



COOPERATIVE CONNECTIONS

Rural Electrification

West Central - The Last
Co-op to Incorporate
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Generational Farmers
Pages 12-13

Rural Electrification served even
the most rural communities.



Your Annual Meeting Leadership Reports

Reliability, Resilience & the Road Ahead



Jordan Lamb
CEO

Our cooperative was established on April 26, 1946 — nearly 80 years ago. Back then, the idea of reliable, affordable power for our communities was more than just a convenience; it was a necessity for growth and quality of life. That mission hasn't changed, and neither has our commitment to serving our members first.

Today, we receive our power from multiple sources, including the Southwest Power Pool markets, and base generation through Basin Electric Cooperative, East River Electric Power Cooperative, and the Western Area Power Administration. This diversity in supply helps us balance reliability and cost efficiency for our members.

Our current generation mix is a blend of resources — each contributing to stability and resilience in its own way. And with continued growth, we're taking steps to make sure we're ready for the future.

One major project underway is the construction of a new power plant, named Bison, a combined cycle natural gas / steam turbine facility located in the Bakken Region. This facility will enhance efficiency and reliability for decades to come.

As our communities grow, so does the demand for reliable, around-the-clock electricity. One of the key drivers behind our current generation projects is the need to meet the increased capacity requirements set by the Southwest Power Pool. When we joined SPP in 2015, the accreditation requirement stood at 15% of nameplate generation additional capacity. Over the past decade, that number has risen to 39% — a significant increase that reflects the need for dependable generation resources during peak demand. At Southwest Power Pool's inception, the country was embarking on a movement to build war materials. At that time, electricity was not widely available, and many utilities 'pooled' their capacity to allow quicker buildouts of our necessary equipment. The standard outage threshold at that time targeted 1 day per 250 years and now lies at 1 day per 10 years of an expected outage. By building new generation like the Bison combined

cycle power plant, we're not only positioning ourselves to support future growth, but also ensuring that we meet these higher capacity obligations without compromising reliability or affordability for our members.

Rates are always an important topic of discussion. Looking ahead, Oahe Electric anticipates an increase in 2026. This projection is primarily due to the rising costs of capacity accreditation, along with continued financial challenges at Dakota Gas Company, where natural gas prices have remained lower than originally expected.

When costs rise, we work hard to shield our members from the full impact. Last year is a great example — our purchased power costs went up by 7%, but we were able to shield members from most of that, limiting the increase to just 1.9%.

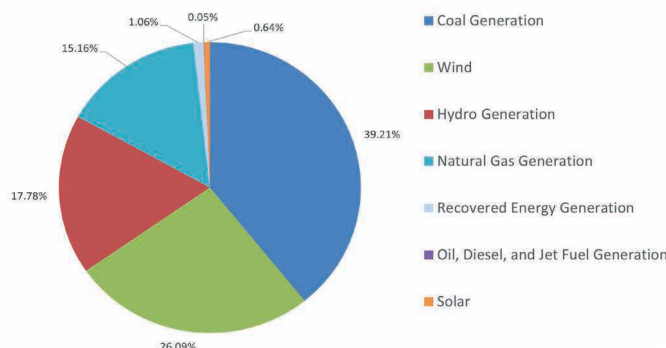
We do this by using a variety of financial tools, such as revenue deferral, strategic investments to smooth out monthly cash flows, and actively pursuing grant funding to improve our total plant and equity. By reducing the need for member-funded capital expenditures, we strengthen our financial position, which in turn helps us secure better interest rates on the loans we do take out. We also receive revenues from Southwest Power Pool through Basin and East River that directly reflects in the rates offered to Oahe Electric. Since 2015, Basin has received over two billion dollars from SPP, roughly a 5 cent per kwh rate difference, while East River currently receives 49.5 million dollars annually, a 1¢ reduction in the rate to Oahe members that we would be paying for otherwise.

Our preferred lending institution is the Rural Utilities Service through the federal government, which allows us to obtain lower-interest loans amortized over 30 years. This is just one more way we stretch every dollar to provide the best value possible to our members.

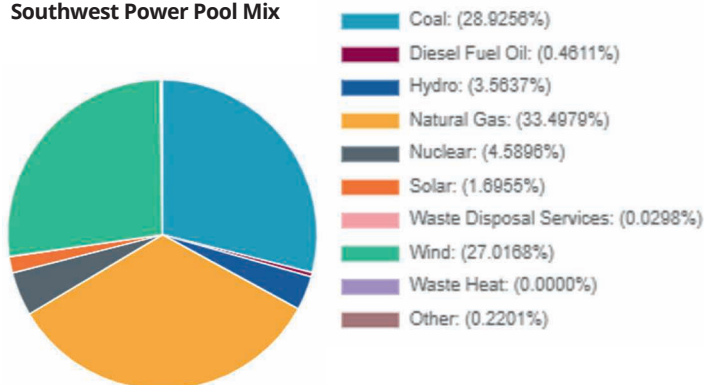
At the end of the day, our job is to keep the lights on, the rates fair, and the future bright for our communities. We've done that for nearly eight decades, and with your continued support, we'll do it for many more to come.

Thank you for being part of this cooperative, and thank you for trusting us to serve you for the past 79 years as well as many more to come.

2024 East River Electric Sales by Fuel Type



Southwest Power Pool Mix



COOPERATIVE CONNECTIONS OAHE ELECTRIC

(USPS No. 019-042)

Board of Directors:

James Feller – Assistant Secretary
605.962.6207
Brandon Haag – President
605.215.6758
Ryan Noyes – Treasurer
605.280.3500
Ross Sperry – Secretary
605.280.7770
Kirk Yackley – Vice President
605.258.2412

Employees:

Tyler Arbach – Journeyman Lineman
Austin Bergeson – Journeyman Lineman
Mark Bruning – Line Foreman
Matt Eldridge – Chief Operations Officer
Trudie Feldman – Custodian
Brady Gaer – Journeyman Lineman
Sidney Geigle – Journeyman Lineman
Austin Hammer – Business Procurement & Development Specialist
Sam Irvine – Executive Services Specialist
Megan Jaeger – Membership Director
Les Job – Journeyman Lineman
Jordan Lamb – Chief Executive Officer
Dan Lettau – Journeyman Lineman
Steve Long – Power Supply Specialist
Valerie Marso – Chief Financial Officer
Tory Smith – Journeyman Lineman

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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.



