



# COOPERATIVE CONNECTIONS



Local art teacher's mural commemorates dedicated Burke lineman.  
Photo by Jacob Boyko

## Rural Murals

Small Communities Showcase History and Culture Through Mural Art

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## Blizzard Bags

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## 73rd Annual Meeting: Hybrid Setup Leads to High Attendance

The 73rd Annual Meeting of Oahe Electric Cooperative, Inc. saw a turnout of 444 registered members on Saturday, Sept. 21. The concept of a pared-down, streamlined meeting held at three drive through locations stationed in Blunt, Onida, and Pierre, SD, and one in person site, located in Onida, was again well-attended by members.

Gone are the days of lengthy, sit-down sessions with multiple speakers and time-consuming presentations. Through member feedback and input, it became apparent that today's members have very busy lives and appreciate being able to participate on their own schedule. This year's registration packet included 2023 financials along with reports from CFO Valerie Marso, COO Matthew Eldridge, and CEO Jordan Lamb. This enabled all members to receive the same information, regardless of attendance style. Also included in the packets this year was a voting ballot for a proposed bylaw amendment. The intent of the bylaw amendment was to split Oahe Electric's service territory into two zones, while adding an additional board of directors seat so that there would be three directors from each zone.

Also included in the program, and presented at the in-person meeting, were this year's Years of Service awards, which includes: Les Job, Journeyman Lineman, 5 years; and Sam Irvine, Executive Services Specialist, 15 years.

The cooperative attorney, Jessica Hegge, also announced the two directors who won board seats by acclamation, Brandon Haag and Ross Sperry. Oahe Electric is happy to have Haag and Sperry's continued leadership on the board.

Hegge also presented the results of the bylaw amendment vote, which saw the membership vote overwhelmingly to approve the change: 338 – YES / 89 – NO.

Thank you to all who came and helped to make this year's annual meeting such a great success!

## Annual Meeting Prize Winners

**(x444) \$30 Bill Credits** – Each registered member received this credit on their Oct. bill in addition to any other prize.

**(x2) \$25 Gift Certificates** – Sponsored by Lamb Chevrolet and Implement in Onida, SD – Dell Acres Residential Corporation / Ron and Karen Arends

**\$100 Bill Credit** – Sponsored by American Solutions for Business, out of Aberdeen, SD – James and Elda Hohenthauer

**\$100 Bill Credit** – Courtesy of EIR Testing and Maintenance, Farmington, MN – Monty and Dana Gloe

**\$150 Bill Credit** – Courtesy of Border States Electric, Rapid City, SD – Richard and Jody Bartels

**\$200 Bill Credit** – Sponsored by K & H Electric, Linton, ND – Kathleen Slocum

**(x4) \$250 Bill Credits** – Courtesy of First Dakota National Bank of Pierre, SD – Curtis and Kim Forgey / Gilbert Hart / Richard R. Olson / Philip and Melissa Bowman

**(x2) \$500 Bill Credits** – Sponsored by Oahe Electric Cooperative – Riley and Tascha Lamb / Mike and Cindy Robinson

**(x2) \$750 Bill Credits** – Courtesy of Oahe Electric Cooperative – Wayne and Astrid Farries / Brittnee Siedschlaw and Brennan Gray

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**COOPERATIVE CONNECTIONS**

**OAHE ELECTRIC**

(USPS No. 019-042)

**Board of Directors:**

- James Feller – Assistant Secretary  
605.962.6207
- Brandon Haag – President  
605.215.6758
- Ryan Noyes – Treasurer  
605.280.3500
- Ross Sperry – Secretary  
605.280.7770
- Kirk Yackley – Vice President  
605.258.2412

**Employees:**

- Tyler Arbach – Journeyman Lineman
- Austin Bergeson – Journeyman Lineman
- Mark Bruning – Line Foreman
- Matt Eldridge – Chief Operations Officer
- Trudie Feldman – Custodian
- Brady Gaer – Journeyman Lineman
- Sidney Geigle – Journeyman Lineman
- Sam Irvine – Executive Services Specialist
- Megan Jaeger – Membership Director
- Les Job – Journeyman Lineman
- Jordan Lamb – Chief Executive Officer
- Dan Lettau – Journeyman Lineman
- Steve Long – Power Supply Specialist
- Valerie Marso – Chief Financial Officer
- Tory Smith – Journeyman Lineman

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**Our Mission**

Oahe Electric delivers high quality, low-cost electric service to our local member-owners. As a Touchstone Energy® Cooperative, we are committed to meeting the highest standards of customer satisfaction. We do business with accountability, integrity, innovation and commitment to community. As an electric co-op, we are part of America's most trusted network of high quality energy providers.



