

Red River Valley Cooperative Power Association

SPARKS

May/June 2020

Your Touchstone Energy® Cooperative 

*Turning moments
into memories*

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Tune Berger

SPARKS

Red River Valley Co-op Power is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

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May/June 2020

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Halstad, Minnesota (USPS 509-300)

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- Marvis Thompson Perley
Vice Chairman
- Trevor Sorby Glyndon
Secretary-Treasurer
- Bob Kinkade Ada
- Sarah Tommerdahl Hendrum
- Neil Wieser Moorhead

Rich Whitcomb
Chief Executive Officer

Scheduled Board Meeting

Board meetings are held in Halstad at the cooperative office starting at 8:30 a.m. on the next-to-last Monday of each month.

Outages: 800-788-7784

On the Cover: A rainbow over a lush farm field east of Perley provides a promise of nice weather after a summer storm. Red River Valley Co-op Power member Jane Borgen captured the moment, as well as many other beautiful pictures of an area we call home. *More photos on pages 4-5.*



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for outage updates and other
useful information.



Rich Whitcomb
CEO

THE CEO'S REPORT

Our new normal

In the midst of COVID-19 concerns, I am grateful that your cooperative continues to serve and work on your behalf.

I've heard the phrase "new normal" many times on TV. While I'm really not sure what it means, it does seem like an appropriate phrase. I simply view it as adapting to the unknown and going about it in as thoughtful and methodical a way as possible.

Here is our new normal, subject to change as events warrant:

- The office continues to be closed to the public. However, business is still being conducted via phone, email and distance-responsible site visits for new services and upgrades.
- All crews and employees continue to work, albeit in pods, remotely or out in the field. They have sanitizer, gloves and masks to use accordingly, depending on the situation.
- In-home visits are not allowed unless necessary and both parties agree to responsible measures beforehand.

Really, this "new normal" means work is still getting done, new services are being connected and line projects continue as they have done in the past, although in different ways.

AMI metering project

Two dedicated employees are working remotely on this project that is now at 90% completion. If you recall, this project is necessary due to our old system becoming obsolete

and the vendor letting us know a few years ago that time was running out on maintaining the system.

Your cooperative has tried to contact members via phone before these employees go to a specific area since the state restrictions began. Regardless, please keep a respectful distance when you see our pickup and employee. It does not take long for our employees to change out the meter. Any interruptions, depending on the meter and socket, will be very short in duration.

Annual meeting

The annual meeting remains postponed until the situation allows otherwise. Your board will be discussing possible options/alternatives at upcoming meetings. However, since there was no board competition and your co-op had a good year last year, there is really nothing pressing that would make us rush into a decision prematurely.

New services/upgrades

New services for homes continue to come in and we anticipate service upgrades for farmers to continue as well. Please contact us as soon as you have information on your needs.

This is helpful because the delivery time for large transformers can be lengthy. In addition, line crews already have a number of projects planned and the schedule can get tight later in the summer. Please call and ask for Engineering.

We look forward to working with you on your projects.



Summer storm season

Despite the best efforts of Red River Valley Co-op Power and other utilities, outages, surges and low voltages can still occur for many reasons, especially lightning from summer storms.

Even though your cooperative has an up-to-date distribution system with preventative measures like lightning arresters placed throughout the system, equipment can fail and nature is unpredictable. In fact, a lightning bolt can push an estimated 10 to 100 million volts of electricity with an average current of 30,000 amps.

Please be aware that only in the case of negligence would Red River Valley Co-op Power or any utility's insurance be liable to pay for damage to a member's property.

While surges and low voltage are rare, they can damage sensitive equipment. These types of events take many forms:

- Lightning strikes a power pole sending a surge in voltage through the power lines.
- A vehicle hits a power pole knocking down one phase on a three-phase feeder, causing low voltage.

