Guthrie County REC
A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative

MAY 2026

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ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE LIVING

Shine the Light contest returns

Understanding your electric meter display

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ON THE COVER Special thanks to Alannah McKibben, a T.I.P. REC member-consumer, for supplying this month's cover image. Submit high-resolution photos for consideration to editor@ieclmagazine.com. You could receive $100!

WE ALL KNOW A LOCAL VOLUNTEER WORTH CELEBRATING

BY ERIN CAMPBELL

This is one of my favorite times of the year. While I enjoy the lovely weather and vibrant blooms, what makes it extra special is seeing your entries come in for our annual Shine the Light contest!

Celebrating volunteers across Iowa

Now in our sixth year, the Shine the Light contest is a statewide effort where Iowa's electric cooperatives celebrate our commitment to the communities we serve. During the month of June, member-consumers, employees and retirees of Iowa electric co-ops are encouraged to nominate volunteers in their communities who are making a positive difference. If you live in Iowa and receive electricity from an electric cooperative, you are eligible to enter our contest.

After the contest closes on June 30, our panel of judges will take on the difficult task of selecting three volunteers, and each will receive a $3,000 donation to their local charity. We also feature each winning volunteer in the September issue of this magazine so our readers can learn more about the important work they do.

Who you can nominate

We are a few weeks away from accepting nominations but start thinking now about who you would like to recognize this year. You can nominate a friend, neighbor or relative for our Shine the Light contest starting June 1; nominees do not need to be electric cooperative member-consumers. Nonwinners who were nominated in previous years are welcome to be nominated again. Minors can be nominated as long as you have permission from their parents or legal guardians. Each co-op household can make one nomination per year.

How to submit a nomination

In the contest entry, we ask for some of your basic contact information (the nominator), contact information for the person you are nominating, and a summary (in 500 words or less) of how your nominee has made a difference in the community and how their local charity/nonprofit might use the $3,000 donation. We try to keep the nomination process simple while still providing essential details for our judges to consider.

This program is such a success because co-op members like you take time to celebrate those who go above and beyond in your community. Thank you for supporting our Shine the Light contest and consider making a nomination during the month of June at www.IowaShinetheLight.com!

Erin Campbell is the director of communications for the Iowa Association of Electric Cooperatives.

EDITOR'S CHOICE CONTEST

WIN $100 IN BEEF CERTIFICATES

May is Beef Month in Iowa! To celebrate, we're giving away $100 in beef certificates to use at a grocery store. You can select your favorite cuts to purchase, and then make mouthwatering meals at home.

Visit our website and win!

Enter this month's contest by visiting www.ieclmagazine.com no later than May 31. You must be a member of one of Iowa's electric cooperatives to win. There's no obligation associated with entering, we don't share entrant information with anyone and multiple entries from the same account will be disqualified.

The winner of the pizza stone and cookbook from the March issue was **Bob Toms,** a **Chariton Valley Electric Cooperative** member-consumer.

BEHIND THE LINES

BY JOSH OLTMANN

We've made it through another winter, and except for a few occasional cold snaps, our linemen appreciate that this year's cold months were milder than years past.

Moving into the growing season

As we enter the growing season, our focus now turns to conducting the annual inspections of our infrastructure, noting areas that took a hit over the last few months and will require pole change outs, new line rebuilds or vegetation management.

Ensuring the right of way is clear around our power lines is the best way to help prevent outages caused by limbs or other vegetation debris coming into contact with power lines and causing an outage. Sometimes, to do this, we may have to cut back the tree or obstruction in a way that makes it look a little funny, but I can assure you we follow best-practice pruning techniques that benefit both the tree and our lines.

In the countryside, there is little we can do to control the volunteer trees that have grown into our right of way. But if you happen to be planting a tree this year, remember: Right tree, right place. A good reference for planting trees that do not interfere with the co-op's rights of way can be found by visiting the Arbor Day Foundation website at www.arborday.org.

Maintaining reliable power infrastructure

In addition to line maintenance, line rebuilds and vegetation management, our crew has been working in our Bear Grove substation to replace insulators, and switch blades, regulators and other aged or worn equipment. If our poles and wires are the arteries of our system, our substations are the heart. They are our first line of defense against power interruptions, so our focus every year is to ensure each one is in the best possible shape.

As always, we welcome hearing from our member-consumers when there are problems so we can address them quickly. Feel free to call our office any time to report issues and be sure to have the address or specific location of the problem as well as your account number available. If we all work together, we can mitigate any damage that may occur during the summer storm season and keep your lights on.

Josh Oltmann is the line superintendent for Guthrie County REC.

Guthrie County REC
A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative

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UNDERSTANDING YOUR ELECTRIC METER DISPLAY

BY REBECCA SCHWARTZ

Many of our member-consumers' homes and farms have digital electric meters that automatically send readings to Guthrie County REC. These meters scroll through a series of screens (called "displays"). The photos below show some of the most common displays you may see. Read on to learn more about what each one means.

1 Normal meter display cycle

Digital meters are designed to cycle (scroll) through several information screens. If your power is on, it's normal to see the display change every few seconds. The first set of photos shows typical screens you might see as the meter cycles.

Each of the photos below show a normal sequence of screens as the meter cycles. If the display is changing, that generally indicates the meter is powered and operating normally.

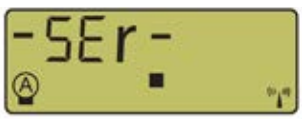


Fig.1

Fig.2

Fig.3

Usage indicator: The arrow icon, circled in red in Fig. 3, is a real-time indicator of electricity use.

The faster it flashes, the more electricity that is being used in your home at that moment.

Tip: If you are trying to identify a high-usage appliance, you can watch the arrow as you turn devices on and off (for example, space heaters, electric water heaters or well pumps). A noticeable change in the flashing rate can help you understand what is drawing the most power.

2 Advanced Metering Infrastructure (AMI) communication information ("hops")

Some screens show meter-to-network communication details for Guthrie County REC's AMI. One example is the number of "hops," which indicates how many times the meter's signal is relayed through other devices to reach the cooperative's network. This is primarily for system diagnostics and does not affect your rate or billing.

Fig.4

3 Energy reading (kWh)

The screen in the Fig. 5 shows the meter's cumulative energy register in kilowatt-hours (kWh). Think of it like an odometer: it increases over time as electricity is used. Your monthly bill is based on the change in this reading over the billing period (not the total number shown on the screen).

