



A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative 

**DAKOTA ENERGY**

MAY 2024 VOL. 27 NO. 1

# COOPERATIVE

## CONNECTIONS



### Wall Meats Expansion

Reviving Local  
Meatcutting in  
New Underwood  
Pages 8-9

Cybersecurity on  
the Grid  
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## YOUTH TOUR WINNERS



**BRYLEE WALLMAN**  
Sophomore  
Miller High School  
Parents: Jason & Kim  
Wallman

## 2024 YOUTH TOUR PARTICIPANTS



**TANNER WALLMAN**  
Senior  
Miller High School  
Parents: Jason & Kim  
Wallman

*Congratulations!*

## Tanner's Essay - A Day Without Electricity

Picture waking up one morning to find your world plunged into darkness. No lights flicker on, no coffee maker hums to life, and your phone remains stubbornly dead. It's not a dream, it's a day without electricity. Such an experience isn't just a break from the conveniences of modern life, it's a stark reminder of the profound reliance we have on electricity and its indispensable role in our daily routines. As the day unfolds, the absence of electricity becomes increasingly apparent. The usual morning rituals are disrupted, and simple tasks suddenly require ingenuity and effort. Without the comforting buzz of the electric alarm clock, waking up becomes a guessing game, and getting breakfast ready without the trusty electric stove or toaster turns into a culinary challenge. Washing dishes without the aid of the dishwasher feels like a step back in time, and the absence of electric lights makes navigating the dimly lit rooms a cautious endeavor. Beyond the confines of our homes, the impact of the power outage reverberates throughout society. Businesses find themselves at a standstill, unable to operate machinery or process transactions. Hospitals rely on backup generators to sustain critical operations, emphasizing the life-saving importance of uninterrupted power supply in medical facilities. Transportation systems falter, and communication networks sputter, underscoring the interconnectedness of modern infrastructure with electricity. In the absence of electricity, communication takes a hit as electronic devices lie dormant, devoid of their usual functionality. The silence of phones and computers serves as a poignant reminder of the role

electricity plays in keeping us connected, informed, and entertained. Without access to the internet, information becomes scarce, and the ability to communicate with loved ones or access essential services is severely limited. Reflecting on a day without electricity prompts a deeper understanding of its importance in our lives. Electricity is not merely a convenience; it is the lifeblood of modern civilization, driving economic development, enhancing productivity, and improving our quality of life in countless ways. Personally, electricity is integral to my daily routines and aspirations. It powers the devices that facilitate communication, enables entertainment and productivity, and fosters connections with others. Moreover, electricity holds transformative potential beyond individual experiences. It has the capacity to bridge divides, empower communities, and catalyze sustainable development. As we confront global challenges such as climate change and energy security, the role of electricity in shaping a more resilient and equitable future becomes increasingly paramount. In conclusion, a day without electricity serves as a poignant reminder of its indispensable role in modern life. From mundane tasks to critical infrastructure, our reliance on electricity permeates every facet of society.

Understanding its significance prompts us to cherish and steward this invaluable resource, ensuring its accessibility and sustainability for generations to come. Through appreciation and conscientious stewardship, we can harness the power of electricity to illuminate pathways to a brighter future for all.

# Brylee's Essay - My Day Without Electricity

## COOPERATIVE CONNECTIONS

## DAKOTA ENERGY

(USPS No. 018-949)

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**Manager of Operations:** Matt Zomer

**Manager of Finance & Administration:**  
Eric Hasart

**Manager of Human Resources & Communications:** Jodene Decker

**Manager of Member Services:** Jeff Gilbert

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I wake up to the sun streaming in through my window and it is cold in my room. I roll over to check what time it is and my alarm clock by my bed is blank. I pick up my phone and it is at twenty percent, the same percentage it was when I plugged it in last night. The white numbers on the screen show that it is eight o'clock. My first thought is that my alarm did not go off, and my siblings and I are going to be extremely late for school. My hand finds its way to the light switch, and nothing happens when I turn it on. I flip the switch a couple times to make sure that it does not work and then venture out to the kitchen where mom tells me that the whole state does not have electricity and does not know when it is coming back on. She also tells me that we have a late start, but we are still going to school. I groan and go back to my room to get ready.

I put on the warmest clothes that I have because it will be cold in the school as the heater will not work. It is a good thing that it is a nice day outside and not overly cold, otherwise we would all freeze to death, but it is not too warm outside either, so it will still be cold. I go to the bathroom with a flashlight because there is no window to light the room. I brush my teeth and wash my face with cold water because the hot water heater does not work. I go back to my room to continue to get ready like I normally do. I eat yogurt for breakfast, as mom is trying to figure out what to do with all the food in the fridge as that does not work, and I pack a sandwich for lunch because none of the places to eat in town will be open. Then me and my siblings drive to town, ready for the day.

