

# COOPERATIVE CONNECTIONS



## Hurricane Aid

**Linemen Help  
Restore Power After  
Hurricane Helene**  
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# May Your Holidays Be Merry and Bright



**Emily Johnson**  
Communications  
Specialist

As the holidays kick off, it's hard to believe we'll soon be gathering with family and friends to celebrate the holiday season. This festive time of year brings joy and warmth, but as the weather gets cooler and we spend more time indoors, the holidays can also bring increased energy use and a higher risk of electrical and fire hazards.

As your local electric cooperative, our team at Northern Electric Cooperative cares about your wellbeing. This month, I'd like to share a few practical tips to help you stay safe and efficient during the holiday season.

## **Safety first.**

Before you deck the halls, always check electrical cords and light strands to make sure they aren't frayed or damaged. This will give you peace of mind, knowing your holiday lights are ready to safely brighten your home. Make sure to also double check the lights you use outside to see if they're rated for outdoor use.

Most households enjoy holiday-scented candles. While festive, candles can create fire hazards and should never be left unattended. One of the best and easiest ways to safeguard your home is to test smoke alarms often. Testing smoke alarms only takes a few seconds and could save lives, so try to make it a monthly habit.

## **'Tis the season for savings.**

Spending more time indoors with a few more guests in the home can really impact home energy use. By taking a

few small steps to save energy during the holiday season, you can lower your bills.

Remind family members to mind the thermostat. Since heating and cooling makes up the majority of home energy consumption, the thermostat is one of the best places for savings. Lower it a few degrees, especially when you have family or friends stopping by. Good company brings additional warmth to your home.

Your family can also save energy by decorating with LED holiday lights. LEDs are the most energy efficient lighting options available, and they last much longer than traditional bulbs.

There's no denying one of the best parts of the holiday season is the food—not just the meals but the time you spend together in the kitchen. There are many ways to save in the heart of your home, but one of the best approaches is to cook with smaller countertop appliances, such as air fryers, slow cookers and toaster ovens. These handy appliances consume a fraction of the energy used to heat the oven, creating the perfect recipe for mealtime and energy savings.

I hope you will implement some of these energy-saving and safety tips into your holiday plans. We're here to help you with safety and savings year-round.

From your friends at Northern Electric, we hope your holiday season is merry and bright.

## COOPERATIVE CONNECTIONS

### NORTHERN ELECTRIC

(USPS 396-040)

**Board President:** Nolan Wipf

**Board of Directors**

- Todd Hettich - Vice President
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info@northernelectric.coop

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**Operations Manager:** Jerry Weber

**Manager of Member Services:** Russel Ulmer

**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's regular board meeting was held October 24, 2024, at the headquarters in Bath with all directors present. As the first order of business, the board approved the September 20, 2024, minutes, and September 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 October 3, 2024, meeting. The next East River Board Meeting will be November 7, 2024.

South Dakota Rural Electric Association Director Nolan Wipf reported on the SDREA Board Meeting held September 26, 2024. The next SDREA Board meeting will be December 2-3, 2024.

#### MANAGER'S REPORT

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

- Update on Rural Electric Economic Development revolving loan fund activities held on October 2.
- Report on the East River MAC Meeting held on October 2.
- Report on the East River Joint 2025 Budget Presentation held on October 2.
- Report on the SDRE MAC meeting held on September 23-24.
- Report on the employee meeting held on October 25.
- Report on the Warner VS Frederick Football Tailgate held on October 18.

- Reminded directors of the NRECA Board leadership course to be held on November 25-26.
- Informed directors of the Northeast Rural Electric Legislative Issues Forum to be held on November 26.
- Reminded directors of the Mid-West Electric 67th Annual Meeting to be held on December 10-12.
- Reminded directors of the East River Member-System Director and Employee Orientation held on November 18.

#### BOARD REPORT

The board considered and/or acted upon the following:

- 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, November 22nd, 2024.
- Approved Work Order Inventories #24-09 \$325,597.94 and #24-09MC \$35,223.55 to be submitted to the Rural Utilities Service for reimbursement from loan funds for electric plant construction already completed.
- Held Executive Session.

