

living with energy IN IOWA

Grundy County REC
A Touchstone Energy Cooperative

MAY 2021

Grundy County REC seeks board candidates ▶ See Page 5



Visit our website at www.grundycountyrecia.com

Save the date: Hansen's
Dairy Farm tour

New ideas for home
improvement projects

Asparagus and
rhubarb recipes

Living with Energy in Iowa magazine (ISSN: 1935-7176) is published monthly by the Iowa Association of Electric Cooperatives, a not-for-profit organization representing Iowa's member-owned local electric cooperatives. Association address: 8525 Douglas Ave., Suite 48, Des Moines, IA 50322-2992. The phrase *Living with Energy in Iowa* is a mark registered within the state of Iowa to the Iowa Association of Electric Cooperatives. The magazine does not accept advertising.

Editorial Office: 8525 Douglas Ave., Suite 48, Des Moines, IA 50322-2992. Telephone: 515-276-5350. E-mail address: editor@livingwithenergyiniowa.com. *Living with Energy in Iowa* magazine does not assume responsibility for unsolicited items.

Website: www.livingwithenergyiniowa.com

Postmaster: Send address changes to *Living with Energy in Iowa* magazine, 8525 Douglas Ave., Suite 48, Des Moines, IA 50322-2992. Periodicals Postage Paid at Des Moines, Iowa, and at additional mailing offices.

Change of Address: Every local electric cooperative maintains an independent mailing list of its members, so please send your change of address directly to your local electric cooperative's office. *Living with Energy in Iowa* magazine cannot make an address change for you.

© Copyright 2021, Iowa Association of Electric Cooperatives. No portion of the editorial, photographic or other content of *Living with Energy in Iowa* magazine or its website may be reproduced without written permission of the editor.

To have your photo considered for a future cover, email high-res images to editor@livingwithenergyiniowa.com. If we select your photo, you'll be awarded with **\$100.**



living with energy IN IOWA

Touchstone Energy®
Cooperatives of Iowa
www.touchstoneenergy.com

CONTENTS

MAY 2021

Features

6 Unified efforts power rural economic development

National Economic Development Week is in May, making it a great time to recognize electric cooperative-inspired economic development success stories across Iowa.



6

8 Asparagus and rhubarb recipes

Celebrate the foods of spring with these asparagus and rhubarb recipes from Iowa's co-op cooks. **PLUS:** Find out how you can receive a \$25 credit on your power bill!



8

10 Trending now: Home improvement projects

The pandemic led to a rise in home improvement projects, and it's a trend that's continuing. Discover tips for making environmentally friendly and cost-effective choices.



10

Favorites

3 Statewide Perspective

State programs provide financial assistance

3 Editor's Choice Contest

Win 10 shade trees

14 In the Community

Shine the Light contest for co-op members

15 Out Back

Gardening genes don't grow here

ON THE COVER



Congratulations to Marty Hulsebos, an Access Energy Cooperative member, for supplying the cover image for this month's issue of *Living with Energy in Iowa* magazine! ⚡

State programs provide financial assistance with mortgage, rent and utility bills due to COVID-19

BY REGI GOODALE

Many households and businesses have been financially impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Iowa's electric cooperatives are committed to the communities we serve, and we want to share some new state resources with our readers.

In late March, Gov. Kim Reynolds announced two new programs to assist eligible Iowans who have been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and need financial assistance: The Iowa Homeowner Foreclosure Prevention Program and the Iowa Rent and Utility Assistance Program. Both programs are administered by the Iowa Finance Authority.

Iowa Rent and Utility Assistance Program

Funded by the federal Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2021, this program will provide rent and/or utility assistance for up to 12 months. Eligible renters can receive financial assistance with past due rent, electricity, gas, propane, fuel oil, water, sewer and/or trash removal bills incurred no earlier than March 13, 2020.

Utility payments through the program will be made directly to utility providers and applied to the applicants' accounts. If you need assistance with electric bill documentation for your application, please contact your local electric cooperative.

Eligible households must be current renters earning no more than 80% of their county's area median income. One or more individuals in the household must have either qualified for unemployment benefits or have experienced a documented financial hardship as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. And the household can demonstrate a risk of experiencing homelessness or housing instability,

which may include a past due utility or rent notice or eviction notice.

Full eligibility details are available at www.IowaHousingRecovery.com. The website includes an eligibility precheck and answers to frequently asked questions. You can also call Iowa's Utility Recovery Hotline at 515-348-8976 or 877-463-3269 for more information about this program.



Iowa Homeowner Foreclosure Prevention Program

This program reopened in late March to provide mortgage payment assistance for income-eligible homeowners impacted by COVID-19 who are at risk of foreclosure.

Eligible homeowners can receive mortgage assistance for up to four months (including up to two months in arrears), beginning with an April 1, 2020 mortgage payment.

There is a maximum assistance per household of \$3,600.

This short-term program will be available until funds are exhausted or a new federal program is launched. Program funding is provided through federal CARES Act funds. Complete eligibility details are available at www.IowaHousingRecovery.com or by calling the Housing Recovery Line at 855-300-5885 or 515-348-8813.

At www.IowaMortgageHelp.com, you can also learn more about Iowa mortgage help, which offers free, confidential mortgage counseling to Iowa homeowners at risk of foreclosure.

