

● DECEMBER 2025

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ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE LIVING

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## ON THE COVER

Special thanks to Kim Scharfenkamp, a Southwest Iowa REC member-consumer, for supplying this month's cover image. Submit high-resolution photos for consideration to [editor@ieclmagazine.com](mailto:editor@ieclmagazine.com). You could receive \$100!

# LEADING THROUGH CHANGE

BY JIM MILLER



By the time you read this column, the Iowa Association of Electric Cooperatives (IAEC) will have held its 2025 Annual

Meeting in West Des Moines with the theme of “Leading through Change.” And that’s the perfect phrase to describe my first year serving as IAEC board president.

## Growing connections

I’ve been reflecting on what the trade association for Iowa’s locally owned and governed electric co-ops has accomplished in 2025, and we worked hard to engage with our member co-ops on new levels. For example, Leslie Kaufman, IAEC executive vice president and general manager, made it a priority to attend Iowa electric co-op board meetings and staff safety meetings across the state during her first year on the job. During these visits, she learned about our members’ priorities and challenges as our industry experiences rapid change.

## Coordinated advocacy, united voice

I’m proud of how the statewide association engaged with our member co-ops during the 2025 Iowa Legislative Session as we advocated to safeguard electric service territory protections for the rural families, farms, businesses and communities we serve. We’re seeing more co-op board directors and co-op staff engage with their local legislators and other community leaders on this issue, and we were successful in changing the direction of proposed legislation that would have diminished Iowa’s long-standing service territory law.

When session ended in May, the statewide policy and advocacy

team rolled up their sleeves and developed a framework tool. It includes member input to analyze and define our statewide position on policy issues and aid in prioritizing resources to accomplish advocacy objectives. This tool will help our statewide staff work proactively on behalf of Iowa’s electric cooperatives as we lead through change.

We have built incredible momentum in 2025 that will propel us to the start of the 2026 Legislative Session next month. We anticipate another active session of challenges to the proven cooperative business model of self-governance and member ownership. IAEC will continue to unify and leverage the voices of board directors, employees and other member-consumers of Iowa’s electric cooperatives to advocate for safe, affordable, reliable and sustainable

power. We embrace leadership from all levels of our membership as we work with key stakeholders on local, state and federal tiers.

## A focus on co-op members

Now is the time to lead through change, and we will have ample opportunities to do so in the electric utility industry. It all points back to our electric cooperative purpose and our collective mission: to power lives and empower communities. Because electric co-ops are owned by the members we serve, our focus is always on you.

It has been an honor and a privilege to serve as your statewide board president this year. I wish you and your family a blessed holiday season and a prosperous 2026.

*Jim Miller is the board president of the Iowa Association of Electric Cooperatives.*

## EDITOR'S CHOICE CONTEST

## WIN A SMART BIRD FEEDER

The 2K HD camera on this smart bird feeder captures the vibrant colors and behaviors of every bird at your feeder. Every detail is recorded with crystal-clear clarity. Receive instant notification whenever birds are detected. Note: Some advanced AI features require a subscription, and new users get a 30-day free trial.

If you don't subscribe, core functions like live viewing and sharing still work as usual. For more details, visit [www.ieclmagazine.com/editors-choice-contest](http://www.ieclmagazine.com/editors-choice-contest).

## Visit our website and win!

Enter this month's contest by visiting [www.ieclmagazine.com](http://www.ieclmagazine.com) no later than Dec. 31. You must be a member of one of Iowa's electric cooperatives to win. There's no obligation associated with entering, we don't share entrant information with anyone and multiple entries from the same account will be disqualified.

The winner of Lodge cast iron skillet set from the October issue was **Les Elgin**, a **Guthrie County Rural Electric Cooperative** member-consumer.



ENTER ONLINE BY DEC. 31!

# LOOKING AHEAD: WHOLESALE POWER COSTS RISING IN 2026

BY KEATON HILDRETH



In September, the Basin Electric Power Cooperative (Basin Electric) board of directors – one of Raccoon Valley Electric

Cooperative's (RVEC) power suppliers – authorized a wholesale power rate increase of approximately 10%, effective Jan. 1, 2026.

We understand this decision has real impacts on our members and communities. For many years, cooperative members have benefited from stable electric rates, made possible by forward-thinking investments in power plants, transmission lines and infrastructure more than 40 years ago. Those investments have served us well, but much of that system is now nearing

the end of its useful life. To maintain reliability and prepare for future growth, Basin Electric must reinvest – just as the generations before us did. These reinvestments require significant capital today, which means there will be upward pressure on rates.

