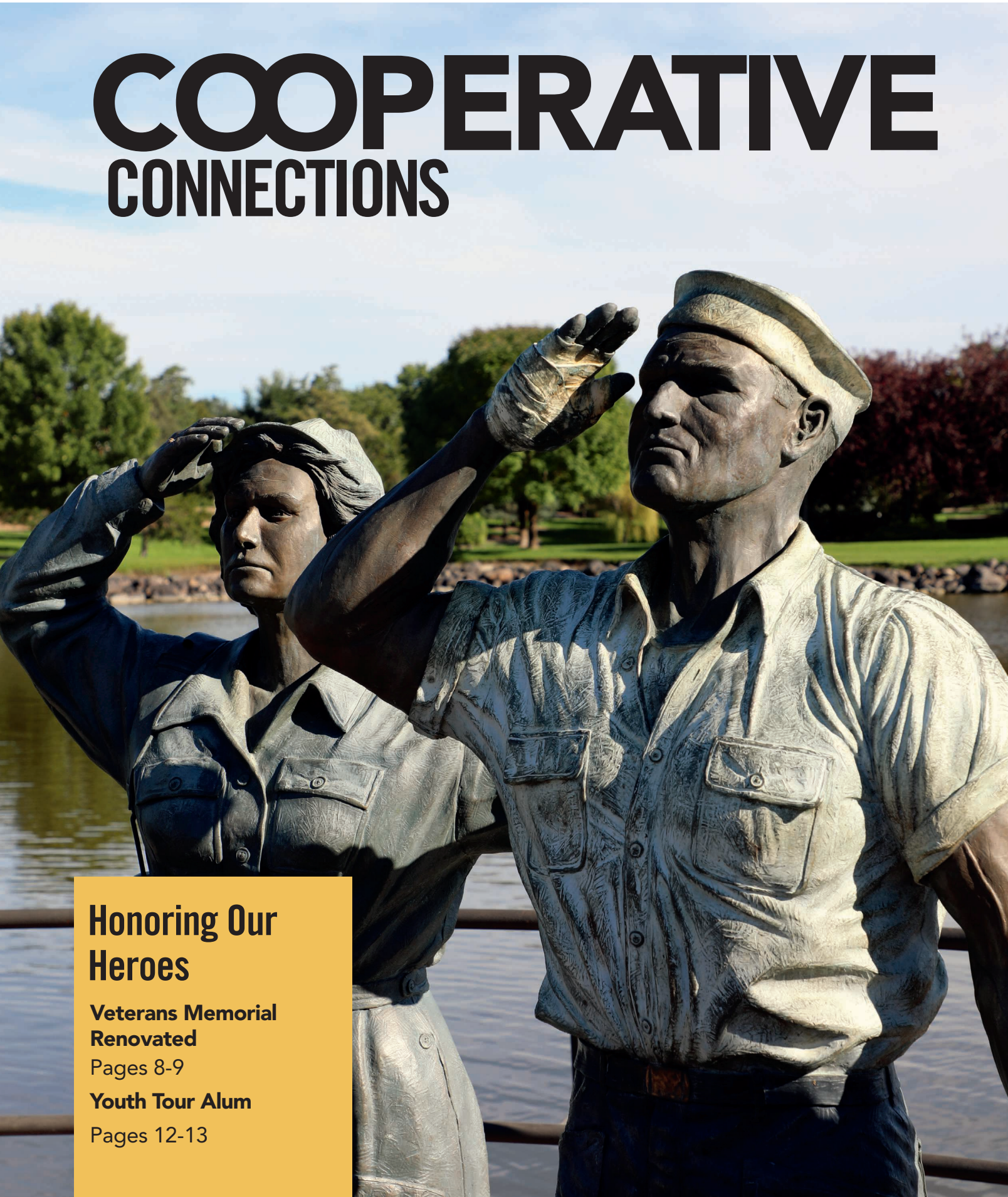
A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative

NORTHERN ELECTRIC
NOVEMBER 2026 VOL. 27 NO. 7

COOPERATIVE CONNECTIONS



Honoring Our Heroes

Veterans Memorial Renovated
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Youth Tour Alum
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Co-ops Vote!



Kathy Haas
Communications Specialist

Voting is one of the many ways you can make a difference in your community. As an electric cooperative, Northern Electric was formed on the foundations of democratic representation and concern for community. We want to encourage everyone to use their voice to shape our communities. This November, South Dakotas will choose who we want to represent us in the United States Senate, United House of Representative, as well as Governor and Lieutenant Governor, Secretary of State, and more. This is your opportunity to choose the best person for the job!

In our state primaries this June, only 34.5% of eligible voters cast a vote. While Northern Electric is a locally-owned cooperative, we're part of a larger network of electric co-ops. Through our non-partisan grassroots program known as "Co-ops Vote," we're working to encourage voter turnout. There's power in numbers, and when we all show up at the polls, we can voice the issues that matter most to our community.

