

# COOPERATIVE CONNECTIONS



## The Days of '76 Rodeo

A Century of Grit and  
Glory

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Fort Meade Patriotism

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# Summer weather safety tips



**Kathy Haas**  
Communications  
Specialist

Keep safety in mind when planning your outdoor activities this summer! While we all want to make the most of these hot, sunny days, it's important to take appropriate precautions. Wear sunscreen, stay hydrated, and always check the weather before heading out.

## SEVERE STORMS

Summer storms can form quickly and turn brutal. High winds, large hail, and tornadoes can cause a lot of damage, including to our infrastructure. If you see a downed power line, remember these three steps:

- **Stay away!** You cannot tell if a line is energized or not just by looking at it. Play it safe, and assume the line is energized. Keep at least 50 feet away from downed lines. Debris could be concealing hazards, and nearby items could be electrified as well, like metal culverts.
- **Call 9-1-1.** Report the downed lines to emergency personnel so they can take the proper steps to keep the area safe.
- **Call the Co-op.** Let us know by calling 605-225-0310 so we can dispatch crews to repair the damaged line as quickly as safely possible.

We try to minimize outages, but it's a good idea to be prepared, just in case. Keep a storm kit somewhere easily accessible and make sure everyone in your household knows the location. Stock it with flashlights, replacement batteries, first aid kit, battery powered weather radio, nonperishable food and water, and a phone charger with a spare battery pack.

## LIGHTNING

There are no specific weather warnings or advisories for lightning. All thunderstorms are capable of producing lightning. When you see lightning or hear thunder, you should go inside an enclosed structure or vehicle. Dugouts, picnic shelters, and portable canopies will not protect you from lightning. Never take shelter under a tree.

Remember, lightning is electricity trying to find a path of least resistance. You are a better conductor than the air around you, so electricity is going to go through you to get to the ground faster. The storm doesn't have to be directly over

you to affect you! Lightning can strike up to 10 miles away from the storm. Lightning strikes and near strikes can be fatal.

Lightning kills an average of over 20 people each year in the US and injures hundreds. Most lightning-related deaths occur when people are outside, having fun! Some of the activities people were doing when struck include golfing, boating, grilling, riding bike, gardening, and running.

Once in a safe place, wait at least 30 minutes following the last rumble of thunder to resume outdoor activities.

## HEAT

Summer temps don't have to soar too high for heat to become dangerous. Hot weather requires your body to work overtime to maintain your temperature. When outside, remember to stay hydrated, stay cool, and limit strenuous activities to prevent overheating. Take frequent water breaks even if you're not thirsty yet. This will help prevent dehydration and other heat-related illnesses. Wear light, breathable clothing and take breaks in the shade or air conditioning.

Know the escalating signs of heat-illness and monitor yourself and others. You need to act fast to prevent worsening conditions:

- **Heat Exhaustion:** *Headache, nausea, dizziness, thirst, heavy sweating, elevated body temperature.* Move to a cool area. Remove unnecessary clothing, including shoes and socks, and apply cold compresses. Take frequent sips of cool water and replenish electrolytes.
- **Heat Stroke:** *Confusion, slurred speech, no longer sweating/hot and dry skin, high body temperature, loss of consciousness.* This is an emergency. The body is no longer able to regulate temperature. Call 9-1-1. Move to a cool area. Remove extra layers. Cool the body quickly with an ice bath or by wetting the skin and placing cool, wet cloths on the skin.

**If you see a flash, dash inside**



**COOPERATIVE CONNECTIONS**

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(USPS 396-040)

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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.

**Subscription information:** Northern Electric Cooperative members devote 50 cents from their monthly electric payments for a subscription. Non-member subscriptions are available for \$12 annually. Periodicals postage paid at Bath, SD 57427.

Postmaster: Please send address changes to Northern Electric Cooperative Connections, PO Box 457, Bath, SD 57427; telephone (605) 225-0310; fax (605) 225-1684

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# MAY BOARD REPORT

Northern Electric Cooperative's regular board meeting was held May 21, 2026, at the Agtegra Cooperative headquarters with all directors present. As the first order of business, the board approved the April 23, 2026, minutes, and April 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 May 7, 2026, board meeting. The next SDREA Board Meeting will be held June 25-26, 2026. Director Kirk Schaunaman reported on the NRECA Legislative Conference he attended from April 26-28, 2026, in Washington, D.C.

**MANAGER'S REPORT**

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

- Reported on . the Rural Electric Economic Development (REED) Board Meeting held on May 5, 2026.
- Reported on the East River MAC Meeting held on May 5, 2026.

