

# InTouch

WITH MEMBERS OF  FRANKLIN RURAL ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE

October 2021

Your Touchstone Energy® Cooperative 



## Line Work *By Sean Dietrich, August 31, 2021*

Morning on an American interstate. A caravan of large bucket trucks travels southward. There must be a hundred of them. Maybe more. These are utility workers.

Hurricane Ida plowed into Louisiana like a Peterbilt semi yesterday. These trucks are heading to ground zero to join the 25,000 other utility workers who are already in the Bayou State restoring power.

The trucks' running lights are on. Their hydraulic lift buckets wobble from highway speed.

The men and women behind the wheels are preparing for weeks of sleepless nights, mechanical failures, possible accidents, wet weather, convenience-store suppers, cheap hotels, and video calls home—provided there is cell service.

A little boy in the backseat of a passing minivan with Florida tags waves at one of the truck drivers. The lineman waves back.

The boy's mother cranes forward. She mouths the words "Thank you" in hopes that the utility worker can read her lips.

He can. He replies with a thumbs up.

And the convoy of trucks never stops coming. One by one they come. And one by one they should be thanked.

I live on the Gulf Coast. Hurricanes are part of our life. When Opal hit, for

instance, it crippled us. And yet, amazingly, it only took 24 hours for hordes of electrical workers to arrive in our town and restore our power so we could all get back to watching daytime television.

The workers came from far-off places like Maryland, Texas, Ohio, or Pennsylvania.

My aunt was so grateful to the linemen working on her street that she brought them sandwiches each morning. Our neighborhood ladies made cookies and deviled eggs. Elderly Miss Elaine made her infamous Green Jell-O Salad of Death. I would have warned the lineworkers to not eat the stuff, but it was too late.

And I'll never forget when Hurricane Ivan smashed into our area a decade later. I was a newlywed, living in a one-bedroom apartment. Our building had no storm shutters, we were in a flood zone, emergency vehicle sirens blared, people screamed out for help, and I ran out of beer.

All anyone could do was cover their windows in duct tape and hide. Friends lost homes, cars, animals, trees. Ivan pommelled us like we'd insulted his mother.

Once again, the next morning, our little world was flooded not only with water, but with bucket trucks.



So yeah, whenever I see a parade of utility vehicles, I get a little emotional. Namely, because these workers don't have to be doing what they're doing.

Utility crews have some of the most dangerous jobs in the world. Out of every 100,000 workers, 30 to 50 die. Some are victims of explosions. Others lose limbs or are burned. Electrical work is not for wimps. This type of labor is not a job, it's a calling.

My friend Chad's father is a retired lineman. Chad said he grew up going to too many funerals. His mother was always wondering if the next memorial service would be for his father.

*Sean Dietrich is a columnist, novelist, and podcast host, known for his commentary on life in the American South. His work has appeared in numerous publications, and he has authored thirteen books, and is the creator of the Sean of the South Podcast.*

## SPARKS of news

### Board room highlights

At their most recent meeting, Franklin REC directors:

- Approved 2022 furniture purchase.

- Conducted the 2022 employee insurance review and approval.
- Reviewed and approved workers' compensation.
- Accepted 2020 Tax Form 990/990T/IA 1220.
- Reviewed financial reports and special equipment.

### Youth Tour dates announced

The 2022 Youth Tour to Washington, D.C., will take place June 18-24. Read next month's *InTouch* newsletter for more information.

### Scholarships

Scholarship details coming soon to the newsletter and website.

## Shoo away vampires this Halloween



Little ghosts, goblins, and princesses are a welcome sight on Halloween night. But beware of the vampire lurking inside your home.

You could be paying for vampire energy—electricity that leaks from your appliances, computers, and entertainment systems—if you leave them plugged in even when they're turned off.

*Any cord that is plugged into an electrical outlet draws electricity.* So if you leave your mobile phone charger plugged in after you've removed the phone or you leave your computer and scanner plugged in after you shut down for the evening, you could be wasting—and paying for—unused energy.

Most people leave electronics plugged in all the time because it's convenient to be able to turn them on without having to plug them in again and again, day after day. The worst offenders are "remote-ready" appliances, like computers, cable boxes, stereos, TVs, microwave ovens, garage door openers, and video game consoles.

As long as they're plugged in, they remain in a "ready" state so they don't have to wake up or warm up when you turn them on.

*That can cost you between \$165 and \$440 per year in wasted electricity,* depending on how many devices you have.

*A tip: Invest in a high-quality power strip*—one that will sacrifice itself during a power surge rather than letting the surge ruin the appliance. Plug multiple items into the power strip and unplug the strip before bedtime. That's easier than unplugging and replugging lots of appliances.

*A caution: Don't overload your home's electrical circuits* by plugging too many appliances into a single power strip. Especially if you live in an older home, consult an electrician about how much of an electrical load your single outlets can handle.



## SmartHub: Your online bill pay option and more

SmartHub offers:

- Payment scheduling that notifies our billing department that you have scheduled your payment
- Automatic bill payment management—sign up or make changes
- New bill notification
- Daily or monthly usage and billing history information
- Contact Us option

Access SmartHub through the app for iOS or Android or through our website.

