



A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative 

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FLINT HILLS RURAL ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE

NEWS

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**This institution is an equal
opportunity provider
and employer**

FROM THE MANAGER

Co-ops Have a ‘Different’ Bottom Line

Author Anthony J. D’Angelo observed that, “Without a sense of caring, there can be no sense of community.”

To a large degree, this reflects Flint Hills RECA’s philosophy toward our consumer-members and the broader service territory that we serve. As a cooperative, we have a different “bottom line.” While our priority is always to provide reliable and safe energy, there is another equally important part of this equation. Your well-being and that of the larger community we serve are of paramount concern.

To us, you are not just a customer; you are a member of our co-op and without you, we would not exist.

In 1938, Flint Hills RECA was founded to fulfill a vital need in our community that would not have otherwise been met. Concerned local leaders came together to build this co-op and bring electricity where there was none.

At that time, members of the community understood we were different because they likely knew someone who helped to create Flint Hills RECA. For most people, our founding and its circumstances have been long forgotten. Over time, folks in the community may have come to think of us as simply another energy provider. But we are not. We are a co-op that is constantly evolving to meet the needs of the communities we serve, and we are able to do this because of members like you.

Since our inception, we have sought feedback and engagement from you and that of the larger community to guide our long-term decisions.

Therefore we hold annual meetings every year. We host this to engage with you and obtain your feedback.

We strive to find new ways to help you use energy more efficiently. We’re always looking to explore more options that will help you manage your energy use such as showing your hourly usage through our SmartHub app and providing possible rebates on our Peak Alert Program. In short, we are always seeking to keep pace with the changing energy environment, evolving technology and shifting consumer expectations.

Flint Hills RECA members help guide important co-op decisions that improve and enrich the community. We value the perspective of our board members, who are members of the co-op and community—just like you.

While the times may have changed, our mission and outlook have not. We view our role as a catalyst for good. Working together, we can accomplish great things for our community now and in the future.



Chuck Goeckel

MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

Tallgrass Prairie N

In 1884 D.W. Wilder, editor of the *Hiawatha World*, wrote “Whenever you stop on the prairie to lunch or camp, and gaze around, there is a picture such as poet or painter never succeeded in transferring to book or canvas ... We ought to have saved a park in Kansas, ten thousand acres broad—the prairie as it came from the hand of God, not a foot or an inch desecrated by improvements or cultivation.”

Flint Hills Rural Electric Cooperative is proud to provide electric service to the **TALLGRASS PRAIRIE NATIONAL PRESERVE**, which is devoted to preserving a portion of the once vast tallgrass prairie. Tallgrass prairie once covered about 170 million

acres of North America. Now only about 4 percent remains, most of it existing here in the Kansas Flint Hills. The 10,861-acre preserve is located in Chase County just 2 miles north of Strong City on Highway 177, in the heart of the Flint Hills Rural Electric Cooperative service area.

On Nov. 12, 1996, the Tallgrass Prairie National Preserve was created as the 370th national park. It is managed jointly by the National Park Service and the Nature Conservancy, with support from the Kansas Park Trust. The 30,000 visitors annually to Tallgrass Prairie National Preserve contribute nearly \$2 million to the regional economy, roughly within a 60-mile radius.

Touring the Tallgrass Prairie National Preserve Visitor Center is the perfect way to begin a trip to the park. Opened in July 2012, the building was designed to blend with the prairie landscape. The building’s stone façade is made with locally quarried limestone making it feel as if it grows naturally from the ground around it. It even has a prairie grass roof planted with native grasses. Park rangers are on hand to answer questions. A short orientation film provides an overview to support the center’s exhibits related to all facets of the tallgrass prairie and the Flint Hills including the history of ranching in the area and Indian culture. The center also contains a bookstore, restrooms, water fountains and park administrative offices.

Just outside the visitor center are the grounds of the historic Spring Hill/Z-Bar Ranch. Visitors step back into the 1880s as they tour the limestone mansion, three-level limestone barn, scratch shed, chicken house, carriage house, curing house, out-house and icehouse. The Lower Fox Creek School, which was built in 1882, sits just 1 mile north of the



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The visitor center is the perfect way to begin the trip.

ational Preserve

ALL PHOTOS
COURTESY OF
MORGAN SPINDEN



Guided tours of the Spring Hill Ranch house begin at the visitor center and are available during summer months on a limited basis.

ranch grounds on Highway 177 and is also open to visitors. Tours of the ranch grounds and school are primarily self-guided with interpretive text panels provided; however, guided house tours starting from the visitor center are available during summer months on a limited basis. Cell phone tours are also available via the internet (myoncell.mobi) or by calling 620-805-3185.

