

Cooperative Connections

**Faulkton mural is
turning heads**

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**Co-ops practice
road safety**

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The 110-foot mural that towers over the town of Faulkton has attracted attention from across the country



Ervin Fink receives Legacy of Leadership Award



Ervin & wife Dee

Ervin Fink of Armour received the 2021 Legacy of Leadership award presented at the South Dakota Rural Electric Association's 79th annual membership meeting held in Pierre on Jan. 13-15.

Fink has been a member of the Douglas Electric Board of Directors since 1986 and currently serves as president. He has also represented his cooperative on the East River Electric Board of Directors for the past 20 years and currently serves as board secretary.

"It's been a great pleasure to work with so many of you over the years," Fink said during the presentation ceremony. "I'm very humbled to receive this award...I don't feel I deserve it, but I'm very grateful and would like to acknowledge the many cooperative members and cooperative leaders I've had the privilege to serve with."

In nominating Fink for this distinguished award, East River Electric General Manager/CEO Tom Boyko said the cooperative leader has been instrumental in guiding the organization through various shifts and changes in the industry over the past two decades.

"Ervin approaches his position on our board of directors with thoughtful professionalism and a very positive attitude. He can always be counted on to contribute engaging insight during board discussions. He has showcased his leadership in keeping East River's costs low while also moving forward with projects that will allow us to continue successfully living out our mission of enhancing value for our members," Boyko said.

Also nominating Fink was Douglas Electric General Manager Jay Spaans, who noted Fink's advocacy work in supporting the Rural Electric Economic Development (REED) Fund. The program has distributed hundreds of thousands of dollars in loans for organizations throughout Douglas Electric's service territory and has also launched a \$4 million initiative to address the growing housing shortage throughout the region.

"Ervin lives out the seventh cooperative principle of concern for community in both his personal and professional life," Spaans said, adding that Fink served in the National Guard for six years and is also heavily involved in his local church, St. Peter Lutheran in Armour. "He supports cooperative youth outreach programs and understands that today's youth will become our future cooperative and community leaders."

Kevin Czymbor, pastor at St. Peter Lutheran, commented on Fink's personal integrity and character: "Ervin represents the best that there could be in a neighbor. Whether a stranger or a lifelong friend, he gives everyone the same love and respect they deserve, not because they did something to earn it but merely because they exist. If he becomes aware of a need that he has the ability to meet he does not hesitate to share his time or resources to do so."

About South Dakota's Electric Cooperatives – South Dakota's electric cooperatives provide electricity to more than 126,000 homes, farms and businesses in the state, averaging only 2.5 consumers per mile of line. SDREA is a member-owned, member-controlled association of 31 electric cooperatives in South Dakota. SDREA is devoted to unifying, promoting and protecting the interests of member electric cooperatives in South Dakota by providing leadership, training, communication, legislative representation and other member services.



Ervin receiving Legacy of Leadership Award

Douglas Electric Cooperative Connections

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We have had the following former member capital credit checks returned to us by the post office. If you know an address or someone who would know an address of one of these former members, please contact Douglas Electric at (605) 724-2323 or dougelec@unitelsd.com



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Mechelle Burgess	Corsica SD
Andrew E Gray	Burke SD
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Five Electrical Dangers in Your Home

Of all the hazards that exist around your home, getting shocked by electricity is one that should not be taken lightly. Depending on the level of electrical current, contact with electricity can result in something as innocuous (but still painful) as a mild shock to more severe injuries like nerve damage and burns. In some circumstances, it can even cause cardiac arrest and death. Here's a list of some of the most common shock risks inside a home.

- **Appliances.** Most shocks from appliances occur when people are trying to repair them. It's not enough to just turn off an appliance before attempting to work on it – you also need to unplug it to reduce risk. Large appliances are responsible for 18 percent of consumer product-related electrical accidents; small appliances account for 12 percent. There's also danger if your appliance comes into contact with water. Many of these hazards can be avoided by using a ground-fault circuit interrupter. A GFCI is a protective device installed on electrical outlets, primarily used where water is present.
- **Ladders.** Typically, ladders present a falling hazard, but 8 percent of consumer product-related electrical shocks were also related to ladders. Electrocutation typically happens when the ladder makes contact with electrical wires. Before you use a ladder, make sure you can clearly see all power lines in the area, including those that may be hidden by tree branches. Ensure that the ladder is at least 10 feet away from them.
- **Power tools.** Power tools account for 9 percent of consumer product-related shocks. When you use power tools that are not double-insulated, are damaged or have damaged cords, you increase your chances of being injured. The chance of danger also increases when you use incompatible cords with power tools, use power tools incorrectly or use them in wet conditions. This is another situation in which GFCIs can help.
- **Electrical outlets and extension cords.** Inserting anything that doesn't belong – screwdrivers, knives, fingers or toy cars - into an electrical outlet can result in a dangerous electrical contact. Use cover plates that fit properly and safety covers on all outlets. By installing tamper-resistant receptacles, outlets will have permanent security against foreign objects being inserted into the slots. Any broken, loose or worn-out plugs, switches and light fixtures should be replaced immediately.

