

## A WORD FROM



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You may have viewed our employee-featured videos on YouTube and wondered why we spent resources to produce those or why we advertise on radio and TV or mail out a member newsletter each month. These are good questions.

Proactive communication is essential in any industry, and it's especially important for Butler County REC to communicate often with our members.

Safety awareness, energy efficiency, cooperative business and regulatory notices are four main areas of information we want to communicate with you. Here is why:

### Safety awareness

We have a duty to keep you safe from the dangers of electricity. Safety messages are a top priority in our public communications efforts—remind-

### Stay connected!

- Find us on Facebook by searching for Butler County REC
- Subscribe to our e-newsletter, Smart Choices: butlerrec.coop, MEMBER PERKS, Smart Choices E-Newsletter, Smart Choices Sign-Up
- Register for SmartHub at butlerrec.coop, then Online Bill Pay on the top right, so you can track your energy use



## Why do we advertise?

ing farmers to watch out for electric lines and poles during planting and harvest, encouraging members to call 8-1-1 before digging, promoting in-home electrical safety, telling members to “look up and live” as they use ladders and tall equipment.

### Energy efficiency

We're committed to helping our members use energy wisely. We provide multiple resources to help you find ways to reduce your electric bill and become more energy efficient, but we need to promote an awareness of those resources.

### Cooperative business

As an owner of the cooperative, we inform you of the annual meeting date, who is running for the board, financial information and personnel changes.

### Regulatory notices

We are required to communicate with members regarding specific state and federal regulations. For example, you may notice the grain bin clearance notice we publish every year in the member newsletter and articles informing members about financial aid available through the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP).

Communicating frequently with our members is important in helping us achieve our mission of powering lives and empowering communities.

## \$762,285.12 in patronage returned to members

Patronage distribution from member-owned not-for-profit utilities, like Butler County REC, are similar to the dividends

investor-owned utilities pay to their shareholders. The difference is that the cooperative's “shareholders” are the people that we serve and the “dividends” are distributed to those people—you, the members.

Before distributing patronage, your board of directors considers the financial condition of the cooperative, and then determines the portion of margins (patronage allocation) to be refunded.

Butler County REC returns patronage on a 19-year cycle. However, our wholesale power supplier, Corn Belt Power Cooperative, is also retiring a portion of the patronage Butler County REC was allocated in 2017.

For 2019, your board of directors authorized a patronage distribution of \$762,285.12 for 2000 and Corn Belt's portion of 2017. Members purchasing electricity in 2000 and/or 2017 are receiving patronage for those years. The amount you receive is based on how much electricity you purchased during those two years and was credited to your power bill mailed in February 2019.

Checks have been mailed to qualifying members no longer receiving service from Butler County REC.



# You are more than a customer

**A**s a cooperative, we have a different “bottom line.” While our priority is always to provide reliable and safe energy, your well-being and that of the larger community that we serve are equally important. That is one advantage of being a member, not a customer.

We were founded to fulfill a vital need in our community that would not have otherwise been met. For most people, our founding and its circumstances have been long forgotten. Over time, folks in the community may have come to think of us as simply another energy provider. But

we are not. We are a co-op that is constantly evolving to meet the needs of the communities we serve, and we are able to do this because of our members.

Since our inception, we have sought feedback and engagement from you and that of the larger community to guide our long-term decisions. These are two reasons why we hold annual meetings.

In addition, we’re always looking to explore more options that will help you manage your energy use and seeking to keep pace with the changing energy environment, evolving technology and shifting consumer



expectations.

While the times may have changed, our mission and outlook have not. Working together, we can accomplish great things for our cooperative community.

## Home automation for more control

Home automation systems are placing the power of control in the hands of co-op members, but many questions remain about the best ways to use them to save money and energy.

“Most smart home technology is about comfort and convenience.

Consumers interested in saving money on monthly energy purchases should look at internet-connected thermostats first,” said Brian Sloboda, program and product line manager for the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA).

“Around half of all thermostats sold today are smart thermostats. These devices can learn your preferences and adjust the thermostat when you are not home,” Sloboda said. “They have the potential to reduce air conditioning energy consumption by 10 percent. During winter months, the thermostats could save 7 percent on energy used to heat the home.”

Sloboda is particularly interested in identifying ways to enhance efficiency and potential savings for co-op members.

“Laundry, dishwashing and water heating can be set to occur outside of your co-op’s peak demand periods, which typically are during weekday business hours,” said Sloboda.

### Making connections

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) states that interest in connected or smart appliances is trending upward among consumers, and manufacturers are responding with a growing list of products.

“If you are thinking of purchasing a smart appliance or thermostat, look for one that is ENERGY STAR®-certified with connected functionality,” according to EPA officials.

Besides smart thermostats, the products available now include, room air conditioners, refrigerators and freezers, laundry equipment, light bulbs and fixtures and power strips.

“While owning a smart product doesn’t automatically save you energy, if you are smart about using them, they can make a significant difference in your home,” wrote the EPA.

## GET SMART ABOUT ENERGY SAVINGS

“Smart” devices and appliances save time and offer convenience – but not all save energy. The guide below shows how several trendy smart home technologies stack up when it comes to energy savings.



### Smart Energy Savers



- Thermostats
- Washing machines and dryers
- Dishwashers
- EV charging stations
- Pool pumps
- Air conditioners
- Light bulbs and fixtures
- Power strips



### Just Smart

- Virtual assistants (like Amazon's Alexa or Apple HomeKit)
- Smart locks
- Smart alarms
- Smart video security cameras

Today, more than **4,000 smart devices** are available to consumers.



