



the power of human connections

sparks

Your Touchstone Energy® Cooperative 

a monthly newsletter from **Steele-Waseca Cooperative Electric** December 2023

Water heater clarification

Steele-Waseca Cooperative Electric received a number of member calls after the water heater replacement story was published in the November 2023 *Sparks* newsletter. The water heaters referenced in the article were for metal water heaters that rust. It does not pertain to the Marathon or Westinghouse water heaters used by Steele-Waseca in their water heater program. Each are built not to rust and have a limited lifetime tank warranty.

inside connections

- 2** Manager Connection
- 3** Transmission upgrades to reduce system congestion; Stan Eaton memorial plaque moved at SWCE headquarters
- 4** Cookin' Connection; SWCE community solar update; Who found their account number in the November 2023 Sparks?; Steele County Tip Line
- 5** Dangers of power pole clutter
- 6** Ad Connection; 4-Seasons Vacations
- 7** Ad Connection; Home safeguards for winter; FREE SWCE calendars for 2024
- 8** Statement of Non-Discrimination; St. John Lutheran Cookie Walk

calendar of events

December

- 7** National Pearl Harbor Remembrance Day
- 21** First day of winter 24837
- 25** Christmas Day
SWCE office is closed



Happy Holidays!

Spark joy and light this holiday season. From our co-op family to yours, we wish you safe and warm season with friends and loved ones.

New record retirement of capital credit equity approved by Steele-Waseca board of directors

The Steele-Waseca Cooperative Electric board of directors, during their Oct. 26 meeting, approved the co-op's latest record-breaking retirement of \$2.135 million in capital credit equity allocated in 1998, 1999, 2000, 2022, and estate settlements for 2023. The previous record was \$1.89 million retired in 2022.

All current and former member-owners who received electric service from Steele-Waseca during the years listed above are eligible for the refund if electric sales exceeded power costs.

For convenience and to save on check processing and mailing costs, current member-owners eligible for this year's refund will have the amount of their equity applied as a credit on their Steele-Waseca bill received next month (December 2023).

All former member-owners eligible for a refund will have their equity mailed to them by check.

Capital credit equity comes from the cooperative's margins or profits. The co-op's margin each year is determined by subtracting operating expenses from operating revenue collected during the year.

Your equity is reserved for you, even if you move away from the area. That's why it is important for you to make sure

Steele-Waseca board appoints Schlaak District 3 director

The Steele-Waseca Cooperative Electric board of directors appointed Neil R. Schlaak District 3 director during their regular meeting, Oct. 26, at the co-op's headquarters in Owatonna.

Schlaak, of rural New Richland, was among five candidates interviewed by the Steele-Waseca board to replace former District 3 Director Duane Edwardson, who died Aug. 28, at the age of 84.

Schlaak's first board meeting as director will be Tuesday, Nov. 21. He


Did You Know?


Electric cooperatives have retired \$20 billion to members since 1988 - \$1.4 billion in 2021 alone. Because electric co-ops operate at cost, any excess revenues (called margins) are allocated and retired to members in the form of capital credits.

Source: National Rural Utilities Cooperative Finance Corporation



Steele-Waseca always has your current address and phone number.

Until it's refunded to members, the equity is used to finance new construction and system improvements. Using members' equity helps Steele-Waseca provide electric service at a lower cost than if all construction funds were borrowed from other resources. 

 #swceTRUST

 #swceTRUST

Published monthly by
 Steele-Waseca Cooperative Electric
 2411 W Bridge Street, PO Box 485
 Owatonna MN 55060-0485

This institution is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

Website: www.swce.coop
 Email: info@swce.coop



Board of Directors

- PJ Duchene District 1
Assistant Secretary/Treasurer
- Geraldine Lienke District 2
- Neil Schlaak District 3
- Dennis Ringhofer District 4
- Rodney Krell, *Vice President* District 5
- Gary Wilson District 6
President, GRE Director
- John Beal District 7
- Ronald Sommers District 8
Secretary/Treasurer
- Scott Carlson District 9

Management

Syd Briggs *General Manager*

Division Managers

- Kim Wilson *Member Services*
- Jon Stelter *Finance*
- Dan Meier *Operations*

Office Hours

8:00 a.m.–4:30 p.m., Monday–Friday

Operations Office Hours

8:00 a.m.–3:30 p.m., Monday–Friday

**For Customer Service, Billing
 Questions and Power Outages
 Phone:**

507-451-7340 or 800-526-3514

Before calling to report an outage

1. Check fuses and circuit breakers in your home and on meter pole.
2. Check with your neighbors to see if they have power.
3. Look for possible causes such as a tree branch on wires, a broken pole, twisted wires, etc.

