

# COOPERATIVE CONNECTIONS



Barb Gross, Adele Enright  
and Jean Tehle have all  
worked hard to facilitate  
free and fair elections  
for registered voters  
in Dewey County

## Poll tenders rock the vote

Election workers are  
dedicated to the task  
Pages 8-9

## Freshman Impact teaches sound decision making

Pages 12-13

# Wrapping up 2022 and planning for 2023

2022 is quickly ending, which brings us to another stage in our calendar of events for Southeastern, the 2023 budget. We have seen a host of changes and challenges over the past year dealing with construction activities, such as a lack of material, inventory, shipping complications and our overall workload in 2022.

We want to thank our member/owners for your patience, understanding and cooperation as we worked our way through a difficult year with a shortage of material and shipping delays, due to a host of supply chain issues. However, 2022 will finish strong and again be another record setting year for new services and work completed by our employee group.

With the material/equipment delays coupled with our explosive growth throughout our service area, we encourage you to contact us as early as possible in your planning process for electric system upgrades, repairs, and new service requests.

We work very hard to avoid delays, but challenges occur when short lead times and major expansion projects are requested with little to no notice ahead of time for our planning process. Taking all these factors into consideration, we have hopes that we will be able to maintain our 2017 rates again next year. The next couple months will be crucial in our planning process for 2023 and we will keep you posted as far in advance as possible if any changes are needed.

We look forward to visiting with you during our Member Appreciation/Pancake Days starting Nov. 2 in Alcester, then on Nov. 3 in Salem (Salem warehouse) and on Nov. 4 at the Viborg Community Building and ending on Nov. 5 at our Sioux Falls office/warehouse. We very much appreciate your attendance and the willingness to donate to your local food pantries. We started this process last year by asking you to help us help others who are less fortunate by bringing items to be donated. A special thanks goes out to your local food pantries for their participation. We always enjoy visiting with you at these events and the opportunity to have fun and fellowship with our member/owners.

Our Board Members, Management, Staff and Employees have lots to be thankful for each day. But a special thanks goes out to you, our member/owners, for your active participation in your electric cooperative. Your faith in Southeastern keeps us going strong and striving to serve you, throughout our six-county service area that serves 18,030 active members and 21,466 services!



**Brad Schardin**  
General Manager

Your elected Board of Directors, our cooperative power supply system and our first-class employee group work hard to be there when you need us. We want you to take us for granted, by providing you with affordable, dependable and reliable service. We very much appreciate you notifying us ahead of time of your construction plans, calling 811 for underground cable locations, working out payment arrangements, picking up a water heater or participating in the load management program. Collectively, through East River Electric and the cooperatives they serve, the load management program has saved more than \$188 million dollars since the project was launched in 1985. These savings come out of our largest expense, our power bill, which we then pass on to you through lower off-peak rates.

I'd like to thank our Board and the hard working, dedicated employees for getting the jobs done for Southeastern. I will be the first to admit that with such an extremely fast-growing membership I am one thankful Manager to be able to work with such a progressive and active Board and employee group that exceeds our mission statement of "Member Focused, Member Driven."



Bob Schrag



Bob Kalda

Last, but not least, I want to mention the retirement of a long-time employee, Bob Schrag, Line Superintendent out of the Marion Office. Bob began his employment on 2/17/1977 and worked his way up to journeyman lineman, line foreman and then finished his career as our Line Superintendent all at the Marion Office for nearly 46 years. His primary duties were working with our members in the Marion, Parkston and Salem area to design and plan for new services, upgraded services and rebuilding existing services.

Thanks so very much for your hard work and dedication to our members and Southeastern Electric. THANKS, BOB, FOR A JOB WELL DONE! I'd also like to recognize and congratulate Bob Kalda for taking over those duties and responsibilities and working with our members.

## COOPERATIVE CONNECTIONS

### SOUTHEASTERN ELECTRIC

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Design assistance by SDREA



## Southeastern Electric Cooperative Member Appreciation Days

### Free Pancake and Sausage Supper

- Nov. 2, Alcester Community Center – 5 to 7 p.m.
- Nov. 3, Salem Area Office/Warehouse – 5 to 7 p.m.
- Nov. 4, Viborg Community Building – 5 to 7 p.m.
- Nov. 5, Sioux Falls Office/Warehouse, I-29, Lennox, #68 exit – 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.

