

COOPERATIVE CONNECTIONS

Hurricane Aid

**Linemen Help
Restore Power After
Hurricane Helene**
Pages 8-9

First Responders
Pages 12-13

2024 December Rate Increase



Jeff Birkeland
CEO

As discussed at the 2024 Annual Meeting, West Central Electric will have rate increases on Jan. 1, 2025, and Jan. 1, 2026. The last rate increase we had was in 2016. That equates to nine years since the last rate increase. A lot has happened in those nine years. COVID-19, inflation and government regulation top my list.

It is also uncommon to hear West Central state that we will have rate increases two years in a row. The reason for this is that we are expecting a power cost increase in 2025 of \$706,000. That's just power cost, we also have other costs that have risen that need to be accounted for. We can't absorb a cost increase like that, but we are able to spread the cost increase over two years. The board thought it would be easier for our membership if we had two smaller increases versus one big increase.

Starting Jan. 1, 2025, the monthly facility charge will increase by \$4. The residential facility charge will increase from \$32 to \$36 a month, and the commercial facility charge will increase from \$65 to \$69 a month. Every meter will have an annual increase of \$48.

We can't tell you what the 2026 rate increase will be until mid-year 2025. WAPA, Western Area Power Administration, is going to increase its power cost in 2026, and we want to wait and see what inflation does to our other operating costs. Speaking of inflation, I put some numbers together on how our cost of materials have increased since 2016. Keep in mind most of the increases happened during and after COVID-19. (2020 and later)

Let's start with overhead wire, the wire attached to our poles. In 2016, overhead wire cost 18.2 cents per foot; today, it costs 41 cents per foot, a 125% increase. Underground wire cost \$1.92 per foot in 2016; today, it costs \$4.39 per foot, a 129% increase.

Now let's look at what happened to the cost of a 35-foot pole. In 2016, a 35-foot pole cost \$294; today, it costs \$1,016! This is an increase of \$722 or a 246% increase. This is the most common pole size used in our system, and we have roughly 65,000 poles in our system. Our pole heights range from 35 feet to 80 feet. The prices increase substantially as the pole height goes up. An 80-foot pole costs \$7,644! Yes, you read that right: \$7,644 for an 80-foot transmission line pole.

We've looked at wire and poles, so let's look at transformers now. The average transformer size to serve an all-electric house is a 25 KVA transformer. In 2016, an overhead 25 KVA transformer cost \$794; today, it costs \$2,034, an increase of \$1,240, a 156% increase. The same transformer but in an underground configuration cost \$1,113 in 2016; today, it costs \$3,172, a 185% increase in price.

The last item I want to compare prices on is our F550 bucket truck. This is our smallest and most versatile bucket truck that gets used on a daily basis. In 2016, this bucket truck cost \$147,277. Today; it costs \$212,130, an increase of \$64,853, a 44% increase.

As you can imagine, all these price increases have negatively impacted our financials. Couple these cost increases with the 2025 power cost increase, and you can see where we need to increase rates to keep our cooperative financially stable. This is a high-level overview, and if you have any questions, please give me a call at 605-530-7345.

COOPERATIVE CONNECTIONS

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Safe, Reliable Service
to our Member Owners.**

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Design assistance by SDREA

General Retirement



Jill Rankin

Manager of Finance

The board of directors of West Central Electric has approved the general retirement of \$836,920. This is in addition to the \$18,267 that was retired to estates. The total 2024 retirement to date is \$855,187. This represents 100 percent of 2002 & 2003 capital credits and 62% of the West Central portion of 2023 capital credits. Capital credit checks will be mailed the first part of December. If the credit value is less than \$35, it will be credited to your November electric bill. Capital credits are created when any earnings (revenues minus expenses) are left over at the end of each year. This creates a margin. At the end of each year, the co-op assigns each member-owner's account a share of the margin, known as an allocation. The cooperative's goal is to rotate capital credits on a 22-year cycle. Before returning margins back to members, co-op's use the capital to help offset the cost of debt for equipment and materials used for the construction and maintenance of the electric distribution system. This helps lower financing needs.

If you have any questions regarding your capital credit check, please contact our office at 605-669-8100 or 1-800-242-9232.



**West Central Electric Cooperative's office
will be closed December 25.
We wish you a Merry Christmas!**

ENJOY A SAFE HOLIDAY SEASON

From late November to mid-January, when families gather, parties are scheduled and travel spikes, safety should be top of mind. Following is tried-and-true advice to ensure your family remains safe and injury-free throughout the season.

Traveling for the Holidays? Be Prepared

If you're traveling this year, be sure your vehicle is in good running condition, get plenty of rest and be prepared for any emergency. Traveling by car during the holidays has the highest fatality rate of any major form of transportation based on fatalities per passenger mile. Hundreds of people die every year in crashes on New Year's Day, Thanksgiving Day and Christmas Day, according to Injury Facts. Alcohol impairment is involved in about a third of these fatalities.

Stay safe on the roads over the holidays – and every day:

- Prepare your car for winter and keep an emergency kit with you.
- Get a good night's sleep before departing and avoid drowsy driving.
- Leave early, planning ahead for heavy traffic.
- Make sure every person in the vehicle is properly buckled up no matter how long or short the distance traveled.
- Put that cell phone away; many distractions occur while driving, but cell phones are the main culprit.
- Practice defensive driving.
- Designate a sober driver to ensure guests make it home safely after a holiday party; alcohol or over-the-counter, prescription and illegal drugs can cause impairment.

Decorate Safely

Decorating is one of the best ways to get in a holiday mood, but emergency departments see thousands of injuries involving holiday decorating every season.