Visit the new SDREA.coop

Want to know more about South Dakota's rural electric cooperative system? Check out our newly redesigned website at www.sdrea.coop. You'll find lots of useful information about our generation, transmission and distribution systems, energy efficiency ideas, legislative issues that impact electric rates, a statewide outage map and much more.



KIDS CORNER SAFETY POSTER



"Don't hit the pole! Be safe!"

Monroe Steiner, 6 years old

Monroe is the daughter of Brandon and Jen Steiner of Lake City, SD. They are members of Lake Region 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.

Super Seafood Recipes

Sheet Pan Fish and Chips

1/4 cup buttermilk	1 tablespoon oil
5 teaspoons OLD BAY® Seasoning, divided	1/4 cup flour
1 pound cod fillets, cut into 4x2-inch pieces	1 egg
2 large russet potatoes, cut into wedges (about 1-1/2 pounds)	1 cup cornflake crumbs
	McCormick® Tartar Sauce

Preheat oven to 450 degrees. Mix buttermilk and 1 teaspoon of the OLD BAY in large resealable plastic bag. Add fish, then seal the bag. Refrigerate for 20 minutes. Toss potatoes and oil into large bowl. Sprinkle with another 2 teaspoons of OLD BAY; toss to coat evenly. Spread potatoes in single layer on foil-lined 15x10x1-inch baking pan that has been sprayed with no-stick cooking spray. Bake 25 minutes, turning potatoes halfway through. Remove pan from oven. Push potatoes to outside edge of the pan. Set aside. Place flour in a shallow dish. Beat egg, another 1 teaspoon of OLD BAY and 1 teaspoon water in a separate shallow dish. Mix cornflake crumbs and remaining 1 teaspoon OLD BAY in another shallow dish. Remove fish from the buttermilk mixture, allowing excess to drip off into bag. Coat fish in flour, shaking off excess flour. Dip in egg mixture, then press into the cornflake mixture until evenly coated. Discard any remaining flour, egg and cornflake mixtures. Place fish on a wire rack in center of pan with the potatoes. Bake 15 minutes or until fish is golden brown and flakes easily with a fork and potatoes are tender. Serve fish with potatoes and tartar sauce, if desired.

www.mccormick.com

Salmon Cheese Balls

1 16 oz. can of salmon	1 T. salt
8 oz. cream cheese	1 T. lemon juice
1 T. chopped onion	1 T. horseradish

Mix all ingredients together and shape into individual balls. Roll balls in chopped pecans and serve with crackers. Chill before and after shaping into a ball.

Denene Miles, Doland, SD

Shrimp Fettuccine with Pesto

15 extra large shrimp	comes in gluten free variety)
6 cloves of garlic	2-6.7 oz. jars of basil pesto
Extra virgin olive oil	Finely shredded parmesan cheese
12 oz. box of fettuccine (also	

Peel and chop garlic until finely diced. In large saute pan, pour a couple of tbsps. of extra virgin olive oil. Add shrimp (shelled and wiped dry with a paper towel). Cook until orange and slightly browned on each side (2-3 minutes per side). Add garlic and cook until light brown (do not over cook or garlic becomes bitter). Put on plate. Fill saute pan 3/4 full with cold water and bring to a rolling boil. Add entire box of pasta and cook 12 minutes. Stir to make sure pasta has separated. Drain in colander. Put the pasta, shrimp and garlic back into the saute pan. Add two jars of pesto sauce. Cook until heated. When serving, add parmesan cheese on top. Serves 4-6. Shrimp & Garlic with Cocktail Sauce: Prepare shrimp and garlic as directed above. Cool. Serve with cocktail sauce.

Sue Nipe, Sioux Falls, SD

Parmesan Baked Salmon

1/4 c mayo	4 salmon fillets
2 T. Parmesan Cheese	2 t. lemon juice
1/8 t. ground red pepper (cayenne)	10 crackers, crushed

Mix the mayo, cheese and pepper. Place salmon on foil on a cooking sheet. Drizzle with lemon juice. Top with cheese mixture. Sprinkle on cracker crumbs. Bake at 400 for 15 minutes. Then enjoy!

