

COOPERATIVE CONNECTIONS



Gardening Greats

**Master Gardeners
Cultivating Community
Growth**

Pages 8-9

Bridging History
Pages 12-13

MANAGER'S MESSAGE

COOPERATIVE DIFFERENCE STARTS AT YOUR DISTRICT MEETING

Central Electric Cooperative's Board President Duane Wolbrink speaks during the 2024 Aurora County district meeting.



Ken Schlimgen
General Manager

I would like to personally invite you to attend this year's district meetings being held May 20 through June 18. These meetings provide an excellent opportunity to learn about the challenges and opportunities facing your cooperative. You will receive a postcard with the date, location, and time of your District Meeting. If you are unable to attend your district meeting, feel free to join a meeting in a neighboring county. Your participation is always welcome.

Director elections are planned in Jerauld, Miner and Sanborn Counties. These elections are a key part of our member-driven governance system, which sets electric cooperatives apart from other businesses. As a not-for-profit electric utility owned and governed by the members we serve, your voice plays a crucial role in shaping the direction of our cooperative. Unlike other utilities, we answer only to you, our members—a distinction that strengthens our commitment to your best interests.

As you may know, Central Electric implemented an electric rate adjustment this year in response to rising operating costs and increased wholesale power prices. I'll be providing more detailed information on these factors at the District Meetings and will be happy to answer any questions you have about what lies ahead.

"Concern for Community" is a guiding principle for rural electric cooperatives. We have shared positive stories about our community-focused initiatives, such as Operation Round-Up and the USDA Rural Economic Development Loan (REDL) for the Mitchell area. I have had members contact me with concerns, thinking these funds come directly from their electric rates. I want to clarify that this is not the case.

Operation Round-Up is funded by voluntary contributions from members who choose to round up their electric bill to the next dollar. These contributions, which average about 50 cents per member each month, generate nearly \$24,000 annually

for grants that support local causes. Your board of directors has established guidelines for the program, and a volunteer board of trustees from the membership oversees the grant application and awarding process.

We are also excited about the approval of a USDA loan for the Mitchell Area Development Corporation. This loan will help install infrastructure for a new business park, which will be served by the cooperative. The USDA's Rural Economic Development Loan program offers a zero-interest, 10-year loan for projects that lead to job creation. Central Electric plays a key role by facilitating the loan application process on behalf of the recipient and overseeing their payments.

These are just a couple examples of how your cooperative adds unique value to our communities. We live and work here, too, and we are deeply committed to supporting local initiatives. Whether it's through development projects, scholarship programs for local students or electrical safety education, we're always working to make a positive impact.

Looking ahead, our focus will remain on ensuring the long-term success and well-being of the members we serve. I look forward to seeing you at the district meetings. Thank you for your continued trust and involvement in our cooperative.

Honoring Our Administrative Professionals

April 23 is Administrative Professionals Day. This is a time to recognize the outstanding billing and administrative professionals who power the day-to-day functions at Central Electric. These dedicated individuals are the steady driving force behind the scenes, answering the call to serve our members on routine days and during emergencies. They juggle multiple responsibilities and always prioritize the needs of our members with professionalism and care.

I want to commend DeEtte B., Lindsey W., Heather W. and Heather G. for their hard work, dedication and commitment. Their efforts do not go unnoticed, and we are fortunate to have their unique skills, knowledge and talent.

Until next month, stay safe!

CENTRAL ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE CONNECTIONS

(USPS 018-963)

Board of Directors

- Aurora County - Duane Wolbrink, President
Brule County - Bradee Pazour
Buffalo County - Donita Loudner
Davison County - Jeff Gustafson, SDREA Director
Hanson County - Mark Hofer - Secretary & NRECA Director
Jerauld County - Mark Reindl, Treasurer
Miner County - Robert Banks
Sanborn County - Todd VanWalleghen, Vice President
Director-At-Large - Merl Bechen

CENTRAL ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE CONNECTIONS is the monthly publication for the members of Central Electric Cooperative, PO Box 850, Mitchell, SD 57301. Families subscribe to Cooperative Connections as part of their electric cooperative membership.

Subscription information: Central Electric Cooperative members devote 50 cents of each monthly electric payments for a subscription. Non-member subscriptions are available for \$12 annually.

Postmaster: Please send address changes to Central Electric Cooperative, PO Box 850, Mitchell, SD 57301. Address all other correspondence to: Cooperative Connections, PO Box 850, Mitchell, SD 57301

Contact Us

Office Hours: Monday - Friday 8 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.
Phone: 800-477-2892 or 605-996-7516
Website: www.centralelec.coop

Our Mission

Provide reliable energy and services with a commitment to safety and member satisfaction.

