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Official publication of



Meeker Co-op is an Equal Opportunity Provider and Employer

VIBRANT Broadband makes schooling and working from home possible for the Thielens

J oel and Lisa Thielen and their son Jakob live three miles south of Eden Valley. Lisa, a project manager, has had the option to work from home regularly for her job. However, she had chosen not to because their internet service was slow and her work was inefficient. The only internet they had was through their phone's hot spot which they used to run their computer and stream Netflix.

"By mid-month we would be out of available service," Lisa said.

Due to COVID-19 and the Governor's Stay at Home order, Lisa has had no choice but to work at home and Jakob, 18, has also been doing his schoolwork at home. With so much more activity all at once, the Thielens knew their service would be used up that much faster. They could either upgrade their phone service or go with VIBRANT Broadband. "I was not impressed with our phone provider service and had not heard anything good about them, so we shied away from them and took the plunge with VIBRANT Broadband."

Part of the attractiveness of VIBRANT was the free installation option with a three-year contract. They could also have chosen to pay for the installation over three years, (a minimum \$25/ month) and not have a contract.

They chose the Fiber-to-the-Home "Streaming" package, which provides 50 mbps download speed and 5 mbps upload speed.

"The installers were fantastic," Lisa said. "They answered all of our questions, allowed us to give feedback about where we wanted the line to come into the home and were just so

Thielens continued on Page 4



Jakob Thielen has no problem accomplishing any of his school work because of internet issues. With VIBRANT, he can do whatever schoolwork is necessary to stay on track.

VIBRANT-U Scholarship Program the answer for college students studying from home

s many other families have experienced during this COVID-19 reality, life has changed a bit for the Sankens. John, a financial planner, and his wife Kathy, who is employed currently as his office manager, now have their two college students living and working at home, plus a friend who is also attending college. Every member of the family has to have access to the internet for college classes or doing paperwork for the business.

The problem was the internet provider they had could only provide them 12-15 mbps of unreliable service.

"It was horrible," Kathy said. "Sometimes we'd have no reception,



then it would come on for awhile and then it was gone again. It was a given that if the weather was bad, we wouldn't have any internet service."

The Sankens had seen photos in the *Pioneer* of VIBRANT contractors installing the fiber optic cable and so became aware of the service coming. Then, when their children came home from college to shelter in place and do distance learning, they saw the advertisement in the *Pioneer* offering the VIBRANT-U Scholarship program and it peaked their interest. They knew they had to do something, so they checked out the pricing and saw that the VIBRANT Streaming package, with 50 mbps download and 5 mbps upload speed, was only \$10 more than what they were paying. They knew it was time to make the switch.

"It was just a no-brainer that we could pay \$10 more a month to go from 15 mbps of terrible service that didn't always deliver to 50 mbps of reliable service," Kathy said. "It is just much more bang for the buck going with VIBRANT."

Vibrant-U Scholarship Program continued on Page 3

Storms and Mutual Aid Highlights "Cooperation Among Cooperatives"

Late, Late Winter Storm -

We were hit with our worst winter storm of the year on Saturday, March 28th. It was a perfect combination of temperature, precipitation and wind to the mid-section of the Co-op's system. The dots on the map below show the outages that took place in 20-plus townships throughout the Co-op's service territory. As you can see, the storm pretty much went through the middle of our system diagonally from southwest to northeast. Some of the hardest-hit areas saw up to two inches of ice/snow build-up on the lines.



Our first outage occurred at 10:13 p.m. that Saturday night. The last member's electricity was restored at 8:38 p.m. Sunday night. At the peak of the outages we had 744 members without power — or close to 10% of the membership. Seventeen poles were broken (see photo of the broken poles, above right) and had to be replaced, in addition to lots of line lying on the ground that had to be put back up.

From the first outage, to getting the last member's electricity restored, was close to 22 ½ hours. Most of the line crews were out repairing outages the entire time — a very long night and day for them. In addition to our line crews, we had line stakers, energy management and office personnel come

Board of Directors



in to assist in restoring power. They helped with phone calls, getting supplies out to the field, as well as bringing meals and drinks to all the workers throughout the long night and day. Several were assigned to check out damaged lines and poles so we would have an idea what was needed to restore that section of line when the crews got there. Still others were assigned to guide and assist and direct neighboring Co-op crews from Kandiyohi Power Cooperative and Renville-Sibley Cooperative Power Association as they helped restore power. Highline Construction, a private power line contractor from Paynesville, also had two crews come in and help out. In total, we had 36 people working to restore electricity that Sunday.

