

MEEKER COOPERATIVE PIONEER



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Meeker
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Meeker Cooperative is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

MEEKER COOPERATIVE CELEBRATES 90 YEARS OF POWERING PROGRESS

For 90 years, Meeker Cooperative has been more than just an energy provider—it has been a lifeline for rural communities, a driver of innovation, and a steadfast advocate for its members. From the first power lines in the 1930s to today's cutting-edge broadband services, Meeker Cooperative has continuously evolved to meet the needs of those it serves.

This milestone anniversary is not just about looking back—it's about recognizing the Cooperative's enduring role in powering homes, businesses, and opportunities for generations.

LIGHTING THE WAY: THE EARLY YEARS

In the 1930s, rural Meeker County, like much of rural America, was left behind in the electrification movement. While cities enjoyed the benefits of electric power, farms and small towns relied on kerosene lamps and manual labor for even the most basic tasks. That changed in 1935 when local farmers and business leaders came together to form Meeker Cooperative Light & Power Association. With the help of the Rural Electrification Act, a construction loan was approved, and soon, the first poles were set. By the end of 1936, electricity was flowing to 300 farms over 175 miles of line.

Continued on page 2.



90 YEARS CONTINUED...

This moment was transformative. Electricity meant farmers could use milking machines instead of hand-milking cows, homes could be heated and lit with ease, and businesses could operate more efficiently. It marked the beginning of a new era, where rural communities had the same opportunities as their urban counterparts.

ADAPTING TO CHANGE: GROWTH AND INNOVATION

The Cooperative continued to grow through the 1940s and 1950s, overcoming wartime resource shortages and expanding services. By the 1960s, Meeker Cooperative introduced underground power lines and security lighting, improving both safety and reliability for members. As the need for electricity increased, the Cooperative kept pace by adopting new technology, such as two-way radio communication for lineworkers, and expanding substation capacity to meet growing demand.

One of the Cooperative's biggest contributions has been its commitment to energy efficiency. In the 1980s, Meeker Cooperative launched its load management program to help members save on energy costs by reducing demand during peak times. This member-first approach extended beyond power, as seen in the launch of Operation Round Up® in the 1990s, which has since contributed over \$1 million back to local organizations, worthy causes, and educational scholarships.

EXPANDING SERVICES BEYOND ELECTRICITY

By the 2000s, Meeker Cooperative was providing more than just electricity—it was offering solutions for the

modern world. From broadband internet to long-distance phone services, the Cooperative recognized that reliable connectivity was just as essential as power. In 2018, the launch of Vibrant Broadband brought high-speed fiber internet to rural members, helping bridge the digital divide and ensuring businesses, students, and families had access to the online world.

A FUTURE ROOTED IN SERVICE

Today, Meeker Cooperative serves over 8,000 members, providing electricity, fiber-optic internet, and innovative energy solutions. With more than \$32 million in state and federal grants secured for broadband expansion, the Cooperative continues to lead the way in connecting rural communities to modern technology.

As Meeker Cooperative celebrates 90 years, it remains committed to the principles it was founded on—member ownership, community investment, and forward-thinking solutions. 30-13-440 What started as a small group of farmers determined to bring power to their homes has grown into a trusted institution that continues to energize lives in new and meaningful ways.

Ninety years ago, Meeker Cooperative brought light to the darkness. Today, it brings power, connectivity, and opportunity—ensuring that rural communities continue to thrive for generations to come.



**FIND YOUR
LOCATION
NUMBER**

Four location numbers are hidden within this Pioneer and four more in articles published on our website. If you find your number and claim it by calling Meeker Cooperative before March 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.



THE NEED FOR NET METERING REFORM: A FAIR AND BALANCED APPROACH

While net metering was originally designed to encourage renewable energy adoption, the energy landscape has changed. Advances in technology and significant decreases in solar installation costs mean that our current net metering policies are outdated and create unintended financial burdens on members who do not generate their own electricity. As a member-owned cooperative, we believe it's time for a fairer approach that benefits everyone.

