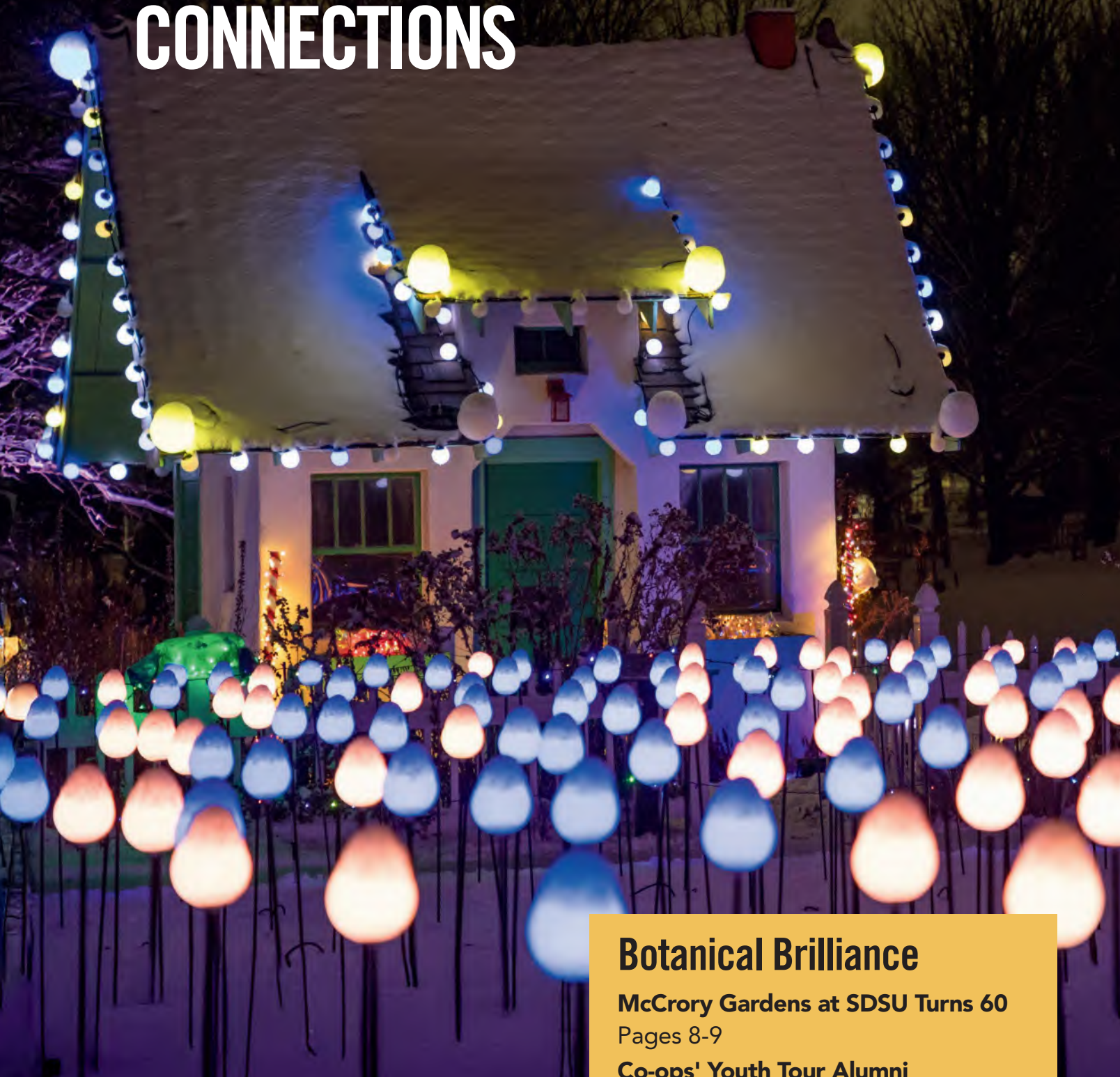


COOPERATIVE CONNECTIONS



Botanical Brilliance

McCrary Gardens at SDSU Turns 60

Pages 8-9

Co-ops' Youth Tour Alumni

Pages 12-13

The annual Garden Glow celebration at SDSU's McCrary Gardens turns the space into a winter wonderland with festive lights and decorations.

Photo by McCrary Gardens

Reflecting on Progress & Planning for the Future



Walker Witt - CEO
wwitt@bhec.coop

As we approach the end of another year, I want to pause and express gratitude for you, our members. Our cooperative was built on the promise of people coming together to improve the quality of life in their communities, and that promise still guides everything we do today.

Each decision, whether it's about delivering reliable electricity, innovating for the future, or advocating for smart energy policies that impact our local communities, comes back to one simple question: **How will this benefit the members we serve?**

This past year has been marked by meaningful progress, both in strengthening our local system and in working at the national level to influence energy policies that directly affect reliability, affordability, and resilience. While the details of federal regulations can feel distant, they shape our daily operations here at home.