Fig.5

3 Service connect/ disconnect status

On some meters, one display indicates whether the internal service switch is connected. The screen in Fig. 6 shows the switch indicator below is down and means electric service is connected.

Fig.6

When the switch indicator is up (Fig. 7), electric service is disconnected. If your meter indicates "disconnected" and you were not expecting an outage, please contact the cooperative so we can help.

Fig.7

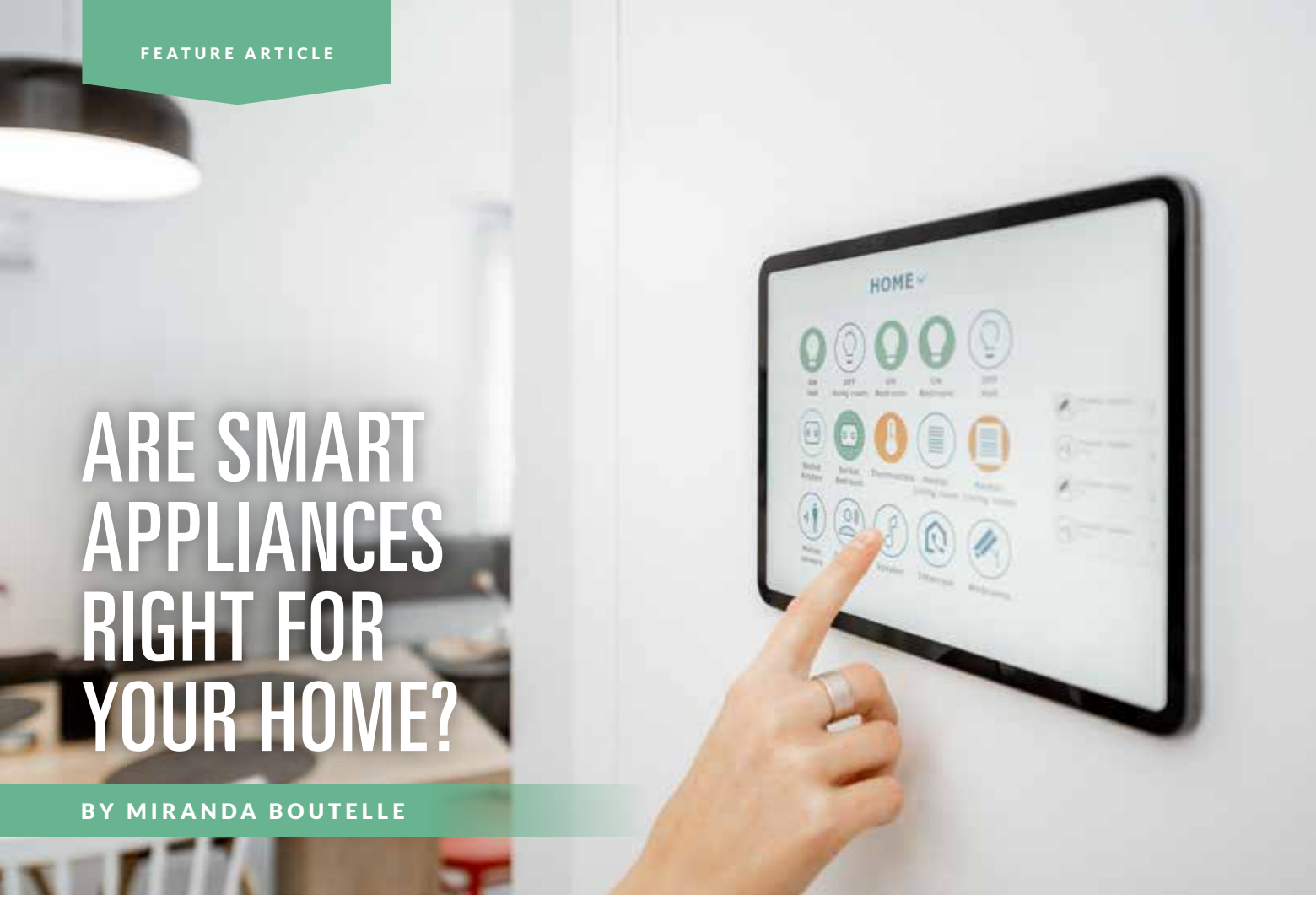
Your meter will cycle through several normal screens, including a real-time usage indicator (arrow), communication information used for our AMI system (such as "hops"), your cumulative kWh reading and, on some meters, a connect/disconnect status indicator.

Rebecca Schwartz is the communications clerk for Guthrie County REC.

SAFETY REMINDER

Electric meters and meter bases contain energized equipment. Please do not tamper with, remove or attempt to open your meter – doing so can cause serious injury or electrocution and is illegal. If you suspect a problem with your meter, contact Guthrie County REC, and we'll be glad to help.

If you have questions about your meter display or would like help understanding your usage, please contact us at 641-747-2206, Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.



ARE SMART APPLIANCES RIGHT FOR YOUR HOME?

BY MIRANDA BOUTELLE

Smart technology is quickly becoming part of everyday life, and home appliances are no exception. From thermostats to refrigerators, connected devices promise greater convenience, improved energy efficiency and more control at your fingertips. But are these features truly worth it for every household? Before making the switch, it's important to understand how smart appliances work and whether they align with your lifestyle.

What makes an appliance "smart"?

Let's start by defining what "smart" means. Smart appliances – such as refrigerators, washers, ovens, thermostats and water heaters – connect to the internet. Typically, through Wi-Fi or Bluetooth, these appliances can be controlled using your smartphone, tablet or voice-assistant device. They are designed to optimize energy use and add convenience. Some smart devices can even learn your habits over time.

Are smart appliances right for your home? The answer depends on your preferences and types of appliances you already have. The better question might be: Are smart appliances right for you? Do you like the newest tech and typically keep your phone within arm's reach? Do you enjoy the convenience of calling out commands to Alexa? Or do you prefer less technology or something in between? Personally, I'm somewhere in the middle.

Where smart appliances can save energy

Many smart appliances allow you to see how much energy each device consumes. That information can be helpful to better understand your energy habits and identify where energy may be going to waste.

Smart thermostats are a popular choice for managing energy use and reducing energy waste. Heating and cooling systems are typically a home's biggest sources of energy consumption. According to ENERGY STAR®, you can save an average of 8% on heating and cooling with a smart thermostat. Savings depend on your climate, the type of system you have and how you use it.

