

APRIL 2024 • VOLUME 85 • NO. 04



## OUR HEROES WEAR HARD HATS

***Throughout April, the nation celebrates electric lineworkers by highlighting the dedication, hard work, and pride they exemplify each day. These lineworkers face immense risks. They often do their jobs in the most dangerous weather conditions.***

Even on days of nice weather, they must still carry heavy gear, regularly scale 40-foot poles, and work near and with electrified high-voltage power lines. #160301 They put their lives at risk to keep power flowing to your homes, farms, businesses, and communities.

When duty calls, lineworkers must respond, leaving their homes and families often at very inconvenient times. Every lineworker can tell you of missed family celebrations and events, long hours of physical work, and disrupted or no sleep. When asked what an FMEC lineworker finds most appealing about their career, most will say they enjoy working outdoors, conquering a variety of challenges, providing an essential service to local people, and the camaraderie among their fellow workers.

### **NATIONAL LINeworker APPRECIATION DAY IS APRIL 18TH**

We honor those who keep the power lines functioning safely and securely. We also acknowledge their families for the many sacrifices they make throughout the year.

### **OUR PROFESSIONAL REQUIREMENTS**

- **Communication:** FMEC lineworkers must communicate effectively with cooperative members to solve power problems and meet electric utility needs.
- **Physical:** Lineworkers work to determine and assure adherence to prescribed operating and safety standards. They participate in regular safety meetings, trainings, and tests.
- **Mental Work:** Lineworkers read and interpret construction plans and schematics related to the installation of electrical power distribution lines.
- **Knowledge:** A lineworker must have complete knowledge of the methods, techniques, materials, and equipment of the electrical trade, and the basic laws and regulations governing electrical work.
- **Ability:** Lineworkers must know how to use the safety procedures and equipment associated with working on high-voltage electrical lines and equipment.



**ceo message**  
Jim Krueger, President & CEO



**CONSTRUCTION SEASON BEGINS**

Thank you to everyone who attended our recent annual meeting. Communication and member participation are key elements of the cooperative business model. We are delighted that you chose to spend the evening of Tuesday, March 26, with us. Due to the timeline for prepping and printing this issue of *County Lines*, a recap of the annual meeting will appear in the May newsletter.

We are a growing electric cooperative that recognizes the importance of investing in service reliability and system upgrades. Our crews will focus on two major construction projects starting this spring.

We will replace two miles of single-phase underground line and also convert two miles of existing three-phase overhead power line to underground line between the communities of Sargeant and Dexter in Mower County. This will eventually be a new feeder line into the City of Dexter and the surrounding area.

To provide a backup feeder line to the City of Lyle and the surrounding area in southwest Mower County, we will install four miles of new underground power line. This project also includes the conversion of four miles of existing overhead and single-phase underground line to three-phase underground line.

Of course, we will also continue with our right-of-way vegetation management program, daily repairs, service installations, and equipment checks and replacements, as usual. We hope for relatively quiet weather in the months ahead. #2227100 However, if we experience spring and summer storms, rest assured that our lineworkers will promptly respond, backed by a team of professionals within our office.



**BUILDING AND EXPANSION PROJECTS**

Contact Freeborn Mower Electric Cooperative regarding any new construction or expansion projects that will require the installation or upgrading of FMEC electric service. Our work calendar fills quickly and there may be a lead time for equipment orders. Call our office as soon as possible to prevent delays.

*member news*

**DIRECTOR ELECTION RESULTS**

Congratulations to the three incumbent directors who were recently re-elected to serve a three-year term on our board of directors. Each was seated in the position during the recent annual meeting.

District 1: Dennis Anderson  
District 4: Richard Schaufler  
District 7: Jack Korman

**COLD WEATHER RULE ENDS APRIL 30**

Minnesota's Cold Weather Rule protects residential utility customers from having electric service shut off between October 1 and April 30.

If your account is past due, you are no longer protected under the Cold Weather Rule after April 30. If you need to make payment arrangements on your account, please contact our office during regular business hours.

**LINWORKER SCHOLARSHIPS**

Freeborn Mower Electric Cooperative offers two \$1,000 scholarships to two applicants pursuing post-secondary education in an electric lineworker program. Preference will be given to FMEC members and residents of Freeborn and Mower Counties. Selection criteria will be based on scholastic achievement, school and community involvement, work history, and essay submission. Applicants must complete and submit the scholarship application by May 1st.



**SANDY FORSTNER, TRUSTEE  
CHAIRPERSON RETIRES**

The impact made by Sandy Forstner through his work with Operation Round Up® is significant. FMEC salutes his dedicated service for more than 16 years on the program's board of trustees, much of that time serving as Chairperson. He recently retired from the post.

