

Cooperative Connections

The Annual Buffalo Round Up at Custer State Park is one of many activities of interest for visitors to South Dakota

SD Tourism continues steady pace

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Anglers in hot pursuit of cold fish

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A Letter to Our Members



Rodney Haag

rhaag@oaheelectric.com

**For 70 years we
have all worked
together to solve
problems and face
the future together.**

You may have heard that Dakota Energy Cooperative, headquartered in Huron serving Beadle, Hand and Hyde counties, is attempting to break its contract with our wholesale power provider, East River Electric Power Cooperative. I, along with our board of directors, want to provide details on this issue and discuss our stance on the matter, including its impact on you, our member-owners.

Oahe Electric Cooperative, Inc. along with Dakota Energy and 22 other distribution electric co-ops and one municipal electric system in eastern South Dakota and western Minnesota receive our power supply from East River Electric. Our family of distribution co-ops created East River about 70 years ago when we all came together to sign long-term contracts. Rural residents in our region couldn't get electric service, so they formed our cooperative. Since our co-ops couldn't get a fair deal from the for-profit power companies of the time, they formed East River. These contracts have been continually updated over the years to ensure our cooperative network can access capital to sustain operations and build infrastructure. The decision to sign this contract was a promise between neighbors and cooperatives to work together in the best interest of all consumers. All East River's members freely signed our current power contract in April 2015. On Nov. 6, 2020, Dakota Energy filed a legal complaint against East River to break the contract and withdraw from their membership in the cooperative. Dakota Energy requested an exit fee in their effort to break its power contract.

Dakota Energy intends to seek their wholesale power supply from a for-profit, Denver-based company called Guzman Energy, a power broker, with no infrastructure or investment in South Dakota or Minnesota. Guzman has made attempts in other states to lure cooperatives away from their local wholesale power supply cooperatives. Now, unfortunately, Guzman is attempting to make profits off of South Dakota's co-op member-owners.

We stand with East River Electric because, collectively, we are East River Electric. We Formed East River. We Own East River. We Are East River. We want to keep our co-op family whole. We understand that every cooperative faces unique challenges, but that's why for 70 years we have all worked together to solve problems and face the future together. Our proven long-term strategy is better than a short-term gamble with an entity like Guzman.

East River's board has representatives from the member systems they serve. Blaine Livermont currently serves as Oahe Electric's representative on East River's board. Through our representation on the board, we help set our power supplier's direction and collectively agree on our wholesale rates. That's the power of our co-op network – we have a voice. Our cooperative network is not beholden to investors. No one's profits come before our members. We are here for you and East River is here for you.

In 2021, East River forecasts a third consecutive year with flat rates. Our co-op network is cost-based, which means that any excess funds are returned to the member.

In the past 10 years East River has returned almost \$27.5 million to their member systems. A for-profit company doesn't return its profits to its customers. That's just one of the values of being a part of the cooperative network.

Again, we stand with East River to keep our cooperatives local, reliable, and out of the hands of for-profit investors. As always, feel free to reach out with any questions or concerns. Thank you for the trust that you have in our co-op family to provide you with safe, affordable and reliable power.

Oahe Electric Cooperative Connections

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Our Mission

Oahe Electric delivers high quality, low-cost electric service to our local member-owners. As a Touchstone Energy® Cooperative, we are committed to meeting the highest standards of customer satisfaction. We do business with accountability, integrity, innovation and commitment to community. As an electric co-op, we are part of America's most trusted network of high quality energy providers.

Oahe Electric Now Accepting Applications for 2021 Scholarships

Oahe Electric, in conjunction with Basin Electric Power Cooperative, is offering **one \$1,000** college scholarship to a lucky student in the Hughes and Sully County area. In addition to this scholarship, Oahe Electric is offering **four \$500** college scholarships.

The scholarship program recognizes and encourages the academic achievements of students in our region. It also serves as an investment in the economic future of rural areas.

Applicants for the scholarships must be a U.S. citizen and be enrolled or planning to

enroll in a full-time undergraduate course of study at an accredited two-year or four-year college, university or vocational/technical school.

The scholarship recipients are chosen based on a combination of SAT/ACT scores, overall grade-point average, work experience, participation in school and community activities, a personal statement of career goals and a written recommendation by a third party.

Oahe Electric Accepting Lineman's Scholarship Applications

Oahe Electric Cooperative is offering a **\$500** scholarship for a full-time student registered or planning to register in a power line construction and maintenance program.

The purpose of this scholarship is to emphasize and support the education of future power line workers in South Dakota. Oahe Electric has committed to

providing funds for financial assistance to students enrolled in power line maintenance programs with the hopes that graduates of that program will pursue a career with rural electric cooperatives in the area.

**All scholarship applications are due on
Friday, Feb. 12, 2021.**

Applicants must be members or member-dependents of Oahe Electric.

For more information, contact Samantha at Oahe Electric in Blunt at 1-800-640-6243 or oahe@oaheelectric.com. Applications can also be downloaded by visiting our website at www.oaheelectric.com.

