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January 2025

Magazine



## CLIMBING NEW HEIGHTS

Brittany Grammer's  
Inspiring Path to  
Becoming a Lineworker

Stay Safe in  
Snow

How Is Electric  
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Freelance writer LaRayne Topp shares the story of Brittany Grammer, a determined mother of four and former nurse and drafter, who has embraced the challenges of Northeast Community College's rigorous utility line program. Despite the demands of family life and a lengthy commute, she thrives in a male-dominated field, mastering skills like pole climbing and line construction.



## 14 The Differences Between Utility-Scale and Residential Battery Storage

As public power districts and electric co-ops navigate the complexities of modern energy supply, the strategic deployment of both utility-scale and residential battery energy storage systems can play a transformative role.

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*Brittany Grammer operates one of the college's trucks to load power poles onto a trailer as fellow students wait their turn. See the related article on Page 6. Photograph by LaRayne Topp*



Wayne Price

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## Reduce Your Winter Heating Costs With Energy Efficiency Upgrades

As the chill of winter sets in, heating your home becomes an unavoidable necessity, but the rising cost of energy doesn't have to leave your budget out in the cold. By embracing energy efficiency, you can significantly reduce your heating bills without sacrificing comfort—and enjoy long-term savings that stretch beyond the season.

Energy efficiency means using less energy to perform the same tasks, reducing waste and cutting costs. While it's an environmentally friendly choice, the most immediate benefit is to your wallet. A few simple changes can make a significant difference in your monthly heating bill while increasing your home's comfort.

**Seal the Gaps** - Drafty windows and doors are among the biggest culprits of heat loss. Inspect your home for air leaks and seal them with weatherstripping or caulk. For an added layer of protection, consider using draft stoppers along the bottom of doors and adding insulation film to windows. These inexpensive fixes can save up to 20 percent on your heating bill.

**Optimize Your Thermostat** - Install a programmable or smart thermostat to take control of your heating schedule. Set the temperature lower during the hours you're asleep or away and program it to warm up just before you return. Dropping your thermostat by just 7-10°F for eight hours a day can save as much as 10 percent annually on heating costs.

**Upgrade Your Insulation** - Heat naturally flows from warmer areas to colder ones, making proper insulation a crucial barrier. Start by insulating your attic, as heat rises and escapes through the roof. Homes in Nebraska should have between R-38 and R-49 attic insulation. If there is less than six or seven inches of insulation in the attic, add R-19 insulation over existing insulation. Then, check walls, floors, and crawl spaces for weak spots. While insulation upgrades may require an upfront investment, the energy savings will pay for themselves over time.

**Service Your Heating System** - A well-maintained heating system is more efficient and lasts longer. Schedule annual maintenance to ensure your furnace or boiler is running at peak performance. Replace air filters regularly to maintain proper airflow and consider upgrading to a high-efficiency system if yours is outdated.

Adopting energy-efficient practices not only reduces your heating bills, but also increases the overall value of your home. Beyond the dollars saved, there's a satisfaction in knowing that you're contributing to a more sustainable future.

So, as the temperatures drop, take charge of your home's energy use. Each step you take toward energy efficiency is an investment in comfort, savings, and the environment—making it easier to enjoy a cozy winter without the worry of high heating costs.



Zac Bryant

Zac Bryant is the General Manager of Panhandle Rural Electric Membership Association, headquartered in Alliance, Neb.

## How is Electric Reliability Achieved?

The common topic of discussion recently is if we are going to have a mild or brutal winter. We all have our ways of preparing at home and work for the upcoming months. Many of Nebraska's public power districts and electric cooperatives have seen challenges with outages caused by high winds and tornadoes. I believe that one of the many benefits from your not-for-profit electric companies is the time, planning, and resources that go back into the infrastructure to prepare for these events, minimize outages, and shorten response times. These are tremendously important things that make us stand out from some other utilities.

