

PIONEER



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

FROM ONE-ROOM SCHOOL TO COMMUNITY LANDMARK

Meeker Energy's Operation Round Up® program demonstrates how small contributions can lead to meaningful, lasting impact. By voluntarily rounding up their monthly electric bills to the nearest dollar, participating members help create a pool of funds that is reinvested directly into local communities. Employees may also choose to round down their paychecks. Those extra cents are combined and distributed as grants to nonprofit organizations that preserve local history, strengthen education, and enhance quality of life throughout Meeker County.

One recent recipient of an Operation RoundUp grant is the Little Red

Schoolhouse, a beloved historical landmark that continues to serve as a bridge between generations.

Located near Litchfield, the Little Red Schoolhouse is dedicated to preserving and sharing the story of rural education. Its mission is to protect the legacy of one-room schoolhouses and ensure future generations understand how students once learned, lived, and connected within their communities.

"This schoolhouse is more than a building," said Lorie Danielson, board member of the Little Red Schoolhouse. "It represents how education used to look in rural

Continued on page 2.



LITTLE RED SCHOOLHOUSE CONTINUED...

communities and reminds us how far education has come. If we don't preserve places like this, that history is simply lost."

The schoolhouse plays an active role in the community today, serving as a living classroom for students and a gathering place for residents. Each spring and fall, the Little Red Schoolhouse hosts field trips for area schools and community education groups. Students experience a hands-on "day in the life" of a country school, complete with period lessons, artifacts, and traditions that help them better understand early education in Minnesota.

"There's something powerful about students sitting at old desks, handling real artifacts, and imagining what school was like more than a century ago," Danielson shared. "It helps make history tangible in a way textbooks alone can't."

In addition to field trips, the schoolhouse hosts community events throughout the year, including picnics, craft fairs, and seasonal gatherings. These events allow families and visitors to connect with local history while supporting the ongoing preservation of the site.

As a nonprofit organization, the Little Red Schoolhouse relies entirely on donations, grants, and volunteer support. Funding is essential not only for programming, but also for maintaining the historic structure itself. Without that support, preservation and upkeep would not be possible.

The Operation Round Up grant from Meeker Energy is helping fund a significant preservation project at the schoolhouse. The grant will be used to replace six front porch pillars and complete restoration work on the bell tower, ensuring the structure remains safe while staying true to its original appearance. Work on the project is scheduled to begin in the spring of 2026.

"This grant allows us to take on projects that would otherwise take years to fund," said Danielson. "The work being done

will maintain the original character of the schoolhouse while ensuring it can continue welcoming students and visitors for many years to come."

Preservation efforts like these are especially important given the region's history. By the 1960s, all rural one-room schools in Meeker County had either closed or been consolidated. The Little Red Schoolhouse stands as one of the few remaining physical reminders of that era, offering the community a rare opportunity to step back in time.

The impact of the schoolhouse is often best seen through the reactions of students during field trips. Many leave saying they wish they could attend school there every day. One memorable moment came when a young student, after seeing artifacts from the early 1900s, asked a volunteer, "Are you Laura Ingalls?"

"That kind of reaction tells us we're doing something right," Danielson said. "When kids are that engaged, history becomes real for them."

For Meeker Energy members who participate in Operation Round Up, Danielson hopes they understand just how meaningful their small monthly contributions can be.

"Those few cents really do add up," she said. "Because the grants stay local, members can actually see the impact of their generosity. In our case, it helps preserve a piece of Meeker County history that belongs to everyone."

Since its inception, Meeker Energy's Operation Round Up program has distributed thousands of dollars to nonprofits and community organizations 04-19-348 across the service area. Each grant represents the collective power of members working together to strengthen their communities, preserve local heritage, and support opportunities for future generations.



KEEPING POWER RELIABLE:

A Message About Your 2026 Electric Rates

As a member owned cooperative, Meeker Energy exists for one reason: to provide you with reliable, affordable electricity today while responsibly planning for the future. Part of that responsibility is communicating early and clearly when changes are coming, especially when they affect your monthly bill.

After careful review and discussion, the Meeker Energy Board of Directors has approved an adjustment to the fixed charge for Residential and Seasonal rate classes. Beginning March 1, 2026, the fixed charge will increase from \$46.50 to \$56 per month.

I know that any increase is difficult news. No one welcomes higher costs, and your board and staff do not take this decision lightly. This column is meant to explain what the fixed charge is, why this adjustment is necessary, and how it helps ensure the long term reliability of the electric system we all depend on.

What is a Fixed Charge?