When I arrive at school and walk into first period, I notice that nobody has their phones out like they usually do before class, I guess everybody is like me and their phones are either dead or they are trying to save battery. Usually, the teacher takes attendance on her computer, but she takes it on paper today because without electricity the Wi-Fi does not work. She then goes on to tell us that she had a project planned that she was going to assign us on line today, but obviously that will not work, so we get some free time to either read or do some work for another class. It is kind of hard though to do some of the work for other classes without a computer as most of our textbooks are online or the assignments require being online, and for some students the whole class is online, and they cannot do their work. This is kind of how every class goes for the rest of the day except for a few teachers assigning worksheets or little projects that do not require a computer. Then, finally, it is the end of the day and I get to go home.

When I get home, I do not have any homework to do and usually I sit on my phone, but I can't so I read a book until supper time. For supper we go outside and have some s'mores and some hotdogs because the oven does not work and no one in our family wants to eat another cold meal. Then, I take a cold shower and then I put on my pajamas, and I read some more by the light of a flashlight. After a while, I begin to become tired of holding the flashlight and reading and I get ready for bed. As I get into bed, I think about how a day without electricity has been. At the beginning of the day, I thought it would be more like the Little House on the Prairie books, but it was more just like normal life without warm food and my phone and as I drift off to sleep, I think that the experience might have been good for me, but also hoping that the power comes back on tomorrow.

# Your Safety Matters

## Prevent home electrical fires

Eight out of 10 fire-related deaths occur at home – the place that embodies comfort and security. That’s why it’s important to take steps to keep everyone safe.

Faulty or deteriorating electrical cords are a top cause of fires at home. Cords that become frayed or cracked can send sparks to flammable surfaces. Check your cords to ensure that they are in good shape, and replace any that are worn.

In addition, make sure you are not overloading circuits. If you’ve been in your home for more than 10 years, have your circuit breaker box inspected by a licensed electrician to tighten loose connections and check for overloaded circuits.



Homes with copper wiring need to be inspected every 20 years, and homes with aluminum wiring should be inspected every five years.

Check all Ground Fault Circuit Interrupter (GFCI) outlets several times each year by pushing the test/reset button to be sure they are working properly.

If breakers are continually tripping or if fuses are blowing frequently, that’s a sign of potential trouble. The cause could be old wiring unable to handle the load demand of today’s modern appliances. If needed, ask a licensed electrician to install additional circuits for safety.

Use surge protectors and power bars to help prevent overloading an electrical outlet, plugging no more than three cords into the strip.

May is National Electrical Safety Month. We urge you to take the time and steps needed to lower the risks of electrical fires. Keep your family safe.



### Stay Away from Power Lines

#### Weston Koistinen, Age 6

Weston Koistinen warns readers to be safe by staying away from power lines. Weston’s parents are Dion and Stephanie Koistinen, members of H-D Electric Cooperative.

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.

# SUMMER CASSEROLES

## BREAKFAST CASSEROLE

### Ingredients:

- 1 5 oz. package croutons, any flavor
- 2 cup sharp Cheddar cheese, shredded
- 1 lb. sausage, fried and drained
- 9 eggs
- 1 can evaporated milk
- 1 tbsp. mustard

### Method

Spray 9x13 pan with vegetable oil. Arrange croutons on bottom. Sprinkle cheese over croutons and put sausage over cheese. Combine eggs, milk and mustard. Beat to blend and pour into pan. Bake covered at 350 degrees for 45 minutes.

Janet Ochsner  
Box Elder, S.D.

## CHICKEN CASSEROLE

### Ingredients:

- 1 package Chicken Stove Top Stuffing mix
- 3 cups cooked cut up chicken
- 1 can cream of mushroom soup
- 2/3 cup milk
- 1 can cream of chicken soup
- 2 eggs, beaten
- 2 cups chicken broth

### Method

Grease a 9x13 pan and put 1/2 of the stuffing mix in the pan. Cover with chicken. Combine soups and milk and spoon over chicken. Spread other 1/2 of stuffing over the top. Pour 2 cups of chicken broth over all and spread with beaten eggs. Bake at 350 degrees for 1 hour.

Gail Lee  
Brookings, S.D.