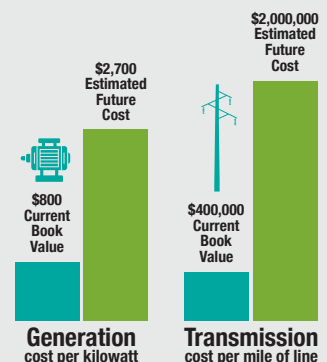
Over the next decade, Basin Electric's power demand (load growth) is expected to increase by about 2.5% annually, well above the national average. To achieve that growth, Basin Electric will invest an estimated \$11 billion in new and upgraded infrastructure, more than doubling its assets. These projects will expand dispatchable generation – power sources like coal and natural gas that can be turned on or off as needed – by 50% and increase transmission capacity by more than 30%. This type of generation is essential to maintaining a reliable electric grid and ensuring members have the power they need when they need it.

However, the cost of building and maintaining infrastructure has risen sharply. The generation assets that make up our current fleet cost about \$800 per kilowatt when built; future projects are projected to cost around \$2,700 per kilowatt. Similarly, transmission lines that once cost roughly \$400,000 per mile now average about \$2 million per mile. On top of that, Basin Electric and its subsidiaries have already invested more than \$2 billion in environmental control technology through 2024, with \$190 million spent this year alone on operations and maintenance for those systems.

## Local response

Since the increase was announced, RVEC's management team and local board of directors have been reviewing the details to fully understand what this means for our cooperative and for our member-owners.

## Current and Future Generation & Transmission Cost



When Basin Electric's wholesale power cost increase takes effect, RVEC will use its Power Cost Adjustment (PCA), formerly known as the Energy Cost Adjustment, to recover the added power costs. The PCA is a formula that calculates the difference between our new wholesale power cost and the cost included in our base rates. A per-kilowatt-hour adjustment is then added to each member's monthly bill. This ensures RVEC remains financially stable and able to continue providing safe, reliable power to all members.

Transparency and communication are key to the cooperative difference, and we're committed to keeping you informed every step of the way. We know that any rate increase is unwelcome news, and we don't take it lightly. Please know that RVEC remains dedicated to doing everything possible to control costs while maintaining the reliability and service you depend on.

Thank you for being a valued member-owner of RVEC. Together, we'll continue building a strong, reliable energy future for our communities.

*Keaton Hildreth is the CEO of Raccoon Valley Electric Cooperative.*



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RVEC is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

## HUNTING SEASON REMINDER: STAY SAFE AROUND ELECTRICAL EQUIPMENT

As hunting season continues in Iowa, Raccoon Valley Electric Cooperative (RVEC) reminds hunters that electrical equipment, including poles, power lines and substations, is never fair game.

Safety always comes first when you're outdoors. A stray bullet can damage electrical equipment, leading to outages, dangerous situations and costly repairs. Since RVEC is a member-owned, not-for-profit cooperative, everyone shares the cost of these repairs.

Whether you're hunting or hosting hunters on your property, please make safety your top priority.

- **Stay aware of your surroundings.** Always know what is beyond your target.
- **Treat electrical equipment with respect.** Never aim at or shoot near power lines, poles or insulators.
- **Stay vigilant in wooded areas.** Power lines may blend in with trees and brush.



- **Secure stands properly.** Never attach deer stands or hunting gear to utility poles or electrical equipment.
- **Communicate clearly.** Landowners should remind guests of nearby power lines and equipment.
- **Report issues.** If you notice damaged electrical equipment, stay clear and contact RVEC right away.

RVEC thanks all hunters who already practice safety and responsibility in the field. Let's work together to keep this hunting season safe, successful and enjoyable for everyone.

## PROPERTY TAXES PAID

Property taxes are used to help fund essential things such as education and city and county government. You might not be aware of it, but your cooperative pays property taxes. Raccoon Valley Electric Cooperative (RVEC) receives a tax bill for the poles, wires, transformers and other equipment out on the line, and another tax bill for the office and warehouse. RVEC pays taxes in nine different counties that we serve.

Below is a breakdown of the property taxes paid in 2025.

COUNTY	TAXES PAID
Audubon County	\$ 3,890.00
Buena Vista County	\$ 161.50
Calhoun County	\$ 691.00
Carroll County	\$ 49,510.00
Crawford County	\$ 55.50
Greene County	\$ 3,287.50
Guthrie County	\$ 417.00
Ida County	\$ 85.50
Sac County	\$ 24,730.00
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$ 82,828.00</b>

## CELEBRATING EMPLOYEE MILESTONES

Raccoon Valley Electric Cooperative (RVEC) is proud to recognize employees who reached significant service milestones in 2025. Their dedication and commitment help keep the lights on and our cooperative strong.



**Mitch McKeever**  
40 years of service

Operations Superintendent Mitch McKeever celebrated an incredible 40

years with RVEC. Mitch's depth of experience and commitment to our members are unmatched. He is always looking out for our members' best interests and continually seeking ways to strengthen and improve our system.



**Brian Heun**  
15 years of service

First Class Lineman Brian Heun marked 15 years of dedicated service with RVEC.

Brian's strong work ethic, safety focus and teamwork make him an essential part of our line crew. He takes pride in delivering reliable power to our members and is always willing to lend a hand wherever needed.

