

MiNews

July 2024 Vol. 8 Issue 7
A monthly publication for members of
MiEnergy Cooperative.

A
JOURNEY
DOWN
MiRoads
WITH MEAGAN MOELLERS

Heirloom peonies

Peony farm helps make
connections to past generations

Is your
HVAC system
in trouble?

Electrical safety for
swimming season



Succession planning

Every month, I send anniversary cards to employees to recognize their service anniversary with MiEnergy Cooperative. Maybe it's the fact that I'm getting older, but I've noticed that many of the cards I'm signing recognize employees for 25, 30 or even 35-plus years of service. Related to this, six months into 2024, we already have three employees who announced their retirement plans for January 2025. It's always difficult to see great employees leave, but I greatly appreciate the advanced six-month notice.

Succession planning is one of today's top business challenges, and it keeps many managers up at night. In 2017, we created MiEnergy by combining the workforces of two electric cooperatives. Looking back, I believe it was one of the most significant strategic undertakings in our cooperative's history. Over the past seven years, we've benefited from natural employee attrition to reorganize, recruit and structure our electric cooperative for the changing electric utility industry. In 2017, we had one information technology employee. Today, we have three, and we're looking to recruit one more. Yet, in 2017, we had 85 combined employees, while today we have 75.

Planning for the succession of employees involves evaluating job responsibilities and giving the cooperative the opportunity to incorporate new technologies and efficiencies. Our AMI (advanced metering infrastructure) has been tremendous in providing efficiency. Meters automatically report kWh use, and we no longer need to manually key in individual account readings. Our outage management system is another efficiency that not only communicates members' individual outages 24/7, but it also provides valuable outage data for compliance reporting and preventive system maintenance planning, effectively preventing future outages.

However, laying out the plan and the organizational structure is only half the battle. Recruitment and attracting talent become job number one. With the mass retirement of the baby boomer generation, the demand for talent is strong.

By addressing our cooperative's succession plans in this month's newsletter update, I hope to instill in our members a sense of confidence that MiEnergy is diligently preparing for the future operation of our electric cooperative. We have been remarkably successful in recruiting new talent and have built an outstanding team of employees. We will continue to "keep the lights on" and focus on affordability, reliability, and sustainability.

I am also hoping that our membership can aid in our recruitment. Perhaps you have a son or daughter who moved away and may have a desire to move back or possibly you know someone that may be interested in joining the team at MiEnergy. Keep in mind that we require residency within our electric cooperative service territory. Our on-call crews also have a response-time radius from the office or outpost where they report.

In June, we began taking applications for an accounts payable specialist, a billing representative/receptionist and a member service administrative assistant position for our Rushford office. Later this summer, we plan to open up an IT technician position. Watch our Facebook page and website for future career opportunities.

In case you are wondering, the board is doing its due diligence in planning for my retirement too, which is still a few years down the road.

As always, I welcome your calls, emails and personal visits.

View power outages 24/7

Real-time outage map available for mobile devices and online

Members can view a map of our service territory in real-time on your computer, smart phone or tablet. The map is for visual reference only. Please call 800-432-2285 to report an outage or with questions concerning outages. Members can click on their township to get an estimate of the number of members experiencing an outage in that area. Visit www.MiEnergy.coop/outages to view the outage map.

MiEnergy also offers power outage text notifications. Sign up online at www.MiEnergy.coop/outages. Select Power Outage Notification Sign Up and be prepared with your electric account number. The site will walk you through the set-up to have a text message sent to you when your power is out and another when power has been restored.



Board room highlights | June 27, 2024

- Youth Tour delegates Aleah Eichenberger and William Carlson provided reports from their trip.
- A quarterly safety and compliance report was given by Compliance & Training Coordinator Brad Pecinovsky.
- CFO Shelly Hove reviewed YTD financials that are tracking to budget projections.
- The board policy committee provided an update on the policy review process.
- Reviewed the North Fountain broadband buildout project.
- Management provided reports on operations and subsidiaries.