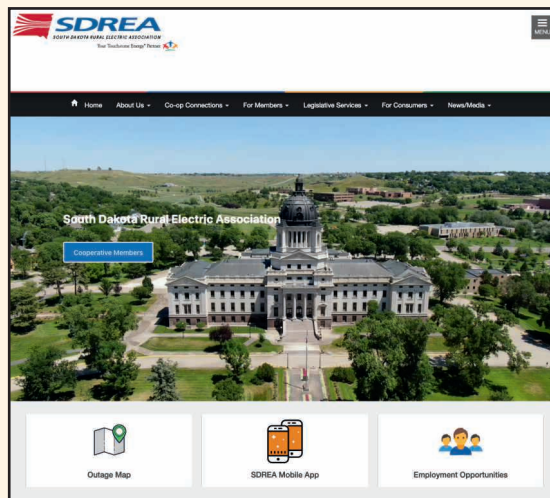
National Cut Your Energy Costs Day

If you resolved to spend less and save more in 2021, cutting back on a few regular expenses is a good place to start. Sunday, Jan. 10, is National Cut Your Energy Costs Day, so we've rounded up a few tips to help you trim your utility bills without making major lifestyle changes.

- **Cut heating and cooling costs.** We spend a great deal of energy heating our homes in the winter and keeping them cool in the summer, but are we really doing our best to minimize the cost of our comfort? A programmable thermostat can allow you to adjust the temperature when you're out of the house or sleeping. There's no reason to blast the heat when everyone is at work, and it's doubtful you need to sleep with the hot air on high. So program your schedule into your thermostat, and it'll do all the work for you.
- **Watch out for energy draining appliances.** Big appliances like refrigerators, washers and dryers consume a lot of energy, so the next time you replace one of these appliances, upgrade to an energy-efficient Energy Star-certified model. These are designed to use much less energy than their older counterparts and often end up paying for themselves in savings over time. Keep these appliances clean and well maintained to ensure optimal performance and efficiency.
- **Pull the plug.** As we continue to be more and more "plugged in," it should come as no surprise that a greater proportion of our energy goes toward keeping our devices charged. To keep costs reasonable, plug electronics into a power strip and turn it off when they're not in use. This cuts off "phantom" usage and can save you a bundle. Some newer power strips even include an automatic shut-off feature.
- **Hit the lights.** As always, turn off the lights when leaving a room. You can also swap out light bulbs to increase your home's energy efficiency. Replace incandescent bulbs with LED versions for an easy and affordable way to save on electricity. Not only do LEDs last significantly longer, they also require much less energy.
- **Start with a simple home assessment.** Interested to know how your home's energy use compares to similar homes? Check out Energy Star's Home Energy Yardstick at energystar.gov to learn how much of your home's energy use is related to heating and cooling versus other appliance use, lighting and hot water.

Visit the new SDREA.coop

Want to know more about South Dakota's rural electric cooperative system? Check out our newly redesigned website at www.sdrea.coop. You'll find lots of useful information about our generation, transmission and distribution systems, energy efficiency ideas, legislative issues that impact electric rates, a statewide outage map and much more.



KIDS CORNER SAFETY POSTER



"Watch Out for Downed Power Lines!"

Gracie Richter, 9 years old

Gracie is a resident of Buffalo, S.D., and is the daughter of Jody Richter. They are members of Grand 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.

Warm and Cozy Soups

Tomato-Tortellini Soup

2 - 14 ounce cans reduced-sodium chicken broth
 1 - 9 ounce package of refrigerated tortellini
 1 - 8 ounce tub cream
 cheese spread with chive and onion
 1 - can tomato soup
 Fresh chives (optional)

In a medium sauce pan bring broth to a boil. Add tortellini then reduce heat to simmer uncovered for 5 minutes. In a bowl whisk 1/3 cup of hot broth into the cream cheese spread. Whisk until smooth. Pour contents into sauce pan. Stir in tomato soup and heat through. Serve with fresh chives, if desired.

Family Features/Better Homes and Gardens

Slow Cooker Split Pea Soup

1 lb. dried green split peas (rinsed)
 1 cup sliced carrots
 2 stalks celery, diced, plus leaves
 2 cups chopped onion
 2 cloves garlic, minced
 1 bay leaf
 1/4 cup chopped parsley
 6 cups chicken broth
 salt and pepper, to taste

Layer ingredients in slow cooker in order given, adding broth last. DO NOT stir ingredients. Cover and cook on high for 4-5 hours or low for 8-10 hours until peas are very soft.

Gail Lyngstad, Pierre, SD

Baked Potato Soup

2/3 cup butter
 2/3 cup flour
 7 cups milk
 4 to 6 baked potatoes, peeled and cooled
 4 green onions chopped
 6 slices of bacon, cooked and crumbled
 1-1/2 cups shredded sharp cheddar cheese
 1 cup sour cream
 3/4 teaspoon salt
 1/2 teaspoon pepper

Melt butter, add flour and stir until smooth. Add milk and stir. Add potatoes and onion. Cook until mixture comes to a boil. Turn to low heat immediately and add bacon, cheese, sour cream, salt and pepper. Stir well. Makes 1 crockpot full.

Terri Halstead, Sioux Falls, SD

Clam Chowder

4 slices thick bacon cut and fried
 1 onion
 1 cup celery
 1/3 cup flour
 1 tsp. pepper
 4 cans 6.5 oz. minced clams (save juice)
 1 15-oz. can chicken broth
 2 potatoes
 2 cups cream
 1 bay leaf

Cut and fry bacon. Add diced onion and celery and cook about five minutes. Stir in 1/3 cup flour using the drained clam juice until slightly thick. Add 1 teaspoon pepper, one can broth, 4 cans clams, 2 diced potatoes and one bay leaf. Cook until potatoes are tender, about 10 minutes. Add cream. Enjoy!

