



# COOPERATIVE CONNECTIONS



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# Annual Meeting Review

## An Excerpt from Jeff's Annual Meeting Speech



**Jeff Birkeland**  
CEO/Manager

I want to thank all of you who attended your electric cooperative's 74th annual meeting. If you attended, you might have noticed the American flag held up between two bucket trucks outside? I think we all have a great appreciation and respect for our flag, but it has far more meaning to me when it's held up with two West Central Electric bucket trucks. Maybe you noticed our solar trailer and all-electric Ford F150 Lightning. We are not trying to promote solar energy or an all-electric pickup, our only goal is to learn about these technologies and relate them to real-world situations. We are finding out how they work and what the costs are associated with each one. That way when you, our members, ask us questions, we can answer them with valid data and not with data we read about on the internet. That way, you can make an educated decision if solar or an electric vehicle works for you.

Looking back at the last couple of years, one item stands out regarding how it negatively affects West Central. It also continues to affect all the membership. That one item is Inflation.

Your co-op has seen many cost increases over the last couple of years. Just like everyone here, prices are going up on many things that we need to continue to operate the co-op. Things such as equipment, fuel costs, insurance, and many more have gone up, but the main item I want to touch on is the material we use to build and maintain the power lines. Not only is the material hard to get, but its cost has increased by over 350% in some cases. I'm going to give you some cost comparisons using "pre-COVID" costs and what the current cost is for these material items. A 25 KVA transformer that most of you have at your house, used to cost \$622; today, it costs \$1,830 for a 194% increase. A 35-foot pole, which you see all over our system, used to cost \$217; today, it costs \$710 for a 227% increase. #2 ACSR wire, which is our most common overhead wire, used to cost \$.10 a foot; today, it costs \$.45 a foot for a 350% increase. If the cost increases weren't bad enough, the lead times to get this material is crazy. It takes nine months to get a meter, 14 months to get wire, and 18 months to get a transformer. It's hard to fill out a transformer order 18 months in advance and know precisely what you will need. These long lead times make planning difficult. It is for this reason that we are sitting on more inventory than we previously have. When you know it takes 18 months to get transformers, and you know Mother Nature, with her storms, can cause devastating damage, we prefer to plan for the worst, and carry more inventory.

Speaking of storms, we do have some good news to report about last June's storms. I am sure everyone remembered what happened June 11-13, 2022. Those are the dates we were hit with severe storms, three nights in a row. Generally, a storm will strike and be a one-and-done deal. Never in West Central Electric's history have we experienced three nights of severe thunderstorms. It was very frustrating for us, and I can't imagine what our affected members felt. The one thing I will guarantee you, and I mean this from my heart when the weather is at its worst, we are at our best! Your West Central Electric linemen are second to no one! And when I say linemen, I also mean the operations department and all other employees. You see the linemen out there busting

their butts getting the power restored, but we have a great supporting cast in the office planning and coordinating, making sure things get done safely and efficiently.

Last year's storm cost \$1,725,071. Luckily, FEMA became an option, so we applied for monetary assistance. Generally, it takes two, maybe four years to complete the paperwork and get reimbursed. With great thanks to our employees, we received a \$1,459,448 payment

## Happy Thanksgiving!

West Central Electric will be closed  
Nov. 23-24 for Thanksgiving Day.  
We wish you a happy and safe holiday!

## COOPERATIVE CONNECTIONS

### WEST CENTRAL ELECTRIC

(USPS No. 018-988)

#### President

Shad Riggle, Hayes

#### Vice President

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#### Secretary/Treasurer

Marty Hansen, Philip

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Jim Willert, Belvidere

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David Larson, Chamberlain

#### CEO/Manager

Jeff Birkeland, Murdo

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Safe, Reliable Service  
to our Member Owners.**

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**Call 605-669-8100  
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Design assistance by SDREA

## Annual Meeting Update, Continued

in less than a year. This is a monumental feat. Getting reimbursed quickly preserves our cash, and lessens our borrowing, and that equates to rate stability. We haven't had a rate increase since 2016, and we don't foresee one in 2024.

I think we are all aware or have at least heard about the federal government and all the money they are pumping into the economy. Included in this money is the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act. Within this act, money is available to improve grid reliability, and West Central has applied for two grants totaling \$2,570,000. If approved, this would allow us to bury 18 miles of three-phase underground and retire the overhead line. In general, the grant works like this. We bury 18 miles of underground wire, and after the project is complete, we submit the paperwork, and we receive 70% reimbursement of the costs. It's hard to beat a deal like that. How often does someone reimburse you 70% of the cost to improve your system? We should know by late fall if our application is successful.