**Congratulations, Mitch and Brian, on these milestone anniversaries. Thank you for your dedication to serving our members and communities.**

## OFFICE CLOSINGS

All of us at Raccoon Valley Electric Cooperative wish you and your family a joyful holiday season!

We will be **closing at noon on Dec. 24** and **closed on Dec. 25-26 for Christmas.**

We will be **closing at noon on Dec. 31** and **closed on Jan. 1 for New Year's Day.**





# YOUR GUIDE TO SMARTER ELECTRONICS

BY SCOTT FLOOD

Wouldn't it be great to wake up on a sunny morning, say "Good morning, house!," and stand back as the right light fixtures flash on, the coffee maker starts, the outdoor security lighting switches off and the toaster oven starts preheating for your frozen toaster pastry? That may sound like something from science fiction, but today's smart home electronics make it possible.

Smart devices use digital technology and Wi-Fi to take your home to a new level of convenience and comfort. They can also help you

make better use of your electricity so you can reduce waste and lower your energy bills.

Even if you've already put the many advantages of smart electronics to work for your home and family, you might be surprised by some of the newer devices with the potential to change your daily life.

#### Smart thermostats

Heating and cooling use more energy than anything else in your home. Replacing your home's standard thermostat with a smart model can lower your monthly electric

bills while keeping you even more comfortable. Smart thermostats learn your daily habits and take over for you. You won't have to lower your thermostat every evening, because it will happen automatically. Because smart thermostats know exactly when you need electricity and when you don't, they waste a lot less.

#### Smart appliances

The second-biggest share of your home's electricity powers appliances, from your refrigerator to your water heater. Smart appliances use Wi-Fi and high-tech sensors to operate

more efficiently. A smart washer can sense the size of your load and adjust the water and cycle times accordingly. Smart refrigerators can warn you when the kids leave the door open. And smart water heaters don't waste energy by heating water while you're asleep.

### Smart plugs and power strips

An easy and affordable way to explore smart technology is with smart plugs, which plug into your wall outlets. You can then plug lighting, appliances and other devices directly into them. You'll be able to control all those devices through a single app, so you can tell the coffeemaker when to start brewing, turn your exterior accent lighting off at dawn or have your favorite music already streaming as you walk in the door.

Smart power strips look like their ordinary cousins but use smart plugs. They're particularly helpful at eliminating waste caused by

what's known as "phantom load" – like leaving your phone charger plugged in when it's not charging.

### Smart shades

You wish your family room didn't face south, because it's always warm during the day. Smart shades and blinds can help. You can set them to automatically open or close depending on the time of day (and year) or based on your home's indoor temperature. They can help your air conditioner keep you cooler for less.

### Smart assistants

When you combine the capabilities of individual smart home electronics with voice assistants like Amazon Alexa or whole-home smart energy management systems, they become even more powerful. You can teach voice assistants to carry out multiple tasks that make up your daily routines, like the "good morning, house" message. Energy management systems simplify control

of all aspects of your home's energy use, and some offer specific tips to help you save even more.

### Be smart with your smart devices

While all those smart devices may be able to make your home more energy efficient and your life more comfortable, they're not perfect. Most require an internet connection, so if your service is down, your smart devices won't work, either.

Smart devices typically don't receive frequent system updates like your smartphone or laptop, so be aware of potential security issues. Before you choose a smart home device, make sure it's completely secure and compatible with what you have. Then prepare to be amazed by what smart home electronics will do for you!

*Scott Flood writes on a variety of energy-related topics for the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association.*



When you combine the capabilities of individual smart home electronics with voice assistants like Amazon Alexa or whole-home smart energy management systems, they become even more powerful.



Replacing your home's standard thermostat with a smart model can lower your monthly electric bills while keeping you even more comfortable.



Smart appliances use Wi-Fi and high-tech sensors to operate more efficiently. Photo Source: Samsung



## CRANBERRY FETA ROLL-UPS

- $\frac{3}{4}$  cup dried sweetened cranberries
- 1 8-ounce package cream cheese, softened
- $\frac{3}{4}$  cup feta, crumbled (not reduced fat)
- $\frac{1}{4}$  cup green onion, diced
- 2 large tortillas, spinach or wheat flavor

Combine all ingredients except for tortillas. Lay tortillas out flat. Divide ingredients between the two tortillas and spread all the way to the edge. Roll tortillas up tightly, wrap in plastic and refrigerate for at least 1 hour. Trim ends of roll slightly, then cut each roll into 12 slices. These can be made one day ahead of time and sliced before serving. *Yields 24 slices*

Mary Ellen Metzger • Rockwell City  
Calhoun County Electric Cooperative Association

## MEATLOAF APPETIZERS

- 2 slices bread
- 2 pounds hamburger
- 1 pound sausage
- 2 eggs, beaten
- 2 tablespoons onion, chopped
- $\frac{1}{2}$  cup milk, approximately
- bacon
- barbecue sauce, optional

Break bread into small pieces. Mix bread pieces in a dish with hamburger, sausage, eggs and onion. Add milk and use fork to moisten hamburger mixture, add more milk as needed. Shape mixture into balls, wrap in bacon and seal ends of bacon with toothpicks. Bake at 350 degrees F for 1 hour, then add barbecue sauce to half or all, if desired. Return to oven for 15 minutes, or until hot.

