



THE OUTLET

Monthly Publication of Mille Lacs Energy Cooperative

Your Touchstone Energy® Cooperative 

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NATIONAL COOPERATIVE MONTH

Celebrate National Cooperative Month in October!

Minnesota was one of the first states to enact a law authorizing Cooperative Month and the first to officially declare October Co-op Month. Cooperative Month was recognized nationally in 1964. In honor of the wonderful things that differentiate the cooperative business model, it gives a nod to more than 40,000 cooperative businesses serving more than 120 million people nationwide.

Community born, Community led, Focused on YOU is the theme of this year's celebration. MLEC is a member-owned and member-controlled business and committed to meeting the needs of our members and communities, rather than generating returns for distant investors. Profits are reinvested to insure that the MLEC members we serve have reliable power at a competitive price. The rest is returned to members. Those dollars circulate close to home, helping to strengthen the local economy. Cooperatives all share a passion for serving our members and helping our communities to thrive. In fact, all cooperatives adhere to the same set of seven principles that reflect our core values of honesty, transparency, equity, inclusiveness and service to the greater community good.

As we celebrate, MLEC would like to thank our members for their patronage, our board for their guidance, our employees for their commitment, and our fellow cooperatives for their services.





AVOID UTILITY SCAMS

Scammers will threaten you with everything from shutting off power to your home to legal action. Don't fall victim to these types of scams.

- Never give personal information to an unknown caller or visitor. Our representatives have access to the details they need to service your account.
- Demands for immediate payment by wire transfer, cryptocurrency, gift cards or cash reload cards should immediately raise red flags.
- If you think you've been contacted by a scammer falsely representing the co-op, please let us know as soon as possible.



Front Row L to R: Melanie White, Kathy Hachey, Kay Bendorf, Kimberly Burton, Judi Deziel, Kim Besch, Tom Besch, Natalie Shereck, Sarah Shereck. Second Row L to R: Lorna White, Ann Schwartz, Mike Eisenbraun, Chuck Schotzko, John Hendrickson, Kevin Pullis, Jim White, Todd Brown, Joy Borden, Dan Asmus, Heidi Lenk.

TRUST BOARD AWARDS GRANTS

The Mille Lacs Community Trust Board meets quarterly to distribute funds raised through Operation Round Up. This September, the board awarded \$20,500 in grants to local non-profit organizations including: Aitkin County CARE - Rides for Health, Aitkin County Environmental Services, Aitkin County Habitat for Humanity, Aitkin County Historical Society, Aitkin County Search and Rescue, Aitkin County Sentence to Serve, Aitkin Youth Fastpitch, Deerwood Lakes Lions, Lakes Area Interfaith Caregivers, Mille Lacs Health Systems Auxiliary, Minnewawa Sportsmen's Club - MAC Bird Busters, and Reading Early Assists Development.

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 of 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, Linda Weimer, Jack Gilbertson, and Lowell W. Larson.

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.

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

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320/692-4800
bwelty@mlecmmn.com
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Find minutes from MLEC Board meetings at:
<http://www.mlecmmn.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

DRIVEWAY CONSTRUCTION

Dear Member:

Throughout our discussions of a possible new operations center, transparency and due diligence have been Mille Lacs Energy's number one priority. I made a promise to you, our members, to keep you informed every step of the way. As of September 1st, we finally have exciting news to share! Permitting for a driveway and turn lane from Highway 169 has been fully approved for the property MLEC purchased in 2020. We have been patiently waiting for this approval so we can move forward with the next phase of the process, and construction on the driveway began September 8th.

As you all know, we are still many steps away from the possibility of opening the doors to a new, efficient, and updated operations center – steps that require the successful conclusion of all prior steps before moving on to the next. Please know we are keeping an open mind and continually doing research to make sure that the chosen location is the best possible home for the future of MLEC. We have taken into consideration input from our members, contacted landowners, and have even looked at five additional parcels of land within the last 45 days. With all our efforts, we keep coming back to our purchased property near the junction of Highway 169 and Highway 18.

Now that the driveway construction has moved forward, we are excited to put out a Request for Proposal to architects and assessing bids. We have a lot of things in our favor right now, and we do not anticipate new construction of an operations center having much of an impact on members rates. With lower interest rates, Great River Energy's anticipated wholesale power rate reductions, and MLEC's strong financial position, an extremely conservative 10-Year Financial Forecast does not anticipate a rate increase for MLEC members until 2027 – even with the addition of a new operations center and scheduled fiber expansion. With this being said, if the cost for a new operations center is out of reach, the project will be put on hold, or it will simply come to a stop.

