A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative

SOUTHEASTERN ELECTRIC
DECEMBER 2026 VOL. 27 NO. 8

COOPERATIVE CONNECTIONS



Christmas Storms

Christmas on Call
Pages 8-9

Light of Mine Ranch
Pages 12-13

Photo Submitted by Black Hills Electric Cooperative

THE GIFT OF MEMBERSHIP



Chad Kinsley
CEO/General Manager

Southeastern Electric Cooperative and Union County Electric Cooperative

As the holiday season gets underway, many of us will be thinking about the gifts that matter most. While this special time of year often brings thoughts of presents and celebrations, it's also a time to appreciate the people, relationships and communities that make our lives special. At Southeastern Electric Cooperative, we're grateful for something that makes our cooperative unique: you, our members.

When you receive electric service from Southeastern Electric Cooperative, you're more than a customer. You're a member of an electric co-op, and that distinction is at the heart of everything we do.

All electric cooperatives operate under a business model designed to serve their members, not outside shareholders. Our purpose is to provide safe, reliable and affordable electricity while supporting the communities we call home. Every decision we make starts with that responsibility.

One of the most meaningful benefits of co-op membership is having a voice in how your cooperative operates. Our locally elected board of directors is made up of members who live here and represent the communities we serve. They help guide priorities and make decisions with the needs of our membership in mind. Your participation, whether by voting in board elections, attending our annual meeting or sharing feedback, helps keep our cooperative connected to the people that matter most.

Membership also means access to co-op resources and programs designed specifically with your needs in mind. From energy efficiency programs, rebates, and tools to help you manage energy use to offering multiple payment options and economic development loans to improve the communities we live in, we work to provide services that make a meaningful difference in your life.

Our commitment extends beyond the power lines. We live and work in the same communities you do. We see the impact of local schools, small businesses, community organizations and neighbors helping neighbors. That connection shapes how we serve and reminds us that a strong co-op is built on more than electricity alone.

The holiday season offers a special opportunity to reflect on what we can accomplish when we work together. The cooperative model is built on that very idea: people joining together to meet a shared need and creating something stronger than any one person could build alone.

As you gather with family and friends this December, I hope you'll take pride in knowing that your co-op belongs to you. Your membership helps sustain a business rooted in local accountability, community investment and service to others.

On behalf of everyone at Southeastern Electric, thank you for being part of our cooperative family. We're honored to serve you and grateful for the trust you place in us throughout the year.

OFFICES CLOSED FOR HOLIDAYS

Our offices will be closed on Friday, December 25 & Friday, January 1 in observance of the Christmas and New Year's holidays. Our 24/7 outage phone will still be active (1-800-333-2859). Pay by phone will also be available at 844-961-2524. Bills can also be paid through Smart Hub online or in the phone app. We wish you and your family a blessed and happy holiday season!

COOPERATIVE CONNECTIONS
SOUTHEASTERN ELECTRIC

(ISSN No. 1531-1058)

CEO: Chad Kinsley
chadk@southeastern.coop
Editor: Erica Fitzhugh
erica@southeastern.coop
Board of Directors
Steve Holmberg, President
Robert Wollmann, Vice President
Johnathan Wildeboer, Secretary
Daryl Terveen, Treasurer
Don Heeren
John Ostraat
Chris Hofer
Carlos Hofer
Donovan Kost

www.southeasternelectric.com
1-800-333-2859

Southeastern Electric Cooperative, Inc.
A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative

@SE_Electric
@southeasternelectric
@southeasternelectric

SOUTHEASTERN ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE CONNECTIONS is published monthly by Southeastern Electric Cooperative, PO Box 388, 501 S. Broadway Ave., Marion, SD 57043-0388 for its members. Families subscribe to Southeastern Electric Cooperative Connections as part of their electric cooperative membership. Southeastern Electric Cooperative Connections' purpose is to provide reliable, helpful information to electric cooperative members on electric cooperative matters and better rural living. Subscription information: Electric cooperative members devote 50 cents from their monthly electric payments for a subscription. Nonmember subscriptions are available for $12 annually. Periodicals Postage Paid at Marion, SD 57043 and at additional mailing offices.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to: Southeastern Electric Cooperative Connections, 47077 276th St, Lennox, SD 57039; telephone (800) 333-2859; e-mail info@southeastern.coop

OCT. BOARD SUMMARY

The Board of Directors of Southeastern Electric met in Sioux Falls on Thursday, October 22 with all directors present. Also present were CEO Chad Kinsley, Attorney Nadolski, & staff members John Euchner, Erica Fitzhugh, Todd Nelson, & Jon Wunder. Staff member Audri Carlson was absent.