**Lineman's Lens**

Austin Bergeson (left), Brady Gaer (right).

Journeyman Linemen Austin Bergeson and Brady Gaer left the morning of Oct. 2 with one of our bucket trucks for Pickens, South Carolina, to assist with power restoration efforts following the devastation of Hurricane Helene.

They joined linemen from four other South Dakota cooperatives to travel the 24 hours to Blue Ridge Electric Cooperative, Inc. As of Oct. 1, Blue Ridge Electric still had approximately 35,000 meters without power, all

representing families and businesses in the area. With more than 450 broken poles, many of them three-phase poles, it is more than a restoration effort – it's a rebuild in many places.

**Please pray for the safety of not only our linemen, but all linemen responding to this natural disaster. Pray for the families and businesses without access to necessities such as power, running water and cell phone service, among other basic provisions.**

**2024 GREY GOOSE HALLOWEEN DISPLAY**

**October 17th - 19th**

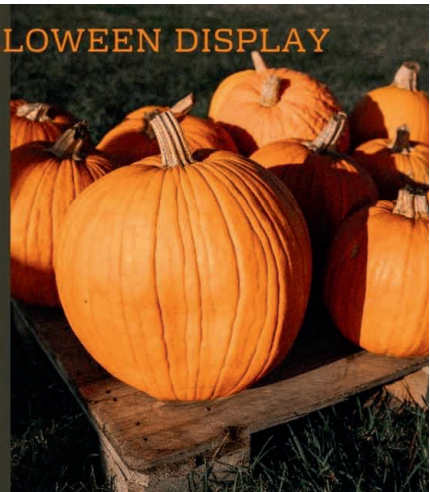
*Weather permitting*

**6:00 PM until 9:00 PM**

**19988 Grey Goose Road  
Pierre, SD 57501**

**New from 6:00-7:00 PM**  
Pick a pumpkin from the patch to take home.

Please feel free to walk around and enjoy the displays. As a reminder, be aware of wildlife, vehicles, and pedestrians. Donations will be accepted and appreciated. Landowners are not responsible for accidents or lost items.



# HOLIDAY FOOD SAFETY TIPS

**Rachel Dotson**

USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture

It's the time of year when many families will be gathering around the dining room table savoring the flavors of their favorite holiday meals. Check out how to keep your holiday meals safe this season with a few tips from Land-grant University Extension Services.

### Shopping Safely

Before shopping, check the ingredients you have at home and verify their expiration date. It is helpful to prepare a shopping list before going shopping. Make sure you have sufficient room in your refrigerator for all purchased food items. Cold foods that need refrigeration or freezing should be purchased last.

Oklahoma State University Extension advises while shopping, keep raw meat, poultry and seafood away from other foods in your grocery cart. Placing raw meat, poultry and seafood in plastic bags can be a good method to separate them from other foods. Ask a cashier to place your raw meat, poultry and seafood in a separate bag.

### Safe Food Handling Practices

- When it comes to preparing meats, washing poultry and meats at home is no longer necessary and is not recommended by the USDA. University of Connecticut Extension recommends thawing meat in a refrigerator or in a cold-water bath.
- Defrost meats in the refrigerator for approximately 24 hours, depending on size, or submerge meat in its original package in cold water and allow 30 minutes of thawing time for every pound.
- Rinse fruits and vegetables thoroughly under cool running water and use a produce brush to remove surface dirt. Even wash prepackaged greens to minimize bacterial contamination.
- While preparing food, use two cutting boards: one for preparing raw meat, poultry and fish, and the other for cutting fruits and vegetables, cooked food or preparing salads.
- Don't forget to also wash hands with soap and water before and after handling food.

### Storing Leftovers

Bacteria grows when the food is left out for more than

two hours at room temperature. Divide leftovers into smaller portions and store in shallow containers in the refrigerator. University of Nebraska-Lincoln Extension advises reheating cooked leftovers to 165 degrees. Use a food thermometer to measure temperature accurately. Sauces, soups and gravies should be reheated by bringing them to a boil. When microwaving leftovers, make sure there are no cold spots in food where bacteria can survive.

### Multistate Approach for Food Safety

Food-borne illnesses affect 48 million Americans each year. Research and education have led to major advances in food safety; however, challenges remain. Many methods that use heat or chemicals to ensure food safety are not 100% effective and can damage food color, texture, flavor and nutrients.

