

# Cooperative Connections

**AgritourismSD seeks to attract visitors from far and near**

**Education and Entertainment on the Farm**

Pages 8-9

**College Students Deal with Change**

Pages 12-13



# Take Time To Avoid Electrical Hazards On The Job

## Do It Safely



**Ben Dunsmoor**

bdunsmoor@northernelectric.coop

**Taking extra time to prepare will ensure planting season, or the next outdoor project, will be much safer.**

The days are longer, the temperatures are warmer, and the grass is getting greener. The change in seasons also means it is time to usher in some of the other popular seasons in South Dakota; planting season, construction season, and do-it-yourself season.

Maybe you only participate in one of those seasons every spring and summer, or maybe you are involved in all three seasons. But if you find yourself in the field, on the job, or out in your lawn it is important that you tackle your project safely.

May is National Electrical Safety Month and according to the Electrical Safety Foundation International (ESFI) and the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission there are nearly 400 electrocutions in the United States every year. ESFI reports that 166 deaths occurred due to electrical injuries in 2019. That was the highest number of fatalities since 2011. So, what can you do to avoid electrical accidents when you are planting, digging, or working outside? Here are a few easy tips to stay safe.

### Prepare

Preparation is key for any outdoor work during the spring or summer. It is always important to survey your work area for any electrical hazards. Look up to see if there are any overhead power lines near the area you will be driving your planter, tractor, or excavator. Look around to see if there are any padmount transformers (green boxes) or electrical infrastructure that may not be visible when you are using heavy machinery. It is also important to call 811 at least two business days before any digging project to make sure all underground utilities are located before the job begins. Taking extra time to prepare will ensure planting season, or the next outdoor project, will be much safer.

### Safety During The Job

Electricity can jump to equipment or ladders that are too close to overhead power lines. It is a good idea to keep any heavy machinery, tractors, sprayers, planters, or ladders at least 10 feet away from any overhead power lines while you are working. It is also important to only dig by hand with a shovel when you are within 18 inches on either side of a marked underground utility. Digging by hand will ensure you do not accidentally dig too deep too quickly and damage an underground line. If you have a project, such as tree trimming, that needs to be done within 10 feet of a power line it is best to call a professional.

### Know What To Do In An Emergency

If you do accidentally contact a power line with construction equipment or farm machinery it is critical you know how to react. The best advice is to stay inside the equipment and call 911. It is also important for bystanders to stay away from the equipment until the line is deenergized. If you or a bystander touches the equipment and the ground at the same time you could become the path to ground for high-voltage electricity. If you have to exit your equipment due to a fire you should jump as far away from the equipment with both feet together, so you do not touch the ground and the equipment at the same time. More tips can be found at [www.poweringyoursafety.com](http://www.poweringyoursafety.com).

So, whether you are planting, working on a construction site, or simply embarking on a backyard do-it-yourself project, it is crucial to take some extra time to do it safely and avoid any electrical accidents, deaths, or injuries.

Stay safe this spring and summer!



(USPS 396-040)

**Board President:** Donna Sharp

**Board of Directors**

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

**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.

Postmaster: Please send address changes to Northern Electric Cooperative Connections, PO Box 457, Bath, SD 57427; telephone (605) 225-0310; fax (605) 225-1684

This institution is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

[www.northernelectric.coop](http://www.northernelectric.coop)

[facebook.com/NorthernElectricCooperative](https://facebook.com/NorthernElectricCooperative)



Northern Electric Cooperative's regular board meeting was held March 18, 2021, at the headquarters in Bath with all directors present. As the first order of business, the board approved the February 25, 2021, minutes and February expenditures. The board then reviewed and accepted monthly reports by management.

Directors viewed the East River Electric Power Cooperative video report. East River Director Mark Sumption reported on actions taken by the East River Board at its March 4, 2021, meeting. General Manager Char Hager reported on the East River MAC meeting held March 2, 2021. The next South Dakota Rural Electric Association board meeting will be March 25-26, 2021. Directors Donna Sharp, Todd Hettich, Nolan Wipf, General Manager Char Hager, Communications Director Ben Dunsmoor and Manager of Information Technology Derek Gorecki reported on the 2021 NRECA PowerXchange/TechAdvantage Experience events held March 2-4, 2021, virtually. Directors Todd Hettich and Nolan Wipf reported on the 2021 NISC Annual Meeting, March 11, virtually. Directors Jeff Vander Wal and Kirk Schaunaman reported on the 2021 NRECA Credentialed Cooperative Director (CCD) certificate courses which they attended March 9-10, virtually.

**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 activities.
- Legal and Legislative Report
- Announced 2021 Scholarship winners: Cullen McNeil chosen for the \$1,000 Basin/

**MARCH BOARD REPORT**

Northern Electric Scholarship and Tessa Erdmann chosen for the \$500 Northern Electric Cooperative Scholarship.

- Reminded the board of the CFC Forum, June 14-16, 2021, in San Antonio, TX.
- Reminded the board of the 2021 NRECA Legislative Conference, April 19-23, online.
- Calendar review of upcoming meetings and events.

