

COOPERATIVE CONNECTIONS

Local art teacher's mural
commemorates dedicated
Burke lineman.
Photo by Jacob Boyko

Rural Murals

Small Communities
Showcase History
and Culture Through
Mural Art

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There is Power in Community



Emily Johnson
Communications
Specialist

Today's consumers want to buy products and services from purposeful companies that contribute to the greater good. Every day, cooperatives strive to hold down costs while providing quality service. That's one of the benefits members of electric cooperatives receive. Besides the financial and economic benefits cooperatives bring, there's also commitment to the wellbeing of their members and strong support of education, local events and organizations within the community.

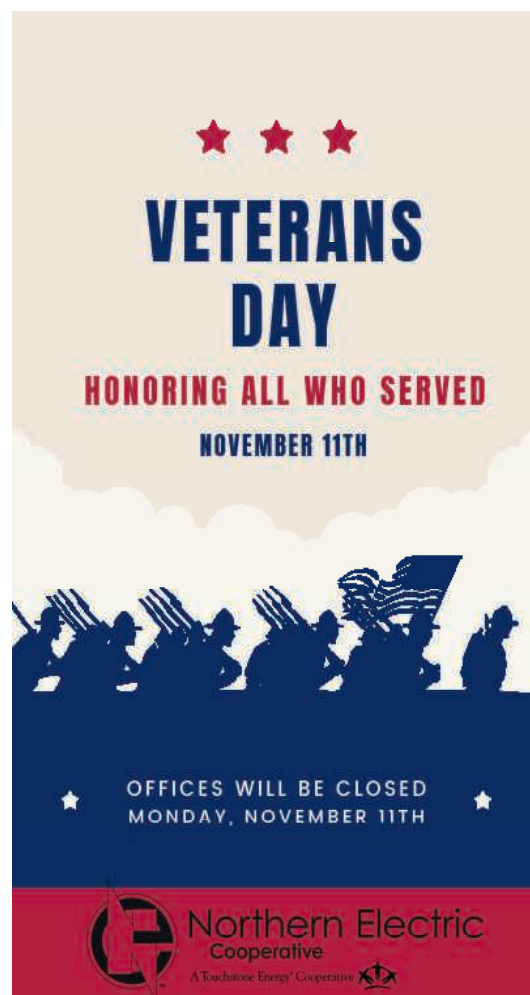
Knowing the core values and purpose of electric co-ops, I am very excited to be a part of this industry as the new Communications Specialist at Northern Electric Cooperative here in Bath, SD. I look forward to learning more about the issues that impact our members and cooperative and communicating the information to you.

Growing up as a small-town farm girl near Faulkton, SD, my life revolved around agriculture and community. Being a part of something and having a sense of community has always been important to me as I was active in just about everything from farm life to sports to 4-H to church youth group. After high school, I earned my bachelor's degree in 2017 at South Dakota State University in Agricultural Communications which has ultimately led me to here. I am excited to get back in touch with what I went to college for and being a part of a community focused organization.

I have enjoyed my first few weeks here and am looking forward to learning more about the cooperative world and being a part of NEC. Please let me know

of any topics you would like to hear and read about in the future. Knowing what issues are important to you is a priority as I start this new position. If you ever have a story you would like to see covered in the magazine or shared on social media, please share those ideas by contacting me at ejohnson@northernelectric.coop.

I am excited to get back in touch with what I went to college for and being a part of a community-focused organization!



COOPERATIVE CONNECTIONS

NORTHERN ELECTRIC

(USPS 396-040)

Board President: Nolan Wipf

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info@northernelectric.coop

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Manager of Information Technology: Derek Gorecki

Communications Specialist: Emily Johnson
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Executive Secretary: Amy Golden

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

Board Report

Northern Electric Cooperative's regular board meeting was held Sept. 20, 2024, at the headquarters in Bath with all directors attending in-person or virtually. Attorney Harvey Oliver was absent. As the first order of business, the Board approved the Aug. 23, 2024, minutes and Aug. expenditures. The board then reviewed and accepted monthly reports by management.

East River Director Kirk Schaunaman reported on actions taken by the East River Board at the regular meeting held Sept. 5, 2024. South Dakota Rural Electric Association Director Nolan Wipf reported that the next SDREA board meeting would be held Sept. 26 in Pierre.

Directors Todd Hettich, Nolan Wipf, Kirk Schaunaman and General Manager Char Hager reported on the 2024 East River Annual Meeting, held Sept. 4 in Sioux Falls, SD. Directors Todd Hettich, Nolan Wipf, Scott Sperry and General Manager Char Hager reported on the NRECA Regional Meetings 5 & 6 held Sept. 16-18 in Minneapolis.