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

#### FINANCIAL REPORT

	September-24	September-23
kWh Sales .....	19,455,853 kWh.....	17,929,356 kWh
Electric Revenues .....	\$2,268,969.....	\$1,922,282
Total Cost of Service .....	\$2,332,812.....	\$2,177,832
Operating Margins .....	-\$63,843.....	-\$255,549
Year to Date Margins.....	\$411,117.....	\$272,531

#### RESIDENTIAL AVERAGE MONTHLY USAGE AND BILL

SEPTEMBER-2024.....	1,171 kWh.....	\$187.87 .....	0.1604 per kWh
SEPTEMBER-2023.....	1,068 kWh.....	\$158.29 .....	0.1482 per kWh

Wholesale power cost, taxes, interest, and depreciation account for 80.3% of NEC's total cost of service.

# ENJOY A SAFE HOLIDAY SEASON

From late November to mid-January, when families gather, parties are scheduled and travel spikes, safety should be top of mind. Following is tried-and-true advice to ensure your family remains safe and injury-free throughout the season.

### Traveling for the Holidays? Be Prepared

If you're traveling this year, be sure your vehicle is in good running condition, get plenty of rest and be prepared for any emergency. Traveling by car during the holidays has the highest fatality rate of any major form of transportation based on fatalities per passenger mile. Hundreds of people die every year in crashes on New Year's Day, Thanksgiving Day and Christmas Day, according to Injury Facts. Alcohol impairment is involved in about a third of these fatalities.

Stay safe on the roads over the holidays – and every day:

- Prepare your car for winter and keep an emergency kit with you.
- Get a good night's sleep before departing and avoid drowsy driving.
- Leave early, planning ahead for heavy traffic.
- Make sure every person in the vehicle is properly buckled up no matter how long or short the distance traveled.
- Put that cell phone away; many distractions occur while driving, but cell phones are the main culprit.
- Practice defensive driving.
- Designate a sober driver to ensure guests make it home safely after a holiday party; alcohol or over-the-counter, prescription and illegal drugs can cause impairment.

### Decorate Safely

Decorating is one of the best ways to get in a holiday mood, but emergency departments see thousands of injuries involving holiday decorating every season.

When decorating follow these tips from the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission:

- Keep potentially poisonous plants – mistletoe, holly berries, Jerusalem cherry and amaryllis – away from children.
- If using an artificial tree, check that it is labeled “fire resistant.”
- If using a live tree, cut off about two inches of the trunk to

expose fresh wood for better water absorption, remember to water it, and remove it from your home when it is dry.

- Place your tree at least three feet away from fireplaces, radiators and other heat sources, making certain not to block doorways.
- Avoid placing breakable ornaments or ones with small, detachable parts on lower tree branches where small children can reach them.
- Only use indoor lights indoors and outdoor lights outdoors, and choose the right ladder for the task when hanging lights.
- Replace light sets that have broken or cracked sockets, frayed or bare wires or loose connections.
- Follow the package directions on the number of light sets that can be plugged into one socket.
- Never nail, tack or stress wiring when hanging lights, and keep plugs off the ground away from puddles and snow.
- Turn off all lights and decorations when you go to bed or leave the house.

Source: National Safety Council



**“Don’t Spill Water on Electronics...  
It Could Start a FIRE!”**

### Bethany Langworthy, Age 9

Bethany Langworthy warns readers to be careful with water around electronics. Thank you for your picture, Bethany! Bethany's parents are Kristina and Edward Langworthy, 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.

# Family FAVORITES

## CREAM CHEESE AND CUCUMBER SPREAD DIP

### Ingredients:

1 large cucumber, grated  
1 tsp. onion, grated  
8 oz. pkg. cream cheese  
3/4-1 cup mayonnaise  
Salt and pepper to taste

### Method

Grate cucumber and onion on several thicknesses of paper towels, squeeze out all the water. Place in a bowl. Blend other ingredients, adding enough mayonnaise to make it a spreading consistency. Serve with crackers or chips.

Mary Ann Klarenbeek  
Harrisburg, S.D.

## GRANDMA GRACE'S FROZEN FRUIT SALAD

### Ingredients:

8 oz. Cool Whip  
1 tbsp. lemon juice  
1 cup sour cream  
3/4 cup sugar  
Dash of salt

*Mix all thoroughly until  
sugar is dissolved.*

9 oz. can pineapple, crushed  
and drained  
Small jar maraschino cherries  
(halve or chopped if desired)  
2 sliced bananas (halve or  
quarter slices if desired)  
1/4 cup chopped walnuts

### Method

Mix thoroughly. Pour into 8x8 or 9x9 container. Cover and freeze. Thaw 10-15 minutes to allow cutting into serving portions.