Julie and Jared Frank, Sioux Falls, SD

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

Tips for Planting an Efficient Garden



Pat Keegan

Collaborative Efficiency

Tilling can bring weed seeds that are deep in the soil to the top where they can germinate and grow.

Pat Keegan and Brad Thiessen of Collaborative Efficiency write on energy efficiency topics for the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association, the national trade association representing more than 900 local electric cooperatives. From growing suburbs to remote farming communities, electric co-ops serve as engines of economic development for 42 million Americans across 56% of the nation's landscape. For additional energy tips and information on Collaborative Efficiency visit: www.collaborativeefficiency.com/energytips

Pat and Brad: It's almost time to plant our garden, and we're wondering if there are steps we can take to save energy when planting. How can we make our home garden more efficient? - Leandra

Dear Leandra: We're glad you asked! One approach to gardening we've been excited about lately is no-till, also known as no-dig. No-till gardens have been gaining ground with farmers in recent years, partly because of the energy savings. The principles behind no-till gardening work well for large farms, as well as smaller home gardens. No-till can be done without chemicals. Research shows that this approach can produce more fruits and vegetables within a few years, and they get better over the long term. Best of all, this approach to gardening takes less time and effort--and you won't even have to fire up the rototiller!

Two ideas are at the heart of no-till gardening. First, don't break up the soil. We usually think that by breaking up the soil and mixing it up, we keep weeds from growing. But tilling can bring weed seeds that are deep in the soil to the top where they can germinate and grow. Tilling also destroys microbes in the soil that bring nutrients to the plants.

The second idea is to spread thick layers of compost and other mulch on top of the soil. When compost and other mulch are spread on top, they feed the soil from above, the same way leaves in a forest fall to the ground, decompose and turn into rich soil over time. When you build up the soil by spreading layers of compost and other mulch on top, the weed seeds are kept dormant. Mulch keeps the soil moist, so less water is used to irrigate, which means less electricity use for pumping water from your well or community water system.

Your no-till garden can be planted at ground-level or in raised beds. Start by laying weed-blocking material on top of the old dirt. Sheets of cardboard are often used because they will decompose over time. Then spread at least 4 inches of weed-free soil or compost on top.

If the soil under the cardboard is reasonably loose, you can probably start planting right away. Your garden may be less productive the first year, but will grow healthier and have less weeds every season from then on. If the ground is heavily compacted or clay, you may have to till in some compost or healthy soil before laying down the cardboard and give it a year for the new mix to get looser.

In the fall, you can cut the dead plants at ground level and leave the roots in the ground to decompose over the winter. You may also want to plant a cover crop, like peas, fava beans or barley late in the growing season. Setting up a no-till garden takes a fair bit of work, but it will require less maintenance in the future and get healthier every year.

If you're ready to try your hand at planting a no-till garden, many colleges and universities offer extension classes for folks who are not enrolled as students. You can also watch a variety of videos online that can guide you through setup and long-term care.

We hope these tips will help you prepare for a more energy efficient garden this season. Happy planting - and eating!

Tips to Reduce Energy Use in the Garden

- Drip systems lose less water to evaporation.
- Timers are a convenient way to control irrigation, but be sure to override the timer and shut off watering cycles when a rain shower can do the job.
- Consider purchasing a rain barrel for energy efficient watering.
- Learn how to store your produce to reduce waste.
- Make sure your freezer is energy efficient.

Birkeland, Fink Recognized for Outstanding Cooperative Leadership at Statewide Meeting

Billy Gibson

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Bev Birkeland of Dupree and Ervin Fink of Armour were named Legacy of Leadership award winners at the South Dakota Rural Electric Association's 79th annual membership meeting held recently in Pierre.

Each year, SDREA recognizes two individuals for their contributions to the advancement of electric co-ops throughout the state. This award highlights outstanding co-op leaders who lend their talent, time, expertise and passion toward improving the quality of their cooperative organizations and their communities. Legacy of Leadership award winners routinely demonstrate their commitment to serving the interests of others above their own.

Bev Birkeland

Birkeland was a member of the Moreau-Grand Electric board from 1998 to 2016 and also served on the SDREA Board from 2000 to 2016.



Bev Birkeland is pictured with her husband, Russ, after receiving her award.

A life-long resident of Dupree, Bev has been married to her husband, Russ, since 1958. She spent her career with the USDA Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service and retired in 1994 after 35 years with the federal program.

"There are a lot more people more deserving than I am for this award," said Birkeland. "But I've enjoyed working with the cooperative and I encourage you all to continue the great work that you do."

