

COOPERATIVE CONNECTIONS

Gardening Greats

**Master Gardeners
Cultivating Community
Growth**

Pages 8-9

Bridging History
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Photo courtesy of SDSU Extension.

2025 May Projects



Jeff Birkeland
CEO

Spring is upon us, and we are in full construction mode. Our primary focus for the 2025 construction season is the installation of 27 miles of underground line to enhance system reliability and resilience while retiring 70-year-old overhead infrastructure that has reached the end of its service life. This underground conversion consists of 10 separate projects strategically located throughout our service territory to improve service quality and reduce maintenance costs. The total investment for these projects is \$1,227,000, reflecting our commitment to modernizing our distribution system and ensuring long-term reliability for our members.

While some crews focus on installing 27 miles of underground line, other crews will work to convert approximately 50 overhead highway crossings to underground crossings by boring under the highways. This project will begin at the Oahe Dam on Highway 34 and continue west to Quinn, as well as north of Four Corners on Highway 63 to the Cheyenne River. The primary reason for this conversion is to eliminate the need to assist with large loads and raise overhead lines, which is a frequent challenge in our service area. Most oversized loads enter our system by crossing the Oahe Dam, then either head west toward Rapid City or north at the Four Corners junction (Highways 34 & 63). By transitioning to underground crossings, we will significantly reduce the time spent managing large loads, making our operations more efficient, productive, and focused on serving our members.

With only 16 linemen, completing the above projects in one year is a very tall order. We would likely need it to rain only on the weekends to reach these goals. But last year, your linemen built 11 miles of 115KV transmission faster than expected, so never say never!

Here's a quick update on the grants West Central was awarded from the government. We received two grants totaling \$2.8 million to replace 70-year-old three-phase overhead lines with new underground infrastructure. However, we are currently waiting for the current administration's decision on whether these grants will be honored or if the funding will be pulled. We remain hopeful that the grants will move forward so we can begin work on these critical upgrades. Replacing aging infrastructure with underground lines provides significant cost savings to our members while also delivering key benefits such as fire mitigation, increased line capacity, reduced outage times, and lower maintenance costs. We will continue to keep you updated as we learn more. No time frame has been given as to when a decision will be made, but I'm hopeful we will hear something by the time you are reading this article.

As odd as this may sound, I'd like to close this article by hoping we receive plentiful moisture this spring/summer and our construction timeline slips a little.

COOPERATIVE CONNECTIONS

WEST CENTRAL ELECTRIC

(USPS No. 018-988)

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

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Design assistance by SDREA

WEST CENTRAL ELECTRIC AWARDS SCHOLARSHIPS TO AREA YOUTH



MaKaylan Bonenberger

My name is MaKaylan Bonenberger, and I am currently a senior at Kadoka Area High School. My parents are Brett and Nikki Bonenberger, and I am the eldest of my two younger brothers, McCoy and McKey. I am involved in a variety of extracurricular activities including volleyball, track, student council, HOSA, FFA, 4-H, football and basketball statistician, as well as National Honor Society. Next year, I plan to attend Dakota Wesleyan to pursue a Bachelor of Science in Nursing.

MaKaylan Bonenberger – Kadoka

I participate in football, basketball, and track and am also a member of the National Honor Society.

Aksel Ehlers – Presho



Jesse Eldridge

My name is Aksel Ehlers and I am a senior at Lyman High School. I participate in football, basketball, and track and am also a member of the National Honor Society.

I'm currently a senior at Pierre T.F. Riggs High School and will be attending South Dakota State University this fall to pursue a degree in Electrical Engineering. Throughout high school, I've been involved in football, tennis, hockey, and trap shooting. I've also been a member of the National Honor Society for two years and serve as the team leader in the Gov-to-Gov mentorship program. Additionally, I've volunteered at Feeding South Dakota, St. Joe's Elementary, Meals on Wheels, and the Oahe Youth Hockey Association. In my free time, I enjoy hunting, fishing, spending

time on the farm, and hanging out with friends.

Jesse Eldridge – Pierre

Hi, my name is Wiley Elwood and I'm a senior at Lyman High School in Presho. I live on the family ranch with my parents and siblings southwest of Oacoma. During high school I was active in football, basketball, golf and FFA. This fall I will be attending Black Hills State University to get a degree in education with an emphasis on mathematics. In the future I hope to teach math to high school students.

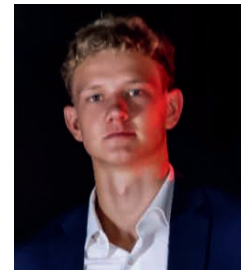
Wiley Elwood – Oacoma



Reese Hand

I grew up on a farm north of Midland, S.D. I am the youngest of 4 children and am a part of the 4th generation of my family's farm. I enjoy all aspects of farming and ranching! I am enlisted in the South Dakota Army National Guard. I will be attending USD to gain my Bachelor's degree in Health Sciences and then I will be attending STC to gain my Associates degree in Diagnostic Medical Sonography.