Susan Ausborn • Ventura  
Prairie Energy Cooperative

## CHICKEN NUT ROLL

- 1 12.5-ounce can chicken
- 1 8-ounce package cream cheese, softened
- 3 tablespoons green onion, diced
- 1 teaspoon garlic powder
- 1 tablespoon Hidden Valley Ranch dry seasoning
- 1 tablespoon lemon juice
- $\frac{3}{4}$  cup walnuts, chopped, divided
- 2 stalks celery, chopped
- 2 tablespoons pimentos, well drained, optional
- crackers

Mix all ingredients, except crackers, using half of the walnuts. Form mixture into a log, star or Christmas tree shape. Sprinkle remaining walnuts over top of mixture. Refrigerate for 4 hours, or overnight. Serve with crackers. *Serves 6-8*

Nancy Anderson • Ankeny  
Prairie Energy Cooperative

## HANKY PANKY'S

- 1 pound ground beef
- 1 pound spicy pork sausage
- 1 pound Velveeta cheese
- 1 teaspoon Worcestershire sauce
- 1 teaspoon oregano
- $\frac{1}{2}$  teaspoon garlic salt
- $\frac{1}{2}$  teaspoon salt
- $\frac{1}{2}$  teaspoon pepper
- 2 packages party rye bread

Brown meat and drain. Add cheese, stir until melted, then add seasonings. Spread on rye bread. Bake at 350 degrees F until brown, approximately 10-15 minutes. *Serves 10-15*

Michael Treiber • Battle Creek  
North West Rural Electric Cooperative

## GINGERBREAD CHEESECAKE DIP

- 1 8-ounce package cream cheese, softened
- $\frac{3}{4}$  cup dark brown sugar, packed
- 2 tablespoons whole milk
- $\frac{3}{4}$  teaspoon ground cinnamon
- $\frac{1}{2}$  teaspoon pure vanilla extract
- $\frac{1}{4}$  teaspoon ground ginger
- $\frac{1}{8}$  teaspoon ground nutmeg
- $\frac{1}{8}$  teaspoon salt
- 1 $\frac{1}{2}$  cups whipped cream
- sprinkles, optional
- gingerbread cookies

In a large bowl, beat cream cheese until smooth. Add brown sugar, milk, cinnamon, vanilla, ginger, nutmeg and salt. Beat until smooth and combined. Add whipped cream and gently fold to combine. Transfer dip to a serving bowl and top with sprinkles, if desired. Serve with gingerbread cookies.

Marilyn O'Brien • Geneva  
Franklin Rural Electric Cooperative

## HAM-WRAPPED OLIVE SHRIMP

- $\frac{1}{4}$  cup olive oil
- 1 $\frac{1}{2}$  teaspoons lemon zest
- 3 tablespoons fresh lemon juice
- $\frac{3}{4}$  teaspoon dried crushed red pepper
- $\frac{1}{4}$  teaspoon salt
- 30 large raw shrimp, peeled (about 1 pound)
- 10 deli ham slices, thinly sliced
- 30 pimento-stuffed Spanish olives

In a large bowl, whisk together the first five ingredients. Add shrimp and toss to coat. Cover and chill for 30 minutes. Preheat broiler with oven rack 5 $\frac{1}{2}$  inches from heat. Cut each ham slice into three lengthwise strips. Wrap each strip around one shrimp and one olive, secure with a wooden toothpick. Place wrapped shrimp on a large, lightly greased baking sheet. Repeat process with remaining ham, shrimp and olives. Broil 3 minutes on each side or until each shrimp turns pink. Arrange appetizers on a serving platter and serve hot. These can be made ahead and refrigerated, then broiled just before serving. *Yields 30 appetizers*

Kary Blunk • Russell  
Chariton Valley Electric Cooperative, Inc.

## SAUSAGE WONTONS

- 12 wonton wrappers
- 1 pound ground sausage, crumbled
- 1 teaspoon seasoned salt
- 1 $\frac{1}{2}$  cups cheddar cheese, shredded
- 1 $\frac{1}{2}$  cups Monterey jack cheese, shredded
- 1 cup buttermilk ranch dressing
- $\frac{1}{4}$  cup green pepper, chopped
- $\frac{1}{4}$  cup red pepper, chopped

Lightly grease a 12-cup muffin tin. Press one wonton wrapper in each muffin cup. Bake at 350 degrees F for 5 minutes, until lightly browned. Remove and let cool on cookie sheet. In a skillet over medium heat, brown ground sausage and seasoned salt. Drain grease from sausage. In a bowl, combine sausage with cheddar cheese, Monterey jack cheese, ranch dressing and peppers. Mix with spatula until combined. Fill each cooked wonton with mixture and place in muffin pan. Bake at 350 degrees F for 5-6 minutes. *Serves 12*

Julie Allison • Marshalltown  
Consumers Energy

Visit [www.ieclmagazine.com](http://www.ieclmagazine.com) and search our online archive of hundreds of recipes in various categories.



