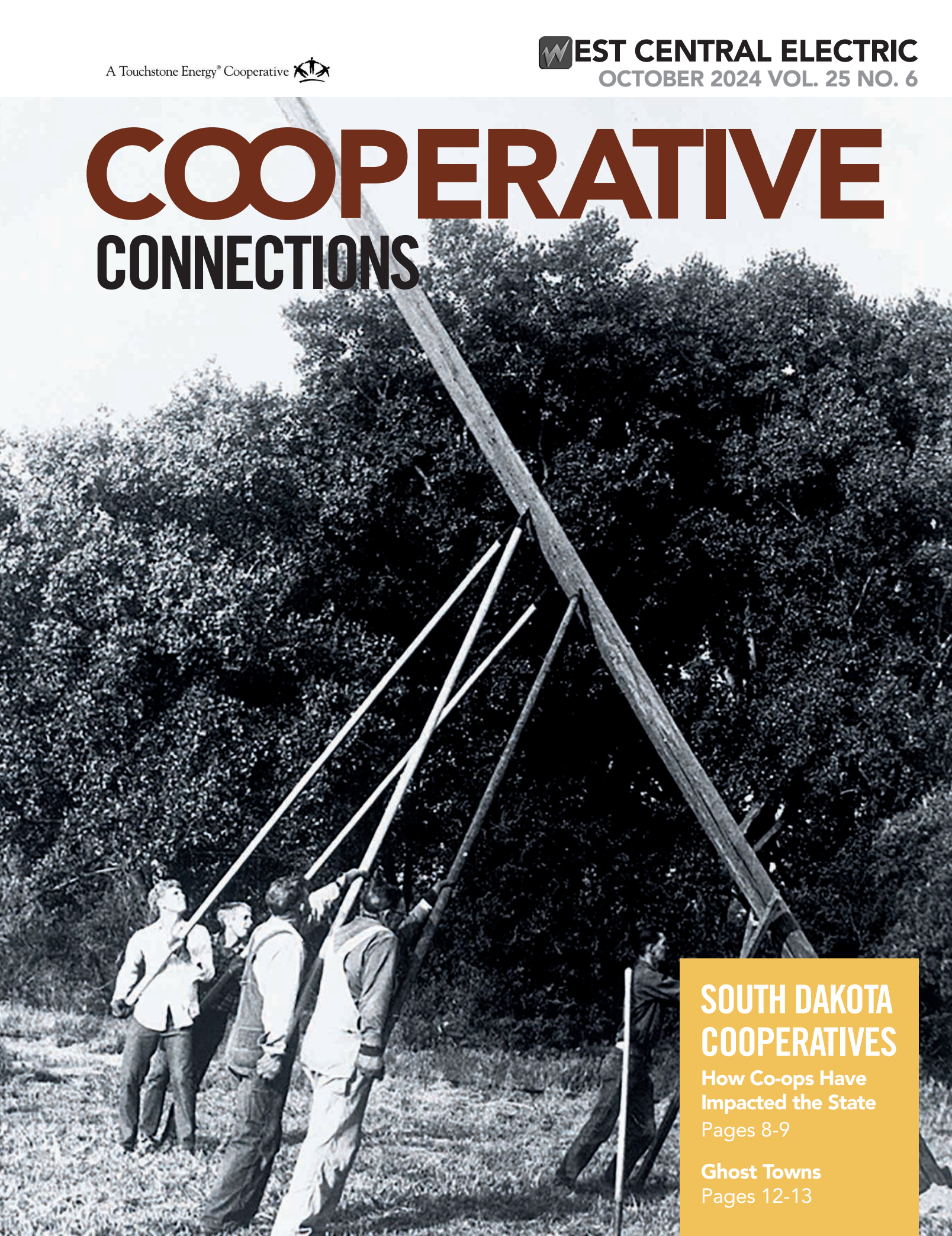


COOPERATIVE CONNECTIONS



SOUTH DAKOTA COOPERATIVES

**How Co-ops Have
Impacted the State**
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Ghost Towns
Pages 12-13

MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL MEETING OF MEMBERS

WEST CENTRAL ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE, INC.

OCTOBER 4, 2023

The Annual Meeting of the members of West Central Electric Cooperative, Inc. was held at the Midland Auditorium, Town of Midland, Haakon County, State of South Dakota, pursuant to due notice to the members, commencing at 5:00 PM MT on Wednesday, October 4, 2023.

The meeting was called to order by President Shad Riggle who announced that a quorum was present.

Pastor Dallas McKinley of Midland gave the invocation.

Manager Jeff Birkeland recognized all Veterans and active service personnel.

The National Anthem was played.

The Manager introduced the directors from the various zones. He then recognized past employees of West Central and special guests.

The business meeting commenced with Manager Birkeland stating the official notice of the meeting was published in the October Cooperative Connections and it is posted at the registration desk. Manager Birkeland then read the proof of mailing.

President Riggle announced that the minutes of last year's Annual Meeting were published in the Cooperative Connections and asked if the members wished to have them read or was there a motion to approve the minutes as published. A motion was made, seconded and upon being placed before the membership, the motion was approved. Thereupon the president declared the motion carried and the minutes approved.

President Riggle announced that the Financial Report, the President's Report, and the Manager's Report were published in the Cooperative

Connections and asked if the members wished to have them read or was there a motion to approve the reports as published. A motion was made, seconded and upon being placed before the membership, the motion was approved. Thereupon the president declared the motion carried and the reports approved.

President Riggle and Manager Birkeland each gave their reports.

Manager Birkeland recognized the employees, announced service awards, and the retirement of Mike Trapp, former Midland Foreman.

Manager Birkeland then called upon the Legal Counsel for West Central, David Larson of Chamberlain, South Dakota. Mr. Larson reported on the legal status of West Central Electric Cooperative, Inc., as follows:

From a legal point of view, the past year has been successful and relatively uneventful.

A review of the minutes indicates that all actions taken during the past year comply with the by-laws, articles of incorporation, South Dakota Law, and RUS regulations.

David Larson, Corporate Attorney, announced the results of the Director election process. The Directors were elected earlier through the zone meeting process as defined in the Cooperative's By-Laws. This year four Directors were elected, each to serve a three-year term, and they are as follows:

- Lyman County – Rural Director
Zone 1 – James Smith
- Jones County – Rural Director
Zone 2 – Paul Patterson
- Haakon County – Town Director
Zone 4 – Marty Hansen
- Stanley County – At-Large Director
Zone 5 – Mike McQuiston

President Riggle then called for unfinished business followed by any new business.

Kory Hammerbeck, CEO of Rushmore Electric, gave an update.

Jessie Tucker, Manager of Member Services, conducted prize drawings at intervals throughout the meeting.

