

# COOPERATIVE CONNECTIONS



Katie Grott, field station manager at SDSU's Cottonwood research facility near Philip, stays busy overseeing several ongoing projects designed to deliver practical and profitable solutions for producers.

## Blazing new trails

**Ag research abounds at Cottonwood**  
Pages 8-9

**Line work courses through their veins**  
Pages 12-13



# Lineworker Appreciation Day shows gratitude for those who keep the lights on



**Ben Dunsmoor**  
Editor

Everybody and everything has its day. The website [nationaldaycalendar.com](https://nationaldaycalendar.com) tracks all these special days throughout the year. There is National Caramel Popcorn Day, National Zoo Lovers Day, and even National Hug a Newsperson Day. But there is one day that is special to electric cooperatives and utilities. It is National Lineworker Appreciation Day and it is celebrated by co-ops every April.

National Lineworker Appreciation Day was started in 2013 when Congress recognized April 18 as a day to thank power linemen across the country for the work they do to keep the lights on. Since that time the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA) has established the second Monday of April as National Lineworker Appreciation Day.

**It is not your typical job,  
but it is an essential job to  
ensure the power stays on for  
thousands of co-op members  
in our region.**

NRECA estimates there are approximately 120,000 lineworkers across the country who are dedicated to powering America. Being a lineworker is one of the top 10 most dangerous jobs in the United States because linemen work with high-voltage electricity in some of the most unforgiving circumstances. It is a job that takes precision, skill, and attention to detail to ensure it is done the right way and in a safe manner.

Linemen must go through a lot of training to perform the job at a high level. Most lineworkers at Northern Electric Cooperative graduate from the Power Line Construction and Maintenance program at Mitchell Tech. Once they graduate from Mitchell Tech, however, their training is not over. Apprentice lineworkers must complete 8,000 hours of on-the-job training and three dozen tests over a four-year period through the Northwest Lineman College to become journeymen linemen.

Most consumers think about a lineman's work when they have to brave the elements to restore power following a severe thunderstorm or bad winter weather. Restoring power after a storm is one of the most important jobs of a lineworker, but they also repair, replace, and upgrade power lines throughout the year to ensure the electric grid remains reliable and resilient. Northern Electric line crews reconstructed 13 miles of overhead line and buried more than 80 miles of new underground line in 2021 alone. Northern Electric linemen also replace old poles and build out new electrical services to homes, farms, and businesses throughout the year. The construction and maintenance program that Northern Electric linemen complete every year is the backbone of the safe and reliable electricity our members depend on every single day.

Being a lineworker requires thousands of hours of training and a high-level of skill and precision as they work with high-voltage electricity on a daily basis. It is not your typical job, but it is an essential job to ensure the power stays on for thousands of co-op members in our region and millions of Americans across the country. It is the reason lineworkers have their day on the calendar too.

## COOPERATIVE CONNECTIONS

## NORTHERN ELECTRIC

(USPS 396-040)

**Board President:** Donna Sharp

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**Executive Secretary:** Kay Albrecht

Northern Electric Cooperative Connections is the monthly publication for the members of Northern Electric Cooperative, PO Box 457, Bath, SD 57427. Families subscribe to Cooperative Connections as part of their electric cooperative membership. The purpose of Northern Electric Cooperative Connections is to provide reliable, helpful information to electric cooperative members on electric cooperative matters and better rural living.

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**Northern Electric Cooperative**  
A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative

Northern Electric Cooperative's regular board meeting was held February 24, 2022, at the headquarters in Bath with all directors present. As the first order of business, the board approved the January 20, 2022, minutes and expenditures. The board then reviewed and accepted monthly reports by management.

Directors viewed the East River Electric Power Cooperative video report. East River Director Kirk Schaunaman reported on actions taken by the board at its February 3, 2022, meeting. General Manager Char Hager reported on the East River MAC meeting which was held February 2, 2022. South Dakota Rural Electric Association Director Nolan Wipf reported that the next SDREA board meeting will be held March 24-25, 2022. Director Kirk Schaunaman reported on the Basin Electric Power Cooperative February Board Meeting in Bismarck which he attended through East River. Directors Kirk Schaunaman, Donna Sharp, Todd Hettich, Ronald Kaaz and General Manager Char Hager reported on the East River Energize Forum, which was held February 2-3 in Sioux Falls. General Manager Char Hager reported on the South Dakota Rural Electric Managers Association Meeting held February 7-8, 2022, in Pierre.

### MANAGER'S REPORT

General Manager Char Hager's report to the board included the following items:

- Update on development projects.
- Update on Rural Electric Economic Development (REED) revolving loan fund.
- Legal and Legislative Report.
- Informed directors of 2022 ACRE dues.
- Informed directors of the Summit Carbon Solutions easement request.

- Update on the sale of Bald Mountain and Faulkton towers.
- Informed directors of the 7th Annual LAMONT-RHODES Lecture Series, Tuesday, April 12, 2022, at Northern State University.
- Reminded directors of the 2022 NRECA Legislative Conference, May 1-3, in Washington, DC.
- Reminded directors of the 2022 NRECA Directors Conference, April 2-5, in Austin, TX.

