

# COOPERATIVE CONNECTIONS



## The Days of '76 Rodeo

**A Century of Grit and  
Glory**

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Ken addresses the crowd at the Aurora County District Meeting in June.

# A Final Farewell



**Ken Schlimgen**  
General Manager

After 41 years with Central Electric Cooperative, including the past 11 years as General Manager, this will be my final column. It is difficult to put into words what a privilege it has been to serve this cooperative and the employees and members who make it such a special organization. While it is not easy to step away, I look forward to spending more time with my wife, JoAnn, and our family as we begin this next chapter together.

I began my career at Central Electric as a Member Service Advisor. I became Manager of Member Services in 1990 and in 2015 had the honor of being named General Manager. Over those years, I have had the opportunity to build lasting relationships with many members and employees — relationships I will always value and remember.

From the beginning, my goal was simple: at the end of the day, to leave the cooperative stronger than I found it. When I became General Manager, I knew that can only happen by working together. With the support of our Board of Directors and the dedication of our employees, we focused on strategic planning, continuous improvement and setting meaningful goals for the future. Every step forward has been the result of teamwork and a shared commitment to serving our members well.

I am especially proud of the strong safety culture and reliability improvements we have achieved together. Central Electric has now gone nearly four years without a lost-time accident, and our electric service reliability

is better than ever. Those accomplishments are a direct reflection of the professionalism, commitment, and teamwork of our employees and leadership.

Over the past 41 years, the electric cooperative industry has changed in ways we could hardly have imagined back in 1985. Technology, communications, safety standards and member expectations have all evolved dramatically. Yet, what matters most has not changed. The cooperative business model still stands on the principles of member ownership, local governance, service to community and a genuine commitment to providing safe, reliable electricity.

Our cooperative is fortunate to have a Board of Directors that understands and supports that mission. I have had the privilege of working alongside an exceptional group of employees whose dedication and work ethic continue to impress me every day. Whether during storms, outages, or the normal challenges of daily operations, they consistently put the needs of our members first. They are the reason this cooperative continues to succeed.

I want to express my heartfelt gratitude to my wife, JoAnn. Your support, patience, and sacrifice over the years made this journey possible. You carried the responsibilities at home during the many evenings, weekends and nights I was away, and I will always be grateful for that love and support.

As I prepare to walk out the door one final time, I do so with sincere appreciation for our members, Board of Directors, coworkers, and family. Thank you for the trust, support, friendships, and memories that have meant so much to me throughout my career.

I leave knowing Central Electric Cooperative is in capable hands and well-positioned for the future. The cooperative spirit remains strong, and I am confident the best days are still ahead.

With deep gratitude and best wishes, I sign off one final time. Until we meet again, stay safe.

**CENTRAL ELECTRIC  
COOPERATIVE  
CONNECTIONS**

(USPS 018-963)

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

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**Board Meeting Summary**

The board of directors met on April 20, 2026, 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**

President Wolbrink welcomed IT Systems Manager Ryan Mueller to the board meeting and congratulated him on being selected to serve as the next General Manager effective July 1, 2026.

General Manager Schlimgen reported on the East River Electric Managers' Advisory Committee, Rural Electric Economic Development Fund activities, Basin Electric activities and other management initiatives.

Luke Johnson with Eide Bailly gave a presentation on the annual audit report and shared additional information on the auditing process. Financial highlights were reviewed.

General Manager Schlimgen shared information about a Brule County economic development study with the Lake Francis Case Development Corporation. Discussion followed.

General Manager Schlimgen reviewed the process for working with the Crow Creek Sioux Tribe to allow Western Area Power Administration (WAPA) to provide an allocation of electric power to operate their irrigation system.

Director White reported on director training.

Director Banks reported on the South Dakota Association of Cooperatives board meeting and activities.

Director Gustafson reported on South Dakota Rural Electric Association board meeting and activities.