Researchers at 32 Land-grant Universities are collaborating on innovative solutions for food safety and quality.

Their work is helping meet consumer demand for minimally processed, additive-free food items with longer shelf lives, higher nutrient content and less potential to cause food-borne illnesses.



### Farm Safety "Always Be Alert"

#### Clyde Manas, Age 8

Clyde Manas warns farmers and ranchers to be careful with their equipment around power lines. Thank you for your picture, Clyde! Clyde's parents are Terry and Lacey Manas, members of Bon Homme Yankton 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.



# Holiday DELIGHTS

## EASY CRANBERRY SALAD

### Ingredients:

12 oz. fresh cranberries  
 20 oz. crushed pineapple, drained (reserve juice)  
 1/2 cup pineapple juice (from reserved juice)  
 2 cups sugar  
 3 oz. pkg cranberry jello (may also use cherry jello)  
 1/4 cup maraschino cherries, finely chopped

### Method

Boil cranberries with pineapple juice and sugar. When berries pop, remove from heat. Add dry jello, pineapple and cherries. Refrigerate. Keeps for up to two weeks in the refrigerator.

Elaine Rieck  
 Harrisburg, S.D.

## CAKE BATTER DIP

### Ingredients:

8 oz. softened cream cheese  
 8 oz. thawed cool whip  
 1/3-2/3 cup milk  
 1 box Funfetti cake mix (unprepared)  
 Sprinkles

### Method

Add whipped topping and cream cheese to a large mixing bowl and beat with a hand mixer until smooth and creamy.

Add cake mix and 1/3 cup milk and stir with a wooden spoon until combined. Dip will be very thick, so add more milk, a little at a time, until you get to your desired consistency. I used about 2/3 cup for my dip.

Garnish with sprinkles and serve with whatever dippers you prefer (graham crackers, animal crackers, vanilla wafers, pretzels, fresh fruit, etc.)

Kayla Beaner  
 Centerville, S.D.

## OPEN-FACED HOT TURKEY SANDWICHES

### Ingredients:

1 container (12 oz.) turkey gravy  
 8 slices cooked turkey  
 1 loaf baguette bread, (12 in. long)  
 1 cup fresh spinach leaves  
 1 cup prepared stuffing, warmed  
 1/2 cup cranberry sauce

### Method

Cook gravy and turkey slices in large skillet on medium-high heat until heated through.

Cut baguette in half lengthwise, then cut each piece in half. Place bread, cut-side up, onto four serving plates.

Top bread evenly with spinach, turkey, stuffing, any remaining gravy and cranberry sauce.

McCormick.com

Please send your favorite recipes to your local electric cooperative (address found on Page 3). Each recipe printed will be entered into a drawing for a prize in December 2024. All entries must include your name, mailing address, phone number and cooperative name.





# Power Line Safety



**Valerie Marso**  
Chief Financial Officer

Things we see every day can almost fade from view, but failure to notice high-voltage power lines can be a deadly oversight. Oahe Electric has been working extra hard the last couple of years to raise awareness of the dangers of overhead power lines and necessary precautions to take around them. Recently we presented to nearly 600 school-aged children and adults combined regarding what to do if you encounter a downed power line while in your vehicle.

We usually don't even think about power lines when undertaking outdoor activities, but taking a few moments to become aware of your surroundings is a critical step towards keeping yourself and your loved ones safe. In particular this time of year, harvesting can fall into this

category. The powerlines are always at the edge of your field and you don't even give them a second thought (maybe not even a first) and then all of the sudden – BAM! You're in a situation. We get it. Mistakes happen. The important part is how you respond to the incident. Your choices can make all the difference on whether you are safe or not.

**1. Look up and around you.** Always be aware of the location of power lines, particularly when using long metal tools like ladders, augers, pool skimmers and pruning poles. Lower your tall equipment when you are moving it (this includes planting and harvesting equipment). Carry ladders and other long items horizontally whenever possible.



2. **Be especially careful when working near power lines attached to your house.**

3. **Never trim trees near power lines — leave that to the professionals. Never use water or blower extensions to clean gutters near electric lines. Contact a professional maintenance contractor.**

4. **Never climb trees near power lines.** Even if the power lines aren't touching the tree, they could touch when more weight is added to the branch.

5. **If your projects include digging, like building a deck or planting a tree, call your local underground utility locator before you begin.** Never assume the location or depth of underground utility lines. This service prevents the inconvenience of having utilities interrupted and can help you avoid serious injury.