**As we enter the season of giving, we are asking attendees to bring canned food items for the local Food Pantries. Items such as canned meats, vegetables, soups, cereals, paper products, cleaning supplies, diapers and personal hygiene items. (Please make sure items are not expired) Cash donation will also be accepted and welcomed.**

## Send us your favorite recipes!

We are looking for original or your favorite recipes that are a hit at your house. Each month we hold a drawing from the recipes that are submitted for a \$10 credit on the winner's electric account. Last month's winner was Patty Sinning of Lennox, S.D. Congratulations, Patty! All recipes submitted will be entered in a yearly drawing for a grand prize at the Annual Membership Meeting held each June.

All recipes we receive are forwarded to SDREA for possible publication in Southeastern Electric Cooperative Connections. Recipes for the December 2022 magazine should be submitted by Nov. 1. You may e-mail your recipes to [brett@southeastern.coop](mailto:brett@southeastern.coop). Upcoming recipe topics are holiday desserts in December and soups in January.

# A heaping helping of holiday home safety

Nearly every household uses extra electricity during the holidays for cooking, decorating and heating.

Take extra care to use electricity safely and to ask family members and house-guests to do the same. Here are some helpful tips:

- Stay in the kitchen when broiling or doing any stovetop cooking.
- Keep children well away from cooking appliances while in use.
- Keep towels, potholders and curtains away from hot surfaces.
- One of the riskiest holiday behaviors is overloading your electrical outlets. You will overload your wall outlets if you string strand after strand of holiday lights together and plug them into an extension cord that you plug into an outlet. Plugging multiple strands of cords into a power strip does not add any juice to the electrical circuit that powers the outlet you plug the strip into.
- Check decorative lights for damaged cords, plugs and sockets. Replace anything that's frayed, cracked or broken. Buy cords that are certified by UL; look for the UL symbol on the package.
- Don't run extension cords under rugs, carpets or baseboards, or anywhere they can be a tripping hazard.
- Only use decorations and cords outdoors that are properly rated for outdoor use.
- When you put up outdoor decorations, do not string lights in trees near power lines. Fasten outdoor lights carefully and securely with clips, never nails or tacks.
- Keep electric lights away from decorative metal trees.
- Keep all light strings and other decorations away from pets so they don't get tangled in them or chew the wires.
- Keep all decorations - and everything else - at least 3 feet away from heat sources such as fireplaces and space heaters.
- Always turn off your decorations when you leave home and when you're sleeping.
- Make sure smoke detectors are present and working properly.
- Use space heaters properly and safely. Keep them out of high-traffic areas and at least 3 feet from anything that can burn.
- Do not leave a space heater running unattended. Turn off space heaters and unplug them when you leave the room or go to sleep.
- Never leave an open flame, including your fireplace or a candle, unattended.

## LINEMEN PARTICIPATE IN RUBBER GLOVING SCHOOL



Roughly 50 electric cooperative linemen from across the state recently participated in a Rubber Gloving School at the Mitchell Technical College training facility. The program included simulating maintenance and repair work on energized power lines, awareness of proper safety procedures, grounding and insulation of vehicles, operation of aerial lift devices and more.

To see a video of this event and learn more about how electric cooperatives serve our members, visit Cooperative Connections Plus by scanning the QR code at right.



## Don't play on transformer boxes

### Traci Tschetter

Traci, 11, warns readers to stay away from transformer boxes, which contain high-voltage underground electrical equipment inside. Traci is the child of Ryan and Elaine Tschetter and they are members of Whetstone Valley 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.

# CROCKPOT CREATIONS

## SLOW COOKER CHILI

### Ingredients:

- 2 lbs. lean ground beef
- 1 pkg. McCormick Slow Cookers Chili Seasoning
- 2 cans (14.4 ozs. each) diced tomatoes, undrained
- 2 cans (16 ozs. each) kidney beans, drained and rinsed
- 1 can (15.5 ozs.) tomato sauce

### METHOD

Brown ground beef or turkey in large skillet on medium-high heat. Drain fat. Place cooked beef, Slow Cookers Chili Seasoning Mix, tomatoes, beans and tomato sauce in slow cooker. Stir until well mixed. Cover. Cook 8 hours on low or 4 hours on high. Stir before serving. For best results, do not remove cover during cooking.

