

# COOPERATIVE CONNECTIONS



Clarence Kooistra of VFW Post 628 in Sioux Falls salutes military veterans interred at the South Dakota State Cemetery

## Honoring our Veterans

A new resting place for fallen soldiers  
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First responders in rural South Dakota  
Page 12

# West Central Annual Operations Report



**Scott Kittelson**

We finished the 2021 construction season with another busy year. Western Area Power Administration (WAPA) needed to take an outage on their Mt. Vernon substation for two months for some upgrades. This substation outage would leave ConEdison's windfarm by Kimball stranded and not able to get out on the electrical grid.

With involving all three parties and extensive study work, West Central had the capability of taking that wind load through part of our system and back to the WAPA Ft. Thompson substation to get back out on the grid. At peak, we were wheeling 26 megawatts through our transmission line. For wheeling this electricity for two months, WCE and its members received \$223,000.

Our fall work included moving two miles of underground just east of Presho for a county road project, replacing



1.5 miles of old underground cable on Verendrye Drive just west of Ft. Pierre, and 1.25 miles of overhead line replaced with underground two miles south of Philip.

To finish the year, we helped WR/LJ with converting their satellite meters to radio read meters with setting eight 85' poles to be used as towers. We also set three 85' poles to be

used as towers in Lower Brule for their Wi-Fi to help with online learning at home.

With the unfortunate lack of spring moisture, we started early on our overhead to underground conversion projects. A few of those projects would be five miles in the Milesville area, three miles north of Presho, three miles southeast of



Murdo, and two miles of three-phase south of Kennebec.

We had power line crews assist us for the early March ice storm, then again for the Dry Creek fire at the end of March. Oahe Electric sent a crew of four to help us with the 19 poles we lost and several wire breaks. Keller Electric out of Rapid City helped us with 18 transmission poles and 16 poles we lost to the fire.

In the past year, the operations department also saw 233 work orders, and of these, there were 76 new services and 38 service retirements. Additionally, we completed 28 service upgrades to accommodate increased capacity and usage. Crews assisted in 14 large load moves that you may have seen going through our service territory. We had 74 job orders, which is billable work. In the last 12 months, we have received approximately 1,515 locates, and although we don't have to locate each of them, each one does get checked by someone internally.



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

(USPS No. 018-988)

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**Our Mission is to Provide  
 Safe, Reliable Service  
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West Central Electric Cooperative, Inc., is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

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

# West Central Annual Member Service Report



**Jessie Tucker**

For member services, 2021 started with a blast – an arctic blast, to be exact! February had some frigid weather which seemed to get most meters turning much faster than usual. Shortly after that, we spent additional time assisting our members with higher-than-normal bills. One of our free services available to our members is an energy audit. Our informal audit process can still produce excellent results if you think your electric usages are higher than usual.

In collaboration with other co-ops within Rushmore Electric, West Central is ordering an educational solar trailer. The solar trailer will be used throughout the area to better educate our members on the sizing, costs, and in general, how solar works when connected to the electrical grid. The trailer will have solar panels, battery storage, a generator, and will be able to connect to the utility. COVID-19 has pushed production back, but with a bit of luck, the trailer will be done and operational in early 2022. Member Services is excited to show the unit and answer any questions!

Last but not least, we have also been exploring the possibility of installing an electric vehicle (EV) charging station in our service territory. At the end of 2020, the South Dakota Department of Natural Resources awarded us a grant to install a 50-kW charging station in Murdo. Since then, however, the charging network dynamics have changed dramatically because the EV charging throughout our area has changed. Electrify America is planning to install much larger chargers along the I-90 corridor. Tesla, which already has a fast-charging station in Murdo, plans to open their chargers up to other manufacturers. With this news, we are still learning more about the process and making the best decision for our members to move forward with the grant.



