

COOPERATIVE CONNECTIONS



Pick of the Patch

**Pumpkin Patches Offer
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Local Voices Shape Local Solutions

October is National Co-op Month



Robert Raker
CEO/GM

When you hear the word cooperative, what comes to mind? As your local electric co-op, we hope you think of West River Electric.

Regardless of the services offered, all cooperatives have one thing in common: they're led by the people they serve—and that simple idea makes a meaningful difference.

Cooperatives come in all shapes and sizes, each created to meet a specific need. Credit unions help members save and borrow money. Producer cooperatives, like Ocean Spray and Land O'Lakes, help farmers bring their products to market. Retail cooperatives, like REI and ACE Hardware, are owned by their shoppers or a membership of

store owners, while housing cooperatives give residents a voice in managing their communities. And utility cooperatives—like West River Electric—provide reliable electricity to the communities they serve.

Unlike many businesses that answer to outside investors or shareholders, cooperatives are built for their members. Their goal isn't simply to earn a profit—it's to provide value, meet unique local needs and strengthen the communities they call home.

That's exactly what makes West River Electric different.

Our story began in 1939 when neighbors came together to bring electricity to an area when other utilities wouldn't. While a lot has changed since then, our purpose has remained steady. We're still here to provide power and make decisions with our members' best interests in mind.

Being locally owned means we have the flexibility to focus on what matters

most to the communities we serve.

That's why no two electric cooperatives are exactly alike. Every community has different needs, and every cooperative reflects those priorities.

For some co-ops, that means expanding programs that help members save energy and money. Others may focus on supporting economic development, investing in new technology or creating new opportunities for local students. One area we expanded was in our Youth Opportunities. We developed a youth leadership program called PowerUp Youth Leadership that focuses on providing our local youth with the leadership, communication, and problem-solving skills they'll need as they step into the next chapter of their lives after high school.

You'll also find the co-op difference in the little things. It's the linemen restoring power after a storm. The employees answering your questions when you call. The team members volunteering at community events. The board members—your neighbors—who help guide decisions for the future.

We're your neighbor and local energy partner, and we're committed to serving this community for generations to come. 123601

This National Co-op Month, we invite you to join us in celebrating the cooperative difference, because this co-op belongs to you. Whether it's West River Electric, your local credit union or ACE Hardware, cooperatives prove that when people work together, everyone benefits.

Your membership is what makes our mission possible—and it's what keeps us focused on serving the people and communities that matter most.

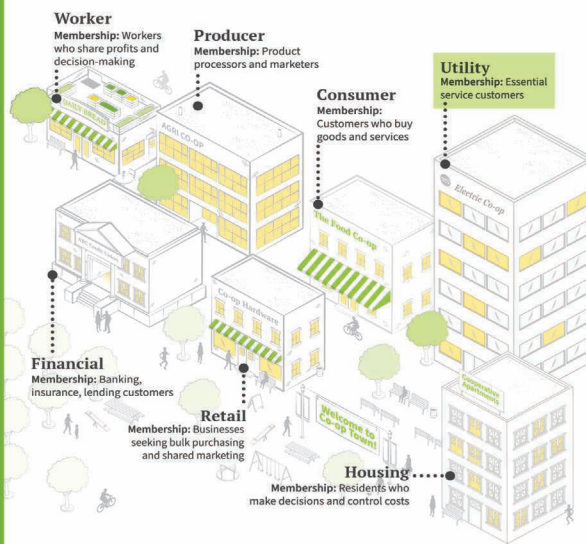
Robert Raker
CEO & General Manager

KINDS OF CO-OPS

Cooperatives come in many forms—from electric utilities and credit unions to farm supply stores and housing co-ops—but all cooperatives are built with a common purpose: to meet the needs of the members they serve.

Co-ops strengthen local communities, keep decisions close to home and invest in long-term success.

October is National Co-op Month.



NATIONAL CO-OP MONTH

KINDS OF CO-OPS



It's National Co-op Month! Here are a few facts about cooperatives and the factors that make them a bit unique compared to traditional business models. To kick things off, take a look at the different kinds of co-ops:

- **Utility Co-ops:** Provide essential services like electricity, water or broadband and are led by the members they serve.
- **Consumer Co-ops:** Owned by the people who shop there or use its products and services.
- **Producer Co-ops:** Help farmers, ranchers or other producers work together to market and sell their products.
- **Worker Co-ops:** Owned and operated by the employees who work there.
- **Housing Co-ops:** Give residents the opportunity to own and manage their housing together.
- **Retail Co-ops:** Allow members to shop at and help support a member-owned retail business.

