



the power of human connections

sparks

Your Touchstone Energy® Cooperative 

a monthly newsletter from Steele-Waseca Cooperative Electric

February 2026

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- 2** Groundhog Day
- 4** National Thank a Mail Carrier Day
- 8** Super Bowl LX
- 14** Valentine's Day 1030031
- 16** Presidents' Day

Roetman, Kjersten volunteer to assist recovery efforts in Jamaica following Hurricane Melissa

Steele-Waseca Cooperative Electric Field Technician Gabe Roetman and Line Foreman Kevin Kjersten spent early December volunteering in Jamaica with recovery efforts following Hurricane Melissa in October 2025.

They left for Jamaica early, Dec. 1, and returned back to Minnesota late, Dec. 19.

Roetman and Kjersten joined other National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA) volunteers from U.S. co-ops rebuild the Jamaica Public Service's damaged grid with focus on installing new wires and equipment with the goal of restoring electricity, water, and connectivity to enable communities to recover and rebuild. "The team lead that we had last year sent a text saying that he was going to Jamaica over a weekend to do some scouting on work areas," wrote Gabe. "Kevin had emailed the international program and secured a slot so I jumped in with him."

Hurricane Melissa destroyed about 75% of the distribution system in Jamaica, requiring significant international aid.



Steele-Waseca's Field Technician Gabe Roetman (pictured right) feeds a downed line for placement on a power pole as part of recovery efforts to restore power in Jamaica during December 2025.

"The conditions were pretty torn up," stated Kevin. "A lot of roofs missing and trees tipped over. We worked around Discovery Bay and Runaway Bay. I would call it a urban area with a lot of houses and small stores. Some of the areas were very hilly and we primarily worked on the north side of the island close to the coast."

"A lot of the work consisted of putting up taps to houses, framing poles and putting wire back on poles," stated Gabe. "We would typically leave around 7:15 a.m., and get back to our rooms around 6 or 7 p.m. A few nights were around 8 p.m. Traffic played a big part on what time we would get back. Under normal traffic it was around a 45 minute drive to or from the work site, but if we got into rush hour traffic it would get close to double that time for the commute."

"The challenging part was patience and putting things together with the material we could salvage or what little material we were given," stated Kevin. "When a Jamaican says call you back shortly or food and material is on the way, it would usually mean 3 or 4 hours you should expect it."

"The Jamaican people were friendly, talkative and happy to see us," stated



Steele-Waseca Line Foreman Kevin Kjersten clears debris to access a downed line as part of the power restoration efforts in Jamaica following Hurricane Melissa.

HAPPY
VALENTINE'S
DAY



(SWCE in Jamaica continued on Page 3)

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This institution is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

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



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8:00 a.m.–4:30 p.m., Monday–Friday

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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*

We at Steele-Waseca Cooperative Electric are proud to be approaching our 90th year of service as your local power provider where our goal has always been to keep the electricity flowing as safely and consistently as possible.

Our mission use to simply be “keep the lights on,” and then our society developed into so many more applications for an enhanced life. Behind every switch, every warm home, and every business that opens its doors is a complex system that requires constant care and significant investment of time and capital.

Reliable electricity doesn't happen by accident. It requires ongoing investment in our local grid—through system repairs, maintenance, upgrades and the integration of new technologies that help us operate smarter and more efficiently.

Much of the energy system we rely on today was built decades ago. While it continues to serve us well, age alone means that components must be repaired or replaced to maintain performance and

safety. From poles and wires to transformers and substations, every part of the grid has a lifespan.

Routine maintenance helps extend that lifespan, but eventually equipment must be updated to meet modern standards. These proactive investments reduce the likelihood of outages, shorten restoration times when disruptions do occur and create a stronger backbone for our growing community. 1099701

The demands on the electric grid are also evolving. Homes and businesses today use more electricity than ever, and that trend will only continue. Electric vehicles, advanced HVAC systems, smart appliances and new commercial facilities add load to the local distribution system. As these technologies take hold, the grid must be able to support increased demand while maintaining the reliability our members expect.

