

# Cooperative Connections

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of cooperatives**

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## The Drive-In Experience is Coming to the Co-op

# Social Distancing at the Drive-In



**Char Hager**

[info@northernelectric.coop](mailto:info@northernelectric.coop)

**Electric cooperatives in South Dakota have already held drive-in annual meetings this summer to keep their members safe and healthy and still meet the co-op's meeting requirements.**

Families have had to get creative to find entertainment this summer. COVID-19 has shut down community pools, county fairs, and movie theaters. Most indoor movie theaters closed in March due to the pandemic and have remained closed all summer long. It is one of the main reasons drive-in movie theaters have seen a resurgence in popularity over the past several months.

Drive-in movies offer families a great way to venture out for weekend entertainment while staying socially distant from other movie-goers. Entertainers like Garth Brooks and Blake Shelton have held virtual drive-in concerts at theaters throughout the United States this summer. And, Walmart recently announced that it is setting up contact-free drive-in movie theaters in parking lots at 160 of its stores from August to October.

Electric cooperatives have also joined the drive-in trend. Bedford Rural Electric Cooperative in Bedford, Pennsylvania, provided large poles, line-workers, and bucket trucks to construct a drive-in theater and salvage some summer fun in its community.

In just a few weeks, the drive-in experience is making its way to your local co-op. The board and staff at Northern Electric Cooperative have been monitoring the COVID-19 pandemic all summer to see how it will affect our 73rd annual meeting in September. Unfortunately, the pandemic continues to impact our area and the health and safety of our members and employees is our top priority, so we made the tough decision to scale back the annual meeting this year. The 2020 annual meeting will be a drive-in event on Tuesday, September 22. The annual meeting will be held at our main headquarters office in Bath, which is just six miles east of Aberdeen on U.S. Highway 12. Members attending the meeting will be asked to stay in their vehicles just like they would at a drive-in movie theater. Members will be able to register and vote from their cars. Those in attendance will also be able to listen to the meeting through the radio in their vehicles. Due to the unique circumstances of the meeting, we will not be giving away gifts, serving a meal, or drawing for prizes at the end of the meeting. There is more information about the format and agenda for the 2020 drive-in annual meeting on pages 6-7 of this issue.

Other electric cooperatives in South Dakota have already held drive-in annual meetings this summer to keep their members safe and healthy and still meet the co-op's meeting requirements. It is a creative way to keep our co-op strong as we navigate the challenges of the pandemic. Drive-in movie theaters have successfully provided a lot of fun and entertainment this summer and we hope the Northern Electric drive-in annual meeting on September 22 will also be successful.



(USPS 396-040)

**Board President:** Donna Sharp

**Board of Directors**

- Nolan Wipf – Vice President
- Ron Kaaz – Secretary
- Josh Larson – Treasurer
- Fran Esser
- Victor Fischbach
- Todd Hettich
- Kirk Schaunaman
- Mark Sumption

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

**Chief Financial Officer:** Cathi Podoll

**Operations Manager:** Jerry Weber

**Manager of Member Services:** Russel Ulmer

**Manager of Information Technology:** Derek Gorecki

**Communications Director:** Ben Dunsmoor - bdunsmoor@northernelectric.coop

**Executive Secretary:** Kay Albrecht

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.

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Northern Electric Cooperative's regular board meeting was held July 23, 2020, via teleconference at the headquarters in Bath with all directors present. As the first order of business, the Board approved the June 18, 2020, minutes and June expenditures. The Board then reviewed and accepted monthly reports by management.

East River Director Mark Sumption reported on actions taken by the East River Board at the July 2, 2020, meeting. General Manager Char Hager reported on the East River MAC Meeting held June 30, 2020. Director Nolan Wipf reported on the South Dakota Rural Electric Association board meeting held June 25, 2020. Director Ronald Kaaz reported on the South Dakota Wind Energy Association subcommittee meeting held via conference call, July 14, 2020.

**Manager's Report**

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

- Update on development projects.
- Update on Rural Electric Economic Development (REED) revolving loan fund.
- Legal and Legislative Report
- Reminded directors of the SDREA Co-op Board Leadership Summit, July 27-28, 2020, in Pierre.
- Informed directors that the 33rd American Coalition for Ethanol Conference changed to a virtual event, September 16, 2020.
- Reminded directors of the East River Annual Meeting in Sioux Falls on September 9, 2020.
- Informed directors of the 2020 Mid-West Electric Consumers Association Annual Meeting, December 7-10, in Denver, CO.

**Board Report**

The board considered and/or acted upon the following:

1. Approved date and time of the next regular board meeting for 8:30 a.m. on Thursday, August 20, 2020.
2. Approved payment of legal fees for Harvey Oliver in the amount of \$515.99.
3. Approved Work Order Inventories #20-06 for \$92,169.21 and #20-06MC for \$53,586.62 to be submitted to the Rural Utilities Service for reimbursement from loan funds for electric plant construction already completed.
4. Set compensation for Election & Credentials Committee.
5. Approved annual special and general capital credit retirements for members age 70 and over. Estimated retirements will total \$350,843.08.
6. Appointed director Nolan Wipf voting delegate for the RESCO 2020 Director Election.
7. Appointed director Todd Hettich voting delegate for 2020 CFC Special Membership Meeting, August 14, 2020.
8. Appointed director Donna Sharp voting delegate for the 2020 NCSC Annual Membership Meeting, August 6, 2020.
9. Approved \$750 donation to the Spink County 4-H Leaders Association.

Please ask your cooperative manager, staff member or director if you have questions on any of these items.