# A house full of Thanksgiving 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 tips:

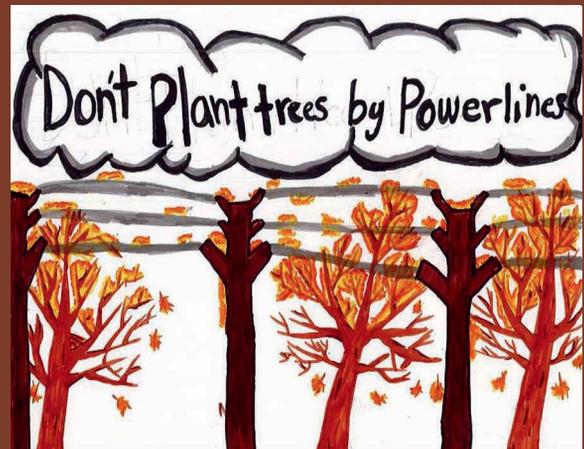
- Stay in the kitchen when broiling or doing any stovetop cooking.
- Keep children well away from cooking appliances while the appliances are in use.
- Keep towels, potholders and curtains away from hot surfaces in your kitchen.
- One of the riskiest holiday behaviors is overloading your electrical outlets. 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 three 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 three 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.

## GOVERNOR'S STUDENT ART COMPETITION



The Governor's Office and the South Dakota Arts Council invite students to participate in the Governor's Student Art Competition.

Students in K-12 will compete in four age divisions. Winning entries will be exhibited in the State Capitol from January through September 2022. Submission deadline is Nov. 12, 2021. All artwork is to be submitted electronically as a high-resolution jpeg image, along with the Artwork Submission Form and the Authorization Release Form. Competition guidelines, instructions and all necessary forms are accessible at [https://artscouncil.sd.gov/events/student\\_art\\_Main.aspx](https://artscouncil.sd.gov/events/student_art_Main.aspx). Contact Rebecca.cruse@state.sd.us or call 605-773-3301 for details.



### Don't plant trees by power lines

Jazzlyn Magera

Jazzlyn shares good advice to avoid planting trees near power lines. Jazzlyn attends Brandon Elementary School and is the daughter of Rachel Schettler. They are 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.

# SLOW COOKING BRINGS OUT FLAVORS OF FALL

## BABY BACK RIBS

### Ingredients:

2-1/2 lbs. pork baby back ribs, cut into eight pieces  
 5 cups water  
 1 med. onion, sliced  
 2 celery ribs, cut in half  
 2 tsps. minced garlic, divided  
 1 tsp. whole peppercorns  
 1/2 cup barbecue sauce  
 1/4 cup plum sauce (Asian section of grocery store)  
 Dash of hot pepper sauce

### METHOD

Place ribs in a 5-qt. slow cooker. Add water, onion, celery, 1 tsp. garlic and peppercorns. Cover and cook on low for six hours or until meat is tender. In a small saucepan, combine the barbecue sauce, plum sauce, hot pepper sauce and remaining garlic. Cook and stir over medium heat for five minutes or until heated through. Remove ribs. Discard cooking juices and vegetables. Coat grill rack with nonstick cooking spray before starting grill. Brush ribs with sauce. Grill, uncovered, over medium low heat for 8-10 minutes or until browned, turning occasionally and brushing with remaining sauce. Can also be finished in the oven using the broil setting.

**Melissa Roerig, Sioux Falls**

## CHILI BEEF AND PASTA

### Ingredients:

2 lbs. lean ground beef  
 2 packages McCormick® Chili Seasoning Mix  
 1 can (14.5 oz.) diced tomatoes  
 2 cans (8 oz. each) tomato sauce  
 1 cup coarsely chopped bell pepper  
 1 cup frozen or canned whole kernel corn  
 1 cup elbow macaroni, cooked and drained (about 2.25 cups)  
 1 cup shredded Cheddar cheese

### METHOD

Cook ground beef in large skillet on medium-high heat until no longer pink; drain. Place in slow cooker. Stir in Seasoning Mix, tomatoes, tomato sauce, bell pepper and corn until well blended. Cover. Cook six hours on low or three hours on high. Stir in cheese and cooked macaroni during the last 10 minutes of cooking.

