

COOPERATIVE CONNECTIONS



Fostering Futures

**Mike Rowe Scholarship
Sponsors Co-op Lineman**

Pages 8-9

**Understanding the
Southwest Power Pool**

Pages 12-13

Dirty Jobs star Mike Rowe with Work Ethic Scholarship recipient Tayden Wells at Mitchell Technical College
Submitted Photo

BOARD REPORT



The Board of Directors meet with FEM staff at the December meeting.

December 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 December 16, 2025, 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 the minutes of the meeting. The following directors were declared present by roll call: Gary Bachman, Paula Petersen, Eric Odenbach, Tom Thorpe, Kelly Melius. Operations Manager Sean Christiansen, Electrical Manager Ryan Holien, Director of Finance and Benefits Rhonda Tuscherer, and CEO Scott Moore.

Guest Employee: Logan Gruenstein

Changes to the agenda: Add SDREA board report under meetings.

Changes/Additions to Minutes from November 18, 2025, meeting: made a spelling correction under the resolution portion.

Next Meeting Date: After a review of the calendars, directors agreed that the next regular meeting of the board would be on Tuesday, January 20, 2026, at 8:30 a.m. to be held at FEM Electric Board Room in Ipswich, South Dakota.

Motion by Eric Odenbach, seconded

by Kelly Melius and carried to approve administrative business.

The board and staff watched NRECA Governance Video titled "The Boards Role in Cybersecurity".

Motion by Tom Thorpe was seconded by Paula Petersen and carried to acknowledge the manager and staff reports along with East River Electric load management report.

The board acknowledges receiving and reviewing November 2025 Cyber Security Report.

Resolutions and Contracts:

Motion by Eric Odenbach was seconded by Kelly Melius and carried to nominate Gary Bachman as voting delegate and Sean Christiansen as alternate voting delegate for NRTC annual meeting.

Motion by Kelly Melius seconded by Eric Odenbach and carried to appoint the following employees to the 2026 committees:

Scholarship Committee 2026: Crystal Thorson (Chair), Cody Scarrott, Barb Schaefer, Perry Ptacek, Ryan Holien, Rhonda Tuscherer

Safety Committee 2026: Sonje Oban, Sean Christiansen, Crystal Thorson, Perry Ptacek, Cody Scarrott and Ryan Holien

Grievance Committee 2026: Sonje Oban, Cody Scarrott, and Gregg Zwart

Membership Business:

Board acknowledged membership business:

New Memberships, Member Cancellations and Contracts:

Disconnects: Irene Pietz, Hosmer, SD, Pasture Pump

Reconnects: Jean Heier, Hosmer, SD, Pasture Pump

Contracts: None

Retired Locations: None

Capital Credits:

Estates: December 2025: one = \$444.76

73 & Older: December 2025: one = \$3,681.01

Board acknowledged receipt of following financial business:

The check register for the month of November 2025 contained information on checks #35800 through #35853 and all automatic payments/withdrawals for November 2025 totaling \$404,531.24.

November 2025 financials were reviewed.

Motion by Kelly Melius seconded by Tom Thorpe and carried to approve the 2026 budget as presented.

After a discussion on 2026 rates.

Motion by Eric Odenbach seconded by Paula Petersen and carried to approve the following electric rate increases beginning January 1, 2026:

SEE PAGE 7 FOR 2026 RATE SCHEDULE

The board reviewed the Y-T-D 2025 aid of construction in the amount of \$220,955.12.

Continued on page 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. Secretary/
Treasurer
Vaughn Beck, Attorney

CEO/General Manager

Scott Moore
info@femelectric.coop

Management Staff

Sean Christiansen
Operations Manager
Ryan Holien
Electrical Manager
Rhonda Tuscherer
*Director of Finance and
Benefits*

Editor's e-mail:

oban@femelectric.coop

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.

Subscription information: As part of their membership, FEM members devote \$1.00 from their monthly electric payments for a subscription. Nonmember subscriptions are available for \$15 annually. (USPS 189-720) Periodical Postage Paid at Ipswich, SD 57451 and at additional offices.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to FEM Electric Cooperative Connections, Box 468, Ipswich, SD 57451-0468.

How to contact us:

FEM Electric
PO Box 468
Ipswich, SD 57451
Phone: 1-800-587-5880 or
605-426-6891
E-mail: info@femelectric.coop
Website: www.femelectric.coop
Design assistance by SDREA

FEM Electric is an equal opportunity provider and employer.



Scott Moore
General Manager/CEO

THE IMPORTANCE OF SERVING AS A DIRECTOR ON AN ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE BOARD

Empower Communities and Discovering Personal Rewards

Why Become a Director on an Electric Cooperative Board?

Electric cooperatives are the backbone of countless communities across America, providing reliable, affordable power to homes, farms, and businesses. At the heart of every cooperative is a dedicated board of directors, elected from among the membership, who guide the organization's mission, strategy, and values. Serving as a director is more than a position, it's a chance to make a lasting difference in your community.

Making a Meaningful Impact

Directors have a direct hand in shaping the future of the cooperative. They are responsible for setting policies, overseeing financial health, and ensuring that the cooperative meets the needs of its members. This role is vital in

maintaining affordable rates, investing in infrastructure, and promoting innovation. By serving, directors help safeguard the interests of their neighbors and build a more resilient local economy.

