

COOPERATIVE

CONNECTIONS



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Prioritize Safety Year-Round



Jeff Birkeland
CEO

At West Central Electric, we recognize Electrical Safety Month every May, but we also know the importance of practicing safety year-round. From our co-op crews to you, the members we serve, we recognize that everyone has a part to play in prioritizing safety.

According to the Electrical Safety Foundation International, thousands of people in the U.S. are critically injured or electrocuted as a result of electrical fires and accidents in their own homes. Many of these accidents are preventable. Electricity is a necessity, and it powers our daily lives. But we know first-hand how dangerous electricity can be because we work with it 365 days a year.

For West Central, safety is our No. 1 priority. It's every employee's responsibility to keep themselves and their co-workers safe. Additionally, we want to help keep you and all members of our communities safe. That's why you'll see West Central Electric hosting safety demonstrations at community events and in schools throughout the year, to demonstrate the dangers of electricity. We discuss emergency scenarios, such as what to do in a vehicle/tractor accident involving a utility pole and downed power lines. We also caution students on the dangers of using grain augers near power lines and a host of other scenarios.

Electricity is an integral part of modern life. Given the prevalence of electrical devices, tools and appliances, I'd like to pass along a few practical electrical safety tips.

Frayed wires pose a serious safety hazard. Power cords can become damaged or frayed from age, heavy use or excessive current flow through the wiring. If cords become frayed or cut, replace them, as they could cause a shock when handled.

Avoid overloading circuits. Circuits can only cope with a limited amount of electricity. Overload happens when you draw more electricity than a circuit can safely handle – by having too many devices running on one circuit.

Label circuit breakers to understand the circuits in your home. Contact a qualified electrician if your home is more than 40 years old and you need to install multiple large appliances that consume large amounts of electricity.

Use extension cords properly. Never plug an extension cord into another extension cord. If you “daisy chain” them together, it could lead to overheating, creating a potential fire hazard. Don't exceed the wattage of the cord. Doing so also creates a risk of overloading the cord and creating a fire hazard. Extension cords should not be used as permanent solutions. If you need additional outlets, contact a licensed electrician to help.

I encourage you to talk with your kids about playing it safe and smart around electricity. Help them be aware of overhead power lines near where they play outdoors.

Our top priority is providing a safe and reliable energy supply 24/7, 365 days per year. But equally important is keeping our members safe around electricity.

**COOPERATIVE
CONNECTIONS**

**WEST CENTRAL
ELECTRIC**

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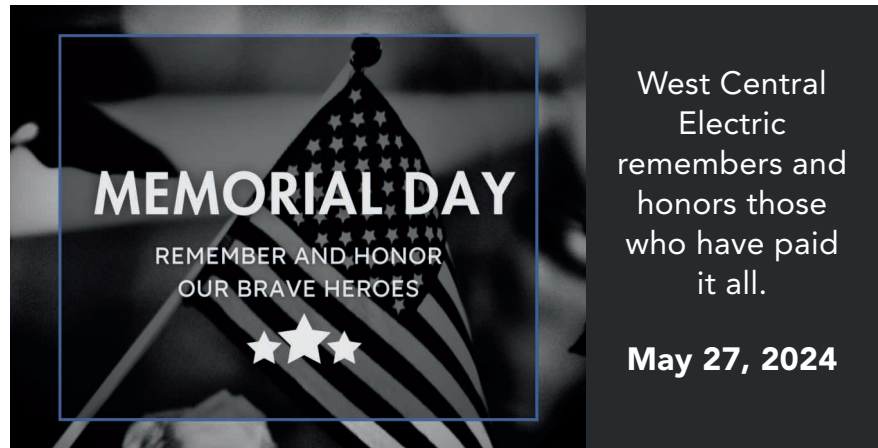
**Our Mission is to Provide
Safe, Reliable Service
to our Member Owners.**

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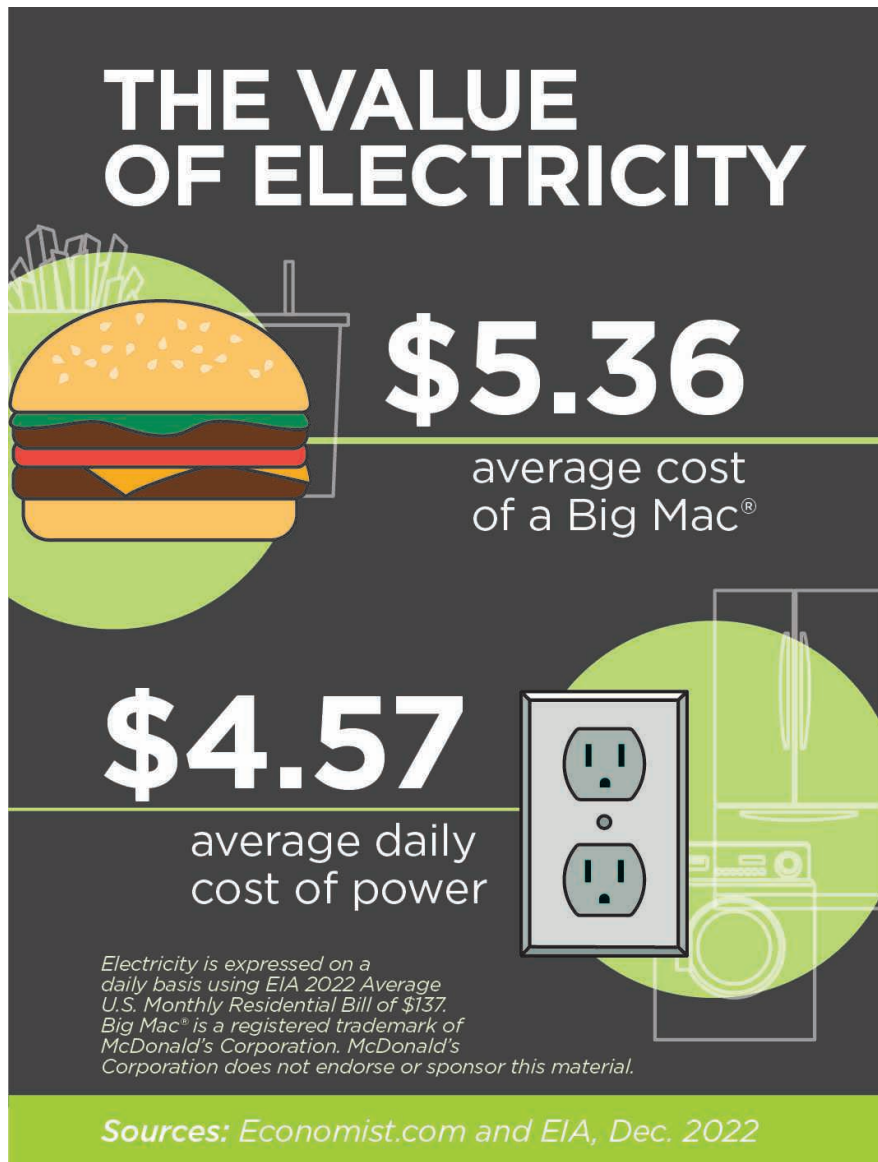
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MEMORIAL DAY
REMEMBER AND HONOR
OUR BRAVE HEROES

