



Freeborn  
Mower  
Electric  
Cooperative

People. Power. Possibilities.

# county lines

## NEWSLETTER

FEBRUARY 2026 • VOLUME 87 • NO. 02



## PROUD TO SERVE: FMEC EARNS TOP MARKS IN MEMBER SATISFACTION

**Freeborn Mower Electric Cooperative values the feedback of our members and works to provide meaningful opportunities for members to share their thoughts on how we are performing as a cooperative. One of the most effective ways we gather this feedback is through a comprehensive benchmarking tool—the American Customer Satisfaction Index (ACSI) survey, which measures overall member satisfaction by collecting input from a representative sample of the people we serve.**

We are proud to share that our most recent ACSI score is 87, which is significantly above the industry average. This outstanding result reflects the trust our members place in us, and our commitment to continuous improvement. The score is based on several key categories, including:

- Overall member satisfaction
- Reliability and quality of electric service
- Member communications
- Service and responsiveness

Your feedback helps guide our decisions and ensures we continue to meet the needs of our members both today and in the future. The comments shared through the survey are carefully reviewed and taken into consideration as we make decisions that reflect the priorities and expectations of the members we serve.

The photo above features our dedicated employees who are committed to serving the needs of our members. Their work includes restoring power during outages, maintaining and upgrading our electric distribution system, assisting members with billing and account inquiries, providing timely and accurate communication, ensuring safe and reliable operations, and supporting the overall mission of FMEC through their daily efforts. #663200 Our employees strive for excellence in every area of our organization, and their contributions are reflected in our solid ACSI score.

With a strong start to the year, we look ahead with pride and purpose, continuing our commitment to safe, reliable service and exceptional member satisfaction.

## ceo message

Jim Krueger, President & CEO

## THE POWER OF PARTICIPATION : 2026 BOARD ELECTIONS AT FMEC

We've already hit the ground running on various projects at the start of the New Year, and as we press onward into 2026, it's a great time to reflect on the privilege of being part of a cooperative. Guided by the Cooperative Principles, Freeborn Mower Electric Cooperative (FMEC) exists to serve its members, with a strong emphasis on local decision-making and member involvement.

One of the core Cooperative Principles is democratic member control. As a member-owned cooperative, FMEC is governed by a board of directors elected by the membership. This structure ensures that the cooperative remains accountable to the people it serves and that decisions are made with members' best interests in mind. Each member's voice matters, and participation plays a vital role in shaping the future of FMEC.

In 2026, three district board seats are up for election. These elections provide members in those districts with the opportunity to influence FMEC's leadership and direction. Directors are responsible for setting policy, providing strategic

oversight, and ensuring the cooperative remains financially sound while continuing to deliver safe, reliable, and affordable electricity. Each seat up for election is representative of the voice of our members, which is why participation in the election is of critical importance.

Your vote truly matters, and staying informed helps make our cooperative stronger. When members participate in the democratic process, #468607 they help ensure that FMEC reflects the values and priorities of the communities we all call home. I encourage our members to stay connected and informed by following us on Facebook, visiting our website, stopping by our booth at community events, or attending our Annual Meeting on April 21, 2026. We look forward to connecting with you and continuing to work together to achieve shared goals that strengthen our cooperative and the communities we proudly serve.

Sincerely,  
Jim Krueger



## UPDATE: DIRECTOR ELECTIONS

As of 3:30 p.m. on Friday, January 23, 2026, the following members have filed for directorship. The filing deadline for directorship by petition is Tuesday, February 17 at 3:30 p.m.

### District 3

Steve Garbisch (Incumbent)

Eric Tupy

### District 6

Matt Maras (Incumbent)

Joe Pacovsky

### District 9

Larry Irvine (Incumbent)

Richard Connelly

When there is a single nominee in the district, that applicant is deemed elected as Director.

When there are multiple applicants in a district, a biography of each nominee will be sent to all members of the district.

