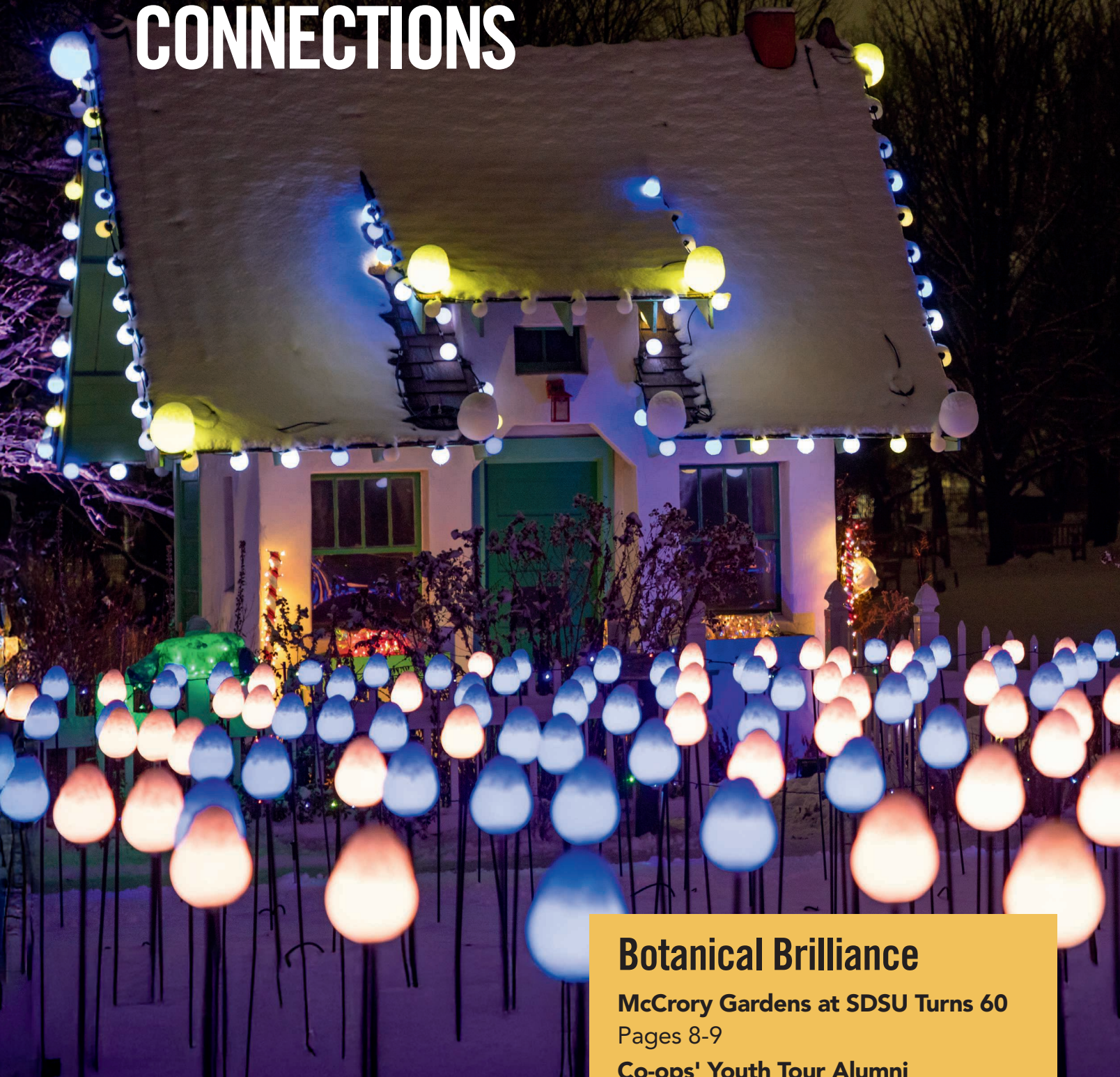


# COOPERATIVE CONNECTIONS



## **Botanical Brilliance**

**McCrorry Gardens at SDSU Turns 60**

Pages 8-9

**Co-ops' Youth Tour Alumni**

Pages 12-13

# Steady Power, Steady Progress



**Robert Raker**  
CEO/GM

If it feels like the last month has been a whirlwind, that's because it has been. Between Member Appreciation Day, Tailgating, the various Galas, and our Annual Meeting — my first as CEO — we somehow managed to fit about three months of activity into four weeks.

Through it all, one thing stood out: people showed up for each other. From members showing up to participate in their cooperatives annual meeting, to stopping by to grab a burger and say hello. The cooperative spirit was on full display. That's what makes this co-op special — when it's time to come together, we do.

### ACSI Results: Consistent and Reliable

It's that time of year again — our American Customer Satisfaction Index (ACSI) results are in, and our score ticked up one point to 87.

Just like when we dipped to 86 last year, we're not going to throw confetti or sound alarms — but this kind of steadiness matters more than any big swing ever could. Each year, a specific number of members are surveyed in order to statistically give us an accurate representation of the membership, and we continue to land in the same range. That consistency tells me something important: our process works. We've been tweaking it over 86 years and we will continue to in the future. 10978700

It shows that the way we serve our members is steady and dependable — no wild highs or lows, just the kind of reliability you expect when you flip that switch and the lights come on ten out of ten times. That reliability is the foundation of trust between our co-op and our members, and it's something we don't take lightly.

### Welcome Director Jason Habrock

This year's Annual Meeting was meaningful for me — not just because it was my first as CEO, but because it marked a transition in leadership on our board.

