

Landowners: Know the facts before signing a solar/battery project lease

If you are a landowner in rural Iowa or Minnesota, you may have received solicitations in the mail, had a sales representative stop by your farm or even received a telephone call offering land lease options for proposed solar projects. These letters/sales calls often offer attractive per-acre rental payments for various phases of a long-term proposed project, promising steady and predictable income. However, like with all contracts, the devil is in the details. Before signing an agreement, we encourage you to do some homework and seek legal counsel to protect your rights.

MiEnergy members have reported that at least three companies are "working" across our service territory. Most of these letters/sales calls are coming from companies outside of Iowa and Minnesota looking to lease land for future solar projects. We have noticed that many of these letters refer erroneously to Iowa law, referencing legislation (Senate File 2356) that did not pass last session or Minnesota's net metering laws that would not be applicable for large solar or battery applications.

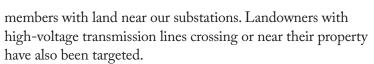
Some solicitations falsely claim local support for their solar initiative or that the electric output would benefit your neighbors or MiEnergy. We have also seen letters that deceptively include endorsements attributed to ag agencies you may be affiliated with.

These sales representatives have specifically targeted our

Board room highlights | Aug. 29, 2024

- The year-to-date financial report is ahead of budget.
- A date was set to review the current strategic plan.
- Approved the process for completing the CEO evaluation and the yearly board assessment.
- Broadband COO Jill Huffman provided a broadband buildout update and pending applications being reviewed.
- Compliance and Training Coordinator Brad Pecinovsky provided a safety update.
- Heartland Security CEO Wendy Youngren was in attendance to provide an update.
- CEO Krambeer provided an update on the Minnesota property tax appeal for MiEnergy.

The next board meeting will be held at the Rushford office on September 26 at 9 a.m.



Thankfully, several cooperative members contacted us when they received a solar lease solicitation and asked if we were involved with the project. MiEnergy is not involved with these speculative projects. At this time, the only solar project we are working on is near the Caledonia Substation along Highway 76 south of Caledonia. In all cases involving MiEnergy, the landowner worked directly with our solar developer and MiEnergy employees on the lease.

The three companies that we have been informed about by members do not plan to develop a solar or battery project. They plan to resell your lease to a third party that may or may not be a business that is good to work with and that business becomes your next new neighbor for their energy project.

We recommend contacting your legal counsel before signing any agreement or contract. Your legal counsel can help explain the benefits and disadvantages of these agreements, answer any questions you have, and help negotiate fair and equitable terms. These are long-term agreements that can give the solar/battery company exclusive options and control of your land for decades. Spending some extra time upfront to better understand the terms and conditions of the proposed agreement can save you significant time, money and headaches in the future.

For more information, we encourage landowners to reach out to Kent Whitcomb, vice president of member services at MiEnergy Cooperative.

I also encourage MiEnergy members considering installing a distributed generation solar system for their home or farm to reach out and visit Kent or Audra at our office before committing to a project. Aid-to-construction costs such as transformer upgrades, movement of the electric service and interconnection costs should not end up being a surprise to the cooperative member.

MiEnergy Cooperative employees welcome your calls and support your energy decisions. We are here to provide information to help you make an informed decision.

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

Federal tax credits and rebates for efficiency upgrades explained

Tax credits and rebates can help bridge the affordability gap to higher efficiency equipment for your home, allowing you to complete energy efficiency upgrades that can lower your energy use and save you money in years to come. But how do you use federal tax credits and rebates for upgrades?

First, knowing the difference between a tax credit and a rebate is important. A rebate is a payment for purchasing or installing a qualified product or home improvement. Depending on how the rebate program is set up, it may be provided at the time of purchase or applied for and received after installation.

A tax credit is a dollar-for-dollar amount that taxpayers can report on their tax documents to reduce taxes owed. When you file your tax documents, you apply for a tax credit, so it typically takes longer to reap the benefits than a rebate.

