

MEEKER COOPERATIVE PIONEER

The official publication of

**Meeker
Cooperative**
Light and Power Association



Meeker Co-op is an Equal Opportunity
Provider and Employer

MAY/JUNE 2022

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CHARGETM
POWERED BY CO-OPS

MEEKER COOPERATIVE JOINS CHARGETM, HOLDS ELECTRIC VEHICLE EVENT

On May 12, Meeker Cooperative held its first Electric Vehicle Experience Event at Central Park in Litchfield. The Electric Vehicle Experience involved several electric powered cars, including a pickup truck and SUV.

This year, Meeker Co-op joined CHARGETM. CHARGE is a national electric vehicle (EV) charging brand powered by electric cooperatives that also invests in EV-focused companies. CHARGE affiliates are part of a growing brand that leads a nationwide co-operation among cooperatives effort (the sixth Cooperative Principle) to help promote and educate members about EVs.

Steve Kosbab, Energy Services Manager at Meeker Cooperative, says it will be a win-win to partner with other cooperatives to promote the benefits of electric vehicles to our members.

Steve coordinated the event with representatives from Davis Motors of Litchfield and Holt Motors of Cokato. They talked with people about the electric vehicles each brand is offering, including the Ford F150 Powerboost Hybrid and Chevy Bolt.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 4

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



CYBER SECURITY PROGRAMS AND TRAINING

BY TIM MERGEN, MEEKER COOPERATIVE, CEO/GENERAL MANAGER

Following is a shortened version of my message at the Co-op's 87th Annual Meeting where I gave an

overview of Meeker Cooperative's Cyber Security Programs and Training.

In normal times we need to be diligent in protecting the Co-op's data and ensuring cyber hackers do not infiltrate our computer systems. Now with the Ukraine Russian war things have escalated. As you have all seen or heard on the news over the past several months, cyber security of the electric grid and energy in general has become paramount.

I don't believe it is a surprise to anyone while Russian troops are physically fighting in the Ukraine, Russian military cyber hacking against the United States and Ukrainian allies across the world has unfortunately stepped up.

Since the Russian invasion of Ukraine began, we have received increased alerts and warnings from various government agencies about the latest cyber threats. In fact, just a few days ago we received a joint letter from the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission and Department of Commerce on their ongoing efforts to work with Minnesota's various utilities to ensure we are taking all precautionary measures to prevent cyber security incidents on our systems. This gives you an idea of how serious everyone is taking this new cyber security threat level, as I don't ever recall receiving any sort of cyber security update or letter from either of those two State of Minnesota departments before.

It's hard to imagine that the Russian military, or the cyber criminals supported by them, would care about little Meeker Cooperative Light and Power Association here in central Minnesota. Of course, they are looking for an in. If they can get into our system, can they then get into our power suppliers computer system through ours, and wreak havoc on a much wider scale? They are looking for the weakest link. Their activities may not only be the downfall of Meeker Co-op but other electric utilities such as Great River Energy,

East River Electric and other co-ops as well.

Besides the military bad actors, there are the cyber criminals that simply are after money in one way or another. They want bank account and credit card info they can use to obtain access to financial accounts. The list of cyber security criminal activities can go on with I.D. theft, fraud and more.

So, what is Meeker Co-op doing to protect its information and its member's information with all this cyber-criminal activity going on?

We take our responsibility to protect our members info, the Co-op's own data and the protection of the Co-op's physical assets seriously. A couple of the internal things we do are:

We have a firm that monitors the Co-op's computer information systems from a "hacker's view" to discover the Co-op's cyber security vulnerabilities and weaknesses. The company then assesses risk levels or scores on the various computer network systems vulnerabilities.

These risk scores are provided to management and the Board of Directors on a monthly basis. Although we have a regular schedule in place for updating software patches and providing hardware upgrades, the risk scores vary from month to month. This depends on the timing of the report and the timing of the software company's patches to the system.

We also conduct Cyber Security training for employees and directors. Anyone with a computer whether it is a laptop, desktop or just an iPad device goes through monthly Cyber Security Awareness training.

This training consists of logging onto an internet module to learn about cyber security threats such as Social Engineering, Disinformation, Strengthening and Securing Passwords, Staying Safe in the Cloud, Ransomware Threats, Credit Card Security, Spoofing, Smishing, Vishing and every other cyber security threat out there.

