



THE OUTLET

Monthly Publication of Mille Lacs Energy Cooperative

Your Touchstone Energy® Cooperative 

VOLUME 55
NUMBER 10
OCTOBER 2024

OPEN HOUSE & ANNUAL MEETING

The 2024 Mille Lacs Energy Cooperative Open House & Annual Meeting was held on Thursday, September 19th, at the new MLEC headquarters building. There were 398 registered members, with a total of 624 in attendance.

The election results showed a total of 1,547 ballots cast, with 82 ballots cast at the meeting. Tiffany Gustin received 708 votes, and Patrick Murphy received 839 votes. Carol Pundt, Bruce Robinson, and Mike Reem ran unopposed and were elected by acclamation. MLEC is excited to welcome Patrick Murphy to the MLEC Board and would like to extend a special thanks to Don Appel as he steps down after 12 years of service.

The theme for the meeting was "Welcome Home." During the Open House portion, members got a free lunch from one of our three food vendors and had the opportunity to tour the new facility. During the business meeting, members heard comments from Board President Harold Harms, who discussed the completion of the headquarters building and various projects that MLEC finished in 2023. CEO Sarah Cron discussed the access charge increase, reliability, MLEC Fiber, and the latest strategic planning session. Accounting and Finance Manager Mark Vosacek presented the financial report to the members.

Special guest speaker Jim Frisell, Executive Vice President and Principal of McGough Construction, discussed the building process and the project's timeline. Chuck Schotzko, MLEC

Community Trust Board President, thanked members for their generosity of contributions to Operation Round Up, a program in which members' bills are rounded up to the nearest dollar, and the money raised is given back through grants to local organizations.

Various questions were answered in the Ask the Co-op section of the meeting. Everyone who attended had the opportunity to submit their questions and have them answered by MLEC staff and board members.

Many door prizes were given away at the conclusion of the business meeting. All who registered in person were eligible to win a prize.



THE VALUE OF COMFORT

Oftentimes the word “value” is related to “cost.” For example, as your local electric cooperative, we remind our members regularly that electricity remains one of the best values you get for your dollar. But there is more to the word value than an assigned price, and the value of electricity extends beyond its cost.

Electricity provides certain creature comforts — things that simply make life more pleasant — we come to depend upon. For some, this means being able to count on an electric kettle to quickly heat up water for a morning cup of tea. For others, it could be time spent with their children playing video games, baking a batch of cookies or stringing up twinkle lights on the porch to make it feel cozier.

With a charged cellphone, we can easily connect and catch-up with friends through a video call. We can store leftovers from a family get-together in our refrigerator to enjoy another day or pull out a meal from the deep freezer to thaw for dinner.

Warmth during Minnesota winters can be priceless. Many households depend on the comfort of home heating provided by an air-source heat pump (ASHP) to make it through the state’s extended cold snaps. This appliance also works double-duty to provide efficient cooling during summers just by efficiently transferring heat outside.

A hot shower as part of a typical morning routine, too, is a comfort valued by most. Houses outfitted with an electric thermal storage (ETS) water heater receive clean, safe, hot water on demand. A heat pump water heater, alternatively, uses electricity to move heat instead of generating it.

Beyond providing comfort to you and your family, these appliances are extremely efficient and take advantage of electricity’s main value: lower costs. ASHPs use 72% less electricity than conventional air conditioners and furnaces; ETS water heaters draw electricity during times of low demand — such as overnight — when it’s less expensive; and heat pump water heaters consume about 50% less electricity than conventional models, resulting in annual savings of up to \$300.

MLEC is committed to providing its members with all the comforts electricity offers in a safe, reliable and affordable way.



Visit www.mlecmm.net or call our office at 218-927-2191 to learn more about how electricity can power comfort in your home.

