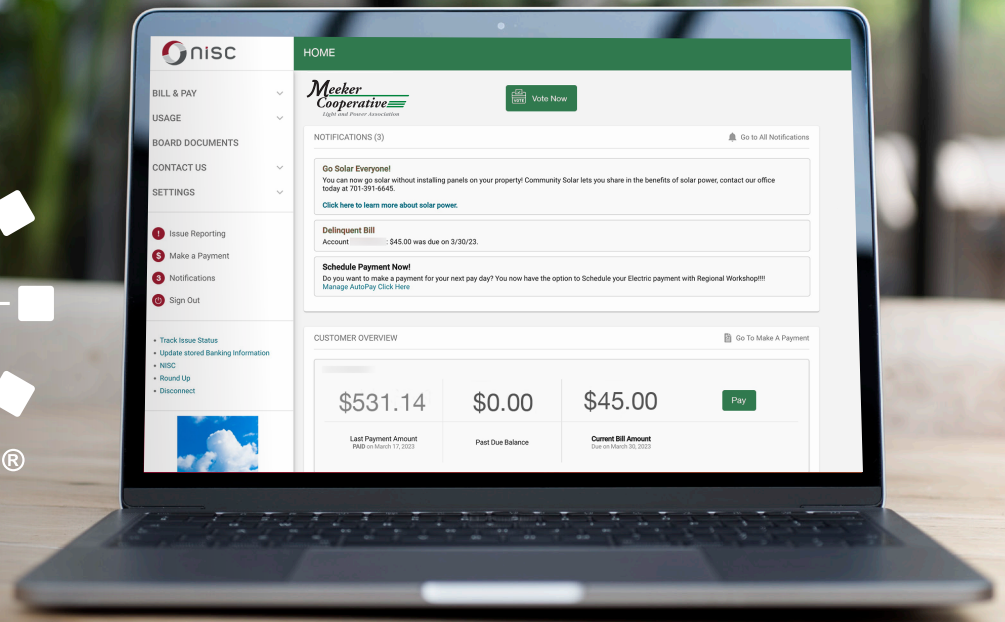


MEEKER COOPERATIVE PIONEER



IN THIS ISSUE

PAGE 3
2024 Rate Increase

PAGE 4
Community Involvement

PAGE 6
New Director



The Pioneer Newsletter is the official Cooperative publication.
Meeker Cooperative is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

REDESIGNED SMARTHUB FOR SEAMLESS ACCOUNT MANAGEMENT

Meeker Cooperative is excited to announce the launch of its revamped online account management tool, SmartHub®. The new and improved SmartHub, developed by the National Information Solutions Cooperative (NISC), introduces a fresh look and enhanced functionality while maintaining the reliability members have come to expect.

The SmartHub web application recently underwent a comprehensive redesign, focusing on a more user-friendly design to elevate the overall experience. 04-19-338 The most noticeable change is the streamlined and intuitive user interface,

offering easy navigation and immediate access to essential features. The home screen has undergone a transformation, now presenting a cleaner appearance that gives end-users immediate access to payment processing, issue reporting, and usage history.

The technological foundation of SmartHub has also undergone significant improvements, enhancing security and adaptability for future integrations and enhancements. Users will also observe improved consistency

Continued on page 2.

SMARTHUB CONTINUED...

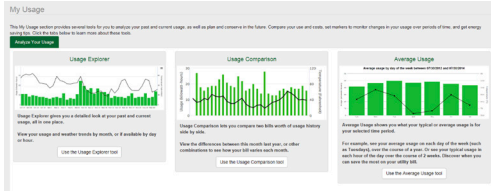
between the SmartHub app and its web counterpart, ensuring a uniform experience across platforms.

BILLING MADE EASY

SmartHub provides users with multiple options for billing notifications, including email or text messages. With just a couple of clicks you can also view your billing history, make a payment, set up AutoPay and so much more. 30-14-213 When viewing your account history, you can easily view both your current bill and bills from previous months allowing you to compare cost and consumption.

payment information for future transactions.

TRACK YOUR USAGE



SmartHub will become your favorite tool for evaluating your electric usage! You can view your usage with three different charts.

For those looking to save money, SmartHub offers detailed hour-by-hour energy usage history, comparisons of energy usage over different periods, and the ability to set usage thresholds for notifications. This feature empowers users to manage their consumption effectively and lower their bills.

