

March 2024 Vol. 8 Issue 3
A monthly publication for members of
MiEnergy Cooperative.

MiNews

**What do vegetation
management and
home building have
in common?**

Building a home?

Plan for electric options

Annual meeting April 10
Ballots, streaming and more



Your board and local governance

The board of directors at MiEnergy Cooperative provides a very important local governance authority for the membership.

This local governing body approves our annual budget, including work plans, policies and capital budget purchases. They set the electric rates that generate the revenue to meet our budget needs. The board hires a chief executive officer to hire staff to operate the cooperative. The board also hires legal counsel and an auditor who, just last month, provided a very positive audit report with no accounting adjustments. The cooperative balance sheet for 2023 totaled \$226 million in assets.

Our board of directors is made up of cooperative members locally elected by members within each of our five service

districts. MiEnergy currently has 11 directors. In 2023, with Director Dennis Young's announcement that he would not be running for another director term, the board approved a move to reduce the board to 10 directors, two elected for each district.

I would like to personally congratulate Dennis on his 20 years of service to our cooperative program and extend our cooperative's appreciation for his leadership. Thanks, Dennis!

In 2017, MiEnergy Cooperative was created upon the membership's approval of the merger of Hawkeye REC and Tri-County Electric Cooperative. MiEnergy's bylaws, also



approved by the members, outline that the board representation could be as few as nine directors or as many as 14. Through natural attrition, the original board of 14 has decreased to its current size of 10. Two directors serve each district on rotating three-year terms. This year, we have districts 2 and 3 up for election. In 2025, districts 4 and 5 will be up for election, and in 2026, it will return to district 1 elections again.

MiEnergy uses a third-party vendor, Survey and Ballot Systems, to oversee our elections. They manage our election by mailing election ballots to members in districts up for election and providing an online voting option. Members living in districts 2 or 3 will receive voting information in mid-March. Members residing in District 2 will notice one seat

is not being challenged, and members living in District 3 will see no one is challenging either incumbent director.

Despite receiving inquiries on the election process and how to apply for director seats, no one completed an application for the nominating committee to review to challenge our incumbent directors in three of the four seats. Unlike other types of elections, write-ins are not allowed. It may seem unnecessary to send out voting ballots with only incumbents listed. However, it was determined by our attorney that our bylaws require elections to be held by mail or electronic ballot. It does not allow a unanimous ballot to be made at the annual meeting. The cooperative must collect voting ballots despite not having a contested election. While we would rather have members run for seats, we will consider presenting a future bylaw change to the membership to address this situation.

More details about the annual meeting and elections for districts 2 and 3 can be found on the back page of this newsletter.

MiEnergy Cooperative has deep roots, dating back 88 years with its predecessors Hawkeye REC and Tri-County Electric Cooperative. On all accounts, local leaders elected to serve on behalf of the membership have successfully governed their local electric cooperative.

Be safe! I welcome your calls, emails and personal visits.

Prepare your home to handle Midwest weather

The experts at MiEnergy have some tips to help you prepare your home to handle the extreme hot and cold temperatures we experience in northeast Iowa and southeast Minnesota.

The time to prepare is before extreme seasons arrive. We encourage you to research during the spring and fall seasons while temperatures are relatively moderate.

Start planning for a new heating, ventilating and air conditioning (HVAC) unit for your home, farm or business before an equipment failure occurs. You will also gain peace of mind knowing that you've done your research to purchase an energy-efficient unit that will help save money on your energy bills and not be left making a hasty decision because you suddenly need a new unit.

Consider a heat pump if you're in the market for a new HVAC unit. Heat pumps transfer heat from one place to another and provide a greener heating option. Air-source heat pumps move heat between the air inside a home and the air outside a home, while ground-source heat pumps (known as geothermal heat pumps) transfer heat between the air inside a home and the ground outside a home.

