for Hunter to provide blankets for children who are experiencing extended stays in local hospitals.

"This is the fifth year that our students have completed this service project," MacLeod explains. She mentions how the school has a limited budget through the school district to fund the tools and supplies for its Gopher Time activities. The tie blanket service project is one of the activities the district was not able to fund this year. The Operation Round Up grant made it possible for students to continue this rewarding service project.

*"Our school is incredibly grateful to have received this grant. I think this program [Operation Round Up] is a perfect illustration that every little bit of good that you can put into the world can make an indelible difference in the lives of others."* – Jessica MacLeod



## CEO MESSAGE *(continued...)* FROM MICHAEL J. HENKE, PRESIDENT & CEO

- **Director Gold Credential Program:** This program recognizes directors committed to continuing their education beyond the CCD and BLC and who desire a tangible credential that demonstrates their ongoing commitment to advancing their knowledge and performing their fiduciary duty to the best of their ability. Jerry Wooner and Art Friedrich are Gold Credentialed Directors.

**ONGOING TRAINING:** In addition to all the formal training offered, we also offer regular training at the Board meetings that includes board governance, anti-harassment, financial, and technology-related training.

*As you can see, in addition to the rich and diverse experience that board members bring to the boardroom, they are also trained on important topics related to governing an electric utility cooperative. I can assure you that your cooperative is in good hands!*

*Sincerely,*  
**Michael J. Henke,**  
*President & CEO,*  
**(800) 214-2694**





# 2023 April Grants

To be considered for third quarter grants in 2023, applications must be submitted no later than June 20, 2023. Program guidelines and applications for Operation Round Up® donations are available at [www.peoplesenergy.coop](http://www.peoplesenergy.coop) or by calling the Cooperative at 800-214-2694.

The People's Energy Cooperative Operation Round Up® Trust Board provided \$31,345 in grants the second quarter of 2023 to the following area organizations:

- **\$1,300: American Red Cross in Rochester** – In support of the Home Fire Program
- **\$2,800: Camp Victory in Zumbro Falls** – To help improve the slippery slide. Thirty-one thousand seven hundred seventeen
- **\$2,500: Dover Eyota Eagle Wrestling Club** – To help with the purchase of a new wrestling mat
- **\$2,500: Hiawatha Homes Foundation in Rochester** – To help purchase slings and harnesses
- **\$2,500: Ironwood Springs Christian Ranch in Stewartville** – To help purchase a new wireless thermostat system
- **\$1,500: Kasson Mantorville Early Childhood Special Education** – To help develop a classroom sensory wall
- **\$2,500: Lake City Fire Dept.** – For the purchase of life jackets for rescue crews
- **\$1,500: Next Chapter Ministries in Rochester** – For the development of a Little Legacies play space
- **\$2,250: PEM Drama Booster Club in Plainview** – To help purchase hotstik stage lights
- **\$350: Rochester Art Center** – In support of the SE MN High School Art Show
- **\$3,395: Rochester Youth Fastpitch Softball Association** – For the purchase of an ice machine at the Rochester Softball Complex
- **\$2,500: Stewartville Community Education Tiger Time** – For transportation to and from swimming lessons

- **\$250: The Grace Foundation in Rochester** – To help with the purchase of new student tables and seating
- **\$2,500: Three Rivers Community Action, Inc. in Zumbrota** – In support of the HART Volunteer Transportation Program
- **\$3,000: Zumbro Valley Food Shelf in Zumbro Falls** – To help with the purchase of food

Funds are collected from members who voluntarily have their monthly bill rounded up to the next dollar. Applications for funding are considered on a quarterly basis. The funds are held separately from the People's Energy Cooperative operating accounts and are administered through the Board of Trustees comprised of seven PEC member volunteers.

## COVER STORY, CONTINUED



**At Play:** Whether you're working in your yard, or spending the weekend on the lake, keeping safety front of mind will ensure a fun and safe summer.

- ▶ Remind kids to never climb on utility poles and to stay away from pad-mounted transformers.
- ▶ Keep all electronics away from pools and hot tubs. Make sure outlets near a water source and all outdoor outlets are GFCI (ground-fault circuit interrupter) protected.
- ▶ Check to make sure items such as ladders, kites, booms, pool skimmers, and antennas are clear of overhead power lines.
- ▶ Before you start digging for your next landscaping project, call 8-1-1 to have underground utility lines properly marked.



## GET SOCIAL!

Are you on social media? We are! We utilize Facebook and Twitter to share information about topics such as electrical safety, energy efficiency, cooperative events, and peak energy alerts.



Go with **confidence.**



**GET HELP AT HOME OR AWAY  
WITH THE PRESS OF A BUTTON.**

*The Belle Medical Alert Pendant  
has everything you need to keep  
your independence. Get help from  
anywhere 24/7, whether you're  
at home or on your next adventure.*

call **888.264.6380** or visit **[heartlandss.com](https://heartlandss.com)**

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## Time for a new **WATER HEATER?**

### PEC offers members options to save money!

- ▶ We offer rebates from \$150 to \$300 for electric water heaters.
- ▶ Members enrolled in the Water Heater Energy Management Program are eligible to receive reimbursement of service repairs (up to \$300) over the life of the water heater.



Visit: [peoplesenergy.coop/water-heating-programs](https://peoplesenergy.coop/water-heating-programs)



### The MyChoice Prepay Program

is a flexible payment option that allows you, as a People's Energy Cooperative member, to prepay on your electric account; eliminating set due dates, deposits, late fees and reconnect fees.



Call or email **Member Services** for more information.

(800) 214-2694 or [memberservices@peoplesenergy.coop](mailto:memberservices@peoplesenergy.coop)



### An alternative way to support renewable energy

Evergreen is an easy way for any People's Energy Cooperative member to do their part to increase renewable energy sources without installing their own system.

