



A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative 

DAKOTA ENERGY
DECEMBER 2024 VOL. 25 NO. 8

COOPERATIVE CONNECTIONS



Hurricane Aid

**Linemen Help
Restore Power After
Hurricane Helene**
Pages 8-9

First Responders
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TEENS: Head to D.C. for FREE!

Dakota Energy will once again sponsor a high school junior or senior on an all-expense-paid trip to Washington, D.C. Each June, over 1,800 high school juniors and seniors travel to Washington, D.C., to participate in the Rural Electric Youth Tour. Throughout the week, participants will explore Washington, D.C., learning about government, cooperative philosophy and rural electrification. The students are selected and sponsored by their local rural electric cooperatives with the South Dakota Rural Electric Association (SDREA) coordinating the trip for South Dakota students.

Tour highlights include the Lincoln Memorial, Washington Monument, U.S. Capitol, Ford's Theatre, Arlington National Cemetery, Mount Vernon, Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, Iwo Jima Statue, National Archives, U.S. Supreme Court, and the Vietnam Veterans Memorial among other exciting sites. Students will also participate in a briefing with the South Dakota Congressional Delegation and a river boat cruise across the Potomac River.

This is available to all area high school juniors and seniors who live in Beadle, Hand, or Hyde Counties of South Dakota. Applicants do not need to be cooperative members to apply.

Visit www.dakotaenergy.coop/your_community/youth_tour or call 605-352-8591 to learn more. **Applications will be accepted until December 13, 2024**



SD YOUTH TOUR 2025

Join students from across South Dakota for a free, once-in-a-lifetime trip to Washington, D.C., sponsored by your rural electric cooperative. **Contact** your local cooperative for more details and application information!

June 15-21



A photograph showing three teenagers looking at a large map or document outdoors. One student is pointing at something on the map. They are wearing lanyards with ID badges.



A QR code located in the bottom right corner of the promotional graphic.

2025 YOUTH TOUR APPLICATION

Students should submit this application by Dec. 13, 2024, to be considered for the Washington, D.C. Youth Tour. Applicants must be high school junior or senior during the 2024-2025 school year who reside in Beadle, Hand or Hyde County of South Dakota. The trip takes place June 15-21, 2025. Dakota Energy will notify students if they are selected by Dec. 31, 2024.

Name: _____

Student's Cell Phone Number: _____ Student's Email: _____

Parent/Guardian's Names: _____

Parent/Guardian's Cell Phone Number: _____ Parent's Email: _____

School: _____ Year in School: _____

Student Essay: Why is it important to be involved in your community and how does it prepare you to be a future leader?

Attach your original 500 word essay. Essays should not be generated using any form of artificial intelligence and should be the student's original writing. Send the essay with this application to dakotaenergy@dakotaenergy.coop or mail to Dakota Energy Cooperative, PO Box 830, Huron, SD 57350.

**COOPERATIVE
CONNECTIONS**

**DAKOTA
ENERGY**

(USPS No. 018-949)

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Dakota Energy Cooperative Connections is the monthly publication for the members of Dakota Energy Cooperative, PO Box 830, 40294 US Hwy 14, Huron, SD 57350. Members subscribe to Cooperative Connections as part of their electric cooperative membership. The purpose of Dakota Energy Cooperative Connections is to provide reliable, helpful information to electric cooperative members on electric cooperative matters and better rural living.

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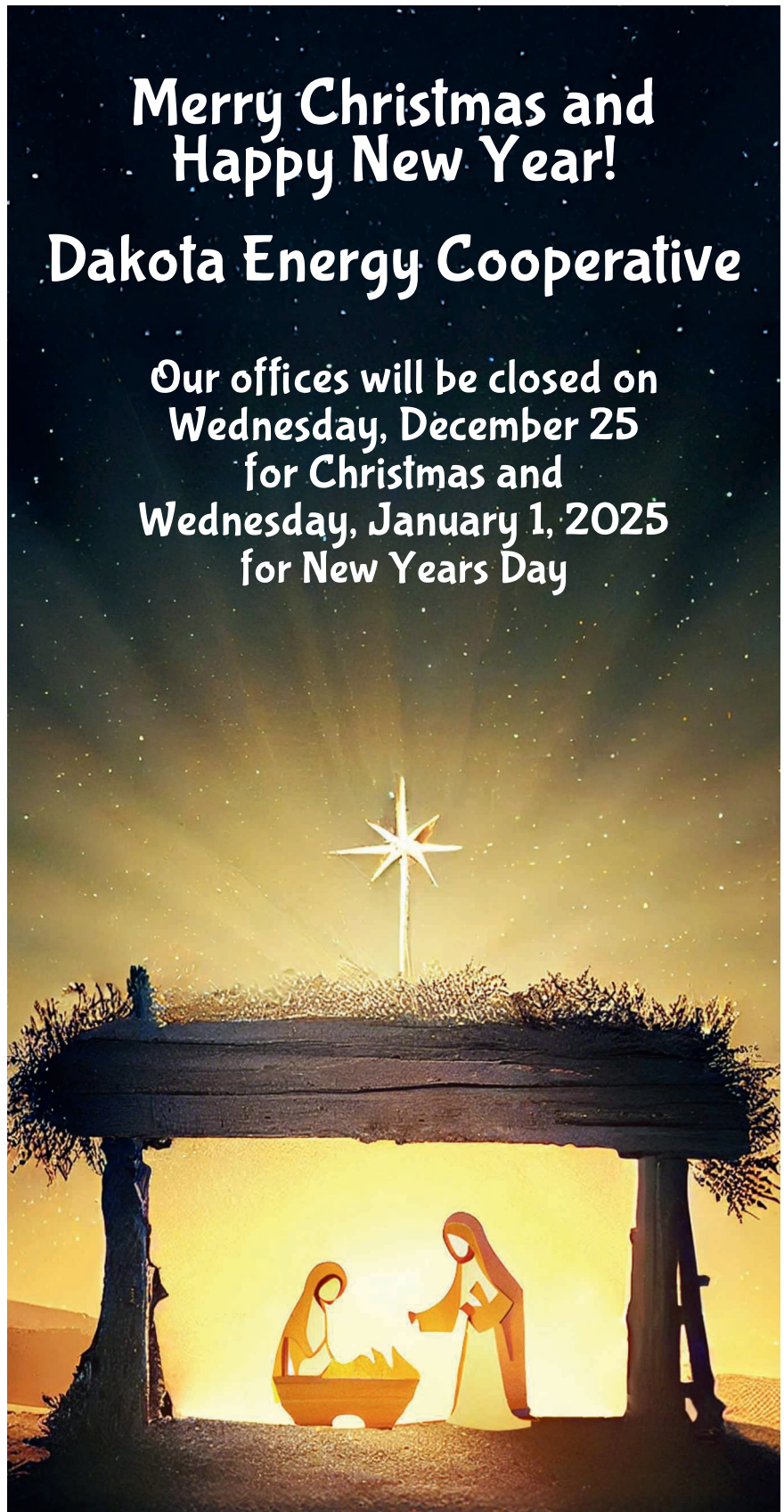


