

COOPERATIVE CONNECTIONS



Katie Grott, field station manager at SDSU's Cottonwood research facility near Philip, stays busy overseeing several ongoing projects designed to deliver practical and profitable solutions for producers.

Blazing new trails

Ag research abounds at Cottonwood
Pages 8-9

Line work courses through their veins
Pages 12-13

The Power Behind Your Power



Jeff Birkeland
CEO

You've likely noticed West Central Electric's crews out and about, working on power lines and other electrical equipment in our community. It's no secret that a linemen's job is tough – but it's a job that's essential and must be done, often in challenging conditions. This month, as we celebrate Lineman Appreciation Day on April 11, I thought I'd share some interesting facts about electric linemen with you.

The work can be heavy, in more ways than one. Did you know the equipment and tools that a lineman carries while climbing a utility pole can weigh up to 50 pounds? That's the same as carrying six gallons of water. Speaking of utility poles, linemen are required to climb poles ranging anywhere from 30 to 80 feet tall. Needless to say, if you have a fear of heights, this likely isn't the career path for you.

Linemen must be committed to their career – because it's not just a job, it's a lifestyle. The long hours and ever-present danger can truly take a toll. In fact, being a lineman is listed in the top 10 most dangerous jobs in the U.S.

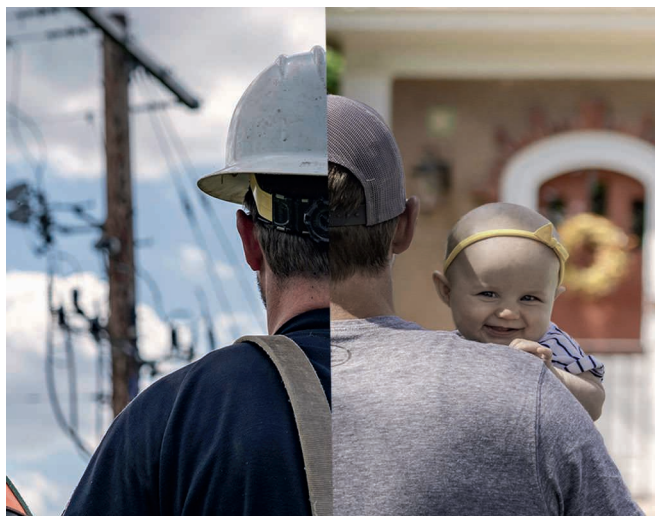
Linemen often work non-traditional hours, outdoors in difficult conditions. While the job does not require a college degree, it does require technical skills, years of training and hands-on learning. Did you know that to become a journeyman lineman, it can take more than 7,000 hours of training (or about four years)? That's because working with high-voltage equipment requires specialized skills, experience and an ongoing mental toughness. Shortcuts are not an option, and there is no room for error in this line of work.

Despite the many challenges, West Central Electric's linemen are

committed to powering our local communities. During severe weather events that bring major power outages, linemen are among the first ones called. They must be ready to leave the comfort of their home and families unexpectedly, and they don't return until the job is done, often days later. That's why the lineman's family is also dedicated to service. They understand the importance of the job to the community.

Nationwide, there are approximately 120,000 electric linemen. West Central has 16 linemen that are responsible for keeping power flowing 24/7, 365 days a year. To do this, they maintain 4,071 miles of power lines across five counties and over 7,000 square miles. In addition to the highly visible tasks linemen perform, their job today goes far beyond climbing utility poles to repair a wire. Today's linemen are information experts who can pinpoint power outages from miles away. Line crews now use laptops, iPads, drones and other technologies to map outages, survey damage and troubleshoot problems.

Being a lineman may not seem like a glamorous job, but it is absolutely essential to the life of our communities. Without the exceptional dedication and commitment of these hardworking men, we simply would not have the reliable electricity that we need for everyday life.



LINEMAN APPRECIATION DAY

We thank lineworkers for their courage and commitment to powering our community.

COOPERATIVE CONNECTIONS

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Design assistance by SDREA

Generator Safety



Scott Kittelson

It is great to report that the West Central Electric service area has not experienced any major ice and snowstorms resulting in extended power outages for several years, but as we all know it has happened before and will happen again.

Hooking up some of your home's electrical circuits to an emergency generator means you can have lights and heat even during a power outage. But weigh the risks and heed these safety tips if you decide to buy one.

Install your generator outdoors under a protective weather shield, like a vented shed, not in your basement! Most units use the same kind of gasoline you put in your lawnmower, a fuel that emits deadly carbon monoxide fumes. Carbon monoxide is odorless and colorless, and can kill in a matter of minutes if it seeps into your living space.

Hire a licensed electrician to install the generator and transfer switch. Improper installation can send electricity from your generator out onto co-op power lines, energizing wires that line workers believe to be out of service. If a line worker is handling the line when it becomes energized, he or she could be killed. West Central will install a transfer switch on your meter pole at a reasonable cost, just give us a call.

Buy a generator with enough capacity to run the appliances you will need while the power is out. If you plan to operate expensive equipment like a computer, double-check with your dealer to make sure the generator can safely power sensitive electronics.

The average life of a moderately priced generator is between 300 and 500 hours, so have it serviced regularly, and start it up about once a month to make sure it is ready to go.

Store gasoline safely. Many generators are equipped with five-gallon tanks. But because power outages generally are few and far between, it's likely that the gas will go bad between uses. Keep a gallon of fresh gas in your generator's tank and another gallon or two away

from your house. Replace the gas every two to three months or add a fuel stabilizer. Remember - spilled fuel can cause fires and explosions.

