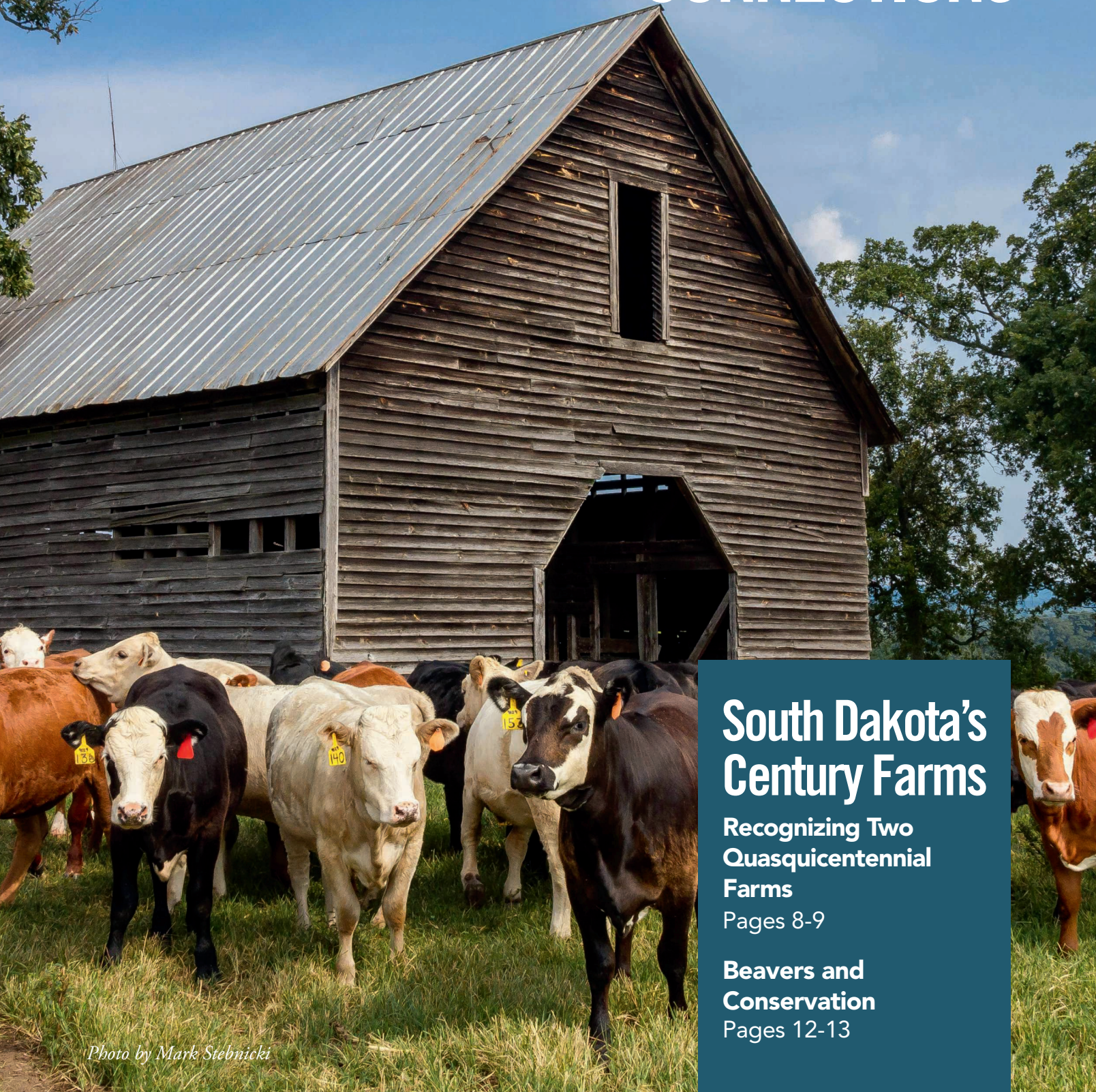




# COOPERATIVE CONNECTIONS



## South Dakota's Century Farms

Recognizing Two  
Quasiquicentennial  
Farms

Pages 8-9

Beavers and  
Conservation

Pages 12-13

*Photo by Mark Stebnicki*



# 2024 Update



**Jeff Birkeland**  
CEO

This month, I'm going to do a recap of the first four months of 2024.

Let's start with member growth. We started 2023 with 3,684 members and closed the year with 3,697. That's an increase of 13 members or 0.35% growth. In the last 30 years, West Central has had 97 new members or a 2.7% increase in membership growth. Yes, you read that correctly. Only 97 new West Central members in the last 30 years. I should also clarify that is a net number. We've lost members, and we've gained members, but in total, our membership count has only risen by 97.

The West Central employees have worked 260,000 hours without a lost time accident, and we are all proud of that accomplishment. That equates to roughly four years without a lost time accident. There are a lot of outages and storm jobs in those hours and that lays more credence to your linemen's commitment to safety and keeping the lights on.

West Central purchased a new DJI M30T drone in March. This drone can be flown in fog, rain and snow which is a big improvement over the old one. The main purpose of this drone is to fly our lines and look for problems. It also has thermal imaging that can help us find hotspots so we can make repairs before it becomes an outage. It also gives us the ability to help search for someone should they become lost. We hope we never get a call like that, but with 41 minutes of flight time, we can cover a lot of ground quickly while searching for heat signatures.

In January of 2021, West Central ordered two Ford F350 service trucks. I'm pleased to report that they should be delivered in the early summer. Generally, I wouldn't think this is a notable item, but given it has taken three years to get these trucks, I think it's notable. The problems we've encountered have absolutely nothing to do with any dealership; the problem rests 100% on Ford and their manufacturing process.

