

COOPERATIVE CONNECTIONS



Hurricane Aid

**Linemen Help
Restore Power After
Hurricane Helene**
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First Responders
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GIVING BACK IS THE COOPERATIVE WAY

Central Electric Cooperative employees recently constructed 20 children's beds with the non-profit Sleep in Heavenly Peace.



Ken Schlimgen
General Manager

The holiday season brings a spirit of generosity and compassion. It's a time to reflect on our many blessings and uplift those in need. While this is certainly a special time of year, cooperatives like Central Electric are deeply rooted in giving back to their local communities year-round.

Central Electric and its employees are active in several communities across eight counties, dedicated to improving our way

of life. We support food pantries and 4-H programs, volunteer for the United Way, provide scholarships and give to worthy causes.

You also help power our ability to enhance quality of life through Operation Round-Up. This grant program is made possible by members rounding up their electric bill to the next dollar amount. Those generous contributions add up to help support local charitable organizations and community services.

Another way your cooperative gives back is by investing in tomorrow's leaders. Through school presentations, scholarship opportunities and the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association Youth Tour program, we aim to empower students to build a brighter future. When we invest in our local youth, we strengthen the fabric of our community.

As a not-for-profit electric cooperative, we believe in giving credit where credit is due—to the member-owners of our cooperative. One of the ways we do this is through capital credits. Because Central Electric operates at cost, we return excess money that we describe as capital credits to our members.

Here's how capital credits work: Central Electric members use the electricity we provide and then pay their monthly bill. We track their business with the cooperative over time. The cooperative pays all operating expenses throughout the year, and if any operating revenue is left, we allocate it to every member as capital credits based on their annual electric purchases.

When financial conditions permit, the cooperative's board of directors votes to pay a portion of the capital credits back to the members. Your cooperative either sends you a check or applies a credit to December energy bills. Capital credits are just one of the many benefits of cooperative membership. Giving back to our local members is one of the many aspects that set cooperatives apart from other types of businesses.

Our members are the reason Central Electric exists. To us, you are a member-owner. This holiday season, we hope you're proud to be part of a community-focused cooperative that puts people before profits. From your friends at Central Electric Cooperative, we hope you have a bright and blessed holiday season.

2025 ELECTRIC RATES

Over the past several months, I have been delivering the news that wholesale electric power costs will increase in 2025 and 2026. The increase for 2025 will add more than \$1.5 million to your cooperative's expenses. Depreciation, interest, labor and maintenance expenses are also increasing, resulting in the need to adjust electric rates in January 2025.

We are still working on the budget details and will have more to share in the next issue of Cooperative Connections magazine. This month, you can learn about the different payment options available to members on page 11. 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, SDREA Director
 Davison County - Jeff Gustafson
 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. Central Electric Cooperative Connections' purpose is to provide reliable, helpful information to cooperative members on matters pertaining to their cooperative and living better with electricity. Also available at www.centraleccoop.com.

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Contact Us

Office Hours: Monday - Friday 8 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.
 Phone: 1-800-477-2892 or 1-605-996-7516

Our Mission

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

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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, gender identity (including gender expression), sexual orientation, 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). Remedies and complaint filing deadlines vary by program or incident. Persons with disabilities who require alternative means of communication for program information (e.g., Braille, large print, audiotope, American Sign Language, etc.) should contact the responsible Agency or USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TTY) or contact USDA through the Federal Relay Service at (800) 877-8339. Additionally, program information may be made available in languages other than English. To file a program discrimination complaint, complete the USDA Program Discrimination Complaint Form, AD-3027, found online at www.usda.gov/oascr/how-to-file-a-program-discrimination-complaint and at any USDA office or write a letter addressed to USDA and provide in the letter all of the information requested in the form. To request a copy of the complaint form, call (866) 632-9992. Submit your completed form or letter to USDA by: (1) mail: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights, 1400 Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, D.C. 20250-9410; (2) fax: (202) 690-7442; or (3) email: program.intake@usda.gov. Central Electric Cooperative, Inc. is an equal opportunity provider, employer and lender.

Board Meeting Summary

The board of directors met on Sept. 20, 2024, 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

Annual officer elections were held with Duane Wolbrink reelected as President, Todd VanWalleghen reelected as Vice President, Mark Reindl reelected as Treasurer and Mark Hofer reelected as Secretary.

General Manager Schlingen updated the board of directors on the East River Electric Managers Advisory Committee, Basin Electric activities, Rural Electric Economic Development activities, Crow Creek Tribe Utility Commission meeting, proposed territory swap with Northwestern Energy and other management priorities.

