



COOPERATIVE CONNECTIONS



*Photo Credit: South Dakota
Snowmobile Association*

South Dakota Snowmobiling

Seasonal Fun in the
Snow

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High School Students
Gaining Dual Credits

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Attention High School Juniors

Win a Trip to Washington, D.C.

West Central Electric will once again sponsor high school juniors on an all-expense-paid trip to Washington, D.C. Each June, more than 1,800 high school juniors and seniors travel to Washington, D.C., to participate in the Rural Electric Youth Tour. During the week, they learn about Washington, D.C., government, cooperative philosophy, and rural electrification. The students are selected and sponsored by their local rural electric cooperatives. The South Dakota Rural Electric Association (SDREA) coordinates arrangements for the South Dakota students.

Some of the sites that toured are the Lincoln Memorial, National Cathedral, The White House, Air and Space Museum, Washington Monument, U.S. Capitol, Ford's Theatre, The Kennedy Center, the Metro, Arlington National Cemetery, Mount Vernon, Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, The Smithsonian, Iwo Jima Statue, National Archives, U.S. Supreme Court, and the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. Students will participate in a breakfast briefing with the South Dakota Congressional Delegation.

Who is Eligible?

All area high school juniors whose parents are members of West Central Electric.

What Does It Cost?

West Central Electric, along with the other local electric cooperatives that participate in the weeklong event, funds the tour. The funding for the tour provides for each participant's transportation, room and board, entertainment, and sightseeing events. Students are required to provide their spending money (snacks and souvenirs).

When is it Held?

The weeklong trip will be held on **June 15-21, 2024**. Participants will meet for an orientation meeting on Saturday, June 15, in Sioux Falls. Then, the group will fly to Washington, D.C., on Sunday, June 16, and return to South Dakota on Friday, June 21. A commercial bus will be used for transportation while in Washington, D.C.

How do I Qualify?

Each entrant must submit an essay, not to exceed 500 words, on the following topic: "If chosen as a youth tour delegate, you will be traveling to Washington, D.C. to experience and learn about America's rich history. What moment in American history do you wish you had been a part of, and what would you have contributed?" All essays must be typed and include a cover sheet that states the title of the essay, the entrant's name and address, name of parent or guardian, and the name of your school. Information may be picked up from your local school guidance counselor, at www.wce.coop, or from West Central Electric Cooperative, 204 Main Street, Murdo, SD 57559. West Central Electric must receive all essays on or before **Feb. 16, 2024**.

COOPERATIVE CONNECTIONS

WEST CENTRAL ELECTRIC

(USPS No. 018-988)

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Design assistance by SDREA

Sealey Now Journeyman

West Central Electric employee JayTee Sealey has recently completed his requirements to become a journeyman lineman. To become a journeyman lineman, JayTee completed an apprenticeship program and had more than 8,000 hours of on-the-job training. JayTee works out of the Murdo area.

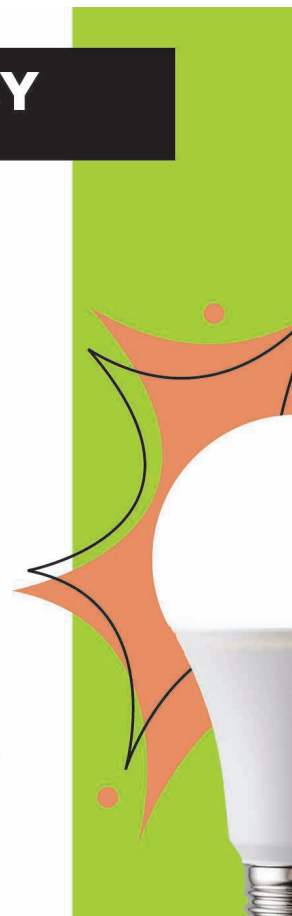
Congratulations, JayTee!



ENERGY EFFICIENCY TIP OF THE MONTH

Area rugs are an easy, cost-effective solution to cold floors. Adding area rugs to hard-surface flooring can add warmth to any room and keep your feet cozy on cold winter days.

Choose rugs made from wool or other natural fibers and plush or high-pile textures for the most insulation. Place rugs in areas where you need additional warmth, like the foot of a bed or under a coffee table. Area rugs can enhance the aesthetic of your home and keep you cozier.



Cooking Safety

Watch What You Heat: Cooking is the Number One Cause of Home Fires

Plan A: Primary Prevention

- The best time to cook is when you are wide awake, and not drowsy from medications or alcohol.
- Always wipe clean the stove, oven, exhaust fan to prevent grease buildup.
- Wear short or close-fitting sleeves when cooking.
- Keep a pan lid and dry potholders or oven mitts near you EVERY time you cook.
- Turn pot or pan handles toward the back of the stove.
- When heating food in the microwave, use microwave- safe cookware that allows steam to escape.
- Allow food to rest before removing from the microwave.
- When frying, use a pan lid or splash guard to prevent grease splatter.
- Stay in the kitchen while you are frying, grilling, or broiling food. If you leave, turn off the stove.
- If you are simmering, baking, roasting, or boiling food, check it regularly. Remain in the home while food is cooking, and use a timer to remind you to check on your cooking.
- After cooking, check the kitchen to make sure all burners and other appliances are turned off.

