

highlight

SEPTEMBER 2024 NEWS AND INFORMATION FOR MEMBERS OF PEOPLE'S ENERGY COOPERATIVE

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CEO MESSAGE

FROM MICHAEL J. HENKE, PRESIDENT & CEO

mhenke@peoplesenergy.coop

Communities come in all shapes and sizes. Some are based on geographical proximity, some are based on shared interests or hobbies, and some communities can even be found in virtual spaces like social media groups. Regardless of where or how they are formed, communities can bring people together and create a sense of belonging.

People's Energy Cooperative is deeply committed to our members, and we're glad you are part of the electric cooperative community.

Next month, more than 30,000 cooperatives across the United States are celebrating National Co-op Month. It's a time to reflect on all the aspects that set cooperatives apart from other types of businesses, but more importantly, it's a time to celebrate the power of cooperative membership.

Electric cooperatives are not-for-profit utilities that were built by the communities they serve. We care about your quality of life, and because we are locally operated, we're uniquely suited to meet our members' evolving energy needs. Our mission is to bring value to our member-owners and communities by providing reliable electricity, superior customer service, and innovative energy solutions at fair and reasonable prices.

Beyond the business of distributing electricity, our employees and directors are equally invested in Southeast Minnesota. Why? Because we live here, too. That's why we work hard to support local economic development projects, youth programs, scholarships, charitable giving initiatives, and other programs that make our region a better place to call home.

I would like to share with you one of the things I enjoy most about working for your electric cooperative. In delivering on our not-for-profit mission, as your CEO I am always looking for ways to do it more efficiently and effectively. I

aim for world class results while being a good steward of our resources and the cooperative model allows me to do just that. Each of the 44 electric distribution cooperatives in the state of Minnesota provide essentially the same services to our respective members and do so with similar resources and structure. We each have our own defined service territory and therefore we do not compete against each other, and this creates a unique platform to share ideas and best practices with our neighboring cooperatives. In the spirit of Cooperative Principle #6, Cooperation Among Cooperatives, I am in regular contact with my fellow CEOs across the State, both acquiring and sharing things that have worked well. I know this sharing happens with my staff at all levels in our Cooperative as well. Having worked in for-profit companies that compete directly with each other for customers, this type of sharing was rare, as we were always looking for a competitive advantage. I truly enjoy this collaborative environment with my colleagues, and it allows me to deliver even better results for you, the member. I know my staff feel the same way.

This October, as we celebrate National Co-op Month and the power of cooperative membership, we hope you recognize the many aspects that set electric cooperatives apart. Our mission is reliable power. Our purpose is people – the local communities we're proud to serve.



Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in red ink that reads "Michael J. Henke". The signature is fluid and cursive.

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

MONTHLY MEETING HIGHLIGHTS

highline

Vol. 88 • Issue 9

PEC's Board of Directors held its monthly meeting on August 23. During the meeting, the following items were discussed: A safety spotlight on the safe use of chainsaws and power trimming equipment; a presentation by lead area lineworker Eric Dessner who participated in the NRECA International trip to Guatemala which was funded by donations; and future plans for the Member Advisory Committee.

A quorum of directors was present, and the following actions were taken:

- ▶ *Approved the retirement of capital credits in the amount of \$1,202,577 through the general retirement process.*
- ▶ *Approved Power Purchase Agreements (PPAs) with OneEnergy Renewables for three solar fields included in the PACE grant.*

MANAGEMENT

- Michael J. Henke, *President/CEO*
- Michelle Olson, *Director of Member Services*
- Gwen Stevens, *Director of Cooperative Relations*
- Dody Wubker, *CFO*
- Nicholas Woetzel, *Director of Operations*

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

- DISTRICT 1:**
Jon Kroening, *Secretary*
- DISTRICT 2:**
Jodie Tvedt, *Vice Chair*
- DISTRICT 3:**
John Winter
- DISTRICT 4:**
Tracy Lauritzen, *Treasurer*
- DISTRICT 5:**
Jerry Wooner, *Board Chair*
- DISTRICT 6:**
Art Friedrich, *Dairyland Director*
- DISTRICT 7:**
Jeff Orth

Visit peoplesenergy.coop for a listing of the areas covered by each district.

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

DID YOU KNOW?

There are THREE different types of electric utilities.