Even though we had a wide-spread electrical outage, VIBRANT internet service experienced no outages. VIBRANT poles and other necessary equipment have battery backup systems in place that allows them to still operate should they lose electric power. Thankfully they were able to restore power before the batteries were depleted. As long as you had electric power at your place, you could still log onto the World Wide Web with VIBRANT.

As I watched employees, neighboring co-ops and contractors assisting us, I couldn't help but be impressed by their commitment — along with the coordination that is required — to make sure power was all restored efficiently and, most importantly, safely. A mighty "Thank You" goes out to everyone who spent their Saturday night and all day Sunday helping to restore electricity.



To our members who lost power, thank you for your patience.

Mutual Aid -

Electric utilities in general, and Co-ops in particular, have a long history of helping each other out in times of need. A major storm creating lots of outages is certainly one of those times of need. Cooperation Among Cooperatives is one of the Seven Cooperative Principles. Looking back through the years, Meeker Co-op has followed this principle by helping neighboring co-ops, or co-ops within Minnesota, when they were hit with numerous outages and needed assistance. Co-op personnel have even gone to different states to assist when widespread areas have been hit with outages. For example, crews assisted with outages after Superstorm Sandy hit New York in 2012 and in Florida when hurricane Irma caused extensive damages and outages in 2017.

With Covid-19 and all the associated fears already out there when this storm hit, I wondered if neighboring co-ops and the contractors would answer our call for Mutual Aid? Thankfully they did.

But the Coronavirus pandemic brings up a list of other questions. Will future Co-op Mutual Aid change or come to an end if the Coronavirus devastates co-ops, certain areas of the state or country? Would co-ops be willing to send their personnel? Would personnel be willing to go? What happens if a large portion of a co-op's personnel are infected and become sick?

Mergen's Message

Continued on Page 3

Meeker Pioneer

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Eden Lake in Stearns; Harvey, Manannah in Meeker

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Monday - Friday 8 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.

For 24-hour service call

320-693-3231 Fax: 320-693-2980 Web sites: www.meeker.coop VIBRANTBB.net Use the "Contact Us" form on the home page

Meeker Cooperative Mission Statement

"To enhance the quality of life of the Cooperative's Members and Customers by providing safe, reliable, competitively priced energy and other value-added services, while practicing environmental stewardship."

Mergen's Message

Continued from Page 2

Mutual Aid for repairing lines and restoring outages is certainly common practice among co-ops. However, what if an entire billing department is unable to perform their functions? The same can be said for energy management, metering or any other group of personnel who may be unable to perform their respective functions. Those are all areas that we as co-op leaders across the state and country have had to plan for.

Some items may have an easier fix than others, such as a delay in sending out bills until billing personnel are back or others take over.

Thankfully, in a situation like this, Meeker Cooperative is not on an island. Other co-ops in the state use the same billing platform, others the same metering system, still others the same engineering firm and the list goes on. Using them as a backup — or maybe just to get questions answered — is just one more way of following the Cooperative Principle of Cooperation Among Cooperatives.

Although no two electric co-ops are exactly alike when it comes to their operations, software, equipment, billing or metering systems, I can proudly say we work together and I don't see that changing. For co-ops, it's just what we do.

Energy Assistance Program -

As the Coronavirus pandemic continues, we are very much aware of members being laid off or worse — losing their livelihood all



The VIBRANT-U Education Scholarship program offers 3 free months of the Essential Package of 25Mbps download with 3Mbps upload service. Standard installation is also free. Ask a VIBRANT Broadband representative for details or visit the website address below to learn more.



together by the elimination of their job or their business no longer being able to survive.

We will do our best to help members that are struggling to pay their electric bill due to circumstances related to COVID-19. We just ask that you call us. We can discuss payment options and possible utility assistance programs to assist you.