Rewards of Board Service

While the responsibility is significant, the rewards are equally profound. Board members gain the satisfaction of contributing to the greater good and seeing tangible results from their efforts. Serving offers opportunities for professional development, leadership training, and networking with other passionate community leaders. Directors also develop a deeper understanding of energy issues, governance, and the cooperative business model.

- Personal Growth: Enhance leadership, decision-making, and strategic thinking skills.
- Community Engagement: Build lasting relationships with members and stakeholders.
- Legacy Building: Create positive change that benefits future generations.

Continued on page 6

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.

Statement Mailing Dates

February 25, 2026 for February's energy
March 26, 2026 for March's energy

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

FIVE WAYS TO SAFEGUARD YOUR HOME THIS WINTER

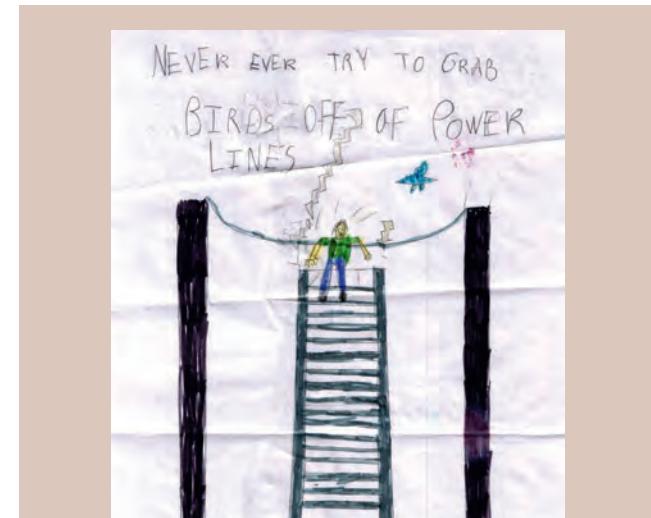
As the temperatures drop and the days grow shorter, there's a natural inclination to create a warm and cozy haven at home. Unfortunately, as we see increased use of heating equipment, candles and electrical items, the number of home fires tends to increase during winter months.

Here are five ways you can safeguard your home for the winter season.

1. Ensure carbon monoxide and smoke detectors are working properly. If your detectors are battery-operated, replace the batteries annually. Test the detectors once a month and give them a good dusting to ensure the sensors are clear of dirt and debris.
2. Inspect electrical cords. We depend on more cords during winter, whether for holiday lighting, extension cords or portable heaters. Before using any corded items, double check to make sure cords aren't frayed or cracked. If you use portable space heaters, remember to keep them at least three feet away from flammable items. Use models that include an auto shut-off feature and overheat protection. Space heaters can take a toll on your energy bills. Use them efficiently (to heat smaller spaces) and safely. Never plug a space heater into a power strip. Speaking of power strips...
3. Avoid overloading electrical outlets and power strips. When overloaded with electrical items, outlets and power strips can overheat and catch fire. If you use power strips for multiple devices, make sure the strip can handle the electrical load. For a safer bet, look for power strips that include surge protection.
4. Clean the fireplace to improve safety and efficiency. There's nothing better than a warm fire on a chilly night, but it's important to maintain your fireplace for safety. As wood burns, a sticky substance known as creosote builds up in the chimney. When creosote buildup becomes too thick, a chimney fire can ignite. The chimney should be cleaned at least once a year to reduce fire risks. Regular cleaning

also improves air flow and limits the amount of carbon monoxide that seeps indoors.

5. Practice safety in the kitchen. As we spend more time in the kitchen during the holiday season, be mindful of potential fire hazards. Never leave food that's cooking on the stovetop unattended. Clean and remove spilled foods from cooking surfaces and be mindful of where you place flammable items like dish towels.



Naomi Krcil, Age 8

Naomi warns readers to never, ever grab birds off power lines. Great job, Naomi! Naomi'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.

Family Night FAVORITES

Picture by Elena Veselova from Shutterstock

SAUERKRAUT BEEF BAKE

Ingredients:

1 lb ground beef
1 can sauerkraut, rinsed and drained
1/2 cup instant rice
1 can cream of mushroom soup
1 soup can water
2 tbsps. onion soup mix
1 small can sliced mushrooms (optional)

Method

Brown ground beef, drain excess fat. In large bowl, mix all remaining ingredients. Transfer to a greased 2-quart casserole or baking dish.

Cover and bake at 350°F for one hour or until heated through.

Sally Florey
Charles Mix Electric

MINI BBQ BACON CHEDDAR MEATLOAF

Ingredients:

2 lbs. ground beef
6 oz. chili sauce
4 slices bacon, cooked and crumbled
1 1/2 cups sharp cheddar cheese, shredded
1/2 cup panko breadcrumbs
2 large eggs
1 tsp. onion powder
1 tsp. seasoned salt
1 tsp. garlic powder
2 tbsps. Worcestershire sauce
1 tsp. yellow mustard
1/2 cup BBQ sauce

Method

Preheat oven to 425°F.
Cook and crumble bacon.
In a mixing bowl, mix together all meatloaf ingredients except the BBQ sauce.
Divide the mixture into 8 round loaves. Press a small depression into the middle of the meatloaves.
Brush BBQ sauce on top of the meatloaves.
Bake for 25 minutes. Turn on broiler and brown the BBQ sauce for 2 to 5 minutes.

