Grains of Minnesota
Local business provides refreshing reward to recreationalists on state trail

A monthly publication for members of MiEnergy Cooperative.

APRIL STORM LEAVES BEHIND 110 BROKEN POWER LINE POLES

It’s Safety Month: Tips for spotting hazards

OPERATION ROUND UP: LOCAL GROUPS RECEIVE $5,250 FROM CO-OP MEMBERS
Our 3rd Annual Meeting of MiEnergy Cooperative was held April 23 at the Mabel Community Center. It was a beautiful day, much fairer than last year’s annual meeting in which we had to postpone the meeting by one day, due to a snow storm. I guess the snow storm came a couple weeks earlier this year. The nice weather brought out a very good crowd of members.

As a recap, members were given a financial report by Director Don Petersen who explained that auditor Eide Bailly reported the financial statements printed in the annual report represent the financial condition of the cooperative. The cooperative once again had a strong financial performance and the board returned $2.1 million back to the membership in capital credits in the form of bill credits and checks in October 2018.

Denny Puckett, MiEnergy’s attorney, gave an update on director elections. Per the Plan of Merger passed by member vote in 2016, elections were not held in 2017, 2018 or 2019. Next year (2020), district 1 directors currently held by Roger Hegland, Dennis Pracek, Darla Rance and Joth Hartz will be available for election. In 2021, district 2 and 3 seats will be up for election. Currently, district 2 directors are Dean Nierling and Ron Stecklein, and district 3 directors are Don Petersen, Skip Wieser and Dennis Young, in 2022, district 4 seats will be up for election. District 4 directors are Dean Fisher, Charles Frana and Carl Reicks, and district 5 directors are Beth Olson and Jenny Scharmer.

Attorney Puckett explained that the bylaws state the board can have as many as 14 directors, but not fewer than 9. Two directors have already announced they will not be seeking re-election, Roger Hegland (2020) and Dean Fisher (2022). The board has determined they will not be filling those seats, rather they will be reducing the board size to 12. Puckett explained that members will continue to have equal representation with 12 directors.

With Director Hegland announcing that he will not be seeking reelection, this was his last annual meeting serving on the board. In recognition of his 36 years of service to the cooperative, he was presented with a rural electric meter lamp.

During my report to the membership, I addressed the outstanding work by our employees and tremendous support from our members following the impacts of the April Winter Storm Wesley. I also highlighted the significant accomplishments in 2018 that included the new retail rate structure that took two rate structures (Hawkeye REC and Tri-County Electric Cooperative) and made them into one (MiEnergy rates); the launch of the electric vehicle charging rate; the battery storage pilot project; and the creation of MiBroadband.

In looking ahead for 2019, I spoke about the installation of the next generation of Advanced Metering Infrastructure (AMI) to create more rate options for members; the continued importance of succession planning and employee recruitment; the construction of a 1.5-megawatt (MW) solar array by ENGIE near MiEnergy’s Madison Substation (between Decorah and Ridgeway) that Dairyland will purchase power from; and the construction of a 14-MW solar array near Utica that will be owned by MiEnergy.

Following my comments, we opened the floor for questions, which displayed our memberships interest in our storage battery pilot program, current and future electric generation resources, the advancement of our broadband communications infrastructure and program, and security of our nation’s electric grid.

We appreciated the continued support for MiEnergy Cooperative and as always, I welcome your calls, emails and personal visits.

WINTER STORM WESLEY

Early April snow and ice storm caused 5,000 outages

A four-day restoration event began during the evening of Wednesday, April 10, as the storm rolled from the west through MiEnergy’s service territory. The cooperative recorded over 5,000 electric service interruptions and 110 broken distribution poles. Four broken transmission poles led to seven substations without power.

For building on distribution lines, poles, crossarms and equipment combined with wind toppled electric lines, MiEnergy responded by working around the clock on Wednesday, followed by 18-hour days on Thursday and Friday. All power outages related to Winter Storm Wesley were restored by 2 p.m. on Saturday, April 13.

“Our lineworkers, operations department and administrative staff did an amazing job of managing the storm restoration and safely restoring electric power,” said President/CEO Brian Krambeer. “I’m very proud of our employees and the outstanding work they accomplished. It’s an incredible group of employees.

Dairyland Power Cooperative, MiEnergy’s wholesale power provider, provided vital restoration efforts to replace the broken high-voltage transmission poles to bring back power to the substations. Transmission lines are the main arteries bringing power to MiEnergy’s substations, which allows us to then deliver power to rural homes, farms and businesses on its distribution lines.

