



Rural HIGHLIGHTS

Local News from Rural Electric Convenience Cooperative

Touchstone Energy Classroom Empowerment Grants awarded to local schools

Two area schools will have additional learning opportunities for their students, thanks to our Touchstone Energy Classroom Empowerment Grants Program! RECC has awarded \$500 mini-grants for projects that will extend beyond their classrooms and broaden the scope of their teaching efforts.

The two grants will go to:

- **Sarah Jennings, Morrisonville Grade School** – to purchase historical fiction novels for 5th and 6th graders as a literacy and history tool, and to help pay for tickets to a theatrical production based on the book at Sangamon Auditorium in Springfield. As a winner of a classroom grant last year, Sarah will also be continuing projects on fossil excavations and a school flowerbed with her students.
- **Erin Nicolas, South Fork Elementary School** – to purchase a projector for her special education classroom to share spreadsheets, websites and videos with all her students.

As a Touchstone Energy electric cooperative, RECC's focus is on our communities, and these projects will enhance the education and experiences of youngsters in our area. We're looking forward to hearing the positive results that will come from these schools!



Sarah Jennings, 5th and 6th grade teacher at Morrisonville Grade School, holds photos of the novel and the theater venue her classes will attend with funding from RECC's Touchstone Energy Classroom Empowerment Grant. A ceremonial check was presented by Dana Smith, Manager of Member and Public Relations.



Dana Smith presented a \$500 Touchstone Energy Classroom Empowerment Grant to Erin Nicolas in her classroom at South Fork Elementary School in Kincaid, to purchase a video projector.

Protect yourself from utility scammers

Electric co-ops and other utilities across the country are reporting many different "scamming" schemes that attempt to bilk their customers. At least one RECC member received a phone call in November that appeared to be a scam attempt, demanding a payment within hours to avoid disconnection of their electric service.

We encourage our members to be very cautious if they receive a phone call about their electric service. Rural Electric provides written notices about past due accounts in our billing statements, and tries to make automated reminder calls if an account is scheduled for a pending disconnection. We do not make last-minute calls demanding immediate payment to avoid disconnection.

Scammers are becoming more sophisticated, and may claim they are calling from the Rural Electric office. Some may even use caller ID spoofing to replicate the co-op's phone number.

You should never give your account number, credit card number or bank account information to a caller who has contacted you. If you're suspicious of a call, hang up and call our office to verify any account issues.

We don't ask for special "cash card"



or third-party payment plans, either over the phone or by representatives at your door.

Tips for spotting a scam

Because RECC does sometimes contact members by phone, it can be difficult to tell a scammer from a member representative. Here are some tips:

- If a caller specifically asks you to **pay by prepaid debit card, this is a red flag.**
- If you feel pressured for immediate payment or personal information, **hang up the phone and call the co-op's phone number on your bill.** This will ensure you are speaking to a real representative.
- If the caller becomes angry and tells you your account is past due and service will be disconnected if a large payment isn't made – usually within less than an hour – that's not how the cooperative does business.

How to protect yourself

- The co-op never asks or requires a customer with a delinquent account to purchase a prepaid debit card to avoid disconnection. Don't offer your account numbers or PIN numbers to any incoming caller.
- Never allow anyone into your home to check electrical wiring, natural gas pipes or appliances unless you have scheduled an appointment or reported a problem. Also, ask employees for proper identification.
- Customers with delinquent accounts receive an advance disconnection notification with the regular monthly billing – never a single notification one hour before disconnection.
- If you suspect someone is trying to scam you, hang up and call the local police then the Rural Electric office at (217) 438-6197. Never dial the phone number the scammers provide.

If you receive a suspicious call, capture as much information about the caller as possible. However, if the person is at your home, please be safe and contact the local authorities for assistance.

Changes approved in renewable energy policies

With the recent growth in Eligible Renewable Electrical Generating Facility projects installed by RECC members, the Board of Directors approved some changes in its policies to assure access to more members in the next several years. At the November 22 Board meeting, the Net Metering Policy 100.50 was revised to increase the total renewable energy capacity that can be connected, from approximately one percent of our annual system peak load

to two percent of our annual peak. Also, the maximum size of eligible renewable systems for each member was reduced from 20 KW to 10 KW.

These changes will apply to all systems installed after November 30, 2016. The Net Metering and Interconnection policies are available on our website at www.recc.coop, under the Our Community – Our Environmental Commitment sections. If you have any questions about these policies, please contact our office.



Weathering a winter power outage safely

Winter storms can cause prolonged power outages by weighing power lines down with ice, knocking trees down and into lines with strong winds, or loading branches with snow to fall across the lines. Snow and ice can also slow our crews down in getting to problem areas.