**Board Report**

The board considered and/or acted upon the following:

1. Approved the date and time of the next regular board meeting for 8:30 A.M. on Thursday, April 22, 2021.
2. Approved payment of legal fees for Harvey Oliver in the amount of \$1,312.61.
3. Approved Work Order Inventories #21-02 for \$226,456.44 and #21-02MC, \$59,665.59 to be submitted to Rural Utilities Service (RUS) for reimbursement from loan funds for electric plant construction already completed.
4. Approved 13 estate requests for out of order capital credit retirements totaling \$21,038.83.
5. Authorized Director attendance to the 2021 NRECA Summer School for Directors, June 4-8, in Myrtle Beach, SC and July 9-13, in Sante Fe, NM.
6. Held Executive Session.

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

Financial Report		February 2021	February 2020
kWh Sales		32,129,650 kWh	29,699,315 kWh
Electric Revenues		\$2,602,443	\$2,534,016
Total Cost of Service		\$2,548,998	\$2,465,370
Operating Margins		\$53,445	\$68,646
Year To Date Margins		\$190,718	\$195,436
Residential Average Monthly Usage and Bill			
February 2021	3,382 kWh	\$280.89	.0831 per kWh
February 2020	3,174 kWh	\$272.14	.0857 per kWh
Wholesale power cost, taxes, interest, and depreciation accounted for 85.5% of NEC's total cost of service.			

## Remodeling? Keep Efficiency in Mind

Sunny days are prime time for tackling remodeling projects, upgrades and repairs around your home. If you're planning a project, make a point of adding energy efficiency features along the way. Here are a few ideas:

- Add insulation around recessed lights so heated or conditioned air doesn't leak out of them and the weather can't sneak in.
- Install programmable thermostats when you add rooms to the house. While you're at it, have the thermostats in the rest of your home upgraded to programmable models.
- Your contractor will install more insulation in any new spaces you're adding than your builder did during the original construction of your home. Consider adding insulation to already-insulated areas, like the crawlspace and attic, to meet new energy efficiency standards.
- A new kitchen means shiny new appliances. Select those rated as energy efficient by ENERGY STAR®, which use less energy than unrated models.
- If your older home still has single-pane windows, consider an upgrade. Double-pane windows are more energy efficient because they better shield your home from the outdoors - and keep your conditioned air indoors.
- Replace old lightbulbs in your most-used rooms with LEDs. They last 10 years or longer and save considerable energy when compared to incandescent bulbs.
- Work with a contractor who understands how passive solar design can affect your energy bills. Rooftop solar panels, sunrooms and skylights are popular additions.
- Add or upgrade ventilation fans in bathrooms. This can improve air quality throughout the home - not just in the bathrooms - by removing moisture from the air.
- Consider having a home energy audit conducted. Audits can help you evaluate your home for energy wasters, suggest ways to remedy inefficiencies and recommend additions that will make your house more comfortable and cheaper to heat and cool.



## Generate Safely.

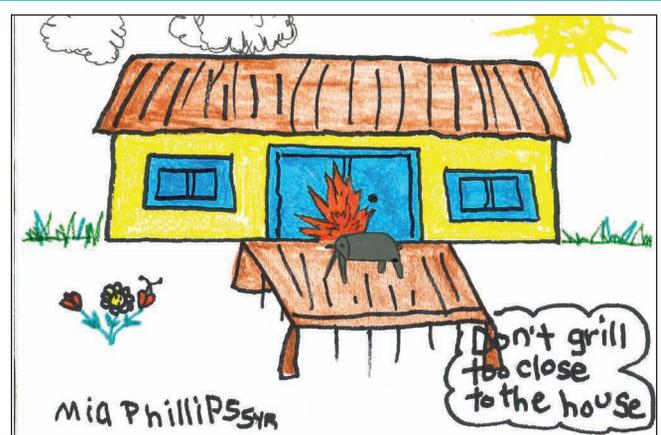
Never use a portable generator indoors.

Do not plug generators into standard electrical outlets.

Use heavy-duty extension cords to connect appliances into the generator.

Start the generator before connecting appliances.

## KIDS CORNER SAFETY POSTER



### Don't Grill Too Close to the House

Mia Phillips, 5 years old

Mia is the granddaughter of Jim and Hans Moore of Rapid City. They are members of Black Hills Electric.

Kids, send your drawing with an electrical safety tip to your local electric cooperative (address found on Page 3). If your poster is published, you'll receive a prize. All entries must include your name, age, mailing address and the names of your parents. Colored drawings are encouraged.



