

Southwest lines

A monthly publication for members of Southwest Iowa Rural Electric Cooperative

January 2026

Leading through Change: Statewide association annual meeting celebrates 2025 achievements and educates on emerging trends

The Iowa Association of Electric Cooperatives (IAEC), the trade association for Iowa's electric cooperatives, conducted its 2025 Annual Meeting at the Sheraton West Des Moines Conference Center on December 4 and 5 with more than 375 registered attendees. Board directors and employees from Iowa's locally owned electric co-ops received informative updates from statewide directors and staff in addition to learning about industry trends and best practices from invited speakers.

"Our theme of Leading through Change aptly describes what our industry is experiencing right now," remarked IAEC Executive Vice President and General Manager Leslie Kaufman. It has been a year of new leadership at IAEC with Board President Jim Miller taking the helm a year ago with two new board directors, and Kaufman completing her first year at IAEC in July.

In his president's report, Miller reflected on his year of serving as board president and how "a farm kid from Fonda" received a call from Governor Reynolds in his second week in the leadership role. He also shared how Kaufman traveled to meet with member co-ops in her first months on the job and how those face-to-face discussions with directors and staff informed their strategic planning. Kaufman then shared successes and future plans by department in her executive report to the members.

During the business meeting portion of the annual meeting, two directors were re-elected to the IAEC Board:

- District 4: Steve Inskeep of Pella Cooperative Electric Association was re-elected to a three-year term
- District 7: Bruce Amundson of Iowa Lakes Electric Cooperative was re-elected to another three-year term

IAEC Board President Jim Miller also thanked Marion Denger for nearly 20 years of exemplary service on the IAEC Board. Denger was presented with a commemorative clock during the business meeting in recognition of his commitment, which includes nine years as the District 6 director (2006-2015) and almost 10 years (2016 to present) as the Iowa director on the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA) Board, which encompasses an ex officio seat on the IAEC Board. Denger's term on the NRECA Board will expire in March 2026.

Following the annual meeting, the IAEC Board met and announced no changes to the slate of officers:

- IAEC Board President: Jim Miller, District 5 director from Calhoun County Electric Cooperative Association
- IAEC Board Vice President: Gordon Greimann, District 6 director from Franklin Rural Electric Cooperative
- IAEC Board Secretary/Treasurer: Tony Lem, District 2 director from Consumers Energy
- IAEC Board Assistant Secretary/Treasurer: Jerry Keleher, District 3 director from Allamakee-Clayton Electric Cooperative

The IAEC Annual Meeting is also an opportunity for attendees to learn more about the electric industry and trends that may impact rural Iowa.

IAEC presented several educational sessions, including:

- Mike Partin, NRECA board president, held a fireside chat with Kaufman and he shared a national perspective on how to lead through change. Partin is also CEO of Sequatchee Valley Electric Cooperative in Tennessee.
- Grace Vanderhei, nuclear engineer at Constellation Energy and Miss America 2023, talked about nuclear's place in America's energy future.
- Ava Meinders, the Iowa delegate for the 2025 Youth Leadership Council, spoke to the group about the power of leadership. She attended the national Electric Cooperative Youth Tour in June, sponsored by Heartland Power Cooperative.
- Susan Olander of Federated Rural Electric Insurance Exchange and Pat Mangan of NRECA held an interactive discussion on governance best practices and adapting to change.
- Tony Clark, executive director of the National Association of Regulatory Utility Commissioners (NARUC), shared how public utility commissioners across the country are working to address major issues regarding resource adequacy, resiliency, cybersecurity and load growth attributed to AI and data centers.
- NFL Hall-of-Famer and former Congressman Steve Largent served as the closing keynote. He shared personal experiences from his various paths in sports, business and politics.

IAEC celebrated 13 graduates of its 2025 Cooperative Leadership in Iowa Program (CLIP) for emerging leaders. Participants committed to a yearlong calendar of in-person, virtual, and on-demand training sessions where they gained leadership skills and learned about various co-op roles. Congratulations to Tanner Rinehart, Line Foreman in Mount Ayr from Southwest Iowa REC. Justin Murphy, Southwest Iowa REC Director of Operations, stated, "As a Line Foreman at Southwest Iowa REC, Tanner is known for his strong leadership, organization, and professionalism.



Pictured left to right: IAEC Board President Jim Miller, SWIAREC Line Foreman Tanner Rinehart, and IAEC Executive Vice President and General Manager Leslie Kaufman

He is respected by his team; he leads by example and is committed to safety and excellence in every project. Congratulations, Tanner on your CLIP graduation!”

12 Iowa electric cooperatives, including Southwest Iowa REC, were congratulated for completing the Rural Electric Safety Achievement Program (RESAP) in 2025. RESAP is a national safety program that electric co-ops utilize as a framework to improve safety performance and culture.

