

COOPERATIVE CONNECTIONS



Get Out & Vote!

It's Your Civic Duty

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Recap: Your Co-op's 84th Annual Meeting

The 84th Annual Membership Meeting of the Whetstone Valley Electric Cooperative, Inc. was held on Thursday, March 26, 2026, at Wilmot High School in Wilmot, S.D. Registration opened at 6 p.m.

At 7 p.m., President Joel Adler called the meeting to order. Adler stated that 225 voting members had registered and were present, creating a quorum. Approximately 294 people attended the meeting.

Adler invited everyone to stand for the singing of the National Anthem. The anthem was led by Marie Ammann. Pastor Peter Reynen of Wilmot provided the invocation for the meeting.

Adler introduced the Board of Directors, officers, and general counsel. He also recognized former employees and directors. Adler recognized Bill Tostenson from District 5 for his years of dedicated service on the board as he steps down due to term limits.

Adler announced there was not a contested election for districts 1, 2, and 5. Without objection by those attending, Dave Behrns (District 1), Matt Cameron (District 2) and Paul Tostenson (District 5) were elected by unanimous consent.

Adler called on Secretary Cameron to give notice of the meeting and present the minutes of 2025.

Secretary Cameron affirmed that the Notice of Annual Meeting along with the unapproved minutes of the 2025 Annual Meeting had been mailed to the membership.

Adler called for a motion to waive the reading of the Notice of Annual Membership Meeting and to approve the minutes of the 83rd Annual Meeting as presented. A motion from the floor was seconded and carried.

Adler pointed out that the Financial Statement and Treasurer's report was included in the material delivered to those attending. A motion from the floor to approve the Treasurer's Report was seconded and carried.

Adler reported that capital credits in the amount of \$9,266,804 have been returned to members and that \$449,138 has been approved for the 2026 general retirement to be credited to members. He reminded those in attendance that the returned cash or credit is a share of the member's equity in the co-op that's being returned this year.

Adler called on Whetstone Valley Electric General Manager Dave Page for the management report and to introduce the employees.

Page welcomed the members to the Annual Meeting of the Cooperative and thanked the employees for their efforts in preparation of the meeting.

Page began by emphasizing the meeting's theme: "A Legacy



Congratulations to Wilmot High School Senior Olivia Foell, who was presented with the \$2,500 Basin Electric Scholarship at Whetstone Valley Electric Cooperative's annual meeting.



(Left to right) Earl Robinson - \$500 grand prize, Colter Finnesand - \$50 kids age 0-13, Bryton Blauert - \$100 kids age 14-18.

of Service", and the Cooperative's mission statement "To provide the highest level of service to our members and patrons in everything we do."

Page introduced Whetstone's Operation Manager, Jon Christensen to provide the 2025 operations report and discuss future work plan projects.

As part of the 2025 operations review, Christensen presented statistical data detailing the volume of services performed by the cooperative, along with a summary of outages for the year.

Christensen then reviewed various projects outlined in the construction work plan aimed at improved load capacity and enhancing system reliability. These initiatives call for the replacement of aging infrastructure and the increase of capacity to accommodate load growth and facilitate system load balancing.

COOPERATIVE CONNECTIONS

WHETSTONE VALLEY ELECTRIC

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Did you know? Some local races in South Dakota have been decided by just a dozen votes or fewer?

Christensen concluded his report by informing the members of additional services the cooperative provides.

Page continued his report by addressing regional growth in energy demand alongside slower local growth, and the resulting impacts on electric rates. He noted that member survey results consistently identify reliability as the top priority and provided an overview of the costs associated with maintaining electric generation and infrastructure.

Page also addressed concerns raised by some members regarding the potential impact of data centers and transmission development on local electric rates.

He concluded his report by thanking the Board of Directors and the members for their attendance.

Page then introduced the employees. Those attending showed their appreciation to the team of employees with a round of applause. Page presented milestone

service awards to Ryan Dunnihoo for 10 years of service, Eric Pederson for 25 years, and Gene Sass for 40 years with the cooperative.

Page also recognized Mark Weber's retirement after 37 years with Whetstone Valley Electric.

Page announced that this year's Whetstone Valley/Basin Electric \$2,500 scholarship was awarded to Olivia Foell.

President Adler called for any unfinished or new business from the floor. With no further business, and a motion and second from the floor, President Adler adjourned the meeting.

There was a drawing for \$50 for children 13 years of age or younger in attendance. The winner was Colter Finnesand

The winner of the \$100 drawing for those 14-18 years of age in attendance was Bryton Blauert.

The winner of the \$500 cash drawing was Earl Robinson.

ELECTRICAL SAFETY MONTH: TIPS FOR PRIORITIZING SAFETY

At your local cooperative, Electrical Safety Month is recognized every May, but the importance of practicing safety year-round is always emphasized. From co-op crews to the consumer-members served, everyone has a part to play in prioritizing safety.

