A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative

NORTHERN ELECTRIC
DECEMBER 2026 VOL. 27 NO. 8

COOPERATIVE CONNECTIONS



Christmas Storms

Christmas on Call
Pages 8-9

Light of Mine Ranch
Pages 12-13

Photo Submitted by Black Hills Electric Cooperative

Rate adjustment expected for 2027



Char Hager
General Manager/
CEO

Preparation of the 2027 budget is currently underway to determine the impact of the wholesale power increases, along with the cooperative's needs. Northern Electric's staff continues to look for ways to control costs, operate efficiently, and make responsible investments in the cooperative, while maintaining the safe and reliable service you expect from your cooperative. Electricity is something we all depend on every day. Our job is to make sure it is there when you need it, today and for generations to come.

While Northern Electric has not determined the 2027 rate yet, the change will most likely go into effect in January. Once the 2027 rate has been determined, we will notify our members as soon as possible through our various communication channels, including bill messages, website, social media, and Cooperative Connections.

As indicated in our rate communications last year, our power provider, Basin Electric, announced a nearly 20% increase in the cost of wholesale power. To lessen the immediate impact, Basin's member cooperatives worked together to spread the increase over two years (2026 and 2027) rather than taking the full increase all at once. Some of the reasons for Basin's increase in rates include the growth in traditional loads requiring new transmission and generation, an increase in Southwest Power Pool planning reserve margins, commodity price variability, and investments in system reliability.

Northern Electric staff and board are committed to keeping rates as low as possible. We understand the hardship any rate increase can place on our members. Unfortunately, most of Northern Electric's costs are uncontrollable.

Every dollar you pay goes directly toward providing reliable, affordable, safe electricity. As shown in the graphic below, out of every dollar you pay for electricity, 63 cents goes toward paying the wholesale power costs. As a cooperative, we utilize loans to spread out the cost of infrastructure to everyone who will use it, including past, present, and future members. Depreciation/Amortization accounts for 10 cents of each dollar, and interest is eight cents. This way, one generation of users aren't solely responsible for paying for infrastructure that will power members for 30-50 years. Nine cents cover all the administrative and general costs not covered elsewhere, such as billing, building maintenance, utility costs, safety education, and employee salaries. Maintaining the current grid, restoring power outages, and replacing unreliable infrastructure uses the last six cents per dollar.

It would be detrimental to the cooperative in the long run to try to save money by ignoring aging infrastructure or delaying upgrades. We understand rate adjustments are difficult, especially back-to-back.

Thank you for your continued support, understanding, and partnership. We are proud to serve you, and we will continue working hard to make sure Northern Electric remains a strong, reliable, and member-focused cooperative.



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.
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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www.northernelectric.coop

Northern Electric Cooperative
A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative

OCTOBER BOARD REPORT

Northern Electric Cooperative's regular board meeting was held Oct. 26, 2026, at the Agtegra Cooperative headquarters with all directors present, except Nolan Wipf. As the first order of business, the board approved the Sept. 28, 2026, minutes and 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 Oct. 1, 2026, board meeting. The next East River Board Meeting will be Nov. 5, 2026. A building construction report was given on the headquarters project.

MANAGER'S REPORT

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

- Reported on the REED Board Meeting held on Sept. 30.
- Reported on the East River MAC Meeting held on Sept. 30.
- Reported on the employee meeting held on Sept. 28.
- 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 Friday, Nov. 20, 2026.
- Approved Work Order Inventory #26-09 $1,671,083.49 to be submitted to the Rural Utilities Service for reimbursement from loan funds for electric plant construction already completed.
- Approved changes to policy GP-23.
- Approved the 2027 Capital Budget.
- Held Executive Session.

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





FINANCIAL REPORT

	SEPTEMBER 2026	SEPTEMBER 2025
kWh Sales	19,491,159	19,805,138
Electric Revenues	$2,689,324	$2,307,395
Total Cost of Service	$2,609,759	$2,395,167
Operating Margins	$79,564	($87,772)
Year to Date Margins	$1,616,704	($64,146)

RESIDENTIAL AVERAGE MONTHLY USAGE AND BILL

SEPTEMBER 2026	1,105 kWh	$224.27	$0.2030
SEPTEMBER 2025	1,118 kWh	$182.72	$0.1634

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

CHRISTMAS GIFT IDEAS FOR WINTER STORM READINESS

Some of the best Christmas gifts aren't the ones that get used right away.

A flashlight, emergency radio or box of freeze-dried meals may not be the most exciting thing under the tree, but when a South Dakota winter storm rolls in, practical gifts can quickly become some of the most valuable items in the house.

Winter weather can bring heavy snow, bitter cold, drifting roads and extended power outages. In rural areas, where homes may be miles from the nearest town, it can take longer for roads to reopen or help to arrive. This Christmas, consider giving something that can help friends and family stay safe, warm and prepared.