- **Financial Co-ops:** Member-owned financial institutions, such as credit unions, that provide banking services.

Co-op may look a little different depending on the services they offer, but one characteristic is true for all: co-ops exist to serve their members.

CO-OPS are led by their MEMBERS.



As we continue to celebrate National Co-op Month, recognizing our members is a must! Members are the heart of co-ops. Unlike traditional businesses that are led by investors or shareholders, co-ops are led by the members they serve--and that positively impacts priorities. Investing locally and providing long-term value is the co-op way.

CO-OPS prioritize LOCAL NEEDS.



Co-ops come in all shapes and sizes, but each has something important in common: co-ops reflect the communities they serve. No two co-ops--or even electric co-ops for that matter--are exactly alike... because every community has unique needs. Local leadership allows co-ops to be nimble and support their members in different ways.

CO-OPS unite local voices to shape LOCAL SOLUTIONS.



West River Electric knows the best solutions start with listening. Because our members guide our future, we're able to focus on what matters most here at home. Local voices. Local leadership. Local solutions. That's just one of the many reasons we celebrate the cooperative difference in October.

CO-OPS are guided by seven PRINCIPLES.



All co-ops are guided by the same set of cooperative principles:

1. Open and Voluntary Membership
2. Democratic Member Control
3. Members' Economic Participation
4. Autonomy and Independence
5. Education, Training, and Information
6. Cooperation Among Cooperatives
7. Concern for Community

As we celebrate National Co-op Month, we hope you know that for West River Electric, being an electric cooperative isn't simply about delivering electricity. It's about serving you, our members, in ways that strengthen our entire communities.

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.

Board President: Andy Moon

Board of Directors

Stan Anders – Vice President
 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.

SAFETY IS ALWAYS IN SEASON

Fall hunting is a core memory treasured by many in South Dakota. It's a family and friend tradition that should be kept safe. This is your caring reminder to stay safe and enjoy a great hunt this season.

Simple Safety Rules for All Hunters

- Watch for posted warning signs and stay clear of electrical equipment.
- Do not shoot at or near power lines or insulators.
- Know where power lines and equipment are located on the land you hunt.
- Be careful in wooded areas where power lines may not be easy to see.
- Do not place deer stands on utility poles or climb poles; energized lines can shock or kill you.
- Do not place decoys on power lines or other utility equipment; they can block lines and create hazards for crews.

Pheasant hunting often takes place in open fields with hedgerows and grassy strips, while dove hunting centers on fast, aerial crossings across agricultural landscapes. In both scenarios, lines may be hidden by trees or tall grass, especially near field edges and canal banks. Staying alert in these transition zones reduces the risk of an accidental encounter with electrical infrastructure.

Practical Rules for Pheasant and Dove Hunts

- Plan ahead: Check maps or ask landowners where lines and equipment are located.
- Keep a safe distance: Stay away from overhead and buried lines near fields and edges.
- Hunt with a partner: A second person can help spot hazards.
- Speak up about hazards: If you see lines or equipment, treat it as a hazard and avoid the area.
- Follow rules: Respect any posted electrical safety warnings or access restrictions.
- Share safety: Tell fellow hunters and guests about these tips.

Why These Safety Tips Matter

Power lines conduct large amounts of electricity and contact with lines or equipment can cause serious injury or death. Maintaining distance, avoiding contact with poles or lines, and not placing gear on equipment are effective practices that protect you, your hunting partners, and the line workers who keep power on.

Your electric cooperative remains committed to safe hunting. We encourage members to stay informed about local electrical safety rules and to know line locations on the lands they hunt. If you encounter hazards, report them right away so they can be addressed. Sharing these safety practices help create a culture of safety that benefits everyone.



