



# Community garden founder from Midland Power area wins Shine the Light

If you make your way to Eldora's Community Garden, you'll likely spot Nicole Low pulling weeds, harvesting vegetables or hosting a culinary event.

Low, an Eldora resident and registered nurse, isn't one to let a need go unnoticed. In 2019, she saw a need in her community and went to work.

"My friend and I started getting into more healthy eating, and started growing our own food in our backyards," she says. "We thought it would be more fun to do it with the community. As a nurse, I have a strong passion for public health. I know it's hard for people who struggle financially to pay for fruits and vegetables. I just thought, we live on some of the most fertile Iowa soil, and why not use that to grow food for our neighbors?"

Low's passion for eating healthy and food insecurity observations in her local community gave rise to the Eldora Community Garden, an ambitious project Low took head-on.

"This is our fourth full year," she said. "The first year had its challenges as we had to amend the soil and turn it from a hayfield into a garden, but it's going really great now."

Our motto here is take what you need and give what you can, very much solidarity with our community, rather than just charity."

The garden, located at 787 4th Street in Eldora, encompasses two-thirds of an



**Shine the Light winner**

**Above** | Nicole Low, winner, Shine the Light volunteer contest, is responsible for creating the Eldora Community Garden that produced more than 9,000 pounds of produce for the local food pantry in 2021. The Touchstone Energy Cooperatives of Iowa awarded the \$2000 prize to the Eldora Community Garden in Low's honor.

acre. It is predominately a donation garden, but also offers leased plots for community members. In 2021, the garden donated more than 9,000 pounds of produce to the local food pantry.

"I definitely couldn't do this alone," says Low. "It's been a true community effort. A lot of those volunteers have no personal, vested interest in the garden for their own food. It's just to help out the community and to help the mission of the garden."

Paul Lawler, a Midland Power Cooperative member, garden volunteer and one of Low's nominators, watched Nicole grow this dream into a reality. "I don't know where to start," he said. "She has been so involved with the Eldora community. She's taken the lead and said, 'OK, let's do this.' She doesn't give up until it's all done, and when it's all done, she will start all over again. She's just a fabulous person and very energetic. She's go, go, go."

Rebekah Cullinan, another one of Low's nominators, says if it weren't for the garden, she might not have moved to Eldora, from Des Moines for more remote living.

Cullinan explains, "Nicole's role in building this community garden came from a passion for healthier food, the mitigation of food poverty, a place where children could come, a place she could come. This is her happy place."

As for what the garden will do with its \$2,000 prize, Low says it's time to purchase their own lawnmower and a few additions to the garden.

"We're also hoping to get a fire pit out here for when we have community events and picnic meals. It would be fun to have a bonfire going, let the kids make some s'mores." ■

**To learn more about the Eldora Community Garden visit:**

[bit.ly/EldoraGarden](https://bit.ly/EldoraGarden)

# Corn Belt Power Cooperative battery project expected to be complete this month

Corn Belt Power's Hampton Substation may begin to look a little different in September.

After months of supply chain delays, three Tesla megapack battery storage systems are slated for installation by mid-September.

"Corn Belt Power electrical maintenance made good progress in the last month, installing equipment in the Hampton substation," said Jacob Olberding, vice president, power supply, Corn Belt Power. "Crews added new structures to extend the distribution bus and installed a recloser and step up transformer for the new battery connection. Corn Belt Power's communications personnel programmed field equipment and SCADA that will allow us to control the batteries from the control center."

In total, crews will install 1.425 megawatts of battery capacity in September. The batteries are capable of discharging energy for up to six hours.

"We hope to commission the project by September 16," Olberding said. "Of course, there's always the possibility of more delays. Following construction and commissioning we will conduct performance testing to ensure

the batteries meet performance guarantees."

Once testing is complete, the batteries will serve as another tool in Corn Belt Power's load management toolbox. The cooperative also hopes to learn more about the technology.

"We know that batteries are beginning to become more prevalent," said Olberding. "We want to make sure we're doing right by our members by learning more about this technology. At the same time, we'll be able to use the batteries as a load management resource, lowering monthly demand purchases, thus saving Corn Belt Power's member-cooperatives money." ■



## Installing new recloser

**Above** | Corn Belt Power's electrical maintenance and transmission crews install a new recloser at the Hampton Substation Aug. 17 in preparation for the co-op's new Tesla battery system.



## Preparing for battery

**Above** | Justin Hesnard, apprentice electrician, Corn Belt Power Cooperative, installs a new jumper at the Hampton Substation Aug. 17.

Concrete pads at the Hampton Substation await Tesla's battery delivery and installation by mid-September.



