A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative

CENTRAL ELECTRIC
DECEMBER 2026 VOL. 28 NO. 8

COOPERATIVE CONNECTIONS



Christmas Storms

Christmas on Call
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Photo Submitted by Black Hills Electric Cooperative



MANAGER'S MESSAGE

'IT STILL WORKS' IS NOT A MAINTENANCE PLAN



Ryan Mueller
General Manager

My wife and I have a long-running debate, and it has nothing to do with money, kids or where we are going for supper. It's my 1999 Buick LeSabre.

I am convinced that it will continue running forever. She thinks I am one dead battery away from finally admitting it is time to let it go. The problem is, we are both probably right.

The Buick has a battery drain, so if I leave it hooked up overnight, there is a pretty good chance I will come back to a dead battery in the morning. My solution has been to disconnect the battery when I park it and keep a charged jump pack in the car at all times.

My wife obviously thinks this is ridiculous. I prefer to think of it as a very hands-on maintenance program.

The problem with fixing it properly is that the repair could easily cost more than the car is worth, and selling a 1999 Buick with electrical problems could turn into a big headache for somebody else. So for now, the Buick stays.

My kids are not much help either. They have never seen a cassette tape, so they are convinced the cassette player is really a built-in Pop-Tart holder.

Somewhere along the way, that car went from "dependable old Buick" to "how long are you going to keep this thing?"

Believe it or not, that same question comes up in the electric business too.

Central Electric has thousands of poles, miles of wire, transformers, substations, and other equipment spread across a large rural service territory. Some of it is relatively new. Some of it has been doing its job for decades. In fact, we still have poles and sections of line in service that date back 70 years or longer in some cases.

Just like the Buick, old does not automatically mean bad.

A pole that has been inspected and is still in good condition may have plenty of useful life left. The same is true for other parts of the system. Our goal is not to replace something simply because it has a few years on it. Our goal is to understand its condition, maintain it properly, and replace it before it becomes a reliability or safety problem.

That is why Central Electric has placed a stronger focus on accelerated line replacement.

In 2019 and 2020, we replaced roughly 75 to 90 miles of line each year. Since then, we have intentionally settled into a more sustainable pace of around 50 to 60 miles annually so we can balance that work with service upgrades, new line extensions, and the rest of our construction workload. Some years we end up a little above that range as member upgrades and other projects create opportunities to replace additional line along the way. That is still a significant investment, but it has helped reduce outages and employee overtime while strengthening the system for the future.

One of the difficult parts about replacing aging electric infrastructure is that the new line usually does not sell one more kilowatt-hour than the old line did. It does not necessarily serve a new member, add a new business, or create new revenue. We may spend a significant amount of money replacing a line that has been serving the same farms and homes for decades, and when the job is finished, it still serves those same farms and homes.

That can make the value harder to see, especially when the old line was still working. But the value is often in what does not happen. Fewer failures, fewer outages, less emergency work, and a system that is better prepared to serve members for another generation. Sometimes the best investment is one you barely notice when you flip the switch.

We also inspect the system regularly rather than simply waiting for something to break. Central uses an outside contractor to test about 10% of our poles each year, with the goal of inspecting every pole on a regular cycle. Poles that are still sound can receive treatment to extend their life, while poles that do not pass inspection are scheduled for replacement.

That is really the balance we are trying to strike.

Replacing equipment too early is not a good use of our members' money. Waiting until everything fails is not a good plan either. Emergency repairs are usually more expensive, more disruptive, and have a funny way of happening during a storm, on the coldest night of the year, or at some other equally convenient time.

Planned replacement gives us the opportunity to do the work safely and efficiently before members are sitting in the dark waiting for us to fix something we knew was nearing the end of its useful life.

It also helps explain why we continue investing in the system even when everything appears to be working just fine. A reliable electric system is a lot like a piece of farm equipment, a furnace, or even an old Buick. A lot of the important work happens before something quits.

I realize there is some irony in writing an article about replacing equipment before it fails while my Buick sits in the parking lot with a jump pack in the back seat. The difference is that if the Buick finally gives up, I am probably the only one inconvenienced. When part of our electric system fails, a lot more people can be affected.

I am sure my wife will read this and point out that I just spent an entire article making her case for getting rid of the Buick. I am choosing to believe the lesson only applies to electric equipment.

At least until it leaves me sitting in the cold with a dead battery and a warm Pop-Tart in the cassette player.

CENTRAL ELECTRIC
COOPERATIVE
CONNECTIONS

(USPS 018-963)

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Our Mission
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 Sept. 28, 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

Election of officers was conducted. Director Wolbrink was reelected president, Director Gustafson was reelected vice president, Director Pazour was reelected treasurer and Director Hofer was reelected secretary.

Director Wolbrink nominated Kristine Van Gorp to serve on the Operation Round-Up board of trustees for Aurora County, following Julie Dykstra who reached her term limit.

The board discussed the recent annual meeting.