The Philip Volunteer Fire Department was approved for a \$100,000 economic development loan so they can purchase a new fire truck. The board is finalizing the paperwork, and the Philip Volunteer Fire Department should have their money in May. West Central still has money in our economic development funds, so please contact us if you are interested. Keep in mind that to qualify for an economic development loan, the funds have to be used for community betterment and not for individual gain. There also has to be another organization or business to backstop the loan. When thinking about economic development loans, it's best to call the office and ask for Jeff. I'll be more than happy to discuss the options with you.

We have a large construction project underway this summer. The employees are building 11 miles of 69KV transmission line from Midland to 1880 Town. This new line will replace the old transmission we are currently using. This is a critical piece of our transmission line system, and we had the opportunity to make the upgrade using material we purchased from Trans Canada at a bargain price. We will have future articles on this project with more details so stay tuned.

We concluded our annual audit in March, and the board received a clean audit report in April. I feel that it is an important piece of information for our members. Your Cooperative is in a strong financial position as we work through the rate pressures. Our last general rate increase was in 2016, so I feel good about that statement. Going eight years without a rate increase is quite a feat in my book. West Central has experienced substantial price increases with inflation in the last three years. It didn't happen by chance that we've gone eight years without a rate increase. Your board of directors has been very proactive in planning, and those decisions are paying dividends.

**COOPERATIVE  
CONNECTIONS**

**WEST CENTRAL  
ELECTRIC**

(USPS No. 018-988)

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**Vice President**

Kenneth Miller, Draper

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**CEO/Manager**

Jeff Birkeland, Murdo

**Our Mission is to Provide  
Safe, Reliable Service  
to our Member Owners.**

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Design assistance by SDREA

# DIRECTOR TERMS EXPIRE

All nominating petitions shall be filed with the Secretary of the Cooperative, on or before the 20th day of July 2024, at the headquarters office of West Central Electric Cooperative, Inc., Located in Murdo, S.D., for parties interested in becoming a member of West Central Electric's Board of Directors.

**Directors term vacancies include:**



Jones County  
Town Director  
**Kenneth Miller**  
Zone 2



Jackson County  
Rural Director  
**Jim Willert**  
Zone 3



Stanley County  
At-Large Director  
**Shad Riggle**  
Zone 5

West Central Electric's Board of Directors consists of 10 members representing five zones (one town and one rural director for each zone). All director positions are based on a three-year term.

All nominating petitions shall be in such form as prescribed by the Board of Directors, but shall contain a declaration signed by the candidate, under oath, certifying to the membership that he/she possesses the necessary qualifications and is willing to serve as director.

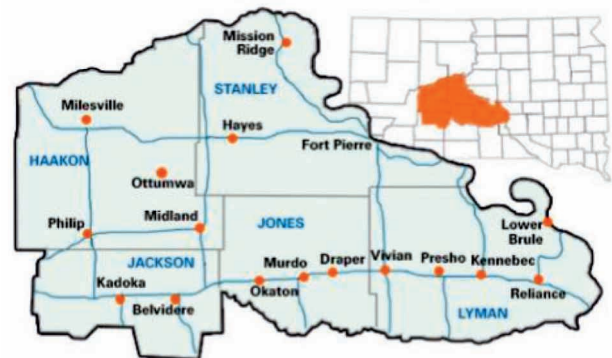
The petition shall be signed by not less than ten (10) members of the cooperative, each of whom shall be required to write their name, address, and the date and time of signing.

In the event that more than one nominating petition is filed in any one Zone, a Zone meeting shall be held in each Zone for the purpose of selecting one candidate for the director to represent the members located in such Zone as their official nominee.

Each Zone Meeting shall be held in August.

Notice of the Meeting shall be sent to all members living in the appropriate Zone by first-class mail or in the West Central Electric Cooperative Connections publication not less than 10 days before the meeting.

## WCEC Territory



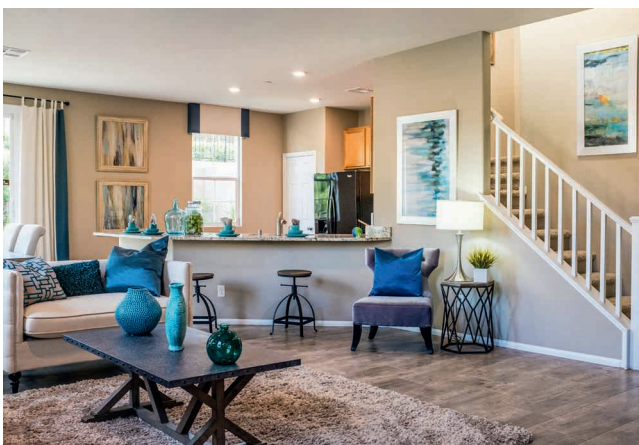
# Prepare Your Family for Fire Emergencies

**In only a matter of minutes, a small house fire can rage out of control, reaching temperatures of up to 1,500°F. In most cases, you have one to two minutes to get out safely.**

We practice fire emergency drills at work and school, but don't forget to create and practice a home escape plan, as well. It is beneficial to keep your plan visible, like on the refrigerator, to help family and visitors remember what to do. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) stresses that even children as young as three years old can understand an escape plan.

### Helpful Planning Tips:

- Plan for two ways to escape from each room.
- Pick a meeting location away from your home.
- Plan for everyone in your home, including babies and others who may need help to escape.
- Teach children not to hide during a fire; they must get out and stay out.



