

COOPERATIVE CONNECTIONS



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Whetstone Valley Electric Prepares for 2025

Comprehensive Budgeting Process Underway



Dave Page
General Manager

As the year winds down, Whetstone Valley Electric Cooperative is busy finalizing the 2025 budget—a critical process that ensures we can meet our operational and capital needs while continuing to deliver safe, reliable, and affordable electricity to our members. Budgeting is a collaborative effort at the Cooperative, involving detailed planning, rigorous research, and alignment with our long-term goals.

Here's a high-level overview of how we're allocating resources to maintain and improve our services in the coming year.

Capital Budget: Building for the Future

Our capital budget primarily supports our Construction Work Plan, a four-year initiative guiding essential upgrades and expansions. We're currently mid-way through this plan, which helps us address current demands and prepare for future growth. In 2025, we'll invest nearly \$2.2 million in power line construction alone, with funds allocated as follows:

- New Construction: \$352,500
- System Replacements and Improvements: \$1,361,550
- Transformers & Meters: \$350,000
- Sectionalizing, Regulators, and Other Equipment: \$133,500

Our team constructs about 26 miles of power lines each year to keep pace with necessary replacements and growth. At this replacement rate, our distribution system's average age will be around 58 years, an important consideration as we work to modernize our infrastructure. Over the past decade, our utility plant has expanded by \$16 million, a testament to our commitment to quality service for our members.

Beyond power lines, our capital

budget includes investments in equipment like bucket trucks, pickups, computers, software, and building improvements at our headquarters. Careful planning and phased replacements of these assets help us avoid large one-time expenses and manage maintenance costs effectively. These capital investments become depreciable assets rather than immediate rate impacts, allowing us to spread costs over time.

Operating Budget: Sustaining Day-to-Day Operations

The operating budget is built by forecasting members' energy usage, projecting new service requirements, and analyzing trends in consumption and weather patterns. Here are a few key areas we're focusing on for 2025:

Power Costs: Wholesale power rates are expected to increase by 9% in 2025. We anticipate our wholesale power purchases to be over \$7 million in 2025 with more than 110,000 MWh in purchased power. The cost of wholesale power is more than 50% of our total operating expense and is the primary driver of our rates.

Depreciation: As we replace aging infrastructure, the cost of these new assets contributes to rising annual depreciation expenses. Poles, transformers, meters, wires, and equipment all come at a higher price with each replacement, increasing our budgeted depreciation each year.

Interest Expense: We finance our infrastructure upgrades through loans from USDA and other cooperative lenders. Spreading the interest expense over the life of these assets helps to minimize immediate impacts on member rates.

Taxes: As a cooperative, we don't pay federal income taxes, but we do incur real estate taxes on our

headquarters and state taxes based on energy sales. In 2023, Whetstone paid a total of \$457,926 in taxes.

Other Operating Costs and Member Benefits

Our operating budget also includes expenses for power line maintenance, member services, consumer accounts, and general administration. These encompass labor, benefits, transportation, and office operations, allowing us to support the daily needs of both our team and our members.

Margins: Returning Value to Members

As a member-owned cooperative, any surplus we achieve at year-end is allocated to members based on their energy purchases. In 2024, we returned \$478,248 in cash or bill credits to our members. Maintaining a healthy margin, as required by our mortgage contracts with USDA and other lenders, also helps us manage unexpected expenses and secure our financial stability.

Revenue Requirement for 2025

By calculating the costs across capital and operating budgets, we arrive at our total Revenue Requirement for the upcoming year. This figure helps us set the rates and fees our members pay, ensuring we cover our expenses while delivering the reliable service our community depends on. Over the next few weeks, we'll be finalizing these requirements as we continue our commitment to transparency, responsibility, and high-quality service.

Thank you for your ongoing support as we work to build a sustainable future for Whetstone Valley Electric Cooperative and our member community.

Wishing you a safe and joyful holiday season.



Dave Page, General Manager of Whetstone Valley Electric Cooperative, presents Mya Heinje, a senior at Wilmot High School, with a check for \$250. Mya was the Touchstone Energy Scholar of the Week for the week of Sept. 29, 2024 through Oct. 5, 2024.



COOPERATIVE CONNECTIONS

WHETSTONE VALLEY ELECTRIC

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ENJOY A SAFE HOLIDAY SEASON

From late November to mid-January, when families gather, parties are scheduled and travel spikes, safety should be top of mind. Following is tried-and-true advice to ensure your family remains safe and injury-free throughout the season.

Traveling for the Holidays? Be Prepared

If you're traveling this year, be sure your vehicle is in good running condition, get plenty of rest and be prepared for any emergency. Traveling by car during the holidays has the highest fatality rate of any major form of transportation based on fatalities per passenger mile. Hundreds of people die every year in crashes on New Year's Day, Thanksgiving Day and Christmas Day, according to Injury Facts. Alcohol impairment is involved in about a third of these fatalities.

