



# Cooperative Connections

AgritourismSD seeks to attract visitors from far and near

**Education and Entertainment on the Farm**

Pages 8-9

**College Students Deal with Change**

Pages 12-13



# Thank a Lineworker



**DeeAnne Newville,**  
**CEO**

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Phone: 320-826-2593 or  
Toll Free 800-826-2593

**Our dedicated  
lineworkers are  
proud to represent  
Renville-Sibley.**

If you were asked to associate an image or a person with Renville-Sibley Cooperative Power, I bet you would picture a lineworker. One of the most visible employees of the co-op, lineworkers work tirelessly to ensure our community receives uninterrupted power 24/7.

“Lineworker” is listed as one of the top 10 most dangerous jobs in the U.S. This is understandable as they perform detailed tasks near high-voltage power lines. Regardless of the time of day, having to brave stormy weather and other challenging conditions, lineworkers must climb up to 40 feet in the air, often carrying heavy equipment to get the job done.

Being a lineworker is not a glamorous or easy profession. It takes years of specialized training, ongoing education, dedication, and equally important, a sense of service and commitment. How else can you explain the willingness to leave the comfort of their homes to tackle a challenging job in difficult conditions, when most are comfortably tucked in at home? This dedication and sense of service to the community is truly what sets them apart. That’s why we set aside the second Monday in April each year to celebrate and recognize the men and women who work around the clock to keep the lights on.

While lineworkers may be the most visible employees at Renville-Sibley, it’s important to note that there is a team of highly skilled professionals working behind the scenes to ensure we can deliver the service and reliability you expect and deserve. Without them, our lineworkers wouldn’t be able to “bring the light” to our community.

Our dedicated lineworkers are proud to represent Renville-Sibley, and they deserved all the appreciation and accolades that came their way on Lineworker Appreciation Day. Although we have a designated day to thank our lineworkers, please any time you see a lineworker, I hope you’ll join me in thanking them for their exceptional service. I also hope you’ll remember that you have a dedicated team of professionals working behind the scenes at the co-op whose commitment to service runs just as deep. Photos of our employees can be found on page 3. 893403

**Committed to the job.  
Committed to safety.  
Committed to you,  
our members.**

**Thank a Lineworker**

# Renville-Sibley

## Cooperative Connections

(USPS 019-074)

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Web site: [www.renville-sibley.coop](http://www.renville-sibley.coop)

This institution is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

## Thanks to All of Our Employees at Renville-Sibley



Gene Alex



Brian Athmann



Shawn Beckler



Mike Benson



Brad Braulick



Nick Bruns



Anthony Carruth



Amy Ervin



Brayden Fischer



Cindy Mertens



Clint Olsen



Kathy Ridl



Shane Suess



Lenae Wordes

## Remodeling? Keep Efficiency in Mind

Sunny days are prime time for tackling remodeling projects, upgrades and repairs around your home. If you're planning a project, make a point of adding energy efficiency features along the way. Here are a few ideas:

- Add insulation around recessed lights so heated or conditioned air doesn't leak out of them and the weather can't sneak in.
- Install programmable thermostats when you add rooms to the house. While you're at it, have the thermostats in the rest of your home upgraded to programmable models.
- Your contractor will install more insulation in any new spaces you're adding than your builder did during the original construction of your home. Consider adding insulation to already-insulated areas, like the crawlspace and attic, to meet new energy efficiency standards.
- A new kitchen means shiny new appliances. Select those rated as energy efficient by ENERGY STAR®, which use less energy than unrated models.
- If your older home still has single-pane windows, consider an upgrade. Double-pane windows are more energy efficient because they better shield your home from the outdoors - and keep your conditioned air indoors.
- Replace old lightbulbs in your most-used rooms with LEDs. They last 10 years or longer and save considerable energy when compared to incandescent bulbs.
- Work with a contractor who understands how passive solar design can affect your energy bills. Rooftop solar panels, sunrooms and skylights are popular additions.
- Add or upgrade ventilation fans in bathrooms. This can improve air quality throughout the home - not just in the bathrooms - by removing moisture from the air.
- Consider having a home energy audit conducted. Audits can help you evaluate your home for energy wasters, suggest ways to remedy inefficiencies and recommend additions that will make your house more comfortable and cheaper to heat and cool.



## Generate Safely.

Never use a portable generator indoors.

Do not plug generators into standard electrical outlets.

Use heavy-duty extension cords to connect appliances into the generator.

Start the generator before connecting appliances.

## KIDS CORNER SAFETY POSTER



### Don't Grill Too Close to the House

Mia Phillips, 5 years old

Mia is the granddaughter of Jim and Hans Moore of Rapid City. They are members of Black Hills Electric.