We'd like to extend our appreciation to Marcia Arneson for her years of service and dedication to the cooperative. Change is never easy, but it's both healthy and necessary. It's how co-ops evolve and stay strong.

We also welcome Jason Habrock as our newest board member. Jason brings energy, perspective, and a strong understanding of what it means

to serve our members. I'm looking forward to working with him as we continue to move WREA forward.

### Local Partnerships & County Engagement

We have been working closely with **county boards and commissions** to represent our members' interests on issues like **right-of-way permitting, planning and zoning, and infrastructure coordination**.

Having a seat at those tables helps ensure local decisions reflect how your Cooperative actually operates. It's not glamorous work, but it's essential for keeping power reliable and costs fair. Our job is to look out for the **entire membership**, and after 86 years of refining how we serve, we need to protect the way we do business—because reliability depends on it.

Now more than ever, we have to keep costs in check. We're anticipating about a **10% increase in power costs in 2026** and another **8% in 2027**. So when there are local policy or permitting decisions that could add unnecessary expense, we step up and engage our local leaders. Many of these local elected officials also have the daunting tasking of finding ways to do more with less just like your Coop. This collaboration is all part of ensuring that **every decision—from the county courthouse to your light switch—keeps service dependable and affordable**. 10821300

### Looking Ahead

The pace isn't slowing down. We're deep into budgeting and planning for next year, while continuing to monitor major regional energy developments — particularly at Basin Electric and across the broader power supply landscape.

We'll continue focusing on keeping the membership informed and listening to your feedback.

In closing, while I'm proud our ACSI score went up a point, I'm even prouder of what that number represents: a cooperative that's steady, dependable, and deeply connected to its members and community.

Till next time — stay safe and stay engaged.

*Robert Raker | CEO*

# Operation RoundUp: Powering Possibility



**Christine Ritter**  
Marketing  
Representative

West River Electric’s voluntary program, Operation Roundup, has given back \$154,015 since 2002 when it was first incorporated. Because of members like you, communities and non-profit organizations within WREA’s 4,500 square mile territory have been able to thrive. 11192300

Operation Roundup is a voluntary program that does just what the name implies. Each month, we “round up” the electric bills of participating consumers to the next highest dollar. For example, a consumer’s monthly bill of \$56.75 would automatically be rounded up to \$57.00, with the additional 25 cents going to the Operation Roundup fund. All donations are tax deductible, and consumers are sent a summary of yearly contributions each January.

If you wish to participate in rounding up your monthly electric bill and help

the communities you live in continue to thrive, please scan the QR code below or visit our website, [www.westriver.coop](http://www.westriver.coop) and sign up online under the “Membership” tab.

Once a year, the five-person board of directors, separate from West River Electric’s board of directors, meets to disperse the funds to the community. To qualify for funds, a non-profit organization, group, family, or individual must have a need or charitable project they will use the funds for. To apply for funding, one must also fill out an application, located on our website under the “Membership” tab. Applications open January 2, 2026.



## Operation Roundup recipients for 2025 include:

CORE Freshman Impact .....	\$2,500
St. Vincent DePaul.....	\$2,500
Feeding SD BackPack Program .....	\$2,000
Rural Meade Ambulance Service .....	\$1,500
Feeding SD Mobile Program .....	\$1,000
SD FFA.....	\$1,000
Rapid City BMX.....	\$1,000
Home Plate Collective .....	\$500

## COOPERATIVE CONNECTIONS

### WEST RIVER ELECTRIC

(USPS No. 675-840)

**Our Mission:**

To serve our members’ best interest.

**Our Vision:**

We will be a high performing co-op.

**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
- Chuck Sloan – Treasurer
- Taran Eisenbraun
- Peter Blake
- Jason Habrock
- Steven Edoff
- Sue Peters

**CEO and General Manager:**

Robert Raker – [robert.raker@westriver.coop](mailto:robert.raker@westriver.coop)

**Editor**

Amanda Haugen – [amanda.haugen@westriver.coop](mailto:amanda.haugen@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. 6564, 6531 or 6522; fax (605)393- 0275; e-mail [amanda.haugen@westriver.coop](mailto:amanda.haugen@westriver.coop).

# So, a Power Line Fell On Your Car...

Driving accidents can happen quickly and easily in the winter months with slick, inconspicuous coatings of black ice, reduced visibility and other weather-related safety hazards.

The important thing is that you know what to do if you find yourself in a collision with a utility pole – because what you don't know can seriously injure or kill you.

### If a power line falls on or near your vehicle and there is no fire...

Call 911 and remain in your vehicle until help arrives — this is where you are safest. Your vehicle may be insulating you from the electrical current. Once you leave the vehicle and place your foot on the ground, the electricity may take a path through your body and shock you.

Never go off looks; a downed power line may not be sparking or showing obvious signs of being live, but it may still be energized.

If someone attempts to assist you, warn them to stay back until the utility can de-energize the line.

### If a power line falls on or near your vehicle and there is a fire...

If your vehicle has caught fire, you must proceed with extreme caution. Again, even if a line isn't sparking, it may still be energized.

To make your escape, jump from your vehicle to the ground, making sure your body is not touching the ground and vehicle simultaneously. Making contact with both would make your body a direct conduit, and you would be electrocuted.

For that same reason, do not assist anyone else exiting the vehicle or accept help exiting the vehicle.

Once you're on the ground, keep your feet together and hop or shuffle away from the scene, at least 40 feet away. As you move, your goal is for there to not be a voltage difference between your feet. You do not want one foot off of the ground while the other foot is making contact with the ground.

