

Cooperative Connections

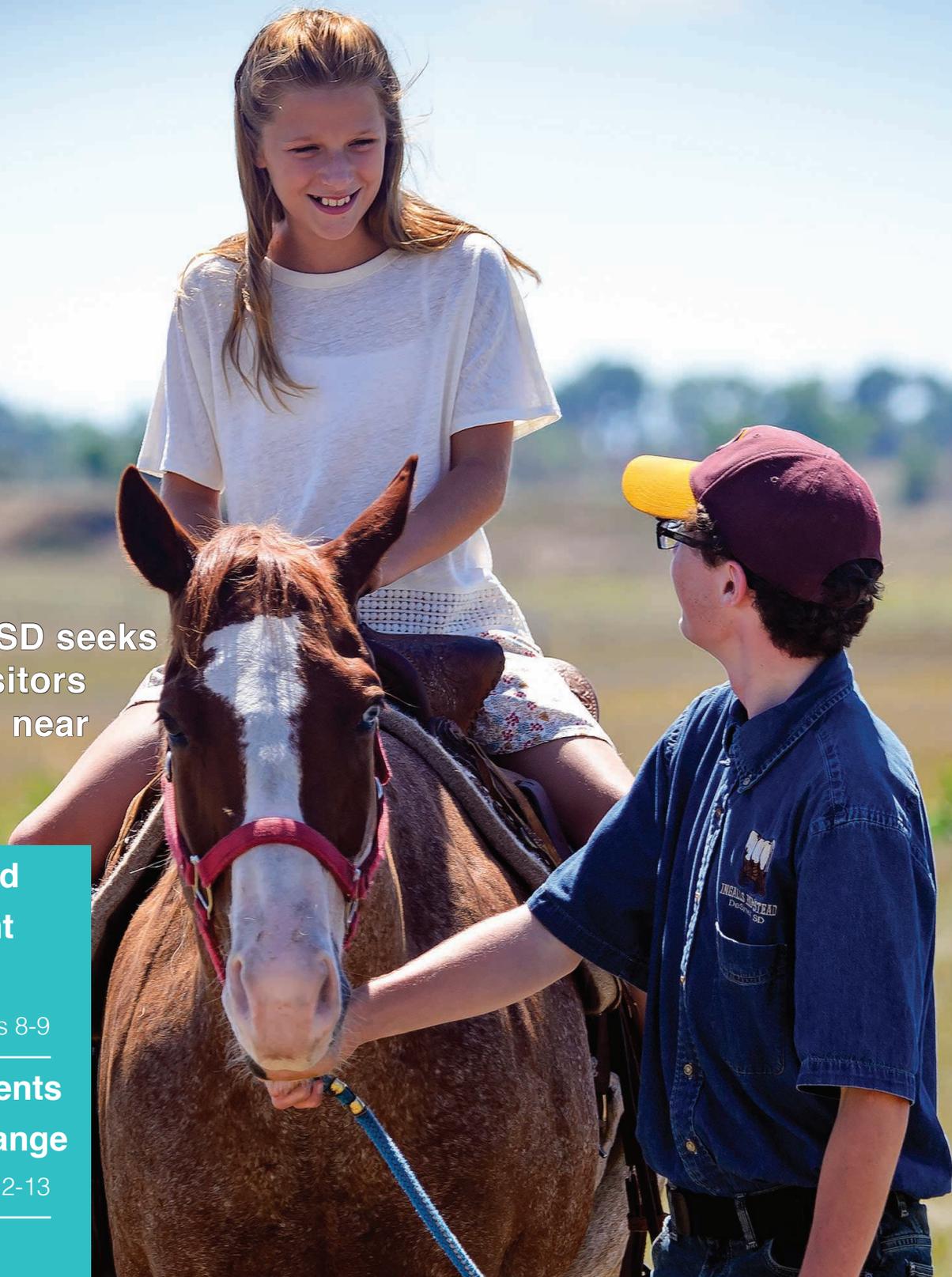
AgritourismSD seeks to attract visitors from far and near

Education and Entertainment on the Farm

Pages 8-9

College Students Deal with Change

Pages 12-13



BOARD ACCOUNTABILITY

A regular meeting of the Board of Directors of FEM Electric was held in Ipswich, at 8:30 a.m. on March 16, 2021, pursuant to due call and notice. It being determined that a quorum was present, President Gary Bachman called the meeting to order at 8:30 a.m.; Secretary Larry Bowar kept minutes of the meeting.

The following directors were declared present by roll call: Gary Bachman, Tom Thorpe, Paula Petersen, Larry Bowar, Eric Odenbach, General Manager/CEO Scott Moore, Line Superintendent Rob Vetch and Director of Finance and Benefits Rhonda Tuscherer.

President Gary Bachman welcomed guest employee Valette Horst.

Ryan Holien and Jesse Brown were present during staff reports.