Plan B: Secondary Prevention

If your food does catch on fire...

1. Cover the pan with its lid. A cookie sheet works too. Leave covered until the pan is cool. NEVER move the pot or carry it outside - the pot is too hot to handle and the contents may splash, causing a severe burn.
2. Turn the heat off. With the lid on and the heat off, the fire should quickly put itself out. NEVER use water to put out a kitchen fire. Water will cause the

oil to splatter and spread the fire, or scald you as it vaporizes.

3. If the fire is inside the oven or microwave, keep the door shut and turn it off. Keep closed until the oven is cool.
4. If the fire gets out of control- get out, stay out and call 9-1-1. Don't return inside for any reason.

STATS

- 47% of all home fires are caused by cooking
- Preventing a burn injury is always better than the pain and trauma of medical treatment afterward.

National Burn Awareness Week (Feb. 4-10, 2024) is a window of opportunity for organizations to mobilize burn, fire, and life safety educators to unite in sharing a common burn awareness and prevention message in our communities.

Source: American Burn Association



Call 811 Before You Dig

Lillee Pannell, Age 10

Lillee Pannell instructs readers to call 811 before digging. Lillee is the daughter of Scott and Kim Pannell from Sioux Falls, S.D., members of Southeastern Electric 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.



BRUNCH SPECIALS

FRENCH TOAST SUPREME

Ingredients:

1/2 cup butter
2 tbsps. white corn syrup
1 cup brown sugar
5 eggs
1 cup Carnation milk
1 tsp. vanilla
1/4 tsp. salt

Method

Boil together butter, corn syrup, and brown sugar for one minute. Grease a 9x13 pan and put the caramel mix in bottom. Slice French bread about one inch thick or use Texas toast. Put slices close together on top of the caramel sauce. Beat together eggs, milk, vanilla, and salt. Pour on top of bread. Cover and refrigerate overnight. Bake at 350 degrees for 45 minutes. When ready to serve, turn the pieces over and caramel will be on top. Best served warm.

Brigitta Hofer
Bridgewater, S.D.

MINI FRITTATAS

Ingredients:

8 eggs
1/4 cup milk
1 1/2 tps. Italian seasoning
1/4 tsp. salt
1/8 tsp. ground black pepper
1 cup crumbled cooked bacon
1 med. onion, finely chopped
1 med. zucchini, finely chopped
1 cup shredded Cheddar cheese, divided

Method

Preheat oven to 350°F. Beat eggs, milk, Italian seasoning, salt and pepper in medium bowl until well blended. Add bacon, onion, zucchini and 1/2 cup of the cheese; mix well. Spray one (12-cup) muffin tin generously with no stick cooking spray. Spoon about 1/4 cup egg mixture into each cup. Sprinkle with remaining 1/2 cup cheese. Bake 20 to 22 minutes or just until eggs are set. Run small knife or spatula around each cup to loosen mini frittatas. Let stand five minutes before serving.

McCormick.com

CINNAMON PANCAKES

Ingredients:

2 cups pancake mix
1 tsp. cinnamon
2 eggs, beaten
1 cup milk
2 tbsps. vegetable oil
1 tsp. pure vanilla extract

Method

Stir pancake mix and cinnamon in large bowl until well blended. Stir in eggs, milk, oil, and vanilla just until blended.

Pour 1/4 cup of batter per pancake onto preheated lightly greased griddle or skillet. Cook one to two minutes per side or until golden brown, turning when pancakes begin to bubble. Serve pancakes with Spiced Syrup, if desired.

Kitchen Tip: To make flavorful Spiced syrup, mix one cup pancake syrup, one teaspoon pure vanilla extract and 1/4 teaspoon cinnamon in a small microwave-safe bowl and microwave on HIGH for one minute or until warm, stirring once.

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 2023. All entries must include your name, mailing address, phone number and cooperative name.

Efficiency Tips for Manufactured Homes



Miranda Boutelle
Efficiency Services
Group

Q: I live in a manufactured home. How can I keep the inside temperature more comfortable and save on energy bills?

A: There are several tasks you can complete to improve comfort and use less energy in your manufactured home. I started my career in energy efficiency as a weatherization technician in Wisconsin. In this role, I helped people in manufactured homes by air sealing, duct sealing, adding insulation and installing new windows, showerheads, faucet aerators and lightbulbs.

More than 22 million Americans live in manufactured homes, according to the National Association of State Energy Officials. Manufactured homes represent 15% of housing in rural areas, and only 3% in urban areas.