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



# A Craving for Casseroles

## Chicken and Rice

- 1 bag Success Brown Rice
- 1/2 cup ricotta cheese
- 1/4 cup grated Parmesan cheese
- 1 tbsp. chopped Italian parsley
- 1 tbsp. olive oil
- 1/3 cup chopped onions
- 2 garlic cloves, minced
- 1/2 package (4 ounces) mushrooms, sliced
- 1/4 cup white wine
- 4 cups baby spinach leaves
- 2 cups shredded, cooked chicken breast
- 1/2 tsp. salt
- 1/2 tsp. black pepper

Prepare rice according to package directions. In small bowl, combine ricotta, Parmesan and parsley; reserve. In large skillet over medium heat, heat oil. Add onions and garlic; saute 2 minutes. Add mushrooms and wine to skillet. Continue cooking 3 minutes, stirring occasionally. Add spinach and chicken. Stir until spinach is wilted and chicken is heated through, about 2 minutes. Stir in rice, salt and pepper. Serve casserole topped with dollops of reserved cheese mixture.

SuccessRice.com

## Meat Lovers Pizza Casserole

- 1 lb. ground beef
- 1 medium onion, chopped
- 1 can (15 oz) pizza sauce
- 8 oz. elbow macaroni, cooked and drained
- 2 c. (8 oz) shredded mozzarella cheese
- 1 pkg (3 1/2 oz) sliced pepperoni, quartered
- 1/2 tsp. salt

In a large skillet, cook ground beef and onion over medium heat until meat is no longer pink; drain. Stir in remaining ingredients. Transfer to a greased 2-quart baking dish. Bake uncovered at 350 degrees for 40-45 minutes or until heated through. Yields 6 servings.

Gail Lee, Brookings

## Chicken Doritos Casserole

- 2 cups shredded cooked chicken
- 1 cup shredded cheese
- 1 can cream of chicken soup
- 1/2 cup milk
- 1/2 cup sour cream
- 1 can Ro-tel tomatoes, drained (canned tomatoes with jalapenos-mild)
- 1/2 packet taco seasoning (or more, to taste)
- 1 bag of regular nacho cheese Doritos

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. In a mixing bowl, combine all ingredients except Doritos. In a greased 2 quart baking dish, put a layer of crushed Doritos (about 2 cups), then a layer of the chicken mixture. Top with more shredded cheese, cover, and bake 30-35 minutes until bubbling hot. Enjoy!

Alana Neville, Milesville, SD

## Garden Cafe Casserole

- 1 bag hash browns
- 1 onion
- 1 green pepper
- 1 box mushrooms
- 1 tomato
- 1/2 lb. deli turkey (cut in pieces)
- 1 lb. bacon (fried and cut in pieces)
- 2-3 cups cheese (Monterey Jack, Colby, Cheddar)

Place thawed hash browns in the bottom of a 9 x 13 pan. Saute onion, green pepper, and mushrooms. Place the meat and tomato on top of the potatoes. Then onion, green pepper and mushrooms. Top with cheese. Bake at 350 degrees for one hour.

Joanna Gum, Clear Lake, SD

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

# Renville-Sibley Annual Meeting

The 83rd annual meeting of Renville-Sibley Co-op Power Association will be held on Thursday, June 24 at the Island Ballroom in Bird Island. The meeting will begin at 6 pm. The format of the meeting, either in-person or drive-up, will be identified in the annual report. The annual report will be mailed to all members the week of June 7th. Members will also receive their voting ballots for director election, including candidate information, at that time.

Members will be asked to pre-register for the annual meeting to assist with planning the event. More information on the annual meeting will be in the next newsletter.

A Safety Note from Your Cooperative – April 2021



## The Line We Can't See

Have you ever been looking at something in the distance and the person next to you kept saying, "it's right there!" You look and look and then, almost magically, it appears. And, you wonder how could you have not seen it when it was there the whole time!

The same goes for our overhead power lines. They are right in front of us. We might even walk past a pole or two, and yet they blend into the landscape. We fail to see them when they are right there . . . until something makes contact with power line. When that happens, outages can occur, or worse, someone can get hurt.



The overhead power lines are important to keep the electricity flowing to our homes, farms and businesses. We need this power. Yet, more importantly, we need to know how to have this power, safely. And, we need you to help us.

So, what can you do? First, **stop, look up and look around to find the power lines before** you begin the task you set out to do today and then follow these safety tips.

**Make sure your equipment can clear the line when moving underneath.** Some farm equipment may be able to pass under the line only when it is in its lowest position. You also might have an antenna or communication equipment that extends up. If the ground underneath the line has a hump, it might change your clearance. And, your equipment moving over uneven or rough ground can cause booms to sway or bounce and make contact. If you can, avoid passing underneath a line with your equipment by finding a different route.

**Don't spray water on power lines, such as with irrigation systems.** Water is an excellent conductor of electricity, as are the pipes used for irrigation systems. Jets of water from irrigation guns can conduct electricity, create a circuit and energize the equipment. Some long-boom irrigators have booms that can be folded and raised vertically for easy movement. When a boom is moved, particularly if it is raised vertically, it can come into contact with overhead power lines.

**Don't stack items below power lines.** The stacked items could be stacked so high, they reach the power lines. And, in order to move them, you have to use equipment that could make contact when reaching for them.

**Report trees that have grown in to the power lines.** We often look at the beautiful trees we have in our yard and once again we fail to see the line going thru them. When a line is in a tree, it contributes to outages as storms blow through, or a tree could land on the line tearing it down. Yet, more importantly, if a child climbed that tree, they could come in contact with the line.

