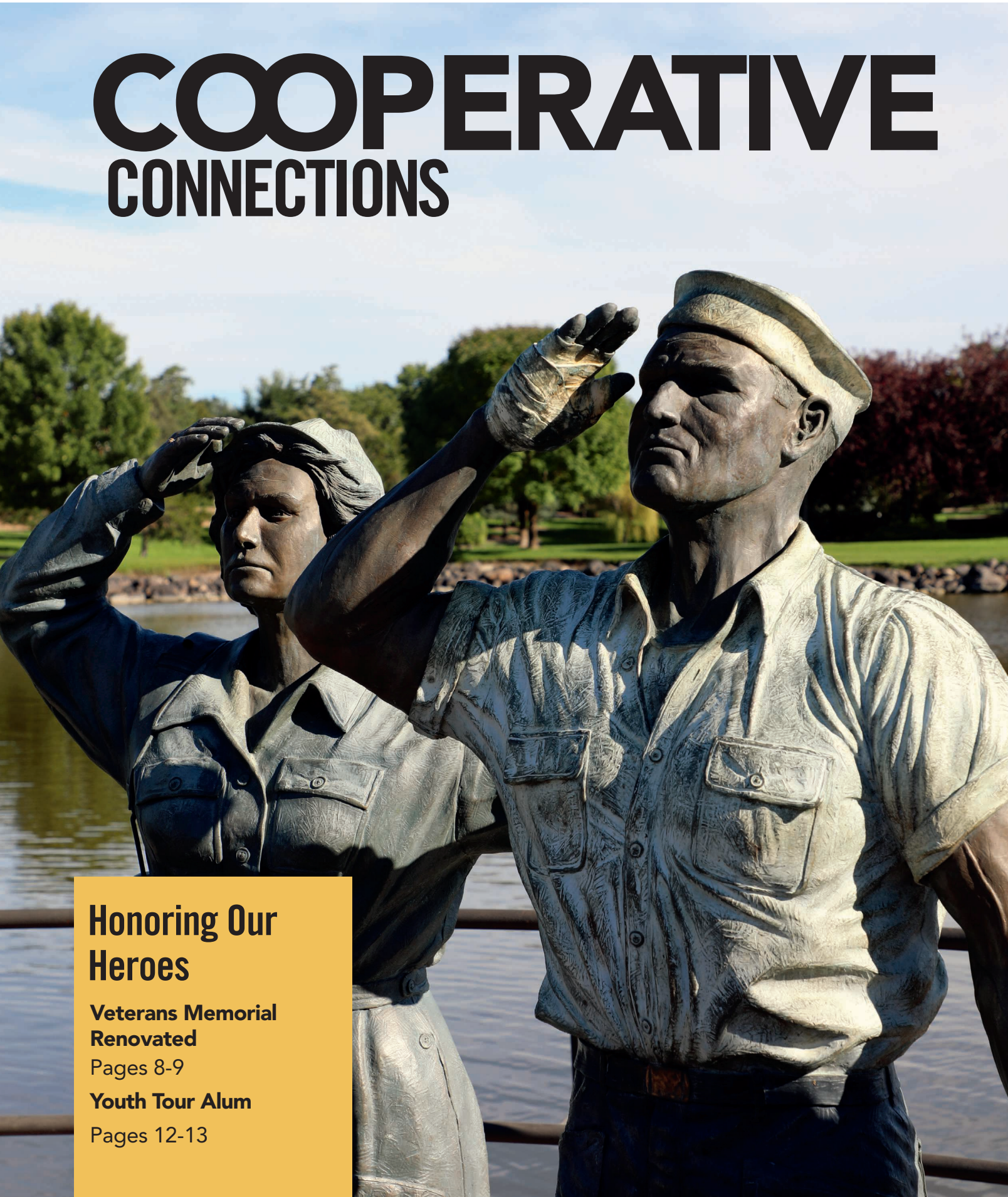
A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative

WEST RIVER ELECTRIC
NOVEMBER 2026 VOL. 27 NO. 7

COOPERATIVE CONNECTIONS



Honoring Our Heroes

Veterans Memorial Renovated
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Strengthening the Grid



Robert Raker
CEO/GM

There has been a lot of discussion about the bulk electric system and making sure it is prepared for the future. Locally, one project that will play an important role in that future is Basin Electric's proposed Laramie River to Belfield 345 kV transmission line.

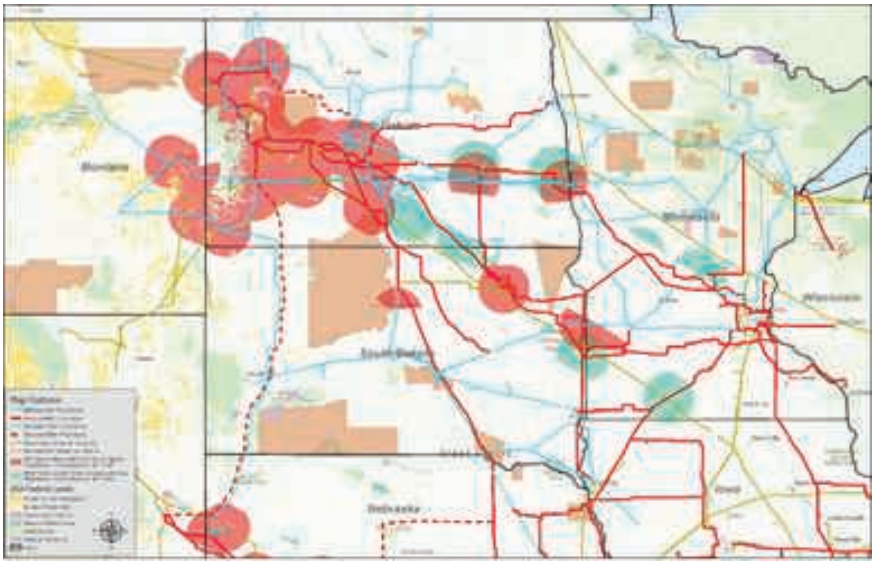
Before I go any further, I want to make one point clear. This transmission line is not being built for data centers. The need for additional transmission into western South Dakota existed long before the recent conversations about data centers.