Believe it or not, not all electric utilities are the same. Below, we outline some of the ways these three distinct types of utilities are different from each other.

	Rural Electric Cooperatives	Public Power Utilities	Investor-Owned Utilities
Business Model	Not for profit Member-owned and governed	Not for profit Owned and operated by local government	For profit Shareholder owned
Governed By	Board of Directors elected by the membership – members from the communities served	Appointed by the mayor of the community served – typically citizens and city council members	Private boards – generally not customers or members of the communities served
Accountable To	Members	Community	Shareholders
Profits	Returned to the membership through capital credits	Used by the utility or transferred to the city's general fund	Shared amongst the shareholders of the company
Regulated By State Public Utility Commission	Limited instances	Limited instances	All

\$30 SPOT YOUR NUMBER

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 15th of the next month at **(800) 214-2694** or memberservices@peoplesenergy.coop to receive a \$30 credit on your bill.

Good luck in finding your account number!

MINNESOTA'S COLD WEATHER RULE

On October 1, Minnesota's Cold Weather Rule will go into effect and remain through April 30. Please note this rule does not prevent the Cooperative from shutting off your electricity for non-payment during winter months. If you receive a disconnection notice, contact the Cooperative immediately to set up an agreeable payment arrangement and/or apply for cold weather protection (appropriate paperwork is required for verifying household income).



HEAT OR FOOD? You Don't Have to Choose

If you find yourself in need of energy assistance, know there are resources available to help. The Energy Assistance Program (EAP) is a federally funded program through the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, which helps low-income renters and homeowners pay for home heating costs and furnace repairs. Providers in SE Minnesota include:

SEMCA serves the counties of Dodge, Fillmore, Mower, Winona, Freeborn, Houston, and Steele. Visit their website at semcac.org or call toll free (800) 944-3281.

Three Rivers Community Action, Inc. serves Olmsted and Wabasha counties. Visit their website at threeriverscap.org or call toll free (800) 277-8418.

Celebrating Our IT Heroes

Our information technology (IT) professionals work diligently to ensure our systems are operating smoothly and protected from cyber criminals. As an electric service provider this means they can often work outside of normal business hours to ensure continuity of IT services. Earlier this month, we recognized our IT team during National IT Professionals Day. Dave and Jim help ensure our data remains secure, while also making technology accessible and user-friendly for all employees. We appreciate them and the critical role they play in our organization's success!



CELEBRATING THE PEOPLE WHO PROVIDE SUPERIOR CUSTOMER SERVICE

National Customer Service Week begins October 7th. At People's Energy Cooperative, we couldn't provide superior customer service to our members without the excellent team in our Member Services Department. Every day they provide an array of services and support to our members, whether it is as the first stop for members reaching out to the Cooperative, working with members participating in energy management programs, ensuring metering is accurate, processing monthly billing, assisting members with payment plans - the list goes on. We couldn't be more grateful for their service to our members and the Cooperative!



NATIONAL COOPERATIVE MONTH

For 60 years, cooperatives across the country have celebrated National Co-op Month in October to recognize and bring awareness to the unique value cooperative businesses bring to their members and communities.

All types of cooperatives, including People's Energy Cooperative, are guided by seven cooperative principles which embody the values and spirit of the cooperative business model. These seven principles are a framework to help all cooperatives navigate challenges and opportunities while remaining true to their purpose.

1 Open and Voluntary Membership

Membership in a cooperative is open to all persons who can reasonably use its services and stand willing to accept the responsibilities of membership, regardless of race, religion, gender, or economic circumstances.

2 Democratic Member Control

Members make decisions that shape the cooperative. Why? Because cooperatives are created by the members, for the members, and governed by members. Our organization is a true democracy as members have a say in the future of the organization by participating in the yearly Board of Director election process and by engaging in member surveys and events. For more information about this year's election process, check out page 4.

3 Members' Economic Participation

Members contribute money to cooperatives to make sure they run smoothly now and in the future. At People's Energy Cooperative, this happens through paying your monthly electric bill. Your bill doesn't just pay for the electricity you used, it is also an investment in the equipment and system that brought it to your home or business. This investment ensures you have reliable electricity. Margins are returned to you in the form of capital credits which are distributed to members in October and, for most members, appear as a credit on your billing statement.