Financial Report	June 2020	June 2019
kWh Sales	21,887,682 kWh	19,020,911 kWh
Electric Revenues	\$2,339,657	\$1,983,740
Total Cost of Service	\$2,136,882	\$2,108,642
Operating Margins	\$202,776	(-\$124,902)
Year To Date Margins	\$450,571	\$379,683

**Residential Average Monthly Usage and Bill**

June 2020	1,712 kWh	\$200.99	.1174 per kWh
June 2019	1,382 kWh	\$174.77	.1265 per kWh

Wholesale power cost, taxes, interest, and depreciation accounted for 83.8% of NEC's total cost of service.

## Recreational Boating: Stay Safe on the Water

With more than 11 million recreational vessels registered in the U.S., millions of Americans are enjoying time on and in the water.

Each year, roughly 4,000 boating incidents occur, causing more than 2,500 injuries and about \$46 million in property damage. Stay safe by being prepared and using the appropriate equipment, whether enjoying a ride on a motorized boat, paddling a kayak or wakeboarding.

Life jackets are at the core of safe boating, whether using a motorized or non-motorized vessel. The U.S. Coast Guard reports 76 percent of boating deaths in 2017 were due to drowning, and 84 percent of the victims were not wearing a life jacket.

While regulations on life jacket use vary from state to state, the Wear It program of the National Safe Boating Council promotes boating safety by encouraging boaters to wear life jackets any time they are on a boat, motorized or non-motorized.

Good swimmers still need life jackets. When people fall off a boat, they may become disoriented, injured or unconscious. Life jackets can keep victims' heads above water so they can breathe and be rescued more easily. Every child should wear a life jacket at all times when boating.

Choose the right life jacket for the activities you will be doing. Double check to make sure the life jackets are U.S. Coast Guard approved and fit correctly:

- Make sure the jacket is a proper fit for your size and weight
- Make sure the jacket is properly fastened
- Hold your arms straight up over your head, ask a friend to grasp the tops of the arm openings and gently pull up; make sure there is no excess room above the openings and that the jacket does not ride up over your chin or face.

The National Safe Boating Council encourages following these boating safety tips to help minimize risks:

- Take a National Association of Boating Law Administrators safety course
- Be familiar with the boating state laws
- Know the "Rules of the Road"
- When operating a motorized boat, know about carbon monoxide; this odorless, colorless poisonous gas is emitted by all combustion engines and onboard motor generators.

## Taggart, Schmidt win Glenn English scholarships

Anneliese Taggart of Vermillion recently landed a \$10,000 scholarship award presented by the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA).

Carter Schmidt of Colman also won a \$1,000 scholarship through the Glenn English Youth Tour Alumni Scholarship program.

Taggart and Schmidt were participants in the 2016 NRECA Washington Youth Tour. Taggart was sponsored by Clay-Union Electric Corp., while Schmidt was sponsored by Sioux Valley Energy.

Taggart was elected by her peers to join the Youth Leadership Council. She participated in a grassroots panel discussion at NRECA's Annual Meeting last year and also helped teach a

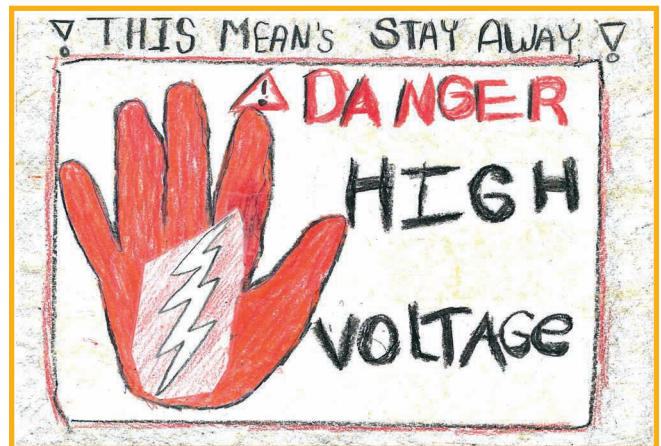
course called "Bridging the Gap" to encourage young adults to vote.

Now in its fifth year, the Glenn English National Cooperative Leadership Foundation has awarded nearly \$100,000 in scholarships to NRECA Youth Tour alumni.

The Glenn English scholarships are one of the few sources of private scholarships for college students. Applicants are required to have completed one year of college as a full-time student.

Glenn English, former CEO of NRECA, spent his career championing the co-op business model and fighting to improve the quality of life for all Americans. A native of Oklahoma, he served 10 terms in Congress.

## KIDS CORNER SAFETY POSTER



**"Danger! High voltage! This means stay away!"**

**David Biggins, 10 years old**

David Biggins is the son of Jessy and Katie Biggins. They reside in Gregory, S.D., and are members of Rosebud Electric Association.

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.

# Goodies from the Garden

## Mashed Potatoes with Kale

4 med. potatoes  
2 Tbs. butter  
1 Tbs. milk or cream  
1/4 c. grated cheese (cheddar or Colby)  
1-1/2 c. chopped raw kale, mid-ribs removed

Peel potatoes if desired, cut into chunks, boil until tender, about 15-20 minutes. Drain, mash and add remaining ingredients. Stir until well combined. Serve with sea salt and pepper. *Mary Jessen, Holabird, SD*

## Cabbage Salad Bowl

4 cups shredded cabbage  
1 c. shredded carrots  
2 Tbs. tarragon vinegar  
1/4 c. mayonnaise  
1/2 tsp. salt  
2 Tbs. sugar  
1/2 c. light raisins  
1/4 c. orange juice

Soak raisins in orange juice while preparing vegetables. Combine cabbage, carrots, sugar and salt in a bowl. Add mayonnaise along with raisins and juice. Toss lightly. Refrigerate until time to serve. Serves 8. *Verna Knapp, Waubay, SD*