## SAUSAGE CHEESE BALLS

- 2 packages Jimmy Dean Sausage, uncooked
- 1 16-ounce package shredded sharp cheddar cheese
- 1 $\frac{1}{2}$  cups all-purpose baking biscuit mix
- $\frac{1}{2}$  cup celery, finely chopped
- $\frac{1}{2}$  cup onion, finely chopped
- $\frac{1}{2}$  teaspoon garlic powder
- barbecue sauce, optional

Mix first six ingredients together and form into 1-inch balls. Bake on a cookie sheet at 375 degrees F for 15 minutes, or until golden brown. They can be served with barbecue sauce in a slow cooker on low. *Yields 6 dozen, approximately*

Karen Caldwell • Albion  
Chariton Valley Electric Cooperative, Inc.

## SIMPLE BACON CHEESE BALL

- 2 8-ounce packages cream cheese, softened
- $\frac{1}{2}$  cup sour cream
- 8 ounces cheddar cheese, shredded
- $\frac{1}{2}$  teaspoon garlic powder
- $\frac{1}{2}$  teaspoon onion powder
- pepper, to taste
- bacon bits

Mix all ingredients, except bacon bits, together until smooth. Shape into a ball and chill for 1 hour, then roll in bacon bits. Wrap in plastic wrap and chill until ready to serve. *Serves 15-20*

Rebecca Hancox • Plano  
Chariton Valley Electric Cooperative, Inc.

WANTED:

## BREAKFAST & BRUNCH RECIPES

THE REWARD:

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**Deadline is Dec. 31**

From egg bakes and casseroles to cinnamon rolls and power bowls – we want your best **breakfast and brunch recipes!** Recipes will appear in our April issue. Please include your name, address, telephone number, co-op name, recipe category and number of servings on all submissions.

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# HOLIDAY LIGHTS: CANDLELIGHT TO CO-OP POWER

How Christmas lights and rural electrification brought warmth, color and connection to Iowa homes

BY SAFE ELECTRICITY AND ANN FOSTER THELEN

Long before electricity, people brightened the dark winter months with firelight, from the burning of the Yule log to candles placed around the home. The first recorded candlelit Christmas trees appeared in Germany in 1660 and eventually spread across Europe, reaching the U.S. later in the century.

While the glow of the candles was festive, it also posed a serious fire hazard, so the light could only be enjoyed for a short time.

## A revolutionary spark

While Thomas Edison invented the incandescent light bulb in 1879, it was his colleague Edward H. Johnson who created the first electric Christmas tree lights in 1882. He hand-wired 80 colored bulbs around a revolving tree in his parlor, all powered by a generator.

Johnson's lights were ahead of their time, as electricity was not yet routinely available and electric lights were considered expensive. President Grover Cleveland and his wife First Lady Frances Cleveland helped boost acceptance in the 1890s when the White House Christmas tree was illuminated with colored bulbs to delight their young daughters.

The tradition of outdoor light displays, now associated with driving around to view beautifully lit homes and elaborate light shows, began in North America. This expansion was made possible by the development of safe outdoor Christmas light bulbs and light strings in the 1920s.

## Lighting up Iowa's countryside

In Iowa, rural homes didn't see the glow of electric Christmas lights until the 1930s and 1940s, when

rural electric cooperatives began bringing power to farms and small towns. Before then, kerosene lamps and candles offered only a modest holiday shimmer. When electricity finally reached the countryside, families could string colorful bulbs for the first time, a symbol not just of celebration but of progress.



The arrival of electric lights brought a new kind of warmth to rural winters, brightening long nights and connecting communities across the state.

### **LEDs, smart displays and sustainability**

Every holiday season, millions of light sets brighten homes across the country. From twinkling displays set to music to TV favorites like ABC's "The Great Christmas Light Fight," modern holiday lighting turns neighborhoods into dazzling shows filled with festive moments when we flip the switch and watch them glow.

Christmas lights have come a long way. Today's LED lights shine brighter than ever, creating beautiful displays while using less energy and lasting longer. LED light strings use about 80-90% less electricity than traditional incandescent bulbs and can last up to 25 times longer. They also stay cooler to the touch, reducing fire risks, and their shatter-resistant lenses make them safer and easier to handle.

Many communities now offer recycling programs for old light strings, and energy-efficient options make it easy to decorate responsibly. For electric cooperatives, encouraging LED lighting is part of an ongoing effort to help members save energy and money while keeping the season bright.