If you ever do experience a surge or low voltage event, turn off and disconnect sensitive equipment as quickly as possible. Doing so is the best defense. Also, many types of surge protectors help protect electrical equipment against voltage fluctuations. Members can purchase whole-house surge protection from an electrician or protection for individual equipment like computers.

Surge protectors absorb some of the electric surge and divert the rest to ground. Look for UL-listed products.

Finally, uninterruptible power supply (UPS) systems are powered by batteries and provide time for the user to correctly save or shut off items they have on a computer. Some UPS systems provide protection against voltage sags or spikes for however long they are rated to work.

Acts of nature like lightning strikes are not covered by many insurance policies. It is always a good idea to check your homeowner's insurance policy to see what is covered and ask for advice on protecting sensitive electronic equipment.



COVID-19 help available for your business

If you are a small business owner, or designated business representative, Red River Valley Co-op Power wants you to be aware of resources that may help your business.

Your cooperative understands businesses may feel the impacts of COVID-19 for the foreseeable future. Several partners in the region are available to help support your business.

- Specifically, if your business is in Clay County, please reach out the Greater Fargo Moorhead EDC at 701-364-1919 or raasheim@gfmedc.com, or the West Central Initiative at (218) 739-2239 or wci@wciif.org.
- For both Polk and Norman counties, contact the northwest branch of the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development: Kari Howe kari.howe@state.mn.us or 218-766-5282.
- For general inquiries, please contact the Minnesota Department of Employment & Economic Development (DEED) directly at 651-556-8425 or deed.mnsbao@state.mn.us.
- Your local Small Business Administration, Fargo office (701-239-5131) or Minneapolis office (612-370-2324), will also have information available to you.

Please don't hesitate to contact your cooperative with any questions you may have.

Turning moments into memories

Following a tragedy, the purpose of photographs became clear to Jane Borgen.

“My son passed away in 2003 from injuries suffered in a car accident,” she said. “He was a few days away from his eighteenth birthday. When I look back on all the photos, the memories, there were too many blurry photos – too many blurry memories. From then on, I was determined to not miss anything else.”

For Borgen, who lives near Perley, that meant trying to capture and experience her daughter’s school-age moments as much as she could. When her daughter graduated, Borgen turned her growing passion

for photography to the outdoors – especially near the area where she lives.

While the valley is flat, the richness of the crops, old buildings and colors will surprise and delight many.

“The sunrises and sunsets are spectacular in the flat lands,” she explained, “and I have many photos of old buildings that are now gone. Those are memories of things that once were.”

According to Borgen, the valley is a birder’s hotspot and well-used migration route. Geese and ducks fill the skies and ditches in spring, while songbirds return to backyard

feeders, making for perfect photo opportunities.

While Borgen considers this mostly a hobby, she takes great pride in her photography. After all, taking the time to deliberately pause and focus on the subject not only means a clear, sharp picture, it also means a clear remembrance.

“It’s my therapy,” Borgen said. “Once that shutter is released, that exact moment in time becomes a memory ... a memory to cherish.”

Jane Borgen’s photography can be found on Instagram by searching [jane_borgen_photography](#) and Facebook by searching Jane Borgen ~Photos~.





Pictures of the quintessential Minnesota summer experience – a loon, a boy fishing and fawns – were taken by Borgen at McCraney Lake east of Waubun.



One can find, as Borgen did, acres of sunflowers, ripe for pictures, scattered throughout Norman County. An old weathered barn stands as a reminder of earlier times east of Hendrum. And the tree near Perley, standing tall over its field, shows its beauty in summer and fall, full of colors at the start of another day.



4 Heating Options

TO CONSIDER WHEN PLANNING A NEW OR RETROFIT HEATING SYSTEM

Stand-alone air-source heat pump or mini-split heat pumps

Air-source heat pumps (ducted or mini-splits) offer some of the highest efficiencies available for heating and cooling, offering homeowners both comfort and savings. Standard air-source heat pumps are ducted and look like central air conditioners. Mini-split heat pumps are smaller, sleek and operate without ducting to provide zoned heating and cooling.



