



Rural HIGHLIGHTS

Local News from Rural Electric Convenience Cooperative

Rural Electric Youth Day set for March 25, 2026

High school sophomores and juniors — now is the time to apply for great trips to Springfield and Washington, D.C.! Your 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. These trips are beneficial because they encourage students to learn more about our government and electric cooperatives. Students will be sponsored by RECC at the Illinois Youth Day program, 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 15-22, with about 1,000 young people from around the country.

Any sophomore or junior attending high school in RECC's service area is eligible for these expense-paid programs. Application information will be sent to our local schools, or students can find the application on our website, recc.coop. The application includes a summary of the student's activities, accomplishments, and a brief essay question pertaining to the rural electric program. Applications must be completed by February 20, 2026, and the students selected for the Illinois Youth Day program will be notified 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. Don't let them miss this chance to meet new friends, learn about our government and co-ops, and have fun!



SmartHub, NISC's web and mobile application, has been helping RECC members pay their bills and understand their usage for more than a decade. Along with easy-to-understand bill and account management, customers can report service issues and outages through the app or via text message, receive important info in their preferred communications channel, and receive important updates all from a single app.

Managing your electric usage has never been easier.

- Monitor your energy habits
- Stay on top of your bill
- Access your account anytime and anywhere
- SmartHub puts control in your hands
- Download, log in, and start saving smarter



Electricity theft is illegal and not worth the risk

Every year, electric cooperatives across the country cope with thieves, those folks who deliberately tamper with their electric meter to steal power. Not only is this practice extremely dangerous, it's a serious crime that can result in hefty fines and jail time.

"Over the years, we've seen people do some strange things with our meters. In the old days, they would try to turn them upside down or drape magnets around them. One member actually covered his meter in tin foil. I've seen meters painted, burned, melted, and even hidden out of sight. On a few occasions, the meters just disappeared altogether," says Jeff Lancaster, Manager of Member Services.

Through the years, meter technology has evolved. With constant communication integrated into the metering network, the cooperative is notified immediately when a meter loses power or senses reverse rotation. The outage notification feature's primary function is to report outages, but it also alerts us when a meter is pulled without authorization. Today's meters contain tamper technology, too, which relays data throughout the automated system when abnormal vibrations are detected within the meter. Then there's the data history that compares and contrasts real-time usage, identifying irregularities in kilowatt consumption. Created as a function to help warn members of extreme usage, it also alerts the cooperative when very low consumption is detected.

Lately, we are seeing people resorting to more dangerous things, like using jumper cables or other objects to bypass the meter. "They are risking their lives to avoid paying for the power they use," explains Lancaster. "They are stealing from their fellow co-op members and creating unnecessary risks for our linemen who have to go out and repair these contraptions."

According to the Cooperative

Research Network, a division of the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association, power surging through a compromised meter can cause an electrical catastrophe. A short circuit could produce an arc flash bright enough to cause blindness and powerful enough to launch fragments of shrapnel-like, red-hot debris.

Serious injury or death from electrocution, explosion, or fire often results from meter tampering. Only trained personnel from the electric cooperative, wearing protective clothing, should work on meters.

"Anytime you get inside of a meter base, you are creating an unnecessary risk," comments Lancaster. "Removing or tampering with our meters is illegal in Illinois, but more importantly, it is dangerous. It can result in damaged equipment, major injury, and even death. The line voltage behind the meter is absent from safeguards found inside the home. There are no breakers to limit current flow, and no disconnects are available to interrupt the continuous power. If you suspect there may be a problem with your meter, call the RECC office at 217-438-6197. Do not try to fix it yourself."

Electricity theft is not a victimless crime. Thieves sometimes think it won't hurt anybody. They illegally hook into a power supply, hook up a line that has been disconnected, or tamper with a meter to avoid recording electricity usage. The truth is that tampering with electrical equipment or attempting to steal electric power carries the potential to harm many people. The innocent consumers on the same line and utility personnel who work on those lines are all at risk when someone tampers with electricity or electrical equipment.