# A Craving for Casseroles

## Chicken and Rice

- 1 bag Success Brown Rice
- 1/2 cup ricotta cheese
- 1/4 cup grated Parmesan cheese
- 1 tbsp. chopped Italian parsley
- 1 tbsp. olive oil
- 1/3 cup chopped onions
- 2 garlic cloves, minced
- 1/2 package (4 ounces) mushrooms, sliced
- 1/4 cup white wine
- 4 cups baby spinach leaves
- 2 cups shredded, cooked chicken breast
- 1/2 tsp. salt
- 1/2 tsp. black pepper

Prepare rice according to package directions. In small bowl, combine ricotta, Parmesan and parsley; reserve. In large skillet over medium heat, heat oil. Add onions and garlic; saute 2 minutes. Add mushrooms and wine to skillet. Continue cooking 3 minutes, stirring occasionally. Add spinach and chicken. Stir until spinach is wilted and chicken is heated through, about 2 minutes. Stir in rice, salt and pepper. Serve casserole topped with dollops of reserved cheese mixture.

SuccessRice.com

## Meat Lovers Pizza Casserole

- 1 lb. ground beef
- 1 medium onion, chopped
- 1 can (15 oz) pizza sauce
- 8 oz. elbow macaroni, cooked and drained
- 2 c. (8 oz) shredded mozzarella cheese
- 1 pkg (3 1/2 oz) sliced pepperoni, quartered
- 1/2 tsp. salt

In a large skillet, cook ground beef and onion over medium heat until meat is no longer pink; drain. Stir in remaining ingredients. Transfer to a greased 2-quart baking dish. Bake uncovered at 350 degrees for 40-45 minutes or until heated through. Yields 6 servings.

Gail Lee, Brookings

## Chicken Doritos Casserole

- 2 cups shredded cooked chicken
- 1 cup shredded cheese
- 1 can cream of chicken soup
- 1/2 cup milk
- 1/2 cup sour cream
- 1 can Ro-tel tomatoes, drained (canned tomatoes with jalapenos-mild)
- 1/2 packet taco seasoning (or more, to taste)
- 1 bag of regular nacho cheese Doritos

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. In a mixing bowl, combine all ingredients except Doritos. In a greased 2 quart baking dish, put a layer of crushed Doritos (about 2 cups), then a layer of the chicken mixture. Top with more shredded cheese, cover, and bake 30-35 minutes until bubbling hot. Enjoy!

Alana Neville, Milesville, SD

## Garden Cafe Casserole

- 1 bag hash browns
- 1 onion
- 1 green pepper
- 1 box mushrooms
- 1 tomato
- 1/2 lb. deli turkey (cut in pieces)
- 1 lb. bacon (fried and cut in pieces)
- 2-3 cups cheese (Monterey Jack, Colby, Cheddar)

Place thawed hash browns in the bottom of a 9 x 13 pan. Saute onion, green pepper, and mushrooms. Place the meat and tomato on top of the potatoes. Then onion, green pepper and mushrooms. Top with cheese. Bake at 350 degrees for one hour.

Joanna Gum, Clear Lake, SD

Please send your favorite dairy 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 2021. All entries must include your name, mailing address, telephone number and cooperative name.

# Three Ways to Save Energy Outdoors



**Pat Keegan**

Collaborative Efficiency

**Whatever you choose, make sure it is rated for the size of the space you are cooling.**

Pat Keegan and Brad Thiessen of Collaborative Efficiency write on energy efficiency topics for the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association, the national trade association representing more than 900 local electric cooperatives. From growing suburbs to remote farming communities, electric co-ops serve as engines of economic development for 42 million Americans across 56 percent of the nation's landscape. For additional energy tips and information on Collaborative Efficiency visit: [www.collaborativeefficiency.com/energytips](http://www.collaborativeefficiency.com/energytips).

**Dear Pat and Brad: During summertime, the deck becomes our kitchen, and my wife and I spend most of our free time in the backyard. We've invested a lot of time and effort making the interior of our home more energy efficient, but we're wondering if there are ways we can save energy outdoors as well. – Josh**

Dear Josh: The most common way to save energy during summer months is lowering your cooling costs indoors. Since you and your wife are spending a lot of time outdoors, you can certainly save energy and money by reducing your air conditioning use inside. Setting the thermostat just a few degrees higher can make quite a difference. But to answer your main question, yes - there are ways to save energy outdoors. Here are three:

## Pumps and Maintenance

Many of us have one or more pumps that service our yard or reside on our property. Pumps can supply water for a swimming pool, your lawn and garden, or your septic system or well. It's easy to let maintenance slip, which cuts the pump's efficiency and shortens its life.

Maintaining pumps involves cleaning the filters or checking oil and belts. If you have multiple pumps and need to hire a professional for assistance, try to do all the maintenance at once to reduce the overall cost. You may also want to consider replacing older pumps with energy efficient ENERGY STAR®-rated ones before they break down. While you're at it, check for leaks in the water lines, which make your pumps work harder and longer.

## Outdoor Lighting

If you have security lighting, there's a good chance you can save a little energy. Some security lights can be 500 to 1000 watts. That's the equivalent of 40 to 80 indoor LED bulbs - quite a lot of energy! Adding timers, motion sensors and light sensors can reduce your bulb energy use. Plus, when you use your lights less often, your neighbors may appreciate a little less light pollution!

Switching to LEDs is another great strategy. Solar lights are also a good way to light walkways, a water feature or your deck - without having to buy any electricity at all.