Heat pumps can be used for both heating in the winter and cooling in the summer. All heat pumps are 100 percent efficient, and ground-source heat pumps can be 300 percent efficient at a minimum. Newer, more efficient air-source heat pumps offer legitimate heating in cold regions with recent technological advancements with cold climate air-source heat pumps.

If you're shopping for a new energy-efficient unit, check the efficiency rating, or SEER. The higher the SEER number, the more efficient the HVAC system. Consider buying an Energy Star-approved unit, which uses around 14 percent less energy than traditional air conditioning units for central air and at least 10 percent less for room units. Appliances with an Energy Star rating meet and often exceed energy efficiency standards and can save you money over the appliance's lifetime.

Visit www.EnergyStar.gov for more information, and check out the 2024 rebates for qualified appliances for MiEnergy members at www.MiEnergy.coop.



RECare
Consumer Contribution Fund
Members helping members

RECare is a consumer contribution fund in which members like you assist other members who need help paying utility bills. Consider a one-time contribution or enroll to provide monthly contributions. Whether it is \$1, \$5, or \$10 a month or a single donation of an amount of your choice, when combined with those of other generous members, your assistance can go a long way in helping others. Complete the form below, or visit www.MiEnergy.coop to fill out the online form.

Local families received an average amount of \$211 last year. Minnesota members can apply for funds by calling 800-432-2285. Iowa members can apply for funds by contacting Northeast Iowa Community Action offices in Chickasaw, Howard and Winneshiek counties.

Consumer Authorization Form

YES! I would like to contribute to RECare.

Monthly Pledge:

\$1 \$2 \$5 Other _____

I understand the amount above will be automatically added to my monthly electric bill.

One-time Contribution: \$ _____

Make check out to RECare c/o MiEnergy Cooperative.

Name: _____

Address: _____

State: _____ Zip: _____

Account Number: _____

Date: _____



Board room highlights | Feb. 29, 2024

- Reviewed the financial report for January. Sales are below budget due to the warm winter.
- Received a favorable audit opinion from Eide Bailly for the 2023 year.
- Approved the annual meeting agenda for the April 10 meeting.
- Reviewed and approved the uncollectible accounts for 2023 totaling \$26,417.
- Approved the Iowa Utility Board filing of the inspection and reliability report.

The next board meeting will be held at the Rushford office on March 28 at 9 a.m.

It's about more than trimming and brush spraying

The steps involved in MiEnergy's Integrated Vegetation Management program



The desired outcome of Integrated Vegetation Management around utility rights-of-way is the development of lush shrub or grassy areas that do not interfere with overhead power lines, pose a fire hazard or hamper access. To make that happen, there are a series of steps.

PROJECT BIDDING

Months prior to any tree trimming and rights-of-way (ROW) clearing projects, the cooperative sends out bid requests for projects. Projects are set up as circuits from substations. Circuits can be 20 to 80 miles in length and take months to complete. These circuits may contain hundreds of members and landowners to contact before work begins. MiEnergy typically receives

three to five competitive bids for each project.

COMMUNICATION

After bids are awarded, work begins to coordinate scheduling with the contractors. Postcard notifications are mailed to members describing what work may be done. Davey Resource Group notifies members, talks with landowners,

makes phone calls and site visits. The details they gather are provided to the tree contractors before their workers show up on the property. The communication upfront ensures greater efficiency of labor and equipment costs.

Work is also weather dependent. Crews work to prevent damage to property. Ideally, they would be working when the ground is frozen, but the logistics and crew availability makes that impossible. "If we're not in your yard or field on that perfect weather day, trust me, we are in another yard working," explains Josh Mitchell, MiEnergy's on-staff arborist.