As part of the Annual Meeting program, IAEC coordinated an auction of personally donated items which raised over \$16,200 for the Iowa Friends of Rural Electrification (Iowa FORE) political action committee. The funds will stay in Iowa to aid state legislators and candidates who support electric cooperatives.

About IAEC

The Iowa Association of Electric Cooperatives is a trade association which represents the interests of locally owned electric cooperatives in the state, including 38 distribution co-ops and nine generation and transmission co-ops. Formed more than 80 years ago, IAEC provides many vital functions for its members, including legislative representation, regulatory oversight, training and education services, safety programs, and communications support. View the 2025 annual report and learn more at www.iowarec.org.

Coop Month Column

Reliability Requires Investment

As your local power provider, Southwest Iowa REC’s mission has always been simple: keep the lights on and support the communities we serve. But behind every switch, every warm home and every business that opens its doors is a complex system that requires constant care. 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.



Phil Kinser CEO

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.

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. Strategic upgrades such as substation upgrades and line rebuilds are essential to ensuring we can meet these needs both today and in the decades ahead.

At the same time, new technologies are reshaping how we operate. Tools such as automated switching devices, smart meters, drones, and advanced monitoring systems 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 the people 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 our community means preparing for the future, not just maintaining the present. By investing in our local grid today, we are building the foundation for a brighter, more resilient tomorrow.

2026 HAPPY NEW YEAR

EMPLOYEE UPDATES



Southwest Iowa REC welcomed **Ross Christie** as an apprentice lineman with the Corning crew. Ross graduated from Metropolitan Community College with a degree in

Electrical Utility Technology in the spring of 2025. He was an intern with SWIAREC throughout the summer and joined the team full-time in November. Welcome Ross!



On April 21st, Southwest Iowa REC welcomed **Chelsea Armstrong** as an accountant in our Mount Ayr office. Chelsea is originally from Cambridge, Iowa, but has lived in Mount Ayr since 2017. She is passionate about learning and contributing meaningful work. Outside of work, she enjoys spending

time and going to sports activities with her three active children Jase (13), Bryer (10), and Aubree (8). Welcome, Chelsea!



Erin Freilinger began her duties as a Cost Accountant in the Corning office on June 2nd. Erin is from Lenox and recently moved back after many years away. Welcome Erin!



On December 12th, Southwest Iowa REC hosted the Adams Community Chamber of Commerce in a ribbon-cutting for the new facility at 2248 Avenue of Industries in Corning. Pictured left to right: SWIAREC's Sarah Newton, Justin Murphy, and Suzy Olson, Chamber Members Adam Grundman, Brian Peterson, De Heaton, SWIAREC CEO & General Manager Phil Kinser, Chamber Members Jessica Wilson, Lorretta Brenton, Kelly Herring, Dr. Stephen Gruba, and Nancy Turner. Thank you for the celebration

Preparing for a Winter Storm

Extreme winter weather can immobilize an entire region. Even areas that normally experience mild winters can suddenly be hit with heavy snowfall or intense cold. Winter storms can result in closed streets and highways, power outages and flooding. Take action now to ensure the safety and comfort of your family in the event of extreme winter weather.

Before a storm

- Have snow removal equipment on hand, as well as rock salt to melt ice, and sand to improve traction.
- Regular heating fuel sources may be cut off, so make sure an alternative is available. For example, store a good supply of dry, seasoned wood for your fireplace or wood-burning stove.
- Keep fire extinguishers on hand and make sure everyone in your house knows how to use them. House fires pose an additional risk as more people turn to alternate heating sources without taking the necessary safety precautions.
- Locate your main water supply and valves and make sure you know how to shut them off in case a freezing pipe bursts.
- Repair roof leaks and keep gutters clear. Trim any tree branches that could fall on your house during a storm.
- Winterize your home by caulking and weather-stripping doors and windows, sealing the attic area and installing storm windows. This will help to keep your family safe and comfortable during a storm.

During a storm

- Listen to your radio, television or NOAA Weather Radio for weather reports and emergency information.
- Eat regularly and drink ample fluids, but avoid caffeine and alcohol.
- If it becomes necessary to conserve fuel, keep your residence cooler than normal. Temporarily close off heat to some rooms.
- Stay dry. Change wet clothing frequently to prevent the loss of body heat.
- Watch for signs of frostbite. These include loss of feeling and white or pale appearance in extremities such as fingers, toes, ear lobes and the tip of the nose. If symptoms are detected, get medical help immediately.
- Drive only if it is necessary. If you must drive, travel in the daytime, do not drive alone and keep others informed of your whereabouts. Also, stay on main roads. Avoid back-road shortcuts.