- Reported on the employee meeting held on April 30, 2026.

**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. on Monday, June 22, 2026.
- Approved Work Order Inventory #26-04 for \$519,494.40 to be submitted to the Rural Utilities Service (RUS) for reimbursement from loan funds for electric plant construction already completed.
- Reviewed the East River 2026 Capital Credit Retirement.
- Appointed Todd Hettich as delegate and Char Hager as alternate for the National Rural Utilities Cooperative Finance Corporation (CFC) and National Cooperative Services Corporation (NCSC) Annual Meeting, June 15-17, Chula Vista, CA.
- Held Executive Session.

**Talk to your director or co-op manager if you have questions on these matters.**

**FINANCIAL REPORT**

	APRIL 2026	APRIL 2025
kWh Sales.....	23,012,274	20,637,437
Electric Revenues .....	\$2,852,248	\$2,211,654
Total Cost of Service .....	\$2,789,275	\$2,351,649
Operating Margins.....	\$62,973	(\$139,995)
Year to Date Margins.....	\$332,071	\$70,265
<b>RESIDENTIAL AVERAGE MONTHLY USAGE AND BILL</b>		
APRIL 2026 .....	1,828 kWh.....	\$259.87 .....\$0.1422
APRIL 2025 .....	1,557 kWh.....	\$199.99 .....\$0.1284
Wholesale power costs, taxes, interest, and depreciation account for 85.3% of total cost of service.		

# BEFORE THE SMOKE: PROTECT YOUR HOME BEFORE WILDFIRE SEASON

Wildfires can move quickly, especially when dry grass, high winds and hot weather come together. In rural South Dakota, where homes, farms, shelterbelts, outbuildings and open grassland share the same landscape, preparation matters.

But there is one important point to make first: fighting a wildfire is not a job for homeowners.

If a wildfire is nearby, leave firefighting to trained professionals. Follow evacuation orders, call 911 to report a fire and stay away from downed power lines, smoke-filled areas and active fire zones. Cooperative members can do their most important work in advance, taking steps that make a property harder for fire to reach and easier for responders to protect.

One of the most effective steps is creating defensible space around the home. That does not mean clearing every tree or turning a yard into bare ground. It means reducing combustible material near houses, garages, sheds and other structures, while thinking about how fire could move from brush to trees to buildings.

Start closest to the house. Embers can collect against siding, under decks, in gutters or near steps. Remove dry leaves, dead plants, stacked lumber, cardboard and other combustible materials from next to the home. Gravel, rock, concrete, pavers and other hardscaping can be better choices near walls, decks and porches.

Gutters and roofs deserve attention, too. Leaves and needles can become dry fuel. Cleaning them before fire season can reduce the chance that embers find an easy place to ignite.

From there, look at the rest of the yard. Clear dead brush, tall grass and dried weeds, especially near structures. Keep grass mowed around homes, outbuildings, propane tanks and driveways. Trim and space shrubs and trees so fire cannot easily climb from grass to brush to tree canopies. Low branches can act like ladder fuels.

Do not overlook decks, porches and crawlspaces. Dry leaves, grass clippings and other materials can collect underneath. Cleaning those areas and using screening can help keep debris from building up.

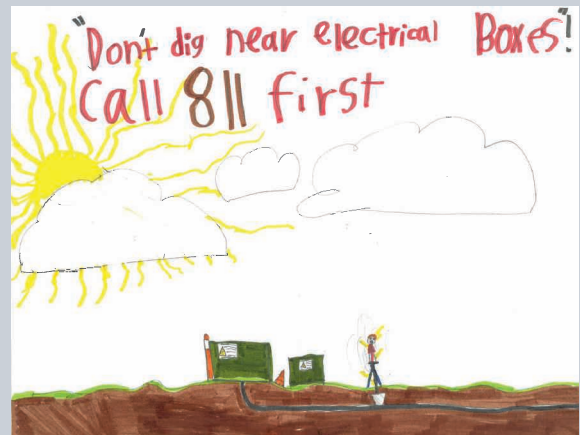
Access is part of preparation, too. Firefighters need to reach

a property quickly and safely. Keep driveways clear, make sure gates can open and trim branches that could block emergency vehicles. Clearly visible address signs can help responders find a home when visibility is poor.

Before making major landscaping changes, building fences, planting trees or adding new water lines, call 811. Underground electric, gas, water and communication lines may be closer than expected. A free locate request helps protect homeowners, utility crews and infrastructure.

Cooperative members can also make a plan. Know two ways out of the property or neighborhood. Keep important documents, medications and emergency supplies ready to go. Take photos or videos of buildings, equipment and belongings for insurance records.