Do business with a reputable company that offers a warranty.

After a power failure, make sure to disconnect all equipment before firing up the generator. Once the generator is running, restart your largest electric motor first, and then turn on other motor-powered items one at a time. After all necessary equipment is operating, power for lights is available.



Generate Safely.

Never use a portable generator indoors.

Do not plug generators into standard electrical outlets.

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

Start the generator before connecting appliances.

10 helpful tips for spring energy savings

Every season of the year provides many unique energy-saving opportunities for you and your family.

Here are some ideas particularly well suited for you to apply this spring.

- 1. Clear the air:** Open windows to allow fresh air to circulate throughout your home.
- 2. Cook outside:** Enjoy the sunshine by using your grill or smoker to add festive flavors to meals.
- 3. Search and seal:** Cracks and spaces let conditioned air slip outdoors. Caulk and weatherstrip to seal leaks.
- 4. Natural light:** Open blinds and curtains and turn off the lights to save energy and money.
- 5. Be fan friendly:** Use ceiling fans to circulate air and keep cool.
- 6. Atmospheric adjustment:** Remember to adjust your thermostat settings for the warmer months ahead.
- 7. Tune up:** Schedule an appointment with a qualified heating, ventilating and air conditioning technician to identify any potential problems with your system.
- 8. Peak savings:** Plan household chores that require electricity during off-peak hours (when energy demand is low).
- 9. Take charge:** Consider disconnecting electrical devices you don't use regularly until you need them. Plugged-in devices use energy even when not in use.
- 10. Move outdoors:** Time spent outdoors offers opportunities to turn off lights, TVs, computers and appliances. You'll be more active, have more fun and save more money.



DON'T TOY WITH PERSONAL SAFETY



When playing outdoors, keep a safe distance from power lines, substations and other equipment your electric co-op uses to send electricity to your home.

Flying remote-controlled toys and drones is a great way to have fun, but accidentally making contact with a power line or other electrical equipment can be dangerous and, in some cases, even deadly.

- Never fly kites or drones near power lines.
- Stay away from power lines, meters, transformers and electrical boxes.
- Never climb trees near power lines.
- If you get something stuck in a power line, call your electric co-op.



Fire Prevention

Jonie Smith

Jonie Smith sends out an important safety message for campers to extinguish fires before leaving the area. Jonie is the daughter of Myles and Amber Smith of Castlewood. They are members of H-D Electric Cooperative.

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.

LIP-SMACKING BEVERAGES

BLUEBERRY BANANA SMOOTHIE

Ingredients:
 1 cup spinach
 1/2 cup water
 2 tbsp. apple cider vinegar
 1 tbsp. almond butter
 1/2 cup bananas, frozen
 1/2 cup blueberries, frozen
 1 tbsp. chia seeds
 1/4 tsp. ground cinnamon
 1/4 tsp. minced ginger
 1/2 cup berry yogurt
 fresh blueberries, for garnish (optional)
 Ground black pepper to taste

METHOD

In blender, blend spinach, water, apple cider vinegar, almond butter, frozen bananas, frozen blueberries, chia seeds, cinnamon, ginger and yogurt until smooth. Pour into two glasses and garnish with fresh blueberries, if desired.

culinary.net

FRENCH ICED COFFEE

Ingredients:
 3 cups strong coffee
 2 cups sugar
 1 pint cream or half & half
 1 qt. milk or almond milk
 2 tsp. (vanilla) flavoring (other flavorings also work)

METHOD

Dissolve sugar in hot coffee. Cool. Add other ingredients. Pour into containers (I use the tall 2 c. Tupperware for individual drinks, but also use quarts.) Freeze. Take out and let thaw.

Ruth Schilberg, Viborg

SWAMP WATER

Ingredients:
 1 small package lime gelatin
 1 cup hot water
 1 (12-oz.) can frozen unsweetened pineapple juice concentrate
 2 liters carbonated water

METHOD

Mix lime gelatin with hot water to dissolve. Add frozen concentrate and carbonated water. Chill. Makes 10 servings.

Lily Gums, Clear Lake

FRUIT SLUSH

Ingredients:
 4 cups sugar (granulated)
 6 cups water
 1 46 oz. can pineapple juice
 2 12 oz. cans frozen orange juice
 1 12 oz. can frozen lemonade (pink or yellow)
 2 small bananas, mashed very fine (or other fruit)

METHOD

Mix and bring to a boil the sugar and water. When mixture is cool, add juices and fruit. Put in 5-quart pail and freeze. When frozen, use 2-3 scoops in a glass with 7-Up or ginger ale. Great drink for spring or summer.

Alana Neville, Milesville

STRAWBERRY SMOOTHIE

Ingredients:
 2 cup fresh strawberries, stemmed & halved
 1 cup plain yogurt
 1/2 cup ice cubes or chips
 1/2 tsp. ground cardamom
 1/4 tsp. ginger

METHOD

In a blender, combine all ingredients. Blend on high speed until smoothie texture. Makes 2-12 oz. glasses.

Jane Ham, Rapid City

Please send your favorite casserole 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 2022. All entries must include your name, mailing address, phone number and cooperative name.

Q: I'm planning to buy a new home this year, and I want to know how efficient it is. What questions should I ask my home inspector?

A: Many factors go into buying a home. For most people, energy efficiency does not top the list, and unfortunately, houses don't typically come with energy efficiency ratings.

