A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative

WEST RIVER ELECTRIC
DECEMBER 2026 VOL. 27 NO. 8

COOPERATIVE CONNECTIONS



Christmas Storms

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Photo Submitted by Black Hills Electric Cooperative

Planning Ahead for 2027 Electric Rates



Robert Raker
CEO/GM

As we prepare for the year ahead, I want to give our members advance notice: you should expect an electric rate increase in 2027. While we are still evaluating the details, our current projections suggest an increase in the neighborhood of 8%. 3790000

The primary pressure is the cost of purchasing the electricity we deliver to your homes, farms, ranches, and businesses. Basin Electric, our wholesale power supplier through Rushmore Electric, increased its rates by 10% in 2026 and approved another 8% increase for 2027. Those increases raise West River Electric's cost of providing service.

In addition to power costs, our rates cover the poles, wires, substations, equipment and people needed to deliver reliable electricity. We are turning over every stone to determine what we can absorb and what we must pass along without jeopardizing safety, reliability, and service.

Wholesale power costs are the main driver of this rate increase, but other expenses are adding pressure as well. These include the costs of essential shared services that support all cooperatives across the state, such as safety training, employee training, and legislative advocacy. Advocacy requires reviewing bills introduced in Pierre during the legislative session to identify proposals that could increase your costs or affect our ability to serve you. This ongoing work to protect members' interests requires time, expertise, and resources.

According to the SD Legislatures' website, 2026 saw 571 bills introduced. The end goal is to protect our members and when that many proposals are introduced, it takes time, expertise, and money. Hopefully, we will see some reprieve during the next legislative session, but with more issues being pulled into the political arena, I would not count on it. We are not unique; this area adds costs across many industries.

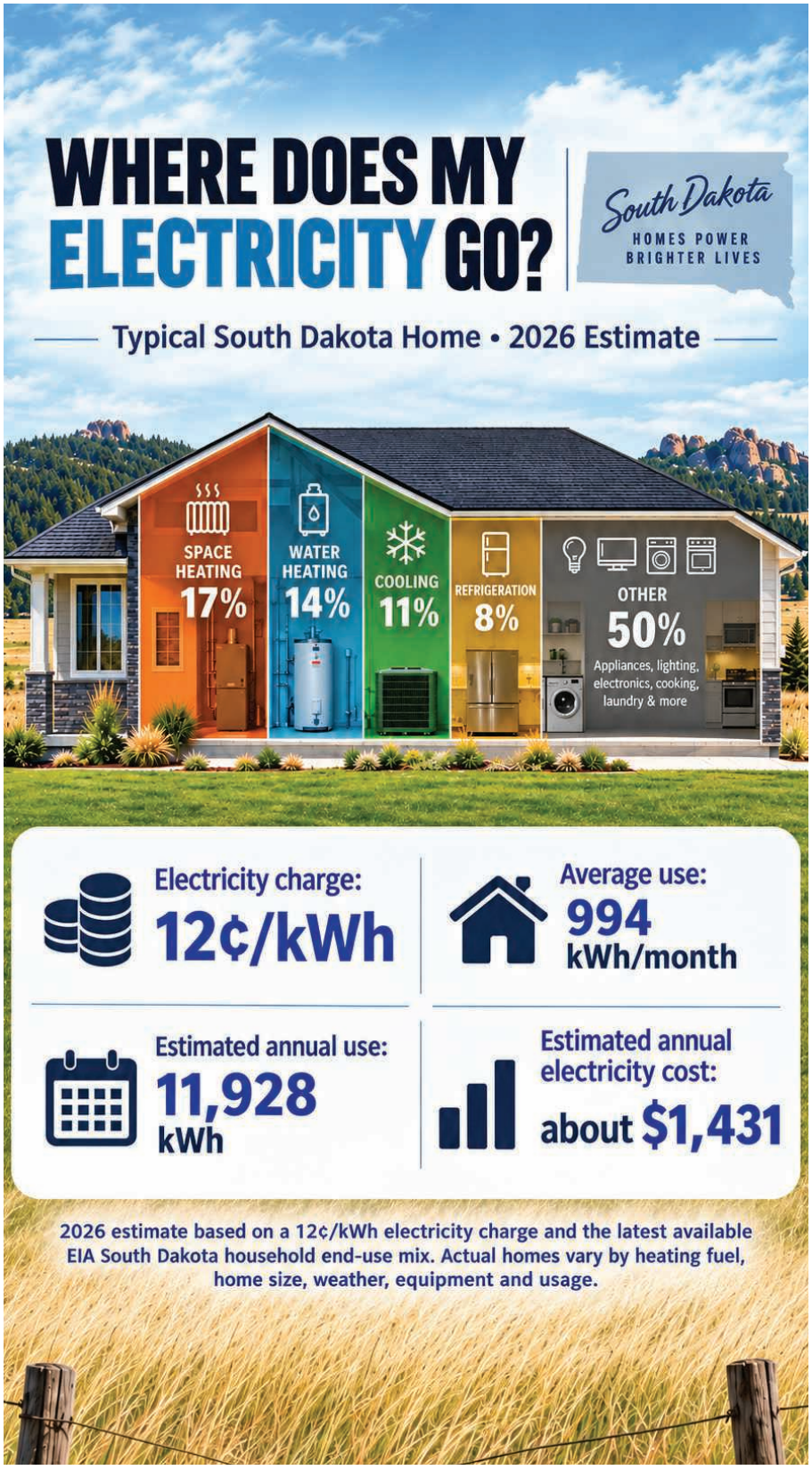
One system that does need serious attention is insurance costs. We are facing double-digit insurance premium increases for 2027. Many of you are experiencing the same frustration in your own households and businesses. Those increases also affect the cost of maintaining the workforce that keeps your electricity flowing.

