

# COOPERATIVE CONNECTIONS



Katie Grott, field station manager at SDSU's Cottonwood research facility near Philip, stays busy overseeing several ongoing projects designed to deliver practical and profitable solutions for producers.

## Blazing new trails

**Ag research abounds at Cottonwood**  
Pages 8-9

**Line work courses through their veins**  
Pages 12-13

# HIGHLIGHTS FROM 2021



**Dick Johnson**  
dick.johnson@  
westriver.coop

I had promised that I would update you on our 2021 results. Needless to say, it was an extremely busy year for all of our team members, not to mention some difficult decisions for our board to make. Supply constraints made it even more difficult to manage. Given all that, I am proud of how our group worked AND stayed safe; we had a great year. Here are some highlights I will bullet below:

- We worked the entire year safely with one reportable accident that ended with six lost days: still great for the industry. We strive to get that to zero, but accidents happen given the hazardous occupation we are in.
- We met all of our targets needed internally and for our lenders.
- For the fourth year, there was no rate increase.
- Our margins ended strong at \$3.685 million compared to \$2.614 million in 2020. This increase was due to many factors. However, we need to maintain strong margins to help fund our growth and keep our equity at an acceptable level.
- We provided \$2.389 million in bill credits from October – December. This was due to our revenue deferral from past years, forgiveness of our SBA PPP loan, and decreased expenses. The power of cooperative membership!
- We gave back \$2.1 million in capital credits in October. This was our largest retirement ever. Again, the power of cooperative membership.
- We added 670 new billed services – a new record for the co-op. The previous one-year record was in 2005 with 629 new services. This represents a 3.5 percent increase in new members from 2020.
- Our sales ended the year at 307 million kWh which was 3.7 percent over 2020. The two previous years had seen decreases in kWh sales.
- We staked over 1,000 new services in 2021 – another record.
- We added 29 miles of underground line, retired five miles of underground, added 42.8 miles of overhead and retired 81 miles of overhead. 342501
- Equity in your electric cooperative grew from 33.8 percent to 34.2 percent.
- Our American Consumer Satisfaction Index (ACSI) score grew one point from 86 to 87.
- Our plant (pole, wires etc) grew \$8.8 million or 6.1 percent.
- Payroll of \$5.3 million went back into our communities thanks to your membership.
- The average member was off 56.6 minutes this year. Much of that was due to the rolling blackout we endured in February 2021. The average in 2020 was 28.6 minutes. Our year average is 49.2 minutes. Each member had electricity 99.99 percent of the time. However, like I always say, that .01 percent probably is still not happy they were off!
- Our urban residential members used 982 kWh per month compared to 977 kWh in 2020. Our rural members used 1,261 kWh per month compared to 1,266 kWh in 2020. Average bills saw decreases due to the bill credit offered this fall.
- Our power costs per kWh went down 2 percent in 2021. This would equate to just under \$400,000 in savings. Thanks to Rushmore and Basin for their diligence in keeping our power costs steady.
- We completed our Wall substation upgrade among many other line rebuilds and new construction activities.

On balance, this was a very successful year for your cooperative and we are hopeful that 2022 will be the same. However, given current national and global concerns, one never knows. We have to stay optimistic.

With spring rolling around, everyone is busy at home with new projects, calving and field work. Please work SAFELY; as I always say, I want you back next month to read this column!

## COOPERATIVE CONNECTIONS

### WEST RIVER ELECTRIC

(USPS No. 675-840)

#### Our Mission:

We are safety conscious, community oriented, and the trusted energy expert for our member owners.

#### Our Vision:

We will achieve an ACSI score of 90 by 2024.

#### Our Values:

1. Safety
2. Accountability
3. Integrity
4. Innovation
5. Commitment to Community

This institution is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

**Board President:** Andy Moon

#### Board of Directors

Stan Anders – Vice President  
 Jamie Lewis – Secretary  
 Larry Eisenbraun – Treasurer  
 Jerry Hammerquist  
 Howard Knuppe  
 Marcia Arneson  
 Chuck Sloan  
 Sue Peters

#### CEO and General Manager:

Dick Johnson –  
[dick.johnson@westriver.coop](mailto:dick.johnson@westriver.coop)

#### Editor

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WEST RIVER ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE CONNECTIONS is the monthly publication for the members of West River Electric Association. Members subscribe to Cooperative Connections as part of their electric cooperative membership for \$6 a year. West River Electric Cooperative Connections purpose is to provide reliable, helpful information to electric cooperative members on matters pertaining to rural electrification and better living. Nonmember subscriptions are available for \$12 per year. Periodicals Postage paid at Wall, S.D., and at additional mailing offices. Postmaster: Send address changes to West River Electric Cooperative Connections, PO Box 412, Wall, SD 57790-0412.

Other correspondence to: West River Electric Cooperative Connections, 3250 E Hwy 44, Rapid City, SD 57703; telephone (605)393-1500, Exts. 6519, 6517, 6531 or 6522; fax (605)393-0275; e-mail [robert.raker@westriver.coop](mailto:robert.raker@westriver.coop).



## DID YOU CHANGE YOUR PHONE NUMBER OR EMAIL?

It is important to keep your information updated with West River Electric. We would like to keep you updated on planned outages or other important information that may affect your service. Contact us at 279-2135 or 393-1500 to make changes to your information.