It can be difficult for a buyer to know how efficient a home is when viewing the listing online or taking a tour. But your home inspector can help you identify potential energy costs and energy-efficiency upgrades.

Some homes may already be efficient, while other homes may need improvements. There's nothing wrong with buying an inefficient home, but you will want to know what you're getting into and that you can afford the energy costs once you get the keys.

Here are five questions to ask your home inspector:

1. What is the condition of the electrical panel and wiring throughout the home?

A panel upgrade or rewiring can be a costly endeavor. An older panel and wiring aren't inefficient, but it can delay or make some energy-efficiency projects more expensive. In several homes I have worked on, older wiring had to be replaced before insulation could be added.

Make sure the panel can accommodate any new appliances you might want to add, such as air conditioning or an electric vehicle charger.

2. How old is the HVAC system, and how efficient is it? Has it been maintained?

The typical lifespan of an HVAC system is 15-25 years. As the largest energy user and often the most expensive equipment in the home, you will want to know the energy, maintenance and replacement costs. If the HVAC system is old, consider the cost for a replacement.

3. How old is the water heater?

The lifespan of a storage water heater is about 10 years. The cost to replace a water heater ranges from \$400 to \$3,600, depending on the unit type and installation costs. If an older water heater is in a finished space or on a second floor, replace it before it fails and potentially causes water damage.

4. What are the levels and conditions of insulation in the attic, walls and floor?

Insulation is one of the easiest and most beneficial energy-efficiency upgrades you can make. It isn't as pretty as new countertops, but it can make a home more comfortable, waste less energy and reduce outdoor noise.

To cut down on drafts and make insulation more effective, air seal before insulating. Seal cracks, gaps or holes in the walls, floors, ceiling and framing between heated and unheated spaces.

If your new home needs insulation and air sealing, make this your efficiency priority. The sooner you do it, the more energy you will save over time. Recommended insulation levels vary by location. You can find information about insulation and air sealing at www.energy.gov.

5. Are there any extras in this home that will increase my utility bills?

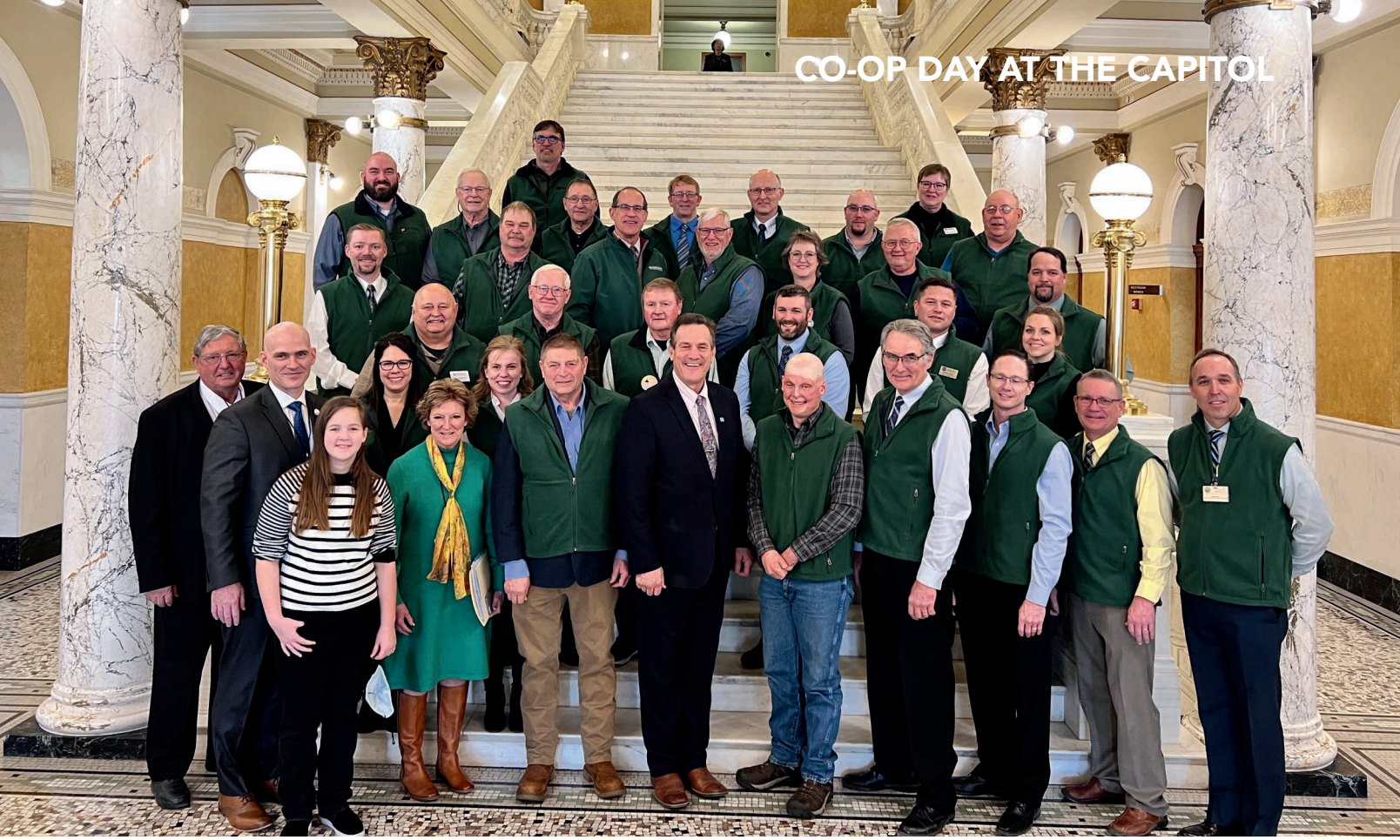
Any motors in the home or on the property should be assessed, including pumps for wells and septic systems. When it comes to extras, remember life's luxuries aren't free. You will want to be able to afford the cost of operating amenities, such as pools, hot tubs and saunas.