Another instance where people often come in contact with power lines is through vehicle crashes. In accidents that bring down power lines or poles, our instincts tell us to flee danger. However, it's almost always best to stay in your vehicle and wait for help. Call 911 and wait until the utility arrives and ensures the area is de-energized.

If you must get out because of fire or another danger, jump clear of the vehicle without touching it and the ground at the same time. Then hop with your feet together — don't run or stride. Electricity spreads out through the ground in ripples, like a stone dropped in water. The voltage is highest in the ring closest to the vehicle and decreases with distance. Hop with both feet together so that one foot won't be in a higher voltage zone than another, which could make you a conductor for electricity.

If you come upon or witness an accident involving toppled power poles and lines, don't leave your vehicle to approach the accident scene. Often our inclination is to step in, help those in danger and offer assistance to the injured. However, in accidents involving power poles, the best thing you can do is call for help. Wait for trained assistance to arrive or else you could become an additional victim in need of rescue.







# RURAL MURALS

## Small Communities Showcase History and Culture Through Mural Art

**Jacob Boyko**

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

### Lemmon

Visitors from all over the map flock to Lemmon each year to explore the town's plethora of fascinating exhibits, from the Petrified Wood Park to the life-size steampunk-style sculptures by local artist John Lopez.

But of all the town's unique offerings, there's one stand-out exhibit that ties everything together: Boss Cowman Square.

Lopez's life-size metal sculpture of cowboy legend George Edward Lemmon is the focal point of the square. The Boss Cowman clutches the reins of his steampunk stallion, his eyes fixed on the horizon watching for stray cattle.

"Dad Lemmon," as the town's founder is so fondly known among locals, settled the town in 1906 between the Grand River and North Dakota border. It would soon be a stop along the incoming Chicago Milwaukee & St. Paul Railroad, which Dad Lemmon had been recruited to platte westward.

The sculpture is accompanied by a background mural depicting a scene far away from the bustling saloons and general stores of early Lemmon. In the scene, saddled-up cowboys under the careful

watch of the Boss Cowman sculpture guide a meandering herd hundreds of heads long across a river – no problem for Dad Lemmon, whose roundup skills and knowledge of the land were legendary across the West.

In 2015, as Lopez dreamt of what would one day be Boss Cowman Square, he recruited the help of two Nigerian artists, Dotun Popoola and Jonathan Imafidor, to help bring the vision to life.

"We studied a few materials and made sure all the elements were well captured, like the kinds of trees, the way the river looks and the butte in the background," Imafidor recalled about the 2016 project.

One obstacle that posed a challenge for the traveling artists – beside the shock of South Dakota's cold spring weather – was the slight differences between the cattle they knew in Nigeria and the cattle of the American West.

"We are representational artists and we've done a lot of drawings of cows, so we kind of had an idea of what the cattle should look like," Imafidor explained. "But in Lemmon, the kind of cattle that are found in the region are a little different than what we have in Nigeria. I remember when we started painting the cattle ... John Lopez told us, 'I don't think you can find those here.' Then he brought some material for

Cowboys keep a herd of longhorns moving at the bank of the Missouri River. Visitors will notice the sculpture of Dad Lemmon turned around to keep an eye on the progress. *Photo provided by John Lopez.*

us so we were able to see the difference and then we made the corrections."

After about a month of work, the mural was completed and the Boss Cowman Square was unveiled to the public in July 2016.

### Burke

In Burke, K-12 art teacher Kate Witt isn't shy about brightening up her community. The mom of four has designed and painted four murals around town, including one depicting the town's beloved utility worker, Rich Bailey.

Rich's wife, Margaret Ann Bailey, commissioned the mural after Rich's passing in 2023. The mural shows the lineman hanging onto a utility pole as he works on the power lines.

"When we came here in 1970, there wasn't a bucket truck or anything," recalled Margaret Ann. "So he climbed everything, whether it was blizzarding or lightning, and he made sure people had electricity."

The mural also features emergency vehicles, as Rich served for decades as a volunteer firefighter and an emergency medical technician. Parked beneath the lines, the rusted white pickup truck Rich drove around town that over the years became synonymous with himself.

"With this mural specifically, I felt I had



a big important job,” Witt said. “This is a man who the town really loves, and I had a big job to make something beautiful that [Margaret Ann] was going to be proud of.”

Witt incorporated her own signature styles into the mural; her white outlines make the lineman’s silhouette stand out against the more geometrically designed Missouri River bluffs and cloudy sunset in the background.

