

● SEPTEMBER 2025

# iowa

ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE LIVING

**Meet this year's  
Shine the Light winners**

**Franklin REC's summer of  
community connections**

**Fall apple recipes**

**Learn about the 2025 Iowa Youth Leadership Academy ▶ See Page 4**

# CONTENTS



6



8



10

VOLUME 78 • ISSUE 9

3

## STATEWIDE PERSPECTIVE

Don't fall for autumn safety hazards

3

## EDITOR'S CHOICE CONTEST

Win a Worx electric leaf mulcher

10

## IN THE COMMUNITY

Shine the Light winners

15

## OUT BACK

Be still in a digital world

**EDITOR**  
Ann Foster Thelen

**DESIGNERS**  
Megan Walters  
Bree Glenn

**IAEC DIRECTOR OF COMMUNICATIONS**  
Erin Campbell

**IAEC EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT**  
Leslie Kaufman

**IAEC BOARD OF DIRECTORS**  
Jim Miller, District 5 – President  
Gordon Greimann, District 6 – Vice President  
Tony Lem, District 2 – Secretary/Treasurer  
Jerry Keleher, District 3 – Asst. Secretary/Treasurer  
Travis Harris, District 1  
Steve Inskeep, District 4  
Bruce Amundson, District 7  
Marion Denger, Prairie Energy Cooperative – NRECA Representative  
Terry Sullivan, Linn County REC – Managers' Representative

*Iowa Electric Cooperative Living* magazine (ISSN: 2770-8683) is published monthly by the Iowa Association of Electric Cooperatives, a not-for-profit organization representing Iowa's member-owned local electric cooperatives. Association address: 8525 Douglas Ave., Suite 48, Des Moines, IA 50322-2992. The phrase ***Iowa Electric Cooperative Living*** is a mark registered within the state of Iowa to the Iowa Association of Electric Cooperatives. The magazine does not accept advertising.

**Editorial Office**  
8525 Douglas Ave., Suite 48, Des Moines, IA 50322-2992. Telephone: 515-276-5350.

**Email Address**  
editor@ieclmagazine.com. *Iowa Electric Cooperative Living* magazine does not assume responsibility for unsolicited items.

**Website**  
[www.ieclmagazine.com](http://www.ieclmagazine.com)

**Postmaster**  
Send address changes to *Iowa Electric Cooperative Living* magazine, 8525 Douglas Ave., Suite 48, Des Moines, IA 50322-2992. Periodicals Postage Paid at Des Moines, Iowa, and at additional mailing offices.

**Change of Address**  
Every local electric cooperative maintains an independent mailing list of its members, so please send your change of address directly to your local electric cooperative's office. *Iowa Electric Cooperative Living* magazine cannot make an address change for you.

© Copyright 2025, Iowa Association of Electric Cooperatives. No portion of the editorial, photographic or other content of *Iowa Electric Cooperative Living* magazine or its website may be reproduced without written permission of the editor.



**Iowa Association of Electric Cooperatives**  
• A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative

## ON THE COVER

Special thanks to Terri Shetler, a Consumers Energy member-consumer, for supplying this month's cover image of an Eastern Bluebird. Submit high-resolution photos for consideration to [editor@ieclmagazine.com](mailto:editor@ieclmagazine.com). You could receive \$100!



# DON'T FALL FOR AUTUMN HAZARDS: FOLLOW THESE TIPS FOR A SAFE SEASON

BY SCOTT MEINECKE



As the weather cools and the leaves begin to change colors, many Iowans are busy with outdoor projects or getting students settled into college

housing. Whether you're climbing a ladder, working the fields or firing up a space heater, take a few minutes to review these important safety tips.

## Ladder safety

Outdoor chores like cleaning gutters and trimming trees often require the use of ladders or tall tools. Stay safe by remembering to look up and be aware of power lines as you use ladders or large tools on your property.

Ensure the ladder is on level ground and that the base is stable. Always maintain three points of contact on the ladder – two hands and one foot or two feet and one hand. Carry tools in a tool belt or pouch to keep your hands free when climbing the ladder. If possible, have another person hold the base of your ladder when you are on it.

## Harvest safety

In Iowa, we know autumn has arrived when we see combines in the fields. We remind farmers and field workers to maintain a 10-foot clearance around power lines and poles and to use a spotter when raising or lowering large equipment or high loads that could come into contact with power lines.

If you are in a vehicle or implement that makes contact with power lines, stay in the cab, contact the local power utility or law enforcement, and keep others away from you until an authority confirms that the power line has been de-energized.

If there is a fire in the cab and you need to exit, jump clear of the equipment without touching it and keep your feet together. Then, bunny hop away with both feet together or shuffle-walk away without lifting your feet off the ground.

## Dorm safety

It's also the time of year when college students move into dorms, apartments and off-campus housing. If you have a student in college, take time to discuss electrical safety and fire safety. Locate fire alarms and fire extinguishers, and walk through the best way to evacuate the space in case of a fire.

Talk to your student about the dangers of overloading electrical outlets and how to use extension cords. For example, don't "daisy chain" extension cords to each other, and don't plug major appliances into extension cords. Unattended cookware is the leading cause of dorm fires, so remind your student to keep an eye on food while it's cooking.

## Space heaters

Cooler autumn weather also ushers in the use of space heaters. Remember to plug your space heater directly into a wall outlet; it could overload a power strip or extension cord. Keep your space heater at least 3 feet from anything that might burn, including furniture, bedding or curtains.