According to the Electrical Safety Foundation International, thousands of people in the U.S. are critically injured or electrocuted as a result of electrical fires and accidents in their own homes. Many of these accidents are preventable. Electricity is a necessity that powers daily life, but it can also be dangerous — something your local cooperative understands firsthand from working with it 365 days a year.

Safety is more than a catchphrase. Cooperative leadership recognizes the responsibility to keep employees safe while also helping protect members and the broader community. That's why your local cooperative hosts safety demonstrations at community events and in schools throughout the year, highlighting the dangers of electricity. These demonstrations often include emergency scenarios, such as what to do in a car accident involving a utility pole and downed power lines, along with discussions about the dangers of pad-mounted transformers and overloading circuits with too many electronic devices.

Electricity is an integral part of modern life. Given the widespread use of electrical devices, tools and appliances, here are a few practical electrical safety tips:

Watch for frayed wires. Power cords can become damaged from age, heavy use or excessive current flow. If cords become frayed or cut, replace them to avoid shock hazards.

Avoid overloading circuits. Circuits can only handle a limited amount of electricity. Running too many devices on one circuit can lead to overheating and potential fire risk.

Label circuit breakers. Understanding your home's electrical system can help prevent overloads. If your home is more than 40 years old and you plan to install large appliances, contact a qualified electrician.

Use extension cords properly. Never plug one extension cord into another. "Daisy chaining" can cause overheating and fire hazards. Do not exceed the cord's wattage, and avoid using extension cords as permanent solutions. If additional outlets are needed, consult a licensed electrician.

Parents and caregivers are encouraged to talk with children

about playing it safe and smart around electricity, including staying aware of overhead power lines near outdoor play areas.

Providing a reliable energy supply 24/7, 365 days a year is a top priority. Equally important is keeping the community safe around electricity.

Contact your local cooperative for additional electrical safety tips or to request a safety demonstration at a school or upcoming community event.



PLUG INTO SAFETY

ELECTRICAL SAFETY MONTH
Make electrical safety a priority this month, and every month.



"Do not fly kites by power lines!"

Casen Yuker

Casen cautions readers not to fly kites around power lines. Thank you for sharing your picture, Casen! Casen's parents are Lance and Tarah Yuker from Aberdeen S.D.

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 DESSERTS

RHUBARB CAKE DESSERT

Ingredients:

1 pkg. yellow cake mix
1 cup sugar
4 cups rhubarb, diced
2 cups half and half

Method

Prepare cake mix as directed on package and pour into a greased 9x13 pan. Mix sugar and rhubarb together. Spoon evenly over cake batter. Pour half and half over top of rhubarb mixture. Bake at 350° for 40-45 minutes. This is like an upside-down cake with custard on the bottom of the cake.

Marla Gilbert
Southeastern Electric

FUZZY NAVEL CAKE

Ingredients:

1 pkg. yellow cake mix
1 instant vanilla pudding (large, 5.1 oz. size)
3/4 cup peach schnapps
1/2 cup vegetable oil
1/2 cup orange juice
4 eggs

Glaze

1 cup powdered sugar
4 tbsps. orange juice
2 tbsps. peach schnapps

Method

Spray a 12-cup fluted baking pan with cooking spray, dust with flour. Mix all cake ingredients together until well blended, spread evenly in pan. Bake at 350° for 45-50 minutes until golden brown and cake springs back when lightly touched. Cool cake for 20 minutes. Run a long, sharp knife around the edges to loosen, and invert onto platter. Whisk glaze ingredients together until smooth. With wooden skewer, poke holes on top and around sides of cake. Spoon glaze over the warm cake, allowing to seep in holes, and drizzle down the sides and center. Cool completely before slicing.

Sally Florey
Charles Mix Electric

HAWAIIAN PINEAPPLE CAKE

Ingredients:

2 cups flour
2 cups sugar
2 eggs
1 tsp. baking soda
1 tsp. vanilla
Pinch salt
1 20 oz. can crushed pineapple, undrained (in natural juice, not heavy syrup)

Frosting

1/2 cup butter, softened
1 8 oz. cream cheese softened
1 tsp. vanilla
1 1/2 cups powdered sugar

Method

Mix all cake ingredients together until well blended. Bake in greased 9x13 pan at 350° for 35-40 minutes or until top is golden brown.

Combine cream cheese, butter and vanilla. Beat until smooth and creamy. Gradually add powdered sugar. Spread frosting on cake while still warm. Garnish with some toasted coconut if desired.

Sally Florey
Charles Mix Electric

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 2026. All entries must include your name, mailing address, phone number and cooperative name.

Picture submitted by William Berry via Shutterstock.

ARE SMART APPLIANCES RIGHT FOR MY HOME?



Miranda Boutelle
Efficiency Services
Group

Let's start by defining what "smart" means. Smart appliances – such as refrigerators, washers, ovens, thermostats and water heaters – connect to the internet. Typically, through Wi-Fi or Bluetooth, these appliances can be controlled using your smartphone, tablet or voice-assistant device. They are designed to optimize energy use and add convenience. Some smart devices can even learn your habits over time.