The poster features a green camouflage pattern at the top, followed by a yellow and black diagonal hazard stripe. Below this, a target icon is positioned to the left of the title "Electrical Safety Tips for Hunters". The text below the title reads: "We encourage all members to be aware of electrical equipment while hunting. Keep these safety tips in mind as you enjoy the great outdoors." A list of six safety tips follows: "Keep clear of electrical equipment.", "Do not shoot at or near power lines or insulators.", "Know where power lines and equipment are located where you hunt.", "Be vigilant in wooded areas where power lines may not be as visible.", "Never place deer stands on utility poles.", and "Never place decoys on power lines or other utility equipment."

Electrical Safety Tips for Hunters

We encourage all members to be aware of electrical equipment while hunting. Keep these safety tips in mind as you enjoy the great outdoors.

- Keep clear of electrical equipment.
- Do not shoot at or near power lines or insulators.
- Know where power lines and equipment are located where you hunt.
- Be vigilant in wooded areas where power lines may not be as visible.
- Never place deer stands on utility poles.
- Never place decoys on power lines or other utility equipment.



The drawing is a simple line drawing on a light blue background. It shows a person standing on the ground, holding a string that goes up to a diamond-shaped kite. The kite is positioned near a horizontal line representing a power line. Above the power line, there is a yellow sun and the handwritten text "Don't dig or fly kites by wires!". To the right of the drawing, the text "Don't dig or fly kites by wires!" is written in a bold, red font.

"Don't dig or fly kites by wires!"

Seth Raak, age 7

Seth cautions readers to not dig or fly kites around power lines. That is great advice, Seth! Thank you! Seth's parents are Nathaniel and Katie Raak, members of Central 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.

Let's Eat CAKE

SWEDISH PANCAKES

Ingredients:

1.5 cups flour, sifted
3 tbsps. sugar
1/2 tsp. salt
3 eggs
2 cups milk
2 tbsps. butter, melted

Method

Sift together flour, sugar and salt. Beat in 3 eggs until thick and piled softly. Beat in milk and butter until blended. Lightly grease griddle with butter. For each pancake, spoon about 1 tbsp. of batter on skillet. Cook over medium heat until lightly brown on each side.

Lois J. Larson
Clay-Union Electric

CREAM CHEESE CUPCAKES

Ingredients:

1 box chocolate cake mix, prepared
1 (8 oz.) package cream cheese
1/3 cup sugar
1 egg
Dash of salt
1 (6 oz.) package chocolate chips
1 can cream cheese frosting

Method

Mix cake mix according to package directions. Fill cupcake liners 1/2 full. mix the cream cheese with the sugar. Beat in egg and salt, then add chocolate chips. Drop a teaspoonful of cream cheese mixture into each cupcake. Bake as directed on package. Frost with cream cheese frosting when cool.

Elaine Rieck
Southeastern Electric

CHOCOLATE ZUCCHINI CAKE

Ingredients:

2 cups all-purpose flour
3/4 cup unsweetened cocoa powder
2 tsps. baking soda
1/2 tsp. baking powder
1 tsp. espresso powder (optional)
1/2 tsp. salt
1 cup canola or vegetable oil
1 cup granulated sugar
3/4 cup brown sugar, packed
4 large eggs, room temperature
1/3 cup sour cream or Greek yogurt, room temperature
2 tsps. vanilla
3 cups shredded zucchini (about 3 medium)
1 cup semi-sweet chocolate chips

Method

Preheat oven to 350 °F. Grease two 9x2 inch cake pans (make sure they're at least 2 inches high or one bundt pan). Whisk the flour, cocoa powder, baking soda, baking powder, espresso powder (if using) and salt together in a large bowl. In another large bowl using a handheld or stand mixer, beat the oil, granulated sugar, brown sugar, eggs, sour cream, vanilla and zucchini together until combined. Pour dry ingredients into the wet ingredients and beat on medium speed until completely combined. Beat in chocolate chips. Batter will be thick. Pour batter evenly into cake pans. Bake for around 25-32 minutes for round pans; 45 minutes for bundt pans or 9x13 pan; 18-22 minutes for cupcakes (24-30 cupcakes). To test doneness, insert a toothpick into the center of cake. If it comes out clean, it is done.

Ginny Jensen
Sioux Valley Energy

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.