Manager of Finance and Administration Uher recommended a capital budget amendment for gate repairs at the Mitchell shop.

The board discussed capital credit retirements.

General Manager Mueller provided a written report regarding the East River Electric Managers' Advisory Committee, Basin Electric activities, Rural Electric Economic Development Fund activities and other management initiatives.

Director Gustafson reported on the SDREA board meeting.

Director Banks reported on the SDAC board meeting.

Directors Banks, Pazour, White and Gustafson reported on recent NRECA board leadership training.

Director Wolbrink reported on the East River Electric board meeting.

Directors Pazour and Hofer reported on NRECA meetings.

Board Action

The board considered or acted upon the following:

- A motion was made and seconded to approve a capital budget amendment for gate repairs. The motion carried.
- 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 $741,614. The 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 $747,912. The motion carried.

There being no further business, President Wolbrink adjourned the meeting. The next board meeting was scheduled for Oct. 19, 2026.

FINANCIAL REPORT	YEAR TO DATE SEPT. 2026	YEAR TO DATE SEPT. 2025
Kilowatt Hour (kWh) Sales	286,403,053 kWh	247,256,854 kWh
Electric Revenues	$ 35,339,140	$ 29,194,544
Total Cost of Service	$ 33,832,633	$ 28,579,346
Operating Margins	$ 1,506,507	$ 615,198

CHRISTMAS GIFT IDEAS FOR WINTER STORM READINESS

Some of the best Christmas gifts aren't the ones that get used right away.

A flashlight, emergency radio or box of freeze-dried meals may not be the most exciting thing under the tree, but when a South Dakota winter storm rolls in, practical gifts can quickly become some of the most valuable items in the house.

Winter weather can bring heavy snow, bitter cold, drifting roads and extended power outages. In rural areas, where homes may be miles from the nearest town, it can take longer for roads to reopen or help to arrive. This Christmas, consider giving something that can help friends and family stay safe, warm and prepared.

A portable radio with a weather band is a good place to start. Battery-powered or hand-crank models can provide weather alerts and emergency information even if the power is out or cellular service becomes unreliable. Many also include flashlights, USB charging ports and other emergency features. For someone who lives in a rural area or travels frequently during the winter, a weather radio can provide another way to stay informed when conditions change quickly.

Food is another important part of storm preparedness. Freeze-dried meals have a long shelf life and are easy to store, making them useful for emergency kits. Pair several meals with bottled water, shelf-stable snacks or an insulated thermos for a practical preparedness package. Canned goods, granola bars, dried fruit and other foods that do not require refrigeration can also help a household get through a period when roads are closed or travel is discouraged.

For the car, consider putting together a winter emergency kit. Useful items include a warm blanket, gloves, flashlight, jumper cables, ice scraper, first-aid supplies and nonperishable food. A compact shovel and traction aids can also come in handy if a vehicle becomes stuck in snow. Road flares or reflective warning triangles can help make a stranded vehicle more visible.

This is especially important in South Dakota and Minnesota, where a short drive can quickly turn into a long wait if snow begins to blow across rural highways. Even experienced winter drivers can find themselves dealing with whiteout conditions, stalled traffic or roads that close with little warning.



A portable power bank can help keep a cellphone charged during an outage, allowing someone to receive alerts, check road conditions or contact family and emergency services. Larger rechargeable battery packs can power multiple small devices, which may be handy in the event of an extended outage.

Warm clothing also makes a practical gift. Wool socks, insulated gloves, hand warmers and heavy blankets can provide extra protection from the cold at home or on the road. An insulated hat, neck gaiter or pair of winter boots can also be useful for anyone who spends time outdoors checking livestock, clearing snow or traveling between buildings.

Battery-powered lanterns and headlamps are another good option. A headlamp allows someone to keep both hands free while finding supplies or moving around a dark home. Lanterns can provide area lighting for a room without relying on candles. Consider including extra batteries – just in case.

Other practical ideas include a new carbon monoxide detector, fire extinguisher, first-aid kit or basic tool kit. As a gift for parents, grandparents and new homeowners, consider replacing their smoke and carbon monoxide alarms.

While it's difficult to prepare for every possible emergency, having supplies on hand can help you and your loved ones stay comfortable, informed and safe until the storm passes or travel becomes safe again.

"Never drive high loads under low power lines!"



Artwork by Lydell Weaver

Lydell warns readers to never climb near power lines. Thank you for sharing, Lydell! Lydell's parents are Lyndon and Gwen Weaver, members of Dakota Energy Cooperative.

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.



Rise & DINE

COLD OATMEAL MUESLI

Ingredients:

½ cup raisins
½ cup old-fashioned oatmeal
1½ cups quick oatmeal
⅓ cup brown sugar
½ tsp. cinnamon
2 cups milk

Method

Mix all ingredients together. Cover and refrigerate overnight. Serve cold. If desired, add walnuts, apples or fresh berries just before serving.

