

ECE Co-op Advantage

Pine County Master Gardeners Touchstone Energy Community Award winner

If you want to build community, plant a garden.

Perhaps no one knows that better than the University of Minnesota (UMN) Extension Pine County Master Gardeners, our 2018 choice for ECE's Touchstone Energy® Community Award.



Master Gardeners Program coordinator Terry Salmela with Master Gardeners Kim Metz and Carol Evans

Through its affiliation with the University of Minnesota, the group of trained volunteers provides research-based horticulture information to the residents of Pine County. Local Master Gardeners spend countless hours in our communities, teaching, leading, and collaborating around all things horticulture.

They offer a Junior Master Gardener program at Pine City Elementary and work with the Summer Food and Fun Backpack program to help provide healthy food for at-risk children. They share their gardening knowledge at the Pine City Farmers' Market. Their 17th annual Horticulture Day on April 6, 2019 will bring about 200 gardening enthusiasts together to learn and share.

An annual plant sale has usually been enough to fund these initiatives, but this year the Master Gardeners have set their sights on a bigger project. They were excited to learn they won the Touchstone Energy Community Award, which comes with a cash prize of \$1,000.

"We are planning to revitalize and expand the Pine City Community Garden," said Terry Salmela, UMN Extension Pine County Master Gardener Program coordinator. "We plan to add a new fence, tall raised beds for those with accessibility needs, demonstration gardens and a pollinator garden with educational signs, and a patio with benches and picnic tables."

"We hope to increase community involvement and impact and create a beautiful place to visit and relax," he said.



Master Gardener Kim Metz teaching a garden workshop

ECE presents the Touchstone Energy Community Award annually to a local organization that is making a difference in its community. As the local winner, the Pine County Master Gardeners will be recognized during a presentation at the ECE Annual Meeting on April 11 and will be entered in competition for the statewide Touchstone Energy Community Award.

ANNUAL MEETING

April 11, 2019

**Braham Event Center and
ECE Superior Operations Center**
(via live video)

Registration begins 5 p.m. Business meeting 6 p.m.

Watt's Cookin'

Congratulations to Sandra Hasser, a member from Stanchfield, MN, for winning the Watt's Cookin' pasta recipe contest. Sandra will receive a \$25 energy credit.

TACO HOT DISH

1 box macaroni and cheese (prepare as directed)
¾ c. sour cream
2 ½ c. cheddar cheese (shredded)
1 lb. ground beef
1 onion (chopped) *optional*
1 pkg. taco seasoning
¾ c. water
1 c. thick and chunky mild salsa

Add sour cream to prepared mac' and cheese and mix well. Brown ground beef and onion. Add taco seasoning and water. Simmer five minutes. Place ½ of mac' and cheese mixture in a buttered 8x8-inch baking dish. Top with hamburger mixture and ½ of cheddar cheese. Spread remaining mac' and cheese on hamburger mixture. Bake 15 minutes at 350°. Remove from oven and top with salsa and remaining cheese. Bake five more minutes or until cheese is melted.

To enter our Watt's Cookin' contest, mail your favorite muffin recipe to Watt's Cookin', P.O. Box 39, Braham, MN 55006. Entries must include your name, address, telephone number, ECE account number, and be received by March 22, 2019. The winning recipe and the contributor's name and city will be featured in a future edition of the Co-op Advantage. Recipes can also be emailed to info@ecemn.com.

2 1.800.254.7944



Auto Pay WINNER

Visit our website to learn about Auto Pay. If you would like to be entered in the monthly drawing, sign up for Auto Pay today!

Members who currently participate in Auto Pay will automatically be entered in the drawing.

Congratulations
Ervin Stevens, Jr., Rush City, MN



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You can view your energy use by the day and the

week and compare bills month to month and year to year. If you notice unusual changes, you can easily contact us using SmartHub.

The SmartHub app can be downloaded to your mobile device, giving you secure access to your ECE account 24/7.

The app also provides a quick route to our Facebook page, which will keep you informed of co-op happenings, events and major outages. An outage map on SmartHub allows you to view the location of outages on our system by county and by township.

First-time users will need their ECE account number to register and access their account.

Out and about with **SAFETY** in mind

Safety is foremost in our cooperative culture. It's part of the job here at ECE, and it travels with us wherever we go.

ECE SAFETY FACTS:

SAFETY TRAINING - Employees collectively received more than 2,700 hours of safety training in 2018

FIRE EXTINGUISHERS - All co-op vehicles and equipment have fire extinguishers on board

AED UNITS - 40 of our vehicles are equipped with an AED unit

FIRST AID/CPR - 97 employees are certified in First Aid and CPR

EMPLOYEE RECOGNITION - Employees receive special recognition when they provide emergency assistance to someone in need

We all want the best for the people in our lives, and that includes you. Make safety a priority every day—at home, at work, at play.

A man in a blue shirt and glasses is looking at a smartphone. The phone screen shows a thermostat interface with "76° Thermostat" displayed. An Energy Star logo is in the bottom left corner of the image.

Wi-Fi-enabled thermostat

Control your energy use and save money with a Wi-Fi thermostat.

Visit our website to download residential rebate form.

\$25 REBATE

A circular graphic with a yellow-to-orange gradient. It features a white downward-pointing arrow in the center. The text "Energy-Saving Tip" is at the top, and "Your heating system works harder when the outdoor temp drops. Adjust your thermostat to the lowest comfortable setting." is at the bottom.

Energy-Saving Tip

Your heating system works harder when the outdoor temp drops. Adjust your thermostat to the lowest comfortable setting.

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.



ENERGY MATTERS

with ECE President/CEO Steve Shurts

The benefits and the costs of renewable energy

If we receive all the necessary approvals, more of the electricity ECE purchases from our power supplier will come from the sun when a 2 megawatt (MW) solar system is constructed in Cambridge, MN, this year.

ENGIE North America plans to build the array on about 15 acres of land it will lease from the city next to Sandquist Park. Great River Energy, our power supplier, will buy the electricity it generates and sell it to us with no mark-up. The facility will be connected to our distribution lines. When you flip the light switch, you'll be using some of the energy it produces, no matter where you live.

This renewable energy project is a perfect fit for the cooperative business model and a win for all of us. It has no impact on our long-term costs, so it won't affect your bill. It allows you to use clean, renewable energy and help the environment without any additional investment on your part.

Member-owned solar systems are another matter. We currently have 100 solar PV systems interconnected to our lines, and the number is growing each year. In 2018, we purchased more than 300,000 kWh of electricity from these systems. Under Minnesota's net metering statute,

we pay retail price for this electricity. That's a much higher price than what we pay Great River Energy for wholesale power.

I like to compare the current renewable energy scenario to a man who enters a restaurant with food he brought in himself. He sits down and uses the silverware, napkins, water, and table space to eat his food, without ordering anything. He does this every day for a week. Would that be fair to the customers who are paying to use the silverware, napkins, water and table space? Of course not.

Now, replace silverware and the other items with poles, lines and transformers, and you understand the challenge that's emerging. When one member isn't paying for his or her share of the infrastructure, other members are.

As a co-op, we exist to deliver safe, reliable electricity to everyone on our system. You and your fellow consumer members share in the cost to purchase, operate and maintain the equipment that makes electricity available. We work diligently to keep our rates fair and equitable to all. We aren't opposed to renewable energy, but we need to find a solution that lets all of us share in the benefits and the costs.



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

Service Center locations:
Braham, Milaca, and Finlayson
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

The ECE Board of Directors meets monthly. Please call Executive Administrator Julie Johnson at 763-689-8046 to confirm meeting information.

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





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