Your electric bill is made up of two main parts: the energy charge and the fixed charge.

The energy charge reflects how much electricity you use during the month. When you conserve energy, this portion of your bill can go down.

The fixed charge, on the other hand, is not tied to how much electricity you use. It covers a portion of the cost of having electric service available to you 24 hours a day, every day of the year, whether you use one kilowatt hour or one thousand.

The fixed charge helps pay for the infrastructure and services required to deliver electricity safely and reliably, including poles, wires, transformers, substations, meters, system maintenance, billing, customer service, and emergency response. These costs exist regardless of usage, and they are necessary to keep the system ready whenever you flip a switch.

Why is the Fixed Charge Increasing?

Across the electric utility industry, the cost of providing reliable power continues to rise. This is not unique to Meeker Energy. From wholesale power generation

and transmission to local delivery, cost pressures are coming from every direction. As these trends continue, upward pressure on rates is expected in the years ahead.

Our wholesale power providers are facing higher expenses driven by several factors. Aging infrastructure must be replaced to prevent failures and maintain safety. New generation and transmission projects are required to meet steady load growth from electric vehicles, modern agriculture, data centers, and expanding technology use. Materials like transformers, wire, breakers, and control equipment have increased dramatically in price over the past few years, in some cases by double digits or more.

At the same time, reliability standards have tightened. Utilities are now required to maintain higher reserve margins to ensure power is available during extreme weather and peak demand events. Maintaining that reliability comes with real costs.

The fixed charge adjustment helps ensure that the essential, always present costs of operating the electric system are recovered in a stable and equitable way. It also reduces the need to rely as heavily on energy charges alone, which can fluctuate significantly based on weather and usage patterns.

Our Commitment to Members

As your cooperative, we remain committed to managing costs responsibly. We continue to work closely with our wholesale partners to phase in increases when possible, advocate for thoughtful planning, and avoid sudden bill impacts. We also look internally for efficiencies and savings to keep rates as affordable as we can.

We will continue to communicate openly as we move forward. Additional information will be shared through the newsletter, bill inserts, and our website, and our team is always available to answer questions

Dedicated to keeping the lights on and the data flowing,

Luke Johnson

CEO, Meeker Energy

MEEKER COOPERATIVE ELECTRIC TRUST DISTRIBUTES \$52,125

Thanks to the incredible generosity of Meeker Energy’s members and VIBRANT subscribers, the Meeker Cooperative Electric Trust Board has proudly awarded \$52,125 in grants to support local community organizations and scholarships that strengthen our region.

This funding comes through Operation Round Up®, a powerful initiative embraced by electric cooperatives nationwide. Participants in the program round their monthly bills up to the nearest dollar, contributing anywhere from just 1¢ to 99¢ each month. These small contributions add up to make a big difference, fueling a trust fund that supports local civic organizations, educational opportunities, and meaningful causes close to home.

Since its launch in 1998, Meeker Cooperative’s Operation Round Up® program has distributed over \$1,100,000 to fund essential projects, from youth and community programs to educational initiatives and beyond. This generosity reflects the strong spirit of community, cooperation, and shared responsibility that defines our Cooperative.

The Meeker Cooperative Electric Trust Board meets three times a year to review applications and distribute grants to deserving organizations. Application deadlines for 2026 are February 5, July 2, and November 5. To learn more or access the application and guidelines, visit our website at www.meeker.coop.

Together, we’re empowering our community, one rounded-up dollar at a time.



DECEMBER 2025 RECIPIENT LIST

COMMUNITY SERVICE

Ambulance Service, Cokato Volunteer	\$1,000
Fire Department, Cokato	\$1,875
Historical Society, Paynesville	\$1,000
Little Red Schoolhouse, Dst. 59	\$1,000
United Community Action Partnership	\$3,500

EDUCATION AND YOUTH

FFA, Paynesville	\$1,000
Meeker County Health and Human Services	\$1,000
Robotics Team, Dassel-Cokato High School	\$750
Wishes & More	\$1,000

TOTAL \$12,125

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.

ONE TIME AWARD TO AREA FIRE DEPARTMENTS (\$2,000 EACH)

(Atwater, Cokato, Cosmos, Dassel, Eden Valley, Grove City, Hutchinson, Kimball, Lake Lillian, Litchfield, Paynesville and Watkins)



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



Four location numbers are hidden within this Pioneer. If you find your number and claim it by calling Meeker Energy 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.



