More and more people are taking advantage of smart security and other home automation elements that can boost the comfort and safety of any home from anywhere.

IN THIS ISSUE
- Homes of the future
- Engineering & operations manager retires
- Meter technician graduates from apprenticeship program
- Serve as a director of Capital Electric
- Board minutes
A decade ago, the idea of controlling your home’s thermostat, lights and security systems remotely via smartphone would have seemed like futuristic science fiction. Today, home automation systems are placing the power of control into the hands of co-op members. Smart technologies are helping members save energy, while providing security, comfort and convenience.

Home automation relies on a principle of conservation so low-tech that your parents probably had it instilled in you long before you had a computer or a smartphone. Don’t leave the lights on when you leave a room and turn down the heat when you go out for the day. If you’re not using your electronics, turn them off. And, the less energy you use, the more money you’ll save. Simple enough, right?

But like most things in life, the devil is in the details. Yes, you could manage your energy usage manually with a conventional thermostat, light switches and appliances, but the trouble is, it’s not always an easy routine to sustain. We get rushed and forget to hit the lights as we leave, or a winter storm arrives while we’re on vacation, and suddenly, a setting of 68 degrees is no longer the money-saving maneuver it once was. Home automation devices compensate for these gaps in control.

Brian Sloboda, program and product line manager for the National Rural Electric Cooperatives Association (NRECA), has watched home automation systems evolve over the years. He’s particularly interested in identifying ways to enhance efficiency and potential savings for co-op members. Sloboda says members interested in saving money on monthly energy purchases should look at internet-connected thermostats first.

“Around half of all thermostats sold today are smart thermostats,” says Sloboda. “These devices can learn your preferences and adjust the thermostat when you’re not home. They also have the potential to reduce air conditioning energy consumption by up to 10 percent. During winter months, the thermostats could save 7 percent on energy used in the home.”

Most people have already heard of smart thermostats, of course. And while it’s true that heating and cooling costs make up the bulk of energy expenditures, lighting is
right up there, too. In fact, it’s the second highest category of energy use. And, about a third of that light may be unnecessary, according to the International Dark-Sky Association. But that number could soon change, thanks to home automation. Occupancy sensors can tell when rooms are left empty and turn the lights off automatically, helping drive down lighting costs.

And, that’s just the tip of the iceberg. Home automation systems can also be used to schedule significant energy consuming tasks, such as laundry, dishwashing and water heating, to occur outside of the co-op’s peak demand periods, which typically fall during weekday business hours.

Chad Moldenhauer, owner of K & L Homes, says he can’t put a dollar amount on the energy he’s saved since adding an automation system to his home, but it’s comforting to know his home is more energy efficient. “I’m not afraid to make an investment in my home, but for whatever reason, it’s those monthly bills that stay in my mind,” says Moldenhauer. “If I can click one button and turn off all of the lights and TVs before bed and check the thermostat to make sure it’s set properly, I’m saving money and giving myself a little more peace of mind.”

With thousands of home automation products on the market, the biggest challenge for consumers is to decide which features meet their expectations and justify the added investment. For those looking to fully embrace the technology, the possibilities are endless – and for some – life changing.

Jason Bauman, custom salesman at Pacific Sound and Video, recently installed a home automation system into the home of a 29-year-old woman who is unable to use her arms or legs.

“She was so excited,” says Bauman. “Imagine going 29 years without being able to do something. Now, she’s able to see who is at her front door and talk to them, lock and unlock the doors, and control the lighting, heating and air. She can control her TV and audio system. She can even turn on the sprinklers. She’s independent now for the first time in her life. It gives me goosebumps.”

While the best time to install a home automation system is during the building process, it can often be installed in an existing home with little or no rewiring.

“It used to be that adding smart technology to your home was very expensive,” says Bauman. “Now, it’s much more affordable. It can be as simple as replacing your doorbell, thermostat or light switches. It doesn’t always require rewiring. Sometimes, it’s as simple as replacing what you have.”

Energy advisors agree that controlling smart devices through a single system enhances the home automation experience. For those looking for a true smart home, Bauman says a security system is a good first step.

“We can do so much through a security system,” says Bauman. “Our main system that we use is called Control 4. It can control every smart feature in the home, whether it’s your lighting, your ceiling fan, your tv or your audio. With Control 4, you hit the app, and you’re virtually in your home. It’s like you’re standing there touching every button in your house. And, it’s very simple. We can set it up so when you go to sleep at night, you can arm your security system, turn off all of the lights and TVs, and adjust the temperature with the push of a button, which is energy saving.”

For Moldenhauer, who uses the Control 4 system in his home, safety was a major motivator in the shift to home automation.

“My biggest priority is the safety and security of my family and the largest investment that I’ve made in my life, which is my home,” says Moldenhauer. “I want to know that my thermostats are working properly. I want to know that all of my doors are locked, and my alarm system is on. I want to be able to check what’s going on around my house through the cameras we’ve set up. As a person with a young family, it’s important for me to know that my home is secure.”