There being no further business to come before the board, President Riggle declared the meeting adjourned.

**COOPERATIVE
CONNECTIONS****WEST CENTRAL
ELECTRIC**

(USPS No. 018-988)

President

Shad Riggle, Hayes

Vice President

Kenneth Miller, Draper

Secretary/Treasurer

Marty Hansen, Phillip

Directors

Rich Bendt, Kadoka

Mike McQuiston, Fort Pierre

Kevin Neuhauser, Midland

Paul Patterson, Draper

Jim Smith, Vivian

Cliff Utthe, Presho

Jim Willert, Belvidere

Attorney

David Larson, Chamberlain

CEO/Manager

Jeff Birkeland, Murdo

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

West Central Electric Cooperative, Inc., is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

**Call 605-669-8100
24-hour Dispatching**

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Design assistance by SDREA

Official Notice

OF ANNUAL MEETING OF MEMBERS OF WEST CENTRAL ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE, INC.

The annual meeting of members of west central electric cooperative, inc., will be held at the Harold Thune Auditorium in the city of Murdo, Jones County, state of South Dakota, on Wednesday, October 2, 2024, at 5:00 p.m., CDT, to take action on the following matters:

1. Report of officers and directors.
 2. The announcement of three (3) directors of the cooperative.
 3. Transact any and all other business, which may come before the meeting.
- In conjunction with the announcement of three (3) directors for three (3) year terms scheduled for this meeting, the following members have been nominated for directors as provided by the by-laws:
- Kenneth Miller, Jones County, zone two (2), town director,
 - Jim Willert, Jackson County, zone three (3), rural director,
 - Shad Riggle, Stanley County, zone five (5), at-large director.

Marty Hansen – Secretary

West Central Electric Cooperative 75th Annual Meeting Agenda

Date: Wednesday, October 2, 2024**Location:** Harold Thune Auditorium, Murdo, SD**Time:** Registration Opens at 4:00 (CDT)**Meeting Agenda:**

Business Meeting Called to Order at 5:00 (CDT)
Introduction of Cooperative Directors
Notice of Annual Meeting
Proof of Mailing
Minutes of 2023 Annual Meeting
President's Report
Manager's Report
Attorney's Report
Announcement of Directors
Unfinished Business
New Business

All attendants will receive either a cutting board or a sorting stick and flag. Cash drawings will be held throughout the meeting, and a delicious meal served by the Murdo Lions Club will follow!

FIRE SAFETY

Cooking and heating are the leading causes of home fires and fire injuries, and winter months are the peak time for fire-related deaths. **Fire Prevention Week (Oct. 6-12, 2024)** is the perfect time to review and practice fire safety.

Minimize Your Risks

The good news: Deaths from home fires in the U.S. have trended downward since the 1970s, according to Injury Facts, but even one death from a preventable fire is too many. While fire doesn't discriminate by age, it is the third leading cause of death for children 1 to 14.

When cooking, make fire safety a priority by keeping these tips in mind:

- Be alert; if you are sleepy or have consumed alcohol, don't use the oven or stovetop.
- Stay in the kitchen while you are frying, grilling, boiling or broiling food.
- Keep anything that can catch fire away from your stovetop.

Heating is the second leading cause of home fires. Follow these tips:

- Keep all flammables, like paper, clothing, bedding, drapes or rugs, at least three feet from a space heater, stove or fireplace.
- Never leave portable heaters and fireplaces unattended; turn off heaters and make sure fireplace embers are extinguished before leaving the room.
- If you must use a space heater, place it on a level, nonflammable surface, like ceramic tile, not on a rug or carpet.
- Keep children and pets away from space heaters.
- When buying a space heater, look for models that shut off automatically if the heater falls over.

Working Smoke Alarms Are a Must

About three out of five fire deaths happen in homes without working smoke alarms. Smoke alarms are a key part of a home fire escape plan providing early warning to reduce your risk of dying in a fire. The National Fire Protection Association recommends you:

- Install smoke alarms on every level of your home, inside bedrooms and outside sleeping areas on the ceiling or high on the wall.
- Keep smoke alarms away from the kitchen, at least 10 feet from the stove, to reduce false alarms.
- Use special alarms with strobe lights and bed shakers for

- people who are hard of hearing or deaf.
- Test smoke alarms monthly.
- Replace batteries in your smoke alarm and carbon monoxide detector annually.
- Replace smoke alarms that are 10 or more years old.

When and How to Use a Fire Extinguisher

Always put your safety first; if you are not confident in your ability to use a fire extinguisher, get out and call 9-1-1. The American Red Cross cautions you to evaluate the situation and ensure:

- Everyone has left or is leaving the home
- The fire department has been called
- The fire is small, not spreading, and there is not much smoke
- Your back is to an exit you can use quickly

Remember the acronym PASS:

- P**ull the pin.
- A**im low at the base of the fire.
- S**queeze the handle slowly.
- S**weep the nozzle side to side.

Source: National Safety Council



Power Line Safety "Watch Out for Power Lines!"

Archer Rindels, Age 7

Archer Rindels warns readers to be careful around power lines. Thank you for your picture, Archer! Archer's parents are Kyle and Rochelle Rindels, members of Sioux Valley Energy.

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

CHEESY CHICKEN BUNDLES

Ingredients:

- 1 (11 oz.) can condensed cream of chicken soup
- 1/2 cup milk
- 3/4 cup Velveeta, shredded or cubed
- 1 (10 oz.) can chunk chicken, drained and flaked
- 1 (8 oz.) can crescent rolls

Method

Combine soup, milk and cheese. Heat until melted and smooth. Pour into a 7x11 inch pan that has been sprayed with vegetable oil.

Separate crescents into 8 triangles. Place 2 tbsps. of chicken on wide end of crescent roll. Pinch to seal. Place on top of sauce.

Bake uncovered at 375 degrees for 25 minutes and until golden brown. Serve with sauce on top.

Yields eight chicken bundles or four servings.

Janet Ochsner
Box Elder, S.D.

CROCKPOT CHICKEN PARMESAN SOUP

Ingredients:

- 3 boneless chicken breasts
- 1 tbsp. minced garlic
- 1 can crushed tomatoes (28 oz. can)
- 1 can tomato sauce (15 oz. can)
- 1 tsp. salt
- 1 tsp. ground black pepper
- 2 tsp. Italian seasoning
- 4 cups chicken broth
- 1 cup parmesan cheese (freshly shaved)
- 1 cup heavy whipping cream
- 8 oz. rotini pasta (uncooked)
- 1 1/2 cup shredded Mozzarella

Method

Add the chicken breast, minced garlic, crushed tomatoes, tomato sauce, salt, pepper, Italian seasoning and chicken broth to the Crock-Pot.