Motion by Larry Bowar, seconded by Tom Thorpe and carried to approve administrative business.

Changes to the agenda – none

Minutes from February 16, 2021 meeting – none

Next Meeting Date – After a review of calendars, directors agreed that the next regular meeting of the board would be on Tuesday, April 20, 2021, at 8:30 a.m. to be held at FEM Electric Board Room in Ipswich, South Dakota.

Motion by Paula Petersen, seconded by Eric Odenbach and carried to acknowledge manager, staff and electrical department reports.

Motion by Eric Odenbach, seconded by Paula Petersen to donate \$1,000.00 to South Dakota State Fair new beef barn complex. Donation will be given through SDREA.

The January and February Cyber Security Reports were acknowledged.

Resolutions, Nominations, and Contracts: Motion by Larry Bowar, seconded by Tom Thorpe and carried to approve construction for underground power lines with K & H Electric, Linton, ND.

Membership Business: The board acknowledged the following membership business as presented:

New Memberships, Member Cancellations and Contracts –

Disconnects: Flynt & Betty Schack, Tolstoy, Pasture Pump;

Reconnects: Evan & Sandra Haar, Onaka, Pasture Pump;

Contracts: Thomas & Donna Schackman, Laporte, MN, Residence;

Retired: None.



Estates: March 2021 – one estate = \$0 (forfeiting remaining East River amount \$14.16)

73 & Older: March 2021 – none

Financial Business: The board acknowledged reviewing the following financial information: Check register for the month of February 2021 contained information on checks #31343 through #31401, and all automatic payments/withdrawals for February 2021 totaling \$612,848.81.

Motion by Eric Odenbach, seconded by Larry Bowar and carried to approve director and attorney fees.

Legal Update: Board received an update on collection from insurance company and a question on capital credit estate.

Meeting Report: East River board update was given by Gary Bachman.

NRECA Annual meeting was discussed, which was held virtual.

The board acknowledged the receipt of the Wellness Presentation on February 17, Safety Committee minutes on February 24th and Safety Meeting minutes from February 23rd, 2021, along with near misses, accident reports and investigations.

Adjourn: President Gary Bachman declared the meeting adjourned.





A Touchstone Energy®
Cooperative 

Cooperative Connections

(USPS 189-720)

Board of Directors

Gary Bachman, President
Tom Thorpe, Vice President
Larry Bowar, Secretary
Paula Petersen, Treasurer
Eric Odenbach, Asst. Sec./Treasurer
Vaughn Beck, Attorney

CEO/General Manager

Scott Moore
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Management Staff

Rob Vetch, Line Superintendent
Rhonda Tuscherer, Director of
Finance and Benefits

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In case of a power outage, line trouble or general information, please contact us at:

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8 am to 4:30 pm

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Scott Moore

General Manager

In my last article, I suggested we wait to get facts about the outages on February 16, 2021, due to the cold snap from the Canadian border south to the Texas coastline. Some who are looking to point blame elsewhere, say they have never seen a cold snap like this. I am guessing it has happened before and I'm sure it will happen again, and it isn't climate change, it is called Mother Nature. We do know there was a lack of wind generation; reasons: turbines iced up, temperature was too cold to operate and lack of wind. Solar did not produce due to a lack of sun. Coal generation had some problems getting online due to equipment failure. Natural gas generators had problems getting gas, keeping the pipelines and valves from freezing, stopping or slowing electric generation and the price of gas in places skyrocketed, supply and demand. We hope that greed did not play a factor in price increases, but I'm guessing time will reveal some bad actors that benefited greatly from the misfortune of others.

Some generation and transmission companies, including some cooperatives, have filed bankruptcy, while others have reached into their operating loans for hundreds of millions in funds. Some people have resigned and others terminated due to the power disruptions. Politicians, and federal and state agencies are posturing and demanding answers and changes to rules and policies they put in place for power companies to operate within. There has already been multiple state and federal investigations started to determine the cause and who to blame. I have been told these will take several years to complete. Along with the investigations, will come lawsuits that will take even longer to get through the legal system. I don't believe either investigations or lawsuits will solve the problem.

Operating on the open market comes with rewards and risk. Some days Basin can buy power on the open market cheaper than they can produce electricity and there are times when prices are higher than Basin's production cost but, in the end, we have a stable average power cost. Both Western Area Power Administration (WAPA) and Basin got hit with some of these increased costs in February, but not enough to justify a rate increase.

Increased power cost: I'm confident that Basin has policies and procedures in place to keep its members protected against extreme power market fluctuations. My concern is electric transmission and generation reliability. Basin has positioned themselves with multiple options for generation and transmission, but that does not guarantee we will not be affected as we experienced February 16, 2021.

We can hope and should expect that common sense prevails and companies and agencies step up to resolve the issues we saw in February. We need to find solutions to make sure these power interruptions do not become regular events. Affordable, reliable power is a must for a safe and strong rural economy.