Once you have completed the training module, you then must pass a test. So, it is not just a simple process of logging on, letting it run and not needing to pay any attention to it.

Another feature of this cyber training program is they will randomly send out test emails to see if we log on or click on emails that we shouldn't. KnowBe4 grades you on your overall performance. We know monthly who completed what module and if their overall score has gone up or down. I can attest to one wrong click on what appears to be a legitimate email can send your score up significantly.

Additionally, IT personnel along with the Co-op's power providers computer personnel, participate in cyber security education and simulation training sponsored by various government agencies. When needed and appropriate, that cyber security information is then communicated to us.

Another Cyber Security program is one that was started in 2016 by our national association NRECA with a grant from the Department of Energy. It is called the Rural Cooperative Cybersecurity Capabilities program or C3 for short. This program produced resources, risk assessments, table top exercises, toolkits, workshops and expert technical outreach specifically for rural and small utilities.

In closing, we are very aware if a Cyber Security breach happens it means bad things may happen:

- bad things to the Co-op
- bad things to the employees
- bad things to our vendors
- bad things to our power providers
- and bad things to our members

As your electric Cooperative we cannot have that happen.

Lastly, I want to ensure our members that we do not sell, give out, or in any way provide your personal information to any outside entity. We just don't. We take our responsibility for protecting our members' information very seriously and simply do not cross that line like many companies do with their customers' information.

I truly thank everyone for the support you give to Meeker Cooperative Light and Power Association.

87TH ANNUAL MEETING HELD AT THE CO-OP

The 87th Annual Meeting of Meeker Cooperative Light & Power Association took place April 25th, 2022, at 9:00 AM. The Annual Meeting was a business-only meeting. The financial report was presented by Meeker's new Finance Manager, Scott Froemming. Scott noted 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 www.meeker.coop/annual-report. #01-31-302

CEO Tim Mergen's Manager's Report covered topics which he reviews in his column on page 2 of this *Pioneer*. Director seats in Districts 3, 5, and 8 were up for election with District 8 being the only contested seat.

Incumbents Brad Donnay (District 3) and Stephen Plaisance (District 5) were re-elected.

Incumbent Larry Huhn of Darwin was challenged by Elizabeth Walke of Dassel. Ballots were mailed to members of District 8 prior to the meeting and the votes were counted at the meeting. Larry Huhn won the election and continues as the District 8 Director.



CEO, Tim Mergen, giving the Manager's Report.



Meeker Finance Manager, Scott Froemming

2022 MEEKER COOPERATIVE LIGHT & POWER ASSOCIATION BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Front Row L to R:

*Mark Larson,
Karl Lundin,
Brad Donnay,
Larry Huhn*

Back Row L to R:

*Randy Bryant,
Steve Plaisance,
Paul Bugbee,
Kevin Issendorf,
Karen Becker*



DO YOU HAVE PAST CAPITAL CREDITS COMING TO YOU?

After seven years of unsuccessful attempts to locate members with outstanding Capital Credit balances, the State of Minnesota allows the Co-op to donate these funds to the Operation Round Up program to use for educational purposes.

To check if your name is on our list of past members, go to www.meeker.coop/capital-credits

You will find a link on that page called "Unclaimed Capital Credits." Click that link and you can download the PDF of the complete list.

You may also call our office to have a list sent to you. If your name is on the list, or if you recognize someone else's name on the list, please contact Jammie at 320-693-3231.

IS YOUR ACCOUNT INFORMATION UP-TO-DATE?

*Please take a moment to
update your information.*

**Go to [www.meeker.coop/
update-my-info](http://www.meeker.coop/update-my-info)
or call us at 320-693-3231.**

MEEKER COOPERATIVE EV EVENT – CONTINUED FROM COVER

Many private owners brought their vehicles to show. These included a Fisker Karma, Jeep Wrangler 4xe, Fiat 500e, and several Tesla models. Other brands featured were Polestar, Nissan, and BMW.

With high fuel prices, the interest in electric vehicles is growing. Deciding which EV is right for you will take some understanding of how you would use your vehicle. For example, an all-electric vehicle is perfect for an everyday commuter, running to the store or shuffling kids around. Most people drive less than 100 miles a day and 90% of charging is done at home. A vehicle with 200 miles in range should handle that even in cold weather.

For those who like to venture off-road or travel where chargers may be sparse, a hybrid vehicle might be a better choice. When the batteries deplete, the gas-engine takes over and even recharges the batteries in most cases.