Are smart appliances right for your home? The answer depends on your preferences and types of appliances you already have. The better question might be: Are smart appliances right for you? Do you like the newest tech and typically keep your phone within arm's reach? Do you enjoy the convenience of calling out commands to Alexa? Or do you prefer less technology or something in between? Personally, I'm somewhere in the middle.

Many smart appliances allow you to see how much energy each device consumes. That information can be helpful to better understand your energy habits and identify where energy may be going to waste.

Smart thermostats are a popular choice for managing energy use and reducing energy waste. Heating and cooling systems are typically a home's biggest sources of energy consumption. According to Energy Star, you can save an average of 8% cost savings on heating and cooling with a smart thermostat. Savings depend on your climate, the type of system you have and how you currently use it.

Most energy savings from a smart thermostat come from automating temperature adjustments while you are sleeping or away from home. If you are already good at manually adjusting your thermostat, you likely won't see big savings, but you might prefer the convenience of a programmable device you can control on an app.

Smart thermostats make it much easier to program your heating and cooling schedule. Some have geofencing features that automatically adjust settings based on how far your phone is from home.

Coming in with the second-highest energy user in most homes is the water heater. I like the smart controls on my heat pump water heater. Also called a hybrid water heater, it uses heat pump technology to move heat instead of using energy to create heat. That makes it two to three times more efficient than a conventional electric resistance water heater. You can save even more energy with smart heat pump water heaters.

I can monitor energy use, change settings if we need more hot water and check how much hot water is available before I jump in the shower after my kids have used it. The app notifies me when it's time to clean the air filter on top of the unit. I can access that information without having to go down to the basement. I can even set it to vacation mode after I've left the house for a trip. Not all heat pump water heaters have smart technology, so be sure to check before buying.

My refrigerator is a different story. I like the ability to monitor energy use, but it can be annoying to have my phone notify me the door is open when I'm 3,000 miles away at a work conference. There are certain features that can only be controlled through the app, which I find frustrating. The next thing I know, my husband texts me to make more ice while he's standing right next to it, and I'm on the other side of the country.

Monitoring energy use and making it easier to control your household devices are benefits of smart appliances. Before upgrading, do your research to understand how the features work and whether they benefit your lifestyle. Smart technology can help lower your energy use. But, in some cases, you're better off improving your energy habits with the appliances already in your home.

CO-OP FAMILY LEGACY

Mother & Daughter Duo Find Careers in Co-ops

Jacob Boyko

jacob.boyko@sdrea.coop

Ask any longtime electric cooperative employee what makes the co-op network special, and the answers often sound the same: It feels like family.

For Sharla and Amanda Haugen, that's more than a figure of speech. Working for electric cooperatives on opposite ends of South Dakota, the mother and daughter pair share a commitment to service and community.

Sharla is the manager of dispatch at Sioux Valley Energy in Colman, overseeing 24-hour radio dispatch for line crews from Sioux Valley Energy, Kingsbury Electric Cooperative, Codington-Clark Electric Cooperative, Union County Electric Cooperative, Nobles Cooperative Electric and the City of Brookings.

Sharla has worked at Sioux Valley Energy for 35 years, starting as a dispatcher nearly a decade before Amanda was born. Amanda understood at a young age that whenever there was a severe snow, wind or ice storm, her mom would be out the door and off to work to help get the lights back on.

"Seeing how my mom dropped everything to serve the members and go above and beyond, and my dad supporting her role, it really opened my eyes to what a co-op does for a community," Amanda said.

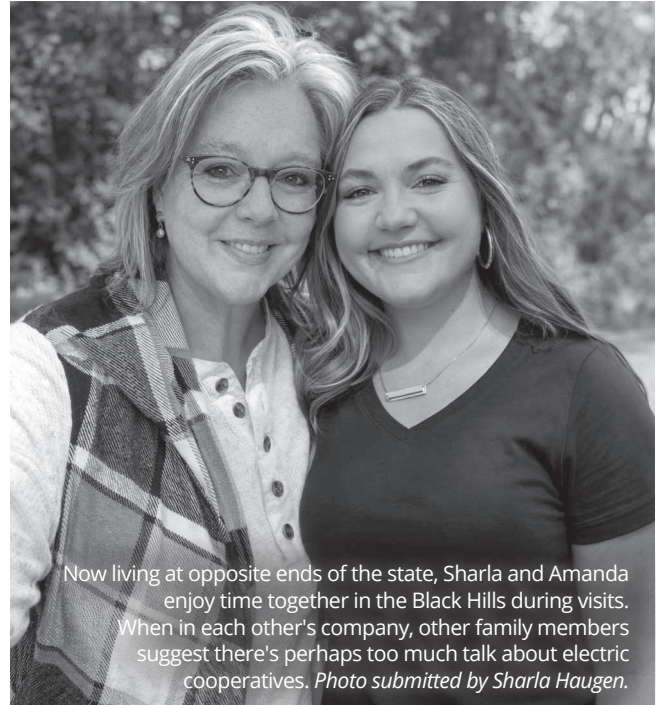
Growing up in rural Moody County on Sioux Valley Energy lines, Amanda was very involved in the co-op. In high school, she helped serve the meals at district meetings, attended annual meetings, and even traveled to North Dakota on Youth Excursion – a co-op event promoting youth education in energy careers and production. On the trip, Amanda toured the Antelope Valley coal-fired power plant and other facilities, getting a behind-the-scenes look at how electricity is generated and transported to co-op members. She also participated in Sioux Valley Energy's youth leadership programs, which prepped students with professional skills for future careers.

