

# COOPERATIVE CONNECTIONS



## Little cars, big smiles

**Smile makers build  
Toys for God's Kids**  
Pages 8-9

**Treatment center  
changes young lives**  
Pages 12-13

Asher Smith plays with a few  
of the thousands of small  
wooden cars built each year  
by Toys for God's Kids

# With A Grateful Heart



**Dick Johnson**  
General Manager

Last week I saw one of my favorite sayings: “nothing is more honorable than a grateful heart.” How true that is. With Thanksgiving upon us, I reflect back on a few of the things I am grateful for.

I am grateful we still live in one of the greatest countries on earth. We have plenty of gloom and doom; just look at all the press on the past election! Congressional, local, statewide, constitutional amendments, ballot initiatives; I could go on and on. Besides political issues, we have plenty of issues within our society; moral dilemmas, racial issues, murders, thefts, skyrocketing substance abuse. However, we should be grateful we live in a country where we can vote for our leaders. I am grateful that we can choose to work together to try and solve these issues instead of having some dictator or regime that spells out everything we do every day. 3723800

I am honored and grateful for our not-for-profit cooperative form of business. That was never more evident than recently when we retired over \$2.0 million in capital credits to our members. Another way we showed the cooperative business model was the last three months of 2021 when we returned over \$2.4 million in bill credits to our members. These were excess margins from lower expenses due to the pandemic that we didn't want to book but gave back to you, our membership. I am honored to be the CEO of an organization working with a board who has the vision and leadership to look into the future just like our forefathers did some 83 years ago.

I am honored and grateful that we have a strong military to protect our freedom. I am thankful for all the brave men and women who serve in the military. I am grateful to the many police officers, fire personnel, EMS and first responders who drop everything at a moment's

notice to help us while putting their lives in jeopardy. I know because I have been in EMS; I know the difficult struggles.

I am honored and grateful to work with such a young, energetic and engaged group of employees. They come to work every day for you, the members at the end of the line, understanding the cooperative nature of our business. Do we do everything right 100 percent of the time? Not hardly, but we strive to do our best in everything we do to make sure we meet your needs. Whether that be handling an outage, building a new line, answering your questions on a bill or giving advice on efficiency and usage, they are THE greatest team. Our safety took a hit this summer with a serious accident. However, I am beyond grateful that our employees picked themselves up and moved forward from it. I am very grateful our lineman will be back soon working beside all of us again.

**“Nothing is more honorable than a grateful heart.”**

I am grateful that our cooperative continues to grow with new members. I am grateful we have been able to meet this growth head on and continue to work hard to make sure we are positioned to meet further growth. We had so many challenges with supply chain issues, but our employees and vendors met those challenges head on and enabled us to keep in stride with the growth. 4630300

Finally, I am grateful and blessed to not only have my cooperative family and friends, but a wonderful wife and two daughters who bless me each day with their love and patience in a job that brings plenty of stresses home.

From the board of directors, staff and employees of West River Electric, our hope is that that you step back this Thanksgiving season and have a grateful heart that so many blessings have been bestowed upon us. Yes, “nothing is more honorable than a grateful heart.” This is my hope for you!

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Dick Johnson', with a stylized flourish at the end.

**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

**Editor**

Robert Raker – robert.raker@westriver.coop

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, 6531 or 6522; fax (605)393- 0275; e-mail robert.raker@westriver.coop.



**West River Electric**  
*Coloring Contest*

Color the picture below and submit it back to WREA to be entered into a drawing to win a prize!



**RULES:**

1. must be 12 years or younger
2. must be on WREA service
3. entries must be submitted by 11am Friday, December 30th.
4. winner will be announced January 13, 2023



**West River Electric Association, Inc.**  
Your Touchstone Energy® Cooperative   
"Powering You For A Brighter Future"  
this institution is an equal opportunity provider and employer

\*coloring sheets can be picked up at the Wall and Rapid City offices starting Dec. 1st

**Value of Electricity**



**1 haircut**



**333 hours**  
of using a hair dryer

Based on 12 cents per kWh, a \$60 haircut and a hair dryer that costs 100 watts.

**Value of Electricity**



**1 cup**  
from the coffee shop



**38 hours**  
of brewing at home

Based on 12 cents per kWh, a \$5 cup of coffee and a coffee maker that costs 2000 watts.

# Deck your halls with home safety in mind

It's time to deck those halls - safely. More than 800 home fires are caused by holiday decorations each year, according to the National Fire Protection Association.

