

COOPERATIVE CONNECTIONS



Fostering Futures

**Mike Rowe Scholarship
Sponsors Co-op Lineman**

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**Understanding the
Southwest Power Pool**

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Dirty Jobs star Mike Rowe with Work Ethic Scholarship
recipient Tayden Wells at Mitchell Technical College
Submitted Photo

Help recognize those making a difference locally



Kathy Haas
Communications
Specialist

The Who Powers You contest shines light on those who make a difference in our community. From feeding seniors and supporting veterans to energizing the community and spearheading local programs, these local heroes often go unsung. Chances are, someone you know deserves recognition for their hard work and commitment to the community.

This will be the fifth year that East River Cooperative will sponsor the contest. The nominations are open to anyone in East River Cooperative's territory, which encompasses 25 cooperatives in eastern South Dakota and western Minnesota, including Northern Electric Cooperative. The contest will honor 20 individuals or organizations who are making an impact.

Nominations can be for individuals, groups, or organizations. Winners and finalists will be selected by a panel of judges based on the impact the nominee has on the community. Nominees who make it as finalists will be featured weekly on KELOLAND living. The contest winners will also be announced on KELOLAND. Watch this year and last year's interviews at WhoPowersYouContest.com

Contest finalists could win one of the following cash prizes:

- Grand Prize Winner: \$3,000
- Second Place: \$1,500
- Third Place: \$500

PREVIOUS GRAND PRIZE WINNERS

Two of the grand prize winners have been from Northern's service territory: Area IV Nutrition and DTOM Veterans Ranch.

Area IV Senior Nutrition employees won in 2025. The organization serves individuals across a 16-county region in central and northeastern South Dakota. For 51 years, they have worked to support the health and wellness of older adults by providing nutritious meals and meaningful social connections. Their efforts not only help seniors maintain physical health but also foster emotional

well-being through companionship.

In 2024, Becky Krause won for her role in many community projects and efforts that enrich Deuel County. She's deeply involved with the farming industry, supporting local farmers through her banking expertise and hands-on experience. She also serves on the Stewards Against Childhood Hunger committee, providing weekend backpacks for students. Her role in the Deuel County Community Foundation is significant, organizing major fundraisers and promoting scholarships for local students. She also mentors high school students, offering guidance on college, tech schools, and finances. She is actively involved with her church.

Bob and Nancy Montross won in 2023 due to their instrumental role in countless projects has helped bring vibrancy to the De Smet area and South Dakota. Bob, known as the "promoter," and Nancy, referred to as the "organizer," form an exceptional team who have dedicated time and effort to raising funds for the De Smet Event & Wellness Center, supporting the Arts Council, serving on the cemetery board, and helping to bring concerts into the area. The Montrosses' unwavering dedication to the Beef Bucks organization has significantly raised awareness of agriculture and beef, not just in South Dakota but across the nation.

In 2022, DTOM (Don't Tread on Me) Foundation and Veteran's Ranch won. The DTOM Foundation and Veterans Ranch provides a safe place for healing and recovery for military service members, veterans, and their families. The organization provides housing assistance, food and clothing assistance, and medical assistance to veterans along with Max Rhythmic Motion Sequencing (MRMS) equine therapy. This specialized therapy uses horses to treat veterans for traumatic brain injuries, PTSD, anxiety, and other injuries. All services at the ranch are funded by donations and offered at no cost.

NOMINATIONS OPEN

Nominations will open Feb. 1 and close mid-April. Know more than one person/group that deserves recognition? You can nominate multiple people/organizations but cannot submit multiple nominations for the same person/organization.

Submit your nomination and see the full requirements and rules at WhoPowersYouContest.com.

**COOPERATIVE
CONNECTIONS**
**NORTHERN
ELECTRIC**

(USPS 396-040)

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Northern Electric Cooperative Connections is the monthly publication for the members of Northern Electric Cooperative, PO Box 457, Bath, SD 57427. Families subscribe to Cooperative Connections as part of their electric cooperative membership. The purpose of Northern Electric Cooperative Connections is to provide reliable, helpful information to electric cooperative members on electric cooperative matters and better rural living.

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DECEMBER BOARD REPORT

Northern Electric Cooperative's regular board meeting was held Friday Dec. 19, 2025, at the Agtegra Cooperative headquarters with all directors present. As the first order of business, the board approved the Nov. 21, 2025, minutes and November expenditures. The board then reviewed and accepted monthly reports by management.

East River Director Kirk Schaunaman reported on the actions taken by the East River Board at the Dec. 4, 2025, meeting. The next East River Board Meeting will be held on Jan. 8, 2026. South Dakota Rural Electric Association Director Nolan Wipf reported on the actions taken by the SDREA Board on Dec. 1-2, 2025. The next SDREA board meeting will be Jan. 14-16, 2026, during the SDREA Annual Meeting and Legislative Dinner.

Directors Nolan Wipf and Todd Hettich reported on the 2025 Mid-West Electric Consumers Association Annual Meeting held Dec. 9-11, in Denver, CO.

Director Hansen reported on the South Dakota Renewable Energy Association.

MANAGER'S REPORT

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

- Reported on Rural Electric Development (REED) Board Meeting held on Dec. 1, 2025.

- Report on East River MAC Meeting held on Dec. 2, 2025.
- Report on employee meeting held on Dec. 4, 2025.

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 Thursday, Jan. 22, 2026.
- Approved Work Order Inventories #25-11 for \$241,705.72 and #25-11MC \$75,593.26 to be submitted to RUS for reimbursement from loan funds for electric plant construction already completed.
- Approved the fourth quarter estate requests for early capital credit retirements in the amount of \$22,076.03.
- Appointed Josh Larson to be delegate and Todd Hettich to be alternate for 2026 NRECA PowerXchange & TechAdvantage, March 6-11, 2026.
- Approved 2026 Basin Load Forecast.
- Approved policy GP-23 Member Access to Cooperative Information.
- Approved Purpa rate tariff for 2026 as presented.
- Approved 2026 rate tariffs.
- Held Executive Session.

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

FINANCIAL REPORT

	November-25	November-24
kWh Sales.....	29,516,555	26,610,516
Electric Revenues	\$2,756,053	\$2,524,811
Total Cost of Service	\$2,816,350	\$2,456,932
Operating Margins.....	(\$60,297)	\$67,879
Year to Date Margins.....	(\$132,977)	\$609,512

RESIDENTIAL AVERAGE MONTHLY USAGE AND BILL

NOVEMBER 2025	2,786 kwh.....	\$276.59	\$0.0993
NOVEMBER 2024	2,336 kwh.....	\$247.02	\$0.1057

Wholesale power costs, taxes, interest, and depreciation account for 83.9% of total cost of Service.