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

**Board Action**

The board considered or acted upon the following:

- A motion was made and seconded to accept the 2025 audit report as presented. The motion carried.
- A motion was made and seconded to contribute \$2,000 toward the Brule County economic development study. The motion carried.
- A motion was made and seconded to authorize Board President Wolbrink to sign the final copy of the WAPA allocation agreement with the Crow Creek Sioux Tribe. The motion carried.

There being no further business, President Wolbrink adjourned the meeting. The next board meeting was scheduled for May 18, 2026.

FINANCIAL REPORT	YEAR TO DATE APRIL 2026	YEAR TO DATE APRIL 2025
Kilowatt Hour (kWh) Sales	133,322,523 kWh	122,322,872 kWh
Electric Revenues	\$ 15,928,509	\$ 13,927,429
Total Cost of Service	\$ 15,251,418	\$ 13,524,236
Operating Margins	\$ 677,092	\$ 403,193

# BEFORE THE SMOKE: PROTECT YOUR HOME BEFORE WILDFIRE SEASON

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

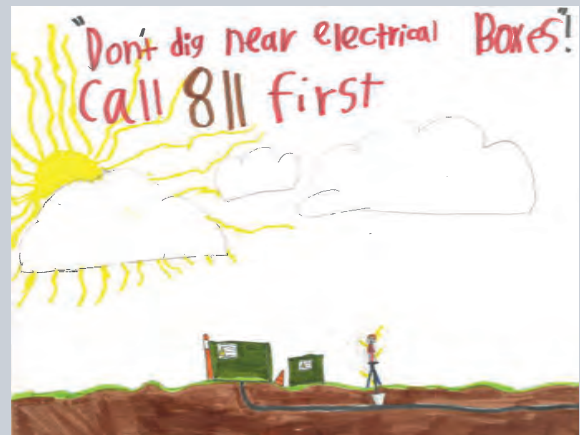
Access is part of preparation, too. Firefighters need to reach

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

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

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

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



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

**Caleb Blake, age 9**

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

Kids, send your drawing with an electrical safety tip to your local electric cooperative (address found on Page 3). If your poster is published, you'll receive a prize. All entries must include your name, age, mailing address and the names of your parents. Colored drawings are encouraged.

# Sweet on RHUBARB

## RHUBARB CAKE

### Ingredients:

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

### Method

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

**Jeanette Kleinsasser**  
Dakota Energy

## RHUBARB SALAD

### Ingredients:

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

### Method

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

**Leanne Eich**  
Central Electric

## RHUBARB CHEESE CAKE

### Ingredients:

#### Rhubarb Filling

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

#### Cheese Cake Filling

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

#### Topping

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

### Method

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

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

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

**Charles Lebeda**  
Sioux Valley Energy

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

Picture by Sokor Space and Shutterstock.



Kids learn about electrical safety at the State Fair.

## Connect with Your Co-op This Summer

Throughout the year, Central Electric participates in community and agricultural events across the region, providing opportunities for members to visit with staff, ask questions and learn more about the services and programs available through your cooperative.

These events offer a chance for meaningful conversations about energy use at your home, farm or business. Whether you're interested in energy efficiency or cooperative programs, our staff is available to discuss your needs. It's also a great opportunity for young people to learn about electrical safety and explore career opportunities within the electric cooperative industry.

This summer, you are invited to stop by and visit us at the following

regional events. We look forward to having discussions with members from across our service area.

### Ag Appreciation Day at the Sioux Empire Fair Aug. 5 | Sioux Falls

Electric cooperatives from across the region will once again host Ag Appreciation Day at the Sioux Empire Fair. Agricultural producers are encouraged to swing by for lunch and learn more about the important role electric cooperatives play in supporting rural communities.

### Dakotafest Aug. 18-20 | Mitchell

Be sure to visit the Touchstone Energy® Building, located at Booth 216 on 2nd Street across from

the SDSU Extension exhibit. The air-conditioned building provides a comfortable place to cool off, enjoy a snack and visit with cooperative representatives throughout the event. We also have a photo booth for kids and families.

