

COOPERATIVE CONNECTIONS



Barb Gross, Adele Enright
and Jean Tehle have all
worked hard to facilitate
free and fair elections
for registered voters
in Dewey County

Poll tenders rock the vote

Election workers are
dedicated to the task
Pages 8-9

Freshman Impact teaches sound decision making

Pages 12-13

73rd Annual Meeting held in Kadoka

On Oct. 5, West Central Electric held its annual membership meeting at the city auditorium in Kadoka, SD. An estimated 300 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 (MDT) p.m., after which Pastor Marcia Brennan gave the invocation. Members of the Kadoka High School Choir sang the National Anthem.

The board's report was given by Shad Riggle and among other things, spoke on the return of the Basin Bus Tour.

"We felt the importance for the membership to know how and where their power comes from," added Riggle. "We are excited to announce that we will be bringing back this tour next year."

In his speech, CEO/Manager Jeff Birkeland informed members of Keystone XL material and project cleanup, inflation and price increases, materials shortages and lead times, the June storms, and the current rate outlook for 2023.

"As Shad stated in his speech, the good news is that we are not planning on a rate increase in 2023," Birkeland confirmed.

Board Vice President, Ken Miller presented service awards to Philip Lineman Rhett Bothwell for 5 years, Murdo Billing Supervisor Cindy Fox for 10 years, Presho Foreman Shane Neiderworder for 25 years. Manager Birkeland then recognized retiring DJ Mertens for 15 years of service as a seat on the board of directors.



At top, those in attendance at West Central Electric's 2022 Annual Membership Meeting heard reports on the Keystone XL cleanup, supply shortages, the June storm response and the rate outlook for 2023. Above, Jessie Tucker congratulates members who won \$300 cash prizes: Marjorie Iwan, Keith Harry, Beverly McDaniel, Eileen Kotz, and Stephen Riggins.

Attorney David Larson presented his legal report and announced that three directors were appointed to three-year terms:

Cliff Uthe, representing Lyman County; Rich Bendt, representing Jackson County; and Kevin Neuhauser, representing Haakon County.

Guest speaker, Rushmore Electric

Manager Kory Hammerbeck, spoke on a Rushmore electric update and touched on the SPP grid issues from February of 2021.

The meeting featured a free roast beef dinner prepared and served by the Kadoka Volunteer Fire Department. Prizes and cash drawings were held throughout the evening.

**COOPERATIVE
CONNECTIONS**

**WEST CENTRAL
ELECTRIC**

(USPS No. 018-988)

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Vice President

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Marty Hansen, Philip

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Kevin Neuhauser, Midland
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Jim Willert, Belvidere
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David Larson, Chamberlain

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Jeff Birkeland, Murdo

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Design assistance by SDREA

ANNUAL MEETING



Editor's Note - The following is an excerpt from General Manager Jeff Birkeland's annual meeting speech.

Good evening and welcome to your 73rd Annual Meeting! Did you see the American flag hanging between two West Central trucks on your way into the building? I have tremendous respect and pride for the American flag and West Central. So when I see them together, it does my heart good.



Jeff Birkeland
CEO

As I reflect back on the last year, it was anything but normal. Between the storms, inflation, long lead times on material, and the termination of our TransCanada contract, it was an action-packed year to say the least.

TransCanada first approached West Central about supplying power for two pumping stations back in 2008. Through all the years and setbacks, I always thought the project would get approved. But as we all know, President Biden killed the Keystone XL project and the \$18 million of revenue it meant for West Central Electric members. The \$18 million I just mentioned is an annual dollar amount. So had we been able to honor our contract, West Central would have recorded over 216 million dollars in revenue from TransCanada. That's real money; that's long-term rate relief. But it hasn't been all doom and gloom. TransCanada has been good for West Central. First and foremost, West Central has not spent one dollar of our members' money on this project. TransCanada has paid for everything. In fact, TransCanada has paid West Central \$738,000 for labor. We built a lot of infrastructure to serve these loads and that has upgraded our electrical system in the process. One upgrade in particular comes to mind. We now have a 3-phase tie line between the Philip town substation and the Philip rural substation. This line was originally built to serve the Philip workforce camp but now will serve the Philip area for decades to come. TransCanada also paid for a new addition to our Murdo warehouse so their material could be stored inside. The last TransCanada benefit I want to mention was that we purchased 11 miles of transmission line material to replace the line from Midland to the 1880 Town. We saved over \$400,000 by purchasing this material. So my main point is, even though Keystone XL did not happen, our members have benefited from TransCanada.

I have a couple of questions for everyone. Have you noticed any inflation, and have you been able to get everything you've ordered? I suspect we all know the answer to those questions. West Central is in the same boat as you. Not only have prices skyrocketed, but the inability to get material is frustrating. Here are some examples of how it has affected West Central. In January of 2021, we ordered four F350 service trucks. We are still waiting on those trucks. In February of 2021, we ordered a new digger truck for Philip. We are still waiting for that. In January of

Continued on page 6

A heaping helping of holiday home safety

Nearly every household uses extra electricity during the holidays for cooking, decorating and heating.

