



# Capital Electric

COOPERATIVE

NOVEMBER 2022

In September, North Dakota educators participated in a poverty simulation exercise to gain better understanding of the challenges experienced by low-income families. Read more in this month's feature story.



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*North Dakota educators discuss challenges faced by their assigned family units during a poverty simulation exercise.*

## IN THEIR SHOES: **Poverty simulation highlights difficult reality faced by low-income families**

BY KRISTA RAUSCH

According to U.S. Census data, nearly 38 million Americans live in poverty. Every day, these families struggle to put food on the table and keep a roof over their heads, and they experience a wave of emotions as they try to cope, including depression, frustration and fear. In September, North Dakota educators stepped into their shoes to help bridge the gap between misconception and understanding.

More than 80 teachers from across the state participated in a poverty simulation exercise, which aimed to promote poverty awareness, increase understanding, transform perspectives and inspire local change. Facilitated by the Central Regional Education Association (CREA), the exercise was part of the North Dakota Association of

Lifelong Learners (NDALL) Fall Conference.

Throughout the two-hour immersive exercise, participants experienced what it would be like to live one month in poverty. Divided into one of 15 family units, each person was assigned a role and given a budget, identification cards, cash and other assets. Participants were expected to find or keep a job, purchase food, pay bills, receive medical care and care for their children. Each 15-minute segment, which represented a week, presented different dilemmas.

“They all have different scenarios, and they all face different challenges,” says Community Coordinator Anne Williamson, CREA. “It could be a single parent household or an elderly person who is living alone and trying to



North Dakota educators review information during a poverty simulation exercise. Participants were divided into family units and assigned individual roles.

navigate the situation by themselves. Maybe there is an unexpected illness or a teen pregnancy. Maybe one of the parents becomes incarcerated. There are many, many real-life scenarios these folks must navigate through.”

Volunteers played important roles in the exercise, representing important community resources, rental agencies, schools, medical centers, banks, utility providers and more. Capital Electric Cooperative’s Dana Solem was one of those volunteers.

“My role in the exercise was the utility collector,” Solem explains. “So, they had to come to me to pay their phone, electricity and gas bills. If they couldn’t pay it, they faced collection fees or service disconnection.”

As a senior billing specialist, Solem was a natural for the part. Every day, she works with co-op members who are struggling to pay their bills and are at risk of disconnection. She says the exercise was a true reflection of reality.

“I hear these stories every day. You can hear their struggle. You can hear their defeat,” she says.

Exercise participants did everything they could to survive. They carpooled to work, stood in long lines at Social Services and took out quick cash loans. As one participant recalls, some even resorted to stealing.

“Someone tried to steal money out of my hands! That was a little scary. But, I held tight enough so they didn’t get any. They were a little surprised I held it that tightly. I didn’t realize I had that reflex!” says Sara Mitzel, adult education program manager and adult education lead, N.D. Department of Public Instruction.

Mitzel was assigned to a four-person family unit, which included a husband, a teenage daughter and a mother-in-law. As a family, their biggest challenges were managing a budget and navigating available resources.

“One week, we didn’t have money for groceries, and

we had to find a way to get what we could and save a little money for other things we need. At the end, we had to pay utilities and the mortgage. All of it came due, and we didn’t have enough money,” Mitzel says.

“My husband was never home. He was always working, and I was having to run around and figure things out. And, it was challenging to figure out transportation. One day, he carpooled to work with our neighbors, but that only worked one week, because the neighbor got cut to part time,” she says.

For many North Dakotans, scenarios like these aren’t an exercise, they’re real life.

“North Dakota is not immune to poverty. We are not exempt from it,” Williamson says. “About 10% of people living in North Dakota are living below the poverty line, and a lot of kids are facing food insecurity regardless of which community or which neighborhood they’re in.”

Mitzel says the exercise gave her empathy and compassion for those living in poverty.