**To leave a non-emergency message
 whenever SWCE's Office is closed:**

Phone 507-451-7340 or 800-526-3514 and listen to the prompts. Please have your account number, phone number, and name on the account available.

Call *Before* You Dig
 Gopher State One Call
 811 or 800-252-1166

48-hour notice required for ALL
 underground cable locations

manager connection

By Syd Briggs,
 General Manager



What did you notice on the front page of this month's *Sparks* newsletter? The Steele-Waseca Coop-

erative Electric board of directors approved the retirement of \$2.135 million in capital credit equity allocated in 1998, 1999, 2000, 2022, and estate settlements in 2023.

Our average retirement, or refund, over the past five years has been \$1,558,000 which makes this year's refund \$577,000 more than the average.

The seventh cooperative principle is Concern for Community. Steele-Waseca carefully makes contributions each year to community organizations like United Way and food shelves, along with scholarships to a number of our graduating high school seniors. We have been diligent in maintaining a healthy equity ratio in recent years and were able to increase the refund for this year. We will also be able to maintain our great history of retiring equity in future years.

Every year Steele-Waseca receives questions from our member-owners regarding capital credit equity. For those who are new to a cooperative, or not familiar with how capital credit equity works, keep in mind that when you signed up to receive electric service from Steele-Waseca, you became a member of an electric co-op.

With investor-owned utilities returning a portion of any profits back to their shareholders, electric co-ops operate on an at-cost basis. This means Steele-Waseca allocates 100 percent of its margins or profits (revenue less expenses) to its members who purchased electricity during the year, and retires or pays back those margins at a future date to those very members.

Instead of returning the margins to people or companies who had little or nothing to do with the generation of those profits, or who probably don't even live in the same region or state that you do, Steele-Waseca returns margins to those who actually purchase and use our product. Steele-Waseca allocates and retires capital credits based on how much electricity you purchased during a year.

Where does the money come from? Member-owned, not-for-profit electric co-ops set rates to generate funds to pay operating costs, make payments on any loans, and provide an emergency reserve. At the end of each year, the co-op subtracts

operating expenses from operating revenue collected during the year. The balance is called an operating "margin."

Can we get our retirement of capital credits sooner? The board of directors has the responsibility of balancing the amount of equity with the cost of debt, and therefore, the amount of capital credit retirements each year. The higher the equity we maintain, the lower the debt, and the less we have retired in capital credits. However, the cost of our debt is one of the major components in our rates. Most co-ops attempt to maintain an equity-to-asset ratio between 30% and 50%; Steele-Waseca is at 45%. Our overall objective is to reward both past and current ratepayers with a balanced approach of retiring past and current capital credits each year, and maintaining the most manageable level of debt possible.

At Steele-Waseca, the board of directors make a decision in the fall of each year to retire capital credits. The co-op has retired nearly \$24 million in capital credits to its members since 1966.

I did not have electric service from Steele-Waseca during 1998, 1999, 2000 or 2022. Will I get any retirement? No. This year capital credit retirements are only being made to members who purchased electricity from Steele-Waseca in 1998, 1999, 2000, and/or 2022.

How will the retirement of capital credit equity work? Inactive or former members, who no longer purchase electricity from Steele-Waseca (but purchased electricity during the years being retired) will receive a check. Due to the expense involved with processing printed checks, current members eligible to receive capital credit equity will have that amount credited to their Steele-Waseca account on their bill coming in December 2023. 1105224

What if I moved? If you move or no longer have electric service with Steele-Waseca, it is important you inform the cooperative of your current address, so future retirements may be properly mailed to you. If you purchased electricity from Steele-Waseca during the years being retired, then you are entitled to a capital credit retirement, even if you move out of Steele-Waseca's service area. If Steele-Waseca has your current address, then the co-op will send your retirement check by mail.

