



# THE OUTLET

Monthly Publication of Mille Lacs Energy Cooperative

Your Touchstone Energy® Cooperative 

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## HOLIDAY GIVING

### *Concern for community rings true at Mille Lacs Energy Cooperative!*

Concern for community is one of the core principles that sets cooperatives apart from other types of utilities and businesses. We take this responsibility to heart and try to spread as much good as possible. While our purpose as an electric cooperative is to provide safe and reliable energy to you, our members, we have a greater mission - to make our service area a better place.

This year, our donation for Operation Christmas exceeded our goals! Operation Christmas is a program coordinated by volunteers working with Aitkin, Hill City, McGregor, Palisade and Tamarack area businesses and service clubs to collect and distribute Christmas gifts for Aitkin County families in need of help. MLEC members, employees, and board members donated \$1,038 to Operation Christmas of Aitkin County. MLEC matched \$500 for a grand total of \$1,538!

In late November, MLEC employees volunteered to ring the bell for the Salvation Army. We hope that our members chose to put some cash in a red kettle this year. Any little bit counts!

We are looking forward to what 2024 brings. As a cooperative, we will continue to keep the lights on and keep our communities' and members' needs at the forefront of our efforts. Never forget that your co-op cares! We hope you all had a wonderful holiday season and wish you a happy and healthy new year!





# YOUTH TOUR 2024

**Apply for an all-expenses paid trip to Washington D.C.  
Open to high school sophomores and juniors! This  
year's tour takes place June 18 - 23, 2024.**



Each year, rural electric cooperatives from across the nation sponsor students for a prestigious leadership experience in Washington, D.C. Mille Lacs Energy Cooperative is looking for one area high school student to represent our cooperative, for an all-expenses paid opportunity, to learn how the government works, and what the cooperative business model is about. Students will visit Congressional offices, tour monuments and museums, gain leadership skills, and enjoy special social events.

Applicants must be a child or dependent of a current MLEC member. Applicants must be sophomores or juniors in high school. Students will be chaperoned, with flight and travel arrangements made by our statewide association, Minnesota Rural Electric Association.

**Applications can be found on our website,  
[mlecmn.net/youth-tour](http://mlecmn.net/youth-tour), or by emailing  
Kassie Peterson at [kpeterson@mlecmn.com](mailto:kpeterson@mlecmn.com)**

## Past Tour Highlights Have Included:

Arlington Cemetery  
Holocaust Memorial Museum  
John F. Kennedy Center  
U.S. Capitol  
Potomac River  
Smithsonian Institution  
911 Pentagon Memorial  
Lincoln Memorial  
WWII Memorial  
Mount Vernon  
Martin Luther King Memorial  
Korean War Veteran's Memorial  
Iwo Jima Memorial  
Museum of Natural History  
Jefferson Memorial  
Franklin D. Roosevelt Memorial  
National Museum of  
Air and Space  
Washington Monument  
Social Events  
Legislator Visits  
Cooperative Learning Sessions

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

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

**Derik Midthun - District 2**  
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**Sarah Cron - CEO**  
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Find minutes from  
MLEC Board meetings at:  
<http://www.mlecmn.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

# SCHOOL DONATIONS

Each year, MLEC donates all unclaimed capital credit checks to the seven schools in our service area including Aitkin, Crosby-Ironton, Isle, McGregor, Minisinaakwaang Leadership Academy, Nah Ah Shing, and Onamia. A total of \$22,560.22 was presented by MLEC Energy Advisor Travis Powers. We know this money will be put to good use and benefit our students!



# STRONG FINANCIAL POSITION

Dear Member:

As the year comes to a close, we are taking a close look at our financial statements to determine what we did well and where we can improve for 2024. Overall, the year was strong. In fact, it was much stronger than we anticipated. This is largely because GRE (Great River Energy) also had a very strong year – despite having lower than budgeted kWh sales. While we were warned to budget for a cost-of-service increase for 2023, GRE turned around and issued over \$600,000 in credits back to MLEC on our power bill. They were able to do this due to prudent fiscal management and favorable market purchases.

Another reason we had a strong year was that our building project started much later than planned; thus, we did not have to borrow money as soon as scheduled, reducing our budgeted interest expense. Lastly, we completed a lot of electrical plant construction in 2022 and were able to draw down money for our construction work plan. Because 2023 savings rates were higher than 2022 loan rates, we were able to earn a significant amount in interest income. All these things add up to your electric cooperative ending the year in an unusually strong financial position.

Maintaining a healthy cooperative isn't just about having strong margins. We must also get all the bills paid (including a budgeted amount for year-end capital credit retirements) and meet our lenders' loan covenants. As we head into 2024, we will take these things into consideration as we face our ongoing goal: make MLEC better tomorrow than it was yesterday.

Our next steps will be to revise our ten-year financial forecast and determine what margins are necessary to accomplish our financial objectives. We will revisit the data in our last cost-of-service study and ensure we collect the appropriate amount from our members per rate class. When this is complete, we will determine if any rate adjustments are necessary for 2024. As I indicated in the past, our goal of the previous rate adjustment was to stabilize the financial position of MLEC during record inflation and cost escalations. Your MLEC Board of Directors and Senior Leadership Team will continue to monitor our financial state as the waters calm.

In the meantime, have a safe, happy, and healthy 2024!

Be well,




*Sarah Cron*  
CEO

# EXPANDING THE GRID

The way electricity is produced is undergoing a dramatic transformation to include much more renewable energy resources. Because the energy resources used to serve our members are changing, the regional power grid that delivers electricity needs to change, too. Great River Energy, wholesale power supplier to MLEC, is investing in new transmission infrastructure to ensure we maintain a reliable, resilient and flexible grid, and enhance its stability long term.

