

# Cooperative Connections



**A Fort Meade  
History**

Page 8

**UL®:  
A Mark of  
Safety**

Page 12

## Special meeting preview

# Highlights of 2019



**Walker Witt**

CEO and General Manager  
wwitt@bhec.coop

With your co-op's annual meeting canceled and a special meeting to celebrate the cooperative's 75 years of service scheduled in September, Board President Alan Bishop and I want to bring you up to date on your co-op's accomplishments in 2019.

2019 was a good year for your co-op. A cold winter resulted in increased heat sales and strong margins. A wet summer slowed construction but enabled increased rights-of-way inspection and tree trimming and cutting. Overall, 2019 was productive, safe, and financially sound.

Increased margins in 2019 allowed your board to return two million dollars in December to present and former members and allocate over two million for future return.

In November 2019, your board of directors took action to refinance over \$11 million with the National Rural Utilities Cooperative Finance Corporation. CFC is a nonprofit finance cooperative that was created and is owned by America's electric cooperative network. This action by your board will save your co-op over \$1 million in interest.

Total 2019 kilowatt hour sales were up by approximately five million kilowatt-hours. Another cold winter contributed to an almost three million kilowatt-hour increase in heat sales over 2018, which was also a cold winter, and approximately a seven million kilowatt-hours increase in heat sales over 2017. Overall, total sales increased three percent in 2019.

Basin Electric Power Cooperative, our wholesale power supplier, had a sound year financially and avoided a rate increase. Fifty-three percent of your co-op's expenses is our wholesale power bill. Although expenses for wages, insurance, taxes, and material continue to increase, your co-op did not have a rate increase in 2019 and will not have a rate increase in 2020.

The construction of the new Pringle Substation was completed in August of 2019. This substation replaced the oldest substation on our system, which was built in 1946. The construction and materials for this substation closed out at \$1.4 million, which was more than \$300,000 under budget.

In 2019, 3,900 distribution poles were inspected at a cost of just over \$60,000. Of those 3,900 inspected poles, one was found to be a priority and was replaced immediately, and 82 poles were identified as having strength loss and will be replaced within the year.

There were two storms in 2019 that resulted in significant outages for our members. Last May, portions of our service territory saw up to 20 inches of heavy, wet snow and ice buildup on the lines. There were 13 broken poles and numerous downed lines. In November, a storm packing extreme winds and freezing rain resulted in damage to the transmission lines in the Rapid City area.

2019 is the first year in a decade that cooperative lines were not involved in some way with a fire. One reason is that our rights-of-way inspection and maintenance programs are working. In 2019, the percent of time that the average Black Hills Electric Cooperative service was on was 99.9982%!

Alan and I look forward to further updating you on your cooperative at the special meeting in September. Please stay safe and healthy.

**2019 was a good year  
for your co-op.**

# Black Hills Electric Cooperative Connections

(ISSN No. 1531-104X)

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## Get outage notifications right to your phone

Signing up for SmartHub® has its advantages. Not only can you pay your bill, see previous months' bills, and track your energy use, you will also get notices of planned outages that affect you.

SmartHub is an application that you can download to your phone, tablet or other mobile devices.

Sign up is simple; go to your app store and download SmartHub to your device. You may also go to those sites directly from our webpage at [www.bhec.coop](http://www.bhec.coop).

Go to Black Hills Electric's webpage and click on "New user? Register to use SmartHub!" found in the "Access My Account" box on the right side of the page. You will enter your account number, last name and e-mail address. You will also need your last bill amount.

Follow the instructions to set up a password, and you are ready to begin using SmartHub to better manage your

electric bill and energy use.

When we have a planned outage that will affect you, we will send you a notice prior to the outage so you may plan for being without power.

Most planned outages are short in duration; however, it depends on the work that is needed to be done. Our line crews will work as fast as safely possible to restore power quickly.

If you need assistance setting up SmartHub, please call the office at 1-800-742-0085 or 605-673-4461.

## Green wins Rushmore Electric Scholarship

Michael Green, a son of Christopher and Ronda Green, of rural Rapid City, has been chosen as the winner of Rushmore Electric Power Cooperative's \$500 scholarship.



Michael Green

Green graduated from Rapid Central High School this spring and plans to attend South Dakota School of Mines and Technology in Rapid City this fall.

He earned 37 college credits at the School of Mines during his high school years.

Green is a year round competitive swimmer, having won two Midwest Regional Championships, 13 South Dakota state championships and five Wyoming championships.

He was ranked the top of his senior class of 339 students at Rapid Central High School.

Rushmore Electric Power Cooperative is Black Hills Electric's generation and transmission cooperative. They provide power to eight western South Dakota distribution cooperatives.

## Join us for a celebration

A lot can happen in 75 years. In 1945, people in the Black Hills and surrounding plains were reading by kerosene lights, milking cows by hand and cooking on wood-burning stoves.

Today, all the modern conveniences are available for everyone, thanks to area people who formed this electric cooperative 75 years ago.

Please join us for a celebration of 75 years of service at a special member meeting on Thursday, September 24, at the Ramkota Convention Center in Rapid City.

We will have a great meal, lots of prizes, a director election and a short history of the cooperative. Watch for details in upcoming newsletters and on-line at [www.bhec.coop](http://www.bhec.coop).

## Summer Electrical Safety Tips

The summer is a season almost everyone looks forward to – after all, who doesn't love the warm temperatures that summer brings? Hanging by the pool, summer cookouts, and barbecues bring family and friends together. However, safety should still be your priority. If you don't want to ruin your summer fun due to the lack of electrical safety in your home, we've put together a list of summer electrical safety tips to follow:

- **Keep electronics away from the water** – If you've got an outdoor pool, then you might be thinking about throwing a little get together with friends and family – a pool party if you will. However, think twice about putting your new speakers or mp3 player right by the poolside. All electronics should be kept at least 10 feet away from the pool or any other water source. It doesn't matter how careful you are, accidents can and do happen.
- **Use outdoor-rated extension cords** – If you're going to set up your mp3 player or smartphone outside to play some music while you grill out, make sure that you are using the right extension cord. What is the right extension cord? One that is rated for outdoor use. There's a good chance it will be exposed to moisture outside – and an outdoor-rated extension cord will be able to handle small exposure to water.
- **Inspect your extension cords for damage** – Before using an extension cord, inspect it carefully for damage. The last thing you should do is use a damaged cord as it presents a safety risk – especially if you plan on using it outdoors. Any cracked extension cords or exposed wires should not be used outdoors.
- **Install GFCIs** – A GFCI (Ground Fault Circuit Interrupter) is a device that can help improve the safety of your outlets. Outlets that are near water sources, such as outdoor outlets or bathroom outlets, should have GFCIs installed. A GFCI will shut off the power to the outlet if the circuit is compromised, such as if it gets exposed to water, a spilled drink, etc. This will help to improve the security of your electrical appliances as well as the safety of those in your home.
- **Trim your tree branches** – If the branches on your property are growing a little too close to any power lines, have them trimmed to prevent any downed power lines during high winds or thunderstorms.
- **Don't fly kites or drones near power lines** – If you have power lines that are located relatively close to your home, instruct your children (if you have any) not to fly their kites or model drones in this area. These types of airborne toys should be reserved for flight in wide open spaces, like the park.
- **Know where your breaker box is** – If there's an electrical emergency in your home, then you'll need to know where the breaker box is so that you can shut off the power in a hurry.

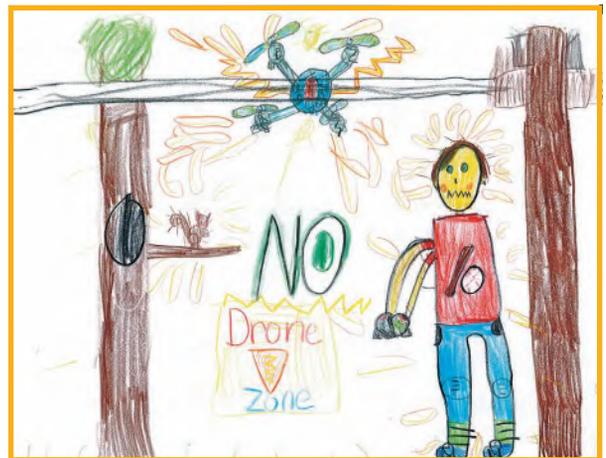
Source: [www.jaffeelectric.com](http://www.jaffeelectric.com)

## Four common culprits of electrical fires

There are 24,000 electrical fires per year across the country. To reduce your risk for damage, check the following areas of your home:

- **Electrical outlets:** Faulty outlets are a leading cause of home fires. As outlets age, so do the wires behind them. Any loose, damaged or warm-to-the-touch outlets should be repaired or replaced.
- **Electrical wiring:** Outdated wiring is another common cause of electrical fires. Frequently tripped breakers, flickering lights and burning smells are warning signs. If your home is more than 20 years old, it may not be able to handle today's increased power load. If you suspect your home's wiring is outdated, contact a qualified electrician.
- **Overloaded cords and outlets:** Extension cords are not permanent solutions. If your big-screen TV, home theater system and other electronics are plugged into extension cords, it's time to have additional outlets installed.
- **Old appliances:** Older appliances are more likely to have loose or damaged wiring, which means they're more likely to catch fire. Check older appliances for damage and determine if it's time to upgrade or replace. Also check to ensure you're using appliance-grade outlets.

## KIDS CORNER SAFETY POSTER



"No drone zone."

Alli Bares, 9 years old

Alli is the daughter of Tony and Angie Bares, Sioux Falls, S.D. They are members of Sioux Valley Energy, Colman, S.D.

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.

# Delectable Desserts

## Aloha Cake

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| 1 pkg. (2-layer size) yellow cake mix                                 | instant pudding mix                                |
| 4 tsp. McCormick® Coconut Extract with Other Natural Flavors, divided | 1 (20 oz.) can crushed pineapple, drained          |
| 1 pkg. (4-serving size) vanilla                                       | 1 (8 oz.) container frozen whipped topping, thawed |

Prepare cake mix as directed on package, stirring in 3 tsp. of the coconut flavor. Pour into greased and floured 13x9-inch baking pan. Bake at 350°F. for 30 minutes or until toothpick inserted in center comes out clean. Cool completely in pan. Prepare pudding mix as directed on package, stirring in remaining 1 tsp. coconut flavor. Spread pineapple and pudding over cake. Frost with whipped topping. Refrigerate 1 hour or until ready to serve. Makes 24 servings.

*Nutritional Information Per Serving: Calories 188, Total Fat 8g, Cholesterol 28mg, Sodium 221mg, Carbohydrates 27g, Fiber 0g, Protein 2g*

**Pictured, Cooperative Connections**

## Buster Bar Dessert

- |                                     |                                      |
|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 1/2 cup butter                      | 1/2 gallon vanilla ice cream         |
| 2/3 cup semi-sweet chocolate chips  | 1-1/2 cups Spanish peanuts, optional |
| 2 cups powdered sugar               | <b>Crust:</b>                        |
| 1-1/2 cups evaporated milk, divided | 1 lb. Oreo cookies                   |
| 1 tsp. vanilla                      | 1/4 cup melted butter                |

Melt butter in heavy saucepan. Add chocolate chips, stirring constantly. Put powdered sugar in mixing bowl; add 1/2 cup evaporated milk, stirring well. Add remaining evaporated milk. Pour mixture into melted butter and chocolate chips, stirring constantly. Bring to a boil, turn heat to medium and boil 8 minutes, stirring often. Remove from heat; add 1 vanilla. Cool completely. **For crust:** Crush Oreo cookies; add butter, mixing well. Press into a 9x13-inch pan. Put pan into freezer. When frozen, quickly spread ice cream over cookie crust. Sprinkle peanuts over crust, if desired, before adding ice cream. Freeze for at least 2 hours. When ice cream layer is completely frozen, quickly pour cooled chocolate layer on top; return to freezer. Can be prepared several days ahead of time.

**Betty Leuthold, Magnolia, MN**

## Summer Peach Dessert

- |                                    |                        |
|------------------------------------|------------------------|
| 14 graham crackers, finely crushed | 24 large marshmallows  |
| 1/2 cup sugar                      | 1/2 cup milk           |
| 1/4 cup melted butter              | 2 cups whipped topping |
|                                    | 3 cups chopped peaches |

Mix graham cracker crumbs, sugar and butter until well blended; reserving a few crumbs for top. Press mixture into a 9x9-inch pan. Heat marshmallows and milk until melted; cool. Fold in whipped topping and peaches. Spread over crust, sprinkling reserved crumbs over all. Chill.