Cover Crock-Pot with lid and cook on low for 6-8 hours.

Shred the chicken. Stir in the shredded parmesan cheese, heavy whipping cream and rotini pasta. Cover and cook on low for 30 minutes.

Top the individual soup servings with mozzarella cheese.

Kayla Beaner
Centerville, S.D.

BUTTER CHICKEN

Ingredients:

- 4 tsps. Garam Masala blend
- 1/2 tsp. garlic powder
- 1/2 tsp. ground ginger
- 1/2 tsp. ground turmeric
- 1/8 tsp. crushed red pepper
- 4 tbsps. butter, divided
- 1 can (14.5 oz.) petite diced tomatoes
- 1 med. red onion, chopped
- 1 1/4 lbs. boneless skinless chicken breasts, cut into 1-inch cubes
- 1/4 cup heavy cream
- 1/2 tsp. sea salt

Method

Mix Garam Masala, garlic, ginger, turmeric and crushed red pepper in small bowl. Heat large non-stick skillet on medium heat. Toast seasoning mixture 1 min. or just until fragrant, stirring constantly. Add 2 tbsps. of the butter to skillet, swirling to melt. Add onion; cook and stir 2 to 3 mins. until softened. Stir in tomatoes; cook 5 mins. Carefully transfer mixture to blender container; cover. Blend until smooth, scraping sides as needed. Return pureed sauce to skillet. Bring to simmer on med.-low heat. Add chicken; cook 8 to 10 minutes or until chicken is cooked though, stirring occasionally. Stir in remaining butter, cream and salt until well blended. Simmer on med.-low heat 2 to 3 minutes until sauce is slightly thickened. Stir in additional crushed red pepper to taste and serve with hot cooked basmati rice or warm naan bread, if desired. Garnish with fresh cilantro leaves, if desired.

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 2024. All entries must include your name, mailing address, phone number and cooperative name.

WEST CENTRAL ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE 2024 ANNUAL REPORT



Jeff Birkeland
CEO

Over the past year, West Central Electric Cooperative has invested in our members' collective future, collaborated with proven partners to lower costs and improve reliability, worked with our staff to extend one of the longest periods of an accident-free workplace in the history of our organization, and made bold plans to upgrade our distribution system for tomorrow while saving more than \$1 million by using in-house labor rather

than high-priced contractors.

At West Central Electric, we've always known that the future doesn't get better by hope. It gets better by plan. And recognizing the challenges of our cooperative's immediate future is the first step in the process of ensuring our members have safe, reliable and affordable electric energy for years to come.

Specifically, with cellphones, laptops, entertainment systems, and the increasing popularity of electric vehicles, we all recognize that everyone is using more electricity per capita. That trend is likely to continue through the advancing years. Naturally, with increased usage come increased costs of generating the energy our members' demand.

Concurrently, inflationary pressures have not receded. In fact, over the past year, we've witnessed increases in the cost of property, vehicle, healthcare and liability insurance coverage rise between 9 and 23 percent.

Additionally, West Central has encountered substantial cost increases in virtually everything it purchases to maintain and upgrade its 70-year-old infrastructure. For instance, a 25 KVA transformer used to cost \$622. Today, it costs \$1,830 for a

194 percent increase. A 35-foot pole, which is our most common pole, used to cost \$217. Today, it costs \$710 for a 227 percent hike. No. 2 ACSR wire, which is our most common overhead wire, used to cost \$.10 a foot, while current prices are at \$.45 a foot for a 350 percent increase.

Meanwhile, in the past three decades, West Central Electric has added just 97 new members to its service territory. Consequently, the cooperative has not experienced a growing base of customers to pay for substantial increases in costs across-the-board. When combined with rate hikes from our primary supplier, Basin Electric Power Cooperative, West Central Electric anticipates a rate hike in early 2025, its first increase since 2016.

Conversely, our members have long received a favorable heat rate for their homes and businesses. That rate was 3.8 cents per kilowatt hour, but this spring was lowered to 3.7 cents per kilowatt hour.

John D. Rockefeller, the great American industrialist who created Standard Oil, once said, "Save when you can and not when you have to."

Rockefeller, who knew a bit about planning and distribution networks, was famously frugal. He amassed \$50 by the time he was 12, loaned it to a neighboring farmer, and was mesmerized months later when the man paid him back with interest. By the time he died in 1937, his wealth was

estimated between \$900 million and \$1.4 billion, which scholars estimate would be about \$400 billion in today's dollars. Of course, when he took his last breath, the meticulous philanthropist had already given away two-thirds of his empire to foundations, charities, his son and other heirs.

For the last few decades, West Central Electric has used emerging technologies to reduce the number of employees necessary to provide members with electricity day in and day out. In the 1980s, West Central Electric had more than 40 employees. Today, the cooperative operates with 29 of the "finest" workers we can find, and it has actually reduced office staff by one full-time-equivalent in the last five years. Staff consistently work to plan for tomorrow and identify potential cost savings in the process.

Consequently, when West Central decided it needed to rebuild its key 10.5-mile 69kV transmission line from Midland to what we call "Hilltop," which is just north of the 1880 Town, staff performed its due diligence and examined bids from reputable contractors. On a separate bid to do substantially the same project, contractors estimated the rebuild would cost \$350,000 per mile.

West Central then elected to tackle the major project in-house, using cooperative employees to realize substantial financial savings. To that end, the co-op purchased steel poles at pennies on the dollar from TransCanada that were originally planned to



be used to build the Keystone XL pipeline. West Central paid TransCanada \$1,000 per pole for equipment sold on the open market for \$4,000 per pole. That purchase alone will save West Central more than \$350,000 on the total scope of the project, combined with \$1.5 million in savings realized by using in-house labor.

The transmission line was originally constructed in the mid-1970s. When Dean Nelson (retired operations manager), was hired in 1975, it was a project that he was involved in building. In fact, he remembers it well. He said the line wasn't built with all new components. The conductor was reused, and so were many of the materials. The poles actually came from a bunk that had caught fire while in storage at another utility. They were sanded down and retreated to be used at West Central. "The line was built to fit the materials, rather than fitting the materials to the line," Nelson recalled.

It will be a crucial upgrade for one of the cooperative's backbone transmission lines.

"The line will need to be built in stages," explains current Operations Manager Scott Kittelson. "This is a line that we still need to be able to use through certain times of the year. If we get a storm and have damages on other stretches of transmission line, we will need to be able to use this."

Constructing in this manner will add to the length of the project, but providing reliability is much more important than the time it takes to build.

In the past year, West Central was awarded \$2.5 million in federal grants. These welcome funds will assist West Central in converting 18 miles of distribution lines from overhead to underground in the northwest portion of our service territory and will cover about 75 percent of the total costs of these two projects.

