

**Director election**  
Meet the candidates

**Safety**  
Surge protection

**Energy-Saving Trees**  
Order your FREE tree

**COOPx**  
Apply now!



March/April 2022

# Co-op Advantage

## Your co-op, your vote

When you participate in the business of your electric cooperative, you are the engine that powers our future. Voting in director elections is your vehicle, a simple but powerful tool that gives you a voice in the leadership of your co-op.

The ECE Credentials and Election Committee met February 23 and approved Chad Erdmann, Ron Volker, and incumbent Jim Jesok as District 6 candidates. Because candidate Shelly Nault, District 1, and incumbent Wayne Eller, District 3, were the only members nominated by petition in their districts, they were acclaimed the winners by the committee. No elections will be held in Districts 1 and 3.

If you are an ECE member in District 6, please vote online or by mail. Official ballots will be mailed March 30. Online voting opens March 30 at 8 a.m. Paper and online ballots must be received by our third-party election management provider, Survey and Ballot Systems, no later than 8 a.m. April 20, so be sure to mail your paper ballot early. As a reminder, ECE does not participate in the sending or tabulation of ballots.

Join us for ECE's 86th Annual Meeting on April 21 at 6 p.m. A review of the 2021 activities of the cooperative, as well as director election results, will be shared. The meeting will be virtual but new this year are three in-person viewing sites! Attend a broadcast where staff will be available to facilitate the meeting and help with questions. Coffee and cookies will be provided but there is no gift for attendance.

Those who wish to attend online from home can find a link to join the meeting on our website and public Facebook page on April 21. Registration is encouraged but not required, and opens April 4 at 8 a.m. and closes April 20 at 8 a.m. Instructions for on-line registration can be found on page 2 of this issue.

Please continue to visit our website, as details could change at any time. Visit [eastcentralenergy.com](http://eastcentralenergy.com) or call 1-800-254-7944 for more information and updates.

MEET THE CANDIDATES ON PAGES 3-5

## Official Notice East Central Energy Virtual Annual Meeting

### TWO OPTIONS TO ATTEND

#### ATTEND AN IN-PERSON LIVE BROADCAST

*Registration begins at 5 p.m.*

**Milaca High School - Dahlager Theater**  
500 MN-23, Milaca, MN 56353

**Hinckley-Finlayson High School - Fine Arts Center**  
201 Main St. E., Hinckley, MN 55037

**ECE Superior Operations Center**  
3617 Baumgartner Rd., Superior, WI 54880

#### ONLINE FROM YOUR HOME

*To participate, register via  
SmartHub beginning April 4*

**DETAILED REGISTRATION  
INSTRUCTIONS ON PAGE 2  
OF THIS ISSUE!**



*Thank you, Diane!*

District 1 Director Diane Zimmerman is not seeking re-election. We appreciate her 23 years of service and will miss her thoughtfulness and enthusiasm. Best wishes, Diane!

**Details dependent on current pandemic restrictions.  
Visit [eastcentralenergy.com](http://eastcentralenergy.com) often for the most up-to-date information.**



## Bob Akers retires

ECE's Purchasing Supervisor is retiring after 24 years with the co-op. Bob's retirement plans include traveling with his wife, Terri, who retired last year. He's also excited to spend more time with their seven grandchildren, and enjoy the great outdoors at their cabin in Wisconsin.

## Do you have a power concern?

Low levels of A/C (alternating current) voltage on the grounded conductors of an electrical wiring system are a normal and unavoidable consequence of operating electrical equipment. This voltage, sometimes called stray voltage, is referred to as neutral-to-earth voltage (NEV) when it can be measured between two objects which may be simultaneously contacted by livestock.

If you suspect NEV or other electricity-related issues, such as low voltage, electromagnetic fields, or power quality concerns, contact us. We have qualified employees who can answer your questions and investigate any suspected problems.

Please note: if a person feels an uncomfortable tingling sensation, the condition is probably not NEV but faulty equipment or a serious problem with your wiring system. This situation requires immediate attention and an electrician should be contacted to investigate and correct the problem.

# Register via SmartHub to attend our online annual meeting

Members who would like to register for the online annual meeting can call 1-800-254-7944 or log into/create a SmartHub account. Registration opens April 4 at 8 a.m. and closes April 20 at 8 a.m. Do not register online if you plan to attend in person.



