



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!

2020 has been a year unlike any other, filled with many challenges. The COVID-19 pandemic has taken a toll on our small rural communities. At MLEC, we have done our best to help support our members and the businesses we serve. 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 holiday season, MLEC employees donated \$615 to Operation Christmas of Aitkin County and another \$475 to the McGregor Food Shelf. MLEC donated an additional \$300 to both organizations. The grand total given to these worthy causes amounted to \$1,690!

This time of year, MLEC employees usually volunteer to ring the bell for the Salvation Army. For the safety of all involved, the cooperative decided to make a donation of \$250 instead. We hope that our members chose to put some cash in a red kettle this year. Any little bit counts!

You can find our employees serving on local boards, coaching/leading youth programs, or volunteering their time to charitable organizations. Because when you work at a co-op, you understand how important a strong community is. We all work here, live here, serve here, and want to see the place we call home thrive.

It has been a difficult year, but we are looking forward to what 2021 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!

Our lobby may not be open at this time, but our dedicated staff is available via phone or email. We hope you all had a wonderful holiday season and wish you a happy and healthy new year!



ECO ACT REMAINS A TOP LEGISLATIVE PRIORITY

In 2007, Minnesota's Conservation Improvement Program (CIP) was established, creating goals for all utilities – including electric cooperatives – to reduce their annual electricity sales by 1.5% and to spend at least 1.5% of revenues to achieve this goal. Mille Lacs Energy Cooperative is proud that we've consistently met or exceeded these goals.

When CIP started, select energy efficient purchases were incentivized including Energy Star® rated appliances and LED lighting. Some of these items were just making their entry into the marketplace, and it was a win-win to encourage co-op member-owners to use these new products. Thanks in part to CIP, we've reached a point of saturation with many of the energy efficiency incentives introduced more than a decade ago and the electric power industry is the only segment of the economy that has exceeded its carbon reduction goals.

While CIP has been beneficial, it has become outdated, lacks an emphasis on innovation and doesn't support many advancements that have positive environmental impacts. To modernize the program, Minnesota's electric cooperatives, along with other industry partners, drafted the Energy Conservation and Optimization (ECO) Act. This bill emphasizes total energy efficiency across many sectors – energy, transportation, agriculture and others – to encourage diverse improvements. Under the ECO Act, the goal to reduce electricity use by 1.5% annually will remain intact. However, a portion of this may be achieved with efficient electrification programs such as incentivizing EVs. The 1.5% spending requirement would be eliminated unless the reduction in electricity use is not met.

Mille Lacs Energy Cooperative supports this bill because we believe it provides more long-term, sustainable benefits for our members. The benefits include:

- Allowing Mille Lacs Energy Cooperative more flexibility to meet our annual energy savings goals by enabling us to count EV incentives, electric storage water heaters and air source heat pumps toward part of the goal.
- Helping the environment by reducing greenhouse gas emissions and fostering a more resilient grid.
- Encouraging innovation by supporting continuously advancing technologies.
- Reducing consumers' total energy bills by eliminating the mandated 1.5% spending requirements while providing better tools for reducing carbon.

We encourage our member-owners to join us in advocating for this legislative change by contacting their MN State Officials. Contact info can be found at www.mrea.org/take-action. If you have questions, please contact Jana at MLEC at (218) 927-8246.

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

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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

MLEC FIBER RATE CHANGE

Effective on your February bill, the price for 100 Mbps service will be raised an additional \$1.95 per month. Because most of our customers have this Internet package, raising the monthly cost will help MLEC recuperate costs and keep our MLEC Fiber Internet network growing.

The current Managed Wi-Fi service is being raised \$2.00 per month because we are converting to a whole-home Wi-Fi experience under a new name. MLEC Premium Wi-Fi will help you reap all the benefits of your fiber Internet. MLEC Premium Wi-Fi provides cloud-based remote Wi-Fi management, which means MLEC will take care of the software updates and routine router maintenance.

This personalized service ensures that Wi-Fi will be readily available to all devices throughout your entire home and has local call-in technical support available. Exciting new products and account management technology are coming soon!

This small change will help keep our MLEC Fiber business financially healthy. Our team has been busy installing new customers and applying for grant funding for new projects. The process takes time, but it is worth it to make great Internet service available for more MLEC members.

We are here to help!

Call MLEC at 218-429-0433 if you have questions or concerns.

HEADQUARTERS FEASIBILITY STUDY

Dear Member:

At the December Board Meeting, your MLEC Board of Directors reviewed a comprehensive Headquarters Building Feasibility Study prepared by Widseth.