Additional considerations - You can request the home's utility bills for the previous two years from the seller or realtor. Your bill will not be the same due to your personal energy habits, but this information will give you an estimate of the home's energy costs.

When buying a home that checks all your boxes, ask your home inspector the right efficiency questions. Understanding the condition of appliances, features and building materials can save you from hidden surprises in your home and on your first utility bills.



Miranda Boutelle
Efficiency Services
Group



Electric cooperative leaders and employees from across the state traveled to the Capitol in Pierre to discuss industry-related issues with lawmakers. The group is shown above with Lt. Gov. Larry Rhoden (front/center). *Photo by Billy Gibson*

Electric Cooperative Day at the Capitol

Billy Gibson

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In-depth discussions about electric vehicles, vaccinations, taxation and other hot topics were in abundance during the 2022 Electric Cooperative Day at the Capitol. Held in February just before the legislative session's "crossover day," more than 30 electric cooperative leaders traveled to Pierre in wintry weather to engage in face-to-face conversations with elected officials.

The co-op representatives also served a hot meal to more than 300 individuals including legislators, government employees, lobbyists, senior government officials and others as the centerpiece of the day's activities.

The meal, prepared by former co-op employee Roger Crom and former co-op board member Ken Gillaspie, stood as a gesture of appreciation to lawmakers and their staffs for their often arduous work

going through the process of crafting legislation.

The cooperative directors, managers and employees from organizations around the state represented the collective interests of more than 300,000 cooperative member-owners.

Topics of interest included renewable power and electric vehicles (EVs) as lawmakers considered rules pertaining to EVs such as creating a network of charging stations in the state, licensing rules and fees for public road use.

The cooperative visitors observed conversations and deliberations among lawmakers taking place during committee meetings and hearings including appropriations, education, transportation, energy and others. Afterwards, they took the opportunity to meet with their representatives, ask questions and dig deeper into the issues that could have a direct impact on electric cooperative consumers.

After the meal was served, co-op leaders gathered for an update from lobbyists representing electric cooperatives and their members.

Don Heeren, president of the board at the South Dakota Rural Electric Association in Pierre, said he looks forward to the annual Electric Cooperative Day at the Capitol because it allows him and other co-op leaders to engage in close, productive conversations with lawmakers.

"Over the past couple of years we've been forced to conduct our legislative business largely over the internet, and that's been very restrictive," Heeren said. "There's just no substitute for having personal conversations when you're charged with the responsibility of making sure the collective voice of the members you represent is heard."

Heeren added: "To be able to sit down together and have our discussions over a hot meal makes it even better."

ROBO RANCHING

Cottonwood Field Station Manager Katie Grott and student Lily McFadden take a break from their work. *Photos by Billy Gibson*

Cottonwood Field Research Station is abuzz with studies designed to increase producer profitability

Billy Gibson

billy.gibson@sdua.coop

There are robo-cops, robo-codes and robo-calls. But robo-cattle ranching?

That futuristic phrase is part of the nomenclature surrounding a beef production movement called “precision ranching,” an offshoot of the “precision agriculture” approach that promotes the use of advanced technology to improve yields and profitability.

This new wave of ag research evokes postmodern images of bovines grazing through the fields wearing high tech gadgets. Turns out, it’s a description not too far off the mark, according to Dr. Jamie Brennan, an assistant professor of research and extension specialist at South Dakota State University.

Based out of the West River Research and Extension Center in Rapid City, Brennan is using SDSU’s Cottonwood Field Station near Philip to study the viability of using high-tech GPS tracking collars to deliver real-time information on steer activity and behavior.

“By monitoring animal movement we can identify changes in behavior that might indicate sickness, for example, which can be sent as an alert to producers,” Brennan said.

He’s deploying the type of advanced accelerator technology commonly associated with Fitbit watches, vehicle trackers, smartphone map apps and other monitoring devices.

“We’re working to develop the capability for producers to easily identify not only where animals are on the landscape but also where they are selecting for grazing and resting locations,” Brennan said. “The work we are doing at the station is designed to determine the potential benefits - and possible shortcomings - of precision ranching technology and to predict the return on investment for the producer.”

Brennan’s project is just one of several intriguing studies currently in play at the Cottonwood Field Station. One of six field research centers in the SDSU Agriculture Experiment Station network, Cottonwood is among the

oldest facilities of its kind in the country. Covering more than 2,600 acres, Cottonwood was established in 1907 and has received regional and national acclaim with impactful results such as developing a new method of determining stocking rates for western regions and devising the Universal Soil Loss Equation now known as RUSLE2.

These scientific forays into precision ranching include virtual fencing (Vence™), Smart Feeder™ systems, mobile app-based mineral consumption monitors, methane emissions measuring devices and soil moisture monitoring.

The exploration into virtual fencing holds plenty of promise in helping producers manage their livestock and landscape more efficiently and effectively, according to Cottonwood Field Station manager Katie Grott.

While it may be hard for an old-school rancher to envision a world without barbed wire, fence posts and cattle guards, moving this technology to market could result in substantial savings for farm families.