MANAGER'S REPORT

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

- Report on the East River Annual Meeting.
- Report on the employee meeting

held on Aug. 27.

- Report on the new communications specialist, Emily Johnson, who started on Sept. 16.
- Report on the Power System Engineering Meeting held on Sept. 12.
- Report on the NRECA Regions 5 & 6 Meeting.
- Report on the 2024 SDRE Line Patrol Charity Ride held Sept. 7-8 in Murdo.

BOARD REPORT

The board considered and/or acted upon the following:

- Approved the date and time of the next regular board meeting for 8:30 a.m. Thursday, Oct. 24, 2024.
- Approved Work Order Inventories #24-08 for \$1,049,328.16 to be submitted to the Rural Utilities Service for reimbursement from loan funds for electric plant construction already completed.
- Approved requests for capital credit retirements of \$26,085.44.
- Approved the 2025 Capital Budget.
- Approved the date for the 2025 Annual Meeting for June 16, 2025 at the Expo Building at the Brown County Fair Grounds.

Contact your director or co-op manager if you have questions on these matters.

FINANCIAL REPORT

	August-24	August-23
kWh Sales.....	22,634,712 kWh.....	21,494,744 kWh
Electric Revenues	\$2,572,812.....	\$2,360,335
Total Cost of Service	\$2,413,494.....	\$2,296,739
Operating Margins.....	\$159,318.....	\$63,596
Year to Date Margins.....	\$432,248.....	\$481,889

RESIDENTIAL AVERAGE MONTHLY USAGE AND BILL

AUGUST 2024	1,359 kWh.....	\$199.51	0.1468 per kWh
AUGUST 2023	1,385 kWh.....	\$184.69.....	0.1334 per kWh

Wholesale power cost, taxes, interest, and depreciation account for 84.1% of NEC's total cost of service.

HOLIDAY FOOD SAFETY TIPS

Rachel Dotson

USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture

It's the time of year when many families will be gathering around the dining room table savoring the flavors of their favorite holiday meals. Check out how to keep your holiday meals safe this season with a few tips from Land-grant University Extension Services.

Shopping Safely

Before shopping, check the ingredients you have at home and verify their expiration date. It is helpful to prepare a shopping list before going shopping. Make sure you have sufficient room in your refrigerator for all purchased food items. Cold foods that need refrigeration or freezing should be purchased last.

Oklahoma State University Extension advises while shopping, keep raw meat, poultry and seafood away from other foods in your grocery cart. Placing raw meat, poultry and seafood in plastic bags can be a good method to separate them from other foods. Ask a cashier to place your raw meat, poultry and seafood in a separate bag.

Safe Food Handling Practices

- When it comes to preparing meats, washing poultry and meats at home is no longer necessary and is not recommended by the USDA. University of Connecticut Extension recommends thawing meat in a refrigerator or in a cold-water bath.
- Defrost meats in the refrigerator for approximately 24 hours, depending on size, or submerge meat in its original package in cold water and allow 30 minutes of thawing time for every pound.
- Rinse fruits and vegetables thoroughly under cool running water and use a produce brush to remove surface dirt. Even wash prepackaged greens to minimize bacterial contamination.
- While preparing food, use two cutting boards: one for preparing raw meat, poultry and fish, and the other for cutting fruits and vegetables, cooked food or preparing salads.
- Don't forget to also wash hands with soap and water before and after handling food.

Storing Leftovers

Bacteria grows when the food is left out for more than

two hours at room temperature. Divide leftovers into smaller portions and store in shallow containers in the refrigerator. University of Nebraska-Lincoln Extension advises reheating cooked leftovers to 165 degrees. Use a food thermometer to measure temperature accurately. Sauces, soups and gravies should be reheated by bringing them to a boil. When microwaving leftovers, make sure there are no cold spots in food where bacteria can survive.

Multistate Approach for Food Safety

Food-borne illnesses affect 48 million Americans each year. Research and education have led to major advances in food safety; however, challenges remain. Many methods that use heat or chemicals to ensure food safety are not 100% effective and can damage food color, texture, flavor and nutrients.

Researchers at 32 Land-grant Universities are collaborating on innovative solutions for food safety and quality.

Their work is helping meet consumer demand for minimally processed, additive-free food items with longer shelf lives, higher nutrient content and less potential to cause food-borne illnesses.



