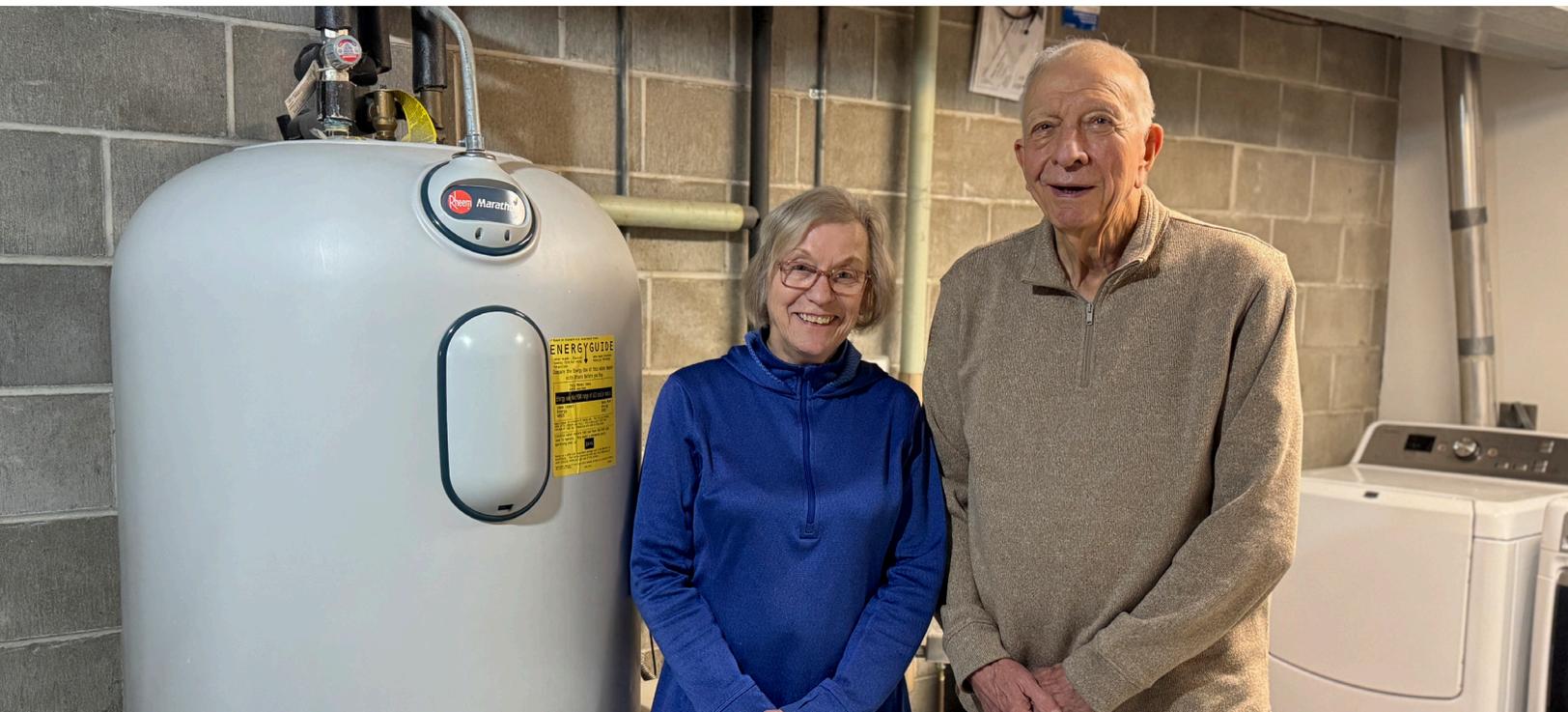


PIONEER



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Meeker Energy is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

FROM 1980 TO TODAY: A MEMBER STORY OF SMART ENERGY CHOICES

When Ed and Mary Otto built their home north of Dassel in 1980, they were planning for more than just a place to raise their three children. They were building for the future. “At the time, Meeker didn’t have any energy management programs yet,” Ed recalls. “But our electrician said, ‘We’re going to wire your house for it anyway.’”