Reese Hand – Midland



Aksel Ehlers



Wiley Elwood

Continued on page 10.

Power Life Safely

May is Electrical Safety Month

Every May, Electrical Safety Month serves as a vital reminder of the importance of preventing electrical hazards at home. Electricity powers nearly every aspect of modern life, but if handled improperly, it can pose serious risks, including injuries and property damage.

Your electric cooperative understands the risks associated with improper electricity use, which is why we're committed to reminding you to stay vigilant and practice electrical safety not only in May, but year-round.

By following key safety practices, you can reduce the risk of electrical hazards and ensure your family stays protected. Here are five essential tips for powering up safely at home.

1. **Be vigilant.** Regularly inspect your home's electrical system for any signs of damage or outdated components and replace any frayed electrical wires or cords. The Electrical Safety Foundation International estimates roughly 3,300 home fires originate from extension cords every year, either from overloading, overheating or fraying. If you're relying on extension cords as permanent power solutions, consider contacting a qualified electrician to install additional outlets where you need them.
2. **Use Surge Protectors.** Safeguard your sensitive electronics and appliances from surges with surge protectors. These handy devices help divert excess voltage away from your electronics, reducing the risk of damage or electrical fires. Not all power strips include surge protection, so read the product label carefully. Additionally, surge protectors can lose effectiveness over time and should be replaced when damaged or outdated.
3. **Practice Safe Power Strip Use.** Avoid overloading electrical outlets with power strips that exceed the outlet's capacity. High-energy devices, like heaters, microwaves and hairdryers should be distributed across multiple outlets. Overloading an outlet with a "busy" power strip can lead to overheating and create a fire hazard, so be sure to check the power strip's wattage rating before plugging in items.

4. **Water and Electricity Don't Mix.** It may seem obvious, but accidents involving water contact with electrical items happen. Always keep electrical appliances and devices away from water sources, like sinks, bathtubs or swimming pools. Make sure your hands are dry before touching any electrical switches or appliances – never handle electrical devices with wet hands. Ground Fault Circuit Interrupters (GFCIs) should be installed in areas where water and electricity are typically in close proximity, including kitchens, bathrooms and outdoor outlets.
5. **Educate Family Members.** One of the best ways to ensure the safety of everyone in your household is to talk about electrical safety. Teach children not to play with electrical outlets or appliances and ensure they understand the potential dangers of electricity. Create and practice a home fire escape plan that includes electrical safety precautions in case of emergencies.

Practicing electrical safety at home is essential for protecting your family, property and peace of mind. Remember, electrical safety isn't just a one-time effort – it's a year-round responsibility. Taking these steps can help ensure a safer, more secure home for you and your loved ones.



"Don't plant trees near power lines."

Jeremiah Barlow

Jeremiah cautions readers not to plant trees near power lines. Thank you for your picture, Jeremiah! Jeremiah's parents are Mosiah and Cristine Barlow, members of West River Electric Association.

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.



Delicious CHICKEN

CHICKEN BREAST SUPREME

Ingredients:

4 chicken breasts
(boned and halved)
8 strips bacon
2 pkgs. chipped beef
8 oz. sour cream
1 can cream of chicken soup
6 oz. evaporated milk

Method

Wrap each half of chicken breast in a piece of bacon. Place in a baking dish lined with two layers of chipped beef.

Blend sour cream, soup, and milk. Pour over chicken.

Bake uncovered at 300°F for three hours. Serve over rice.

*Makes 8 servings.

Sharon Houchin
Central Electric Member

CHICKEN ROLLUPS

Ingredients:

8 oz. tube crescent rolls
4 boneless chicken breasts
(cooked shredded and seasoned to taste)
8 oz. cheddar cheese
(finely shredded, divided)
10 1/2 oz. can cream of chicken soup
1 packet chicken gravy mix
1 cup water

Method

In a bowl, mix the shredded chicken and 1/3 of the cheese. Take a scoop of the mixture and roll it into a crescent roll then place in a greased 9" x 13" pan. Bake at 350°F until the crescent rolls look browned on top. Mix the soup, gravy mix, 1/3 of the cheese, and enough water to make the mixture pourable. Pour over the crescent rolls. Sprinkle the remaining 1/3 of the cheese on top and bake again until the cheese melts and starts to brown.

Nicole Einrem
B-Y Electric Member

SMOKY CHICKEN TACOS

Ingredients:

1 tbsp. oil
1 lbs. boneless skinless chicken breast, cut into thin strips
1/4 cup Flavor Maker Taco Night Topping Seasoning
1/2 cup water
12 (6-inch) flour or corn tortillas, warmed

Method

Heat oil in large skillet on medium-high heat. Add chicken; cook and stir just until browned.

Stir in Flavor Maker Seasoning and water. Bring to boil. Reduce heat and simmer 5 minutes or until sauce has thickened and chicken is cooked through, stirring occasionally.

Spoon chicken into warm tortillas. Serve with desired toppings, such as shredded lettuce, shredded cheese, sour cream, guac or salsa.