According to ENERGY STAR®, homeowners can qualify for up to \$3,200 annually in federal tax credits for energy efficiency upgrades. Federal tax credits are available for heating and cooling system upgrades, including airsource and ground-source (geothermal) heat pumps, furnaces, central air conditioners and boilers. Tax credits for ENERGY STAR®-rated heat pump water heaters cover 30% of the project cost, up to \$2,000. You can also improve your home's envelope—the portion of the home that separates the inside from the outside—with tax credits for insulation, windows and skylights.



MiEnergy will be conducting a member satisfaction survey starting the week of Monday, September 23. The online survey randomly selects co-op members. The National Rural Electric Cooperative Association's Market Research Services has been hired to conduct the confidential survey. We strongly encourage you to take the short survey if you are contacted. The survey's initiatives focus on questions to measure the value of our cooperative to the membership, electric service quality and several other specific areas of interest. We've been using this type of survey for decades. We appreciate your time and input because your feedback helps us discover ways to serve you better.



If an energy efficiency upgrade requires improving the electrical panel in your home, there's a tax credit for that, too. You can receive 30% of the panel upgrade cost, up to \$600.

These federal tax credits are available through 2032. You must own the home you're upgrading, and it must be your primary residence. Federal tax credits only apply to existing homes in the United States, not new construction.

The Inflation Reduction Act of 2022 expanded available funding for many home upgrades. The act allocated \$8.8 million for home rebate programs to be implemented at the state level, and this funding is offered in two different programs. The HOMES program allows up to \$8,000 per home for standard-income households. Higher rebates are available for low- to moderate-income households. The HEAR program offers rebates of up to \$14,000 per home for qualified, efficient electric equipment for low- to moderate-income households.

These programs are designed to bolster existing programs and should be available in late 2024 or early 2025.

Tax credit and rebate programs can make upgrades more affordable—helping people save money and improve the overall comfort of their homes.

Miranda Boutelle is the chief operating officer at Efficiency Services Group in Oregon, a cooperatively owned energy efficiency company. She has more than 20 years of experience helping people save energy at home, and she 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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Learn more about electric options as part of National Drive Electric Week

National Drive Electric Week (Sept. 27 to Oct. 6) makes for a great time to learn about the many perks of all-electric and plug-in hybrid cars, trucks, bicycles, motorcycles and more.

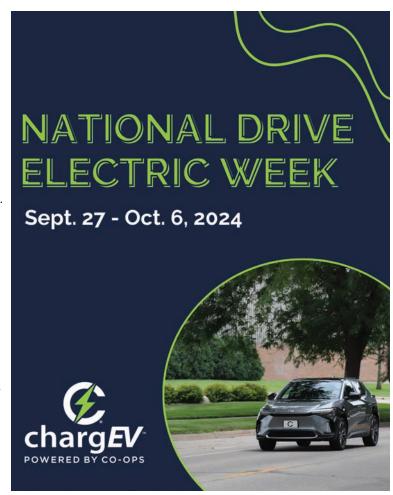
MiEnergy Cooperative is committed to raising awareness of electric vehicles (EVs) year-round, and is one of nearly 100 electric cooperatives powering electrification in rural America called chargEVTM.

Since its inception in 2020, chargEV™ affiliate cooperatives have grown to include nine states, powering more than 120 public chargers in electric cooperative service territories. But everyone's journey and driving preferences are different. chargEV™ affiliates are resources to learn more about EVs, whether through hands-on events or to just ask questions.

Members looking for some road-trip inspiration can check-out the charging map at https://charge.coop. chargEV™ affiliates focus on placing public chargers where there is an opportunity to explore one of the many incredible rural communities prevalent in our service territories

EV drivers also have a growing number of opportunities to stay overnight at hotels offering EV chargers. Travel doesn't get much easier when you can charge while you sleep, then wake up ready to hit the road

"We are here as a resource to help educate members about electric vehicles, our two electric vehicle charging programs and rebates that are available for purchasing and installing in-home chargers. Having a Chevy Bolt and a Ford Lightning as part of our fleet, allows us handson experience to help members who may have questions," says Kent Whitcomb, MiEnergy's vice president of member services.





Need help with paying your heating bill?