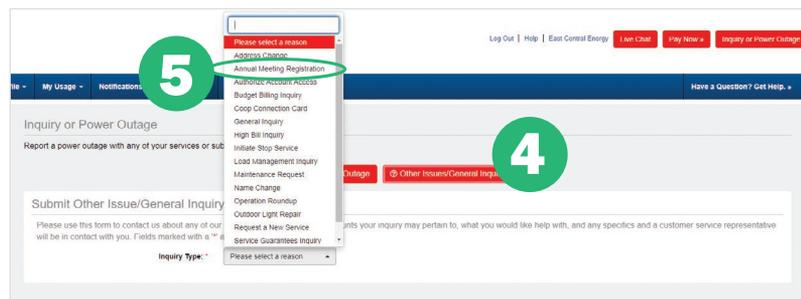
Sign into SmartHub account

then choose Contact Us from the menu

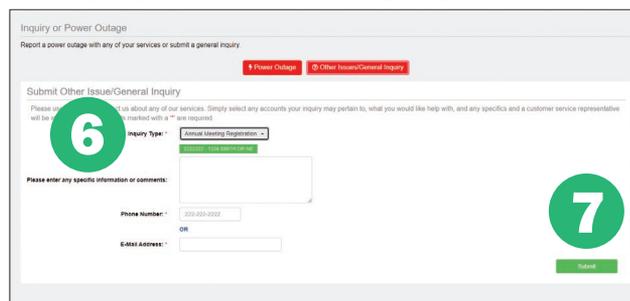


Click on Inquiry or Power Outage

Select Other Issues/General Inquiry then choose Annual Meeting Registration



Inquiry type: Annual Meeting Registration



Confirm information is correct, enter an address OR phone number, and click "Submit"

A link to the online meeting will be emailed to you April 21.

Since only one candidate has been nominated by the members in director districts 1 and 3, no election will be held, and the candidate so nominated has been declared duly certified as co-op director by the ECE Credentials and Election Committee. Voting by ballot in Districts 1 and 3 will not be necessary this year.

## District 1 Acclaimed Director

### Shelly Nault

#### Why do you want to serve as an ECE Director?

As an ECE Director, I sincerely believe I would be a true representative of District 1 to serve as a bridge between the community and ECE. I would regularly attend scheduled meetings, learn co-op policies, and help facilitate budget issues to the best of my ability.



#### What strengths would you bring to the Cooperative's Board of Directors?

I am a lifelong resident of District 1 and have a genuine interest in the long-term health of our cooperative. I am a team player and possess excellent communication skills. I would represent our cooperative in a professional and responsible manner.

#### What is the biggest challenge facing ECE in the coming years?

It appears the rapidly evolving landscape of alternative energy possibilities seem to be the biggest challenge facing ECE in the next 10-20 years. As technological advancements occur, ECE will need to develop and discover efficient ways to interface with aging infrastructure to best facilitate growth and progress.

#### Recent board/council experience:

Essentia Health Emergency Employee Fund Foundation, past President and current Member, 20 years  
Ducks Unlimited, past Committee Member

#### Serving Wisconsin townships:

*Amnicon, Bennett, Blaine, Dairyland, Frog Creek, Gordon, Hawthorne, Highland, Lakeside, Minong, Oakland, Parkland, Solon Springs, Summit, Superior, and Wascott.*

#### Serving Minnesota townships:

*Arna, Atkinson, Birch Creek, Blackhoof, Bremen, Bruno, Clear Creek, Danforth, Finlayson, Fleming, Holyoke, Kerrick, Kettle River, Millward, New Dosey, Nickerson, Norman, Park, Partridge, Pine Lake, Silver Brook, Sturgeon Lake, Twin Lakes, Wagner, Wilma, Windemere, and Wrenshall, including the cities of Denham and Finlayson\*.*

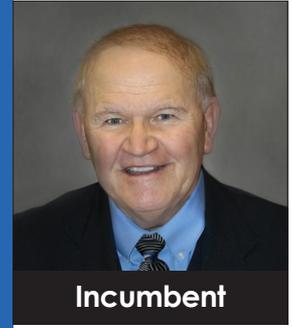
*\*All or part of the areas listed may be served by ECE.*

## District 3 Acclaimed Director

### Wayne Eller

#### Why do you want to serve as an ECE Director?

As both a 21-year ECE member and board member, I've noted ECE employees go that extra mile to provide courteous, professional service. The positive culture of ECE employees to resolve customer concerns encourages me that my continued board service representing fellow members and neighbors will achieve successful results, however challenging.



#### What strengths would you bring to the Cooperative's Board of Directors?

ECE board for six years, including two terms as Vice Chair. Executive Director ECM Habitat for Humanity (20 years), six years board membership at a homeless shelter, a Northwestern University business degree, an Army veteran, retired Wildlife Officer, and a Salvation Army seasonal volunteer identify a history of community service.