Grott explained the technology is a much more sophisticated version of the kind of residential-grade invisible fence



A cow at the Cottonwood Field Research Station waits patiently for a Smart Feeder to be loaded with hay.

designed to keep pets from wandering around the neighborhood streets. Virtual fencing is already being used to contain goat herds and other smaller animals with measurable success.

The latest research testing involves combining an electrical pulse administered through a GPS-enabled collar, combined with an auditory stimulus to keep cattle confined within certain boundaries. A software program allows the rancher to define those boundaries as needed for successful grazing rotation and land management.

“We’re looking at how virtual fencing affects animal behavior, performance and natural resources,” Grott said.

Dr. Krista Ehlert, assistant professor and extension specialist, is also involved in the project and adds, “Virtual fencing turns physical labor into cognitive labor for producers, helping to reduce labor and potentially improve work-life balance for producers.”

Other projects at Cottonwood include work being led by assistant professor Dr. Hector Menendez. The research uses technology developed by the Rapid City firm, C-Lock. C-Lock has a scale that collects daily weight records on animals every time they drink. The data provide

valuable information on stocking rates, forage quality and weather conditions on individual animal performance.

“It’s an exciting time in the area of agricultural research,” Menendez said. “We have secured funds to proceed with a project on interdisciplinary engagement in animal systems and precision livestock water monitoring. And we’re excited about holding producer-oriented workshops, training classes and field days to educate producers on how these advancements can improve their profitability.”

One rancher who keeps a close eye on the latest research results is Eric Jennings, president of the South Dakota Cattleman’s Association.

“There are some interesting new concepts being explored through this facility and others,” Jennings said. “We’re watching to see which of these systems prove to become both practical and affordable for producers to implement in their daily operations. For instance, the idea of virtual fencing has been around for a while, but the research and application of new technology has emerged as a viable option.”

Brennan, Ehlert, Menendez and others who work daily to blaze new pathways

Amount of acres
researchers have

2,640

at their disposal at the
Cottonwood
Field Station

for cattle producers take gratification from knowing their labor and application of scientific methods could result in a farm family turning the corner toward profitability and sustaining a generational way of life. Plus, they enjoy drawing students into the process and inspiring the next generation of farmers.

“They receive training in animal science, rangeland ecology, precision technology, modeling, computer programming and boots-on-the-ground ranching,” Menendez said. “One of our aims is to encourage the next generation of professionals that can merge precision technology to maximize rangeland livestock production while maintaining ranching culture.”

RATE AND USAGE INFORMATION



Jessie Tucker

It seems like this time each year, we receive some questions about our electric rates and high usage concerns. Typically, the winter months

tend to use more electricity. Hopefully, this article will alleviate concerns and answer your questions.

Did you know that West Central has not increased members' rates since August 2016? That's five and a half years of rate stability, and we don't foresee any change to that in the near future. Many dedicated employees and directors working on behalf of the membership consider steady,

affordable rates as their top priority.

For the typical single-phase account, West Central has three main components of the rate. The first is a \$32 facility charge, which I prefer to think of as a "service availability" charge. These are fixed costs that it takes to supply power to your meter before any actual energy is used. The second portion of the rate is demand charges. If your location exceeds 50 kilowatts (kW) of demand within a given month, each kW above 50 is billed at \$6.31. It is also worth noting that it is exceptionally rare for a typical home to use more than 50 kW of demand. The third portion is the kWh charges, or the actual energy metered. West Central has a declining kWh block rate for the energy portion. As a co-op, we do not need or want

excess margins. We need a certain level of margins to operate and to meet our financial requirements. Excess margins, however, are just turned back to the membership in the form of capital credits. We would rather keep those margins in your own hands, and declining kWh block rates allow just this. Aside from the three main

West Central has not increased members' rates since August 2016.

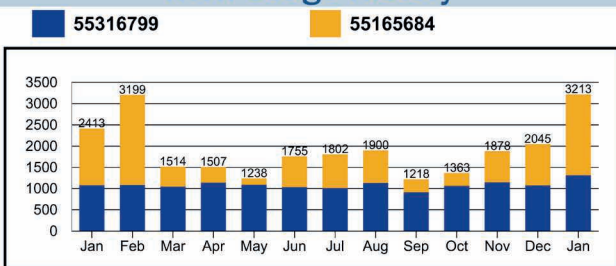
components to the rate, there are a few more things to consider breaking down your total costs, such as the electric heat discount of 3.8 cents per kWh, sales tax, or light rental.

Now that we have reviewed the rate that West Central has had in place for more than five and a half years, we need to focus on usage concerns. If your bill is higher than one might typically expect, it is simply because you have used more electricity than expected. Each month, your bill shows the amount of kWh metered at your location. In the example below, 3,213

Service Location: MU099-001 Account Number: 1234567

Service Address	Service Description	Meter Number	Services			Readings		Meter Multiplier	kWh Usage	kW
			From	To	Days	Previous	Present			
1224 E 45TH ST	HOME	55316799	12/28/21	01/28/22	31	58870	62083	1.0	3213	22.900
	Electric Heat	55165684	12/28/21	01/28/22	31	72957	74857	1.0	1900	22.160

kWh Usage History



PERIOD ENDING	January 2021	January 2022
Avg Daily Temp	27	19
Avg Daily kWh	73	104
Avg Daily Cost	\$7.48	\$9.67

Current Service Detail

Energy Charge		\$371.85
Electric Heat Credit	-\$0.038 per kWh	\$72.20CR
Total Electric Charges		\$299.65
Sales Tax		\$19.48
Total Current Charges		\$319.13

Rate and Usage, Cont.

was the total kWh used at this home for January. The second meter shows the electric heat portion. Of the 3,213 total kWh, 1,900 were used to heat the home. This is also signified on the graph area as the yellow portion of the month. The non-heating usage portion is shown in blue and usually doesn't vary too much throughout the year. Under the graph, there is also a quick comparison of 2021 to 2022. This shows that this January had a colder average daily temp of 19 degrees, compared to 27 degrees last year. More kWh were consumed because of this lower temperature, and the average daily cost was \$2.19 higher than 2021.