Non-Discrimination Statement:

In accordance with Federal civil rights law and U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) civil rights regulations and policies, the USDA, its Agencies, offices, and employees, and institutions participating in or administering USDA programs are prohibited from discriminating based on race, color, national origin, religion, sex, disability, age, marital status, family/parental status, income derived from a public assistance program, political beliefs, or reprisal or retaliation for prior civil rights activity, in any program or activity conducted or funded by USDA (not all bases apply to all programs).

Board Meeting Summary

The board of directors met on Feb. 17, 2025, at Central Electric Cooperative's headquarters for the regular board meeting. They reviewed reports by management including details on operations, member services, communications, service department and financials.

Board Report

General Manager Schlimgen reported on legislative cracker barrels, Northwestern Energy territory discussions, East River Electric Managers' Advisory Committee, Basin Electric updates, Rural Electric Economic Development (REED) activities, Rural Utilities Service and other management activities.

The minutes of the January safety meeting were reviewed. Schlimgen shared information about a REED loan application for JaBaS in White Lake.

The board reviewed Policy 301 - Line and Service Extensions and a draft policy for succession management.

Director Van Walleghen reported on the South Dakota Association of Cooperatives board meeting.

Directors Bechen and Hofer reported on the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association activities.

Director Wolbrink updated the board on the East River Electric board meeting and activities.

The board reviewed monthly director expenses.

Board Action

The board acted upon the following items:

- The board president and secretary were authorized to execute labor-only contracts for the year.
A motion was made and seconded to support a REED application for JaBaS of White Lake. The motion carried.
A motion was made and seconded to adopt revised Policy 301 - Line and Service Extensions. The motion carried.

There being no further business, President Wolbrink adjourned the meeting. The next board meeting was scheduled for March 17, 2025.

Table with 3 columns: FINANCIAL REPORT, YEAR TO DATE FEB. 2025, YEAR TO DATE FEB. 2024. Rows include Kilowatt Hour (kWh) Sales, Electric Revenues, Total Cost of Service, and Operating Margins.

Power Life Safely

May is Electrical Safety Month

Every May, Electrical Safety Month serves as a vital reminder of the importance of preventing electrical hazards at home. Electricity powers nearly every aspect of modern life, but if handled improperly, it can pose serious risks, including injuries and property damage.

Your electric cooperative understands the risks associated with improper electricity use, which is why we're committed to reminding you to stay vigilant and practice electrical safety not only in May, but year-round.

By following key safety practices, you can reduce the risk of electrical hazards and ensure your family stays protected. Here are five essential tips for powering up safely at home.

1. **Be vigilant.** Regularly inspect your home's electrical system for any signs of damage or outdated components and replace any frayed electrical wires or cords. The Electrical Safety Foundation International estimates roughly 3,300 home fires originate from extension cords every year, either from overloading, overheating or fraying. If you're relying on extension cords as permanent power solutions, consider contacting a qualified electrician to install additional outlets where you need them.
2. **Use Surge Protectors.** Safeguard your sensitive electronics and appliances from surges with surge protectors. These handy devices help divert excess voltage away from your electronics, reducing the risk of damage or electrical fires. Not all power strips include surge protection, so read the product label carefully. Additionally, surge protectors can lose effectiveness over time and should be replaced when damaged or outdated.
3. **Practice Safe Power Strip Use.** Avoid overloading electrical outlets with power strips that exceed the outlet's capacity. High-energy devices, like heaters, microwaves and hairdryers should be distributed across multiple outlets. Overloading an outlet with a "busy" power strip can lead to overheating and create a fire hazard, so be sure to check the power strip's wattage rating before plugging in items.

4. **Water and Electricity Don't Mix.** It may seem obvious, but accidents involving water contact with electrical items happen. Always keep electrical appliances and devices away from water sources, like sinks, bathtubs or swimming pools. Make sure your hands are dry before touching any electrical switches or appliances – never handle electrical devices with wet hands. Ground Fault Circuit Interrupters (GFCIs) should be installed in areas where water and electricity are typically in close proximity, including kitchens, bathrooms and outdoor outlets.
5. **Educate Family Members.** One of the best ways to ensure the safety of everyone in your household is to talk about electrical safety. Teach children not to play with electrical outlets or appliances and ensure they understand the potential dangers of electricity. Create and practice a home fire escape plan that includes electrical safety precautions in case of emergencies.

Practicing electrical safety at home is essential for protecting your family, property and peace of mind. Remember, electrical safety isn't just a one-time effort – it's a year-round responsibility. Taking these steps can help ensure a safer, more secure home for you and your loved ones.



“Don't plant trees near power lines.”

Jeremiah Barlow

Jeremiah cautions readers not to plant trees near power lines. Thank you for your picture, Jeremiah! Jeremiah's parents are Mosiah and Cristine Barlow, members of West River Electric Association.