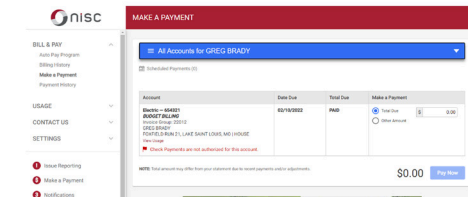
SIGN UP NOW

Access SmartHub by visiting meeker.smarthub.coop or by downloading the app on your mobile device through the Apple App Store (iOS devices) or Google Play Marketplace (Android devices). Managing your Meeker Cooperative account has never been easier.



Key Features of SmartHub:

- Pay Online with a Credit Card or Checking Account
- Monitor Energy Use with Daily and Monthly Readings
- Analyze Past and Current Usage Trends
- Accessible from Desktop or Mobile Devices (iOS and Android)
- Set Up Auto Pay via Credit Card or Checking Account
- Paperless Billing Option
- View Current and Past Billing Statements
- Update Billing and Contact Information
- Schedule Payments



Simply click "Make a Payment" in the left menu and SmartHub will walk you through making a payment step-by-step. You can pay your entire balance due, make a partial payment, or pay a specific amount, for one account or several.

Making payments through SmartHub is also secure and easy. The first time you make a payment either through the web or through the mobile app, you'll be able to securely store your



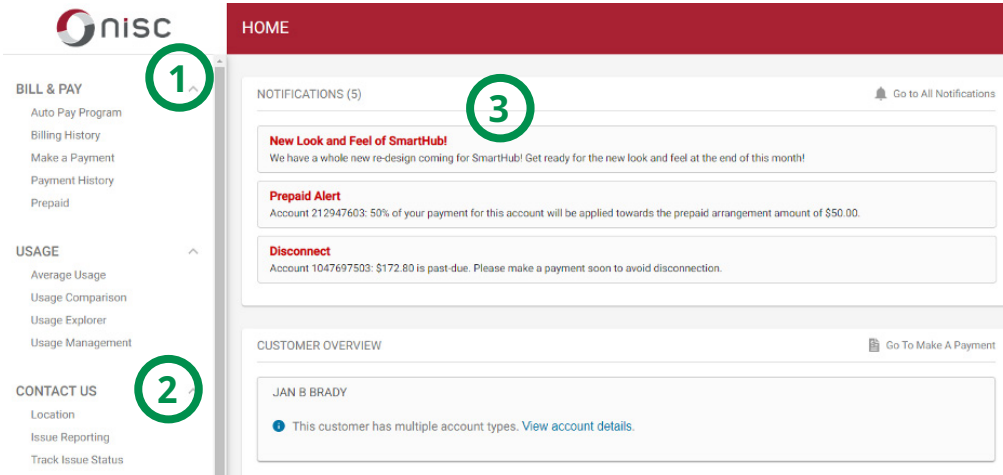
SIGN UP AND WIN!

Sign up for SmartHub, Automatic Payments, and E-Billing by February 29, 2024 for three chances to win a bill credit.

PRIZES INCLUDE:
TWO \$100.00 BILL CREDITS
TWO \$250.00 BILL CREDITS

Sign up now and experience a new era of convenience in account management.

meeker.smarthub.coop



1 Clicking on the NISC Logo in the top left will always take you back to the home screen.

2 The navigation menu is now on the left side of the screen, making it easy to access each feature of the program.

3 Notifications will be displayed at the top of the home page to ensure you don't miss important information about your account.



BALANCING THE BOOKS: UNDERSTANDING MEEKER COOPERATIVE'S 2024 RATE INCREASE

In the last edition of the *Pioneer*, I provided a brief update on our ongoing review of the Cooperative's finances. Meeker Cooperative is feeling the full impact of rising inflation across all operations and investments. This extends from the cost of wholesale power and labor to transportation and equipment.

As we prepared for 2024, our budget forecasts indicated that additional revenue would be needed to maintain day-to-day operations and support crucial investments in the long-term reliability of our distribution system. To address these economic challenges, we launched a Cost of Service study in collaboration with an independent firm to analyze our revenue requirements and provide us with valuable insights to determine a rate adjustment that aligns with our cooperative's financial goals and obligations.

The outcome of our Cost of Service Study confirmed a revenue shortfall of 3.7% and determined that a rate increase will be necessary this Spring. This decision is not taken lightly, and I want to emphasize that as a Co-op, we answer to you, our members, not investors or shareholders. We believe in transparency and accountability, which is why I want to explain how each dollar you spend on your monthly bill is used.