CFO Jon Wunder reviewed his written report, including the preliminary financial report & budget, cost of service study, unclaimed property, bad debt write-off, hiring & staffing & annual enrollment.

VP of Operations Euchner reviewed the operations written report, close calls, safety meetings, projects, large loads, substation work, Federated Loss Control, OCR cleanup & pole inspections.

VP of Technology Todd Nelson reviewed his written report, load control receiver update, technology roadmap update & cybersecurity.

CEO Kinsley reviewed Carlson's written report, outage management, phone software upgrade, accounts receivable, disconnects, past due accounts & call volume.

Communications Manager Erica Fitzhugh reviewed member communications, advertising, Co-ops in the Classroom, Scholar of the Week, internal communications, & social media.

CEO Kinsley reviewed his report & commented on the following topics: Basin financials, East River financials, EPA Repeal of 2024 Power Plant Rules, PowerOn Midwest, Union County shared services, large load growth, Basin rate cases, legislative updates & East River's 2027 budget.

Attorney Nadolski generally discussed co-op related legal matters.

THE BOARD ACTED ON THE FOLLOWING MOTIONS:

- A motion was duly made & seconded to approve Director Terveen to attend virtually. Motion carried.
- A motion was made & seconded to authorize CEO Kinsley to execute the merger communications proposal. Motion carried.
- A motion was made & seconded to authorize CEO Kinsley to execute the Shared Services Agreement. Motion carried.
- A motion was made & seconded to approve the proposed retail rate changes for all market retail rates to become effective on January 1, 2027. Motion carried.
- A motion was made & seconded to approve the write-off and authorize management to apply each member's outstanding capital credits to their past due balances. Motion carried.
- A motion was made & seconded to approve the following amended policies: 107 Director Compensation and Benefits, 114 Director Duties & Standards of Conduct, 306 Sick Leave & 309 Leaves of Absence with Pay. Motion carried.
- A motion was duly made to enter executive session. Motion carried. A motion was duly made to exit executive session. Motion carried.
- A motion was duly made to authorize Kost to attend the East River Director Orientation in Madison, SD. Motion carried.
- A motion was duly made to authorize Wollmann & Ostraat to attend the NRECA Board Leadership workshop on behalf of the Co-op. Motion carried.
- A motion was duly made to donate to authorize all directors to attend both legislative forums on behalf of the Cooperative. Motion carried.
- A motion was duly made to select Terveen & Kost as the SDREA Annual Meeting voting delegate and alternate, respectively, & authorize all directors to attend on behalf of the Co-op. Motion carried.
- A motion was duly made to select Wollmann and Heeren to attend the NRECA Directors' Conference. Motion carried.
- A motion was duly made & seconded to select Wollmann & Heeren as the delegate & alternate, respectively, to attend the NRECA PowerXchange. Motion carried.

The next regular monthly meeting will be held Thur., Nov. 19 at the Sioux Falls office.

CHRISTMAS GIFT IDEAS FOR WINTER STORM READINESS

Some of the best Christmas gifts aren't the ones that get used right away.

A flashlight, emergency radio or box of freeze-dried meals may not be the most exciting thing under the tree, but when a South Dakota winter storm rolls in, practical gifts can quickly become some of the most valuable items in the house.

Winter weather can bring heavy snow, bitter cold, drifting roads and extended power outages. In rural areas, where homes may be miles from the nearest town, it can take longer for roads to reopen or help to arrive. This Christmas, consider giving something that can help friends and family stay safe, warm and prepared.

A portable radio with a weather band is a good place to start. Battery-powered or hand-crank models can provide weather alerts and emergency information even if the power is out or cellular service becomes unreliable. Many also include flashlights, USB charging ports and other emergency features. For someone who lives in a rural area or travels frequently during the winter, a weather radio can provide another way to stay informed when conditions change quickly.