GET READY

To help, Co-ops Vote has a website full of voter resources and information. You can check it out at vote.coop. Remember, it's essential to regularly check your registration and verify that your information is correct and up to date. You can check your registration on the South Dakota Secretary of State website's Voter Information Portal, at sdsos.gov/elections-voting/

Scan for SD Secretary of State website

GET THE DETAILS

General Election Date: Nov. 3
Voter registration deadline: Oct. 19
Absentee/Early voting: Began Sept. 18

It's important to know about upcoming voter registration deadlines, the process for requesting absentee ballots and more, so you don't miss key dates. You can find information about voting in South Dakota by visiting the Secretary of State website, or visit vote.coop.

GET INFORMED

Before you head to the polls, it's important to be educated on the policy issues that help keep our community's power reliable, affordable, and safe. The South Dakota Secretary of State website has sample ballots, as well as the draft and final versions of the ballot measures available for you to read.

GET THE BACKGROUND

Before voting, take the time to learn about your candidates. You can view a list of your current elected officials on the Voices for Cooperative Power website as well as the Secretary of State website. Make sure their policy positions align with your values and the changes you would like to see in your community.

GET OTHERS INVOLVED!

Now that you've done your research and are officially ready to head to the polls as a Co-op Voter, it's time to get your family, friends and neighbors involved. Together, we have the power to educate lawmakers, build awareness about our issues, and support measures that are important to our communities. The co-op voice is powerful, and it starts with you!





COOPERATIVE
CONNECTIONS

NORTHERN
ELECTRIC

(USPS 396-040)

Board President: Todd Hettich

Board of Directors
B.J. Hansen - Vice President
Scott Sperry - Secretary
Josh Larson - Treasurer
Nolan Wipf
Thomas Lambert
Kirk Schaunaman
Bruce Schumacher, Jr.
Mike Traxinger

CEO/General Manager: Char Hager
info@northernelectric.coop

Chief Financial Officer: Lorisa Rudolph

Operations Manager: Jerry Weber

Manager of Member Services: Russel Ulmer

Manager of Information Technology: Derek Gorecki

Communications Specialist: Kathy Haas

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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SEPTEMBER BOARD REPORT

Northern Electric Cooperative's regular board meeting was held Sept. 28, 2026, at the Agtegra Cooperative headquarters with all directors present. As the first order of business, the Board approved the August 26, 2026, minutes and August 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. 10, 2026. The next East River Board Meeting will be on Oct. 1, 2026. South Dakota Rural Electric Association Director Nolan Wipf reported on the actions taken by the SDREA Board at the regular meeting held Sept. 17-18, 2026. The next SDREA board meeting will be held Nov. 30 - Dec. 1, 2026. Directors Kirk Schaunaman, Todd Hettich, Nolan Wipf, Scott Sperry and General Manager Char Hager reported on the 2026 East River Annual Meeting, held Sept. 9. Director Todd Hettich reported on the NRECA Regional Meetings 5 & 6 held Sept. 21-23 in Minneapolis, MN. Hettich also gave an update on RESCO board activities. JDH Construction gave a progress report on the headquarters building project.

MANAGER'S REPORT

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

- Reported on the East River Annual Meeting held Sept. 9.
- Reported on the REED Board Meeting held on Sept. 1.
- Reported on the employee meeting held on Aug. 31.
- Provided department updates.

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, Oct. 26, 2026.
- Approved Work Order Inventory #26-08 for $380,867.06 to be submitted to the Rural Utilities Service for reimbursement from loan funds for electric plant construction already completed.
- Approved 23 requests for capital credit retirements of $33,214.37.
- Approved the 2027-2030 Construction Work Plan.
- Approved RUS loan for the 2027-2030 Construction Work Plan of $35,930,380.
- Approved REED Loan Application for the Frederick Development Corporation.
- Appointed Todd Hettich as authorized representative for the Mid-West Electric Annual Meeting, Dec. 8-10, Denver, CO.
- Held Executive Session.

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

FINANCIAL REPORT

	AUGUST 2026	AUGUST 2025
kWh Sales	23,757,011	21,125,255
Electric Revenues	$3,033,713	$2,485,458
Total Cost of Service	$2,928,646	$2,620,414
Operating Margins	$105,067	($134,956)
Year to Date Margins	$1,510,248	($28,443)

RESIDENTIAL AVERAGE MONTHLY USAGE AND BILL

AUGUST 2026	1,391 kWh	$257.09	$0.1848
AUGUST 2025	1,387 kWh	$210.44	$0.1517

Wholesale power costs, taxes, interest, and depreciation account for 81.8% of total cost of service.