Widseth is an independent contractor in Baxter that employs a team of architects, engineers, scientists, and surveyors that designs a host of critical infrastructure projects from commercial buildings to roads and bridges. MLEC engaged Widseth to take an in-depth look at MLEC's current facility and property and determine the feasibility of MLEC remaining in our existing facility, remodeling the existing facility, demolishing the existing facility and rebuilding on the existing site location, or building a new building on a new building site. The ultimate goal of this project is to find the best option that best serves MLEC employees and members in Aitkin, Mille Lacs, and Crow Wing Counties.

To ensure an accountable response to this process, Widseth conducted a needs assessment of the current MLEC facility. Through this process, each MLEC Department Manager provided analysis for their current and future needs, as well as an assessment of how departments could be configured to optimize operational efficiency.

After reviewing the needs assessment and completing a thorough walk-through of the facility, Widseth concluded that the current MLEC headquarters facility and site are in poor condition. According to the consultant, the site and buildings have reached the limit of their useful effectiveness. To stay in the existing building with no expansion improvements would require approximately \$2 million in repair costs over the next two to five years to keep the building operational.

“Widseth concluded that the current MLEC headquarters facility and site are in poor condition. According to the consultant, the site and buildings have reached the limit of their useful effectiveness.”

The current facility has bearing walls that pose structural limitations for remodeling, with existing room configuration and public restroom accesses that could not provide a fully accessible work environment. Existing soil conditions and adjacent wetlands along the north side of the property and to the east make expansion in those areas difficult to impossible.

With the upcoming Highway 169 construction, MLEC will need to close and relocate both existing driveways off of Highway 169. Additionally, the widening of the highway will take an additional 20 feet of property from the southern edge of the MLEC property boundary. This, along with the wetland considerations, make it very difficult to build a modern, efficient complex on the current location. In addition, MLEC would need to relocate its pole yard, shed and trucks, and all materials in its cold storage facility during this approximate two-year construction period. We would need to include



Sarah Cron
CEO

the additional cost of warehousing and inefficiency to the operational expenses during this time. We would also hope there are no major storms while a new facility is being constructed.

While these are only a few highlights of the report, Widseth determined a new facility on a new site is the most appropriate, cost-effective, flexible, and responsible solution that would allow MLEC to serve the membership effectively while minimizing the cost to MLEC members.

Your MLEC Board of Directors is not taking this decision lightly. They will review all of the possibilities over the next month or two, ask more questions, get more answers, run the numbers, and determine what is best for the MLEC employees and members. One thing is for certain, after engaging with Widseth, we do know that our 60-year-old facility no longer serves the business needs of MLEC for today; and, as we grow and change, it will not serve the needs of our future.

Until next month,

LET'S DISH

Thank you to Darla Medeck-Johnson of Perham 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@mlecmn.com



TACO SOUP

3 - 14.5 oz. cans chicken broth	1 bunch green onions (chopped)
1 - 14.5 oz. can diced tomatoes	1 - 14.5 oz. can corn
1 - 15 oz. can black beans (drained)	1 package taco seasoning
1 - 15 oz. can chili	

Combine all ingredients in a large pot. Bring to a boil then simmer for 30 minutes. Serve with tortilla chips and shredded cheese. Enjoy!

TOUCHSTONE COMMUNITY AWARD

Congratulations to this year's winner, Knights of Columbus!

The Knights of Columbus Coats for Kids Program is MLEC's 2020 Touchstone Energy Commitment to Community Award winner. An award plaque and a \$500 check was presented to the organization on December 3rd.

The Knights of Columbus are Catholic men of faith and men of charitable action. The group's charitable activities encompass a variety of local, national, and international projects. Their 109 members volunteer at many events each year working with local youth setting the example of charity and volunteerism.

In the Coats for Kids Program, new winter coats and snow pants are given to youth in our communities. The coats are given to local school nurses, teachers, and police who know the youth in

our area. The individual child can select the coat style they like best. Coats come in a large variety of colors and sizes that the individual can wear proudly.

This is the 17th year of this award recognizing a group that shows a strong commitment to community and is helping make the area a better place to live and work. Mille Lacs Energy Cooperative is a Touchstone Energy Co-op and "Concern for Community" is one of the guiding principles.

The Knights of Columbus will go on to contend for the statewide Touchstone Energy Community Award, which has a cash prize of \$1,000.

Photographed: Kassie Peterson (MLEC) and Mark Greninger (KofC)



BOARD ELECTIONS

Candidate filing for MLEC director positions from Districts Two, Five, Six, and Seven is now open!