"The Empower Youth Leadership program went over different leadership skills and how to find strengths and weaknesses," Amanda recalled. "That involvement is really how I got ingrained with the co-op."

Years later, as Amanda worked to finish her marketing degree at Lake Area Technical College, she was on the hunt for internship openings to help kick off her career.

"I gave it to God and put it in his hands," Amanda said.

One Thursday afternoon, during class, Amanda's phone started



Now living at opposite ends of the state, Sharla and Amanda enjoy time together in the Black Hills during visits. When in each other's company, other family members suggest there's perhaps too much talk about electric cooperatives. Photo submitted by Sharla Haugen.

buzzing over and over again. When she glanced down, she saw multiple missed calls and texts from her mom. West River Electric Association had an opening for a member services representative at their Rapid City office, and applications were due the next day.

"Friday morning, I worked on a revamped resume and cover letter and sent it off," Amanda said. West River Electric Association reached out shortly after for an interview, and less than two weeks later, Amanda was offered the job.

"It's like the stars aligned," Amanda said. "When I told my mom, she was ecstatic – I'm pretty sure she started crying."

For Sharla, it was a joyful moment, knowing Amanda was part of the co-op family that had treated her so well over her decades at Sioux Valley Energy.

"If Amanda got out there and she had car trouble, I knew the co-op people would take care of her," Sharla said. "It was just a sense of relief for me to know if something were to happen, there'd be people there to help her."

Amanda, now five years into the job at West River Electric, works on the co-op's Cooperative Connections magazine, communications and public relations, and youth initiatives similar to the ones at Sioux Valley Energy that lead to her co-op career. Much like her mom, Amanda said her co-op now feels like family.

"Coming to work every day, you kind of have this second family that always has your back," Amanda said. "They are there for you and will help you whenever you need it."

That's exactly what Sharla wanted for her daughter.

"Co-ops are big on employee growth, so I knew Amanda would always be learning and improving. I knew she wouldn't be stagnant in a career at a cooperative because they're always investing in their employees. It was just such a proud moment when she joined the co-op world."

ONE VOTE MAKES A DIFFERENCE



Chuck Sloan • Piedmont, S.D.

Board Treasurer, West River Electric Association

U.S. Air Force 1983-2003

Chuck Sloan has spent much of his life serving his nation.

Sloan enlisted in the U.S. Air Force in 1983 and served 21 years on active duty

before retiring as a master sergeant in 2004. In that time, he was stationed at bases all around the world, including Oman, South Korea, Turkey, and the Pacific. Since 2004, Sloan has worked as a civilian at Ellsworth Air Force Base, where today he is Chief of Operations Compliance.

Serving in the military, Sloan observed firsthand how seriously service members took absentee voting and civic participation, despite being thousands of miles from American soil. Their passion helped ignite Sloan's own admiration for America's democratic system of government.

"If I found somebody a little laissez-faire about voting, saying, 'my vote probably won't count,' I would give them a spiel," Sloan explained. "Yes, your vote does count, and you'll want to be able to say that you made that vote."

He continued, "If you don't choose to exercise that responsibility, then later on if you're displeased, you really can't

complain about it because you didn't make a choice – If anything, vote and give yourself the opportunity to legitimately complain!"

Sloan said people should never underestimate the importance of showing up and making their voices heard, because in close races, one vote can tip the scale.

"There are many instances when one vote may have been a determining factor," Sloan said. "It may not be a general election, but how about in a state or local election where one vote can be the deciding factor? That happens more often than one would think. Your vote matters, no matter what you do."

Sloan brought that civic-mindedness along with him to West River Electric Association, where he serves on the Board of Directors and helps make decisions in the interest of his neighbors and communities he represents.

Sloan said it all just comes back to civic responsibility and staying involved.

"From the time I turned 18, I've never missed a vote," Sloan said. "It's second nature. It's too important to not do."



VOTING STRENGTHENS COMMUNITIES



Evan Buckmiller • De Smet, S.D.

General Manager, Kingsbury Electric Cooperative

De Smet School District Board

For Kingsbury Electric Cooperative General Manager Evan Buckmiller, his call to public service came after a mid-term resignation on the De Smet School District

Board left a vacancy that needed to be filled.