Most energy savings from a smart thermostat come from automating temperature adjustments while you are sleeping or away from home. If you are already good at manually adjusting your thermostat, you likely won't see big savings, but you might prefer the convenience of a programmable device you can control on an app.

Smart thermostats make it much easier to program your heating and cooling schedule. Some have geofencing features that automatically adjust settings based on how far your phone is from home.

Coming in with the second-highest energy user in most homes is the water heater. I like the smart controls on my heat pump water heater. Also called a hybrid water heater, it uses

heat pump technology to move heat instead of using energy to create heat. That makes it two to three times more efficient than a conventional electric resistance water heater. You can save even more energy with smart heat pump water heaters.

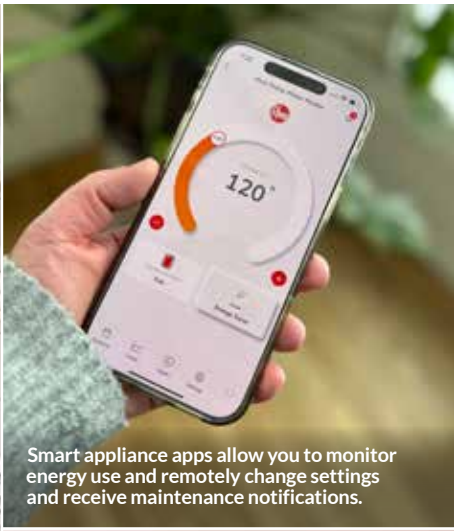
I can monitor energy use, change settings if we need more hot water and check how much hot water is available before I jump in the shower after my kids have used it. The app notifies me when it's time to clean the air filter on top of the unit. I can access that information without having to go down to the basement. I can even set it to vacation mode after I've left the house for a trip. Not all heat pump water heaters have smart technology, so be sure to check before buying.

Balancing convenience with potential drawbacks

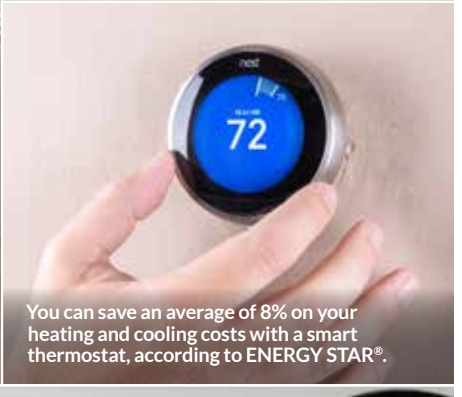
My refrigerator is a different story. I like the ability to monitor energy use, but it can be annoying to have my phone notify me that the door is open when I'm thousands of miles away at a work conference. There are certain features that can only be controlled through the app, which I find frustrating. The next thing I know, my husband texts me to make more ice while he's standing right next to it, and I'm on the other side of the country.

Monitoring energy use and making it easier to control your household devices are benefits of smart appliances. Before upgrading, do your research to understand how the features work and whether they benefit your lifestyle. Smart technology can help lower your energy use. But, in some cases, you're better off improving your energy habits with the appliances already in your home.

Miranda Boutelle writes on energy efficiency topics for the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association.



Smart appliance apps allow you to monitor energy use and remotely change settings and receive maintenance notifications.



You can save an average of 8% on your heating and cooling costs with a smart thermostat, according to ENERGY STAR®.

Before buying new appliances, such as a smart dryer, research how the features work to understand whether they are beneficial to your lifestyle and help lower energy use.

COOL THINGS YOU CAN DO WITH SMART APPLIANCES

- Get an alert if your refrigerator door is open.
- Look inside your refrigerator without opening the door and wasting energy each time a family member wants a snack.
- Schedule your laundry or dishwasher to operate when your electricity rates are lowest.
- Have your dryer adjust cycle time automatically with incorporated sensors to help you reduce your dryer's energy use. This feature ensures that your dryer will automatically shut off when clothes are dry.
- Turn your room air conditioner off remotely from your smartphone if you forget before you leave home.

SMASH BURGERS

- **1 cup and 3 tablespoons ketchup, divided**
- **2 tablespoons mayonnaise**
- **2 tablespoons dill relish**
- **1 tablespoon mustard**
- **1 tablespoon green onion, diced**
- **1½ teaspoons pepper, divided**
- **1¼ teaspoons salt, divided**
- **3 pounds ground beef**
- **3 tablespoons white onion, grated**
- **3 tablespoons Worcestershire sauce**
- **oil**
- **16 slices cheese**
- **8 buns**
- **toppings: onion, lettuce, tomato**

In a small bowl, stir together 1 cup ketchup, mayonnaise, dill relish, mustard, green onion, ½ teaspoon pepper and ¼ teaspoon salt. Set smash sauce aside. Combine ground beef, grated onion, Worcestershire sauce, 3 tablespoons ketchup, 1 teaspoon pepper and 1 teaspoon salt. Divide mixture into 16 balls. Brush skillet or griddle with oil. Place ground beef balls in skillet and smash with a piece of parchment paper to create burgers. Cook 2 minutes on high. Flip and top with one slice of cheese. Cook another 2 minutes, or until done and cheese is melted. Brush additional mayonnaise inside bun halves and toast for 2-3 minutes. Assemble burgers in order: bottom bun, generous amount of smash sauce, two burger patties, onion, lettuce leaf, tomato slice, more smash sauce and top bun. Burgers can also be grilled and onions for topping can be sautéed. *Yield: 8 sandwiches*

Lauren Zollinger • Rock Rapids
Lyon Rural Electric Cooperative

BARBECUED BURGERS (SLOPPY JOES)

- **10 pounds ground beef**
- **3 cups onion, finely chopped**
- **9 teaspoons salt, optional**
- **¾ teaspoon pepper**
- **3 cups tomato juice**
- **3 cups ketchup**
- **1 cup brown sugar**
- **¼ cup prepared mustard**
- **¼ cup vinegar**
- **1½ tablespoons Worcestershire sauce**
- **¾ cup rolled oats, to thicken**

Brown ground beef, then add remaining ingredients and simmer for 30 minutes. Or, to make ahead, mix and cook all ingredients except ground beef. Divide sauce into 10 small freezer bags and freeze. When needed, brown ground beef. Then, add one portion of sauce per one pound of ground beef and simmer for 30 minutes. The sauce is also great for tacos, taco bowls and similar meals. *Entire recipe serves 30*

Sonya Colvin • Ames
Consumers Energy

BBQ SHREDDED BEEF

- **2 pounds beef**
- **1½ cups BBQ sauce, warmed**
- **½ cup brown sugar**
- **1 tablespoon dried onion**

Cook beef and shred. Mix all ingredients together and serve. *Serves 6*

Rebecca Hancox • Plano
Chariton Valley Electric Cooperative, Inc.