*Everyone | Everyday | Everywhere | Everything*




To learn more, visit: [peoplesenergy.coop/evergreen](https://peoplesenergy.coop/evergreen)




# Your air conditioner...


(LET PEC HELP YOU WITH A TUNE-UP)

In the heat of a Minnesota summer, the last thing you want is for your air conditioner to go out. 

*Did you know that PEC offers an Air Conditioner Tune-Up Rebate? This \$25 rebate is available for existing homes and small commercial members with central air conditioners or air source heat pumps less than or equal to 5.5 tons. Window units are not eligible. Members are eligible for the rebate every two years.*

Visit [peoplesenergy.coop/rebates](https://peoplesenergy.coop/rebates) to learn more. 

As we get into the warmer months of the year, here are three tips to keep your air conditioner running great!

- 1) **A dirty filter causes your air conditioner to work harder than necessary.** Remember to change your air filter every month (or every two months) to prevent dust buildup, which can lead to even bigger problems. 
- 2) **Setting your thermostat to a colder setting than normal when you turn on your air conditioner will not cool your home any faster and could result in excessive cooling and unnecessary expense.**
- 3) **Avoid placing lamps or TV sets near your room air-conditioning thermostat.** The thermostat senses heat from these appliances, which can cause the air conditioner to run longer than necessary. 



# MAY IS NATIONAL ELECTRICAL SAFETY MONTH

## TIPS TO STAY IN THE SAFE ZONE



What does it mean to “stay in the safe zone”? It means being aware of your surroundings, working carefully to prevent injuries, and remembering safe practices when going about your day.

*This is one of 12 lifesaving habits we promote at PEC. Our comprehensive safety manual details specific safety procedures and policies, but the list of habits helps keep safe work practices top of mind during the workday. While some items on the list are specific to linework, many are applicable to workers in a wide range of professions.*

*Take time today to consider what it means for you to “stay in the safe zone” as you head to work at your place of employment. Here are a few guidelines to help keep you safe while doing your job.*



- ▶ **Take time to start with a job briefing.** Plan out work and identify any hazards before beginning a new project.
- ▶ **Always inspect and wear** the proper personal protective equipment for the job.
- ▶ **When driving** a vehicle, do not allow any distractions. Maintain a safe speed and follow all traffic laws.
- ▶ **Complete a circle check** before driving a vehicle away from a worksite.
- ▶ **Remember safe practices** when working near electricity. Be aware of any overhead and underground power lines in the vicinity of where you're working.
- ▶ **Use extra care and remain alert** when working around animals and people.
- ▶ **When using a ladder,** make sure to keep a distance of at least 10 feet from power lines. If a ladder or other equipment comes in contact with a line, do not touch it.
- ▶ **Make sure to use tools safely.** Never carry a power tool by the cord or yank the cord to disconnect it. Don't use electrical tools in damp or wet locations unless they're approved for that purpose.
- ▶ **If you see something, say something.** Pause work and speak out if you notice a potential hazard developing.





## People's Energy Cooperative

Your Touchstone Energy® Cooperative

1775 Lake Shady Avenue South  
Oronoco, Minnesota 55960

### HIGHLINE HI-LITES • May 2023 • Vol. 87 • Issue 05

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Highline Hi-Lites, 1775 Lake Shady Ave. S.  
Oronoco, Minnesota 55960

This institution is an equal opportunity provider and employer.



## 24-HOUR OUTAGE NUMBER

### WHEN THE LIGHTS GO OUT, SO DO WE

Call even if you think your neighbors have reported the outage. Leave one light on so you know when power has been restored. Have an emergency kit prepared.

**(507) 367-7000 or (800) 214-2694**

## SPOT YOUR NUMBER

# \$30

Each month, we hide four account numbers (without the last two digits) within the text of the newsletter. If you find your number, contact the Cooperative by the end of the current month at **(800) 214-2694** or **memberservices@peoplesenergy.coop** to receive a \$30 credit on your bill.

**GOOD LUCK IN FINDING YOUR ACCOUNT NUMBER!**

## VEGETATION MANAGEMENT 2023

Carr's Tree Service and New Age Tree Service continue to work with us to execute our vegetation management plan for 2023. During the month of June, Carr's Tree Service will be working in portions of Pleasant Grove, Orion, Jordan, and Sumner Townships. New Age Tree Service will be working during this time in portions of High Forest, Marion, and Pleasant Grove Townships. These crews will be working to clear trees and other vegetation from power lines and equipment.

Both companies also assist with the yearly herbicidal application in areas that were cleared two to three years ago. This summer, they will be spraying in portions of Ashland, Canisteo, Farmington, Hayfield, Hyde Park, Kalmar, Mantorville, Marion, Milton, New Haven, Oakwood, Orion, Oronoco, Pleasant Grove, Pleasant Valley, Racine, Rock Dell, Salem, Vernon, and West Albany Townships. It is important to note that postcards will be sent to members affected in advance of each company arriving to work in their area.

If you have any questions regarding the vegetation management program, please call the Cooperative at **(800) 214-2694** or email **poconnor@peoplesenergy.coop**

## Memorial Day

PEC will be closed Monday, May 29 to observe Memorial Day. If you have a power outage or an electrical emergency, please call **(800) 214-2694**.

We honor the men and women who made the ultimate sacrifice in serving our nation.

### UPCOMING RATE INCREASE:

A friendly reminder that members will see a rate increase, effective with May 1 energy use, on their June billing statements. We've been doing our best to communicate the rate increase through multiple channels to help members understand what the changes are and why they were made. For a listing of the most common rates, frequently asked questions, and information on our rate restructure plan we encourage members to visit **peoplesenergy.coop/rates**.