The next board meeting will be held at the Rushford office on July 30 at 9 a.m.

Signs your HVAC is in trouble

Your heating, ventilation and air conditioning system is one of the most important and expensive systems in your home. Detecting issues early can help you plan for repairs or equipment replacement.

Equipment functionality issues can affect your electricity use, which may result in higher energy bills. The age of your equipment can be a major factor in function. The lifespan of a heating and cooling system ranges from 15 to 20 years.

Proper maintenance and lower use can increase the life of the equipment. To find out the age of your system, look for the manufactured date printed on the unit's nameplate. If you can't find it, search online using the model number or call the manufacturer.

If you are thrifty by nature, you may subscribe to the notion of "If it ain't broke, don't fix it." That said, it is important to be prepared for the inevitable. If your system is approaching or past the 20-year mark, start saving for a new system and get replacement estimates.

There are a few warning signs to watch out for if your heating and cooling system needs to be repaired or replaced:

- **COOLING IS NOT NORMAL.** If the air from your air conditioner is warm or not as cool as it usually feels, it could be a problem with the compressor or a refrigerant leak. Contact a professional to get the issue checked.
- **LOW AIRFLOW.** If you aren't getting good airflow, it could be that you need to replace a filter or open closed dampers. If you've made these fixes and airflow is not at normal levels, contact a professional. There could be a bigger problem with a motor, fan or something else.
- **BAD ODORS.** Heating and cooling systems sometimes smell when you first start them up for the season. Those smells should dissipate quickly. Any serious smells—such

as burning metal, melting plastic or noxious odors—are a sign that your system is in trouble.

- **STRANGE NOISES.** If your system is making any clunking, clanging or whistling noises, turn it off and check the filter. If that doesn't solve it, reach out to a pro.
- **RUNNING FREQUENTLY.** Your system needs to run more to keep up on extreme weather days, but there might be an issue if it runs too often. Short cycling is when a system cycles on and off before completing the heating or cooling process. Contact a professional to diagnose this issue.

Several factors come into play when deciding to fix existing equipment or invest in new equipment. Consider the severity of the issue, repair costs, the likelihood of additional repairs, equipment lifespan and your budget.

The efficiency of your existing system is also a consideration. Heating and cooling technology improvements have come a long way in the last 20 years. Lower operation costs can offset the cost of a new system over time.

Consider your options before you are in desperate need. I recommend getting estimates from at least three contractors. Ask the contractor, "If this was your home, what type of system would you install and why?" The best solution for your home might be a different type of equipment.

Miranda Boutelle writes on energy efficiency topics for the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association, the national trade association representing nearly 900 electric co-ops.



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CAPTURE THE FAMILIAR FRAGRANCE AT HIDDEN SPRINGS PEONY FARM



Bryan and Laura Kubes of Hidden Springs Peony Farm and their three daughters.



© J.Érica Photography

Varieties that are not found at the big box stores, but they have them! They have done their research, so shop local and embrace the chance to eat what you grow in your backyard! Some things are going to work, and some will not. Try it once and see. “We love fruit trees. They have beautiful blooms, and what’s better than sharing the produce with friends? Why not leave a bushel of apples on your neighbor’s front steps? Midwest nice,” Laura suggests.

SPECIAL OCCASIONS - THE PERFECT TIME TO SHOWCASE PEONIES

Is there a wedding or special occasion that your family is planning? Consider a peony bouquet. And for the DIY brides, Hidden Springs offers an option that includes a basket of cut flowers you can arrange. Looking for something extra special and unique for your big day? Purchase a potted peony bush. Have each side of the family bring soil from their gardens as a complementary option to the unity candle tradition. The newlywed couple plants the peony bush at their new home, and they can enjoy the blossoms each year as an anniversary gift to each other.

