

March 2024

Director election
Meet the candidates

Residential rebates
Save money & energy

ECE Fiber
Ribbon cutting event



C6-6p ADVANTAGE

Constructing the future through voting

The ECE Credentials & Election Committee met February 21 and approved director candidates for Districts 1, 3, and 6 for the 2024 election year. 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 27. Online voting opens March 27 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 17. As a reminder, ECE does not participate in the sending or tabulation of ballots.

Please join us for ECE's 88th Annual Meeting at the Braham Event Center on April 18 with the theme of "Beyond the Blueprints." Grab some hot appetizers beginning at 5 p.m. and peruse the multiple electric vehicles on display or stop by our fiber informational table.

The meeting begins at 6 p.m. sharp, which includes a short review of the 2023 activities of the cooperative, director election results, and exciting prize drawings at the end of the evening—including bill credits.

OFFICIAL NOTICE East Central Energy Annual Meeting

"BEYOND THE BLUEPRINTS"

April 18, 2024

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

Registration & EV Showcase
opens 5 p.m.
Business meeting 6 p.m.



Meeting will also be
streamed live on Facebook

To learn if you live in one of
these districts, please check
the upper-right corner
of your bill.

Member Name(s) JOHN PUBLIC

Account: 123456700
Board District: 3
Bill Type: Bank Draft



MEET THE CANDIDATES
ON PAGES 3-5

Grow and behold – a free tree!



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 18. You will need your ECE account number to process your order at arborday.org/eastcentralenergy. Supplies are limited. All calls about the program should be directed to 1-855-234-3801.



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

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

(MN) Gopher State One Call
Call 811 or 800-252-1166
or visit gopherstateonecall.org

(WI) Digger's Hotline
Call 811 or 800-242-8511
or visit diggershotline.com



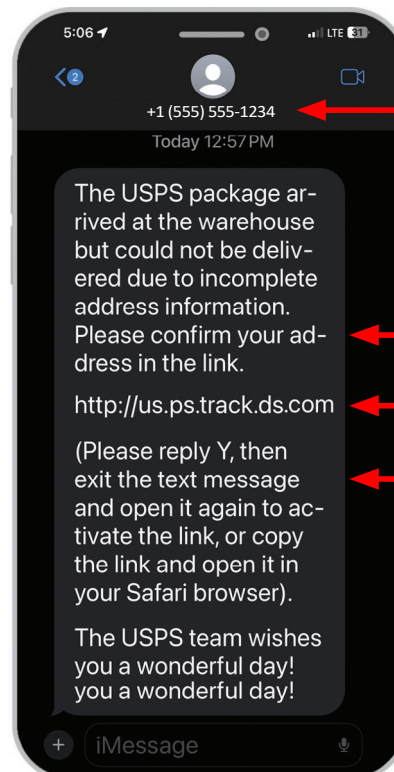
NEVER IGNORE THE RED FLAGS

Cybercriminals continue to target shoppers with urgent phishing emails and smishing text messages about their recent purchases.

A very common scam includes fake shipping delays. Typically, these have a sense of urgency, designed to catch you off guard in the hopes you'll click impulsively.

Remember that the post office does NOT have your phone number! Clicking a link in a text will likely direct you to a screen attempting to obtain your financial information. Don't click the link and be aware of the red flags!

Visit uspis.gov (United States Postal Inspection Service) for more helpful information.



UNKNOWN CONTACT

ASKING FOR PERSONAL INFORMATION

NEVER CLICK ON A LINK

NEVER REPLY

District 1 Acclaimed Director

Since only one candidate has been nominated by the members in District 1, no election will be held, and the candidate so nominated has been declared duly certified as co-op director by the ECE Credentials & Election Committee.



Greg Kvasnicka
(Incumbent)

Why do you want to serve as an ECE Director?

I would like to continue serving as I have the time, energy, and experience in the electric utility industry, including knowledge of all facets of electric utility director responsibilities, and the desire to continue to serve ECE members as a dedicated ECE Board Director.

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

I bring six years' experience and training as an ECE Director; 35 years in the electrical industry, the last 25 years as an ECE employee, retiring as Manager of Energy Services and Facilities. I hold an Electrical Technology degree, MN Licensed Master Electrician, and have experience serving on several boards.