## TACO CASSEROLE

### Ingredients:

- 1 1/2 lbs. ground beef
- 1 package taco seasoning mix
- 1 can (16 oz.) pinto beans, drained and rinsed
- 1 can (15 oz.) tomato sauce
- 1 can (11 oz.) whole kernel corn, drained
- 1 cup shredded Cheddar cheese
- 1 cup coarsely crushed tortilla chips

### Method

Preheat oven to 400°F. Brown meat in large skillet on medium-high heat. Drain fat. Stir in seasoning mix, beans, tomato sauce and corn. Bring to boil. Reduce heat to low; simmer 5 minutes. Spoon into 2-quart baking dish. Sprinkle with cheese and tortilla chips. Bake 5 to 10 minutes or until cheese is melted. Serve with assorted toppings, if desired.

McCormick

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.

## **ALWAYS STEER CLEAR OF OVERHEAD AND UNDERGROUND POWER LINES**



Always look up and look out for overhead power lines. If you or an object you are touching contacts or gets too close to a power line, you could be seriously injured or killed.

Regardless of the task, always keep a 10-foot minimum clearance between you or an object you are holding and an overhead line, including the drop-down service line.

Power lines are buried and run underground as well. Always call 8-1-1 or visit [call811.com](http://call811.com) before digging to get underground utilities marked.



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COOPERATIVE, INC.

### **BE MINDFUL OF POWER LINES WHEN COMPLETING THESE TASKS:**

- Home maintenance: Examples include cleaning gutters, being on the roof or using extended tools to wash windows or skim a pool.
- Yard work: Examples include trimming trees, carrying ladders and digging.
- Transporting tall objects: Ladders are not the only extended objects people use outdoors. Be careful any time you move a tall object or tool.
- Contracted and DIY projects: If you are planning any project that requires digging, ensure underground utilities are marked.

Look up and look out for overhead power lines and think about what is below them. Contact can happen in an instant.

If there is a damaged/downed power line or padmount transformer (green box), do not go within 50 feet of it.

# FEBRUARY 2024

The Board of Directors met on Tuesday, February 27, 2024, with Directors Baum, Binger, Bushong, Dearborn, Nemeč, Raschke, and Schaefer present. Manager Felderman and Employees Decker, Gilbert, Hasart, Picek, Rakness, and Zomer were present.

## MANAGER'S REPORT

Manager Felderman reported on the following items:

- Energy sales and revenue
- Basin Electric's Manager meeting
- ENGIE North America's North Bend Wind project
- FERC hearing
- Greater Huron Development
- NextGen
- REED Loan inquiry
- Meter changes
- 2024 Annual Meeting date
- SD Legislative update
- Basin's Crypto and large load rates

## OFFICE SERVICES REPORT

Manager of Finance and Administration Hasart reported on the following items:

- January financial reports
- East River bill credit
- 2024 Audit
- 2023 Gross kWh tax report
- 2024 Ten-year financial forecast
- 2024 Standard costs in work orders
- Interest rates

## OPERATIONS REPORT

Manager of Operations Zomer reported on the following items:

- Grounds and sticks testing
- Pole changes

- Retiring metering equipment
- Annual inventory
- Construction material

## MEMBER SERVICES REPORT

Manager of Member Services Gilbert reported on the following items:

- Wiring department workload
- Potential hazards
- Load management
- Annual inventory

## HUMAN RESOURCES/ COMMUNICATIONS REPORT

Manager of HR/Communications Decker reported on the following items:

- 2023 Annual pension plan compliance report
- 2023 Federated safety audit
- StartTodaySD Apprenticeship
- 2023 SDREA wage and salary survey

## BOARD ACTION

The following items were acted upon:

- Accepted the reports presented
- Approved revised policy

## BOARD REPORTS

Director Nemeč reported on the NRECA New Director Orientation, Dulles, VA

Director Raschke reported on East River's February 2024 regular board meeting.

Director Raschke reported on East River's Energize Forum

Next monthly board meeting is April 23, 2024 at 10:00 a.m. in the Huron office.



**ON THE GO AND  
IN CONTROL**

**MANAGE**

**your account**

**VIEW AND PAY**

**your bill**

**MONITOR**

**usage 24/7**

**... all in  
the palm  
of your  
hand and  
online**



## Year-to-Date Financial Report

	Feb-24	Year-to-Date
Total Revenue .....	\$2,258,663	\$4,776,291
Cost of Power .....	\$1,650,066	\$3,372,299
Operating Expenses .....	\$639,872	\$1,299,246
Total Margins .....	\$54,175	\$267,682
KwH's Purchased .....	21,656,455	47,532,265
Services in Place .....		3,626
Miles of Line .....		2,537
Members per Mile .....		1.43



Patsy Besson helps package fresh cuts of meat at the Wall Meat Processing plant.  
Photo Credit: Shannon Marvel

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## Wall Meats Revives Local Meatcutting in South Dakota Through New Underwood Expansion

**Shannon Marvel**

shannon.marvel@sdrea.coop

A local meat processing plant is expanding its footprint in Pennington County in a way that will put more locally produced protein on dinner tables and bolster the local meat processing workforce throughout South Dakota.

