

COOPERATIVE

CONNECTIONS



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Whetstone Valley Electric Cooperative, Inc. Summary of the 82nd Annual Membership Meeting March 21, 2024

The 82nd Annual Membership Meeting of the Whetstone Valley electric Cooperative, Inc. was held on Thursday, March 21, 2024 at the Wilmot High School gymnasium in Wilmot, SD. Registration opened at 6:00 pm.

At 6:30 pm, the meeting was called to order by President Bill Tostenson.

President Tostenson stated that 184 voting members had registered and were present, creating a quorum.

Tostenson invited everyone to stand for the singing of the National Anthem. The anthem was led by Brooklyn Remund of Wilmot.

Pastor DeVern Schwenn of Milbank provided the invocation for the meeting.

Tostenson introduced the Board of Directors, officers, former directors, former employees, and special guests. Tostenson noted that Darren Strasser has completed his tenure as director and is now stepping down, in accordance with the cooperative governing bylaws stipulating a term limit of 5 consecutive terms.

President Tostenson invited to the podium, Mike Jaspers, Business Development Director for East River Electric Power Cooperative to speak on behalf of East River.

Mr. Jaspers provided a brief summary of East River's role in providing electricity to Whetstone Valley Electric. He also addressed Darren Strasser's role as Whetstone Valley's representative on the Board of Directors of East River Electric. Mr. Jaspers commended Darren for his exceptional abilities, particularly highlighting his strong aptitude for comprehending

financial reports and quickly calculating numbers. Moreover, he praised Darren's objective approach in tackling challenging issues that arose during his tenure as director.

Tostenson called on Secretary Strasser to give notice of the meeting and present the minutes of 2023.

Darren Strasser addressed those in attendance and thanked the members for the opportunity for him to serve as director for 15 years. He also thanked the other directors and East River Electric for their support during his time as director.

Secretary Strasser affirmed that the Notice of Annual Meeting along with the unapproved minutes of the 2023 Annual Meeting had been mailed to the membership.

Tostenson called for a motion to waive the reading of the Notice of Annual Membership Meeting and to approve the minutes of the 81st Annual Meeting as presented. A motion from the floor was seconded and carried.

Tostenson pointed out that the Financial Statement and Treasurer's report was included in the material delivered to those attending. A motion from the floor to approve the Treasurer's Report was seconded and carried.

Tostenson noted that capital credits in the amount of \$8,228,948 have been returned to members and that \$495,805 has been approved for the 2024 general retirement to be credited to members in May. He reminded those in attendance that the returned cash or credit is a share of the member's equity in the coop that's being returned this year.

Tostenson reported the election results. He announced that districts with open seats were districts 3, 4, and 6. Only one candidate for each of the districts was submitted; Wayne Jarman, Tom Berens, and Scott Niedert respectively. With no other members nominated for these districts, the candidates were declared elected by general consent of the membership.

Tostenson called on Whetstone Valley General Manager, Dave Page, for the management report and to introduce the employees.

General Manager Page welcomed the members to the Annual Meeting of the Cooperative. He thanked the employees for their efforts in preparation of the meeting.

Page provided a brief history of the establishment of the three-tier cooperative structure of Whetstone Valley, East River and Basin Electric cooperatives. He underscored the collective strength achieved through working together to achieve objectives that would be unattainable individually.

Page introduced Whetstone's Operation Manager, Jon Christensen to provide the 2023 operations report and discuss



Brooklyn Remund was the winner for the \$100 cash prize.

COOPERATIVE CONNECTIONS

WHETSTONE VALLEY ELECTRIC

USPS 018-979)

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Annual Meeting Summary, Continued

future work plan projects.

In the 2023 operations review, Christensen discussed the cooperatives meter replacement initiative and reported on underground cable installations, replacement of aging infrastructure and other statistics including the installation of 28 miles of underground cable, the installation of 41 new services, upgrades of 34 existing services, replacement of 10 reject poles, and the completion of 1276 underground cable locates.



Wally Hamman was the winner of the \$500 cash prize.

Christensen then reviewed various projects outlined in the 2024 work plan aimed at enhancing system reliability.

These initiatives call for the replacement of aging infrastructure and the increase of capacity to accommodate load growth and facilitate system load balancing.

Christensen concluded his report by discussing vehicle accidents impacting the electric distribution system and the importance of safety for community members and employees.

Page continued his report by discussing electric rates. He noted a surge in costs associated with construction materials, equipment, and labor over the past three years, along with an increase in wholesale power expenses. Page emphasized that wholesale power costs, comprising 55 percent of total operating expenses, constitute the single largest portion. He reported that a rate adjustment of 10 percent was implemented February 1st of 2024. Page noted the increase equates to an average increment of 1.4 percent per year since the last rate adjustment in January of 2017.

Page concluded his report and thanked the Board of Directors and the members for attending.

Page then introduced the employees. Those attending showed their appreciation to the team of employees with a round of applause. He presented milestone service awards to Marie Loutsch for 10 years of service and Chad Pollock for 15 years of service.

Page announced that this year's Whetstone Valley / Basin Electric \$1,000 scholarship was awarded to Aubrey Fraasch.

President Tostenson expressed appreciation for the service of outgoing Director Darren Strasser and former Director Dale Jensen, acknowledging their 15 years of dedication to the cooperative. He honored them by presenting commemorative certificates as a token of recognition for their contributions.