Wildfire preparation is a seasonal habit, much like cleaning gutters, changing filters or preparing equipment for winter. The goal is not to fight the fire. That job belongs to firefighters and emergency responders. The goal is to give the home, property and responders a better chance before the fire ever starts.



**"Don't dig near electrical boxes!  
Call 811 first."**

**Caleb Blake, age 9**

Caleb urges members to not dig near a pad-mounted transformer. Thank you for sharing your picture, Caleb! Caleb's parents are Peter and Stephanie Blake – members of West River 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.

# Sweet on RHUBARB

## RHUBARB CHEESE CAKE

### Ingredients:

#### Rhubarb Filling

9" pie shell, unbaked  
2 1/2 cups rhubarb, chopped  
1/2 cup sugar  
1 tbsp. flour

#### Cheese Cake Filling

8 oz. cream cheese  
2 eggs, added one at a time  
1/2 cup sugar

#### Topping

3/4 cup sour cream  
2 tbsps. sugar  
1 tsp. vanilla

### Method

Stir rhubarb with flour and sugar. Put in the unbaked pie shell and bake at 425° for 15 minutes. Remove from oven and lower temperature to 350° degrees.

Beat cream cheese, add 2 eggs one at a time, then add the sugar. Mix well and pour over hot rhubarb layer. Bake 30 minutes at 350° degrees.

Mix the topping of sour cream, sugar and vanilla well and spread over hot pie. Cool 3 hours or more before serving. The flavors blend better the longer it cools. Refrigerate leftovers.

**Charles Lebeda**  
Sioux Valley Energy

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 2026. All entries must include your name, mailing address, phone number and cooperative name.

## RHUBARB SALAD

### Ingredients:

2 cups rhubarb, chopped  
4 tbsps. water  
1/2 cup sugar  
3 oz. red jello  
3/4 cup cold water  
1 apple, diced  
1 banana, sliced

### Method

Combine rhubarb, water and sugar. Stir and cook until mushy. Add jello and stir until dissolved. Add 3/4 cup cold water. Cool until it begins to set. Stir in diced apple and sliced banana. Chill and serve.

**Leanne Eich**  
Central Electric

## RHUBARB CAKE

### Ingredients:

White cake mix  
4 cups rhubarb, diced  
1 cup white sugar  
2 cups heavy whipping cream

### Method

Mix white cake as directed on the box. Pour in a greased 9x12 pan. Place 4 cups of diced rhubarb over the top. Pour 1 cup of white sugar over the rhubarb. Pour 2 cups of heavy whipping cream over the top. Bake at 350° for 40 minutes.

**Jeanette Kleinsasser**  
Dakota Energy

Picture by Sokor Space and Shutterstock.



Northern Electric linemen replace crossarms on a pole earlier this year.



**Jerry Weber**  
Operations  
Manager

I'm not fond of the term "construction season." It doesn't really apply to Northern Electric. We build line year-round and don't have an off-season! Even during winter, we are busy replacing aging infrastructure. Only severe weather events or other safety-related considerations prevent us from working in the field.

It is construction season in the sense that new service requests have been pouring in. From requests to add service to new bins to installing line to reach a new house, we are a growing cooperative! That's why we construct our work plan to include new loads.

### **THE WORK PLAN**

Every four years, Northern Electric puts together a work plan that lays out our projects for the next four years. Our

infrastructure is evaluated by NEC staff as well as our engineering firm, Power System Engineering (PSE).

This year, Northern electric staff will meet with our engineers to create the next four-year plan. The engineers will look at our whole system for places where voltage issues may occur during peak loading. We also look at tree issues, aged lines, and places we've had outages. Then we decide whether those areas are better served by underground or overhead lines. PSE will bring forward their recommendations, and we bring forward ours.

Limited by time, and also by budget. The work plan is pretty comprehensive. Each project lists out the timing, materials needed, and estimated prices for both labor and materials. Unfortunately, costs for some items, like crossarms, poles, and

underground cable, have increased over 50%. Project costs need to be adjusted annually.

Northern Electric builds for longevity. Some of our infrastructure currently in use is from the 1950s! After nearly 80 years of use, those lines and poles need to be replaced.

Although we try our best, we don't always accomplish 100% of our work plan. New services and outages take priority over our projects. Repairing infrastructure after an accident, like a vehicle hitting a pole or digging into underground cable, can have a huge impact on our ability to complete projects. The funds and labor that were dedicated to improving reliability are then used to replace infrastructure that might not have otherwise needed updating. Depending on the extent of damage, we might lose a day of work, we might lose a week or more.