West Central Electric remembers and honors those who have paid it all.

May 27, 2024



THE VALUE OF ELECTRICITY

\$5.36
average cost of a Big Mac®

\$4.57
average daily cost of power

Electricity is expressed on a daily basis using EIA 2022 Average U.S. Monthly Residential Bill of \$137. Big Mac® is a registered trademark of McDonald's Corporation. McDonald's Corporation does not endorse or sponsor this material.

Sources: Economist.com and EIA, Dec. 2022

Your Safety Matters

Prevent home electrical fires

Eight out of 10 fire-related deaths occur at home – the place that embodies comfort and security. That’s why it’s important to take steps to keep everyone safe.

Faulty or deteriorating electrical cords are a top cause of fires at home. Cords that become frayed or cracked can send sparks to flammable surfaces. Check your cords to ensure that they are in good shape, and replace any that are worn.

In addition, make sure you are not overloading circuits. If you’ve been in your home for more than 10 years, have your circuit breaker box inspected by a licensed electrician to tighten loose connections and check for overloaded circuits.



Homes with copper wiring need to be inspected every 20 years, and homes with aluminum wiring should be inspected every five years.

Check all Ground Fault Circuit Interrupter (GFCI) outlets several times each year by pushing the test/reset button to be sure they are working properly.

If breakers are continually tripping or if fuses are blowing frequently, that’s a sign of potential trouble. The cause could be old wiring unable to handle the load demand of today’s modern appliances. If needed, ask a licensed electrician to install additional circuits for safety.

Use surge protectors and power bars to help prevent overloading an electrical outlet, plugging no more than three cords into the strip.

May is National Electrical Safety Month. We urge you to take the time and steps needed to lower the risks of electrical fires. Keep your family safe.



Stay Away from Power Lines

Weston Koistinen, Age 6

Weston Koistinen warns readers to be safe by staying away from power lines. Weston’s parents are Dion and Stephanie Koistinen, members of H-D 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.

SUMMER CASSEROLES

BREAKFAST CASSEROLE

Ingredients:

- 1 5 oz. package croutons, any flavor
- 2 cup sharp Cheddar cheese, shredded
- 1 lb. sausage, fried and drained
- 9 eggs
- 1 can evaporated milk
- 1 tbsp. mustard

Method

Spray 9x13 pan with vegetable oil. Arrange croutons on bottom. Sprinkle cheese over croutons and put sausage over cheese. Combine eggs, milk and mustard. Beat to blend and pour into pan. Bake covered at 350 degrees for 45 minutes.

Janet Ochsner
Box Elder, S.D.

CHICKEN CASSEROLE

Ingredients:

- 1 package Chicken Stove Top Stuffing mix
- 3 cups cooked cut up chicken
- 1 can cream of mushroom soup
- 2/3 cup milk
- 1 can cream of chicken soup
- 2 eggs, beaten
- 2 cups chicken broth

Method

Grease a 9x13 pan and put 1/2 of the stuffing mix in the pan. Cover with chicken. Combine soups and milk and spoon over chicken. Spread other 1/2 of stuffing over the top. Pour 2 cups of chicken broth over all and spread with beaten eggs. Bake at 350 degrees for 1 hour.

Gail Lee
Brookings, S.D.

TACO CASSEROLE

Ingredients:

- 1 1/2 lbs. ground beef
- 1 package taco seasoning mix
- 1 can (16 oz.) pinto beans, drained and rinsed
- 1 can (15 oz.) tomato sauce
- 1 can (11 oz.) whole kernel corn, drained
- 1 cup shredded Cheddar cheese
- 1 cup coarsely crushed tortilla chips

Method

Preheat oven to 400°F. Brown meat in large skillet on medium-high heat. Drain fat. Stir in seasoning mix, beans, tomato sauce and corn. Bring to boil. Reduce heat to low; simmer 5 minutes. Spoon into 2-quart baking dish. Sprinkle with cheese and tortilla chips. Bake 5 to 10 minutes or until cheese is melted. Serve with assorted toppings, if desired.

McCormick

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

Why Solar is Not Free



Miranda Boutelle
Efficiency Services
Group

Q: I often hear claims you'll never pay an electric bill again if you go solar. Is that true?

A: The ability to generate your own renewable energy at home is an amazing thing. It's pretty cool that the technology is accessible to home and property owners across the country. The concept of free energy from the sun is appealing, but solar power isn't actually free. There are costs associated with capturing that energy for use in your home.