In 2001, your board of directors decided to help our membership by getting involved in economic development. We partnered with the United States Department of Agriculture, and in December of 2001, we awarded the Philip Hospital with a \$716,000 low-interest loan.

Fast forward 22 years and I am pleased to report that West Central has helped our members acquire 4.4 million dollars in economic development loans. This year our members received \$785,000 in economic development loans! Philip Health Services received \$300,000, Fun Time Rentals located in Ft. Pierre received \$325,000, and the Milesville Fire Department received \$60,000.

Now, I don't want anyone to get excited and think that all this money is coming from West Central Electric. West Central Electric received money from USDA for our revolving loan fund, and we currently have \$300,000 in that revolving loan fund that can be loaned out to local member businesses. West Central's revolving loan fund is used for community betterment. The larger loans and more personalized loans are sent to the Rural Electric Economic Development Fund located in Madison, S.D. If anyone has any ideas or questions on economic development, please contact us as we are always looking to improve our communities.



## AUTO PAY PROMOTION

**What:** West Central Electric is giving away six \$100 bill credits that will be applied to the accounts of drawing winners.

**Who:** West Central Electric Members

- Four winners will be drawn from newly signed up autopay accounts
- Two winners will be drawn from existing autopay accounts

**When:** Drawing will take place on Monday, December 11th.

**Contact our office at  
605.669.8100 or use  
our SmartHub app to  
sign up today!**

# Drowsy Driving

**Drowsy Driving Prevention Week (Nov. 5-11, 2023)**, held every year during the first full week of November, is a good time to remember that drowsy driving is impaired driving.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, about 1 in 25 adult drivers report having fallen asleep while driving in the previous 30 days, and many more admit to driving when they were sleep-deprived.

These startling figures show how prevalent drowsy driving is. What drivers may not realize is how much drowsy driving puts themselves – and others – at risk. In fact, an estimated 6,400 people died annually in crashes involving drowsy driving, according to the National Sleep Foundation.

### Impact of Drowsiness on Driving

Driving while drowsy is similar to driving under influence of alcohol.

- Drivers' reaction times, awareness of hazards and ability to sustain attention all worsen the drowsier the driver.
- Driving after going more than 20 hours without sleep is the equivalent of driving with a blood-alcohol concentration of 0.08% – the U.S. legal limit.
- You are three times more likely to be in a car crash if you are fatigued.

A driver might not even know when he or she is fatigued because signs of fatigue are hard to identify. Some people may also experience micro-sleep – short, involuntary periods of inattention. In the 4 or 5 seconds a driver experiences micro-sleep, at highway speed, the vehicle will travel the length of a football field.

### Prevalence of Drowsy Driving Crashes

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration estimates that every year about 100,000 police-reported, drowsy-driving crashes result in nearly 800 fatalities and about 50,000 injuries. The real number may be much higher, however, as it is difficult to determine whether a driver was drowsy at the time of a crash.

A study by the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety estimated that 328,000 drowsy driving crashes occur annually. That's more than three times the police-reported number. The same study found that 109,000 of those drowsy driving crashes resulted in an injury and about 6,400 were fatal. The researchers suggest the prevalence of drowsy driving fatalities is more than 350% greater than reported.

Beyond the human toll is the economic one. NHTSA estimates fatigue-related crashes resulting in injury or death cost society \$109 billion annually, not including property damage.

### Interventions for Drowsy Driving

Drowsy driving affects everyone, including adolescents and teens, who are not getting enough sleep (according to the CDC, it is recommended that teens get 8-10 hours of sleep each night). That means interventions focusing on this age group can help reduce drowsy

driving. One such intervention is for parents to incorporate discussions and rules on drowsy driving while completing their parent-teen driving agreements.

#### Other ways to reduce drowsy driving include:

- **Crash avoidance technologies:** New and existing safety technologies, such as drowsiness alert and lane departure warnings, can detect common drowsy driving patterns and warn drivers to stay in their lane or take a break
- **University interventions:** College students receive less than average sleep, with some estimates at less than six hours a night; education programs aimed at college students may help curb drowsy driving and instill healthier behaviors that can last into adulthood
- **Getting more sleep:** According to the American Academy of Sleep Medicine and the Sleep Research Society, adults should get seven or more hours of sleep each night
- **Medication labels:** An article by Consumer Reports found that side-effect warnings are not always clear; new labeling guidelines may help drivers understand when to drive or not drive after taking these medications
- **Employers:** Workplaces with strong off-the-job safety and health programs can include key information on getting sufficient sleep and refraining from driving drowsy

*Source: National Safety Council*



### Don't Fly Kites Near Power Lines!

#### Jason Willman, Age 9

Jason Willman advises people it's not safe to fly kites around power lines. Jason is the son of Dave and April Willman from Yankton, S.D., members of Clay-Union Electric Corporation.