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 CHICKEN

CHICKEN BREAST SUPREME

Ingredients:

- 4 chicken breasts (boned and halved)
- 8 strips bacon
- 2 pkgs. chipped beef
- 8 oz. sour cream
- 1 can cream of chicken soup
- 6 oz. evaporated milk

Method

Wrap each half of chicken breast in a piece of bacon. Place in a baking dish lined with two layers of chipped beef.

Blend sour cream, soup, and milk. Pour over chicken.

Bake uncovered at 300°F for three hours. Serve over rice.

*Makes 8 servings.

Sharon Houchin
Central Electric Member

CHICKEN ROLLUPS

Ingredients:

- 8 oz. tube crescent rolls
- 4 boneless chicken breasts (cooked shredded and seasoned to taste)
- 8 oz. cheddar cheese (finely shredded, divided)
- 10 1/2 oz. can cream of chicken soup
- 1 packet chicken gravy mix
- 1 cup water

Method

In a bowl, mix the shredded chicken and 1/3 of the cheese. Take a scoop of the mixture and roll it into a crescent roll then place in a greased 9" x 13" pan. Bake at 350°F until the crescent rolls look browned on top. Mix the soup, gravy mix, 1/3 of the cheese, and enough water to make the mixture pourable. Pour over the crescent rolls. Sprinkle the remaining 1/3 of the cheese on top and bake again until the cheese melts and starts to brown.

Nicole Einrem
B-Y Electric Member

SMOKY CHICKEN TACOS

Ingredients:

- 1 tbsp. oil
- 1 lbs. boneless skinless chicken breast, cut into thin strips
- 1/4 cup Flavor Maker Taco Night Topping Seasoning
- 1/2 cup water
- 12 (6-inch) flour or corn tortillas, warmed

Method

Heat oil in large skillet on medium-high heat. Add chicken; cook and stir just until browned.

Stir in Flavor Maker Seasoning and water. Bring to boil. Reduce heat and simmer 5 minutes or until sauce has thickened and chicken is cooked through, stirring occasionally.

Spoon chicken into warm tortillas. Serve with desired toppings, such as shredded lettuce, shredded cheese, sour cream, guac or salsa.

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 2025. All entries must include your name, mailing address, phone number and cooperative name.

CENTRAL ELECTRIC PROVIDES MUTUAL AID

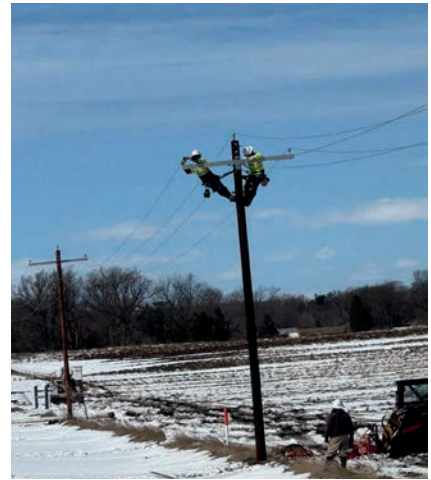
Mutual aid is a collaborative system in which electric cooperatives assist one another during emergencies, such as severe storms, natural disasters or large-scale power outages. When a cooperative's infrastructure is damaged beyond its immediate repair capabilities, neighboring cooperatives or those from other regions deploy crews, equipment and resources to help restore power as quickly and safely as possible.

Dedicated crews from Central Electric, Dakota Energy, Douglas Electric, Sioux Valley Energy and

Southeastern Electric recently traveled south to provide mutual aid following a blizzard that hit Burt County Public Power District in Nebraska.

Central Electric lineworkers Tim Olinger and Chase Phillips, pictured to the right, worked diligently to help restore power for consumers following the blizzard.

Central Electric wants to express its gratitude to our lineworkers, their spouses and families for their support and sacrifice. It takes a strong team at home to make mutual aid possible.



Notice of Capital Credit Allocations

Each spring, members receive notification by mail of capital credits acquired the previous year. Members will not receive a refund or bill credit for the allocation at this time. In the fall, the board of directors determines if a percentage of capital credits will be returned to members, and if so,



what amount. The board makes the decision based on the financial condition of the cooperative.

As a member-owned cooperative, Central Electric does not earn profits like other businesses. After the co-op deducts costs and upkeep for yearly operations, the net profit is reinvested into the company to provide cash flow, collateral to show stability and to obtain loans. Any net profit over those costs is allocated back to the members in the form of capital credits. Every member of Central Electric has shares in capital credits. The more electricity you buy and the longer you

use the service, the more monetary equity (allocations) you accumulate. Allocations are the total sum of annual equity accrued by the member during their prior year of service.