### **Behind the bulbs: The technology of light**

From the first incandescent filaments to today's smart LEDs controlled by phone apps, holiday lighting has mirrored the evolution of electric power itself. The same current that once revolutionized rural life now drives innovation in energy efficiency and smart home technology.

Many electric cooperatives are helping members explore these new frontiers, from real-time usage tools and rebates for efficient lighting to systems that make homes brighter and more connected. Each advance continues the story of illumination that began more than a century

ago, when light first connected homes to the wider world.

### **A brighter tomorrow**

As we look to the future, Christmas lights remain a shining reminder of how far we've come, from candlelight to clean, efficient energy. Each twinkle tells a story of innovation, cooperation and community spirit. Across Iowa and beyond, those bright strands remind us that even in the darkest winter nights, we have the power to bring warmth and wonder to the world around us.

*Article by Safe Electricity with supplemental content provided by Ann Foster Thelen, editor of Iowa Electric Cooperative Living.*



# BE PREPARED FOR WINTER STORMS

When winter temperatures drop and snow begins to fall, staying safe and warm can be challenging. Whether it's ice, high winds or heavy snow, Iowa winters can bring severe weather that causes power outages and dangerous travel conditions. Raccoon Valley Electric Cooperative (RVEC) cares about your safety, and we want to help you prepare for whatever Mother Nature brings this season.

## Stay warm

During a power outage, plan ahead by selecting a safe alternative heat source. These can keep your home comfortable until power is restored but always exercise caution – never leave fires unattended and ensure proper ventilation. Never use fuel-burning heaters or generators indoors, as they can produce deadly carbon monoxide. Always follow the manufacturer's instructions for any heating equipment.

## Stay fed

Keep a supply of non-perishable foods, such as cereal, crackers, bread or canned goods. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends storing enough food for several days and five gallons of water per person in case of a long-term outage.

## Stay safe

Downed power lines are very



dangerous. Always assume any wire on the ground is live and keep your distance. Report downed lines or broken poles to RVEC at 712-659-3649. Avoid unnecessary travel during storms, but if you need to drive, bring a survival kit that has food, water, a flashlight, a first-aid kit and blankets.

## Plan ahead

Before storms arrive, take a few minutes to prepare:

- 1 Create a family emergency plan.** Write down important phone numbers – including RVEC, your doctor, neighbors and family members – and choose a safe meeting place if you can't stay at home.
- 2 Pack a "go bag."** Fill a backpack or cooler with essentials like water, non-perishable food, medications, flashlights, cash and a battery-powered radio.

- 3 Protect your electronics.** Before the storm, unplug your appliances and turn off the water heater or air conditioning units to prevent damage from power surges. Leave one light on so you'll know when the power is back.

- 4 Stock up on batteries.** Keep extras in various sizes for flashlights, radios and flameless candles.

## Teach your family

Talk to your children about the dangers of power lines and what to do if they see one on the ground. Understanding the risks helps prevent accidents and keeps everyone safe.

Winter weather can be unpredictable, but a little preparation goes a long way in keeping your family safe and comfortable. RVEC's crews are ready to respond when storms strike – and we encourage you to be prepared, too.

# USE EMERGENCY GENERATORS WITH CARE

Over the past few years, more frequent and severe fall and winter storms have led more homeowners to invest in emergency backup generators. These generators can run a couple of appliances or keep the lights on when wind, rain and falling tree branches knock the electricity out.

Like any electric appliance, it's important to follow the manufacturer's safety instructions that came with your generator so nobody in your family gets hurt while using it. But unlike other appliances, an improperly operated generator can harm or even kill a

member of a line crew who's working on a downed wire in your neighborhood.

## Here are some generator safety tips:

- Generators can produce carbon monoxide, an invisible, odorless and deadly gas. Never power up a generator indoors. Place carbon-monoxide alarms in the rooms of your house that are near the location where you operate your generator.
- Never plug your generator into an electrical outlet. Instead, use extension cords to connect



the appliance you want to run directly to the generator.

- Do not connect the generator to any of your home's electrical circuits. This requires a transfer switch and installing a transfer switch requires a licensed electrician.

# KEEP ENERGY COSTS IN CHECK THIS HOLIDAY SEASON

The holiday season is here – a time for decorating, cooking and spending time with loved ones. But with all the extra activity around the house, your energy use can increase just like your holiday cheer. Raccoon Valley Electric Cooperative (RVEC) wants to help you enjoy the season without any unexpected surprises on your energy bill.

## Small improvements, big impact

Simple, affordable upgrades can significantly improve your home's comfort and efficiency. Adding weatherstripping to exterior doors and sealing gaps around old windows helps retain warm air inside where it should be. Not sure where to start? Contact RVEC to schedule a free home energy audit and find out where your home can save the most.

## Brighten up efficiently

Shine bright this season with LED



holiday lights. LEDs consume up to 88% less energy than traditional incandescent bulbs and last much longer. According to the U.S. Department of Energy, LED holiday lighting typically adds just \$5-\$7 to your electric bill, compared to \$30 or more with incandescent lights – a simple switch that can really pay off.

