

MEEKER COOPERATIVE PIONEER

The official publication of

**Meeker
Cooperative**
Light and Power Association



Meeker Co-op is an Equal Opportunity
Provider and Employer

JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2022

KEEK'S GETS VIBRANT

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KEEK'S IS COOKING WITH VIBRANT

Keek's family restaurant serves up delicious American fare cuisine and is now "cooking" with VIBRANT Broadband. Located on Highway 55 in Watkins, the husband-and-wife team of Collin and Drea Kuechle have been serving their customers and the community for the last five years.

Collin and Drea are Meeker Cooperative Members at their home, and recently, they decided to upgrade their restaurant's Internet with VIBRANT Broadband.

VIBRANT was happy to help connect Keek's and their guests with a high-speed solution. The restaurant industry is fast-paced and requires fast internet speed to keep up with the demands. "With running a business, you need the internet always on all the time," mentions Drea.

Collin and Drea had experienced some slow and spotty service including some outages with their previous provider. When asked what led to them switching to VIBRANT Drea said, "A big part of the reason we wanted to switch is because we loved the VIBRANT team. The service and the people that we dealt with when getting VIBRANT was far and beyond what we had experienced with our old provider."

CONTINUED ON PAGE 5



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



MERGEN'S MESSAGE

BY TIM MERGEN, MEEKER COOPERATIVE, CEO/GENERAL MANAGER

6.8%, 21.2%, & 18%

The numbers above are the respective rate increases Otter Tail Power, Xcel Ener-

gy and Minnesota Power, Minnesota's three Investor-Owned Utilities (IOU's) are wanting to implement.

In November we presented the 2022 Budget to Meeker's Board of Directors. We reviewed it again at their December meeting where it was approved. It now becomes our guideline for operating the Co-op in 2022. As you see in your everyday spending, prices have gone up, and in some cases greatly. This is no different in what the Co-op will see in increased expenses next year as well. A few examples are:

- an increase in healthcare, and retirement benefits along with increased labor costs
- an increase in postal costs
- an increase in electrical materials and supplies
- an increase in broadband equipment and materials
- an increase in engineering services
- an increase in fuel costs
- an increase in power and transmission charges

We are seeing increases in individual supplies and materials from eight percent to more than doubling. A very troubling trend for sure but unlike the three IOUs that are wanting to implement rate increases, Meeker Co-op is not planning a rate increase in 2022. Belt tightening for sure, but our goal is no rate increase.

105 & 0

Minnesota's own Robert Zimmerman (AKA - Bob Dylan) wrote Blown' in the Wind in 1962 and released it in 1963. In 2004, it was ranked number 14 on Rolling Stone magazine's list of the "500 Greatest Songs of All Time". The winds on the night of December 15th certainly may rank on the greatest of all times as well. According to the National Weath-

er Service, Litchfield had wind gusts of 53 MPH that night. I can't recall a wind storm as fierce for such an extended period of time, as the one that howled thru that December 15th night.

Luckily it only created a fistful or two of outages for us. Thank you to the six employees who worked through the night, in some less than desirable conditions, getting our members back on. In total we had 105 members lose electricity at some point that night. The first outage occurred around midnight and the last member's power was restored about 7:00 a.m. that morning. We almost made it through the year without a major outage but in the end, if having just over 100 members off after a storm is as bad as it gets in a year, I'll take it.

Others weren't so fortunate. Some co-ops in Minnesota still had thousands without power well into the next day. Corn Belt Electric, a Generation and Transmission Cooperative in Iowa, lost about 200 transmission poles. A major task to rebuild for sure.

On the VIBRANT Broadband side, we didn't have any outages. Zero. Knock on wood! How sweet is that?

