



# Co-op Advantage

## Creating a more sustainable future Partnering with Mille Lacs Corporate Ventures

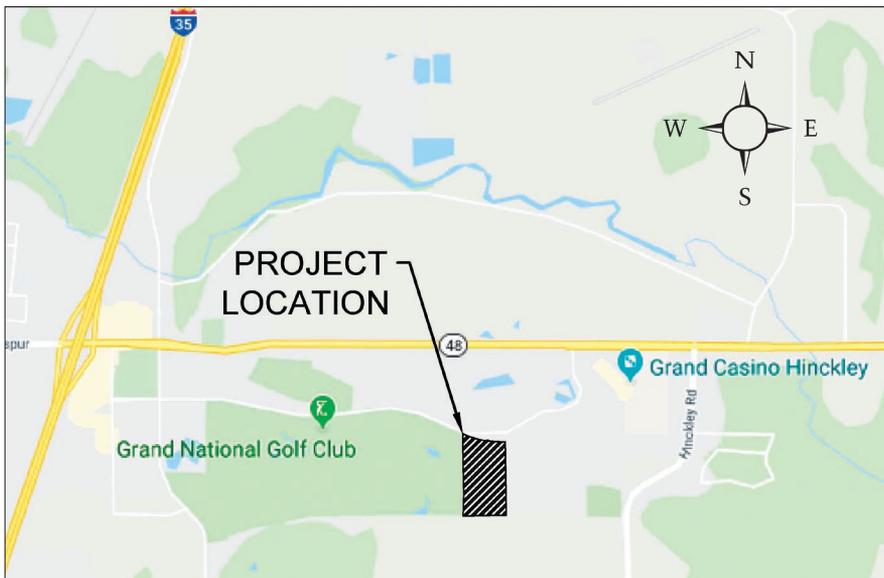
A unique partnership will soon be solidified when a 3-megawatt solar array breaks ground near the Grand National Golf Club at Grand Casino Hinckley. We plan to work with Mille Lacs Corporate Ventures (MLCV) and a subsidiary of NextEra Energy Resources—the developer, operator, and owner of the solar array—to purchase the array’s output and sell to MLCV for a defined period. The project is expected to be complete by summer 2022.

“The way this transaction is structured,” explains VP/COO Andy Olson, “keeps Grand Casino Hinckley on their load control program, while allowing ECE to stay within the terms of our contract with our power supplier, Great River Energy.”

“Equitable member access to renewable energy is an important initiative for ECE,” Andy highlights. “Combined with MLCV’s plan to produce and consume renewable energy, we anticipate a mutually beneficial outcome.”

The solar array will be sited in a way that captures the maximum amount of daily sunlight. Single-axis panels will tilt and track the sun as it moves through the sky from east to west, which is important because it will generate output late in the day, which is typically when energy demand peaks; it’s also the most expensive time of day to purchase energy from the market.

Mille Lacs Band member and MLCV Youth Intern Jaeden King emphasizes, “The solar array in Hinckley is a great step forward to clean energy use... As a part of the younger generation, I worry about climate change. As an Anishinaabe person, I worry about climate change. It is important for us as a tribal-owned property to protect our planet. As Native people we are taught to care for and respect the land. I’m happy to see this project move forward.”



The project will impact the Mille Lacs Band and Hinckley communities by helping reduce the region’s carbon footprint. For MLCV, investing in renewable energy resources as a tribally owned entity aligns with its corporate values. The solar array will offset the equivalent of taking nearly 900 cars off the road for a year.