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.



# EASY CROCKPOT CREATIONS

## MOM'S ROAST

### Ingredients:

3-5 lbs. beef roast  
1 can beefy mushroom soup  
1 pkg. au jus (dry)

### Method

Place roast in crock pot at bedtime. Mix au jus and soup together and pour over the roast. Cook on low. Roast will be ready to serve in its own gravy for dinner tomorrow.

Elaine Rieck  
Harrisburg, S.D.

## CREAMY GARDEN ROTINI

### Ingredients:

1 lb. cooked and drained sausage or beef  
1 large can (26 oz.) cream of chicken soup  
1 soup can of milk  
1 can (14.5 oz.) chicken broth soup  
1 tbsp. Italian seasoning  
1 cup fresh mushrooms  
6 cups fresh spinach  
1 pkg. Garden Rotini

### Method

Add ingredients in the order given to the instant pot. Pressure cook on high for 20 minutes. Allow pressure to reduce to normal for 10 minutes, then serve! You will need an instant pot for this recipe!

Jean Cave  
Sioux Falls, S.D.

## CROCKPOT CASHEW CHICKEN

### Ingredients:

1 pkg. slow cookers limited edition cashew chicken seasoning  
2 lbs. boneless skinless chicken thighs, cubed  
1 cup frozen chopped onion and pepper blend  
1/3 cup water  
3 tbsps. soy sauce  
2 tbsps. ketchup  
1 cup cashew pieces  
2 green onions, finely chopped

### Method

Place chicken and vegetables in slow cooker. Mix seasoning, water, soy sauce, and ketchup in bowl until well blended. Pour over chicken and vegetables; stir to coat. Cover. Cook eight hours on low or four hours on high. Stir in cashews. Sprinkle with green onions. Serve over cooked rice, if desired. If cooking on low, decrease water to 1/4 cup.

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.

# Consumer Guide to Stovetops



**Miranda Boutelle**  
Efficiency Services  
Group

**Q:** I'm considering a new stovetop. Can you explain the different options available?

**A:** I have found that most people who enjoy cooking have pretty strong opinions about their preferred fuel choice: gas or electric. Induction is a newer option for home stovetops, which is growing in popularity.

According to a study completed by Electric Power Research Institute, 74% of the energy from an electric range is transferred to food, versus 40% on a gas range. Induction cooktops are the most efficient option at 90% energy transferred to food. Regardless of your stovetop choice, right-sizing pots and pans to the burner is important to avoid wasting energy.

Electric cooktops are a tried-and-true option for many homes, and they are typically the most affordable option. Glass top models offer a cleaner look than the traditional coil elements and are easier to clean but tend to be a bit more expensive. The most common complaint about electric cooking is that the heating controls are not as fast or precise.

Many home chefs prefer gas stovetops because you can easily see the size of the flame, a visual clue that helps you control the cooking temperature. Temperature adjustments are also faster and more precise than on electric stovetops. However, there are some concerns with safety and indoor air quality associated with gas stoves because gas emissions can be harmful to your health. To help reduce indoor air pollution, always use your exhaust fan when using your gas stovetop. Ideally, your exhaust fan should be vented to the exterior of the home.

Access is also a consideration. Natural gas is typically available in more populated areas, while rural customers may need a propane storage tank installed outside their homes to use a gas stove.

An induction stovetop can offer a higher-end cooking experience than a standard electric stovetop, and some people prefer it to cooking on gas.

Induction stovetops use electromagnetic energy to heat the pan, reducing energy waste. Instead of heating the stove's surface, they heat the pans themselves. Because the pans heat directly, you don't have to wait for the heat to transfer like you do with gas and electric stovetops, resulting in faster cooking times. They also allow for more precise temperature control, which can deliver better results.

Cool burners offer additional safety benefits. You don't have the indoor air quality issues associated with gas, and they won't ignite items like dishrags or paper left on the stovetop.

Induction cooktops are typically more expensive than similar gas or electric models. They also require you to use specific cookware. Stainless steel and cast-iron cookware are both compatible with induction cooktops. If you want to test your pots and pans to see if they are induction compatible, do the magnet test. If a magnet sticks to the bottom of the pan, it will work on an induction stove.

Cooking on an induction stovetop takes a little time to get used to, but many people have made the switch and enjoy the experience.

If you are remodeling and have a gas range, consider running electrical to support an induction cooktop if you change your mind in the future. Setting up the power supply during a remodel can offer significant savings.

If you are considering making the switch, be sure to keep an eye on any incentives for your state or region. A rebate for replacing your gas stove with an electric one may be available under The Inflation Reduction Act.