We choose to live in an area that can experience multiple days of below zero temperatures, and I do not want to experience any outages due to lack of transmission or generation. Mother Nature's wind and ice storms are enough excitement for me.

As we move rapidly into spring, we will soon be seeing the dust from spring planting and green grass starting the growth cycle for another prosperous year. Please remember to look around and be aware of safety hazards, we need to have a safe planting and calving season.

If adding any electrical load in the future, please contact Rob Vetch or Ryan Holien at 605-426-6891. Planning early will help make your project successful.

Reminder that June 29, 2021, is FEM Electric's Annual Meeting: please plan to attend.

Statement Mailing Dates

May 26th for May's energy.

June 25th for June's energy.

Regardless of the statement mail out date payments are due in the office by the 9th of the following month.

Remodeling? Keep Efficiency in Mind

Sunny days are prime time for tackling remodeling projects, upgrades and repairs around your home. If you're planning a project, make a point of adding energy efficiency features along the way. Here are a few ideas:

- Add insulation around recessed lights so heated or conditioned air doesn't leak out of them and the weather can't sneak in.
- Install programmable thermostats when you add rooms to the house. While you're at it, have the thermostats in the rest of your home upgraded to programmable models.
- Your contractor will install more insulation in any new spaces you're adding than your builder did during the original construction of your home. Consider adding insulation to already-insulated areas, like the crawlspace and attic, to meet new energy efficiency standards.
- A new kitchen means shiny new appliances. Select those rated as energy efficient by ENERGY STAR®, which use less energy than unrated models.
- If your older home still has single-pane windows, consider an upgrade. Double-pane windows are more energy efficient because they better shield your home from the outdoors - and keep your conditioned air indoors.
- Replace old lightbulbs in your most-used rooms with LEDs. They last 10 years or longer and save considerable energy when compared to incandescent bulbs.
- Work with a contractor who understands how passive solar design can affect your energy bills. Rooftop solar panels, sunrooms and skylights are popular additions.
- Add or upgrade ventilation fans in bathrooms. This can improve air quality throughout the home - not just in the bathrooms - by removing moisture from the air.
- Consider having a home energy audit conducted. Audits can help you evaluate your home for energy wasters, suggest ways to remedy inefficiencies and recommend additions that will make your house more comfortable and cheaper to heat and cool.



Generate Safely.

Never use a portable generator indoors.

Do not plug generators into standard electrical outlets.

Use heavy-duty extension cords to connect appliances into the generator.

Start the generator before connecting appliances.

KIDS CORNER SAFETY POSTER



Don't Grill Too Close to the House

Mia Phillips, 5 years old

Mia is the granddaughter of Jim and Hans Moore of Rapid City. They are members of Black Hills Electric.

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.



A Craving for Casseroles

Chicken and Rice

- 1 bag Success Brown Rice
- 1/2 cup ricotta cheese
- 1/4 cup grated Parmesan cheese
- 1 tbsp. chopped Italian parsley
- 1 tbsp. olive oil
- 1/3 cup chopped onions
- 2 garlic cloves, minced
- 1/2 package (4 ounces) mushrooms, sliced
- 1/4 cup white wine
- 4 cups baby spinach leaves
- 2 cups shredded, cooked chicken breast
- 1/2 tsp. salt
- 1/2 tsp. black pepper

Prepare rice according to package directions. In small bowl, combine ricotta, Parmesan and parsley; reserve. In large skillet over medium heat, heat oil. Add onions and garlic; saute 2 minutes. Add mushrooms and wine to skillet. Continue cooking 3 minutes, stirring occasionally. Add spinach and chicken. Stir until spinach is wilted and chicken is heated through, about 2 minutes. Stir in rice, salt and pepper. Serve casserole topped with dollops of reserved cheese mixture.

SuccessRice.com

Meat Lovers Pizza Casserole

- 1 lb. ground beef
- 1 medium onion, chopped
- 1 can (15 oz) pizza sauce
- 8 oz. elbow macaroni, cooked and drained
- 2 c. (8 oz) shredded mozzarella cheese
- 1 pkg (3 1/2 oz) sliced pepperoni, quartered
- 1/2 tsp. salt

In a large skillet, cook ground beef and onion over medium heat until meat is no longer pink; drain. Stir in remaining ingredients. Transfer to a greased 2-quart baking dish. Bake uncovered at 350 degrees for 40-45 minutes or until heated through. Yields 6 servings.