“We are gratefully able for all the support that our employees received from our membership. The positive comments and support truly energized our team through this disaster recovery,” added Krambeer.

MiEnergy was fortunate that its electrical contractor Tjader & Highstrom was planning on beginning work on April 15 as part of the cooperative’s summer construction contract. What was supposed to be one crew grew to 16 lineworkers once the storm hit. The added assistance and equipment proved to be extremely valuable. Equally beneficial was the delivery of distribution poles the week prior for summer construction projects, which provided the necessary inventory for the storm.

This is one of the largest storms, if not the largest, we’ve had run through our service area in Minnesota. It’s extremely rare that the cooperative doesn’t get power restored within 24 hours, and the difficult decision was made for crews to come in the last two nights knowing members would be without electricity overnight. Keeping employees safe took priority knowing that crews were in shortly after dark and regrouping early the next day.

“It is amazing to supervise employees that when you compliment them for going above and beyond, they are more humble and nonchalance about it. They are so good at saying, ‘no problem, just doing my job.’ This is after working an 18-hour plus day out in the field or in the office. They are truly an outstanding workforce that is willing to help out wherever and whenever it is necessary,” said Chad Chaffee, vice president of Minnesota system operations.

Power was temporarily restored during and after the storm, and it will take several weeks to clean up and transfer temporary fixes into permanent ones. Broken power poles and line equipment in the rights-of-way will be cleaned up by the cooperative or its contractor. The co-op also began the process of working with county and state disaster recovery personnel to document and report damages to our infrastructure in hopes of state and federal declarations of disaster and recovery of costs. MiEnergy is all too familiar with both the state and federal disaster recovery process. The flood of 2007 in Minnesota and the ice storm of 2007 in Iowa were both state and federal disaster declarations.

President/CEO Brian Krambeer, president/CEO | 800.432.2285 | bkrambeer@MiEnergy.coop
Electricity proving to be a force for positive change

Electricity was a term used by cooperatives in the 1930s to describe bringing electricity to the rural farmlands that were largely ignored by established power companies due to those areas being perceived as uneconomical for business. These days, it is often used to describe a movement seen by many as lowering greenhouse gas emissions on a global scale. The idea is that using smarter applications of electricity can make us more energy efficient today and can also allow more of our energy to come from clean sources over time. This is made possible in part by the utility industry’s move toward more renewable energy.

REDUCING CARBON EMISSIONS

The results of those efforts so far show that U.S. electric power sector’s carbon dioxide emissions have declined 28 percent since 2005, according to a report from the U.S. Energy Information Administration. The report shows that in 2005, noncarbon sources (such as wind and solar) accounted for 28 percent of the U.S. electricity mix, but by 2017 that share had grown to 38 percent.

And it’s not just a national trend; local electric cooperatives are also committed to creating a more balanced energy mix. Dairyland Power Cooperative, MiEnergy’s wholesale power supplier, generated 4 percent of electricity from renewables in 2007 and by 2017 it had grown to 23 percent. Currently, Dairyland has a purchase power agreement for a 1.5-megawatt (MW) solar array being built in Decorah, and announced earlier this year it has a purchase power agreement with Range Power for a proposed 149-MW Badger State Solar Project. MiEnergy added two community solar arrays in 2014 and in that same year became an owner of Minnesota Three, a 517-AW solar array. MiEnergy has a 1-MW, MiEnergy-owned solar array in the planning stages to be added near Utica, Minn. in 2020.

Now that we are working with increasingly cleaner sources of energy, electricity becomes the simple choice for use in applications that have traditionally been gas-powered. Transportation is one of the largest opportunities to make this shift as electric vehicle (EV) battery technology continues to improve, which increases its range, and costs decline.

INCENTIVES AND REBATES

Federal and state tax credits as well as incentives from your electric cooperative are also encouraging members who are looking to make the change. MiEnergy created an electric vehicle charging rate in 2018. There are a variety of other technologies that are advancing better uses of electricity that members can consider incorporating into their home. By installing a heat pump for home heating and cooling, or an electric thermal storage water heater, you know that the electricity powering those appliances is becoming cleaner over time.

Energy Efficient SAVINGS

THERMOSTAT SMARTS | Save up to 10 percent a year with a programmable thermostat to adjust the temperature by 2 or 3 degrees when the house is unoccupied.