Farm Safety "Always Be Alert"

Clyde Manas, Age 8

Clyde Manas warns farmers and ranchers to be careful with their equipment around power lines. Thank you for your picture, Clyde! Clyde's parents are Terry and Lacey Manas, members of Bon Homme Yankton Electric.

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.



Holiday DELIGHTS

EASY CRANBERRY SALAD

Ingredients:

12 oz. fresh cranberries
20 oz. crushed pineapple,
drained (reserve juice)
1/2 cup pineapple juice
(from reserved juice)
2 cups sugar
3 oz. pkg cranberry jello
(may also use cherry jello)
1/4 cup maraschino cherries,
finely chopped

Method

Boil cranberries with pineapple juice and sugar. When berries pop, remove from heat. Add dry jello, pineapple and cherries. Refrigerate. Keeps for up to two weeks in the refrigerator.

Elaine Rieck
Harrisburg, S.D.

CAKE BATTER DIP

Ingredients:

8 oz. softened cream cheese
8 oz. thawed cool whip
1/3-2/3 cup milk
1 box Funfetti cake mix
(unprepared)
Sprinkles

Method

Add whipped topping and cream cheese to a large mixing bowl and beat with a hand mixer until smooth and creamy.

Add cake mix and 1/3 cup milk and stir with a wooden spoon until combined. Dip will be very thick, so add more milk, a little at a time, until you get to your desired consistency. I used about 2/3 cup for my dip.

Garnish with sprinkles and serve with whatever dippers you prefer (graham crackers, animal crackers, vanilla wafers, pretzels, fresh fruit, etc.)

Kayla Beaner
Centerville, S.D.

OPEN-FACED HOT TURKEY SANDWICHES

Ingredients:

1 container (12 oz.) turkey
gravy
8 slices cooked turkey
1 loaf baguette bread,
(12 in. long)
1 cup fresh spinach leaves
1 cup prepared stuffing,
warmed
1/2 cup cranberry sauce

Method

Cook gravy and turkey slices in large skillet on medium-high heat until heated through.

Cut baguette in half lengthwise, then cut each piece in half. Place bread, cut-side up, onto four serving plates.

Top bread evenly with spinach, turkey, stuffing, any remaining gravy and cranberry sauce.

McCormick.com

Please send your favorite 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 2024. All entries must include your name, mailing address, phone number and cooperative name.

Best Smart Home Tech on a Budget



Miranda Boutelle
Efficiency Services
Group

Q: How can smart home technology help me lower my power bill?

A: Smart technology can make it easier to save energy by simplifying or automating tasks. It can also optimize energy use to reduce waste and improve efficiency.

When upgrading to smart technology at home, consider the purchase cost as well as long-term savings. For example, you may pay a little more for a product with the latest technology, but it could result in significant savings each year and over the lifetime of the appliance.

Here are some smart devices that will take the work out of saving energy.

Smart thermostats save energy by automatically adjusting your heating or cooling system. For example, you can save as much as 10% a year on heating and cooling costs by adjusting your thermostat 7 to 10 degrees from its normal setting for eight hours a day, according to the Department of Energy (DOE).

You can program a smart thermostat to change the temperature when you are asleep or away, or use a smartphone app to adjust your thermostat settings. Some models use artificial intelligence to maximize efficiency by learning your patterns and preferences. Prices range from \$80 to \$250, depending on features. Smart thermostats do not work with all heating and cooling systems, so check compatibility before you buy.

Your water heater can also be controlled for energy savings. Installing a timer on your electric water heater can save 5% to 12% of the energy it uses by turning it off at night and when you don't need to use hot water, according to the DOE.

If you are already planning to replace your electric storage water heater with a heat pump water heater, consider a model equipped with smart technology features, including Wi-Fi capabilities for controlling it remotely or during peak demand times, viewing the amount of hot

water available and tracking energy use. There are a variety of modes, including vacation, efficiency and high demand, which produces more hot water. Some models can notify you or shut off if a leak is detected. Depending on the manufacturer and size of the unit, a smart heat pump water heater may only cost a few hundred dollars more than a standard heat pump water heater.

Smart lighting gives you the power to control lights in your home remotely or set a lighting schedule that fits your lifestyle. This can be beneficial for energy savings and provide home security benefits. If you or other members of your household are notorious for leaving lights on, smart lighting can help. Numerous features are available, including dimmable bulbs and color-changing effects.

Smart light switches are another budget-friendly way to control lighting. They're priced from about \$10 to \$50. Smart switches with dimmable options are available and can also control ceiling fans. Some have occupancy sensors that turn lights off when no movement is detected in a room.