Returned ballots are due on Thursday, March 19, 2026. Ballots must be returned in the provided secrecy envelope to the third-party balloting company, and not to our cooperative. Allow for possible mail delays. Elected directors will be seated during the upcoming annual meeting on Tuesday, April 21, 2026.

## member news

### OFFICE CLOSED:

Monday, February 16  
Staff Development

### COLD WEATHER RULE REMINDER

Freeborn Mower Electric Cooperative members who may have trouble paying their winter energy bills are reminded that the Cold Weather Rule is in effect from October 1 through April 30. If you are unable to pay your electric bill by the due date, you must contact our office to arrange a payment plan. Your service may be discontinued, even during the winter months if you fail to respond to the disconnect notice.



We invite our members to join us!

### FREEBORN MOWER ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE ANNUAL MEETING

TUESDAY, APRIL 21, 2026

Albert Lea High School  
Registration | Meal  
5:00 p.m. – 6:30 p.m.  
Bingo 5:30 p.m. – 6:30 p.m.  
Business Meeting 6:30 p.m.

*We look forward to having you join us!*



## YOUR SAFETY COMES FIRST: STAYING ALERT TO UTILITY SCAMS

**Utility scams continue to increase nationwide, with scammers targeting electric cooperative members by pretending to be utility employees or representatives. Their goal is to pressure individuals into providing personal information, making immediate payments, or granting access to accounts. These scams often sound convincing and are designed to create fear, urgency, or confusion.**

Freeborn Mower Electric Cooperative (FMEC) wants to remind members that we will never demand immediate payment, threaten legal action, or ask for sensitive personal or financial information over the phone, by email, or through text messages.

To protect our members, FMEC has implemented multiple layers of security, including advanced cybersecurity technology, secure payment systems, and strict identity verification procedures. These measures help safeguard your personal and account information.

Common scam tactics include phone calls claiming your power will be disconnected unless payment is made immediately, emails or texts asking you to click on suspicious links, or individuals posing as utility workers requesting access to your property. If you receive any communication that seems unusual or creates a sense of urgency, trust your instincts. Do not provide information, click links, or make payments. Hang up or delete the message and contact our office directly.

If you believe you have been contacted by a scammer or have fallen victim to a utility scam, please contact FMEC as soon as possible. #1940503 Reporting these incidents allows us to alert other members and take proactive steps to prevent additional scams in our community.

Staying informed is one of the best defenses against fraud. FMEC is committed to protecting our members and encourages everyone to remain vigilant and share this information with family, friends, and neighbors.

# SCHOLARSHIPS AVAILABLE! APPLY NOW.



## LUCK OF THE DRAW SCHOLARSHIPS

Freeborn Mower Electric Cooperative offers Luck of the Draw Scholarships.

### PROGRAM DETAILS:

- Scholarships of \$1,000 will be awarded.
- The Luck of the Draw Scholarship drawing will be held Tuesday evening, April 21, 2026, during the cooperative's annual meeting. The meeting will be held at the Albert Lea High School, 2000 Tiger Lane, Albert Lea, MN.
- **Must be present to win.**

### QUALIFICATIONS:

- Applicant must be a graduating high school senior.
- Parents/legal guardians must be active members of Freeborn Mower Electric Cooperative at the time of the drawing and reside in our service territory.
- Recipients must be full-time college students in the fall of 2026.
- Proof of enrollment must be presented to Freeborn Mower Electric Cooperative before the funds will be disbursed to the school. Proof of enrollment does not need to accompany the application.
- In the event the student is unable to fulfill his/her enrollment obligations, the award is forfeited.

Applications are available online or from our office.

**The application deadline is March 20, 2026 3:30 p.m.**

For further information, please contact:

Lori Jimenez | (507) 379-8852

## ELECTRIC LINEMAN SCHOLARSHIPS

Two applicants pursuing post-secondary education in an Electric Lineman program will each be awarded a scholarship for \$1,000. The full scholarship amount will be disbursed directly to the school and applied to their student account.

### ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS ARE:

- Recipients must be enrolled in an Electric Lineman Program to begin in the fall of the current year. In the event the lineman program is full and the college of choice is maintaining a student waiting list, the recipient must provide proof in writing in order to hold funds for the next open enrollment period.
- The student must successfully complete the first semester with a grade point average of at least 2.5 on a 4.0 scale to be paid in full.
- Preference will be given to Freeborn Mower Electric Cooperative members and residents of Freeborn and Mower counties.
- The applications will be reviewed and evaluated, and students will be selected based on the application, the essay question(s), and the ability of the student to maintain a 2.5 grade point average during their first term of college.

Applications are available online or from our office.

**The application deadline is March 1, 2026 at 3:30 p.m.**

Minnesota Colleges Offering Training in this Field:

- [Minnesota West Community & Technical College](#)  
Jackson, MN - (800) 658-2330 | [www.mnwest.edu](http://www.mnwest.edu)
- [Dakota County Technical College](#)  
Rosemount, MN - (877) 937-3282 | [www.dctc.edu](http://www.dctc.edu)
- [Minnesota State Community & Technical College - Wadena](#)  
Wadena, MN - (877) 450-3322 | [www.minnesota.edu/wadena](http://www.minnesota.edu/wadena)

## RIVERLAND COMMUNITY COLLEGE SCHOLARSHIPS

Freeborn Mower Electric Cooperative is proud to offer scholarships to Riverland Community College. Scholarships are awarded to children of Freeborn Mower Electric Cooperative members and also to adult members of the cooperative returning to school to further their education.

### ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS ARE:

- To hold a current membership in Freeborn Mower Electric Cooperative or be the child of a current member.
- Have demonstrated financial need.
- Be enrolled as a full-time student in any field.

Non-traditional students are encouraged to apply. #663200

**Please contact Riverland Foundation for information and scholarship applications at (507) 433-0630 or [foundation@riverland.edu](mailto:foundation@riverland.edu).**

**UNCLAIMED CAPITAL CREDITS ARE  
USED TO FUND FREEBORN MOWER  
ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE SCHOLARSHIPS.**

## WHERE HAVE THEY GONE?

***We need your help locating these former members.***



Capital Credit checks for the 2025 General Retirement were returned by the Post Office as undeliverable. If these former members do not claim their Capital Credit disbursement, the funds will be forfeited in accordance with Minnesota Statute and used to fund scholarships.

If you have current contact information for any of the individuals listed, please contact Freeborn Mower Electric Cooperative at (507) 379-6421 or [joanne.miller@fmec.coop](mailto:joanne.miller@fmec.coop)

MICHAEL J. ADAMS  
SHIRLEY D. ADAMS  
RANDI M. AKEMANN  
JULIA E. ANDINO-CRUZ  
ARNOLDO BARRIENTOS  
ALYSSA BARRIENTOS  
RON BARTHEL  
PAUL E. BESONG  
JAMES A. CARON  
WILLIAM W. CLARK  
CHAD A. EMANUEL  
LOWELL EVANS  
ANN FARR  
MOLLIE J. GAPPA  
DAVID M. GILDERHUS  
ORLIE GRANT  
SUE E. GUNDERSON  
RICHARD HAVENER  
STACEY L. HORMANN  
KATE JULIAN  
PHILIP A. KOMDAT

JEANETTE E. LEMKE  
ERON C. MATY  
GORDON D. MICKELSON  
KRISTEN A. MILLER  
BLAINE C. MOE  
CONNIE J. MOE  
BEV MOEN  
GARY E. MORSE  
DAVID NACKERS  
RACHEL NAGELE  
YAGIRA ORTIZ  
JOMAR PEDROZA  
CLINTON PHILBRICK  
DAVID M. PRESCOTT  
PAULA S. PRESCOTT  
JUSTIN QUEENSLAND  
ALEX R. REICHENBACH  
RON D. RELIFORD  
ARACELI REYES  
FRANCES M. ROBERTS  
RONALD ROSENBERG