**DAKOTA ENERGY
COOPERATIVE, INC.**
HURON, SD 57350

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!

Dakota Energy Cooperative

Our offices will be closed on
Wednesday, December 25
for Christmas and
Wednesday, January 1, 2025
for New Years Day



ENJOY A SAFE HOLIDAY SEASON

From late November to mid-January, when families gather, parties are scheduled and travel spikes, safety should be top of mind. Following is tried-and-true advice to ensure your family remains safe and injury-free throughout the season.

Traveling for the Holidays? Be Prepared

If you're traveling this year, be sure your vehicle is in good running condition, get plenty of rest and be prepared for any emergency. Traveling by car during the holidays has the highest fatality rate of any major form of transportation based on fatalities per passenger mile. Hundreds of people die every year in crashes on New Year's Day, Thanksgiving Day and Christmas Day, according to Injury Facts. Alcohol impairment is involved in about a third of these fatalities.

Stay safe on the roads over the holidays – and every day:

- Prepare your car for winter and keep an emergency kit with you.
- Get a good night's sleep before departing and avoid drowsy driving.
- Leave early, planning ahead for heavy traffic.
- Make sure every person in the vehicle is properly buckled up no matter how long or short the distance traveled.
- Put that cell phone away; many distractions occur while driving, but cell phones are the main culprit.
- Practice defensive driving.
- Designate a sober driver to ensure guests make it home safely after a holiday party; alcohol or over-the-counter, prescription and illegal drugs can cause impairment.

Decorate Safely

Decorating is one of the best ways to get in a holiday mood, but emergency departments see thousands of injuries involving holiday decorating every season.

When decorating follow these tips from the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission:

- Keep potentially poisonous plants – mistletoe, holly berries, Jerusalem cherry and amaryllis – away from children.
- If using an artificial tree, check that it is labeled “fire resistant.”
- If using a live tree, cut off about two inches of the trunk to

expose fresh wood for better water absorption, remember to water it, and remove it from your home when it is dry.

- Place your tree at least three feet away from fireplaces, radiators and other heat sources, making certain not to block doorways.
- Avoid placing breakable ornaments or ones with small, detachable parts on lower tree branches where small children can reach them.
- Only use indoor lights indoors and outdoor lights outdoors, and choose the right ladder for the task when hanging lights.
- Replace light sets that have broken or cracked sockets, frayed or bare wires or loose connections.
- Follow the package directions on the number of light sets that can be plugged into one socket.
- Never nail, tack or stress wiring when hanging lights, and keep plugs off the ground away from puddles and snow.
- Turn off all lights and decorations when you go to bed or leave the house.

Source: National Safety Council



**“Don’t Spill Water on Electronics...
It Could Start a FIRE!”**

Bethany Langworthy, Age 9

Bethany Langworthy warns readers to be careful with water around electronics. Thank you for your picture, Bethany! Bethany's parents are Kristina and Edward Langworthy, members of West River Electric.

Kids, send your drawing with an electrical safety tip to your local electric cooperative (address found on Page 3). If your poster is published, you'll receive a prize. All entries must include your name, age, mailing address and the names of your parents. Colored drawings are encouraged.

Family FAVORITES

CREAM CHEESE AND CUCUMBER SPREAD DIP

Ingredients:

1 large cucumber, grated
1 tsp. onion, grated
8 oz. pkg. cream cheese
3/4-1 cup mayonnaise
Salt and pepper to taste

Method

Grate cucumber and onion on several thicknesses of paper towels, squeeze out all the water. Place in a bowl. Blend other ingredients, adding enough mayonnaise to make it a spreading consistency. Serve with crackers or chips.

Mary Ann Klarenbeek
Harrisburg, S.D.

GRANDMA GRACE'S FROZEN FRUIT SALAD

Ingredients:

8 oz. Cool Whip
1 tbsp. lemon juice
1 cup sour cream
3/4 cup sugar
Dash of salt

*Mix all thoroughly until
sugar is dissolved.*

9 oz. can pineapple, crushed
and drained
Small jar maraschino cherries
(halve or chopped if desired)
2 sliced bananas (halve or
quarter slices if desired)
1/4 cup chopped walnuts

Method

Mix thoroughly. Pour into 8x8 or 9x9 container. Cover and freeze. Thaw 10-15 minutes to allow cutting into serving portions.

My mother, Grace Alley, first made this salad for holiday meals. It has become a family favorite, and we always have it for one of our holidays.