Call 911 and warn others to stay away from the scene.

### If you come across downed power lines...

Stay no less than 40 feet away, as the ground can become energized. Never drive over downed power lines – not only do you risk electrocution and damage to your vehicle, but the added tension could pull down surrounding utility poles and create additional hazards.

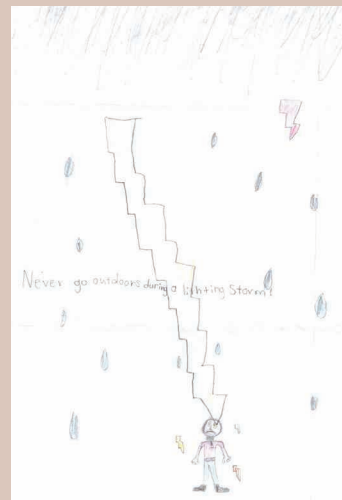
### If you're a first responder at the scene...

Always assume lines are energized. Contact the utility and wait for them to de-energize the lines and give you the all-clear.



Always assume a downed power line is energized. A downed power line may not be sparking or showing obvious signs of being live, but it may still be energized.

## "Never go outside during a lightning storm!"



### Josiah Krcil, Age 9

Josiah cautions readers on the dangers of going outside during a lightning storm. Great picture, Josiah! Josiah's parents are Andrew and Andrea Krcil from Dante, S.D.

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

# Specialty SOUPS

## CHEESEBURGER VEGETABLE SOUP

### Ingredients:

- 1 lb. ground beef
- 2 lbs. block Velveeta cheese
- (2) 12 oz. cans evaporated milk
- (3) 10.5 oz. cans cream of mushroom soup
- 10.5 oz. can cream of celery soup
- 1 can French style green beans
- 1 can mixed vegetables
- 1 can diced potatoes

### Method

Brown ground beef. Cut Velveeta into cubes. Put all ingredients into slow cooker. Cook on low six to eight hours, stirring halfway through or cook on high two hours, and then on low another two hours, stirring halfway through.

**Wendy Thorson**  
Northern Electric

## DUMPLING SOUP

### Ingredients:

- 1 tbsp. vegetable oil
- 2 tsps. sesame oil
- 1 cup carrots, shredded
- 5 green onions, thinly sliced (whites and greens separated)
- 3 cloves garlic, finely chopped
- 1/4 tsp. ground ginger
- 1/4 cup white miso paste
- 6 cups chicken vegetable broth, divided
- 1 lb. frozen mini dumplings
- 3 cups baby spinach
- 3 tsps. soy sauce (plus more to serve)
- Hot sauce or chili oil to serve

### Method

In a large pot, heat the vegetable oil and sesame oil over medium heat. Add the carrots, green onion whites, garlic, and ginger. Cook, stirring frequently, until the vegetables begin to soften, two to three minutes. In a small bowl, combine the miso paste with 1/2 cup broth, whisking until the miso is dissolved. Add the miso mixture and remaining broth to the pot and bring to a boil.

Add the dumplings and bring to a simmer. Heat until the dumplings are heated through, three to five minutes. Stir in the spinach, cooking until the greens are wilted, one to two minutes. Add the soy sauce and green onion greens.

Serve hot with hot sauce or chili oil, and extra soy sauce.

**Susan Forma**  
Union County Electric

## PHEASANT CHOWDER

### Ingredients:

- 2 pheasants (thighs and breasts: or only breasts if preferred)
- 4 celery stalks, sliced
- 1/2 lb. bacon strips, sliced
- 1 large yellow onion, diced
- 4 cups chicken broth
- 4 medium size Yukon Gold potatoes, peeled and cubed
- 3 cloves garlic, diced
- 5 tsps. flour
- 2 cups half-and-half
- 1 cup parmesan cheese
- Salt and Pepper

### Method

Put cubed potatoes in a separate pot, cover with the chicken broth, and bring to a boil. Cook the potatoes until they are soft.

Slice the pheasant meat, across grain into 1/4 to 1/2 inch strips.

Cut bacon slices into small pieces and put in a Dutch oven on medium heat. Add diced celery and onion and cook until the bacon and celery are cooked through and onions are transparent. Add the garlic and pheasant. The meat should cook quickly because of the small sized pieces. Once meat is cooked, add the flour one tablespoon at a time while stirring the mixture, thoroughly coating the vegetables and meat.

Add the potatoes and broth from the separate pot. Once incorporated, stir in the half-and-half, then stir in the parmesan cheese. Salt and pepper to taste. This chowder is ready to eat once heated through, or you can let it simmer on low heat. Flavors should continue to meld.

**Nick Kvernevig**  
Lake Region Electric

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 2025. All entries must include your name, mailing address, phone number and cooperative name.

Picture submitted by Laurie Wernke

# Annual Meeting Recap



**Amanda Haugen**  
Communications Specialist

West River Electric's 86th Annual Meeting was held on Saturday, October 11, 2025, at the Wall Community Center. The meeting started with everyone standing and saluting the flag

as Athena Simons, daughter of Sanden and Elaine Simons of Wall, sang our National Anthem. Our theme this year was Your Co-op, Your Power. It's not just a slogan. You own it and you guide it. Together we will continue to build a cooperative that future generations will be proud to inherit. One that is reliable, innovative, and rooted in community.