"The board had to appoint someone to fill the seat," Buckmiller said. "Initially when I was asked, I didn't know if I wanted to do it, but I also knew that my wife and I have two young kids in the school system, so I agreed to fill the spot until the next election."

Buckmiller wasn't expecting to develop a passion for civic-service, but six years and two election cycles later, he's still representing the De Smet community on the school board.

"It's for my kids, to make sure they have the best education opportunities possible to prepare them for their future," Buckmiller added.

He said that while serving on the school board has been a

rewarding endeavor, there are also moments that are discouraging; some people will sit out elections, but are also vocal about board decisions they disagree with.

"I receive phone calls about how we are doing everything wrong, but they don't want to step up to be a part of change," Buckmiller explained.

His advice is simple: show up.

"Public participation at the monthly school board meetings is always encouraged," Buckmiller said. "When a community is engaged, there is more diverse input and you get to see the needs of everyone. The needs for one person might not be the same as another, and when you are sitting on a board you want to hear the needs of everyone so you can make the best decision possible for everyone."

Buckmiller said when more people get involved and exercise their civic duties, the communities like his are better for it.

"Being active in the community makes the community stronger and allows different opinions to be heard," Buckmiller said.

"When you show up to meetings and vote, you are giving the board direction so they can make decisions that are in the best interest of everyone."

STICK UP FOR YOURSELF & VOTE



Don Schurdevin • Elk Point, S.D.
Board President, Union County Electric Cooperative
U.S. Navy 1962-1968

Serving on the Union County Electric Cooperative board for more than 25 years, Don Schurdevin has built a reputation for steady leadership and a strong commitment

to the cooperative and its members. But before serving his neighbors and community on the co-op board, Schurdevin first served in a different way. He served not just his Union County neighbors, but his entire country in the U.S. Navy. Schurdevin enrolled during his junior year of high school in 1962, serving active duty in Vietnam from 1963 to 1965, some of that time aboard the USS Midway. The experience helped shape his views on patriotism, civic duty and personal responsibility.

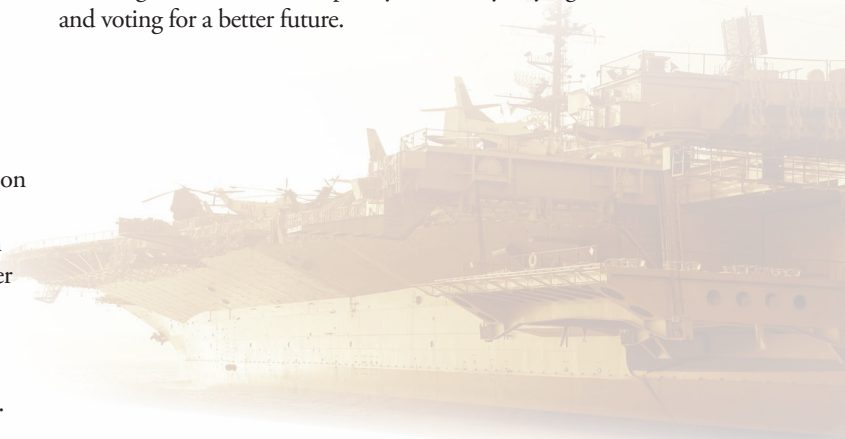
“In the navy, you learn to get along with people, but you learn to also stick up for yourself, because nobody else – is so you better take care of your own business,” he said.

That’s the attitude that Schurdevin brings to his civic participation. He said serving in the military gave him a deeper appreciation for the freedoms Americans enjoy, including voting.

Schurdevin believes participating in elections is one of the most important ways citizens can stay involved in their communities and help shape the future of their community, state and country.

“I think I voted in every election since I could,” Schurdevin recalled. “School board election, county, state – if I was able to vote I was voting.”

That sense of duty carried into his years of cooperative service. As a director, Schurdevin remains focused on serving members and ensuring the co-op continues to meet local needs. Schurdevin encourages others to “stick up for yourself” by staying informed and voting for a better future.



LEADERS DEPEND ON YOU SPEAKING UP



Chris Rahn • Mission, S.D.
Member Services Manager, Cherry-Todd Electric Cooperative
Todd County School District Board, Rosebud Sioux Tribe

Chris Rahn was not always interested in his local government. In fact, up until just several years ago, he sat many elections out.

But through his work at Cherry-Todd Electric Cooperative and the commitment to community that came with it, Rahn gained a new perspective on civic participation, realizing that change only happens when peoples’ voices are heard.

“I believe everybody who has an opinion should come out and vote,” Rahn said. “One vote matters. One vote can change an entire election.”

Rahn’s indifference to voting began to change as he was asked to take on more responsibilities with the co-op. Cherry-Todd Electric General Manager Tim Grablander nominated Rahn to the Rushmore Electric Federal Credit Union Board of Directors, where Rahn now serves as president.