**McCormick.com**

## SLOW COOKER TURKEY BREAST

### Ingredients:

- 2 tsps. McCormick Garlic Powder
- 2 tsps. McCormick Paprika
- 2 tsps. McCormick Rubbed Sage
- 2 tsps. Sicilian Sea Salt
- 1 tsp. McCormick Pure Ground Black Pepper
- 1 tsp. McCormick Whole Thyme Leaves
- 1 turkey breast, (about 6 lbs.) fresh or frozen, thawed
- 3 tsps. butter, melted

### METHOD

Mix seasonings in small bowl; set aside. Rinse turkey and pat dry. Brush turkey with melted butter. Sprinkle seasoning mixture over entire surface and under skin of turkey. Place turkey breast in slow cooker. Cover. Cook 1 hour on high. Reduce heat to low; cook 7 hours longer or until turkey is cooked through (internal temperature reaches 165 degrees). Transfer to platter or carving board and slice.

**McCormick.com**

## SLOW COOKER MASHED POTATOES

### Ingredients:

- 5 lbs. Yukon gold potatoes, peeled and cut into cubes
- 1 c. chicken stock
- 2 McCormick Bay Leaves
- 1/2 c. (1 stick) butter, cut into chunks
- 1 tsp. salt
- 3/4 tsp. McCormick Pure Ground Black Pepper
- 1/2 tsp. McCormick Garlic Powder
- 1/2 -1 c. milk
- 1 tsp. McCormick Parsley Flakes

### METHOD

Spray inside of 6-quart slow cooker with no-stick cooking spray. Add potatoes, stock and bay leaves. Cover. Cook 4 hours on high or until potatoes are tender, stirring after each hour. Remove bay leaves. Stir in butter, salt, pepper and garlic powder. Cover. Let stand 5 minutes. Beat potatoes with electric mixer on medium-high speed or mash with potato masher, gradually adding milk, until smooth. Stir in parsley. Top with additional butter, if desired. Serve with McCormick Brown Gravy or Perfect Brown Gravy.

**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 2022. All entries must include your name, mailing address, phone number and cooperative name.

Retirement news

# Bob Schrag retires after nearly 46 years of service



Bob Schrag is shown through the years from the time he was hired at Southeastern Electric Cooperative as a Journeyman Lineman and eventually worked his way up to Line Foreman and later to Area Line Superintendent

Southeastern Electric would like to extend best wishes to Bob Schrag, who will officially retire on Nov. 1, with nearly 46 years of service.

Bob retired as Line Superintendent for the Marion, Parkston and Salem areas and has been an essential fixture for Southeastern since he started on 2/14/1977.

He made his way up from Journeyman to Line foreman to Area Line Superintendent, a position he has held for many years now.

Bob has seen his share of changes in the industry since his beginning and too many storm jobs to mention.

Members always appreciated his expertise when planning, designing, building and upgrading their services. His willingness to go the extra mile demonstrated his commitment to excellence that not only our members have come to expect but his coworkers as well.

He was always happy to help in any way he could when asked and did it with a smile on his face. Bob will be greatly missed, and we want to thank him for all his years of dedicated service to Southeastern Electric. We wish Bob and his wife Kaye a wonderful retirement.

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I certify that all information furnished on this form is true and complete. I understand that anyone who furnishes false or misleading information on this form or who omits material or information requested on the form may be subject to criminal sanctions (including fines and imprisonment) and/or civil sanctions (including civil penalties).

## Board summary report for September 2022

The Board of Directors of Southeastern Electric Cooperative met in Marion on Tuesday, September 20, 2022, with all directors present. Also, present were Manager Brad Schardin, Attorney Alan Peterson and staff members John Euchner and Jon Wunder and Todd Nelson

Manager Schardin in his report reviewed with the board the following items:

1. Commented on the employee committee meeting and the East River Annual meeting.
  2. Updated the board on SPP reserve margins, member capital credits and electric service exceptions.
  3. Discussed to the board an informational carbon capture pipeline meeting, the Basin financials, the RUS loan status, the district #7 vacancy and electric vehicles.
  4. Updated the board on the Sioux Falls office expansion and the Sioux Falls land acquisition and sale.
  5. Reviewed the circulation folder and various member-related issues.
- CFO Jon Wunder reviewed his written report, the preliminary financial report

for August 2022, capital credit retirement summary, the IRS Form 990, FEMA updates and the East River member sales report.

