

The

# Enlightener



North Star  
Electric Cooperative, Inc.

Your Touchstone Energy® Partner



VOLUME 49 NUMBER 10

BAUDETTE, MINNESOTA

OCTOBER 2003

## North Star Electric sponsors child ID program

A missing child is a parent's worst nightmare. Cases of abducted and run-away children occur at an alarming rate every year. Each year, approximately 450,000 children run away, 350,000 children are abducted by a family member and 4,600 children are abducted by strangers.

That's more than 800,000 children missing each year – one child every 40 seconds.



Front row: Brynn Pirkl, Athena Pirkl and Laine Krause. Back row: general manager Dan Hoskins with superintendent Connie Nelson.

program the largest child identification effort ever conducted.

North Star is proud to be a sponsor of this program dedicated to providing parents and guardians with a tool they can use to help protect their children. The inkless fingerprint ID

Kit provides parents and guardians with a clean, convenient way to record their child's fingerprints and physical characteristics on a card they can keep at home.



General manager Dan Hoskins, Kailee Ogden, 5th grade, and Mr. Ditsch, middle school principal.

The National Child Identification Program, created in 1997

by the American Football Coaches Association (AFCA), has partnered with Touchstone Energy®, a national network of local electric cooperatives, to provide child ID Kits to communities. Since the program began, more than 10 million ID Kits have been distributed, making the National Child Identification Pro-



Front row: Maria Lewis, Mitch Frank and Dacotah Lehman. Back row: general manager Dan Hoskins and Indus School principal Sue Frank.



Front row: 1st grader's Josie Porter and Zach Dahlen. Back row: North Star Electric board member Bruce Polkinghorne, general manager Dan Hoskins and Littlefork/Big Falls superintendent Terry Erholtz.

Parents do not need to be fingerprint experts, and the entire fingerprinting process takes about five minutes. If ever needed, parents can immediately provide authorities with the identification card, which includes vital information about their missing child. Fingerprints can then be scanned into the National Crime Information Center database to help locate an abducted or run-away child.



North Star will be serving coffee and goodies at the Baudette and Littlefork offices during regular working hours from Monday, Oct. 27, to Wednesday, Nov. 5. Stop by – have a cup of coffee on us – let us answer any questions you might have.

## October is Co-op Month!

### Check out our DBS satellite systems

# The Enlightener

October 2003

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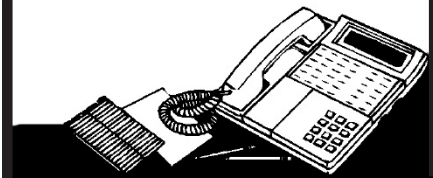
### If calling long distance, call toll-free

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## AFTER HOURS

DirecTV® Problems  
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**Electrical  
After-Hours  
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1-888-6OUTAGE  
(1-888-668-8243)  
634-2603**



## August 2003 Operating Report

Revenue . . . . .	\$ 571,470
Cost of Power . . . . .	\$ 263,364
Operation, Maintenance, Administration . . . . .	\$ 193,576
Depreciation, Interest . . . . .	\$ 123,445
Margin on Operations . . . . .	\$ (8,915)
Average use per Residential . . . . .	884
Total kWhs Sold . . . . .	6,317,015

## OFF-PEAK LOAN PROGRAM FOR AUTOMATIC BACKUP SYSTEMS

If your off-peak backup heating system is in need of repair or replacement, we may be able to help.

From 1977 to 2000, we had an average of 34 hours of load control per heating season. This past heating season, we had 407 hours. The years of 20 to 40 hours of control are gone. In the future, you can expect 400 hours or more per heating season.

You must have a reliable backup heating system.

**North Star Electric will lend up to \$2,500 for upgrading members' existing off-peak backup systems when the following terms and conditions are met:**

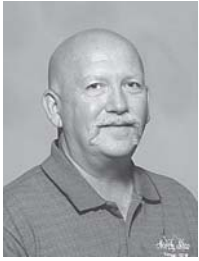
1. On approved credit
2. \$2,500 maximum
3. 6 percent interest
4. 1 to 3-year term
5. Payment will be added to existing electric bill (\$25 minimum per month)
6. \$35 filing fee
7. Must be an existing off-peak member
8. Automatic backup system only (no wood or manual systems)
9. Must furnish sales receipt from contractor or vendor
10. Job must be completed before loan is approved for payment by member services department
11. Outstanding loan balance at termination of service is due in full

## WE NEED YOUR METER READING!

Please read your meter on or as near the 25<sup>th</sup> of EACH month as possible. We must have your reading by the 5<sup>th</sup> of the next month to avoid an estimated bill. If a bill consecutively estimates two times, the crew will read the meter and a \$15 fee will be added to the account.