### BOARD REPORT

The board considered and/or acted upon the following:

1. Approved the date and time of the next regular board meeting for 8:30 A.M. on Thursday, March 17, 2022.
2. Approved annual signature and transaction authorization.
3. Approved payment of legal fees for Harvey Oliver of \$6,218.47.
4. Approved Work Order Inventories #22-01 for \$275,472.85 and #22-01MC for \$33,331.06 to be submitted to Rural Utilities Service (RUS) for reimbursement from loan funds for electric plant construction already completed.
5. Reviewed and modified co-op marketing programs.
6. Authorized board attendance to the NRECA Credentialed Cooperative Director (CCD) Courses, 2620-Board Operations and Process, 2630-Strategic Planning and 2640-Financial Decision Making, March 29-31, 2022, in Pierre.
7. Authorized board attendance to the 2022 NRECA New Director Orientation, May 11-13, Arlington, VA.
8. Held Executive Session.

### FINANCIAL REPORT

	Jan-22	Jan-21
kWh Sales .....	36,972,405 kWh	31,303,063 kWh
Electric Revenues .....	\$2,944,885	\$2,647,552
Total Cost of Service .....	\$2,739,787	\$2,518,511
Operating Margins.....	\$205,098	\$129,041
Year to Date Margins .....	\$207,140	\$130,378

### RESIDENTIAL AVERAGE MONTHLY USAGE AND BILL

JAN-2022.....	3,876 kWh.....	\$310.27 .....	0.0800 per kWh
JAN-2021.....	2,993 kWh.....	\$261.49 .....	0.0874 per kWh

Wholesale power cost, taxes, interest, and depreciation account for 84.0% of NEC's total cost of service.

# 10 helpful tips for spring energy savings

Every season of the year provides many unique energy-saving opportunities for you and your family.

Here are some ideas particularly well suited for you to apply this spring.

1. **Clear the air:** Open windows to allow fresh air to circulate throughout your home.
2. **Cook outside:** Enjoy the sunshine by using your grill or smoker to add festive flavors to meals.
3. **Search and seal:** Cracks and spaces let conditioned air slip outdoors. Caulk and weatherstrip to seal leaks.
4. **Natural light:** Open blinds and curtains and turn off the lights to save energy and money.
5. **Be fan friendly:** Use ceiling fans to circulate air and keep cool.
6. **Atmospheric adjustment:** Remember to adjust your thermostat settings for the warmer months ahead.
7. **Tune up:** Schedule an appointment with a qualified heating, ventilating and air conditioning technician to identify any potential problems with your system.
8. **Peak savings:** Plan household chores that require electricity during off-peak hours (when energy demand is low).
9. **Take charge:** Consider disconnecting electrical devices you don't use regularly until you need them. Plugged-in devices use energy even when not in use.
10. **Move outdoors:** Time spent outdoors offers opportunities to turn off lights, TVs, computers and appliances. You'll be more active, have more fun and save more money.



## DON'T TOY WITH PERSONAL SAFETY



When playing outdoors, keep a safe distance from power lines, substations and other equipment your electric co-op uses to send electricity to your home.

Flying remote-controlled toys and drones is a great way to have fun, but accidentally making contact with a power line or other electrical equipment can be dangerous and, in some cases, even deadly.

- Never fly kites or drones near power lines.
- Stay away from power lines, meters, transformers and electrical boxes.
- Never climb trees near power lines.
- If you get something stuck in a power line, call your electric co-op.



## Fire Prevention

### Jonie Smith

Jonie Smith sends out an important safety message for campers to extinguish fires before leaving the area. Jonie is the daughter of Myles and Amber Smith of Castlewood. They are members of H-D Electric Cooperative.

Kids, send your drawing with an electrical safety tip to your local electric cooperative (address found on Page 3). If your poster is published, you'll receive a prize. All entries must include your name, age, mailing address and the names of your parents. Colored drawings are encouraged.



# LIP-SMACKING BEVERAGES

## BLUEBERRY BANANA SMOOTHIE

### Ingredients:

1 cup spinach  
1/2 cup water  
2 tbsp. apple cider vinegar  
1 tbsp. almond butter  
1/2 cup bananas, frozen  
1/2 cup blueberries, frozen  
1 tbsp. chia seeds  
1/4 tsp. ground cinnamon  
1/4 tsp. minced ginger  
1/2 cup berry yogurt  
fresh blueberries, for garnish (optional)  
Ground black pepper to taste

### METHOD

In blender, blend spinach, water, apple cider vinegar, almond butter, frozen bananas, frozen blueberries, chia seeds, cinnamon, ginger and yogurt until smooth. Pour into two glasses and garnish with fresh blueberries, if desired.

**culinary.net**

## FRENCH ICED COFFEE

### Ingredients:

3 cups strong coffee  
2 cups sugar  
1 pint cream or half & half  
1 qt. milk or almond milk  
2 tsp. (vanilla) flavoring (other flavorings also work)

### METHOD

Dissolve sugar in hot coffee. Cool. Add other ingredients. Pour into containers (I use the tall 2 c. Tupperware for individual drinks, but also use quarts.) Freeze. Take out and let thaw.

**Ruth Schilberg, Viborg**

## SWAMP WATER

### Ingredients:

1 small package lime gelatin  
1 cup hot water  
1 (12-oz.) can frozen unsweetened pineapple juice concentrate  
2 liters carbonated water

### METHOD

Mix lime gelatin with hot water to dissolve. Add frozen concentrate and carbonated water. Chill. Makes 10 servings.

