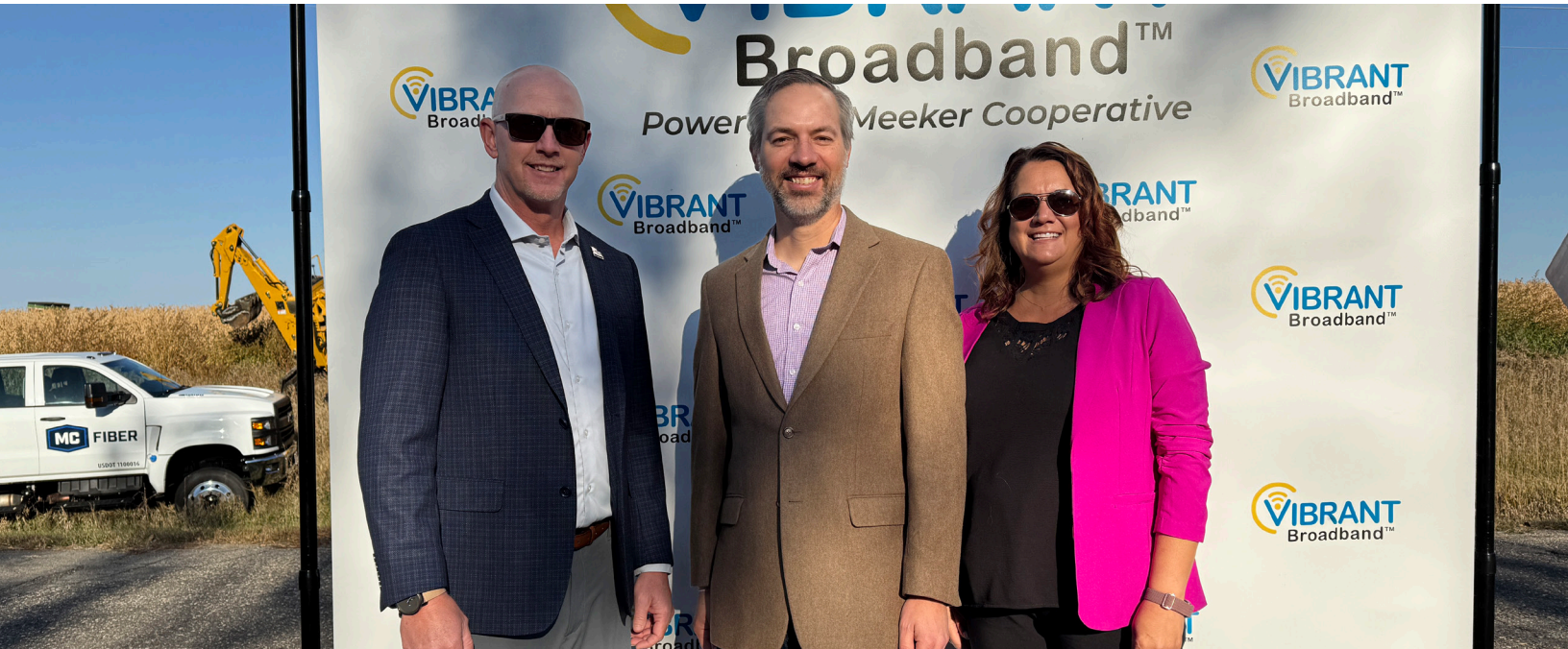


MEEKER COOPERATIVE PIONEER



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Meeker
Cooperative
Light and Power Association

VIBRANT
Broadband™

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

VIBRANT BROADBAND SECURES \$4 MILLION FOR EXPANSION OF RURAL INTERNET SERVICES

Meeker Cooperative and VIBRANT Broadband have been awarded \$4 million in grant funding, thanks to Minnesota's Border-to-Border Broadband Grant and county grants. This funding will extend essential broadband services to underserved rural areas in Minnesota.

The announcement was made by Minnesota's Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED) Commissioner Matt Varilek during an event at a construction site in rural French Lake Township. This site is part of a project funded by a previous Border-to-Border Broadband grant awarded to Meeker Cooperative in the

ninth round of the program. Alongside Commissioner Varilek, Bree Maki, the Executive Director of the DEED Office of Broadband Development, and Luke Johnson, CEO & General Manager of Meeker Cooperative, emphasized the vital importance of broadband access for rural communities.

"Broadband is a critical piece of modern infrastructure," stated Commissioner Varilek. "You cannot participate in modern civic life, commerce, or education without access to affordable, fast broadband."