— Please Note —

*Bills that are past due will be charged a 1.5 percent late payment fee. Bills that are 30 days past due will also be charged a \$2 delinquent notice fee.*



# Natural gas shortage could cause heating costs to rise

By Dan Hoskins  
General Manager

*“Natural gas may ignite winter heating costs...”*

That’s the way the article in section B was headlined in the *USA Today* newspaper on Friday, June 27. Then there is an article on the Wolf Energy site Web page and they talk about a natural gas shortage. I also received, and have seen numerous articles in the mail, stating that the experts predict a natural gas shortage and high prices.

Now I suppose you are wondering why I am telling you all of this. Well this has a lot to do with our load control, and with this news load control could very well be at an all-time high again this year!

You see, as of the news article, natural gas storage supplies were still 29 percent below last year’s storage amounts and 19 percent below the five-year average. With over half of the homes in the United States heated by natural gas and with this same gas being the third largest source used to generate electricity, winter heating costs could rise.

Here’s a short story on how I understand this works. A lot of the new generating plants are fueled by natural gas, because it is clean and the emissions are where the experts want them and the plants are cheaper to

build. (673-24-036-02 Frank/Karren Lewanovich) The only thing is, they are driven by the gas market, which in turns, makes it either profitable to generate electricity or cheaper to buy schedule L power. So now that the transmission grid has been opened up to all by deregulation, it is cheaper for other power G&Ts to purchase rather than to produce, so this in turn creates a higher market for Schedule L.

## Load control

Of course we hope our rates won’t change this winter, but because of the high cost to generate electricity with natural gas, this in turn makes the Schedule L power more affordable for other G&Ts, so then Minnkota’s purchases during load control will be higher priced also. This will create more load control because it is not economical to purchase Schedule L at a much higher price than you sell it for. This makes sense, because if Minnkota would purchase electricity at a higher cost, we would have to then pass that higher cost onto you, our members.

Also please remember, although the weather is a driving factor in load control, it is not the only reason. There are other possibilities that could create load control, such as power plant

outages, transmission line problems, maintenance or others.

So this information is for you to read and think of a few of things – is my backup heating system adequate, do I have my fuel tanks full before the heating season gets here and am I ready for winter load control? This is not to alarm you, this is just another informational article concerning load control and a reminder to get all your ducks in a row concerning your heating systems.

## Check your heating system

Last year, load control went for over 400 hours. This year, there is a good chance we will surpass that number, so please take that extra time to check your heating system and make sure you are ready for Old Man Winter.

So if you have questions concerning load control and/or your heating system, please call our member service department, and they will be glad to answer your concerns. I still believe that our product, electricity, is the best product, the most economical and the cleanest product that people can use. I know my wife and I enjoyed our electric heat at our home in North Dakota, and the home we just purchased north of Baudette, well, it has electric heat also!

God Bless you and Stay Safe.

## Cold weather disconnects

Section 216B.097 was added to the Public Utilities Act effective Aug. 1, 1991. The law provides that cooperatives and municipal utilities cannot disconnect a residential consumer between Oct. 15 and April 15 if the disconnection affects the primary heating source, provided that certain conditions are met.

The conditions include that the member must declare, on forms provided by the cooperative, an inability

to pay, and the household income of the customer is less than 50 percent of the state median income. Another major change this winter is that any member who is receiving energy assistance is eligible. In addition, the customer’s account must be current for the billing period immediately prior to Oct. 15, or in the alternative, the customer has entered into and is reasonably current on a mutually acceptable payment schedule. Several

agencies provide financial assistance to qualifying households. We urge you to check with them for details on available programs.

To avoid electric disconnection, arrangements for bill payment need to be made before the line crew is sent to collect. Do not disregard your bill. It is your responsibility. If you have financial difficulties, please contact our office to discuss payment arrangements.