As Abraham Lincoln said, "Prosperity is the fruit of labor. It begins with saving money."

But, saving money isn't the only critical operational aspect that commands the attention of West Central Electric. Everyone on our cooperative team also pays strict attention to on-the-job safety, because we all realize that the best safety device is a well-trained employee.

In his bestselling book, "Without Remorse," author Tom Clancy wrote,

"Kelly was a seaman, and his life on the water followed a strict routine, which meant observing all the safety rules written in the blood of less careful men." The same, it seems, applies to all of the West Central linemen who scale power poles and repair overhead lines on a daily basis.

In fact, in 2024 West Central employees surpassed 275,000 hours of no loss-time due to accidents. That's the equivalent of about four and a half years. As someone more astute once said, "Safety doesn't happen by accident."

By promoting safety, our staff saves lives and reduces the cooperative's insurance premiums. But, more importantly, it means that everyone in our co-op goes home safely to their families at night.

To that end, five employees of West Central have undergone extensive drone training and received FAA certification. The cooperative has two introductory drones and one advanced drone, the latter purchased in 2024. These drones are primarily used in the inspection of our transmission and distribution lines, particularly after storm incidents.

Procurement of this innovative equipment has greatly reduced costs previously associated with chartering aircraft. The drones allow us to capture photos and video and may be used in search and rescue operations. Equipped with a thermal imaging camera and infrared capabilities, the drones allow staff to find bad connections and other anomalies. Flying at nearly 50 mph, the drones can check miles of transmission and distribution lines, all while providing a video feed back to the main office in Murdo.

In other West Central Electric developments over the past year:

- The cooperative purchased four new service trucks, a new bucket truck and a Skid Steer. In greater detail on all equipment news, the cooperative purchased a new Polaris Ranger for its Kadoka operations; updated Unit 10 in Presho with a Ram service truck; updated Unit 16 in Murdo with a flatbed Ram service truck; updated Unit 4 in Murdo with a Ford flatbed truck; updated Unit 8 in Murdo with a Ford flatbed truck; purchased a new CAT 265 Skid Steer as well as an EZ-Spot-Ur Pole Jack;



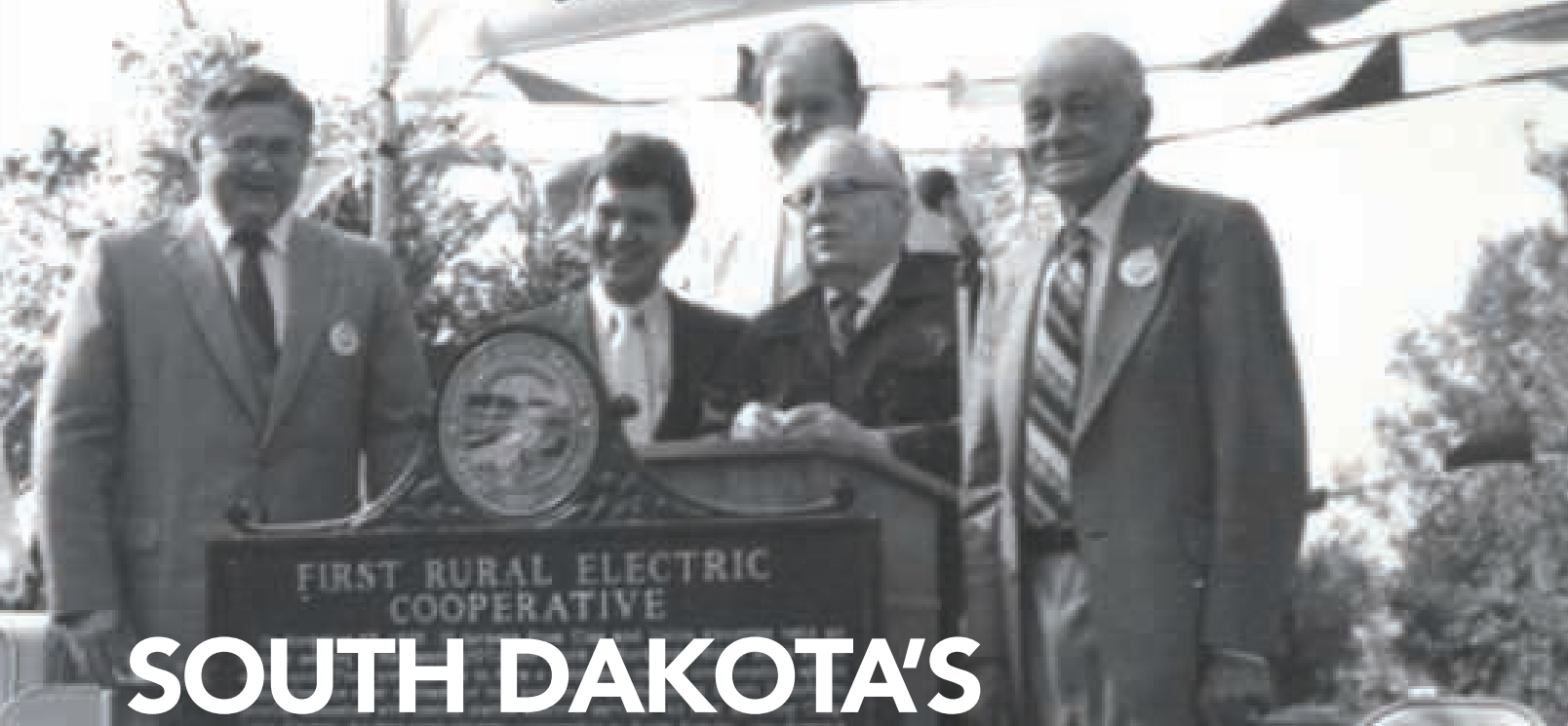
and replaced Unit 47 bucket truck at Attec.

- We ended the year with 6,797 main meters, which does not include heat meters. That means, on average, every member has 1.8 meters in their name.
- We sold 130,034,574 KWHs of electricity, an average year. In 2022, we sold 136,600,296 KWHs of electricity, so we are actually down from last year. Our average residential member used 1,181 KWHs of energy per month. In 2022, the average residential member used 1,264 KWHs of energy per month. Our average commercial account used 3,829 KWHs per month, and in 2022, they used 3,981 KWHs per month.
- West Central ended the year with gross revenue of \$16,903,614, which is down \$537,000 from last year. As stated above, the reason for the decrease is due to weather.
- The co-op's margins ended strong, with \$1,026,844 to be allocated to our membership after the March audit.
- In December, we returned \$536,000 back to the membership in the form of a Capital Credit retirement.