## Grilling

Using your oven can raise your kitchen's temperature up to 10 degrees, increasing the need for running your air conditioner, so grilling outdoors is a great way to save energy. If you like to barbecue or grill most of your meals, you may want to consider the fuel you use. If natural gas is available, it's usually much less expensive than propane. Natural gas is also convenient because you don't have to refill any tanks like you would with propane. On the downside, if you don't already have gas lines running to your patio or deck, the cost of installing them can be prohibitive.

Other fuel types like charcoal briquettes or wood take more preparation and can be fussy to work with, and charcoal grills emit three times as much carbon as gas grills.

Whichever fuel type you choose for your grill, you can save energy by barbecuing (keeping the lid closed during cooking) rather than grilling (cooking with the lid off at higher heat).

Hopefully these ideas will help you enjoy your outdoor living space this summer - and help you save energy!



Grilling outdoors is an excellent way to save energy.

# Cole Sonne's YouTube Channel Makes Farm Life Look Like a Visit to Disneyland

**Billy Gibson**

billy.gibson@sdrea.coop

Every day on the farm is a new adventure for Cole Sonne. While many 20-somethings contemplate leaving their family homesteads in search of a more urbane and sophisticated lifestyle, Sonne has no intention of giving up the farming life.

His enthusiasm for agriculture is in his blood and in his soul. But it's also all over the internet.

There is perhaps no more effective web-based advocate for South Dakota agriculture than Sonne, as evidenced by his audience of more than 145,000 YouTube subscribers. Sonne's 250 video posts have received over 26 million views since he created his YouTube channel two years ago.

After earning a degree in agronomy from South Dakota State University, Sonne returned to the family farm near Mount



Cole and his father Brian exchange some friendly sniping on the channel.

Vernon and it wasn't long before he had a notion to let the world see how fun and adventurous farming can be.

He saw that some ag-based channels created by young farmers such as Minnesota Millennial Farmer and Farm Life SD were growing in popularity, so he figured he'd take a shot at posting videos of all the wild and sometimes wacky situations that can emerge during a typical day.

"It's really informational and entertaining at the same time," said Sonne, a fourth



Fourth generation farmer Cole Sonne has amassed more than 145,000 YouTube subscribers.

generation farmer. "I think it's important to teach people who have never done this what farm life is really like.

The genesis of the channel came after he bought a drone and started taking aerial shots of raking hay and feeding cattle, but he didn't know what to do with the footage. He started posting his videos and then thought about capturing some of

the dialogue that takes place between him and his father, Brian, and other family members. The animals, machinery, chores and weather conditions never fail to create intriguing scenarios that keep fans tuned in.

Sonne was surprised when the viewer count started to skyrocket.

"It just took off right away," he said. "I call it ag advocacy. We just show people what we do from day to day and try to make it as fun as possible.

Much of the witty repartee is exchanged between Sonne and his often exasperated father. As Sonne had his camera rolling and capturing a farm task that wasn't going well recently, Brian grumbled, "To me this is embarrassing. To you it's good footage."

The conversation in that episode ran the gamut from Halle Berry to woodpeckers to classic Saturday Night Live skits as the

duo went from gathering hay to scraping manure. Sonne says the near constant laughing, joking and friendly sniping keep things light-hearted as they take care of their business.

Asked which of his videos has received the greatest amount of attention, Sonne is quick with his response.

"A video we did last April got more than one million hits," he said. "There was an approach to a field that was holding back water and we had to dig it out and release the water and put in a culvert. When we pulled the last grab of dirt that was holding a year's worth of water, the water just came gushing through. People seemed to really like seeing that large volume of water. A lot of what's going to get the attention is the thumbnail picture. If you can get the perfect thumbnail, people will click on it."

Apparently, the video titles also help to attract eyeballs. Some recent titles include: "Cole got splattered with poo," "Watch out - angry calf hits Brian and Jeff," "We saved him - moments from the end."

As for the time and dedication it takes to keep content fresh for thousands of eager viewers, Sonne said he considers it just another item on a lengthy list of tasks that every farmer has.

"It usually takes a couple of hours to get the videos done," he said. "I'll farm all day, come home and start editing and work til late at night. That's what most farmers do anyway. You have to balance things out."



The AgritourismSD program blends the state's top two economic drivers: agriculture and tourism. Photos provided by SD Tourism.

# AGRITOURISM

## New Program Blends South Dakota's Top Two Economic Drivers

Billy Gibson

billy.gibson@sdrea.coop

Amy Kruse already had a baby before she actually became a mother. That baby was proudly named Circle View Guest Ranch. That's the bed and breakfast establishment in Interior run by Amy and her husband, Philip.

"Before I had three kids, this was my baby," Kruse said on a recent Thursday afternoon while taking a break from getting the nearly 3,000-acre ranch spiffed up for weekend visitors and the busy travel season. "I got out of college and we got married and we came here 18 years ago. It's a lot of work to operate the ranch and make things run to give our guests a memorable experience, but it's worth it to see them enjoy themselves and have a great time in South Dakota."