BRIDGET M. SCHINDLE  
JERRID B. SCHINDLE  
ANTHONY SCHMIDT JR.  
CARRIE L. SEWALD  
LARRY P. SMITH  
JUNE M. SMITH  
KIMBERLY D. STEINHORST  
DAVE TANG  
SARA M. TOENGES  
D. VAN GUILDER  
MERLE E. VOKOUN  
KATHY J. VOKOUN  
DONALD WERMEDAL  
RUSSELL WIGNES  
WAITT OUTDOOR  
HICKORY TECH  
SPRINT NEXTEL CORP  
NORTHERN PCS, SPRINT NEXTEL CORP  
REMAX PROPERTIES



## POWERED BY MEMBERS: Operation Round Up® Makes a Difference in 2025

The end of 2025 marked another successful year of Operation Round Up® at Freeborn Mower Electric Cooperative (FMEC). The program's continued success is a testament to the power of collective generosity and what FMEC members can accomplish together when small contributions are combined for a greater purpose.

Through Operation Round Up®, participating members round their monthly electric bills up to the nearest dollar, with the spare change pooled to support local needs across our service area.

In 2025, FMEC distributed \$102,234 in Operation Round Up® grants to 145 community projects and initiatives. These funds supported a wide range of organizations, including nonprofit groups, schools, first responders, youth programs, food shelves, and community improvement efforts. Each grant helped strengthen the communities where FMEC members live, work, and raise their families.

What makes Operation Round Up® especially meaningful is that every dollar stays local. Grant decisions are made with a focus on addressing real needs, improving quality of life, and creating lasting positive impacts throughout Freeborn and Mower counties. From supporting educational opportunities

to funding critical resources for essential services, Operation Round Up® continues to make a meaningful difference.

The success of the program would not be possible without the participation of FMEC members. While each individual contribution may be small, together they create a powerful impact for good. #1940503 This shared commitment reflects FMEC's cooperative principles and dedication to serving not only our members' electric needs, but also the broader well-being of our communities.

As FMEC looks ahead to 2026, Operation Round Up® will continue to support the communities we serve by funding meaningful projects while strengthening our valuable community partnerships. FMEC is proud to partner with its members in making a lasting difference, one rounded-up bill at a time.

**In 2025, FMEC awarded \$102,234 in Operation Round Up® grants, supporting 145 community projects and initiatives.**



### SNOWMOBILE SAFETY: WATCH FOR HIDDEN ELECTRICAL HAZARDS

Snowmobiling is a great way to enjoy winter, but it's important to remember that snow can hide serious dangers. Electrical equipment like guy wires, utility poles, and buried transformers may be covered by snow or hard to see, especially in low #468607 light or bad weather. Hitting this equipment can cause serious injuries and damage to both the snowmobile and nearby infrastructure.

For your safety, stick to groomed and marked trails whenever possible. These trails are planned to help riders avoid known hazards. Keep at least 10 feet away from electrical equipment and never assume an area is safe just because it looks untouched. Watch for warning signs and trail markers, and slow down in unfamiliar areas.

If you come across downed or sagging power lines, stay well away from them. Always assume the lines are live and dangerous. Do not try to move them or ride around them. Keep others back and contact the electric company right away so trained crews can handle the situation safely. Paying attention and using common sense can help make sure snowmobiling stays fun and safe for everyone all winter long.

## CLASSIFIED marketplace

### FOR SALE

**VEHICLES/MOTORIZED:**  
**2015 FLEETWOOD STORM 32H MOTORHOME.** 30,600 miles. Email at [tinlog7894@yahoo.com](mailto:tinlog7894@yahoo.com).

**FARM:**  
**SMALL SQUARE BALES OF GOOD QUALITY MIXED GRASS HAY.** No rain. Call (507) 440-2255.

**HOUSEHOLD:**  
**KOOLMATE THERMOELECTRIC 1.7 CU FT REFRIGERATOR.** Like new. Could be used in camper, home, etc. Call (507) 279-1856.