**Lily Gums, Clear Lake**

## FRUIT SLUSH

### Ingredients:

4 cups sugar (granulated)  
6 cups water  
1 46 oz. can pineapple juice  
2 12 oz. cans frozen orange juice  
1 12 oz. can frozen lemonade (pink or yellow)  
2 small bananas, mashed very fine (or other fruit)

### METHOD

Mix and bring to a boil the sugar and water. When mixture is cool, add juices and fruit. Put in 5-quart pail and freeze. When frozen, use 2-3 scoops in a glass with 7-Up or ginger ale. Great drink for spring or summer.

**Alana Neville, Milesville**

## STRAWBERRY SMOOTHIE

### Ingredients:

2 cup fresh strawberries, stemmed & halved  
1 cup plain yogurt  
1/2 cup ice cubes or chips  
1/2 tsp. ground cardamom  
1/4 tsp. ginger

### METHOD

In a blender, combine all ingredients. Blend on high speed until smoothie texture. Makes 2-12 oz. glasses.

**Jane Ham, Rapid City**

Please send your favorite casserole recipes to your local electric cooperative (address found on Page 3). Each recipe printed will be entered into a drawing for a prize in December 2022. All entries must include your name, mailing address, phone number and cooperative name.

# New Employees Bring Cooperative Experience to Northern Electric's Accounting and Billing Department



**Brittany Hofer**

Brittany will be the new senior billing clerk for Northern Electric.

Northern Electric Cooperative has hired two new employees to fill open positions in the accounting and billing department. Brittany Hofer has been hired as the senior billing clerk to take over for Doris Scheuffele who plans to retire in April. Lorisa Rudolph has been hired as a senior accountant to fill a vacant position in the department.

Both Hofer and Rudolph were raised in the region and their families were served by electric cooperatives. The new employees also participated in youth programs offered by their local electric cooperatives when they were growing up in the area.

Hofer grew up in Bath and still lives in Bath. She graduated cum laude from Northern State University with a major in Professional Accountancy and a minor in Banking/Finance. Prior to coming to Northern Electric Cooperative, she did accounting for South Dakota Wheat Growers/Agtegra and Harms Oil. Most recently she prepared tax returns, bookkeeping and payrolls for clients at TNTax Business Services. Hofer grew up as a Northern Electric member.

"I grew up around Northern Electric and have been intrigued with what they do. I attended farm safety camp when I was little that was put on by the co-op," Hofer said. "I am looking forward to being a part of the community with the co-op, growing into my position, and the fun volunteer opportunities the co-op has to offer."



**Lorisa Rudolph**

Lorisa was hired as a senior accountant in February. She fills a vacant position in the co-op's accounting and billing department.

Rudolph is a Webster native who comes to Northern Electric from Agtegra Cooperative where she worked as a senior accountant. Rudolph interned with Eide Bailly during college and worked for the South Dakota Department of Legislative Audit and South Dakota Wheat Growers prior to working for Agtegra. She graduated from Northern State University summa cum laude with a degree in Professional Accounting and a minor in Banking. She passed the CPA exam in December and received her CPA license.

Rudolph was the recipient of the Lake Region Electric Association scholarship in 2014 and is looking forward to advancing her career at an electric cooperative.

"Growing up in a cooperative system and then working at a cooperative, I love the unique business model and what a cooperative can do for its members," Rudolph said. "Northern Electric Cooperative has a great record of providing outstanding service and looking out for the members they serve. I think that is something great to be proud of."

Rudolph is married and has two Labrador retrievers. Hofer is engaged and planning a fall wedding.

Current Northern Electric senior billing clerk Doris Scheuffele plans to retire in April after serving the cooperative more than 32 years.

**For more information on the cooperative difference and the seven cooperative principles visit:**  
[northernelectric.coop/cooperativeprinciples](http://northernelectric.coop/cooperativeprinciples)

# VANDER WAL STEPS DOWN FROM BOARD

**The Northern Electric Board of Directors is accepting applications until April 14 to fill the vacancy in District 7**



**Jeff Vander Wal**

Vander Wal has resigned from the board because he is moving outside the co-op's service territory.

Northern Electric Cooperative board member Jeff Vander Wal of Brentford has resigned his seat on the board because he is moving outside of the co-op's service territory. The Northern Electric Cooperative Bylaws under Article IV, Section 3, states

that a board members must be a - "bona fide resident of the service area served by the cooperative located within the particular district."

The co-op's bylaws state that the Board of Directors has three months to fill the vacancy. The Board is requesting co-op members who live in District 7 to submit a letter of interest and a summary of their background and qualifications to a co-op office by Thursday, April 14, if they would like to be considered for the vacant seat. Once the Board of Directors has received the requested information from all interested members, they will vote for the member who has the best qualifications to serve on the board. The member who is chosen to fill the vacancy will serve on the board

until Vander Wal's term expires in September of 2023. The member who is chosen to fill Vander Wal's vacant board seat has the option of filing a petition to be elected by the members in District 7 at the 2023 annual meeting. Applicants must meet all board qualifications as laid out in Article IV, Section 3 of the Northern Electric Cooperative Bylaws. Copies of the bylaws are available at the co-op offices in Bath or Redfield. The bylaws can also be found online at [www.northernelectric.coop/cooperative-bylaws](http://www.northernelectric.coop/cooperative-bylaws)