Stay safe on the roads over the holidays – and every day:

- Prepare your car for winter and keep an emergency kit with you.
- Get a good night's sleep before departing and avoid drowsy driving.
- Leave early, planning ahead for heavy traffic.
- Make sure every person in the vehicle is properly buckled up no matter how long or short the distance traveled.
- Put that cell phone away; many distractions occur while driving, but cell phones are the main culprit.
- Practice defensive driving.
- Designate a sober driver to ensure guests make it home safely after a holiday party; alcohol or over-the-counter, prescription and illegal drugs can cause impairment.

Decorate Safely

Decorating is one of the best ways to get in a holiday mood, but emergency departments see thousands of injuries involving holiday decorating every season.

When decorating follow these tips from the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission:

- Keep potentially poisonous plants – mistletoe, holly berries, Jerusalem cherry and amaryllis – away from children.
- If using an artificial tree, check that it is labeled “fire resistant.”
- If using a live tree, cut off about two inches of the trunk to

expose fresh wood for better water absorption, remember to water it, and remove it from your home when it is dry.

- Place your tree at least three feet away from fireplaces, radiators and other heat sources, making certain not to block doorways.
- Avoid placing breakable ornaments or ones with small, detachable parts on lower tree branches where small children can reach them.
- Only use indoor lights indoors and outdoor lights outdoors, and choose the right ladder for the task when hanging lights.
- Replace light sets that have broken or cracked sockets, frayed or bare wires or loose connections.
- Follow the package directions on the number of light sets that can be plugged into one socket.
- Never nail, tack or stress wiring when hanging lights, and keep plugs off the ground away from puddles and snow.
- Turn off all lights and decorations when you go to bed or leave the house.

Source: National Safety Council



**“Don’t Spill Water on Electronics...
It Could Start a FIRE!”**

Bethany Langworthy, Age 9

Bethany Langworthy warns readers to be careful with water around electronics. Thank you for your picture, Bethany! Bethany's parents are Kristina and Edward Langworthy, members of West River 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.

Family FAVORITES

CREAM CHEESE AND CUCUMBER SPREAD DIP

Ingredients:

1 large cucumber, grated
1 tsp. onion, grated
8 oz. pkg. cream cheese
3/4-1 cup mayonnaise
Salt and pepper to taste

Method

Grate cucumber and onion on several thicknesses of paper towels, squeeze out all the water. Place in a bowl. Blend other ingredients, adding enough mayonnaise to make it a spreading consistency. Serve with crackers or chips.

Mary Ann Klarenbeek
Harrisburg, S.D.

GRANDMA GRACE'S FROZEN FRUIT SALAD

Ingredients:

8 oz. Cool Whip
1 tbsp. lemon juice
1 cup sour cream
3/4 cup sugar
Dash of salt

*Mix all thoroughly until
sugar is dissolved.*

9 oz. can pineapple, crushed
and drained
Small jar maraschino cherries
(halve or chopped if desired)
2 sliced bananas (halve or
quarter slices if desired)
1/4 cup chopped walnuts

Method

Mix thoroughly. Pour into 8x8 or 9x9 container. Cover and freeze. Thaw 10-15 minutes to allow cutting into serving portions.

My mother, Grace Alley, first made this salad for holiday meals. It has become a family favorite, and we always have it for one of our holidays.

Mary Harris
Glad Valley, S.D.

LEMON ROSEMARY GLAZED HAM

Ingredients:

1 bone-in spiral-cut ham,
about 10 lbs.
1 1/4 cups honey, divided
2 tsp. lemon extract
1 1/4 tps. whole rosemary
leaves, crushed, divided

Method

Preheat oven to 325°F. Place the ham on its side in roasting pan. Mix 1 cup of the honey, 1 1/2 tps. of the extract and 1 tsp. of the rosemary in small bowl until well blended. Brush 1/2 of the honey mixture over ham, gently separating the slices so mixture can reach middle of ham. Cover loosely with foil.

Bake 1 hour, basting occasionally with pan drippings. Remove foil. Brush with remaining honey mixture. Bake 45 minutes longer.

Meanwhile, mix remaining 1/4 cup honey, 1/2 tsp. extract and 1/4 tsp. rosemary in small bowl. Serve with ham along with the pan drippings.

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 2024. All entries must include your name, mailing address, phone number and cooperative name.

Simple Ways to Save in the Kitchen



Miranda Boutelle
Efficiency Services
Group

Q: How can I save in the kitchen during the most expensive time of the year?

A: The holiday season brings opportunities to enjoy meals with friends and family, leading to spending more time in the kitchen. Whether hosting a few or a crowd, consider making new energy efficiency traditions this year with these tips to manage your energy use.

