

# COOPERATIVE CONNECTIONS



Katie Grott, field station manager at SDSU's Cottonwood research facility near Philip, stays busy overseeing several ongoing projects designed to deliver practical and profitable solutions for producers.

## Blazing new trails

**Ag research abounds at Cottonwood**  
Pages 8-9

**Line work courses through their veins**  
Pages 12-13



## Energy Efficiency Tip of the Month

When streaming content, use the smallest device that makes sense for the number of people watching. Avoid streaming on game consoles, which use 10 times more power than streaming through a tablet or laptop.

Streaming content with electronic equipment that has earned the ENERGY STAR® rating will use 25% to 30% less energy than standard equipment.

*Source: Dept. of Energy*



**Douglas Electric  
will be closed  
April 15  
Good Friday**



**Douglas Electric  
Welcomes New Members**

**Armour Archery Club  
James Hoogers  
Darryl Jongsma**

## Douglas Electric Outages

| Date    | Cause                                  | Number of Members Affected |
|---------|--|----------------------------|
| Feb. 20 | Part Power - Pigtail on Pole Top Broke | 1                          |

## Operating Report

|                            | January 2022 | January 2021 |
|----------------------------|--------------|--------------|
| <b>KWH Sold</b>            | 3,008,457    | 2,586,242    |
| <b>Revenue</b>             | \$329,466.42 | \$292,935.57 |
| <b>Cost of Power</b>       | \$135,648.08 | \$155,836.98 |
| <b>Connected Consumers</b> | 829          | 823          |
| <b>Miles Energized</b>     | 502.3        | 502.3        |
| <b>Consumers /Mile</b>     | 1.65         | 1.64         |
| <b>Average KWH Used</b>    | 3,629        | 3,142        |
| <b>Average Bill</b>        | \$397.43     | \$355.94     |

## COOPERATIVE CONNECTIONS

### DOUGLAS ELECTRIC

(USPS No. 019-046)

#### Board of Directors:

Ervin Fink - President  
Joel Baier - Vice President  
David Neugebauer - Secretary/Treasurer  
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Larry VanderLey

#### Office Staff:

Jay Spaans - Manager/Line Superintendent  
Phyllis Hrdlicka - Staff Assistant  
Sheila Sanders - Cashier-Receptionist

#### Line Crew:

Troy Ziebart - Line Foreman  
Randy VanZee - Journeyman Lineman  
Brandon Metzinger - Journeyman Lineman  
Adam Nase - Journeyman Lineman

Douglas Electric Cooperative Connections is the monthly publication for the members of Douglas Electric Cooperative, 27913 US Hwy 281, Armour, SD 57313-5726. Families subscribe to Cooperative Connections as part of their electric cooperative membership. The purpose of Douglas Electric Cooperative Connections is to provide reliable, helpful information to electric cooperative members on electric cooperative matters and better rural living. Subscription information: Douglas Electric Cooperative members devote 50 cents from their monthly electric payments for a subscription. Non-member subscriptions are available for \$12 annually. Periodicals Postage Paid at Armour, SD 57313 and at additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Douglas Electric Cooperative Connections, 27913 US Hwy 281, Armour, SD 57313-5726, Phone (605) 724-2323; Fax (605) 724-2972; e-mail [sheila@douglaelec.coop](mailto:sheila@douglaelec.coop)

**In case of a power outage, call  
(605) 724-2323**

**MISSION STATEMENT**  
Dedicated to provide safe, low-cost  
reliable electricity to all our Members.

# Manager's Report



**Jay Spaans**

Manager/Line Supt.

Hello everyone!! I wanted to write this month about our electric rates as we have had several phone calls in February with questions. We did raise the monthly minimum charge for pump services, and you may or may not have noticed that in the notes section on your last power bill. The note said, "The monthly minimum for pump accounts beginning February 1 will be \$41.00". This is what the monthly minimum is for all other single phase residential and small commercial loads at Douglas Electric. A pump account, which is

sometimes referred to as a pump service, is a service that is used very little typically for watering livestock. Most of the pump services have an outlet on the pole for an electric fencer or to plug a tractor into. The board and I felt that the minimum should be set to the same as any other service since these services still require poles and wires for electricity whether or not it is a large or small load.

The monthly minimum listed at the bottom of the bill has always been there. This is not something that Douglas Electric just implemented.

Monthly minimum values vary from coop to coop, but every one of us has a minimum charge to cover our assets that carry the electricity to your home and farm.

While you may have noticed that your January electric bill may have been higher, this was due to the colder temperatures and not because we raised rates. Rates at Douglas Electric have been the same since 2016. While it seems almost everything we buy has a higher price due to inflation, electricity cost per kilo-watt hour at Douglas Electric has remained the same. I hope this has helped explain some of the questions you may have and please feel free to call with any concerns you may have. We are always here for you and will do our best to answer questions!

## We ♥ Trees, Too.

We know everyone in our community enjoys the beauty and shade trees provide. But trees and power lines can be a dangerous mix without regular trimming during the growing season.

If you see us out in the community trimming, remember the many benefits it brings:

- Keeps power lines clear of tree limbs
- Helps us restore power outages more quickly
- Keeps crews and members of our community safe
- Reduces unexpected costs for repairs

Trimming improves service reliability for you, the members we serve.



