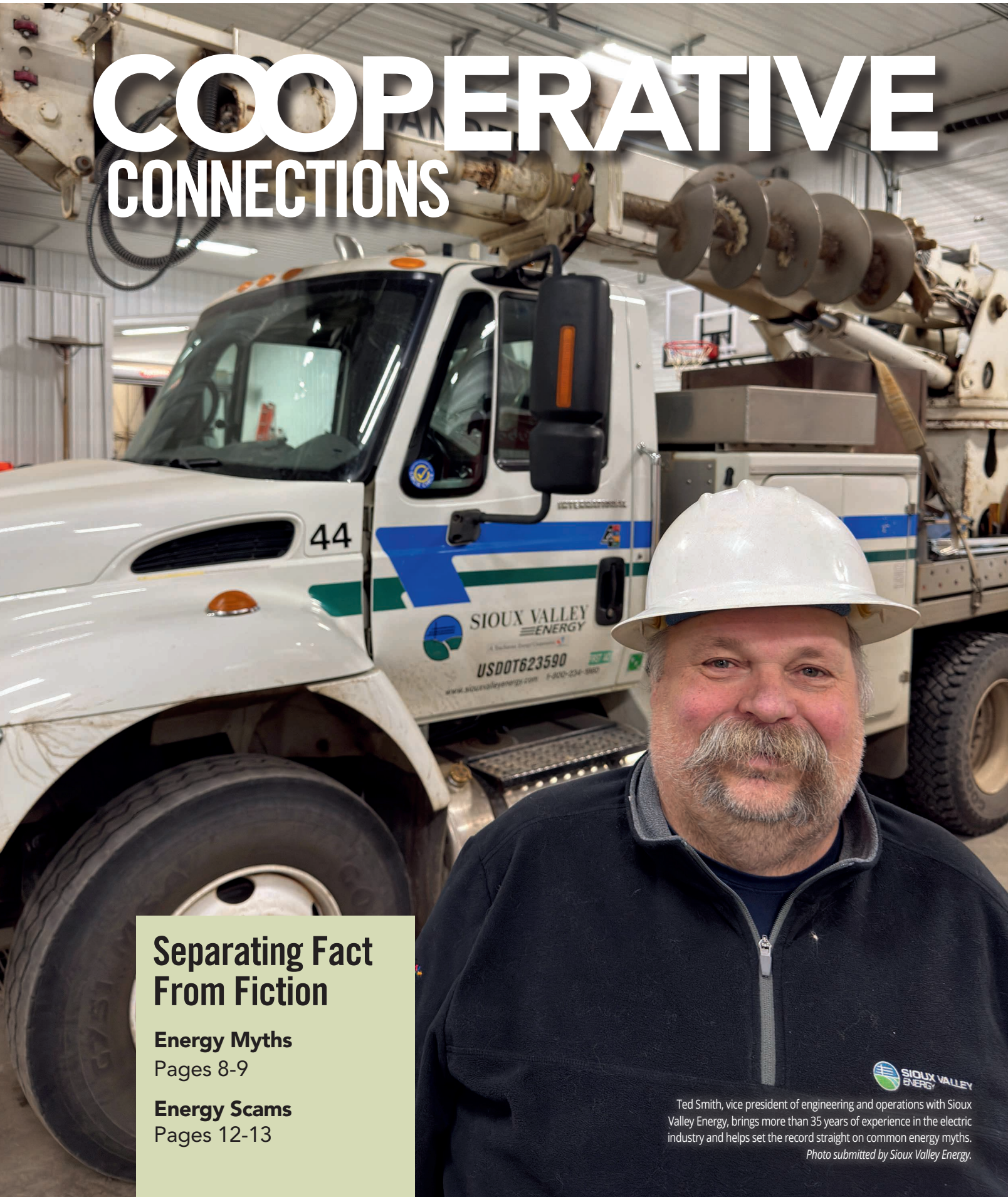




A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative 

DAKOTA ENERGY
APRIL 2026 VOL. 26 NO. 12

COOPERATIVE CONNECTIONS



Separating Fact From Fiction

Energy Myths

Pages 8-9

Energy Scams

Pages 12-13



Ted Smith, vice president of engineering and operations with Sioux Valley Energy, brings more than 35 years of experience in the electric industry and helps set the record straight on common energy myths.

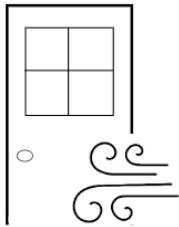
Photo submitted by Sioux Valley Energy.

EFFECTIVE WAYS To Lower Home Energy Use

While factors like fuel costs and extreme South Dakota weather can impact electricity prices, Dakota Energy members can take simple steps at home to manage energy use and control monthly bills.

Adjust Your Thermostat

As spring temperatures arrive, set your thermostat to the highest comfortable setting for cooling and the lowest comfortable setting for any late-season heating. The U.S. Department of Energy recommends 68 degrees or lower when you're home and awake. Small adjustments when you're away from home or asleep can help reduce energy use.

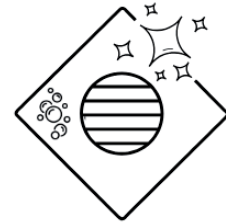


Seal Air Leaks

ENERGY STAR® estimates that about 20% of heated or cooled air is lost through leaks and poor insulation. Seal gaps around windows and doors with caulk or weatherstripping and make sure your home has proper insulation to improve comfort and efficiency.