When the board decides to issue refunds, active members will receive a credit on their December bill and inactive members will receive a check. Capital credits are one of the many benefits of being a member of Central Electric Cooperative. When you have Central Electric as your electric provider, you are part owner of the cooperative through the equity you have invested.

When the Lights Came On

Darrell Kirby Reflects on the Arrival of Electricity and How Co-ops Powered His Career

Erica Fitzhugh
Southeastern Electric Cooperative

Growing up on a farm northwest of Salem, Darrell Kirby was the second oldest of five children in his family. Their farm had dairy cows, hogs and chickens and they grew corn, oats and beans. “Before we had electricity, the memory that sticks in my mind is doing schoolwork with an old kerosene lamp with a wick, set in the middle of the table for light,” shared Kirby. “After that we switched to a gas light with two mantels. It was much brighter and more dependable. But when we got electricity...that was out of this world.”

The Kirby family was one of the original members of McCook Electric, now Southeastern Electric. Kirby remembers that his home was energized by the cooperative around the time he was a fifth grader. “My uncle came out to wire our house,” said Kirby. “It was really something to be able to turn on a switch and have all that light!” Before electricity, Kirby and his siblings would carry a lantern from their house to the barn. A long wire was strung the length of the ceiling - they would hang the lantern from the wire and as they moved down the aisle milking cows by hand, they would slide the lantern down to light their way. Using a hand cranked milk separator, they would remove the cream from the

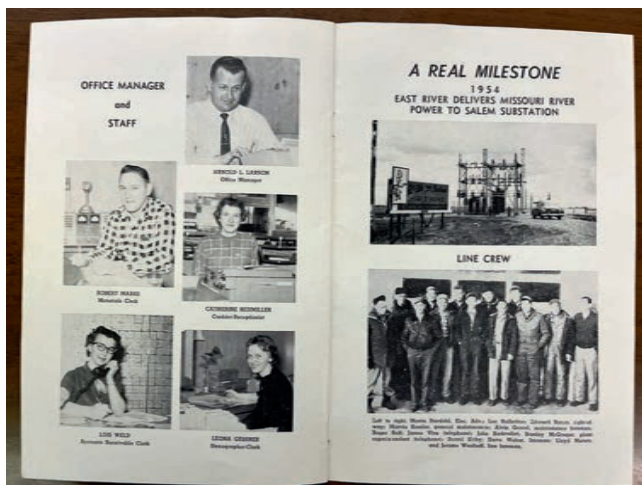


Photo by Erica Fitzhugh

milk. The milk would be fed to the hogs, and the cream would be kept in cream cans until it could be taken to town, usually twice a week, to trade for groceries and other goods at the K&K Store. “Electricity changed our lives,” Kirby exclaimed. “The yard light and lights in the barn, the milking machine, a cream separator with a motor instead of a crank, a refrigerator – the changes to our farming operation were remarkable.”

As Kirby finished high school, he had his mind set on farming. However, life had other plans for him. “I worked as a farmhand in the summer and as a mechanic in the winter. The next summer, McCook Electric bought property to build on and was looking for people to help with the construction. I assisted with the construction for a few months before I had to take a break due to a health issue,” said Kirby. He knew from that interaction with McCook Electric that he wanted to work for the electric cooperative. After Kirby recovered, he returned to McCook Electric and asked for a job as a lineman. He started in the spring of 1958 and spent the next 40 years powering the lives of his neighbors through his career at the co-op. “I was not scared of heights and liked working outdoors. I borrowed a set of hooks and belts and with no formal training or previous experience, I started my career as a lineman,” laughed Kirby.

Kirby held positions as a lineman, line superintendent and eventually as the general manager. He recalled experiencing ice and windstorms, working at annual meetings and witnessing several changes to the electric utility industry. “My fondest memories of working at the co-op included the people – our employees and our members. I got to know almost everyone because we were so small. I enjoyed visiting with and working for our members, helping them in any way I could,” smiled Kirby. “The co-op was so good to me and my family. I still miss the people after all these years.”



History is remembered in the 1959 McCook Electric Cooperative Annual Report, Years of Progress. It focused on the cooperative's growth from 1949-1959. Photo submitted by Erica Fitzhugh.



GARDENING GREATS

Missouri Valley Master Gardeners remove invasive bellflower and other non-desirable plants at the Dorothy Jenks Memorial Garden in Yankton.
Photo courtesy of SDSU Extension.

How Master Gardeners are Cultivating Community Growth

Frank Turner

frank.turner@sarea.coop

After years of tending to her garden, Codington-Clark Electric member Dianne Rider of Hazel can confidently say she is an expert in horticulture. However, her extensive experience of working with the earth isn't the only reason she is considered a soil savant.