District 7 encompasses any members who live east of U.S. Highway 281 in southern Brown County and northern Spink County near the communities of Stratford, Mellette, Brentford, Conde, Ashton and Turton. The northernmost border of District 7 is 142nd Street in Brown County. The southernmost border of the district is 166th Street south of Ashton in Spink County. Members who are interested in applying for the vacant seat should call the Northern Electric office at 605-225-0310 to confirm that their residence is within the boundaries of District 7. Members interested in

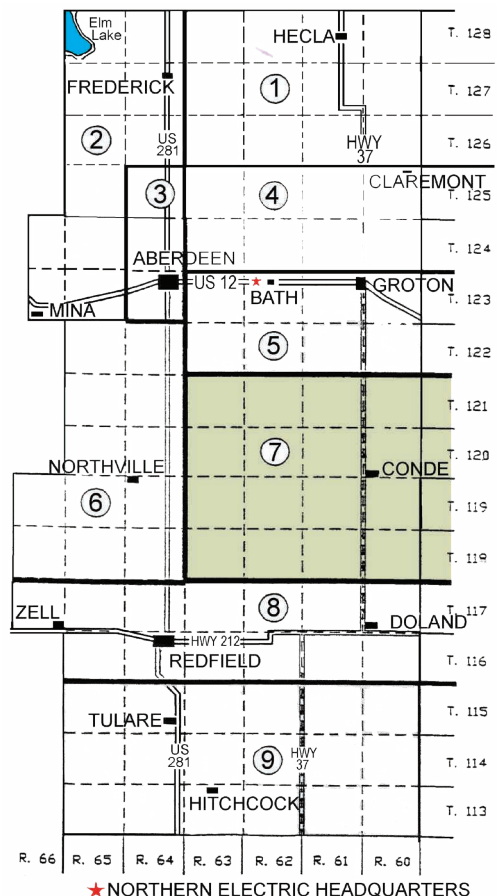
filling the vacancy can mail their letter of interest and summary of background and qualifications to:

**Kay Albrecht,  
Northern Electric Cooperative  
PO Box 457  
Bath, SD 57427**

Letters must be postmarked by **April 14.**

The requested materials can also be dropped off before the close of business on April 14 at one of the co-op offices in Bath or Redfield.

## COOPERATIVE DISTRICT MAP







# ROBO RANCHING

Cottonwood Field Station Manager Katie Grott and student Lily McFadden take a break from their work. *Photos by Billy Gibson*

## Cottonwood Field Research Station is abuzz with studies designed to increase producer profitability

**Billy Gibson**

billy.gibson@sdrea.coop

There are robo-cops, robo-codes and robo-calls. But robo-cattle ranching?

That futuristic phrase is part of the nomenclature surrounding a beef production movement called “precision ranching,” an offshoot of the “precision agriculture” approach that promotes the use of advanced technology to improve yields and profitability.

This new wave of ag research evokes postmodern images of bovines grazing through the fields wearing high tech gadgets. Turns out, it’s a description not too far off the mark, according to Dr. Jamie Brennan, an assistant professor of research and extension specialist at South Dakota State University.

Based out of the West River Research and Extension Center in Rapid City, Brennan is using SDSU’s Cottonwood Field Station near Philip to study the viability of using high-tech GPS tracking collars to deliver real-time information on steer activity and behavior.

“By monitoring animal movement we can identify changes in behavior that might indicate sickness, for example, which can be sent as an alert to producers,” Brennan said.

He’s deploying the type of advanced accelerator technology commonly associated with Fitbit watches, vehicle trackers, smartphone map apps and other monitoring devices.

“We’re working to develop the capability for producers to easily identify not only where animals are on the landscape but also where they are selecting for grazing and resting locations,” Brennan said. “The work we are doing at the station is designed to determine the potential benefits - and possible shortcomings - of precision ranching technology and to predict the return on investment for the producer.”

Brennan’s project is just one of several intriguing studies currently in play at the Cottonwood Field Station. One of six field research centers in the SDSU Agriculture Experiment Station network, Cottonwood is among the

oldest facilities of its kind in the country. Covering more than 2,600 acres, Cottonwood was established in 1907 and has received regional and national acclaim with impactful results such as developing a new method of determining stocking rates for western regions and devising the Universal Soil Loss Equation now known as RUSLE2.

These scientific forays into precision ranching include virtual fencing (Vence™), Smart Feeder™ systems, mobile app-based mineral consumption monitors, methane emissions measuring devices and soil moisture monitoring.

The exploration into virtual fencing holds plenty of promise in helping producers manage their livestock and landscape more efficiently and effectively, according to Cottonwood Field Station manager Katie Grott.

While it may be hard for an old-school rancher to envision a world without barbed wire, fence posts and cattle guards, moving this technology to market could result in substantial savings for farm families.

Grott explained the technology is a much more sophisticated version of the kind of residential-grade invisible fence





A cow at the Cottonwood Field Research Station waits patiently for a Smart Feeder to be loaded with hay.

designed to keep pets from wandering around the neighborhood streets. Virtual fencing is already being used to contain goat herds and other smaller animals with measurable success.

The latest research testing involves combining an electrical pulse administered through a GPS-enabled collar, combined with an auditory stimulus to keep cattle confined within certain boundaries. A software program allows the rancher to define those boundaries as needed for successful grazing rotation and land management.