Let's start with cooking your meal. Your electric oven is typically the highest-wattage appliance in the kitchen. Yet, people usually don't turn their ovens on for long periods of time. Assuming an average oven wattage of 3,000 and an average cost of \$0.16 per kilowatt-hour, according to the United States Energy Information Administration, it costs \$0.48 an hour. Let's say you use your oven for four hours to make a special meal. That's less than \$2 of electricity. While that may not seem like a big deal now, operating your oven for four hours every day is \$700 a year.

Using smaller appliances instead of your oven can help you save. A slow cooker uses between 100 and 450 watts, which is significantly less than an electric oven at 2,000 to 5,000 watts. That means you can use a slow cooker for a longer period and still use less energy.

Opt for your microwave or toaster oven to reheat or cook smaller items. The microwave uses significantly less energy than the oven. A toaster oven uses about half the energy of a conventional oven, according to Energy Star®.

You also want to avoid turning on your oven and leaving the door open to heat your home. This can break your oven and be a safety hazard, especially with gas ovens that can cause carbon monoxide buildup.

When cooking on the stovetop, match the pot or pan size to the burner. Lids help your pots retain heat, which cooks food faster and wastes less heat. Keep your stovetop clean to ensure the appliance heats evenly.

If you're looking to upgrade your stovetop, consider switching to an induction cooktop. It uses an electromagnetic field below the surface to heat pots and pans directly. This provides more precise heat, faster cook times and higher efficiency. It can also

improve the air quality in your home when compared to a gas cooktop.

In my experience, people like to gather in the kitchen during parties. To avoid overheating your guests in a room that has a hot oven, turn your thermostat down a few degrees before guests arrive.

Next, let's look for refrigerator savings. The gaskets on your refrigerator doors should make a tight seal to keep in cold air. Make sure you clean and maintain them or replace them if necessary. Don't let frost build up in the freezer, which can decrease efficiency and make your freezer work harder to maintain a balanced temperature.

Wait until food cools before putting leftovers in the fridge. Putting hot food in the refrigerator results in more energy used to cool it down. Aim for about 30 minutes of cool time. Perishable food should be refrigerated within two hours after it is cooked, according to the United States Department of Agriculture.

Setting your refrigerator colder than needed wastes energy. The U.S. Department of Energy recommends 37 degrees for the refrigerator and 0 degrees for the freezer. Use an appliance thermometer to monitor the temperature.

When it comes to cleanup, run full loads of dishes in the dishwasher – being careful not to block any moving parts. Use eco mode if your dishwasher has that setting. If you are in the market for new appliances, select Energy Star® models.

Whatever you choose to cook or how you cook it, keep in mind these simple tips to make your kitchen more efficient and save energy this holiday season.





Don and Maxine Knapp
Photo by Jacob Boyko

Don Knapp Remembers When Electricity Came to Hermosa

Jacob Boyko

jacob.boyko@sdrea.coop

In 1947, 17-year-old Don Knapp was working as a ranch hand outside the small western South Dakota town of Hermosa.

It was still somewhat of a primitive time in South Dakota's history; While at night the cities glowed on the horizon, rural folk worked in shadowy barns and shops lit by the dim flicker of a kerosene lantern.

"We milked a lot of the time early in the morning with a lantern, and you didn't think of it as hard or odd because that's the only thing you had those days," Don recalled.

Today, the 95 year old Don and his wife, Maxine, 92, admit they sometimes take for granted the modern amenities electricity brought to rural life – from refrigeration, to lights, to easier labor on their ranch.

Even so, nearly 80 years after Black Hills Electric Cooperative ran lines to Maxine's parents' ranch where her high school friend Don worked, the couple says they still think about the life-changing impact of electricity from time to time.

"Today, we have two refrigerators and

two deep-freezes," Don said, pausing at that realization. "You sometimes don't think about it, but we didn't have that before. Nowadays we butcher beef and it's all frozen – we don't can food anymore like we used to."

Before electricity, Don explained, refrigeration on the ranch was anything but simple.

To cool the milk and keep it fresh, a gasoline-fueled pump would draw cold groundwater from the well to flow around the large milk jugs before being picked up for delivery. Household amenities like butter and cream were sometimes lowered into the well to keep them from spoiling. If you wanted to keep food in the house, a block of ice harvested in the winter was carried in from the sawdust-filled ice house and placed into a boxy cooler, dripping slowly into a puddle.

Maxine also remembers the labor-intensive chores she'd help her mother with as Don worked with her father in the field.

"It was a lot of work!" Maxine said about washing clothes. "The washing machine – it was called a Maytag – was just a round tank with a wringer on it, and you'd run the

clothes through the wringer to get the water out. Then in the winter, the clothes would freeze outside on the line – stiff as a board!"

In September, as Don left the ranch to join the navy, he recalled seeing the co-op linemen near the ranch climbing atop poles and running brand-new power lines – miles out of town.

"I remember seeing them build the lines that summer and I thought, 'My gosh, those guys are climbing clear to the top of some of the poles. How do they do that?'" Don chuckled. "Then they'd come in and wire some of these old homes built 40 or 50 years prior. It had to be an awful challenge, but people knew it had to be done and they stepped up to the plate and got it done."