Food is another important part of storm preparedness. Freeze-dried meals have a long shelf life and are easy to store, making them useful for emergency kits. Pair several meals with bottled water, shelf-stable snacks or an insulated thermos for a practical preparedness package. Canned goods, granola bars, dried fruit and other foods that do not require refrigeration can also help a household get through a period when roads are closed or travel is discouraged.

For the car, consider putting together a winter emergency kit. Useful items include a warm blanket, gloves, flashlight, jumper cables, ice scraper, first-aid supplies and nonperishable food. A compact shovel and traction aids can also come in handy if a vehicle becomes stuck in snow. Road flares or reflective warning triangles can help make a stranded vehicle more visible.

This is especially important in South Dakota and Minnesota, where a short drive can quickly turn into a long wait if snow begins to blow across rural highways. Even experienced winter drivers can find themselves dealing with whiteout conditions, stalled traffic or roads that close with little warning.



A portable power bank can help keep a cellphone charged during an outage, allowing someone to receive alerts, check road conditions or contact family and emergency services. Larger rechargeable battery packs can power multiple small devices, which may be handy in the event of an extended outage.

Warm clothing also makes a practical gift. Wool socks, insulated gloves, hand warmers and heavy blankets can provide extra protection from the cold at home or on the road. An insulated hat, neck gaiter or pair of winter boots can also be useful for anyone who spends time outdoors checking livestock, clearing snow or traveling between buildings.

Battery-powered lanterns and headlamps are another good option. A headlamp allows someone to keep both hands free while finding supplies or moving around a dark home. Lanterns can provide area lighting for a room without relying on candles. Consider including extra batteries – just in case.

Other practical ideas include a new carbon monoxide detector, fire extinguisher, first-aid kit or basic tool kit. As a gift for parents, grandparents and new homeowners, consider replacing their smoke and carbon monoxide alarms.

While it's difficult to prepare for every possible emergency, having supplies on hand can help you and your loved ones stay comfortable, informed and safe until the storm passes or travel becomes safe again.

"Never drive high loads under low power lines!"



Artwork by Lydell Weaver

Lydell warns readers to never climb near power lines. Thank you for sharing, Lydell! Lydell's parents are Lyndon and Gwen Weaver, members of Dakota Energy Cooperative.

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



Rise & DINE

COLD OATMEAL MUESLI

Ingredients:

½ cup raisins
½ cup old-fashioned oatmeal
1½ cups quick oatmeal
⅓ cup brown sugar
½ tsp. cinnamon
2 cups milk

Method

Mix all ingredients together. Cover and refrigerate overnight. Serve cold. If desired, add walnuts, apples or fresh berries just before serving.

Elaine Rieck
Southeastern Electric

BREAKFAST HOT DISH

Ingredients:

14 slices bread, divided
2 cups milk
½ lb. cubed ham
½ lb. sliced cheese
5 eggs
½ tbsp. mustard
⅓ cup melted butter

Method

Place 7 bread slices on bottom of greased 9x13 pan. Spread cheese and ham over bread slices.
Mix eggs, milk, and mustard, then pour over.

Tear the remaining 7 bread slices into pieces and sprinkle over the mixture. Pour melted butter over the bread pieces.

Bake 1 hour at 350°F.

Rowena Wipf
Northern Electric

OVERNIGHT COFFEE CAKE

Ingredients:

½ cup white sugar
½ cup brown sugar
¾ cup butter
1 cup buttermilk
2 eggs, beaten
2 cups flour
½ tsp. salt
½ tsp. baking soda
1 tsp. baking powder

Topping:
½ cup brown sugar
1 tsp. cinnamon
½ tsp. nutmeg (optional)
Nuts, as desired

Method

Cream together the butter, white sugar and brown sugar. Add the beaten eggs. In a separate bowl, combine the flour, salt, baking soda and baking powder. Add the dry ingredients to the butter mixture alternately with the buttermilk.

Spread the batter in a 9x13-inch baking pan. Combine the topping ingredients and sprinkle over the batter. Cover and refrigerate overnight.

In the morning, bake at 350°F for 35 minutes or until done.

