

COOPERATIVE CONNECTIONS



Little cars, big smiles

**Smile makers build
Toys for God's Kids**
Pages 8-9

**Treatment center
changes young lives**
Pages 12-13

Asher Smith plays with a few
of the thousands of small
wooden cars built each year
by Toys for God's Kids

BOARD REPORT



A regular meeting of the Board of Directors of FEM Electric was held in Ipswich, South Dakota at 8:30 a.m. on October 18, 2022, pursuant to due call and notice. It being determined that a quorum was present, President Gary Bachman called the meeting to order. Secretary Eric Odenbach kept minutes of the meeting. The following directors were declared present by roll call: Gary Bachman, Paula Petersen, Kelly Melius, Eric Odenbach, Tom Thorpe, General Manager/CEO Scott Moore, Line Superintendent Rob Vetch, Director of Benefits and Finance Rhonda Tuscherer.

Ryan Holien and Jesse Brown were present until their board reports were given.

Gary Bachman welcomed guest employee Barb Schaefer.

Changes to the agenda: none

Changes/Additions to Minutes from September 20, 2022, meeting: none

Next Meeting Date: After a review of calendars, directors agreed that the next regular meeting of the board would be on Tuesday, November 15, 2022, at 8:30 a.m. to be held at FEM Electric Board Room in Ipswich, South Dakota.

Motion by Tom Thorpe, seconded by Kelly Melius and carried to approve

administrative business.

Motion by Kelly Melius, seconded by Eric Odenbach and carried to acknowledge manager, staff, and electrical department reports.

Motion by Kelly Melius seconded by Paula Petersen and carried to approve plant corrections.

The board acknowledged reviewing the September 2022 Cyber Security Report.

Resolutions, Contracts, and Nominations:

The board set January 20, 2023, as the date for member appreciation pancake breakfast 7:00 a.m. to 10:00 a.m. at FEM Electric headquarters Ipswich.

Motion by Tom Thorpe seconded by Eric Odenbach and carried to approve Basin Electric/FEM Electric load forecast resolution.

Eric Odenbach nominated Kelly Melius as Basin Electric Voting Delegate and Tom Thorpe as Alternate Voting Delegate motion seconded by Paula Petersen. Motion for nominations to cease and unanimous ballot was cast for Kelly Melius as Basin Electric Voting Delegate and Tom Thorpe as Alternate Voting Delegate.

Tom Thorpe nominated Eric Odenbach

as Midwest Electric Voting Delegate and Gary Bachman as Alternate Voting Delegate motion seconded by Kelly Melius. Motion for nominations to cease and unanimous ballot was cast for Eric Odenbach as Midwest Electric Voting Delegate and Gary Bachman as Alternate Voting Delegate.

Membership Business: Board acknowledged membership business.

New Memberships, Member Cancellations and Contracts:

Disconnects: Peter & Sandra Heier, Aberdeen, SD, Active Farm; Theodore Ablin, Mansfield, SD, Active Farm; Roy & Philipina Heintzman, Onaka, SD, Active Farm

Connects: Holly & Bill Johnson, Hosmer, SD, Active Farm; Mark T. Ablin, Mansfield, SD, Active Farm; East River Electric, Madison, SD, Temp Service; Rick Heintzman, Onaka, SD, Active Farm

Contracts: Ethan Helfenstein, Ashley, ND, Shop/Grain Bins; SD DOT, Pierre, SD, Tower for Cameras

Retired Locations: None

Motion by Eric Odenbach seconded by Paula Petersen and carried to approve large Load Market Rate for 2023 for Glacial Lakes Ethanol and Agtegra Bowdle.

Capital Credits:

Estates - October 2022 - five =
\$5,315.03

73 & Older - October 2022 - one =
\$2,087.14

Financial Business: The board acknowledged reviewing the following financial information: September 2022 financials and check register for the month of September 2022 contained information on checks #32841 through #32912 and all automatic payments/

Continued on pg 6

COOPERATIVE CONNECTIONS

FEM ELECTRIC ASSOCIATION

(USPS 189-720)

Board of Directors

Gary Bachman, President
Tom Thorpe, Vice President
Eric Odenbach, Secretary
Paula Petersen, Treasurer
Kelly Melius, Asst. Sec./
Treasurer
Vaughn Beck, Attorney

CEO/General Manager

Scott Moore
info@femelectric.coop

Management Staff

Rob Vetch
Line Superintendent
Rhonda Tuscherer
Director of Finance and
Benefits

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FEM ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE CONNECTIONS is the monthly publication for the members of FEM Electric Association, Inc., 800 5th Ave., Ipswich, SD 57451.