**Carry/move long items that could contact power lines horizontally.** It might be time to do some roofing or siding on your home or barn. As you move the ladder into place, don't bring it into contact with the line. Again, remember to look up! And, this action applies to anything long you might be using.

And, one final safety tip is simple and powerful - **Don't ever touch anything in contact with a power line and never touch a line on the ground.** It takes all of us to work together to deliver and maintain power, safely. And, I know you can do it – you got it!

Prepared by Minnesota Rural Electric Association; author Lidia Dilley Jacobson

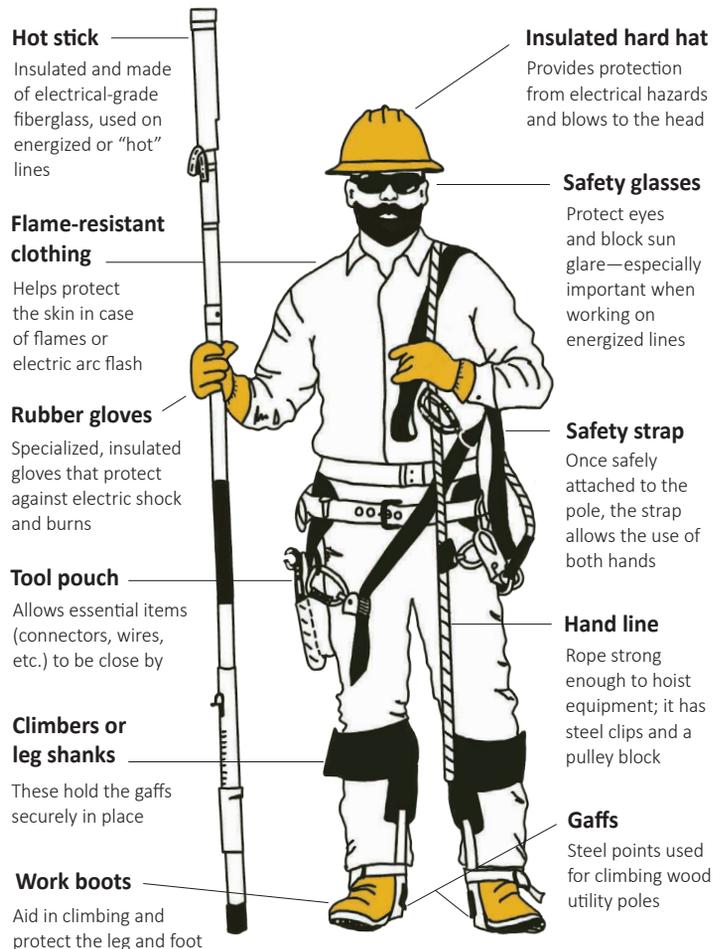
## ELECTRICAL LINEWORKERS

Lineworkers install and maintain overhead and underground electrical systems. We rely on their expertise to power our world.

They must commit to safety above all else for the benefit of those they serve (you!), fellow crew members and themselves.

### WHAT THEY WEAR

Protective clothing is required to shield lineworkers since they work around high voltages. Gear can vary depending on pole structure (wood or steel) and weighs up to 45 pounds.



# Operation Round Up



The following thank you note was received from the Gibbon Fire and Rescue Department.

Thank you so much for the contribution of \$500.00 towards the purchase of our new HEROS-titan Pro Helmets. Gibbon Fire and Rescue purchased 4 helmets to ensure safety of our firefighters in small spaces. HEROS-titan Pro Helmets have the same safety features as a regular helmet except they do not have a brim, they are lighter in weight and are ranked number one for safety with falls. Although these helmets can be worn for every call they will be greatly beneficial in attic fires, crawl spaces and car extractions, where the work area is a tighter space. Our firefighters are grateful for the continued support from Renville - Sibley Cooperative Power Association.

## Scholar of the Month

Congratulations to Aidan Cavanaugh from Cedar Mountain High School for being selected as the March Scholar of the Month. Aidan was nominated because he is a kind, considerate and trusted student. He participates in the National Honor Society, E-Sports, Knowledge Bowl and student council. Through these organizations, Aidan is involved in community activities including food drives, corresponding and visiting with the elderly and participating in events for children in the community. Renville-Sibley Co-op Power salutes Aidan Cavanaugh as the March Touchstone Energy Scholar of the month.



More information about the Scholar of the Month program can be found on our website [www.renville-sibley.coop](http://www.renville-sibley.coop) under the Customer Service tab.

## Reminder:

Renville-Sibley encourages any member planning on making changes to their service in 2021 to please contact our office as soon as possible. In order to complete these projects on time, material may need to be ordered well in advance as often there is extended lead time to get the appropriate material. In addition, crew time will be scheduled in the order projects and material are received.