FIVE WAYS TO SAFEGUARD YOUR HOME THIS WINTER

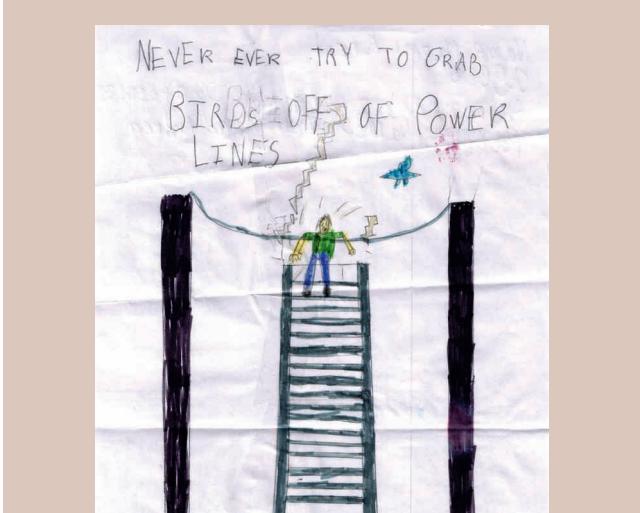
As the temperatures drop and the days grow shorter, there's a natural inclination to create a warm and cozy haven at home. Unfortunately, as we see increased use of heating equipment, candles and electrical items, the number of home fires tends to increase during winter months.

Here are five ways you can safeguard your home for the winter season.

1. Ensure carbon monoxide and smoke detectors are working properly. If your detectors are battery-operated, replace the batteries annually. Test the detectors once a month and give them a good dusting to ensure the sensors are clear of dirt and debris.
2. Inspect electrical cords. We depend on more cords during winter, whether for holiday lighting, extension cords or portable heaters. Before using any corded items, double check to make sure cords aren't frayed or cracked. If you use portable space heaters, remember to keep them at least three feet away from flammable items. Use models that include an auto shut-off feature and overheat protection. Space heaters can take a toll on your energy bills. Use them efficiently (to heat smaller spaces) and safely. Never plug a space heater into a power strip. Speaking of power strips...
3. Avoid overloading electrical outlets and power strips. When overloaded with electrical items, outlets and power strips can overheat and catch fire. If you use power strips for multiple devices, make sure the strip can handle the electrical load. For a safer bet, look for power strips that include surge protection.
4. Clean the fireplace to improve safety and efficiency. There's nothing better than a warm fire on a chilly night, but it's important to maintain your fireplace for safety. As wood burns, a sticky substance known as creosote builds up in the chimney. When creosote buildup becomes too thick, a chimney fire can ignite. The chimney should be cleaned at least once a year to reduce fire risks. Regular cleaning

also improves air flow and limits the amount of carbon monoxide that seeps indoors.

5. Practice safety in the kitchen. As we spend more time in the kitchen during the holiday season, be mindful of potential fire hazards. Never leave food that's cooking on the stovetop unattended. Clean and remove spilled foods from cooking surfaces and be mindful of where you place flammable items like dish towels.



Naomi Krcil, Age 8

Naomi warns readers to never, ever grab birds off power lines. Great job, Naomi! Naomi's parents are Andrew and Andrea Krcil from Dante, S.D.

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 Night FAVORITES

Picture by Elena Veselova from Shutterstock

SAUERKRAUT BEEF BAKE

Ingredients:

1 lb ground beef
1 can sauerkraut, rinsed and drained
1/2 cup instant rice
1 can cream of mushroom soup
1 soup can water
2 tbsps. onion soup mix
1 small can sliced mushrooms (optional)

Method

Brown ground beef, drain excess fat. In large bowl, mix all remaining ingredients. Transfer to a greased 2-quart casserole or baking dish.

Cover and bake at 350°F for one hour or until heated through.

Sally Florey
Charles Mix Electric

MINI BBQ BACON CHEDDAR MEATLOAF

Ingredients:

2 lbs. ground beef
6 oz. chili sauce
4 slices bacon, cooked and crumbled
1 1/2 cups sharp cheddar cheese, shredded
1/2 cup panko breadcrumbs
2 large eggs
1 tsp. onion powder
1 tsp. seasoned salt
1 tsp. garlic powder
2 tbsps. Worcestershire sauce
1 tsp. yellow mustard
1/2 cup BBQ sauce

Method

Preheat oven to 425°F.

Cook and crumble bacon.

In a mixing bowl, mix together all meatloaf ingredients except the BBQ sauce.

Divide the mixture into 8 round loaves. Press a small depression into the middle of the meatloaves.

Brush BBQ sauce on top of the meatloaves.

Bake for 25 minutes. Turn on broiler and brown the BBQ sauce for 2 to 5 minutes.

Kayla Beamer
Southeastern Electric

SMOKED MEATLOAF

Ingredients:

1 cup panko breadcrumbs
1 cup whipping cream
1.5 lbs. 93% lean ground beef
1 lb. ground pork
1/2 pkg. bacon
2 eggs, beaten
2 tps. Worcestershire sauce
1-2 tps. minced garlic
1/8 cup ketchup
2 tps. Heifer Dust (spice)
1/2 tsp. ground pepper
1/2 sweet onion, chopped
1/2 green pepper, chopped
1-2 carrots, chopped
1-2 celery stalks, chopped
1/2 carton mushrooms, chopped

Basting Sauce

Cookies BBQ	Ketchup
Brown sugar	Dry mustard
Apple cider vinegar	

Method

Turn Traeger to Smoke then set to 225°F and preheat for 15 minutes.

Combine the vegetables, drizzle with olive oil and microwave for about 2 minutes to soften. Cool for 10 minutes. Mix everything in a large bowl with hands. Form into a large loaf on parchment paper. Place bacon strips on grate pan. Gently flip loaf onto the bacon lined grate pan.

Place on grill and smoke for 45 minutes. Increase temperature to 325°F. Preheat for 10 minutes. Return to grill and insert probe. Cook until internal temperature reaches 160°F – about 1-2 more hours depending on size of loaf.

During the last 15-20 minutes, baste heavily with barbecue sauce mixed with brown sugar, ketchup, mustard and a little apple cider vinegar or apple juice.

Deb Prins
Cam Wal 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.

NEW RATES FOR 2026

Adjusted rates take effect in January

At the December 2025 board meeting, Northern Electric Cooperative's Directors approved new rates for 2026. Northern worked with an independent engineering firm to determine the cooperative's rate requirements for 2026. The new rates will take effect January 1, 2026 and be reflected on the statement you receive at the beginning of February for your January usage. Members were sent a letter explaining how the adjustment will affect their rates. As a not-for-profit cooperative, Northern Electric strives to hold down costs while providing safe and reliable electricity. We know that any rate increase affects our members, and this decision was not taken lightly.