Tostenson called for any unfinished or new business from the floor. With no further business, and a motion and second from the floor, President Tostenson adjourned the meeting.

There was a drawing for \$50 for children 13 years of age or younger in attendance.

Another drawing for \$100 was held for those 14 to 18 years of age in attendance. The winner was Brooklyn Remund.

The winner of the \$500 cash drawing was Wallace Hamman of Milbank.

Your Safety Matters

Prevent home electrical fires

Eight out of 10 fire-related deaths occur at home – the place that embodies comfort and security. That’s why it’s important to take steps to keep everyone safe.

Faulty or deteriorating electrical cords are a top cause of fires at home. Cords that become frayed or cracked can send sparks to flammable surfaces. Check your cords to ensure that they are in good shape, and replace any that are worn.

In addition, make sure you are not overloading circuits. If you’ve been in your home for more than 10 years, have your circuit breaker box inspected by a licensed electrician to tighten loose connections and check for overloaded circuits.



Homes with copper wiring need to be inspected every 20 years, and homes with aluminum wiring should be inspected every five years.

Check all Ground Fault Circuit Interrupter (GFCI) outlets several times each year by pushing the test/reset button to be sure they are working properly.

If breakers are continually tripping or if fuses are blowing frequently, that’s a sign of potential trouble. The cause could be old wiring unable to handle the load demand of today’s modern appliances. If needed, ask a licensed electrician to install additional circuits for safety.

Use surge protectors and power bars to help prevent overloading an electrical outlet, plugging no more than three cords into the strip.

May is National Electrical Safety Month. We urge you to take the time and steps needed to lower the risks of electrical fires. Keep your family safe.



Stay Away from Power Lines

Weston Koistinen, Age 6

Weston Koistinen warns readers to be safe by staying away from power lines. Weston’s parents are Dion and Stephanie Koistinen, members of H-D Electric Cooperative.

Kids, send your drawing with an electrical safety tip to your local electric cooperative (address found on Page 3). If your poster is published, you’ll receive a prize. All entries must include your name, age, mailing address and the names of your parents. Colored drawings are encouraged.

SUMMER CASSEROLES

BREAKFAST CASSEROLE

Ingredients:

- 1 5 oz. package croutons, any flavor
- 2 cup sharp Cheddar cheese, shredded
- 1 lb. sausage, fried and drained
- 9 eggs
- 1 can evaporated milk
- 1 tbsp. mustard

Method

Spray 9x13 pan with vegetable oil. Arrange croutons on bottom. Sprinkle cheese over croutons and put sausage over cheese. Combine eggs, milk and mustard. Beat to blend and pour into pan. Bake covered at 350 degrees for 45 minutes.

Janet Ochsner
Box Elder, S.D.

CHICKEN CASSEROLE

Ingredients:

- 1 package Chicken Stove Top Stuffing mix
- 3 cups cooked cut up chicken
- 1 can cream of mushroom soup
- 2/3 cup milk
- 1 can cream of chicken soup
- 2 eggs, beaten
- 2 cups chicken broth

Method

Grease a 9x13 pan and put 1/2 of the stuffing mix in the pan. Cover with chicken. Combine soups and milk and spoon over chicken. Spread other 1/2 of stuffing over the top. Pour 2 cups of chicken broth over all and spread with beaten eggs. Bake at 350 degrees for 1 hour.

Gail Lee
Brookings, S.D.

TACO CASSEROLE

Ingredients:

- 1 1/2 lbs. ground beef
- 1 package taco seasoning mix
- 1 can (16 oz.) pinto beans, drained and rinsed
- 1 can (15 oz.) tomato sauce
- 1 can (11 oz.) whole kernel corn, drained
- 1 cup shredded Cheddar cheese
- 1 cup coarsely crushed tortilla chips

Method

Preheat oven to 400°F. Brown meat in large skillet on medium-high heat. Drain fat. Stir in seasoning mix, beans, tomato sauce and corn. Bring to boil. Reduce heat to low; simmer 5 minutes. Spoon into 2-quart baking dish. Sprinkle with cheese and tortilla chips. Bake 5 to 10 minutes or until cheese is melted. Serve with assorted toppings, if desired.

McCormick

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.

Why Solar is Not Free



Miranda Boutelle
Efficiency Services
Group

Q: I often hear claims you'll never pay an electric bill again if you go solar. Is that true?

A: The ability to generate your own renewable energy at home is an amazing thing. It's pretty cool that the technology is accessible to home and property owners across the country. The concept of free energy from the sun is appealing, but solar power isn't actually free. There are costs associated with capturing that energy for use in your home.

Installing a residential solar system doesn't equate to \$0 energy bills. Prices for the solar system and installation vary, but adding solar typically comes with a five-figure price tag. Solar systems only provide power when the sun is shining. You still rely on your electric utility for power at night and when the skies are cloudy. Most electric utility rate structures include a set monthly service fee. Unless you plan to disconnect from local electric service completely, you will still have a monthly electric bill.

Solar might be a good investment for you, or it might not. Several factors impact how well the investment pencils out, including where you live, home orientation and shading, electric bill rate structure and cost, available incentives and tax credits, your budget and credit rating.