“That’s where I have a little fun, putting in the modern twist and bold colors,” Witt continued. “I put this white line around everything which made some elements almost look like they’re stickers on a wall.”

Since Witt completed the mural last August, it’s become a point of pride for Margaret Ann who says it’s a testament to her husband’s years of dedication to his community.

“There was an older gal here in town, and she called him at 2 o’clock in the morning and said ‘my air conditioner isn’t working and it’s darn hot in my house,’” Margaret Ann recalled.

She said her husband explained that his job was to fix power lines, not air conditioners. Still, he went to flip the breaker on the woman’s fuse box anyway before going back to sleep.

“That’s the kind of guy he was, and I’m proud,” Margaret Ann said.

## Tabor

Where in South Dakota can you find roses, ears of corn, a cardinal and Czech kolaches all in one mural?

Only in Tabor, probably.

Commissioned for the town’s 150th anniversary in 2022, the colorful mural on the sidewall of the local library meanders through the community’s history. From the heavy Czech influence of the earliest settlers represented by pastries and roses to the school’s original mascot, the cardinals, Robbie Jelsma worked very intentionally to portray the town in a way only a knowledgeable local artist could.

Growing up in nearby Springfield, Jelsma is no stranger to Tabor and its famous Czech Days, which draws thousands of people from across the country for the three-day celebration.

“I wanted to represent Czech Days and the Czech culture, so I did my own

research,” Jelsma said.

He incorporated roses, which are the national flower of the Czech Republic, as well as the fluffy pastries with fruit in the middle called kolaches.

He also incorporated local history—Tabor’s school mascot was the cardinal before merging with Springfield and Tyndall to form Bon Homme School District.

When he’s not painting murals, Jelsma is a highly sought-after tattoo artist specializing in more realistic styles. For him, the highlights of the Tabor mural is the level of depth and realism he achieved in his roses and clouds.

The hardest part of painting the mural is working with the elements, as there’s a laundry list of work that needs to be done on the surface before any real painting can begin: washing; smoothing; primer.

On top of that, unpredictable Midwestern weather requires a careful eye on the weather radar for any outdoor painting projects, Jelsma said.

“We started about early October so the fall was just getting started, and you never know in South Dakota if the weather is going to hold out or if you’ll get an early snow or strong wind,” he recalled about his three and a half weeks working on the project.

For Jelsma, the finished mural is as big of a point of pride for him, having been selected and commissioned for the work, as it is for the people of Tabor who get to show it off every summer during Czech Days.

“It’s cool I was thought of for the project,” Jelsma said. “It’s an art project that I think just lights everybody up a little bit when you drive down main street and you see something like that in a small town.”



Artist Robbie Jelsma puts the finishing touches on his mural ahead of the 2022 unveiling. Photo provided by Robbie Jelsma.

# The Talented Office Team at Your Service – Part 2



**Valerie Marso**  
Chief Financial Officer

We have a small but mighty front office of three that takes care of 2,159 members, 3,351 meters and a consistently growing membership! I am extremely proud of these girls for their dedication, problem solving abilities and compassion for our members.

If you haven't had the pleasure of meeting us in person yet, or even if you have, let's get to know a little bit more about us and our functions at your cooperative!

**Sam - Executive Services Specialist – 16 years**

I handle a wide range of responsibilities revolving around our members, employees and directors. My tasks include assisting with payroll, processing accounts payable, compiling and publishing the Cooperative Connections newsletter, coordinating meeting attendance and arrangements, collating monthly board of director books, answering phones and consumer inquiries, planning and organizing member appreciation events and annual meetings and providing general assistance wherever it's needed.

One project that has changed wildly in the last few years is our annual meeting! Increasing

member attendance has long been a priority, driving us to continuously brainstorm new ideas and strategies. Starting in 2020, we got our wish – attendance has increased over 50% from 2019 to 2023 and things really haven't been the same since! Understanding what resonates most with our members has been very interesting and

we strive to accommodate their preferences as much as possible.

I am particularly proud of my contribution to establishing a more structured safety committee and safety program. The safety of our employees, members and the public is not just a priority – it's also a passion!

One thing I like about cooperatives are that we are member-owned and member-focused. It is unlike any other business

model I've ever worked within. We are one of the few industries that actively encourage our consumers to use less of our product.

I have been married to Josh for the past 15 years and together we have two children: Deacon, who is 12 years old, and Lily, our lively 3-year-old. We are almost outnumbered by our hairy family members which includes three cats and a dog. Outside of my family life, I love reading and making memories with friends.