Rowena Wipf
Northern Electric

RECIPE CORRECTION: SWEDISH PANCAKES

Ingredients:

1½ cups flour
3 tbsp. sugar
½ tsp. salt
3 eggs
2 cups milk
2 tbsp. melted butter

Lois J. Larson
Clay-Union Electric

Method

Sift together the flour, sugar and salt. In a separate bowl, beat the eggs until thick and softly mounded. Add the milk and melted butter to the eggs, then add the flour mixture.

Lightly grease a griddle with butter. Spoon 1 tablespoon of batter onto the griddle for each pancake. Cook over medium heat until lightly browned on both sides.

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 2027. All entries must include your name, mailing address, phone number and cooperative name.

SUPPORTING LOCAL SCHOOLS

SEC once again distributed pallets of bottled water to local schools. Some schools use the bottles for fundraising by selling the water at school events. Each water bottle label includes a safety message about how to stay safe around electrical equipment. SEC hopes that every bottle will not only provide a fundraising opportunity for local schools but also promote electrical safety awareness among students and within the surrounding communities. Photo (right): Students in Freeman help unload the donated bottles. Photo (below): SEC employees deliver the donation to Centerville High School.









HOLIDAY COOKING

Save Energy in the Kitchen

During the holiday season, you may spend more time cooking, baking and prepping for family and friends. A few small changes can help you save energy, lower utility costs and keep your kitchen running efficiently Saving energy in the kitchen starts with using the right appliance for the job, keeping equipment in good condition and making simple changes to everyday cooking habits.

Cooking and prep

• Use small appliances when possible. Choose an air fryer, microwave, slow cooker or toaster oven for small meals or side dishes. They often use less energy than a full-size oven.
• Keep the stovetop clean. Clean burners and surfaces help heat transfer evenly.
• Match the pan to the burner. Using a small pan on a large burner wastes heat. Choose a burner that closely matches the size of the pan.
• Cover pots and pans. Lids keep heat inside, help water boil faster and allow food to cook evenly at lower settings.
• Keep the oven door closed. Use the oven light instead of opening the door to check on food. Opening the door lets heat escape and makes the oven work harder.
• Thaw frozen foods ahead of time. Move frozen foods to the refrigerator in advance to avoid microwave defrosting.
• Cook more at once. Bake multiple dishes together when possible and make larger portions to freeze for later.
• Cut food into small pieces. Small pieces of vegetables and meat cook faster and more evenly than large ones.
• Skip the self-cleaning cycle. Use it sparingly, since it requires very high heat and uses extra energy.
• Turn down the thermostat while cooking. Cooking and baking can warm your home quickly, especially when guests are gathered.

Refrigeration

• Let leftovers cool slightly. Allow hot foods to cool before refrigerating (but do not leave them out too long). This keeps your refrigerator from working harder to cool warm food.
• Check the door seal. Make sure the refrigerator door closes tightly. Test the seal by closing the door on a dollar bill. If it slides out easily, the gasket may need to be replaced.
• Prevent frost buildup. Too much frost can make the freezer work harder to maintain the right temperature.
• Keep it full, but not crowded. Refrigerators work best when cold air can circulate.

Dishwashing

• Run full loads. Wait until the dishwasher is full before running it to make the most of each cycle.
• Skip heated dry. Use the air-dry or eco-mode setting to dry dishes while reducing energy use.

Small changes in how you cook, cool and clean up can help save energy, no matter the season.



CHRISTMAS ON CALL

Sometimes The Holidays Have to Wait

The 2016 Christmas Storm Europa left 23,000 members without power and hundreds of broken poles across the state. *Photo Submitted by East River Electric Power Cooperative*

Frank Turner
frank.turner@sdrea.coop

On Christmas evening in 2016, West Central Electric Cooperative Foreman Dustin Vollmer, then a lineman, headed north from Midland to investigate outages as a blizzard swept across western South Dakota. They made it about 12 miles.

"You couldn't even see the reflectors on the side of the road," Vollmer recalled. "We ended up pulling over and sat there till about 4 in the morning."

When conditions improved enough to turn around, the trucks had made their own snow drifts, and Vollmer's truck overheated twice on the trip back to Midland. More work awaited.