Take extra care to use electricity safely and to ask family members and house-guests to do the same. Here are some helpful tips:

- Stay in the kitchen when broiling or doing any stovetop cooking.
- Keep children well away from cooking appliances while in use.
- Keep towels, potholders and curtains away from hot surfaces.
- One of the riskiest holiday behaviors is overloading your electrical outlets. You will overload your wall outlets if you string strand after strand of holiday lights together and plug them into an extension cord that you plug into an outlet. Plugging multiple strands of cords into a power strip does not add any juice to the electrical circuit that powers the outlet you plug the strip into.
- Check decorative lights for damaged cords, plugs and sockets. Replace anything that's frayed, cracked or broken. Buy cords that are certified by UL; look for the UL symbol on the package.
- Don't run extension cords under rugs, carpets or baseboards, or anywhere they can be a tripping hazard.
- Only use decorations and cords outdoors that are properly rated for outdoor use.
- When you put up outdoor decorations, do not string lights in trees near power lines. Fasten outdoor lights carefully and securely with clips, never nails or tacks.
- Keep electric lights away from decorative metal trees.
- Keep all light strings and other decorations away from pets so they don't get tangled in them or chew the wires.
- Keep all decorations - and everything else - at least 3 feet away from heat sources such as fireplaces and space heaters.
- Always turn off your decorations when you leave home and when you're sleeping.
- Make sure smoke detectors are present and working properly.
- Use space heaters properly and safely. Keep them out of high-traffic areas and at least 3 feet from anything that can burn.
- Do not leave a space heater running unattended. Turn off space heaters and unplug them when you leave the room or go to sleep.
- Never leave an open flame, including your fireplace or a candle, unattended.

LINEMEN PARTICIPATE IN RUBBER GLOVING SCHOOL



Roughly 50 electric cooperative linemen from across the state recently participated in a Rubber Gloving School at the Mitchell Technical College training facility. The program included simulating maintenance and repair work on energized power lines, awareness of proper safety procedures, grounding and insulation of vehicles, operation of aerial lift devices and more.

To see a video of this event and learn more about how electric cooperatives serve our members, visit Cooperative Connections Plus by scanning the QR code at right.



Don't play on transformer boxes

Traci Tschetter

Traci, 11, warns readers to stay away from transformer boxes, which contain high-voltage underground electrical equipment inside. Traci is the child of Ryan and Elaine Tschetter and they are members of Whetstone Valley Electric.

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.

CROCKPOT CREATIONS

SLOW COOKER CHILI

Ingredients:

- 2 lbs. lean ground beef
- 1 pkg. McCormick Slow Cookers Chili Seasoning
- 2 cans (14.4 ozs. each) diced tomatoes, undrained
- 2 cans (16 ozs. each) kidney beans, drained and rinsed
- 1 can (15.5 ozs.) tomato sauce

METHOD

Brown ground beef or turkey in large skillet on medium-high heat. Drain fat. Place cooked beef, Slow Cookers Chili Seasoning Mix, tomatoes, beans and tomato sauce in slow cooker. Stir until well mixed. Cover. Cook 8 hours on low or 4 hours on high. Stir before serving. For best results, do not remove cover during cooking.

McCormick.com

SLOW COOKER TURKEY BREAST

Ingredients:

- 2 tsps. McCormick Garlic Powder
- 2 tsps. McCormick Paprika
- 2 tsps. McCormick Rubbed Sage
- 2 tsps. Sicilian Sea Salt
- 1 tsp. McCormick Pure Ground Black Pepper
- 1 tsp. McCormick Whole Thyme Leaves
- 1 turkey breast, (about 6 lbs.) fresh or frozen, thawed
- 3 tsps. butter, melted

METHOD

Mix seasonings in small bowl; set aside. Rinse turkey and pat dry. Brush turkey with melted butter. Sprinkle seasoning mixture over entire surface and under skin of turkey. Place turkey breast in slow cooker. Cover. Cook 1 hour on high. Reduce heat to low; cook 7 hours longer or until turkey is cooked through (internal temperature reaches 165 degrees). Transfer to platter or carving board and slice.

McCormick.com

SLOW COOKER MASHED POTATOES

Ingredients:

- 5 lbs. Yukon gold potatoes, peeled and cut into cubes
- 1 c. chicken stock
- 2 McCormick Bay Leaves
- 1/2 c. (1 stick) butter, cut into chunks
- 1 tsp. salt
- 3/4 tsp. McCormick Pure Ground Black Pepper
- 1/2 tsp. McCormick Garlic Powder
- 1/2 -1 c. milk
- 1 tsp. McCormick Parsley Flakes

METHOD

Spray inside of 6-quart slow cooker with no-stick cooking spray. Add potatoes, stock and bay leaves. Cover. Cook 4 hours on high or until potatoes are tender, stirring after each hour. Remove bay leaves. Stir in butter, salt, pepper and garlic powder. Cover. Let stand 5 minutes. Beat potatoes with electric mixer on medium-high speed or mash with potato masher, gradually adding milk, until smooth. Stir in parsley. Top with additional butter, if desired. Serve with McCormick Brown Gravy or Perfect Brown Gravy.

