



COOPERATIVE CONNECTIONS



The Days of '76 Rodeo

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Powering Through Summer & Celebrating Independence



Jordan Lamb
CEO

As we move into June and the heart of summer, I want to take a moment to thank our members for their continued trust and partnership. This season brings longer days, increased outdoor activity, and, of course, some of the highest electricity demand of the year. It also brings one of our most meaningful national celebrations – Independence Day. The Fourth of July is a time to gather with family and friends, reflect on the freedoms we enjoy, and appreciate the infrastructure that helps power our daily lives.

Preparing for Summer Demand

Summer reliably places higher stress on the electric grid due to air conditioning use, irrigation loads, and extended daylight hours. Across the region, utilities are closely monitoring system conditions to ensure reliable service during peak demand periods.

In coordination with regional partners, including the Southwest Power Pool, we continue to plan and operate the system with reliability as our top priority. For the summer of 2026, the Southwest Power Pool anticipates ample capacity across the region, which is a positive indicator for system reliability heading into peak conditions. These efforts help ensure that power is available when you need it most – even during extreme heat events or unexpected generation outages. We also encourage members to participate in voluntary conservation and demand response efforts when called upon. Small steps – such as adjusting thermostats during peak hours or delaying non-essential electricity use – can collectively make a significant difference in maintaining grid stability and controlling costs.

Reliability, Affordability, and the Future

Our focus remains on providing safe, reliable, and affordable power. At the same time, we are navigating an evolving energy landscape that includes new generation resources, transmission needs, and growing demand from electrification and economic development.

Programs like demand response and load management help bridge the gap between current supply and growing demand, giving us flexibility while new resources are added to the system. These tools are essential in maintaining reliability without placing unnecessary upward pressure on rates.

Celebrating Independence Day Safely

As we celebrate the Fourth of July, we encourage everyone to enjoy the holiday safely and responsibly. Please keep electrical safety in mind during outdoor gatherings, especially when using lighting, extension cords, or inflatable decorations. If you're planning fireworks at home, always follow local regulations and keep a safe distance from power lines and equipment. Overhead lines and pad-mounted equipment should never be used as part of holiday setups or displays.

Thank You to Our Members

We are grateful for the communities we serve. Your support allows us to continue investing in infrastructure, improving reliability, and preparing for the energy needs of the future.

As we celebrate Independence Day this year, we also mark a historic milestone – 250 years of American independence since 1776. This semi-quintennial (ironically, I had to look this up!) is a meaningful reminder of the enduring strength, resilience, and innovation that have shaped our nation and the communities we are proud to serve.

From all of us, we wish you a safe, enjoyable, and meaningful Fourth of July as we honor both our nation's history and the bright future ahead.

Your Co-op's Thank-You Notes

*Greetings Oahe Electric,
The great gift I won at the [birthday party] drawing was a total surprise – I was making new friends and almost missed hearing my name called. Thank you very much and for a great afternoon.
Thanks again,
Warren Weischedel*

*Chad and I just wanted to say a huge thank you for the amazing [birthday party] grand prize of a Pit Boss flat top grill and all the "goodies" in the bag to go with! What a surprise it was, we never would have believed it would be us!!
Thanks again!
Chad and Vickie Husted*

*Dear Oahe Electric Scholarship Committee,
Thank you very much for your generous contribution towards my post-secondary education. It will be very helpful in my future plans of becoming a registered nurse.
Sincerely,
Cheznie Heezen*

COOPERATIVE CONNECTIONS

OAHE ELECTRIC

(USPS No. 019-042)

Board of Directors:

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Tyler Arbach – Journeyman Lineman
Austin Bergeson – Journeyman Lineman
Mark Bruning – Line Foreman
Matt Eldridge – Chief Operations Officer
Trudie Feldman – Custodian
Brady Gaer – Journeyman Lineman
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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.

Oahe Electric to Hold Director Elections

During the annual meeting, the members present will be electing two board members, one from each district, to fill two, three-year position. Any individual who satisfies the qualifications and complies with the nominating procedures set forth on page 7 should be prepared to:

- Attend regular monthly board meetings held at Oahe Electric headquarters in Blunt, S.D.
- Attend annual and other special meetings as needed
- Attend director seminars or other outside meetings that provide necessary education on matters related to financing, electric rates, power requirements and legal issues of concern to rural electric members
- Provide an important and necessary link between member-owners and management staff of the Cooperative
- Serve as an extension of the rights and responsibilities of the cooperative member-owner. Joining with other directors of the cooperative, they try with honesty, consistency, and good conscience to make decisions and set

policy for the cooperative which are in the best interests of the cooperative and the membership as a whole

Petitions are available at the headquarters in Blunt. Should there be any questions concerning the bylaw procedures or if you would like to request a petition, feel free to call or stop in at the office. Petitions are due by Aug. 5, 2026.



Bylaws Governing Election of Directors

Section 4. Qualifications. No person shall be eligible to become or remain a Director or to hold any position of trust in the Cooperative who:

1. It is not a member and a bona fide resident of the area served by the Cooperative; or
2. Is in any way employed by or financially interested in a competing enterprise, a business selling electric energy or supplies to the Cooperative, or a business primarily engaged in selling electrical or plumbing appliances, fixtures or supplies to the members of the Cooperative; or
3. Is an employee of the Cooperative, or who has, within five years of the proposed election or appointment, been an employee of the Cooperative.

The determination of residency, as required by this section, shall be determined by application of objective criteria to be set forth in policy adopted by the Board of Directors.