FEM Electric Cooperative Connections' purpose is to provide reliable, helpful information to members on electric cooperative matters and better living.

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Design assistance by SDREA

**FEM Electric is an equal
opportunity provider and
employer.**



Scott Moore
General Manager/CEO

What a fall! We have had a great fall harvest with yields and weather, and now we can use fall moisture to assist with dust control and 2023 crops. It may seem like we are in turbulent times both nationally and locally, but we must continue to look forward and work to keep the South Dakota economy strong. With a strong economy, and the best state to live and raise children, we will keep seeing our young people returning to start businesses or filling existing employment opportunities.

By the time this article is published, we will know the results for both the state and national elections. I hope you voted, November 8, 2022, it may be a right, but nothing comes free. The only way to keep rural South Dakota strong is by letting your voice be heard.

There has been and will continue to be many issues that are dealt with behind the scenes to keep providing safe, reliable, and affordable power to each meter. Over the past ten years FEM Electric, East River Electric, and Basin Electric have joined Regional Transmission Operators (RTOs) and have met and exceeded goals to move from fossil fuels to renewables, or intermittent power generation. With government regulations, we are sometimes pushed in directions where we would sometimes

rather stop and reverse course, but we need to look forward, not just for tomorrow, but years and decades away. These decisions are best made by cooperatives, companies, and individuals that are locally owned and operated. We sometimes wonder or question if the meetings and unpleasant conversations help give good direction to keep our power flowing and affordable. I can guarantee without the meetings and conversations we would be on a runaway train for rural economic disaster now and into the future.

FEM Electric has had a good 2022 with strong finances, new construction on farm operations and homes. We are receiving requests for 2023 which is a good sign our territory will keep increasing electric usage with stable loads. FEM Electric board and management are not looking for a short-term large growth homerun, but a manageable steady electric load growth. Working with our members, we will continue to see good growth within our service territory.

Our wiring department continues to grow, and they are doing an excellent job meeting our member's needs. If Ryan Holien has told you, we cannot get to your wiring job this year he is
Continued on pg 6

Statement Mailing Dates

Nov 29, 2022 for Nov's energy

Dec 30, 2022 for Dec's energy

Regardless of the statement mail out date, payments are due in the office by the **9th of the following month.**

Deck your halls with home safety in mind

It's time to deck those halls - safely. More than 800 home fires are caused by holiday decorations each year, according to the National Fire Protection Association.

An additional 170 home fires are caused by Christmas trees each year. Keep these tips in mind for a safe holiday season:

- Carefully inspect all electrical decorations before you use them. Cracked or damaged sockets and loose or exposed wires can cause serious shock or start a fire.
- Make sure all extension cords and electrical decorations are being used properly - indoor-rated cords indoors, outdoor-rated cords for outside decorations.
- Inspect extension cords for damage and discard (not repair) any that are not completely intact.
- Never mount or support light strings in a way that might damage the cord's insulation.
- Outdoor electrical lights and decorations should be plugged into circuits protected by ground-fault circuit interrupters.
- Exercise caution when decorating near power lines. Keep yourself and your ladder at least 10 feet from power lines.
- Turn off all indoor and outdoor electrical decorations before leaving home or going to sleep.
- Avoid overloading electrical outlets with too many decorations or electrical devices. They can overheat and cause a fire.
- Never connect more than three strings of incandescent lights together.
- Water your Christmas tree daily.
- Keep all decorations at least 3 feet away from heating equipment.
- Avoid using candles. The flames are just too dangerous with all the flammable decorations around.
- Purchase electrical decorations from reputable retailers and that are approved by a nationally recognized testing lab such as UL, Intertek or CSA.

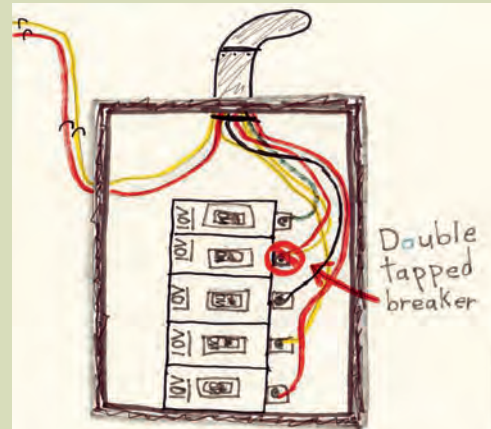


A NEW TEACHING TOOL FOR SOLAR POWER EDUCATION



Rushmore Electric and Touchstone Energy have joined together to construct a demo trailer designed to teach co-op members across the state more about how solar power functions. The trailer is equipped with fold-out collection panels and also battery storage capability. Co-op energy experts use the trailer to frame discussions about net metering, interconnection agreements and more.