An additional 170 home fires are caused by Christmas trees each year. Keep these tips in mind for a safe holiday season:

- Carefully inspect all electrical decorations before you use them. Cracked or damaged sockets and loose or exposed wires can cause serious shock or start a fire.
- Make sure all extension cords and electrical decorations are being used properly - indoor-rated cords indoors, outdoor-rated cords for outside decorations.
- Inspect extension cords for damage and discard (not repair) any that are not completely intact.
- Never mount or support light strings in a way that might damage the cord's insulation.
- Outdoor electrical lights and decorations should be plugged into circuits protected by ground-fault circuit interrupters.
- Exercise caution when decorating near power lines. Keep yourself and your ladder at least 10 feet from power lines.
- Turn off all indoor and outdoor electrical decorations before leaving home or going to sleep.
- Avoid overloading electrical outlets with too many decorations or electrical devices. They can overheat and cause a fire.
- Never connect more than three strings of incandescent lights together.
- Water your Christmas tree daily.
- Keep all decorations at least 3 feet away from heating equipment.
- Avoid using candles. The flames are just too dangerous with all the flammable decorations around.
- Purchase electrical decorations from reputable retailers and that are approved by a nationally recognized testing lab such as UL, Intertek or CSA.

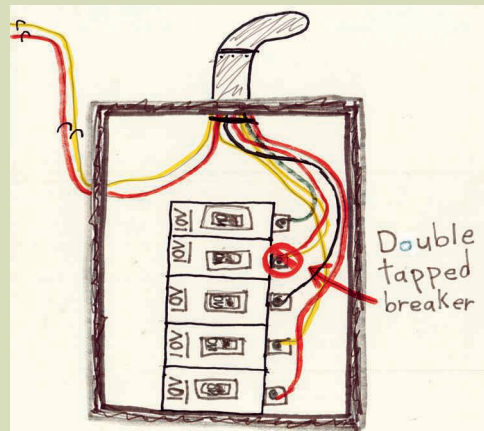


## A NEW TEACHING TOOL FOR SOLAR POWER EDUCATION



Rushmore Electric and Touchstone Energy have joined together to construct a demo trailer designed to teach co-op members across the state more about how solar power functions. The trailer is equipped with fold-out collection panels and also battery storage capability. Co-op energy experts use the trailer to frame discussions about net metering, interconnection agreements and more.

To see a video of the trailer 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

### Olaf Sahlstrom

Olaf Sahlstrom, 9, shares a tip he learned from his parents, Ben and Naomi Sahlstrom: Double-tapped breakers are unsafe and can lead to overheating, arcing, and electrical fires. The Sahlstroms reside in Tracy, MN and are members of Lyon-Lincoln 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.

# CHRISTMAS DESSERTS

## PEANUT BUTTER PIE

**Ingredients:**

1 heaping c. peanut butter  
 1 8 oz. pkg. cream cheese  
 (softened)  
 1 8 oz. tub cool whip (thawed)  
 1/2 c. milk  
 2 c. powdered sugar graham  
 cracker pie crust (prepared)  
 Crushed Butterfingers or Reeses  
 for garnish

**METHOD**

Thoroughly mix peanut butter and cream cheese. Add 1/2 cup milk and slowly add 2 cups powdered sugar. Mix well. Fold in cool whip. Put in a prepared graham cracker crust. Makes two 9" pies or one 10" pie with a little extra. Top with crushed candy. Place in freezer until frozen. Remove from freezer 10 minutes before serving.

**Elaine Rieck, Harrisburg**

## HOLIDAY HOT CHOCOLATE

**Ingredients:**

8 qt. box powdered milk  
 1 lb. can Nestles Cocoa Mix  
 7-8 oz. jar powdered creamer  
 3 c. powdered sugar  
 1/3 c. cocoa

**METHOD**

Mix in order given in large bowl. Put in air tight container. Use 1/4 cup mix per cup of hot water. Makes about 16-cup mix.

**Phyllis Niemann, Clear Lake**

## MOM'S CHRISTMAS DESSERT

**Ingredients:**

2-1/2 c. Rice Krispies  
 1/2 c. light brown sugar  
 1 c. slivered almonds or toasted  
 nut meats  
 1/2 c. butter, melted  
 1/2 gal. vanilla ice cream  
 1 can pie cherries  
 1/2 tsp. almond flavoring

**METHOD**

Mix first four ingredients together. Spread half mixture in a 9x13 pan evenly. Cut and press vanilla ice cream on top and spread remaining mixture on top. Freeze. When ready to serve, stir pie filling and almond flavoring together and heat on stove top or microwave and use for topping individual pieces.