Board President Andy Moon guided the meeting through the normal business procedures. He highlighted the retirement of \$1 million in capital credits, the slowed growth compared to years past, and leadership changes on the board with the retirement of Larry Eisenbraun as well as at the top with the retirement of Dick Johnson. We welcome Taren Eisenbraun to the Board and Robert Raker as CEO. Moon ended by sharing our main power supplier, Basin Electric Power Cooperative, has projected a 10% rate increase for 2026 and another 8% in 2027. Your board is preparing strategies and exploring local solutions to do everything possible to soften the impact for you, the member.

Legal counsel Greg Erlandson guided the membership through the board election process and voting of a District 2 director. The membership re-elected two incumbent directors, Jamie Moon, District 1, and Sue Peters, District 3. New leadership was voted in for District 2, and we welcome Jason Habrock, of Piedmont, to represent District 2. He will serve a three-year term which will

run until October 2028. 11363500

Jason was raised on a family farm in northeast Nebraska, where agriculture was more than a livelihood—it was a way of life for him. His family farm included thousands of acres of crops and a sizeable cattle operation, and he even grew his own hog business to 2,000 head by the time he graduated high school. Agriculture has always been at the heart of who Jason is.

He earned a degree in mechanical engineering from the South Dakota School of Mines, where his wife Tracy and him first fell in love with the Black Hills. Career opportunities took Jason and wife elsewhere, where he spent over two decades with ADM, a Fortune 50 agricultural processor. His work spanned engineering and operations leadership, eventually serving as Global Director of Continuous Improvement, where he led a team supporting 165 facilities worldwide. Along the way, Jason also completed his MBA at Millikin

University.

Four years ago, Jason and Tracy returned to the Black Hills to raise their family in a community rooted in the values they cherish. Since then, Jason launched a manufacturing optimization consultancy serving clients across the region. Jason is excited to help shape the cooperative's future and support the needs of its membership.

The Board would like to extend a sincere 'thank you' to Marcia Arenson for her 31 years of dedicated knowledge and experience serving on the Board.

Robert Raker, CEO of West River Electric, went over various happenings at your cooperative. First, he shared we had another clean audit for 2024 and touched on utility plant, equity and our long-term debt totals. A big portion of Robert's speech was highlighting what is driving that rate increase from Basin Electric Power Cooperative. The first driver is substantial electrical demand. Between the years 2018 and 2024, Basin



Scholarship recipients, Morgan M., Brooke H., Austin K., Talon A., Louis R., Saraya L.

only brought on 45 MW of power, yet their demand grew by 40%. They relied heavily on Purchase Power, mostly renewables, as that was all that was being built.

The second driver is increased reserve margins from Southwest Power Pool (SPP). What that means is Basin can't build to serve its current loads. They have to build 136% capacity to serve 100% of their loads. This has to do with a lack of national energy policy and essentially the grid needs more dispatchable generation, like natural gas. Basin knows that the grid needs, which is why they have announced the building of Bison Station Generation. This is a 1,490 MW natural gas generation plant expected to be completed by 2030 with an overall price tag of roughly \$3.9 billion.

The third main driver of this rate increase from Basin, is the building of a 345 kV Transmission line that will run through western South Dakota. This will help strengthen our reliability by connecting the Bakken, where they have large amounts of dispatchable generation, down to Laramie River Station in Wyoming, where they also have more dispatchable generation. This transmission line will give us access to more reliable electricity.

Attendees of the meeting were able to receive a meal ticket to their favorite restaurant in Wall, have a chance to win door prizes, and receive an update on their cooperative. Every year, high school or college students have a chance at one of six \$500 scholarships, just for attending the annual meeting. This year we had 21 students in attendance and gave out six scholarships.

The board would like to thank all who attended their annual meeting. Please stay safe and healthy and we will see you next year for the 87th Annual Meeting.



CEO Robert Raker gives his update on the affairs of the cooperative.





During the annual Garden Glow event, McCrory Gardens in Brookings is transformed into a winter wonderland.  
*Photo submitted by McCrory Gardens*

# NATURE GROWS & GLOWS AT MCCRORY GARDENS

**Jacob Boyko**

[jacob.boyko@sdrea.coop](mailto:jacob.boyko@sdrea.coop)

Tucked among the towering pines at the busy corner of 6th Street and 22nd Avenue in Brookings, S.D., you'll find a little plot of botanical paradise.

For 60 years, South Dakota State University's McCrory Gardens has not only served as a mecca for horticulture enthusiasts, but also a versatile, community-focused space for weddings, workshops and other seasonal festivities.

"Here, our mission is connecting people and plants through education, research, discovery and enjoyment of the natural and built landscape," said Lisa Marotz, director of McCrory Gardens.

Working toward that mission, Marotz and staff keep a schedule full of activities for SDSU students and community members with a variety of seasonal events: a spring-time syrup-making workshop where participants are taught to tap trees; the summertime TuliPalooza where more than 15,000 tulip bulbs are planted in a colorful display; and the family-focused fall festival during Hobo Day weekend featuring horse-drawn hay rides and food trucks.

"There really is always something to see — just maybe not always what you expect," said Kathryn Bowar, an SDSU ag science

student and McCrory Gardens intern from Hoven, S.D.

Bowar says the space is increasingly popular for students looking to take a break from busy campus life to study, hang out with friends, or just enjoy time alone in a tranquil, outdoor environment surrounded by nature.

"I grew up as a ranch kid and adjusting to city life was overwhelming at times," Bowar added. "Coming to McCrory Gardens was a breath of fresh air and helped me recenter in the beauty of nature."

The garden's hallmark event is the regionally renowned Garden Glow, which transforms the dormant grounds into a winter wonderland with bright and festive Christmas lights and decorations.