Any projects that don't get completed will be re-examined before rolling over to the next work plan. We'll assess whether the project is still feasible, if there is a better route, or if added infrastructure has alleviated the low voltage issues.

## THIS YEAR

A couple of the projects slated for this year include finishing updates around Richmond Lake, getting infrastructure ready for new loads north of Aberdeen, and improving voltage near Ashton.

The Richmond Lake project is a multi-part project that is partially rolling over from last year. We bored under the lake to connect the east and west sides of the



Journeyman Lineman Kyle Miller steadies a transformer that was installed at POET.

lake, creating a loop. Now we need to do the cleanup and connection work to get the line energized.

Just north of Ashton, we'll be replacing five miles of single-phase line with three-phase. The single-phase line didn't have enough capacity to cover all the demands on that line. Changing to three-phase will help us better balance our system. In addition, we're adding infrastructure to accommodate growth north of Aberdeen.

Planning has started on our 2027-2031 work plan.



## SUMMER/FALL HELP

Preston Cavalier from Warner will be assisting and learning from Northern's linemen this summer. He recently graduated from the Power Line Construction and Maintenance program at Mitchell Technical College. As part of the 1,000-hour program, Preston will work at Northern for 1,000 hours and the hours will count toward his journeyman requirements. While at Northern, Preston hopes to learn more about the best practices in the field.

"I'm hoping to learn more about operating additional machinery, and finding efficient ways to do a task," Preston said. Preston likes to be outside and stay busy. That's why a career as a lineman appealed to him. "I like to jump in where I'm able," Preston said. He plans to use this opportunity to put in the work and develop his skills. "At the start, I'm going to be a little slow," he said. "But by the end I hope to be as good as the other guys."



# A CENTURY OF GRIT AND GLORY

## The Days of '76 Rodeo

Photos by KSchurr Photography

Jocelyn Johnson

[jocelyn.johnson@sdrea.coop](mailto:jocelyn.johnson@sdrea.coop)

In the historic gulch of Deadwood, S.D., the past isn't tucked away in books – it rides out of old wooden chutes every July at the Days of '76 Rodeo.

What began more than a century ago as a short weekend celebration has grown into a week-long rodeo and parade tradition that draws contestants and visitors from across the country. Yet, amid the growth and national recognition, the Days of '76 remains rooted in family, heritage and a deep sense of place.

Pat Roberts, longtime board member of the Days of '76 Rodeo planning committee, said, "It started in 1924, and it actually wasn't a rodeo then. It was a celebration of Deadwood and its establishment in 1876 – hence where the name came from. It was started by the community just to promote the founding."

Those early celebrations featured parades, horses, fireworks and the kind of small-town pageantry that fits a frontier

community proud of its past. The full-fledged rodeo format came a few years later in the late 1920s, but the heart of the event hasn't changed: honoring Deadwood's origins and the Western way of life that built it.

Today, the Days of '76 Rodeo is marking its 104th year alongside other milestones – the 150th anniversary of Deadwood and the nation's 250th anniversary.

The rodeo boasts a total payout of roughly \$350,000 and typically draws 700 to 800 contestants, including top names like Rocker Steiner, Lisa Lockhart and rising stars such as Emily Beisel. During a week of performances, 25,000 to 30,000 spectators pack the grandstands, turning the arena into a sea of cowboy hats and hometown pride.

The events remain classic: bareback riding, steer wrestling, calf roping, team roping, barrel racing, saddle bronc riding, bull riding and breakaway roping. No frills, no gimmicks – just the timeless contests of skill and grit that define rodeo.

"We just keep it traditional," Pat said. "Just welcome everybody to Deadwood to enjoy the best cowboys and the best bucking stock that we can get."

For a town of about 1,200 people, the Days of '76 Rodeo has earned outsized recognition.

In 2011, the Days of '76 was inducted into the Pro Rodeo Hall of Fame, a distinction the Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association (PRCA) had not extended to a rodeo in many years.

Chris Roberts, son of Pat Roberts and fellow board member on the Days of '76 Rodeo planning committee, said, "We won the PRCA Rodeo of the Year every single year that we were in the medium category until we surpassed into large. We've been nominated many times in the large category and won it once. To our knowledge, we're the only rodeo that's won Rodeo of the Year in each and every category."

In Deadwood, legacy still rides out of wooden chutes, year after year, drawing generational athletes. Rodeo here is a family affair. The Roberts family has been involved continuously since the event began.

"There's been a Roberts at every Days of '76 celebration since it started," said Pat.

Pat attended his first Days of '76 Rodeo when he was four days old and serves on the board with his son, Chris.