Section 5. Nominations. Any Fifteen (15) or more members acting together may make nominations by petition received at the principal office of the Cooperative not less than forty-five (45) days prior to the meeting and the Secretary shall post such nominations at the principal office of the Cooperative. The Secretary shall mail with the notice of the meeting, or separately, but at least 10 days before the date of the meeting, a statement of the number of Directors to be elected and the names and addresses of the candidates nominated by petition. There shall be no nominations from the floor unless no petition has been filed for a vacancy. In that event only, nomination shall be taken from the floor for that vacancy, and nominations shall not be closed until at least one minute has passed during which no additional nomination has been made. No member may nominate more than one candidate.

BEFORE THE SMOKE: PROTECT YOUR HOME BEFORE WILDFIRE SEASON

Wildfires can move quickly, especially when dry grass, high winds and hot weather come together. In rural South Dakota, where homes, farms, shelterbelts, outbuildings and open grassland share the same landscape, preparation matters.

But there is one important point to make first: fighting a wildfire is not a job for homeowners.

If a wildfire is nearby, leave firefighting to trained professionals. Follow evacuation orders, call 911 to report a fire and stay away from downed power lines, smoke-filled areas and active fire zones. Cooperative members can do their most important work in advance, taking steps that make a property harder for fire to reach and easier for responders to protect.

One of the most effective steps is creating defensible space around the home. That does not mean clearing every tree or turning a yard into bare ground. It means reducing combustible material near houses, garages, sheds and other structures, while thinking about how fire could move from brush to trees to buildings.

Start closest to the house. Embers can collect against siding, under decks, in gutters or near steps. Remove dry leaves, dead plants, stacked lumber, cardboard and other combustible materials from next to the home. Gravel, rock, concrete, pavers and other hardscaping can be better choices near walls, decks and porches.

Gutters and roofs deserve attention, too. Leaves and needles can become dry fuel. Cleaning them before fire season can reduce the chance that embers find an easy place to ignite.

From there, look at the rest of the yard. Clear dead brush, tall grass and dried weeds, especially near structures. Keep grass mowed around homes, outbuildings, propane tanks and driveways. Trim and space shrubs and trees so fire cannot easily climb from grass to brush to tree canopies. Low branches can act like ladder fuels.

Do not overlook decks, porches and crawlspaces. Dry leaves, grass clippings and other materials can collect underneath. Cleaning those areas and using screening can help keep debris from building up.

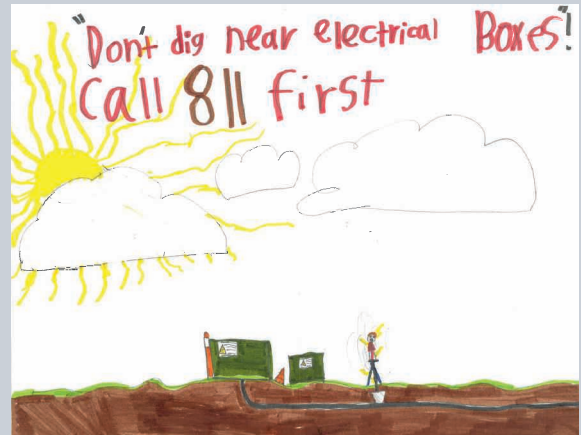
Access is part of preparation, too. Firefighters need to reach

a property quickly and safely. Keep driveways clear, make sure gates can open and trim branches that could block emergency vehicles. Clearly visible address signs can help responders find a home when visibility is poor.

Before making major landscaping changes, building fences, planting trees or adding new water lines, call 811. Underground electric, gas, water and communication lines may be closer than expected. A free locate request helps protect homeowners, utility crews and infrastructure.

Cooperative members can also make a plan. Know two ways out of the property or neighborhood. Keep important documents, medications and emergency supplies ready to go. Take photos or videos of buildings, equipment and belongings for insurance records.

Wildfire preparation is a seasonal habit, much like cleaning gutters, changing filters or preparing equipment for winter. The goal is not to fight the fire. That job belongs to firefighters and emergency responders. The goal is to give the home, property and responders a better chance before the fire ever starts.



**"Don't dig near electrical boxes!
Call 811 first."**

Caleb Blake, age 9

Caleb urges members to not dig near a pad-mounted transformer. Thank you for sharing your picture, Caleb! Caleb's parents are Peter and Stephanie Blake – members of West River 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.

Sweet on RHUBARB

RHUBARB CHEESE CAKE

Ingredients:

Rhubarb Filling

9" pie shell, unbaked
2 1/2 cups rhubarb, chopped
1/2 cup sugar
1 tbsp. flour

Cheese Cake Filling

8 oz. cream cheese
2 eggs, added one at a time
1/2 cup sugar

Topping

3/4 cup sour cream
2 tbsps. sugar
1 tsp. vanilla

Method

Stir rhubarb with flour and sugar. Put in the unbaked pie shell and bake at 425° for 15 minutes. Remove from oven and lower temperature to 350° degrees.

Beat cream cheese, add 2 eggs one at a time, then add the sugar. Mix well and pour over hot rhubarb layer. Bake 30 minutes at 350° degrees.

Mix the topping of sour cream, sugar and vanilla well and spread over hot pie. Cool 3 hours or more before serving. The flavors blend better the longer it cools. Refrigerate leftovers.

Charles Lebeda
Sioux Valley Energy

Please send your favorite recipes to your local electric cooperative (address found on Page 3). Each recipe printed will be entered into a drawing for a prize in December 2026. All entries must include your name, mailing address, phone number and cooperative name.

RHUBARB SALAD

Ingredients:

2 cups rhubarb, chopped
4 tbsps. water
1/2 cup sugar
3 oz. red jello
3/4 cup cold water
1 apple, diced
1 banana, sliced

Method

Combine rhubarb, water and sugar. Stir and cook until mushy. Add jello and stir until dissolved. Add 3/4 cup cold water. Cool until it begins to set. Stir in diced apple and sliced banana. Chill and serve.