Northern Electric's last rate adjustment was implemented on June 1, 2024 after holding rates for six years. Based on the information available to us at that time, we expected the June 1,

2024 rate increase to carry us through 2025. Unfortunately, after our June 1, 2024 rates went into effect, Basin Electric Power Cooperative (Basin) announced an unexpected rate increase of 6.5% for its members for 2025. Basin is our generation cooperative based in Bismarck, ND that delivers electricity across nine states. At that time, Basin was forecasting another increase of 2.7% for their 2026 rates. The Northern Electric Board decided to hold rates until 2026, based on Basin's forecast.

As cited in previous articles, power costs account for 64% of NEC's total costs. We already operate on very slim margins to keep costs as low as possible for our members. Since Basin provides 83% of

the power that Northern distributes to our members, any rate increase from Basin will have a substantial impact on our budget. The other 17% of wholesale power comes from Western Area

Power Administration (WAPA). A federal agency under the Department of Energy, WAPA delivers hydropower from 57 dams to customers across 15 states. WAPA is also raising their rates for the second straight year.

During this process, we have made transparency a focus. As indicated in the October and December editions of Cooperative Connections, on our website, and on our socials, Basin's rate increase for 2026 is 9.9% instead of the 2.7% that they had forecasted.

KEY FACTORS

It's not just Northern Electric struggling with rate adjustments. Power utilities across the nation are facing historic cost increases. Increasing infrastructure costs in addition to explosive growth in demand for electricity have compounded the issue. Your member-owned cooperative's primary goals are to provide you with electricity as safely, reliably, and affordably as possible.

Basin initially requested an 18.7% increase for 2026. East River and their member distribution cooperatives advocated to lessen the impact by spreading the increase over 2026 and 2027, resulting in a 9.9% increase for 2026. Basin has indicated they will potentially need a 10% rate increase for 2027.

Basin cited four main reasons for their rate increase:

- **Meet SPP Requirements:** Southwest Power Pool (SPP) is requiring Basin Electric to have higher capacity of dispatchable and dependable power. In essence, SPP is requiring Basin to build extra transmission and generation above and beyond what is needed for existing members and anticipated growth, in case of an emergency. Think back to the unexpected winter outages in February 2021. Extreme cold combined with generating plant outages meant there wasn't enough electricity being generated to meet the demand, resulting in outages across the nation. Some of Basin's upcoming projects will help fulfill the requirements. In addition, SPP is requiring the generation cooperatives to increase their capital reserves.

- **Higher Demand for Electricity:** Basin's load growth is projected to increase at 2.5% per year for the next decade, well above the national average. To serve this growth, Basin is investing in new generation and transmission projects, such as Pioneer Generation Station and Bison Generation Station. Pioneer Generation Station will add 580 MW from natural gas-fired generation, and Bison Generation Station will add 1,490 MW in natural gas-fired generation. These projects will also help fulfill the SPP requirements. The cost to build and run generation stations is higher than ever. Basin's current generation fleet has an average cost on their books of \$800/kW and future building costs are predicted to be \$2,700/kW to construct.

- **Investments in Reliability:** Rising costs have made it more expensive to maintain and build infrastructure. Currently, the average cost on Basin's books for transmission is \$400,000 per

mile. Future costs are predicted to skyrocket to \$2 million per mile. At this time, Basin needs to make significant investments in existing facilities to ensure ongoing reliability. SPP is also requiring Basin to complete a new 160-mile transmission line for additional system reliability.

- **Commodity Price Variability:** Fluctuations in commodity prices affect the cost of fuel for Basin Electric, as well as sales revenue at its subsidiaries, such as Dakota Gasification Company.

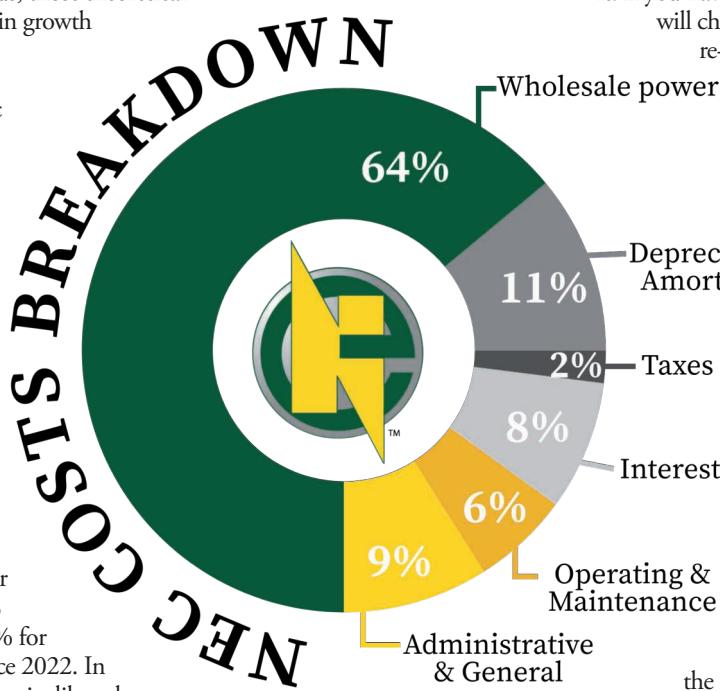
Basin has a Large Load Commercial Program that thoroughly vets any large load requests for viability and requires those large loads to help pay for the cost of additional infrastructure and generation. Thus, while Basin is aware of the potential for additional large loads, those theoretical loads are not included in growth forecasting.

At both the national and local levels, electric cooperatives have seen prices for essential materials fluctuate wildly due to supply chain challenges and material shortages over the last five years. The volatile market has made it hard for electric utilities to accurately budget for infrastructure needs. Northern Electric has paid an additional 66% for poles, 64% for pad transformers, 25% for cross arms, and 24% for underground cable since 2022. In addition, Northern Electric, like other local businesses, must protect our assets, attract and retain skilled employees, and keep our system running safely and efficiently.

MEMBERSHIP IMPACT

The impact to our members will vary by rate class and usage. Each member was sent a letter explaining how the adjustment will affect their rates. If you have any questions about your new rate or how to read your bill, please call 605-225-0310 or email info@northernelectric.coop.

On your statement, your bill will be broken down into the main rate components: facility charge, energy charge, capacity charge, and coincident demand charge. No new components are being added. The facility charge is the portion of your bill which reimburses the cooperative for the poles, wires, equipment, and other non-power costs incurred to deliver electricity to you. The energy charge is based on the total electricity used during the billing period. It is measured in kilowatts per hour (kWh). The



coincident demand charge is calculated using the kilowatts (kW) used during peak usage across Northern. Northern also pays a coincident demand charge to East River for the kilowatts used during the monthly peak. The capacity charge is for members on coincident demand rate because they require more infrastructure to accommodate their power needs, and is based on the member's maximum kW demand for a rolling 12-month period.