Birkeland has been heavily involved in community activities since graduating high school in 1958, including many positions of leadership. She is a former vice chair of the Dupree City Council and has been active in various local organizations such as 4-H, Dupree Community Club, United Church of Christ, Dupree Alumni Association, Dupree Volunteer Fire Department Auxiliary, Pioneer Hall Building Campaign and the Prairie Stripper Quilt Guild.

Melissa Maher, general manager of Moreau-Grand Electric, said of Birkeland, "As a director, she would often sit back and listen prior to engaging in the conversation during board discussions. But when she did speak up, everyone would listen because she was so well respected, and still is."



Shown above are Douglas Electric Board Members Larry VanderLey and Wayne Lefers, Ervin Fink and General Manager Jay Spaans.

Ervin Fink

Ervin Fink, serves as president of the Douglas Electric board and also sits on the East River Electric board. A native and life-long resident of Armour, Fink is a farmer who served in the National Guard for six years. He is an active member of St. Peter Lutheran Church. He and his wife, Dee, have two sons: Jeremy and Reggie.

In nominating Fink, Douglas Electric General Manager Jay Spaans emphasized the director's role in promoting electric safety as well as his advocacy work in supporting the Rural Electric Economic Development (REED) Fund. The program has distributed hundreds of thousands of dollars in loans for organizations throughout Douglas Electric's service territory.

"Ervin lives out the seventh cooperative principle of concern for community in both his personal and professional life. He supports cooperative youth outreach programs and understands that today's youth will become our future cooperative and community leaders," Spaans said.

To view video profiles of Birkeland and Fink, visit YouTube and search for the Cooperative Connections Plus channel.



The mural in Faulkton is a prominent feature in the town. Aerial photography by Billy Gibson.

EYE-POPPING APPEAL

Faulkton Mural Attracts Attention from Far and Near

Billy Gibson

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The story of how the small town of Faulkton became an attraction for art aficionados far and near actually begins on another continent many years ago.

Today, Faulkton is home to an imposing 110-foot mural displayed on three sides of an Agtegra grain elevator, the town's most prominent structure. Visible from long distances on Hwy. 212, the mural depicts a boy and girl and several wide-brimmed hats blowing between them in the prairie wind. While the meaning of the mural is open to as many interpretations as there are viewers, the intriguing story of how the artwork came into existence is a "10 beer tale," according to Dave Hedt, the community leader who initiated the project.

A native of Australia, the mate known among the locals as "Aussie Dave" was nursing a "frothy" in a bar in Melbourne when he encountered a chap from Faulkton who happened to be in Melbourne on business. He and Craig Mutsch struck up a conversation during that chance encounter in 1998 and kept in regular contact until 2013 when Hedt decided to relocate to South Dakota on a permanent basis.

Hedt went to work for Mutsch in the beginning before eventually setting down roots in Faulkton. He later married a gal from Harrold, became a regular at Lakeside Golf Club, built a retail strip center along the highway across from the Agtegra elevator and established several businesses in the quiet town.

The idea of creating the mural is actually credited to Hedt's father, who was visiting his son one day in 2015: "He was here and we were driving into town and he saw the grain elevator. He said, 'Hey, why don't you call Guido about painting a mural on that.' Right away I thought it was a great idea," Aussie Dave recalled.

In this case, Guido is the internationally renowned photographer and visual artist Guido Van Helten, who had painted a highly acclaimed mural on the side of a set of grain silos in Brim, Australia, not far from Hedt's home town of Dimboola.

"That mural had such a positive impact on the community, I knew it would get the same kind of response here and create the



The town known as The Carousel City, is home to several murals seen in public spaces.

Faulkton Mural Fast Facts

- The mural stands 110 feet high
- The project took seven weeks to complete
- Artist Guido Van Helton has done similar projects all around the world
- Local residents donated their time and labor to prepare the grain elevator for painting

same kind of excitement, for the town,” Hedt said.

He got in touch with the artist, who didn’t hesitate to take on the project. Van Helten visited Faulkton several times conducting preliminary work before taking his brushes in hand. As he’d done with previous similar projects, Van Helten spent time getting involved in community events and getting to know the residents of The Carousel City. He was hosted by a local family and tried to capture the ambiance of the town to inspire the visual and thematic elements of his work.

He received tremendous support from the community as folks chipped in to help the project financially and also contributed some “sweat equity” by scraping, cleaning and pressure-washing the elevator’s concrete surface in preparation for Van Helten’s artistic touch.