Kayla Beamer
Southeastern Electric

SMOKED MEATLOAF

Ingredients:

1 cup panko breadcrumbs
1 cup whipping cream
1.5 lbs. 93% lean ground beef
1 lb. ground pork
1/2 pkg. bacon
2 eggs, beaten
2 tps. Worcestershire sauce
1-2 tps. minced garlic
1/8 cup ketchup
2 tps. Heifer Dust (spice)
1/2 tsp. ground pepper
1/2 sweet onion, chopped
1/2 green pepper, chopped
1-2 carrots, chopped
1-2 celery stalks, chopped
1/2 carton mushrooms, chopped

Basting Sauce

Cookies BBQ	Ketchup
Brown sugar	Dry mustard
Apple cider vinegar	

Method

Turn Traeger to Smoke then set to 225°F and preheat for 15 minutes.

Combine the vegetables, drizzle with olive oil and microwave for about 2 minutes to soften. Cool for 10 minutes. Mix everything in a large bowl with hands. Form into a large loaf on parchment paper. Place bacon strips on grate pan. Gently flip loaf onto the bacon lined grate pan.

Place on grill and smoke for 45 minutes. Increase temperature to 325°F. Preheat for 10 minutes. Return to grill and insert probe. Cook until internal temperature reaches 160°F – about 1-2 more hours depending on size of loaf.

During the last 15-20 minutes, baste heavily with barbecue sauce mixed with brown sugar, ketchup, mustard and a little apple cider vinegar or apple juice.

Deb Prins
Cam Wal 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 2026. All entries must include your name, mailing address, phone number and cooperative name.

BOARD REPORT CONTINUED

Board Report Continued from page 2

Moore reported that there were no bad debt write-offs in 2025 and reported that FEM members do an excellent job keeping their energy bills current.

Director of Finance and benefits Rhonda Tuscherer reported that Basin Electric returned \$268,323.08 to FEM Electric. A decision will be made in 2026 when to return the money to FEM Electric members.

Motion by Eric Odenbach seconded by Kelly Melius to approve CEO Moore, to sign service agreement between FEM Electric and Eide Bailly to perform annual audit.

Motion by Tom Thorpe was seconded by Paula Petersen and carried to approve board expense reports and attorney fees.

Legal Update: Moore reported that Attorney Beck reviewed county franchise agreements and they will need to be renewed by 2034.

Meeting Report:

East River monthly board report was given by Gary Bachman, and monthly video was watched.

Directors Gary Bachman, Kelly Melius, and Tom Thorpe reported on NE Rural Utilities Legislative forum where four cooperatives discussed cooperative issues with six legislators.

Paula Petersen and Kelly Melius reported on two NRECA board education classes they attended in Pierre.

Gary Bachman reported on the Mid-West annual meeting held in Denver. Mid-West is the legislative lobbying for our hydro power along with Western Area Power and activities that affect our rivers.

Tom Thorpe gave a report on SDREA board meeting.

The safety meeting minutes from November 19 & 20, 2025, were acknowledged.

Josh Weigel received a gift celebrating twenty-five years of service to FEM Electric members.

Adjourn: President Gary Bachman declared the meeting adjourned.

Manager's Article Continued from page 3

- Education: Access ongoing training and resources to stay informed about energy trends and cooperative governance.

Who Should Consider Serving?

If you are passionate about your community and eager to make a difference, consider running for the board. No special background is required—just a commitment to serving your fellow members, a willingness to learn, and a desire to see your cooperative thrive. By stepping forward, you can ensure that the cooperative remains responsive, innovative, and member focused.

Conclusion

Serving as a director on your electric cooperative board is a chance to be part of something bigger than yourself. It's about stewardship, collaboration, and community pride. The role may be challenging, but the opportunity to leave a lasting legacy and experience personal growth makes it incredibly rewarding. If you're ready to help shape the future of your cooperative, consider board service—you'll be making a difference where it matters most.

In the March edition of our Cooperative Connections, we will list open Director Districts up for election.

Article Courtesy of Clay Union's Manager, Chris Larson

25 YEARS OF SERVICE CELEBRATED



On December 16th, Scott Moore presented Josh Weigel with a gift for 25 Years of Service to FEM Electric.

2026 Rate Schedule

EFFECTIVE JANUARY 1ST, 2026

FEM ELECTRIC RATE SCHEDULE

The FEM Electric Board of Directors met December 16th and set new rate schedules. To help members see what this means for them, we've provided a rate schedule comparison below.