Sharon Waltner, Freeman, SD

My Mother's Tomato Soup

2 cups tomato juice or pureed canned tomatoes
 1/2 tsp. soda
 1 qt. milk
 salt to taste
 1 tbsp. butter

Combine tomatoes or juice with soda in a saucepan. Let froth up. Add milk, salt and butter. Heat and serve.

Doris Ekberg, Hamill, SD

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 2021. All entries must include your name, mailing address, telephone number and cooperative name.



Incentives and Rebates for Oahe Electric Customers

Rebates and Electric Rates for Electric Heating Systems

1) Electric furnace OR Electric boiler (100 percent efficient): \$200 rebate! Plus, an electric rate of 5 cents per kWh on your heating usage. An air conditioner must also be purchased if you desire cooling in your building. An electric rate of 5 cents per kWh is available for air conditioners that are connected to a load management receiver.

2) Air-source heat pump (with an electric furnace) (250 percent efficient): \$600 rebate! Plus, an electric rate of 5 cents per kWh on your heating and cooling usage. The heat pump provides primary heating and cooling for your home. When ambient outdoor temperatures reach 15 degrees or less, the electric furnace will assist with heating requirements. If installed with a gas furnace, no rebates or reduced rate offered.

3) Geothermal-source heat pump (350 percent efficient): \$600 rebate! Plus, an electric rate of 5 cents per kWh on your heating and cooling usage. This is a stand-alone system which provides heating and cooling for your home.

4) Unattached shops/garage buildings: \$600 rebate! Plus, an electric rate of 5 cents per kWh on your heating and cooling usage, if you install an air-source heat pump with an electric backup or a geothermal-source heat pump. If you install a minimum of eight kW resistance heat, you are eligible for a \$200 rebate and the reduced rate of 5 cents per kWh.

All heat pumps must be ENERGY STAR® rated and have a minimum rating of 15 SEER. Cord- and plug-style heating equipment is not eligible for rebates or reduced rates.

Rebates for Lighting


Commercial Members – Members are eligible for lighting rebates when replacing less efficient lighting and installing more efficient lighting. Payment will be \$0.20 per watt saved. Maximum payment per structure is \$1,000. **There are no lighting rebates for residential members.**

Rebates for Water Heaters

Members will receive a \$6/gallon rebate and \$4 credit on their monthly electric bill. The consumer must agree to have a load management receiver installed on the water heater. If you have multiple water heaters, they all must abide by the criteria to qualify.

Water heaters that qualify for rebates and incentives:

- All Marathon electric water heaters with a lifetime warranty – 50 gallons or larger.
- All Westinghouse electric water heaters with a lifetime warranty – 50 gallons or larger.

Co-op Connections Card			
			
Cooperative Connections Card Program Vendors			
Automotive			
Graham Tire Company	605-224-8643	Pierre	Receive a 10% discount on regularly priced service work. Cannot be combined with any other offer.
Lamb Motor Company	800-952-2222	Onida	Receive a free alignment check with the purchase of 4 new tires.
Napa Auto and Truck Parts/Farnam's Genuine Parts, Inc.	605-224-8624	Pierre	Receive 10-50% off retail price.
Food/Convenience Store			
Branding Iron Bistro	605-494-3333	Pierre	Enjoy \$1 off your order. Limit one per visit.
Gator's Pizza Pasta and Subs	605-224-6262	Pierre	Purchase any large pizza at regular price and receive a FREE order of breadsticks.
Grey Goose Store	605-945-0794	Pierre	Receive a free 20 oz. fountain soda or coffee with the minimum of a \$30 gas or diesel purchase.
The Corner	605-258-2400	Onida	Buy one breakfast sandwich at regular price, get second half off.
Health/Fitness and Beauty			
Anytime Fitness	605-224-4011	Pierre	Receive a free two-week mini-membership.
Home/Garden			
The Pink Petal	605-224-1775	Pierre	10% discount on cash and carry purchases - fresh floral only.
Slumberland Furniture	605-945-1997	Pierre	20% off any regular priced Lazy Boy items. Excluding special orders.
Services			
Airtech Heating and Cooling	605-945-0160	Pierre	\$50 discount on any new heat pump OR \$15 discount on any service call
Apryl's Animal House	605-224-9203	Pierre	10% off a grooming or boarding
Inman's Water Technologies	605-224-5111	Pierre	Receive a 15% discount on the rental price of a water softener and/or reverse osmosis drinking water system by paying a year in advance. Receive 10% off of the purchase price of a new Water Softener or reverse osmosis drinking water system when you mention this ad. Payments made by credit cards do not qualify for discounts/specials.
Olson Plumbing Inc.	605-224-6436	Pierre	\$50 discount on any electric boiler, Marathon water heater, or fireplace
Small Engine House	605-224-5815	Pierre	10% off parts and labor
Sports/Recreation			
Teton River Traders Gun Shop LLC	605-224-1371	Ft. Pierre	2% discount. Payments made by credit cards do not qualify for discount.
Retail			
Fastenal	605-224-4060	Pierre	10% off of fasteners and 5% off on all other products

Winner of Question of the Month

The Question of the Month winner for the November 2020 publication was Kaleen Wolforth. She correctly answered the question "How many combined years of services were recognized at this year's annual meeting?" The answer was 65 years! Congratulations and we hope you enjoy your prizes!

Question of the Month!

This month's question is:

How long ago was East River created?

Please submit your answer via e-mail to oahe@oaheelectric.com with the subject line reading: Question of the Month. A winner will be chosen and surprise gift will be sent to them.

Like Us!

You can now keep in touch with your cooperative on Facebook!