“At the end of the exercise, a quote was shared from ‘Ted Lasso,’ and it really impacted me — ‘Be curious, not judgmental,’” Mitzel recalls. “This exercise was an emotional rollercoaster, and it helped me appreciate what these families are going through.”

For more information on CREA and the poverty simulation exercise, visit [www.creand.org](http://www.creand.org). ☎



Capital Electric Cooperative Senior Billing Representative **Dana Solem** plays the role of a utility collector during a poverty simulation exercise on Sept. 23. The exercise was part of the North Dakota Association of Lifelong Learners’ (NDALL) Fall Conference.



*S'mores, a cockapoo, gets all the love and attention in the Fitterer house, says Capital Electric Cooperative General Manager Paul Fitterer.*

# Keep pets and energy bills comfortable

BY PAUL FITTERER

I don't know about you, but I consider my four-legged companion part of the family. Our cockapoo, S'mores, gets all the love and attention at our house, and I can't imagine life without her. I know others feel this way, too. That's why during the winter months, we make sure our whole family, including S'mores, is cozy — without taking a big bite out of our budget.

This month, I'd like to share a few simple ways you can make your home more comfortable this winter, which can ultimately help you save on energy bills.

At the onset of the cold weather season, we replace the HVAC filter for better air quality and to help the unit operate more efficiently. You can also keep your home cozier by caulking and weatherstripping windows and

doors. If your home is particularly chilly, you can tape or affix heavy, clear plastic to the inside of your window frames to create an additional barrier against the cold. Ensure the plastic is tightly sealed to the frame to help reduce infiltration.

We know winter can be “ruff,” so we set our thermostat to 68 degrees, a “purr-fect” temperature for people and pets. This is especially important for smaller, short hair and senior dogs — not just for warmth, but for their general health. Puppies, kittens and older pets with arthritis or other ailments may have a harder time controlling their body heat and need the additional warmth when it’s chilly out.

Pets that sleep close to the floor can be subject to cold drafts that enter your home through windows and exterior doors. If your pet’s bed is near a window or door that feels



**Paul Fitterer**

drafty, tightly roll up a towel and place it near the bottom of the door or window to eliminate the draft. Cutting down on cold drafts helps everyone feel more comfortable during colder months.

If possible, elevate your pet’s bed so it’s not placed directly on a cold floor. An old chair or sofa cushion works well. If you don’t use a pet bed, take some old blankets and create a donut shape on the cushion so the dog can snuggle and nest within the blanket. You can do the same for cats, but on a smaller scale. Blankets enable pets to nestle into them, even when they aren’t tired, and provide a comfortable place for dogs and cats to curl up.

During the day, open your blinds and curtains to allow sunlight to warm your home. Close window coverings at night for an added layer of insulation.

At Capital Electric Cooperative, we want to help you save energy and money. Check out our website, [capitalelec.com](http://capitalelec.com), for additional energy-saving tips.

We can’t control the weather, but we can provide advice to help you save energy and keep your family and furry friends more comfortable during the winter season.

*Paul Fitterer is the general manager of Capital Electric Cooperative. ☺*

## Sheila Wald joins CEC’s billing department

BY WES ENGBRECHT



**Sheila Wald**

Capital Electric Cooperative is pleased to announce the addition of Sheila Wald to its billing department staff. Sheila brings a calm disposition to the department, one that is necessary to handle member issues and needs in an efficient manner.

Her positivity results in a

constant smile, which is an important addition to any office setting.

Most of Sheila’s work background was gained at Basin Electric Power Cooperative, which generates much of our members’ power. She spent ten years at Basin Electric, working in the property and right-of-way department for six years and completing her last years in the legal department. During that time, she worked on board administration and a wide variety of legal topics.

One of the aspects of her new job that Sheila enjoys is

member interaction.

“At Basin, I didn’t have an opportunity to work directly with the public, and I really enjoy that. While I’m still learning and growing here, I feel like it will be a great job moving forward,” she explains.