One of those programs is the Energy Assistance Program (EAP). Minnesota is set to receive an additional \$28 million in this program funding. Minnesota has changed some of the requirements for utility customers to obtain these funds during this peacetime emergency crisis. Another change includes benefits based on unpaid past due balances plus current balances due. The EAP crisis benefit maximum amount has also increased.

You may be a member that has never had the need to utilize these types of services before but these are not normal times. We encourage anyone who is falling behind financially during this pandemic to please take advantage of these programs. For more information, please check out Page 5 of this *Pioneer*.

Did You Know –

I ran across this little tidbit and thought since no one is now doing this ancient custom due to the Covid-19 social distancing requirements, I'd include it here so we all would know how it got started.

In ancient times strangers shook hands to show that they were unarmed.

VIBRANT-U Scholarship Program allows Sankens to work and learn from home

Continued from Page 1

Kathy called Meeker Co-op on Monday, April 20, and by the 22nd, they had their Fixed Wireless service installed.

"Instantly we've had huge results," Kathy said. "The kids couldn't do what they needed to do before because it was too slow. We've got one student who is doing her nursing clinicals, one in interior design and the friend is studying horticulture."

"Now they can do everything they need to do, and it's so much easier to watch television."

But the best part of the experience was the customer service she received, beginning to end.

"The level of customer service you have is rare today," Kathy said. "It really stood out to me. The employees enjoy working for your company and it showed. They were polite, respectful, always smiling and pleasant. They wanted to make sure we were happy, and they even cleaned up after themselves."

Kathy commented that the installer had to come back once to make a minor adjustment. Her daughter had to do her clinicals at 12:30 p.m. and he didn't come until 12:10. "The installer said, 'I can do this' and literally ran around getting everything taken care of so she could get online by 12:30."

It is such a refreshing experience to see this level of care they have for what they do. I've already recommended you to two others and they will probably be giving you a call."

VIBRANT-U Education Scholarship Program offers 3 months FREE internet for at-home students

eeker Cooperative wants to help students continue their learning through this time of crisis by offering our fiber optic supported VIBRANT Broadband service for three months FREE if you sign up before June 1.

VIBRANT Broadband offers the highest speeds and consistent connection to the Internet for our rural communities using fiber optic technologies. By signing up for our "VIBRANT-U Education Scholarship" Program, you can enjoy the super fast, reliable speeds FREE for the first 3 months of service with FREE standard installation.

Our Essential Package of 25Mbps download with 3Mbps upload service is FREE along with FREE Standard installation for any Fixed Wireless system or the Fiber Direct to the Home up to 800 feet from Meeker's fiber-optic splice points. A 3-year service commitment is required.

After the first 3 months, standard monthly billing applies. VIBRANT Broadband's Internet packages

start at \$59.95 per month, and you can upgrade to even faster speeds at any time.

If you need (or want) more than the 25Mbps download speed, you can get any of our other plans and simply pay the difference in the package cost for the first three months! For instance, the Essential Package is \$59.95 a month — FREE for the first three months. If you'd rather get the Streaming Package at \$69.95 a month, which allows 50 mbps download speed, then you will pay \$10 a month for the first three months and \$69.95 thereafter. Location #35-36-301

Find out more information on our website at https://VIBRANTBROADBAND.com or call 320-693-3231.

For details on our VIBRANT-U Education Scholarship program, visit https:// VIBRANTBROADBAND.com/scholarship. Or you can sign up directly at https://VIBRANTBROADBAND. com/signup.



Lisa Thielen works from home easily and efficiently using VIBRANT Broadband service.

polite, courteous and fast."

The Thielens have had VIBRANT Broadband for about three weeks now, and they are pleased with the service so far.

"Our service is stellar," Lisa said. "We have no fear about running out of service now. We can stream Netflix, I can participate in company WebEx and Zoom conferences without any issues, and Jakob can easily access anything he needs for school."



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You don't have to choose.

In these challenging times, Minnesotans may find themselves having to choose between paying their energy bill and other necessities - food, medicine and healthcare. Minnesota's Energy Assistance Program offers eligible residents help to pay their energy bills so they do not have to choose between life's necessities. Spread the word to your friends and family.