DIRECTOR ELECTIONS APPLICATIONS AVAILABLE FOR DIRECTOR CANDIDATES IN DISTRICTS 1, 2 AND 6

Meeker Energy is member-owned and governed by directors elected by you, the member-owners, from each of the nine service territory districts. Director seats in Districts 1, 2 and 6 are up for election following the normal rotation of districts for election. The election will be held in conjunction with 2026 Annual meeting which will be held at Meeker’s headquarters at 4 pm on May 20, 2026.

These districts are made up of the following townships:

DISTRICT 1: Roseville, Irving in Kandiyohi, Paynesville in Stearns, Union Grove in Meeker

DISTRICT 2: Eden Lake in Stearns, Harvey, Manannah in Meeker

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

Members from these districts, interested in being placed on the ballot and meeting the qualifications identified in the bylaws, must submit a completed Meeker Energy Application for Director packet by the close of business on January 20, 2026.

The process for director elections is outlined in the bylaws of the Cooperative.

All potential candidates must:

- declare their intention to be placed on the ballot by submitting a completed Application Form, and
- be declared qualified for placement on the ballot by the Qualifications and Election Committee (Q&E Committee).

No write-in candidates are accepted.

The bylaws outline the make up and responsibilities of the Q&E Committee. Members are appointed by the Board of Directors from each of the Director Districts not up for election. The Committee:

- reviews all of the applications submitted to determine that all candidates meet the stated qualifications.
- notifies any potential candidate that does not meet the qualifications and requests they comply.
- places qualified candidates on the ballot for election. If there are no candidates in a district, the position shall be considered vacant following the annual meeting and the Board of Directors may appoint a Member 06-25-103 from that district to fill the position until the next election of directors.
- has the authority to waive the ballot process and declare the candidate elected for any district in which there is only one candidate.
- prepares and posts the list of qualified candidates at least 75 days prior to the annual meeting.

The decisions of the Q&E Committee will be final.

For complete director election information, qualifications and requirements, please visit www.meeker.coop. Under the Member Services tab at the top of the home page, select “download forms” to find the packet or contact Mary Alice Holm at 320-693-3231 to request one be mailed to you.



WILLIE WIREDHAND'S
ELECTRICITY FUN FACT

Winter makes static electricity stronger. Static electricity happens more often during winter months because cold air holds less moisture. Dry air allows electric charges to build up on clothing and surfaces, which is why small shocks are more common when touching metal objects in winter.

MEMBER NEWS

SAVE THE DATE: MEEKER ENERGY ANNUAL MEETING AND MEMBER APPRECIATION DAY

Join us Wednesday, May 20 at Meeker Energy for our Member and Subscriber Appreciation Day from 4:30 to 7:30 pm. The Annual Meeting business session begins at 4:00 pm (members only). Mark your calendar and plan to attend.

SAVE THE DATE: MEMBER TRIP TO THE TWINS GAME

Make plans to join us for Meeker Energy’s annual member trip to the Minnesota Twins game. This popular summer tradition brings members together for a fun afternoon at the ballpark.

Wednesday, June 3, 2026
12:40 p.m. vs. Chicago White Sox

Watch for more details, including registration information, in a future issue of *The Pioneer*.



2026 ENERGY MANAGEMENT REBATES

Meeker Energy 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. 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 PUMPS

Ducted/Hybrid - Electric Resistance or FossilFuel

≤ 5-Tons, ≥14.3 SEER2 & ≥ 7.5 HSPF2	\$750
≤ 5-Tons, 2026 CEE Tier 1 Listed	\$1,000

Ductless - Electric Resistance or Fossil Fuel

≤ 1 Ton ≥ 14.3 SEER2 & ≥ 7.5 HSPF2	\$150
≤ 1 Ton, 2026 CEE Tier 1 Listed	\$250
> 1 Ton ≥ 14.3 SEER2 & ≥ 7.5 HSPF2	\$750
> 1 Ton, 2026 CEE Tier 1 Listed	\$1,000

- 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

Ducted or Ductless ASHP Quality Installation

Additional Amount Per Ton \$40 per ton

AC TUNE-UP \$25 PER UNIT

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

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

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

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.

To view complete details and requirements visit www.meeker.coop/programs.



NOTICE: CO-GENERATION AND SMALL POWER PRODUCTION

In compliance with Cooperative Rules implementing Minnesota Statute section 216B.164 Co-generation and Small Power Production Notice, Meeker Energy is required to interconnect with, and purchase electricity from, co-generation and small power production facilities that satisfy the conditions of a Qualifying Facility.