Mary Harris
Glad Valley, S.D.

LEMON ROSEMARY GLAZED HAM

Ingredients:

1 bone-in spiral-cut ham,
about 10 lbs.
1 1/4 cups honey, divided
2 tsp. lemon extract
1 1/4 tps. whole rosemary
leaves, crushed, divided

Method

Preheat oven to 325°F. Place the ham on its side in roasting pan. Mix 1 cup of the honey, 1 1/2 tps. of the extract and 1 tsp. of the rosemary in small bowl until well blended. Brush 1/2 of the honey mixture over ham, gently separating the slices so mixture can reach middle of ham. Cover loosely with foil.

Bake 1 hour, basting occasionally with pan drippings. Remove foil. Brush with remaining honey mixture. Bake 45 minutes longer.

Meanwhile, mix remaining 1/4 cup honey, 1/2 tsp. extract and 1/4 tsp. rosemary in small bowl. Serve with ham along with the pan drippings.

McCormick.com

Please send your favorite recipes to your local electric cooperative (address found on Page 3). Each recipe printed will be entered into a drawing for a prize in December 2024. All entries must include your name, mailing address, phone number and cooperative name.

Capital Credit Refund Approved by the Board

How Capital Credits Work



At the end of each year, if Dakota Energy Cooperative has received more revenue than was necessary to cover expenses, the difference is allocated back to members as capital credits based on their share of electricity purchased.



When the co-op's financial condition permits, the board of directors may decide to retire, or pay back, some of the capital credits. **This year part of outstanding capital credits from Dakota Energy's remainder of year 2005 will be retired, as well as part of East River's from year 2004 and Basin Electric's outstanding balance from years 2006, 2007 and part of 2008.**



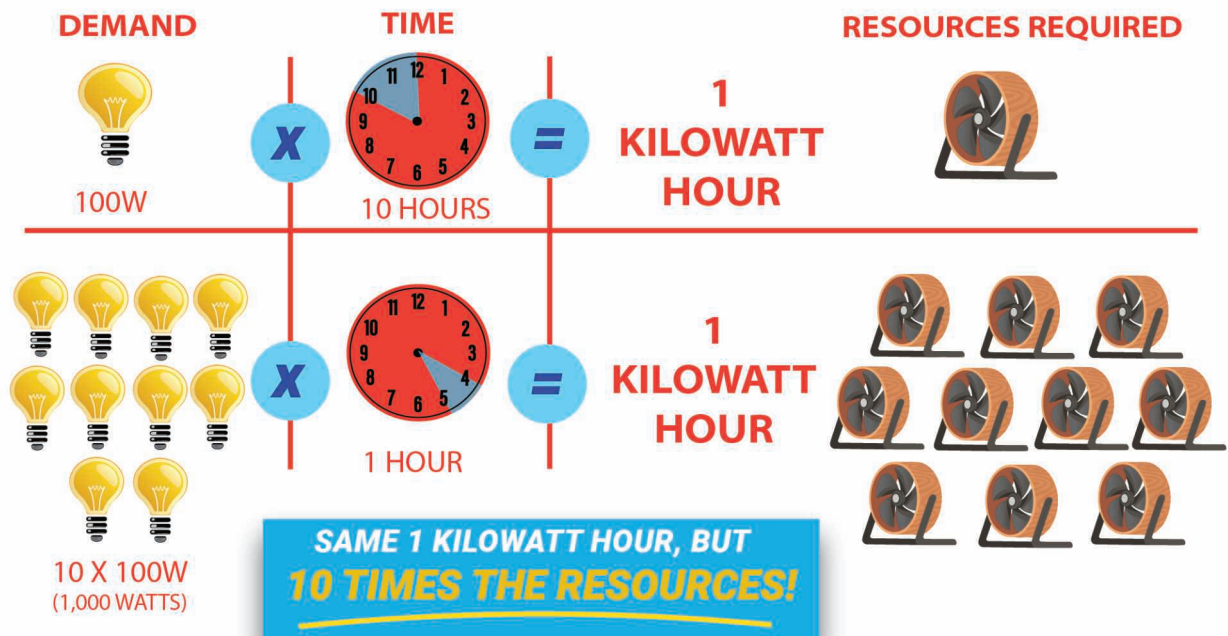
Capital credits are returned to active members in the form of a **BILL CREDIT** on their November electric bill they will receive the first part of December 2024.

Meter #	Billing Period From	To	Days	Readings Present	Previous	Meter Multiplier	kWh Usage	Rate
20428	10/01/22	10/31/22	30	21829	21359	40	18,800	61
Previous Account Activity				Current Activity				
Previous Balance				\$1,539.46	Facility Charge			\$105.00
Payment Received - Thank You				-\$1,539.46	Energy Charge 18,800 kWh @ 0.04800			\$902.40
Balance Forward				\$0.00	Non-Coincidental Demand 79.45 kWh @ 0.00000			\$238.20
					Capital Credit Refund			-\$915.97
					State Sales Tax			\$56.05
					Current Charges			\$385.88
Total Amount Due							\$385.68	
							DUE DATE 11/25/2022	

Former members who no longer have service from Dakota Energy will receive checks at the current address on file with the Cooperative.

PEAK DEMAND IN ELECTRICITY USAGE

In power, time is a factor. The energy used by one 100-watt light bulb lit for 10 hours is the same as the energy used by 10 bulbs lit for 1 hour.



SEPTEMBER 2024

The Board of Directors met on Tuesday, September 24, 2024, with Directors Baruth, Baum, Bonebright, Langbehn, Nemeč, Raschke, Schaefer, and Wangsness present. Manager Felderman and Employees Decker, Gilbert, Hasart, Picek, Rakness, and Zomer were present.