**Elaine Rowett, Sturgis, SD**

## Raspberry Delight

- |                                       |  |
|---------------------------------------|--|
| 2-1/4 cups flour                      | 1/4 tsp. salt                                  |
| 2 T. sugar                            | 2 cups Cool Whip                               |
| 3/4 cup butter, softened              | Topping:                                       |
| <b>Filling:</b>                       | 1 (6 oz.) pkg. raspberry gelatin               |
| 1 (8 oz.) pkg. cream cheese, softened | 2 cups boiling water                           |
| 1 cup powdered sugar                  | 2 (10 oz.) pkgs. sweetened, frozen raspberries |
| 1 tsp. vanilla                        |  |

In a bowl, combine flour and sugar; blend in butter with wooden spoon until smooth. Press into an ungreased 9x13-inch pan. Bake at 300°F. for 20 to 25 minutes or until set (crust will not brown). Cool. In a mixing bowl, beat cream cheese, powdered sugar, vanilla and salt until smooth. Fold in Cool Whip. Spread over crust. For topping, dissolve gelatin in boiling water; stir in raspberries. Chill for 20 minutes or until mixture begins to thicken. Spoon over filling. Refrigerate until set. Cut into squares; garnish with additional Cool Whip, if desired. Makes 12 to 16 servings.

**Becki Hauser, Tripp, SD**

Please send your favorite vegetarian, garden produce and pasta 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 2020. All entries must include your name, mailing address, telephone number and cooperative name.

# Five Surprising Energy Hogs



Pat Keegan

Collaborative Efficiency

**You might have a hidden energy hog causing your higher bills.**

This column was co-written by Pat Keegan and Brad Thiessen of Collaborative Efficiency. For more information on surprise energy hogs, please visit: [www.collaborativeefficiency.com/energytips](http://www.collaborativeefficiency.com/energytips).

## SOURCES

- <https://www.wapa.gov/EnergyServices/Documents/HotTubs.pdf>
- <https://www.consumeraffairs.com/homeowners/energy-efficient-hot-tubs.html>
- <https://www.consumerreports.org/refrigerators/second-refrigerator-is-running-up-your-utility-bill/>
- [https://energyusecalculator.com/electricity\\_freezer.htm](https://energyusecalculator.com/electricity_freezer.htm)

**Dear Pat and Brad:** Our family's been trying to reduce our expenses. The other day my sister-in-law and I compared our electric bills. I was surprised to find out her energy costs were significantly lower than mine, even though our homes are similar in size and built about the same time by the same builder. What could be causing my bill to be so much higher? – Melissa

**Dear Melissa:** You have a lot of company in these trying times as you search for ways to cut costs and your electricity use might provide some opportunities. With so many other pieces of your home's energy puzzle the same between the two homes, you might have a hidden energy hog causing your higher bills. Here are some likely culprits to investigate.

## Hog 1: Old fridge/freezer in garage

That second fridge or freezer may be costing you more than you think. If it's built before 1990, it's probably using two or more times as much energy than a new ENERGY STAR®-rated unit. If it's located in the garage, it may run constantly in the summer, which could lead to some large electric bills.

## Hog 2: Heating an uninsulated area

Heating your workshop or garage in winter can be expensive. We remember discovering, during an energy audit, that the owner heated a shed to keep half-empty buckets of paint from freezing. He was paying more to keep his paint warm than the paint was worth. Pet owners have been known to heat an uninsulated garage to keep pets warm, not realizing that might be costing them more than heating the house. If you really want to heat garages or sheds, they need to be well insulated and heated efficiently, perhaps with a ductless mini-split system.

It's possible to heat your shop or garage and not even know it. In another audit we found a heat register, hidden from view, that was supplying the attached garage. The owner was surprised that, for decades, he had been paying to heat the garage.

An insulated area that many people routinely heat is the vehicle parked outside their home. Engine block heaters can drive up your electric bill. You'll save money if you only use them when it's extremely cold and then only for a few hours before you start the vehicle.

## Hog 3: A hot tub

The average operating cost of a hot tub is \$250 per year. That amount may be higher if your hot tub is older, if it isn't an energy-efficient model or if you live in a colder climate. A smaller hot tub with better insulation, a cover and a pump that runs on a lower voltage will use less energy than other models. In the end, getting a 'good deal' on a used hot tub may cost more money in energy bills in the long run.

## Hog 4: A swimming pool

If you have a swimming pool, consider installing a more efficient, smaller pump and cutting down how often it runs. You can also look at installing a larger filter and maximizing the flow of water through the pipes by making them larger and reducing how sharply the corners turn. These measures might cut your electric use for the pool pump by as much as 75 percent. Consult a pool installation specialist to find the most efficient setup that will still keep your pool clean.

## Hog 5: Pumps

If you live on a acreage or on a farm, you probably have several pumps, including irrigation, well, septic and sump, and maybe a few we haven't thought of. If you're like most of us, you use those pumps until they break down. Consider replacing the oldest and most-used pumps over time with efficient new ones that are sized correctly for their task. And make sure you're eliminating leaks in the water lines, which make your pumps work harder and longer.

If one of these five energy hogs doesn't explain the difference in energy use between your home and your sister-in-law's, there are many other possibilities. An energy audit should give you the answers you seek.

## Alexa! Can you help me reduce my power bill?

Before this year's virus protection measures turned business meetings and family gatherings into smart-phone conference calls and video conferences, your electric appliances jumped on the bandwagon of internet-connected energy.

If that makes your gadgets and gizmos sound almost human, well, in some ways that's exactly what's happening. Talking to a computer isn't just for Captain Kirk on Star Trek anymore – surveys show about one in four American adults owns a smart speaker like the Amazon Echo, Google Home or Apple HomePod. Now we can just ask Alexa or Siri to tell us the weather or how to save money on our electric bill.

Appliances you control from your phone aren't just luxury items anymore, says Brian Sloboda, director of consumer solutions with the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association.

"Two years ago, when you would buy a smart appliance, you were really buying a high-end product. Now they're in the middle," he says. "More and more appliances are smart, and they have come down in price. It's everything from light bulbs you screw into your table lamps, to your microwave, to your washing machine, to your thermostat that you can control through a voice assistant or apps on the phone."