STOP AIR LEAKS | Block leaks around windows, doors, and wiring/plumbing perforations. Don’t forget to insulate your attic, exterior walls, basement and crawl spaces.

NATURE’S CLIMATE CONTROL | Open curtains and blinds on south-facing windows to allow sunlight to heat your home on cool days, and leave them closed on summer days.

LIGHTING | Switch to Energy Star LED bulbs which use 70-90 percent less energy than incandescent and last 15 times longer.

APPLIANCES | Cut your electric bill by purchasing ENERGY STAR labeled major appliances.

HOME ELECTRONICS | Unplug any battery chargers, such as a cell phone charger, from the wall when not in use. Keep electronics plugged into power strips and surge protectors that can be turned off when not in use, especially overnight.

WATER | Because 90 percent of the energy used for washing clothes is for heating water, try washing clothes using the cold or warm settings. Make sure the washing machine and dishwasher are full when running and let the clothes and dishes air dry. Lowering the thermostat on your home’s water heater to a setting of 120°F can also help cut costs and save energy.

LANDSCAPING | Plant trees or shrubs to shade air conditioning units (but don’t block the airflow). A well-placed tree near the house can deliver effective shade, act as a windbreak and reduce your energy bills up to 25 percent. Just make sure to keep those trees away from nearby power lines.
The locals who call Fountain, Minn. their home, as well as tourists, bicyclists, snowmobilers, fishermen, hunters, commuters and beer-drinking tourists, find themselves admiring the two-year old establishment that appeals well to craft beer enthusiasts. Using local hops from a farm just six miles from their brewery, Eric and Sandy Luoma are proud to say they filled a brewery void for the small southeastern Minnesota community of Fountain when they opened Karst Brewing in 2017. Its perfect location attracts customers and greets them with quaint, rustic charm. Situated only two miles from the Root River State Trail, adventurers make the trek knowing that the perfect combination of farm-fresh craft beer favorites awaits them.

After spending over 25 years in the Twin Cities, returning to the driftless area became part of their new life plan. And since Eric had been a home-brewer since the 90s, the creation of a small ‘ma and pop’ brewery became an integral part of their plan as well. They chose Karst Brewing as the name for their business, a very creative way to honor the unusual for their business, a very creative way to honor the unusual name of a small ‘ma and pop’ brewery became an integral part of their plan as well. They chose Karst Brewing as the name for their business, a very creative way to honor the unusual phenomena, and so karst became a clever way to distinguish and personalize themselves in the trendy craft beer world.

The key ingredients to produce a brilliant tasting wet hop brew include a local hops yard (Civil Sass – Chatfield), community members willing to get their hands dirty harvesting the fragrant Cascade hops from the bines, and a local brewery (Karst Brewing – Fountain). This annual harvest event is quite popular, perhaps because the participants get to come back and taste the fresh, wet-hop beer! Knowing it was harvested locally puts the icing on the cake. “It’s just like fresh blueberry pie – you can only get it during a small window of the year,” explains Sandy. “We encourage them to come back and taste the beer, topped with a fresh hop, signifying the hard work they put into harvesting the special brew. The “Battle of the Bines”, a hop picking contest, takes place annually in September.

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REUSE | REPURPOSE

Upon making the decision to up-root their urban lives and take-root in rural Fillmore County, they needed to find the perfect location. Wanting something quaint and picturesque to match the landscape of the driftless, an old café which had once been a one-room schoolhouse, caught their attention. Eric spent three years renovating the building, creating an industrial yet inviting atmosphere by using steel siding accompanied by a large full-window garage door. He was able to repurpose much of the material found in the historic building. Reclaimed purlington paver bricks were recycled for their patio area. Plans are to bring in pieces from their Minneapolis past as well. This will include large granite slabs from Nicollet Mall to be incorporated throughout their new courtyard space. It’s a great example of repurposing, making their brewery an inviting and natural space for outdoor enthusiasts.