If you are at imminent risk of foreclosure and need legal assistance, Iowa Legal Aid may be able to assist you at no cost. Call 800-532-1275 or visit www.IowaLegalAid.com. ⚡

Regi Goodale is the director of regulatory affairs for the Iowa Association of Electric Cooperatives.

EDITOR'S CHOICE CONTEST

Win 10 shade trees

Shade trees can help lower summer energy bills. To help you get started, we're giving 10 lucky electric co-op members 10 free shade trees up to a foot tall. The winners also will receive a one-year membership to the Arbor Day Foundation, which includes a subscription to the organization's bimonthly newsletter, a copy of *The Tree Book* and discounts on future tree and shrub purchases. ⚡



Visit our website and win!

Enter this month's contest by visiting www.livingwithenergyiowa.com no later than May 31, 2021. You must be a member of one of Iowa's electric cooperatives to win. There's no obligation associated with entering, we don't share entrant information with anyone and multiple entries from the same account will be disqualified. The winner of the Home Technology Package from the March issue was Larry Heitmeier from Access Energy Cooperative.

OFFICE CLOSING

Grundy County REC
will be closed

Monday, May 31

in observance of
Memorial Day.
Our phones are
answered 24/7. ⚡

SOCIAL MEDIA

Like us on
Facebook



Like Grundy County REC on Facebook (@GrundyCountyREC) to stay up-to-date on energy efficiency information, safety tips, current promotions, outages and more. ⚡

Grundy County REC
A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative
"Our mission is to provide our members safe, reliable, electric service"



Office: Grundy County REC
303 N Park Avenue
P.O. Box 39
Grundy Center, IA 50638

Phone: 319-824-5251 or 1-800-390-7605

Fax: 319-824-3118

Call Before You Dig (Iowa One Call):
800-292-8989

Website: www.grundycountyrecia.com

Facebook: facebook.com/GrundyCountyREC

E-mail: mgeerdes@grundycountyrecia.org

Office Hours: Monday-Friday, 8 a.m.-4:30 p.m.
Call our office 24/7: 319-824-5251

General Manager/CEO: Michael Geerdes

Officers and Directors:

District 1: Kevin Pruisner
District 2: Norbert Boyle
District 3: Nick Strohbehm
District 4: Larry Rohach
District 5: Matt Kopriva
District 6: David Schmidt
District 7: Jason Paper

This institution is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

LOCAL PERSPECTIVE

Tree trimming improves service for all

BY MICHAEL GEERDES

One of the things I love best about our community is the natural beauty that surrounds us. We are fortunate to have so many trees that offer beauty, shade and a habitat for all sorts of birds and other wildlife. We know that you appreciate our community for many of the same reasons.

At Grundy County REC, we strive to balance maintaining beautiful surroundings and ensuring a reliable power supply by keeping power lines clear in rights of way (ROW).

While we recognize and appreciate the beauty of trees, there are three main benefits to tree trimming in ROW areas. However, before touching on the main reasons, let me explain what a "right of way" is and how it may impact you. A right of way is the land we use to construct, maintain, replace or repair underground and overhead power lines. Rights of way enable the co-op to provide clearance from trees and other obstructions that could hinder the power line installation, maintenance or operation. ROW areas are typically on public lands or located near a business or home.

Grundy County REC must be able to maintain the power lines above and below the ROW. The overall goal of vegetation management is to provide reliable power to our members while maintaining the beauty of our community. Proactive vegetation management benefits co-op members in three tangible ways.

Safety

First and foremost, we care about our members and put their safety and that of our lineworkers above all else. Overgrown vegetation and trees pose a risk to power lines. For example, if trees are touching power lines in our members' yards,

they can pose a grave danger to families. If children can access those trees, they can potentially climb into a dangerous zone. Electricity can arc, or jump, from a power line to a nearby conductor like a tree. A proactive approach also diminishes the chances of fallen branches or trees during severe weather events that make it more complicated and dangerous for lineworkers to restore power.



Reliability

Strategic tree trimming reduces the frequency of downed lines causing power outages. Generally, healthy trees don't fall on power lines, and clear lines don't cause problems. Proactive trimming and pruning keeps lines clear to promote reliability.

Affordability

As you know, Grundy County REC is a not-for-profit cooperative. This structure means we strive to keep our costs in check to keep our rates affordable, and it extends to our approach to vegetation management. If trees grow too close to power lines, the potential for expensive repairs also increases. Effective tree trimming and other vegetation management efforts keep costs down for everyone.

Our community is a special place. We appreciate the beauty trees afford, but we also know our community depends on us to provide reliable energy. Through vegetation management, we are better able to keep the power lines clear, prepare for future weather events and secure the grid's reliability. ⚡

Michael Geerdes is the general manager of Grundy County REC.

Grundy County REC seeks board candidates

As an electric cooperative, Grundy County REC is guided by an elected board of directors who represent our members when making important decisions. It is essential to elect strong directors to your cooperative's board, which is why we encourage members to run in the board elections. Not only do we need to encourage friends and family to run for board positions, but we also need to get out and vote for those individuals who we think will act in the best interests of our cooperative.

The nomination process puts no limit on the number of candidates in a given district. To serve on the board:

- A candidate must hold an active membership and be a bonafide resident in the district he or she is to represent.
- A candidate cannot be in any way employed by, financially affected by or have other interests in a business that competes with the cooperative,



its affiliates or sells its products or services to the cooperative. No close relative of a candidate, as defined by board policy, can be employed by the cooperative.