That foresight paid off. Within a few years, when Meeker Energy introduced its off-peak water heating program, the Ottos were ready and among the first members to sign up. Back then, electric thermal storage looked a little different. To meet storage needs, the Ottos installed two traditional water heaters to provide 100 gallons of capacity. When one eventually failed in the early 2000s, they replaced both with a 105-gallon Marathon

electric water heater, and they’ve been using it ever since. “We raised our three kids here,” Mary says. “There were five of us, and sometimes 15 or 20 people in the house. We never ran out of hot water.”

Today, their water heater continues to operate on Meeker Energy’s peak-shave water heater program, that allows the Co-op to turn off the water heater during peak demand times. In exchange for allowing the Cooperative to control when certain appliances operate, members receive discounted electric rates. The Ottos didn’t stop at water heating. Over the years, they added electric thermal storage heat with brick units that charge overnight, electric

Continued on page 2.

MEMBER STORY CONTINUED...



Load management equipment at the Otto home north of Dassel. The Ottos have participated in Energy Management programs since they were first introduced in the early 1980s.

radiant ceiling heat, and more recently, an air-source heat pump with LP backup. Most of their interruptible equipment runs through a separate 200-amp service dedicated to load management. “I think we use everything they have to offer,” Ed laughs.

Meeker Energy’s Energy Management programs are designed to reduce strain on the regional grid during periods of peak demand. When wholesale power costs spike, often during extreme cold, the Cooperative can temporarily interrupt participating loads like electric water heaters, thermal storage heat, or dual fuel systems. For members, the tradeoff is clear: lower rates year-round in exchange for occasional, short-term interruptions.

The Ottos have experienced both the benefits and the realities of that partnership. In the early years, interruptions were maybe three or four times a month,” Ed says. “Now, with higher loads, we see more of them, and sometimes for longer stretches.” But the Ottos see that as simply part of the partnership. Their system is built to handle it. When their electric heat was off one January from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m., their LP backup automatically took over without any effort on their part. “We’re glad we have the backup,” Mary says. “But even in winter, we only use about 60 to 80 gallons of LP. Electricity still carries almost everything.” The savings speak for themselves: even during one of the coldest recent months, their total electric bill was under \$400, covering heating, hot water, and all household usage, while summer bills often drop below \$100. “Electricity has been stable long term,” Ed notes. “Living in the country, we don’t have natural gas. This has worked very well for us.”

For the Ottos, participation in Energy Management isn’t just about savings. It’s about trust. One frigid night, when temperatures dipped 20 to 25 degrees below zero, they woke up to a cold house. A control panel issue had prevented their system from coming back online after an interruption. “We called the emergency number at two in the morning,” Ed says. “They walked me through it over the phone.” By early the next morning, their electrician had picked up the needed part from Meeker Energy and restored heat before 7:30 a.m. “You can’t call most places any time of day or night and get that kind of help,” Mary says. “That’s outstanding service.”

The Ottos’ involvement goes beyond their own home. They are participating in Meeker Energy’s Co-op 101 program, an educational course designed to help members better understand how their Cooperative operates, from power supply and rates to governance and community programs. “We would highly recommend it,” Mary says. “You meet employees, you learn how everything works, and you understand why rates have to go up sometimes.” Ed currently serves on the Electric Trust board, helping distribute member-donated funds to local organizations, and the couple has also participated in generation plant tours that gave them firsthand insight into how the energy landscape is changing. “It’s eye-opening,” he says. “You don’t realize all the good happening in your own community.”

When asked what they would tell someone considering enrollment in an Energy Management program, Ed doesn’t hesitate. “I would highly recommend it,” he says. “The storage water heating is great. The Marathon tank, you’re probably buying your last water heater. And we love the heat pump. 07-28-108 It’s efficient, it’s comfortable, and it’s been a smart decision.” After more than four decades as members, the Ottos describe Meeker Energy in simple terms: “Friendly. Knowledgeable. Outstanding.” Their story is a reminder that when members and their Cooperative plan for the future together, the benefits can last a lifetime.



**GO ELECTRIC.
SAVE ENERGY.
WIN \$250.**

Join one of Meeker Energy’s Energy Management Programs for a chance to win a \$250 VISA® Gift Card.