In closing, we'd like to thank each of our members for your support over the past year. We look forward to continuing to provide reliable, safe and affordable electric energy for all of your needs for decades to come.

Sincerely,

Jeff Birkeland, CEO/General Manager, and
Shad Riggle, Board President



SOUTH DAKOTA'S COOPERATIVES

Jacob Boyko

jacob.boyko@sdrea.coop

Picture life in rural South Dakota 100 years ago. Each morning, families woke before dawn to work by the flicker of kerosene lamps, hand-pumped water to fill a gas-powered wringer-washer, and retrieved breakfast ingredients from a dripping ice box. Looming in the backs of producers' minds were fears that the market would trend downward and they may not be able to cover their debts, or even harvest their fields.

Today, South Dakota's rural farmers and ranchers enjoy virtually all of the accommodations of modern living their suburban counterparts enjoy. Past luxuries like running water, full-time electricity, internet and telephone are now standard, and many farmers enjoy stronger economic security compared to the past's tumultuous markets.

That's because for over 100 years, rural South Dakotans have pooled their resources by forming cooperatives that level out some of the disparities between rural and urban life. Thanks to members' ingenuity, rural America is not just a viable, but a thriving place to live and work.

The First Cooperatives

The first cooperatives in South Dakota were agriculture-focused. Far too often, an

oversupply of goods led to price crashes, resulting in farmers unable to economically harvest crops or market livestock. This led to tremendous waste and crushed livelihoods.

As producers grew weary of the uncertain market, they organized to collectively market and distribute their products: they coordinated, shared risk and pooled resources.

South Dakota's earliest farm supply and marketing cooperatives started popping up a little after the turn of the 20th century. The South Dakota Secretary of State's office lists Lake Andes Farmers Cooperative, formed in 1909, as the oldest ongoing cooperative in the state.

During this early period, cooperatives operated in a legal gray area. Since producers working collectively in a cooperative setting could be viewed as monopolistic or collusive, they were under careful watch by the Federal Trade Commission as well as their larger competitors.

That changed in 1922 with the passage of the Capper-Volstead Act.

"Capper-Volstead allowed producers to come together and market their products and not be in violation of the Sherman Antitrust Act," explained Brenda Forman, South Dakota Association of Cooperatives executive director. "[Cooperatives] were not considered to be a monopoly as long as they were a cooperative association formed

Clay-Union Electric Corporation was the first electric cooperative in South Dakota.

by producers, owned by the members, one member gets one vote in cooperative elections, etc."

The presence of ag cooperatives surged in the 1930s as producers looked for stability during the Great Depression, the South Dakota Farmers Union says. With effectiveness proven, the cooperative strategy has stuck around since.

Today, there are 63 farm supply and marketing cooperatives serving over 130 South Dakota communities, Forman said.

Those same visionaries who established the first ag cooperatives identified another need that was not being met. Using the same cooperative model that changed their lives once already, farmers would bring power to the prairie.

Electricity

Before energy infrastructure was widespread, many small towns in South Dakota relied on local power plants. However, with distribution lines only serving the city, living even a mile or two out of town was the difference between flipping a light switch and carrying a lantern.

Despite requests from farmers to run lines to their homes – some of whom even offered to pay installation costs – most municipalities and investor-owned utilities (IOUs) refused because undertaking the effort didn't lead to any meaningful profit.

Even many of the state's elected representatives seemed resigned to the idea

that the future of energy for their farming constituents was tied to on-site generation, like the modest Delco–Light plants that could power a few small appliances and light bulbs. To them, it seemed laughable that there was any feasible way to run lines in a state where the service would average out to a sparse 2.2 customers per mile of line, and for many, that was the end of the conversation.

The narrative changed when President Franklin D. Roosevelt expanded his New Deal programs to modernize rural America, creating the Rural Electrification Administration (REA) to finance ambitious projects.

The profit-minded IOUs were largely uninterested in expanding into sparse territory for mealy returns, and little progress was made toward Roosevelt's vision.

In 1936, once it was apparent IOUs wouldn't be making the foray into rural territories as farmers had hoped they would, Roosevelt signed the Rural Electrification Act. Now, cooperatives could organize and receive REA loans while the IOUs idled.

A group of 17 farmers from Clay and Union counties jumped at the opportunity to finally bring their homes into the modern age. Just months after the REA was established, and at a time when just 5% of South Dakota farms had power, the group hatched out a plan to secure an REA loan for their newly-formed Fairview Rural Electric System, today Clay-Union Electric Corporation.

Going door to door and collecting \$5 sign-ons from neighbors ranging from ecstatic to skeptical, the cooperative finally got the REA's green light and received a \$70,000 loan to build 67 miles of line that would serve about 300 members, according to a 1936 Argus Leader report.

The success of South Dakota's first electric cooperative brought hope to still more than 90% of South Dakota farmers without power. It wasn't long before dozens more newly-formed cooperatives were each going door to door collecting sign-on fees to secure their own REA loans.

Serving Everyone

In 1946, roughly 10 years after the state's first electric cooperative debuted, rural farmers and ranchers from the state's

remote northwest corner met in Lemmon to form their own cooperative. The board understood securing a loan from REA to serve such a vast and sparse territory would be a big ask, so they opted to charge members a \$10 monthly minimum, which was twice the minimum rate of most South Dakota cooperatives, and equal to about \$170 today.

Even so, would-be members agreed to the terms of the longshot project and paid their \$5 membership fee. Despite federal hesitation about the feasibility of such a project, the REA loan was approved.

Grand Electric Cooperative received more than \$1.8 million over two loans that would build 1,127 miles of line and serve 948 members. The investment amounted to one of the REA's largest and riskiest yet in the state, but proved to be a success.

Cooperative members did the impossible; the wires in northwest South Dakota had finally been energized. Board members then eyed another ambitious goal – bringing telephone to Northwest South Dakota.

West River Cooperative Telephone Company was formed as a separate entity, but in the spirit of cooperation, the telephone and electric cooperative would be jointly operated. The two would, and still to this day, share a building, staff and infrastructure.

“Up here, we cover almost 8,000 square miles and have 4,000 miles of wire, but we only have 1,800 members,” explained Eric Kahler, the cooperatives' joint general manager. “When you look at the economics of this type of service territory, if you're in the business to make money, you're not going to be too successful here. The cooperative model is really the only model that could work here.”

And the community knows that fact and is grateful for their cooperative, says Patricia Palmer, who has spent much of her last 63 years working in Grand Electric and West River Telephone's member services.

“They're thankful,” she said. “Very thankful. We have a terrific telephone work crew and line department. At times, they work tirelessly in horrible weather conditions... You can't believe the thank you notes that we get.”

Growing up on a farm near McIntosh, Palmer has a firsthand account of the impact

of cooperatives. And she says it's one she will never forget.