2. Operations Manager John Euchner reviewed his written report, the monthly safety report, close calls, new services, the outage report and dispatch reports. He also commented on future services, the status of the FEMA mitigation work, the status of the construction work plan for 2023-2026, the impacts of the proposed East River construction work plan and current job openings.

3. Member Services and IT Manager Todd Nelson reviewed his written report, discussed the electric bus project, the Sioux Falls Sustainability committee, outage reporting, disconnects, cybersecurity and load management.

In his legal report, Attorney Peterson updated the board on recent capital credit assignment inquiries.

The board acted on the following motions:

- A motion was made and seconded to approve the consent agenda. Motion carried.
- A motion was made and seconded

to accept the management reports as presented. Motion carried.

- A motion was made and seconded to approve the base long range financial forecast. Motion carried.

- A motion was made and seconded to authorize Heeren, Holmberg, Wildeboer and Terveen to represent the board the upcoming Joint Director/Employee Committee meeting. Motion carried.

- A motion was made and seconded to approve the changes as proposed for the 401k match and medical premium cost share present. Motion carried.

- A motion was made and seconded to approve work order inventories #270 through 275 and make available for loan fund advance. Motion carried.

- A motion was made and seconded to approve the recommended changes to Policy 702, Construction and Extension of Electric Services. Motion carried.

- A motion was made and seconded to set the November board meeting for Wednesday, November 30, 2022, at the Marion office. Motion carried.

Next regular monthly meeting will be held on Thursday, Oct. 27, 2022, at the Marion office.





Jamalia Franzen, auditor deputy in Dewey County, encourages all eligible citizens to register to vote. *Photos by Billy Gibson*

## Poll workers urge voters to stay active in the election process

**Billy Gibson**

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

About 10 years ago, Michele Moore was newly retired and looking for something interesting to occupy her time. Out of the blue, she received a call from the Clay County elections auditor.

“She wanted to know if I was interested in working the elections and I told her I’d do it. It’s been very rewarding and it feels like I’m doing something important and worthwhile,” Moore said.

When she’s not facilitating the election process, Moore takes care of the bookkeeping for the family’s welding and manufacturing business operated by her husband, David.

While election work isn’t a full-time gig, poll tenders put in long hours on voting day. They typically report to the local precinct at 6 a.m. before the polls open an hour later. The shift goes straight through to 7 p.m. when the polls close, although any voters still

standing in line at that time are allowed to cast their ballots. Workers have to stay on duty the entire time and often pack their own lunch and dinner.

After the last voter is done, all the sealed ballots and accompanying paperwork are brought to the auditor’s office for verification and certification to ensure the election is “free and fair.”

Moore said all the workers at her precinct located at the National Guard Armory in Vermillion are diligent, dependable, thorough and conscientious. She said they take their jobs very seriously and are careful not to be “political” in any way, a guideline contained in the orientation and training process that workers go through before each election regardless of one’s years of service.

The training material requires that workers be professional, punctual, respectful to voters, team-oriented and “leave partisan leanings at the door.” Anyone concerned about the validity of the election process can appear at



the precinct as a “poll watcher” or “poll observer,” however, those individuals must adhere to a separate set of guidelines as set forth by the Secretary of State’s Office.

“We’re not here to change anyone’s mind or influence how anyone votes,” Moore said. “We’re just here to do anything we can to help them vote as quickly and smoothly as possible and make sure the process goes well. We try to make it easy for them.”

That doesn’t mean everything always goes according to plan. As the political passions and divisions have grown more intense over recent years, Moore said she’s encountered some fairly tense situations. But she said she generally





Poll workers are on the job from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. local time. If the polls close while you are in line, you will still be permitted to vote.

Here is a breakdown of party identification as of Sept. 1, 2022:

- Republican - 291,956
- Democrat - 150,760
- No party/Ind. - 142,538
- Libertarian - 2,733
- Other - 1,376

**Total - 589,363**

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Election poll workers see themselves as doing something helpful to support and facilitate the democratic process.

feels safe while doing her work inside the armory.