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 2022. All entries must include your name, mailing address, phone number and cooperative name.

Q: How can I save energy at home during the holiday season?

A: The holidays are a magical time when we come together with our loved ones to share food, gifts and quality time. It's also the most expensive time of year for many of us. Along with the expense of gifts, meals and travel comes colder weather and darker nights that lead to more electricity use and higher bills.

One way to reduce the financial burden of the most wonderful time of year is by implementing efficiency tips to use less energy at home and lower your monthly bills.

HOME PRACTICES

If you are hosting guests, your household will consume more electricity than normal. Be prepared with efficiency basics:

- Have your thermostat programmed at 68 degrees when you are home and dialed back 8 to 10 degrees when you leave the house or go to sleep.
- Run the clothes washer on cold with full loads.
- When not in use, turn off lights and the TV; fully shut down computers and gaming systems instead of putting them in sleep or standby mode.
- Lower the thermostat when guests are over or cooking food. Most gatherings happen in the center of the home, so save energy by turning the heat down in areas you are not using.

COOKING EFFICIENCY

Whether you are making holiday treats or a feast, here are a few tips to help lower energy use in the kitchen.

Use the oven light to check food. Every time the oven door is opened, the temperature inside is reduced by up to 25 degrees, according to the Department of Energy (DOE). When possible, make use of a slow cooker, microwave, toaster oven or warming plate, which use less energy than an oven and

stovetop. According to DOE, a toaster oven can use up to half the energy of the average electric stove over the same cooking time.

Let hot food cool to room temperature before placing it inside the refrigerator. This ensures you don't increase the temperature inside your fridge and cause it to use more energy to cool down. You can also take some of the stress and expense out of your holiday cooking by asking guests to bring a dish.

HOLIDAY LIGHTING

This year, make the switch to LEDs for all your holiday lighting. LED holiday lights consume 70 percent less energy than conventional incandescent light strands. For example, it costs 27 cents to light a 6-foot tree for 12 hours a day for 40 days with LEDs compared to \$10 for incandescent lights.

Pick up a few light timers so you don't have to remember to unplug your lights every evening. You can also choose to upgrade to smart holiday lights that offer a wide range of app-controlled options, including time, colors, music and modes.

OUT-OF-TOWN EFFICIENCY

If you're visiting family and friends during the holidays, prepare your home to use less energy while you're away.

Water heating is the second-largest energy expense in your home, accounting for about 18% of your utility bill, according to DOE. Switching your water heater to vacation mode will reduce wasted energy by keeping the water at a lower temperature. If your water heater does not have vacation mode on the dial, you can adjust it to the lowest setting.

Set your thermostat to around 55 degrees so you're not wasting energy to heat the home while you're away.

Instead of leaving lights on all day, consider upgrading a lamp or fixture to a smart lightbulb. This allows you to control lights from afar and set a schedule for the light to go on and off. Another option is to repurpose your holiday light timer for one of your living room lamps.

Lower your energy bills this holiday season with these simple tips. Happy Holidays!



Miranda Boutelle
Efficiency Services
Group

Schaunaman living out Miss Rodeo dream

Billy Gibson

billy.gibson@sdrea.coop

Adrienne Schaunaman is used to being the center of attention and pulling off pressure-packed performances in front of large crowds, but one spine-tingling moment managed to mangle her nerves.