Maintain Your System

Replace dirty filters regularly and schedule annual maintenance to keep your heating and cooling system running efficiently. A well-maintained system uses less energy and helps avoid unexpected breakdowns.



THANK YOU

Jodene!

After 24 years of dedicated service, Jodene Decker is retiring from Dakota Energy Cooperative. During her time with the cooperative, Jodene served as Manager of Human Resources and Communications, playing an important role in supporting employees, strengthening workplace culture, and helping communicate with members and the community. Her leadership and commitment have made a lasting impact on the organization. As she retires just shy of her 25th anniversary this June, we thank Jodene for her many years of service and wish her all the best in retirement.



COOPERATIVE CONNECTIONS

DAKOTA ENERGY

(USPS No. 018-949)

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Manager of Finance & Administration:
Eric Hasart

Manager of Member Services: Jeff Gilbert

Communications & Marketing Specialist:
Samantha Brodeen

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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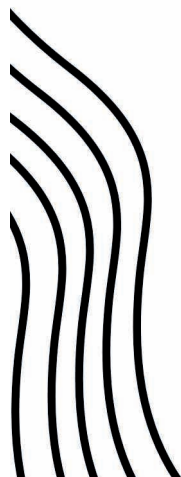


**DAKOTA ENERGY
COOPERATIVE, INC.**
HURON, SD 57350

April 13, 2026 Lineworker Appreciation Day

Here are 10 of the many reasons we appreciate lineworkers:

1. They are expertly trained to work on power lines and equipment.
2. They are dedicated to safely and efficiently maintaining power.
3. They have a heart for service, always looking out for their communities.
4. They conquer heights without hesitation.
5. They prioritize safety every second of every day.
6. They answer the call, day or night, to restore power.
7. They endure it all: rain, shine, and extreme weather conditions.
8. They go when they are needed, supporting communities nationwide when severe weather strikes.
9. They have each other's backs and work together like family.
10. They power our lives and energize our communities!



READY WHEN IT MATTERS MOST



STAYING FOCUSED BEHIND THE WHEEL: A SIMPLE GUIDE TO SAFER ROADS

Distractions behind the wheel aren't just inconvenient – they're deadly. Each moment you allocate to anything other than driving increases the risk for you and everyone sharing the road. According to the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration, distracted driving claimed 3,522 lives in the United States in 2021, underscoring how costly a split-second lapse can be. The good news is that small, deliberate habits behind the wheel can make a big difference. Here are three practical ways to stay focused.

First, minimize phone use. Store your device out of sight before starting the engine. Texting or scrolling through apps draws your eyes from the road, your hands from the wheel and your mind from the task at hand. If you must communicate, pull over safely or use hands-free features only if absolutely necessary and legal in your area. Remember, many places have laws prohibiting texting while driving, with penalties that reflect the risk. Consider enabling “do not disturb” modes that silence notifications while you drive, and set your status to indicate you're driving. This simple barrier can prevent impulsive checks and help you maintain steady attention.

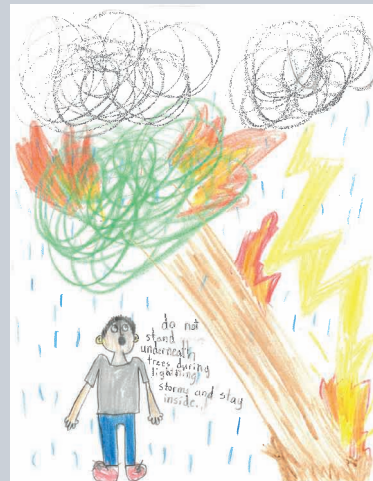
Second, plan your route before you depart. Entering a destination while driving is a dangerous distraction. Take a few minutes to review the route, check traffic conditions, and set your navigation system in advance. With your route loaded, you can keep your attention on driving rather than on-screen instructions during the journey. If possible, choose routes with fewer turns or fewer heavy-traffic segments, and be ready to adjust if conditions change. Having a mental map of the journey can also reduce the need to peek at the screen for updates.

Third, ensure you are well rested. Fatigue can dull reaction times, reduce concentration, and cause your eyes or your vehicle to drift. Prioritize a good night's sleep before long trips, and consider stopping for short breaks on extended drives to refresh your focus. Even brief pauses for stretching and deep breathing can reset your alertness and help you respond more quickly to changing road situations.

Beyond these tips, practice general safe-driving habits: obey speed limits, maintain a safe following distance and stay alert for pedestrians, cyclists, and other motorists. If you feel distracted or fatigued, it's wiser to pause and reassess rather than press on. Safe driving is about consistent, proactive choices that protect everyone on the road.



"Do not stand underneath trees during lightning storms and stay inside."



**Ramsey Faini,
Age 8**

Ramsey warns readers about the dangers of lightning storms. Thank you for sharing your picture, Ramsey! Ramsey's mom is Katie Faini from Rapid City, 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.

MAIN DISHES

HOMEMADE MAC & CHEESE

Ingredients:

16 oz. box elbow macaroni noodles
Oil
1 pkg. bacon
3 cups whole milk
1/2 cup butter (melted)
5 oz. can (about 2/3 cup) evaporated milk
16 oz. block Velveeta cheese (cut into cubes)
1 tsp. salt
Guda cheese
Parsley (to taste)
1 tsp. garlic powder
1/2 tsp. black pepper

Method

Cook noodles as directed. Drain noodles and pour a small amount of oil on them while in the strainer. Cook bacon and cut into small pieces. Add all of the ingredients into a Crock-Pot and mix. Cover and cook on low for 1.5 hours, stirring once or twice while cooking. Serve and enjoy.