Leanne Eich
Central Electric

RHUBARB CAKE

Ingredients:

White cake mix
4 cups rhubarb, diced
1 cup white sugar
2 cups heavy whipping cream

Method

Mix white cake as directed on the box. Pour in a greased 9x12 pan. Place 4 cups of diced rhubarb over the top. Pour 1 cup of white sugar over the rhubarb. Pour 2 cups of heavy whipping cream over the top. Bake at 350° for 40 minutes.

Jeanette Kleinsasser
Dakota Energy

Picture by Sokor Space and Shutterstock.

Small Change, Big Impact

Why Operation Round Up Matters More Than Ever



Valerie Marso
CFO

Every month, something remarkable happens across our community – often with just a few spare cents at a time.

Through Operation Round Up®, members of our cooperative voluntarily round their electric bill up to the nearest dollar. That means an average contribution of about 50 cents each month. Small enough that most people never miss it.

But together? Those nickels, dimes, and quarters become something powerful. They help families facing unexpected hardships. They support local fire departments, food pantries, school programs, youth organizations, veterans, senior services, and community projects that make our towns stronger and more connected.

Operation Round Up® is neighbors helping neighbors – quietly, locally, and directly.

And the truth is, it works because people choose to participate. Over the years, the generosity of our members has made an incredible difference. But participation in the program has gradually declined, even as needs in our communities continue to grow. Fewer participating members means fewer grants, fewer opportunities to help, and fewer local organizations receiving support when they need it most.

That's why we're asking members to consider enrolling – or re-enrolling – in Operation Round Up®. Not because anyone has to. But because this community has always been strongest when we look out for one another.

It's easy to think that a few cents can't really matter. Yet every meaningful community effort starts the same way: many people each doing a small part. In fact, if every member participated, the combined impact over a single year could help fund emergency assistance, community improvement projects, and

critical local services throughout our entire service area. The best part? Every dollar stays local.

The funds collected through Operation Round Up® are distributed right here in the communities we serve. Chances are good that someone you know – a neighbor, a local student, a family going through a difficult season, or a community organization you care about – has already benefited from this program.

For less than the cost of a cup of coffee each year, you can help create real change close to home.

That's the power of cooperative membership. Not just powering homes, but empowering communities.

And those impacts aren't just theoretical. In May, members of the Operation Round Up® Board of Trustees awarded \$9,500 in funding to seven local organizations, demonstrating exactly how a few cents at a time can make a meaningful difference.

This year, seven organizations submitted funding requests totaling \$28,470. After careful review, the Board of Trustees granted funding to the following organizations:

- **Capital Area Counseling Services** – Support and expand community-based suicide prevention and mental health promotion efforts.
- **Onida Fire Department** – Build a Polaris 800 UTV fire unit for specialty emergency fire situations.
- **Pierre Junior Shooting Club** – Upgrade scanner equipment, electronic targets, and replace two air guns.
- **The Ranch Ministries** – Install underground power lines to a new livestock facility supporting therapy horses, cattle grazing, and pheasant habitat.
- **Sixth Circuit CASA Program** – Expand and strengthen volunteer advocacy services for children who have experienced abuse or neglect.

- **Sleep in Heavenly Peace** – Purchase lumber, hardware, mattresses, sheets, pillows, and blankets to provide beds for children in need.
- **Sully County Historical Society** – Purchase flags recognizing the 250th anniversary of the United States and Sully County's 150th anniversary.

These grants are funded entirely by Oahe Electric members who voluntarily participate in Operation Round Up®. On average, members contribute a combined total of approximately \$850 each month, with individual annual contributions ranging from just \$0.12 to \$11.88.

Since the program began distributing funds in 2009, Operation Round Up® has returned more than \$171,300 to our communities – one small donation at a time, creating lasting local impact.

If you are not currently enrolled in Operation Round Up®, we hope you'll consider joining. The organizations listed above are proof that when neighbors come together, even the smallest contributions can make a big difference.

Independent Audit Confirms Co-op's Financial Integrity

Each year, Oahe Electric Cooperative undergoes a thorough audit conducted by an independent accounting firm. In their most recent audit, the firm confirmed that the cooperative's financial statements accurately reflect the results of our operations and cash flows, with no material misstatements identified.

The audit also verified that Oahe Electric remains fully compliant with Government Auditing Standards issued by the Comptroller General of the United States, as well as with generally accepted accounting principles (GAAP).

This annual review ensures transparency and accountability, reaffirming our commitment to sound financial management and responsible stewardship of our members' resources.

A LEGACY OF SERVICE

Vedvei Father & Son Serve Their Community

Jacob Boyko

jacob.boyko@sdrea.coop

Before Alec Vedvei helped guide the future of rural electric cooperatives, he lived a life without electricity.

Growing up in the 1920s and 30s on a farm near Hetland, S.D., when chores had to be done before daylight, a kerosene lantern was part of the job.

“Either that or just guess where things were,” the 100-year-old chuckled.

It was a different time; Alec’s family farmed with horses, not tractors, and milked cows by hand. He remembers walking out to the pig pen with his little brother, Vernon, to collect corn cobs in a pail so his dad could burn them in the stove to heat their farmhouse.

“Vernon was going to grade school in the country, and the teacher asked him what he did for his mother, and he said that he carries ‘coobs,’” Alec chuckled. “Teacher didn’t know what ‘coobs’ were.”

One day in the 1940s, thanks to the visionary farmers who started Kingsbury Electric Cooperative, the Vedvei family’s lifestyle changed with the flip of a switch.