2025 Rate 2026 Rate

SINGLE-PHASE RESIDENTIAL & SMALL COMMERCIAL

Availability charge	\$62.00	\$62.00
Kilowatt Hour (kWh)	.107	.119

HEAT METER RATE (OCT 1ST - APRIL 30TH)

Heat Rate per Kilowatt Hour (kWh)	.056	.068
-----------------------------------	------	------

THREE-PHASE LARGE COMMERCIAL

Availability charge	\$62.00	\$62.00
Kilowatt Hour (kWh)	.077	.089
Demand Rate per Kilowatt (KW)	\$16.90	\$19.02

LARGE COMMERCIAL CONTROLLED

Availability charge	\$62.00	\$62.00
Kilowatt Hour (kWh)	.077	.089
Demand Rate per Kilowatt (KW)	\$18.40	\$20.52

THREE-PHASE LARGE COMMERCIAL LOAD CONTROL 5/7

Availability charge	\$62.00	\$62.00
Kilowatt Hour (kWh)	.077	.089

IRRIGATION THREE-PHASE NON LOAD CONTROL/LOAD CONTROL

Availability charge	\$62.00	\$62.00
Kilowatt Hour (kWh)	.08	.092
Demand Rate per Kilowatt (KW)	\$17.80	\$19.92
Coincidental Peak per Kilowatt (KW)	\$19.90	\$22.02

ENERGY EFFICIENCY TIP OF THE MONTH

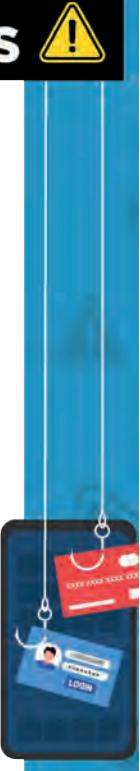
Mid-winter is a great time to ensure you're making the most of your home heating system. Replace or clean filters to keep your furnace or heat pump running efficiently. Listen for strange noises and check for uneven heating—these signs indicate that the system may need servicing. Ensure vents and radiators aren't blocked by furniture or rugs as proper airflow helps your system work less and saves energy. A little maintenance along the way can prevent costly repairs and keep your home cozy through winter.



TIPS TO AVOID ENERGY SCAMS



Enrolling in autodraft payments with your utility provider can help prevent certain types of utility bill scams. If a scammer contacts you with fake disconnection threats, you can rest easy knowing your bill is paid automatically through a pre-arranged, secure channel. Autodraft payments also eliminate the risk of exposing checks and personal banking info through the mail. If your utility offers autodraft payments, consider enrolling to stay on track and avoid certain scams.



Source: AARP

FOSTERING FUTURES

'Mike Rowe Scholarship' Winner Kicks Off Career at Electric Co-op

Jacob Boykojacob.boyko@sdrea.coop

For many high schoolers, figuring out the next steps after graduating is a time for making big decisions and answering tough questions. What do I want to do for a career? Should I go to a university or technical college? Will I be able to pay off all of this college debt?

Tayden Wells' mind was already made up following a great high school internship and a little bit of faith and support from others. Wells was awarded numerous scholarships, but none as prestigious – nor time-consuming – as the Work Ethic Scholarship from 'Dirty Jobs' star Mike Rowe.

Discovering the Passion

Growing up around linemen, Tayden had an early appreciation for their work, unpredictable schedules and the expansive grid of wires and poles that keeps everyone's lights on.

"As a child I'd be sitting in the house and all of a sudden, Dad would up and vanish," Tayden explained. "And I always wondered, what's he doing? Where's he going? Why is he going to work on a Saturday or in the middle of the night? And then finally it occurred to me that we rely on the power grid, and when the power goes out, linemen go to work."

Tayden's dad, Travis, is a lineman at Clay-Union Electric in Vermillion, S.D. Tayden recalls the long car rides on hunting trips with his dad and uncle – also a lineman – where the conversations would drift to the power lines outside the truck windows.

"I'd hear them talking, using linemen slang like 'distro' (distribution lines) and 'T-lines' (transmission lines)," Tayden said. "They really sparked my interest."

When Tayden's high school business teacher told students to think about internships, he knew exactly where he wanted to go.

It All Started With an Internship

Tayden's teacher made the call to Union County Electric Cooperative in Elk Point, S.D. After getting the green light from the board of directors, Tayden was cleared to shadow the crew for about 10 hours a week as he learned the ins and outs of the job.

"He was always looking for something to do, and he also asked a lot of questions and had an eagerness to learn," General Manager Matt Klein said about Tayden's work ethic. "When I saw that, I knew he would fit in well with the rest of our team."

Klein offered the high school senior a full-time summer



internship where he continued to expand his skills before heading to Mitchell, S.D., in the fall.

Mike Rowe's Work Ethic Scholarship and the S.W.E.A.T. Pledge

With his mind made up after the internship, Tayden's next step was to enroll in the power line program at Mitchell Technical College for a formal education – and find scholarships to help pay for it.

A straight-A student involved in athletics and extracurricular activities, Tayden applied for numerous scholarships, including the highly competitive Work Ethic Scholarship.

The scholarship, founded and administered by Mike Rowe and his foundation, offers millions of dollars to kids around the nation interested in pursuing trade careers.

Electricians, linemen, HVAC, nursing, culinary, automotive, even cosmetology – just no four-year bachelor's degrees.

"We promote skilled trades and want to get people into good-paying jobs without them drowning in debt," explained mikeroweworks President Mary Sullivan, who oversees the scholarship. "It's just heartbreaking seeing the amount of kids taking on college debt and graduating and aren't able to find jobs in their chosen field. Even more heartbreaking – but less reported – is the number of kids that drop out partway through the program with the debt and no piece of paper."