Manager of Finance and Administration Dean Uher presented on equity management and capital credit retirement details and options.

Directors Bechen and Banks reported on NRECA training courses.

Directors Bechen, Hofer, Loudner and Wolbrink reported on the NRECA Region 6 annual meeting.

Director Hofer reported on the NRECA board meeting.

Director Wolbrink updated the board on East River Electric activities.

BOARD ACTION

The board considered or acted upon the following:

- A motion was made and seconded to adopt a resolution to approve the general retirement of capital credits to members for an amount not to exceed \$600,000. Motion carried.
- A motion was made and seconded to adopt a resolution to approve the retirement of generation and transmission capital credits to members for an amount not to exceed \$670,468.27 less estate forfeitures and other adjustments. Motion carried.
- A motion was made and seconded to send up to four students on Youth Tour, up to four students on the Basin Youth Excursion, and award up to two \$500 district scholarships per county in 2025. Motion carried.
- A motion was made and seconded to approve a member loan up to \$7500 for heating and cooling equipment installation. Motion carried.

There being no further business, President Wolbrink adjourned the meeting. The next board meeting was scheduled for Oct. 21, 2024.

FINANCIAL REPORT	YEAR TO DATE SEPT. 2024	YEAR TO DATE SEPT. 2023
Kilowatt Hour (kWh) Sales	256,765,195 kWh	256,972,733 kWh
Operating Revenues	\$ 27,741,352	\$ 26,488,766
Total Cost of Service	\$ 27,460,031	\$ 26,298,524
Operating Margins	\$ 281,321	\$ 190,242

ENJOY A SAFE HOLIDAY SEASON

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

Traveling for the Holidays? Be Prepared

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

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

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

Decorate Safely

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

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

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

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

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

Source: National Safety Council



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

Bethany Langworthy, Age 9

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

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

Family FAVORITES

CREAM CHEESE AND CUCUMBER SPREAD DIP

Ingredients:

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

Method

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

Mary Ann Klarenbeek
Harrisburg, S.D.

GRANDMA GRACE'S FROZEN FRUIT SALAD

Ingredients:

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

*Mix all thoroughly until
sugar is dissolved.*

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

Method

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

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

Mary Harris
Glad Valley, S.D.

LEMON ROSEMARY GLAZED HAM

Ingredients:

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

Method

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

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

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

McCormick.com

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



Office Closed

November 28-29 for Thanksgiving
 December 24-25 for Christmas
 January 1 for New Year's Holiday



December 16-20, 2024
 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.
 Betts Road Office

Please stop by for baked goods,
 hot cider and coffee during our
 Holiday Open House.



Job Complete for Seasonal Utility Workers

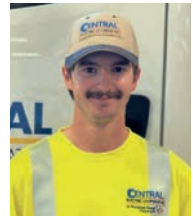
Each year, Central Electric hires temporary utility workers to assist during the busy construction season. November marked the final month on the job for seasonal utility workers Brady Fonder and Chase Snedeker.

Since May, these two assisted operations crews to fulfill or add to their 1,000 working hours that are required after completing the powerline construction and maintenance program at Mitchell Technical College.

Fonder and Snedeker proved to be great help to the line crews this year, and we wish them the best as they progress in their careers.



Brady Fonder



Chase Snedeker

Employee Years of Service



DeEtte

27 years on Dec. 1



Davis

4 years on Dec. 1



Chandler

3 years on Dec. 16



Tara

4 years on Dec. 16



Don and Maxine Knapp
Photo by Jacob Boyko

Don Knapp Remembers When Electricity Came to Hermosa

Jacob Boyko

In 1947, 17-year-old Don Knapp was working as a ranch hand outside the small western South Dakota town of Hermosa.

It was still somewhat of a primitive time in South Dakota's history; While at night the cities glowed on the horizon, rural folk worked in shadowy barns and shops lit by the dim flicker of a kerosene lantern.

"We milked a lot of the time early in the morning with a lantern, and you didn't think of it as hard or odd because that's the only thing you had those days," Don recalled.

Today, the 95 year old Don and his wife, Maxine, 92, admit they sometimes take for granted the modern amenities electricity brought to rural life – from refrigeration, to lights, to easier labor on their ranch.

Even so, nearly 80 years after Black Hills Electric Cooperative ran lines to Maxine's parents' ranch where her high school friend Don worked, the couple says they still think about the life-changing impact of electricity from time to time.