## LOCATE YOUR ACCOUNT NUMBER

If you locate your account number anywhere in this issue of West River Electric's *Cooperative Connections*, you will be a winner. There will be five account numbers placed randomly throughout the publication. If you spot your account number and notify our office before the 10th of the next month, you will receive a \$10 credit on your next bill.

## WEST RIVER ELECTRIC OFFICE HOURS

### RAPID CITY OFFICE

3250 E Hwy 44, Rapid City, SD  
 Monday-Friday 7 a.m. to 5 p.m.  
 605-393-1500

### WALL OFFICE

1200 W 4th Ave, Wall, SD  
 Monday-Friday 7 a.m. to 5 p.m.  
 605-279-2135

A night depository is available at both offices for your convenience. Office hours are subject to change in response to COVID-19. 182900

## SERVICE AND BILLING QUESTIONS?

Contact 605-279-2135 or 605-393-1500 during office hours. E-mail us at [info@westriver.coop](mailto:info@westriver.coop) for questions on your account.

## OUTAGE OR EMERGENCY?

Contact 605-279-2135 or 605-393-1500 in the event of an outage or other emergency. Our calls are answered 24/7.

# 10 helpful tips for spring energy savings

Every season of the year provides many unique energy-saving opportunities for you and your family.

Here are some ideas particularly well suited for you to apply this spring.

- 1. Clear the air:** Open windows to allow fresh air to circulate throughout your home.
- 2. Cook outside:** Enjoy the sunshine by using your grill or smoker to add festive flavors to meals.
- 3. Search and seal:** Cracks and spaces let conditioned air slip outdoors. Caulk and weatherstrip to seal leaks.
- 4. Natural light:** Open blinds and curtains and turn off the lights to save energy and money.
- 5. Be fan friendly:** Use ceiling fans to circulate air and keep cool.
- 6. Atmospheric adjustment:** Remember to adjust your thermostat settings for the warmer months ahead.
- 7. Tune up:** Schedule an appointment with a qualified heating, ventilating and air conditioning technician to identify any potential problems with your system.
- 8. Peak savings:** Plan household chores that require electricity during off-peak hours (when energy demand is low).
- 9. Take charge:** Consider disconnecting electrical devices you don't use regularly until you need them. Plugged-in devices use energy even when not in use.
- 10. Move outdoors:** Time spent outdoors offers opportunities to turn off lights, TVs, computers and appliances. You'll be more active, have more fun and save more money.



## DON'T TOY WITH PERSONAL SAFETY



When playing outdoors, keep a safe distance from power lines, substations and other equipment your electric co-op uses to send electricity to your home.

Flying remote-controlled toys and drones is a great way to have fun, but accidentally making contact with a power line or other electrical equipment can be dangerous and, in some cases, even deadly.

- Never fly kites or drones near power lines.
- Stay away from power lines, meters, transformers and electrical boxes.
- Never climb trees near power lines.
- If you get something stuck in a power line, call your electric co-op.



## Fire Prevention

### Jonie Smith

Jonie Smith sends out an important safety message for campers to extinguish fires before leaving the area. Jonie is the daughter of Myles and Amber Smith of Castlewood. They are members of H-D Electric Cooperative.

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

# LIP-SMACKING BEVERAGES

## BLUEBERRY BANANA SMOOTHIE

**Ingredients:**  
 1 cup spinach  
 1/2 cup water  
 2 tbsp. apple cider vinegar  
 1 tbsp. almond butter  
 1/2 cup bananas, frozen  
 1/2 cup blueberries, frozen  
 1 tbsp. chia seeds  
 1/4 tsp. ground cinnamon  
 1/4 tsp. minced ginger  
 1/2 cup berry yogurt  
 fresh blueberries, for garnish (optional)  
 Ground black pepper to taste

### METHOD

In blender, blend spinach, water, apple cider vinegar, almond butter, frozen bananas, frozen blueberries, chia seeds, cinnamon, ginger and yogurt until smooth. Pour into two glasses and garnish with fresh blueberries, if desired.

[culinary.net](http://culinary.net)

## FRENCH ICED COFFEE

**Ingredients:**  
 3 cups strong coffee  
 2 cups sugar  
 1 pint cream or half & half  
 1 qt. milk or almond milk  
 2 tsp. (vanilla) flavoring (other flavorings also work)

### METHOD

Dissolve sugar in hot coffee. Cool. Add other ingredients. Pour into containers (I use the tall 2 c. Tupperware for individual drinks, but also use quarts.) Freeze. Take out and let thaw.

**Ruth Schilberg, Viborg**

## SWAMP WATER

**Ingredients:**  
 1 small package lime gelatin  
 1 cup hot water  
 1 (12-oz.) can frozen unsweetened pineapple juice concentrate  
 2 liters carbonated water

### METHOD

Mix lime gelatin with hot water to dissolve. Add frozen concentrate and carbonated water. Chill. Makes 10 servings.

**Lily Gums, Clear Lake**

## FRUIT SLUSH

**Ingredients:**  
 4 cups sugar (granulated)  
 6 cups water  
 1 46 oz. can pineapple juice  
 2 12 oz. cans frozen orange juice  
 1 12 oz. can frozen lemonade (pink or yellow)  
 2 small bananas, mashed very fine (or other fruit)

### METHOD

Mix and bring to a boil the sugar and water. When mixture is cool, add juices and fruit. Put in 5-quart pail and freeze. When frozen, use 2-3 scoops in a glass with 7-Up or ginger ale. Great drink for spring or summer.