My mother, Grace Alley, first made this salad for holiday meals. It has become a family favorite, and we always have it for one of our holidays.

Mary Harris  
Glad Valley, S.D.

## LEMON ROSEMARY GLAZED HAM

### Ingredients:

1 bone-in spiral-cut ham,  
about 10 lbs.  
1 1/4 cups honey, divided  
2 tsp. lemon extract  
1 1/4 tps. whole rosemary  
leaves, crushed, divided

### Method

Preheat oven to 325°F. Place the ham on its side in roasting pan. Mix 1 cup of the honey, 1 1/2 tps. of the extract and 1 tsp. of the rosemary in small bowl until well blended. Brush 1/2 of the honey mixture over ham, gently separating the slices so mixture can reach middle of ham. Cover loosely with foil.

Bake 1 hour, basting occasionally with pan drippings. Remove foil. Brush with remaining honey mixture. Bake 45 minutes longer.

Meanwhile, mix remaining 1/4 cup honey, 1/2 tsp. extract and 1/4 tsp. rosemary in small bowl. Serve with ham along with the pan drippings.

[McCormick.com](http://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.



Guides and hunters at the rib cook-off in Lemmon, SD.  
Photos sourced by: Brian Hansen



Wounded Warrior, Travis, with the first buck of the 2020 WWIA hunt.

## WWIA BOW HUNT

### NEC EMPLOYEE VOLUNTEERS TIME TO PURPLE HEART RECIPIENTS

EMILY JOHNSON

At the beginning of October, four combat-wounded warriors from across the U.S. met upon the beautiful Black Horse Butte area of South Dakota to archery hunt the elusive mule deer thanks to Finn Sacrison of Rapid City, SD and his team of volunteers which includes one of our very own journeyman lineman, Brian Hansen, of Bath, SD.

This year was the 4th Annual South Dakota Archery Mule Deer hunt which is funded through Wounded Warriors In Action. The mission of WWIA is to serve our nation's combat-wounded Purple Heart recipients by providing world-class outdoor sporting activities

to recognize and honor their sacrifice, encourage connections, and promote healing and wellness through camaraderie and a shared passion for the outdoors.

This event in SD offers a true hunting experience from start to finish, hiking across various terrain, using pack-goats, and camping in wall tents in the areas they are hunting. While early each morning they enjoy breakfast in their tent, each night supper is provided by a local landowner. A lot of ground is covered throughout their hunts as they glass and stalk from different vantage points along the buttes. Each year, the majority of warriors tag out and get to harvest a nice mule deer.

Brian states, "It's a lot of fun. You meet a lot of good people and make great memories every year."

Each year on the last evening of the event, the hunters are honored and welcomed by local members of the Lemmon community. They participate in a rib cook-off where they are the honorary judges. It's a wonderful time of fellowship and a fun way to end an incredible memorable trip.

WWIA hosts many world-class events, around the U.S., for our warriors throughout the year, that include fishing and hunting for deer, waterfowl, pheasant, etc. If you have interest in getting involved with this organization whether it be hosting an event or fundraiser, volunteering, or giving a donation please visit [wwiaf.org](http://wwiaf.org).



Goats packing out a deer during the 2023 WWIA hunt.



**CELEBRATE THE SEASON.  
AND THE SAVINGS.**

**RE-ENERGIZING EFFICIENCY**





# HURRICANE AID

## Linemen Help Restore Power After Hurricane Helene

**Jacob Boyko**

[jacob.boyko@sdrea.coop](mailto:jacob.boyko@sdrea.coop)

Linemen from five of South Dakota's rural electric cooperatives traveled to the Southeastern U.S. in October to help restore power along Hurricane Helene's path of destruction.

The 18 linemen left Oct. 2 for Pickens, South Carolina, where Blue Ridge Electric Cooperative faced over 64,000 meter outages and more than 800 broken poles in Helene's aftermath.

Zach Hansen, a lineman from West River Electric Association, didn't think twice before he volunteered to go along.

"It's just the co-op way," he said. "There are people in need down there who lost their houses – lost their lives – and this is something we know we can do to help. It's kind of a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity."

The linemen stayed at a crowded base camp with dozens of other utility workers from all across the country. They slept on cots in a large, open army-sized tent, but with their busy schedules, they didn't spend

much time there anyway. Most days, the linemen woke at 5:30 a.m. for breakfast and worked in the field until supper at 8 p.m.