Maxine remembers being in disbelief when the lightbulb in the kitchen flickered on just a few weeks later.

"You just couldn't believe it," Maxine laughed. "You had this little bulb hanging down, and it was just such a great feeling to think you could see."

The ranch house was zapped into the modern age; It wasn't long before her dad purchased a cooler and milking machine and her mom picked out an electric clothes iron.

"It really relieved a lot of manual labor when the electricity came on," Don said.

It was that deep appreciation that led Don to run for a director seat in 1987. He served 24 years on the co-op board before retiring in 2011.

"Serving on the board made me realize the value of the co-op and the need to have a system like the co-ops serve the rural communities," Don said. "It's just so hard to believe how life was so tough."

Now, close to eight decades later, having in-home electricity is just as natural to the Knapps as it is to their children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren and great-great-grandchildren.

"People who were here when the lights first came on, there are not many of them around anymore," Don said. "All the people around now, lights and electricity are just part of life."

"You don't even stop to think, you just plug it in." Maxine chuckled, as their kitchen refrigerator's ice maker rumbled in the background.



HURRICANE AID

Linemen Help Restore Power After Hurricane Helene

Jacob Boyko

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Linemen from five of South Dakota's rural electric cooperatives traveled to the Southeastern U.S. in October to help restore power along Hurricane Helene's path of destruction.

The 18 linemen left Oct. 2 for Pickens, South Carolina, where Blue Ridge Electric Cooperative faced over 64,000 meter outages and more than 800 broken poles in Helene's aftermath.

Zach Hansen, a lineman from West River Electric Association, didn't think twice before he volunteered to go along.

"It's just the co-op way," he said. "There are people in need down there who lost their houses – lost their lives – and this is something we know we can do to help. It's kind of a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity."

The linemen stayed at a crowded base camp with dozens of other utility workers from all across the country. They slept on cots in a large, open army-sized tent, but with their busy schedules, they didn't spend

much time there anyway. Most days, the linemen woke at 5:30 a.m. for breakfast and worked in the field until supper at 8 p.m.

The work also presented unfamiliar challenges for the linemen; each time the crew needed to repair damaged infrastructure, they'd first have to start the labor-intensive process of clearing through debris and trees toppled by Helene's heavy wind gusts.

"When we have blizzards and ice storms in South Dakota, it's hard work – and you're trying to stay warm," Hansen explained. "But out here, there's a lot more chainsaw work and fixing wire breaks. It's not just straight miles of line lying down like we're used to at home."

By Oct. 9, fewer than 1,000 meters in Blue Ridge Electric territory remained offline, and the South





Dakota crews were dismissed to begin the 1,200-plus mile journey home.

But as the South Dakota convoy – which included bucket trucks, skid steers and ATVs – moved north, another call came in.

Jefferson Energy Cooperative in Wrens, Georgia, also faced catastrophic damage to their distribution lines, with 100% of their service territory without power after the storm. On Oct. 9, as South Dakota's linemen were driving home from South Carolina to reunite with their families, still over 10,000 homes and businesses remained without power.

Just like before, South Dakota's rural electric cooperatives answered the call.

"When our line superintendent called me that morning and asked me how we felt about going to Georgia, I said, 'well, we're right here, so we might as well go in and help,'" Bon Homme Yankton lineman Gunnar Dally said. "If they need help, we're more than willing to come."

The stop in Wrens delayed the linemen's return home by about a week, but the appreciation from the communities helped keep spirits high.

"When we were on breaks, there were people stopping to thank us for helping," Dally said. "A lot of them were very surprised when we said we were from South Dakota."

Hansen recognized another subset

of heroes: the families.

"The unsung heroes of storm jobs are the people we leave behind," he said. "My wife is at home with six kids taking care of the ranch while I'm gone. If we didn't have those people, we couldn't go out and do the things we needed to do. They are the real heroes."

SDREA General Manager Steve Barnett thanked the linemen for volunteering to help with the storm restoration efforts and for embodying

the values of South Dakota's rural electric cooperatives.

"These 18 linemen gave up time at home with their families to help people in need they've never met in a place they've never been," Barnett said. "Their selfless actions reflect what we stand for as a family of cooperatives, as South Dakotans, and as fellow Americans. We thank them for their work, their spirit and their dedication to keeping the lights on – at home, and in South Carolina and Georgia."



Weathering Winter Storms

SafeElectricity.org

When ice and heavy snow bring down limbs and power lines, safety is a consideration indoors and out. Make sure you know how to weather the storm.