If you have abnormal usage, you may have some type of problem after

the meter. One service West Central offers free of charge is an energy audit. The audit can find the reasons as to why you are using more electricity than you feel acceptable.

We know that this is a lot of information to digest, but when it is all said and done, you, the member, need to understand how you are billed and why it is so. If you still have questions or want to visit about an energy audit, please call me at 669-8100. I would love to have the conversation.

Single Ø Rate			
Facility Charge			\$32.00
Demand Charge	kW	0	
First	50		\$0.00
Excess			\$6.31
Energy Charge	kWh		
First	150		\$0.167
Next	850		\$0.122
Next	1,500		\$0.097
Excess			\$0.092
Electric Heat Discount/kWh			\$0.038



Energy Efficiency Tip of the Month

When streaming content, use the smallest device that makes sense for the number of people watching. Avoid streaming on game consoles, which use 10 times more power than streaming through a tablet or laptop.

Streaming content with electronic equipment that has earned the ENERGY STAR® rating will use 25% to 30% less energy than standard equipment.

Source: Dept. of Energy



VOLTAGE IN THEIR VEINS

The Miller and Wingen men share a total of 177 years of experience in the electric utility industry. Pictured above are Joel Miller, Rollie Miller, Travis Miller, Corey Miller, Wes Wingen and Dustin Wingen.

Miller, Wingen utility workers represent a combined 177 years of faithful service

Tara Miller

taram@centralec.coop

Take a moment to imagine life without electricity. No household appliances, no electric heat, no air conditioning, no internet and no phone. In 1925, only half of homes in the U.S. had electricity. Fast forward to 2022, and electricity is a basic necessity.

April is Lineworker Appreciation Month – a time to celebrate and honor the brave men and women who often work in hazardous conditions to power our world.

The Miller family, originally from Canova, has 177 years of electric industry experience, and most of them started their careers as lineworkers.

WHERE IT ALL STARTED

Before attending school to become a lineworker, Joel Miller, better known as “Joe” or “Smokey” to some, graduated from Canova High School and began working at Overhead Door Company

in Sioux Falls. While he didn’t mind the work, he knew it wasn’t what he wanted to do for the rest of his life. Joe then heard about an opportunity to attend school and become a lineworker.

“I knew Ron Callies. He was an instructor,” Joe said. “He told us to look at the program, so Robert Zens and I checked it out and thought we would give it a try.”

Joe graduated from what is now known as Mitchell Technical College (MTC) in 1978 and began the family’s legacy of life on the line when he joined East River Electric in Madison. He started on the construction crew and later worked in maintenance. His friend Robert Zens also worked at East River Electric, but passed away in a motorcycle accident in 1980.

Joe worked at East River Electric for nearly 20 years before he moved to Western Area Power Administration (WAPA) in Pierre. WAPA is a federal organization that markets and delivers hydroelectric power and related services

across the 15-state region. Joe retired from his position of line foreman at WAPA in 2020 after 43 years.

FOLLOWING THE LEADER

Rollie was next in the Miller family line-up, a year younger than Joe. His mom talked him into going to Pipestone, MN, to work at Bayliner Boats with his older brother Ed. Rollie then worked at Feterl’s Manufacturing in Salem where he welded augers until he decided to enroll in line school at MTC at the age of 20.

“The biggest reason I went to line school was because Joe had just done it, and I was friends with Robert Zens. I saw how they just did it, and I thought I could do it, too,” Rollie explained.

Rollie now manages Vigilante Electric Cooperative in Dillon, MT. Before running the show, he worked for an electrical contractor and for West River Electric.

He then attended SDSU and worked for Bob’s Electric in Flandreau with Reggie Gassman, who is manager of customer electrical services at Sioux

Valley Energy. They both grew up in the Canova area.

Rollie earned a bachelor's degree in electrical engineering, allowing him to become a licensed professional engineer.

"My education has greatly benefited me throughout my career," Rollie said.

Rollie's boys are also following the family tradition. Cody Miller attended SDSU to become an electrical engineer and consults for electric utilities, and Logan "L.J." Miller is enrolled in the power line construction and maintenance program at MTC.



Cody Miller



L.J. Miller

"It's not a cake walk. I told them you really have to study and work hard," he said.

After Rollie, Corey was the next Miller brother to attend MTC.

"The reason I went into it is because I had two older brothers who were

linemen. I knew when I was a freshman in high school that I was going to be a lineman," Corey said.

After graduating from MTC in 1987, Corey became an apprentice lineworker at Public Service of New Hampshire. He worked there for three years, then took a position at Missouri Public Service.

Like his brothers, Corey worked his way up the ranks. He was hired as a lineworker and promoted to foreman, then supervisor, and now works in management. He is also on the board of directors for the International Lineman Rodeo Association, helping host the annual lineman rodeo event which promotes lineworker safety.