FAVORITE PICKS

Bryan’s top pick is called My Love. It has fragrant, large white, pink and yellow flowers while Laura reminisces on her favorite, her great-grandmother’s peony variety from Central Wisconsin - a classic farmhouse variety. The great thing about peony bushes is that they can be divided from a century old plant and transplanted to various family members to carry on the tradition. If something has happened to your family’s heirloom peony bush, come to Hidden Springs and they will help research to find a similar variety.

Don’t be concerned about Midwest weather. Minnesota and Iowa actually have great growing conditions for peonies. They need the cold winters, so they thrive here, not in southern states like many other plants do. As you journey down MiRoads, take notice of the peony plants amongst the corn and soybean fields. And don’t forget to take the time to stop and smell the fragrance of the peony flowers. You won’t be disappointed.

future picking opportunities, such as a fruit tree expansion area and edible landscaping opportunities. There are rare plants, succulents, fruits and more, making it a popular destination for Midwest gardeners. They are passionate about growing their food and are excited to teach others about the power of sustainability in our busy lives. Or, maybe you just want to be among the natural beauty. Watch for details for the Picnic at the Peony Farm events in June 2025. Pilates and Peace with the Peonies will be available next year, too. How about taking professional pictures amongst the flowers? Does your garden club want an outing? The farm is open to the public. Check their website for current hours.

ANTHOPHILE: A PERSON WHO LOVES FLOWERS

Laura might love gardening and flowers, but you can also tell she adores berry growing as they embark on a new adventure. The Kubes are expanding their expertise and are now providing extraordinary types of berries. With the strong Scandinavian presence and history in this area, one of the top sellers is a Nordic staple: the lingonberry. The red tart berries have been known to symbolize resilience and life’s enduring nature in harsh climates and have excellent health benefits. Honeyberries, yellow and red raspberries, kiwiberries and thimbleberries are a few more options for expanding your garden.

Additionally, the Kubes have fruit trees that you may not instantly think of planting and growing in the Midwest.



Come pick a bundle of peonies, the cherished scent of summer

A JOURNEY DOWN MiRoads

WITH MEGAN MOELLERS

They packed up and left behind the hustle of city life and made a move to rural life with room

to roam in the Spring Grove countryside. Purchasing specialty cropland in the driftless region and learning the curves of being peony farmers was just what the Kubes family needed last year. It was the right time, and it was the right place. They took a leap and left the Twin Cities, relocating to Southeast Minnesota. Taking hold of the roots from the legacy left by the Buchite family as previous owners, Laura and Bryan now feel perfectly at home living the dream, embracing one peony blossom at a time and sharing that beauty with others.

Can a single type of flower really connect generations? Maybe it’s the first sight of them blossoming during early springtime. Perhaps it’s the amazing smell from the bouquet lingering for days on your family’s table during dinnertime. Maybe it’s the antique vase your grandmother chose to display her beloved peony blooms in each season. Indeed,

Peony

HIDDEN SPRINGS FARM



Seele Century Farm-Cresco

I believe one flower can truly connect generations, keeping stories alive and connecting families.

A peony bush could be found near farmhouses dotted along the countryside starting in the late 1800s and the development of rural

America. Did you know that peonies date back thousands of years from parts of Europe and Asia? Can you remember that first blossom of the season at your grandparents’ farm? Does it bring back that nostalgic feeling you get when

thinking of their yards, like the typical fencing around the farmyard with a border of peonies that instantly takes you back to a different time? A time on the farm where simple things brought beauty and joy. A blossom on the family’s peony plant meant warmer temperatures were just around the corner, and the start of a new season on the farm and promising things to come.

If you want to relive those memories, take the trip to Hidden Springs Peony Farm just outside Spring Grove. Immerse yourself in acres of vibrant true red, yellow, coral, blush, lavender, white, pink and many other unique colored peony flowers. The season may be short, but it’s worth the drive. Bryan and Laura are proud to carry on the traditions of the beloved peony plant. You can find over 600 heirloom, highly collectible and proven peony varieties at their farm. And if peonies aren’t your thing, don’t worry. They continue to add to their collection of unusual and hard-to-find items. They have many ideas for



Laura’s Top 3 Growing Tips:

Peonies are not super picky but don’t have it too wet or shady.