RECIPE CORRECTION THE BEST APPLE CRISP

Ingredients:

6 cups sliced apples
1 1/2 cups white sugar
1 tsp. cinnamon
6 tbsps. flour

Topping (makes enough for two pans)

2 cups flour
2 cups brown sugar
2 cups soft butter
1 tsp. baking powder
3 cups oatmeal

Method

Mix ingredients in a bowl and place in a 9x12 glass baking dish. Mix topping ingredients together until crumbly and sprinkle over apple mixture. Don't pack. Bake at 350 F for 1 hour or until apples are done.

Ginny Jensen
Sioux Valley Energy

This Fall, Refresh Your Cybersecurity Habits



Gerri Johnston
Manager of IT

As the leaves begin to change and we settle into the routines of fall, it's a good time to take stock of a few things around the house—preparing for cooler weather, checking our heating systems and getting ready for the months ahead. It's also a good time to refresh our cybersecurity habits.

October is National Cybersecurity Awareness Month, but protecting your personal information is something that deserves attention all year long.

At West River Electric, cybersecurity is a critical part of providing safe, reliable electric service. While much of our focus is on protecting the physical systems that operate the electric grid, we also work to protect the systems and information that help us serve you—including online accounts, payment systems, member portals and outage communications.

Unfortunately, scammers are becoming more sophisticated, too. Artificial intelligence (AI) is making it easier for cyber criminals to create convincing emails, text messages, websites and even voice messages that can look and sound legitimate. The FBI has warned that generative AI can make fraudulent schemes more believable by eliminating many of the errors that once helped us identify a scam.

That matters when it comes to utility scams. 640600

A scammer may impersonate West River Electric and claim your account is past due, your service is about to be disconnected or you need to make an immediate payment. The message might even include our logo, use professional-looking

language or direct you to a website that appears legitimate. With AI helping scammers create more convincing communications, simply looking for spelling mistakes or other obvious warning signs may no longer be enough. And these scams are not a small problem.

According to the Federal Trade Commission, consumers reported losing \$3.5 billion to imposter scams in 2025, making these types of scams the most commonly reported type of fraud. Nearly one in three fraud reports involved an imposter scam.

So, what should you do if you receive an unexpected message claiming to be from West River Electric?

If a message creates a sense of urgency or threatens immediate disconnection, take a moment to verify it. Don't click the link or call the phone number provided in the message. Instead, contact us directly using our trusted methods. You can reach us by phone at 605-279-2135 or 605-393-1500; through our website chat at www.westriver.coop; or by email at info@westriver.coop.

You can also take steps to protect your online accounts before a scam occurs. Start with your password. Longer is generally better than simply adding more special characters. Choose a long, unique passphrase that is difficult for others to guess, and don't reuse the same password across multiple accounts.

If the accounts you access online offer multifactor authentication (MFA), consider using it. MFA adds an extra layer of protection by requiring an additional way to verify your identity, such as a code sent to your phone or an authentication app.

Most importantly, remember that you don't have to make a payment simply



If a message creates a sense of urgency or threatens immediate disconnection, take a moment to verify it. Don't click the link or call the phone number provided in the message. Instead, contact West River Electric directly using our trusted methods.

because someone tells you that you do. We want you to have an opportunity to verify any unexpected request.

West River Electric is committed to protecting the systems that help us deliver your electricity and serve our members. You can help by protecting your own account, slowing down when something seems urgent and contacting us directly when you're unsure.

For questions about your account or payment options, contact one of our offices:

Wall Office: 605-279-2135

Rapid Office: 605-393-1500

Exploring AI's Potential for Improved Service and Reliability



Amanda Haugen
Communications
Specialist

Like it or not, artificial intelligence seems inescapable. Even a quick Google search produces an AI-generated smorgasbord of results, rather than a simple list of links. AI is even shaping conversations about the future of energy. 592901

While news headlines often focus on the rapid growth of AI, electric cooperatives are taking a measured approach to understanding how these tools might help improve service for the local communities they serve.

For West River Electric, our goal is not to adopt AI technology simply because it's new. Instead, any tool or innovation must provide a clear benefit to our members, whether that's improving power reliability, increasing operational efficiency or helping our team make better-informed decisions. As we explore AI tools, we are doing so cautiously, evaluating where it can add value while maintaining a strong focus on member needs, privacy and system reliability.

One area where AI shows promise is electricity load forecasting. Electric demand changes throughout the day and fluctuates significantly

during periods of extreme weather. Advanced forecasting tools can analyze historical data, weather patterns and additional factors to help predict when electricity use is likely to increase. Better forecasts allow us to prepare for higher demand, manage resources more effectively and support reliable service during peak periods.