Sam Irvine, Executive Account Specialist, at the 2023 Line Patrol Charity Ride.

## COVE HEAT SALE

Oahe Electric Cooperative is offering great deals on our remaining Cove Heat inventory!  
Call 1.800.640.6243 today to learn more!



# Kailey Wallman: Touchstone Energy Scholar of the Week

Congratulations to Kailey Wallman, the Touchstone Energy Scholar of the Week for Sept. 22-28!

Kailey has a 4.0 GPA, is a member of the National Honor Society, National Art Society, book club, Riggs Competitive Dance Team, and volunteers for many community programs.

She was nominated and attended the National Junior Youth Leadership Conference in 2021.

Congratulations on the achievement, Kailey!



Oahe Electric CEO Jordan Lamb congratulates Kailey Wallman on the achievement.

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## Electric Vehicle Charger Ready for Customers

Oahe Electric installed a state-of-the-art electric vehicle charger at One Stop Travel Plaza, just east of Pierre, and it's officially up and running. This advanced JuicePump model is a Level 3 charger capable of charging an electric vehicle to 80% in just 30 minutes.





# PREPARING FOR WINTER WEATHER

**Jacob Boyko**

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As we near the frigid winter months of South Dakota, it's important for you and loved ones to stay ready for an emergency.

Even though power outages are rare, a loss of electricity can affect modern lives in critical ways; In an instant, you may no longer be able to heat your home, prepare food or access critical information.

It's crucial to prepare for power outages and other general emergencies by keeping supplies in both your home and vehicles as well as making sure you and your loved ones have a plan in place.

Brad Reiners, director of communications for the state Department of Public Safety, encourages South Dakotans to stock

up on essentials like food, water and batteries prior to the winter months.

"Make sure you have enough food and water for at least three days, and each person in the household should have one gallon of water per day," Reiners said.

State DPS recommends keeping non-perishable food items like pasta, canned goods and nutritious snacks that don't require refrigeration and don't need to be heated or cooked before consumption.

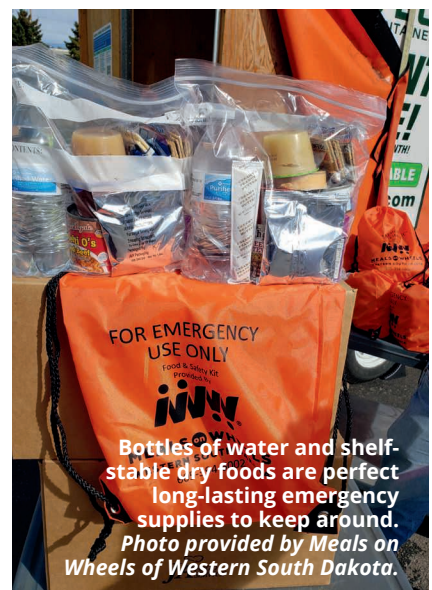
"Never use gas powered generators, grills or portable stoves indoors, as they can produce dangerous levels of carbon monoxide," Reiner added.

As you prepare, remember to be proactive about your health. Have your medical prescriptions refilled in advance of a severe storm and keep a battery bank charged so you can power your cell phone in case you need to

access telehealth services, emergency services or access critical information.

In your car, keep warm blankets, winter clothes, snacks, a shovel, flashlight and a set of jumper cables in case you get stranded.

"It's also advisable to check your tires for proper inflation and tread, and make sure your windshield wipers are in good condition with freeze-resistant washer fluid," Reiners added.



**Bottles of water and shelf-stable dry foods are perfect long-lasting emergency supplies to keep around.**  
*Photo provided by Meals on Wheels of Western South Dakota.*



If you plan to rely on a generator or wood burning stove for heat if the power goes out, check beforehand that your equipment is in safe working order, and you have enough fuel to last several days.

Keeping warm clothes, blankets and sleeping bags at the ready can be lifesaving if you're unable to heat your home.

## Meals on Wheels here to help with Blizzard Bags

For senior citizens, some of this advice is easier said than done. Meals on Wheels of Western South Dakota understands that better than anyone, and they have come up with a solution.

"Blizzard Bags" have been a part of the organization's lineup for over 20 years now and include some of the essentials seniors need when hunkering down for severe weather.

"We deliver shelf-stable meals for seniors who, especially in rural areas, may not have access to food for a while if their electricity goes out," said Jennifer Paschke, regional manager for Meals on Wheels of Western South Dakota. "We provide five meals in those bags they can use during a loss of power or being stranded in their homes due to weather."