The man behind this plan is local business owner Ken Charfauros, who owns Wall Meat Processing, which has locations in Wall and Rapid City.

Charfauros is currently raising funds through a capital drive campaign to finance the construction of a 30,000 square foot meat processing facility in New Underwood. The new facility will help train the next generation of meat processors through a partnership with Western Dakota Tech in Rapid City.

“We are at \$2.8 million in our drive. We also have the \$3.3 million USDA Rural Development grant, which is a meat and poultry expansion plan grant. We are about \$200,000 short of our goal,” Charfauros said.

He added that the New Underwood processing plant will also use funding from the Meat and Poultry Intermediary Lending Program (MPILP), which according to the USDA’s website “provides grant funding to intermediary lenders who finance – or plan to finance – the start-up, expansion, or operation of slaughter, or other processing of meat and poultry. The objective of the MPILP is to strengthen the financing capacity for independent meat processors, and to create a more resilient, diverse, and secure U.S. food supply chain.”

Charfauros said he’s still meeting with potential investors and has a financial team focused on creating relationships with local ag producers.

“After we get our capital drive, the plan itself will be about \$21 million,” he added. “And then we start the project. The groundbreaking is going to happen in about a year and the facility will begin operations six months after that.”

Charfauros said he expects to purchase the property to site the new plant this spring.

### Returning to a Passion

Wall Meats Processing opened for business 57 years ago, but



Charfauros took ownership over the facility in 2017. His passion for meat cutting began when he was a teenager while working for a local meat plant in Delaware.

“It was my high school job and I loved it. After I graduated high school, I felt that my country needed me, so I joined the Air Force and did 30 years. But I always missed that part of my life,” Charfauros recalled.

“A guy that taught me how to cut was like my second dad, and I always wanted to come back to it. My son had just graduated from South Dakota State University, and I had retired from the Air Force. That’s when we decided to buy a plant.”

His son manages the store in Rapid City while Ken’s three nephews help run the family’s businesses in Wall, which include Wall Meats and the Red Rock restaurant.

## Supporting Local Producers

Building the new facility has been a challenging venture that’s been years in the making.

“We started building this plan about four years ago, then COVID hit and got in our way. Then, we were lucky enough to get those grant awards last year, and ever since we have been working diligently to get the format right,” Charfauros said.

“I have drawings. I have an equipment list all put together — everything is ready to go except for this capital drive that we are undergoing.”

Charfauros said he has been meeting with both potential and locked-in investors daily over the last year to produce the required financing.

“We have met with over 600 people with 99 percent of those people being producers, because this is all for them. This plant offers them premium pricing above the market rates,” Charfauros said.

While the cattle market is high now, Charfauros remains realistic that the market can change for the worse.

While he hopes the market remains high enough for producers to survive, his partnership with producers will serve as

added security. That means the partnership must be tightknit.

He knows he cannot do it alone.

## Reviving a Dying Art

“Meat cutting is a dying art, and we teach meat processing at our store in Rapid City to bring that art back. We’re trying to fight for that industry as it is,” he said.

Three meat processing students are currently being taught at the Rapid City facility through a partnership with Western Dakota Tech, which recently began offering the two-year program.

Pam Stillman-Rokusek, director of communications and marketing at Western Dakota Tech, said three students are currently enrolled in the Meat Processing program. Of those three, two will graduate in May.

But the college is still working on more outreach.

“Enrollment has been a bit low in the program, so the plan is for a hiatus this fall. They’ll revamp the curriculum. Then, we will certainly do additional outreach. We have done advertising, gone to the schools. We have reached out to 4-H

groups and done some traveling, but we need to turn it up a notch to produce more students in the program. That is our goal,” Stillman-Rokusek said.

Despite the Meat Processing program being put on hiatus, the school will still ensure that the remaining student completes the program while actively working on developing the program and outreach methods.

“There’s such a high need for meat processors and we’re looking at different ways to fill that gap. It’s something we’re committed to doing,” she added.

The goal is to enroll at least five students in the following school years when the program restarts.

The learning center that will be built within the New Underwood facility will also teach producers, in addition to students, the art of meat cutting.