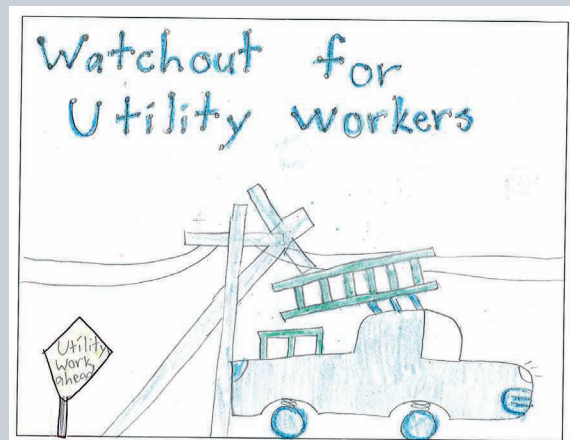
- Practice your escape drill with everyone in your family at least twice a year.

### Ways to Stay Safe:

- Clear toys, furniture and other clutter from exits.
- Check that windows open easily – fix any that stick.
- Test the batteries in your smoke alarms monthly.
- Be sure that security bars on doors and windows have a quick-release latch, and everyone knows how to open them.

### Special Considerations for Apartment Buildings:

- If you live in a multi-story apartment building, map out as many escape routes as possible to get to the stairways on your floor.
- If you live in a high-rise, plan to use the stairs – never the elevator – to escape a fire.
- A secondary route might be a window onto an adjacent roof or a collapsible ladder for escape from upper-story windows – purchase only collapsible ladders evaluated by a nationally recognized laboratory, such as Underwriters Laboratory (UL).



### Stay Away from Power Lines

#### Reese Rindels, Age 9

Reese Rindels cautions readers to watch out for utility workers. Reese's parents are Rochelle and Kyle Rindels, members of Sioux Valley Energy.

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.



# DELICIOUS *Dairy*

## CHOCOLATE FUDGE FROSTING

### Ingredients:

2 1/4 cups confectioners' sugar  
1/4 cup unsweetened cocoa powder  
1/4 tsp. cinnamon  
6 oz. (3/4 package) cream cheese, softened  
3/4 cup (1 1/2 sticks) butter, softened  
8 oz. semi-sweet chocolate, melted and cooled slightly  
1 tbsp. pure vanilla extract

### Method

Mix sugar, cocoa powder and cinnamon in medium bowl until well blended. Set aside. Beat cream cheese and butter in large bowl with electric mixer on medium speed until smooth. Gradually beat in cocoa mixture on low speed until well blended. Gradually beat in melted chocolate then vanilla until well blended.

McCormick.com

## RED VELVET HOT CHOCOLATE

### Ingredients:

4 cups whole milk  
1/4 cup sugar  
10 oz. semi-sweet baking chocolate, coarsely chopped  
2 tsps. red food color  
1 tsp. pure vanilla extract  
**Vanilla Whipped Cream**  
1/2 cup heavy cream  
2 tbsps. confectioners' sugar  
1/2 tsp. pure vanilla extract

### Method

Place milk and granulated sugar in medium saucepan. While stirring, bring to simmer on medium heat. Remove from heat. Stir in chocolate with wire whisk until melted. Stir in food color and vanilla. Serve with marshmallows. For the vanilla whipped cream, beat heavy cream, confectioners' sugar and vanilla in medium bowl with electric mixer on high speed until stiff peaks form.

McCormick.com

## LEMON PUDDING DESSERT

### Ingredients:

1 cup COLD butter  
1 8 oz. pkg. cream cheese, softened  
1 8 oz. tub cool whip, divided  
2 pkgs. (small) instant lemon pudding  
2 cups flour  
1 cup powdered sugar  
3 cups COLD milk

### Method

In bowl, cut butter into flour until crumbly. Press into an ungreased 9 x 13 inch glass pan. Bake at 350 degrees for 18 to 22 minutes or until set. Cool on wire rack. In mixing bowl, beat cream cheese and powdered sugar until smooth. Fold in one cup cool whip. Spread over cooled crust. In bowl, beat milk and pudding mixes on low speed for 2 minutes. Carefully spread over cream cheese layer. Top with remaining cool whip. Refrigerate for at least 1 hour or more. Yields 12 to 16 servings.

Mary Jessen  
Holabird, S.D.

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.

# Set Your Home to Vacay Mode



**Miranda Boutelle**  
Efficiency Services  
Group

**Q:** How can I lower my electric bill when I'm gone on vacation?

**A:** Just like you, the equipment in your home is hard at work getting through the daily grind. While you are off enjoying a new adventure or time away, give your home's equipment a vacation, too. Doing so can reduce unnecessary energy waste and unneeded wear and tear on your heating and cooling system, appliances and more. Here's how to set your home to vacay mode.

Your heating and cooling system keeps you comfortable. If you aren't there, it doesn't need to be quite so comfortable in your home. Setting the thermostat closer to the outdoor temperature can save you energy and money. I don't recommend completely turning off the heating or cooling system. In extreme weather, your heating and cooling system also helps protect your home from freezing pipes or damage from excessive heat.

As a rule, you can typically set your thermostat 5 to 10 degrees closer to the outdoor temperature when you aren't home. Each home is different, and the weather varies depending on where you live. Consider the right temperature balance for your home.

Installing a smart thermostat gives you the ability to control your settings remotely from your smartphone. This allows you to adjust the temperature after you leave home and right before you return.