Valerie Marso
CFO

Powering Through Together

Oahe Electric recently welcomed members to its 74th Annual Meeting. Each year, this gathering provides more than just a chance to review business matters — it's a reminder of what makes our cooperative unique. Unlike a typical utility company, Oahe Electric belongs to its members. It's your cooperative, and your participation helps guide its direction and future.

Being a member of a cooperative is not just a label. It's a relationship. It means that each of you are not only a member — you're an owner. A voice that matters in every decision we make. You have a vote. You can be part of the board that steers the ship of your electric cooperative. With that in mind, we want to share openly and honestly about electric rates and the factors that go into setting them — especially when we are faced with increases.

Let me start by saying: I understand. We all understand. These are challenging economic times. Costs are rising everywhere — groceries, gas, housing — and our cooperative is not immune to the strain. We know that for many of our members, every dollar counts. The decision to raise rates is never taken lightly. It's one of the hardest conversations we have, because we know it affects real families — our neighbors, our friends and ourselves. So why do rates increase?

There are a few key reasons, and few of them are things we control. First, the cost of generating and purchasing electricity has gone up. Fuel prices fluctuate. Infrastructure ages. Technology evolves. And like every responsible utility, we have to maintain and invest in the system that delivers reliable power to your homes and businesses — 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

Second, the industry is dealing with supply chain challenges and labor shortages that are

driving up the cost of materials and skilled work. Transformers, poles, wire — things we once could get in weeks now take months, and they cost significantly more. And finally, we're preparing for the future — investing in system upgrades, cybersecurity, and clean energy solutions that will keep us resilient in the years ahead.

But here's the difference — and it's a big one — when a cooperative raises rates- it's not about generating profits for shareholders. We don't have shareholders. We have members.

And every dollar that comes in goes toward keeping the lights on, maintaining safe operations, and investing in the long-term health of the cooperative. When we have excess revenue, it doesn't go to Wall Street — it comes back to you in the form of capital credits. That's what makes us different. That's what makes us a cooperative.

We also try, whenever possible, to find alternatives before resorting to a rate increase. We trim budgets. Look for efficiencies. And when we do make the difficult decision to adjust rates, we do so with transparency, with oversight, and with the input of your elected board — members just like you.

If you're facing financial hardship, please don't hesitate or wait to reach out. There are local assistance programs and we can generally make arrangement for payment plans. No one in our community should feel they have to face these challenges alone.

Looking forward, we continue to focus on ways to control costs, increase energy efficiency, and invest in technologies that will make our system more reliable and affordable over time. That's the long-term vision, and it's one we all share.

Because this cooperative doesn't belong to a distant corporation. It belongs to you. Every decision we make, every dollar we spend, every mile of line we upgrade—we do it with our members in mind.

So thank you—for your understanding, your participation, and your continued support. We are proud to serve you. We are honored to be part of this community. And we are committed to keeping your trust, every single day.

Your Co-op's Thank-You Notes

Oahe Electric – I wanted to send a personal thank you for the generosity you have shown toward the turf project at SJS! What a blessing it is to have benefactors such as you! God Bless, – Mrs. Walsh

Go Above and Beyond for a Safe Harvest

Anne Prince
NRECA

Modern farming often relies on data and equipment with GPS and auto-guidance systems. However, even with these modern conveniences, farm workers must remain vigilant. That's because farming is considered one of the most dangerous jobs.

Massive machinery is indispensable to farming, but the same impressive size, height and extensions make them particularly vulnerable to contacting power lines. That's why staying alert, focused and knowledgeable about potential hazards and safety procedures is crucial.

During a busy harvest season, the familiar sights around the farm can easily fade into the background, and farm workers can overlook the power lines overhead. However, failing to notice them can lead to deadly accidents.

360 Awareness

Awareness of your surroundings, around, above and below, and planning safe equipment routes can significantly reduce the risk of accidents. Even with GPS and auto-steering, it's imperative that farm workers keep a close eye on the equipment's location and are ready to take action if necessary.

Exposed underground powerlines, defective wiring in farm buildings and extension cords are also hazards. Grain bins can pose a potential danger as well. The National Electrical Safety Code requires power lines to be at least 18 feet above the highest point on any grain bin with which portable augers or other portable filling equipment are used.

Smart Harvest Safety Tips

To ensure a safer harvest season, SafeElectricity.org recommends the following tips to avoid electrical accidents on the farm:

- Exercise caution near power lines. Be careful when raising augers or the bed of grain trucks around power lines.
- Use spotters when operating large machinery near power lines. Ensure the spotters do not touch the machinery while it is moving near power lines.

- Lower equipment extensions, portable augers or elevators before moving or transporting equipment. Do not raise equipment, such as ladders, poles or rods into power lines. Remember that non-metallic materials like lumber, tree limbs, ropes and hay can conduct electricity, especially when damp, dusty or dirty.
- Never attempt to raise or move power lines to clear a path. Doing so could result in electric shock or death.
- Avoid using metal poles inside bins. Don't use metal poles to break up bridged grain inside or around bins.
- Hire qualified electricians. Ensure that qualified electricians handle work on drying equipment and other farm electrical systems.

While rare, the only reason to exit equipment that has come into contact with overhead lines is if the equipment is on fire. However, if it happens, jump off the equipment with your feet together and without touching the machinery and the ground at the same time. Then, still keeping your feet together, hop to safety as you leave the area.



"Don't play with outlets!"

Kinzlee Klomp, Age 12

Kinzlee warns readers not to play with power outlets. Great advice, Kinzlee! Kinzlee's parents are Kaitlin and Austin Klomp from Box Elder, 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.