Knowing how manufactured homes are built helps us understand where we can seal in savings around the house. These homes are constructed in factories and then transported and set up on-site. Construction in a factory reduces costs, making manufactured homes an affordable option. That lower price point can come, in part, from the use of less expensive equipment and fewer materials, such as lower-efficiency heating equipment or less insulation.

If you are considering buying a manufactured home, ENERGY STAR®-certified manufactured homes are 30% more energy efficient than standard models, with a variety of options that increase the home's energy efficiency.

If you already live in a manufactured home, you likely know that manufactured homes are constructed in sections. One section is a single wide home, two are combined to make a double wide home and three make a triple wide home.

In my experience, the biggest issues were in the duct systems, which deliver heating and cooling throughout the homes. The ductwork is typically located in the cavity between the floor and the

transport barrier, which protects the underside of the manufactured home while it is transported from the factory to the site. Typically, one long duct runs the length of each section of the home, with the registers or vents cut into it.

The first step is making sure all registers are accessible, open and not covered by furniture, rugs, dog beds or anything else.

Next, check your ductwork by removing the registers and looking inside. Anything inside the duct will restrict airflow, so check that it is free and clear. Use a mirror and flashlight to look into the duct or take a picture by sticking a camera or phone inside and snapping some shots with flash in each direction. I've pulled all kinds of things out of ducts over the years, from garbage to toys to shoes.

If you have a double wide or triple wide, you will likely have a crossover duct, which joins the ducts in each section. The crossover duct is typically a large flexible duct with an inner liner, insulation and an outer cover to protect the insulation. Damaged or disconnected crossover ducts allow the air you pay to heat escape under the home. Often, damage is done by animals chewing or scratching to get inside the warm area. An inspection of the crossover duct requires crawling under the home. That's a dirty job and often a tight spot, so you might choose to hire a professional.

Another place to check is the joint joining the sections of a double wide or triple wide together. This is often covered by trim when the home is placed. You can caulk around the trim or remove it and caulk underneath to reduce air leakage.

Weatherstripping doors and windows to make sure they seal tightly will also reduce drafts and save energy. Some homes can benefit from additional insulation in the attic or under the floor. Those projects typically require specialized equipment or help from a professional.

Weatherization assistance programs, like the ones offered by the company I worked for in Wisconsin, provide discounted and no-cost energy-saving upgrades. Check with your county or electric utility for more information.

Rural Writings

Exploring Rural Art with Eliza Blue

Frank Turner

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In the tight-knit quarters of rural communities, where relationships are tightly woven, local art forms such as music and prose often reflect the unique character of the small towns they come from. Eliza Blue is one such writer, folk musician, mother, and self-described “accidental rancher” from the outskirts of Bison, S.D., who regularly captures the essence of rural living in every facet of her creative work.

However, Blue’s journey to the Northern Plains was unexpected. Originally from the big city, she first visited South Dakota as a temporary stop during one of her music tours. What was meant to be a brief visit transformed into a life-altering decision. Her visit turned into a permanent settlement, and Bison became the location where she would go on to marry, start a family, and immerse herself in rural life.

“It’s been a journey,” said Blue. “I started writing about these new experiences in motherhood and ranch life because they were all new to me. People really appreciated my perspective in a way that I didn’t see coming.”

With her touring days put on pause, Blue turned to writing as her creative outlet. A prolific artist, Blue began writing a column, “Little Pastures on the Prairie” for the Bison Courier. Her slice-of-life column that explored the quirks of living in one of the most remote locations in the U.S. quickly found an audience far and wide and is now published by 18 news outlets across the Upper Midwest.

In many ways, Blue’s column takes an ordinary rural experience and portraying it in a new, thoughtful way.

“A lot of my writing is about my interactions with the natural world and the relationships I have with my animals and the climate,” said Blue. “For example, I write a lot about the wind and what a dynamic force that is. It does almost become like a person that you are in a relationship with.”

Inspired by the content from her column, Blue published a collection of essays, *Accidental Rancher: ‘Lambs in the Laundry Room and other stories from Perkins County,’* in 2020. She has since been featured in South Dakota Magazine, The Daily Yonder, and other noteworthy publications.

Although Blue found success in her writing, her connection to music has continued. In 2021, Blue began touring again, taking on a new role as the host of SDPB’s traveling concert series, “Wish You Were Here with Eliza Blue,” a series in its fourth season that celebrates rural artists across the state.

“The show has been a huge inspiration and part of my broader mission to highlight not only my own experiences in agriculture but also rural artists,” said Blue. “It’s really exciting to be a part of show that illuminates what the modern pastoral genre looks like. It’s celebrating not how things were but how things are, which is really the theme of the show.”

Whether it’s through a column or a public broadcast, Blue said she will continue to illuminate the unique aspects of rural life through her work, which can be found on her website: elizablue.net.