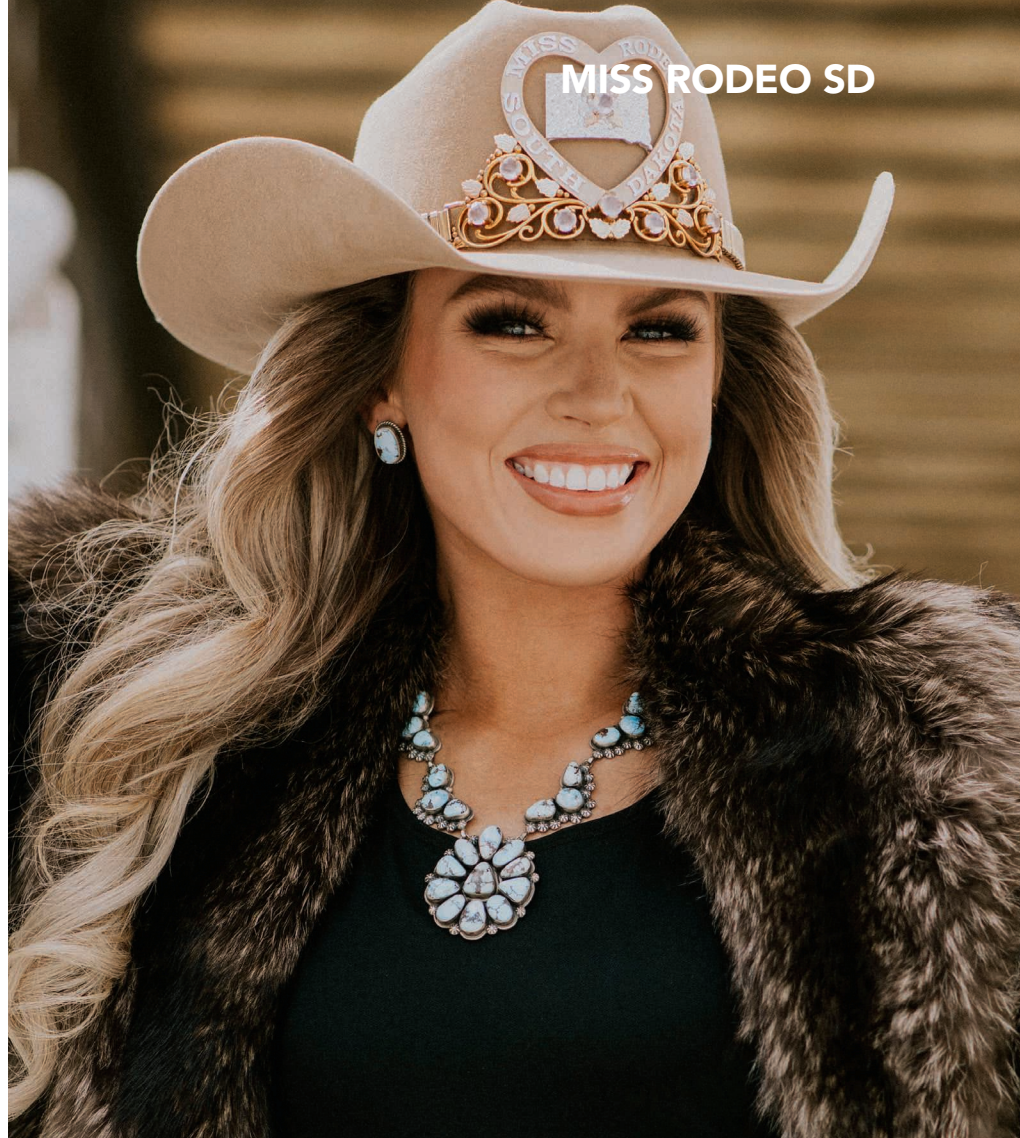
The reigning Miss Rodeo South Dakota was on horseback at the start of the annual Rodeo Rapid City event last February. She was staged at the edge of the arena and getting ready to take off across the middle of the ring holding a state flag with a switch attached to the pole. Her task was to ride out in front of the crowd as the national anthem reached a crescendo and flip a switch



that would send fireworks shooting out of the end of the pole.

There was something about the extraordinary zeal of the sold-out crowd that gave her the jitters.

“They were screaming the national anthem at the top of their lungs and it was clear they knew the meaning of every single word,” she recalled. “They were singing with such enthusiasm and passion that it made me nervous. I had to make sure I clicked the switch at the



Adrienne Schaunaman has spent 2022 traveling across the state and region representing South Dakota and promoting the rodeo and ranching lifestyle.

right time and get everything done like we had planned. As soon as they got to ‘home of the brave’ I headed out down the center and it was so cool. It was a once-in-a-lifetime moment.”

Schaunaman, 24, has spent the year traveling across the state and region promoting her chosen platform, “Mentoring Matters.” When she speaks to groups, she shares with her audiences the positive impact that so many influential individuals have had in her life, including her parents, 4-H leaders, school teachers, rodeo coaches and her network of friends.

A graduate of Aberdeen Central High School, she grew up on the family farm raising and showing livestock. She competed in barrel racing at Colby Community College in Colby, Kan., and showed horses at the University

of Minnesota-Crookston where she graduated in 2021 with a degree in equine science and equine business management. She took a break from her job at Northern Plains Animal Health and hit the road to pursue her ambassador responsibilities.

Schaunaman recently returned from Oregon where she represented South Dakota at the Pendleton Round Up, one of the oldest rodeo events in the country.

“I try to ingrain into everyone that they have unique talents they can share,” she said. “I wouldn’t be where I am without so many people helping me along the way. I encourage people to try to do more with what they have. We should unite around common causes, volunteer and help our communities thrive by identifying and coalescing around those many things that unite us.”



Jamalia Franzen, auditor deputy in Dewey County, encourages all eligible citizens to register to vote. *Photos by Billy Gibson*

Poll workers urge voters to stay active in the election process

Billy Gibson

billy.gibson@sdrea.coop

About 10 years ago, Michele Moore was newly retired and looking for something interesting to occupy her time. Out of the blue, she received a call from the Clay County elections auditor.

“She wanted to know if I was interested in working the elections and I told her I’d do it. It’s been very rewarding and it feels like I’m doing something important and worthwhile,” Moore said.

When she’s not facilitating the election process, Moore takes care of the bookkeeping for the family’s welding and manufacturing business operated by her husband, David.