While Kruse has long been engaged in her own form of what's called agritourism, she's an enthusiastic supporter of a new initiative designed to promote the accelerated growth of more agritourism enterprises across the state.

In 2017, the South Dakota Agritourism Work Group was formed to create an intensive program aimed at providing education, training and various support services to agribusiness owners interested in expanding their operations to include recreational, entertainment, educational, hospitality, cultural, on-farm sales and other activities for the general public. As tourism and agriculture are the two most significant business sectors in the state, organizers felt it only made sense to combine the two.

Spearheaded by South Dakota State University Extension and the state Office of Tourism, other local, state and federal agencies and entities joined in the effort. A partial list of participating organizations includes the Bed and Breakfast Innkeepers of South

Dakota, Experience Sioux Falls, Southeast Technical Institute, the South Dakota Specialty Producers Association, the South Dakota Value Added Ag Development Center and others.

According to Program Coordinator Stacy Hadrack of SDSU, AgritourismSD kicks off this month and consists of eight two-day, in-person workshops taking place over the course of 24 months where instructors provide the basic skills and tools that have been demonstrated to help increase the chances of success. The curriculum includes field visits to venues that already have a sustained track record of running thriving agritourism businesses.

The Circle View Guest Ranch, a member of West River Electric Association, is one of those venues. During the program's second year, the facility is slated to serve as a case study on how to launch and grow an agritourism operation and participants can have direct personal conversations with operators who will offer solid advice on every aspect of their business. Kruse said she looks forward to sharing some of the approaches and strategies that she and Philip have used to keep visitors coming to the ranch. The program, which kicks off this month, is designed to educate and train those associated with the ag industry on how to start, manage and operate an agritourism enterprise.

"This is such an excellent time to do something like this because things are opening up and people are ready to travel and escape the cities, get off the interstate and explore the back roads and see the tremendous beauty of our state," Kruse said. "They're craving an authentic experience after being shut down for so long."

Kruse added that she is eager to coach and encourage the group, but she also plans to shoot straight. That means giving the partici-



pants a healthy dose of unvarnished reality so they'll have a clear understanding of the commitment required.

"I think it's a wonderful program for our state. We're going to show them how we make things work with the overnight facilities and with the animals and their interactions with our guests," she said. "The business pretty much runs our lives for seven to eight months out of the year, and if you do it right it's all-consuming. But it's also extremely rewarding to see families have a terrific time bonding with each other, bonding with the natural landscape and the animals. It can be extremely rewarding for our guests and for our family as we're always making new friends. But you have to be committed."

Amy and her husband operate 12 guest rooms and three cabins with an average of 30 guests at any given time from April through September. She explained the cattle ranch and the bed-and-breakfast are separate businesses all set on 2,800 acres of land that includes prairie terrain in addition to Badlands formations, a river valley, rock beds, rolling hills, grazing pastures and tree groves.

For more effective statewide coordination, the AgritourismSD program organizers have developed a hub system, selecting the communities of Wall, Faulkton and Timber Lake to serve as regional organization centers. Participating business owners work through these hubs and meet six times over two years to share ideas and

discuss strategies for attracting visitors to their communities.

Robin Bickel is the hub coach for the Timber Lake area. A member of Moreau-Grand Electric Cooperative, Bickel runs a Red Angus cattle ranch in Firesteel that has been in the family for four generations. She said her interest in getting involved was to pursue potential economic growth not only for her ranch but for the entire area as well. She also sees agritourism as an incentive to both keep and attract young families to rural communities.

"If working ranches can find ways to expand and diversify their businesses, it may present opportunities for those young people who have left to come back to the family farm and be able to generate enough revenue to sustain multiple families on one place," she said.

Aside from the potential for added revenue, Bickel said she is eager to share with the rest of the world the wonders of rural life and the rural lifestyle she experiences each day.

"I think there's an increased interest people have about where their food and fiber come from, and we need to find a way to make that connection between the producer and consumer," she said. "We have such a rich history and so many natural resources to share. It's insane how many people can't see the sky full of stars at night where they live and can't see the prairie grass waving in the wind and



rolling across a hillside. There are people interested in things we take for granted. There are people in Nebraska that have a prairie chicken dance tour where people actually pay to see the chickens. I think there are many opportunities for our state if we commit ourselves and do it right."

For more information on the program, contact Jacey Ellsworth, Industry Outreach and Development Representative, at 605-773-3301 or [Jacey.Ellsworth@TravelSouthDakota.com](mailto:Jacey.Ellsworth@TravelSouthDakota.com).

# Responding To A Need

## Electric Cooperatives Donate \$5,000 To Build Spink County EMS Center

**Ben Dunsmoor**

bdunsmoor@northernelectric.coop

Emergency medical services are the cornerstone of the community. And organizers of a project in Spink County hope a new emergency medical services (EMS) center will build a solid foundation for the future of emergency response in the county.

