

# MEEKER COOPERATIVE PIONEER

The official publication of  
**Meeker**  
**Cooperative**  
Light and Power Association  
Meeker Co-op is an Equal Opportunity  
Provider and Employer

SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2021

## ANNUAL MEETING & MEMBER APPRECIATION DAY RECAP

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## CO-OP'S 86TH ANNUAL MEETING HELD AT THE A MAZE'N FARMYARD

The 86th Annual Meeting of Meeker Cooperative Light & Power Association took place August 11th, 2021, at 7:00 PM in conjunction with Meeker's Member Appreciation celebration.

Kari Miller, Finance Manager, gave the financial report noting a solid financial position and a clean audit opinion from the auditor. The financial statements can be found in the Annual Report on our website at <https://www.meeker.coop/annual-report>.

CEO Tim Mergen's Manager's Report covered four topics which he reviews in his column on page 2 of this *Pioneer*.

Director seats in Districts 4, 7, and 9 were up for election with District 7 being the only contested seat. Incumbents Kevin Issendorf (District 4) and Karl Lundin (District 9) were re-elected. Incumbent K. Bruce Krueger of Hutchinson was challenged by Randy Bryant of Dassel. Ballots were mailed to members of District 7 prior to the meeting and the votes were counted at the meeting. Randy Bryant won the election and is now the District 7 Director.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 3



**"ENERGIZING AND CONNECTING...ENHANCING YOUR LIFE."**



# 86TH ANNUAL MEETING HIGHLIGHTS

BY TIM MERGEN, MEEKER COOPERATIVE, CEO/GENERAL MANAGER

When it came to the Co-op's Annual Meeting, we did things a bit differently this year due to the COVID-19 pandemic. We

combined the Annual Meeting with our traditional Member Appreciation Event.

Although the Co-op bylaws allow the Co-op to hold its Annual Meeting anytime of the year, we generally have held it in late March or early April. Due to the pandemic restrictions, the Board made the decision to move it back a few more months in the hope mask mandates and social distancing requirements would be less restrictive by then. Thankfully they were.

In this time of COVID it was a bit of a challenge trying to determine how many meals to plan for, so a big 'Thank You' to the Members for RSVPing their attendance. Amazingly, we were right on. Not close to the number saying they would attend but exactly that number. Going into that day's event we had 1068 RSVPs. When we tallied everything up the next day, we registered exactly 1,068 attendees. Incredible.

A big 'Thank You' to A Maze'n Farmyard for hosting us, Keek's Restaurant in Watkins for catering the meal, the employees for making it all happen and you the members for coming out and supporting the Co-op.

**During my General Manager's report, I touched on four topics. They were:**

- The COVID-19 Pandemic
- Great River Energy's Sale of Coal Creek Station
- The Texas Cold Weather (Polar Vortex) Outages and
- A brief VIBRANT update.

Here is a summary of those comments here.

## COVID-19 PANDEMIC

No question COVID-19 challenged us to do things differently, as it did everyone. Both Electricity and Broadband are essential services so it was critical for us to keep all the operations going. This created some new and different challenges for us as the pandemic was new ground for everyone and we were all learning as we went.

Suddenly we were all dealing with quarantines, social distancing, hand sanitizing, mask mandates, and Plexiglas barriers.

We already knew electricity is "wicked". It can kill you instantly, so safety is always our number-one priority. Now with COVID we had new safety concerns and as we soon learned COVID-19 was also deadly.

Whether it is electric or COVID-19 related, for our employees, the members and the general public, safety has to be our number-one priority. Going forward we will continue to monitor the pandemic and take necessary precautions to provide a safe and healthy work environment for all employees, members and the public.

We all learned a lot over the past year and half. It is almost like we lived in a sci-fi movie or maybe we were living in the Twilight Zone. Regardless, I cannot say how much I appreciate and admire the grit, determination, perseverance and maybe most importantly the patience the employees came to work with every day to keep the electricity flowing and the data downloading.

## GREAT RIVER ENERGY'S (GRE) SALE OF COAL CREEK STATION

On July 30th GRE's 28 Co-ops voted to sell Coal Creek station to Rainbow Energy Center. Rainbow is an affiliate of Rainbow Energy Marketing Group Corporation based in Bismarck, North Dakota.