"Today, we have two refrigerators and

two deep-freezers," Don said, pausing at that realization. "You sometimes don't think about it, but we didn't have that before. Nowadays we butcher beef and it's all frozen – we don't can food anymore like we used to."

Before electricity, Don explained, refrigeration on the ranch was anything but simple.

To cool the milk and keep it fresh, a gasoline-fueled pump would draw cold groundwater from the well to flow around the large milk jugs before being picked up for delivery. Household amenities like butter and cream were sometimes lowered into the well to keep them from spoiling. If you wanted to keep food in the house, a block of ice harvested in the winter was carried in from the sawdust-filled ice house and placed into a boxy cooler, dripping slowly into a puddle.

Maxine also remembers the labor-intensive chores she'd help her mother with as Don worked with her father in the field.

"It was a lot of work!" Maxine said about washing clothes. "The washing machine – it was called a Maytag – was just a round tank with a wringer on it, and you'd run the

clothes through the wringer to get the water out. Then in the winter, the clothes would freeze outside on the line – stiff as a board!"

In September, as Don left the ranch to join the navy, he recalled seeing the co-op linemen near the ranch climbing atop poles and running brand-new power lines – miles out of town.

"I remember seeing them build the lines that summer and I thought, 'My gosh, those guys are climbing clear to the top of some of the poles. How do they do that?'" Don chuckled. "Then they'd come in and wire some of these old homes built 40 or 50 years prior. It had to be an awful challenge, but people knew it had to be done and they stepped up to the plate and got it done."

Maxine remembers being in disbelief when the lightbulb in the kitchen flickered on just a few weeks later.

"You just couldn't believe it," Maxine laughed. "You had this little bulb hanging down, and it was just such a great feeling to think you could see."

The ranch house was zapped into the modern age; It wasn't long before her dad purchased a cooler and milking machine and her mom picked out an electric clothes iron.

"It really relieved a lot of manual labor when the electricity came on," Don said.

It was that deep appreciation that led Don to run for a director seat in 1987. He served 24 years on the co-op board before retiring in 2011.

"Serving on the board made me realize the value of the co-op and the need to have a system like the co-ops serve the rural communities," Don said. "It's just so hard to believe how life was so tough."

Now, close to eight decades later, having in-home electricity is just as natural to the Knapps as it is to their children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren and great-great-grandchildren.

"People who were here when the lights first came on, there are not many of them around anymore," Don said. "All the people around now, lights and electricity are just part of life."

"You don't even stop to think, you just plug it in." Maxine chuckled, as their kitchen refrigerator's ice maker rumbled in the background.



HURRICANE AID

Linemen Help Restore Power After Hurricane Helene

Jacob Boyko

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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





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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Hansen recognized another subset

of heroes: the families.

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

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

the values of South Dakota's rural electric cooperatives.

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





WATCH OUT THIS WINTER!

- *When plowing, avoid electrical cabinets, poles, wires and other equipment*
- *Never touch a downed power line*
- *Treat everything near downed power lines—such as trees or debris—as dangerous*

RE-ENERGIZING SAFETY



Central Electric Offering Scholarships

Central Electric Cooperative is active in the community and strives to help develop future leaders. As part of that goal, the cooperative is offering the following scholarships to members or their dependents in 2025:

- \$1,000 Basin Electric Power Cooperative Scholarship (Must be the dependent of a member with primary residence served by Central Electric.)
- \$1,000 Jay Headley Memorial Scholarship (Must be the dependent of a member and pursuing a bachelor's degree in an agriculture-related field.)
- Two \$500 Mitchell Technical College scholarships (Must be a member or the dependent of a member in a specified major at MTC.)
- Sixteen \$500 District Scholarships (Up to two recipients per county. Must have primary residence served by Central Electric.)

Applications for the District Scholarships, Basin Electric Scholarship and Jay Headley Memorial Scholarship are due by January 31, 2025. Scholarships are paid to the post-secondary school of the selected student's choice. Mitchell Technical College scholarships are administered by the school foundation.

Complete eligibility guidelines and scholarship applications are available online at www.centralec.coop/scholarships.

D.C. Trip for H.S. Juniors



The National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA) and Central Electric Cooperative invite high school juniors to apply for a trip to Washington, D.C. The educational experience takes place June 15-21, 2025.

Up to four students will be selected to represent Central Electric on the trip. Applicants must be high school juniors living in Aurora, Brule, Buffalo, Davison, Hanson, Jerauld, Miner or Sanborn County. Interested students should complete the online application at www.centralec.coop/youth-tour by Dec. 10. Students selected to attend will be notified by Dec. 31.