Cindi Foster
Codington-Clark Electric

CHEDDAR POTATO SOUP

Ingredients:

1 medium onion, chopped
3/4 cup celery, chopped
1/4 cup butter
5 cups peeled potatoes, cubed
3 cups water
3 cups milk, divided
4 tps. chicken bouillon granules
1/2 tsp. salt
1/2 tsp. pepper
1/4 cup flour
4 cups (16 oz.) cheddar cheese, shredded

Method

In large Dutch oven or kettle, saute onion and celery in butter for 5 minutes. Add potatoes and water, bring to a boil. Reduce heat, cover and simmer for 15 minutes or until potatoes are tender. Stir in 2 cups milk, bouillon, salt and pepper. Combine flour and remaining milk until smooth, gradually stir into soup. Bring to a boil, cook and stir for 2 minutes or until thickened. Reduce heat, add cheese and stir until cheese is melted.

Sally Florey
Charles Mix Electric

CARAMELIZED HAM & SWISS SLIDERS

Ingredients:

12 Hawaiian dinner rolls, split
1/4 cup horseradish sauce (optional)
12 slices deli ham (or 24 if it's thinly sliced)
6 slices Swiss cheese, cut in fourths (so you will have 24 squares of cheese)
Sauce
1/2 cup butter
1/4 tsp. onion powder
2 tbsps. brown sugar
1 tbsp. Dijon mustard
2 tps. poppy seeds
1 1/2 tps. Worcestershire sauce
1/4 tsp. garlic powder

Method

Spray a 9x9 or 9x13 glass dish with non-stick cooking spray. Set aside. Preheat oven to 325°. Spread roll bottoms with horseradish sauce (if using). Fold up pieces of ham to fit the rolls and place them on the bottom halves of the roll. Next, place 2 squares of cheese. Replace tops and place in a single layer in the prepared pan.

Sauce

In a small skillet, heat butter over medium-high heat. Stir in remaining ingredients. Pour over rolls. Cover with foil and bake covered for 20 minutes. Remove foil and bake 5 more minutes. These can also be made ahead of time. Just cover with foil and refrigerate for several hours or overnight. Bake as instructed.

Jerald & Virginia Jensen
Sioux Valley Energy

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.

MORE ABOUT DEMAND & YOUR ELECTRIC BILL

Two key factors are affecting electric costs this year: higher wholesale power costs and updates to Dakota Energy's rate design.

Members may notice changes in their electric costs this year, and we want to explain why.

Two primary factors are driving these changes. First, the cost Dakota Energy pays to purchase wholesale power has increased. Both Basin Electric and East River Electric have raised power supply costs, which affects all member classes. As a result, Dakota Energy must collect additional revenue to cover the higher cost of delivering electricity and maintain the financial strength required to operate reliably.

Second, Dakota Energy updated its rate design following an independent cost-of-service study completed last fall. The study showed that some rate classes were not fully covering the cost of the service they received, meaning other members were indirectly paying part of those costs. Rates were adjusted so charges better reflect the actual cost drivers of providing power.

One of those changes is the addition of demand billing for residential members.

Demand represents the highest level of electricity used at one time during a month, measured over a 15-minute period. That peak usage determines how much system capacity must be available to serve homes, so it is now included in residential billing along with total energy use. Demand billing is not new to the cooperative. Larger commercial, irrigation, and three-phase members have been billed this way for many years, but it is new for residential members.

We recognize that changes in billing can be frustrating. Because each household's usage patterns are different, bill impacts will vary. Members sometimes compare rates with neighboring cooperatives or utilities, but service areas vary greatly.

Dakota Energy serves a large rural territory with long distribution lines and fewer meters per mile than cooperatives that serve towns or more densely populated areas. Delivering power across greater distances to fewer members increases the cost per member because infrastructure and power supply costs are shared among a smaller membership base.

Dakota Energy must collect approximately \$1.9 million in additional revenue in 2026 to cover higher wholesale power supply cost, planned construction, system improvements, maintenance, and infrastructure needs not included in last year's budget. **These investments support reliability, safety, and continued service while keeping the cooperative financially stable.**

We understand changes like this raise questions, and we are committed to helping members understand their usage. Members are encouraged to contact Dakota Energy with questions or for assistance reviewing their account.

The goal is to "level your load" by not running every high-power appliance at once. Instead of using appliances like the dishwasher, dryer, oven, grain bin motors, or engine heaters simultaneously, spread them out across different hours. Members can monitor their demand through SMARTHUB and view resources on our website.

Dakota Energy strives to be transparent in its billing practices. As the electric system changes, we have been placing greater focus on demand to maintain grid stability, manage costs, and plan infrastructure. Our system must be built to handle the maximum demand (peak), even if those peaks only occur for short periods during the year.



SCAN THE CODE TO LEARN MORE ABOUT DEMAND



JANUARY 2026

The Board of Directors met on Tuesday, January 27, 2026, with Directors Baum, Langbehn, Morford, Nemec, Raschke, Schaefer, and Schnathorst present with Wangness attending on Teams. Manager Felderman and Employees Brodeen, Decker, Gilbert, Hasart, Picek, Rakness, and Zomer were present.