A little background on Coal Creek Station. It is located about 50 miles north of Bismarck, near Underwood, North Dakota. It started generating power in 1979. It has two twin turbines which each produce a little over 575 megawatts of electricity for a combined total generating capacity of 1,151 megawatts of electricity. This makes it the largest power plant in North Dakota.

It has more than 200 employees. Rainbow will hire current plant employees so the sale is exciting news for them, their families and all the communities surrounding Coal Creek Station.

By selling Coal Creek Station and moving to a new portfolio of electric generation, GRE is expecting operational savings in future years while being on track to meet Minnesota's 80% carbon goal.

Although GRE has made the decision to sell Coal Creek Station it still must be approved

by government regulators from North Dakota, Minnesota, and the U.S. Federal Government. Getting the final I's dotted and the T's crossed may be months out yet.

## THE TEXAS BLACKOUTS

In the interest of space, and since I wrote a very lengthy and in-depth article for the March/April *Pioneer* concerning the Texas blackouts and how Meeker is insulated from that same thing happening here I'll forego the comments I made on that topic at the annual meeting in this article.

If you are interested in reading the article about the Texas outages, please go to the Co-op's website ([www.meeker.coop](http://www.meeker.coop)) and check out that issue. All recent past issues of the *Pioneer* are there for your review.

## VIBRANT BROADBAND UPDATE

I think we can all agree, each day electricity touches all of our lives. In today's world I would also say broadband internet touches all of our lives in some form or fashion each day as well.

Even if you are the rare person who doesn't use it, your employer likely does, and the stores or companies you shop at are using the internet. It is being used for medical reasons, eLearning for students of all ages and education levels, entertainment, economic development and even in many forms of agriculture.

With the pandemic hitting, the ability of our members to connect to high-speed internet became more critical than ever. Employees needed it to work from home and students needed Rip Snort'n FAST internet for eLearning. There simply is no question they could not have survived without it. In fact, the Governor's Broadband Taskforce reported internet use increased by 70% because of COVID-19.

Moving forward, we will be adding a new wireless technology to 17 of our 49 monopoles to increase connectivity of VIBRANT to those that we have not been able to reach as of yet. Our goal is to have the equipment installed and tested and ready yet this fall. If it proves successful, we will go back to the board to obtain additional funding for installations on more monopoles next summer.

Beyond that we are working with our state and national organizations and the local governments to obtain financing to con-



tinue to install fiber and deliver VIBRANT Broadband to those still not served at all or are totally underserved.

Just like the Co-op's forefathers did when they made the decision to bring electricity to those that were not being served by the existing electric utilities, I'm proud that Meeker's Board of Directors stayed true to the mission of the Co-op and made the decision to provide this essential service to its members that were not being served or were underserved by the existing providers.

### IN CLOSING

I've heard it said that in times of change and conflict the true heart of an organization is revealed. No question, with the start-up of VIBRANT, this past February's Polar Vortex cold spell, the sale of Coal Creek Station and the huge challenge the pandemic put on us, the true heart of Meeker's employees, Directors and Members was revealed. It was one of patience, sympathy, understanding, determination and endurance.

I truly thank everyone for that and the support you all give to Meeker Cooperative.

### DID YOU KNOW?

**By 2022, Investment Bank Morgan Stanley estimates that Amazon, UPS and FedEx will have combined package delivery volume of almost 15 billion packages.**

(June 2021 Fleet Owner Magazine)

## MORE ARTICLES & CLASSIFIEDS AVAILABLE Online!

We are posting more articles on our website in-between issues of the Pioneer.

Go to [www.meeker.coop/news](http://www.meeker.coop/news) to stay up to date and browse our Classifieds!



## IS YOUR ACCOUNT INFORMATION UP-TO-DATE?

Please take a moment to update your information.

Visit our website: [www.meeker.coop/update-my-info](http://www.meeker.coop/update-my-info) or call us at 320-693-3231.

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I certify that all information furnished on this form is true and complete. I understand that anyone who furnishes false or misleading information on this form or who omits material or information requested on the form may be subject to criminal sanctions (including fines and imprisonment) and/or civil sanctions (including multiple damages and civil penalties).