"Garden Glow is a way that we are able to bring thousands of people to a botanical garden in South Dakota in December," Marotz said with a laugh. "We started out in 2015 when about 51 people came. Last year we were up to about 13,000, so it's grown a lot in popularity."

At the upcoming Garden Glow, visitors will meander through the reindeer meadow, travel across the life-size "Candy Land" board, warm up with a stop at the hot cocoa hut and peek inside Santa's summertime home while exploring all the garden has to offer.

And there's been a lot of change over the garden's 60-year history, from new flowerbeds and gardens to patios and memorials.

But despite that, Marotz says she and her staff work to ensure the original vision of the garden and the contributions of those who worked before her are preserved.

Rather than tearing out and replacing sections of the gardens, the staff update and add to the space, with each parcel of the 25-acre garden bearing the fingerprints of past enthusiasts who cultivated, researched and appreciated the flora that make the Midwest beautiful.

"We have visitors comment that they now know what heaven looks like," Marotz said. "That's what people feel here: sanctuary and peace."



Lisa Marotz – McCrory Gardens Director since 2016 – with intern Kathryn Bowar, who is beginning her third fall working at the garden.  
*Photo by Jacob Boyko*

With bright, blooming flowers, McCrory Gardens is the perfect stop for migrating butterflies and other helpful pollinators.  
 Photo by Jacob Boyko



Many area visitors recognize this cottage as the 1928 Lawson Gas Station in Lake Preston, which was moved to McCrory Gardens in 1996 and renovated in 2024.  
 Photo by Jacob Boyko



Each cactus in the cacti garden is dug up each fall and moved into a greenhouse on campus before being replanted in the spring.  
 Photo by Jacob Boyko



The 1991 Sioux Quartzite rock garden and 2013 waterfall are a favorite fixture in the garden — and the site of numerous summertime marriage proposals.  
 Photo by Jacob Boyko

A labyrinth of pathways and trails lined with mature trees and vines give garden visitors a sense of exploration — even though they're right in the middle of Brookings.  
 Photo by Jacob Boyko



During the Garden Glow event, the East Terrace Lawn and Gazebo becomes The Enchanted Forest. Marotz notes this was the site of the first Garden Glow in 2015 — miniscule compared to today's expansive decorating.

**This winter, Garden Glow is open 5-9 p.m. from Dec. 6, 2025 through Jan. 6, 2026.**

Photo submitted by McCrory Gardens

# 60<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY THE MCCRORY STORY

Photos submitted by  
 McCrory Gardens

## 1964

The S.D. Legislature approves funds to construct Bailey Rotunda and Wagner Hall on the site of SDSU's Horticulture-Forestry Gardens. Samuel A. McCrory, head of the horticulture department at SDSU, advocated for a research garden filled with S.D. flora that would also serve as a learning center for students. McCrory passed away March 10, 1964.



## 1966

The new horticulture garden is formally dedicated "McCrory Gardens" to honor the late department head.



## 1977

McCrory Gardens receives the prestigious All-American Display Garden Award. The Garden is now designated to receive and showcase winning plant selections each year.



## 1979

McCrory Gardens is named on a list of the top 10 small gardens in the U.S. by ARCO Travel Club Magazine.



## 1988

The first annual Garden Party is held to fund the maintenance and operating costs of the garden.



## 1994

The late Gov. George Mickelson is honored in the newly-constructed Mickelson Grove.



## 2012

The new Education & Visitor Center is dedicated.



## 2025

McCrory Gardens celebrates its 60th anniversary!

# Balancing Electricity Supply and Demand



**Amanda Haugen**  
Communications  
Specialist

Electricity is essential for nearly every aspect of daily life—so essential that we rarely think about how it's produced and delivered to our homes. You might be surprised to learn that behind

the scenes, a network of experts is working daily (and even by the minute) to anticipate how much electricity you need before you even use it.

We're all connected to the electric grid, so ensuring the right amount of electricity for all involves a complex process of forecasting energy demand, planning for capacity and securing enough supply to meet Americans' needs.

## Powerful sources

First, electricity must be generated at a power plant using either traditional sources, such as coal, natural gas or nuclear energy, or from renewable sources, such as solar, wind or hydropower.

At West River Electric (WREA), we work closely with Rushmore Power Cooperative, our local wholesale power partner, to secure enough electricity for

our communities, using a diverse mix of energy sources to generate the power we deliver to your home or business. By maintaining a diverse energy mix—coal, natural gas, wind and solar—WREA has options to ensure reliable power at a competitive cost.

On a larger scale, across the country, electricity supply and demand are managed through a market that includes long-term planning agreements, where electricity is bought and sold just like other common goods and services. Because West River Electric works with our wholesale power partner, which is also a cooperative, we are able to pool resources and expertise to deliver affordable power to our local communities. 12217400

Electricity supply changes throughout the day because demand fluctuates based on consumers' needs. For example, WREA knows that we need to ensure more electricity in the mornings when you're starting your day, and in the evenings when you're cooking dinner, running appliances and watching TV. Demand also increases when weather patterns change, such as extremely warm or cold temperatures.

## Managing supply and demand across the grid

Across the country, other electric

utilities are managing the same task of balancing supply and demand, which is why we have a larger network of key players in place to ensure enough power is delivered across the grid.

In most cases, the amount of electricity generated and how much is sent to specific areas are coordinated and monitored by regional transmission organizations (RTOs) and independent system operators (ISOs). In other areas, individual electric utilities perform these tasks.

RTOs, ISOs and electric utilities act as air traffic controllers for the electric grid. They forecast when you, your neighbors and communities across a large region will need more power. These organizations take measured steps to ensure there's enough supply to meet demand.