## Balsamic Vegetable Salad

3 lg. tomatoes, wedged  
3 med. cucumbers, peeled, halved and sliced  
1/2 c. olive oil  
1/4 c. balsamic vinegar  
3 Tbs. water  
1 envelope Italian dressing mix

In a salad bowl combine tomatoes and cucumbers; in another small bowl whisk oil vinegar, water and dressing mix. Pour over vegetables and toss to coat. Yields: 6 servings. *Jane Barthel, Elkton, SD*

## Rhubarb Upside Down Cake

Yellow cake mix  
4-6 c. rhubarb, chopped  
3-4 c. sugar  
1 pint whipping cream

Mix cake mix as directed. Put in a 9x13-inch pan. Mix rhubarb with sugar; pour over cake. Pour whipping cream over mixture and bake at 350 for 30-45 minutes. *Shirley Dreher, Clark, SD*

## Zucchini Dish

1/4 c. cooking oil  
1 lb. unpeeled thinly sliced zucchini  
1 lg. carrot, coarsely shredded  
1 lg. onion, chopped  
3/4 c. chopped celery  
1/2 tsp. garlic salt  
1/2 med. green, red or yellow pepper cut in thin strips  
1/4 tsp. dried basil, crushed  
Dash of pepper  
1/2 c. taco sauce  
2 tsps. prepared mustard  
2 medium tomatoes, cut in wedges

Heat cooking oil in a 10-inch skillet. Add sliced zucchini, shredded carrot, chopped onion, chopped celery, pepper strips, garlic salt, basil and pepper. Mix well, cook covered, over medium-high heat 4-5 minutes, stirring occasionally. Combine taco sauce and mustard; stir into vegetables. Add tomato wedges, cook uncovered, 3-5 minutes or till heated through. Makes 4-6 servings. Optional: sprinkle with shredded cheese of your choice. *Rachel Brezczinski, Marshall, MN*

## Stuffed Cherry Tomatoes

24-28 cherry tomatoes  
1 package (8 ounces) cream cheese, softened  
2 tablespoons mayonnaise  
3 green onion stalks, diced  
1 medium cucumber, peeled and diced  
2 teaspoons minced dill  
fresh dill, for garnish

Cut thin slice off top of each tomato. Scoop out pulp. Invert tomatoes on paper towel to drain. In medium bowl, combine cream cheese and mayonnaise until smooth. Stir in cucumber, green onion and dill. Spoon mixture into tomatoes. Top with fresh dill. Refrigerate until ready to serve. [www.culinary.net](http://www.culinary.net).

Please send your favorite pasta 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 2020. All entries must include your name, mailing address, telephone number and cooperative name.



# SHAPING A STRONGER TOMORROW

## Drive-In Annual Meeting To Be Held At Co-op Office In Bath

# 2020 ANNUAL MEETING

### AGENDA

Tuesday, September 22, 2020

5:30 p.m - 6:30 p.m.

**NO MEAL, GIFTS OR PRIZES**

- Drive-up registration and voting for District 7 candidate. This will take place at the main headquarters office at:

39456 133rd St  
(U.S. Highway 12)  
Bath, SD 57427

6:30 p.m.

- Call to Order
- Approval of 2019 Annual Meeting Minutes
- Approval of Treasurer's Report
- Announcement of District 7 Election Results
- Seating of Directors
- Adjournment

The format of the 2020 Northern Electric Annual Meeting is going to be different this year due to COVID-19. The meeting will be held at the main cooperative office located six miles east of Aberdeen in Bath. It will be a drive-in annual meeting. Much like a drive-in movie, members will remain in their vehicles and register, vote, and listen to the meeting over the radio from the comfort of their cars.

“Drive-in annual meetings have become common across South Dakota, and across the country, as co-op’s try to satisfy their meeting requirements while keeping their members safe and socially distanced,” Northern Electric Cooperative CEO/ General Manager Char Hager said.

### 2020 Annual Meeting Details

- Members can begin registering and voting at 5:30 p.m. on Tuesday, September 22.
- Members can enter the co-op parking lot by turning into the east or west driveway at the Bath office located six miles east of Aberdeen on U.S. Highway 12.
- Co-op employees will direct traffic into registration lines.
- Members will be asked to remain in their vehicles for the entire meeting.

■ Members from District 7 will be given a ballot to vote for Jeff Vander Wal or Danny Miles. Members will vote in their vehicles. Voting will end at 6:30 p.m.

■ President Donna Sharp will call the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m. to conduct the co-op’s official business and seat the directors up for election.

■ Members will listen to the meeting through the radio in their vehicles.

“Several other electric co-ops have had success with drive-in annual meetings, and we believe this will be the safest way to conduct co-op business this year,” Northern Electric Cooperative President Donna Sharp said. “We’re looking forward to seeing our members and hope they will be understanding about the changes that we made to this year’s annual meeting.”

For the health and safety of our members, no meal will be served and no gifts will be distributed at the annual meeting in 2020. No prizes will be given away following the business meeting, however, all active members will be eligible for a special prize drawing that will be held at a later date. Members do not need to be present for the drawing and the winners will be directly contacted. The names of the winners will be published in a future issue of *Cooperative Connections*.

# Members Will Vote For New District 7 Director



## Jeff Vander Wal

Jeff Vander Wal believes his experience working for a cooperative will serve him well if he is elected to represent District 7 on the Northern Electric Board of Directors.

Vander Wal lives and farms near Brentford and worked as an agronomist at a cooperative for 13 years before he started his farming career in 2009.

“I feel my background working in the co-op system on the agronomy side has given me an appreciation and knowledge of how we can serve our customers,” Vander Wal said.