Sloboda says all those connected devices can not only make you more energy efficient, but can help you take advantage of your electric service in ways you never even thought of. But if your machines are acting more like people, you'll also want to take precautions to protect your security and privacy – smart speakers are on and listening in all the time, after all. Sloboda

advises that you might want to get in the habit of reading the fine print that comes with instructions and app downloads, so you know how your personal information is being used.

Sloboda recently brought one of those humanoids into his home.



"My washing machine sends me an email every month telling me how much electricity it has used," he says. "It gives me tips on how to save energy. It suggests I could wash the clothes in cold water. It will gently tell you that rather than washing a small load, it's more efficient to let the clothes accumulate."

If that sounds creepy, smart speaker manufacturers understand. They try to encourage customers to get more familiar with their devices. They want you to ask your smart speaker to tell a joke or play music. Sloboda says studies show owners like making personalized connections.

While apps and speakers can help you use energy more efficiently, Sloboda says smart thermostats offer some of the biggest potential energy savings. High-tech thermostats are getting easier to use and more innovative. These days, they not only can change temperatures set for daytime or nighttime, but can track your phone as you leave the house or move from room to room, making adjustments based on your lifestyle.

## Reduce Electrical Fire Hazards

There are about 24,000 electrical fires per year in the U.S., according to the U.S. Fire Administration.

Although most electrical fires start in the bedroom, the most fatal fires start in the living room, family room and den. Check the following areas of your home to ensure your home's electrical safety is up to par.

- **Electrical outlets:** Faulty electrical outlets are a leading cause of home fires. As outlets age, so do the wires behind them that you can't see. Any loose, damaged or warm-to-the-touch outlets should be repaired or replaced.
- **Electrical wiring:** Outdated wiring is another common cause of electrical fires. Frequently tripped breakers, flickering lights and burning smells are clear warning signs. If your home is more than 20 years old, it may not be able to handle today's increased power load. If you suspect your home's wiring is outdated, leave this one to the pros and contact a qualified electrician.
- **Overloaded cords and outlets:** Extension cords are not permanent solutions. If your big-screen TV, home theater system and other electronics are plugged into extension cords, it's time to call an electrician and install additional outlets.
- **Old appliances:** Older appliances are more likely to have loose or damaged wiring, which means they're more likely to catch fire. Check older appliances for damage and determine if it's time to upgrade or replace. Also check to ensure you're using appliance-grade outlets. A qualified electrician can help with installation.
- **Light fixtures:** Light fixtures, lamps and light bulbs are other common culprits behind electrical fires. Installing a bulb with a wattage too high for a lamp or light fixture is a leading cause of electrical fires. Always check the maximum recommended bulb wattage on any lighting fixture or lamp and never go over the recommendation.

Keep flammable materials like cloth and paper away from light fixtures. The material can heat up and ignite, causing a fire. Faulty lamps and light fixtures also can cause fires.



The Old Fort Meade Museum details the history of Fort Meade, its residents, life as a cavalry officer and military history throughout the 66-year history of the fort.

# FORT MEADE

## Historic Outpost Has Varied Past

Susan Smith

Contributing Writer

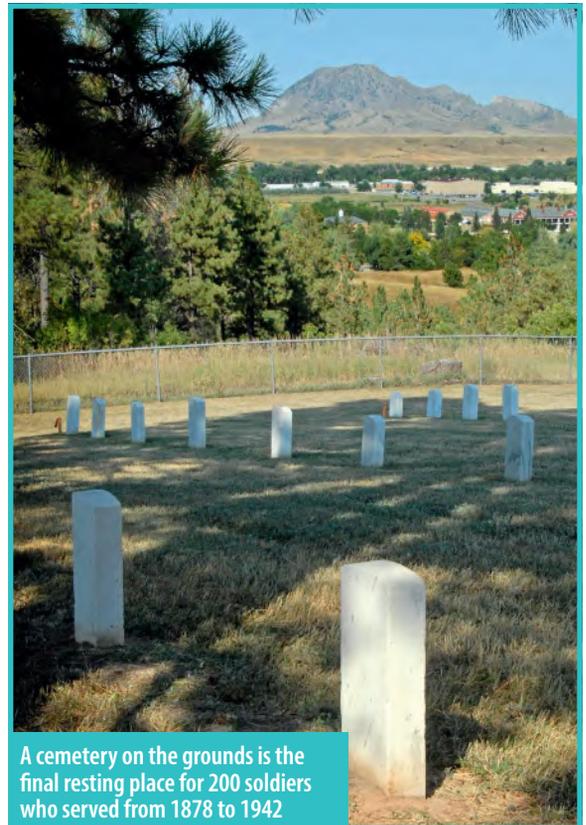
Named for Civil War Gen. George Meade, Fort Meade was built as a peacekeeping military outpost in 1878, two years after the infamous Battle of the Little Bighorn.

The fort provided an early customer base to the town of Sturgis, named for 7th Cavalry commander Col. Samuel Sturgis. According to fortmeademuseum.org, General Phil Sheridan, a Civil War Cavalry leader, selected the location after riding around the then-envisioned mile-square grounds and pointing to the location of future buildings with his saber.

“The fort was established to provide protection for the stage lines and freight routes that came in here as well as the miners and the settlers that came into the area for the many gold locations in the Black Hills and the Deadwood area,” said Robert Kusser, current president of the Fort Meade Museum Board.

Many of the buildings on the grounds of Fort Meade are from the 1900s. One building remains from 1878 and stables that were there from the beginning were rebuilt from wood to stone. Kusser said cannon wheels that are rimmed in steel but have wooden spokes were refurbished and ready for the coming tourist season. Artist Len McCann created figurines of soldiers that are on display in the museum. An exhibit of the U.S. Constitution is also on display. Unfortunately, COVID-19 sidelined many plans for the 2020 season, Kusser said. The museum will be opening for the summer 2020 as soon as possible.

Unlike most forts of the era, where hardly anything of significance remains, Fort Meade is still involved with military training with the South Dakota Army National Guard, which holds officer candidate training each summer. When the fort was officially deactivated in 1944, the Veterans Administration was approached to take over the post hospital, the VA Black Hills Health Care System, which cares for veterans in a 200-mile radius and also maintains the complex. A cemetery overlooking the fort is the final resting place for 200-plus



A cemetery on the grounds is the final resting place for 200 soldiers who served from 1878 to 1942

**Fort Meade is still attached to the South Dakota National Guard, which holds officer candidate training at the fort each summer.**

## Co-ops and the Old Nut Box

soldiers, family members and employees who served from 1878 to 1942, Kusser said. Streets that pass around the original parade field and buildings are still occupied and historically maintained.