Throughout the years, he took pride in witnessing the growth of the program and the invaluable assistance it provides organizations in Freeborn and Mower counties. In 2023, Operation Round Up hit the impressive mark of more than \$1 million in grant awards made since the program's inception.

"It was an honor to serve as a trustee," said Sandy. "I enjoyed my years with the program, working alongside some wonderful individuals. It was rewarding to see the program grow and all the help it provided organizations in our communities."

He was raised in Austin, and his wife Pam hailed from a family farm near LeRoy. Together, they shared a professional journey in the newspaper industry for more than two decades, always in small-town media markets. #1879801 In 2000, he returned to Austin to serve as Executive Director of the Austin Chamber, a position from which he retired in 2019. Sandy and Pam enjoy their family time, having two sons and five beloved grandchildren.

In appreciation of your volunteer time and deep dedication given to Operation Round Up, we express our sincerest thanks to Sandy Forstner.



Operation Round-Up® is a community grant program established through Freeborn Mower Electric Cooperative that provides funding to non-profit and charitable organizations in the local area. The program began at FMEC in 2003. Giving back to the communities we serve is an expression of FMEC's core values. The Operation Round Up® Program is managed by a five-member board of trustees. The trustees are cooperative members from throughout our service territory. Trustees meet quarterly to review and approve grant applications.

**LEARN MORE: [WWW.FMEC.COOP](http://WWW.FMEC.COOP)**



# TRIMMING FUTURE PROBLEMS: VEGETATION MANAGEMENT 101

*Trees and power lines are a problematic combination, often leading to downed lines during storms and posing safety risks. Freeborn Mower Electric Cooperative (FMEC) addresses these issues through proactive vegetation management.*

### WHAT IS AN ELECTRIC LINE RIGHT-OF-WAY?

An electric line right-of-way is a designated strip of land used by utilities for installing and maintaining power lines, ensuring clearance from obstructions like trees. At FMEC, it's policy to maintain a 15-foot clearance on both sides from the center. This maintenance ensures safety, reliability, and affordability of electric power.

### SAFETY

Your safety is a top priority for FMEC. Trees near power lines pose serious hazards, even without direct contact.

Electricity can arc from the line to nearby trees, presenting deadly risks.

### RELIABILITY

While lightning is often blamed, it's actually wind and ice that cause most outages by toppling trees onto power lines. Proper right-of-way maintenance prevents such issues, enhancing reliability for you and your community. Maintained clearances also ensure safe access for maintenance and outage response crews.

### AFFORDABILITY

As a not-for-profit cooperative, we aim to cover costs and keep rates reasonable. When trees grow too close to power lines, the potential for costly repairs grow. A well-managed right-of-way program can mitigate these costs, ultimately benefiting your electric rates.



ARBOR DAY 2024 IS OBSERVED ON **FRIDAY, APRIL 26, 2024**



## Know what's below. Call before you dig.

Before you dig, click or call Gopher State One Call for the location of underground utilities. Specifics about the project location and lead time are required. Do not start digging or excavating until you are given a start date from Gopher State One Call. Once the utilities have been marked on the ground with flags or paint, keep your digging at least two feet away from the markings.

Before you dig call 811 or visit [gopherstateonecall.org](http://gopherstateonecall.org)



### TIME FOR AN A/C CHECK-UP

When was the last time your home air conditioning system was inspected? Beat the summer rush and schedule a tune-up this spring! Contact your local HVAC service technician. #2227100 A tune-up can help maximize your system's efficiency, saving you money and energy.

The inspection should include:

- A check of the refrigerant levels
- Inspection for any refrigerant leaks
- Check and seal any air duct leaks
- Measure airflow through the evaporator coil
- Verify the electric controls are functioning correctly
- Oil the motors and check belts for tightness and wear
- Check the accuracy of the thermostat

Out with the old and in with the new — filter, that is! Replacing the air filter is one of the easiest ways to keep your air conditioner running efficiently and reduce its energy consumption. Follow the manufacturer's instructions.



## BE PREPARED FOR STORMY WEATHER

The best way to deal with a storm, and possible power outage, is to plan ahead. We'll take care of restoring your electric service as promptly and as safely as possible, but you'll need some items from your storm emergency kit to maintain your family's comfort.

### ITEMS TO INCLUDE IN YOUR KIT:

- Flashlights with fresh batteries
- Water and non-perishable food
- Child and baby care items
- Medications
- Blankets
- Pet food
- A pre-determined evacuation plan. Should you need to leave your home, know where you'll go and alert others to your intentions.
- Phone numbers of family and friends. Realize that phone service (cell and landline) may not be available, but if you can make contact with those on your list, they will appreciate hearing about your status.