Payment Options to Fit Your Life

Electricity is an essential part of daily life, and it may be a substantial monthly expense for some. Knowledge of the different payment options helps you plan ahead and decide which option fits your needs. Below is a summary of billing and payment options available to Central Electric members.

BUDGET BILLING

Budget billing enables members to pay a fixed amount each month to avoid fluctuating bills throughout the year. The fixed amount is calculated based on average usage for one year. Once you sign up for budget billing, you must keep your account in good standing to stay on the plan. Members may request to stop budget billing at any time and would be required to pay their bill in full at that time.

PREPAID BILLING

This payment option enables members to pay for a set amount of electricity before it is used, the same way you put gas in a vehicle. With prepaid or pay-as-you go billing, members purchase electricity when it's convenient. When funds are depleted, members can choose to add more funds. With this option, there are no late fees or monthly bills.

PAY THROUGH SMARTHUB

Download the SmartHub app to a cell phone or access SmartHub online for more information. In SmartHub, members can then view and pay their electric bill using Visa, Mastercard, Discover or e-check.

PAY ON WEBSITE

This option on our website enables members to pay their bill with no registration required. Simply use your billing account number and last name/business name to access your account and make a payment.

PAY BY PHONE

Have your account number ready, and call 855-939-3738. Follow the instructions on the line. Our payment vendor ensures the highest level of security and complies with credit card use standards.

PAY BY MAIL

Payments can be mailed to Central Electric Cooperative in the envelope provided with your bill. We do not use the postmark date on payments, so please allow enough time to ensure your payment reaches our office by the due date to avoid a late fee.

DROP BOX PAYMENTS

For your convenience, members can drop off payments in the outside drop box at the Betts Road Service Center west of Mitchell or at the payment kiosk inside the Lode Star Casino in Fort Thompson.

AUTOMATIC PAYMENTS

Members can sign up to have payments automatically deducted from a bank account or credit card. To sign up, call 855-939-3738, press option 4 and follow the instructions. You can also sign up through SmartHub. Payments are debited on the 15th each month. If the 15th falls on a holiday or weekend, it will be deducted on the next business day.

Poppens Officially Becomes Journeyman

Congratulations to Joey Poppens on the Mitchell crew for completing the apprenticeship lineworker program and earning journeyman certification.

To become a journeyman, Poppens completed more than 8,000 hours of on-the-job training and four years of coursework through the Merchant Job Training and Safety Program for lineworkers.

Completing the apprenticeship program is a major milestone, and it involves a great deal of time and dedication. Central Electric congratulates Poppens on this achievement.



Line Superintendent Dusty Roskens (left) presents lineworker Joey Poppens with his journeyman certificate.