Meeker Energy has available and will provide information to all interested members regarding rates and interconnection requirements. An application for interconnection is required for a Qualifying Facility to interconnect and operate in parallel with the Cooperative's distribution system and is subject to approval by the Cooperative. For more information regarding interconnection of distributed energy systems, please contact us either by visiting our website at <https://www.novapowerportal.com/Home/Index/5>, email to DERcoordinator@meeker.coop or by calling Meeker Energy during business hours, 8:00 AM – 4:30 PM at 320-693-3231.



Each December, Meeker Energy welcomes its members to enjoy a warm cup of coffee and a seasonal treat during the annual Coffee on the Co-op gatherings. Held between the holidays, the event offers a friendly, low-key opportunity for members to connect, ask questions, and visit with Cooperative staff.

Since expanding services to include Vibrant Broadband, the Cooperative has also extended invitations to Vibrant subscribers. This year's events were hosted in Paynesville, Watkins, and Litchfield, drawing members and subscribers from across the service area.

Guests enjoyed fresh coffee, hot apple cider, and sweet treats while catching up with neighbors, friends, and Meeker Energy employees. 01-06-229 Some attendees stopped by with questions about their electric service, while others were eager to learn more about Vibrant Broadband and its offerings.

Although attendance dipped slightly due to early-season snow, ice, and sub-freezing temperatures, those who braved the winter weather were treated to warm hospitality and good company, continuing a tradition the Co-op proudly upholds each year.



Lighting is something most of us don't think much about—until it's wrong. Maybe the living room feels too dim for reading, or the kitchen lights cast an odd yellow glow. We often grab whatever bulb or fixture looks good without considering how it will actually perform in the space. But with a little planning, you can make your home brighter, cozier and more energy efficient.

WATTS VS. LUMENS

When you're shopping for lightbulbs, it's easy to focus on watts, but watts only measure how much energy a bulb uses. When it comes to brightness, what really matters is the lumen count. Lumens measure the actual light output. For example, an 800-lumen bulb gives off about the same amount of light as an old-fashioned 60-watt incandescent bulb.

DIMMERS AND SWITCHES

Installing dimmers instead of standard on/off switches can be a game changer. Dimmers give you more control over brightness, help save energy and create a more comfortable atmosphere. Not all bulbs are dimmable, so double check labels before buying.

SMART LIGHTING: ENERGY EFFICIENCY MEETS CONVENIENCE

Smart lighting adds another layer of control for illuminating your home. But the real magic is convenience. With smart bulbs, you can adjust brightness, set schedules or even change colors—all from your phone or a voice assistant like Alexa or Google Assistant. Want the lights to turn on before you get home? Smart bulbs make it easy. Remember, smart bulbs still rely on power from your wall switch, which needs to stay in the "on" position for remote controls to work.

CONTACT US

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BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Brad Donnay, President — District 3

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

Paul Bugbee, Vice-President — District 1

Roseville, Irving in Kandiyohi;
Paynesville in Stearns;
Union Grove in Meeker

Randy Bryant, Treasurer — District 7

Collinwood, Cedar Mills in Meeker;
Stockholm in Wright;
Acoma, Hutchinson in McLeod

Karen Becker, Secretary — District 2

Eden Lake in Stearns;
Harvey, Manannah in Meeker

Barbara Ann Nelson — District 4

Litchfield, Greenleaf in Meeker

Ben Beckman — District 5

Fairhaven in Stearns; Kokato, 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

Jerome Wosmek — District 8

Darwin, Ellsworth in Meeker

Jesse Turck — District 9

North Kingston, Kingston,
Forest City in Meeker

Chad Felstul, Attorney

COLORING CONTEST WINNERS!

Congratulations to our winners of the 2025 Co-op Coloring Contest. Voting took place by our Members and Vibrant Subscribers at our Coffee on the Co-op events in December. Each winner, one from each age group 2-11, received a \$10 Walmart gift card in the mail. Thank you to all the wonderful young artists that participated.



AGE 2
Liza B, Watkins



AGE 4
Ellie H, Watkins



AGE 5
Walker S, Eden Valley



AGE 6
Bronson S, Eden Valley



AGE 7
Everett H, Watkins



AGE 8
Adelynn S, Dassel



AGE 9
Harper H, Watkins



AGE 10
William S, Dassel



AGE 11
Dustin S, Watkins



AGE 12
Freyra O, Litchfield



You can see a larger version of each winner's masterpiece on our website by visiting meeker.coop/2025-color-contest



Go, with Confidence

Our Medical Alert System has everything you need to help maintain your independence. It's easy to use, comfortable to wear all day, and uses WiFi technology to help locate you in an emergency.



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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.