**Patty Sinning, Lennox**

## GINGERBREAD KISSED THUMBPRINT COOKIES

**Ingredients:**

3 c. flour  
 2 tsps. ground ginger  
 1 tsp. ground cinnamon  
 1 tsp. baking soda  
 1/4 tsp. ground nutmeg  
 1/4 tsp. salt  
 3/4 c. (1-1/2 sticks) butter,  
 softened  
 3/4 c. firmly packed brown sugar  
 1/2 c. molasses  
 1 egg  
 1 tsp. pure vanilla extract  
 1/4 c. granulated sugar  
 60 milk chocolate kisses

**METHOD**

Mix flour, ginger, cinnamon, baking soda, nutmeg and salt in large bowl. Set aside. Beat butter and brown sugar in large bowl with electric mixer on medium until light and fluffy. Add molasses, egg and vanilla; mix well. Gradually beat in flour mixture on low speed until well mixed. Press dough into a thick flat disk. Wrap in plastic wrap. Refrigerate 4 hours or overnight. Preheat oven to 350°F. Shape dough into 1-inch balls. Roll in granulated sugar to coat. Place 2 inches apart on ungreased baking sheets. Bake 8-10 minutes or until edges of cookies begin to brown. Immediately press a chocolate candy into center of each cookie. Remove to wire racks; cool completely. Store cookies in airtight container up to 5 days.

**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.**

# Winter Energy Efficiency



**Adam Daigle**  
Energy Advisor

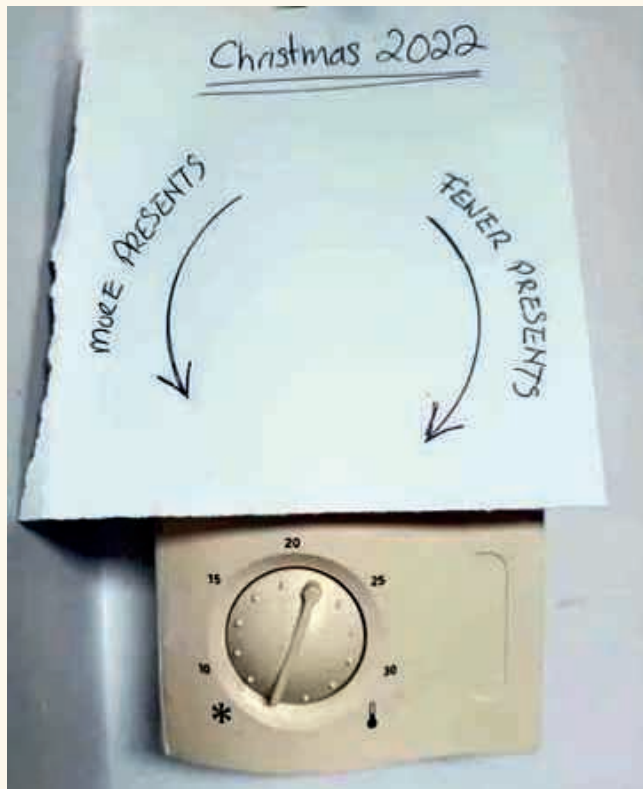
Everyone has their favorite season. Some like the thought of crisp cool days filled with sledding or building snowmen, while others prefer the warm summer days spending their time on the lake or sitting around a fire eating s'mores.

At the end of the day, whether you're a winter person or a summer person, there's one thing we can all agree on: high winter bills are never fun.

Here are five tips to help improve your homes energy efficiency:

1. **Watch the thermostat:** When the temps start to drop the first response we have is to crank that thermostat up. One of the easiest ways to manage your home energy use is by setting your thermostat to the recommended 68 degrees (or lower) when you are home. When you are away, try setting it between 58 and 62 degrees; no need to heat your home when you are away.
2. **Install an Air-to-Air Heat Pump:** When properly installed, and if your home is applicable, an air-source heat pump can deliver 1.5 to 3 times more heat energy compared to the electrical energy it consumes. This is possible because it moves heat rather than converting it from a fuel, like in combustion heating systems. For more information on heat pumps, please visit our website or call our office and talk to your trusted energy advisors on finding the right heat pump for your home.
3. **Bundle up your home:** The Department of Energy estimates that air leaks account for 24 percent to 40 percent of the energy used for heating and cooling homes. Insulating electric wall outlets and wall switches with foam pads and caulking around windows with a clear sealant are simple, cost-effective ways to increase comfort and save energy. If you can feel drafts while standing near a window or door, that's a good indicator that it needs to be sealed. 11703000
4. **Use window coverings wisely:** During the day, open your blinds, shades, or other window coverings to allow in the natural sunlight to warm your home. Close them at night to keep the cold winter air out. If you feel cold air around your windows, consider hanging shades made of thicker material. This can make a significant difference in keeping cold air out.

5. **Get creative:** If you are still feeling chilly, try thinking of other ways to warm up-beyond turning up the thermostat. Add layers of clothing, wear thick socks or slippers, and bundle up under blankets. If you have hardwood floors, consider purchasing an area rug to help block the cold air seeping through the floor.



If you are taking steps to help increase your home energy efficiency, but continue to see increases in your bills, give us a call at 605-393-1500 or take advantage of our free home energy audit.

Winter months can bring some of the highest energy bills of the year. By being proactive in increasing your home energy efficiency, you can increase your comfort and reduce monthly bills.