"I'm fourth generation," Chris said. "My great-granddad was there from year one, and we never missed a single year. Then his son – my granddad – followed in his footsteps, my dad and now me."

A fifth generation is already helping behind the scenes, continuing a family legacy that mirrors the rodeo's own endurance through the decades.

That kind of continuity isn't unique to the Roberts alone. Many contestants

arrive with stories of parents and grandparents who once competed in Deadwood.

"From a contestant perspective, I'd be willing to bet that no matter where you grew up, if you are a rodeo family, Deadwood was one that was always on the map," Chris said. "I hear it every single year – contestants talking about how grandpa or great-grandpa, grandma or great-grandma competed in Deadwood, and they've always wanted to be here. In the rodeo world, everybody knows Deadwood."

Mackenzi Gatzke, secretary of the board of directors, says her family story is similar. She currently serves on the Days of '76 board alongside both of her parents and noted two other families who have long served on the board promoting the event.

"Our board is all made up of people who were or still are locals to Deadwood, and we're all volunteers," she said. "We really do it because we love Deadwood, and we love the Days of '76 and the tradition behind it. We actually have four different families with multiple generations on our board, and we all just work together like one big family that just loves the community."

That focus on authenticity extends beyond the arena. The Days of '76 Museum houses the largest working



collection of horse-drawn wagons in the country, along with memorabilia from across the Black Hills dating back to 1876. During rodeo week, many of those wagons leave their resting place to roll through downtown Deadwood in historic parades – matching the sight of a 19th-century streetscape.

For Pat Roberts, rodeo's relevance in modern life is still significant and comes down to identity.

"It's tradition – it's the cowboy way," he said. "These cowboys and cowgirls are athletes...and the horses are too. They're bred to buck. We're not hurting anything by doing it – that's what they want to do. Just think of Deadwood and the West. Rodeo fits right in."





Robert Bernhardt performs routine maintenance on one of Northern's bucket trucks.

## TEMP JOB TURNS INTO 20-YEAR CAREER

General Maintenance Tech Robert retired in April

**Kathy Haas**

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When Robert Bernhardt was offered a job at Northern Electric, he jumped at the chance. At the time, Robert was a seasonal employee. He was working at Northern after his construction job laid everyone off for the season. A maintenance position opened and turned into a career.

Robert retired at the end of April after two decades with Northern Electric.

For 20 years, Robert has helped keep Northern's Bath office running smoothly. From keeping the equipment in order to basic repairs, Robert has been a jack of all trades. Members might have seen Robert making endless laps in the summer, keeping the grass in check, and setting

up the festive holiday lights and displays in the fall.

There have been many changes and improvements during Robert's time at Northern. Not only has the equipment changed, but the shop was also remodeled, and the office underwent a litany of repairs. The highlight for Robert?

"Just the people. Working with and meeting different people," Robert said.

Even though he's retiring, Robert has no plans of slowing down.

"They say when you retire, you're busier than before," he said.

Robert plans to keep at least one part time job. He plans to continue working in his automotive shop. Since 2015, Robert has been servicing vehicles in his spare time. Robert has always been mechanically inclined, he said. It came from growing up on



a farm and helping with equipment repairs. He used those skills at Northern. Robert performed general maintenance, like oil changes, on the fleet.

His family will keep him busy, too, Robert said. Robert's wife, Brenda, is already retired. His son, Josh, lives in Sioux Falls and his daughter, Desiree, and granddaughter live in Aberdeen. Robert expects to be busy helping his kids with their various projects. In addition, Robert plans to help out at the family farm.

"And of course, there's the honey-do list," Robert said.

**Congratulations, Robert!**



# PANCAKE BREAKFAST



**Northern  
Electric  
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**THURSDAY, JULY 30  
7 A.M. - 9:30 A.M.**

**Spink County Fairgrounds, Redfield, SD**

During the  
Spink County  
Achievement Days



**Free and open  
to the public**

# FORT MEADE & THE STAR SPANGLED BANNER

## How South Dakota Set the Stage for a National Anthem

Jacob Boyko

jacob.boyko@sdrea.coop

This month – July of 2026 – the United States of America celebrates the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence, when the Founding Fathers declared the end of Great Britain’s role as their colonial overseer.

No patriotic song captures the sacrifice and resilience of the American experiment quite like the national anthem, “The Star-Spangled Banner.” However, the anthem is not from the American Revolution, nor was it immediately adopted as the nation’s official song. Its story unfolded over more than a century, from a British bombardment in Baltimore to a flag-lowering ceremony on the plains of western South Dakota.