If you are considering solar on your home, I suggest taking these three steps:

First, make your home as energy efficient as possible. It wouldn't make sense to put a new motor on a boat with holes in it, so why would you put a solar system on an energy-wasting home? Invest in reducing wasted energy before investing in creating new energy. The efficiency updates I recommend before installing solar include insulating and air sealing your home and upgrading to efficient appliances – especially the heating, ventilation and air conditioning system.

If your HVAC system is older than 10 years or malfunctioning, make sure replacing it is in the budget. Remember, energy efficiency upgrades might have a better return on investment than installing solar.

A more efficient home means a smaller – and lower-cost – solar energy system. Solar systems are typically designed to produce the amount of energy a home uses in a year, so if you complete energy efficiency improvements before installing a solar system, make sure the solar contractor accounts for those energy savings.

Second, check with your electric utility about the requirements to install solar and how it will impact your bill. If you decide to install solar panels, working with your utility will be essential, as you will need to take important steps, such as signing an interconnection agreement to ensure the system is properly connected to the electric grid.

Third, get at least three quotes to compare each contractor's recommended system design, equipment and cost. It's a significant investment, so you want to know your options.

There are several ways to pay for a solar system and installation. It can be bought outright with cash or financed by a loan. This allows you to own the system immediately or at the end of the loan term. State and federal tax incentives can help offset the costs.

There is also the option to install a solar system through a lease or power purchase agreement. In this structure, a third party – usually the solar installer – owns the system. They install the system on your property and then sell you the energy produced at a predetermined rate. They are responsible for maintaining the system and own it at the end of the agreement term.

Loans, leases and power purchase agreements can impact the sale of a home. Although a solar system may increase the value of your home, some buyers – or their lenders – are not interested in taking on leases or power purchase agreements.

Investing in solar is one way to support the transition to renewable energy. Before you make the leap, improve your home's energy efficiency and empower yourself by thoroughly weighing the costs and benefits.

Wish Upon a Crawdad

Curtis Condon's children's literature illuminates electric cooperative history

Frank Turner

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What happens when you blend the rich history of electric cooperatives with the picturesque landscapes of rural America and the magic of fiction storytelling? Curtis W. Condon, a former writer and editor for electric cooperative magazines, finds the answer in his vibrant children's novel, "Wish Upon a Crawdad." This coming-of-age story combines these unlikely elements through the eyes of the main character, 12-year-old Ruby Mae Ryan, during the late Great Depression years in rural Oregon.

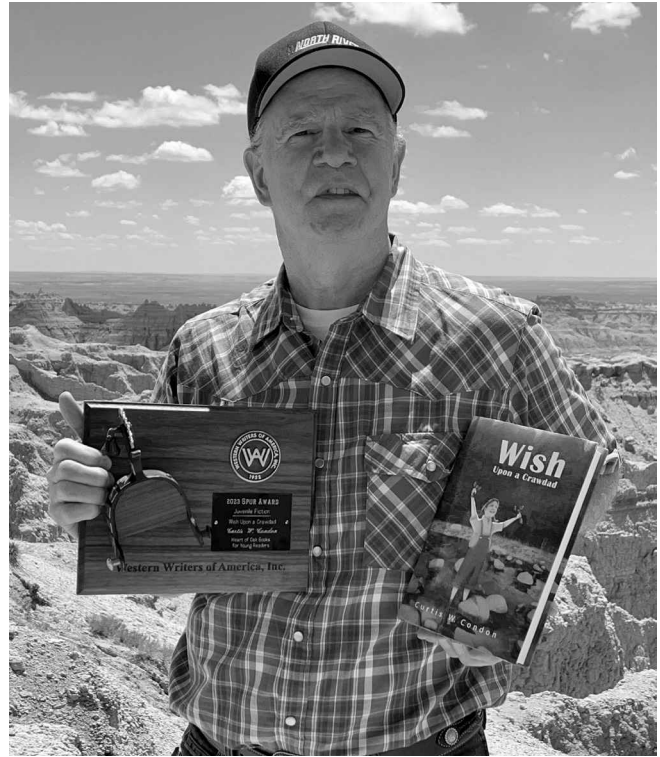
The book, highlighting Ruby's outdoor adventures, explores personal growth while giving testimony to rural electrification in American history. Before writing children's literature, Condon spent more than 27 years in the electric co-op industry as an editor and writer for *Ruralite*, a magazine for electric cooperatives and their members in the Northwest. His time there, conducting interviews and writing, familiarized Condon with the history of rural electrification in the U.S.

"I fell in love with the concept of the electric co-op. Electric co-ops have such a fantastic history and a wonderful story to tell, and I wanted to tell that in this book," said Condon.

This history began with President Franklin D. Roosevelt's determination to lead America out of the Great Depression. Deciding that electrification would play a central role in the process, the president established the Rural Electrification Administration through an executive order in the face of strong dismay from private utility companies. The president's order set the stage for the current network of member-owned electric cooperatives we recognize today, which bring electricity to rural homes that would otherwise be powerless.

However, "Wish Upon a Crawdad" doesn't tell the story of presidents and executive orders. Instead, the book focuses on the very real impact rural electrification had on Ruby, her family, and her community.