STAYING SAFE

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

Butte Electric Cooperative Connects With First Responders

Frank Turner

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

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

In September, Butte Electric further strengthened its ties and

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

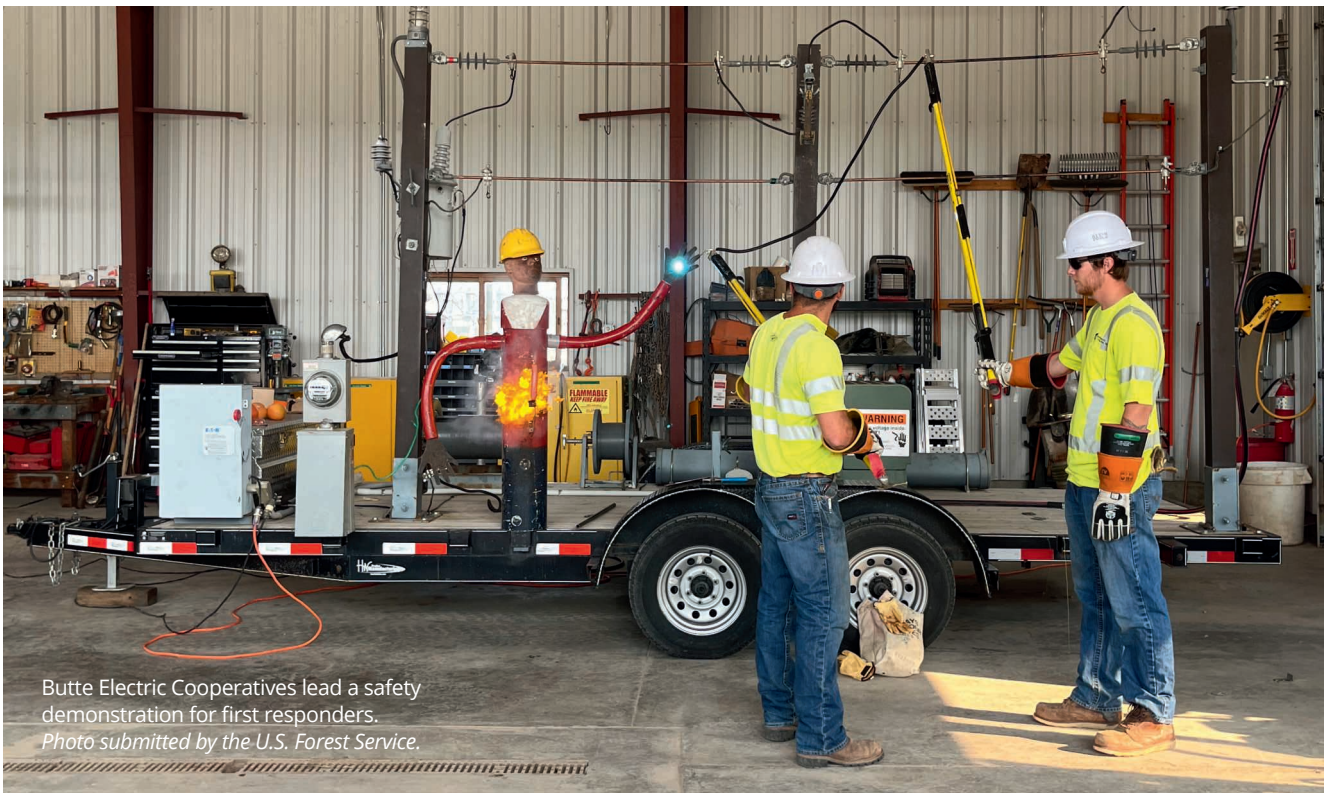
In a separate training tailored to the Sturgis Fire Department, Volunteer Fire Chief of the Sturgis Fire Department Scott Lensegrav said the training was impactful for his fellow volunteers. In addition to noting the value of the demonstration, Lensegrav highlighted the importance of maintaining a strong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

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

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

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

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



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



THE END OF AN ERA

SPADER AND NEISES HANGING UP THE CLIMBING HOOKS

After working a combined 84 years in the field, two of Central Electric Cooperative's most experienced team members plan to retire. Howard area lineworkers Tim Neises and Al Spader will soon hang up their hard hats, rubber gloves and climbing hooks to enjoy the retired life.

TIM NEISES

When asked why he decided to become a lineman, Tim said, "My dad thought it was the thing to do."

Tim's parents, Jerry and Bonnie, farmed outside of Howard. The local farming economy in the late 1970s was not what it is today. So, following his father's wisdom, Tim enrolled at Mitchell Technical College. After graduating in 1979, he worked for the City of Flandreau for about five months before landing a position at Intercounty Electric, which enabled him to move back home to the Howard area. Intercounty Electric merged with Tri-County Electric in 2000 to form Central Electric Cooperative.

Tim was eventually promoted to Howard Area Foreman. His extensive knowledge of electric distribution has made him an incredible asset to the

cooperative and its members. Over the years, Tim has weathered numerous storms, ensured the lights were on in difficult times and helped train the next generation of lineworkers.

With an impressive 45 years of service, Tim is currently Central Electric's most tenured employee. The only cooperative employees in recent history with comparable records are retired customer service representative Marge Schryvers with 46 years, and retired lineworker and Plankinton foreman Curt Guindon with 45 years, not counting his first year when he was not yet considered a full-time employee.

In January, Tim's wife, Karla, plans to retire from her position as the Miner County Register of Deeds after 41 years of service. She has worked in the office since 1983 and served as the Register of Deeds since 1986.

With this newfound time, Tim and Karla hope to enjoy the outdoors, travel and spend time with family and friends. Tim said, "My kids and grandkids all live fairly close, so we look forward to spending more time with them."

Tim's kids are Chris, Steve and Ashley. Chris works as an electrician at Patriot Electric (formerly Bob's Electric) in Flandreau, Steve was a lineworker and is now a staking engineer at Sioux Valley Energy (Central Electric's neighboring cooperative in Colman) and Ashley works as a nurse in Madison.

AL SPADER

Al's first career after high school was working as a welder at Apple Lines in Madison.

"I knew I didn't want to weld the rest of my life," he said. Al was friends with Tim and others who went to school for powerline construction and maintenance, so he thought he'd give it a try.

