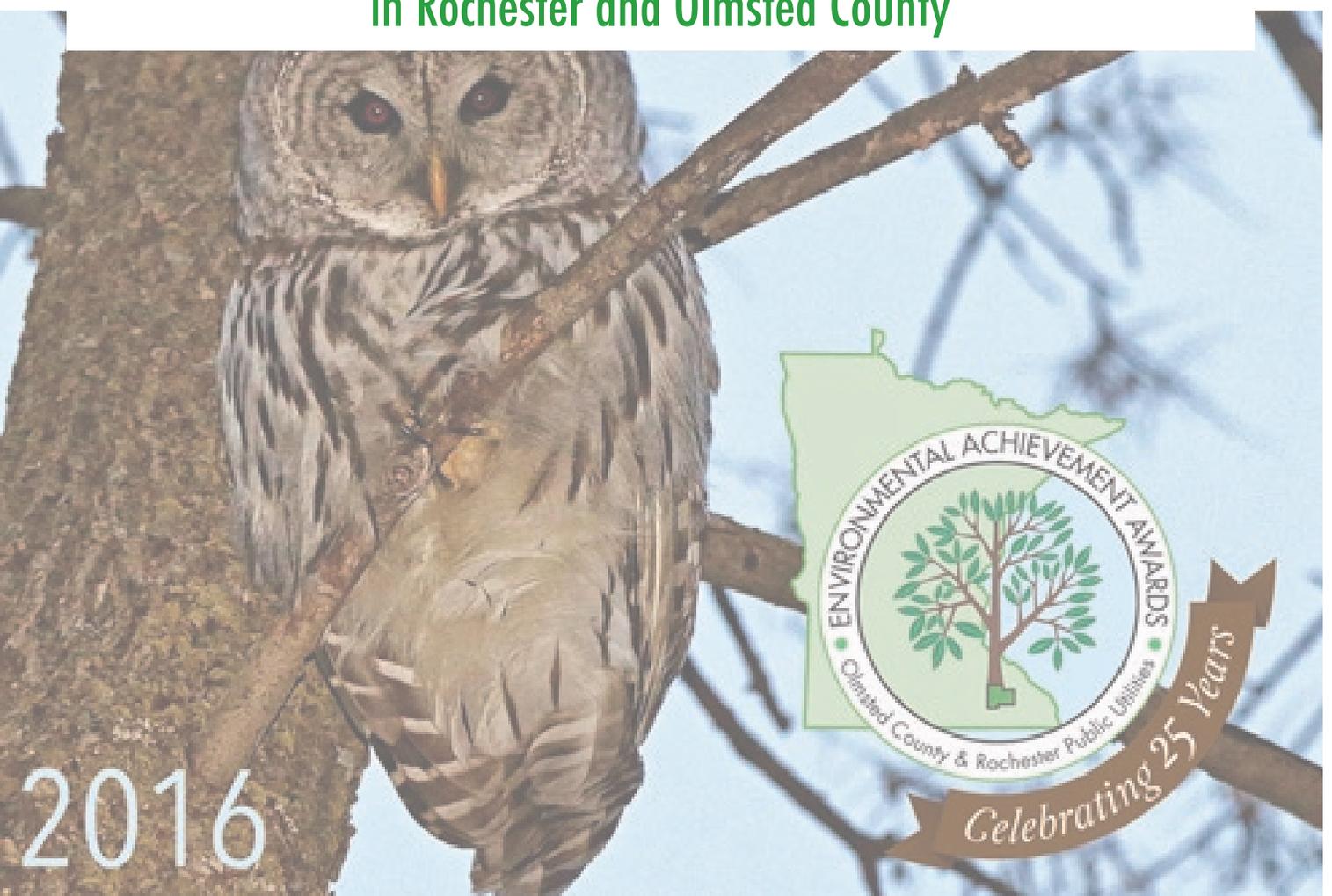


RPU Plugged In



Celebrating 25 Years of Environmental Accomplishments
in Rochester and Olmsted County





CELEBRATING 25 YEARS of Environmental Accomplishments In Rochester and Olmsted County

RPU, along with Olmsted County, marked 25 years of recognizing environmental achievements in Rochester and Olmsted County through the Environmental Achievement Awards in January. Many of the recipients noted that they didn't do it for the recognition, but for the positive impact that their work or project will leave on the local environment.