Never leave pets or children unattended around space heaters, and shut them off when you go to sleep or leave the room. Only use space heaters that automatically shut off when tipped over.

## Move over, slow down

Iowa motorists are required by law to move over or slow down when approaching ANY vehicle on the side of the road with flashing lights activated, including co-op utility trucks. Give our co-op employees room on the road to work safely; their families thank you!

*Scott Meinecke is the director of safety and loss control at the Iowa Association of Electric Cooperatives.*

## EDITOR'S CHOICE CONTEST

### WIN AN ELECTRIC LEAF MULCHER!

The new Worx leaf mulcher makes collecting leaves easier and quicker. Turn 11 bags of leaves and debris into one with the 13-amp electric leaf mulcher. This tool features a clean air motor cooling system, enabling it to run at peak efficiency and keep mulching up to 53 gallons of leaves per minute.

### Visit our website and win!

Enter this month's contest by visiting [www.ieclmagazine.com](http://www.ieclmagazine.com) no later than Sept. 30. You must be a member of one of Iowa's electric cooperatives to win. There's no obligation associated with entering, we don't share entrant information with anyone and multiple entries from the same account will be disqualified.

The winner of the Solo Stove Runner tabletop fire pit from the July issue was **Barbara Buseman**, a **Grundy County REC** member-consumer.



ENTER ONLINE BY SEPT. 30!

# FRANKLIN REC'S SUMMER OF COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

Franklin REC had a jam-packed summer out in the community!

Our traveling basketball gravity wagon made its way across our service territory, bringing fun and friendly competition to all ages. From town celebrations and church picnics to summer camps, library visits, farmers markets, barbeque competitions, car shows, National Night Out and even RAGBRAI – it's been a slam dunk everywhere we've gone!

But the fun didn't stop there. Franklin REC employees have been busy, too. We celebrated the Reeve REA Power Generating Plant's designation as a National Historic Landmark, volunteered at the 4-H Food Stand during the Franklin County Fair and handed out popsicles to RAGBRAI riders to help them beat the heat.

During National Night Out, our office staff helped distribute 300 donated headphones and earbuds to Franklin County students, in partnership with



Franklin County Family Focus. It was a rewarding way to help families prepare for the upcoming school year and strengthen our community connections.

At Franklin REC, community isn't just where we work – it's where we live. We're proud to play a part in making our service territory a place where people want to live, work and play.



**Office**  
1560 Highway 65 • P.O. Box 437  
Hampton, IA 50441

**Summer Office Hours**  
Monday-Friday 7:00 a.m.-3:30 p.m.  
Closed Saturdays, Sundays and holidays

**Telephone Number**  
641-456-2557  
Calls answered 24/7

**Secure Pay-by-Phone Number**  
1-855-940-3953

**Website**  
[www.franklinrec.coop](http://www.franklinrec.coop)

This institution is an equal opportunity provider.

## CALLING ALL FUTURE LEADERS! JOIN THE 2025 IOWA YOUTH LEADERSHIP ACADEMY

Franklin REC is excited to invite local high school students to be part of something powerful – the 2025 Iowa Youth Leadership Academy! This free, virtual program is your chance to grow as a leader, discover what makes electric cooperatives unique and learn how to speak up for the things that matter most to you.

During this fun and interactive experience, students will:

- Uncover their leadership strengths.
- Connect with peers from across Iowa.
- Hear from inspiring speakers.

- Learn how to make a difference through advocacy.

If you're passionate, curious or ready to explore your potential – this is for you! There are three sessions, and Franklin REC offers a \$100 gift card to students who participate in all three sessions.

**Register at [www.iowayouthtour.com](http://www.iowayouthtour.com)**

Once students register online for the Iowa Youth Leadership Academy, they can attend the webinars from their own computer or mobile device. Each Zoom session will last around 45-60 minutes.

**Questions? Contact Franklin REC at 641-456-2557 or visit [www.franklinrec.coop](http://www.franklinrec.coop).**



# GET TO KNOW US

In this edition of our "Get to Know Us" series, we're featuring three valued members of the Franklin REC team: Madison Alert, Jens Hovenga and Matt Roelfs. They'll share their unique experiences working at the cooperative, the achievements that stand out most to them and how they see Franklin REC positively impacting the community. They'll also offer their insights on the cooperative's journey and provide advice for individuals just beginning their careers.

Read on to learn more about Madison, Jens and Matt and the important roles they play at Franklin REC!

## MADISON ALERT

Communications/Key Accounts Representative



**Q: What is your favorite part of working at Franklin REC?** The feeling of family we have here. We have the best interests at heart for our members, employees and community.

**Q: How would you describe Franklin REC's impact on the community?**

Undeniable. As a core principle, the co-op stays true to itself by providing support and presence in our service territory.

**Q: What is one thing you wish more members knew about Franklin REC?** Decisions are made in

house and are for the best interests of our members and the co-op. We are a not-for-profit organization who plans not only months, but years in advance to project the needs of the cooperative and our members in an ever-changing environment.

**Q: What is one piece of advice you would give to someone just starting their career?** When working as a team, rely on your coworkers. Your strengths may be another's weaknesses and vice versa. Continue to grow; there is always something more you can do and learn.

## JENS HOVENGA

Warehouseman



**Q: What is your favorite part of working at Franklin REC?** Doing something different every day.

**Q: How would you describe Franklin REC's impact on the community?** It has a huge impact with

all the voluntary projects and programs.