**Know what's below.  
Call before you dig.**

## Nondiscrimination Statement

In accordance with Federal civil rights law and U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) civil rights regulations and policies, the USDA, its Agencies, offices, and employees, and institutions participating in or administering USDA programs are prohibited from discriminating based on race, color, national origin, religion, sex, gender identity (including gender expression), sexual orientation, disability, age, marital status, family/parental status, income derived from a public assistance program, political beliefs, or reprisal or retaliation for prior civil rights activity, in any program or activity conducted or funded by USDA (not all bases apply to all programs). Remedies and complaint filing deadlines vary by program or incident.

Persons with disabilities who require alternative means of communication for program information (e.g., Braille, large print, audiotape, American Sign Language, etc.) should contact the responsible Agency or USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TTY) or contact USDA through the Federal Relay Service at (800) 877-8339. Additionally, program information may be made available in languages other than English.

To file a program discrimination complaint, complete the USDA Program Discrimination Complaint Form, AD-3027, found online at [http://www.ascr.usda.gov/complaint\\_filing\\_cust.html](http://www.ascr.usda.gov/complaint_filing_cust.html) and at any USDA office or write a letter addressed to USDA and provide in the letter all of the information requested in the form. To request a copy of the complaint form, call (866) 632-9992. Submit your completed form or letter to USDA by:

- (1) mail: U.S. Department of Agriculture  
Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights  
1400 Independence Avenue, SW  
Washington, D.C. 20250-9410;
- (2) fax: (202) 690-7442; or
- (3) email: [program.intake@usda.gov](mailto:program.intake@usda.gov).

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The AgritourismSD program blends the state's top two economic drivers: agriculture and tourism. Photos provided by SD Tourism.

# AGRITOURISM

## New Program Blends South Dakota's Top Two Economic Drivers

Billy Gibson

billy.gibson@sdrea.coop

Amy Kruse already had a baby before she actually became a mother. That baby was proudly named Circle View Guest Ranch. That's the bed and breakfast establishment in Interior run by Amy and her husband, Philip.

"Before I had three kids, this was my baby," Kruse said on a recent Thursday afternoon while taking a break from getting the nearly 3,000-acre ranch spiffed up for weekend visitors and the busy travel season. "I got out of college and we got married and we came here 18 years ago. It's a lot of work to operate the ranch and make things run to give our guests a memorable experience, but it's worth it to see them enjoy themselves and have a great time in South Dakota."

While Kruse has long been engaged in her own form of what's called agritourism, she's an enthusiastic supporter of a new initiative designed to promote the accelerated growth of more agritourism enterprises across the state.

In 2017, the South Dakota Agritourism Work Group was formed to create an intensive program aimed at providing education, training and various support services to agribusiness owners interested in expanding their operations to include recreational, entertainment, educational, hospitality, cultural, on-farm sales and other activities for the general public. As tourism and agriculture are the two most significant business sectors in the state, organizers felt it only made sense to combine the two.

Spearheaded by South Dakota State University Extension and the state Office of Tourism, other local, state and federal agencies and entities joined in the effort. A partial list of participating organizations includes the Bed and Breakfast Innkeepers of South

Dakota, Experience Sioux Falls, Southeast Technical Institute, the South Dakota Specialty Producers Association, the South Dakota Value Added Ag Development Center and others.

According to Program Coordinator Stacy Hadrick of SDSU, AgritourismSD kicks off this month and consists of eight two-day, in-person workshops taking place over the course of 24 months where instructors provide the basic skills and tools that have been demonstrated to help increase the chances of success. The curriculum includes field visits to venues that already have a sustained track record of running thriving agritourism businesses.

The Circle View Guest Ranch, a member of West River Electric Association, is one of those venues. During the program's second year, the facility is slated to serve as a case study on how to launch and grow an agritourism operation and participants can have direct personal conversations with operators who will offer solid advice on every aspect of their business. Kruse said she looks forward to sharing some of the approaches and strategies that she and Philip have used to keep visitors coming to the ranch. The program, which kicks off this month, is designed to educate and train those associated with the ag industry on how to start, manage and operate an agritourism enterprise.

"This is such an excellent time to do something like this because things are opening up and people are ready to travel and escape the cities, get off the interstate and explore the back roads and see the tremendous beauty of our state," Kruse said. "They're craving an authentic experience after being shut down for so long."

Kruse added that she is eager to coach and encourage the group, but she also plans to shoot straight. That means giving the partici-



pants a healthy dose of unvarnished reality so they'll have a clear understanding of the commitment required.

"I think it's a wonderful program for our state. We're going to show them how we make things work with the overnight facilities and with the animals and their interactions with our guests," she said. "The business pretty much runs our lives for seven to eight months out of the year, and if you do it right it's all-consuming. But it's also extremely rewarding to see families have a terrific time bonding with each other, bonding with the natural landscape and the animals. It can be extremely rewarding for our guests and for our family as we're always making new friends. But you have to be committed."

Amy and her husband operate 12 guest rooms and three cabins with an average of 30 guests at any given time from April through September. She explained the cattle ranch and the bed-and-breakfast are separate businesses all set on 2,800 acres of land that includes prairie terrain in addition to Badlands formations, a river valley, rock beds, rolling hills, grazing pastures and tree groves.