When outside, stay away from downed power lines:

- A power line need not be sparking or arcing to be energized. Equipment near power lines can also be energized and dangerous.
- Lines that appear to be “dead” can become energized as crews work to restore power or sometimes from improper use of emergency generators. Assume all low and downed lines are energized and dangerous. If you see a downed or sagging line, contact your utility.
- If you are in an auto accident involving a downed power line, your vehicle is usually the safest place to be (unless it is on fire). If it is safe to do so, stay in your car, call 9-1-1, and wait for electric utility personnel to arrive to deenergize the power. If you step out of the car and the ground is energized, you could become the electrical current’s path to ground and you could be electrocuted. If your car is on fire or you see smoke, make a solid, clean jump from your vehicle and hop away with your feet together as far away as you can. If you run or walk away, you could get electrocuted.
- Motorists should never drive over a downed line, as snagging a line could pull down a pole or other equipment and cause other hazards.
- Be careful approaching intersections where traffic or crossing lights may be out.
- If you plan to use a generator, know how to operate it safely.

Before a winter storm, have supplies on hand and know how to stay warm:

- Always keep a battery-powered radio or TV.



- Keep warm clothes and blankets handy.
- Store flashlights and a supply of fresh batteries.
- Have a stock of water and non-perishable food.
- When power goes out, it often comes back in spikes. This can damage electronics. Keep your electronics safe by unplugging them when the power goes out. Leave one lamp or switch on as a signal for when your power returns.
- To prevent water pipes from freezing, keep faucets turned on slightly, so water drips from the tap. Know how to shut off water valves in case a pipe bursts.
- Never use a charcoal grill to cook or heat with inside the home. Burning charcoal gives off deadly carbon monoxide gas. Charcoal grills should only be used outdoors.
- If you live with a child or elderly person, you may need to take them somewhere with power, so they can stay warm. If you are healthy enough to stay home safely, there are ways to stay warm: stay inside and dress warmly in layered clothing.
- When using an alternate heat source, follow operating instructions, use fire safeguards, and be sure to ventilate properly.

2025 Director Elections

Whetstone Valley Electric Cooperative is planning its 83rd annual membership meeting. The 2025 annual meeting will be held Thursday, March 27, 2025, at 6 p.m. at the Milbank High School Theater.

This year, three members must be selected to serve on the Board of Directors, all for three-year terms.

The districts with open seats are as follow:

- **District 7 – Grant Center, Alban Townships**
- **District 8 – Stockholm, Madison, Vernon Townships**
- **District 9 – Adams, Waverly, Troy, Antelope Valley, Georgia Townships**

Director nominations are by petition only. Petition forms are available at our headquarters at 1101 E. 4th Ave. in Milbank. A candidate must be a bona fide resident of the district and return a petition with at least six signatures from current members of the same district to the Whetstone office not less than 40 days prior to the annual meeting.

Due to publication deadlines, in order to have a candidate profile published in the March issue of Cooperative Connections, petitions should be submitted by Jan. 31, 2025.

The process for becoming a director for Whetstone Valley Electric Cooperative, Inc. (WVEC) is contained in the Cooperative bylaws Article IV. Each candidate for a director position should carefully read the bylaws and understand the procedures. The bylaws can be found on our website, www.whetstone.coop or by contacting our office.

The Whetstone Valley Electric Cooperative board serves on behalf of the membership to provide oversight and strategic governance, while day-to-day

operations are led by the cooperative general manager. The board is responsible for sending representatives to the associations of which the cooperative is a member. Directors are expected to attend education seminars and may be asked to serve on other associated cooperative boards. Directors may be asked to lobby and remain informed on pertinent legislative issues. Reading and studying is necessary to keep informed of current issues and how they may affect the co-op. It is the responsibility of the board to evaluate and develop long-term strategic plans to assure the financial and operational stability of the cooperative. Directors should expect to commit about 30 days per year for cooperative-related activities.

In addition to the rewards of being a director, there are some important responsibilities. A director must:

- Be prepared to abide by and uphold the bylaws of the cooperative
- Be open to new ideas and have a desire to learn
- Be able to understand and engage members as their expectations change
- Be adept at analyzing complex options to make sound decisions

If you are interested in learning more about what it means to be director, please feel free to contact a board member or our General Manager.



Submit to be entered into a drawing for 1 of 2 \$100 Visa gift cards

THE COUNTRY COOKIN'
cookbook

Submit recipes to graphics@eastriver.coop or contact your local co-op for more information.



Merry Christmas
AND
HAPPY NEW YEAR

We will be closed Wednesday
December 25th and Wednesday
January 1st.



STAYING SAFE

First responders put out a fire near Belle Fourche. Photo submitted by Butte Electric Cooperative.

Butte Electric Cooperative Connects With First Responders

Frank Turner
frank.turner@sdrea.coop

October marks First Responders Month, a time to honor the dedication and courage of those who rush toward danger to keep their communities safe. This fall, electric cooperatives across the country expressed their gratitude to these everyday heroes who are always prepared to protect lives and the essential infrastructure that supports local neighborhoods.