AI tools are also being used to identify potential problems along the local grid before they lead to power outages. By analyzing information from automated meters and other equipment across the electric system, AI-powered tools can detect unusual patterns or anomalies that might otherwise go unnoticed. These early warnings could help our crews investigate issues sooner, potentially reducing the likelihood or duration of outages.

Maintaining power lines is another critical area where AI technology may offer benefits. Trees and overgrown vegetation are one of the leading causes of power outages. Many electric utilities, including co-ops, are exploring image recognition tools that can help monitor vegetation growth near power lines more efficiently. Rather than replacing the expertise of our field crews, these tools can help identify parts of the system that need attention, allowing crews to prioritize work areas and make the best use of their time.

Beyond the electric system itself, AI could also improve day-to-day operations. For example, AI tools can assist office employees by summarizing lengthy reports, organizing member feedback and analyzing large amounts of data. These types of tools could help our team spend less time on repetitive administrative tasks and more time focusing on members and addressing our community's energy needs.

Even with these potential benefits, we recognize that AI is not a cure-all. Human oversight remains essential, and decisions that affect our members will never rely solely on automated systems.

As AI tools evolve, West River Electric will continue exploring their potential. But as with any new technology, adoption will be guided by a simple principle: if an AI tool helps improve reliability, efficiency or services for our members, it's worth considering. If it doesn't, we will continue exploring solutions that do.

Emerging AI Tools for Better Service

Electric co-ops are already exploring AI for a variety of applications that improve service and reliability and ultimately benefit consumer-members.

Electricity Load Forecasting: Prompt-based tools help predict periods of high electricity use, helping prepare for increased demand.

Anomaly Detection: Scans of the local system and automated meter data can spot unusual activity early — helping identify potential issues before outages occur.

Vegetation Management: Image recognition tools help crews monitor tree and vegetation growth near power lines more efficiently.

Office Productivity: AI tools can help summarize safety reports, organize feedback and analyze data to better understand the services members value most.



PICK OF THE PATCH

Frank Turner

frank.turner@sirea.coop

South Dakota Pumpkin Patches Offer Plenty of Reasons to Get Outside this Fall

Cooler air, changing leaves and the search for the perfect pumpkin all mark the arrival of the autumn season. Across South Dakota, fall weekends bring families to farms and orchards for corn mazes, apple picking and hayrides.

But putting together a few weeks of fall fun takes months of work behind the scenes.

Pumpkin patches and orchards are preparing to welcome visitors for another season of pumpkins, games and family traditions.

Country Apple Orchard – Harrisburg, S.D.

By the time visitors arrive at Country Apple Orchard near Harrisburg, owner Greg Jones and his crew have already brought in three semi loads of straw bales and about 6,000 bushels of corn.

It's all part of preparing for a fall season

that lasts just a couple of months but requires work throughout the year.

"The property is kind of a full-time, year-round job," Jones said.

The orchard has been around for more than 30 years, and Jones is six years into owning the operation. Since taking over, he has expanded the pumpkin patches and added many of the attractions that now make up the orchard's fall festival.

The season opens Sept. 4 and runs through October, beginning with apple picking in September before pumpkins take center stage in October. Weekend festivities include zip lines, apple cannons, hay bale mazes, corn mazes, corn pits and, new this year, fresh-cut flowers.

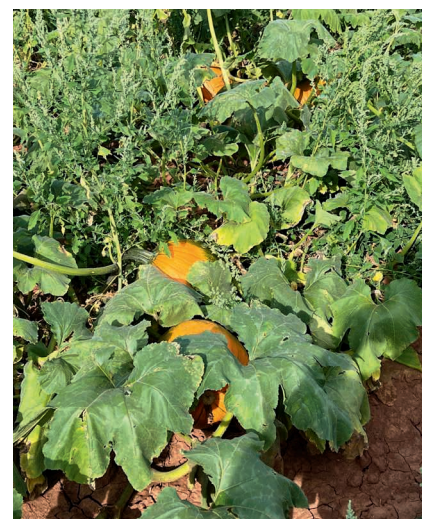
Country Apple Orchard is also a member of Southeastern Electric Cooperative, which helps power the operation through the busy fall season. Keeping everything running takes about

Lucas Hartshorn, owner of Lil' Harvester's Pumpkin Patch, and his family opening the patch for last year's fall season.
Photo submitted by Lucas Hartshorn

60 seasonal employees. Once the crowds disappear, that workforce drops to Jones and one other worker.