## West River Electric Christmas Open house

Thursday, December 15, 2022 ;  
9:00am - 3:00pm  
Rapid City and Wall Offices

Stop in for a cup of coffee or apple cider and a cookie! This is also a chance to register for an \$85 bill credit. December 1st-30th, if you stop in to make a payment, your name will be put into a drawing for your chance to win!

For those that pay online or over the phone, there will also be an opportunity for you to win an \$85 bill credit. We will draw from the list of members who made a payment from Dec. 1st-30th.

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# Annual Meeting Recap



**Amanda Haugen**  
Communications  
Specialist

West River Electric's 83rd Annual Meeting was held on Saturday, Oct. 8, 2022, at the Wall Community Center. The meeting started with the National Anthem as all stood to salute the flag. Our theme this year was Focus on Success and as an old age saying goes, "the windshield is bigger than the rearview mirror, because where you are going, is more important than where you have been." Though there is some truth in that, we still need to look in that rearview mirror, as the past is our teacher.

Board President Andy Moon guided the meeting through the normal business procedures. He highlighted the 2021 Power Cost Adjustment that returned \$2.4 million back to the membership, the retirement of \$2.1 million in capital credits, and an update on our main power supplier – Basin Electric Power Cooperative.

West River Electric's general

counsel guided the members through the board election process. The membership re-elected three incumbent directors on the board of directors, Jamie Lewis, District 1, Marcia Arneson, District 2, and Sue Peters, District 3. 11632700

Dick Johnson, CEO of West River Electric, went over various happenings at your co-op. First, he pointed out the financial strength of your cooperative followed by the exponential growth in the Rapid Valley and Box Elder areas. He then touched on the collaboration with NRECA (National Rural Electric Cooperative Association) and Ellsworth Air Force base to place a 250kw battery out of Ellsworth, followed with the national news warning people that their electric rates were going to increase; but rest assured, West River Electric hasn't raised its rates since 2016. Dick wrapped up with an update on the board, the employees, and their response to all the change that has happened within West River Electric.

Attendees of the meeting were able to receive a meal ticket to their favorite restaurant in Wall, have a chance to win some door prizes, and get updated on what is happening at their cooperative. I would finally like to mention that we gave out six \$500 scholarships to high school seniors or college students that were in attendance to help power them for a brighter future.



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**New Look!**

**New Experience!**

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**COMING SOON**

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[www.smarthubapp.com](http://www.smarthubapp.com)



LeRoy Iedema, Richard Ringling and Duane Strand crank out nearly 60,000 toy cars each year from their 12x10-foot workshop in Platte.  
*Photo by Billy Gibson*

## Duane Strand gets lots of 'smileage' out of making toy cars for children

**Billy Gibson**

editor@sdrea.coop

Frustrated moms across the ages have been searching for a surefire method for getting an unruly child to simmer down.

Duane Strand is pretty sure he's found a failsafe solution: toy cars.

Several years ago, Strand began building tiny wooden cars in his nondescript backyard shed in Platte. He recalls visiting Pierre one evening and having dinner at a local restaurant when a young boy suddenly started pitching a fit and hollering at the top of his lungs.

Strand just happened to have one of the cars in his pocket. He reached out and handed it to the child and was rather amazed at the result. Not only did the whining stop forthwith, but that boy's frown turned upside down as the

kid started beaming from ear to ear.

"He quit yelling right then and there. His whole attitude changed," Strand recalls. "These cars really have a soothing effect on the kids."

That's the impact Strand is shooting for as he and his three-man team of retirees crank out nearly 60,000 toy cars each year. They're looking to squeeze all the "smileage" they can get out of the toy cars they build.

The main construction crew includes retired farmer Richard Ringling and retired mechanic LeRoy Iedema. Ringling usually works the drill press to create holes in the wood where the axles will go. Then Iedema follows up by pressing the wheels onto the axles. He came up with a way to make sure the wheels roll straight and stay in place and dares anyone to try and pull off a wheel.

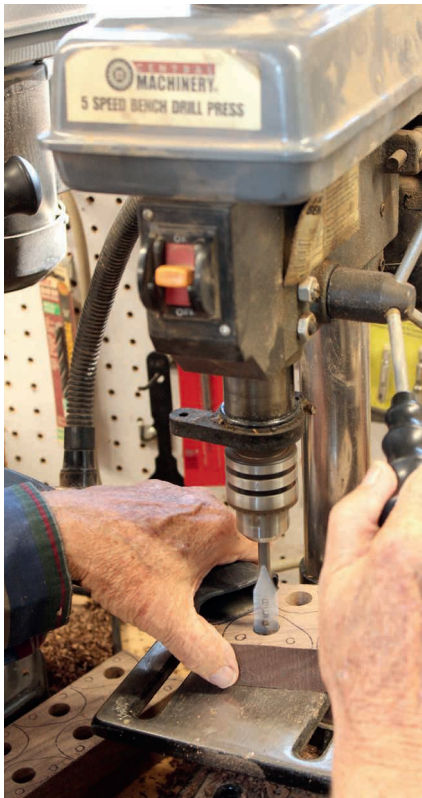
There are others who join in the

process: Justin Kok cuts the wood into manageable blocks; Brett Wynia performs repairs on the drill presses, band saws, sanders, routers and other pieces of equipment when they break down; and Curtis Versteeg helps to sand down the rough surfaces on the cars.