Elaine Rieck
Southeastern Electric

BREAKFAST HOT DISH

Ingredients:

14 slices bread, divided
2 cups milk
½ lb. cubed ham
½ lb. sliced cheese
5 eggs
½ tbsp. mustard
⅓ cup melted butter

Method

Place 7 bread slices on bottom of greased 9x13 pan. Spread cheese and ham over bread slices.
Mix eggs, milk, and mustard, then pour over.

Tear the remaining 7 bread slices into pieces and sprinkle over the mixture. Pour melted butter over the bread pieces.

Bake 1 hour at 350°F.

Rowena Wipf
Northern Electric

OVERNIGHT COFFEE CAKE

Ingredients:

½ cup white sugar
½ cup brown sugar
¾ cup butter
1 cup buttermilk
2 eggs, beaten
2 cups flour
½ tsp. salt
½ tsp. baking soda
1 tsp. baking powder

Topping:
½ cup brown sugar
1 tsp. cinnamon
½ tsp. nutmeg (optional)
Nuts, as desired

Method

Cream together the butter, white sugar and brown sugar. Add the beaten eggs. In a separate bowl, combine the flour, salt, baking soda and baking powder. Add the dry ingredients to the butter mixture alternately with the buttermilk.

Spread the batter in a 9x13-inch baking pan. Combine the topping ingredients and sprinkle over the batter. Cover and refrigerate overnight.

In the morning, bake at 350°F for 35 minutes or until done.

Rowena Wipf
Northern Electric

RECIPE CORRECTION: SWEDISH PANCAKES

Ingredients:

1½ cups flour
3 tbsp. sugar
½ tsp. salt
3 eggs
2 cups milk
2 tbsp. melted butter

Lois J. Larson
Clay-Union Electric

Method

Sift together the flour, sugar and salt. In a separate bowl, beat the eggs until thick and softly mounded. Add the milk and melted butter to the eggs, then add the flour mixture.

Lightly grease a griddle with butter. Spoon 1 tablespoon of batter onto the griddle for each pancake. Cook over medium heat until lightly browned on both sides.

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 2027. All entries must include your name, mailing address, phone number and cooperative name.

Employee Years of Service



Chase Phillips
Mitchell Area
Lineworker
6 years on Nov. 2



Dean Uher
Manager of Finance
& Administration
8 years on Nov. 5



Landon Laible
Howard Area
Foreman
2 years on Nov. 21



DeEtte Bohr
Accounting & Cust.
Service Supervisor
29 years on Dec. 1



Davis Mathison
Howard Area
Lineworker
6 years on Dec. 1



Ryan Bigge
Journeyman
Electrician
6 years on Dec. 11



Tara Miller
Manager of
Communications
6 years on Dec. 16

Thanks for your dedication!



Harvest Lunch with the Niles Crew

Tara Miller
Manger of Communications

Each fall, Mitchell Radio Group delivers meals to area farmers through its Harvest Lunch promotion. This year, Central Electric's Harvest Lunch winner was Vern Niles of rural Wessington Springs. The visit offered a chance to share a meal, thank the crew for their hard work and talk about electrical safety during the busy harvest season.

Central Electric participates in the Harvest Lunch to raise awareness of electrical hazards on the farm. Long hours and large equipment make it especially important for farmers and hired help to stay aware of their surroundings and avoid contact with power lines and electrical equipment. It's a good idea to check overhead clearance and discuss potential hazards with everyone on the crew.

Thank you to everyone who entered the drawing and to the Niles crew for welcoming us to their farm. We appreciate the opportunity to visit and share a reminder about getting the work done safely.



CAPITAL CREDIT REFUNDS

$1.57 Million Returned to Membership

DeEtte Bohr
Accounting & Customer Service Supervisor

Central Electric Cooperative's board of directors recently approved $1,489,526 in capital credit general retirements, refunding past margins to cooperative members. The refunds include $741,614 of Central Electric capital credits, $207,348 of East River Electric Power Cooperative capital credits and $540,564 of Basin Electric Power Cooperative capital credits. On top of that, the cooperative has also refunded $83,835 in capital credits to estates, bringing total retirements to $1,573,361.

Revenue margins earned by the cooperative are allocated back to members as capital credits in proportion to the amount of electricity that was billed during the years being retired. Because capital credits are based on electricity purchases, each member's refund amount is different.

Members with active Central Electric accounts receive their refund as a credit on their November bills mailed in December.

Inactive members are mailed a check to the address on file. Former co-op members may contact Central Electric to ensure capital credit payments are sent to the correct address.

Capital credits are fundamental to the cooperative business model. They are a financial benefit for the membership and ensure strong financial standing. For more information, contact the office or visit www.centralec.coop/capital-credits for a list of frequently asked questions.

Kizer Named Scholar of the Week

Tara Miller
Manger of Communications



Howard H.S. senior Hoyt Kizer (center) accepts the Touchstone Energy Scholar of the Week award from Ryan Mueller of Central Electric (left) and Howard H.S. Principal Travis Aslesen (right).