Over the past year, electric cooperatives across the country, including yours, came together for advocacy efforts on the EPA's Power Plant Rule. As originally written, the rule would have forced a rapid shift away from always-available power generation resources, threatening the accessibility of a diverse fuel supply that keeps electricity reliable. Renewable energy sources are an essential part of our energy future, but we also know that the demand for electricity is rising rapidly, and natural gas, coal, and nuclear remain essential for ensuring power is available around the clock. As we collaborated and engaged with policymakers, we pressed for a more balanced approach to generating power—one that supports clean energy innovation while still recognizing the role of traditional resources. Our efforts are helping to shape a more workable path forward that better protects reliability. Currently, Basin Electric, our generation and transmission cooperative, is constructing a four-billion-dollar natural gas plant in North Dakota to ensure that its members, including BHEC, have reliable power.

Another area of ongoing progress came through advocacy work on federal permitting reform. For too long, outdated rules and lengthy delays have stood in the way of building critical infrastructure, including new transmission lines and generation projects. Modernizing this process is essential if we are going to strengthen the electric grid and keep pace with growing demand. This year, electric co-ops helped move the needle on permitting reform, advocating for policies that make the process faster, more

predictable, and more efficient. Investments we make in infrastructure will reach communities sooner, improving reliability and preparing us for the future.

We're also seeing progress with bipartisan support for the FEMA Act of 2025, which would speed up the disaster recovery process for electric cooperatives and the communities they serve. Severe storms are a fact of life, and their impact on the electric system can be devastating.

FEMA is a crucial partner for electric co-ops in efforts to restore power after disaster strikes, but currently, the federal reimbursement process after a major storm is slow and full of red tape. If passed, the bill would make FEMA a stronger, more responsive agency to help strengthen rural resilience, protect taxpayer dollars, and ensure essential services are restored as quickly as possible after a natural disaster.

Achievements like these are not just wins in Washington, they are wins for our co-op and members like you.

In addition to advocacy efforts, we are proactively addressing our cooperative's needs for the future by investing in new technologies and infrastructure that improve service and reliability for our members.

As we look ahead to a new year, I see both challenges and opportunities on the horizon. The energy industry is undergoing significant changes driven by the rising need for more electricity, new tools and technologies, and federal energy policies.

The path forward requires innovative thinking and member-focused solutions. I'm confident that with the dedication of your employees and the continued support of all of you, our members, we are well positioned to adapt and meet challenges head-on. Through it all, our promise to you remains steadfast: reliable power for today—and tomorrow.

**From all of us at your cooperative,
Happy Thanksgiving!**

COOPERATIVE CONNECTIONS

BLACK HILLS ELECTRIC

(ISSN No. 1531-104X)

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Accepting Scholarship Applications

Black Hills Electric Cooperative is excited to offer scholarships to graduating high school seniors. Basin Electric Power Cooperative has increased its contribution to \$2,500, allowing us to award a \$1,500 first-place scholarship and a \$1,000 runner-up scholarship. Qualifying applicants will also be considered for a \$500 Rushmore Electric scholarship.

Additionally, scholarships will be awarded during the Annual Meeting scheduled for June 4, 2026, in Hot Springs.

Interested students can find the application online at bhec.coop/scholarship-program or request a physical or emailed application. Completed applications, along with all supporting documents, must be submitted to BHEC by Friday, February 6, 2026.

For any questions or concerns, please reach out to Michelle Fischer at 800-742-0085 or 605-673-4461.

AVAILABLE SCHOLARSHIPS FOR DEPENDENTS OF BHEC MEMBERS:

- \$1,500 Basin Electric 1st place
- \$1,000 Basin Electric runner-up
- \$500 Rushmore Electric

REQUIREMENTS:

- Be a U.S. citizen
- Be a dependent of a BHEC member
- The graduating senior must be planning to enroll at an accredited college, university, or technical school.

THE RECIPIENTS WILL BE CHOSEN BASED ON:

- A combination of SAT or ACT scores
- Overall grade-point average
- Personal statement of career goals
- One-page essay
- An adult appraisal

DEADLINE: FEBRUARY 6, 2026
WINNERS WILL BE ANNOUNCED IN APRIL



So, a Power Line Fell On Your Car...

Driving accidents can happen quickly and easily in the winter months with slick, inconspicuous coatings of black ice, reduced visibility and other weather-related safety hazards.

The important thing is that you know what to do if you find yourself in a collision with a utility pole – because what you don't know can seriously injure or kill you.

If a power line falls on or near your vehicle and there is no fire...

Call 911 and remain in your vehicle until help arrives — this is where you are safest. Your vehicle may be insulating you from the electrical current. Once you leave the vehicle and place your foot on the ground, the electricity may take a path through your body and shock you.

Never go off looks; a downed power line may not be sparking or showing obvious signs of being live, but it may still be energized.

If someone attempts to assist you, warn them to stay back until the utility can de-energize the line.

If a power line falls on or near your vehicle and there is a fire...

If your vehicle has caught fire, you must proceed with extreme caution. Again, even if a line isn't sparking, it may still be energized.

To make your escape, jump from your vehicle to the ground, making sure your body is not touching the ground and vehicle simultaneously. Making contact with both would make your body a direct conduit, and you would be electrocuted.