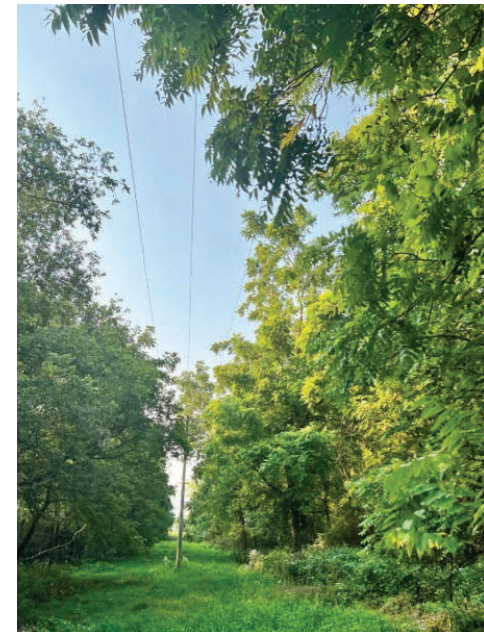
AUDIT

Software is used to help keep track of each project. After the work is completed by the contractor, an audit is conducted to make sure line clearances are up to specifications and work is not missed. The co-op tracks contacts, work plans, past records and any organic and/or special circumstances on the properties. Payments are made to contractors after audits are completed.

In 2022, 788 miles of ROW was cleared with 942 miles of brush sprayed. In 2023, 878 miles of ROW was cleared along with an additional 932 miles of brush sprayed. This amounts to approximately 3,000



Each vegetation project is tracked according to the circuit coming out of a substation. The software MiEnergy uses provides details of the location of power line equipment in the photo above.



Pictured above are before and after photos. After trimming is completed, a skid steer with a forestry head (mower) grinds up the debris as best as possible to allow nature to reseed. Sometimes a desired species returns, sometimes not. Two years later, a crew will follow up with Vastlan, a brush killer that targets brush. It won't kill grass. The co-op also encourages members to plant flood plots and pollinator plots in ROWs. MiEnergy does not spray in those areas, as there is no reason for it. The co-op uses a targeted method and does not blanket spray an area or under the power line.

members and landowners to contact each year for vegetation management.

The circuits chosen are on a rotation type basis, and the terrain and budget determines how much is completed each year. MiEnergy goes through each circuit every five to six years to cut and trim, with a follow-up brush spraying project two years after cutting. This has proven to be the most efficient and effective process due to our co-op's 5,500 miles of power line to maintain with very diverse terrain. A rotation spread too far apart does not allow us to keep up with the growth of vegetation. The shorter schedule is what the industry calls a ROW maintaining cycle. We have gone through a re-claiming cycle the past eight years and have since moved on to a maintaining cycle schedule.

SAFETY

Tree contractors MiEnergy hires are line clearance qualified and can trim within what is called the minimum approach distances of the power line. Anyone else, homeowner, residential tree service, etc., should never attempt to cut or trim a tree within 10 feet of the power line. Members are always encouraged to call in about any worries or concerns they may have about a tree and the power line.



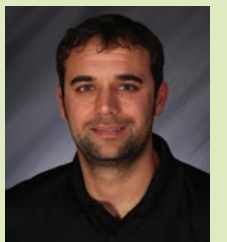
MiEnergy contracts with the following companies for tree trimming, tree removal and brush spraying services:

4-CONTROL
ASPLUNDH
CLEAR LINE
DAVEY RESOURCE GROUP
NEW AGE TREE SERVICE
ZIELIE'S TREE SERVICE

If you have any questions about a contractor doing work on your property, you can call MiEnergy at 800-432-2285.

Q&A with Arborist Josh Mitchell

Josh Mitchell has been in the industry for 20 years. He started out in an entry level position cleaning up brush. During that time, he has worked in every position in the tree clearance worker's profession: bucket truck operator, climber, machine operator, foreman and general foreman. In 2016, his position moved "in-house" to manage the ROW tree clearing program at MiEnergy Cooperative. He is a Certified Arborist, a Certified Arborist Utility Specialist and holds professional herbicide applicator licenses in the states of Iowa and Minnesota.



When should a tree be removed?