- All candidates should note the time requirements of a director are more than just 12 monthly meetings. Directors should be prepared to devote an average of 25-30 days annually to cooperative business-related activities.

Director elections are scheduled to be held at Grundy County REC's annual meeting on Thursday, Sept. 9, 2021. Currently, two board

seats are up for election in two of the seven cooperative districts. The incumbent directors whose terms expire in 2021 include Norb Boyle, District 2 and Nick Strohbehn, District 3.

If you are interested in being nominated as a director, please contact one of the following nominating committee members to learn about the process. ⚡

- **Mike Wiarda**, 12192 B Avenue, Ackley, IA 50601-8042, 515-689-2649, District 2
- **Mark Schildroth**, 23083 V Avenue, Reinbeck, IA 50669-8100, 319-269-3631, District 3
- **Kevin Pruisner**, 14705 R Avenue, Dike, IA 50624-8112, 319-415-8637
- **Matt Kopriva**, 2429 200th Street, Traer, IA 50675-9327, 319-240-3773
- **Jason Paper**, 1020 Underwood Avenue, Conrad, IA 50621-9611, 641-485-8862

ELECTRICAL SAFETY
⚡ TIPS FOR YOUR HOME

FOR MORE TIPS, VISIT SAFELECTRICITY.ORG

Cell phones don't belong in bed
Do not sleep or lounge with a charging cell phone or other device. You could burn your skin or set bedding on fire.

Don't overload outlets
Plugging several cords on one circuit draws too much power and can damage electronics or your wiring and may start a fire.

Pay attention to flickering lights
Do not ignore odd electrical symptoms. Flickering lights, warm or discolored outlets, frequently tripped circuits or fuses, or smoky odors may mean you have a problem. Consult a qualified electrician.

ILLINOIS EXTENSION
COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURAL, CONSUMER & ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCES

EEC
Energy Education Council

Safe Electricity.org

Happy Mother's Day

FROM GRUNDY COUNTY REC!

There's no denying it – moms are simply the best. From our family to yours, we hope all you amazing moms out there have a wonderful Mother's Day!

HAPPY MOTHER'S DAY

Unified efforts power the economic development puzzle

BY KAY SNYDER

The second week of May marks National Economic Development Week, providing an opportunity to highlight the strategic and unified effort that goes into supporting business growth and community vitality across Iowa. As part of its foundational principle of Concern for Community, your electric cooperative works with numerous partners to foster a thriving business climate in your area.

Economic development means different things to different people. On a broad scale, anything a community does to foster and create a healthy economy can fall under the umbrella of economic development. Most of the time, economic development focuses on promoting investment, creating jobs and improving the quality of life for residents. Economic development is truly a puzzle, with a diversity of essential players coming together to address dozens of core activities accomplished by accessing many programs and resources.

Recognizing the benefits of a unified effort to power the “puzzle of economic development” and fit these pieces together, Iowa’s electric cooperatives created the Iowa Area Development Group (IADG) to serve as its economic development organization. For decades, IADG staff has been immersed in statewide economic development, compiling the network of partners, knowledge of programs and project experience needed to support this vital business initiative. IADG focuses on business attraction, existing business expansion, entrepreneurship and community development projects.



There are hundreds of examples of electric cooperative-inspired economic development success stories across Iowa, including the following two recent examples.

Powering business growth

The Butler Logistics Park, located in rural Butler County near Shell Rock, provides a perfect example of how an industrial park can spark incredible regional growth through business location and job creation. Butler County REC, Butler-Grundy Development Alliance, Iowa Northern Railway Company (IANR) and Central Iowa Water Association are vital partners in developing this 230-acre and expanding industrial park.

Through active marketing, Trinity Industries became interested in the property as a location for the \$60 million TrinityRail Maintenance Services facility, which purchased the entire park. Local players came together to work through the company’s requirements. Butler County REC secured a \$2 million pass-through loan from the U.S. Department of Agriculture to support installing nearly 8,000 additional feet of rail to the IANR main track, necessary to meet the company’s requirements.

“With any project such as this, there are numerous parts that have to come together, including the work of many individuals,” says Craig Codner, CEO of Butler County REC. Our staff put in many hours toward this project and continues to be engaged as the park expands. We have a tremendous working relationship with the Butler-Grundy Development Alliance, who was instrumental in attracting the plant to the park.”

“I also cannot say enough about



the IANR team. This was a true partnership with everyone’s goal the same, to bring the plant to the Butler Logistics Park,” Codner adds.

The impact of the 230-acre rail maintenance facility is the creation of more than 250 career opportunities for current residents and those attracted by these positions, and an overall boost to the local economy.

Spurring additional growth, in October 2020, Mid-Iowa Cooperative, a farmer-owned cooperative based in east-central Iowa, broke ground on Shell Rock Soy Processing, a \$270 million soybean crushing plant located on an expansion of the Butler Logistics park. The facility is expected to create 50 high-quality jobs when operational in 2022.

Powering community services and entrepreneurship

Concern for Community and Cooperation among Cooperatives are two of the cooperative principles that shine in this community

development project spotlight.