For that same reason, do not assist anyone else exiting the vehicle or accept help exiting the vehicle.

Once you're on the ground, keep your feet together and hop or shuffle away from the scene, at least 40 feet away. As you move, your goal is for there to not be a voltage difference between your feet. You do not want one foot off of the ground while the other foot is making contact with the ground.

Call 911 and warn others to stay away from the scene.

If you come across downed power lines...

Stay no less than 40 feet away, as the ground can become energized. Never drive over downed power lines – not only do you risk electrocution and damage to your vehicle, but the added tension could pull down surrounding utility poles and create additional hazards.

If you're a first responder at the scene...

Always assume lines are energized. Contact the utility and wait for them to de-energize the lines and give you the all-clear.



Always assume a downed power line is energized. A downed power line may not be sparking or showing obvious signs of being live, but it may still be energized.

"Never go outside during a lightning storm!"



**Josiah Krcil,
Age 9**

Josiah cautions readers on the dangers of going outside during a lightning storm. Great picture, Josiah! Josiah's parents are Andrew and Andrea Krcil from Dante, 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.

Specialty SOUPS

CHEESEBURGER VEGETABLE SOUP

Ingredients:

1 lb. ground beef
2 lbs. block Velveeta cheese
(2) 12 oz. cans evaporated milk
(3) 10.5 oz. cans cream of mushroom soup
10.5 oz. can cream of celery soup
1 can French style green beans
1 can mixed vegetables
1 can diced potatoes

Method

Brown ground beef. Cut Velveeta into cubes. Put all ingredients into slow cooker. Cook on low six to eight hours, stirring halfway through or cook on high two hours, and then on low another two hours, stirring halfway through.

Wendy Thorson
Northern Electric

DUMPLING SOUP

Ingredients:

1 tbsp. vegetable oil
2 tsps. sesame oil
1 cup carrots, shredded
5 green onions, thinly sliced (whites and greens separated)
3 cloves garlic, finely chopped
1/4 tsp. ground ginger
1/4 cup white miso paste
6 cups chicken vegetable broth, divided
1 lb. frozen mini dumplings
3 cups baby spinach
3 tsps. soy sauce (plus more to serve)
Hot sauce or chili oil to serve

Method

In a large pot, heat the vegetable oil and sesame oil over medium heat. Add the carrots, green onion whites, garlic, and ginger. Cook, stirring frequently, until the vegetables begin to soften, two to three minutes. In a small bowl, combine the miso paste with 1/2 cup broth, whisking until the miso is dissolved. Add the miso mixture and remaining broth to the pot and bring to a boil.

Add the dumplings and bring to a simmer. Heat until the dumplings are heated through, three to five minutes. Stir in the spinach, cooking until the greens are wilted, one to two minutes. Add the soy sauce and green onion greens.

Serve hot with hot sauce or chili oil, and extra soy sauce.

Susan Forma
Union County Electric

PHEASANT CHOWDER

Ingredients:

2 pheasants (thighs and breasts: or only breasts if preferred)
4 celery stalks, sliced
1/2 lb. bacon strips, sliced
1 large yellow onion, diced
4 cups chicken broth
4 medium size Yukon Gold potatoes, peeled and cubed
3 cloves garlic, diced
5 tsps. flour
2 cups half-and-half
1 cup parmesan cheese
Salt and Pepper

Method

Put cubed potatoes in a separate pot, cover with the chicken broth, and bring to a boil. Cook the potatoes until they are soft.

Slice the pheasant meat, across grain into 1/4 to 1/2 inch strips.

Cut bacon slices into small pieces and put in a Dutch oven on medium heat. Add diced celery and onion and cook until the bacon and celery are cooked through and onions are transparent. Add the garlic and pheasant. The meat should cook quickly because of the small sized pieces. Once meat is cooked, add the flour one tablespoon at a time while stirring the mixture, thoroughly coating the vegetables and meat.

Add the potatoes and broth from the separate pot. Once incorporated, stir in the half-and-half, then stir in the parmesan cheese. Salt and pepper to taste. This chowder is ready to eat once heated through, or you can let it simmer on low heat. Flavors should continue to meld.

Nick Kvernevig
Lake Region Electric

Please send your favorite recipes to your local electric cooperative (address found on Page 3). Each recipe printed will be entered into a drawing for a prize in December 2025. All entries must include your name, mailing address, phone number and cooperative name.

Water Heater Woes



Miranda Boutelle
Efficiency Services
Group

Q: How can I tell if my water heater needs repair or replacement?

A: We've all gotten used to having reliable hot water in our homes. Nobody wants to get caught off guard with an unexpected cold shower or failed water heater. I tend to live in the "if it isn't broken, don't fix it" school of thought, but a failed water heater can cause damage to your home and property. Emergency replacement of a water heater can add unnecessary cost, not to mention inconvenience. Evening or weekend replacement or repair can lead to higher costs charged by a plumbing company.

Here are some signs that your storage water heater might be approaching the end of its life.