A smart plug fits into any outlet to control whatever is plugged into it. Set them to automatically turn off and on or control them using a smartphone app. Prices range from \$8 to \$25.

A wide variety of smart shades, curtains and blinds are available, including styles with integrated controls. You can also add smart controls to your existing blinds or curtains. Both options allow you to adjust the tilt of blinds and open or close curtains. Set a schedule, control them remotely or use a voice command paired with a voice assistant, such as Alexa or Google Home. This allows you to reduce cooling needs in the summer and heating needs in the winter. Smart controls start at around \$70. To save the most energy, prioritize windows with the most incoming light.

Upgrading to smart home technologies can make it easy to use less energy at home. Choose options that make the most sense for your lifestyle to optimize savings.



Rosebud Electric Cooperative providing power in the early days.
Photo provided by the Rosebud Electric archive.

William Kindle Remembers When Electricity Came to Bull Creek

Frank Turner

frank.turner@sirea.coop

William Kindle, a member of the Rosebud Sioux Tribe, carries vivid memories of growing up in Bull Creek, a small township just east of Winner. It was the mid-1950s: Eisenhower was president, and the Korean War had just ended. Though more than half a century has passed, Kindle remembers clearly the challenges of living without electricity.

“Growing up, we didn’t have any refrigeration,” Kindle said. “My mom used to drop our food into a well using a bucket, clear down to the water level where it was cool, and that’s where she kept her cream and butter.”

At age 10, Kindle’s life changed drastically when Rosebud Electric connected his rural, family home to the grid. The lights came on, and the days of using the water well for food preservation would soon be a memory as his father

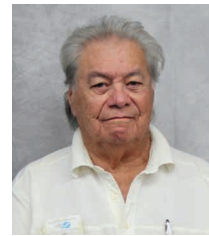
brought home the family’s first refrigerator.

“After that, he went to town again and bought a TV, a great big old wooden thing,” Kindle laughed. “It had only one channel, KPLO.”

But electricity meant more than just connection to a grid. It brought with it a connection to the outside world through shows like “I Love Lucy,” “The Andy Griffith Show,” and Kindle’s personal favorite growing up, “Captain 11”. The show, broadcast from Sioux Falls, featured weatherman Dave Dedrick as a space captain who would introduce cartoons and play games as an after-school children’s program.

“Us kids thought that it was the greatest thing that ever happened, when we got a TV,” Kindle said.

According to Kindle, the introduction of electricity had an overwhelmingly positive impact on his rural community. The dangers of using kerosene lamps



William Kindle
Photo by Frank Turner

vanished, allowing producers to work more effectively through the night.

“I remember the first night that we had a yard light,” Kindle said. “Us kids were playing under that light, and we couldn’t get over the fact that the whole yard was lit up. Prior to that, as soon as the sun went down, we would light the lamps and that’s all we had.”

“Everyone in the community welcomed having power,” Kindle added. “It was quite a thing.”

The safety and productivity it brought were immeasurable, transforming every facet of daily life. Kindle remembers how much the addition of consistent light affected his own family’s cattle operation.

“We ran cattle and raised hogs,” he said. “I remember when my dad got the barn wired up, because he used electricity for calving. Before we had electricity in there, we used kerosene lamps out in the barn, and they started a lot of fires – those damn things.”

Kindle’s early years were spent farming and ranching, but he devoted most of his career to the autobody and fender business, repairing cars for over 30 years. He later joined the tribal council of the Rosebud Sioux in 1989 and has since completed five terms as president, including one in an interim capacity, and three terms as vice president. Recently, he was re-elected to the council as a representative for the Swift Bear community near White River, where he lives now as a member of Cherry-Todd Electric.

As someone who has served his community for more than three decades, Kindle said he is unsure if people could ever return to a time before electricity reached their door.

“If we had to go back to those days, people couldn’t do it,” he said. “I don’t think people would adjust. It would be too difficult to go back.”



Small Communities Showcase History and Culture Through Mural Art

Jacob Boyko

jacob.boyko@sdrea.coop

Lemmon

Visitors from all over the map flock to Lemmon each year to explore the town's plethora of fascinating exhibits, from the Petrified Wood Park to the life-size steampunk-style sculptures by local artist John Lopez.

But of all the town's unique offerings, there's one stand-out exhibit that ties everything together: Boss Cowman Square.

Lopez's lifesize metal sculpture of cowboy legend George Edward Lemmon is the focal point of the square. The Boss Cowman clutches the reins of his steampunk stallion, his eyes fixed on the horizon watching for stray cattle.