Howard High School senior Hoyt Kizer, the son of Brian and Heather Kizer, has been named the Touchstone Energy® Scholar of the Week for Nov. 8-14, 2026. Kizer receives a $250 scholarship from Central Electric Cooperative and will be featured on Dakota News Now for this honor.

A straight-A student, Kizer balances academics with leadership roles, athletics and community involvement. He serves as FFA president, student council treasurer and a football team captain. He is also a member of the National Honor Society, volunteers at his church, and participates in wrestling, baseball and 4-H shooting sports.

Through FFA, Kizer placed in the top five in the veterinary science career development event at the state convention. He has qualified for state career development events each year and competed in an agricultural issues leadership development event. He also helps with the FFA mentor program.

Kizer plans to attend Mitchell Technical College to pursue an agriculture-related degree while continuing to work on his family's farm.

The Scholar of the Week program is a partnership between Dakota News Now Television, Central Electric and the region's other Touchstone Energy Cooperatives that honors accomplished high school students. The program reflects Central Electric's commitment to supporting education and communities.

Kizer's interview is available online at www.dakotanewsnow.com by searching "Scholar of the Week."



CHRISTMAS ON CALL

Sometimes The Holidays Have to Wait

The 2016 Christmas Storm Europa left 23,000 members without power and hundreds of broken poles across the state. *Photo Submitted by East River Electric Power Cooperative*

Frank Turner
frank.turner@sdrea.coop

On Christmas evening in 2016, West Central Electric Cooperative Foreman Dustin Vollmer, then a lineman, headed north from Midland to investigate outages as a blizzard swept across western South Dakota. They made it about 12 miles.

"You couldn't even see the reflectors on the side of the road," Vollmer recalled. "We ended up pulling over and sat there till about 4 in the morning."

When conditions improved enough to turn around, the trucks had made their own snow drifts, and Vollmer's truck overheated twice on the trip back to Midland. More work awaited.

The 2016 Winter Storm Europa brought blizzard conditions, freezing rain and powerful winds across South Dakota on Christmas Day, damaging hundreds of utility poles. According to the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association, more than 23,000 members of at least 20 electric cooperatives statewide were without power by Christmas evening. Restoration work would stretch into the new year.

Vollmer joined West Central Electric in 1999 after graduating from line school at Mitchell Technical College. Even in high school, he understood that linemen sometimes worked holidays. "I realized it could be any time, just whenever the lights go out," Vollmer said.

When Winter Storm Europa caused widespread outages across West Central Electric's service territory, neighboring cooperatives sent crews and equipment to help restore power. Vollmer remembers working alongside linemen from nearby West River Electric Association, one of several cooperatives that came to their aid. Nine years later, Vollmer was able to return the favor when a storm struck Black Hills Electric's service territory in the days leading up to Christmas.



Dustin Vollmer and other West Central Linemen get the power back on during the holidays. *Photo Submitted by West Central Electric Cooperative*

A Return To The Black Hills

On Dec. 18, 2025, winds exceeding 100 mph swept across western South Dakota, uprooting trees, breaking utility poles and leaving more than 11,000 Black Hills Electric Cooperative meters without power. More than 96% of the co-op's electrical system was affected, making it the largest outage event in Black Hills Electric's history.

With damage spread throughout its service territory, Black Hills Electric requested assistance from neighboring cooperatives. Crews and equipment arrived from across western South Dakota, including Vollmer's crew from West Central Electric.

Vollmer was back to work over the Christmas holiday, honoring the cooperative spirit. He said getting around was easier than it had been during the 2016 blizzard, but widespread tree damage made restoration difficult in the Black Hills' rugged terrain. Crews worked to clear fallen trees, replace poles and repair damaged lines throughout the service territory.

Altogether, 55 additional linemen from six neighboring cooperatives and a local contractor assisted Black Hills Electric. Crews worked 12- to 16-hour shifts, prepared to remain through Christmas if the power wasn't restored in time.

"All the outside crews said they weren't leaving," recalled Bill Brisk, manager of operations at Black Hills Electric. "They stayed to help us finish."

By Christmas Eve, nearly all of Black Hills Electric's members had power again, allowing the visiting crews to head home. Black Hills Electric employees continued limited restoration work through Christmas, while Vollmer made it home to Midland late Christmas Eve.

The Families Behind The Work

Vollmer was fortunate to spend much of Christmas with his family following both storms, but not every lineman made it home for the holidays. During the 2016 storm, some employees were called back from trips while others spent days repairing power lines.

Ken Schlimgen, former general manager of Central Electric Cooperative, also acknowledged the sacrifices made by employees' families.

"The individuals who receive the least amount of credit for their role are the spouses and family members," Schlimgen wrote in his 2017 Cooperative Connections column following the Europa storm.

