

COOPERATIVE CONNECTIONS



Barb Gross, Adele Enright and Jean Tehle have all worked hard to facilitate free and fair elections for registered voters in Dewey County

Poll tenders rock the vote

Election workers are dedicated to the task
Pages 8-9

Freshman Impact teaches sound decision making

Pages 12-13

BOARD REPORT



Your FEM Electric Board of Directors
L to R: Eric Odenbach, Paula Petersen, Tom Thorpe, Gary Bachman, Kelly Melius

A regular meeting of the Board of Directors of FEM Electric was held in Ipswich, South Dakota at 8:30 a.m. on September 20, 2022, pursuant to due call and notice. It being determined that a quorum was present, President Gary Bachman called the meeting to order. Secretary Eric Odenbach kept minutes of the meeting. The following directors were declared present by roll call: Gary Bachman, Paula Petersen, Kelly Melius, Eric Odenbach, Tom Thorpe, General Manager/CEO Scott Moore, Line Superintendent Rob Vetch, Director of Benefits and Finance Rhonda Tuscherer.

Ryan Holien and Jesse Brown were present until their board reports were given.

Gary Bachman welcomed guest employee Josh Weigel.

Changes to the agenda: none

Changes/Additions to Minutes from August 23, 2022, meeting: none

Next Meeting Date: After a review of calendars, directors agreed that the next regular meeting of the board would be on Tuesday, October 18, 2022, at 8:30 a.m. to be held at FEM Electric Board Room in Ipswich, South Dakota.

Motion by Kelly Melius, seconded by Tom Thorpe and carried to approve

administrative business.

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

Motion by Kelly Melius, seconded by Eric Odenbach and carried to enter executive session at 9:27 a.m.

Topics: review employee wages.

Motion by Paula Petersen, seconded by Tom Thorpe and carried to leave executive session at 10:13 a.m.

Motion by Eric Odenbach, seconded by Paula Petersen and carried to approve employee and staff wages as presented, along with Manager/CEO and Director compensation.

The board acknowledged reviewing the August 2022 Cyber Security Report.

Resolutions, Contracts, and

Nominations: Motion by Kelly Melius, seconded by Eric Odenbach and carried to approve the review of Policy #106 Directors' Fees and Expense.

Membership Business: Board acknowledged membership business.

New Memberships, Member Cancellations and Contracts:

Disconnects: Timothy & Yasmin Rieger, Tuscon AZ, Active Farm & Pasture Pump; Ellen Palmer, Aberdeen, SD, Active Farm; Richard Morgan, Aberdeen, SD, Active Farm; Colleen Volzke, Tea, SD, Active Farm; Dave Undlin, Spearfish, SD, Active Farm; Roger & Elvera Bierman, Mansfield, SD, Active Farm; Suzanne Barondeau, West Pointe, NE, Active Farm; James & Jolinda Finley, Chelsea, SD, Pasture Pump

Reconnects: Robert Rieger, Aberdeen, SD, Active Farm & Pasture Pump; Beth Schwab, Aberdeen, SD, Active Farm; Angela Harris, Roscoe, SD, Active Farm; Stephanie Smith, Eureka, SD, Active Farm; Steven Grabow, Aberdeen, SD, Active Farm; Tara & Brad Bierman, Northville, SD, Active Farm; Robert & Barbara Knadle, Ipswich, SD, Active Farm; Adam & Amanda Kindt, Mansfield, SD, New House

Contracts: James Finley, Chelsea, SD, New House; Rick Rohrbach, Roscoe, SD, Grain Bins

Retired Locations: Web Water Development, Aberdeen, SD, Commercial

Motion by Kelly Melius, seconded by Paula Petersen to approve two single phase service contracts.

Capital Credits:

Estates - September 2022 - two = \$910.23

73 & Older - September 2022 - one = \$13,611.57

The board agreed to leave 2023 Nominating Committee Reimbursement at \$50.00 plus IRS mileage rate.

The board had discussion on the Basin Electric Capital Credit Retirement of \$46,758.24 and decided to hold the funds until later in 2022 to make final decision on the timing of retirement to members.