The 2016 Winter Storm Europa brought blizzard conditions, freezing rain and powerful winds across South Dakota on Christmas Day, damaging hundreds of utility poles. According to the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association, more than 23,000 members of at least 20 electric cooperatives statewide were without power by Christmas evening. Restoration work would stretch into the new year.

Vollmer joined West Central Electric in 1999 after graduating from line school at Mitchell Technical College. Even in high school, he understood that linemen sometimes worked holidays. "I realized it could be any time, just whenever the lights go out," Vollmer said.

When Winter Storm Europa caused widespread outages across West Central Electric's service territory, neighboring cooperatives sent crews and equipment to help restore power. Vollmer remembers working alongside linemen from nearby West River Electric Association, one of several cooperatives that came to their aid. Nine years later, Vollmer was able to return the favor when a storm struck Black Hills Electric's service territory in the days leading up to Christmas.



Dustin Vollmer and other West Central Linemen get the power back on during the holidays. *Photo Submitted by West Central Electric Cooperative*

A Return To The Black Hills

On Dec. 18, 2025, winds exceeding 100 mph swept across western South Dakota, uprooting trees, breaking utility poles and leaving more than 11,000 Black Hills Electric Cooperative meters without power. More than 96% of the co-op's electrical system was affected, making it the largest outage event in Black Hills Electric's history.

With damage spread throughout its service territory, Black Hills Electric requested assistance from neighboring cooperatives. Crews and equipment arrived from across western South Dakota, including Vollmer's crew from West Central Electric.

Vollmer was back to work over the Christmas holiday, honoring the cooperative spirit. He said getting around was easier than it had been during the 2016 blizzard, but widespread tree damage made restoration difficult in the Black Hills' rugged terrain. Crews worked to clear fallen trees, replace poles and repair damaged lines throughout the service territory.

Altogether, 55 additional linemen from six neighboring cooperatives and a local contractor assisted Black Hills Electric. Crews worked 12- to 16-hour shifts, prepared to remain through Christmas if the power wasn't restored in time.

"All the outside crews said they weren't leaving," recalled Bill Brisk, manager of operations at Black Hills Electric. "They stayed to help us finish."

By Christmas Eve, nearly all of Black Hills Electric's members had power again, allowing the visiting crews to head home. Black Hills Electric employees continued limited restoration work through Christmas, while Vollmer made it home to Midland late Christmas Eve.

The Families Behind The Work

Vollmer was fortunate to spend much of Christmas with his family following both storms, but not every lineman made it home for the holidays. During the 2016 storm, some employees were called back from trips while others spent days repairing power lines.

Ken Schlimgen, former general manager of Central Electric Cooperative, also acknowledged the sacrifices made by employees' families.

"The individuals who receive the least amount of credit for their role are the spouses and family members," Schlimgen wrote in his 2017 Cooperative Connections column following the Europa storm.

When the first call comes, linemen rarely know whether they'll find a small repair or widespread damage. Families have to plan around that uncertainty. Vollmer's family understands the demands.

"They know what it is," Vollmer said. "People out of power, you gotta go."

Vollmer said West Central Electric supports employees when personal or medical circumstances arise, an understanding that works both ways. When a major storm hits, employees know their coworkers and members are depending on them.

Even cooperative members often return that commitment. Vollmer said members offer assistance when a truck gets stuck or crews need help reaching damaged equipment.

"We got real good consumers," he said. "You could usually find somebody. They'll drop everything and come help."

That willingness to help extends across cooperative service territories, where crews regularly assist neighboring cooperatives during major outages. For Vollmer, it's an expectation shared by the people who have worked alongside him throughout his career.

"When stuff gets bad, you're expected to come help," Vollmer said. "You're part of the team."



The 2025 Black Hills Christmas Storm not only left 11,000 members without power, but also uprooted trees in the area, damaging lines as they fell.
Photo Submitted by Black Hills Electric Cooperative



McCook Central senior Parker Randall accepts his scholarship check from Communications and Public Relations Manager Erica Fitzhugh.

PARKER RANDALL

Selected as Touchstone Energy Scholar of the Week

Southeastern Electric Cooperative and McCook Central High School are pleased to announce Parker Randall as the Touchstone Energy® Scholar of the Week winner for the week of October 4 - 10, 2026. The scholar of the week program is a partnership between Dakota News Now Television, Southeastern Electric Cooperative, and other local Touchstone Energy Cooperatives that honor accomplished high school students. As a Scholar of the Week, Parker was featured in a weekly segment on Dakota News Now and received a $250 scholarship from Southeastern Electric Cooperative.