Gail Lee, Brookings

Chicken Doritos Casserole

- 2 cups shredded cooked chicken
- 1 cup shredded cheese
- 1 can cream of chicken soup
- 1/2 cup milk
- 1/2 cup sour cream
- 1 can Ro-tel tomatoes, drained (canned tomatoes with jalapenos-mild)
- 1/2 packet taco seasoning (or more, to taste)
- 1 bag of regular nacho cheese Doritos

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. In a mixing bowl, combine all ingredients except Doritos. In a greased 2 quart baking dish, put a layer of crushed Doritos (about 2 cups), then a layer of the chicken mixture. Top with more shredded cheese, cover, and bake 30-35 minutes until bubbling hot. Enjoy!

Alana Neville, Milesville, SD

Garden Cafe Casserole

- 1 bag hash browns
- 1 onion
- 1 green pepper
- 1 box mushrooms
- 1 tomato
- 1/2 lb. deli turkey (cut in pieces)
- 1 lb. bacon (fried and cut in pieces)
- 2-3 cups cheese (Monterey Jack, Colby, Cheddar)

Place thawed hash browns in the bottom of a 9 x 13 pan. Saute onion, green pepper, and mushrooms. Place the meat and tomato on top of the potatoes. Then onion, green pepper and mushrooms. Top with cheese. Bake at 350 degrees for one hour.

Joanna Gum, Clear Lake, SD

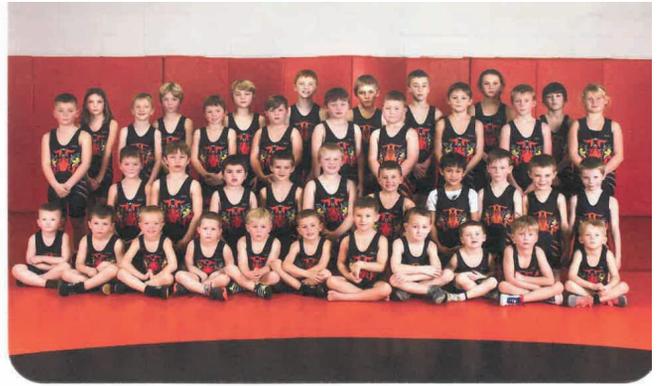
Please send your favorite dairy recipes to your local electric cooperative (address found on Page 3). Each recipe printed will be entered into a drawing for a prize in December 2021. All entries must include your name, mailing address, telephone number and cooperative name.



*I.L.M. Employees
For everything you do!*

*Thank you, each and everyone
of you out there working hard
during the night, to get all
the power back on.
Thanking you for Bright lights,
and Warm Homes.*

Love Lorraine Jung



FEM

*Thank You for your continued support
to the wrestling program. Your donation
of water and napkins is very generous
and helpful for our club.
money profited goes towards wrestling scholarships,
paying coaches, singlets, mats, camps and much more.*

We truly appreciate your support

*The Ipswich Wrestling
Booster Club*

2021



*FEM Electric,
Thank you so much for the honor of being cho
as the Touchstone Energy Scholar of the week,
Thank you also for the monetary gift which w
be helpful for preparing for college. This honor and
your support are much appreciated.*

*Sincerely,
Josh Hoffman*



Groundwork beginning in October 2020.

Progress made on Richmond Substation

East River Electric Power Cooperative is building a new 115/69-kV transmission substation located approximately four miles north of the Aberdeen Energy Ethanol Plant, along County Highway 15N.

The majority of physical construction in the substation is complete. The protection, control and communication work is scheduled to start the first week of April with commissioning activities commencing toward the end of May. All of the transmission line work will be complete in early July and the substation will be ready for service sometime toward the middle of July.

The Richmond substation will be the southern inter-connection point of the major transmission buildout within Brown, Edmunds and McPherson counties.



Construction progress March 2021

Cole Sonne's YouTube Channel Makes Farm Life Look Like a Visit to Disneyland

Billy Gibson

billy.gibson@sdrea.coop

Every day on the farm is a new adventure for Cole Sonne. While many 20-somethings contemplate leaving their family homesteads in search of a more urbane and sophisticated lifestyle, Sonne has no intention of giving up the farming life.

His enthusiasm for agriculture is in his blood and in his soul. But it's also all over the internet.

There is perhaps no more effective web-based advocate for South Dakota agriculture than Sonne, as evidenced by his audience of more than 145,000 YouTube subscribers. Sonne's 250 video posts have received over 26 million views since he created his YouTube channel two years ago.

After earning a degree in agronomy from South Dakota State University, Sonne returned to the family farm near Mount



Cole and his father Brian exchange some friendly sniping on the channel.

Vernon and it wasn't long before he had a notion to let the world see how fun and adventurous farming can be.

He saw that some ag-based channels created by young farmers such as Minnesota Millennial Farmer and Farm Life SD were growing in popularity, so he figured he'd take a shot at posting videos of all the wild and sometimes wacky situations that can emerge during a typical day.

"It's really informational and entertaining at the same time," said Sonne, a fourth



Fourth generation farmer Cole Sonne has amassed more than 145,000 YouTube subscribers.

generation farmer. "I think it's important to teach people who have never done this what farm life is really like.