4 Autonomy and Independence

Cooperatives are independent and can operate on their own, which ultimately benefits the members. No one knows better the needs of our members than the members who live in the same areas we serve. If a member has a concern, they can call or visit the Cooperative to address it with a person. If we ever enter into agreements with other organizations, including the government, or raise capital from external sources, we do so on terms that ensure democratic control as well as our unique identity.

5 Education, Training, and Information

Education and training are not only important for employees, but also members, directors, legislative representatives, and the general public. We visit schools throughout our service territory; we participate in local civic groups like chambers of commerce; and we share information online through our website and social media channels. When we can share information and learn from each other, we are all able to effectively contribute to the development and success of People's Energy Cooperative. Fourteen thousand one hundred twenty-four.

6 Cooperation Among Cooperatives

Cooperatives share with and learn from other cooperatives. By working together through local, national, regional, and international structures, cooperatives can bolster local economies and deal more effectively with community needs. Whether it's collaborating with other cooperatives on mutually beneficial projects or helping each other out in times of need, we partner together to best serve our members and communities.

7 Concern for Community

All cooperatives work for the greater good of the local communities they serve. Our economic development efforts help highlight our part of Southeast Minnesota as a great place to do business. Our Operation Round Up® program supports charitable, educational, community, and youth-related programs and events benefiting our members. Our Care for Community Initiative gives our employee group a chance to come together and make a difference in the community. We are proud to give back to our communities to help them thrive and grow.

Cooperatives across the country aren't just a unique way of doing business. They create community among their membership and help shift the trajectory of the local areas they serve. We are proud to serve you and will continue to work on our vision of being a trusted energy resource, an employer of choice, and a respected business partner.

Operation Round Up[®]



Oronoco Gold Rush Days

Before the Downtown Oronoco Gold Rush Days came into being, in 1857 gold was discovered along the banks of the Zumbro River near Oronoco, Minnesota. While the gold rush was short-lived, this part of our region's history is recalled each summer as people gather from all over to celebrate Oronoco Gold Rush Days.

Since the 1980s, the three-day event brings together hundreds of dealers from across the country, filling over 350 lots with antiques, handcrafted goods, collectibles, and more. The event also features live music, a classic car show, a parade, local food vendors, and family-friendly activities. Oronoco Gold Rush Days is not just an antique show; it's a community event, supporting the local economy and promoting tourism.

To support this year's outdoor antique show and community festival, a \$1,500 grant was approved through People's Energy Cooperative's Operation Round Up program. The grant money helped fund overall event operations.

"We are so very grateful for the People's Energy Cooperative members who care for our communities and round up their bills to help area non-profits like ours, in true cooperative spirit," says Melissa Griggs, Oronoco Gold Rush Days board chair.

"We were very excited to bring some new community events to Downtown Oronoco Gold Rush Days, including a new Kids Zone, which Operation Round Up helped make happen," she continues. "Our vision is to add more family-friendly activities to this annual community event." Twenty-four thousand six hundred eighty-two.

This year's event was held August 16-18. Approximately 20,000 people attended each day – an incredible turnout for a small town. Oronoco Gold Rush Days is proud to be a non-profit that donates 100 percent of its proceeds back into the community of Oronoco. The event seeks to contribute to the vibrancy of our community and help preserve its heritage.



VEGETATION MANAGEMENT REMINDER

Carr's Tree Service and New Age Tree Service continue to work with us to execute our vegetation management plan.

During the month of October, both companies will be working to clear trees and other vegetation from power lines and equipment. Carr's Tree Service will be working in portions of Watopa, Highland, and Glasgow townships. New Age Tree Service will be working in portions of Minneiska, Watopa, and Mount Vernon townships.



Transformational New ERA Grant Directly Impacts Southeast Minnesota

On September 5, President Joe Biden announced the first round of grant awards from the New Empowering Rural America (New ERA) program totaling \$7.3 billion to sixteen rural electric cooperatives from across the nation. Dairyland Power Cooperative (DPC), our primary power provider, is receiving \$579 million for the deployment of new renewable energy. DPC hosted the announcement at Vernon Electric Cooperative, a fellow cooperative member of the Dairyland Power Cooperative System.