KEEP SAFETY AT THE HEART OF YOUR HOLIDAY CELEBRATIONS

The holiday season, stretching from late November through mid-January, is widely considered the most joyous time of the year. Families gather, festive parties fill our calendars, and a spirit of generosity warms our homes. However, alongside the cheer comes a significant spike in travel, home decorating, and large-scale cooking. Consequently, preventable accidents and injuries dramatically increase during these months. To ensure your family and friends remain safe and injury-free throughout the festivities, keeping safety top of mind is crucial. Below is a comprehensive guide of tried-and-true advice to help you navigate the season securely.

Traveling for the Holidays? Be Prepared and Alert

For millions of people, the holidays mean hitting the road to visit loved ones. Unfortunately, car travel during this busy period carries the highest fatality rate of any major transportation form. Hundreds tragically lose their lives in crashes on Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Year's Day alone. Alarmingly, alcohol impairment contributes to approximately one-third of these fatal incidents.

To stay safe on the roads, follow these essential guidelines:

- Winterize your vehicle: Prepare for harsh weather and keep a well-stocked emergency kit in your trunk.
- Rest up: Get plenty of sleep before departing to avoid the severe dangers of drowsy driving.
- Plan ahead: Leave early and anticipate heavy traffic to eliminate the dangerous temptation to speed.
- Buckle up: Ensure every passenger is properly restrained, regardless of the trip's length.
- Eliminate distractions: Put your cell phone away; it remains the primary driving distraction today.
- Designate a driver: Always use a completely sober driver. Alcohol and medications cause severe impairment.

Decorate with Caution and Care

Decking the halls instantly puts families in a holiday mood, but hospital emergency departments treat thousands of decorating-related injuries annually. Remember these safety tips:

- Keep poisonous seasonal plants, like mistletoe and holly berries, strictly out of the reach of children.
- If utilizing an artificial tree, verify it is clearly labeled as "fire resistant."
- For live trees, cut two inches off the trunk for better water absorption. Water daily and remove it when dry.
- Place your tree at least three feet away from fireplaces, radiators, and space heaters.
- Discard and replace light sets featuring broken sockets, frayed wires, or loose electrical connections.
- Turn off all holiday lights before going to bed or leaving the house.

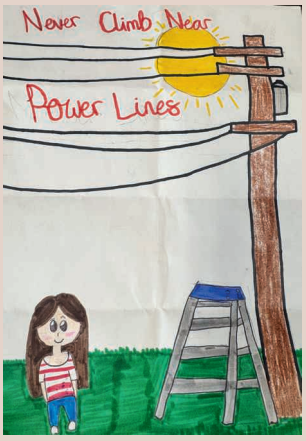
Watch Out for Holiday Fire-Starters

The glow of candles and fireplaces is a holiday staple, but combined with combustible decorations, house fire risks skyrocket. The National Fire Protection Association notes candles cause 46% of December home fires.

- Place candles in sturdy holders away from curtains and curious children.
- Store matches and lighters in a locked, high cabinet.
- Consider battery-operated flameless candles as a very safe alternative.
- Never burn pine branches or wrapping paper in fireplaces; they can cause flash fires.
- Use a protective screen for burning fires and never leave lit candles unattended.

Be highly alert to the extreme dangers of turkey fryers. Hundreds of fires and severe burns are linked to these devices. Consider using oil-less fryers or purchasing fried turkeys from professionals. If you must fry your own, strictly follow all U.S. Fire Administration guidelines.

By taking these simple, proactive steps, you can protect loved ones and ensure your holidays remain merry, bright, and safe.



"Never climb near power lines."

Penelope Poppen

Penelope warns readers to never climb near power lines. Thank you for sharing, Penelope! Penelope's parents are Brett and Megan Poppen, members of Black Hills 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.



THE FAMILY TABLE

ENCHILADA CASSEROLE

Ingredients:

1 lb. hamburger
1 medium onion, chopped
1 green pepper, chopped
1 can (10 oz.) enchilada sauce
6 tortilla shells
1 cup shredded cheese
1 can pinto beans

Method

In a glass baking dish, put the browned hamburger, onion, pepper, beans and sauce in shells and roll up. Layer with shredded cheese on top. Bake 20 minutes in oven.
Optional: Use 1 cup of sliced black olives on top of cheese

Marla Gilbert
Southeastern Electric

PARTY IN A PAN

Ingredients:

1 1/2 lbs. hamburger, browned
1 can cream of celery soup
1 can cream of chicken soup
1 box Stove Top Stuffing Mix
1 can corn, drained
3 cups mozzarella cheese, shredded

Method

Combine the hamburger, celery soup and chicken soup in a bowl and set aside.
Prepare the Stove Top Stuffing as directed on the box. Layer half the hamburger mixture, half the corn, half the stuffing, and half the cheese; repeat layers again. Bake 30-40 minutes at 350°F or until cheese is melted.
Makes a 9x13-inch pan.