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 2025. All entries must include your name, mailing address, phone number and cooperative name.

Tips to Beat the Energy Peak



Miranda Boutelle
Efficiency Services
Group

Q: What does “beat the peak” mean, and why should I care about it?

A: When your electric cooperative talks about “beat the peak,” it is a call to action for energy consumers to reduce electricity use during periods of highest demand. Using less energy during peak times can ease the strain on the electric grid, benefit your cooperative and sometimes lower your electric bill.

Electricity generation and energy supply must match consumption in real time to ensure safe, reliable power. Every moment of every day, an entire workforce monitors energy use, adjusting power plant production up or down as needed to keep the grid balanced.

As energy demand grows, all of us can do our part to use less. To put this in perspective, peak electricity demand is expected to increase by 38 gigawatts over the next four years, according to the Energy Information Administration. That’s like adding another California to our nation’s power grid.

Peak time varies for each electric utility but typically occurs in the morning when people get ready for the day and in the evening when they return home from work and school. During these times, we turn on lights, cook, adjust the thermostat, run

the dishwasher and do laundry – to name just a few energy-consuming activities.

Typically, the price of power increases when demand is higher. Reducing your electric use during peak times can help lower market prices for everyone and lessen stress on the electric grid.

Electric cooperatives set electric rates to cover costs. Some utilities have time-of-use rates that reflect higher costs during peak demand periods. Whether you have time-of-use rates or not, these tips can help keep costs down for your utility and establish off-peak energy habits.

As a general rule, I try to spread out my use of equipment and appliances. For example, I avoid washing dishes and clothes, and cooking all at the same time. Running a lot of hot water will cause your water heater to use more energy, too.

Increasing the energy efficiency of your home can lower its impact on the grid. Weatherize windows and doors and add insulation to improve the comfort of your home. You can also consider upgrading to energy efficient appliances or using energy-saving features on your existing appliances.

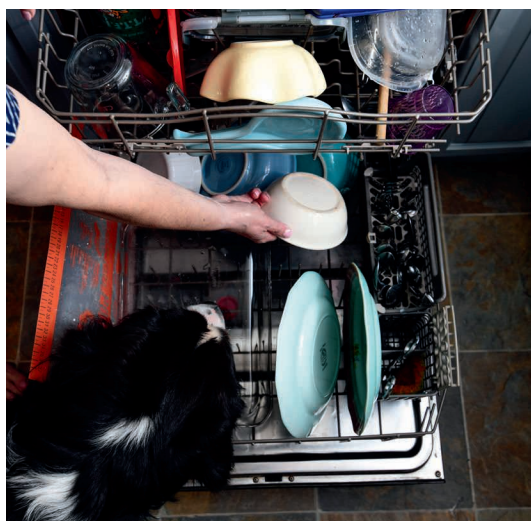
If you haven’t already, switch your incandescent lighting to LEDs, which use at least 75% less electricity and last up to 25 times longer, according to the U.S. Department of Energy. There are many affordable options on the market.

Schedule your dishwasher run time. My dishwasher, which is several years old, has a “delay start” button. This is also handy if your dishwasher is loud. Setting it to start after you go to bed shifts that energy consumption to off-peak hours, and you don’t have to hear it.

Running your washing machine and dryer during off-peak hours can help, too. If you’re in the market for a new washer or dryer, look for a model with a high Integrated Modified Energy Factor and a low Integrated Water Factor to save water and energy.

Also, consider switching your charging habits for all devices to off-peak hours. If you have an electric vehicle, use the scheduled charge settings. You’ll plug in your vehicle when you get home, and it will start charging automatically during the off-peak hours you choose.

Small changes at home can make a big difference to the energy grid. Incorporate these energy-wise habits into your daily routine.



When the Lights Came On

Darrell Kirby Reflects on the Arrival of Electricity and How Co-ops Powered His Career

Erica Fitzhugh

Southeastern Electric Cooperative

Growing up on a farm northwest of Salem, Darrell Kirby was the second oldest of five children in his family. Their farm had dairy cows, hogs and chickens and they grew corn, oats and beans. “Before we had electricity, the memory that sticks in my mind is doing schoolwork with an old kerosene lamp with a wick, set in the middle of the table for light,” shared Kirby. “After that we switched to a gas light with two mantels. It was much brighter and more dependable. But when we got electricity...that was out of this world.”