The work also presented unfamiliar challenges for the linemen; each time the crew needed to repair damaged infrastructure, they'd first have to start the labor-intensive process of clearing through debris and trees toppled by Helene's heavy wind gusts.

"When we have blizzards and ice storms in South Dakota, it's hard work – and you're trying to stay warm," Hansen explained. "But out here, there's a lot more chainsaw work and fixing wire breaks. It's not just straight miles of line lying down like we're used to at home."

By Oct. 9, fewer than 1,000 meters in Blue Ridge Electric territory remained offline, and the South







Dakota crews were dismissed to begin the 1,200-plus mile journey home.

But as the South Dakota convoy – which included bucket trucks, skid steers and ATVs – moved north, another call came in.

Jefferson Energy Cooperative in Wrens, Georgia, also faced catastrophic damage to their distribution lines, with 100% of their service territory without power after the storm. On Oct. 9, as South Dakota's linemen were driving home from South Carolina to reunite with their families, still over 10,000 homes and businesses remained without power.

Just like before, South Dakota's rural electric cooperatives answered the call.

"When our line superintendent called me that morning and asked me how we felt about going to Georgia, I said, 'well, we're right here, so we might as well go in and help,'" Bon Homme Yankton lineman Gunnar Dally said. "If they need help, we're more than willing to come."

The stop in Wrens delayed the linemen's return home by about a week, but the appreciation from the communities helped keep spirits high.

"When we were on breaks, there were people stopping to thank us for helping," Dally said. "A lot of them were very surprised when we said we were from South Dakota."

Hansen recognized another subset

of heroes: the families.

"The unsung heroes of storm jobs are the people we leave behind," he said. "My wife is at home with six kids taking care of the ranch while I'm gone. If we didn't have those people, we couldn't go out and do the things we needed to do. They are the real heroes."

SDREA General Manager Steve Barnett thanked the linemen for volunteering to help with the storm restoration efforts and for embodying

the values of South Dakota's rural electric cooperatives.

"These 18 linemen gave up time at home with their families to help people in need they've never met in a place they've never been," Barnett said. "Their selfless actions reflect what we stand for as a family of cooperatives, as South Dakotans, and as fellow Americans. We thank them for their work, their spirit and their dedication to keeping the lights on – at home, and in South Carolina and Georgia."



2023-2024 HEATING SEASON LIEAP INCOME LIMITS	
HOUSEHOLD SIZE	MAXIMUM 3-MONTH INCOME
1 Person	\$7,290
2 Person	\$9,827
3 Person	\$12,140
4 Person	\$14,452
5 Person	\$16,764
6 Person	\$19,077
7 Person	\$19,510
8 Person	\$19,944
9 Person	\$20,877
10 Person	\$22,815

Source: South Dakota Department of Social Services

# HEATING ASSISTANCE

## Heating assistance is available through the South Dakota Department of Social Services

South Dakotans who need help paying their heating bills this winter can request energy assistance from the Department of Social Services (DSS). Energy assistance can help low-income families pay for heating costs; however, the assistance does not cover all costs associated with heating. Funds for the Low Income Energy Assistance Program (LIEAP) are distributed on a first-come basis for meter readings from October 1 – May 15.

To be eligible for the South Dakota DSS Low Income Energy Assistance Program households must:

- Complete the DSS Low Income Energy Assistance Application
- The total gross income of the household must not exceed maximum income guidelines.
- The applicant must be responsible for paying the home heating costs.

DSS also has an Energy Crisis Intervention Program (ECIP) that is available from October 1 – March 31. This program offers income-eligible households emergency assistance if they have a disconnection notice for their heat source or an eviction notice if the heat bill is included with rent.

For more information – or to obtain an application for LIEAP – contact DSS:

- **Website:** [https://dss.sd.gov/economicassistance/energyweatherization\\_assistance.aspx](https://dss.sd.gov/economicassistance/energyweatherization_assistance.aspx)
- **Phone:** 1-800-233-8503

LIEAP applications can also be picked up at the Northern Electric Cooperative office in Bath. Please contact the Northern Electric Cooperative office with questions at 605-225-0310.