By far, our biggest expense is the cost of purchasing power. Accounting for 54 cents of each dollar, this is what it costs the Cooperative to buy the electricity itself from our wholesale power providers. Next up, at 9.1 cents, is our operations and maintenance expenses which cover the nitty-gritty of keeping the lights on – maintaining power lines, transformers, and other essential equipment. It's like the upkeep cost that ensures a steady flow of electricity to your home.

Customer service comes in at 5.6 cents, this includes everything from meter reading and billing to addressing your inquiries. Administrative and general expense is the office side of things. this 7.7 cents covers salaries, office supplies, software, and the other general costs of running the show fit under this category.

Depreciation is a bit like setting aside money for the wear and tear on assets. It's a non-cash expense, representing the

gradual aging of equipment and infrastructure, accounting for 9.4 cents. Interest expense, 8.4 cents is the cost of borrowing money, and the tiny catch-all category of other expenses covers the miscellaneous costs that just don't fit neatly into the main groups.

Finally, the operating margin at 5.7% is the portion of revenue remaining after the costs of goods sold and operating expenses. We are required by our lenders to maintain minimum margins, and this is also the portion of each dollar that is retained for reinvesting in our distribution system but assigned as capital credits to be returned to you, our members, in the future.

It's extremely important to understand here, that of the total costs incurred by the Cooperative, we really only have control over about 15% of our spending. All other costs are external pressures.

As we look at the budget for 2024 and consider how to address the 3.7 cent per dollar shortfall identified by the Cost of Service Study, our first response is to do everything we can to control that 15%, but as you can see that will only get us so far. After careful consideration, the Board of Directors has approved an overall increase of 3.2% across all rate classes that will go into effect on April 1, 2024. Detailed information and a breakdown of this rate increase are currently in development and will be shared in the February digital and March printed editions of the *Pioneer*. (Learn more about our new and expanded digital member newsletter on page 7.)

We understand that these are economically difficult times for our communities and members. With that in mind, Board members reviewed and discussed various rate adjustment options and chose what they believe is the best plan that balances the impact on our members with the need to maintain our financial stability, ongoing operations and the reliable service you depend on.

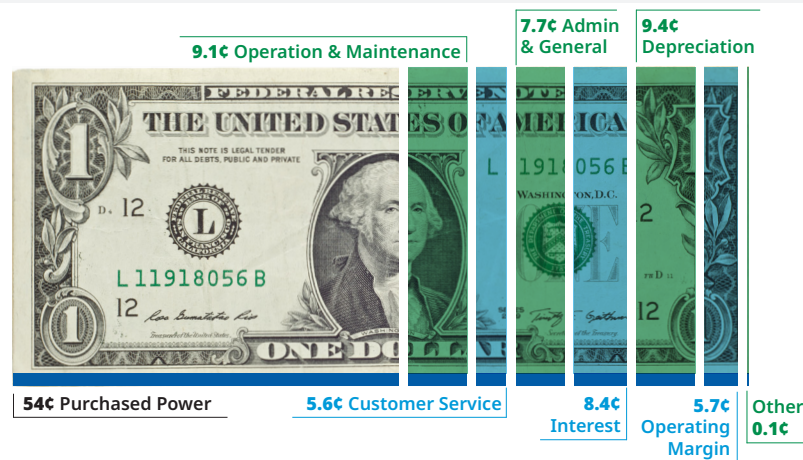
Dedicated to keeping the lights on and the data flowing,

Luke Johnson
CEO, Meeker Cooperative

2024 PROJECTED REVENUE VS. EXPENSES



WHERE DOES THE MEMBER DOLLAR GO?



Graph One:
This bar graph represents our projected revenue vs. expenses in 2024 without a rate increase. As you can see, our budget forecasts show us spending 3.7% more than we collect.

Graph Two:
By implementing a rate increase of 3.2% this Spring, in addition to managing expenses under our control, we are able to effectively rebalance the budget.



COFFEE ON THE CO-OP

Coffee on the Co-op took place from 9 AM to 11 AM, spanning December 5 to 8, 2023, across four locations: Shady's 55 in Paynesville, Keek's Restaurant in Watkins, The Handle Bar in Atwater, and at the Co-op's headquarters.

The event offered a platform for electric members, broadband subscribers, and local community members to interact with Co-op representatives. 18-01-201 Conversations primarily focused on discussions about cost-saving through energy management programs and exploring opportunities for connecting and streaming on Vibrant Broadband.