Fresh BREADS

ZUCCHINI BREAD

Ingredients:

3 eggs
2 cups sugar
1 cup oil
2 tsps. vanilla
3 cups flour
1 tsp. baking soda
1/2 tsp. baking powder
1 tsp. salt
1 tsp. cinnamon
3 cups zucchini (shredded)

Method

Cream together eggs, sugar and oil. Then add the vanilla. Mix together the flour, baking soda, baking powder, salt, cinnamon and add to the egg mixture. Stir in zucchini. Pour into two loaf pans. Bake at 325°F for approximately one hour.

Kimberly Grimm
Southeastern Electric

GLUTEN FREE OATMEAL PANCAKES

Ingredients:

2 1/2 cups oats
1 tsp. baking powder
1 tsp. baking soda
1 tsp. cinnamon
1/2 tsp. salt
2 eggs
1/2 cup milk
3/4 cup applesauce
3 tsps. maple syrup
2 tsps. apple cider vinegar
2 tsps. vanilla

Method

Grind 2 1/2 cups oats in blender until turned into flour. In large bowl, whisk together oats, baking powder, baking soda, cinnamon and salt. Form a bowl in center, add eggs and whisk them. Then, add milk, applesauce, maple syrup, apple cider vinegar and vanilla. Stir to combine. Wait five minutes to thicken batter. Cook in oiled pan.

Jean Beauchamp
Southeastern Electric

KUNSI' FRY BREAD

Ingredients:

1 tbsp. yeast (quick rise)
2 tsps. sugar
1 qt. warm water
1 tbsp. oil/melted butter
1/2 tsp. salt
6 cups all-purpose flour
2 tsps. powdered dry milk
4 cups oil for frying

Method

Mix yeast, sugar, salt, warm water, oil/melted butter and let proof for 15 minutes. Mix flour and powdered dry milk. Make a well in the flour mixture and add yeast mixture. Gradually add warm water until dough comes together and is no longer sticky. Cover and let rise until doubled in size. Heat oil to fry dough. Separate dough into 10 to 12 baseball-size dough balls (or smaller if you want smaller pieces). Stretch dough balls and shape into oval discs or round discs approximately 1/4 inch thick. Test the oil to see if it's hot enough by dropping a small pea size piece of the dough in the oil. If it floats it's ready. Flatten the disc between your hands and stretch it again. Fry the bread until both sides are golden brown. Transfer to paper towel lined plate to drain. Continue until all the dough is fried. Enjoy with soup or a Spam and egg sandwich or taco toppings.

Sheila Ironheart
Whetstone Valley 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.

ANNUAL MEETING REPORT

Income Statement			
Revenue:	2023	2024	
Farm & Residential	\$ 4,763,358	\$ 4,861,983	
Irrigation	1,454,137	1,249,526	
Commercial	8,211,896	21,747,511	
Onida	677,916	673,547	
Public Highway & Lighting	4,697	4,704	
Other Income	135,515	(610,543)	
Total Revenue	\$ 15,247,519	\$ 27,926,728	
Operating Expenses:			
Operations & Maintenance	\$ 1,456,046	\$ 1,335,184	
Consumer Accounts	183,902	182,012	
Consumer Services & Info	83,837	73,631	
Administration & General	1,011,346	1,220,107	
Other	5,883	7,110	
Total Operation Expenses	\$ 2,741,014	\$ 2,818,044	
Fixed Expenses:			
Purchased Power	\$ 10,390,994	\$ 22,630,992	
Depreciation	1,022,491	1,097,541	
Taxes	264,406	594,422	
Interest (Long Term Debt)	595,386	656,206	
Total Fixed Expenses	\$ 12,273,277	\$ 24,979,161	
Total Cost of Service	\$ 15,014,291	\$ 27,797,205	
Capital Credits & Margins:			
Operating Margins	\$ 233,227	\$ 129,523	
Non-operating Margins (Interest)	247,649	294,952	
G&T Patronage - East River & Basin	993,920	1,645,057	
Other Patronage	33,212	155,775	
Total Capital Credits & Margins	\$ 1,508,008	\$ 2,225,307	

Balance Sheet			
Assets (what we own)	2023	2024	
Utility Plant			
Total Utility Plant	\$ 34,118,458	\$ 36,740,158	
Less Accumulated Depreciation	(12,267,732)	(12,561,255)	
Utility Plant - Net	\$ 21,850,726	\$ 24,178,903	
Other Property & Investments			
Investments in Assoc. Companies	\$ 8,723,604	\$ 10,230,679	
Other Invest./Non-Utility Prop.	886,618	814,125	
Special Funds	1,000,000	1,750,000	
Total Other Property & Invests.	\$ 10,610,222	\$ 12,794,804	
Current Assets			
Cash & Cash Equivalents	\$ 5,359,387	\$ 2,104,011	
AR, Net of Allowance	2,220,392	1,984,166	
Materials & Supplies	1,688,162	1,657,630	
Prepayments	42,317	50,700	
Interest Receivable	44,380	23,358	
Total Current Assets	\$ 9,354,638	\$ 5,819,865	
Deferred Debts	34,441	28,549	
Total Assets	\$ 41,850,027	\$ 42,822,121	
Liabilities (what we owe)			
Long Term Debt	\$ 19,598,325	\$ 18,646,046	
Accounts Payable	3,662,178	2,500,910	
Customer Deposits	549,950	862,775	
Other Liabilities	1,438,687	1,788,433	
Deferred Credits	1,071,806	1,797,200	
Total Liabilities	\$ 26,320,946	\$ 25,595,364	
Net Worth (member equity)			
Patronage Capital & Other Equities	15,529,081	17,226,757	
Total Liabilities & Net Worth	\$ 41,850,027	\$ 42,822,121	

Your Co-op's Financial Report



Valerie Marso
CFO

Your electric cooperative wrapped up the 2024 fiscal year in excellent financial health. Let's start by examining the statement of operations. Total electric revenue was up more than \$12M due to a large load coming online. Operating expenses, which are the day-to-day activities, increased \$154k. Fixed expenses or uncontrollable expenses, including purchased power, interest on debt and depreciation, more than doubled and also directly correlates to the

large load coming online. We received capital credit allocations from East River and Basin Electric of over \$1.6M.