# Office notes

From Ann Ellis, Office Manager

**“The dictionary is the only place where success comes before work.” –Donald Kendall**

## WildBlue High-Speed Internet

Last month we asked you to respond to a survey asking if your cooperative should participate in the new Ka band satellite technology that will be capable of delivering high-speed Internet service via a 2-way satellite connection. The responses were clear, and the board has approved our involvement. Although the service will not be available for a year, I’m sure you’ll find it worth the wait! Here are the results....Oh, and the winner of the \$50 drawing was Patricia Johnston of International Falls.

Do you have a PC?	Yes - 720	No - 254	
What type of Internet access is available?	Dial up - 655	DSL - 149	
Would you be interested in high-speed Internet?	Yes - 521	No - 320	Maybe - 149
Should North Star offer this service?	Yes - 680	No - 74	Maybe - 63

At your service we remain . . .

## In the dark

### Northeast blackout spurs look at U.S. power grid

by Michael Nisbet,  
Senior Publications Editor,  
Minnkota Power Cooperative, Inc.

The northeastern section of the nation experienced a rare occurrence on Aug. 14. That was the day the lights went out and the biggest blackout ever to occur in North America affected an estimated 50 million people.

During a 10-second period that afternoon, the blackout shut down power plants, airports, mass transit systems, municipal water systems and countless other services in eight states and two Canadian provinces. A convenience that most Americans take for granted – reliable electric service – was interrupted.

### So, what caused the blackout?

At this time, the exact cause is being intensely investigated, but its source has been traced to the failure of several high-voltage transmission lines in Ohio. (373-08-014-02 Brian/Joyce Palm) The disturbance then cascaded over other transmission lines running through Michigan, into Canada and down through New York, causing additional lines to go out of service and knocking several major fossil fuel and nuclear power plants offline.

### Interconnected grid

There are three major power grids in the United States: Eastern, Western and Texas. The blackout had repercussions throughout the entire Eastern Interconnection, but only affected customers in the Northeast.

North Star Electric Cooperative is one of 11 distribution cooperatives that own Minnkota Power Cooperative, a regional power supplier headquartered in

Grand Forks, N.D. Minnkota is a member of the Mid-Continent Area Power Pool (MAPP), a voluntary association of more than 100 electric utilities in the Upper Midwest. MAPP members serve Minnesota, North Dakota, Nebraska, Manitoba and Saskatchewan, and portions of Wisconsin, Montana, Iowa and South Dakota.

“Even though the Minnkota system is located in eastern North Dakota and northwestern Minnesota, we are tied to all other utilities in the Eastern Interconnection via the high-voltage transmission system,” said David Loer, Minnkota president & CEO. “When the blackout occurred on the East Coast, a power system disturbance was noted by equipment in our transmission system for approximately five minutes.”

The good news, however, is that the power system disturbance did not cause any local outages or equipment failures, Loer emphasized.

### Investigation under way

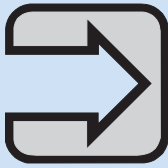
What can be done to prevent a similar event from occurring in the future? A joint U.S. and Canadian task force, created by the Bush administration, is currently seeking an answer to that question.

Industry experts tend to agree that the United States has sufficient electrical generating capacity. The real problem lies in the fact that electrical demand has jumped 30 percent in the past 10 years, yet the nation’s ability to transmit electricity to meet that demand has increased by only half as much.

Energy Secretary Spencer Abraham is leading an effort to investigate the blackout and recently told a U.S. House panel that it is too early to conclude what precisely caused the outage. Investigators say it is essential that they learn the precise time sequence of events for a correct analysis to occur.

Several organizations have produced timelines in connection with the unfolding events, but the data is not yet conclusive enough to provide an exact analysis. At best, the timelines are snapshots of what took place in

Continued on page 6 . .



## West End News

By Steve Ellis  
Baudette District Operations Supervisor

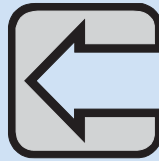
The crews have been busy this past month working on new services as we, along with everyone else, try to prepare for Old Man Winter. It has been a very busy summer with lots of accomplishments. The rebuild north of Williams went well with very few problems. The new upgraded feeder will serve our members in that area with better, more reliable service. We also replaced several areas that had old trouble-causing underground cable; this will save us time and money as well as provide more reliable service to those members affected. With fall and winter approaching, we hope to be doing some right-of-way clearing. The trees never seem to stop growing toward our lines.