MANAGER'S REPORT

Manager Felderman reported on the following items:

- Monthly kWh Sales and Revenue
- Basin Electric
- CRC
- Wildfire Mitigation Plan
- SPP Large Load Connection
- Department Summary 2025
- East River Capital Credit Allocation Change
- Central Electric On-Call

OFFICE SERVICES REPORT

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

- Financial Reports
- Audit Preparation
- Debarment and Lobbying Certificates
- Emergency Storm Rate Letters
- New IRS Mileage
- Yearly Inventory
- CRC Loan Advance
- Capital Credit Requests

OPERATIONS REPORT

Manager of Operations Zomer reported on the following items:

- Construction, Maintenance, and Retirement Activities
- Frost Outages
- Tree Trimming

- Dakota Substation Outage for East River Maintenance
- Heat Testing
- Dakota Provisions' Transformer
- Pole Changes
- CRC
- December Outages

MEMBER SERVICES REPORT

Manager of Member Services Gilbert reported on the following items:

- Wiring Department Workload
- Potential Hazards
- Load Control Savings
- A/C Load Control Removal
- High Bill Inquiries
- Load Limiter Installation

HUMAN RESOURCES/ COMMUNICATIONS REPORT

Manager of HR/Communications Decker and Marketing/Communications Specialist Brodeen reported on the following items:

- Youth Tour
- Community Events
- Summary Plan Description
- OSHA 300A Completion
- Annual Compliance
- Daniel Vetsch completed Apprentice Lineman program.
- Miller Career Fair and Farm & Home Show

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY REPORT

Information Technology Administrator Rakness reported on the following items:

- Security News
- Website/Cyber Security
- Demand Material
- Server Room Update
- 2026 Technology Plan

BOARD ACTION

The following items were acted upon:

- Accepted the reports presented
- Approved policies include Policy No. 032 Retirement of Capital Credits, No. 057 Consumer Owned Small Renewable Energy Rate and Interconnection Requirements, and No. 301 Method of Handling Personnel Problems.
- Approved Resolution 26-01 Revenue Deferral and Resolution 26-02 Revenue Retention Reserve.

BOARD REPORTS

- Director Raschke reported on East River's January 2026 regular board meeting.
- Director Nemec reported on SDREA's December 2025 board and annual meetings.

Year-to-Date Financial Report:

	January-26	Year-to-Date
Electric Revenue	\$ 2,815,040	\$2,815,040
Cost of Power	\$1,824,076	\$1,824,076
Operating Expenses.....	\$734,140	\$734,140
Operating Margins	\$329,593	\$329,593
kWh Sales.....	23,894,626	23,894,626
Services in Place.....		3,656
Miles of Line		2,530
Meters per Mile of Line		1.44
Number of Members.....		2,265

Wholesale power costs, taxes, interest, and depreciation account for 83.98% of DEC's total cost of service.

NOTICE:
MONTHLY BOARD MEETING DATES
10:00 AM - HURON
TUESDAY, MARCH 24
TUESDAY, APRIL 28



From left, in the Sioux Valley Energy shop: Ted Smith, vice president of engineering and operations; Chad Williams, manager of operations; journey lineworker Jager Rus; and journey lineworker Paul Schamber. Photo submitted by Sioux Valley Energy

BUSTING ENERGY MYTHS

with Ted Smith of Sioux Valley Energy

Frank Turner

frank.turner@sdrea.coop

Electricity powers nearly every part of daily life, yet most people only think about it when the lights flicker or a bill arrives. Because the system works quietly in the background, assumptions about how it operates tend to fill the gaps.

To sort through several common misconceptions, Cooperative Connections spoke with Ted Smith, vice president of engineering and operations at Sioux Valley Energy, the cooperative serving South Dakota counties of Brookings, Lake, Moody, Kingsbury, and Minnehaha and Minnesota counties of Rock and Pipestone. Smith has worked in the electric industry for 35 years, including 20 years at Sioux Valley, where he

oversees engineering, line crews and dispatch.

Here are several claims he regularly hears from members and how he responds.

Myth: If the lights go out, it must be a local problem.
Smith: That's definitely a myth.

An outage can begin anywhere from inside your home all the way back to a generating station two states away. The electric grid is highly interconnected. A disruption in one area can ripple outward across transmission lines that serve multiple utilities.

There have been large historical outages, especially in the eastern United States, where a single event such as a tree contacting a transmission line triggered a cascading failure across multiple states. Entire cities lost power

because one initiating fault spread across the network.

Closer to home, severe weather in one region can affect transmission lines feeding a much broader footprint. If a major transmission line trips offline, and another line is already out for maintenance, service interruptions can extend far beyond the original storm area.

“Just because your lights go out doesn't mean the problem started down the road, close to home” Smith said. “It could be much farther upstream.”

Myth: The grid can be powered entirely by renewable energy.
Smith: At times, yes. Around the clock, no.

Smith pointed to hydroelectric dams along the Missouri River as renewable generation that run continuously, but other renewable resources, such as wind and solar, simply aren't reliable sources of energy and only contribute

significantly when conditions allow.

“Although sometimes it seems like it, the wind doesn’t always blow in South Dakota,” Smith said. “And solar only produces during daylight hours.”

Although battery storage has improved in recent years, Smith says storing enough energy to power the grid around the clock is prohibitively expensive at this point in time.

For now, maintaining reliability requires a mix of generation resources so supply remains available regardless of weather or time of day.

Myth: If my neighbor has power and I do not after a storm, the cooperative skipped me.