The Energy Assistance Program:

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- Serves both renters and homeowners
 Provides benefits to pay for home heating ranging from \$200 to \$1,400, with an average benefit of about \$500
- Benefit amounts are based on the household's heating costs, household size, and income
- Provides help with energy disconnections, no/low fuel in the tank, and homeowners' furnace repairs
- Eligibility is based on the household's past 1 month of income and assets are not counted.

Are you e	ligib	le?
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Size of household	Past 1 month maximum income	
1	\$2,253	
2	\$2,947	
3	\$3,641	
4	\$4,334	

Visit mn.gov/commerce/eap.jsp to learn more or call 1-800-657-3710 to connect with your local service provider

COMMERCE DEPARTMENT

Word of Mouth is best testimonial for Heartland Security

"Back in 2004, we were building a new house and we planned to get a hardwired security system," said Troy Hilsgen, Kimball. "We chose Heartland because they were connected with Meeker Co-op and all the other security companies were bigger metro-type organizations. *I figured I would just cancel the* monitoring after the initial contract, but the amount they take off my homeowner's insurance totally covers my monitoring fee. It pays for itself! The only expense was the initial equipment and if you divide that by the 16 years of service, it's really a no-brainer.

"Every encounter I've had with Heartland Security has been professional, polite, and straightforward. In 16 years, we've had a technician come out only once or twice to replace a battery and a sensor and other than that, just one or two false alarms with a window because it was around 35 below and the windows had just moved that much from the temperature!

"When my neighbor's house was robbed, they asked what company I had for a security system and when they got their Heartland system installed, I got a referral fee. You could tell they appreciated the referral. Location #08-03-404

"Even if people weren't thinking about burglaries, how can you put a price on protecting your family from carbon monoxide? You can also put a water sensor in for when you're at work or away from home to protect your home from flooding. A security system isn't just about somebody breaking in."



Energy Assistance Providers

Kandiyohi, McLeod & Meeker counties United Community Action Partnership

PO Box 1359, 200 4th St. SW Willmar, MN 56201 218 Main St. S., Suite 108, Hutchinson, MN 55350 Toll free: (800) 992-1710 Willmar: (320) 235-0850 Hutchinson: (320) 587-5244

McLeod County area McLeod County Social Service Center

1805 Ford Avenue North Glencoe, MN 55336 (320) 864-3144 (320) 484-4330 (800) 247-1756 (Toll Free)

Renville County area United Community Action Partnership

500 East DePue Ave. Olivia, MN 56277 (320) 523-1842 (800) 363-2533

Wright County area Wright County Community Action

130 West Division Street Maple Lake, MN 55358 (320) 963-6500

Stearns County area Stearns Tri-County Action Programs

1210 23rd Ave. So. P.O. Box 683 Waite Park, MN 56387 (320) 251-1612 (888) 765-5597

Save a tree! Read your *Pioneer* from computer, laptop or tablet.

hen you sign up for our E-Newsletter, you'll get an email listing the top stories, and a link to the full PDF version with all the news, classified ads and recipe!

Ditch the paper copy and you won't have that extra paper lying around you need to throw away! Plus, you'll save your Co-op the money it takes to print and mail it to you. As a member-owner of the Co-op, it's the right thing to do for the Co-op, you and your fellow members!

To sign up, send a email with the Subject "Sign Me Up!" to rsorenson@meeker. coop. Thanks for your partnership!



Energy Efficiency Tip of the Month

When the weather is nice, put your grill to use! During summer months, cooking outdoors is a great way to save energy and eliminate unwanted heat from cooking indoors.



Be Safe Always call before you dig

CALL 811 BEFORE

YOU DIG.

greatriverenergy.com

IT'S THE

LAW.

UNDERGROUND POWER LINES can be just as dangerous as overhead power lines. Avoid serious injury and property damage by calling 811 before you dig to have underground facilities marked.