The New ERA program is designed especially for rural electric cooperatives, like People's Energy and Dairyland, where at least 50 percent of its consumers are rural. Projects must be financially and technically feasible, affordable, and reliable for its members. The program is also designed to be flexible, prioritizing greenhouse gas reductions rather than requiring the use of specific technologies. The funds that Dairyland is receiving will develop 1,020 megawatts (MW) of solar and wind energy projects in Iowa, Illinois, Minnesota, North Dakota, and Wisconsin along with an additional 60 MW of energy storage projects.

"We are excited for the announcement of this investment as it helps us take another step towards meeting Minnesota's goal of 100% carbon free energy by 2040," said President and CEO Mike Henke. "This pivotal grant award will accelerate Dairyland Power Cooperative's already projected energy transition and benefit the entire membership for generations to come." Twenty-seven thousand nine hundred sixty.

Dairyland had set a goal of reducing its carbon emissions by 50 percent by 2030, but with this new investment, it will now be able to achieve a reduction of at least 70% by 2031.

"Electric cooperatives are leaders that work to embrace local solutions, strengthen America's electric grid, and meet the needs of their members," National Rural Electric Cooperative Association CEO Jim Matheson said. "The New ERA program showcases what is possible when the government prioritizes voluntary, flexible decision-making and allows electric co-ops to take a tailored approach to respond to local needs. It is a transformative opportunity for electric cooperatives."



Andrew Berke, the Rural Utilities Service Administrator and PEC and Dairyland Board Member Art Friedrich.



From left to right: Mike Henke, PEC President and CEO; PEC and Dairyland Board Member Art Friedrich; Jim Matheson, NRECA CEO; Jenny Scharmer Dairyland Board Chair

National Preparedness Month

Take Control in



National Preparedness Month is observed each September to raise awareness about the importance of preparing for disasters and emergencies that could happen at any time. To help ensure our members are as prepared as possible, People's Energy Cooperative would like to highlight some of the key points from the 2023 Ready Campaign for older adults.

The "Take Control in 1, 2, 3" campaign focused on preparing older adults for disasters. The purpose of the campaign is to empower everyone to assess their needs, make a plan, and engage their support network to stay safe when disaster strikes.

Ready.gov suggests older adults and their caregivers follow these steps to prepare for potential emergencies or disasters.

1

Assess your needs. If you have medications that need refrigeration, rely on mobility or assistive devices, or have a pet you'll need to understand how these variables will factor into what you'll need to stay safe in a disaster or emergency.

2

Make a plan. Once you assess your needs, you can tailor your plans to make sure your needs are met. This can involve building a kit that includes extra medication, having a way to store medications in an emergency, and planning for your pets or service animals. If you're an older adult or work with and support older adult communities, visit [Ready.gov/older-adults](https://www.ready.gov/older-adults) for resources.

3

Engage your support network. Reach out to family, friends, and neighbors to build a support network that can help you before, during, and after a disaster or emergency. Make sure everyone knows how you plan to evacuate your home or workplace and where you will go in case of a disaster. Make sure someone in your personal support network has an extra key to your home and knows where you keep your emergency supplies. Practice your plan with those who have agreed to be part of your personal support network.

Older adults can face greater risks when it comes to extreme weather events and emergencies, especially if they are living alone, have low-income, have a disability, or live in rural areas. Ready.gov notes that by the year 2035, the U.S. Census Bureau projects there will be more Americans over the age of 65 than under the age of 18. Over the next decade, it is imperative that the growing older adult population become more aware of their risks and prepare for them.



People's Energy Cooperative

Your Touchstone Energy® Cooperative 

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Energy Efficiency Upgrades Save Energy and Money

As we look ahead toward the end of 2024, it's important to remember that energy efficiency upgrades don't just help you save energy, they can also help you save money in more ways than one!

By upgrading to an energy efficient device or appliance, you are naturally saving money by using less energy. Another way to save is by remembering to submit paperwork for a rebate. People's Energy Cooperative offers a variety of rebates from lightbulbs to heat pumps and water heaters to electric vehicle chargers. Rebates are issued in the form of a bill credit unless the amount is over \$300. Rebates over \$300 are issued as a check in the mail.

If you recently did any work at your home or business installing energy efficient equipment, now is the time to get paperwork submitted. If you're considering a project before the end of the year, remember to submit the paperwork before December 31 to take advantage of this year's rebates.

For more information about our rebate program, visit www.peoplesenergy.coop/rebates.



**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.

(800) 214-2694