In fact, some of the major transmission infrastructure serving our part of the state was constructed more than 40 years ago. Think about how much western South Dakota has changed since then. Rapid City and our surrounding communities have grown substantially, electric demand has increased, and Ellsworth Air Force Base is now preparing for its new B 21 mission. Yet portions of the transmission backbone we rely upon were designed for a very different western South Dakota.

The proposed 345 kV line is an opportunity to strengthen that backbone.

One of the things I believe is particularly important about this project is how it strengthens the connection between the northern and southern portions of Basin Electric's system and our access to dispatchable generation. Dispatchable generation is simply generation that can be called upon when we need it, i.e. coal and natural gas. When demand is high, the wind is not blowing, the sun is not shining, or another resource is unavailable, having access to dependable generation and the transmission capacity to deliver it matters.

The project also provides something



that is increasingly important to us: resiliency.

I like to compare transmission to our highway system. One road into town may work perfectly well most days, but when that road is closed, your options become pretty limited. Additional transmission pathways give system operators more options to move electricity when another line or generation resource is unavailable.

That additional capacity will help support the growth associated with Ellsworth's new mission, but the benefit extends well beyond new growth. A stronger transmission system benefits the homes, farms, ranches and businesses already here. For West River members, this project is not simply about serving what might come next. It is about strengthening the system we all depend upon today.

Of course, delivering reliable electricity also comes with a cost, and we are continuing to evaluate what our rates will need to look like in the coming year.

Basin Electric has indicated that we should expect an increase of roughly 8% in our wholesale power costs. Purchased power is our largest expense, so an increase of that size is significant.

We did have a very warm summer and set a new all time peak on our system. Unfortunately, last winter was also very mild. So, when we look at the year as a whole, it is unlikely that our increased summer sales will be enough to absorb the higher cost of power. 2469800

That does not mean an 8% wholesale power increase automatically becomes an 8% increase on your electric bill. There are many other factors that go into our rates, and we are continuing to work through those numbers. We want to make a thoughtful decision based on what West River actually needs, and we will communicate with you as soon as we know more.

Finally, I want to thank everyone who joined us at one of our events this fall. From our member appreciation events to our Annual Meeting, our employees and directors had the opportunity to visit with many of you. Those conversations are one of the best parts of being a Co-op that is controlled locally. We can talk about 345 kV lines, substations, generation and rates, but at the end of the day, all of that infrastructure exists for one reason: to serve you, the member/owner.

We appreciate the opportunity to serve you!

Have a safe and enjoyable fall.

Optimize Your HVAC System



Jared Stalley
Marketing Rep

As November settles in and temperatures begin to drop, your HVAC system will soon become one of the hardest-working appliances in your home. Before your system undergoes all that extra work this winter, now is a great time to ensure it is optimized and ready to go.

Start with something simple. One of the easiest and most effective measures you can take is checking filters. A clogged or dirty filter makes it harder for air to move through your system, which can cause it to work longer and harder than necessary. Check filters regularly and replace them according to the manufacturer's recommendations. Vents matter too. Take a look around your home to make sure furniture, curtains, rugs and other household items aren't blocking any supply or return vents.

If you have a heat pump, your outdoor unit also deserves extra attention this time of year. Falling leaves, limbs and other debris can collect around the unit and restrict airflow, so keep the area around your outdoor unit clear. Be sure to follow the manufacturer's instructions for cleaning recommendations. If you have a traditional central air conditioning system, your outdoor unit will likely remain idle during winter months, but it's still good practice to keep it clear of debris.

Don't overlook what you can't see. With forced-air systems, ductwork plays an essential role in delivering heated air throughout your home. Leaks, gaps or disconnected sections can allow conditioned air to escape before it reaches the rooms where you need it. If you've noticed rooms that never seem to get comfortable or unusually high energy use, ask an HVAC professional to inspect your ductwork.

Fall is also an ideal time for a professional tune-up. A technician can inspect your heating system, identify potential problems and make sure it is operating safely and efficiently before the coldest weather arrives. Regular professional maintenance can also help extend the life of your equipment.

Finally, take more control of your energy use by proactively managing your thermostat. There's no reason to heat an empty house. Lowering the temperature when you're asleep or away can help reduce energy use. Better yet, a programmable or smart thermostat can make those adjustments automatically, taking one more thing off your to-do list.

Your home heating system has an important job this winter. Giving it a little extra attention this fall to help the system operate more efficiently, reduce unnecessary energy use and potentially prevent an inconvenient breakdown on a cold winter night.

Outdoor Unit Care
Once or twice a year

- Keep leaves, grass and other debris at least 2 feet away from the outdoor unit.
- Gently rinse dirty condenser coils with a garden hose, following your manufacturer's recommendations.



Proactive Service
Twice a year

- Schedule professional tune-ups in spring for cooling and fall for heating.
- Have ductwork checked for leaks or disconnected sections, and seal leaks with mastic or foil-backed tape.