818 Forward with Faith (FWF) is a non-profit dedicated to building homes where adults with disabilities can lead lives of dignity while their specialized physical, emotional and social needs are met. FWF was founded by Jerry and Judy Fynaard, whose son Caleb was born with cerebral palsy. It was right after high school when Caleb was involved in an automobile accident, and the special care he needed became more than his current living facility could provide. That is what spurred the Fynaards to found FWF with the mission of providing homes for adults with disabilities that are an extension of their childhood home and a safe haven for the residents and their families.

Pella Cooperative Electric Association and Southwest Iowa REC provided \$300,000 from their Revolving Loan Funds to support the FWF home construction, which opened in Pella in November 2019.

With the goal of “one Faith House at a time,” FWF is working toward constructing a home for women also to be located in Pella.

“Pella is a small community where we step up to take care of each other and work to support those in need. Pella Cooperative Electric and Southwest Iowa REC were honored to use our resources to help Forward with Faith develop a solution for a need in our community,” Pella Cooperative Electric CEO Jon Miles says.

While just two projects were highlighted in this article, examples of large and small “wins” are frequently included in your local newspapers, electric cooperative and chamber newsletters, and *Living with Energy in Iowa* magazine.

Rural utilities have an important presence in local communities. Throughout the past several years, the local ownership of businesses in rural communities continues to trend downward. So does the pool of stakeholders willing and able to invest, engage and support local business and community development efforts. Your electric cooperatives actively participate and contribute to business and community initiatives across the state.

We’re grateful that electric cooperative staff, and their members, volunteer time and talents to support local communities across Iowa. Every one of these roles is a vital piece of powering economic development. ⚡



Kay Snyder is the director of marketing and communications for the Iowa Area Development Group.

RHUBARB & ASPARAGUS RECIPES



Creamy Rhubarb Dessert

- ½ cup butter
- 1½ cups plus 2 tablespoons flour, divided
- 1 cup pecans, chopped, divided
- 4 cups rhubarb
- 1 cup plus 3 tablespoons sugar, divided
- 16 ounces cream cheese
- 2 teaspoons vanilla, divided
- 3 eggs, lightly beaten
- 1½ cups sour cream

Cut together butter and 1½ cup flour. Add ½ cup pecans and press into 13x9-inch pan. Mix rhubarb, ½ cup sugar and 2 tablespoons flour. Spoon over crust and bake at 350 degrees F for 15 minutes. Mix together cream cheese, ½ cup sugar and 1 teaspoon vanilla until smooth, then add eggs. Pour over hot rhubarb and bake at 350 degrees F for 30-35 minutes. Cool 10 minutes. Mix sour cream, 3 tablespoons sugar and 1 teaspoon vanilla. Spread over hot cheesecake, sprinkle with ½ cup pecans. Cool 1 hour then refrigerate. *Serves 12-16*

Cindy Bru • Marshalltown
Grundy County Rural Electric Cooperative

Chicken Asparagus Casserole

- 4 chicken breasts
- 1½ teaspoons seasoned salt
- ¼ teaspoon pepper
- ¼ cup vegetable oil
- 20 ounces frozen asparagus
- 10½ ounces cream of chicken soup (1 can)
- ½ cup mayonnaise or sour cream
- 1 teaspoon lemon juice
- ¼ teaspoon curry powder
- 1 cup cheddar cheese, grated

Cut chicken into bite size pieces and season with seasoned salt and pepper. Sauté chicken in oil for 5-6 minutes until white and opaque. Remove and drain on paper towels. Cook asparagus as directed on package. Drain and place in greased 9x13-inch baking dish. Add chicken pieces. In a separate bowl, mix soup, mayonnaise or sour cream, lemon juice and curry powder. Pour over chicken and sprinkle with cheese. Bake at 350 degrees F for 30 minutes. *Serves 8*

Linda Terlouw • Pella
Pella Cooperative Electric Association

Rhubarb Surprise Pie

- 1 cup flour, sifted
- 1 teaspoon baking powder
- ½ teaspoon salt
- 2 tablespoons butter
- 1 egg, beaten
- 2 tablespoons milk
- 3 cups rhubarb, diced
- 1 package strawberry Jell-O (3 ounces)
- ½ cup flour
- 1 cup sugar
- ½ teaspoon cinnamon
- ¼ cup butter, melted

Sift together 1 cup sifted flour, baking powder and salt. Cut in 2 tablespoons butter, add egg and milk then mix. Press into a greased 9-inch pie pan. Arrange rhubarb in pie pan and sprinkle with Jell-O. Combine ½ cup flour, sugar, cinnamon and ¼ cup melted butter and sprinkle on top of pie. Bake at 350 degrees F for 50 minutes or until rhubarb is tender. *Serves 6*

Lea Bradley • Mount Pleasant
Access Energy Cooperative

Fresh Facts Source:
Iowa Department
of Agriculture and
Land Stewardship

MEDICINAL ROOTS

Rhubarb is a very old plant that dates back to ancient China in 2700 BC. At that time, it was used for medicinal purposes. The roots of the Chinese variety are still used in medicine today.