There are multiple preventive measures your local utility takes to invest back into the electrical system that create a more reliable sustainable system. Utilities typically use a contractor to evaluate a portion of the poles annually in their systems. There are ways to evaluate the poles including probing, sound testing, and sonar. The goal is to identify those poles that are reaching end of life or have been damaged. This can be from human, animal, or weather damage. The poles are prioritized by their condition, and this allows the company to plan and change them out before they fail. This is a great practice to minimize outages and interruptions and to plan and budget for system improvements.

Line patrolling is also an opportunity for our employees to get out and get a visual inspection on our systems. The community and customers also serve as a valuable resource in reporting hazards they may see. Staying a safe distance and reporting these issues is especially important to maintain safety. Technology has evolved as most things with helping in line patrols. Thermal imaging is utilized to show problem areas. These are helpful in finding bad connections or failing apparatus that may not be seen from a visual inspection. Drones are used to get a bird's eye view in line patrolling and troubleshooting. Drones offer an alternate cost-effective option to helicopters and airplanes.

The variety of buckets, diggers, pickups, skid steers, etc., is crucial to have in a well-maintained reliable manner. This equipment is used in some of the toughest conditions to complete construction and maintenance of the system. Equipment is well maintained, serviced, and replaced to ensure a reliable fleet. The operators maintain an inventory of material and tools to perform their work.

The biggest assets I believe we have is our members, employees, and communities. This past year we have seen overwhelming support to reach out and help our neighboring utilities. We send resources and support to neighbors and know we have the same in return. Mother nature will always give us challenges and, that is why we prepare for it. This reflects back to when electricity first came into rural areas by the people coming together. We will continue to welcome opportunities and challenges and together overcome them.



By LaRayne Topp

# CLIMBING NEW HEIGHTS

*Brittany Grammer's Inspiring Path to Becoming a Lineworker*

"If they come to class with a worn-out pliers-holder on their belt, you know they'll be a good student." That's the feeling of Todd Pfeil, utility line instructor at Northeast Community College in Norfolk, Nebraska. Student Brittany Grammer may not have come with a pliers-holder on her blue jeans, but Pfeil says, "She's not shy." That may be because she has to hold her own with her fellow lineworker students as one of the few females the utility line program has seen.

With a one and a half to two-hour drive from home to school, four days out of a week, Grammer has shown herself to be a dedicated student. Then add to that, four kids (ages 17, 13, 7 and 6) and a husband, Mike

Couchenour, at her home in Cedar Rapids, Nebraska, and you'll know how determined she actually is to get her utility line degree.

Before enrolling at Northeast, Grammer took up automotive repair in high school. Later she studied nursing and served as a nurse's aide in both a hospital's emergency room and its intensive care unit. Then she became certified in drafting, working for a company that replaced underground electrical cables. She became familiar with industry standards and calling for materials, plus designing and fixing underground. It's at that point that Grammer fell in love with electricity.

She also liked Northeast from first glance, appreciating its nationally-recognized and comprehensive utility line and job training safety program. College information

states that completion of the program prepares its students for skilled and highly-marketable careers installing, replacing, and repairing electrical power poles, lines and equipment.

"I like electricity a lot," Grammer explained. Her

previous drafting work had given her basic understanding of the electrical grid, but it was the climbing and assembly that she wasn't familiar with, she said.

The transition from her job behind a computer screen to climbing up on the poles seemed like a good fit for Grammer as she enjoys the outdoors (she felt like a potato sitting at the computer), and isn't afraid of heights.

Todd Pfeil, who has been

an instructor for Northeast's utility line program for the past five years and was a lineman himself for 15, recalled one student who fearfully made it to the top of the pole and immediately climbed back down.

"We never saw him again," Pfeil said.

"You can't be afraid of heights," Grammer agreed, understanding that students, and eventually full-fledged lineworkers, rely on the supports around the belt and pole to keep them safe from falling. Once students adjourned from the classroom to the field, and eventually up on the poles, Grammer enjoyed time spent throwing softballs around from the top of one pole to the top of another with her fellow students, even calling it "fun."