The typical lifespan of a storage water heater is 10 to 15 years, according to the U.S. Department of Energy. If your water heater is older than that, plan to replace it soon. Don't have records of when it was installed? No problem. Find the serial number on the water heater's sticker or metal plate. Look up the serial number online or call the manufacturer to find its age.

Sediment or water on the floor or at the bottom of the water heater could mean its days are numbered. Sediment can be a sign of corrosion, which leads to a leak or failure.

Seeing rusty or discolored water when you turn on your faucets can be a sign the tank is rusting inside. If water is not getting as hot as it used to, it could be a sign of a failing electric element or a gas burner not functioning properly.

Odd noises could indicate an issue with the components. If you're hearing unusual noises from your water heater, schedule a checkup with a plumber. Well-functioning water heaters typically don't make much noise.

A professional plumber may be able to replace failing components. If you are having issues with the tank itself, it's likely time for a new unit.

If you're in the market for a new water heater, a heat pump water heater might be a good fit for your home. These systems are two to three times more energy efficient than conventional electric-powered

tank water heaters, according to the DOE. A federal tax credit is available until Dec. 31. You can claim 30% of the project cost, up to a maximum of \$2,000, for the installation of an Energy Star heat pump water heater. If your water heater is past its useful life or showing any signs of failure, consider investing in a new one before the end of the year. You might also be eligible for rebates from your state or electric cooperative.

Even if your water heater is in great shape, you can save at home by lowering your hot water use. Some easy ways to do this are washing laundry in cold water and installing high-performance aerators on faucets and showerheads to reduce the amount of hot water you use. If you have time-of-use rates, you can save by installing a timer on your water heater to prevent it from operating during peak energy use hours, typically in the mornings and evenings. It also helps lower the strain on your electric utility.

Knowing the signs of water heater failure can save you from home damage and offer opportunities to explore options for more efficient equipment to lower your electric use.



HOLIDAY HEROES: Your Local Mail Carrier

Jacob Boyko

jacob.boyko@sdrea.coop

Through rain, snow and blistering cold, rural mail carriers persevere hundreds of miles of rough country roads each day as they deliver the mail to their communities.

It's a big job for mail carriers, and with the increased mail and packages that come along with the holiday season, the job can get that much more difficult.

Thankfully, hardworking folks like Woody Richards of Oelrichs are up to the challenge. For over 50 years, the 81 year old Black Hills Electric Cooperative member has been the friendly face behind countless deliveries of Christmas cards and presents in the rural areas around the Southwest South Dakota communities of Oelrichs, Smithwick, Hot Springs, S.D., and Chadron, Neb., – rain, shine, or 30 degrees below.

"We have a lot of challenges out there in the wintertime," Woody said. "There are days I haven't made the route because there's too much snow and I can't get through. Years ago, I used to carry a snowmobile with me, and I've delivered mail from the snowmobile a couple of times."

And with more than 9.6 billion envelopes and packages mailed between Thanksgiving and Christmas, according to USPS, the holiday season marks an extra busy time for postal workers.

"About November 15th, the mail's going to start getting heavy," Woody said. "The route will take a little bit longer since so many get packages through Christmas. Our mail gets a lot heavier through the holidays."

The added work can be a slight inconvenience, Woody admits, but is made up for ten-fold when people along the route go out of their way to show their appreciation.

And there are numerous ways people show gratitude, Woody explained. Sometimes, that's stopping to chat while he's out delivering, other times it's towing his mail truck out of especially precarious snowbanks or mud ruts.

Woody recalls one couple along his route that each year would leave a utilitarian present for him – pairs of mittens.

"They always said, 'Oh Woody, you need some warm gloves,' so they'd give me a new pair of mittens every Christmas," Woody



Woody Richards at the post office in Oelrichs, S.D.
It's just one of the many stops on his rural route.
Photo by Jacyné Romey

said. "Another couple always made fudge and gave me some, which was really nice. And a guy down in Nebraska, he gives me jars of honey every Christmas."

The kind gestures, accompanied with cards thanking the civil servant for his dedication to getting everyone their mail on time, are part of why Woody has stayed on the route for five decades. He now splits the lengthy route with his wife, Bobbi, but Woody is steadfast to carry on his commitment – the same commitment that's led to Woody working with 31 postmasters, driving about 50 different vehicles, traveling more than 2.8 million miles across southwest South Dakota and northwest Nebraska, and just about every name on the entire route.

"Right now, the count (on my route) is about 140 mailboxes," Woody said. "When I started, we only had 46 mailboxes, so it's grown a lot."

He continued, "It's been a challenging 50 years, but just keeping the people happy by getting their mail – that makes me feel good, that they can get their mail delivered to their door."

Photo by Jacyné Romey





During the annual Garden Glow event, McCrory Gardens in Brookings is transformed into a winter wonderland.
Photo submitted by
McCrory Gardens

NATURE GROWS & GLOWS AT MCCRORY GARDENS

Jacob Boyko

jacob.boyko@sdrea.coop

Tucked among the towering pines at the busy corner of 6th Street and 22nd Avenue in Brookings, S.D., you'll find a little plot of botanical paradise.