# 10 helpful tips for spring energy savings

Every season of the year provides many unique energy-saving opportunities for you and your family.

Here are some ideas particularly well suited for you to apply this spring.

1. **Clear the air:** Open windows to allow fresh air to circulate throughout your home.
2. **Cook outside:** Enjoy the sunshine by using your grill or smoker to add festive flavors to meals.
3. **Search and seal:** Cracks and spaces let conditioned air slip outdoors. Caulk and weatherstrip to seal leaks.
4. **Natural light:** Open blinds and curtains and turn off the lights to save energy and money.
5. **Be fan friendly:** Use ceiling fans to circulate air and keep cool.
6. **Atmospheric adjustment:** Remember to adjust your thermostat settings for the warmer months ahead.
7. **Tune up:** Schedule an appointment with a qualified heating, ventilating and air conditioning technician to identify any potential problems with your system.
8. **Peak savings:** Plan household chores that require electricity during off-peak hours (when energy demand is low).
9. **Take charge:** Consider disconnecting electrical devices you don't use regularly until you need them. Plugged-in devices use energy even when not in use.
10. **Move outdoors:** Time spent outdoors offers opportunities to turn off lights, TVs, computers and appliances. You'll be more active, have more fun and save more money.



## DON'T TOY WITH PERSONAL SAFETY



When playing outdoors, keep a safe distance from power lines, substations and other equipment your electric co-op uses to send electricity to your home.

Flying remote-controlled toys and drones is a great way to have fun, but accidentally making contact with a power line or other electrical equipment can be dangerous and, in some cases, even deadly.

- Never fly kites or drones near power lines.
- Stay away from power lines, meters, transformers and electrical boxes.
- Never climb trees near power lines.
- If you get something stuck in a power line, call your electric co-op.



## Fire Prevention

### Jonie Smith

Jonie Smith sends out an important safety message for campers to extinguish fires before leaving the area. Jonie is the daughter of Myles and Amber Smith of Castlewood. They are 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.



# LIP-SMACKING BEVERAGES

## BLUEBERRY BANANA SMOOTHIE

### Ingredients:

1 cup spinach  
1/2 cup water  
2 tbsp. apple cider vinegar  
1 tbsp. almond butter  
1/2 cup bananas, frozen  
1/2 cup blueberries, frozen  
1 tbsp. chia seeds  
1/4 tsp. ground cinnamon  
1/4 tsp. minced ginger  
1/2 cup berry yogurt  
fresh blueberries, for garnish (optional)  
Ground black pepper to taste

### METHOD

In blender, blend spinach, water, apple cider vinegar, almond butter, frozen bananas, frozen blueberries, chia seeds, cinnamon, ginger and yogurt until smooth. Pour into two glasses and garnish with fresh blueberries, if desired.

[culinary.net](http://culinary.net)

## FRENCH ICED COFFEE

### Ingredients:

3 cups strong coffee  
2 cups sugar  
1 pint cream or half & half  
1 qt. milk or almond milk  
2 tsp. (vanilla) flavoring (other flavorings also work)

### METHOD

Dissolve sugar in hot coffee. Cool. Add other ingredients. Pour into containers (I use the tall 2 c. Tupperware for individual drinks, but also use quarts.) Freeze. Take out and let thaw.

**Ruth Schilberg, Viborg**

## SWAMP WATER

### Ingredients:

1 small package lime gelatin  
1 cup hot water  
1 (12-oz.) can frozen unsweetened pineapple juice concentrate  
2 liters carbonated water

### METHOD

Mix lime gelatin with hot water to dissolve. Add frozen concentrate and carbonated water. Chill. Makes 10 servings.

**Lily Gums, Clear Lake**

## FRUIT SLUSH

### Ingredients:

4 cups sugar (granulated)  
6 cups water  
1 46 oz. can pineapple juice  
2 12 oz. cans frozen orange juice  
1 12 oz. can frozen lemonade (pink or yellow)  
2 small bananas, mashed very fine (or other fruit)

### METHOD

Mix and bring to a boil the sugar and water. When mixture is cool, add juices and fruit. Put in 5-quart pail and freeze. When frozen, use 2-3 scoops in a glass with 7-Up or ginger ale. Great drink for spring or summer.

**Alana Neville, Milesville**

## STRAWBERRY SMOOTHIE

### Ingredients:

2 cup fresh strawberries, stemmed & halved  
1 cup plain yogurt  
1/2 cup ice cubes or chips  
1/2 tsp. ground cardamom  
1/4 tsp. ginger

### METHOD

In a blender, combine all ingredients. Blend on high speed until smoothie texture. Makes 2-12 oz. glasses.

**Jane Ham, Rapid City**

Please send your favorite casserole 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.

### **Q: I'm planning to buy a new home this year, and I want to know how efficient it is. What questions should I ask my home inspector?**

A: Many factors go into buying a home. For most people, energy efficiency does not top the list, and unfortunately, houses don't typically come with energy efficiency ratings.

It can be difficult for a buyer to know how efficient a home is when viewing the listing online or taking a tour. But your home inspector can help you identify potential energy costs and energy-efficiency upgrades.