Day or night, regardless of the weather, first responders answer the call, whether it's battling a blaze or responding to a medical emergency. When it comes to keeping the community safe, their collaboration with local electric co-ops is key for both local residents and the first responders themselves. Together, they work to ensure that emergencies are managed quickly, effectively and, most importantly, safely.

In September, Butte Electric further strengthened its ties and

communications with local first responders following an eventful summer by hosting a series of safety demonstrations for emergency crews in Meade and Butte Counties and the U.S. Forest Service.

"Earlier this year we faced several incidents that resulted in exposed power lines near first responders," said Matt Sleep, chief executive officer of Butte Electric. "In one case, we had a situation west of Spearfish where strong winds brought down a billboard, exposing lines that sparked and started a fire."

Both Butte Electric and the local fire department responded to the emergency, de-energizing the lines and containing the small grass fire. In a separate incident, a driver suffered a medical emergency and crashed into an electrical pedestal. Although the driver died in the accident, the actions of first responders and the electric cooperative prevented further injuries. The incident, among others, prompted Butte Electric to take proactive steps in preparation for the next possible emergency.

"We wanted to both educate responders and build some rapport, so when they see a power line, they know who to call and that they are comfortable getting in contact with us," said Sleep.

Butte Electric employees organized and led a hands-on safety training using the South Dakota Rural Electric Association's high voltage demonstration trailer, a specialized tool



that highlights the very real dangers of electricity. During the session, linemen demonstrated how electricity can arc, or jump, from one connection to another, always seeking the easiest path to the ground.

The training is one that linemen across the state have facilitated, which includes a memorable demonstration involving a grapefruit to show how contact with electricity impacts organic material. On the outside, the grapefruit appears undamaged after contact with an electrified line but cutting it open reveals it's been cooked from the inside.

The training left an impression with Trevor Papenfuss, an assistant fire management fire officer who has served with the U.S. Forest Service in the Spearfish area for more than 30 years. Papenfuss was just one of roughly 30 U.S. Forest Service members who attended the demonstration.

"We deal with incidents involving electricity at least once a year, if not more," Papenfuss said. "Butte

Electric provided us with a lot of valuable information and a powerful demonstration. Seeing a grapefruit burn from the inside out makes a big impact and impression of just how dangerous live electricity can be. Several of our new wildland firefighters attended and they took away information that will stay with them for a long time."

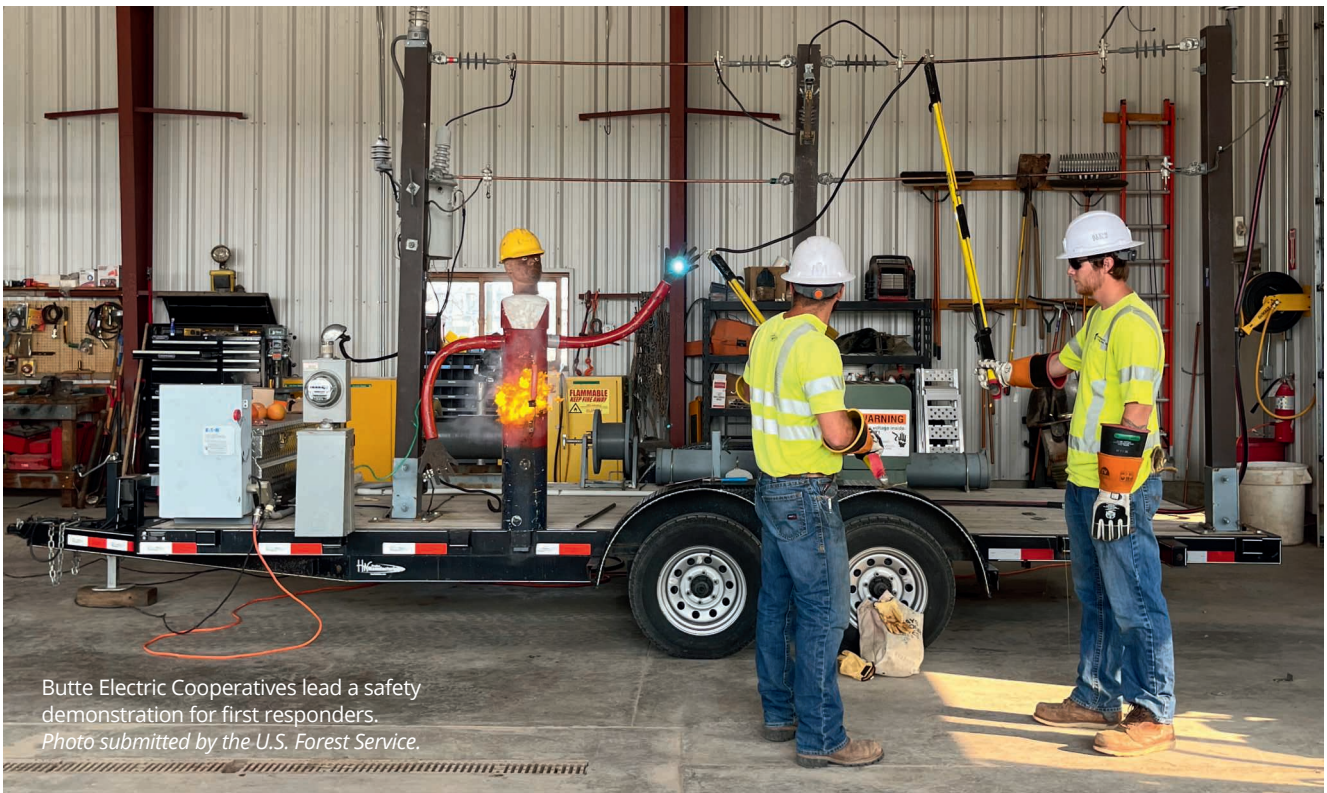
In a separate training tailored to the Sturgis Fire Department, Volunteer Fire Chief of the Sturgis Fire Department Scott Lensegrav said the training was impactful for his fellow volunteers. In addition to noting the value of the demonstration, Lensegrav highlighted the importance of maintaining a strong line of communication between electric service providers like Butte Electric and the fire department, especially during an emergency.