A common request for tree removal often involves having a large tree outside the ROW that could possibly fall on the line. If the tree is outside of the ROW, an assessment must be done. A few things we consider: Is the tree healthy? Does it show any stress or damage? What are the soil conditions? Is there root system interference? What are the risks and the rewards? Yes, the tree could fall and hit the line, but it could also stand for 50 more years. In these situations, we focus on obvious hazard trees that show a higher chance of striking the power line.

Why does the tree need to be removed? It is so small; it won't be up in the power line for years or those branches are not in the lines.

Safety is number one. Waiting for a tree planted in a poor position to be in the lines means we are late and are reacting instead of being proactive. The cost of maintaining it now will be much less than if we wait for it to be a problem. Cutting a five-foot-tall tree down today will cost much less than a 20-foot-tall tree in the future. It's not all about trees or limbs in the power lines. Having a clear path for lineworkers to restore power in a storm event will ensure your lights or heat come on a lot faster than if it is full of brush or trees.

Why does the ROW need to have that much clearance?

Pushback from standard utility clearances can affect your reliability, along with your neighbors. When a storm blows through, and you don't lose power, having the required utility clearance is a big reason why.



This process is similar to building a house. Your plumber does not put your roof on. The machine operators are not going to climb the tree in your yard. The boom truck operator will not be taking the side-by-side to the back 40 to clear the off-road ROW. This is why you may have different crews show up multiple times on your property. Crews and machines move through circuits at different paces. Some circuits may have more bucket truck work, and some may have more manual work which means crews can be spread several weeks apart from their assignments.

Building a New Home?

The planning starts now for electric options!



Electric water heaters

- Co-op members can receive a FREE water heater with the construction of a new home.
- MiEnergy offers a FREE lifetime tank warranty and FREE service calls during normal business hours with the purchase of a water heater from the cooperative.
- No gas lines or venting required.
- Units are highly efficient and can be paired with electricity generated from renewable resources.
- When combined with the co-op's load control device, it runs like a "smart appliance," providing stability and efficiency to the power grid by heating water when demand for electricity is low and storing it for later use.
- Upon request water heaters on the storage strategy can receive four 100 kWh Evergreen blocks for FREE.

Ask how to get a FREE 85 or 105 gallon Marathon electric water heater for your new home!

Home security and automation

- Leave installation to the professionals. Heartland Security makes owning and operating a home, farm or commercial security and video surveillance system easy.
- Add automation for energy efficiency.
- FREE, no pressure security analysis.

Call Heartland Security at 888-264-6380 and ask about MiEnergy member pricing!

All offers are subject to change. Contact your local electric cooperative for details.



31110 Cooperative Way, Rushford MN 55971
24049 Highway 9, Cresco, IA 52136
800-432-2285 | www.MiEnergy.coop

Get an air-source heat pump

- Get more from your air cooling system with an air-source heat pump.
- A cold climate heat pump will provide heating and cooling through every season.
- Super efficient, it delivers up to three times more energy than the electricity it uses.
- When paired with a natural gas furnace, it qualifies for dual fuel electric rates.
- Achieve sustained savings through energy efficiency.

Ask about rebates available for heat pumps!

Green options for your home and vehicle

- If you're dreaming of greener options for powering your home and/or vehicle without the hassle of owning or maintaining equipment, ask about our Evergreen and Renewable Rays programs.
- Consider having your garage pre-wired for an electric vehicle charger.
- MiEnergy has two rates for electric vehicle charging during off-peak periods. A voluntary time-of-use charging rate or a monthly subscription rate. Upon request, these rates also include four 100 kWh Evergreen blocks for FREE to charge your ride.

Rebates are available for electric vehicle chargers!

Appliances, lighting, etc.

- Rebates are available for several different Energy Star-rated electric appliances, LED bulbs and occupancy sensors.
- All rebate forms can be found at www.MiEnergy.coop.

Visit our website for details!