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

All electric utilities in the country face many common challenges, including drastically increasing costs, state and federal mandates, and cyber security, but I believe that the biggest challenge for ECE in the coming years will be the successful rollout and establishment of ECE Fiber, ECE's new high-speed internet product.

Recent board/council experience:

- East Central Energy, Board Director/Assistant Secretary Treasurer
- Park Township, Board Clerk
- Como Oil & Propane (former ECE subsidiary), Board Member
- Pine County Housing & Redevelopment Authority, Board Chair
- Pine County Historical Society, Board Member

Serving all or part of the following areas in Minnesota:

Arlone, Arna, Atkinson, Barry, Birch Creek, Blackhoof, Bremen, Bruno, Clear Creek, Clover, Danforth, Dell Grove, Finlayson, Fleming, Hinckley, Holyoke, Kerrick, Kettle River, New Dosey, Nickerson, Norman, Ogema, Park, Partridge, Pine Lake, Sandstone, Silver Brook, Sturgeon Lake, Twin Lakes, Wilma, Windemere, and Wrenshall, including the cities of Bruno, Denham, Finlayson, Hinckley, Kerrick, Rutledge, Sandstone, Sturgeon Lake, and Willow River.

Serving all or part of the following areas in Wisconsin:

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



*Lighting the
way together*

One of your co-op's most powerful and long-standing collaborations is with Lakes & Pines Community Action Council. In 1964, Lakes & Pines' original staff of 10 operated out of a small office space in Braham provided by East Central Energy. Though their central office is now located in Mora and staff has multiplied tenfold, Lakes & Pines still helps administer our Caring Members program, which is funded by donations and assists members struggling to pay their electric bills.

"ECE's Caring Members initiative underscores our shared commitment to address the unique needs of individuals and families within the communities we both serve," describes Denise Stewart, Executive Director at Lakes & Pines.

Founded on the principles of community empowerment, Lakes & Pines is deeply committed to fostering a brighter future for the residents of Aitkin, Carlton, Chisago, Isanti, Kanabec, Mille Lacs, and Pine counties.

Denise continues, "Partnering with entities like ECE embodies the spirit of Lakes & Pines' grassroots initiatives and really highlights the power of collaboration."

The Caring Members program continues to play a vital role in ensuring the safety and comfort of our members. Don't forget, the Cold Weather Rule, which governs how ECE handles winter disconnects, ends April 30. We encourage you to call us if you are struggling to pay your electric bill. We're here to help!

District 3 Board of Director candidates



Rocky DeVries

Why do you want to serve as an ECE Director?

As director of ECE District 3, I will ensure that every member in our district has access to fast, affordable internet. Our area has been lacking this important amenity for far too long.

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

I am a thoughtful, dynamic leader. My leadership style is one of pragmatism and finding common ground. My goal will always be to put the needs of ECE's members first and to serve as a voice for the members in my district.

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

Continuing to provide reliable, affordable electrical service and internet in the face of rising costs. Maintaining transparency, so members better understand the services we receive and any changes to our bills.

Recent board/council experience:

- Skyway Software Symposium, Founder
- Minnesota Roller Derby, Head Referee



Rick Olson
(Incumbent)

Why do you want to serve as an ECE Director?

After being on the board for four years, I believe I understand the goals of the cooperative and the goal to serve the members with reliable electricity and broadband.

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

Over 20 years of experience as an owner and board member of a growing small business. Leadership experience where I can advocate for members' best interests. Ability to adapt and stay up to date on ever-changing economic fluctuations. Approachable, personable, and available to listen to fellow members' concerns.

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

Maintaining competitive and low energy prices while still providing excellent and reliable service. As ECE builds broadband, coming up with innovative ways to meet the needs of all members within the region.

Recent board/council experience:

- Olson Power and Equipment, Board Member

Serving all or part of the following areas:

Amador, Chisago Lake, Fish Lake, Franconia, Lent, New Scandia, North Branch, Oxford, Shafer, and Sunrise, including the cities of Chisago City, Center City, Harris, Lindstrom, North Branch, Scandia, and Shafer.