Smith: That’s not how it works.

In some cases, the cooperative may not yet know a member is without service. Reporting outages remains important.

Another possibility is that the issue is on the member side of the meter. Crews may restore cooperative equipment and determine that the damage is within the member’s own service.

“When crews see it’s a problem on the member side of the meter, they will call dispatch and have them contact the member,” Smith said.

He also emphasized the importance of keeping current phone numbers on file. Fewer households rely on landlines today, which makes updated cell phone numbers critical during storm response.

Myth: Burying all power lines would eliminate outages.

Smith: No.

Underground lines are not exposed to wind and ice, but they are not immune to failure. Over time, underground conductors deteriorate. Rodents such as gophers can damage them. Excavation damage is also common when individuals dig without confirming where utilities are buried.

Before digging, members should always contact 811, the national call-before-you-dig number. That service

notifies utility providers so buried lines can be located and marked before excavation begins. Failing to call 811 can be dangerous and increase the risk of damaging underground infrastructure, causing outages.

And even when damage occurs naturally, locating the fault underground can take time.

“With overhead lines, crews can usually see the damage,” Smith said. “Underground, it takes troubleshooting to figure out exactly where the fault is, sometimes leading to longer outage durations.”

He recalled one outage that proved especially difficult to diagnose.

“One time we had an outage that we just could not narrow down,” he said. “When we finally found the damage, we saw that a gopher had chewed the bottom of the wire. You could not see it from the top. We had to dig up about 20 feet of cable and turn it over before we could see the damage.”

Underground systems can reduce certain types of outages, but they do not eliminate them, and repairs often require more time and labor.

Myth: Wind and solar power are free once installed.

Smith: The fuel is free, but that’s the only thing that’s free.

Wind turbines require ongoing maintenance, including mechanical components that need to be regularly serviced. Solar power relies on inverters and other equipment that must be maintained and eventually replaced.

There are construction costs, financing costs and transmission costs involved in delivering electricity from generation sites to homes and businesses. Those transmission and maintenance assets are accounted for over time and included in the overall cost of electricity.

Free fuel lowers one portion of cost. It does not remove the need to build, maintain and replace infrastructure.

Myth: Electric cooperatives raise rates to increase profits.

Smith: No. Cooperatives are not-for-profit.

Electric cooperatives are member owned, not investor owned. That means there are no outside shareholders expecting earnings. Instead, cooperatives operate on margins, collecting enough revenue to pay expenses, maintain infrastructure and meet financial obligations.

“The only place we get money is from the people at the end of the line,” Smith said. “We don’t have a printing press in the basement.”

In fact, if revenue exceeds expenses in a given year, a portion of those margins are allocated back to members as capital credits when the board determines it’s financially appropriate. Capital credits represent a member’s share of the cooperative’s financial performance during the years they received service.

However, in recent years, equipment costs have risen significantly. Smith cited bucket trucks that once cost around \$220,000 have since more than doubled in price, and major system components have seen similar increases. Usually, the cost of wholesale power from the cooperative’s power suppliers makes up the largest share of the budget and those costs have been increasing as well.

Rate adjustments reflect those rising operational costs and the need to maintain reliable service, not profit distribution.

Electricity may seem simple at the flip of a switch, but as Smith makes clear, the system behind it involves infrastructure, coordination and constant evaluation. Understanding how it works helps members separate assumption from reality and better appreciate the network that serves them every day.



Rising Costs of Key Electric Materials

Over the past few years, Dakota Energy has experienced significant increases in the cost of materials needed to deliver safe and reliable electricity. While we have worked hard to absorb many of these costs, a rate adjustment in 2026 is necessary to continue providing dependable service. The cost changes shown reflect several key components required to build and maintain the electric system and how their prices have increased since 2020. We appreciate your understanding as we strive to deliver the best possible value for your energy dollar. If you have questions about your electric rate, please don't hesitate to contact us.

Disclaimer: Material price increases represent recent averages in our region and may fluctuate.