Toy cars are distributed by military personnel serving overseas.

And just down the road from the shop is the Platte Lumber Yard, where many of the material supplies are stored until needed for production. Strand said it was the folks down at the lumber yard who initiated the vital connection with



Dustin Knutson of Boyds Hardwood Gunstock supplies the toy makers with the laminated wood used to create the tiny cars (inset) for worldwide distribution. *Photo by Billy Gibson*

Boys Hardwood Gunstock that keeps the operation humming along.

“Without Boyds we wouldn’t be able to do any of this,” Strand said.

Dustin Knutson, a member of Central Electric Cooperative and part owner of the company that bills itself as the largest after-market gun stock maker in the world, is a Shriner with a heart for community service and said he was all-in when Strand approached him about supporting the program by supplying excess wood.

“They’re really easy to work with,” he said, noting that he keeps one of the cars on his desk. “They take whatever they can get and they show up consistently. We started saving off-cut blocks of wood specifically for the cars. The laminated wood works well because it’s colorful and looks good and the kids can pick out their favorite one.”

Strand’s distribution system is a bit scatter shot but he still manages to send them all over the globe. Anyone he knows who is planning a trip gets a supply of cars. Knutson, for instance, takes them with him when he travels for business or pleasure, whether vacationing in Mexico or hunting in Africa.

“People in America may think these are just simple toys, but I’ve been in parts of the world where a toy for a kid is a stick and a rock,” Knutson said. “But these little cars give kids something to smile about. Duane and his guys are just beautiful people doing good things for the good of humanity and we’re happy to help them any way we can.”

The toys also ride along in ambulances, military satchels and police vehicles in the event a child needs to be calmed. They show up in doctor’s offices, churches and other venues.

The operation is affiliated with a group called Toys for God’s Kids, a non-denominational organization based in Denver. Strand is the only affiliated “smile maker” in South Dakota.

While the three-man crew claims they’re working harder than they used to before retiring, Iedema assigns a greater value to his toil beyond the opportunity to put a smile on a kid’s face. He said his heart doctor has informed him that he’s in better shape than before he started woodworking three years ago. He’s slimmer, more active and feels a lot better.

Strand chips in, “...yeah, and he’s



more ornery than ever, too!”

Collectively, the guys crank out about 250 cars a day scrunched inside the 12 x 10-foot shed. Each unit has to be dipped in linseed oil to protect children from any potential toxicity. The toys are boxed and shipped to their destination at the recipient’s expense.

Strand doesn’t know how much longer he’s going to be able to keep cranking out cars. He’ll reach the age of 90 in a few months and his friend Ringling has a plan: “I told him when he turns 90 we’re going to take him up by the interstate and take a picture underneath the sign that says I-90. Get it?”

# The Power of Surveying



**Amanda Haugen**  
Communications Specialist

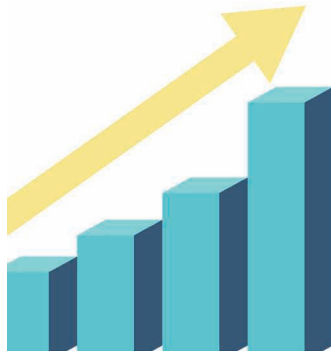
“We will achieve an ACSI score of 90 by 2024.” West River Electric’s vision statement was set by our Board of Directors as they represent you, the member owners. It also reminds us employees every day of why we do what we do. In a recent conversation, there was discussion about the ACSI (American Consumer Satisfaction Index) survey that goes out annually and the importance behind it. West River Electric just completed this year’s ACSI survey, and though the results for 2022 are not in yet, I am happy to report that our current ACSI score is 87.

You may be wondering, “what do these numbers mean and why is 90 so important?” The importance behind these numbers is to measure

how well we, as your trusted energy advisors, are communicating, engaging, and doing, to meet your needs as the member owner. It is also one measurable that we can look back on to help guide us in continuing to move the needle forward. We know we cannot rest on our laurels and in the changing world we must evolve.

That is where setting internal goals comes into play. The ACSI score is the employees “North Star” for where we want to be. So, to reach that, we need to set goals and they must be difficult to reach. If we are trying to get to that “North Star” and we don’t have goals, we don’t have anywhere to pivot to see what areas we need to improve in.