When decorating follow these tips from the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission:

- Keep potentially poisonous plants – mistletoe, holly berries, Jerusalem cherry and amaryllis – away from children.
- If using an artificial tree, check that it is labeled “fire resistant.”
- If using a live tree, cut off about two inches of the trunk to

expose fresh wood for better water absorption, remember to water it, and remove it from your home when it is dry.

- Place your tree at least three feet away from fireplaces, radiators and other heat sources, making certain not to block doorways.
- Avoid placing breakable ornaments or ones with small, detachable parts on lower tree branches where small children can reach them.
- Only use indoor lights indoors and outdoor lights outdoors, and choose the right ladder for the task when hanging lights.
- Replace light sets that have broken or cracked sockets, frayed or bare wires or loose connections.
- Follow the package directions on the number of light sets that can be plugged into one socket.
- Never nail, tack or stress wiring when hanging lights, and keep plugs off the ground away from puddles and snow.
- Turn off all lights and decorations when you go to bed or leave the house.

Source: National Safety Council



**“Don’t Spill Water on Electronics...
It Could Start a FIRE!”**

Bethany Langworthy, Age 9

Bethany Langworthy warns readers to be careful with water around electronics. Thank you for your picture, Bethany! Bethany's parents are Kristina and Edward Langworthy, 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.

Family FAVORITES

CREAM CHEESE AND CUCUMBER SPREAD DIP

Ingredients:

1 large cucumber, grated
1 tsp. onion, grated
8 oz. pkg. cream cheese
3/4-1 cup mayonnaise
Salt and pepper to taste

Method

Grate cucumber and onion on several thicknesses of paper towels, squeeze out all the water. Place in a bowl. Blend other ingredients, adding enough mayonnaise to make it a spreading consistency. Serve with crackers or chips.

Mary Ann Klarenbeek
Harrisburg, S.D.

GRANDMA GRACE'S FROZEN FRUIT SALAD

Ingredients:

8 oz. Cool Whip
1 tbsp. lemon juice
1 cup sour cream
3/4 cup sugar
Dash of salt

*Mix all thoroughly until
sugar is dissolved.*

9 oz. can pineapple, crushed
and drained
Small jar maraschino cherries
(halve or chopped if desired)
2 sliced bananas (halve or
quarter slices if desired)
1/4 cup chopped walnuts

Method

Mix thoroughly. Pour into 8x8 or 9x9 container. Cover and freeze. Thaw 10-15 minutes to allow cutting into serving portions.

My mother, Grace Alley, first made this salad for holiday meals. It has become a family favorite, and we always have it for one of our holidays.

Mary Harris
Glad Valley, S.D.

LEMON ROSEMARY GLAZED HAM

Ingredients:

1 bone-in spiral-cut ham,
about 10 lbs.
1 1/4 cups honey, divided
2 tsp. lemon extract
1 1/4 tsp. whole rosemary
leaves, crushed, divided

Method

Preheat oven to 325°F. Place the ham on its side in roasting pan. Mix 1 cup of the honey, 1 1/2 tsp. of the extract and 1 tsp. of the rosemary in small bowl until well blended. Brush 1/2 of the honey mixture over ham, gently separating the slices so mixture can reach middle of ham. Cover loosely with foil.

Bake 1 hour, basting occasionally with pan drippings. Remove foil. Brush with remaining honey mixture. Bake 45 minutes longer.

Meanwhile, mix remaining 1/4 cup honey, 1/2 tsp. extract and 1/4 tsp. rosemary in small bowl. Serve with ham along with the pan drippings.

McCormick.com

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



CAPITAL CREDITS

Help Us Find These People

Capital credit checks were returned for the following individuals. Help us find them and get the money they are owed into their hands. Contact the office at 605-669-8100 with any information. Thank you for your assistance.