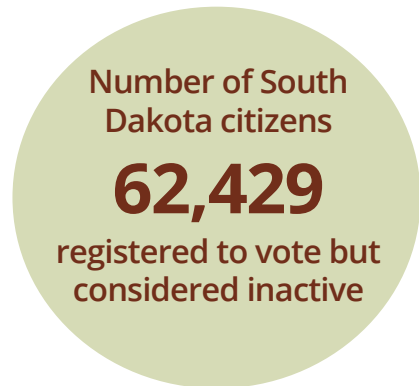
While election work isn’t a full-time gig, poll tenders put in long hours on voting day. They typically report to the local precinct at 6 a.m. before the polls open an hour later. The shift goes straight through to 7 p.m. when the polls close, although any voters still

standing in line at that time are allowed to cast their ballots. Workers have to stay on duty the entire time and often pack their own lunch and dinner.

After the last voter is done, all the sealed ballots and accompanying paperwork are brought to the auditor’s office for verification and certification to ensure the election is “free and fair.”

Moore said all the workers at her precinct located at the National Guard Armory in Vermillion are diligent, dependable, thorough and conscientious. She said they take their jobs very seriously and are careful not to be “political” in any way, a guideline contained in the orientation and training process that workers go through before each election regardless of one’s years of service.

The training material requires that workers be professional, punctual, respectful to voters, team-oriented and “leave partisan leanings at the door.” Anyone concerned about the validity of the election process can appear at



the precinct as a “poll watcher” or “poll observer,” however, those individuals must adhere to a separate set of guidelines as set forth by the Secretary of State’s Office.

“We’re not here to change anyone’s mind or influence how anyone votes,” Moore said. “We’re just here to do anything we can to help them vote as quickly and smoothly as possible and make sure the process goes well. We try to make it easy for them.”

That doesn’t mean everything always goes according to plan. As the political passions and divisions have grown more intense over recent years, Moore said she’s encountered some fairly tense situations. But she said she generally



Poll workers are on the job from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. local time. If the polls close while you are in line, you will still be permitted to vote.

Here is a breakdown of party identification as of Sept. 1, 2022:

- Republican - 291,956
- Democrat - 150,760
- No party/Ind. - 142,538
- Libertarian - 2,733
- Other - 1,376

Total - 589,363

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Election poll workers see themselves as doing something helpful to support and facilitate the democratic process.

feels safe while doing her work inside the armory.

Some voters can get upset when they try to make requests that violate the voting rules, such as attempting to change their party affiliation on voting day or not providing the proper identification. She said tensions can run high during contentious presidential or mid-term elections.

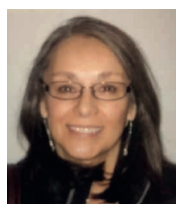


“Sometimes people get angry and you just try to calm them down. They don’t know how things work and what’s required because they’re not paying attention,” she said. “Social media and TV stirs up their passion and they don’t always know how to control that.”

She recalled one particular fellow who insisted on voting without presenting the proper identification. When he was

told he would have to use a provisional ballot, he became agitated and stormed out of the precinct. Moore was “a little nervous” about the man returning and what he might do, but she took comfort in the fact that the National Guard soldiers were right there in the building.

Cris Sichmeller, a resident of Webster, signed on to join her local precinct in Roslyn six years ago and enjoys the



Michele Moore

social aspects of the assignment. A self-described “farm wife,” Sichmeller said she doesn’t often have an opportunity to sit down and visit with friends, but being at

the polling place means visiting with folks and catching up on current events.

“People used to spend time just visiting with one another, going to houses and having coffee and playing cards, but that doesn’t happen a lot these days,” she said. “There’s a lot of camaraderie that comes with being around people you know in the community that you have something in common with.”

She said at her precinct things normally proceed “without a lot of drama,” but she remembers that the Covid pandemic did cause a few wrinkles. Several workers contracted the virus, along with the precinct deputy.

The workers had to wear face shields, and Plexiglas was set up in the voting area and at the registration tables.

“I remember a man who had just retired from the military and he came in and saw the face shields and just laughed,” Sichmeller recalled. “He said that wasn’t going to keep us from getting the virus or passing it on to others. He said we needed a hazmat suit for that. I guess he was right.”

Barb Gross recently retired after tending the polls in Dewey County since the 1980s. She describes herself as a stickler for adhering to the rules and buttoning everything down.

“We always made sure everything tallied up because we knew we were going to be audited and we invited that because it was a challenge to see if we could pull it off without a hitch and without anything slipping through the cracks,” she said.

Secretary of State Steve Barnett emphasized the fact that poll workers serve a very valuable role in society.

“They’re on the front lines of the election process. You couldn’t run an election without them,” he said.

Barnett stressed importance of voters meeting their obligation to stay actively involved and make sure they are familiar with the rules and regulations. To find out more about voting rights and responsibilities, visit www.sdsos.gov.