“We are trying to bring that industry back to what it should be—regionally processed protein,” Charfauros said.

“That means we must build the environment to spark that passion. In anything you do, you need to learn how to do it the right way.”



Wall Meat Processing plant, established in 1957. Photo Credit: Shannon Marvel

# SPRING INTO SAFETY

Spring is in the air and that means more than just a change of season for farmers. During the busy planting season, follow these six safety tips:



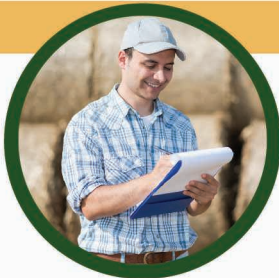
## TRANSPORT SAFELY

Ensure equipment is compliant with agriculture road and travel safety rules.



## SHARE SAFETY TIPS

Teach anyone working or doing business on your farm about electrical hazards.



## WRITE IT DOWN

Keep directions with proper road and farm ground names at home, in the shop and in cabs.



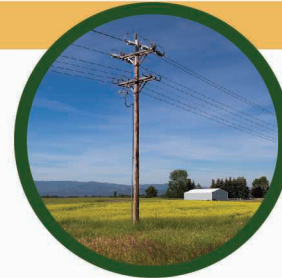
## BE CLEAR

Explain where the “back 80” or Smith field is located so everyone knows.



## MEET AND DISCUSS

Conduct morning safety meetings to brief everyone and talk about potential hazards.



## LOOK AROUND

Inspect your space and look for hazards before you start planting.



Dakota Energy is a rural electric cooperative. South Dakota law requires DEC to pay a tax on the kilowatt hours (kWh) that are sold during a year. The kWhs are tracked by the location they are sold and then allocated to the local school district. The tax is then distributed to the school district by the local county.

This is the cooperative’s way of paying taxes in place of a property tax on all the electric lines and equipment installed in the service area in public and private rights-of-way.

Fifteen school districts in our service area received a total of \$797,562.94 in gross kWh tax because of electric sales to members in 2023.

School	Total Tax Amount
Huron Independent	\$ 262,372.19
Iroquois Independent	\$ 35,461.70
Wolsey-Wessington	\$ 35,220.94
Willow Lake Independent	\$ 291,657.54
Wessington Springs Independent	\$ 1,615.62
Doland Independent	\$ 981.85
Hitchcock-Tulare	\$ 16,680.15
Faulkton Area	\$ 8,369.71
Miller Area	\$ 98,689.08
Redfield Independent	\$ 6,138.66
Howard	\$ 120.15
Woonsocket	\$ 56.07
Highmore-Harrold	\$ 39,581.98
Chamberlain Independent	\$ 311.30
Agar-Blunt-Onida	\$ 306.00
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$ 797,562.94</b>



## TIME FOR AN AIR CONDITIONER CHECK-UP

When was the last time your home air conditioning system was inspected? Beat the summer rush and schedule a tune-up this spring! Contact your local HVAC service technician. A tune-up can help maximize your system's efficiency, saving you money and energy.

The inspection should include:

- A check of the refrigerant levels
- Inspection for any refrigerant leaks
- Check and seal any air duct leaks
- Measure airflow through the evaporator coil
- Verify the electric controls are functioning correctly
- Oil the motors
- Check belts for tightness and wear
- Check the accuracy of the thermostat

Replacing the air filter is one of the easiest ways to keep your air conditioner running efficiently and reduce its energy consumption. Follow the manufacturer’s instructions.





# CYBERSECURITY ON THE GRID

**Frank Turner**

frank.turner@sdrea.coop

Imagine sitting at your desk on a typical Monday morning. You have logged into your computer with coffee in hand, ready to tackle the day. But as you begin, your computer displays an ominous message: “Your files have been encrypted. Pay a ransom to regain access.” It’s not just your computer; your co-workers have received the same message. Overnight, the entire office has fallen victim

to a ransomware attack that has locked away critical data. Your office computers will remain unusable until a payment is made.

This scenario, among others, has become a primary concern for workplaces everywhere, including electric cooperatives. As a result, local co-ops are taking action in the cybersecurity space to prevent bad actors from disrupting the critical goal of delivering power that is safe, affordable and reliable to their members. Electric co-ops are focused

on enhancing cybersecurity resilience and readiness to defend against potential cyber threats.

Co-ops are routinely monitoring and managing cyber risks, working with federal and local law enforcement agencies and the North American Electric Reliability Corp. to protect critical infrastructure. By working as a network, co-ops are enhancing grid resilience, ensuring reliable electricity for their members.