The Kirby family was one of the original members of McCook Electric, now Southeastern Electric. Kirby remembers that his home was energized by the cooperative around the time he was a fifth grader. “My uncle came out to wire our house,” said Kirby. “It was really something to be able to turn on a switch and have all that light!” Before electricity, Kirby and his siblings would carry a lantern from their house to the barn. A long wire was strung the length of the ceiling - they would hang the lantern from the wire and as they moved down the aisle milking cows by hand, they would slide the lantern down to light their way. Using a hand cranked milk separator, they would remove the cream from the

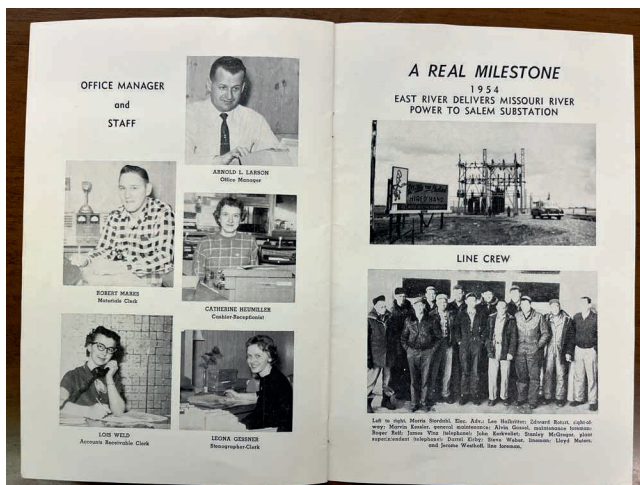


Photo by Erica Fitzhugh

milk. The milk would be fed to the hogs, and the cream would be kept in cream cans until it could be taken to town, usually twice a week, to trade for groceries and other goods at the K&K Store. “Electricity changed our lives,” Kirby exclaimed. “The yard light and lights in the barn, the milking machine, a cream separator with a motor instead of a crank, a refrigerator – the changes to our farming operation were remarkable.”

As Kirby finished high school, he had his mind set on farming. However, life had other plans for him. “I worked as a farmhand in the summer and as a mechanic in the winter. The next summer, McCook Electric bought property to build on and was looking for people to help with the construction. I assisted with the construction for a few months before I had to take a break due to a health issue,” said Kirby. He knew from that interaction with McCook Electric that he wanted to work for the electric cooperative. After Kirby recovered, he returned to McCook Electric and asked for a job as a lineman. He started in the spring of 1958 and spent the next 40 years powering the lives of his neighbors through his career at the co-op. “I was not scared of heights and liked working outdoors. I borrowed a set of hooks and belts and with no formal training or previous experience, I started my career as a lineman,” laughed Kirby.

Kirby held positions as a lineman, line superintendent and eventually as the general manager. He recalled experiencing ice and windstorms, working at annual meetings and witnessing several changes to the electric utility industry. “My fondest memories of working at the co-op included the people – our employees and our members. I got to know almost everyone because we were so small. I enjoyed visiting with and working for our members, helping them in any way I could,” smiled Kirby. “The co-op was so good to me and my family. I still miss the people after all these years.”



History is remembered in the 1959 McCook Electric Cooperative Annual Report, Years of Progress. It focused on the cooperative's growth from 1949-1959. Photo submitted by Erica Fitzhugh.

GARDENING GREATS

How Master Gardeners are Cultivating Community Growth

Frank Turner

frank.turner@sdua.coop

After years of tending to her garden, Codington-Clark Electric member Dianne Rider of Hazel can confidently say she is an expert in horticulture. However, her extensive experience of working with the earth isn't the only reason she is considered a soil savant.

In 2016, Rider earned the prodigious title of Master Gardener through the South Dakota State University Extension's Master Gardener Volunteer Program. This program provides in-depth horticultural training – covering topics like plant science, soil management and sustainable gardening practices – so enthusiasts like Rider can share their extensive gardening knowledge with their communities.

Becoming an Extension Master Gardener volunteer is a commitment. Applicants must complete horticulture classes, pass the course test and contribute 40 hours of volunteer service

during the first year of involvement. Despite the challenges, Rider had aspired to this achievement for decades, but it wasn't until she retired from her teaching career that she was able to dedicate herself fully and earn her place as a Master Gardener.

Reflecting the adage, “once a teacher, always a teacher,” Rider continues to educate and influence those around her, even after retirement, through gardening.

“Becoming a Master Gardener has always been on my bucket list since they organized,” Rider said. “I’ve always been a teacher, so finding a way to help others through gardening is probably what’s most rewarding.”

As a Master Gardener, Rider plays a key role in organizing annual gardening events for SDSU Extension, including the Master Gardener Annual Update Conference at Joy Ranch near Watertown. This event, attended by more than 125 Master Gardeners, serves as a thriving forum for gardening clubs to exchange ideas on the latest and greatest

Missouri Valley Master Gardeners remove invasive bellflower and other non-desirable plants at the Dorothy Jenks Memorial Garden in Yankton.
Photo courtesy of SDSU Extension.

projects they are tackling.

“The event is a lot of fun, because when you get 125 Master Gardeners in one room – let me tell you, the conversations are riveting,” Rider laughed.

Master gardeners also help SDSU Extension achieve its broader goal: to make cutting-edge research easily accessible to the people who can benefit from the findings. Master Gardeners have regular continuing education opportunities with experts from the SDSU Horticulture team, such as Professor John Ball, a SDSU Extension Forestry Specialist and South Dakota Department of Agriculture Forest Health Specialist. Once equipped with this information, volunteers can share the most significant takeaways from research being conducted across the state through the university, providing a bridge between research and practical application.