For 60 years, South Dakota State University's McCrory Gardens has not only served as a mecca for horticulture enthusiasts, but also a versatile, community-focused space for weddings, workshops and other seasonal festivities.

"Here, our mission is connecting people and plants through education, research, discovery and enjoyment of the natural and built landscape," said Lisa Marotz, director of McCrory Gardens.

Working toward that mission, Marotz and staff keep a schedule full of activities for SDSU students and community members with a variety of seasonal events: a spring-time syrup-making workshop where participants are taught to tap trees; the summer-time TuliPalooza where more than 15,000 tulip bulbs are planted in a colorful display; and the family-focused fall festival during Hobo Day weekend featuring horse-drawn hay rides and food trucks.

"There really is always something to see — just maybe not always what you expect," said Kathryn Bowar, an SDSU ag science

student and McCrory Gardens intern from Hoven, S.D.

Bowar says the space is increasingly popular for students looking to take a break from busy campus life to study, hang out with friends, or just enjoy time alone in a tranquil, outdoor environment surrounded by nature.

"I grew up as a ranch kid and adjusting to city life was overwhelming at times," Bowar added. "Coming to McCrory Gardens was a breath of fresh air and helped me recenter in the beauty of nature."

The garden's hallmark event is the regionally renowned Garden Glow, which transforms the dormant grounds into a winter wonderland with bright and festive Christmas lights and decorations.

"Garden Glow is a way that we are able to bring thousands of people to a botanical garden in South Dakota in December," Marotz said with a laugh. "We started out in 2015 when about 51 people came. Last year we were up to about 13,000, so it's grown a lot in popularity."

At the upcoming Garden Glow, visitors will meander through the reindeer meadow, travel across the life-size "Candy Land" board, warm up with a stop at the hot cocoa hut and peek inside Santa's summer-time home while exploring all the garden has to offer.

And there's been a lot of change over the garden's 60-year history, from new flowerbeds and gardens to patios and memorials.

But despite that, Marotz says she and her staff work to ensure the original vision of the garden and the contributions of those who worked before her are preserved.

Rather than tearing out and replacing sections of the gardens, the staff update and add to the space, with each parcel of the 25-acre garden bearing the fingerprints of past enthusiasts who cultivated, researched and appreciated the flora that make the Midwest beautiful.

"We have visitors comment that they now know what heaven looks like," Marotz said. "That's what people feel here: sanctuary and peace."



Lisa Marotz – McCrory Gardens Director since 2016 – with intern Kathryn Bowar, who is beginning her third fall working at the garden.
Photo by Jacob Boyko

With bright, blooming flowers, McCrory Gardens is the perfect stop for migrating butterflies and other helpful pollinators.
Photo by Jacob Boyko



Many area visitors recognize this cottage as the 1928 Lawson Gas Station in Lake Preston, which was moved to McCrory Gardens in 1996 and renovated in 2024.
Photo by Jacob Boyko



Each cactus in the cacti garden is dug up each fall and moved into a greenhouse on campus before being replanted in the spring.
Photo by Jacob Boyko



The 1991 Sioux Quartzite rock garden and 2013 waterfall are a favorite fixture in the garden — and the site of numerous summertime marriage proposals.
Photo by Jacob Boyko



A labyrinth of pathways and trails lined with mature trees and vines give garden visitors a sense of exploration — even though they're right in the middle of Brookings.
Photo by Jacob Boyko



During the Garden Glow event, the East Terrace Lawn and Gazebo becomes The Enchanted Forest. Marotz notes this was the site of the first Garden Glow in 2015 — miniscule compared to today's expansive decorating.

This winter, Garden Glow is open 5-9 p.m. from Dec. 6, 2025 through Jan. 6, 2026.

Photo submitted by McCrory Gardens

60TH ANNIVERSARY THE MCCRORY STORY

*Photos submitted by
McCrory Gardens*

1964

The S.D. Legislature approves funds to construct Bailey Rotunda and Wagner Hall on the site of SDSU's Horticulture-Forestry Gardens. Samuel A. McCrory, head of the horticulture department at SDSU, advocated for a research garden filled with S.D. flora that would also serve as a learning center for students. McCrory passed away March 10, 1964.



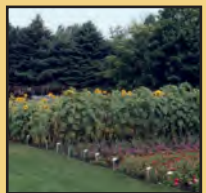
1966

The new horticulture garden is formally dedicated "McCrory Gardens" to honor the late department head.



1977

McCrory Gardens receives the prestigious All-American Display Garden Award. The Garden is now designated to receive and showcase winning plant selections each year.



1979

McCrory Gardens is named on a list of the top 10 small gardens in the U.S. by ARCO Travel Club Magazine.



1988

The first annual Garden Party is held to fund the maintenance and operating costs of the garden.



1994

The late Gov. George Mickelson is honored in the newly-constructed Mickelson Grove.



2012

The new Education & Visitor Center is dedicated.



2025

McCrory Gardens celebrates its 60th anniversary!