If you have additional questions regarding your equity, please feel free to contact Steele-Waseca during regular business hours.

#swceTRUST

Grid North Partners to implement 19 transmission upgrades to reduce system congestion

Courtesy: Great River Energy (GRE)

Grid North Partners utilities have identified 19 transmission project upgrades expected to be built over the next three years.

These projects, which span Minnesota and touch eastern South Dakota, will enable more low-cost renewable energy to be delivered from western Minnesota to customers throughout the region by reducing congestion on the transmission system.

“We have individually made several improvements to our systems to reduce congestion, but working together has allowed us to holistically study the system and identify these additional 19 solutions that can be quickly implemented on a coordinated basis,” Grid North Partners said in a joint statement. “This work will help us maintain reliable service, keep electric prices low and achieve clean energy goals for customers and members.”

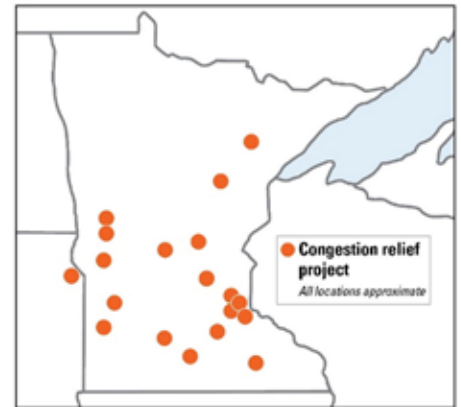
Transmission congestion has become an increasingly noticeable issue, particularly in western Minnesota, in part due to the construction of new energy generation resources outpacing the construction of new transmission lines.

Congestion is a limitation on the elec-

tric transmission system preventing the most economic energy generation, often low-cost renewable energy, from being delivered to customers throughout the region. When the transmission system is unable to move electricity from the most economic generation, market prices rise and the lowest-cost generation often needs to be curtailed, resulting in higher electricity costs.

The 19 identified projects are estimated to cost approximately \$130 million. They are planned to be built over the next three years and are expected to provide economic savings for customers in excess of the investment. These savings help ensure continued access to low-cost electricity for utility customers and cooperative members throughout the region.

Grid North Partners utilities will reach out to the regional transmission grid operator, MISO (Midcontinent Independent System Operator), and its respective communities about each of these upcoming projects, which primarily include upgrading existing transmission lines and substations to increase system capacity.



Grid North Partners, which Great River Energy helped co-found and continues to be co-leader of, is a broad mix of 10 investor-owned and not-for-profit cooperative and municipal utilities working together to ensure continued safe, reliable and cost-effective electric service to customers in the Upper Midwest. The Grid North Partners include: Central Municipal Power Agency/Services, Dairyland Power Cooperative, GRE, Minnesota Power, Missouri River Energy Services, Otter Tail Power Company, Rochester Public Utilities, Southern Minnesota Municipal Power Agency, WPPI Energy, and Xcel Energy. #swceCOOPERATION



Stan Eaton memorial plaque moved

The memorial plaque for Steele-Waseca Cooperative Electric Line Foreman Stan Eaton was formally moved Friday, Oct. 20, as salt and weathering had eroded its foundation in its previous location in front of the main entrance at the co-op's headquarters in Owatonna. Eaton died Sept. 19, 1990, from complications as a result of injuries sustained from a fall on a power pole, Sept. 6, of that year. He was repairing a security light that didn't have any wires connected to the pole when it cracked and fell with Eaton still on the pole. The memorial was originally dedicated with a flagpole at the co-op's Rose Street location May 31, 1991. It was rededicated at Steele-Waseca's Bridge Street location July 22, 1994. Masonry work for the relocated memorial was conducted by Melby Masonry of Owatonna. 1017569

cookin' connection

Cowboy Caviar

Julie Mussman

Claremont

1 c. frozen corn	1/4 c. lime juice
1 c. tomato	1/3 c. olive oil
1/2 c. red onion	1 tbsp. honey
3/4 c. bell pepper	1 tsp. cumin
1/3 c. cilantro	1 tsp. chili powder
1 can black beans	salt
1 can black eye peas	pepper
1 avocado	

Rinse and drain beans. Mix all veggies together with beans. Mix the lime juice, olive oil, honey, cumin, chili powder, salt, and pepper, then pour over veggies and beans. Do not add avocado until just before serving.

