



# 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.

**Cooperative Commit** 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.

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.



# MAJOR OUTAGE EVENTS

*Harsh weather has brought on power outages for MLEC members.*

As many of you have noticed, it has been a long summer for storms and violent weather, resulting in major outages affecting members of Mille Lacs Energy. While we've dealt effectively with storms in the past, we have been dealing with an unprecedented number this calendar year.

Our March snowstorm affected the eastern coverage area and continued down to the south end, which was hit the hardest. The storm buried our customers under many inches of snow, which also caused sagging lines and snapped off tree limbs that took out many power lines. Yet, this was just the beginning.

On July 8<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup>, a large storm system hit. Our crews worked tirelessly for multiple days to repair the damages done by wind and lightning. Many fallen trees needed to be removed along with repairing or replacing of broken poles.

Outage calls started coming in again around 6:00 p.m. on August 14<sup>th</sup>, from Onamia, north of Isle, the Opstead areas, and the north side of Palisade. As the storm continued, it took out 3 substations, which is the complete eastern side of Mille Lacs Lake. Many spans of wire were laying on the ground and trees went down in areas that were extremely difficult to reach. In fact, in some areas, homeowners lost all of their trees!

A funnel cloud was seen in the middle of the lake, but thankfully it turned into straight line winds by the time it reached shore or damage could have been much worse.

One can see the intensity of our weather in comparison to last year. The numbers are eye-opening. On our transmission lines alone, in 2019, there were 18 momentary blinks and 3 sustained outages. In 2020, there were 51 momentary blinks and 12 sustained outages. In total, 12,777 customers were affected by major events this year.



Cory Brix  
Line Superintendent

An interesting aspect of lightning events is how hard it is on underground cable. One would think that it would be protected by being buried, but in fact, lightning stresses the cable causing underground faults that only begin to show themselves 5-7 days after the storm. This increases complexity of our work for weeks up to months as we continue to find and repair faults.

***"You can see the intensity of our weather in comparison to last year. The numbers are eye-opening... 12,777 customers were affected by major events this year."***

Even while attending to a high volume of new services and rebuilds, tackling the weather, and operating under the new Covid-19 guidelines, our staff at Mille Lacs Energy would like to assure you that we are working hard to keep the lights on.

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

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bwelty@mlecmmn.com  
Secretary/Treasurer

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

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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 Peterson,  
Communications Specialist

# 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 \$22,100 in grants to local non-profit organizations including: Aitkin County Friends of the Arts, Aitkin County Habitat for Humanity, Aitkin County Historical Society, Aitkin FFA Alumni, Aitkin Lions, Aitkin Youth Fastpitch, American Legion Riders Post # 395, Crisis Line and Referral Services, Deerwood Lakes Lions, Friends of the Aitkin Public Library, Onamia Fire and Rescue Department, Onamia Vets Club, Ripple River Quilt Guild, Riverwood Foundation, Second Harvest North Central Food Bank, South Aitkin First Responders, Saint Vincent de Paul "the Lunch Bunch", and Veterans of Foreign Wars Post # 1727.

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, Carol Pundt, 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 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.

**THANK YOU MEMBERS!**

# POTENTIAL NEW HEADQUARTERS

Dear Member:

As I write this, I, along with your MLEC Board of Directors and Senior Management Team, prepare to meet for our strategic financial planning session that will be facilitated by one of our cooperative lenders, Cooperative Finance Corporation (CFC). We are excited to look at the future opportunities available to MLEC and its membership, but also look at how those opportunities align with our ten-year financial forecast.

In my column in the May 2020 Outlet, I briefly mentioned that I began discussing the prospects of a “desperately needed” new headquarters building with the board; however, like most things this year, that conversation has taken a back seat to all of the ripple effects of challenges we are navigating during a global pandemic. With our 2021 budget just around the corner, it is time to refocus our efforts on the future. At MLEC, we need to continue to deliver safe, reliable electricity, continue to build out our true gigabit fiber internet to the home, and consider what our future home could look like. During our strategic financial planning session, we will look at these, and other opportunities, and assess the feasibility of them. We will also look at the financial impact to MLEC over the next 10, 20, and 30 years.

Since I started at MLEC (January 2019), my employees have been telling me how much we need a new building. I asked them to start a list of the reasons so I could discuss it with the board. This was definitely not a new conversation, because the list piled up quickly. While it has undergone several renovations, MLEC’s staff, fleet, and technology have outgrown our 1960’s facility. The Minnesota Department of Transportation (MNDOT) has advised us that they will be closing our two driveways off of 169, forcing us to reconfigure our existing driveway/parking area, and wetland constraints will not allow us to expand east on our current property. We view relocating as our best option.