Cherry Rhubarb Crunch

- 2¼ cups oatmeal
- ¾ cup flour
- ¾ cup brown sugar
- ¾ cup oleo
- 1 cup sugar
- 2 tablespoons cornstarch
- 1 cup water
- 1 can cherry pie filling
- 4 cups rhubarb, diced
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract

Combine oatmeal, flour, brown sugar and oleo. Cut together to make crumbs. Save ¾ cup crumbs for top and spread the rest in 9x13-inch pan. In saucepan, combine sugar, cornstarch and water; cook until thick. Remove from heat and add pie filling, rhubarb and vanilla extract. Pour over crumb crust and sprinkle with remaining crumbs. Bake at 350 degrees F for 40 minutes.

**Barbara Dather • Melvin
North West Rural Electric Cooperative**

Ham and Asparagus Roll-Ups

- 30 fresh asparagus spears
- 15 ham slices
- 8 ounces cream cheese

Trim asparagus to length of ham slices. Wash the asparagus and blanch briefly for 2 minutes in boiling water. Remove stalks and put in bowl of ice water. Spread cream cheese on ham slices then add two asparagus spears and roll them up. Keep refrigerated until served. *Serves 15*

**Ann Clark • Panora
Guthrie County Rural Electric Cooperative Association**

Rhubarb Dump Cake

- 1 pound rhubarb, chopped (3-4 cups)
- 1 cup sugar
- 1 package strawberry Jell-O (3 ounces)
- 1 package yellow cake mix
- 1 cup water
- ¼ cup butter, melted

Spread rhubarb evenly over bottom of a greased 9x13-inch cake pan. Sprinkle sugar over the rhubarb, then the dry Jell-O, then the cake mix. Pour water and melted butter over the top. Do not stir. Bake at 350 degrees F for 45 minutes or until rhubarb is tender. This comes out like a cobbler.

Kathy Carter • Williams • Prairie Energy Cooperative

Asparagus Bacon Quiche

- 1 pound fresh asparagus
- 6 bacon strips
- 1 9-inch baked pastry crust
- 3 eggs
- 1½ cups half and half cream
- 1 cup grated Parmesan, divided
- 1 tablespoon green onions, sliced
- 1 teaspoon sugar
- ½ teaspoon salt
- ¼ teaspoon pepper
- 1 pinch ground nutmeg

Trim asparagus and cut into 1-inch pieces, then cook and drain. Cook and crumble bacon. Arrange bacon and asparagus in pastry crust. In a bowl, beat eggs, then add cream, ½ cup cheese, onions, sugar, salt, pepper and nutmeg. Pour over asparagus and bacon. Sprinkle with remaining cheese. Bake at 400 degrees F for 10 minutes. Reduce to 350 degrees F and bake for 23-25 minutes longer.

**Anna Domnick • Rock Rapids
Lyon Rural Electric Cooperative**

Wanted: Chicken Recipes The Reward: \$25 for every one we publish!

Winner, winner, chicken dinner! A versatile protein, chicken is a recipe favorite. Whether it's grilled, baked, fried or in sandwiches, salads or casseroles, the possibilities are endless. If we run your recipe in the magazine, we'll send a \$25 credit for your electric co-op to apply to your power bill. Recipes submitted also may be archived on our website at www.livingwithenergyiowa.com.

The deadline is May 31, 2021. Please include your name, address, telephone number, co-op name and the recipe category on all submissions. **Also provide the number of servings per recipe.**

EMAIL: recipes@livingwithenergyiowa.com
(Attach your recipe as a Word document or PDF to your email message.)

MAIL:
Recipes
Living with Energy in Iowa magazine
8525 Douglas Ave., Suite 48
Urbandale, Iowa 50322



ONLY EAT THE STALKS

Rhubarb is a perennial plant that is usually eaten fresh and harvested in the spring when the stalks are tender. Only the stalks (petioles) should be eaten because the leaves contain moderately poisonous oxalic acid.

FRESH FACTS

THREADED ON STRAW

Strawberries are thought to have originated with the Romans, maybe as far back as the Greeks. The name "strawberry" may have resulted from children in the 19th century, who threaded the berries on straw and sold them.

FRESH FACTS

PACKED WITH VITAMIN C

Strawberries contain vitamin C, folic acid, potassium and fiber. Eight fresh strawberries provide approximately the same amount of vitamin C as an orange.

FRESH FACTS

Trending now: Home improvement

Tips for making environmentally friendly and cost-effective choices

BY JULIA ROBINSON

With ongoing pandemic concerns and expanded remote working options, many of us are not only spending more time at home, but we're also considering a home office upgrade, creating a music room or enhancing an outdoor space. Mischa Fisher, chief economist for HomeAdvisor, says the growth in home improvement in 2020 was huge: "We nicknamed it the year of the home."