The genesis of the channel came after he bought a drone and started taking aerial shots of raking hay and feeding cattle, but he didn't know what to do with the footage. He started posting his videos and then thought about capturing some of

the dialogue that takes place between him and his father, Brian, and other family members. The animals, machinery, chores and weather conditions never fail to create intriguing scenarios that keep fans tuned in.

Sonne was surprised when the viewer count started to skyrocket.

"It just took off right away," he said. "I call it ag advocacy. We just show people what we do from day to day and try to make it as fun as possible.

Much of the witty repartee is exchanged between Sonne and his often exasperated father. As Sonne had his camera rolling and capturing a farm task that wasn't going well recently, Brian grumbled, "To me this is embarrassing. To you it's good footage."

The conversation in that episode ran the gamut from Halle Berry to woodpeckers to classic Saturday Night Live skits as the

duo went from gathering hay to scraping manure. Sonne says the near constant laughing, joking and friendly sniping keep things light-hearted as they take care of their business.

Asked which of his videos has received the greatest amount of attention, Sonne is quick with his response.

"A video we did last April got more than one million hits," he said. "There was an approach to a field that was holding back water and we had to dig it out and release the water and put in a culvert. When we pulled the last grab of dirt that was holding a year's worth of water, the water just came gushing through. People seemed to really like seeing that large volume of water. A lot of what's going to get the attention is the thumbnail picture. If you can get the perfect thumbnail, people will click on it."

Apparently, the video titles also help to attract eyeballs. Some recent titles include: "Cole got splattered with poo," "Watch out - angry calf hits Brian and Jeff," "We saved him - moments from the end."

As for the time and dedication it takes to keep content fresh for thousands of eager viewers, Sonne said he considers it just another item on a lengthy list of tasks that every farmer has.

"It usually takes a couple of hours to get the videos done," he said. "I'll farm all day, come home and start editing and work til late at night. That's what most farmers do anyway. You have to balance things out."



The AgritourismSD program blends the state's top two economic drivers: agriculture and tourism. Photos provided by SD Tourism.

AGRITOURISM

New Program Blends South Dakota's Top Two Economic Drivers

Billy Gibson

billy.gibson@sdrea.coop

Amy Kruse already had a baby before she actually became a mother. That baby was proudly named Circle View Guest Ranch. That's the bed and breakfast establishment in Interior run by Amy and her husband, Philip.

"Before I had three kids, this was my baby," Kruse said on a recent Thursday afternoon while taking a break from getting the nearly 3,000-acre ranch spiffed up for weekend visitors and the busy travel season. "I got out of college and we got married and we came here 18 years ago. It's a lot of work to operate the ranch and make things run to give our guests a memorable experience, but it's worth it to see them enjoy themselves and have a great time in South Dakota."

While Kruse has long been engaged in her own form of what's called agritourism, she's an enthusiastic supporter of a new initiative designed to promote the accelerated growth of more agritourism enterprises across the state.

In 2017, the South Dakota Agritourism Work Group was formed to create an intensive program aimed at providing education, training and various support services to agribusiness owners interested in expanding their operations to include recreational, entertainment, educational, hospitality, cultural, on-farm sales and other activities for the general public. As tourism and agriculture are the two most significant business sectors in the state, organizers felt it only made sense to combine the two.

Spearheaded by South Dakota State University Extension and the state Office of Tourism, other local, state and federal agencies and entities joined in the effort. A partial list of participating organizations includes the Bed and Breakfast Innkeepers of South

Dakota, Experience Sioux Falls, Southeast Technical Institute, the South Dakota Specialty Producers Association, the South Dakota Value Added Ag Development Center and others.

According to Program Coordinator Stacy Hadrick of SDSU, AgritourismSD kicks off this month and consists of eight two-day, in-person workshops taking place over the course of 24 months where instructors provide the basic skills and tools that have been demonstrated to help increase the chances of success. The curriculum includes field visits to venues that already have a sustained track record of running thriving agritourism businesses.

The Circle View Guest Ranch, a member of West River Electric Association, is one of those venues. During the program's second year, the facility is slated to serve as a case study on how to launch and grow an agritourism operation and participants can have direct personal conversations with operators who will offer solid advice on every aspect of their business. Kruse said she looks forward to sharing some of the approaches and strategies that she and Philip have used to keep visitors coming to the ranch. The program, which kicks off this month, is designed to educate and train those associated with the ag industry on how to start, manage and operate an agritourism enterprise.

"This is such an excellent time to do something like this because things are opening up and people are ready to travel and escape the cities, get off the interstate and explore the back roads and see the tremendous beauty of our state," Kruse said. "They're craving an authentic experience after being shut down for so long."

Kruse added that she is eager to coach and encourage the group, but she also plans to shoot straight. That means giving the partici-



pants a healthy dose of unvarnished reality so they'll have a clear understanding of the commitment required.

