



August 2023

Co-op Advantage

Sparking the potential of local teens



June was a busy month for seven local high school students, three of whom experienced a week-long all-expenses-paid trip to our nation's capital, and four who spent a day with our employees in Braham.

Pictured left, Liam Kuehn (Rush City), Emma Hermanson (Pine City), and Chase Dahler (Foley), embarked on an eye-opening journey to the nation's capital, along with other Minnesota delegates, as part of the Electric Cooperative Youth Tour.

"This experience is always an adventure of a lifetime," explained Desiree Cuda, who coordinates the tour for ECE. "It sparks both personal growth and a greater appreciation for the impact young adults can have on society."

The tour was filled with educational visits to historic sites, including the Lincoln Memorial and Washington Monument. Students had the opportunity to meet with policymakers and learn about the importance of electric cooperatives. Beyond the educational aspects, our three representatives also had a blast exploring the city, trying new foods, and creating lifelong friendships.

COOP

ECE's cooperative experience



With two students interested in line work and the other two focused on a future in engineering, the day offered enough activities to keep everyone interested. The morning was spent with line crews, setting poles and learning about safe power restoration. After lunch, the group met with the executive team and enjoyed bite-size sessions with System Control, IT, Engineering, and Fleet.

Seth summed up the day perfectly when he recounted, "Even though everyone at ECE comes from a different background, they all work in unison and that's cool to see."



Two days after the Youth Tour students returned, we welcomed Max Knudson (Pine City), Owen Stellmach (Foley), Ross Vandenheuvel (Cambridge-Isanti), and Seth Noack (Milaca), pictured right, for the third year of COOPx, to get a first-hand look of what it's like behind the scenes at ECE.

Power to the planet

Amping up sustainability at the local level

Electric co-ops are like the superheroes of the energy world, championing environmentally friendly practices while balancing reliability and safety. From harnessing renewable sources like solar, to promoting conservation and offering energy-efficient solutions to our members, ECE strives to make a difference in our communities. Most recently, we've been focused on continuing our commitment to pollinator-friendly practices, involving youth in our efforts, and celebrating our dedication to the environment.

To create and maintain pollinator-friendly habitats, ECE made a voluntary commitment in 2020 to participate in the Monarch Candidate Conservation Agreement with Assurances. This meant we agreed to implement specific conservation practices that support the monarch butterfly throughout its lifecycle.

This spring, we were honored to receive two nationwide awards: the Trailblazer Award for being the first energy sector CCAA enrollee, as well as the High Flyer Award for most adopted acres above our target (over 4,000 habitat acres 1,199% above target). This recognition underscores that our efforts significantly impact conservation and provide a net benefit to protecting monarch habitat in our service territory and beyond.



When it comes to finding suitable nesting sites, Ospreys have discovered that electric poles make excellent substitutes for trees. This presents a potential danger, as nests built directly on electric infrastructure can cause power outages or harm to the birds. Early this year, we invited all 21 high schools in our service area to build an Osprey platform. Students from nine schools chose to tackle this unique project, giving these remarkable birds a safe home while protecting our electrical system! In June, our Wahkon lineworkers placed the Foley-built platform near an unoccupied osprey nesting site in Mora. Less than a week later, Ospreys were already using the nest.

In June, we held our second-annual Pollineighbor Party in partnership with MNL and our power supplier, Great River Energy, at the 100 Acre Homestead in Princeton. Families spent the day learning about the crucial role pollinators play in our ecosystem. The event offered hands-on wildflower seed ball and monarch mask crafts, live music, farm-to-table food truck, wagon rides, pollinator scavenger hunt, a store to purchase farm-made goodies, plus roaming chickens and goats. It was a great chance to connect with nature and discover how we can promote the well-being of pollinators.



Sustainability is all about finding the perfect harmony between meeting our present needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own.

BACK TO SCHOOL SAFETY

As summer draws to a close and students gear up to head back to school, Safety Administrator Pete Leibel offers some helpful tips to make sure the whole family has a safe school year. Feel free to email info@ecemn.com for a free classroom presentation that offers safety information in a fun and educational way.

- Be mindful of power lines and stay clear of pad-mount transformers. Never climb utility poles or trees near power lines and avoid flying kites or drones near electric infrastructure.
- If your car or school bus is in an accident involving power lines, always assume the line is energized! Remain in the vehicle and tell others that may come to help to stay away and call 911. If you must exit the vehicle, jump out with both feet together and avoid contact with the vehicle and ground at the same time. Then, shuffle away with small steps, keeping your feet together and on the ground at all times, to reduce the risk for electrical shock or electrocution.
- Consider using power strips with an over-current protector that shuts off power automatically if too much current is being drawn.

Can you help us find former members?

We are trying to find current addresses for former members. To view the list, go to eastcentralenergy.com > Your Cooperative > Capital Credits, or call 1-800-254-7944 and we will mail the list to you.





Burning questions about *blazing* fast internet?