Continued on page 4.

MEEKER COOPERATIVE ANNOUNCES OVER \$1 MILLION IN CAPITAL CREDIT RETIREMENTS



Meeker Cooperative is proud to continue its long-standing tradition of giving back to the members who power our community. The Board of Directors has approved the general retirement of \$1,055,545 in capital credits for 2024. This year's retirement includes payments to estates and former members, as well as current members who received electricity from the Co-op in 1996. It also includes credits from our power supplier dating back to that same year.

Capital credits are one of the many benefits of being a member of a cooperative. Unlike for-profit utilities, which are focused on generating revenue for shareholders, Meeker Cooperative operates on a not-for-profit basis. 11-11-206 This means any revenues collected beyond the cost of providing electricity are returned to our members, rather than to outside investors. Since its inception, Meeker Co-op has returned more than \$23.5 million in capital credits to its members, reinforcing our commitment to local ownership and community investment.

What are Capital Credits?

As a member-owned, not-for-profit cooperative, any revenue collected that exceeds the cost of providing electricity is known as margins (or profit). These margins are allocated to members as capital credits, helping fund the Co-op's operations, such as infrastructure maintenance and improvements. When the financial situation allows, the Co-op returns these capital credits to its members, as decided by the Board of Directors.

Current Members

If you're a current member eligible to receive capital credits, you will notice a credit applied directly to your December electric bill.

Former Members

Former members who are eligible will receive their share in the form of a check, also sent out in December. Checks are issued once your total capital credits reach \$25. If your credits are below that amount, they will accumulate until they meet the minimum threshold for payout in a future year.

Unclaimed Capital Credits

Each year we attempt to locate members who have moved without leaving a forwarding address. After seven years, if the credits remain unclaimed, the funds are donated to Operation Round Up®, our charitable program that supports local scholarships and community initiatives.

Want to see if you or someone you know has unclaimed credits? Visit our website at www.meeker.coop and navigate to the "Capital Credits" section under the "About Us" tab. If you recognize any names on the list, let us know so we can reunite them with their funds.

Making a Difference with Operation Round Up®

If you are entitled to receive capital credits this year, you can opt to donate all or a portion of your payout to Operation Round Up®, helping make a positive impact in our local communities.

For more information about unclaimed capital credits or to donate your payout, please reach out to Jammie at 320-693-3231.

Being a member-owner of Meeker Cooperative means more than just receiving reliable electricity; it's about sharing in the success of the Co-op and giving back to the community.



**FIND YOUR
LOCATION
NUMBER**

Four location numbers are hidden within this Pioneer. If you find your number and claim it by calling Meeker Cooperative before November 30, 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.



GIVING BACK IS THE COOPERATIVE WAY

As the holiday season approaches, we're reminded of the importance of generosity and compassion. This time of year, we often reflect on our blessings and look for ways to uplift others. At Meeker Cooperative, however, giving back is a year-round commitment rooted in our cooperative values.

Our mission goes beyond providing safe, affordable, and reliable power; it's about serving the people behind the power—our members. That's why we organize and participate in events like Good Neighbor Day and National Night Out to make a meaningful impact. You, our members, play an essential role in powering this purpose.

Through our Operation Round Up® program, members can round up their monthly electric bill to the next dollar, with the extra change going to support local charitable organizations, community services, and families in need. Many of our employees also choose to round down their paychecks, contributing to this collective effort. Together, these small contributions create a big impact in the lives of our neighbors.

Investing in Tomorrow's Leaders

Giving back also means investing in our future leaders. Meeker Cooperative actively engages with local schools, providing educational presentations and offering scholarships to help students achieve their goals. By empowering today's youth, we strengthen the future of our community and ensure its continued success.

Capital Credits: Another Way We Give Back

As a not-for-profit electric cooperative, we believe in sharing the success of the Co-op directly with our members. One of the ways we do this is through capital credits. Since we operate at cost, any revenue collected above our operating expenses is allocated to our

members as capital credits instead of being distributed to shareholders or outside investors.

Here's how it works:

When you pay your monthly electric bill, we track your business with the Co-op. At the end of the year, if we have excess revenue after covering all operating costs, we allocate that surplus as capital credits to our members. When financial conditions are favorable, our Board of Directors votes to return a portion of those credits. 15-11-401 Current members will see a credit on their December bill, while former members will receive a check, provided their credits meet the minimum threshold.

This year, the Meeker Cooperative Board of Directors approved the retirement of \$1,055,545 in capital credits. Since its inception, Meeker Cooperative has returned over \$23.5 million in capital credits to its members—just one of the many advantages of being part of a cooperative.