We will share with you the latest news, events, power outage updates, energy efficiency tips, money-saving rebates, load management information, legislative alerts, safety tips and much more!

We hope you "like" Oahe Electric Cooperative, Inc. on Facebook.



Tourism in South Dakota has remained robust despite the impact of the global pandemic. Photos courtesy of the SD Tourism Department.

SD TOURISM GOING STRONG

Tired of Being Shut In: Visitors Flock to South Dakota

Billy Gibson

billy.gibson@sdrea.coop

Probably the last time a member of the Hustead family was worried about going broke, it was back in the 1930s.

Ted and Dorothy Hustead had just purchased a small drug store in Wall and were having a hard time getting the business to grow in the middle of a severe drought and the Great Depression.

The business that went on to become known as Wall Drug has been named one of the busiest tourist attractions in the northern part of the country. The prospects of the Husteads going broke have been very slim since the store hit its stride.

That is until last March.

Third-generation owner Rick Hustead won't lie: he was downright worried that Wall Drug might bite the dust when COVID-19 prompted lockdowns and travel restrictions.

The entire operation – the stores, the restaurants, the galleries and even the free ice water – came grinding to a stop for 71 days just as the travel season was about to kick into gear.

“I was afraid we might go broke and we might not make it. They're projecting that half of the restaurants out there are going to close down permanently,” Hustead said. “We were closed that whole time and had to cut back on our employees because we felt that trying to ‘flatten the curve’ was the right thing to do.”

The business reported losses through the summer, but returned to the black in August due in part to traffic from the Sturgis motorcycle rally. Hustead reported that September and October also showed considerable increases over 2019 numbers.

“People just got tired of being shut in and they got in their cars and on their motorcycles and their RVs and came to South Dakota,” he said, noting that even President Trump made his way to Mount Rushmore for a Fourth of July gathering.



The annual Buffalo Round Up at Custer State Park continues to attract visitors from throughout the country.

The Thing I Love Most about Living in South Dakota is...

What do you love most about living in South Dakota? Share your thoughts with us (200 words or less) and you could win a \$25 gift card!

Send your response to editor@srea.coop by Jan. 4, and don't forget to include your contact information.



South Dakota's outdoor attractions have continued to draw visitors looking to avoid lockdowns in other states.

Hustead said he took public safety measures such as installing Plexiglas barriers, posting hand-sanitizer stations and requiring that employees wear masks. He said no employees have been known to contract the coronavirus. The bottom line also received a boost from some federal relief money.

Once the financial fog lifted, Hustead called his mother Marjorie – who is in a care facility in Rapid City but is “still involved in the business” – and told her he felt Wall Drug was going to make it through the crisis after all.

“I told her, ‘Mom, I think we’re going to make it.’ And that made her happy,” Hustead said.

He was quick to heap praise on the South Dakota Office of Tourism and leader Jim Hagen.

In assessing the state of tourism in South Dakota, officials paint a picture similar to Hustead. While many annual events have been canceled or postponed to a later date, outdoor events and activities such as Sturgis, walleye fishing, pheasant hunting and the many outdoor tourist attractions have led to a healthy industry performance and outlook.

Hagen's office has also taken the initiative to develop innovative programs to ensure that South Dakota stays top-of-mind when people throughout the region and nation make their travel plans.

The department recently launched an on-line learning program for children and their families to learn more about South Dakota and experience the attractions of the state from the comfort of their homes or in a classroom setting. There are eight virtual pages that allow site visitors to learn more about the icons, wildlife, people and history of the state, each featuring games and activities for the entire family to explore.

“These online lessons provide an opportunity to educate children and adults alike about our state's Great Faces and Great Places,” said Gov. Kristi Noem. “We hope that they are used as a tool to engage families

and inspire them to explore our great state.”

The department also partnered with Badlands National Park to promote its virtual Junior Ranger program. Once the virtual exploration is complete, kids can become official Badlands National Park Junior Rangers.

Last summer, the department teamed up with tourism officials in Wyoming to develop a program called “Black to Yellow” to entice travelers to explore scenic routes that wind from the Badlands National Park to Wyoming's iconic Yellowstone National Park.

To help travelers plan their trip, the states put together itineraries that explore their most well-known attractions and lesser-known gems. From taking in roadside stops, like Wall Drug and Wyoming's Devils Tower, to exploring the scenery of Bighorn Canyon National Recreation Area and Badlands National Park, travelers were encouraged to explore the beauty of the states' wide open spaces, unparalleled wildlife and the freedom of the open road.

State tourism leaders will meet in Pierre on Jan. 20-21 for the 2021 Governor's Conference on Tourism. There will be limited in-person engagement as well as an online attendance option. The theme for this year's meeting is, “Onward!” While 2020 could have been worse, leaders are hoping that travel will continue to be a significant economic driver in the state.



Wall Drug shut down for 71 days last spring but rebounded to have a successful 2020.

Political Experts Believe Biden, Congress Can Make Deals That Help Co-ops



Russ Hohn

Member Services Advisor
rhohn@oaheelectric.com

Political strategists from both parties told electric cooperative leaders they believe Congress and President-elect Joe Biden can reach a deal to pass an infrastructure package that could include expanded broadband service to rural communities.

“There’s bipartisan agreement that we need to do this to stimulate and grow the economy,” said Steve Elmendorf, a Democratic strategist who spoke at a post-election webinar hosted by NRECA. “I actually think we have a real chance to get

it done,” said Elmendorf, a partner and co-founder of Subject Matter, an advocacy firm in Washington, D.C. Jack Oliver, former CEO of the Republican National Committee, agreed.