- **Sub-meter changes:** Northern Electric will no longer control air conditioners during the summer months. Instead, you will have full control over your own usage and can decide how to best manage your demand. If you have a load control device on your air conditioner, please call to let us know and we will remove

it. If you have a sub-meter for heating, your rate will change as well. As standard, this rate is re-calculated at the beginning of every

Wholesale power year. The rate will vary by season. The rate will be lower Oct. 1 through April 30, and higher May 1 through Sept. 30.

- **Lighting:** Both metered and nonmetered lights will have a rate adjustment.

YOUR CO-OP

Northern Electric board and staff will continue to make decisions with the best interests of the membership in mind.

We are here to serve our members. As a non-profit, our core tenant is to provide our member owners reliable, safe, and affordable electricity. Any extra revenue is always returned to the members as capital credits. Even with additional market pressures, we continue to take steps to control costs and reduce the impact on members.

Unfortunately, it's not possible to focus just on affordability without sacrificing safety and reliability. Northern's wholesale power costs are 64% of every dollar we collect. Our board and staff manage expenses responsibly and already remove inefficiencies wherever possible. Only 15% of our costs are directly controllable. Of that, 6% is used to maintain our system, including restoring power outages and replacing unreliable infrastructure. The other 9% covers all the general and administrative costs of running a business.

We recognize the impact any rate adjustment has on the families, farms, and businesses we serve. Rate changes are never easy, but they are necessary to ensure that your cooperative continues to provide reliable service today and into the future.

If you have any questions about your rates, please call 605-225-0310.

FOSTERING FUTURES

'Mike Rowe Scholarship' Winner Kicks Off Career at Electric Co-op

Jacob Boyko

jacob.boyko@sdrea.coop

For many high schoolers, figuring out the next steps after graduating is a time for making big decisions and answering tough questions. What do I want to do for a career? Should I go to a university or technical college? Will I be able to pay off all of this college debt?

Tayden Wells' mind was already made up following a great high school internship and a little bit of faith and support from others. Wells was awarded numerous scholarships, but none as prestigious – nor time-consuming – as the Work Ethic Scholarship from 'Dirty Jobs' star Mike Rowe.

Discovering the Passion

Growing up around linemen, Tayden had an early appreciation for their work, unpredictable schedules and the expansive grid of wires and poles that keeps everyone's lights on.

"As a child I'd be sitting in the house and all of a sudden, Dad would pop up and vanish," Tayden explained. "And I always wondered, what's he doing? Where's he going? Why is he going to work on a Saturday or in the middle of the night? And then finally it occurred to me that we rely on the power grid, and when the power goes out, linemen go to work."

Tayden's dad, Travis, is a lineman at Clay-Union Electric in Vermillion, S.D. Tayden recalls the long car rides on hunting trips with his dad and uncle – also a lineman – where the conversations would drift to the power lines outside the truck windows.

"I'd hear them talking, using linemen slang like 'distro' (distribution lines) and 'T-lines' (transmission lines)," Tayden said. "They really sparked my interest."

When Tayden's high school business teacher told students to think about internships, he knew exactly where he wanted to go.

It All Started With an Internship

Tayden's teacher made the call to Union County Electric Cooperative in Elk Point, S.D. After getting the green light from the board of directors, Tayden was cleared to shadow the crew for about 10 hours a week as he learned the ins and outs of the job.

"He was always looking for something to do, and he also asked a lot of questions and had an eagerness to learn," General Manager Matt Klein said about Tayden's work ethic. "When I saw that, I knew he would fit in well with the rest of our team."

Klein offered the high school senior a full-time summer



Tayden Wells of Vermillion is an apprentice lineman at Union County Electric Cooperative in Elk Point.

Submitted Photo

internship where he continued to expand his skills before heading to Mitchell, S.D., in the fall.

Mike Rowe's Work Ethic Scholarship and the S.W.E.A.T. Pledge

With his mind made up after the internship, Tayden's next step was to enroll in the power line program at Mitchell Technical College for a formal education – and find scholarships to help pay for it.

A straight-A student involved in athletics and extracurricular activities, Tayden applied for numerous scholarships, including the highly competitive Work Ethic Scholarship.

The scholarship, founded and administered by Mike Rowe and his foundation, offers millions of dollars to kids around the nation interested in pursuing trade careers.

Electricians, linemen, HVAC, nursing, culinary, automotive, even cosmetology – just no four-year bachelor's degrees.

"We promote skilled trades and want to get people into good-paying jobs without them drowning in debt," explained mikeroweworks President Mary Sullivan, who oversees the scholarship. "It's just heartbreaking seeing the amount of kids taking on college debt and graduating and aren't able to find jobs in their chosen field. Even more heartbreaking – but less reported – is the number of kids that drop out partway through the program with the debt and no piece of paper."

The scholarship's application process is different too – it's intensive, spanning several months and requires applicants to submit a video, answer questionnaires, gather references and think critically about the scholarship's curriculum.

The scholarship attracts thousands of applicants, but by the end, only the most committed, hardest working remain.

"We want to give scholarships to the kids who are passionate – they show up early, stay late and help others," Sullivan explained. "One of the recipients said he applied for 20 scholarships, and if you put all the other 19 into a bucket, ours still took more

Q&A COOPERATIVE CONNECTIONS WITH MIKE ROWE

time – but he said there was a level of pride in receiving it. High school kids today need to see 18-20 year olds who are successful, and the scholarship program allows us to meet students we believe are good representatives for the industry."

Part of the curriculum includes the S.W.E.A.T. Pledge (Skill & Work Ethic Aren't Taboo) video series that walks students through 12 pledges Rowe designed to promote strong work ethic and foster successful careers, which include:

"I do not follow my passion. I bring it with me. I believe that any job can be done with passion and enthusiasm."

"I deplore debt and do all I can to avoid it. I would rather live in a tent and eat beans than borrow money for a lifestyle I can't afford."

After completing all of the curriculum and proposing a 13th S.W.E.A.T. pledge for a final project, Tayden was awarded \$16,000 to cover his education.

And when Rowe traveled to MTC in 2024, Tayden got the chance to thank Rowe face-to-face.

"Mike told me, from his mouth, that my scholarship was one of the highest amounts they gave out that year," Tayden said. "That was very cool to hear."

Rowe said Tayden stood out among thousands of applicants and embodies the qualities the scholarship promotes.

"Tayden checked all the boxes, and then some," Rowe said. "His references were great, his attitude was great, his essay was great, and his comments about The SWEAT Pledge were spot on. His willingness to pursue a skill that's in demand, along with his attitude and work ethic, make him a perfect example of the qualities we're trying to encourage with our scholarship program. The country needs thousands more like him."

Reflecting On the Journey

Tayden graduated from the power line program in 2025. He credits his success in part to his internship, saying the out-of-classroom experience set him up for a good year of training at MTC and a rewarding career with electric cooperatives.