Vander Wal graduated from South Dakota State University with an Ag Education major and a minor in Animal Science. He is currently involved with the South Dakota Shorthorn Association, Northwestern Area FFA Alumni chapter, Spink County 4-H Leaders Association, the Spink County Conservation District, and the Brentford UCC Search Committee.

Vander Wal is running against Danny Miles for the District 7 seat on the Northern Electric Cooperative Board of Directors.



## Danny Miles

Danny Miles has a family farm operation in the Conde area and has been impressed with the service he has received from Northern Electric. He remembers an outage last winter that shut off the supply of water to his cattle. His power was quickly restored at 2:00 a.m. following an after-hours call. Miles would be honored to be elected to the District 7 seat.

“I was very impressed with Northern Electric,” Miles said. “I would be very proud to be a part of it and represent my district.”

Miles grew up in the Conde area and studied at Lake Area Tech. He operated a custom harvesting business for several years before settling down in Conde area. Miles has four children and two grandchildren.

Miles currently serves as the clerk on the Benton Township Board and he is on the parish council at Saint Joseph Church in Turton. Miles has also served on the Spink County FSA Committee and has been a member of the U.S. Custom Harvesters Safety Board.

Miles is running against Jeff Vander Wal for the District 7 seat.

## OFFICIAL NOTICE

### Members of Northern Electric Cooperative Inc.

The **Annual Meeting of the members of Northern Electric Cooperative Inc.** will be held at the headquarters building in rural Bath, State of South Dakota, on the **22nd day of September, 2020, at 6:30 p.m.** to take action on the following matters:

- Approval of 2019 Annual Meeting Minutes
- Approval of Treasurer's Report
- Election and Seating of Directors

**PLEASE TAKE NOTICE** that although Directors for Districts 4 and 6 will be elected by the membership at the meeting, paper ballots will only need to be cast in the District 7 election. Incumbent directors Josh Larson (District 4) and Kirk Schaunaman (District 6) are the only eligible candidates for their Districts. Since no other nominations can be submitted, the candidates will be automatically elected at the annual meeting.

### 2020 Northern Electric Cooperative Board of Director Candidates

#### District 4

**Josh Larson**  
Columbia, SD

#### District 6

**Kirk Schaunaman**  
Aberdeen, SD

#### District 7

**Jeff Vander Wal**  
Brentford, SD

**Danny Miles**  
Conde, SD

**PLEASE TAKE FURTHER NOTICE** that the Secretary has posted such nominations in the principal office of the Cooperative.

Ronald Kaaz  
Secretary

August 20, 2020



Sioux Valley Energy donated food and helped raise more than \$3,000 for booster clubs in Brandon, Hartford and Pipestone, MN.

# Local Co-op Events Provide Fun, Food and Festivities for Sports Fans

**Ben Dunsmoor**

Contributing Writer

In northwest South Dakota, clashes on the football field between rival schools are the main attractions on Friday nights. It is where community members can count on connecting with friends and neighbors. It is also a place where high school sports fans can count on seeing employees from Grand Electric Cooperative cooking up a pre-game meal.

“We see people of all ages at the tailgate parties,” Grand Electric Cooperative Marketing/Tech Specialist Rachel Eggebo said.

The Bison based cooperative began hosting block parties in the summer months nearly 20 years ago to reach out to the community. In 2009, Grand Electric transitioned to serving up brats, hot dogs, and chips before high school football games to reach families that were busy attending school activities. The co-op says it has been a great way to serve the community and show support for local schools.

“It gives us an opportunity to show our membership that we are there for them. Occasionally, it might be the only time we have to communicate with our busy members,” Eggebo said.

Grand Electric is taking a cautious approach to its tailgate parties this year due to concerns surrounding COVID-19. But, if the players are on the field, the co-op is committed to serving up free food at five different games this fall. Grand Electric will make some modifications to the tailgate parties by packaging the food and making it a “grab-and-go” style event for fans.

Grand Electric is not alone in its efforts to partner with local schools and reach out to the community with fun pre-game events. Butte Electric plans to host a tailgate party before the Belle Fourche and Spearfish game this fall. West River Electric holds a tailgating event before the Wall and New Underwood football game and sponsors a basketball tournament in Union Center every November.



Arm wrestling contestants square off during a tailgate party and family fun day hosted by Grand Electric.

Sioux Valley Energy in Colman is also on the tailgating bandwagon. Sioux Valley started hosting events before football games to help its local schools raise money.

“As school funding becomes tighter, booster clubs - and other school organizations run by parents - serve an important purpose,” Sioux Valley Director of Communications and Government Relations Carrie Vugteveen said. “Sioux Valley Energy feels that supporting these efforts helps the co-op live out its guiding principle of ‘commitment to community.’”

Sioux Valley hosted three tailgate parties in 2019 to raise money for booster clubs in Brandon, Hartford, and Pipestone, MN. Sioux Valley bought all the food and asked for a free-will





Lyon-Lincoln Electric Co op in Tyler, MN, helped to host a tailgate party where the main attraction was the co op's Tesla electric vehicle.

donation from fans during the meal. The three events raised more than \$3,000 combined for the booster clubs.

FEM Electric Association in Ipswich also partners with local schools to raise money during athletic events. FEM Electric donates 60 cases of bottled water to each school district within its service territory every year. The schools can sell the water in their concession stands and keep all the profits. Each water bottle has an electrical safety message printed on the label which translates into a big win for both the school and the co-op.

**The schools can sell the water in their concession stands and keep all the profits.**

“We wanted to contribute something to help out the various school programs and at the same time get our safety message out to kids and everyone,” Carol Schaffner with FEM Electric Association said.