Charging infrastructure is growing, and it's growing fast, but taking a long-distance trip with an all-electric vehicle will take some planning and may take a little longer.

There are other things to consider as well. Battery range decreases in the



winter months, mainly due to the cabin heater and window defroster. Not all dealerships can work on electric vehicles, so know where to take it for updates or maintenance. Not all public charging stations are the same, either. You cannot charge a non-Tesla vehicle at a Tesla charger. #25-29-401

On the plus side, the benefits of an electric vehicle can be many. You don't need to stop for gas. You simply plug it in when you get home and let it charge

overnight. There are no more oil changes and maintenance is minimal. They are quiet, fun to drive, and less costly to fuel.

That is one of the biggest benefits, the fuel cost savings. With fuel prices on the rise and electricity prices stable, the average fuel savings with an EV can range from \$400 to \$1,400 or more a year. This is driving an average of 15,000 miles and compared to an internal combustion engine vehicle getting 30 miles to the gallon.

The Meeker Co-op Electric Vehicle Experience Event drew a pretty good crowd. It felt a lot like a car club event, with EV owners swapping specs and stories, and visitors asking questions about the cars and trucks.

Some people inquired about how far a vehicle will travel on a full charge and how long the batteries will last. They also asked about maintenance and updates. One owner mentioned that brake pads last a long time on electric vehicles because the motors themselves help in braking. The biggest maintenance for the brakes is making sure the caliper is lubricated.

Some of the questions asked were focused on the chargers like how much they cost and how long it takes for them to charge a vehicle, and where to find chargers while traveling.



Litchfield Mayor Keith Johnson takes a ride in a Tesla owned by Meeker Co-op Member John Martin.

When it comes to chargers, there are 3 levels of charging systems...

⚡ **LEVEL 1 chargers** use a typical 120-volt outlet. These take the longest time to charge electric vehicles. Depending on the vehicle battery size it could take several hours to days to completely charge a vehicle. A level 1 charger may work fine for plug-in hybrids but will not work well with an all-electric vehicle and could take more than 40 hours for a complete charge.

⚡ **LEVEL 2 chargers** use 240-volt outlets similar to a clothes dryer or electric stove. Level 2 chargers can operate at 16-32 amps. Home owners will need to install a dedicated 240 volt outlet and breaker to support the requirements of the charger. Vehicle owners will need to purchase the necessary equipment separately. If you purchase an all-electric vehicle, you need to have a level 2 charger installed in your garage. A Chevy Bolt will charge completely in 8.5 hours.

⚡ **LEVEL 3 chargers**, also referred to as super chargers, use up to 1000 volts. These chargers can charge vehicles in minutes instead of hours. They are typically found at businesses or along busy travel routes.



Overall, the Electric Vehicle Experience was a great event. It brought EV owners together with the general public to educate and make them aware of what an electric vehicle has to offer. EV enthusiasts are no different than classic car enthusiasts with everyone excited about their cars and trucks and “talking shop” with each other.

Look for more upcoming EV Experience Events from Meeker Cooperative and CHARGE™.

STAY SAFE WHEN DIGGING – CALL GOPHER STATE ONE CALL FIRST



Digging projects have started so remember to call before you dig.

As a homeowner or a professional excavator, Minnesota State law says you must contact Gopher State One Call (GSOC) before you dig. This means anything from planting trees to a new mailbox to sewer or underground pet fencing.

The process takes a little planning, but it's quite simple. Before you contact Gopher State One Call, mark your digging area with white paint, white flags, lathes, or stakes.

After you mark your planned digging location, you can visit GSOC's Online Locate Request system at www.gsocsubmit.org.

You will need to answer a few questions:

- Name, address, and phone number
- Type of work you will be doing
- The dig location's address
- Where you will be digging at the location
- When you will be digging

Once submitted, utilities will be contacted who may have facilities at the dig location. They will send a locator to either paint or flag the area in question.

You must wait 48 hours before you start your digging project. Utilities have 48 hours excluding weekends and holidays to locate their facilities. If you are planning a Saturday or Sunday project, contact GSOC on Wednesday, or sooner.

All of the public utilities will be marked, however, if you have private underground facilities such as pet fencing, phone or television cabling, electrical lines, or sewer, these will not be marked. To have those marked, you will need to contact a private locating services company and pay for their services. Check www.gopherstateonecall.org/private-facility-locators to find a privately owned locating company in your area.