Financial Business: The board acknowledged reviewing the following
Continued on pg 6

COOPERATIVE CONNECTIONS

FEM ELECTRIC ASSOCIATION

(USPS 189-720)

Board of Directors

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

CEO/General Manager

Scott Moore
info@femelectric.coop

Management Staff

Rob Vetch
Line Superintendent
Rhonda Tuscherer
Director of Finance and
Benefits

Editor's e-mail:

oban@femelectric.coop

FEM ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE CONNECTIONS is the monthly publication for the members of FEM Electric Association, Inc., 800 5th Ave., Ipswich, SD 57451.

FEM Electric Cooperative Connections' purpose is to provide reliable, helpful information to members on electric cooperative matters and better living.

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Design assistance by SDREA

**FEM Electric is an equal
opportunity provider and
employer.**



Scott Moore
General Manager/CEO

As I begin this article October 3, 2022, our agriculture producers have gotten off to a good start on fall harvest, and with some cooperation from mother nature, it looks to be a good fall for harvesting. Our cattle producers will be bringing their livestock home and start to wean or sell their calves. It is always exciting to see spring come with planting of new crops and the sight of newborn calves, but fall is equally nice, seeing rewards of managing your crops and cattle. Make sure we have a productive and safe fall.

As you plan for next years crop and selection of breeding stock, please remember to plan your next construction or electrical project early. Our suppliers continue to update us on supply chain shortages or disruptions, and it sounds like it could be 2024 or later before we get to some normal supply deliveries. In the 70's and 80's, feed, grocery, hardware stores and lumberyards had buildings or lots full of inventory. Then suppliers started to hold inventory for a one- or two-day delivery. We are once again following a circle of life as current conditions have forced us to build our local inventory to make sure we have products to sell or serve our members with. This isn't a new concept, but one that some haven't seen or have forgotten about. I do believe as companies build local inventory it is keeping pressure on

the manufacturers. We are hearing of companies moving some manufacturing back to America, but building buildings, along with building a work force, takes time. FEM Electric's focus is to make sure we have material and supplies to keep our members power on and our rural economy strong. Good planning is the key to completing a successful project.

At our September board meeting, we held a small meal for some family members and employees honoring years of service to FEM Electric. Rhonda Tuscherer has 30 years at FEM and is currently our Director of Finance and Benefits; Justin Larson has 25 years at FEM Electric and holds the position of Line Foreman; Gary Bachman has completed 25 years of service as a Board of Director and currently holds Board Chairman position. Longevity and stability with employees and board members are key to a strong and successful cooperative.

As we work to complete projects in 2022, we have also been working on our 2023 annual budget and next four-year work plan. Our annual budgets and work plans help make FEM Electric successful. These two items not only give our employees and board of directors a good road map and direction, they also contribute to

Continued on pg 6

Statement Mailing Dates

Oct 27, 2022 for Oct's energy

Nov 29, 2022 for Nov's energy

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

A heaping helping of holiday home safety

Nearly every household uses extra electricity during the holidays for cooking, decorating and heating.

Take extra care to use electricity safely and to ask family members and house-guests to do the same. Here are some helpful tips:

- Stay in the kitchen when broiling or doing any stovetop cooking.
- Keep children well away from cooking appliances while in use.
- Keep towels, potholders and curtains away from hot surfaces.
- One of the riskiest holiday behaviors is overloading your electrical outlets. You will overload your wall outlets if you string strand after strand of holiday lights together and plug them into an extension cord that you plug into an outlet. Plugging multiple strands of cords into a power strip does not add any juice to the electrical circuit that powers the outlet you plug the strip into.
- Check decorative lights for damaged cords, plugs and sockets. Replace anything that's frayed, cracked or broken. Buy cords that are certified by UL; look for the UL symbol on the package.
- Don't run extension cords under rugs, carpets or baseboards, or anywhere they can be a tripping hazard.
- Only use decorations and cords outdoors that are properly rated for outdoor use.
- When you put up outdoor decorations, do not string lights in trees near power lines. Fasten outdoor lights carefully and securely with clips, never nails or tacks.
- Keep electric lights away from decorative metal trees.
- Keep all light strings and other decorations away from pets so they don't get tangled in them or chew the wires.
- Keep all decorations - and everything else - at least 3 feet away from heat sources such as fireplaces and space heaters.
- Always turn off your decorations when you leave home and when you're sleeping.
- Make sure smoke detectors are present and working properly.
- Use space heaters properly and safely. Keep them out of high-traffic areas and at least 3 feet from anything that can burn.
- Do not leave a space heater running unattended. Turn off space heaters and unplug them when you leave the room or go to sleep.
- Never leave an open flame, including your fireplace or a candle, unattended.