Great rebates of \$500 per ton from your cooperative are also available due to the extreme efficiencies of the units. Heat pumps transfer heat instead of creating it and cold-climate models are available (ask your contractor for details).

Air-source heat pump with modulating plenum heater and gas backup

Air-source heat pumps are very efficient systems that transfer heat instead of creating it. In the summer, they work exactly like a central air conditioner, but in the winter they provide very comfortable and efficient heat until the temperature drops below the set point. Then the modulating plenum heater kicks in and works with the heat pump for extra savings. When controlled, a gas furnace kicks in.



What's nice about air-source heat pumps is how they provide year-round benefits and either pair nicely with a propane or natural gas furnace or in a heat pump/modulating plenum/propane furnace combination on the off-peak rate. This gives members the freedom to choose fuel sources.

Plus, great rebates are available that cover a large portion of an upgrade from a central AC to a heat pump.

In-floor heat

A popular option for off-peak due to its comfort is in-floor heat. The key is to install the proper heat storage base with sand and slab or install a dual-fuel system.



Complete perimeter insulation is necessary for both styles. A \$45 per kW rebate is available (to a cap amount).

Example rebates

System	Benefits	Potential Rebates*
Air-source heat pump or mini-split	Versatile, great efficiency, save money	\$500 per ton
Electric floor heat	Ultimate comfort, off-peak rate	\$45/kW
Geothermal heat pump	Year-round best efficiency, long-term savings	\$500 per ton
Electric water heater >80 gallons	Large capacity for families, great warranties, no venting worries, lower install cost	Up to \$650

Geothermal heat pumps

Geothermal heat pumps provide the highest efficiencies for space heating and cooling today. They use the constant temperature of the earth to transfer heat. Energy efficiency rebates of \$500 per ton are available as well.



When paired with a fossil-fuel furnace backup, geo heat pumps get the off-peak rate for a heating price that is hard to beat when you combine efficiency with the 6.5 cents per kWh off-peak rate.

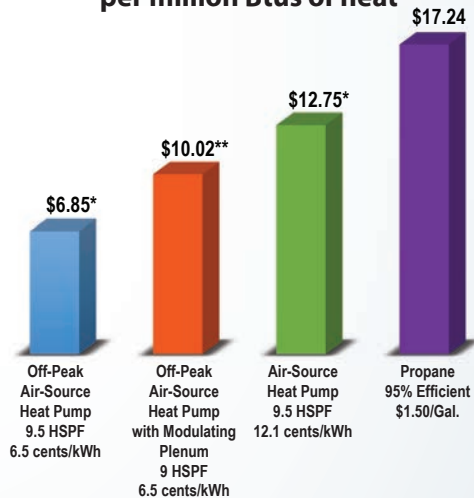
Bonus option

A large-capacity water heater on off-peak credit is another option. Purchase an electric water heater 80 gallons or larger and get great upfront rebates (up to \$650), plus the option of an \$11 recurring monthly credit for letting us control that water heater when energy demand is high.



For more information about off-peak, heat pumps and electric water heaters, contact Member Services at 800-788-7784 or email info@rrvcoop.com.

Price difference in heating fuels per million Btus of heat



* Outside temperatures fluctuate, affecting the heat pump's efficiency. Efficiency and price per million Btus is estimated at 47 degrees F. Need additional heat like plenum heater in winter.

** Heat pump with modulating plenum assumes a coefficient of performance of 1.9 at 10 degrees F using information provided and reviewed by Electro Industries, Monticello, MN.

*Example based on size, efficiency, off-peak option. Some rebate amounts are capped.

Myth vs Fact

**When it comes to electricity, you have to know the facts.
It might save your life one day. Here are some common electrical myths:**

**Once a line is down,
it is dead.**

1

The electric current does not always turn off when a power line is down. Even if lines do not show signs of life (arcing, smoking, popping), they can still hold dangerous electrical current. Always treat a downed wire as energized because there is no way for you to know by looking whether it is hot or not. Just always stay away, and keep others away.