"In a situation involving power lines or electricity, the first thing we do is communicate with dispatch to try and figure out whose power line is involved in the emergency," said Lensegrav.

"The training was just another step in building good communication between our department and utilities. It was also great to have the refresher for our volunteers who have been with us for years and a good learning tool for the new volunteers that are coming into the service."

Looking forward, Sleep plans to continue strengthening the relationship between local first responders and Butte Electric for a safer future in their service area.

"It's all about building relationships and familiarity so that first responders know who to talk to and don't hesitate to call," said Sleep. "We deeply appreciate our first responders and want to help them however we can. These emergency personnel and volunteers are what make our communities great, and we just want to play our part in keeping them and our neighborhoods safe."



Butte Electric Cooperatives lead a safety demonstration for first responders.
Photo submitted by the U.S. Forest Service.

CO-OP OPPORTUNITIES



POWERING FUTURES

Electric Cooperatives Ignite Career Paths for Students

Frank Turner

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The path to a fulfilling career can start early, often before a young student's first job. Many opportunities connect ambitious students to real-world work experiences and electric cooperatives across South Dakota are tapping into this potential.

Through hands-on learning experiences such as internships, job shadowing and youth outreach, these early career experiences can ignite a student's passion for the work that takes place at their local electric cooperative, often leading to lifelong careers.

Every year, several students take the time to discover the many facets of an

electric cooperative, from office managers who oversee daily operations to the linemen who keep the lights on. In the office, students see the careful work that keeps operations running smoothly. Out in the field, they witness the skill and dedication of line crews who brave the elements to maintain reliable service. Each role offers unique insights into not only a potential career path but also how a cooperative functions and serves its community.

Sioux Valley EmPOWER Program

Since 2014, Sioux Valley Energy has hosted its annual EmPOWER Youth Leadership Program for high school juniors, helping them explore Sioux Valley Energy, improve leadership

EmPOWER participants from the 2023-2024 school year.
Photo submitted by Sioux Valley Energy.

skills, and build connections. Often, the EmPOWER program serves as a precursor to the Youth Tour and Youth Excursion trips to Washington, D.C., and Bismarck, N.D., respectively.

According to Sioux Valley Energy's Culture and Training Development Strategist Chinelle Christensen, the EmPOWER program is available to 26 school districts across the electric cooperative's service area.

"We really feel like this outreach is important," Christensen said. "We want people to understand the co-op way, the impact that we have in our communities, and that we are different. It's so critical to be constantly sharing that with the younger generation."

During the program, Sioux Valley also hosts a NetWeaving event where students get a chance to quickly meet and question different career professionals. For three to five minutes, they can further their understanding of a possible

profession by asking questions such as, “What does an average day look for you?” or “What’s the best part of your job?”

“A lot of people don’t realize that we are more than just linemen, and we teach them that,” she said. “A lot of students walk out of our NetWeaving program with an opportunity to job shadow.”

In addition to the EmPOWER, Sioux Valley Energy offers a variety of internships for college-level students. System Engineer Andrew Chmela joined the Sioux Valley team in May after a yearlong internship with the cooperative.

When he was a student at South Dakota State University, Chmela learned from a professor that an internship with Sioux Valley Energy had become available. Chmela applied for the internship, which quickly led to a full-time job with the cooperative.

“During the internship, I was able to job shadow, learn the area and see the company culture for myself,” Chmela said. “Since starting full-time, I love it. Every day is different and it’s challenging in the right aspects. It was a great opportunity to bridge the gap from when you transition from school to internship status to full-time work.”

Lake Region Electric Opportunities

Growing up, Carter Williams would occasionally tag along to work with his dad, Daniel Williams, a line foreman at Lake Region Electric.

“My dad would show me the trucks and talk about all of the stuff they did,” Carter said.