*Brittany Grammer uses one of Northeast Community College's trucks to load electric power poles onto a waiting trailer.*

**Continued on Page 8**

## From Page 7

Her fellow students—completing training to climb poles, utilize heavy equipment to move poles onto and off of a truck and place them in the ground, plus install, operate, and maintain electrical utility lines—are all young men.

“I appreciate that they don’t cut me any slack or baby me,” she said. “I’m just like one of them.”

Some day, in a decade or two, when Lineworker Grammer becomes tired of climbing those poles and is anticipating a slower paced job, she hopes to add project manager or journeyman to her name.

For the moment, she looks forward to completing company interviews to secure an apprenticeship to earn on-the-job training, one of the degree requirements at Northeast. Following graduation, it’s onto the job site whether it’s at a rural power district or city municipal, or specialized areas such as underground, high voltage substations, load control and load management, street lighting, traffic control or metering.

For Grammer, the harder it is, the better. “I want storm duty in an emergency situation,” she said, “where I can jump on it, fix it and get it done!”

Type A personality students, such as Grammer, are no surprise to Todd Pfeil. They are regulars in his classroom and are go-getters.

“It’s hard for them to ever say, ‘I can’t do this,’ Pfeil said, because they have a lot of pride.

Because Northeast Community College offers one of



*Brittany Grammer is currently attending the utility line program at Northeast Community College in Norfolk, Neb.*



only three two-year utility line degree programs in the United States, plus the only two-year utility line program in Nebraska, the college has a waiting list to get in. Junior and Senior high school students from the area and out of state tour the school; once accepted, they come from across the country.

“Indiana, New York, and Pennsylvania are almost always represented,” Pfeil said.

Northeast utility line program students not only study the topics of wiring, pole climbing, metering and line construction, but they actually perform these skills as they learn. Instruction also includes practical application of mathematics, sciences, circuit diagrams and blueprints, together with pole-line construction.

These aren’t skills typically used elsewhere, in any other career, Pfeil said. It’s not until students get outside the classroom that they are able to actually utilize what they’ve learned in the lab.

“I get a lot of wide eyes.” Pfeil said. “It’s all a foreign concept and then the light goes on.”

After all, it’s electricity.

*“Any storm, any time, anywhere,” will be Brittany Grammer’s motto once she completes utility line classes at Northeast Community College.*



## Circuit Breaker Safety

By Larry Oetken



With power strips and outlet converters (a multiple outlet “bar” plugged directly into an existing outlet), we can plug in multiple items in or near the same outlet.

Just because we can, doesn't mean we should. (I can eat a whole box of chocolates, but that doesn't mean I should.)

Just like chocolate consumed in excess can overload your body with too many calories, attempting to draw too much power from an outlet or circuit can overload your home's electrical system. Depending on how your home is wired, you may get away with it — or you may not. If too much current is drawn, usually a circuit breaker would trip or fuses would blow, but this is never guaranteed.

The results of overloading a circuit could range from a damaged appliance to starting a fire. That is because when too much electrical current flows through a circuit, things can overheat. Whether it is a wire, an outlet, or any other part along the electrical path, excess heat can cause serious problems.

Follow these electrical safety tips to help prevent overloading a circuit:

- Do not plug too many things into one outlet, extension cord, power strip, multi-outlet device or outlets on the same circuit.
- Look for loose connections or damaged or corroded wires, which can also cause an overload.
- If you continually upgrade your home with more electrical demands (lighting, appliances, electronics and so on), your home's circuits may not be able to handle the increased load.

Larry Oetken is the Director of Job Training & Safety for the Nebraska Rural Electric Association.

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# Why rural electric utilities replace utility poles

You probably don't pay much attention to the utility poles found throughout the state, but did you know these tall structures are the backbone of our rural electric distribution network?