Most water heaters include a vacation mode setting. This setting drops the temperature to reduce wasted energy when you're away. A storage water heater is like an insulated tea kettle, standing by and ready for you to have hot water whenever you need it. Give that water heater a vacation, too. Changing the setting to vacation mode keeps it on at a lower setting, saving energy. Leave yourself a note with a reminder to turn it back on when you get home, so you don't wind up with a disappointing shower before the first day back at work.

Closing the curtains can provide two benefits. It can keep heat from the sun at bay. This reduces the load on your heating and cooling system, which saves energy. It also has the benefit of blocking visibility into your home when you're away.

For security, some people use timers or leave on exterior lights. Make sure any lights left on are LEDs, instead of incandescent or compact fluorescent bulbs. LEDs use less energy and have less impact on your electric use when left on all night. You can also consider adding smart LEDs to your home. Smart LEDs can be controlled remotely through an app on your phone.

Did you know there are devices in your home that continue to draw power from your electrical outlets even when turned off or on standby? Before you leave, walk through your home and unplug devices and small appliances. Make sure gaming consoles and computers are fully powered down. Unplugging any devices that have lights, clocks or use standby mode can also reduce wasted energy.

Having peace of mind that your home is powered down and secure can help you enjoy your vacation. After all, we all need an occasional break.





# Ezra Aderhold's Road Trip from Prairie to Disc Golf Pro

Frank Turner

frank.turner@sdrea.coop

Disc golf, a sport increasingly capturing the interest of new amateurs and enthusiasts nationwide, is embedding itself in the rolling landscapes of South Dakota. Parks across the state have been developing disc golf courses, erecting chain link baskets and inviting locals to let their discs soar through the countryside.

Alongside these courses, an entire industry has emerged, complete with high-stakes tournaments, live broadcast coverage, and a class of professional players who have elevated their disc golf game to new heights. At the forefront of this scene is Ezra Aderhold, a native of Bath, S.D., whose passion for disc golf has led to a full-time career in the sport with seven career wins and career earnings totaling more than \$100,000.

Aderhold's journey from an amateur player to a professional disc golfer, however, did not happen overnight. Without any tournament experience or a single dollar earned from the sport, Aderhold set a goal to become one of the world's best disc golfers.

"My brothers and I started watching the pro disc golf scene from the couch," Aderhold recounted. "I was a bit delusional, thinking I could immediately compete with the pros. I thought I was better than I was, which, granted, wasn't a complete delusion because I am one of the top pros now; but at the time, that mindset fueled my confidence to make it happen."

With a headstrong mindset, Aderhold set out to achieve his audacious goal. In 2017, Aderhold began treating disc golf as a full-time job, practicing daily. After picking up a few wins in local tournaments, Aderhold kicked off his first tour in the professional disc golf scene in 2019 by driving to a tournament in Texas, where he lived out of his car to sustain his dream.

"When I went on tour my first year, I just lived out of my Toyota Prius, so I built it out with my bed in there. I would go to local parks to plug in my Instant Pot and cook my beans," Aderhold laughed. "I wanted to live as cheaply as possible so I could stay out on the road and keep the tour going. At the time, I was so focused on making that dream a reality that it didn't feel like a sacrifice. I was just so happy to have a chance to be out there, trying to make it in the pro disc golf scene."

Eventually, the days spent living out of his Prius palace paid off, and after months of living on the road, Aderhold's career began gaining traction. While in Texas, Aderhold earned his



Ezra Aderhold gains notice on the national disc golf stage.

*Photo submitted by Ezra Aderhold.*

first small sponsorship from OTB Discs, a disc golf retailer. As his wins started to compile, so did the offers from sponsors. By the end of his second season in 2020, Aderhold had offers on the table from multiple sponsors. Today, Aderhold holds sponsorships with several disc golf companies, including Squatch Disc Golf, OTB Discs and Discraft.

"Once I landed a sponsorship with Discraft, that's when it really became sustainable for me," he said.

In April, Aderhold again proved his determination in Arkansas at the Jonesboro Open. In the same week the moon covered the sun during the total solar eclipse, Aderhold took second place in the tournament, throwing 23 under par. Although the stars aligned that week, Aderhold was just one throw shy of taking home the win.

"I am definitely disappointed that I didn't take home the win – that's the goal; but I'm happy with how I am playing and I know that at the level I'm playing at now, a win is inevitable," Aderhold said.

A firmly established professional disc golfer, Aderhold said his next goal is to join the ranks of the top disc golf players in the world.

"Back in the day there were four players that always had a chance at winning and always played at the top of their game," said Aderhold. "Obviously, I want to win, but I think the bigger goal is to be one of the top guys who is always in contention for the win."



# South Dakota's Century Farms

Shannon Marvel

shannon.marvel@sdrea.coop

## Soukup Homestead: Raising families and farmers for over 125 years

Nestled in the heart of southcentral South Dakota lies a cherished piece of land with a name that's been long-established in Charles Mix County – the Soukup Homestead.

Almost anyone with Wagner ties knows a Soukup.

There are even a few members of the Soukup family who are also part of South Dakota's rural electric cooperative family, including Charles Mix Electric District 1 Director Denise Soukup.

But it all had to start somewhere, and good things take time.

That was the case for the Soukup's Century Farm and the Gronseth/Fiegel/Nelson/Evans homestead, a farm located near Britton that's served by Lake Region Electric.

Really, it's a common theme for Century Farm families to be located within rural electric cooperative service areas.

The South Dakota Farm Bureau and the South Dakota Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources began the Century Farm Program in 1984 to recognize farm and ranch families who have kept the farm in the family for 100 years or more.

Farms reaching the milestone of 125 years, known as

Quasquicentennial Farms, and the venerable Sesquicentennial Farms, marking an impressive 150 years, are also given their due recognition.