1. Full sun. If a tree grows nearby and changes the amount of sunshine, that could be one reason your peony is not doing so great. Ask yourself if something has changed in its environment.
2. We don’t recommend using fertilizer. And the plants need the cold weather in the winter, so you don’t have to mulch around them either.
3. Water is essential in early spring and fall.

BONUS TIP: Ants are good! The peony plant doesn’t need them to open, but they don’t hurt it either.

Laura’s favorite secret to rewarding gardening is figuring out which peony varieties bloom at certain times during the summer, along with other flowers’ prime times. Possibly consider purchasing a few carefully timed bushes so that one starts blooming while the other is finishing up its blossom season. You could get a few months of joy that way. They are happy to help with your planting decisions! Check out their website or call 763-218-4540.

www.hiddenspringspeonyfarm.com
18581 County 4 • Spring Grove, MN

Sign up on the website to be included in their email list and get helpful tips in their weekly newsletter.

Bare root sales run January through Labor Day and are shipped in the fall (which is the best time to plant). Potted peony bushes are sold at the farm. It’s not too early to start your holiday shopping. Venture out to their farm store and find the perfect gift idea for the reader, plant lover, optimist, peony lover, birder, hostess, chef, etc.! Gift the Christmas Velvet Peony for the Christmas enthusiast - a stunning red double hybrid will serve as a reminder of the holiday season as it blooms in the springtime. Gift cards are always a good idea or grab some Hidden Springs merchandise.

Check out our Facebook post and comment on how you pronounce peony. Is it Pee-OH-nee or Pee-A-nee? Share your favorite connection with peony bushes, maybe even a photo!

“Peonies are a symbol of LOVE, PROSPERITY & GOOD FORTUNE.” -Chinese proverb.

BEFORE JUMPING IN

KNOW THESE 6 POOL SAFETY TIPS

Keep these electrical safety tips in mind before and during swimming season. These safety tips also apply to hot tubs.



- 

Keep anything that is plugged in at least 5 feet from the pool. The farther, the better.
- 

Have a licensed contractor inspect the pool/hot tub wiring to ensure it meets code requirements.
- 

Know where electrical switches and circuit breakers are and how to operate them.
- 

Keep pool skimmers and other far-reaching tools more than 10 feet away from overhead power lines.
- 

Make sure all outdoor outlets are GFCI protected. Test them once a month.
- 

Do not touch electrical devices when you are wet or in contact with wet surfaces.

Teach these tips to kids and teens, especially when it comes to using a cell phone that is plugged into an outlet.



POWERFUL PENNIES

The Fillmore County Ag Society received a donation from the fall 2023 Operation Round Up program. They used the funds to update the restroom facilities at the Fillmore County Fairgrounds, completing the project in time for this year's county fair.



The City of Spring Grove was also a recipient of our fall 2023 Operation Round Up donations. They used the funds to update discontinued AEDs (automated external defibrillators) in the community. The AEDs had been discontinued, so they couldn't get replacement parts. Locations included the Spring Grove Fire Department, Spring Grove Community Center and the Spring Grove Aquatic Center.



HELP TURN COINS INTO CHANGE

Operation Round Up (ORU), a voluntary community support program helps local organizations and worthy causes via spare change. MiEnergy members can choose to have their monthly electric bills rounded up to the nearest dollar, with the exceeding cents going towards ORU. Sign-up is available by calling the co-op or by filling out our online form.

The deadline to apply for grant funds is August 15. A list of program guidelines and an application is available online at www.MiEnergy.coop.



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CO-OP CONFERENCE — WALKER, MINN.

In June, MiEnergy's Brenda Tesch participated as a panelist speaker for the Minnesota Rural Electric Association's Member Services and Communications Conference.



HOWARD COUNTY FAIR — CRESCO, IOWA

MiEnergy sponsored three contests at the Howard County Fair: homemade salsa, strawberry dessert and light bulb decorating.