Please use a 3 x 5 card when submitting your recipe. The member whose recipe is published will receive a \$7 energy credit.



Steele-Waseca Cooperative Electric's solar subscribers will see a 35 kWh credit per panel on this month's statement for energy generated during October 2023. Learn more about community solar and The Sunna Project by visiting Steele-Waseca's website, swce.coop. #swceINNOVATION

Was your account number in Sparks?

Each month five account numbers are printed in *Sparks* and a total of \$35 in energy credits is divided among however many of those numbers are found. For example, if all numbers are found, a credit of \$7 will be applied to the members' following month's electric bills; or, if only one number is found, that member receives the full \$35 credit. Members finding their numbers who have a load management receiver on their dual fuel, electric water heater, air conditioner, or genset will receive an additional \$7 credit. When you find your number, phone our office no later than the 7th of the month following receipt of the *Sparks*, or the amount will be forfeited.

November issue of Sparks



Numbers found:

Michael Frana
Raymond Ordner

Numbers not found:

Delos Vincent
Kelly Kraay or Jason Guevara
Charlotte/Robert Bradford



Sparks in brief . . .

- **Want easy energy payments?** Sign up for **EnergyPay Plus**, our automatic payment plan, or **Energy Prepay**, our discounted advance payment plan. Contact our office for details. You may also pay your bill online at www.swce.coop. By entering your Steele-Waseca username and password you can also view a 13-month history of your account.

- **If you have changed or added phone numbers**, please contact SWCE to update your contact information. 16439

- **Need a new water heater?** For information about our Westinghouse Electric Water Heater Program, phone Cindy Butterfield at our office between 8 a.m.-3:30 p.m., 446-4204 / 800-526-3514.

- **October temps** – The average high temperature for October was 59° F, while the average low was 40° F. This resulted in 495.5 Heating Degree Days (HDDs), and 36.5 Cooling Degree Days (CDDs). They compare to last year's average high of 61° F and average low of 37° F. This resulted in 500.5 HDDs and 3.5 CDDs.

- **ENERGY STAR® Rebates** – In 2023, all ENERGY STAR refrigerators/freezers (with recycling), electric clothes dryers, dehumidifiers, central air conditioners, air and ground source heat pumps, light emitting diode (LED) bulbs purchased (limit 5) are eligible to receive rebates (may not be combined with special promotions). Rebate request forms must be submitted within 90 days of purchase. Rebate forms are available at www.swce.coop. For more information or to receive a rebate request form, phone Cindy Butterfield at 446-4204 or 800-526-3514.

- **Steele-Waseca's tree service contractor** – Carr's Tree Service, Inc., is contracted to do SWCE's tree trimming. To report a tree concern, phone:

507-451-7340 / 800-526-3514

STEELE COUNTY TIP LINE

866-878-7964

TO BE USED TO REPORT ANY CRIME OR SUSPICIOUS ACTIVITY ANONYMOUSLY

COVERS ALL OF STEELE COUNTY INCLUDING THE CITIES OF:

OWATONNA ELLENDALE
BLOOMING PRAIRIE MEDFORD

Power Pole Clutter

Flyers, satellite dishes, posters, basketball hoops, decorative lights, even hunting stands. You name it, someone has tried to staple, nail or tie it to a power pole. Here's a quick look at the dangers and pitfalls associated with unauthorized pole attachments.

Illegal

Many state and local laws and the National Electrical Safety Code prohibit any unauthorized items on poles. Utilities can face fines if these attachments aren't removed.



Pole Damage

Even small holes can allow moisture and insects past the pole sealant, which can shorten the life of the pole or weaken it and cause it to fall in a storm.