## Looking ahead


As the energy sector undergoes rapid change, it's important for all consumers to understand the basics of electricity supply and demand.

Electricity use in the U.S. is expected to rise to record highs this year and next, with the demand for electricity expected to at least double by 2050. At the same time, energy policies are pushing the early retirement of always-available generation sources, which will undoubtedly compromise reliable electricity.

West River Electric remains committed to providing affordable, reliable energy to the members we serve. That's why we are preparing now for increased demand and other challenges that could compromise our local electric supply.

Managing the balancing act of electricity supply and demand is a complex job, which is why we have a network of utilities, power plant operators and energy traffic managers in place to direct the electricity we need and keep the electric grid balanced.

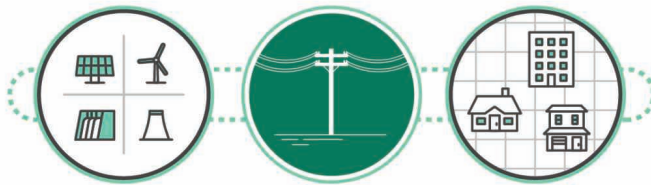
**Happy Holidays**  
Your Co-op. Your Power. Your Holidays.

 **West River Electric Association, Inc.**  
Your Touchstone Energy Cooperative

**OFFICES WILL BE CLOSED THE FOLLOWING DATES:**  
Wednesday Dec. 24th | All day  
Thursday Dec. 25th | All day  
Wednesday Dec. 31st | 11am-5pm  
Thursday Jan. 1st | All day

# A Balancing Act: ELECTRICITY SUPPLY AND DEMAND

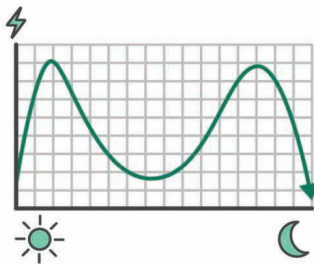
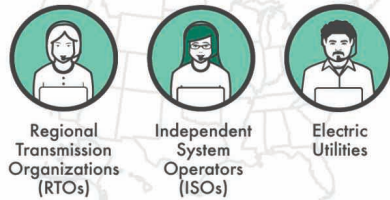
Behind the scenes, a network of people and facilities work together to ensure you have electricity when you flip the switch.



Electricity is generated at a power plant, then sent across the grid to homes, schools and businesses.

The amount of electricity generated and how much is sent to where it's needed are typically coordinated and monitored by regional grid operators that essentially act as energy traffic managers.

## Regional Grid Operators



As electricity demand varies throughout the day, grid operators, power plant operators and electric utilities work to forecast, plan and purchase enough electricity for everyone.

Ensuring communities have the exact amount of electricity they need is a challenging task, but behind the scenes, a network of industry experts make it happen every day.



## Factors that Impact Electricity Supply and Demand



- Demand Surges
- Extreme Temperatures
- Infrastructure Costs and Availability
- Supply Chain Challenges
- Fuel Costs
- Federal and State Regulations



The 2006 Youth Tour group takes a photo on the Albert Einstein Memorial in Washington, D.C.  
Photo by Brenda Kleinjan

# YOUTH TODAY. LEADERS TOMORROW.

## South Dakota's Youth Tour Continues to Inspire Leadership Years Later

**Frank Turner**  
frank.turner@sdra.coop

Each summer, a new group of South Dakota teens will board a plane for Washington, D.C., full of excitement for the trip of a lifetime. They're part of the South Dakota Electric Cooperative Youth Tour, a weeklong experience that connects rural students to the people, places and ideas that shape our country.

The Youth Tour began after a 1957 speech by former Sen. Lyndon B. Johnson, who encouraged electric cooperatives to send young people to the Capitol so they could "see what the flag stands for." Since South Dakota sent

its first group in 1963, more than 1,300 students have made the trip.

During the trip, students visit landmarks like Ford's Theater, the National Archives and the U.S. Capitol. They meet members of Congress, make friends from across the country and see firsthand how decisions made in Washington affect people back home.

For many, the most meaningful part of the trip happens long after they return. The experience lights a spark that shapes how they view their communities and their roles within them.

Two of those alumni, Kevin Larsen and Andi Foberg, still carry lessons from their Youth Tour experiences today.

### Kevin Larsen

Kevin Larsen remembers applying for Youth Tour in 2006 as a junior from Howard High School to represent Central Electric Cooperative.

"I've always been a history nut," he said. "My parents, like a lot of farmers, weren't made of money. This was a chance to go see the nation's capital, and I figured, why not apply?"

Once he decided to apply, he approached his high school English teacher, who helped him polish his essay, which landed on the desk of longtime Central Electric Cooperative General Manager Ken Schlimgen. "Lo and behold, the legendary Ken Schlimgen gives me a call," Larsen said. "And the rest is history."

Larsen now serves as the public information officer for the South Dakota State Historical Society in Pierre. He is also active in local organizations and community leadership roles, serving as president of the Pierre Kiwanis Club, incoming exalted ruler for the Pierre Elks Lodge, and in 2025

he ran for a position on the Pierre City Commission, only to come short by a handful of votes.

“These types of trips instill a passion for civics, and I think they mean a lot more for rural South Dakota kids,” Larsen said. “I’m from the middle of nowhere, Canova, South Dakota – a lot of people don’t even know where that is. The nearest town from our farm was six miles away, and that town is 100 people if everybody’s home. I think the opportunity to travel means more coming from somebody that was raised on a farm.”