For more effective statewide coordination, the AgritourismSD program organizers have developed a hub system, selecting the communities of Wall, Faulkton and Timber Lake to serve as regional organization centers. Participating business owners work through these hubs and meet six times over two years to share ideas and

discuss strategies for attracting visitors to their communities.

Robin Bickel is the hub coach for the Timber Lake area. A member of Moreau-Grand Electric Cooperative, Bickel runs a Red Angus cattle ranch in Firesteel that has been in the family for four generations. She said her interest in getting involved was to pursue potential economic growth not only for her ranch but for the entire area as well. She also sees agritourism as an incentive to both keep and attract young families to rural communities.

"If working ranches can find ways to expand and diversify their businesses, it may present opportunities for those young people who have left to come back to the family farm and be able to generate enough revenue to sustain multiple families on one place," she said.

Aside from the potential for added revenue, Bickel said she is eager to share with the rest of the world the wonders of rural life and the rural lifestyle she experiences each day.

"I think there's an increased interest people have about where their food and fiber come from, and we need to find a way to make that connection between the producer and consumer," she said. "We have such a rich history and so many natural resources to share. It's insane how many people can't see the sky full of stars at night where they live and can't see the prairie grass waving in the wind and



rolling across a hillside. There are people interested in things we take for granted. There are people in Nebraska that have a prairie chicken dance tour where people actually pay to see the chickens. I think there are many opportunities for our state if we commit ourselves and do it right."

For more information on the program, contact Jacey Ellsworth, Industry Outreach and Development Representative, at 605-773-3301 or [Jacey.Ellsworth@TravelSouthDakota.com](mailto:Jacey.Ellsworth@TravelSouthDakota.com).

# Attention Members Impacted by COVID-19?

Renville--Sibley encourages members to contact the office to make arrangements if they are not able to pay their electric bill in full due to the impact of COVID-19. Renville-Sibley employees will work with members to enter into reasonable payment arrangements based on their individual circumstances..



### Energy Efficiency Tip of the Month

Avoid placing items like lamps and televisions near your thermostat.

The thermostat senses heat from these appliances, which can cause your air conditioner to run longer than necessary.

Source: [www.energy.gov](http://www.energy.gov)

## Mission Statement

Renville-Sibley Cooperative Power Association will provide efficient, reliable electric energy and services to enhance the quality of rural living.

## Where's the Number?

Last month Wencil Kojetin found his member number in the newsletter. Congratulations! The credit will start over with a value of \$15. Another number has been hidden in this newsletter. If you find your number and call the office by the 3rd of May, you will receive this credit on your electric statement. Good luck in your search!

## Outage Report

Affecting 10 members or more:  
**Date:** 02-06-21  
**Time off:** 6:22 pm  
**Time on:** 7:00 pm  
**Substation:** Emmet, Crooks, Troy  
**Cause:** Transmission line  
 Please contact Renville-Sibley's office for more details about these power outages.

## For Sale

2001 Sportrac 4.0L V6 5-speed auto toreador bed, clearcoat, nice condition, good tires, new differential, 169,150 miles, asking \$4,800.  
**David Landgraff**  
 Franklin, MN  
 218-280-1461

## FREE Want Ad Service

Members can submit ads for the following categories: Giveaway, For Sale, For Rent and Wanted. Ads should be, or are limited to, no more than 15 words and must be received by the first of the month to be included in the following month's newsletter. Renville-Sibley reserves the right to edit content or exclude ads due to space restrictions. Ads will be run one time only unless resubmitted. Please complete the following information and mail to the Renville-Sibley Cooperative Power, P.O. Box 68, Danube, MN 56230.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone number: \_\_\_\_\_

Ad to be placed (limit of 15 words per ad)  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

Type of ad:  Giveaway  For Sale  For Rent  Wanted

# February Board Meeting Highlights

The March board meeting was held on Monday, March 29 at 8 am via Zoom and in-person. All board members were present. Others present were CEO DeeAnne Newville, Gene Alex, Cindy Mertens and Lenae Wordes. Also in attendance was attorney Jeff Whitmore.

The board reviewed and approved the following items:

- Minutes of the February 22 board meeting
- Operating and disbursement reports for the month of February
- Capital credits to estates
- Safety report for March
- 2021 Budget

The board reviewed:

- Total new members
- Capital credits transferred
- Reports from staff members as to the activities in their department. Items in the reports include:

- High level Statement of Operations review – YTD through February (unaudited)
- Organization activities
- Facilities update
- East River update
- Basin Electric update
- NRECA update
- MREA update
- Linecrew work in progress, equipment update and outage update
- Accounts receivable
- Member Informational meetings
- Nominating Committee meetings
- Annual meeting
- Operation Round Up program

Please contact the Renville-Sibley office if you would like more information regarding the board meeting.



## Operation Round Up

The Operation Round Up board of trustees met on March 18. Two applications were reviewed. The following donations were awarded:

- BOLD Post Prom - \$500
  - Gift for students attending the post prom event.
- Gibbon Fire and Rescue Department - \$500
  - Purchase of four new HEROS-titan Pro helmets with a flash-light attached.