#### What is the biggest challenge facing ECE in the coming years?

Cybersecurity issues and emerging technologies are ongoing challenges to protect members' personal information and enhance abilities to supply safe, reliable electricity. ECE staff and board members are developing strategies addressing future needs for electric vehicles, broadband technologies, and wholesale energy supplier's costs to protect members' precious financial resources.

#### Recent board/council experience:

ECE Board, current Director  
Habitat for Humanity, current Executive Director

#### Serving all or part of the following areas:

*Amador, Chisago Lake, Fish Lake, Franconia, Lent, Nessel, New Scandia, North Branch, Oxford, Rushseba, Shafer, and Sunrise, including the cities of Harris, North Branch, Rush City, and Scandia.*

*Congratulations Shelly and Wayne!*

# District 6 Board of Director candidates

## Chad Erdmann

### Why do you want to serve as an ECE Director?

I want to serve my community in a director capacity to help guide future operations including electrical distribution and production to ensure an affordable, safe future for all patrons. I will also focus on the best interests of District 6 members as ECE explores options for investing in rural broadband.



### What strengths would you bring to the Cooperative's Board of Directors?

With my experience in construction and agriculture I have learned strong leadership capabilities and financial responsibility. I am eager to serve on the ECE Board and help guide the future of the co-op to ensure all patrons have access to affordable, reliable, and environmentally-conscious electricity for generations to come.

### What is the biggest challenge facing ECE in the coming years?

The biggest challenges facing ECE in the coming years include hiring and retaining an experienced, efficient, and productive workforce while promoting a safe environment for employees and patrons alike. The co-op also needs to be vigilant in complying with ever-changing industry regulations while keeping rates affordable.

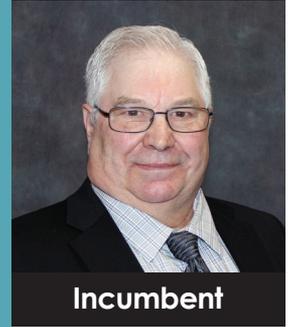
### Recent board/council experience:

Rice Contracting and Development Services Inc.,  
Vice President  
Benton Economic Partnership, Member  
Benton County Solid Waste Advisory Board,  
Board Member

## Jim Jesok

### Why do you want to serve as an ECE Director?

Work with patrons from the district that have questions with ECE. To keep energy costs down while looking to the future to have reliable energy, including wind and solar. Have policies in place to keep ECE a safe and enjoyable place to work.



**Incumbent**

### What strengths would you bring to the Cooperative's Board of Directors?

I have a business and understand what it takes to work with people and employees on the management of ECE. I now have four years of experience on the ECE Board and have taken classes on management and policy-making for ECE.

### What is the biggest challenge facing ECE in the coming years?

To promote wind and solar energy and at the same time having a reliable and reasonable cost of energy. To keep up with changes in the co-op industry such as meter systems, off-peak programs. To get the patrons involved in their co-op.

### Recent board/council experience:

ECE, Director, 4 years  
Christian Labor Association, Pension Board  
Saints Peter & Paul Church,  
Maintenance & Building Board  
Knights of Columbus, Trustee  
Catholic United Financial, Trustee

### Serving all or part of the following areas:

Alberta, Blue Hill, Buckman, Gilmanton, Glendorado, Graham, Granite Ledge, Greenbush, Haven, Langola, Mayhew Lake, Maywood, Milaca, Milo, Minden, Morrill, Palmer, Pease, Sauk Rapids, St. George, Santiago, and Watab, including the cities of Foley, Foreston, Gilman, Glendorado, Milaca, Pease, Rice, Ronneby, Santiago, Sauk Rapids, and St. Cloud.

## District 6 Board of Director candidates *(continued)*

### Ron Volker

#### Why do you want to serve as an ECE Director?

I have been an ECE member for 31 years. I bring a local view-point to serve the community. I like to be helpful in whatever way I can, including setting policy to keep the cost of energy affordable and ECE solvent at the same time.

#### What strengths would you bring to the Cooperative's Board of Directors?

I was a dairy farmer for 43 years. I served as president on numerous boards and held other positions. I have always believed that small things need addressing before they become big things. I will work hard to listen, learn, see all sides, and make informed decisions.