WHAT IS NET METERING?

Net metering allows homeowners with solar panels or other distributed energy resources (DERs) to generate electricity and sell excess power back to the grid. Under current Minnesota law, cooperatives must purchase this excess power at retail rates, which are significantly higher than the wholesale prices we typically pay for electricity.

WHY REFORM IS NEEDED

Minnesota was one of the first states to adopt net metering, a policy designed in the 1980s when solar technology was new, expensive, and far less efficient than it is today. At that time, the goal was to help homeowners recoup installation costs and promote clean energy adoption. However, solar costs have dropped by nearly 90%, and panel efficiency has improved by more than 300%. The financial barriers that once justified retail-rate compensation for excess power have diminished. Yet, the policy remains unchanged. As a result, Minnesota's current net metering model is outdated and unintentionally shifting costs onto members who do not have solar.

Unlike investor-owned utilities, electric cooperatives operate on a not-for-profit basis—we exist to serve our members, not to generate revenue for shareholders. This makes fairness essential. 04-18-206 The current net metering policy forces cooperatives to buy excess electricity from solar owners at retail rates, which are nearly double the wholesale cost.

The current system creates an unintended consequence: cost-shifting. When cooperatives pay retail rates for excess power the additional costs must be absorbed somewhere—typically by members without solar installations.

This creates a significant equity issue. Studies show that households installing solar tend to be higher-income, meaning that lower-income members—who may not have the means to install solar—are subsidizing the cost of the current net metering policy. This imbalance contradicts the cooperative principle of fair and equal treatment for all members.

Minnesota is unique in allowing oversized solar installations in cooperative territories. Some members are installing systems that generate far more power than they consume, turning their solar arrays into passive income sources at the expense of other members. While Meeker Cooperative supports members using solar to offset their energy use, net metering should not serve as a financial windfall, especially when excess energy could be provided more cost-effectively through utility-scale renewables that benefit all members.

FINDING A FAIR SOLUTION

Reforming net metering doesn't mean abandoning renewable energy goals. Rather, it means creating a more balanced model that ensures fairness for all members. A well-structured reform would:

- Ensure fair distribution of grid maintenance costs among all members while properly valuing distributed energy without unfairly burdening non-participating members.
- Support grid stability as renewable adoption increases and aligns with Minnesota's carbon-free electricity goals.
- Preserve homeowners' ability to install solar and recover their investment while preventing oversized systems from creating inequitable cost shifts.
- Encourage investment in the most cost-effective clean energy solutions, ensuring benefits for all cooperative members.

With the 2025 legislative session underway, Meeker Cooperative is actively working with lawmakers, members, and industry leaders to modernize net metering policies. Our priority is to ensure that all members—whether they generate their own power or not—are treated fairly and that cooperative resources are used in the most effective way.

We encourage our members to stay informed, ask questions, and make their voices heard. Whether you attend a meeting, reach out to your representatives, or simply want to learn more, we're here to provide the information you need.

Dedicated to keeping the lights on and the data flowing,

Luke Johnson

CEO, Meeker Cooperative



MAKING YOUR HOME SMARTER WITH VIBRANT BROADBAND

Smart home technology is changing the way we live, making everyday tasks easier, improving home security, and increasing energy efficiency. Whether you want to control your lights with a voice command, monitor your home remotely, or automate daily routines, smart devices can enhance your lifestyle in powerful ways.

But where do you start? And how can you ensure everything works smoothly? 10-22-227 We asked Nathan, one of Vibrant Broadband's experts, for his top recommendations on integrating smart home technology.

START WITH THE BASICS

"If you're new to smart home technology, start simple," Nathan suggests. "Choose one or two devices that solve a specific need—like a smart thermostat to optimize energy use or smart plugs to control appliances remotely. Once you get comfortable, you can expand your setup."

A smart thermostat can help regulate your home's temperature more efficiently, reducing energy costs by adjusting settings automatically when you're away. Smart plugs allow you to turn everyday devices—like lamps and coffee makers—on and off remotely or on a schedule.