LINEMEN PARTICIPATE IN RUBBER GLOVING SCHOOL



Roughly 50 electric cooperative linemen from across the state recently participated in a Rubber Gloving School at the Mitchell Technical College training facility. The program included simulating maintenance and repair work on energized power lines, awareness of proper safety procedures, grounding and insulation of vehicles, operation of aerial lift devices and more.

To see a video of this event and learn more about how electric cooperatives serve our members, visit Cooperative Connections Plus by scanning the QR code at right.



Don't play on transformer boxes

Traci Tschetter

Traci, 11, warns readers to stay away from transformer boxes, which contain high-voltage underground electrical equipment inside. Traci is the child of Ryan and Elaine Tschetter and they are members of Whetstone Valley 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.

CROCKPOT CREATIONS

SLOW COOKER CHILI

Ingredients:

- 2 lbs. lean ground beef
- 1 pkg. McCormick Slow Cookers Chili Seasoning
- 2 cans (14.4 ozs. each) diced tomatoes, undrained
- 2 cans (16 ozs. each) kidney beans, drained and rinsed
- 1 can (15.5 ozs.) tomato sauce

METHOD

Brown ground beef or turkey in large skillet on medium-high heat. Drain fat. Place cooked beef, Slow Cookers Chili Seasoning Mix, tomatoes, beans and tomato sauce in slow cooker. Stir until well mixed. Cover. Cook 8 hours on low or 4 hours on high. Stir before serving. For best results, do not remove cover during cooking.

McCormick.com

SLOW COOKER TURKEY BREAST

Ingredients:

- 2 tsps. McCormick Garlic Powder
- 2 tsps. McCormick Paprika
- 2 tsps. McCormick Rubbed Sage
- 2 tsps. Sicilian Sea Salt
- 1 tsp. McCormick Pure Ground Black Pepper
- 1 tsp. McCormick Whole Thyme Leaves
- 1 turkey breast, (about 6 lbs.) fresh or frozen, thawed
- 3 tsps. butter, melted

METHOD

Mix seasonings in small bowl; set aside. Rinse turkey and pat dry. Brush turkey with melted butter. Sprinkle seasoning mixture over entire surface and under skin of turkey. Place turkey breast in slow cooker. Cover. Cook 1 hour on high. Reduce heat to low; cook 7 hours longer or until turkey is cooked through (internal temperature reaches 165 degrees). Transfer to platter or carving board and slice.

McCormick.com

SLOW COOKER MASHED POTATOES

Ingredients:

- 5 lbs. Yukon gold potatoes, peeled and cut into cubes
- 1 c. chicken stock
- 2 McCormick Bay Leaves
- 1/2 c. (1 stick) butter, cut into chunks
- 1 tsp. salt
- 3/4 tsp. McCormick Pure Ground Black Pepper
- 1/2 tsp. McCormick Garlic Powder
- 1/2 -1 c. milk
- 1 tsp. McCormick Parsley Flakes

METHOD

Spray inside of 6-quart slow cooker with no-stick cooking spray. Add potatoes, stock and bay leaves. Cover. Cook 4 hours on high or until potatoes are tender, stirring after each hour. Remove bay leaves. Stir in butter, salt, pepper and garlic powder. Cover. Let stand 5 minutes. Beat potatoes with electric mixer on medium-high speed or mash with potato masher, gradually adding milk, until smooth. Stir in parsley. Top with additional butter, if desired. Serve with McCormick Brown Gravy or Perfect Brown Gravy.

