



# THE OUTLET

Monthly Publication of Mille Lacs Energy Cooperative

Your Touchstone Energy® Cooperative 

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## 2023 FISH HOUSE PARADE

### *Aitkin's World Famous Fish House Parade is a success!*

On Friday, November 24<sup>th</sup>, MLEC participated in the World Famous Fish House Parade. Employees and their families rode the winter-themed MLEC float down Minnesota Avenue in Aitkin. It was a great day for a parade with a large audience. Thank you to all who attended and to the Aitkin Chamber of Commerce for organizing a great event. We are looking forward to next year!





# NON-DISCRIMINATION STATEMENT

Mille Lacs Energy Cooperative is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

In accordance with Federal civil rights law and U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) civil rights regulations and policies, the USDA, its Agencies, offices, and employees, and institutions participating in or administering USDA programs are prohibited from discriminating based on race, color, national origin, religion, sex, gender identity (including gender expression), sexual orientation, disability, age, marital status, family/parental status, income derived from a public assistance program, political beliefs, or reprisal or retaliation for prior civil rights activity, in any program or activity conducted or funded by USDA (not all bases apply to all programs). Remedies and complaint filing deadlines vary by program or incident.

Persons with disabilities who require alternative means of communication for program information (e.g., Braille, large print, audiotape, American Sign Language, etc.) should contact the responsible Agency or USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TTY) or contact USDA through the Federal Relay Service at (800) 877-8339. Additionally, program information may be made available in languages other than English.

To file a program discrimination complaint, complete the USDA Program Discrimination Complaint Form, AD-3027, found online at [How to File a Program Discrimination Complaint](#) and at any USDA office or write a letter addressed to USDA and provide in the letter all of the information requested in the form. To request a copy of the complaint form, call (866) 632-9992. Submit your completed form or letter to USDA by: (1) mail: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights, 1400 Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, D.C. 20250-9410; (2) fax: (202) 690-7442; or (3) email: [program.intake@usda.gov](mailto:program.intake@usda.gov).

## CAPITAL CREDITS

When dealing with a business or a service, how many times do you get part of the profit? At MLEC, you do because you're an owner.

In December, MLEC will distribute capital credit refunds totaling \$570,160. The refunds are based on electric accounts that were active 2001-2002 (GRE), 2006 (MLEC), 2006 (COOP NOP).

If you have an active account, you will see the refund on your December electric bill. If not, you will receive a check.

The 2023 payment brings the total dollars refunded by your Cooperative through the years to over \$22 million. Just another example of the Cooperative difference!

### How Do Capital Credits Work?



- 1** MLEC tracks how much electricity you use throughout the year.
- 2** Each year, after expenses are paid, MLEC calculates margins (leftover funds).
- 3** MLEC uses the margins to pay down debt, invest in facilities and improvement projects, and allocates to members as capital credits based on their usage of electricity.
- 4** MLEC retires (returns) capital credits to members.

**Questions or concerns?**  
MLEC's Board of Directors represent you!

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320/469-0951  
[manderson@mlccmn.com](mailto:manderson@mlccmn.com)

**Derik Midthun - District 2**  
218/821-4349  
[dmidthun@mlccmn.com](mailto:dmidthun@mlccmn.com)

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Vice President

**Sarah Cron - CEO**  
218/927-8224  
[scron@mlccmn.com](mailto:scron@mlccmn.com)

Find minutes from  
MLEC Board meetings at:  
<http://www.mlccmn.net>  
under **My Co-op**

*This newsletter is the voice of  
your tax and interest paying  
RURAL ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE,  
an organization which was  
formed to supply you with  
low-cost, dependable  
electricity when other sources  
failed to do so.*

Managing Editor: Kassie Peterson,  
Communications Specialist

# 2023 - A YEAR IN REVIEW

I am wrapping up my fifth year as the CEO of MLEC. At the end of each year, when I look back on how much our Board of Directors and employees have accomplished, I think, "next year will be a little quieter." Somehow, that never seems to happen. It is simply in our nature to push forward full steam ahead! Regardless, it has been another excellent year for MLEC, and we are all looking forward to 2024.

