

October 2020

October is National Co-op Month  
#PowerOn



# Co-op Advantage

## Careers in Energy

Proud to power the communities we serve

We're celebrating Careers in Energy Month by highlighting a few of our employees. All three have different job duties but provide an essential service to members. It takes a wide range of skills to keep an electric co-op running efficiently within member services, finance, mapping, line work, and more.

### CRAIG FLEET SERVICES SUPPORT



Craig has been with the co-op for two and a half years as Fleet Services Support. He orders and delivers parts, maintains asset software, and assists in data reporting and fleet analysis. Craig says, "Working here has been like finding family. I feel supported and understood. Everyone tries to keep the members in mind and I appreciate that level of integrity."



*"Careers in energy are on the rise. There is so much to explore, thanks to new technologies. It's definitely a career path worth investigating."*

~ Wendy Leibel  
ECE Employee Development Coordinator

### BEN SAFETY ADMINISTRATOR

Ben has worked as our Safety Administrator since January 2019. He came to ECE from the metro area and loves his shorter commute. "My family has a farm in Isanti," Ben notes, "So being able to work close by has made a huge difference." Because of their rural settings, many co-ops help keep money in the local economy while providing competitive wages and benefits.



**2,369** MN lineworker jobs expected to open in the next 10 years

### HEIDI COMMERCIAL SERVICES COORDINATOR

Heidi has been at the co-op for five years. In that time, she's held three different positions. "There is so much to learn in the energy industry!" Heidi stresses. "ECE is great about providing an opportunity to grow your skills and advance your career." As part of our commitment to employees, cooperatives support many types of development opportunities.

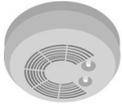


To learn about working in the energy industry, visit [getintoenergy.com](http://getintoenergy.com).



# FIRE SAFETY

As the nation recognizes Fire Prevention Month this October, we want to remind our members to:



Install smoke alarms and CO detectors, changing batteries twice a year.



Keep a fire extinguisher in the kitchen, garage, and laundry room.



Close all bedroom doors at night to slow the spread of flames and smoke.



Talk to your family about what to do and where to meet if a fire occurs.

*As a volunteer firefighter in Pine City, Forestry Specialist Kyle Palmer knows the importance of fire prevention.*



## TEACHER TOTES CELEBRATING EDUCATORS DURING A PANDEMIC



Sunrise River Elementary

We all know that a teacher's job isn't easy. However, when a student arrives without enough school supplies, it becomes even more difficult, and many teachers find themselves purchasing supplies with their own money. To support area teachers, students, and parents, each summer we shop for school supplies, load them into large storage totes, then deliver to area schools.



Isle Elementary

This year marked our fifth-annual Teacher Totes project. Even though the start of school looked a little different, supplies were delivered to teachers in Cambridge, North Branch, Pine City, Rice, Isle, and Superior, and included items like label makers, hand sanitizer, tissues, laminating machines, paper towels, headphones, and even snacks. Each school district received about \$3,000 in supplies.

Communications Coordinator Desiree Cuda, who organizes the Teacher Totes project, mentions, "This is a big undertaking but incredibly fulfilling. We're so grateful to again partner with CoBank through their Sharing Success program."



## Q&A with Doug Bitzan Area Service Foreman



Since October is Careers in Energy Month, we decided to chat with Doug Bitzan, Area Service Foreman from the Milaca district, who's been with us for 33 years—longer than anyone else currently working at ECE.

### How have the tools of your job changed in 33 years?

Everything has gotten much safer. For example, bucket trucks have become the norm and have greatly reduced trauma on the body. Not only is storm restoration faster, the overall wear-and-tear on linemen has been declining. Battery-operated tools, like crimpers, have really reduced repetitive injuries. Electricity has always been dangerous; we're just getting better at protecting ourselves from it.

### What has working at ECE meant to your family?

I've spoken to my family about this. My son feels that the nature of my job has taught him to be more self-sufficient. And while my career allowed my wife, Paula, to pursue her own passions, sometimes it can be tough for her to handle things on her own while I'm out doing storm work. Line wives are strong and I've been blessed with the best. Paula knows I work safely and that helps put her mind at ease.

### Looking back, if you weren't doing line work, what would you be doing?

I don't have an answer to this question! It's always been line work. My dad started as a lineman at a neighboring co-op in 1944; growing up, my brother and I would ride along on outages and help out. My siblings and I would help my mom answer outage calls because the "outage center" was actually a few phones in our basement. I started at ECE when I was 20 and haven't looked back.