Strong, sturdy utility poles ensure a reliable electric system, which is why we routinely inspect the thousands of poles found on power lines in Nebraska. Throughout the year, crews check poles for decay caused by exposure to the elements. They know which poles are oldest and conduct inspections through a rotational process. Typically, a standard wooden distribution pole is expected to last more than 50 years.

Occasionally, poles need to be replaced for other reasons besides decay and old age. Weather



disasters, power line relocation, and car crashes are potential causes for immediate replacement. When possible, the local rural electric system communicates when and where pole replacements will take place so that you stay informed of where crews will be working.

Here is a quick breakdown of how crews replace a utility pole:

When a pole needs to be replaced,

crews will start the process by digging a hole, typically next to the pole being replaced. The depth of the hole must be 15 percent of the new pole's height. Next, the new pole must be fitted with bolts, cross arms, insulators, ground wires and arm braces – all of the necessary parts for delivering safe and reliable electricity. Then, crews safely detach the power lines from the old pole. The new pole is then raised and guided carefully into position, and the lines are attached, leaving the new pole to do its job.

So, the next time you come across a utility crew replacing a pole, use caution and know that this process ensures a more reliable electric system for you, a rural electric consumer.



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# Master Your Thermostat to Save Energy in Winter

When temperatures plummet and heating bills soar, finding practical ways to reduce energy usage becomes essential. A simple adjustment to your thermostat could result in substantial savings while maintaining a cozy home during the winter. Here's how you can maximize your energy efficiency and minimize costs.

A key to saving energy lies in strategic thermostat management. The U.S. Department of Energy recommends setting your thermostat to 68°F while awake and lowering it when asleep or away. By reducing the temperature by 10° to 15° for at least eight hours, you could save 5 to 15 percent annually on heating costs. That's approximately one percent savings for every degree lowered during the setback period.

Contrary to popular belief, your heating system does not "work harder" to warm your home after the temperature has been reduced. In fact, a lower interior temperature slows heat loss through walls, floors, and ceilings. The longer your home stays at a reduced temperature, the more energy—and money—you save. The same principle applies in summer: a higher thermostat setting slows the flow of heat into your home, cutting air conditioning costs.

## The Benefits of Programmable Thermostats

While manual adjustments can achieve savings, programmable thermostats make the process easier and more efficient. These devices automatically adjust the temperature based on your schedule, ensuring

comfort when you're home and savings when you're not. Once programmed, they eliminate the need to remember to reset your thermostat daily.

For accurate temperature readings and optimal performance, install your thermostat on an interior wall away from direct sunlight, heating vents, and drafts or other sources of heat distortion.

## Features to Look For:

- Separate heating and cooling programs for year-round use.
- Air circulation modes to maintain even temperatures, preventing hot air from rising and leaving lower floors chilly.
- Filter change reminders to ensure efficiency by prompting timely filter replacements.
- Advanced models allow remote programming via cell phone or the internet.

If you're upgrading to a more advanced system, consider consulting a heating and cooling professional for proper installation.

## Energy Efficiency, Simplified

With thoughtful thermostat use and the right tools, you can enjoy a warm home and a reduced heating bill this winter. By lowering your thermostat during inactive hours, investing in a programmable thermostat, and maintaining your system, energy efficiency is easily within reach.





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36	9.21	8.31	10.35	9.51	14.03	12.36	21.10	17.74	59	31.60	23.51	55.57	39.88	100.09	70.22	189.27	128.98
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40	9.63	9.10	12.94	11.08	17.91	15.21	26.19	23.63	63	44.70	34.39	85.55	59.60	156.32	103.51	287.62	189.69
41	10.05	9.22	13.66	11.83	19.43	16.78	29.57	26.17	64	48.23	38.53	93.16	64.38	172.38	113.14	326.16	211.66
42	10.48	9.26	14.21	12.67	21.12	18.59	32.95	28.51	65	53.18	41.15	101.79	70.36	190.05	126.49	360.58	233.60
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# The Differences Between Utility-Scale and Residential Battery Storage

*Public power districts and electric cooperatives are leveraging innovative battery storage technologies to enhance grid reliability and resilience in rural communities.*

In an ever-changing energy landscape, public power districts and electric cooperatives are on the cutting edge of delivering reliable, resilient power to the local communities they serve. Rural electric utilities utilize a variety of generation and grid technologies to provide power, including battery energy storage—but not all battery storage systems are the same, and understanding the key differences between each is important.