**Q: What is one thing you wish more members knew about Franklin REC?** We care about the members and try to quickly accomplish repairs in tough situations to restore their power.

**Q: What is one piece of advice you would give to someone just starting their career?** Stay focused and be patient.

## MATT ROELFS

Board Director



**Q: What's your favorite part of being involved with Franklin REC?** I really like the community and the passion to serve not just our consumers, but also the community.

**Q: How has Franklin REC changed since you started?** I think Franklin REC has

become a lot more sophisticated and savvy in operating a relatively small electric cooperative.

**Q: What's one thing you wish more members knew about Franklin REC?** I wish more members knew how much all the directors and employees care about providing reliable and efficient power.

**Q: What's a project or initiative at Franklin REC that you're especially proud of?** Any projects that build up the power grid and decrease outages for our members.

## FROM YOUR BOARDROOM

During the July meeting, Franklin REC directors approved the following:

- Approved construction and special equipment work orders of \$65,060.78
- Approved a donation to Franklin REC's Shine the Light nominees
- Approved board meeting date change for September
- Appointed National Rural Electric Cooperative Association Regional Meeting voting delegate
- Approved new tariff model to be filed with Iowa Utilities Commission
- Appointed Basin Electric Power Cooperative Annual Meeting voting delegate
- Approved the Iowa Association of Electric Cooperatives membership dues
- Approved a donation to the Cooperative Family Fund



The most recent NERC assessment found that while most areas were prepared for typical summer conditions, some could experience elevated risk during periods of extreme heat or when generation resources are limited. *Photo Source: Dennis Gainer, NRECA*

# STAYING POWERED DURING PEAK DEMAND

BY JENNAH DENNEY

Extreme temperatures, whether during summer or winter months, drive up the demand for electricity as homes and businesses rely on air conditioning or heating to stay safe and comfortable. Every year, the North American Electric Reliability Corporation (NERC), the nation's watchdog for grid reliability, issues two Reliability Assessment reports – one for summer months and one for winter. These biannual assessments provide independent views of how prepared the U.S. grid is to meet electricity demand when temperatures soar or dip.

The NERC assessments are critical planning tools for electric

utilities as they prepare for peak demand months. The reports provide a comprehensive evaluation of the North American Bulk Power System and highlight areas of concern regarding reliability.

## **What the recent reliability assessment told us**

NERC's 2025 Summer Reliability Assessment found that while most areas were prepared for typical summer conditions, some regions of the U.S. could experience elevated risk during periods of extreme heat or when generation resources are limited due to planned or unplanned power outages. A few months ago, Entergy and SWEPCO customers in Louisiana

experienced rolling power outages due to grid capacity constraints.

Iowa's electric cooperatives want our members to understand how these surges in demand can impact you – and how you can play an important role in supporting reliable electric service for our local communities.

The electric grid is a vast network comprised of power plants, transmission lines and distribution systems that work together to deliver electricity to homes and businesses. Grid reliability means ensuring enough electricity is always available to meet demand – even on the hottest and coldest days of the year.

According to NERC's most recent assessment, our electric grid is experiencing rapid load growth. Across North America, the total forecasted peak demand for summer months increased by more than 10 gigawatts (GW) since 2024 – more than double the increase seen in 2023. This growth is being driven by continued economic activity, expansion of data centers and industrial facilities, and increasing electrification across many sectors.

At the same time, more than 7.4 GW of generation capacity has retired or gone inactive since last summer. Retirements include natural gas, coal, nuclear and other types of generation, which reduces the availability of dispatchable resources that can operate at any time to help balance the grid. But new resources are becoming available to help meet some of this growing demand. Over 30 GW of new solar capacity and 13 GW of new battery storage are already contributing to increased demand requirements. These resources are especially helpful during peak daylight hours but can create new operational challenges in the evening, when solar generation tapers off and the demand for electricity remains high.

### **Why grid reliability is everyone's responsibility**

While most regions are prepared to meet demand under normal conditions, the NERC assessment highlights that some areas – including parts of the Midwest, New England and Texas – face elevated risk of supply shortfalls during periods of above-normal demand or low resource availability. These risks may occur during extended periods of extreme temperatures or when generation outages coincide with high loads.

In regions like ours, grid operators and electric cooperatives rely on the collective actions of individual consumers to help maintain reliability when the system is under stress. This is where you can help. Stay informed and watch for communications from your electric co-op about peak demand periods or energy conservation requests. Quick

actions taken by co-op members can make a meaningful difference.

### **Small actions, big impact during peak demand**

Adjusting your thermostat by a few degrees, postponing use of large appliances until evening hours, and turning off lights and unnecessary electronics are simple, effective ways you can help ease strain on the grid.

As the electric grid evolves – with changing generation resources, new technologies and growing demand – maintaining reliable service requires careful planning and participation from everyone.

NERC will likely release the 2025-2026 Winter Reliability Assessment in November, which will provide Iowa's electric cooperatives with key insights into winter reliability.

Your electric co-op is working closely with our power supply providers in preparing for peak demand, and your actions to conserve during these times are equally important. By working together, we can help ensure our community continues to receive reliable and affordable electric service throughout periods of high demand.

