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January 2026 NEWS

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PICKING WINNERS AND SOLAR LOSERS

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SHEET PAN RECIPES



A GUIDE TO LOAD MANAGEMENT

by Craig Buros, CEO & General Manager

Across Vernon Electric Cooperative's service territory, reliability and affordability remain central to our mission. As energy use patterns shift and the demands on the grid become more complex, one of the most effective tools for maintaining dependable service and stable rates is electricity load management. This approach helps balance when and how electricity is used, therefore reducing strain on the system during periods of high demand. Understanding load management and how it works, can help you decide whether participating makes sense for you, your family, or your business.

What Is Load Management?

Load management is a strategy that helps align electricity consumption with the capacity of the grid. During specific times of day or during extreme weather, electricity demand can spike dramatically. These peak periods often require utilities to purchase higher-cost power or activate additional generation resources, which increases overall costs and can create stress on the system.

By reducing or shifting electricity use during those peak periods, the co-op can manage demand more effectively. For members, this typically involves temporarily cycling or turning off certain non-essential loads such as water heaters, electric heating elements, or opting to run energy-intensive tasks during off-peak hours. The result is a more efficient grid, cost savings, and reduced pressure on the system during critical periods.

What Does Load Management Require?

Coordination between the member and the cooperative is essential for participating in the load management program, and interested members are encouraged to contact our office to speak with one of our Member Service Representatives.

Equipment also plays a critical role. Vernon Electric Cooperative uses communication systems that allow signals to reach participating devices during peak times. Depending on the setup, a load control receiver will be installed directly on a piece of equipment or the breaker panel.



What Is a Load Control Receiver?

A load control receiver is the device that makes load management possible. A small receiver is installed near equipment such as an electric water heater and receives a signal, transmitted from Dairyland Power Cooperative (VEC, wholesale power supplier) during a peak event. The receiver temporarily cycles or pauses the equipment's operation. Because water heaters and similar appliances have built-in thermal storage, most members experience little to no change in comfort.

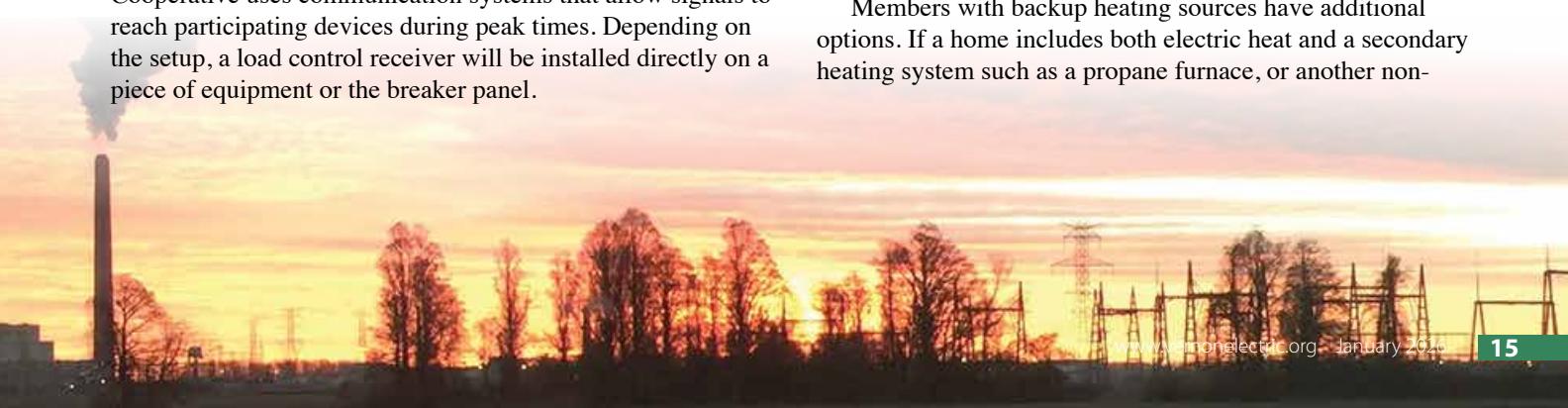
Modern load controls may also include smart thermostats, smart switches, or internet-connected devices that adjust settings through digital communication. For members with backup power systems, equipment like automatic transfer switches ensure a generator can operate safely during outages or other events without posing a risk to lineworkers or the grid. Load controls and transfer switches can work together to support both reliability and demand response when installed correctly.

Is Load Management Right for Me?

Determining whether load management is right for your home or business depends on your equipment, how you use energy, and the flexibility you have during peak times. For many residential members, enrolling a single water heater or heating system can provide meaningful bill savings with minimal inconvenience.

However, family size is important to consider. Large households, especially those where showers, laundry, and dishwashing happen frequently or close together may find that a water heater load control does not align with their hot water needs. Larger families often consume hot water quicker, and a control event during peak demand may reduce the recovered supply. Smaller households or those with staggered schedules (may not) notice a difference.

Members with backup heating sources have additional options. If a home includes both electric heat and a secondary heating system such as a propane furnace, or another non-



electric source, the cooperative's dual fuel program may be a perfect fit. In this arrangement, the electric heating system is controlled during peak periods and automatically switches to the backup source. Members benefit from lower electric heating rates while maintaining comfort and avoiding interruptions. For families who heat primarily with electricity but already own a secondary system, dual fuel can offer significant savings.