Grant funding was received from the South Dakota Arts Council and other non-profit groups, while the balance of the funds were raised privately through sponsorships and contributions from local businesses. Hedt is quick to point out no taxpayer money was used. For its part, Agtegra was quickly sold on the idea as plans were to eventually take the elevator out of service and move the operation to another site east of town.

As for what would ultimately appear on the side of the elevator, the residents were lending their support without knowing how the project would actually turn out. They figured they could always paint over it if they felt the mural’s theme wasn’t congruent with the town’s self-image.



FAULKTON MURAL

Artist Guido Van Helton spent several weeks in Faulkton getting to know the local residents and getting a sense of the town’s spirit before he started painting.

“Guido kind of kept that a secret,” Hedt said. “He wanted it to be a surprise, but knew from the other things he’d done that it would be spectacular and something that we would all be proud of. He always paints what he feels is reflective of the town and the people.”

After the surface was prepared, it took several weeks for Van Helten to complete the painting while working suspended beside the large concrete canvas. The painting was unveiled on Sept. 1, 2018. Hedt said the result of the project has brought more positive results than anyone in the town could have anticipated.

“In terms of the financial impact, it’s just unbelievable the traffic we get through the town,” he said. “We had a woman from Washington state fly all the way here just to see it.”

Dawn Melius is owner of a local insurance agency and has been involved in the project since the beginning. She said the mural has brought a unique and welcomed vibrancy to the community.

“It’s such a great work of art, and people can interpret it however they want. That’s part of the fun of it and the attraction of it. It’s such an amazing project and it has brought a lot of interest to the town. Of course, once people are drawn here by the mural and they stop and spend some time around town, they like what they see and they have a real positive experience.”

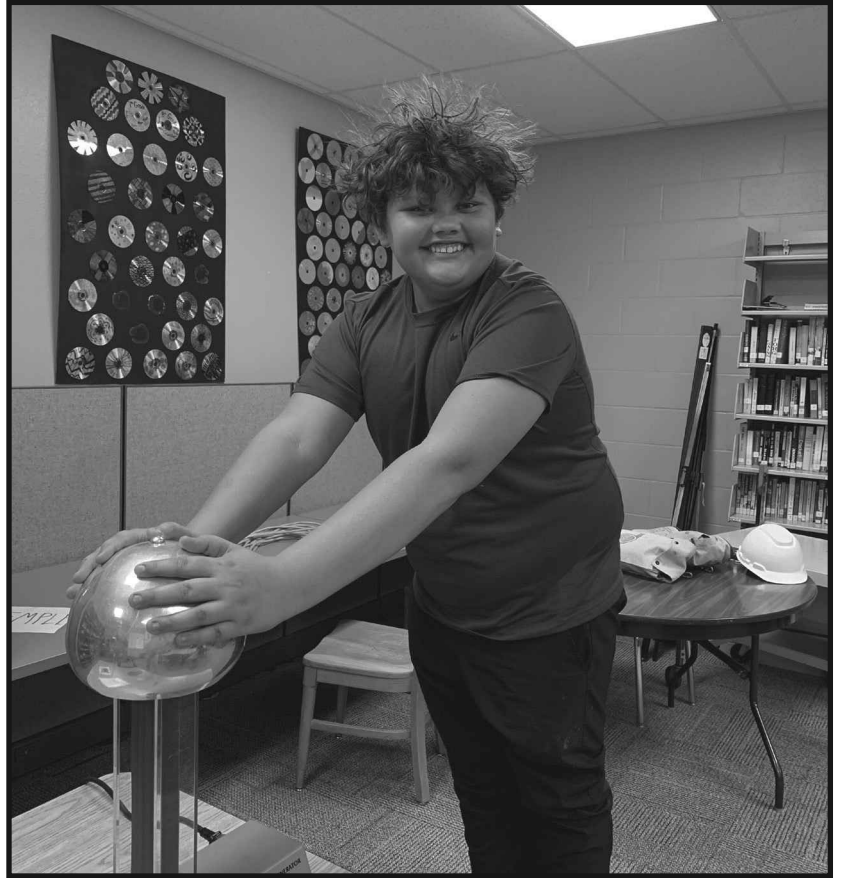
Find an aerial video of the mural by visiting the Cooperative Connections Plus YouTube channel at <https://youtu.be/n2gEDAltHMk>. Find out more about Van Helten at www.guidovanhelten.com.

Co-ops In the Classroom

Jennifer Gross, East River's Communication Coordinator and Jay Spaans, Manager of Douglas Electric recently visited the 5th & 6th grade students at Armour, Netherland Reformed and Dakota Christian Schools to present Co-ops in the Classroom. This program is geared to teach children the importance of respecting electricity. Co-ops in the Classroom offers a hands-on approach that teaches ways to conserve energy, recognizes where electricity comes from, and evaluates electrical usage through classroom instruction and demonstrations. By instilling these concepts in children from an early age, they will be better prepared to make wise energy decisions now and be conscientious consumers of energy in the future.

