



THE OUTLET

Monthly Publication of Mille Lacs Energy Cooperative

Your Touchstone Energy® Cooperative 

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JANUARY 2020



DOING THE MOST GOOD

MLEC employees volunteer to ring the bell for the Salvation Army.

On Tuesday, December 17th, MLEC employees volunteered to ring the bell for the Salvation Army at County Market in Aitkin. Bell ringers included: Kassie Kokesh, Shelly DeFoe, Bill Fillion, Cory Brix, Erin Beck, Kelly Buttler, Mary Ward and Amber. People were very generous and kettles were filled to the top. Thank you to all who volunteered and all who have donated throughout the holiday season!



2019 TOUCHSTONE COMMUNITY AWARD

Congratulations to this year's winner, Salem West!

Salem West is MLEC's 2019 Touchstone Energy Commitment to Community Award winner. An award plaque and a \$500 check was presented to the organization on December 17th.

Salem West is a donation center located in Deerwood, MN that focuses on helping local families and individuals in need obtain household and furniture items to aid in their daily lives. Whenever possible, donations are also delivered to the families.

This is the 16th 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.

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



Deb Chute and Dee Dee Frahm

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

Barbara Welty - District 1
320/692-4800
bwelty@mlecmmn.com
Secretary/Treasurer

Bill Bernard - District 2
218/678-3911
bbernard@mlecmmn.com

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

Aileen DeMenge - District 4
218/768-4900
ademenge@mlecmmn.com
Vice President

Don Appel - District 5
218/927-4134
dappel@mlecmmn.com
Assistant Secretary/Treasurer

Bruce Robinson - District 6
218/851-4760
brobinson@mlecmmn.com

Michael Reem - District 7
218/839-5697
mreem@mlecmmn.com

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

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 Kokesh,
Communications Specialist

HOLIDAY GIVING

Operation Christmas and Mitten Tree donations are a great success!

Our donation bins were overflowing with new toys for Operation Christmas! 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.

This December, MLEC decorated the lobby Christmas tree with new or handmade hats, mittens, gloves, and scarves. With the help of employees and members, we filled the tree and will donate them after the first of the year.

Thank you to all who participated and donated!



2019 - A YEAR OF CHANGE

Dear Member:

Happy New Year! I would like to take this opportunity to look back on 2019 and fill you in on some important things that happened throughout the year.

As your Board President, Harold Harms, indicated at the Annual Meeting, 2019 was going to be a year of change. Boy, did we live up to that expectation! We experienced some employee turnover in 2019 resulting in MLEC hiring seven more new employees. I am very happy to welcome Tanner, Isabel, Scott, David, Chase, Adam, and Johnston to the MLEC family! They are all great additions to the team.

Your MLEC management team has done an excellent job at finding ways to control costs and improve efficiencies in 2019. Additionally, our wholesale power provider, Great River Energy (GRE), has notified us they will not have a rate increase in 2020. As a result, I am happy to report that MLEC will not have a rate increase in 2020. We will continue on this cost containment path in 2020 and look for positive results in 2021. As a reminder, over 60% of our annual costs are attributed to wholesale power. That gives your management team very little room to work with. Please know we will continue to do our best at controlling that piece of the pie.

Over the past three years, MLEC has spent a significant amount of time and money promoting our XSTREAM fiber brand. It has been successful, and we are all proud of the results. Recently, we have been threatened with a lawsuit by a national internet provider indicating that our brand, XSTREAM, is too close to their brand. This is a legal battle that a small not-for-profit organization like MLEC cannot afford to take on. They are giving us until April 10, 2020, to change our brand and get our new brand into the market. NOTE: MLEC will continue to provide and expand our same great fiber service. We will simply be doing so under a new brand. Please continue to read the Outlet, Facebook, and our website for more information on our fiber brand change.

“As your Board President, Harold Harms, indicated at the Annual Meeting, 2019 was going to be a year of change. Boy, did we live up to that expectation!”

You may have noticed a larger than expected capital credit retirement this December. This would have been in the form of a check or a credit on your December bill for eligible members. A capital credit retirement sets co-ops apart from any other type of business. It is the way you, as a member owner, get to share in the profits of the co-op. The reason for the larger capital credit retirement was due largely in part to our wholesale power supplier, Great River Energy (GRE). For the first time in its history, GRE met its equity goals and was able to retire capital credits back to its member owners (MLEC being one of those member owners), and we were able to pass capital credit retirements on to you, our member owners. GRE hopes to be able to retire capital credits again in 2020.



Sarah Cron
CEO

To date, over 4,000 Advanced Metering Infrastructure (AMI) meters have been installed on MLEC's system. We hope to have the entire project complete in 2021. This meter replacement was required because our existing metering system is outdated and will no longer be supported. While it is an investment in our plant, the new system will help detect and restore outages more quickly, and reduce the need for specific truck rolls, saving MLEC money.

MLEC right-of-way crews along with contract crews cleared approximately 255 miles of powerline right-of-way in 2019. This is the third year of a five-year commitment to get our powerlines back into a maintainable condition. This project was a large undertaking, but we are already seeing the results in fewer outages and quicker restoration times after outages. This is a project that will cost a little money on the front end but will pay for itself in the long run.

These are just a few things that have been keeping us busy in 2019. We look forward to another strong and successful year at MLEC, and we wish you and your families a safe and prosperous 2020.

Until next month,

LET'S DISH

SEND US YOUR RECIPES!