"I think it's a wonderful program for our state. We're going to show them how we make things work with the overnight facilities and with the animals and their interactions with our guests," she said. "The business pretty much runs our lives for seven to eight months out of the year, and if you do it right it's all-consuming. But it's also extremely rewarding to see families have a terrific time bonding with each other, bonding with the natural landscape and the animals. It can be extremely rewarding for our guests and for our family as we're always making new friends. But you have to be committed."

Amy and her husband operate 12 guest rooms and three cabins with an average of 30 guests at any given time from April through September. She explained the cattle ranch and the bed-and-breakfast are separate businesses all set on 2,800 acres of land that includes prairie terrain in addition to Badlands formations, a river valley, rock beds, rolling hills, grazing pastures and tree groves.

For more effective statewide coordination, the AgritourismSD program organizers have developed a hub system, selecting the communities of Wall, Faulkton and Timber Lake to serve as regional organization centers. Participating business owners work through these hubs and meet six times over two years to share ideas and

discuss strategies for attracting visitors to their communities.

Robin Bickel is the hub coach for the Timber Lake area. A member of Moreau-Grand Electric Cooperative, Bickel runs a Red Angus cattle ranch in Firesteel that has been in the family for four generations. She said her interest in getting involved was to pursue potential economic growth not only for her ranch but for the entire area as well. She also sees agritourism as an incentive to both keep and attract young families to rural communities.

"If working ranches can find ways to expand and diversify their businesses, it may present opportunities for those young people who have left to come back to the family farm and be able to generate enough revenue to sustain multiple families on one place," she said.

Aside from the potential for added revenue, Bickel said she is eager to share with the rest of the world the wonders of rural life and the rural lifestyle she experiences each day.

"I think there's an increased interest people have about where their food and fiber come from, and we need to find a way to make that connection between the producer and consumer," she said. "We have such a rich history and so many natural resources to share. It's insane how many people can't see the sky full of stars at night where they live and can't see the prairie grass waving in the wind and



rolling across a hillside. There are people interested in things we take for granted. There are people in Nebraska that have a prairie chicken dance tour where people actually pay to see the chickens. I think there are many opportunities for our state if we commit ourselves and do it right."

For more information on the program, contact Jacey Ellsworth, Industry Outreach and Development Representative, at 605-773-3301 or Jacey.Ellsworth@TravelSouthDakota.com.

Congratulations 2021

Scholarship Winners!

Katelyn Geditz submitted the winning application to become the recipient of the \$1,000 Basin/FEM Electric Scholarship. She is a senior at Ipswich High School and is the daughter of David and Teri Geditz.

Katelyn has been very active in sports, music, NHS and FBLA throughout high school. Some of her activities include being the marching band drum major, football stats, volleyball, basketball and track. After school, you can find her tutoring, doing church activities and 4H.

Her future plans are attending the University of South Dakota to obtain a double major in Psychology and Criminal Justice. After graduating with a Bachelor of Science degree in these areas, Katelyn would like to move to a large city and pursue a career in Criminal Psychology.



Ally Cunningham, senior at Faulkton High School, submitted a winning application to become a \$500 FEM Scholarship award winner. She is the daughter of Brice and Nicole Cunningham.

Ally is a very busy student-athlete. She is active in volleyball, basketball, golf, student government, FCCLA and NHS. You can find her coaching elementary volleyball and junior golf, being a bible camp leader or working at concessions during her non-school hours.

Her future plans are to attend Northern State University to obtain an Elementary/Special Education teaching degree. After graduating, Ally would like to teach students and coach high school volleyball in a rural South Dakota school.



Peyton Melius is a senior at Faulkton High School. She also submitted a winning application and was awarded a \$500 FEM Scholarship. She is the daughter of Ryan and Nikki Melius.

Peyton has been involved in many sports and activities throughout her high school career. She participated in volleyball, basketball, track and field, FCCLA, student government, NHS and choir. Her outside school activities include being a 4-H member and teaching Sunday school classes.

She will be attending Northern State University this fall to pursue a degree in Elementary/Special Education. Peyton will also be a member of the Wolves Volleyball team. After graduation, obtaining a rural special education or early elementary teaching position would be her dream.



Safety around those

Big, Green, Boxes!



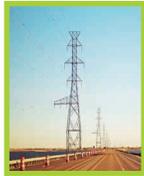
... they're actually called
Transformers

No, they are not first base in your baseball game. You cannot eat your lunch atop them and absolutely do not go near them if the door is open! These “big, green boxes” are called transformers and they can be very dangerous if not treated properly.

Transformers are the pieces of equipment that are crucial in converting electricity to a voltage that is safe for use in homes and businesses. Regardless of the shape or size, they all work in the same manner. Electricity leaves the power plant at high voltages and travels across transmission lines to substations. At the substation, the voltage is brought down to levels that range from 7200 to 24900 volts. A couple more levels down through more transformers, and power arrives at your home at 240 volts.