Along with wholesale power costs and infrastructure costs, the examples that I gave you above, are also taken into consideration when we are setting rates. Unfortunately, we know that these are areas almost every household and business is also dealing with. That's why, as a member-owned cooperative, we owe you more than an explanation of rising costs. We owe you careful decisions about how your money is spent. We are evaluating expenses, questioning increases, and looking for savings while protecting the service you depend on.

Let me end with some encouraging news. Our future is looking promising. Current wholesale power forecasts point toward more moderate increases after 2027. We still expect upward pressure, but the pace of increases appears likely to stabilize. That does not mean costs will return to previous levels. And this is South Dakota; we all know forecasts can change. 3852400

So please stay tuned, we will share the final rate details as soon as the decisions are completed so you have time to plan. Thank you for your trust in West River Electric.





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
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Stan Anders – Vice President
Jamie Lewis – Secretary
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Taran Eisenbraun
Peter Blake
Jason Habrock
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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 Connection's 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.

CHRISTMAS GIFT IDEAS FOR WINTER STORM READINESS

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

"Never drive high loads under low power lines!"



Artwork by Lydell Weaver

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

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



Rise & DINE

COLD OATMEAL MUESLI

Ingredients:

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

Method

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

Elaine Rieck
Southeastern Electric

BREAKFAST HOT DISH

Ingredients:

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

Method

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

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

Bake 1 hour at 350°F.

Rowena Wipf
Northern Electric

OVERNIGHT COFFEE CAKE

Ingredients:

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

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

Method

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

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

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

Rowena Wipf
Northern Electric

RECIPE CORRECTION: SWEDISH PANCAKES

Ingredients:

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

Lois J. Larson
Clay-Union Electric

Method

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

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

Please send your favorite recipes to your local electric cooperative (address found on Page 3). Each recipe printed will be entered into a drawing for a prize in December 2027. All entries must include your name, mailing address, phone number and cooperative name.

87th Annual Meeting Recap



Amanda Haugen
Communications Specialist

West River Electric's 87th Annual Meeting was held on October 10, 2026, at the Wall Community Center. The meeting was kicked off by saluting the flag as Ada Dennis, daughter of Hope and Garrett Shearer of Wall, sang the National Anthem. Our theme this year was Together Towards Tomorrow. For 87 years, West River Electric has been built on the idea of people working together for a common purpose. That cooperative spirit continues today as we serve our members, strengthen our communities, and prepare for the opportunities and challenges ahead. 3871200



Marcia Arneson recognized for her 31 years on the board.



Bailey Cerney and Kylie Dartt share their experience on the Youth Tour.

Board President Andy Moon guided the meeting through the normal business procedures. He highlighted the retirement of $1 million in Capital Credits, the importance of having enough financial strength from member equity to serve the members that come next and finally, recognizing the hard work our employees and board put in day in and day out to keep the lights on. Moon ended by sharing that Golden West will be leasing the second floor of our Rapid City location in 2027. Golden West and West River Electric are both headquartered in Wall and from 1953 to 1964, they shared a manager. Eventually the boards decided it was time to go their separate ways and now, more than 60 years later, we will be under the same roof again. We want to make it clear, Golden West and West River Electric are not merging. We are still two separate cooperatives with separate employees, boards, and operations. It just so happened we had space available after Caterpillar moved out and Golden West was looking for space for their various operations in the Rapid City area.