Utility-scale battery systems are designed for large-scale energy storage to support the electric grid, requiring high initial investments but offering significant long-term savings and benefits. In contrast, residential battery systems cater to individual homes, providing more energy independence and savings while still representing a significant investment.

## Utility-Scale Battery Storage

Utility-scale storage systems are large installations designed to store vast amounts of electricity. Typically connected to the grid, these systems can store power generated from both conventional and renewable energy sources, with capacities ranging from several megawatt-hours (MWh) to gigawatt-hours (GWh).

While most battery storage system projects are developed with a primary application in mind, they can also be optimized for multiple applications, which adds significant additional value.



Utility-scale storage systems could play a crucial role in grid stabilization by absorbing excess energy during periods of low electricity demand and releasing it during peak demand, which is particularly beneficial in rural areas where demand can fluctuate significantly.

Public power districts and electric cooperatives can also deploy utility-scale storage systems at electric substations to enhance grid resilience and ensure a steady supply of electricity as needed. In the event of a power outage, utility-scale storage systems can provide backup power to critical infrastructure, such as hospitals and emergency services.

## Residential Battery Storage

Residential battery storage systems are compact



*Left: Utility-scale battery systems are designed for large-scale energy storage to support the electric grid, requiring high initial investments but offering significant long-term savings and benefits. Photograph provided by Trico Electric Cooperative*

*Above: Utility-scale storage systems could play a crucial role in grid stabilization by absorbing excess energy during periods of low electricity demand and releasing it during peak demand. Photograph provided by Jackson EMC*

installations designed for individual homes, typically ranging from a few kilowatt-hours (kWh) to tens of kWh in capacity. Often paired with residential solar panels, these smaller systems allow homeowners to store excess energy generated during the day for use later at night or during power outages, providing a level of energy independence.

By utilizing stored energy, homeowners can reduce their energy bills and ensure a steady supply of power, even during grid disruptions and outages, enhancing the resilience of rural households. However, the initial cost of purchasing and installing a residential storage system can be expensive, which may deter some homeowners.

Rural electric utilities are increasingly recognizing the benefits of residential battery storage. These systems not

only support grid stability and resilience, but also help reduce costs for utilities and their consumers. Some utilities offer energy storage programs and rates, which means homeowners can contribute to a more efficient and reliable energy system. This benefits the entire community.

As public power districts and electric co-ops navigate the complexities of modern energy supply, the strategic deployment of both utility-scale and residential battery energy storage systems can play a transformative role.

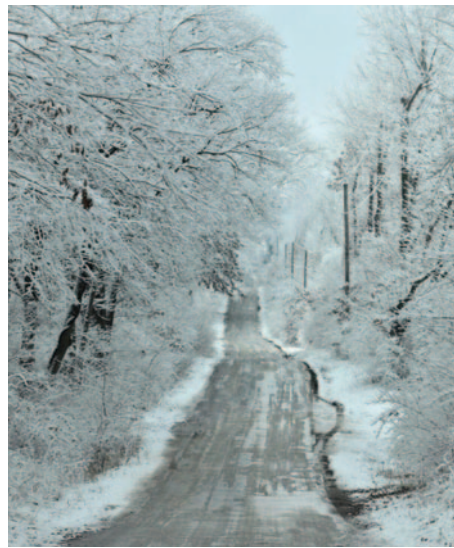
By understanding the unique advantages and challenges of each type of system, rural electric utilities and their consumers can make informed decisions that enhance grid reliability, reduce costs, and improve resilience for their communities.