The balance sheet reflects the following: Net utility plant for 2024 was \$24.1M. Add this to the other investments and cash, and your cooperative has assets totaling nearly \$43M. The Cooperative's debt and other liabilities total over \$25M, which leaves patronage capital due to you the members of over \$17M.

Each year, Oahe Electric Cooperative undergoes a thorough

audit conducted by an independent accounting firm. In their most recent audit, the firm confirmed that the cooperative's financial statements accurately reflect the results of our operations and cash flows, with no material misstatements identified.

The audit also verified that Oahe Electric remains fully compliant with Government Auditing Standards issued by the Comptroller General of the United States, as well as with generally accepted accounting principles.

This annual review ensures transparency and accountability, reaffirming our commitment to sound financial management and responsible stewardship of our members' resources.

Oahe Electric had a very solid financial performance in 2024 and we are dedicated to continuing that trend. Stay in the loop with everything happening at your cooperative by diving into the Cooperative Connections newsletter, exploring our website, checking out your bill inserts and following us on Facebook!

If you have any questions or want to talk about the numbers, I am always here. It is truly an honor to serve you.

Got a Sub Meter? Please Keep the Power On

Many of you may remember when Oahe Electric installed your sub meter. This special meter makes it possible for your heating and cooling usage to be billed at a reduced rate — helping you save money on your electric bill.

From time to time, however, we run into an issue: some sub meters are being shut off at the breaker. When that happens, the sub meter can't record your heating or cooling usage, and all of that electricity ends up being billed at the regular residential rate instead of the lower rate.

This creates two problems:

1. Members receive higher bills than expected.
2. Our employees must spend time diagnosing the issue, often requiring site visits to check breakers, wiring, and equipment.

To prevent this, please make sure all of your breakers remain turned on. Each piece of electronic equipment — furnaces, air conditioners, water heaters — has its own switch or thermostat that should be used during regular maintenance. Do not shut off breakers unless it's an emergency.

Keeping your sub meter powered ensures accurate billing and continued savings for you.

Reliability In Action:

A Year of Upgrades & Achievements



Matt Eldridge
COO

This is one of my favorite times of the year — a chance to not only share what we've been working on, but also to celebrate the people behind the work. Our crews, contractors, and partners have been busy, and I think you'll be proud of what we've accomplished together.

One of our biggest focuses recently has been pole testing—a critical part of keeping our system reliable and safe. Over the last four summers, we partnered with a company called EXO, Inc. to inspect every single power pole in our service area. These inspections were extremely thorough, using both visual checks and soundness tests to identify any signs of rot or structural weakness.

Out of thousands of poles, more than 400 were flagged for replacement. Some of them had been here since the 1950s — standing through blizzards, thunderstorms, and a few decades of South Dakota wind, serving our members faithfully for over 70 years. That's a remarkable run, but even the toughest poles eventually need to retire.

This summer, I'm proud to report that we finished replacing every single one of them. That's a huge achievement, and it's a credit to our crews' skill, dedication, and commitment to safety.

Looking ahead, we'll pick up testing again in six years, keeping every pole on a ten-year inspection cycle. That way, we're not reacting to problems — we're staying ahead of them, and keeping our system strong when extreme weather comes our way.

Now, thanks to a mild winter — something we don't always get — our crews were also able to complete our annual line patrol in Sully County. This patrol is essential for spotting hazards or maintenance needs along our overhead powerlines before they become problems.

And, as part of our ongoing reliability efforts, we brought in a tree-cutting service from Aberdeen to help address some challenging areas. Working together with Dakota Tree Company and our own team, we've removed a number of problem trees — ones that could have caused outages or damage during storms.

This spring, we also tackled two major underground powerline projects with K&H Electric out of Linton, North Dakota.

The first was west of Onida, along 294th Avenue and 190th Street. We installed five miles of underground three-phase line — creating a two-way feed between our Okobojo, Logan, and Onida substations, giving us greater flexibility when it comes to restoring power during outages.

The second project converted overhead three-phase line to underground along Highway 1804 and Grey Goose Road, serving both the Grey Goose area and the Mid-Dakota Water System.

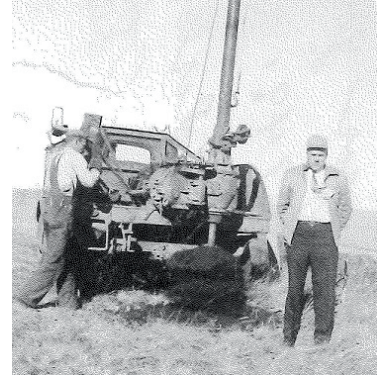
That project was partly funded by a FEMA grant — and we're working with FEMA now to secure more funding for future underground work. These upgrades are a big step forward in improving reliability and outages for our members.

Looking ahead to this fall and winter, we'll keep working on new service installations and general maintenance across our system. If you're thinking about adding a service or upgrading one, please give us a heads-up as early as you can. Material lead times are still longer than we'd like, and early notice makes all the difference in getting your project done on schedule.

As always, if you ever have a question, concern, or even just curiosity about your electric service, give us a call. We want to hear from you and we're here to help.

Finally, thank you for trusting us to keep the lights on. It's your support that makes this work possible, and on behalf of the entire operations department, we're proud to serve you.

An Oahe Electric crew digs a hole for a pole six miles east of Agar in Oct. 1949



Oahe Electric crew changes out an aging pole.



An Oahe Electric crew converts overhead lines to underground for enhanced reliability.