Some homes may already be efficient, while other homes may need improvements. There's nothing wrong with buying an inefficient home, but you will want to know what you're getting into and that you can afford the energy costs once you get the keys.

Here are five questions to ask your home inspector:

**1. What is the condition of the electrical panel and wiring throughout the home?**

A panel upgrade or rewiring can be a costly endeavor. An older panel and wiring aren't inefficient, but it can delay or make some energy-efficiency projects more expensive. In several homes I have worked on, older wiring had to be replaced before insulation could be added.

Make sure the panel can accommodate any new appliances you might want to add, such as air conditioning or an electric vehicle charger.

**2. How old is the HVAC system, and how efficient is it? Has it been maintained?**

The typical lifespan of an HVAC system is 15-25 years. As the largest energy user and often the most expensive equipment in the home, you will want to know the energy, maintenance and replacement costs. If the HVAC system is old, consider the cost for a replacement.

**3. How old is the water heater?**

The lifespan of a storage water heater is about 10 years. The cost to replace a water heater ranges from \$400 to \$3,600, depending on the unit type and installation costs. If an older water heater is in a finished space or on a second floor, replace it before it fails and potentially causes water damage.

**4. What are the levels and conditions of insulation in the attic, walls and floor?**

Insulation is one of the easiest and most beneficial energy-efficiency upgrades you can make. It isn't as pretty as new countertops, but it can make a home more comfortable, waste less energy and reduce outdoor noise.

To cut down on drafts and make insulation more effective, air seal before insulating. Seal cracks, gaps or holes in the walls, floors, ceiling and framing between heated and unheated spaces.

If your new home needs insulation and air sealing, make this your efficiency priority. The sooner you do it, the more energy you will save over time. Recommended insulation levels vary by location. You can find information about insulation and air sealing at [www.energy.gov](http://www.energy.gov).

**5. Are there any extras in this home that will increase my utility bills?**

Any motors in the home or on the property should be assessed, including pumps for wells and septic systems. When it comes to extras, remember life's luxuries aren't free. You will want to be able to afford the cost of operating amenities, such as pools, hot tubs and saunas.

**Additional considerations** - You can request the home's utility bills for the previous two years from the seller or realtor. Your bill will not be the same due to your personal energy habits, but this information will give you an estimate of the home's energy costs.

When buying a home that checks all your boxes, ask your home inspector the right efficiency questions. Understanding the condition of appliances, features and building materials can save you from hidden surprises in your home and on your first utility bills.



**Miranda Boutelle**  
Efficiency Services  
Group



Electric cooperative leaders and employees from across the state traveled to the Capitol in Pierre to discuss industry-related issues with lawmakers. The group is shown above with Lt. Gov. Larry Rhoden (front/center). *Photo by Billy Gibson*

## Electric Cooperative Day at the Capitol

**Billy Gibson**

billy.gibson@sdrea.coop

In-depth discussions about electric vehicles, vaccinations, taxation and other hot topics were in abundance during the 2022 Electric Cooperative Day at the Capitol. Held in February just before the legislative session's "crossover day," more than 30 electric cooperative leaders traveled to Pierre in wintry weather to engage in face-to-face conversations with elected officials.

The co-op representatives also served a hot meal to more than 300 individuals including legislators, government employees, lobbyists, senior government officials and others as the centerpiece of the day's activities.

The meal, prepared by former co-op employee Roger Crom and former co-op board member Ken Gillaspie, stood as a gesture of appreciation to lawmakers and their staffs for their often arduous work

going through the process of crafting legislation.

The cooperative directors, managers and employees from organizations around the state represented the collective interests of more than 300,000 cooperative member-owners.

Topics of interest included renewable power and electric vehicles (EVs) as lawmakers considered rules pertaining to EVs such as creating a network of charging stations in the state, licensing rules and fees for public road use.

The cooperative visitors observed conversations and deliberations among lawmakers taking place during committee meetings and hearings including appropriations, education, transportation, energy and others. Afterwards, they took the opportunity to meet with their representatives, ask questions and dig deeper into the issues that could have a direct impact on electric cooperative consumers.

After the meal was served, co-op leaders gathered for an update from lobbyists representing electric cooperatives and their members.

Don Heeren, president of the board at the South Dakota Rural Electric Association in Pierre, said he looks forward to the annual Electric Cooperative Day at the Capitol because it allows him and other co-op leaders to engage in close, productive conversations with lawmakers.

"Over the past couple of years we've been forced to conduct our legislative business largely over the internet, and that's been very restrictive," Heeren said. "There's just no substitute for having personal conversations when you're charged with the responsibility of making sure the collective voice of the members you represent is heard."

Heeren added: "To be able to sit down together and have our discussions over a hot meal makes it even better."





# ROBO RANCHING

Cottonwood Field Station Manager Katie Grott and student Lily McFadden take a break from their work. *Photos by Billy Gibson*

## Cottonwood Field Research Station is abuzz with studies designed to increase producer profitability

**Billy Gibson**

billy.gibson@sdrea.coop

There are robo-cops, robo-codes and robo-calls. But robo-cattle ranching?

That futuristic phrase is part of the nomenclature surrounding a beef production movement called “precision ranching,” an offshoot of the “precision agriculture” approach that promotes the use of advanced technology to improve yields and profitability.