This year's recipients covered a broad range of work and projects, including many with an educational component to them. Through education on environmental initiatives, others may be inspired to become involved in an existing or new project to continue bettering the environment of Rochester and Olmsted County for years to come.

The 2016 recipients are:



TERRI DUGAN

As part of her capstone project in the Minnesota Master Naturalist Program, Terri Dugan organized a volunteer effort to restore a 10-acre woodland on the west side of Quarry Hill Park. Terri and her team of volunteers flagged a sustainable trail, blocked a steep erosion path, and planted 60 species of

native flora. Summer of Service (SOS) teens assisted in clearing deadfall and invasive species. This restoration project allows hikers to enjoy a part of the park that was previously inaccessible.

Additionally, Terri started the Weed Warriors program at Quarry Hill. Since 2014, Terri and other volunteers have cleared over 20 acres of invasive plant species. She continues to play a major role in educating the public about the detriments of garlic mustard and buckthorn.



THE GREEN THUMB INITIATIVE

The Green Thumb Initiative (GTI) is a hands-on educational program for environmentally conscious students who attend the Rochester Alternative Learning Center (ALC). GTI is involved in a number of student-led projects. The group maintains the school's garden, organizes Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) subscriptions, and introduces students from other schools to raised-bed gardening.

This past spring, GTI transformed an empty plot at the fairgrounds into a small space gardening demonstration. The students cultivated the soil over a demolished building's rocky foundation and planted a mixture of vegetable crops and ornamental plants. A mulch path leading through the garden was added to showcase a variety of "upcycled" planting containers. The containers included an old grill, milk crates, and shoes. Signs were placed near each planting to inform patrons how each upcycled container was created. Produce from the garden did not go to waste; some of the vegetables were donated to the Salvation Army, while others were used to teach a science lesson on food preservation at the ALC.

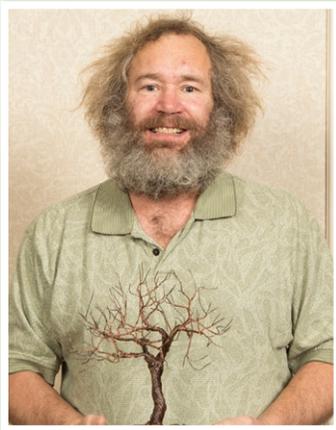


*Jon Goetz, owner
of First Student*

FIRST STUDENT

First Student in Rochester, Minnesota, services Rochester Public Schools for student transportation and provides intra-town transportation for Mayo Clinic. In an effort to reduce their environmental impact, First Student upgraded their fleet with vehicles that run on alternative fuels. Thirty-four propane-powered

school buses, 12 propane-powered shuttle mini-coaches, and four compressed natural gas (CNG) powered transit buses operate throughout the city. Utilizing these alternative fuel sources reduces greenhouse gas emissions and improves air quality in Rochester. First Student further reduces emissions with its three-minute idling policy.



JEFFERY O'NEILL

Jeffery O'Neill understands the important role agriculture plays in preserving water resources. His farm is located along the Middle Branch of the Whitewater River, and he has worked to curb runoff by converting an area of land that was previously used as a feedlot into fields that support fruit and vegetable

production. He used mulch to establish crop rows and seeded a ryegrass cover over an area adjacent to the river. These modifications represent Jeffery's commitment to sustainable land management.



*Jeremy Kramer, 5th grade
teacher at Gage Elementary*

2015-2016 FIFTH GRADERS OF GAGE ELEMENTARY GARDEN BOXES

Students at Gage Elementary aren't afraid to get their hands dirty. This past spring, fifth graders submitted designs for a series of raised garden planters. With a little guidance from several

skilled teachers, the students learned to use a variety of tools. Once complete, the garden boxes were filled with topsoil and vegetable seedlings. The students tended the garden into the summer, and eventually harvested their crop. Produce collected from the garden went to the school's Community Resource Room to support families in need.



DR. CORY RUBIN

As an educator for Rochester Community and Technical College (RCTC), Dr. Cory Rubin is able to connect with future environmental leaders through experiential learning and extracurricular leadership. Cory serves on the RCTC Stormwater Committee, where he advises and assists with

decisions that affect stormwater management on the campus. In his role as advisor to the Ecology Club, Cory assists with an annual cleanup along the Zumbro River, organizes tree plantings, and assists in the management of the Native Species Garden at RCTC.