PUSHING A SUPPLY LOG CHAIN

We have all heard about supply chain issues a thousand times by now. We are seeing it in getting materials and supplies whether on the electric side or the broadband side of the business. Following are some examples of how much we are seeing lead times grow for materials and supplies;

- fiber optic cable has gone from 6 to 8 weeks to 30-80 depending on the sizes.
- a standard transformer went from 16 weeks to now 46 weeks to over a year out.
- the chassis for a new bucket truck is now out 80 weeks minimum and some companies are not even taking orders because they have no idea when they might have them available.
- a simple thing like a meter socket was an in-stock item which meant we could get it in a day, now it is out a year.

- another everyday item for utilities is paint for marking underground wires, right now we just can't get any.
- underground duct to install cable in, was two days out and now it is 24 weeks out.
- underground cable itself was about 12 weeks out, now it is at least eight months out.
- of course, electronic items have similar issues – an electronic card for a VIBRANT monopole component is now a 3-4-month order when it used to be an in-stock item that we could get in a few days.

The entire supply chain has become like pushing a log chain; slow, cumbersome, challenging, and requiring much patience. Let's hope it will get better before we have another toilet paper shortage!

.....

DID YOU KNOW?

The song, Auld Lang Syne, is sung at the stroke of midnight in almost every English-speaking country in the world to bring in the new year.

Follow Us!

Stay **CURRENT** and **VIBRANT** by following our Facebook pages

 /meeker.coop
 /vibrantbb.net



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 to stay up to date and browse our Classifieds!

MEMBERS JOINED US DURING OUR COFFEE ON THE CO-OP EVENTS!

Members and guests attended our Coffee on the Co-op events in Litchfield and Kimball, despite the fog and stormy weather. They enjoyed coffee, hot apple cider, caramel rolls, and cookies. They also voted on the coloring contest (see winners on back page) and visited with friends and neighbors.

At these events, the Electric Trust Board distributed \$7,945 in Operation Round Up grants to qualifying non-profit organizations.




OPERATION ROUND UP® RECIPIENTS

Community Service

Community Market, Litchfield.....	\$500
Forest City Threshers.....	\$1,000
Historical Society, Grove City.....	\$1,000
Library, Eden Valley Area.....	\$1,000
Living at Home/BN Prog., Grove City C.A.R.E.....	\$500
United Community Action Partnership.....	\$2,500*
*Teen Foster Care Project	\$500
*Energy Assistance	\$2000

Education and Youth

ECFE, Atwater-Cosmos-Grove City..	\$445
Post Prom, Kimball	\$500
Post Prom, Litchfield High School...	\$500
Total	\$7,945

High School Scholarships – Two - \$1,000 scholarships per school as eligible

ACGC, BOLD, Dassel-Cokato, Eden Valley-Watkins, Hutchinson, Kimball, Litchfield, Paynesville

OPERATION ROUND UP® BOARD OF TRUSTEES



Back row:
John Donnay,
Marshall Carlson,
Holly Schultz-Anderson,
Allen Anderson,
Wendy Hellwig

Front row:
Pixie Mumford,
Teresa Hanson,
Theresa Nelson,
Joan Euerle,
Marcia Dischinger

#17-03-402



Post Prom, Litchfield



Historical Society, Grove City

IS YOUR ACCOUNT INFORMATION UP-TO-DATE?

Please take a moment to update your information.

Visit our website: www.meeke.coop/update-my-info or call us at 320-693-3231.



2022 ENERGY MANAGEMENT PROGRAMS AND REBATES

Every year, Meeker Cooperative puts together its rebates for energy management programs for space heating, air conditioning, and water heating that can help you save money at your home, farm or business. If you plan to make energy-wise improvements in 2022, the sooner the better as rebate funds are limited. Here are the energy management programs and rates for 2022. You can also visit the website at www.meeker.coop/programs/.