In the winter, transformer boxes can be hidden by snow making it an easy target to be hit by a vehicle, tractor or snowplow. Linemen have been placing red and white ‘candy-cane’ markers next to the transformers to help members locate them in tall snow or weeds. Keeping the area around the box free from piled up snow is very helpful in making sure it doesn’t get hit. During other times of the year, caution needs to take place when mowing near the boxes. Hitting a transformer can be costly and even deadly, so please do what it takes to take care of the area around the box to avoid hitting and potentially damaging a transformer.

Transformers



High voltage transmission lines carry electricity from the power plant to the substation.



Substation transformers lower the voltage and then electricity travels along distribution lines in the utilities territory.



Transformers lower the voltage one more time before electricity is used in the home or business.

Rural POWER

Leadership Program Aimed at Boosting Co-op Leadership

Intentional listening is a skill Billie Sutton has honed over the course of his adult life. And as he leaned into recent conversations with electric cooperative leaders across the state, the former legislator from Burke started noticing a trend.

He picked up on a common refrain: cooperatives are having a hard time finding qualified candidates to run for positions on their governing boards.

As not-for-profit organizations, electric cooperatives don't have pockets deep enough to dangle large compensation packages in front of potential board candidates. This reality tends to narrow the field of interested parties.

After hearing this a few too many times, Sutton decided to take action and do something about it. He began working to develop a leadership program through his non-profit Billie Sutton Leadership Institute to encourage and inspire rural co-op members to consider campaigning for a board position.

The new year-long leadership development program is called "Rural POWER: Powering Opportunities While Energizing Rural." It will be held alongside the third leadership class offered by the Institute. The first program in 2019 attracted more than 100 applicants to fill 12 spots. Last year's class drew roughly 70 applicants but was hampered by the impact of the pandemic.

Sutton surmised that the high interest level in the Institute's first two programs stems from a desire to return to a more community-focused style of leadership and steer away from a brand of politics that appears to be growing more openly hostile.

His supposition comes from the comments he heard not only during his six years serving in the state senate but also from voters during his gubernatorial campaign three years ago in which he received more than 167,000 votes while losing the race to Gov. Kristi Noem.



Billie Sutton and his wife, Kelsea (foreground) are shown with the Institute's inaugural class of rural leaders.

"I think people were excited about a new style of leadership I brought to the table that's focused on service, finding common ground, overcoming adversity and getting things done on behalf of the people. I think people are tired of politics as usual," he said.

For the Institute's inaugural class, applicants ranged in age from 18 to 60 and represented a plethora of professional backgrounds: health care, teaching, education administration, local elected officials, ranchers and more. Sutton said he hopes the new program will also attract interest from a diverse set of applicants.

Rural POWER will kick off this summer and is sponsored by the South Dakota Farmers Union. Participants will engage in educational leadership training opportunities emphasizing community building and

Participants will engage in educational leadership training opportunities emphasizing community building and serving neighbors, while learning from cooperative leaders.

serving neighbors, while learning from cooperative leaders who have demonstrated their commitment to rural development. They will gain the knowledge and enthusiasm to re-imagine and re-energize rural South Dakota, Sutton said.



Rural POWER aims to provide leadership training that will help re-invent and re-energize rural South Dakota.

The program has an advocate in Melissa Maher, general manager at Moreau-Grand Electric based in Timber Lake. Maher notes that while most of the state's electric co-ops qualify as "rural," that doesn't mean they are merely small-time mom-and-pop operations. For instance, Moreau-Grand Electric is a member-owned business with more than \$47 million in assets.

Maher said it's important that electric co-ops be run by managers and board members dedicated to the task at hand. Board directors are democratically elected by the members in their respective districts and charged with the responsibility of developing the policies that guide the future of the co-op. They also have certain legal, fiduciary and industry-related issues they must deal with during the course of carrying out their duties.

"These are positions of responsibility and leadership, and you need qualified people because they're making big decisions," Maher said, adding that serving on a co-op board requires considerable time and attention. "If someone is interested in being nominated, you have to be up front and honest about that fact. That's one of the first things people ask, and the honest answer is that it's a commitment."

Those who succeed in meeting their board responsibilities recognize and appreciate the fact they're contributing to the advancement of their entire service area by providing an essential commodity. Maher said it also takes a certain type of personality and temperament to be a successful board member.

"They have to learn protocol and there can be situations like dealing with personnel issues where they have to be discreet. They have to be the type of person who can agree to disagree and walk away and not let it get to them," Maher said. "They have to study up on the issues. We send out information a week ahead of time so that the board members can brush up on things and we can have a productive conversation. They need to care enough to be engaged and prepared."