# RattleSnake Randy

Scott Waltman

Thousands of prospectors flocked to the Black Hills after the 1847 expedition of Gen. George Custer and accompanying stories that there were riches to be found in the streams and beneath the pine trees.

South Dakota wasn't even a state back then. But when folks heard there was "gold in them thar hills" of western Dakota Territory, they didn't want to miss out.

That was the onset of the Black Hills Gold Rush, which peaked in 1876 and 1877 not far from the town that's now named for Custer, according to a history account published by Black Hills Visitor Magazine.

Eventually, of course, the discovery of gold led to full-scale mining, much of it near the outlaw and gambling town of Deadwood.

While the big mines have since closed, visitors to the Black Hills can still try their hand at panning for a little gold.

That's where RattleSnake Randy can help out. He'll take folks to a claim of his not far from Rockville for an authentic gold-panning experience. He can't guarantee gold will be found, but said that for those who work at it, the odds of finding a few flakes are good. And he does guarantee fun.



Randy first went panning more than 20 years ago in California.

"Once I did my first pan, I was hooked on it."

Like the prospectors of old, he had the fever.

Randy said he always had an interest in gold, which grew from watching old westerns in which the outlaws would steal gold belonging to the cowboys.

He started Black Hills Gold Mining a few years back after a series of health issues, which included five back surgeries and an aortobifemoral bypass surgery because of problems with some of his blood vessels. It all changed Randy's perspective on life, including the realization that there are more important things than money.

Now, he spends the spring and summer months offering a unique experience to folks from around the world.

"To me, it's to make a memory for a family," he said.

He offers three four-hour gold-panning tours a day with no more than five people per group. Randy's been on a dozen or so TV shows, including one shown in Germany, Austria and Switzerland. And he's taken international rock star Ozzie Osbourne out for a day of panning.

"He called me a lunatic, so if that's any indication..." Randy said with a chuckle. "I took it as a compliment coming from him."

Randy said Osbourne is a history buff, which sparked his interest in trying to find some gold.

The panning experiences are a



combination of science, geology, physics and gold-mining history, Randy said.

Going out with the expectation to have fun is the best plan, he said. With that mindset, finding some gold adds to the excitement. And there's something to realize when the panning yields a little gold.

"When you find it, you're the first one to ever see that gold," Randy said.

His peak months are June through August, but he leads tours from whenever the temperatures warm up until the claim freezes.

Oh, and as for the name RattleSnake Randy? Well, he put a rattlesnake rattle on his gold mining cap, which led to the whole cap being covered with snake rattles. So, a neighbor started calling him Rattlesnake Randy. The name fits in more than one way as others call on him to remove the venomous serpents.

More often, though, he's leading people on panning adventures or exploring the nine other claims he has in the Back Hills.

Randy said it's smart to book early as his business has been increasing every summer. A panning adventure costs \$50 for adults and \$40 for kids 5 to 16. To book or learn more, visit [blackhillsgoldpanning.com](http://blackhillsgoldpanning.com).





Veterans enjoying their stay at Wings of Valor.

# WINGS OF VALOR

## A Veteran's Retreat

Shannon Marvel

shannon.marvel@sdrea.coop

Wings of Valor Lodge isn't just a hunting retreat offering veterans a good time and a free pheasant hunt, it's a place for them to come home.

The non-profit organization offers all U.S. military veterans an all-expense paid hunt in the heart of pheasant country, about five miles south of Parker, South Dakota.

The organization runs almost entirely on volunteers, donations and sponsorships and has already served more than 500 veterans from over 40 states since it began operations in 2019.

Sean Adams, the organization's president and co-founder, said the idea to open a hunting lodge came after discussions with the organization's now-CEO Bruce Weller back in 2018.

Weller owned a private hunting lodge called Birds, Bucks and Berries, and was host to Adams and other veterans during his annual veterans' hunt.

"Bruce was saying how the veterans' hunt was always the best day of the year, so I said, we can make every day the best day of the year if you want," said Adams.

Adams, who was grievously injured while serving in Afghanistan resulting in a double amputation of his legs in 2012, said he was well-versed in the non-profit community by the time he and Weller began discussing opening a hunting lodge that served veterans.

"I know pretty much how it works. If you do what you say, do it on time, do it well, serve veterans with a level of professionalism, and have a little faith, people will come," Adams said.

"From that conversation to Nov. 1, 2019, we worked on build site plans that I designed with one of the volunteers. We took a pavilion area that (Weller) used for weddings and put chalk lines everywhere, which is how we mapped out a building plan."