When you sign up for an eligible electric load, you’ll be entered into a quarterly drawing, four chances in 2026 to win, while enjoying lower electric rates on qualifying equipment.

WATT’S IN IT FOR YOU?

- Lower electric rates on electric water heaters, electric heat, electric vehicle charger, or heat pumps
- A chance to win \$250 just for participating plus you save money every month!

HOW TO QUALIFY:

- Enroll in an Energy Management Program (new or additional)
- Replacement (10 years or older) of existing heating/cooling equipment on energy management
- You will be placed in the drawing for the quarter when installation is complete

DRAWING WILL BE AFTER EACH QUARTER IN 2026

To enroll or if you have questions, please call 320-693-3231 and ask to speak to the Energy Services Department.



THE BREAKDOWN BEHIND YOUR BILL

Understanding how Meeker Energy allocates each electric dollar in service to our members.

As a member-owned cooperative, Meeker Energy exists for one purpose: to provide safe, reliable, and affordable electricity to the members we serve. Because you are not just a customer but a member-owner, you deserve to understand how your electric dollar is used.

When you pay your monthly bill, approximately 56.7% of every dollar goes to the cost of power. This is the wholesale cost of the electricity we purchase and deliver to your home, farm, or business. Meeker Energy does not generate its own electricity but purchases power from our wholesale providers and distributes it across our local system. These costs are influenced by wholesale system upgrades, new lines, new generation assets, fuel markets, generation resources, grid conditions, and overall demand, and they represent the largest portion of your bill.

Another 9.1% supports maintenance and operations. These dollars keep our distribution system strong and reliable by funding line work, pole inspections, tree trimming, equipment upgrades, substation improvements, and storm response. In Minnesota's climate, ongoing maintenance is essential to ensure power is there when you need it.

Approximately 10.9% covers customer, administrative, and general expenses, including billing services, member support, technology systems, office operations, and the employees who serve you each day. Whether you call with a question, report an outage, or participate in an energy management program, these resources allow us to provide the response you need.

Another 9.3% is allocated to depreciation. Electric infrastructure is built to last, but it does not last forever. Poles, wires, transformers, and substations must eventually be replaced. Depreciation allows us to plan for those future investments and manage costs gradually rather than through sudden rate increases.

Interest accounts for 10.1% of your electric dollar. Like most utilities, Meeker Energy finances major infrastructure projects over time. Borrowing responsibly allows us to upgrade the system while keeping rates as stable as possible.

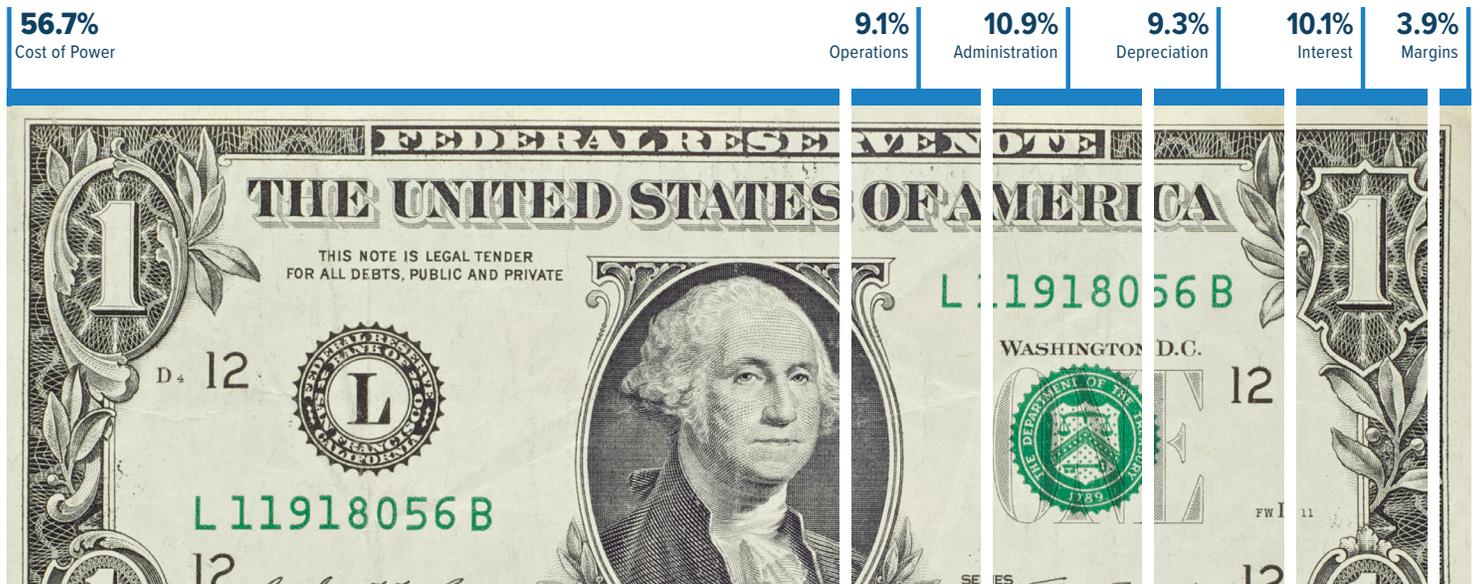
Finally, 3.9% remains as operating margin. As a not-for-profit cooperative, margins are not profits paid to shareholders. Instead, they are reinvested into the system or returned to members as Capital Credits. When Meeker Energy performs well financially, members benefit directly.