BACON-WRAPPED HAMBURGERS

- ½ cup cheddar cheese, shredded
- 1 tablespoon Parmesan cheese, grated
- ½ small onion, chopped
- 1 egg
- 1 tablespoon ketchup
- ½ teaspoon salt
- ½ teaspoon pepper
- 1 pound ground beef
- 1 tablespoon Worcestershire sauce
- 6 slices bacon

In a bowl, combine all ingredients except bacon. Mix well, then shape into patties. Wrap each with a piece of bacon and secure with toothpicks. Grill patties until done. *Serves 6*

Tom DeVries • Maurice
North West Rural Electric Cooperative

GOOD OL' BURGER

- 1 egg, lightly beaten
- ¼ cup dry red wine or beef broth
- 1 tablespoon chili sauce
- ¼ teaspoon Italian seasoning
- ¼ teaspoon pepper
- 1 pound ground beef
- buns

In a large bowl, combine egg, wine or broth, chili sauce, seasoning and pepper. Add beef and mix lightly but thoroughly. Shape into four ½-inch thick patties. Cover and grill burgers over medium heat 5-7 minutes on each side, or until 160 degrees F. Grill buns cut side down over medium heat 30-60 seconds, or until toasted. Serve burgers on buns with toppings of your choice. *Yield: 4 servings*

Joel Hartter • Rock Rapids
Lyon Rural Electric Cooperative

STUFFED BURGERS

- 2 pounds hamburger
- 2 eggs
- ¼ cup rice
- 1 cup ketchup
- 1 cup zesty Italian dressing
- 1 cup Miracle Whip
- 1 tablespoon Worcestershire sauce
- mozzarella cheese
- button mushrooms, sliced

Mix hamburger, eggs and rice well. Form into large, thin patties and place in an air-tight container. Whisk together ketchup, dressing, Miracle Whip and Worcestershire sauce. Add mixture to container with patties and marinate overnight. Take one patty and top with 1 tablespoon mozzarella and mushroom slices. Top with another patty and thoroughly seal edges together. Brown each side of patties, then place in slow cooker. Cover with marinade sauce and simmer on low for 3-4 hours. The burgers can also be grilled if you prefer.

Mary Roberts • Victor
T.I.P. Rural Electric Cooperative

Visit www.ieclmagazine.com and search our online archive of hundreds of recipes in various categories.

CROWD CRUSHER BEEF BURGERS

- 10 pounds ground beef
- ½ teaspoon salt
- ½ teaspoon pepper
- 1 cup ketchup
- ½ cup mustard
- ½ cup brown sugar
- ½ cup dried onions, chopped
- 1 cup sweet pickle juice

Brown ground beef with salt and pepper. Once cooked thoroughly, add the remaining ingredients. Keep tasting until desired flavor is obtained. Serve immediately or place in slow cooker to keep warm. *Yield: 20 4-ounce sandwiches*

Walter Mason • Hampton
Franklin Rural Electric Cooperative

MOCK FILET MIGNON

- 1½ pounds ground beef
- 1 tablespoon Worcestershire sauce
- 2 tablespoons ketchup
- 1 egg
- 1 tablespoon dry onion flakes, minced
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1 cup cheddar cheese, shredded
- 1 small can mushroom bits and pieces
- bacon slices

Combine all ingredients except bacon and form into thick patties. Wrap each with a slice of bacon and secure with toothpicks. Broil or barbecue on a grill to desired doneness. *Serves 6*

Deb Peterson • Albia
Chariton Valley Electric Cooperative, Inc.

WANTED:

CHICKEN DINNER RECIPES

THE REWARD:

$25 BILL CREDIT FOR EVERY ONE WE PUBLISH!

Deadline is May 31
Winner, winner chicken dinner! Grilled, fried, breaded or in a casserole, we're looking for your favorite chicken recipes. Selected submission will appear in our September issue, just in time for Family Meals Month. Please include your name, address, telephone number, co-op name, recipe category and number of servings on all submissions.

EMAIL: recipes@ieclmagazine.com

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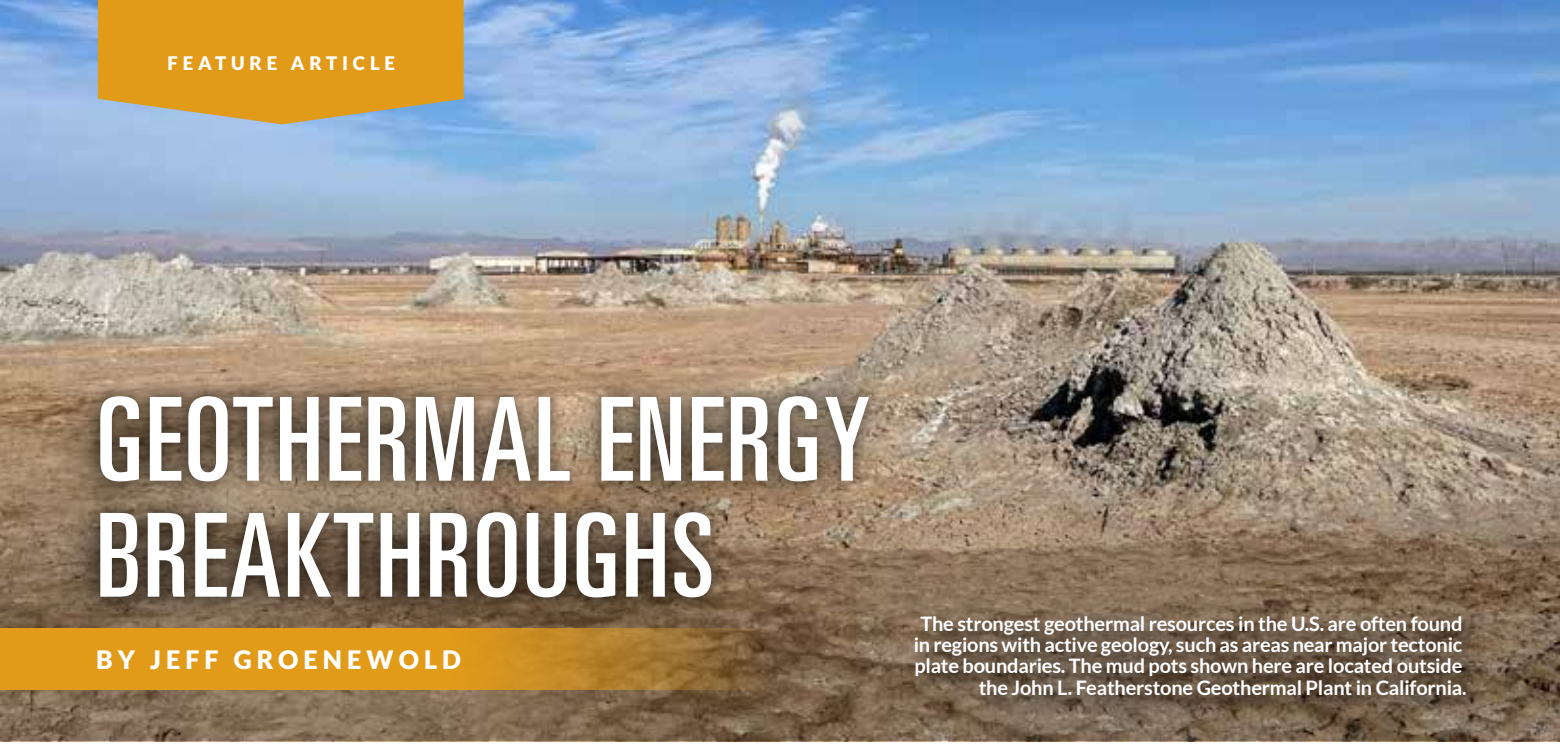