Legal counsel Greg Erlandson gave the incumbent directors seeking re-election report. There was no contested election, so Peter Blake from District 1, Chuck Sloan from District 2 and Taran Eisenbraun from District 3 were all re-elected to serve another three-year term on the board.

Past Board member Marcia Arneson was recognized for her 31 years of dedicated service to West River Electric. Marcia demonstrated what it meant to show up and serve others. We thank her for her many years of service and guidance.

Bailey Cerney and Kylie Dartt shared their experience on the NRECA Youth Tour trip to Washington, D.C. this past June. They represented West River Electric well and we are excited to see what the future holds for them. Applications for the 2027 Youth Tour are open and the deadline to apply is December 11th.

Robert Raker, CEO of West River Electric, went over various happenings at your cooperative. First, he shared how we responded to the changes we saw and how we are preparing for what comes next. In 2025, our outage performance was the best in the state and nationally we ranked in the top 6% out of 814 cooperatives. Those numbers are a reflection of the hard work, planning, and commitment of the employees. He went over the growth we continue to see, the increase in kilowatt-hours moving across our system, and how our next four-year work plan will focus on reliability improvements across our system.

A big portion of Robert's speech was answering the question, "what kind of cooperative do we want to leave for the next generation?" Parts of our system have been serving members for decades while growth continues to change where and how electricity is needed across our service territory. Basin Electric Power Cooperative shared a projected 18% wholesale rate increase over two years. 10% in 2026 and another 8% in 2027. Now, just because they say 8% does not mean it automatically means your bill will increase that much. Your board of directors and management team continue evaluating every option, conducting rate studies, and looking for ways to absorb costs wherever possible. As more information about this becomes available, we will share through our multiple communication channels.

Lastly, Raker shared the projected 345kV Transmission project from Basin Electric Power Cooperative that will run across western South Dakota will play an important role in maintaining reliability and adding additional capacity. This project is crucial for western SD and one that will take many years to build.

Attendees of the meeting received a registration gift, meal ticket to their favorite restaurant in Wall, and had a chance at some door prizes. We had 14 high school students in attendance for a chance at one of six scholarships, and 11 employees were recognized for their years of service. 3949300

The Board would like to extend their thanks for all who attended their annual meeting, both in person and online, and we look forward to seeing you at next year's 88th Annual Meeting.



Members received a registration gift and were entered into door prize drawings.



Over 150 members were in attendance.



Kylie Dartt was one of six scholarship recipients.



CEO Robert Raker gives his update on the cooperative affairs.



CHRISTMAS ON CALL

Sometimes The Holidays Have to Wait

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

Frank Turner
frank.turner@sdrea.coop

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

A Return To The Black Hills

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Families Behind The Work

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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


SMALL CHOICES BIG SAVINGS
What Does It Cost to Run Household Appliances?
Cost per kWh: 12¢
Brighten Tomorrow Starts at Home
SAVE ENERGY
SAVE MONEY
Heating & Cooling
Stay Comfortable, Save Energy!
APPLIANCE COST PER
Air Conditioner - Room $0.16 Hour
Air Conditioner - Central (3 Ton) $0.60 Hour
Fan-Window $0.02 Hour
Fan-Ceiling $0.01 Hour
Heater-Portable $0.16 Hour
Heating Pad $0.01 Hour
Electric Blanket $0.02 Hour
Water Heater $1.58 Day
Kitchen & Cooking
Good Food Brighter Days!
APPLIANCE COST PER
Blender $0.05 Hour
Broiler $0.17 Hour
Crock Pot $0.02 Hour
Coffee Maker-Drip $0.02 Pot
Microwave Oven $0.18 Hour
Range with Oven $0.38 Day
Toaster $0.05 Use
Toaster Oven $0.18 Use
Food Processor (50V) $0.04 Hour
Self-Cleaning Oven $0.60 Clean
Laundry & Cleaning
A Cleaner Home A Brighter Life!
APPLIANCE COST PER
Clothes Dryer-Electric $0.43 Load
Clothes Dryer-Gas $0.12 Load
Clothes Washer $0.04 Load
Dishwasher $0.12 Load
Vacuum Cleaner $0.08 Hour
Sewing Machine $0.01 Hour
Iron-Hand $0.12 Hour
Hair Dryer $0.05 Hour
Electronics & Entertainment
Powering the Moments You Love
12:00
APPLIANCE COST PER
Clock $0.18 Month
Computer w/ Monitor $0.02 Hour
Nintendo/PlayStation $0.01 Hour
Stereo System $0.01 Hour
Television-Color $0.02 Hour
Lighting, Refrigeration & Other
Bright Ideas Lower Bills!
APPLIANCE COST PER
Lights-Christmas (100 Lights, 7.5 W) $0.10 Hour
Lighting-(100 Watts) $0.01 Hour
Fridge-Auto/Top Freezer (16 CF) $0.59 Day
Fridge Auto/Side/Side (20 CF) $0.68 Day
Freezer-Frostless (16 CF) $0.70 Day
Pool Pump (1.5 HP) $0.18 Hour
SAVE ENERGY | SAVE MONEY
Estimates for reference only. Actual costs vary by wattage, usage, and electric rate.