“We’re looking at how virtual fencing affects animal behavior, performance and natural resources,” Grott said.

Dr. Krista Ehlert, assistant professor and extension specialist, is also involved in the project and adds, “Virtual fencing turns physical labor into cognitive labor for producers, helping to reduce labor and potentially improve work-life balance for producers.”

Other projects at Cottonwood include work being led by assistant professor Dr. Hector Menendez. The research uses technology developed by the Rapid City firm, C-Lock. C-Lock has a scale that collects daily weight records on animals every time they drink. The data provide

valuable information on stocking rates, forage quality and weather conditions on individual animal performance.

“It’s an exciting time in the area of agricultural research,” Menendez said.

“We have secured funds to proceed with a project on interdisciplinary engagement in animal systems and precision livestock water monitoring. And we’re excited about holding producer-oriented workshops, training classes and field days to educate producers on how these advancements can improve their profitability.”

One rancher who keeps a close eye on the latest research results is Eric Jennings, president of the South Dakota Cattleman’s Association.

“There are some interesting new concepts being explored through this facility and others,” Jennings said. “We’re watching to see which of these systems prove to become both practical and affordable for producers to implement in their daily operations. For instance, the idea of virtual fencing has been around for a while, but the research and application of new technology has emerged as a viable option.”

Brennan, Ehlert, Menendez and others who work daily to blaze new pathways

Amount of acres  
researchers have

**2,640**

at their disposal at the  
Cottonwood  
Field Station

for cattle producers take gratification from knowing their labor and application of scientific methods could result in a farm family turning the corner toward profitability and sustaining a generational way of life. Plus, they enjoy drawing students into the process and inspiring the next generation of farmers.

“They receive training in animal science, rangeland ecology, precision technology, modeling, computer programming and boots-on-the-ground ranching,” Menendez said. “One of our aims is to encourage the next generation of professionals that can merge precision technology to maximize rangeland livestock production while maintaining ranching culture.”

# Three new substations serving members



## The new substations will bring better reliability and redundancy to members in northern Brown County

**Ben Dunsmoor**

[bdunsmoor@northernelectric.coop](mailto:bdunsmoor@northernelectric.coop)

Three new substations in Brown County will improve reliability for the members of Northern Electric Cooperative and accommodate new growth within the co-op's service territory. The Moccasin Creek substation was energized in February and now serves nearly 600 members

north of Aberdeen. The Elm Lake and Frederick substations were energized last fall and will improve service and reliability in northern Brown County.

"The transmission line (from East River Electric) has redundancy now and Northern Electric has improved capacity," Northern Electric Cooperative Operations Manager Jerry Weber said.

Northern Electric's wholesale power supplier, East River Electric Power Cooperative, constructed the

substations and owns and operates the substations. Northern Electric builds its lines from the substations to the members at the end of the line. East River operates a total of 19 substations within Northern Electric's service territory.

The new Frederick substation was the first to be energized in October 2021. It replaces the old substation which was located along U.S. Highway 281. The new Frederick substation serves more than 200 members around the Frederick area and will have more circuits that can carry more electrical load. The new Frederick substation will receive power from East River and





The Moccasin Creek substation is located north of Aberdeen along U.S. Highway 281. It will serve the growing electrical load around the city.

can now be fed by other East River substations in northern Brown County so power can quickly be rerouted and restored in the event of an outage.

“It improves reliability and shortens up our feeder lines for better voltage and redundancy,” Weber said.

The Elm Lake substation is a new substation that was added to the system southwest of Frederick. It was energized in November 2021 and will accommodate the growing farm and residential development in northwest Brown County and around Elm Lake. It is also being fed by East River and will improve reliability and voltage issues in the area.

“Frederick and Elm Lake are served off of a new supply point on East River’s system and new transmission line built this last year, which greatly improves East River and Northern’s ability to reliably serve members,” East River Electric

Power Cooperative Engineering Manager Matthew Mohr said.

The Moccasin Creek substation is also a new substation that was added to the system.

It is located just north of Aberdeen along U.S. Highway 281 and will serve around 600 members. It will help the cooperative accommodate the growth and development around the city of Aberdeen.

“These substations should carry Northern Electric well into the future,” Weber said.

The combined number  
of Northern Electric  
members  
**1,037**  
receiving service from  
three new substations.



The new Elm Lake substation was energized in November 2021.

## COMMITTEE REVIEWING COOPERATIVE BYLAWS

A committee appointed by the Northern Electric Board of Directors is currently reviewing the bylaws of the cooperative. The bylaws have not been amended since 2012. Any changes to the bylaws proposed by the committee and approved by the Northern Electric Board of Directors must be approved by the members of the cooperative. Any member who would like to provide input to the committee during the review process may contact their board member, a co-op staff member, or call the office at **605-225-0310**. A copy of the current cooperative bylaws can be found online at [northernelectric.coop/cooperative-bylaws](http://northernelectric.coop/cooperative-bylaws)



#THANKALINEMAN

# VOLTAGE IN THEIR VEINS

The Miller and Wingen men share a total of 177 years of experience in the electric utility industry. Pictured above are Joel Miller, Rollie Miller, Travis Miller, Corey Miller, Wes Wingen and Dustin Wingen.