According to an FBI Internet Crime Report, the U.S. reported more than \$12.5 billion in annual losses in 2023 due to cyberattacks like the one described. A significant number of these attacks target the elderly and vulnerable. When breaking down the losses by age group, individuals aged

20 to 29 accounted for \$360.7 million of the total losses, while those 60 and older incurred losses of \$3.4 billion in 2023 alone.

And it's not just about the money. These attacks also have the potential to undermine the stability of entire systems, including the electrical grid. This year, directors of the FBI, NSA, and CISA testified before Congress about Chinese Communist Party hacking groups that had gained access to the electric grid and other critical infrastructure to "wreak havoc and cause real-world harm to American citizens and communities."

"Many cyberattacks are conducted by criminals trying to steal money or collect a ransom," explains Chief Security and Compliance Officer Daniel Graham of Basin Electric Power Cooperative. "Nation-states

target electric utilities for different reasons. Some nation-states want to steal intellectual property. Others want to be able to disrupt our electric grid."

So how is it done? To execute their schemes, bad actors employ a long list of complex strategies and techniques, such as phishing, data breaches and malware to adversely impact their targets. Business email compromise, one of the most common techniques, occurs when an impostor poses as a legitimate business contact, seeking to steal sensitive information such as credit card numbers, bank account information or login credentials.

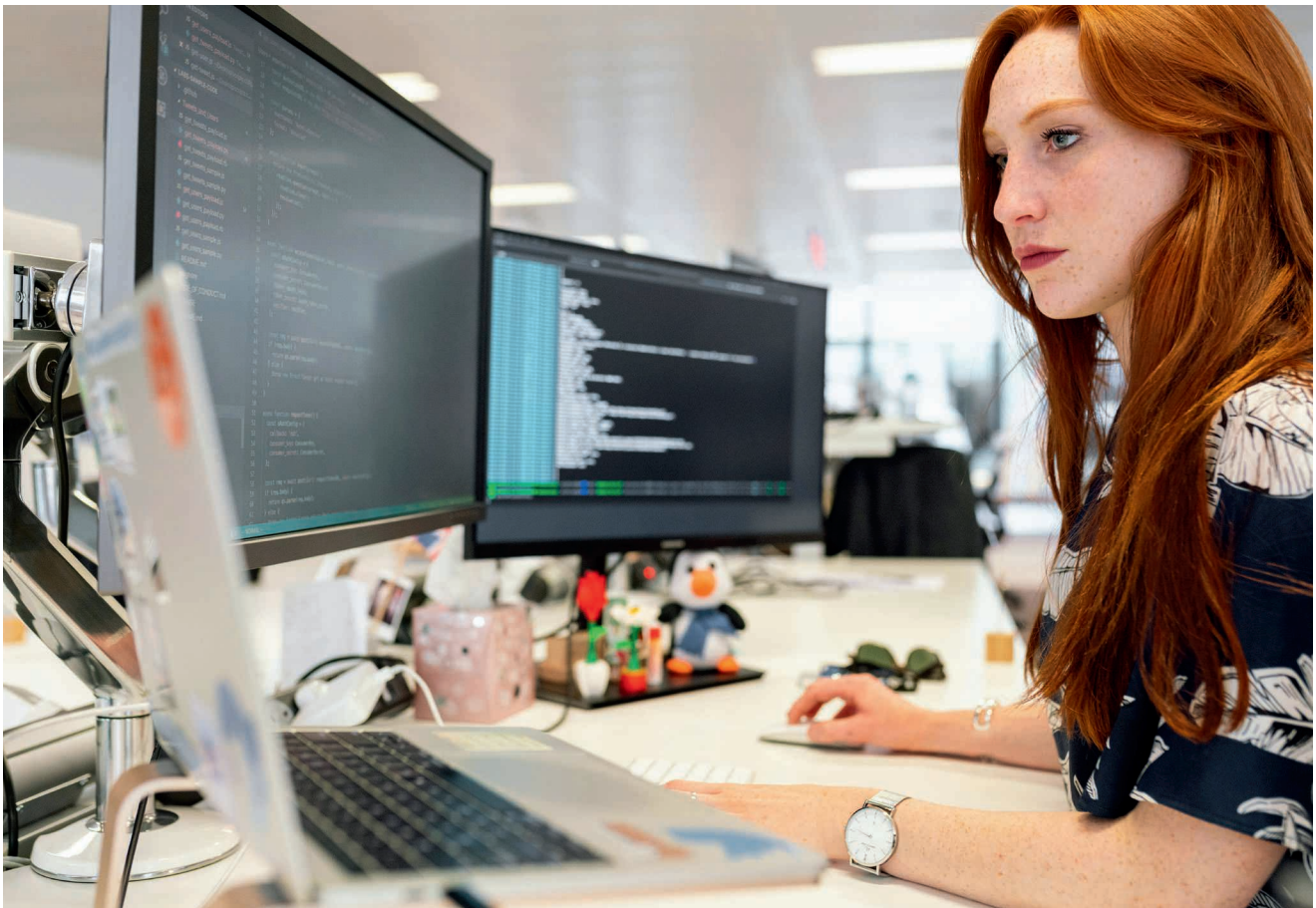
Luckily, co-ops are implementing a variety of tools, policies and training to help mitigate attacks and secure the grid. Programs like NRECA's Co-op Cyber Goals Program help co-ops build fundamental cybersecurity