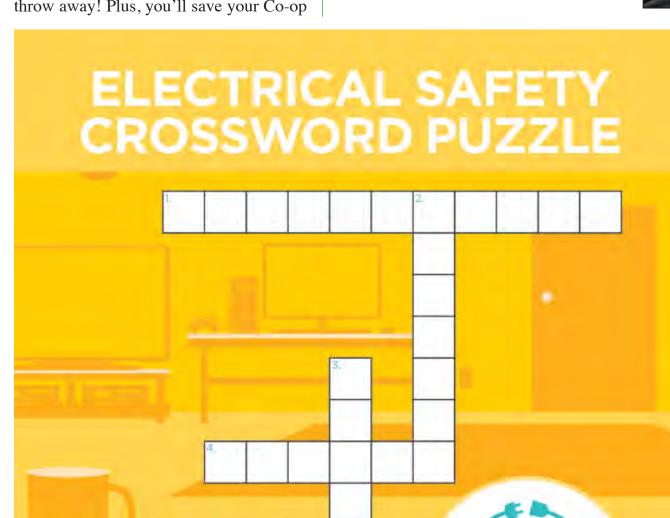
- Call Gopher State One Call at 811 at least two business days prior to a dig.
- Dial 811 or 1-800-252-1166 during normal business hours; this service is free for homeowners.
- Minnesota state law requires you to call.
- If you damage a line, you may be financially responsible for repairs.

You may also submit your dig information at gapherstateonecall.org/submit

Great River Energy—Powering what's possible

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May is Electrical Safety Month!

Read the safety tips below to complete the crossword puzzle.

- ACROSS: Keep all liquids away from _____, like TVs, computers and gaming consoles.
- DOWN: Never overload electrical ______. This creates a greater risk of fire.
- DOWN: Never use electrical ______ that feel warm to the touch or are damaged in any way.
- ACROSS: Smoke ______ should be installed in every bedroom, outside each sleeping area and on every level of your home.
- ACROSS: Don't run electrical cords under rugs. This creates potential fire ______.

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Save your A/C Tune Up!

f your A/C or heat pump unit is five years or older, you can save on your tune-up by getting a \$25 rebate when your contractor completes one of the green coupons and mails it to Meeker Co-op Area contractors have received these coupons in the mail. If your contractor didn't receive coupons, call the Co-op at 320-693-3231 and we'll rush them to him. Location # 02-35-303

Why have your A/C unit tuned up? It will help your unit run more efficiently, keeping you cool for less money. It's the smart things to do!



Easy Yummy Shrimp

Rosalea Hoeft of Kimball submitted this month's winning recipe for **Easy Yummy Shrimp** (Favorite Seafood Recipe). She will have \$10 credited to her account. Congratulations!

Easy Yummy Shrimp

Melt a stick of butter in a 9x13 pan. Put enough raw, deveined shrimp on top of the butter to cover. Sprinkle with 1 package of dried Italian seasoning. Bake at 375 degrees for 15 minutes.

Yummy and Easy is right!

For June, submit your favorite Recipe using Berries to:

Meeker Cooperative, ATTN: Becky Sorenson, 1725 US Hwy 12, Suite 100, Litchfield, MN 55355



Electrical outlets: Faulty electrical outlets are a leading cause of home fires. As outlets age, so do the wires behind them that you can't see. Any loose, damaged or warm-to-the-touch outlets should be repaired or replaced.

Electrical wiring: Outdated wiring is another common cause of electrical fires. Frequently tripped breakers, flickering lights and burning smells are clear warning signs. If your home is more than 20 years old, it may not be able to handle today's increased power load. If you suspect your home's wiring is outdated, leave this one to the pros and contact a qualified electrician.

Overloaded cords and outlets: Extension cords are not permanent solutions. If your big-screen TV, home theater system and other electronics are plugged into one extension cord, it's time to call an electrician and install additional outlets.



Old appliances: Older appliances are more likely to have loose or damaged wiring, which means they're more likely to catch fire. Check older appliances for damage and determine if it's time to upgrade or replace. Also check to ensure you're using appliance-grade outlets. A qualified electrician can help with installation.

Take a few minutes to update your data for our files.

We have been communicating with our members via email and phone recently. However, many of our members don't have valid email addresses or their land lines have been disconnected. This leaves us having to communicate with those members by snail mail.

If you want to be updated in the quickest way possible, please complete the form below and mail it in and we will update your data. Thank you so much for your help.