In 2016, Rider earned the prodigious title of Master Gardener through the South Dakota State University Extension's Master Gardener Volunteer Program. This program provides in-depth horticultural training – covering topics like plant science, soil management and sustainable gardening practices – so enthusiasts like Rider can share their extensive gardening knowledge with their communities.

Becoming an Extension Master Gardener volunteer is a commitment. Applicants must complete horticulture classes, pass the course test and contribute 40 hours of volunteer service

during the first year of involvement. Despite the challenges, Rider had aspired to this achievement for decades, but it wasn't until she retired from her teaching career that she was able to dedicate herself fully and earn her place as a Master Gardener.

Reflecting the adage, “once a teacher, always a teacher,” Rider continues to educate and influence those around her, even after retirement, through gardening.

“Becoming a Master Gardener has always been on my bucket list since they organized,” Rider said. “I’ve always been a teacher, so finding a way to help others through gardening is probably what’s most rewarding.”

As a Master Gardener, Rider plays a key role in organizing annual gardening events for SDSU Extension, including the Master Gardener Annual Update Conference at Joy Ranch near Watertown. This event, attended by more than 125 Master Gardeners, serves as a thriving forum for gardening clubs to exchange ideas on the latest and greatest

projects they are tackling.

“The event is a lot of fun, because when you get 125 Master Gardeners in one room – let me tell you, the conversations are riveting,” Rider laughed.

Master gardeners also help SDSU Extension achieve its broader goal: to make cutting-edge research easily accessible to the people who can benefit from the findings. Master Gardeners have regular continuing education opportunities with experts from the SDSU Horticulture team, such as Professor John Ball, a SDSU Extension Forestry Specialist and South Dakota Department of Agriculture Forest Health Specialist. Once equipped with this information, volunteers can share the most significant takeaways from research being conducted across the state through the university, providing a bridge between research and practical application.

“Dr. John Ball’s presentation on how to trim a tree after planting it is one of the best things that I’ve learned that I can now share with others,” said Rider. “He says that raising a tree is just like raising a kid: you have to shape your tree when

they are young, otherwise they turn into ugly adults.”

Master Gardener Field Specialist Prairey Walkling emphasizes that the connection between research-based information and enthusiasts is what the Master Gardener Volunteer Program thrives on. And the research goes far beyond just trees. SDSU’s horticulture research also extends into innovative mulching techniques, soil care and even studies on the growth and quality of four popular zinnia varieties.

“SDSU Extension wants to empower individuals to reach their gardening goals through providing science-based information. Each person has different pieces of land, resources and goals for their gardens and landscapes,” she said. “We strive to provide them with trusted, research-based information to help them make decisions.”

Walkling said the impact of these volunteers cannot be understated. According to Walkling, there are more than 400 Master Gardeners across the state and 14 Master Gardener clubs. In 2024, these vital volunteers hosted 153 gardening events, including farmers market booths, gardening workshops and demonstrations, reaching nearly 10,000 South Dakotans. Regardless of the event or what is being discussed, Walkling said Master Gardeners carry an infectious love of digging in the dirt.

“These volunteers help get people excited about gardening,” she said. “There are so many volunteer opportunities – teaching youth, teaching adults, maintaining demonstration gardens, answering questions, organizing events, engaging in horticultural research, writing horticulture articles – the sky is the limit.”



SDSU Extension Master Gardeners host an educational booth at the SD State Fair. From left: Lael Abelmann, Sharelle Meyer and Nancy Kadous.



Coteau Prairie Master Gardener Club (Watertown area) hosted the 2024 state conference at Joy Ranch. | Photos courtesy of SDSU Extension.

Van Walleghen Stepping Aside After 15 Years of Service

Tara Miller

Manager of Communications

Since 2010, Todd Van Walleghen of rural Letcher has been the Sanborn County director for Central Electric Cooperative. Following 15 years of dedicated service, he is not seeking reelection this year, giving somebody new the chance to serve.

Board members set the strategic direction and goals for the cooperative. During his time as a director, Todd has been involved with a number of significant accomplishments, including the planning and construction of the Betts Road headquarters in 2012, a new shop in Wessington Springs in 2015 and a new shop in Howard being constructed this year. Todd was also instrumental in the hiring of General Manager Ken Schlinggen following Loren Noess's retirement in 2015, the launch of the Operation Round-Up grant program and the adoption of the accelerated line replacement program to enhance electric reliability.

Members might be curious to know how Todd ended up on the Central Electric board of directors. In 2010, the Sanborn County director seat was being vacated, and outgoing director Ron Uttecht from the Alpena area encouraged Todd to run.

Todd had previously served with Ron's son, Darrin Uttecht, on the Sanborn County Farm Service Agency (FSA) board. "Ron wouldn't take no for an answer," Todd recalls, and the rest is history.

From financial dealings to strategic planning, Todd's farming background helped him succeed in his role as a director and eventually vice president.