Winter's beauty often comes with a dangerous side, especially for drivers. Snow, ice, and high winds not only make roads treacherous but can also lead to accidents involving downed power lines. According to the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) Federal Highway Administration, 24 percent of weather-related crashes occur on snowy or icy pavement. Knowing how to handle these situations can save lives.

Winter storms often bring down power lines, creating additional hazards for drivers and pedestrians. While the instinct to help after an accident is admirable, approaching a vehicle involved in a collision with a power pole can be life-threatening.

### What You Should Do If a Power Line is Down:

- Stay in Your Vehicle. The safest place to be is inside. Do not exit unless your car is on fire.
- If You Must Exit: Jump clear of



*Slow down when driving in winter conditions. Icy roads reduce traction, making it harder to stop or avoid obstacles.*

the vehicle without touching it and the ground simultaneously. Keep your feet together, and shuffle or “bunny hop” to avoid electrical current flowing through your body.

- Assume All Lines Are Energized. Downed lines may not spark, but

they can still carry lethal electricity. Never drive over a downed line or approach one on foot.

- Call 911 Immediately. Notify emergency services so utility crews can address the situation safely.

If you're stranded in your car after an accident, especially during extreme cold, it's crucial to protect yourself from frostbite and hypothermia.

### Signs of Hypothermia and Frostbite to Watch For:

- Change in skin color
- Numbness
- Shivering
- Slurred speech
- Loss of coordination
- Confusion

### While Waiting for Help:

- Stay awake and alert.
- Shift your position occasionally to keep circulation flowing.
- Avoid overexertion, which can strain your heart.

## Murphy





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A home energy audit may sound daunting, but it can be as easy as creating a checklist of improvements based on what you see around your home.

Here's what you'll need to find opportunities to save energy and money: a flashlight, dust mask, tape measure and cooking thermometer. I recommend taking notes on your phone or a notepad.

First, check the heating and cooling equipment. Determine the age and efficiency of the equipment by looking up the model number on the nameplate. The average lifespan of HVAC equipment is 10 to 30 years, depending on the type of equipment and how well it's maintained. If your equipment is older, it may be time to budget for an upgrade. Check the filter and replace it if needed.

Then, check the envelope of your home, which separates the heated or cooled areas from the exterior, for drafts and air leakage. Feel around windows and trim for any drafts. Pay special attention to spots where different building materials come together. Check under sinks for gaps around pipes. Seal with weatherstripping, caulk or expanding foam as needed.

Make sure to replace incandescent or compact fluorescent bulbs with LEDs. LEDs use significantly less energy and last longer than traditional incandescent bulbs.

Check for leaking faucets and make sure showerheads are high-efficiency models in good condition. The gallons-per-minute (GPM) ratings should be etched onto them. To reduce wasted energy from using more hot water than needed, aerators should be 0.5 to 1.5 GPM, and showerheads should be no more than 2 GPM.

Next, look in the attic, while wearing a dust mask, to make sure it's insulated. You may be able to see enough from the access area using a cellphone with the flash on to take pictures. Use the tape measure to check the depth of the insulation. It should be a minimum of 12

inches deep. This can vary depending on the type of insulation used and your geography.

Insulation can become compacted over time. It should be evenly distributed throughout the attic. Loose fill or blown-in insulation should be fluffy and evenly dispersed. Rolled batt insulation should fit tightly together without gaps.



Also, exterior walls should be insulated. If your home is older than the 1960s, the walls are probably not insulated. Homes from the 1960s or 1970s likely need more insulation. Sometimes you can see wall insulation by removing an outlet cover or switch plate and using a flashlight to look for insulation inside the wall cavity. Turn off the power at the electrical panel to avoid the risk of electric shock. Wall insulation can be blown in from the inside or the outside of the home. This is a job for a professional.