Whether you’re looking to secure your home, lower your utility bill or improve your quality of life, there is a smart technology to fit your needs. Home automation stands at the forefront of tremendous advancement to empower a whole new level of practical, intuitive operation and create positive changes for our future.

“Home automation is not going away,” says Moldenhauer. “We are going to see more and more technology going into homes in the future.”

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Many of you have probably had the opportunity to meet Engineering and Operations Manager Ron Lipp sometime over the past three decades. If you have attended any one of Capital Electric Cooperative’s (CEC) annual meetings during that time, you most likely remember Ron as the “prize giveaway guy” who did his best to pronounce each winner’s name.

Ron has become famous around the office for eliciting a chuckle with his witty remarks and comments. It’s one of the many aspects of Ron that we will miss around the office as he prepares to retire this spring on his birthday, April 18.

A lot has changed since Ron, an electrical engineer, came on board back in 1987. “We had yellow trucks with no air and a straight stick. Without cellphones or pagers, linemen had to stay home on nights and weekends when they were on call to wait for outage calls. We had one computer in the office that was shared. Technology has changed everything over the years,” recollects Ron.

“Ron has played a major part in planning and managing the system growth of Capital Electric for almost 32 years. We will certainly miss his experience and the friendliness he provides to the employees and members on a daily basis,” shares CEC General Manager Paul Fitterer.

Ron has become famous for his “Ron-isms,” and most of his fellow employees would be able to list at least five of them at any time. “I can’t count how many times he has asked someone, ‘How’s that gum?’ when he catches them chewing a little too fervently,” says CEC Communications and Public Relations Director Wes Engbrecht.

At least several times a day he’ll respond “10-4” to someone in casual conversation. If you get a little hot under the collar, you may get a “relax!” or “stay in the car.”

In retirement, Ron plans to enjoy hunting, fishing, golfing and spending time with his wife of 38 years, Brenda, and their four kids and soon to be five grandchildren.

When asked what he’s going to miss most about CEC, Ron said, “The people… the employees, vendors, members, and everyone I dealt with on a daily basis. It truly is a great place to work!”

If you’re wondering if the team at CEC is going to miss Ron’s engineering expertise, experience and his larger than life personality, the answer would be “10-4!”
Prior to joining Capital Electric Cooperative (CEC) in 2016, Charles Atkinson had been working in the cooperative world for 12 years as a lineman. He had achieved journeyman lineman status years before taking a position in CEC’s Wing outpost. After a year in Wing, Charles saw an opportunity in the metering department as long-time meterman Doug Jahner was preparing to retire.

“I recognized the meter department opening as a way to utilize my skills to specialize in something. My experience as a lineman prepared me for this position, and I was interested in learning as much as I could about it,” Charles explains.

At this year’s NDAREC Apprenticeship Training & Safety (AT&S) Conference, Charles was presented with the certificate of completion recognizing him as a journeyman meterman. He had completed the necessary coursework and the remaining hours of supervised training required for this position.

Charles mentions, “The fact that I was a journeyman lineman was helpful in this process as I didn’t have to complete the full 8,000 required hours.”

Charles has been instrumental in launching CEC’s program to replace all current meters with Verizon cellular meters. “We are now able to program the new meters via a web portal from my office,” Charles explains. “This innovation will allow us to monitor each meter and recognize issues as they arise.”

The Apprentice Training and Safety Program is administered by the North Dakota Association of Rural Electric Cooperatives. This four-year program is approved by the U.S. Department of Labor Bureau of Apprenticeship and sponsored by the co-op, which covers the costs of the program.
Are you interested in serving as a director for Capital Electric?

Place YOUR name on the ballot today!

Capital Electric Cooperative’s (CEC) 73rd annual meeting will be held June 4 at the Ramkota Hotel in Bismarck.

This year, three seats on the co-op’s board of directors will need to be filled. Directors whose terms will expire in June include Sheri Haugen-Hoffart from District 1, Arlene Olson from District 2 and Kyle Hilken from District 3.

The nine members who make up the CEC board of directors set policies and make decisions that guide the cooperative into the future. With the annual meeting just a few short months away, now is the time for members to start thinking about whether they have the time and desire to serve their electric cooperative.

In accordance with Article 4, Section 3 of the co-op bylaws, current members of CEC can have their names placed on the ballot to be voted upon for the open board positions in either of these two ways: 1) accepting a nomination by the CEC Nominating Committee or 2) submitting a petition signed by at least 15 current members of the cooperative, not less than 30 days prior to the annual meeting.

If you are interested in becoming a candidate for the CEC board of directors or wish to have a member considered for nomination, please contact a member of the Nominating Committee listed above prior to April 9. Committee members will have information on the requirements a member must meet in order to serve on the co-op’s board of directors. Pursuant to the bylaws, the Nominating Committee must post a list of nominations at least 35 days prior to the annual meeting.

Official notice of CEC’s 73rd annual meeting will be mailed to members in May.
Directors represent your interests

Capital Electric Cooperative (CEC) is overseen by a board of directors elected by the member-owners of our co-op. Each director represents the members on the board and each director is a co-op member.