This new wave of ag research evokes postmodern images of bovines grazing through the fields wearing high tech gadgets. Turns out, it’s a description not too far off the mark, according to Dr. Jamie Brennan, an assistant professor of research and extension specialist at South Dakota State University.

Based out of the West River Research and Extension Center in Rapid City, Brennan is using SDSU’s Cottonwood Field Station near Philip to study the viability of using high-tech GPS tracking collars to deliver real-time information on steer activity and behavior.

“By monitoring animal movement we can identify changes in behavior that might indicate sickness, for example, which can be sent as an alert to producers,” Brennan said.

He’s deploying the type of advanced accelerator technology commonly associated with Fitbit watches, vehicle trackers, smartphone map apps and other monitoring devices.

“We’re working to develop the capability for producers to easily identify not only where animals are on the landscape but also where they are selecting for grazing and resting locations,” Brennan said. “The work we are doing at the station is designed to determine the potential benefits - and possible shortcomings - of precision ranching technology and to predict the return on investment for the producer.”

Brennan’s project is just one of several intriguing studies currently in play at the Cottonwood Field Station. One of six field research centers in the SDSU Agriculture Experiment Station network, Cottonwood is among the

oldest facilities of its kind in the country. Covering more than 2,600 acres, Cottonwood was established in 1907 and has received regional and national acclaim with impactful results such as developing a new method of determining stocking rates for western regions and devising the Universal Soil Loss Equation now known as RUSLE2.

These scientific forays into precision ranching include virtual fencing (Vence™), Smart Feeder™ systems, mobile app-based mineral consumption monitors, methane emissions measuring devices and soil moisture monitoring.

The exploration into virtual fencing holds plenty of promise in helping producers manage their livestock and landscape more efficiently and effectively, according to Cottonwood Field Station manager Katie Grott.

While it may be hard for an old-school rancher to envision a world without barbed wire, fence posts and cattle guards, moving this technology to market could result in substantial savings for farm families.

Grott explained the technology is a much more sophisticated version of the kind of residential-grade invisible fence





A cow at the Cottonwood Field Research Station waits patiently for a Smart Feeder to be loaded with hay.

designed to keep pets from wandering around the neighborhood streets. Virtual fencing is already being used to contain goat herds and other smaller animals with measurable success.

The latest research testing involves combining an electrical pulse administered through a GPS-enabled collar, combined with an auditory stimulus to keep cattle confined within certain boundaries. A software program allows the rancher to define those boundaries as needed for successful grazing rotation and land management.

“We’re looking at how virtual fencing affects animal behavior, performance and natural resources,” Grott said.

Dr. Krista Ehlert, assistant professor and extension specialist, is also involved in the project and adds, “Virtual fencing turns physical labor into cognitive labor for producers, helping to reduce labor and potentially improve work-life balance for producers.”

Other projects at Cottonwood include work being led by assistant professor Dr. Hector Menendez. The research uses technology developed by the Rapid City firm, C-Lock. C-Lock has a scale that collects daily weight records on animals every time they drink. The data provide

valuable information on stocking rates, forage quality and weather conditions on individual animal performance.

“It’s an exciting time in the area of agricultural research,” Menendez said. “We have secured funds to proceed with a project on interdisciplinary engagement in animal systems and precision livestock water monitoring. And we’re excited about holding producer-oriented workshops, training classes and field days to educate producers on how these advancements can improve their profitability.”

One rancher who keeps a close eye on the latest research results is Eric Jennings, president of the South Dakota Cattleman’s Association.

“There are some interesting new concepts being explored through this facility and others,” Jennings said. “We’re watching to see which of these systems prove to become both practical and affordable for producers to implement in their daily operations. For instance, the idea of virtual fencing has been around for a while, but the research and application of new technology has emerged as a viable option.”

Brennan, Ehlert, Menendez and others who work daily to blaze new pathways

Amount of acres  
researchers have

**2,640**

at their disposal at the  
Cottonwood  
Field Station

for cattle producers take gratification from knowing their labor and application of scientific methods could result in a farm family turning the corner toward profitability and sustaining a generational way of life. Plus, they enjoy drawing students into the process and inspiring the next generation of farmers.

“They receive training in animal science, rangeland ecology, precision technology, modeling, computer programming and boots-on-the-ground ranching,” Menendez said. “One of our aims is to encourage the next generation of professionals that can merge precision technology to maximize rangeland livestock production while maintaining ranching culture.”

## Erynn Gerlach: 2022 Basin Electric Scholarship Winner



Erynn Gerlach is the Douglas Electric-Basin Electric \$1,000 scholarship winner.

Erynn will graduate from Ethan High School in May with a 4.159 GPA and a class rank of 1 out of 20. She plans to attend Dakota Wesleyan University to study Elementary Education with an emphasis/minor in Special Education and Educational Technology and will also be a member of the Women's Track and Field team as a sprinter. Her career goal is to become a teacher at an elementary school. Her High School English Teacher calls Erynn "an absolutely amazing student and person, who takes pride in her work and is such a great leader and role model."

Erynn has been involved in many extracurricular activities throughout her high school career including Track, Boy's Basketball Videographer & Statistician, Band, Choir, All-State Choir, FCCLA, NHS, FFA, Educators Rising and Girls' State Delegate. She volunteers at her church and various fundraisers in her community. Erynn's parents are Jared and Michele Gerlach.