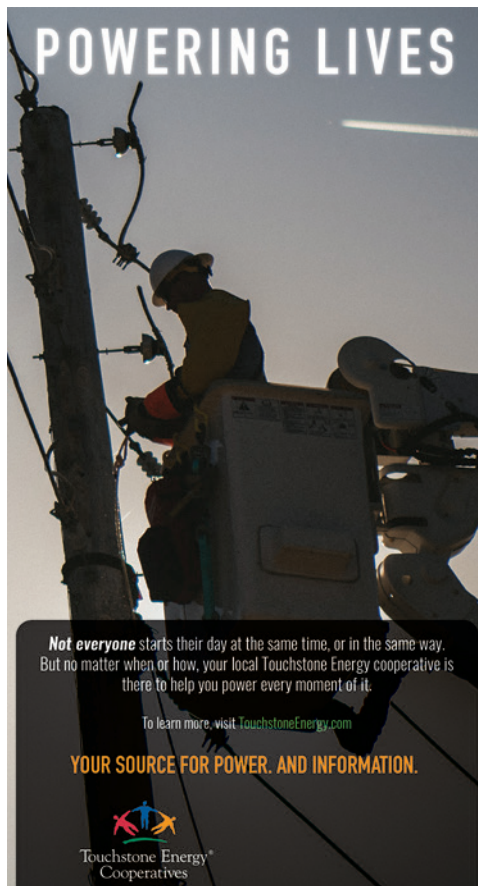
At the same time, new technologies are reshaping how we operate. They allow us to detect problems faster and respond more effectively. These technologies can isolate problems, reroute power to minimize outages and provide real-time data that helps us plan and maintain equipment more efficiently.

Implementing innovative technologies into the grid is not just a convenience—it is a necessity for ensuring reliability in an increasingly complex energy landscape.

While these improvements require thoughtful planning and financial investment, the return is significant. A stronger grid supports economic growth, improves service quality and enhances safety for our crews and community. Most importantly, it ensures that the essential power you rely on is available whenever you need it.

Our commitment to reliability runs deeper than infrastructure alone. It reflects our responsibility to our members and communities we serve. Every upgrade, every repair and every technology we deploy is an investment in your daily life—from the comfort of your home to the success of local businesses and schools.

We know that powering the communities in our service area means preparing for the future, not just maintaining the present. By investing in our local grid today, we are building a foundation for a brighter, more resilient tomorrow.



The Power Surge: Factors driving the rising demand for electricity

Courtesy: National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA)

Across the U.S., the demand for power is climbing at one of the fastest rates in decades.

As the economy becomes more reliant on electricity and data centers continue to sprout up in many parts of the country, electric cooperatives are preparing to meet the challenges that skyrocketing demand brings.

The North American Reliability Corporation—the watchdog for the U.S. electric grid—recently released the 2025-26 winter reliability assessment, which echoed other recent reports, including longer-term outlooks that expect sufficient energy resources during normal conditions, but potential supply shortfalls and outages under more intense weather conditions.

Extreme weather coupled with additional factors that are driving increased demand creates challenges for electric utilities, including cooperatives, in their mission to provide reliable power around the clock.

Several key factors are driving increased demand—including economic growth, expanded manufacturing, data center development and increased electrification in transportation. Together, these trends are reshaping how much electricity we consume and how quickly utilities like Steele-Waseca Cooperative Electric must adapt to meet future needs.

One of the biggest drivers of rising demand is increased electrification. More homes and businesses are transitioning to electricity for home heating, water heating, and transportation. EVs are becoming more common on the road, and many states are offering incentives to help consumers make the switch. Additionally, electric heat pumps are replacing traditional furnaces in many homes due to their efficiency. These transitions mean more energy use and pressure placed on our electric grid.

Data centers are another major contributor to rising demand. As AI, cryptocurrency and cloud computing technologies grow, the need for data processing and storage has skyrocket-



Why is the Demand for Electricity Rising?

Demand for electricity in the U.S. is booming. Recent data shows that power consumption nationwide is set to increase by at least 38 gigawatts (enough electricity to power 3,600 homes for one year) between now and 2028. Meeting this new demand will require a combination of new power plants, grid upgrades and energy storage technology advancements. Here are the key factors that are driving increased demand.

- 1 Increased Electrification:** Electric vehicle adoption, electrification of home heating and industrial electrification are increasing overall U.S. energy consumption.
- 2 Data Centers:** Driven by explosions in AI, cryptocurrency and cloud computing, total U.S. data center load is projected to increase by 65% by 2050.
- 3 Economic Growth:** Residential power consumption is expected to increase by 14% to 22% through 2050 due to increases in population and steady economic growth.
- 4 Manufacturing Growth/Onshoring:** New, expanding and "onshored/reshored" manufacturing capacity driven by federal incentives is expected to increase industrial demand by 13,000 GWh per year.

ed. Data centers require huge amounts of power to operate servers and cooling systems 24/7. Tech companies are building new facilities nationwide—many of which are in electric cooperative-served areas—and these regions are experiencing multi-year surges in electricity demand as a result.