## \$5.5 MILLION being returned to members

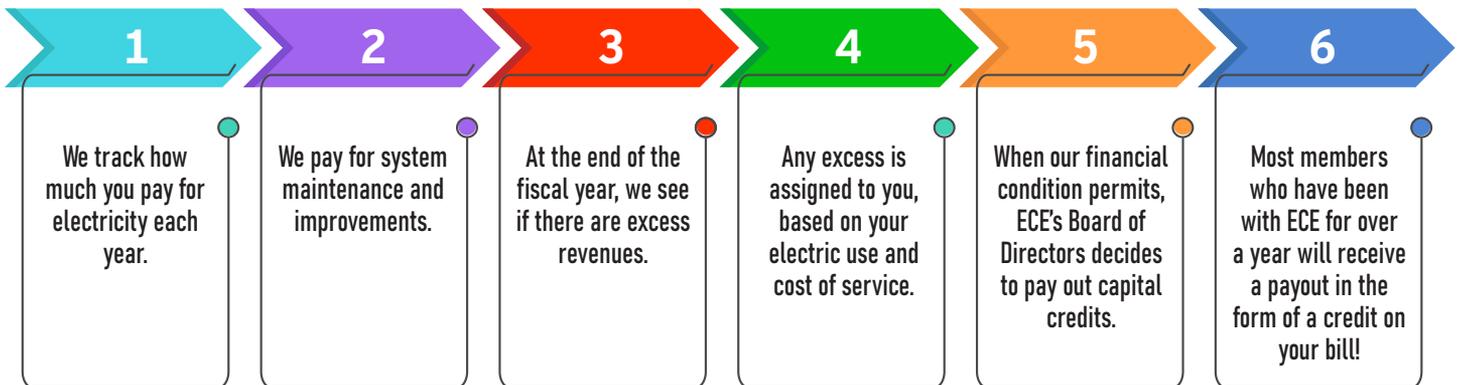
Your ECE Board of Directors has approved a capital credits refund of \$5.5 million for 2021. This year, the board has determined we can meet our mortgage requirements and fulfill an important part of the cooperative business model—member economic participation. As an ECE member, you share in the financial success of your cooperative, and you will see your portion of the capital credits payout reflected on your bill due in December.

When there is a margin over the cost to operate, a portion is allocated to you, based primarily on your energy use and cost of basic service charges. The money is placed

in your capital credits account. We retain this member capital for up to 25 years, which is very common in the industry, and use it for infrastructure improvements, system maintenance, and emergencies.

Capital credits are paid back to you over time if the financial condition of the co-op allows. This year's retirement includes all accumulated capital credits from 1996 and a percentage of all other years allocated to members. Thank you for being a member and helping your co-op to grow and maintain a reliable and safe electric distribution system.

## HOW DO CAPITAL CREDITS WORK?



## ELECTRICAL SAFETY TIPS FOR HUNTERS

This hunting season, please keep these safety tips in mind as you enjoy the great outdoors.



**Keep clear** of electrical equipment.



**Do not** shoot at or near power lines.



**Know** where power lines and equipment are located on the land where you hunt.



**Be especially careful** in wooded areas where power lines may not be as visible.



**Do not** place deer stands on utility poles or climb poles! Energized lines and equipment can cause shock or electrocution.



**Do not** place decoys on power equipment. This can pose an obstruction and harm our line crews.

## A new form of member appreciation

When our Member Appreciation Events were canceled during the pandemic, we asked ourselves if there was a better way to make a difference in your daily lives. While we always love seeing our members and sharing a meal, we knew we could make a greater impact. Coupled with feedback from December's \$72,000 donation to food programs across our service area, we recognized that food insecurity continues to be a major issue in many of our communities.

This fall, we partnered with local food programs to offer two free drive-through food distribution events: one in Mora and another in Pine City. We provided staff and covered the costs to supply nearly 400 households with food and personal items. Special thanks to Mora Food Pantry, Family Pathways, and Second Harvest food banks for their partnership and coordination.

As Communications Supervisor Tina Lanhart mentions, "Many households in our area make trade-offs between basic needs and nutritional groceries. Our goal with the pop-up pantries was to reach members at risk of hunger, at the local level, in a direct and substantial way."

While not our traditional type of member appreciation event, we received positive comments, big smiles, and words of heartfelt gratitude. Please keep an eye on our Facebook page, as that's the best way to communicate last-minute changes for future events.



*ECE Board Chair Linda Laitala at the Mora pop-up pantry.*

## Co-ops unite during National Drive Electric Week



It was a perfect autumn day to drive our 2018 Chevrolet Bolt electric vehicle (EV) to the North Country Show & Tell event, held September 30 at Canal Park Lodge in Duluth.

