New solar site in co-op territory

Scholarship opportunities for high school students

21 employees recognized for service milestones

Farm-to-bottle series:

HOLIDAY JOY & MERRIMENT
Cranberry & dessert wines with local driftless twist
Happy holidays

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year from your cooperative employees and directors of MiEnergy Cooperative. It’s been another great year and we’re grateful for the opportunity to serve members in southeastern Minnesota and northeastern Iowa.

Our 2020 capital budget was presented to our board of directors at the November board meeting. Our capital budget is comprised of expenditures for new assets that have a useful life in excess of one year and exceed $2,000 in value. The 2020 capital budget is $9.8 million and includes over $7.6 million in new electric distribution improvements, substation upgrades, pole replacements, and projected new electric services for members. It also includes vehicle replacements totaling $950,000 which includes two bucket trucks, two digger derrick trucks and one ¾ ton pickup.

Our fleet management program ensures a planned cycling of our equipment to not only maintain reliability, but to also spread out replacement costs. The co-op creates five-year work plans. The current work plan goes through the end of 2020. We are in the planning stage of a new five-year work plan as part of the Rural Utilities Services (RUS) loan program through the United States Department of Agriculture. The interest rates for our RUS loans are targeted at the federal governments FFB rate which is currently under 3%. This low cost of capital through the RUS program (formerly the REA program) is a valued and critical part of the rural electrification program that continues to be challenged with low density compared to municipal and investor-owned utilities.

Our work plan improvements for the year are determined not only on the age of current distribution system assets, but also electrical line loading. This takes into account the electric equipment operations of our members, outage history and loop feeder lines to transfer distribution load during larger system outages. We also anticipate another $2.5 million toward vegetation management, but this budgeted item will be expended in our 2020 operating budget that is still in the development stage and awaiting 2020 wholesale power projections.

The new year will again provide many opportunities and challenges for your electric cooperative. Retirements, organizational structure changes, recruiting and hiring new employees will be on the top of the list of priorities for management to address. This is not an issue unique to MiEnergy as more and more boomers leave for retirement.

Director elections, fixed cost recovery, additional large-scale renewable energy projects, along with our new work plan and RUS loan application will keep all of us very busy in the coming months.

We were also grateful to receive the favorable results of our 2019 residential member satisfaction survey that was completed earlier in the year. Overall satisfaction with MiEnergy Cooperative was excellent with an 8.74 satisfaction rating on a 10-point scale. More information about the survey will be shared next month in relation to our 2020 operating budget.

I hope you can take the opportunity this holiday season to spend time with friends and family and please be safe hanging those Christmas lights and decorations.

As always, I welcome your calls, emails and personal visits.

New solar generating site in MiEnergy’s service territory

A utility-scale solar generating site is new online and producing renewable energy in MiEnergy’s service territory. The Madison Solar Site is a 1.5-megawatt solar energy array owned and operated by ENGE North America. Dairyland Power Cooperative, MiEnergy’s wholesale power provider, has a power purchase agreement with ENGE for the full output of the facility. ENGE installed, owns, operates and maintains the facility, which is located south of Highway 9 between Ridgeway and Decorah on 270th Avenue.

“As your local energy cooperative, we are pleased to support the development of local renewable energy,” said Brian Krambeer, MiEnergy’s president and CEO. “Solar energy is an important part of a sustainable future and it’s exciting to celebrate commercial operation in the Decorah community.”

Madison Solar covers roughly 11 acres and is projected to produce enough energy to power approximately 240 homes per year. The solar installation is engineered with a tracking system which follows the path of the sun to increase energy production. Beneficial bee and butterfly habitat is also being developed at the Madison solar site. ENGE is using native seed mixes of grasses and flowers to create a certified pollinator garden.

2019 service milestones

2019 2018

Lorraine Berest
Monticello Service Rep.
Outage 10
Gary Housen
KIM

2019 2018

Cindy Christensen
Staff Assistant
Outage 10
Greg Cornell
KIM

2019 2018

Craig Cornell
Junctional Foreman
Outage 10
Greg Becker
KIM

2019 2018

Glen Becker
Junctional Foreman
New Employee
Ryan Carl
MIS I

Holiday Lighting Safety

Opportunities for High School Students

COMMUNITY SERVICE SCHOLARSHIPS
Any graduating high school senior, whose parent(s) or guardian(s) are members of the cooperative, are eligible for a MiEnergy Cooperative community service based scholarship. The scholarships are funded through unclaimed capital credits. An application is available online at www.MiEnergy.coop.