“The washing machine came first,” Alec recalled. “Oh, yeah, it was a godsend for the farm women at that time.”

That appreciation for electricity and rural cooperation inspired Alec to answer the call when he was approached about serving on the co-op board in 1970. He went on to serve about 18 years on the Kingsbury Electric Cooperative board, with about 15 of those years also spent on the board of the co-op’s transmission and wholesale energy provider, East River Electric Power Cooperative. Alec played a pivotal role in helping shape the future of the cooperatives as the systems grew and modernized.

Alec’s son, Alan Vedvei, followed a similar path. Alan joined the Kingsbury Electric board in 1999 and later joined the East River Electric board in 2011. Now, in his 15th year at East River Electric, Alan serves as board president.

Throughout Alan’s time on the co-op boards, he says he’s often turned to his dad for input and advice.

“A lot of times when things come up, I go and ask Dad about how this was done or how that was done when he was on the board,” Alan said. “What do you think, Dad? How should we handle this?”

Alan said the learning curve was steep when he first joined East



Centenarian Alec Vedvei (right) and his son, Alan Vedvei, reminisce about the days before electricity and their years of service in the cooperative network.

Photo by Jacob Boyko

River Electric, but the experience has been rewarding. One of the larger efforts came in the 2010s with East River Electric’s system upgrade plan, Alan recalled, when they voted to allocate funds to modernize and increase reliability across the transmission system.

“People thought maybe that we were a little bit crazy,” Alan said, “but it was the right thing to do, and it’s only gotten more expensive since we started it.”

For both father and son, the cooperative model is what drove them to sit on the boards and stay involved. Alan said electric cooperatives are built around a shared purpose: providing affordable, reliable power to the people they serve.

“I’ll say this, the co-op business model is a perfect model for the utility industry,” Alan said.

That’s something Alec saw from the beginning, first hand, as rural lines were built and electricity reached more farms. He remembered the excitement people felt when the lights came on and when power made everyday work easier.

With his experience on the co-op board, Alec in 1974 was inspired to serve his community in an additional way. With the help of his neighbors, Alec helped start the Kingbrook Rural Water System to bring reliable and quality water to farms like his that relied on inconsistent wells.

While Alec and his wife, Helen, have moved off the farm east to Brookings, they keep up with the co-ops through the Cooperative Connections newsletter – and good chats with Alan.

Alec doesn’t take rural development for granted – he was right there among the community cooperation that brought both power and water to him and his neighbors.

“No more corn cobs,” Alec chuckled.



A CENTURY OF GRIT AND GLORY

The Days of '76 Rodeo

Photos by KSchurr Photography

Jocelyn Johnson

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In the historic gulch of Deadwood, S.D., the past isn't tucked away in books – it rides out of old wooden chutes every July at the Days of '76 Rodeo.

What began more than a century ago as a short weekend celebration has grown into a week-long rodeo and parade tradition that draws contestants and visitors from across the country. Yet, amid the growth and national recognition, the Days of '76 remains rooted in family, heritage and a deep sense of place.

Pat Roberts, longtime board member of the Days of '76 Rodeo planning committee, said, "It started in 1924, and it actually wasn't a rodeo then. It was a celebration of Deadwood and its establishment in 1876 – hence where the name came from. It was started by the community just to promote the founding."

Those early celebrations featured parades, horses, fireworks and the kind of small-town pageantry that fits a frontier

community proud of its past. The full-fledged rodeo format came a few years later in the late 1920s, but the heart of the event hasn't changed: honoring Deadwood's origins and the Western way of life that built it.

Today, the Days of '76 Rodeo is marking its 104th year alongside other milestones – the 150th anniversary of Deadwood and the nation's 250th anniversary.

The rodeo boasts a total payout of roughly \$350,000 and typically draws 700 to 800 contestants, including top names like Rocker Steiner, Lisa Lockhart and rising stars such as Emily Beisel. During a week of performances, 25,000 to 30,000 spectators pack the grandstands, turning the arena into a sea of cowboy hats and hometown pride.

The events remain classic: bareback riding, steer wrestling, calf roping, team roping, barrel racing, saddle bronc riding, bull riding and breakaway roping. No frills, no gimmicks – just the timeless contests of skill and grit that define rodeo.

"We just keep it traditional," Pat said. "Just welcome everybody to Deadwood to enjoy the best cowboys and the best bucking stock that we can get."

For a town of about 1,200 people, the Days of '76 Rodeo has earned outsized recognition.

In 2011, the Days of '76 was inducted into the Pro Rodeo Hall of Fame, a distinction the Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association (PRCA) had not extended to a rodeo in many years.

Chris Roberts, son of Pat Roberts and fellow board member on the Days of '76 Rodeo planning committee, said, "We won the PRCA Rodeo of the Year every single year that we were in the medium category until we surpassed into large. We've been nominated many times in the large category and won it once. To our knowledge, we're the only rodeo that's won Rodeo of the Year in each and every category."

In Deadwood, legacy still rides out of wooden chutes, year after year, drawing generational athletes. Rodeo here is a family affair. The Roberts family has been involved continuously since the event began.

"There's been a Roberts at every Days of '76 celebration since it started," said Pat.

Pat attended his first Days of '76 Rodeo when he was four days old and serves on the board with his son, Chris.

"I'm fourth generation," Chris said. "My great-granddad was there from year one, and we never missed a single year. Then his son – my granddad – followed in his footsteps, my dad and now me."

A fifth generation is already helping behind the scenes, continuing a family legacy that mirrors the rodeo's own endurance through the decades.

That kind of continuity isn't unique to the Roberts alone. Many contestants

arrive with stories of parents and grandparents who once competed in Deadwood.