## 86TH ANNUAL MEETING CONTINUED FROM COVER



We would like to thank Bruce Krueger for his years of service to the Meeker Cooperative Light & Power Association. He served from 1985 to 2003, going off the board as a result of redistricting, and then again from 2006 and served until this year (2021). Bruce worked for Hutchinson Utilities and brought an interesting perspective from within the industry.

We welcome Randy Bryant to the board. Randy was an Engineering Manager at 3M and has an Electrical Engineering degree.

## APPLICATIONS AVAILABLE

### FOR DIRECTOR SEATS IN DISTRICTS 3, 5 AND 8

(see back cover for townships assigned to each district)

All potential candidates must declare their intention to be placed on the ballot by submitting a completed application form, and be declared qualified for placement on the ballot by the Qualifications and Election Committee.

For complete director election information, qualifications and requirements, please visit the Co-op website at [www.meeker.coop](http://www.meeker.coop). The packet (available after October 11, 2021) can be found in the downloadable forms under Member Services, or contact Mary Alice Holm at 320-693-3231 to request a packet.



# 2021 *Member Appreciation Day*



Meeker Cooperative held its Member Appreciation Day on August 11th at the A maze'n Farmyard near Eden Valley. Over 1000 attendees, including Members and their families, enjoyed an evening feeding animals, holding birds, playing in corn, navigating a maze, and mingling with Meeker's employees. Information tents were available to learn about Energy Services, Heartland Security, Operation Round Up®, VIBRANT Broadband, and to meet your Board of Directors.

A meal of BBQ pulled pork, hot dogs, beans, and chips was catered by Keek's of Watkins. Meeker Cooperative linemen demonstrated electrical safety and gave bucket rides for those who dared the heights. Thank you to all who attended.





# COLD WEATHER RULE Q&A



## Shut-Off Protection Information for Residents and Military Personnel

### What is the Cold Weather Rule?

The Cold Weather Rule protects some members from having their electricity shut off due to non-payment between October 1 and April 30.

### Can my heat be shut off in the winter?

Yes, the Cold Weather Rule still allows electricity to be shut off for non-payment. You will only be protected if electricity provides your primary source of heat AND you have done all the following things:

- Your household income meets the state guidelines (less than 50 percent of the state median income). # 18-19-102
- You provide Meeker Co-op with a completed Application for Electric Shut-Off Protection; and
- You have a payment arrangement with the Co-op that you have remained reasonably current with.

### What must I do to receive shut-off protection?

If you are behind in your electricity payments and you will not be able to catch up, your first step is to call Meeker Cooperative. We don't want to shut off anyone's electricity. We will work with you to set up a payment arrangement or help you to see if you qualify for shut-off protection. There is no way we can know what your financial situation is unless you tell us. On the right is a list of providers that can help with your energy bills. It is up to you to contact them for help.

### Will you disconnect me without my knowledge?

No. You will receive a "Notice of Disconnection" in your bill, along with the list of agencies that may help you; a form for you to fill out stating you can't pay; a list of rights and responsibilities for you as well as the Cooperative; and a list of payment plans and other ways to prevent disconnection. If you receive this information, you **MUST** take the next step and call us or one of the agencies who can help you.

We will not disconnect electricity without first notifying you. We also won't disconnect the electricity on a Friday, a weekend, or the day before a holiday.

### If my electricity has been disconnected, how can I be reconnected?

In order to re-establish power, contact Meeker Cooperative for the total balance due, which may include additional fees and a deposit.

Our members are important to Meeker Cooperative. We would rather work with you to set up a plan to pay your bill than disconnect your service. But everyone who needs help must ask for it by calling 320-693-3231.

### Are Military personnel subject to shut-off?

When a household member has been ordered into active duty, for deployment, or for a change of duty station, some customers may find it hard to pay their utility bills.

Minnesota law protects these military personnel from shut-off if they cannot pay their utility bills in full.

### How can I learn more about Shut-Off Protection?

For more information or additional answers to your questions on the Cold Weather Rule, you can go online and visit [www.meeker.coop/shut-off-protection](http://www.meeker.coop/shut-off-protection) or call our office at 320-693-3231.