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

Mark Anderson - District 1
320/469-0951
manderson@mlecmm.com

Carol Pundt - District 2
218/687-3256
cpundt@mlecmm.com

Harold Harms - District 3
218/232-2935
hharms@mlecmm.com
President

Aileen DeMenge - District 4
218/768-4900
ademenge@mlecmm.com
Secretary/Treasurer

Patrick Murphy - District 5
612/910-5822
pmurphy@mlecmm.com

Bruce Robinson - District 6
218/851-4760
brobinson@mlecmm.com
Assistant Secretary/Treasurer

Michael Reem - District 7
218/839-5697
mreem@mlecmm.com
Vice President

Sarah Cron - CEO
218/927-8224
scron@mlecmm.com

Find minutes from
MLEC Board meetings at:
<http://www.mlecmm.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

PLAY IT SAFE ONLINE

October is the time of year we recognize Cybersecurity Awareness Month. While taking necessary steps to protect our personal information is a year-round practice, at MLEC we use this time to share helpful cybersecurity reminders.

According to the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Agency (CISA), an agency of the United States Department of Homeland Security that is responsible for strengthening cybersecurity and infrastructure protection, these are the four best ways to keep you and your family safe online.



1. Implement multi-factor authentication (also known as two-step verification) on your accounts. This layer of protection makes it much harder for criminals to access your information.
2. Update your software. This is one of the easiest ways to protect your personal data. When downloading a software update, make sure it’s coming straight from the company that created it.
3. Think before you click. Most successful cyber attacks start with a phishing email. Avoid emails (or texts) that look too good to be true, oddly urgent, poorly crafted or include unusual requests.
4. Create strong passwords, using long, unique and complex words or phrases.

THANK YOU FOR ATTENDING!

I want to thank everyone for taking the time to attend our Open House and Annual Meeting. We were surprised to have over 600 people tour the facility and participate in the democratic process of running your electric cooperative. A special thanks to our member, Out of Place in Garrison, for getting pizzas to us when we ran out of food!

Director elections were held in Districts Two, Five, Six, and Seven. In Districts Two, Six, and Seven Carol Pundt, Bruce Robinson, and Mike Reem ran uncontested and were elected by acclamation. In District Five, Patrick Murphy was elected by Popular Vote.

Our keynote speaker, Jim Frisell of McGough, our contractor partner for the building project, praised the success of the project. He attributed this success to the dedication and hard work of the MLEC employees and our ability to be flexible when quick decisions needed to be made. We estimate that the project will come in about \$500,000 under the construction budget, a testament to our efficient use of resources. We were also able to use cash on hand, reducing the actual loan amount by over \$4,000,000. All of these actions save MLEC money and directly impact your pocketbook.

The most frequent question asked during the business meeting was about that dang access charge. If you could not attend the meeting, I want to address that concern for all members. At MLEC, our member makeup is unique, with 91% of our members consisting of residential consumers. This is significant because we have very few commercial consumers (typically higher energy consumers per account) to add revenue to our bottom line. Additionally, nearly half of our residential members are seasonal, using less than half of the energy of the permanent residential members. Consider that it costs the same amount per member to build and maintain one mile of distribution power line – regardless of the number of kWhs a member uses. At that same time, we collect less than half the revenue from our seasonal members than our permanent residential members. Increasing the access charge was the best option to make that cost per mile equitable among the two rate classes. I fully understand that you, our member, will not like this answer, but it is the nature of the makeup of our electric cooperative, and we need to ensure we are recovering costs from all rate classes as fairly as possible.

We experienced 1,099 power disruptions in 2023. Over half of those (603) were due to scheduled maintenance on the distribution system. The second largest number of power disruptions (142) were caused by birds and small animals coming into contact with energized power lines. The remaining (354) were caused by equipment failures, storms, inclement weather, and public vehicle accidents. In spite of these incidents, our service to you is NOT interrupted 99.97% of the time. Think about it: every time you flip the switch, you will only be without power for .03% of the time. Rest assured, we

will continue to do what we can to improve our reliability factor.