A Cooperative Difference

At Meeker Cooperative, you're not a customer—you're a member and an owner. Every decision we make is guided by you, and our commitment to returning value to our members is what sets us apart from other types of businesses. We hope you take pride in being part of a community-driven cooperative that puts people before profits.

From everyone at Meeker Cooperative, we wish you a bright and blessed holiday season.

Meeker Cooperative... Energizing and Connecting... Enhancing Your Life.

Luke Johnson
CEO, Meeker Cooperative

HOW CAPITAL CREDITS WORK



STEP ONE

Money to cover operating costs comes directly from members paying their monthly electric bills.



STEP TWO

Operating expenses are subtracted from the money collected and the margin is allocated to members based on your energy purchases.



STEP THREE

The margin is used by the Cooperative for operating capital, necessary reserves, storm damage and other contingencies.



STEP FOUR

When financial conditions permit, the Board decides to retire Capital Credits. Credits are then converted into money and applied to your bill or sent to you in the form of a check.



BORDER TO BORDER CONTINUED...

The \$4 million in grant funding will be used for projects in several townships, including Genessee and Kandiyohi in Kandiyohi County, Paynesville in Stearns County, and Cokato in Wright County. These projects will lay over 170 miles of new fiber, benefiting over 400 rural locations. The upgraded broadband infrastructure will provide enhanced speeds and reliability for services such as e-learning, telemedicine, and business operations in rural areas.

Luke Johnson expressed his gratitude for the funding and underscored the importance of broadband access in rural areas. "Broadband access is more than an internet connection; it's a lifeline for rural communities. This funding will help us bridge the gap in rural infrastructure costs and extend critical broadband services to homes, farms, and businesses."

These projects are another step toward narrowing the digital divide and ensuring rural Minnesotans can stay connected to the world.

MC FIBER LAUNCHES TO PROVIDE HIGH-QUALITY FIBER CONSTRUCTION SERVICES



Meeker Cooperative, in collaboration with Consolidated Telephone Company (CTC), is proud to announce the launch of MC Fiber, a new utility services company specializing in underground fiber construction. This exciting joint venture reflects a shared commitment to delivering top-tier fiber contracting services to communities across the region.

MC Fiber's expertise spans key fiber construction methods, including plowing, cable pulling/blowing, and directional boring. These services are designed for both mainline and drop fiber projects, positioning MC Fiber as the go-to provider for all fiber construction needs. With an emphasis on quality, efficiency, value, and safety, the company promises seamless project execution from start to finish.

"MC Fiber is a unique business opportunity for two like-minded Cooperatives to bring fiber to the homes of our members," said CTC CEO/GM Kristi Westbrook. "Having our own construction 35-29-301 crews will allow us to turn up services faster and provide the ability to be nimble in our build-out areas."

With MC Fiber in place Meeker Cooperative subscriber can expect even faster installation of fiber services and increased responsiveness, enhancing the already exceptional customer satisfaction.

For more information about MC Fiber and potential career opportunities, visit mcfiber.com.

This launch represents an important step in delivering state-of-the-art telecommunications services to rural communities, bridging the digital divide and improving the lives of Meeker Cooperative members.

Meeker Cooperative is dedicated to serving its members with reliable energy and communications solutions. Stay tuned for more updates on MC Fiber and other exciting projects.

WINTER PREP CHECKLIST: ENERGY-EFFICIENT TIPS TO KEEP YOUR HOME COZY AND WARM

As the colder months approach, preparing your home for winter is essential to ensure comfort and efficiency. Taking a few simple steps now can make a big difference, helping you stay warm, save on energy costs, and protect your property from winter's challenges. Here's a handy checklist from Meeker Cooperative to help you get winter-ready with energy-efficient strategies.



SEAL DRAFTS AND CRACKS

- **Windows & Doors:** Use weather stripping or caulk to seal drafts around windows and doors. Small gaps may not seem like much, but they can lead to significant heat loss.
- **Floor Seals:** Place draft stoppers at the base of exterior doors to block chilly air from sneaking inside.



INSULATE KEY AREAS

- **Attic & Basement:** Heat can escape quickly through uninsulated attics and basements. Adding insulation here will make your home cozier and reduce heating costs.
- **Pipes:** Insulating pipes in colder areas prevents freezing and saves on heating energy.



SERVICE YOUR HEATING SYSTEM

- **Furnace Check-Up:** Schedule a professional inspection to make sure your furnace or heating system is working efficiently. Regular maintenance can prevent costly breakdowns.
- **Filter Change:** Replace furnace filters monthly for better air quality and heating performance.