Kathy Zomer
Douglas Electric

BEEF TERIYAKI

Ingredients:

1lb. boneless beef sirloin steak
2 tbsp. cornstarch
14 oz. beef broth
2 tbsp soy sauce
1 tbsp. brown sugar
1/4 tsp. garlic powder
3 cups broccoli florets
1 1/2 cups rice
1 2/3 cups water

Method

Cook the rice in water according to the directions on the bag.
Slice beef in very thin strips. In a large skillet, saute the beef strips until browned and the juices evaporate.
In a mixing bowl, combine cornstarch, beef broth, soy sauce, brown sugar and garlic powder. Mix thoroughly.
Add the liquid mixture and broccoli florets to the beef. Cook until mixture boils & thickens to a desired consistency, stirring frequently.
Serve over the cooked rice.

Karen Soulek
Charles-Mix Electric

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.

Picture from Shutterstock.



TOP CHOP BECOMES FAMILY BUSINESS

Kathy Haas
khaas@northernelectric.coop

What started as a business opportunity has blossomed into family company. Chad and Shannon Bergan purchased Top Chop, formerly known as Economy Meat Market, earlier this year. Top Chop is a meat shop that offers custom and retail butchering.

"I got two boys (Andrew and Turner) working out here right now and then my third son (Cole) will help every now and then. My wife and daughter (Mia) both help run retail stores," Chad said. "All six of us have been helping since we've opened."

The business was new industry for the family, so there was a bit of a learning curve in the beginning. Chad had recently retired from the banking industry. Andrew heard about the business being up for sale and suggested giving it a shot.

"We decided to just go for it and learn on the job.



TOP: Chad Bergan, left, and his son, Andrew Bergan, stand behind the counter at the Bath shop.
ABOVE: Honey BBQ is a new flavor available at Top Chop.

People have been very good to us about that," Chad said.

The community has been very welcoming, Chad said. Since it's a smaller industry, the butchering world is tight knit. They've picked up some tips and tricks from the previous owner and forged connections with the local producers. Top Chop offers retail cattle, hogs, and sheep, as well as custom butchering.

Before taking over, Chad and Andrew had to get the necessary safety certifications to butcher. The timing worked out perfectly for them to attend the required trainings in Minneapolis, MN. Turner and his classmate, Jon, recently graduated high school and assist with butchering full time now.

The last six months have been crazy, but a good crazy, Chad said.

"We're learning every day, and we'll probably always keep learning every day," Chad said. "But it's getting better and better."

Internet trends make the retail side a new adventure every day, Chad said. They have to keep up with the trends and stay aware of the quickly shifting demand. Different cuts of meat become hot overnight or are renamed and then there's a rush of orders.

At the moment, the Bergans are trying to maintain the balance between custom processing and keeping retail on hand. Top Chop butchers twice a week, Tuesdays and Thursdays, and processes the other three days. All their cattle hang for a minimum of two weeks. Some custom orders will hang for three. Hanging allows the muscles to soften and relax, which produces a better flavor, Chad said.

"We're busy," Chad said. "It's a good busy, so we're happy with that."

While they've made a couple changes to the business already, more are planned for the future. Chad's background in banking helped smooth the way to implement technology that would streamline processes. One of the first upgrades was to the point of service systems, including the phone tree. Now when customers call, crew at both the Bath and Aberdeen locations can answer and transfer between locations. In addition, new processing equipment helps speed up the process to portion out meat for sausages and ground meats. They've started dabbling in new seasonings. So far, they added honey BBQ beef sticks to their retail selections. Chad hopes they will be able to start accepting deer in the near future.

"There's always something we want to do. It will take us time, but we'll get some more things going," Chad said, "Hopefully get some additional new technology."

TOP CHOP LOCATIONS

605-228-9680

Bath: 39455 133rd St
Open Mon-Fri 8 a.m. - 5:30 p.m.

Aberdeen: 202 6th Ave SE
Open Mon-Fri 10 a.m. - 6 p.m., Sat 10 a.m. - 4 p.m.



Jon, a full time employee, uses the new stuffer, which automatically weighs out the meat to be bagged.



HONORING OUR HEROES

Veterans Memorial Undergoing Revamp

The WWII memorial on Capitol Lake shows soldiers saluting the American flag after battle. Later, after the Korean and Vietnam soldier statues and walls were added beneath the flag, the WWII veterans appear to salute them too. *Photo by Jacob Boyko*

Jacob Boyko
jacob.boyko@sdrea.coop

Lee Leuning's father was about 80 when he sat in his son's sculpting studio to become the sailor at South Dakota's World War II memorial.

For three days, Leuning studied his face and shaped his features. His father slowly began talking about the war. After 50 years, the experience still weighed heavy.

Today, more than 25 years later, Leuning's father stands immortalized in bronze on the shore of Capitol Lake in Pierre, representing sailors like himself who served in World War II.