*Insulate your attic to help warm your home and save energy dollars.*

## Put a hat on your home

Just as you wear a hat, scarf and gloves to help keep you warm in winter, remember there are ways to warm your home as well, including insulation.

If your home could use more insulation, always start at the top since the majority of heat loss in a home is through the roof. Work your way down through the walls and then to the basement or crawl space.

While addressing your home's insulation is one of the more expensive outlays you can make to save on your utility bill, it's the biggest bang for your energy buck, paying for itself in the long run.

Other warm-up measures include:

- **Installing a programmable or smart thermostat.**
- **Caulking windows and door frames that leak air.**
- **Bundling up and turning down your thermostat.**

Don't forget that we offer insulation rebates and **FREE** energy assessments to evaluate your home's overall efficiency. Contact us for rebate forms and to schedule your walk through.

We are your source for energy saving solutions!

## Your generator could generate trouble

When the lights go out, it's a relief to have a generator on hand, whether portable or permanent, but misusing one is dangerous.

When using a portable version, there are two ways to connect it to a home: 1) with a powered circuit panel that has a power transfer switch installed by a qualified electrician, or 2) to plug in a limited number of home appliances directly into a fuel-powered portable generator with heavy-duty extension cords.

Never plug a generator into a wall outlet. It could electrocute a neighbor or an electric lineman working to restore power. This is called back feeding.

A permanent generator must have a transfer switch installed by a qualified electrician to avoid back feeding. The switch is required by the National Electrical Code.

The primary hazards of using a portable generator include carbon monoxide (CO) poisoning from the toxic engine exhaust, electric shock or electrocution and fire, according to the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). A permanent or standby generator also has significant risks if not installed by a qualified electrician. Installing one is extremely dangerous and definitely not a DIY project.

Additional important safeguards to take when using a generator:

- Operate a portable generator in well-ventilated locations outdoors away from all doors, windows and vent openings to avoid carbon monoxide poisoning.
- Turn the generator on before using it. Once it's running, turn your appliances and lights on one at a time to avoid overloading the unit.
- Never use a generator in standing water and never touch with wet hands.
- Never use or install a generator in an attached garage.
- Turn off portable generators and let them cool down before refueling.
- Store fuel for your portable generator in a container intended for the purpose and is correctly labeled as such. Store the containers outside of living areas.
- Keep children and pets away from all generators, especially portable ones.

Using a generator is serious business and shouldn't be done in haste. Learn more about using electricity safely and efficiently at [SafeElectricity.org](http://SafeElectricity.org).



### Are you ready for a new electric water heater?

Contact us for information on the Marathon water heater, offering durability, lightweight design and a limited lifetime tank warranty.

**Generous rebate available!**





The Butler County REC nominating committee (from left): Kevin Zwanziger, Brent Janssen and Phillip Destival.

## Nominating committee selects candidates for board

The nominating committee of Butler County REC, duly appointed by the board of directors and consisting of Kevin Zwanziger, Phillip Destival and Brent Janssen, met Jan. 10, 2019. They nominated the cooperative members listed below for the office of director for the ensuing term of three years each. The election will take place at the annual meeting to be held Saturday, April 6, 2019.

### To represent Chickasaw County

- Gary Poppe (incumbent), Ionia
- Mark Miller, Sumner

### To represent the east half of Bremer County

- Steve Boevers (incumbent), Readlyn
- David Lahmann, Sumner

### To represent the southeast quarter of Butler County

- Allyn Harms (incumbent), Clarksville

Candidate information will be mailed to members with the March electric bills and will be online at [butlerrec.coop](http://butlerrec.coop).

**Make plans to attend your co-op's annual meeting on April 6 at the North Butler Elementary School in Allison.**

# Commitment to community

## Employee donations received

This past Christmas season, Butler County REC employees showed their generous spirit by donating hats, mittens and coats (shown right on our Christmas tree) to Cedar Valley Friends of the Family in Waverly.

Employees also donated canned goods, given to the Allison Food Pantry, Allison, and Northeast Iowa Community Action, Waverly.

Both organizations sent thank you's: "Butler County REC - Thank you so much for the bags of groceries. We so appreciate your generosity. Blessings to you all in the New Year. -Allison Food Pantry" and "Thank you for collecting and donating food to our food pantry! We appreciate it. -Northeast Iowa Community Action."



## Annual raffle held

At our annual raffle, employees raised \$370, used to buy items for the pediatric units at the medical centers in Charles City, New Hampton, Sumner and Waverly. The cooperative's board of directors and Corn Belt Power Cooperative also contributed for a total amount donated of \$1,490.

## Volunteer hours logged

In 2018, 13 employees volunteered 1,524 hours to various organizations. Gary Doehrmann, accountant, with 544 hours, and Lori Roose, accounting clerk, with 333 hours were our top volunteers. Doehrmann chose the Trinity United Methodist Church choir in Waverly to receive a \$25 donation in his name, and Roose chose Hope Lodge in Iowa City.

# Deadline approaching

**High school juniors** whose parents are Butler County REC members or residents of Aplington, Fairbank, Fredericksburg or Readlyn are invited to apply for the **FREE** 2019 Youth Tour to Washington, D.C., June 14-20! The deadline to apply is March 11, 2019.

Students will visit monuments and memorials, the White House, the capitol and a number of other sites. The top three applicants will be interviewed for an opportunity to go on the trip and will each receive a **\$500 scholarship**.

**For more information, visit [butlerrec.coop](http://butlerrec.coop) or contact us at 319.267.2726.**



**INtouch** is published monthly for members of Butler County Rural Electric Cooperative  
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PHONES: 319.267.2726 or 888.267.2726 • FAX: 319.267.2566  
OFFICE HOURS: Mon. - Fri., 7:00 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.  
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