“I have a few big projects in the pipeline,” said Blue. “I’ve been working on a Folk Opera. Hopefully in 2024, I will be working with some amazing musicians to put something together, so people will have to keep an eye out for that.”



Eliza Blue, a musician, writer, and rancher, performs music with folk and blues roots for her rural community.



SOUTH DAKOTA'S SNOWMOBILE CLUBS

A group of Black Hills Snowmobile Club members enjoy a ride through the snow covered pines.

Snow Lovers Create Trails and Lifelong Friendships Through Club Membership

Shannon Marvel

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Being a member of one of South Dakota's many snowmobiling clubs is more like being a member of a big, adrenaline-loving family.

Being a part of a snowmobile club provides the opportunity to meet likeminded individuals that can easily turn into some of your best friends. That's the case for Mike Boock, of Rapid City, who is a longtime member of the Black Hills Snowmobile Club (BHSC).

"Most of the friendships that I have today are because of the snowmobile club. Many of us even camp together during the summer at the lake," Boock said.

Boock said the club boasts up to 70 members in all. While he primarily rides the mountains of Colorado and Wyoming, Boock loves riding in Black Hills when the area receives enough snow.

There are a total of 416 miles of groomed snowmobile trails

in the Black Hills National Forest, making it a pristine spot for snowmobiling.

The snowmobile clubs in the Black Hills have it a little easier than those out east as they don't have to mark, install, groom or repair trails.

"The state takes care of that," Boock said. "This allows clubs like the BHSC to become more of an educational and community support organization."

This allows club members more free time to volunteer or participate in community events, such as the Festival of Lights Parade and Storybook Island Christmas Nights of Light.

Kelly Weaver is the President of the South Dakota Snowmobile Association and a member of the Aberdeen Drift Busters Snowmobile Club.

The Aberdeen Drift Busters maintain what's called the Dakota Midland trail system, which connects Aberdeen, Mina Lake, Richmond Lake, Westport, Frederick and Columbia.

"This provides about 75 miles of riding in a safe, marked, and groomed corridor," Weaver said.

There are rules governing the trail system. While there are no posted speed limits on the trail, when the trail is located in a road right-of-way, the speed limit of the road applies.

There are also laws governing the type of vehicle that can be ridden on a snowmobile trail. Machines must meet the state definition of a snowmobile. ATV's and other motorized vehicles do not typically meet that definition.

Aberdeen Drift Busters has held the title of being the largest snowmobile club in the state for several years. It was established in 1969, the same year the South Dakota Snowmobile

Association was established.

“Currently, our membership is right around 100 families,” Weaver said. “The club has been as large as 225 members but membership has slowed over the past decade due to the lack of snow and the growing number of activities that families have an opportunity to participate in.”

Anyone can join a snowmobile club and snowmobile ownership is not a requirement.

“You are connected with very experienced snowmobilers who can provide information about machines, riding ventures and how organized snowmobiling operates,” Weaver said. “It is a way to connect with people who have a shared passion for the sport.”

Weaver had her first taste of snowmobiling as a young child with her father and neighbors.

“When I was young, I only rode as a passenger, which I found was not to my liking. When I met my future husband, he also had a snowmobile and I had to ride as a passenger once again,” Weaver said.

Weaver and her husband decided to join the Aberdeen Drift Busters while taking a break from riding for a bite to eat years ago.

“In 1986, my fiancé – now husband – and I were on a snowmobile ride and stopped to eat at a trailside business. Another snowmobiler, who we did not know, approached us and told us we needed to join the club. We did and have been actively involved ever since. That snowmobiling ‘stranger’ became a lifelong friend who we’ve shared many snowmobile memories with,” Weaver said. “Like most things we are drawn to, it is the ability to connect with others who share a common interest that keeps us involved. We have met so many people across the state and the nation through our involvement and have experienced some awesome and fun-filled trips over the years. There are so many ways to be involved that even members who are not avid riders can benefit from and enjoy

being part of the club.”

Once married, Weaver decided she’d need her own sled if she were to continue with snowmobiling. When her husband acquired a new Polaris, she was granted a used Arctic Cat Jag that she described as a “trusty starter sled.”

“Early on in our riding, we were able to make trips to the Black Hills, Big Horn Mountains and West Yellowstone. These venues are even more breathtaking in the winter,” Weaver said.

A long day on the trail in a large riding area might last six to eight hours. There needs to be a minimum of six inches of snow on the ground, depending on the terrain.

It may take several layers of snow to create a base for the trail, which can then be groomed and maintained throughout the season.

With adequate snow and a trail in place, an ideal riding day for Weaver would be sunny skies with a little wind, and temperatures between 0 and 30 degrees.

Over in the southeastern corner of

the state, Duane Duerr, President of the Siouxland Sno Trackers, finds great enjoyment in riding his Ski Doo 900 Ave Four Cycle snowmobile.

The Siouxland Sno Trackers is one of the original snowmobile clubs in South Dakota and has around 78 miles of groomed trails for its 80 members.