MANAGER'S REPORT

Manager Felderman reported on the following items:

- Monthly energy sales and revenue
- 2024 annual meeting survey results
- Basin Electric
- East River
- Dakota Energy load forecast
- Net metering
- SPP price map
- CRC
- REED
- Large loads

OFFICE SERVICES REPORT

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

- Financial reports for August
- Capital credit allocation and distribution options
- 2025 General budget
- CFC capital credit retirement
- CoBank line of credit renewal
- TransCanada rate discussion with East River
- Cash management presentation
- KRTA ratio review

OPERATIONS REPORT

Manager of Operations Zomer reported on the following items:

- Construction, maintenance and retirement activities
- Two mile overhead line retirement
- Pole changes
- Service rebuilds
- Dakota Provisions transformer
- Pole testers
- Seven miles of URD
- Morningside substation shutdown
- Ames substation west circuit Crow Creek rebuild

MEMBER SERVICES REPORT

Manager of Member Services Gilbert reported on the following items:

- Wiring department workload
- Potential hazards
- Load control savings

HUMAN RESOURCES/ COMMUNICATIONS REPORT

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

- 2025 Group benefits and annual enrollment
- Annual employee evaluations
- 2025 Workman's compensation experience rating
- First responder training
- Touchstone Energy Scholar of the Week - Olivia Resel, Miller

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY REPORT

Information Technology Administrator Rakness reported on the following items:

- Virtual local area network
- Miller server/room
- PCI internal penetration test and vulnerability assessment
- Website/Cybersecurity

BOARD ACTION

The following items were acted upon:

- Accepted the reports presented
- Approved the 2025 capital and construction budget
- Set the October 22nd board meeting to interview candidates for the vacant Ree Area board position
- Authorized change of users for safety deposit box
- Approved the 2024 annual meeting minutes
- Approved to set the annual meeting date to the 3rd Thursday in August each year
- Approved the 2025 employee compensation plan

BOARD REPORTS

Director Raschke reported on East River's 2024 annual meeting and the September 2024 regular board meeting.

SDREA 2025 budget presentation was reviewed.

Next monthly board meeting is November 26, 2024 at 10:00 a.m. in the Huron office.

Year-to-Date Financial Report

	Sept-24	Year-to-Date
Total Revenue	\$2,078,072	\$19,526,265
Cost of Power	\$1,512,139	\$14,019,622
Operating Expenses	\$586,093	\$5,516,566
Total Margins	\$105,893	\$1,045,038
KwH's Purchased	20,835,428	194,368,724
Services in Place		3,628
Miles of Line		2,534
Members per Mile		1.43



HURRICANE AID

Linemen Help Restore Power After Hurricane Helene

Jacob Boyko

jacob.boyko@sdrea.coop

Linemen from five of South Dakota's rural electric cooperatives traveled to the Southeastern U.S. in October to help restore power along Hurricane Helene's path of destruction.

The 18 linemen left Oct. 2 for Pickens, South Carolina, where Blue Ridge Electric Cooperative faced over 64,000 meter outages and more than 800 broken poles in Helene's aftermath.

Zach Hansen, a lineman from West River Electric Association, didn't think twice before he volunteered to go along.

"It's just the co-op way," he said. "There are people in need down there who lost their houses – lost their lives – and this is something we know we can do to help. It's kind of a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity."

The linemen stayed at a crowded base camp with dozens of other utility workers from all across the country. They slept on cots in a large, open army-sized tent, but with their busy schedules, they didn't spend

much time there anyway. Most days, the linemen woke at 5:30 a.m. for breakfast and worked in the field until supper at 8 p.m.

The work also presented unfamiliar challenges for the linemen; each time the crew needed to repair damaged infrastructure, they'd first have to start the labor-intensive process of clearing through debris and trees toppled by Helene's heavy wind gusts.

"When we have blizzards and ice storms in South Dakota, it's hard work – and you're trying to stay warm," Hansen explained. "But out here, there's a lot more chainsaw work and fixing wire breaks. It's not just straight miles of line lying down like we're used to at home."

By Oct. 9, fewer than 1,000 meters in Blue Ridge Electric territory remained offline, and the South





Dakota crews were dismissed to begin the 1,200-plus mile journey home.

But as the South Dakota convoy – which included bucket trucks, skid steers and ATVs – moved north, another call came in.

Jefferson Energy Cooperative in Wrens, Georgia, also faced catastrophic damage to their distribution lines, with 100% of their service territory without power after the storm. On Oct. 9, as South Dakota’s linemen were driving home from South Carolina to reunite with their families, still over 10,000 homes and businesses remained without power.

Just like before, South Dakota’s rural electric cooperatives answered the call.

“When our line superintendent called me that morning and asked me how we felt about going to Georgia, I said, ‘well, we’re right here, so we might as well go in and help,’” Bon Homme Yankton lineman Gunnar Dally said. “If they need help, we’re more than willing to come.”

The stop in Wrens delayed the linemen’s return home by about a week, but the appreciation from the communities helped keep spirits high.

“When we were on breaks, there were people stopping to thank us for helping,” Dally said. “A lot of them were very surprised when we said we were from South Dakota.”

Hansen recognized another subset

of heroes: the families.

“The unsung heroes of storm jobs are the people we leave behind,” he said. “My wife is at home with six kids taking care of the ranch while I’m gone. If we didn’t have those people, we couldn’t go out and do the things we needed to do. They are the real heroes.”

SDREA General Manager Steve Barnett thanked the linemen for volunteering to help with the storm restoration efforts and for embodying

the values of South Dakota’s rural electric cooperatives.

“These 18 linemen gave up time at home with their families to help people in need they’ve never met in a place they’ve never been,” Barnett said. “Their selfless actions reflect what we stand for as a family of cooperatives, as South Dakotans, and as fellow Americans. We thank them for their work, their spirit and their dedication to keeping the lights on – at home, and in South Carolina and Georgia.”