Lyon-Lincoln Electric Cooperative in Tyler, MN, hosted a “Tailgating with Tesla” party before the Minneota and Canby football game last fall. The co-op partnered with a local youth group to host

the event. The co-op bought all the food and the youth group kept all the proceeds from the tailgate party to help pay for a mission trip. It was an opportunity to raise money for a good cause and for Lyon-Lincoln Electric to showcase its Tesla and talk about the benefits of electric vehicles.

“These events are a win-win for the cooperative and the community,” Lyon-Lincoln Electric Manager of Marketing and External Relations Brian Jeremiason said. “The co-op is able to deliver a message to a targeted audience and visit about other topics that community members may have. The community benefits by having a face-to-face opportunity to visit with their co-op.”

Electric co-op participation in school events is widespread across South Dakota. Northern Electric Cooperative in Bath, Dakota Energy in Huron, Charles Mix Electric in Lake Andes, and Central Electric in Mitchell all participate in local homecoming parades. Lacreek Electric in Martin sponsors a t-shirt toss during basketball and football games. Dakota Energy also hosts “co-op night” during local basketball games. And, Central Electric hosts free popcorn nights at high school basketball and football games to promote electrical safety and give back to the school and community.

So, whether it is a tailgate party, a fundraiser, or a t-shirt toss, it is likely that electric co-ops will be supporting their

local schools and communities this fall and winter.

“High school sports are wonderful opportunities to reach out to our communities,” Jeremiason said. “Young and old all attend and we can communicate with families as a unit which can be difficult sometimes with the busy lives most families are living.”



FEM Electric Association donates bottled water with unique labels to raise funds for schools in the co op's service area.

## Visit Co-op Connections Plus

Take a moment to visit our new online companion to Cooperative Connections. Co-op Connections Plus is a YouTube channel that features a more in-depth treatment of stories appearing in this publication as well as other subjects of interest to rural South Dakotans.

Search for “Co-op Connections Plus” and you’ll find videos on human trafficking, the State High School Rodeo finals and grain bin safety. Be sure to “like” and “subscribe.”





New Northern Electric Accountant Ben Krueger received 'Best in Show' at the 2019 Brown County Fair for his photograph of a hummingbird (left) and 'Best in Show' for his photograph of a screech owl at the 2018 Brown County Fair (above).

## New Accountant Enjoys Outdoor Photography

# Ben Krueger Hired As Accountant



Ben Krueger

Northern Electric Cooperative's new accountant is also an accomplished outdoor photographer.

"It's something to do when hunting season is closed,"

Northern Electric's newly hired accountant Ben Krueger said. "It's like hunting with a camera instead of a gun. I like the challenge of it."

Krueger started working at Northern Electric on July 6 after spending several years as an accountant with the South Dakota Department of Labor and Regulation. He fills a position in the accounting and billing department that was left vacant after an employee moved out of state.

Krueger has received 'Best in Show' awards at the Brown County Fair the past two years for his images of a screech owl and a hummingbird. He enjoys hunting and being outdoors, but he said his interest in wildlife photography can also be traced back to his family.

"My grandfather was into bird watching so I was interested in it as well. I would see many unique birds and wanted to share them with others," Krueger said.

And, Krueger does not have to travel far to find his subjects. The new Northern Electric employee maintains four wood duck boxes outside his Aberdeen home. All four boxes were occupied this spring.

"Forty ducklings left our yard this year and well over a hundred since we started maintaining them," Krueger said.

Krueger grew up in Wisconsin and attended the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater for his undergraduate degree. He also received his Master's in Professional Accountancy from the school. He moved to South Dakota in 2009 after graduating. Krueger said he is looking forward to serving the members of Northern Electric and building a stable career at the co-op.

Krueger and his wife, Andrea, live in Aberdeen with their two black labs.



Krueger enjoys outdoor photography. He also maintains wood duck boxes at his home in Aberdeen.

# Employees Recognized for Years of Service

Northern Electric Cooperative is fortunate to have several employees who have built their careers at the co-op and are dedicated to keeping the lights on for members. Every year, these employees are recognized for their longevity and years of service. These employees are typically recognized during the annual meeting; however, this year's annual meeting will not be held as normal due to COVID-19. Northern Electric would like to recognize several of these employees in this month's issue of *Cooperative Connections* as they celebrate milestone anniversaries. The names, pictures, and years of service of each employee are printed below. We thank them for their time, hard work, and dedication to Northern Electric Cooperative and its members.



**Brad Becker**

Purchasing Agent  
**40 Years**



**Tyler Marken**

Journeyman Lineman  
**30 Years**



**Shawn Evans**

Redfield Journeyman  
Lineman  
**20 Years**



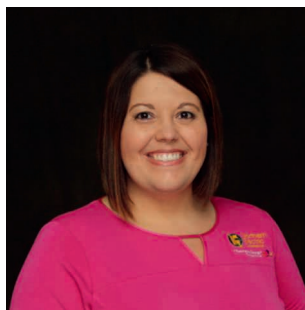
**Christy Nagel**

Billing Clerk  
**10 Years**



**Chris Piehl**

Redfield Journeyman  
Lineman  
**10 Years**



**Rene Waldman**

Dispatch/Engineering  
Aide  
**10 Years**



## LOOK UP AROUND OUT

*Farm equipment and power lines can be a lethal combination. Look for overhead power lines and plan safe routes for moving your equipment. Keep equipment, antennas and people away from power lines and power poles. And never touch a downed line. Contact your local electric cooperative if you have questions.*

## RE-ENERGIZING FARM SAFETY





South Dakota's Rural Electric Cooperatives are adapting to the expectations of the next generation of co-op members.

# NEXT GENERATION

## Young adults figure prominently in the future of the rural electric cooperative movement

**Billy Gibson**

Contributing Writer

It's getting harder and harder to find people who can provide a first-person account of what it was like when electrical power came to their communities.

