

SPARKS

THE POWER OF HUMAN CONNECTIONS

AUGUST 2026

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

Steele-Waseca Cooperative Electric



Touchstone Energy
Cooperatives



SWCE HIGHLIGHTS

Congratulations to:

- Jake Jablonski - Promoted to Line Foreman (6/22/26)
- Tanen Holzem - Promoted to Asst. Foreman (6/22/26)

Also, new fleet bucket truck #44 is ready for service (pictured in Sparks banner above)

YOUTH TOUR UPDATES

Read more about Leighton and Connor's trip on page 3



SWCE welcomes operations employees to new roles

Bret Wobschall, June 8, became SWCE's operations division manager; Kevin Kjersten promoted to line supervisor

"Employees at SWCE have been very welcoming and all have assisted in ensuring a seamless transition of roles within the Operations team," wrote Bret (pictured in adjacent photo). "There is already good alignment and vision for the future within the team."

Bret was born and raised in Owatonna and graduated from Owatonna High School in 2003. He earned an undergraduate degree from Iowa State University and a master's degree from Minnesota State University, Mankato.

His previous work experience in operations management were at Lakeside Foods, The Retrofit Companies, and Climate by Design. Learn more about Bret through the QR code.

Line Foreman Kevin Kjersten was promoted, June 15, to line superintendent.

"I felt it was time to make a change and help with moving the co-op forward," said Kjersten. "I will always miss doing line work. This position will allow me to stay close with the crew and still get out into the field."

When asked to assess the transition at this point, Kevin said, "The biggest transition is lining up the jobs for the crews and not doing the jobs. There are a lot of behind-the-scenes tasks that keep everything moving that people don't ever see. The processes that the previous line superintendents have had in place have helped me out."

As for priorities seeking to accomplish by the end of the calendar year, "I hope to have my own processes down to comfortably schedule the day-to-day schedule without being overwhelmed," stated Kevin. 30122

Kjersten started with Steele-Waseca as a journeyman line technician in October 2012, and was asked about significant changes in the profession since his start with the co-op.



Click Here!



BRET



Click Here!



KEVIN

Learn more about Kevin's new position through the QR code.
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By SWCE General
Manager
Kelly Hovel

Recently the communities in our region have played host to informational meetings, comment sessions and open houses related to the proposed transmission build-out across the Midwest. Those conversations often come with questions, concerns, and many times controversy. Where are they going? Why do we need them? How can I make sure my voice is heard and my questions are answered? 87015

In our region there are a couple of major transmission projects in the works. The Mankato to the Mississippi project, which runs from the north side of Mankato to the east along the southern edge of Faribault and on to the north side of Pine Island. It is 120 miles of 345-kilovolt (kV) transmission line. Public meetings were held across the region over the past two years, and the MN Public Utilities Commission approved the certificate of need and the route permit this past February.

PowerOn Midwest, a group of major transmission projects anchored by a 765 kilovolt (kV) line, is the other. This project is in the midst of public meetings, some of which are happening right now in August, aimed at finalizing a route that will connect eastern South Dakota, Minnesota and the broader Upper Midwest, helping move electricity where it's needed, when it's needed. This line does not have a final route but considers multiple paths along southern MN through Martin, Faribault, Freeborn, and Mower counties.

Both projects are designed to make sure the grid can keep up with growing demand while supporting a more reliable and flexible energy system. Mankato to the Mississippi is an Xcel Energy led project (it also includes Dairyland Power, Rochester Public Utilities, and Southern Minnesota Municipal Power) and PowerOn Midwest is being developed by Great River Energy (project lead), ITC Midwest and Xcel Energy.

The need is based on studies conducted by MISO (Midwest Independent System Operator), the organization that manages our regional grid. As energy use across the region increases, older power plants retire and new generation comes online, stronger transmission is what keeps everything connected, reliable and affordable. Without it, we risk bottlenecks that raise costs and limit our ability to serve the homes, farms and businesses that depend on us. We already see that congestion impacting energy costs in the region today when wind generation must be curtailed because there is no room for the energy on the current transmission system.



GRE's Greg Schutte presents PowerOn Midwest information to SWCE employees.

The PowerOn Midwest project alone will enable more than 12,000 megawatts of new wind, solar, storage and natural gas generation in Minnesota. This expanded capacity will support a diverse energy mix, unlock existing generation that is currently constrained by transmission limitations and help attract private investment in the region's growing energy sector.

For our power supplier, Great River Energy, the project is also about creating value for the cooperatives and communities it serves.



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U.S. Senator Tina Smith posed with Minnesota's Youth Tour delegates during their visit to the Capitol. Steele-Waseca's Delegate Leighton Richter is pictured fourth from the left in the back row, while Delegate Connor Louks is pictured first on the right in the back row.