A variety of hands-on demonstrations engages the students. A Van de Graaff generator demonstrated the movement of electrons with some hair-raising results. Another device that invokes a lot of excitement is the Pedal Power bicycle generator. Students are asked to become power plants as they provide the energy that produces electricity for lights and small household devices. Some of the students also tried on the gear that the Lineman wear.

Jennifer Gross, East River's Communication Coordinator, did a great job of teaching the kids about electricity.





Armour Students



Netherland Reformed Students



Dakota Christian Students

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Troy Ziebart, line foreman at Douglas Electric in Armour, loads up his vehicle before hitting the road to perform maintenance work on the co-op's system. Photo by Billy Gibson.

On the Road Again

Cooperative crews log millions of safe miles each year

Billy Gibson

billy.gibson@sdrea.coop

Some people follow their instincts to run away from emergency situations, others are obligated to steer towards them.

South Dakota's electric cooperative linemen often find themselves headed toward the site of potentially hazardous predicaments, whether it's simply answering an emergency outage call or engaging in rebuilding many miles of poles and lines in the most austere conditions in the aftermath of a major storm.

In any event, the first task for linemen is to arrive at the scene and make the return trip to co-op headquarters with themselves and their vehicles all in one piece. Many cooperative consumers are unaware of the fact that co-op linemen in South Dakota collectively log more than 8 million miles on the road each year taking care of maintenance projects, installing equipment, performing public service work, answering outage calls or other daily duties.

That figure includes those instances when linemen are called upon to drive long

distances across state lines to assist other fellow cooperatives restore power after a natural disaster, which raises the potential risk for accidents.

Compared to the amount of time and number of miles they travel on a routine basis, cooperative linemen have an impressive track record of operating their vehicles without incident and without harm to either themselves or the motoring public.

According to Mark Patterson, manager of loss control services at the South Dakota Rural Electric Association (SDREA) in Pierre, safe operating practices do much more than just save lives and property; they also keep insurance premiums down and help control the cost of fleet maintenance.

"Safety is such an important aspect of what we do as electric cooperatives, and it takes on many dimensions," Patterson said. "We often think of safety as adopting prudent practices when it comes to working in close proximity to different equipment such as power lines, transformers and substations. But it also includes other aspects such as safety in the workplace,

emergency preparedness, handling hazardous materials and knowing how important it is to be safe out on the road every time we leave the back shop and pull out of the gate."

As with many aspects of their operations, South Dakota's electric cooperatives are using the power of computer software and advanced technology to promote safety on the road. Many co-ops use software programs such as NexTraq, which processes and provides a wealth of information to help maintenance managers keep records on vehicle tracking and telemetry, fuel use and efficiency, service scheduling, driver performance, job completion and more.

These systems deliver real-time data not only on vehicle speed, heading, location, etc., but they also indicate where each vehicle is positioned at any given moment within the service territory so that supervisors can more effectively and efficiently coordinate movements of various crews throughout the system and throughout the work day.

"Linemen from the old days would be amazed at the advanced technology we



Cooperative linemen log thousands of hours on the road but sometimes find themselves having to take their vehicles off the paved surfaces. Aerial photography by Billy Gibson.

now have at our disposal,” Patterson said. “And it’s not just things like hydraulics and buckets and all the equipment we use today, but also the computer-based tools we have to help us do our jobs better. It all adds up to making the best use of the members’ resources and ultimately making sure the electricity we deliver is as affordable as possible. Members can count on the fact that cooperatives are trusted stewards of their resources and we’re doing everything we can to keep costs low.”