Thermostat Smarts
Year-round

- Adjust your thermostat when you're asleep or away. In summer, set it a little higher; in winter, a little lower.
- Consider a programmable or smart thermostat to automatically manage temperatures and save energy.



COOPERATIVE CONNECTIONS

WEST RIVER ELECTRIC

(USPS No. 675-840)

Our Mission:
To serve our members' best interest.

Our Vision:
We will be a high performing co-op.

Our Values:
1. Safety 2. Accountability
3. Integrity 4. Innovation
5. Commitment to Community

This institution is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

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Board of Directors
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Jamie Lewis – Secretary
Chuck Sloan – Treasurer
Taran Eisenbraun
Peter Blake
Jason Habrock
Steven Edoff
Sue Peters

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Other correspondence to: West River Electric Cooperative Connections, 3250 E Hwy 44, Rapid City, SD 57703; telephone (605)393-1500, Exts. 6564, 6531 or 6522; fax (605)393- 0275; e-mail amanda.haugen@westriver.coop.

KEEP SAFETY AT THE HEART OF YOUR HOLIDAY CELEBRATIONS

The holiday season, stretching from late November through mid-January, is widely considered the most joyous time of the year. Families gather, festive parties fill our calendars, and a spirit of generosity warms our homes. However, alongside the cheer comes a significant spike in travel, home decorating, and large-scale cooking. Consequently, preventable accidents and injuries dramatically increase during these months. To ensure your family and friends remain safe and injury-free throughout the festivities, keeping safety top of mind is crucial. Below is a comprehensive guide of tried-and-true advice to help you navigate the season securely.

Traveling for the Holidays? Be Prepared and Alert

For millions of people, the holidays mean hitting the road to visit loved ones. Unfortunately, car travel during this busy period carries the highest fatality rate of any major transportation form. Hundreds tragically lose their lives in crashes on Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Year's Day alone. Alarmingly, alcohol impairment contributes to approximately one-third of these fatal incidents.

To stay safe on the roads, follow these essential guidelines:

- Winterize your vehicle: Prepare for harsh weather and keep a well-stocked emergency kit in your trunk.
- Rest up: Get plenty of sleep before departing to avoid the severe dangers of drowsy driving.
- Plan ahead: Leave early and anticipate heavy traffic to eliminate the dangerous temptation to speed.
- Buckle up: Ensure every passenger is properly restrained, regardless of the trip's length.
- Eliminate distractions: Put your cell phone away; it remains the primary driving distraction today.
- Designate a driver: Always use a completely sober driver. Alcohol and medications cause severe impairment.

Decorate with Caution and Care

Decking the halls instantly puts families in a holiday mood, but hospital emergency departments treat thousands of decorating-related injuries annually. Remember these safety tips:

- Keep poisonous seasonal plants, like mistletoe and holly berries, strictly out of the reach of children.
- If utilizing an artificial tree, verify it is clearly labeled as "fire resistant."
- For live trees, cut two inches off the trunk for better water absorption. Water daily and remove it when dry.
- Place your tree at least three feet away from fireplaces, radiators, and space heaters.
- Discard and replace light sets featuring broken sockets, frayed wires, or loose electrical connections.
- Turn off all holiday lights before going to bed or leaving the house.

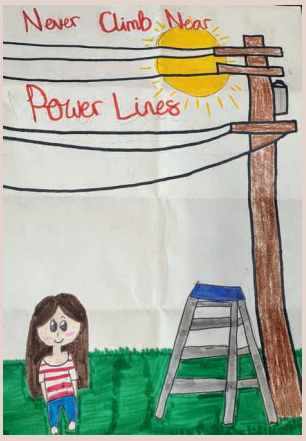
Watch Out for Holiday Fire-Starters

The glow of candles and fireplaces is a holiday staple, but combined with combustible decorations, house fire risks skyrocket. The National Fire Protection Association notes candles cause 46% of December home fires.

- Place candles in sturdy holders away from curtains and curious children.
- Store matches and lighters in a locked, high cabinet.
- Consider battery-operated flameless candles as a very safe alternative.
- Never burn pine branches or wrapping paper in fireplaces; they can cause flash fires.
- Use a protective screen for burning fires and never leave lit candles unattended.

Be highly alert to the extreme dangers of turkey fryers. Hundreds of fires and severe burns are linked to these devices. Consider using oil-less fryers or purchasing fried turkeys from professionals. If you must fry your own, strictly follow all U.S. Fire Administration guidelines.

By taking these simple, proactive steps, you can protect loved ones and ensure your holidays remain merry, bright, and safe.



"Never climb near power lines."

Penelope Poppen

Penelope warns readers to never climb near power lines. Thank you for sharing, Penelope! Penelope's parents are Brett and Megan Poppen, members of Black Hills Electric Cooperative.

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



THE FAMILY TABLE

ENCHILADA CASSEROLE

Ingredients:

1 lb. hamburger
1 medium onion, chopped
1 green pepper, chopped
1 can (10 oz.) enchilada sauce
6 tortilla shells
1 cup shredded cheese
1 can pinto beans

Method

In a glass baking dish, put the browned hamburger, onion, pepper, beans and sauce in shells and roll up. Layer with shredded cheese on top. Bake 20 minutes in oven.
Optional: Use 1 cup of sliced black olives on top of cheese

Marla Gilbert
Southeastern Electric

PARTY IN A PAN

Ingredients:

1 1/2 lbs. hamburger, browned
1 can cream of celery soup
1 can cream of chicken soup
1 box Stove Top Stuffing Mix
1 can corn, drained
3 cups mozzarella cheese, shredded

Method

Combine the hamburger, celery soup and chicken soup in a bowl and set aside.
Prepare the Stove Top Stuffing as directed on the box. Layer half the hamburger mixture, half the corn, half the stuffing, and half the cheese; repeat layers again. Bake 30-40 minutes at 350°F or until cheese is melted.
Makes a 9x13-inch pan.