A portable radio with a weather band is a good place to start. Battery-powered or hand-crank models can provide weather alerts and emergency information even if the power is out or cellular service becomes unreliable. Many also include flashlights, USB charging ports and other emergency features. For someone who lives in a rural area or travels frequently during the winter, a weather radio can provide another way to stay informed when conditions change quickly.

Food is another important part of storm preparedness. Freeze-dried meals have a long shelf life and are easy to store, making them useful for emergency kits. Pair several meals with bottled water, shelf-stable snacks or an insulated thermos for a practical preparedness package. Canned goods, granola bars, dried fruit and other foods that do not require refrigeration can also help a household get through a period when roads are closed or travel is discouraged.

For the car, consider putting together a winter emergency kit. Useful items include a warm blanket, gloves, flashlight, jumper cables, ice scraper, first-aid supplies and nonperishable food. A compact shovel and traction aids can also come in handy if a vehicle becomes stuck in snow. Road flares or reflective warning triangles can help make a stranded vehicle more visible.

This is especially important in South Dakota and Minnesota, where a short drive can quickly turn into a long wait if snow begins to blow across rural highways. Even experienced winter drivers can find themselves dealing with whiteout conditions, stalled traffic or roads that close with little warning.



A portable power bank can help keep a cellphone charged during an outage, allowing someone to receive alerts, check road conditions or contact family and emergency services. Larger rechargeable battery packs can power multiple small devices, which may be handy in the event of an extended outage.

Warm clothing also makes a practical gift. Wool socks, insulated gloves, hand warmers and heavy blankets can provide extra protection from the cold at home or on the road. An insulated hat, neck gaiter or pair of winter boots can also be useful for anyone who spends time outdoors checking livestock, clearing snow or traveling between buildings.

Battery-powered lanterns and headlamps are another good option. A headlamp allows someone to keep both hands free while finding supplies or moving around a dark home. Lanterns can provide area lighting for a room without relying on candles. Consider including extra batteries – just in case.

Other practical ideas include a new carbon monoxide detector, fire extinguisher, first-aid kit or basic tool kit. As a gift for parents, grandparents and new homeowners, consider replacing their smoke and carbon monoxide alarms.

While it's difficult to prepare for every possible emergency, having supplies on hand can help you and your loved ones stay comfortable, informed and safe until the storm passes or travel becomes safe again.

"Never drive high loads under low power lines!"



Artwork by Lydell Weaver

Lydell warns readers to never climb near power lines. Thank you for sharing, Lydell! Lydell's parents are Lyndon and Gwen Weaver, members of Dakota Energy 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.



Rise & DINE

COLD OATMEAL MUESLI

Ingredients:

½ cup raisins
½ cup old-fashioned oatmeal
1½ cups quick oatmeal
⅓ cup brown sugar
½ tsp. cinnamon
2 cups milk

Method

Mix all ingredients together. Cover and refrigerate overnight. Serve cold. If desired, add walnuts, apples or fresh berries just before serving.

Elaine Rieck
Southeastern Electric

BREAKFAST HOT DISH

Ingredients:

14 slices bread, divided
2 cups milk
½ lb. cubed ham
½ lb. sliced cheese
5 eggs
½ tbsp. mustard
⅓ cup melted butter

Method

Place 7 bread slices on bottom of greased 9x13 pan. Spread cheese and ham over bread slices.
Mix eggs, milk, and mustard, then pour over.

Tear the remaining 7 bread slices into pieces and sprinkle over the mixture. Pour melted butter over the bread pieces.

Bake 1 hour at 350°F.

Rowena Wipf
Northern Electric

OVERNIGHT COFFEE CAKE

Ingredients:

½ cup white sugar
½ cup brown sugar
¾ cup butter
1 cup buttermilk
2 eggs, beaten
2 cups flour
½ tsp. salt
½ tsp. baking soda
1 tsp. baking powder

Topping:
½ cup brown sugar
1 tsp. cinnamon
½ tsp. nutmeg (optional)
Nuts, as desired

Method

Cream together the butter, white sugar and brown sugar. Add the beaten eggs. In a separate bowl, combine the flour, salt, baking soda and baking powder. Add the dry ingredients to the butter mixture alternately with the buttermilk.

Spread the batter in a 9x13-inch baking pan. Combine the topping ingredients and sprinkle over the batter. Cover and refrigerate overnight.

In the morning, bake at 350°F for 35 minutes or until done.