Each portion reflects reliability, stewardship, and long-term planning. We continuously evaluate costs, pursue efficiencies, and advocate for our members. Our goal is to balance affordability with the investments required to maintain a safe, dependable electric system.

Thank you for being a member of Meeker Energy and for the trust you place in us. We remain committed to using every electric dollar wisely in service to our members.

Dedicated to keeping the lights on and the data flowing,

Luke Johnson
CEO, Meeker Energy





INVESTING IN RELIABILITY: MEEKER ENERGY CONSTRUCTION WORK PLAN

Meeker Energy continues investing in a strong, reliable electric system as we enter year three of our 2024–2027 Construction Work Plan. These upgrades ensure our infrastructure meets today’s needs while preparing for future growth.

In 2026, crews will complete approximately 10.75 miles of conductor upgrades to improve reliability and increase capacity. Modernized lines help reduce outages and support growing demand across our service area.

We also plan to replace 2.5 miles of underground residential distribution cable to address faulted sections. Additional projects may be added as needed. Proactive replacement helps prevent recurring outages and improve long-term performance.

At our substations, seven hydraulic reclosers will be replaced with electronic reclosers. These devices respond more quickly to faults, helping isolate issues, restore power faster, and enhance safety.

Through careful planning and steady investment, Meeker Energy remains focused on delivering safe, dependable service to our members today and into the future.

JOIN US FOR THE 2026 ENERGY TOUR



Ever wonder what it takes to power your home at the flip of a switch? Join Meeker Energy for our 2026 Energy Tour, June 10–12, 2026, and see the journey of electricity firsthand.

This three-day motor-coach trip takes members to Beulah, North Dakota, for tours of Freedom Mine and Antelope Valley Station, owned by Basin Electric Power Cooperative, one of our wholesale power supplier. You’ll get a behind-the-scenes look at how lignite coal is mined and converted into reliable electricity for communities like ours.

The cost is \$200 per person, offering an affordable and informative way to better understand how your cooperative works with our power partners to deliver dependable service.

Along the way, we will also explore North Dakota’s history with guided visits to:

- Lewis and Clark Interpretive Center
- Fort Mandan
- North Dakota Heritage Center and State Museum

The tour includes:

- Motor-coach transportation
- Two nights lodging at the Comfort Inn & Suites Mandan - Bismarck
- A banquet-style dinner and presentation from a Basin Electric representative
- All meals except lunch on the return trip home Friday
- All guided tours and admissions

Space is limited, and the registration deadline is May 20, 2026, unless the tour fills sooner. We encourage members to reserve their seat early and join us for this engaging look at the power behind your power.



READY TO JOIN US?

Reserve your seat today. Scan the QR code to register or visit: www.meeke.coop/tour26.