McCormick.com

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 2022. All entries must include your name, mailing address, phone number and cooperative name.

BOARD REPORT & NOTICE

Continued from pg 2 - Board Report

financial information: August 2022 financials and check register for the month of August 2022 contained information on checks #32765 through #32840 and all automatic payments/withdrawals for August 2022 totaling \$366,357.01.

Motion by Kelly Melius, seconded by Eric Odenbach and carried to approve director and attorney fees.

Legal Update: none

Meeting Report:

East River board update was given by Gary Bachman. East River annual meeting update was given by Gary Bachman, Eric Odenbach, and Tom Thorpe.

The board acknowledged the receipt of the August 24, 2022, Safety Meeting Minutes.

Adjourn: President Gary Bachman declared the meeting adjourned.

Continued from pg 3 - Manager's Report

successfully providing safe, reliable, and affordable power to you, our members.

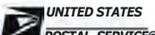
If you are thinking of adding any electrical load, please contact

Looking for a qualified Electrician? Give us a call!

FEM Electric offers electrical wiring services in Faulk, Edmunds and McPherson counties. Some services include wiring houses, pasture pumps, shops, and grain bins.

Services are provided for cooperative members as well as non-members, so spread the word!

Call us at 605-426-6891 to discuss your electrical needs or upcoming projects. If you have a large project, please plan ahead and call us early. Like much of the world, we are not immune to supply chain delays, and we would like to be able to service your project in a timely manner.

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CONGRATULATIONS!



Congratulations to Bruce & Jackie Opp, who were the winners of a packaged raffle prize of an electric chainsaw and an electric leaf blower! The raffle was held at the South Dakota State Fair in the Touchstone Energy booth.

POLE TOP RESCUE TRAINING

Pole Top Rescue training was held on August 24th at FEM Electric. Each linemen went through the steps to rescue a fellow linemen in case of an accident.

SDREA safety coordinators come on site every year to inspect gear and go over several safety topics, including Pole Top Rescue. Continual safety training helps ensure that crews are always up to date on the latest safety standards, and integrates safety as a normal part of their daily routine.



POLL TENDERS



Jamalia Franzen, auditor deputy in Dewey County, encourages all eligible citizens to register to vote. *Photos by Billy Gibson*

Poll workers urge voters to stay active in the election process

Billy Gibson

billy.gibson@sdrea.coop

About 10 years ago, Michele Moore was newly retired and looking for something interesting to occupy her time. Out of the blue, she received a call from the Clay County elections auditor.

“She wanted to know if I was interested in working the elections and I told her I’d do it. It’s been very rewarding and it feels like I’m doing something important and worthwhile,” Moore said.

When she’s not facilitating the election process, Moore takes care of the bookkeeping for the family’s welding and manufacturing business operated by her husband, David.

While election work isn’t a full-time gig, poll tenders put in long hours on voting day. They typically report to the local precinct at 6 a.m. before the polls open an hour later. The shift goes straight through to 7 p.m. when the polls close, although any voters still

standing in line at that time are allowed to cast their ballots. Workers have to stay on duty the entire time and often pack their own lunch and dinner.

After the last voter is done, all the sealed ballots and accompanying paperwork are brought to the auditor’s office for verification and certification to ensure the election is “free and fair.”

Moore said all the workers at her precinct located at the National Guard Armory in Vermillion are diligent, dependable, thorough and conscientious. She said they take their jobs very seriously and are careful not to be “political” in any way, a guideline contained in the orientation and training process that workers go through before each election regardless of one’s years of service.

The training material requires that workers be professional, punctual, respectful to voters, team-oriented and “leave partisan leanings at the door.” Anyone concerned about the validity of the election process can appear at

Number of South Dakota citizens

62,429

registered to vote but considered inactive

the precinct as a “poll watcher” or “poll observer,” however, those individuals must adhere to a separate set of guidelines as set forth by the Secretary of State’s Office.

“We’re not here to change anyone’s mind or influence how anyone votes,” Moore said. “We’re just here to do anything we can to help them vote as quickly and smoothly as possible and make sure the process goes well. We try to make it easy for them.”