Some voters can get upset when they try to make requests that violate the voting rules, such as attempting to change their party affiliation on voting day or not providing the proper identification. She said tensions can run high during contentious presidential or mid-term elections.

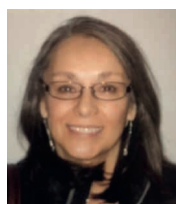


“Sometimes people get angry and you just try to calm them down. They don’t know how things work and what’s required because they’re not paying attention,” she said. “Social media and TV stirs up their passion and they don’t always know how to control that.”

She recalled one particular fellow who insisted on voting without presenting the proper identification. When he was

told he would have to use a provisional ballot, he became agitated and stormed out of the precinct. Moore was “a little nervous” about the man returning and what he might do, but she took comfort in the fact that the National Guard soldiers were right there in the building.

Cris Sichmeller, a resident of Webster, signed on to join her local precinct in Roslyn six years ago and enjoys the



Michele Moore

social aspects of the assignment. A self-described “farm wife,” Sichmeller said she doesn’t often have an opportunity to sit down and visit with friends, but being at

the polling place means visiting with folks and catching up on current events.

“People used to spend time just visiting with one another, going to houses and having coffee and playing cards, but that doesn’t happen a lot these days,” she said. “There’s a lot of camaraderie that comes with being around people you know in the community that you have something in common with.”

She said at her precinct things normally proceed “without a lot of drama,” but she remembers that the Covid pandemic did cause a few wrinkles. Several workers contracted the virus, along with the precinct deputy.

The workers had to wear face shields, and Plexiglas was set up in the voting area and at the registration tables.

“I remember a man who had just retired from the military and he came in and saw the face shields and just laughed,” Sichmeller recalled. “He said that wasn’t going to keep us from getting the virus or passing it on to others. He said we needed a hazmat suit for that. I guess he was right.”

Barb Gross recently retired after tending the polls in Dewey County since the 1980s. She describes herself as a stickler for adhering to the rules and buttoning everything down.

“We always made sure everything tallied up because we knew we were going to be audited and we invited that because it was a challenge to see if we could pull it off without a hitch and without anything slipping through the cracks,” she said.

Secretary of State Steve Barnett emphasized the fact that poll workers serve a very valuable role in society.

“They’re on the front lines of the election process. You couldn’t run an election without them,” he said.

Barnett stressed importance of voters meeting their obligation to stay actively involved and make sure they are familiar with the rules and regulations. To find out more about voting rights and responsibilities, visit [www.sdsos.gov](http://www.sdsos.gov).

## BOTTLED WATER PROGRAM



# Southeastern Electric Cooperative delivers safety and opportunity in bottled water

SEC delivered pallets of bottled water to area schools again this year.

Each school can choose what they want to do with each of their 60 cases of bottled water. Selling the water at school events to raise money for certain events is encouraged, but no matter what they decide each bottle has an electrical safety message on them.

SEC hopes each bottle will bring an opportunity to make money and spread electrical safety to the students and the local communities.



## Southeastern participates in EV Ride & Drive

Electric vehicles (EVs) were the focus at this year's EV Ride & Drive held at the W.H. Lyon Fairgrounds in September. Southeastern, along with Sioux Valley Energy Cooperative, Xcel Energy, East River Electric Cooperative and the City of Sioux Falls, sponsored this year's event.

Members of the Cooperatives and the general public were invited to give electric vehicles a try. The sponsors and local dealerships brought many different models to show off and for attendees to actually test drive.

Attendees had their choice from the Ford Lightning, the Ford Mach E to Mercedes, Audi, Nissan Leaf and a Chevy Bolt. Most of the attendees had the opportunity to test drive each and every one of the EVs up for grabs. Most were shocked by the roominess, comfort and power that electric vehicles can provide.

Attendees also had the opportunity to hop on a Livewire motorcycle and take it for a simulated drive. EV bikes and lawn equipment were also available to test out along with a car show that local EV owners, dealerships and EV car clubs brought to show off and answer questions.

Overall, the EV Ride & Drive had a great turnout. We are sure next year's event will be even bigger.



Southeastern Electric Cooperative participated in the EV Ride & Drive event where drivers could test out a variety of EV makes and models.

## SEC shocks third graders during McCook County SOFY Days



Third-graders from McCook County got to experience the shocking truth about electricity during SOFY Days held at the McCook County 4-H Grounds in Salem.