**mccormick.com**

## WHITE PHEASANT CHILI

### Ingredients:

3 boneless pheasants cooked and shredded  
 1 large onion chopped  
 4 Tbsps. butter  
 1/4 cup flour  
 3/4 cup chicken broth  
 2 cups half and half  
 2 cans Navy beans  
 1 tsp. Tabasco sauce  
 1-1/2 tsp. chili powder  
 1 tsp. cumin  
 1/2 tsp. salt  
 1/2 tsp. pepper  
 1-2 jalapeno peppers  
 1-1/2 cups Monterrey jack cheese  
 1/2 cup sour cream

### METHOD

Cook and shred pheasant. Set aside. Cook onion with 2 Tbsps. butter until soft, add flour and remaining butter, whisking constantly. Add broth and half and half while whisking. Bring to boil for 5 minutes, or until onions are tender. Put in crockpot and add remaining ingredients. Put on high heat for one hour then reduce to low heat for one to two hours.

**Alice DeHaai, Keystone**

**Please send your favorite holiday dessert 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 2021. All entries must include your name, mailing address, phone number and cooperative name.**

## Energy Efficiency Tip of the Month

Fall is the perfect time to prep your home for the upcoming winter chill. One of the best ways you can save energy and stay comfortable is to caulk and weatherstrip areas that typically need sealing. Start by sealing around windows and doors. Seal plumbing, ducting, and areas where electrical wiring comes through walls, floors and ceilings for additional energy savings.

Source: [energy.gov](https://www.energy.gov)



# Electric Heat Meters

The 2021-2022 heating season is here. October 1st marked the beginning of the heating season and West Central's electric heat rate.

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

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

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



## COOK UP ENERGY SAVINGS THIS HOLIDAY SEASON.

- Clean oven burners regularly.
- Match the pan size to the burner you're using.
- Use small appliances like slow cookers and toaster ovens when possible.

From our table to yours,  
Happy Thanksgiving!

## Happy Thanksgiving!

West Central Electric will be closed **Nov. 25-26** in observance of Thanksgiving.

We wish you a safe and enjoyable holiday!





A volunteer distributes food to the needy at the Feeding South Dakota facility in Pierre.

# FEEDING SOUTH DAKOTA

## Hunger relief program takes on the task of making sure families have food on the table

**Billy Gibson**

[billy.gibson@sdrea.coop](mailto:billy.gibson@sdrea.coop)

Putting an end to hunger in the state of South Dakota is a very tall order. But it's one that leaves Lori Dykstra decidedly undaunted.

Dykstra is CEO of Feeding South Dakota, a non-profit hunger relief organization with outposts all across the state dedicated to providing access to nutritious meals for those in need.

She and her team are driven not only to deliver quality meals to the young and old alike but in a broader sense to contribute to the economic, social and emotional health of families and the communities they call home.

Each week, Feeding South Dakota uses its network of agencies and partners to distribute roughly 200,000 meals, including 5,000 packages of food provided to children through the organization's BackPack program and 2,700 food boxes for seniors.

While it may not be readily apparent to some, Dykstra points out that South Dakota has four of the 10 poorest

counties in the country, and the rural nature of the state causes the creation of food deserts where grocery stores, markets and other resources can be separated by many miles. Nearly 15 percent of the population lives at or below the poverty line and more than 40 percent of school-aged children qualify for free and reduced meals.

Dykstra believes no family should face the decision of buying food or buying medication or paying rent.

"I'm excited to work toward meeting the needs of those who face hunger in South Dakota and grateful for the opportunity to share my passion for community service," she said.

The program began in 1975 when the Sioux Falls Ministerial Association formed a community food pantry. Eight years later, the Black Hills Regional Food Bank, Inc., was created.

Eventually, in 2004 an inevitable joining of forces took place when the two separate organizations merged and became the Community Food Banks of South Dakota, Inc., bringing together 45 years of experience in



Lori Dykstra

providing hunger relief.

The program is continuing to look for new ways to meet its mission. In July, Feeding South Dakota launched Heroes for the Hungry: A Campaign for Monthly Giving, as an effort to re-energize the spirit of giving after the height of the pandemic and encourage regular monthly donations.

The United Methodist Church Dakotas Conference pitched in with a Miracle Offering in which the first 120 monthly donations would be matched up to a total of \$12,000.

"This is a wonderful opportunity to strengthen our foundation of sustaining gifts that allow us to do our important work," Dykstra said.