When the first call comes, linemen rarely know whether they'll find a small repair or widespread damage. Families have to plan around that uncertainty. Vollmer's family understands the demands.

"They know what it is," Vollmer said. "People out of power, you gotta go."

Vollmer said West Central Electric supports employees when personal or medical circumstances arise, an understanding that works both ways. When a major storm hits, employees know their coworkers and members are depending on them.

Even cooperative members often return that commitment. Vollmer said members offer assistance when a truck gets stuck or crews need help reaching damaged equipment.

"We got real good consumers," he said. "You could usually find somebody. They'll drop everything and come help."

That willingness to help extends across cooperative service territories, where crews regularly assist neighboring cooperatives during major outages. For Vollmer, it's an expectation shared by the people who have worked alongside him throughout his career.

"When stuff gets bad, you're expected to come help," Vollmer said. "You're part of the team."



The 2025 Black Hills Christmas Storm not only left 11,000 members without power, but also uprooted trees in the area, damaging lines as they fell.
Photo Submitted by Black Hills Electric Cooperative

Understanding Your Electric Bill

Patrick Soukup
Manager of Member Services & Marketing

Electric bills are changing as more electric cooperatives include demand charges for residential members. Under this billing structure, members pay for both the total electricity they use, measured in kilowatt-hours (kWh), and the highest level of electricity they draw at one time, measured in kilowatts (kW). Understanding the difference between energy usage and energy demand can help homeowners make informed decisions and potentially lower their monthly bills.

What Is Electric Demand?

Demand measures how much electricity your home needs to run appliances, heating, cooling and lighting at the same time. Running an electric water heater, clothes dryer and oven simultaneously can create a higher demand than operating those appliances at separate times, even if the total electricity used is the same.

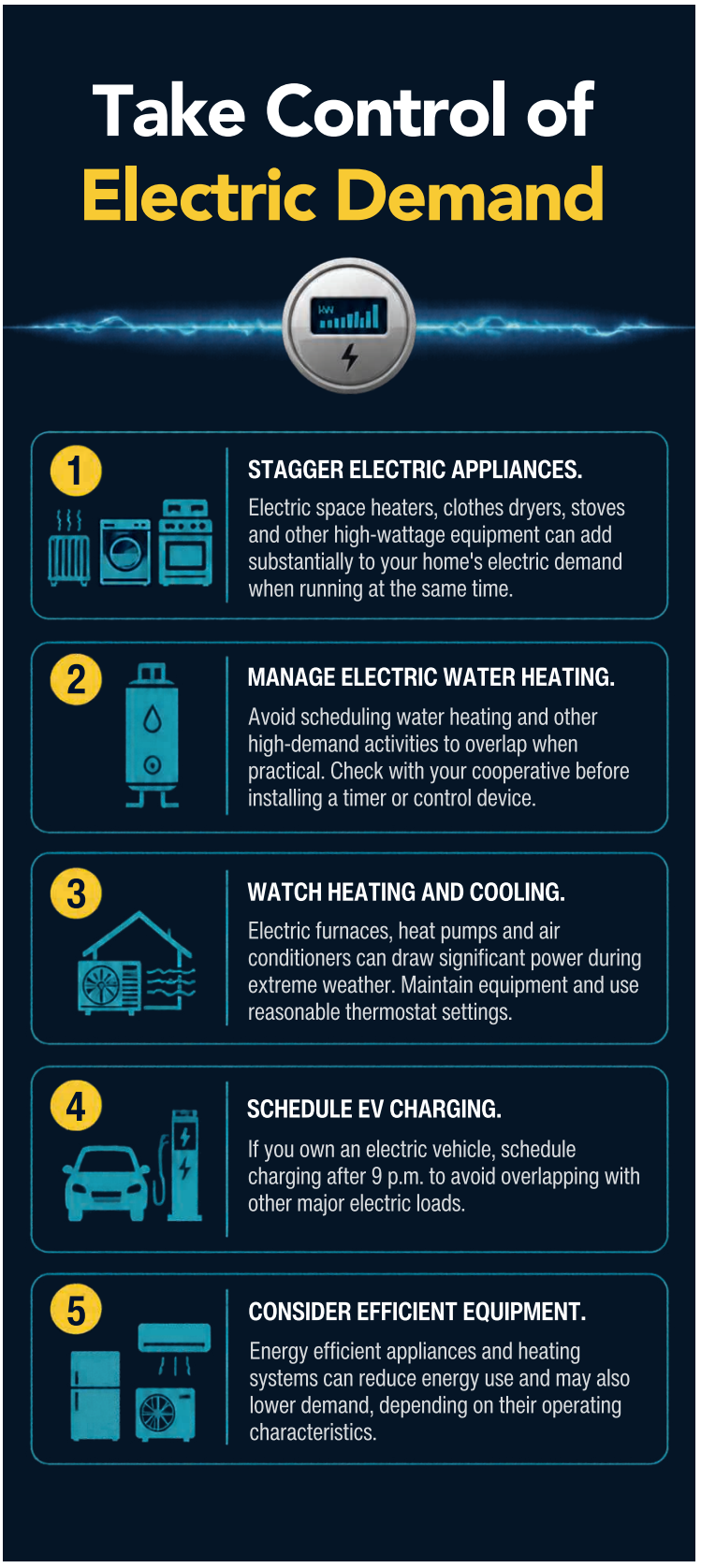
Think of it as the difference between the odometer and speedometer in your car. Energy usage is the total amount used over time (odometer), while demand reflects how much energy is needed at once (speedometer).