“We’re fortunate to still be able to maintain a visual presence of history,” Kusser said.

The 4th Cavalry, one of the units stationed longest, and two separate times at Fort Meade, provided security when President Calvin Coolidge was at the game lodge in Custer State Park, a summer White House in the Black Hills, in 1927. The cavalry unit was deployed to the European theater in World War II.

Kusser said beginning in June 1945, 113 POWs were housed at the fort. That number grew to 600 by 1946. They worked in the



Belle Fourche region in agriculture, mainly to help with beet farming. They also did community work and helped convert the fort from an active military post to a veteran’s hospital by doing stonework and creating sidewalks.

After his retirement from state government, Kusser was director of the Fort Meade Museum for several years. The three-story building he still oversees as board president houses numerous artifacts commemorating the history of the fort and recreating what life was like as a cavalry soldier.

The museum is organized around the 66-year history of the fort, with most of that information on the main floor, Kusser said. The lower level includes more military displays and the top floor features a ballroom and views of Bear Butte, the parade field and a view of the prairie. The museum also contains information about the early days of the town of Sturgis.

The Old Fort Meade Museum is located in the historic headquarters building 55, Sheridan Street on Fort Meade, one mile east of Sturgis on Hwy. 34.

There are few things more satisfying for a pack rat than to find just the right thingamajig at the bottom of a growing pile of doodads.

I know a guy who has so much stuff stashed in his storeroom, it’s like walking through a dense jungle forest. You never know when you might need a backup buggy whip. Or the crusty motherboard of a Commodore C64. Or a clutch release bearing for a 1956 Farmall tractor.

Every now and again, I’ll put him to the test...

“I was looking for a book of Green Stamps from June of 1975. Can you sort through all that clutter and see if you can find one for me?”

Or, “Hey, I need a 26-inch inner tube for a 1962 Huffy Aerowind bicycle. Can you help me out with that?”

He hasn’t managed to fulfill any of my quirky requests so far, but he’ll spend all day and half the night searching.

While my own garage is only mildly untidy, I did have one of those pack rat discovery moments recently when I was working on my son’s 2000 Honda 80R. Not that I’m much of a motorcycle mechanic, but I had to crack the carburetor open to clean out the pilot jet and discovered I needed a replacement bolt.

I contemplated a trip to my local Hanks Hardware, but then I remembered what my Dad used to call “the nut box.” Not a very descriptive name, to be sure, but this nut box has some unique characteristics. First of all, it’s not really a box. It’s a round container made of heavy metal that my father had back when he was a young man and a pretty decent mechanic.

And like any good pack rat, I’ve been hanging onto that thing through every change in address and spring cleaning session for decades.

Another unique quality of the nut box is that over the years it has been repainted many times and many colors with the kind of paint that would trigger a code-red biohazard alert by today’s standards.

But the nut box has been around so long even that super industrial strength paint is peeling off. Though I tried to mitigate the damage, a chunk of dime-thick paint flew off when I wedged open the top of the container.

Clawing through a thousand nuts, bolts, screws and some stray nails, I lucked up and grabbed just the size I was looking for. Small victories, I know.

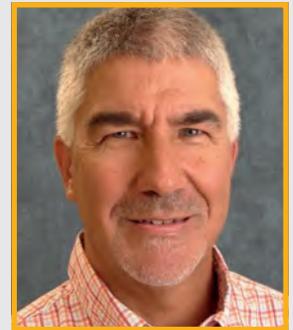
That dip into the nut box came to mind when I received a package from a faithful Cooperative Connections reader. The note inside stated: “I’ve enclosed an ad from a 1961 newspaper you might be interested in. My mom kept some old newspapers in her boxes and I found it there.”

The focal point of this gentle reader’s curiosity was a full-page spread featuring a caricature image of the sun wearing a pair of sunglasses, displaying a wide smile and sporting an incandescent light bulb for a nose.

The headline read: “Casting light on what rural electric cooperatives really mean to South Dakota.” The page was filled with information about what rural electric co-ops are, what they aren’t, and why they’re good for the state.

When it comes to the mission of rural electric co-ops, not much has changed through the decades. Our co-ops are still firmly committed to serving our members as they were on the day they were founded.

Serving homes and businesses the safe, affordable, reliable power they need is what we’ve done and will continue to do. That’s a responsibility and a purpose that will be around even longer than that trusty old nut box.



**Billy Gibson**

editor@sdrea.coop

# Saving Custer's ambulance service

mchase@bhec.coop

Less than six months after Merle Holden went to work for Black Hills Electric Cooperative as office manager, he was out on the line helping with a major early spring snow storm.

"It was a bad storm, we had lots of snow and outages," he said. "I was working with Jim Newberg (BHEC's engineer at that time.) in waist deep snow."

Holden served as office manager from November 1975 until 1979, having been the staff assistant at West River Electric Association in Wall, S.D. before coming to Black Hills Electric.

Holden grew up in Wall, graduated from Black Hills State University and went to work for Homestake Mining Company. But, after one year, he decided he did not like working underground and returned to Wall where he went to work at the electric cooperative there.

During his years as office manager, BHEC was seeing a lot of growth and the billing system was inefficient and outdated. "We were trying to use something that was not set up for rural electrics," Holden said. "I wanted to go with North Central Data Cooperative, a data center, but the billing people did not want to change."

Holden continued to work toward a new billing system but left before he was able

to get it done. "When I got a new computer, I made sure it could convert to NCDL's system," he said.

When Holden came to Custer, he was a registered emergency medical technician; the only one in Custer.

"When I came, the fire department took care of the ambulance," he said. "State law required an EMT if you had an ambulance and the fire department was going to drop the ambulance."

Holden requested a town meeting to see if there was enough support to keep the ambulance. "We had overwhelming support," he said. "Dr. Wicks and all the nurses at the hospital said they would help me keep it going."

When Holden took over, he found that the ambulance service had never billed anyone, including those with insurance that would cover the cost of the ambulance. Holden's wife, Gloria, began handling the billing of insurance companies. "By the time I left, the ambulance service had enough money to purchase a new ambulance," he said.

Elmer Flatt was manager during this time and was very supportive of Holden and the ambulance service. "Elmer let me go whenever I was needed as long as my work was done," Holden said. "I spent a lot of nights and weekends catching up on my work. Elmer gave me great support."