Power Costs on the Rise



Eric Hasart

Manager of Finance and Administration

Electric utilities nationwide, including Dakota Energy, will face increasing wholesale power costs in 2025 and 2026. When wholesale power costs rise and it becomes too substantial for the cooperative to absorb, increases eventually reach the individual members.

Basin Electric Power Cooperative supplies about 83 percent of our wholesale power. They have announced an increase of up to 10 percent over the next two years. The other 17 percent of our power comes from Western Area Power Administration (WAPA). They have announced their plans to increase rates by 14 percent over the next two years.

East River Electric Power Cooperative based their budget on the increase from Basin and

WAPA along with their own budget needs and have increased their power costs to us by 7.6 percent for 2025.

They cite the main drivers for the rate increases include growing demand for electricity, increased capital investments, volatility of power markets, impacts from inflation, and higher interest rates.

Dakota Energy has seen inflation increase the cost of materials, equipment, labor, and contracted services. The cost of insurance premiums and interest rates are much higher than in previous years. We have seen heavy equipment costs and material prices increase by almost 50% on average since 2020, impacting the cost to keep our system reliable. Our goal is to find the balance between building the most reliable system possible while controlling costs and providing outstanding service.

Although we are still developing our 2025 budget, it is likely we will need to increase electricity rates by 10-12 percent to sustain operations in the rising rate environment. This increase will go effect on January 1, 2025. We want to assure you that we are committed to providing the best value for every dollar collected as we navigate cost increases over the next few years.

When setting rates, we consider the unique needs of different service classes. For example, a residential home requires less power than a large farm or industrial facility. Each service requires specific equipment and infrastructure. Ideally, we would charge each member what it costs, but the reality is that members are grouped into similar categories to develop a fair rate structure that takes into account the unique needs of each service class.

We use an independent firm to perform a cost-of-service study when there is a material change, such as an increase in the cost of power. This study ensures each rate class covers its portion of the cooperative's expenses, through their specific rate structure. A study will be completed in the summer of 2025 to determine the impact of the rate increase to the members of the cooperative.

While this is quite a bit of information, we acknowledge the 2025 rate increase may pose challenges for some of our members. Our intention is to help you have an understanding of why rates are increasing and to assure you that we are doing everything we can to manage costs while maintaining the reliability of our system. Management and the board of directors appreciate your understanding and support as we make these difficult decisions.



HUNT SAFELY

Hunting allows one to appreciate the natural world. Whether tracking deer in the early morning mist or calling in waterfowl at dusk, every outing offers new challenges and opportunities for growth.

It's crucial to keep in mind that guns, bows, and other hunting gear should never be mixed with power equipment. This can lead to potentially dangerous situations. All hunters should be vigilant, aware, and proactive about electrical safety.

Never shoot near or toward power lines, poles, transformers, or substations. A stray bullet can damage equipment and/or potentially interrupt electric service and could be deadly to the shooter. Damage to the conductor could drop the power line to the ground, causing electrocution to those nearby. The consequences of not following these guidelines can be severe, including injury or even death.

Hunters must be mindful of overhead lines and not shoot birds from power lines or poles. If you come across downed poles or power lines, report the issue immediately by calling 911. Your prompt action can prevent potential hazards.

Contact us immediately if you strike, shoot, or damage any DEC utility equipment or structures.

Remember, safety should always be your top priority, especially when it comes to electrical equipment. With careful planning and commitment to safe practices, hunters can enjoy the thrill of the chase while protecting themselves and their fellow adventurers.

Happy hunting!

DEC urges hunters to follow these safety tips while hunting:



Familiarize yourself with the location of power lines and equipment on land where you shoot.



Be careful in wooded areas where power lines may not be as visible.



Take notice of warning signs and keep clear of electrical equipment.



Do not place deer stands on utility poles or climb poles. Energized lines and equipment on the poles can conduct electricity to anyone who comes in contact with them.



Do not place signs or decoys on power lines, poles, or other utility equipment. Anything attached to a pole, except for utility equipment, is an obstruction and poses a serious hazard to utility workers.



STAYING SAFE

First responders put out a fire near Belle Fourche. Photo submitted by Butte Electric Cooperative.

Butte Electric Cooperative Connects With First Responders

Frank Turner
frank.turner@sdrea.coop

October marks First Responders Month, a time to honor the dedication and courage of those who rush toward danger to keep their communities safe. This fall, electric cooperatives across the country expressed their gratitude to these everyday heroes who are always prepared to protect lives and the essential infrastructure that supports local neighborhoods.

Day or night, regardless of the weather, first responders answer the call, whether it's battling a blaze or responding to a medical emergency. When it comes to keeping the community safe, their collaboration with local electric co-ops is key for both local residents and the first responders themselves. Together, they work to ensure that emergencies are managed quickly, effectively and, most importantly, safely.

In September, Butte Electric further strengthened its ties and

communications with local first responders following an eventful summer by hosting a series of safety demonstrations for emergency crews in Meade and Butte Counties and the U.S. Forest Service.

"Earlier this year we faced several incidents that resulted in exposed power lines near first responders," said Matt Sleep, chief executive officer of Butte Electric. "In one case, we had a situation west of Spearfish where strong winds brought down a billboard, exposing lines that sparked and started a fire."

Both Butte Electric and the local fire department responded to the emergency, de-energizing the lines and containing the small grass fire. In a separate incident, a driver suffered a medical emergency and crashed into an electrical pedestal. Although the driver died in the accident, the actions of first responders and the electric cooperative prevented further injuries. The incident, among others, prompted Butte Electric to take proactive steps in preparation for the next possible emergency.

"We wanted to both educate responders and build some rapport, so when they see a power line, they know who to call and that they are comfortable getting in contact with us," said Sleep.