## Miller, Wingen utility workers represent a combined 177 years of faithful service

**Tara Miller**

taram@centralec.coop

Take a moment to imagine life without electricity. No household appliances, no electric heat, no air conditioning, no internet and no phone. In 1925, only half of homes in the U.S. had electricity. Fast forward to 2022, and electricity is a basic necessity.

April is Lineworker Appreciation Month – a time to celebrate and honor the brave men and women who often work in hazardous conditions to power our world.

The Miller family, originally from Canova, has 177 years of electric industry experience, and most of them started their careers as lineworkers.

### WHERE IT ALL STARTED

Before attending school to become a lineworker, Joel Miller, better known as “Joe” or “Smokey” to some, graduated from Canova High School and began working at Overhead Door Company

in Sioux Falls. While he didn’t mind the work, he knew it wasn’t what he wanted to do for the rest of his life. Joe then heard about an opportunity to attend school and become a lineworker.

“I knew Ron Callies. He was an instructor,” Joe said. “He told us to look at the program, so Robert Zens and I checked it out and thought we would give it a try.”

Joe graduated from what is now known as Mitchell Technical College (MTC) in 1978 and began the family’s legacy of life on the line when he joined East River Electric in Madison. He started on the construction crew and later worked in maintenance. His friend Robert Zens also worked at East River Electric, but passed away in a motorcycle accident in 1980.

Joe worked at East River Electric for nearly 20 years before he moved to Western Area Power Administration (WAPA) in Pierre. WAPA is a federal organization that markets and delivers hydroelectric power and related services

across the 15-state region. Joe retired from his position of line foreman at WAPA in 2020 after 43 years.

### FOLLOWING THE LEADER

Rollie was next in the Miller family line-up, a year younger than Joe. His mom talked him into going to Pipestone, MN, to work at Bayliner Boats with his older brother Ed. Rollie then worked at Feterl’s Manufacturing in Salem where he welded augers until he decided to enroll in line school at MTC at the age of 20.

“The biggest reason I went to line school was because Joe had just done it, and I was friends with Robert Zens. I saw how they just did it, and I thought I could do it, too,” Rollie explained.

Rollie now manages Vigilante Electric Cooperative in Dillon, MT. Before running the show, he worked for an electrical contractor and for West River Electric.

He then attended SDSU and worked for Bob’s Electric in Flandreau with Reggie Gassman, who is manager of customer electrical services at Sioux



Valley Energy. They both grew up in the Canova area.

Rollie earned a bachelor's degree in electrical engineering, allowing him to become a licensed professional engineer.

"My education has greatly benefited me throughout my career," Rollie said.

Rollie's boys are also following the family tradition. Cody Miller attended SDSU to become an electrical engineer and consults for electric utilities, and Logan "L.J." Miller is enrolled in the power line construction and

maintenance program at MTC.

"It's not a cake walk. I told them you really have to study and work hard," he said.

After Rollie, Corey was the next Miller brother to attend MTC.

"The reason I went into it is because I had two older brothers who were



Cody Miller



L.J. Miller

linemen. I knew when I was a freshman in high school that I was going to be a lineman," Corey said.

After graduating from MTC in 1987, Corey became an apprentice lineworker at Public Service of New Hampshire. He worked there for three years, then took a position at Missouri Public Service.

Like his brothers, Corey worked his way up the ranks. He was hired as a lineworker and promoted to foreman, then supervisor, and now works in management. He is also on the board of directors for the International Lineman Rodeo Association, helping host the annual lineman rodeo event which promotes lineworker safety.

Corey's 15-year-old son Zach plans to become a lineworker after high school. Corey shares this advice for anybody

- **Joel Miller**, Retired Line Foreman at Western Area Power Administration (Pierre, SD)  
43 Years, 6 months of industry experience
- **Rollie Miller**, General Manager at Vigilante Electric Cooperative (Dillon, MT)  
42 years, 6 months of industry experience
- **Corey Miller**, Director of Regional Operations at Evergy (Lexington, MO)  
35 years, 6 months of industry experience
- **Travis Miller**, Foreman at Southeastern Electric (Salem, SD)  
30 years of industry experience
- **Wes Wingen**, Manager of Meter Services at Black Hills Power (Rapid City, SD)  
15 years, 10 months of industry experience
- **Cody Miller**, Electrical Engineer (Dillon, MT)  
8 years, 6 months of industry experience
- **Dustin Wingen**, Former Lineworker at Alaska Village Electric Co-op (Anchorage, AK)  
2 years of industry experience
- **Logan (L.J.) Miller**, Student in the power line program at Mitchell Technical College

considering a career in the field:

"We need linemen. It is an awesome profession to get into. Linemen live to restore power – that's their lifeblood. And, quite honestly, you will make a very good wage while doing that."

Travis was the last of the Miller brothers to attend line school. He decided milking cows wasn't his calling, so in 1991 at age 26, Travis followed the path started by his big brother Joe.

"I figured they all did it, so I could probably do it better," Travis joked. He is now the foreman at Southeastern Electric in Salem.

Wes and Dustin Wingen are the sons of Stacy (Miller) and Bob Wingen. They are nephews to the Miller brothers and have also been involved in the electric utility industry. Dustin was a lineworker in Anchorage, AK, before coming back home to farm. Wes is an engineer and manager of meter services at Black Hills Power in Rapid City.