Home energy assistance program available

**If you are having financial difficulties and cannot pay your electric bill, communicating with MiEnergy is essential. Don't ignore disconnection notices. Contact us at 1-800-432-2285 to discuss winter disconnection protection and the steps required to avoid being disconnected. Even if you don't qualify for either of these programs, the cooperative can help set up a payment plan to help members through tough times to avoid disconnection at any time of the year. **

IOWA MEMBERS:

The 2024-2025 Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) has been established to help qualifying low-income lowa homeowners and renters pay for a portion of their primary heating costs for the winter heating season.

The assistance is based on household income, household size, type of fuel and type of housing.

If you are not sure where to apply, dial 2-1-1, visit https://humanrights.iowa.gov/dcaa/where-apply to contact your local community action agency or write to: LIHEAP, lowa Department of Human Rights, Capitol Complex, Des Moines, IA 50319.

2023-2024 INCOME MAXIMUMS	
Household	Annual Gross
Size	Income
1	\$30,120
2	\$40,880
3	\$51,640
4	\$62,400
5	\$73,160
6	\$83,920
7	\$94,680
8	\$105,440

For households with more than eight members, add \$10,760 for each additional member.

WHEN TO APPLY:

- Elderly (60 & over) and/or disabled: October 1, 2024 to April 30, 2025
- All other households: November 1, 2024 to April 30, 2025

WHAT TO TAKE:

- Proof of income (for all household members age 18 and over).
 Depending on your household income type, income documentation from the past 30 days, the last 12 months or last calendar year, whichever is easier or more beneficial for you.
- Proof of social security numbers for <u>all</u> household members (documentation required).
- · Most recent heat bill.
- · Most recent electric bill.

WAGE EARNERS:

Please bring copies of your check stubs for the 30-day period preceding the date of application or a copy of your federal income tax return.

FIXED INCOME:

This income may include: Social Security Benefits, Supplemental Security Income, Veteran's Assistance, Unemployment Insurance and pensions. Please bring copies of your check stubs from the previous 30 days.

SELF-EMPLOYED/FARMERS:

Please bring a copy of your most recent federal income tax return.

If you receive alimony or child support, it will also need to be verified. Additional income not listed here may be required.

IOWA ENERGY ASSISTANCE PROVIDERS

CHICKASAW COUNTY: 641-394-2007 HOWARD COUNTY: 563-547-4413 WINNESHIEK COUNTY: 563-382-8436 NE IOWA COMMUNITY ACTION: 563-382-9608

MINNESOTA MEMBERS:

In accordance with Minnesota's Cold Weather Rule, electric service for Minnesota members cannot be disconnected for nonpayment between October 1 and April 30 if electricity is the primary heat source and ALL the following statements apply:

- Your household income is at or below 50 percent of the state median income. Income may be verified on forms provided by MiEnergy or by the local energy assistance provider.
- You enter into and make reasonably timely payments under a payment agreement that considers the financial resources of the household
- You receive referrals to energy assistance, weatherization, conservation or other programs likely to reduce your energy bills from MiEnergy.

Minnesota's Cold Weather Rule does not completely stop winter disconnects. Before disconnecting electric service to Minnesota residential members between October 1 and April 30, MiEnergy must provide:

- A 30-day notice of disconnection.
- A statement of members' rights and responsibilities.
- A list of local energy assistance providers.
- Forms on which to request Cold Weather Rule protection.
- A statement explaining available payment plans and other options to continue service.

MINNESOTA ENERGY ASSISTANCE PROVIDERS

FILLMORE COUNTY: 507-765-2175 HOUSTON COUNTY: 507-725-5811 MOWER COUNTY: 507-437-9701 SEMCAC, INC: 800-944-3281 WINONA COUNTY: 507-457-6200





MiEnergy would like to thank members who voluntarily participated in the Summer Shift campaign during June, July and August. The Summer Shift incorporated simple modifications and new habits such as delaying the dishwasher, turning up the thermostat and shifting the start of laundry that will help change tomorrow's lifestyles for the next generation. Thanks for helping to keep electric rates affordable for everyone.

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Steve Bronner, of Preston, has been a lineworker for MiEnergy for 26 years. He's experienced a lot of different situations during that time with building and maintaining power lines in the electric cooperative industry. Now, he can say his career has taken him to Guatemala.