Attention High School Juniors & Seniors: Win An All-Expenses Paid Trip to Washington D.C.

Black Hills Electric Cooperative is once again sponsoring local high school juniors and seniors for the Rural Electric Youth Tour, an unforgettable, all-expenses-paid trip to Washington, D.C.

Each June, more than 1,800 students from across the country explore our nation's capital while learning about government, leadership, and the cooperative way of doing business. The South Dakota Rural Electric Association (SDREA) coordinates the trip for South Dakota students.

Students visit some of the nation's most iconic landmarks, including:

- The Lincoln Memorial • Ford's Theatre
- Mount Vernon • Vietnam Veterans Memorial • The National Archives
- U.S. Supreme Court • Washington Monument • U.S. Capitol • Arlington National Cemetery

Students will also enjoy a riverboat cruise on the Potomac and meet members of South Dakota's Congressional Delegation.

Who is Eligible? All area high school juniors and seniors whose parents are members of Black Hills Electric Cooperative.

What Does It Cost? Nothing! The trip is fully funded by your local cooperative. All transportation, lodging, meals, entertainment, and tours are included. Students only need to bring spending money for souvenirs or snacks.

When is It Held? June 14–20, 2026

Participants will meet for orientation on Sunday, June 14, at the Sioux Valley Energy Office in Brandon, SD. The group will then travel to Minneapolis and fly to Washington, D.C. on Monday morning. The tour returns to South Dakota on Saturday, June 20. (Note: Transportation to Brandon, SD, is not provided by the cooperative.)

How Do I Qualify?

BHEC students must complete the Youth Tour application and submit a one-page form summarizing their volunteer activities, leadership roles, and future goals.

To learn more, visit bhec.coop/youth-tour-opportunity or call 800-742-0085 to request more information.

DEADLINE: DECEMBER 30TH, 2025



AREA MEETINGS SCHEDULED FOR 2026

It's hard to believe 2026 is just around the corner, and BHEC is gearing up for the upcoming area meetings! We're looking forward to gathering with our members over a comforting bowl of soup, tasty desserts, and engaging conversations. For many years, our directors and staff have eagerly anticipated these gatherings, which are more than just meetings; they're a celebration of community and a chance to express our gratitude to our members.

Each year, the co-op proudly partners with local civic organizations to co-host these area meetings. The cooperative provides a monetary donation to support the event, while our civic partners prepare the meal. Any donations collected during the meeting go directly to the co-hosting organization, helping to fund projects and initiatives within the community. It's a tradition that reflects our cooperative values and strengthens the bonds we share with the towns and people we serve.

It's a wonderful opportunity to enjoy a free meal, catch up with friends and neighbors, and get to know the co-op team. Together, let's celebrate our cooperative values, share ideas, and foster a sense of unity that makes our community unique.

Bring your appetite and join us at one of the locations listed below. We look forward to seeing you there, sharing a meal, and connecting with the people who make our cooperative strong!



The Johnson Siding Area Meeting was well attended, and the community enjoyed a delicious variety of meals and desserts.



Board members in action, serving attendees at the 2025 Rockerville Area Meeting.



Meal will be served from 5:30 - 6:30 p.m. at all meetings.

AREA MEETING	DATE	LOCATION	CO-SPONSOR
Oelrichs	February 12th	Oelrichs Community Hall	Oelrichs Rodeo Association
Hermosa	February 13th	Hermosa Elementary School	Battle Creek Fire District
Whispering Pines	February 16th	Whispering Pines VFD	Whispering Pines VFD
Rockerville	February 20th	Rockerville Community Hall	Rockerville Community Club
Johnson Siding	February 26th	Rimrock Community Center	Rimrock Community Club
Rochford	April 10th	Rochford Community Hall	Rochford Community Club



The 2006 Youth Tour group takes a photo on the Albert Einstein Memorial in Washington, D.C.
Photo by Brenda Kleinjan

YOUTH TODAY. LEADERS TOMORROW.

South Dakota's Youth Tour Continues to Inspire Leadership Years Later

Frank Turner

frank.turner@sdsrea.coop

Each summer, a new group of South Dakota teens will board a plane for Washington, D.C., full of excitement for the trip of a lifetime. They're part of the South Dakota Electric Cooperative Youth Tour, a weeklong experience that connects rural students to the people, places and ideas that shape our country.

The Youth Tour began after a 1957 speech by former Sen. Lyndon B. Johnson, who encouraged electric cooperatives to send young people to the Capitol so they could "see what the flag stands for." Since South Dakota sent

its first group in 1963, more than 1,300 students have made the trip.

During the trip, students visit landmarks like Ford's Theater, the National Archives and the U.S. Capitol. They meet members of Congress, make friends from across the country and see firsthand how decisions made in Washington affect people back home.

For many, the most meaningful part of the trip happens long after they return. The experience lights a spark that shapes how they view their communities and their roles within them.

Two of those alumni, Kevin Larsen and Andi Fouberg, still carry lessons from their Youth Tour experiences today.

Kevin Larsen

Kevin Larsen remembers applying for Youth Tour in 2006 as a junior from Howard High School to represent Central Electric Cooperative.