Take Control of Your Electric Costs

Managing demand does not mean sacrificing comfort or changing every household routine. Often, spreading out major appliance use can help prevent unnecessary peaks.

The goal is to be mindful of which appliances are operating together. A few adjustments to when you do household tasks can reduce overlapping loads without adding much inconvenience to your day.

Reference the practical tips on the right to help manage your home's electric demand. Small changes in timing can make a difference in how your household uses electricity throughout each busy day.





Calling All Cooks! Submit Recipes by Dec. 15

Tara Miller
Manger of Communications

As an East River Electric member distribution system, Central Electric is collecting recipes for the next edition of East River Electric's Country Cookin' Cookbook, and we would love to include yours.

Each recipe you submit equals a chance to win one of two $100 gift cards. Winners will be drawn at random once the cookbook is published. Not all recipes will be included in the cookbook.

The Country Cookin' Cookbook is a long-standing tradition, filled with recipes from co-op members across the region. Copies are distributed at district meetings and other events.

Submit your recipes by Dec. 15 for a chance to get them published. Members may email recipes to graphics@eastriver.coop, or scan the QR code above to submit recipes online and enter the drawing.

Heating Assistance Available

The Low-Income Energy Assistance Program (LIEAP) helps eligible South Dakotans pay for home heating costs. Energy assistance may not pay for all your home heating costs, but it could help ease the strain of the heating season. Energy assistance is available from October 1 to May 15.

The program may also help if your heating costs are included in the cost of your rent or if you pay heating costs directly to your landlord in addition to your rent.

Eligibility is based on:
- Number of people in household
- Gross income of everyone in the household
- Your home's main heat source type
- County you live in

How to apply:
- E-mail DSSHeat@state.sd.us to request an application or e-mail a completed application.
- Call toll-free at 1-800-233-8503 to request an application be mailed
- Complete an application online at dss.sd.gov/economicassistance/energy_weatherization_assistance.aspx
- Visit your local Department of Social Services office to obtain an application.

2026-2027 HEATING SEASON INCOME LIMITS

HOUSEHOLD SIZE	MAXIMUM 3-MONTH INCOME
1 Person	$7,980
2 Person	$10,820
3 Person	$13,660
4 Person	$16,500
5 Person	$19,340
6 Person	$22,180
7 Person	$23,895
8 Person	$24,426
9 Person	$24,957
10 Person	$25,488
11 Person	$27,285
12 Person	$29,415



The Foster Care Shop offers free toys and essentials to local foster families in Black Hawk, S.D.
Photo courtesy of Light of Mine Ranch

FOSTER CARE
THE COMMUNITY'S KIDS

Light of Mine Ranch Helps Black Hills Foster Families Find the Supplies and Support They Need

Frank Turner
frank.turner@sdrea.coop

When children visiting the Foster Care Shop in Black Hawk, S.D., ask Jordan Combs how much something costs, he gets to give them good news. Everything is free.

Combs said children's eyes light up when they hear the news. They tell their foster parents, then make another trip around the shop.

"I'm the yes guy," Combs said. "If you ask me if you can have it, I'm going to say yes."

Combs and his wife, Mallory, founded Light of Mine Ranch, which provides clothing, baby equipment and household supplies at no cost to foster families.

The inspiration for the Foster Care Shop began when Jordan and Mallory Combs started fostering in 2016.

The couple had been considering international adoption when they attended a community dinner. Local agencies described the need for foster parents, and that's the moment they decided to foster.

"We just felt like God put it on our heart," Combs said.

Since then, the couple has provided long-term foster care for 10 children. When including emergency placements and short stays, Combs estimates that number exceeds 40. Today, the couple has five children, including two daughters they adopted.

As they cared for children and got to know other foster parents, they saw how stretched families could become. Everyday chores like grocery shopping became more complicated. Eating out became more expensive, and they wanted to help ease those burdens.

In 2020, the couple began building a nonprofit. They envisioned homes for foster families on a ranch, giving parents the space and support to focus on children. When housing prices did



Jordan and Mallory Combs have five children, including two they adopted.
Photo courtesy of Light of Mine Ranch

not cooperate with their vision, they put their dream on hold and began helping families on a smaller scale.

"We started looking at what impact can we make now," Combs said.