Installing a residential solar system doesn't equate to \$0 energy bills. Prices for the solar system and installation vary, but adding solar typically comes with a five-figure price tag. Solar systems only provide power when the sun is shining. You still rely on your electric utility for power at night and when the skies are cloudy. Most electric utility rate structures include a set monthly service fee. Unless you plan to disconnect from local electric service completely, you will still have a monthly electric bill.

Solar might be a good investment for you, or it might not. Several factors impact how well the investment pencils out, including where you live, home orientation and shading, electric bill rate structure and cost, available incentives and tax credits, your budget and credit rating.

If you are considering solar on your home, I suggest taking these three steps:

First, make your home as energy efficient as possible. It wouldn't make sense to put a new motor on a boat with holes in it, so why would you put a solar system on an energy-wasting home? Invest in reducing wasted energy before investing in creating new energy. The efficiency updates I recommend before installing solar include insulating and air sealing your home and upgrading to efficient appliances – especially the heating, ventilation and air conditioning system.

If your HVAC system is older than 10 years or malfunctioning, make sure replacing it is in the budget. Remember, energy efficiency upgrades might have a better return on investment than installing solar.

A more efficient home means a smaller – and lower-cost – solar energy system. Solar systems are typically designed to produce the amount of energy a home uses in a year, so if you complete energy efficiency improvements before installing a solar system, make sure the solar contractor accounts for those energy savings.

Second, check with your electric utility about the requirements to install solar and how it will impact your bill. If you decide to install solar panels, working with your utility will be essential, as you will need to take important steps, such as signing an interconnection agreement to ensure the system is properly connected to the electric grid.

Third, get at least three quotes to compare each contractor's recommended system design, equipment and cost. It's a significant investment, so you want to know your options.

There are several ways to pay for a solar system and installation. It can be bought outright with cash or financed by a loan. This allows you to own the system immediately or at the end of the loan term. State and federal tax incentives can help offset the costs.

There is also the option to install a solar system through a lease or power purchase agreement. In this structure, a third party – usually the solar installer – owns the system. They install the system on your property and then sell you the energy produced at a predetermined rate. They are responsible for maintaining the system and own it at the end of the agreement term.

Loans, leases and power purchase agreements can impact the sale of a home. Although a solar system may increase the value of your home, some buyers – or their lenders – are not interested in taking on leases or power purchase agreements.

Investing in solar is one way to support the transition to renewable energy. Before you make the leap, improve your home's energy efficiency and empower yourself by thoroughly weighing the costs and benefits.

Wish Upon a Crawdad

Curtis Condon's children's literature illuminates electric cooperative history

Frank Turner

frank.turner@sdrea.coop

What happens when you blend the rich history of electric cooperatives with the picturesque landscapes of rural America and the magic of fiction storytelling? Curtis W. Condon, a former writer and editor for electric cooperative magazines, finds the answer in his vibrant children's novel, "Wish Upon a Crawdad." This coming-of-age story combines these unlikely elements through the eyes of the main character, 12-year-old Ruby Mae Ryan, during the late Great Depression years in rural Oregon.

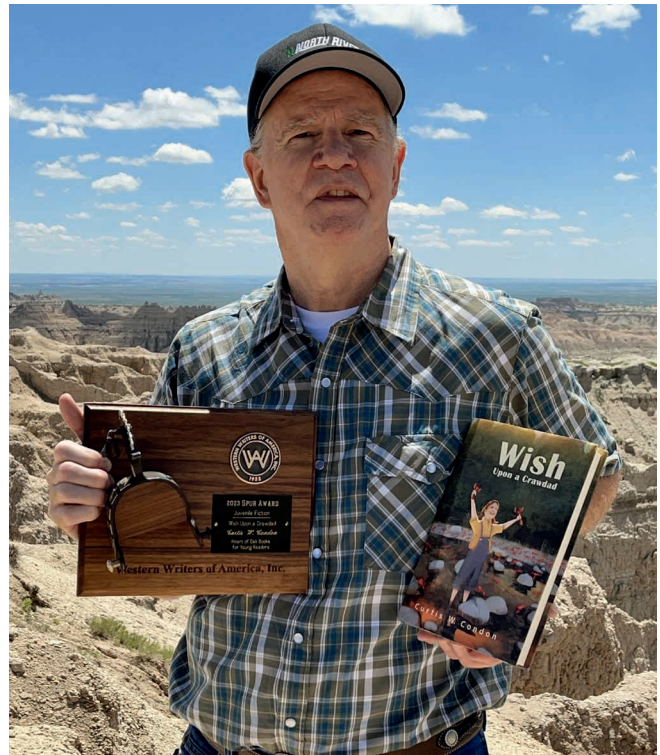
The book, highlighting Ruby's outdoor adventures, explores personal growth while giving testimony to rural electrification in American history. Before writing children's literature, Condon spent more than 27 years in the electric co-op industry as an editor and writer for *Ruralite*, a magazine for electric cooperatives and their members in the Northwest. His time there, conducting interviews and writing, familiarized Condon with the history of rural electrification in the U.S.

"I fell in love with the concept of the electric co-op. Electric co-ops have such a fantastic history and a wonderful story to tell, and I wanted to tell that in this book," said Condon.

This history began with President Franklin D. Roosevelt's determination to lead America out of the Great Depression. Deciding that electrification would play a central role in the process, the president established the Rural Electrification Administration through an executive order in the face of strong dismay from private utility companies. The president's order set the stage for the current network of member-owned electric cooperatives we recognize today, which bring electricity to rural homes that would otherwise be powerless.

However, "Wish Upon a Crawdad" doesn't tell the story of presidents and executive orders. Instead, the book focuses on the very real impact rural electrification had on Ruby, her family, and her community.