The nation's rural electric program sprang to life more than 80 years ago when an executive order by President Franklin Roosevelt created the Rural Electric Administration (REA). The REA issued low-cost loans that gave local communities the ability to build out power delivery systems to serve their own farms, homes and businesses.

But relatively few of the members served by those cooperatives today actually witnessed the transformation that took place when thousands of small towns and hamlets across the country began

enjoying the benefits made possible by electrical power.

Though many characteristics of electric co-ops have stayed the same – democratic control, focus on quality service, accessibility, commitment to community – other elements have certainly changed over the decades. For instance, some cooperative service areas that were once rural have become suburban as population centers have expanded into spaces that were once sparsely populated farms and fields.

Cooperatives are also taking advantage of modern technology to broaden their menu of services available to members, such as online account management systems, energy audits, pre-pay programs, automated meter reading, renewable power and more.

Yet another change is the generational shift taking place as older board directors, managers, employees and consumers are being replaced with younger folks who have different ideas, different approaches, different plans and different expectations.

In South Dakota, co-op leaders say the changing dynamics present an opportunity to bring innovative ideas and new concepts to the table – all centered around the ongoing mission to deliver power that is safe, reliable, affordable and accessible.

Evan Buckmiller is manager of Kingsbury Electric Cooperative (KEC) based in DeSmet. He is part of a group of younger general managers who have taken the reins at various electric co-ops in the state. He said that over the past decade KEC has seen a 100 percent turnover in personnel and that every current employee



Co-ops will continue their commitment to both personal and digital service.

is under the age of 35. The result is a prevailing mindset that's not averse to searching for new ways to "work smarter."

"Our employees are constantly exploring new avenues to operate more efficiently and effectively," Buckmiller said. "They understand that the money people pay for power doesn't grow on trees. Our members expect value, and it's our job to make sure we're using the latest technology to minimize operating costs while improving service and convenience."

He said one advantage of having a younger work force is a greater acceptance of change, more flexibility and being open to new approaches to addressing issues.

"We've made wise investments in new equipment that we never would have considered in the past," Buckmiller said. "Our employees don't mind trying something new. They don't mind going through the training process. Having grown up in the internet age, they adapt well to learning things like new computer-based applications and software."

Some of those changes include a new barcoding program to track inventory, using iPads for preparing timesheets and taking service orders online.

Jay Spaans, manager of Douglas Electric in Armour, echoed Buckmiller's observations regarding younger employees. Two of his seven staff members are expected to retire in the not-too-distant future. They represent a combined 96 years of service.

"That's a lot of institutional knowledge



**Kingsbury Electric Co-op Manager Evan Buckmiller leads a staff of young employees who understand the co-op's mission.**

walking out the door, and as a manager you wonder if the next generation will be as dedicated to the co-op as them," Spaans said. "I'm sure that whoever we hire will have grown up with technology and will have new ideas. I see that as a benefit."

When it comes to engaging younger consumers, co-ops across the state maintain social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and others. West River Electric based in Wall, is representative of many South Dakota co-ops that use an array of digital tools to track the organization's member engagement.

Public Relations Manager Robert Raker said diversity and the strategic use of various social media channels is the key to making sure the lines of communication remain open across the age spectrum.

"We use Facebook and our printed newsletter to appeal to our older members," he said. "We use Instagram and Tik Tok to reach our younger members, and we're beginning to deploy LinkedIn to interact with our technology and business accounts."

There's even a specific approach to communicating internally, Raker said.

"We're using Snapchat to communicate with some of our crews in the field because

**One advantage of having a younger work force is a greater acceptance of change, more flexibility and being open to new approaches.**

we've found that our young linemen prefer to use Snapchat rather than a conventional email account."

Chad Felderman, CEO/General Manager at Dakota Energy in Huron, said it's important for co-ops to balance their approach so that the interests of all age groups are taken into account.

Part of that strategy of fostering connect- edness across generations is to get out of the office and meet members at events that attract a cross-section of people.

"In order to interact with all age groups, we have been present at sporting events, parades and event booths. It's more difficult due to the pandemic, but this is our goal," Felderman said. "This has allowed us to engage with members of all ages and creates an overall increase in knowledge of who we are and what services we provide. Utilizing Facebook, the website and text messaging has been a great way to inform members and makes us more visible in our communities."

Matt Klein, General Manager at Union County Electric in Elk Point, said he has noticed the older generation has been receptive to change, albeit at a more measured pace.

"In general, our older members want to come to the office and pay by check and get a receipt, while our younger members are more comfortable paying online, having us withdraw directly from their back account, or setting up recurring charges to their credit card," Klein said. "Now that we offer these other payment options, we are seeing more of the older generation using them. So they are clearly becoming more comfortable with this, but are a bit slower to adopt the change."



**Younger members expect their cooperative to provide information through social media platforms.**

# 2019 Annual Meeting Minutes

Pursuant to the notice to all members, the 72nd Annual Meeting of the membership of Northern Electric Cooperative, Inc., was held in the Aberdeen Civic Arena and Theatre on the 5th day of September 2019, at 6:30 p.m. with registration commencing at 5:00 p.m.

More than 400 members and guests were served a buffet dinner before the business meeting. An electric products and services expo was also held.

Following the National Anthem, President Donna Sharp called the meeting to order. The President then called on Pastor Bret Bierman of Trinity Lutheran Church of rural Mansfield to deliver the invocation. General Manager Char Hager and President Sharp then recognized guests, directors and officers of the board.

Secretary Nolan Wipf declared a quorum was present, with the official registration being 165. He then gave a report on petitions for nominees. Wipf stated that petitions were received for the following Director candidates: District 2, Todd M. Hettich, Mina, District 5, Donna Sharp, Bath, and District 9, Nolan Wipf, Hitchcock.