Economic and manufacturing growth are also contributing to higher electricity use. As businesses expand and new industries take root, especially in rural and suburban areas, the demand for reliable, high-capacity power is increasing. The resurgence of domestic manufacturing has led to major facility construction. These facilities often require substantial energy loads, and many operate continuously to keep production lines running. This growth brings jobs and investment, but it also puts new pressures on the electric grid.

Population growth and housing development are also contributing to rising demand in many regions, and everyday life is becoming more energy dependent, too. Smart appliances, connected devices, home offices and entertainment systems are adding to overall consumption, even as efficiency

improves.

While increased demand presents new challenges for electric utilities, it also has the potential to create significant opportunities for co-ops and the communities they serve, such as job growth, steady revenue and improved infrastructure. Electric co-ops are responding by planning carefully for the future—investing in grid modernization and offering programs and services to help co-op members conserve energy.

Strategic planning is critical to ensuring the grid can support everything from EV charging to large-scale manufacturing plants.

Electricity powers nearly every aspect of today's economy, and its role will only grow stronger. As electrification accelerates, long-term planning becomes more important than ever.

Steele-Waseca is ready to meet rising demand in their local communities. Through innovation, investment and collaboration, we are preparing for a more reliable and resilient energy future.

 #swceSERVICE

(SWCE in Jamaica continued from Page 1)

Kevin. "The English dialect can be difficult to understand with some of the Jamaicans. Our bus driver I noticed would use a different English dialect

talking with us or talking with native Jamaicans." 34231

As for where Kevin and Gabe stayed during their stay, "Accommodations were pretty good," stated Gabe. "We

stayed at Sand Castle in Ocho Rios which is close to where the big cruise ships dock. We would see different cruise ships throughout the week dock-

(SWCE in Jamaica continued on Page 5)

cookin' connection

Sweet & Salty P.O.D.

Delores Kalina

Lonsdale

pretzel rods
jumbo marshmallows
chocolate, melted
crushed pretzels

Insert pretzel rod into a jumbo marshmallow. Then dip it in melted chocolate and coat with crushed pretzels.

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 12 kWh credit per panel on this month's statement for energy generated during December 2025. 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 minimum bill credit of \$15 is awarded among however many of those members find their account number. For example, if all numbers are found, a credit of \$15 will be applied to the members' following month's electric bill; or, if only one member finds their number, that member receives a \$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 3rd of the month following receipt of the *Sparks*, or the amount will be forfeited.

January issue of Sparks



Numbers found:
Ramona Zihlke
Numbers not found:
Cheri Hopke
Christopher DeGrood
Kevin McMullin
William Stransky



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, or register your account with SmartHub. For instructions to use SmartHub, visit swce.coop/smarthub.

• **If you have changed or added phone numbers**, please contact SWCE to update your information, or change it through your SWCE SmartHub account.

• **Need a new water heater?** For information about our Westinghouse Electric Water Heater Program, phone the SWCE office weekdays between 8 a.m.-4:30 p.m., or email rebates@swce.coop.

• **December temps** – The average high temperature for December was 27° F, while the average low was 9° F. This resulted in 1,447.5 Heating Degree Days (HDDs), and 0 Cooling Degree Days (CDDs). They compare to last year's average high of 31° F and average low of 17° F. This resulted in 1,262.5 HDDs and 0 CDDs.

• **ENERGY STAR® Rebates** – For a complete list of residential, commercial, industrial, and agricultural rebates, and their respective rebate form, visit swce.coop/rebates/. For more information or to receive a rebate request form, email rebates@swce.coop, or call 507-451-7340 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 or
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

Metallic balloon safety for all times during the year

Metallic Mylar balloons are great indoors and can brighten the bleakest and most dreary winter day. They are great at birthdays, graduations, and other special occasions like the upcoming Valentine's Day.

However, you must know how to use and dispose of metallic balloons properly, or you could cause a power outage and damage utility electrical equipment.

Because of the metallic coating, they conduct electricity well and can short out circuits in your community's power system.

You and your neighbors could lose power, traffic lights could go out, and entire blocks of homes and businesses could go dark. To prevent this, keep metallic balloons secured. When done with the balloons, deflate them and throw them in the garbage. Do not release them.