The night she watched her family's farmhouse light up for the first time was also the beginning of a new chapter, she recalled. A chapter with an automatic washer, a refrigerator and a toaster.

As times change, cooperatives continue to be at the forefront of bringing service that might otherwise be out of reach.

“When I came to the cooperative, it was just telephone and electricity, and now we have high-speed internet and TV,” Palmer said. “Over the years, the cooperative has really grown!”

Other Applications

The cooperative model is also used in many other sectors; there are 34 South Dakota credit unions that offer member-owners better interest rates and reduced fees compared to for-profit banks.

Even some rural water systems, while not wholly cooperatives themselves, borrow some of the cooperative fundamentals to make serving large areas more practical.

“Cooperatives are pretty significant in the impact they've had,” Forman said. “And the other cooperatives we have – there are daycare co-ops, food co-ops, education co-ops – there's a number of different structures that the cooperative model has been used for, because of that ownership and one member, one vote.”

Today, there are 141 cooperatives in the state, providing more than 78,500 jobs, \$2.8 billion in worker salaries and \$3.9 billion in gross domestic product (GDP), according to a South Dakota State University study titled *The Economic Impact of Cooperatives in South Dakota*.

That means cooperatives contribute almost 13% of South Dakota jobs, more than 11% of salaries, and 6.2% of the state's entire GDP.

“In a cooperative, your board is local,” Forman said. “[The co-op board and employees] support and participate in sports functions, 4-H barbecues, you may go to church with them, or they may be at family dinner. Which means when something is a concern or challenge, you have somebody to go to and you have contacts close that know you and understand the system.”

Voting Authorization Necessary for Organizations

A number of questions seem to arise concerning voting at the Annual/Zone Meetings by non-individual members of the Cooperative, such as schools, municipalities, churches, organizations, and corporations. All of these members are entitled to representation and one vote, but the proper procedure must be followed to exercise this right.

Each such member should see that a representative is designated in writing prior to the meeting. The representative must be a person who will not be voting another membership as no person shall be entitled to more than one vote on each matter submitted to a vote at the meeting. This written authorization must be in the following form and must be filed with the Secretary of the Cooperative prior to formal commencement of the meeting.

To avoid errors, we urge you to get these in just as soon as possible for approval.

Authorization to Vote

This is to certify that the _____ of _____ in a duly assembled meeting, designated _____ who is a(n) _____ of said organization, to represent the _____ at

the regular Annual/Zone Meeting of the members of West Central Electric Cooperative, Inc., to be held October 2, 2024, and said person is authorized to cast such member's vote on all issues that may come before said meeting.

The undersigned verifies that (s)he is the _____ of said organization and authorized to execute this instrument on behalf thereof.

State of South Dakota)
)ss.

County of _____)

On this ___ day of _____, 2024 before me the undersigned Notary Public of the State of South Dakota, personally appeared _____

known to me to be the person named in the above foregoing instrument, who acknowledged that (s)he executed the same for the purpose therein specified, (s) he being authorized so to do.

Notary Public, South Dakota

My commission expires _____, 20_____

2024 ATTORNEY'S REPORT



David Larson
Attorney

Because we have seen a lot of controversy regarding pipeline easements in the eastern part of the state, and in the legislature, I thought I should provide a brief history and explanation of the Cooperative's policies regarding easements.

At the time West Central was formed, obtaining easements from the members was seldom an issue. The people of West River were happy and eager to obtain electrical service and understood the necessity of granting easements for the electrical lines required to serve themselves and their neighbors.

Because REA rules prohibited using loan funds to pay for easements from the members, the Cooperative's policy was to require donated easements, without compensation to the member landowners. Providing donated easements was, and continues to be, one of the conditions of membership and the right to receive service.

The ability to obtain donated easements is as important to the Cooperative today as it was in the beginning. Without the ability to obtain donated easements the costs of providing service to West Central's members would be prohibitive for everyone.

For that reason, the Cooperative continues to require that members provide donated easements when requested for distribution lines necessary to serve members. This requirement is included in the Cooperative's bylaws, policies, and your membership agreement.

Although West Central has never needed to do it, the Cooperative actually has the legal right to deny or terminate service to any member who refuses to grant a required easement.

The policy of the cooperative is to cooperate with its members in the location and placement of easements so as to cause as little interference with the member's use of their property as possible. Although the placement of its lines may cause some inconvenience, the Cooperative attempts to work with its members to avoid as many issues as possible. Cooperative staff is always willing to discuss any issues with you.

One issue that is especially important to the Cooperative is avoiding potential danger to the members because of the location of its lines. Whenever carrying out operations on your property it is critically important that you pay attention to the location of existing electrical lines. This is especially true around grain bin sites or other areas in which large equipment will be used.

The Cooperative's staff strongly encourages you to consult with them when planning sites for grain bins, new buildings, or machinery yards. They are more than happy to come out and discuss your situation and help you to avoid dangerous situations.

When being asked to grant an easement, I hope that you will keep in mind, that no one, including yourself, is able to receive electrical service today except for the fact that other members have given the Cooperative the easements necessary to serve you. As members of the Cooperative, we are all in this together.

Statement of Revenue and Expenses

FOR THE YEAR ENDING DECEMBER 31, 2023

Operating Revenues	2023	2022
Farm and Residential	\$9,153,194	\$9,479,294
Small Commercial	2,023,469	2,083,043
Large Commercial	4,826,333	4,980,351
Irrigation	116,718	140,827
Street Lighting	296,650	297,728
Sales to Others	401,595	350,371
Miscellaneous Electric Revenue	85,655	553,935
Total Operating Revenue	16,903,614	17,885,549
Operating Expenses		
Cost of Power	8,376,735	9,076,286
Operation and Maintenance Expense	2,831,455	2,536,997
Consumer's Accounting and Collecting	280,483	288,698
Electric Sales and Promotion Expense	359,536	319,657
General and Administrative Expense	1,538,344	1,486,064
Property Insurance Expense	85,806	66,297
Maintenance of General Property	147,850	189,419
Taxes	246,700	250,043
Depreciation and Amortization Expenses	1,726,180	1,707,996
Interest on Long-term Debt	989,431	983,818
Total Operating Revenue Deductions	16,582,520	16,905,275
Net Operating Margins	321,094	980,274
Interest Income	467,876	132,243
Generation and Transmission Capital Credits	705,748	1,034,341
Other Nonoperating Income	(6,382)	616
Net Margins for the Year	\$1,488,336	\$2,147,474