The Gift of Membership



Amanda Haugen
Communications Specialist

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

When you receive electric service from WREA, you're more than a customer. You're a member of an electric co-op, and that distinction is at the heart of everything we do. 3954900

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

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

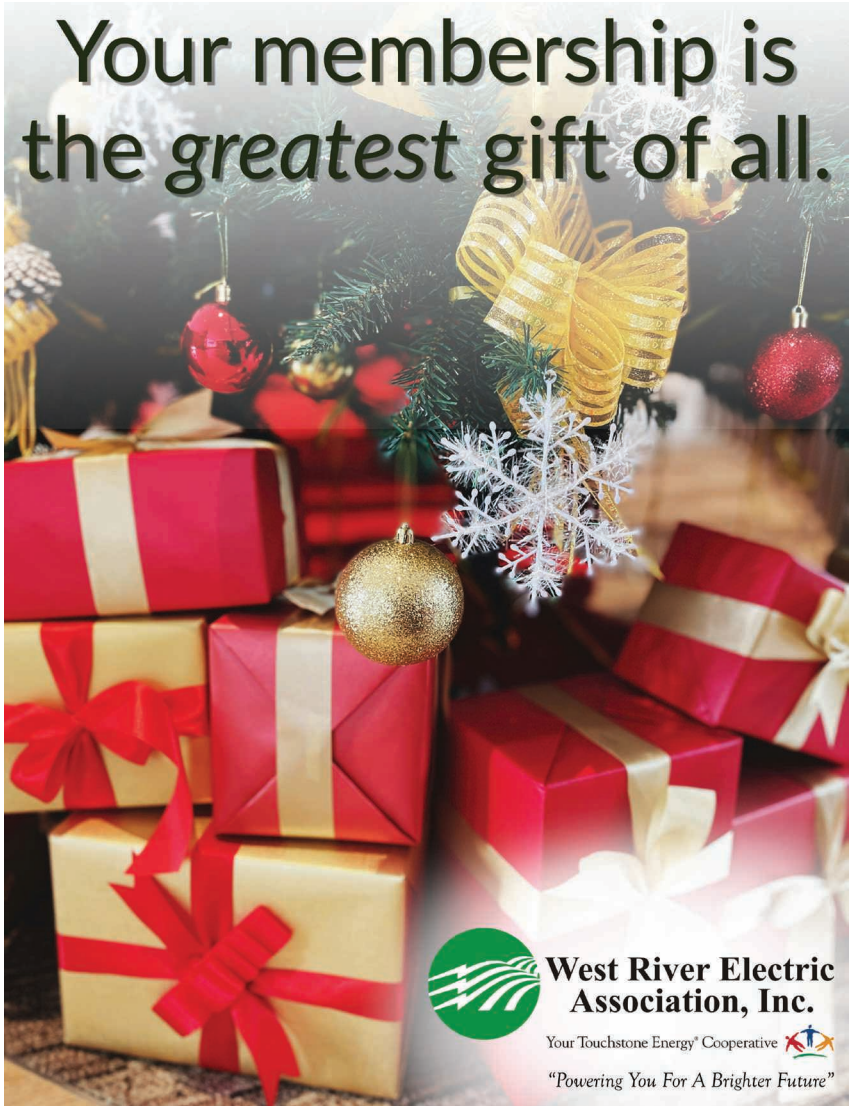
Membership also means access to co-op resources and programs designed specifically with your needs in mind. From programs and tools to help you manage energy use to payment assistance, energy audits, and different youth opportunities, we work to provide services that make a meaningful difference in your life.