We ended 2022 and began 2023 with storm after storm after storm. And with that, we found our new normal with CRC (Cooperative Response Center) handling our after-hours dispatch. We found a few holes in the process that we addressed immediately – including some safety issues with our radios. We spent several months working with CRC and GRE (Great River Energy) to install and update the proper equipment to ensure all vehicles and CRC can always communicate.

With safety top of mind, our engaged employees jumped in, hosting youth safety presentations in our communities, performing peer-to-peer safety talks with state-wide employee groups, ensuring proper PPE (personal protective equipment) is used on the job, and adopting safe and healthy work habits. Your MLEC Senior Leadership Team worked closely with their representatives at the IBEW Local 31 Union to create an official Safety Role at MLEC to develop consistent safety messaging and a culture of safety. All these efforts paid off when our annual RESAP (Rural Electric Safety Achievement Program) assessment yielded favorable results.

While some of our members did experience prolonged outages during storm season, the outage duration would have been much longer had it not been for the aggressive tree-clearing program and substation/downstream equipment investments we made. Other major investments included grid modernization, EV charging, smart infrastructure integration, storage, infrastructure transition, and more. We are investing in your electric cooperatives' infrastructure as we prepare for decarbonization and the added load it will bring to the electrical grid.

This year, we broke ground on our headquarters project. Today, the building is almost fully enclosed. Even though we are experiencing some supply chain issues, we are still on track to occupy the building by September 2024. If luck is on our side, we will push our Annual Meeting to September, and hold a combination Open House Annual Meeting in 2024.

We increased our monthly Residential Access Charge from \$33 to \$49 in May. This recommendation came from a thorough rate study completed by CFC (Cooperative Finance Corporation). This rate adjustment did cause concern among our members; however, we want to be clear that the adjustment accomplished what it was intended to do. We are collecting the proper revenue from our residential members to ensure that everyone is paying their fair share of the cost of providing

electric service. The rate study also looked at each of our special programs to determine where MLEC was subsidizing the cost of the special program through their general service rate class. It was determined that we lose money on every kW we sell on the Freedom Heat Program. Again, while met with great member concern, we must discontinue a program that is costing the entire membership while a benefit is seen by a small percentage of members. We know that change is not easy and may seem unfair right now, but the decisions we are making today are for the long-term stability of the future of your electric cooperative.

By the end of 2023, we will near our 1500th customer on MLEC Fiber! Our focus has been to bring this critical infrastructure to unserved and underserved areas of the MLEC service territory. In 2024, we will celebrate our 85th Anniversary of bringing electricity to rural Aitkin County. That dream of a few farmers grew to over 13,500 members and spread across three counties. We are very excited to see where we go in the years to come.

We continue to retire capital credits to our members at an accelerated pace. On a 17-year rotation, meaning we are returning patronage from members who joined the cooperative just 17 years ago, we plan to retire \$570,160 at the end of 2023, for a total of over \$22 million since our inception. We just sent \$22,560 to 5 local schools as part of our annual unclaimed property donation and continue supporting the communities we serve through our Operation Round Up and Loyal to Local programs.

As I think about everything we did, I want to thank our staff for completing 27 of the 27 strategic initiatives outlined by the MLEC Board of Directors and Senior Staff. It was a heavy lift, and we finished it two years ahead of the five-year goal. In 2024, Your MLEC Board of Directors and Senior Leadership Team will undertake another strategic planning session to uncover where we can take MLEC over the next five years.

We look forward to your continued support along the way.

Be well, and Happy Holidays!



*Sarah Cron*  
CEO

A handwritten signature in white ink, appearing to read 'Sm', located at the bottom right of the page.

# LET'S DISH

Thank you to Pat Trombley of Anoka  
for sharing this month's recipe.

## SEND US YOUR RECIPES!

We'll credit your account **\$10.00**  
if it's printed in THE OUTLET

### MAIL TO:

Kassie Peterson  
Mille Lacs Energy, P.O. Box 230 Aitkin,  
MN 56431

### OR E-MAIL:

kpeterson@mlecmmn.com



## GINGERBREAD

1/2 cup sugar  
1 tsp baking soda (add to molasses)  
1/2 cup shortening  
1 cup molasses  
2 eggs

1 tsp cinnamon  
2 tsp baking powder  
1/2 tsp salt  
3 cups flour  
1 cup boiling water

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Grease and flour a 9x13 inch pan. In a large bowl, mix baking powder, flour, salt, and cinnamon. In another large bowl mix sugar, molasses (with baking soda), shortening, and eggs until blended. Add wet ingredients to the dry then add boiling water to the mixture. Pour into pan and bake at 350 degrees for 35-40 minutes.