"It's about a girl who grows up without electricity until she is 12 years old, and she likes to wish upon crawdads the way that people wish upon stars," Condon explained. "One of the wishes is to get electricity, and that dream comes true because her mom



Curtis W. Condon, author of "Wish Upon a Crawdad," accepts the 2023 Western Writers of America Spur Award, an award presented to Condon in Rapid City, S.D.

and dad get together with their neighbors and create an electric co-op."

Condon's own upbringing in Oregon inspires the book's setting, filled with his memories of crawdad-filled pools, temperate forests and rural dirt roads. While set in the 1940s, many of Ruby's experiences reflect those of Condon's own family.

"My grandmother remembered when electricity was first introduced to her community. She considered electricity to be one of the greatest wonders of the world," said Condon.

Together, Condon's childhood and passion for electric cooperative history set the stage for "Wish Upon a Crawdad," his first children's book, fulfilling a dream he had held onto for years.

"Since I was twelve years old, I knew I wanted to be a children's book writer. It took me 30 years of doing a different kind of writing, but I finally got there," said Condon.

Fulfilling a childhood dream, Condon's book was published in 2022, and his passions and life history began connecting with readers. Although the target audience of the book is children ages 9 to 12, Condon said readers of all ages are enjoying Ruby's story.

Since publication, "Wish Upon a Crawdad" has won the 2023 Western Writers of America Spur Award, an award presented to Condon in Rapid City, S.D. Other awards include the 2023 Will Rogers Medallion Award, the 2023 First Horizon Award, and the 2023 Eric Hoffer Book Award. The book has a presence in libraries across 37 states, including South Dakota.



Patsy Besson helps package fresh cuts of meat at the Wall Meat Processing plant.
Photo Credit: Shannon Marvel

Wall Meats Revives Local Meatcutting in South Dakota Through New Underwood Expansion

Shannon Marvel

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A local meat processing plant is expanding its footprint in Pennington County in a way that will put more locally produced protein on dinner tables and bolster the local meat processing workforce throughout South Dakota.

The man behind this plan is local business owner Ken Charfauros, who owns Wall Meat Processing, which has locations in Wall and Rapid City.

Charfauros is currently raising funds through a capital drive campaign to finance the construction of a 30,000 square foot meat processing facility in New Underwood. The new facility will help train the next generation of meat processors through a partnership with Western Dakota Tech in Rapid City.

“We are at \$2.8 million in our drive. We also have the \$3.3 million USDA Rural Development grant, which is a meat and poultry expansion plan grant. We are about \$200,000 short of our goal,” Charfauros said.

He added that the New Underwood processing plant will also use funding from the Meat and Poultry Intermediary Lending Program (MPILP), which according to the USDA’s website “provides grant funding to intermediary lenders who finance – or plan to finance – the start-up, expansion, or operation of slaughter, or other processing of meat and poultry. The objective of the MPILP is to strengthen the financing capacity for independent meat processors, and to create a more resilient, diverse, and secure U.S. food supply chain.”

Charfauros said he’s still meeting with potential investors and has a financial team focused on creating relationships with local ag producers.

“After we get our capital drive, the plan itself will be about \$21 million,” he added. “And then we start the project. The groundbreaking is going to happen in about a year and the facility will begin operations six months after that.”

Charfauros said he expects to purchase the property to site the new plant this spring.

Returning to a Passion

Wall Meats Processing opened for business 57 years ago, but

Charfauros took ownership over the facility in 2017. His passion for meat cutting began when he was a teenager while working for a local meat plant in Delaware.

“It was my high school job and I loved it. After I graduated high school, I felt that my country needed me, so I joined the Air Force and did 30 years. But I always missed that part of my life,” Charfauros recalled.

“A guy that taught me how to cut was like my second dad, and I always wanted to come back to it. My son had just graduated from South Dakota State University, and I had retired from the Air Force. That’s when we decided to buy a plant.”

His son manages the store in Rapid City while Ken’s three nephews help run the family’s businesses in Wall, which include Wall Meats and the Red Rock restaurant.

Supporting Local Producers

Building the new facility has been a challenging venture that’s been years in the making.

“We started building this plan about four years ago, then COVID hit and got in our way. Then, we were lucky enough to get those grant awards last year, and ever since we have been working diligently to get the format right,” Charfauros said.

“I have drawings. I have an equipment list all put together — everything is ready to go except for this capital drive that we are undergoing.”

Charfauros said he has been meeting with both potential and locked-in investors daily over the last year to produce the required financing.

“We have met with over 600 people with 99 percent of those people being producers, because this is all for them. This plant offers them premium pricing above the market rates,” Charfauros said.

While the cattle market is high now, Charfauros remains realistic that the market can change for the worse.

While he hopes the market remains high enough for producers to survive, his partnership with producers will serve as

added security. That means the partnership must be tightknit.

He knows he cannot do it alone.

Reviving a Dying Art

“Meat cutting is a dying art, and we teach meat processing at our store in Rapid City to bring that art back. We’re trying to fight for that industry as it is,” he said.

Three meat processing students are currently being taught at the Rapid City facility through a partnership with Western Dakota Tech, which recently began offering the two-year program.

Pam Stillman-Rokusek, director of communications and marketing at Western Dakota Tech, said three students are currently enrolled in the Meat Processing program. Of those three, two will graduate in May.

But the college is still working on more outreach.