Duerr grew up in Minnesota and joined the club in 2006 when he moved to South Dakota. Joining the club helped him to learn the trails and rules, and provided him with many friendships.

“I think snowmobiling has become more popular, but involvement in all organizations is down,” Duerr said.

“Many do not realize that snowmobile clubs are why we have a trail system and that they put it in and take it out. Without the clubs, we will no longer have trails in South Dakota. Member support is what makes a difference and too many take that involvement for granted.”

More information on the state’s snowmobile clubs can be found at the SDSA’s website at snowmobilesd.com.



Watertown’s South Dakota Snowmobile Club members take a break during an outing.



PROVIDING YOU WITH RELIABLE ELECTRICITY!

The Rural Electric Cooperative's Number One Goal Since the Beginning.



Kory Hammerbeck

Rushmore Electric
Power Cooperative
CEO/GM

On New Year's Day 2021, had you asked me the odds of a winter blackout rolling through these parts, I would have told you a million to one. A longshot. Don't worry about it. Then, February 16 happened. A polar vortex took a nasty turn, causing rolling blackouts for over 5,500 rural South Dakotans west of the Missouri. Now, on the 3-year anniversary of that storm (Uri), it looks like the odds of a repeat are increasing.

It's not because your local co-op has neglected grid maintenance. Quite the opposite: Over the past 3 years, West Central invested nearly \$10.4 million in system hardening (upgrading poles, wires, transformers, substations, line maintenance, etc.). In 2023, West Central's average outage time per consumer was 2 hours per meter, and this is with a mid-July thunderstorm that caused many

outages in the Oacoma area. For perspective, the national average outage time per consumer is 5 hours a year. WCEC, at 99.97% reliability, easily beats that – a remarkable feat considering the extreme cold, snow and ice storms, hail and high winds that distinguish our climate. I tip my hat to the line crews. Their craft is one of the most dangerous in the country. Often, they maintain energized power lines so your heat and light are not interrupted. So your Wi-Fi router doesn't reboot. So your microwave clock doesn't blink. So you don't experience any inconvenience at all.

To grasp what happened during Uri, you must first understand the grid's complexity. In southern states, natural gas lines feeding power plants froze. Iced-up regional wind turbines went offline. To counterbalance the shortfall, so a larger geographic area didn't blackout, the Southwest Power Pool (SPP, our region's transmission operator) directed electric suppliers to reduce the amount of power they delivered to the grid. This marked the first time in SPP's 83-year history that it initiated such a call. The result: outages from the Midwest to Mexico. But the grid did not crash.

Since that storm, our region's reliability has not been severely tested.

Here at Rapid City-based Rushmore Electric Power Cooperative, we sell the electricity delivered to your co-op. We purchase it from two places: (1) Generating stations (primarily fueled by coal, natural gas and wind) owned by Bismarck, ND-based Basin Electric Power Cooperative (BEPC); and (2) hydroelectric power from the Western Area Power Administration (WAPA, a federally managed agency). Both have a half-a-century-plus track record of reliability. Drought conditions can reduce the amount of WAPA's hydropower, but it's dependable. West Central employs an all-of-the-above generation strategy, using

coal, natural gas, wind, hydro, oil and solar to generate power. And recently, to bolster regional reliability, it committed more than \$1 billion for new transmission and generation.

Even so, what happens in 14 states impacts our reliability. That's 756 generating plants, 61,000 miles of transmission and 4,800 substations delivering power to 18 million people across 546,000 square miles. Have utility post-Uri upgrades made our region's network bulletproof? Perhaps only another prolonged Arctic blast will tell.

At the federal level, reliability concerns now grow. In December, the North American Electric Reliability Corporation (NERC), our nation's grid monitoring watchdog, warned that over the next decade, our region is at elevated risk: likely to experience an increased number of shortages when extreme and prolonged weather conditions strike. NERC attributes this to:

- Electric generating plants not designed or prepared for extreme cold or heat
- Fuel production and transportation disruptions limiting fuel availability
- Weather-dependent renewable generation
- Increased electric demand

In its recent 2023 Long-Term Reliability Assessment, NERC acknowledges that electric use in North America is increasing more rapidly than at any time in the past three decades. This certainly factors into future reliability concerns.

I can add some color to this.

It's not just electric vehicles, heat pumps and air conditioners. It's crypto mining and large data processing centers. It's sitting and permitting delays for needed transmission lines. It's sensitive wind and solar inverters tripping unexpectedly. It's heightening concerns that existing generation is at risk of retirement before reliable alternatives are in place. And that proposed Clean Air Act Section 111(d) EPA regulations addressing carbon emissions will accelerate fossil-fuel generator retirements. As you can see, it's intricate.

Rest assured, reliability tops our region's present and future priority list.

WHAT YOUR CO-OP IS DOING TO ADDRESS FUTURE RELIABILITY

Locally

We regularly conduct face-to-face meetings with local, state and federal delegates. We educate and inform them about this issue, stressing the need for legislative support.