“It is necessary,” Mike Sanger, the director of Spink County Ambulance said. “When businesses look to move to Redfield, they ask about the school, the hospital, and



Pictured Left to Right: Eric Schueth, Sheri Zens, and Amanda Schultz with the Spink County Ambulance, Northern Electric Board Member Jeff Vander Wal, Northern Electric CEO/General Manager Char Hager, Spink County Ambulance Director Mike Sanger and Dawn Oakley with Spink County Ambulance.

ambulance and fire.”

Members of the Spink County Ambulance Service and the Redfield Community Memorial Hospital and Clinic Foundation are working to build a new EMS center in

Redfield. A portion of the new building will house on-call EMTs because half of the county’s emergency responders live outside of Redfield and two of them live in Aberdeen. They currently stay in an old home that was purchased near the hospital, but the new EMS center would provide dedicated living quarters.

The new EMS center will also allow the EMTs to stay in the same building where the ambulances are parked. The county’s three ambulances will be housed in the EMS center. Right now, Spink County’s three ambulances are parked in two different locations and emergency equipment is kept in four different storage areas throughout Redfield. The proposed EMS Center would allow the ambulance service to operate more efficiently and serve all its needs with one building.

Organizers are also planning for a community room in the new building to host CPR trainings and community blood drives.



The Spink County Ambulance service responds to more than 500 calls a year in an 1,800 square mile area which covers Spink County and portions of Hand, Beadle, Faulk and Brown counties.



A drawing of the proposed Spink County EMS Center showcases enough garage stalls to store the county's three ambulances in one location.

Spink County Ambulance Director Mike Sanger believes the project will help attract new EMTs in the future.

“We need to get younger people in here and it is hard to recruit if you don’t have good facilities or good equipment,” Sanger said.

**“It is necessary. When businesses look to move to Redfield, they ask about the school, the hospital, and ambulance and fire.”**

Organizers of the project have been working to raise \$580,000 for the building for the past three years. Northern Electric Cooperative teamed up with East River Electric Power Cooperative and Basin Electric Power Cooperative to donate checks totaling \$5,000 on March 12.

“We know how crucial emergency services are to our rural communities,” Northern Electric Cooperative CEO/General

Manager Char Hager said. “This project will improve emergency response and put the Spink County Ambulance Service in a good position to grow and retain EMTs into the future.”

Spink County Ambulance currently averages 500 calls a year and provides emergency response to an 1,800 square mile area in Spink County and portions of Beadle, Faulk, Brown, and Hand counties.

About \$150,000 has been raised for the EMS center so far.

“We’re excited about it and keep plugging away looking at every option, financing and fundraising,” Sanger said about the fundraising efforts.

Organizers of the project hope to break ground for the building this fall.



**YOUR VOICE. YOUR POWER. YOUR CO-OP.**

The best part about being a member of your local Touchstone Energy® Cooperative is just that ... it's YOUR cooperative. That means:

- One member = One vote
- You have a say
- Your co-op answers to you
- Invested in community
- Capital credits (get money back!)

Learn more about the power of membership at [YourCoopPower.com](http://YourCoopPower.com)



# Rural POWER

## Leadership Program Aimed at Boosting Co-op Leadership

Intentional listening is a skill Billie Sutton has honed over the course of his adult life. And as he leaned into recent conversations with electric cooperative leaders across the state, the former legislator from Burke started noticing a trend.

He picked up on a common refrain: cooperatives are having a hard time finding qualified candidates to run for positions on their governing boards.

As not-for-profit organizations, electric cooperatives don't have pockets deep enough to dangle large compensation packages in front of potential board candidates. This reality tends to narrow the field of interested parties.

After hearing this a few too many times, Sutton decided to take action and do something about it. He began working to develop a leadership program through his non-profit Billie Sutton Leadership Institute to encourage and inspire rural co-op members to consider campaigning for a board position.

The new year-long leadership development program is called "Rural POWER: Powering Opportunities While Energizing Rural." It will be held alongside the third leadership class offered by the Institute. The first program in 2019 attracted more than 100 applicants to fill 12 spots. Last year's class drew roughly 70 applicants but was hampered by the impact of the pandemic.

Sutton surmised that the high interest level in the Institute's first two programs stems from a desire to return to a more community-focused style of leadership and steer away from a brand of politics that appears to be growing more openly hostile.

His supposition comes from the comments he heard not only during his six years serving in the state senate but also from voters during his gubernatorial campaign three years ago in which he received more than 167,000 votes while losing the race to Gov. Kristi Noem.



Billie Sutton and his wife, Kelsea (foreground) are shown with the Institute's inaugural class of rural leaders.

"I think people were excited about a new style of leadership I brought to the table that's focused on service, finding common ground, overcoming adversity and getting things done on behalf of the people. I think people are tired of politics as usual," he said.

For the Institute's inaugural class, applicants ranged in age from 18 to 60 and represented a plethora of professional backgrounds: health care, teaching, education administration, local elected officials, ranchers and more. Sutton said he hopes the new program will also attract interest from a diverse set of applicants.