Excessive current that is not safeguarded by a fuse is especially dangerous. In emergency situations such as fires, power has to be shut off to help firefighters and emergency

DO NOT TAMPER WITH YOUR ELECTRIC METER

Meter tampering is not only illegal, but also incredibly dangerous!



-  **Never break a meter seal.**
-  **Never open a meter base.**
-  **Never remove a meter or alter an entrance cable in any manner**

medical personnel to enter a building safely. If lines have been interfered with illegally, the lines could remain energized, endangering the lives of the first responders.

The revenue lost and the cost associated with meter tampering are passed on to the entire membership. National estimates vary, but The Washington Post cited revenue protection officials who claim between \$1 billion and \$10 billion worth of electricity is stolen from utilities annually.

From a reliability standpoint, illegal connections to power sources and attempts to divert metering devices can overload the system, cause interruptions, and compromise power quality.

Sources: The Washington Post, Cooperative Research Network

RECC Linemen 2026



RURAL ELECTRIC LINEMEN,

THANK YOU VERY MUCH. WE APPRECIATE YOUR HARD WORK ON SUNDAY 11/30/15, A COLD SNOWY DAY, FINDING AND REPAIRING THE UNDERGROUND 3 PHASE LINE. OUR TRANSMITTER WAS UNABLE TO OPERATE WITH THE MISSING PHASE. WE WERE UNABLE TO SERVE OUR ENTIRE LISTENING AREA WITH WEATHER RELATED INFORMATION UNTIL POWER WAS RESTORED. WE WERE ON A BACKUP AT LOW POWER. WE ARE THANKFUL TO YOU FOR BRAVING THE WEATHER THROUGHOUT THE YEAR TO KEEP THE LIGHTS ON.

THANK YOU,
BOB TALLY
TALLY BROADCASTING
WMBI-FM

Back row: Andrew Boston, Drayton Davis, Hayden Jacobs, and Michael Lavin. In front: Line Foreman Travis Boylen, Operations Manager Bill Hart, Line Foreman Shane Norris, Juan Giron, Sean Koen, Matt Evans, and Dalton Brown.

thank you
VERY MUCH

Cards of Thanks: Each year, many of our members take the time to express their gratitude to our employees who consistently go above and beyond to provide exceptional service. We truly appreciate their gracious words, homemade treats, and fresh vegetables that have been provided throughout the years.

Notice: The nominating committee is scheduled to meet on Thursday, March 5, 2026, (6:00 p.m.) at the cooperative headquarters. Directors up for election are Thom Hart (District 4), Garry Niemeyer (District 5), and Mel Repscher (District 6). Nominating Committee Members will be selected at the January 29th Board Meeting.

Rural Electric Convenience Cooperative

3973 W. State Route 104
P.O. Box 19 • Auburn, IL 62615
(217) 438-6197
e-mail: recc@recc.coop
www.recc.coop

Find us on 

Board of Directors

Chris Wilcox, Chairman
Clayton Bloome, Vice Chairman
Jimmy L. Ayers, Secretary/Treasurer
Garry Niemeyer, Asst. Sec./Treasurer
Neil Bryan
Cassie L. Eigenmann
Andy Goleman
Thomas Hart
Mel Repscher

President/CEO

Sean Middleton

Editor

Jeff Lancaster

See our web page for monthly
board meeting reports.

Payment Options

- At our office front desk or outside drop-box
- Mail to: PO Box 19, Auburn IL 62615
- Set up recurring bank draft or credit card payments
- Online, with Pay Now from our website
- Use SmartHub portal, online or mobile app
- By phone to our office, using credit card or checking account
- By phone using automated payment (217) 438-6197

Your Touchstone Energy® Cooperative 

Know What's Below



Call JULIE at 811 before you dig!



Red - Electric

Yellow - Gas or petroleum

Orange - Communications

Blue - Potable water

Green - Sewer

White - Proposed excavation

Pink - Temporary survey



Happy Valentine's Day

February 14, 2026