| | | | | |
|-------------------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| Abrahamson, Curt | Bergeson Fmly Prtnshp LLP | Chargingwhirlwind, Jeanette | Dominiack, Ronald | Fortune, Irene |
| Abrahamson, Laurel | Bergeson, Sandy L | Chasing, Doris | Donahey, Shawn | Frame, Darlene |
| Abundant Life Assembly of God | Bernard, Bill | Cholik, Joseph | Donahue, Dan | Frame, Duane L |
| Aby, Perry | Berry, Marx | Christensen, Stan | Donahue, Patrick | Frame, Marie |
| Allen, Gary | Bingen, Noel D | Christensen, Steven W | Dorman, Scott W | Frank, Christopher |
| Andersen, Clarence D | Black, Brett | Clark, Hattie | Dowling, Wade | Frank, James R |
| Anderson, Amos | Blevins, Alice R | Clifton, Cheryl | Driving Hawk, Ben | Frederick, John H |
| Anderson, Lana J | Boschee, Ronald | Cole, Helen | Eagle Thunder, Naomi | Freeman, Richard |
| Anderson, Ray F | Boyd, Carol A | Commnet Cellular Inc | Econolodge | Fuhs, Rickey |
| Andrews, Elaine | Bradley, Kate | Communications Center | Eidse, Robert A | Fuoss, Anne J |
| Atkinson, Brian | Brammer, June | Coverdale, Arthur | Ellston, Carol | Gabriel, Raymond E |
| Audiss, Bill Sr | Braun, Gina | Creek, Beverly | Engen, Oscar | Gapuz, Rezty |
| Baak, Darrell | Brisson, George J | Cruse, Brad W | Enright, Kay | General Cellular |
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| Baker, Ray | Brotsky, Darrel | Cummins, Kristi S | Estes, James H | Gerard, Doug |
| Bandi, Calvin D | Brouse, Joel | Cuny, Willard M | Ewing, Tracy | Getz, Roger |
| Barber, David | Brown, Keena | Curtis, Mary L | Faltinson, Connie | Gifford, Roe W |
| Barber, Paul J | Brown, Sherry | Cynthiana Cattle Company | Fanning, Morgan | Gittings, Beth |
| Barclay, Robert | Brown Wolf, Maria | Dakota King Inc | Farrar, F C | Goldsmith, John J |
| Barnes, Dan | Buchholz, Carl J | Dakota West Ltd | Fedderson, Gary L | Goodlow, Tony |
| Barry, Taylor | Buck, Wayne A | Dakotah Red Inc | Felion, Hayden | Grabowski, Joanne |
| Bartels, Iris M | Burke, Delbert O | Dassinger, Larry | Fennell, John T | Grassrope, Jefferson |
| Bartels, James R | Bush, Sharyl | Day, Rochelle | Fenner, Todd L | Graves Construction |
| Bartlett, Marvin L | Buxcel, Doris | Daylight Donut | Ferguson, Tori | Gray, Norma |
| Beachy, Ryan | Cadman, Ruby | Deisch, Yoshiko | Flury, Jeff | Griffith, June |
| Bean, Debra | Carlson, James | Dempsey, Kim | Flute, Charlotte | Grimes, James R |
| Bearheels, Stacey | Carlson, Stephanie L | Development Resources Inc | Flute, Delaine | Gruenwald, Jerald |
| Becker, Ray L | Carpenter, Lori | Dias, Harriet | Flute, Emil F | Gruwell, Jerry R |
| Begay, Robert | Carrico, Helen M | Diehm, Donald | Flute, April | Gundersen, Dori |
| Bender, Harold | Chamley, Dick | Dingman, Wayne Jr | Flute, Irene | Hall, Alvin L |
| Benson, Bruce A | Charger, Johnelle | Dolloff, Angelica | Flute Samuel Jr | Hansen, Eric J |

| | | | | |
|---------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------|
| Hansen, Jan | Kentch, Charles | Miller & Brunsonjan & Jane | Pier, J E | Strait, James C |
| Harker's Distribution Inc | Kienst, Mark | Miller, A C | Pittenger, Susan M | Strey, Daron |
| Harmelink, Lyle | King, Clifford | Miller, Gary B | Plumley, Robert L | Sundowner Motor Inn Inc |
| Harris, Fenila L | King, Irene C | Miller, Gary D | Polchow, Steven D | Sunshine Foods |
| Harrison, Christopher L | Kirchgasler, Marlene | Miller, Vern | Porch, Dorothy | Svec, L P |
| Hawkins, Elizabeth | Kirkpatrick, Kevin | Misterek, John | Post, Frank | Swan, Marvin E |
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| Hoyt, Charlotte J | Lhotak, Cleo | Olson, Don A | Schulte, Donald F | Vogel, David W |
| Hoyt, Scott L | Lindquist, Myron C | Olson, Kimberly | Schumacher, Gabe | Waldner, John |
| Hubbard, G A | Livingston, Patricia J | Oneill, Wilber C | Schwalm, Wylie | Walking Bull, Lorriane |
| Hudson, Robert | Long, Robert | Osborn, Francis | Seaton, Robert | Walking Bull, Michelle |
| Huntingdon Engineering | Loveday, Clifford | Osborn, Patsy | Seifert, Joyce | Watters, Darold G |
| Hupp, Lila L | Lower Brule Construction Co | Ostlien, John | Semmler, Eugene | Webber, Robert |
| Hurtado, Cody | Lux, Bonnie | Pan Am Agri Inc | Shafer, Harvey | Weddle, Vivian |
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| Ingram, Kay L | M & M Spraying Inc | Parker, John | Sharp, Charles W | West, John |
| Ironroad, Barbara J | Mackrell, Elaine | Parsen Electric Company | Sheppard, Bernadine | Westlind, Roy |
| Jacoby, Joe | Madison, January | Patterson, Bruce | Sherwood, David W | White, Gerald Jr |
| Jandahl, Brian | Mahutga, Mike | Patterson, Ida M | Sherwood, Terry | White, Warren H |
| Janiss, Martin | Mallory, Tate W | Patton, Dorothy | Sibson, Herb | Whiteco Metrocom |
| Jarr Inc | Mammel, Williard P | Pauly, Meredith | Silverspoon Development | Wilder Ranches |
| Jenniges, Doris M | Marrington, Sophia | Pearson, James T | Skunk, Susan | Wilson, Gene |
| Jirsa, Sundae R | Martinez, Franklin O | Pearson, Zane | Small, Dennis E | Winckler, Margaret |
| Jobgen, Kathy | Marvin, Shirley | Pelle, James | Smith, Jerald | Wolf, Philip |
| Johnson, Aaron | Maus, Cy | Penticoff, Jackie | Smith, William J | Woodward, Shawn |
| Johnson, Agnes | Maxim Technologies Inc | Pepion, Lita J | Smythe, Kelly | Word, John W |
| Johnson, Kent | McCormick, Leo | Peters, Wayne | Snyder, Jaisa | Yale, Gregory W |
| Johnson, Richard | McDonald, Dennis | Pettyjohn, Dale | Spreckels, Norman | Young, Irwin H |
| Jones, Lana | McKee, Stan | Pfeifer, Diane | Standing Bear, Sarah | Young, Verna M |
| Jumper, Earl S | McKinley, C E | Pfeifer, Robert | Steffens, John R | Zapletal, Paul |
| K 90 Development Inc | McPherson, Kermit L | Pfeifle, Robert | Sterling, Stanley | Zelenka, Sharon |
| Kahl, Robert | Mechaley, Ryan | Philip Cong Of Jehovahs Witnesses | Stoeser, Alex | Zeman, Hank |
| Karrels, Michael H | Merchen, Monica | Philip Plaza Apartments | Stohr, Mike | Ziegler, Bryan |
| Karstens, Briana | Merwin, Jack | Pickett, Tim | The B Stop | Ziegler, Martin T |
| Kenobbie, Bradly D | Mickelsen, Brian | | Stordahl, Gregory E | |