#### What is the biggest challenge facing ECE in the coming years?

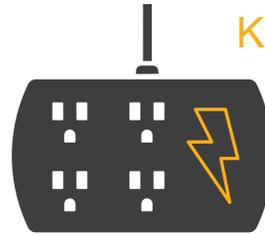
A challenge I'd like to help with is the rapid growth in electric vehicles while dealing with solar and wind energy. The future of energy use is rapidly changing, and ECE has to balance long-term goals with the current financial situation while keeping electricity safe, reliable, and affordable.

#### Recent board/council experience:

Mille Lacs County American Dairy Association,  
Treasurer/President  
Farmers Cooperative Creamery,  
Board Member/President  
Mille Lacs Soil Service, Board Member  
Dairy Herd Improvement Association Mille Lacs County,  
Board Member  
MN Holstein Regional, Board Member



# SURGE PROTECTION



Keep your electronic equipment safe

A power surge is an unexpected increase in voltage, and can occur from a variety of sources. Typically caused by lightning, changes in electrical loads, or faulty home wiring, power surges can damage electronic devices and equipment.

#### Tips to remember:

- **Unplug all unused electronics** during severe thunderstorms.
- **Call a licensed electrician** if you experience power surges due to electrical overload, or you notice signs of faulty wiring like visible burns on outlets, buzzing sounds from outlets, or frequently tripped circuit breakers.
- **Be sure to unplug devices** when you suspect a power surge. It's also smart to use additional levels of protection, like surge power strips or whole-home suppressors, to better safeguard your sensitive electronics.



**DID YOU KNOW** not all power strips offer surge protection? Shop carefully! A strip simply provides more outlets, whereas a surge protector also diverts electricity into a ground wire housed within the protector. Don't overload the strip with too many devices, and remember, surge protection strips should be replaced after a major surge event.

# RESIDENTIAL



## REBATES

It's easy and cost-effective to make your home more energy efficient. Combined with our low off-peak rates, rebates make electric heating and cooling affordable.

### Ground source heat pump: \$400/ton

Using the constant temperature of the earth to transfer heat to and from your home, it's a complete heating and cooling system.

### Storage water heater rebate: up to \$700

A sufficient supply of water is heated during off-peak hours to meet your family's daily hot water needs. 0% financing may be available.

### Storage space heater: \$100/kW

Systems store and convert electricity to heat during off-peak hours using specially designed electric thermal storage technology. 0% financing may be available.

### Electric vehicle charger: \$750

Already own an electric vehicle? We offer a rebate to install a Level 2 charger on either the time-of-use rate or off-peak storage rate.

### Wi-Fi-enabled thermostat rebate: \$25



### Ductless air source heat pump: \$400

Older homes that lack a central heating system can benefit from this heating and cooling unit.

### Refrigerator and freezer rebates: \$25

(with recycling of old unit)

### Dehumidifier: \$25

Incentives, current rates, criteria and guidelines for residential members can be found on our website or by calling us. Rebates under \$1,000 are issued in the form of a bill credit.



Snap a picture with your smart device for quick access to rebates on our website.



## Stay cool with an Air Source Heat Pump

Not only a high-efficiency air-conditioning unit, it can heat your home or business. With \$1,250 rebates and 0% financing possible, you can't go wrong!

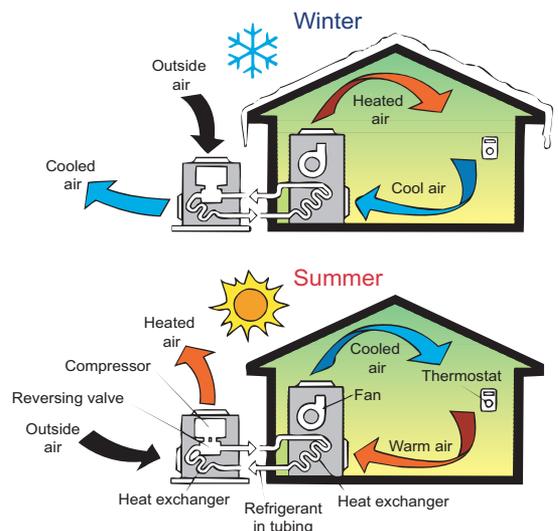
### HOW THEY WORK

#### ❄️ WINTER

In the heating mode, air source heat pumps transfer heat from the outdoor air to the inside, reducing your reliance on propane, fuel oil or other fuel sources. When the outdoor temperature drops below 25°, your primary heating system takes over.

#### ☀️ SUMMER

In the cooling mode, your air source heat pump works like a standard central air conditioning system, transferring heat to the outside.



## “Branch out” with a free tree



We're proud to once again partner with the Arbor Day Foundation's Energy-Saving Trees program to provide free trees to ECE members.