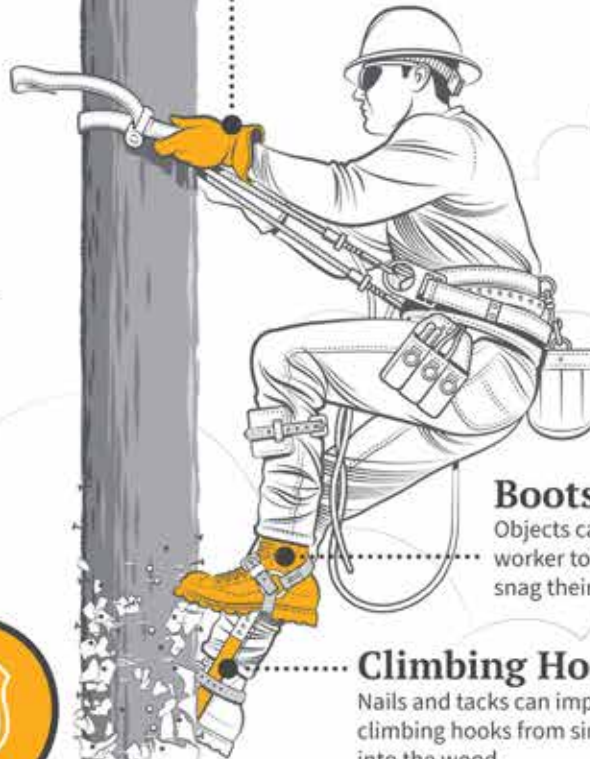
Hinders Repairs

Posters and flyers can hide identifying markers on poles and slow repair work.



Gloves

Staples, tacks and nails can puncture a lineworker's insulated rubber gloves and expose them to electric shock.



Boots

Objects can cause a worker to fall if they snag their boots.

Climbing Hooks

Nails and tacks can impede climbing hooks from sinking into the wood.



Dangerous

A person who gets too close to energized lines while attaching an object can be electrocuted.



Distraction

Some materials posted on poles, like mirrors or holiday decorations, can be a distraction to drivers.

Source: NRECA; Design: Jeff Dionise

ad connection

give away

AIR HOCKEY TABLE. 334-3676.

FIELD ROCK. 581-3901 or 334-7756.

KITTENS/CATS, litter-box trained, garage/outdoor cats, various ages, vry friendly. 612-910-0041.

USED 24" CEDAR SHAKES. 451-9533.

FREE ONLINE CLASSIFIEDS, you place & remove your own ad on SWCE's website, swce.coop; these are separate from Sparks & will not appear in Sparks unless mailed, delivered, or emailed to SWCE.

wanted

HAY WAGON to be used for hayrides. 213-1278.

1973, '74, OR '75 MONTE CARLO. 279-0431/Mark.

STORAGE SPACE FOR A LARGE MOTORHOME. 583-7718.

RECIPES for the Sparks, only from members who have not submitted a recipe in 2023; please use a 3x5 card; the member who has their recipe published earns a \$7 energy credit on their SWCE statement.

BARN, GRANARY, &/OR OUTBUILDINGS, I remove to repurpose the lumber; OLD TIN; BARN SIDING; LUMBER. 330-0258/Tim.

USED/WASTE OIL, 200-gal. min. 420-7429/Quentin.

USED 12' STEPLADDER. 456-5466.

FORD DIESEL SKID STEER. 330-1849.

1955-57 CHEV. CARS & PARTS. 363-6810/Charlie.

for sale

SNOWBLOWER FOR JD RIDING MOWER, will fit 210, 212, & 214 models, \$100/obo. 456-4073.

17 WIN SUPER MAG 25 GR POLYMER TIP, 50 rds, \$40/box. 461-1191.

HUNTING BLINDS, weather/rodent proof, insulated & much more. 330-2452.

SMALL GRAIN BIN FOR A "BINZEBO." 390-2304.

ALOE VERA PLANTS, 5" pots, \$5/each; larger decorative pots w/larger plant, \$10-\$12 (great gifts). 304-0903.

All area codes are 507 unless otherwise noted

PETMATE ULTRA VARI DOG KENNEL, 28"L x 20.5"W x 21.5"H, \$80; TOP PAW DOUBLE DOOR FOLDING WIRE DOG CRATE, 24"L x 18"W x 19"H, \$30. 651-335-9929.

WOODEN HIGHCHAIR, gd cond., \$25. 645-8659.