Corey's 15-year-old son Zach plans to become a lineworker after high school. Corey shares this advice for anybody

- **Joel Miller**, Retired Line Foreman at Western Area Power Administration (Pierre, SD)
43 Years, 6 months of industry experience
- **Rollie Miller**, General Manager at Vigilante Electric Cooperative (Dillon, MT)
42 years, 6 months of industry experience
- **Corey Miller**, Director of Regional Operations at Evergy (Lexington, MO)
35 years, 6 months of industry experience
- **Travis Miller**, Foreman at Southeastern Electric (Salem, SD)
30 years of industry experience
- **Wes Wingen**, Manager of Meter Services at Black Hills Power (Rapid City, SD)
15 years, 10 months of industry experience
- **Cody Miller**, Electrical Engineer (Dillon, MT)
8 years, 6 months of industry experience
- **Dustin Wingen**, Former Lineworker at Alaska Village Electric Co-op (Anchorage, AK)
2 years of industry experience
- **Logan (L.J.) Miller**, Student in the power line program at Mitchell Technical College

considering a career in the field:

"We need linemen. It is an awesome profession to get into. Linemen live to restore power – that's their lifeblood. And, quite honestly, you will make a very good wage while doing that."

Travis was the last of the Miller brothers to attend line school. He decided milking cows wasn't his calling, so in 1991 at age 26, Travis followed the path started by his big brother Joe.

"I figured they all did it, so I could probably do it better," Travis joked. He is now the foreman at Southeastern Electric in Salem.

Wes and Dustin Wingen are the sons of Stacy (Miller) and Bob Wingen. They are nephews to the Miller brothers and have also been involved in the electric utility industry. Dustin was a lineworker in Anchorage, AK, before coming back home to farm. Wes is an engineer and manager of meter services at Black Hills Power in Rapid City.

IT'S A MILLER THING

The Miller family had nine children: Sandy, Duane, Ed, Joe, Rollie, Stacy, Derrin, Travis and Corey. Marcella, mother of the youngest eight children,

passed away in 2011, and Duane "Stub" Miller, the family patriarch, currently resides in Howard. Stub shared, "People don't know it today, but having electricity is something we shouldn't take for granted."

The four Miller brothers share a combined 151 years of electric industry experience. When you add it all up, the Miller and Wingen men boast an impressive 177 years of electric industry experience.

They couldn't have worked in this profession without the support of their families, which are too large to list. All the storm jobs, dangerous assignments and family moves were worth it when they think about the people they serve. They all agree, "It's a Miller thing" and working with voltage is in their veins.

THANK A LINEMAN

Please take time to thank lineworkers for all they do to brighten our lives. We thank the Miller family for their many years of service in the industry.

Editor's note: Writer Tara Miller is Travis Miller's wife and works for Central Electric Cooperative near Mitchell.



FORAGING FOR FUN

Jayne Pfeifle of Timber Lake is fond of foraging for fruit, which she turns into delicious jellies and jams. *Photo by Roger Lawien*

Foraging for 'found food' can be fun and also good for your diet plan

Billy Gibson

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Back when Jayne Pfeifle was a little girl and ventured outdoors to gather chokeberries with her mother, her thoughts were fixed on the delicious jellies and jams she'd soon enjoy.

She wasn't aware she was engaging in an activity that would come to be known decades later as "foraging." For all she knew, foraging for food was something wild animals did when they got hungry.

With the steady lifting of pandemic restrictions, many people across the country are taking to the outdoors to avail themselves of what's called "found

food" or "nature's free grocery store."

As an indication of the rising popularity of foraging, one social media star from Ohio has amassed nearly 3.5 million TikTok followers, in addition to nearly a million more fans on Instagram. Alexis Nikole Nelson, 29, has been featured on National Public Radio, Fortune magazine, The New York Times and other news and entertainment outlets.

During the pandemic, Nelson started posting videos from her forays into the forests to gather edible mushrooms, berries, weeds and other plants. She was floored by the response she received.

Some subjects included "Where to find mushrooms that taste like shrimp,"

"How to make 'bacon' out of acorns," and "How to make 'danger bread' using cow parsnip." But Nelson struck social media gold when she posted a video that got the attention of people left financially strapped by the pandemic: "How to 'stretch' groceries by foraging."

Before long, a wider audience of outdoors enthusiasts were gravitating toward the notion that foraging can not only be enjoyed either solo or with others, but it can also be adventurous while saving money and promoting a more nutritious diet.

For Pfeifle, much of the satisfaction she derives from foraging for chokeberries, plums, elderberries and other wild edibles is making sure her husband of 39 years has a tangy treat to spread on his breakfast toast.

"Clyde likes his jelly and toast every

What to take

- Bug spray
- Sunscreen
- Long pants (for prickly and/or poisonous plants)
- Gardening gloves
- A basket or bag for storage
- A GPS or phone for maps
- Scissors or a hunting knife



Morel mushrooms are a favorite target for many foragers in search of free food and fun.

morning,” she said of her husband, her frequent foraging field companion. “I enjoy getting out and gathering the berries and he enjoys the jelly, so it makes everybody happy.”

Just don’t ask her to deal with buffaloberries. That’s where Pfeifle draws the line.

“It’s a tiny berry. They’re hard to pick, hard to clean and hard to process. The jelly is good, but it’s too much hard work and not worth the trouble,” said Pfeifle, who has served as an educator at Timber Lake Elementary for the past 48 years.