Information on the Application for Donation, application deadline, and next board meeting date can be found on Renville-Sibley's website [www.renville-sibley.coop](http://www.renville-sibley.coop) under the Your Co-op tab. Non-profit organizations that support our local community are encouraged to apply.

## Thank You Notes

Thank you for not only considering but accepting me for this scholarship. Your aid will be a great help in my education and is very appreciated. Once again, thank you for supporting my future.

**Whitney Wordes**

I am very pleased and grateful to be a recipient of this scholarship from the co-op as it will help me to pursue my career goals and cover tuition costs. It was a nice surprise receiving your letter in the mail. Thank you for your kind words and for awarding me this scholarship.

**Ashley Frank**

## Notice:

**The April board meeting will be held on April 26 at 8 a.m.  
The May board meeting will be held on May 24 at 8 a.m.**

## Comparative Report

	Current YTD through February 2021	One Year Ago YTD through February 2020	10 Years Ago YTD through February 2011
average # of Consumers	1,882	1,882	1,926
kWhs purchased	39,063,632	37,545,781	38,916,420
Cost of purchased power	\$2,601,092.62	\$2,299,590.50	\$1,739,086.08

# Rural POWER

## Leadership Program Aimed at Boosting Co-op Leadership

Intentional listening is a skill Billie Sutton has honed over the course of his adult life. And as he leaned into recent conversations with electric cooperative leaders across the state, the former legislator from Burke started noticing a trend.

He picked up on a common refrain: cooperatives are having a hard time finding qualified candidates to run for positions on their governing boards.

As not-for-profit organizations, electric cooperatives don't have pockets deep enough to dangle large compensation packages in front of potential board candidates. This reality tends to narrow the field of interested parties.

After hearing this a few too many times, Sutton decided to take action and do something about it. He began working to develop a leadership program through his non-profit Billie Sutton Leadership Institute to encourage and inspire rural co-op members to consider campaigning for a board position.

The new year-long leadership development program is called "Rural POWER: Powering Opportunities While Energizing Rural." It will be held alongside the third leadership class offered by the Institute. The first program in 2019 attracted more than 100 applicants to fill 12 spots. Last year's class drew roughly 70 applicants but was hampered by the impact of the pandemic.

Sutton surmised that the high interest level in the Institute's first two programs stems from a desire to return to a more community-focused style of leadership and steer away from a brand of politics that appears to be growing more openly hostile.

His supposition comes from the comments he heard not only during his six years serving in the state senate but also from voters during his gubernatorial campaign three years ago in which he received more than 167,000 votes while losing the race to Gov. Kristi Noem.



Billie Sutton and his wife, Kelsea (foreground) are shown with the Institute's inaugural class of rural leaders.

"I think people were excited about a new style of leadership I brought to the table that's focused on service, finding common ground, overcoming adversity and getting things done on behalf of the people. I think people are tired of politics as usual," he said.

For the Institute's inaugural class, applicants ranged in age from 18 to 60 and represented a plethora of professional backgrounds: health care, teaching, education administration, local elected officials, ranchers and more. Sutton said he hopes the new program will also attract interest from a diverse set of applicants.

Rural POWER will kick off this summer and is sponsored by the South Dakota Farmers Union. Participants will engage in educational leadership training opportunities emphasizing community building and

**Participants will engage in educational leadership training opportunities emphasizing community building and serving neighbors, while learning from cooperative leaders.**

serving neighbors, while learning from cooperative leaders who have demonstrated their commitment to rural development. They will gain the knowledge and enthusiasm to re-imagine and re-energize rural South Dakota, Sutton said.



Rural POWER aims to provide leadership training that will help re-invent and re-energize rural South Dakota.

The program has an advocate in Melissa Maher, general manager at Moreau-Grand Electric based in Timber Lake. Maher notes that while most of the state's electric co-ops qualify as "rural," that doesn't mean they are merely small-time mom-and-pop operations. For instance, Moreau-Grand Electric is a member-owned business with more than \$47 million in assets.

Maier said it's important that electric co-ops be run by managers and board members dedicated to the task at hand. Board directors are democratically elected by the members in their respective districts and charged with the responsibility of developing the policies that guide the future of the co-op. They also have certain legal, fiduciary and industry-related issues they must deal with during the course of carrying out their duties.

"These are positions of responsibility and leadership, and you need qualified people because they're making big decisions," Maher said, adding that serving on a co-op board requires considerable time and attention. "If someone is interested in being nominated, you have to be up front and honest about that fact. That's one of the first things people ask, and the honest answer is that it's a commitment."

Those who succeed in meeting their board responsibilities recognize and appreciate the fact they're contributing to the advancement of their entire service area by providing an essential commodity. Maher said it also takes a certain type of personality and temperament to be a successful board member.

"They have to learn protocol and there can be situations like dealing with personnel issues where they have to be discreet. They have to be the type of person who can agree to disagree and walk away and not let it get to them," Maher said. "They have to study up on the issues. We send out information a week ahead of time so that the board members can brush up on things and we can have a productive conversation. They need to care enough to be engaged and prepared."

