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Meet the candidates

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March/April 2023

# Co-op Advantage

## Co-op elections are rooted in our communities

The ECE Credentials and Election Committee met February 22 and approved director candidates for Districts 2, 5, and 6 for the 2023 election year. Because candidate Thomas Schoenecker, District 4, was the only member nominated by petition in his district, he was acclaimed director by the committee and no election will be held in that district. Candidate profiles are included in this special issue.

If you are an ECE member in a voting district, please vote online or by mail (traditional mail-in paper ballot, online through our website, by scanning a barcode on a smartphone, or through the SmartHub app). Official ballots will be mailed March 29. Online voting opens March 29 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 19. As a reminder, ECE does not participate in the sending or tabulation of ballots.

We can't wait to see our members in person for ECE's 87th Annual Meeting at the Braham Event Center on April 20 with the theme of "Rural Roots." Check out multiple electric vehicles beginning at 5 p.m., then stay for the 6 p.m. presentation. A review of the 2022 activities of the cooperative, as well as director election results, will be shared. Hot appetizers will also be provided. While there is no gift for attendance, we will have exciting prize drawings at the end of the evening, including bill credits. We hope to see you there!

OFFICIAL NOTICE  
East Central Energy Annual Meeting  
Thursday, April 20, 2023

"Rural Roots"

Braham Event Center  
655 8th St. SW  
Braham, MN 55006

- Registration opens & EV showcase 5 p.m.
- Business meeting 6 p.m.

 Meeting will be streamed live on Facebook



*Best wishes, David and Garry!*

*District 2 Director David Deutschlander (L) and District 4 Director Garry Bye (R) are not seeking re-election. We appreciate David's 19 total years of service and Garry's 8 years of service.*



# COOPx

## June 20, 7 a.m.-4 p.m.

ECE's cooperative experience for students

- Four spots available
- Meet the executive team
- \$500 scholarships
- Visit a job site
- Lunch and snacks included
- Job shadow opportunities

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

## District 2 Board of Director candidates

Mike  
Gainor



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

I believe broadband is a key to our region's future. As a cooperative, ECE can bring fiber to every last member household and business, just as it did with electric service 85+ years ago. ECE must accomplish this while continuing to provide quality, reliable electrical service at an affordable cost.

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

As editor of the Pine City Pioneer for 13+ years, I heard from people across our region, and did my best to speak honest common sense to our readers. I'm lucky and blessed to serve our area, and will work hard for you on the ECE Board.

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

Stepping into broadband is a huge transition for ECE, and it needs to be focused on that goal while keeping sight on its primary responsibility: maintaining the highest level of electrical service (and employee safety) at the lowest possible cost to members.

### **Recent board/council experience:**

ECE Member Resource Council, Member  
Pine Technical and Community College Foundation, Board Member  
Pine City Area Chamber of Commerce, Board Member  
Pine Center for the Arts, Board Member  
Highway 61 Film Festival, Committee Member

Linda  
LaTourelle



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

As a 40-year resident of Pine County and long-term member, I would like to serve on ECE's board. I am passionate about the electric cooperative and have over 30 years of experience working in the utility industry. I am driven to offer my expertise to ECE and its membership.

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

I have held leadership positions at utilities for 30 years, including 25 years as an employee of ECE and seven years working closely with the nation's electric cooperatives. My experience includes understanding the workings of ECE as well as the concerns and direction of a wide array of cooperatives.

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

The biggest challenge for ECE in the coming years will be positioning itself in the best place for future growth/stability. Finding the balance necessary to maintain affordable and quality service during this time of inflationary costs and shortages, while evolving new electric loads, will require dynamic leadership.

### **Recent board/council experience:**

National Information Solutions Cooperative, Large Utility Committee, Chairperson  
Northland Connect Broadband, Board Member  
National Information Solutions Cooperative, retired employee  
East Central Energy, former employee

Jim  
Rostberg



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

ECE is a wonderful cooperative and as a director I look forward to working with ECE and their members to meet future challenges such as broadband distribution to members' homes and renewable energy solutions.

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

The majority of my career has been that of a listener and problem solver, helping my clients address issues and assist them to meet their expectations. As a director I will listen to the concerns of the members of ECE and bring their concerns and issues to the board.

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

Ensuring the availability of a safe, reliable and affordable energy supply while experiencing increased usage due to membership growth and new technology such as electric vehicles.