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

2026 QUALIFICATIONS AND ELECTION COMMITTEE COMPLETES WORK: SLATE OF CANDIDATES SET & DECLARED ELECTED

The 2026 Qualifications & Election Committee (Q&E) met on Thursday, February 12 to review the three Applications for Director submitted by Members from Districts 1, 2 and 6. The director seats in these three districts are up for election in 2026 following the regular rotation of districts. Meeker's Bylaws designate 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 all three applicants as candidates for the 2026 elections: Incumbent Paul Bugbee (District 1), Incumbent Karen Becker (District 2) and Incumbent Neil Pearson (District 6). As all of the candidates were unopposed, the Committee acted as directed by the Bylaws waiving the ballot process for these Districts and declaring the candidates elected.

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



Members of the 2026 Qualifications & Election Committee included:

Left to Right: David Lindberg (District 4), Matt Woetzel (District 5), Alan West (District 8) and John Donnay (District 3)

Unable to attend: Andrew Schoolmeesters (District 9) and K. Bruce Krueger (District 7)

Thank you to these members for their service to Meeker Energy in completing the work of the Committee.



March is one of the windiest months in the Midwest, and that breeze does more than rattle windows. Wind turbines often generate more electricity in early spring than in the heat of summer because cooler, denser air moves blades more efficiently. Stronger, steadier winds can make March a surprisingly powerful month for renewable energy production.

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 p.m. The Annual Meeting business session begins at 4:00 p.m. (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*.

WHY IS THE DEMAND FOR ELECTRICITY RISING?

Demand for electricity in the U.S. is booming. Recent data shows that power consumption nationwide is set to increase by at least 38 gigawatts (enough to power more than 30 million homes) between now and 2028. Meeting this new demand will require a combination of new power plants, grid upgrades and energy storage technology advancements. Here are the key factors that are driving increased demand:

1

Increased Electrification: Electric vehicle adoption, electrification of home heating and industrial electrification are increasing overall U.S. energy consumption.

2

Data Centers: Driven by explosions in AI, cryptocurrency and cloud computing, total U.S. data center load is projected to increase by 65% by 2050.

3

Economic Growth: Residential power consumption is expected to increase by 14% to 22% through 2050 due to increases in population and steady economic growth.

4

Manufacturing Growth/Onshoring: New, expanding and “onshored/reshored” manufacturing capacity driven by federal incentives is expected to increase industrial demand by 13,000 GWh per year.

SMALL SHIFTS MAKE A BIG DIFFERENCE: HOW YOU CAN HELP REDUCE DEMAND

You may be hearing more lately about “energy demand” and what it means for electric cooperatives. While major weather events like Winter Storm Fern can put pressure on the grid, everyday energy use across thousands of homes also shapes how and when electricity is needed most.

The good news is that small, thoughtful changes 25-27-406 at home can make a meaningful difference.

Here are a few easy ways you can help:

- **Rethink the timing.** If it works for your schedule, run dishwashers and laundry machines, or charge devices later in the evening rather than during early morning or early evening peak hours.
- **Turn it down a touch.** Lowering your thermostat just one or two degrees while sleeping or away from home can ease strain during cold snaps without sacrificing comfort.
- **Don't stack the load.** Try not to run multiple large appliances at once. Spreading out heavy energy use helps balance demand across the system.
- **Keep the warmth in.** Close blinds at night, seal drafts, and replace furnace filters regularly to help your heating system operate efficiently.
- **Why does this matter?** Electric systems are built to meet the highest demand at any given moment. When usage spikes, power costs rise. When we work together to smooth those peaks, we help strengthen reliability and manage long-term costs for everyone.

That's the cooperative difference — small actions, shared impact.



LOCKED IN AND LOGGED ON: CYBERSECURITY TIPS FROM VIBRANT BROADBAND & THE MEEKER ENERGY IT TEAM



At Meeker Energy, keeping your lights on is only part of what we do. Through Vibrant Broadband, we also help keep you connected. And today, connection means more than speed and reliability. It also means security.

We see firsthand how quickly cyber threats are evolving. Scams are more sophisticated. Phishing emails look more convincing. Text messages appear to come from trusted companies. The good news is that a few smart habits can dramatically reduce your risk.

Here are practical cybersecurity tips we encourage every member and subscriber to follow.

Strengthen your passwords.