Regional transmission lines transport bulk electricity across the region at high voltages. One of these new regional projects is the Northland Reliability Project, which is being jointly developed by Great River Energy and Minnesota Power. It will run from Minnesota Power's Iron Range Substation near Grand Rapids to a new substation near Becker. The two utilities submitted their application for a Certificate of Need and Route Permit from the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission in August. If approved, construction is expected to begin in 2027 with an in-service date of 2030.

This project, and others like it, will support continued reliable electric service in northern and central Minnesota, as well as the greater Upper Midwest region. It is being developed with two significant technology additions: more resilient structures to better withstand wind, and twisted pair conductors, which are more resilient to icing from winter weather.

One of the biggest weather-related threats to the transmission system in Minnesota is an ice storm with wind during the winter. Great River Energy's new standard design includes structures that are strong enough to withstand the highest wind speeds recorded in the previous 300 years.

Great River Energy's transmission employees have specific, organized efforts underway to continually address resilience and ensure reliable electric service to its member-owner cooperatives, including MLEC. New transmission projects, like the Northland Reliability Project, will allow the power that comes to MLEC and is passed on to our members to be cleaner and more reliable than ever before.



# LET'S DISH

## 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



## BAYOU BACKSTRAP

1 Tbsp butter or margarine  
1/2 cup diced onion  
1/2 cup diced bell pepper  
1 lb. Owen's Breakfast Sausage

1 venison tenderloin  
vegetable oil  
1 cup water

To prepare tenderloin, butterfly lengthwise and flatten to 1/4 inch. Melt butter in a skillet; add onion and bell pepper, and sauté until tender. Remove from heat and add sausage, mixing well. Place stuffing on one-half of venison, and fold to cover. Sew venison edges together using cotton thread. Brown in hot oil and skillet, and place in a roasting pan. Add one cup of water and bake, covered at 350 degrees for 1 hour. (Add water as needed.) Enjoy!

Thank you to Darla Medeck-Johnson of Perham  
for sharing this month's recipe.

# TRUST BOARD GRANTS

The Mille Lacs Community Trust Board meets quarterly to distribute funds raised through Operation Round Up. This December, the board awarded \$13,250 in grants to local non-profit organizations including: Aitkin County DAC, Aitkin County Environmental Services, Angels Anonymous, Cuyuna Range Youth Center, Great River String Ensemble, McGregor Area Scholarship Foundation, McGregor Post Prom Committee, Minnesota Historical Society (Mille Lacs Indian Museum), Riverwood Auxiliary, and True Friends. The total amount of grants awarded since the start of Operation Round Up has surpassed \$1.5 million!

Operation Round Up is a voluntary program at Mille Lacs Energy Cooperative where our generous members round-up their electric bill payment to the nearest dollar. All the

funds raised go into the trust fund which is donated back to the community. Board members include: Lisa Anderson, Kim Waffensmith, Darlene Stigen, Bethany Sellers, Charles Schotzko, Becky Joerger, Bob Nelson, and Doyle Jelsing.

To receive a Trust application, contact Deb Chute at 218-927-8221 or 1-800-450-2191. The Trust Board meets the second Wednesday in March, June, September, and December. Applications are accepted at any time. Those submitted a week before the quarterly meetings will go to the board. Anything submitted after will be seen at the next board meeting.

Photographed L to R: Kim Waffensmith, Angie Kjelstrom, Rich Aulie, Jami Pierce, Paige Pierce, and Chuck Schotzko.





# 2023 TOUCHSTONE COMMUNITY AWARD

## *Congratulations to this year's winner, MLASC!*

Mille Lacs Area Social Concerns (MLASC) is MLEC's 2023 Touchstone Energy Commitment to Community Award winner. An award plaque and a \$500 check was presented to the organization.

MLASC began as a group of women coming together to make an impact in the community. Their focus has been providing assistance to seniors with food insecurity. They provide outreach three times per month, including preparing and delivering meals for participating seniors, partnering with food shelves and pop-up pantry programs, and providing extra support for the holiday season.



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

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



48 hours before you dig  
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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  
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Photographed L to R:

Kassie Peterson, Marilyn Rhode,  
Steve Timmers, Margaret Hitzemann



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**NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTION:  
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Offer valid Jan. 1 through Jan. 31, 2024.  
While supplies last – No coupon necessary.  
Discount applied at checkout. Customer  
assumes responsibility for all sales tax.

ENERGY WISE  MN



## 2024 photo calendars now available at the MLEC office!

Photo calendars are free for all MLEC members. Stop by the MLEC office to get one while supplies last. Please only take one per membership. Thank you to all who submitted photos this year!

## Internet that donates to our local schools

Our employees donate school supplies and volunteer in our communities to support students and educators. Get fast and reliable Internet service that gives back!



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## ENERGY EFFICIENCY TIP OF THE MONTH

During winter months, ensure your home is well sealed to reduce the need for excessive heating. Seal air leaks around your home and add insulation where needed to save up to 10% on annual energy bills.

Install weather stripping on exterior doors and apply caulk around windows. Check attic insulation levels and hire a qualified contractor if additional insulation is required.

Source: [energystar.gov](http://energystar.gov)



## 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 **January 31<sup>st</sup>**.

### MAIL TO:

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

### OR E-MAIL:

[kpeterson@mlecmn.com](mailto:kpeterson@mlecmn.com)

When does the 2024 Washington D.C. Youth Tour take place?

---

Name:

Address:



Congrats to Rita Glazebrook, the November gift card trivia winner!



**MILLE LACS ENERGY COOPERATIVE**

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