"I kind of had the upper hand going into the program with my internship," Tayden said. "I was able to see stuff before I went to school, so I kind of had a good understanding of the basics. But for kids coming in, some of them obviously struggle. I'm a very hands-on, visual learner, so because I was able to see it beforehand, the bookwork and the schooling really clicked a lot better with me."

Today, Tayden is a full-time apprentice lineman at Union County Electric, where he continues to accumulate hours and complete coursework to earn his journeyman lineman certification. He encourages other young people not to overlook a career in the trades – or the Work Ethic Scholarship.

"With all of the talk about AI now, the trade jobs are always going to be there," Tayden said. "Without oil fields we wouldn't have gas, and without electricity we wouldn't have lights. Mike realizes that the world revolves around the trades. and he wants to see kids strive and succeed because in the trades there are endless opportunities, just like any other job."

Why is it so important that more young Americans enter the trades, and what does a shortage of skilled workers mean for the country?

For decades, the skills gap has been a tragedy of missed opportunity, both for students who weren't encouraged to consider a lucrative and viable path and the industries that rely on skilled labor. It still is. Today though, it's also a matter of national security. Not a week goes by that MRW doesn't get a call from an industry leader, desperate to hire skilled workers. The US Maritime Industrial Base told me they need 250,000 tradespeople to build nuclear subs. The automotive industry has over 100,000 openings for mechanics and collision repair techs. The energy industry needs half a million electricians, and the construction industry has so many openings they've stopped counting. The skills gap is real, and I can tell you that every CEO and every elected official I know are paying attention like never before.

What's one piece of advice you have for young people who are deciding their career path?

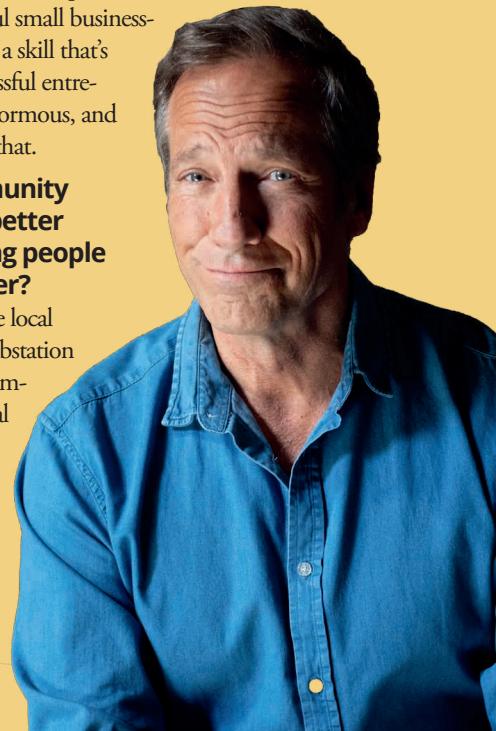
With regard to choosing a career, there's nothing more dangerous than dispensing advice to people you've never met. Same thing with choosing an education. We told an entire generation of kids that a four-year degree was the best path for the most people and then pressured them to borrow whatever it took to buy a degree, regardless of the cost. That kind of cookie-cutter advice was a colossal mistake and a big reason why we have millions of open jobs today that don't require a college diploma and lots of college graduates with a trillion dollars in student debt and no work in their chosen field. The only advice I generically offer to young people is to be very careful about "following your passion." Just because you're passionate about something doesn't mean you can't suck at it. Obviously, it's important to be passionate about whatever you do, but passion – like work ethic – is a choice, and life is a lot easier when you figure out a way to be passionate about whatever it is you're good at. (People hate hearing that, by the way, but it's the truth.)

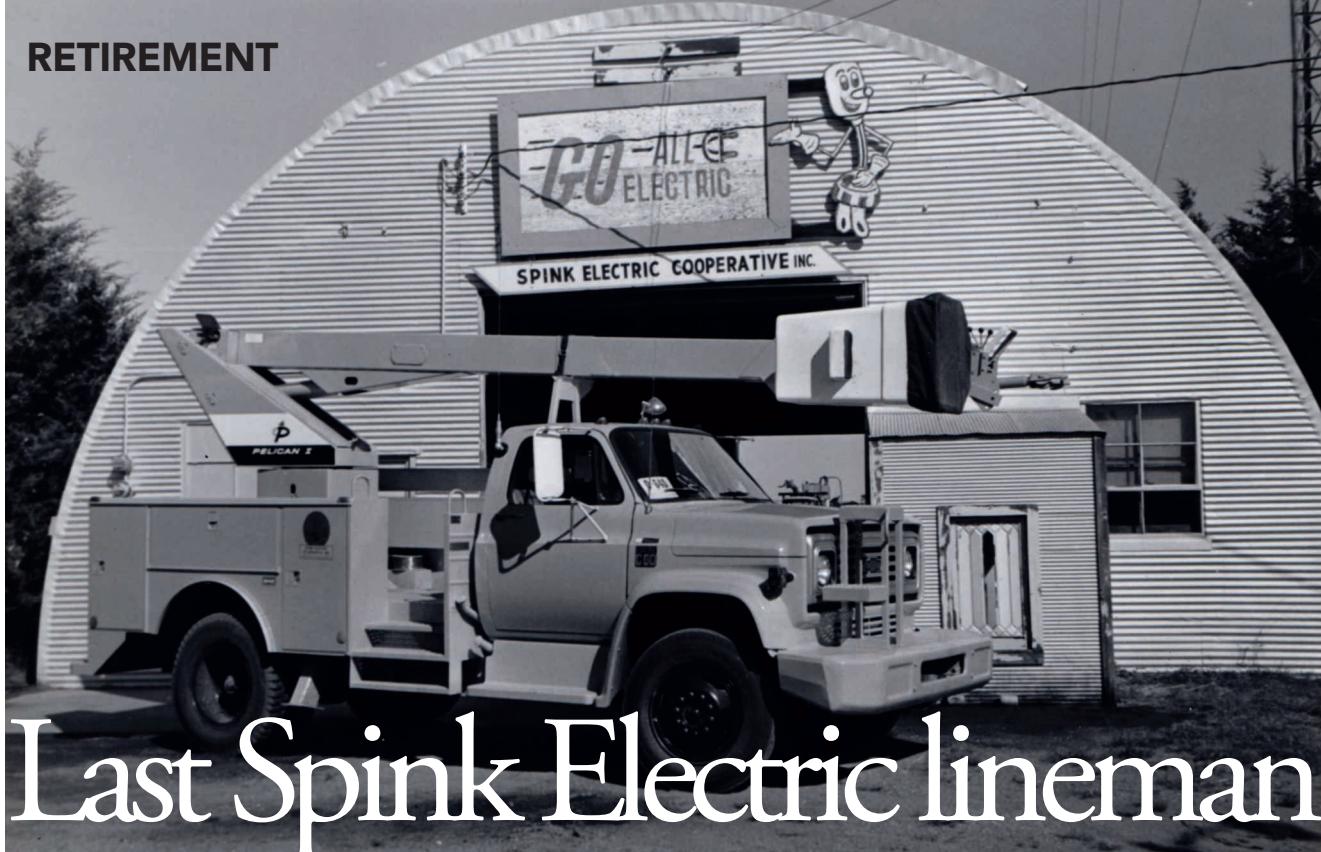
What do you see as the single biggest misunderstanding young people have about working in the trades today?