Here are tips to help you make sure metallic balloons are used and disposed of safely:

- Always tie your balloon down or use a weight.
- Do not intentionally release the balloons. 1103153
- It is safest to keep metallic balloons inside. In fact, some parks have banned metallic balloons on their property, so

be aware of these warnings.

- If you see a metallic balloon or another toy in contact with a power line, never attempt to disconnect it yourself. Notify the electrical company immediately. Always assume power lines are live, and keep yourself and all other items at least 10 feet away from power lines.

- Never tie a metallic ribbon on your balloon. Also, never tie a metallic balloon to a child's wrist. If the balloon comes in contact with electricity, it will travel through the balloon and into the child. This could cause a serious injury or even death.

- When no longer in use, puncture and deflate the balloons before creatively reusing or disposing of them.

Metallic balloons have been known to float for several days before losing their helium and returning to Earth. If one lands within the fence of an electric utility substation, it can cause electrical fires and untold dollars' worth of damage after high transmission circuitry goes down.

(Courtesy: Safe Electricity)

 #swceLIFE+

TIPS TO AVOID ENERGY SCAMS

Beware of "winter bill relief" energy scams. Scammers often exploit high winter bills by offering fake discount or relief programs. They may ask for upfront payments or personal details to lower your rate. Legitimate utilities never demand gift cards, wire transfers or payment through apps like PayPal or Venmo. Always verify offers directly by calling your utility's phone number located on your energy bill—do not call any phone numbers provided in a suspicious email or text. Remember to take time to confirm before you pay; real savings programs won't pressure you for immediate action.

Is my off peak/dual fuel being controlled today?

Visit Steele-Waseca's website, swce.coop, move your cursor to "MEMBERS" and click on "Are We Controlling Today" to learn of our wholesale energy provider, Great River Energy, plans for controlling.

(SWCE in Jamaica continued from Page 3)

ing and leaving. I shared a room with Kevin and we had hot water and air conditioning. Some of the guys did not have hot water."

"The food was OK. It was typically the same thing every day," stated Kevin. "Breakfast would consist of fish or chicken with boiled green banana, dumplings and potato. Lunch was typically jerk chicken or sweet chili chicken, plantains and rice. Towards the last week we would get juicy patties for breakfast. We also stopped at a store and got bread, peanut butter and jelly and a few other snacks. A lot of days

(SWCE in Jamaica continued on Page 7)



Kevin works on pole connections in Jamaica.



ad connection

give away

APPROX. 650 RELIGIOUS BOOKS, 80% Catholic, hours Fri., 12-6 p.m., Sat. 10 a.m.-3 p.m., 9079 SW 37th Ave., Hope. 676-1804.

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

RETIRED PHYSICAL THERAPIST ASSISTANT WILL ASSIST w/personal cares, exercises, meal prep, errands, light housekeeping. 456-0076.

JUNKERS OR REPAIRABLES, top \$ paid, cars, pickups, trucks, farm trackers. 332-2300.

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

FARMALL H TRACTOR in gd running condition. 456-5466.

FORD DIESEL SKID STEER. 330-1849.

TDR TRANSFER DEVELOPMENT RIGHTS in Erin & Forest Townships, CPI vs CER calculation, are you losing them? Sell & transfer off before deadline. 612-756-0271/Dan.

LOOKING FOR CARPENTERS & REMODELERS! Flexible hrs, full- or part-time work, no experience needed, must have a valid driver's license, \$18-25 an hour. Set up an interview w/Eric. 676-4886.

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

for sale

(2) GOODYEAR TIRES, 9.5x15, 3 rib, tractor fronts, like new on JD 6-hole rims, \$160/pair; **HINIKER 1300 TRACTOR CAB**, JD 4020 mounts, new paint, gd glass, \$650. 330-3945.

2002 POLARIS 550 SUPER SPORT, 2444 mi., fan-cooled twin ran great 3 yrs ago, looks great, \$2500. 676-2802.

MINI STORAGE UNITS, Blmg Prairie. 456-2957.

USED AUTO PARTS: motors, trannys, tires, anything automotive. 332-2300/Fbo.

All area codes are 507 unless otherwise noted

OAK FIREWOOD, seasoned 2 yrs, stored inside, you haul, \$125/pickup load. 210-0316.

BOAT/RV STORAGE FOR RENT; 1999 CRESTLINER, 1-yr-old trailer, \$6900/obo; **SM. STRAW & HAY BALES**. 475-2322.