“Enrollment has been a bit low in the program, so the plan is for a hiatus this fall. They’ll revamp the curriculum. Then, we will certainly do additional outreach. We have done advertising, gone to the schools. We have reached out to 4-H

groups and done some traveling, but we need to turn it up a notch to produce more students in the program. That is our goal,” Stillman-Rokusek said.

Despite the Meat Processing program being put on hiatus, the school will still ensure that the remaining student completes the program while actively working on developing the program and outreach methods.

“There’s such a high need for meat processors and we’re looking at different ways to fill that gap. It’s something we’re committed to doing,” she added.

The goal is to enroll at least five students in the following school years when the program restarts.

The learning center that will be built within the New Underwood facility will also teach producers, in addition to students, the art of meat cutting.

“We are trying to bring that industry back to what it should be—regionally processed protein,” Charfauros said.

“That means we must build the environment to spark that passion. In anything you do, you need to learn how to do it the right way.”



Wall Meat Processing plant, established in 1957. Photo Credit: Shannon Marvel

Construction Update



Jon Christenson
Operations Manager

Construction season is getting close. During this season there is a lot of digging and work being done. Every year Whetstone along with many other utilities install more and more facilities underground. This can cause a safety issue if the safety procedures put in place are not followed. In this article I am going to touch on one of these safety procedures to help keep everyone safe this construction season.

Making sure locates are called in prior to digging. It is very important and is also required by law.

In order to get underground facilities located a contractor or private landowner must notify SD 811. Once that call is made, utilities have the responsibility to identify buried infrastructure in an effort to protect homeowners and contractors from potential injury and damage to underground utilities.

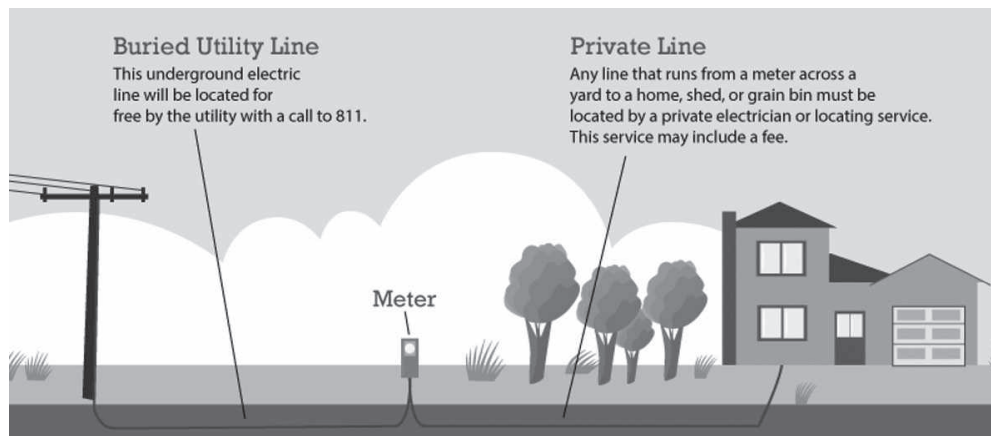
After SD 811 is notified of a locate request, it is all automatic. Whetstone Valley receives the ticket and then our crews are dispatched to do the locate. Homeowners and excavators must call 811, or fill out a utility-locate ticket online at www.southdakota811.com, at least two business days before they begin any digging project of 12 inches or deeper.

All buried electrical lines are identified with red spray paint and red flags. Any digging within 18 inches of that area must be done by hand with a shovel.

Privately-Owned Utility Lines

Whetstone Valley Electric Cooperative only locates electrical lines that the co-op has buried, mapped, and registered with South Dakota 811. Overhead wires are not registered with SD 811 so Whetstone will not receive a ticket to locate if our meters are fed by overhead wires.

This graphic identifies the difference between utility-owned lines and privately-owned lines.



Whetstone Valley Electric does not locate wires past the meter. These are consumer owned wires and the consumer or contractor doing the digging needs to call us directly or call another electrician for this service. There is usually a fee for this service.

Above ground safety.

This time of the year also brings the need to be aware of where the overhead lines and above ground boxes and transformers are. Being vigilant on knowing and watching for these facilities is extremely important. We as humans see lines day in and day out and we almost forget they are there sometimes.

This is just a reminder to slow down, look around, and pay attention during this busy time of the year.

Youth Excursion 2024

Join in the Fun and Sign Up!

Calling all high school freshmen, sophomores, and juniors! Is your parent or guardian an active member-owner of Whetstone Valley Electric Cooperative? If so, you're eligible to apply for an unforgettable summer experience: Youth Excursion 2024!

If chosen, you will receive an all-expenses-paid trip to Bismarck, N.D., for a youth event unlike any other. From **July 22-24**, participants will stay on-campus at Bismarck State College. During this time, they will have the opportunity to sightsee, make friends from all across the

state and gain a new understanding of where their electrical power comes from.

Once participants arrive on the campus, they can look forward to building friendships, taking in the sights of North Dakota's capitol and learning "The Story Behind the Switch." During their stay, students will get to hear from power industry experts and participate in hands-on activities. Students will be given the opportunity to tour the Great Plains Synfuel Plant, Freedom Coal Mine and Antelope Valley Station Power Plant to see where South Dakota's power is generated.