Rowena Wipf
Northern Electric

RECIPE CORRECTION: SWEDISH PANCAKES

Ingredients:

1½ cups flour
3 tbsp. sugar
½ tsp. salt
3 eggs
2 cups milk
2 tbsp. melted butter

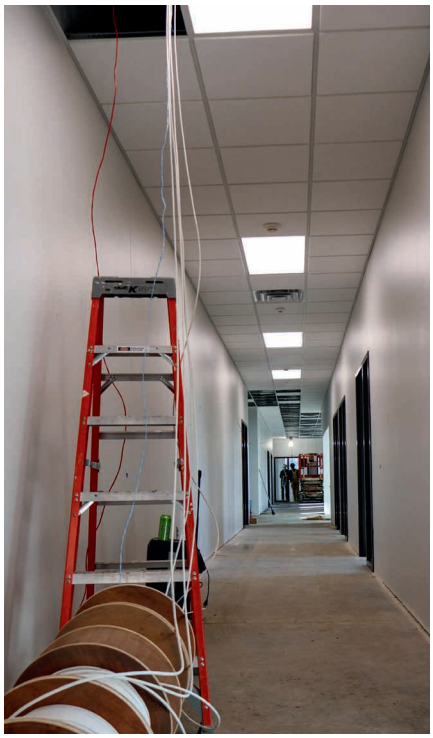
Lois J. Larson
Clay-Union Electric

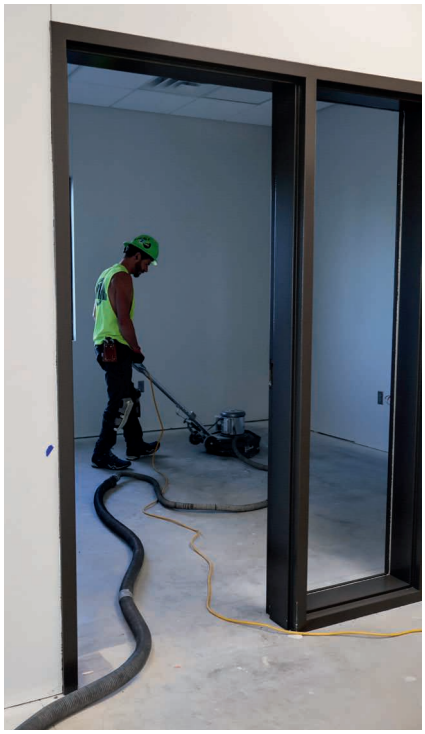
Method

Sift together the flour, sugar and salt. In a separate bowl, beat the eggs until thick and softly mounded. Add the milk and melted butter to the eggs, then add the flour mixture.

Lightly grease a griddle with butter. Spoon 1 tablespoon of batter onto the griddle for each pancake. Cook over medium heat until lightly browned on both sides.

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 2027. All entries must include your name, mailing address, phone number and cooperative name.





From left: Workers run cable above the ceiling tiles in the main hallway; HVAC finishes up in the Multi-Purpose room; The floors are throughly cleaned before they are polished.

HEADQUARTERS PROJECT NEARING COMPLETION



Todd Hettich
Board President, Building Committee Chair

We're still a couple weeks away from crossing the t's and dotting the i's, but we're in the final stretch. As of Sept. 30, just over half of the $7.1M budget has been expended. We are expecting to be operating out of the new headquarters building by January 2027. We will let membership know when we are moving and the date business will resume at the new headquarters.

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.

HEADQUARTERS CONSTRUCTION BUDGET

Total Project Budget: 7.1M

Expended: 51%	Remaining: 49%

As of September 30, 2026



The cabinetry has been installed for the billing/ reception area.



Olivia Knox received a $250 check for being named Touchstone Energy's Scholar of the Week.

OLIVIA KNOX NAMED SCHOLAR OF WEEK

Kathy Haas
khaas@northernelectric.coop

When Olivia Knox was in eighth grade, she suffered three concussions back-to-back. Although the injuries knocked her off course, she found a new path and worked hard to overcome the lingering side effects from the concussions. Her hard work has paid off, both academically and in athletics. Olivia switched to golf and has been recruited to play at Briar Cliff. She was also named the Touchstone Energy Scholar of the Week for Nov. 23.

Since the Scholar of the Week program began, more than $80,000 in scholarships have been awarded to more than 530 students. As Scholar of the Week, Olivia was awarded a $250 scholarship from Northern Electric and will have the chance to receive a $1,000 scholarship, or one of two $500 scholarships that will be given away at the annual Scholar of the Year banquet.

A Doland High School senior, Olivia was nominated for the Touchstone Scholar of the Week by Bailey Coats, Doland Ag Teacher and FFA Advisor. Olivia has been active in FFA since she was in seventh grade.

"Olivia is a student that exemplifies tenacity," said Bailey. "She's met hardships and challenges, come in second place time and again, and yet, she's never given up and has continued to push herself to try again and again."