The scholarship's application process is different too – it's intensive, spanning several months and requires applicants to submit a video, answer questionnaires, gather references and think critically about the scholarship's curriculum.

The scholarship attracts thousands of applicants, but by the end, only the most committed, hardest working remain.

"We want to give scholarships to the kids who are passionate – they show up early, stay late and help others," Sullivan explained. "One of the recipients said he applied for 20 scholarships, and if you put all the other 19 into a bucket, ours still took more

Q&A COOPERATIVE CONNECTIONS WITH MIKE ROWE

time – but he said there was a level of pride in receiving it. High school kids today need to see 18-20 year olds who are successful, and the scholarship program allows us to meet students we believe are good representatives for the industry."

Part of the curriculum includes the S.W.E.A.T. Pledge (Skill & Work Ethic Aren't Taboo) video series that walks students through 12 pledges Rowe designed to promote strong work ethic and foster successful careers, which include:

"I do not follow my passion. I bring it with me. I believe that any job can be done with passion and enthusiasm."

"I deplore debt and do all I can to avoid it. I would rather live in a tent and eat beans than borrow money for a lifestyle I can't afford."

After completing all of the curriculum and proposing a 13th S.W.E.A.T. pledge for a final project, Tayden was awarded \$16,000 to cover his education.

And when Rowe traveled to MTC in 2024, Tayden got the chance to thank Rowe face-to-face.

"Mike told me, from his mouth, that my scholarship was one of the highest amounts they gave out that year," Tayden said. "That was very cool to hear."

Rowe said Tayden stood out among thousands of applicants and embodies the qualities the scholarship promotes.

"Tayden checked all the boxes, and then some," Rowe said. "His references were great, his attitude was great, his essay was great, and his comments about The SWEAT Pledge were spot on. His willingness to pursue a skill that's in demand, along with his attitude and work ethic, make him a perfect example of the qualities we're trying to encourage with our scholarship program. The country needs thousands more like him."

Reflecting On the Journey

Tayden graduated from the power line program in 2025. He credits his success in part to his internship, saying the out-of-classroom experience set him up for a good year of training at MTC and a rewarding career with electric cooperatives.

"I kind of had the upper hand going into the program with my internship," Tayden said. "I was able to see stuff before I went to school, so I kind of had a good understanding of the basics. But for kids coming in, some of them obviously struggle. I'm a very hands-on, visual learner, so because I was able to see it beforehand, the bookwork and the schooling really clicked a lot better with me."

Today, Tayden is a full-time apprentice lineman at Union County Electric, where he continues to accumulate hours and complete coursework to earn his journeyman lineman certification. He encourages other young people not to overlook a career in the trades – or the Work Ethic Scholarship.

"With all of the talk about AI now, the trade jobs are always going to be there," Tayden said. "Without oil fields we wouldn't have gas, and without electricity we wouldn't have lights. Mike realizes that the world revolves around the trades. and he wants to see kids strive and succeed because in the trades there are endless opportunities, just like any other job."

Why is it so important that more young Americans enter the trades, and what does a shortage of skilled workers mean for the country?

For decades, the skills gap has been a tragedy of missed opportunity, both for students who weren't encouraged to consider a lucrative and viable path and the industries that rely on skilled labor. It still is. Today though, it's also a matter of national security. Not a week goes by that MRW doesn't get a call from an industry leader, desperate to hire skilled workers. The US Maritime Industrial Base told me they need 250,000 tradespeople to build nuclear subs. The automotive industry has over 100,000 openings for mechanics and collision repair techs. The energy industry needs half a million electricians, and the construction industry has so many openings they've stopped counting. The skills gap is real, and I can tell you that every CEO and every elected official I know are paying attention like never before.

What's one piece of advice you have for young people who are deciding their career path?

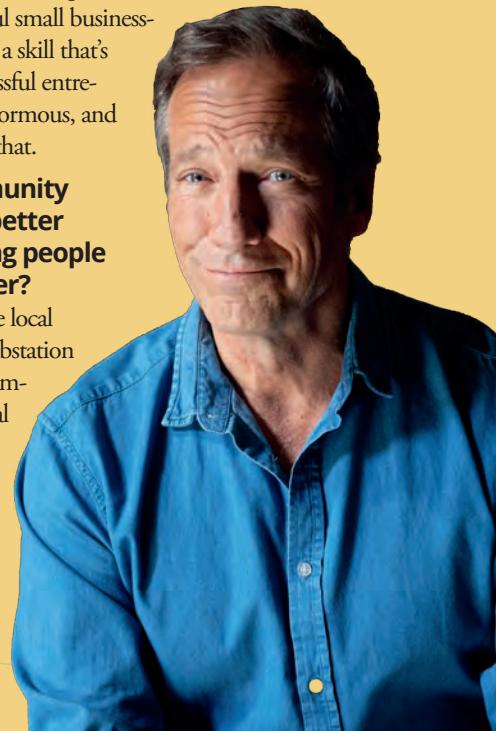
With regard to choosing a career, there's nothing more dangerous than dispensing advice to people you've never met. Same thing with choosing an education. We told an entire generation of kids that a four-year degree was the best path for the most people and then pressured them to borrow whatever it took to buy a degree, regardless of the cost. That kind of cookie-cutter advice was a colossal mistake and a big reason why we have millions of open jobs today that don't require a college diploma and lots of college graduates with a trillion dollars in student debt and no work in their chosen field. The only advice I generically offer to young people is to be very careful about "following your passion." Just because you're passionate about something doesn't mean you can't suck at it. Obviously, it's important to be passionate about whatever you do, but passion – like work ethic – is a choice, and life is a lot easier when you figure out a way to be passionate about whatever it is you're good at. (People hate hearing that, by the way, but it's the truth.)