FRONTIER PALLET FORKS, like new, for 746 loader; **JD 7630**, 2WD w/746 loader, 1 owner, 480/80/42 w/duals, 16-spd AutoQuad; **CHERRY PICKR**, \$100/obo; **PINCOR GENERATOR**, \$2500/obo. 381-9849.

.17 REM FIREBALL 20-GR. ACCUTIP, 3 boxes, \$90; **300 WIN MAG**, 150-gr., \$25 per box; **FEDERAL FUSION 30-06 150-GR.**; **WIN COPPER IMPACT 30-06 150-GR.**, \$25 per box. 461-1191.

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

QUALITY CARPENTRY; MAINTENANCE on houses, apartments, and outbuildings; **PROFESSIONAL DECK BUILDING & REPAIR; MINOR PLUMBING**. 213-7569.

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

MINK JACKET, new cond., ladies, brown, size 10-12, best offer. 645-4103.

GRASS HAY, full size small square bales, no rain. 451-2978.

RENTAL, Izaak Walton League Bldg., 4 mi. south of Owat., seats 100, full kitchen, grill, Wi-Fi, \$175. 451-7946.

AUSTRALIAN SHEP. PUPS, born 11/20/25, excellent family, companion, & working dogs, purebred/registered parents on site, 1st shots & dewormed. 456-3419.

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

2018 CHEV. TRAVERSE, new tires, 3rd row seating, A-1 cond., \$13,500. 210-3622.

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

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

3-PC. LUGGAGE SET, exc. cond. w/wheels, used once, red, \$45. 363-2219.

ICE HOUSE, 8x14, 110+12V, 6 hole, sleeps 2-3, new tires & bearings. 951-2568.

FORTUNE CREEK TRL LOTS, the covenant allows for a pole shed, starting at \$75,000. 332-4623/John.

RED BEDROOM SET, matt. & box spring incl.; **ROCKING HORSE**. 451-5456 after 5 p.m.

1939 CHEVY PICKUP CAB ONLY, front bumper, hood, front fenders, running boards, \$2500; **CHAINS FOR TRACTOR**, #2, 10'4" long, 28" wide, \$200. 491-4565.

KID'S WOODEN HIGH CHAIR & FOLDING PLAYPEN, nice, \$20/each, both for \$35; **CASABLANCA 52" CEILING FAN** w/4-light fixture, \$20. 213-0600.

2 DOWNHILL ROSSIGNOL SKIS. 678-978-7444.

13" TIRE RIM, 5 hole, new, \$25. 200-2096.

1938 FORD PICKUP, professionally built, lowered, Ford Ranger 2007 chassey, motor, lots of new parts, like new pickup box, in primer, \$28,569. 327-2741.

VINTAGE 1-HORSE SLEIGH, \$250/obo; **(2) VINTAGE WASH MACHINE TUBS**, 1 blue, 1 green, great for flowers & decoration, \$50/each. 330-4125.

AIR FRYER; TV TRAYS w/stand; **3-PIECE LUGGAGE**. 451-2687.

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.

Sparks Free Classified Ad Form for all SWCE Members

Ads need to be received in our office by **February 3** to ensure being printed in the March *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 3rd will be printed in the April 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 at 2411 W. Bridge St., or email your ad to: sparks@swce.coop.

ENERGY EFFICIENCY

TIP OF THE MONTH

Winter weather can cause your home heating system to work overtime. Check for air leaks and drafts around doors and windows, then seal them with weatherstripping or caulk. Close fireplace dampers when not in use, and consider installing insulating curtains to help keep warm air inside. You can also save energy by lowering your thermostat a few degrees. Even small adjustments like these can reduce heating costs and improve comfort during the coldest months.



SAVE THE DATE

"STRIP TILL MAKES DOLLARS AND SENSE"

FREE LUNCH PROVIDED

Feb 17th: Torey's Restaurant - Owatonna

Feb 18th: SW Research & Outreach Center - Lamberton

Feb 19th: Lake Benton Community Center - Lake Benton

Hwy 14 Tour-CLASIC February 2026

KEYNOTE SPEAKERS:

Pat Duncanson is a 5th generation farmer who owns and manages Highland Family Farms near Mapleton, MN, producing commodity, food grade, and organic corn, soybeans, rye, and hogs, using no-till, strip-till, and cover crops. Highland Family Farms' practices of increasing soil organic matter for long-term productivity and maintaining near term cash flow can meet the needs of current and future generations.