## 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 Ave. N.  
Glencoe, MN 55336

(320) 864-3144  
(320) 484-4330  
(800) 247-1756

### Renville County area

#### United Community Action Partnership

500 E. 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

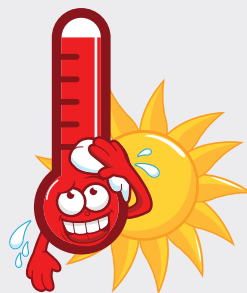
1210 23rd Ave. So.  
P.O. Box 683  
Waite Park, MN 56387  
(320) 251-1612  
(888) 765-5597

## WILLIE WIREDHAND'S ELECTRICITY FUN FACT

### Did you know....?

*This past June was the hottest we've seen at the Co-op in the last 10-years. Including all of the summer months, 2021 has been the hottest in the same time period.\**

*\*based on cooling degree days*



## FIND YOUR LOCATION NUMBER

Four location numbers have been hidden within this *Pioneer* and four more will be found in articles published on our website between now and the next *Pioneer* mailing. If you find your number and claim it by **calling** Meeker Cooperative before **November 5**, you will have a \$10 credit to your account! When you call and verify your information is correct in our system, you will also receive an additional bill credit equal to one month's output from a Member Solar Panel. **Good luck!**



## VIBRANT PHONE AVAILABLE IN OUR ENTIRE SERVICE AREA!

Landline phone service has been a staple of homes and businesses for nearly a century. It is a technology that has kept people connected and conducting business through easy communication with a telephone. As technology advances, a more modern form of phone service has become popular for both residents and businesses that replaces traditional landlines.

This new technology combines the features of a landline and the internet to provide a stable and clear home and business phone upgrade.

Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) is a technology that converts voice data into a digital signal that is sent over broadband Internet rather than traditional landline phone service. The call quality using tra-

ditional copper wiring can be inconsistent and sometimes unclear because of an aging system.

One of the main benefits of VoIP is the voice quality of the call. Because the signal is digital, there is no loss of quality. Another benefit is that VIBRANT VoIP includes unlimited long-distance calling. Many traditional landline services charge for calling long-distance.

If you own a business, you might find other advantages. Rather than leasing equipment and relying on an internal IT department to run it, VoIP can offer hosted service. What this means is that the equipment is hosted through the Internet rather than having physical hardware on your premises.

This offers customizable features such as hunt groups, auto attendant and voice-

mail-to-email to meet the individual needs of a business. Many of these features are not available through the traditional landline phone system or come at a high cost.

A benefit of a hosted VoIP that is becoming more popular is the ability to take the office phone from the business and use it remotely at an employee's home. As long as there is an internet connection, a hosted phone can be used in any location giving businesses and their employees much more flexibility. # 01-32-302

VIBRANT Broadband offers VoIP for both homes and businesses. Our service is now available anywhere you can get VIBRANT Broadband's Rip Snort'n FAST Internet.

If you are interested in learning more about updating your phone to a modern solution, call us at 320-693-3231 and speak with a VIBRANT Broadband Representative.

### VIBRANT Reviews

*LOVE MY VIBRANT! Seriously, I couldn't be happier with the service. Great job to you all for the solid fast network!*

*- Justin K.*

### SHARE VIBRANT, GET REWARDED



Get a \$25 bill credit for everyone you refer to VIBRANT Broadband.

Find out details at  
[vibrantbroadband.com/sharevibrant](http://vibrantbroadband.com/sharevibrant)  
or call us at 320-693-3231.

## Featured Recipe

## Spiced Butternut Squash Mash

**Congratulations to Marge Zeppelin** for submitting this month's winning recipe for **SQUASH**.

### INGREDIENTS

- 1 butternut squash
- Water
- Butter to taste
- Salt to taste
- Pepper to taste
- Cinnamon to taste
- Nutmeg to taste

### DIRECTIONS

1. Peel squash, cut in half and remove seeds.
2. Dice into small cubes, place in a pot and cover with a small amount of water.
3. Cook on the stovetop over medium heat until tender enough to mash.
4. Drain water, mash and mix in butter. Season with salt, pepper, cinnamon, and nutmeg.