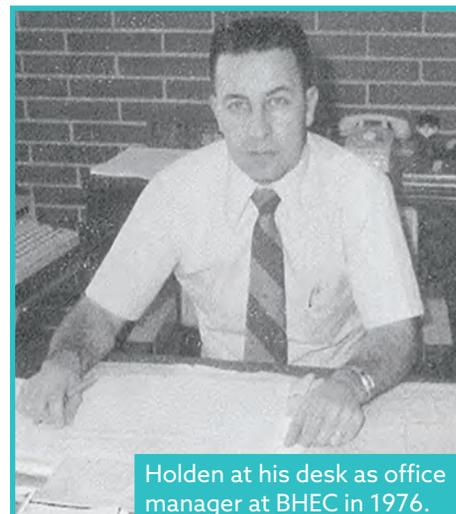
Merle Holden, left, and BHEC employees Warren Graham and Jackson Wright volunteered for the Custer Ambulance Service in the late 70s. Holden was Custer's first EMT.



Merle and Gloria Holden have enjoyed life together for 52 years.

"After research, I decided not to take it."

However, when the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association asked him to apply for a manager's job in Finley N.D., he took it. "I wasn't planning to leave Black Hills Electric but there was little chance for advancement."



Holden at his desk as office manager at BHEC in 1976.

Holden spent eight years in North Dakota before getting a manager's position in Westby, Wisc., where he spent 13 years.

Holden retired at age 62 and he and Gloria returned to Winner, S.D. where he bought the family farm and got his appraiser's license. He spent 15 years as an appraiser and in 2018, the couple moved back to Custer, to the home they had built in 1975, where they are officially retired.

"I didn't leave for any other reason than to be able to advance," he said. "It was a good experience working here. We had good employees, Elmer was great to work with and I really enjoyed working at the co-op."

# A new beginning

Charles Clinton, president of Black Hills Electric Association, called a special meeting on January 13, 1945, to set the ground work to reactivate the association.

George Frink made a report on his trip to Huron and the formation of the Rural Electric Association of South Dakota.

The board approved paying dues of \$100 to the REA of South Dakota.

The board also approved paying Frink's expenses of \$37.56 for attending the state association meeting at Huron.

His expenses were:

**January 8, 1945**

- Fare, Mystic to Rapid City – \$0.90
- Supper – \$0.050
- Round trip, Rapid City to Huron plus one-way Pullman – \$20.16

**January 9, 1945**

- Breakfast – \$0.81
- Dinner – \$0.61
- Membership fee, Rural Electric Assoc. – \$5.00
- Return Pullman – \$3.39
- Supper – \$0.60
- Hotel – \$1.85

**January 10, 1945**

- Breakfast – \$0.60
- Fare, Rapid City to Mystic – \$0.90
- Telephone calls – \$2.12
- Postage – \$0.12

It wasn't until May 3, 1945, that a special meeting was called by Charles Clinton for the purpose of reactivating the association.

Reasons for the meeting were to do all the necessary work in checking memberships and maps, securing new applications where ownership had changed or where there were now residences on properties to be served by the lines, securing applications for potential members, hire help to accomplish these purposes and to request



changes in the amortization plan for loan payment.

The association had been approved for a \$72,000 REA loan on June 20, 1941 and for a \$108,000 REA loan on August 15, 1941. But because of World War II, it was impossible to start construction on the project.

The board passed a resolution requesting that the Rural Electric Administration extend the association's amortization plan from 25 years to 35 years.

It was also at this meeting that the board hired Henry Barnes as coordinator at a salary of \$200 a month plus five cents per mile for miles connected with doing business for the association.

The board also approved submitting to REA a request to begin survey work on approximately 200 miles of line. Though electricity was still a year away, excitement was increasing as people in the Black Hills saw the work the association was doing to electrify the Hills.



Rural women were bombarded with ads for electric appliances. If you buy your bride this "Honeymoon Special" today, you might be honeymooning alone!



People paid \$5 to become members of Black Hills Electric Association in 1945.



Underwriters Laboratories Inc., (UL) sets safety standards for various products. The UL mark appears on billions of products globally.

# A MATTER OF TRUST AND SAFETY

The UL symbol marks safety of products for consumers across the globe

**Brenda Kleinjan**

Contributing Writer

Have you ever examined the hairdryer you use each morning? How about the coffee pot or the cords of your cell phone charger? Chances are they bear a circle with an “UL” inside. If not, they probably should.

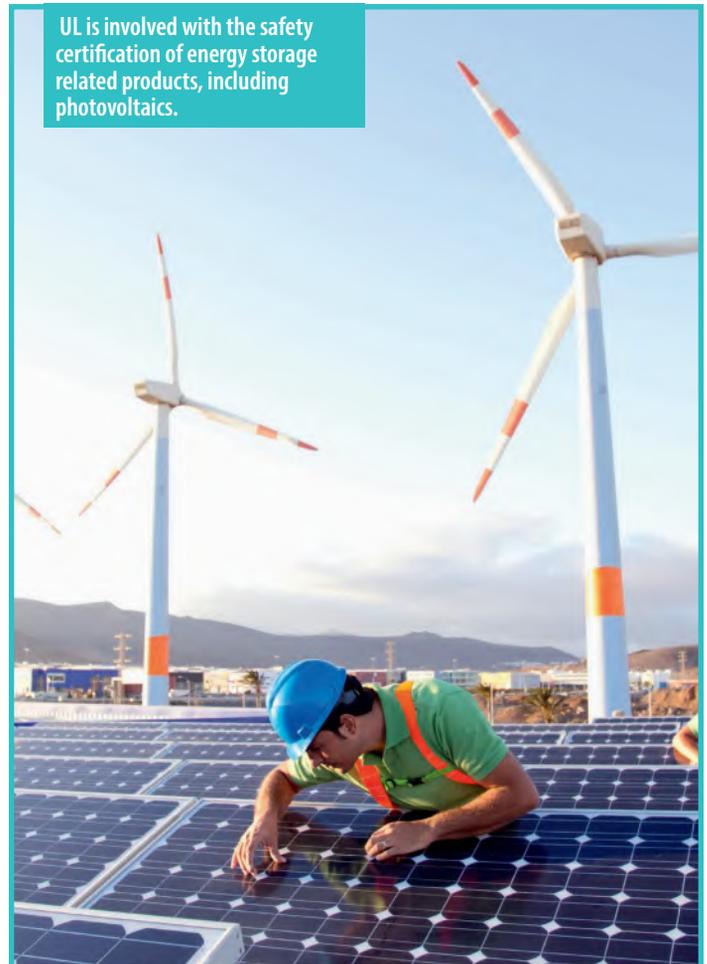
That UL symbol is not a talisman but rather an indicator that the product used has been tested and is designed to operate as intended safely.