Kathy Zomer
Douglas Electric

BEEF TERIYAKI

Ingredients:

1lb. boneless beef sirloin steak
2 tbsp. cornstarch
14 oz. beef broth
2 tbsp soy sauce
1 tbsp. brown sugar
1/4 tsp. garlic powder
3 cups broccoli florets
1 1/2 cups rice
1 2/3 cups water

Method

Cook the rice in water according to the directions on the bag.
Slice beef in very thin strips. In a large skillet, saute the beef strips until browned and the juices evaporate.
In a mixing bowl, combine cornstarch, beef broth, soy sauce, brown sugar and garlic powder. Mix thoroughly.
Add the liquid mixture and broccoli florets to the beef. Cook until mixture boils & thickens to a desired consistency, stirring frequently.
Serve over the cooked rice.

Karen Soulek
Charles-Mix 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.

Picture from Shutterstock.

Juniors and Seniors!

Win a Trip to Washington, D.C.



Amanda Haugen
Communications Specialist

West River Electric will once again sponsor high school juniors and seniors on an all-expense-paid trip to Washington, D.C. Each June, more than 1,500 high school students from 44 states travel to Washington, D.C., to participate in the Electric Cooperative Youth Tour.

Throughout the week, participants will explore Washington, D.C., learning about government, cooperative principles and rural electrification. The students are selected and sponsored by their local rural electric cooperatives with the South Dakota Rural Electric Association (SDREA) coordinating the trip for South Dakota students.

Tour highlights include the Lincoln Memorial, Washington Monument, U.S. Capitol, Ford's Theatre, Arlington National Cemetery, Mount Vernon, Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, Iwo Jima Statue, National Archives, U.S. Supreme Court, and the Vietnam Veterans Memorial among other exciting sites. Students will also participate in a briefing with South Dakota's congressional delegation.

Who is Eligible? All area high school juniors and seniors whose parents are members of West River Electric.

What Does It Cost? West River Electric, along with the other participating local electric cooperatives, fully fund the tour. The tour covers each participant's transportation, accommodations, meals, entertainment, and sightseeing events. Students should bring their own spending money for snacks, souvenirs and other personal expenses. 2471500

When is it Held? The weeklong trip will take place from June 17-23, 2027. Participants will meet for an orientation meeting on Thursday, June 17, at the Sioux Valley Energy Office in Brandon, S.D. and then bus to Minneapolis. The next morning the group will fly to D.C., explore the nation's capital for five days, and then return to South Dakota on Wednesday, June 23. A commercial bus will be used for transportation while in D.C.

How do I Qualify? Each applicant must submit a short 250-word essay and participate in an interview with their local cooperative discussing their current extracurricular involvement, community volunteerism and future endeavors.

The application and essay topic can be found at www.westriver.coop under the Youth Opportunities tab. Applications open September 21, 2026, and close December 11, 2026. For questions, please reach out to Amanda Haugen at amanda.haugen@westriver.coop or 605-791-6564.



2027 **June 17-23**

YOUTH TOUR

Join students from across South Dakota for a free, once-in-a-lifetime trip to Washington, D.C., sponsored by your electric cooperative.
Contact your electric cooperative for more details and application information!

SCAN TO APPLY!

A Day Celebrating Our Members



Amanda Haugen
Communications Specialist

Thank you to everyone who joined us for another great Member Appreciation Day! More than 1,000 people came through our doors for a day centered around food, fun, education and—most importantly—our members.

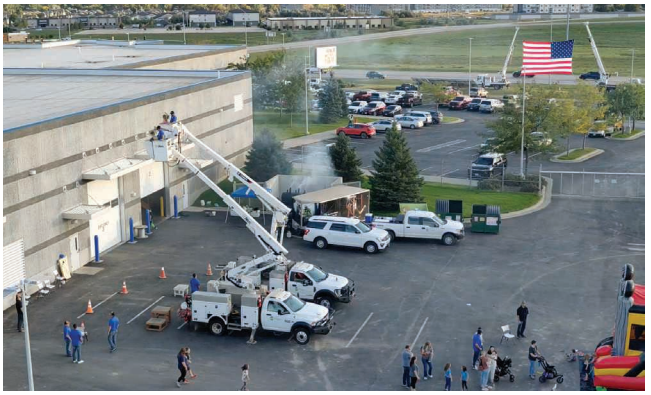
Throughout the day, our employees served 1,442 meals, along with 402 bags of popcorn and plenty of cookies. Members also had the opportunity to visit with employees, participate in activities and learn more about their cooperative.

One of this year's highlights was our new kids' electrical safety course, completed by 79 kids. After making their way through the course and learning important lessons about staying safe around electricity and what to do if they find themselves in an accident involving electricity, participants were entered into a drawing to win a new bike. Our 3-7 age category winner was Ella H. and our 8-12 age category winner was Lydia B.