# A PLACE TO REST



The South Dakota Veterans Cemetery located northeast of Sioux Falls provides a new resting place for U.S. military veterans and their families. *Photos by Billy Gibson*

## State Veterans Cemetery in Sioux Falls opens new options for military families

**Billy Gibson**

[billy.gibson@sdrea.coop](mailto:billy.gibson@sdrea.coop)

A dozen distraught family members surrounded the casket conspicuously draped with a bright, crisp American flag. The brilliant hues of red, white and blue stood in stark contrast to the slate gray sky hanging overhead and the slight chill that filled the air.

As the gathered mourners paid their last respects and turned back toward the administration building at the South Dakota Veterans Cemetery, the clouds suddenly burst open and a heavy rain began to fall.

“Well, your daddy was a rancher,” the grieving widow said to her son as they made their way down the hillside. “A good rain is exactly what he would have wanted. This would have made him smile.”

Erin Brown is director of the South Dakota Veterans Cemetery (SDVC) located northeast of Sioux Falls and she often hears stories that family members share about their loved ones who arrive at their final resting

place there. A military veteran herself, Brown said those stories bring added meaning and significance to her work.

“The veterans – and their families – are very important to us,” she said. “When I hear those kinds of stories and hear them describe a lifetime of memories and all the good times they had together, it reinforces the idea that there’s real value in what we’re doing here at the cemetery.”

The SDVC is the first federally funded, state-owned and operated veterans cemetery in the state, although there is no residency requirement for military veterans to be interred there. The Black Hills National Cemetery is located a few miles east of Sturgis.

The facility is located on 60 acres donated by the City of Sioux Falls and ultimately will have enough space for over 28,000 casket grave sites, cremation grave sites, a columbarium for cremated remains and a scattering garden. More than 600 in-ground crypts have already been installed. The facility was made possible by more

than \$7 million in federal money, state funds and private donations.

Since the ribbon-cutting ceremony last Memorial Day, the cemetery has seen a steady stream of burials. There were four on a recent Friday.

SDVC staff works with the families to arrange details of the burial services which typically include a final pre-service consultation with the families, a processional to the committal shelter, a 15-20 minute service, folding and presentation of the flag, and a rifle salute and Taps presented by local military-related volunteer organizations.





Members of the grounds crew are all veterans and can relate to military families in their time of grief.

Clarence Kooistra is one of those volunteers who donates his time to make sure veterans receive a proper burial and their families receive the proper respect. He's a member of the VFW Post 628 Honor Guard based in Sioux Falls.

"I just feel it's very important that these men and women are treated with the respect they deserve for the sacrifices they've made to preserve our freedoms and democracy in our country," Kooistra said. "It's a privilege for me to come out here and do this for the families."

While construction commenced on the cemetery two years ago, it took several years to bring the project to fruition. At the time the first federal grant application was submitted in 2017, Brown was serving as a veterans program manager in the State Department of Veteran's Affairs helping veterans navigate through the federal bureaucracy to receive their rightful benefits. She often found, however, that some of the former soldiers would balk at the benefits "so that someone they felt needed it more than them could get it."

When the cemetery director position opened up, she jumped at the chance to find another way to help veterans.

In performing her job, Brown

calls on her own military experience, which includes joining the Minnesota National Guard in high school and receiving advanced individual training at Fort Lee in Virginia. She returned and attended college for three years before getting deployed to Iraq for nearly two years.

She worked in supply management at a Marine base between Ramadi and Fallujah and eventually left the service as an E-5.

When she and her staff are interacting with veterans and their families, they have little difficulty relating to them on a personal basis.

"The military is the kind of experience that you don't know you want or need until you have it," she said. "All of those experiences have put me into one of the most rewarding jobs I've been able to do. Without it, I wouldn't be able to relate to the families and get the help they need and have earned. Once they realize I'm also a veteran, things change and they see me differently."

Brown and her staff - all of whom are veterans themselves - have

developed personal relationships with the families whose loved ones are interred at the facility. During their visits to the cemetery, family members often express their gratitude to the staff for their work in keeping the facility well maintained and give updates on how the family is faring and if they have any further needs.

Brown said she is looking toward the future with optimism for the



The Committal Shelter is the site of many outdoor funeral services for veterans.

cemetery and its mission, especially after the South Dakota Veterans Council last summer announced a \$2.1 million donation from philanthropist T. Denny Sanford, PREMIER Bankcard CEO Miles Beacom and his wife Lisa.