"I've always been a history nut," he said. "My parents, like a lot of farmers, weren't made of money. This was a chance to go see the nation's capital, and I figured, why not apply?"

Once he decided to apply, he approached his high school English teacher, who helped him polish his essay, which landed on the desk of longtime Central Electric Cooperative General Manager Ken Schlimgen. "Lo and behold, the legendary Ken Schlimgen gives me a call," Larsen said. "And the rest is history."

Larsen now serves as the public information officer for the South Dakota State Historical Society in Pierre. He is also active in local organizations and community leadership roles, serving as president of the Pierre Kiwanis Club, incoming exalted ruler for the Pierre Elks Lodge, and in 2025

he ran for a position on the Pierre City Commission, only to come short by a handful of votes.

“These types of trips instill a passion for civics, and I think they mean a lot more for rural South Dakota kids,” Larsen said. “I’m from the middle of nowhere, Canova, South Dakota – a lot of people don’t even know where that is. The nearest town from our farm was six miles away, and that town is 100 people if everybody’s home. I think the opportunity to travel means more coming from somebody that was raised on a farm.”

He laughs when he thinks back to the trip. He keeps in touch with one of his roommates from that week. “You build connections you don’t expect,” he said. “One of the guys I roomed with ended up being a friend of my wife’s, and years later he attended our wedding.”

Larsen also credits his former Youth Tour Director, Brenda Kleinjan, for making the trip a success. “She was so passionate about the places we visited,” he said. “We weren’t just seeing historic monuments; we were learning what they meant.”

For Larsen, that week in D.C. helped set him on a lifelong path of leadership. “That trip really instilled that leadership ability and finding that inner voice to apply for something you might not think would ever happen,” he said. “When I sent off the essay in high school, I would have never imagined in my wildest dreams that I’d get an all-expenses-paid trip to D.C. We even ate well, too.”

Andi Fouberg

When Andi Fouberg applied for the Youth Tour, she was a high school student from Letcher. “I’m pretty sure my best



Kevin Larsen
2006 Youth Tour Alum
Submitted Photo



Andi Fouberg
1994 Youth Tour Alum
Submitted Photo

friend went the year before, and I thought that seemed pretty cool,” she said.

Also representing Central Electric Cooperative, she joined the 1994 Youth Tour, a year she remembers vividly for an unusual reason.

“The night before we left was when O.J. Simpson went on the white Ford Bronco run through Los Angeles,” she said with a laugh. “We watched it on TV in the hotel in Sioux Falls because we met there and stayed the night before we all flew out together.”

The trip instilled an early passion for civic life in Fouberg. After college, she moved to Washington, D.C., and spent 10 years as Sen. John Thune’s communications director.

“Youth Tour was what prompted me to want to be in D.C. at some point,” Fouberg said.

While working for Sen. Thune, Fouberg would regularly meet new Youth Tour students visiting the Capitol every year in June.

“I’d see these students walking the same halls I once toured, wide-eyed and curious, and I’d think, that was me,” she said.

Now, Fouberg leads the South Dakota State University Alumni Association as its president and CEO. She credits that early trip with showing her what public service and connection can look like.

“The trip had an impact on me wanting to be out there and be part of that environment,” she said. “It made me want to be part of the process and feel like you are part of the government machine, but in a way that helps people.”

Reflecting on it now, she believes the experience gives students from small towns something they might not otherwise see.

“Growing up in Letcher or any small community in South Dakota, I don’t know that civic engagement is something you naturally imagine yourself doing without exposure from something like Youth Tour,” she said. “Without exposure to Washington D.C. through something like that, I probably would not have pursued that path. It all had its roots in Youth Tour.”



Kevin Larsen (left) takes a photo with Youth Tour friends at the FDR Memorial in 2006.
Photo by Brenda Kleinjan



BUS TOUR TO DRY FORK STATION

Michelle Fischer
michellef@bhec.coop

On September 10th, approximately 30 members and employees of Black Hills Electric Cooperative participated in a bus tour of the Dry Fork Station, located seven miles north of Gillette, WY. This coal-fired power plant is owned by Basin Electric Power Cooperative, a consumer-owned regional cooperative based in Bismarck. Basin Electric generates and transmits electricity to 141 rural electric systems across nine states, including Colorado, Iowa, Minnesota, Montana, Nebraska, New Mexico, North Dakota, South Dakota, and Wyoming, serving roughly three million member-owners.

Since opening in 2011, Dry Fork Station has reached several milestones, including an impressive safety record during construction with over six million man-hours worked without a lost-time accident. The facility was built at a cost of \$1.35 billion.

The station is fueled by sub-bituminous coal from the nearby Dry Fork Mine, connected via a one-mile conveyor system. Using pulverized coal technology along with advanced pollution control measures, Dry Fork Station operates with minimal emissions. The facility also hosts the Wyoming Integrated Test Center and the Wyoming CarbonSAFE project, both focused on advancing carbon capture technologies.

