



Co-op Advantage

Teacher Totes is still GR8 Continuing to support educators

Did you know most teachers spend their own money to prepare and maintain their classrooms? Eight years ago, we created the Teacher Totes initiative to help alleviate back-to-school financial stress for local educators.



Employees from every department work together to purchase and sort the supplies, then assemble and deliver to public elementary schools within our service area. Items include LCD writing tablets, label makers, wall pockets, and snacks for students.

"We appreciate that CoBank's Sharing Success grant matches ECE's \$10,000 donation," explains Desiree Cuda, who organizes the Teacher Totes project. "We're committed to supporting local communities and our educators are a vital component."

This year we delivered several totes filled with school supplies to elementary teachers in Cambridge, Four Corners, Isle, North Branch, Pine City, and Rice. Schools are on a three-year rotation.

Principal Scott Peterson from Cambridge Intermediate School says, "Part of our new mission statement talks about partnering with the community, and we are so fortunate to have East Central Energy support our teaching staff. We can't thank you guys enough!"



Internship insights

Careers in Energy Month



Behind the scenes of ECE, where our engineers use their highly technical skills to design and develop our system, Lacy Cuda had the opportunity to gain hands-on experience as a summer intern, which has been extended through November. Members might recognize her from our first year of COOPx in 2021. Now, two years later, she's winding down an engineering internship with us.

Her days at the co-op have been a whirlwind of activity, from working alongside our experienced engineers to bringing her flair for creativity to the team's communication strategies. Nate Knudsen, System Engineer II, speaks highly of Lacy's dedication. "During her time here, she's shown an ability to learn quickly. We have a lot of added projects coming through the engineering department—from the fiber buildout, grant applications, and solar hosting capacities—and there's no way these projects could have remained on their expected timelines without Lacy's skills and contributions."



Lacy and Nate

One of her most notable projects involved collaborating with the team on the co-op's five-year work plan. "I was able to create many aspects of the plan on my own and present it to the engineering team," Lacy notes. "They gave me a lot of guidance and mentoring, which has significantly contributed to my growth as an engineer."

As we celebrate Careers in Energy Month, Lacy offers some tips for those interested in learning more about the industry. "An electric co-op is such a great place to get started in your career. You get to experience real-world situations alongside supportive professionals, using top-notch technology, all while living in a small town."

With her internship ending next month, Lacy's plans include pursuing a degree in electrical engineering and (hopefully) returning to the cooperative as a full-fledged engineer. As she steps into the next phase of her journey, which includes a deployment in January 2024 through the U.S. Army National Guard, we thank her for her service and wish her safe travels and a successful school year!



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Careers & Job Openings

Clean up for fall safely

Another summer has come and gone. Many of us capitalize on the cooler weather to prepare our yards for winter. Here are three tips to help you avoid electrical hazards during your fall chores:

- If your cleanup involves trimming trees or removing foliage, be mindful of any power lines in the vicinity. Accidental contact between tree limbs and power lines can result in fire, serious injury, or death.
- When using a ladder for gutter cleaning, always make sure to maintain a 10-foot distance from power lines. Carefully assess your surroundings and ensure there's ample clearance.
- Keep cords away from water. When using extension cords or power tools outdoors, keep them elevated and away from puddles, wet leaves, or other sources of moisture.

Safety should always be your top priority during fall cleanup. Happy fall y'all!



Protecting the financial stability of your co-op

We work hard to keep ECE financially strong on behalf of all our members, while upholding our commitment to safely provide reliable electricity. Energy rates are carefully structured to collect what we need to meet our financial obligations and to dependably serve our diverse 14-county service area.

As we all know, the cost of goods and services continues to rise, and the utility industry is not immune. Our staff and board of directors are currently reviewing the results of an independent cost-of-service study, which will help verify what it costs to serve each member class (residential and commercial).

Redistricting in progress

Our February 2023 addition of 2,000 North Branch members has necessitated a redrawing of the director district map, which must be completed so that each district is substantially equal in population. This process, called redistricting, is important in ensuring that each board member represents about the same number of members (MN Statute 308A.313).

During the regular board meeting August 24, a resolution related to redistricting was approved. While we will still have six districts, the boundaries will be redrawn, and you might land in a new district. More details will be shared in the November Co-op Advantage.

FALL BACK NOVEMBER 5

Changing your clocks is a good time to test your smoke alarms. Be sure to change replaceable batteries if needed.