HURRICANE AID

Linemen Help Restore Power After Hurricane Helene

Jacob Boyko

jacob.boyko@sdrea.coop

Linemen from five of South Dakota's rural electric cooperatives traveled to the Southeastern U.S. in October to help restore power along Hurricane Helene's path of destruction.

The 18 linemen left Oct. 2 for Pickens, South Carolina, where Blue Ridge Electric Cooperative faced over 64,000 meter outages and more than 800 broken poles in Helene's aftermath.

Zach Hansen, a lineman from West River Electric Association, didn't think twice before he volunteered to go along.

"It's just the co-op way," he said. "There are people in need down there who lost their houses – lost their lives – and this is something we know we can do to help. It's kind of a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity."

The linemen stayed at a crowded base camp with dozens of other utility workers from all across the country. They slept on cots in a large, open army-sized tent, but with their busy schedules, they didn't spend

much time there anyway. Most days, the linemen woke at 5:30 a.m. for breakfast and worked in the field until supper at 8 p.m.

The work also presented unfamiliar challenges for the linemen; each time the crew needed to repair damaged infrastructure, they'd first have to start the labor-intensive process of clearing through debris and trees toppled by Helene's heavy wind gusts.

"When we have blizzards and ice storms in South Dakota, it's hard work – and you're trying to stay warm," Hansen explained. "But out here, there's a lot more chainsaw work and fixing wire breaks. It's not just straight miles of line lying down like we're used to at home."

By Oct. 9, fewer than 1,000 meters in Blue Ridge Electric territory remained offline, and the South





Dakota crews were dismissed to begin the 1,200-plus mile journey home.

But as the South Dakota convoy – which included bucket trucks, skid steers and ATVs – moved north, another call came in.

Jefferson Energy Cooperative in Wrens, Georgia, also faced catastrophic damage to their distribution lines, with 100% of their service territory without power after the storm. On Oct. 9, as South Dakota's linemen were driving home from South Carolina to reunite with their families, still over 10,000 homes and businesses remained without power.

Just like before, South Dakota's rural electric cooperatives answered the call.

"When our line superintendent called me that morning and asked me how we felt about going to Georgia, I said, 'well, we're right here, so we might as well go in and help,'" Bon Homme Yankton lineman Gunnar Dally said. "If they need help, we're more than willing to come."

The stop in Wrens delayed the linemen's return home by about a week, but the appreciation from the communities helped keep spirits high.

"When we were on breaks, there were people stopping to thank us for helping," Dally said. "A lot of them were very surprised when we said we were from South Dakota."

Hansen recognized another subset

of heroes: the families.

"The unsung heroes of storm jobs are the people we leave behind," he said. "My wife is at home with six kids taking care of the ranch while I'm gone. If we didn't have those people, we couldn't go out and do the things we needed to do. They are the real heroes."

SDREA General Manager Steve Barnett thanked the linemen for volunteering to help with the storm restoration efforts and for embodying

the values of South Dakota's rural electric cooperatives.

"These 18 linemen gave up time at home with their families to help people in need they've never met in a place they've never been," Barnett said. "Their selfless actions reflect what we stand for as a family of cooperatives, as South Dakotans, and as fellow Americans. We thank them for their work, their spirit and their dedication to keeping the lights on – at home, and in South Carolina and Georgia."





Jennah Denney

As the holiday season approaches and the days grow colder, you may be considering ways to stay cozy while also managing home energy use.

One of the best ways to make your home more energy efficient is by choosing products with the Energy Star® label. But what exactly does that label mean, and how can it benefit you?

How Products Earn the Energy Star® Label

Energy Star® is a program by the U.S. Department of Energy (DoE) and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to help consumers identify energy efficient products that save money and reduce environmental impact.

Products that earn the Energy Star® label must meet strict guidelines for energy efficiency, performance and cost effectiveness. Here's how the process works:

1. The product must be more energy efficient than typical models. This helps you save on energy bills by using less electricity while still providing the same performance.
2. The product must be tested in EPA-recognized labs, following standardized procedures. These tests ensure the product meets all energy efficiency and performance requirements.
3. Once tested, the product's data is reviewed by a third-party certification body to verify it meets the set standards. This ensures that only the best products receive the Energy Star® label.

Even after a product is certified, the EPA conducts "off-the-shelf" testing on random samples of Energy Star® products to ensure they continue to meet the required standards. If a product fails to meet the performance requirements during verification testing, it can be disqualified from the Energy Star® program.

The EPA has clear procedures for handling such disqualifications to maintain the integrity of the label.

Speaking of Labels

Whether you're upgrading your refrigerator, replacing light bulbs or purchasing new electronics, the blue Energy Star® label is your assurance that the product has passed all energy efficiency tests. It's easy to spot and can be found on products ranging from small and major appliances to electronics.