He laughs when he thinks back to the trip. He keeps in touch with one of his roommates from that week. “You build connections you don’t expect,” he said. “One of the guys I roomed with ended up being a friend of my wife’s, and years later he attended our wedding.”

Larsen also credits his former Youth Tour Director, Brenda Kleinjan, for making the trip a success. “She was so passionate about the places we visited,” he said. “We weren’t just seeing historic monuments; we were learning what they meant.”

For Larsen, that week in D.C. helped set him on a lifelong path of leadership. “That trip really instilled that leadership ability and finding that inner voice to apply for something you might not think would ever happen,” he said. “When I sent off the essay in high school, I would have never imagined in my wildest dreams that I’d get an all-expenses-paid trip to D.C. We even ate well, too.”

## Andi Fouberg

When Andi Fouberg applied for the Youth Tour, she was a high school student from Letcher. “I’m pretty sure my best



Kevin Larsen (left) takes a photo with Youth Tour friends at the FDR Memorial in 2006.  
*Photo by Brenda Kleinjan*



**Kevin Larsen**  
2006 Youth Tour Alum  
*Submitted Photo*



**Andi Fouberg**  
1994 Youth Tour Alum  
*Submitted Photo*

friend went the year before, and I thought that seemed pretty cool,” she said.

Also representing Central Electric Cooperative, she joined the 1994 Youth Tour, a year she remembers vividly for an unusual reason.

“The night before we left was when O.J. Simpson went on the white Ford Bronco run through Los Angeles,” she said with a laugh. “We watched it on TV in the hotel in Sioux Falls because we met there and stayed the night before we all flew out together.”

The trip instilled an early passion for civic life in Fouberg. After college, she moved to Washington, D.C., and spent 10 years as Sen. John Thune’s communications director.

“Youth Tour was what prompted me to want to be in D.C. at some point,” Fouberg said.

While working for Sen. Thune, Fouberg would regularly meet new Youth Tour students visiting the Capitol every year in June.

“I’d see these students walking the same halls I once toured, wide-eyed and curious, and I’d think, that was me,” she said.

Now, Fouberg leads the South Dakota State University Alumni Association as its president and CEO. She credits that early trip with showing her what public service and connection can look like.

“The trip had an impact on me wanting to be out there and be part of that environment,” she said. “It made me want to be part of the process and feel like you are part of the government machine, but in a way that helps people.”

Reflecting on it now, she believes the experience gives students from small towns something they might not otherwise see.

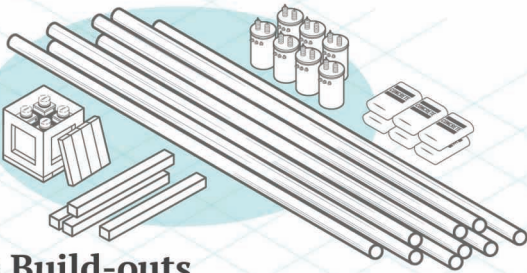
“Growing up in Letcher or any small community in South Dakota, I don’t know that civic engagement is something you naturally imagine yourself doing without exposure from something like Youth Tour,” she said. “Without exposure to Washington D.C. through something like that, I probably would not have pursued that path. It all had its roots in Youth Tour.”

# Infrastructure Costs

The past five years have been a period of exploding costs for the electric utility industry and for broadband providers, pushed by soaring demand, supply chain challenges, raw materials shortages, increased labor costs and tariffs. The impact has been rapid increases in the cost of producing power, longer and more unpredictable project timelines and the need for more financing, all of which have driven electric rates up for residences, businesses and other end-users. Here's a look at what's contributing to the trend. **Percent increase since 2020:**

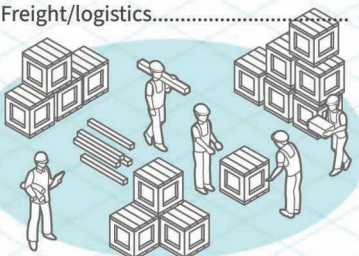
## Infrastructure

- Utility poles (wood, steel, composite) **+25-40%**
- Crossarms & braces (steel/wood)..... **+20-35%**
- Conductor wire (aluminum/copper).. **+30-50%**
- Transformers..... **+70-100%**
- Grain-oriented electrical steel..... **+80-100%**
- Oil/dielectric fluids..... **+25-40%**
- Copper wiring..... **+50%**
- Concrete..... **+25-35%**
- Smart meters..... **+20-35%**
- Pad-mounted switchgear..... **+25-40%**
- Circuit breakers/reclosers..... **+20-35%**



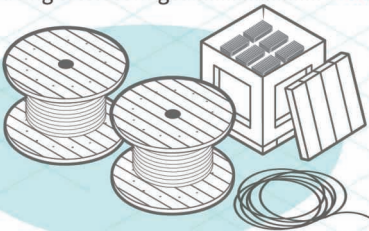
## Build-outs

- Utility construction labor..... **+20-40%**
- Freight/logistics..... **+30-60%**