The event helped raise awareness of the many benefits of EVs and allowed attendees to chat directly with EV enthusiasts. Our power supplier, Great River Energy, worked with several co-ops to host the event, including Arrowhead Cooperative, Cooperative Light & Power, ECE, and Lake Country Power.

"We were happy to celebrate National Drive Electric Week with this event," says Pete Leibel, Energy Services Supervisor. "There is a wide range of EV options and ECE is here to help our members navigate chargers, money-saving charging rates, and future technologies."

During the discussion panel, industry experts shared their knowledge of EVs, including information about expanding charging options. The event continued at the adjacent solar panel/EV charging lot, along with free ice cream provided by Love Creamery.

Electric vehicles offer a variety of benefits, including lower costs-to-own over the life of the vehicle, cleaner air, no emissions, and a smooth, powerful ride. Visit our website for special charging rates and rebates on EV chargers.



### Congratulations

Michael Miller  
Cambridge, MN

Visit our website to learn more about Auto Pay.



At first glance, electric cooperatives, investor-owned utilities, and municipal utilities seem similar—and in some respects, they are. All provide electricity and strive for safe, reliable service. But there are many differences, including one important aspect called capital credits.

As described elsewhere in this issue, capital credits represent your ownership of ECE. By rotating your equity through the cooperative, you are an owner of the co-op. You're also equitably paying for the distribution system we all benefit from. Capital credits provide fair ownership of the cooperative

and allow the organization to acquire low-interest loans to fund system upgrades that enhance reliability and, ultimately, help keep rates as reasonable as possible.

Cooperative membership is a powerful thing. Your financial participation in the co-op affords you the opportunity to vote in elections, campaign for a director position, share your thoughts at annual meetings, and attend board meetings if you choose. Of course, receiving a capital credits payout is also a nice benefit that makes co-ops unique. Rather than excess income going to investors, it circles back to you. We're proud to power your life in every way we can.

So even though all poles and wires can look similar, the way a co-op operates is different...a little thing we like to call "the cooperative difference." Thank you for being an ECE member!

At your service we remain,

## Caring Members: a light amid darkness

### Neighbors helping neighbors

For those struggling to pay the electric bill, our Caring Members program is a blessing. During 2020, nearly 80 households received over \$13,000 in assistance to keep the lights on.

Marti Reynolds, Member Accounts Supervisor, notes, "Caring Members is aptly named. Our members truly care for one another in times of hardship. I can't tell you how heartwarming it is to speak with a struggling single parent or a husband whose wife is battling cancer—and be able to say 'YES, help is available!' Many thanks to those who donate to this program."

You can help fellow members resolve an energy crisis by having a monthly

amount added to your electric bill, or by making a one-time donation. We would like to extend a big thank you to Lakes and Pines Community Action Council (MN); Tri-County Action Program, Inc.; and Rural Housing Development (WI) for their help in administering the program.

"Dollars are essentially doubled," Marti says, "because ECE matches funds donated to Caring Members. Contributions are also tax-deductible."

This holiday season, stretch your donation fund twice as far by contributing to our Caring Members program. Call 1-800-254-7944 and make a tangible difference to neighbors in need.



East Central Energy  
P.O. Box 39  
Braham, MN 55006

Braham Service Center  
Monday-Friday  
8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

1.800.254.7944

General business calls are answered from 7:30 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday-Friday.

Emergency and outage calls are answered 24 hours a day.

Email: [info@ecemn.com](mailto:info@ecemn.com)

The ECE Board of Directors meets monthly. Please call Executive Assistant Wendy Leibel at 763-689-8046 to confirm meeting information. Monthly board meeting highlights and board operating policies can be found on SmartHub.

The Co-op Advantage newsletter is published by East Central Energy, your not-for-profit, member-owned, local electric cooperative.

Website:  
[eastcentralenergy.com](http://eastcentralenergy.com)



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#### Holiday office closings

November 25 and 26  
December 24



# Lend a helping hand

When you donate to the Caring Members program, as little as \$1 a month could help a neighbor in need.

Did you know ECE will match your donation?

Call us and make a difference today!

**ECE** 1.800.254.7944  
eastcentralenergy.com



Caring  
Members

*ECE is an equal opportunity provider and employer.*