Douglas Electric would like to thank all that applied for the 2022 Scholarship. We wish you all the best in the years to come.

Congratulations Erynn!

## Essay: What challenges face rural electric cooperatives in the coming years and how do you think challenges should be addressed

Electric cooperatives face a multitude of challenges as the economy is continuously expanding and starts to both modernize and revolutionize. Some of the more present concerns of electric cooperatives all over the nation are a decline in sales, the movement of members to urban areas, environmental disputes, and disruptive technology. Many cooperatives also have an aging infrastructure and electrical grid system that need to be updated in order to keep up with the modern-day needs. As the economy steps forward towards the future, co-ops need to do the same in order to be able to keep up with our ever-changing surroundings. In doing so, this presents the necessity for a shift in mindset from traditional to modern, which can be difficult and a challenge in itself. I think that the first resolution to these problems is just keeping an open mind. If electric cooperatives are willing to welcome new ideas to the table, they could see a switch in the difficulties they are facing. Being open-minded doesn't just mean accepting every critique and suggestion given to them. This means that it can allow them to see the possibilities of a change that could be made and adapt it specifically to their cooperative as well as their member's needs. One change that was made at Douglas Electric Cooperative was that they have the monthly meter numbers sent to their main office in Armour wirelessly. This makes it more efficient for both the consumer member and the cooperative. Douglas Electric is receiving their meter numbers in a timely and accurate manner every month and the consumer member does not have to take the time to read the meter or remember to read the meter the 1st of every month. This is a change that has benefitted both the cooperative and the consumer member. The more open the cooperative is to adapting to the continuously changing society and technological world, the more the cooperative will find itself with a secure future.



## Statement of Non-discrimination

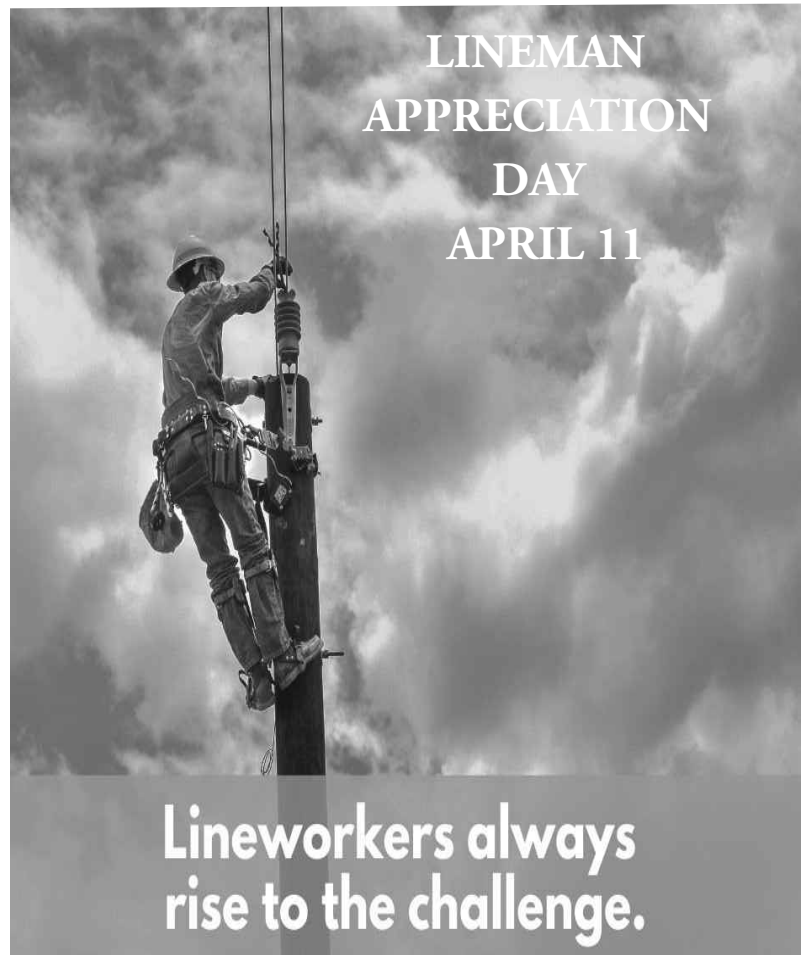
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## IN CASE OF OUTAGE, CALL 605-724-2323

|                 |   |
|-----------------|---|
| 1 <sup>ST</sup> | Look at your main meter.  |
| 2 <sup>ND</sup> | If the display is NOT lit up, you do not have power and should call Douglas Electric. If your main meter display is ON, you should have power.  |
| 3 <sup>RD</sup> | If the display is ON, you can check your breakers below the meter or the breakers in your house.  |
| 4 <sup>TH</sup> | When reporting outages, please give name of member and location number to assist with prompt response.<br>If you don't get an answer at 605-724-2323, call:<br>Troy Ziebart, 933-2249, Adam Nase, 770-0630,<br>Brandon Metzinger, 770-6469, Randy VanZee, 770-2565<br>or Jay Spaans, 530-3683 |

# VOLTAGE IN THEIR VEINS

The Miller and Wingen men share a total of 177 years of experience in the electric utility industry. Pictured above are Joel Miller, Rollie Miller, Travis Miller, Corey Miller, Wes Wingen and Dustin Wingen.