Suzie Jones Pranger serves as executive director of the Institute. Today, Jones Pranger is an attorney living in rural Hartford, but she grew up on her family's farm in Burke and remembers her grandfather's involvement in her local co-op, Rosebud Electric.

"Even as a kid, I knew our power came from the local co-op, and I knew my family had a legacy of service to the co-op and our neighbors through my Grandpa's longtime position on the board," she said. "But what I never considered growing up is the need for subsequent generations to become active and continue to power our rural communities and our South Dakota way of life. Rural POWER will help build a pipeline of rural leaders ready to step up and take on leadership positions."

Kevin Mikkelsen, general manager of Rosebud Electric, is also supportive of the program and believes there is a lot of potential in the leadership program, especially when it comes to drawing some younger participants.

"I'm hoping the program sheds some light



on how cooperatives function and how they work on behalf of all the member-owners," he said. "All around the state, we really need to see some younger folks get involved and provide a new perspective and help us discover new and more effective ways to carry out our mission as co-ops, whether it's electric co-ops or ag-based co-ops."

Visit suttonleadership.org/rural-power to learn more about the program or to apply.



FEM Annual Meeting June 29, 2021

Murphy



FEM Director District Up For Election

FEM Electric Director in District #5 will be up for election at the 2021 Annual Meeting on June 29, 2021. The incumbent is not seeking re-election. District #5 is currently represented by Larry Bowar.

To be an eligible nominee, one must be an active member (with an FEM Electric energy account in their name) who resides in the Director's District in which the nominee seeks to run.

Any member of FEM Electric requiring additional information may refer to the Bylaws of the association or may contact the FEM Electric office at 605-426-6891 or 1-800-587-5880.

Voting for the Director District will take place at the Annual Meeting on June 29, 2021 at the Ipswich Public School.

You can't AVOID what you CAN'T SEE

Starting a job — big or small — without first getting utilities marked could result in serious injury, service disruptions for you and your neighbors, and a hefty fine.

Call 8-1-1 before you dig.

Learn more at: **Safe Electricity.org**

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

April 22-May 2

Beauty & the Beast, Sioux Empire Community Theatre, Sioux Falls, SD
605-367-6000

April 23-24

Junkin' Market Days, W.H. Lyon Fairgrounds Expo Building, Sioux Falls, SD
605-941-4958

April 24

Party for the Planet, Great Plains Zoo, Sioux Falls, SD
605-367-7003

April 30-May 2, May 6-8

Radium Girls, Pierre Players Community Theatre, Pierre, SD
605-224-7826

May 8

Davis Flea Market & Artisan Fair, Main Street, Davis, SD
605-940-0069

May 8

Wells Fargo Cinco de Mayo Fiesta, Falls Park, Sioux Falls, SD
605-271-0468

May 8 NEW DATE

Winefest Renaissance, Boys & Girls Club of Aberdeen Area, Aberdeen, SD
605-225-8714

May 9

Mother's Day Tours, Historic Adams House & Days of '76 Museum, Deadwood, SD
605-578-37241

May 13

Vermilion-Area Farmers Market - Plant Sale, High & Cherry Streets, Vermilion, SD
605-659-3399



State Parks Open House & Free Fishing Weekend, May 21-23, 2021

May 15

Red Dirt Music Festival featuring Casey Donahew, Ian Munsick and Randy Burghardt Mountain Grand, Deadwood, SD
605-559-0386

May 21-23

Annual Sound of Silence Tesla Rally, Downtown, Custer, SD
605-673-2244

May 21-23

State Parks Open House & Free Fishing Weekend, All State Parks & Recreation Areas, SD
605-773-3391

May 22

Frühlingsfest & Spring Market, Main Street, Rapid City, SD
605-716-7979

May 22

La Framboise Island Bike Race, Steamboat Park, Pierre, SD
605-224-7054

May 31

PPQG 25th Annual Quilt Show, Harding County REC Center, Buffalo, SD
605-641-5591

June 3-6

Wheel Jam, South Dakota State Fairgrounds, Huron, SD
605-353-7340

June 4-5

State BBQ Championships, South Dakota State Fairgrounds, Huron, SD
605-353-7354

June 4-6

Black Hills Blues Stomp & Swamp Romp, Rush No More RV Resort & Campground, Sturgis, SD
605-347-2916

June 4-6

Lake Andes Fish Days, City-wide, Lake Andes, SD
605-487-7694

June 5-6

18th Annual Wessington Springs Foothills Rodeo, Wessington Springs Rodeo Grounds, Wessington Springs, SD
605-770-5720

June 5-6

Siouxland Renaissance Festival, W.H. Lyon Fairgrounds, Sioux Falls, SD
866-489-9241

June 18-20

Ipswich Trail Days: Rodeo/ Neal McCoy Concert, Trail Days Complex, Ipswich, SD
605-426-6155

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.