## Cook smarter, save energy

Your kitchen can be a major source of energy use during the holidays. To conserve energy while cooking, use small appliances like slow cookers, air fryers and microwaves – they use much less energy than an oven or stovetop.

When using your oven, try baking multiple dishes at once and turn it off a few minutes early to let the residual heat finish the cooking. On the stove, match the pan size to the burner for better efficiency.

RVEC is here to help you manage your energy use year-round. If you have questions about your energy habits or ways to save, contact us – we're always happy to help.

**From all of us at RVEC, we wish you a warm, safe and joyful holiday season!**

## BASIN ELECTRIC POWER COOPERATIVE SCHOLARSHIP AVAILABLE

Dependents of Raccoon Valley Electric Cooperative (RVEC) members are eligible to apply for a \$2,500 scholarship from Basin Electric Power Cooperative, which supplies power for RVEC.

The scholarship program is designed to encourage and recognize the achievements of a student living on electric cooperative lines. The scholarship must be used for educational costs, and the student must enter college in the fall of the school year for which the scholarship is given. The applicant must be a student who is enrolled or planning to enroll in a full-time graduate or undergraduate course of study at an accredited two-year, or four-year college, university or vocational/technical school.

This scholarship is awarded without regard to other awards, loans or financial assistance the applicant may have



obtained. Award of the scholarship is based on the following criteria: SAT/ACT scores, GPA, work experience, participation in school and community activities, a statement by the student explaining educational and career goals and a written recommendation by a third party. Application forms can be obtained from RVEC.

**Application forms are due to RVEC by Jan. 30, 2026.**

For more information, contact Jill Hannasch at 712-659-3649, 800-253-6211 or [jillh@rvec.coop](mailto:jillh@rvec.coop).

## CONCERN FOR COMMUNITY



Cooperatives work for the development of their communities through policies supported by the membership.

## SUPPORTING FAMILIES IN NEED

Raccoon Valley Electric Cooperative (RVEC) proudly upholds the cooperative principle of Concern for Community. This holiday season, RVEC donated \$700 each to New Opportunities in Carroll and Sac Counties – \$500 from RVEC and an additional \$200 from Corn Belt Power Cooperative. These contributions help provide meals and support for local families in need. At RVEC, we're committed to powering our communities.

# 2026 MOMENTUM IS BUILDING CONFERENCE DETAILS

Iowa builders and contractors are invited to discover the latest advancements in energy efficiency technologies at the **2026 Momentum is Building Conference**, set for Feb. 19-20 at the Sheraton in West Des Moines.

The annual conference offers opportunities for contractors to earn continuing education units (CEUs) in Iowa's plumbing/mechanical, HVAC and electrical codes. Attendees will also have the chance to network with industry peers, learn from leading experts in energy efficiency and the building trades, and gain insights into current energy efficiency regulations and incentives.

Sponsored by the Iowa Cooperatives for Energy Efficiency, the annual Momentum is Building Conference connects Iowa's construction industry with the services and resources provided by local electric cooperatives, which serve nearly 650,000 Iowans across all 99 counties.

"Electric cooperatives have long supported energy efficiency, and one of our key goals is to help member-consumers use energy wisely," said Angela Catton, vice president of communications and development at Northwest Iowa Power Cooperative. "We invest in this conference to build relationships between cooperatives and the contractors who serve our members."

## Lineup of speakers, educators

The conference kicks off with Justin Wilson from Construction Instruction as the keynote.

"Wilson, who spoke in 2013, will discuss current policies, technologies, and consumer trends affecting home building and remodeling," shared Ryan Cornelius, vice president of corporate relations at Corn Belt Power Cooperative.



Annual energy efficiency conference for Iowa builders, contractors and HVAC professionals.

Feb. 19-20, 2026  
Sheraton West Des Moines

[www.MomentumIsBuilding.com](http://www.MomentumIsBuilding.com)



The conference also welcomes back Bill McAnnally, who can be heard monthly on Iowa Public Radio's "Talk of Iowa - Home Improvement Day." CEU providers, Dave Sullivan (electrical), Terry Moorman and Jeff Reichart (PMSB), who have been long-time partners and presenters at the conference, will return to offer their specialized training to attendees.

The conference will close with Kenyon Murray on Friday, Feb. 20. Kenyon is the CEO of Murray Legacy Management and the business manager to his sons, Kris and Keegan, who play in the NBA. He is a host of "The Leave Your Legacy Show" and became a Certified Professional Life Coach. In his session, attendees will be introduced to a simple and digestible way to embrace personal growth. The goal is to share tools for creating a

systematic personal routine that can impact their lives at multiple levels.

## A long-standing resource

For almost 35 years, the Momentum is Building Conference has provided a platform for electric cooperatives and contractors to collaborate in delivering safe, efficient and cost-effective home comfort solutions to Iowans.