### South Dakota State Fair Sept. 2-7 | Huron

Bring the family to the Touchstone Energy tent during the South Dakota State Fair to learn about cooperatives and electrical safety. Kids can climb a power pole and learn about several electric cooperative careers. You can also claim your free cookbook. The Touchstone Energy tent is now located in the grass northwest of the Game, Fish and Parks building. We hope to see you there!



Ag Appreciation Day



Dakotafest



State Fair

# 'Who Powers You' Honors Local Heroes

The region's Touchstone Energy Cooperatives are excited to announce the three winners of the fifth annual 'Who Powers You' Contest. The contest, held in partnership among electric cooperatives throughout the region, spotlights outstanding individuals and organizations across eastern South Dakota and western Minnesota who are making a difference in their communities.

"As an electric cooperative, our services extend beyond delivering reliable power to our member-owners," said Tara Miller, Manager of Communications at Central Electric Cooperative. "This contest highlights our commitment to the communities and member-owners that we serve."

Contest finalists were featured weekly on KELOLAND Living, including five finalists from Central Electric's service area: Tokata Youth Center in Fort Thompson, Miner County Historical Society in Howard, Jill Budahl of Emery, Angie Fisk of Emery and Joyce Krueger of Wessington Springs. Three overall contest winners were chosen by a panel of judges based on their impact in the community.

The first-place \$3,000 grand prize was awarded to Inter-Lakes Community Action Partnership (ICAP) of Madison, headquartered in Sioux Valley Energy's service area. ICAP serves individuals and families across a 14-county region in eastern South Dakota through programs focused on education, housing, nutrition, and family support services. ICAP helps families and individuals reach their full potential.

The second-place \$1,500 prize was awarded to Aaron Vaughn and the Tokata Youth Center in Fort Thompson, located in Central Electric's service area. The Tokata Youth Center provides educational programs, mentorship, and cultural opportunities for youth while creating a supportive environment for students to learn and grow. The organization consistently demonstrates its commitment to empowering youth and strengthening the community.

The third-place \$500 prize was awarded to Mary Jo Parker from Charles Mix Electric Association's service area. Mary Jo is a highly involved volunteer who dedicates her time across many facets of her community. She teaches Sunday school, serves as the community librarian, started a community garden, launched a wellness council and so much more. Mary Jo is a shining example of someone who is powering her community.

We congratulate our local finalists and thank them for the work they are doing in their local communities. To learn more about the 'Who Powers You' contest, visit [whopowersyoucontest.com](http://whopowersyoucontest.com).



## Tokata Youth Center

Tokata Youth Center Director Aaron Vaughn accepts the nomination for the 'Who Powers You' contest. The organization won the \$1,500 second-place prize for making a difference in the community.



## Miner County Historical Society

Volunteers Chloe Andenas and Chrysti Protsch accept the nomination on behalf of MCHS.



## Jill Budahl

Community volunteer Jill Budahl of Emery accepts her nomination.



## Angie Fisk

Community volunteer Angie Fisk of Emery accepts her nomination.



## Joyce Krueger

Community volunteer Joyce Krueger of Wessington Springs accepts her nomination.



# A CENTURY OF GRIT AND GLORY

## The Days of '76 Rodeo

Photos by KSchurr Photography

Jocelyn Johnson

[jocelyn.johnson@sdrea.coop](mailto:jocelyn.johnson@sdrea.coop)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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



# Service You Can Depend On



**Lincoln Feistner**  
Sales & Project  
Manager

Whether you're updating your heating and cooling system, planning an electrical project or shopping for new appliances, Central Electric is here to help. Our knowledgeable team provides trusted products, expert installation and responsive service to keep homes, farms and businesses running efficiently.

## Electrical Wiring Services

Whether you're building new, remodeling, upgrading existing electrical systems or converting overhead service to underground, Central Electric's licensed electricians are ready to help. We provide professional electrical solutions designed to meet your needs today and into the future.