ENHANCE HOME SECURITY

One of the biggest benefits of smart technology is added security. With the right devices, you can monitor and protect your home no matter where you are.

"A video doorbell lets you see and talk to visitors in real time, whether you're home or away," says Nathan. "It's a great way to keep an eye on deliveries, unexpected visitors, or activity around your front door."

Smart locks allow for keyless entry, letting you lock and unlock your doors remotely. You can also grant access to family members or service providers without the need for spare keys.

For even more security, motion sensors and smart cameras provide instant alerts when unusual activity is detected. "Many systems let you customize notifications, so you only get alerts when something truly needs your attention," Nathan explains.

AUTOMATE DAILY TASKS FOR CONVENIENCE

One of the best features of a smart home is the ability to automate everyday tasks, making life more convenient.

"Smart lighting is a great example," Nathan says. "You can program lights to turn on and off at certain times, dim automatically in the evening, or even adjust based on whether someone is in the room."

Voice assistants help tie everything together, allowing you to control multiple devices with simple commands. "Imagine saying 'Goodnight' and having your lights turn off, your doors lock, and your thermostat adjust—all at once," Nathan says.

RELIABLE WI-FI IS THE KEY TO A SMART HOME

With more devices connected than ever, a strong and reliable internet connection is essential.

"Your smart home depends on Wi-Fi," Nathan emphasizes. "A slow or unreliable connection can cause delays, glitches, or devices disconnecting unexpectedly. That's why having fast and stable internet is so important."

MAXIMIZE YOUR SMART HOME WITH VIBRANT BROADBAND

Smart home technology can improve security, energy efficiency, and convenience—but only if your internet can keep up. With Vibrant Broadband, you get the fast, reliable connection needed to keep everything running smoothly.

Ready to enhance your home? Contact Vibrant Broadband today and get the dependable internet service your smart devices need to perform at their best!

2025 QUALIFICATIONS AND ELECTION COMMITTEE COMPLETES WORK - SETS 2025 DIRECTOR ELECTION BALLOT

The 2025 Qualifications & Election Committee (Q&E) met on Wednesday, February 26. Their task was to review the four Applications for Director submitted by Members from Districts 3, 5 and 8, the districts whose seats are up for election in 2025 and place candidates on the ballot. Meeker's Bylaws designates the rotation of districts for election and specifies that the Q&E Committee be made up of one Member from each of the Co-op's districts where the seat is not currently up for election.

Following review of the applications, the Committee placed a slate of candidates for the 2025 elections. Incumbents Bradley Donnay (District 3) and Jerome Wosmek (District 8, appointed in October 2024 to fill the open seat) were unopposed in their respective districts. The Committee acted as directed by the Bylaws and waived the ballot process for these districts and declared each elected.

Two members, Incumbent David Leonhardi and candidate Benjamin Beckman, filed for nomination in District 5. The Committee placed both candidates on the ballot. A mail ballot will be sent to the Members in District 5 in late April. A properly executed ballot must be received on or before the last business day of the Cooperative prior to the date of the annual meeting in order to be counted. Voting is by mail ballot only.

Profiles of the Candidates will be provided in the April Pioneer.



2025 Qualifications & Election Committee: Back row: John Nelsen (District 6), Andrew Schoolmeesters (District 9), David Ruprecht (District 1), K. Bruce Krueger (District 7)
Front: David Lindberg (District 4), Roger Osborne (District 2)



SAVE THE DATE: MEMBER APPRECIATION EVENT & ANNUAL MEETING

Join us for a special celebration as we honor 90 years of Meeker Cooperative's service to our members and our community!

Wednesday, May 21, 2025
Annual Meeting: 12:00 PM
Member Appreciation: 12:30 PM - 6:00 PM

The Annual Meeting will be followed by our Member Appreciation event with activities, refreshments, and more to celebrate this milestone anniversary.