MEEKER COOPERATIVE ELECTRIC TRUST DISTRIBUTES \$28,650



Thanks to the active engagement of Meeker Cooperative's dedicated members and VIBRANT Subscribers, the Meeker Cooperative Electric Trust Board has recently distributed grants totaling \$28,650 to empower local community organizations.

Operation Round Up® is a widely adopted initiative by electric cooperatives in the United States in which monthly bills are voluntarily rounded to the nearest dollar. The rounded-up funds (ranging from 1¢ to 99¢) are deposited into a trust fund and later allocated to local civic organizations and deserving causes through an application and selection process. The program has successfully raised millions of dollars for diverse charitable causes and community projects, including but not limited to food banks, youth programs, and educational programs. 08-03-112 In the case of Meeker Cooperative alone, the Operation Round Up® program has disbursed over \$1,053,392 to local organizations since its inception in 1998.

The trust meets three times per year to review applications and award grants. The application deadlines for 2024 are February 1, July 5, and November 7. The application and guidelines can be found on Meeker Cooperative's website. www.meeker.coop.

December 2023 Recipient List

COMMUNITY SERVICE

Arts Association, Dassel-Cokato	\$750
Green Roof Area Center (Paynesville Senior Center)	\$2,000
Lakeside Generations (Augustana Care)	\$1,000
True Friends and Friendship Ventures	\$1,500
United Community Action Partnership	\$3,400
- Gas Vouchers (\$500)	
- Energy Assistance (\$2,500)	
- Head Start (\$400)	

EDUCATION AND YOUTH

Knights of Columbus #11345	\$400
Meeker County 4-H	\$1,200
PACT for Families Collaborative	\$1,000
Post Prom, Kimball	\$400
SWWC Foundation for Innovation in Education	\$1,000

TOTAL **\$12,650**

HIGH SCHOOL SCHOLARSHIPS

\$16,000
TWO \$1,000 SCHOLARSHIPS PER SCHOOL AS ELIGIBLE
 (Atwater-Cosmos-Grove City, BOLD, Dassel-Cokato, Eden Valley-Watkins, Hutchinson, Kimball, Litchfield, and Paynesville)

Contact your high school's guidance office for application details.



LEARN MORE ABOUT OPERATION ROUND UP AT
www.meeker.coop/operationroundup

2024 DIRECTOR ELECTIONS

Watch for information in the February electronic newsletter regarding director candidate applications available for Co-op board of director candidates for districts 4, 5, 7, and 9. Townships comprising each district are listed on the back cover.

Members interested in becoming a candidate must meet all guidelines and complete an application packet which will be available on our website in February.

SCHOLARSHIP APPLICATION DEADLINE REMINDER

Don't miss out on valuable opportunities! Apply for the following scholarships by **February 1**:

Basin Electric \$1,000 Scholarship
Meeker Cooperative Electric Trust
Non-Traditional Scholarship

**APPLY ONLINE AT
MEEKER.COOP**



WILLIE WIREDHAND'S ELECTRICITY FUN FACT

The ancient Greeks were aware of static electricity, as Thales of Miletus (c. 624–546 BCE) observed that rubbing fur on an amber produced a static charge, a discovery that laid the foundation for later developments in the understanding and manipulation of electrical forces.

COLORING CONTEST WINNERS!

Congratulations to our winners of the 2023 Co-op Coloring Contest. Voting took place by our Members at our Coffee on the Co-op events in December. Each winner, one from each age group 3-12, received a \$10 Walmart gift card in the mail. Thank you to all the wonderful young artists that participated.



AGE 3
Walker S., Eden Valley



AGE 4
Lydia T., Watkins



AGE 5
Everett H., Watkins



AGE 6
Everly H., Litchfield



AGE 7
Harper H., Watkins



AGE 8
Lydia H., Litchfield



AGE 9
Lita T., Watkins



AGE 10
Noella M., Eden Valley



AGE 11
Myles H., Litchfield



AGE 12
Emily K., Litchfield



You can see a larger version of each winner's masterpiece on our website by visiting meeker.coop/2023-color-contest

MEMBER NEWS

NOTICE OF CO-GENERATION

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. 22-23-108 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.

LEARN MORE AT meeker.coop/cogen

TRUCK FOR SALE

The Co-op is offering a 2008 Dodge Dakota 4x4 for sale through a sealed bid process. This well-maintained 2008 Dakota Sport with 224,422 miles features a 4.7L V-8 engine, leather interior, heated seats, remote start, and comes with new tires. The minimum bid is set at \$2,500. For questions or to schedule a viewing, feel free to call our office and speak to Kelly. Interested parties can submit their sealed bids at our office by February 8.