Member Appreciation Day also gave us another opportunity to put cooperative benefits into action. We printed 64 capital credit checks, welcomed 17 new Operation Round Up participants, and had four students complete our Scholarship Scavenger Hunt. 2471900

Congratulations to our five $87 bill credit winners—Kenneth V., Lisa C., Sandell E., Gerhardt H. and Cynthia E.—and to Tammera and Loren G., winners of the $200 Operation Round Up bill credit.

Whether you stopped by for a burger, brought the kids for activities or simply spent some time visiting with your cooperative employees, thank you for joining us. Member Appreciation Day is about you, and we're grateful for another opportunity to celebrate the people who make West River Electric a cooperative.













HONORING OUR HEROES

Veterans Memorial Undergoing Revamp

The WWII memorial on Capitol Lake shows soldiers saluting the American flag after battle. Later, after the Korean and Vietnam soldier statues and walls were added beneath the flag, the WWII veterans appear to salute them too. *Photo by Jacob Boyko*

Jacob Boyko
jacob.boyko@sdrea.coop

Lee Leuning's father was about 80 when he sat in his son's sculpting studio to become the sailor at South Dakota's World War II memorial.

For three days, Leuning studied his face and shaped his features. His father slowly began talking about the war. After 50 years, the experience still weighed heavy.

Today, more than 25 years later, Leuning's father stands immortalized in bronze on the shore of Capitol Lake in Pierre, representing sailors like himself who served in World War II.

He stands among five other slightly larger-than-life statues representing members of the U.S. armed forces. The display, called "Why We Fought," depicts the service members in tattered uniforms saluting toward the American flag.

"It's soldiers in each individual moment stepping out of battle and recognizing the flag and what they fought for," Leuning said.

A member of Northern Electric Cooperative, Leuning created the figures with fellow sculptor Sherri Treeby. Visitors to Pierre will find their work throughout the city, including statues along the Trail of Governors and a relief plaque commemorating the Lt. Cmdr. John C. Waldron Memorial Bridge. At Capitol Lake, their sculptures honor veterans of World War II, Korea and Vietnam.

Several of the World War II figures have family connections. Leuning used his mother's likeness for the army corps mechanic – she served as a plane mechanic in WWII – and his sons as models for the pilot and Marine. Treeby's father, an Army veteran, provided the face of the Coast Guardsman.

The WWII memorial was the first memorial unveiled, dedicated by Gov. Bill Janklow just four days after the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks. Leuning recalls being amazed by the turnout – thousands of visitors were at the Capitol for the dedication.

He remembers one Navy veteran watching the dedication parade from a hospital bed with an attendant.

"Every time a flag came by with an honor guard … that guy would have his aide get him out of the bed, and he'd snap to attention," Leuning said. "That, to me, showed this really means something to them."



Recent renovation improved water drainage. Previously, water under the granite tiles caused loosening. The tiles have since been replaced with sod grass. The stream bed was also replaced. *Photo by Jacob Boyko*

Subsequent dedications for the Korean and Vietnam memorials during Gov. Mike Rounds' administration attracted even more visitors. The state estimated 32,000 people attended the two-day Vietnam dedication in 2006. Some veterans watched the ceremony from pontoon bridges on Capitol Lake.

Unfortunately, years of exposure have taken a toll on the site. Trapped water beneath the granite tiles caused some to loosen and crumble, explained Leah Haugan, Special Projects Coordinator for the South Dakota Bureau of Human Resources and Administration.

"Try as we might to keep it in great shape, you can't keep up with deteriorating stone," Haugan said.

Over the summer, the state began work on a renovation project for the memorials, which will bring some changes to the site.

Sections of granite have been replaced with grass. The military seals embedded in the walkway were lifted out and placed on pedestals. The stream from the Artesian well remains, but it's now bordered by a concrete curb. The granite tiles around the fountain were upgraded from ¾ inch thick tiles to 2 inch thick tiles, and the fountain enclosure was remade with concrete and granite tiles around the top.

Restoring the site is part of the state's commitment to honoring veterans and their service, Haugan said.

"Words are words, but when you build something like that that memorializes their efforts and their sacrifice, I think that shows them there's proof positive that we recognize and honor them," Haugan said.

The renovation does not bring back the Flaming Fountain's flame. Methane rising from the artesian well that feeds Capitol Lake kept the flame burning for decades, but it went out around 2015 when the flow could no longer sustain it. Haugan said a more ambitious fountain project is among the ideas for the site, depending on funding.

A separate proposal would honor Native American code talkers who served in World Wars I and II using their native languages to transmit messages that enemy forces were not able to translate. Funding for that memorial also remains unresolved.

Visiting the memorials, Leuning has seen what that recognition can mean to a family. The day after the Vietnam memorial dedication, he returned to take photos and was approached by a woman asking him to take her picture. He obliged, and the lady went up to the bronze statue and hugged it.

"She said, 'That's my Davy. It looks just like my Davy.'"

Then she pointed to her husband's name on the wall.