Concern (commitment) for Community is one of our core principles that we practice at West River Electric and our vision statement is just that. Making sure we are doing everything possible in our day-to-day duties to meet the needs of you, the member owner. 11667100



## ATTENTION HIGH SCHOOL SENIORS OR COLLEGE STUDENTS

# Scholarships Available

**Deadline: February 1, 2023**



visit [www.westriver.coop](http://www.westriver.coop) for more details  
\*students are eligible to receive one scholarship yearly

*“Powering You For A Brighter Future”*  
This motto does not mean equal opportunity program and employee.



Small countertop appliances like slow cookers and Instant Pots® are convenient and typically use less energy than an oven.



*From our table to yours,*

*Happy Thanksgiving!*

West River Electric Association, Inc.  
Your Touchstone Energy Cooperative  
*“Powering You For A Brighter Future”*

**MERRY Christmas AND A HAPPY NEW YEAR**

**OUR OFFICES WILL BE CLOSED THE FOLLOWING DATES:**  
 Friday, Dec. 23rd-11am-5pm  
 Monday, Dec. 26th-All day  
 Friday, Dec. 30th-11am-5pm  
 Monday, Jan. 2nd-All day

West River Electric Association, Inc.  
 "Powering You For A Brighter Future"

To report an outage or in case of emergency please call 605-393-1500 or 605-279-2135

**Operation Round-up Application deadline Feb. 15, 2023 by 5pm**

Do you have a non-profit organization that you would like to see apply for Operation Round-up funds? You can visit [westriver.coop](http://westriver.coop) to submit an application online or download and drop it off at either office.

Rapid City Office  
 3250 E Hwy 44  
 Rapid City, SD 57703

West River Electric Association, Inc.  
 "Powering You For A Brighter Future"

Wall Office  
 1200 W Fourth Ave  
 PO Box 412  
 Wall, SD 57790

Office hours: Mon-Fri | 7am-5pm

## 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.

## 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?

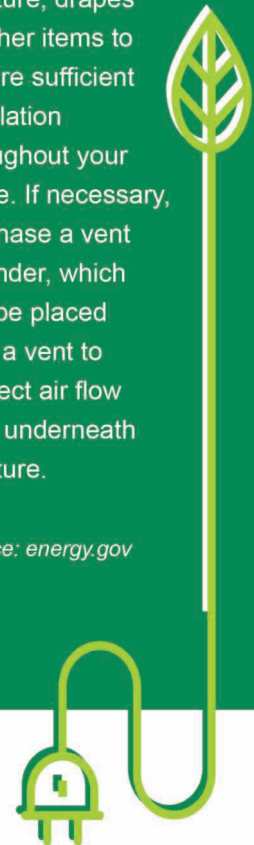
Contact 605-279-2135 or 605-393-1500 in the event of an outage or other emergency. Our calls are answered 24/7.

## Energy Efficiency Tip of the Month

Blocked air vents force your heating system to work harder than necessary and increase pressure in your ductwork, which can cause cracks and leaks to form.

Make sure all air vents are unobstructed from furniture, drapes or other items to ensure sufficient circulation throughout your home. If necessary, purchase a vent extender, which can be placed over a vent to redirect air flow from underneath furniture.

Source: [energy.gov](http://energy.gov)





# CHANGING YOUNG LIVES

The Great Plains Youth Regional Treatment Center near Mobridge is a place where at-risk youth can go to address their challenges with drug and alcohol abuse. *Photo by Roger Lawien*

## Treatment center helps young people get back on the right path

**Billy Gibson**

billy.gibson@sdrea.coop

It was a small compliment, but it meant everything to the young lady who wasn't quite accustomed to receiving positive reinforcement. A simple affirmation spoken softly and sincerely into her ear: "You're gorgeous, and you're worthy." And the tears began to flow.

The Indian Health Service Great Plains Youth Regional Treatment Center near Mobridge is a place where at-risk youth can go to address their challenges with drug and alcohol abuse and find the support they need to deal with difficult situations.

Acting Clinical Director Charita Dowdell remembers that encounter with the young woman.

"I tell all of our residents how gorgeous they are and that I see the beauty in them and who they are deep down inside," Dowdell said. "I told her she was worthy and that she had value,

and she just broke down. She told me that nobody had ever said that to her."

That's just one of the stories about how the treatment center's staff strive to change the lives of teens who enter the program. There are many others.

Program Director Lavon Booth has been involved with the residential program for 20 years, initially as an administrative officer when she started in 2002. She previously served at the Cheyenne River Service Unit in her hometown of Eagle Butte before starting at the YRTC.

She sees the transformation of residents captured in plain view during graduation ceremonies that take place when the 12-week session concludes.