Energy Assistance Available to Those Who Qualify

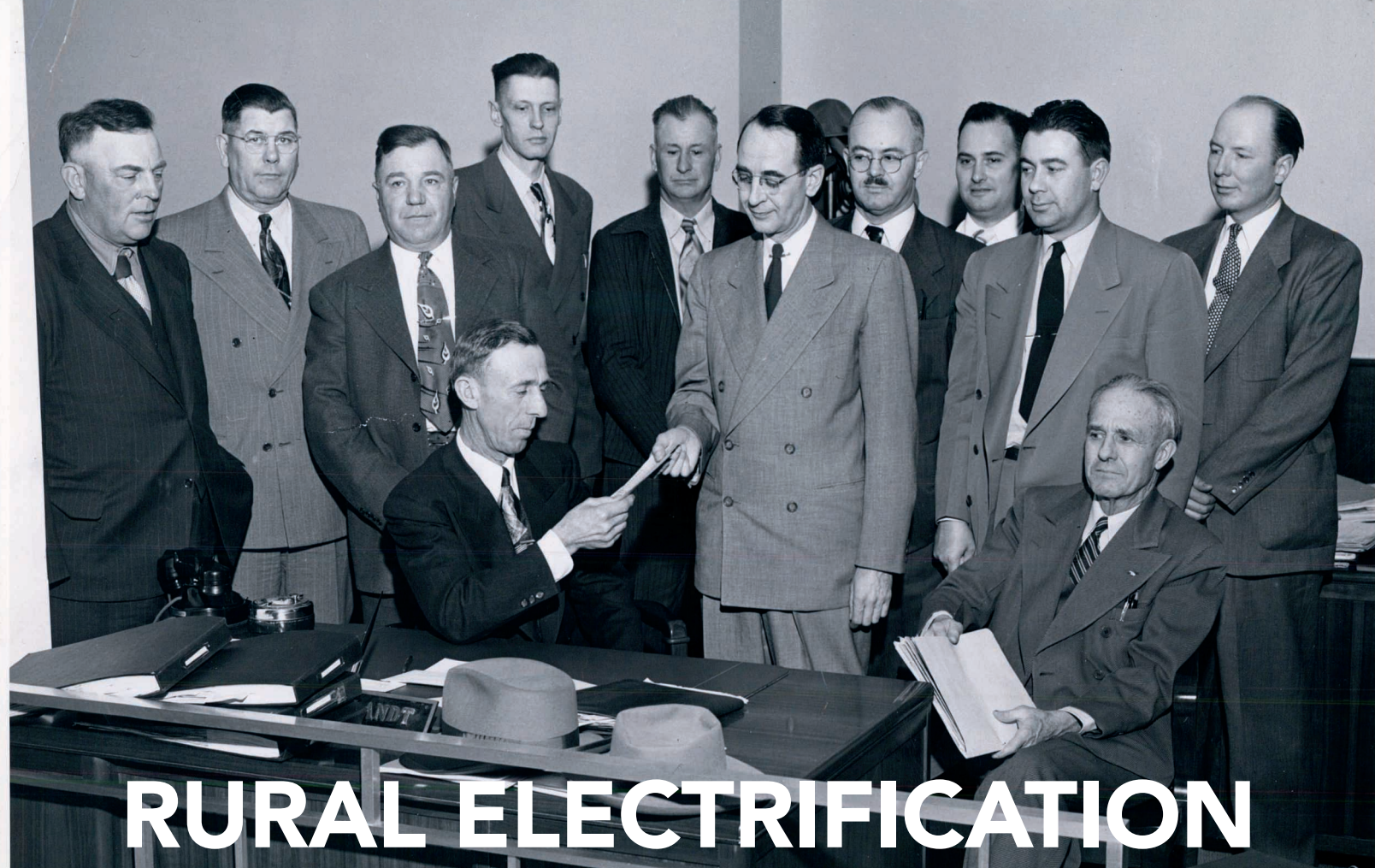
Winter heating costs can put a strain on many households, but help is available. The Low-Income Energy Assistance Program (LIEAP) is designed to support eligible South Dakotans by covering a portion of home heating expenses. While it may not pay for all your heating costs, it can make a meaningful difference during the colder months. Assistance is applied to energy usage from Oct. 1 through May 15.

Eligibility is based on several factors, including:

- The number of people in your household

- The gross income of everyone in the household
- The type of heating used in the home
- The geographic area you live in

If you think you may qualify, we encourage you to apply. Applications are available by calling 1-800-233-8503, online at www.dss.sd.gov/energyassistance. If heating costs are weighing on your mind, please don't wait — help is just a phone call or click away.



RURAL ELECTRIFICATION

WEST CENTRAL

Last to Incorporate, Lasting in Impact

Frank Turner

frank.turner@sdrea.coop

Before rural electrification, South Dakota's farmsteads ended the day in silence. There was no music from the radio playing in the living room or hum of an electric refrigerator in the kitchen. Over decades of work, power lines would stretch across the prairie through President Franklin Roosevelt's vision of rural electrification, carrying not only electricity but also a new way of life.

In 1935, President Roosevelt created the Rural Electrification Administration (REA) as part of his New Deal policies to revive a nation struggling through the Great Depression and bring electricity to

America's rural communities, something that private and investor-owned utilities refused to do.

Clay-Union Electric was the first rural community in South Dakota to adopt the cooperative model in 1937, and West Central was the last in 1949. But as former West Central Electric CEO Steve Reed can attest, being the last to adopt the cooperative way didn't hinder their success. Once the path to forming a cooperative was established, the members of West Central benefitted from electricity's transformation from a luxury into a necessity with the rest of rural South Dakota.

"We couldn't rely on the power

West Central Electric board directors present a check to a representative of Central Electric and Gas in 1951, finalizing the cooperative's purchase of the private utility system. *Photo submitted by West Central Electric.*

companies to come out to serve rural South Dakota," said Reed, a 42-year cooperative veteran who joined West Central Electric as a lineman and worked his way up to CEO. "They were never going to do it at price that was affordable, so rural electric has been great for not only the members of West Central but the entire country."

So why was West Central the last to form a cooperative? According to Reed, the rural communities that organized West Central Electric in 1949 had several hurdles to clear. The first was overcoming the sheer remoteness of the territory, which then had a system that averaged 1.5 members per mile of line constructed, even including towns and

cities. Because members were few and far between, the REA needed the towns in the proposed West Central territory to become members: from Philip to Hayes and Murdo to Kennebec, where West Central Electric was incorporated.