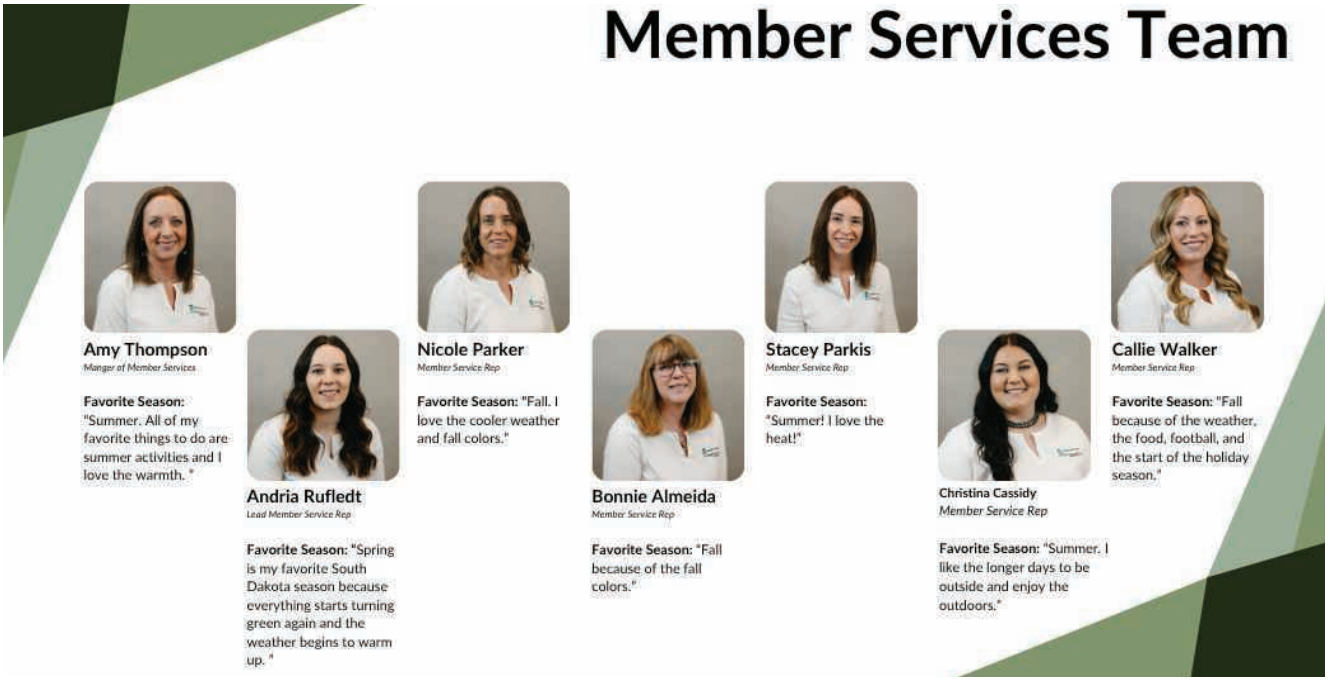
Leuning's Vietnam War memorial.
Photo submitted by Lee Leuning



Sculptor Lee Leuning with his dad, Donald Leuning, at the World War II Veterans Memorial dedication Sept. 15, 2001, in Pierre.
Photo submitted by Lee Leuning



An estimated 32,000 people attended the Vietnam War Memorial dedication in 2006.
U.S. Airforce Photo by 1st Lt. Carrie L. Kessler



MSR Department Spotlight

Q: In simple terms, what does a typical day look like for you guys?

A: Every day brings something different. We assist members by phone, in person, and online. Process payments, start, stop, and transfer electric service, explain bills and energy use, establish payment arrangements, handle outage and trouble reports, and coordinate with other departments when additional support is needed.

Q: What would a member come to you guys for?

A: A member may contact us to manage electric service, make a payment, update account information, ask about billing or usage, enroll in payment programs, discuss a past due balance, report an outage, or learn about cooperative programs, policies, and capital credits.

Q: What's something your department does members might not realize?

A: A great deal happens behind the scenes. We protect member information, maintain account records, reconcile payments, prepare service orders, monitor prepaid accounts and payment arrangements, review unusual usage, and work with billing, metering, operations, and assistance agencies to keep accounts accurate and requests moving forward.

Q: What do the stats look like for the Member Service Department?

A: Our 2026 average per month stats are as follows: # of calls: 2141; Online Applications: 145; In office Applications: 44; # of transactions: 1392

Q: If your department had a mascot, what would it be and why?

A: A Hen because we are always talking to each other and laughing so the linemen say it sounds like chickens/hens with all the chirping.

Q: What makes your department fun to be part of?

A: The variety and the people. We enjoy connecting with members, solving new challenges, and supporting one another. Even on busy days, teamwork and a sense of humor keep us going. 2492200

Q: How does your department directly or indirectly impact our members?

A: Member Services is often a member's first connection with West River Electric. We listen, provide clear information, resolve concerns, and connect members with the right people and resources. Our work helps make each interaction accurate, helpful, and welcoming.

Q: What's a common question or misconception you hear from members?

A: That West River Electric is a member owned cooperative, not an investor owned utility. 8002600

Member Photo Calendar Winners

Our Member Photo Calendar contest closed on August 31st with over 70 photo entries. We would like to give a HUGE shout out and thank you to all who participated and submitted photos. The talent, creativity, and love for our communities was truly captured through the lens in each photo. By the time you are reading this, calendars will be available for pick up at each of our offices, Wall, Enning, and Rapid City.