Submit your favorite **PIE RECIPE** for our next issue! Please include a photo if you are able. The chosen winner will receive a \$10 credit to their account. **DEADLINE:** October 25, 2021

**E-mail to:** [szeppelin@meeker.coop](mailto:szeppelin@meeker.coop) | **Mail to:** Meeker Coop, ATTN: Shane, 1725 US Hwy 12, Ste. 100, Litchfield, MN 55355



# MEEKER COOPERATIVE LITCHFIELD NORTH SUBSTATION GETS NEW TRANSFORMER

It's not often that a transformer is replaced in a Meeker Cooperative substation, but on July 13, 2021, the Litchfield North Substation received a new transformer, replacing one that was 52 years old.

Recently additional load was added to the Litchfield substation, which brought the need for a new transformer. The 7.5 MVA transformer, built in 1969, was removed and will be used as a spare in the event any one of our 14 substation transformers were to fail. The new 10 MVA will be able to handle the current load as well as foreseeable future added load.

Planning the replacement of a substation transformer requires forward thinking as it takes 14 months for a transformer of this size to be built. Ahead of the transformer arriving, a new concrete pad has to be constructed with very stringent specs to stabilize the nearly 28-ton transformer.

Upon arrival of the new transformer, the lines in the substation need to be deenergized and back-fed from other substations eliminating members from being without power. The use of a 400-ton crane is used to remove the existing transformer and place the new transformer. Deenergizing the substation, removing the existing

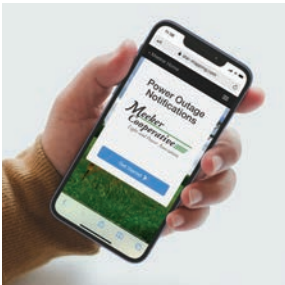


transformer, and placing the new transformer all takes place in one day.

Testing the new transformer ahead of energizing is imperative to verify proper functionality ahead of energizing. Once a new substation transformer is energized, the practice is to let it "soak" for 24 hours. This process allows the transformer to acclimate without connecting electric load. After a final inspection, the back-fed lines are switched back to normal allowing the new transformer to offer decades of service.

# MEEKER'S NEW EXTENDED POWER OUTAGE TEXT NOTIFICATION SYSTEM

Meeker Cooperative has recently implemented a text notification system for outages. You can sign up to receive notifications to your mobile phone number when extended outages occur.



When an outage happens that is longer than two minutes, a notification is sent to Meeker Cooperative as well as your mobile phone. If you have signed up for this service and receive a notification, there is no need to notify Meeker Cooperative. Our system notifies us that an outage has occurred. #02-36-206

When the system is back up, you will then receive a notification that power has been restored. However, there may be situations where you could receive several notifications, such as during a storm when power is intermittent. This is normal with our new power outage text notification system.

During any unplanned power outage, our support specialists won't know how long it will take to restore power. When the crews are dispatched, they work diligently to get the power back on as quick and safely as possible.

**TO SIGN UP, GO TO:**  
<https://www.meeker.coop/outagetext>

*Note: You will need your account number to sign up. Find your account number on your billing statement.*

## NON-SUMMER RATES START ON YOUR OCTOBER ELECTRIC BILL

The non-summer seasonal electric rate is in effect from Sept. 1 through May 31. The rate you are billed depends if the electric service is either single-phase or three-phase and also depends on the kilowatt (kW) demand your house, farm or business uses. You can see our rates on the website at [www.meeker.coop/rates](http://www.meeker.coop/rates).

The energy you use in September will be reflected on your October bill. Feel free to contact us at 320-693-3231 with questions about your energy use, including energy efficiency programs and rebates for qualified appliances, heat pumps and dual fuel. Energy management programs will help reduce your energy costs and could save you hundreds of dollars each year.