That led to the next problem: the towns and cities in the proposed West Central Electric's service territory were already being served by Central Electric and Gas, a private company based out of Philadelphia. This obstacle didn't stop the people who had a vision of what rural electrification could accomplish. Following lengthy discussion in 1951, West Central Electric purchased systems from Central Electric and Gas for \$850,000 using low-interest REA federal funds.

Former West Central Electric Attorney John Larson outlined the discussions in his 50th Annual Meeting Speech: "There was no choice but to buy out the private supplier, Central Electric and Gas, and that was accomplished... (Former South Dakota Governor M. Q. Sharpe, who served as West Central Electric's attorney), showed up for the meeting that morning unshaven and unkempt, with a threadbare shirt and suit. For the entire morning, he listened with his head down and eyes shut to the Philadelphia lawyer types who represented the power company. After the dinner break, however, he showed up in a new suit, shaved, and took over the meeting by dictating exactly what West Central would do and what we would pay. During an afternoon break, one of the Philadelphia types was heard to mutter, 'You want to watch that old guy. When he's got his head down and eyes shut, he's not sleeping!'"

West Central Electric's 1951 purchase included all the electrical infrastructure within the town boundaries, as well as the diesel generation system extending west from Chamberlain. Shortly after, the evolution of West Central Electric progressed with the construction of distribution systems to farms and reconstructing the systems of various

towns, including the installation of street lights.

Since that iconic moment, West Central has continued to grow with its membership, meeting more demand for electrical energy than had been previously thought possible, a reflection of just how integral electricity has

become in day-to-day living for business owners, ag producers, and rural folk alike.

"That moment modernized us," said Reed. "It just did so much for everything – and without it, where would we be?"



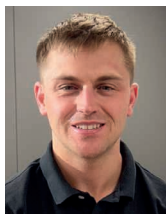
(Top) A West Central Electric Annual Meeting.
(Bottom) A West Central Electric Board Meeting with the REA.
Photos submitted by West Central Electric



The East Pierre Landscape & Garden Center billboard along S.D. Highway 34 in Pierre.

In the Spotlight:

East Pierre Landscape & Garden Center



Austin Hammer
Business
Development
& Procurement

A Year-Round Destination

The East Pierre Landscape and Garden Center has served central South Dakota's landscaping and gardening needs since 1952. Since early 2016, the business has been owned and operated by Art Smith and Mary Eckstrom, who are proud to run the region's only year-round garden center. Their offerings include plants, trees, and funeral arrangements, along with a wide selection of garden and

landscape materials for local contractors. Visitors will also find a variety of garden art and unique gifts inside the shop.

Sharing Knowledge and Expertise

In addition to their products, Art and Mary are known for their expertise and willingness to help. Customers often stop in for advice on starting new gardens, improving plant health, or simply learning a new gardening technique. Their knowledge and guidance have made them a trusted resource throughout the community.

Workshops and Education

Education is also central to their work. Over the years, they have hosted both free and paid workshops on topics such as creating fall porch pots, butterfly gardening, and growing roses with ease. Guest speakers have also been invited to share specialized knowledge. For Art and Mary,

these events are an opportunity to share their passion while bringing people together, and they look forward to continuing to welcome strong community participation in the years ahead.

Community Events

In addition to their regular workshops, the East Pierre Landscape and Garden Center hosts several special events each year. The most popular is their annual Fall Festival, first introduced by Art and Mary in 2016 as a way to thank customers and create a family-friendly community gathering. The festival begins with a children's session from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m., featuring games and the always-popular hay bale maze set up inside the greenhouse. Later in the day, from 3 to 5 p.m., the celebration continues with an adult session, complete with beer and wine tastings. Both sessions also feature food trucks and local vendors, making the Fall Festival a highlight for all ages. This year's festival is scheduled for Oct. 4.

Another signature event is the Spring Fling, held each April. The most recent event featured four free, hour-long presentations on topics such as designing with native plants, composting, culinary uses of herbs, and reducing food waste. These sessions are led by experts in their fields who are eager to share their knowledge with the community. Art and Mary enjoy offering these opportunities, bringing in specialists and providing a space for community members to learn, connect, and grow together.

Planting for the Future

Art and Mary also keep the East Pierre Landscape and Garden Center closely connected to the community through their work with the Pierre Arbor Board's annual tree giveaway. Each year, every second-grade student in the Pierre area receives a free tree to plant at home, and the garden center plays an important role in making that possible. By providing the trees at a significant discount, Art and Mary help ensure the tradition continues. Art also keeps a detailed record of the types of trees distributed each year, allowing the Arbor Board to offer new varieties over time and encourage a more diverse urban forest in the community. On average, about 250 students receive trees each year — a contribution Art and Mary are proud to support as they help nurture the next generation of growers.

Weathering the Storm

On the evening of July 14, the Pierre area was struck by a powerful thunderstorm with wind gusts recorded at over 80 mph near the airport. South of the airport, where the East Pierre Landscape and Garden Center is located, the damage was even greater. At home, Art Smith heard the reports and soon realized the storm may have impacted the store as well. When he arrived on site, he discovered extensive damage: the riser pole outside the shop had snapped into three pieces, leaving power lines strewn across the parking lot. Six storage sheds were also impacted — three destroyed, two tipped over, and one partially on its side. Fortunately, the store itself escaped major damage, aside from harm to the outdoor sign.

Art quickly acted to keep the area safe, parking a vehicle at the entrance so no one would accidentally drive into the downed lines. When Oahe Electric linemen arrived to replace the pole, they faced another challenge: the ground was too soft to set it securely. Thanks to Art's quick thinking and equipment on hand, he was able to deliver rock from his property with a skid steer, allowing the crew to stabilize the pole and restore power safely and efficiently.

Oahe Electric is grateful for Art's assistance that night, which made the difficult job go more smoothly.