“Dr. John Ball’s presentation on how to trim a tree after planting it is one of the best things that I’ve learned that I can now share with others,” said Rider. “He says that raising a tree is just like raising a kid: you have to shape your tree when

they are young, otherwise they turn into ugly adults.”

Master Gardener Field Specialist Prairey Walkling emphasizes that the connection between research-based information and enthusiasts is what the Master Gardener Volunteer Program thrives on. And the research goes far beyond just trees. SDSU’s horticulture research also extends into innovative mulching techniques, soil care and even studies on the growth and quality of four popular zinnia varieties.

“SDSU Extension wants to empower individuals to reach their gardening goals through providing science-based information. Each person has different pieces of land, resources and goals for their gardens and landscapes,” she said. “We strive to provide them with trusted, research-based information to help them make decisions.”

Walkling said the impact of these volunteers cannot be understated. According to Walkling, there are more than 400 Master Gardeners across the state and 14 Master Gardener clubs. In 2024, these vital volunteers hosted 153 gardening events, including farmers market booths, gardening workshops and demonstrations, reaching nearly 10,000 South Dakotans. Regardless of the event or what is being discussed, Walkling said Master Gardeners carry an infectious love of digging in the dirt.

“These volunteers help get people excited about gardening,” she said. “There are so many volunteer opportunities – teaching youth, teaching adults, maintaining demonstration gardens, answering questions, organizing events, engaging in horticultural research, writing horticulture articles – the sky is the limit.”



SDSU Extension Master Gardeners host an educational booth at the SD State Fair. From left: Lael Abelmann, Sharelle Meyer and Nancy Kadous.



Coteau Prairie Master Gardener Club (Watertown area) hosted the 2024 state conference at Joy Ranch. | Photos courtesy of SDSU Extension.

Continued from page 3.

WEST CENTRAL ELECTRIC AWARDS SCHOLARSHIPS TO AREA YOUTH



Peyton Haugen

Hello my Name is Peyton Haugen. I am from Reliance, S.D., where I live with my parents Will and Cortney and siblings Prestyn and Adessa. I participate in many school activities including FFA, student council, high school rodeo, football, wrestling, and NHS. I am also involved in many community groups including the O.C.P. Community Foundation, Church Call Committee, and 4-H. I am grateful that West Central Electric has chosen me as a recipient.

Peyton Haugen – Reliance

I'm Prestyn Haugen and I have lived in Reliance since 2014 with my siblings and parents Will and Cortney. I will graduate from Chamberlain High School in May and continue my education this fall at Montana State University pursuing an engineering degree and competing on the rodeo team. Growing up in rural Reliance has taught me many things about the rural/western lifestyle including resourcefulness, hard work, and resilience. I am grateful for the support West Central Electric offers students through the scholarship program.

Prestyn Haugen – Reliance



Prestyn Haugen



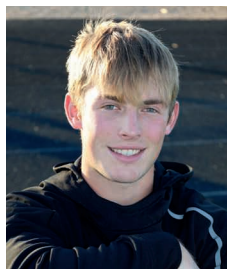
Brady Heltzel

My name is Brady Heltzel. I am the daughter of Brad and Jackie Heltzel, and the sister to Kaci, Riley, and Reece, sister-in-law to Bradley and Dilyn, aunt to Isley, Harlow, and Jase. I am a senior at Philip High School and have attended PHS all my life. I am involved in volleyball, band, choir, FCCLA, and student council. After graduation, I will be attending South Dakota State University to major in Human Biology to later go on to optometry school.

Brady Heltzel – Philip

Hello, I am Garrett Hermann. I am a senior at Kadoka Area High School. The past four years of school, I've enjoyed being a student-athlete where I played football, basketball, and ran track. I was also part of the FFA team and a member of National Honor's Society. My plans are to attend a technical school and earn a degree in electrical construction

Garrett Hermann – Kadoka



Garrett Hermann

I am the daughter of John Hoffman and Rachel Sundstrom. I was born and raised in Pierre, SD. I went to school at Stanley County until my junior year then transferred to Lyman High School and will be valedictorian of Lyman's 2025 graduating class. I grew up playing volleyball and basketball, lettering in both for 4 years. I plan to attend Southeast Technical College fall of 2025 for their LPN program.

Morgan Hoffman – Presho



Morgan Hoffman



Taya Iversen

My name is Taya Iversen. My parents are Aaron & Lori Iversen and I have an older brother Carter. I am a senior at Jones County High School. I will be attending Southeast Technical College in Sioux Falls. I plan to obtain an LPN degree and then further my education to achieve a Registered Nurse degree. I have participated in various high school activities including basketball, volleyball, track/football manager, school play, band, and student council.

Taya Iversen – Murdo

My name is Natalie Kelsey, my parents are Kurt and Rachel Kelsey and my brother is Maxwell Kelsey. I live in Oacoma, SD. In high school I participated in golf, fall play/musical and the one act play. I was also a wrestling manager for three years and a football manager for one year. I plan on attending Northern State University and Major in Elementary Education and Minor in Special Education.