If you are still using the same password across multiple accounts, now is the time to change that. Create unique passwords for important accounts like email, banking, and online utilities. Use a mix of upper and lowercase letters, numbers, and symbols. Even better, consider using a password manager to generate and store complex passwords securely.

Turn on multi-factor authentication.

Multi-factor authentication, or MFA, adds a second layer of protection. Even if someone guesses your password, they cannot access your account without a second code sent to your phone or email. Many platforms offer this feature, including social media, financial institutions, and streaming services. It is one of the simplest and most effective steps you can take.

Think before you click.

Phishing scams remain one of the most common cyber threats. Be cautious of emails or text messages that create urgency, ask for personal information, or include suspicious links. Always double-check the sender's address. If something feels off, do not click. Instead, go directly to the company's official website or contact them using a trusted phone number.

Keep devices updated.

Software updates are not just about new features. They often include critical security patches that protect against known

vulnerabilities. Enable automatic updates on your computers, smartphones, tablets, routers, and smart home devices. The same applies to antivirus software and firewalls.

Secure your home network.

Your Wi-Fi network is the front door to your digital life. Make sure your router has a strong, unique password and uses modern encryption settings such as WPA3. 30-11-311 If you are unsure how to adjust your settings, our Vibrant Broadband team is happy to help. We recommend changing default login credentials and periodically reviewing which devices are connected to your network.

Be cautious with public Wi-Fi.

Public networks can be convenient, but they are not always secure. Avoid accessing sensitive accounts, like online banking, when connected to public Wi-Fi. If you must, consider using a virtual private network, or VPN, to encrypt your connection.

Talk to your family about online safety.

Cybersecurity is a household effort. Teach children about safe browsing habits and remind older family members to be cautious of unsolicited calls or emails. Many scams specifically target seniors by posing as utility companies or tech support representatives.

As your trusted local cooperative, we will never ask for sensitive information like passwords or full Social Security numbers through email or text. If you ever receive a suspicious message claiming to be from Meeker Energy or Vibrant Broadband, contact us directly.

Technology will continue to change, and so will the tactics of cybercriminals. But strong awareness, updated tools, and a few consistent habits go a long way in protecting what matters most.

Your connection is important to us. So is your peace of mind. If you have questions about securing your home network or devices, reach out to the Vibrant Broadband team. We are here to help you stay safely connected.

CONTACT US

Phone: 320-693-3231 | Fax: 320-693-2980
1725 U.S. Hwy. 12 E, Suite 100, Litchfield, MN 55355
www.meeker.coop | www.vibrantbroadband.com

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

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Chad Felstul, Attorney

ENERGIZING TRADITION: MEEKER ENERGY PROUDLY SUPPORTS THE PBM FESTIVAL

The 54th annual Peanut Butter & Milk Festival wrapped up Saturday, February 7th as ten guests from Hartford, Alabama, Litchfield's Sister City, returned home after a full week in Meeker County. What began in 1971 as a simple peanut butter promotion by Litchfield grocer Bruce Cottingham has grown into a half-century tradition that now spans generations and celebrates agriculture, youth, and the unique partnership between two communities.

Throughout the week, the Hartford group experienced Minnesota in ways many locals might take for granted. Festival Chair Terri Anderson noted that exchange visits give both communities a fresh perspective, allowing guests to see things residents may overlook in their own hometowns. The group toured the historic G.A.R. Hall, explored local businesses, and connected with area students and families. Civil War history, Anderson shared, is often better preserved in the North, making the G.A.R. Hall a meaningful stop for Southern visitors.

One highlight of the week was Ski Day at Powder Ridge Recreation Area. For many of the Alabama students, it was their first time skiing or tubing. Bundled in layers against the "freezer cold" Minnesota air, they tumbled, laughed, and embraced every wipeout. The adventure, along with stops at Meis Outdoors and Knaus Sausage Haus, gave the group a true taste of winter in central Minnesota.

The week concluded with the traditional banquet at St. Philip's Church. Tables were filled with 25-22-115 hot dishes, desserts, and peanut butter treats, and the evening featured a lively silent auction.

Meeker Energy was proud to support this year's exchange, helping create experiences that celebrate agriculture, friendship, and the next generation of community leaders.



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.