To see a video of the trailer and learn more about how electric cooperatives serve our members, visit Cooperative Connections Plus by scanning the QR code at right.



Don't play on transformer boxes

Olaf Sahlstrom

Olaf Sahlstrom, 9, shares a tip he learned from his parents, Ben and Naomi Sahlstrom: Double-tapped breakers are unsafe and can lead to overheating, arcing, and electrical fires. The Sahlstroms reside in Tracy, MN and are members of Lyon-Lincoln Electric Cooperative.

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

CHRISTMAS DESSERTS

PEANUT BUTTER PIE

Ingredients:

1 heaping c. peanut butter
18 oz. pkg. cream cheese
(softened)
18 oz. tub cool whip (thawed)
1/2 c. milk
2 c. powdered sugar graham
cracker pie crust (prepared)
Crushed Butterfingers or Reeses
for garnish

METHOD

Thoroughly mix peanut butter and cream cheese. Add 1/2 cup milk and slowly add 2 cups powdered sugar. Mix well. Fold in cool whip. Put in a prepared graham cracker crust. Makes two 9" pies or one 10" pie with a little extra. Top with crushed candy. Place in freezer until frozen. Remove from freezer 10 minutes before serving.

Elaine Rieck, Harrisburg

HOLIDAY HOT CHOCOLATE

Ingredients:

8 qt. box powdered milk
1 lb. can Nestles Cocoa Mix
7-8 oz. jar powdered creamer
3 c. powdered sugar
1/3 c. cocoa

METHOD

Mix in order given in large bowl. Put in air tight container. Use 1/4 cup mix per cup of hot water. Makes about 16-cup mix.

Phyllis Niemann, Clear Lake

MOM'S CHRISTMAS DESSERT

Ingredients:

2-1/2 c. Rice Krispies
1/2 c. light brown sugar
1 c. slivered almonds or toasted
nut meats
1/2 c. butter, melted
1/2 gal. vanilla ice cream
1 can pie cherries
1/2 tsp. almond flavoring

METHOD

Mix first four ingredients together. Spread half mixture in a 9x13 pan evenly. Cut and press vanilla ice cream on top and spread remaining mixture on top. Freeze. When ready to serve, stir pie filling and almond flavoring together and heat on stove top or microwave and use for topping individual pieces.

Patty Sinning, Lennox

GINGERBREAD KISSED THUMBPRINT COOKIES

Ingredients:

3 c. flour
2 tsp. ground ginger
1 tsp. ground cinnamon
1 tsp. baking soda
1/4 tsp. ground nutmeg
1/4 tsp. salt
3/4 c. (1-1/2 sticks) butter,
softened
3/4 c. firmly packed brown sugar
1/2 c. molasses
1 egg
1 tsp. pure vanilla extract
1/4 c. granulated sugar
60 milk chocolate kisses

METHOD

Mix flour, ginger, cinnamon, baking soda, nutmeg and salt in large bowl. Set aside. Beat butter and brown sugar in large bowl with electric mixer on medium until light and fluffy. Add molasses, egg and vanilla; mix well. Gradually beat in flour mixture on low speed until well mixed. Press dough into a thick flat disk. Wrap in plastic wrap. Refrigerate 4 hours or overnight. Preheat oven to 350°F. Shape dough into 1-inch balls. Roll in granulated sugar to coat. Place 2 inches apart on ungreased baking sheets. Bake 8-10 minutes or until edges of cookies begin to brown. Immediately press a chocolate candy into center of each cookie. Remove to wire racks; cool completely. Store cookies in airtight container up to 5 days.

mccormick.com

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 2022. All entries must include your name, mailing address, phone number and cooperative name.

BOARD REPORT & NOTICE

Continued from pg 2

withdrawals for September 2022 totaling \$332,181.63.

Director of Finance and Benefits, Rhonda Tuscherer reviewed quarterly budget projections and TIER, policy for cash reserves, and CFC Capital Credits/ Member Capital/Securities and SCTC interest.

Rhonda Tuscherer also presented the recommendations from the Wellness Committee for the 2023 employee Wellness Plan and Budget. Board agreed to put wellness budget as requested in 2023 budget.