Those days left an impression, and as a sophomore in high school, Carter began thinking about becoming a lineman or electrician for an electric cooperative. Carter expressed his interest in seeing Lake Region Electric first-hand, and the cooperative jumped at the opportunity to facilitate a three-day job shadowing opportunity for him to see industry professionals at work.

The experience inspired Carter to

seek out an internship with Lake Region Electric through a school program. More than three years later, the experience has paid off as Carter is now beginning his first year in the Mitchell Technical College Electrical Construction and Maintenance Program to become a journeyman lineman for a cooperative.

“That internship really helped me decide that I wanted to go into powerline work,” Carter said. “I wanted a job at an electric cooperative because I would have a stable community and I wouldn’t be jumping from jobsite to jobsite. It looks like a really great opportunity.”

Carter’s story is just one of many at Lake Region Electric according to Brett Kwasniewski, manager of member services with Lake Region Electric.

“If there is interest in the field, there are opportunities with Lake Region Electric,” Kwasniewski said. “If a student is interested, I highly encourage them to reach out to us, and that can happen through a guidance counselor, teacher or parent.”

In addition to internships, many cooperatives like Lake Region Electric offer 1,000-hour journeyman or apprentice lineman positions. These

seasonal, entry-level positions are open to those older than 18 and interested in exploring the industry.

“We want to bring in a kid who is interested in the trade to give them real-world experience,” Kwasniewski said. “Really, if you are 18 years of age and you are willing to work, there is a good chance that we will give you a shot at that.”

Cooperative Opportunities

Whether it’s internships, job shadowing or youth programs, these opportunities extend beyond Lake Region Electric and Sioux Valley Energy to cooperatives across South Dakota, each dedicated to building a skilled workforce.

Students are encouraged to reach out to their local electric cooperative to see what opportunities are available, whether they’re seeking hands-on work experience, mentorship or an introduction to the field.

Regardless of Chmela or Carter’s next step, they both know their hometown electric cooperative in South Dakota is cheering them on in their future endeavors.



EmPOWER participants take part in a team building exercise.
Photo submitted by Sioux Valley Energy.



DEC. 7
Santa at the Zoo
 10 a.m.-2 p.m.
 Great Plains Zoo
 Sioux Falls, SD
 605-367-7003

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

NOV. 29
Parade of Lights
 Parade of Lights
 7 p.m.
 Chamberlain, SD

NOV. 30
A Hometown Christmas Market
 2 p.m.-6 p.m.
 Main Street
 Elk Point, SD

NOV. 30
Mid-Winter Fair
 9 a.m.-4 p.m.
 Gregory Memorial Auditorium
 Gregory, SD
 605-830-9778

NOV. 29-DEC. 29
Trees & Trains Exhibit at SD State Railroad Museum
 Hill City, SD
 605-665-3636

DEC. 1
A Christmas Carol
 2 p.m.
 Gayville Music Hall
 Gayville, SD
 605-624-2859

DEC. 5
Christmas on the Prairie
 4 p.m.
 Main Street
 Miller, SD

DEC. 5
Holiday Festival of Lights
 4 p.m.-7:30 p.m.
 Yankton, SD
 605-665-3636

DEC. 6
Kimball's Hometown Holiday
 3:30-7 p.m.
 Legion Hall
 Kimball, SD

DEC. 6
Hometown Holiday Vendor Fair
 10 a.m.-6 p.m.
 Armory
 Howard, SD

DEC. 7
Newell Festival of Trees
 9 a.m. - Doors Open
 11:30 a.m. - Community Lunch
 4 p.m. - Auction
 Newell City Hall
 Newell, SD

DEC. 6-8, 13-15
A Sherlock Carol
 Dec. 6-7, 13-14, 7:30 p.m.
 Dec. 8, 15, 2:30 p.m.
 Corson, SD
 mightycorson.com

DEC. 7
Santa Day
 2 p.m.
 Stockholm Buggy Museum
 Stockholm, SD
 605-467-3940

DEC. 7
KJAM Parade of Lights
 5:30 p.m.
 Madison, SD
 605-256-4514

DEC. 7-31
Garden Glow at McCrory Gardens
 5 p.m.-9 p.m.
 Brookings, SD
 605-688-6707

DEC. 8
Aberdeen Community Concert Association Fund Raiser 2024 Medora Magical Christmas Memories Tour
 3 p.m.
 Aberdeen Civic Theater
 Aberdeen, SD
 605-228-0946
 aberdeencommunityconcerts.com

DEC. 14
Parade of Lights
 Wessington, SD
 605-359-2049

DEC. 15
A Poker Alice Christmas
 2 p.m.
 Gayville Music Hall
 Gayville, SD

DEC. 31
American Legion Post 15 Save the Last Dance 2024
 8 p.m.-12:30 a.m.
 El Riad Shrine
 Sioux Falls, SD
 605-336-3470

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