### The War of 1812

The year is 1814. The United States of America is in the midst of its second war with Great Britain – The War of 1812 – and the nation is reeling from a recent attack on Washington, D.C., where British troops torched the Capitol and White House.

A Maryland lawyer, Francis Scott Key, had just boarded a British naval vessel. He was sent there on behalf of the U.S. government to negotiate the release of an American prisoner, and while his negotiation was successful, Key was not allowed to return ashore until the British forces completed their bombardment on nearby Fort McHenry for fear that Key had overheard military plans while on board.

Detained aboard the enemy ship, Key looked ashore to Baltimore as the American forces fended off the invasion. As dusk settled over the harbor, it became harder for Key to track the battle, his only illumination being the occasional glow of British rockets and exploding shells. Key watched through the night, not sure who was winning the drawn-out fight. At dawn, there was just enough illumination for Key to make out the American flag still flying over the fort. The Americans had held



Visitors to Fort Meade (1 mile west of Sturgis, S.D.) will see the very same flag pole used by Col. Caleb Carlton during the flag retirements. These once-a-day evening ceremonies were the first instance of the Star Spangled Banner serving as the United States’ unofficial national anthem.

*Photo submitted by Randy Bender*

the fort and fended off the British from Baltimore.

Key’s experience that night inspired him to write a poem he titled “The Defence of Fort M’Henry.” Later, it was put to song and became known as “The Star-Spangled Banner.”

### Fort Meade

Fast forward to 1892, thousands of miles west on the American frontier.

Col. Caleb Carlton is the new commander of the Eighth U.S. Cavalry at Fort Meade, a U.S. Army post in the young state of South Dakota. About a mile west, the bustling town of Sturgis is growing along with the fort, serving as an important stop along numerous trails heading toward gold country in the streams of the Black Hills.

“Fort Meade was put in place in about 1878 to help maintain the peace in the Black Hills region between the native tribes and the settlers coming in,” explained Randy Bender, a lifelong resident of Sturgis and second-generation Fort Meade Museum board member.

Carlton was eager to make his mark – not through a battle, but patriotism. He and his wife discussed how they could better instill respect for the American flag among their troops stationed at the fort. The Carltons’ idea was to have the band play an official song during the evening retreat, when the flag is retired for the night.

“Carlton issued orders that all within hearing distance were to stand at attention, and all men not under arms were to remove their hats as a sign of respect to the flag,” Bender said.

That song, chosen at the urging of Mrs. Carlton, was the Star Spangled Banner.

“We selected the Star Spangled Banner as it was written under very unusual circumstances,” Carlton later wrote in a 1914 letter.

Carlton’s daughter, Mabel, recalled the first ceremony in her journal.

“As the final notes of the song faded away, the flag landed gently in the arms of the waiting troops,” she wrote. “If it had been practiced, it could not have been done more perfectly.”

From Fort Meade, the practice began to spread as other officers and government officials visited and observed the ceremony.

“The New York Times referred to the fact that (I) was trying to establish a national anthem,” Carlton wrote. “This attracted the attention of Col. Cook in command of the recruiting depot at David’s Island, who wrote me that he was having recruits taught to sing our national air. I suggested he concentrate his instruction on the Star Spangled Banner.”

Carlton also wrote that later, during a meeting in Harrisburg with Pennsylvania Gov. Daniel H. Hastings, that the governor promised he would initiate the playing of the Star Spangled Banner among the state’s militia.

The most decisive support came during a meeting between Carlton and Secretary of War Daniel Lamont, with the two speaking about the custom. Before long,



Above: Officers of the 8th Cavalry in Fort Meade, S.D. in 1892. Photo courtesy of the South Dakota State Historical Society



Right: A photograph of Fort Meade with Bear Butte in the distance. Photo courtesy of the Library of Congress.

Lamont ordered that the Star Spangled Banner be played during evening retreats across the nation.

Nearly 40 years after Fort Meade’s first Star Spangled Banner rendition, Congress in 1931 declared it the national anthem.

Today, visitors to Fort Meade can stand near the place where that custom began. A historical marker near the parade ground bears the words “It Started Here,” connecting the South Dakota fort to the story of the national anthem.

“That flagpole that they lowered the flag down from for that event is still standing at Fort Meade, and still used,” Bender said.

For Bender, who grew up at Fort Meade while his father worked at the

VA hospital and mother served on the museum board, the historic post still carries the feel of another era.

“When you visit Fort Meade, it’s like stepping back in time,” Bender said.

Many visitors are surprised to learn about Fort Meade’s place in the anthem’s history.

“It’s one of those things we just take for granted that we have a national anthem,” Bender said, “We never stopped to think about how these things came to be. But every one of those stories had to start at some point, and the national anthem story got its start in Fort Meade, South Dakota.”