We need a facility that is going to operate effectively, efficiently and allow us to serve our members in the best possible way. After careful analysis, we have determined that we need a location that allows us to serve our membership effectively while minimizing the cost to each member. In reviewing a new location, we would want a close proximity to the majority of our member density, ready highway access, an easy tie in to our existing infrastructure (poles and wires), and close to diesel fueling. Considering outages, maintenance, and construction patterns, we kept coming back to an ideal location being on Highway 169 close to Highway 18. With 550,000 acres (51%) of Aitkin County being jurisdictional wetlands, we are not finding a lot of parcels that meet our requirements.

Recently, a piece of property became available, and MLEC made an offer on the property contingent on obtaining a conditional use permit by the county, and getting MNDOT to authorize a driveway move – two very challenging asks. As of the time this article has gone to print, here are the things that are factual about this prospect:

- MLEC has not finalized the purchase of the land.
- The land is not zoned commercial and must go through a conditional use permitting process prior to the purchase of and acquisition of land.



*Sarah Cron*  
CEO

- A rough sketch of a potential option of what a development of land could look like was submitted to the county, per the conditional use permitting process. MLEC has not met with an architect. We have not drawn up plans. All of those things will depend on what type of property we are able to secure.
- We have not discussed this openly because we have not purchased the land; and, we felt the current property owners deserved their privacy.
- We are borrowing just above 1% right now and will likely never see money that low again. The difference between starting to plan and act now and waiting until interest rates go back up to 4 – 5% could add \$5 to \$10 million to the cost of a construction loan. In our upcoming strategic financial planning session, we will discuss land, building, and financing options to see what the long-term financial implications to the cooperative and our members could be.
- If we do not obtain a conditional use permit, we will not buy the land, and we will continue to look for another piece of property.

As we have any concrete information about future plans, we will be sure to share them with the entire membership. We do take the principle of Democratic Member Control seriously. You have elected a strong and fiscally-minded Board of Directors that is working for your best interests, and together, we will plan for the sustainable future of MLEC. I will continue to let you know the details of all major decisions at MLEC – when there is something to share.

Until next month,

# LET'S DISH

Thank you to Rose Jessen of Mound 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@mlecmmn.com



## WHOOPIE PIES

1/2 cup softened butter	2 cups flour	Marshmallow filling:
1 cup sugar	1/2 tsp baking powder	1/2 cup softened butter
1 egg	1 1/2 tsp baking soda	2 cups powdered sugar
1 tsp vanilla extract	1/2 tsp salt	1 jar marshmallow cream
1 cup milk	1/2 cup cocoa	1 tsp vanilla extract

Mix ingredients together in order mentioned, beat until smooth. Drop by rounded teaspoon onto buttered cookie sheet. Bake at 400 degrees for 7 minutes or until touching center of cookie and it bounces back.

For marshmallow filling, cream butter and powdered sugar together and beat in other ingredients. Add milk to make it a firm spreading consistency. Spread filling on one cookie and add another to make a sandwich. Makes about 24 cookies. 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 15 and April 15 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 mlec@mlecmmn.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](http://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.mlecmm.net](http://www.mlecmm.net) under *Quick Links*.



Visit our website -  
[www.mlecmm.net](http://www.mlecmm.net)  
E-mail us - [mlec@mlecmm.net](mailto:mlec@mlecmm.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 WIFI, make sure it's reasonably close to the router to prevent periodic disconnections. If your thermostat is too far from your router, consider a WIFI range extender, which can improve overall connectivity.

We offer a \$25 rebate on smart thermostats. You can also go online to [www.energywisemnstore.com](http://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.



# 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 30<sup>th</sup>**.

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

**OR E-MAIL:**  
kpeterson@mlecmn.com

## The deadline for the 2021 Photo Calendar is quickly approaching!

Submit your photos by October 27<sup>th</sup> 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](http://www.mlecmn.net/photo-contest)

How much money did the MLEC Trust Board donate to local organizations in September?

Name:

Address:

*Congrats to Virginia Peterson of Osceola, the August gift card trivia winner!*



**Plans start at**  
**\$50**  
per month

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**reliable.**

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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 an advanced metering infrastructure (AMI) and install a meter data management system (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.mlecmn.net](http://www.mlecmn.net)