



Co-op Advantage

Your co-op, your **VOTE**

Last fall, the presidential election understandably attracted a lot of attention, but local elections have a huge impact on our daily lives. In 2021, ECE members in District 4 will elect their co-op leader.

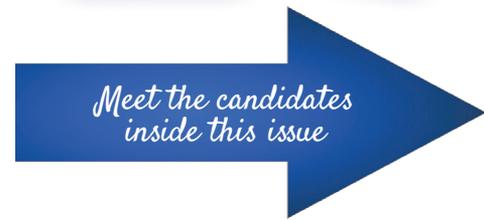
The ECE Credentials and Election (C&E) committee met February 24 and approved Joseph Morin and incumbent Joe Morley as District 4 candidates. Because current directors Lonnie Johnson, District 2, and Jerry Tvedt, District 5, were the only members nominated in their districts, they were acclaimed the winners by the C&E committee. No elections will be held in Districts 2 and 5.

Become familiar with each candidate by reading the personal profiles offered within this issue. Members in District 4 are invited to vote online or by mail. Official

ballots will be mailed the week of March 29. Online voting opens March 31 at 8 a.m. Paper and online ballots must be received by Survey and Ballot Systems (SBS) no later than 8 a.m. April 21, so be sure to mail your paper ballot early. The outcome of the election will be announced at the ECE Annual Meeting on April 22.

Most of the things that impact our daily lives happen on a local level and are influenced by community members who live and work in the area. ECE was established over 85 years ago by members just like you. This is your co-op, and your vote is crucial to the future of our success.

ECE does not participate in the tabulation of ballots. Instead, we contract with SBS, a third-party election management provider.



Official Notice
East Central Energy
Annual Meeting

Join us
ONLINE ONLY

APRIL 22, 2021 - 11 A.M.

Visit eastcentralenergy.com for details.



Congratulations

Wally Smetana
Pine City, MN

Visit our website
to learn more about
Auto Pay.

District 4 Board of Director candidates



Joseph Morin

What strengths would you bring to the cooperative's board of directors?

I was on the Cambridge City Council for 13-plus years, and have worked on budgets and planning for all of those years. I have represented the city in official functions in the state and internationally. I had the privilege of giving speeches internationally also.

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

The companies that provide exceptional customer service are the ones who survive. So, ECE must continue to do its very best while keeping utility rates as low as possible.

Why do you want to serve as an ECE Director?

I learned early in life everyone needs to be involved and serve as they are able. My parents instilled this in me, and I still strive to do it today. Plus, if you try new things, you grow and learn. What a great idea that is!

Recent board/council experiences:

Cambridge City Council, 13-plus years
Cambridge Planning Commission
Boy Scouts, Merit Badge Counselor
Cambridge-Isanti Community Education committee, current Chairman, 6 years



Joe Morley
Incumbent

What strengths would you bring to the cooperative's board of directors?

A strong business and financial background, over twenty years as a director on this board and a willingness to challenge ECE staff.

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

Rates, rates, rates. As we see favorable wholesale power rates in the years ahead, ECE needs to adapt to make sure the members receive the benefits.

Why do you want to serve as an ECE Director?

It takes many years to understand the complexities of the utility business. I am always learning and using my cooperative experience to support the membership. I am in good health and still have a strong mind to continue to serve as a director on this board.

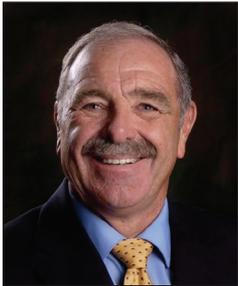
Recent board/council experiences:

East Central Energy, Director
Great River Energy, Director
National Cooperative Services Corporation, former Director, varied positions including Board Chair
Cambridge Volunteer Fire Department, former member, 23 years
Numerous chamber and business board positions

Serving all or part of the following areas: Athens, Bogus Brook, Cambridge, Dalbo, Isanti, Maple Ridge, Princeton, Springvale, Stanchfield, and Wyanett.