What do you see as the single biggest misunderstanding young people have about working in the trades today?

The trades are surrounded by dozens of stigmas, stereotypes, myths and misperceptions that dissuade people from giving them an honest look. I guess if I had to pick one, I'd point to the stubborn belief held by many parents that their kids can't make six figures working with their hands. It's laughably and demonstrably false. And fun to disprove. Also – the simple fact that the road to so many successful small businesses often starts with the mastery of a skill that's in demand. The number of successful entrepreneurs in the skilled trades is enormous, and more people need to understand that.

What can teachers, community leaders and co-ops do to better identify and support young people interested in a trade career?

Start a "Career Reality Day" where local linemen, meter technicians and substation operators come in and talk real numbers. Not feel-good fluff, but actual wages, benefits, and career paths. When kids hear that a journeyman lineman can make \$80,000 a year without student loan debt, that gets their attention.



The parts of a POWER POLE

Ever wonder what's on a power pole and how it delivers electricity to your home? Learning about each part can help you and your family stay informed — and safe.

Here are some common parts found on power poles.

Equipment can vary depending on location and service needs.

Insulators keep energized wires from touching the pole or other wires, preventing dangerous contact.

Primary wires are the main series of wires that carry high-voltage electricity (often 7,200 volts) from substations through the distribution system — about 60 times higher than household voltage.

Lightning surge protectors shield equipment from lightning or sudden voltage spikes.

Transformers — the round, metal tank-like devices — reduce high-voltage electricity from primary wires to a safer level for homes and businesses. Many include a lightning arrestor for protection.

Neutral conductor wires provide a return path for electricity to the substation and are grounded to balance the system.

Ground wires run the entire length of the pole and safely channel electricity and lightning into the earth.

Secondary wires deliver lower-voltage electricity directly to homes and businesses.

Communication lines — for phone, cable or internet — are usually the lowest wires on the pole.

Guy wires anchor poles to the ground for stability. Stay clear of them when walking, playing, mowing or driving nearby.

Safety Tip: Never attach signs or posters to utility poles — it creates serious hazards for lineworkers.

Piles of presents wrapped during the 2025 gift wrapping event.

GIFT WRAPPING A SUCCESS

FEM ELECTRIC EMPLOYEES GIVE BACK DURING IPSWICH'S HOMETOWN HOLIDAY WEEKEND

It was another successful year of gift wrapping during Ipswich's Hometown Holiday. FEM hosted the event for free, allowing anyone who had a gift they needed wrapped to drop them off during the busy holiday season.

There was an increase in the number of people who dropped off gifts this year, which was a delight to the FEM staff who wrapped presents. The FEM elves were busy all morning, and part of the afternoon. Hot chocolate and cookies were also served to help power people on the go.

FEM welcomes anyone during this event, and we hope to see more people in 2026. Be on the lookout for our dates in the November and December editions of the Cooperative Connections, and on our social media platforms!



FEM elves, Rhonda and Angie, work together wrapping presents dropped off by several locals.

***New* Scholarship Available!**

Submit your application for a chance at one of FOUR scholarships:

1 - \$1500 Basin Scholarship* New in 2026

1 - \$1000 Basin Scholarship

2 - \$500 FEM Scholarships

DEADLINE TO APPLY:
February 13th, 2026

Applications available at femelectric.coop/scholarships



UNDERSTANDING THE SOUTHWEST POWER POOL

Frank Turner

frank.turner@sorea.coop

When looking at the entire electric grid, electric cooperatives are just one component in a much larger system. Understanding how that system works, and how power is planned and shared across the region, provides important context for decisions that affect reliability, long-term infrastructure investments and, ultimately, the cost of electricity.

Southwest Power Pool

Every electric cooperative in South Dakota operates within the Southwest Power Pool (SPP), a regional transmission organization that oversees the grid. Really, electric cooperatives are all essential pieces of a larger,

regional puzzle that keeps the lights on.

SPP manages a wholesale electricity market and operates transmission lines across all or parts of 14 Midwest states, including South Dakota.

In 2015, East River Electric Power Cooperative joined the Southwest Power Pool along with Basin Electric Power Cooperative and the Western Area Power Administration Upper Great Plains Region. This move allowed electricity generators in the state to participate in a larger regional market, making it easier and more efficient to buy and sell energy across the grid.

Electric cooperatives aren't the only utilities operating within this regional system. Investor-owned utilities and

Basin Electric's trading floor connects the cooperative to the broader wholesale electricity market.