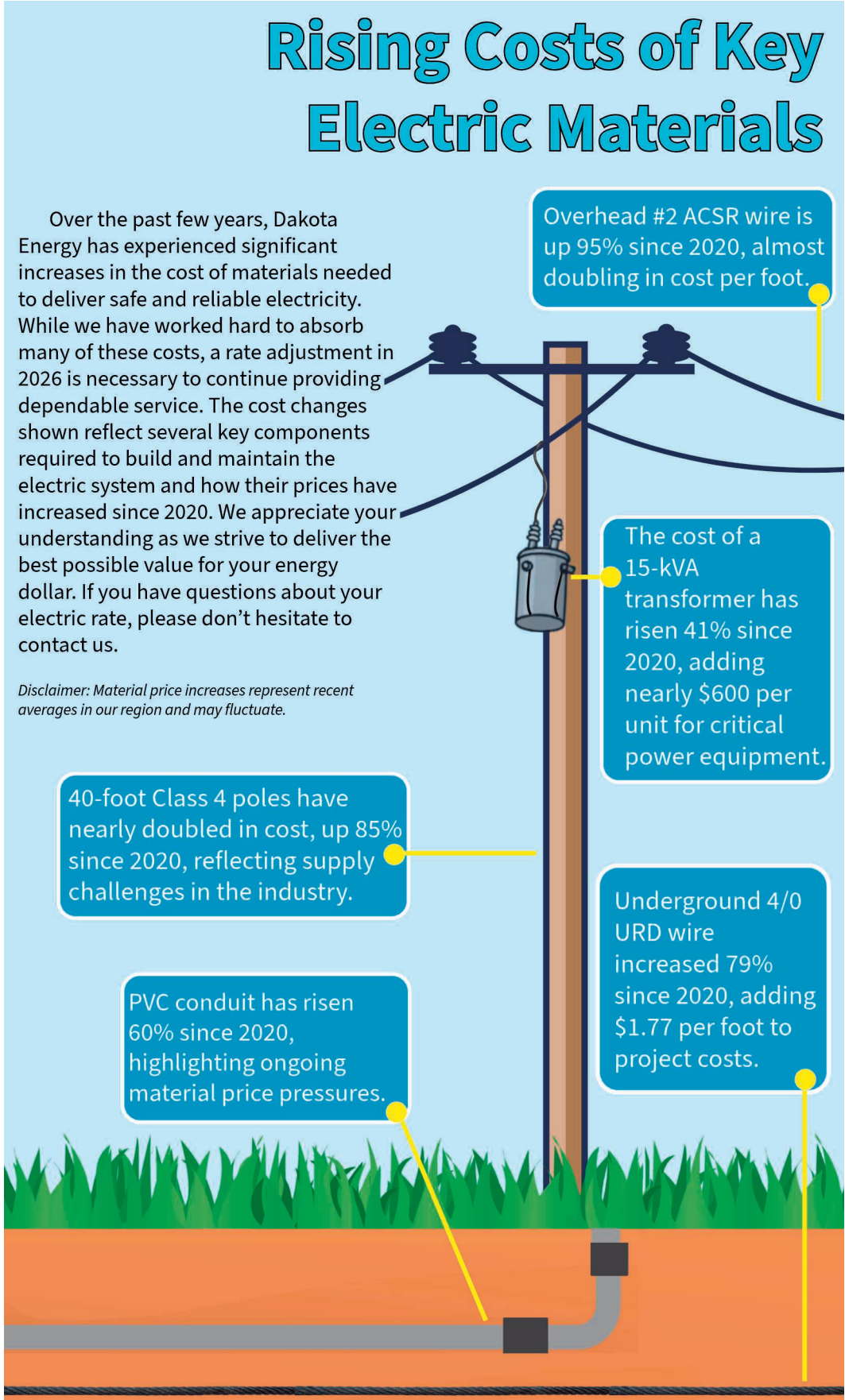
Overhead #2 ACSR wire is up 95% since 2020, almost doubling in cost per foot.

The cost of a 15-kVA transformer has risen 41% since 2020, adding nearly \$600 per unit for critical power equipment.

40-foot Class 4 poles have nearly doubled in cost, up 85% since 2020, reflecting supply challenges in the industry.

PVC conduit has risen 60% since 2020, highlighting ongoing material price pressures.

Underground 4/0 URD wire increased 79% since 2020, adding \$1.77 per foot to project costs.



TELL US WHO POWERS YOU!

We know our co-op community is filled with people making a difference. Let's celebrate them! Nominate a hero in your community who goes above and beyond.

They could win up to \$3,000!



A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative

Nominate your local hero at WHOPOWERSYOUCONTEST.COM

HAPPY WORK ANNIVERSARY!



Dakota Energy representatives accept the Rural Electric Safety Achievement Program certificate at the South Dakota Rural Electric Association Annual Meeting in January.



Tim Goetz
35 years



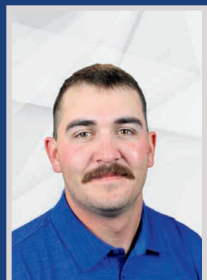
Kim Blackwell
20 years



Brandon Moore
15 years



Stephen LaFreniere
15 years



Pat McCarty
5 years



South Hand Volunteer Fire Department received a \$1,000 grant through the Basin Electric New ERA Program, along with Highmore and Ree Heights volunteer fire departments. The grants support local emergency services and help strengthen safety and resources in Dakota Energy's service territory.

We are proud to recognize the employees who celebrated their work anniversaries in 2025. Their dedication, hard work, and commitment to our members help make Dakota Energy stronger every day.

ON THE LOOKOUT FOR ENERGY SCAMS

Photo by Frank Turner

Frank Turner

frank.turner@sdrea.coop

It's no April Fools' joke. Consumers with an electricity connection have long been targets for scams. In today's digital world, those schemes have evolved. As more daily business is conducted online, scammers have shifted their tactics to match. They now use phone calls, texts and emails to create urgency, confusion and fear, hoping consumers will act before taking time to verify the claim.

For victims, these scams can lead to financial loss and identity theft, but understanding how the most common schemes work and what they typically look like is one of the best defenses to staying safe.

The "Past Due" Disconnection Threat

One of the most common tactics that scammers use is the disconnection threat. They use a fake message claiming a bill is past due and that service will be disconnected immediately unless payment is made on the spot.

The call may sound official. The message may include account numbers

or appear to come from your local cooperative's phone number due to caller ID spoofing. The scammer's goal is simple: create panic so you pay first and question later.

In reality, cooperatives follow clear procedures and provide advance notice before any disconnection. A demand for instant payment, especially with threats attached, is a major red flag.

The "You Overpaid" Refund Scam

Who would not want a refund? Scammers take advantage of that instinct.

In this scheme, a text, call or email claims a member overpaid an electric bill and is owed money. The message often includes instructions to click a link or provide banking information so the refund can be "processed."