In South Dakota

Through the South Dakota Rural Electric Association (our state's lobbying organization), we advocate initiatives in Pierre that promote reliable, affordable electric service.

At the regional level

Representing co-ops in western South Dakota, West Central's Mike McQuiston, a board member of West Central Electric and

Rushmore Electric, also sits on the BEPC Board of Directors. There, at monthly meetings, he provides local input. Additionally, on peak-electric-use days – when it's really hot or cold – we cycle voluntarily connected loads (turning the power on for a while, off for a while), including irrigation units, water heaters, AC units, etc. This prevents us from pushing the grid to its limits and reduces regional power costs.

At the federal level

Through the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association, we advocate initiatives that promote reliability and affordability throughout the region.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

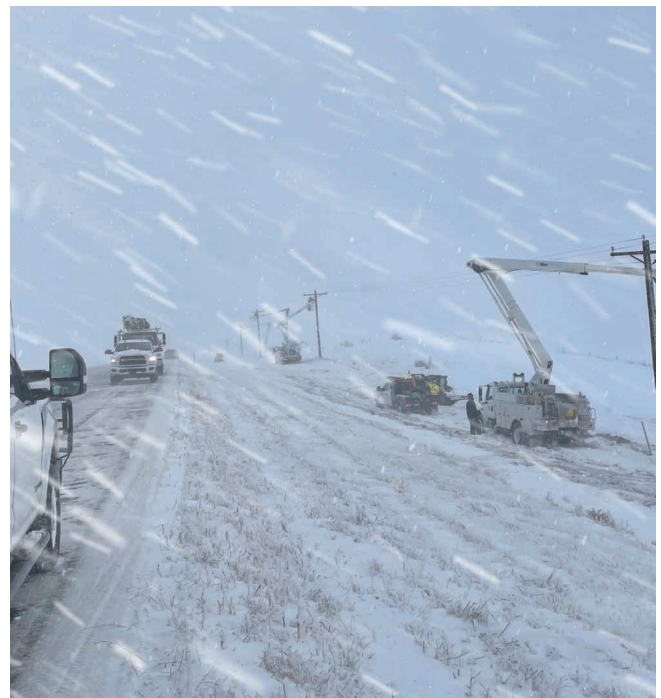
Sign up for our load management program (if you haven't already)

When critical, a few hours a month (for those who sign up), we remotely cycle water heaters, irrigation, and other electric loads to improve reliability during peak-use times. Our goal is to do this without causing you inconvenience while reducing the risk of outages and high wholesale power costs.

Start the conversation locally

Tell us what you think. Tell your co-op board member, your general manager and member services representative. Your voice is important to them. Also, don't forget to email/write a letter to your state and federal representatives.

Kory Hammerbeck is the CEO/General Manager of Rushmore Electric Power Cooperative in Rapid City, South Dakota. Hammerbeck has worked in the electric industry for 23 years.





Jocelyn Cihak takes a dual-credit calculus class offered by Northern State University. Photo courtesy of Northern State University

DUAL-CREDIT

High Schoolers are Gaining College Credits

Scott Waltman

Some graduates of South Dakota high schools are showing up on college campuses with a semester's worth of credits.

Sometimes even more.

The dual-credit program has proven to be both beneficial and popular since it was introduced by Gov. Dennis Daugaard in 2014.

It's easy to understand why. Here's how the program works. High school juniors and seniors at any South Dakota high school can take classes for which they get both high school and college credits. There are scores of

classes to choose from, and the cost to take them is steeply discounted.

For instance, once a student enrolls at any of the state's six public schools or universities, they pay between \$253.85 and \$260.55 per credit hour. That cost for a high school student taking a college-level class through the dual-credit program? It's a mere \$48.33 per credit hour.

That's why education officials in South Dakota love the program.

Nathan Lukkes, executive director and chief executive officer for the South Dakota Board of Regents, said providing an affordable education has been a priority for the regents in

recent years. Tuition freezes and an increased number of scholarships are part of that work. But so are dual-credit classes, he said.

Most of the dual-credit courses are general education classes – or generals, as college students often call them – he said. Through the program, students can have some of those courses out of the way before they even get their high school degrees.

The work done by the regents and the universities resulted in Forbes naming South Dakota the most affordable state in which to get a high school education, Lukkes said.

All six South Dakota public universities offer dual-credit classes, and the number of high school students taking advantage has been going up in recent years.

The number of students taking dual-credit classes changes throughout

the year, but there were 1,223 taking classes at Northern State University in Aberdeen in fall 2023 compared to 1,141 the year before. And at South Dakota State University in Brookings, the number jumped from 903 to 1,031 in fall 2023, according to statistics from the board of regents.

Here's how the systemwide numbers are trending based on the number of students taking dual-credit classes, according to the 2023 South Dakota Board of Regents Fact Book, which was issued during summer at the end of the most recent fiscal year.