He stands among five other slightly larger-than-life statues representing members of the U.S. armed forces. The display, called "Why We Fought," depicts the service members in tattered uniforms saluting toward the American flag.

"It's soldiers in each individual moment stepping out of battle and recognizing the flag and what they fought for," Leuning said.

A member of Northern Electric Cooperative, Leuning created the figures with fellow sculptor Sherri Treeby. Visitors to Pierre will find their work throughout the city, including statues along the Trail of Governors and a relief plaque commemorating the Lt. Cmdr. John C. Waldron Memorial Bridge. At Capitol Lake, their sculptures honor veterans of World War II, Korea and Vietnam.

Several of the World War II figures have family connections. Leuning used his mother's likeness for the army corps mechanic – she served as a plane mechanic in WWII – and his sons as models for the pilot and Marine. Treeby's father, an Army veteran, provided the face of the Coast Guardsman.

The WWII memorial was the first memorial unveiled, dedicated by Gov. Bill Janklow just four days after the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks. Leuning recalls being amazed by the turnout – thousands of visitors were at the Capitol for the dedication.

He remembers one Navy veteran watching the dedication parade from a hospital bed with an attendant.

"Every time a flag came by with an honor guard … that guy would have his aide get him out of the bed, and he'd snap to attention," Leuning said. "That, to me, showed this really means something to them."



Recent renovation improved water drainage. Previously, water under the granite tiles caused loosening. The tiles have since been replaced with sod grass. The stream bed was also replaced. *Photo by Jacob Boyko*

Subsequent dedications for the Korean and Vietnam memorials during Gov. Mike Rounds' administration attracted even more visitors. The state estimated 32,000 people attended the two-day Vietnam dedication in 2006. Some veterans watched the ceremony from pontoon bridges on Capitol Lake.

Unfortunately, years of exposure have taken a toll on the site. Trapped water beneath the granite tiles caused some to loosen and crumble, explained Leah Haugan, Special Projects Coordinator for the South Dakota Bureau of Human Resources and Administration.

"Try as we might to keep it in great shape, you can't keep up with deteriorating stone," Haugan said.

Over the summer, the state began work on a renovation project for the memorials, which will bring some changes to the site.

Sections of granite have been replaced with grass. The military seals embedded in the walkway were lifted out and placed on pedestals. The stream from the Artesian well remains, but it's now bordered by a concrete curb. The granite tiles around the fountain were upgraded from ¾ inch thick tiles to 2 inch thick tiles, and the fountain enclosure was remade with concrete and granite tiles around the top.

Restoring the site is part of the state's commitment to honoring veterans and their service, Haugan said.

"Words are words, but when you build something like that that memorializes their efforts and their sacrifice, I think that shows them there's proof positive that we recognize and honor them," Haugan said.

The renovation does not bring back the Flaming Fountain's flame. Methane rising from the artesian well that feeds Capitol Lake kept the flame burning for decades, but it went out around 2015 when the flow could no longer sustain it. Haugan said a more ambitious fountain project is among the ideas for the site, depending on funding.

A separate proposal would honor Native American code talkers who served in World Wars I and II using their native languages to transmit messages that enemy forces were not able to translate. Funding for that memorial also remains unresolved.

Visiting the memorials, Leuning has seen what that recognition can mean to a family. The day after the Vietnam memorial dedication, he returned to take photos and was approached by a woman asking him to take her picture. He obliged, and the lady went up to the bronze statue and hugged it.

"She said, 'That's my Davy. It looks just like my Davy.'"

Then she pointed to her husband's name on the wall.



Leuning's Vietnam War memorial.
Photo submitted by Lee Leuning



Sculptor Lee Leuning with his dad, Donald Leuning, at the World War II Veterans Memorial dedication Sept. 15, 2001, in Pierre.
Photo submitted by Lee Leuning



An estimated 32,000 people attended the Vietnam War Memorial dedication in 2006.
U.S. Airforce Photo by 1st Lt. Carrie L. Kessler