measures, such as employee training, developing cyber incident response plans, and regular self-assessment. These strategies help co-ops reduce the risk of a successful cyberattack in the ongoing battle against cybercrime.

"Additionally, co-ops can conduct cybersecurity exercises to determine the effectiveness of current defenses and practice responses," Graham says.

Despite these efforts, the threat of a successful cyberattack persists, making vigilance an essential component of effective cybersecurity.

"If you see something suspicious, report it to your cooperative," explains Graham. "Electric co-ops are an essential part of our country's critical infrastructure. We can best protect our electric grid by working with each other."





# Living Prepared

## South Dakota's survivalist community live in bunkers

Jocelyn Johnson

[jocelyn.johnson@sdrea.coop](mailto:jocelyn.johnson@sdrea.coop)

It's a semi-underground community of survivalists acting as humanity's last chance.

These survivalists, otherwise known as preppers, have prepared for security and safety within what's touted as the world's largest survival community – in southwest South Dakota.

Vivos xPoint, owned by real-estate mogul Robert Vicino, is located south of the Black Hills, near Edgemont, S.D. It was formally established as the U.S. Army's Black Hills Ordnance Depot – a military base created to store

ammunition and bombs. The base's history began in 1942, just after the United States entered World War II.

Once humming with approximately 6,000 workers and their families, the military base was eventually retired in 1967, leading to its eventual abandonment. The army sold the property to the town of Edgemont, S.D., which in turn, sold it to local cattle ranchers.

"This land was used by landowners to graze cattle, until one of these ranchers sent me an email asking if I would be interested in the bunkers," Vicino said. "It took me about a minute, and I said yes. So, in 2016, I acquired the southern

Vivos xPoint owns 575 bunkers. *Photo Credit: Vivos xPoint*

portion of the base. That portion is about three-fourths the size of Manhattan. We take people up on a local hill that's about 300-400 feet higher than the rest of the site. From there, you can almost see all the quarters of the property. At a distance, the bunkers are like specs...you can't really tell what you're looking at. That's how big this thing is."

Vicino owns just under 6,000 acres of land where these bunkers sit. Originally, the army built 800 bunkers, but Vivos xPoint owns 575. Today, approximately 200 of these bunkers are being leased for 99 years with an up-front payment of \$55,000. Additionally, the ground lease is \$1,200 per year and utility payments are \$108 per month.

Mark Bowman, a retired tenant at Vivos xPoint, moved from Chicago with his wife to live in one of the bunkers



*Photo Credit: Jocelyn Johnson*



Each bunker is 2,200 square feet. Photo Credit: Vivos xPoint

seven years ago. Keeping busy by doing odd jobs and helping others get settled, Bowman commented that people from various backgrounds lease these bunkers. Some visit on occasion and some live in them full time.

“Eventually, we plan to have a health club, meeting hall and store out here too,” Bowman said. “It’s a work in progress.”

Each bunker is 2,200 square feet. It’s relatable to a narrow Quonset fixed underground, measuring 80 feet long and 26 feet wide with 12-foot ceilings. Vivos xPoint boasts 575 bunkers in total. Tenants can access floor plans and choose to have a Vivos xPoint contractor customize their bunker. Currently, there is a one-year backlog for customization services provided by a company contractor.

“It’s cavernous on the inside,” Vicino said. “We can build out a five-bedroom interior with a living room, two bathrooms, laundry room...everything you will need. When we build it, it’s effectively a submarine. The power we get from the local electric cooperative is to run our well pump that pumps water 4,300 feet underground up to a cistern on a hill. From there, it’s distributed to

the bunkers via gravity.”

Vicino noted that one of the most important features to these bunkers is the location. It’s centrally located within the United States and remote – making it an unlikely target in war. The off-grid area is also located at high altitude in a non-seismic area, relatively safe from natural disasters.