After graduating from Mitchell Technical College in 1985, Al started his career as a lineworker in the Minneapolis area at Northern States Power Company, now known as Xcel Energy. He ended up moving back home to work for Intercounty Electric in 1987.

With 39 years in the field and 37 of those years at your cooperative, Al has been a cornerstone of the Howard outpost. Known for his hard work and reliability, Al's dedication to providing and restoring electricity in all weather conditions helped the cooperative maintain a high standard of service for its members.

Al's wife, Audrey, recently retired after working 38 years as a school speech clinician. She spent two years in Nebraska, nine years with the Cornbelt Conference and 27 years in Howard. She continues to fill in for the Howard School District as a substitute teacher.

Once Al is officially retired, they plan to spend more time enjoying their cabin in the Black Hills near Custer.

Their son, Colton, is an electrician at Sioux Valley Energy. Al is happy with Colton's career choice.

"I told him not to be a lineman, so he doesn't have to be on-call all the time," he said. "Being an electrician gives him normal work hours, and he doesn't have to worry about outages."

WEATHERING STORMS

Tim and Al have worked to restore power through several blizzards, ice storms, wind storms, thunderstorms and floods. They both recalled a winter storm in 2005 that caused the power to go out for 16 days in some areas.

“Sanborn County really got beat up in 2005,” Al recalled. “It was all ice and the lines were buried.”

Tim said, “We had farmers with tractors helping us dig holes, and we had to break the crust to pull the lines out of the snow.”

Affected members were thankful for the selfless efforts to restore power in the freezing cold. That was just one of countless storms Tim and Al weathered over the decades.

EVOLUTION IN THE FIELD

Both Tim and Al will tell you that a lot has changed since they started out as apprentices. In the 1980s and 1990s, crews spent a great deal of time disconnecting well services in the fall and reconnecting them in spring. Nowadays, well services must be hooked up all year to continue receiving power.

Since 2000, there’s also been renewed focus on replacing aging infrastructure and improving system reliability. The Howard crew has been instrumental in burying more than 150 miles of line,

greatly improving electric reliability.

Equipment and technological advancements have also made linework less taxing on the body.

“We didn’t have skid steers, plows and jet-vacs like they use now. Most of the work was done by hand with a shovel,” Al said. “And we shared a bucket truck with another outpost, so we only had it two weeks out of the month.”

Metering and billing technology has also come a long way.

“I don’t miss doing collections,” Tim shared. In the past, line crews had to go out and physically disconnect meters on unpaid accounts, but with new metering technology, that can all be done from the office.

A GRATEFUL FAREWELL

It would be impossible to list all of Tim and Al’s accomplishments, but in recent years they have been instrumental in boosting reliability by overseeing several miles of underground installation in Miner County and the surrounding area. They have had their gloves on

several hundred miles of overhead and underground lines that power the lives of their friends and neighbors.

When talking about the future, one thing is clear – Tim and Al are glad they will no longer be on-call.

“I can do anything I want, and I won’t have to worry about power outages,” Al said. “I can just relax.”

They each have some CRP acres and food plots to keep them busy when they are no longer working five days a week.

As Tim and Al embark on retired life, the cooperative wants to thank them for their countless contributions over the years. Their expertise, work ethic and commitment to the cooperative’s mission have been instrumental in shaping our success.

“I’m going to miss the people,” Tim said. “Whether it’s coworkers or members, that’s what I will miss the most.”

Al’s last day of work is Dec. 31, 2024. Tim’s last day will be Jan. 15, 2025. Please join us in wishing them all the best in retirement.



The Howard crew shared trucks and equipment with the Woonsocket crew for a number of years before they were able to get their own.



A winter storm in 2005 caused power to go out for 16 days in some areas while line crews worked to make repairs in the cold.



Tim Neises (left) and Al Spader (right) have been the faces of Central Electric for members in the Howard area for decades. Al plans to retire in December and Tim will retire in January.



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

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

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

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

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

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

DEC. 3
Parade of Lights
 7 p.m.
 Christmas Movie Theme
 Main Street
 Mitchell, SD

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

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

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

DEC. 6
Plankinton Hometown Christmas
 Evening Festivities
 Plankinton, SD

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

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

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

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

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

DEC. 14-15
Alexandria Winterfest
 Downtown Auditorium
 Alexandria, SD

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

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

DEC. 16-20
Central Electric Holiday Open House
 Hot Cider & Snacks
 Betts Road Office

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

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