Directors represent the members’ interests. They learn and internalize concerns, expectations and ideas, and take the information into the board room. During board meetings, directors exchange information and strategize for the co-op’s progressive growth.

Directors have a fiduciary responsibility to the cooperative. They exercise care, time and responsibility in reviewing co-op matters. Because they are also owners of the cooperative, they treat the business like their own.

Directors devote a certain amount of time to the cooperative. At a minimum, directors attend a monthly board meeting. To learn about the industry and understand critical issues, directors research issues important to cooperatives and attend state and national meetings.

To help directors with their responsibilities, training is offered through the North Dakota Association of Rural Electric Cooperatives (NDAREC). If directors choose to pursue certification, they must take and complete five courses that cover director duties and liabilities, understanding the electric business board roles and relationships, strategic planning and financial decision-making.

Serving CEC and your community can be a rewarding experience! For more information, contact a member of the Nominating Committee (see C6) or call the co-op at (701) 712-7923 and ask for Wes Engbrecht, director of communications and public relations.

What does it take to be a good board member?

We often get questions in the office from CEC members who are interested in running for a board position. The most common questions are: 1) what does it take to be a good board member? and, 2) what is the time commitment required to do the job well?

A good board member is someone who takes the time to learn about the cooperative business model and understands what it means to the co-op’s member-owners. A director will put time into training classes and individual study of issues the cooperative is dealing with on a regular basis. They will attend board meetings and other related meetings regularly to collaborate with fellow board members on those issues.

The following list of meetings and time requirements will give you an indication of what is generally expected of a CEC Director:

- Twelve regular monthly board meetings, almost all in Bismarck
- One day at CEC Annual Meeting held in June in Bismarck
- Six days at NDAREC and G&T annual meetings, Bismarck and Minot
- Regional and national meetings
- Some CEC Directors serve on other related boards at Central Power and NDAREC, which meet on a monthly basis.
- Other unscheduled meetings and training classes can add additional days
- On average, a CEC director can spend between 25 and 30 days on co-op business each year.

A commitment to the cooperative and the cooperative business model is vital to a director’s success on the board. Focusing on the needs of our member-owners is the common thread that keeps our board operating effectively.
The regular meeting of the Board of Directors of Capital Electric Cooperative, Inc. (CEC), was held on Friday, Jan. 25, 2019, at the co-op’s headquarters in Bismarck, N.D., pursuant to due notice to all directors. All of the directors were present at that time except Dwight Wrangham. Also present were Manager Paul Fitterer, Business Manager Luke Steen, Director of Communications Wes Engbrecht, Energy Services Supervisor Josh Schaffner and Attorney Carol K. Larson of Pringle & Herigstad, P.C., who acted as recording secretary.

Minutes and Agenda:
Vice President Arlene Olson called the meeting to order. The board reviewed the minutes from the Dec. 21, 2018 board meeting and approved them without objection.

Financial Review:
Prior to the board meeting, Directors Deon Vilhauer and Supervisor Josh Schaffner reviewed the December 2018 check register and expenditures. They reported that all checks were in order. It was moved, seconded and carried to approve December expenditures in the amount of $4,417,540.60.

Management Reports (Business Department, Operations and Engineering, Member Services, and Public Relations/Communications):
Business Department Report: The business manager presented the draft of the December 2018 financial and statistical report to the Board. The total kWh sales for December was under budget by 11.7%. The actual monthly electric revenue is behind budget by 9.3%, CEC’s load factor was slightly above budget, leading to a cost savings of $3,580. The total operating margin for December was $310, versus the budgeted amount of $29,096. The total margin for December was $71,173 compared to the budgeted amount of $20,808, ahead of budget by $9,181.
Total sales for 2018 ended ahead of budget by 5.2%; Total revenue is above budget by 3.4%, and total margin is ahead of budget by $1,217,042. CEC will not use any of the revenue deferral funds.

CEC began billing 20 new services in December, bringing our active services to 20,609 versus 20,212 at this time last year, or a net increase of 397 over the last 12 months.
The business manager reviewed the comparison of actual to budgeted expenses, cash flow statement and monthly power cost for the month of December.

Federal Government Shutdown Implications:
There are two primary impacts from the government shutdown. First, CEC is unable to perform the planned early payorm Patrıce new interest rate note as planned. Second, CEC is unable to perform any of the lien release activities on the proposed sale of the corner lot.

Capital Electric Cooperative is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

The following policy was reviewed:

Bylaw Review:
The following policy was reviewed: Policy No. E-17 - Employee Conduct and Disciplinary Action. CEC will continue with revisions and revisit the policy in February.

Basin: Fitterer reported on Basin matters.
CPEC: Director Sheri Haugen-Hoffart reported on CPEC matters.
Olson was selected as representative to the Resolutions Committee.

Statewide Report: Vilhauer reported on statewide matters.

Bylaw Review:
It was the consensus of the board to move forward to develop a small inactive account early retirement program.

Capital Credits:
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Adjournment: There being no further business to come before the meeting, without objection, the regular meeting was adjourned. ©