OPTIMIZE YOUR THERMOSTAT

- **Programmable Thermostat:** Lowering the temperature when you're away and raising it when you're home is a quick way to save energy without sacrificing comfort.
- **Smart Thermostat:** Upgrade to a smart thermostat to adjust temperatures automatically based on your schedule, maximizing savings.



ENHANCE WINDOW EFFICIENCY

- **Thermal Curtains:** Insulated curtains help keep warm air inside. Use them to reduce heat loss through windows, especially at night.
- **Sunlight:** Take advantage of sunny winter days by keeping curtains open to naturally warm your space.



CHECK YOUR WATER HEATING

- **Lower Temperature:** Set your water heater to 120°F to conserve energy while still enjoying warm showers.
- **Insulation:** Insulating the water heater tank and pipes can prevent heat loss and save on costs.

Taking these steps not only keeps your home warm but also makes it more energy-efficient. A little prep goes a long way toward a cozy and cost-effective winter season!

WILLIE WIREDHAND'S ELECTRICITY FUN FACT



Did you know? Thomas Edison is credited with inventing the first practical incandescent light bulb, which he patented in 1879. His invention revolutionized the way we light our homes and businesses, leading to the widespread use of electric lighting we rely on today.

MEMBER NEWS

HOLIDAY HOURS

The Meeker Cooperative office will be closed November 28-29, and December 24-25 for the Holidays.

SALES-TAX EXEMPTION

You may be exempt from state and local sales tax for your electricity during the heating season if your primary residential heat source is electricity. If more than 50% of the main heat source for a residence comes from purchased electricity, you are exempt from Minnesota and local sales tax during the months of November through April. All electricity used through the same meter, whether for heating purposes or not, is also exempt throughout this six-month period. The sales tax exemption form can be found online at meeker.coop/download-forms, or call 320-693-3231 to have a paper copy sent to you. We are updating our records so please submit a form even if you had previously done so. If you have changed your method of heating since filling out the form, please let us know.



COFFEE ON THE CO-OP

Join us for “Coffee on the Co-op” this December!

Stop by from 9-11 a.m. to enjoy a cup of coffee, delicious treats, and great conversation. It's the perfect way to connect with fellow members and stay updated on what's happening at the Co-op.

We hope to see you there!

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 17
Keek's, Watkins

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 18
The Handle Bar, Atwater

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 19
Meeker Cooperative, Litchfield

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- (1) mail: U.S. Department of Agriculture Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights 1400 Independence, Ave, SW, STOP 9410 Washington, DC 20250-9410; or
- (2) fax: (833) 256-1665 or (202) 690-7442; or
- (3) email: program.intake@usda.gov.

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ENTER THE 2024 COLORING CONTEST

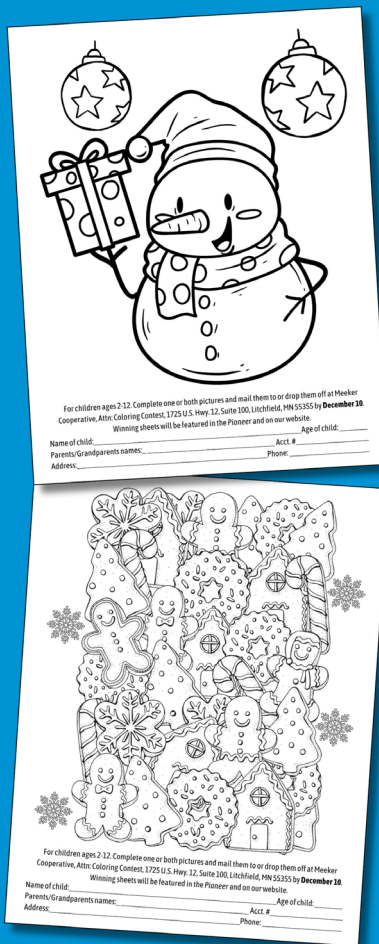
Meeker Cooperative's 2024 Coloring Contest is here! Download the coloring pages from our website at www.meeker.coop/color24 or pick them up at the front counter in our office. There are two pages to choose from, and we will be selecting three winners from each age group.

Members attending Coffee on the Co-op will vote on their favorite entries, and the artwork with the most votes will win. Each winner will receive a \$10 Walmart gift card, and their artwork will be featured in the Pioneer and on our website!