Even the store cat, Bear, had entertainment into the late hours, with four bucket trucks and their flashing lights parked outside as the team worked through the storm's aftermath.



Oahe Electric Cooperative workers restore power to a line south of Pierre after a storm July 14.



East Pierre Landscape & Garden Center owners Mary Erkstrom and Art Smith.
Submitted Photo



Photo submitted by JT and Luann Weber.

GENERATIONAL FARMERS

Four Generations of Lyon-Lincoln Electric Members Ranch on Lake Benton-Area Land

Jacob Boyko

jacob.boyko@sdrea.coop

Nestled amongst the rolling green pastures of western Minnesota, there's a generations-old farm worked by one family for over three quarters of a century.

From their Lincoln County property, the Weber family watched rural electrification improve the prairie, connect neighbors and bring reliability to farmsteads. Now they watch precision agriculture guide planting, bovine genetics strengthen herds, and social media and the internet connect their business to the wider world.

It all started in 1947, when John and Marie Weber moved into the old three-bedroom farmhouse from nearby

Elkton, S.D. Luckily, the move came six years after Lyon-Lincoln Electric Cooperative energized lines in the area, so the Weber home enjoyed many of the modern amenities brought on by rural electrification, including electric lights, kitchen appliances and a washing machine.

"I know I had the best mom and dad in the world," said JT, one of John and Marie's eight children, who today helps run the ranch with his wife, Luann, their three sons and their families. "Dad was very community-oriented. He was on the school board, the elevator board and the rural water board. In fact, he was instrumental in starting rural water. He went from place to place, talking people

into getting rural water."

JT was born on the farm in 1957 during a blizzard that left his parents unable to reach the hospital in town. As a boy, he remembers collecting rainwater in a cistern and using it for cooking, cleaning and baths. Even as rural electrification began to transform the countryside, life on the farm remained far different – and often harder – than life in town.

"When I grew up, back in the 60s and 70s, if you milked 40 cows that was quite a few," JT said. "We were milking about 100 cows – we were kind of ahead of our time. But we had a big family, and us boys, we got right in there."

He continued, "We were hauling silage, hauling manure, milking cows and doing chores. But Dad never told us to do anything. He always asked us if we wanted to, and there's a difference. You wanted to work for him. He made you want to work for him, and it was never a burden."

That was a quality JT kept in mind with his own seven children on that same

ranch where he grew up. Today, JT and Luann's sons Jake, Garret, and Matt all stay involved in the ranch, now Weber Bros. Cattle.

"Growing up, I kind of always had that bug to get in the tractor, chase cows, put up fence, and do what needs to be done," explained Jake, the oldest son.

Today, they specialize in raising purebred Angus bulls and Simmental-Angus crosses, while also producing corn silage and alfalfa to help sustain the operation. While the operation may be old, it's not at all low-tech.

"Our main thing is our bull program," Jake said. "We sell about 50 registered Angus and Simmental bulls by private treaty every spring, and we also develop 50 replacement and bred heifers, and market a portion of them. We do a lot of artificial insemination and embryo transfer. Some of the more elite donor cows we can get our hands on by buying females and buying embryos. We're just trying to make good cows."

Jake, like his dad, graduated from South Dakota State University with an animal science degree, and was excited to return to the ranch to incorporate some of his new skills into the operation.

"When I got back from school, we really amped up our embryo transfer program with different ideas and stuff I learned about genetics from contacts and producers we've met over the years," Jake continued. "We went from selling 10 bulls per year to selling close to 50 bulls."

Jake's younger brother and fellow SDSU animal science graduate, Garret, keeps involved on the family's ranch as well. Though he works full time as swine genetic company Hypor's US Sales Manager, he helps out with the operation and finds the time to run Weber Bros. Cattle's social media pages, which he says has successfully expanded their presence in the market.

"Whether it's Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat or our company website, we're able to hit such a broad spectrum of people, and it's a great way to tell the story of our operation, what we're doing year-in and year-out and advertise the



genetics of the cattle that we're showing and selling," Garret explained. "We're able to have a much greater touch point of individuals that we can reach out to and market our livestock."

JT, Jake and Garret all credit their spouses and families for supporting them as they work to grow the operation.

"It took a long time and a lot of support for us to get established and get to where we are today," JT said.

Looking toward the future – and the next generation, their goals are to make an already successful operation even better.

"We'll keep working with the cow herd, continue to make improvements and make better genetics every year," Jake said. "I want this opportunity to be available to my kids, so that if they want to be able to do this, they'll have the same chance we did."

Garret added, "It's something that I hope my sons can do someday if we're able to continue to grow the operation. I hope it's something they're going to be able to share and cherish with their own kids, because those are the memories that stick with you forever."

JT and Luann Weber with their adult children, Jake, Garret, Matt and Sara Weber, Liz Mergen, and Maria Opheim, and families.

Back, from left: Garret Weber, Levi Weber, Kailey Weber, Jake Weber, Amanda Weber, Sara Weber, Cade Opheim, Maria Opheim, Tawnee Opheim, JT Weber, Luann Weber, Brent Mergen, Liz Mergen, Davie Fiedler, Matt Weber, Racheal Krog.
Front, from left: Adam Weber, Chisum Weber, Abeline Weber, Vidalia Fiedler.
Not pictured: Talon Weber



Photo submitted by JT and Luanne Weber.



A purebred Angus Heifer.
Photo by Garret Weber



CYBERSECURITY THINK BEFORE YOU CLICK

Frank Turner

frank.turner@sdrea.coop

This October marks the 22nd National Cybersecurity Awareness Month, first established in 2004 by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security and the National Cybersecurity Alliance. The annual observance was created to highlight the importance of cybersecurity and safe online practices.

This year's theme, "Stay Safe Online," emphasizes the small but important steps individuals can take to reduce online risks, especially during an age when it seems a new data breach makes headlines every single day. While big companies often make headlines when they are hacked, everyday people are just as likely to be targeted through scams, phishing attempts, or weak passwords.