For more information, visit <https://vetaffairs.sd.gov/veteranscemetery/>.

# ANNUAL MEETING RECAP



# 72ND ANNUAL MEETING

## Membership Meets in Presho

**Jessie Tucker**

[jessie.tucker@wce.coop](mailto:jessie.tucker@wce.coop)

On Oct. 6, West Central Electric held its annual meeting at Lyman Gardens in Presho, S.D. An estimated 180 guests partook in the evening's events, which included the meeting, meal and prize giveaways.

Board President Shad Riggle officially called the meeting to order at 5 p.m. (CDT), after which, Father John Heying gave the invocation and the national anthem was sung.

The board report was given by Shad Riggle, who, among other things, spoke of the retirement of capital credits.

"The board of directors plans to retire 1.3 million dollars back to the membership. A large portion of these margins are due to the governments Paycheck Protection Program," added Riggle.

In his speech, CEO/Manager Jeff Birkeland informed members of project updates, the cancellation of the Keystone XL pipeline, an update on the Paycheck

Protection Program loan, the inability to get materials within the past year and the current rate outlook for 2022.

"As of today, there will be no rate increase in 2022," said Birkeland. "I use the language, 'as of today,' because we have no idea what new rules and regulations Congress may pass in the coming months."

Board Vice President, Ken Miller presented service awards to Presho Journeyman Lineman Jordan Jessop for five years, Murdo Staff Engineer Kit Talich for 15 years, Presho Journeyman Lineman Grady Floyd for 15 years, Philip Foreman Nathan Drury for 20 years, and Midland Operations Assistant Mike Trapp for 25 years. Manager Birkeland then recognized retiring employees Greg Arthur for 27 years

of service and Lyle Linderman for 37 years.

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

Ken Miller, representing Jones County; Jim Willert, representing Jackson County; and Shad Riggle, representing Stanley County.

Guest speaker, Rushmore Electric Manager Vic Simmons, spoke on a Rushmore electric update and touched on the SPP grid issues from last February.

The meeting featured a free roast beef dinner prepared and served by the Lyman County EMTs. Prizes and cash drawings were held throughout the evening.



Winners of the \$300 cash prize, left to right, Terry Moore, Clinton Caldwell, Roland Peterson, Donna Rolf, Dianne Marshall.

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# Annual Accounting Finance Report

The Billing and Accounting Departments at West Central Electric continue to move forward with advances within our software. As we all know, technology is always changing and evolving.

We continue to offer Variable Budget Billing which calculates your billing averages every month. This helps levelize the member's billing amounts. The billing amount may vary slightly from month to month, but it keeps the cost consistent throughout the year.

Auto Pay is another program that is becoming popular with our members. Members authorize monthly scheduled payments to be drafted from a checking or savings account; or charged to a debit or credit card. We recently ran a promotion for our Auto Pay program and signed up several members who wanted to take advantage of this feature.

SmartHub is a free app that lets you as a member monitor your account 24/7. It provides information right at your fingertips. With SmartHub, members can manage accounts, report service issues, receive notices, view and pay bill, and track daily usage. Members can also access SmartHub from computers through West Central Electric's home page.

West Central Electric currently has 7,070 active accounts, with an average of 4,016 bills printed each month. After our most recent promotion, Auto Pay users are up to 1,473 members. Also, it's worth noting 963 members are registered SmartHub users and 332 member accounts have elected to go to paperless billing. Speaking of paperless, a few years back West Central Electric went paperless with paper documents at our office. The software program Document Vault gives our employees the ability to access files quickly at the click of the mouse. We are currently at 167,025 scanned documents in Document Vault.

Lastly, in 2020 West Central was able to put \$1.2 million worth of capital credits back into the members hands. The board is in the early stages of discussing the 2021 General Retirement dollar amounts. Stayed tuned!



# THE FIRST TO ACT



The state's emergency medical services workforce declined 30 percent last year, though some are still eager to serve.

## Though rural South Dakota is experiencing a shortage of first responders, some are still eager to bear the responsibility

**Billy Gibson**

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The early morning fog had already settled in heavy and thick as a damp blanket when Joey Denison pulled out of his driveway in Lake Norden. He was headed to Lake Preston for his job as an electric lineman and just happened to be fresh off earning his paramedic license in his spare time.