District 2 Acclaimed Director

This year in Districts 2 and 5, the only candidates nominated by petition were the incumbents, Lonnie Johnson and Jerry Tvedt. They were confirmed and acclaimed winners by the ECE Credentials and Election committee. Voting by ballot in Districts 2 and 5 will not be necessary this year.



Lonnie K. Johnson
Incumbent

What strengths would you bring to the cooperative's board of directors?

I know the importance of dependability, approachability, thoughtful decision-making, and collaborating with other cooperatives to bring the best value for our members. I've managed my own business for 45 years, served on the ECE board twelve years, and served on Great River Energy's board for four years.

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

The cost of energy is a big issue while keeping electricity affordable for our members. Getting the right blend of wind energy, solar, and fossil fuel is a challenge. State and federal regulations mandate us to use more renewable energy.

Why do you want to serve as an ECE Director?

As an ECE member for 44 years, I have a desire to listen to and represent the members of my district well. I know the importance of thoughtful decision-making. I have an appreciation for ECE, its members and employees. It is a privilege to serve and represent ECE.

Recent board/council experiences:

East Central Energy, Board Member
Great River Energy, Board of Directors
Pine City Evangelical Free Church Board
Rock Creek City Council

Serving all or part of the following areas: Arlone, Barry, Brook Park, Chengwatana, Clover, Crosby, Dell Grove, Hinckley, Kroschel, Mission Creek, Munch, Ogema, Pine City, Pokegama, Pomroy, Rock Creek, Royalton, and Sandstone.

District 5 Acclaimed Director



Jerry T. Tvedt
Incumbent

What strengths would you bring to the cooperative's board of directors?

Education and experience. Served the public in county government for 32 years. Duties included working with county boards, creating budgets, all personnel functions, negotiating union contracts, holding meetings with the public. My education is accounting. Will continue to work to keep rates from increasing.

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

Providing safe, reliable, affordable electricity to our members. Adapting to change. The transition from coal to renewable energy, wind, and solar is happening. The key to this is having adequate power during 'peak' times.

Why do you want to serve as an ECE Director?

The rural electric utility is a most fascinating business to learn. I feel blessed to have had the opportunity to serve as a director for East Central Energy. I would appreciate being re-elected to serve during the transition to renewables.

Recent board/council experiences:

East Central Energy Board
Lewis Lake Covenant Church, Vice Chair
Kanabec County EDA, recently Vice Chair
Minnesota Rural Electric Assn., Director
Ogilvie American Legion, membership team

Serving all or part of the following areas: Ann Lake, Arthur, Bradbury, Borgholm, Brunswick, Comfort, Dailey, East Side, Ford, Grass Lake, Haybrook, Hayland, Hillman, Idun, Isle Harbor, Jewette, Kanabec, Knife Lake, Lakin, Leigh, Lewis, Mount Morris, Mudgett, Page, Peace, Pliny, Seavey, South Fork, South Harbor, White Pine, Whited, and Williams.



Andy Olson
VP/COO



Ty Houglum
VP/CIO



Wendy Leibel
Executive Assistant



Lisa Prachar
VP/CFO

Familiar faces in new places

Four employees join ECE's Executive Team

After a round of retirements, the Executive Team at East Central Energy is now complete. The team consists of three vice president positions, as well as an executive assistant, who all report to the President/CEO.

In November, ECE Forestry Supervisor Andy Olson was chosen as the next Vice President/Chief Operating Officer (VP/COO). At the same time, ECE Information Technology Manager Ty Houglum was promoted to the newly-created position of Vice President/Chief Information Officer (VP/CIO). Shortly after, Wendy Leibel, former ECE Employee Development Coordinator, assumed the role of Executive Assistant.

With the retirement of Cheryl Hagfors, and after an extensive recruitment process, the co-op has recently selected Lisa Prachar, ECE Finance & Asset Manager, to fill the role of Vice President/Chief Financial Officer (VP/CFO).

Ty, Andy, Wendy, and Lisa bring a combined total of over 60 years of co-op experience to the team. We are confident their fresh ideas, deep understanding of ECE's culture, and proven integrity will play an integral role in the future of the cooperative.