The food supplied is generally items that don't require a heat source, like packages of tuna salad and crackers, protein bars or cans with a pop-top seal so no can opener is required, Paschke said.

The bags also include water and other donated supplies like batteries and flashlights from local businesses, including some rural electric cooperatives.

"The biggest success story I know in

my area is a couple of years ago when they had tornados in Philip," Paschke remembered. "The water we provided [in the blizzard bags] were some of the only sources of water some of those people had. Just having that food and water can be a godsend for some people."

Blizzard Bags are available to seniors age 60 and up who are a part of the Meals on Wheels program. The bags cost roughly \$20 to put together, according to Pascke, and are funded in part by community donors. The organization provides home deliveries for seniors living in both cities and rural areas.

Anyone interested in getting service or helping with the cause can contact Meals on Wheels of Western South Dakota at (605) 394-6002.



Meals On Wheels of Western South Dakota provides blizzard bags to seniors in case weather conditions affect normal delivery. Photo provided by Meals on Wheels of Western South Dakota.





# EMPOWERING THE FUTURE

## The Impact of Local Electric Cooperative Youth Programs

**Frank Turner**  
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It is a core tenet of rural electric cooperatives to inform the public – particularly young people – about the nature and benefits of cooperation. Electric cooperatives have a long history of engaging youth in South Dakota through cooperative-sponsored youth

experiences, including trips like the annual Youth Tour in Washington, D.C., Youth Excursion in North Dakota, and Youth Leadership Conference at the annual NRECA PowerXchange conference.

These opportunities provide many South Dakota students with their first travel experiences outside the state. For

Youth Tour participants Mallory Gant, left, and Madison Robertson pose for a photo at the FDR Memorial in Washington, D.C.  
*Photo by Frank Turner.*

many, it's their first time flying on an airplane. Students not only gain valuable insights into rural electric cooperatives and energy, but they also learn basic life skills, such as how to navigate a city or use public transportation.

Former SDREA communications director Brenda Kleinjan, now a communications specialist with Sioux Valley Energy, was the driving force behind many of these programs through her 20 years of youth engagement for South Dakota cooperatives. From 2000 to 2019, Kleinjan coordinated and facilitated the many youth trips sponsored by electric cooperatives, leading hundreds of students to explore the impact of rural electricity on Capitol Hill and energy generation in North



Dakota over the course of her career.

According to Kleinjan, many alumni of the electric cooperative youth programs have gone on to achieve great things.

“These trips are an investment that our co-ops are making for not only our youth and their families, but our state and regions’ future,” Kleinjan said. “We are tapping into the drive of our most energetic teenagers with the idea of encouraging them to explore their world, their communities and their future.”

### Youth Tour

Since 1963, South Dakota electric cooperatives have sponsored youth trips to Washington, D.C., each June for the annual Youth Tour. This year, Mallory Gant was one of 36 students from South Dakota who participated in a weeklong exploration of the nation’s capital, learning about the cooperative network and rural electrification. Sponsored by Charles Mix Electric, Gant visited the many memorials and monuments of the capital city and met South Dakota’s congressmen in the U.S. Capitol to ask questions.

Gant, who lives on farm and ranch outside Platte, made the most of her time by making new friends while experiencing the history of sites like Ford’s Theater, Mount Vernon and the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier.

“It was definitely an eye-opening experience – to be able to fly on a plane and visit these huge cities,” Gant said. “A big part of the trip for me was meeting the friends I made along the way. Since the trip, I’ve seen them at volleyball and FFA events. When you go on the trip, you are out there with people you don’t know, so you are forced to get out of your comfort zone and meet new people. I think it sparked a lot of friendships for me.”

### Youth Leadership Council

In addition to Youth Tour, Gant was selected as this year’s South Dakota representative for the annual Youth

Leadership Council. As the state’s sole representative, Gant will join 43 other young leaders at the NRECA PowerXchange Conference in Atlanta from March 7-12 next spring.

“From the first moment of being a representative, I had to introduce myself to a room of almost 2,000 kids,” Gant said. “It really put me on the spot, but it was really cool to be able to know I was capable of doing that.”

Leading up to the event, Gant is working to complete a creative and engaging community project by setting up an agriculture-focused electric safety booth at the upcoming South Dakota 4-H Land and Range Judging Contest with Charles Mix Electric, her sponsoring electric cooperative.

Gant will also prepare and deliver a short speech at a Charles Mix Electric meeting for the opportunity to be chosen as the 2025 Youth Leadership Council National Spokesperson. If chosen, Gant will deliver a speech in Atlanta Georgia at the PowerXChange Conference.

