Since 1940

WISCONSIN ENERGY Cooperative NEWS

November 2026

OCONTO ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE

READY BEFORE THE STORM

HEROES ARE NEVER THAT FAR AWAY

THE NEXT GENERATION OF RENEWABLE ENERGY

PECAN RECIPES

MAKING MEMORIES IN THE KITCHEN WHILE SAVING ENERGY

There is something magical about the aromas of holiday cooking. The scent of fresh bread rising in the oven, a simmering pot of soup, or cinnamon-spiced treats filling the air instantly brings a sense of comfort and togetherness.

The kitchen is definitely one of the most-loved rooms in our homes. It is where we gather with family and friends to share favorite meals, stories, and traditions. For some, the holidays bring the nostalgia of preparing recipes that have been handed down through generations. For others, it is the excitement of starting new traditions or perhaps hosting Thanksgiving dinner for the very first time.

For me, the holidays are all about the joy of spending time with family and sharing the savory dishes and desserts that I make. Those simple moments remind us that the best holiday memories are often made in the kitchen.

As you prepare holiday meals this season, here are a few easy ways to keep energy costs in check without sacrificing any of the warmth and joy that make this time of year so special.

Sweet Savings Start with Dessert

One simple way to save energy is to skip the oven altogether and make a no-bake dessert. A creamy pumpkin cheesecake is a perfect holiday treat that saves energy while still delivering a delicious ending to any meal.

Use Smaller Appliances

Countertop appliances often use much less energy than a full-sized oven and can efficiently prepare many holiday favorites while using less electricity. I like to make my stuffing in a crock pot and cook my potatoes in the instant pot, then mash them and leave it on warm.

Put a Lid on It

When cooking on the stovetop, keep lids on pots and pans whenever possible. (488601) Covered cookware retains heat, cooks food faster, and reduces energy waste.

Match Pots to Burners

Using the right-sized pot on the appropriate burner helps maximize efficiency. A small saucepan on a large burner wastes energy, while properly matched cookware transfers heat more effectively.

Preheat Wisely

Not every recipe requires a fully preheated oven. Many casseroles and long-baking dishes can begin cooking as the oven heats up. If preheating is necessary, time it carefully because modern ovens generally reach temperature quickly.

Choose Glass or Ceramic Bakeware

Glass and ceramic baking dishes retain heat longer than metal pans, helping foods cook more efficiently. They also stay warm longer once they leave the oven, making them ideal for holiday meals.

Cook Multiple Dishes Together

If your oven has room, bake several dishes simultaneously using the convection setting, it circulates hot air directly around food for faster, more even cooking.

No Peeking

It may be tempting to check on that beautiful pie or pan of cookies, but every time the oven door opens, heat escapes. In fact, oven temperatures can drop significantly with each peek, forcing the appliance to work harder. Use the oven light and window instead.

No-Bake Pumpkin Cream Cheese Torte

Crust

- 2 cups graham cracker crumbs
- 1/3 cup sugar
- 7 tbsp melted butter

Mix ingredients and press into a 9x13-inch pan. Chill for 30 minutes.

Cream Cheese Layer

- 2 (8 oz.) packages cream cheese, softened
- 2/3 cup sugar
- 1 tsp vanilla
- 1 tsp lemon juice
- 2 cups sour cream
- 12 oz. Cool Whip, thawed

Beat cream cheese, sugar, vanilla, lemon juice, and sour cream until smooth. Mix in Cool Whip and spread over chilled crust.

Pumpkin Layer

- 29 oz. pumpkin puree
- 2 cups milk
- 2 (5.1 oz.) boxes instant vanilla pudding
- 2 tsp cinnamon
- 2 tsp pumpkin pie spice

Mix all ingredients until smooth and spread over cream cheese layer.

Top with 8 oz. thawed Cool Whip. Refrigerate at least 4 hours before serving.

By making a few small energy-smart choices, you can spend less on electricity and more on what truly matters, creating memories with the people you love. After all, the smell of cinnamon, the laughter of family, and the warmth of togetherness are the real ingredients that make the holidays unforgettable.