## August 2021 Recipient List

<b>Community Service</b>	
Darwin Tourism & Promotions Committee .....	\$500
Eden Valley Citizens for Progress .....	\$1,000
Kimball Days.....	\$500
Ness Church Preservation Foundation .....	\$1,500
<b>Education and Youth</b>	
Eden Valley-Watkins Boy Scout Troop #363 .....	\$500
Post Prom, Eden Valley-Watkins .....	\$350
SWWC Foundation for Innovation in Education .....	\$1,000
True Friends and Friendship Ventures .....	\$1,500
<b>Total .....</b>	<b>\$6,850</b>

## BOARD OF DIRECTORS

**Kevin Issendorf, President — District 4**  
Litchfield, Greenleaf in Meeker

**Brad Donnay, Vice President — District 3**  
Luxemburg, Maine Prairie,  
South Maine Prairie in Stearns;  
Forest Prairie in Meeker

**Karl Lundin, Secretary — District 9**  
North Kingston, Kingston,  
Forest City in Meeker

**Mark Larson, Treasurer — District 6**  
Harrison, Kandiyohi, Genessee, Fahlun,  
Lake Elizabeth, E. Lake Lillian in Kandiyohi;  
Cosmos, Acton, Danielson, Swede Grove  
in Meeker; Brookfield, Boon Lake in Renville

**Paul Bugbee — District 1**  
Roseville, Irving in Kandiyohi;  
Paynesville in Stearns;  
Union Grove in Meeker

**Karen Becker — District 2**  
Eden Lake in Stearns;  
Harvey, Manannah in Meeker

**Stephen Plaisance — District 5**  
Fairhaven in Stearns;  
Cokato, Southside, French Lake in Wright;  
Dassel in Meeker

**Randy Bryant — District 7**  
Collinwood, Cedar Mills in Meeker;  
Stockholm in Wright;  
Acoma, Hutchinson in McLeod

**Larry Huhn — District 8**  
Darwin, Ellsworth in Meeker

**Chad Felstul, Attorney**

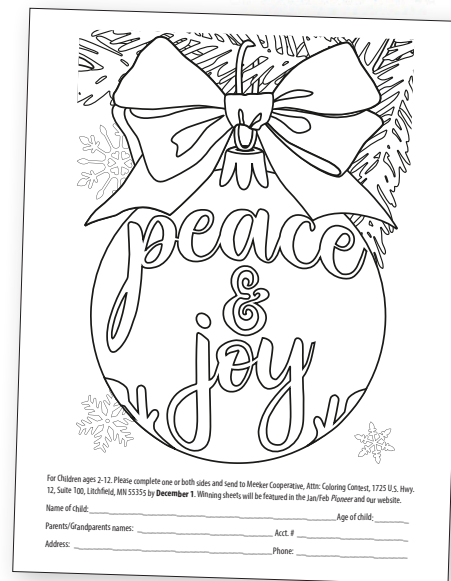
## ENTER OUR COLORING CONTEST!



Download the coloring pages from our website at [www.meeker.coop/color21](http://www.meeker.coop/color21) or pick them up in our office at the front counter. There are two pages to choose from.

Three entries will be chosen from each age group (ages 2-12). Members who attend Coffee On The Co-op will vote on their favorite. The most votes will win. Winners will receive a \$10 Walmart Gift Card and their artwork will be featured in the January/February issue of the *Pioneer* and on our website. The deadline to submit entries for the Coloring Contest is

**Wednesday, December 1.** Either drop off your entry at our office or mail to: Coloring Contest-Meeker Cooperative, 1725 U.S. Hwy. 12 E., Suite 100, Litchfield, MN 55355.



## Coffee on the Co-op!

Please join us for Coffee on the Co-op in December.

**DECEMBER 15, 9AM-11AM**

@ Meeker Co-op in Litchfield

**DECEMBER 16, 9AM-11AM**

@ Triple-R in Kimball

#18-06-301

## OFFICE HOURS

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

## CONTACT US

320-693-3231 | Fax: 320-693-2980  
1725 U.S. Hwy. 12, Suite 100, Litchfield, MN 55355  
[www.meeker.coop](http://www.meeker.coop) | [www.vibrantbroadband.com](http://www.vibrantbroadband.com)



[meeker.coop](http://meeker.coop)



[vibrantbb.net](http://vibrantbb.net)

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**Meeker**  
**Cooperative**  
*Light and Power Association*

**VIBRANT**  
Broadband™

**Heartland**  
Security