WILLIE WIREDHAND'S ELECTRICITY FUN FACT



At extremely low temperatures, certain materials become superconductors, meaning they conduct electricity without any resistance. This fascinating phenomenon allows electric currents to flow indefinitely without energy loss.

Superconductors have exciting applications in MRI machines, maglev trains, and quantum computing, revolutionizing technology with their ability to create powerful magnetic fields and efficient energy transfer.

MEMBER NEWS

SAVE THE DATE – MEEKER COOPERATIVE MEMBER TOURS

Meeker Cooperative is excited to offer opportunities for members to travel, learn, and enjoy unique experiences together. Mark your calendars for these upcoming trips:

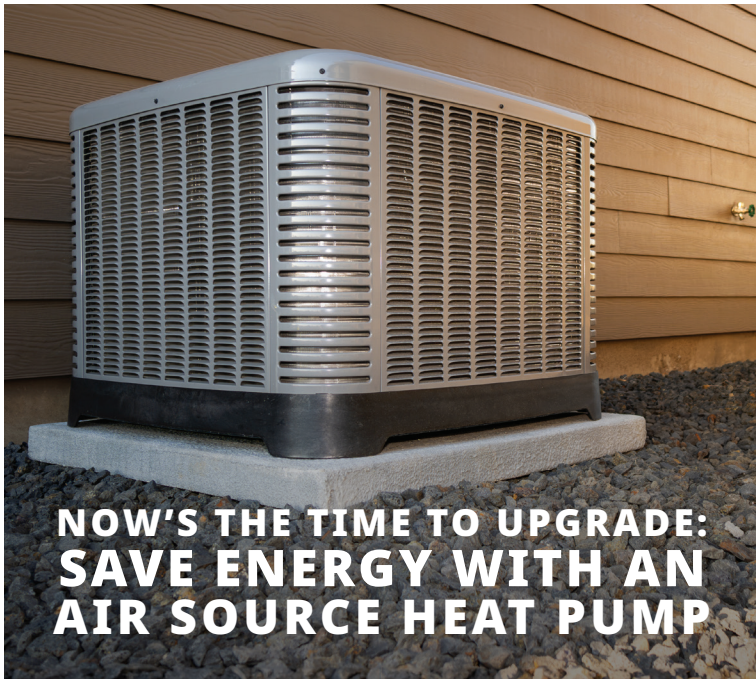
ENERGY
BUS TOUR
–
JUNE
11-13



TWINS
GAME TRIP
–
JUNE
26



These trips provide a great way to connect with fellow members, explore energy-related sites, and enjoy some of Minnesota's favorite events. More details, including registration information, will be available soon. We look forward to having you join us!



NOW'S THE TIME TO UPGRADE: SAVE ENERGY WITH AN AIR SOURCE HEAT PUMP

With warmer weather on the way, now is the perfect time to upgrade your home's cooling system. Whether you're replacing an aging air conditioner or looking for a more efficient way to manage both heating and cooling, an Air Source Heat Pump (ASHP) is a smart investment that can lower energy costs and improve comfort year-round.

What is an Air Source Heat Pump?

An ASHP is a high-efficiency electric system that cools your home in the summer and provides supplemental heat in the winter. 04-35-436 It's a great alternative to a traditional air conditioner, offering better energy efficiency and lower operating costs.

How It Works

Rather than creating heat, an ASHP moves heat from one place to another.

- In cooling mode, it removes heat from inside your home and releases it outdoors.
- In heating mode, it draws warmth from the outdoor air—even in cold temperatures—and brings it inside.

Why Upgrade Now?

- **Better Efficiency, Lower Energy Bills:** ASHPs are up to 300% efficient, meaning they use significantly less electricity than standard air conditioners and furnaces.
- **All-in-One Heating and Cooling:** A single system to keep your home cool in the summer and provide supplemental heat when temperatures drop.
- **Easy Installation:** ASHPs come in both ducted and ductless options, making them a fit for nearly any home.
- **Big Savings with Rebates and Lower Rates:** Meeker Cooperative offers up to \$1,200 in rebates for members who install a qualifying ASHP. Plus, by enrolling in the Cycled AC and Dual Fuel programs, you can cut electricity costs nearly in half, reducing your reliance on propane or natural gas.