Oliver, now a managing partner at Finback Investment Partners in Coral Gables, Fla., said the coronavirus pandemic has shown lawmakers how important it is for children to have access to high-speed internet service to do their schoolwork from home. “If you don’t have the resources, your kid falls behind — and that is unacceptable,” Oliver said during the Nov. 13 webinar.

NRECA CEO Jim Matheson said he is optimistic that Congress will also pass a pandemic relief package that will help boost co-ops as it lifts the U.S. economy. NRECA will work with bipartisan champions in Congress to pass the Flexible Financing for Rural America Act, which could save co-ops more than \$10 billion by allowing them to reprice loans from the Rural Utilities Service at current low interest rates. The bill would waive any prepayment penalties normally associated with refinancing.

While divided government typically creates legislative gridlock, co-ops won passage last year of two major priorities — the RURAL Act and the SECURE Act — with support from a Democratic-led House and a Republican-led Senate, Matheson said. The key was to create bipartisan support for co-op priorities by reaching out to lawmakers on both sides of the aisle.

“We have a divided government and, in some cases, we have a divided America,” Matheson said. “But we have been able to overcome that with our bipartisan approach. Nobody does that like us



Political analysts are optimistic that Congress and President-elect Joe Biden can reach agreement on an infrastructure bill that includes expanded rural broadband service. (Photo By: Vichaya Kiatying Angsulee/Getty Images)

on a substantive issue. We need to double down on that and focus on our mission of representing our communities.”

During a question-and-answer session moderated by Louis Finkel, NRECA’s senior vice president of government affairs, the two political analysts said Biden’s plan to reduce climate change will be tempered by the Republican-led Senate and a weakened Democratic majority in the House.

Democrats lost House seats in the Nov. 3 election but held onto their majority, while Republicans are expected to narrowly retain control of the Senate after two runoff elections in Georgia in January. At this point, election results show that Republicans have 50 Senate seats and Democrats have 48, including two held by independents who caucus with Democrats.

“You’re not going to see a carbon tax or comprehensive legislative approach to climate,” Elmendorf predicted. Instead, he said, Biden will use his executive power to do as much as he can without Congress, including having the U.S. rejoin the Paris Climate Agreement to combat climate change. President Donald Trump pulled the nation out of the agreement.

Continued next page

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Oliver predicted that Republicans will oppose Biden's plan to eliminate carbon dioxide emissions from the electric power sector by 2035 and replace fossil fuels with zero-emission sources such as wind, solar, nuclear, hydropower and biomass. But he cautioned his party that it must be careful not to become categorized as anti-environment by young Americans who supported Biden in part because of his pledge to reduce carbon emissions.

Matheson said NRECA and its members will work to educate more than 60 new members of Congress about issues that affect co-ops and their communities. NRECA has developed a customizable briefing template to explain the co-op model to lawmakers. "That relationship-building is already underway," Matheson said.

Elmendorf said it's also crucial for co-ops to get to know the staffs of their new members of Congress — particularly in local district offices. "That's critically important to ensure you're in a good position no matter who won those seats," he said.

Matheson said NRECA and its member co-ops will introduce themselves to new urban lawmakers as well as those from rural areas. Urban members of Congress have provided valuable support for co-ops in the past, he said.

"While there is a broader rural-urban divide, we have been able to develop support for our policy priorities from urban Democrats by describing ourselves as consumer-owned, and so we are supporting consumer-focused policy," Matheson said. "If you sit down and talk to people, it's amazing what you can accomplish."



**THIS HOLIDAY SEASON, OAHE
ELECTRIC'S OFFICES WILL BE CLOSED ON
THE FOLLOWING:**

DEC. 24-25, 2020 FOR CHRISTMAS

JAN. 1, 2021 FOR NEW YEAR'S DAY

**EVERYONE AT OAHE ELECTRIC WISHES
YOU A JOYOUS HOLIDAY SEASON AND
A HAPPY AND PEACEFUL NEW YEAR!**

Statement of Nondiscrimination

In accordance with Federal civil rights law and U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) civil rights regulations and policies, the USDA, its Agencies, offices, and employees, and institutions participating in or administering USDA programs are prohibited from discriminating based on race, color, national origin, religion, sex, gender identity (including gender expression), sexual orientation, disability, age, marital status, family/parental status, income derived from a public assistance program, political beliefs, or reprisal or retaliation for prior civil rights activity, in any program or activity conducted or funded by USDA (not all bases apply to all programs). Remedies and complaint filing deadlines vary by program or incident.

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(1) mail: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights, 1400 Independence Avenue, SW Washington, D.C. 20250-9410; (2) fax: (202) 690-7442; or (3) email: program.intake@usda.gov

USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer, and lender.



Ice fishing is a pursuit that's enjoyed each winter by South Dakotans of every stripe.

Guys, Gals and Castles on Ice

South Dakotans Stay in Hot Pursuit of Cold Fish

Billy Gibson

billy.gibson@sdrea.coop

What happens if you hold an ice fishing tournament and it turns out there's no ice?

You improvise.

That's what organizers of the annual Mobridge Ice Fishing Tournament had to do 10 years ago when Mother Nature refused to cooperate and left them scrambling to come up with a Plan B.

At that time, the tournament was just gaining traction as a main winter attraction for Mobridge. No one dreamed that what started as just a handful of anglers vying to win an ice auger has grown into a field that's capped at 525 two-person teams arriving from 16 different states.