There was a lengthy discussion on options for returning cash to members as FEM Electric is having a strong financial year due to bill credits from Basin and East River Electric.

Motion by Tom Thorpe, seconded by Paula Petersen and carried to approve director and attorney fees.

Legal Update: none

Meeting Report:

East River board update was given by Gary Bachman.

Tom Thorpe gave update on SDREA board meeting.

Paula Petersen gave an update on board leadership course she attended in Pierre.

The board acknowledged the receipt of the September 29, 2022, Safety Meeting Minutes.

Adjourn: President Gary Bachman declared the meeting adjourned.



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accepting the goals put in place for this department. Our goal is to provide good customer service. Starting jobs but not completing them correctly or on time is poor customer service. In 2019 the addition of an electrical wiring department came out of a strategic planning session. In December 2022 we will once again be hosting a strategic planning session that will include employees, members, directors, and staff. After the strategic planning session, the board and management are hoping to have some good feedback from each group to help strengthen our existing services and look at providing needed additional services.

Please plan early if you are adding any electrical load. All indications show that 2023 will be a tough year for receiving supplies. Call Rob Vetch or Ryan Holien early at 605-426-6891 or 800-587-5880.




FOLLOW US ON SOCIAL MEDIA

@FEMElectric on 

@fem_electric on 

@FEMElectric on 

We'll post outage updates, safety tips, news and more to keep our members informed on all the latest from FEM Electric.



RECIPES NEEDED FOR

The Country Cookin'

cookbook

Your recipe could be featured in the 39th volume of East River Electric's Country Cookin' cookbook!

Help us create another great cookbook by submitting your favorite recipes as well as recipes for the cookbook's "Wild Game" section.

Submit recipes via email to

ajohannsen@eastriver.coop


or contact your local cooperative for more information.



FEM ELECTRIC'S ANNUAL

*Pancake &
Sausage Breakfast*

JANUARY 20TH, 2023
7:00 AM - 10:00 AM
North Shop Building
800 5th Ave. - Ipswich, SD



FEM Electric is hosting its annual pancake breakfast, and will collect essential paper products and cleaning supplies for local food pantries, as well as provide a free breakfast to everyone! Bring your appetite and any donation is appreciated, but the following items have been requested:

Napkins
Cups
Plates
Paper Towels
Tissues

Toilet Paper
Shampoo
Body Wash
Laundry Soap
Diapers

The annual breakfast is a great time for FEM Electric board and staff to visit with our member-owners, show our appreciation, and give back to the communities we serve.

We can't wait to see you and your family at the FEM
Pancake and Sausage Breakfast!



LeRoy Iedema, Richard Ringling and Duane Strand crank out nearly 60,000 toy cars each year from their 12x10-foot workshop in Platte.
Photo by Billy Gibson

Duane Strand gets lots of 'smileage' out of making toy cars for children

Billy Gibson

editor@sdrea.coop

Frustrated moms across the ages have been searching for a surefire method for getting an unruly child to simmer down.

Duane Strand is pretty sure he's found a failsafe solution: toy cars.

Several years ago, Strand began building tiny wooden cars in his nondescript backyard shed in Platte. He recalls visiting Pierre one evening and having dinner at a local restaurant when a young boy suddenly started pitching a fit and hollering at the top of his lungs.

Strand just happened to have one of the cars in his pocket. He reached out and handed it to the child and was rather amazed at the result. Not only did the whining stop forthwith, but that boy's frown turned upside down as the

kid started beaming from ear to ear.

"He quit yelling right then and there. His whole attitude changed," Strand recalls. "These cars really have a soothing effect on the kids."

That's the impact Strand is shooting for as he and his three-man team of retirees crank out nearly 60,000 toy cars each year. They're looking to squeeze all the "smileage" they can get out of the toy cars they build.

The main construction crew includes retired farmer Richard Ringling and retired mechanic LeRoy Iedema. Ringling usually works the drill press to create holes in the wood where the axles will go. Then Iedema follows up by pressing the wheels onto the axles. He came up with a way to make sure the wheels roll straight and stay in place and dares anyone to try and pull off a wheel.

