

## A WORD FROM



**Becky Bradburn**  
General Manager

## Rate increase announced

**B**eginning April 1, 2020, the average cost per kilowatt-hour (kWh) for residential use will increase to \$0.1302 from \$0.1264, which is a 3 percent increase. This increase will appear on the bill you receive in May.

Your board of directors made the decision to increase rates after we had a cost-of-service study performed by a third-party. The study showed that the increase in costs affected each rate

differently. We break down our rates to ensure that all members are treated fairly—that you are charged as close as possible to what it costs to serve you.

Our last rate increase was in May of 2013—almost seven years ago. Those conducting the study took into account, among other things, higher generation costs, the aging grid, and government regulations. Taking everything into consideration, they found the increase was necessary to ensure fiscal responsibility so that we can meet our financial obligations. This is part of our commitment to you.

At Franklin REC, we take the increase seriously and recognize our role in keeping costs down. To that end, we work with other cooperatives and our power suppliers, Corn Belt Power Cooperative and Basin Electric Power Cooperative on increasing power supply, improving efficiency, and using new resources.

You can help, too, by having an energy assessment done by our member service advisor, who can offer ideas for savings; using SmartHub to track your energy usage; take advantage of our rebates; and, if you have an electric water heater, participate in load management, in which the power to your water heater may be interrupted during peak energy use time.

If you need financial assistance with your bill, please contact our office. We can provide you with resources to help.

If you have questions regarding the rate increase, please call us. We are here to serve you.

## Plan to attend the Franklin REC annual meeting!

Tuesday, April 7, Franklin County Convention Center  
5:30 p.m. - 6:45 p.m. Meal served  
7:00 p.m. Meeting



## Understanding lighting labeling

Labels on light bulb packages provide information on the brightness and color of the light bulbs.

Lumens, not watts, are key to picking a bulb that is the right brightness. Watts represent the units of power that it takes to light a bulb, whereas lumens measure the amount of light produced. The more lumens a bulb has, the brighter the bulb. The following comparisons outline the lumen measurement to look for that will produce the brightness previously gauged by the wattage use of incandescent bulbs:

- 100 watt bulb = 1600 lumens
- 75 watt bulb = 1100 lumens
- 60 watt bulb = 800 lumens
- 40 watt bulb = 450 lumens

Lighting labels also have information about the color of a light, ranging from cool to warm. Cool lights, which correspond with higher Kelvin temperatures, are better for visual tasks because they increase contrast. Warm lights, which correspond to lower Kelvin temperatures, are preferable for living spaces because they are more flattering.



## Stay in the know

At your Touchstone Energy cooperative, we are constantly striving to improve our operational efficiency so we can provide the most reliable electric service possible to you.

We rely on data for nearly every aspect of our operations, which is why we need your help. By making sure we have your most accurate and complete contact information, we can continue to provide the high level of service that you expect and deserve. Accurate information enables us to improve customer service and enhance communications for repairing outages. It also allows co-op members to receive information about other important programs, events, and activities.

Many of you have been members of the co-op for years, and it's possible that your account information hasn't been updated for some time. We recognize that many members now use a cell phone as their primary phone service, and we might not have that number in our system.

We will never share your information with any third parties. We use it only to send important information to you. Please take a moment to confirm or update your information by contacting our office. By doing so, you will be helping us improve service and efficiency so we can better serve you and all members of the co-op.

## Electrify your lawn care



Spring is just around the corner. If you're in the market to upgrade your lawn care equipment, consider electric (or battery-powered).

### Lawn mowers

Electric lawn mowers have come a long way. Newer cordless electric mowers are more expensive than gas-powered mowers, but much of the upfront cost can be recovered because electricity is less expensive than gas, and electric engines generally require less maintenance than gas engines. Cordless electric mowers typically range from \$200 to \$500.

### Trimmers

Cordless electric string trimmers are a great option for most lawns. New versions of electric trimmers are improving and are now considered worthy competitors of gas-powered models.

Cordless electric trimmers are much quieter and easier to use. Most batteries last about 30 to 45 minutes. Costs can vary depending on your needs, but you can find a quality version for about \$100.

### Leaf blowers

After cutting and trimming your lawn, you'll need to clear off those walkways and patios. Consider a cordless electric leaf blower.

Cordless electric leaf blowers are lightweight and easy to maneuver, but they don't offer quite as much power as gas-powered and corded blowers. Costs for a cordless electric blower vary depending on power and battery quality. You can purchase a dependable model for about \$150 and up.

If you're looking to electrify your lawn care equipment, search online for the latest reviews. You could be well on your way to Lawn of the Month.

## Census 101: Make it count

President Thomas Jefferson directed the nation's first census in 1790. Today, the U.S. Constitution requires that everyone in the country, including the District of Columbia and five U.S. territories, be counted every 10 years.

The results of the census are used for a variety of reasons including to reapportion the U.S. House of Representatives; to determine how federal funds and grants are dispersed; for public safety and emergency preparedness plans; and businesses consult the data to decide where to build factories, offices, and stores, which creates jobs and fosters economic development.

Census invitations will begin in mid-March. The census can be completed online or by phone in English and in 12 additional languages. The official Census Day is April 1. By mid-April, a paper questionnaire will be mailed to every household that has not yet responded. If necessary, participants can also respond in person beginning in mid-May.

It is against the law for any Census Bureau employee to disclose or publish any census information that identifies an individual or business. The Bureau will never ask for your Social Security number, bank or credit card account numbers, money or donations, or anything on behalf of a political party.