District 6 Board of Director candidates



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 six 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 wind and solar energy and at the same time having reliable power with existing power sources, which would keep the cost of energy affordable. 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
- Christian Labor Association, Pension Board
- Saints Peter & Paul Church, Maintenance & Building Board
- Knights of Columbus, Trustee
- Catholic United Financial, Trustee



Rick Stevens

Why do you want to serve as an ECE Director?

I would like to give back to the community. I see the energy business having many new hurdles and obstacles coming at it in the next few years and I feel my background will assist the cooperative overcome these hurdles and obstacles and make it stronger for the cooperative membership.

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

My banking background, analytical skills, understanding of financial statements, dealing with complex government regulations, and being able to get to the core of issues and make rational, sound business decisions to benefit the cooperative are all the strengths that I bring to the table.

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

Government regulation, technology, customer confidentiality, high-speed internet and solar and wind energy issues appear to be the biggest issues the cooperative faces in the coming years.

Recent board/council experience:

- State Bank of Bellingham, Board Member
- Security State Bank of Maple Lake, Board Member
- Bank of Maple Plain, Advisor

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, Sauk Rapids, St. George, Santiago, and Watab, including the cities of Foley, Foreston, Gilman, Glendorado, Milaca, Pease, Rice, Ronneby, Royalton, Santiago, Sauk Rapids, and St. Cloud.



RESIDENTIAL REBATES

Combined with ECE's low off-peak rates, rebates make electric heating and cooling more affordable. Incentives, current rates, criteria, and guidelines for residential members can be found on our website or by calling us. Rebates are issued as a bill credit (under \$1,000) or check (over \$1,000).



HEATING & COOLING

- **Ducted air source heat pump: \$750-\$1,000**
Cooling and supplemental heating with 72% less energy than conventional air conditioners and furnaces. Ask about 0% financing!
- **Ductless (mini-split) air source heat pump: \$150-\$1,000**
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**
A complete heating and cooling system using the constant temperature of the earth to transfer heat.
- **Storage space heating: \$100/kW**
Converts and stores electricity to heat during off-peak hours using specially-designed technology. Ask about 0% financing!
- **Air conditioner tune-up: \$25**
- **Pool air source heat pump: \$400**
Warm air from outside heats your pool. Pump must be tested to AHRI 1160 standards.
- **ENERGY STAR rated, variable speed pool pump: \$200**



WATER HEATING

- **Storage water heater: up to \$500**
Water is heated during off-peak hours to meet your daily hot water needs. Ask about 0% financing!
- **Interruptible water heating: \$250**
- **ENERGY STAR rated heat pump water heater: \$500**



APPLIANCES

- **ENERGY STAR rated refrigerator and/or freezer purchase: \$75**
(with recycling of old unit)
- **Refrigerator or freezer recycling: \$50**
- **ENERGY STAR rated dehumidifier: \$25**
- **ENERGY STAR rated electric clothes dryer: \$25**
- **Wi-Fi enabled smart thermostat: \$25**
- **Vehicle engine block heater timer (outdoor rated): \$10**
- **LED yard light fixture (50-100W): \$30**



ELECTRIC VEHICLE CHARGER: \$500

Already own an electric vehicle or thinking of buying one? We offer a rebate to install a Level 2 charger on either the time-of-use rate or off-peak storage rate. Rebate available for primary residence only.

ECE FIBER FROM ZERO TO 100



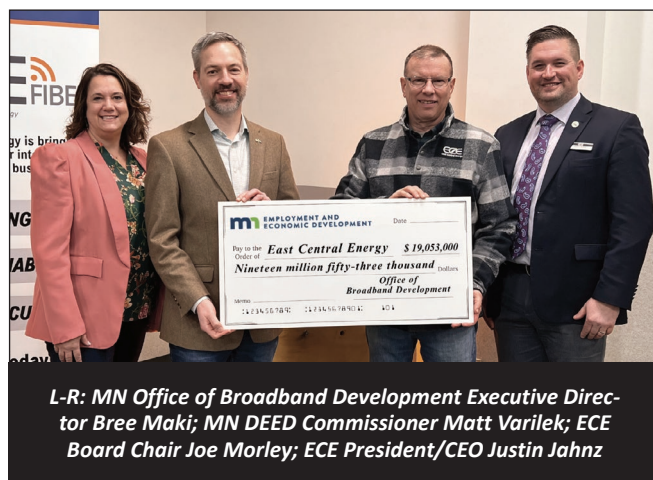
As of February 1, your co-op hit a milestone of 100 members connected to ECE Fiber internet! This was the first of many historic milestones for our newest endeavor and was certainly an exciting time for members in the Dalbo, MN, area.