Support Your Community

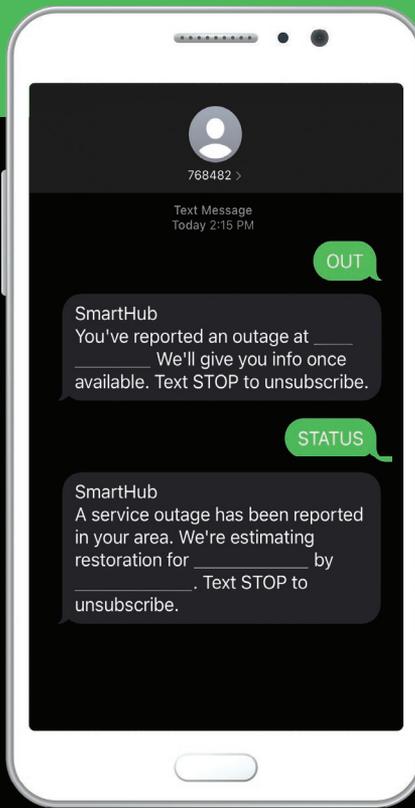
Support local organizations by "rounding up" your bill to the next dollar.

Less than \$1 per month!



Start making a difference today!
Visit our website to learn more.

4 eastcentralenergy.com



REPORTING AN OUTAGE HAS NEVER BEEN EASIER

POWER OUT? Let us know.
Text "OUT" to 768482

Want status updates?
Text "STATUS" to 768482

Mobile number must be text enabled via SmartHub.
[Visit our website to learn more.](#)

"It's hard to achieve success unless you love what you do."
Cheryl Hagfors retires



The 30 years that Cheryl Hagfors spent at ECE can be divided neatly into three equal decades: finance supervisor, then controller, and finally CFO & VP of Member Services. She was instrumental during the mergers with North Pine Electric as well as Head of the Lakes, worked alongside three CEOs, introduced the use of spreadsheets to the co-op, and navigated countless successful audits. She strategized the personalized budgeting program the cooperative uses, and guided the cooperative through many challenges over the last 30 years.

"How lucky am I?" Cheryl asks. "I'm proud to have worked with so many aspects of the co-op. I've learned so much and I hope others have learned from me, too."

Cheryl's love for numbers started at Braham High School during Mrs. Phyllis Londgren's bookkeeping class, and continued at St. Cloud State University. After earning a Bachelor's in accounting, she worked for Investors Diversified Services (now Ameriprise), where she quickly rose through the ranks from finance supervisor to computer programmer and finally to finance manager. In 1988, she and husband Tom purchased Braham Hardware and Rental, where she learned the financial details of a small business. Cheryl continued her daily commute to downtown Minneapolis until 1991, when she started at ECE.

"The co-op is my extended family," she says. "During waking hours I was at work more than I was at home—which isn't bad when you love your job. I appreciated the variety that I have always been offered at ECE, like serving pancakes at an annual meeting or answering phones during outages."

After grandson Blake was born in 2016, then selling the hardware store in 2019, Cheryl is more than ready to tackle projects that have been put on hold for 30 years, plus make memories with family and friends. "It's hard to achieve success unless you love what you do. While I'll miss the friends I've made, I'm leaving at an exciting time, and I know the co-op is in good hands. I have been blessed."





It's easy and cost-effective to make your home more energy efficient. Combined with our low off-peak rates, rebates make electric heating and cooling affordable.

Air source heat pump: \$1,250

Not only a high efficiency air-conditioning unit, it can heat your home or business when outdoor temperatures are above 25°. Zero-percent financing may be available.

Ground source heat pump: \$400/ton

Using the constant temperature of the earth to transfer heat to and from your home; it's a complete heating and cooling system.

Storage water heater rebate: up to \$700

A sufficient supply of water is heated during off-peak hours to meet your family's daily hot water needs. Zero-percent financing may be available.