Adams said he rolled his wheelchair around each room, and if he hit a chalk line, he'd remark the line to ensure it was handicap accessible. That was in





**Above:** CPL USMC (RET) Sean Adams

**Right:** Sean Adams recovers in a hospital after suffering serious injuries in an IED explosion in Afghanistan in 2011.



January of 2019. Eleven months later, the lodge had been built and a group of veterans came to hunt under the newly established Wings of Valor Lodge.

Adams said a premise of Wings of Valor Lodge is to welcome veterans' home to something that's not chaotic, a place where they can find purpose and peace.

There's no religious angle, nor any requirements other than having taken the oath to serve our country for a veteran to have their travel expenses and entire hunting trip paid for by the non-profit.

"My generation fought in a war that was religious based," Adams explained. "We do have a spiritual setting, but we don't press anything. We never want a veteran to feel that they are oppressed by any sort of a faith."

Whether a veteran is religious, Christian, Muslim, atheist, or simply spiritual, they will be amongst others who understand what they've been through.

"No veteran is broken, they just need to come home," Adams said.

"God did not call the qualified, he called the unqualified that were willing to do

whatever was asked. Don't think because you did something overseas that your any worse than the pastor in the pulpit. We're all sinners on this earth."

Nature is also a powerful tool that Adams believes helps mend the mind, body and spirit. It's peaceful, which he said is the type of environment veterans need.

"You need all those to regroup yourself back in society. It's really hard to come out of a war, or wars, and describe that to the average human being," Adams said.

The lodge has hosted veterans of World War II, the Korean War and Vietnam to

veterans who have served in the wars in Iraq, Afghanistan and Operation Desert Storm.

Many of the veterans that have come to the lodge have never had a chance to heal or "come home", Adams said.

Some of those

men were Marines that Adams served with directly a decade ago.

"They saw me in an IED blast. They didn't have time to heal. They were able to see that I was okay and it was time for them to start healing. They had given enough to the country. It was time to start the healing process," Adams said.

"We also had a veteran talk about

Vietnam. He hadn't talked about it since 1968," Adams said.

Combat veterans, regardless of where they served or experienced warfare, establish a connection with one another at the lodge.

Older veterans find purpose in helping their younger counterparts. Adams said the connection can be overwhelming at times for the Vietnam veterans because of the newfound sense of purpose they find in these interactions.

Adams said raising kids and having companionship with your wife or husband is meaningful to veterans, but they often go without the relationships they had with their fellow soldiers they had beside them in the heat of battle.

"Giving someone millions of dollars, houses, or trip – that's great. But that's only mending the problem. Giving someone a sense of purpose is something we have to do," Adams said.

"When the Vietnam veterans tell my generation 'I get it, and it won't last forever', it gives the Vietnam guys a sense of purpose. The longer you hold it in the deeper it gets. That's something we realized at Walter Reed. We started getting off our medications the more we talked about what happened."

Adams said any veteran who wants to come and hunt at the Wings of Valor Lodge need only apply.

Individual applications come to the lodge free of charge. That means the organization will cover the cost of travel and any other expenses incurred to ensure the veteran doesn't pay a dime out of their own pocket.

To apply for a hunt or learn more about Wings of Valor Lodge, go to [www.wingsofvalorlodge.org](http://www.wingsofvalorlodge.org).



A handicap accessible bedroom at Wings of Valor lodge





# 74<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting Recap



On Oct. 4, West Central Electric held their annual meeting at the school auditorium in Midland, S.D. An estimated 362 guests partook in the evening's events which included the meeting, meal, and prize giveaways.

Board President Shad Riggle officially called the meeting to order at 5 p.m., and Pastor Dallas McKinley gave the invocation. Military veterans and active service

duty members were recognized for their sacrifices and the national anthem was played.

The board's report was given by Shad Riggle and among other things, Philip wind project.

"One of the most important things to understand is that West Central will not receive power from these turbines. The energy generated would go to the WAPA substation and then, from there, travel to the open market," explained Shad.

In his speech, CEO/Manager Jeff Birkeland informed members of inflation effects and price increases, materials shortages and lead times, the 2022 June storm FEMA reimbursements, the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act applications, and economic development.

"West Central has helped our members acquire 4.4

million dollars in economic development loans," Birkeland states.

Board Vice President Ken Miller presented service awards to Murdo Lineman JayTee Sealey for five years, Murdo Administrative Assistant Carrie Lolley for 10 years, and Purchasing Agent/Lineman Greg Glaze for 25 years. Manager Birkeland then recognized retiring Mike Trapp for 29 years of service as a dedicated employee of West Central Electric.

Attorney David Larson presented his legal report and announced that four directors were appointed to three-year terms – James Smith, representing Lyman County; Paul Patterson, representing Jones County; Marty Hansen, representing Haakon County; and Mike McQuistion, representing Stanley County.