"Treat it the same way you would run a business and try to make good decisions," he said.



Director Todd Van Walleghen speaks during the Sanborn County District Meeting in 2024.

Farming wasn't Todd's first profession. After high school, he attended South Dakota State University and earned degrees in biology and microbiology with a minor in chemistry. After graduating with his second degree in 1986, Todd worked for Conagra Frozen Foods, first in Missouri and later in California, where he met his wife, Kim.

Todd knew about Conagra because his uncle worked there, and his education enabled him to become the assistant lab manager. The company is still operating today as Conagra Brands, known for products such as Chef Boyardee, Slim Jim, Orville Redenbacher's popcorn and Marie Callender's pot pies.

The plant Todd was working at shut down in 1992, and that's when he and Kim decided to move to Letcher to farm with Todd's dad, Merlin Van Walleghen. They have been growing corn and soybeans on the family farm ever since.

From working as a microbiologist and chemist to owning and operating a farm, Todd learned some lessons and acquired some wisdom leading up to his time on the Central Electric board.

He shared this advice for the next member to fill the seat. "There's a great deal of knowledge in the board room between the other directors and the management staff. Listen and ask questions. Common sense will get you a long way."

After his time as a director comes to a close, Todd said he will miss the people and the relationships he has built.

"I've made a lot of friends, and I've stayed in contact with retired board members, too," he said. "It's a good bunch of people."

Todd and Kim have three adult children, and Kim operates a carpentry business called Aerie Construction. While the couple won't have to worry about board meetings every month, they don't have any big plans for Todd's newfound time.

"It will definitely be easier to make plans," he said. "I won't have to schedule around meetings if we want to go do something."

Board President Duane Wolbrink said, "Todd will be greatly missed in the board room. His various business experiences and time serving on other boards made him a huge asset for Central Electric. When the discussions were serious during a board meeting, we could always count on Todd for his common sense and business mind to give wise counsel."

Besides serving as a director for Central Electric, Todd has also been active with the Sanborn County FSA board, Cenex CHS Farmers Alliance board, De Smet Farm Mutual Insurance board and, most recently, the South Dakota Association of Cooperatives (SDAC) board.

A new director will be elected at the Sanborn County district meeting on the evening of May 22. Todd's term officially ends following Central Electric's annual meeting on Sept. 9.



Todd Van Walleghen

Mueller Completes Prestigious Management Internship Program

Central Electric's Information Technology Systems Manager, Ryan Mueller, has successfully completed the Robert I. Kabat Management Internship Program (MIP) through the University of Wisconsin. This is a distinguished program designed to cultivate leadership excellence in the electric utility industry.

Offered by the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA) in collaboration with the University of Wisconsin, MIP is an intensive leadership training initiative that equips participants with the knowledge and skills needed to navigate the complexities of cooperative management. The program explores all aspects of the electric utility industry, addressing current challenges and preparing future leaders to make strategic, member-focused decisions.

Mueller completed three rigorous 10-day sessions, where he gained

hands-on experience in innovative management techniques. The program emphasizes the unique principles that govern electric cooperatives, providing insights into potential business opportunities while reinforcing the core mission and strategic goals of member-owned electric utilities.

Participation in MIP is extremely selective, with only high-level employees from rural electric cooperatives invited to attend. This ensures a focused curriculum on leadership, cooperative governance and the evolving needs of members. Mueller is among a small group of electric utility professionals to graduate from the program this year.

We congratulate Mueller on this outstanding achievement and commend his dedication to advancing Central Electric's commitment to excellence.



Ryan Muller (left) accepts a plaque after earning his MIP designation from NRECA and the University of Wisconsin. Mueller is the Information Technology Systems Manager for Central Electric.

Attend Your District Meeting

May 20, 2025

Jerauld County (District 6)

Springs Inn Cafe
Wessington Springs
Meal 6:00-6:30 p.m.
Election registration closes 6:30

May 21, 2025

Miner County (District 7)

4-H Building, Howard
Meal 6:00-6:30 p.m.
Election registration closes 6:30

May 22, 2025

Sanborn County (District 8)

4-H Building, Forestburg
Meal 6:00-6:30 p.m.
Election registration closes 6:30

May 29, 2025

Davison County (District 4)

Fairgrounds Building, Mitchell
Meal 6:00-6:30 p.m.
Q&A session during meal

June 5, 2025

Buffalo County (District 3)

IHS Health Fair
Powwow Grounds or Tribal Gym
Fort Thompson
Noon meal served at health fair

June 9, 2025

Hanson County (District 5)

A1 A's Pheasant Ranch, Emery
Meal 6:00-6:30 p.m.
Q&A session during meal

June 16, 2025

Brule County (District 2)

Ag Building, Pukwana
Meal 6:00-6:30 p.m.
Q&A session during meal

June 18, 2025

Aurora County (District 1)

Ag Building, Plankinton
Meal 6:00-6:30 p.m.
Q&A session during meal

**District Meeting dates and locations may be subject to change. Official notice postcards will be mailed 10-25 days before each meeting.*



Local, state and federal officials celebrate the ribbon-cutting of the new Lieutenant Commander John C. Waldron Memorial Bridge, March 25, 2025. Photo by Marcy Anderson, Courtesy of the Pierre Area Chamber of Commerce.