2021-2022: 4,300

2020-2021: 3,919

2019-2020: 3,781

2018-2019: 3,168

The 10 most popular classes all had more than 150 students.

College algebra: 990

Fundamentals of speech: 905

Composition I (English 101): 830

General psychology: 513

U.S. history I: 379

American government: 317

Music appreciation (Music 101): 280

Introduction to sociology: 241

Biology survey I (Biology 101): 157

Biology survey lab: 156

In 2021, there were 9,523 dual-credit courses taken by South Dakota high school students, according to information from the regents. That number includes summer courses and students who took more than one course.

At Northwestern High School in Mellette, Superintendent Rob Lewis said about 25% of the juniors and seniors are taking advantage of dual-credit courses. One student has taken a full semester's worth, he said.

Do the math over the course of a semester, and that's a savings of north of \$2,300. And that doesn't take on-campus housing and food into account.

That's just a great deal for high school kids, Lewis said.

Chris Ulrich, the middle school and high school principal at Northwestern, agrees.

"It's a nice opportunity for kids

to get not only college credits, but also experience what college is like," he said.

And they get to do it within the comfort of their high school, Ulrich said. The program is a great transitional step leading from high school to college, he said.

AP, or Advanced Placement classes, were great, but dual-credit classes are even better, Lewis said.

AP classes are college-level courses taught by high school teachers. But they don't always equate to college credit. Dual-credit courses are taught by college instructors and professors and always result in college credit, if a student passes.

In South Dakota, dual-credit courses can be taken on any of the six public university campuses, in Sioux Falls, Rapid City, Huron, Pierre, Watertown and online.

And there's another benefit, Lukkes said. Dual-credit classes create a tie between South Dakota high school students and the regental schools. Any chance a high school student has a chance to engage with a state school creates a bond that could help keep that kid in South Dakota, he said.

Perhaps a Spearfish High School student takes a dual-credit class at Black Hills State University and it's a good experience. Maybe that high school graduate stays in town and enrolls at BHSU.

Lewis, too, said the program is a great way to keep students in South Dakota for college and perhaps beyond.

That's also a focus for the Aberdeen Development Corp., which is starting a program aimed at keeping more Northern graduates in town to start their professional careers.



Rhianna Troske, a student at Northwestern High School in Mellette, takes a dual-credit class while at school. Photo by Scott Waltman



Basin Electric Security and Response Services dispatchers take calls from rural electric cooperative members at Basin's headquarters in Bismarck, N.D.

SRS Dispatchers Keep Watch Over South Dakota Linemen

Shannon Marvel

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No matter the time of day or night, nor outdoor conditions, members can be assured their calls will be taken during an outage thanks to the Security and Response Services (SRS), a 24-hour dispatching service provided by Basin Electric in Bismarck, N.D.

When a rural electric cooperative is closed, the SRS team takes incoming outage calls from members. "Safety is the reason we exist," said Chad Reisenauer, Director of Community and Member Relations for Basin Electric.

The SRS program started in 1992. Reisenauer has been in charge of the

dispatch team for just over a decade.

"We started with one or two cooperatives that were asking us to monitor alarms and dispatch linemen. Back then it was nothing but a phone and a computer screen where we typed notes. Now we're integrated into outage management systems, we're doing all sorts of things to predict outages and this technology has grown leaps and bounds," Reisenauer said.

The team is comprised of 22 dispatchers total, with 18 of those positions dedicated to dispatching full time, while the other four dedicate half their time to dispatching and the other half to alarm monitoring. Each dispatcher works 12 hour shifts with

four to six dispatchers working per shift, depending on what they're expecting for the day. These shifts begin at 4 p.m. and end at 4 a.m.

"Our job is to be the cooperative during the hours they are closed," said Jolene Johnson, dispatch supervisor.

"We'll back them a little bit if they have a safety meeting or a funeral where they're shutting the office down. We oversee 18 cooperatives in South Dakota. We're a little bit of feast and famine," Johnson said.

Overall, Basin SRS oversees 13 states, from Washington to Illinois to Texas. On any one day, dispatchers could be dealing with a blizzard in the Dakotas, freezing rain in Nebraska and a tornado in Texas.

On a light day, the SRS team will receive 600 to 700 calls for assistance. That number quells in comparison to the number of calls SRS dispatchers receive during major storm events, such as the winter storms events in April of 2021, when a couple of huge blizzards came through the Northern Great Plains region. During that storm, the

SRS team took in around 33,000 calls for service in a 24-hour period.

“That’s a stressful day for our dispatchers. They’re getting beat up continually, then they have to get onto the next call and maintain the safety of the linemen,” Reisenauer said.

“The other type of stress is if Bismarck is getting hit by a blizzard. Then there’s the stress of employees getting into work.”