Several of Southeastern Electric's line crew were on hand to present a High Voltage demonstration about the hazards of the line-voltage that is present in the lines that carry your electricity to your home, farm or business.

The third-graders learned that even though you can't see the electricity carried along those wires that line our streets and roads, it is always there. Most hardly notice the overhead power lines that run to every home, farm and business, but those lines are deadly if they are not respected.

Each line that sits on top of the many wooden poles we take for granted carries 7,200 volts of electricity. Southeastern's crew demonstrated what would happen to a person's heart if 7,200 volts would go through it and what happens to your flesh. After a couple demonstrations the students learned real fast just how deadly those electrical lines can be, it was also prevalent by the shouts of concern in their voices.

Electrical safety reminders are good for EVERYONE, not just third-graders. That's why Southeastern tries so hard to promote electrical safety in area schools and communities.



# SOUND DECISIONS

Central Electric lineman Cody Riggs uses a hot stick to simulate de-energizing a power line during a Freshman Impact emergency exercise at Hanson High School in Alexandria. *Photo by Billy Gibson*

## Freshman Impact program promotes sound safety practices for students

**Billy Gibson**  
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The students at Hanson High School were stunned and aghast at the horrific scene unfolding right before their eyes.

There were two wrecked sedans, a downed utility pole and tangled wires strewn across the road. Emergency responders were swarming everywhere as a fire truck barreled onto the scene with its sirens blaring. And the most unsettling sight of all: four of their fellow students lying in the crumpled cars with massive wounds and barely clinging to life.

Fortunately, it turns out the accident scene was just a drill staged by a group known as Freshman Impact: Caught in the Moment, and coordinated as part of Cornbelt Program Day at the school located in Alexandria.

Nearly 200 students came from surrounding schools for a full slate of

learning opportunities centered around vehicle safety, first aid, emergency response, drug abuse awareness and much more. Participating schools were Hanson High School, Armour, Bridgewater-Emery, Ethan, Marion, McCook Central, Plankinton and Wessington Springs.

Local organizers Yolanda Price and Don Huber worked with Freshman Impact Executive Director Rick McPherson, local school officials and emergency response agencies to plan the event.

The morning session included seven separate stations scattered throughout the school's parking lot and in the gymnasium. The learning stations focused on the following subjects: teen mental health; healthy relationships; jaws of life and ambulance demonstration; seatbelt awareness; drug dog; social media dangers; and a distracted driving course where the



West River Electric is one of several electric cooperatives that support the Freshman Impact program.

students wore goggles simulating drug and alcohol impaired vision and attempted to navigate a short course behind the wheel of an ATV.

Taking part in the program was Central Electric Cooperative, which provided the downed power pole and wires. Once the emergency exercise was set into motion, two co-op linemen promptly arrived on the scene to de-energize the lines and worked with other responders to secure the area and form a safe perimeter.

Central Electric's Manager of Communications Tara Miller helped



A Hanson High School student takes on the role of an accident victim during a recent mock emergency scenario. *Photo by Billy Gibson*

facilitate the partnership while working alongside local organizers.

“This is an incredible opportunity for area students to learn about good decision-making, safety and the real dangers that are out there,” Miller said. “Concern for community is one of our guiding principles as a cooperative. This experience serves to educate first responders and students. It aligns with our values, and we are pleased to support it.”

The day’s program covered just about all the bases. The schedule included a poignant perspective of loss and grief from LeAnn Moe, who lost her teenage daughter to an automobile accident. During the mock accident response, one of the crash victims was carried away in a hearse furnished by a local funeral

home. And after all the activity settled down outside, the students returned to the gymnasium to observe a mock legal trial and sentencing hearing over the car accident they had witnessed.

The day ended with the distribution of educational materials by CORE (Community Organized Resources for Educating), the parent organization of Freshman Impact.

McPherson said he has found that the teaching method employed by Freshman Impact is successful in driving the message home to students, and they also develop a rapport with local

agencies and emergency responders.

“The students see up close and learn through hands-on activities the possible consequences of wrong choices and the lasting effects physically and emotionally on their bodies, their families and friends and their community,” he said, noting that West River Electric based in Wall is also an event sponsor. “It’s all about making safe choices and preventing destructive behaviors, and it’s important our teens learn the life-long skills and values to help them make the best possible decisions.”