General Manager's report, *continued*

2022 we ordered a new tree chipper, and we are still waiting for that. Those items may sound bad, but it gets worse. The basic transformer we use to serve your house and business, takes 150 weeks to get. That's almost three years! That makes it hard to plan future projects, let alone severe storms capable of ruining dozens of transformers per storm. The wire you see hanging on our poles takes 76 weeks to get. Underground wire takes 52 weeks to get. The inability to get material is frustrating but the cost increases have been terrible. In 2020, we purchased a 300 KVA transformer for \$8,400, today that same transformer costs \$23,000. Our cost of underground wire has doubled. We are also on track to spend an additional \$61,000 in gas and diesel compared to last year. I could talk all night on the price increases, but the point is the same. Our cost of materials has doubled, and in some instances, it has tripled. But as Shad stated in his speech, the good news is that we are not planning on a rate increase in 2023.

The last topic I want to report on directly affected everyone in this auditorium. Does anyone remember June 11th, 12th and 13th? I bet you do! Those dates signify three nights of storms that brought severe destruction. Generally, a summer storm will be a single occurrence, and the damage is localized to a small area. These storms damaged infrastructure in Haakon, Jackson, Jones and Lyman counties. I know this won't come as a surprise, but the most extensive damage occurred in Haakon and Jackson counties. West Central lost 75 transmission line poles, 214 distribution poles, 12 transformers, and numerous meters. We hired two transmission line contractors and crews from five neighboring co-ops to help restore service. In total, we had 69



Members had an opportunity to stop by the solar demonstration trailer to gather more information about the advantages and drawbacks of residential solar power.

linemen working to repair the damage. We estimate the cost of the damage at \$1.6 million. The good news is that we are eligible for FEMA reimbursement and working on that process. There was another side to these storms, and it exemplifies who we are as a Cooperative. As I stated earlier, most storms are short in nature and damage is localized, but in this instance, we had prolonged storm damage that covered four counties. After the first storm, the guys started repairing the damage and 16 hours later, we started feeling good about what we had accomplished. Then the second round of storms came through and damaged more lines. At that point, we started calling in transmission line contractors and help from neighboring Cooperatives. The damage was so extensive, we knew there was no way we could repair everything in a timely basis by ourselves. We continued to plug away restoring power to as many members as we could. Things weren't good at this point but we were holding our own. The last storm that rolled through the Kadoka area really hit us hard. It took more transmission line down that resulted in Philip, Kadoka and the Belvidere areas being without

power. Worse than that, there was no way to get power restored fast. We have a loop feed transmission line system and that last storm took out our backup system. I have never had such a sick feeling in my stomach. The damage was so bad that we knew it would be days before power was restored to Philip, Kadoka and Belvidere. In our 73 years, West Central has never experienced this kind of damage. It was at this point I expected tempers would flare out of frustration, and the phone would ring off the wall with complaints. But just the opposite happened. Our members and communities called us asking what they could do to help. I have never felt so humble, but yet had so much pride! As I reflect back at that point in time, I realize that's who we are.

Both as members and as employees. No matter how bad things are, we dig our heels in and work together to get things done! So on behalf of the board, the employees and myself, I want to thank everyone for all the help during the storm restoration. I'd like to close by telling you I believe we have the best employees in the state and I know they will bust their tails to keep your lights on. Thank you and God Bless.

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f. Total Distribution (Sum of 15c and 15e)		3636	3626
g. Copies not Distributed (See Instructions to Publishers #4 (page #3))			
h. Total (Sum of 15f and g)		3636	3626
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18. Signature and Title of Editor, Publisher, Business Manager, or Owner: *Jill Rankin* Date: 09/28/2022

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Remember to turn on your heat breakers

The 2022-2023 heating season is here. October 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 seasonal 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.





SOUND DECISIONS

Central Electric lineman Cody Riggs uses a hot stick to simulate de-energizing a power line during a Freshman Impact emergency exercise at Hanson High School in Alexandria. *Photo by Billy Gibson*

Freshman Impact program promotes sound safety practices for students

Billy Gibson
billy.gibson@sdrea.coop

The students at Hanson High School were stunned and aghast at the horrific scene unfolding right before their eyes.

There were two wrecked sedans, a downed utility pole and tangled wires strewn across the road. Emergency responders were swarming everywhere as a fire truck barreled onto the scene with its sirens blaring. And the most unsettling sight of all: four of their fellow students lying in the crumpled cars with massive wounds and barely clinging to life.

Fortunately, it turns out the accident scene was just a drill staged by a group known as Freshman Impact: Caught in the Moment, and coordinated as part of Cornbelt Program Day at the school located in Alexandria.

Nearly 200 students came from surrounding schools for a full slate of

learning opportunities centered around vehicle safety, first aid, emergency response, drug abuse awareness and much more. Participating schools were Hanson High School, Armour, Bridgewater-Emery, Ethan, Marion, McCook Central, Plankinton and Wessington Springs.

Local organizers Yolanda Price and Don Huber worked with Freshman Impact Executive Director Rick McPherson, local school officials and emergency response agencies to plan the event.