With over 3,000 families honored to date, the program continues to shine a light on the enduring legacy of South Dakota's agricultural heritage. To qualify for these prestigious honors, farms must encompass at least 80 acres and provide documented proof of their original purchase date. That means a family member must have always had ownership of the land over the last 100 years, including during the Great Depression and Dust Bowl.

The annual award presentation is a cherished tradition held at the South Dakota State Fair.

After migrating with family from what is now known today as the Czech Republic in the late 1800s, Joseph and Mary Soukup



Tom Soukup stands beside his Farmall Red International Harvester 460 tractor. *Photo courtesy of Linda Soukup*



came to the Dakota Territory at a time when most of the land open for settlement had already been settled.

While living in Tabor with family, Joseph Soukup applied for a homestead on reservation land that was now open for settlement at the U.S. Land Office in town of Mitchell on Jan. 30, 1896.

"In the following five years he built a frame house 13 feet by 18 feet in order to establish a residence, then a grainery, a corn crib, and he also fenced in 80 acres," said Linda Soukup, the wife of Tom Soukup. Her husband is Joseph and Mary's grandson.

Joseph and Mary raised ten children on the very homestead that Tom and Linda raised their kids.

"There's a lot of pride in the heritage and the legacy of, you know, having it passed down," Linda said. A new house was built on the site of Joseph and Mary's original home's structure in 1952.

That's where Tom and Linda lived and became the third generation to live on the homestead.

"When we lived here and Tom's parents and their brothers and sisters used to all come here," Linda said, as she started walking towards one of the farm buildings on the property referred to as "the shed."

"And they would butcher hogs and cattle and we would process them down there. We had a meat cooler in the basement. And then one of the families owned the meat saw and one owned the sausage stuffer," she recalled. "That was always kind of what we did until, well, families got bigger, and you couldn't. You just couldn't keep up, you know? We could have had a critter in there all the time," she said.

Tom and Linda raised their children – Becky, David, Kathy and Mary – in the house as well.

Their son David works as a project engineer for Phillips Petroleum in Texas. Two of their daughters live in different towns but remain relatively close to the homestead.

Kathy Jaeger lives in Tyndall and Mary Ringling lives in Platte. In 1996, their daughter Becky and her husband, Mike

Brunsing were living in Montana when Tom and Linda decided to move into town, so in 1998 the Brunsings moved back to South Dakota and began helping Tom on the farm while living in the house.

Becky raised three children of her own in the house she grew up in herself.

Becky and Mike still live on the homestead but in a more recently built home.

Now her son Dylan, 28, is raising his own family in the 1952 farmhouse.

In doing so, he became the fifth generation on the homestead.

Dylan and his wife, Keely, have two sons – a 20-month-old and an infant born in late March.

### **After 126 years, Torger Gronseth's homestead continues to bring family together.**

It's hard for Carol Evans to put into words how she feels when she reflects on the 126 years of history of her family's farm in Marshall County.

"It's so important to us," Evans said. Then she takes pause.

"I'm sorry, it's emotional for me," she says, before telling her family's – and the farm's – origin story.

In 1872, her great grandfather, Torger Gronseth, immigrated to America from Norway at only 14 years old.

He made the trip to join his eldest brother in Minnesota. He officially "staked his claim" and homesteaded in the Pleasant Valley Township of Marshall County in 1901.

Over the next two decades, Torger and his wife, Berthe Lea, amassed over 960 acres of undeveloped land in the Coteau de Prairie of northeastern South Dakota.

To each of their six children, Torger bequeathed a quarter of land.

The pioneering couple sold a quarter to their daughter, Louise, upon her marriage to George Fiegel for \$1.

While they were building the house that Carol and Frank Evans now call home, the Fiegels welcomed their first child.

"All of them were born in that house built in 1920. The first born was born on

the actual homestead. The house was being built when my first aunt was born," Evans said.

Louise and George owned the house and quarter of land until 1972, at which point ownership was passed onto their daughter Joyce and her husband Orvin Nelson.

"We bought the house in 2011. Last year after my mom passed, we were able to buy the entire quarter," she recalled.

Carol and Frank then got to work refurbishing the 800-square-foot house.

The Evans live in Arizona in the fall, winter, and spring months, but spent years renovating the farmhouse over the course of several summers.

"We go back in May every year, and we've renovated the house from the chimney to the basement," Evans said.

Their summer stay at the farm begins with the help of Lake Region Electric Association.

"The first thing we do when we get there is turn the power on. Then we turn the water on and then we mow," she said.

The week over the Fourth of July holiday is especially meaningful to Carol. That's when her grandchildren make their pilgrimage back to the Gronseth/Fiegel/Nelson/Evans homestead.

"They're always here around Fort Sisseton Days," Evans said.

The traditional agenda for the kiddos also includes picnics at Roy Lake, routine farm work, and touching up the paint on an American Flag pallet display located at the base of Torger Gronseth's tombstone.

"Every one of the kids has learned how to drive when they're back in South Dakota – because it's safe," Evans said.

Evans ensures the next generation knows their family history.

"They know their great grandpa was only 14 years old when he left Norway. The strength of the person to do that – the longevity of our genetic background, the struggle, and the fact that we're so fortunate – are something they'll understand," Evans said.

"And that it's home. It's never going to the farm. It's going home."