**Alana Neville, Milesville**

## STRAWBERRY SMOOTHIE

**Ingredients:**  
 2 cup fresh strawberries, stemmed & halved  
 1 cup plain yogurt  
 1/2 cup ice cubes or chips  
 1/2 tsp. ground cardamom  
 1/4 tsp. ginger

### METHOD

In a blender, combine all ingredients. Blend on high speed until smoothie texture. Makes 2-12 oz. glasses.

**Jane Ham, Rapid City**

**Please send your favorite casserole 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.**



to play the watchdog role and monitor what is happening in Pierre during the session and in the off-season as well.

So, we monitor issues and like actual watchdogs, our response to them will vary. For some issues, just seeing that the cooperative is watching and the threat of sounding the alarm to our owners is enough – while other issues might cause your co-op to actively get involved to try and stave off the problem. Finally, just like a watchdog, your co-op stays in our area, we do not go into issues that do not impact the co-op business model and our ability to serve reliable and affordable electricity to the communities we serve.

We also know that we need to keep our owners informed of what we are watching. Therefore, we dedicated this magazine space to lightly discuss some things political, the co-op business model, the communities we serve and our ability to serve reliable and affordable electricity. Fortunately, this year we did not have to get into the political aspects because it looks like we made it out of the session with no scathing political storms.

The state constitution requires the annual session to start on the second Tuesday of January and lawmakers are allowed to set the schedule so long as it does not last at most 40 days. Therefore, by the time that you are reading this the legislative session is winding down and should wrap up on Thursday, March 10. During this time, your co-op and other co-ops in the state spent time watching closely what was happening in Pierre. That oversight allows us



**Robert Raker**  
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westriver.coop

What is a watchdog? In the context of this section of *Cooperative Connections*, a watchdog is your cooperative keeping an eye on public policy/legislation out of our

community concern. A watchdog warns the owners of potential risks. Many think storms are our biggest threat, and although storms can have

an atrocious impact, we know how to handle those threats. Line crews maintain their equipment and stand ready 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. However, storm threats do not eclipse the detrimental impacts bad legislation can have on our owners' electric bills. 10200

This issue with legislation is often the uncertainty that surrounds it because we do not have meteorologist to let us know when it is coming or how bad it is going to be. With politics, there is not much that is off the table of possibility. So, your cooperative is forced

*Continued from previous page*

to report back that we can rest easy, knowing there was no imminent threat to you, the cooperative's owners. That does not mean we are free and clear. Like I said earlier we still need to keep our ears and eyes open during the off-season. In other words, we do not rest on our laurels. 13171

Finally, I want to touch on why just the threat of sounding the alarm to our owners is often enough to guard against bad legislation. It is our owners that hold elected officials accountable. South Dakota's electric cooperatives represent 128,819 members in every county in the state with 65,207 miles of line. So, although we are primarily rural, when the cooperatives' watchdogs "sound the alarm," that something is jeopardizing their electricity, our owners will answer the call. Because they own the company being affected. Our member/owners are the type of people that show up and get involved.

We hope and pray that we do not have to call on our owners to help stave off bad legislation. However, just like our linemen, and your real watchdog, we will stay ready by keep the lines of communication open to our owners. Because, as the saying goes, it's better to be a warrior in a garden than a gardener in a war.

## IT'S BACK!

**Come see West  
River Electric at the  
Cammack Ranch  
Supply Open House**

**April 21-22, 2022**



# LINEMAN APPRECIATION DAY APRIL 11TH



# THANK YOU

24/7 - 365 DAYS A YEAR, REGARDLESS OF THE WEATHER CONDITIONS, YOUR COOP'S LINEMAN STAND READY. SO, WHEN YOU FLIP YOUR LIGHT SWITCH ON THINK ABOUT THE LINEMAN THAT MADE SURE IT IS ALWAYS AVAILABLE.



# ROBO RANCHING

Cottonwood Field Station Manager Katie Grott and student Lily McFadden take a break from their work. *Photos by Billy Gibson*

## Cottonwood Field Research Station is abuzz with studies designed to increase producer profitability

**Billy Gibson**

billy.gibson@sdua.coop

There are robo-cops, robo-codes and robo-calls. But robo-cattle ranching?

That futuristic phrase is part of the nomenclature surrounding a beef production movement called “precision ranching,” an offshoot of the “precision agriculture” approach that promotes the use of advanced technology to improve yields and profitability.

This new wave of ag research evokes postmodern images of bovines grazing through the fields wearing high tech gadgets. Turns out, it’s a description not too far off the mark, according to Dr. Jamie Brennan, an assistant professor of research and extension specialist at South Dakota State University.

Based out of the West River Research and Extension Center in Rapid City, Brennan is using SDSU’s Cottonwood Field Station near Philip to study the viability of using high-tech GPS tracking collars to deliver real-time information on steer activity and behavior.

“By monitoring animal movement we can identify changes in behavior that might indicate sickness, for example, which can be sent as an alert to producers,” Brennan said.