Electric Vehicle (EV) Charger

- Install a Level 2 Electric Vehicle Charger - \$500
- Battery Electric Vehicles (BEV) and Plug-in Hybrid Electric Vehicles (PHEV) are controlled/interruptible and metered separately at the energy management rate (\$.057/kWh Sept-May, \$.062/kWh Jun-Aug)

Electric Water Heating

- 8 Hour Peak Shave Water Heating
- Controlled Up to 8-Hours
- Minimum Efficiency - 0.90 Energy Factor (EF)
- Must use greater than 400 kWh per month on main service meter

Options

1) With an existing electric water heater not on an energy management program:

- A. Metered applicable general service rate
 - i. \$4 per month credit on bill
 - ii. Up to an \$800 credit/rebate toward purchase of an electric water heater; 80-gallon capacity or larger; minimum .90 EF
- B. Metered separately at energy management rate (\$.057/kWh Sept-May, \$.062/kWh Jun-Aug)
 - i. Up to a \$400 credit/rebate toward the purchase of an electric water heater; 80-gallon capacity or larger; minimum .90 EF

2) New construction or conversion from gas to electric water heater:

- A. Metered applicable general service rate
 - i. \$4 per month credit
 - ii. Up to an \$800 credit/rebate toward purchase of an electric water heater; 80-gallon capacity or larger; minimum .90 EF
- B. Metered separately at energy management rate (\$.057/kWh Sept-May, \$.062/kWh Jun-Aug)
 - i. Up to an \$800 credit/rebate toward purchase of an electric water heater; 80-gallon capacity or larger; minimum .90 EF

Interruptible Dual Fuel - \$10/kilowatt (kW) connected load

- Minimum of 5 kW resistance or any qualified electric thermal storage room unit (new or existing)
- Must have qualified backup heating system
- Metered separately at energy management rate (\$.057/kWh Sept-May, \$.062/kWh Jun-Aug)

Electric Thermal Storage - \$25 per kW connected load

- Central furnace, room units or radiant floor cable
- Metered separately at energy management rate (\$.057/kWh Sept-May, \$.062/kWh Jun-Aug)

AC Tune-Up - \$25 per unit

- Unit must be five years or older and in working condition
- Work must be performed by licensed HVAC contractor

Air Source Heat Pump – Ductless - \$500 per unit

- Controlled on Dual Fuel and Cycled Air Conditioning with qualified backup heating system
- Metered separately at energy management rate (\$.057/kWh Sept-May, \$.062/kWh Jun-Aug)

Air Source Heat Pump (standard rebate) - \$300 per unit

- Controlled on Dual Fuel and Cycled AC with qualified backup heating system
- Metered separately at energy management rate (\$.057/kWh Sept-May, \$.062/kWh Jun-Aug)

Air Source Heat Pump with Quality Installation (QI) requirement

- Installation must be performed by a registered HVAC contractor
- Matched equipment of the outdoor unit and indoor coil
- Proper equipment sizing with a completed load calculation on file
- Performance tests and measurements of the airflow and refrigerant charge
- Controlled on dual fuel and cycled air conditioning
- Sealing of the exposed ductwork in the mechanical room area
- Metered Separately (\$.057/kWh Sept-May, \$.062/kWh Jun-Aug)

14.5 - 15.9 SEER	\$530 Rebate
>16+ SEER.....	\$630 Rebate
14.5 - 15.9 SEER + ≥ 8.2 HSPF.....	\$1,050 Rebate
>16+ SEER + ≥ 8.2 HSPF.....	\$1,200 Rebate

SEER = Season Energy Efficiency Ratio
HSPF = Heating Seasonal Performance Factor

Ground Source Heat Pump – \$400 per Ton

- Controlled on Cycled Air Conditioning and Dual Fuel heating with qualified backup heating system
- Metered separately at energy management rate (\$.057/kWh Sept-May, \$.062/kWh Jun-Aug)

Ground Source Heat Pump - \$100 per Ton

- Metered at Applicable General Service Rate
- Controlled for Cycled Air Conditioning