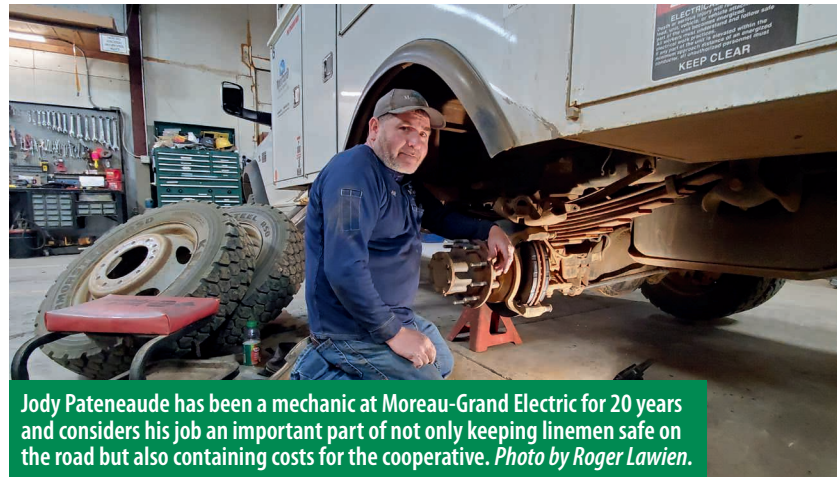
One of those mechanics who remembers the “old days” is Jody Pateneau, who has kept watch over the vehicle fleet at Moreau-Grand Electric for the past 20 years. Pateneau, who notes that linemen are required to carry a Commercial Driver’s License (CDL) and that he has one himself, said fleet maintenance was more of an art in the past.

“We kept records as well as we could, but we would just kind of know when parts or brakes or oil needed to be changed

and what needed to be done,” he said. “But with the new technology, we know what needs to be taken care of a long time before the guys driving the vehicle know. Our job is to make sure there are no break-downs when our guys get out there and that no one is in danger, and the computer helps us accomplish that goal.”

Patterson pointed out that the public also plays a role in making sure cooperative linemen and their vehicles stay accident-free. He said every year linemen and other utility workers across the country are severely injured or killed either in their vehicles or in their work sites.

“We should all be more aware of emergency workers who perform their jobs along roadsides or other places where traffic is present,” Patterson said. “We always remind the public to ‘slow down and move over’ when they see a work area or utility vehicle nearby. It’s not only good, sound advice, but it’s also the law in the state of South Dakota.”



Jody Pateneau has been a mechanic at Moreau-Grand Electric for 20 years and considers his job an important part of not only keeping linemen safe on the road but also containing costs for the cooperative. Photo by Roger Lawien.

Visit Co-op Connections Plus

Take a moment to visit our new online companion to *Cooperative Connections*. Co-op Connections Plus is a YouTube channel that features a more in-depth treatment of stories appearing in this publication as well as other subjects of interest to rural South Dakotans.

Search for “Co-op Connections Plus” and you’ll find videos on human trafficking, support programs for veterans, grain bin safety, the Co-ops Vote campaign and more. Be sure to “like” and “subscribe.”





Quin and Tom Brunner (foreground, center) are strong supporters of home schooling. They home schooled each of their seven children. Brunner is a former state legislator who served as an advocate for alternative education options for South Dakota families.

Home Schooling

Learning from Home Provides Flexibility for Families

Billy Gibson

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If home schooling were a common stock and you jumped into the market 10 years ago, you'd be on Easy Street right now.

Statistics show that since 2010, the number of families home schooling their children in South Dakota has increased 125 percent. And with the impact of the coronavirus pandemic, the numbers continue to climb steadily. According to state records, there were 5,109 home schoolers in 2019. Last year that number increased 27 percent to 6,698.

Once seen as somewhat of a fringe movement, home schooling is getting a fresh look from families all across the country.

And that's just fine with Tom Brunner, a board member at Butte Electric Cooperative in Newell and a member of the state Legislature for 14 years. Brunner and his wife, Quin, have taught each of their seven children from home. Today those children are grown up and pursuing a variety of career tracks, an occupation list that includes earth science, welding, legal counseling, music instruction and more.

While Brunner no longer serves in the statehouse, he recalls being a vocal advocate for alternative education options for South Dakota families.

"I was grateful to receive a lot of cooperation from my fellow lawmakers and people at the Department of Education because I think everyone understood that the department is responsible for overseeing the education of all of the students in our state, not just those attending public schools," he said.

Looking back on his legislative career, Brunner said he is proud of the work he did to make sure parents and families had choices, but that those families also needed to be held accountable for adhering to certain guidelines. For example, parents must comply with state law by submitting a Notification for Public School Exemption Certificate to the local superintendent each year.

While home school instructors aren't required to attain certification, they cannot instruct more than 22 students and must conduct nationally standardized testing in grades four, eight and 11. Local officials are allowed to monitor those tests while the state is entitled to inspect the records of alternative education programs if there is probable cause of non-compliance.

It's also the local district's responsibility to track the student's progress using the Student Information Management System (Infinite Campus System) to make sure certain educational



How to Begin Home Schooling in South Dakota

To home school in South Dakota, parents must complete the following steps:

- Every year, complete and file a notification for Public School Exemption.
- Return the completed exemption form to the public school district office where you reside.
- Choose the best home school curriculum that includes required subjects of language arts and math.
- Participate in standardized tests in grades 4, 8 and 11.
- Keep good records.
- Have fun learning together!

standards are being met and students aren't "slipping through the cracks."