The crews will also be out and about reading seasonal meters; this is done once a year, and also gives us a chance to look for problems and possible safety issues out in the field.

Until next time, stay safe!

## East End News

By Allan Baumgartner  
Littlefork District Operations Supervisor



Our crews have been building and upgrading services through much of September. We still will be pushing into late fall in order to get all of them completed. We also installed a new tie-line on Kabetogama Lake and changed out and converted a bad 3-phase corner pole by Rainy Lake.

Minnkota Power is just about finished building the new 14.4 bay at our International Falls substation. We still have some work to complete before we can use the new system to feed the growing electric load to Rainy Lake. I will be meeting with a contractor to look at installing new underground cable out to the Sturgeon River Road in the Big Falls area.

We had four planned outages by our crew for construction and maintenance work; we also had six others. The worst was a lightning strike up by Jackfish Island on Rainy Lake, which burned out two pad-mount transformers and an elbow terminator.

## Problems paying your electric bill?

*Energy assistance may be available!*

If you are receiving a low income or suffering from a temporary financial shortfall, the following agencies may be able to assist you with your electric bill. We urge you to contact them immediately to avoid disconnection if you feel you are eligible for aid.

- **Lake of the Woods County Community Services**  
P.O. Box G-0200  
Baudette, MN 56623  
Phone: 634-2642
- **Northwest Community Action Council**  
P.O. Box 67  
Badger, MN 56714-0067  
Phone: 1-800-568-5329
- **Koochiching County Community Services**  
1000 5th St.  
International Falls, MN 56649  
Phone: 283-7000
- **Kootasca Community Action, Inc.**  
2232 2nd Ave. E.  
P.O. Box 44  
International Falls, MN 56649  
Phone: 283-9491 or 1-800-559-9491
- **Kootasca Community Action, Inc.**  
1213 SE 2nd Ave.  
Grand Rapids, MN 55744-3984  
Phone: 1-800-422-0312
- **Arrowhead Economic Opportunity Agency**  
702 3rd Ave. S.  
Virginia, MN 55792-2797  
Phone: 1-800-662-5711

## CURRENT ELECTRICAL INSPECTORS

State law requires that every new electrical installation in any construction, remodeling, replacement or repair shall file a certificate for inspection with the State Board of Electricity and be inspected by a Minnesota electrical inspector.

■ **Koochiching and St. Louis counties:**  
**Lee Herseth**  
10078 Gappa Road  
Ray, MN 56669  
Phone: (218) 875-3028  
7:00 a.m. - 8:30 a.m. (Mon. thru Fri.)

■ **Roseau and Lake of the Woods counties:**  
**Laurence Otto**  
408 Washington Ave. West, Apt. 101  
Karlstad, MN 56732  
Phone: (218) 436-2588  
7:00 a.m. - 8:30 a.m. (Mon. thru Fri.)

## Gopher State One Call



It's the LAW

**CALL BEFORE YOU DIG**

Minnesota Statewide One Call  
Notification Center

**1-800-252-1166**

# Highlights of the board of directors meeting

September 3, 2003

These are the highlights from the board of directors meeting held on September 3, 2003. Detailed minutes are available at the Cooperative for member review. The next regular board meeting is tentatively set for November 5, 2003. If you wish to speak with the board or have an item that you would like to have placed on the agenda, please contact Manager Dan Hoskins at least one week in advance to be included on the agenda.

All directors were present. They acted upon usual, routine business. In addition they voted to approve candidates Brzoznowski and Hallan for the election at the Annual Meeting, to authorize execution of all loan documents to help finance the line construction projects included in the 2002-2005 work plan, and to participate in NRTC's WildBlue Ka band satellite Internet offering scheduled to launch in a year.

## Management and operations report

General Manager Hoskins reported on personnel issues, Operations Department activities, interruptible load rates, and Minnkota issues including load control, the wholesale rate and substation repair.

## Office report

Office Manager Ellis provided the financial report and commented further on annual meeting items, capital credit refund checks and bill credits, the FFB loan documents, interest rates, unclaimed capital credits, scholarships and the upcoming audit.

## Compliance and member services report

Manager of Member Services Haukaas reported on continued interest in the off-peak program, load control hours, summer billing demand measurements taken over 120 hours of control, DirecTV issues, and results thus far from the WildBlue satellite Internet survey.