Our Fiber business (MLEC fiber) gained nearly 200 consumers in 2023, a significant growth. As a self-sustaining business unit, MLEC is stalwart in our commitment to bringing true gigabit internet to our members that do not have access to this critical infrastructure. At the same time, we are doing so in a fiscally responsible manner, so this business unit does not impact the electric side of the cooperative.

After this look back, know that your MLEC Board of Directors and staff are already taking a look forward. We have held a new Strategic Planning session, and are excited to start working on strategic initiatives that will lead to our over-arching goal: providing you with safe and reliable power at the lowest possible cost. Your trust in us is our driving force.

Until next time,




Sarah Cron
CEO



LET'S DISH

Thank you to Deb Peterson of Aitkin 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, 23483 US Hwy 169
Aitkin, MN 56431

OR E-MAIL:

kpeterson@mlecmn.com



VEGETABLE CHOWDER SOUP

3 cups diced potatoes	2 celery ribs, diced	4 cups milk
2 1/2 cups broccoli florets	1 cup diced carrots	1 tsp salt
1 cup chopped onion	3 cups water	1/4 tsp pepper
4 tsp chicken bouillon granules	3/4 cup butter	2 cups cubed ham
	3/4 cup flour	1 cup shredded cheese

Combine potatoes, broccoli, onion, chicken bouillon granules, celery, carrots, and water in a kettle and simmer for 20 minutes. Melt butter in a saucepan, then add flour. Cook and stir on medium heat for 2 minutes. Whisk in milk, salt, and pepper and bring to a boil, then boil/stir for an additional 2 minutes. Combine both mixtures in the kettle and add cubed ham. Simmer for 10 minutes, then stir in shredded cheese. Enjoy!

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 1st and April 30th 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 50% 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 and Dual Fuel 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
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 under *Quick Links*.



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

NATIONAL COOPERATIVE MONTH

Celebrate National Cooperative Month in October!

Fall is a busy time, and October is a particularly eventful month. School, community, and sports activities are in full swing, and all cooperatives celebrate National Co-op Month.

When we say MLEC celebrates Co-op Month, it really means we are celebrating you! After all, our co-op wouldn't exist without you, our members.

Our core business purpose is to serve as your electricity provider, but the co-op's larger mission is to help make our corner of the world a better place. "Concern for community" is one of seven guiding principles that all co-ops share.

Just as our wires connect our service territory, our commitment to the community is woven into every decision we make. Being a co-op means being a reliable partner and a caring neighbor.

MLEC works to help our community thrive through initiatives led by our employees and local board, which is comprised of neighbors who live here. Because we're local, we understand our community's unique needs and strive to help meet them.

We're proud to support local youth through our Youth Tour and scholarship programs. With your help, we offer Operation Round Up to provide assistance to our community's most vulnerable. We support area food shelves, local schools, and charitable organizations by volunteering and donating funds. The word "cooperative" is close to "cooperation," meaning people working together towards a common goal—mutually benefitting one another and the larger community. That's the essence of the cooperative spirit. Our employees and member-

elected board members are invested in the community in which we live and serve.

Above all, as a co-op, we put our members' priorities first. As your trusted energy partner, we know that saving energy and money is important to you. That's why we have numerous programs in place to help. Also, check out our many rebates available to save you some money.

MLEC is continuously examining ways to operate more efficiently while continuing to provide the highest level of friendly, reliable service you expect and deserve. After all, we're your local co-op. We were built by the members we serve.





The deadline for the 2024 Photo Calendar is quickly approaching!

Submit your photos by October 24th 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.mlecmn.net/photo-contest



Internet that keeps our communities clean

Our employees volunteer to keep our roadways clean and leave places better than we find them. Get fast and reliable Internet service that gives back!



(218) 429-0433 • www.mlecmn.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@mlecmn.com

What was the total amount of ballots that were cast at the Annual Meeting?

Name:

Address:

Three horizontal input fields for Name and Address.