46% OF BUDGET EXPENDED

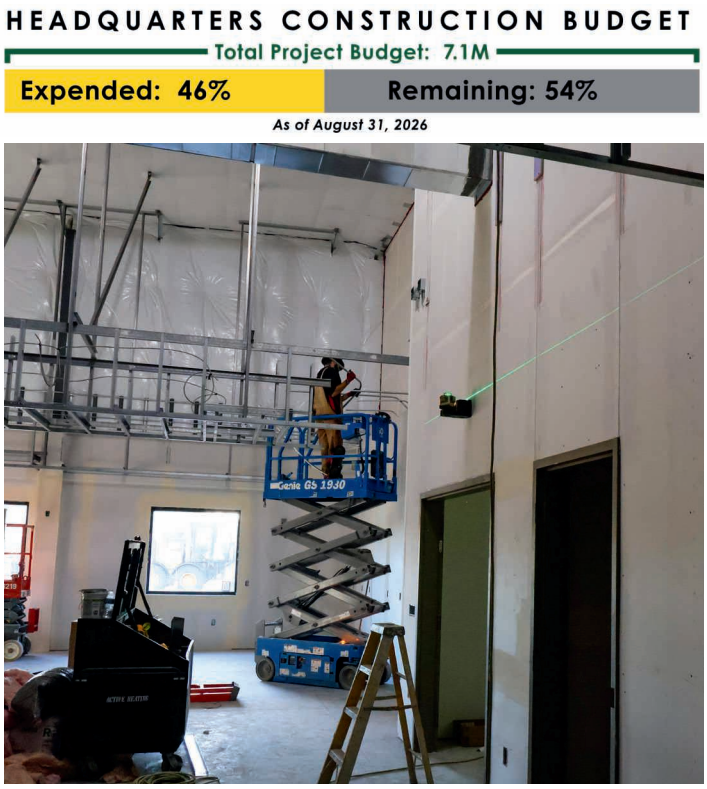


Todd Hettich
Board President, Building Committee Chair

With only a couple months left in the project, your new Northern Electric Cooperative headquarter building is still within budget. As of August 31, 46% of the $7.1 million budget has been expended. As subcontractors continue to wrap up their pieces of the project, we may see a jump in expenditures.

Work inside the building is getting closer to the final stages. The ceiling grid and lights have been installed. Taping, texturing, and painting is wrapping up. Many of the ducts for the HVAC system have been installed already. The exterior of the vestibule is almost complete; the glass has been installed. Once a majority of the interior work is done, the concrete floors will be polished.

We will continue to provide highlights as the project continues. For more information about your new headquarters, please talk to your director or co-op manager.



Construction on the ceiling grids throughout the building were being wrapped up in early October.

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1400 Independence Avenue SW
Washington, D.C. 20250-9410

Fax:
(202) 690-7442; or

Email:
program.intake@usda.gov

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Kathy Haas, *Editor* 09/29/26



How a Youth Tour Friendship Changed Marty Larsen's Life

The 1969 South Dakota Youth Tour group. Marty Larsen is pictured in the top row, seventh from the right. John Nordlie is pictured in the top row, fifth from the left. *Photo courtesy from the SDREA Archives*

Frank Turner
frank.turner@sdrea.coop

When Marty Larsen earned a spot on the 1969 Youth Tour to Washington, D.C., through Turner-Hutchinson Electric Cooperative, he had every reason to believe dairy farming would remain at the center of his life. Turner-Hutchinson, a predecessor of today's Southeastern Electric Cooperative, served the area around his family's dairy farm seven miles west of Hurley.

Youth Tour gives high school students sponsored by their local electric cooperatives the chance to spend a week in Washington, D.C., visiting historic sites, learning about government and electric cooperatives and meeting students from across the country. South Dakota began sending students on the trip in 1963. Larsen went just six years later.

Back then, Turner-Hutchinson Electric selected its Youth Tour delegates through 4-H, rewarding young people for their accomplishments. In 1969,

Larsen placed eighth at the national 4-H dairy judging competition in Ohio. The accomplishment earned him the cooperative's Youth Tour trip to Washington, D.C.

But before Larsen could make the trip, an Army recruiter threw a wrench in his plans, warning him that he was likely to be called for service soon. Rather than wait to be drafted, Larsen chose to enlist, expecting to head to basic training and then Vietnam.

Not long after, Larsen received an induction notice, but first he had to complete a military physical. Larsen, who is hard of hearing, failed the hearing test and was disqualified from service. Had he passed, he said he would have left for basic training about a week before the 1969 Youth Tour departed.

"Somebody upstairs was looking out for me," he said.

With the Army no longer standing in the way, Larsen was going on the trip. To prepare, his mother bought him new clothes and a new pair of shoes. Even still, he returned home with the soles nearly worn through. At the Washington Monument, he and a small group of students climbed 897 steps rather than wait in the long elevator line, then rode the elevator back down.

Near the end of the trip, the group ate at a seafood restaurant along the Potomac River. Larsen persuaded the chaperones that the students ought to try lobster, something many of them had never eaten before. When the waitress brought lobster bibs to the table, Larsen passed his around and asked everyone to sign it.

His mother later saved the bib in the scrapbook she kept of his childhood, alongside years of 4-H ribbons, judging cards and other keepsakes. Larsen still has the scrapbook today.

The students took an evening cruise on a multilevel paddlewheel-style boat on the Potomac, complete with live music. South Dakota Youth Tour students continue the tradition of a river cruise today aboard the Cherry Blossom.

For Larsen, though, the most important part of Youth Tour was the people he met. One of them was John Nordlie of Sioux Falls, a young photographer who worked with the Argus Leader and later attended Augustana College.

The two became friends during the trip and stayed in contact after returning home.