One-year term to complete the remainder of a three-year position in:

District 2 - includes members whose electric account numbers start with 35, 38, 49 and 50.

Three-year terms in:

District 5 - includes members whose electric account numbers start with 40, 41, 45 or 46.

The present director is Don Appel of Aitkin.

District 6 - includes members whose electric account numbers start with 7, 8, 11, 12, 13, 14, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 24, 25, 26 or 27. The present director is Bruce Robinson of Palisade.

District 7 - includes members whose electric account numbers start with 39, 47, 48 or 53.

The present director is Michael Reem of Aitkin.

If you are an MLEC member receiving electricity in one of the districts listed above and are interested in filing for a director position, call Kassie Peterson at 927-8243 or 800-450-2191 or, email kpeterson@mlecmn.com for director election filing forms and a complete information packet. **All filings must be received by February 26, 2021.**

You can find additional district and annual meeting information on the MLEC website www.mlecmn.net.

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
Mike Wenzel 218-270-2265

Northern Crow Wing County
Bradley Rasmussen 218-543-1023

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

DIRECTOR INTERVIEW

We sat down with Harold Harms, MLEC Board President, to ask him about his personal experience serving on the Board of Directors and why he encourages other members to consider running in the 2021 election.

What inspired you to run for the MLEC Board of Directors?

When I first ran for the board, I could see many significant changes and challenges coming to the electric utility industry. With my background and experience in technology and the electric utility industry, I felt I could offer some perspective to MLEC. I also had a strong desire to be part of any solutions, rather than sit back and complain as changes were made at MLEC.

What kind of commitment does serving on the MLEC Board of Directors require?

First is the monthly meeting. This meeting is usually 3-6 hours in length. There is a significant amount of reading of industry emails, publications, and board book material for the monthly meetings. I probably spend an average of 25-30 hours a month on various MLEC board activity. We also encourage directors to attend conferences and meetings sponsored by MREA (Minnesota Rural Electric Association), our statewide electrical cooperative organization, NRECA (National Rural Electrical Cooperative Association), our national cooperative organization, and GRE (Great River Energy), our generation and transmission supplier.



*Harold Harms
Board President*

Is there preparation and training for new directors?

Initially, CEO Sarah Cron and I will do an MLEC orientation for a new director. This involves touring the facilities and introductions to employees. There will also be training on the use of the iPad that we use for board meetings and cooperative emails. In the first term after election, we require a new director to attend and complete the work required to obtain their CCD (Credentialed Cooperative Director) certificate. This is about a week-long course that covers what a director should know to be a responsible, informed director. It covers understanding the electrical business, board roles and responsibilities, director duties, and financial decision making.

What have you found to be the most rewarding about your time on the MLEC board?

The most obvious is the interaction and friendships with other directors and the management team. Also, the ability to get to know the great employees at MLEC that keep the lights on. I also enjoy the ability to meet with peers in the industry from across the nation when attending trade group and association meetings. There is always something new to learn and it is never boring. I have also enjoyed representing MLEC by serving as our director on the Great River Energy board of directors.

What excites you about the future of MLEC?

While there is so much new going on in the industry, MLEC is positioned very well to be the local leader and energy expert. We have a strong, engaged board of directors, a skilled, cohesive management team and great employees. Our financials are in great shape and will allow us to move forward on the strategic initiatives we have outlined. I am proud to be a part of all of this and provide the leadership our members deserve and expect.



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 31st**.

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

OR E-MAIL:
kpeterson@mlecmn.com

2021 photo calendars now available at the MLEC office!

Photo calendars are free for all MLEC members. They are located in a box to the right of the lobby door near the deposit drop box. Please only take one per membership. Thank you for all who submitted photos this year!

Who was announced the winner of the 2020 Touchstone Energy Community Award?

Name:

Address:

Congrats to Kathryn Will of Palisade, the November gift card trivia winner!

SIGN UP TODAY! Call our office at
218-429-0433 or 800-497-5310



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30
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SYSTEM-WIDE METER UPGRADE

MLEC is in the process of making a substantial investment in infrastructure, building one of the most technologically advanced power control systems. In 2021, MLEC will continue to implement an advanced metering infrastructure (AMI) and install a meter data management system (MDMS). The new meters will improve reliability and give you more tools and opportunities to manage and save energy.



FOR MORE INFORMATION

(218) 927-2191 • (800) 450-2191 • www.mlecmn.net

 **MILLE LACS ENERGY COOPERATIVE**

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