GEOTHERMAL ENERGY BREAKTHROUGHS

BY JEFF GROENEWOLD

The strongest geothermal resources in the U.S. are often found in regions with active geology, such as areas near major tectonic plate boundaries. The mud pots shown here are located outside the John L. Featherstone Geothermal Plant in California.

Electric cooperatives focus on delivering safe, reliable and affordable electricity to the communities they serve – and they do that by utilizing a variety of energy generation resources, ranging from natural gas, coal, hydropower, nuclear, solar and wind. One energy source that is often overlooked is geothermal energy. Geothermal power has been used for many years and continues to improve as new technologies are developed.

Geothermal energy is a renewable source of power that comes from heat inside the Earth. Geothermal resources are natural or man-made pockets of hot water found at varying temperatures and depths below the ground. Wells, which can be just a few feet deep to several miles deep, are used to bring extremely hot water and steam to the surface for a variety of applications, such as heating and cooling, direct use in industrial processes and electricity generation.

The strongest geothermal resources in the U.S. are often found in regions with active geology, such as areas near major tectonic plate boundaries. These resources are not limited to one location but are spread across several western states. One well-known example is The Geysers in Northern California, the largest geothermal power complex in the country. Facilities like this use injected water to create steam from underground heat, which spins turbines to generate reliable electricity for the power grid.

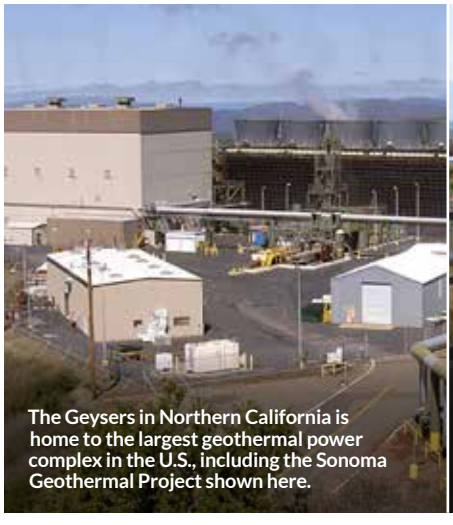
In 2023, geothermal generation accounted for approximately 17 billion kilowatt-hours, the equivalent of a year's worth of consumption for the city of Indianapolis.

The U.S. has about 3.9 gigawatts of geothermal power capacity. Most of this power is produced in California and Nevada, which together generate the majority of U.S. geothermal electricity. Smaller amounts of geothermal power are also produced in Alaska, Hawaii, Idaho, New Mexico, Oregon and Utah.

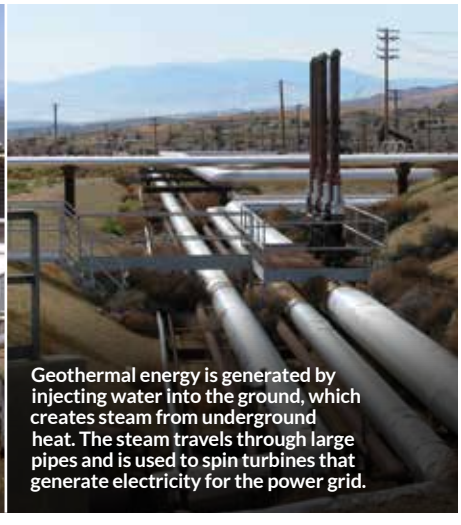
Technology advances and new projects

New ways of exploring geothermal energy, such as enhanced geothermal systems (EGS) and superhot rock technology, are helping developers access heat sources that were not possible to use before. These new methods are making geothermal energy available in more places across the country.

In early 2025, investment in geothermal energy grew quickly, reaching $1.7 billion. One example of this growth is Fervo Energy's Cape Station project in Utah. The project plans to produce 100 megawatts of power by the end of 2026 and increase to 500 megawatts by 2028. It already has approval to expand to up to 2 gigawatts. The project aims to produce electricity at a cost of $79 per megawatt hour, even without government subsidies.



The Geysers in Northern California is home to the largest geothermal power complex in the U.S., including the Sonoma Geothermal Project shown here.



Geothermal energy is generated by injecting water into the ground, which creates steam from underground heat. The steam travels through large pipes and is used to spin turbines that generate electricity for the power grid.

Geothermal has a high capacity factor, near 90%, making it a strong source of around-the-clock power. Electric co-ops in the western U.S. can benefit from existing geothermal plants, while new technologies like EGS and hybrid designs are helping expand geothermal energy across the country. Continued federal support for tax credits, permitting and research lowers the cost and risk of new projects.

Growing investment and project development

Federal policy has helped drive recent growth in geothermal energy. The Geothermal Tax Parity Act (HR 6873), introduced in late 2025, aims to put geothermal projects on equal footing with oil and gas by extending important tax benefits, including exploration credits. Other proposed bills before the House Natural Resources Committee focus on improving permitting, reducing exploration risk, clarifying land use and supporting lease sales.