A STORY HELD QUIETLY FOR 50 YEARS

Who is a veteran? Under Title 38 of the U.S. Code, a veteran is defined as a person who served in the active military, naval, air, or space service and was discharged under conditions other than dishonorable. While the definition may be straightforward, every veteran carries a unique story, one shaped by service, sacrifice, and experiences that most of us can only imagine.

Some veterans are eager to share their memories, while others keep those experiences carefully tucked away, rarely speaking of their time in uniform.

Growing up, Veterans Day programs were a tradition at my school on Washington Island. Local veterans would gather to be recognized and, in many cases, share stories of their service. One memory that has stayed with me is pausing at 11:11 a.m., turning eastward, and observing two minutes of silence to honor the service and sacrifice of veterans throughout our nation's history. It was a simple gesture, but one that left a lasting impression about the importance of remembering those who served.

I'm grateful that many schools throughout our service territory continue that tradition today. These events create special opportunities for veterans, students, and community members to connect and reflect on the freedoms we enjoy because of their sacrifice.

Last year, I attended the Veterans Day program at Lena Public Schools, where Oconto Electric Cooperative member Paul Bednarik was the featured speaker. Until that day, he had never publicly shared his story. What followed was a powerful reminder that behind every veteran is a journey worth hearing.

"Today we celebrate Veterans Day, but I want to bring attention to the Vietnam War, a war that lasted 20 years and ended on April 30, 1975. So today we celebrate 50 years since the end of the Vietnam War," stated Paul Bednarik.

Bednarik is a Vietnam Veteran and served over 12 months in Vietnam with the 9th Infantry Division. He volunteered for the draft in 1966 and eight days later began his service at Fort Riley in Kansas.

For the first time, Vietnam veteran Paul Bednarik publicly shares his story of service, sacrifice, friendship, and loss with students and community members.

Upon arrival, the captain welcomed the recruits and explained that the 9th Infantry Division had been activated for the first time since World War II. The men in the room would be a part of that division and would get to know one another very well. One year later, they would be serving together in Vietnam.

After Bednarik finished basic training he started Advanced Individual Training, where he learned job-specific training for what he would be doing in Vietnam.

After being home for Christmas, he left Fort Riley by train and headed to Oakland, California, where he boarded the USS John Pope, a troop ship that would take them on a 21-day journey to Vietnam. They traveled with all of their gear including their M16 rifles.

"Living conditions were not good, the meals were bad, and we were packed in tight quarters. On the way over, two guys jumped overboard. People were getting stressed, and being so crowded together, we did not smell very good," said Bednarik.

The ship stopped in Okinawa, Japan to refuel and the next stop was Vietnam. Upon arrival, he boarded the back

of a truck for a three hour ride to his base camp called Bear Cat. The first thing he noticed was the smell of the country, an intense smell of human waste, stagnant water, wet jungle foliage and just how hot and humid it was. Bear Cat was a big base, so he had meals and barracks to sleep in until April when he knew he would be moving to the Mekong Delta.

Bednarik was a 50-caliber machine gunner on a recovery vehicle that followed the trucks that carried ammo, water, c rations and anything else needed. He was the last truck in the convoy. The trip took about 6 hours as they went through Saigon, he recalls how bad the roads were for the last 20 miles and that helicopter gun ships would go up and down the convoy to eliminate sniper fire on them.

When he arrived at Dong Tam, Bednarik could not believe how small the camp was. It was being built by pumping water and sand from the Mỹ Tho River, and bulldozers would move it around until it dried, and then level it off for the camp. There were no barracks to sleep in, and he sometimes slept under trucks. Water was sometimes scarce and bad tasting.

At first, there were no showers and no Post Exchange where soldiers could buy necessities. There were no flush toilets for 12 whole months. He didn't always have clean clothes, but when time allowed, he would clean his gear, dry his clothes and catch up on writing letters to home. Mail call wasn't a daily thing, but when you did get a letter from home, you were glad. If someone got a care package they shared it.

Stories like his remind us that behind every veteran is a journey of service, sacrifice, friendship, and loss.