FREe TRIP TO WASHINGTON, D.C.
Two area high school students will be selected by MiEnergy to represent the cooperative as delegates of the Washington, D.C. Youth Tour June 19-26, 2020. To be eligible, the student’s parent(s) or guardian(s) must be members. An application is available online at www.MiEnergy.coop.

Board election process begins for District 1

Last month we published information regarding the board election process for 2020. If you are interested in running for a district 1 board seat contact Heather Larson at 800-432-2285 or hlarson@MiEnergy.coop for a director application. The application deadline is January 17, 2020.

The next board meeting is scheduled for 9 a.m. on December 23 at the Cooperative office.
Farm-to-bottle series: Viticulture is ever present with countryslide vineyards in our river valley region

The fast approaching holidays mean another year is drawing to a close. It also means our local “farm-to-bottle” series is also coming to an end. This issue highlights two more delightful wineries producing grape-to-glass and fruit-to-bottle farm inspired wines. Iowa and Minnesota each claim one of these gems who patiently and carefully grow grapes and fruits to be mixed in their specialty wine blends.

Holiday favorites take center stage this time of year including cranberry variations and even a warm version of fresh sangria! Who knew wine could be heated during the holiday season and enjoyed? Get in the spirit as you venture to Winneshiek Wildberry Winery and Garvin Heights Vineyards on the bluffs of Winona.

Both local wineries plant grapes especially suited for cold climates. These varieties were created by the University of Minnesota within the last few decades which inspired many vineyards and wineries to open along the Upper Mississippi River Valley. And glad tidings of our local agri-tourism zone! Plus, they also have some great gifts for the “wine-enthusiast” in your family. Happy Holidays!

WINNESHIEK WILDBERRY WINERY

The Barnes family started planting grapes on Mother’s Day in 2001 as a way to keep their farm viable. They opened their heritage barn inspired wine center in 2005. The original wine available for purchase that first year was simply called Harvest Blend, a humble name to honor the blend that mixed various grapes and fruits together which had been proudly grown on their converted farmland. Fifteen years later, over 30 varieties of wines have been created at their native winery. Everything from hand-picking two acres of rhubarb for their Rhubarb Crisp wine, to fermentation, bottling and labeling is all completed on-site. Their daughter Darla directs their wine making process, using an average of 15 different varieties of grapes. Daughter Beth handles the marketing and event coordination aspects of the business. This is truly a family operation.

GARVIN HEIGHTS VINEYARDS

Planting fruit and nut trees and grapevines on beautiful rolling blufflands turned into a perfect and picturesque landscape for a vineyard. Linda and Marvin Seppanen were soon dreaming of turning their home wine making venture into a vineyard akin to those popular in Napa Valley wine country on the West Coast. To their advantage, vineyards have been popping up in the valleys and on the hills along the border of Minnesota and Wisconsin. Explore Minnesota uses a slogan to draw people from the Twin Cities and around the Midwest “Come to the New West Coast”. They are referring to the Mississippi River, an area of the driftless region exploding with viticulture (grape growing).

Come to a place where you can arrange your own cheese board, complete with meat sticks from local family farms in Winona County. The cheese blocks and curds are locally sourced from Metz’s Hart-Land Creamery and the beef from Heiden Century Farms both near Rushford. Complete your wine tasting experience with a variety of crackers and your choice of wine, and viola! you have yourself a first class wine tasting experience. Adding Linda’s expert knowledge of food and wine pairing suggestions with Marvin’s vast understanding of grape growing and harvesting, ensures a grand time at their winery.

Garvin Heights is family friendly; kids and dogs are welcome. They have a variety of games and decks of cards available for guests to use. “We want to give opportunities for our guests to talk to others, to get to know someone new!” Linda explains. Most patrons are local, but many travel from the four state area and of course the college in Winona plays a big part in travel tourism. Many alumni and parents stop during school visits or after activities. WWW.GHVINE.COM

Winneshiek Wildberry Winery has a great location in Northeast Iowa. They are not far from Decorah, which has been quite the destination for craft beverages and are close to their activities and great camping options. Look no further for your next birthday or anniversary celebration, graduation party, wedding or art and cooking class. They have a full menu offered during summer months and soups and pies for the wintertime.
OLD FASHIONED GINGER SNAAPS

AMY NIELSEN, LEWISTON

1 1/4 c. molasses (I like Briner Rabbit; full flavor)
2 c. flour
1/4 t. salt
2 t. baking soda
2 c. flour
1 egg

Mix all together and put in greased loaf pan. Bake at 350° for 40-50 minutes.