## IT'S A MILLER THING

The Miller family had nine children: Sandy, Duane, Ed, Joe, Rollie, Stacy, Derrin, Travis and Corey. Marcella, mother of the youngest eight children,

passed away in 2011, and Duane "Stub" Miller, the family patriarch, currently resides in Howard. Stub shared, "People don't know it today, but having electricity is something we shouldn't take for granted."

The four Miller brothers share a combined 151 years of electric industry experience. When you add it all up, the Miller and Wingen men boast an impressive 177 years of electric industry experience.

They couldn't have worked in this profession without the support of their families, which are too large to list. All the storm jobs, dangerous assignments and family moves were worth it when they think about the people they serve. They all agree, "It's a Miller thing" and working with voltage is in their veins.

## THANK A LINEWORKER

Please take time to thank lineworkers for all they do to brighten our lives. We thank the Miller family for their many years of service in the industry.

*Editor's note: Writer Tara Miller is Travis Miller's wife and works for Central Electric Cooperative near Mitchell.*

# PLANT TREES IN THE PROPER PLACE THIS SPRING

Springtime is planning time in northeast South Dakota as local farmers plan out what they will plant in their fields and homeowners plan their summer gardens and landscaping projects. This spring, Northern Electric is reminding members to think about power lines and electrical equipment as they begin making those plans.

Every year, Northern Electric spends thousands of dollars on tree trimming because trees are too close to power lines. Planning out the proper planting distances now will prevent problems in the future.

Avoid planting any trees within

20 feet of a powerline. If you must plant a tree within 20 feet of a power line, make sure that it will never get taller than 15 feet when it is fully mature. Trees that will reach between 25 and 40 feet tall should be planted at least 25 feet away from power lines and trees that are 40 feet or taller should be planted 50 feet away.

“If the branches of a tree get too close to the lines our crews will either have to trim it back or remove the tree completely,” Northern Electric Cooperative Operations Manager Jerry Weber said.

The same tips apply when there are underground power lines in the

area. Homeowners need to call 811 to have all utilities located before planting or digging. This will not only ensure that an underground line won't be hit during excavation, but it will show property owners the best spot for their trees. Similar distances and guidelines should be followed when planting around underground lines because roots can cause damage and also be dangerous.

It is also important to keep any shrubs at least 10 feet away from the doors of green pad-mount transformers and four feet away from all other sides of the transformer. This will allow linemen to access the underground transformer if there is an outage or any maintenance is required.

So, as spring arrives, keep the co-op in mind when making plans to landscape and plant new trees.

## Plant Trees Safely

Before you dig, call 811 to locate buried utility lines.

### LOW TREE ZONE

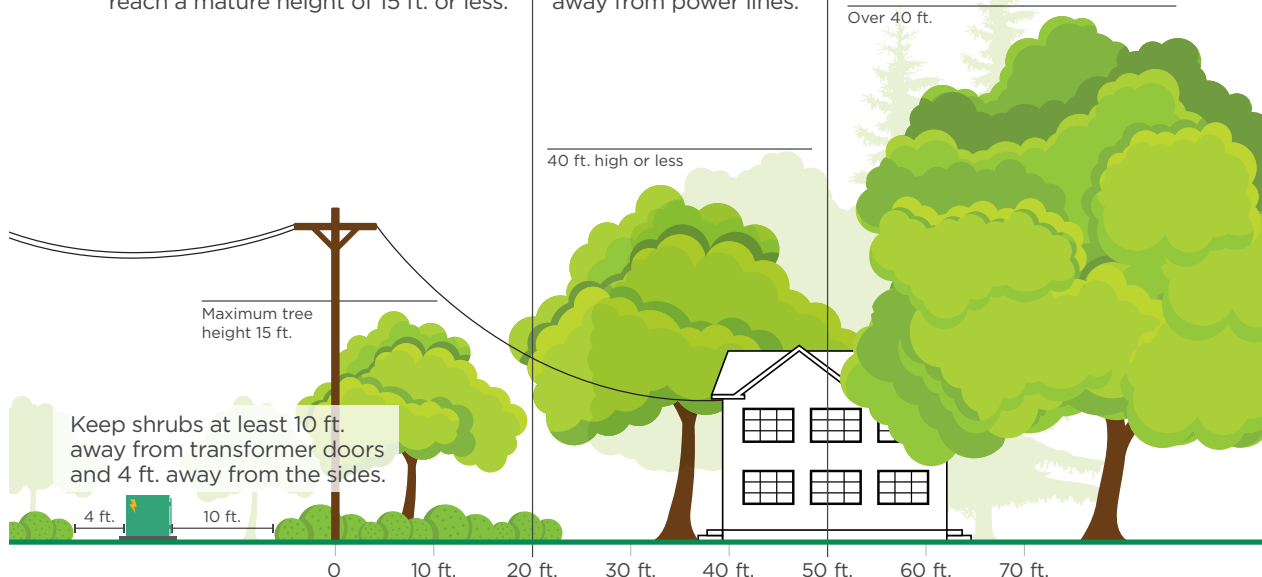
Avoid planting within 20 ft. of power lines. If planting is unavoidable, only plant shrubs and small trees that reach a mature height of 15 ft. or less.

### MEDIUM TREE ZONE

Plant medium trees (under 40 ft. when mature) at least 25 ft. away from power lines.