When you finally start your digging project, you must respect the markings. Anything within 24 inches either side of the marking must be dug with hand tools only.

With a little planning, your digging project can save you a costly utility repair bill or upset neighbors. Most importantly, it can keep you safe. Visit www.gopherstateonecall.org to learn more before you dig.



WILLIE WIREDHAND'S ELECTRICITY FUN FACT



Do you know....?

Benjamin Franklin invented the lightning rod. It conducts a lightning charge to the ground through a metal wire and helps protect buildings and prevents fires caused by lightning strikes.



VIBRANT BROADBAND DELIVERS RIP SNORT'N FAST INTERNET TWO WAYS

When the decision was made to build fiber-optic infrastructure to Meeker's substations, VIBRANT's current success was still a dream. After it was decided to pursue that dream, some of the first questions were how do we reach as many of our Members as possible in the shortest time frame possible, and how do we build it to be financially feasible?

The answer came by building a hybrid system.

What this means is that a solid backbone had to be built and from there, expansion can happen. This allows VIBRANT to reach Members with Rip Snort'n FAST Internet while at the same time expanding into areas that are unserved or underserved.

VIBRANT's hybrid system consists of two ways to deliver high-speed Internet: fiber-to-the-premise and fiber-fed fixed wireless.

FIBER-FED FIXED WIRELESS

VIBRANT's core infrastructure consists of 49 monopoles placed throughout Meeker Cooperative's service area connected by fiber-optic cables. Each monopole has radios attached to them that deliver high-speed Internet to homes and businesses wirelessly from the monopole. The radios deliver speeds nearly as fast as being connected directly to fiber, and faster than other fixed-wireless Internet options offered to rural residents.

The signal is unaffected by weather; however, they do need line-of-sight to deliver the fastest speeds. It's a system that allows you to connect to fiber-fast Internet in the quickest way possible.

FIBER-TO-THE-PREMISE

The other way VIBRANT Broadband is offered is by being connected directly to its fiber line. This can happen if you live along a fiber route or where fiber is installed. VIBRANT has installed fiber in areas where there are buildings and heavy tree cover, like in a city or around lakes.

VIBRANT is expanding in several towns including Litchfield and Hawick, along with filling in areas where high-speed Internet is still being underserved. If you know of anyone who might be interested in getting VIBRANT Broadband, you can get a \$25 bill credit through our Share VIBRANT, Get Rewarded Program.

We encourage you to take a look at VIBRANT Broadband as your Internet provider. It's owned by Meeker Cooperative, which is you. There are packages and prices to fit your budget and lifestyle, and well, you know our customer service. #30-12-306

Call us at 320-693-3231 for information about VIBRANT Broadband or visit the website, vibrantbroadband.com.

SEE YOU AT THE SUMMER PARADES



Meeker Cooperative and VIBRANT Broadband will be participating in our local parades this summer. You will see the electric vehicle and Meeker Co-op trucks with employees handing out treats.

The parades we will see you at are:

- | | |
|------------------------|----------------------|
| • Grove City, June 4 | • Watkins, Aug. 6 |
| • Paynesville, June 16 | • Darwin, Aug. 13 |
| • Atwater, June 18 | • Kimball, Aug. 13 |
| • Eden Valley, June 25 | • Dassel, Sept. 3 |
| • Litchfield, July 9 | • Manannah, Sept. 10 |
| • Cosmos, July 17 | |

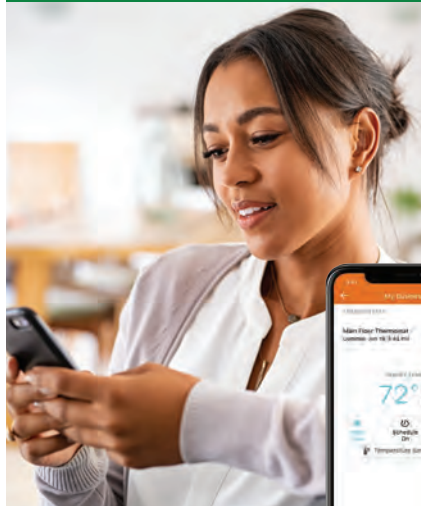
We hope to see you there!



Fast, easy and Fabulous! Everyone I worked with was kind, knowledgeable and efficient. Great people and great service. Glad I made the decision to use VIBRANT! Thanks everyone!