Butte Electric employees organized and led a hands-on safety training using the South Dakota Rural Electric Association's high voltage demonstration trailer, a specialized tool



that highlights the very real dangers of electricity. During the session, linemen demonstrated how electricity can arc, or jump, from one connection to another, always seeking the easiest path to the ground.

The training is one that linemen across the state have facilitated, which includes a memorable demonstration involving a grapefruit to show how contact with electricity impacts organic material. On the outside, the grapefruit appears undamaged after contact with an electrified line but cutting it open reveals it's been cooked from the inside.

The training left an impression with Trevor Papenfuss, an assistant fire management fire officer who has served with the U.S. Forest Service in the Spearfish area for more than 30 years. Papenfuss was just one of roughly 30 U.S. Forest Service members who attended the demonstration.

"We deal with incidents involving electricity at least once a year, if not more," Papenfuss said. "Butte

Electric provided us with a lot of valuable information and a powerful demonstration. Seeing a grapefruit burn from the inside out makes a big impact and impression of just how dangerous live electricity can be. Several of our new wildland firefighters attended and they took away information that will stay with them for a long time."

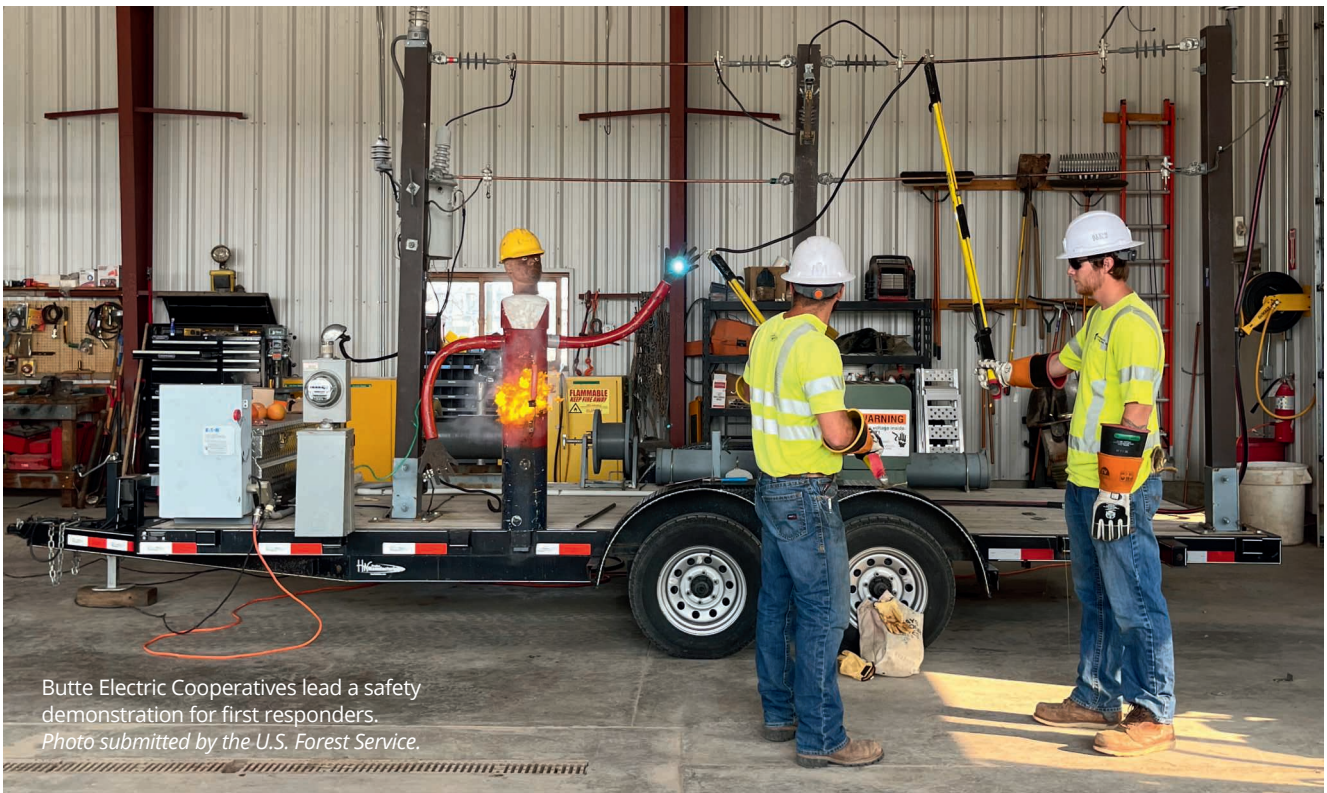
In a separate training tailored to the Sturgis Fire Department, Volunteer Fire Chief of the Sturgis Fire Department Scott Lensegrav said the training was impactful for his fellow volunteers. In addition to noting the value of the demonstration, Lensegrav highlighted the importance of maintaining a strong line of communication between electric service providers like Butte Electric and the fire department, especially during an emergency.

"In a situation involving power lines or electricity, the first thing we do is communicate with dispatch to try and figure out whose power line is involved in the emergency," said Lensegrav.

"The training was just another step in building good communication between our department and utilities. It was also great to have the refresher for our volunteers who have been with us for years and a good learning tool for the new volunteers that are coming into the service."