Sheila was a farm girl, growing up south of Napoleon. When asked about those years, she remembers, “It was a grain farm, but we also raised cattle and a wide variety of other animals. We were members of KEM Electric Cooperative, and my parents looked forward to attending their annual meeting each year.”

Sheila attended Bismarck State College, where she earned an associate degree as an administrative assistant. She then went on to earn her bachelor’s degree in business management from the University of Mary.

When she isn’t at work, Sheila loves to raise vegetables and flowers in her garden at home. In addition, she spends time on the water, either on a kayak or pontoon. She is an avid reader and enjoys yoga as well.

The cooperative is fortunate to add Sheila to our team, and we look forward to having her positive energy and productivity in the billing department. ☺

# Need Help with Heating Costs? LIHEAP can help.

The Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) helps eligible low-income households with home heating costs.

- Heating assistance
- Weatherization services (insulation, weather stripping, etc.)
- Furnace and chimney cleaning
- Furnace repair and replacement
- Emergency assistance

Applications are accepted from October 1 through May 31 for each heating season.

For help filling out and submitting the LIHEAP application, call 1-800-823-2417 ext: 140.



[www.communityoptionsnd.com](http://www.communityoptionsnd.com)

# AN ALL-EXPENSE-PAID TRIP TO WASHINGTON, D.C.

## ESSAY QUESTION:

*If chosen as a Youth Tour delegate, you will be traveling to Washington, D.C., to experience and learn about America's rich history. What moment in American history do you wish you had been a part of and what would you have contributed?*

## TOP 3 REASONS

1. All-expense-paid trip to Washington, D.C., compliments of Capital Electric Cooperative
2. A whole week to visit unforgettable historic monuments, museums and the U.S. Capitol
3. A learning experience you'll never forget

**JUNE 18 TO 23, 2023**



- To enter the essay-writing contest, you must be a sophomore or junior in high school.
- You and your parents or guardian must be served by Capital Electric Cooperative.
- If you have any questions, please contact Wes Engbrecht, Capital Electric, at 701-223-1513 during regular business hours.
- The deadline is Jan. 20, 2023. You can email entries to Wes Engbrecht at [wese@capitalelec.com](mailto:wese@capitalelec.com) or mail a hard copy to: Youth Tour Essay Contest, PO Box 730, Bismarck, ND 58502-0730.



CHECK OUT THE ESSAY CONTEST GUIDELINES AT  
**[ndyouthtour.com](http://ndyouthtour.com)**

# Board minute excerpts **SEPT. 19, 2022**

The Capital Electric Cooperative Board of Directors held its regular meeting on Monday, Sept. 19. All directors were present at that time. Also present, in person, were Manager Paul Fitterer, Business Manager Luke Steen, Operations Manager Rick Dressler, Engineering Services Manager Greg Owen, Energy Services Manager Josh Schaffner and Attorney Zachary Pelham of Pearce Durick, PLLC, who acted as recording secretary.

**Minutes and Agenda:** Board President Deon Vilhauer called the meeting to order. The agenda was approved as presented. After review, the minutes from the Aug. 26 board meeting were approved.

**Financial Review:** The financial review was approved as presented.

**Management Reports (Business Department, Operations Department, Engineering Services, Energy Services and Communications/IT):**

**Business Department Report:** Steen presented the August 2022 financial and statistical report to the board.

Total kilowatt-hour (kWh) sales for August were ahead of budget by 5.6%. Monthly electric revenue was ahead of budget by 3.9%.

Capital Electric's August load factor was ahead of budget by 4.3%.

The operating margin for August was -\$220,343, ahead of the budgeted -\$429,887. The total margin for August was -\$144,004, which was ahead of the budgeted -\$429,285.

The co-op began billing 20 new services in August, bringing active services to 21,815 versus 21,521 at this time last year, or a net increase of 294 accounts over the last 12 months.

Monthly power costs and the cash flow statement were reviewed.

Accounts receivable balances as of Sept. 16 were reviewed.