BRIDGING HISTORY

The Demolition of the Waldron Memorial Bridge

Frank Turner

frank.turner@sdrea.coop

Tons of concrete and steel came crashing down in a planned demolition of the Lt. Cmdr. John C. Waldron Memorial Bridge that connected Pierre and Fort Pierre over a half mile stretch of river. The planned explosion marked a significant historic moment for not only Pierre and Fort Pierre, but also eastern and western South Dakota.

The demolition of the bridge unfolded in seconds. A plume of black smoke erupted from the detonating cord placed at key points in the bridge, quickly followed by a bone-rattling shock wave. Paul Nelson, a recently retired employee of the South Dakota Department of Transportation, witnessed the end of the bridge's 63-year lifespan. Nelson, a member of Oahe Elec-

tric, spent over 40 years with the SDDOT, serving most of that time as the regional bridge engineer. In this role, he was responsible for the maintenance, inspection and upkeep of the very bridge that he saw demolished.

As legacy bridge engineer, this was not Nelson's first experience with such a demolition. "I had actually witnessed the 1986 demolition of the old truss bridge that was just downstream of the current railroad bridge – so I have been around something of this magnitude before," he explained.

Even still, Nelson laughed that the modern demolition had a "pretty good report when it went off."

Although the bridge has been decommissioned, its history endures. In 2002, the bridge was dedicated to Lt. Cmdr. John C.

Waldron, a naval aviator from Fort Pierre who led a torpedo squadron during the Battle of Midway in World War II. His actions proved pivotal in the battle, but led to death of himself and most of his squadron. Of the 30 men who served under his command, only one survived the Battle of Midway.

Waldron's legacy is still commemorated through the new Pierre-Fort Pierre Bridge, which had its ribbon-cutting ceremony last month.

Construction of the new bridge began in 2020, just yards from the old bridge's location. In total, the bridge cost nearly \$50 million and is designed to last a century.

"This bridge is going to be a beautiful and wonderful enhancement to the communities and something that will last more than a hundred years," South Dakota Governor Larry Rhoden said at the ribbon cutting ceremony for the new bridge that now connects the two halves of the state.

BRIDGE DEMOLITION



The Lt. Cmdr. John C. Waldron Memorial Bridge comes crashing down at 9:03 a.m., on March 13.
Photos by Frank Turner.



Sparking Enthusiasm for Electricity

Co-ops in the Classroom is an interactive program offered to area schools by Central Electric Cooperative and its wholesale power provider, East River Electric Power Cooperative each year in March.

During the presentation, Tara Miller of Central Electric teaches kids about the history of electricity and electric cooperatives. Jennifer Gross of East River Electric engages students in hands-on demonstrations.

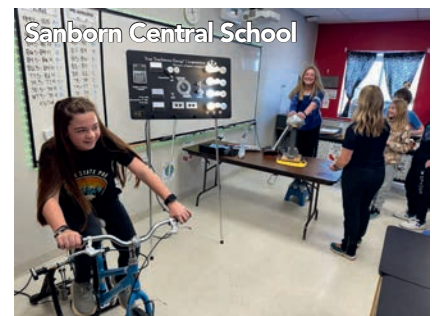
Protons, neutrons and electrons are a major topic of discussion as students took an educational journey into the exciting world of electricity. A Van de Graaff generator demonstrates the movement of electrons with some hair-raising results.

Another device that invokes a lot of excitement was the pedal-power bicycle generator. Students became power plants as they provided energy for lights and small household devices.

Kids learn about electrical safety in town and out in the country. By the end of the presentation, students develop a new understanding and appreciation for electricity.

Schools on the rotation this year were Chamberlain Elementary, Ethan Elementary, Gertie Belle Rogers Elementary, Hanson Elementary, Howard Elementary, Kimball Elementary, LB Williams Elementary, Millbrook Colony, Mitchell Christian, Oak Lane Colony, Rockport Colony, Rosedale Colony, Sanborn Central Elementary, Wessington Springs Elementary and the Tokata Youth Center in Fort Thompson.

Schools are offered the presentation every other year, so those we didn't visit in 2025 will be contacted in 2026.