"We're very fortunate to see the change that happens in our residents from the time they arrive until the time they graduate," she said. "We see them moving in a positive direction and at graduation we get to hear them speak intimately about what they've learned and you see how it all comes together.

They come in very shy and reserved, and they leave here carrying a more positive spirit and more confidence. It's really touching for us and very rewarding."

The treatment center is housed in the old Chief Gall Inn hotel on land leased from the Standing Rock tribe. Youth between the ages of 13 and 17 are referred through tribal alcohol programs, local schools, community service organizations and other agencies.

According to the center's mission statement, the program "is dedicated to promoting a healthy lifestyle restoring balance and harmony in mind, body and spirit to our American Indian youth and their families."

Dowdell said playing a role in watching that mission statement come true to life in the form of changed behaviors and more positive attitudes makes her know she's definitely making a profound difference.

One effective modality is a mentoring program where residents taking part in the rehabilitation process shepherd those who are just entering the facility. Not only do the incumbent residents show the newbies around the physical



The youth treatment center is located in the former Chief Gall Inn hotel near Mobridge. *Photo by Roger Lawien*

space, but they also listen to their concerns, answer questions and try to allay their fears that stem from living in a new environment with certain rules, guidelines and expectations.

“When they start feeling homesick or afraid or stressed and they just need someone near their age to talk to, it helps them make the adjustment so they can settle down and focus on what they need to do to make changes. That bond is something that actually helps both of them get through and graduate successfully,” she said.

Dowdell noted there is a concern among staff about residents returning to a challenging environment. So, upon graduation, the youth receive support through a tracking system where staffers make regular check-in calls after three days, three months, six months and a year. A tele-health network is also

available to the graduates.

Role-playing also helps re-integration, Dowdell said. She added that the residents are taught to anticipate the same kind of challenges they faced before and how to handle them with a different approach.

“They return as a changed person, but everybody else around them will be doing the same things,” she said. “We tell them to stay connected to their support system and manage their emotions; how to be true to yourself while being respectful to others. We prepare them for what life is going to look like when they leave.”

She mentioned one particular youngster who entered the program with a defiant attitude and dealing with depression, anxiety and post-traumatic stress. She knuckled down academically and caught up to her class grade. After

graduation, she returned to juvenile detention for seven months. But in the end, she straightened out her life by applying the things she learned at the center.

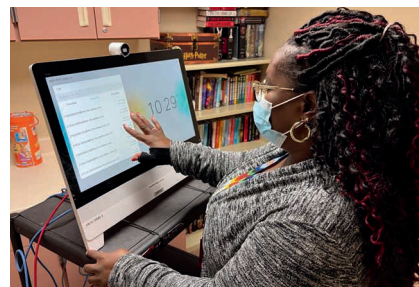
“She struggled with treatment, but she sent us a letter thanking us for what the program did for her,” Dowdell said. “She said she was grateful for giving her the skills to manage the difficult predicament she was going through. She changed her mentality and grew and matured and became a new person.”

Dowdell stressed that parents can play a key role in helping their children navigate through rehabilitation or prevent them from becoming a candidate in the first place.

“Listen to your children,” she emphasized. “They are saying something to you, but often they don’t feel like they’re being heard. Before you shut that door, listen to what they’re saying. You may have to shut the door anyway, but at least take the time to listen to what they have to say.”

Visit [www.ihs.gov/greatplains/healthcarefacilities/greatplainsyrct/](http://www.ihs.gov/greatplains/healthcarefacilities/greatplainsyrct/).

Lavon Booth, left, and Charita Dowdell, work to provide students the skills they need to change the direction of their lives.





# SANTA SACS FOR KIDS

The Botkins - Amanda, Dean, Elizabeth, Anna and Eric - work as a team to provide gift bags for students. *Photo by Billy Gibson*

## Botkin family creates Santa Sacs program to spread holiday cheer

**Billy Gibson**

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Each Christmas season, the Botkin family home nestled in the foothills just outside of Spearfish is transformed from a cozy chalet-style space into a tightly managed, finely tuned assembly center.

The goal is to produce dozens of cinch sacks full of Christmas gifts for school-age children. There's even a name for the operation: Santa Sacs for Kids.

Amanda Botkin and her husband, Eric, have spent the past 10 yuletide seasons organizing the program and working in conjunction with local school counselors to connect with students and distribute the gift bags. When the calendar page flips to December, the Botkins and their three children ages 8 through 14 kick into high gear and the home starts buzzing with activity.

To achieve maximum efficiency – or possibly to prevent the family pets from completely freaking out - the process is

departmentalized. In the kitchen area, bags are filled with coloring books and stickers and small toys for kindergarten and elementary school children. In the living room, items specifically for older female students are gathered up and placed in pink plastic sacks. Down the hallway, fast-food gift cards, winter hats and personal hygiene products like body wash and shampoo for high schoolers are collected and deposited in the totes.