“When people see that UL mark on the product when they’re shopping – when they see that mark of safety – they know they can trust it has been certified by a third-party organization as safe,” said Jonette Herman, a Standards Engineer/Project Manager for Underwriters Laboratories Inc., based in Research Triangle Park, North Carolina.

Herman, a South Dakota native, develops safety standards. UL maintains more than 1,600 safety standard documents that define how they test and certify that a product is safe.

As an organization, Underwriters Laboratories is dedicated to fostering safe living and working conditions to people throughout the world.

UL is involved with the safety certification of energy storage related products, including photovoltaics.



“We do that through science and hazard-based safety engineering,” said Herman. Simplified, Herman says they look at an object and determine where the hazards might be.

“I grew up in Pierre. In high school, I always thought I’d be good at making sure that things work the way they should,” said Herman. That led her to the University of Minnesota where she pursued a degree in electrical engineering.

“I remember looking at my hairdryer and seeing that UL mark and wondering what it was about. After college, I moved out to North Carolina and found that UL was located there,” Herman said.

That was 27 years ago. Since then Herman has worked on making products from chainsaws to appliances to motors and batteries safer.

“Several years ago, I worked on the chainsaw standards. We were finding a lot of those injuries were due to fatigue and the operators not wearing personal protective equipment (PPE). That’s when accidents were occurring,” Herman said.

UL continued to analyze the equipment.

“Instruction manuals include important information that people should read,” Herman said. But, knowing that many people don’t read the manuals, UL seeks to ensure that “safety is built into the product as much as possible.”

“That’s part of that safety-based hazard approach. We

look at the product and how it’s used,” Herman said.

Worldwide, UL has more than 14,000 employees. In the non-profit portion of UL which Herman works, there are more than 200 people dedicated to research and education.

Today, Herman’s work focuses on wire positioning devices, motors and generators and energy storage, and energy distribution, among other areas.

“We’re constantly seeing new technologies introduced. All this innovation inherently creates risk.”



## Underwriters Laboratories

More than 400 panels and committees work with UL in developing the standards for various products. The panels and committees are comprised of an array of stakeholders including producers of the products, regulators and consumers.

“It’s important for consumers to educate themselves. How do they know a new product is safe? Looking for that certification on the product is helpful to the consumers.”



**Jonette Herman**  
Standards  
Engineer/Project  
Manager  
Underwriters  
Laboratories, Inc.



UL is working to make lithium ion battery storage safer. Herman cautioned that excessive damage to a product with a lithium ion battery, such as caused by repeated dropping, could cause it to go into thermal runaway, causing it to overheat and potentially catch fire.



Human trafficking in South Dakota is showing signs of growing due in part to the coronavirus pandemic. This crime impacts individuals across the demographic and geographic spectrum.

## PROTECTING THE VULNERABLE

### Coronavirus emboldens trafficking predators

By Billy Gibson

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

Becky Rasmussen is clear in her contention that her vocation is a clarion call coming straight from her Creator.

In her heart and in her soul, Rasmussen carries a deep concern for those who find themselves victimized by human trafficking - whether it comes in the form of labor or sexual exploitation.

Rasmussen, executive director of Call to Freedom in Sioux Falls, traces the path that led her from a partially satisfying professional position to running a program dedicated to steering victims clear of their perpetrators and helping survivors rebuild their lives.

The journey began when she received what she describes as a direct and unambiguous message from a higher power.

At the time, she was signed on as a volunteer for the program that later became the present-day Call to Freedom non-profit organization. When one of the program leaders appealed to her to take the reins, Rasmussen listened carefully for that still small voice.

“I’m a prayer girl. I’m the type who steps out in faith and sees what kind of plan God has in store for me,” she said. “I was prompted by prayer to get involved.”

Rasmussen led the program’s transition to full non-profit status, attained in January of 2016, and managed to hold down two jobs along the way. Today, Call to Freedom boasts a contingent of 18 staff members - including eight case managers - who facilitate a wide range of services such as victim identification, safety assessment, housing, transportation, medical care, counseling trauma/addiction, education/employment and legal advocacy.

It’s a prescribed glide path to freedom that includes the following key components: victim referral, emergency assistance, intake

Youth of all ages can become a target.



and assessment, implementation and referrals, long-term care and self-sufficiency.

### Marissa’s Housing Project

It was during a trip to the Sturgis Rally the previous year that Rasmussen discovered her true calling. When speaking to civic groups, she often recounts the story of a young woman named Marissa to illustrate the plight of those who fall prey to trafficking and find themselves in the clutches of an oppressor.

Amid all the frenetic fervor of the 75th anniversary of Sturgis, she noticed a young girl who wore a certain disturbing look on her face. Rasmussen immediately recognized it as the terrified, distance gaze of teenager who had unwillingly slipped under the power of a dark and sinister force.

There was a quick and strong connection.

“Something just prompted me to go up to her and introduce myself,” she recalled. “In two minutes she was crying and was scared and was looking around. She said she couldn’t talk and she

said I had no idea of how horrible her day had been.”

Working in conjunction with the program Free International, Rasmussen tapped into a database later that day and discovered Marissa was one of 117 girls in the region between the ages of 12 and 18 who were identified as victims. In fact, the teen was reported by family members as missing on two separate occasions, once in October of 2014 and then in May of 2015.

Rasmussen pointed out that the fact Marissa had been reported as missing twice is part of a known cycle of reverting back into victimhood and is a result of traffickers who use a variety of techniques designed to keep their subjects under their control. Some of those nefarious tactics include depriving the victim of housing and financial resources, separating them from their families and devising ways to push them into a legal morass with the judicial system.

The day after finding out more information about Marissa’s background, Rasmussen felt convicted to find her and offer to help. She waded into the massive crowds at Sturgis and went on a determined quest to find the troubled teen.

As Rasmussen describes it, locating Marissa once again set the wheels in motion for the formation of the Call to Freedom non-profit and also the creation of the Marissa Housing Project.