In mid-June, 14 lineworkers from electric cooperatives in Iowa and Minnesota traveled about 2,800 miles to transform a rural village, improving Guatemalan families' lives for generations. The trip was part of the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association's International Program, which has been providing volunteers to illuminate villages and homes in impoverished countries around the world since 1962.

Bronner says he volunteered so he could learn something new.

"I'm getting towards the end of my career. As a lineman, I've always enjoyed the camaraderie during storm restoration. This was an opportunity to expand on that and

experience something life-changing," Bronner explained.

At an elevation of around 6,000 feet, the village of Las Peñas is made up of about 35 homes scattered on the crests and flat areas of the mountainside, near the larger community of Jalapa in eastern Guatemala.

"The people of Las Peñas are humble. Homes had dirt floors, and they were very tidy. We would consider them poor, but they are happy people," stated Bronner. "It makes you realize quickly that we don't know how good we have it."



2 MILES OF LINE | 35 HOMES | 1 SCHOOL | 1 CHURCH

Lineworkers like Bronner are accustomed to dealing with lessthan-desirable weather and terrain.

"We thought going in June would be insanely hot, but that is their cold and rainy season. Temperatures weren't terrible, but it was muggy. The terrain was tough. The roads narrowed as they got closer to the village. It was more of a motorcycle or horse path, just wide enough to get the trucks through," Bronner remarked.

To get to the village, the team spent more than an hour bouncing over rocks, splashing through puddles, straddling washouts, spinning through ruts and sliding on the wet, red clay



1. Steve Bronner at the bottom of a pole helping to bring power to electrify a rural village. 2. Village workers stringing secondary power line. 3 & 4. Wiring homes for electricity. 5. Woman turning on an indoor light after having electricity brought to her home. 6. Steve Bronner pictured with children from the village.

road that hadn't existed four weeks earlier. The rain, coming in sheets at times or as a lingering gray mist, kept the road slick and travel slow and caused the team to walk the last mile into the village for a couple of days.

"We learned that when the interpreters said it was time to go [due to impending weather], we should go," Bronner said. "Once the road was wet, it was scary slippery."

The crew built about two miles of overhead power line into the village. Once the transformer was hung, they started bringing the secondary wire to

about 35 homes, a school and a church. Then they hung breaker boxes up in each of the buildings and wired up two outlets, two light switches and four lights. Two lights would be inside and a

Some younger boys were excited to have light so they wouldn't have to use candles. A man in his 50s said he couldn't wait for a refrigerator.

The local municipality will now manage the lines and serve the village. How might electricity change their lives?

"Right now, girls have to stay home to help their mothers while the boys get to go to school," Bronner explained.

Girls are kept home to do housework and food preparation. With electricity, girls can join the boys in attending school. Additionally, electricity brings numerous other benefits, including better health, fewer open fires, food refrigeration, economic growth and more.

Bronner said at first he wasn't sure if he'd do something like











this again. But his mind quickly changed.

"I'd go again in a heartbeat," Bronner said. "I'm grateful for the opportunity provided by the electric cooperative industry. It is a good cause. You go through a wide range of emotions. It

opened my mind and gave me a broader view. I'd encourage others to take advantage of the opportunity to do the same."

On the last day up the mountain, the crews met the locals outside the village for a small ceremony and to say their goodbyes.

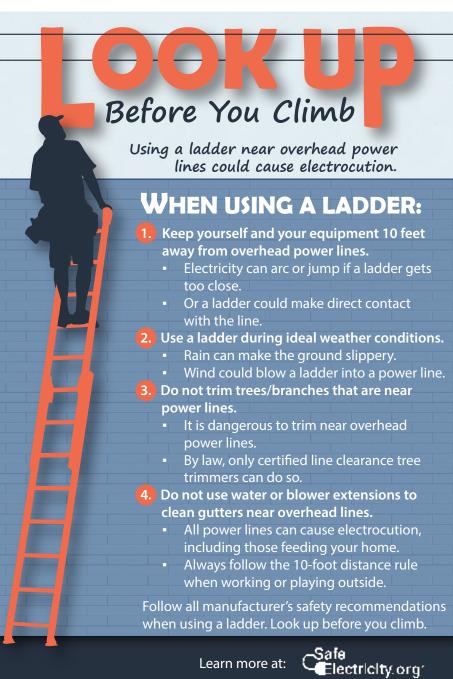
The leader of the village spoke on behalf of the community, expressing their gratitude to the team. "Thank you to everyone who helped," he said. "You bring happiness for the hope that we can do more now with electricity."