*Jennah Denney writes on consumer and cooperative affairs for the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association.*



Your electric co-op works closely with power supply providers in preparing for peak demand. Photo Source: Garrett Hubbard



During times of peak electricity demand, quick conservation actions taken by co-op members can make a meaningful difference. Photo Source: Scott Van Osdol





## MULBERRY APPLE STREUSEL PIE

- 4 cups tart baking apples
- 2 cups mulberries
- $\frac{3}{4}$  cup sugar
- 3 tablespoons minute tapioca
- $\frac{1}{2}$  teaspoon cinnamon
- $\frac{1}{4}$  teaspoon nutmeg
- 1 9-inch deep-dish pie crust
- 1 cup Bisquick baking mix
- $\frac{1}{2}$  cup nuts, chopped
- $\frac{1}{3}$  cup brown sugar
- 3 tablespoons butter

Cook apples slightly in microwave until tender crisp. Mix apples, mulberries, sugar, tapioca, cinnamon and nutmeg. Add to pie crust. Mix baking mix, nuts, brown sugar and butter until crumbly. Sprinkle over pie. Bake at 350 degrees F for 55 minutes. *Serves 6-8*

Jo Groth • Plainfield  
Butler County Rural Electric Cooperative

## APPLE PIE ROLL-UPS

- $\frac{1}{2}$  stick butter, melted
- 1 teaspoon cinnamon
- $\frac{1}{2}$  cup sugar
- 10 flour tortillas
- 1 20-ounce can apple pie filling

Brush a 9x13-inch glass dish with melted butter. Mix cinnamon and sugar and put on a paper plate. Fill each tortilla with 2-3 spoonfuls of apple pie filling. Roll tightly and brush with melted butter, then roll in the cinnamon sugar mixture. Coat well. Place in prepared baking dish and bake at 350 degrees F for 15-18 minutes. *Serves 10*

Crystal Hammes • Libertyville  
Access Energy Cooperative

## APPLE TOSS SALAD

- 1 quart apples, cored and diced with peel
- $\frac{1}{2}$  cup peanuts
- $\frac{1}{2}$  cup celery, diced
- $\frac{1}{2}$  cup carrots, chopped
- $\frac{1}{2}$  cup raisins
- 1 8-ounce container lemon-flavored yogurt

Combine apples, peanuts, celery, carrots and raisins. Stir in yogurt until everything is well combined. Cover and refrigerate until ready to eat. This cool and refreshing treat is perfect for hot fall days. *Yields 1½ quarts*

Kimberly Peterson • Red Oak  
Southwest Iowa Rural Electric Cooperative

## BAKED APPLES

- apples, peeled and halved
- butter
- 1 cup sugar
- $\frac{1}{4}$  cup brown sugar
- $\frac{1}{4}$  cup flour
- 1½ cups water
- cinnamon
- marshmallows, cut in half

Add enough apples to fill the bottom of a 9x13-inch pan when halved. Add a dab of butter in each half. Mix sugar, brown sugar, flour and water. Spoon sugar mixture into apple centers. Sprinkle with cinnamon. Bake at 350 degrees F for 45 minutes. Then, place half a marshmallow on each apple half and return to oven for a few minutes until marshmallows melt. Coat with juice and serve. *Serves 12*

Emily Rassi • Rock Rapids  
Lyon Rural Electric Cooperative



## AUTUMN FRUIT SALAD

- ½ cup sugar
- ½ cup flour
- 1½ cups water
- 1 teaspoon margarine or butter
- 1 teaspoon almond flavoring
- 6 cups green and red apples, unpeeled, cubed
- 2 cups red seedless grapes, halved
- 1 cup pecans, chopped

In a saucepan, combine sugar and flour. Stir in water and boil until thickened. Remove from heat and add margarine or butter and almond flavoring. Cool to room temperature. In a large bowl, combine fruits and nuts. Add dressing and toss gently. Chill for a few hours. Serves 12

**Sandy Harmelink • Orange City**  
**North West Rural Electric Cooperative**

## APPLE PUFF PANCAKE

- 4 tablespoons butter
- 4 cups apples, diced
- 6 eggs
- 1½ cups milk
- 1 cup flour
- ½ teaspoon salt
- ½ teaspoon cinnamon
- 1 teaspoon vanilla
- 1 tablespoon ground flax seed, optional
- 2 tablespoons brown sugar
- maple syrup

Preheat oven to 425 degree F and melt butter in 9x13-inch pan. Add apples and bake until they sizzle. In a blender, mix eggs, milk, flour, salt, cinnamon and vanilla. Pour over apples and sprinkle with flax seed and brown sugar. Bake at 425 degrees F for 20 minutes. Serve with syrup.

**Lauren Zollinger • Rock Rapids**  
**Lyon Rural Electric Cooperative**

## CARAMEL APPLE BROWNIES

- 1¼ cups oil
- 3 large eggs
- 2 cups sugar
- 3½ teaspoons vanilla, divided
- 3 cups flour
- 1 teaspoon baking soda
- 1 teaspoon cinnamon
- 2 Granny Smith apples, peeled and chopped
- 1 cup walnuts, chopped, optional
- ¾ cup butter
- 1½ cups brown sugar
- 6 tablespoons milk
- 3-3½ cups powdered sugar

Mix oil, eggs, sugar and 2 teaspoons vanilla. Add flour, baking soda and cinnamon. Then add apples and nuts. Pour into a greased 10x15-inch baking pan. Bake at 350 degrees F for 45 minutes until a toothpick inserted comes out clean. Remove from oven and cool completely. Melt butter in a medium saucepan. Add brown sugar and cook 2 minutes. Add milk and bring to a boil. Cool to warm stage and add powdered sugar. Beat, then add 1½ teaspoons vanilla and mix well. Spread caramel frosting on cooled brownies.