Many large appliances, such as washing machines and clothes dryers, include a yellow Energy Guide label that provides estimated energy use. Comparing these labels can help you determine how much you'll save with an Energy Star® model compared to a standard model.

While Energy Star® products can cost a little more upfront, their energy savings over time will often cover the difference. They help reduce your household energy consumption, which could translate to lower utility bills.

Why Should I Care?

As a member of an electric cooperative, choosing energy efficient products benefits not only you but also our entire community. When co-op members use less energy, it lowers overall electricity demand, helping to stabilize rates and reduce costs for everyone.

As you shop for appliances, electronics or other home equipment this holiday season, look for the Energy Star® label. Whether it's a new washing machine or energy efficient lighting options, these products are a simple and effective way to save money and lower energy use. Check with your local electric co-op to see if they offer rebates or incentives for purchasing Energy Star® products.

To browse products that have earned the Energy Star® label, visit <https://www.energystar.gov>.

SMART INSIGHT ABOUT BUYING SMART APPLIANCES

Scott Flood

Santa isn't the only one who makes an appearance as the year nears its end. Retailers start trumpeting deep discounts on home appliances. That's great if you've considered replacing some of your home's tired appliances with one of today's "smart" models. Before deciding to buy a smart appliance, take some time to get smarter about what they offer – and what you really need.

Begin with an honest look at how you live and consider the role your current appliances play in your daily routine. Would the capabilities of a smart appliance make your life easier? For example, if you frequently forget to start the laundry or your dishwasher, Wi-Fi enabled appliances with remote start capabilities may save you time and trouble. But if you're thinking about stepping up to a smart appliance because it has a cool feature you might use once a year, ask yourself if it's worth the extra cost.

Next, think about any smart devices you already use in your home. Make sure they're compatible with the smart appliance's operating system, so you can get all the benefits you expect. For example, many of these appliances are engineered to work with familiar voice assistants like Amazon Alexa, Google Assistant or Apple's Siri. Incompatible systems might limit your ability to use the features that are most important to you.

Is your home's infrastructure ready to handle the demands of a smart appliance? Depending upon the model you choose, it might require anything from a basic internet connection to a home Wi-Fi network to provide the operation you expect. Some smart appliances may require Bluetooth, Zigbee, Z-Wave or other systems for connectivity. Others have the ability to receive software updates via wi-fi. Having access to the right technology ensures your system will function correctly and be able to handle updates as they become available.

It's always important to consider energy efficiency when purchasing a new appliance. Most smart appliances are designed to reduce energy consumption, with operating modes that deliver the performance you want while making more efficient use of energy. Smart appliances that are Energy Star® certified meet or exceed federal energy efficiency standards and some may use only half as much energy as standard appliances. Many let you schedule operations during times of day when energy rates are lower. That's particularly beneficial with high-energy appliances like washing machines, dishwashers and clothes dryers.

Repairs to smart appliances can be expensive, so be sure to consider the warranty. Generous manufacturer warranties demonstrate the company's confidence in the quality of its products.

Finally, because most smart appliances are connected to the internet, make sure you think about privacy and security. Research the manufacturer's privacy policies and security features to ensure that data like your voice commands and shopping habits don't fall into the wrong hands. Making sure the manufacturer takes your privacy and online safety as seriously as you do is a smart strategy.

For most homeowners, the biggest downside to smart appliances is that they carry a higher price tag than their not-so-smart counterparts. However, price is just one factor in the cost of any appliance. When you also consider the long-term value smart appliances deliver – whether that's in energy savings, helpful conveniences or improved reliability – most will save you money over their service life. In addition, smart appliances may be eligible for rebates and tax incentives, so ask your retailer what's available.

What's ahead for smart appliances in the foreseeable future? The marketplace is starting to see the integration of basic artificial intelligence (AI) capabilities that can make smart appliances provide better service, greater reliability, and lower energy needs. As these AI-fueled systems become more common, your refrigerator might know your habits so well that it can generate a shopping list for you. Your dishwasher could adjust its operating cycle to better clean your family's uniquely dirty dishes.

There was a time when appliances changed little from decade to decade. Today, products advance more quickly than ever before, and we can expect to see more big changes ahead. Fortunately, today's smart appliances give you a way to start using the technology that will make you the envy of your neighbors as it makes your life easier.





STAYING SAFE

First responders put out a fire near Belle Fourche.
Photo submitted by Butte Electric Cooperative.

Butte Electric Cooperative Connects With First Responders

Frank Turner

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October marks First Responders Month, a time to honor the dedication and courage of those who rush toward danger to keep their communities safe. This fall, electric cooperatives across the country expressed their gratitude to these everyday heroes who are always prepared to protect lives and the essential infrastructure that supports local neighborhoods.

Day or night, regardless of the weather, first responders answer the call, whether it's battling a blaze or responding to a medical emergency. When it comes to keeping the community safe, their collaboration with local electric co-ops is key for both local residents and the first responders themselves. Together, they work to ensure that emergencies are managed quickly, effectively and, most importantly, safely.

In September, Butte Electric further strengthened its ties and

communications with local first responders following an eventful summer by hosting a series of safety demonstrations for emergency crews in Meade and Butte Counties and the U.S. Forest Service.

"Earlier this year we faced several incidents that resulted in exposed power lines near first responders," said Matt Sleep, chief executive officer of Butte Electric. "In one case, we had a situation west of Spearfish where strong winds brought down a billboard, exposing lines that sparked and started a fire."