The Fort Meade museum is open from mid-May through the end of September 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Monday-Saturday.



# STILL ROLLING

Cody Denne, third-generation owner of Ron's Bike Shop, holds an e-bike available at his shop in Mitchell, S.D.  
Photo by Frank Turner

## Three Generations Later, Ron's Bike Shop Embraces E-Bikes

Frank Turner

frank.turner@sdrae.coop

For nearly 70 years, Ron's Bike Shop has helped keep Mitchell, S.D., moving.

The family-owned business has served generations of riders from the same location since 1958, when Cody Denne's grandfather, Ron, bought a local repair shop, renamed it and moved his family to South Dakota. Today, Denne is the third generation to run the business, carrying forward a name that has become familiar to local riders.

"I really just love the bike industry and trying to keep more people on a bike," Denne said.

The story traces back to St. Cloud, Minn., where Denne's grandfather, Ron, had been working at a bike shop when he told a bicycle sales representative he wanted to own a shop of his own.

The representative knew of one for sale in Mitchell: Harvey's Fix It Shop. Ron purchased the business in 1958, gave it the

name it still carries today, beginning a family connection that has lasted nearly seven decades.

"My grandpa owned it for about 20 or 25 years," Denne said. "My dad, Mike, owned it for 40, and I'm going on year six since my dad passed away."

The shop has changed with each generation. Old photos from the 1960s show that Ron's Bike Shop once sold Cushman scooters and BSA motorcycles.

Today, the newest shift is electric. About 12 years ago, Denne added his first e-bike to the shop's inventory after a customer came in looking for one. At the time, he said, he did not know much about them. But he ordered the bike, the customer bought it and the sale became an early sign of where the industry was headed.

The trend took time to build, but over the past few years, e-bikes have become a major part of the showroom.

"I'd say three years ago was the big year where I started investing, putting more on my showroom floor than regular bikes," Denne said. "And last year, they took off. I think I sold, give or take, like 60 electric bikes last year."

Denne said the demand for e-bikes is something that would

have been hard for his grandfather, Ron, to imagine when he purchased the shop in 1958.

“He probably never would have thought electric bikes would ever exist,” Cody said.

For some riders, the appeal is simple. An e-bike can make hills easier, make longer rides more realistic and give people confidence to ride farther than they otherwise would. Denne said the technology has opened cycling to customers who might have stopped riding or never considered buying a bike at all.

“E-bikes are getting more people riding who wouldn’t have ridden before – people who are tired of riding their regular bike and need a little assist to climb hills,” he said.

One couple from Huron helped Denne see what that could mean. About three years ago, the two came into the shop looking at electric bikes. Denne sent them out for a short test ride to a nearby bike path. After about 45 minutes, he started to worry.

“I was just getting in my van to go find them,” he said.

But then they returned to the shop, smiling.

“They were so happy,” Denne said. “They both took an e-bike home, and I think that first year they put like 1,500 miles on them.”

That added distance is also where e-bikes can become a tool for accessibility. For riders who need a little help because of age, hills, wind, endurance or confidence, electric assist can lower the barrier without taking away the activity. Denne said some riders who may have gone only 3 or 4 miles on a regular bike are now riding closer to 12.

“They’re seeing more,” he said. “They’re adding more adventure to their ride.”

As e-bikes become more common, Denne spends more time answering questions about motors, batteries, charging and what type of e-bike makes sense for each rider. He also pushes back on the idea that e-bikes do all the work.

“People think if you get an electric bike, it’s just going to do all the assist for you,” Denne said. “No, you’ve still got to pedal.”

Safety has become part of that education. Denne encourages riders to understand the class of e-bike they are buying, know where that type of e-bike is allowed and respect the added speed that comes with electric assist. Helmets, working brakes, proper lights and basic awareness still matter, especially as riders travel farther and faster than they might on a traditional bicycle.

But regardless of the technology, Ron’s Bike Shop continues to do what it has done for nearly 70 years: help people ride.

“Electric bikes are the thing right now,” Denne said. “It’s only getting bigger and better every year.”

Only now, more of those bikes plug in before they hit the trail.