He’s deploying the type of advanced accelerator technology commonly associated with Fitbit watches, vehicle trackers, smartphone map apps and other monitoring devices.

“We’re working to develop the capability for producers to easily identify not only where animals are on the landscape but also where they are selecting for grazing and resting locations,” Brennan said. “The work we are doing at the station is designed to determine the potential benefits - and possible shortcomings - of precision ranching technology and to predict the return on investment for the producer.”

Brennan’s project is just one of several intriguing studies currently in play at the Cottonwood Field Station. One of six field research centers in the SDSU Agriculture Experiment Station network, Cottonwood is among the

oldest facilities of its kind in the country. Covering more than 2,600 acres, Cottonwood was established in 1907 and has received regional and national acclaim with impactful results such as developing a new method of determining stocking rates for western regions and devising the Universal Soil Loss Equation now known as RUSLE2.

These scientific forays into precision ranching include virtual fencing (Vence™), Smart Feeder™ systems, mobile app-based mineral consumption monitors, methane emissions measuring devices and soil moisture monitoring.

The exploration into virtual fencing holds plenty of promise in helping producers manage their livestock and landscape more efficiently and effectively, according to Cottonwood Field Station manager Katie Grott.

While it may be hard for an old-school rancher to envision a world without barbed wire, fence posts and cattle guards, moving this technology to market could result in substantial savings for farm families.

Grott explained the technology is a much more sophisticated version of the kind of residential-grade invisible fence



A cow at the Cottonwood Field Research Station waits patiently for a Smart Feeder to be loaded with hay.

designed to keep pets from wandering around the neighborhood streets. Virtual fencing is already being used to contain goat herds and other smaller animals with measurable success.

The latest research testing involves combining an electrical pulse administered through a GPS-enabled collar, combined with an auditory stimulus to keep cattle confined within certain boundaries. A software program allows the rancher to define those boundaries as needed for successful grazing rotation and land management.

“We’re looking at how virtual fencing affects animal behavior, performance and natural resources,” Grott said.

Dr. Krista Ehlert, assistant professor and extension specialist, is also involved in the project and adds, “Virtual fencing turns physical labor into cognitive labor for producers, helping to reduce labor and potentially improve work-life balance for producers.”

Other projects at Cottonwood include work being led by assistant professor Dr. Hector Menendez. The research uses technology developed by the Rapid City firm, C-Lock. C-Lock has a scale that collects daily weight records on animals every time they drink. The data provide

valuable information on stocking rates, forage quality and weather conditions on individual animal performance.

“It’s an exciting time in the area of agricultural research,” Menendez said. “We have secured funds to proceed with a project on interdisciplinary engagement in animal systems and precision livestock water monitoring. And we’re excited about holding producer-oriented workshops, training classes and field days to educate producers on how these advancements can improve their profitability.”

One rancher who keeps a close eye on the latest research results is Eric Jennings, president of the South Dakota Cattleman’s Association.

“There are some interesting new concepts being explored through this facility and others,” Jennings said. “We’re watching to see which of these systems prove to become both practical and affordable for producers to implement in their daily operations. For instance, the idea of virtual fencing has been around for a while, but the research and application of new technology has emerged as a viable option.”

Brennan, Ehlert, Menendez and others who work daily to blaze new pathways

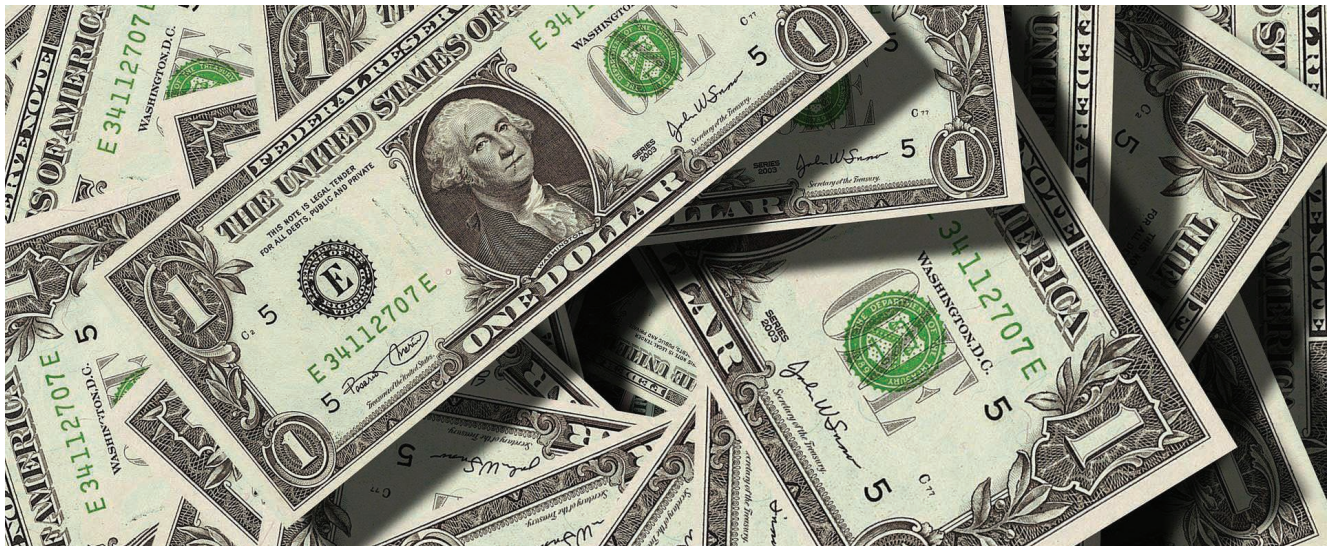
Amount of acres  
researchers have

**2,640**

at their disposal at the  
Cottonwood  
Field Station

for cattle producers take gratification from knowing their labor and application of scientific methods could result in a farm family turning the corner toward profitability and sustaining a generational way of life. Plus, they enjoy drawing students into the process and inspiring the next generation of farmers.