### LARGE TREE ZONE

Plant large trees (over 40 ft. when mature) at least 50 ft. away from power lines.





# TELL US WHO POWERS YOU!

We know our co-op community is filled with people making a difference. Let's celebrate them! Nominate a member or employee of your local Touchstone Energy® Cooperative who goes above and beyond.

**They could win up to \$3,000!**

Nominate your local hero at

**[WHOPOWERSYOUCONTEST.COM](https://whopowersyoucontest.com)**





**APRIL 16**  
Easter Egg Hunt at  
Reclamation Ranch, Mitchell, SD

To have your event listed on this page, send complete information, including date, event, place and contact to your local electric cooperative. Include your name, address and daytime telephone number. Information must be submitted at least eight weeks prior to your event. Please call ahead to confirm date, time and location of event.

To view the publication's master event calendar, scan the QR code below:



Or visit <https://sdrea.coop/cooperative-connections-event-calendar> to view more upcoming events.

### **MARCH 25-26**

#### **Schmeckfest**

748 S Main Street, Freeman, SD, 605-925-4237

### **MARCH 26**

#### **Annual Ag Day**

Washington Pavilion, Sioux Falls, SD, 605-367-6000

### **MARCH 30**

#### **Elton John Tribute Concert**

Performing Arts Center, Mitchell, SD, 605-770-7813

### **APRIL 2**

#### **Watertown Coin and Currency Show**

Elks Lodge, Watertown, SD, 605-882-4663

### **APRIL 2-3**

#### **Youth & Family Services' 25th Annual Kids Fair**

The Monument, Rapid City, SD, [youthandfamilyservices.org/kids-fair/](http://youthandfamilyservices.org/kids-fair/)

### **APRIL 8-9**

#### **Forks, Corks & Kegs Festival**

Various Locations, Deadwood, SD, [deadwood.com/event/forks-corks-kegs](http://deadwood.com/event/forks-corks-kegs)

### **APRIL 8-9**

#### **Jackrabbit Stampede Rodeo**

Swiftel Center, Brookings, SD, [swiftelcenter.com](http://swiftelcenter.com)

### **APRIL 8-10**

#### **CAHF Spring Fling Eggstravaganza Series**

Carroll Acres Hobby Farm, Rapid City, SD, [carrollacreshobbyfarm.com](http://carrollacreshobbyfarm.com)

### **APRIL 8-16**

#### **The Passion and the Cross**

Orpheum Theater Center, Sioux Falls, SD, [siouxfallsorpheum.com](http://siouxfallsorpheum.com)

### **APRIL 9**

#### **Pancake Breakfast**

1303 7th Avenue SE, Aberdeen, SD, 8-11 a.m. 605-626-3330

### **APRIL 9-10**

#### **DGTCA Gun Show**

Rushmore Civic Center, Rapid City, SD, 605-270-0764

### **APRIL 16**

#### **Easter Egg Hunt**

Reclamation Ranch, Mitchell, SD, 605-770-2867

### **APRIL 22**

#### **River Rat ½ Marathon, 10K, and 5K**

Gavins Point Area, Yankton, SD, [allsportscentral.com](http://allsportscentral.com)

### **APRIL 22-23**

#### **Junkin' Market Days**

W. H. Lyon Fairgrounds, Sioux Falls, SD, 605-941-4958

### **APRIL 23-24**

#### **Aberdeen A.B.A.T.E. Bike Show and Dance**

Ramkota Hotel, Aberdeen, SD, [aberndeenabate2011@gmail.com](mailto:aberndeenabate2011@gmail.com)

### **APRIL 23**

#### **Martina McBride**

Swiftel Center, Brookings, SD, [swiftelcenter.com](http://swiftelcenter.com)

### **APRIL 23**

#### **Winefest Renaissance**

1121 1st Avenue SE, Aberdeen, SD, 605-225-8714

### **APRIL 23-24**

#### **46th Mobridge Area Art Show**

Scherr-Howe Arena, Mobridge, SD, 605-845-2060

### **APRIL 23-24**

#### **Brookings Quilt Guild Show**

Swiftel Center, Brookings, SD, 605-690-3246

### **APRIL 27-30**

#### **45th Annual Kingswood Rummage Sales**

Southwest Sioux Falls, SD, [kingswoodrummage.com](http://kingswoodrummage.com)

### **APRIL 28-30**

#### **26th Annual Black Hills Dance Festival**

The Monument, Rapid City, SD, [blackhillsdancefestival.com](http://blackhillsdancefestival.com)

### **APRIL 29-MAY 1, 5-7**

#### **Ordinary Days**

Grand Opera House, Pierre, SD, [pierreplayers.com](http://pierreplayers.com)

### **APRIL 30**

#### **SDSO Centennial Finale**

Washington Pavilion, Sioux Falls, SD, [sdsymphony.org](http://sdsymphony.org)

### **MAY 7**

#### **Cinco de Mayo Fiesta**

131 E Falls Park Drive, Sioux Falls, SD, 605-274-3735

### **MAY 14-15**

#### **Ellsworth Air and Space Show**

1940 EP Howe Drive, Ellsworth AFB, SD, [ellsworthairshow.com](http://ellsworthairshow.com)

**Note: Please make sure to call ahead to verify the event is still being held.**