Balance Sheet

DECEMBER 31, 2023

What We Own	2023	2022
Total Cost of Electrical System (After Depreciation)	\$36,118,709	\$34,452,440
Other Investments	10,785,793	9,849,969
Cash and Cash Equivalents	696,180	1,968,577
Temporary Cash Investments	6,154,684	6,851,812
Receivables Less Reserves	1,575,633	3,517,368
Notes Receivable – Current Maturities	18,200	12,400
Materials and Supplies on Hand	2,533,872	2,066,362
Advanced Payments on Insurance, Etc.	63,707	80,933
Deferred Debits	14,694	8,205
Total Assets	57,961,472	58,808,066
What We Owe		
Total Borrowed from RUS, CFC and FFB	49,822,712	49,822,712
Total Paid on Loans	(18,466,191)	(16,958,220)
Balance Owed RUS, CFC and FFB	31,356,521	32,864,492
Accounts Payable and Other Liabilities	3,434,591	3,749,101
Margins and Equities		
Net Margins Prior Years	14,246,518	12,825,297
Margins for Current Year	1,488,336	2,147,474
Other Equities	7,435,506	7,221,702
Total Liabilities and Equity	\$57,961,472	\$58,808,066

The financial statements of West Central Electric Cooperative, Inc., were audited by Eide Bailly, LLP, Certified Public Accountants of Sioux Falls, S.D. A copy of the complete audit report is available for review at the cooperative headquarters.

GHOST TOWNS

South Dakota's History Remembered

Jacob Boyko

jacob.boyko@sdrea.coop

Scattered across open fields and through narrow mountain gulches, a careful eye can spot many of South Dakota's nearly 250 long-lost prairie villages and prospecting towns.

Many of these communities were once thriving outposts, railroad hubs, farming villages and mining towns, but were dealt their final blows by the hardships of the dust bowl, changes to railroad systems and the depletion of natural resources.

Most of the towns are long forgotten, their existence marked only by the rotted shell of an old wood barn or a crumbling foundation poking up from the ground.

Thanks to the work of local historical societies who have pieced together the history of the communities' "booms and busts" through old newspaper clippings, plat maps and land records, we can get a glimpse into the lives of the first rural South Dakotans and learn about the communities that once bustled with life.

Galena

Unique among a cavalcade of abandoned Black Hills gold-rush towns, Galena's roots are in its silver. The town was settled in the late 1870s after prospectors Patrick Donegan and John F. Cochran discovered layers of lead and silver ore near Bear Butte Creek while searching for gold deposits.

The U.S. government removed the two men from the area in accordance with Native American treaties. However,

their exile turned out to be short-lived. Donegan and Cochran returned shortly after to mine their claim as more and more gold-hungry settlers tested the increasingly unenforceable treaties.

The claim, which would later become the Sitting Bull mine, turned out to be a mother lode, according to Galena Historical Society member Jeff Jacobsen.

Over the next several years, other mining operations popped up in the gulch as the miners' families made Galena their new home. The town soon had multiple houses, a hotel, restaurant, stores, a catholic church, cemetery and school, attracting new settlers through its peak between 1881 and 1883.

Arriving from Chicago in hopes of expanding his fortune, Col. John Davey soon became a Galena mining heavyweight, buying up claims along the Bear Butte Creek, including the Sitting Bull claim.

Davey's more than 125-man operation was running smoothly until trouble arose from a claim dispute. The owners of the nearby Richmond claim suspected Davey was digging too far into the hill and mining their silver. Davey claimed he was following the path of the ore, which according to mining law, he was allowed to follow onto another claim. The Richmond claim owners said the law didn't apply to a horizontal blanket formation of ore, like the one in Galena.

A lengthy court battle ensued, and the judge shut down the Sitting Bull mine

until the ruling. Galena was suspended in controversy as many of the townsfolk found themselves out of work.

Thus began Galena's rocky "boom and bust" cycle, Jacobsen explained.

"The boom time was when Col. Davey and other mines were producing, and then the lawsuit shut that down and you have a bust," he said.

The judge ruled against Davey, and the operation never recovered. Galena would never again be the bustling town it was in the early 1880s.

"In 1892, some more people came into town and tried to start up again, so that was a boom, and then they went bankrupt, so there's a bust," Jacobsen continued. "There's like three or four cycles like that in Galena."

By the mid 1930s, the town had seen its final bust. The mining wasn't comparable to the riches of the past, and interest in the gulch slowly started to fade. The tracks were removed and the school house closed in 1943.

Today, Galena is the best-preserved Ghost Town in South Dakota. On the second Saturday of each June, visitors can tour the town, visit the maintained graveyard and go inside the newly-restored schoolhouse, courtesy of the Galena Historical Society.

"It just kind of stands out," Jacobsen said. "Galena is just one of the very few silver mining areas in the Black Hills when almost everyone else was trying for gold."



Galena School
Photo Credit: Galena Historical Society

Did You Know

In 1947, Deadwood resident Ollie Wiswell came across an orphaned coyote pup while he was out on a hike. He gave the pup, named Tootsie, to Fred and Esther Borsch of Galena. Tootsie gained fame as the mascot for the Borschs' Deadwood liquor store, famously appearing on the store's sign. Fred taught Tootsie to howl along to his singing, and the two recorded the album "South Dakota Tootsie."

Tootsie, at this point a South Dakota mascot, rode through parades, was featured in an airline advertising campaign, and even embarked on a nationwide tour where she visited the White House and performed for President Dwight D. Eisenhower and Vice President Richard Nixon.

Gov. George Mickelson, a fan of Tootsie himself, signed legislation in 1949 making the coyote the state's official animal. Tootsie died in 1959 and is buried near her home in Galena.

Argonne

About nine miles northwest of Howard, just off state Highway 25, lay the remains of the ill-fated farming community, Argonne.

Marked by a blue historical sign, travelers-by can catch a glimpse of the town's massive cement bank vault with its swinging iron door, an old silo bearing the town's name, several concrete foundations, and a house falling into its own footprint.

The town's founder, Dr. Louis Gotthelf, was a Prussian-born physician who emigrated to the United States in the aftermath of the Prussian revolution. Gotthelf staked his claim in 1881 and established the townsite in 1886.

The town was originally called St. Mary's, named after Gotthelf's daughter, and was strategically positioned along the Chicago and North Western railroad, with the streets running parallel to the railroad rather than the traditional east-west layout. Confusion with another St. Mary's led to the residents voting to change the name to Argonne in 1920, which was chosen to honor local soldiers who had served in the Meuse-Argonne Offensive during World War I.

Despite having what should have been a prime location, Argonne failed to grow to Gotthelf's satisfaction, and he left with his family for Parker in 1889.

A 1919 land boom in South Dakota finally turned things around for Argonne, Miner County Historical Society member George Justice Forster said.

"Most of the growth that happened initially was when it kind of took off as a

trade center," he explained. "Suddenly the town had a railway depot, lumberyard, farmer's cooperative and general store."