COLLABORATION BETWEEN BREWER AND HOP GROWER

Grab a glass or growler at Karst Brewery in Fountain

Farm-to-tap series: Cozy historic building home to “Ma & Pop” Nano brewery

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MiEnergy Cooperative’s Operation Round Up Trust Board met in March and elected to donate $5,250 to the following local organizations:

- $500, Commonsweat Theatre Company, Lansebros, Minn., to support the Student Matinee performances helping make these field trips accessible for all area schools.
- $500, Quilts for Veterans, Castalia, Iowa, for long-arm quilting of quilts to honor veterans.
- $500, Quilts of Honor, Spring Grove, Minn., for long-arm quilting of quilts to honor veterans.
- $450, Horse and Soul Ranch, Decorah, Iowa, to help provide program assistance.
- $425, Thunder Rode Inc., Decorah, Iowa, to help purchase a weatherproof, portable mounting block.
- $400, Bundles of Love, Chetfield, Minn., to help with basics supplies for diaper bags given to families in need in Fillmore, Houston and Winona counties.
- $400, Norman Borlaug Heritage Foundation, Cresco, Iowa, to provide educational opportunities for high school students with a focus on environment and agriculture.
- $325, Roseville WA TAN YE, to assist with the removal of trees that are at risk of damaging the historic one-room schoolhouse.
- $300, Fillmore County DM, Preston, Minn., to purchase supplies for an enrichment program.
- $300, Kindred Family Focus, Rochester, Minn., to help foster families in Fillmore and Winona counties with basic needs.
- $300, Lansebros Arts, to support Surrise Sculpture, a summer art educational opportunity, for students.
- $300, Root Prairie Lutheran Church, Fountain, Minn., to help purchase an automated external defibrillator.
- $250, City of Spring Grove, to support the Spring Grove Area Active Living Trail Planning Project.
- $100, Howard County Energy District, Cresco, Iowa, to support energy efficiency related events.
- $100, St. Charles Trap Team, to help with expenses for establishing a team for students.

POWERFUL PENNIES

MEMBERS GIVE $5,250 IN LOCAL DONATIONS

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Operation Round Up is funded by donations made by members of MiEnergy Cooperative who voluntarily have their electric bill rounded up to the next dollar. About 1,800 members currently participate with the average donation being $46 per member.

The program is based on the idea that small change adds up. Currently, the program gives away about $10,000 each year to local organizations.

The Operation Round Up Trust Board chooses where the funds get donated and the amount of the donation based on an application process. The trust board members include: John Bronk, of Winona, Minn., president; Janet Mahn, of Lime Springs, Iowa, vice president; Margaret Knudston, of Houston, Minn., secretary/treasurer; Larry Hafner, of La Crescent, Minn.; Alen Hanson, of Preston, Minn.; Arlene Hegge, of La Crescent, Minn.; Shannon Schmelzer, of Cresco, Iowa; and Perry Sliwa, Decorah, Iowa.

Donations to Operation Round Up are tax deductible. Organizations receive grants through an application process. The next application deadline is August 15. To learn more about Operation Round Up or to round up your electric bill, visit www.MiEnergy.coop or call 1-800-432-2285.

Utility poles are not bulletin boards
Help keep our lineworkers safe

MiEnergy would like to remind everyone that it is prohibited to attach objects to our utility poles, such as: campaign signs, garage sale signs, lost and found signs, deer stands, birdhouses, satellite dishes, etc. Signs on utility poles raise major safety concerns for our lineworkers. Stakes, tacks and nails can cause more serious injuries than most people would suspect. For example, if a nail tears an insulated glove, the lineman is no longer properly protected from the high-voltage power lines they work on. Also, nails and staples can cause the lineman’s boot spikes to cut out of the pole, causing a serious fall from a dangerous height.

We need your help. If you notice anyone trying to attach something to a utility pole, let them know it’s dangerous and illegal. Thank you for your cooperation.

MiRecipes | Family Favorites

Submit your family’s favorite recipe for consideration to be printed in the September 2019 newsletter. Deadline is August 13. Send to Megan at mmellers@MiEnergy.coop or PO Box 69, Cresco, IA 52242. MiRecipes will be printed quarterly in this publication. If we publish your recipe, you will receive a $5 credit on your next electric bill. Limit one recipe per member annually.

CASEROLE FOR FIVE | NANCY ELDORIDGE, DECORAH

2 c. cooked squash
Salt
1 t. maple syrup
½ lb. (or more) Italian sausage (browned)
2 c. brown or white rice
1 large red onion (sliced)
2-4 jalapeno/poblanos or red/orange peppers (sliced)
Turmeric
Butter

Broccoli and Cheese Egg Cups | CAROLYN RUBER, NEW HAMPTON

( Makes 12 mini muffins)

½ c. broccoli florets (finely chopped)
½ c. cheese (shredded) (optional)
2 eggs (lightly beaten)
½ c. chopped onion (chopped) (optional)
2 ½ c. shredded cheddar cheese
2 T. grated Parmesan cheese

Preheat oven to 350° and grease 12 mini muffin cups.