Rural POWER will kick off this summer and is sponsored by the South Dakota Farmers Union. Participants will engage in educational leadership training opportunities emphasizing community building and

**Participants will engage in educational leadership training opportunities emphasizing community building and serving neighbors, while learning from cooperative leaders.**

serving neighbors, while learning from cooperative leaders who have demonstrated their commitment to rural development. They will gain the knowledge and enthusiasm to re-imagine and re-energize rural South Dakota, Sutton said.



Rural POWER aims to provide leadership training that will help re-invent and re-energize rural South Dakota.

The program has an advocate in Melissa Maher, general manager at Moreau-Grand Electric based in Timber Lake. Maher notes that while most of the state's electric co-ops qualify as "rural," that doesn't mean they are merely small-time mom-and-pop operations. For instance, Moreau-Grand Electric is a member-owned business with more than \$47 million in assets.

Maher said it's important that electric co-ops be run by managers and board members dedicated to the task at hand. Board directors are democratically elected by the members in their respective districts and charged with the responsibility of developing the policies that guide the future of the co-op. They also have certain legal, fiduciary and industry-related issues they must deal with during the course of carrying out their duties.

"These are positions of responsibility and leadership, and you need qualified people because they're making big decisions," Maher said, adding that serving on a co-op board requires considerable time and attention. "If someone is interested in being nominated, you have to be up front and honest about that fact. That's one of the first things people ask, and the honest answer is that it's a commitment."

Those who succeed in meeting their board responsibilities recognize and appreciate the fact they're contributing to the advancement of their entire service area by providing an essential commodity. Maher said it also takes a certain type of personality and temperament to be a successful board member.

"They have to learn protocol and there can be situations like dealing with personnel issues where they have to be discreet. They have to be the type of person who can agree to disagree and walk away and not let it get to them," Maher said. "They have to study up on the issues. We send out information a week ahead of time so that the board members can brush up on things and we can have a productive conversation. They need to care enough to be engaged and prepared."

Suzie Jones Pranger serves as executive director of the Institute. Today, Jones Pranger is an attorney living in rural Hartford, but she grew up on her family's farm in Burke and remembers her grandfather's involvement in her local co-op, Rosebud Electric.

"Even as a kid, I knew our power came from the local co-op, and I knew my family had a legacy of service to the co-op and our neighbors through my Grandpa's longtime position on the board," she said. "But what I never considered growing up is the need for subsequent generations to become active and continue to power our rural communities and our South Dakota way of life. Rural POWER will help build a pipeline of rural leaders ready to step up and take on leadership positions."

Kevin Mikkelsen, general manager of Rosebud Electric, is also supportive of the program and believes there is a lot of potential in the leadership program, especially when it comes to drawing some younger participants.

"I'm hoping the program sheds some light



on how cooperatives function and how they work on behalf of all the member-owners," he said. "All around the state, we really need to see some younger folks get involved and provide a new perspective and help us discover new and more effective ways to carry out our mission as co-ops, whether it's electric co-ops or ag-based co-ops."

Visit [suttonleadership.org/rural-power](http://suttonleadership.org/rural-power) to learn more about the program or to apply.

# Breanna Huber To Receive \$1,500 Scholarship



## Scholarship Awarded After Annual Washington D.C. Youth Tour Canceled

Breanna Huber of Mansfield will receive a \$1,500 scholarship from Northern Electric Cooperative after the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA) Youth Tour trip to Washington D.C. was canceled for the second year in a row. Youth Tour is an annual gathering of more than 1,800 teens representing electric cooperatives from across the country.

Huber was selected as Northern Electric’s representative for the Washington D.C. Youth Tour in March of 2020; however, the trip was canceled due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Huber’s winning essay, which was submitted last March, focused on the topic of engaging youth in their cooperative.

*“Today, cooperatives need to engage young members,”* Huber wrote in her essay. *“These members will be an asset because they can bring a fresh perspective to the cooperative. Involving young people can bring innovation and creativity to the organization.”*

Earlier this year it was announced that the 2021 Youth Tour would also be canceled because of the ongoing pandemic and restrictions in Washington D.C. The Northern Electric Cooperative staff and board decided to award Huber a \$1,500 scholarship since the Mansfield teen will be unable to make the trip.

“It is unfortunate that Breanna will not be able to experience Youth Tour or our nation’s capital,” Northern Electric Communications Director Ben Dunsmoor said. “We decided it was appropriate to still recognize her for her accomplishments and use the



money we had budgeted for the trip to award her with a scholarship.”

Huber plans on attending Lake Area Technical Institute in Watertown in the fall. She will pursue a degree in accounting.

“This scholarship will help me reach my educational goals faster,” Huber said. “I will be able to maximize my college experience through learning opportunities and internships. I believe this scholarship will allow me to pursue the education I need to achieve my goals.”

Huber said her goal is to never stop learning so she can help people with the career path she has chosen.

**“Today, cooperatives need to engage young members. These members will be an asset because they can bring a fresh perspective to the cooperative. Involving young people can bring innovation and creativity to the organization.”**

# Apply For 2021 Connect Con

## High School Students Of Northern Electric Members Can Apply For Four-Day Youth Leadership Experience

High school students can apply now for 2021 Connect Con: A Youth Leadership Experience.