**Monica Johnson • Williams**  
**Prairie Energy Cooperative**

Visit [www.ieclmagazine.com](http://www.ieclmagazine.com) and search our online archive of hundreds of recipes in various categories.



## FIRST PRIZE APPLESAUCE CAKE

- 1 cup oil
- 2 cups granulated sugar
- 3 cups unsweetened applesauce, heated
- 4 cups all-purpose flour, sifted
- 4 teaspoons soda
- 1¼ teaspoons salt, optional
- 1 tablespoon ground cinnamon
- ½ teaspoon nutmeg
- ¼ teaspoon cloves
- 2 tablespoons cocoa
- ½ cup raisins and/or cranberries
- ½ cup nuts, chopped
- ½ cup butter, melted
- 1 cup dark brown sugar, firmly packed
- ¼ cup milk
- 2 cups powdered sugar, sifted
- 1 tablespoon vanilla

Stir together oil and sugar and add to hot applesauce. Sift together flour, soda, salt, cinnamon, nutmeg, cloves and cocoa. Then blend into the applesauce mixture. Stir in raisins and/or cranberries and nuts. Pour into two greased and floured 9x9x2-inch pans. Bake at 400 degrees F for 15 minutes, then lower the oven temperature to 375 degrees F and bake for 15 minutes more, or until done. Move cakes to racks to cool. Boil butter and brown sugar for 2 minutes. Remove from heat and stir in milk. Return to full boil, then remove and cool to lukewarm. Stir in powdered sugar and vanilla. Add more sugar if needed to make caramel frosting more spreadable. When cakes are cool, spread frosting on one layer. Top with second cake layer and frost top and sides. May garnish with more nuts. Tip: Wax parchment paper can be added to line sprayed/greased pans before pouring in batter.

**Steve Fisher • Sigourney**  
**T.I.P. Rural Electric Cooperative**

**WANTED:**

## VEGETARIAN RECIPES

**THE REWARD:**  
**\$25 FOR EVERY**  
**ONE WE PUBLISH!**

**Deadline is Sept. 30**

Submit your favorite recipes for vegetarian meals. Please include your name, address, telephone number, co-op name, recipe category and number of servings on all submissions.

**EMAIL:** [recipes@ieclmagazine.com](mailto:recipes@ieclmagazine.com)

**MAIL:** Recipes

*Iowa Electric Cooperative Living* magazine  
8525 Douglas Ave., Suite 48  
Des Moines, IA 50322



# MEET THE 2025 SHINE THE LIGHT WINNERS



Driven by their commitment to community, the Touchstone Energy® Cooperatives of Iowa held their fifth annual Shine the Light contest in June to celebrate local volunteers. Employees and member-consumers of Iowa's locally owned electric cooperatives were invited to nominate someone who makes a positive difference in their community.

The judging committee reviewed essays from 88 outstanding nominations, which were published in the August issue of this magazine, and selected three winners.

Congratulations to **Chuck Bildstein**, who is recognized for supporting families through Chelsey's Dream Foundation; **Aimee Goeman McKnight**, who is recognized for her generous community efforts through Build a Better Belmond; and **Gerry Holtrup**, who is recognized for his commitment to assisting veterans through Partners for Patriots.

These three winners have been awarded a \$3,000 donation to their charity. The following pages showcase and honor each of the Shine the Light contest winners' commitment to humbly serving their communities.

Learn more at  
[www.iowaShineTheLight.com](http://www.iowaShineTheLight.com).

Gerry Holtrup is pictured with photos of dogs he has helped to pair with veterans.



## WHERE DUTY NEVER ENDS

GERRY HOLTRUP PAIRS VETERANS WITH LIFE-SAVING COMPANIONS

BY EMILY VANDER VELDE

After more than 35 years in law enforcement, Gerry Holtrup could have stepped into retirement quietly. But a call from a past connection helped launch a mission that would touch the lives of hundreds of veterans across the country.

Gerry first met Cindy Brodie while working in the sheriff's office, when he was looking to add a narcotics dog to the force. Cindy, then training law enforcement dogs in Tennessee, connected him with Jeb, a dog who would work closely with Gerry for nearly a decade and become a valued partner.

Years later, after moving to the Sioux City area, Cindy began training service dogs for disabled veterans. Inspired by helping some veterans receive their life-saving service dog, she founded Partners for Patriots, a nonprofit that raises, trains and places service dogs with disabled veterans – completely free of charge.

"These dogs truly are helping them," Cindy said. "They've saved lives and helped veterans function in society."



### Answering the call again

When North West REC member Mollie Griffin heard about the Shine the Light contest, she immediately thought of Gerry. As a puppy raiser for the program, Mollie has witnessed his dedication firsthand.

"Gerry is the driving force behind the fundraising," she said. "He cares so deeply. He's one of the nicest guys I've ever met."

Just two months before retiring, Gerry got a call from Cindy. She was overwhelmed trying to do everything on her own and asked for help with fundraising. He stepped in without hesitation – and hasn't stopped since. His first fundraiser brought in \$5,000, when the group had just \$2,000 left in its bank account. Since 2017,



Gerry has helped raise more than \$400,000 to fund the placement of over 200 service dogs.

From coordinating annual dinners and golf tournaments to organizing fair booths and business events, Gerry keeps the mission front and center in the community. But while fundraising is vital, his most meaningful role has been as a traveling trainer.