Stir together all ingredients in a medium bowl. Spoon into muffin cups. Filling about to the top. Bake for 18-18 minutes or until firm to the touch & golden brown around the edges. Let cool for at least 5 minutes before serving. Use a paring knife around the edges of each to help loosen, if needed. Serve warm on or room temp.

Store in the fridge for up to 3 to 5 days or store in freezer in a zip top bag. Reheat in the microwave for 30 seconds before serving.

QUICK CARBONARA | VICKY JAEGGER, DECORAH

(1 pkg. (12 oz) spaghetti)
3 ½ c. margarine
3 ½ c. squash
2 garlic cloves (minced)
3 c. cooked ham (chopped)
6 bacon strips (fried)
3 T. oil
3 T. white pepper
3 T. garlic powder
3 T. onion powder
1 c. grated Parmesan cheese

Cook spaghetti. Meanwhile, heat butter, oil and garlic; mix well. Drain spaghetti and add to skillet with ham, bacon, parsley and salt. Cook and stir until heated through. Remove from heat and add the olives and cheese. Serve.

Quick Carbonara | VICKY JAEGGER, DECORAH

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Safety starts with you

Tips for spotting potential electrical hazards in your home

Electricity plays many roles in our lives, from powering baby monitors, cell phones and lighting, to running heating and cooling systems and appliances. May is National Electrical Safety Month, and here at MiEnergy, we think it’s a great time to look around your home and check for potential safety hazards.

Remember, every electrical device has a purpose and a service lifespan. While we can extend their operations with maintenance and care, none of them are designed to last or work forever. When electricity is involved, failures can present electrical hazards that might be avoided with periodic inspections.

GROUND FAULT CIRCUIT INTERRUPTERS

Outdoor outlets or those in potentially damp locations in a kitchen, bathroom or laundry room often include ground fault circuit interrupter (GFCI) features. They are designed to sense abnormal current flows, breaking the circuit to prevent potential electric shock from devices plugged into the outlets.

The average GFCI outlet is designed to last about 10 years, but in areas prone to electrical storms or power surges, they can wear out in five years or less. Check them periodically. Most GFCIs have a test button that you should press. If it doesn’t trip, it should be replaced. If the grounding prong is missing, it should be repaired or replaced by an electrician.

If you use extension cords regularly to connect devices and equipment to your wall outlets, you may live in an underwired home. A growing number of electrical devices contain GFCI features to protect your family from electric shock and are now sold at most retail stores. When electricity is involved, failures can present electrical hazards that might be avoided with periodic inspections.

EXTENSION CORDS

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LOOSE OR DAMAGED OUTLETS OR SWITCHES

Unstable electrical outlets or wall switches with signs of heat damage or discoloration can offer early warnings of potential shock or electrical fire hazards. Loose connections can cause overheating and can present electrical hazards that might be avoided with periodic inspections.

SURGE PROTECTORS

Power strips with surge protectors can help safeguard expensive equipment like televisions, home entertainment systems and computer components from power spikes. Voltage spikes are measured in joules, and surge protectors are rated for the number of joules they can effectively absorb. That means if your surge protector is rated at 1,000 joules, it should be replaced when it hits or passes that limit. When the limit is reached, protection stops, and you’re left with a basic power strip. Some surge protectors include indicator lights that flicker to warn you when they’ve stopped working as designed, but many do not. If your electrical system takes a major hit, or if you don’t remember when you bought your surge protector, replacement may be the best option.

Depending on your zip code, you may receive an application. Minnesota members can contact Kent Whitcomb at kwhitcomb@mienergy.coop or by calling 800-432-2285 to schedule a time to meet at the cooperative for assistance in submitting the application. MiEnergy will only accept DER interconnection applications made active (i.e., those that have all the related documentation, process information, rate tariff and any other information). Members may contact the cooperative to schedule a time to meet at the cooperative for assistance in submitting an application. Minnesota members can contact Kent Whitcomb at kwhitcomb@mienergy.coop or by calling 800-432-2285 with questions.

May is Electrical Safety Month. Safety Starts with You.

#ElectricalSafetyMonth

CAREER DAY — RICEVILLE

The freshman class from Riceville Community Schools recently toured the Iowa office to bring awareness of the various career opportunities available at their local electric cooperative. The students were also able to engage and discuss education and work experiences with a panel of four employees that also graduated from Riceville. Employees Pat Boyle, Cindy Christensen, Eric Friedrich, Jarele Sunnes and Dave Wilkes participated in the student career day event.