Together, these efforts help create a stronger path for geothermal energy development in the U.S.

Jeff Groenewold writes on consumer and cooperative affairs for the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association.

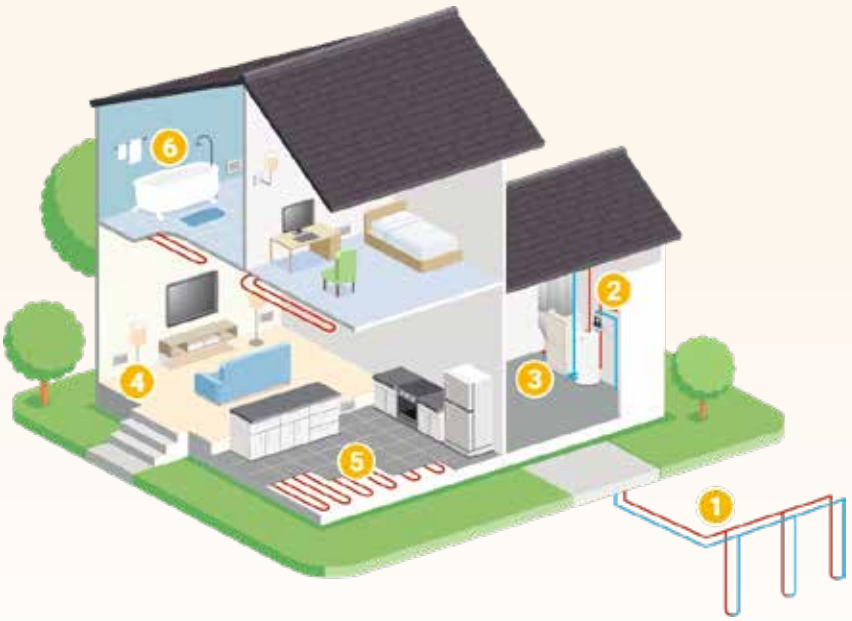
HOW GEOTHERMAL TECHNOLOGY WORKS IN HOMES

Beneath our feet, the Earth maintains a steady temperature year-round and geothermal systems use that stability to heat and cool homes efficiently. Also known as ground source heat pumps, these systems rely on a network of underground pipes, or "loops," that circulate a water-based solution to transfer heat between your home and the ground.

In the winter, the system pulls heat from the Earth and brings it indoors. In the summer, the process reverses: excess heat from your home is transferred into the cooler ground. Because the Earth's temperature remains relatively constant compared to outdoor air, geothermal systems operate far more efficiently than traditional heating and cooling systems.

Though the technology may sound cutting-edge, it's been used by electric cooperatives for decades.

One of the biggest advantages is efficiency. Geothermal systems can be up to 400% efficient and typically reduce heating and cooling costs by 40% to 70%, saving homeowners around $1,400 annually compared to older HVAC systems. While installation costs are higher – mainly due to the need for underground loop installation – many systems pay for themselves within five to seven years. Federal and state tax credits can also significantly offset upfront costs.



1 **Ground loop.** The Earth absorbs and stores almost 50% of the sun's solar energy. Because of this, the temperature 4 to 6 feet below ground is consistently between 45-70 degrees F. A geothermal system transfers heat from one place to another using a ground loop field buried in the yard. The loop field circulates a water-based solution through a series of pipes.

2 **Flow center.** The flow center resides on your unit or a wall near the geothermal system. It pumps the water-based solution in the ground loop to the house or building unit to disperse heating or cooling.

3 **Indoor heat pump.** The loop field transfers heat to the home through an indoor geothermal heat pump kept indoors through forced air and radiant heating and cooling.

4 **Forced-air heating and cooling.** In a forced-air system, an air-handler disperses the ground's heat to air in a home or building through ductwork and vents. In the cooling mode, the process is simply reversed.

5 **Radiant heating (optional).** Known as the most comfortable type of heating, radiant heating uses a series of pipes under a home or building's floor to circulate warm water, which heats the entire space evenly.

6 **Hot water.** A hot water assist, known as a desuperheater, allows the system to capture excess heat to assist a water heater. This cuts hot water costs 25-40%. Geothermal systems can also provide 100% of the hot water needed for a home.

Beyond savings, geothermal systems offer durability and low maintenance, making them a long-term investment in both comfort and sustainability.

Unlike solar or wind, geothermal energy is available 24/7, using stored thermal energy from the Earth regardless of weather conditions.

EMPLOYEE NEWS

Please join Guthrie County REC in welcoming Ellie Wingert as the newest cooperative team member!

As a billing clerk, Ellie's duties put her face-to-face with our member-consumers when they pay their bills, transfer their accounts, or request new connections or disconnections. And she may be the friendly voice you hear on the phone when you call the co-op office.

> **"I love working at the REC," she said. "The ladies in the office welcomed me with open arms and are always there to answer my million questions. I have never worked at a cooperative before, so I was really going in blind, and they have been so gracious to me. The linemen are great guys who truly care about taking care of our members."**

Ellie grew up near Ames and attended Ballard High School in Huxley. In 2014, she moved to Guthrie County to be with her now-husband Shane.

"It was quite an adjustment moving one hour away from my family to a place where there isn't a Target or fast-food restaurant within 10 minutes of my house," she said. "But now, I can't imagine myself not living in a small community."

Many people may recognize her from the Medicap Pharmacy in Panora, where she worked for seven years as a technician. She ultimately decided to leave that job to help her husband with his fencing and farming business.

Ellie and Shane have two girls and a baby boy due this month. She said she loves spending time with her family and playing outside or helping with farm chores. When she does have a moment of free time, she enjoys thrifting and decorating her home.

Welcome Ellie!

SAFETY IS SMART. PREVENTION IS POWER.

Knowing when to stop work is one of the most important safety decisions you can make. Whether you're tackling a small home project or working on a large construction site, continuing a job without proper training or the right tools can quickly turn a routine task into a serious accident.

May is National Electrical Safety Month, an opportunity to raise awareness about the hazards of working with or around electricity, whether you are trained or not.

In the U.S., workplace injuries and fatalities remain a significant concern. According to the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), there were 5,283 fatal work injuries in 2023, and millions more nonfatal injuries occur each year. Research consistently shows that inadequate training and improper equipment are major contributors to these incidents. In fact, safety training can reduce injuries by 30-50%, highlighting how dangerous it is to proceed without proper preparation.