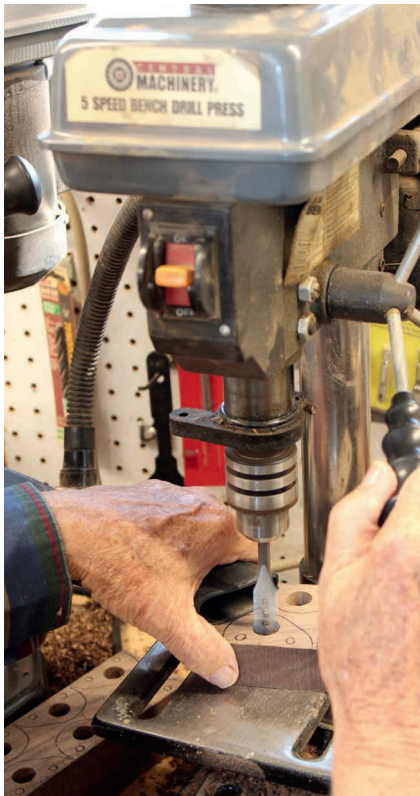
There are others who join in the

process: Justin Kok cuts the wood into manageable blocks; Brett Wynia performs repairs on the drill presses, band saws, sanders, routers and other pieces of equipment when they break down; and Curtis Versteeg helps to sand down the rough surfaces on the cars.



Toy cars are distributed by military personnel serving overseas.

And just down the road from the shop is the Platte Lumber Yard, where many of the material supplies are stored until needed for production. Strand said it was the folks down at the lumber yard who initiated the vital connection with



Dustin Knutson of Boyds Hardwood Gunstock supplies the toy makers with the laminated wood used to create the tiny cars (inset) for worldwide distribution. *Photo by Billy Gibson*

Boyds Hardwood Gunstock that keeps the operation humming along.

"Without Boyds we wouldn't be able to do any of this," Strand said.

Dustin Knutson, a member of Central Electric Cooperative and part owner of the company that bills itself as the largest after-market gun stock maker in the world, is a Shriner with a heart for community service and said he was all-in when Strand approached him about supporting the program by supplying excess wood.

"They're really easy to work with," he said, noting that he keeps one of the cars on his desk. "They take whatever they can get and they show up consistently. We started saving off-cut blocks of wood specifically for the cars. The laminated wood works well because it's colorful and looks good and the kids can pick out their favorite one."

Strand's distribution system is a bit scatter shot but he still manages to send them all over the globe. Anyone he knows who is planning a trip gets a supply of cars. Knutson, for instance, takes them with him when he travels for business or pleasure, whether vacationing in Mexico or hunting in Africa.

"People in America may think these are just simple toys, but I've been in parts of the world where a toy for a kid is a stick and a rock," Knutson said. "But these little cars give kids something to smile about. Duane and his guys are just beautiful people doing good things for the good of humanity and we're happy to help them any way we can."

The toys also ride along in ambulances, military satchels and police vehicles in the event a child needs to be calmed. They show up in doctor's offices, churches and other venues.

The operation is affiliated with a group called Toys for God's Kids, a non-denominational organization based in Denver. Strand is the only affiliated "smile maker" in South Dakota.

While the three-man crew claims they're working harder than they used to before retiring, Iedema assigns a greater value to his toil beyond the opportunity to put a smile on a kid's face. He said his heart doctor has informed him that he's in better shape than before he started woodworking three years ago. He's slimmer, more active and feels a lot better.

Strand chips in, "...yeah, and he's



more ornery than ever, too!"

Collectively, the guys crank out about 250 cars a day scrunched inside the 12 x 10-foot shed. Each unit has to be dipped in linseed oil to protect children from any potential toxicity. The toys are boxed and shipped to their destination at the recipient's expense.

Strand doesn't know how much longer he's going to be able to keep cranking out cars. He'll reach the age of 90 in a few months and his friend Ringling has a plan: "I told him when he turns 90 we're going to take him up by the interstate and take a picture underneath the sign that says I-90. Get it?"



From our co-op family to yours,
wishing you a joyous holiday
season and a happy and peaceful
New Year!

FEM Electric will be closed Dec. 26th for
Christmas and Jan. 2nd for New Year's.

It's that time of year again!

**Don't wait until the last minute
to wrap your gifts. Let FEM help!**

**Free gift wrapping services will
be available December 8th from
9:00 am to 4:00 pm.**

**Cookies and hot chocolate will be
available, too!**



STAY SAFE DURING SEVERE WEATHER

ICE AND OTHER SEVERE WINTER WEATHER CAN RESULT IN POWER OUTAGES

When severe winter weather hits, power outages can occur. Roadways can be dangerous. Do all you can to prepare your pantry, home and car for the next severe winter storm. Once you are ready, watch and listen for weather bulletins mentioning winter storms, blizzard warnings or windchill dangers.