Jacob Steeg, IT Administrator at Rushmore Electric Power Cooperative, says there are many easy-to-implement strategies and tips people can use to reduce the likelihood of hacks and personal data breaches. Steeg has worked in the information technology field for more than 16 years and has spent the past three with Rushmore Electric Cooperative.

The first step is staying vigilant. Steeg compares cybersecurity to a bank: even if the vault – or in this case, technology – is impenetrable, a human can still be tricked into opening it. That's how phishing works. Hackers send fraudulent, attention-grabbing emails or messages designed to trick users into clicking a link or giving away personal information.

"If you convince the guard of your bank to give you the code to the safe, it

doesn't matter how secure the vault is," Steeg said. "That's what phishing does. Bad actors are trying to bait you into giving up the information they need to break in."

"These messages may all look different, but they tend to follow the same script," he added. "They try to heighten your emotions with money, fear, or urgency so that you stop thinking clearly and hand over information you normally wouldn't."

Steeg also recommends users enable two-factor authentication. This extra layer of security requires not just a password, but a second step, such as entering a code sent to your phone or approving a login through an authentication app. Even if hackers steal your password, they won't be able to access your account without that second piece of verification. Steeg says this extra step may feel inconvenient at first, but it's one of the simplest and most effective tools for keeping accounts safe.

But of all the tips mentioned, Steeg says the most important step to staying secure online is to use different



Rushmore Electric Power Cooperative's information technology team, from left: Jacob Steeg, MarcCharles Zuatke and Jordan Kunkel.
Photo submitted by Rushmore Electric Power Cooperative.

passwords for different websites.

"By using different passwords, you are reducing your attack surface," he said. "Let's assume that someone was able to hack into a small forum tied to a specific interest you had 15 years ago. The person who built that forum likely isn't a cybersecurity expert – and these small forums are exactly what are getting breached. If you're using the same email and password across every site, hackers suddenly have access to your bank account, social media and more."

Instead of trying to remember 100 different passwords for 100 different websites, Steeg advises using a password manager, which securely stores your password information and can generate strong passwords for each account. He also recommends using a password that is at least 14 characters long.

"A password manager's whole job is to store your passwords safely," said Steeg. "It's not impossible that it gets breached, but your information is a lot safer there."

Steeg says it's also important to share these basic online safety practices with those around you, especially older relatives, who are often the most vulnerable to scams.

"Please reach out to the less tech-savvy people around you, like the elderly," he said. "The world has changed so much around them, and they might just not know. Just tell them what's out there and what is coming. Try to help them be aware that you aren't just valuable for the money that's in your pocket; you are also valuable for the data you store online, and somebody wants it."

At the end of the day, Steeg says one of the best ways to stay safe online is to "remember the stuff your parents taught you as a kid."

"If it's too good to be true, it's probably not," he said. "Nobody is reaching out to you via email to give you a gift or free money. Just because the medium has changed, doesn't mean that the scam is any different."

An Important Message About Cybersecurity

The IRS will never contact you directly by email, text message or social media to ask for personal or financial information. If you receive a message claiming to be from the IRS, it's a scam.

The agency communicates primarily through official letters sent by mail. If you're unsure whether a message is legitimate, do not click links or provide information. Instead, contact the IRS directly through its official website or phone number.



OCT. 10-12
Black Hills Powwow
 Rapid City, SD
 605-341-0925

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.

UNTIL OCT. 31
Wallace Dow, Prairie Architect
Traveling Exhibit
 Lake County Museum
 Madison, SD
 605-256-5308

OCT. 3
DSU Architecture Walking Tour
 3-4 p.m.
 Lake County Museum
 Madison, SD

OCT. 3-5
Black Hills Film Festival
 Journey Museum
 Rapid City, SD
 605-574-9454

OCT. 4
Pumpkin Train, Vendor
Showcase
 Prairie Village
 Madison, SD

OCT. 4-5
Sioux Falls Quilt Guild
 Sat. 9 a.m.-5 p.m.
 Sun. 11 a.m.-4 p.m.
 Sioux Falls Convention Center
 Sioux Falls, SD
 605-951-2034

OCT. 10-11
Holman Acres Pumpkin Fest
& Vendor Show
 Fri. 12 p.m.-6 p.m.
 Sat. 10 a.m.-6 p.m.,
 Philip, SD
 605-441-1060

OCT. 11
A Celebration of Classic Hits
 7 p.m.
 Gayville Music Hall
 Gayville, SD
 605-760-5799

OCT. 11
Howard Fall Festival
 10 a.m.-4 p.m.
 Miner County 4-H Grounds
 Howard, SD

OCT. 18
Arts & Crafts Festival
 10 a.m.-4 p.m.
 Faulkton, SD

OCT. 18
Northern Prairie Arts
Barn Quilt Class
 Highland Conference Center
 Register by Oct. 6
 Watertown, SD
 605-882-1780

OCT. 18-19
Heartland Quilting Stars Show
 Highland Conference Center
 Mitchell, SD
 605-770-1551

OCT. 19
Helping With Horsepower
Year-End Horse Show
 10 a.m.
 Reclamation Ranch
 Mitchell, SD

OCT. 24
Humor for Heroes
Comedy Night Fundraiser
 Comedians, Silent Auction
 Tickets \$15, two for \$25
 1600 W. Russell St.
 Sioux Falls, SD
 605-336-3470

OCT. 25
The Greats of Country
 7 p.m.
 Gayville Music Hall
 Gayville, SD
 605-760-5799

OCT. 31-NOV. 2
Haunted Trail at
Reclamation Ranch
 7-10 p.m.
 Reclamation Ranch
 Mitchell, SD

NOV. 1
Reliance Christmas Carousel
 9 a.m.-3 p.m.
 Reliance, SD
 605-730-1462

NOV. 1
Fall Fling Craft/Vendor Show
 10 a.m.-2 p.m.
 Dakota Christian School
 Corsica, SD
 605-366-7940

NOV. 1
Black Hills Meat Fest
 2-4 p.m.
 Nerdy Nuts Expo Hall
 Rapid City, SD

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.