“Once construction is completed on the driveway, the next step is putting out a Request for Proposal to architects and assessing bids. We have a lot of things in our favor right now, and we do not anticipate new construction having much of an impact on members rates.”

When thinking of a new operations center, we are planning for the longevity and bright future of Mille Lacs Energy Cooperative. There is no glass ceiling as to what the next 80 years might bring! Today, we're expanding the MLEC Fiber offering to help our members bridge rural America's broadband accessibility gap. It is amazing to think that in just one year's time, we have doubled the amount of connected MLEC Fiber Internet customers. Emerging opportunities span alternative energies, energy storage, standby generators, distributed generation, and electric vehicle technologies. These new energy technologies mean our cooperative has opportunities to grow and expand. MLEC needs a facility that will match the innovative and technological work we are doing – and will do in the future. A new operations center will be built from the ground up with the next 80 years in mind.



Sarah Cron
CEO

We have launched a page on our MLEC website that is dedicated to information about the new facility project. News sources, frequently asked questions, and a project summary video can all be found there. The webpage will be updated frequently and will act as an additional resource for our members and will be a place to foster productive and effective communication.

As always, feel free to contact me with any questions.



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 Cooperative
P.O. Box 230
Aitkin, MN 56431

OR E-MAIL:

kpeterson@mlecmn.com



PUMPKIN NUT BARS

Crust:

1 cup all-purpose flour
1/2 cup quick cooking oatmeal
1/2 cup brown sugar, packed
1/2 cup butter

Filling:

1 - 15 oz. can pumpkin
1 can evaporated milk
2 eggs
1 tsp. cinnamon
1/2 tsp. powdered ginger
1/4 tsp. ground cloves
1/2 tsp. salt
3/4 cup sugar

Topping:

1/2 cup pecans, chopped
1/2 cup brown sugar, packed
2 Tbsp. softened butter

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Mix together flour, oatmeal, brown sugar, and butter. Press into a 9x13 ungreased baking dish and bake for 15 mins. Beat together the pumpkin, evaporated milk, eggs, cinnamon, ginger, cloves, salt, and sugar until thoroughly blended. Pour the filling over the baked crust and bake for 20 mins. Mix pecans, brown sugar, and butter together until crumbly. When bars are done baking, sprinkle the topping on top and bake for another 20 mins. Let cool and serve with whipped cream. Enjoy!

Thank you to Carla Emons of Aitkin for sharing this month's recipe.

COLD WEATHER DISCONNECTS

Minnesota residential cold weather law (MN Statute, Ch 235, sec.216B.097) provides that cooperative utilities cannot disconnect a residential consumer between October 1 and April 30 if the disconnection affects the primary heating source, provided that certain conditions are met. These conditions include that the customer must declare on forms provided by the cooperative an inability to pay, the household income of the customer must be less than 60% of the state median income level for their family size, and the customer enters into and makes timely payments under a mutually accepted payment arrangement. There are several agencies that provide financial assistance to qualifying households. We urge you to check with them for details on available programs.

Aitkin Co Health & Human Services
218- 927-7200

Crow Wing County Community Service
218-824-1250

Mille Lacs Co Family Service
320-983-8208 or 888-270-8208

Lakes & Pines Community Action Council
(serving Aitkin & Mille Lacs Co)
320-679-1800 or 800-832-6082

Lutheran Social Services
(serving Crow Wing County)
218-829-5000 or 800-829-5902

To avoid electric service disconnection, arrangements for bill payment need to be made before the line crew is sent to collect.

Do not disregard your bill; it is your responsibility. If you have financial difficulties, please contact our billing team to discuss payment arrangements at 218-429-0430 or 877-634-4314.

TAX EXEMPTION

ELECTRICALLY HEATED RESIDENCES

With the start of another heating season, we would like to remind our residential consumers who have **electric heat as their primary heating system** that their electric bills are exempt from Minnesota sales tax from November through April. All certificates signed during the past years are **ON FILE** and **NO REFILE** is necessary. If you have a signed certificate on file, the bill you receive will not include sales tax.

If you qualify and are charged sales tax, complete the form at the right and return it to our Aitkin office. You can either drop it off, scan and email to mlecmn@mlecmn.net; fax to 218-927-6822 or mail to : MLEC - PO Box 230, Aitkin MN 56431.

Off Peak, Dual Fuel, and Freedom Heat programs are already tax exempt, so there is no need to file this form.