Light of Mine Ranch helped pay sports fees, purchase equipment and provide bicycles and bunk beds. As community members learned about the work, donations began filling the Combs family's garage.

At the same time, Combs noticed a recurring problem. Someone would offer a crib on Facebook when no family needed one. A few weeks later, a foster family would ask for a crib.

The couple decided to create a shop where donated supplies could be stored until a family needed them.

The Combs family opened the Foster Care Shop in June 2025, giving families a central place to find everything from strollers and shoes to meals and school supplies.

"We're trying to be your first stop to get all the supplies that you need," Combs said.

The shop also serves kinship families, including grandparents, aunts and uncles caring for relatives' children. Relatives often have little time to prepare, Combs said. A grandparent whose own children are grown may suddenly need a crib, a car seat and clothing for an infant.

The organization also assists some families referred by the South Dakota Department of Social Services.

Combs remembers one family relieved to avoid spending an afternoon driving between stores to gather everything they needed.

"They were happy that they didn't have to spend the whole afternoon shopping around town," Combs said.

Combs recalled another girl who had not started school by mid-October because of her family's circumstances.

"She was able to come here and get all her school supplies to get started for school," Combs said.

Since its grand opening, community donations have filled the shop faster than Combs expected. The same moment toys run low after an event, a donor always seems to arrive with boxes of puzzles, toys and dollhouses. When a family picks up a crib, Combs said another donation seems to take its place.

While the shop helps foster families with everyday expenses, the couple is still working toward a place for families and children to stay.

"It'd be a six-bedroom home," Combs said. The organization has identified a prospective site south of Rapid City, but Combs said there is no construction timeline.

The home would provide temporary accommodations for children awaiting placement. Combs said it could also provide space for foster families to rest and take a break. Having several bedrooms would help accommodate sibling groups and children of different ages.

Whether a child stays with a foster family for a weekend or a year, Combs believes the time spent together matters.

"You can make it meaningful to them for that time," he said.

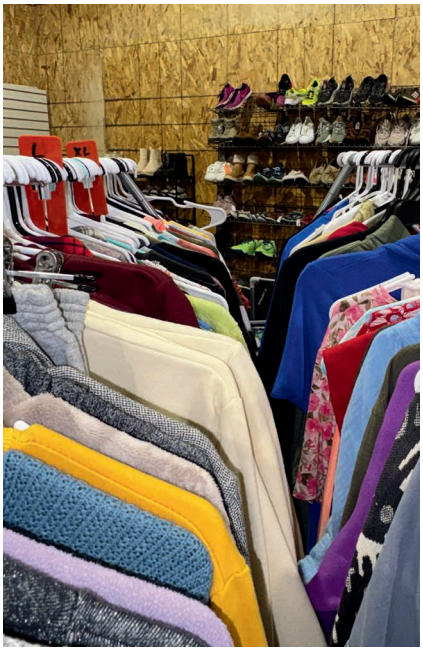
Private donations fund the organization's work and local volunteerism keeps it running, Combs said. They are always looking for more volunteers to sort donations and organize supplies.

Combs hopes the community will also rally together to help make foster families feel less alone. Taking children into a home is a family's decision, he said, but helping care for them is something the wider community can share.

"These are the community's kids," Combs said.



The Foster Care Shop has everything a foster family might need - everything from toys and strollers to racks of clothes. *Photos courtesy of Light of Mine Ranch*



Help or get involved

Families seeking assistance and people interested in helping can visit lightofmineranch.com for information. Combs recommends checking current hours and donation needs before bringing items to the shop.



NEW UTILITIES LAB UNVEILED AT MTC

Photos by East River Electric

Steve Barnett
General Manager, SD Rural Electric Association

Thursday, Sept. 3, 2026, proved to be a transformative day for electric cooperatives in South Dakota. Not only did we mark the second year of our annual Touchstone Energy Cooperatives at the South Dakota State Fair event, but co-ops were also honored in Mitchell for one of the most important investments in our futures since rural landowners gathered by kerosine lanterns in the 1930s and 1940s to establish their cooperatives.

I'm proud to share that together, we've pledged more than $480,000 over the next five years to support the next generation of electric utility workers with a new underground utilities training building at Mitchell Technical College (MTC). This workspace allows students a year-round opportunity for hands-on learning, helping ensure a steady supply of well-prepared line workers and technicians who are ready to serve cooperative members safely and reliably into the future.

Theresa Kriese started off the afternoon ceremony by thanking the supporting cooperatives. Speaking on behalf of the cooperative network, Bob Sahr, general manager and CEO of East River Electric Power Cooperative, emphasized that this project reflects the core cooperative principle of working together to do what no single organization could do alone. A total of 35 Touchstone Energy Cooperatives and utility partners collaborated to close the funding gap and bring the facility to life.

"This building is a powerful example of people coming together to support the community and work with higher education to do something we simply couldn't do individually," Sahr said. "As cooperatives, we have a responsibility to make sure we have a skilled workforce ready to serve our members not just today, but 10, 20 and 30 years from now."