Olivia credits Bailey with helping push her out of her comfort zone and become more outgoing. Through FFA, Olivia was able to take on leadership roles, compete in the state agriscience fair, and socialize at the dances. Being in FFA also helped Olivia broaden her focus from sports to include academics.

"I'm so proud of how she represents our school with humility and grace and the role model she is for our younger students," Coates said.

To recover from the concussions, Olivia completed occupation and physical therapies.

"I worked on memory and a lot of eye movements, because the concussions affected my vision and memory," Olivia said. "It was hard to focus in school, hard to get my homework done on time."

Having to go through therapy herself has made Olivia want to pursue a degree in kinesiology and become a physical therapist. She's looking forward to helping others on their journey to recover. Since physical therapy also requires patients to build muscle, there will also be a sports aspect, she said.

Olivia will be featured on Dakota News Now during the 6 p.m. news on Monday, Nov. 23 and again on the morning 6-7 a.m. news on Tuesday, Nov. 24. Scan the QR code to see the replay of Olivia's interview, as well as interviews with other Scholar of the Week winners.



CHRISTMAS ON CALL

Sometimes The Holidays Have to Wait

The 2016 Christmas Storm Europa left 23,000 members without power and hundreds of broken poles across the state. *Photo Submitted by East River Electric Power Cooperative*

Frank Turner
frank.turner@sdrea.coop

On Christmas evening in 2016, West Central Electric Cooperative Foreman Dustin Vollmer, then a lineman, headed north from Midland to investigate outages as a blizzard swept across western South Dakota. They made it about 12 miles.

"You couldn't even see the reflectors on the side of the road," Vollmer recalled. "We ended up pulling over and sat there till about 4 in the morning."

When conditions improved enough to turn around, the trucks had made their own snow drifts, and Vollmer's truck overheated twice on the trip back to Midland. More work awaited.

The 2016 Winter Storm Europa brought blizzard conditions, freezing rain and powerful winds across South Dakota on Christmas Day, damaging hundreds of utility poles. According to the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association, more than 23,000 members of at least 20 electric cooperatives statewide were without power by Christmas evening. Restoration work would stretch into the new year.

Vollmer joined West Central Electric in 1999 after graduating from line school at Mitchell Technical College. Even in high school, he understood that linemen sometimes worked holidays. "I realized it could be any time, just whenever the lights go out," Vollmer said.

When Winter Storm Europa caused widespread outages across West Central Electric's service territory, neighboring cooperatives sent crews and equipment to help restore power. Vollmer remembers working alongside linemen from nearby West River Electric Association, one of several cooperatives that came to their aid. Nine years later, Vollmer was able to return the favor when a storm struck Black Hills Electric's service territory in the days leading up to Christmas.



Dustin Vollmer and other West Central Linemen get the power back on during the holidays. *Photo Submitted by West Central Electric Cooperative*

A Return To The Black Hills

On Dec. 18, 2025, winds exceeding 100 mph swept across western South Dakota, uprooting trees, breaking utility poles and leaving more than 11,000 Black Hills Electric Cooperative meters without power. More than 96% of the co-op's electrical system was affected, making it the largest outage event in Black Hills Electric's history.

With damage spread throughout its service territory, Black Hills Electric requested assistance from neighboring cooperatives. Crews and equipment arrived from across western South Dakota, including Vollmer's crew from West Central Electric.

Vollmer was back to work over the Christmas holiday, honoring the cooperative spirit. He said getting around was easier than it had been during the 2016 blizzard, but widespread tree damage made restoration difficult in the Black Hills' rugged terrain. Crews worked to clear fallen trees, replace poles and repair damaged lines throughout the service territory.

Altogether, 55 additional linemen from six neighboring cooperatives and a local contractor assisted Black Hills Electric. Crews worked 12- to 16-hour shifts, prepared to remain through Christmas if the power wasn't restored in time.

"All the outside crews said they weren't leaving," recalled Bill Brisk, manager of operations at Black Hills Electric. "They stayed to help us finish."

By Christmas Eve, nearly all of Black Hills Electric's members had power again, allowing the visiting crews to head home. Black Hills Electric employees continued limited restoration work through Christmas, while Vollmer made it home to Midland late Christmas Eve.

The Families Behind The Work

Vollmer was fortunate to spend much of Christmas with his family following both storms, but not every lineman made it home for the holidays. During the 2016 storm, some employees were called back from trips while others spent days repairing power lines.

Ken Schlimgen, former general manager of Central Electric Cooperative, also acknowledged the sacrifices made by employees' families.

"The individuals who receive the least amount of credit for their role are the spouses and family members," Schlimgen wrote in his 2017 Cooperative Connections column following the Europa storm.

When the first call comes, linemen rarely know whether they'll find a small repair or widespread damage. Families have to plan around that uncertainty. Vollmer's family understands the demands.

"They know what it is," Vollmer said. "People out of power, you gotta go."