Shortly after, he was encouraged by local community leaders to apply for a board seat with the Rosebud Sioux Tribe. The tribal

council voted to seat Rahn on the judiciary committee, leading to his first real experience with public service. Like flipping a switch, Rahn’s enthusiasm led to his appointment to other tribal boards, including the Tribal Utilities Commission, Tribal Tax Commission, and the Rosebud Energy Services Company.

Rahn said serving in tribal government opened his mind to the impact he can have on his community. That realization inspired Rahn to run for his first publicly-elected position as a school board member for the Todd County School District.

“I wanted to be more involved in my daughter’s education and just listen to the community’s input,” Rahn said, restating the importance of community members actively engaging with elected officials and sharing feedback.

He continued: “I feel like I’ve been able to bridge the gap between the people I represent and the administration and other public leaders.”

As Rahn looks ahead to years of future public service to work for a better community, he encourages others to step up as well — and all it takes is a vote.

“If you speak up, your voice is heard,” he continued. “When everyone’s voice is heard, we can make better decisions for the community as a whole.”

Photos by Shutterstock

Becky Harstad a 'Who Powers You' Contest Nominee

Congratulations to Becky Harstad of rural Wilmot, SD. She was selected as a finalist for the 4th annual "Who Powers You" contest hosted by Whetstone Valley Electric Cooperative and the region's other Touchstone Energy Cooperatives. The contest seeks to highlight local figures who are making a difference in their communities. The individual that nominated Becky, stated that she is a tremendous supporter of the FFA program through her time, effort, and dedication to the students and the program. She helps with fundraising and coaching for FFA. Becky comes with a well deserved recommendation through her selfless service to the community and the FFA Chapter.

Whetstone Valley Electric Cooperative is proud to have someone like Becky as a member. We appreciate all the work she puts into making our community a great place.



Jacy Dexter is Touchstone Energy Scholar of the Week

Congratulations to Becky Harstad of rural Wilmot, SD. She was selected as a finalist for the 4th annual "Who Powers You" contest hosted by Whetstone Valley Electric Cooperative and the region's other Touchstone Energy Cooperatives. The contest seeks to highlight local figures who are making a difference in their communities.

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PLEASE UPDATE YOUR CONTACT INFORMATION

If your phone number or any other pertinent information has changed, contact Whetstone Valley Electric and let us know.

We need the updated information to contact you for reasons pertaining to your service. You can reach us by phone at 1-605-432-5331 or email whetstone@whetstone.coop if you have any updates to your account.

Co-ops in the Classroom Adds Energy to Education

Whetstone Valley Electric Cooperative along with Jennifer Gross, Communications Coordinator from East River Electric Power Cooperative, teamed up in March to provide a free presentation to the local 5th grade classes. Jennifer presented to approximately 190 area children.

The presentations were conducted in the following schools: Sisseton, Wilmot, Summit, Milbank, St. Lawrence, and Blue Sky Colony.

The objective of the Co-ops in the Classroom program is to teach children about electrical safety, generation, energy efficiency, and conservation. The students learned about how electricity travels, the difference between conductors and insulators, and many more interesting facts related to electricity.



BUILDING FOR WHAT COMES NEXT

Basin Electric's Pioneer Generation Station, located near Williston, N.D.
Photo Submitted by Basin Electric

Basin Electric Expands Generation Capacity to Meet Growing Demand

Frank Turner

frank.turner@sdrea.coop

Although the flick of a switch can seem close at hand, the electricity that powers our world is often generated many miles away.

For rural cooperative members, electricity often comes from North Dakota, where Basin Electric Power Cooperative operates a fleet of power plants to serve rural communities across nine states. As demand continues to build across that system, the infrastructure behind it is growing right alongside it.

This steady growth has shaped the work now underway across Basin Electric's service territory. In response, the cooperative has kept up with demand by expanding existing generation facilities, building a new power plant and supporting the system with additional transmission projects in just a few short years.

"We're seeing load growth across our system, and it's coming from a combination of residential, agricultural, commercial and energy development," said Gavin McCollam, Basin Electric's senior vice president and chief operating officer. "When you step back and look at it as a whole, it becomes clear that we need to continue building to keep pace with that growth."



New transmission lines in western North Dakota support Basin Electric's newest generation assets.
Photo Submitted by Basin Electric

Pioneer Generation Station

To maintain reliability and keep the lights on for their members, Basin Electric recently expanded its generation capacity through new development to Pioneer Generation Station near Williston, N.D.

Originally developed in the early 2010s, the facility grew in phases over time. Those additions turned Pioneer Generation Station into one of Basin Electric's most important generation assets, but within a decade, the pace of that growth had begun to change.

"Coming out of COVID, not just us but everybody

was seeing rapid increases in loads,” McCollam said. “At that point, we were asking what we could do the quickest to add capacity.”

To meet the need, Basin Electric moved forward with Pioneer Generation Station Phase IV. The cooperative completed the project in 2025, adding about 580 megawatts of generation and bringing the site’s total capacity to 822 megawatts, enough to power roughly 400,000 homes.

The expansion moved quickly in part because Basin Electric built on what it already had.