Supplies for the storm: At home, have enough nonperishable food, water and medical supplies/medicines for 72 hours. The Federal Emergency Management Agency and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention suggest storing one gallon of water per person per day. Have cell phones and chargers, as well as backup charger sources, ready. Gather important documents and medical records. Protect your pets and make sure you have enough supplies for them as well. Also have these items ready: a first-aid kit, a flashlight and batteries, hand sanitizer, blankets and warm clothing.

Readying the house: Weatherproof your home ahead of winter by caulking windows and doors and looking for other air leaks that need attention. Inspect chimney flues for wood stoves or wood-burning fireplaces. Install smoke and carbon monoxide detectors on each floor of your home. Protect pipes from freezing.

Prepare your vehicle with an emergency kit: According to Consumer Reports, it can be cheaper to buy a prepared emergency kit than to purchase items individually. A kit typically includes battery booster cables, an ice scraper, a portable shovel, flashlights, a signaling cone, backup batteries for the flashlight, roadside triangles, a reflective vest, a basic first-aid kit (add in what is needed for individual needs) and a cell phone charger.

In addition, your car or truck should also be stocked with gloves, a blanket, a rain poncho, wipes, rags, boots and a hat. It cannot hurt to also have bottled water and nonperishable snacks in your vehicle in case you get stranded.

Prepare your vehicle: Complete annual maintenance, test the car battery and cooling system, use winter tires and replace them if the tread is less than 2/32 of an inch, check tire pressure and wiper blades, add wiper fluid rated for less than minus 30 degrees and keep the gas tank at least half full.

Know that when the power goes out, we work hard to restore it safely and efficiently. For information about electrical safety or storm preparation, visit SafeElectricity.org.

A Storm is Always Ready

ARE YOU?



When Mother Nature threatens a severe storm, be ready by having an emergency kit on hand.

YOUR KIT SHOULD INCLUDE:



Bottles of water
Nonperishable food
Portable phone charger

Flashlights
Batteries
Can opener



First-aid supplies
Hand sanitizer
Prescriptions

Pain reliever
Warm clothing
Blankets



Battery-operated radio
Toys, books and games
Important documents

Money
Baby supplies
Pet supplies

Once your kit is assembled, check it a few times a year to make sure batteries are fresh and that no one has borrowed a necessary item.

Learn more at:





CHANGING YOUNG LIVES

The Great Plains Youth Regional Treatment Center near Mobridge is a place where at-risk youth can go to address their challenges with drug and alcohol abuse. *Photo by Roger Lawien*

Treatment center helps young people get back on the right path

Billy Gibson

billy.gibson@sdrea.coop

It was a small compliment, but it meant everything to the young lady who wasn't quite accustomed to receiving positive reinforcement. A simple affirmation spoken softly and sincerely into her ear: "You're gorgeous, and you're worthy." And the tears began to flow.

The Indian Health Service Great Plains Youth Regional Treatment Center near Mobridge is a place where at-risk youth can go to address their challenges with drug and alcohol abuse and find the support they need to deal with difficult situations.

Acting Clinical Director Charita Dowdell remembers that encounter with the young woman.

"I tell all of our residents how gorgeous they are and that I see the beauty in them and who they are deep down inside," Dowdell said. "I told her she was worthy and that she had value,

and she just broke down. She told me that nobody had ever said that to her."

That's just one of the stories about how the treatment center's staff strive to change the lives of teens who enter the program. There are many others.

Program Director Lavon Booth has been involved with the residential program for 20 years, initially as an administrative officer when she started in 2002. She previously served at the Cheyenne River Service Unit in her hometown of Eagle Butte before starting at the YRTC.

She sees the transformation of residents captured in plain view during graduation ceremonies that take place when the 12-week session concludes.

"We're very fortunate to see the change that happens in our residents from the time they arrive until the time they graduate," she said. "We see them moving in a positive direction and at graduation we get to hear them speak intimately about what they've learned and you see how it all comes together.

They come in very shy and reserved, and they leave here carrying a more positive spirit and more confidence. It's really touching for us and very rewarding."

The treatment center is housed in the old Chief Gall Inn hotel on land leased from the Standing Rock tribe. Youth between the ages of 13 and 17 are referred through tribal alcohol programs, local schools, community service organizations and other agencies.

According to the center's mission statement, the program "is dedicated to promoting a healthy lifestyle restoring balance and harmony in mind, body and spirit to our American Indian youth and their families."