That doesn’t mean everything always goes according to plan. As the political passions and divisions have grown more intense over recent years, Moore said she’s encountered some fairly tense situations. But she said she generally



Poll workers are on the job from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. local time. If the polls close while you are in line, you will still be permitted to vote.

Here is a breakdown of party identification as of Sept. 1, 2022:

- Republican - 291,956
- Democrat - 150,760
- No party/Ind. - 142,538
- Libertarian - 2,733
- Other - 1,376

Total - 589,363

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Election poll workers see themselves as doing something helpful to support and facilitate the democratic process.

feels safe while doing her work inside the armory.

Some voters can get upset when they try to make requests that violate the voting rules, such as attempting to change their party affiliation on voting day or not providing the proper identification. She said tensions can run high during contentious presidential or mid-term elections.

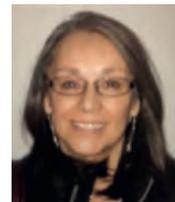


“Sometimes people get angry and you just try to calm them down. They don’t know how things work and what’s required because they’re not paying attention,” she said. “Social media and TV stirs up their passion and they don’t always know how to control that.”

She recalled one particular fellow who insisted on voting without presenting the proper identification. When he was

told he would have to use a provisional ballot, he became agitated and stormed out of the precinct. Moore was “a little nervous” about the man returning and what he might do, but she took comfort in the fact that the National Guard soldiers were right there in the building.

Cris Sichmeller, a resident of Webster, signed on to join her local precinct in Roslyn six years ago and enjoys the



Michele Moore

social aspects of the assignment. A self-described “farm wife,” Sichmeller said she doesn’t often have an opportunity to sit down and visit with friends, but being at

the polling place means visiting with folks and catching up on current events.

“People used to spend time just visiting with one another, going to houses and having coffee and playing cards, but that doesn’t happen a lot these days,” she said. “There’s a lot of camaraderie that comes with being around people you know in the community that you have something in common with.”

She said at her precinct things normally proceed “without a lot of drama,” but she remembers that the Covid pandemic did cause a few wrinkles. Several workers contracted the virus, along with the precinct deputy.

The workers had to wear face shields, and Plexiglas was set up in the voting area and at the registration tables.

“I remember a man who had just retired from the military and he came in and saw the face shields and just laughed,” Sichmeller recalled. “He said that wasn’t going to keep us from getting the virus or passing it on to others. He said we needed a hazmat suit for that. I guess he was right.”

Barb Gross recently retired after tending the polls in Dewey County since the 1980s. She describes herself as a stickler for adhering to the rules and buttoning everything down.

“We always made sure everything tallied up because we knew we were going to be audited and we invited that because it was a challenge to see if we could pull it off without a hitch and without anything slipping through the cracks,” she said.

Secretary of State Steve Barnett emphasized the fact that poll workers serve a very valuable role in society.

“They’re on the front lines of the election process. You couldn’t run an election without them,” he said.

Barnett stressed importance of voters meeting their obligation to stay actively involved and make sure they are familiar with the rules and regulations. To find out more about voting rights and responsibilities, visit www.sdsos.gov.

CELEBRATING YEARS OF SERVICE

On September 20th, FEM Electric hosted a luncheon in conjunction with the board meeting celebrating the years of service for 2 FEM employees and a FEM board member.

Rhonda Tuscherer, Director of Finance and Benefits celebrated 30 years of employment at FEM this year.

Justin Larson, Line Foreman, celebrated 25 years of employment at FEM in 2022.

Gary Bachman, FEM Board President, celebrated 25 years of service as a board member as well. During his time as a FEM board member, Gary has served as Vice President in addition to board president.

Each person has been a dedicated, hardworking asset to FEM over the years. The rest of the FEM staff and board members would like to congratulate them on their commitment to the FEM membership.



Rhonda Tuscherer
Director of Finance
& Benefits
30 Years of Service



Justin Larson
Line Foreman
25 Years of Service



Gary Bachman
District 3
President
25 Years of Service

Energy Efficiency Tip of the Month

Is your home heating system ready for the winter chill? One of the easiest ways to keep your system running efficiently is to regularly replace filters. If your central air system has a furnace filter, it should be replaced about every 90 days.