### Delivering healing, one dog at a time

Once a dog completes six months of training in Anthon, it's Gerry's job to deliver the dog to its new handler. Cindy trains him on the veteran's specific needs, then Gerry drives – or sometimes flies – with the dog to their new home, staying several days to help build the bond between the veteran and the dog. He has personally delivered 35 dogs, from Iowa to California to Tennessee.

The dogs are trained to respond to veterans' post-traumatic stress disorder symptoms – recognizing triggers and calming them through touch and distraction. Gerry shared powerful stories of dogs pulling veterans out of night terrors or stepping in when a veteran was on the verge of suicide.

"These dogs really do save lives," he said.

Each veteran is given 500 custom baseball-style cards featuring their service dog's photo and name. It's something to hand out when people ask to pet the dog, which can't be allowed while the dog is working.

From his early years with Jeb to his coast-to-coast deliveries for veterans in need, Gerry has never stopped serving. Through compassion, determination and a deep respect for the sacrifices of others, he is making a life-changing difference – one dog and one veteran at a time.

Learn more at [www.partnersforpatriots.org](http://www.partnersforpatriots.org).

Emily Vander Velde is the communications and member services coordinator for North West REC.



## WHERE DETERMINATION DIVES DEEP

**AIMEE GOEMAN MCKNIGHT RALLIES A SMALL TOWN AROUND A \$5.7 MILLION DREAM**

Aimee Goeman McKnight is pictured fourth from the right.

BY RYAN CORNELIUS

Every small town has its unsung heroes, but in Belmond, one woman is proving that determination, vision and a heart for her community can turn the impossible into reality. Amy Goeman McKnight is one of those unsung heroes.

Aimee returned to her hometown of Belmond in 2020 after moving away when she graduated high school in 1995. In 2023, when the city pool faced a crisis, Aimee stepped into her true role – community champion.

After a summer marked by repeated breakdowns, the Belmond City Council voted not to reopen the pool in 2024, citing the nearly \$1 million in needed repairs. Instead of accepting defeat, Aimee gathered a group of dedicated community members to form the Luick Memorial Swimming Pool Committee under the Build a Better Belmond organization.

### A new vision for a community landmark

They began meeting with city officials, engineers, financial experts,

pool design firms and residents. What they discovered was that repairing the pool wasn't the answer – rebuilding it from the ground up was the solution.

The challenge? A staggering \$5.7 million price tag.

For most towns of 2,300 people, that number might have been the end of the story. But for Aimee, it was just the beginning.

### Fundraising, faith and a finish line in sight

In just 12 months, she and her committee raised an incredible \$2.1 million through donations and a steady stream of community-driven fundraisers. Next up is a critical vote in November 2025 on a \$3 million city bond that could push the project across the finish line.

Her motivation is simple: a love for her community and its future. Friends and neighbors often marvel at how she balances her demanding job, her business and countless hours of volunteer work, often pouring more time into the pool project than anything else.

In a world that could use more unsung heroes, Belmond already has one. Her name is Aimee and she's proving that with passion and persistence, even the biggest dreams can make a splash.

Ryan Cornelius is the vice president of corporate relations for Corn Belt Power Cooperative.

Learn more at [bit.ly/belmondpool](http://bit.ly/belmondpool).

See Page 14 for the article on Chuck Bildstein and Chelsey's Dream Foundation.



# JULY SUMMER STORMS PUT OUR LINE CREW TO THE TEST

The month of July brought a series of intense summer storms that caused significant damage across our service territory. High winds swept through the area, toppling whole trees that fell onto power lines, while powerful lightning strikes damaged transformers and utility poles. These storms created numerous outages and posed serious challenges for our line crew as they worked to keep the power flowing for our members.

The damage from the storms varied – from entire trees brought down across lines to lightning strikes that severely impacted key infrastructure like transformers and utility poles. These challenges required careful coordination and extra effort to ensure repairs were completed correctly the first time, minimizing outage times for our members.

Throughout these events, our linemen demonstrated unwavering dedication and professionalism. Despite the long hours and difficult conditions, they worked tirelessly to assess damage, clear debris and make critical repairs to restore electricity safely and efficiently.



Their hard work often took place in hazardous conditions, but thanks to their training and commitment to safety, we are grateful to report that there were no injuries or close calls among our crew or members during these incidents.

We also want to express our sincere appreciation to all members who experienced outages during these storms. We understand how disruptive power interruptions can be, and we are grateful for your patience and understanding during these times.

## CELEBRATING OUR TEAM'S MILESTONES

At Franklin REC, we know our success is powered by the dedicated people behind the scenes. This month, we're proud to celebrate three employee anniversaries and recognize the contributions they make each day.



**EMILY RUSH**  
14 years

As our accountant, Emily's attention to detail and commitment to

excellence are key to our cooperative's success. Her hard work and reliability continue to make a lasting impact. Congratulations on 14 years, Emily!



**JENS HOVENGA**  
11 years

From keeping the warehouse running efficiently to making sure our line crews

have exactly what they need – often on short notice – Jens is a behind-the-scenes hero. Thank you, Jens, for 11 years of dedication!



**CHRISTY MASON**  
9 years

Christy's friendly demeanor and willingness to help have made her a familiar

and trusted voice for our members. Her commitment to service shines through in everything she does. Congrats on nine wonderful years, Christy!



# RECOGNIZING LOCAL SHINE THE LIGHT NOMINEES

Franklin REC is proud to recognize two outstanding individuals nominated for this year's Shine the Light campaign. Our rural communities are made stronger by the dedication of volunteers who give their time, talents and hearts to others. Because of individuals like James Abbas and Roger Kregel, our community truly shines brighter.