There will also be plenty of time built in for recreation and socializing – students will play games, visit local attractions and much more. Participants can look forward to connecting with students from all across South Dakota, building strong friendships and learning from their peers.

To be eligible for Youth Excursion, students must be in high school, and their parent or guardian must be an active member-owner of Whetstone Valley Electric Cooperative.

The **application deadline is June 3, 2024**. Completed applications can be returned via fax to 605-432-5951, emailed to emilyj@whetstone.coop, or mailed to Whetstone Valley Electric Cooperative, Attn: Emily Jonason, PO Box 512, Milbank, SD 57252.

WE'LL NEVER FORGET.

Memorial Day 2024

Our soldiers' selfless courage make them true heroes.

Whetstone Valley will be closed Monday, May 27th.

Statement of Nondiscrimination

Whetstone Valley Electric Cooperative Inc., is an equal opportunity provider and employer. In accordance with Federal civil rights law and U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) civil rights regulations and policies, the USDA, its Agencies, offices, and employees, and institutions participating in or administering USDA programs are prohibited from discriminating based on race, color, national origin, religion, sex, gender identity (including gender expression), sexual orientation, disability, age, marital status, family/parental status, income derived from a public assistance program, political beliefs, or reprisal or retaliation for prior civil rights activity, in any program or activity conducted or funded by USDA (not all bases apply to all programs). Remedies and complaint filing deadlines vary by program or incident. Persons with disabilities who require alternative means of communication for program information (e.g., Braille, large print, audiotape, American Sign Language, etc.) should contact the responsible Agency or USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TTY) or contact USDA through the Federal Relay Service at (800) 877-8339. Additionally, program information may be made available in languages other than English. To file a program discrimination complaint, complete the USDA Program Discrimination Complaint Form, AD-3027, found online at How to File a Program Discrimination Complaint and at any USDA office or write a letter addressed to USDA and provide in the letter all of the information requested in the form. To request a copy of the complaint form, call (866) 632-9992. Submit your completed form or letter to USDA by: (1) mail: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights, 1400 Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, D.C. 20250-9410; (2) fax: (202) 690-7442; or (3) email: program.intake@usda.gov. USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer, and lender.



CYBERSECURITY ON THE GRID

Frank Turner

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Imagine sitting at your desk on a typical Monday morning. You have logged into your computer with coffee in hand, ready to tackle the day. But as you begin, your computer displays an ominous message: “Your files have been encrypted. Pay a ransom to regain access.” It’s not just your computer; your co-workers have received the same message. Overnight, the entire office has fallen victim

to a ransomware attack that has locked away critical data. Your office computers will remain unusable until a payment is made.

This scenario, among others, has become a primary concern for workplaces everywhere, including electric cooperatives. As a result, local co-ops are taking action in the cybersecurity space to prevent bad actors from disrupting the critical goal of delivering power that is safe, affordable and reliable to their members. Electric co-ops are focused

on enhancing cybersecurity resilience and readiness to defend against potential cyber threats.

Co-ops are routinely monitoring and managing cyber risks, working with federal and local law enforcement agencies and the North American Electric Reliability Corp. to protect critical infrastructure. By working as a network, co-ops are enhancing grid resilience, ensuring reliable electricity for their members.

According to an FBI Internet Crime Report, the U.S. reported more than \$12.5 billion in annual losses in 2023 due to cyberattacks like the one described. A significant number of these attacks target the elderly and vulnerable. When breaking down the losses by age group, individuals aged

20 to 29 accounted for \$360.7 million of the total losses, while those 60 and older incurred losses of \$3.4 billion in 2023 alone.

And it's not just about the money. These attacks also have the potential to undermine the stability of entire systems, including the electrical grid. This year, directors of the FBI, NSA, and CISA testified before Congress about Chinese Communist Party hacking groups that had gained access to the electric grid and other critical infrastructure to "wreak havoc and cause real-world harm to American citizens and communities."

"Many cyberattacks are conducted by criminals trying to steal money or collect a ransom," explains Chief Security and Compliance Officer Daniel Graham of Basin Electric Power Cooperative. "Nation-states

target electric utilities for different reasons. Some nation-states want to steal intellectual property. Others want to be able to disrupt our electric grid."

So how is it done? To execute their schemes, bad actors employ a long list of complex strategies and techniques, such as phishing, data breaches and malware to adversely impact their targets. Business email compromise, one of the most common techniques, occurs when an impostor poses as a legitimate business contact, seeking to steal sensitive information such as credit card numbers, bank account information or login credentials.