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

MAIL TO:

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

OR E-MAIL:

kkokesh@mlecmn.com



SWEET & SALTY COOKIES

3/4 cup sugar
3/4 cup packed brown sugar
2 eggs
2 sticks of butter (softened)
1 Tsp. salt
1 Tsp. baking soda

2 1/4 cups flour
1 Tsp. vanilla
2 cups (12 oz.) semi sweet chocolate chips
2 cups coarsely broken potato chips
1 cup crushed pretzels
1/2 cup crushed peanuts

Preheat oven to 375 degrees. Combine flour, salt, and baking soda in a bowl and set aside. Beat butter, sugar, and brown sugar until creamy. Add eggs, then beat in flour mixture. Stir in chocolate chips, potato chips, pretzels, and peanuts. Drop by rounded tablespoons onto ungreased baking sheets. Bake for 9-11 minutes. Cool on baking sheets for 2 minutes. Remove to wire racks to cool. Enjoy!

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

TRUST BOARD AWARDS GRANTS

The Mille Lacs Community Trust Board meets quarterly to distribute funds raised through Operation Round Up. On December 17th the board awarded \$31,000 in grants to local non-profit organizations including: Aitkin Anglers Fishing Club, Mille Lacs Indian Museum, Onamia Senior Citizens Inc, True Friends, Aitkin Co. Environmental Services, Mille Lacs Health System Auxiliary, Ruby's Pantry, The Legacy Chorale of Greater Minnesota, Aitkin Grad Blast 2020, Mille Lacs Academy, City of Aitkin, Kinship Partners, Cuyuna Range Youth Center, Mounted Eagles, United 4 Recovery, Aitkin Co. Private Woodland Committee, DAV Warriors on Water, Salem West, Riverwood Healthcare Center Auxiliary, Aitkin Co. CARE, and Palisade Area Lions.

Operation Round Up is a voluntary program at MLEC 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: Shirley

Adolphson, Fred Tessmer, Loren Larson, Pat Scollard, Diane Landstad, 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 Tuesday 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.

Front Row L to R: Shannon Westerlund, Judy Waytashek, Pam Olson, Jennifer Pedersen, Jill Blanchette, Jeremy Janski, Gary Tibbitts, Denny Davis, Kathy Hachey.

Back Row L to R: Mary Dinger, Kyle Fredrickson, Alan Jensen, Kristi Kunz, Darrell Pedersen, Dee Dee Frahm, Joyce Knapper, Judie Jones, Lynne Jacobs, Bill Pick, Michael Rader.

THANK YOU MEMBERS!



BOARD ELECTIONS

Candidate filing for MLEC director positions from Districts Three and Four is now OPEN!

District Three includes members whose electric account numbers start with 52, 54, 55, 58, or 59. The present director is Harold Harms of McGrath.

District Four includes members whose electric account numbers start with 17, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 42, or 43. The present director is Aileen DeMenge of McGregor.

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 Erin Beck at 927-8245 or 800-450-2191 or, email ebeck@mlecmm.com** for director election filing forms and a complete information packet.

All filings must be received at the Cooperative by **February 23, 2020**.

You can find additional district and annual meeting information on the MLEC website www.mlecmm.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
Tim Emery 320-692-4104

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

Find load control schedule at www.mlecmm.net under *Quick Links*.



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

SCHOOL DONATIONS

Each year, MLEC donates all unclaimed capital credit checks to the seven schools in our service area. This year, a total of \$17,250.64 was presented by Energy Advisors Jeff Coombs, Jeff Peysar, and Scott Nutting. They are shown in the photos along with school representatives.



JJ Vold and Jeff Peysar

Onamia Schools

Plans to use money for educational student assemblies.



Dan Stifter, Jeff Peysar, and Scott Nutting

Aitkin Schools

Plans to use money for updating AED devices.



Jeff Peysar and Jennifer Strom

Crosby Schools

Plans to use money for installing vaping detectors in school bathrooms.



Lehtitia Weiss and Jeff Peysar

Nay Ah Shing School

Plans to use money to provide books for the kids to take home and keep.



Paul Grams and Jeff Coombs

McGregor Schools

Plans to use money for social, emotional learning, bully prevention and child protection curriculum for elementary students.



Jeff Coombs and Raina Killspotted

Minisinaakwaang Leadership Academy

Plans to use money for Minisinaakwaang Leadership Academy drum & dance support.



Jeff Coombs and Dean Kapsner

Isle Schools

Plans to use money for a P.A. system overhaul, camera upgrades, and improvements of auditorium lights.



YOUTH TOUR 2020

This summer... go on a POWER TRIP! Apply for the 2020 Washington D.C. Youth Tour!

MLEC is now accepting applications for the 2020 Youth Tour! Current sophomores or juniors in high school, whose parent or guardian is an MLEC member are eligible to apply. This year's Youth Tour is June 20-25.

The Youth Tour program continues to foster the grassroots spirit of the rural electric cooperative by demonstrating how our government works and what the electric cooperative business model is all about.

Meet student leaders from nearly every state in the country. The tour includes visits with congressional representatives. You'll get the chance to visit some of the most famous museums in the world, and experience monuments dedicated to our country's leaders and heroes. You'll be a part of a group that has more than 50,000 alumni in every walk of life, including U.S. Senators and CEOs. You'll make memories and friendships that will last a lifetime.

Applications can be found on our website, www.mlecmm.net/youth-tour, or by emailing Erin Beck at ebeck@mlecmm.com. Applications must be received by March 10, 2020.

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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. MLEC plans to implement AMI and install an MDMS throughout 2020. 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.mlecmm.net



MILLE LACS ENERGY COOPERATIVE

36559 US Highway 169, Aitkin, MN 56431 • (218) 927-2191 / (800) 450-2191 • www.mlecmm.net

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