The trades are surrounded by dozens of stigmas, stereotypes, myths and misperceptions that dissuade people from giving them an honest look. I guess if I had to pick one, I'd point to the stubborn belief held by many parents that their kids can't make six figures working with their hands. It's laughably and demonstrably false. And fun to disprove. Also – the simple fact that the road to so many successful small businesses often starts with the mastery of a skill that's in demand. The number of successful entrepreneurs in the skilled trades is enormous, and more people need to understand that.

What can teachers, community leaders and co-ops do to better identify and support young people interested in a trade career?

Start a "Career Reality Day" where local linemen, meter technicians and substation operators come in and talk real numbers. Not feel-good fluff, but actual wages, benefits, and career paths. When kids hear that a journeyman lineman can make \$80,000 a year without student loan debt, that gets their attention.





Last Spink Electric lineman RETIRED



Kenny poses next to the poles that were removed late December 2025. He worked in the field up to the day that he retired.

Swanson retired in January after 39 years

Kathy Haas

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The last lineman from Spink Electric retired on January 2, after 39 years. Kenny Swanson started in February 1987 when Redfield and Tulare members were served by four Spink Electric linemen. His lineman career started from a desire to work outside.

"I grew up on a farm and was outside all the time," Kenny said. "I had been working at a tire shop and was inside all the time. I wanted to be outside."

That's also how he plans to spend his retirement. Kenny will be kicking off retirement by trading his cowboy boots for sandals and relaxing on a beach in Cancun with his wife, Penny. Their next big trip has been picked out as well. In a couple years, Kenny and Penny

plan to take a trip to Sweden to visit Kenny's brother who lives in Sweden. While he appreciates having the chance to travel, he's just as happy to be home, he said.

"After traveling, I like returning to South Dakota. It's nice to go home," Kenny said.

In the coming year, Kenny is hoping to spend more time with his children and family camping, fishing, and hunting. Kenny and Penny have three kids: Garret Swanson, Abby Gjernes, and Emily Brick, and six grandchildren. Kenny tries to go camping five or six times a year. He's hoping to get a couple more camping trips in, now that he'll have the time.

After nearly 40 years serving area members, Kenny has seen a lot of changes. He had 10 years as a lineman under his belt before

Northern Electric and Spink Electric merged in May 1997. Discussions about the merger started in the fall of 1996. That is year Kenny referred to as “the winter from hell.” Not because of the merger, but because winter started by dumping 20 inches of snow in November and continued snowing through April. The region accumulated 70 to 100 inches of snow and ice over those six months.

“We fixed lines off the snowbanks that year,” Kenny said. “That’s how deep the snow was. You could reach the lines just standing on top of the snowbank.”

The snow, ice, and wind wreaked havoc on the overhead lines. Kenny spent the majority of that winter repairing lines and restoring power. Some of his checks had more overtime than regular hours, he said. There was so much snow, crews had a hard time even getting to the lines. The trucks couldn’t get anywhere without a snowplow opening a path, he said.

Storm jobs like that were some of Kenny’s favorite memories because restoring power is immensely satisfying. Despite the hard work and inclement weather, storm jobs were also an opportunity to learn from linemen from across the state.

“Every co-op does things a little different. On storm jobs, I got to meet other linemen and find out how they do things,” Kenny said. “It might be easier the way they do it, might be harder. You never know.”

Throughout the decades of changes, Kenny said the day-to-day duties of the linemen are still mostly the same. Linemen are still installing new services, maintaining infrastructure, and responding to outages. The major changes have been to the equipment and the scale, he said.



Kenny Swanson completes pole rescue training sometime in the early 2000s.

“The services are getting big. A couple hundred amps used to be big. Now, we send 600 amps to houses,” Kenny said.

While the basics haven’t changed, the increase in equipment has made the job a little faster and easier, he said. When Kenny started, the cooperative only had one bucket truck. That meant rookies, like Kenny, mostly had to climb the poles to work on the lines.

“All I did was climb poles,” Kenny said. “I climbed almost every day.”

Climbing that often is hard on the body, especially the knees and shoulders, he said. While linemen have specialized equipment to help with climbing, it’s still strenuous and requires the linemen to muscle their way 30 feet up and down. Kenny had an additional disadvantage: his height.

“I’m not tall,” he said, “I had to stretch to reach the wires.”

While he won’t miss climbing, Kenny will miss the members and his coworkers.

“I like getting out and seeing the members and visiting with them,” Kenny said. “That’s the one thing I’m going to miss the most.”

Between his work as a lineman and participating in NEC community events, Kenny has had the opportunity to connect with people throughout the service territory. He’s welcomed new linemen and members to Northern, and built decades-long friendships. Although bittersweet, as the last lineman from Spink Electric, Kenny will leave a lasting legacy.

Congratulations, Kenny! We wish you the best!



UNDERSTANDING THE SOUTHWEST POWER POOL

Frank Turner

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When looking at the entire electric grid, electric cooperatives are just one component in a much larger system. Understanding how that system works, and how power is planned and shared across the region, provides important context for decisions that affect reliability, long-term infrastructure investments and, ultimately, the cost of electricity.

Southwest Power Pool

Every electric cooperative in South Dakota operates within the Southwest Power Pool (SPP), a regional transmission organization that oversees the grid. Really, electric cooperatives are all essential pieces of a larger,

regional puzzle that keeps the lights on.

SPP manages a wholesale electricity market and operates transmission lines across all or parts of 14 Midwest states, including South Dakota.

In 2015, East River Electric Power Cooperative joined the Southwest Power Pool along with Basin Electric Power Cooperative and the Western Area Power Administration Upper Great Plains Region. This move allowed electricity generators in the state to participate in a larger regional market, making it easier and more efficient to buy and sell energy across the grid.

Electric cooperatives aren't the only utilities operating within this regional system. Investor-owned utilities and

Basin Electric's trading floor connects the cooperative to the broader wholesale electricity market.

Submitted Photo

municipal utilities also participate in the SPP, all feeding into the same wholesale electricity market. By sharing transmission lines and following the same market rules, these utilities help create a broader, more flexible grid, allowing power to move long distances to where it's needed most.