To safely weather a winter outage, you need to be prepared and know what to do when a storm strikes.

When the lights go out, you should first check your own breakers in the house. Or, RECC's electronic meters can tell you whether you have power coming to the meter. If you see the digital number display on the front of your meter, then it has power from our lines. If there is no digital display, then there is a problem on the co-op side of the meter.

If your power seems to be off from the co-op, call our office at (217) 438-6197 or (800) 245-7322. Don't send us an e-mail, as these messages are not constantly monitored by co-op employees! Our phone system offers you an option to report an outage directly into our information system, and line crews will be dispatched.

A storm preparedness kit should be assembled ahead of time to help keep you safe and comfortable

Once we know about an outage, our crews begin an assessment of the area affected through our outage management system. They can determine what lines, feeders or substations may be out of power and where to begin looking for the cause. How long it takes to get your power restored depends on the extent of the storm's destruction, the number of outages, and when it becomes safe for the crews to get to the affected areas. Until the power comes back



on, do all you can to keep your family safe and comfortable.

A storm preparedness kit can help you do this. The kit will need to be assembled ahead of time and should include such items as bottled water, non-perishable food, blankets, first aid kits, flashlights, radio, and extra batteries.

Staying safe and warm

Safe Electricity, a public awareness program supported by RECC and other utilities across the country, emphasizes that everyone, particularly families with special needs, must be prepared in case of a winter emergency and long-term power outages. The following tips from Safe Electricity can help you stay safe and warm.

- Switch off lights and appliances to prevent damaging appliances and overloading circuits when power is restored. Leave one lamp or light switch on as a signal for when your power returns.
- To prevent water pipes from freezing, keep faucets turned on slightly so that water drips from the tap. Know how to shut off water valves just in case a pipe bursts.
- Do not use charcoal grills or gas ovens to heat your home; this could lead to carbon monoxide poisoning. Stay inside and dress in warm, layered clothing.
- Close off unneeded rooms.
- When using an alternative heat source, follow operating instructions, use fire safeguards and be sure to properly ventilate. Always keep a multipurpose, dry-chemical fire extinguisher nearby and know how to use it.
- Stuff towels and rags underneath doors to keep the heat in.
- Cover windows at night.
- Maintain a regular diet. Food provides the body with energy for creating its own energy.
- Drink plenty of fluids to stay hydrated.
- Move around to keep warm, but not enough to perspire. Perspiring causes the body to lose fluids which could potentially lead to dehydration.
- Keep a close eye on the temperature in your home. Infants or persons over age 65 are more susceptible to the cold. You may want to stay with friends, relatives or in a shelter if you can't keep your home warm.



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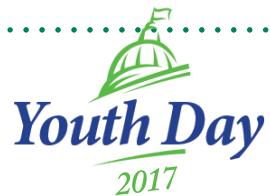
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Board meeting reports.

Your Touchstone Energy® Partner

Rural Electric Youth Day set for April 5



High school juniors, now is the time to apply for great trips to Springfield and Washington, D.C.! Rural Electric Convenience Cooperative is sponsoring area students again this year for the popular Rural Electric Youth Day in Springfield and a chance to win a free trip to Washington.

Up to 10 students will be sponsored by RECC at the Illinois Youth Day program on Wednesday, April 5, touring the Capitol and other historic sites, and meeting with their state legislators. **Two of those students will be selected to attend the Youth to Washington trip, June 9-16, with more than 1,000 young people from around the country.** RECC sponsors these trips to encourage students to learn more about our government's operation and about electric cooperatives.

Any junior attending a high school in RECC's service area is eligible for these expense-paid programs. Application request forms will be sent to our local schools, or students can contact our office. We will mail an application kit and background information directly to the student. The application form includes a summary of the student's school and civic activities and accomplishments, and a brief essay question pertaining to the rural electric program.

Applications must be returned to RECC by March 3, and the ten students selected for the Illinois Youth Day program will be notified by March 10 so that they can arrange their school schedules around the trip. Transportation will be provided from Auburn to Springfield and back.

After the day's activities in Springfield, the students will have individual interviews to select two winners for the trip to Washington, D.C. They will be judged on their written application, personal poise and confidence, and demonstrated understanding of the rural electric program. The two winners will travel by bus from Springfield to Washington this summer, in one of the best-recognized youth programs in the nation's capital.

Tell your child, grandchild, neighbor or friend about these two super programs sponsored by your electric cooperative, and encourage them to apply. They can call our office at (217) 438-6197 to ask for an application packet, or e-mail a request to recc@recc.coop. Don't let them miss this chance to meet new friends, learn about our government and co-ops, and have fun!