This work echoes the time in the U.S. about 80-90 years ago when rural areas received power for the first time thanks to rural electric cooperatives. Life in America is significantly better today thanks to rural electrification.

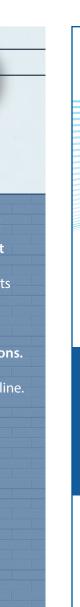
One Guatemalan woman summed it up nicely: "I am grateful that you came here to visit. It is a grand day that you installed electricity here."

Watch our social media pages for a video highlighting this experience!











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For many people, there aren't enough hours in the day. Because of this, many people use drive time to be productive. Multitasking can be an effective use of time, but not while driving.

Help keep our crews safe by slowing down and following any other instructions — including moving over to give them space — anytime you see orange warning signs and cones that lead up to a work zone.

Cars or trucks that speed through a work zone endanger workers on the ground. Driving too fast or not moving over can also put an elevated lineworker in danger by causing the bucket to move or sway.

Lineworkers already have enough to contend with by working high up on power lines while out in the elements. Their profession consistently places on the Bureau of Labor Statistics most dangerous jobs. Do your part; please don't add noncompliant drivers to the mix of challenges.

Orange cones, flashing lights, and warning signs all indicate a work zone on the road ahead. Within these zones are people doing work like road construction, working on power lines or trimming trees. Unfortunately, hundreds of these workers are injured every year from work and road hazards. Safe Electricity and MiEnergy urge motorists to slow down and pay attention in work zones while driving.

"Keep a safe distance between your car and the construction workers and equipment, drive the posted work zone speed limit and use your four-way flashers when stopping or traveling slowly to help reduce accidents in work zones," says Brad Pecinovsky, MiEnergy's compliance and training coordinator.

Many states have hefty fines or even jail time for violating traffic laws in work zones.

"Power poles and electrical equipment line our streets and highways, and narrow roadways often require crews to place their equipment in traffic lanes," Pecinovsky explains. "Their work activities are often taken for granted but benefit us all, and like everyone, they deserve a safe workplace." Watch out for

SOLAR

SCANS

Members beware: Don't fall for deceptive

Members beware: Don't fall for deceptive solar sales scams. Salespeople and ads are circulating claiming false information about pricing and rebates in association with MiEnergy. Watch out for:



PUSHY SALES

Don't let anyone pressure you with deadlines or urgent messaging.



NAME DROPPING

Just because a salesperson says they are working with us, it isn't necessarily so.





If something seems too-goodto-be-true, it probably is. Confirm rebates and tax credits with the state or U.S. government.

SOCIAL MEDIA ADS



Don't click on the ad-verify information on ads by researching the company through a third party website.

BEFORE YOU SIGN



Call MiEnergy before you sign a solar contract to make sure we are able to accomodate you and your solar contractor.

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Go above and beyond for a safe harvest

Modern farming often relies on data and equipment with GPS and auto-guidance systems. However, even with these modern conveniences, farm workers must remain vigilant.

Massive machinery is indispensable to farming, but its impressive size, height and extensions make them particularly vulnerable to contacting power lines. That's why staying alert, focused and knowledgeable about potential hazards and safety procedures is crucial.

During a busy harvest season, the familiar sights around the farm can easily fade into the background, and farm workers can overlook the power lines overhead. However, failing to notice them can lead to deadly accidents.

360 AWARENESS

Awareness of your surroundings, around, above and below, and planning safe equipment routes can significantly reduce the risk of accidents. Even with GPS and autosteering, it's imperative that farm workers keep a close eye on the equipment's location and are ready to take action if necessary.

Exposed underground powerlines, defective wiring in farm buildings and extension cords are also hazards. Grain bins can pose a potential danger as well. The National Electrical Safety Code requires power lines to be at least 18 feet above the highest point on any grain bin using portable augers or other portable filling equipment. If you plan to install new grain bins or are concerned about power lines' proximatey to existing grain bins, contact MiEnergy Cooperative.