Natalie Kelsey – Oacoma



Natalie Kelsey



Kaysen Magee

Hi, my name is Kaysen Magee and I am the daughter of Bryce and Kayla Magee. Currently, I am a senior at Stanley County High School. After I graduate, I plan on attending Dakota Wesleyan University to major in nursing. Aside from school, I enjoy working as a caregiver, running, reading, and hunting with my dad. I greatly appreciate West Central Electric for awarding me with this scholarship money.

Kaysen Magee – Fort Pierre

My name is Carley Malm. I am 18 years old and I am from Fort Pierre, S.D., I go to school at T.F. Riggs in Pierre. I have been involved in a variety of athletic activities. I have 3 siblings, two

older sisters and one younger brother. I live with my mom, dad, and my brother. I plan to attend Bismarck State College next year to pursue an associates of applied science degree in Diagnostic Medical Sonography. I would like to thank West Central for giving me this scholarship.

Carley Malm – Fort Pierre



Carley Malm

I am Race O'Connor, son of Todd and Laura O'Connor. My family lives on a farm and ranch west of Philip where we raise cattle and crops. I have been class vice president junior and senior years and have participated in FFA, band, choir, and basketball. I am also active in the Philip Volunteer Fire Department. I am thankful for being chosen for this scholarship as it will help me



Race O'Connor

tremendously to pursue higher education.

Race O'Connor – Philip

My name is Morgan Sammons. My parents are Katie and Casey Sammons and I have an older brother named Logan. I live on a ranch/farm just outside of Midland, South Dakota. I attended Midland school from Preschool to 5th grade. After that I transferred to Philip school. I have participated in FFA, National Honor Society, Track, Basketball, and Student Council. I will be attending Mitchell Tech in the fall for an Ag Business Degree.

Morgan Sammons – Midland



Morgan Sammons

My name is Ashley Schriever. My parents are David and Jennifer Schriever, and I have two older brothers, Casey and Wyatt. I am the fourth generation to live on my family's ranch and have a very strong agricultural background. I have been involved in FFA, rodeo, volleyball, and 4-H during my high school years. After graduation, I am planning to attend South Dakota State University for animal and range science with a minor in ag business.

Ashley Schriever – Philip



Ashley Schriever

My name is Presley Terkildsen and I am a senior at Philip High School. I am the daughter of Travis and Danielle Terkildsen, and I have an older sister and a younger brother. At PHS I am vice president of student council, class president, in FCCLA, and Teens as Teachers. I am also active in basketball and track. Upon graduation, I plan to attend South Dakota State University and pursue a degree in Elementary education.

Presley Terkildsen – Philip



Presley Terkildsen

I'm Lukas VanderMay, a senior from Philip High School, I am active in FFA and have played football for 3 years. When I was a freshman, I started working for my grandparents on their ranch doing daily ranch work, haying, and a bit of trucking. Next year I plan to attend the Livestock Production program at Lake Area Technical College. After that I plan to continue working for them and drive truck for my uncle.

Lukas VanderMay – Philip



Lukas VanderMay



Gunnar Whitney

My name is Gunnar Whitney and I am a senior at Jones County High School. I live in Murdo with my parents Chad and Heather Whitney and my brother Bodie. I have been involved in Future Farmers of America, Student Council, basketball, football, and golf. This fall, I plan on attending Mitchell Technical College for Welding and Manufacturing Technology.

Gunnar Whitney – Murdo

I grew up on a ranch near Kadoka, surrounded by horses, cows, and dogs, which has given me a deep respect for animals and the outdoors. Since I was a kid, I attended school at Kadoka and played basketball and volleyball throughout the years. My upbringing shaped my work ethic and taught me hard work and teamwork. Whether on the ranch or playing sports, I thrive with things that challenge me mentally or physically.

Isabella Williams – Kadoka



Isabella Williams





Local, state and federal officials celebrate the ribbon-cutting of the new Lieutenant Commander John C. Waldron Memorial Bridge, March 25, 2025. Photo by Marcy Anderson, Courtesy of the Pierre Area Chamber of Commerce.

BRIDGING HISTORY

The Demolition of the Waldron Memorial Bridge

Frank Turner

frank.turner@sdrea.coop

Tons of concrete and steel came crashing down in a planned demolition of the Lt. Cmdr. John C. Waldron Memorial Bridge that connected Pierre and Fort Pierre over a half mile stretch of river. The planned explosion marked a significant historic moment for not only Pierre and Fort Pierre, but also eastern and western South Dakota.

The demolition of the bridge unfolded in seconds. A plume of black smoke erupted from the detonating cord placed at key points in the bridge, quickly followed by a bone-rattling shock wave. Paul Nelson, a recently retired employee of the South Dakota Department of Transportation, witnessed the end of the bridge's 63-year lifespan. Nelson, a member of Oahe Elec-

tric, spent over 40 years with the SDDOT, serving most of that time as the regional bridge engineer. In this role, he was responsible for the maintenance, inspection and upkeep of the very bridge that he saw demolished.