## Miller, Wingen utility workers represent a combined 177 years of faithful service

**Tara Miller**

taram@centralec.coop

Take a moment to imagine life without electricity. No household appliances, no electric heat, no air conditioning, no internet and no phone. In 1925, only half of homes in the U.S. had electricity. Fast forward to 2022, and electricity is a basic necessity.

April is Lineworker Appreciation Month – a time to celebrate and honor the brave men and women who often work in hazardous conditions to power our world.

The Miller family, originally from Canova, has 177 years of electric industry experience, and most of them started their careers as lineworkers.

### WHERE IT ALL STARTED

Before attending school to become a lineworker, Joel Miller, better known as “Joe” or “Smokey” to some, graduated from Canova High School and began working at Overhead Door Company

in Sioux Falls. While he didn’t mind the work, he knew it wasn’t what he wanted to do for the rest of his life. Joe then heard about an opportunity to attend school and become a lineworker.

“I knew Ron Callies. He was an instructor,” Joe said. “He told us to look at the program, so Robert Zens and I checked it out and thought we would give it a try.”

Joe graduated from what is now known as Mitchell Technical College (MTC) in 1978 and began the family’s legacy of life on the line when he joined East River Electric in Madison. He started on the construction crew and later worked in maintenance. His friend Robert Zens also worked at East River Electric, but passed away in a motorcycle accident in 1980.

Joe worked at East River Electric for nearly 20 years before he moved to Western Area Power Administration (WAPA) in Pierre. WAPA is a federal organization that markets and delivers hydroelectric power and related services

across the 15-state region. Joe retired from his position of line foreman at WAPA in 2020 after 43 years.

### FOLLOWING THE LEADER

Rollie was next in the Miller family line-up, a year younger than Joe. His mom talked him into going to Pipestone, MN, to work at Bayliner Boats with his older brother Ed. Rollie then worked at Feterl’s Manufacturing in Salem where he welded augers until he decided to enroll in line school at MTC at the age of 20.

“The biggest reason I went to line school was because Joe had just done it, and I was friends with Robert Zens. I saw how they just did it, and I thought I could do it, too,” Rollie explained.

Rollie now manages Vigilante Electric Cooperative in Dillon, MT. Before running the show, he worked for an electrical contractor and for West River Electric.

He then attended SDSU and worked for Bob’s Electric in Flandreau with Reggie Gassman, who is manager of customer electrical services at Sioux



Valley Energy. They both grew up in the Canova area.

Rollie earned a bachelor's degree in electrical engineering, allowing him to become a licensed professional engineer.

"My education has greatly benefited me throughout my career," Rollie said.

Rollie's boys are also following the family tradition. Cody Miller attended SDSU to become an electrical engineer and consults for electric utilities, and Logan "L.J." Miller is enrolled in the power line construction and

maintenance program at MTC.

"It's not a cake walk. I told them you really have to study and work hard," he said.

After Rollie, Corey was the next Miller brother to attend MTC.

"The reason I went into it is because I had two older brothers who were



Cody Miller



L.J. Miller

linemen. I knew when I was a freshman in high school that I was going to be a lineman," Corey said.

After graduating from MTC in 1987, Corey became an apprentice lineworker at Public Service of New Hampshire. He worked there for three years, then took a position at Missouri Public Service.

Like his brothers, Corey worked his way up the ranks. He was hired as a lineworker and promoted to foreman, then supervisor, and now works in management. He is also on the board of directors for the International Lineman Rodeo Association, helping host the annual lineman rodeo event which promotes lineworker safety.

Corey's 15-year-old son Zach plans to become a lineworker after high school. Corey shares this advice for anybody

- **Joel Miller**, Retired Line Foreman at Western Area Power Administration (Pierre, SD)  
43 Years, 6 months of industry experience
- **Rollie Miller**, General Manager at Vigilante Electric Cooperative (Dillon, MT)  
42 years, 6 months of industry experience
- **Corey Miller**, Director of Regional Operations at Evergy (Lexington, MO)  
35 years, 6 months of industry experience
- **Travis Miller**, Foreman at Southeastern Electric (Salem, SD)  
30 years of industry experience
- **Wes Wingen**, Manager of Meter Services at Black Hills Power (Rapid City, SD)  
15 years, 10 months of industry experience
- **Cody Miller**, Electrical Engineer (Dillon, MT)  
8 years, 6 months of industry experience
- **Dustin Wingen**, Former Lineworker at Alaska Village Electric Co-op (Anchorage, AK)  
2 years of industry experience
- **Logan (L.J.) Miller**, Student in the power line program at Mitchell Technical College

considering a career in the field:

"We need linemen. It is an awesome profession to get into. Linemen live to restore power – that's their lifeblood. And, quite honestly, you will make a very good wage while doing that."

Travis was the last of the Miller brothers to attend line school. He decided milking cows wasn't his calling, so in 1991 at age 26, Travis followed the path started by his big brother Joe.

"I figured they all did it, so I could probably do it better," Travis joked. He is now the foreman at Southeastern Electric in Salem.

