



Co-op Advantage

Challenging physical and mental obstacles Veteran reflects on No Barriers Warriors experience



In February 2020, when U.S. Navy veteran Roberta “Ro” Haight saw a Facebook post about ECE’s connection to the No Barriers Warriors program through CoBank, she felt compelled to apply. “I wanted to become stronger through adversity while seeking adventure,” Ro shares.

The No Barriers Warriors program is meant to transform lives through curriculum-based experiences in challenging environments. It also fosters camaraderie, helps veterans push through adversity, and offers a sense of community. Veterans with disabilities can apply to attend the program, which includes a five-day expedition in Colorado. Activities are tailored to accommodate disabilities.

Ro and her wife Paula became ECE members in 1993 and lived in Ann Lake, MN. Ro worked in the Ogilvie and Mora school districts and was a long-time Master Gardener in Kanabec County. After raising their now-grown daughter, Heather, and becoming a proud grandma to Robby and Scarlett, Ro found herself ready to tackle some of her own personal obstacles as both a veteran and civilian.



Her application was approved for 2020, but COVID-19 kept the outdoor adventure experience from happening. Instead, a virtual “Warriors At Home” expedition was offered in the fall, keeping the pandemic from completely interrupting the program. “Four of us spent an hour to two hours, every week for six weeks, going through the No Barriers book and talking about

our lives,” Ro explains. “We built a virtual community which gave all of us an increased sense of purpose.”

After connecting virtually, Ro was thrilled to attend the July 2021 in-person base expedition in pristine Red Feathers Lake, Colorado, where she got to meet her newfound friends face-to-face. Of the twelve participants, four were members of a cooperative.



Surrounded by mountain peaks, the camp was a playground for Ro and her fellow veterans. “We hiked to beautiful Lake Agnes,” she recounts. “Class III and IV-level white water rafting on the Cache la Poudre River was amazing. We spent a day rock climbing and scrambling on a private crag. We also had breakout sessions as part of the curriculum, and nighttime found us around the campfire where we were able to connect and share our stories.”

“No Barriers created and designed an experience that challenged me to think about where I was in my life,” Ro reflects. “I learned strategies to acknowledge my own personal obstacles, and found the drive to overcome physical and mental barriers that might be holding me back. I realized it’s important for me to step outside my wheelhouse and continue to grow, no matter what my age! This program helped us all connect with other veterans in a meaningful way.”

Do you know a veteran with a positive attitude and a willingness to overcome challenges? Details are still in progress for the 2022 No Barriers Warriors program, so watch our website and Facebook page in the coming months.

Why does ECE have a board of directors?

Aside from representing other members' best interests, our twelve board members also manage ECE policies, review the budget, hire the President/CEO, and monitor progress of the strategic plan. Here are 5 reasons YOU should apply for your cooperative's board of directors!

- 1. TEAMWORK** Working collaboratively with fellow board members and ECE staff is rewarding. Brainstorming is a good opportunity for the team to exchange ideas and come up with creative ways of doing things. By working together, the board finds solutions that work best for our members.
- 2. COMMITMENT** Board members do much more than prep for, and attend, one board meeting per month. They make time for industry conferences and training, as well as committee assignments, and participate in community events. Board members spend an average of 20 hours doing ECE business each month.
- 3. TECHNOLOGY** We're part of an ever-evolving industry, so board members must be willing to utilize new technologies. In fact, each one uses an iPad for co-op business. Since the pandemic, many of our meetings have become hybrid. Embracing technology helps further productivity and innovation.
- 4. EDUCATION** New directors are expected to become a Credentialed Cooperative Director during their first term by completing approximately 30 hours of training. They are encouraged to stay abreast of issues affecting the electric cooperative industry and continue their cooperative education. We also stress the importance of the 7 Cooperative Principles, which guides the board in its decision-making.
- 5. IMPACT** Decisions made by the board impact 63,000 members. Directors take this responsibility very seriously. The board focuses on setting policy, which the President/CEO then uses to manage and operate the cooperative.



Your ECE Board of Directors

Do you have proven leadership skills? Consider running for your district's open board seat! If you live in District 1, 3, or 6 and are interested in becoming a nominee, visit our website to review the ECE Bylaws, which specify the eligibility requirements you must meet. Then contact us for a director nomination packet at 1-800-254-7944, ext. 8046. Don't delay! The packet must be completed and returned by 10 a.m. February 15.



DITCH THE SPACE HEATER

Space heaters can provide affordable comfort if used for a short time to heat a small space, but one heater can add more than \$100 per month to your electric bill.

If you're trying to compensate for inefficiencies in your home, taking these proactive energy-saving measures (rather than relying on space heaters for supplemental warmth) can reduce your heating bills for years to come.

- Replace your HVAC or furnace filter regularly to help the system run more efficiently.
- Caulk and weatherstrip around all windows and doors to prevent heat loss.
- Consider adding insulation to your attic and around duct work.