If you have a basement or crawlspace, head there next. Unfinished basements

should have insulation on the rim joists, at minimum. This is the area between the top of the foundation and the underside of the home's first-story floor. Use closed-cell spray foam or a combination of rigid foam and spray foam to insulate rim joists. Crawl spaces should have insulation on the underside of the floor between the floor joists. Insulation should be properly supported in contact with the floor with no air gaps. Water pipes and ductwork should also be insulated.

Lastly, check the temperature of your water by running it for three minutes at the faucet closest to your water heater. Then fill a cup and measure with a cooking thermometer. Hot water should be between 120 and 140 degrees. You can reduce the temperature on your water heater to reduce energy waste and prevent scalding.

Once your home energy audit is finished, review your findings and start prioritizing home energy efficiency projects. For step-by-step instructions, visit [www.energy.gov/save](http://www.energy.gov/save).

# BE WINTER READY

As winter temperatures start to drop, work on your livestock operation goes up. Now is the time to prepare. Have a winter emergency plan in place to protect your livestock and your family in case of an unexpected power outage.

Backup generators can help protect against the unexpected and help maintain day-to-day operations.

## STAY SAFE AND FOLLOW THESE GENERATOR SAFETY TIPS:



### PORTABLE GENERATOR SAFETY

- Before starting your generator, thoroughly read and follow all the manufacturer's instructions.
- NEVER plug a generator directly into a power outlet. This can electrocute you and the utility workers attempting to restore power.
- Only operate the generator outdoors, in dry areas, and at least 30 feet away from buildings and any openings.
- Be aware of carbon monoxide poisoning symptoms.



### PERMANENT GENERATOR SAFETY

- Installation requires a licensed electrical contractor, must follow local codes, and be inspected.
- Generators not correctly installed can backfeed the power lines and pose a threat of electrical shock to the utility workers attempting to restore power.
- Notify your local electric utility about your backup system. This allows crews to be alert for possible generators in service if they work to restore power in your area.



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## TWO BILLS STEAKHOUSE CLEARWATER, NEB.

In Clearwater, Nebraska, Two Bills Restaurant has quickly become a new staple for the community since it opened in April 2024. Founded by Mike Tabbert and Brian Ferris, the steakhouse offers much more than great food—it's a heartfelt tribute to family and Nebraska roots. Named after their fathers, Bill Tabbert and the late Bill Ferris, the restaurant is a personal project from top to bottom. "I came up with the name, and Mike created the logo," Brian shared, adding that the pair's dedication to honoring their families guided every detail, from the design of the space to the food they serve.

Transforming the former L Bar B Steakhouse, which had been around since the 1970s but closed during the COVID-19 pandemic, was no small task. With help from Mike's dad, who crafted the buffet bar, and the duo's own hands-on remodeling efforts, Two Bills emerged with a fresh, inviting look. They installed TVs, repainted, added new flooring and lighting, and even redesigned the men's restroom. "The shelves you see throughout the space were made from a tree in our backyard," Brian noted, explaining that when the tree died, they decided to incorporate it into the restaurant to keep a part of their home within its walls.

The menu at Two Bills is designed to bring people together over quality food made with care. In addition to the dinner menu, which features items like house-made onion rings, steak mac and cheese, and a popular ribeye, they also offer a Sunday brunch buffet with everything from scrambled eggs to a full salad bar. The dinner buffet includes roasted chicken, roast beef, fried fish, and shrimp—a selection they're constantly refining. "We want to make sure there's something for everyone," Mike said, adding that quality is key. All the beef is certified Angus, sourced from a butcher near Council



Bluffs, Iowa, and the bread is freshly baked in Omaha.

Running the restaurant has quickly become all-consuming for Mike and Brian. "I thought people lied when they said restaurants become your life, but literally every waking moment is spent in this place," Mike admitted. Brian, who works in IT, manages the administrative side of the business remotely, often traveling to Dallas for part of the month. Despite the hectic schedule, both men are committed to making Two Bills a success. With the help of a team of 15 employees, including three full-time cooks, they've turned their vision into a bustling reality.