Name_

Acct. #__

Email___

Phone:_

Cell Phone_

Second Cell Phone_

Please mail to:

Meeker Cooperative Light & Power Assn. 1725 U.S. Hwy. 12 E., Suite 100 Litchfield, MN 55355

Or email your updates to rsorenson@meeker.coop or go to www.meeker.coop, click "Contact us" and send your changes electronically **Pioneer Ads** — Free want ad service for members. Please limit your ad to nine words, one word per line. One phone number please. Use the coupon below or pick one up in our office. Ads will be printed for one month only. Submit again for addtl. months. Three ads per member per month limit. Include your name/address, which will be used for identification purposes. Ads received by **May 28** will be included in the June issue.

Please run this ad in the next Pioneer						
Name:			Please check			
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Remember to limit your ad to nine words!			Agricultural			
			Automotive			
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4	5	6	Giveaway			
			Service			
7		99	For Rent			
Clin and Se	nd to Meeker Coop	erative 1725 US Hwy 12 Si	uite 100 Litchfield			

MN 55355 Attn: Becky Sorenson or email rsorenson@meeker.coop

For Sale - Miscellaneous

 Yamaha Waverunner w/lift. Runs gd. \$400. 320-761-4043. • 8 metal shelving units 3'x1'x6'. \$10/ea. 320-420-2649. • NASCAR collection: Earnhardt, Harvick diecast cars, signs, books, mugs, etc. 320-275-2493. • Les Kouba "Shelter" series matted, framed prints, 12"x14". \$45.320-693-2529. Catamaran w/trailer, 30' mast, needs work. \$100. 320-221-0382. • 2 carpet pieces, each 6'x9', neutral color. \$15. 320-693-2074. • 22 cu.ft. Hotpoint refrigerator w/top freezer/ice maker. \$125. 320-894-8618. • Gas grill w/tank. \$50. 320-593-5794. • Productive land: 2 parcels, 74

acres total. 320-296-6829. • 4-tine micro cultivator w/ edger/dethatcher/furrower. \$125/obo. 320-398-2774. Fisher-Price Deluxe bouncy chair-baby up to 25 lbs. \$30.
320-583-4490.
Oak China cabinet. \$100.
320-434-0785.
Weeres pontoon, 40hp w/ trailer, live well, runs good.
\$4,875. 320-469-7713.
Pipes, seat & primary cover for 99 Softail. \$100/obo.
320-583-4938.
14-ft. boat with 15 hp motor and trolling motor.
320-979-6313

For Sale - Agricultural

 John Deere hay or grain swather, 12-ft. cut. 320-398-2655.

Wanted

Inexperienced rancher seeks consultant, small beef operation, Paynesville area. 320-295-2109.
Person to clean bushes/weeds from hillside near Lk. Carnelian, Kimball. 320-282-5387.

Find your location number

Four location numbers have been hidden within this **Pioneer.** If you find your number and claim it by calling Meeker Cooperative by May 28, you will have \$10 credited to your account! If you find your

number and your information is correct in our system, you'll receive a bill credit equal to one month's output from a Member Solar panel. Luke and Megan Truenow of South Haven found



their location number and will have a credit to their electric bill. Good luck!

Lk. Superior agates or rocky fields/gravel pits where I can find them. 320-493-7555.
Larger pressure canner; canning jars. 320-453-4200.

Give Away

Wurlitzer spinet piano and bench. 320-693-3091.
White pine log, 16" diameter by 18-ft. long. 320-276-8237.
Floral pattern hide-a-bed in great shape. 320-275-5195.
45-gal. aquarium/pumps/ filters, etc. 320-275-2493.
Good used Whirlpool clothes dryer. 320-276-8290.

For Rent

Small 1 BR house in country.
Washer/dryer. \$700/mo + util.
320-693-7477.
Location #29-15-305

Services

• Will clean up old farms, pick up metals, mow, trim. 320-905-5625.

- Lawn Care: Resid./commer./ cabins. The Cutting Edge
- 320-828-6057.
- Larry's Barber & Style, 213 N.Sibley. Tues-Sat. 8-5:30. 320-693-2421.
- Stump grinding, any size job. John's Stump Grinding. 320-583-9158.



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