"Dad Lemmon," as the town's founder is so fondly known among locals, settled the town in 1906 between the Grand River and North Dakota border. It would soon be a stop along the incoming Chicago Milwaukee & St. Paul Railroad, which Dad Lemmon had been recruited to platte westward.

The sculpture is accompanied by a background mural depicting a scene far away from the bustling saloons and general stores of early Lemmon. In the scene, saddled-up cowboys under the careful

watch of the Boss Cowman sculpture guide a meandering herd hundreds of heads long across a river – no problem for Dad Lemmon, whose roundup skills and knowledge of the land were legendary across the West.

In 2015, as Lopez dreamt of what would one day be Boss Cowman Square, he recruited the help of two Nigerian artists, Dotun Popoola and Jonathan Imafidor, to help bring the vision to life.

"We studied a few materials and made sure all the elements were well captured, like the kinds of trees, the way the river looks and the butte in the background," Imafidor recalled about the 2016 project.

One obstacle that posed a challenge for the traveling artists – beside the shock of South Dakota's cold spring weather – was the slight differences between the cattle they knew in Nigeria and the cattle of the American West.

"We are representational artists and we've done a lot of drawings of cows, so we kind of had an idea of what the cattle should look like," Imafidor explained. "But in Lemmon, the kind of cattle that are found in the region are a little different than what we have in Nigeria. I remember when we started painting the cattle ... John Lopez told us, 'I don't think you can find those here.' Then he brought some material for

Cowboys keep a herd of longhorns moving at the bank of the Missouri River. Visitors will notice the sculpture of Dad Lemmon turned around to keep an eye on the progress. *Photo provided by John Lopez.*

us so we were able to see the difference and then we made the corrections."

After about a month of work, the mural was completed and the Boss Cowman Square was unveiled to the public in July 2016.

Burke

In Burke, K-12 art teacher Kate Witt isn't shy about brightening up her community. The mom of four has designed and painted four murals around town, including one depicting the town's beloved utility worker, Rich Bailey.

Rich's wife, Margaret Ann Bailey, commissioned the mural after Rich's passing in 2023. The mural shows the lineman hanging onto a utility pole as he works on the power lines.

"When we came here in 1970, there wasn't a bucket truck or anything," recalled Margaret Ann. "So he climbed everything, whether it was blizzarding or lightning, and he made sure people had electricity."

The mural also features emergency vehicles, as Rich served for decades as a volunteer firefighter and an emergency medical technician. Parked beneath the lines, the rusted white pickup truck Rich drove around town that over the years became synonymous with himself.

"With this mural specifically, I felt I had

a big important job,” Witt said. “This is a man who the town really loves, and I had a big job to make something beautiful that [Margaret Ann] was going to be proud of.”

Witt incorporated her own signature styles into the mural; her white outlines make the lineman’s silhouette stand out against the more geometrically designed Missouri River bluffs and cloudy sunset in the background.

“That’s where I have a little fun, putting in the modern twist and bold colors,” Witt continued. “I put this white line around everything which made some elements almost look like they’re stickers on a wall.”

Since Witt completed the mural last August, it’s become a point of pride for Margaret Ann who says it’s a testament to her husband’s years of dedication to his community.

“There was an older gal here in town, and she called him at 2 o’clock in the morning and said ‘my air conditioner isn’t working and it’s darn hot in my house,’” Margaret Ann recalled.

She said her husband explained that his job was to fix power lines, not air conditioners. Still, he went to flip the breaker on the woman’s fuse box anyway before going back to sleep.

“That’s the kind of guy he was, and I’m proud,” Margaret Ann said.

Tabor

Where in South Dakota can you find roses, ears of corn, a cardinal and Czech kolaches all in one mural?

Only in Tabor, probably.

Commissioned for the town’s 150th anniversary in 2022, the colorful mural on the sidewall of the local library meanders through the community’s history. From the heavy Czech influence of the earliest settlers represented by pastries and roses to the school’s original mascot, the cardinals, Robbie Jelsma worked very intentionally to portray the town in a way only a knowledgeable local artist could.

Growing up in nearby Springfield, Jelsma is no stranger to Tabor and its famous Czech Days, which draws thousands of people from across the country for the three-day celebration.

“I wanted to represent Czech Days and the Czech culture, so I did my own

research,” Jelsma said.

He incorporated roses, which are the national flower of the Czech Republic, as well as the fluffy pastries with fruit in the middle called kolaches.

He also incorporated local history—Tabor’s school mascot was the cardinal before merging with Springfield and Tyndall to form Bon Homme School District.