Off campus, he has organized neighborhood tree planting events, been part of the Earthfest Planning Committee, and currently serves on the Rochester Energy Commission.



LINCOLN K-8 FIRST LEGO LEAGUE TEAM

FIRST LEGO League is an extracurricular program that challenges students to solve real-world problems by applying science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) concepts. Students enhance a variety of skills in the process: critical thinking, team building, and public speaking. During the 2015-2016 school year, the Lincoln K-8 FIRST LEGO League team found a way to reduce their lunchroom waste through composting. Team members collaborated with staff and faculty to teach their fellow students how to separate garbage, organics, and recyclables correctly. The team worked with Full Circle Organics to collect and compost the organic waste. Thanks to the team's leadership, the school now diverts two to three bags of compostable material from the trash each day.

For more information on energy conservation or the Environmental Achievement Awards, visit www.rpu.org.

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*Visit our website at www.rpu.org to download a rebate application with minimum efficiency requirements and complete terms and conditions.

COLD WEATHER RULE WINDOW ENDING SOON

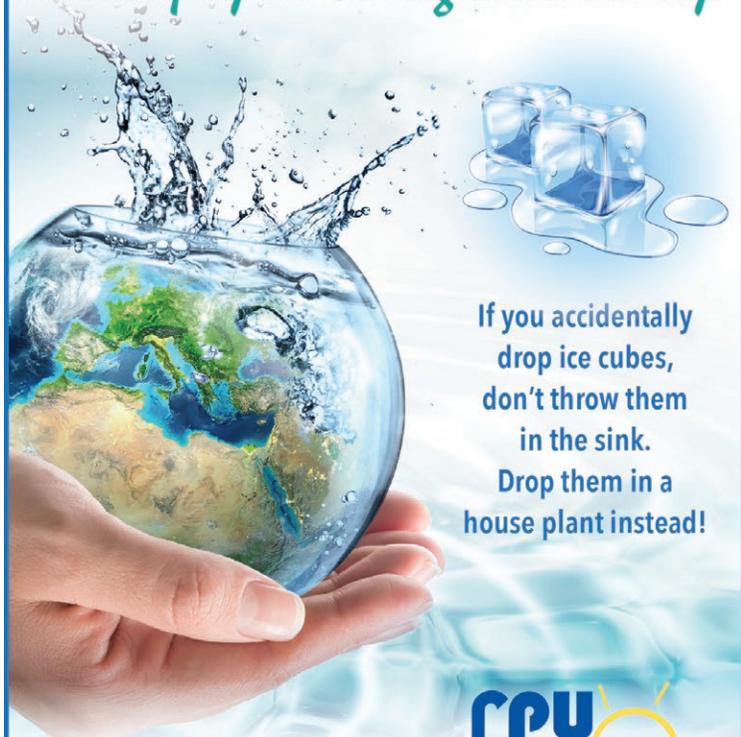
The Minnesota Cold Weather Rule window is coming to an end on April 15, 2017. If you are behind on paying your RPU bill, please contact RPU customer service to make arrangements to bring your account current by April 15.

If no arrangement has been made and your account is not current as of April 15, your electric service may be shut off for non-payment. RPU customer service is available from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday through Friday to assist you.

Visit the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission website for full details on the Minnesota Cold Weather Rule at <http://www.puc.state.mn.us/puc/consumers/index.html>.

WATER CONSERVATION

Monthly Tip on Saving From the Tap



If you accidentally drop ice cubes, don't throw them in the sink. Drop them in a house plant instead!

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RPU Utility Board Meeting Dates for 2017

Consider being a part of the decision making process at RPU by attending a board meeting in 2017. All RPU Board meetings are open to the public and allow time for visitors to address the board if they choose.

Meeting location: RPU Service Center (unless alternate location is otherwise noted on the RPU website)

Meeting time: 4 p.m. (unless alternate time is noted on the RPU website)

Board meeting information can be found on the RPU website (www.rpu.org) under the About RPU tab.