After a storm

- Avoid overexertion when shoveling snow. Overexertion can bring on a heart attack—a major cause of death in the winter. If you must shovel snow, stretch before going outside.
- Help neighbors who may require special assistance including infants, the elderly and people with disabilities.
- If the pipes freeze, remove any insulation and open all faucets; pour hot water over the pipes, starting where they were most exposed to the cold. Do not try to thaw them with a blow torch or other open flame.
- Follow forecasts and be prepared when venturing outside. Major winter storms are often followed by extremely cold conditions.

A little forethought and some attention to detail will help to ensure that you and your family stay warm, dry and safe in your home this winter, no matter what the weather is outside.

Southwest Iowa REC has secured the right to publish this document

Why do Co-Ops Advertise?

Proactive communication is essential in any industry or business, and it's especially important for Southwest Iowa REC to communicate often with our members who own the co-op. In fact, the core principles of our cooperative business model include concern for community and keeping our members informed and educated. We use a variety of communication methods such as our monthly newsletter, radio announcements, social media posts, and our website. All serve as effective ways for us to quickly communicate important information with you regarding safety, energy efficiency, cooperative business and regulatory notices.

Here are a few other reasons we advertise:

1. Safety Awareness

As your electric cooperative, we have a duty to keep you safe from the dangers of electricity. Preventative safety messages are a top priority in our public communications efforts. For example, we remind farmers to watch out for electric lines and poles during planting and harvest seasons. We encourage members to call 8-1-1 before digging so underground utilities can be properly located. Throughout the year, we tell members to "look up and live" as they use ladders and tall equipment around the house, garage or farm.

2. Energy Efficiency

At Southwest Iowa REC, we're committed to helping our members use energy wisely. We provide multiple resources to help you find ways to reduce that electricity bill and become more energy efficient, but we need to promote those resources so you know about them. We communicate through various methods to let you know about rebates and incentives for energy efficient products.

3. Cooperative Business

As an owner of the electric cooperative, you need to know important information about the financial condition of the business and when to elect directors of the board. We publish an annual report which includes important information about the cooperative.

4. Regulatory Notices

We are required to communicate with our cooperative members regarding specific state and federal regulations. Communicating frequently with our members is an important business function that helps Southwest Iowa REC achieve our mission of powering lives and empowering communities.

Scholarships Reminder

Southwest Iowa REC will once again be offering scholarships for the 2025-2026 school year to graduating high school seniors. We will be awarding fourteen (14) \$500 scholarships. In addition, three (3) \$1,000 scholarships will be available for students planning to attend an Accredited Lineman School or electrical trade program.

Completed applications and a photo must be received at the REC Office by March 2nd, 2026 to be eligible.

Applications can be found on our website, swiarec.coop/scholarships

Crockpot:

Ingredients

- 32-ounce bag of frozen potatoes (diced hashbrowns)
- 4 cups chicken broth
- 1 can cream of chicken soup
- 1 ranch seasoning packet
- Garlic powder, onion powder, and salt/pepper (to taste)
- 1 block of cream cheese, cubed
- 8 strips of cooked bacon OR bacon bits (I use both)
- ½ cup half-and-half OR heavy whipping cream
- 2 cups Cheddar cheese

Darien's Crack Potato Soup

Instructions

1. Add the potatoes, chicken broth, cream of chicken, ranch packet, garlic powder, onion powder, salt/pepper, cream cheese, and bacon or bacon bits to the crockpot.
2. Stir everything together.
3. Cook on low for 5-6 hours.
4. After 5-6 hours, add ½ cup of half-and-half or heavy whipping cream.
5. Add cheddar cheese, close the lid, and let it melt.
6. Once melted, top with whatever you like and enjoy!



2026 Vegetation Management Plans

The majority of our vegetation management program is completed during the months of January – March. In 2026 the following areas are scheduled for vegetation management (ground cut, trim and chemical treatment):

Spray Contractor

Western Ringgold and Eastern Taylor

Tree & Brush Removal Contractor

Union County- Union, Jones, Grant, Sand Creek and Pleasant Townships

REC Crews

Adams County- Prescott, Union and Washington Townships

Montgomery County – West township

Ringgold County – Lincoln, Washington and Jefferson Townships

Taylor County – Washington and Holt Townships

Union County – Douglas Township

You can always feel free to contact us at any of our service locations in Corning, or Mount Ayr, or with any questions you might have on this process. Or perhaps, you would like to let us know about a tree or other vegetation that you think could be too close to power lines or important electrical equipment. You'll also find helpful information on our website at www.swiarec.coop.



Corning

2248 Avenue of Industries., Corning, IA 50841

Mount Ayr

1502 W. South St., Mount Ayr, IA 50854

Phone Number: (888) 220-4869

Southwest Iowa REC is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

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