

# ECE Co-op Advantage

## A career and a life full of energy **President/CEO Steve Shurts retires**

Steve Shurts has been overdue for retirement. He was eligible to turn in his badge a few years ago, but wasn't quite ready to leave. "I enjoy my job and love the employees," Steve shares. "It would have been tough to leave then, and it still is."

His concept of TGIM (Thank Goodness It's Monday) is part of what employees will miss the most about their optimistic leader. After ten years of service to the cooperative and a career spanning 43 years, Steve is ready to explore retirement. He and his college sweetheart, Leila, plan to spend a month each winter in a sunny, southern location, then return home to enjoy their five children and 19 (and growing) grandchildren.

Steve's roots in the energy industry run deep. He graduated in 1976 with a B.S. in Nuclear Engineering from UW-Madison. Shortly after, he began his career at Northern States Power Company. He eventually became a manager at United Power Association before it merged with Cooperative Power Association to become Great River Energy in 1999. That same year, Steve completed his MBA at the University of St. Thomas. "Doing my homework at the kitchen table, while the kids were working on their homework, was a great way to hold each other accountable."



After a vice president position at Split Rock Energy, he served as general manager of Owatonna Public Utilities for seven years before coming to ECE. "I enjoyed working with cooperatives while at Great River Energy," he explains. "I knew I'd like the co-op culture and was ready for new challenges."

Since July 2010, Steve has led the cooperative as it developed strategic initiatives to address a changing economic and political environment. Under his leadership, ECE implemented a system-wide meter upgrade and established its first solar array, while fostering a culture of engagement and integrity. Steve was also instrumental in elevating the visibility of the cooperative business model. He built statewide relationships with cooperatives and municipalities alike, and has successfully lobbied for legislation that protects our industry and the pocketbooks of our members.

"I know ECE is poised for great things," he affirms. "Our cooperative has come a long way in ten years. It comes down to our talented employees, cohesive board of directors, and involved members. It's an effective combination that will continue long after I'm gone."



## Watt's Cookin'

Congratulations to Liz Bertelson, a member from Princeton, MN, for winning the Watt's Cookin' vegetarian recipe contest. Liz will receive a \$25 energy credit.

### MEATLESS MEATLOAF

1 can chickpeas, rinsed (save ½ c. liquid from can)  
2 cans black beans, drained and rinsed  
1 c. rolled oats  
3 T. liquid smoke  
1 c. cornmeal  
2 T. olive oil  
1 large onion, finely diced  
1 T. dried Italian seasoning  
2 tsp. sea salt  
1 tsp. black pepper  
2 T. Worcestershire sauce  
½ c. low sodium veggie broth  
½ c. ketchup  
1 c. barbecue sauce



Preheat oven to 350°. Blend or process chickpeas until creamy and spoon into large bowl. Blend one can of black beans until creamy. Pulse or chop second can of beans and add both to bowl. Grind oats to flour-like consistency, then add to bowl along with liquid smoke, cornmeal, and bean liquid.

Heat oil in skillet on medium heat. Add onions, Italian seasoning, salt and pepper. Sauté about five minutes or until onions are soft. Add Worcestershire sauce, veggie broth and ketchup. Stir until ketchup dissolves. Add to bean/chickpea mixture and gently combine all.

Evenly press mixture into greased 9-inch bread pan. Spread barbecue sauce on top. Cook 1 hour, 20 minutes. Yields 10 servings.

To enter our Watt's Cookin' contest, mail your **favorite recipe using honey** 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 July 17, 2020**. 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](mailto:info@ecemn.com).

# ELECTRIC SHOCK DROWNING

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## Q&A with Wendy Leibel Employee Development Coordinator



Cooperative Principle #5 focuses on education and training, and in today's competitive workforce, commitment to employee development helps attract and keep great people. We asked Wendy Leibel, our Employee Development Coordinator, to share some of her knowledge.