The message can sound especially convincing to cooperative members because electric cooperatives do return margins to members in the form of capital credits. Capital credits represent a member's share of the cooperative's annual margins and are returned over time.

However, capital credits are distributed through established,

official processes. They are not issued through unsolicited texts, surprise phone calls or links requesting personal banking information. When your local cooperative retires capital credits, members are notified through official channels such as billing statements, newsletters, verified mailings or even through Cooperative Connections.

An unexpected refund message that asks for sensitive information is a red flag. When in doubt, pause and contact your local cooperative directly using trusted contact information.

Gift Card and Cryptocurrency Demands

Scammers often insist on unusual payment methods such as gift cards, prepaid debit cards or cryptocurrency. They may provide detailed instructions on how to purchase gift cards and read the numbers over the phone.

This is a clear warning sign. Legitimate cooperatives do not request payment in gift cards or cryptocurrency. These forms of payment are nearly impossible to trace or recover, which makes them attractive to criminals.

Spotting a Scam

Regardless of the method, every scam has similar warning signs that members can watch for:

- High-pressure tactics that demand immediate payment
- Requests for payment through gift cards, prepaid debit cards or cryptocurrency
- Emails or text messages with poor grammar, spelling errors or unfamiliar web addresses

Scammers rely on urgency. Taking a few extra minutes to verify a message can prevent lasting financial consequences.

What Your Local Cooperative Will and Will Not Do

Your local cooperative will not demand immediate payment without prior notice. Cooperatives follow

established procedures and provide advance communication before any service interruption.

Your local cooperative will not ask for Social Security numbers, banking details or other sensitive information through unsolicited phone calls, emails or text messages.

Members have secure payment options available through official cooperative channels, including the cooperative's verified website and approved payment systems. When in doubt, independently locate the cooperative's official contact information rather than using links or phone numbers included in a message.

Text alerts are only sent to members who have enrolled in official notification programs, such as outage updates.

Avoiding Energy Scams

If you receive a suspicious call, text or email claiming to be from your local cooperative, do not use the contact information provided in that message. Instead, use the phone number printed on your billing statement or listed on the cooperative's verified website.

Also, reporting suspected scams helps protect fellow members. By alerting your local cooperative to fraudulent activity, members help strengthen the community's defense against energy scams and ensure the cooperative network remains secure for everyone.

Have a question about whether something is real or not? Reach out to your local cooperative. Electric cooperatives are owned by the members they serve and powered by the communities around them.

SIGNS OF AN

ENERGY SCAM

High-Pressure Tactics

Scammers will pressure you, creating a sense of urgency. Claims that your power will be disconnected without immediate payment are common with utility scams.

Sketchy Payment Methods

Scammers may ask for unusual payment methods like gift cards or cryptocurrency. In these cases, it's likely a scam.

Dodgy Communication

Whether an email, text message or letter, utility scams typically include poor grammar, spelling errors or unusual email addresses. These are common warning signs of a scam.





DIAL 8-1-1 BEFORE DIGGING

South Dakota One Call teamed up with South Dakota's Electric Cooperatives to promote safety at the South Dakota State Fair.
Photo by Jacob Boyko

S.D. One Call/811 Q&A With Steve Barnett

Jacob Boyko

jacob.boyko@sdrea.coop

When planning any excavation project in South Dakota – whether installing a backyard fence, planting trees or building an outdoor shop – one simple phone call can protect lives, property and vital infrastructure. South Dakota One Call is the statewide system that helps homeowners, contractors and landowners locate underground utilities before digging begins. It's easy to get started – all you do is call 8-1-1.

Steve Barnett has served on the S.D. Call Board since 2022 when he was hired as the general manager of the South Dakota Rural Electric Association.

Barnett attends S.D. One Call's board meetings where he advocates for the interests of the utilities and co-op member-owners he represents, while helping guide the organization to better respond to the needs of utilities, rate payers, excavators and everyone else who may use the service.



Steve Barnett

S.D. One Call Board Member
Representing Electric Cooperatives
SDREA General Manager

Barnett sat down with Cooperative Connections to discuss the importance of S.D. One Call and how it benefits electric cooperatives and their members.

Q: What's your role on the South Dakota One Call board?

I serve on the South Dakota One Call Board of Directors as the representative for the 31 rural electric cooperatives operating within our state. The One Call board includes representatives from different utility sectors as well as excavators. I've been involved in this role to help ensure our members' infrastructure is protected and that we're promoting safe excavation practices statewide.

Q: Why was South Dakota One Call founded, and why is calling 811 so important?

South Dakota One Call serves as a centralized notification center for underground infrastructure. The system was created in 1993 to provide one central point of contact for excavators to encourage more responsible digging. Prior to the founding of S.D. One Call, excavators doing their due diligence needed to make multiple calls to various utilities. Today, thanks to S.D. One Call, the only number you need to dial is 811. That call triggers notification to all participating utilities in the area so they can send locators out to the digsite.

It's important to call 811 because state law requires it. If someone digs without a locate ticket and damages a buried utility, they are fully responsible for the damages and liability. Beyond that, hitting a gas or electric line can be extremely dangerous. There are thousands of miles of buried electric, gas, water, sewer, communication lines and drain tile underground.

Calling 811 is free, and it protects the excavator and the utilities.

Q: What happens after I call 811?

When you call 811 or submit a request through sdonecall.com:

- Your information goes to the South Dakota One Call center.
- You identify and map out where you plan to dig.
- The system notifies all utilities with infrastructure in that area.