"I've always felt families have the right to do what's best for the education of their children, but as a state we also have a duty to make sure our children are being taught what they need to know to be successful in life," Brunner said. "There's a fear that kids who aren't in public schools might be used as laborers or just sitting around the house and not being supervised. I've never seen a case where that fear is a reality."

The good news for home school parents and those searching for options is that in addition to the state DOE, there are many resources available. South Dakota is home to roughly 15 associations, alliances, cooperatives and other groups created to help families achieve their educational goals.

There is also the Home School Legal Defense Association based in Purcellville, Va., a non-profit organization whose mission is to "defend and advance the constitutional right of parents to direct

the upbringing and education of their children and to protect family freedoms."

Like many aspects of society, home schooling was given a second blush after the pandemic struck. Community schools were among the first public gathering places to be shut down once the virus began spreading across the country. When it became clear the virus wouldn't be disappearing soon, parents became accustomed to juggling the responsibilities of work while dealing with their children receiving instruction remotely.

While some parents struggled with the new reality, others gave consideration to adopting the home school platform on a permanent basis. Observers with the U.S. DOE predict the increased interest in home schooling will be sustained long after the pandemic has passed. The National Federation of Children conducted a poll that indicated 40 percent of U.S. families are more likely to home school or enroll their children in a virtual school after the pandemic.

Before the pandemic, the reason most

parents gave for choosing home schooling for their children was a "concern about the school environment, such as safety, drugs, or negative peer pressure." Other top reasons were a desire to provide more moral and religious instruction, a dissatisfaction with public school instruction and the ability to take a "non-traditional" approach to education.

Brunner said he has explored and discussed many different sides of the issue and is fully aware that when it comes to matters of public policy, public funding and personal choice, people can have strong feelings.

"In our state, we place a high value on our rights and freedoms," he said. "I've been in many meetings with those who have very strong opinions, but we've always had very civil discussions. And while our opinions might differ, there's always been a clear understanding that we all want the same outcome: making sure all of our children get the education and preparation they need to live a fulfilling life and have an opportunity to raise a family of their own."

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

February 18-25

Twelfth Annual Black Hills Film Festival, Virtual
605-574-9454

February 20

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

February 20-27

SD State High School Wrestling Tournament, Rushmore Plaza Civic Center Barnett Arena, Rapid City, SD

February 25

Daniel Tiger's Neighborhood Live: Neighbor Day, Washington Pavilion, Sioux Falls, SD
605-367-6000

February 27

Nemo 500 Outhouse Races Nemo Guest Ranch, Nemo, SD
605-578-2708

March 5-6

SD High School State Debate & IE Tournament, Central High School, Aberdeen, SD

March 5-7

BH Rapid's President's Cup 2021, Rushmore Plaza Civic Center Rushmore Hall, Rapid City, SD 605-394-4115

March 11-14

Team 8-Ball Tournament, Rushmore Plaza Civic Center Rushmore Hall, Rapid City, SD 605-394-4115

March 12-13

St. Patrick's Day Weekend, Main Street, Deadwood, SD
605-578-1976



St. Patrick's Day Weekend, Mar. 12-13, 2021

March 13

28 Below Fatbike Race, Ride and Tour, Spearfish Canyon Lodge, Lead, SD
605-641-4963

March 13

St. Patrick's Day Celebration, Knights of Columbus Hall, Watertown, SD
605-886-5814

March 13-14

Philip Area Annual 2021 Gun Show, American Legion Hall, Philip, SD
605-859-2280

March 19-20

Sioux Empire Arts & Crafts Show, W.H. Lyon Fairgrounds Expo Building, Sioux Falls, SD
605-332-6000

March 23-24

Shen Yun, Rushmore Plaza Civic Center Fine Arts Theatre, Rapid City, SD
605-394-4115

March 25

A Lakota View of the Dead Hills, Homestake Adams Research and Cultural Center, Deadwood, SD
605-722-4800

March 27

SD State High School All-State Band Concert, Mitchell Fine Arts Center, Mitchell, SD

April 8

The Wildest Banquet Auction in the Midwest, Sioux Falls Arena/Virtual, Sioux Falls, SD
605-339-1203

April 9-10

Forks, Corks and Kegs Food, Wine and Beer Festival, Main Street, Deadwood, SD
605-578-1876

April 9-18

Four Weddings & An Elvis, Mitchell Area Community Theatre, Mitchell, SD
605-996-9137

April 17

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

April 23-24

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

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.