As a small token of appreciation and in the spirit of cooperative gratitude, Franklin REC is honored to make a donation to each nominee's chosen organization. Thank you, James and Roger, for the difference you continue to make.

The following are excerpts from the nominations. You can read about this year's Shine the Light winners on Pages 10-11 and 14 of this issue.

## James Abbas, AGWSR FFA

James Abbas has a heart for teaching – but more importantly, he has a heart for people. As the ag and FFA teacher at AGWSR Community School District, he's the kind of educator who goes far beyond the classroom. He's passionate about helping students discover who they are, where they fit and how they can use their talents to give back.

To James, FFA is what he calls a "buffet of opportunities." And under his leadership, it truly is. His students get involved in all kinds of hands-on experiences – whether it's planning events, speaking at public functions or volunteering their time in the community. They grow flowers in the school greenhouse to fill planters around town and at the Ackley cemetery. They help the local Lions Club, clean up stretches of highway and step up in big ways at the Franklin County Fair – working behind the scenes at the rodeo and with the Franklin Farmhands at Grandpa's Farm.

But it's not just about staying local. James also wants his students to understand the impact they can have on the world. One of the most meaningful projects he leads is their World Hunger Day effort. With help from a local community member who donates land, students plant and harvest crops. The

money raised from the crops goes to Growing Hope Globally, an organization that supports farming and food security efforts in communities facing hunger. James uses this to show students that what they grow in a small Iowa town can help families across the globe.

What makes James so special is how deeply he cares about his students, his community, and the values he's passing on. He shows up early, stays late and gives every student a reason to believe they can make a difference. He's not in it for recognition – he just wants to help kids grow into people who care about others and their communities.

If James were selected for the Shine the Light award, he wouldn't think twice about what to do with it. He'd give it right back to the AGWSR FFA chapter to create even more opportunities for students to learn, lead and give back. Because for James, that's what it's always been about – making the most of every moment to help others shine.

## Roger Kregel, Revitalize Dumont

In every small town, there's someone who believes deeply in what could be – someone who sees possibility where others see decline. In Dumont, that person is Roger Kregel.

Roger's love for Dumont runs deep. He's raised his family here, built relationships here and has never stopped believing in the strength of this close-knit town. So, when the community's once-proud school building sat empty, crumbling for more than a decade, Roger didn't just feel heartbreak, he felt called to act.

The building wasn't just bricks and mortar. It held memories where children laughed, games were played, and generations learned and flourished. Watching the school fall into disrepair was painful, a visible reminder of what had been lost. Roger saw something more, an opportunity to bring Dumont back to life.

In December 2024, Roger formed Revitalize Dumont, an organization built with a team of passionate community members and a simple but powerful message: enough is enough. Under

Roger's leadership, the group created a mission: "Lead and Promote Stewardship and Pride in the Community of Dumont." This mission has grown into something greater than words.



The community's response to Revitalize Dumont was overwhelming. At the first town hall meeting, more than 200 people attended, nearly a quarter of the town's population of 829. It was a powerful moment of hope. Revitalize Dumont set out to purchase the school from private ownership – not only to save a building, but to reignite pride in the place they call home. Neighbors leaned in, felt inspired, and when it came time to clean up, they didn't need to be asked twice.

With Roger's leadership, a multitude of volunteers continue to roll up their sleeves, scraping residue off gym floors, painting over graffiti and making needed repairs. Thus, breathing new life back into the building, what was once forgotten is now the center of something bigger. Whether it becomes a childcare center, job hub or gathering space, Roger is committed to ensuring these next steps serve the town's needs.

This project is just the beginning for Revitalize Dumont; Roger's vision stretches far beyond those walls. Through the organization, he's already laying the groundwork for sidewalk repairs, community clean-up efforts and future initiatives to help Dumont thrive. Every action is guided by a desire to uplift the community, helping people feel connected and proud of where they live.

Roger's leadership reminds residents that change doesn't come from waiting – it starts with someone willing to lead. His belief in Dumont is lighting a spark in others, proving with heart, hard work and hope, a town can be transformed to shine once again.

As the town sign proudly declares, "Small Town with a Big Heart," Dumont isn't just rebuilding, it's believing again.

# MEET THE 2025 SHINE THE LIGHT WINNERS



## WHERE WISHES BECOME FAMILIES

**CHUCK BILDSTEIN FULFILLS  
CHELSEY'S DYING DREAM,  
ONE ADOPTION AT A TIME**



Chuck Bildstein is pictured second from right.

BY CHRISTIE REMLEY

Feature continued from Page 11

Chelsey Bildstein was a talented athlete, rising professional, and beloved daughter, sister, aunt, cousin and friend. Raised in a loving family, she wanted nothing more than to be a mom someday. Sadly, she would not have the opportunity herself, but it was her dying wish that others get to experience the joy of parenthood.

In 2013, Chelsey, was diagnosed with uterine and ovarian cancer at the age of 23. When she learned of her disease, she gracefully accepted that she would not have biological children. As her cancer rapidly progressed, Chelsey expressed to her parents Chuck and Carol Bildstein her dying wish. Her dream was no longer to grow a family of her own through adoption, but to help other families with the cost of their adoptions. Her wish became Chelsey's Dream Foundation.

### Carrying on Chelsey's legacy

Maquoketa Valley Electric Cooperative Energy Advisor Al Reiter nominated Chuck for a Shine the Light award for his work with Chelsey's Dream Foundation, which was established to honor the memory of Chelsey and fulfill her wish to assist families with adoption expenses and emotional support.