# News in brief

## Employees attend leadership training

Training, Information and Education is one of the seven cooperative principles. Several of Corn Belt Power's employees exercised that principle in August.

The Kossuth Palo Alto Development Corporation began hosting leadership trainings in August in Emmetsburg. The corporation held the first session titled, "Lead From Where You Are: You Don't Need a Title to Make a Positive Impact," on August 17.



"I thought it was a great training," said Courtney Christensen, administrative assistant, engineering and system operations, Corn Belt Power. "I thought the presenter's attitude was great. The breakout sessions were interactive and insightful. It gave me a new perspective on leadership and personal growth."

Three other sessions will be held this fall. The sessions will cover team building, communication skills, customer service, building better relationships and careers.

## Candidates visit Corn Belt Power

With election season on the horizon, Corn Belt Power and the Iowa Institute of Cooperatives jointly hosted a "Meet the Candidates" event at the cooperative's Humboldt headquarters.

Incumbent state representatives Mike Sexton and Phil Thompson along with governor candidate Rick Stewart and house candidate Charles Aldrich attended the event.

Those in attendance came from a wide variety of cooperative-industries, including credit unions, telephone and grain cooperatives. The group discussed issues ranging from broadband access to biofuels and eminent domain.

The event was the first of seven "Meet the Candidates" events the Iowa Institute of Cooperatives held in August. Other events were held in Sibley, Marion, New Hampton, Ottumwa, Creston and Des Moines.



**Above** | Incumbent state representatives Mike Sexton and Phil Thompson along with governor candidate Rick Stewart and house candidate Charles Aldrich attended the Iowa Institute of Cooperatives "Meet the Candidates" event inside Corn Belt Power's training room August 22.



## Supporting trail project

**Above** | Corn Belt Power Cooperative, Prairie Energy Cooperative, Basin Electric Power Cooperative and CoBank teamed up to donate \$4,000 to the Wright County Trail System project. Over the next 20-25 years, Wright County hopes to develop a trail system spanning more than 40 miles. Pictured from left at the check presentation are: Ryan Cornelius, vice president, corporate relations, Corn Belt Power; Darrel Carlyle, economic development director, Wright County; Todd Foss, manager business/community development and Darren Johnson, member services, fleet/work order clerk, Prairie Energy.

## Cooperation among cooperatives leads to big donation

**C**orn Belt Power, Prairie Energy and Basin Electric teamed to donate \$4,000 to a trail project in Wright County.

The Wright County Trail System will be an accessible trails network used by people of all ages and abilities for recreation and transportation. It will serve as an economic development tool for Wright County. The future system will offer connections between development areas and attractions within the county, provide opportunities for appreciation of nature, increase recreational amenities, encourage economic development and between connect Wright County to other communities throughout the region.

Eight trail corridors have been identified running across the County aimed at connecting the most users, encouraging economic growth, and attracting and retaining a modern workforce and younger families. The corridor spans over 40 miles that will be developed over the next 20 to 25 years.

Trails improve the quality of life for residents, promote healthy living and social interaction, allow for alternate forms of transportation, encourage economic growth and development, and attract and retain younger families.

The first section of trail will connect Clarion to Lake Cornelia. ■

Corn Belt Power Cooperative contributed a donation and employee volunteer time to help construct the new community-built Humboldt Wildcat Wonderland Aug. 16-19. The community finished playground construction just in time for the start of a new school year.



Kevin Bornhoft



Mike Devers  
Shawn Ruberg

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Jaylen Heinz



Karen Berte  
Ryan Cornelius



Ashly Zinnel



**August Touchstone Energy Volunteer Challenge winner | Cody Bartling**, foreman, Iowa Lakes Electric Cooperative, donated his \$100 prize drawing to People for Pets in Spencer.



Jim Mertz

### The power of human connections

Corn Belt Power's Jim Mertz, electrical maintenance foreman, and Kerri Mertz, executive assistant, demonstrate the Touchstone Energy value of commitment to community by volunteering for the Two Rivers Junior Pistol Club. The duo spends part of each year teaching a 10-week gun safety course to students 14 years of age and older. Following the course, students take part in a live action shoot (pictured to the left). Kerri says, "We love spending time with the students, teaching them gun safety and introducing them to a lifetime sport."



**Iowa co-ops meet thousands at the State Fair**



Above | Cooperative employees from across the state gave out more than 3,000 plastic hardhats and 4,000 suckers to youth in attendance at the Iowa State Fair August 11-21. The Touchstone Energy Cooperatives of Iowa sponsor the Bruce Rastetter 4-H Exhibits building each year. Kids also tried on a variety of line worker safety gear and took photos inside the photo booth.

## Corn Belt Power Cooperative Watts Watt

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