Connect Con is an all-expense-paid youth leadership event in the Black Hills. Participants will stay on-campus at Black Hills State University in Spearfish from July 26-29. Students will have the opportunity to meet new friends from across South Dakota, learn about electric cooperatives, gain valuable team-building and leadership skills, and tour a power generation facility.

The teens who are selected for Connect Con will take a bus to Black Hills State University on July 26. Once they arrive on campus, students will get to listen to electrical industry experts and participate in hands-on activities designed to enhance their leadership abilities. Connect Con participants will also have the opportunity to tour the Spearfish Hydro Plant as well as Butte Electric Cooperative where they will learn about the past, present and future of South Dakota's energy industry.

There will also be plenty of time built in for recreation and socializing during 2021 Connect Con. Students will play games,



hike the scenic Spearfish Canyon and much more.

To be eligible for Connect Con, students must be entering their freshman, sophomore, or junior year in high school and their parent or guardian must be an active member of Northern Electric Cooperative. Due to limited capacity restrictions only two students from Northern Electric Cooperative will be

selected for this experience. Please, apply by filling out the online application at [www.northernelectric.coop/connectcon](http://www.northernelectric.coop/connectcon) or by filling out the form below and mailing it to: Northern Electric Cooperative ATTN: Ben Dunsmoor PO Box 457 Bath, SD 57427.

**The deadline to apply for 2021 Connect Con is May 28, 2021.**

### 2021 Connect Con Registration Form APPLICATION DEADLINE May 28, 2021

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Parent/Guardian's Names: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_ City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

School: \_\_\_\_\_ Year in School (2021-2022): \_\_\_\_\_ Gender: \_\_\_\_\_

T-Shirt Size: \_\_\_\_\_

**MAIL APPLICATION TO:**

Northern Electric Cooperative  
 ATTN: Ben Dunsmoor  
 PO Box 457  
 Bath, SD 57427

**APPLY ONLINE AT:**   
[www.northernelectric.coop/connectcon](http://www.northernelectric.coop/connectcon)

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

---

**April 22-May 2**

Beauty & the Beast, Sioux Empire Community Theatre, Sioux Falls, SD  
605-367-6000

---

**April 24**

Firemen's Spring Social, Fire Station, Groton, SD  
605-397-8422

---

**April 25**

Father/Daughter Dance, Groton High School, Groton, SD  
605-397-8422

---

**April 30-May 2, May 6-8**

Radium Girls, Pierre Players Community Theatre, Pierre, SD  
605-224-7826

---

**May 1**

Lions Club Spring Rummage Sale, City-wide, Groton, SD  
605-397-8422

---

**May 8**

Wells Fargo Cinco de Mayo Fiesta, Falls Park, Sioux Falls, SD  
605-271-0468

---

**May 8 NEW DATE**

Winefest Renaissance, Boys & Girls Club of Aberdeen Area, Aberdeen, SD  
605-225-8714

---

**May 9**

Mother's Day Tours, Historic Adams House & Days of '76 Museum, Deadwood, SD  
605-578-37241

---

**May 13**

Vermilion-Area Farmers Market - Plant Sale, High & Cherry Streets, Vermilion, SD  
605-659-3399



State Parks Open House & Free Fishing Weekend, May 21-23, 2021

---

**May 15**

Red Dirt Music Festival featuring Casey Donahew, Ian Munsick and Randy Burghardt Mountain Grand, Deadwood, SD  
605-559-0386

---

**May 21-23**

Annual Sound of Silence Tesla Rally, Downtown, Custer, SD  
605-673-2244

---

**May 21-23**

State Parks Open House & Free Fishing Weekend, All State Parks & Recreation Areas, SD  
605-773-3391

---

**May 22**

Frühlingsfest & Spring Market, Main Street, Rapid City, SD  
605-716-7979

---

**May 22**

La Framboise Island Bike Race, Steamboat Park, Pierre, SD  
605-224-7054

---

**May 31**

Groton Legion Memorial Day Services, American Legion Post #39, Groton, SD  
605-397-8422

---

**June 4-5**

State BBQ Championships, South Dakota State Fairgrounds, Huron, SD  
605-353-7354

---

**June 4-6**

Black Hills Blues Stomp & Swamp Romp, Rush No More RV Resort & Campground, Sturgis, SD  
605-347-2916

---

**June 4-6**

Lake Andes Fish Days, City-wide, Lake Andes, SD  
605-487-7694

---

**June 5-6**

18th Annual Wessington Springs Foothills Rodeo, Wessington Springs Rodeo Grounds, Wessington Springs, SD  
605-770-5720

---

**June 5-6**

Siouxland Renaissance Festival, W.H. Lyon Fairgrounds, Sioux Falls, SD  
866-489-9241

---

**June 7-9**

Vacation Bible School, St. John's Lutheran Church, Groton, SD  
605-397-2386

---

**July 11**

Lions Club Summer Fest/Car Show, City Park, Groton, SD  
605-397-8422

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.