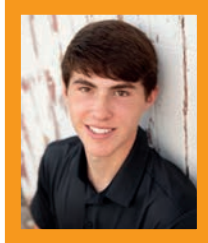
CONGRATULATIONS 2025 SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENTS!



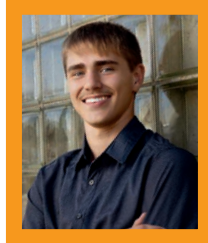
**Basin Electric Power
Cooperative Scholar**
Cadence Jardig
Hanson High School



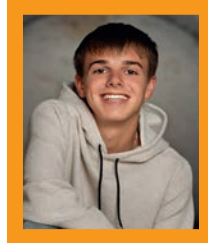
**Jay Headley
Memorial Scholar**
Shayda Ness
Kimball High School



District 1 Scholar
Driftin Mulder
Corsica-Stickney
High School



District 1 Scholar
Tate Tolsma
Corsica-Stickney
High School



District 4 Scholar
Hunter Dean
Ethan High School



District 4 Scholar
Cole Hinckley
Ethan High School



District 5 Scholar
Amelia Gerlach
Mitchell High School



District 5 Scholar
Sutton Thompson
Mitchell High School



District 6 Scholar
Taylor Braun
Wessington Springs
High School



District 7 Scholar
Hanna Dold
Howard High School



District 7 Scholar
Kenya Kizer
Howard High School



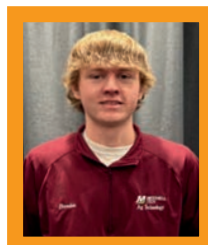
District 8 Scholar
Avarie Prien
Hanson High School



District 8 Scholar
Tatiana Roberts
Woonsocket
High School



**Mitchell Technical
College Scholar**
Zachary Baker
Mount Vernon



**Mitchell Technical
College Scholar**
Brendan Thompson
Pukwana



Your Touchstone Energy® Cooperative 

Learn more online at www.centralec.coop/scholarships.



MAY 31, JUNE 28, JULY 26
Fort Sisseton Lantern Tour
 Lake City, SD
 605-910-4465

*Photo courtesy of
 Travel South Dakota*

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.

APRIL 26
Mitchell Lions Club
Pancake Jamboree
 7 a.m.-1 p.m.
 Masonic Lodge
 5th & Lawler
 Mitchell, SD
www.mitchelllions.org

APRIL 28-30
Shrine Circus
 The World's Only Corn Palace
 Mitchell, SD

MAY 3-4
Flea Market
 Rustic Designs & More
 41450 264th St.
 Ethan, SD
 605-770-2411

MAY 3-4
Prairie Village Events
 Sat. Consignment Auction
 Sun. Season Opening
 Madison, SD
www.prairievillage.org

MAY 3-11
Craft & Antique Show
 Rustic Designs & More
 41450 264th St.
 Ethan, SD

MAY 17
Norwegian Independence Day
 Vivian, SD
 605-222-3296

MAY 20
Central Electric Jerauld Co.
District Meeting
 Meal 6:00-6:30 p.m.
 Springs Inn Café
 Wessington Springs, SD

MAY 21
Central Electric Miner Co.
District Meeting
 Meal 6:00-6:30 p.m.
 4-H Building
 Howard, SD

MAY 22
Central Electric Sanborn Co.
District Meeting
 Meal 6:00-6:30 p.m.
 4-H Building
 Forestburg, SD

MAY 29
Central Electric Davison Co.
District Meeting
 Meal 6:00-6:30 p.m.
 Fairgrounds Building
 Mitchell, SD

MAY 29-31
HuntSAFE Course
 Davison County Fairgrounds &
 Mitchell Trap Club
 Mitchell, SD
 605-770-5555
gfp.sd.gov/hunter-education

MAY 31
Howard Headers Car Club
 11th Annual Car Show
 11 a.m. - 2:30 p.m.
 Main Street
 Howard, SD
[Facebook.com/HowardHeaders](https://www.facebook.com/HowardHeaders)

MAY 31
Miss Prairie Village Pageant
 6:30 p.m.
 Lawrence Welk Opera House
 Madison, SD
www.prairievillage.org

JUNE 5
Central Electric Buffalo Co.
District Meeting
 Meal at IHS Health Fair
 Fort Thompson, SD

JUNE 9
Central Electric Hanson Co.
District Meeting
 Meal 6:00-6:30 p.m.
 A1 Al's Pheasant Ranch
 Emery, SD

JUNE 16
Central Electric Brule Co.
District Meeting
 Meal 6:00-6:30 p.m.
 Ag Building
 Pukwana, SD

JUNE 18
Central Electric Aurora Co.
District Meeting
 Meal 6:00-6:30 p.m.
 Ag Building
 Plankinton, SD

JUNE 21
Gann Valley 140th Celebration
 Car show, parade
 Gann Valley, SD

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