Submitted Photo

municipal utilities also participate in the SPP, all feeding into the same wholesale electricity market. By sharing transmission lines and following the same market rules, these utilities help create a broader, more flexible grid, allowing power to move long distances to where it's needed most.

"SPP is like a traffic director of electricity, because it doesn't own any assets," said Kristi Fiegen, South Dakota Public Utilities Commissioner and chair of the Southwest Power Pool's Regional State Committee. "They direct traffic and work to make sure the transmission lines and generation are bringing electricity to about 18 million customers on a second-by-second basis. That supply has to equal the demand every single second."

Winter Storm Uri

Another important benefit of participating in SPP is its ability to support the grid during extreme weather or unexpected outages, when regional coordination becomes especially important. Because SPP manages electricity across such a large footprint, the system can draw on resources from far beyond state borders. For example, when a power plant in North Dakota goes offline for routine maintenance, electricity from another state can cover the gap. Likewise, during severe winter weather in the South, generation from the Dakotas can help support the southern part of the grid.

That system maintained regional reliability until Feb. 2021, when it was pushed to its limits by Winter Storm Uri, which caused widespread power outages across Texas. According to the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, 4.5 million people in Texas lost power during the storm.

“Winter Storm Uri woke up the entire nation, because we didn’t know how vulnerable we were,” said Fiegen.

The storm prompted SPP to reexamine how the grid maintains regional reliability during the winter. Part of that change involved increasing the reserve margin — the extra electric generation capacity kept on hand beyond what is normally needed — to help the system withstand extreme cold and unexpected outages. The goal, according to Fiegen, is to ensure enough power is available across the region, especially on the coldest days of the year.

“Since Winter Storm Uri, we have spent much of our time focused on resource adequacy policies,” Fiegen said, referring to SPP leadership and regulatory committees.

Reserve Margin

One significant change set to take effect in the 2026/2027 winter season is SPP’s adoption of a winter planning reserve margin, which increases the amount of generation required to be available during the winter season. The change will apply across the SPP footprint, including impacts to Basin Electric, which supplies power to cooperatives across South Dakota, North Dakota, Montana, Minnesota and much of the Midwest.

Through an increased winter reserve margin, the SPP aims to better prepare the entire SPP footprint for extreme weather and periods of unusually high electricity demand, helping ensure reliable power for homes, businesses and industries across the SPP footprint.

So, what does this mean for cooperative members in South Dakota? Valerie Weigel, senior vice president of Energy Markets and Dakota Coal Operations at Basin Electric, said higher reserve margins mean Basin Electric needs to supply more generation capacity to the SPP market to meet expected peak winter demands, which affects Basin Electric’s wholesale rates for the cooperatives it serves.

“The increase in reserve margins means we need to build additional generation to ensure we have enough accredited resources to meet new planning requirements,” Weigel said. “As we look toward the rate increase in 2026, part of that increase reflects the cost of adding these resources to meet updated market requirements.”

Learning The Lingo

Transmission

High-voltage power lines and related infrastructure that move electricity long distances from power plants to local utilities. Transmission allows electricity to be shared across regions, especially during emergencies or peak demand.

Generation Capacity

The maximum amount of electricity that a utility’s power plant or portfolio of power plants can produce at one time. Capacity matters most during peak demand, when the grid is under the most strain. This may happen during extreme heat or cold, when people are using more electricity to heat or cool their homes.

Southwest Power Pool (SPP)

A regional transmission organization that coordinates electricity transmission and wholesale power markets across 14 Midwestern states, including South Dakota and Minnesota. SPP does not own power plants or transmission lines; instead, it manages how electricity flows across the regional grid.

Regional Transmission Organization (RTO)

A federally approved organization, like SPP, that operates the electric grid across multiple states. RTOs balance supply and demand, manage wholesale electricity markets and plan for long-term grid reliability.

Reserve Margin

The extra amount of generation capacity kept available above expected peak demand. This extra capacity helps the grid handle extreme weather, unexpected outages or sudden increases in electricity use.

UNCLAIMED PROPERTY

IF YOU KNOW ANY OF THESE PAST MEMBERS OR BUSINESSES, PLEASE HAVE THEM CALL FEM ELECTRIC AT 605-426-6891 OR 800-587-5880 AND ASK FOR ANGIE.

ADM ALLIANCE NUTRITION
STAYE HOOSE, MGR
KIMBERLY A. ALBRIGHT
RENA E. ALLBEE
CALVIN ANDERSEN
DOUGLAS D. ARCHER
ROBERT L. ARCURI
VINCENT AMATO
WILLARD ARTHURS
ORPHA BENSEN
ALEX BICHLER
DONALD BISBEE
BARON OR JANELLE BRAUSEN
MIKE CASJENS
LEWIS CLARK
CRAVEN CORNER, LLC
CROSSROADS VET CLINIC, LTD
DAKOTA AG SUPPLY
GARY OR SARAH DAVIDSON
CHAD DAVIS
JOHN DEATON
DEVASTATOR LP
MICHAEL DEVOSS
MIKE DOSCH
EDNA DUNAWAY
GARY A. DUTENHOEFFER
DOUG EDGAR
WESLEY R. EVANS
MARGARET FEHR
WILMA FINLEY
EDWARD FISCHER
JESSE GEDITZ
GRAVES BROTHERS INC.
VERNA GUSTAFSON
BERNICE HANSEN
FRED HARNER
LEE HASELHORST
JACK HEACOCK
DONALD HEILMAN
JAMES R. HOGWOOD
ELIZABETH HUBERS
KURT D. HUBERS