Jeff Jackson is owner of the Wrangler Inn in Mobridge and one of the founders of the tournament marking its 20th anniversary this year. He remembers a bit of panic setting in when hundreds of fishermen were scheduled to descend on Mobridge and the ice on the Missouri River wasn't thick enough to ensure the safety of competitors. Fortunately, the organizing committee had scheduled enough attractions and activities around the one-day tournament that there was plenty for the eager visitors to do.

"We got the word out that the competition was canceled, but 420 out of the 450 teams that were registered showed up anyway," Jackson recalls. "They wanted to come and have a good time."

Those non-angling activities included raffles and prize drawings, an expo featuring all the latest fishing gear, gizmos and gadgets, and according to Jackson, lots of libations.

"People keep coming back year after year," Jackson said, noting that the town's population doubles in the second week of each January. "We've had to limit the number of participants so we have an Ebay auction for three spots that can go as high as \$3,000, and we have another lottery drawing for 26 spots where we usually have up to 800 names."

Instead of a simple ice auger as a grand prize, today the tournament gives away roughly \$225,000 in prizes, including Ice



Hundreds were in attendance at the Dakota Anglers Fishing Expo in Sioux Falls. Photo provided by Dakota Angler.



Castles, four-wheelers, a Polaris Ranger, \$5,000 worth of Scheel's gear, \$3,000 in Runnings gear, clam shacks and more.

The tournament is a boon for Mobridge, bringing an economic impact of \$500,000. According to Jesse Konold, chairman of the town's tourism committee, over the past four years proceeds paid for South Dakota's first climate-controlled indoor fish cleaning station, ADA compliant bathrooms, improvements to the town's rodeo grounds and more than \$100,000 in donations to local non-profits. This year's tournament will be held Jan. 7-9 at the Sherr-Howe Center in Mobridge.

Not Everyone is Hooked

Among the state's population of electric cooperative linemen, there are many who look forward to chasing walleye in winter. In Josh Lemburg's case, the term "chasing" walleye would be close to accurate.

Lemburg, operations foreman at Moreau-Grand Electric who lives in Timber Lake, prefers to stay on the move when he fishes on the ice. Eschewing the "ice castle" approach that calls for staking out a spot and staying put for the weekend, Lemburg uses a portable flip-over shack and keeps his auger close at hand.

"Ice castles are fun, but I'm not afraid to move around and dig holes," he said. "If I'm not catching fish in an hour, I'll 'run-and-gun' til I find them."

Even with his "move-and-groove" approach, Lemburg has failed to get his entire family sold on the merits of ice fishing. Even hooking a lunker walleye didn't

convince his son to swear a life-long oath to ice fishing.

Several years ago, Lemburg took his dad and his elementary-age kids, Landon and Kendal, out on the ice. His dad and daughter were in one shack and he and Landon were in the other. After a few hours, just as Landon was getting bored and ready to call it a day, a walleye snatched his bait.

"Landon had his line in the water and I saw a big mark on my Vexilar," Lemburg recalls. "I told him he had a big fish on the line but he just gave me his pole and said he wasn't interested. I kept trying to get him to reel it in, but he kept giving me the pole back. Finally, I got the fish to the surface I looked in the hole and there was nothing but fish. My dad reached down in the water to his armpits and it was a 12-pound walleye."

Brent Reilley is an electrician at Selby-based Cam Wal Electric, which serves the Mobridge area. Over the past 20 years, he has only missed the tournament twice - once when he had to decide between ice fishing and a week in Cancun.

He and his wife, Tandy, have actually both claimed titles at the prestigious Mobridge tournament. One particular year the husband-and-wife duo were on separate teams. Brent was on the first-place team and Tandy and her partner placed second. But Tandy believes she has her



Above, hundreds attend the Mobridge Ice Fishing Tournament each year. Below, "ice castles" bring comfort and convenience to the sport.



husband beat: her second-place finish was clinched by reeling in a 25-inch walleye while she was six months pregnant.

The two have always had pretty good luck with the raffles and random prize drawings as well. Tandy won a side-by-side one year and a family friend has won two four-wheelers.

"We just love being outdoors in the winter when there's nothing else to do," Reilley said. "You can get outside and enjoy the fresh air. It gets cold, but it beats sitting inside and it's something great to do with the family. My son is addicted. He'd love it if all he could do is fish all day."

A New Lease on Life

After completing lineman's school, Haag hired at Oahe Electric

Tom Griffith

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Editor's Note: This is the second of a four-part series about Oahe Electric Cooperative's General Manager Rodney Haag, who began work with the cooperative shortly after graduating lineman's school in 1977 and never left.

After working his way through high school at his father's truck stop and a couple of summers of sweat bailing hay at his uncle's farm, Rodney Haag got married to his sweetheart and pondered what he would do with the rest of his life.

The predicament arrived just a few short years after his level-headed father discouraged him from dreaming about taking over his Lemmon truck stop, telling Rodney, "This isn't a business that you need to be in."

His dad recognized that an interstate highway system and its new concrete ribbons spanning both North and South Dakota, east to west, would drive business from the two-lane highway on which his business sat. But that unwelcome message deflated young Rodney who had planned to take over his father's truck stop, settle down with his new wife, start a family and live happily ever after.

"My wife asked me, 'How would you like to be a lineman?'"

Now, Rodney didn't have a clue about what he would do.

Fortunately, Janice, his beautiful young bride, was not as discouraged about the prospects for her new husband, who she knew was no stranger to hard work. She had spent a year attending the

Aberdeen School of Commerce and, after graduating and returning home, had almost immediately landed a position at the Bank of Lemmon.