Guest speaker Kory Hammerbeck, Rushmore Electric general manager, gave an update on generation shortages and problems in constructing new power generation.

The meeting featured a free roast beef dinner prepared and served by the Midland Volunteer Fire Department. All attendees received a cooler bag and additional prizes, and cash drawings were held throughout the evening.



A \$300 cash prize was awarded to each of the following members: (left to right) Angie Dolittle, Clint Caldwell, Jon Johnson, Dallas Young, and Robin Cromwell.



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# Electric Heat Meters

The 2023-2024 heating season is here. Oct. 1 marked the beginning of the heating season and West Central's electric heat rate.

To receive the maximum benefit of our electric heat rate please check to make sure your heat meter breaker is turned on.

If you have electric heat but do not have a heat meter, please contact us at 669-8100 for more information about our electric heat rate.

If you are planning to update your current heating system or install electric heat on a new service, please call West Central Electric about the benefits of the electric heat rate and the rebates that are available for cooperative members.





Dignity courtesy of Travel South Dakota

# DIGNITY

## Celebrating American Indian Heritage

Scott Waltman

Rising from the prairie land as it gives way to bluffs on the east side of the Missouri River is a spectacular sculpture commemorating both South Dakota's 125 anniversary and the state's original inhabitants.

Dignity of the Earth and Sky was built by Sturgis-based sculptor Dale Claude Lamphere, who used to be the state's poet laureate.

The sculpture was erected in 2016 after Norm and Eunabel McKie announced it as a gift to South Dakota upon the state's quasiquicentennial in 2014.

Dignity towers 50 feet above the ground, beckoning motorists as they travel along Interstate 90. From the

east, it's the gateway to West River en route to the beautiful Black Hills. From the west, it's a sign to travelers that they are closer to the Minnesota border than the state's most popular playgrounds that range from Wall to Spearfish to Hot Springs.

Ashley Riehle of Sylvania, Ohio, which is on the northwestern outskirts of Toledo and just south of the Michigan

border, said the stretch of I-90 alone makes South Dakota one of the best road trip states in the nation.

She visited South Dakota in 2021, driving from Sioux Falls to the Black Hills and back and twice stopping at the Dignity monument. She planned to visit the sculpture during her drive but said the Chamberlain area also doubled as a logical place to take a break.

As a history buff, Riehle appreciates







Jeremy and Stacey Waltner of Freeman visit the Dignity of Earth and Sky sculpture in 2018.

both the beauty and the significance of Dignity.

"I thought it was great that South Dakota acknowledges the first people that occupied the state," she said.

Many states don't, she said, and she doesn't know of any such significant recognitions in Ohio or Michigan.

Jeremy Waltner of Freeman, South Dakota, also appreciates the sculpture on multiple levels.

"It is as impressive as you can imagine just in terms of both size and impact," he said.

Being a South Dakotan, he knew of Dignity and that he wanted to visit. But he also wanted to make sure his wife Stacey, daughter Ella and son Oliver could share the experience. They stopped during a trip west in summer 2018.

The sculpture pays homage to South Dakota's Native American population, setting it apart from so many other tourist stops in the state, Waltner said.

"It's education as much as it is art," he said, adding that the context behind Dignity is critical.

Three Native American women from Rapid City served as models for the sculpture, which was created east of the town in an isolated area along the Cheyenne River.

Lamphere's other creations include work in the South Dakota State Capitol in Pierre and the Arch of Dreams in Sioux Falls. He's done commissioned portraits of Bob and Dolores Hope, Burl Ives, Walter Annenberg, George and Eleanor McGovern and others, according to his website.

For Dignity, he had a specific goal.

"I wanted something that would really honor the indigenous people of the Great Plains, and I kept that in mind all the time. I made the work reflect the name that it has of Dignity, and I think that's part of what makes it work so well," Lamphere has said of his creation.

Riehle noted that the star quilt Dignity wears has meaning.

It's comprised of more than 100 blue diamonds as Dignity holds it behind her back in her outstretched arms.

In Native American culture, star quilts are a sign of respect and are often given as gifts to honor somebody for a substantial achievement in their life.

Including the quilt was a nice touch that took some planning, Riehle said, because it's a direct tie to the Lakota culture.

While there is a plaque at Dignity that briefly tells the story of the sculpture, Waltner said he's not sure most people realize the history.

In fact, he said, he's not sure if most people set out to visit Dignity or just happen across her as they zip through the heart of the state on the interstate.

"It's South Dakota's greatest conversational piece outside of two gigantic granite carvings in the Black Hills," Waltner said, referring to Mount Rushmore and the Crazy Horse Memorial.