Wes and Dustin Wingen are the sons of Stacy (Miller) and Bob Wingen. They are nephews to the Miller brothers and have also been involved in the electric utility industry. Dustin was a lineworker in Anchorage, AK, before coming back home to farm. Wes is an engineer and manager of meter services at Black Hills Power in Rapid City.

## IT'S A MILLER THING

The Miller family had nine children: Sandy, Duane, Ed, Joe, Rollie, Stacy, Derrin, Travis and Corey. Marcella, mother of the youngest eight children,

passed away in 2011, and Duane "Stub" Miller, the family patriarch, currently resides in Howard. Stub shared, "People don't know it today, but having electricity is something we shouldn't take for granted."

The four Miller brothers share a combined 151 years of electric industry experience. When you add it all up, the Miller and Wingen men boast an impressive 177 years of electric industry experience.

They couldn't have worked in this profession without the support of their families, which are too large to list. All the storm jobs, dangerous assignments and family moves were worth it when they think about the people they serve. They all agree, "It's a Miller thing" and working with voltage is in their veins.

## THANK A LINEWORKER

Please take time to thank lineworkers for all they do to brighten our lives. We thank the Miller family for their many years of service in the industry.

*Editor's note: Writer Tara Miller is Travis Miller's wife and works for Central Electric Cooperative near Mitchell.*



# FORAGING FOR FUN

Jayne Pfeifle of Timber Lake is fond of foraging for fruit, which she turns into delicious jellies and jams. *Photo by Roger Lawien*

## Foraging for ‘found food’ can be fun and also good for your diet plan

**Billy Gibson**

[billy.gibson@sdrea.coop](mailto:billy.gibson@sdrea.coop)

Back when Jayne Pfeifle was a little girl and ventured outdoors to gather chokeberries with her mother, her thoughts were fixed on the delicious jellies and jams she’d soon enjoy.

She wasn’t aware she was engaging in an activity that would come to be known decades later as “foraging.” For all she knew, foraging for food was something wild animals did when they got hungry.

With the steady lifting of pandemic restrictions, many people across the country are taking to the outdoors to avail themselves of what’s called “found

food” or “nature’s free grocery store.”

As an indication of the rising popularity of foraging, one social media star from Ohio has amassed nearly 3.5 million TikTok followers, in addition to nearly a million more fans on Instagram. Alexis Nikole Nelson, 29, has been featured on National Public Radio, Fortune magazine, The New York Times and other news and entertainment outlets.

During the pandemic, Nelson started posting videos from her forays into the forests to gather edible mushrooms, berries, weeds and other plants. She was floored by the response she received.

Some subjects included “Where to find mushrooms that taste like shrimp,”

“How to make ‘bacon’ out of acorns,” and “How to make ‘danger bread’ using cow parsnip.” But Nelson struck social media gold when she posted a video that got the attention of people left financially strapped by the pandemic: “How to ‘stretch’ groceries by foraging.”

Before long, a wider audience of outdoors enthusiasts were gravitating toward the notion that foraging can not only be enjoyed either solo or with others, but it can also be adventurous while saving money and promoting a more nutritious diet.

For Pfeifle, much of the satisfaction she derives from foraging for chokeberries, plums, elderberries and other wild edibles is making sure her husband of 39 years has a tangy treat to spread on his breakfast toast.

“Clyde likes his jelly and toast every



## What to take

- Bug spray
- Sunscreen
- Long pants (for prickly and/or poisonous plants)
- Gardening gloves
- A basket or bag for storage
- A GPS or phone for maps
- Scissors or a hunting knife



Morel mushrooms are a favorite target for many foragers in search of free food and fun.

morning,” she said of her husband, her frequent foraging field companion. “I enjoy getting out and gathering the berries and he enjoys the jelly, so it makes everybody happy.”

Just don’t ask her to deal with buffaloberries. That’s where Pfeifle draws the line.

“It’s a tiny berry. They’re hard to pick, hard to clean and hard to process. The jelly is good, but it’s too much hard work and not worth the trouble,” said Pfeifle, who has served as an educator at Timber Lake Elementary for the past 48 years.

Little Moreau Recreation Area is a prime public picking place for Pfeifle and other people in the Timber Lake area, but she stays close to the vest when asked to disclose some of her other favorite foraging sites. It so happens that holding secrets is a quality found in many foragers, akin to a fisherman’s reluctance to announce to the world where the fish are biting.

Jaclyn Arens, communications and marketing coordinator at Bon Homme Yankton Electric Cooperative, looks forward to foraging for morel mushrooms when the weather warms up in the spring. She’s learned over the past

few years since she began the hobby that there’s a limited window of time for the best hunting.

“We start scouting at the end of March, but we don’t usually find anything until April and May,” she said. “The soil temperature is important, and the morels don’t pop up until it’s warm enough, about 50 degrees. They burn up or disappear when it gets too warm.”

In keeping with the forager’s unspoken code of silence, she’ll say when and how, but she won’t say where.

“I will say we look for places that have moist soil and deciduous trees like oak, elm, ash and cottonwood. Forests with big, old, decaying trees are best because morels grow from the root systems of dying trees. People have had luck in places where trees have been cut down or burned. There is plenty of public land in South Dakota to explore,” Arens said.