## Board reports and other discussion

Minnkota Delegate Brzoznowski reported on the monthly Minnkota board meeting, NRTC's Tom Thorson addressed the board regarding the opportunity to participate in WildBlue, and legal services following Attorney Brink's retirement.

From page 4 ...

small areas of the total region hit by the blackout.

Once a reliable chronology of the blackout is created, task force investigators are confident they will be able to determine the cause. Their goal is to determine what needs to be done in the future to ensure that the nation's high-voltage electrical grid doesn't become unstable again.

## Reliable power supplier

As a wholesale power supplier, Minnkota provides electricity to North Star Electric and 10 other distribution cooperatives in eastern North Dakota and northwestern Minnesota. The Minnkota generation and transmission system, along with each member-owners' distribution system, form an integrated network that links the coal mines and power plants in central North Dakota to the meter at the co-op customer's home, farm or business.

"Minnkota's mission is to provide affordable and reliable electricity, capable of meeting the growing requirements of our member systems and their customers," said David Loer, Minnkota president & CEO.

To accomplish that important goal, Minnkota makes significant investments each year in its power generation and transmission system.

Although it is not practical for any electric utility to invest in a power system that is unaffected by time and nature, Minnkota seeks to strike the right balance between containing costs and providing dependable electric service. Power plant, transmission, substation and telecommunications projects are planned and carried out to maintain the various systems and keep them operating in a safe and efficient manner.

"A reliable supply of electricity is essential to modern living," Loer said. "Minnkota's engineering and operations personnel regularly perform evaluations of the equipment presently in use and plan for system improvements or replacements to provide high levels of reliability and service. And although we cannot guarantee that a similar blackout event will not happen here, the odds are that it will not."



Have you filled  
your tank  
yet?



## Delay reported for Duluth networks

We have just received word from DirecTV that they are expecting a slight delay in the launch of the satellite equipment that will allow them to “spot beam” the local Duluth networks to subscribers in Koochiching and St. Louis counties. They now have a target date of February 2004 to launch the satellite equipment rather than the December time frame they were initially anticipating. We will keep you posted as to any change, updates or information on this. We are all very anxious to receive the local channels and know that they will be well worth the wait. Your patience is greatly appreciated.

## Good news from NBC Officials!

NBC Officials recently stated that it will be the Channel #11 of Chisholm, Minn., that we receive for our local news and forecasts! The programs that air will be the same programs and events that Duluth airs (as channel #11 is a re-broadcast channel of Duluth). However, the news will be content from the Range area – not just Duluth. They will report the evening news, weather and local sports....all just a little bit closer to home! This was **GREAT** news to us! It will bring the local information “loop” even CLOSER to us!

## Equipment upgrades continue

The equipment upgrades continue to be the hot topic in the DBS department! We are getting numerous calls daily from customers wanting to upgrade their equipment for the upcoming Duluth networks. The contractors are still in the area, so if you haven't phoned in to get your equipment exchanged yet, you may want to do so as soon as possible. (654-25-007-02 Alice Dixon) Just to recap what's been previously mentioned regarding this; for those of you in Koochiching and St. Louis counties, the cost to exchange both your receiver and antenna is \$49.99 installed, the cost to exchange just your antenna is \$29.99. The monthly fees are expected to be the same at our LOW price of just \$1.00 per month, per network!

Keep in mind, once the local channels are up and running, the east and west coast feeds for that particular channel will no longer be available to you. For now, it will just be the NBC east/west coast feeds that will be dropped when NBC/KBJR of Duluth is aired. ABC and CBS will be at a later date that we do not have confirmation of yet.

In addition to receiving local news, weather and sports, the new upgraded receiver has the interactive weather channel! You can program in your city and state (or any other area that you may be interested in) and have access to the weather and forecast each time you enter channel 492!

Note: For those of you in Lake of the Woods and Roseau counties, Fargo will be your local network. We don't have a confirmation yet of the date it will be made available to you, but do expect that it's in the works. SO, STAY TUNED!

## Pay-per-view Tuesday's Feature \$2.99 Movies In October!

Every Tuesday during the month of October, DirecTV will be offering PPV movies for

**just \$2.99!**

From 6 a.m. to 5:59 a.m. to any subscriber with the impulse PPV option.

## Total Choice Plus Free Preview

DIRECTV will offer a free preview of the Total Choice Plus programming package to all customers that subscribe to the Total Choice package (or larger) from Nov. 7- 10.