Stop work before risk turns into harm

Electrical tasks are particularly unforgiving – one mistake due to lack of knowledge or improper tools can result in severe injury or death. The same principle applies across all types of work: when you are unsure, stopping is not a weakness – it is a critical safety action.

There are clear warning signs that it's time to stop. If you have not been trained on the equipment, do not understand the procedure or lack proper protective gear, you are at increased risk. OSHA frequently cites violations related to missing training, improper tool use and lack of protective equipment as issues that directly lead to preventable accidents.

When you don't feel comfortable proceeding, take practical steps. Pause the work immediately and assess the risks. Ask a supervisor, experienced coworker or qualified professional for guidance. Seek proper training before continuing, and ensure you have the correct tools and protective equipment. If necessary, refuse to perform the task until it can be done safely.

HOW CO-OPS ARE KEEPING THE GRID SECURE

BY MICHAEL LEITMAN

The electric grid is the backbone of modern life. It powers homes, businesses and institutions, including hospitals and other critical infrastructure. As the grid becomes more interconnected and digitized, it also faces growing threats ranging from cyberattacks to extreme weather events and wildfires.

Keeping the grid reliable and resilient is essential, and electric cooperatives are actively involved in national efforts to secure the electric grid.

Electric cooperatives, other utilities and grid operators follow standards set by organizations like the North American Electric Reliability Corporation (NERC), which mandate protections for critical infrastructure, including:

- **Cybersecurity measures:** Firewalls, encryption and multi-factor authentication help prevent unauthorized access to control systems. Regular software updates and vulnerability scans reduce the risk of exploitation.
- **Physical security:** Electric substations and control centers are protected with fencing, surveillance and restricted access. Physical breaches or attacks can be just as damaging as cyberattacks.
- **Redundancy and resilience:** Backup systems and redundant lines ensure power can be rerouted during outages caused by natural events or deliberate attacks. This minimizes disruption and speeds recovery.

Each of these standards creates layers of defense, making it harder for any single failure to compromise the entire grid.

Advancing grid resilience through technology

As threats evolve, so do the tools to combat them. New tools, including drones, remote sensors and advanced controls, allow cooperatives to be more effective in monitoring and responding to a variety of grid threats.

Electric co-ops are creating plans and conducting training to practice their responses to cyber and physical attacks and natural hazards.

New tools and technologies allow cooperatives to be more effective in monitoring and responding to a variety of grid threats.

Automated sensors and controls allow real-time visibility across the grid and enable rapid response to emergency conditions, either by a human operator or automated settings. AI can be a powerful technology to enhance these other tools, especially in sifting through large amounts of data or imagery to detect irregularities or patterns. But to be effective, AI tools must be well designed, properly trained and incorporated into cybersecurity protections.

Electric co-ops are also making investments to harden their local systems against the growing threat of wildfires, extreme weather events and other natural hazards. These investments include identifying vulnerable parts of the grid, replacing wooden poles with metal or cement poles, burying lines underground or adding enhanced technologies that allow greater visibility and control to anticipate and respond to emergency conditions.

Planning for the unexpected is critical

Utilities and government agencies conduct large-scale exercises to test their readiness for emergencies. One example is GridEx, a biennial event organized by NERC that simulates cyber and physical attacks on the electric grid. Thousands of participants, from utilities to law enforcement, work together to identify weaknesses and improve coordination.

These drills serve two purposes. They expose vulnerabilities before real crises occur, and they build relationships among key stakeholders. In an actual emergency, rapid communication and collaboration can make the difference between a minor disruption and a widespread outage.

Beyond planning exercises like GridEx, electric co-ops also create plans and conduct training to practice their responses to cyber and physical attacks and natural hazards. For example, as wildfires have become more intense and more common over a larger portion of the U.S., many co-ops are adopting wildfire mitigation plans in conjunction with grid hardening efforts.

So, why does all this matter? A secure electric grid isn't just about keeping the lights on; it's about protecting national security, public health and economic stability in the co-op communities we serve.

By combining robust industry standards, rigorous training and cutting-edge technology, electric co-ops are helping to build a grid that is not only reliable but resilient today and in the future.

Michael Leitman writes on consumer and cooperative affairs for the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association.

HOME SAFE HOME: SPRING INTO ELECTRICAL SAFETY

BY ANN FOSTER THELEN

Spring is a season of fresh starts. As the weather warms across Iowa, "For Sale" signs pop up, moving trucks roll through neighborhoods and many families begin a new chapter in a new home. It's also a time when home projects and outdoor activities ramp up – making it the perfect moment to think about safety.

That timing lines up with two important reminders: May is National Electrical Safety Month and June is National Homeownership Month. Together, they offer a simple but powerful message for Iowa's electric cooperative member-consumers: whether you're settling into a new house or simply refreshing your current one, taking a few minutes to check your home's electrical safety can protect your family, your property and your peace of mind.

Get to know your electrical panel

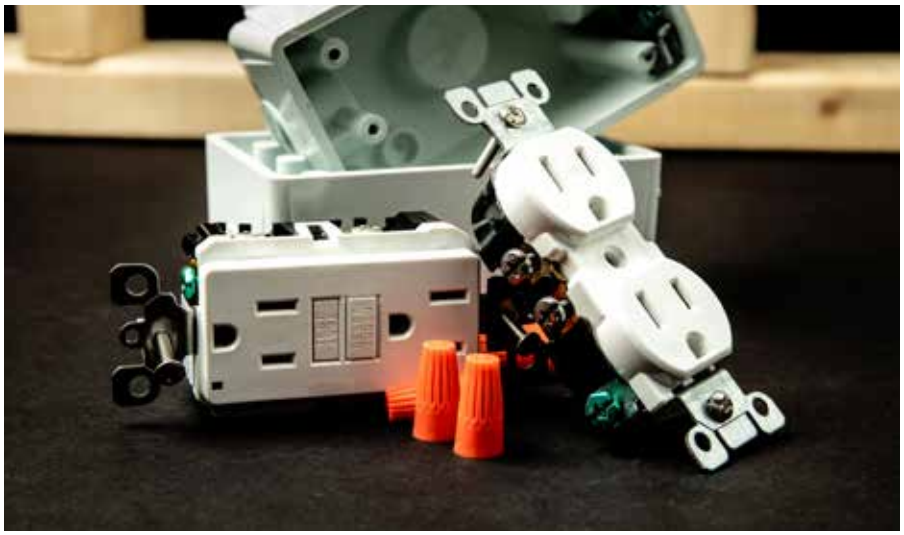
Knowing your breaker box means understanding its parts, like the main breaker for the whole house, individual switches for circuit breakers and their functions.