When he’s not painting murals, Jelsma is a highly sought-after tattoo artist specializing in more realistic styles. For him, the highlights of the Tabor mural is the level of depth and realism he achieved in his roses and clouds.

The hardest part of painting the mural is working with the elements, as there’s a laundry list of work that needs to be done on the surface before any real painting can begin: washing; smoothing; primer.

On top of that, unpredictable Midwestern weather requires a careful eye on the weather radar for any outdoor painting projects, Jelsma said.

“We started about early October so the fall was just getting started, and you never know in South Dakota if the weather is going to hold out or if you’ll get an early snow or strong wind,” he recalled about his three and a half weeks working on the project.

For Jelsma, the finished mural is as big of a point of pride for him, having been selected and commissioned for the work, as it is for the people of Tabor who get to show it off every summer during Czech Days.

“It’s cool I was thought of for the project,” Jelsma said. “It’s an art project that I think just lights everybody up a little bit when you drive down main street and you see something like that in a small town.”



Artist Robbie Jelsma puts the finishing touches on his mural ahead of the 2022 unveiling.
Photo provided by Robbie Jelsma.

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**Northern Electric
Cooperative**

A Touchstone Energy Cooperative

Member Satisfaction Survey



WE WANT YOUR FEEDBACK!

TAKE THE SURVEY

**Northern Electric is
conducting a Member
Satisfaction Survey. If you
receive an email, we
would greatly appreciate
your participation in
measuring our
performance.**

ENERGY EFFICIENCY TIP OF THE MONTH

If you're heading out of town during the holiday season, remember to set your home to vacation mode. You can save energy while you're away by lowering your thermostat a few degrees or creating an "away" schedule with a smart or programmable thermostat. Newer water heaters include a vacation mode setting to help you save on water heating costs, or you can simply lower the temperature manually.

Small actions can also stack up to energy savings. Unplug devices that consume energy when they're not in use, including phone chargers, toothbrush chargers, TVs and gaming consoles.





PREPARING FOR WINTER WEATHER

Jacob Boyko

jacob.boyko@sdrea.coop

As we near the frigid winter months of South Dakota, it's important for you and loved ones to stay ready for an emergency.

Even though power outages are rare, a loss of electricity can affect modern lives in critical ways; In an instant, you may no longer be able to heat your home, prepare food or access critical information.

It's crucial to prepare for power outages and other general emergencies by keeping supplies in both your home and vehicles as well as making sure you and your loved ones have a plan in place.

Brad Reiners, director of communications for the state Department of Public Safety, encourages South Dakotans to stock

up on essentials like food, water and batteries prior to the winter months.

"Make sure you have enough food and water for at least three days, and each person in the household should have one gallon of water per day," Reiners said.

State DPS recommends keeping non-perishable food items like pasta, canned goods and nutritious snacks that don't require refrigeration and don't need to be heated or cooked before consumption.

"Never use gas powered generators, grills or portable stoves indoors, as they can produce dangerous levels of carbon monoxide," Reiner added.

As you prepare, remember to be proactive about your health. Have your medical prescriptions refilled in advance of a severe storm and keep a battery bank charged so you can power your cell phone in case you need to

access telehealth services, emergency services or access critical information.

In your car, keep warm blankets, winter clothes, snacks, a shovel, flashlight and a set of jumper cables in case you get stranded.

"It's also advisable to check your tires for proper inflation and tread, and make sure your windshield wipers are in good condition with freeze-resistant washer fluid," Reiners added.



Bottles of water and shelf-stable dry foods are perfect long-lasting emergency supplies to keep around.
Photo provided by Meals on Wheels of Western South Dakota.

If you plan to rely on a generator or wood burning stove for heat if the power goes out, check beforehand that your equipment is in safe working order, and you have enough fuel to last several days.

Keeping warm clothes, blankets and sleeping bags at the ready can be lifesaving if you're unable to heat your home.

Meals on Wheels here to help with Blizzard Bags

For senior citizens, some of this advice is easier said than done. Meals on Wheels of Western South Dakota understands that better than anyone, and they have come up with a solution.

"Blizzard Bags" have been a part of the organization's lineup for over 20 years now and include some of the essentials seniors need when hunkering down for severe weather.

"We deliver shelf-stable meals for seniors who, especially in rural areas, may not have access to food for a while if their electricity goes out," said Jennifer Paschke, regional manager for Meals on Wheels of Western South Dakota. "We provide five meals in those bags they can use during a loss of power or being stranded in their homes due to weather."

The food supplied is generally items that don't require a heat source, like packages of tuna salad and crackers, protein bars or cans with a pop-top seal so no can opener is required, Paschke said.