### **Recent board/council experience:**

Isanti County Beyond the Yellow Ribbon, Inc., Chair

## District 2 Board of Director candidates *(continued)*

Andrew Rypkema



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

To represent the members of District 2 and advocate for their best interests. To help direct and support the mission of the cooperative as a reliable supplier of energy and going into the future as a reliable provider of internet access for all ECE members.

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

An international business and highly technical background as an engineer and business development manager who will bring a unique perspective to the board of directors. My background allows me to understand the positive impact that affordable and reliable power and internet access brings to residential, agriculture, commercial, and industrial members.

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

Rolling out ECE Fiber internet access to all members in a timely and cost-effective manner. Continue to provide members with affordable and reliable energy in the face of changing policies and politics. Retaining and hiring talented employees who operate and maintain the infrastructure that we depend on for our livelihoods.

### **Recent board/council experience:**

Angel Aircraft Corporation, Board Member  
Sandstone Evangelical Free Church Worship Committee, Secretary

*District 2 serves all or part of the following areas: Arlone, Barry, Brook Park, Chengwatana, Clover, Crosby, Dell Grove, Hinckley, Kroschel, Mission Creek, Munch, Ogema, Pine City, Pokegama, Pomroy, Rock Creek, Royalton, and Sandstone, including the cities of Rock Creek, Pine City, Henriette, Brook Park, Hinckley, and Sandstone.*

## District 4 Acclaimed Director

*Since only one candidate has been nominated by the members in director District 4, 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.*

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

Hello fellow cooperative members. I am excited to have the ability to be elected to the ECE Board. Being involved in providing safe and reliable electricity has always been an interest of mine. If elected I will work hard to continue ECE sustainability and growth for the community it serves.

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

I have retired from the industrial/commercial construction industry after 42 years; the last 18 in training and safety. My experience as a craft worker and in the office as a project manager, trainer, and as Safety Director has provided me with a strong capability for leadership and fiduciary responsibilities.

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

Sustainability in being a safe and reliable electrical provider at a reasonable cost to the cooperative members. The promotion and implementation of alternative energy sources. To excel in providing new and cost-effective services to our members.

### **Recent board/council experience:**

Minnesota Subcontractor Association, Board of Directors  
MG McGrath Construction, Safety Director  
Lake Fannie Board of Directors, Lake Improvement District

Thomas Schoenecker



*District 4 serves all or part of the following areas: Athens, Bogus Brook, Cambridge, Dalbo, Isanti, Maple Ridge, Princeton, Springvale, Stanchfield, and Wyanett, including the cities of Braham, Cambridge, Isanti, and Princeton.*

## District 5 Board of Director candidates

Linda  
Laitala  
(Incumbent)



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

I have great respect for the mission and values of ECE. Members/customers always come first, from the board room to every employee. The future of our cooperative is exciting and innovative: renewables, battery storage, electric vehicles, broadband. What an exciting time to be a director!

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

I have served as a director for 17 years. As a business owner, I have survived challenging economic times. I know the value of planning, budgeting, and being prepared. I'm a listener and a leader. I'm excited about technology and the benefits it brings to our members.

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

ECE serves 66,000 members in 14 counties in two states covering 8,473 miles of lines. We must adhere to government regulations while continuing to provide reliable, affordable electricity to members. Add bringing high speed internet to members living in some of the most underserved counties in Minnesota and northwestern Wisconsin.

### **Recent board/council experience:**

ECE, Board Chair  
Minnesota Rural Electric Association, Secretary  
ECE, Secretary Treasurer  
Dala of Mora Business & Professional Women, President  
Minnesota Federation of Business & Professional Women, State President

Jim  
Rueter



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

To learn new things and to help out as needed.

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

I have a practical mind and experience with budgeting a multi-million-dollar facility.

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

The way we generate power.

### **Recent board/council experience:**

Great River Federal Credit Union, Board Member, 30+ years and currently Supervisory Committee Chair

Luke  
Stultz



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

I'll work to help ECE apply for grants to offset or alleviate the cost to residents of infrastructure installation for the broadband project. High-speed internet is important for every rural household and business, and the ECE board should do everything in its power to keep monthly service costs affordable.

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

I've led and volunteered for a number of non-profits over the past two decades. Doing so, I've learned to build consensus among those with differing viewpoints in order to further each organizations' individual missions. When making decisions, I prefer to listen and understand each person's viewpoint before taking action.

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

One challenge will be to seamlessly implement additional renewable energy sources while controlling costs for residents and businesses. As the shift to renewable energy expands, it's important that ECE continues to evolve and innovate so this shift happens without noticeable interruption to members.