Suzie Jones Pranger serves as executive director of the Institute. Today, Jones Pranger is an attorney living in rural Hartford, but she grew up on her family's farm in Burke and remembers her grandfather's involvement in her local co-op, Rosebud Electric.

"Even as a kid, I knew our power came from the local co-op, and I knew my family had a legacy of service to the co-op and our neighbors through my Grandpa's longtime position on the board," she said. "But what I never considered growing up is the need for subsequent generations to become active and continue to power our rural communities and our South Dakota way of life. Rural POWER will help build a pipeline of rural leaders ready to step up and take on leadership positions."

Kevin Mikkelsen, general manager of Rosebud Electric, is also supportive of the program and believes there is a lot of potential in the leadership program, especially when it comes to drawing some younger participants.

"I'm hoping the program sheds some light



on how cooperatives function and how they work on behalf of all the member-owners," he said. "All around the state, we really need to see some younger folks get involved and provide a new perspective and help us discover new and more effective ways to carry out our mission as co-ops, whether it's electric co-ops or ag-based co-ops."

Visit [suttonleadership.org/rural-power](http://suttonleadership.org/rural-power) to learn more about the program or to apply.

# South Dakota Families Struggle to Stay Connected in Post-Pandemic Times

**Billy Gibson**

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Some people can pinpoint the positive in just about any predicament...even a global pandemic. Lynell Rice Brinkworth considers herself the sort of person who places a premium on optimism.

While social scientists continue to crunch the numbers, analyze the data and draw conclusions about the pandemic's impact on families across the country, Brinkworth has witnessed the struggles families have faced but also sees signs of hope.

Brinkworth is a licensed family therapist practicing in the Rapid City area and also serves as president of the state's Board of Examiners for Counselor and Marriage and Family Therapists. Though she acknowledges there was a lot of negative consequences caused by the coronavirus that swept across the globe last year, Brinkworth is quick to emphasize many South Dakota families emerged stronger, more resilient and more committed than before.

Amid the chaos that ensued when it became clear the coronavirus would be more than a two-week span of minor inconvenience, experts began reporting a higher incidence of family dysfunction brought on by the stress of job loss, financial difficulties, online learning, disruption of daily routines, restricted travel, isolation from extended family members and other pressures.

Across the continents, there were reports of increases in child abuse, spousal abuse and domestic violence as families were forced to lock down for the long term and curtail their in-person social interactions. Consequently, experts predicted an enormous upturn in the divorce rate, which would seem to be an inevitable outcome of such a difficult predicament.

While there are some limited studies that indicate the number of couples seeking divorce did actually increase, a study of



Family therapist Lynell Rice Brinkworth says many South Dakota families are working through their challenges and keeping their family units intact.

five states by Bowling Green State University showed divorces actually decreased by 35 percent through the first half of 2020 compared to the previous year. That study also indicated that the marriage rate in those states continued to drop by about 30 percent, which researchers noted continued a pre-pandemic trend among Millennials who have taken a more cautious approach to the institution of matrimony and also reflected the fact that lockdowns limited the number of wedding ceremonies taking place.

For her part, Brinkworth reports that during the pandemic she saw more couples succeed in saving their marriages than failing to hold their relationships together.

“By the time couples come to me there’s usually something boiling under the surface, not just over the past three months but maybe for the past three years,” she said. “During the stress of the pandemic we saw all of that coming up to the surface and a lot of people reached their boiling point. But the majority of

the couples I’ve seen were able to work through their problems.”

Similar to medical workers who have been overwhelmed addressing the physical needs of COVID-19 patients for more than a year, Brinkworth and her colleagues have been busy helping to restore relationships and working with individuals to sort through issues related to anxiety, grief, financial struggles and more.

But in keeping with her sunny demeanor, Brinkworth brings out the bright spots. She explains that being confined in close quarters with other family members presented an opportunity for individuals to put down their electronic devices and interact on a more intimate level with loved ones. She said families were able to slow the frenetic pace of their daily lives and “step back from the rat race.”

“I heard parents say that they haven’t had a family dinner together in years because of their busy lives with work and school and sports and other activities that happen every day,” she said. “Others had the

opportunity to get out and do things they don't normally do, such as get outdoors and exercise. I drive past a trail head on my way in to the office and I saw more people there than I ever had before."

In working with her patients to achieve favorable outcomes, Brinkworth said she didn't want to minimize or ignore the real difficulties families have experienced over the past 12 to 14 months. The stress, she said, resulted in a variety of problems for people such as less quality sleep, changes in dietary habits, drug and alcohol consumption, grief from the loss of loved ones, depression, internal family conflict and other challenges.

Brinkworth declined to express an opinion as to whether the state should have locked down in response to the coronavirus, but she believes the citizens of South Dakota will benefit from a gradual return

to normalcy. One particular group that should see a tremendous benefit, she said, is students. Even as nearly 2,000 South Dakotans lost their lives to the disease, many teenagers not only had to deal with the loss of a loved one but also had to miss traditional rites of passage such as graduation ceremonies, religious ceremonies, birthday parties, weddings, family vacations and other milestone events.

"It has been really hard on children and students. For a lot of kids, not being able to go to school was hard on both the parents and students. For many of them, school is their safety zone where teachers and instructors can keep their eyes on them," she said.