Steele-Waseca Cooperative Electric Youth Tour Delegates Leighton Richter of Fari-bault and Connor Louks of Ellendale returned home June 20 after flying with Minnesota's delegation of 35 students and five chaperones, which included Steele-Waseca's Cindy Butterfield, to Washington, D.C., June 15, and experiencing nearly a week in our nation's capital.

"The 2026 Electric Cooperative Youth Tour to Washington D.C. was truly a once in a lifetime experience," wrote Leighton, "and I am incredibly grateful to Steele-Waseca Cooperative Electric for providing me with the opportunity to take part in this trip. During the trip, I visited Washington D.C. with students from across the country and gained knowledge about our government, leadership, and the role cooperatives play in our communities."

"WOW! What an amazing experience in Washington, DC!" wrote Connor. "I met the group near the MSP airport, we introduced ourselves, found out who our roommate was. Then we received last minute instructions, and we were off to the airport. We flew into Baltimore, MD then we traveled down to National Harbor, MD."

"One of the highlights of the trip was when we had an entire day to walk around and explore all of the different Smithsonian museum," wrote Leighton. "My favorite museum was the National Museum of Natural History. It was amazing being able to see real dinosaur fossils, the giant ocean exhibits, and the Hope Diamond up close, all of which are things that I have only dreamed of seeing. 1032371

"I also enjoyed seeing the Lincoln Memorial and the Washington Monument. It was especially meaningful visiting the Arlington Cemetery and watching the changing of the guard.

"In addition to sightseeing, I had the opportunity to build extremely close friendships with the people that I met," wrote

Leighton. "We created memories that I will never forget. I can't say enough how much I would encourage anyone to take the time to apply for the Youth Tour in the future!"

"The thing that I enjoyed the most about having the opportunity to go to Washington DC was to meet others from around the country to see where they were from and learn more about them," wrote Connor. He noted on their last event of the week there was an all-states dinner and dance provided by the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association. There were more than 1,700 other students from 44 states in attendance.



Youth Tour delegates had an opportunity to have their photo taken with the Capitol in the background. Pictured are Steele-Waseca's delegation (left to right) Connor Louks, Cindy Butterfield (chaperone), and Leighton Richter.

"I would like to thank the members and the board of directors of Steele-Waseca Cooperative Electric for providing the opportunity to represent them in Washington DC," wrote Connor. "I really appreciated to opportunity to have such a great experience in DC."



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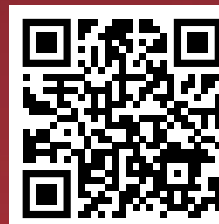
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Please mail, email, drop-off your recipe for the SPARKS newsletter. Make sure it includes your name and SWCE account number. The member whose recipe is published will receive a **\$7 energy credit.**

SWCE SPARKS IN BRIEF...

- Need a yard security light? For information, contact us between 8 a.m.-4:30 p.m., or at info@swce.coop.
- For average temperatures per day, check your SmartHub app. 1100532
- ENERGY STAR® Rebates – For a complete list of residential, commercial, industrial, and agricultural rebates, and their respective rebate form, visit swce.coop/rebates.

SPEAKER PRESENTATION REQUEST

To help increase the safety awareness and well-being for its members, your cooperative provides a safety program for interested groups. This interactive program is ideal for school and community organizations and focuses on the importance of high voltage safety. Learn more and submit your presentation date!



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INGREDIENTS

- 6 c. chopped rhubarb
- 2/3 c. granulated sugar
- 2 c. apple juice
- 2 c. water
- 12 oz. pink lemonade concentrate, thawed
- 12 oz. cranberry juice concentrate, thawed

PREPARATION

Bring rhubarb, sugar, and water to a boil. Reduce heat, cover, and simmer until rhubarb is tender, about 5 minutes. Let cool. Once the rhubarb mix is cooled, process in a blender until smooth. Mix in the juices and freeze until ready to serve. Scoop slush into a glass and mix with ginger ale. Enjoy!

PROGRAM HIGHLIGHT

The electric vehicle (EV) market is ever evolving.

Today, you can buy an EV in almost every vehicle class. EVs offer consumers affordable, efficient, and high-tech transportation. More models, including crossovers, minivans, hatchbacks, and sedans, become available every year.

SWCE makes owning an EV even more attractive by offering the ChargeWise Level 2 EV Charger rebate, as well as the Revolt renewable energy (100% wind energy for your BEV or PHEV) programs.



Learn more with the QR code!

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Town Hall Meetings

SWCE will be hosting four town hall meetings in September. Watch your mailbox for the invitation/registration card. All meetings will be held at Torey's Restaurant (upper level), 208 N Cedar Ave., Owatonna from 6:30 PM – 8 PM. Once you receive your invitation, please call 507.451.7340 to RSVP with the number attending; seating is limited.



Scan or click the code to learn more!



Don't forget to bring your registration card with you to the meeting!