President Sharp called for the Secretary's report. Upon motion, the reading of the minutes of the September 12, 2018, Annual Meeting was waived and the minutes, as previously mailed to all the members prior to this meeting, were approved as printed and mailed.

Treasurer Wayne Holt stated that the financial statements printed in the annual report represented an accurate reflection of the audited financial status of the Cooperative, as of December 31, 2018. The treasurer's report was approved as presented.

President Sharp called for any unfinished or old business. There was none. Sharp and General Manager Char Hager began their presentation.

In combined President/Manager reports, Sharp and Hager stated:

Energizing Our Cooperative Future is the theme of the 2019 Annual Meeting as we look at how your cooperative is always looking to the future when we take action on policies, budgets, and long-range forecasts.

Northern Electric was the co-op that turned

on the lights in rural northeast South Dakota more than 70 years ago and we are preparing to be the co-op that will keep the lights on for decades to come as we continue to grow together.

During the past year, your cooperative adopted a new four-year work plan as we focus on the future.

Your co-op board has worked with staff members to put this \$17 million dollar long-range plan together as we identify important projects that need to be completed to ensure that we continue to have a safe and reliable electrical system which will meet the growing demands of the region.

This plan will guide co-op crews as they work to build and upgrade nearly 300 miles of overhead and underground line through the year 2022.

East River Electric Power Cooperative is your co-op's wholesale power supplier. East River operates the large transmission lines and substations that deliver electricity to the Northern Electric service territory. East River has also adopted an aggressive transmission system replacement plan within the past year to improve reliability and plan for growth across the system.

A video report from East River General Manager Tom Boyko was shown which talked about the important infrastructure improvements they will be making to ensure a consistent and reliable power supply is always available.

The Northern Electric Operations Department has undergone several changes within the past year. In April, Mike Kelly retired, and line foreman Jerry Weber was hired as the new Operations Manager.

Jerry brings decades of experience to the position. Jerry has worked for Northern Electric for 36 years and has made a seamless transition into his new role leading the operations department, organizing construction projects, and directing crews in the field.

Northern Electric Cooperative also implemented a new outage management system during the past year. This system includes automated vehicle location technology that allows dispatch to deploy crews to outages in a safe, quick, and efficient manner.

The new system was instrumental in

restoring power during two different winter storms we experienced in October 2018 and March 2019. Both of these storms caused hundreds of outages, but co-op crews were able to restore power safely and quickly. I would like to thank all of our Northern Electric linemen and employees who worked long hours to restore power during these storms – and I would like to thank our members for their patience during these outages.

Northern Electric currently maintains nearly 2,600 miles of distribution line. Within the past year, our crews replaced 149 distribution poles, built 52 new electric services to connect new homes or businesses within the cooperative's service area, buried nearly 52 miles of new underground line, and built 18 miles of new overhead line.

Manager of Member Services Russ Ulmer and our member services representatives have been busy maintaining and monitoring the nearly 10,000 meters and submeters that are installed across the co-op's system.

Through automated meter technology member services representatives can monitor meters remotely and make sure they are properly recording electric use.

Member services representatives are also working to make sure the co-op is containing its wholesale power costs with the load management system. The current system consists of more than 5,000 load-control receivers which cycle electric loads like grain bin fans, water heaters, and air conditioners on and off during times of peak demand on the system.

The member services team has checked, replaced, or repaired more than 500 load-control receivers within the past year to ensure the load management system continues to operate properly to reduce wholesale power costs and peak demand.

Member services also administers the co-op's rebate programs and investigates and plans electrical services for new construction, new developments, and system improvements.

The Northern Electric Cooperative accounting and billing department played a critical role in the new four-year work plan which was adopted by the co-op during the past year.

The accounting team developed and secured the financing for the plan through the Rural Utilities Service. The accounting team will continue to track the progress of the work plan and ensure the co-op has the appropriate resources and financing available over the next four years to complete these projects.

The accounting and billing team is also responsible for the co-op's billing and payment management systems, developing the co-op's annual budgets, managing capital credit accounts, and ensuring that your cooperative is meeting Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, and Rural Utilities Service guidelines throughout the year.

Northern Electric Cooperative currently has seven different options members can choose from to pay their monthly bill. Members can pay online or on their smartphone with SmartHub and the SmartHub mobile app, members can make one-time online payments through the Pay Now system. An automatic withdrawal can be set up from a checking or savings account, members can use a secure toll-free pay-by-phone system – or – pay through the mail or at one of the co-op offices in Bath or Redfield. Members can also sign up for a new prepaid billing option that was introduced last year. For more information or to enroll in one of these programs simply call or stop into one of your convenient co-op office locations in Bath or Redfield.

The Northern Electric Information Technology department is responsible for maintaining hardware and software programs, managing the cooperative's fleet of towers and network communications, and ensuring the proper cybersecurity protocols are in place to protect member data.

During the past year, the IT department implemented the new outage management system and the automated vehicle location system for crews in the field.

Cybersecurity is an ongoing priority and focus of the IT department. IT has upgraded the security of the network systems used to communicate with Northern Electric's substations and meters. IT also maintains industry standards for protecting member data from the latest threats and cyber-attacks.

IT has also engaged all cooperative employees in regular cybersecurity training throughout the year so they can be aware of the latest tactics and threats that exist.

The Northern Electric communications department focuses on informing members about the operation of their cooperative and developing connections with communities throughout our service territory.

A new co-op website was launched on November first to improve communication with members and the public. The new website is built with a responsive design so members can easily view all site content on their smartphones, tablets, or laptops.