The Denne family purchased Harvey's Fix It Shop in 1958.  
Photo submitted by Ron's Bicycle Shop



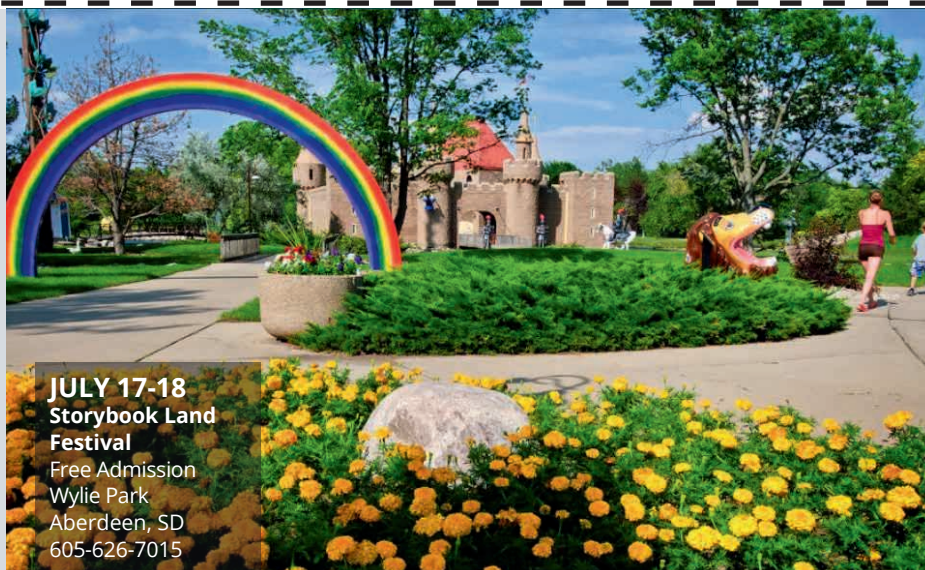
By 1963, Ron's Bicycle Shop was selling more than bicycles, with Cushman scooters and BSA motorcycles also part of the business.  
Photo submitted by Ron's Bicycle Shop

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**JULY 17-18**  
**Storybook Land Festival**  
Free Admission  
Wylie Park  
Aberdeen, SD  
605-626-7015

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.

**JULY 2-4**  
**USA 250th Celebration at Mount Rushmore**  
Rapid City, SD  
[www.nps.gov](http://www.nps.gov)

**JULY 4**  
**Fishing Derby & Fireworks**  
Lake Farley Park  
Milbank, SD  
605-432-6656

**JULY 8**  
**Tracy Area Gardens & Quilts Tour**  
2-7:30 p.m.  
Lakes Area - Shetek, Sarah, Gavin  
Rain Date: July 9  
Tracy, MN  
507-629-3252  
[tracy.area.garden.quilts@gmail.com](mailto:tracy.area.garden.quilts@gmail.com)

**JULY 10-12**  
**Rooted: A Prairie Arts Weekend**  
Geddes, SD  
Vendors, Artists: 605-428-5007

**JULY 11**  
**40th Annual Spearfish Canyon Half Marathon & 5K**  
Start: 7 a.m., Savoy, SD  
End: City Park, Spearfish, SD  
Register: [www.nhcasa.org](http://www.nhcasa.org)

**JULY 18**  
**A Celebration of Johnny Cash**  
7 p.m.  
Gayville Hall  
Gayville, SD

**JULY 18**  
**Forever Simon & Garfunkel**  
Prairie Village  
Madison, SD

**JULY 18-19**  
**10th Annual Charles Mix Saddle Club SDRA Rodeo**  
Geddes, SD  
605-680-2763

**JULY 24-26**  
**Bruce Honey Days**  
Bruce, SD  
605-627-5671

**JULY 24-26**  
**Winner Elks 57th Annual Rodeo to Benefit LifeScope**  
7 p.m.  
Tripp County Fairgrounds  
Winner, SD

**JULY 25**  
**Planes, Trains & Automobiles**  
Prairie Village  
Madison, SD

**JULY 30**  
**Spurs Grand Classic Equestrian Competition**  
9 a.m.  
Aberdeen, SD  
605-226-1099

**AUG. 1-2**  
**51st Annual Pioneer Power Threshing Show**  
MN Machinery Museum  
Hanley Falls, MN  
507-828-5437

**AUG. 4-6**  
**Farmfest 2026**  
8-a.m.-4 p.m.  
Gilfillan Estate  
28269 MN Hwy. 67  
Morgan, MN  
[ideagroup.com/farmfest](http://ideagroup.com/farmfest)

**AUG. 7-9**  
**Fur Trader Days**  
NEW Art in the Park  
Geddes, SD  
Vendors, Artists: 605-428-5007

**AUG. 9**  
**Czech Heritage Festival**  
8-a.m.-4 p.m.  
Brechyn, MN  
320-522-1218

**Note: We publish contact information as provided. If no phone number is given, none will be listed. Please call ahead to verify the event is still being held.**