“I think the whole experience has made me a more vocal and outgoing person,” Gant said.

### Youth Excursion

Erica Fitzhugh is one of many alumni from the rural electric youth program whose life has been shaped by her experience traveling to North Dakota to learn about electricity generation.

In 2005, Northern Electric sponsored Fitzhugh, then a high school junior, on a trip to tour energy infrastructure in Beulah, North Dakota.

Fitzhugh vividly recalls visiting Basin Electric Power Cooperative’s complex, where electricity is generated and transmitted to homes and businesses, as well as the Freedom Mine, the nation’s largest lignite coal mine by deliveries.

“I remember standing in the bucket of the dragline for a photo and thinking it was an amazing experience,” Fitzhugh said.

Her connection to the local electric cooperative continued after the trip. As a member of 4-H, Fitzhugh attended monthly meetings hosted at Northern Electric’s office. Each year, she would write thank-you letters to Jim Moore, Northern Electric’s CEO at the time, for supporting their program and hosting their meetings.

Years later, Northern Electric awarded Fitzhugh The Northern Electric Scholarship when she was a high school senior. That investment paid off when Moore later hired Fitzhugh as the Northern Electric director of communications.

“Jim Moore was the person who hired me, and I had handwritten him thank you letters in high school for the 4-H club,” said Fitzhugh, now a communications specialist for Southeastern Electric Cooperative.

## Interested in Local Youth Opportunities?

Whether it’s scholarships, Youth Tour or Youth Excursion, there are several youth events and opportunities catered to young electric co-op members that continue to thrive. Please contact your local co-op to learn more about these ongoing youth opportunities.



**NOV. 22-JAN.5**  
 Winter Wonderland  
 Nightly - 5 p.m.-12 a.m.  
 Falls Park  
 Sioux Falls, SD  
 605-275-6060

**OCT. 26**  
**Mortimer's Monstrous Halloween**  
 3 p.m.-6 p.m.  
 Oakwood Lakes State Park  
 605-627-5441

**NOV. 2**  
**Wall Community Craft Show**  
 10 a.m.-3 p.m.  
 Wall, SD  
 605-279-2665

**NOV. 2**  
**Fall Fling Craft Show**  
 10 a.m.-2 p.m.  
 Dakota Christian School  
 Corsica, SD  
 605-366-7940

**NOV. 8-9**  
**Sioux Empire Arts & Crafts Show**  
 Friday, 12 p.m.-8 p.m.  
 Saturday, 9 a.m.-5 p.m.  
 Sioux Falls, SD  
 605-332-6004

**NOV. 9**  
**Deadwood's Big Whiskey Festival**  
 4 p.m.-8 p.m.  
 Main Street  
 Deadwood, SD

**NOV. 9**  
**Christmas at the Homestead**  
 12 p.m.-4 p.m.  
 North Sioux City, SD  
 605-232-0873

**NOV. 9-10**  
**Zonta Craft & Vendor Show**  
 Saturday, 9 a.m.-5 p.m.  
 Sunday, 10 a.m.-4 p.m.  
 Ramkota Hotel  
 Pierre, SD  
 605-280-1511

**NOV. 16**  
**Festival of Trees**  
 6 p.m.  
 Lead, SD  
 605-584-2067

**NOV. 23-24**  
**Winterfest: A Winter Arts Festival**  
 Saturday, 10 a.m.-5 p.m.  
 Sunday, 10 a.m.-4 p.m.  
 Aberdeen, SD

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

**NOV. 29-DEC. 29**  
**Trees & Trains Exhibit at SD State Railroad Museum**  
 Hill City, SD  
 605-665-3636

**DEC. 1**  
**A Christmas Carol**  
 2 p.m.  
 Gayville Music Hall  
 Gayville, SD  
 605-624-2859

**DEC. 5**  
**Christmas on the Prairie**  
 4 p.m.  
 Main Street  
 Miller, SD

**DEC. 6**  
**'Twas the Night Before Christmas Celebration**  
 3 p.m.-8 p.m.  
 Onida, SD

**DEC. 6-8, 13-15**  
**A Sherlock Carol**  
 Dec. 6-7, 13-14, 7:30 p.m.  
 Dec. 8, 15, 2:30 p.m.  
 Corson, SD  
 mightycorson.com

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

**DEC. 7**  
**Santa Day**  
 2 p.m.  
 Stockholm Buggy Museum  
 Stockholm, SD  
 605-467-3940

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

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

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.

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