**Estate Retirements:** Payment for one estate retirement was authorized in the amount of \$133.87.

**Employee Retention Tax Credit:** Fitterer reported on the availability of the Employee Retention Tax Credit. He will work with a third-party to evaluate.

**Operations Report:** Dressler reviewed the written report from the operations department.

Crews have completed the Lincoln substation rebuild. They are working to change out meter pedestals at a trailer court and move materials to the new headquarters facility.

**Safety Report:** There were no lost time accidents in August.

Without objection, the Safety Report was approved.

**Engineering Services Report:** Owen reviewed the written report from the engineering services department.

There were 43 work orders completed in August.

Owen reported on ongoing and upcoming projects, including completion of connections at several local subdivisions, continued fiber optic cable replacement on the 43rd Avenue road construction project and a three-phase cable replacement south of Regan.

**Work Order Inventory Rural Utilities Service (RUS) Form 216:** Owen reviewed RUS Form 219 for inventory 506, which was approved.

**Property Update:** Owen reported on continued efforts to market the administrative building, the closing on the sale of cooperative property scheduled for Sept. 30, renewal of a real estate broker contract, and status and progress of modifications to the new facility.

**Energy Services:** Schaffner reviewed the Energy Services Report.

Nineteen service orders were completed in August.

Schaffner reported on replacement of a damaged sign at the Wing outpost, disassembly of the vehicle hoist that will be reassembled at the new facility, installation of a fuel tank at the new facility and continued efforts to move materials to the new facility.

**Communications and IT:** Fitterer reviewed topics of interest.

The Member Advisory Committee meeting will be held Oct. 5.

**Rate Discussion:** Fitterer reviewed external forces impacting rates and how management is working to develop rate structures to lessen the impact.

**2023-2026 Construction Work Plan:** Owen reviewed the proposed 2023-2026 construction work plan, which was approved.

**2023 Budget Draft:** Steen, Fitterer and Owen reviewed draft budgets for 2023 for revenue, power cost, general plant expenditures, construction and the new facility. No action was taken.

**Policies:** Steen reviewed proposed modifications to Policy IV-1 (Rate 29) – Demand TOU Rate. The modifications to the policy were adopted as presented.

Fitterer reviewed proposed Policy E-22 – Employee Use of Cooperative Equipment for Non-work Purposes. Fitterer also reviewed modifications to Policy No. IV-03 – Use, Sale and Disposal of Material and Other Cooperative Assets and Services, and Policy No. I-21 – Visitor Policy and Use of Cooperative Facilities for Non-work-related Purposes. Following discussion, the new policy and modified policies were adopted as presented.

Owen reviewed proposed modifications to Policy III-13 – Distributed Energy Resources. The modifications were adopted as presented.

Vilhauer reviewed proposed modifications to Policy No. I-17-Board of Director Meeting Attendance-Physical Presence. The policy modifications were adopted.

**Basin Electric Power Cooperative:** Fitterer reported on Basin Electric matters, including the co-op's positive financial outlook and information on Dakota Gasification Company.

**2023 Load Forecast:** Fitterer reviewed the 2023 load forecast prepared for Capital Electric by Basin Electric. The load forecast was approved.

**Central Power Electric Cooperative:** The Central Power board meeting is Sept. 20.

**Industry Update:** Fitterer reviewed materials related to power markets and general cooperative news.

**North Dakota Association of Rural Electric Cooperatives (NDAREC):** Fitterer reported on the Rural Electric Political Action Committee board meeting and the Quentin Burdick Center for Cooperatives.

Vilhauer reported on the Rural Electric and Telecommunications Development Center's work on an addiction rehabilitation center in Wolford and the Spirit Lake Food Distribution program on the Spirit Lake Indian Reservation.

**National Rural Electric Cooperatives Association (NRECA):** Fitterer reviewed the upcoming September regional meeting in Minneapolis.

**Adjournment:** There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned. ☺

## CAPITAL ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE

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Website: [www.capitalelec.com](http://www.capitalelec.com)

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