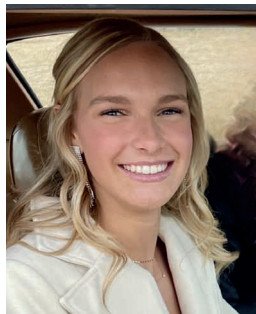
# YOUTH TOUR PARTICIPANTS

West Central Electric announces that three area high school juniors will represent the cooperative on the 2024 Rural Electric Youth Tour to Washington, D.C. This year's Youth Tour winners, McKaylan Bonenberger of Belvidere, Taya Iversen of Murdo, and Brady Heltzel of Philip will travel with other South Dakota teens to Washington, D.C., in June. While there they will spend a full week touring the nation's capital and learning about cooperatives, rural electrification, and the process of government.

### Meet your 2024 Rural Electric Youth Tour Winners:

#### MaKaylan Bonenberger – Belvidere

My name is MaKaylan Bonenberger, and I am currently a Junior at Kadoka Area High School. My parents are Brett and Nikki Bonenberger, and I am the eldest of my two younger brothers, McCoy and McKey. We live on a ranch a couple miles north of Belvidere. I am involved in a variety of extracurricular activities including volleyball, track, student council, HOSA, FFA, 4-H, football and basketball statistician, as well as National Honor Society. I also keep busy helping on the ranch, babysitting, and working at our local nursing home as a Certified Nursing Aide. During my spare time, you'll find me enjoying the outdoors with family and friends or running!



#### Brady Heltzel – Philip

My name is Brady Heltzel. I am the daughter of Brad and Jackie Heltzel, and the sister to Kaci, Riley, and Reece, Sister-

in-law to Bradley, aunt to Isley, and future sister-in-law to Dilyn. I am a junior at Philip High School and have attended PHS all my life. I am involved in volleyball, track and field, band, FCCLA, and student council. In the summer, I work at the city pool as a lifeguard and teach swim lessons and water aerobics. I am also the janitor at Scotchman Industries. In my spare time, I enjoy time with my friends and family, and playing pickleball. As of right now, I plan on attending South Dakota State University to major in Biology to later go on to optometry school. Thank you for selecting me for this amazing opportunity to learn more about American History.



#### Taya Iversen – Murdo

I am Taya Iversen. I am the daughter of Aaron and Lori Iversen and have one older brother, Carter. I am a junior at Jones Co. High School. I have participated in various activities throughout high school such as basketball, student manager for track and football, band, pep band, and youth group. I work as a lifeguard and waitress during the summer months. I enjoy hanging out with friends in my free time. My future plans after high school are a bit undecided but looking at something in the medical field, possibly nursing.



## ENERGY EFFICIENCY

### TIP OF THE MONTH

Did you know ceiling fans can help you save energy? Ceiling fans create a windchill effect on your skin to make you feel a few degrees cooler. Raise the thermostat a few degrees and turn on fans to reduce air conditioning costs.

Set fan blades to rotate counterclockwise during summer months and clockwise during winter months. Remember, ceiling fans cool people but don't actually lower the indoor temperature. Turn them off when you leave the room.

Source: energy.gov





# Anatomy of a Power Outage

Scott Flood

Fifteen minutes from now, a stray bolt of lightning will connect a menacing cloud with a power pole about a mile east of your home. Your lights will flicker briefly before going out. Things will become eerily quiet as all your home's devices equipped with motors and fans stop providing their constant symphony of background noise.

You're experiencing a power outage, so you reach for your phone and call your electric co-op. Good move. Sometimes, members don't call because they assume their neighbors will. However, the more members who do make the call, the more quickly the co-op will be able to pinpoint the outage location.

Back at the office, the co-op's grid system operator noticed the sudden pause at the moment 300 million volts of lightning danced around a transformer, and they're able to triangulate the location of the outage. The system estimates just over 500 members are in the dark as a line crew tosses their dinner aside and steer their trucks in that direction.

Thirty minutes later, the lineworkers slowly drive along a

stretch of road, keeping one eye on traffic while inspecting every pole, wire and transformer. In another eight minutes, they stop and step out for a closer look. The mystery is solved with one glance at the burn mark across the surface of the transformer. Ready to move the truck and ensuring it's safe, they move closer to the line.

If you watch the lineworkers, you might mistakenly assume they're not very motivated. After all, you're dealing with a power outage, you want it to end as soon as humanly possible, and it looks like they're simply taking their sweet time while you're missing the ballgame. But there's a good reason the lineworkers aren't rushing or running around.

Those power lines carry high-voltage electricity. It's safe when all elements of the system are in good working order, but it's potentially deadly when that's not the case. Lineworkers approach what they do deliberately, efficiently – and most of all, safely. Every action they take is carefully planned so they can spot potential hazards. When performing tasks, they follow standard procedures and safety requirements to ensure the repair is effective and sound. Working that way may take a little extra time, but it means they'll make it home safely at the end of the day (or night).

Less than an hour after finding the cause of the outage, the lineworkers load their tools and gear back onto the trucks. This time, the problem was easy to spot, the repair was fairly straightforward and the weather cooperated. But no two outages are exactly alike. The next one could be in severe weather or on a remote segment far off the main road. It could involve a fallen tree that needs to be cut with chainsaws or broken utility pole that needs to be replaced. Doesn't matter, because lineworkers will always get to the location and fix the problem as quickly as safety allows.

Driving back to the co-op, the lineworkers watch the passing homes and smiles, because the warm glow coming from the windows means the power's back on again. A couple members in their yard wave as the trucks pass by. They may not know why the electricity went off and what was involved in bringing it back, but thanks to the lineworkers, life is back to normal.

Lightning streaks across the world's skies roughly eight million times every day, and power poles, lines and other infrastructure provide attractive targets for helping it connect it with the ground. But outages can occur from a variety of causes, including fallen trees, vehicle crashes and even curious critters, like snakes and squirrels.