In February, Northern Electric Cooperative partnered with East River and generation and transmission cooperative Basin Electric Power Cooperative to donate more than \$6,000 to the Conde ambulance. This rural ambulance service was at risk of closing and needed funds to assist new volunteers with training and equipment. The donation helped keep this vital service operating in Conde and demonstrated our seventh cooperative principle of commitment to community.

The communications department also reached out to our future co-op members through the 'Co-ops in the Classroom' program this past year. The 'Co-ops in the Classroom' program teaches elementary school students about electricity, efficiency, and safety through hands-on experiments and demonstrations.

During the 2018-2019 school year the 'Co-ops in the Classroom' program visited ten schools within Northern Electric's territory and reached hundreds of students.

The communications department also organizes the co-op's various youth programs including the Youth Tour trip to Washington, D.C.

This year, Aryan Jamal, who is a freshman at South Dakota State University was selected to represent Northern Electric Cooperative during the week-long Youth Tour trip to Washington D.C.

Ben Dunsmoor read a letter received from Aryan about his once-in-a-lifetime learning experiences on the Youth Tour.

All the accomplishments and projects we have highlighted during this meeting would not be possible without the hard work of a committed group of co-op employees and a dedicated Board of Directors. We would like to thank a few of them tonight for their longevity and service to the co-op.

At this time, we would like to recognize Treasurer Wayne Holt for his nine years of service on the Northern Electric Cooperative Board of Directors by presenting him with a plaque for his dedication to the co-op.

After serving on the Northern Electric Board of Directors for the past nine years Wayne has reached his term limit and will officially finish his duties as a director tonight. I would like to invite Wayne up onto the stage to receive his plaque.

We would also like to recognize former Vice President Randy Kienow for his eight years of service on the Northern Electric Cooperative Board of Directors. Randy recently moved to a new residence outside the co-op's service territory and is unable to complete the last year of his term. We would also like to invite Randy to the stage to receive his plaque and be recognized for his eight years of service.

We would also like to welcome one new employee to the cooperative. Kyle Miller was hired by Northern Electric Cooperative in February as a full-time apprentice lineman. Please, join us in welcoming Kyle.

I would also like to thank all our employees for their hard work and dedication over the past year. I would ask them to, please stand up to be recognized.

Sharp called for any New Business. Hearing none, called to take action on the election of directors. Attorney Harvey Oliver explained the voting rules and procedures of the election of directors and explained that there was no election. The District 2, 5 and 9 candidates ran unopposed and were declared elected by general consent.

Sharp called for any other business to come before the meeting, there being none, she declared the meeting adjourned at 7:09 p.m. and thanked all for attending.

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

South Dakota's Touchstone Energy® Cooperatives will not have a booth this year at the state fair due to COVID-19 safety concerns.

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**August 26-30**

Corn Palace Festival, Mitchell, SD, [www.cornpalace.com](http://www.cornpalace.com)  
605-995-8430

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**August 27**

PRCA Xtreme Broncs Finals 7-9:30 p.m., Central States Fair, Rapid City, SD  
[www.centralstatesfair.com](http://www.centralstatesfair.com)

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**August 27-30 CANCELED**

Annual Steam Threshing Jamboree featuring John Deere, Madison, SD  
605-256-3644

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**August 28-29**

Pioneer Museum Excess Sale 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Pioneer Museum, Hot Springs, SD  
605-745-4616

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**August 29-30**

Fall River Hot Air Balloon Festival, Municipal Airport, Hwy 79, Hot Springs, SD  
605-745-4140

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**September 3-5**

South Dakota State Fair: Perfect Vision of Fun, 1060 3rd St. SW, Huron, SD  
800-529-0900  
[www.sdstatefair.com](http://www.sdstatefair.com)

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**September 6**

Studebaker and Packard Car and Truck Show, 10 a.m. to 3 p.m., Custer, SD  
605-718-7431



**August 29-30**

Fall River Hot Air Balloon Festival

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**September 7**

Hidewood Valley Steam Threshing Show, 1 p.m., 47326 183rd Ave., Clear Lake, SD, 605-881-8405

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**September 12**

Central Valley Struttin' Gobblers NWTF Banquet, Dakota Plains Event Center Hartford, SD, 5:30 p.m.  
605-941-4297

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**September 12-13**

Fall Harvest Festival, Delmont, SD, 605-928-3792,  
[www.twinriversoldiron.org](http://www.twinriversoldiron.org)

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**September 13**

20th Annual Antique Tractor and Car Parade, 1 p.m., Farmer, SD, 605-239-4498

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**September 19**

Health Connect's Human Race, Elmwood Park, Sioux Falls, SD, 8 a.m. 888-761-5437

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**September 19**

Health Connect Fair, Sanford Pentagon, Sioux Falls, SD, 11 a.m. to 5 p.m., free lunch, door prizes and flu shots  
888-761-5437

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**September 25-27**

Coal Springs Threshing Bee Featuring Massey Harris Tractors, Meadow, SD,  
605-788-2229

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**September 26 CANCELED**

10th Annual ROCS Fall Festival, 9 a.m. to 2 p.m., Springfield, SD, 605-464-7379

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**September 26**

Wheelin' to Wall, Wall Community Center, Wall, SD

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**October 3 CANCELED**

Hobo Marlin's Pumpkin Train 11 a.m., Madison, SD  
605-256-3644

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**October 7-8 CANCELED**

Energize! Explore Innovative Rural Communities Conference, Milbank, SD,  
<https://extension.sdstate.edu>

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**October 31-November 1**

Dakota Territory Gun Collectors Assn. Sioux Falls Classic Gun Show, 3200 W Maple St. Sioux Falls, SD, 605-630-2199

**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.**