(3) SETS OF MATCHING CAR TIRES: Yokohama, P225/60-17, 3/4 tread; Goodyear, P225/65-17, half tread; Bridgestone, P225/65-17, 1/3 tread (make offer). 612-290-2704.

OVER 100 PUZZLES, 300-500 or 1000 pieces, \$2/each (you choose). 688-9432.

1994 INTL 4900 SERIES DIESEL TRUCK w/18" cold plate freezer box, current DOT, \$7400. 334-7177.

GRASS HAY, small sq. bales by Waldorf. 327-3672.

(5) COOPER LIFELINER GLS TIRES, 185-70-14 tires w/rims, gd cond., make offer. 581-2301.

TRANSFERRABLE BUILDABLE RIGHTS in Rice County's Webster Twp. 612-919-4130 for details.

CRAFTSMAN ROUTER, like new, \$20; SCAF-FOLDING; LARGE GARFIELD COLLECTION, amazing! 451-5172.

TREE TRIMMING, REMOVAL, & STUMP GRIND., professional climber & aerial lift to U of M guidelines; 2007 FRONT CHROME BUMPER for an F-650, like new. 456-1609.

1997 JAYCO 5TH WHEEL CAMPER, 25' long. 688-9410.

(2) 10' PRIEFERT BROWN FEED BUNKS w/liner, used, 8-yrs-old, \$100/each. 475-8551.

(2) FARMALL H, \$1000-\$1250; ALLIS WD w/3 pt & loader, \$1600; MF 2705 w/cab, new cab kit, \$7250. 456-1181.

FORTUNE CREEK TRL LOTS, covenant allows for a pole shed, starting at \$75,000. 838-5033/John.

ALFALFA HAY, big square bales. 456-8639.

FARM FRESH EGGS. 475-0486.

(3) PATIO HEATERS. 581-3901 or 334-7756.

RENTAL, Izaak Walton League Bldg., 4 mi. south of Owat., seats 100, full kitchen, grill, Wi-Fi, \$150. 451-7946.

SCHWINN DELUXE EXERCISE BIKE, Model XRF w/manual, \$35; KITCHEN TABLE w/5 chairs, 2 leaves, solid wood legs, Formica top, exc. cond., \$125. 763-439-2961.

JD 4020 DIESEL & 148 LOADER 1966, vry nice; HAY, alfalfa & grass, 3x3x8 big bales, no rain. 456-3084.

NI 324 CORN PICKER, 2 row. 210-2048.

DOLL-FACED PERSIAN KITTENS: (1) Himalayan, male, blue eyes; (1) Tourtoise, female, call for pics, \$500. 589-9259.

1996 CHEV. SILVERADO K-1500, V8, 216,000 mi., 4WD, navy blue, \$2000/obo. 676-4061.

MINI STORAGE UNITS, Blmg Prairie. 456-2957.

1969 CHEV. C10 STEPSIDE 350, auto trans., 2WD, \$3500/obo. 330-3178.

(2) 240V USED SAUNA HTRS w/controls, (1) floor & (1) wall mount, \$50/each. 952-652-2933.

(2) FIRESTONE TRANSFORCE AT TIRES, LT275/70R18, came off 3/4 diesel Ram, 10 ply, 17,000 mi. on them, lots of tread left, \$200 for pair. 491-4565.

BEACHFRONT VACATION CONDOS FOR RENT in Fort Myers Beach, South Padre Island & Mexico, visit www.sandysbeachfrontcondo.com for details & photos. 612-865-9604/Sandy.

FEATHERLITE SNOWMOBILE TRAILER FOR RENT, 4 place, everything new floor, lights, tires, 22' long. 363-6601.

CABELA'S INSULATED HUNTING BOOTS, size 14, waterproof, \$25; PET CARRIER, large, exc. cond., \$35; OFFICE DESK, 5 drawer w/file folder space, \$20. 455-3881.

OAK FOR FIREWOOD OR LUMBER, you cut, price varies; H.D. MULTI-POSITION LADDERS; (3) ANTIQUE OCCASIONAL TABLES. 528-2252.