As legacy bridge engineer, this was not Nelson's first experience with such a demolition. "I had actually witnessed the 1986 demolition of the old truss bridge that was just downstream of the current railroad bridge – so I have been around something of this magnitude before," he explained.

Even still, Nelson laughed that the modern demolition had a "pretty good report when it went off."

Although the bridge has been decommissioned, its history endures. In 2002, the bridge was dedicated to Lt. Cmdr. John C.

Waldron, a naval aviator from Fort Pierre who led a torpedo squadron during the Battle of Midway in World War II. His actions proved pivotal in the battle, but led to death of himself and most of his squadron. Of the 30 men who served under his command, only one survived the Battle of Midway.

Waldron's legacy is still commemorated through the new Pierre-Fort Pierre Bridge, which had its ribbon-cutting ceremony last month.

Construction of the new bridge began in 2020, just yards from the old bridge's location. In total, the bridge cost nearly \$50 million and is designed to last a century.

"This bridge is going to be a beautiful and wonderful enhancement to the communities and something that will last more than a hundred years," South Dakota Governor Larry Rhoden said at the ribbon cutting ceremony for the new bridge that now connects the two halves of the state.

BRIDGE DEMOLITION



The Lt. Cmdr. John C. Waldron Memorial Bridge comes crashing down at 9:03 a.m., on March 13.
Photos by Frank Turner.





Photo courtesy of the Belle Fourche Police Dept.

PROTECT AND SERVE

In 1962, President John F. Kennedy proclaimed May 15 as National Police Officers Memorial Day and the week as National Police Week.

As we pay special recognition to our law enforcement officers, we want to spotlight some of the selfless work police officers do to better serve communities and make positive impacts in people's lives.

Jacob Boyko

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In Belle Fourche, it's fun to hang out with the cops.

That's the consensus among fifth graders in the Kids-n-Cops programs when officers from the Belle Fourche Police Department arrive at kids' homes early in the morning to pick them up for an unforgettable Christmas shopping spree.

"We pick up the kids from their houses, drive them around for about a half hour and let them activate the lights and sirens, then we bring them to Runnings and go on a shopping spree for their family," explained Police Chief Ryan Cherveny. "They can buy shopping cart loads of gifts for everyone in their house, and then still buy some gifts for themselves."

The outing continues with games, gift wrapping and a pizza party. At the end of the day, officers drop the kids off at their

homes, leaving behind not only presents but a lasting friendship.

The police department works with the school to target children who may be going through something at home or could otherwise benefit from a friendly acquaintance with some of Belle Fourche's finest.

The program is supported by donations from community – last year, the community sponsored \$500 shopping limits for 16 kids.

Cherveny, who's headed the program for more than a decade, says it's as big of a hit with his officers as it is with the fifth graders.

"It's one of the things every year the officers look forward to," Cherveny explained. "We never have to ask for volunteers because just about everybody volunteers. Even the guys working the overnights come in, do the event, and then

go home and try to get the last two hours of sleep before they come back to work."

Knowing the community members they serve and making a difference in the life of a kid boosts officers' mental health "tremendously," he added.

"It helps keep the officers grounded – they know the people that they're serving and that they're there to protect. [Knowing community members] can help alleviate a really stressful situation into a much more manageable one where we're able to work with people to resolve things."

He continued, "Our main focus is just being out there in the community, helping kids recognize that when we show up to their houses during negative events, we're there because we have a job – it's less scary for the children and they see we're people they can always come to when they need somebody"

The success of the program and the outpouring of community support has led the department to expand their community involvement beyond Christmas shopping, according to Police Administrative Technician Mardi Reeves. The police force also distributed grocery

cards, gift bags, food and blankets to families in need. Reeves estimates a community-wide impact of nearly 200 people in 2024.

Police officers and other first responders also coach little league sports, with plans to soon offer registration fee and equipment “scholarships” so any kid can get involved.

“There are a lot of under-privileged children who can’t be in sports that end up wandering around town with nothing to do and trouble tends to find them,” Reeves said. “Having them participate in a sport really helps with that.”

Chervený says he is grateful for the continued community support that not only makes the Kids-n-Cops program possible, but also creates lasting friendships and memories for kids and their families.

“We had a kid that went shopping with us, and he ended up buying a popcorn popper, oil, butter, cheese, and the different popcorn toppings along with gifts for his other siblings,” Chervený remembered. “The family had never been able to go to a movie – the parents worked rough schedules – so this was the opportunity. The kid bought some movies and a Blu-ray player and the whole purpose was so that they could sit down and watch movies as a family.”

Gregory Police Chief Ryan Cook also believes in the merits of community

involvement. In Gregory, he spearheads multiple community initiatives including the popular bike rodeo.

A partnership between the police department, Avera Health and Gregory’s volunteer ambulance and fire services, the bike rodeo teaches kids – and anyone else interested – the rules of the road for kids on bicycles as well as other safety tips.