- Familiarize yourself with your electrical panel and label each breaker and panel by appliance or room.
- Test how to reset a tripped breaker.
- Find the main shut-off switch in case of an emergency.

Avoid electrical hazards

Identifying potential hazards can ensure your family's safety, prevent fires and reduce costly repairs.

- Have only one heat-producing appliance, such as a coffee maker, microwave or space heater, plugged into an outlet at a time.



- Major appliances (refrigerators, dryers, washers, stoves) should be plugged directly into a wall receptacle outlet. Extensions cords and outlet strips should not be used.
- Inspect cords for signs of fraying or damage and replace or repair them immediately.
- Only use extension cords temporarily. Don't run cords under rugs, carpets, doorways or windows. Have a qualified electrician add more outlets if needed.
- Use surge protectors to safeguard devices such as computers, televisions and appliances from sudden power spikes.
- Always keep electrical devices away from water sources such as sinks, tubs and pools.
- Reduce risk of shock by using ground fault circuit interrupters (GFCIs) around water sources such as kitchens, bathrooms, garages, basements and outdoors.
- Use outlet covers to prevent children (and pets) from inserting objects into unused outlets.
- Use light bulbs with the correct wattage – lamps and fixtures have a sticker to indicate the maximum wattage.
- Have a working smoke and carbon monoxide detector on every floor of your home and ensure there are units installed near your sleeping area.
- Keep outdoor ladders away from overhead power lines, including the electrical service into your home.

Call a professional if you notice these signs of an electrical problem

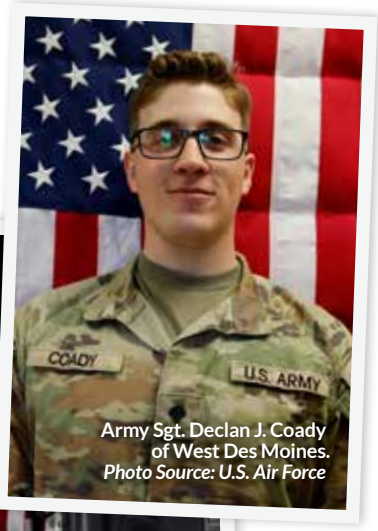
- Frequently blown fuses, tripped circuit breakers and unexplained power outages.
- A tingling feeling when touching an appliance.
- Discolored or warm outlets or switch plates.
- A burning or rubbery smell, or a buzzing or sizzling sound.
- Flickering or dimming lights.
- Sparks from an outlet.

As you enjoy Iowa's warm weather, always keep electrical safety on your home checklist. Pair these habits with energy-saving steps, and you'll reduce risk while lowering your utility bill. The little choices you make every day add up to a safer, more efficient household.

Ann Foster Thelen is the editor of Iowa Electric Cooperative Living magazine.

IT'S A GOOD THING THAT IT HURTS

BY DARCY DOUGHERTY MAULSBY



Army Sgt. Declan J. Coady of West Des Moines. *Photo Source: U.S. Air Force*

A U.S. Army carry team transfers the remains of Army Sgt. Declan J. Coady of West Des Moines, March 7, 2026, at Dover Air Force Base, Delaware. Sgt. Coady was assigned to the 103rd Sustainment Command, Des Moines, Iowa. *Photo Source: U.S. Air Force, Jason Minto*

His family described him as the calm in a storm. He had an endless curiosity about the world. He made the most of every opportunity to learn a new skill.

He was also good to his family's cat, Autumn.

Such simple details about Sgt. Declan Coady, 20, and yet they resonate with me, a cat lover with an insatiable curiosity.

I never knew Sgt. Coady, but I heard a lot about him after the West Des Moines native was killed in a March 1 airstrike in Kuwait. As soon as I heard the name Coady, my thoughts turned to my friend Becky Coady, whom I met in our 2017-2018 Leadership Iowa class.

Becky and her family are a military family. I hoped this loss wasn't someone they knew. But Sgt. Coady was a relative. My heart broke.

Sgt. Coady enlisted in the Army Reserve in 2023. He received the Army Service Ribbon, National Defense Service Ribbon and the Overseas Service Ribbon. He served his country with honor, courage and dedication, embodying the best of what it means to wear the uniform.

He died during in early-morning U.S. and Israeli strikes on Iran. He and fellow Army reservists, including Maj. Jeffrey O'Brien of Indianola, were killed when a drone struck a port in Kuwait. These men and women were supporting Operation Epic Fury, a mission focused on destroying Iran's missile capabilities.

About a week after the deadly drone strike, family and friends gathered at Drake University to remember Sgt. Coady. "It's a good thing that it hurts," said Marty Martin, Drake's president, who is also a U.S. Air Force veteran and Air Force Reserve veteran. "Whether we knew Declan as a friend, as a member of our family, as a fellow student or one of our students, we respected him and held him in esteem. And losing him hurts."

Honoring service and sacrifice

Too often in our hectic, fast-paced world, it's easy for losses like this to make news headlines and then quickly fade away. It's different, though, for the families, friends and communities closest to those who died.

Those memories can last a lifetime – and beyond. I'm reminded of this each Memorial Day when my family and I place flowers on the graves of our ancestors, including those who served in the U.S. Army more than a century ago.

Originally called Decoration Day, Memorial Day was first widely observed on May 30, 1868, to commemorate the sacrifices of Civil War soldiers. I'm grateful this tradition lives on.

Protecting our freedom

Sacrifice is almost a foreign concept in our world today. Yet it's ingrained in our service members like Sgt. Coady and their families. Some pay the ultimate price.

I'm thankful we still have people who are willing to serve and protect our freedom, including soldiers like Sgt. Coady. Perhaps nothing reflects this spirit better than the Soldier's Creed from the U.S. Army.

SOLDIER'S CREED

I am an American soldier.

I am a warrior and a member of a team.

I serve the people of the United States and live the Army values.

I will always place the mission first.

I will never accept defeat.

I will never quit.

I will never leave a fallen comrade.

I am disciplined, physically and mentally tough, trained and proficient in my warrior tasks and drills.

I always maintain my arms, my equipment and myself.

I am an expert, and I am a professional.

I stand ready to deploy, engage, and destroy, the enemies of the United States of America in close combat.

I am a guardian of freedom and the American way of life.

I am an American soldier.

Darcy Dougherty Maulsby lives near her family's Century Farm northwest of Lake City. Visit her at www.darcymaulsby.com.

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