Variety Vegetable Soup

MARTH A MEYER, BROWNSVILLE

1/2 ground beef
1 c. potatoes (diced)
1 c. carrots (sliced)
1 c. celery (diced)
1 c. cabbage (shredded)
1/2 onion

Cook ground beef and onion together until browned. Drain off excess fat. Add all remaining ingredients and mix together to boil. Cover and simmer for about one hour.

Apple Pie Bread

DON HROVICHACK, FORT ATIMON

1 can apple pie filling (mashed)
4 c. tomatoes or 2 one-pound cans
1 c. carrots (sliced)
3 T. cinnamon
1 c. flour

Mix all together and put in greased loaf pan. Bake at 350°F for 40-50 minutes, done when toothpick comes out clean.

Deadline is January 10. Send to Meagan at mmoellers@MiEnergy.coop or PO Box 90, Cresco, IA 52136.
Submit your family's favorite recipe for consideration to be printed in the February 2020 newsletter.

Thanksgiving Food Drive

Employees and directors collected food and monetary donations for area food banks to help local families during the holiday season, pictured L to R: Bonnie Food Pantry Board Member Betsy Morse, Mary Thoma and Sharon Pelzer and MiEnergy employees Joaange Moeller and Janette Sunnes.

Blood drive coming to Cresco

MiEnergy's Cresco office will be hosting an American Red Cross community Blood Drive on January 2, 2020 from 12-5 p.m. These blood drives are open to the general public. It is encouraged to schedule an appointment time, however walk-ins are also welcome. Call 1-800-RED-CROSS (1-800-733-2767) or visit www.redcrossblood.org and enter MiEnergy to schedule an appointment.

ANNUAL LEGISLATIVE FORUMS

Local representatives and senators attended our annual legislative forums held at our offices. This is a great opportunity for legislators to talk with co-op employees and staff about issues affecting the cooperative and its local communities. The legislators also provided information regarding the upcoming legislative 2020 session.

MiEnergy's Cresco office was featured in the February 2020 newsletter 12-5 p.m. These blood drives are open to the general public. It is encouraged to schedule an appointment time, however walk-ins are also welcome. Call 1-800-RED-CROSS (1-800-733-2767) or visit www.redcrossblood.org and enter MiEnergy to schedule an appointment.

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Protect your HVAC system and vents from snow and ice

Winter is fast approaching and it’s important to protect your HVAC (heating, ventilation, and air conditioning) from cold temperatures as well as snow and ice buildup. HVAC units are built to withstand some snow and ice, but they also require good air flow to function and will not work properly and can be damaged if operated with snow buildup.

- Be sure to keep at least 18 inches of clearance around each unit. This may require you to shovel or dust snow away from the unit. But do so with extreme caution so that you don’t hit or touch the condenser.
- Be sure that gutters and pipes are not forcing water onto a heater or air conditioning unit. You don’t want an icicle to fall and possibly damage the unit.
- Continue to clean and change your furnace filters even in wintertime. It is recommended cleaning or replacing furnace filters each month during the heating season.
- Check and clean air vents throughout your home. The buildup of dust and dirt within your home can cause ventilation blockages and inefficient airflow.
- Check your furnace air intake pipes or vents. A vent that is buried in snow is starving your furnace for the air it needs for combustion.

Now is also a good time to start researching options for an energy efficient Air Source Heat Pump or Geothermal Heat Pump if plans are in your future to replace your HVAC system.

Seasonal Reminder Iowa Members | Sales Tax Exemption

There is a tax exemption that could save you money if your business is agricultural, manufacturing or processing related.

Since January 1, 2006, residential customers are no longer subject to state sales tax. State sales tax rates are applicable for non-residential customers, unless a sales tax exemption certificate is filed with the cooperative. If you use electricity for processing/agriculture, you may be eligible to file a sales tax exemption certificate for the portion of your electric use that qualifies.

The certificate may be valid for up to three years and you can also file for refunds for past years, up to a maximum of three years.

You are not required to have exempt usage metered separately, but are required to calculate the percentage of exempt and non-exempt usage.

Contact Iowa Department of Revenue for instructions and the refund form by visiting www.tax.iowa.gov or calling 800-367-3388.