Both Butte Electric and the local fire department responded to the emergency, de-energizing the lines and containing the small grass fire. In a separate incident, a driver suffered a medical emergency and crashed into an electrical pedestal. Although the driver died in the accident, the actions of first responders and the electric cooperative prevented further injuries. The incident, among others, prompted Butte Electric to take proactive steps in preparation for the next possible emergency.

"We wanted to both educate responders and build some rapport, so when they see a power line, they know who to call and that they are comfortable getting in contact with us," said Sleep.

Butte Electric employees organized and led a hands-on safety training using the South Dakota Rural Electric Association's high voltage demonstration trailer, a specialized tool



that highlights the very real dangers of electricity. During the session, linemen demonstrated how electricity can arc, or jump, from one connection to another, always seeking the easiest path to the ground.

The training is one that linemen across the state have facilitated, which includes a memorable demonstration involving a grapefruit to show how contact with electricity impacts organic material. On the outside, the grapefruit appears undamaged after contact with an electrified line but cutting it open reveals it's been cooked from the inside.

The training left an impression with Trevor Papenfuss, an assistant fire management fire officer who has served with the U.S. Forest Service in the Spearfish area for more than 30 years. Papenfuss was just one of roughly 30 U.S. Forest Service members who attended the demonstration.

"We deal with incidents involving electricity at least once a year, if not more," Papenfuss said. "Butte

Electric provided us with a lot of valuable information and a powerful demonstration. Seeing a grapefruit burn from the inside out makes a big impact and impression of just how dangerous live electricity can be. Several of our new wildland firefighters attended and they took away information that will stay with them for a long time."

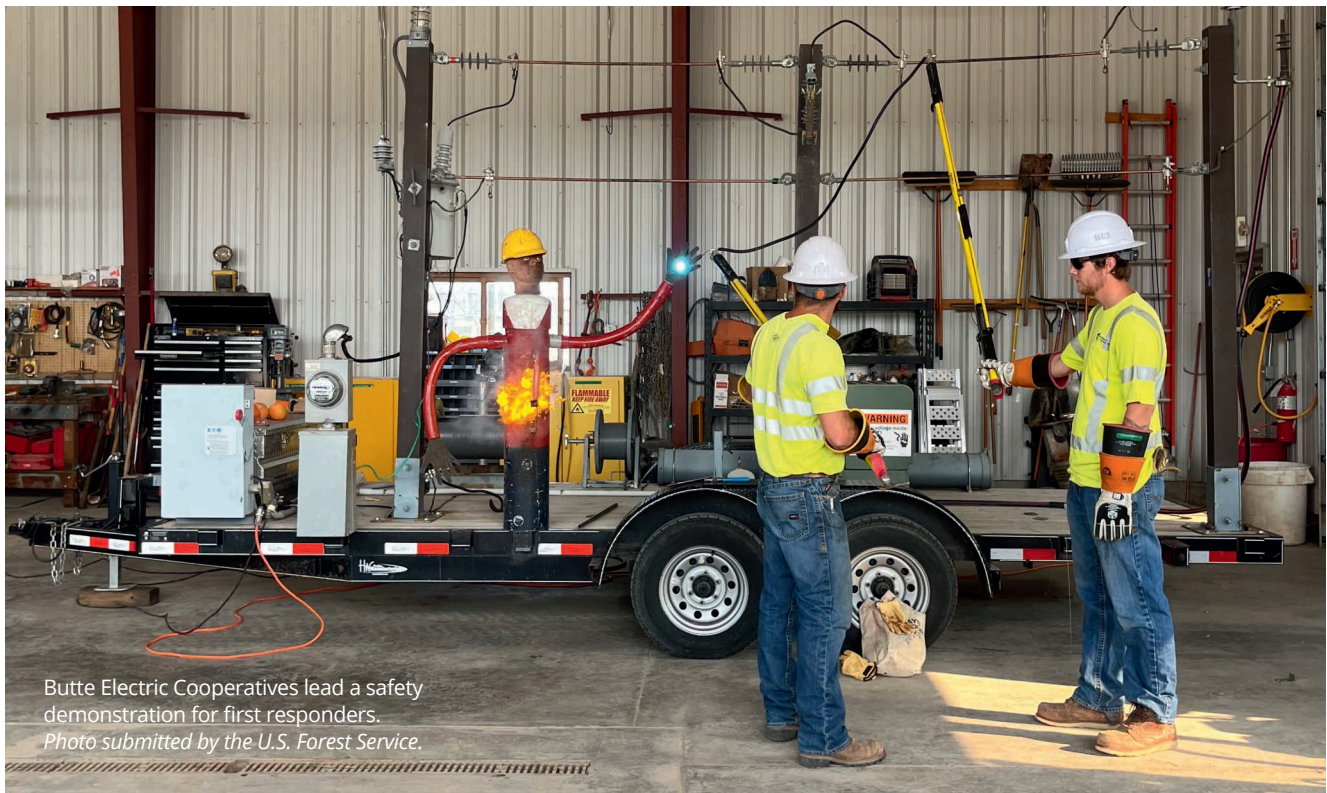
In a separate training tailored to the Sturgis Fire Department, Volunteer Fire Chief of the Sturgis Fire Department Scott Lensegrav said the training was impactful for his fellow volunteers. In addition to noting the value of the demonstration, Lensegrav highlighted the importance of maintaining a strong line of communication between electric service providers like Butte Electric and the fire department, especially during an emergency.

"In a situation involving power lines or electricity, the first thing we do is communicate with dispatch to try and figure out whose power line is involved in the emergency," said Lensegrav.