Utilities have 48 hours from the start of the next business day to respond by marking their lines with paint or flags.

After that 48-hour period, excavation can begin.

The service is free to the caller, as the utilities fund the system by paying a small fee every time their infrastructure is identified in an excavation area. The utility is responsible for marking its own facilities.

During this year's legislative session in Pierre, legislators voted to enact a change to how the 48-hour locate window is determined.

Starting July 1, South Dakota will be a "midnight state," meaning the day you submit the ticket does not count toward the 48-hour window. The clock begins at 12:01 a.m. the next business day.

If you submit a ticket at 4 p.m. on a Tuesday, the 48-hour window will start Wednesday at 12:01 a.m. Your project start time will be Friday.

Q: Since serving on the One Call board, what's one interesting thing you've learned?

What I've come to better understand is how much protection the system provides the excavator. When you call 811 and obtain a valid locate ticket, you've documented that you followed state law and gave utilities the opportunity to mark their facilities. If something is properly marked and you dig carefully around those markings, you've significantly reduced both safety risks and liability exposure. On the other hand, if you dig without a ticket and hit a line, you are fully responsible for the damages and any related costs.

I've also learned how many different types of underground infrastructure exist – everything from electric and fiber to water, sewer, gas, and even private drain tile that crosses into public right-of-way.

Q: What's the mission of the One Call board?

I think you can summarize the board's mission pretty succinctly: promote public safety by preventing damage to underground utilities, and ensuring excavation across the state is conducted safely and responsibly.

Apart from that, our goal is to continue improving our one-call notification system, making it more efficient and effective, as well as just getting the word out. We've done some of that through letters to the editor in various newspapers and with booths at events including, the South Dakota State Fair. The more we can get the word out, the less problems we have, and that means keeping costs low for our member-owners.

At its core, the board's mission is to reduce injuries, prevent service disruptions and protect both excavators and utility providers through communication, compliance and education.



Mark Meier, Chairman

Watertown Municipal Utilities
South Dakota Municipalities

Ryan Barr, Vice Chairman

Midco
Community Antenna Television Companies

Kay Braaten

Northern Border Pipeline
Interstate Pipeline Carriers

Steve Barnett

South Dakota Rural Electric Association
Rural Electric Cooperatives

Scott Wiese

Otter Tail Power Co.
Investor-Owned Electric Utilities

Brad Wenande

NorthWestern Energy
Investor-Owned Natural Gas Companies

Loren Beld

LL & Sons Excavating, Inc.
Excavating Contractors

Jim Wedin

CenturyLink
Telecommunications with > 50,000 customers

Lloyd Rave

Minnehaha Community Water Corporation Board
Rural Water Systems

John Morris

Morris Inc
Excavating Contractors

Jake VanDewater

SDN Communications
Small Telecommunications with < 50,000 customers



APRIL 9-11
Annual Schmeckfest
 German Festival of
 Tasting
 Freeman, SD
 605-925-4237
 www.schmeckfest.com

Travel South Dakota Photo

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.

MARCH 27-APRIL 4
The Passion and the Cross
 Orpheum Theatre
 Sioux Falls, SD
 605-367-6000
 www.ThePassionMusical.com

APRIL 3
**Bachelors of Broadway:
 Gentlemen of the Theatre**
 7 p.m.
 Johnson Fine Arts Center
 Aberdeen, SD

APRIL 5
Easter Sunrise Service
 7 a.m.
 Mount Rushmore

APRIL 9
**McCrossan Wildest Banquet
 Auction in the Midwest**
 Jimmy Buffett Tribute
 Polynesian Paradise Dancers
 Sioux Falls, SD
 www.mccrossan.org

APRIL 9-11
Annual Schmeckfest
 German Heritage Celebration
 Freeman, SD
 605-925-4237
 www.schmeckfest.com

APRIL 11
Women VetsConnect Retreat
 A Wellness Retreat for
 Women Veterans and Military
 Spouses
 9 a.m.-2 p.m.
 Our Savior's Lutheran Church
 909 W. 33rd St.
 Sioux Falls, SD

APRIL 11
**Minnehaha County Pheasants
 Forever Annual Banquet**
 5:30 p.m.-10 p.m.
 Blue Haven Atrium
 46594 268th St.
 Sioux Falls, SD
 605-214-1415

APRIL 11-12
The Black Market
 Sat. 9 a.m.-5 p.m.
 Sun. 10 a.m.-3 p.m.
 W.H. Lyon Fairgrounds Expo Bldg.
 Sioux Falls, SD
 605-332-6004

APRIL 18
Brookings Quilt Show XII
 9 a.m.-5 p.m.
 Admission: \$10
 Dakota Bank Center
 Brookings, SD
 605-690-3246

APRIL 18
**Tri-Valley Chorus
 75th Annual Show**
 4 p.m.
 Centerville, SD
 605-201-9398

APRIL 20
The Bronx Wanderers
 7 p.m.
 Johnson Fine Arts Center
 Aberdeen, SD

APRIL 25
**Screams by Night
 Halfway to Halloween Con**
 11 a.m.-5 p.m.
 The Social
 Sioux Falls, SD

APRIL 28
American Legion Bingo
 5-6 p.m. Social
 6-6:30 p.m. Meal
 6:45 p.m. Bingo
 American Legion Post 15
 1600 W. Russell
 Sioux Falls, SD
 605-682-1222

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

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

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

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.