If your home is heated through warm-air registers, baseboard heaters or radiators, remember to clean them regularly to boost efficiency.

Source: energy.gov



happy
Thanksgiving
THE FEM OFFICE WILL BE CLOSED
NOVEMBER 24TH & 25TH.





WE'RE THANKFUL FOR YOU CONTEST



Update your phone number and email with the form below, and you will be entered into a drawing for a \$50 VISA gift card for the holidays!

First & Last Name

Account Number

Phone Number

Primary number you would like us to call with outage or other alerts

Email Address

Return this slip by November 23rd, 2022 to FEM Electric, PO Box 468, Ipswich, SD 57451. Winner will be notified November 28th, 2022.



SOUND DECISIONS

Central Electric lineman Cody Riggs uses a hot stick to simulate de-energizing a power line during a Freshman Impact emergency exercise at Hanson High School in Alexandria. *Photo by Billy Gibson*

Freshman Impact program promotes sound safety practices for students

Billy Gibson

billy.gibson@sdrea.coop

The students at Hanson High School were stunned and aghast at the horrific scene unfolding right before their eyes.

There were two wrecked sedans, a downed utility pole and tangled wires strewn across the road. Emergency responders were swarming everywhere as a fire truck barreled onto the scene with its sirens blaring. And the most unsettling sight of all: four of their fellow students lying in the crumpled cars with massive wounds and barely clinging to life.

Fortunately, it turns out the accident scene was just a drill staged by a group known as Freshman Impact: Caught in the Moment, and coordinated as part of Cornbelt Program Day at the school located in Alexandria.

Nearly 200 students came from surrounding schools for a full slate of

learning opportunities centered around vehicle safety, first aid, emergency response, drug abuse awareness and much more. Participating schools were Hanson High School, Armour, Bridgewater-Emery, Ethan, Marion, McCook Central, Plankinton and Wessington Springs.

Local organizers Yolanda Price and Don Huber worked with Freshman Impact Executive Director Rick McPherson, local school officials and emergency response agencies to plan the event.

The morning session included seven separate stations scattered throughout the school's parking lot and in the gymnasium. The learning stations focused on the following subjects: teen mental health; healthy relationships; jaws of life and ambulance demonstration; seatbelt awareness; drug dog; social media dangers; and a distracted driving course where the



West River Electric is one of several electric cooperatives that support the Freshman Impact program.

students wore goggles simulating drug and alcohol impaired vision and attempted to navigate a short course behind the wheel of an ATV.

Taking part in the program was Central Electric Cooperative, which provided the downed power pole and wires. Once the emergency exercise was set into motion, two co-op linemen promptly arrived on the scene to de-energize the lines and worked with other responders to secure the area and form a safe perimeter.

Central Electric's Manager of Communications Tara Miller helped



A Hanson High School student takes on the role of an accident victim during a recent mock emergency scenario. *Photo by Billy Gibson*

facilitate the partnership while working alongside local organizers.

“This is an incredible opportunity for area students to learn about good decision-making, safety and the real dangers that are out there,” Miller said. “Concern for community is one of our guiding principles as a cooperative. This experience serves to educate first responders and students. It aligns with our values, and we are pleased to support it.”

The day’s program covered just about all the bases. The schedule included a poignant perspective of loss and grief from LeAnn Moe, who lost her teenage daughter to an automobile accident. During the mock accident response, one of the crash victims was carried away in a hearse furnished by a local funeral

home. And after all the activity settled down outside, the students returned to the gymnasium to observe a mock legal trial and sentencing hearing over the car accident they had witnessed.

The day ended with the distribution of educational materials by CORE (Community Organized Resources for Educating), the parent organization of Freshman Impact.

McPherson said he has found that the teaching method employed by Freshman Impact is successful in driving the message home to students, and they also develop a rapport with local

agencies and emergency responders.