Larger commercial and industrial members typically have the greatest potential to reduce demand, and many already work closely with the cooperative to identify opportunities. These sites may require customized solutions, site visits, or tailored communication plans, especially when multiple staff members are responsible for equipment operations.

If you value cost savings and are willing to allow certain equipment to be cycled or controlled during peak times, load management is likely a good option for you.

Can I Manage My Load on My Own?

Many load management strategies can be implemented independently. Simple behavioral shifts—such as running dishwashers, laundry machines, or electric vehicle chargers during off-peak hours—can significantly reduce your household's contribution to peak demand. Smart home devices also allow you to automate many of these choices, ensuring energy-intensive tasks occur when electricity is less expensive to produce and deliver.

A Shared Path Forward

Electricity load management is a community-focused way to improve reliability, manage costs, and ensure the long-term strength of Vernon Electric Cooperative's system. By working together, we can keep power affordable, dependable, and ready to support the growth of our region for years to come.

Easy Ways to Lower Your Energy Bill

- 1. Lower your thermostat.** Reducing the temperature by a few degrees can help.
- 2. Delay using large appliances during peak hours.** Run dishwashers, washing machines and dryers during off-peak hours.
- 3. Adjust your water heater to 120 degrees F.** Spacing out showers helps conserve both energy and hot water.
- 4. Unplug unnecessary devices.** Power used for lighting and electronics adds up and accounts for a significant portion of home energy use. Disconnect unused items to reduce energy waste.



FULL LOAD CONTROL TIMES



Summer
June - Aug.
2 p.m. - 6 p.m.
up to 4x/mo.



Winter A.M.
Dec. - Feb.
6:55 a.m. - 11 a.m.
up to 3x/mo.



Winter P.M.
Dec. - Feb.
4:55 p.m. - 10 p.m.
up to 3x/mo.



Life as Art

Local artist provides inspiration to live creatively

By Leah Call

Life is a blank canvas—a creation of your own making. From the furniture you choose to the clothes you wear to the way you move through time, you are the artist, shaping, coloring, and molding your world into a masterpiece. That is certainly the way artist and Vernon Electric Cooperative member Corina Bergan lives her life.

Born and raised in the Driftless region, Bergan has always felt that art was less something to pursue and more a way of being. Though neither of her parents were formally trained artists, she grew up surrounded by makers, doers, and thinkers—people who taught her to pay attention, experiment, and trust what emerges.

Among the first students to attend Pleasant Ridge Waldorf School when it opened in 1980, Bergan credits that experience with providing an early foundation in creative thinking. Later, at La Farge High School, she was guided by art teacher Gail Hanson, who helped

her develop essential techniques. With a creative mother and other supportive mentors, art became an instinctive part of Bergan's life.

"I'm really an intuitive artist," Bergan said. "I just love to make things, and try new things, and create beauty all around me."

Beauty as Medium

Over the years, Bergan has explored many mediums—from sculpture to costume-making to large-scale commissions—but she settled most comfortably into acrylic and watercolor. Some pieces emerge quickly in watercolor; others unfold on large canvases, layered and reworked until they feel alive. "Sometimes I look at my paintings and think—where did that come from?" she quipped.

Nature is Bergan's primary inspiration. Her curiosity is shaped by landscapes, birds, color, and chaos. She often begins a project with her eyes



Artist Corina Bergan

closed. "I'll scribble with whatever medium I have, then see what I see in the picture and bring it to life," she explained. "I know it sounds crazy, but that's how a lot of my work starts. It's very intuitive."

From there, she blends colors, shapes, and often covers what she first created. "I love not having a plan," she says. "I'll go through a couple of stages

of covering up three-quarters of what I originally painted, keeping only my favorite parts."

Winter is Bergan's most productive painting

season, while summer draws her outdoors to tend her garden—another form of art. This winter, she is illustrating and publishing a children's book and exploring ways to turn her paintings into puzzles, a playful approach to sharing her art more widely.



A Creative Business

Bergan is no stranger to commissioned work, having created labels, posters, logos, sculptures, and more for local businesses and individuals. "I love having people come to me with an idea that I can help bring to life," she said. "I tend to think in pictures. I'm a creator. I love to help bring something into focus for people."

Her studio—built on her farm in 2015—serves as both home-school classroom and creative workshop. It has been a stop on the Winding Rivers Art Tour in years past, though she has not yet decided whether she will participate again this year. Keep an eye out for Bergan's work at that and other local art shows.

Often found in the classroom at the Driftless Folk School, Pleasant Ridge and Youth Initiative, Bergan encourages people of all ages to explore their creative side. "I really believe we are all artists and creators at heart."

As 2026 unfolds, she hopes more people embrace the freedom of being a creator. "Life is all creation. We get to do this thing—try it, change it, make it pretty, and redo it," she added. "I really love to inspire others that they can make that happen in their lives, too."



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SCHOLARSHIPS AVAILABLE FROM VEC

Scholarships are available to students who are dependents of Vernon Electric Cooperative members. High school seniors selected will each receive a \$1,000 scholarship for the college or university they decide to attend. Funding for the scholarships comes from unclaimed capital credit checks, which are entrusted to the Federated Youth Foundation. **A Non-Traditional and Line Worker scholarship will also be offered.**

Scholarship applications are available on www.vernonelectric.org/scholarships by calling our office, or through school counselors.

APPLY BY JANUARY 21, 2026



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