SMART HARVEST SAFETY TIPS

To ensure a safer harvest season, SafeElectricity and

MiEnergy recommend the following tips to avoid electrical accidents on the farm:

- Exercise caution near power lines. Be careful when raising augers or the bed of grain trucks around power
- Use spotters when operating large machinery near power lines. Ensure the spotters do not touch the machinery while it is moving near power lines.
- Lower equipment extensions, portable augers or elevators before moving or transporting equipment. Do not raise equipment like ladders, poles or rods into power lines. Remember that non-metallic materials like lumber, tree limbs, ropes and hay can conduct electricity, especially when damp, dusty or dirty.
- Never attempt to raise or move power lines to clear a path. Doing so could result in electric shock or death.
- Avoid using metal poles inside bins. Don't use metal poles to break up bridged grain inside or around bins.
- Hire qualified electricians. Ensure qualified electricians handle drying equipment and other farm electrical systems.

While rare, the only reason to exit equipment that has come into contact with overhead lines is if the equipment is on fire. However, if it happens, jump off the equipment with your feet together and without touching the machinery and the ground at the same time. Then, still keeping your feet together, hop to safety as you leave the area.

Anne Prince writes on consumer and cooperative affairs for the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association, the national trade association representing nearly 900 local electric

5 Tips for a Safe Harvest Electrical safety during harvest season requires vigilance and proactive measures. Follow these tips to reduce the risk of electrical accidents. Maintain at least a 10-foot distance Ensure all farm workers are trained on electrical safety procedures. from power lines when operating equipment like grain augers, Regularly inspect all electrical equipment and machinery for signs of wear and damage. elevators and other tall machinery. Use a spotter to navigate safely around power lines and other Keep first aid kits and emergency electrical equipment contact numbers in an easily accessible





ENERGY ISSUES SUMMIT—BLOOMINGTON

MiEnergy's CEO Brian Krambeer and District 5 Board Director Jenny Scharmer spoke at the Minnesota Rural Electric Association's Energy Issues Summit in August on the benefits to MiEnergy members of the merger in 2017 of Hawkeye REC and Tri-County Electric Cooperative. The annual Summit has evolved into a premier event for electric cooperatives in Minnesota and the Midwest region to become informed on key issues, exchange ideas, share experiences and talk through various co-op strategies.

Your Touchstone Energy® Cooperative



OFFICE INFORMATION

Open Monday-Thursday 7 a.m. - 4 p.m. Friday by

OWA 24049 Highway 9, PO Box 90, Cresco, IA 52136 MINNESOTA 31110 Cooperative Way, PO Box 626, Rushford, MN 55971

This institution is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

PHONE NUMBERS

LOCAL 563-547-3801 (Cresco); 507-864-7783 (Rushford) TOLL-FREE & 24/7 OUTAGE REPORTING 800-432-2285 PAYMENT LINE 24/7 877-853-6517 **UNDERGROUND CABLE LOCATING 811**

WEBSITE www.MiEnergy.coop

SOCIAL MEDIA Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Instagram

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2024 OFFICES CLOSED

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.

Personnel changes at the co-op

NEW EMPLOYEES

Dani Gorder is MiEnergy's accounts payable specialist and started work on August 5. Dani brings many years of experience with her from employment at Merchants Bank. Welcome Dani!



Wendy Jacobson is MiEnergy's member service administrative assistant. Most recently she was the community outreach coordinator for Good Shepherd Lutheran Services and prior to that was the office manager for Bluff Country Equine Veterinary Center for 19 years. Wendy started at MiEnergy on August 19. Welcome Wendy!

Tammy Brown was promoted to senior billing representative. Tammy has been with the cooperative for 10 years. She started her new position on July 7.

Rhonda Bauer was promoted to senior accountant. Rhonda has been employed by the cooperative for 22 years. She started her new position on July 7.

Audra Skalet was promoted to director of member services. Audra has been at the cooperative for 25 years. She started her new role on July 7.

Congratulations Tammy, Rhonda and Audra!









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