*Doug's daughter, Rachel, will soon graduate college and has already secured a job at a cooperative. She writes, "Growing up with my dad in the co-op world has inspired me to take a similar path. I see a community of people that not only want to get safe, reliable energy to members' homes, but they also sincerely care about their employees. Ever since I was a little girl I have been immersed in the values and priorities of ECE. This has made me passionate about pursuing a career with rural electric cooperatives."*



You gotta be in it to **WIN** it

### Congratulations

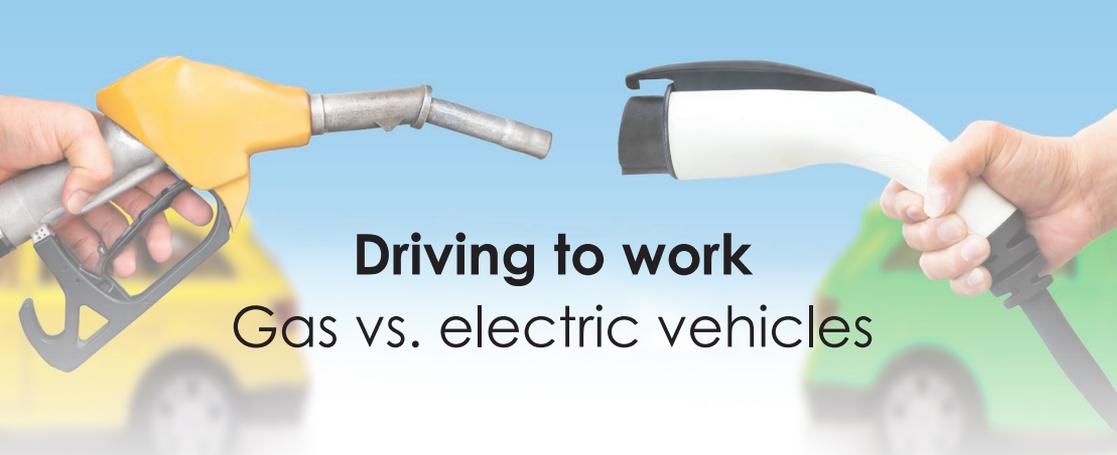
Lloyd Erdman  
Rice, MN

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## Are you satisfied with us?

You might not realize it, but we're not just another utility company. We are a cooperative, and that means every member has a voice. We are conducting a random telephone/on-line survey to explore member views about co-op programs and services.

If you are contacted for the survey, we would appreciate your participation. Your input will help us improve service and plan for the future.



# Driving to work Gas vs. electric vehicles

For those of us who drive to work each day, the cost of gas and regular maintenance can really add up. Have you thought about using an electric vehicle (EV) for your daily commute?

EVs have a lot to offer. They're better for the environment, can be charged overnight while you sleep (we're even offering \$1,000 rebates on level 2 chargers through December 31), and are less expensive to maintain. EVs are also decreasing in price.

Holly Giffrow-Bos, our Fleet Supervisor, has noticed the EV difference. "ECE purchased a Chevy Bolt in 2018," she explains. "Since then, our technicians have done nothing to this vehicle but rotate tires. There are no moving parts to be maintained or expensive exhaust systems, so there's no need for tune-ups or oil changes. Really all we'll do is inspections and maintenance on the brakes, tires, and suspension."

The Bolt is driven on daily errands by Keri Erickson, Safety & Wellness Coordinator, who says, "I love the Bolt. It's quiet, has a surprising amount of torque, and is always ready for last-minute trips to our Superior office because it charges at night."

If you're interested in figuring out the cost difference between an EV and a gas vehicle, there's a handy tool on the U.S. Department of Energy's site (<https://afdc.energy.gov/calc/>) that compares the overall cost of multiple vehicles at once based on your expected driving habits. It even takes into account your state so that it can adjust the fuel-cost data to fit the gas and electricity prices of your area.



ECE's Chevy Bolt operates at the equivalent of 60 cents per gallon if it ran on gasoline.



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**Service Center locations:**  
Braham and Milaca  
Monday-Friday  
8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

**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 Administrator Julie Johnson 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.

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**Website:**  
[eastcentralenergy.com](http://eastcentralenergy.com)



**Holiday office closings**  
November 26 and 27  
December 25



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