Two Bills is more than just a restaurant. It's a place built on family values, hard work, and dedication to community. Brian and Mike have poured their hearts into every detail, hoping the restaurant will inspire others to live by the same principles their fathers instilled in them. "We spend so much time here that it feels like this is what we've always done," Mike reflected. And from the looks of it, Two Bills has already become a cherished part of Clearwater's story.

Visit the website at [www.twobillssteakhouse.com](http://www.twobillssteakhouse.com).



### Hummingbird Cake

- 1 spice cake mix
- 1 cup sugar
- 1 cup banana cream Greek yogurt
- 3 eggs
- 1 cup crushed pineapple
- 1 cup crushed pecans
- 1 cup all-purpose flour
- 2 tablespoons melted butter

#### Frosting:

- 1 stick butter, softened
- 1 package (8 ounces) cream cheese, softened
- 1/4 cup heavy whipping cream
- 5 cups powdered sugar
- 1 package pecans (optional)

Heat oven to 350 F.

In mixing bowl, mix spice mix and sugar. Blend in yogurt, eggs and pineapple. In separate bowl, mix pecans, flour and butter then add to cake mixture.

Grease two 8-inch cake pans with butter. Pour half the mixture into each pan then bake 45 minutes. Cool on rack before icing.

To make frosting: In mixing bowl, mix butter, cream cheese and heavy whipping cream. Slowly blend in powdered sugar.

Ice cake then decorate with pecans, if desired.

### Chicken Alphabet Soup

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1 rotisserie chicken deboned and diced</li> <li>2 stalks of thinly sliced celery</li> <li>2 thinly sliced long carrots</li> <li>2 large chicken bouillon cubes</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1 tablespoon onion flakes</li> <li>1 package Alphabet pasta</li> <li>2-4 14 oz. cans chicken broth (depending on the thickness of soup you prefer)</li> </ul> |
|--|--|

Debone chicken and put skin and carcass into a dutch oven, add 4-5 cups water and cook about 30 minutes. Remove skin and carcass and discard.

To broth add carrots, celery, onion flakes, bouillon cubes, chicken broth, and diced chicken. Bring to a full boil and then lower heat and simmer for 20-30 minutes. Add pasta and continue to cook for another 10 minutes. Salt and Pepper to taste and garnish with fresh or dried parsley flakes.

Nancy Robinson, North Platte, Nebraska

### Chocolate Chipee Coffee Cake

#### Topping

- 1/3 cup packed brown sugar
- 1 tablespoon all-purpose flour
- 2 tablespoons butter or margarine, softened
- 1/2 cup chopped nuts
- 1/2 cup semi-sweet mini chocolate chips

Combine brown sugar, flour and butter in small bowl with pastry blender or two knives until mixture is crumbly. Stir in nuts and mini chocolate chips.

#### Cake

- 1 3/4 cups all-purpose flour
- 1 teaspoon baking powder
- 1 teaspoon baking soda
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- 3/4 cup granulated sugar
- 1/2 cup (1 stick) butter or margarine, softened
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 3 large eggs
- 1 cup sour cream
- 1 1/2 semi-sweet mini chocolate chips

Preheat oven to 350. Grease 13 x 9 pan. Mix flour, baking powder, baking soda and salt in small bowl. Beat granulated sugar, butter and vanilla extract in large mixer bowl until creamy. Add eggs, one at a time, beating well after each addition. Gradually add flour mixture alternately with sour cream. Fold in 1 1/2 cups mini chocolate chips.

Spread into prepared baking pan, sprinkle with topping.

Bake 25 – 35 minutes or until wooden pick inserted in center comes out clean. Cool in pan on wire rack. Makes 12 servings.

Terri Oltmans, Nelson, Nebraska

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