Throughout the last year, we certainly saw our fair share of growth. With over 850 miles of fiber lines constructed, 14,500+ members expressing interest, 34 new employees, a new operations center built, and the first members connected to fiber, we all have a lot to be proud of.

To celebrate this achievement, the co-op hosted a ribbon-cutting event on February 23 at our Braham Headquarters location. By the time the ribbon-cutting ceremony took place, fiber connections hovered around 280 people. In attendance were smiling faces from the entire project trajectory, including partners from townships, cities, counties, state government agencies, and local media.



During the event, President/CEO Justin Jahnz said a few words regarding the historic achievement. "In 1936, ECE powered its first address and undeniably improved the lives of members throughout the region," he mentioned. "Now 88 years later, we are connecting members to fiber internet and bridging the digital divide. ECE Fiber service provides an opportunity for members to participate in remote work, distance learning, telehealth, and so many other opportunities that improve daily life."



Although fiber construction was paused during the winter months, the co-op has continued to accept registrations for the Braham, Cambridge, Dalbo, Ogilvie, and Pine City areas. Spring construction will begin once the ground thaws and will generally follow ECE's power structure (using both overhead and underground lines).

You are encouraged to visit ecefiber.com to sign up and express interest in internet services. You'll also receive timely email updates as ECE moves closer to your area.



We surpassed the 100-member mark exactly one year after the launch of ecefiber.com!



The winter of 2023-24 shaped up to be the winter that wasn't. We had historically warm temperatures and almost no snow. Our thoughts go out to the businesses who depend on winter activities and associated revenue.

In the middle of January, we did experience a period of cold weather in Minnesota and Wisconsin, and more importantly, that cold weather pushed all the way into the southern parts of the Midcontinent Independent System Operator (MISO) market. During the cold weather, we saw market demand spike to high levels.

Baseload generation resources like coal, natural gas, and nuclear supplied most of the energy during the cold snap. In fact, it represented up to 80% of the electricity serving the loads.

There was an abundance of energy available. Reserves in the market exceeded the load by more than 20%. At no time was there a risk of rolling blackouts.

Wind was available and helped keep market prices reasonable. Because there was an abundance of wind in southern Minnesota and the Dakotas, many more

expensive resources (such as peaking stations owned by our power supplier) were not needed. If these resources had been called upon, we would have seen prices go much higher.

Often, we hear strong political messages around the U.S. generation mix. Some advocate for more renewable energy, claiming it can do everything our legacy resources do. Others would rather see us hold onto our fossil fuel resources at all costs, asserting that wind is unreliable and financially unsustainable.

This weather event, while locally normal for our region, did create pressure on our regional market, and the resource mix performed well. Neither end of the political spectrum can point to the event and prove their arguments because it was our baseload, combined with recently developed wind assets, that kept energy reliable and affordable through a regionally challenging event.

At your service we remain,



Email: info@ecemn.com

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.

The ECE Board of Directors meets monthly. Please call 1-800-254-7944 and ask to talk to our Executive Administrator to confirm meeting information. Monthly board meeting minutes 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



Email: info@ecfiber.com

Website:
ecfiber.com



East Central Energy Annual Meeting

"BEYOND THE BLUEPRINTS"

April 18, 2024 - Braham Event Center

655 8th St. SW, Braham, MN 55006

Registration & EV Showcase opens 5 p.m. • Business meeting 6 p.m.

ECE 1.800.254.7944
eastcentralenergy.com

ECE is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

Appetizers, prize & bill credit drawings

Meeting will also be streamed
live on Facebook