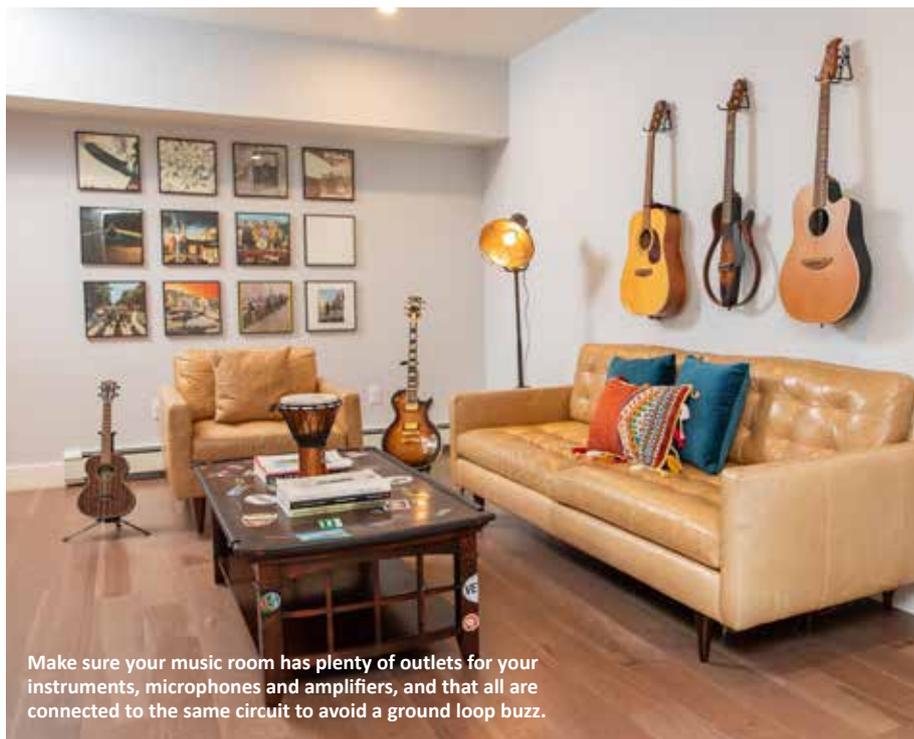
"In past years, there was a significant focus on return on investment," Fisher says. "People do a project because they're planning on selling their house." Last year was different because 41% of people said they planned upgrades specifically to make their homes better suit their lifestyle. It's a trend that's continuing in 2021.

No matter what project is on tap, it's essential to start with basic improvements that ensure your energy needs are met safely and efficiently. HomeAdvisor, a digital marketplace that aims to connect clients with prescreened local service professionals, found home maintenance budgets doubled in 2020 compared to previous years. Simple updates to infrastructure can make every home kinder to the environment and safer, with the added benefit of trimming electric bills.

Green building with simple improvements

Simple improvements based on a home's current condition can go a long way toward improving energy efficiency. "Often improvements are more beneficial than investing in newer technology, such as solar panels," says Peter Pfeiffer, president of an architecture firm and an early advocate for the ENERGY STAR® program, which encourages energy-efficient appliance purchases.

He recommends that homeowners plan their improvements based on



Make sure your music room has plenty of outlets for your instruments, microphones and amplifiers, and that all are connected to the same circuit to avoid a ground loop buzz.

increasing overall energy efficiency, beginning with modest repairs. The next step involves pricier improvements like replacing windows and upgrading to more efficient appliances. The most advanced improvements center on renewable energy generation and storage.

Pfeiffer suggests homeowners start by eliminating energy-wasting gaps in the home's structure and shading windows and walls.

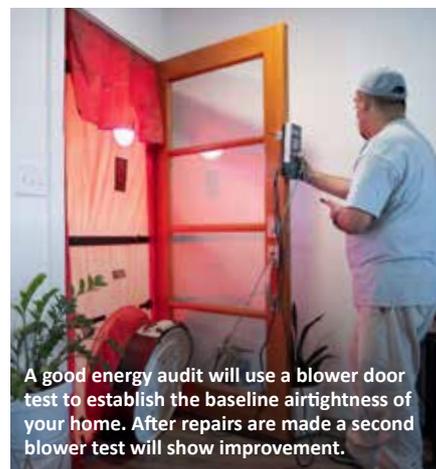
STEPS TO ELIMINATE ENERGY-WASTING GAPS

① Audit energy use

To find your home's trouble spots, engage a professional for a home energy audit. Your electric co-op offers advice on audits, which likely includes a review of your electric bills and a thorough examination of your home. Auditors will inspect the quality of insulation, test for electrical

hazards, make a thermographic inspection with infrared scanning, and conduct a blower test that measures the quality of air sealing around ducts, doors and windows.

The auditor then prepares a report detailing their findings and recommendations. According to the U.S. Department of Energy, the average home has enough air



A good energy audit will use a blower door test to establish the baseline airtightness of your home. After repairs are made a second blower test will show improvement.

Replacing regular window screens with solar screens can keep your home 10-15 degrees cooler in the summer by blocking the sun's rays that can heat the inside of your home.



leakage to add up to a 2-square-foot hole that remains open 24 hours a day. Fortunately, simple remedies can save up to 30% on utility bills. With your co-op's guidance, an energy audit will help you prioritize fixes for tightening your home and using shade to your advantage.

② Keep outside air outside

Managing the infiltration of outside air can affect homes year-round. Common recommendations are to update weatherstripping and caulk around doors and windows, clean filters and vents, and seal leaks in your ducts. Pfeiffer points out that leaky ducts are more wasteful than an inefficient air conditioner. It's more important to make sure you have an airtight heating, ventilating and air conditioning system before upgrading to a new air-handling system.

③ Prevent radiant heat

Radiant heat is absorbed from sunlight and can be transmitted through roofs and windows into the home. Pfeiffer advises using roof overhangs, awnings or planting trees and landscaping to shade west-facing windows to prevent the sun's rays from hitting the windows directly. Thermal drapes and window coverings can also deflect heat from sunny rooms. Radiant barriers in an attic can prevent heat from the roof from transferring to the attic floor and warming the rest of the house in the summer, saving money on cooling bills.