"It's about a girl who grows up without electricity until she is 12 years old, and she likes to wish upon crawdads the way that people wish upon stars," Condon explained. "One of the wishes is to get electricity, and that dream comes true because her mom



Curtis W. Condon, author of "Wish Upon a Crawdad," accepts the 2023 Western Writers of America Spur Award, an award presented to Condon in Rapid City, S.D.

and dad get together with their neighbors and create an electric co-op."

Condon's own upbringing in Oregon inspires the book's setting, filled with his memories of crawdad-filled pools, temperate forests and rural dirt roads. While set in the 1940s, many of Ruby's experiences reflect those of Condon's own family.

"My grandmother remembered when electricity was first introduced to her community. She considered electricity to be one of the greatest wonders of the world," said Condon.

Together, Condon's childhood and passion for electric cooperative history set the stage for "Wish Upon a Crawdad," his first children's book, fulfilling a dream he had held onto for years.

"Since I was twelve years old, I knew I wanted to be a children's book writer. It took me 30 years of doing a different kind of writing, but I finally got there," said Condon.

Fulfilling a childhood dream, Condon's book was published in 2022, and his passions and life history began connecting with readers. Although the target audience of the book is children ages 9 to 12, Condon said readers of all ages are enjoying Ruby's story.

Since publication, "Wish Upon a Crawdad" has won the 2023 Western Writers of America Spur Award, an award presented to Condon in Rapid City, S.D. Other awards include the 2023 Will Rogers Medallion Award, the 2023 First Horizon Award, and the 2023 Eric Hoffer Book Award. The book has a presence in libraries across 37 states, including South Dakota.



Patsy Besson helps package fresh cuts of meat at the Wall Meat Processing plant.
Photo Credit: Shannon Marvel

Wall Meats Revives Local Meatcutting in South Dakota Through New Underwood Expansion

Shannon Marvel

shannon.marvel@sdrea.coop

A local meat processing plant is expanding its footprint in Pennington County in a way that will put more locally produced protein on dinner tables and bolster the local meat processing workforce throughout South Dakota.

The man behind this plan is local business owner Ken Charfauros, who owns Wall Meat Processing, which has locations in Wall and Rapid City.

Charfauros is currently raising funds through a capital drive campaign to finance the construction of a 30,000 square foot meat processing facility in New Underwood. The new facility will help train the next generation of meat processors through a partnership with Western Dakota Tech in Rapid City.

“We are at \$2.8 million in our drive. We also have the \$3.3 million USDA Rural Development grant, which is a meat and poultry expansion plan grant. We are about \$200,000 short of our goal,” Charfauros said.

He added that the New Underwood processing plant will also use funding from the Meat and Poultry Intermediary Lending Program (MPILP), which according to the USDA’s website “provides grant funding to intermediary lenders who finance – or plan to finance – the start-up, expansion, or operation of slaughter, or other processing of meat and poultry. The objective of the MPILP is to strengthen the financing capacity for independent meat processors, and to create a more resilient, diverse, and secure U.S. food supply chain.”

Charfauros said he’s still meeting with potential investors and has a financial team focused on creating relationships with local ag producers.

“After we get our capital drive, the plan itself will be about \$21 million,” he added. “And then we start the project. The groundbreaking is going to happen in about a year and the facility will begin operations six months after that.”

Charfauros said he expects to purchase the property to site the new plant this spring.

Returning to a Passion

Wall Meats Processing opened for business 57 years ago, but

Charfauros took ownership over the facility in 2017. His passion for meat cutting began when he was a teenager while working for a local meat plant in Delaware.

“It was my high school job and I loved it. After I graduated high school, I felt that my country needed me, so I joined the Air Force and did 30 years. But I always missed that part of my life,” Charfauros recalled.

“A guy that taught me how to cut was like my second dad, and I always wanted to come back to it. My son had just graduated from South Dakota State University, and I had retired from the Air Force. That’s when we decided to buy a plant.”

His son manages the store in Rapid City while Ken’s three nephews help run the family’s businesses in Wall, which include Wall Meats and the Red Rock restaurant.

Supporting Local Producers

Building the new facility has been a challenging venture that’s been years in the making.

“We started building this plan about four years ago, then COVID hit and got in our way. Then, we were lucky enough to get those grant awards last year, and ever since we have been working diligently to get the format right,” Charfauros said.

“I have drawings. I have an equipment list all put together — everything is ready to go except for this capital drive that we are undergoing.”

Charfauros said he has been meeting with both potential and locked-in investors daily over the last year to produce the required financing.

“We have met with over 600 people with 99 percent of those people being producers, because this is all for them. This plant offers them premium pricing above the market rates,” Charfauros said.

While the cattle market is high now, Charfauros remains realistic that the market can change for the worse.

While he hopes the market remains high enough for producers to survive, his partnership with producers will serve as

added security. That means the partnership must be tightknit.

He knows he cannot do it alone.

Reviving a Dying Art

“Meat cutting is a dying art, and we teach meat processing at our store in Rapid City to bring that art back. We’re trying to fight for that industry as it is,” he said.

Three meat processing students are currently being taught at the Rapid City facility through a partnership with Western Dakota Tech, which recently began offering the two-year program.

Pam Stillman-Rokusek, director of communications and marketing at Western Dakota Tech, said three students are currently enrolled in the Meat Processing program. Of those three, two will graduate in May.

But the college is still working on more outreach.

“Enrollment has been a bit low in the program, so the plan is for a hiatus this fall. They’ll revamp the curriculum. Then, we will certainly do additional outreach. We have done advertising, gone to the schools. We have reached out to 4-H

groups and done some traveling, but we need to turn it up a notch to produce more students in the program. That is our goal,” Stillman-Rokusek said.

Despite the Meat Processing program being put on hiatus, the school will still ensure that the remaining student completes the program while actively working on developing the program and outreach methods.

“There’s such a high need for meat processors and we’re looking at different ways to fill that gap. It’s something we’re committed to doing,” she added.