More photos are available on Facebook.

Enhancing the Meeker Cooperative Pioneer: Embracing the Digital Era

In our commitment to keeping you well-informed in today's fast-paced world, we are excited to share significant changes to our newsletter.

EXPANDED DIGITAL PRESENCE: MONTHLY DIGITAL NEWSLETTER

Recognizing the importance of timely information delivery, Meeker Cooperative is expanding its digital newsletter from bi-monthly to a monthly publication.

Our regular printed newsletter will be printed and mailed in January, March, May, July, September, and November.

We are adding a new, digital-only newsletter in February, April, June, August, October, and December.

To ensure that you receive these valuable updates, please be advised that **the digital newsletter will be sent automatically to all email addresses in our system.** Please make sure your account is updated.

If you prefer not to receive this newsletter, you will have the option to opt out by following the provided instructions in the email footer. 05-31-214 Your engagement and feedback are important to us, and we look forward to keeping you informed through our additional digital-only newsletters.

INTRODUCING OUR NEW DISTRICT 4 BOARD MEMBER: JAMES (JIM) ELLINGSON

We are happy to announce the latest addition to the Meeker Cooperative Board of Directors, Mr. James (Jim) Ellingson - a seasoned Financial Advisor with extensive experience in community service.

Jim holds an Associate of Applied Science (AAS) degree in Agriculture from the University of Minnesota Crookston and a Bachelor of Science (BS) degree in Agriculture Business from Montana State University. As a Financial Advisor, Jim specializes in helping clients plan, accumulate, manage, and utilize their assets to meet their financial needs and goals.

Jim's commitment to community service is evident in his extensive involvement in various organizations throughout his life, particularly in Meeker County. 13-08-417 Notably, he served in leadership positions on a variety of boards including the Litchfield Watercade, the Star Lake Association, Litchfield Kiwanis, LAMP, LACF, the RidgeWater College Foundation, the Litchfield School Board, and various Masonic and charitable foundations. Additionally he has served as a youth athletics official in the area. Jim grew up on a farm and his family was involved in the electrical and construction industries which have equipped him with valuable insights as well.

In a recent interview, Jim shared his motivations and vision for his role on Meeker Cooperative's Board. He emphasized the importance of representing member needs and goals, combining financial acumen with an understanding of the Cooperative's challenges. Jim believes that the challenges our Cooperative



faces in the future come primarily from government mandates at the state and federal level.

Communication and education are key pillars in Jim's vision for the Cooperative's success. He advocates for active listening to members and emphasizes the importance of ongoing education for board members. By staying informed on a wide range of issues impacting the Cooperative, the board can better serve the best interests of the members and employees.



FIND YOUR LOCATION NUMBER

Eight 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 January 31, you will have \$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.

2024 ENERGY MANAGEMENT REBATES

Meeker Cooperative offers voluntary energy management programs to its members to reduce wholesale energy costs and provide members with a low-cost electric rate for space heating, cooling, water heating and electric vehicle charging. 23-22-401 To be eligible for rebates and the energy management rate, members' equipment must be interconnected to the Co-op's energy management system, and the system must be checked and approved by the Co-op. To view complete details and requirements visit meeker.coop/programs/

AIR SOURCE HEAT PUMP WITH QUALITY INSTALLATION

>= 8.2 HSPF / 7.0 HSPF2	\$650
>= 8.8 HSPF / 7.5 HSPF2	\$925
>= 9.5 HSPF / 7.7 HSPF2	\$1,200

- Must be controlled on Cycled Air Conditioning and Dual Fuel with qualified backup heating system.
- Must meet Quality Install requirements.
- Metered separately at \$.057/kWh Sept-May, \$.062/kWh Jun-Aug

AC TUNE-UP \$25 PER UNIT

AIR SOURCE HEAT PUMP (DUCTED SPLIT NON-QI) \$500 PER UNIT

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

DUCTLESS AIR SOURCE HEAT PUMP \$500 PER OUTDOOR UNIT

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

GROUND SOURCE HEAT PUMP \$400 PER TON

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

GROUND SOURCE HEAT PUMP \$100 PER TON

- Controlled for cycle cooling and metered at applicable General Service Rate

ELECTRIC VEHICLE LEVEL-2 CHARGER \$500

- Metered separately at \$.057/kWh Sept-May, \$.062/kWh Jun-Aug

DUAL FUEL SPACE HEATING \$25/KW CONNECTED LOAD

- Must have qualified backup heating system (LP, natural gas, or electric thermal storage)
- Metered separately at \$.057/kWh Sept-May, \$.062/kWh Jun-Aug

