

# WATTS & VOLTS

The Official Publication of **IREA**

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## DIRECTOR NEWSLETTER

Greetings! I hope this summer finds you well. I have several updates I'd like to share with you regarding your electric cooperative.

### Proposed changes to Rates & Regulations

You may have seen in the June Watts & Volts notice of proposed changes to IREA's Rates & Regulations. This was done primarily to accommodate people who would like to opt out of receiving an upgraded meter for our Advanced Metering Infrastructure (AMI). Along with this are a few housekeeping modifications. These proposed changes will not increase overall electricity rates; they instead will adjust the charges for some field and other customer-requested service calls to accommodate the AMI system and make the application of monthly service charges consistent across the different residential rate structures. For the time-of-use residential rates this is principally a reduction of the monthly charges. For the residential demand rate it is a change to the monthly service charges associated with those rates to be consistent with the service charge of the other residential rates along with a reduction in energy charges to be cost-neutral.

If approved, the proposed changes also will allow customers who meet specific eligibility requirements to opt out of AMI. The proposed policy will require a customer to sign an AMI opt-out agreement. That customer would be required to pay an \$80 setup fee and a \$20-per-month meter-reading fee. Those fees are to recover some, but not all, of our costs to install different meters, set up alternative billing and read meters manually. If a customer chooses to opt out after an AMI meter has already been installed, there also would be a one-time charge to swap out the AMI meter with a non-AMI meter. That fee is \$20 if the meter change occurs during business hours, and \$65 if it occurs outside of normal business hours.

Those who do not opt out of having their meter upgraded will enjoy many benefits provided by the improved meters, which already serve nearly half of



MICHAEL KEMPE  
District 1



U.S. homes. Once the AMI is installed and implemented, you can expect convenient access to energy usage data, improved custom billing dates (within a three-day window) and quicker service restoration following outages. We also are exploring the possibility of additional cost-saving programs and pre-payment plans. With an AMI system, you can have a much better understanding of your energy usage to either adjust it or to select an optimal rate structure for your usage.

We already have installed more than 10,000 upgraded meters and expect installation to ramp up through the rest of the year, with the majority of meters upgraded in 2020. Customers will receive a mailed postcard two to six weeks ahead of planned installation of their new meters. On this card you will find details about the meter upgrade process, as well as contact info if you have questions. In the meantime, you can visit [www.IREA.coop/ami](http://www.IREA.coop/ami) to read more about AMI. There is no charge for the new meter or its installation, and IREA will fix at no charge problems with the meter socket discovered during installation.

### Outage mitigation

In mid-March, IREA's 5,000-square-mile service territory was hit by a record-setting "bomb cyclone" that was later declared the strongest storm in Colorado's recorded history. Hundreds of thousands of Coloradans experienced loss of power and other essential services. At their peak, these outages affected nearly 5,500 IREA customers, some of them for extended periods of time. Several of our neighboring utilities lost service to much larger numbers of customers. Two months later we experienced a late spring snowstorm that also wreaked havoc with unseasonable ice and fallen trees. The number of affected IREA customers was kept to a minimum. We believe the performance of our system during these storms shows our outage mitigation efforts are working.

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Our linemen and other field personnel deserve credit for working around the clock during and after the storms to make sure power was restored to every affected customer. They were aided by the improvements we continually make to our system, as well as our aggressive maintenance and vegetation management programs. We understand the frustration and worry our customers experience during outages and will always work to reduce the number and length of service interruptions.

### Free and upgraded payment options

We are working to improve your customer experience. To that end, we recently eliminated all fees associated with electronic payments. We previously passed some of these fees on to customers, but have negotiated with our payment processor to reduce costs and create more options for customers. Payments made via credit card, debit card and ACH are now free for residential accounts; commercial accounts now have free ACH payments.

In conjunction with the elimination of those fees, we have implemented an improved version of Speedpay, our electronic payment system. It offers quicker, more convenient payment via desktop, laptop and mobile devices and allows you to save multiple payment types to a digital wallet and access a searchable payment history. Speedpay can be accessed via the My Account feature on [www.IREA.coop](http://www.IREA.coop), but is also available through our automated voice service at (800) 332-9540.

### Summer safety

Many of our members are well into summer landscaping and other outdoor projects. We encourage everyone to make use of the free 811 utility locate service for any projects that require digging. Hitting an underground utility line can have severe consequences such as bodily injury and even death. Legal liability for fines and damages also can be imposed for damage to underground utility facilities if a locate is not requested. It is worth the minimal amount of time it takes to simply dial 811 before you dig. Please make the call at least three business days before you break ground on any size project.

Please maintain that mindfulness when it comes to above-ground activity, too. Be especially careful when working or playing near overhead lines, transformers and other equipment, and consult our vegetation guidelines, available at [www.IREA.coop/irea-your-property](http://www.IREA.coop/irea-your-property), before placing any

plants, trees, shrubs or other vegetation. If you spot any existing hazards related to our system, don't hesitate to call us at (800) 332-9540.

### Energy efficiency

Higher energy bills during summer months sometimes catch customers off-guard. If you haven't already seen and followed the energy efficiency tips we've shared in previous editions of Watts & Volts, please visit [www.IREA.coop/energy-efficiency-is-a-breeze](http://www.IREA.coop/energy-efficiency-is-a-breeze). If you have taken action using those tips but still see a spike in your monthly bill, consider scheduling a free energy audit. Our energy efficiency specialist will visit your home, identify possible efficiency issues and provide you recommendations for how to fix them. You can schedule your audit online via [www.IREA.coop/energy-audits](http://www.IREA.coop/energy-audits), where you also can find our recently updated energy use chart, which makes it easy to calculate how much energy your household appliances and other devices use each month.

### Education grants

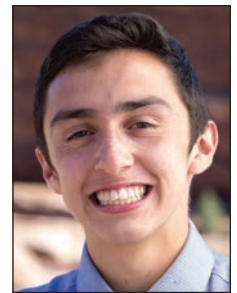
I would like to close this letter by congratulating the recipients of this year's IREA education grants. The names of three graduating high school seniors from District 1 were drawn randomly at last month's Board of Directors meeting:



**Corinne Campbell**  
High Country Christian  
Pepperdine University



**Rebecca Layman**  
Castle View High School  
University of Colorado-Denver



**Timothy Merkle**  
Rock Canyon High School  
Holy Cross College

Corinne, Rebecca and Timothy will each receive a \$2,000 grant to be used for higher education expenses. Next year's graduating seniors can expect the education grant application process to reopen in early 2020. Look to Watts & Volts and our social media channels – @IREAColorado on Twitter and IntermountainREA on Facebook – for updates on when applications will be available.

It is my pleasure to continue serving as your representative on the IREA Board of Directors. I hope the remainder of your summer is safe and enjoyable!