# IN FOCUS: SOLAR ENERGY

*As the interest in residential solar systems grows, so does the need for comprehensive information to guide homeowners through the decision-making process. While advancements in technology and decreasing costs make solar an attractive option, seeking advice before committing to installation is crucial. Here's a comprehensive guide to help you make informed decisions.*

The first step in the process of considering solar installation is education. It involves understanding whether a solar photovoltaic (PV) system aligns with your energy consumption patterns. While solar is a popular choice, alternative technologies such as air source heat pumps, ground source heat pumps, and improved insulation may be more suitable depending on your specific needs.

Site assessment is pivotal in making an informed decision. Factors such as orientation, roof pitch, tree coverage, and local weather patterns must be considered. Utilizing tools like the MN Solar Suitability App can provide an initial sense of your site's solar potential. #1879801 Additionally, consulting with a solar site assessor can offer valuable insights into the best technologies for your home, addressing structural or electrical considerations.

Local ordinances and zoning regulations play a crucial role and should not be overlooked. Before committing to a solar project, it's essential to check with your city or county regarding any ordinances that might impact your installation. Some areas may have setbacks or require structural assessments for solar projects.

Budget considerations are also crucial. While most solar installers provide estimates, it's essential to plan for all financial aspects. Take into account potential energy savings, hidden costs, and upfront payments. Various incentives, such as federal tax credits and grants, can make solar more financially feasible.

When it comes to choosing a contractor, comparing bids from multiple solar contractors is a wise move. Resources



*"As an energy solutions specialist at our electric cooperative, I aim to empower our members by providing them with innovative solutions to optimize their energy usage and reduce costs. By offering personalized advice, energy-efficient rebates, and access to renewable energy options, I aim to help our members make informed decisions that benefit their wallets and the environment. We can achieve a more sustainable future together while ensuring reliable and affordable energy for all."*

**Carter Dahlum, Energy Solutions Specialist**  
carter.dahlum@fmec.coop | (507) 379-8882

like the Clean Energy Resource Teams (CERTs) solar directory can aid in finding reputable installers. CERTs also provides a set of questions to ask potential contractors, ensuring you make an informed decision.

Once a contractor is selected, the installation process typically takes between two weeks and two months. The chosen contractor will facilitate the interconnection agreement, enabling the tracking of production and receiving payments for excess energy through a "net metering" billing arrangement. For personalized assistance, Freeborn Mower Electric Cooperative (FMEC) offers one-on-

one support. If you're considering solar implementation and want guidance, contact us. We are ready to help you determine the best option and navigate the interconnection process.

In Minnesota, it's important to note that consumers cannot legally install solar until after applying for interconnection to the power grid, meeting safety installation

requirements, and receiving approval to interconnect. Contacting the co-op ahead of time can save both money and time. To initiate the process, visit FMEC online and follow the link to the NOVA Power Portal, where you can access application forms, requirements, tariffs, and more.

**LEARN MORE ABOUT SOLAR AT:**  
[www.fmec.coop/interconnection-information](http://www.fmec.coop/interconnection-information)

## CLASSIFIED marketplace

### FOR SALE

#### VEHICLES/MOTORIZED:

**1988 FORD F150 HEAVY HALF TON** w/ topper. Regular cab, does not run, good for parts. \$1,750 OBO. Text or call (651) 263-0140.

**2004 TOYOTA CAMRY LE.** 253,000 miles, runs & drives great. \$3,200 OBO. Call (507) 460-8017.

**2019 CHEVROLET IMPALA.** Loaded, 19,800 approximate miles. \$27,000 OBO. Call (507) 402-9638 leave message.

#### FARM:

**B-ALLIS TRACTOR 3-POINT HITCH.** \$1,500. Call (507) 606-1494.

**PUMP & HOIST** for 16' grain box. \$450 OBO. Call (507) 383-7858.

**CATEGORY I QUICK HITCH.** New, never used. \$250. Call (507) 279-0949 or (507) 279-0838.

**CUB CADET GARDEN TRACTOR** w/40" mounted tiller. Works great! \$1,500. Call (507) 273-6063.

#### HOUSEHOLD:

**CLOTH NAPKINS.** Large assortment. Call (507) 383-4909.

**MAGIC CHEF CHEST FREEZER.** 7 cubic feet, like new. \$100 OBO. Call (206) 795-3818.

#### MISCELLANEOUS:

**BOOK - HISTORY OF THE MINNESOTA GOPHERS - MINNESOTA FOOTBALL VAULT** by Rick Moore. Like new. \$20. Call (507) 402-2601.