Sign up today and check out all that SmartHub has to offer! As always, call us if you have questions.

## RECare: Members helping members

Your rural electric cooperative has always extended a helping hand to those needing it. In response to actions by the Iowa General Assembly, your REC has established RECare, a program of members helping members.

RECare will provide funds to be distributed by local community action agencies to help pay winter heating bills and to assist in weatherization of homes of low-income consumers.

You may make a one-time contribution or a monthly pledge that will be automatically added onto your monthly electric bill. Even a dollar a month pledge will help others. **You have the power to make a difference.**

### RECare Consumer Authorization Form

• I will contribute \$\_\_\_\_\_ per month. I understand this amount will be automatically added to my monthly electric bill.

• I will make a one-time contribution of \$\_\_\_\_\_ to RECare. My check is enclosed.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Account Number \_\_\_\_\_



Return to your local Touchstone Energy® Cooperative



# Protecting water pipes? Use heat tape with care

Below-zero temperatures can cause pipes to freeze and burst, resulting in a huge mess and expensive repairs. One way to help prevent pipes from bursting is to use heat tape, a product that uses electricity to generate heat.

Although not adhesive, heat “tape” acts as a heating pad for exposed pipes. There are two installation methods. The first, and less common, method is when the tape is hardwired to a home’s electrical system and has its own breaker(s). In this case, the tape should be installed by a licensed contractor.

The second installation method uses heat tape that plugs directly into a GFCI (ground fault circuit interrupter) outlet. This type of tape typically allows you to control the temperature.

If you are considering installing heat tape, extra care should be taken.

- Due to its potential to over-heat and cause a fire, **do not use heat tape on pipes behind**

walls or ceilings. It should only be used for exposed pipes, such as those found in your crawl space or outside your home.

- **Select the right kind of tape for your pipes.** If you use tape designed for PVC on metal pipes, it will not be as effective; if you use heat tape designed for metal on PVC pipes, it can melt them.
- **Always purchase heat tape that is backed by a reputable testing lab,** such as UL (Underwriter Laboratories), and do not use damaged or worn tape, cords, or plugs.
- **Unplug the heat tape in the spring.** Heat tape is not a must for everyone, but if you have had an issue with exposed pipes freezing in the past, it



might be worth considering.

Heat tape involves plugging in something in an area that could become wet, so never step into a flooded or damp area that could have an electrical current running through it. In other words, always use caution with heat tape since it runs on electricity. While installing the specialized covering may help prevent freezing pipes, always follow the instructions provided for installation and use.

## Help us stop copper theft

This summer, Northwest Power Cooperative, LeMars, and its member distribution cooperative, Western Iowa



Power Cooperative, Denison, were victims of copper theft. Vandals cut through locked gates and mesh fencing where they

stripped copper grounding wire.

Copper thefts can cause power surges, outages, fires, explosions, and injuries. Common post-theft repairs cost tens of thousands of dollars.

If you see someone suspicious at a substation or around any electrical equipment, please call 9-1-1 or Crime Stoppers at 800-452-1111. Your information and identity will remain anonymous, and you could earn a reward.

## CO-OPS ARE GUIDED BY 7 PRINCIPLES

- 1 Voluntary & Open Membership
- 2 Democratic Member Control
- 3 Members' Economic Participation
- 4 Autonomy & Independence
- 5 Education, Training, & Information
- 6 Cooperation Among Cooperatives
- 7 Concern for Community



Community born.  
Community led.  
Focused on YOU.

October is  
National Co-op Month!





# Save the Date!

## Lighted Holiday Parade & Light Up the Park

Saturday, Nov. 27, 5:00 p.m.  
Downtown Hampton

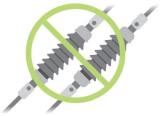


### ELECTRICAL SAFETY TIPS FOR HUNTERS

This hunting season, we encourage all members to be aware of electrical equipment and take necessary precautions while hunting. Keep these safety tips in mind as you enjoy the great outdoors.



**Take notice** of posted warning signs and keep clear of electrical equipment.



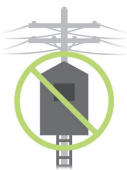
**Do not** shoot at or near power lines or insulators.



**Know** where power lines and equipment are located on the land where you hunt.



**Be especially careful** in wooded areas where power lines may not be as visible.



**Do not** place deer stands on utility poles or climb poles. Energized lines and equipment can conduct electricity to anyone who comes in contact with them, causing shock or electrocution.



**Do not** place decoys on power lines or other utility equipment. Any non-electrical equipment attached to a pole can pose an obstruction and serious hazards to our line crews.



### Conserve energy as weather cools

It's tempting to turn the heat on as soon as the weather starts to cool down in the fall. But holding off for a few weeks until you really need to rely on heat can keep your energy bills low.

If you must turn the heat on during the early fall:

1. Set it no higher than 68 degrees.
2. Move furniture and drapes away from warm air registers and baseboard heaters so they don't block the heat from circulating.
3. Close the flue damper of your wood-burning fireplace or consider an electric fireplace fitting.
4. Have an HVAC pro inspect your heating system before it gets too cold outside.
5. Caulk indoor openings on external walls.

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