COVER
Submitted by: Aleah Cassens

West River Electric Association, Inc.
Your Touchstone Energy® Cooperative
"Powering You For A Brighter Future"



JANUARY
Submitted by: Mark O'loughlen



FEBRUARY
Submitted by: Jackson Habrock



MARCH
Submitted by: Elijah Robertson



APRIL
Submitted by: Tabatha Goodwin



MAY
Submitted by: Aleah Cassens



JUNE
Submitted by: Ashley Kier



JULY
Submitted by: Jo Miller



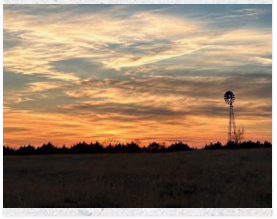
AUGUST
Submitted by: Teri Arneson



SEPTEMBER
Submitted by: Mark O'loughlen



OCTOBER
Submitted by: Tabatha Goodwin



NOVEMBER
Submitted by: Ashley Kier



DECEMBER
Submitted by: Kateri Cook



How a Youth Tour Friendship Changed Marty Larsen's Life

The 1969 South Dakota Youth Tour group. Marty Larsen is pictured in the top row, seventh from the right. John Nordlie is pictured in the top row, fifth from the left. *Photo courtesy from the SDREA Archives*

Frank Turner
frank.turner@sdrea.coop

When Marty Larsen earned a spot on the 1969 Youth Tour to Washington, D.C., through Turner-Hutchinson Electric Cooperative, he had every reason to believe dairy farming would remain at the center of his life. Turner-Hutchinson, a predecessor of today's Southeastern Electric Cooperative, served the area around his family's dairy farm seven miles west of Hurley.

Youth Tour gives high school students sponsored by their local electric cooperatives the chance to spend a week in Washington, D.C., visiting historic sites, learning about government and electric cooperatives and meeting students from across the country. South Dakota began sending students on the trip in 1963. Larsen went just six years later.

Back then, Turner-Hutchinson Electric selected its Youth Tour delegates through 4-H, rewarding young people for their accomplishments. In 1969,

Larsen placed eighth at the national 4-H dairy judging competition in Ohio. The accomplishment earned him the cooperative's Youth Tour trip to Washington, D.C.

But before Larsen could make the trip, an Army recruiter threw a wrench in his plans, warning him that he was likely to be called for service soon. Rather than wait to be drafted, Larsen chose to enlist, expecting to head to basic training and then Vietnam.

Not long after, Larsen received an induction notice, but first he had to complete a military physical. Larsen, who is hard of hearing, failed the hearing test and was disqualified from service. Had he passed, he said he would have left for basic training about a week before the 1969 Youth Tour departed.

"Somebody upstairs was looking out for me," he said.

With the Army no longer standing in the way, Larsen was going on the trip. To prepare, his mother bought him new clothes and a new pair of shoes. Even still, he returned home with the soles nearly worn through. At the Washington Monument, he and a small group of students climbed 897 steps rather than wait in the long elevator line, then rode the elevator back down.

Near the end of the trip, the group ate at a seafood restaurant along the Potomac River. Larsen persuaded the chaperones that the students ought to try lobster, something many of them had never eaten before. When the waitress brought lobster bibs to the table, Larsen passed his around and asked everyone to sign it.

His mother later saved the bib in the scrapbook she kept of his childhood, alongside years of 4-H ribbons, judging cards and other keepsakes. Larsen still has the scrapbook today.

The students took an evening cruise on a multilevel paddlewheel-style boat on the Potomac, complete with live music. South Dakota Youth Tour students continue the tradition of a river cruise today aboard the Cherry Blossom.

For Larsen, though, the most important part of Youth Tour was the people he met. One of them was John Nordlie of Sioux Falls, a young photographer who worked with the Argus Leader and later attended Augustana College.

The two became friends during the trip and stayed in contact after returning home.

"We stayed friends after we got back," he said. "I was in his wedding party when he got married. He was in my wedding party when I got married."

For the next several years, Larsen stayed close to the life he knew, working in dairy and welding. Nordlie, meanwhile, developed an interest in pipe organs. In 1983, he called Larsen and asked if he wanted to come work for him building organs for cathedrals and music halls.

Larsen agreed, bringing his experience as a welder, machinist and mechanical problem-solver into a trade he had never expected to enter. He spent the next 20 years working with Nordlie and became deeply involved in the mechanics of organ construction.

His work eventually went far beyond basic fabrication. Larsen built components, developed specialty tools and designed machinery for organ builders. One machine he created transformed a wire-bending process that had taken workers several minutes per piece, allowing them to produce several pieces per minute. Other tools he built ended up with organ companies elsewhere in the United States and overseas.

The work also took Larsen far beyond southeastern South Dakota. Over the years, he traveled throughout the country and to Japan, worked on historic instruments and helped construct and restore pipe organs in churches, museums and other settings. More than four decades after entering the trade, he is still involved in restoration work.

Looking back, Larsen can draw a direct line from the Youth Tour trip to the career that followed. Without the trip, he may never have met Nordlie. Without that friendship, the call inviting him into organ building may never have come.

"It meant a lot to me to be able to go on that trip," Larsen said. "It changed me from a dairy farmer to a pipe organ builder."

More than 50 years later, Larsen still has the scrapbook his mother kept from the trip, along with the signed lobster bib awnd other reminders of that week in Washington. But the most lasting thing he brought home was the friendship that, years later, opened the door to a life he never could have planned.



Marty Larsen and his wife, Barbara.
Photo by Frank Turner

Interested in attending Youth Tour?
Contact your local electric cooperative to learn more about the application process.