**2 GARAGE PANELS** for 9' x 7' door. White. 2 windows in one panel. Side rails, mounting brackets. \$250. Call (507) 402-5050.

#### 4 KIDS CARDIO EXERCISE

**EQUIPMENT.** Steel. Text (507) 391-4529 for more info.

**NEW YETI TUNDRA 35 HARD COOLER.** White, still in the box. \$200. Call (507) 383-1394.

**OLDER MTD SNOW BLOWER.** 24" cut, 5 hp, electric start, as well as pull start. \$135 OBO. Call (507) 318-3865.

**2004 DEMCO KARKADDY** with pivot point. Upgraded - spare tire/mount. Rock guard/mount. Call (507) 402-4800.

**RBW INDUSTRIES INC 5TH WHEEL CAMPER HITCH.** In good condition. \$100 OBO. Call (507) 448-3491.

**FOOTVIBE FOOT MASSAGER.** Deluxe model with remote control or manual control. \$40. Call (507) 676-0228.

**CAREX WALKER.** Dark blue, adjustable, 4 wheels, seat, & storage. Like new condition. \$55. Call (507) 369-5172.

**LOG SPLITTER.** 20-ton, 5 hp Briggs. Call (507) 383-3613.

#### PETS/ANIMALS:

**ENGLISH CREAM GOLDEN RETRIEVER PUPPIES.** Ready for Easter. Call (507) 440-4184.

### WANTED

**OLD NON-RUNNING CHAINSAWS.** No matter the condition. Call (507) 391-2560.

### FREE

**USED QUEEN SELECT COMFORT AIR MATTRESS.** 2 air chambers w/ separate controls, and box spring. Call (507) 383-6353.

**TREADMILL.** Call (507) 440-4818.

## CLASSIFIED MARKETPLACE RULES

Classified Marketplace ads are printed in our monthly **County Lines** newsletter **FREE OF CHARGE** to our current members.

- Ad deadline is the 15<sup>th</sup> of the month prior to the issue in which it will be printed. Ads received after the 15<sup>th</sup> of the month will be printed a month later. Example: An ad received on or before June 15<sup>th</sup> will appear in the July issue. If it is received on June 16<sup>th</sup> or later, it will appear in the August issue.
- No business ads will be accepted. Ads must be submitted in writing or electronically, not by phone call.
- Ads will not be repeated.
- One ad/item per member, per month.

You will find a downloadable form on our website: **www.fmec.coop**. Select **MY COOPERATIVE**. Click on **NEWSLETTER** under **NEWS & INFO** tab.

You may also email ads to **michelle.rayman@fmec.coop** or go to the website, use the instructions above, and click on the **NEWSLETTER** tab to electronically submit an ad.



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President: Jim Krueger, President & CEO  
Telephone: (507) 373-6421

## SPOT YOUR NUMBER

### WIN A \$25 BILL CREDIT

To reward our faithful newsletter readers, we've randomly selected and hidden three (3) member account numbers and placed them in the newsletter, each two times. Hidden account numbers are spelled out numerically. (Ex: #123456)

If you spot your full account number, contact the cooperative by the 15<sup>th</sup> of the current month to claim your \$25 bill credit.

### FREEBORN MOWER ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE

PO Box 611  
3366 Bridge Avenue  
Albert Lea MN 56007

(507) 373-6421 or (800) 734-6421  
[www.fmec.coop](http://www.fmec.coop)  
[info@fmec.coop](mailto:info@fmec.coop)



#### Office Hours:

Monday - Friday, 7:00 a.m. - 3:30 p.m.

#### Board Meetings:

Typically the last Tuesday of each month.

*Freeborn Mower Electric Cooperative is an  
equal opportunity provider and employer.*



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## LET'S COOK



## CHEESY OLIVE & GARLIC BREAD

Submitted By: Jena Thompson

- 12 oz. olives (sliced green & black)
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- ½ C. mayo
- ½ C. butter, softened
- 3 C. mozzarella cheese
- 1 loaf French bread
- Chopped scallions for the top

#### Directions:

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Mix all ingredients except bread & scallions together in a bowl. Slice French bread in half. Spread mixture onto each half. Place on baking sheet. Bake for 25 minutes, until bubbly & melted. Broil for a few minutes to get a nice top. Top with scallions, slice, and enjoy!

*Members may submit one short recipe per month by email at [michelle.rayman@fmec.coop](mailto:michelle.rayman@fmec.coop) or by mail at FMEC Newsletter, PO Box 611, Albert Lea, MN 56007. The member whose recipe is published will receive a \$10 electric bill credit.*