CERTIFICATE OF SALES TAX EXEMPTION

I _____ do certify
(please print name)
that the primary energy used for residential heating at account number _____ is electricity. As the occupant and/or owner of this residence, I am responsible for the electric bills incurred for this electric account and do hereby request the Minnesota Sales Tax Exemption as provided by state statutes.
I also acknowledge that I am responsible to notify Mille Lacs Energy Cooperative, Aitkin, Minnesota if and when electric energy is no longer used as the primary heating source.
The undersigned hereby claims sales tax exemption for the purchase of electric energy used as a primary source for residential heating.

(Authorized Signature)

Date

(Address)

(City)

(State)

(Zip Code)

MILITARY PROTECTION

Utility Payment Arrangements for Military Personnel, section 325E.028, was added to Minnesota Statutes effective August 1, 2007. This law provides that utility service providers must not disconnect the utility service of a residential customer if a member of the household has been issued orders into active duty, for deployment, or for a permanent change in duty station during the period of active duty, deployment, or change in duty station if such a residential customer:

1. Has a household income below the state median household income or is receiving energy assistance and enters into an agreement with the utility service provider under which the residential customer pays 10% of the customer's gross monthly income toward the customer's bill and the residential customer remains reasonably current with those payments.
2. Has a household income above the state median household income and enters into an agreement with the utility service provider establishing a reasonable payment schedule that considers the financial resources of the household and the residential customer remains current with payments under the payment schedule.

If you feel you qualify for this disconnection protection, call the Mille Lacs Energy Cooperative billing department and ask for the Military Personnel Protection Form. Do not disregard your bill; it is your responsibility. **If you are having financial difficulties, please contact our billing team to discuss payment arrangements at 218-429-0430 or 877-634-4314.**

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

Then contact a licensed electrician to locate your secondary wires.

MN Electrical Inspectors

Aitkin County &
South East Crow Wing County
Nathan Readell 218-537-8419

Northern Crow Wing County
Jeff Overmyer 218-252-0919

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 under *Quick Links*.



Visit our website -
www.mlecmn.net
E-mail us - mlec@mlecmn.net

SMART THERMOSTATS FOR LESS

For the average American household, almost half of the annual energy bill goes towards heating and cooling. Controlling your temperature settings with a smart thermostat will help you save money and stay comfortable in your home.

Each product uses slightly different features to help homeowners save energy. Do your research, and choose the smart thermostat that's right for you.

Common smart thermostat features may include:

Remote Control: Using your smartphone, you can adjust the temperature in your home from anywhere with an internet connection.

Geofencing: This feature allows your thermostat to detect when you've left for the day to 'set back' your HVAC system and save money on your heating or A/C bill. If you're on the way home, the thermostat can automatically adjust the temperature to ensure you arrive to a comfortable home.

Learning temperature preferences: Certain smart thermostats can learn your preferences automatically and establish a schedule that adjusts to energy-saving temperatures when you are asleep or away.

Over-the-Air Updates: Your thermostat may update its software periodically to ensure it uses the latest algorithms and energy-saving features available.



Buying Tips:

- Make sure the smart thermostat you purchase is compatible with your heating and cooling system. For the very highest efficiency heating and cooling equipment, you may want a controller from the same company (e.g. air conditioner rated at 20 SEER or higher).
- If your smart thermostat uses Wi-Fi, make sure it's reasonably close to the router to prevent periodic disconnections. If your thermostat is too far from your router, consider a Wi-Fi range extender, which can improve overall connectivity.

We offer a \$25 rebate on smart thermostats. You can also go online to www.energywisemnstore.com to purchase with the rebate taken right off the cost at time of purchase. Otherwise, you can go online to our website for the rebate form, or call us at 888-433-4279 to have one sent in the mail.



The deadline for the 2022 Photo Calendar is quickly approaching!

Submit your photos by October 27th for your chance to be featured in the calendar and win a \$10 credit on your electricity bill! To view the photo guidelines, visit our website at www.mlecmmn.net/photo-contest

SCHOOL DONATION



This month, MLEC employees and board members raised money and collected items for the annual school supply drive. Over \$300 worth of school supplies was donated to Onamia Elementary School. As your local cooperative, we always do our best to support our schools!

Rural lifestyle. Big city Internet.

Just because you're not in the big city, doesn't mean you can't have access to great Internet service. Let MLEC Fiber give you the fast and reliable Internet you deserve!

218-429-0433 • www.mlecmmn.net/fiber



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 **October 31st**.

MAIL TO:
Kassie Peterson
Mille Lacs Energy Cooperative
P.O. Box 230
Aitkin, MN 56431
OR E-MAIL:
kpeterson@mlecmmn.com

What is the theme for this year's National Cooperative Month celebration?

Name:

Address:

Congrats to Harvey Blomberg of Aitkin, the July gift card trivia winner!