Energy Management Improvement (EMI) Loan

- Loan funds from \$500 - \$5,000 are available for interruptible dual fuel, storage space heating, air-source heat pumps, ground source heat pumps, peak shave water heating, storage water heating, heat pump, water heater, and electric vehicle charger and load control equipment installations.
- Interest rates and maximum loan amount
 - » In Lieu of rebates: 0%, \$500 - \$3,000 / 3%, \$500 - \$5,000
 - » With rebate: 7%, \$500 - \$3,000
- Maximum loan period of 5 years (60 months)

ALL REBATES ARE FOR NEW ENERGY MANAGEMENT INSTALLATIONS. REBATES FOR LOADS TYPES ALREADY ENROLLED ON AN ENERGY MANAGEMENT PROGRAM GREATER THAN 10 YEARS OLD QUALIFY FOR 50% OF THE CURRENT REBATES, EXCLUDING WATER HEATERS.

KEEK'S CONTINUED FROM COVER

At the restaurant, you'll see Collin interact with the patrons. He's definitely his own character. Collin is a classically trained gourmet chef with a degree from the Culinary Institute of America in New York. Collin grew up in Plymouth but his family is originally from the Watkins area. Collin and Drea met while working together in the corporate restaurant business, opening restaurants for a chain all over the country.

Collin and Drea fulfilled a lifelong dream of opening a restaurant of their own when they both quit their jobs and opened Keek's in May of 2016. They started with pizza and appetizers and have since expanded their menu adding soups, salads, sandwiches, entrées and now, gourmet coffee.

Drea started her career managing and opening coffee shops in the Metro area. She wanted to bring gourmet coffee to the Watkins community. The pandemic lockdown of 2020 presented the opportunity to open a drive-through window for the restaurant and along with it, Keek's Coffeehouse menu. Drea loves testing out new drink recipes and the employees have become the taste-testers. She said she keeps the staff caffeinated and "buzzing" throughout the day.



Collin and Drea Kuechle,
Owners of Keek's Restaurant

“with VIBRANT everything loads up so fast and we can just cruise”



When asked about the process of Keek's switching their Internet and business phone to VIBRANT Broadband Drea told us, "The sales process was easy and we never felt pressured. When we were ready, the VIBRANT Team was ready." She also says VIBRANT has allowed Keek's to operate the business with no lag time, interruptions or outages. "They made it a great transition with switching providers. VIBRANT was always there to answer any questions we had and the answers came so quickly".

"We run our entire system off of Wi-Fi and tablets. We used to have to allow extra time in the morning to get the system running but with VIBRANT everything loads up so fast and we can just cruise."

Drea also commented that having a high-speed Internet solution with VIBRANT will allow them to open up opportunities for a possible expansion of the restaurant without having to worry about their network keeping up. Drea notes that the transition would be "seamless" when the time comes.

Collin and Drea demonstrate their desire to buy locally with Keek's as they purchase locally roasted coffee and local honey as well as other locally sourced ingredients for the restaurant. They loved the idea of being able to continue the local theme with their Internet and phone through VIBRANT Broadband.

FIND YOUR LOCATION NUMBER

Four location numbers are hidden within this *Pioneer* and four more 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 **February 28**, 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!



WILLIE WIREDHAND'S ELECTRICITY FUN FACT

Do you know....?

Using an 800 watt microwave a half-hour each day costs less than \$1.50* to heat your food for an entire month.

*Based on 12.3 cents per kWh.

Source: <https://www.perchenergy.com/energy-calculators/cost-of-running-microwave>





DREAMING OF STREAMING EVENT

Are you Dreaming of Streaming? Would you like to learn more about it? Join us for a FREE presentation and hands-on demonstration about streaming TV, shows, and movies..

VIBRANT Broadband will be hosting a VIBRANT-U Dreaming of Streaming Event

JOIN US!

WHEN: Thursday, February 24th

TIME: 5pm to 6pm

WHERE: Meeker Cooperative Community Room

COST: FREE

We will have a short presentation where you'll learn...

- What is streaming?
 - How do I stream?
 - What devices are available?
 - What type of Internet do I need?
- And more!**

VIBRANT Broadband representatives will be giving a live demo and will answer your streaming questions.