WHEN THE ENERGY IS ELECTRIC

You'll rave about all the benefits you get by switching to electric appliances, power tools and even vehicles. Electric appliances, especially stoves, are generally safer than their gas counterparts as they eliminate both open flames and the potential for a gas leak. They're less expensive throughout total ownership, easier on your pocketbook and better for the planet. Electricity powers all types of energy usages, while gas is limited in its scope of power.

Have questions about going electric? Contact your local Touchstone Energy® Cooperative or visit [yourcooppower.com](http://yourcooppower.com) today.



**RE-ENERGIZING COST SAVINGS**

# SDAC SCHOLARSHIP

Attention second year higher-education students! The South Dakota Association of Cooperatives is awarding two \$1,000 scholarships to second-year higher-education students who are members or whose parents/guardians are members of a SDAC member cooperative. Students will need to fill out the application and complete an essay of at least 150 words, not to exceed one typewritten page, with the topic which is listed on the application. Applications are due December 6, 2024 and winners will be announced December 23, 2024.

For more information and to complete the application go to this website: <https://www.northernelectric.coop/sd-association-cooperatives-scholarship-application-open>



# A COOKBOOK THAT HAS YOUR TASTE BUDS DANCING

Electric co-op members have been sharing their homemade recipes since the day electric cooperatives were formed. The recipe page of *Cooperative Connections* and the annual *Country Cookin'* Cookbook published by our wholesale supplier, East River Electric Power Cooperative, is still one of the most sought-after publications by our members.

We know you have a recipe that could be made into a household favorite. From Mama's Special Lasagna to Grandma's famous meatballs, each recipe, perfectly crafted to tune your taste buds into an 80's disco. Don't you want to share the joy with others?

We need your help to craft the cookbook that has your taste buds dancing on every page so please, share your best dish with us. We promise you won't be disappointed. From vegetable trays to Carbonara Florentine, all recipes are welcome. With your submission you will be entered into a drawing to win 1 of 2 \$100 gift cards!

There are multiple ways to get your recipe to us. Please send them in, scan the QR Code, or go to this website: <https://airtable.com/appKf28fg5srXFUCr/pagccZXl0goKqekn0/form>

 A promotional graphic for 'The Country Cookin' Cookbook'. At the top is a logo of a lightbulb with a fork inside it. Below the logo, the text reads 'THE COUNTRY COOKIN' cookbook'. To the right is a QR code. Below the QR code, it says 'RECIPES NEEDED' and 'Help us create another great cookbook by submitting your favorite recipes.' Further down, it says 'Submit recipes to [graphics@eastriver.coop](mailto:graphics@eastriver.coop) or contact your local co-op for more information.' At the bottom, it says 'Submit to be entered into a drawing for 1 of 2 \$100 Visa gift cards'. The background features a plate of food, possibly a pizza or a salad.



# STAYING SAFE

First responders put out a fire near Belle Fourche. Photo submitted by Butte Electric Cooperative.

## Butte Electric Cooperative Connects With First Responders

**Frank Turner**  
frank.turner@sdrea.coop

October marks First Responders Month, a time to honor the dedication and courage of those who rush toward danger to keep their communities safe. This fall, electric cooperatives across the country expressed their gratitude to these everyday heroes who are always prepared to protect lives and the essential infrastructure that supports local neighborhoods.

Day or night, regardless of the weather, first responders answer the call, whether it's battling a blaze or responding to a medical emergency. When it comes to keeping the community safe, their collaboration with local electric co-ops is key for both local residents and the first responders themselves. Together, they work to ensure that emergencies are managed quickly, effectively and, most importantly, safely.

In September, Butte Electric further strengthened its ties and

communications with local first responders following an eventful summer by hosting a series of safety demonstrations for emergency crews in Meade and Butte Counties and the U.S. Forest Service.

"Earlier this year we faced several incidents that resulted in exposed power lines near first responders," said Matt Sleep, chief executive officer of Butte Electric. "In one case, we had a situation west of Spearfish where strong winds brought down a billboard, exposing lines that sparked and started a fire."

Both Butte Electric and the local fire department responded to the emergency, de-energizing the lines and containing the small grass fire. In a separate incident, a driver suffered a medical emergency and crashed into an electrical pedestal. Although the driver died in the accident, the actions of first responders and the electric cooperative prevented further injuries. The incident, among others, prompted Butte Electric to take proactive steps in preparation for the next possible emergency.

"We wanted to both educate responders and build some rapport, so when they see a power line, they know who to call and that they are comfortable getting in contact with us," said Sleep.