“They receive training in animal science, rangeland ecology, precision technology, modeling, computer programming and boots-on-the-ground ranching,” Menendez said. “One of our aims is to encourage the next generation of professionals that can merge precision technology to maximize rangeland livestock production while maintaining ranching culture.”



# CAPITAL CREDIT NOTICES MAILED IN APRIL

Each member who was on service in 2021 will receive a capital credit allocation notice in the mail during April. West River Electric is a not-for-profit organization owned by you, its members. The revenue that covers day-to-day operating costs of the cooperative comes directly from members paying their monthly electric bills. Member rates must provide:

- A sufficient amount of revenue to cover all operating costs,
- Funds for capital requirements, such as trucks, equipment, and other items not funded by the RUS loans,
- Sufficient income to meet our financial needs set by our lenders,
- Revenue for additional capital items to keep pace with growth.

Revenue over the amount needed to keep the co-op operating is called a “margin.” These margins are allocated in the spring of each year based on the amount of electricity you have used for the previous year (your patronage) and are called “capital credits.” The allocation notice you receive will state your balance before the 2021 allocation. In the middle, it shows the amount that has been credited to your capital credit account for the year 2021 for each service location

you have on service. In the end, it will show your total capital credits allocated to date. These capital credits provide equity for the co-op and you. As a reminder, this allocation notice cannot be cashed, nor can it be used as a credit on your energy account. 48401

On the notice, you will notice line items listed as “COOP,” “G&T,” and “DGC.” The “COOP” line is for the margins derived strictly from West River Electric. The “G&T” line is for the margins that have been allocated by our power supplier, Basin Electric Power Cooperative (BEPC), of which we are a member. The “DGC” line is for margins that BEPC derived from the coal gasification plant that BEPC owns, called Dakota Gasification Company (DGC). “DGC” allocated a margin in 2008 when they had high natural gas prices resulting in a large margin. If you don’t have a dollar amount indicated for this line item, you would not have been on service with us in 2008. Each year, the board of directors review the financial condition of West River Electric to determine if a capital credit “retirement” (payment of capital credits) will be possible for the year. If one is approved, you will find this information in the October edition of *Cooperative Connections*. If you have further questions, please contact our office at 279-2135 or contact us by email at [info@westriver.coop](mailto:info@westriver.coop).



West River Electric Association, Inc.  
 Your Touchstone Energy® Cooperative   
 PO Box 412  
 Wall, SD 57790-0412

**EXAMPLE OF STATEMENT**



Visit us at:

[www.westriver.coop](http://www.westriver.coop)

**Wall Office**  
 1200 W. Fourth Ave.  
 PO Box 412  
 Wall, SD 57790-0412  
 (605) 279-2135

**Rapid City Office**  
 3250 E Hwy 44  
 PO Box 3486  
 Rapid City, SD 57709-3486  
 (605) 393-1500  
**24-Hour Automated Attendant:** (605)791-6555

5 1851  
 C-4 P-4

RE: Capital Credit

Page 1 of 1

**Capital Credit Allocation Notice**

**THIS IS NOT A REQUEST FOR PAYMENT**

Prior Years Balance: COOP 118.46  
 G&T 113.39  
 DGC .00  
 \$ 231.85

You are part owner of West River Electric Association, Inc. and one way your ownership is reflected is through capital credits -- your share of what's left over after the co-op pays all its expenses.

CAPITAL CREDIT STATEMENT Calendar Year 2018			
Location	Patronage	Type	Capital Credits
7779	1,787.31	COOP	54.85
	1,787.31	G&T	128.27
<b>Totals allocated for Jan. 1, 2018 - Dec. 31, 2018:</b>			<b>183.12</b>

Every month, you pay your bill for electric service, and the co-op pays the expenses incurred in providing that service. Any funds left over at the end of the year -- margins -- provide equity for the co-op and you, the member. These funds are allocated each year based on the amount of electricity you have used for the previous year (patronage) and are called "capital credits." Allocated capital credits are considered "unretired" until the Board of Directors "retire" a portion of the capital credits, which normally happens annually in September.

We retain the unretired capital credits for two reasons: (1) as working capital to keep the co-op financially sound and to allow for emergencies, such as storm damage that might require replacement of poles and power lines; and (2) to retire debts and build equity in the co-op.

Be sure to keep the Cooperative informed of your correct address so that you continue to receive your notices and future refunds. If you move, we recommend that you update your current address with us every five years.

Total Unretired Capital Credits: COOP 173.31  
 G&T 241.66  
 DGC .00  
 \$ 414.97

**Unretired capital credits cannot be applied to your past due or current energy bill or payment for any other services provided by your cooperative.**

If you have any questions please feel free to contact us.