Participants will be put into a drawing to WIN an Amazon FireTV Stick!



SCHOLARSHIP GRANT APPLICATION DEADLINES

\$1000 College Scholarship funded by Basin Electric Power Cooperative deadline: **January 26, 2022.**

\$1000 Meeker Cooperative Electric Trust Non-Traditional Student Scholarship deadline: **February 4, 2022.**

Download information and applications at: www.meeker.coop/download-forms

SHARE VIBRANT, GET REWARDED



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

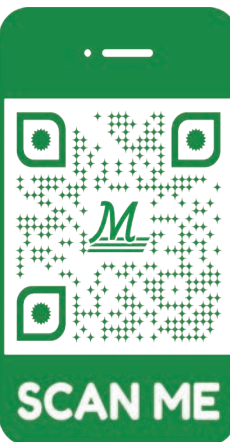
Find out details at vibrantbroadband.com/sharevibrant or call us at 320-693-3231.

#28-03-403

VIBRANT Review

We had VIBRANT installed by a technician and he was so polite and very knowledgeable. From the moment we contacted Meeker Co-op to inquire about VIBRANT, and working with them to set up our information and schedule our appointment, to the technician doing the actual installation, I can't say enough good things about the whole process. The best parts are that this is local and not having to deal with some huge company and getting the run-around on the telephone. We're anxious to sit back, learn this whole streaming process, and enjoy watching a whole new lineup of shows on our television and to have Rip Snort'n FAST Internet! Thank you again!!

- Gary and Deb W.



RECEIVE OUTAGE TEXTS!

Scan the code and sign up to receive texts when an outage occurs in your area.

Or go to: www.meeker.coop/outagetext



Verify your visitors.

One in four homeowners has had a package stolen.

SEE WHAT'S HAPPENING ON YOUR DOORSTEP.

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SECURITY AUTOMATION VIDEO MEDICAL ALERTS
888-264-6380 heartlandss.com



MANAGE YOUR ENERGY SAVINGS!

Meeker Cooperative encourages our Members to take advantage of free or inexpensive options available to better manage energy use and make a meaningful impact on monthly bills.

- **Have an energy audit.** Identifying energy-efficient measures specific to your home can help save money on monthly utility bills. Contact your electric cooperative for more information.
- **Make sure your fireplace is cleaned and your flue damper properly sealed.** Keep the fireplace damper closed unless you have a fire burning. Replace an inefficient wood-burning fireplace with a more efficient wood stove or gas insert.
- **Use the sunshine to your advantage.** Open blinds on sunny winter days to warm your home and shut them at sundown to trap heat inside.
- **Install a smart thermostat.** Smart thermostats can automatically turn off or reduce heating and cooling when you're asleep or not home.
- **Use smart power strips.** Electricity consumed by electronics when they are not in use or on standby wastes energy.
- **Seal air leaks around your home.** Weatherizing your home is an easy way to reduce heating and cooling costs without upgrading your HVAC system. Use weatherstripping, caulk or plastic film on windows and small openings to keep out cold air.



- **Replace your furnace air filter.** Change out your air filter once a month. Maintaining proper airflow keeps your HVAC system from working overtime.
- **Use LED lighting.** LED lights are significantly more energy efficient than incandescent bulbs and fluorescents.
- **Lower the water heater temperature.** Some manufacturers set water heater thermostats at 140°F, but most households usually only require them to be set at 120°F. For each 10°F reduction in water temperature, you can save 3% to 5% in energy costs.

Energy conservation and demand response programs are valuable tools for saving on monthly bills through reduced electricity rates. Meeker Cooperative offers rebates on energy-efficient products like air-source heat pumps and electric water heaters, which help reduce both the cost of initial investments and monthly energy usage. Call our office at 320-693-3231 and speak with an Energy Service Representative about your options.