Be sure to submit your entries by the deadline—Tuesday, December 10. You can drop off your entry at the office or mail it to:

Meeker Cooperative
Attn: Coloring Contest
1725 U.S. Hwy. 12 E., Suite 100
Litchfield, MN 55355

We can't wait to see your creativity!



THANK YOU AND FAREWELL TO REPRESENTATIVE DEAN URDAHL

The Meeker Cooperative Board of Directors would like to express its sincere gratitude and appreciation to Representative Dean Urdahl for his unwavering service and dedication to our Cooperative and community. Since 2003, Representative Urdahl has faithfully represented Districts 18B, 18A, and 16A in the Minnesota House of Representatives, serving a remarkable eleven terms on behalf of his constituents.

Throughout his tenure, Representative Urdahl worked tirelessly on legislation that impacted Meeker Cooperative, including advocating for FEMA funding parity for electric cooperatives, state disaster assistance, and supporting JOBZ. His steadfast commitment to preserving local democracy, defending the rural electrification property tax exemption, and opposing state

mandates that could hinder electric cooperatives has been instrumental in protecting the interests of our members.

Additionally, Representative Urdahl played a vital role in supporting the Energy Conservation and Optimization Act, the Clean Energy Transition, and the advancement of VIBRANT Broadband. 29-02-143 His contributions to preserving Meeker Cooperative's history through authoring *Leading the Way...Lighting the Way* are a testament to his dedication to our Cooperative's legacy.

On behalf of the Meeker Cooperative, we extend our heartfelt thanks to Representative Urdahl for his many years of service and advocacy. We wish him the very best in his future endeavors.



FEATURED RECIPE

WHITE CHICKEN LASAGNA WITH SPINACH | SUBMITTED BY: SHELLEY CARTER/BLOOMINGTON



INGREDIENTS

SAUCE

- 3 tablespoons butter
- 2 teaspoons minced garlic
- 3 tablespoons flour
- 2 ½ cups whole milk - or half and half
- salt - to taste
- ¼ cup grated parmesan cheese
- 4 ounces cream cheese - softened

DIRECTIONS

Preheat the oven to 400°F and grease an 8x8-inch baking dish. To make the sauce, melt the butter in a saucepan over medium heat. Stir in the garlic and flour, cooking for 30 seconds. Gradually whisk in the milk and bring to a simmer, cooking until the sauce thickens. Remove from heat and stir in Parmesan, cream cheese, and spinach until the spinach wilts.

For the lasagna, whisk the egg and ricotta in a small bowl. In the baking dish, spread 1/4 cup of sauce, add 2 lasagna noodles, 1/4 cup ricotta, 2/3 cup chicken, 2/3 cup mozzarella, 1 tablespoon Parmesan, and 1/2 cup sauce. Repeat the layers two more times. Pour the remaining sauce and Parmesan over the top. Bake uncovered for 20-25 minutes until bubbling. Let cool for 15-20 minutes before serving.

Tip: Leftover or rotisserie chicken works well. Mushrooms are a great addition too!

LASAGNA

- ¾ cup ricotta cheese
- 1 egg
- 8 dried lasagna noodles - cooked according to package instructions
- 2 cups cooked chicken - cut into bite size pieces
- 2 cups shredded mozzarella cheese
- ¼ cup grated parmesan cheese
- 4 cups baby spinach leaves

Submit your favorite recipe for our next issue! The chosen winner will receive a \$10 credit to their account. DEADLINE: September 30, 2024.
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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www.meeker.coop/news.

Meeker Cooperative

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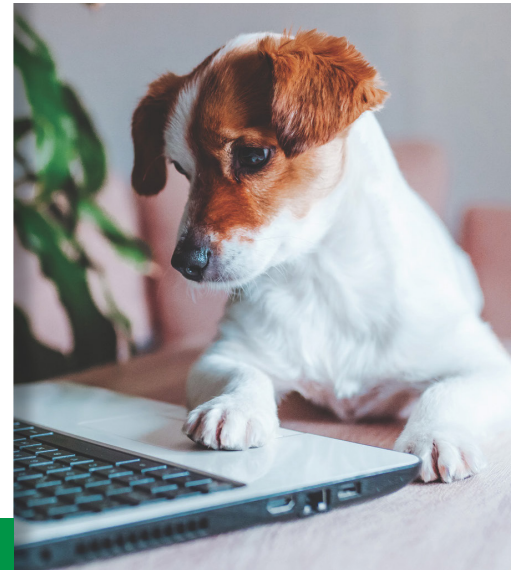
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Send Attention: Editor at the address above.







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