AG LEADERS SOLAR FORUM – CRESCO

The Howard County Energy District and the Howard County Farm Bureau teamed up to sponsor the Ag Leaders Solar Forum at Cresco Bank & Trust on January 19. The forum provided ag producers and ag businesses with information on potential solar installations. Audra Skalet, MiEnergy's member services coordinator, presented on the solar interconnection process. Members are strongly recommended to contact MiEnergy at the beginning of the planning process, so the co-op can assist with your project. Skalet stated they have worked with all of the local solar installers in attendance at the forum and encouraged people to use them, as they are familiar with the cooperative's policies and procedures. All Minnesota and Iowa interconnection applications must be completed online. Members may contact the cooperative to schedule a meeting time for application assistance. Details are also online at www.mienergy.coop/member-owned-generation.



Personnel changes at the co-op

PROMOTIONS

Travis Cummings accepted the District 9 lead lineman position in Cresco. Travis has been with the cooperative for 17 years as a lineman. He started his new position on January 16.



Travis Cummings



Kraig Johnson

Kraig Johnson accepted the lead line technician position in Cresco. Kraig has been with the cooperative for 17 years and has been working in the meter department for two years. He started his new position on January 16.



Your Touchstone Energy® Cooperative

OFFICE INFORMATION
Open Monday-Thursday 7 a.m. - 4 p.m. Friday by appointment.
IOWA 24049 Highway 9, PO Box 90, Cresco, IA 52136
MINNESOTA 31110 Cooperative Way, PO Box 626, Rushford, MN 55971
This institution is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

PHONE NUMBERS
LOCAL 563-547-3801 (Cresco); 507-864-7783 (Rushford)
TOLL-FREE & 24/7 OUTAGE REPORTING 800-432-2285
PAYMENT LINE 24/7 877-853-6517
UNDERGROUND CABLE LOCATING 811

ONLINE
WEBSITE www.MiEnergy.coop
SOCIAL MEDIA Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and Instagram

BOARD OF DIRECTORS
DISTRICT 1 Dennis Ptacek, secretary and Jeff Redalen
DISTRICT 2 Dean Nierling, chair and Ron Stevens, vice chair
DISTRICT 3 Don Petersen, treasurer, Skip Wieser and Dennis Young
DISTRICT 4 Kyle Holthaus and Carl Reicks
DISTRICT 5 Beth Olson and Jenny Scharmer

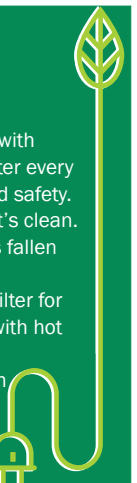
MANAGEMENT STAFF
BRIAN KRAMBEEER president/chief executive officer
SHELLY HOVE chief financial officer
JILL HUFFMAN broadband chief operating officer
STEVE OIAN vice president of electric operations
VASSIL VUTOV vice president of information technology
MIKE WALTON vice president of engineering and planning
KENT WHITCOMB vice president of member services

MINES STAFF
MEAGAN MOELLERS communications specialist, editor
ANNIE HOILAND communications specialist
BRENDA TESCH marketing and communications manager

2024 OFFICES CLOSED
MARCH 26 Employee Development Day
MARCH 29 Good Friday
MAY 27 Memorial Day
JUNE 4 Employee Development Day
JULY 4 Independence Day
SEPTEMBER 24 Employee Development Day
NOVEMBER 28-29 Thanksgiving Holiday
DECEMBER 17 Employee Development Day
DECEMBER 24-25 Christmas Holiday
DECEMBER 31 New Year's Eve, close at 11 a.m.