"From a contestant perspective, I'd be willing to bet that no matter where you grew up, if you are a rodeo family, Deadwood was one that was always on the map," Chris said. "I hear it every single year – contestants talking about how grandpa or great-grandpa, grandma or great-grandma competed in Deadwood, and they've always wanted to be here. In the rodeo world, everybody knows Deadwood."

Mackenzi Gatzke, secretary of the board of directors, says her family story is similar. She currently serves on the Days of '76 board alongside both of her parents and noted two other families who have long served on the board promoting the event.

"Our board is all made up of people who were or still are locals to Deadwood, and we're all volunteers," she said. "We really do it because we love Deadwood, and we love the Days of '76 and the tradition behind it. We actually have four different families with multiple generations on our board, and we all just work together like one big family that just loves the community."

That focus on authenticity extends beyond the arena. The Days of '76 Museum houses the largest working



collection of horse-drawn wagons in the country, along with memorabilia from across the Black Hills dating back to 1876. During rodeo week, many of those wagons leave their resting place to roll through downtown Deadwood in historic parades – matching the sight of a 19th-century streetscape.

For Pat Roberts, rodeo's relevance in modern life is still significant and comes down to identity.

"It's tradition – it's the cowboy way," he said. "These cowboys and cowgirls are athletes...and the horses are too. They're bred to buck. We're not hurting anything by doing it – that's what they want to do. Just think of Deadwood and the West. Rodeo fits right in."



A Journey of Strength, Support & Gratitude

Dan Lettau

Journeyman Lineman

In early October of 2024, I began experiencing nagging back pain. At first, I assumed it was just a strain that would go away with time – but it didn't. By mid-November, the pain had spread to my legs. I noticed it most during deer season, when walking creeks and draws became increasingly difficult. I was having balance issues, and even simple movement became a challenge.

I tried to manage the pain by limiting my work to line patrol, but walking was getting more difficult by the day. Being the cheapskate that I am, I wanted to wait until after Jan. 1 before seeing anyone about it because I hadn't yet reached my deductible for the year. Then after the first of the year, I went to the chiropractor to see if he could relieve the pain. After three unsuccessful visits he suggested that I seek medical help.

I scheduled a physical and explained the symptoms and they were convinced that I had a back injury or possibly a bone spur pushing on my spinal cord. They did an MRI on my lower back, which showed nothing unusual. I was then referred to a neurologist, who was nice enough to see me on President's Day. He did a barrage of tests over a four-hour period and still found nothing unusual – other than me, as I flailed around like a frog on his table as he poked needles into my nerves! He said that they needed to do a complete body scan from my brain clear down to my knees. Five MRIs later they found a mass on my spinal cord that ran through the T10-T11 vertebrae, along with another mass in my chest. The MRI during my physical just missed the one in my back because it was too low.

The results were concerning and suggested malignancy but would have to be biopsied to be sure. I was then referred to an oncologist. After reviewing the MRI results, they urged me to immediately get to the nearest emergency room, warning that a fall could result in paralysis. What followed was a whirlwind- I was at work at the time so I decided to eat lunch and then go home and take a shower first as I didn't want to be hungry, stinky, and sweaty in the hospital. When I got to the co-op, I told the office personnel that I had to leave early and what was going on with me. As we sat together for lunch I jokingly said, "what would happen if this was the last time that we ever get to eat lunch together?" and we all tried to laugh it off, I still had a bad feeling about it. They then helped me set up a group text so that I could keep everyone informed on what was happening with me. Before I left I backed my car into the shop and cleaned all of my personal belongings out of the bucket truck that I was assigned and I completely cleaned out my locker so if things took a turn for the worse, no one else would have to do it for me.

I then called my wife to let her know what was going on, went home, took a shower, then off we went on to the hospital.



Lettau in the hospital with a gift basket from Oahe Electric. "They wouldn't let me eat any of it, but it never made it home because my wife and kids ate it!" he recalled.

Unfortunately, on this particular Tuesday afternoon they were full. I was there for a total of 12 hours because they didn't have a room available for me and they wanted to send me to the Mayo clinic or to Sioux Falls, but they didn't have any rooms available either. What an education I got as to how hard the doctors and nurses work on a daily basis in an emergency room. Around midnight they finally had a room available so I got to leave the chaos of the busy emergency room. I was able to get some rest and around noon our co-op's General Manager and his wife came to visit me in the hospital. I thought that this was very thoughtful of them and he reassured me then that he and the board had my back on this and would help me out in any way needed.

Later that afternoon I was transferred via Life Flight to Avera McKenna Hospital in Sioux Falls which began what would become a 10-day stay. Immediately they did a PET scan, biopsied the mass in my chest and installed a port in my chest. Before results were even confirmed, doctors prepared me for the possibility of stage 4 cancer in my chest, spinal cord and lymph nodes. The determining factor would be the type – lung cancer, which offered little hope, or Hodgkin lymphoma, which is treatable.

I texted my co-workers with the news and asked them to please pray – not just for healing, but for a specific diagnosis. Something that I never imagined I would do.



Lettau's Oahe Electric friends gathered before he rang the bell.

After consulting with doctors at the Mayo Clinic, they told me that they weren't going to biopsy the cancer in my back because it was just too risky, so they decided to use radiation on that as soon as possible to try to keep it from doing any more damage to my spinal cord. They said that I was only the 12th case in the nation that they knew of, where this type of cancer migrated into the spinal cord.

Several days later, our prayers were answered. The biopsy confirmed Hodgkin lymphoma in my thymus gland, lymph nodes, spinal cord and at the anal rectal juncture. Never underestimate the power of prayers.