Randy Depuydt manages his family's corn/soybean operation between St. Clair and Mankato, where they started working with strip-till in 2009. Randy also runs a custom strip-tilling business that has helped local producers transition with over 35,000ac covered to date. Randy has been a GIS Specialist and Certified Crop Advisor with McPherson Crop Management since 2011, consulting with growers using both reduced till and conventionally tilled cropping systems.

To register scan the QR code:

Owatonna:



Lamberton:



Lake Benton:



or go to:

<https://www.mnsoilhealth.org/events/2026-02/>



(SWCE in Jamaica continued from Page 5)

lunch didn't show up till 4 p.m. At night we ate at a restaurant across the street which had a good variety of food to choose from. KFC wasn't too far away either." 22114

"The other volunteers were great," wrote Gabe. He stated four of them were back from their volunteer experience in Jamaica that Gabe participated in 2024, four from Maryland, two from Arkansas, two from Virginia, one from

Missouri, one from Texas, along with Gabe and Kevin from Minnesota.

"We all signed up with a very common goal and it is very impressive of how little time it takes to form a team, friendship and bond with the people on these missions," stated Gabe. "It's almost like we had worked together for years."

 #swceCOOPERATION

Applications due Feb. 11 for 2026 Youth Tour to Washington, D.C.

Steele-Waseca Cooperative Electric is sponsoring up to two eligible students, and adds incentive to attract applicants

Steele-Waseca Cooperative Electric (SWCE) is accepting applications from eligible high school sophomores or juniors for an all-expense paid trip, valued at approximately \$4,000, to Washington, D.C., for the 2026 Youth Tour, June 15-20.

The tour is coordinated through the Minnesota Rural Electric Association (MREA) and hosted by the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA). Participating cooperatives sponsor a member student(s) to travel to Washington, D.C., learn about cooperatives and our government, tour historical sites, and have fun meeting new friends from Minnesota and other delegates from across the nation.

To be eligible, the entrant must meet the following requirements:

1. The entrant is currently a high school sophomore or junior, and their parent(s)/guardian(s) are a Steele-Waseca member. Dependents of Steele-Waseca employees or directors are not eligible to participate.
2. All entries must include: a) the completed application form below; b) selfie/video response to the 3 questions lasting at least 2 minutes in length total (not to exceed 3 minutes); c) two letters of recommendation (one from an instructor, counselor or administrator, and the other from a church or community leader).
3. Videos may be emailed to Member Services Supervisor Randy Sobrack at rsobrack@swce.coop. Applicants

may either mail, email, or drop off the application form and letters of recommendation to: Steele-Waseca Cooperative Electric, c/o Youth Tour 2026, P.O. Box 485, Owatonna, MN 55060. Entries must be received in Steele-Waseca's office on or before Wednesday, Feb. 11. The two Youth Tour recipients will be notified by Wednesday, March 11. **All entrants completing the application requirements will be entered into a drawing for a \$250 gift card that will be announced at SWCE's annual meeting Tuesday, June 2.**

Each entry will be evaluated by a panel of judges for the personality and communication exhibited in the video response to the three listed questions within the time requirement, and to learn more about the applicant from their letters of recommendation.

Responses to the following questions:

1. Why would you like to be Steele-Waseca's delegate for the 2026 Youth Tour? What do you hope to gain from the experience?

2. What activities do you enjoy most at school? Note letters and honors earned, positions held, etc.

3. How do you contribute to making your community a better place to live whether it's through your school, church, community service, or being employed?

MREA is requiring each participating cooperative's delegate(s) report to the Crowne Plaza Airport located at 3 Appletree Square in Bloomington for an orientation session on Monday, June 15, presently at 9:30 a.m. An afternoon flight to Washington, D.C., will follow the session. ~~5/2~~

 #swceLIFE+

 **YOUTH** *Make* **TOUR** *Your* **2026** *Mark*

A week of building memories, skills, leadership and friendships that will last a lifetime!

Washington, D.C. Youth Tour 2026 — June 15-20

Name _____ Gender _____ Phone _____

Address _____
Street _____ City _____ State _____ Zip _____ County _____

Email address _____ Parent(s) or Guardian(s) _____

I am currently a high school _____ sophomore _____ junior at _____

Parent/Guardian consent: I/we hereby give my/our dependent high school student permission to enter the Rural Electric Washington, D.C. Youth Tour 2026 Contest. I/we understand if they're selected, I/we will be responsible for providing their transportation to the Crowne Plaza Airport in Bloomington and from the Minneapolis/St. Paul International Airport.

Name(s) _____ SWCE account # _____