**KING SIZE HEADBOARD.** Solid wood. Perfect condition. Paid \$1,000, will sell for \$300. Call (507) 318-9681.

**MISCELLANEOUS:**  
**BOBCAT PALLET FORKS.** 48" long, very nice. Call (507) 383-0410.

**TRUNNION STYLE 3-POINT HITCH.** 8000 lb. Max loaded trailer wt. Call (507) 440-0701.

**NORDIC TRACK SEQUOIA SKI MACHINE WITH BOOK & TABLET HOLDER.** \$20. Call (507) 391-1935.

**OAK FIREWOOD.** Cut in 24 to 30 in. lengths, not split. Stored inside. \$100 per pickup load, OBO. Text or call (507) 440-9334.

**WOMAN'S BLACK MILWAUKEE HEATED JACKET.** Size Med. Perfect condition. \$70. Call (507) 460-8168.

**8" GAS ICE AUGERS.** Two available. Call (507) 440-3261.

### WANTED

**POLARIS SNOWMOBILES.** 1991 xc400, 1992-98 xcr/xc440, Indy 650, 1997-98 xc, rmk, sks 600 or 700. Call (507) 391-1777.

Classified Marketplace ads are printed in our monthly **County Lines** newsletter **FREE OF CHARGE** to our current members. You can review the Classified Marketplace Rules and/or submit an ad at [www.fmeccoop.com](http://www.fmeccoop.com). Select **MY COOPERATIVE**. Click on **NEWSLETTER** under **NEWS & INFO** tab. You may also email ads to [info@fmeccoop.com](mailto:info@fmeccoop.com) or send by mail to County Lines, PO Box 611, Albert Lea MN 56007. One ad/item per member. Ads will not be accepted over the phone. Ads will not be repeated.

USPS 209-540 ISSN 8755-9099

Periodicals Postage Paid at Albert Lea, MN and other locations.

Postmaster: Send address corrections to:  
County Lines, P.O. Box 611, Albert Lea, MN 56007-0611

County Lines is published monthly, except for the Annual Report edition, by Freeborn Mower Electric Cooperative, 3366 Bridge Avenue, Albert Lea, MN 56007. This monthly publication is designed to provide information about the cooperative to the member-owners of Freeborn Mower Electric Cooperative.

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. Congratulations to Carol Linde for spotting her account number in the January newsletter.

### 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)



#### Business Hours:

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

#### Lobby Hours:

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

Friday, By appointment only

Kiosk, Available 6:00 a.m. - 8:00 p.m.

7 Days a Week

#### Board Meetings:

Typically the last Tuesday of each month.

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



## KEEP YOUR CONTACT INFO UPDATED

Your accurate contact details mean:

### EASIER OUTAGE REPORTING

Helps us quickly locate your account and log outage details accurately.

### TIMELY UPDATES

Be the first to know about planned outages, events, and programs.

### SEAMLESS COMMUNICATION

Enjoy smooth service and billing support.

*Update your info today by calling us or logging into SmartHub.*

## LET'S COOK



### CRAZY CAKE

Submitted By: Sandy Stephens

- 2 cups sugar
- ½ teaspoon salt
- 2⅔ cups flour
- 2 teaspoons baking soda
- 1⅓ cup unsweetened cocoa powder
- 2 teaspoons vinegar
- 1 teaspoon vanilla
- ¾ cup cooking oil
- 2 cups water

#### Directions:

Preheat the oven to 350°F. In a large bowl, combine the sugar, salt, flour, baking soda, and cocoa powder, and sift together three times. In a separate bowl, mix the vinegar, vanilla, cooking oil, and water. Add the wet ingredients to the dry ingredients and mix well until smooth. Pour the batter into a greased 9×13-inch pan and bake for 45 minutes, or until a toothpick inserted in the center comes out clean.

Members may submit one short recipe per month by email to [info@fmec.coop](mailto:info@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.