The free preview is not available to customers subscribing to packages less than Total Choice.

## Freeview events for November

Tune to DIRECTV channel #103 and enjoy Prince Live in Las Vegas, David Bowie Live in London and Dave Gahan Live in Paris, exclusive DIRECTV® FREEVIEW® Events, premiering Oct. 31, and airing every weekend throughout November. We are proud to present these concerts to you – at no additional charge – as our way of saying, “Thanks for allowing us to serve you!”

Tune into channels 200, 201 or 500 to get all the latest updates about equipment, DirecTV movies, pay-per-view events and more!

## BLOCKBUSTER TICKET

only on DIRECTV

Movies ONLY \$3.99 when you order by remote!

## Equipment problems?

If you are having problems with your DirecTV system, please give us a call. We are here to help you.

If your existing system quits working properly, we have an exchange program where we will exchange your unit with one of ours at little or no cost to you. Please call one of our offices for more details.

## HBO/Cinemax Free Preview

DIRECTV will offer a free preview of the HBO and Cinemax premium channels to all residential subscribers Nov. 14-17.

During the preview subscribers will be able to view all 12 HBO and Cinemax premium movie channels at no additional cost.

The free preview begins at 6 a.m. eastern time, Friday and concludes at 6 a.m. eastern time Monday.

# RCA Satellite System & Phase 3 Antenna

(Capable of 4 receivers & local programming – when available)

**Installed for only \$49.99**

(Save over \$350 from our regular price.)

<u>ADD UP YOUR SAVINGS:</u>	<u>VALUE</u>	<u>SALE</u>
**RCA System-Antenna	\$259.00	\$ 49.99
Basic Installation	95.00	FREE
Surge Protector	20.00	FREE
1 Month Total Choice Plus	37.99	FREE
	<u>\$411.99</u>	<u>\$ 49.99</u>

- Warranty & damaged equipment exchange program is available to all subscribers.
  - \*\*1-year commitment to Total Choice or larger programming package.
  - Must be a new DirecTV account & purchase programming from North Star Electric.
  - Must reside in USA & North Star Electric's DBS sales territory.
  - Activation fees are charged per unit - \$10 NSEC members & \$20 non-members.
  - All sports channels, pay-per-view & additional receivers require a telephone connection.
  - \*\*1-year commitment to Total Choice or higher programming package required.
- If you downgrade or terminate programming during the 1-year commitment, \$100 will be charged to you.

**ADDITIONAL RECEIVERS ONLY \$139**

(Free basic installation & programming is only \$1.95 a month)

## North Star's attorney retires

### 25 year employee Adlai Brink retires

Adlai (Bill) Brink retired on October 1 after 25 years as North Star's attorney. Bill is a lifelong resident of the Baudette area. After completing high school in

Baudette, Bill enlisted in the U.S. Marine Corp. and served his country from 1956 to 1958. He then attended college at the University of North Dakota in Grand Forks, and after receiving his

law degree, worked for a law firm at Hallock, Minn. He opened his own law firm in Baudette in 1972.

Bill and his wife, Ardis, live in Baudette and have one son, Ad, who is also an attorney and resides in Minneapolis.

Bill's hobbies include hunting and fishing. Asked what he plans to do in retirement, Bill replied, "I'm retired....no plans!"

North Star wishes Bill the very best in his retirement. Good luck in the future, Bill, but most of all, thank you for your 25 years of dedicated service.

*North Star  
thanks Bill for 25  
years of dedicated  
service!*

## Snowbirds on the monthly billing

### Contact us before heading out for the winter

Each year we receive inquiries concerning what should be done if you leave your home or close your resort for the winter. Whether you leave for a short vacation or for the entire winter, please notify me at the Baudette office. Call Pat Olson at 634-2202 or toll-free (888) 634-2202.

If you are on the monthly billing, the most important thing to remember is to read your meters before you leave and report those readings to me. I will use those readings to figure your charges up to date and then, depending on what you plan to leave running while you're gone, I will set up an estimate. It is also helpful to know the estimated time you plan to be gone and a winter address, if possible.

If the estimated bill is not totally accurate, any differences will be adjusted on the first billing after you return home and report the actual readings to me.

You may choose to pay your bills monthly while you are away, but then you could forget to make a payment. Your account will pick up penalties and run the risk of possible disconnection. Most members find it more convenient to take care of their bills in advance.