Dowdell said playing a role in watching that mission statement come true to life in the form of changed behaviors and more positive attitudes makes her know she's definitely making a profound difference.

One effective modality is a mentoring program where residents taking part in the rehabilitation process shepherd those who are just entering the facility. Not only do the incumbent residents show the newbies around the physical



The youth treatment center is located in the former Chief Gall Inn hotel near Mobridge. *Photo by Roger Lawien*

space, but they also listen to their concerns, answer questions and try to allay their fears that stem from living in a new environment with certain rules, guidelines and expectations.

“When they start feeling homesick or afraid or stressed and they just need someone near their age to talk to, it helps them make the adjustment so they can settle down and focus on what they need to do to make changes. That bond is something that actually helps both of them get through and graduate successfully,” she said.

Dowdell noted there is a concern among staff about residents returning to a challenging environment. So, upon graduation, the youth receive support through a tracking system where staffers make regular check-in calls after three days, three months, six months and a year. A tele-health network is also

available to the graduates.

Role-playing also helps re-integration, Dowdell said. She added that the residents are taught to anticipate the same kind of challenges they faced before and how to handle them with a different approach.

“They return as a changed person, but everybody else around them will be doing the same things,” she said. “We tell them to stay connected to their support system and manage their emotions; how to be true to yourself while being respectful to others. We prepare them for what life is going to look like when they leave.”

She mentioned one particular youngster who entered the program with a defiant attitude and dealing with depression, anxiety and post-traumatic stress. She knuckled down academically and caught up to her class grade. After

graduation, she returned to juvenile detention for seven months. But in the end, she straightened out her life by applying the things she learned at the center.

“She struggled with treatment, but she sent us a letter thanking us for what the program did for her,” Dowdell said. “She said she was grateful for giving her the skills to manage the difficult predicament she was going through. She changed her mentality and grew and matured and became a new person.”

Dowdell stressed that parents can play a key role in helping their children navigate through rehabilitation or prevent them from becoming a candidate in the first place.

“Listen to your children,” she emphasized. “They are saying something to you, but often they don’t feel like they’re being heard. Before you shut that door, listen to what they’re saying. You may have to shut the door anyway, but at least take the time to listen to what they have to say.”

Visit www.ihs.gov/greatplains/healthcarefacilities/greatplainsyrtc/.

Lavon Booth, left, and Charita Dowdell, work to provide students the skills they need to change the direction of their lives.



SANTA SACS FOR KIDS

The Botkins - Amanda, Dean, Elizabeth, Anna and Eric - work as a team to provide gift bags for students. Photo by Billy Gibson

Botkin family creates Santa Sacs program to spread holiday cheer

Billy Gibson

billy.gibson@sdrea.coop

Each Christmas season, the Botkin family home nestled in the foothills just outside of Spearfish is transformed from a cozy chalet-style space into a tightly managed, finely tuned assembly center.

The goal is to produce dozens of cinch sacks full of Christmas gifts for school-age children. There's even a name for the operation: Santa Sacs for Kids.

Amanda Botkin and her husband, Eric, have spent the past 10 yuletide seasons organizing the program and working in conjunction with local school counselors to connect with students and distribute the gift bags. When the calendar page flips to December, the Botkins and their three children ages 8 through 14 kick into high gear and the home starts buzzing with activity.

To achieve maximum efficiency – or possibly to prevent the family pets from completely freaking out - the process is

departmentalized. In the kitchen area, bags are filled with coloring books and stickers and small toys for kindergarten and elementary school children. In the living room, items specifically for older female students are gathered up and placed in pink plastic sacks. Down the hallway, fast-food gift cards, winter hats and personal hygiene products like body wash and shampoo for high schoolers are collected and deposited in the totes.

Closer to Christmas and before school lets out for the break, the bags are loaded up in the family Sequoia and transported to counselors at different schools in the area.

The entire program was Amanda's brainchild, which stemmed from her quest for a way to spark a spirit of giving and community service within her own children – and most of all, a sense of gratitude for blessings received.

"My oldest daughter, Elizabeth, was in kindergarten and I just felt that it was very important for my kids to understand how fortunate we are as a



Eric's sister, Amy Irion, also enjoyed participating in the annual project.

family. They need to know what it's like to do things for others," she said. "Not everybody has a Christmas that looks like ours does."

Amanda, who works as a nurse in Spearfish, contacted local school counselor and personal friend Mandi Scott and shared the details of her plan. Scott climbed aboard without hesitation. Then Amanda hopped on social media to seek support from other friends, relatives and anyone else interested in contributing to the project. The response was overwhelming.