West River Electric exists for the purpose of providing its members with electric service on a non-profit basis. All excess margins are allocated back to its members.



**KEEP THIS STATEMENT FOR YOUR RECORDS**

#THANKALINEMAN

# VOLTAGE IN THEIR VEINS

The Miller and Wingen men share a total of 177 years of experience in the electric utility industry. Pictured above are Joel Miller, Rollie Miller, Travis Miller, Corey Miller, Wes Wingen and Dustin Wingen.

## Miller, Wingen utility workers represent a combined 177 years of faithful service

### Tara Miller

taram@centralec.coop

Take a moment to imagine life without electricity. No household appliances, no electric heat, no air conditioning, no internet and no phone. In 1925, only half of homes in the U.S. had electricity. Fast forward to 2022, and electricity is a basic necessity.

April is Lineworker Appreciation Month – a time to celebrate and honor the brave men and women who often work in hazardous conditions to power our world.

The Miller family, originally from Canova, has 177 years of electric industry experience, and most of them started their careers as lineworkers.

### WHERE IT ALL STARTED

Before attending school to become a lineworker, Joel Miller, better known as “Joe” or “Smokey” to some, graduated from Canova High School and began working at Overhead Door Company

in Sioux Falls. While he didn’t mind the work, he knew it wasn’t what he wanted to do for the rest of his life. Joe then heard about an opportunity to attend school and become a lineworker.

“I knew Ron Callies. He was an instructor,” Joe said. “He told us to look at the program, so Robert Zens and I checked it out and thought we would give it a try.”

Joe graduated from what is now known as Mitchell Technical College (MTC) in 1978 and began the family’s legacy of life on the line when he joined East River Electric in Madison. He started on the construction crew and later worked in maintenance. His friend Robert Zens also worked at East River Electric, but passed away in a motorcycle accident in 1980.

Joe worked at East River Electric for nearly 20 years before he moved to Western Area Power Administration (WAPA) in Pierre. WAPA is a federal organization that markets and delivers hydroelectric power and related services

across the 15-state region. Joe retired from his position of line foreman at WAPA in 2020 after 43 years.

### FOLLOWING THE LEADER

Rollie was next in the Miller family line-up, a year younger than Joe. His mom talked him into going to Pipestone, MN, to work at Bayliner Boats with his older brother Ed. Rollie then worked at Feterl’s Manufacturing in Salem where he welded augers until he decided to enroll in line school at MTC at the age of 20.

“The biggest reason I went to line school was because Joe had just done it, and I was friends with Robert Zens. I saw how they just did it, and I thought I could do it, too,” Rollie explained.

Rollie now manages Vigilante Electric Cooperative in Dillon, MT. Before running the show, he worked for an electrical contractor and for West River Electric.

He then attended SDSU and worked for Bob’s Electric in Flandreau with Reggie Gassman, who is manager of customer electrical services at Sioux

Valley Energy. They both grew up in the Canova area.

Rollie earned a bachelor's degree in electrical engineering, allowing him to become a licensed professional engineer.

"My education has greatly benefited me throughout my career," Rollie said.

Rollie's boys are also following the family tradition. Cody Miller attended SDSU to become an electrical engineer and consults for electric utilities, and Logan "L.J." Miller is enrolled in the power line construction and maintenance program at MTC.



Cody Miller



L.J. Miller

"It's not a cake walk. I told them you really have to study and work hard," he said.

After Rollie, Corey was the next Miller brother to attend MTC.

"The reason I went into it is because I had two older brothers who were

linemen. I knew when I was a freshman in high school that I was going to be a lineman," Corey said.

After graduating from MTC in 1987, Corey became an apprentice lineworker at Public Service of New Hampshire. He worked there for three years, then took a position at Missouri Public Service.

Like his brothers, Corey worked his way up the ranks. He was hired as a lineworker and promoted to foreman, then supervisor, and now works in management. He is also on the board of directors for the International Lineman Rodeo Association, helping host the annual lineman rodeo event which promotes lineworker safety.

Corey's 15-year-old son Zach plans to become a lineworker after high school. Corey shares this advice for anybody

- **Joel Miller**, Retired Line Foreman at Western Area Power Administration (Pierre, SD)  
43 Years, 6 months of industry experience
- **Rollie Miller**, General Manager at Vigilante Electric Cooperative (Dillon, MT)  
42 years, 6 months of industry experience
- **Corey Miller**, Director of Regional Operations at Evergy (Lexington, MO)  
35 years, 6 months of industry experience
- **Travis Miller**, Foreman at Southeastern Electric (Salem, SD)  
30 years of industry experience
- **Wes Wingen**, Manager of Meter Services at Black Hills Power (Rapid City, SD)  
15 years, 10 months of industry experience
- **Cody Miller**, Electrical Engineer (Dillon, MT)  
8 years, 6 months of industry experience
- **Dustin Wingen**, Former Lineworker at Alaska Village Electric Co-op (Anchorage, AK)  
2 years of industry experience
- **Logan (L.J.) Miller**, Student in the power line program at Mitchell Technical College

considering a career in the field:

"We need linemen. It is an awesome profession to get into. Linemen live to restore power – that's their lifeblood. And, quite honestly, you will make a very good wage while doing that."