Treatment began immediately. I went through 10 rounds of radiation therapy to protect my spinal cord, and a week after that, on April 9, 2025, I had my first round of chemotherapy. This went on every other week for the next six months. It was both mentally and physically exhausting. By the first part of May, I was largely confined to a wheelchair, including during my son's wedding.

Throughout it all, I stayed connected with my Oahe Electric family, providing updates and even attending monthly safety meetings via FaceTime. But what truly carried me through was the overwhelming support I received.

When I got home from the hospital my fellow coworkers asked what I needed and almost all of them went to my house

and installed handicap grab bars in my bathroom, a new handicap friendly shower head and anti-slip mats on the shower floor. They moved my office desk upstairs so that I had a comfortable place to keep up with all the paperwork and medications, and they even changed my toilet out to a taller one that was more handicap friendly. They then built a wheelchair ramp in my garage so that I could get in and out of my house. Every week someone from the co-op would stop by to visit me and ensure that I kept having good days by constantly encouraging me to stay the course to beat my cancer diagnosis. The continual care that they provided me daily was really humbling and means very much to me, even to this day over a year later. They would all come over to my house occasionally – board members included – bringing pizza and beverages for supper just to cheer me up and keep me going. (We are still working to keep that bimonthly get-together going today). That kind of commitment that they showed towards me really, really meant a lot and absolutely was a huge part of my recovery. I even had a water leak around a sewer vent pipe on my roof and they came over to fix it so that I didn't have to call a contractor. I had many phone conversations with my fellow coworkers when I was feeling down and they kept telling me that they really missed me and wanted me back to work as soon as I was able.

I can't forget my close friends and family that also went the extra mile when I needed a ride to the doctor or physical therapy, that kept cooking me food so that after a chemotherapy treatment when you felt really crappy all I had to do was warm up the great meals and eat, no hassle with cooking.

I had so many people praying for my recovery I actually felt different. I can't explain it, but it was there. My journey through my cancer battle certainly would not have been possible without my loving wife standing by my side, managing appointments, treatment, and the many challenges that came with them.

One of the most meaningful moments of my recovery was the day that I had my last chemotherapy treatment when ALL my coworkers and some close friends were there to greet me as I rang the bell signifying that I had finished that portion of my cancer journey. I fought the fight along with all their help and much needed support.

Today, I am grateful to say that so far, I have been cancer free for six months following my last chemotherapy treatment. I am still healing from all the damage from cancer, chemotherapy and radiation treatments, but very happy to still be alive. I'm still not able to walk the best, especially in tall grass or on any kind of a slope, and I still have major balance issues, but I am improving every day.

On Dec. 1, 2025, I returned to work. Although I was unable to return to my regular job as a lineman, the board and management graciously welcomed me back to work in any capacity that I was able to return so that I could help try to make every day at Oahe Electric better and safer than the last.

Everyone whom I've met that had cancer has told me the same thing: "recovery is not possible without the support you get from the people in your life," and I just thank God that I have the people in my life that I have: my family, friends and especially my Oahe Electric family. I truly could not have made it through without all of you.

FORT MEADE & THE STAR SPANGLED BANNER

How South Dakota Set the Stage for a National Anthem

Jacob Boyko

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This month – July of 2026 – the United States of America celebrates the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence, when the Founding Fathers declared the end of Great Britain’s role as their colonial overseer.

No patriotic song captures the sacrifice and resilience of the American experiment quite like the national anthem, “The Star-Spangled Banner.” However, the anthem is not from the American Revolution, nor was it immediately adopted as the nation’s official song. Its story unfolded over more than a century, from a British bombardment in Baltimore to a flag-lowering ceremony on the plains of western South Dakota.

The War of 1812

The year is 1814. The United States of America is in the midst of its second war with Great Britain – The War of 1812 – and the nation is reeling from a recent attack on Washington, D.C., where British troops torched the Capitol and White House.

A Maryland lawyer, Francis Scott Key, had just boarded a British naval vessel. He was sent there on behalf of the U.S. government to negotiate the release of an American prisoner, and while his negotiation was successful, Key was not allowed to return ashore until the British forces completed their bombardment on nearby Fort McHenry for fear that Key had overheard military plans while on board.

Detained aboard the enemy ship, Key looked ashore to Baltimore as the American forces fended off the invasion. As dusk settled over the harbor, it became harder for Key to track the battle, his only illumination being the occasional glow of British rockets and exploding shells. Key watched through the night, not sure who was winning the drawn-out fight. At dawn, there was just enough illumination for Key to make out the American flag still flying over the fort. The Americans had held



Visitors to Fort Meade (1 mile west of Sturgis, S.D.) will see the very same flag pole used by Col. Caleb Carlton during the flag retirements. These once-a-day evening ceremonies were the first instance of the Star Spangled Banner serving as the United States’ unofficial national anthem.

Photo submitted by Randy Bender

the fort and fended off the British from Baltimore.

Key’s experience that night inspired him to write a poem he titled “The Defence of Fort M’Henry.” Later, it was put to song and became known as “The Star-Spangled Banner.”

Fort Meade

Fast forward to 1892, thousands of miles west on the American frontier.

Col. Caleb Carlton is the new commander of the Eighth U.S. Cavalry at Fort Meade, a U.S. Army post in the young state of South Dakota. About a mile west, the bustling town of Sturgis is growing along with the fort, serving as an important stop along numerous trails heading toward gold country in the streams of the Black Hills.

“Fort Meade was put in place in about 1878 to help maintain the peace in the Black Hills region between the native tribes and the settlers coming in,” explained Randy Bender, a lifelong resident of Sturgis and second-generation Fort Meade Museum board member.