Change your clocks

Test your batteries



NATIONAL FIRE

PREVENTION *month*

Residential Member Satisfaction Survey begins in November

We are conducting a random telephone/online survey to explore member views about ECE communications and community engagement. If you are contacted for the survey, we would appreciate your participation. Your input will help us plan for the future.

Neighbors helping neighbors

In today's fast-paced world, it's easy to overlook the importance of small communities caring for one another. However, thanks to members like you, we can all help those who need it most through the Caring Members program. Even better, ECE matches funds, so donations are essentially doubled!

This unique initiative aims to build stronger connections between our members, while also addressing the needs of those facing challenges. 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. The program is administered by Lakes and Pines Community Action Council (MN); Tri-County Action Program, Inc.; and Rural Housing Development (WI).



Please consider stretching your donation fund twice as far by contributing to the tax-deductible Caring Members program. Call 1-800-254-7944 and make a tangible difference to a neighbor in need.



As we near the end of ECE Fiber's first year, we're excited to share that target areas for 2024 are finally mapped out!

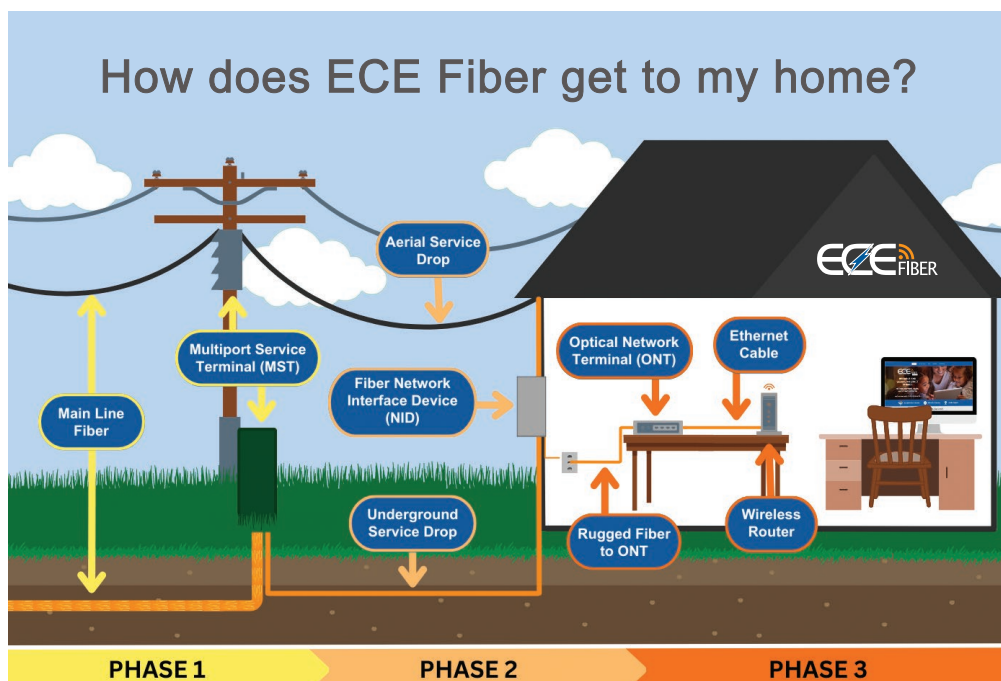
There are still a few details to finalize, but fiber construction will be broken down into two different stages. The first will focus on grant-funded areas including Cambridge, Mora, North Branch, and Pine City. To meet grant requirements, these areas must be completed by summer 2026. The second stage will tackle ECE-funded locations in portions of Harris and Rush City.

As grants become available, we will continue to apply in the hopes of bringing fiber to more areas. With a project total of \$350 million, grants are essential to the success of this project.

I'm proud of how far we've come this year. We went from hiring new fiber personnel to breaking ground, then promotion and sign-ups, registering internet packages, and our first fiber connections are soon going live. By bridging the digital divide, ECE Fiber aims to empower residents with seamless access to online education, telemedicine, e-commerce, and remote work opportunities.

Whether you're considering upgrading to fiber, or simply want to stay informed about your cooperative's exciting new venture, keep an eye on ecefiber.com for updates.

At your service we remain,



Your Touchstone Energy® Cooperative 

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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

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:
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NEIGHBORS HELPING NEIGHBORS

This winter, help keep the lights on for a neighbor in need.
Donate to East Central Energy's

Caring Members Program



ECE is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

Did you know
ECE matches donations?

Call us today to make
a difference.

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