"SPP is like a traffic director of electricity, because it doesn't own any assets," said Kristi Fiegen, South Dakota Public Utilities Commissioner and chair of the Southwest Power Pool's Regional State Committee. "They direct traffic and work to make sure the transmission lines and generation are bringing electricity to about 18 million customers on a second-by-second basis. That supply has to equal the demand every single second."

Winter Storm Uri

Another important benefit of participating in SPP is its ability to support the grid during extreme weather or unexpected outages, when regional coordination becomes especially important. Because SPP manages electricity across such a large footprint, the system can draw on resources from far beyond state borders. For example, when a power plant in North Dakota goes offline for routine maintenance, electricity from another state can cover the gap. Likewise, during severe winter weather in the South, generation from the Dakotas can help support the southern part of the grid.

That system maintained regional reliability until Feb. 2021, when it was pushed to its limits by Winter Storm Uri, which caused widespread power outages across Texas. According to the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, 4.5 million people in Texas lost power during the storm.

“Winter Storm Uri woke up the entire nation, because we didn’t know how vulnerable we were,” said Fiegen.

The storm prompted SPP to reexamine how the grid maintains regional reliability during the winter. Part of that change involved increasing the reserve margin — the extra electric generation capacity kept on hand beyond what is normally needed — to help the system withstand extreme cold and unexpected outages. The goal, according to Fiegen, is to ensure enough power is available across the region, especially on the coldest days of the year.

“Since Winter Storm Uri, we have spent much of our time focused on resource adequacy policies,” Fiegen said, referring to SPP leadership and regulatory committees.

Reserve Margin

One significant change set to take effect in the 2026/2027 winter season is SPP’s adoption of a winter planning reserve margin, which increases the amount of generation required to be available during the winter season. The change will apply across the SPP footprint, including impacts to Basin Electric, which supplies power to cooperatives across South Dakota, North Dakota, Montana, Minnesota and much of the Midwest.

Through an increased winter reserve margin, the SPP aims to better prepare the entire SPP footprint for extreme weather and periods of unusually high electricity demand, helping ensure reliable power for homes, businesses and industries across the SPP footprint.

So, what does this mean for cooperative members in South Dakota? Valerie Weigel, senior vice president of Energy Markets and Dakota Coal Operations at Basin Electric, said higher reserve margins mean Basin Electric needs to supply more generation capacity to the SPP market to meet expected peak winter demands, which affects Basin Electric’s wholesale rates for the cooperatives it serves.

“The increase in reserve margins means we need to build additional generation to ensure we have enough accredited resources to meet new planning requirements,” Weigel said. “As we look toward the rate increase in 2026, part of that increase reflects the cost of adding these resources to meet updated market requirements.”

Learning The Lingo

Transmission

High-voltage power lines and related infrastructure that move electricity long distances from power plants to local utilities. Transmission allows electricity to be shared across regions, especially during emergencies or peak demand.

Generation Capacity

The maximum amount of electricity that a utility’s power plant or portfolio of power plants can produce at one time. Capacity matters most during peak demand, when the grid is under the most strain. This may happen during extreme heat or cold, when people are using more electricity to heat or cool their homes.

Southwest Power Pool (SPP)

A regional transmission organization that coordinates electricity transmission and wholesale power markets across 14 Midwestern states, including South Dakota and Minnesota. SPP does not own power plants or transmission lines; instead, it manages how electricity flows across the regional grid.

Regional Transmission Organization (RTO)

A federally approved organization, like SPP, that operates the electric grid across multiple states. RTOs balance supply and demand, manage wholesale electricity markets and plan for long-term grid reliability.

Reserve Margin

The extra amount of generation capacity kept available above expected peak demand. This extra capacity helps the grid handle extreme weather, unexpected outages or sudden increases in electricity use.



WINTER SAFETY

During a storm in November 2025, Northern Electric linemen repair a pole that broke.

Stay prepared for inclement weather

“Neither snow nor rain nor heat nor gloom of night stays these couriers from the swift completion of their appointed rounds.” - Herodotus, 500 B.C., in reference to the Persian courier system in his work “The Histories.”

While often cited in reference to the postal service, the phrase embodies your Northern Electric Cooperative linemen. As long as it is safe to do so, your linemen are out building and maintaining infrastructure year-round, regardless of weather. Each weather event is assessed and monitored by management. While restoring power to members in an outage is a top priority, at Northern Electric, employee safety is paramount.

Linemen will fix lines in a blizzard if the bucket trucks are still able to traverse the roads and visibility is still

good. In some cases, linemen are sent out with snowplows forging a path for them. The length of the storm can also impact how quickly your power can be restored.

SAFETY FIRST WHEN RESTORING POWER DURING STORMS

All that to say, if your power goes out during a storm, we will fix it as soon as safely possible. Take precautions before storms arrive! Keep survival items on hand in your household and your vehicles in preparation for winter storms and pay attention to weather reports.

WARNING, ADVISORY, WATCH

Make sure you know the terminology used by weather services so you can take appropriate precautions.

Warnings = Take Action

The National Weather Service issues warnings when there is a significant weather event. Each type of weather warning has its own requirements for how it will impact the public, and most advise no travel. If you must travel during a winter warning, have a winter survival kit with you. If you get stranded, stay in your vehicle and wait for help to arrive.

The most general warning is the winter storm warning. These are issued due to severe hazards, such as snow, ice, sleet, blowing snow, or a combination, that make travel difficult or impossible. Typically, no travel is advised. When possible, delay your travel plans until conditions improve.

Sleet and freezing rain are different weather events, but both will impact driving conditions. Freezing rain is when the precipitation freezes once it hits the ground, coating roads, walkways, trees, and power lines in layers of ice. Sleet is

when the precipitation freezes into small pellets before hitting the ground. Sleet will also cause roads to become slippery.

Blizzard warnings are issued when falling and blowing snow, paired with strong wind create poor visibility and whiteout conditions. Travel will be extremely difficult. To be considered a blizzard warning, there must be frequent gusts of wind greater or equal to 35 mph and visibility reduced to less than a quarter mile for three hours or more. No travel is typically advised.

