



# Co-op Advantage

## Tusen Tack wins Touchstone Energy Community Award

Among the many organizations that applied for the 2020 Touchstone Energy® Community Award, one stood out due to the scope and nature of its work. A spark at the heart of its community, Tusen Tack of Braham, MN, currently administers four entities, including a thrift store, food shelf, the Braham Event Center (which is home to their commercial kitchen, Kathy's Kitchen), and the Alice Studt Library. It is the winner of this year's award, which comes with a prize of \$1,000—a fitting amount for an organization that translates to “thousand thanks” in Swedish.

For the last 31 years, Tusen Tack has been serving East Central Minnesota as a largely volunteer-run organization and currently engages around 200 volunteers. A combination of programs allows the group to contribute financially to community projects, supply food and clothing to area residents, provide meeting space and meals for fundraisers and organizations, and offer educational classes.

*“Helping improve the quality of life for residents in East Central Minnesota is one of our goals.”*



“Dollars stay local when residents can find necessities, enjoy social events, and turn to the safety net of a food shelf when needed,” describes Patty Lind, who nominated Tusen Tack for the award.



After years of fundraising, Tusen Tack opened the Braham Event Center in 2014, a grassroots project that involved a lot of hard work, collaboration, community spirit, and generous donations. However, the event center has served as more than a gathering place. Kitchen volunteers provide delicious creations for guests. Located within the facility is the Braham Food Shelf and a library, which helps fill the digital gap by offering free public access to computers and the internet.

Across town at the thrift store, volunteers take pride in keeping prices low. Shoppers find quality merchandise, and proceeds support Tusen Tack programs and other community projects. Since the pandemic, the store has continued to overcome obstacles. The group's strength lies in highly-involved volunteers who donate their time to promote the community as an inclusive, thriving place to call home.

“East Central Minnesota is an economically-challenged area,” explains Lind. “By offering a wide range of services, Tusen Tack hopes individuals and families will be more stable, and that life will be a little better for citizens and the overall community.”

*“By working together, we've proved that small towns are stronger than ever.”*

ECE presents the Touchstone Energy Community Award annually to a local organization that is making a difference in its community. Due to the financial strain of the pandemic, all applicants received a donation from ECE. As the local winner, Tusen Tack will be recognized during the ECE Annual Meeting on April 22, and will be entered in competition for the statewide Touchstone Energy Community Award.

# Students apply for COOPx

The 2021 Electric Cooperative Youth Tour has been canceled, but don't worry—we're planning a new experience in its place! We're pleased to announce COOPx, your cooperative's three-day alternative to forgoing the Youth Tour.

After completing a written or video essay and a short interview, we plan to invite three students to explore their futures by meeting with our most passionate co-op leaders over the course of three days. The selected students will also receive a scholarship to be used for continuing education.

The experience will be held June 23-25, 2021, at ECE's Braham Headquarters location, and is open to students in grades 10-12.

**Apply before April 5**

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

## Feeling chilled?

### Think twice before using a space heater



**Before you dust off your space heater, remember to consider two things: cost and safety. There's a bite in the air at this time of year, and there could be a bite out of your wallet if you use an electric space heater too often. Space heaters can provide affordable comfort if used for a short time to heat a small space, but if used every day around the clock, one heater can add more than \$100 per month to your electric bill.**

#### If you must use a space heater, here are some safety tips to remember:

- Do not leave them unattended and remove any items within 3 feet.
- Plug them directly into outlets—don't use an extension cord.
- Keep children and pets away from space heaters at all times.
- Turn them off before you leave the room or go to sleep.



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## Notice to small power producers and cogenerators

In compliance with Minnesota Adopted Rules Relating to Cogeneration and Small Power Production, Chapter 7835, we are required to interconnect with and purchase electricity from cogenerators and small power producers which satisfy the conditions of a Qualifying Facility.

We provide free information to all interested members regarding rates and interconnection requirements. An application for interconnection is required for a Qualifying Facility to interconnect and operate in parallel with the cooperative's distribution system and is subject to approval by the cooperative.

Members interested in further information should contact us or visit our website.



## Congratulations

Victor Lindgren, Dalbo, MN

Visit our website to learn more about Auto Pay.

# Thank you retirees

Join us in congratulating Leon, Luanne, Deb, and Pam, who retired in January with a total of 86 years of experience at ECE. Whether it was by stringing new power lines, calculating your capital credits payout, checking meter data, or greeting you with a smile when you stopped in, we know these four have impacted all of our cooperative members in a positive way. We wish them a long, healthy retirement!