The morning session included seven separate stations scattered throughout the school's parking lot and in the gymnasium. The learning stations focused on the following subjects: teen mental health; healthy relationships; jaws of life and ambulance demonstration; seatbelt awareness; drug dog; social media dangers; and a distracted driving course where the



West River Electric is one of several electric cooperatives that support the Freshman Impact program.

students wore goggles simulating drug and alcohol impaired vision and attempted to navigate a short course behind the wheel of an ATV.

Taking part in the program was Central Electric Cooperative, which provided the downed power pole and wires. Once the emergency exercise was set into motion, two co-op linemen promptly arrived on the scene to de-energize the lines and worked with other responders to secure the area and form a safe perimeter.

Central Electric's Manager of Communications Tara Miller helped



A Hanson High School student takes on the role of an accident victim during a recent mock emergency scenario. *Photo by Billy Gibson*

facilitate the partnership while working alongside local organizers.

“This is an incredible opportunity for area students to learn about good decision-making, safety and the real dangers that are out there,” Miller said. “Concern for community is one of our guiding principles as a cooperative. This experience serves to educate first responders and students. It aligns with our values, and we are pleased to support it.”

The day’s program covered just about all the bases. The schedule included a poignant perspective of loss and grief from LeAnn Moe, who lost her teenage daughter to an automobile accident. During the mock accident response, one of the crash victims was carried away in a hearse furnished by a local funeral

home. And after all the activity settled down outside, the students returned to the gymnasium to observe a mock legal trial and sentencing hearing over the car accident they had witnessed.

The day ended with the distribution of educational materials by CORE (Community Organized Resources for Educating), the parent organization of Freshman Impact.

McPherson said he has found that the teaching method employed by Freshman Impact is successful in driving the message home to students, and they also develop a rapport with local

agencies and emergency responders.

“The students see up close and learn through hands-on activities the possible consequences of wrong choices and the lasting effects physically and emotionally on their bodies, their families and friends and their community,” he said, noting that West River Electric based in Wall is also an event sponsor. “It’s all about making safe choices and preventing destructive behaviors, and it’s important our teens learn the life-long skills and values to help them make the best possible decisions.”

Visit www.freshmanimpact.com.

Central Electric Cooperative of Mitchell presented CORE with a \$2,500 Operation Round Up grant to help fund the local program. Pictured left to right are Freshman Impact founder Rick McPherson, CORE Coordinator Yolanda Price, CORE Coordinator Don Huber, Operation Round-Up Trustee LeAnn Moe, Central Electric Director Merl Bechen and Hanson County Chief Deputy Mike Brown. *Photo by Tara Miller*





University of Minnesota graduate students pose in a massive coal bucket during an electric cooperative tour sponsored by Renville-Sibley CPA and the university.

Renville-Sibley leads tour of electric cooperatives for college students

Erin Kelly
NRECA

The smallest electric cooperative in Minnesota is having an outsized impact in educating college students about the co-op business model and how power is generated and delivered for co-ops in the region.

Renville-Sibley Cooperative Power Association, a 1,586-member co-op with 13 full-time employees, worked with the University of Minnesota to organize a week-long tour of distribution co-ops and generation and transmission co-ops in Minnesota, South Dakota and North Dakota for graduate students pursuing master's degrees in science, technology and environmental policy.

"These students are going to lead us into the future from a public policy and an environmental perspective,"

said DeeAnne Norris, Renville-Sibley's CEO. "It's important that they understand there's an obligation to keep energy reliable and affordable while trying to marry that up with renewable energy and sustainability."

The mid-May tour began at Renville-Sibley's office in Danube, Minn., with a discussion about broadband, solar energy and farming. It continued with stops at several facilities run by Basin Electric Power Cooperative, the Bismarck, N.D.-based generation and transmission provider owned by 131 member co-ops that provide electricity for more than 3 million people in nine states.

Other visits included Sioux Valley Energy, a distribution co-op in Colman, South Dakota, where students learned about electric vehicle charging and other kinds of beneficial electrification,

and East River Electric in Madison, South Dakota, a G&T that supplies power to Renville-Sibley and 23 other co-ops in eastern South Dakota and western Minnesota. Students learned about East River's load management, economic development programs and co-op relationships.

The tour wrapped up at Lake Region Electric Cooperative in Pelican Rapids, Minn., where students saw the co-op's creative member-focused programs like wind and solar generation and hydroponic gardening trailers.

"It's important for the students to be able to get out there in the field to see the really big energy infrastructure," says Gabriel Chan, an associate professor at the University of Minnesota and co-director of the Electric Cooperative Innovation Center, a new initiative focused on research partnerships with co-ops.

"You read about wind, hydro or coal plants, but being there is an entirely



The students put on their harnesses and took turns going up in a bucket to simulate working conditions for linemen. The group also stopped by the headquarters of East River Electric in Madison, SD.



different experience.”

Chan had worked with Norris since before the COVID-19 pandemic to organize the tour and used the pandemic delay to create a semester-long graduate seminar called The Energy Transition in Rural America, which brought in guest speakers and included site visits to nearby cooperative facilities.