"There's been a big concern over children. Some kids have done well with the on-line learning and the isolation but most that I've talked to said it just wasn't their thing.

They couldn't wait to get back to school and get back into their social circles and be with their classmates. When the sports seasons were canceled, that was a big thing for kids who get a lot of satisfaction and have a lot of their self-esteem, confidence and identity tied into their participation in sports."

The impact of COVID-19 on family relationships will take a while to fully resolve, but Brinkworth is hopeful that the pandemic has brought some clarity in our interactions with, and appreciation for, our family members and friends.

"We get swept up in technology and social media and the internet," she said. "But I really think the trauma we've all experienced through this event will cause us to think about putting down our devices and spending more time really getting to know one another better."



*Sensible Solutions for Our Energy Future*

South Dakota's electric cooperatives support reasonable strategies for our energy future that make sense for our members:

- Renewable energy solutions that are both productive and practical
- Rate structures that take affordability into account
- Balanced strategies centered on the best interests of co-op consumers
- Technology-based policies that promote economic development

## DOE Announces \$24.5 M Investment in Grid

America's economy, national security and even the health and safety of our citizens depend on the reliable delivery of electricity. The U.S. power grid is an engineering marvel with 9,200 generating units and more than 1 million megawatts of generating capacity connected to 600,000 miles of transmission lines.

The grid is an ecosystem of asset owners, manufacturers, service providers, and officials at federal, state and local levels, all working together to run one of the most reliable systems in the world.

The U.S. Department of Energy recently announced \$24.5 million for manufacturing innovation to build a clean and resilient grid. The Office of Electricity (OE) is currently working to strengthen, transform, and improve energy infrastructure to ensure access to reliable, secure, and clean sources of energy.

The country's grid is aging and is being pushed to do more than it was originally designed to do. Modernizing the grid to make it "smarter" and stronger through the use of cutting-edge technologies, equipment, and controls that communicate and work together to deliver electricity more reliably and efficiently can reduce the frequency and duration of power outages, reduce storm impacts, and restore service faster when outages occur.

Consumers can better manage their own energy consumption and costs because they have easier access to their own data. Utilities also benefit from a modernized grid, including improved security, reduced peak loads, increased integration of renewables and lower operational costs.

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

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**April 22-May 2**

Beauty & the Beast, Sioux Empire Community Theatre, Sioux Falls, SD  
605-367-6000

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**April 23-24**

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

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**April 24**

Party for the Planet, Great Plains Zoo, Sioux Falls, SD  
605-367-7003

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**April 30-May 2, May 6-8**

Radium Girls, Pierre Players Community Theatre, Pierre, SD  
605-224-7826

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**May 8**

Davis Flea Market & Artisan Fair, Main Street, Davis, SD  
605-940-0069

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**May 8**

Wells Fargo Cinco de Mayo Fiesta, Falls Park, Sioux Falls, SD  
605-271-0468

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**May 8 NEW DATE**

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

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**May 9**

Mother's Day Tours, Historic Adams House & Days of '76 Museum, Deadwood, SD  
605-578-37241

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**May 13**

Vermilion-Area Farmers Market - Plant Sale, High & Cherry Streets, Vermilion, SD  
605-659-3399



State Parks Open House & Free Fishing Weekend, May 21-23, 2021

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**May 15**

Red Dirt Music Festival featuring Casey Donahew, Ian Munsick and Randy Burghardt Mountain Grand, Deadwood, SD  
605-559-0386

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**May 21-23**

Annual Sound of Silence Tesla Rally, Downtown, Custer, SD  
605-673-2244

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**May 21-23**

State Parks Open House & Free Fishing Weekend, All State Parks & Recreation Areas, SD  
605-773-3391

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**May 22**

Frühlingsfest & Spring Market, Main Street, Rapid City, SD  
605-716-7979

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**May 22**

La Framboise Island Bike Race, Steamboat Park, Pierre, SD  
605-224-7054

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**May 31**

PPQG 25th Annual Quilt Show, Harding County REC Center, Buffalo, SD  
605-641-5591

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**June 3-6**

Wheel Jam, South Dakota State Fairgrounds, Huron, SD  
605-353-7340

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**June 4-5**

State BBQ Championships, South Dakota State Fairgrounds, Huron, SD  
605-353-7354

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**June 4-6**

Black Hills Blues Stomp & Swamp Romp, Rush No More RV Resort & Campground, Sturgis, SD  
605-347-2916

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**June 4-6**

Lake Andes Fish Days, City-wide, Lake Andes, SD  
605-487-7694

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**June 5-6**

18th Annual Wessington Springs Foothills Rodeo, Wessington Springs Rodeo Grounds, Wessington Springs, SD  
605-770-5720

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**June 5-6**

Siouxland Renaissance Festival, W.H. Lyon Fairgrounds, Sioux Falls, SD  
866-489-9241

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**June 19**

South Dakota Cattlemen's Foundation Prime Time Gala, Denny Sanford PREMIER Center, Sioux Falls, SD  
605-945-2333

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.