Travis was the last of the Miller brothers to attend line school. He decided milking cows wasn't his calling, so in 1991 at age 26, Travis followed the path started by his big brother Joe.

"I figured they all did it, so I could probably do it better," Travis joked. He is now the foreman at Southeastern Electric in Salem.

Wes and Dustin Wingen are the sons of Stacy (Miller) and Bob Wingen. They are nephews to the Miller brothers and have also been involved in the electric utility industry. Dustin was a lineworker in Anchorage, AK, before coming back home to farm. Wes is an engineer and manager of meter services at Black Hills Power in Rapid City.

### IT'S A MILLER THING

The Miller family had nine children: Sandy, Duane, Ed, Joe, Rollie, Stacy, Derrin, Travis and Corey. Marcella, mother of the youngest eight children,

passed away in 2011, and Duane "Stub" Miller, the family patriarch, currently resides in Howard. Stub shared, "People don't know it today, but having electricity is something we shouldn't take for granted."

The four Miller brothers share a combined 151 years of electric industry experience. When you add it all up, the Miller and Wingen men boast an impressive 177 years of electric industry experience.

They couldn't have worked in this profession without the support of their families, which are too large to list. All the storm jobs, dangerous assignments and family moves were worth it when they think about the people they serve. They all agree, "It's a Miller thing" and working with voltage is in their veins.

### THANK A LINEMAN

Please take time to thank lineworkers for all they do to brighten our lives. We thank the Miller family for their many years of service in the industry.

*Editor's note: Writer Tara Miller is Travis Miller's wife and works for Central Electric Cooperative near Mitchell.*



# FORAGING FOR FUN

Jayne Pfeifle of Timber Lake is fond of foraging for fruit, which she turns into delicious jellies and jams. *Photo by Roger Lawien*

## Foraging for 'found food' can be fun and also good for your diet plan

**Billy Gibson**

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

Back when Jayne Pfeifle was a little girl and ventured outdoors to gather chokeberries with her mother, her thoughts were fixed on the delicious jellies and jams she'd soon enjoy.

She wasn't aware she was engaging in an activity that would come to be known decades later as "foraging." For all she knew, foraging for food was something wild animals did when they got hungry.

With the steady lifting of pandemic restrictions, many people across the country are taking to the outdoors to avail themselves of what's called "found

food" or "nature's free grocery store."

As an indication of the rising popularity of foraging, one social media star from Ohio has amassed nearly 3.5 million TikTok followers, in addition to nearly a million more fans on Instagram. Alexis Nikole Nelson, 29, has been featured on National Public Radio, Fortune magazine, The New York Times and other news and entertainment outlets.

During the pandemic, Nelson started posting videos from her forays into the forests to gather edible mushrooms, berries, weeds and other plants. She was floored by the response she received.

Some subjects included "Where to find mushrooms that taste like shrimp,"

"How to make 'bacon' out of acorns," and "How to make 'danger bread' using cow parsnip." But Nelson struck social media gold when she posted a video that got the attention of people left financially strapped by the pandemic: "How to 'stretch' groceries by foraging."

Before long, a wider audience of outdoors enthusiasts were gravitating toward the notion that foraging can not only be enjoyed either solo or with others, but it can also be adventurous while saving money and promoting a more nutritious diet.

For Pfeifle, much of the satisfaction she derives from foraging for chokeberries, plums, elderberries and other wild edibles is making sure her husband of 39 years has a tangy treat to spread on his breakfast toast.

"Clyde likes his jelly and toast every

## What to take

- Bug spray
- Sunscreen
- Long pants (for prickly and/or poisonous plants)
- Gardening gloves
- A basket or bag for storage
- A GPS or phone for maps
- Scissors or a hunting knife



Morel mushrooms are a favorite target for many foragers in search of free food and fun.

morning,” she said of her husband, her frequent foraging field companion. “I enjoy getting out and gathering the berries and he enjoys the jelly, so it makes everybody happy.”

Just don’t ask her to deal with buffaloberries. That’s where Pfeifle draws the line.

“It’s a tiny berry. They’re hard to pick, hard to clean and hard to process. The jelly is good, but it’s too much hard work and not worth the trouble,” said Pfeifle, who has served as an educator at Timber Lake Elementary for the past 48 years.

Little Moreau Recreation Area is a prime public picking place for Pfeifle and other people in the Timber Lake area, but she stays close to the vest when asked to disclose some of her other favorite foraging sites. It so happens that holding secrets is a quality found in many foragers, akin to a fisherman’s reluctance to announce to the world where the fish are biting.

Jaclyn Arens, communications and marketing coordinator at Bon Homme Yankton Electric Cooperative, looks forward to foraging for morel mushrooms when the weather warms up in the spring. She’s learned over the past

few years since she began the hobby that there’s a limited window of time for the best hunting.

“We start scouting at the end of March, but we don’t usually find anything until April and May,” she said. “The soil temperature is important, and the morels don’t pop up until it’s warm enough, about 50 degrees. They burn up or disappear when it gets too warm.”

In keeping with the forager’s unspoken code of silence, she’ll say when and how, but she won’t say where.