STEM Festival was an exhibitor at the Northeast Iowa Family STEM Festival in Cresco on April 11 at the Howard County Fairgrounds. The goals of the festival were to promote, inspire and engage youth in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) activities and to introduce children and parents to STEM careers in their local communities. MiEnergy’s Vice President of Marketing and External Relations Ted Kjos invited students to try a hand pedal power generator that compared pedaling power to light a LED versus an incandescent bulb with similar lumens to see which bulb used less power to illuminate.

Call 811 POSTER CONTEST — CRESCO

MiEnergy’s Communications Specialist Meagan Moellers visited the 5th grade class at Notre Dame Catholic School in Cresco and encouraged students to enter the Energy Safe Kids 811 Poster Contest. The student’s role of the contest was to produce an original poster and write an explanation of his/her understanding of the Call 811 theme. Spring is a great time to remind everyone of all ages to Call Before You Dig.

MINNESOTA NOTICE: JUNE 1 MARKS NEW PROCESS FOR INTERCONNECTIONS

On March 27, 2019, the MiEnergy Cooperative Directors approved adopting the Cooperative Minnesota Distributed Energy Resources Interconnection Process (C-MIP). This new process will be effective starting June 1, 2019, for all applications for interconnection of member-owned renewable Distributed Energy Resources (DER). MiEnergy Cooperative will have all the related documentation, process information, rate tariff and application materials available on the MiEnergy website, www.MiEnergy.coop. A link to a designated web portal to submit DER interconnection applications will be available June 1, 2019 (or as soon as the portal is made active). MiEnergy will only accept DER interconnection applications through the web portal. Members may contact the cooperative to schedule a time to meet at the cooperative for assistance in submitting an application. Minnesota members can contact Kent Whitcomb at kwhitcomb@mienergy.coop or by calling 800-432-2285 with questions.

MiEnergy will be closed Monday, May 27 to observe Memorial Day. Call 800-432-2285 to report power outages. Visit www.MiEnergy.coop or call 877-853-6517 for account information.

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Spring is the onset of MiEnergy’s construction and contractor season. Cooperative crews handle all the day-to-day operations, but on an annual basis MiEnergy hires many different contractors that make sure our electric system is safe and reliable for our members. Through the cooperative’s bidding process, the following contractors have been awarded contracts for the year 2019: 4-Control, Acculine, Asplundh, Chapman Metering, Highline Construction, IClimb, Lake States, MiTech, New Age, Star Energy and Tjader & Highstrom Utility, LLC.

Please be aware that you may see these companies working throughout our service territory in Minnesota and Iowa. If you have questions about whether a contractor is working on our behalf, you can call 800-432-2285 at any time, including after normal business hours.

### MEMBER SURVEY

MiEnergy will be conducting a member satisfaction survey starting Monday, June 24. The telephone and online survey will randomly select co-op members. MiEnergy hired a third-party independent research group, National Rural Electric Cooperative Association’s Market Research Services, to conduct a confidential survey with co-op members. If you are contacted, we strongly encourage you to take the short survey. The survey’s initiatives will focus on questions to measure the value of our cooperative to the membership, electric service quality and a number of other specific areas of interest. We’ve been using this type of survey for decades. We appreciate your time and input because your feedback helps us discover ways to better serve you.

### Co-op leaders discuss tax code issue

Senator Tina Smith spoke with electric co-op leaders in Oronoco, Minn. MiEnergy President/CEO Brian Krambeer was one of three area co-op leaders to speak with Senator Tina Smith in Oronoco, Minn. on April 25. Senator Smith said she introduced a bill to make sure co-ops do not lose tax exempt status following a disaster. Recent changes to the Internal Revenue Code created an unintended consequence for electric cooperatives. Government grants may now be considered non-member income. As it stands, it means that an electric cooperative struck by disaster may have to consider whether it can afford to use FEMA’s Public Assistance Program to help restore power to members. Co-ops could be forced to choose between maintaining their tax-exempt status or accepting FEMA assistance when recovering from a major storm or other disaster.

PHOTO: L-R: Elaine Garry, People’s Energy Cooperative; Brian Krambeer, MiEnergy Cooperative; Senator Tina Smith; and Jim Krueger, Freeborn-Mower Cooperative Services.