④ Add insulation

Adding insulation to a home's attic, basement, walls or crawl spaces will improve



With good planning, adding insulation to your home can be a successful DIY project.

energy efficiency. Pfeiffer says that optimal roofing materials combined with shade will prevent radiant heat from leaking into the home in the first place. Sealing basements and crawl spaces and wrapping your water heater in a thermal blanket also improve energy efficiency.

⑤ Upgrade lighting

Efficient lighting and lighter colors are key considerations when adding a home office or hobby space.

Replace lightbulbs with energy-efficient CFLs or LEDs to decrease energy consumption. An Energy-Star qualified CFL uses about one-fourth of the energy and lasts 10 times longer than traditional incandescent bulbs, and Energy-Star-qualified LEDs last 15 to 25 times longer. Light fixtures should hang close to the work or hobby space without getting in the way.

"The color of the horizontal reflecting surfaces in the room makes a big difference in how much energy you use," Pfeiffer says. "You need about three times as much lighting if you've got dark countertops compared to light-colored countertops."

⑥ Take additional steps to reduce demand

Once you've invested some time and a little money into making basic improvements, Pfeiffer advises implementing additional energy-saving measures. Replacing older appliances and windows with ENERGY STAR®-rated and e-coated products will save energy over the lifetime of your home. Solar panels can help you create your power, but they won't have as big of an impact unless you first address your energy demands.

"Before you go to the sexy things like solar on the roof, or things that you can talk about at a cocktail party, let's reduce the demand of energy first," Pfeiffer says.

Make safety a priority with home improvement projects

Rewiring your lights and adding new electrical systems to your home are complex and hazardous tasks that are best left in the hands of a licensed electrician.

Replacing old electrical outlets with ground-fault circuit interrupter (GFCI) outlets, while not a cost-saving improvement, is a necessary safety upgrade for outlets around water. GFCIs protect against shocks by breaking the flow of electrical current if they detect a fault. They are required in new construction, but the Electrical Safety Foundation International estimates 40 million homes do not have these lifesaving outlets in all "wet" rooms.

In addition, consider having an arc-fault circuit interrupter (AFCI) breaker professionally installed. AFCIs protect against fire-causing arcing that is commonly caused by damaged or worn wiring. ⚡

Hansen's Dairy Farm

Located in Hudson, population of about 2,400, sits Hansen's Dairy Farm, a name most of us know well. In fact, it's a brand you may find in your refrigerator or freezer right now.

A family-owned and operated farm with more than 150 years of history in the area, Hansen's began processing its own milk in 2004 and grew the operation to include three retail stores with delicious products like cheese curds, ice cream, butter, Wagyu-Holstein beef, and of course, a variety of milk. Hansen's employs 40 individuals, which is a significant value to our local communities.

On a typical day on the Hansen farm, Blake takes care of 300 cows – milking, breeding, helping deliver calves and tending to their livestock, which include the Holstein dairy cows, Wagyu beef cows and kangaroos. Blair manages the farm's 400 acres of crops and feeding the cows; everything they grow goes to feeding their cows. Brad runs the creamery and makes all the Hansen's Dairy products with the help of four employees. Brent manages product distribution and drives the farm's delivery truck.

In addition to the four brothers, many other members of the Hansen family play important roles in the operation. Blake's wife Jordan handles the farm's marketing, bookkeeping and tourism operations. The boys' mom Jeanne manages the farm store, and their dad Jay serves as the general contractor of their Cedar Falls store and their current renovations.

Hansen's Dairy Farm isn't an ordinary dairy farm. All the farm's dairy products are made right in their own creamery, they aren't brought in from an outside vendor. They are also well-known for providing tours, giving attendees a good view of what happens on a working farm, and yes, they have the most adorable kangaroos on-site that love to be treated to a delicious snack of bread. ⚡



Four brothers – Blake, Blair, Brad and Brent – returned to the family farm, each bringing their own interests, talents and knowledge, and began expanding the Hansen's Dairy operation.



Fun Fact:

The farm produces about 9,000 gallons of milk per week, with two-thirds of it staying in milk form and one-third is used in other products.

Save the date

Grundy County REC presents on geothermal at Hansen's Dairy farm

Grundy County REC is excited to be hosting our first member event of 2021! Are you interested in learning more about geothermal and its benefits? This is the perfect event for you!

- ▶ **Who:** Members of Grundy County REC
- ▶ **What:** Geothermal presentation and tour of Hansen's Dairy Farm
- ▶ **When:** June 26, 2021; two-time options – 11:30 a.m. & 2:30 p.m.
- ▶ **Where:** Hansen's Dairy Farm, 8461 Lincoln Rd, Hudson, Iowa

If you are interested in this event, please call Allyson at 319-824-5251 to RSVP. Spots are limited!

More information coming soon!

Nominating committee selected

At the regular monthly board meeting held on March 25, 2021, in accordance with the Articles of Incorporation, the board of directors appointed the Nominating Committee.

The Nominating Committee shall prepare a list of nominees identifying each candidate by name, address and the director district in which they reside. The Nominating Committee shall make a good faith effort to nominate two (2) candidates for each director position to be filled at the annual meeting, Sept. 9, 2021. In the event the Committee is unable to identify two (2) candidates for each position who consent to be nominated, the Committee may nominate only one (1) candidate for the position.