This is why your electric co-op invests in the right technologies and equipment designed to protect the power grid and prevent outages from plunging your home into darkness. And it's also why the lineworkers, who put themselves at risk to return your life to normal, are some of our favorite people.





# REBUILDING HABITATS

Beavers provide many environmental benefits including drought resilience, flood control and wildlife habitat. *Photo Credit: Richard Hamilton Smith.*

## BEAVER-INSPIRED STREAM RESTORATION

**Frank Turner**

[frank.turner@sdrea.coop](mailto:frank.turner@sdrea.coop)

Centuries ago, the arrival of European traders in North America marked the beginning of a multi-century hunt for furs. The pelt of the North American beaver was at the forefront of this fur trade, prized for its use in crafting felt hats. These stylish hats fueled an ever-increasing demand for beaver furs that persisted for centuries, leading to a severe decline in beaver populations. By the early 1900s, beavers had become critically endangered, nearly vanishing from the expansive wetlands across the continent.

As the beavers dwindled, so did their dams. Lazy streams and rivers, once

tamed by beaver dams, began to flow more rapidly. The disappearance of the dams caused waterways to narrow and floodplains essential to willow trees and cottonwoods to vanish. The loss of these beaver-engineered habitats set the stage for the significant erosion of precious prairie lands.

In 2020, The Nature Conservancy set out to combat these issues by launching a project in partnership with the Natural Resources Conservation Service, South Dakota State University and local conservation agencies to restore stream health in western South Dakota.

“Our West River streams make up a small percentage of the total landscape – just under two percent of our total acreage is stream and valley

bottom,” said Lori Brown, riparian health program manager with The Nature Conservancy. “Yet, nearly everything in the prairie depends on these streams, including us in our rural communities.”

Prior to launching the project, The Nature Conservancy engaged local landowners in discussions to best understand their challenges and needs. During the discussions, several landowners faced similar issues: streams were eroding the land, fence lines were being washed away, and the water table was too low. Despite having effective tools for managing grasslands, landowners lacked the means to best maintain healthy streams.

“We needed to explore options



that any landowner could implement – strategies that didn't require a hydrologist to implement or an engineer to design," Brown said. "Our ranchers and landowners are some of the best stewards of the land. A lot of them are hungry for information and tools that can help them help the land."

The solution was simple, inspired by the ingenious works of an aquatic rodent: an artificial beaver dam. After all, if a beaver can engineer a dam, why can't a landowner?

Known as beaver analog devices, these simple speedbump-like structures quickly became integral to a broader strategy known as process-based restoration, a method that uses nature to help nature. Composed of locally sourced sticks, rocks and mud, beaver analog devices replicate a key natural process once performed naturally by beavers centuries ago. When established correctly, they filter water,

slow fast-flowing streams, and even recreate floodplains.

After settling on a solution, The Nature Conservancy set out to implement the idea in the real world, working with 10 landowners to help build and record the effects of the simulated beaver dams.

"Every day that I go out to one of these sites and I see that the beaver dams that we have built aren't totally washed out, it absolutely amazes me," Brown said. "I've read the manuals and I know how it's supposed to work, but I'm always in awe at what we are able to accomplish with the right building blocks in place."

After four years of the project, Brown said there is a lot to be excited about as the benefits of the project are evident. Signs of stream restoration are well underway. Sediment is accumulating rather than eroding, and revitalized floodplains are sprouting new willow trees.

"Without any planting on our part, woody species are now returning to these stream channels," Brown said. "The next step will be to lean into the success of this project. We want to act as a support for our conservation partners and other interested landowners that want to see their stream condition improve on their properties."

Others have been inspired by demonstrations led by The Nature Conservancy and other conservation organizations in the state to take action to slow down and hold water.

"We are just starting to see some of the effects from our outreach and education side of this project," said Brown. "The most rewarding part of this effort has been hearing the stories from local ranchers and landowners and hearing them get excited about the project."



A rock structure installed to help prevent headcuts from eroding upstream reaches. Photo Credit: Joe Dickie, Generation Photography, Inc.





# Reliable Energy is in Jeopardy

### Steve Barnett

General Manager of the South Dakota Rural Electric Association, a statewide association that represents 31 member-owned electric cooperatives. He previously served as Secretary of State for South Dakota.



South Dakota's families and businesses rightfully expect their lights to stay on at a price they can afford. Our national energy policies should support our cooperative mission, which is to provide safe, reliable, and affordable electricity to our member-owners.

Unfortunately, our country is now confronted with a harsh reality – we are quickly approaching a point where there won't be enough electricity to go around.

The North American Electric Reliability Corporation (NERC) is the nation's grid watchdog. For years, the organization has issued a string of increasingly dire reports warning that threats to grid reliability are mounting, and more frequent rolling blackouts could soon become the norm. NERC's recent assessment predicts more than 110 gigawatts of always-available generation, enough to power about 35 million homes, will retire through 2033.

And all or parts of 19 states are at high risk of rolling blackouts during normal peak conditions over the next five years.

Keeping the lights on is not a partisan issue. Yet, politics and energy policy have had an outsized impact on how we got here. The current state of our nation's energy policy related to electricity can be summed up simply: Do more with less.

That's just not sustainable. From data centers to EVs, from home heating and cooling to the way we run America's farms, our nation is increasingly reliant on electricity to power the economy. As technology and energy demands advance, a recipe for rolling brownouts and blackouts is brewing.

Opposite that increasing demand for electricity is an alarming reduction in supply as our country shutter's existing always-available power plants to comply with various federal and state regulations.