Butte Electric employees organized and led a hands-on safety training using the South Dakota Rural Electric Association's high voltage demonstration trailer, a specialized tool



that highlights the very real dangers of electricity. During the session, linemen demonstrated how electricity can arc, or jump, from one connection to another, always seeking the easiest path to the ground.

The training is one that linemen across the state have facilitated, which includes a memorable demonstration involving a grapefruit to show how contact with electricity impacts organic material. On the outside, the grapefruit appears undamaged after contact with an electrified line but cutting it open reveals it's been cooked from the inside.

The training left an impression with Trevor Papenfuss, an assistant fire management fire officer who has served with the U.S. Forest Service in the Spearfish area for more than 30 years. Papenfuss was just one of roughly 30 U.S. Forest Service members who attended the demonstration.

"We deal with incidents involving electricity at least once a year, if not more," Papenfuss said. "Butte

Electric provided us with a lot of valuable information and a powerful demonstration. Seeing a grapefruit burn from the inside out makes a big impact and impression of just how dangerous live electricity can be. Several of our new wildland firefighters attended and they took away information that will stay with them for a long time."

In a separate training tailored to the Sturgis Fire Department, Volunteer Fire Chief of the Sturgis Fire Department Scott Lensegrav said the training was impactful for his fellow volunteers. In addition to noting the value of the demonstration, Lensegrav highlighted the importance of maintaining a strong line of communication between electric service providers like Butte Electric and the fire department, especially during an emergency.

"In a situation involving power lines or electricity, the first thing we do is communicate with dispatch to try and figure out whose power line is involved in the emergency," said Lensegrav.

"The training was just another step in building good communication between our department and utilities. It was also great to have the refresher for our volunteers who have been with us for years and a good learning tool for the new volunteers that are coming into the service."

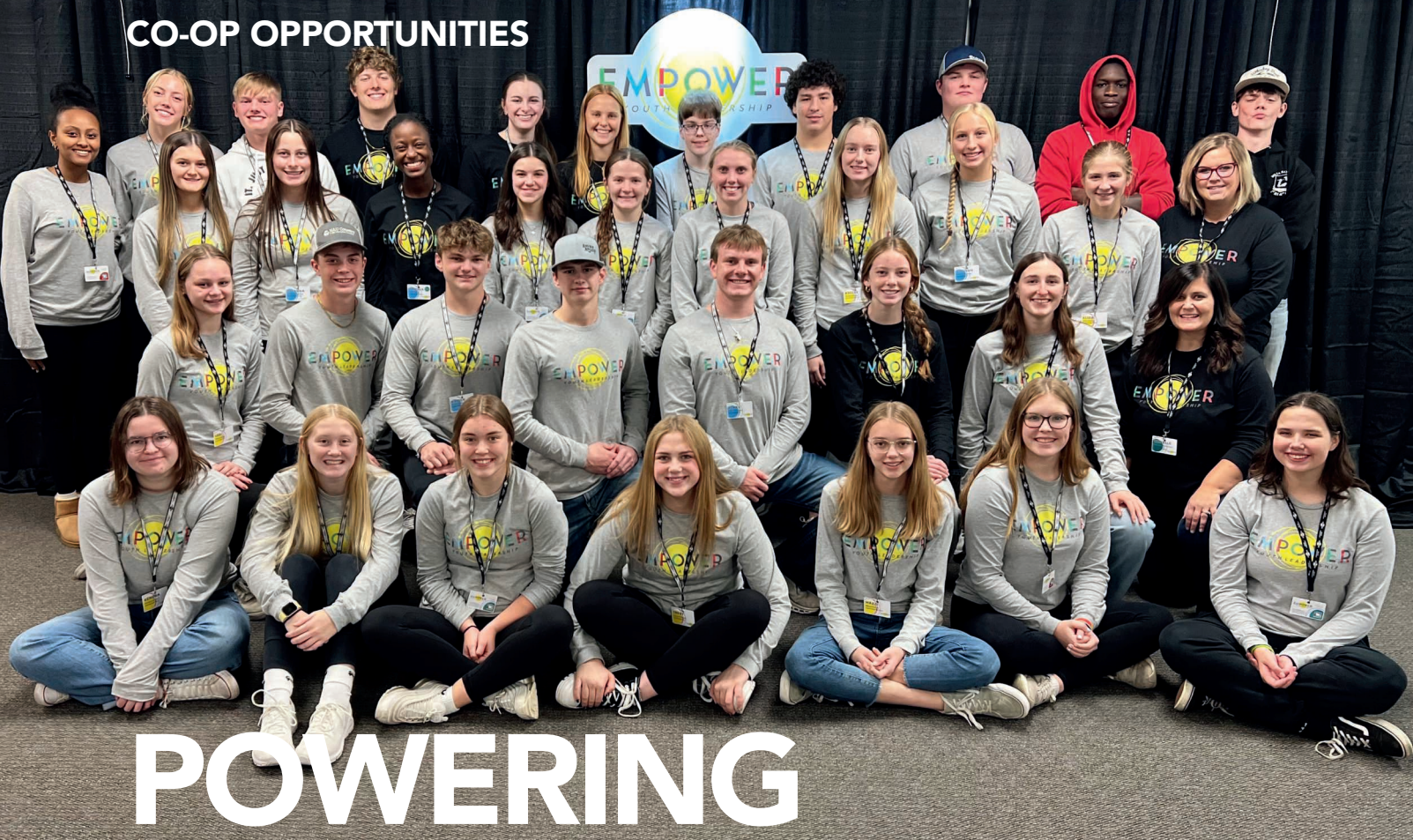
Looking forward, Sleep plans to continue strengthening the relationship between local first responders and Butte Electric for a safer future in their service area.