The goal is to enroll at least five students in the following school years when the program restarts.

The learning center that will be built within the New Underwood facility will also teach producers, in addition to students, the art of meat cutting.

“We are trying to bring that industry back to what it should be—regionally processed protein,” Charfauros said.

“That means we must build the environment to spark that passion. In anything you do, you need to learn how to do it the right way.”



Wall Meat Processing plant, established in 1957. Photo Credit: Shannon Marvel

WEST CENTRAL ELECTRIC AWARDS SCHOLARSHIPS TO AREA YOUTH



Wakely Burns

I'm Wakely Burns, a senior at Philip High School. My parents are Craig and Heidi Burns and my twin brothers are Baylor and Creston. I participate in cross country, track

and basketball. I'm president of National Honor Society, vice-president of Student Council and a member of FCCLA, FFA and Band. I plan to attend SDSU and major in computer science. I'm really grateful West Central Electric chose me as a recipient of this generous scholarship.

Wakely Burns - Philip



Dane Daly

My name is Dane Daly. I am a senior at Philip High school and live near Midland, where we farm and ranch. My parents are Steve and Julie Daly and I have one brother, Carson.

During high school, I enjoyed being part of FFA, FCCLA, FCA, drama - as the lights and sound technician, the golf team, and live streaming our home ball games on YouTube. I am going to attend Mitchell Tech for their Progressive Welding Technology program. Thank you West Central for giving me the opportunity for the scholarship.

Dane Daly - Midland



Mattie Duffy

My name is Mattie Duffy and I am a senior at Stanley County High School. I was born and raised in Fort Pierre, South Dakota. At Stanley County I have been involved in volleyball, basketball, football cheer, band, Student Council, National Honor Society, and Spanish National Honor Society. Next fall I am planning on attending Augustana University. I am very grateful to have received this scholarship.

Mattie Duffy - Ft. Pierre
My name is Kade Fitzgerald and I am the son of Jake and Aaron Fitzgerald. I am currently a senior at Philip High School. I have one older brother and one younger sister. I have been active in football, basketball, track, FCA, FCCLA, and band in my time at PHS. I plan on attending South Dakota State University and pursuing a degree in Construction Management next fall. I enjoy being outdoors and love spending time with my friends and family.

Kade Fitzgerald - Philip



Kade Fitzgerald

My name is Teijah Estes, and I'm a student at Lower Brule High School. I plan on pursuing a double major in Elementary Education and Lakota Studies at Sitting Bull College. I am passionate about Lakota language revitalization which involves effort within my tribal community and my goal is to reclaim and preserve traditional language and culture, such as establishing a Lakota immersion school. Growing up I've witnessed firsthand the importance of preserving our culture/language and I'm deeply committed to contributing to Lakota revitalization efforts, as I advocate through education and aspire to play a role in becoming a language teacher. I strongly believe that revitalizing our Lakota language, culture, and traditions is essential for a strong future. I envision myself being fluent in Lakota and fulfilling the role as a language teacher and preserving our culture.

Teijah Estes - Lower Brule



Teijah Estes

My name is Caysen Gran, daughter of Charlie and Stacie Gran of Kennebec, South Dakota. Throughout my time at Lyman High School, I have been involved in many activities such as volleyball, basketball, High School Rodeo, 4-H Rodeo, National Honor Society, Student Council, and choir. Upon graduating, I plan to attend the University of Wyoming, seeking a degree in Animal Science with an emphasis in Equine Science, and compete on the rodeo team.

Caysen Gran - Kennebec



Caysen Gran

I'm Kellen Griffith, my parents are Jamie and Casey, and I have a little sister, Claire. I attend Lyman High School where I've participated in football, wrestling, track, golf, and trap shooting. I plan to attend South Dakota State University to pursue a degree in agronomy. With that degree I hope to come home and take over our family hunting lodge as well as start up my own agronomy business.

Kellen Griffith - Presho

I was born on November 30, 2005, to Angelique Hickey and Ben Guest. I live in Kennebec, SD, with my parents and four siblings. I participated in several activities in high school, including Teens as Teachers and Student Council. After graduation, I plan to attend the University of South Dakota in Vermillion, SD, for Elementary Education. I hope to return to Lyman County and teach at the Kennebec Elementary someday.

Aspen Hickey - Kennebec



Kellen Griffith

My name is Cadence Hand. I currently attend Stanley County High school. While in high school, I have been involved in Volleyball, Basketball, Track, Golf, National Honor Society, One-Act Play, HOSA, FCA, and I am also our school Student Council President and our Region Student Council President. For college, I will be attending South Dakota State University to major in Respiratory Care.

Cadence Hand - Midland



Aspen Hickey

My name is Savanah Hendricks. I am a senior at Jones County High school and live on a 3rd generation ranch with family. I plan to study Criminology while at SDSU. I want to minor in military science because I plan to par-

Savanah Hendricks



Savanah Hendricks

ticipate in the Reserve Officers' Training Corps Program. I hope to achieve my master's in criminal justice, and continue my military career. I believe in hard work and putting the right foot forward
Savanah Hendricks – Draper



Jonathan Herman

My name is Jonathan Herman, and I have lived in Reliance my entire life. During high school, I was involved in youth group, TeenPact (a government class), volunteering at church, participating in Summer Rec soccer, and attending Bible camp. Despite being homeschooled, I was fortunate enough to be able to play football and run track for Lyman County Schools. I plan to study accounting/business at a state school this fall. I am grateful to be a recipient of this scholarship.

Jonathan Herman – Reliance



Tristen Host

My name is Tristen Host and I am a senior at Jones County High School. I live in Murdo with my parents David and Ann Geisler and my siblings, Madelyn and Ryder. I have been involved in 4-H, NHS, Turner Youth, basketball, football, cross country, and track. In my free time, I enjoy fishing, hunting, and dirt biking. This fall, I plan on attending South Dakota State University and studying mechanical engineering.