### Jim Matheson

CEO of the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association, the national trade association that represents the nation's more than 900 not-for-profit, consumer owned electric cooperatives. He previously served seven terms as a U.S. representative for Utah.





South Dakota experiences extreme weather conditions throughout the year with temperatures rising above 100 degrees in the summer and falling far below zero in the winter. When the sun is not shining and the wind is not blowing, renewable energy sources do not fit the bill for reliability. We simply cannot fully retire power plants that still have a useful life ahead of them.

The final challenge to meeting our nation's energy needs is the arcane set of rules and regulations required to build anything in this country. The process for siting, permitting and building infrastructure – everything from solar farms, to pipelines to transmission lines – is mired in red tape and years of litigation.

These trends are not going to get any better in the coming years.

On April 25, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) finalized four new rules to regulate power plants. The path outlined by the EPA is unrealistic, unachievable, and unlawful – exceeding the EPA's authority and disregarding Supreme Court rulings. It undermines electric reliability and poses grave consequences for an already stressed electric grid.

The American economy can't succeed without reliable electricity. Smart energy policy recognizes this fundamental truth, while keeping the lights on. This barrage of new EPA rules ignores our nation's ongoing electric reliability challenges and is the wrong approach at a critical time for our nation's energy future.

EPA finalized its rule against a backdrop of daunting threats to reliability as electricity demand surges and supply decreases. This will lead directly to more blackouts, higher costs, and uncertainty for America. That's a dangerous approach to regulation.

The National Rural Electric Cooperative Association filed a lawsuit with the U.S. Court of Appeals for the D.C. Circuit challenging the EPA over its unlawful power plant rule on May 9. This suit points out that the rule goes far beyond what Congress has authorized the agency to do, violates the Clean Air Act and disregards recent Supreme Court rulings. The rule hinges on the widespread adoption of carbon capture and storage – a promising technology that is simply not ready for prime time.

South Dakota's Attorney General is also one of several dozen that have filed suit against the EPA for similar reasons.

Policymakers cannot overlook the laws of physics or the reality of the current situation. Adding more renewable resources to the nation's energy portfolio can be part of the solution; however, since the wind doesn't always blow and the sun doesn't always shine, our country also needs a robust supply of readily available energy resources to call on at a moment's notice.

Any long-term solution requires policymakers to recognize the need for time, technology development and new transmission infrastructure. These are essential ingredients for an energy future that prioritizes reliable electricity for all consumers.

Electricity powers industries, businesses, and technology. It fosters economic development vital for medical facilities, ensuring the functioning of life-saving equipment. Reliable power is essential for emergency services, law enforcement, and disaster response efforts. It also fuels innovation by supporting research, development, and deployment of new technologies.

Keeping the lights on is vital to South Dakota's economy. The stakes are too high to get this wrong.



**JUNE 12-JULY 20, 2024**  
**Prairie Repertory Theatre**  
**Summer Season**  
 Oscar Larson Performing  
 Arts Center  
 Brookings, SD  
 605-688-6045



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.

**JUNE 1**  
**Spring Volksmarch**  
 Crazy Horse Memorial

**JUNE 7-9**  
**Gumbo Ridge Wagon Trail Ride**  
 Murdo, SD

**JUNE 8**  
**Mt. Rushmore Rodeo**  
 Palmer Gulch Resort  
 Hill City, SD

**JUNE 8**  
**Sportsman's Bash**  
 2 p.m.  
 Weston County Senior Center  
 Newcastle, WY  
 605-440-1842

**JUNE 9**  
**1880 Train Old West Shootout**  
 5 p.m.  
 Hill City, SD

**JUNE 14-15**  
**Fine Arts in the Hills Show & Sale**  
 Hill City, SD

**JUNE 14-16**  
**Highmore's Old Settler's Day Weekend**  
 Highmore, SD

**JUNE 15**  
**The Big Mick**  
 The Mickelson Trail  
 605-673-5154

**JUNE 15-16**  
**Friends of the Library Book Sale**  
 Hill City Public Library  
 Hill City, SD

**JUNE 18**  
**Double O Okobojo Oldies The Life & Music of Badger Cark, presented by Pegie Douglas**  
 Mike Finley's Shop  
 Sully County, SD  
 RSVP Sully Co. Auditor  
 605-258-2541

**JUNE 20**  
**Kadoka Ranch Rodeo**  
 Kadoka, SD

**JUNE 21-22**  
**Scavenger's Journey**  
 Yard sales, farmer's markets & specialty shops  
 Wall, SD to Wagner, SD  
[www.scavengersjourney.com](http://www.scavengersjourney.com)

**JUNE 21-22**  
**Kadoka Reunion Weekend & PRCA Rodeo**  
 Kadoka, SD

**JULY 4**  
**Philip Volunteer Fire Dept. Annual Firework Display**  
 Begins at dusk  
 Lake Waggoner  
 Philip, SD

**JULY 19**  
**Gumbo Ridge Bronc Ride**  
 Murdo, SD

**JULY 20**  
**Murdo Ranch Rodeo**  
 Murdo, SD

**JULY 19-21**  
**Custer Piecemakers Quilt Show**  
 9 a.m.- 4 p.m. each day  
 Custer School Armory  
 Custer, SD

**JULY 26**  
**Disability Resource Fair**  
 11 a.m.-2 p.m.  
 Main Street Square  
 Rapid City, SD

**JULY 26-28**  
**Meghan Newsam Community Celebration**  
 Murdo, SD

**AUG. 10**  
**Pioneer Auto Museum 70th Anniversary**  
 Murdo, SD

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