The bags also include water and other donated supplies like batteries and flashlights from local businesses, including some rural electric cooperatives.

"The biggest success story I know in

my area is a couple of years ago when they had tornados in Philip," Paschke remembered. "The water we provided [in the blizzard bags] were some of the only sources of water some of those people had. Just having that food and water can be a godsend for some people."

Blizzard Bags are available to seniors age 60 and up who are a part of the Meals on Wheels program. The bags cost roughly \$20 to put together, according to Paschke, and are funded in part by community donors. The organization provides home deliveries for seniors living in both cities and rural areas.

Anyone interested in getting service or helping with the cause can contact Meals on Wheels of Western South Dakota at (605) 394-6002.



Meals On Wheels of Western South Dakota provides blizzard bags to seniors in case weather conditions affect normal delivery. Photo provided by Meals on Wheels of Western South Dakota.



Youth Tour participants Mallory Gant, left, and Madison Robertson pose for a photo at the FDR Memorial in Washington, D.C.

Photo by Frank Turner.

EMPOWERING THE FUTURE

The Impact of Local Electric Cooperative Youth Programs

Frank Turner

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It is a core tenet of rural electric cooperatives to inform the public – particularly young people – about the nature and benefits of cooperation. Electric cooperatives have a long history of engaging youth in South Dakota through cooperative-sponsored youth

experiences, including trips like the annual Youth Tour in Washington, D.C., Youth Excursion in North Dakota, and Youth Leadership Conference at the annual NRECA PowerXchange conference.

These opportunities provide many South Dakota students with their first travel experiences outside the state. For

many, it's their first time flying on an airplane. Students not only gain valuable insights into rural electric cooperatives and energy, but they also learn basic life skills, such as how to navigate a city or use public transportation.

Former SDREA communications director Brenda Kleinjan, now a communications specialist with Sioux Valley Energy, was the driving force behind many of these programs through her 20 years of youth engagement for South Dakota cooperatives. From 2000 to 2019, Kleinjan coordinated and facilitated the many youth trips sponsored by electric cooperatives, leading hundreds of students to explore the impact of rural electricity on Capitol Hill and energy generation in North

Dakota over the course of her career.

According to Kleinjan, many alumni of the electric cooperative youth programs have gone on to achieve great things.

“These trips are an investment that our co-ops are making for not only our youth and their families, but our state and regions’ future,” Kleinjan said. “We are tapping into the drive of our most energetic teenagers with the idea of encouraging them to explore their world, their communities and their future.”

Youth Tour

Since 1963, South Dakota electric cooperatives have sponsored youth trips to Washington, D.C., each June for the annual Youth Tour. This year, Mallory Gant was one of 36 students from South Dakota who participated in a weeklong exploration of the nation’s capital, learning about the cooperative network and rural electrification. Sponsored by Charles Mix Electric, Gant visited the many memorials and monuments of the capital city and met South Dakota’s congressmen in the U.S. Capitol to ask questions.

Gant, who lives on farm and ranch outside Platte, made the most of her time by making new friends while experiencing the history of sites like Ford’s Theater, Mount Vernon and the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier.

“It was definitely an eye-opening experience – to be able to fly on a plane and visit these huge cities,” Gant said. “A big part of the trip for me was meeting the friends I made along the way. Since the trip, I’ve seen them at volleyball and FFA events. When you go on the trip, you are out there with people you don’t know, so you are forced to get out of your comfort zone and meet new people. I think it sparked a lot of friendships for me.”

Youth Leadership Council

In addition to Youth Tour, Gant was selected as this year’s South Dakota representative for the annual Youth

Leadership Council. As the state’s sole representative, Gant will join 43 other young leaders at the NRECA PowerXchange Conference in Atlanta from March 7-12 next spring.

“From the first moment of being a representative, I had to introduce myself to a room of almost 2,000 kids,” Gant said. “It really put me on the spot, but it was really cool to be able to know I was capable of doing that.”

Leading up to the event, Gant is working to complete a creative and engaging community project by setting up an agriculture-focused electric safety booth at the upcoming South Dakota 4-H Land and Range Judging Contest with Charles Mix Electric, her sponsoring electric cooperative.

Gant will also prepare and deliver a short speech at a Charles Mix Electric meeting for the opportunity to be chosen as the 2025 Youth Leadership Council National Spokesperson. If chosen, Gant will deliver a speech in Atlanta Georgia at the PowerXChange Conference.

“I think the whole experience has made me a more vocal and outgoing person,” Gant said.