ECE has programs that can be used with your existing system to reduce your heating costs. Contact one of our energy specialists at 1-800-254-7944 today!



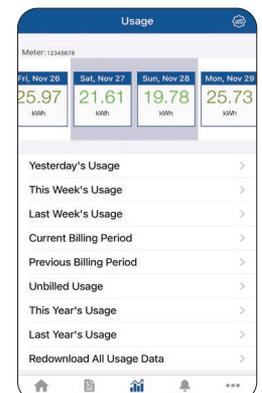
More than 25,000 residential fires are associated with the use of space heaters every year. If you must use a space heater, purchase a model that includes the most current safety features and carries the Underwriter's Laboratory (UL) label.



Monitor your energy use with SmartHub

Have you used more electricity this winter than last? Curious how many kilowatt hours you use on the weekends compared to the weekdays?

The answers are at your fingertips when you download the free SmartHub app!



Scholarship Opportunities

Applications are being accepted until February 25 for our Power Up scholarship program.

Five \$1,000 Power Up scholarships will be awarded to non-traditional students, which include those already in college or those returning to college after a hiatus; high school seniors who attend homeschool, private educational institutions, or a high school located outside our service territory.

Applicants must be an ECE member or the dependent of an ECE member. The application form and more information can be found on our website under Community > Scholarships > Non-traditional.

Separately, we also provide scholarship opportunities to college-bound seniors at participating high schools within our service territory. Most of these scholarships are funded by unclaimed capital credits. For a list of participating high schools, visit our website under Community > Scholarships > High School Students. Contact your high school for information and to apply.



Energizing those who walk through fire

A fire department is like a family—one that rallies together to save local lives and protect property. To help the fire departments that faithfully serve our members, we're donating \$109,200 to 26 departments across our 14-county service area. As in 2020, the pandemic canceled several of ECE's events in 2021, resulting in budgeted dollars not being spent.

"Last year, we donated year-end dollars to food programs," explains VP/CFO Lisa Prachar. "This year, we want to help another group of everyday heroes by lessening their financial load. Putting on a heavy uniform and running toward a dangerous situation is the definition of bravery. We can't thank these men and women enough for the valuable service they provide."



Pictured is ECE Director Joe Morley, a former firefighter, with VP/CFO Lisa Prachar. A list of recipients is available on eastcentralenergy.com.



"PAWS" to pet-proof your home

Every year, thousands of pets around the country are given as gifts during the holiday season. If your family has a furry addition, please "paws" to pet-proof your home.

- 🐾 Cover or enclose electrical cords.
- 🐾 Keep loose electrical cords unplugged or tucked out of sight.
- 🐾 Do not allow pets to curl up behind warm computer equipment or other electrical items.

Remember, what may seem like a mild shock to an adult may be enough to kill a small pet!



There are times in life when we make a decision and then weeks, months, or even years later, circumstances change. If we exercise humility in those situations, we may have the opportunity to make a better choice, with more information. That was the case recently for ECE regarding our position on broadband internet.

In 2019, ECE hired a consultant to conduct a feasibility study for broadband in our service territory. That feasibility study provided strong evidence that entering the broadband business would almost certainly put ECE's financial position and electric assets at risk because of the large amount of debt required to make the investment in fiber and other equipment. Based on that study, ECE's Board of Directors made the decision to forgo investment in broadband.

We all know that the pandemic has intensified the need for high-speed internet. Students and employees are working remotely more often. Telehealth and virtual meetings are becoming much more common and some of those changes will stay with us long after the pandemic has subsided.

However, this evolution of society has been harder for those with poor internet

coverage. State and federal governments are taking notice. Funding opportunities are becoming increasingly available. As a result, ECE has made the decision to take another look at a regional solution to broadband. We are working on refreshing our feasibility study and are engaging in conversation with county officials to determine if ECE is the right candidate to provide a comprehensive solution to the broadband crisis in our communities.

In general, electric utilities make good broadband providers because future smart grid initiatives require solid, fast communication methods. Owning and operating a fiber network would give ECE and its members the value of smart grid technologies and would increase the efficiency and performance of our electric distribution grid.

This second look at broadband is being performed for good reason. We will continue to use sound judgement and exercise fiscal responsibility for the assets our members have entrusted to us. We will keep you updated.

At your service we remain,



Your Touchstone Energy® Cooperative 

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

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.

ECE is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

Website:
eastcentralenergy.com



ECE ANNUAL MEETING

April 21, 2022 - 6 p.m.

Registration opens at 5 p.m.

In person and virtual options.

Watch our website for details!





STORAGE WATER HEATING

Savings the whole family can enjoy!

REBATES UP TO \$700
SPECIAL LOW RATES

*Call 1-800-254-7944 or visit
eastcentralenergy.com for details.*



ECE is an equal opportunity provider and employer.