### **Recent board/council experience:**

Bancroft Neighborhood Association, Executive Director  
Kanabec History Center, Board Member  
Pomroy Township, Clerk  
Alpaca Owners Association, Membership Committee volunteer

## District 5 Board of Director candidates *(continued)*

Wayne  
Zaudtke



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

To see that ECE does what it needs to do in order to deliver safe, affordable, and reliable electricity. To fold in alternate energy without raising the price of electricity.

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

Understanding of the electrical industry. Familiar with its delivery to the consumer. My experience as an electrical business owner, a class A Master Electrician, BA in Organizational Management from Bethel University, and experience as a public servant.

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

Alternate energy, off-peak usage, electric vehicles and their demands for power, weather effects on our lines, and government regulations. To consider these and maintain the lowest kilowatt rate, and reliable delivery to the cooperative members.

**Recent board/council experience:**

East Central Regional Library Board  
Snake River Advisory Board  
Kanabec County Planning Commission

Jeni  
Zinda



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

As a new member of the community, the nomination process has been rewarding! I'm eager to build new relationships while giving back. My husband and I love living here. This is an opportunity to provide meaningful contributions, while learning and growing through education, interaction, and experiences on the board.

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

In my "work life" I am a collaborative, accountable team player, driven for team success and have been recognized and rewarded with continued front line leadership training and professional development. I'm a fierce advocate for our customers and will bring the same listening, tenacity, and strategy skills to our members.

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

The biggest? That's a good question! While I can't say I know the answer for sure, I have to imagine that one challenge is managing the costs of maintaining and improving technology and infrastructure while providing satisfactory rates and value to the members.

**Recent board/council experience:** N/A

District 5 serves all or part of the following areas: Ann Lake, Arthur, Bradbury, Borgholm, Brunswick, Comfort, Dailey, East Side, Ford, Grass Lake, Haybrook, Hayland, Hillman, Idun, Isle Harbor, Jewette, Kanabec, Knife Lake, Lakin, Leigh, Lewis, Mount Morris, Mudgett, Page, Peace, Pliny, Seavey, South Fork, South Harbor, White Pine, Whited, and Williams, including the cities of Braham, Grasston, Quamba, Mora, Ogilvie, Bock, Milaca, Hilman, Wahkon, Isle, and McGrath.



Plant a free  
tree this spring!

We're excited 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, which also helps prevent future conflicts with overhead lines.

Trees are available on a first-come basis (one per member household) starting March 20. You will need your ECE account number to process your order at [arborday.org/eastcentralenergy](http://arborday.org/eastcentralenergy). Supplies are limited. All calls about the program should be directed to 1-855-234-3801.

**REMEMBER!** Always have your underground utilities located three working days before digging to avoid making dangerous or deadly contact.

**(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

## District 6 Board of Director candidates

Mike  
Engmark



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

As an ECE director, I would leverage my strengths as a lifelong resident of central Minnesota with my extensive experience in the electrical industry to execute director duties to the best of my ability. I will take all questions and concerns from District 6 members to the board for resolution.

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

First is my local connection of being born and raised in District 4, and residing just under 30 years in District 6. Second, I have a solid electrical knowledge base as a registered professional engineer and I am currently employed at a nearby power plant as a Senior Reliability Engineer.

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

The biggest challenge for ECE will be providing reliable electricity while navigating ever increasing clean energy issues and requirements, all while preventing significant increases to the rates we pay for electricity. Along with cybersecurity issues, we will also need to ensure physical security of our transmission lines and substations.

### **Recent board/council experience:**

Love of Christ Lutheran Church, Head Trustee  
MN First Chapter of the Coca-Cola Collectors Club, Editor

Jim  
Jesok  
(Incumbent)



### **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.

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

I owned an electrical contracting business for 40 years and understand what it takes to work with people and employees on the management of ECE. I now have five years of experience on the ECE Board and have taken classes on management and policymaking for ECE.

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

To promote affordable broadband services in ECE areas that do not have it now. To keep up with changes in the co-op industry such as meter systems, off-peak programs, and to get the patrons involved in their co-op.

### **Recent board/council experience:**

ECE, Director, 5 years  
Christian Labor Association, Pension Board  
Saints Peter & Paul Church, Maintenance & Building Board  
Knights of Columbus, Trustee  
Catholic United Financial, Trustee



## Carbon-free by 2040?

President/CEO Justin Jahnz shares his thoughts!

Visit [eastcentralenergy.com](http://eastcentralenergy.com) > Newsroom > News & Events.



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

Rick  
Stevens



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

Enhance my understanding of the co-op, while bringing my background expertise in business and finance to the table. My ability to analyze financials and business proposals will provide the co-op with added board member strength.