To make sure you and everyone you know is counted, visit [www.2020census.gov](http://www.2020census.gov).

## Downed line danger

If you see a downed power line, always assume the line is energized and deadly. This also applies to any electrical equipment, including pad-mounted transformers (“green boxes”) or other utility cabinets or fenced substations.



**In an accident with a downed line or other utility equipment,** do not get out. You could be electrocuted. Call 9-1-1.

**If you must leave a vehicle due to smoke or fire,** jump out with your feet together and without touching the car or truck. Then hop (making sure both feet land at the same time) at least 30 feet to safety, so you are less likely to enter two different voltages of electricity at the same time, which causes shock and electrocution.

## What is right-of-way?

A right-of-way, when it comes to utilities, is an agreement that allows a utility to use or access a piece of property according to the terms of the easement.

Easements are areas designated for overhead and underground utility access and are usually defined when a lot or neighborhood is first platted. Easements are implemented because it is more efficient and less expensive to run utility lines straight through neighborhoods than it is to run them around parcels of land.

Having right-of-way means that utilities can access the area to fix a utility-related problem or to perform maintenance.

Easements outline general property rights by others while right-of-way (as its name implies) is a specific property right.

Workers who service utility lines should arrive in a marked vehicle and have proper identification. If you have any concerns, please call us.

*Q: Who decides whether an electric utility can cut down a tree near a power line?*

A: The choice is primarily made by the electric utility, subject to state and local requirements and laws, safety codes, and limitations specified in rights-of-way agreements.

*Q: The power lines near my house don't seem to be anywhere near the trees. Why is the utility trimming my trees?*

A: Electric utilities are required to maintain the appropriate clearance between trees and transmission lines at all times.

*Q: Why can't I stop the utility from cutting down or trimming the trees in my yard?*

A: An electric utility is granted an easement or a right-of-way on private property to build and maintain electric power lines. The terms of a utility right-of-way are specified in rights-of-way agreements, and these agreements are usually attached to a property deed.

## TRIMMED TREES = BETTER SERVICE



### When you see us trimming trees near power lines, know that we are doing so because:

- **Tree and foliage overgrowth** can interfere with power distribution.
- **Power lines** can give off a spark or arc that may land on a nearby branch and ignite.
- The lights in your house may flicker when tree branches brush power lines during **high winds**.
- **Stormy weather** can cause nearby limbs to break off and land on power lines.
- Unobstructed power lines make it easier and **safer** for lineworkers to **maintain equipment** or **restore power**.

# Meet your board of directors' candidate



*Darwin VanHorn*

At the annual meeting on April 7, Darwin VanHorn, representing District 3, is running unopposed for a three-year term on the Franklin REC board.

VanHorn has been a member of Franklin REC since 2019. He and his wife, Koreen, live seven miles west of Chapin and have three sons: Ben (21), Jacob (19), and Sam (14).

A 1987 graduate of CAL Community High School in Latimer, VanHorn went on to earn a Bachelor of Science degree in journalism and mass communications from Iowa State University in Ames.

Upon graduation, he served as an account executive and project manager in the advertising field. In 1999, Darwin began a second career in ministry, as a youth ministry director and then as a campus life director. He went on to help launch Youth for Christ in Hampton and is currently the area director for the organization. In addition, Darwin has farmed with his parents since 2013.

Darwin has been involved as a Chamber of Commerce ambassador, Lambda Chi Alpha fraternity alumni advisory, YMCA and youth sports league volunteer and coach, and Kiwanis member. He is currently participating in the Franklin County Ministerial Association serving local care center residents.

## SPARKS of news

### Board room highlights

At their most recent meeting, Franklin REC directors:

- Approved submitting \$99,602.50 of construction projects and equipment purchases to RUS for reimbursement.
- Approved the 2020 budget and rate changes.
- Adopted a new employee handbook.
- Accepted the Nominating Committee's report to place Darwin VanHorn on the ballot for the open District 3 seat.
- Approved reducing the interest rate on the Revolving Loan Fund loans by 1 percent.

## Iowa's electric cooperatives discuss important issues at legislative reception

Nearly 200 directors, managers, and employees from Iowa's electric cooperatives discussed priorities with more than 80 state legislators in January during the annual Welcome Back Legislative Reception in downtown Des Moines. The Iowa Association of Electric Cooperatives, in conjunction with the Iowa Biotechnology Association, the Iowa Institute for Cooperatives, the Iowa Communications Alliance, and FUELlowa, hosted the annual reception.



*Franklin REC directors speak with State Senator Amanda Ragan.*

The event provided an opportunity to meet with legislators to discuss issues regarding the commitment to reliability, commitment to community, and commitment to safety shared by Iowa's electric cooperatives.

In the coming months, the Iowa General Assembly will be addressing a multitude of issues, including energy-related items central to Iowa's rural economy. Electric co-op directors, managers, and staff will again be important advocates for a balanced approach in addressing energy issues.

Don't miss your chance to go on this informative trip!



Attend Franklin REC's annual meeting and enter to win three great days on the Energy Trail Tour. For details, call 456-2557.

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1560 Highway 65 • PO Box 437 • Hampton, IA 50441  
PHONES: 641.456.2557 or 800.750.3557 • FAX: 641.456.5183  
OFFICE HOURS: Mon. - Fri., 7 a.m. to 4 p.m.  
GENERAL MANAGER: Becky Bradburn • EDITOR: Anne Sesker, CCC



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