“I will say we look for places that have moist soil and deciduous trees like oak, elm, ash and cottonwood. Forests with big, old, decaying trees are best because morels grow from the root systems of dying trees. People have had luck in places where trees have been cut down or burned. There is plenty of public land in South Dakota to explore,” Arens said.

One pro tip Arens offers is to bring along a mesh bag to store your morels. The mesh material allows the spores to spread while hunting for more mushrooms. Another pro tip: if you do find an elusive morel, freeze in your tracks...there are likely more close by, so it’s wise to stop before accidentally trampling over a perfectly fine ’shroom.

In addition to the lure of the hunt, the taste of morels and the quality time spent with her boyfriend, Arens really



Jaclyn Arens

enjoys the annual ritual of getting out into the wild after a long winter.

“My favorite thing is getting outside in the spring after being cooped up in

the winter,” she said. “Plus, morels are delicious, and they taste even better after a long day of mushroom hunting. My favorite way to cook morels is to lightly batter them in flour and fry them in a hot pan with butter. Yummy!”

She encourages beginners to follow a few basic rules:

- Avoid areas beneath or around electric power lines.
- Avoid trespassing on private property.
- Never eat anything unless you can identify it with 100 percent accuracy.
- Take a companion along for fun and safety.
- Try to avoid areas where chemicals or insecticides may have been applied.



**APRIL 16**  
Easter Egg Hunt at  
Reclamation Ranch, Mitchell, 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.

**MARCH 17**  
**Love Inc. Spring Quarter Classes, EAST CAMPUS**  
Faith Lutheran Church, Rapid City, SD, 605-718-5683

**MARCH 19**  
**Craft & Vendor Fair**  
Minneluzahan Senior Citizens Center, Rapid City, SD, 605-394-1887

**MARCH 22**  
**Love Inc. Spring Quarter Classes, WEST CAMPUS**  
South Canyon Baptist, Rapid City, SD, 605-718-4833

**APRIL 2**  
**Watertown Coin and Currency Show**  
Elks Lodge, Watertown, SD, 605-882-4663

**APRIL 2-3**  
**Youth & Family Services' 25th Annual Kids Fair**  
The Monument, Rapid City, SD, [youthandfamilyservices.org/kids-fair/](http://youthandfamilyservices.org/kids-fair/)

**APRIL 8-9**  
**Forks, Corks & Kegs Festival**  
Various Locations, Deadwood, SD, [deadwood.com/event/forks-corks-kegs](http://deadwood.com/event/forks-corks-kegs)

**APRIL 8-9**  
**Jackrabbit Stampede Rodeo**  
Swiftel Center, Brookings, SD, [swiftelcenter.com](http://swiftelcenter.com)

**APRIL 8-10**  
**CAHF Spring Fling Eggstravaganza Series**  
Carroll Acres Hobby Farm, Rapid City, SD, [carrollacreshobbyfarm.com](http://carrollacreshobbyfarm.com)

**APRIL 8-16**  
**The Passion and the Cross**  
Orpheum Theater Center, Sioux Falls, SD, [siouxfallsorpheum.com](http://siouxfallsorpheum.com)

**APRIL 9**  
**Keystone Spring Fling Vendor Fair**  
1101 Madill Street, Keystone, SD, 605-786-3035

**APRIL 9-10**  
**DGTCA Gun Show**  
Rushmore Civic Center, Rapid City, SD, 605-270-0764

**APRIL 16**  
**Easter Egg Hunt**  
Reclamation Ranch, Mitchell, SD, 605-770-2867

**APRIL 22**  
**River Rat ½ Marathon, 10K, and 5K**  
Gavins Point Area, Yankton, SD, [allsportscentral.com](http://allsportscentral.com)

**APRIL 22-23**  
**Junkin' Market Days**  
W. H. Lyon Fairgrounds, Sioux Falls, SD, 605-941-4958

**APRIL 23**  
**Lakota All Star Basketball Games**  
The Monument Summit Arena, Rapid City, SD, 605-342-41985

**APRIL 23**  
**Martina McBride**  
Swiftel Center, Brookings, SD, [swiftelcenter.com](http://swiftelcenter.com)

**APRIL 23**  
**Spaghetti Feed and Silent Auction for the BH Raptor Center**  
Canyon Lake United Methodist Church, Rapid City, SD, 605-391-2511

**APRIL 23-24**  
**46th Mobridge Area Art Show**  
Scherr-Howe Arena, Mobridge, SD, 605-845-2060

**APRIL 27-30**  
**45th Annual Kingswood Rummage Sales**  
Southwest Sioux Falls, SD, [kingswoodrummage.com](http://kingswoodrummage.com)

**APRIL 28-30**  
**26th Annual Black Hills Dance Festival**  
The Monument, Rapid City, SD, [blackhillsdancefestival.com](http://blackhillsdancefestival.com)

**APRIL 29-MAY 1, 5-7**  
**Ordinary Days**  
Grand Opera House, Pierre, SD, [pierreplayers.com](http://pierreplayers.com)

**APRIL 30**  
**SDSO Centennial Finale**  
Washington Pavilion, Sioux Falls, SD, [sdsymphony.org](http://sdsymphony.org)

**MAY 14-15**  
**Ellsworth Air and Space Show**  
1940 EP Howe Drive, Ellsworth AFB, SD, [ellsworthairshow.com](http://ellsworthairshow.com)

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