### Why does ECE value employee development?

Employees who feel empowered and supported are happier and more productive, and are willing to contribute more. We're continually creating a pool of capable individuals to help fill future positions. As a result, like many organizations, we have strong candidates within our organization. To put it simply, because we're investing in employees through things like development opportunities, everyone is a winner—especially our members.

### I'm hearing a lot about employee development. Why is it so important?

ECE's philosophy is that all employees can (and should) continually develop. With the way technology is evolving, we must keep an eye on the future, and that includes the skills of our employees. However, there's a difference between "training" and "development." Training is about helping employees learn specific knowledge and skills to do their current jobs, whereas development focuses on growth and the future. We ask our employees to select a development goal each year, then we discuss progress and results.

### Do you know of any development resources for me to utilize?

We take a three-prong approach to development: learn by doing, learn from others, and learn through education. Many people think the only way to develop is by going back to school, but more than anything, development is about having a growth mindset and seeking out resources from multiple avenues. Take on a special project or learn a new skill; find or be a mentor; watch a TED Talk; take a class at a local community college or through community ed; explore online learning resources like online degrees or programs like LinkedIn Learning, MasterClass, or edX. Most importantly, never stop reading, learning, and collaborating with others.

*Don't let summer slip by without learning something new! Keep an eye on career opportunities at ECE by visiting [eastcentralenergy.com](http://eastcentralenergy.com) > About Us > Careers.*

## Electrify Your Lawn Care

Summer is here! If you're in the market to upgrade your lawn care equipment, you may want to consider electric (or battery-powered) options. Here are three ways you can electrify your lawn care.

**Electric lawn mowers** are suitable for most lawn care needs and have come a long way over the last few years. Electricity is less expensive than gas, and electric engines generally require less maintenance than gas engines.

**Electric trimmers** are a great option for most lawns and are much quieter and easier to use. If you're interested in purchasing an electric trimmer, the main factors to consider are the battery's life, charge time, and power.

**Electric leaf blowers** are lightweight and easy to maneuver, making it a breeze (literally) to clear off those walkways and patios.

If you're looking to electrify your lawn care equipment, be sure to do your homework. Search trusted websites for the latest reviews. With a little research, you'll be well on your way to Lawn of the Month – with less maintenance, hassle and noise...and your neighbors will thank you!

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# Preserving the monarch population

## Pollinator Week June 22-28, 2020



The monarch butterfly, an iconic species, is under threat. According to Dr. Chip Taylor of Monarch

Watch, the monarch population declined 53% over winter. Monarch populations have been in decline for many years, which is why the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is currently examining whether to list the monarch butterfly as endangered.

Land managers like ECE and other utilities around the nation are combining their efforts to boost pollinator populations by enrolling in a Candidate Conservation Agreement with Assurances (CCAA). A variety of sectors make up tens of millions of miles of rights-of-ways in the U.S., and this collaborative effort will connect crucial habitat for monarch migration.

"As a cooperative, we care about the communities we serve," says Alicia Kroll, Member Account Analyst and the author of ECE's Powering Our Pollinators blog. "That includes

farmers, businesses, and families that rely on pollinators. Even if the monarch doesn't get listed as endangered, we are committed to boosting the pollinator population."

The CCAA encourages land managers to adopt conservation measures that address key threats to monarchs, including loss of habitat and habitat fragmentation. Fortunately, the required conservation measures are things we have been doing for years through our integrated vegetation management program. This includes targeted herbicide application to promote low-growing vegetation, suitable habitat set-asides, and seeding and planting to restore or create habitat. The monarch may be under threat, but with collaborative and proactive measures we have the power to help preserve the monarch and its habitat.

We are converting roughly five total acres to native pollinator-friendly habitat at our Braham Headquarters and Superior Operations Center. For updates on our pollinator projects, follow Alicia's blog, Powering Our Pollinators, on our website.



East Central Energy  
P.O. Box 39  
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Service Center locations:  
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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.

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