Vollmer said West Central Electric supports employees when personal or medical circumstances arise, an understanding that works both ways. When a major storm hits, employees know their coworkers and members are depending on them.

Even cooperative members often return that commitment. Vollmer said members offer assistance when a truck gets stuck or crews need help reaching damaged equipment.

"We got real good consumers," he said. "You could usually find somebody. They'll drop everything and come help."

That willingness to help extends across cooperative service territories, where crews regularly assist neighboring cooperatives during major outages. For Vollmer, it's an expectation shared by the people who have worked alongside him throughout his career.

"When stuff gets bad, you're expected to come help," Vollmer said. "You're part of the team."



The 2025 Black Hills Christmas Storm not only left 11,000 members without power, but also uprooted trees in the area, damaging lines as they fell.
Photo Submitted by Black Hills Electric Cooperative



HEATING ASSISTANCE AVAILABLE THROUGH STATE PROGRAM

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:

- Applicants must complete the DSS Low Income Energy Assistance Application.
- The total gross income of the household must not exceed maximum income guidelines (reference chart to right).
- 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.

Please contact the Northern Electric Cooperative with questions by calling 605-225-0310 or stopping by our headquarters office, Mon-Fri 8 a.m.-4:30p.m.

2025-2026 HEATING INCOME LIMITS

Household size	Maximum 3-month Income
1 Person	$7,980
2 Person	$10,820
3 Person	$13,660
4 Person	$16,500
5 Person	$19,340
6 Person	$22,180
7 Person	$23,895
8 Person	$24,426
9 Person	$24,957
10 Person	$25,488

DSS CONTACT INFO

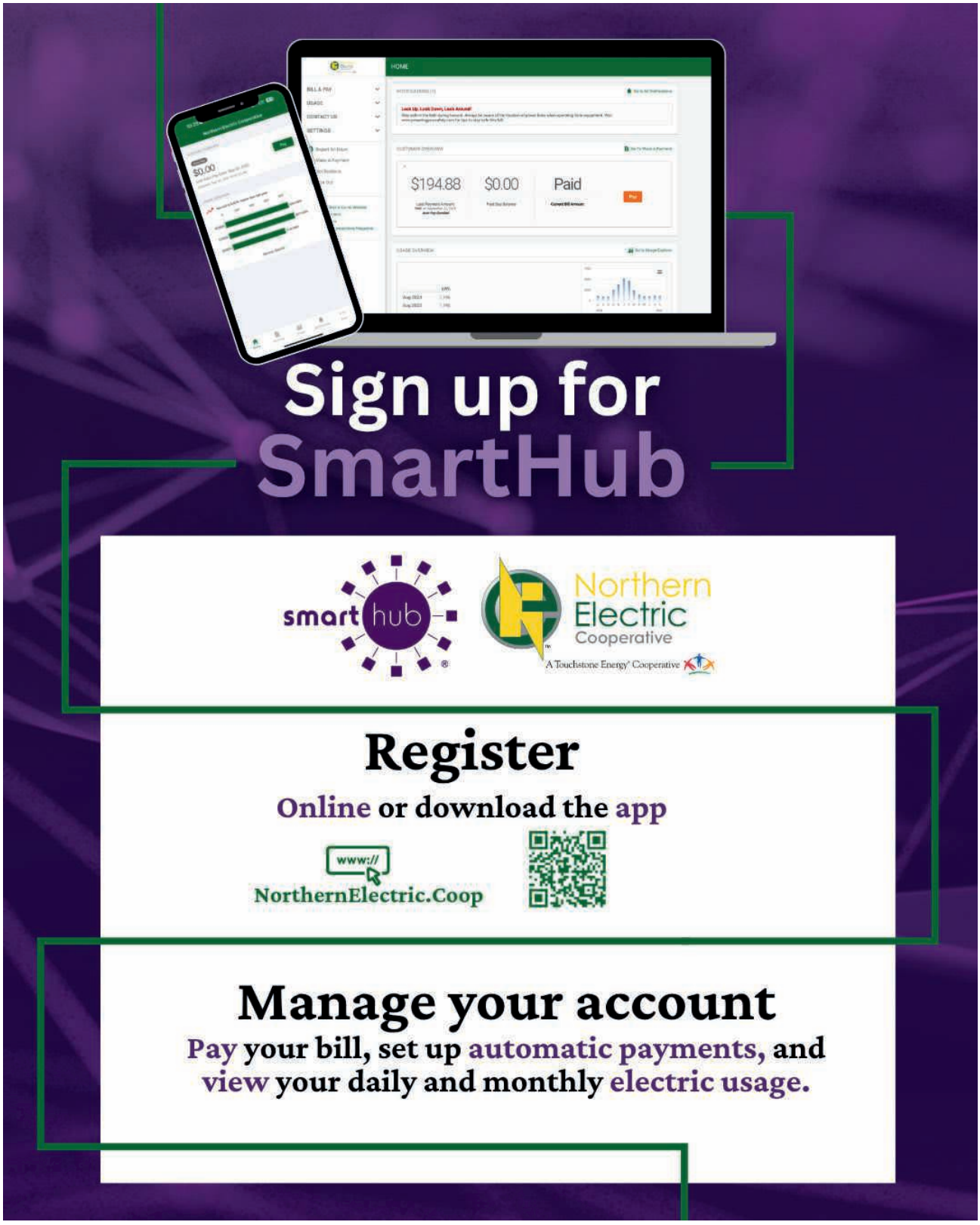
For more information or to obtain an application for LIEAP, contact DSS:

Call 1-800-233-8503

Email DSSHeat@state.sd.us

Visit dss.sd.gov/economicassistance

Scan the QR code for the LIEAP application.


HOME
$194.88
$0.00
Paid
Sign up for
SmartHub
smart hub
Northern
Electric
Cooperative
A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative
Register
Online or download the app
www://
NorthernElectric.Coop
Manage your account
Pay your bill, set up automatic payments, and
view your daily and monthly electric usage.



The Foster Care Shop offers free toys and essentials to local foster families in Black Hawk, S.D.
Photo courtesy of Light of Mine Ranch

FOSTER CARE
THE COMMUNITY'S KIDS

Light of Mine Ranch Helps Black Hills Foster Families Find the Supplies and Support They Need

Frank Turner
frank.turner@sdrea.coop

When children visiting the Foster Care Shop in Black Hawk, S.D., ask Jordan Combs how much something costs, he gets to give them good news. Everything is free.

Combs said children's eyes light up when they hear the news. They tell their foster parents, then make another trip around the shop.

"I'm the yes guy," Combs said. "If you ask me if you can have it, I'm going to say yes."

Combs and his wife, Mallory, founded Light of Mine Ranch, which provides clothing, baby equipment and household supplies at no cost to foster families.

The inspiration for the Foster Care Shop began when Jordan and Mallory Combs started fostering in 2016.

The couple had been considering international adoption when they attended a community dinner. Local agencies described the need for foster parents, and that's the moment they decided to foster.

"We just felt like God put it on our heart," Combs said.

Since then, the couple has provided long-term foster care for 10 children. When including emergency placements and short stays, Combs estimates that number exceeds 40. Today, the couple has five children, including two daughters they adopted.

As they cared for children and got to know other foster parents, they saw how stretched families could become. Everyday chores like grocery shopping became more complicated. Eating out became more expensive, and they wanted to help ease those burdens.

In 2020, the couple began building a nonprofit. They envisioned homes for foster families on a ranch, giving parents the space and support to focus on children. When housing prices did



Jordan and Mallory Combs have five children, including two they adopted.
Photo courtesy of Light of Mine Ranch

not cooperate with their vision, they put their dream on hold and began helping families on a smaller scale.

"We started looking at what impact can we make now," Combs said.

Light of Mine Ranch helped pay sports fees, purchase equipment and provide bicycles and bunk beds. As community members learned about the work, donations began filling the Combs family's garage.

At the same time, Combs noticed a recurring problem. Someone would offer a crib on Facebook when no family needed one. A few weeks later, a foster family would ask for a crib.

The couple decided to create a shop where donated supplies could be stored until a family needed them.

The Combs family opened the Foster Care Shop in June 2025, giving families a central place to find everything from strollers and shoes to meals and school supplies.

"We're trying to be your first stop to get all the supplies that you need," Combs said.

The shop also serves kinship families, including grandparents, aunts and uncles caring for relatives' children. Relatives often have little time to prepare, Combs said. A grandparent whose own children are grown may suddenly need a crib, a car seat and clothing for an infant.

The organization also assists some families referred by the South Dakota Department of Social Services.

Combs remembers one family relieved to avoid spending an afternoon driving between stores to gather everything they needed.

"They were happy that they didn't have to spend the whole afternoon shopping around town," Combs said.

Combs recalled another girl who had not started school by mid-October because of her family's circumstances.

"She was able to come here and get all her school supplies to get started for school," Combs said.

Since its grand opening, community donations have filled the shop faster than Combs expected. The same moment toys run low after an event, a donor always seems to arrive with boxes of puzzles, toys and dollhouses. When a family picks up a crib, Combs said another donation seems to take its place.

While the shop helps foster families with everyday expenses, the couple is still working toward a place for families and children to stay.

"It'd be a six-bedroom home," Combs said. The organization has identified a prospective site south of Rapid City, but Combs said there is no construction timeline.