Salsa contest winners pictured l to r: second place Freddy Stevenson, first place Anne Wemark, third place Kathy Ferrie with MiEnergy judges Ruth Riha and Meagan Moellers.

Strawberry dessert contest winners pictured l to r: Judge and Fair Queen Candidate Emma Godman, second place Rachel Decker, first place Jenna Leuenberger, third place April Smith and Judge and Fair Queen Candidate Mackenzie Thiele.

There were 19 entries in the light bulb decorating contest taking old, used light bulbs and turning them into creative masterpieces. Pictured is first place KISS rock by Violet Gardner, second place chicken by Mia Gardner and third place ice cream by Gabby Gardner.



QSI ANNUAL MEETING — GRAND RAPIDS, MICH.

MiEnergy's Safety and Compliance Director, Brad Pecinovsky, was recognized with a plaque to signify the completion of his three-year term on the executive board for Quad State Instructors (QSI). Pecinovsky has served as secretary and vice president, and this past year he served as QSI's president. QSI is a group of electric utility professionals who are responsible for or play a key role in safety, training and compliance, primarily at electric cooperatives and across this industry. QSI was founded in 1964 and currently has 184 members in 27 states.



Your Touchstone Energy® Cooperative

OFFICE INFORMATION
Open Monday-Thursday 7 a.m. - 4 p.m. Friday by appointment.
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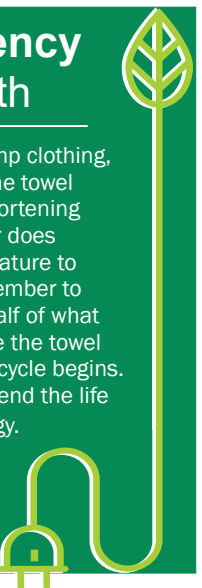
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2024 OFFICES CLOSED
SEPTEMBER 2 Labor Day
SEPTEMBER 24 Employee Development Day
NOVEMBER 28-29 Thanksgiving Holiday
DECEMBER 17 Employee Development Day
DECEMBER 24-25 Christmas Holiday
DECEMBER 31 New Year's Eve, close at 11 a.m.

Energy Efficiency Tip of the Month

Before you dry a load of damp clothing, toss in a clean, dry towel. The towel will absorb excess water, shortening the drying time. If your dryer does not include an autosense feature to determine drying time, remember to reduce the timer to about half of what you normally would. Remove the towel about 15 minutes after the cycle begins. Shorter drying times will extend the life of your dryer and save energy.

Source: homesandgardens.com





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KEEP RATES STABLE BY DOING THE SUMMER SHIFT

Reduce electric use on weekdays from 11 a.m. – 7 p.m.

This is the 13th summer that your electric cooperative has promoted a campaign that asks members to reduce energy use during the summer on weekdays from 11 a.m. to 7 p.m.

You may be wondering why a company would want people to use less of their product? The simple answer is because we are a cooperative. We are here to serve you with reliable, affordable power. We are not here to make a profit. We promote programs and services that help save you money.

Turning items off or shifting the time of use helps the cooperative manage costs today and into the future. Demand for electricity is highest during the months of June, July and August between the hours of 11 a.m. and 7 p.m. on weekdays. When members reduce their energy use during that timeframe it saves the cooperative money on wholesale power costs, leading to less frequent and smaller rate increases for all members.

When we ask you to Do the Summer Shift, there are two approaches: You can conserve by turning things off. For example, dry your clothes outside on laundry lines rather than in the electric dryer. Or, you can choose to shift the time you use energy. For example, run the dishwasher cycle before 11 a.m. or after 7 p.m.

The campaign does not include weekends, holidays or overnight use, as the cost of electricity is not at a premium during those times.

WHAT CAN YOU DO TO HELP?

1. Delay the start of the dishwasher.
2. Turn up the thermostat a few degrees.
3. Shift the start of laundry.

Thanks for your participation. It truly helps make a difference.