ELECTRIC THERMAL STORAGE SPACE HEATING \$25/KW CONNECTED LOAD

- Central furnace, room units, radiant floor cable
- Metered separately at \$.057/kWh Sept-May, \$.062/kWh Jun-Aug

PEAK SHAVE ELECTRIC WATER HEATING

- Minimum efficiency - 0.90 Energy Factor
- Metered separately at \$.057/kWh Sept-May, \$.062/kWh Jun-Aug
- Up to an \$800 credit/rebate toward purchase of an electric water heater with a capacity of 80-gallons or larger.
- Rebates do not apply when a member is already on the controlled water heater program.

FEATURED RECIPE

SWEET POTATO MUFFINS | SUBMITTED BY: CHRIS RANSOM



INGREDIENTS

- 1/4 Cup Butter (or Canola/Vegetable Oil)
- 1/4 Cup Honey (or Brown Sugar)
- 2 Large Eggs, beaten
- 1/2 Cup Milk
- 1 Cup Cooked Sweet Potato Puree
- 1 tsp Baking Powder
- 1/2 tsp Baking Soda
- 1/2 tsp Salt
- 1 Cup Oatmeal
- 1 Cup All-Purpose Flour
- 1 tsp Cinnamon (optional)
- 1 tsp Vanilla (optional)

DIRECTIONS

To make sweet potato puree, start by washing, peeling, and cutting sweet potatoes into pieces. Boil them until they are soft, similar to boiling regular potatoes. Drain, cool, and then mash with a fork until smooth. Preheat oven to 350 degrees. In a separate mixing bowl, combine butter (or oil) and honey (or brown sugar). Add beaten eggs and stir, then incorporate milk. Mix in sweet potato puree, followed by baking powder, baking soda, salt, cinnamon, and vanilla (if using). Stir in oatmeal, then add flour and mix until well combined. Place the batter in a greased muffin tin or use muffin paper cups. Bake for 15 minutes or until a toothpick inserted comes out clean. Recipe yields approximately 16 muffins.

Submit your favorite recipe for our next issue! The chosen winner will receive a \$10 credit to their account. DEADLINE: January 31, 2024. Email to: szeppelin@meeker.coop | Mail to: Meeker Coop, ATTN: Shane 1725 US Hwy 12 E, Ste 100, Litchfield, MN 55355

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

CEO/General Manager: Luke Johnson
Contract Editor: Fuller Creative, LLC

Follow Us!

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

 /meekercoop

 /vibrantbroadband

 /vibrantbroadband

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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

Larry Huhn, Vice President — District 8
Darwin, Ellsworth in Meeker

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

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

James Ellingson — District 4
Litchfield, Greenleaf in Meeker

David Leonhardi — District 5
Fairhaven in Stearns; Cokato, Southside,
French Lake in Wright; Dassel in Meeker

Neil Pearson — 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

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

Jesse Turck — District 9
North Kingston, Kingston,
Forest City in Meeker

Chad Felstul, Attorney

Meeker
Cooperative
Light and Power Association

Meeker
Cooperative
Light and Power Association

VIBRANT
Broadband™

Heartland
Security

USPS 018-308 | ISSN 1525-1055 | Periodicals Postage Paid at Litchfield, MN with additional mailing offices.
POSTMASTER: Send address changes to address above, Attn: Meeker Pioneer.

The *Meeker Pioneer* is published bi-monthly. Cost is \$5 per year for members and \$10 per year for non-members by Meeker Cooperative. 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.

KEEP YOUR MOST PRECIOUS VALUABLES SAFE

Our security and medical alert systems protect your loved ones from intruders, carbon monoxide, fire, medical emergencies, and other threats. Call for information on the variety of protection services available.

For affordability and reliability, trust Heartland Security.

(888) 264-6380 | heartlandss.com

A subsidiary of Meeker Cooperative.

Heartland
Security



MORE NEWS & CLASSIFIEDS ONLINE

Keep up-to-date with your Cooperative in-between issues of the Pioneer and browse our classifieds online at:

www.meeker.coop/news.

 **SAVE
THE
DATE**

Mark your calendars for the 89th Meeker Cooperative Annual Meeting scheduled for Tuesday, August 6, 2024 and join us for updates on the recent progress and future goals of the Cooperative.