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

My analytical skills, understanding financial statements, business proposals, and dealing with complex government regulations are the strengths I bring to the table.

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

Technology and customer confidentiality issues are important issues to deal with today. Keeping up with alternative energy sources is another important issue to offer current customers. I have an interest in solar projects for the St. Cloud area.

### **Recent board/council experience:**

State Bank of Bellingham, former Director  
Security State Bank of Maple Lake, former Director

**District 6 serves 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.*

## SAVE MONEY WITH RESIDENTIAL REBATES AND PROGRAMS

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!

### **HEATING & COOLING REBATES**

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

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

#### **ENERGY STAR® rated 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 heating: \$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.

#### **ECM (electronically commutated motor): \$25**

(Replacement only - new furnaces do not qualify)

#### **Pool air source heat pump: \$400**

#### **ENERGY STAR rated heat pump water heater: \$100**

### **APPLIANCE REBATES**

**ENERGY STAR rated freezer and refrigerator: \$25**  
(with recycling of old unit)

**ENERGY STAR rated dehumidifier: \$25**

**ENERGY STAR rated electric clothes dryer: \$25**

**Wi-Fi-enabled thermostat: \$25**

**Vehicle engine block heater timer: outdoor rated \$15**

### **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.

*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.*



Your Touchstone Energy® Cooperative 

**East Central Energy**  
PO Box 39  
Braham, MN 55006

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

**1.800.254.7944**  
General business calls are answered Monday-Friday, 8 a.m.-5 p.m.

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)



If you have reliable internet access at home, count yourself lucky. Many of our members have expressed frustration regarding current options and rural accessibility.

In February, we asked our social media followers why they want or need better internet services. Common responses included adults working from home, children and teens researching school reports, cameras in the barn for foaling time, the desire to stop paying for mobile hot spots, and of course entertainment: how nice it would be to stream a movie without lagging, or for the kids to play a video game with their friends on the weekends. None of these hopes are

grandiose—our members just want the ability to maximize their time and participate in everyday experiences.

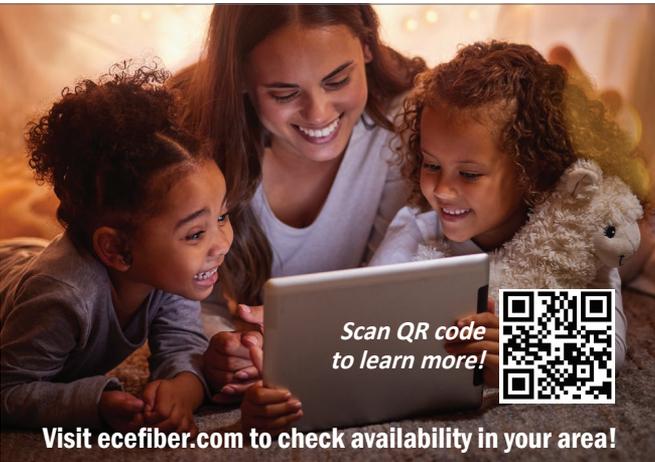
We hear you! Your cooperative is making large strides towards closing the digital divide. ECE Fiber is coming your way soon and will be offering a step up from broadband: fiber internet, the gold standard.

We're planning to begin construction Phase 1 of 5 in May (funded by ECE in the amount of \$30 million, plus nearly \$15 million in MN Border-to-Border grants). The overall cost is \$350 million. Grants are an important component, and supply chain issues could prolong our overall target. We look forward to eventually offering lightning-fast fiber internet service to ALL members!

While we're still working on services and pricing, the level of interest from each neighborhood could impact our construction schedule and allow us to get to certain areas sooner. Be sure to visit [ecefiber.com](http://ecefiber.com) to add your address to the list of potential subscribers, then ask friends, family, and neighbors to do the same. Don't rely on luck! Just as our predecessors in 1936, let's work together to change our rural landscape.



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to help you work, study, and stream at home.



Scan QR code to learn more!

**Visit [ecefiber.com](http://ecefiber.com) to check availability in your area!**





# Join us for East Central Energy's 87<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting - "Rural Roots"

Thursday, April 20, 2023

Braham Event Center, 655 8<sup>th</sup> St. SW, Braham, MN 55006

Registration & EV showcase 5 p.m. | Business meeting 6 p.m.

Hot appetizers, prize & bill credit drawings



Meeting will be streamed  
live on Facebook



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eastcentralenergy.com

*ECE is an equal opportunity provider and employer.*