"We stayed friends after we got back," he said. "I was in his wedding party when he got married. He was in my wedding party when I got married."

For the next several years, Larsen stayed close to the life he knew, working in dairy and welding. Nordlie, meanwhile, developed an interest in pipe organs. In 1983, he called Larsen and asked if he wanted to come work for him building organs for cathedrals and music halls.

Larsen agreed, bringing his experience as a welder, machinist and mechanical problem-solver into a trade he had never expected to enter. He spent the next 20 years working with Nordlie and became deeply involved in the mechanics of organ construction.

His work eventually went far beyond basic fabrication. Larsen built components, developed specialty tools and designed machinery for organ builders. One machine he created transformed a wire-bending process that had taken workers several minutes per piece, allowing them to produce several pieces per minute. Other tools he built ended up with organ companies elsewhere in the United States and overseas.

The work also took Larsen far beyond southeastern South Dakota. Over the years, he traveled throughout the country and to Japan, worked on historic instruments and helped construct and restore pipe organs in churches, museums and other settings. More than four decades after entering the trade, he is still involved in restoration work.

Looking back, Larsen can draw a direct line from the Youth Tour trip to the career that followed. Without the trip, he may never have met Nordlie. Without that friendship, the call inviting him into organ building may never have come.

"It meant a lot to me to be able to go on that trip," Larsen said. "It changed me from a dairy farmer to a pipe organ builder."

More than 50 years later, Larsen still has the scrapbook his mother kept from the trip, along with the signed lobster bib awnd other reminders of that week in Washington. But the most lasting thing he brought home was the friendship that, years later, opened the door to a life he never could have planned.



Marty Larsen and his wife, Barbara.
Photo by Frank Turner

Interested in attending Youth Tour?
Contact your local electric cooperative to learn more about the application process.



A PLACE AT THE TABLE

Volunteers cook hundreds of meals for community members in Marshall, Minn.
Photo submitted by Teri Hively

Thanksgiving Meals Bring Neighbors Together in Marshall and Murdo

Frank Turner
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Across the Midwest, Thanksgiving has a way of becoming a community project. By late November, church kitchens, senior centers and fellowship halls fill with volunteers roasting turkeys with all the fixings for neighbors who need a meal or simply somewhere to spend the holiday. Nearly every town seems to have its own version. In Marshall, Minn., and Murdo, S.D., community Thanksgiving meals have lasted for decades.

Marshall, Minnesota

In Marshall, a community Thanksgiving dinner has grown from 35 meals served out of crockpots into an annual event that reached more than 900 people last year. Lyon-Lincoln Electric Cooperative member Teri Hively of Balaton, Minn., has been involved from the beginning and now leads the meal through Grace Life Church in Marshall.

The dinner started 35 years ago when Hively's late mother-in-law, inspired by God's vision, began to prepare a Thanksgiving meal for the community. Her idea came with a standard that still guides volunteers today: serve great food for a great community.



Kelly Deutz, left, and Teri Hively coordinate the Thanksgiving community meal in Marshall, Minn.
Photo submitted by Teri Hively

That standard means real turkey, real potatoes and a home-cooked meal served on glass plates with real silverware.

"I want it to be a home-cooked meal," Hively said. "I want it to feel like you're at home."

The Thanksgiving dinner requires months of planning and a network of volunteers. Hively and Kelly Deutz begin organizing in August, lining up cooks, servers, donations and the smaller jobs that need to be finished before Thanksgiving Day. Deutz helps organize all the volunteers and delivery routes.

The cooking begins days before anyone sits down to eat. Volunteers arrive at the start of the week to peel fresh potatoes while another group handles setup the day before Thanksgiving. When the big day arrives, even more volunteers fill the kitchen to set up serving lines, dessert tables and a proper dining area.

Some volunteers cook turkeys at home. Others donate pies or pans of bars, while local businesses and private donors provide ingredients and money. Hively estimates that more than 200 people contribute to the dinner each year.

"I could never do it alone," Deutz said. "It takes many hands to make that happen. I just happen to be the piece that helps drive it forward."

Luckily, feeding a crowd is familiar work for Hively, who spent more than 12 years working in catering.

Service is familiar to Hively, too. She has been an EMT for 37 years and a firefighter for 32 years, including volunteer service with the Balaton Fire Department, Balaton Ambulance and Tyler Ambulance.

In 2014, Hively's mother-in-law told her she was ready to step back and pass leadership of the dinner to Teri. Soon after, Hively's mother-in-law passed away unexpectedly, and Hively took over the following year in her memory.

"I took the lead role, not knowing I was going to be in charge without her," Hively said. "But I wasn't worried because I had been there every step along the way, so I knew what the meal entailed from beginning to end."

Today, the meal remains open to anyone, regardless of income or circumstance, and volunteers also deliver meals to older residents and those who are homebound. Some people need the food, Hively explained, while others simply need somewhere to spend Thanksgiving.