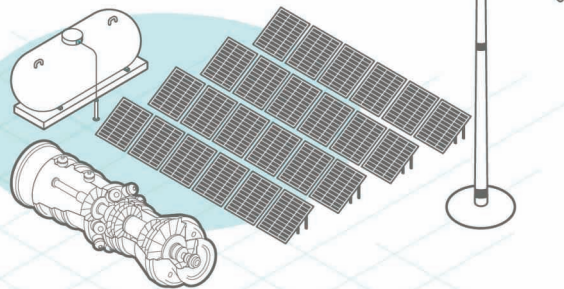
## Broadband

- Fiber-optic cable..... **+25-40%**
- Splicing & telecom gear..... **+20-30%**



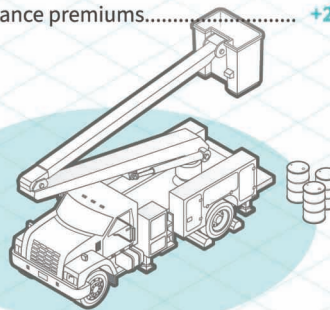
## Generation

- Diesel gensets..... **+20-40%**
- Gas turbines..... **+20-30%**
- Solar PV systems..... **+25-35%**
- Wind turbines..... **+25-35%**
- Hydropower components..... **+20-30%**
- Battery storage..... **+25-40%**
- SCADA/EMS systems..... **+20-30%**
- Inverters..... **+20-30%**
- Relays & switchgear..... **+25-40%**
- Natural Gas..... **+20-120%**
- Coal..... **+30-60%**
- Diesel/fuel oil..... **+40-70%**



## Fleets

- Light trucks..... **+25-40%**
- Bucket trucks, digger derricks ..... **+20-50%**
- Fuel costs (especially diesel)..... **+20-30%**
- Maintenance..... **+15-25%**
- Insurance premiums..... **+20%**



Sources: BLS; energynews.com; Reuters; Wood Mackenzie; NREL; IEA



SCAN TO APPLY FOR YOUTH TOUR!



# YOUTH TOUR



## LOCATE YOUR ACCOUNT NUMBER

There are five (5) account numbers placed randomly throughout the publication. If you locate your account number anywhere in this issue of the Cooperative Connections, you will be credited \$10.00, towards your next bill. You must notify our office by the 10th of the following month to receive your credit.

## WEST RIVER ELECTRIC OFFICE HOURS

### RAPID CITY OFFICE

3250 E Hwy 44  
Rapid City, SD 57703  
Monday – Friday: 7 a.m. – 5 p.m.  
605-393-1500  
Info@westriver.coop

### WALL OFFICE

1200 W 4th Ave  
PO Box 412  
Wall, SD 57790  
Monday – Friday: 7 a.m. – 5 p.m.  
605-279-2135  
Info@westriver.coop

\*This email is not monitored on nights or weekends and it is not for reporting outages. To report an outage please follow the instructions below.

## OUTAGE OR EMERGENCY?

Our calls are answered 24/7. In the event on an outage, please report it via the SmartHub app, texting OUT to 855-939-3719, or by calling our office at 605-279-2135 or 605-393-1500.

## REGISTER TO WIN!

Bring this coupon and mailing label to the Touchstone Energy® Cooperatives booth at the Black Hills Stock Show & Rodeo to win a prize!

Your Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Your E-mail Address: \_\_\_\_\_



**NOV. 25-DEC. 26**  
**Christmas at the Capitol**  
**8 a.m.-10 p.m. (holidays included)**  
Pierre, SD  
605-773-3178  
[christmasatthecapitol.sd.gov](http://christmasatthecapitol.sd.gov)

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. 28**  
**Snacks With Santa**  
2-4 p.m.  
Hill City Center  
Hill City, SD

**NOV. 28**  
**Roasted Chestnuts & Cider**  
5 p.m.  
Alpine Inn  
Hill City, SD

**NOV. 28**  
**Olde Tyme Christmas Parade**  
6 p.m.  
Main Street  
Hill City, SD

**NOV. 28**  
**Holiday Express Classic**  
First Class & 21+ Spiked!  
1880 Train  
Hill City, SD

**NOV. 28-29**  
**Kris Kringle Vendor Fair**  
Fri. 9 a.m.-4 p.m.  
Sat. 9 a.m.-3 p.m.  
Hill City High School  
Hill City, SD

**NOV. 30**  
**Advanced Technique Class:**  
**Split Rectangles**  
The Farmer's Daughter  
Hill City, SD

**DEC. 1-30**  
**Trees & Trains Exhibit**  
SD State Railroad Museum  
Hill City, SD

**DEC. 2**  
**SunCatcher TRA Chilli Cook-off**  
**& Dessert Silent Auction**  
841 E. St. Patrick St.  
Rapid City, SD  
[info@suncatchertra.org](mailto:info@suncatchertra.org)

**DEC. 5-6**  
**Christmas in the Hills**  
Mueller Center  
Hot Springs, SD  
605-890-2974

**DEC. 7**  
**KCBA Hometown Christmas**  
10 a.m.-4 p.m.  
Kadoka City Auditorium  
Kadoka, SD  
605-488-0151

**DEC. 7**  
**Christmas Carnival**  
10 a.m.-2 p.m.  
Hermosa School Gymnasium  
Hermosa, SD  
605-290-9409

**DEC. 8**  
**Senior Sunday Breakfast**  
8 a.m.-12 p.m.  
Hill City Center  
Hill City, SD

**DEC. 15**  
**Lions Club/Vitalant Blood Drive**  
Hill City Center  
Hill City, SD

**DEC. 20**  
**Lions Club Bingo**  
5 p.m. Dinner, 6 p.m. Bingo  
Hill City Center  
Hill City, SD

**JAN. 10**  
**Knights of Columbus**  
**Coats for Kids Bowling**  
**Tournament**  
1 p.m.  
Meadowood Lanes  
3809 Sturgis Rd.  
Rapid City, SD  
605-393-2081  
[jschlim1@gmail.com](mailto:jschlim1@gmail.com)

**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.**