The home would provide temporary accommodations for children awaiting placement. Combs said it could also provide space for foster families to rest and take a break. Having several bedrooms would help accommodate sibling groups and children of different ages.

Whether a child stays with a foster family for a weekend or a year, Combs believes the time spent together matters.

"You can make it meaningful to them for that time," he said.

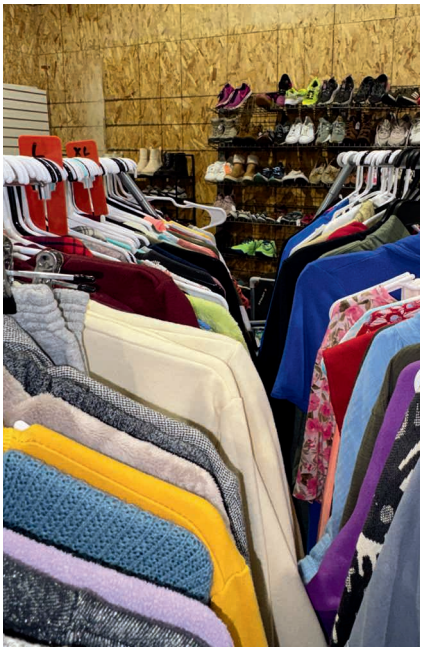
Private donations fund the organization's work and local volunteerism keeps it running, Combs said. They are always looking for more volunteers to sort donations and organize supplies.

Combs hopes the community will also rally together to help make foster families feel less alone. Taking children into a home is a family's decision, he said, but helping care for them is something the wider community can share.

"These are the community's kids," Combs said.



The Foster Care Shop has everything a foster family might need - everything from toys and strollers to racks of clothes. *Photos courtesy of Light of Mine Ranch*



Help or get involved

Families seeking assistance and people interested in helping can visit lightofmineranch.com for information. Combs recommends checking current hours and donation needs before bringing items to the shop.



A BED FOR EVERY CHILD

"Help Tuck Them In" Charity Builds Beds for Kids in Need

Jacob Boyko
jacob.boyko@sdrea.coop

Five finished beds sit inside a trailer in Joe Buyck's yard, ready to go at a moment's notice.

Sometimes the call comes in the evening. A child is being removed from an unsafe home. A family has lost everything in a fire. A domestic violence shelter needs beds before new arrivals can be placed.

Buyck's answer is usually the same: When and where?

For the past three years, Buyck and his organization, "Help Tuck Them In," have built, delivered, and set up beds for more than 400 kids in the Tracy, Minn., area – free of charge and judgment.

"It doesn't take much to put you in the position of needing a bed," he said.

Buyck, a longtime member of the Tracy Lions Club, helped launch the project in 2023 after fellow Lion Lori Alf suggested a bed-donation program. Not long afterward, Greg Holland surprised the club by walking into a meeting with a bed frame he had built.

"He goes, 'I can build these,'" Buyck recalled. "And we said, 'Great!'"

Another club member, George Erbes, offered the use of his large shop to build the beds. From there, the idea went from a small Lions Club side project to a full-fledged operation.

"We don't care what religion you are, what politics you have, where you're living," Buyck said. "If there's a child who is in need of a bed, we will deliver. This is all about the kids."

Help Tuck Them In volunteers with a completed bed.
Photo submitted by Joe Buyck



Joe Buyck serves on the Board of Directors for Lyon-Lincoln Electric Cooperative in Tyler, Minn. He's also an active member of the Tracy Lions Club, and one of the founders of Help Tuck Them In.
Photo Submitted by Lyon-Lincoln Electric Cooperative

Holland designed the beds to be easy to take apart, reassemble and transport. They've since redesigned the headboards to be shorter so volunteers can navigate them through narrow hallways and around corners. The team prides itself on the craftsmanship of the product.

"When we deliver these beds, kids can jump on them," Buyck said. "They're built to last, and it's a quality product that looks nice and fits good in a room."

Each home delivery includes the bed frame, twin mattress, stuffed animal, quilted bedspread, toothbrush and toothpaste. The organization also purchases, assembles and distributes cribs when needed. When they're making deliveries, they'll look around to see how else they can help.

They also carry grocery gift cards, pots, pans, kitchen utensils and other necessities in case they arrive at a home and realize a family needs more than a bed.

Buyck, Alf, Holland, and Erbes couldn't do it alone. It's a substantial effort made possible through community support: The local lumberyard in Slayton sets aside the straightest, best quality wood; Ashley Furniture in Marshall sells discounted mattresses; and countless volunteers have helped fund, build and deliver the beds to hundreds of children in need.

Buyck says people regularly approach him at church, the grocery store and around town with cash or checks for the project. Others drive from miles away with handmade quilts.

"Everybody's asking, 'Who do I write the check out to?'" Buyck said. "And I never knew there were so many ladies that do quilting in our area … there will be people who drive from quite a distance and call me and say, 'we've got 20 quilts we just made and we want to give them to you.'"