## Heating and Cooling Solutions

Keep your home comfortable year-round with heating and cooling services from Central Electric. Our heating and cooling technicians offer routine maintenance, repairs and complete system installations. Whether you're replacing an aging unit or improving your home's energy efficiency, we'll help you find the right solution.



Our heating and cooling professionals can perform maintenance on an existing unit or install a new system.

## Home Appliance Sales and Service

Finding appliances that are built to last isn't always easy. That's why Central Electric carries trusted brands like GE and Speed Queen, known for their durability, performance and reliability. We offer a variety of appliances to fit your home and lifestyle, along with expert service after the sale to keep them running their best.

## Why Choose Central Electric?

As a member-owned cooperative, we're committed to delivering value, quality and service you can trust. Central Electric is dedicated to offering reliable solutions that enhance your home's efficiency and comfort.

Members and non-members can depend on Central Electric for all their electrical wiring, heating and cooling and home appliance needs. Call us at 605-996-7516 for a free estimate on your next project.

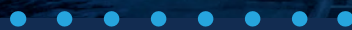
# Mark Your Calendar!

## 2026 Annual Meeting

Tuesday, September 15

Meal 5:30-6:45 p.m. Business Meeting 7:00 p.m.

Corn Palace, Mitchell



*A Legacy of*  
**SERVICE**





# OPERATION ROUND-UP TRUSTEES AWARD GRANTS

What can a few cents a month accomplish? For Central Electric members participating in Operation Round-Up®, those small contributions have helped fund nearly 200 community projects.

Through the voluntary program, members donate their change by rounding up their monthly electric bill to the next dollar. The funds are then awarded as grants to local organizations by a volunteer board of trustees made up of cooperative members from across Central Electric’s service area. Several cooperative employees and board members also contribute to the fund, helping support projects that strengthen local communities.

Upon reviewing more than 30 applications, the Operation Round-Up board of trustees approved the grant awards listed below.

Each county in Central Electric’s service area has representation on the Operation Round-Up Board of Trustees. Cooperative staff and legal counsel help facilitate and administer the grant program.

“Since 2015, Operation Round-Up has supported 196 community-focused projects across our service area, and we couldn’t do it without the support of our membership,” said Tara Miller, Manager of Communications and Operation Round-Up coordinator for Central Electric.

Grants are awarded twice each year by a volunteer board of trustees representing Central Electric’s service area. Julie Dykstra of Stickney represents Aurora County, Clarissa Glaus of Chamberlain represents Brule County, Yvette Isburg of Fort Thompson represents Buffalo County, Steven Weisz of Mitchell represents Davison County, LeAnn Moe of Alexandria represents Hanson County, Amber Kolousek of Wessington Springs represents Jerauld County, Tami Moore of Howard represents Miner County, Dawna Van Overschelde of Letcher represents Sanborn County and Merl Bechen of Mitchell represents the board of directors.

The next deadline to apply for a grant is October 30. For more information, call 605-996-7516 or visit [centralec.coop](http://centralec.coop) and click on Member Programs.



- Canova Community Improvement Assoc.: \$1,200 for Ballpark Improvements
- Crow Creek Sioux Tribe: \$1,500 for Little Bighorn Commemoration Event
- Davison County Area Rodeo Club: \$1,000 for Equipment & Supplies
- EmBe: \$1,200 for Girls on the Run in Brule, Davison & Hanson Counties
- Hanson County Child Protection Team: \$500 for Open Closet Program
- Kimball Ambulance: \$1,200 for Emergency Radios
- Kimball White Lake Teeball: \$800 for Jerseys & Equipment
- Letcher Youth Program: \$1,000 for Ballpark Improvements
- Rooted 23: \$500 for Hope Squad at Ethan School
- Stickney Community Foundation: \$500 for Park Improvements
- Wessington Springs Senior Center: \$600 for Facility Improvements
- Wessington Springs VFW Teener Baseball: \$600 for Jerseys & Equipment
- White Lake Senior Citizens: \$500 for Facility Improvements



At the May meeting, Aurora County Trustee Julie Dykstra (center) was honored for volunteering on the Operation Round-Up Board of Trustees from 2019-2026 and serving as the chairperson since 2021. Dykstra will reach her term limit in September.