No trip to the park is complete without exploring the wide open spaces that make up the tallgrass prairie. Visitors are treated to amazing views of the prairie landscape complete with prairie wildlife, seasonal wildflowers, streams and bison herds. Guided prairie bus tours are provided from the last Saturday in April through the last Sunday in October. If hiking meets visitors' fancy the park contains over 40 miles of nature and hiking trails. Maps are available in the visitor center, in kiosks on the ranch grounds, or via the internet at <http://nature.org/tallgrass> trails. Trails are open 24 hours daily, but camping is not allowed.

Of particular interest is the Scenic Overlook Trail

that runs through the Windmill Pasture, home of the preserve's bison herd. Hikers will experience unique aspects of the prairie across the different trails through the park, but all provide up close discovery that the tallgrass prairie is more than just grass!

The Tallgrass Prairie National Preserve offers something for all ages. Don't miss the opportunity to experience an amazing look at one of the most unique geographical regions of the United States right here in our backyard. The visitor center and ranch buildings are open 8:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m. May through October and 9 a.m.-4:30 p.m. November through April. Hiking trails are open 24 hours a day, year-round. Admission is free.

Flint Hills RECA plans to periodically highlight a member in our "Member Spotlight" series of articles. Do you have a suggestion of an individual, organization or business you'd like us to consider? Send an email to mail@flinthillsrec.com with the member's name and a brief statement about why you think we should feature them in an upcoming issue of *Kansas Country Living*.

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Smart Houses No Longer a Fantasy

Not that long ago, the 1999 movie *Smart House*—which featured a fully automated dream home run by a computer named Pat—seemed futuristic and farfetched. Fast forward to today, and there are voice-assisted devices you can talk to and ask to control anything from your television and your lights to your mood (OK, it can't literally change your mood but you could ask it to tell you jokes or play upbeat music).

Using smart home devices doesn't mean your digs will have a higher IQ, but it does mean your home could have a leaner energy budget. "Smart homes" are houses that have a number of interconnected devices and home appliances that perform certain actions or functions and many are designed to save money, time and energy.

Here are some smart home devices—that may or may not be interconnected—that could save some green:

- ▶ Energy monitoring devices, which give real-time feedback on energy consumption and track your energy stats (kind of like a Fitbit for your home) –
- ▶ these typically cost between \$200 and \$300 but can make a real difference in your energy bills if you make adjustments based on feedback.
- ▶ The SmartThings Hub that acts as the brains of your smart home – with it (and compatible items), you can open your garage door, turn on music or start the coffee maker. When you leave, it can lock the doors, turn off the lights, adjust your smart thermostat and activate a security camera.
- ▶ A smart lighting outdoor module, such as GE Z-Wave, which works with Alexa – this allows you to control all your outdoor lighting and appliances, including seasonal and landscape lighting, and schedule or turn outdoor lights on or off from anywhere.
- ▶ Smart bulbs, which are internet-capable LED bulbs that allow lighting to be controlled remotely – many of them can change color, some can play music, and specialty smart bulbs may help you sleep better by emitting colors designed to help regulate natural melatonin production

or provide soothing light that doesn't disrupt circadian rhythm.

- ▶ Smart sprinkler systems – these water your garden only when plants need it. They take local weather forecasts into account and will delay watering if rain is headed your way.
- ▶ Water leak detectors and shut-off systems – some are SmartThings compatible but can be operated independently. The simplest versions sit on the floor and alert you when they get wet. More elaborate versions continually monitor the flow of your water system, informing you if water pressure changes and allowing you to shut off the water supply if a leak is detected.

Smart appliances and devices save money because in many cases they allow you to use less energy. They're also convenient, fun to use and can give you peace of mind. In short, they may be worth it in the long run, but only if the initial outlay fits your budget.

For more information on electrical safety, go to SafeElectricity.org.

Don't have a SmartThings Hub?

If you don't have a smart home command center, consider these ala carte options:

- ▶ **A SMART THERMOSTAT** – they learn your habits to keep your home comfortable and then do so in the most efficient way possible.
- ▶ **A MODERATELY PRICED SMART PLUG (AROUND \$40)** – turns your electronics on or off from anywhere using your phone or tablet.
- ▶ **SMART GARAGE DOOR OPENERS** – prevent thieves (and hot or cold air) from coming in your home if you forget to close your garage door. You can check it and close it from your smartphone with the companion app.
- ▶ **WIRELESS LIGHT SWITCH AND DIMMERS WITH REMOTE CONTROL AND SCHEDULING** – some offer smart-home integration options so you can hook them up to Alexa, Google Assistant, Nest and other digital assistants.
- ▶ **MOTION SENSORS** – these shut off lights when there's inactivity in a room.
- ▶ **A SMART POWER STRIP** – monitors and turns off power to plugged-in items when not in use.

**Safe
Electricity.org**

57% of Americans say that smart home technology products save them an average of 30 minutes per day.



Information collected from
National Council for Home Safety and Security