Parker participates in several extracurricular activities, including golf, baseball, FFA, National Honor Society, wrestling (captain), football (captain), Student Council (president), Tri-M Music association (president), marching band, Augustana Honor Band, and the Big East Honor Band. One of his proudest achievements was being selected for the National All Star Marching Band where he will perform as a percussionist in Florida in January.

"Thank you for the scholarship!" said Randall. "It will help me next fall when I pursue a degree in business economics from South Dakota State University."

Touchstone Energy Cooperatives are local, active members of their communities, dedicated to building our communities and improving our way of life. Since the Scholar of the Week program began, more than $100,000 in scholarships has been awarded to more than 750 students. The program is a great partnership between local Touchstone Energy Cooperatives and their members and truly captures the commitment that electric cooperatives have to the communities they serve.

Nominations for the weekly awards are submitted by area school principals and faculty, whose selections were based on excellence in the classroom and service in the community.

How will you MAKE YOUR MARK?



YOUTH TOUR NRECA

A week of building memories, skills, leadership and friendships that will last a lifetime!

Experience the (free) trip of a lifetime with Youth Tour!

- Explore Washington, D.C. through historic monuments, world-class museums and visits with elected officials. **2027 dates: June 17- 23. Applications due Dec. 6.**
- Build leadership skills and discover how you can make your mark on the future.
- Connect with juniors and seniors from across the country and form friendships that last a lifetime, all sponsored by Southeastern Electric Cooperative.
- Learn more at www.southeasternelectric.com

Scan to apply

Southeastern Electric Cooperative, Inc.

A Touchstone Energy Cooperative

YT



The Foster Care Shop offers free toys and essentials to local foster families in Black Hawk, S.D.
Photo courtesy of Light of Mine Ranch

FOSTER CARE
THE COMMUNITY'S KIDS

Light of Mine Ranch Helps Black Hills Foster Families Find the Supplies and Support They Need

Frank Turner
frank.turner@sdrea.coop

When children visiting the Foster Care Shop in Black Hawk, S.D., ask Jordan Combs how much something costs, he gets to give them good news. Everything is free.

Combs said children's eyes light up when they hear the news. They tell their foster parents, then make another trip around the shop.

"I'm the yes guy," Combs said. "If you ask me if you can have it, I'm going to say yes."

Combs and his wife, Mallory, founded Light of Mine Ranch, which provides clothing, baby equipment and household supplies at no cost to foster families.

The inspiration for the Foster Care Shop began when Jordan and Mallory Combs started fostering in 2016.

The couple had been considering international adoption when they attended a community dinner. Local agencies described the need for foster parents, and that's the moment they decided to foster.

"We just felt like God put it on our heart," Combs said.

Since then, the couple has provided long-term foster care for 10 children. When including emergency placements and short stays, Combs estimates that number exceeds 40. Today, the couple has five children, including two daughters they adopted.

As they cared for children and got to know other foster parents, they saw how stretched families could become. Everyday chores like grocery shopping became more complicated. Eating out became more expensive, and they wanted to help ease those burdens.

In 2020, the couple began building a nonprofit. They envisioned homes for foster families on a ranch, giving parents the space and support to focus on children. When housing prices did



Jordan and Mallory Combs have five children, including two they adopted.
Photo courtesy of Light of Mine Ranch

not cooperate with their vision, they put their dream on hold and began helping families on a smaller scale.

"We started looking at what impact can we make now," Combs said.

Light of Mine Ranch helped pay sports fees, purchase equipment and provide bicycles and bunk beds. As community members learned about the work, donations began filling the Combs family's garage.

At the same time, Combs noticed a recurring problem. Someone would offer a crib on Facebook when no family needed one. A few weeks later, a foster family would ask for a crib.

The couple decided to create a shop where donated supplies could be stored until a family needed them.

The Combs family opened the Foster Care Shop in June 2025, giving families a central place to find everything from strollers and shoes to meals and school supplies.