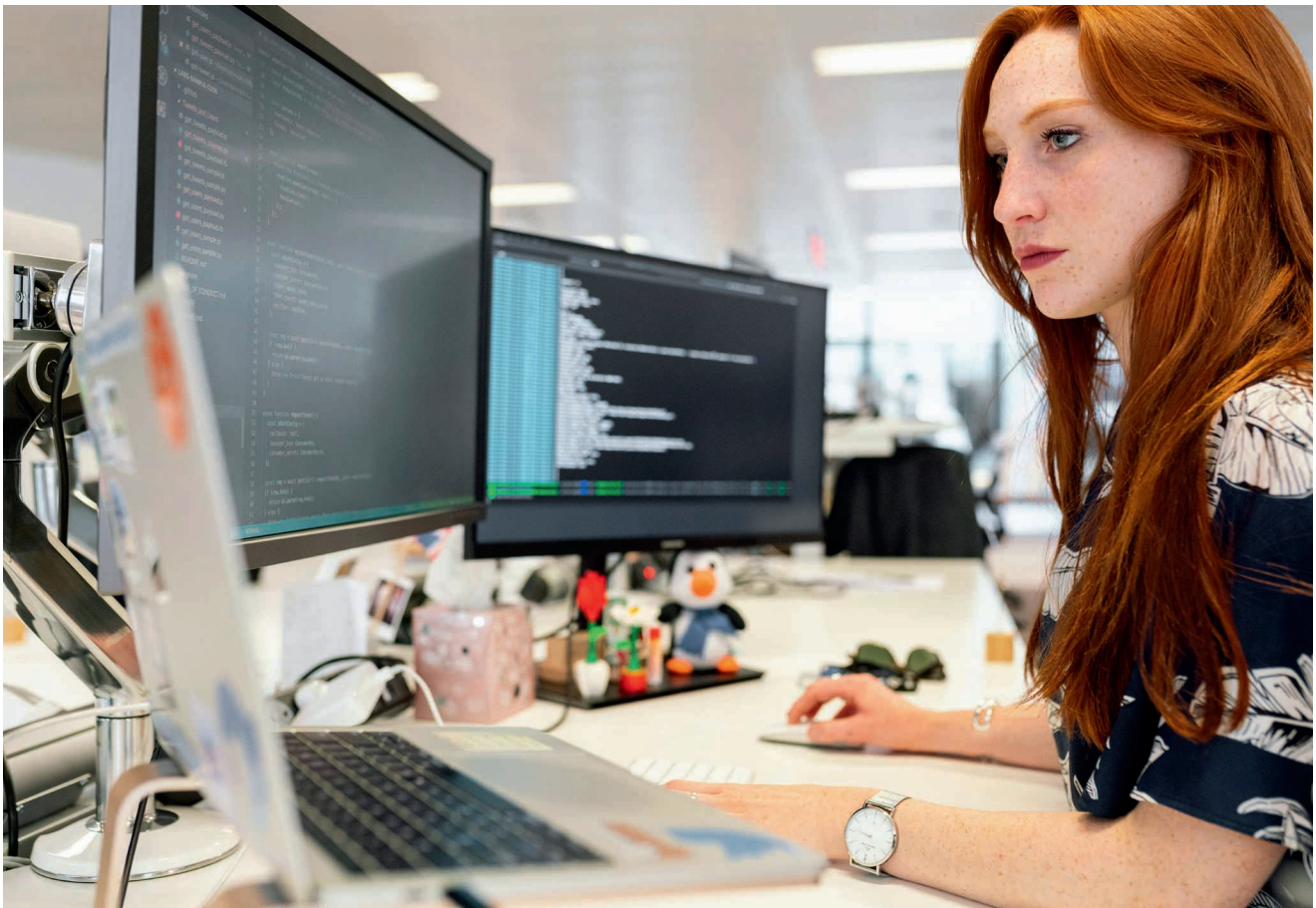
Luckily, co-ops are implementing a variety of tools, policies and training to help mitigate attacks and secure the grid. Programs like NRECA's Co-op Cyber Goals Program help co-ops build fundamental cybersecurity

measures, such as employee training, developing cyber incident response plans, and regular self-assessment. These strategies help co-ops reduce the risk of a successful cyberattack in the ongoing battle against cybercrime.

"Additionally, co-ops can conduct cybersecurity exercises to determine the effectiveness of current defenses and practice responses," Graham says.

Despite these efforts, the threat of a successful cyberattack persists, making vigilance an essential component of effective cybersecurity.

"If you see something suspicious, report it to your cooperative," explains Graham. "Electric co-ops are an essential part of our country's critical infrastructure. We can best protect our electric grid by working with each other."





Living Prepared

South Dakota's survivalist community live in bunkers

Jocelyn Johnson

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It's a semi-underground community of survivalists acting as humanity's last chance.

These survivalists, otherwise known as preppers, have prepared for security and safety within what's touted as the world's largest survival community – in southwest South Dakota.

Vivos xPoint, owned by real-estate mogul Robert Vicino, is located south of the Black Hills, near Edgemont, S.D. It was formally established as the U.S. Army's Black Hills Ordnance Depot – a military base created to store

ammunition and bombs. The base's history began in 1942, just after the United States entered World War II.

Once humming with approximately 6,000 workers and their families, the military base was eventually retired in 1967, leading to its eventual abandonment. The army sold the property to the town of Edgemont, S.D., which in turn, sold it to local cattle ranchers.

"This land was used by landowners to graze cattle, until one of these ranchers sent me an email asking if I would be interested in the bunkers," Vicino said. "It took me about a minute, and I said yes. So, in 2016, I acquired the southern

Vivos xPoint owns 575 bunkers. Photo Credit: Vivos xPoint

portion of the base. That portion is about three-fourths the size of Manhattan. We take people up on a local hill that's about 300-400 feet higher than the rest of the site. From there, you can almost see all the quarters of the property. At a distance, the bunkers are like specs...you can't really tell what you're looking at. That's how big this thing is."