**Leon Payne**  
Area Service Foreman

Leon came to ECE when we merged with North Pine Electric and is now retiring with 30 years of service. He's seen a lot of changes over the years! Leon is looking forward to golfing, fishing, working on home projects, traveling, and enjoying his grandchildren.



**Luanne Browen**  
Capital Credit Specialist

Over the last 21 years, Luanne has built many friendships at ECE. At the same time, she is ready to retire her calculator! She plans to spend time with her grandchildren, work on crafts, and continue her addiction with thrift store/vintage "junk" shopping.



**Deb Norling**  
Meter Data Analyst

After 20 years of service, Deb has her sights set on her favorite hobbies: gardening, quilting, traveling, and (of course!) spending time with family. She feels lucky to have worked with such a wonderful team, but is excited to see where the co-op goes in the future.



**Pam Fitzsimmons**  
Contact Specialist  
Front Office

Pam is retiring after 15 years at the cooperative. She will miss her co-op family, but is looking forward to spending more time with her kids and grandkids, motorcycling, hiking, gardening, crafting, and learning new things.

## CLEAN HANDS ARE HAPPY HANDS

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to learn more.

## SAVE THE DATE



**ANNUAL MEETING**  
**April 22, 2021**

*(format to be determined)*

eastcentralenergy.com **3**



We purchase almost all of our energy from Great River Energy (GRE). In May 2020, when GRE announced their decision to transform their resource mix, it set a course to become one of the first major electricity producers in the Upper Midwest to have renewable resources as the main energy source. By the end of 2022, Great River Energy plans to shut down Coal Creek Station, the 1,100-MW coal plant that has been the largest production asset in GRE's generation fleet for many years, and is the largest coal plant in North Dakota. Electricity from Coal Creek Station travels toward the Twin Cities along a 436-mile, high voltage direct current line—which is rare, since most transmission lines run on alternating current—and after the station closes, the line will be able to be used in new ways.

Low market prices have made coal-fired power less competitive across the country and Coal Creek has been struggling financially for the last couple years. GRE has secured low-cost wind contracts to replace much of the energy production lost with the closure of the plant. We are fortunate to live in a region with world-class wind resources that are competitive in the market.

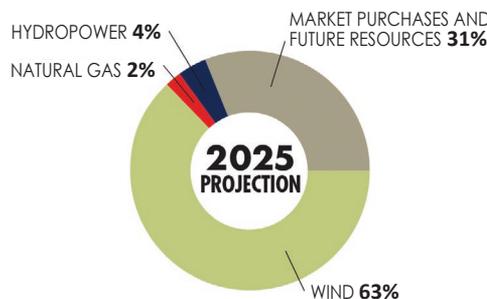
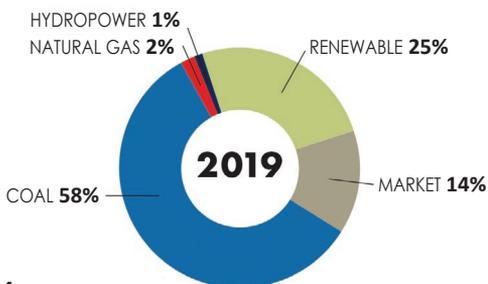
Our members have expressed concerns about the closure of the plant, and rightly so, as we have seen states like California suffer from reliability issues and rolling

blackouts. Rest assured, GRE has a fleet of natural gas peaking plants that can start up in minutes and quickly ramp production up or down to provide energy and year-round reliability for ECE's membership and the grid. In addition, the regional market where GRE buys and sells energy on our behalf is populated by high levels of baseload energy resources that include natural gas and coal.

Even though Coal Creek Station is a large asset, it represents less than 1% of the overall regional market capacity. Its closure will not impact reliability for the region or our membership. In fact, the closure of the plant will have a positive impact on the financial outlook of GRE and that value will translate to stable and promising long-term energy pricing. Future wind contracts will be competitive and provide a valuable hedge against the volatility of natural gas prices for decades to come.

A longtime leader in innovation, Great River Energy is Minnesota's second-largest electricity supplier. I have no doubt they will be our valued partner for many years to come, and I look forward to this next chapter.

*At your service we remain,*



Source: Great River Energy



East Central Energy  
P.O. Box 39  
Braham, MN 55006

**Service Center locations:**  
Braham and Milaca  
Monday-Friday  
Hours vary by service center.

**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)





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