(For Sale ads continued on Page 7)

travel

CARIBBEAN CRUISE, Jan. 25-Feb. 6, 2024. Round trip Delta Air from Mpls to Ft Lauderdale, 7-day cruise on the Caribbean Princess, 7 ports of call including Virgin Isl. \$4,199 pp w/2 per room.

NEW ORLEANS, April 13-21. Deluxe motor coach, 8 nights, 14 meals, guided tours, admission to Mardi Gras World, visit historic New Orleans French Quarter, & more! \$1,599 pp w/2 per room.

WASHINGTON, D.C., April 25-30. Round trip Delta Flights from Mpls to D.C., 4 nights, 8 meals, guided Memorial & Monument tours, National Harbor & more! \$1,799 pp w/2 per room.

Call 4-Seasons at 373-4705 or 373-2473, from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. weekdays, to learn more about their tour information.



Sparks Free Classified Ad Form for all SWCE Members

Ads need to be received in our office by December 5 to ensure being printed in the January Sparks. Please print neatly or type your ad of 20 words or less on this form. We reserve the right to edit ad copy to allow space for more ads. Ads received after the 5th will be printed in the February issue.

For Sale Wanted Give Away

Phone # _____ Account # _____

Name _____

Clip and mail to: SWCE, PO Box 485, Owatonna MN 55060-0485, deliver to the SWCE office, or email your ad to: sparks@swce.coop.

ad connection

(For Sale ads continued from Page 6)

RABBIT CAGE, blk wire, new cond., 23.5" long, 15" wide, 15" high, \$20. 390-5707.

CATERPILLAR D4D BULLDOZER, exc. cond., \$12,000; **BELSAW 12" PLANER** w/5-hp motor, \$400; **POWERMATIC 12" PLANER MOLDER**, \$600. 330-3945.

JD 325 SKID LOADER, **BUCKET FORKS**, **SNOW-BLOWER**; 2015 JD 825i **GATOR**; JD X734 **MOWER** (all nice). 456-1104.

DUCTLESS MINI-SPLIT HEAT PUMP, used 2 mths, make offer after inspection in Fbo. 612-805-3033.

AIRCARE SPACE SAVER EVAPORATIVE HUMIDIFIER, 6 gal., for large room or home, 1000+ sq. ft. like new w/extras, \$65. 451-7682.

55-GAL. PLASTIC & STEEL BARRELS w/covers, \$5-\$15; **220-GAL. POLY TANK** w/valve in forklift frame, \$75. 421-2521.

(2) **DOWNHILL ROSSIGNOL SKIS**. 678-978-7444.

BOAT/RV STORAGE FOR RENT. 475-2322.

1995 DODGE 2500 HD TRUCK w/blade Fisher snowplow. 783-9240.

HAY, 4x5 round bales. 390-0600.

Ads need to be received in the Steele-Waseca office by Tuesday, Dec. 5, to ensure being published in the January 2024 Sparks newsletter.

Steele-Waseca Cooperative Electric (SWCE) assumes no liability for the content of, or reply to, any item posted. The party posting any advertisement assumes complete liability for the content of, and all replies to, any advertisement and for any claims against SWCE as a result thereof, and agrees to indemnify and hold SWCE harmless from all costs, expenses, liabilities and damages resulting from, or caused by, any advertisement or reply thereto.

Five ways to safeguard your home this winter

by Abby Berry, National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA)

As the temperatures drop and the days grow shorter, there's a natural inclination to create a warm and cozy haven at home.

Unfortunately, as we see increased use of heating equipment, candles, and electrical items, the number of home fires tends to increase during winter months.

Here are five ways you can safeguard your home for the winter season:

1. Ensure carbon monoxide and smoke detectors are working properly. If your detectors are battery-operat-

ed, replace the batteries annually. Test the detectors once a month and give them a good dusting to ensure the sensors are clear of dirt and debris.

2. Inspect electrical cords. We depend on more cords during winter, whether for holiday lighting, extension cords, or portable heaters. Before using any corded items, double check to make sure cords aren't frayed or cracked. If you use portable space heaters, remember to keep them at least three feet away from flammable items. Use models that include an auto shut-off feature and

overheat protection. Space heaters can take a toll on your energy bills. Use them efficiently (to heat smaller spaces) and safely. Never plug a space heater into a power strip. Speaking of power strips...