In the early 20s, Argonne's population boomed to about 100 residents, and the town offered new amenities including a school, blacksmith and post office.

Argonne's peak was short-lived, and by 1930 the population had fallen to about 65 residents.

When Doug Jerlow moved to town in 1953, much of what was built in the town's prime was left abandoned, and most of the businesses that did remain were struggling.

"It was past the peak," Jerlow recounted. "One general store closed when the post office inside it closed, and that was an elderly lady who ran that and lived in a house by herself. The Haxby family's store was open for maybe a year or two after that."

Though the town was facing a bleak outlook, there remained one huge point of pride for Argonne: high school basketball.

Delbert Gillam, also known as the

Argonne Ace, led the Argonne Arrows to a 10-1 start in his junior year in 1953. Gillam also broke the state record for the most points scored by a player in a single game, making 31 field goals and 10 free throws, scoring 72. Argonne still holds this record.

The high school closed in 1956, but the community limped on for a few more years before the grade school closed in 1970 when the railroad picked up and left.

Doug Jerlow's family, the last residents of Argonne, left town that same year.

Jerlow pointed out that while many other communities along the rail line like Unityville, Canova, Carthage, and Esmond struggled to recover from the abandonment of the line, for Argonne, it was the death blow.

Now, Forster and other members of the Miner County Historical Society are working to preserve the history of Argonne.

A historical marker will soon be placed east of Argonne on state Highway 25 that will tell the story of Argonne from its founding to its final household.

Though Jerlow now lives near Madison, he still farms near Argonne and owns most of the former townsite. As the unofficial mayor of Argonne, as Jerlow sometimes calls himself, he wants to keep the memory of his childhood hometown alive.

"It was just a nice community to grow up in," he said. "Those small communities, I think it's becoming harder to find them anymore."



Argonne Arrows
Photo Credit: Miner County Historical Society

STAFF



Jeff Birkeland CEO/General Manager
Scott Kittelson Manager of Operations
Kit Talich Staff Engineer
Seth Geigle Line Superintendent
Jessie Tucker Manager of Member Services
Stephanie Hesper Staff Assistant
Jill Rankin Office Manager



Cindy Fox Billing Supervisor
Beth Feddersen Accountant
Carrie Lolley Administrative Asst.
Joni Morre Member Services
Derek Wolf IT Coordinator

Philip



Nathan Drury Lineman Foreman
Chase Barnes Apprentice Lineman

Presho



Shane Neiderworder Lineman Foreman
Grady Floyd Journeyman Lineman
Jordan Jessop Journeyman Lineman
Braeden Walton Journeyman Lineman

Kadoka



Landon Stout Lineman Foreman

Murdo



Dana DesLauriers Lineman Foreman
Jared Dowling Technician/Metering Tech
Greg Glaze Journeyman/Purchasing Agent
Steven O'Dell Pole Tester/ Groundsman
JayTee Sealey Journeyman Lineman
Rick Schiley Journeyman Lineman
Jackson Volmer Journeyman Lineman

Midland



Dustin Vollmer Lineman Foreman
Colby Fosheim Apprentice Lineman



Shad Riggle
President
Zone 5
Stanley County



Ken Miller
Vice President
Zone 2
Jones County



Marty Hansen
Secretary/Treasurer
Zone 4
Haakon County



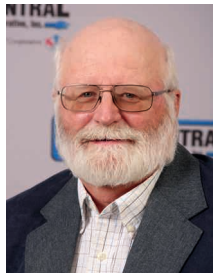
Rich Bendt
Zone 3
Jackson County



Mike McQuiston
Zone 5
Stanley County



Kevin Neuhauser
Zone 4
Haakon County



Paul Patterson
Zone 2
Jones County



Jim Smith
Zone 1
Lyman County



Cliff Uthe
Zone 1
Lyman County



Jim Willert
Zone 3
Jackson County



SEPT. 14-OCT. 27
Mazing Acres Fall Festival
10 a.m. to 6 p.m.
30851 433rd Ave.
Yankton, SD
605-760-2759



SEPT. 27-29
Coal Springs Threshing Bee and Antique Show
Meadow, SD
605-788-2299

OCT. 4-5
Holman Acres Pumpkin Fest and Vendor Show
Philip, SD
605-441-1060

OCT. 4-5
25th Annual Pumpkin Fest
Webster, SD
<https://webstersd.com/home>

OCT. 5-6
Run Crazy Horse Marathons
Crazy Horse
605-390-6137
www.runcrazyhorse.com

OCT. 5-6
Magic Needlers Quilt Show
Codington County Extension Complex
Watertown, SD
605-881-3273

OCT. 5-6
The Black Market
W.H. Lyon Fairgrounds
Sioux Falls, SD
605-332-6004

OCT. 6
Giant Pumpkin Festival
Bentley Memorial Building
Bison, SD
Enter Pumpkins by 11:30 a.m.
605-244-5475

OCT. 10-11
Rural Women in Agriculture Conference
Oct. 10 from 1-9 p.m.
Oct. 11 from 7 a.m.-3 p.m.
The Lodge of Deadwood
Deadwood, SD
SouthDakotaWomeninAg.com

OCT. 11-12
Junkin' Market Days
Ramkota Exhibit Hall
Sioux Falls, SD
605-941-4958

OCT. 19
Buffalo County Fall Ball
Live Music and Food
8 p.m.
Fire Hall
Gann Valley, SD

OCT. 25-27
Forest of Fears Haunted Trail
7 p.m.-10 p.m.
Reclamation-Ranch
40787 259th St.
Mitchell, SD

OCT. 26
Hill City Children's Boo Bash and Pumpkin Festival
Hill City, SD
605-574-2368

OCT. 26
Hartford Women of Today Fall Craft Fair
9 a.m.-3 p.m.
West Central Becker Center
Hartford, SD
605-359-2049

OCT. 26
Owl-O-Ween
Noon-5 p.m.
Black Hills Raptor Center
Caputa, SD
605-391-2511

OCT. 31
Treat Street
5:30 p.m.-7 p.m.
Main St.
Milbank, SD
605-432-6656
MilbankSD.com/Chamber

NOV. 2
Fall Fling Craft Show
10 a.m.-2 p.m.
Dakota Christian School
Corsica, SD
605-366-7940

NOV. 2
Reliance Christmas Carousel
9 a.m.-3 p.m.
Legion Hall
Reliance, SD
605-730-0553

NOV. 22-23
Holiday Arts Christmas Craft Show
Davison County Fairgrounds
Mitchell, SD
605-359-2049

NOV. 30
A Hometown Christmas Market
2 p.m.-6 p.m.
Main St.
Elk Point, 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.

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