“The students see up close and learn through hands-on activities the possible consequences of wrong choices and the lasting effects physically and emotionally on their bodies, their families and friends and their community,” he said, noting that West River Electric based in Wall is also an event sponsor. “It’s all about making safe choices and preventing destructive behaviors, and it’s important our teens learn the life-long skills and values to help them make the best possible decisions.”

Visit www.freshmanimpact.com.

Central Electric Cooperative of Mitchell presented CORE with a \$2,500 Operation Round Up grant to help fund the local program. Pictured left to right are Freshman Impact founder Rick McPherson, CORE Coordinator Yolanda Price, CORE Coordinator Don Huber, Operation Round-Up Trustee LeAnn Moe, Central Electric Director Merl Bechen and Hanson County Chief Deputy Mike Brown. *Photo by Tara Miller*





University of Minnesota graduate students pose in a massive coal bucket during an electric cooperative tour sponsored by Renville-Sibley CPA and the university.

Renville-Sibley leads tour of electric cooperatives for college students

Erin Kelly
NRECA

The smallest electric cooperative in Minnesota is having an outsized impact in educating college students about the co-op business model and how power is generated and delivered for co-ops in the region.

Renville-Sibley Cooperative Power Association, a 1,586-member co-op with 13 full-time employees, worked with the University of Minnesota to organize a week-long tour of distribution co-ops and generation and transmission co-ops in Minnesota, South Dakota and North Dakota for graduate students pursuing master's degrees in science, technology and environmental policy.

"These students are going to lead us into the future from a public policy and an environmental perspective,"

said DeeAnne Norris, Renville-Sibley's CEO. "It's important that they understand there's an obligation to keep energy reliable and affordable while trying to marry that up with renewable energy and sustainability."

The mid-May tour began at Renville-Sibley's office in Danube, Minn., with a discussion about broadband, solar energy and farming. It continued with stops at several facilities run by Basin Electric Power Cooperative, the Bismarck, N.D.-based generation and transmission provider owned by 131 member co-ops that provide electricity for more than 3 million people in nine states.

Other visits included Sioux Valley Energy, a distribution co-op in Colman, South Dakota, where students learned about electric vehicle charging and other kinds of beneficial electrification,

and East River Electric in Madison, South Dakota, a G&T that supplies power to Renville-Sibley and 23 other co-ops in eastern South Dakota and western Minnesota. Students learned about East River's load management, economic development programs and co-op relationships.

The tour wrapped up at Lake Region Electric Cooperative in Pelican Rapids, Minn., where students saw the co-op's creative member-focused programs like wind and solar generation and hydroponic gardening trailers.

"It's important for the students to be able to get out there in the field to see the really big energy infrastructure," says Gabriel Chan, an associate professor at the University of Minnesota and co-director of the Electric Cooperative Innovation Center, a new initiative focused on research partnerships with co-ops.

"You read about wind, hydro or coal plants, but being there is an entirely



The students put on their harnesses and took turns going up in a bucket to simulate working conditions for linemen. The group also stopped by the headquarters of East River Electric in Madison, SD.



different experience.”

Chan had worked with Norris since before the COVID-19 pandemic to organize the tour and used the pandemic delay to create a semester-long graduate seminar called The Energy Transition in Rural America, which brought in guest speakers and included site visits to nearby cooperative facilities.

Sarah Komoroski, a mechanical engi-

“IF YOU DON’T TELL PEOPLE WHAT’S HAPPENING AT YOUR CO-OP, THEY’RE GOING TO COME UP WITH THEIR OWN STORY ABOUT YOU.”

- DEEANNE NORRIS, CEO, RENVILLE-SIBLEY CPA

neer who is halfway through her master’s degree program, said she felt like “a kid in a candy shop” on the tour as she got up-close and personal with coal boiler, gas turbine and other infrastructure.

“I was just smiling the whole time,” says Komoroski, who describes her passions as climate change and the transition to renewable energy. “Everyone

was so nice and so welcoming and so passionate about what they do.

“I think the biggest thing that struck me about co-ops is they’re so unique in terms of their governance structure,” she said. “They’re non-profit, member-owned, and their goals and incentives are different than a traditional for-profit utility. They’re each tackling the challenges of affordability, reliability and sustainability in a slightly different way.”