"It's all about building relationships and familiarity so that first responders know who to talk to and don't hesitate to call," said Sleep. "We deeply appreciate our first responders and want to help them however we can. These emergency personnel and volunteers are what make our communities great, and we just want to play our part in keeping them and our neighborhoods safe."



Butte Electric Cooperatives lead a safety demonstration for first responders.  
Photo submitted by the U.S. Forest Service.

## CO-OP OPPORTUNITIES



# POWERING FUTURES

## Electric Cooperatives Ignite Career Paths for Students

**Frank Turner**

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The path to a fulfilling career can start early, often before a young student's first job. Many opportunities connect ambitious students to real-world work experiences and electric cooperatives across South Dakota are tapping into this potential.

Through hands-on learning experiences such as internships, job shadowing and youth outreach, these early career experiences can ignite a student's passion for the work that takes place at their local electric cooperative, often leading to lifelong careers.

Every year, several students take the time to discover the many facets of an

electric cooperative, from office managers who oversee daily operations to the linemen who keep the lights on. In the office, students see the careful work that keeps operations running smoothly. Out in the field, they witness the skill and dedication of line crews who brave the elements to maintain reliable service. Each role offers unique insights into not only a potential career path but also how a cooperative functions and serves its community.

### Sioux Valley EmPOWER Program

Since 2014, Sioux Valley Energy has hosted its annual EmPOWER Youth Leadership Program for high school juniors, helping them explore Sioux Valley Energy, improve leadership

EmPOWER participants from the 2023-2024 school year.  
*Photo submitted by Sioux Valley Energy.*

skills, and build connections. Often, the EmPOWER program serves as a precursor to the Youth Tour and Youth Excursion trips to Washington, D.C., and Bismarck, N.D., respectively.

According to Sioux Valley Energy's Culture and Training Development Strategist Chinelle Christensen, the EmPOWER program is available to 26 school districts across the electric cooperative's service area.

"We really feel like this outreach is important," Christensen said. "We want people to understand the co-op way, the impact that we have in our communities, and that we are different. It's so critical to be constantly sharing that with the younger generation."

During the program, Sioux Valley also hosts a NetWeaving event where students get a chance to quickly meet and question different career professionals. For three to five minutes, they can further their understanding of a possible

profession by asking questions such as, “What does an average day look for you?” or “What’s the best part of your job?”

“A lot of people don’t realize that we are more than just linemen, and we teach them that,” she said. “A lot of students walk out of our NetWeaving program with an opportunity to job shadow.”

In addition to the EmPOWER, Sioux Valley Energy offers a variety of internships for college-level students. System Engineer Andrew Chmela joined the Sioux Valley team in May after a yearlong internship with the cooperative.

When he was a student at South Dakota State University, Chmela learned from a professor that an internship with Sioux Valley Energy had become available. Chmela applied for the internship, which quickly led to a full-time job with the cooperative.