Storage space heater: \$100/kW

Systems store and convert electricity to heat during off-peak hours using specially designed electric thermal storage technology. Zero-percent financing may be available.

Electric vehicle charger: \$750

Already own an electric vehicle? We offer a rebate to install a Level 2 charger on either the time-of-use rate or off-peak storage rate.

Wi-Fi-Enabled Thermostat rebate: \$25



Energy Star® Rebates

Ductless air source heat pump: \$300

Older homes that lack a central heating system can benefit from this heating and cooling unit.

Refrigerator and freezer rebates: \$25

(with recycling of old unit)

Incentives, current rates, criteria and guidelines for residential members can be found on our website or by calling us.

Do you have a power concern?

Low levels of A/C (alternating current) voltage on the grounded conductors of an electrical wiring system are a normal and unavoidable consequence of operating electrical equipment. This voltage, sometimes called stray voltage, is referred to as neutral-to-earth voltage (NEV) when it can be measured between two objects which may be simultaneously contacted by livestock.

If you suspect NEV or other electricity related issues, such as low voltage, electromagnetic fields, or power quality concerns, contact us. We have qualified employees who can answer your questions and investigate any suspected problems.

Please note: if a person feels an uncomfortable tingling sensation, the condition is probably not NEV but a serious problem with your wiring system or faulty equipment. This situation requires immediate attention and an electrician should be contacted to investigate and correct the problem.

You cool?



AIR SOURCE HEAT PUMPS

Heat and cool your home with ECE's special low rates

0% financing • Great rebates

Act NOW!

Rebates are awarded on a first-come basis.

Call or visit our website for details and system requirements.



6 1.800.254.7944



FREE! Energy-Saving Trees

Yes, we WANT you to plant trees—in the right places. Once again, we're partnering with the Arbor Day Foundation's Energy-Saving Trees program to provide FREE trees to members.

Select a species and optimize your home's energy efficiency with an interactive online mapping tool. The tool also helps prevent future conflicts with overhead lines.

Trees are available on a first-come basis (one per member household) **starting March 22**. 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 the Arbor Day Foundation at 1-855-234-3801.



You can't **AVOID**
what you **CAN'T SEE**



Know what's below.
Call before you dig.



Watt's Cookin' Calendar

Get your recipes in for the 2022 Watt's Cookin' calendar!

Mail your favorite recipes* to Watt's Cookin', P.O. Box 39, Braham, MN 55006 or email info@ecemn.com. Entries must include your name, address, telephone number, ECE account number, and be received by August 1, 2021.

Chosen recipes and contributor's name and city will be featured in our 2022 calendar and receive an \$85 bill credit (in honor of our 85th anniversary).

*Maximum of three recipe submissions per member.



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

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



One of the drawbacks of rural living has emerged during the pandemic. No, I'm not talking about the supply chain for toilet paper or our ability to agree on the government's role in our lives. This is something equally as frustrating: rural internet access.

Most telecommunication companies are bound by the same logistics as electric utilities; they have a desire to serve the densest populations possible, since the ability to cover more people in a given area is inherently more profitable. Alternatively, serving sparsely-populated rural areas results in higher infrastructure costs and ultimately drives down margins.

Over the years, ECE has kept an eye on the broadband industry. The co-op recently considered a large-scale internet solution for our members. However, the board agreed that the cost, combined with improvement in the industry, meant they could not justify the risk associated with entering the market. If we had

moved forward, we could have had millions of dollars of stranded investment that our members would ultimately be responsible for. As your neighbors, it's a chance we aren't willing to take.

I'm a person who spends a lot of time online—with kids who spend even more time on it—so I understand the very real need for internet access. We are living in a connected society and the need for reliable communication has created significant demand. Much like the electrification of America decades ago, innovation and the bright minds of entrepreneurs will result in a better world for all of us. I have no doubt our members will soon have affordable access to quality internet—without gambling on the future of the cooperative.

At your service we remain,



*You
cool?*



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0% financing • Great rebates

Act NOW!

Rebates are awarded on a first-come basis.

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