"The training was just another step in building good communication between our department and utilities. It was also great to have the refresher for our volunteers who have been with us for years and a good learning tool for the new volunteers that are coming into the service."

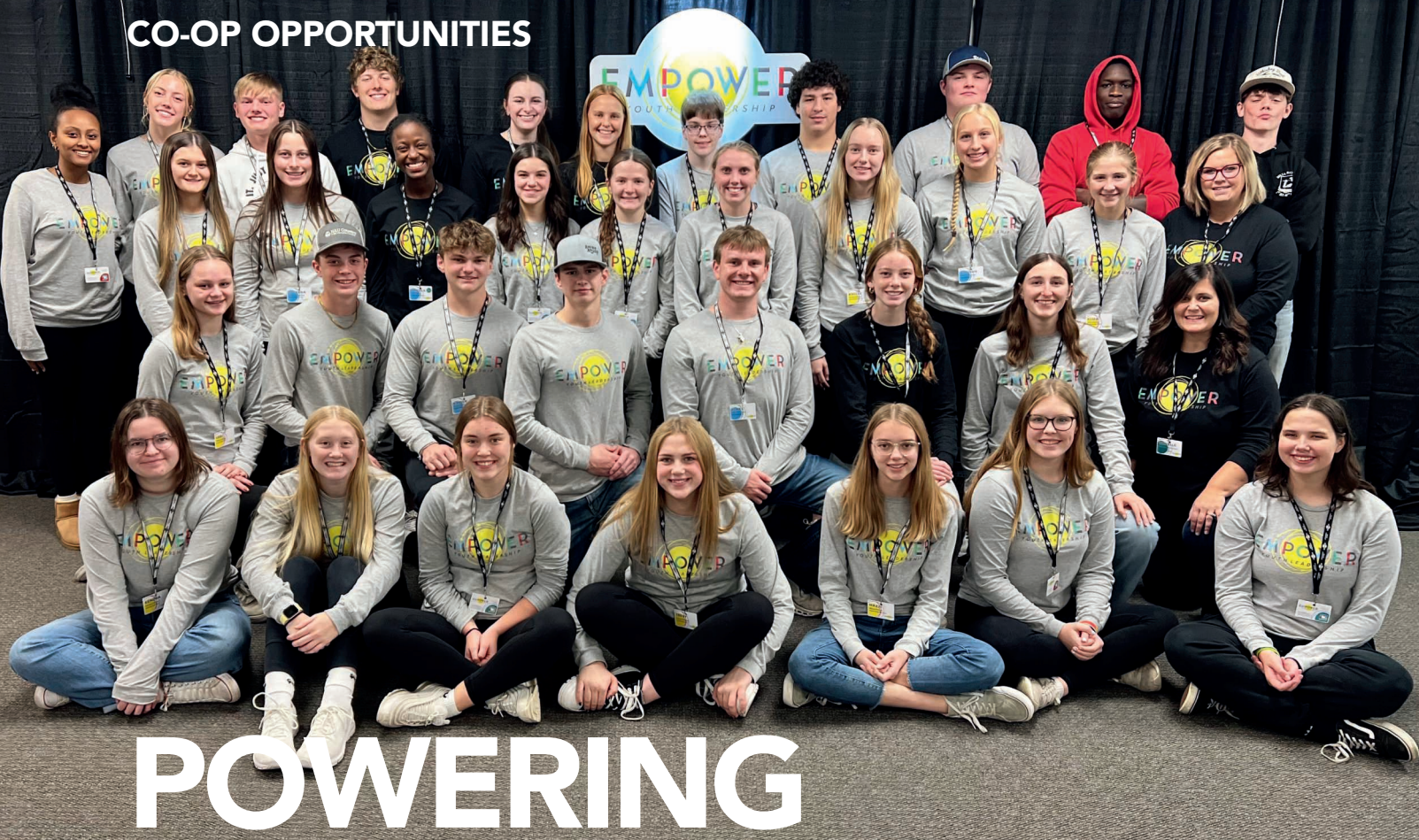
Looking forward, Sleep plans to continue strengthening the relationship between local first responders and Butte Electric for a safer future in their service area.

"It's all about building relationships and familiarity so that first responders know who to talk to and don't hesitate to call," said Sleep. "We deeply appreciate our first responders and want to help them however we can. These emergency personnel and volunteers are what make our communities great, and we just want to play our part in keeping them and our neighborhoods safe."



Butte Electric Cooperatives lead a safety demonstration for first responders.
Photo submitted by the U.S. Forest Service.

CO-OP OPPORTUNITIES



POWERING FUTURES

Electric Cooperatives Ignite Career Paths for Students

Frank Turner

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The path to a fulfilling career can start early, often before a young student's first job. Many opportunities connect ambitious students to real-world work experiences and electric cooperatives across South Dakota are tapping into this potential.

Through hands-on learning experiences such as internships, job shadowing and youth outreach, these early career experiences can ignite a student's passion for the work that takes place at their local electric cooperative, often leading to lifelong careers.

Every year, several students take the time to discover the many facets of an

electric cooperative, from office managers who oversee daily operations to the linemen who keep the lights on. In the office, students see the careful work that keeps operations running smoothly. Out in the field, they witness the skill and dedication of line crews who brave the elements to maintain reliable service. Each role offers unique insights into not only a potential career path but also how a cooperative functions and serves its community.

Sioux Valley EmPOWER Program

Since 2014, Sioux Valley Energy has hosted its annual EmPOWER Youth Leadership Program for high school juniors, helping them explore Sioux Valley Energy, improve leadership

EmPOWER participants from the 2023-2024 school year.
Photo submitted by Sioux Valley Energy.

skills, and build connections. Often, the EmPOWER program serves as a precursor to the Youth Tour and Youth Excursion trips to Washington, D.C., and Bismarck, N.D., respectively.