There were a lot of small rivers in the Delta, and it wasn't unusual to see a Vietnamese woman washing clothes in the river while, a short distance away, another person collected water for cooking and drinking. Poverty was widespread, and it wasn't uncommon to see people searching through floating debris for anything they could use or eat.

"As my tour was coming to an end and some guys were going home it was hard to explain how hard it was to say farewell. There were tears, and we hugged one another goodbye. We were friends for two years and would have given our lives for each other, and very likely never see each other again," said Bednarik.

After an 18 hour flight, Bednarik landed in California. They had been told that there would be protesters when they left the plane. No one was there to welcome them home. Not what you would expect.

"When I joined the Army, there were four of us from Spruce that all went into service at the same time. We were buddies who played ball together, went fishing and spent time together. I was in Vietnam, Kenny Slatky was in Germany, Leroy Wessley served on an aircraft carrier near Vietnam, and Tony Podebradsky was stationed in Hawaii. We stayed in touch through letters, and two months before I came home, Tony was transferred to Vietnam. We were all looking forward to being together again later that year. Leroy and I were home for only eight days when we received word that Tony had been killed after stepping on a land mine. I've seen the results of that. Leroy and I put on our uniforms one last time to carry an American hero to his final resting place. I made up my mind then that I would stay involved in my community. Besides being a veteran, I would continue through other organizations. We are here today as American Citizens, because together, we say the Pledge of Allegiance, stand and respect the American flag during the National Anthem, and always respect each other. We show everyone that America is the greatest country on earth and that here in Lena, we will always be proud, free Americans."

Bednarik's story really hit home. It painted a small picture of what he endured during his time in Vietnam. Whether you were a first-grader attending the program or a community member listening from the audience, his words provided a deeper appreciation for the sacrifices veterans have made and the challenges many faced both during and after their service. I am grateful that Bednarik agreed to let me share his story with you. Stories like his remind us that behind every veteran is a journey of service, sacrifice, friendship, and loss. If you have the opportunity this Veterans Day, consider attending a local Veterans Day program. Take a moment to listen, learn, and show your appreciation to those who have served our country.

Fresh out of basic training, Paul Bednarik poses for a military photo before deploying overseas with the 9th Infantry Division.

Investing in Safety for Young Athletes

Community Change is pleased to award a $1,000 grant to Lena Youth Sports. The funding will help purchase new football helmets and protective padding, providing young athletes with updated equipment. The Community Change Board strongly supported the project, recognizing the importance of protecting students from head injuries and ensuring they have access to reliable protective gear while participating in sports.

Community Change grants are made possible through the generosity of Oconto Electric Cooperative members who round up their monthly electric bills. These small contributions add up to make a big difference in communities throughout OEC's service territory.

The deadline for December Community Change grant applications is November 20. Applications are available online at www.ocontoelectric.com or can be picked up in the cooperative's lobby.

TIPS TO AVOID ENERGY SCAMS

Stay alert for fraudulent utility calls. Scammers can spoof caller ID to make a phone call appear to come from your electric utility—even when it doesn't. They may threaten disconnection, demand immediate payment or ask for personal information. Don't rely on caller ID alone to verify a caller's identity. If you receive a suspicious call, hang up and contact your utility using the phone number printed on your bill or listed on the official website.

Source: FTC

HIDDEN ACCOUNT NUMBERS

Oconto Electric Cooperative hides two account numbers in the local pages of the *Wisconsin Energy Cooperative News* each month. (917002) If you spot your account number, call our office before you receive the next issue, and OEC will give you a $15 credit on your electric bill or a $25 credit if you have a load management receiver.

OCONTO ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE

Ryan Miller, CEO

Katie Jagiello, Communications and Marketing

7479 REA Road, P.O. Box 168, Oconto Falls, WI 54154
www.ocontoelectric.com
Hours of Operation: 7:30 a.m.–4:00 p.m.
Hours of Lobby: 9:00 a.m.– 3 p.m. Friday
Non-emergencies: 920-846-2816
Emergencies & outages: Toll FREE 800-472-8410
24 hours a day, 7 days a week