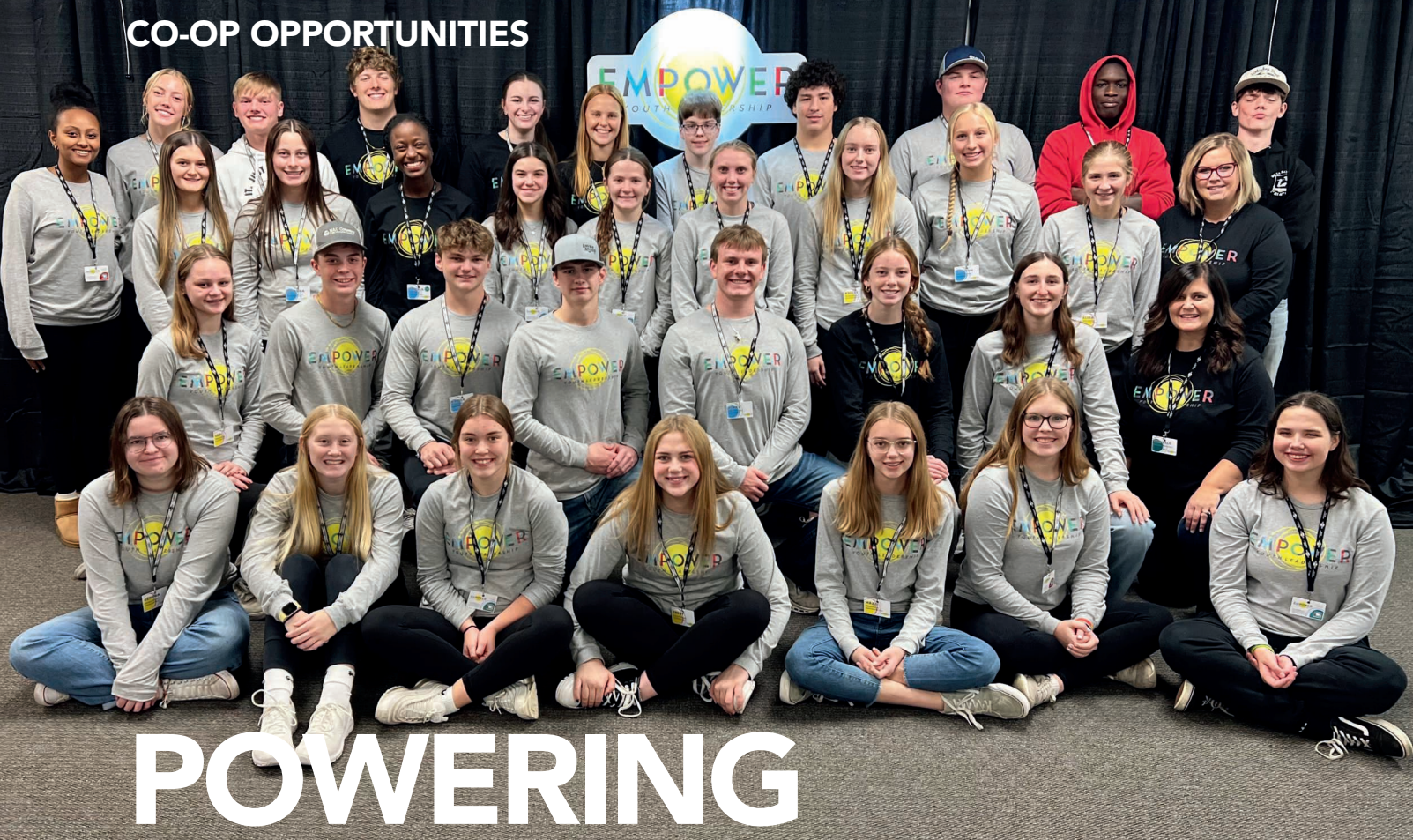
Looking forward, Sleep plans to continue strengthening the relationship between local first responders and Butte Electric for a safer future in their service area.

"It's all about building relationships and familiarity so that first responders know who to talk to and don't hesitate to call," said Sleep. "We deeply appreciate our first responders and want to help them however we can. These emergency personnel and volunteers are what make our communities great, and we just want to play our part in keeping them and our neighborhoods safe."



Butte Electric Cooperatives lead a safety demonstration for first responders.
Photo submitted by the U.S. Forest Service.

CO-OP OPPORTUNITIES



POWERING FUTURES

Electric Cooperatives Ignite Career Paths for Students

Frank Turner

frank.turner@sdrea.coop

The path to a fulfilling career can start early, often before a young student's first job. Many opportunities connect ambitious students to real-world work experiences and electric cooperatives across South Dakota are tapping into this potential.

Through hands-on learning experiences such as internships, job shadowing and youth outreach, these early career experiences can ignite a student's passion for the work that takes place at their local electric cooperative, often leading to lifelong careers.

Every year, several students take the time to discover the many facets of an

electric cooperative, from office managers who oversee daily operations to the linemen who keep the lights on. In the office, students see the careful work that keeps operations running smoothly. Out in the field, they witness the skill and dedication of line crews who brave the elements to maintain reliable service. Each role offers unique insights into not only a potential career path but also how a cooperative functions and serves its community.

Sioux Valley EmPOWER Program

Since 2014, Sioux Valley Energy has hosted its annual EmPOWER Youth Leadership Program for high school juniors, helping them explore Sioux Valley Energy, improve leadership

EmPOWER participants from the 2023-2024 school year.
Photo submitted by Sioux Valley Energy.

skills, and build connections. Often, the EmPOWER program serves as a precursor to the Youth Tour and Youth Excursion trips to Washington, D.C., and Bismarck, N.D., respectively.

According to Sioux Valley Energy's Culture and Training Development Strategist Chinelle Christensen, the EmPOWER program is available to 26 school districts across the electric cooperative's service area.

"We really feel like this outreach is important," Christensen said. "We want people to understand the co-op way, the impact that we have in our communities, and that we are different. It's so critical to be constantly sharing that with the younger generation."

During the program, Sioux Valley also hosts a NetWeaving event where students get a chance to quickly meet and question different career professionals. For three to five minutes, they can further their understanding of a possible

profession by asking questions such as, “What does an average day look for you?” or “What’s the best part of your job?”