Within just a few minutes of driving along Hwy. 81, the blurry image of a wrecked semi came into view through the haze. The rig was overturned and rested across the roadway. At first blush, the scene appeared to be a one-vehicle accident, but Denison soon saw the small pickup that was crushed beneath the trailer.

When he got close enough to peer inside the vehicle, he saw a young woman who had clearly sustained severe damage to her skull. His four years of training through EMT and paramedic school kicked into high gear.

"There were cars still running into the semi from the other side so I positioned

my truck where no one could run into her car," Denison recalled. "Then I pulled her car out from underneath the trailer with my truck. I could see her head was shattered and someone had already called 911 to report that she was dead. Eventually, we were able to get her out with the Jaws of Life and transport her to the hospital in Madison."

The young lady made a full recovery and she and Denison still stay in contact three years later.

Denison doesn't characterize his actions as heroic; he sees his response as something that neighbors and citizens simply do for one another. Spurred on by his passion for helping others, Denison began his EMT training seven years ago and now volunteers his services in Lake Norden and the surrounding area.

"I always kind of regretted not going into the military, so this is my way of being a community servant," he said.

These days he teaches classes in emergency training and notes a shortage of qualified volunteers to staff rural first responder operations.

According to the South Dakota Department of Health, over the past year the active EMS workforce has declined 30 percent.

Denison said assumptions sometimes depart from reality when it comes to EMS work, and he encourages those who have a penchant for serving others to consider first responder training.



Joey Denison says emergency response work is both challenging and rewarding.

"The physical act of rendering first aid is a lot of repetitive training and muscle memory, but people think it's too complex. If you can catch a baseball, you can put your hand over a cut. It's not that hard," he said. "We can't be afraid to help someone in need in an emergency situation. Someday it could be you who needs the help."

# A LIFETIME OF CO-OP SERVICE TO MEMBERS

*Co-op leaders recognized at SDAC Hall of Fame banquet*

**Billy Gibson**

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Harry Thomas still remembers turning on the “power switch” for the first time at his home when he was a youngster.

That was made possible by his local electric cooperative, and for Thomas it was a life lesson about the great things that can happen through co-op organizations. He went on to serve for nearly four decades on the board of Venture Communications and was one of four recent inductees into the South Dakota Association of Cooperatives Hall of Fame.

Thomas and Paul Symens were recognized as 2021 inductees at the ceremony held in Watertown Sept. 22, while Chuck Birkholt and Dan Lindblom were honored as 2020 inductees. Last year’s banquet was canceled due to the pandemic.

“I’ve been around cooperative systems all my life,” Thomas said. “I remember when the co-op brought power to the farm and when Sully Buttes built the first telephone line out there. Those things would not have happened if not for cooperatives. The Bell companies built in the towns, but they had no



Inducted into the South Dakota Association of Cooperatives Hall of Fame were Harry Thomas, Chuck Birkholt and Paul Symens. Not shown is Dan Lindblom, who was unable to attend the induction ceremony in Watertown.

interest in going into the country.”

Symens served on the board at Lake Region Electric in Webster before he was elected to the state Legislature in 1987 and again in 1996. He was a board member for Farmers Union Marketing and Processing for 36 years.

“I’ve put in a lot of time with cooperatives and I know how co-ops work. I was raised in co-ops and it has been a pleasure to be a part of that process. The magic of co-ops is people working together to help each other, and as long as board and management do their jobs, it’s going to be successful.”

Symens said his advice for the younger generation of co-op leaders would be to learn about the history of cooperatives, how they were founded and why they exist.

“Learning from history will teach you a lot and keep you from making mistakes,” he said.

Birkholt started his cooperative career

as a laborer at Cam Wal Electric in Selby. He went to work “digging holes and setting poles” for 85 cents an hour until he discovered he could make more money as a lineman.

He worked at the co-op for 45 years, the last eight as general manager. He went on to serve on the board at Venture Communications for the past 21 years.