Tristen Host – Murdo



Addison Kierl

I am the daughter of Joe and Elysa Kierl and sister of Thad of Murdo, SD. I have stayed actively involved in 4-H, FFA, Cross Country and Rodeo, while maintaining a spot on the National Honor Society. I plan to attend Mitchell Technical Institute in the Fall of 2024 and Double Major in Accounting and Business Management with the aspiration of becoming an Accountant and running a photography business one day.

Addison Kierl – Murdo

My name is Kaden Kinsley from Murdo, South Dakota, where I have lived and gone to school my whole life. The past four years I have participated in many activities such as Student Council, National Honor Society, Future Farmers of America,



Kaden Kinsley

and Fellowship of Christian Athletes, as well as many athletics including cross country, football, basketball, and track. I plan to attend Mitchell Technical College in the fall of 2024 for Power Line Construction and Maintenance. I would like to thank West Central Electric Cooperative for their support and this generous scholarship.

Kaden Kinsley – Murdo



Kate Kramme

My name is Kate Kramme. I am a senior at Stanley County High School. I grew up on a ranch on the Fort Pierre National Grasslands. My parents are Shane and Dawn Kramme, and I have three older brothers. I have been Stanley County's FFA president for four years and a member of the volleyball team. After high school, I plan to attend Black Hills State University for my bachelor's degree in History Education!

Kate Kramme – Ft. Pierre



Kaylee Larson

My name is Kaylee Larson, a senior at Lyman High School in Presho, SD. I'm a member of the National Honors Society, student council, and have a 4.061 GPA. I've participated in volleyball all four years of high school and have been a varsity starter for three of those years. After high school I'm attending Mitchell Tech to pursue a career as a licensed practical nurse.

Kaylee Larson – Kennebec



Alexandria Madsen

I am Alexandria Madsen, the daughter of John and Sarah Madsen of Kadoka. Throughout my years at Kadoka High School, I was involved in a number of activities, including, Student Council, FFA, football cheerleading, and NHS. This upcoming fall, I will be attending SDSU in Brookings, SD, for Ag Business with a minor in Accounting. I plan to become a Certified Public Accountant with an emphasis on the agricultural field.

Alexandria Madsen – Kadoka

I am Dalton Poch, a senior at Kadoka High School. I have lived in Kadoka my en-



Dalton Poch

tire life with my family, which includes my older brother, Brendon, and younger sister, Peyton, and of course my mom and dad. I have been active in rodeo as long as I can remember. I plan to continue to college rodeo as a member of Gillette College Rodeo team. I am grateful for this scholarship and the opportunity West Central Electric provided me.

Dalton Poch – Kadoka



Kaitlyn Schofield

I grew up on a small farm and ranch near Midland and went to Midland School through seventh grade. In eighth grade I transferred to Kadoka and have been going there since. During high school, I played volleyball, basketball, ran track, participated in FFA, HOSA, and NHS. I plan to attend Mitchell Tech to get my LPN degree.

Kaitlyn Schofield – Midland



Tyan Schofield

I am Tyan Schofield, son of Jared Schofield and Chaney Boomer. I am currently attending Philip High School where I am active in sports and other extra curricular activities such as football, basketball and FFA. After highschool I plan on attending Mitchell Technical College in pursuit of a degree in Powerline Construction and Maintenance.

Tyan Schofield – Philip



Alyn Spry

I'm Alyn Spry, daughter of Joel and Jari Spry; the second child of four. I'm a senior at Philip High School and will be attending South Dakota State University for a degree in Nursing in hopes of becoming a travelling NICU nurse. I enjoy playing basketball and volleyball, going for hikes and walks in nice weather, reading books that are hard to put down, soaking in a good sunset, and spending time with people I love.

Alyn Spry – Philip



CYBERSECURITY ON THE GRID

Frank Turner

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Imagine sitting at your desk on a typical Monday morning. You have logged into your computer with coffee in hand, ready to tackle the day. But as you begin, your computer displays an ominous message: “Your files have been encrypted. Pay a ransom to regain access.” It’s not just your computer; your co-workers have received the same message. Overnight, the entire office has fallen victim

to a ransomware attack that has locked away critical data. Your office computers will remain unusable until a payment is made.

This scenario, among others, has become a primary concern for workplaces everywhere, including electric cooperatives. As a result, local co-ops are taking action in the cybersecurity space to prevent bad actors from disrupting the critical goal of delivering power that is safe, affordable and reliable to their members. Electric co-ops are focused

on enhancing cybersecurity resilience and readiness to defend against potential cyber threats.

Co-ops are routinely monitoring and managing cyber risks, working with federal and local law enforcement agencies and the North American Electric Reliability Corp. to protect critical infrastructure. By working as a network, co-ops are enhancing grid resilience, ensuring reliable electricity for their members.

According to an FBI Internet Crime Report, the U.S. reported more than \$12.5 billion in annual losses in 2023 due to cyberattacks like the one described. A significant number of these attacks target the elderly and vulnerable. When breaking down the losses by age group, individuals aged

20 to 29 accounted for \$360.7 million of the total losses, while those 60 and older incurred losses of \$3.4 billion in 2023 alone.

And it's not just about the money. These attacks also have the potential to undermine the stability of entire systems, including the electrical grid. This year, directors of the FBI, NSA, and CISA testified before Congress about Chinese Communist Party hacking groups that had gained access to the electric grid and other critical infrastructure to "wreak havoc and cause real-world harm to American citizens and communities."

"Many cyberattacks are conducted by criminals trying to steal money or collect a ransom," explains Chief Security and Compliance Officer Daniel Graham of Basin Electric Power Cooperative. "Nation-states

target electric utilities for different reasons. Some nation-states want to steal intellectual property. Others want to be able to disrupt our electric grid."