Hively's children grew up helping with the dinner, and now her grandchildren are taking part. She finds jobs for families with young children so they can help, too.

"Be the hands and feet of Jesus," said Hively.

Murdo, South Dakota

In Murdo, the Thanksgiving dinner began about 20 years ago with Joe Connot, who worked at West Central. When Connot retired, the Murdo Lions Club took over and continued serving the meal at the local senior center.

The club sponsors the dinner, and members cook the turkeys and help serve. The senior center provides the space and prepares the rest of the meal. Murdo Lions Club President Travis Van Dam said about 75 people usually attend, not including those who receive deliveries.

Van Dam joined the Lions Club after watching his father volunteer with the organization and wanting to do the same for Murdo.

"There's not a lot to do in our little town, so it's just something that we can do to provide for the community," said Van Dam.

The dinner is meant for people who do not want to cook, cannot cook or may not have family nearby. Volunteers also deliver meals around Murdo, including to employees at businesses that remain open on Thanksgiving.

Last year, Van Dam used Facebook to collect meal requests and organize deliveries.

"Just helping – it just feels good to help somebody and give them a meal," he said.

Freewill donations collected at the dinner help fund local service projects. Much of the club's fundraising supports Caring and Sharing, which helps people facing illness pay for travel, medical care, food and hotel stays.

Club members also help with community cleanup, sponsor a movie day for students, collect eyeglasses and volunteer at school sporting events.

"As long as we keep getting the turnout and people appreciate it, we'll keep doing it," he said.

In Marshall and Murdo, volunteers keep showing up to cook, serve and make sure their neighbors have a place around the Thanksgiving table.



Bruce Vennard (left) and other volunteers with the Murdo Lions Club serve a Thanksgiving meal for their local community.
Submitted Photo

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.



NOV. 7
Wine, Cheese & Chocolate Stroll
Deadwood, SD
www.deadwood.com/events/

NOV. 1
Kadoka Holiday Festival
10 a.m.-4 p.m. (MST)
Lunch 11 a.m.-1 p.m.
Kadoka City Auditorium
Kadoka, SD
605-488-0151

NOV. 6-8
Hill City Girlfriends' Weekend
Hill City, SD

NOV. 7
Fall Fling Craft/Vendor Show
10 a.m.-2 p.m.
Dakota Christian School
Corsica, SD

NOV. 7
Black Hills Meat Fest
Free Admission
Central States Fairgrounds
Nerdy Nuts Expo Hall
Rapid City, SD
Facebook.com/BlackHillsMeatFest

NOV. 7-15
Rustic Designs & More Christmas Country Show
9 a.m.-5 p.m.
41450 264th St.
Ethan, SD
605-770-2411

NOV. 8
32nd Annual Lutefisk, Meatball & Lefse Supper
4-7 p.m.
Trinity Lutheran Church
Chamberlain, SD
605-730-0553

NOV. 12
The Satin Dollz
Patriotic Female Vocal & Dance Quintet
7 p.m.
Johnson Fine Arts Center
Aberdeen, SD
aberdeencommunityconcerts.org

NOV. 14
Kick-Off to Christmas & Santa Shop
10 a.m.-2:45 p.m.
7 p.m. Parade
Eureka, SD
605-230-1777

NOV. 14
Lake Campbell Lutheran Church Lutefisk Supper
Seatings: 4:30, 5:45, 7 p.m.
Volga, SD
Reservations: 605-690-4868

NOV. 14
Club 14 Craft & Vendor Fair
9 a.m.-2 p.m.
Hendricks Public School
Hendricks, MN
605-690-5586

NOV. 14-15
Zonta Holiday Craft & Vendor Show
Sat. 9 a.m.-5 p.m.
Sun. 10 a.m.-3 p.m.
Ramkota Hotel
Pierre, SD

NOV. 16-21
Yelduz Shrine Festival of Trees
Mon.-Fri. 4-7 p.m.
Sat. 11 a.m.-6 p.m.
802 S. Main St.
Aberdeen, SD
605-225-4841
Yelduz.com

NOV. 20
Aberdeen University Civic Symphony Concert
7:30 p.m.
Johnson Fine Arts Center
Aberdeen, SD
aberdeencommunityconcerts.org

NOV. 21
Lille Norge Fest
8 a.m.-12:30 p.m.
Canyon Lake Activity Center
2900 Canyon Lake Dr.
Rapid City, SD
borgundlodge.org

NOV. 27-28
Sip, Shop & Stroll
Viborg, SD

NOV. 28
Gregory Mid-Winter Fair
9 a.m.-4 p.m.
Gregory Memorial Auditorium
Gregory, SD
605-830-9778

DEC. 4-5
Christmas in the Hills
Mueller Civic Center
Hot Springs, SD
951-591-2335

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.