Visit [www.freshmanimpact.com](http://www.freshmanimpact.com).

Central Electric Cooperative of Mitchell presented CORE with a \$2,500 Operation Round Up grant to help fund the local program. Pictured left to right are Freshman Impact founder Rick McPherson, CORE Coordinator Yolanda Price, CORE Coordinator Don Huber, Operation Round-Up Trustee LeAnn Moe, Central Electric Director Merl Bechen and Hanson County Chief Deputy Mike Brown. *Photo by Tara Miller*





University of Minnesota graduate students pose in a massive coal bucket during an electric cooperative tour sponsored by Renville-Sibley CPA and the university.

## Renville-Sibley leads tour of electric cooperatives for college students

**Erin Kelly**  
NRECA

The smallest electric cooperative in Minnesota is having an outsized impact in educating college students about the co-op business model and how power is generated and delivered for co-ops in the region.

Renville-Sibley Cooperative Power Association, a 1,586-member co-op with 13 full-time employees, worked with the University of Minnesota to organize a week-long tour of distribution co-ops and generation and transmission co-ops in Minnesota, South Dakota and North Dakota for graduate students pursuing master's degrees in science, technology and environmental policy.

"These students are going to lead us into the future from a public policy and an environmental perspective,"

said DeeAnne Norris, Renville-Sibley's CEO. "It's important that they understand there's an obligation to keep energy reliable and affordable while trying to marry that up with renewable energy and sustainability."

The mid-May tour began at Renville-Sibley's office in Danube, Minn., with a discussion about broadband, solar energy and farming. It continued with stops at several facilities run by Basin Electric Power Cooperative, the Bismarck, N.D.-based generation and transmission provider owned by 131 member co-ops that provide electricity for more than 3 million people in nine states.

Other visits included Sioux Valley Energy, a distribution co-op in Colman, South Dakota, where students learned about electric vehicle charging and other kinds of beneficial electrification,

and East River Electric in Madison, South Dakota, a G&T that supplies power to Renville-Sibley and 23 other co-ops in eastern South Dakota and western Minnesota. Students learned about East River's load management, economic development programs and co-op relationships.

The tour wrapped up at Lake Region Electric Cooperative in Pelican Rapids, Minn., where students saw the co-op's creative member-focused programs like wind and solar generation and hydroponic gardening trailers.

"It's important for the students to be able to get out there in the field to see the really big energy infrastructure," says Gabriel Chan, an associate professor at the University of Minnesota and co-director of the Electric Cooperative Innovation Center, a new initiative focused on research partnerships with co-ops.

"You read about wind, hydro or coal plants, but being there is an entirely



The students put on their harnesses and took turns going up in a bucket to simulate working conditions for linemen. The group also stopped by the headquarters of East River Electric in Madison, SD.



different experience.”

Chan had worked with Norris since before the COVID-19 pandemic to organize the tour and used the pandemic delay to create a semester-long graduate seminar called The Energy Transition in Rural America, which brought in guest speakers and included site visits to nearby cooperative facilities.

Sarah Komoroski, a mechanical engi-

**“IF YOU DON’T TELL PEOPLE WHAT’S HAPPENING AT YOUR CO-OP, THEY’RE GOING TO COME UP WITH THEIR OWN STORY ABOUT YOU.”**

- DEEANNE NORRIS, CEO, RENVILLE-SIBLEY CPA

neer who is halfway through her master’s degree program, said she felt like “a kid in a candy shop” on the tour as she got up-close and personal with coal boiler, gas turbine and other infrastructure.

“I was just smiling the whole time,” says Komoroski, who describes her passions as climate change and the transition to renewable energy. “Everyone

was so nice and so welcoming and so passionate about what they do.

“I think the biggest thing that struck me about co-ops is they’re so unique in terms of their governance structure,” she said. “They’re non-profit, member-owned, and their goals and incentives are different than a traditional for-profit utility. They’re each tackling the challenges of affordability, reliability and sustainability in a slightly different way.”

Komoroski said she believes electric cooperatives also have the advantage of having a special relationship with their members.

“Co-ops are uniquely positioned to build trust with their members during the energy transition,” she said. “That relationship is the exciting part to me.”