We spoke with Dennis Rice, Broadband Manager, to answer your most frequently-asked ECE Fiber questions.

WHEN WILL FIBER COME TO MY HOME?

Progress and construction plans are determined by where we can secure grant funding, along with the amount of member interest within an area. Our first-year construction plans include servicing the Dalbo, Cambridge, Ogilvie, Braham, and Pine City areas. We're still finalizing 2024 construction plans.

WHAT ARE YOUR PRICES?

Depending on the internet speed you choose, packages range from \$64.95-119.95 monthly. We will also offer features like phone services, network and family security, Wi-Fi extenders, and custom IP addresses for additional fees. Remember, you will not be charged equipment or installation fees as long as you keep services for a full six months (if service is canceled before then, an early cancellation fee will be assessed).

HOW FAST IS "BLAZING" FAST?

We offer three internet packages at various speeds: 100 Mbps, 250 Mbps, and 1 Gbps. These speeds are symmetrical, meaning the download and upload speeds are the same. In addition, we will not have any data caps, so members will always have blazing fast service!

To learn more, please visit ecefiber.com, which is updated frequently with new information. More burning questions? Send us an email at info@ecefiber.com.

Purposeful power

The electricity that serves your home is the same as ever, but the way it is made has changed significantly in recent years. For decades, power was defined by large power plants capable of supplying energy to thousands of households. Recent history has seen a remarkable rise in renewable resources, which generate emissions-free electricity across wide swaths of the landscape.

"Renewable energy is quickly becoming one of the dominant energy sources in our region," explains VP/COO Andy Olson. "Our power supplier, Great River Energy, has designed a diverse portfolio of resources, keeping power plants and other resources at the ready for when the electric system needs additional energy."

As renewable energy growth has increased at a significant rate, GRE has added several wind resources in recent years, and has signed a contract for what will be the largest wind farm in its power supply portfolio. The advancement of energy storage is

increasingly important. GRE is also performing a large-scale test of new energy storage technology, scheduled to begin operation in late 2024.

Andy highlights, "ECE members are already benefiting from renewable energy in the form of utility-scale solar arrays within our service territory." In Cambridge, the 2 MW solar array built on 15 acres in 2019 has powered the equivalent of 320 homes annually. More than 3.7 million kWh of energy have been produced each year thanks to over 7,000 panels that track the sun.

In Hinckley, the 3 MW Grand Casino solar array completed in 2022 has seen the equivalent of over 460 homes powered annually, with 5.3 million kWh of energy created.

"We are continuing to learn about the evolving market of distributed energy, like solar," Andy stresses. "ECE is always happy to help educate members and share the things that we're learning from these exciting projects."



Want to have a positive impact on the environment? East Central Energy makes it easy for you to support renewable energy for as little as 20 cents per month added to your electric bill. Call or visit eastcentralenergy.com > Residential > Renewable Energy for details.



In today's ever-changing landscape, your cooperative is constantly striving to meet the evolving needs and expectations of our members. This includes expanded job positions, a new building with a dual purpose, and bringing value to members through reliable electricity and internet.

To ensure exceptional service and support, ECE has been creating new positions within its organizational structure. To cater to the growing needs of our members, the cooperative has added over 10 new positions since January. Regardless of job title, everyone at your co-op is dedicated to providing personalized service to each member. It is always our goal to cultivate strong relationships and ensure you receive the highest level of attention and support.

We were proud to partner with many local contractors when we broke ground June 8 on a new 25,000 sq. ft. combination warehouse and office space for fiber and electric employees, located in the Braham Industrial Park. In addition, we are leasing three additional storage spaces in the Braham area for electric materials to be stored and overflow for broadband materials. The increased storage capacity,

streamlined operations, dedicated quality control areas, modern office facilities, and future growth potential all contribute to enhanced efficiency and productivity.

New positions and buildings are just a small part of how we continue to invest in our communities. We will always be an electric cooperative first. At the same time, to address the diverse needs of our members, ECE has chosen to expand our product portfolio to include broadband. By enhancing our existing electric plant while introducing new internet offerings, members will be well-equipped for working from home, accessing telemedicine, participating in online schooling, and whatever else comes our way in the future.

In an era defined by rapid technological advancements, ECE recognizes the importance of staying ahead of the curve. We believe in continuous improvement and learning from our experiences. This commitment to growth ensures that the co-op remains responsive to your evolving needs.

At your service we remain,

EV SHOW & TELL

September 14

5-7:30 p.m., presentation at 5:30
ECE Braham HQ, 412 Main Ave. N.

Get your questions answered and see a variety of EVs on display!

Visit eastcentralenergy.com for details.



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Email: info@ecemn.com

The ECE Board of Directors meets monthly. Please call Executive Administrator 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



EV SHOW & TELL EVENT

Bring your questions and drive
a variety of EVs!

September 14, 5-7:30 p.m.
with presentation at 5:30.

ECE Braham HQ, 412 Main Ave. N.

Visit our website for details.

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