The couple discussed Rodney's prospects in the same manner they would do for the next half-century, contemplating his affinity for the outdoors and the positives and negatives of each consideration and possible position. Then the pair remembered their good friend, Barry Benke from Lemmon, who had gone to school to be a lineman at what is now known as Mitchell Technical Institute.

"My wife asked me, 'How would you like to be a lineman?'" Rodney recalled recently. "I said, 'I wouldn't mind that,' so she ordered a packet of materials about what it took to become a lineman."

Actually, Janice did even more than that. When the packet arrived,

The old Oahe Electric headquarters back in the day.



she filled out all the paperwork, had Rodney sign it, and then she mailed it in. A short time later, Rodney was accepted to the lineman's school and by August 1976, the newlyweds had packed up one of her parent's horse-trailers with everything they had in their small apartment and were headed East River for Rodney's nine months of training.

Looking back, Rodney said he was apprehensive about the move and his pending schooling.

"I was nervous because I hadn't known anything but Lemmon," he recalled. "Never traveled much, never been too far. Maybe went to Rapid City or Bismarck once in a while, so this would take me out of my comfort zone. And, when it came to electricity, I didn't know very much at all. I knew you plugged in whatever you were using and turned a switch."

In short order, Janice found a job at a local bank in Mitchell and Rodney started his schooling.

"Here I am, two years out of high school riding a school bus again from the Vo-Tech's main campus in Mitchell to the lineman school which then was located in an old school house north of town," he remembered.

Rodney also recalls a flurry of activity over the ensuing months, learning the fundamentals of electricity, studying each night with assistance from Janice, and a course load that only got more intense as the weeks pressed on. When he and his classmates finally got out of the classroom, they learned how to climb power poles, build lines, set poles and do short spans on the school grounds.

And, Rodney said he'll never forget the first power pole he ever climbed.

A young Rodney Haag starting his new career as a lineman.



“I was scared to death, asking myself, ‘How are these little things strapped to my boots going to hold me up?’” he said. “We had to climb 30-, 35- and 45-foot-tall poles, even a 50-footer. For many, it’s even harder to come down. Of course, I fell off poles before, maybe from 25 feet up. The first thing you do is bear-hug that pole. It slows you down, but it leaves a bunch of creosote slivers in your arms.

“But, you quickly learn that the biggest cause for concern are electrical contact burns, which occur when a lineman comes into direct contact with high-voltage lines,” he added. “The result can often be death. If not, you’d wish you were dead.”

Between Rodney’s intense schooling, which involved studying each night with Janice by his side, and her daytime bank job, the couple didn’t have much spare time. Compounding matters, like most students, Rodney didn’t have a dime.

“We were flat-ass broke,” he remembered. “I took out a student loan from the bank Janice worked at so we were sure we’d have our rent covered for the nine months I was at lineman’s school and I ended up taking a loan from my dad for \$500 to cover gas money to get to my new job when I graduated.

“I didn’t know what I had gotten myself into,” Rodney said of those lean times. “Thank God we didn’t have any kids at that point. But the most valuable thing I learned at vo-tech was that my future was in front of me. I just had to make it come true and, with my wife, I did.”

When Rodney graduated from lineman school in May 1977, he started applying for jobs in North and South Dakota, Nebraska and Wyoming. All told, he probably sent out two dozen applications, but many positions were with private contractors whose work would take Rodney out of town for extended periods. Several prospects offered him part-time positions with no benefits from jobs that would last six months at most.

Finally, a contractor from the oil fields around Gillette, Wyo., offered him and a classmate from lineman school positions with his firm.

“I was looking for some permanency and, frankly, I didn’t have a clue what an electric co-op was,” he admitted.

So, weeks after finishing school in Mitchell, Rodney and Janice again packed up all their worldly possessions and made the move to

eastern Wyoming, armed with his newly acquired training and a new lease on life.

But, that lease would last less than two months.

“I liked the work and I learned a lot about an electrician’s life,” Rodney said. “But, like many of Wyoming’s boom and bust cycles, I hit the downturn and when it got slow, they started sending us home early. I had only been there a month and half when the slowdown began.

“And, it was a rough life there,” he added. “I had friends from home who were working in the oil fields and when we’d go out for a night on the town it wouldn’t be unusual to see a knife pulled in a bar fight. It was a crazy there. It was wild and fast-paced and I liked it. But I told my wife, ‘You don’t go anywhere at night without me or a few close-knit friends.’”

As Rodney watched his hours dwindle to 30 per week, he became frustrated and felt he was losing money from nothing he could control. As his exasperation grew, a shining light shone on he and Janice.

“Seriously, our prayers were answered,” he said, a smile growing on his face with the memory. “I had put in an application to Oahe Electric the year before, but they did not need help at that time. But then, low and behold, they sent me a letter in Wyoming and said my application had been kept on file and they needed a lineman. It would mean a modest pay cut from what I was supposed to be earning in Wyoming, but they wanted me to come to their Blunt, S.D., headquarters for an interview.”

So, in the middle of July, Rodney and Janice climbed into the old Chevy Malibu Janice’s parents had presented her for her high school graduation, unfortunately unequipped with air-conditioning, and made the 300-mile trek from Gillette to Blunt.

“They interviewed me on a Saturday, with Janice by my side, after our long, hot haul from Gillette,” Rodney recalled. After considerable discussion, the potential employer informed Rodney that the lineman job was available and it was his for the taking.