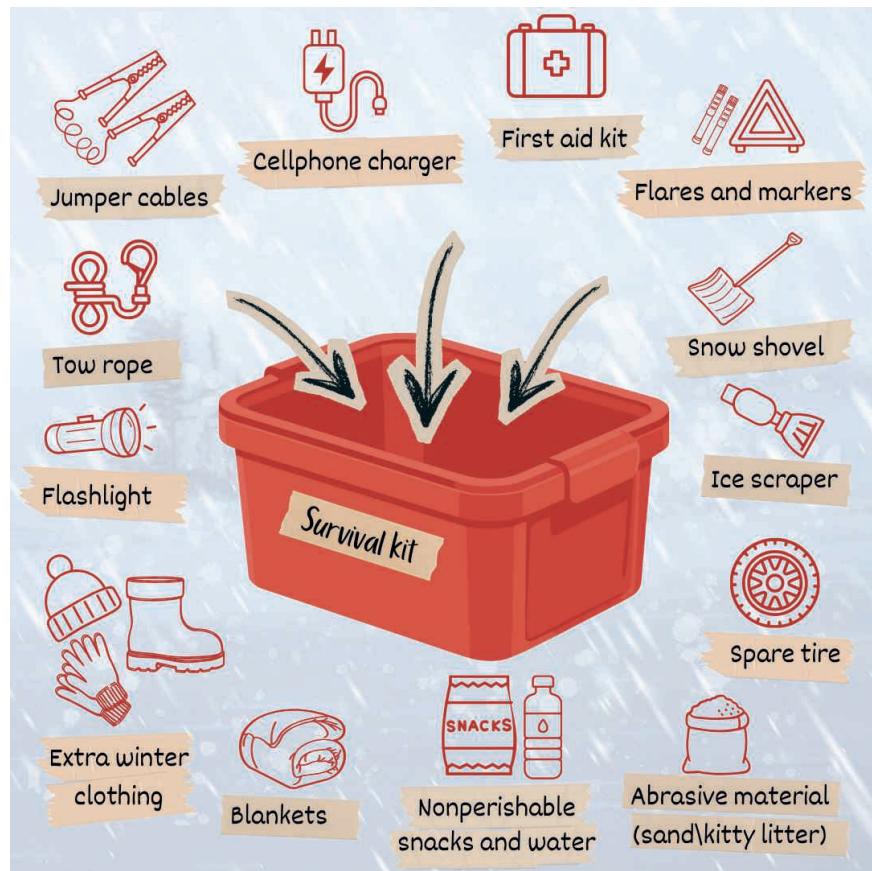
A quarter inch of accumulated ice will prompt an ice storm warning. During a storm, a quarter inch of ice can lead to snapped power lines and falling branches and trees. It will also make travel dangerous, as the roads will be very slick. No travel is advised.

Wind chill warnings are issued for dangerously low wind chill values. When strong winds and extremely cold air combine, it can result in frostbite and hypothermia if precautions are not taken. Wind chill is based on the rate of heat loss from exposed skin and is a measure of how cold it will feel. This will be different than the actual temperature outside. Since both cold temperatures and wind remove body heat, as wind speeds increase or temperatures drop, the body loses heat faster. Eventually, your body is unable to maintain your internal body temperature and hypothermia sets in. During a wind chill warning, avoid going outside. If you have to venture out, wear layers of warm, protective clothing, and limit time outside.

Advisories = Be Aware

Advisories are a step down from warnings. You still need to be cautious and stay informed in case the weather event strengthens. Advisories mean travel may be impacted. If driving, use caution.

When wintry elements are expected, such as blowing snow, ice, sleet, snow, or a combination, but are not considered hazardous to trigger a warning, National Weather Service will issue a winter



weather advisory. When traveling, expect less than ideal driving conditions and plan for possible difficulties.

Wind chill advisories are issued when strong winds and cold air generate a low wind chill, but not as low as wind chill warnings. If you are outdoors for prolonged periods, take precautions against possible frostbite and hypothermia by wearing warm, protective clothing.

Watches = Be Prepared

Watches are issued to warn of the possibility of severe weather. If the conditions are favorable for a significant weather event to form, such as heavy snow, ice storm, sleet, or blowing snow, a winter storm watch is issued. If there is potential for extremely cold air to move in and strong winds to form, a wind chill watch will be issued.

VEHICLE SURVIVAL KIT

Even the best drivers can end up in the ditch during winter. Bad road conditions, low visibility and unprepared drivers are all factors outside your control. Keep a winter survival kit in your vehicle:

- Cellphone charger
- First aid kit
- Flares and road markers
- Snow shovel
- Ice scraper
- Spare tire
- Sand or kitty litter for traction
- Nonperishable snacks
- Bottled water
- Blankets
- Extra sets of hats, mittens, coats, and gloves
- Flashlight
- Tow rope
- Jumper cables

REGISTER TO WIN!

Bring this coupon and mailing label to the Touchstone Energy® Cooperatives booth at the Black Hills Stock Show & Rodeo to win a prize!

Your Phone Number: _____

Your E-mail Address: _____



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.

FEB. 20-22

Winterfest 2026

Lead, SD

www.leadmethere.org/winterfest

JAN. 30-FEB. 7
Annual Black Hills Stock Show
Central States Fairgrounds
Rapid City, SD
www.centralstatesfairinc.com
605-355-3861

FEB. 1
The Great Lake County Hotdish Competition
11:30-1:30 p.m.
St. Thomas School Gym
Madison, SD
605-256-5308

FEB. 6-7
31st Annual Dinner Theater
Reliance Legion Hall
Reliance, SD
Tickets: 605-730-0553

FEB. 7-8
The Black Market/Formerly Benson's Flea Market
Sioux Falls, SD
605-332-6004

FEB. 13-16
12th Annual Frost Fest
Brookings, SD

FEB. 14
Polar Bear Chili Cook-Off
11 a.m.-2 p.m.
Hill City, SD

FEB. 20-22
Winterfest
Fireworks, Parade of Lights,
Bonfire, Snowshoeing
Lead, SD
www.leadmethere.com/winterfest

FEB. 21
Knights of Columbus Fishing Derby & Raffle
10 a.m.-2 p.m.
Enemy Swim Lake, Waubay, SD
605-881-5075

FEB. 21
All Ability Skate
12-3 p.m.
Main Street Square
Rapid City, SD
disabilityaac@rcgov.org

FEB. 21
Bellator Titans Casino Night Fundraiser

6-11 p.m.
City Lights Bar & Event Center
Aberdeen, SD

FEB. 22
C Street Brass
4 p.m.
Johnson Fine Arts Center
Aberdeen, SD

FEB. 24
Life as an Astronaut
Free Presentation by NASA
Astronaut Charles Gemar
7-8 p.m.
DSU Science Center
Madison, SD
605-256-5308

FEB. 28
Spay-Ghetti & No Balls
Pet Rescue League
5-8 p.m.
802 S. Main St.
Aberdeen, SD
605-228-2984

MARCH 5
SD Jazz Festival
7:30 p.m.
Johnson Fine Arts Center
Aberdeen, SD

MARCH 7
Free Christian Men's Event
The Barn at Aspen Acres
8:30 a.m.-1:30 p.m.
Spearfish, SD
Register: RiseUpMen.com

MARCH 14
St. Uhro Finnish Festival
11 a.m. Main Street Parade
12 p.m. Community Ctr. Lunch
Lake Norden, SD
605-881-1758

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.