– Renee M.

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MEEKER COOPERATIVE ELECTRIC TRUST GRANT APPLICATION DEADLINE

The Meeker Cooperative Electric Trust makes grants available to area non-profit charitable organizations for projects.

The Trust meets three times per year to review applications and award grants. Remaining application deadlines for 2022 are July 7 and November 3. The application and guidelines can be found on Meeker Cooperative's website at www.meeker.coop. Scroll to the bottom of the home page and click on the Round Up logo to download the materials and guidelines to apply.

How to Contribute: Funds are generated by members/subscribers choosing to round their billing statement up to the nearest dollar and by employees choosing to round down their paychecks. On average, contributions from any individual members are about \$6 per year, but added together, they can make a big impact. If you are not currently an Operation Round Up participant, please contact the Cooperative to get signed up.



JULY BILL MAY BE HIGHER

Beginning June 1, Meeker Cooperative's rates will be 12.3¢ per kilowatt hour. The energy you used in June will be at this higher rate. This may result in a slightly higher bill in July.

Beginning September 1, the rate will return to the fall/winter rate of 10.3¢/kWh.

If you are on an Energy Management program, your rate will be 6.2¢/kWh in the summer and 5.7¢/kWh the remaining months.

For information on how to receive the low Energy Management electric rate, contact us at 320-693-3231.

MEEKER MEMBERS ENCOURAGED TO VET SOLAR VENDORS

Minnesota Attorney General Keith Ellison announced a lawsuit in April against four Utah-based solar companies. His suit alleges they violated various consumer

protection laws and used deceitful business practices to push Minnesotans into expensive solar panel contracts without delivering on the bonuses or tax incentives customers were promised.



According to a Star Tribune newspaper article, Ellison's office estimates over 400 Minnesotans were targeted. People were pressured into signing contracts by sales people who suggested they were connected with utility companies, often wearing utility vests to look official. #16-34-401

Facebook ads and door-to-door sales pitches were used to convince people

to sign individual contracts ranging from \$20,000 to \$55,000. People thought they were signing a contract for panel costs and energy savings; however, the contracts were instead for installation costs.

Meeker Cooperative encourages its Members to look closely at any solar panel company and make sure they know who they are dealing with. If you have any questions on your energy needs, please speak with a Meeker Cooperative Energy Services Representative. They are here to help you with your energy needs and can answer your energy questions.

Featured Recipe

Congratulations to **Gretchen Sandquist** for submitting this issue's winning recipe for Cookies.

- 2 eggs
- 1 box confetti cake mix
- 1/2 C. oil or melted butter

1. Mix ingredients together and chill for 40 minutes.
2. Scoop spoonfuls onto baking sheet.
3. Bake at 350 degrees for 4-10 minutes, depending on your oven. Do not let them get brown.

Cake Mix Cookies



Submit your favorite **Summer Punch 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: June 28, 2022.

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

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 **June 30**, 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!



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!

RECEIVE OUTAGE TEXTS!

Sign up to receive texts when an outage occurs in your area.

Go to:

www.meeker.coop/outagetext

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Brad Donnay, President — District 3

Luxemburg, Maine Prairie,
South Maine Prairie in Stearns;
Forest Prairie in Meeker

Karl Lundin, Vice President — District 9

North Kingston, Kingston,
Forest City in Meeker

Mark Larson, Secretary — 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

Larry Huhn, Treasurer — District 8

Darwin, Ellsworth in Meeker

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

Kevin Issendorf — District 4

Litchfield, Greenleaf 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

Chad Felstul, Attorney

Meeker Cooperative

Light and Power Association

ELECTRICAL CONSTRUCTION TECHNOLOGY STUDENTS OF ST. CLOUD TECHNICAL & COMMUNITY COLLEGE VISIT CO-OP

Encouraging the next generation of electricians, electrical contractors, linemen and energy technicians is one of the ways Meeker Cooperative gives back to the communities in our service area.

Forty-five students who are attending St. Cloud Technical & Community College to study electrical construction, motors, industrial technology, electrical wiring and much more visited the Co-op and toured Integrated Power Systems, Adam's and Danielson's Wind Farm near Cosmos, and Meeker's Solar Array and Litchfield substation.



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 | www.vibrantbroadband.com

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Send Attention: Editor at the address above.

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