“Trying to be a good husband and alluding to Janice, I said, ‘We’ll need to talk about it.’ But Janice piped right in immediately and said, ‘No, we’re taking it.’ She loved the town and hey, she’s kind of my boss.”

Up next: In Part III, Rodney Haag and his wife find a home where they would live and work for decades, and witness him rise through the ranks at Oahe Electric Cooperative.

Due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, there will be no in person retirement party for Rodney. In lieu of a party, we would like to organize a card shower to thank Rodney for his 43 years of dedicated service to Oahe Electric! If you would like to send a card saying congratulations or sharing a memory, they can be mailed to: Rodney Haag, 8001 Sunny Oak Circle, Sioux Falls, SD 57108.

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

November 27-December 27

Trees and Trains at the South Dakota Railroad Museum, Weekends, Contact the Museum for Days and Times. Hill City, SD
605-574-9000

December 4-25

Fort Sisseton Drive Thru Christmas Light Display, Fort Sisseton Historic State Park, Lake City, SD
605-448-5474

December 5-January 1

Custer State Park Festival of Trees, Custer, SD
605-255-4515

December 5-January 6

Garden Glow, McCrory Gardens Education & Visitor Center, Evenings From 5-8 p.m., Brookings, SD
605-688-6707

December 16-19

Lakota Nation Invitational, Rushmore Plaza Civic Center, Rapid City, SD
605-394-4115

December 17-20, 27

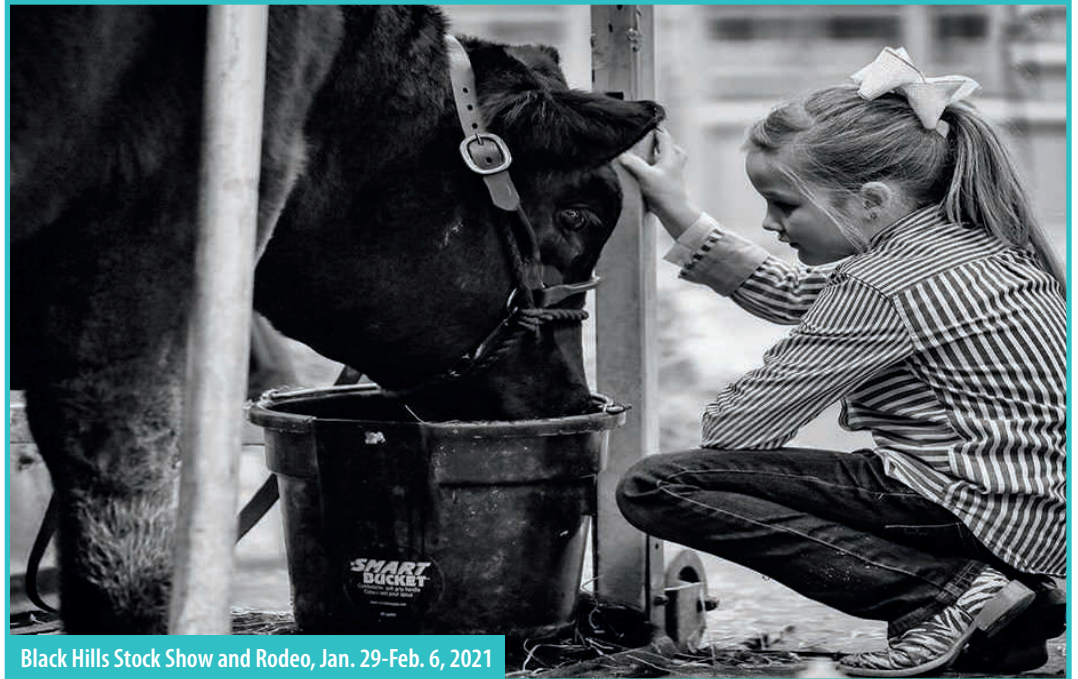
Twilight Flights, Strawbale Winery, Renner, SD,
605-543-5071

December 19

Cirque Dream Story, Rushmore Plaza Civic Center, Rapid City, SD
605-394-4115

January 9

Dakota Ridgetop Toy Show, Codington County Extension Complex, Watertown, SD
712-261-0316



Black Hills Stock Show and Rodeo, Jan. 29-Feb. 6, 2021

January 14-17, 21-24

Elf The Musical, Area Community Theatre, Mitchell, SD
605-996-9137

January 15-17

BH Rapid Winter Classic Indoor Soccer Tournament, Rushmore Plaza Civic Center, Rapid City, SD
605-394-4115

January 16

Annual Burning Beetle Festival, 5 p.m., Pageant Hill, Custer, SD
605-673-2244

January 18-25

Chinook Days, Spearfish, SD
605-717-9294

January 29-February 6

Black Hills Stock Show & Rodeo, Rushmore Plaza Civic Center, Rapid City, SD
605-335-3861

January 29-30

Pro Snocross Races, Days of '76 Rodeo Grounds, Deadwood, SD
605-578-1976

January 29-31

Winterfest, Lead, SD
605-335-3861

February 5-6

Mardi Gras Weekend, Main Street, Deadwood, SD
605-578-1976

February 10-13

Watertown Winter Farm Show, Codington County Extension Complex, Watertown, SD
605-886-5814

February 18-25

Twelfth Annual Black Hills Film Festival, Virtual,
605-574-9454

February 20-27

SD State High School Wrestling Tournament, Rushmore Plaza Civic Center Barnett Arena, Rapid City, SD

March 13-14

Philip Area Annual 2021 Gun Show, American Legion Hall, Philip, SD
605-859-2280

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.