Requests for beds typically come from hospitals, social workers, school districts, the Red Cross or domestic violence shelters.

"There was a fire in a small town near us, and the mother ran back into the house to try to save her children, and she perished in the fire," he said.

The Red Cross contacted Help Tuck Them In soon after.

"They called us and said, 'There's three little kids here that have absolutely nothing,'" Buyck said.

There wasn't any discussion about what to do.

Buyck continued, "We just turned around and said, 'When do you want them delivered?'"

Volunteers who go along on bed deliveries attest that the experience is life-changing, Buyck said.

"There is a ton of abuse out there, and I did not realize how much of that there was until we started this," Buyck said. "I have watched grown men [volunteers] with tears pouring down their faces talking about what we just did that day … I can honestly say this has really made a change in my life to see things that I have never seen before."

Buyck also serves on the Lyon-Lincoln Electric Cooperative board. Through the cooperative's Operation Round Up program, participating members round their monthly electric bills up to the next whole dollar with the difference distributed to local charitable causes, including Help Tuck Them In.

"I think they've donated to [Help Tuck Them In] every year now for the last three years," Buyck said. "It was a very short conversation before they said, 'yeah, we'll help you.'"

That support has been a consistent theme for the group.

"We thought our biggest problems were going to be raising money and finding quilts, but that's not our problem," Buyck said. "We have more people wanting to help us now than we have jobs available."

He continued, "I keep telling people that [we're changing kids' lives], but I think the four of us, we've changed our lives … doing this project. There's no way you can see what we've seen and not be changed."



Volunteers assemble cribs.
Photo submitted by Joe Buyck



Buyck says the organization's goal is to give kids a bed that is not only functional, but one that is made of quality materials and looks nice in a bedroom.
Photo submitted by Joe Buyck



NOV. 24-DEC. 26
Christmas at the Capitol
Pierre, SD
christmasatthecapitol.sd.gov

Photo courtesy of Travel South Dakota

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. 20-JAN. 3
Winter Wonderland
5 p.m.-12 a.m.
Falls Park
Sioux Falls, SD
605-275-6060

NOV. 25-JAN. 2
1880 Holiday Express
222 Railroad Ave.
Hill City, SD
605-574-2222

NOV. 27-DEC. 31
Hall of Trees
Sat.-Thurs.: 10 a.m.-5 p.m.
Fri.: 10 a.m.-8 p.m.
Mead Museum
Yankton, SD

NOV. 27-DEC. 27
Christmas Nights of Light
5:30-8:30 p.m.
Storybook Island
1301 Sheridan Lake Rd.
Rapid City, SD
605-342-6357

DEC. 3
City of Yankton Holiday Festival of Lights
4 p.m. Family Activities
6 p.m. Lighted Parade
Yankton, SD
605-665-5234

DEC. 4
'Twas the Night Before Christmas Soup & Sandwich Lunch
11 a.m.-1 p.m.
St. Pius X Catholic Church
Onida, SD
605-765-4841

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

DEC. 5
KJAM Parade of Lights
5:30 p.m.
Madison, SD
AmazingMadison.com

DEC. 5
Christmas in the Valley
2-9 p.m.
Irene, SD

DEC. 5-JAN. 6
Garden Glow at McCrory Gardens
5-9 p.m.
Closed Dec. 24-25, Jan. 1
Brookings, SD
605-688-6707

DEC. 5
Holiday Jam with the Hegg Brothers
4 p.m.
Summit Activities Center
Yankton, SD
605-665-5234

DEC. 6
KCBA Hometown Christmas
10 a.m.-4 p.m. (MST)
Kadoka City Auditorium
Kadoka, SD
605-488-0151

DEC. 6
Christmas on the Prairie Concert
St. Anthony's Catholic Church
Hoven, SD
605-948-2451

DEC. 10-13
Christmas at the Cathedral
Thurs. & Fri.: 7:30 p.m.
Sat.: 1 p.m., 7:30 p.m.
Sun. 2 p.m., 7:30 p.m.
Cathedral of St. Joseph
Sioux Falls, SD
Tickets: 605-988-3765

DEC. 12
Frontier Christmas
10 a.m.-2 p.m.
Fort Sisseton State Park
Lake City, SD
605-448-5474

DEC. 12
American Legion Chili Cookoff
11 a.m.
The Alliance; 1600 W. Russell St.
Sioux Falls, SD

DEC. 12
Parade of Lights
5:30-6:30 p.m.
Main Street
Aberdeen, SD
605-226-3441

FEB. 20
Bellator Titans Casino Night Fundraiser
6-11 p.m.
AmericInn Event Center
Aberdeen, SD
605-730-0553

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.