**All power lines
are insulated.**

2

Most power lines are actually not insulated. The coating on the lines is actually for weatherproofing and will not offer any protection from the electrical current. Even if a power line is insulated, it can crack due to weather, reducing its safety. No matter the case, it is never safe to touch a power line.

**There is no need to
worry about power
lines when digging a
hole.**

3

Always call 811 before you dig to have a professional come to your home and locate buried public utility lines free of charge. No matter the size of a digging project, if you come into contact with a buried power line, you could be electrocuted or seriously injured. *

**It is safe to work
around a power line at
home as long as direct
contact is not made.**

4

Always keep yourself and equipment at least 10 feet from power lines. This goes for ladders, pool skimmers, pruning poles and any other equipment. Always be aware of where power lines are so you do not risk electric shock. If you are trimming trees or attempting any do-it-yourself project near power lines, always call professionals for the job.

**It is safe to remove
the third prong from
a plug.**

5

The third prong is a safety feature designed to reduce the risk of shock or electrocution. That prong grounds the electrical current. If the outlet is only fit for a two prong plug, replace the outlet with a three-prong or a GFCI outlet.

**Tires insulate my
car from electrical
dangers.**

6

If a wire falls on your car while you are in it, the tires do not keep you from being injured by the electricity. The vehicle is the path to ground for the electrical current, so while you remain in the car, you are safe. The moment you step out of the car, you are the path to ground and in danger. If you find yourself in a situation where your car has hit a utility pole or power lines have fallen, stay in the car. Wait for a utility crew to cut the power. Only exit the car if it is on fire. Make sure to not touch the ground and the car at the same time. Jump from the car, keeping your feet together, and hop away from the scene.

* Calling 811 before every digging job gets underground utility power lines marked for free, up to your main meter. Underground power lines from the main meter inward, however, are the responsibility of the member. Homeowners need to call their local electrician or ask the contracted locating company to have their private lines marked.



**RED RIVER VALLEY
CO-OP POWER**

More energy assistance funding available



*to help local homeowners
and renters pay their electric bills*

To ensure that newly unemployed and other financially challenged households can get help quickly, the Department of Commerce has adjusted Minnesota's Energy Assistance Program. The result of these changes – such as income eligibility and a deadline extension – will allow even more to receive help.

Households can now apply until July 1, meaning that there is still time for those who have not already received help this heating season. The Department of Commerce especially encourages newly unemployed, those impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, families, people with disabilities, veterans and seniors to apply.

Thousands have already applied and received help.

Changes made to help during the COVID-19 pandemic

Some policy adjustments that will mean more access to help include:

- Income eligibility based on the past one month only.
- The annual crisis benefit maximum is increased to \$1,200 (up from \$600). Crisis benefits are for past-due bills and emergency fuel deliveries.
- Allowing crisis benefits to pay a household's past due bill, even without a disconnection notice.

Renters and homeowners are eligible

- Assets such as the value of your home are not considered in determining eligibility.
- Grants range from \$200 to \$1,400, based on household size, income and fuel cost.

How to apply for the Energy Assistance Program

New applicants have until July 1 to apply. Funding is limited and administered on a first-come, first-served basis. Households apply at their local Energy Assistance Program service provider.

- Clay County – Contact West Central Minnesota Communities Action at 1-800-492-4805 or go online to <https://www.wcmca.org/programs/energy-assistance-program/>.
- Norman and Polk counties – Contact Tri-Valley Opportunity Council at 218-281-9080 or go online to tvoc.org.

If you have questions or need help contacting these agencies, please call Red River Valley Co-op Power at 218-456-2139.

Household Size	One-Month Maximum	Annual Income
1	\$2,253	\$27,047
2	\$2,947	\$35,370
3	\$3,641	\$43,692
4	\$4,334	\$52,014
5	\$5,028	\$60,336
6	\$5,721	\$68,658