Act Now Before Summer Heat Arrives

By installing an ASHP now, you'll be ready to enjoy efficient, affordable cooling all summer long while setting yourself up for savings in the winter. Visit Meeker Cooperative to learn more about rebates, installation, and energy-saving programs.

FEATURED RECIPE

PASTEL MINT DESSERT | SUBMITTED BY: DORATHY HOLM



INGREDIENTS

- 32 Oreos or other chocolate sandwich cookies (double stuffed work great)
- 1 pint whipping cream
- 1 c. pastel pillow after dinner mints (can find them at Runnings) or butter mints- slightly crushed
- 2 c. mini marshmallows

DIRECTIONS

Crush the cookies and spread two-thirds of them evenly into the bottom of a 9x9-inch pan to form the crust. In a mixing bowl, whip the cream until soft peaks form, then gently fold in the marshmallows and crushed mints until well combined. Spread the whipped mixture evenly over the crust, then sprinkle the remaining crushed cookies on top. Cover and refrigerate for 1-2 days before serving to allow the flavors to meld.

Note: Crushed graham crackers or vanilla wafers can be substituted for the crust if desired.

Submit your favorite recipe for our next issue! The chosen winner will receive a \$10 credit to their account. DEADLINE: March 31, 2025.
Email to: szeppelin@meeker.coop | Mail to: Meeker Coop, ATTN: Shane 1725 US Hwy 12 E, Ste 100, Litchfield, MN 55355

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South Maine Prairie in Stearns;
Forest Prairie in Meeker

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Jerome Wosmek — District 8

Darwin, Ellsworth in Meeker

Jesse Turck — District 9

North Kingston, Kingston,
Forest City in Meeker

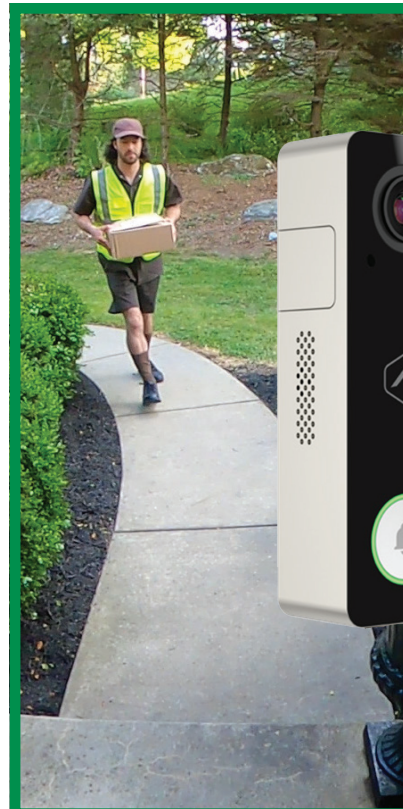
Chad Felstul, Attorney

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.

MEEKER COOPERATIVE WELCOMES PEANUT BUTTER & MILK FESTIVAL GUESTS

For over 50 years, the Peanut Butter & Milk Festival has brought together Litchfield, MN, and its sister city, Hartford, AL, in a unique agricultural and cultural exchange. Each February, Meeker County hosts visitors from Hartford to showcase Minnesota's dairy industry and winter activities. As part of this year's visit, Meeker Cooperative welcomed FFA students and their advisor and two chaperones for an informative tour, highlighting the Co-op's role in powering rural communities. The group also enjoyed an afternoon of skiing and tubing at Powder Ridge. Other festival activities included Dairy Day, local business visits, a high school tour, and a trip to the State Capitol and Mall of America. The week wrapped up with a potluck banquet and silent auction, celebrating the enduring partnership between the two communities.



VERIFY YOUR VISITORS

Get alerted when someone arrives, view them with high-resolution video, and talk to them with two-way audio, all from our video doorbell


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