“We have volunteers at different stations and the kids go around to each station and participate in whatever event that is,” Cook explained. “One of the stations is helmet sizing and we hand out free helmets, other stations make sure the bicycle chain is lubed up and tight and the different parts are working correctly, and so on.”

The department is involved in other ways, too. For example, the officers work with the post office to ensure children’s letters to Santa Claus are delivered to the North Pole and receive a response.

The involvement is a necessity, explained Cook, because police can’t do their jobs and serve their communities without building relationships first.

“You need to be someone the community trusts,” he said. “You want folks to be comfortable approaching you, knowing there’s an open door, knowing they’re welcome to make the phone call or stop in. And obviously, when our officers are active and out doing stuff, it’s that much easier.”

Women in Law Enforcement



Metzger

Public service knows no gender, and neither does a career in law enforcement. That’s the message South Dakota Highway Patrol

deputy Emily Metzger wants to send to young girls with a passion for public service.

Originally from Kansas, Metzger attended the University of South Dakota in Vermillion to study criminal justice and public administration.

“I wanted to be in law enforcement since I was very young,” Metzger explained. My grandfather was in law enforcement, and in college I worked for the fire department and ambulance and really decided being a first responder was something I wanted to do.”

After college, she attended the police academy training in Pierre, where for 13 weeks she studied everything ranging from traffic stops to defensive tactics to interrogation. Then, another 10 weeks of highway patrol academy and another 10 weeks of field training.

“In South Dakota, the Highway Patrol offers a lot of different things,” Metzger said. “All of our education and training is 100% paid for and they pay your salary while you’re there.”

While the Highway Patrol isn’t exactly brimming with female troopers, Metzger said she’s on the scene to help just like anyone else.

“I have the same expectations as any trooper highway patrol – there’s no special treatment,” she said.

Metzger encourages young women interested in applying to reach out to a local law enforcement officer for more information.



Officer Allan Guinard helps local children with their Christmas shopping. Photo courtesy of the Belle Fourche Police Dept.



The Annual Bike Rodeo. Photo courtesy of the Gregory Police Dept.



MAY 31, JUNE 28, JULY 26
Fort Sisseton Lantern Tour
 Lake City, SD
 605-910-4465

*Photo courtesy of
 Travel South Dakota*

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.

APRIL 27
Country Roads
 2 p.m. Matinee
 Gayville Music Hall
 Gayville, SD
 605-760-5799

MAY 2-3
SD Spring Square Dance Festival
 Fri. 7:30-10:30 p.m.
 Sat. 9:30 a.m.-7:30 p.m.
 Faith Lutheran Church
 601 N. Cliff Ave.
 Sioux Falls, SD
 Call for events & times
 605-360-2524

MAY 3-4
Prairie Village Events
 Sat. Consignment Auction
 Sun. Season Opening
 Madison, SD
www.prairievillage.org

MAY 3
West River Pheasants Forever Banquet
 5 p.m. Central Time
 Draper Auditorium
 Draper, SD
 605-516-0143

MAY 3
American Legion Post 15
Just Because It's Time to Dance
 6-10:30 p.m.
 Tables Available
 El Riad Shrine
 Sioux Falls, SD
 605-336-3470

MAY 6-7
7th Annual Energize!
Exploring Innovative Rural Communities Conference
 Hosted by SDSU Extension
 Community Vitality
 Platte, SD
 605-626-2870

MAY 17
Norwegian Independence Day
 Vivian, SD
 605-222-3296

MAY 17
Annual Plant Sale
 9 a.m.-11 a.m.
 Codington Co. Extension Complex
 Watertown, SD
 830-534-5359

MAY 23-25
Brandon's Big Car Show
 Carnival & Car Show
 Fri. 6-11 p.m., Sun. 12-5 p.m.
 Sat. 1-11 p.m., Car Show 1-4 p.m.
 815 McHardy Rd
 Brandon, SD

MAY 31
Auto Parts Swap Meet & Car Show
 8 a.m.-2 p.m.
 Brown County Fairgrounds
 Aberdeen, SD

MAY 31
Hay Country Jamboree
 7 p.m.
 Gayville Music Hall
 Gayville, SD
 605-760-5799

JUNE 5
Danish Constitution Day Celebration
 6:15 p.m.-9 p.m.
 Danish Folk Dancing & Music
 Daneville Heritage Museum
 Viborg, SD
 605-766-1312
danevilleheritage.com

JUNE 6
Joy Fest
 John Mogen Piano Performance
 7 p.m. Central Time
 Okaton, SD
cristenjoyphotography.com

JUNE 11
Agricultural Women's Day
 9 a.m.-4 p.m.
 Agar-Blunt-Onida School
 Onida, SD
 605-769-0013

JUNE 13
Jesse James Days
 Garretson, SD
visitgarretsonsd.com

JUNE 20-21
Czech Days
 Fun, Music, Entertainment,
 Dancing & Czech Food
 Tabor, SD
www.taborczechdays.com
Facebook.com/TaborCzechDays

Note: We publish contact information as provided. If no phone number is given, none will be listed. Please call ahead to verify the event is still being held.