Either way, he said, people who take time to admire the grand piece of art wind up learning a little bit.

When he stopped with his family, he said there was a good crowd of people visiting about the sculpture, smiling as they looked on in awe and waiting in line so they could get their pictures taken

with Dignity.

Waltner said he has stopped to see the sculpture twice on his own.

Riehle met friends from Denver and Chicago in the Black Hills as part of her trip. She had been to South Dakota before but got to see and do much more in 2021. She visited Sioux Falls, Mitchell's Corn Palace, Deadwood, the Badlands, Wall Drug, Spearfish Canyon, Custer State Park, the Chapel in the Hills, Pactola Lake, Palisades State Park and other popular places.

All were fun, but Dignity was special, she said, because it is a reflection of the true foundation of South Dakota's history.

"So much history focuses on when the white settlers got there," Riehle said.

Dignity is deeper.

The McKies donated \$1 million to the Dignity project. Less than a decade later, that investment helps the thousands upon thousands of people who stop just east of Chamberlain each year take a moment to remember and acknowledge the rich history of South Dakota's first citizens.

## Additional Facts:

- November is National American Indian Heritage Month. It's a time to remember and celebrate the important contributions of Native people and their cultures, traditions, and histories.
- The first state to declare and celebrate an American Indian Day was New York on the second Saturday in May 1916.
- In 1990, the month of November was approved by a joint resolution and signed by President George H. W. Bush as "National American Indian Heritage Month."
- Central Electric Cooperative proudly powers Dignity and the rest area where thousands of visitors stop each year to celebrate the beauty of the American Indian.



Scott Pudwill, director of the Aberdeen Public School District's A-TEC Academy shows school board members one of three electric vehicles purchased for the academy's automotive class. *Photo courtesy of The Aberdeen Insider*

# The Rise of Career and Technical Education

**Scott Waltman**

Many high school graduates in South Dakota are veering from the traditional path to college and a four-year degree.

Career and technical education classes continue to grow in popularity with school districts expanding their offerings and academies and seeing more students interested in those classes.

During the 2021-22 school year, there were 25,282 South Dakota public school students taking some type of career or technical training class, according to information from the South Dakota Department of Education. That number includes students who took more than one class.

Those are the most recent complete numbers available from the state.

More and more, those classes get young people prepared for jobs that offer

good wages and benefits. The perception of what, decades ago, was called “tech school” has changed, and the number of students taking classes that focus on agriculture, manufacturing, hospitality and tourism, and architecture and construction continues to rise.

In recent months, the Aberdeen Public School District expanded its A-TEC Academy on the campus of Central High School. The project cost roughly \$3.6 million.

New spaces for agriculture, family and consumer sciences, networking, and broadcast courses were added, though the district offers other career and technical education classes.

The agriculture program is especially popular, said Scott Pudwill, the district's A-TEC Academy director.

Before the expansion, he said, all of the ag classes were in one room. Now, ag

classes have a multipurpose space with tables and sinks and the academy has a new greenhouse.

Students were starting to put plant beds together at the end of September and, Pudwill said, the kids will be able to monitor them during the winter months with the new facility.

He said ag classes average about 105 students per term, which is nine weeks. The automotive program is almost as popular with about 400 students taking classes over the course of a school year, he said.

Career and technical education classes are also popular in the Harrisburg School District, said Breanne Lynch, the district's career and technical education coordinator.

Harrisburg offers classes in 13 of the 16 clusters the state has, she said, and about half of the 1,700 students in grades nine through 12 take career and tech classes.

If you included internships, work-based learning and other options, about 90% of high school students have a career or technical education-related class or experience during their four years, Lynch said.

The district continues to offer more



options. For example, Lynch said, a home builders academy opened in 2019. That first year, students built a full house. Now, they are working on tiny homes that will eventually go to veterans, she said.

In Aberdeen, A-TEC students have built cabins for the city's Wylie Park campground.

Both districts have partnerships with their local home builders associations.

Harrisburg's automotive program teams with Schulte Subaru in town. As is the case with many career and technical education classes, that gives students the chance to get hands-on experience.

Lynch said that when Schulte buys cars at auction, students have the chance to diagnose what problems there might be. They also do basic work like change the oil on district staff cars. That gives them experience in what it's like to work at a quick stop, she said.

Harrisburg students in the business management and administration cluster operate the Roar Store at the school. It offers snacks and drinks to students when meals aren't being served, Lynch said. For managing the store, including tasks like working with wholesalers to purchase products, the kids are paid in Roar Bucks they can spend at the store.

The aim of all of the career and technical education classes is to prepare students for the workforce, Lynch said. Workforce development is a prime focus of state leaders, she said.