The Marissa Housing Project is a seven-unit apartment complex that provides a safe haven for victims who receive the support, stability and separation from their perpetrators necessary to achieve

**“It’s a problem that’s proliferating.”**  
Becky Rasmussen



long-term success and integration back into society.

## Coronavirus Impact

Like many other areas in the post-Covid world, the pandemic has changed the dynamic when it comes to human trafficking. And not in a positive way.

In fact, Rasmussen noted, the impact of the pandemic is creating a situation that has even more traffickers crouching low in the weeds, just waiting for a prime opportunity to pounce.

The financial stress and economic hardship that comes as a consequence of a locked down community only compounds problems for those already susceptible to captivity and emboldens those set on exploiting others.

As the unemployment rolls expand, fraudulent offers of modeling contracts, high-wage processing plant positions and other means of employment look more enticing to those facing financial ruin.

Adding to the problem is the fact that at the same time the potential for trafficking is increasing, services have been more scant. There is a statewide network of safe places where victims can receive assistance in Mobridge, Pierre, Rapid City, Pine Ridge Reservation, Sioux Falls, Watertown, Winner and Yankton.

However, most of those services are currently operating with limited resources

and are working to build back up to full strength when possible.

“It’s a problem that’s proliferating as we see our shelter numbers declining and resources designed to help are struggling,” Rasmussen lamented. “It’s important, especially now, that if a recruiter comes up to you and offers a job opportunity that sounds too good to be true, stay away. Be aware of those tactics.”

She pointed out that pornographers are blatantly attempting to capitalize on the pandemic - and consequently creating more victims - by offering “free 30-day memberships” on pornography websites.

One of the more popular websites, Porn Hub, has seen a 12 percent increase in activity over the past few months.

“We see that where there is pornography, especially child pornography, there is human trafficking,” she said.

## How to Help

Recognizing the signs of trafficking can go a long way toward addressing the problem, Rasmussen said. Because human trafficking impacts all levels of society across

**IF YOU ARE IN IMMEDIATE DANGER,  
PLEASE ASK FOR HELP.**

**NHTRC**

NATIONAL  
HUMAN TRAFFICKING  
RESOURCE CENTER

1-888-373-7888

Call 24 hours a day,  
7 days a week.  
Confidential.

Text HELP to  
233733 (BeFree)

Open 2pm-10pm CST

**CALL 911 if you are in an emergency.**

every demographic and geographic profile, many subtle indications can go unnoticed.

“We see problems in farming communities as well as population centers throughout the state,” she said. “It happens to the poor and the middle-class alike. Everyone needs to stay on the lookout for the signs.”

Those interested in supporting Call to Freedom’s mission can contribute in a number of ways, including purchasing a Freedom Candle, direct monetary donations, in-kind donations of hygiene and household products and volunteering.

Visit [www.calltofreedom.org](http://www.calltofreedom.org) to find out more about the organization’s mission.



Trafficking victims suffer the pain of separation and despair.

## Register to Win!

Bring this coupon and mailing label to the Touchstone Energy® Cooperatives booth at the South Dakota State Fair to win a prize!

Your Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_  
Your E-mail Address: \_\_\_\_\_

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

### August 4-6

Minnesota Farmfest  
28269 Hwy 67, Polk, MN  
800-881-1007  
www.ideagroup.com/  
farmfest

### September 3-5

South Dakota State Fair:  
Perfect Vision of Fun,  
1060 3rd St. SW, Huron, SD  
800-529-0900  
www.sdstatefair.com

### July 3, 18, 25 and August 1, 22

The Murder of Miss Kitty  
Comedy Mystery Dinner  
Theater, Holiday Inn Express  
& Suites, Deadwood, SD,  
605-580-5799

### June 19, 26 and July 3, 10

River City Friday Nights, 6  
to 10 p.m., Live music, beer  
garden, vendors, food trucks,  
games and activities, Main  
Street, Chamberlain, SD,  
605-683-9051

### June 27

Railroad Day, Prairie Village,  
Madison, SD, 800-693-3644

### June 28

Variety Show, Prairie Village,  
Madison, SD, 800-693-3644

### July 18-19

Charles Mix Saddle Club  
Fourth Annual SDRA Rodeo,  
Geddes, SD, 605-680-1580

### July 18-21

Senior Games, Rapid City,  
SD, Contact Eric Holmes at  
605-394-4175



### July 3:

Independence Day celebrations at  
Mount Rushmore National Memorial  
[www.nps.gov/moru/planyourvisit/  
independence-day-events.htm](http://www.nps.gov/moru/planyourvisit/independence-day-events.htm)

### July 21-25

98th Annual Days of '76 PRCA  
Rodeo, Arena, Deadwood,  
SD, 1-888-838-BULL,  
www.DAYSOF76.com

### July 23-24

Jr. Miss Rodeo South Dakota  
Pageant, The Lodge and Days  
of '76 Rodeo, Deadwood, SD,  
605-641-8604,  
jrmissrsd@gmail.com

### July 24-25

Senior Games, Brookings,  
SD, Contact Traci Saugstad at  
605-692-4492

### July 26

15th Annual Car Show  
Langford, SD, 10 a.m. - 2 p.m.  
605-493-6597

### July 31-August 1

Senior Games, Yankton,  
SD, Contact Kristi Hauer at  
605-665-4685

### July 31-August 1

Plein Air & Arts in the Garden,  
Wessington Springs, SD,  
605-354-3826

### August 1

Rockin' Ribfest BBQ  
Competition, Wessington  
Springs, SD, 605-505-1135

### August 1

Foothills Classic, Wessington  
Springs, SD, 605-350-1687

### August 8-9

Threshing Show, Twin Brooks,  
SD, [www.threshingshow.com](http://www.threshingshow.com)

### August 8-10

Red Power Round Up,  
Fairgrounds, Huron, SD,  
605-460-0197

### August 22

World of Outlaw Sprint Car  
Races plus Wissota MWM,  
Dakota State Fair Speedway,  
Huron, SD, 605-352-4848

### September 7

Hidewood Valley Steam  
Threshing Show, 1 p.m.,  
47326 183rd Ave., Clear Lake,  
SD, 605-881-8405

### September 12-13

Fall Harvest Festival,  
Delmont, SD, 605-928-3792,  
[www.twinriversoldiron.org](http://www.twinriversoldiron.org)

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.