Carlton was eager to make his mark – not through a battle, but patriotism. He and his wife discussed how they could better instill respect for the American flag among their troops stationed at the fort. The Carltons’ idea was to have the band play an official song during the evening retreat, when the flag is retired for the night.

“Carlton issued orders that all within hearing distance were to stand at attention, and all men not under arms were to remove their hats as a sign of respect to the flag,” Bender said.

That song, chosen at the urging of Mrs. Carlton, was the Star Spangled Banner.

“We selected the Star Spangled Banner as it was written under very unusual circumstances,” Carlton later wrote in a 1914 letter.

Carlton’s daughter, Mabel, recalled the first ceremony in her journal.

“As the final notes of the song faded away, the flag landed gently in the arms of the waiting troops,” she wrote. “If it had been practiced, it could not have been done more perfectly.”

From Fort Meade, the practice began to spread as other officers and government officials visited and observed the ceremony.

“The New York Times referred to the fact that (I) was trying to establish a national anthem,” Carlton wrote. “This attracted the attention of Col. Cook in command of the recruiting depot at David’s Island, who wrote me that he was having recruits taught to sing our national air. I suggested he concentrate his instruction on the Star Spangled Banner.”

Carlton also wrote that later, during a meeting in Harrisburg with Pennsylvania Gov. Daniel H. Hastings, that the governor promised he would initiate the playing of the Star Spangled Banner among the state’s militia.

The most decisive support came during a meeting between Carlton and Secretary of War Daniel Lamont, with the two speaking about the custom. Before long,



Above: Officers of the 8th Cavalry in Fort Meade, S.D. in 1892. Photo courtesy of the South Dakota State Historical Society



Right: A photograph of Fort Meade with Bear Butte in the distance. Photo courtesy of the Library of Congress.

Lamont ordered that the Star Spangled Banner be played during evening retreats across the nation.

Nearly 40 years after Fort Meade’s first Star Spangled Banner rendition, Congress in 1931 declared it the national anthem.

Today, visitors to Fort Meade can stand near the place where that custom began. A historical marker near the parade ground bears the words “It Started Here,” connecting the South Dakota fort to the story of the national anthem.

“That flagpole that they lowered the flag down from for that event is still standing at Fort Meade, and still used,” Bender said.

For Bender, who grew up at Fort Meade while his father worked at the

VA hospital and mother served on the museum board, the historic post still carries the feel of another era.

“When you visit Fort Meade, it’s like stepping back in time,” Bender said.

Many visitors are surprised to learn about Fort Meade’s place in the anthem’s history.

“It’s one of those things we just take for granted that we have a national anthem,” Bender said, “We never stopped to think about how these things came to be. But every one of those stories had to start at some point, and the national anthem story got its start in Fort Meade, South Dakota.”

The Fort Meade museum is open from mid-May through the end of September 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Monday-Saturday.



STILL ROLLING

Cody Denne, third-generation owner of Ron's Bike Shop, holds an e-bike available at his shop in Mitchell, S.D.
Photo by Frank Turner

Three Generations Later, Ron's Bike Shop Embraces E-Bikes

Frank Turner

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For nearly 70 years, Ron's Bike Shop has helped keep Mitchell, S.D., moving.

The family-owned business has served generations of riders from the same location since 1958, when Cody Denne's grandfather, Ron, bought a local repair shop, renamed it and moved his family to South Dakota. Today, Denne is the third generation to run the business, carrying forward a name that has become familiar to local riders.

"I really just love the bike industry and trying to keep more people on a bike," Denne said.

The story traces back to St. Cloud, Minn., where Denne's grandfather, Ron, had been working at a bike shop when he told a bicycle sales representative he wanted to own a shop of his own.

The representative knew of one for sale in Mitchell: Harvey's Fix It Shop. Ron purchased the business in 1958, gave it the

name it still carries today, beginning a family connection that has lasted nearly seven decades.

"My grandpa owned it for about 20 or 25 years," Denne said. "My dad, Mike, owned it for 40, and I'm going on year six since my dad passed away."

The shop has changed with each generation. Old photos from the 1960s show that Ron's Bike Shop once sold Cushman scooters and BSA motorcycles.

Today, the newest shift is electric. About 12 years ago, Denne added his first e-bike to the shop's inventory after a customer came in looking for one. At the time, he said, he did not know much about them. But he ordered the bike, the customer bought it and the sale became an early sign of where the industry was headed.

The trend took time to build, but over the past few years, e-bikes have become a major part of the showroom.

"I'd say three years ago was the big year where I started investing, putting more on my showroom floor than regular bikes," Denne said. "And last year, they took off. I think I sold, give or take, like 60 electric bikes last year."

Denne said the demand for e-bikes is something that would

have been hard for his grandfather, Ron, to imagine when he purchased the shop in 1958.

“He probably never would have thought electric bikes would ever exist,” Cody said.

For some riders, the appeal is simple. An e-bike can make hills easier, make longer rides more realistic and give people confidence to ride farther than they otherwise would. Denne said the technology has opened cycling to customers who might have stopped riding or never considered buying a bike at all.

“E-bikes are getting more people riding who wouldn’t have ridden before – people who are tired of riding their regular bike and need a little assist to climb hills,” he said.

One couple from Huron helped Denne see what that could mean. About three years ago, the two came into the shop looking at electric bikes. Denne sent them out for a short test ride to a nearby bike path. After about 45 minutes, he started to worry.

“I was just getting in my van to go find them,” he said.

But then they returned to the shop, smiling.

“They were so happy,” Denne said. “They both took an e-bike home, and I think that first year they put like 1,500 miles on them.”