Aberdeen Central's A-TEC Academy had a shop before the expansion. But students will get to try their hand at something new this school year.

The auto curriculum now has three electric cars, Pudwill said. Students will be able to build them, then the vehicles can be taken apart and used in future years.

Once finished, the cars will look somewhat like a dune buggy, he said. But they can be licensed and driven on streets and roads.

Even if students who take career and technical education classes choose another profession, they'll still have the skills to, for

example, make home or vehicle repairs, Pudwill said.

For those who go onto a postsecondary school, many of the programs are one or two years, Pudwill said. So students get into the workforce quicker while accruing less debt than they would at a traditional four-year college or university, he said.

Bobbie Jo Donovan is the college and career readiness manager for the Rapid City Public School District and past president of the South Dakota Association for Career and Technical Education. The number of high school students taking those courses is certainly on the uptick, she said.

One of the biggest challenges is finding qualified, certified teachers to lead the classes, she said.

Sometimes there's a community member with a strong background in a profession who isn't certified but would make a good teaching candidate, Donovan said. The state has programs to help those folks, who, because of their career experience, can often offer a wealth of knowledge to students, she said.

So many careers can start in high school with career and tech classes, Donovan said, and school districts want to be able to help those young people, she said.

Lynch said the Harrisburg district also offers opportunities to students in kindergarten

through eighth grade. Career learning can begin as early as age 4, so keeping students interested and curious in career and technical education options will pay dividends in the future, she said.

"We also know that students who take multiple CTE classes are more engaged in learning and see a higher graduation rate," said Nancy Van Der Weide, public information specialist with the state Department of education.

"Statewide, 82% of high school students graduated on time in the 2021-22 school year, but 94% of students who were actively involved in CTE graduated on time," she said.



Harrisburg students working on a car in the automotive class.  
Photo courtesy of Harrisburg School District



Students in the Harrisburg School District's home builders academy have built a full house. Photo courtesy of John Klemme



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.

**OCT. 24-28**  
**Grey Goose Halloween Display**  
 6 p.m.  
 19988 Grey Goose Rd.  
 Pierre, SD

**OCT. 28**  
**Hill City Children's Boo Bash and Pumpkin Festival**  
 Hill City Visitor's Center  
 Hill City, SD  
 605-574-2368

**OCT. 28-29**  
**Dakota Territory Gun Collectors Association**  
 Ramkota Hotel Exhibit Hall  
 Sioux Falls, SD  
 605-731-9155

**NOV. 3**  
**Plankinton Service Club Fun Night**  
 7 p.m.  
 Aurora County Ag Building  
 Plankinton, SD

**NOV. 4-5**  
**Benson's Flea Market**  
 W.H. Lyons Fairgrounds  
 Sioux Falls, SD

**NOV. 5**  
**American Legion Post 15 Pancake Breakfast**  
 8:30 a.m.  
 S.D. Military Heritage Alliance Building  
 Sioux Falls, SD

**NOV. 5**  
**Turkey Dinner/ Silent Auction**  
 11:45 a.m.  
 RVUMC  
 Rapid City, SD

**NOV. 10-12**  
**Christmas at the Barn**  
 10 a.m.  
 Groton, SD

**NOV. 10-11**  
**Sioux Empire Arts & Crafts Show**  
 W.H. Lyon Fairgrounds  
 Sioux Falls, SD

**NOV. 11**  
**Sisseton Area Merchants & Crafters Holiday Extravaganza**  
 Sisseton, SD

**NOV. 12**  
**Lutefisk, Lefse & Meatball**  
 4-7 p.m.  
 Trinity Lutheran Church  
 Chamberlain, SD  
 605-730-0553

**NOV. 24**  
**Parade of Lights**  
 7 p.m.  
 Dakota Avenue  
 Huron, SD

**NOV. 25**  
**Mid-Winter Fair**  
 Gregory Auditorium  
 Gregory, SD  
 605-830-9778

**NOV. 30-DEC. 3**  
**Hatchery Holidays**  
 D.C. Booth Fish Hatchery  
 Spearfish, SD

**DEC. 2**  
**6th Annual Holiday Party, Tour of Homes, Silent Auction**  
 4 p.m.  
 Olive Grove Golf Course  
 Groton, SD

**DEC. 8-9**  
**Alexandria's Winter Festival**  
 5 p.m.  
 Alexandria, SD

**DEC. 8-9**  
**Junkin' Market Days**  
 W.H. Lyon Fairgrounds Expo Center  
 Sioux Falls, SD  
 605-941-4958

**DEC. 17**  
**Christmas Cantata**  
 3 p.m.  
 Hermosa United Church of Christ  
 Hermosa, SD

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