MEEKER COOPERATIVE/VIBRANT BROADBAND WINS FIRST PLACE IN 2021 LIGHTING CONTEST

The Litchfield Visitors Bureau held its annual Light Up Litchfield Contest in December, asking local businesses to



#29-25-201

participate in creating a light display for the Holidays.

Meeker Cooperative/VIBRANT Broadband participated along with 16 other businesses in Litchfield. The public voted on the best lighting display and ours won First-Place!

'Thank you' to all who voted for us.

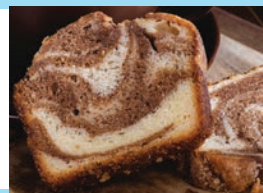


Featured Recipe

Cinnamon Swirl Bread

Congratulations to **Angie Zumach** for submitting this issue's winning recipe for Bread.

- 1/2 cup sugar
- 1 instant vanilla pudding mix
- 1 tablespoon cocoa
- 4 eggs
- 1 teaspoon cinnamon
- 2/3 cup vegetable oil
- 1 white cake mix
- 3/4 cup water



1. Mix sugar, cocoa, and cinnamon – set aside.
2. Mix cake mix, pudding, eggs, oil and water with electric mixer for 10 minutes.
3. Pour half of batter into 2 bread loaf pans. Sprinkle half of the cinnamon mixture on top of batter and swirl with fork. Repeat this step with the remainder of batter and cinnamon mixture.
4. Bake at 350 degrees for 50 minutes.

Submit your favorite **Homemade Soup 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: February 18, 2022.

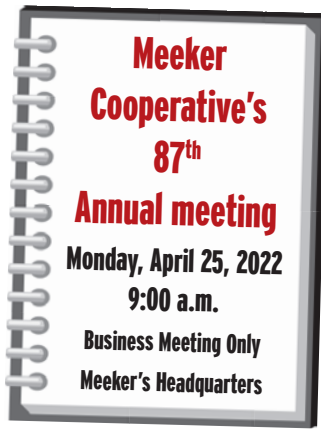
Email to: szeppelin@meeker.coop | Mail to: Meeker Coop, ATTN: Shane 1725 US Hwy 12 E, Ste 100, Litchfield, MN 55355

COGENERATION AND SMALL POWER PRODUCTION GOVERNED BY MINNESOTA RULES

Meeker Cooperative is obligated by Minnesota Rules pts. 7835 to interconnect with and purchase electricity from any cogenerators and/or small power producers. We also are required to provide information free of charge to any and all members who may be interested in entering into an interconnection agreement with the Co-op. In compliance with Minnesota adopted rules relating to cogeneration and small power production, all interconnections require an application and approval to become a qualifying facility.

www.meeker.coop/cogen

SAVE THE DATE



BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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Litchfield, Greenleaf in Meeker

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South Maine Prairie in Stearns;
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Darwin, Ellsworth in Meeker

Chad Felstul, Attorney

OFFICE HOURS

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

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The *Meeker Pioneer* is the official member publication of Meeker Cooperative and focuses on our members, programs and events. All member story ideas and comments are welcome. Send Attention: Editor at the address above.

COLORING CONTEST WINNERS

Congratulations to our winners of the 2021 Co-op Coloring Contest. Voting took place by our Members at our Coffee on the Co-op in December. Each winner, one from each age group 2-12, will received a \$10 Walmart gift card in the mail. Thank you to all the wonderful young artists that participated.



Age 2 -
Lydia T, Watkins



Age 3 -
Lucas C, Watkins



Age 4 -
Everly H, Litchfield



Age 5 -
Ruth T, Watkins



Age 6 -
Maci R, Darwin



Age 7 -
Linnea W, Dassel



Age 8 -
Hailey M, Paynesville



Age 9 -
Myles H, Litchfield



Age 10 -
Mesa S, Litchfield



Age 11 -
Paylin K, Dassel



Age 12 -
Alec A, Dassel

You can see a larger version of each winner's masterpiece on our website by going to:
www.meeker.coop/2021-annual-coloring-contest/