“A lot of people don’t realize that we are more than just linemen, and we teach them that,” she said. “A lot of students walk out of our NetWeaving program with an opportunity to job shadow.”

In addition to the EmPOWER, Sioux Valley Energy offers a variety of internships for college-level students. System Engineer Andrew Chmela joined the Sioux Valley team in May after a yearlong internship with the cooperative.

When he was a student at South Dakota State University, Chmela learned from a professor that an internship with Sioux Valley Energy had become available. Chmela applied for the internship, which quickly led to a full-time job with the cooperative.

“During the internship, I was able to job shadow, learn the area and see the company culture for myself,” Chmela said. “Since starting full-time, I love it. Every day is different and it’s challenging in the right aspects. It was a great opportunity to bridge the gap from when you transition from school to internship status to full-time work.”

Lake Region Electric Opportunities

Growing up, Carter Williams would occasionally tag along to work with his dad, Daniel Williams, a line foreman at Lake Region Electric.

“My dad would show me the trucks and talk about all of the stuff they did,” Carter said.

Those days left an impression, and as a sophomore in high school, Carter began thinking about becoming a lineman or electrician for an electric cooperative. Carter expressed his interest in seeing Lake Region Electric first-hand, and the cooperative jumped at the opportunity to facilitate a three-day job shadowing opportunity for him to see industry professionals at work.

The experience inspired Carter to

seek out an internship with Lake Region Electric through a school program. More than three years later, the experience has paid off as Carter is now beginning his first year in the Mitchell Technical College Electrical Construction and Maintenance Program to become a journeyman lineman for a cooperative.

“That internship really helped me decide that I wanted to go into powerline work,” Carter said. “I wanted a job at an electric cooperative because I would have a stable community and I wouldn’t be jumping from jobsite to jobsite. It looks like a really great opportunity.”

Carter’s story is just one of many at Lake Region Electric according to Brett Kwasniewski, manager of member services with Lake Region Electric.

“If there is interest in the field, there are opportunities with Lake Region Electric,” Kwasniewski said. “If a student is interested, I highly encourage them to reach out to us, and that can happen through a guidance counselor, teacher or parent.”

In addition to internships, many cooperatives like Lake Region Electric offer 1,000-hour journeyman or apprentice lineman positions. These

seasonal, entry-level positions are open to those older than 18 and interested in exploring the industry.

“We want to bring in a kid who is interested in the trade to give them real-world experience,” Kwasniewski said. “Really, if you are 18 years of age and you are willing to work, there is a good chance that we will give you a shot at that.”

Cooperative Opportunities

Whether it’s internships, job shadowing or youth programs, these opportunities extend beyond Lake Region Electric and Sioux Valley Energy to cooperatives across South Dakota, each dedicated to building a skilled workforce.

Students are encouraged to reach out to their local electric cooperative to see what opportunities are available, whether they’re seeking hands-on work experience, mentorship or an introduction to the field.

Regardless of Chmela or Carter’s next step, they both know their hometown electric cooperative in South Dakota is cheering them on in their future endeavors.



EmPOWER participants take part in a team building exercise.
Photo submitted by Sioux Valley Energy.



DEC. 7
Santa at the Zoo
 10 a.m.-2 p.m.
 Great Plains Zoo
 Sioux Falls, SD
 605-367-7003

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.

NOV. 29
Parade of Lights
 Parade of Lights
 7 p.m.
 Chamberlain, SD

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

NOV. 30
Mid-Winter Fair
 9 a.m.-4 p.m.
 Gregory Memorial Auditorium
 Gregory, SD
 605-830-9778

NOV. 29-DEC. 29
Trees & Trains Exhibit at SD State Railroad Museum
 Hill City, SD
 605-665-3636

DEC. 1
A Christmas Carol
 2 p.m.
 Gayville Music Hall
 Gayville, SD
 605-624-2859

DEC. 5
Christmas on the Prairie
 4 p.m.
 Main Street
 Miller, SD

DEC. 5
Holiday Festival of Lights
 4 p.m.-7:30 p.m.
 Yankton, SD
 605-665-3636

DEC. 6
Kimball's Hometown Holiday
 3:30-7 p.m.
 Legion Hall
 Kimball, SD

DEC. 6
Hometown Holiday Vendor Fair
 10 a.m.-6 p.m.
 Armory
 Howard, SD

DEC. 7
Newell Festival of Trees
 9 a.m. - Doors Open
 11:30 a.m. - Community Lunch
 4 p.m. - Auction
 Newell City Hall
 Newell, SD

DEC. 6-8, 13-15
A Sherlock Carol
 Dec. 6-7, 13-14, 7:30 p.m.
 Dec. 8, 15, 2:30 p.m.
 Corson, SD
 mightycorson.com

DEC. 7
Santa Day
 2 p.m.
 Stockholm Buggy Museum
 Stockholm, SD
 605-467-3940

DEC. 7
KJAM Parade of Lights
 5:30 p.m.
 Madison, SD
 605-256-4514

DEC. 7-31
Garden Glow at McCrory Gardens
 5 p.m.-9 p.m.
 Brookings, SD
 605-688-6707

DEC. 8
Aberdeen Community Concert Association Fund Raiser 2024 Medora Magical Christmas Memories Tour
 3 p.m.
 Aberdeen Civic Theater
 Aberdeen, SD
 605-228-0946
 aberdeencommunityconcerts.com

DEC. 14
Parade of Lights
 Wessington, SD
 605-359-2049

DEC. 15
A Poker Alice Christmas
 2 p.m.
 Gayville Music Hall
 Gayville, SD

DEC. 31
American Legion Post 15 Save the Last Dance 2024
 8 p.m.-12:30 a.m.
 El Riad Shrine
 Sioux Falls, SD
 605-336-3470

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