That added distance is also where e-bikes can become a tool for accessibility. For riders who need a little help because of age, hills, wind, endurance or confidence, electric assist can lower the barrier without taking away the activity. Denne said some riders who may have gone only 3 or 4 miles on a regular bike are now riding closer to 12.

“They’re seeing more,” he said. “They’re adding more adventure to their ride.”

As e-bikes become more common, Denne spends more time answering questions about motors, batteries, charging and what type of e-bike makes sense for each rider. He also pushes back on the idea that e-bikes do all the work.

“People think if you get an electric bike, it’s just going to do all the assist for you,” Denne said. “No, you’ve still got to pedal.”

Safety has become part of that education. Denne encourages riders to understand the class of e-bike they are buying, know where that type of e-bike is allowed and respect the added speed that comes with electric assist. Helmets, working brakes, proper lights and basic awareness still matter, especially as riders travel farther and faster than they might on a traditional bicycle.

But regardless of the technology, Ron’s Bike Shop continues to do what it has done for nearly 70 years: help people ride.

“Electric bikes are the thing right now,” Denne said. “It’s only getting bigger and better every year.”

Only now, more of those bikes plug in before they hit the trail.



The Denne family purchased Harvey's Fix It Shop in 1958.
Photo submitted by Ron's Bicycle Shop



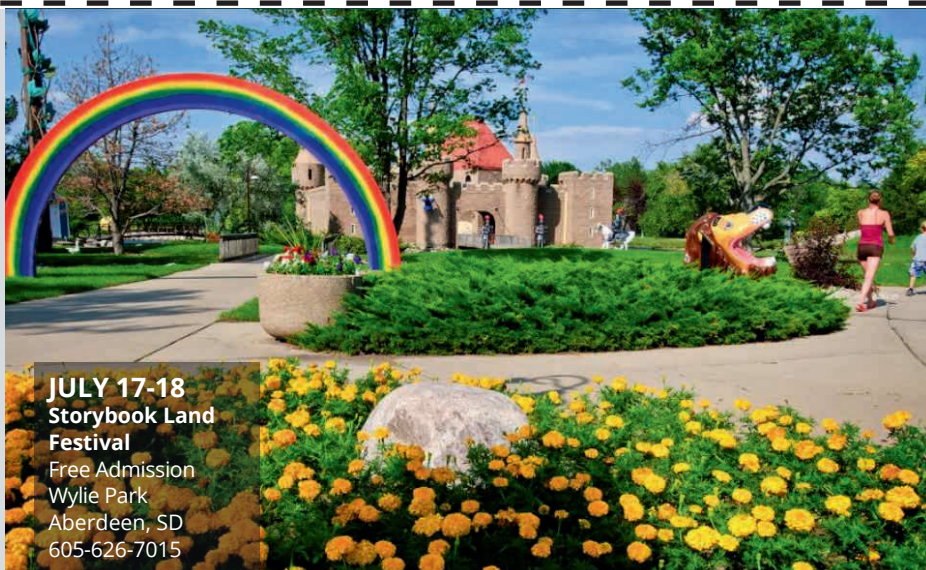
By 1963, Ron's Bicycle Shop was selling more than bicycles, with Cushman scooters and BSA motorcycles also part of the business.
Photo submitted by Ron's Bicycle Shop

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JULY 17-18
Storybook Land
Festival
Free Admission
Wylie Park
Aberdeen, SD
605-626-7015

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.

JULY 2-4
USA 250th Celebration
at Mount Rushmore
Rapid City, SD
www.nps.gov

JULY 8
Tracy Area Gardens & Quilts Tour
2-7:30 p.m.
Lakes Area – Shetek, Sarah, Gavin
Rain Date: July 9
Tracy, MN
507-629-3252
tracy.area.garden.quilts@gmail.com

JULY 10-12
Rooted: A Prairie Arts Weekend
Geddes, SD
Vendors, Artists: 605-428-5007

JULY 11
40th Annual Spearfish Canyon
Half Marathon & 5K
Start: 7 a.m., Savoy, SD
End: City Park, Spearfish, SD
Register: www.nhcaso.org

JULY 15-19
Danish Days
Viborg, SD
danishdays.org

JULY 18
A Celebration of Johnny Cash
7 p.m.
Gayville Hall
Gayville, SD

JULY 18
Forever Simon & Garfunkel
Prairie Village
Madison, SD

JULY 18-19
10th Annual Charles Mix
Saddle Club SDRR Rodeo
Geddes, SD
605-680-2763

JULY 24-26
Bruce Honey Days
Bruce, SD
605-627-5671

JULY 24-26
Winner Elks 57th Annual
Rodeo to Benefit LifeScope
7 p.m.
Tripp County Fairgrounds
Winner, SD

JULY 25
Planes, Trains & Automobiles
Prairie Village
Madison, SD

JULY 25
Disability Awareness &
Accessibility Committees
Resource Fair (DAAC)
11 a.m.-2 p.m.
Minneluzahan Senior Center
Rapid City, SD

JULY 30
Spurs Grand Classic
Equestrian Competition
9 a.m.
Aberdeen, SD
605-226-1099

AUG. 1-2
51st Annual Pioneer Power
Threshing Show
MN Machinery Museum
Hanley Falls, MN
507-828-5437

AUG. 4-6
Farmfest 2026
8-a.m.-4 p.m.
Gilfillan Estate
28269 MN Hwy. 67
Morgan, MN
ideagroup.com/farmfest

AUG. 7-9
Fur Trader Days
NEW Art in the Park
Geddes, SD
Vendors, Artists: 605-428-5007

Note: We publish contact information as provided. If no phone number is given, none will be listed. Please call ahead to verify the event is still being held.