So how is it done? To execute their schemes, bad actors employ a long list of complex strategies and techniques, such as phishing, data breaches and malware to adversely impact their targets. Business email compromise, one of the most common techniques, occurs when an impostor poses as a legitimate business contact, seeking to steal sensitive information such as credit card numbers, bank account information or login credentials.

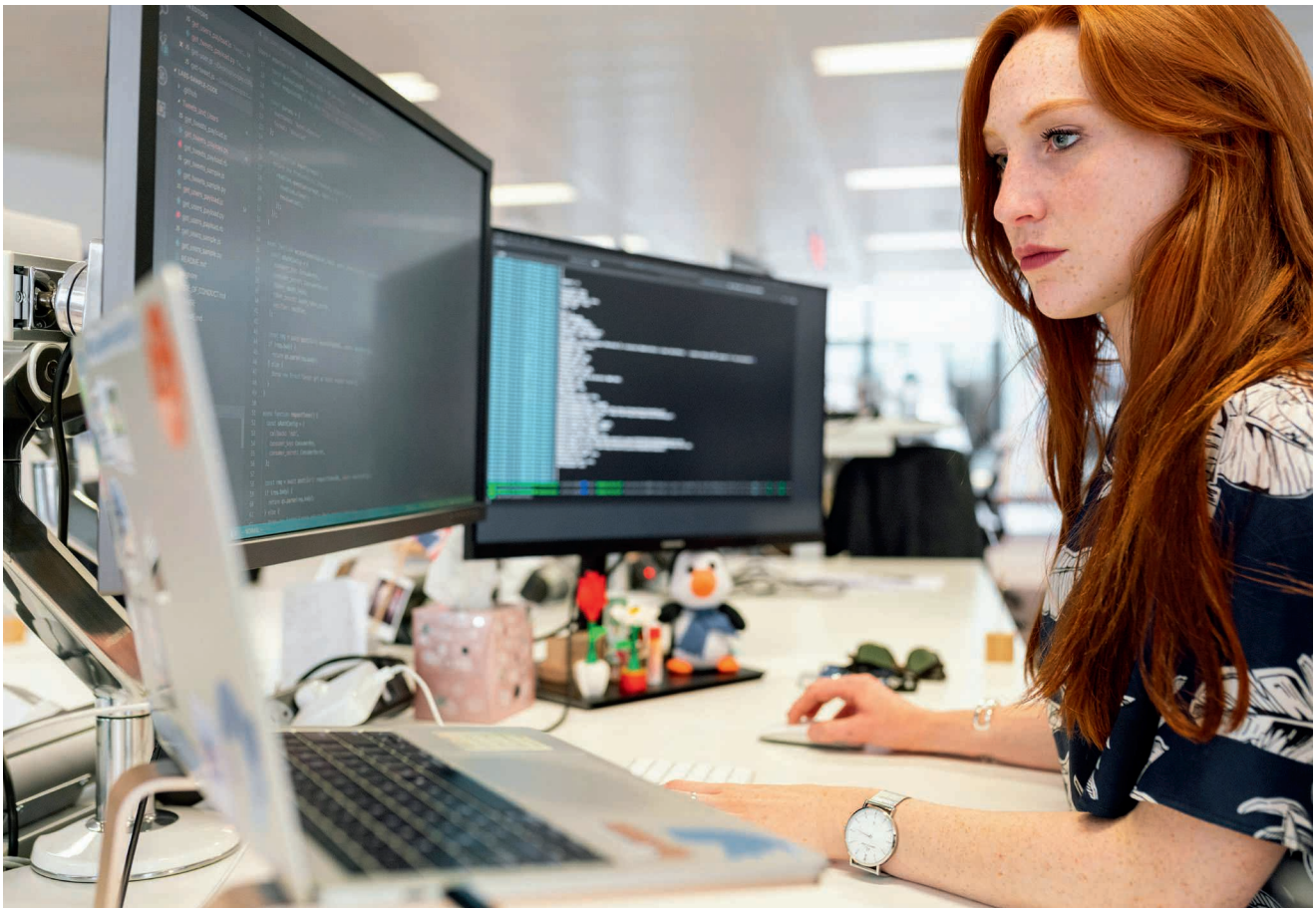
Luckily, co-ops are implementing a variety of tools, policies and training to help mitigate attacks and secure the grid. Programs like NRECA's Co-op Cyber Goals Program help co-ops build fundamental cybersecurity

measures, such as employee training, developing cyber incident response plans, and regular self-assessment. These strategies help co-ops reduce the risk of a successful cyberattack in the ongoing battle against cybercrime.

"Additionally, co-ops can conduct cybersecurity exercises to determine the effectiveness of current defenses and practice responses," Graham says.

Despite these efforts, the threat of a successful cyberattack persists, making vigilance an essential component of effective cybersecurity.

"If you see something suspicious, report it to your cooperative," explains Graham. "Electric co-ops are an essential part of our country's critical infrastructure. We can best protect our electric grid by working with each other."





Living Prepared

South Dakota's survivalist community live in bunkers

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It's a semi-underground community of survivalists acting as humanity's last chance.

These survivalists, otherwise known as preppers, have prepared for security and safety within what's touted as the world's largest survival community – in southwest South Dakota.

Vivos xPoint, owned by real-estate mogul Robert Vicino, is located south of the Black Hills, near Edgemont, S.D. It was formally established as the U.S. Army's Black Hills Ordnance Depot – a military base created to store

ammunition and bombs. The base's history began in 1942, just after the United States entered World War II.

Once humming with approximately 6,000 workers and their families, the military base was eventually retired in 1967, leading to its eventual abandonment. The army sold the property to the town of Edgemont, S.D., which in turn, sold it to local cattle ranchers.