RPU Utility Board



Mark Browning,
Board President



Tim Haskin



Melissa Graner
Johnson



Michael Wojcik



Brian Morgan

Monthly Meeting Dates

January 31
February 28
March 28

April 25
May 23
June 27

July 25
August 29
September 26

October 24
November 14
November 28
December 19

RPU Commercial Customer Corner

Now Is the Time to Address Your Commercial Air Conditioning Unit Maintenance

Is March a good time to talk air conditioner (AC) maintenance? You bet it is. Summer heat is just around the corner, but more importantly, spring humidity is just about to sneak up on us. This will make the air uncomfortable and be a breeding ground for bacteria and mold.

AC systems do much more than cool the air, they remove humidity. There are folks familiar with psychrometric charts who understand the meaning of wet bulb, dry bulb, and enthalpy, while the rest of us just want it to be cool and comfortable. Whatever category you fall into, remember even the best equipment requires maintenance to work as designed, and humidity control is just as important as temperature control.

All AC equipment has an evaporator and a condenser. The evaporator absorbs heat from inside the building and the condenser releases the heat to the atmosphere outside the building. In the process of absorbing heat, extra moisture in the air is squeezed out, controlling humidity and increasing comfort.

In Rochester, we are fortunate to have great open spaces and lots of trees. These conditions also provide areas for wind to collect dust, leaves, and those pesky little cottonwood seeds. All of these can end up in condenser coils, significantly impacting AC performance. Whether you have a rooftop unit, a split system, or cooling tower, these are all exposed to the elements and collect debris, making heat transfer from the coils to the outside air more difficult. This increases the load on your AC unit, and can reduce its capacity.

The evaporator inside your building is exposed to similar contaminants. While the debris might not be as large, the ability to absorb heat is greatly reduced and therefore the ability of the system to remove humidity and cool the air will be reduced as well.

Your AC system doesn't necessarily need to be cleaned annually, but if you haven't thought about it for three years, it may be time. Or if you live in an area with a lot of cottonwood trees, a quick cleaning of the condenser may be necessary. An annual checkup and cleaning of your AC system can make it run more efficiently, extend equipment life, and most importantly, make you and your building occupants more comfortable.

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Beware of Possible Fraudulent Payment Sites

RPU and other utilities across the nation are warning customers to be aware of third-party payment sites that claim to collect payments for the utility, but the payment can show up past the due date or not at all. The websites even utilize the utility branding and logos on their payment pages. There are many negative reviews and complaints to the Better Business Bureau (www.bbb.org) regarding businesses that offer utility payment processing. In addition, they also charge a processing fee, whereas RPU never charges a fee for making a payment online (www.rpu.org).

Beware of these sites and DO NOT make an RPU payment on any site other than the RPU website (www.rpu.org), your trusted banking website, or the site for a payment service provider that you have thoroughly investigated.



RPU May Be Tree Trimming in Your Neighborhood This Spring/Summer

RPU invests significant resources and time into tree trimming operations each year. The importance of having clearance near and around distribution lines helps to better ensure safety and reliability. Overgrown trees and vegetation can be a bad combination with high voltage electricity.

We want to share some helpful information with you regarding our tree trimming process, in case we are trimming in your neighborhood this spring/summer.

- RPU will send you a letter prior to tree trimming work in your area. The letter will explain who will be trimming in your area, when, and why trimming is necessary.

- RPU contracts with two tree trimming services to ensure that tree trimming is done in a timely manner. Wright Tree Service or Asplundh will be doing the work.
- A representative will contact you if trimming or removal is necessary on your property.
- Most of the time, electric service does not need to be interrupted.
- Keep back a safe distance from all tree trimming operations, due to the dangerous nature of the work.
- Never try to trim near overhead lines yourself.

If you have questions, please contact RPU customer service at **507.280.1500**.

RPU Lineworkers Visit the Minnesota Children's Museum Rochester

RPU lineworkers, Chuck Floeter and Colton Koster, visited the Minnesota Children's Museum Rochester to talk about their job and to show tools of their trade, including their bucket truck!

RPU tries to make time for employees to visit and speak with organizations and groups in Rochester. If you are interested in having someone from RPU speak or present to your group or organization, contact Tony Benson at tbenson@rpu.org.





It's the **WRITE** time for scholarship money!