Closer to Christmas and before school lets out for the break, the bags are loaded up in the family Sequoia and transported to counselors at different schools in the area.

The entire program was Amanda's brainchild, which stemmed from her quest for a way to spark a spirit of giving and community service within her own children – and most of all, a sense of gratitude for blessings received.

“My oldest daughter, Elizabeth, was in kindergarten and I just felt that it was very important for my kids to understand how fortunate we are as a



Eric's sister, Amy Irion, also enjoyed participating in the annual project.

family. They need to know what it's like to do things for others,” she said. “Not everybody has a Christmas that looks like ours does.”

Amanda, who works as a nurse in Spearfish, contacted local school counselor and personal friend Mandi Scott and shared the details of her plan. Scott climbed aboard without hesitation. Then Amanda hopped on social media to seek support from other friends, relatives and anyone else interested in contributing to the project. The response was overwhelming.

“We've received so much help from so many people who were willing to donate items or funds to buy gifts,” she said. “But we wouldn't be able to do



Anna Botkin, a student at Spearfish Middle School, has learned that it's more important to give than to receive. *Photo by Billy Gibson*

anything without participation from our counselors. We do everything through them and everything is anonymous with the kids. They give us the ages and genders and we put together the Santa Sacs for them based on the information we get. School counselors have a really hard job and don't always get the recognition they deserve, so we want them to know how much we appreciate what they do and the critical services they provide. They're amazing!"

While Amanda says that pursuing the project is its own reward, occasionally the counselors will forward messages of thanks they've received from students.

"It's nice to get notes when the kids send them," Amanda said. "But it's mostly about trying to give them the kinds of gifts that they'll like or use or have fun with."

Eric Botkin said he was gung-ho from the beginning when his wife approached him with her plans. He describes the influence his single mother had on developing his understanding of charity. When he was younger, his mom worked

Elizabeth was a youngster when her mother started Santa Sacs for Kids and helps each year to stuff and distribute gift bags.

at a nursing home in Douglas, WY, and he and his siblings would spend Christmas visiting with residents and giving them presents. When Eric was in high school, his mother was a patrolling police officer and used her position to serve others and help solve problems.

During the first year of Santa Sacs for Kids, Eric's role was to take care of the younger kids, Anna and Dean, while kindergartner Elizabeth played the role of Amanda's elf.

"I kept an eye on the kids while Elizabeth and Amanda went out and shopped," Eric said. "But then as the years went along, the number of bags and gifts kept growing. We needed



every hand in the house and whatever volunteers we could get. Amanda has a huge heart and is a great person and always tries to make sure there are nice things in the bags. She wants the kids to all love what they get."

Amanda, not exactly a loafer, has bigger dreams for the program she created: "I'd really like to get more of the surrounding communities involved and put more bags out there. There's so much need."

She would also like to see more older kids get involved in Christmas giving projects so that they can learn the lessons that Elizabeth has learned.

Elizabeth, a 14-year-old freshman at Spearfish High School, is a track and wrestling athlete and also participates in Spartans for Spartans, a group that helps elementary students make a smoother transition to middle school.

"I like getting Christmas presents, but it's more important to give to others," she said. "I like doing something positive with my family and it's great knowing I'm helping other kids make their lives better."

For those who wish to donate, visit <https://gofund.me/2f62016a>.

## REGISTER TO WIN!

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**December 15-18, 2022**  
**Christmas at the Cathedral**  
521 N Duluth Ave.  
Sioux Falls, SD  
605-988-3765

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

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

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

**NOV. 26**  
**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**  
**Tabor's Holiday Light Parade**  
Tabor, SD  
605-660-0274

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

**DEC. 3**  
**Julefest 2022: Scandinavian Christmas Festival & Bazaar**  
8 a.m.-2p.m.  
Our Savior's Lutheran Church  
Spearfish, SD

**DEC. 4**  
**Sioux Falls Legion Post 15 Pancake Breakfast**  
8:30 a.m.-noon  
1600 W Russell St.  
Sioux Falls, SD

**DEC. 4**  
**Hartford Hometown Christmas**  
Hartford, SD  
www.hartfordhtc.com

**DEC. 4**  
**Walk Through Bethlehem**  
United Methodist Church  
Webster, SD  
605-345-3747

**DEC. 10**  
**Frontier Christmas**  
Fort Sisseton Historic State Park  
Lake City, SD  
605-448-5474

**DEC. 15-18**  
**Christmas at the Cathedral**  
521 N Duluth Ave.  
Sioux Falls, SD  
605-988-3765

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

**JAN. 14**  
**Coats for Kids Bowling Tournament**  
Registration Starts at 1 p.m.  
\$80 for a four-person team  
Meadowood Lanes  
Rapid City, SD  
605-393-2081

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