"We're trying to be your first stop to get all the supplies that you need," Combs said.

The shop also serves kinship families, including grandparents, aunts and uncles caring for relatives' children. Relatives often have little time to prepare, Combs said. A grandparent whose own children are grown may suddenly need a crib, a car seat and clothing for an infant.

The organization also assists some families referred by the South Dakota Department of Social Services.

Combs remembers one family relieved to avoid spending an afternoon driving between stores to gather everything they needed.

"They were happy that they didn't have to spend the whole afternoon shopping around town," Combs said.

Combs recalled another girl who had not started school by mid-October because of her family's circumstances.

"She was able to come here and get all her school supplies to get started for school," Combs said.

Since its grand opening, community donations have filled the shop faster than Combs expected. The same moment toys run low after an event, a donor always seems to arrive with boxes of puzzles, toys and dollhouses. When a family picks up a crib, Combs said another donation seems to take its place.

While the shop helps foster families with everyday expenses, the couple is still working toward a place for families and children to stay.

"It'd be a six-bedroom home," Combs said. The organization has identified a prospective site south of Rapid City, but Combs said there is no construction timeline.

The home would provide temporary accommodations for children awaiting placement. Combs said it could also provide space for foster families to rest and take a break. Having several bedrooms would help accommodate sibling groups and children of different ages.

Whether a child stays with a foster family for a weekend or a year, Combs believes the time spent together matters.

"You can make it meaningful to them for that time," he said.

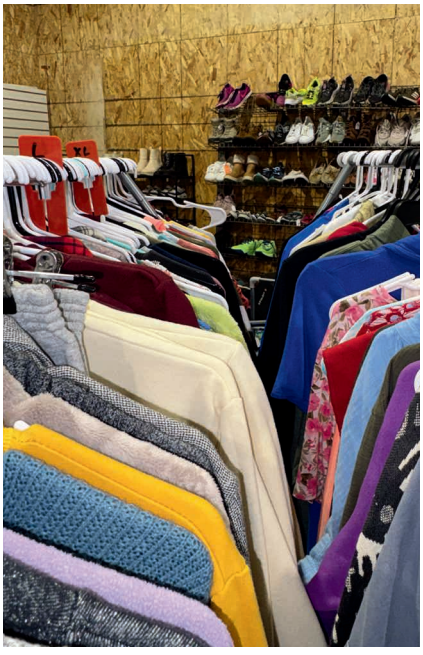
Private donations fund the organization's work and local volunteerism keeps it running, Combs said. They are always looking for more volunteers to sort donations and organize supplies.

Combs hopes the community will also rally together to help make foster families feel less alone. Taking children into a home is a family's decision, he said, but helping care for them is something the wider community can share.

"These are the community's kids," Combs said.



The Foster Care Shop has everything a foster family might need - everything from toys and strollers to racks of clothes. *Photos courtesy of Light of Mine Ranch*



Help or get involved

Families seeking assistance and people interested in helping can visit lightofmineranch.com for information. Combs recommends checking current hours and donation needs before bringing items to the shop.

Levelized Billing

Electric bills can rise and fall throughout the year, especially during the hottest summer months and coldest winter days when energy use often increases. Levelized Billing from your Cooperative helps take the guesswork out of your monthly electric bill by spreading your electricity costs into more predictable payments throughout the year.

Instead of experiencing the full impact of seasonal highs and lows, you'll pay a monthly amount based on your past electricity usage, helping you plan ahead and manage your household budget with greater confidence.

Enjoy More Predictable Monthly Electric Bills!

How Does Levelized Billing Work?

Your monthly Levelized Billing amount is calculated using your previous 12 months of electricity usage, divided across 12 monthly payments, with adjustments for anticipated changes in energy use and electric rates and any previous over or underpayments accounted for.

To help keep payments aligned with your actual electricity costs, the Cooperative reviews Levelized Billing amounts in January, April, July and October. Following each review, your monthly payment may increase, decrease or stay the same. Any change will be communicated in the message center on your billing statement.

While Levelized Billing can make monthly expenses more manageable, it does not reduce the amount of electricity you use or the overall cost of your energy. It simply helps spread those costs more evenly over time.

Who Is Eligible?

Levelized Billing is available to member-consumers who meet the Cooperative's eligibility requirements.