# FORT MEADE & THE STAR SPANGLED BANNER

## How South Dakota Set the Stage for a National Anthem

Jacob Boyko

jacob.boyko@sdreaa.coop

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

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

### The War of 1812

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

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

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



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

*Photo submitted by Randy Bender*

the fort and fended off the British from Baltimore.

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

### Fort Meade

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



# STILL ROLLING

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

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

**Frank Turner**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

But then they returned to the shop, smiling.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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



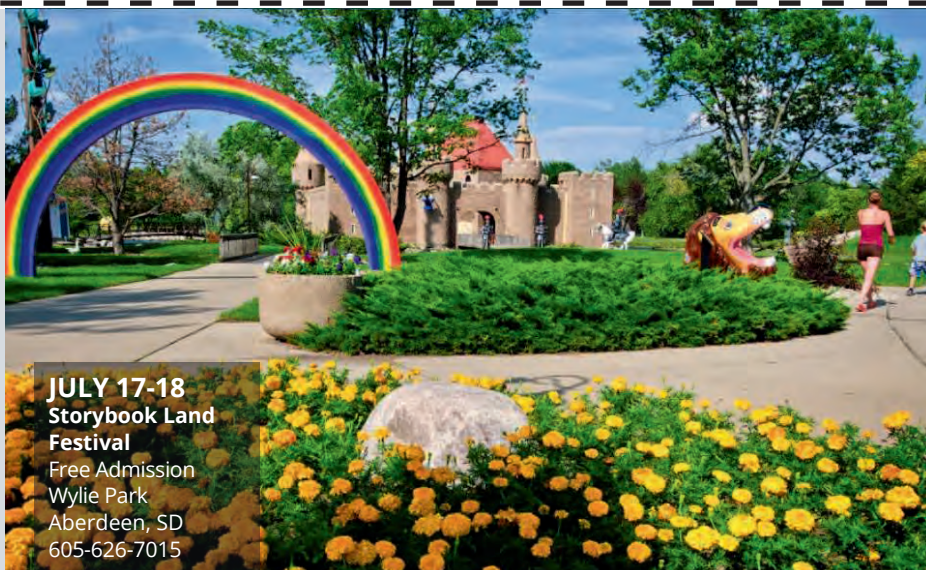
By 1963, Ron's Bicycle Shop was selling more than bicycles, with Cushman scooters and BSA motorcycles also part of the business.  
Photo submitted by Ron's Bicycle Shop

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Free Admission  
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**JULY 3-4**  
**Rockin' the Bluffs**  
Music on the Missouri River  
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**JULY 3**  
**Epiphany Street Dance**  
Freedom, Food & Fun  
Epiphany, SD

**JULY 10-12**  
**Friendship Days;  
America's 250th Birthday**  
White Lake, SD

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

**JULY 11**  
**40th Annual Spearfish Canyon Half Marathon & 5K**  
Start: 7 a.m., Savoy, SD  
End: City Park, Spearfish, SD  
Register: [www.nhcasa.org](http://www.nhcasa.org)

**JULY 15-19**  
**Danish Days**  
Viborg, SD  
[danishdays.org](http://danishdays.org)

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

**JULY 18**  
**Forever Simon & Garfunkel**  
Prairie Village  
Madison, SD

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

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

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

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

**AUG. 5**  
**Ag Appreciation Day**  
11 a.m.-1 p.m.  
Sioux Empire Fair  
Sioux Falls, SD

**AUG. 15**  
**Melon Festival**  
Forestburg, SD

**AUG. 18-20**  
**Dakotafest**  
Visit the Touchstone Energy Building; Booth 216 across from SDSU Extension  
Mitchell, SD

To have your event listed on this page, send complete information, including date, event, place and contact to your local electric cooperative. Include your name, address and daytime telephone number. Information must be submitted at least eight weeks prior to your event. Please call ahead to confirm date, time and location of event.

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