Little Moreau Recreation Area is a prime public picking place for Pfeifle and other people in the Timber Lake area, but she stays close to the vest when asked to disclose some of her other favorite foraging sites. It so happens that holding secrets is a quality found in many foragers, akin to a fisherman’s reluctance to announce to the world where the fish are biting.

Jaclyn Arens, communications and marketing coordinator at Bon Homme Yankton Electric Cooperative, looks forward to foraging for morel mushrooms when the weather warms up in the spring. She’s learned over the past

few years since she began the hobby that there’s a limited window of time for the best hunting.

“We start scouting at the end of March, but we don’t usually find anything until April and May,” she said. “The soil temperature is important, and the morels don’t pop up until it’s warm enough, about 50 degrees. They burn up or disappear when it gets too warm.”

In keeping with the forager’s unspoken code of silence, she’ll say when and how, but she won’t say where.

“I will say we look for places that have moist soil and deciduous trees like oak, elm, ash and cottonwood. Forests with big, old, decaying trees are best because morels grow from the root systems of dying trees. People have had luck in places where trees have been cut down or burned. There is plenty of public land in South Dakota to explore,” Arens said.

One pro tip Arens offers is to bring along a mesh bag to store your morels. The mesh material allows the spores to spread while hunting for more mushrooms. Another pro tip: if you do find an elusive morel, freeze in your tracks...there are likely more close by, so it’s wise to stop before accidentally trampling over a perfectly fine ’shroom.

In addition to the lure of the hunt, the taste of morels and the quality time spent with her boyfriend, Arens really



Jaclyn Arens

enjoys the annual ritual of getting out into the wild after a long winter.

“My favorite thing is getting outside in the spring after being cooped up in

the winter,” she said. “Plus, morels are delicious, and they taste even better after a long day of mushroom hunting. My favorite way to cook morels is to lightly batter them in flour and fry them in a hot pan with butter. Yummy!”

She encourages beginners to follow a few basic rules:

- Avoid areas beneath or around electric power lines.
- Avoid trespassing on private property.
- Never eat anything unless you can identify it with 100 percent accuracy.
- Take a companion along for fun and safety.
- Try to avoid areas where chemicals or insecticides may have been applied.



APRIL 16
Easter Egg Hunt at
Reclamation Ranch, Mitchell, SD

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.

To view the publication's master event calendar, scan the QR code below:



Or visit <https://sdrea.coop/cooperative-connections-event-calendar> to view more upcoming events.

MARCH 25-26

Schmeckfest
748 S Main Street, Freeman, SD, 605-925-4237

MARCH 26

Annual Ag Day
Washington Pavilion, Sioux Falls, SD, 605-367-6000

MARCH 30

Elton John Tribute Concert
Performing Arts Center, Mitchell, SD, 605-770-7813

APRIL 1-3

69th Annual Hayes Play: Interruptions
Hayes Community Hall, Hayes, SD, 605-280-6556

APRIL 2-3

Youth & Family Services' 25th Annual Kids Fair
The Monument, Rapid City, SD, youthandfamilyservices.org/kids-fair/

APRIL 8-9

Forks, Corks & Kegs Festival
Various Locations, Deadwood, SD, deadwood.com/event/forks-corks-kegs

APRIL 8-9

Jackrabbit Stampede Rodeo
Swiftel Center, Brookings, SD, swiftelcenter.com

APRIL 8-10

CAHF Spring Fling Eggstravaganza Series
Carroll Acres Hobby Farm, Rapid City, SD, carrollacreshobbyfarm.com

APRIL 8-16

The Passion and the Cross
Orpheum Theater Center, Sioux Falls, SD, siouxfallsorpheum.com

APRIL 9

Keystone Spring Fling Vendor Fair
1101 Madill Street, Keystone, SD, 605-786-3035

APRIL 9-10

DGTCA Gun Show
Rushmore Civic Center, Rapid City, SD, 605-270-0764

APRIL 16

Easter Egg Hunt
Reclamation Ranch, Mitchell, SD, 605-770-2867

APRIL 22

River Rat ½ Marathon, 10K, and 5K
Gavins Point Area, Yankton, SD, allsportscentral.com

APRIL 22-23

Junkin' Market Days
W. H. Lyon Fairgrounds, Sioux Falls, SD, 605-941-4958

APRIL 23

Lakota All Star Basketball Games
The Monument Summit Arena, Rapid City, SD, 605-342-41985

APRIL 23

Martina McBride
Swiftel Center, Brookings, SD, swiftelcenter.com

APRIL 23

Winefest Renaissance
1121 1st Avenue SE, Aberdeen, SD, 605-225-8714

APRIL 23-24

46th Mobridge Area Art Show
Scherr-Howe Arena, Mobridge, SD, 605-845-2060

APRIL 23-24

Brookings Quilt Guild Show
Swiftel Center, Brookings, SD, 605-690-3246

APRIL 27-30

45th Annual Kingswood Rummage Sales
Southwest Sioux Falls, SD, kingswoodrummage.com

APRIL 28-30

26th Annual Black Hills Dance Festival
The Monument, Rapid City, SD, blackhillsdancefestival.com

APRIL 29-MAY 1, 5-7

Ordinary Days
Grand Opera House, Pierre, SD, pierreplayers.com

APRIL 30

SDSO Centennial Finale
Washington Pavilion, Sioux Falls, SD, sdsymphony.org

MAY 7

Cinco de Mayo Fiesta
131 E Falls Park Drive, Sioux Falls, SD, 605-274-3735

MAY 17

Norwegian Independence Day
Vivian, SD, 605-222-3296

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