# LED HOLIDAY LIGHTS

Decking the halls doesn't have to take a toll on your energy bill! Light up your home this holiday season while saving energy.

- Switching to LED holiday lights can save up to 90% of energy use when compared to traditional incandescent string lights.
- LED bulbs always remain cool to the touch unlike older incandescent models making them safer for pets & kids.
- LEDs last up to 10 times longer than traditional incandescent strands and do not contain fragile filaments that break from shaking and rattling.

### Recycle your old light strands!

Mille Lacs Energy is joining with the Brainerd Sunrise Sertomas to sponsor the holiday Bites for Lights recycling program. Drop off your old strands at the Aitkin office and the Sertomas will work with Kenwood Enterprises to recycle them. Consider going green and recycle to help area food shelves.



**Save 30% on LED holiday  
lights for a limited time.**

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

\*Restrictions apply

# MLEC GIFT CERTIFICATE



Any MLEC member would welcome one less bill to pay during the holiday season. It's easy - return the completed form with the desired gift amount to:

**Mille Lacs Energy Cooperative**  
P.O. Box 230  
Aitkin, MN 56431

This gift is for: \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

This gift is from: \_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Daytime Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Certificate amount \$ \_\_\_\_\_

*Recipient's gift will be applied to their MLEC account*



# WINTER STORM PREP

When winter temperatures drop and storms hit, it can be challenging to stay safe and warm. MLEC cares about your safety, and we want you to be prepared. Heavy snow and ice can lead to downed power lines, leaving co-op members without power. During extremely low temperatures, this can be dangerous. During a power outage, our crews will continue to work as quickly and safely as possible to restore power, but there are a few things you can do to prepare yourself.

- **Stay warm** – Plan to use a safe alternate heating source, such as a fireplace or wood-burning stove during a power outage. These are great options to keep you and your loved ones warm, but exercise caution when using, and never leave the heating source unattended. If you are using gasoline, propane, or natural gas burning devices to stay warm, never use them indoors.
- **Stay fed** – The CDC recommends having several days' supply of food that does not need to be cooked handy. Crackers, cereal, canned goods and bread are good options. Also have drinking water available in the event of an extended power outage.
- **Stay safe** – When an outage occurs, it usually means power lines are down. It is best not to travel during winter storms, but if you must, bring a survival kit along, and do not travel alone. If you encounter downed lines, always assume they are live. Stay as far away from the downed lines as possible.

Winter weather can be unpredictable and dangerous, and planning ahead can often be the difference between life and death. MLEC is ready for what Mother Nature has in store, and we want you to be ready too.

Regular office hours are  
Mon-Fri 8:00 to 4:30

927-2191 or  
800-450-2191 (toll free)



48 hours before you dig  
Dial 811 - Gopher State  
One Call or log on to:  
[www.gopherstateonecall.org](http://www.gopherstateonecall.org)

Then contact a licensed electrician  
to locate your secondary wires.

## **MN Electrical Inspectors**

Aitkin County &  
South East Crow Wing County  
Jeff Larson 320-227-3009

Northern Crow Wing County  
Nathan Readle 218-537-8419

Mille Lacs County  
Benjamin Husom 320-277-6277

Off-peak and dual fuel system  
consumers should call an  
electrician or heating contractor for  
service or repairs.

Find load control schedule at  
[www.mlecmn.net](http://www.mlecmn.net) under Quick Links.



Visit our website -  
[www.mlecmn.net](http://www.mlecmn.net)  
E-mail us - [mlec@mlecmn.net](mailto:mlec@mlecmn.net)

# XMAS TREE RECYCLING

**Drop off your real Christmas tree at the  
MLEC office for chipping.**

This year, MLEC will be offering free Christmas tree recycling for members. Drop off your tree at the Aitkin office in the member parking lot. There will be signs to direct you to the drop off spot. To prep your tree for chipping, please remove all decorations and lights.