Select a species and optimize your home's energy efficiency with an interactive online mapping tool. The tool also helps prevent future conflicts with overhead lines.

Trees are available on a first-come basis (one per member household) starting March 21. You will need your ECE account number to process your order at [arborday.org/](http://arborday.org/) [eastcentralenergy.com](http://eastcentralenergy.com). Supplies are limited.

All calls about the program should be directed to the Arbor Day Foundation at 1-855-234-3801.

REMEMBER! Always have your underground utilities located three working days before digging to avoid making dangerous contact. If you damage a buried facility without calling for a locate, you will be financially responsible for the damage, as well as a fine up to \$2,000.

**(MN) Gopher State One Call**  
Call 811 or 800-252-1166  
or visit [gopherstateonecall.org](http://gopherstateonecall.org)

**(WI) Digger's Hotline**  
Call 811 or 800-242-8511  
or visit [diggershotline.com](http://diggershotline.com)



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

Respect all markings and dig with care. It could save your life!

## COOPx *ECE's cooperative experience*

What is it like to work at ECE? Could you see yourself staying close to home with a rewarding career?

We're looking for students in grades 10-12 to participate in the second year of COOPx, your cooperative's personalized youth experience.

After completing a written or video essay and a short interview, we plan to invite four students to explore their co-op by meeting with our most passionate leaders. The experience will be held June 20-23 at ECE's Braham Headquarters location.

Get a first-hand look of what it's like behind the scenes at ECE. Attend a board meeting, watch our linemen at work, and meet with employees. The experience culminates with a professional board meeting and lunch with our directors. The selected students will also receive \$500 scholarships to be used for continuing education!

**Apply before April 11**

[eastcentralenergy.com](http://eastcentralenergy.com) > Community > COOPx



*Last year's winners Lacy Cuda, Ria Edberg and Allison Cavallin formed a fast friendship.*



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](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.

ECE is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

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



## On board with Linda Laitala

*Twelve members serve on the ECE Board of Directors, two from each of our six districts, and are entrusted with the future of the co-op. With an election approaching, we asked Linda Laitala, ECE Board Chair, to answer a few questions about our board of directors.*

### Why does ECE have a board of directors?

ECE was formed (and is owned) by its members to deliver energy and other services and products. Article III of The Articles of Incorporation and Bylaws state that “the management of its affairs and business shall be vested in a Board of Directors who shall be elected by the members.” These documents also outline the procedures by which directors are elected, and legally empower the board to act on behalf of the membership.

### What does the board do?

Some of the responsibilities of the board include determining strategic goals for the co-op, approving rates, reviewing financials, budgets and audits, and hiring the President/CEO. We have four primary responsibilities: member representation, governance, fiduciary, and monitoring control. We distribute profits in the form of capital credits back to the members. We also review and approve investments in affiliated businesses.

### Are there policies in place that guide the board?

Absolutely. Not only do the policies lay out our duties, but they also explain the qualifications necessary to run for a board position and the lines of authority for the board. Each year our directors agree to

the code of conduct, sign a confidentiality agreement, and complete a conflict-of-interest disclosure form.

### Are members allowed to attend a board meeting?

Yes! Regular monthly meetings of the board are open to members; the schedule can be found on our website. We request a two-week notice so we have time to prepare for a healthy and informed dialogue. Our members are at the forefront of every decision. You can always review highlights of our board meetings on SmartHub.

### If I live in District 6, how can I vote this year?

Thank you for being interested in voting! We need our members to be fully represented. We provided profiles of candidates in this issue; please take a look at them. Once you’ve chosen your preferred candidate from your district, we offer multiple ways to vote:

- Traditional mail-in paper ballot
- Online through our website
- Scan a barcode on your smartphone
- Through the SmartHub app

Remember to attend the virtual ECE Annual Meeting on April 21, where director election results will be announced!





# VIRTUAL ANNUAL MEETING

Join us Thursday, April 21 at 6 p.m.

**Attend an in-person live broadcast** (*registration begins at 5 p.m.*)

- Milaca High School • Hinckley-Finlayson High School
- ECE's Superior Operations Center

**OR join us from the comfort of your own home**

*(register via SmartHub beginning April 4 to attend online)*

*Coffee &  
cookies!*

**Details dependent on current pandemic restrictions.  
Watch our website for the most up-to-date information.  
[eastcentralenergy.com](http://eastcentralenergy.com)**

**1.800.254.7944**

*ECE is an equal opportunity provider and employer.*