Sahr underscored the importance of Mitchell Tech as a talent pipeline for the cooperative network. Central Electric Cooperative currently employs a total of 34 MTC graduates, holding positions both in the field and in the office.



Students demonstrate equipment for visitors during a ribbon cutting event.



East River Electric CEO Bob Sahr speaks during a ribbon cutting event.

CENTRAL ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE

Your Touchstone Energy® Cooperative

SCHOLARSHIPS AVAILABLE

Central Electric Cooperative is proud to offer several scholarships to area students. Eligible students must be the dependent of a current cooperative member whose primary residence receives electric service from Central Electric. Dependents of cooperative employees and board members are not eligible for these scholarships.

$2,500 Basin Electric Power Cooperative Scholarship

One student will be selected. Must be the dependent of a current cooperative member whose primary residence receives electric service from Central Electric. Must be enrolled or planning to enroll in a full-time undergraduate course of study.

$1,000 District Scholarship

Eight students (one per county) will be selected. Must be the dependent of a current cooperative member whose primary residence receives electric service from Central Electric. Must be enrolled or planning to enroll in a full-time undergraduate course of study.

$1,000 Jay Headley Memorial Scholarship

One student will be selected. Must be the dependent of a current cooperative member whose primary residence receives electric service from Central Electric. Must be enrolled or planning to enroll in a full-time undergraduate course of study and pursuing a bachelor's degree in an agriculture-related field.

$500 Mitchell Technical College Scholarship

Two students will be selected. Mitchell Technical College administers this scholarship. Must be the dependent of a current cooperative member whose primary residence receives electric service from Central Electric. Must be enrolled in an eligible program.

Apply By February 1

Students must write a summary of career goals, attach an academic transcript and attach a letter of recommendation from a teacher, coach, 4-H advisor or adult that is not a family member. Scholarship awards are paid directly to the post-secondary school of the selected student's choice.

WWW.CENTRALEC.COOP/SCHOLARSHIPS

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.



Photo courtesy of Travel South Dakota

NOV. 24-DEC. 26
Christmas at the Capitol
Pierre, SD
christmasatthecapitol.sd.gov

NOV. 20-JAN. 3
Winter Wonderland
5 p.m.-12 a.m.
Falls Park
Sioux Falls, SD
605-275-6060

NOV. 25-JAN. 2
1880 Holiday Express
222 Railroad Ave.
Hill City, SD
605-574-2222

NOV. 27-DEC. 31
Hall of Trees
Sat.-Thurs.: 10 a.m.-5 p.m.
Fri.: 10 a.m.-8 p.m.
Mead Museum
Yankton, SD

DEC. 1
Parade of Lights
7 p.m.
Main Street
Mitchell, SD

DEC. 3
City of Yankton Holiday Festival of Lights
4 p.m. Family Activities
6 p.m. Lighted Parade
Yankton, SD
605-665-5234

DEC. 4
Hometown Holiday
3:30-7 p.m.
Kimball, SD

DEC. 5
KJAM Parade of Lights
5:30 p.m.
Madison, SD
AmazingMadison.com

DEC. 5
Parade of Lights
6:15 p.m.
Main Street
Howard, SD

DEC. 5
Christmas in Emery
10 a.m.-2 p.m.
School Auditorium
Emery, SD

DEC. 5-JAN. 6
Garden Glow at McCrory Gardens
5-9 p.m.
Closed Dec. 24-25, Jan. 1
Brookings, SD
605-688-6707

DEC. 6
Hometown Christmas
Main Street
Plankinton, SD

DEC. 6
KCBA Hometown Christmas
10 a.m.-4 p.m. (MST)
Kadoka City Auditorium
Kadoka, SD
605-488-0151

DEC. 6
Christmas on the Prairie Concert
St. Anthony's Catholic Church
Hoven, SD
605-948-2451

DEC. 10-13
Christmas at the Cathedral
Thurs. & Fri.: 7:30 p.m.
Sat.: 1 p.m., 7:30 p.m.
Sun. 2 p.m., 7:30 p.m.
Cathedral of St. Joseph
Sioux Falls, SD
Tickets: 605-988-3765

DEC. 12
Frontier Christmas
10 a.m.-2 p.m.
Fort Sisseton State Park
Lake City, SD
605-448-5474

DEC. 12
Holly Jolly Christmas Party
Santa, Mrs. Claus, Reindeer
1-3 p.m.
Huron Public Library
Huron, SD

DEC. 13
Christmas on Main
5-7 p.m.
Alexandria, SD

DEC. 17-18
Central Electric Holiday Open House
Snacks & Cider
8 a.m.-4:30 p.m.
Betts Rd. Office
Mitchell, SD

DEC. 20
Bethlehem in Brule County
5 p.m.
Soup supper to follow
Ag Building
Pukwana, SD
Jeff Tveit: 605-730-0553

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.