"Chelsey's Dream Foundation is a perfect fit for the Shine the Light award. It has been a valuable resource

since it began and continues to help families with their adoption goals more than a decade later," said Al.

### Building families with every act of generosity

While Chelsey passed away in 2014, her foundation has since helped more than 100 families (80 from Iowa) with adopting 141 children. This organization continues to be a valuable resource, providing adoptive families with grants from \$3,000 to \$15,000. The foundation has never turned a family down.

Chuck has taken the loss of his daughter as an opportunity to help others and carry on her dream. The Bildstein family and many close family friends support the foundation by holding numerous fundraising activities in the Anamosa community, including an annual raffle for a side-by-side UTV, a girls' youth softball tournament with more than 50 teams participating and a golf and auction event that attracts at least 300 people annually.

In addition to financial assistance, the foundation provides emotional support through annual seminars on the adoption process. They

also connect families who share their experiences and mentor those needing help navigating the adoption process.

While Chuck lives by the creed of getting involved and doing something to bring a smile to someone's face every day, he is most proud of Chelsey's courage and her open heart to help others, even in a time when she was facing terminal cancer.

Chuck said simply, "She is our hero."

Learn more at  
[www.chelseysdreamfoundation.com](http://www.chelseysdreamfoundation.com).

Christie Remley is the manager of communications and public relations for Maquoketa Valley Electric Cooperative.



Chelsey Bildstein (left).



# BE STILL IN A DIGITAL WORLD

BY DARCY DOUGHERTY MAULSBY

I was quite a sight, one hot, humid July morning this past summer during a Sunday service at the Swede Bend Church at Twin Lakes Bible Camp.

By 9 a.m. it was stuffy inside that simple 150-plus-year-old building with no air conditioning. But that wasn't the issue. The guest pastor was preaching on Psalm 46 and the verse, "Be still, and know that I am God." He noted that this has become tougher than ever in a world of digital distractions. And yet there I was, typing away on my smartphone.

I didn't have a pen or paper handy, but I needed to take some notes fast. Ironical, I know, but I sensed a story when the preacher started talking about our inability – our refusal – to be still.

I typed notes in an email to myself, even as the pastor urged us to spend less time on electronic devices. I kept on typing as he shared his "no cell phones at dinner" rule. He's happy to pay for his family members' meals at a restaurant – except for anyone in the group who picks up his or her phone during the meal. Guess it's a good thing we weren't at dinner.

## How much of your time is consumed online?

These comments from the pastor really hit home:

- How much time do you devote each day to looking at phone screens, computer screens and TV screens? For the average American adult, it's approximately 7 hours and 3 minutes each day, according to a study by Exploding Topics. Guilty as charged.
- Smartphones can be addictive, as I know all too well. How many times a day do you check your phone? For the average American, it's a staggering 205 times a day, according to a 2024 report from Reviews.org. "If you add up all this screen time, it's the equivalent of

a part-time job – or more," the pastor said. If you keep tallying up this screen time, it equates to spending more than 18 years of your life online, he added.

- All this screen time can be especially rough on adolescents. By the early 2010s, an epidemic of teen mental illness hit many countries at the same time. Young people's rates of depression, anxiety, self-harm and suicide rose sharply, more than doubling on many measures, noted social psychologist Jonathan Haidt, who wrote "The Anxious Generation."

Published in 2024, his book explains how "play-based childhood" began to decline in the 1980s and was wiped out by the arrival of the "phone-based childhood" in the early 2010s. He presents specific examples of how this great rewiring of childhood has interfered with kids' social and neurological development, from sleep deprivation to attention fragmentation, addiction, loneliness and more.

## Being still is an action

So, what's the answer? It's not like most of us can just disconnect from



This inviting view of the Raccoon River by the historic Rainbow Bridge southwest of Lake City reflects the concept of "be still."

the digital world. I liked the pastor's practical suggestions, which I'm trying to incorporate into my life:

- 1 Understand that being still is an action. Set aside non-phone and non-computer time every day. It takes commitment, but it's worth it. Use tech to support your values, rather than eclipsing real-life experiences.
- 2 Practice being still every day. Establish a routine. Before the day is done, write down three things you're thankful for. I've found it's surprisingly easy and enjoyable, once you get started.
- 3 Be truly present. This can be as simple as appreciating the beauty of creation around you.

To me, something that symbolizes all this is a lake or river with water so smooth it reflects the sky. Calm. Peaceful. Unhurried. It's a good reminder that God whispers to you in the quiet moments. Be still and listen.

*Darcy Dougherty Maulsby lives near her family's Century Farm northwest of Lake City. Visit her at [www.darcymaulsby.com](http://www.darcymaulsby.com).*



IOWA ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE LIVING

The magazine  
for members of  
Iowa's electric  
cooperatives

September 2025

Visit our website at [www.franklinrec.coop](http://www.franklinrec.coop)

## FOCUSED ON YOUR STREET. NOT WALL STREET.

Think of your not-for-profit Touchstone Energy cooperative as your very own local energy advisor. After all, we're owned by you and the other members in our community, which means you'll always have a say in how your co-op runs. To learn more, visit [TouchstoneEnergy.com](http://TouchstoneEnergy.com).

## YOUR SOURCE OF POWER. AND INFORMATION.



Touchstone Energy® Cooperative  
*The power of human connections®*