Sarah Komoroski, a mechanical engi-

“IF YOU DON’T TELL PEOPLE WHAT’S HAPPENING AT YOUR CO-OP, THEY’RE GOING TO COME UP WITH THEIR OWN STORY ABOUT YOU.”

- DEEANNE NORRIS, CEO, RENVILLE-SIBLEY CPA

neer who is halfway through her master’s degree program, said she felt like “a kid in a candy shop” on the tour as she got up-close and personal with coal boiler, gas turbine and other infrastructure.

“I was just smiling the whole time,” says Komoroski, who describes her passions as climate change and the transition to renewable energy. “Everyone

was so nice and so welcoming and so passionate about what they do.

“I think the biggest thing that struck me about co-ops is they’re so unique in terms of their governance structure,” she said. “They’re non-profit, member-owned, and their goals and incentives are different than a traditional for-profit utility. They’re each tackling the challenges of affordability, reliability and sustainability in a slightly different way.”

Komoroski said she believes electric cooperatives also have the advantage of having a special relationship with their members.

“Co-ops are uniquely positioned to build trust with their members during the energy transition,” she said. “That relationship is the exciting part to me.”

Norris and Chan say they hope to continue the week-long tour every other year for students in the two-year master’s program. The professor said he would like to hear more from cooperative consumer-members, and Norris says she would like to start it a day earlier.

“The students are in their 20s and

30s, but regardless of your age, that was a very taxing schedule,” says Norris, who went on the tour herself.

“It was an intense week,” Komoroski agrees. “We had about 15 stops in five days, with 26 hours of driving.”

Norris urges other co-ops across the country to connect with local universities or university extension offices and plan similar experiences that can raise awareness of energy systems in rural areas and how consumer-centric utilities like co-ops can lead the energy transition.

“When I was planning this trip, there was a little skepticism by a few people we wanted to visit,” she said. “But if you don’t tell people what’s happening at your co-op, they’re going to come up with their own story about you, and often it’s not close to reality.

“This experience shows that when we open our doors, we can engage and collaborate with students who are excited about the cooperative business model, who are passionate about the Earth and her resources and are enthusiastic about learning and making a difference.”



NOV. 3-5
Huron Ringneck Festival
& Bird Dog Challenge
 Huron, 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.

To view the publication's master event calendar, scan the QR code below:



Or visit <https://sdrea.coop/cooperative-connections-event-calendar> to view more upcoming events.

OCT. 28-30

ZooBoo
 Great Plains Zoo
 Sioux Falls, SD
 605-367-7003

OCT. 31
Halloween Parade
 Belle Fourche, SD

NOV. 3-5
Yankton's Harvest Halloween
 Downtown, Yankton, SD

NOV. 3-5
Huron Ringneck Festival & Bird Dog Challenge
 100 4th Street SW, Huron, SD
 605-352-0000

NOV. 4-6
Girlfriends' Weekend
 Hill City, SD

NOV. 5-20
Rustic Designs & More Christmas Show
 9 a.m.-5 p.m. daily
 Ethan, SD
 605-770-2411

NOV. 5
Fairburn Community Center Bazaar
 Fairburn, SD

NOV. 11-13
Christmas at the Barn
 Front Porch 605
 Groton, SD
 605-216-4202

NOV. 12
Black Hills Meat Festival
 Black Hills Harley Davidson
 2820 Harley Dr.
 Rapid City, SD
 605-390-7917

NOV. 12
Holiday Extravaganza
 Sisseton, SD
 605-698-7425

NOV. 13
Lutefisk, Lefse, Meatball Supper
 Chamberlain, SD
 605-234-6698

NOV. 18-20
Deadwood's Big Whiskey Festival
 Deadwood, SD
 605-578-1876

NOV. 19
Fall Craft Show
 Minneluzahan Senior Center
 Rapid City, SD
 605-394-1887

NOV. 19
Lille Norge Fest
 Canyon Lake Activity Center
 Rapid City, SD
 605-342-4226

NOV. 25
Olde Tyme Christmas Kick-off and Parade
 Hill City, SD

NOV. 25
Trap Shoot
 Izaak Walton League
 Sioux Falls, SD
 605-332-9527

NOV. 25
"Light up the Night" Parade and Fireworks
 Belle Fourche, SD

NOV. 25-26
Kris Kringle Kraft Fair
 Hill City, SD

DEC. 2-3
Gregory Mid-Winter Fair
 Gregory Auditorium
 Gregory, SD
 605-830-9778

DEC. 2-3
Christmas in the Hills
 Mueller Center
 Hot Springs, SD
 605-745-4140

DEC. 3
Santa's Thrift Village
 Minneluzahan Senior Center
 Rapid City, SD
 605-394-1887

DEC. 3
60th Annual Wreath and Centerpiece Sale
 Central States Fair Grounds,
 Rapid City, SD
 605-343-0710

DEC. 17
Custer Christmas for Kids
 Custer High School
 Custer, SD
 custerchristmas4kids@gmail.com

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