“I told my wife I always wanted to see



Hall of Fame inductee Chuck Birkholt addresses the audience at the Watertown Event Center.

what it was like on the other side of the board table,” he said. “But I think she just wanted me out of the house.”

Lindblom, a long-time board member at Black Hills Electric in Custer, was unable to attend the banquet.

# HUNTING FOR THE HUNGRY

Sportsmen Against Hunger is nearing one million pounds of game meat donated to food banks across the state since 1993.

## South Dakota hunters donate game meat for families in need through Sportsmen Against Hunger program

**Billy Gibson**

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One million pounds of meat is an awful lot of protein...and a lot of goose burgers.

The organization Sportsmen Against Hunger is closing in on one million pounds of wild game donated to the needy since the program was founded in 1993 by Dr. Jeff Olson and Dr. Tom Kafka.

For nearly three decades, generous hunters throughout the state have given away a variety of game meat including deer, antelope, elk, pheasant, grouse and geese.

According to Olson, the goose meat has been quite a hit.

“Apparently, there are a lot of people who like to eat goose burgers,” he said. “It may not

sound too appetizing when you think about it, but it’s not bad and a lot of the people who receive our donations say it’s great. They’ve developed quite a taste for it.”

Olson recalls that even when he launched the program he was completely oblivious to how many people in the state were going to bed hungry every night.

“We’re reaching one million pounds of meat our hunters and processors have donated over the years, but there are so many who are food insecure in our state that we could use another several million and still not meet the need,” he said.

Olson is accustomed to working around a maze of regulations, restrictions and prohibitions, noting “there’s a new and different hurdle we have to jump every year.”

Presently, the program is facing the challenge of finding enough plants to process the donated animals. Just a few years ago, there were nearly 50 wild game processors on the list of licensed receiving plants. Today there are just 14.

Olson cites pandemic-related problems in the industry and a dearth of available workers. The plants have been forced to take domestic animals for production and push donated wild game to the back of the line.

Ron Fowler has served as field director for the program since 2005 when he retired from South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks as a game management specialist after 35 years. He works out the details of the operation, recruits processors and hunters to participate and sorts through the red tape of state and federal regulations, health precautions, quality control and the program’s certification system.

He explained that when a hunter

# SPORTSMEN AGAINST HUNGER



decides to donate a doe deer or antelope, they fill out a certificate and deliver it to any processor in the state that's on the prearranged receiving list. The certificate covers \$75 of the processing fee while the hunter is responsible for any balance, though some facilities will accept the certificate as full payment. In the case of bucks, the hunter is responsible for the entire balance, which could run to more than \$100. Processors collect the certificates



Ron Fowler, left, delivers a shipment of donated venison to a Feeding South Dakota warehouse facility.



Pictured at left, South Dakota fishermen donated 320 pounds of cleaned walleye in 2020. Above, Dr. Jeff Olson presents a plaque to Bruce Anderson, president of the Western Buffalo Company in Rapid City, for participating in the Sportsmen Against Hunger program. Shown far left is SAH Board Member Tom Weaver. Far right is SAH field director Ron Fowler.

and turn them in at the end of the season for payment.

Fowler said the policy is in place to help control and manage the state's deer population. He said some hunters will obtain more than one deer license, keep one for themselves and donate the others.

"When the program started, we had no funds to cover any of the hunter's cost, but then we created a foundation and now we can pay for does, plus we provide the casing for processors and pay for the cost of getting the meat to the food banks where it's distributed to those who need it."

Fowler said these days most donated venison is coming from deer taken within, or close to, city limits. Several larger cities and towns have allowed deer to be taken in close proximity of their borders simply to hold the deer population down and keep them out of yards, gardens and streets. The cost of processing those animals is typically shared with the local government.

Sportsmen Against Hunger is also seeing more anglers getting in on the action. More than 300 lbs. of cleaned walleye has been donated in the past year. At this year's Governor's Cup Walleye Fishing Tournament, for instance, nearly 1,000 fish went to the needy.

Most of the cleaning is done by local volunteers and members of sportsmen clubs.

Thousands of pheasants are also donated each year, often by those who are visiting the state and can't take home their kill.

Fowler maintains a steady drum beat of encouraging hunters to donate their game even though he knows the incentives to do so are diminishing. He notes that in earlier times processors weren't hard to find, but now a hunter may have to drive some distance to the nearest facility.