“We had the site and the people that worked there, so we could add onto it a lot quicker than we could analyze and research new sites,” McCollam said.

Bison Generation Station

Still, Basin Electric continued building for traditional member load growth, beyond Pioneer Generation Station Phase IV, turning to a new project: Bison Generation Station.

Located near Epping, N.D., the natural gas-fueled generation project is being built from the ground up as a large-scale, natural gas facility designed to meet future demand. Once completed, the combined-cycle power plant will produce approximately 1,490

megawatts of electricity, making it the largest power plant solely owned by Basin Electric – almost double the capacity of Pioneer Generation Station. The plant is expected to come online in two phases, with the first unit operating in 2029 and the second in 2030.

Unlike Pioneer Generation Station, which expanded over time, Bison Generation Station is being built as a single, large project.

“We had a history of building small units, piecemealing them in as quickly as we could. That worked for a long time, but eventually we reached a point where we needed to think about building differently,” McCollam said. “There was a point where we recognized that continuing to add smaller pieces wasn’t going to be the most effective approach. We needed to build something at a scale that would allow us to stay ahead of that growth.”

Serendipitously, the transition from Pioneer Generation Station to Bison Generation Station happened on the same day. Basin Electric finished construction at Pioneer and turned the facility over to operations, then received the permits to begin construction on Bison.

“I’m kind of a nerd,” McCollam

said, laughing. “I’m nerdy enough to think this wasn’t a coincidence, and the power plant gods were smiling on us.”

Once complete, it will become a central part of Basin Electric’s generation portfolio.

“It’s going to be the flagship of our gas fleet,” McCollam said. “It’s being designed with the understanding that the system we’re serving today is going to continue to grow.”

Looking Ahead

According to McCollam, these new generation assets are a response to the organic growth Basin Electric is seeing across its traditional membership, including residential demand, agriculture, commercial activity and energy production.

“We support that growth where it happens, and we make sure the system can deliver power where it’s needed,” he said.

For Basin Electric, the work underway now is part of a longer process to ensure reliability in a time of growing energy demand.

“The entire purpose of Basin Electric is to provide reliable service to our membership,” McCollam said. “As that system grows, we have to continue building to keep up with it.”



FROM FIELD TO FUEL

A new multi-seed crush processing facility, served by Central Electric Cooperative, is now operational after two years of construction near Mitchell. Photo submitted by High Plains Processing

New High Plains Processing Seed-Crush Facility Opens Near Mitchell, S.D.

Frank Turner

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A new multi-seed crush processing facility is now operational after nearly two years of construction, and its impact is taking shape across the region.

Located two miles south of Mitchell, the High Plains Processing plant is a large-scale seed crush and refining facility, powered by Central Electric Cooperative in the heart of South Dakota's soybean country.

The facility is backed by South Dakota Soybean Processors, the majority owner and operator, which also operates soybean crush facilities in Volga and Miller, along with a large group of local investors.

"There's a lot of local influence in this plant," said Pat Gathman, general manager of the facility. "Many of the investors originally invested in South Dakota Soybean Processors in Volga, and others invested directly into this project here in Mitchell."

That local investment shows up not

just in ownership, but in how the facility fits into the broader agricultural system. For local producers, it means more of what they grow can be processed closer to the farm.

"Instead of having the soybeans go to an elevator to be processed someplace else, they're being processed right here in Mitchell," Gathman said. "It gives farmers a better opportunity from a market standpoint."

For Central Electric Cooperative members, the plant represents one of three industrial loads being served by the cooperative. In addition to strengthening the local economy, large industrial loads like the multi-seed crush facility provide a consistent demand for electricity and help justify new investments in local infrastructure.

"The soybean plant brings new revenues to Central Electric Cooperative, which helps minimize rates for the entire cooperative membership," said Central Electric Cooperative General Manager Ken Schlimgen.

As part of the proposal process and selection as the electric provider, East River Electric Power Cooperative built a new substation and made additional system upgrades to serve the facility. Central Electric Cooperative also completed system improvements to support the load.

"The work was completed over a two-year window," Schlimgen said. "The project was on time and under budget during the worst of the supply chain delays."

Inside the facility, energy from the electric cooperative is used to turn familiar crops into multiple usable products, with the primary goal of separating oil from soybeans, sunflowers and camelina and preparing it for a range of markets. Currently, the plant is only accepting soybeans.

"We go through the preparation area where we crack the beans, heat them up, separate the hulls from the soybean itself, flake it, and then send it over to the extraction area," Gathman said.

The process separates oil from the soybean. The oil is refined and prepared for a range of uses, including renewable

fuels and food products, while the remaining material becomes soybean meal, a high-protein livestock feed.

“We bring it into our oil refinery where we refine it, bleach it, deodorize it and send it to storage,” Gathman said. “From there, it can go out by truck or rail to be turned into renewable fuels.”

The Mitchell location was selected in part because it brings together several key pieces of infrastructure needed to support a facility of this scale. Rail access, utilities and proximity to soybean production all played a role in the decision.