"We've received so much help from so many people who were willing to donate items or funds to buy gifts," she said. "But we wouldn't be able to do



Anna Botkin, a student at Spearfish Middle School, has learned that it's more important to give than to receive. *Photo by Billy Gibson*

anything without participation from our counselors. We do everything through them and everything is anonymous with the kids. They give us the ages and genders and we put together the Santa Sacs for them based on the information we get. School counselors have a really hard job and don't always get the recognition they deserve, so we want them to know how much we appreciate what they do and the critical services they provide. They're amazing!"

While Amanda says that pursuing the project is its own reward, occasionally the counselors will forward messages of thanks they've received from students.

"It's nice to get notes when the kids send them," Amanda said. "But it's mostly about trying to give them the kinds of gifts that they'll like or use or have fun with."

Eric Botkin said he was gung-ho from the beginning when his wife approached him with her plans. He describes the influence his single mother had on developing his understanding of charity. When he was younger, his mom worked

Elizabeth was a youngster when her mother started Santa Sacs for Kids and helps each year to stuff and distribute gift bags.

at a nursing home in Douglas, WY, and he and his siblings would spend Christmas visiting with residents and giving them presents. When Eric was in high school, his mother was a patrolling police officer and used her position to serve others and help solve problems.

During the first year of Santa Sacs for Kids, Eric's role was to take care of the younger kids, Anna and Dean, while kindergartner Elizabeth played the role of Amanda's elf.

"I kept an eye on the kids while Elizabeth and Amanda went out and shopped," Eric said. "But then as the years went along, the number of bags and gifts kept growing. We needed



every hand in the house and whatever volunteers we could get. Amanda has a huge heart and is a great person and always tries to make sure there are nice things in the bags. She wants the kids to all love what they get."

Amanda, not exactly a loafer, has bigger dreams for the program she created: "I'd really like to get more of the surrounding communities involved and put more bags out there. There's so much need."

She would also like to see more older kids get involved in Christmas giving projects so that they can learn the lessons that Elizabeth has learned.

Elizabeth, a 14-year-old freshman at Spearfish High School, is a track and wrestling athlete and also participates in Spartans for Spartans, a group that helps elementary students make a smoother transition to middle school.

"I like getting Christmas presents, but it's more important to give to others," she said. "I like doing something positive with my family and it's great knowing I'm helping other kids make their lives better."

For those who wish to donate, visit <https://gofund.me/2f62016a>.

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NOV. 25
Olde Tyme Christmas Kick-off and Parade
Hill City, SD

NOV. 25
"Light up the Night" Parade and Fireworks
Belle Fourche, SD

NOV. 25-26
Kris Kringle Kraft Fair
Hill City, SD

NOV. 26
Gregory Mid-Winter Fair
Gregory Auditorium
Gregory, SD
605-830-9778

DEC. 2-3
Christmas in the Hills
Mueller Center
Hot Springs, SD
605-745-4140

DEC. 3
Santa's Thrift Village
Minneluzahan Senior Center
Rapid City, SD
605-394-1887

DEC. 3
Tabor's Holiday Light Parade
Tabor, SD
605-660-0274

DEC. 3
60th Annual Wreath and Centerpiece Sale
Central States Fair Grounds,
Rapid City, SD
605-343-0710

DEC. 3
Julefest 2022: Scandinavian Christmas Festival & Bazaar
8 a.m.-2p.m.
Our Savior's Lutheran Church
Spearfish, SD

DEC. 4
Sioux Falls Legion Post 15 Pancake Breakfast
8:30 a.m.-noon
1600 W Russell St.
Sioux Falls, SD

DEC. 4
Hartford Hometown Christmas
Hartford, SD
www.hartfordhtc.com

DEC. 4
Walk Through Bethlehem
United Methodist Church
Webster, SD
605-345-3747

DEC. 10
Frontier Christmas
Fort Sisseton Historic State Park
Lake City, SD
605-448-5474

DEC. 15-18
Christmas at the Cathedral
521 N Duluth Ave.
Sioux Falls, SD
605-988-3765

DEC. 17
Custer Christmas for Kids
Custer High School
Custer, SD
custerchristmas4kids@gmail.com

JAN. 14
Coats for Kids Bowling Tournament
Registration Starts at 1 p.m.
\$80 for a four-person team
Meadowood Lanes
Rapid City, SD
605-393-2081

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