UNITED STATES POSTAL SERVICE® — **Statement of Ownership, Management, and Circulation (All Periodicals Publications Except Requester Publications)**

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Full Name	Complete Mailing Address
Rural Utilities Services (RUS)	1400 Independance Way Washington, D.C., 20250-1566
Cooperative Finance Corporation (CFC)	2101 Cooperative Way, Herdon, WA, 20171-3025

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The purpose, function, and nonprofit status of this organization and the exempt status for federal income tax purposes:
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☐ Has Changed During Preceding 12 Months *(Publisher must submit explanation of change with this statement)*

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	(2)	Mailed In-County Paid Subscriptions Stated on PS Form 3541 *(Include paid distribution above nominal rate, advertiser's proof copies, and exchange copies)*		
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c. Total Paid Distribution *[Sum of 15b (1), (2), (3), and (4)]*			14,447	14,602
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	(2)	Free or Nominal Rate In-County Copies Included on PS Form 3541		
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e. Total Free or Nominal Rate Distribution *(Sum of 15d (1), (2), (3) and (4))*			104	100
f. Total Distribution *(Sum of 15c and 15e)*			14,551	14,702
g. Copies not Distributed *(See Instructions to Publishers #4 (page #3))*			50	50
h. Total *(Sum of 15f and g)*			14,601	14,752
i. Percent Paid *(15c divided by 15f times 100)*			99.28	99.31

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16. Electronic Copy Circulation	Average No. Copies Each Issue During Preceding 12 Months	No. Copies of Single Issue Published Nearest to Filing Date
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c. Total Print Distribution (Line 15f) + Paid Electronic Copies (Line 16a)	14,551	14,702
d. Percent Paid (Both Print & Electronic Copies) (16b divided by 16c × 100)		

☑ **I certify that 50% of all my distributed copies (electronic and print) are paid above a nominal price.**

17. Publication of Statement of Ownership
☑ If the publication is a general publication, publication of this statement is required. Will be printed in the 11/01/2026 issue of this publication. ☐ Publication not required.

18. Signature and Title of Editor, Publisher, Business Manager, or Owner — Date
Amanda Haugen | Communications Specialist — 10/01/2026

Happy Thanksgiving

We're grateful for your membership today and everyday.

West River Electric Association, Inc.
Your Touchstone Energy Cooperative

"Powering You For A Brighter Future"

West River Electric offices will be ***closed Nov. 26-27.***

To report an outage, please do so via ***SmartHub*** or by calling ***605-279-2135 or 605-393-1500.***



LOCATE YOUR ACCOUNT NUMBER

There are five (5) account numbers placed randomly throughout the publication. If you locate your account number anywhere in this issue of the Cooperative Connections, you will be credited $10.00, towards your next bill. You must notify our office by the 10th of the following month to receive your credit.

WEST RIVER ELECTRIC OFFICE HOURS

RAPID CITY OFFICE

3250 E Hwy 44
Rapid City, SD 57703
Monday – Friday: 7 a.m. – 5 p.m.
605-393-1500
info@westriver.coop

WALL OFFICE

1200 W 4th Ave
PO Box 412
Wall, SD 57790
Monday – Friday: 7 a.m. – 5 p.m.
605-279-2135
info@westriver.coop

*This email is not monitored on nights or weekends and it is not for reporting outages. To report an outage please follow the instructions below.

OUTAGE OR EMERGENCY?

Our calls are answered 24/7. In the event of an outage, please report it via the SmartHub app, texting OUT to 855-939-3719, or by calling our office at 605-279-2135 or 605-393-1500.



NOV. 7
Wine, Cheese & Chocolate Stroll
Deadwood, SD
www.deadwood.com/events/

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.

OCT. 31
Hill City Main Street Merchant Trick-or-Treat
3-5 p.m.
Hill City, SD

OCT. 31
Merchant Trick-or-Treat
4-6 p.m.
Hot Springs, SD

NOV. 1
Kadoka Holiday Festival
10 a.m.-4 p.m. (MST)
Lunch 11 a.m.-1 p.m.
Kadoka, SD
605-488-0151

NOV. 6-8
Hill City Girlfriends' Weekend
Hill City, SD

NOV. 7
Roast Beef Supper & Live Auction
5 p.m.
Fairburn Community Ctr. Bazaar
Fairburn, SD
605-255-4807

NOV. 7
Black Hills Meat Fest
Free Admission
Central States Fairgrounds
Nerdy Nuts Expo Hall
Rapid City, SD
Facebook.com/BlackHillsMeatFest

NOV. 7
Northern Hills Veterans Appreciation Fair – We've got Your Six
10:30 a.m.-1:30 p.m.
Doors Open 9:30 a.m.
Sturgis Community Center
Sturgis, SD
605-645-3719

NOV. 14-15
Zonta Holiday Craft & Vendor Show
Sat. 9 a.m.-5 p.m.
Sun. 10 a.m.-3 p.m.
Ramkota Hotel
Pierre, SD

NOV. 21
Hill City Christmas Tree Lighting
Hill City, SD

NOV. 21
Lille Norge Fest
8 a.m.-12:30 p.m.
Canyon Lake Activity Center
2900 Canyon Lake Dr.
Rapid City, SD
borgundlodge.org

NOV. 21
Evergreen Bazaar
9 a.m.-2 p.m.
Eras Event Center
Hill City, SD

NOV. 27 (THRU JAN)
Trees & Trains Exhibit
S.D. State Railroad Museum
Hill City, SD

NOV. 27
Snacks With Santa
2-4 p.m.
Hill City Center
Hill City, SD

NOV. 27
Olde Tyme Christmas Parade
6 p.m.
Main Street
Hill City, SD

NOV. 27
Olde Tyme Christmas
Participating Businesses
Hill City, SD

NOV. 27-28
Kris Kringle Vendor Fair
Fri. 9 a.m.-4 p.m.
Sat. 9 a.m.-3 p.m.
Hill City High School
Hill City, SD

DEC. 4-5
Christmas in the Hills
Mueller Civic Center
Hot Springs, SD
951-591-2335

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.