“Sometimes, I get asked why would anyone want one of these,” Vicino

commented. “And I say, ‘well, have you ever watched the news?’ Look what’s going on in this country.”

“All of the bunkers have NBC filtration, which is nuclear, biological and chemical filtration,” Vicino explained. “The air that comes in is scrubbed, so it’s breathable on the inside. We’re even adding CO2 scrubbers, which scrub the air you breath out if you had to shut off the air to the outside. You can do that for a week maybe.”

This isn’t a project that Vicino took lightly or stumbled upon in his business ventures. He emphasized it was years in the making.

“When I was 27 years old, I had a vision or an inspiration in my head. I could hear the words of a woman talking to me in total silence. The only thing I could attribute it to was the Holy Spirit. What she said to me was, ‘Robert, you need to build bunkers deep underground to help thousands of people survive what’s coming our way.’ The message was very loud and quick, and so I tucked it away for 30 years, thinking about it occasionally.... Then, I got the feeling I didn’t have any more time. It’s either now or never.”



Mark Bowman, right, shows an empty bunker to Calvin Romey, left. Bowman has been a tenant in a neighboring bunker for seven years with his wife. Photo Credit: Jocelyn Johnson



**MAY 11, 2024**  
**Cinco de Mayo Fiesta**  
 Falls Park  
 Sioux Falls, SD

**APRIL 27**  
**66th Annual Lions Pancake Jamboree**  
 7 a.m.-1 p.m.  
 Masonic Hall  
 112 E 5th Ave.  
 Mitchell, SD

**MAY 4-5**  
**Flea Market**  
 9 a.m.-6 p.m.  
 Rustic Designs & More  
 Ethan, SD  
 605-770-2411

**MAY 4-12**  
**Spring Show**  
 9 a.m.-6 p.m.  
 Rustic Designs & More  
 Ethan, SD  
 605-770-2411

**MAY 11**  
**"Summer Shakes" Midwest Sprint Touring Series**  
 7 p.m.  
 Dakota State Fair Speedway  
 Huron, SD

**MAY 20-JUNE 10**  
**Central Electric Cooperative District Meetings**  
 Dates & locations on page 15

**JUNE 6**  
**"Wild Race Car Night" Wheel Jam**  
 7 p.m.  
 Dakota State Fair Speedway  
 Huron, SD

**JUNE 8**  
**"Challenge Cup XXII" Wheel Jam**  
 7 p.m.  
 Dakota State Fair Speedway  
 Huron, SD

**JUNE 13**  
**IHS Health Fair**  
 10 a.m. - 2 p.m.  
 Fort Thompson, SD

**JUNE 15**  
**1st Annual CheeseFest**  
 10 a.m. - 7 p.m.  
 Farm Life Creamery  
 Ethan, SD

**JUNE 21-23**  
**Scavenger's Journey**  
 Yard sales, farmer's markets & specialty shops  
 Wall to Wagner  
[www.scavengersjourney.com](http://www.scavengersjourney.com)

**JUNE 22**  
**Alexandria Car Show**  
 Sponsored by Alexandria Fire District  
 Facebook.com/  
[alexandriafiredistrictSD](https://www.facebook.com/alexandriafiredistrictSD)  
 Alexandria, SD

**JUNE 22**  
**Huron MS Walk/Run**  
 8 a.m.  
 Huron Country Club  
 Huron, SD

**JUNE 28-30**  
**Donnie Days**  
 Stickney, SD

**JULY 20**  
**1st Annual John Zens Memorial Parade**  
 Epiphany, SD

**JULY 20**  
**S.D. MCC Relief Sale Food Court, Bake Sale, Live Auction & Silent Auction**  
 Free Admission & Parking  
 Pioneer Hall  
 Freeman, SD  
 605-925-7009

**JULY 20-21**  
**Charles Mix Saddle Club**  
 SDREA Rodeo  
 Geddes, SD  
 605-680-2763

**JULY 26-28**  
**Bruce Honey Days**  
 Facebook & Instagram  
 Bruce, SD  
 605-627-5671

**AUG. 9**  
**Northern Bull Riding Tour Finals & Bull-a-Rama**  
 Geddes, SD  
 605-680-2763

**AUG. 17**  
**"Harvest of Champions"**  
 7 p.m.  
 Dakota State Fair Speedway  
 Huron, SD

To have your event listed on this page, send complete information, including date, event, place and contact to your local electric cooperative. Include your name, address and daytime telephone number. Information must be submitted at least eight weeks prior to your event. Please call ahead to confirm date, time and location of event.

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