One pro tip Arens offers is to bring along a mesh bag to store your morels. The mesh material allows the spores to spread while hunting for more mushrooms. Another pro tip: if you do find an elusive morel, freeze in your tracks...there are likely more close by, so it’s wise to stop before accidentally trampling over a perfectly fine ‘shroom.

In addition to the lure of the hunt, the taste of morels and the quality time spent with her boyfriend, Arens really



Jaclyn Arens

enjoys the annual ritual of getting out into the wild after a long winter.

“My favorite thing is getting outside in the spring after being cooped up in

the winter,” she said. “Plus, morels are delicious, and they taste even better after a long day of mushroom hunting. My favorite way to cook morels is to lightly batter them in flour and fry them in a hot pan with butter. Yummy!”

She encourages beginners to follow a few basic rules:

- Avoid areas beneath or around electric power lines.
- Avoid trespassing on private property.
- Never eat anything unless you can identify it with 100 percent accuracy.
- Take a companion along for fun and safety.
- Try to avoid areas where chemicals or insecticides may have been applied.



**APRIL 16**  
Easter Egg Hunt at  
Reclamation Ranch, Mitchell, 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.

### **MARCH 25-26**

#### **Schmeckfest**

748 S Main Street, Freeman, SD, 605-925-4237

### **MARCH 26**

#### **Annual Ag Day**

Washington Pavilion, Sioux Falls, SD, 605-367-6000

### **MARCH 30**

#### **Elton John Tribute Concert**

Performing Arts Center, Mitchell, SD, 605-770-7813

### **APRIL 2**

#### **Watertown Coin and Currency Show**

Elks Lodge, Watertown, SD, 605-882-4663

### **APRIL 2-3**

#### **Youth & Family Services' 25th Annual Kids Fair**

The Monument, Rapid City, SD, [youthandfamilyservices.org/kids-fair/](http://youthandfamilyservices.org/kids-fair/)

### **APRIL 8-9**

#### **Forks, Corks & Kegs Festival**

Various Locations, Deadwood, SD, [deadwood.com/event/forks-corks-kegs](http://deadwood.com/event/forks-corks-kegs)

### **APRIL 8-9**

#### **Jackrabbit Stampede Rodeo**

Swiftel Center, Brookings, SD, [swiftelcenter.com](http://swiftelcenter.com)

### **APRIL 8-10**

#### **CAHF Spring Fling Eggstravaganza Series**

Carroll Acres Hobby Farm, Rapid City, SD, [carrollacreshobbyfarm.com](http://carrollacreshobbyfarm.com)

### **APRIL 8-16**

#### **The Passion and the Cross**

Orpheum Theater Center, Sioux Falls, SD, [siouxfallsorpheum.com](http://siouxfallsorpheum.com)

### **APRIL 9**

#### **Keystone Spring Fling Vendor Fair**

1101 Madill Street, Keystone, SD, 605-786-3035

### **APRIL 9-10**

#### **DGTCA Gun Show**

Rushmore Civic Center, Rapid City, SD, 605-270-0764

### **APRIL 16**

#### **Easter Egg Hunt**

Reclamation Ranch, Mitchell, SD, 605-770-2867

### **APRIL 22**

#### **River Rat ½ Marathon, 10K, and 5K**

Gavins Point Area, Yankton, SD, [allsportscentral.com](http://allsportscentral.com)

### **APRIL 22-23**

#### **Junkin' Market Days**

W. H. Lyon Fairgrounds, Sioux Falls, SD, 605-941-4958

### **APRIL 23**

#### **Lakota All Star Basketball Games**

The Monument Summit Arena, Rapid City, SD, 605-342-41985

### **APRIL 23**

#### **Martina McBride**

Swiftel Center, Brookings, SD, [swiftelcenter.com](http://swiftelcenter.com)

### **APRIL 23**

#### **Winefest Renaissance**

1121 1st Avenue SE, Aberdeen, SD, 605-225-8714

### **APRIL 23-24**

#### **46th Mobridge Area Art Show**

Scherr-Howe Arena, Mobridge, SD, 605-845-2060

### **APRIL 23-24**

#### **Brookings Quilt Guild Show**

Swiftel Center, Brookings, SD, 605-690-3246

### **APRIL 27-30**

#### **45th Annual Kingswood Rummage Sales**

Southwest Sioux Falls, SD, [kingswoodrummage.com](http://kingswoodrummage.com)

### **APRIL 28-30**

#### **26th Annual Black Hills Dance Festival**

The Monument, Rapid City, SD, [blackhillsdancefestival.com](http://blackhillsdancefestival.com)

### **APRIL 29-MAY 1, 5-7**

#### **Ordinary Days**

Grand Opera House, Pierre, SD, [pierreplayers.com](http://pierreplayers.com)

### **APRIL 30**

#### **SDSO Centennial Finale**

Washington Pavilion, Sioux Falls, SD, [sdsymphony.org](http://sdsymphony.org)

### **MAY 7**

#### **Cinco de Mayo Fiesta**

131 E Falls Park Drive, Sioux Falls, SD, 605-274-3735

### **MAY 14-15**

#### **Ellsworth Air and Space Show**

1940 EP Howe Drive, Ellsworth AFB, SD, [ellsworthairshow.com](http://ellsworthairshow.com)

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