Komoroski said she believes electric cooperatives also have the advantage of having a special relationship with their members.

“Co-ops are uniquely positioned to build trust with their members during the energy transition,” she said. “That relationship is the exciting part to me.”

Norris and Chan say they hope to continue the week-long tour every other year for students in the two-year master’s program. The professor said he would like to hear more from cooperative consumer-members, and Norris says she would like to start it a day earlier.

“The students are in their 20s and

30s, but regardless of your age, that was a very taxing schedule,” says Norris, who went on the tour herself.

“It was an intense week,” Komoroski agrees. “We had about 15 stops in five days, with 26 hours of driving.”

Norris urges other co-ops across the country to connect with local universities or university extension offices and plan similar experiences that can raise awareness of energy systems in rural areas and how consumer-centric utilities like co-ops can lead the energy transition.

“When I was planning this trip, there was a little skepticism by a few people we wanted to visit,” she said. “But if you don’t tell people what’s happening at your co-op, they’re going to come up with their own story about you, and often it’s not close to reality.

“This experience shows that when we open our doors, we can engage and collaborate with students who are excited about the cooperative business model, who are passionate about the Earth and her resources and are enthusiastic about learning and making a difference.”



NOV. 3-5
Huron Ringneck Festival & Bird Dog Challenge
 Huron, SD

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.

To view the publication's master event calendar, scan the QR code below:



Or visit <https://sdrea.coop/cooperative-connections-event-calendar> to view more upcoming events.

OCT. 28-30

ZooBoo
 Great Plains Zoo
 Sioux Falls, SD
 605-367-7003

OCT. 31
Halloween Parade
 Belle Fourche, SD

NOV. 3-5
Yankton's Harvest Halloween
 Downtown, Yankton, SD

NOV. 3-5
Huron Ringneck Festival & Bird Dog Challenge
 100 4th Street SW, Huron, SD
 605-352-0000

NOV. 4-6
Girlfriends' Weekend
 Hill City, SD

NOV. 5-20
Rustic Designs & More Christmas Show
 9 a.m.-5 p.m. daily
 Ethan, SD
 605-770-2411

NOV. 5
Fairburn Community Center Bazaar
 Fairburn, SD

NOV. 11-13
Christmas at the Barn
 Front Porch 605
 Groton, SD
 605-216-4202

NOV. 12
Black Hills Meat Festival
 Black Hills Harley Davidson
 2820 Harley Dr.
 Rapid City, SD
 605-390-7917

NOV. 12
Holiday Extravaganza
 Sisseton, SD
 605-698-7425

NOV. 13
Lutefisk, Lefse, Meatball Supper
 Chamberlain, SD
 605-234-6698

NOV. 18-20
Deadwood's Big Whiskey Festival
 Deadwood, SD
 605-578-1876

NOV. 19
Fall Craft Show
 Minneluzahan Senior Center
 Rapid City, SD
 605-394-1887

NOV. 19
Lille Norge Fest
 Canyon Lake Activity Center
 Rapid City, SD
 605-342-4226

NOV. 25
Olde Tyme Christmas Kick-off and Parade
 Hill City, SD

NOV. 25
Trap Shoot
 Izaak Walton League
 Sioux Falls, SD
 605-332-9527

NOV. 25
"Light up the Night" Parade and Fireworks
 Belle Fourche, SD

NOV. 25-26
Kris Kringle Kraft Fair
 Hill City, SD

DEC. 2-3
Gregory Mid-Winter Fair
 Gregory Auditorium
 Gregory, SD
 605-830-9778

DEC. 2-3
Christmas in the Hills
 Mueller Center
 Hot Springs, SD
 605-745-4140

DEC. 3
Santa's Thrift Village
 Minneluzahan Senior Center
 Rapid City, SD
 605-394-1887

DEC. 3
60th Annual Wreath and Centerpiece Sale
 Central States Fair Grounds,
 Rapid City, SD
 605-343-0710

DEC. 17
Custer Christmas for Kids
 Custer High School
 Custer, SD
 custerchristmas4kids@gmail.com

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