Vicino owns just under 6,000 acres of land where these bunkers sit. Originally, the army built 800 bunkers, but Vivos xPoint owns 575. Today, approximately 200 of these bunkers are being leased for 99 years with an up-front payment of \$55,000. Additionally, the ground lease is \$1,200 per year and utility payments are \$108 per month.

Mark Bowman, a retired tenant at Vivos xPoint, moved from Chicago with his wife to live in one of the bunkers



Photo Credit: Jocelyn Johnson



Each bunker is 2,200 square feet. *Photo Credit: Vivos xPoint*

seven years ago. Keeping busy by doing odd jobs and helping others get settled, Bowman commented that people from various backgrounds lease these bunkers. Some visit on occasion and some live in them full time.

“Eventually, we plan to have a health club, meeting hall and store out here too,” Bowman said. “It’s a work in progress.”

Each bunker is 2,200 square feet. It’s relatable to a narrow Quonset fixed underground, measuring 80 feet long and 26 feet wide with 12-foot ceilings. Vivos xPoint boasts 575 bunkers in total. Tenants can access floor plans and choose to have a Vivos xPoint contractor customize their bunker. Currently, there is a one-year backlog for customization services provided by a company contractor.

“It’s cavernous on the inside,” Vicino said. “We can build out a five-bedroom interior with a living room, two bathrooms, laundry room...everything you will need. When we build it, it’s effectively a submarine. The power we get from the local electric cooperative is to run our well pump that pumps water 4,300 feet underground up to a cistern on a hill. From there, it’s distributed to

the bunkers via gravity.”

Vicino noted that one of the most important features to these bunkers is the location. It’s centrally located within the United States and remote – making it an unlikely target in war. The off-grid area is also located at high altitude in a non-seismic area, relatively safe from natural disasters.

“Sometimes, I get asked why would anyone want one of these,” Vicino

commented. “And I say, ‘well, have you ever watched the news?’ Look what’s going on in this country.”

“All of the bunkers have NBC filtration, which is nuclear, biological and chemical filtration,” Vicino explained. “The air that comes in is scrubbed, so it’s breathable on the inside. We’re even adding CO2 scrubbers, which scrub the air you breath out if you had to shut off the air to the outside. You can do that for a week maybe.”

This isn’t a project that Vicino took lightly or stumbled upon in his business ventures. He emphasized it was years in the making.

“When I was 27 years old, I had a vision or an inspiration in my head. I could hear the words of a woman talking to me in total silence. The only thing I could attribute it to was the Holy Spirit. What she said to me was, ‘Robert, you need to build bunkers deep underground to help thousands of people survive what’s coming our way.’ The message was very loud and quick, and so I tucked it away for 30 years, thinking about it occasionally.... Then, I got the feeling I didn’t have any more time. It’s either now or never.”



Mark Bowman, right, shows an empty bunker to Calvin Romey, left. Bowman has been a tenant in a neighboring bunker for seven years with his wife. *Photo Credit: Jocelyn Johnson*



MAY 11, 2024
Cinco de Mayo Fiesta
 Falls Park
 Sioux Falls, SD

MAY 4
Consignment Auction
 Historic Prairie Village
 Madison, SD

MAY 5
Opening Day
 Historic Prairie Village
 Madison, SD

MAY 18
Booth Day
 10 a.m.
 D.C. Booth Fish Hatchery
 Spearfish, SD

MAY 18-SEPT. 28
Buggy & Ag Museum
 10 a.m.-4 p.m. Saturdays only
 Stockholm, SD

JUNE 1
**Miss Prairie Village/Miss
 Prairie Princess Pageant**
 Historic Prairie Village
 Madison, SD

JUNE 6
**14th Annual Ag Women's
 Day**
 GracePoint Wesleyan Church
 1420 Orchard Dr.
 Brookings, SD

JUNE 6
"Wild Race Car Night"
Wheel Jam
 7 p.m.
 Dakota State Fair Speedway
 Huron, SD

JUNE 8
"Challenge Cup XXII"
Wheel Jam
 7 p.m.
 Dakota State Fair Speedway
 Huron, SD

JUNE 8
Antique Tractor Pull
 Historic Prairie Village
 Madison, SD

JUNE 9
Brookings Car Show
 11:30 a.m.-3 p.m.
 Pioneer Park
 Brookings, SD
www.brookingscarshow.org

JUNE 13
IHS Health Fair
 10 a.m. - 2 p.m.
 Fort Thompson, SD

JUNE 15
1st Annual CheeseFest
 10 a.m. - 7 p.m.
 Farm Life Creamery
 Ethan, SD

JUNE 21-23
Scavenger's Journey
 Yard sales, farmer's markets &
 specialty shops
 Wall to Wagner
www.scavengersjourney.com

JULY 19
Farley Fest
 Lake Farley Park
 Milbank, SD

JULY 20-21
Charles Mix Saddle Club
 SDREA Rodeo
 Geddes, SD
 605-680-2763

JULY 26-28
Bruce Honey Days
 Facebook & Instagram
 Bruce, SD
 605-627-5671

JULY 31-AUG. 3
**4-H & FFA Livestock Shows
 Carnival Rides & Games**
 Pipestone, MN

AUG. 9
**Northern Bull Riding Tour
 Finals & Bull-a-Rama**
 Geddes, SD
 605-680-2763

AUG. 17
"Harvest of Champions"
 7 p.m.
 Dakota State Fair Speedway
 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.

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