INDUSTRIAL PROCESS TECH, INC.
WILLIAM OR RACHEL ISHEE
CATHY A. JONES
RONALD JONES
ALTON OR RAMONA JUNG
LLOYD KELLER
SHIRLEY KESSLER
THOMAS KOCH
JIMMY KOLB
RUSSELL & CAROLINE KRONBERG
L & J PROPERTIES
IRENA LARSON
ABNER T. LEWIS
LEURA LEWIS
HELEN LONG
RAYMOND D. LUNDBERG
CALVIN MCCURLEY
BILL OR TAMARA MCVAY
KIM MCKITTRICK
JIM MEEHL
EUGENE MILLER
MILLIRON H RANCH
EUGENE L. MITCHELL
GARRETT MITTLEIDER
ELMER MULSKE
JOHN OR TERI MUSKE
DALE OAKLEY
WALTER OPP
MARLYS PERRY
MICHELLE PICOTTE
BILLY PIPPIN
ROBERT PRITCHARD
CARL H REED
RICHARD RIEBEN
WILLIAM RIEBEN
DEVIN ROGERS
HELGA ROHRBACH
RUBIE'S BAR & GRILL
MAUREEN MILLER
TED SCEPANIAK
JACOB SCHILLING
ROGER SCHNABEL

RAYMOND OR ROSE SCHMALTZ
RUTH SCHUMACHER
TAMY SEHNERT
SHAWN SIGAFOOS
JIM SPECK
LORRIE G. STAFFORD
KARISSA STEIN
CAROLE A. STEWARD
MICHAEL STROMAN
ROBERT STROMAN
ALAN STUCKLE
VENTURE COMMUNICATIONS COOP
BRUCE VOEGELE
NAOMI VOEGELE
ALAN WALKER
MONTE WARREN
WESTERN COMMUNICATIONS
MATT WHELAN
RICHARD WILLIAMS
VIOLET B. WOLF

SAFETY TIP

During a power outage, unplug and turn off electrical devices to avoid power surges when power is restored. Leave one light on so you know when power comes back on. While the power is out, use flashlights instead of candles to reduce fire risk.



FEM ELECTRIC'S ANNUAL PANCAKE & SAUSAGE BREAKFAST

FREE

FEB 13, 2026
NORTH SHOP
7 AM - 10 AM



Accepting free will donations of paper products
and cleaning supplies for our local food pantries.

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: _____



FEB. 20-22
Winterfest 2026
Lead, SD
www.leadmethere.org/winterfest

Photo Courtesy of Lead Area Chamber of Commerce

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.

JAN. 30-FEB. 7
Annual Black Hills Stock Show
Central States Fairgrounds
Rapid City, SD
www.centralstatesfairinc.com
605-355-3861

FEB. 1
The Great Lake County Hotdish Competition
11:30-1:30 p.m.
St. Thomas School Gym
Madison, SD
605-256-5308

FEB. 6-7
31st Annual Dinner Theater
Reliance Legion Hall
Reliance, SD
Tickets: 605-730-0553

FEB. 7-8
The Black Market/Formerly Benson's Flea Market
Sioux Falls, SD
605-332-6004

FEB. 13-16
12th Annual Frost Fest
Brookings, SD

FEB. 14
Polar Bear Chili Cook-Off
11 a.m.-2 p.m.
Hill City, SD

FEB. 20-22
Winterfest
Fireworks, Parade of Lights,
Bonfire, Snowshoeing
Lead, SD
www.leadmethere.com/winterfest

FEB. 21
Knights of Columbus Fishing Derby & Raffle
10 a.m.-2 p.m.
Enemy Swim Lake, Waubay, SD
605-881-5075

FEB. 21
All Ability Skate
12-3 p.m.
Main Street Square
Rapid City, SD
disabilityac@rcgov.org

FEB. 21
Bellator Titans Casino Night Fundraiser
6-11 p.m.
City Lights Bar & Event Center
Aberdeen, SD

FEB. 22
C Street Brass
4 p.m.
Johnson Fine Arts Center
Aberdeen, SD

FEB. 24
Life as an Astronaut
Free Presentation by NASA
Astronaut Charles Gemar
7-8 p.m.
DSU Science Center
Madison, SD
605-256-5308

MARCH 5
SD Jazz Festival
7:30 p.m.
Johnson Fine Arts Center
Aberdeen, SD

MARCH 7
Free Christian Men's Event
The Barn at Aspen Acres
8:30 a.m.-1:30 p.m.
Spearfish, SD
Register: RiseUpMen.com

MARCH 14
St. Uhro Finnish Festival
11 a.m. Main Street Parade
12 p.m. Community Ctr. Lunch
Lake Norden, SD
605-881-1758

MARCH 20-21
Badlands Quilters Getaway
Fri. 5:30 p.m. Start
Sat. 8 a.m. Start
Wall Community Center
Wall, SD
605-279-2807

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.