"It used to be more convenient for hunters when you didn't have to drive across the state to find a processor, but people are still hungry," he said.

Fowler said his work can often be challenging, but he stays motivated by remembering that there's always a need.

"There are so many families in our state that struggle and they need help," he said. "It all comes down to a warm, fuzzy thing for me. The work is a little more than I first anticipated but I can't just ignore it when I see an opportunity to help someone who needs it. We get a lot of positive feedback from our processors and the people we help are very grateful."



**Thanksgiving**  
November 25, 2021

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.

**OCTOBER 22-23**

**Governor's South Dakota Showcase**  
1201 N West Avenue, Sioux Falls, SD, 605-773-3301

**OCTOBER 22-24, 28-30**

**A Little Piece of Heaven**  
Grand Opera House, Pierre, SD, call 605-224-7826 to purchase tickets

**OCTOBER 23**

**Aberdeen Oktoberfest**  
Aberdeen Civic Arena, Aberdeen, SD, 605-380-8448

**OCTOBER 29-30**

**Deadweird**  
Various Locations, Deadwood, SD, 605-578-1876

**OCTOBER 30**

**16th Holiday Shopping Extravaganza**  
Davison County Fairgrounds, Mitchell, SD, call Cindy at 605-999-8563 for more info

**OCTOBER 30**

**Scare in the Square**  
Main Street Square, Rapid City, SD, 605-716-7979

**OCTOBER 30**

**Yankton's Harvest Halloween**  
Downtown, Yankton, SD, email [mandi@bostonsyankton.com](mailto:mandi@bostonsyankton.com) for more info

**OCTOBER 31**

**Halloween Bash Weekend at Mazing Acres Pumpkin Patch**  
30851 433rd Avenue, Yankton, SD, 605-760-2759

**NOVEMBER 4**

**Chris Young Famous Friends Tour**  
Summit Arena, Rapid City, SD, 605-394-4115

**NOVEMBER 6**

**Cyrus Steele Comedy Show**  
Homestake Opera House, Lead, SD, visit <https://www.homestakeoperahouse.org/> for more info and tickets

**NOVEMBER 5-7, 12-14, 19-21**

**Julius Caesar**  
Black Hills Playhouse, Rapid City, SD, visit <https://www.bhct.org/> for more info and tickets

**NOVEMBER 12-13**

**Sioux Empire Arts and Crafts Show**  
W.H. Lyon Fairgrounds, Sioux Falls, SD, 605-332-6000

**NOVEMBER 13**

**Christmas at the Homestead**  
Adams Homestead and Nature Preserve, North Sioux City, SD, 605-232-0873

**NOVEMBER 13**

**Deadwood's Big Whiskey Fest**  
Main Street, Deadwood, SD, 605-578-1876

**NOVEMBER 13**

**Sisseton Area Merchants and Crafters Holiday Open House Extravaganza**  
Sisseton, SD, call Beverly at 605-698-7425 for more info

**NOVEMBER 19-20**

**Holiday Arts Christmas Show**  
Masonic Hall, Mitchell, SD, 605-359-2049

**NOVEMBER 20**

**Little Norge Fest: A Taste of Scandinavia**  
Canyon Lake Activity Center, Rapid City, SD, 605-342-4226

**NOVEMBER 26**

**Parade of Lights**  
Dakota Avenue, Huron, SD, 605-352-0000

**NOVEMBER 26-28**

**Beautiful - The Carole King Musical**  
Washington Pavilion, Sioux Falls, SD, visit <https://www.washingtonpavilion.org/> for more info and tickets

**NOVEMBER 27**

**Holiday Celebration and Winter Market/Festival of Lights Parade**  
Downtown, Rapid City, SD, 605-381-4204

**DECEMBER 2**

**Christmas on the Prairie**  
526 North Broadway Avenue Miller, SD, 605-853-3098

**DECEMBER 3**

**Handel's Messiah**  
First Lutheran Church, Sioux Falls, SD, 605-367-6000

**DECEMBER 4**

**Rapid City Garden Club's Wreath & Centerpiece Sale**  
Central States Fairgrounds, Rapid City, SD, 605-343-0710

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