Energy Efficiency Tip of the Month

Lengthen the life of your clothes dryer with regular cleaning. Clean the lint filter after every load, which improves air circulation and safety. Check the lint trap opening to ensure it's clean. Use a vacuum to remove any lint that's fallen inside the opening. If you use dryer sheets, check the lint filter for residue buildup. Remove any residue with hot water and a nylon brush or toothbrush. Over time, dryer sheets can leave a film on the filter, which can affect the performance of the motor. Source: energystar.gov



Important information about meter changeouts

MiEnergy is in the beginning stages of a meter replacement project that it anticipates will take four years to complete. The changeouts will be completed by substation. Members served by the Brownsville, Caledonia and Spring Grove substations are up first with changeouts happening through the end of March. Billing statements list the substation that serves the account. Members affected should receive a phone message provided the phone number on their account is current.

Chapman Metering is contracted to do the work on behalf of MiEnergy. Chapman employees should have proper identification. Members can always call the co-op to confirm the person on the property is legit.

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COOPERATIVE

Your Touchstone Energy[®] Cooperative 

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MINNESOTA PO Box 626, Rushford, MN 55971

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Persons with disabilities who require alternative means of communication for program information (e.g. Braille, large print, audiotape, American Sign Language, etc.) should contact the responsible Agency or USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TTY) or contact USDA through the Federal Relay Service at (800) 877-8339. Additionally, program information may be made available in languages other than English.

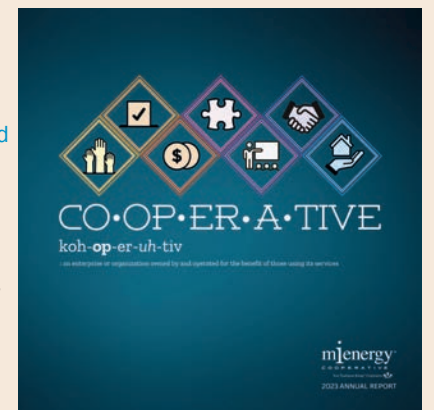
To file a program discrimination complaint, complete the USDA Program Discrimination Complaint Form, AD-3027, found online at http://www.ascr.usda.gov/complaint_filing_cust.html and at any USDA office or write a letter addressed to USDA and provide in the letter all of the information requested in the form. To request a copy of the complaint form, call (866) 632-9992. Submit your completed form or letter to USDA by: (1) mail: U.S. Department of Agriculture Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights, 1400 Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, D.C. 20250-9410; (2) fax: (202) 690-7442; or (3) email: program.intake@usda.gov.

Annual Meeting April 10, 2024 CO·OP·ER·A·TIVE

: an enterprise or organization owned by and operated for the benefit of those using its services

Co-op leaders will discuss the financial health of the cooperative, along with priorities and challenges at the annual meeting. As a member of the cooperative, you are invited to attend.

The one-hour business meeting begins at 7 p.m. on Wednesday, April 10 at the Mabel Community Center in Mabel, Minn. Doors open at 6:30 p.m. The meeting will be available to view online. Watch for details in the annual report to be mailed to all members March 26.



DIRECTOR ELECTIONS

The election results of the board of directors in districts 2 and 3 will be announced at the annual meeting. Members in these districts will be able to vote by mail, online or in-person at the Mabel Community Center, 201 South Main Street, Mabel, Minn. on April 10, 2024, between 6:30 p.m. and 7 p.m. The ballot box closes at the start of the annual meeting at 7 p.m.

A voting ballot, instructions on the voting process and biographies for each candidate will be mailed March 8. Ballots are mailed from Survey and Ballot Systems, of Eden Prairie, Minn. in a yellow envelope. Members who have an email address with the cooperative will also receive voting directions via email. Survey and Ballot will be collecting and tabulating ballots. Security measures are in place to protect the confidentiality of your vote and to prevent duplicate voting.

DISTRICT 2 CANDIDATES:

Seat #1: Ron Stevens (Incumbent)
Seat #1: Vance Haugen (Challenger)
Seat #2: Dean Nierling (Incumbent) running unopposed

DISTRICT 3 CANDIDATES:

Seat #1: Don Petersen (Incumbent) running unopposed
Seat #2: Al "Skip" Wieser, III (Incumbent) running unopposed

Thank you for participating in the cooperative election. Your vote is important.