Youth Excursion

Erica Fitzhugh is one of many alumni from the rural electric youth program whose life has been shaped by her experience traveling to North Dakota to learn about electricity generation.

In 2005, Northern Electric sponsored Fitzhugh, then a high school junior, on a trip to tour energy infrastructure in Beulah, North Dakota.

Fitzhugh vividly recalls visiting Basin Electric Power Cooperative’s complex, where electricity is generated and transmitted to homes and businesses, as well as the Freedom Mine, the nation’s largest lignite coal mine by deliveries.

“I remember standing in the bucket of the dragline for a photo and thinking it was an amazing experience,” Fitzhugh said.

Her connection to the local electric cooperative continued after the trip. As a member of 4-H, Fitzhugh attended monthly meetings hosted at Northern Electric’s office. Each year, she would write thank-you letters to Jim Moore, Northern Electric’s CEO at the time, for supporting their program and hosting their meetings.

Years later, Northern Electric awarded Fitzhugh The Northern Electric Scholarship when she was a high school senior. That investment paid off when Moore later hired Fitzhugh as the Northern Electric director of communications.

“Jim Moore was the person who hired me, and I had handwritten him thank you letters in high school for the 4-H club,” said Fitzhugh, now a communications specialist for Southeastern Electric Cooperative.

Interested in Local Youth Opportunities?

Whether it’s scholarships, Youth Tour or Youth Excursion, there are several youth events and opportunities catered to young electric co-op members that continue to thrive. Please contact your local co-op to learn more about these ongoing youth opportunities.



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.

OCT. 20
Aberdeen Community Concert Association
 The Hall Sisters – Vocal/
 Multiple Instrument Quartet
 4 p.m.
 Johnson Fine Arts Center
 Aberdeen, SD

NOV. 2
Wall Community Craft Show
 10 a.m.-3 p.m.
 Wall, SD
 605-279-2665

NOV. 2
Fall Fling Craft Show
 10 a.m.-2 p.m.
 Dakota Christian School
 Corsica, SD
 605-366-7940

NOV. 8-9
Sioux Empire Arts & Crafts Show
 Friday, 12 p.m.-8 p.m.
 Saturday, 9 a.m.-5 p.m.
 Sioux Falls, SD
 605-332-6004

NOV. 8-10
Christmas at the Barn
 10 a.m.-5 p.m.
 Front Porch 605
 Groton, SD

NOV. 22-JAN.5
 Winter Wonderland
 Nightly - 5 p.m.-12 a.m.
 Falls Park
 Sioux Falls, SD
 605-275-6060

NOV. 9
Christmas at the Homestead
 12 p.m.-4 p.m.
 North Sioux City, SD
 605-232-0873

NOV. 9-10
Zonta Craft & Vendor Show
 Saturday, 9 a.m.-5 p.m.
 Sunday, 10 a.m.-4 p.m.
 Ramkota Hotel
 Pierre, SD
 605-280-1511

NOV. 14
Aberdeen Community Concert Association
 Beo String Quartet – Classical
 String Quartet
 7 p.m.
 Johnson Fine Arts Center
 Aberdeen, SD

NOV. 23-24
Winterfest: A Winter Arts Festival
 Saturday, 10 a.m.-5 p.m.
 Sunday, 10 a.m.-4 p.m.
 Aberdeen, SD

NOV. 30
A Hometown Christmas Market
 2 p.m.-6 p.m.
 Main Street
 Elk Point, SD

NOV. 29-DEC. 29
Trees & Trains Exhibit at SD State Railroad Museum
 Hill City, SD
 605-665-3636

DEC. 1
A Christmas Carol
 2 p.m.
 Gayville Music Hall
 Gayville, SD
 605-624-2859

DEC. 5
Christmas on the Prairie
 4 p.m.
 Main Street
 Miller, SD

DEC. 5
Holiday Festival of Lights
 4 p.m.-7:30 p.m.
 Yankton, SD
 605-665-3636

DEC. 6-8, 13-15
A Sherlock Carol
 Dec. 6-7, 13-14, 7:30 p.m.
 Dec. 8, 15, 2:30 p.m.
 Corson, SD
 mightycorson.com

DEC. 7
KJAM Parade of Lights
 5:30 p.m.
 Madison, SD
 605-256-4514

DEC. 7
Santa Day
 2 p.m.
 Stockholm Buggy Museum
 Stockholm, SD
 605-467-3940

DEC. 7-31
Garden Glow at McCrory Gardens
 5 p.m.-9 p.m.
 Brookings, SD

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