"This land was used by landowners to graze cattle, until one of these ranchers sent me an email asking if I would be interested in the bunkers," Vicino said. "It took me about a minute, and I said yes. So, in 2016, I acquired the southern

Vivos xPoint owns 575 bunkers. *Photo Credit: Vivos xPoint*

portion of the base. That portion is about three-fourths the size of Manhattan. We take people up on a local hill that's about 300-400 feet higher than the rest of the site. From there, you can almost see all the quarters of the property. At a distance, the bunkers are like specs...you can't really tell what you're looking at. That's how big this thing is."

Vicino owns just under 6,000 acres of land where these bunkers sit. Originally, the army built 800 bunkers, but Vivos xPoint owns 575. Today, approximately 200 of these bunkers are being leased for 99 years with an up-front payment of \$55,000. Additionally, the ground lease is \$1,200 per year and utility payments are \$108 per month.

Mark Bowman, a retired tenant at Vivos xPoint, moved from Chicago with his wife to live in one of the bunkers



Photo Credit: Jocelyn Johnson



Each bunker is 2,200 square feet. Photo Credit: Vivos xPoint

seven years ago. Keeping busy by doing odd jobs and helping others get settled, Bowman commented that people from various backgrounds lease these bunkers. Some visit on occasion and some live in them full time.

“Eventually, we plan to have a health club, meeting hall and store out here too,” Bowman said. “It’s a work in progress.”

Each bunker is 2,200 square feet. It’s relatable to a narrow Quonset fixed underground, measuring 80 feet long and 26 feet wide with 12-foot ceilings. Vivos xPoint boasts 575 bunkers in total. Tenants can access floor plans and choose to have a Vivos xPoint contractor customize their bunker. Currently, there is a one-year backlog for customization services provided by a company contractor.

“It’s cavernous on the inside,” Vicino said. “We can build out a five-bedroom interior with a living room, two bathrooms, laundry room...everything you will need. When we build it, it’s effectively a submarine. The power we get from the local electric cooperative is to run our well pump that pumps water 4,300 feet underground up to a cistern on a hill. From there, it’s distributed to

the bunkers via gravity.”

Vicino noted that one of the most important features to these bunkers is the location. It’s centrally located within the United States and remote – making it an unlikely target in war. The off-grid area is also located at high altitude in a non-seismic area, relatively safe from natural disasters.

“Sometimes, I get asked why would anyone want one of these,” Vicino

commented. “And I say, ‘well, have you ever watched the news?’ Look what’s going on in this country.”

“All of the bunkers have NBC filtration, which is nuclear, biological and chemical filtration,” Vicino explained. “The air that comes in is scrubbed, so it’s breathable on the inside. We’re even adding CO2 scrubbers, which scrub the air you breath out if you had to shut off the air to the outside. You can do that for a week maybe.”

This isn’t a project that Vicino took lightly or stumbled upon in his business ventures. He emphasized it was years in the making.

“When I was 27 years old, I had a vision or an inspiration in my head. I could hear the words of a woman talking to me in total silence. The only thing I could attribute it to was the Holy Spirit. What she said to me was, ‘Robert, you need to build bunkers deep underground to help thousands of people survive what’s coming our way.’ The message was very loud and quick, and so I tucked it away for 30 years, thinking about it occasionally.... Then, I got the feeling I didn’t have any more time. It’s either now or never.”



Mark Bowman, right, shows an empty bunker to Calvin Romey, left. Bowman has been a tenant in a neighboring bunker for seven years with his wife. Photo Credit: Jocelyn Johnson



MAY 11, 2024
Cinco de Mayo Fiesta
 Falls Park
 Sioux Falls, 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.

MAY 4
Jones County Pheasants
Forever Banquet
 Murdo, SD

MAY 10
Mother's Day Tea
 1 p.m.
 Spearfish Senior Center
 Spearfish, SD

MAY 11
Opening Day
 1880 Train
 Hill City, SD

MAY 11-12
Best of Hill City
 Main Street
 Hill City, SD

MAY 12
Hill City Senior Sunday
Breakfast
 8 a.m.
 Hill City Center
 Hill City, SD

MAY 12
Mother's Day Special
 1880 Train
 Hill City, SD

MAY 17
"Heart of the Hills" a
musical
 2 p.m.
 Spearfish Senior Center
 Spearfish, SD

MAY 18
Booth Day
 10 a.m.
 D.C. Booth Fish Hatchery
 Spearfish, SD

MAY 18
Fundraising Breakfast
 7:30 a.m.
 Spearfish Senior Center
 Spearfish, SD

MAY 18
Grand Re-Opening & New
Artist Reception
 3 p.m.
 ArtForms Gallery
 Hill City, SD

JUNE 1
Spring Volksmarch
 Crazy Horse Memorial

JUNE 7-9
Gumbo Ridge Wagon Trail
Ride
 Murdo, SD

JUNE 8
Mt. Rushmore Rodeo
 Palmer Gulch Resort
 Hill City, SD

JUNE 8
Sportsman's Bash
 2 p.m.
 Weston County Senior Center
 Newcastle, WY
 605-440-1842

JUNE 9
1880 Train Old West
Shootout
 5 p.m.
 Hill City, SD

JUNE 14-15
Fine Arts In the Hills Show
& Sale
 Hill City, SD

JUNE 15
The Big Mick
 The Mickelson Trail
 605-673-5154

JUNE 15-16
Friends of the Library Book
Sale
 Hill City Public Library
 Hill City, SD

JUNE 20
Murdo Ranch Rodeo
 Murdo, SD

JUNE 20
Kadoka Ranch Rodeo
 Kadoka, SD

JUNE 21-22
Scavenger's Journey
 Yard sales, farmer's markets &
 specialty shops
 Wall, SD to Wagner, SD
 www.scavengersjourney.com

JUNE 21-22
Kadoka Reunion Weekend &
PRCA Rodeo
 Kadoka, SD

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