A new dispatch center equipped with a sleeping room for dispatchers was recently built at the headquarters in Bismarck, which has no windows and a locking door so dispatchers can get as good of sleep as they’re going to get if the weather prevents them from traveling back home.

Dispatchers are also trained to remain calm under high stress situations, especially when the caller on the other end has lost power and is having a stressful day as a result.

“We reassure them that crews are working on it. We do call backs to make sure they’re not left in the dark, no pun intended. We just remain calm, we can’t

let them get us worked up,” said Seth Neer, lead dispatcher.

“No one ever calls us to tell us thanks for keeping the lights on,” joked Reisenauer. “It’s the worst day in the world for them if they’ve got water freezing and pipes bursting. They’re mad about the situation and we stress to our dispatchers that we’re just the voice on the phone and focal point of their anger.”

Neer added that it’s one of those jobs where you have to have the right mentality and the calls are something you cannot take personally.

Dispatchers must successfully pass a training program, which is self-directed.

From the time the dispatcher is hired to the time they are allowed to go live on the phones typically takes two months.

Reisenauer said he wouldn’t put anyone on the phone that he feels wouldn’t be able to handle an emergency.

“This is lineman safety. We literally have their lives in our hands,” he added.

Johnson said the SRS dispatchers are

also taken out into the field to visit local member cooperatives, such as Moreau-Grand Rural Electric, so they can go out and see what linemen are looking at.

“It’s hard for any dispatcher to get a call about a transformer if they don’t know what a transformer looks like,” she said.

Dispatchers track the locations of all linemen and check in with them every 90 minutes. If they miss a status check, dispatch will be sending someone their way. Their duty is to keep track of linemen at all times.

“We’re talking to them everyday. They do get to be family in some ways,” Reisenauer said.

“It’s funny when we bring operations and linemen in and they’ll go ‘I recognize that voice!’ And it turns out they’re good friends with the dispatcher but they’ve never met in person before,” Reisenauer said.

For more information on the SRS team, including quarterly newsletters on the department’s activities, go to Basin Electric’s website – www.basinelectric.com.





FEB. 24, 2024
Nemo 500 Outhouse
Races & Chili Cookoff
 10 a.m.
 Nemo Guest Ranch
 Nemo, 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.

FEB. 3
Lake Hendricks Fishing Derby
 11 a.m.
 City Boat Landing
 Hendricks, MN

FEB. 9-10
Mardi Gras Weekend
 Historic Downtown Deadwood
 Deadwood, SD

FEB. 10
Polar Bear Chili Cook-Off
 11 a.m.
 Main Street
 Hill City, SD

FEB. 11
Beadle County Humane Society Bingo, Silent Auction & Bake Sale Benefit
 2 p.m.
 Huron Community Center
 Huron, SD

FEB. 18-20
MASC presents Disaster! the Musical
 Vesta Community Center
 Vesta, MN

FEB. 22
The Starlets: Pop Female Trio
Aberdeen Community Concert Association
 7 p.m.
 Johnson Fine Arts Center NSU
 Aberdeen, SD

FEB. 23-24
Women in Blue Jeans Conference
 Highland Conference Center
 Mitchell, SD

MARCH 1-3
National Pheasant Fest & Quail Classic
 Denny Sanford Premier Center
 Sioux Falls, SD

MARCH 2
Live on Stage
 High Country Guest Ranch
 Hill City, SD

MARCH 7
Elevate Rapid City Economic Summit
 8 a.m.
 The Monument
 Rapid City, SD

MARCH 9
French Toast/Pancake Feed & Health Fair
 8:30 a.m.
 Tea Community Building
 Tea, SD

MARCH 9
SunCatcher Therapeutic Riding Academy & 3rd Annual Shamrock Gala and Benefit Auction
 5 p.m.
 Alex Johnson Ballroom
 Rapid City, SD

MARCH 11-15
Black Hills Institute's 50th Anniversary Celebration
 Hill City, SD

MARCH 15
East Dakota Chapter NWFT 31st Annual Banquet
 Ramkota Exhibit Hall
 Sioux Falls, SD

MARCH 16
Live On Stage
 High Country Guest Ranch
 Hill City, SD

MARCH 16-17
Hill City Antiques, Railroad & Collectibles Show & Sale
 Hill City Center
 Hill City, SD

MARCH 17
St. Patrick's Day Green Pancakes and Sausage
 8:30 a.m.
 RVUMC
 Rapid City, SD

MARCH 20-23
Hill City Restaurant Week
 Hill City, SD

MARCH 23
Tyndall VFW Vegas Night
 7:30 p.m.
 Tyndall Community Center
 Tyndall, SD

MARCH 23
Hill City Children's Easter Egg Hunt
 Visitor Info Center
 Hill City, SD

MARCH 24
Ham Dinner & Silent Auction
 11:45 a.m.
 RVUMC
 Rapid City, SD

MARCH 24
Run for the Rangers
 Hill City, SD

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