Norris and Chan say they hope to continue the week-long tour every other year for students in the two-year master’s program. The professor said he would like to hear more from cooperative consumer-members, and Norris says she would like to start it a day earlier.

“The students are in their 20s and

30s, but regardless of your age, that was a very taxing schedule,” says Norris, who went on the tour herself.

“It was an intense week,” Komoroski agrees. “We had about 15 stops in five days, with 26 hours of driving.”

Norris urges other co-ops across the country to connect with local universities or university extension offices and plan similar experiences that can raise awareness of energy systems in rural areas and how consumer-centric utilities like co-ops can lead the energy transition.

“When I was planning this trip, there was a little skepticism by a few people we wanted to visit,” she said. “But if you don’t tell people what’s happening at your co-op, they’re going to come up with their own story about you, and often it’s not close to reality.

“This experience shows that when we open our doors, we can engage and collaborate with students who are excited about the cooperative business model, who are passionate about the Earth and her resources and are enthusiastic about learning and making a difference.”



**NOV. 3-5**  
**Huron Ringneck Festival**  
**& Bird Dog Challenge**  
 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.

To view the publication's master event calendar, scan the QR code below:



Or visit <https://sdrea.coop/cooperative-connections-event-calendar> to view more upcoming events.

**OCT. 28-30**

**ZooBoo**  
 Great Plains Zoo  
 Sioux Falls, SD  
 605-367-7003

**OCT. 31**  
**Halloween Parade**  
 Belle Fourche, SD

**NOV. 3-5**  
**Yankton's Harvest Halloween**  
 Downtown, Yankton, SD

**NOV. 3-5**  
**Huron Ringneck Festival & Bird Dog Challenge**  
 100 4th Street SW, Huron, SD  
 605-352-0000

**NOV. 4-6**  
**Girlfriends' Weekend**  
 Hill City, SD

**NOV. 5-20**  
**Rustic Designs & More Christmas Show**  
 9 a.m.-5 p.m. daily  
 Ethan, SD  
 605-770-2411

**NOV. 5**  
**Fairburn Community Center Bazaar**  
 Fairburn, SD

**NOV. 11-13**  
**Christmas at the Barn**  
 Front Porch 605  
 Groton, SD  
 605-216-4202

**NOV. 12**  
**Black Hills Meat Festival**  
 Black Hills Harley Davidson  
 2820 Harley Dr.  
 Rapid City, SD  
 605-390-7917

**NOV. 12**  
**Holiday Extravaganza**  
 Sisseton, SD  
 605-698-7425

**NOV. 13**  
**Lutefisk, Lefse, Meatball Supper**  
 Chamberlain, SD  
 605-234-6698

**NOV. 18-20**  
**Deadwood's Big Whiskey Festival**  
 Deadwood, SD  
 605-578-1876

**NOV. 19**  
**Fall Craft Show**  
 Minneluzahan Senior Center  
 Rapid City, SD  
 605-394-1887

**NOV. 19**  
**Lille Norge Fest**  
 Canyon Lake Activity Center  
 Rapid City, SD  
 605-342-4226

**NOV. 25**  
**Olde Tyme Christmas Kick-off and Parade**  
 Hill City, SD

**NOV. 25**  
**Trap Shoot**  
 Izaak Walton League  
 Sioux Falls, SD  
 605-332-9527

**NOV. 25**  
**"Light up the Night" Parade and Fireworks**  
 Belle Fourche, SD

**NOV. 25-26**  
**Kris Kringle Kraft Fair**  
 Hill City, SD

**DEC. 2-3**  
**Gregory Mid-Winter Fair**  
 Gregory Auditorium  
 Gregory, SD  
 605-830-9778

**DEC. 2-3**  
**Christmas in the Hills**  
 Mueller Center  
 Hot Springs, SD  
 605-745-4140

**DEC. 3**  
**Santa's Thrift Village**  
 Minneluzahan Senior Center  
 Rapid City, SD  
 605-394-1887

**DEC. 3**  
**60th Annual Wreath and Centerpiece Sale**  
 Central States Fair Grounds,  
 Rapid City, SD  
 605-343-0710

**DEC. 17**  
**Custer Christmas for Kids**  
 Custer High School  
 Custer, SD  
 custerchristmas4kids@gmail.com

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