The written list of nominations by the Nominating Committee shall be posted at the office of the cooperative not less than thirty (30) days prior to mailing the notice of the annual meeting to the members. For ten (10) days after posting the list of nominations, additional



nominations of members residing in the district of the vacancy may be made by written petition on forms provided on request by any member and signed by not less than fifteen (15) members of the Cooperative. Any member nominated shall give prior consent to such nominations whether by committee or by petition.

A list of nominations as selected by the Nominating Committee will be posted by July 1, 2021, and nominations by petition will be accepted through July 10, 2021. ⚡

Why choose Hansen's Dairy milk?

1. It is non-homogenized, meaning it is less processed than other brands.
2. It has a short turnaround from the time of milking until it is ready to drink, think cow-to-cup within just 24 hours.
3. It all comes from a single source. Hansen's Dairy has a closed herd, and all the cows were born on the farm, making them disease free.



**PLEASE DON'T
POST SIGNS ON
POWER POLES.**

Foreign objects can
tear utility workers'
protective clothing.



Safe
Electricity.org

New contest shines the light on community volunteers



Iowa's electric cooperatives are excited to announce a new statewide contest, which celebrates our cooperative commitment to community. Called **Shine the Light**, the contest will accept nominations in June and award three winners with a \$1,500 check to their local charity or community organization.

"We're excited to launch this cooperative effort to shine the light on local volunteers," says Erin Campbell, director of communications for the Iowa Association of Electric Cooperatives. "So many people throughout the areas served by Iowa's electric cooperatives deserve to be recognized for making a positive impact."

Sponsored by the Touchstone Energy Cooperatives of Iowa, the Shine the Light contest will accept contest entries online during the

month of June. The three winners will be announced during the Iowa State Fair in August. In addition to receiving a \$1,500 donation for their charity or nonprofit of choice, the winners will also be featured in the September issue of *Living with Energy in Iowa* magazine.

How to nominate

Member-consumers and employees of Iowa's electric cooperatives are eligible to nominate local volunteers. If you receive electricity from an electric cooperative in Iowa, you're a co-op member-consumer and invited to nominate someone who is making a positive impact in the community. The volunteer being nominated does not need to be a co-op member-consumer. Minors may be nominated with consent from their parents or legal guardians. ⚡

Step 1:

Go to www.IowaShineTheLight.com from June 1-30 to make a nomination and to review the contest rules.

Step 2:

As a nominator, provide your contact information and answer the following question in 500 words or less.

How has your nominee made a positive difference in the community, and why do they deserve to be recognized?



Gardening genes don't grow here

BY VALERIE VAN KOOTEN

Once spring quits messing around and gets into high gear, all those garden-minded folks will be out staking, planting and cleaning out old beds. I have great respect for them. They are feeding their families and their neighborhoods. They are enjoying nature and providing beautiful bouquets.

I do not appear able to scale their ranks.

Skipped by the gardening gene

Somehow the gardening gene skipped me. My grandparents had lovely spreads beside their houses. My mother's flower garden includes heirloom blooms from her great-grandmother. My dad enjoys planting a few beans and peppers. Together, they can and freeze apples, pears and peaches. My uncle, for many years, owned a huge truck farm and sold at markets all over central Iowa.

I have some irises in front of my house.

Oh, it's not that I didn't try. When we moved into our present home 20 years ago, I was determined to have a little bed behind our house. It was a gush of optimism – new home, fresh dreams of the Becky Home-Ecky in me coming out. Even then, I'm not sure what made me think it would work. When Kent and I lived in Pammel Court at Iowa State University, we rented a small garden allotment from the university. Despite a brave start, the result was a complete disaster, with the rabbits eating most of what we had grown. In retrospect, I think we were the trashy allotment, the one the neighbors despaired of. We didn't renew the next year.

Putting faith in peas and zinnias

However, going forward, I bravely put my faith in pea pods and zinnias. My 15-by-15 foot garden seemed so



small when I started. I'd be able to fill it up immediately! That was before I reckoned with our property's extreme clay soil. I clawed the seeds into the ground where they stayed, a pathetic patch of doomed dreams and a real pain to mow around. In desperation, I put out some mint plants, which immediately took over the entire area. Even today, when I mow, the scent of chocolate mint wafts up.

Over the years, I've half-heartedly tried a few things. Tulip bulbs were dug up by the voles and squirrels in the area. My dependence on perennials and thinking they'll come back every year, and I won't have to do anything, met a quick death when they bloomed one year and refused to, well, perennial. The weeds in my little

flower patch quickly get ahead of me unless I'm incredibly determined. My one glory are my irises, which seem to like our difficult soil and my glibly negligent care.

I have resigned myself to being the broken link in a family line of green thumbs, although that trait seems to have passed itself to my middle son, who has a new sunroom full of plants and a yard with lots of bulbs that seem undisturbed by wildlife, neighbor dogs or little kids.

I hope things work out for him. If not, I'll lend him a few irises. ⚡

Valerie Van Kooten is a writer from Pella who loves living in the country and telling its stories. She and her husband Kent have three married sons, two incredibly adorable grandsons and a lovely granddaughter.



WE FOLLOW OUR DREAMS

Join Touchstone Energy Cooperatives in celebrating
the power of human connections.



Touchstone Energy®
Cooperatives
of Iowa