## Third Quarter Mille Lacs Energy Cooperative **Comparative Operating Statement** for the Quarter Ending Sept. 30, 2023 & Sept. 30, 2022

	2023	2022
OPERATING REVENUE	23,342,800.40	22,733,860.96
COST OF PURCHASED POWER	12,429,662.73	13,302,690.90
DISTRIBUTION EXPENSE-OPERATION	1,202,263.52	1,195,738.50
DISTRIBUTION EXPENSE-MAINTENANCE	2,170,833.18	1,792,965.52
CUSTOMER ACCOUNTS EXPENSE	672,389.26	595,252.79
CUSTOMER SERVICE AND INFORMATIONAL EXPENSE	413,349.78	354,501.27
ADMINISTRATIVE AND GENERAL EXPENSE	1,497,357.56	1,410,121.18
TOTAL OPERATING COSTS	5,257,849.60	5,348,579.26
TOTAL OPERATIONS EXPENSE	18,385,856.03	18,651,270.16
DEPRECIATION	1,710,834.84	1,629,253.72
TAX EXPENSE	1,358.00	1,360.00
INTEREST ON LONG TERM DEBT	903,894.14	966,788.26
INTEREST EXPENSE-OTHER	10,280.27	389.04
OTHER DEDUCTION	2,004.17	768.56
TOTAL COST OF ELECTRIC SERVICE	21,014,227.45	21,249,829.74
OPERATING MARGINS	<b>2,328,572.95</b>	<b>1,484,031.22</b>
NON OPERATING MARGINS-INTEREST	389,171.57	87,134.66
NON OPERATING MARGINS-OTHER	(75,752.87)	(42,818.51)
GENERATION & TRANSMISSION CAPITAL CREDITS	-	-
OTHER CAPITAL CREDITS	151,504.66	129,132.57
NET MARGINS	<b>2,793,496.31</b>	<b>1,657,479.94</b>

# HAPPY HOLIDAYS!

OUR OFFICE WILL BE CLOSED  
DECEMBER 25<sup>TH</sup> & 26<sup>TH</sup>  
JANUARY 1<sup>ST</sup>



## THE GIFT THAT *keeps on giving!*

Is MLEC Fiber Internet available where you live? Sign up for the fastest and most reliable Internet available.

**Call MLEC at (218) 429-0433**

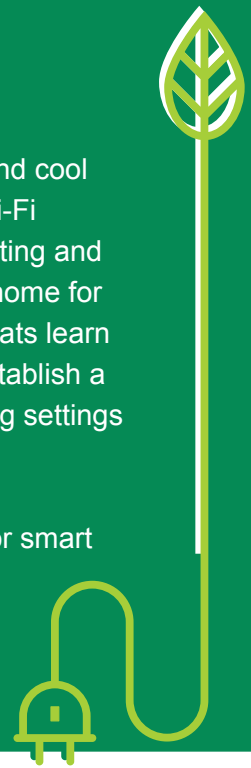
**MLEC** fiber  
Powered by Mille Lacs Energy Cooperative

## Energy Efficiency Tip of the Month

Get smart with a better way to heat and cool your home! Smart thermostats are Wi-Fi enabled and automatically adjust heating and cooling temperature settings in your home for optimal performance. Smart thermostats learn your temperature preferences and establish a schedule that adjusts to energy-saving settings when you're asleep or away.

For maximum energy savings, look for smart thermostat models with the ENERGY STAR® label.

*Source: Dept. of Energy*



## GIFT CARD TRIVIA!

Correctly answer the question below for your chance to win a gift card from a local business within our service area. The answer can be found within this issue of The Outlet. You must be an MLEC member to participate. Be sure to include your name and service address! Entries must be received by **December 30<sup>th</sup>**.

### MAIL TO:

Kassie Peterson  
Mille Lacs Energy Cooperative  
P.O. Box 230  
Aitkin, MN 56431

### OR E-MAIL:

kpeterson@mlecmn.com

*Fill in the blank.*

The 2023 payment brings the total dollars refunded by your Cooperative through the years to over \_\_\_\_\_.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

*Congrats to Jerome Teigen, the October gift card trivia winner!*



**MILLE LACS ENERGY COOPERATIVE**

36559 US Highway 169, Aitkin, MN 56431 • (218) 927-2191 / (800) 450-2191 • [www.mlecmn.net](http://www.mlecmn.net)

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