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

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

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

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





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

FOSTER CARE
THE COMMUNITY'S KIDS

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

Frank Turner
frank.turner@sdrea.coop

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

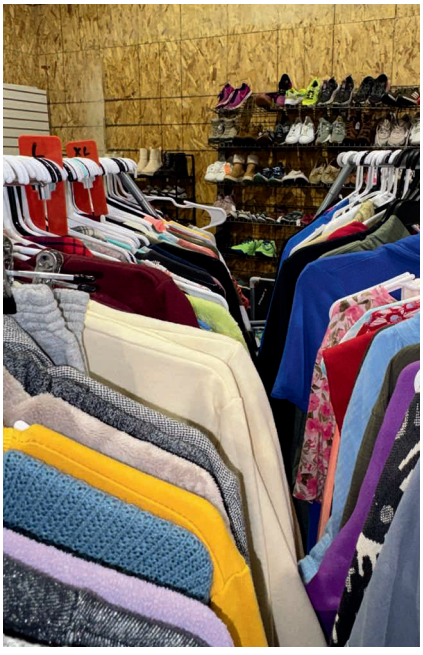
Private donations fund the organization's work and local volunteerism keeps it running, Combs said. They are always looking for more volunteers to sort donations and organize supplies.

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

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



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



Help or get involved

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

Save the Paper for the Presents This Holiday Season!

The holiday season is usually filled with wrapping paper, ribbons, bows, and plenty of packages. This year, West River Electric is encouraging members to save the paper for presents and make the switch to a digital Cooperative Connections magazine!

Going paperless doesn't mean missing out on your favorite cooperative news. You'll still receive the same great stories, important updates, energy-saving tips, and community highlights you've come to enjoy, just in a more convenient format.

Why make the switch?

- Convenience at your fingertips. Receive a link to the latest magazine directly in your email inbox each month ahead of everyone else.
- Read anytime, anywhere. Whether you're at home or on the go, enjoy your magazine from your phone, tablet, or computer.
- Less paper, less clutter. Keep your mailbox a little lighter while reducing unnecessary paper waste.
- Support your cooperative. Going digital helps reduce printing and mailing expenses, allowing your cooperative to make the most of member dollars.

This holiday season, give yourself the gift of convenience while helping your cooperative save resources.

Same great magazine. Less paper. One simple switch.

Ready to go paperless? Scan the QR code or visit https://smarthub.tfaforms.net/3306 and start receiving your monthly Cooperative Connections magazine digitally!





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 of 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.



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

Photo courtesy of Travel South Dakota

To have your event listed on this page, send complete information, including date, event, place and contact to your local electric cooperative. Include your name, address and daytime telephone number. Information must be submitted at least eight weeks prior to your event. Please call ahead to confirm date, time and location of event.

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

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

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

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

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

NOV. 27-29, DEC. 4-6, 11-13,18-20
Rick Mills Trees & Trains Exhibit
Fri., Sat.: 12-7 p.m.
Sun.: 12-5 p.m.
Hill City Harley Davidson Shop
Hill City, SD

DEC. 4
Hot Springs Chamber of Commerce Cookie Cruise
4-6 p.m.
Hot Springs, SD

DEC. 4-5
Christmas in the Hills
Mueller Civic Center
Hot Springs, SD
951-591-2335

DEC. 5
Black Hills Symphony Presents A Night Before Christmas
7:30 p.m.
Historic Theatre in the Performing Arts Center
Rapid City, SD
605-394-1786

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

DEC. 6
KCBA Hometown Christmas
10 a.m.-4 p.m. (MST)
Kadoka City Auditorium
Kadoka, SD
605-488-0151

DEC. 7
Hill City Evergreen Garden Club Christmas Party
11:30 a.m.
Hill City Center
Hill City, SD

DEC. 9
From the Vine to Boutique Fashion Showcase
4-8 p.m.
285 Main St.
Hill City, SD

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

DEC. 12
Santa Hat Shopping Spree
11 a.m.-4 p.m.
Hot Springs, SD

DEC. 19
Cowboy Christmas
Chute Rooster
5 p.m. Doors Open
7 p.m. Show
Hill City, SD

DEC. 31
Black Hills Symphony Presents Disco Inferno
7:30 p.m.
Historic Theatre in the Performing Arts Center
Rapid City, SD
605-394-1786

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.