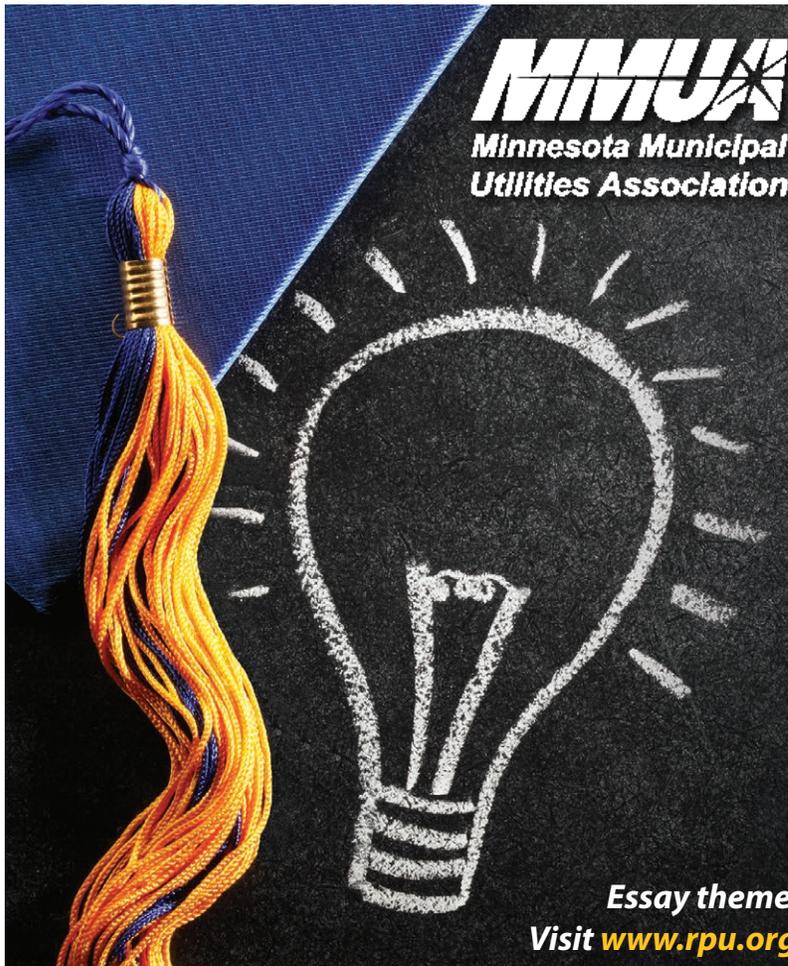
Tom Bovitz Memorial Scholarships for High School Seniors

Entries Due March 31, 2017

ESSAY SCHOLARSHIP CONTEST:

- First Place.....\$2000
- Second Place.....\$1500
- Third Place.....\$1000
- Fourth Place.....\$500

Essay theme is "Municipal Utilities: Good for All of Us."
Visit www.rpu.org for guidelines and to download an entry form.



Do you know where your house needs energy help?

Find out with RPU's Neighborhood Energy Challenge!

- 1. Attend a FREE Energy Workshop:**
Saturday, March 11, 2017 • 10:00-11:00 a.m.
Northrop Community Education Center | 201 8th St NW | Room 308
- 2. Schedule a Home Audit for Only \$50**
Receive FREE "First Step" Water and Energy Saving Products
- 3. Get Expert Help**
With "Next Step" Efficiency Improvements



TO REGISTER:
Contact Stacy Boots Camp
888.734.6365
sbootscamp@mncee.org

Learn more: www.rpu.org



How can you save energy, water, and money?

Watch for NEW Tips from Tony coming this month! Visit our website at www.rpu.org to learn more.



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L-R: RPU employees Steve Johnson and Matt Brekke are ready to answer questions at the RPU booth.

Thanks for Stopping by Our Booth!

We had a great time at the RAB Home Show showing off our exhibit "Our Water Footprint," which shows the real impact on water usage through daily activities and how that can be reduced with small changes. If you have questions about how you can reduce your water or electricity usage, visit the RPU website (www.rpu.org) or contact RPU customer service (507.280.1500).



Save the Date!

RPU's 15th Annual

Arbor Day Celebration

Friday, April 28, 2017 • 11am-1pm
Three Links - Silver Lake Park



FREE Food* • FREE Trees* • Giveaways*
Live Music • Family Activities • Poster Contest Winners Awarded

QUESTIONS: Stephanie Humphrey 507.280.1639

MORE INFORMATION: www.rpu.org

*while supplies last