Don't miss this chance to stay ahead of the curve in energy efficiency and enhance your professional skills. For more information or to register for the 2026 Momentum is Building Conference, visit [www.MomentumIsBuilding.com](http://www.MomentumIsBuilding.com).

Discounted Early Bird registration runs until Monday, Jan. 19.

# GIVING GIFTS FROM THE HEART

BY DARCY DOUGHERTY MAULSBY

When you were a kid, what was your favorite toy for Christmas? Farm toys top the list for Nolan Toomsen.

While Nolan lives on a farm near Geneva in Franklin County, his mom, Erin (Frank) Toomsen, is from Lake City, my hometown. When I visited with Nolan this fall during his Grandma Rita's birthday party, I asked if he wants to be a farmer when he grows up. "I'm a farmer right now," stated Nolan, who celebrated his 5th birthday in early January 2025 with a Pioneer Seed-themed party.

Then I asked Erin about Nolan's accident on Jan. 28, 2025. Erin was at work (she's a kindergarten prep teacher in Hampton), and the Toomsen's older kids were at school. Just a typical Tuesday.

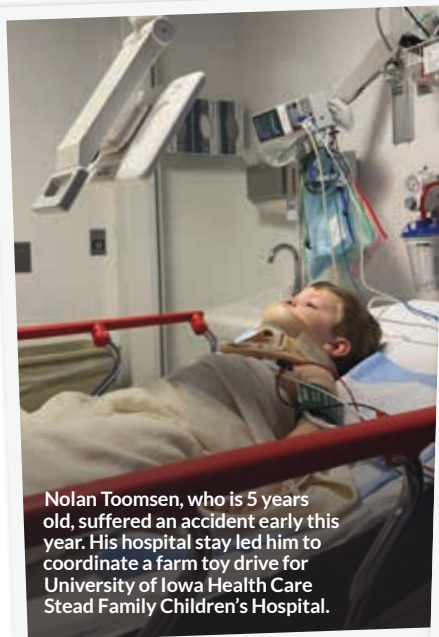
Nolan wasn't feeling well that morning, however, and needed to go home. His dad Tyler took Nolan and his little brother Brody, 2 (who was also home, since daycare wasn't open), along to do farm chores. Around this time, a fluke accident left Nolan unresponsive. He was rushed by ambulance to Franklin General Hospital in Hampton. Then Life Flight whisked him to the University of Iowa Health Care Stead Family Children's Hospital in Iowa City. The medical team ran a CT scan and an MRI on Nolan, who suffered strained neck muscles.

## Turning compassion into action

After a short stay, Nolan returned home wearing a cervical collar. "I really liked it when I finally got to take it off," Nolan told me. "I burned it."

Despite his quick recovery, Nolan couldn't quit thinking about something that troubled him about the Children's Hospital. They only had two toy tractors, several wagons and an odd assortment of farm animals, including a dolphin. (Don't get Nolan started about how silly this is.)

"Nolan told me he wanted to donate some of his farm toys to the Children's



Nolan Toomsen, who is 5 years old, suffered an accident early this year. His hospital stay led him to coordinate a farm toy drive for University of Iowa Health Care Stead Family Children's Hospital.

Hospital for other kids who have to go there," Erin said. He also wanted her to write a letter for him, which she posted on her Facebook page in mid-May.

The letter read: "Do you want to give me some money to buy more tractors for the Iowa City Hospital because the ones they had weren't very good. From Nolan."

Checks and electronic money transfers via Venmo started pouring in from friends, family and strangers. Nolan received more than \$3,000 from more than 200 different donors. Combined with significant discounts from the businesses he purchased from, Nolan was able to donate about \$5,000 worth of farm toys.

## The joy of giving

On delivery day (Aug. 15), the Toomsen family filled the back of their Ford Expedition with toys from John Deere, Case IH, Little Buster Toys and Big Country Toys. When I asked Nolan if it was hard for him to part with any of them, he admitted he really liked a CASE IH harvest equipment set. "But I'd paint it green if it were mine," he emphasized.



Nolan is pictured with some of the farm toys he donated to the hospital.

"We know that these carefully selected toys will help brighten the day of many farm-loving kids who are facing battles in the hospital," said Erin, who added Nolan has always had a kind heart. "We can't thank everyone enough for helping Nolan give back."

The toys have been well received by pediatric patients of all ages, reports Sheri Austin, supervisor, concierge services & Rossi Lodging Program, for University of Iowa Health Care.

"Thank you, Nolan, and your family and community, for generously donating high-quality farm toys to the Stead Family Children's Hospital. Your thoughtful gift has brought joy to children from across Iowa," she said

As we celebrate the priceless gift of a child during this Christmas season, never forget that the greatest gifts are never wrapped in paper, but in love.

Darcy Dougherty Maulsby lives near her family's Century Farm northwest of Lake City. Visit her at [www.darcymaulsby.com](http://www.darcymaulsby.com).

Visit our website at [www.rvec.coop](http://www.rvec.coop)

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