“We’ve looked at Mitchell for many, many years,” said Tom Kersting, CEO of South Dakota Soybean Processors. “You’re on a mainline railroad, it’s good soybean ground, and there’s a strong production history in that area. As we look at other seeds like sunflowers or camelina, you don’t have to go very far west of Mitchell before that becomes even more suitable.”

He added that finding a location with the right infrastructure is becoming increasingly difficult.

“There’s just not a lot of good sites left if you want to be on rail, next to a natural gas line, have a good electrical source and access to wastewater,” Kersting said. “There are a lot of infrastructure needs for a large facility like this, and it’s tough to find all of that in one place.”

That infrastructure includes electric service, which was a key part of the project from the beginning.

“Central Electric has been great to work with,” Kersting said. “They built a large substation not just for this plant, but to expand service throughout the area. It’s been a great partnership, and they’ve been very accommodating and easy to work with.”

Since becoming operational, the plant has already made an impact on the local community. The facility employs about 80 people, with the majority coming from the surrounding area.

“We’ve got some outstanding employees here that are really a part of things,” Gathman added.

For Gathman, the experience of moving to Mitchell has stood out just as

much as the work itself.

“The community has been outstanding,” he said. “Not just from the neighbors that we live around, but the community as a whole. It’s been very welcoming and very inviting.”

After moving multiple times throughout his career, including time spent outside the country, the difference was noticeable.

“My wife and I have moved 12 times, mostly around the U.S., and we did a stint in Brazil,” Gathman said. “I grew up in Fargo, and I love Fargo, but it was nothing compared to the reception we got when we came here.”


That sense of connection is something he hopes to carry forward.

“I can’t say enough about it,” he said. “I really want to help pay that back in the long term.”

As High Plains Processing continues to ramp up, its presence is expected to grow alongside it. The facility adds new demand for infrastructure, new options for producers and a new step in how agricultural products move through the region.



High Plains Processing celebrates the groundbreaking of its seed-crush facility in 2023.
Photo submitted by High Plains Processing



MAY 18
Voter Registration
Deadline for Primary
Election
5 p.m.
(South Dakota)

JUNE 1
Last Day to Request
Absentee Ballot.
5 p.m.
(South Dakota)

JUNE 2
Primary Election
7 a.m.-7 p.m.
(South Dakota)

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MAY 2-10
Rustic Designs & More Spring
Show, Flea Market
41450 264th St.
Ethan, SD
605-770-2411

MAY 2
Consignment Auction
7 a.m. Gates Open
10 a.m. Auction
Prairie Village
Madison, SD

MAY 2
Cinco de Mayo Fiesta
2-8 p.m.
Milbank, SD
605-432-6656

MAY 3
Prairie Village Opening Day
2 p.m. Train Ride
Prairie Village
Madison, SD

MAY 6-7
Energize! Exploring Innovative
Rural Communities Conference
Hosted by SDSU Extension
Community Vitality
Community Center
Wall, SD
extension.sdstate.edu/energize

MAY 9
1880 Train Opens
Hill City, SD

MAY 15-17
Open House Weekend
Free Entrance
Custer State Park
Custer, SD

MAY 16
2nd Annual Bird Bash
8 a.m.-1 p.m.
Bear Butte State Park
Sturgis, SD
605-390-2901
valleyhummingbird@yahoo.com

MAY 23
Free Christian Men's Event
8 a.m.-2 p.m.
The Barn at Aspen Acres
Spearfish, SD
Register: RiseUpMen.com

MAY 30
Familyfest Fun Cruise
& SDSC Safety Fair
9 a.m.-2 p.m.
Bucket Trucks, Safety & More
Sioux Falls, SD
thehoodmagazine.com/ff-faqs/

MAY 30
Frühlingsfest
Spring Street Market
1-5 p.m.
Main Street Square
Rapid City, SD
605-718-8484

MAY 30
Miss Prairie Village/Miss
Prairie Princess Pageant
6:30 p.m.
Lawrence Welk Opera House
Prairie Village
Madison, SD

JUNE 4-6
Black Hills Quilt Show
Thurs. 5-8 p.m.
Fri. 9 a.m.-5 p.m.
Sat. 9 a.m.-4 p.m.
Rushmore Hall
at the Monument
Rapid City, SD

JUNE 13
Journey Into Historic Pickstown
9 a.m.-5 p.m.
Ft. Randall Town & Museum
Pickstown, SD
605-487-7299

JUNE 13
Luce Pioneer Day
10 a.m.-3 p.m.
Rope & Candle Making, Butter
Churning, Dutch Oven Cooking
Lake Herman State Park
Madison, SD
605-880-5077

JUNE 19-20
77th Annual Czech Days
Tabor, SD
www.taborczechdays.com

JUNE 24-27
Crystal Springs Rodeo
Clear Lake, SD
605-874-2996

JUNE 26-27
Buckhorn Rodeo
Britton, SD
605-880-5077

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

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.