According to Sioux Valley Energy's Culture and Training Development Strategist Chinelle Christensen, the EmPOWER program is available to 26 school districts across the electric cooperative's service area.

"We really feel like this outreach is important," Christensen said. "We want people to understand the co-op way, the impact that we have in our communities, and that we are different. It's so critical to be constantly sharing that with the younger generation."

During the program, Sioux Valley also hosts a NetWeaving event where students get a chance to quickly meet and question different career professionals. For three to five minutes, they can further their understanding of a possible

profession by asking questions such as, “What does an average day look for you?” or “What’s the best part of your job?”

“A lot of people don’t realize that we are more than just linemen, and we teach them that,” she said. “A lot of students walk out of our NetWeaving program with an opportunity to job shadow.”

In addition to the EmPOWER, Sioux Valley Energy offers a variety of internships for college-level students. System Engineer Andrew Chmela joined the Sioux Valley team in May after a yearlong internship with the cooperative.

When he was a student at South Dakota State University, Chmela learned from a professor that an internship with Sioux Valley Energy had become available. Chmela applied for the internship, which quickly led to a full-time job with the cooperative.

“During the internship, I was able to job shadow, learn the area and see the company culture for myself,” Chmela said. “Since starting full-time, I love it. Every day is different and it’s challenging in the right aspects. It was a great opportunity to bridge the gap from when you transition from school to internship status to full-time work.”

Lake Region Electric Opportunities

Growing up, Carter Williams would occasionally tag along to work with his dad, Daniel Williams, a line foreman at Lake Region Electric.

“My dad would show me the trucks and talk about all of the stuff they did,” Carter said.

Those days left an impression, and as a sophomore in high school, Carter began thinking about becoming a lineman or electrician for an electric cooperative. Carter expressed his interest in seeing Lake Region Electric first-hand, and the cooperative jumped at the opportunity to facilitate a three-day job shadowing opportunity for him to see industry professionals at work.

The experience inspired Carter to

seek out an internship with Lake Region Electric through a school program. More than three years later, the experience has paid off as Carter is now beginning his first year in the Mitchell Technical College Electrical Construction and Maintenance Program to become a journeyman lineman for a cooperative.

“That internship really helped me decide that I wanted to go into powerline work,” Carter said. “I wanted a job at an electric cooperative because I would have a stable community and I wouldn’t be jumping from jobsite to jobsite. It looks like a really great opportunity.”

Carter’s story is just one of many at Lake Region Electric according to Brett Kwasniewski, manager of member services with Lake Region Electric.

“If there is interest in the field, there are opportunities with Lake Region Electric,” Kwasniewski said. “If a student is interested, I highly encourage them to reach out to us, and that can happen through a guidance counselor, teacher or parent.”

In addition to internships, many cooperatives like Lake Region Electric offer 1,000-hour journeyman or apprentice lineman positions. These

seasonal, entry-level positions are open to those older than 18 and interested in exploring the industry.

“We want to bring in a kid who is interested in the trade to give them real-world experience,” Kwasniewski said. “Really, if you are 18 years of age and you are willing to work, there is a good chance that we will give you a shot at that.”

Cooperative Opportunities

Whether it’s internships, job shadowing or youth programs, these opportunities extend beyond Lake Region Electric and Sioux Valley Energy to cooperatives across South Dakota, each dedicated to building a skilled workforce.

Students are encouraged to reach out to their local electric cooperative to see what opportunities are available, whether they’re seeking hands-on work experience, mentorship or an introduction to the field.

Regardless of Chmela or Carter’s next step, they both know their hometown electric cooperative in South Dakota is cheering them on in their future endeavors.



EmPOWER participants take part in a team building exercise.
Photo submitted by Sioux Valley Energy.



DEC. 7
Santa at the Zoo
 10 a.m.-2 p.m.
 Great Plains Zoo
 Sioux Falls, SD
 605-367-7003

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.

NOV. 29
Parade of Lights
 Parade of Lights
 7 p.m.
 Chamberlain, SD

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

NOV. 30
Mid-Winter Fair
 9 a.m.-4 p.m.
 Gregory Memorial Auditorium
 Gregory, SD
 605-830-9778

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

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

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

DEC. 5
Holiday Festival of Lights
 4 p.m.-7:30 p.m.
 Yankton, SD
 605-665-3636

DEC. 6
Kimball's Hometown Holiday
 3:30-7 p.m.
 Legion Hall
 Kimball, SD

DEC. 6
Hometown Holiday Vendor Fair
 10 a.m.-6 p.m.
 Armory
 Howard, SD

DEC. 7
Newell Festival of Trees
 9 a.m. – Doors Open
 11:30 a.m. – Community Lunch
 4 p.m. – Auction
 Newell City Hall
 Newell, SD

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

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

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

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

DEC. 8
Aberdeen Community Concert Association Fund Raiser
2024 Medora Magical Christmas Memories Tour
 3 p.m.
 Aberdeen Civic Theater
 Aberdeen, SD
 605-228-0946
 aberdeencommunityconcerts.com

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

DEC. 15
A Poker Alice Christmas
 2 p.m.
 Gayville Music Hall
 Gayville, SD

DEC. 31
American Legion Post 15 Save the Last Dance 2024
 8 p.m.-12:30 a.m.
 El Riad Shrine
 Sioux Falls, SD
 605-336-3470

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