“During the internship, I was able to job shadow, learn the area and see the company culture for myself,” Chmela said. “Since starting full-time, I love it. Every day is different and it’s challenging in the right aspects. It was a great opportunity to bridge the gap from when you transition from school to internship status to full-time work.”

## Lake Region Electric Opportunities

Growing up, Carter Williams would occasionally tag along to work with his dad, Daniel Williams, a line foreman at Lake Region Electric.

“My dad would show me the trucks and talk about all of the stuff they did,” Carter said.

Those days left an impression, and as a sophomore in high school, Carter began thinking about becoming a lineman or electrician for an electric cooperative. Carter expressed his interest in seeing Lake Region Electric first-hand, and the cooperative jumped at the opportunity to facilitate a three-day job shadowing opportunity for him to see industry professionals at work.

The experience inspired Carter to

seek out an internship with Lake Region Electric through a school program. More than three years later, the experience has paid off as Carter is now beginning his first year in the Mitchell Technical College Electrical Construction and Maintenance Program to become a journeyman lineman for a cooperative.

“That internship really helped me decide that I wanted to go into powerline work,” Carter said. “I wanted a job at an electric cooperative because I would have a stable community and I wouldn’t be jumping from jobsite to jobsite. It looks like a really great opportunity.”

Carter’s story is just one of many at Lake Region Electric according to Brett Kwasniewski, manager of member services with Lake Region Electric.

“If there is interest in the field, there are opportunities with Lake Region Electric,” Kwasniewski said. “If a student is interested, I highly encourage them to reach out to us, and that can happen through a guidance counselor, teacher or parent.”

In addition to internships, many cooperatives like Lake Region Electric offer 1,000-hour journeyman or apprentice lineman positions. These

seasonal, entry-level positions are open to those older than 18 and interested in exploring the industry.

“We want to bring in a kid who is interested in the trade to give them real-world experience,” Kwasniewski said. “Really, if you are 18 years of age and you are willing to work, there is a good chance that we will give you a shot at that.”

## Cooperative Opportunities

Whether it’s internships, job shadowing or youth programs, these opportunities extend beyond Lake Region Electric and Sioux Valley Energy to cooperatives across South Dakota, each dedicated to building a skilled workforce.

Students are encouraged to reach out to their local electric cooperative to see what opportunities are available, whether they’re seeking hands-on work experience, mentorship or an introduction to the field.

Regardless of Chmela or Carter’s next step, they both know their hometown electric cooperative in South Dakota is cheering them on in their future endeavors.



EmPOWER participants take part in a team building exercise. Photo submitted by Sioux Valley Energy.



**DEC. 7**  
**Santa at the Zoo**  
 10 a.m.-2 p.m.  
 Great Plains Zoo  
 Sioux Falls, SD  
 605-367-7003

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. 29**  
**Parade of Lights**  
 Parade of Lights  
 7 p.m.  
 Chamberlain, SD

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

**NOV. 30**  
**Mid-Winter Fair**  
 9 a.m.-4 p.m.  
 Gregory Memorial Auditorium  
 Gregory, SD  
 605-830-9778

**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**  
**Kimball's Hometown Holiday**  
 3:30-7 p.m.  
 Legion Hall  
 Kimball, SD

**DEC. 6**  
**Hometown Holiday Vendor Fair**  
 10 a.m.-6 p.m.  
 Armory  
 Howard, SD

**DEC. 7**  
**Newell Festival of Trees**  
 9 a.m. - Doors Open  
 11:30 a.m. - Community Lunch  
 4 p.m. - Auction  
 Newell City Hall  
 Newell, SD

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

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

**DEC. 7-31**  
**Garden Glow at McCrory Gardens**  
 5 p.m.-9 p.m.  
 Brookings, SD  
 605-688-6707

**DEC. 8**  
**Aberdeen Community Concert Association Fund Raiser 2024 Medora Magical Christmas Memories Tour**  
 3 p.m.  
 Aberdeen Civic Theater  
 Aberdeen, SD  
 605-228-0946  
 aberdeencommunityconcerts.com

**DEC. 14**  
**Parade of Lights**  
 Wessington, SD  
 605-359-2049

**DEC. 15**  
**A Poker Alice Christmas**  
 2 p.m.  
 Gayville Music Hall  
 Gayville, SD

**DEC. 31**  
**American Legion Post 15 Save the Last Dance 2024**  
 8 p.m.-12:30 a.m.  
 El Riad Shrine  
 Sioux Falls, SD  
 605-336-3470

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