3. Avoid overloading electrical outlets and power strips. When overloaded with electrical items, outlets and power strips can overheat and catch fire. If you use power strips for multiple devices, make sure the strip can handle the electrical load. For a safer bet, look for power strips that include surge protection.

(Home safeguards for winter continued on Page 8)

The advertisement features two calendar covers. The left cover is titled "TREASURED TRUCKS" and shows a green vintage pickup truck in a rural setting. The right cover is titled "GLORIOUS GETAWAYS" and shows a scenic view of a lake and mountains with purple flowers in the foreground. In the center, there is a small calendar page for 2024 with the SWCE logo and contact information. At the bottom, there is a calendar grid for the year 2024, with the months from January to December listed. The SWCE logo and contact information are repeated on both sides of the bottom section.

Steele-Waseca Cooperative Electric
2411 West Bridge Street, PO Box 485, Owatonna, MN 56005
507-451-7340 / 800-526-2514 • www.swce.org

Steele-Waseca Cooperative Electric
2411 West Bridge Street, PO Box 485, Owatonna, MN 56005
507-451-7340 / 800-526-2514 • www.swce.org

FREE 2024 Steele-Waseca Cooperative Electric calendars are available at the co-op's office, 2411 W. Bridge St., Owatonna, while supplies last. You may pick them up during regular business hours. #swceAPPRECIATION

member connection

(Home safeguards for winter continued from Pg 7)

4. Clean the fireplace to improve safety and efficiency. There's nothing better than a warm fire on a chilly night, but it's important to maintain your fireplace for safety. As wood burns, a sticky substance known as creosote builds up in the chimney. When creosote buildup becomes too thick, a chimney fire can ignite. The chimney should be cleaned at least once a year to reduce fire risks. Regular cleaning also improves air flow and limits the amount of carbon monoxide that seeps indoors.

5. Practice safety in the kitchen. As we spend more time in the kitchen

during the holiday season, be mindful of potential fire hazards. Never leave food that's cooking on the stovetop unattended. Clean and remove spilled foods from cooking surfaces and be mindful of where you place flammable items like dish towels.

Steele-Waseca Cooperative Electric wants you and your family to stay safe during the winter season. Visit swce.coop for additional safety tips.

 #swceLIFE+

Non-Discrimination Statement

Steele-Waseca Cooperative Electric is the recipient of Rural Development funding from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA).

In accordance with Federal civil rights law and U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) civil rights regulations and policies, the USDA, its Agencies, offices, and employees, and institutions participating in or administering USDA programs are prohibited from discriminating based on race, color, national origin, religion, sex, gender identity (including gender expression), sexual orientation, disability, age, marital status, family/parental status, income derived from a public assistance program, political beliefs, or reprisal or retaliation for prior civil rights activity, in any program or activity conducted or funded by USDA (not all bases apply to all programs). Remedies and complaint filing deadlines vary by program or incident.

Persons with disabilities who require alternative means of communication for program information (e.g., Braille, large print, audiotope, American Sign Language, etc.) should contact the responsible Agency or USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TTY) or contact USDA through the Federal Relay Service at (800) 877-8339. Additionally, program information may be made available in languages other than English.

To file a program discrimination complaint, complete the USDA Program Discrimination Complaint Form, AD-3027, found online at [How to File a Program Discrimination Complaint](#) and at any USDA office or write a letter addressed to USDA and provide in the letter all of the information requested in the form. To request a copy of the complaint form, call (866) 632-9992. Submit your completed form or letter to USDA by: (1) mail: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights, 1400 Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, D.C. 20250-9410; (2) fax: (202) 690-7442; or (3) email: program.intake@usda.gov.

This institution is an equal opportunity provider and employer.



ST. JOHN LUTHERAN CHURCH
1301 Lincoln Avenue, Owatonna

COOKIE WALK

Saturday, December 9, 2023
9:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.

 Hundreds of Cookies & Christmas Goodies 

All Delicious!!  Incredible Variety 

Most items \$5.00/dozen
or
\$3.00 per half dozen 

Complimentary Coffee & Hot Cocoa 

 Cinnamon Rolls \$1.00 ea