- 12 months of billing history: You must have one full year of usage history before enrolling.
- Satisfactory credit: Eligible member-consumers may enroll at any time during the year.
- Unsatisfactory credit: You may qualify by agreeing to automatic payments withdrawn from your checking account or signing up for recurring credit card payments.

Credit eligibility is determined according to the Cooperative's Security Deposits policy.

A Few Things to Know

To remain on Levelized Billing, your account must stay current. If your account becomes delinquent, you will return to the Cooperative's regular billing method.

You may request removal from the program at any time; however, you will be responsible for paying the full amount due on your account at that time. If you choose to leave the program, a one-year waiting period applies before you may enroll again.

Ready for More Predictable Payments?

Take a step toward easier household budgeting with Levelized Billing from your Cooperative!

Contact Southeastern to learn more, call 1-800-333-2859, sign up on SmartHub, or stop by one of our offices to find out whether Levelized Billing is right for you.

Your energy needs may change with the seasons. Your budget doesn't have to follow every peak and valley.

Find out if Levelized billing is for you by calling 1-800-333-2859.

SAVE MONEY THE SMART WAY

Smart thermostats. Smart lights. Smart appliances. These may just seem like cool tech gadgets, but they're so much more. These devices can help you save energy which in turn saves you money.



RE-ENERGIZING COST SAVINGS

Have questions about energy-saving smart home devices? Contact your local Touchstone Energy® Cooperative or visit **yourcooppower.com** today.

Southeastern Electric Cooperative, Inc.

A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative



NOV. 24-DEC. 26
Christmas at the Capitol
Pierre, SD
christmasatthecapitol.sd.gov

Photo courtesy of Travel South Dakota

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. 20-JAN. 3
Winter Wonderland
5 p.m.-12 a.m.
Falls Park
Sioux Falls, SD
605-275-6060

NOV. 25-JAN. 2
1880 Holiday Express
222 Railroad Ave.
Hill City, SD
605-574-2222

NOV. 27-DEC. 31
Hall of Trees
Sat.-Thurs.: 10 a.m.-5 p.m.
Fri.: 10 a.m.-8 p.m.
Mead Museum
Yankton, SD

NOV. 27-DEC. 27
Christmas Nights of Light
5:30-8:30 p.m.
Storybook Island
1301 Sheridan Lake Rd.
Rapid City, SD
605-342-6357

DEC. 1
Parade of Lights
7 p.m.
Main Street
Mitchell, SD

DEC. 3
City of Yankton Holiday Festival of Lights
4 p.m. Family Activities
6 p.m. Lighted Parade
Yankton, SD
605-665-5234

DEC. 5
Viborg Appreciation Day
11 a.m.-1 p.m.
Viborg Community Center
Viborg, SD

DEC. 5
Christmas in the Valley
2-9 p.m.
Irene, SD

DEC. 5
Holiday Jam with the Hegg Brothers
4 p.m.
Yankton, SD
605-665-5234
CityofYankton.com

DEC. 5-JAN. 6
Garden Glow at McCrory Gardens
5-9 p.m.
Closed Dec. 24-25, Jan. 1
Brookings, SD
605-688-6707

DEC. 5
KJAM Parade of Lights
5:30 p.m.
Madison, SD
AmazingMadison.com

DEC. 6
Christmas on the Prairie Concert
St. Anthony's Catholic Church
Hoven, SD
605-948-2451

DEC. 10-13
Christmas at the Cathedral
Thurs. & Fri.: 7:30 p.m.
Sat.: 1 p.m., 7:30 p.m.
Sun. 2 p.m., 7:30 p.m.
Cathedral of St. Joseph
Sioux Falls, SD
Tickets: 605-988-3765

DEC. 12
Frontier Christmas
10 a.m.-2 p.m.
Fort Sisseton State Park
Lake City, SD
605-448-5474

DEC. 12
American Legion Chili Cookoff
11 a.m.
The Alliance; 1600 W. Russell St.
Sioux Falls, SD

DEC. 13
Christmas on Main
5-7 p.m.
Alexandria, SD

DEC. 20
Bethlehem in Brule County
5 p.m.
Ag Building
Pukwana, SD
605-730-0553

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.