Electricity at Dry Fork Station is generated by heating water to create steam, which spins a turbine linked to a generator. This process is common across coal, oil, natural gas, and nuclear plants, although plant designs and operations vary. The station uses a closed-loop water-to-steam cycle with makeup water added as needed and is a zero-discharge facility thanks to dry cooling technology. Most electricity is transmitted through 125 miles of 230,000-volt transmission lines to substations in northeast Wyoming, integrating into the larger transmission grid.

During the tour, participants explored both the coal mine and the power station. Attendees shared that they enjoyed the experience and gained valuable insights into their energy sources.

We plan to offer this tour again in 2026. If you are interested in joining, please let us know to be added to the attendee list!

WHEELS, WATTS, & WONDER



BHEC members and staff stand on a platform at Dry Fork Station during the September 10th tour.

SAVE THE DATE:
SEPTEMBER 9TH, 2026



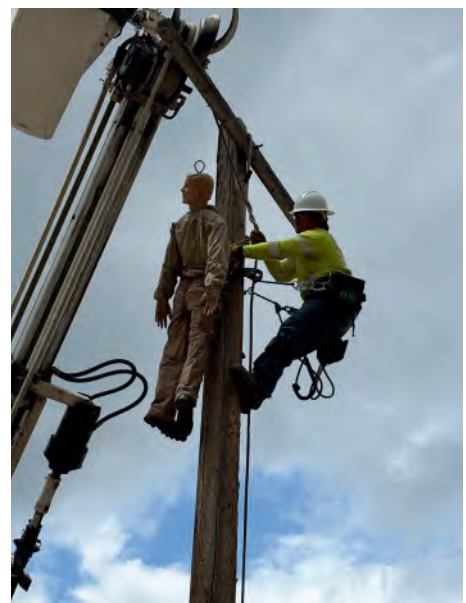
WELCOME TO THE CREW



Black Hills Electric Cooperative is excited to welcome Parker Noem to our team as a new apprentice lineman. Parker graduated from Mitchell Tech's Power Line and Maintenance program and worked with us as a 1,000-hour temporary employee. We were impressed with his work ethic and willingness to learn and decided to bring him on full-time.

As an apprentice lineman, Parker will gain hands-on experience maintaining and operating our electric distribution system, working alongside our experienced line crews to ensure safe and reliable service for our members.

We are thrilled to have Parker on board and look forward to his growth as he begins his career at Black Hills Electric Cooperative. Please join us in welcoming Parker to the Black Hills Electric Cooperative family!



Apprentice Lineman Parker Noem practices essential pole-top rescue skills during a monthly safety meeting

REGISTER TO WIN!

Bring this coupon and mailing label to the Touchstone Energy® Cooperatives booth at the Black Hills Stock Show & Rodeo to win a prize!

Your Phone Number: _____

Your E-mail Address: _____



NOV. 25-DEC. 26
Christmas at the Capitol
8 a.m.-10 p.m. (holidays included)
Pierre, SD
605-773-3178
christmasatthecapitol.sd.gov

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

NOV. 28
Snacks With Santa
2-4 p.m.
Hill City Center
Hill City, SD

NOV. 28
Roasted Chestnuts & Cider
5 p.m.
Alpine Inn
Hill City, SD

NOV. 28
Olde Tyme Christmas Parade
6 p.m.
Main Street
Hill City, SD

NOV. 28
Holiday Express Classic
First Class & 21+ Spiked!
1880 Train
Hill City, SD

NOV. 28-29
Kris Kringle Vendor Fair
Fri. 9 a.m.-4 p.m.
Sat. 9 a.m.-3 p.m.
Hill City High School
Hill City, SD

NOV. 30
Advanced Technique Class:
Split Rectangles
The Farmer's Daughter
Hill City, SD

DEC. 1-30
Trees & Trains Exhibit
SD State Railroad Museum
Hill City, SD

DEC. 2
SunCatcher TRA Chilli Cook-off
& Dessert Silent Auction
841 E. St. Patrick St.
Rapid City, SD
info@suncatchertra.org

DEC. 5-6
Christmas in the Hills
Mueller Center
Hot Springs, SD
605-890-2974

DEC. 7
KCBA Hometown Christmas
10 a.m.-4 p.m.
Kadoka City Auditorium
Kadoka, SD
605-488-0151

DEC. 7
Christmas Carnival
10 a.m.-2 p.m.
Hermosa School Gymnasium
Hermosa, SD
605-290-9409

DEC. 8
Senior Sunday Breakfast
8 a.m.-12 p.m.
Hill City Center
Hill City, SD

DEC. 15
Lions Club/Vitalant Blood Drive
Hill City Center
Hill City, SD

DEC. 20
Lions Club Bingo
5 p.m. Dinner, 6 p.m. Bingo
Hill City Center
Hill City, SD

JAN. 10
Knights of Columbus
Coats for Kids Bowling
Tournament
1 p.m.
Meadowood Lanes
3809 Sturgis Rd.
Rapid City, SD
605-393-2081
jschlim1@gmail.com

Note: We publish contact information as provided. If no phone number is given, none will be listed. Please call ahead to verify the event is still being held.