The effort appears to keep families coming back.

"They love coming out and they come out multiple times," Jones said, adding that some families with season passes



Pumpkins grow in the field at Lil' Harvester's Pumpkin Patch near Rapid City.
Photo submitted by Lucas Hartshorn

return nearly every weekend throughout the season.

Mazing Acres – Yankton, S.D.

What started as a small family project has grown into roughly 35 acres of fall festivities outside Yankton.

Scott and Molly Nedved opened Mazing Acres with their family in 2020. At the time, the idea was to create a small hobby farm that could teach their children the value of hard work while giving the community something new to enjoy.

“It’s grown more than we thought it would,” Molly laughed.

Today, Mazing Acres, a member of Bon Homme Yankton Electric Association, includes six acres of pumpkins, a five-acre corn maze, a flower patch and several attractions. Visitors can take a hayrack ride, watch pig races, play in the corn pit or try the apple cannons.

The corn maze, sponsored by First Dakota National Bank, changes design each year. For 2026, the design celebrates the nation’s 250th anniversary.

Although the festival lasts only several weekends, planning starts almost as soon as the previous season ends. The family reviews what worked, attends industry



A family poses for a photo in the giant pumpkin chair at Mazing Acres.

Photo submitted by Molly Nedved

conferences and selects the next year’s pumpkin varieties in late fall. By August, Scott said preparing the farm becomes “an all-day affair every day until we open.”

Visitors will notice a few changes this year. Saturday hours are being extended until 8 p.m., allowing families to experience the farm after dark, and a new tiny-town area will feature themed playhouses for younger children.

Mazing Acres opens Sept. 19 and runs through Halloween.

“We want to be something for every age,” Molly said. “Not just for the kids.”

Lil’ Harvester’s Pumpkin Patch – Rapid City, S.D.

At Lil’ Harvester’s Pumpkin Patch south of Rapid City, the Hartshorn family’s fall tradition started in 2013 with pumpkins planted by hand.

Since then, owner Lucas Hartshorn said the patch has grown to about 11 acres.

Hartshorn started the pumpkin patch with his parents, Lyle and Donna, after his father retired. The family wanted a way to keep farming while creating an event they could enjoy with their children.

“We were looking for something to do with the kids in the fall,” Hartshorn said.

At the time, pumpkin patches were harder to find around Rapid City. After

visiting one themselves, the family decided they could create a similar experience on their own farm.

Each year brought something new. Planting pumpkins by hand eventually gave way to a planter, while the patch grew to include a petting zoo, bounce houses, wagon rides, a sandbox and other activities.

Lil’ Harvester’s, a member of Black Hills Electric Cooperative, also opens during the week for school field trips, where students get a closer look at agriculture. Hartshorn said demonstrations may focus on pumpkins or the differences between sweet corn, field corn and popcorn, including how each is grown. For Hartshorn, that mix of farming, education and family time remains at the heart of the patch.

“They get to come out to the farm and learn something,” Hartshorn said.

Across South Dakota, there are several more pumpkin patches and fall festivities similar to those put on by Country Apple Orchard, Mazing Acres and Lil’ Harvester’s Pumpkin Patch. Whether it’s a small hobby farm or a dedicated agritourism operation, each one offers its own take on fall traditions that continue to draw families back year after year.



Visitors of all ages can find something to enjoy at Mazing Acres near Yankton, including the farm’s giant slides.

Photo submitted by Molly Nedved

Staking Department Team



Lance Steiger
Staking Foreman

Favorite Season: "Spring and fall because the temps are not cold and it's not hot. Perfect time for camping, hunting or doing anything outside."



Zach Hansen
Staking Technician

Favorite Season: "Summer with lots of rain."



Aarin Ainsworth
Staking Technician

Favorite Season: "Summertime so I can ride my motorcycle."



Brandon Arnold
Staking Technician

Favorite Season: "Any season the wind doesn't blow."



Tracea Ladner
Operations Admin Assistant

Favorite Season: "Summertime as I enjoy doing yardwork."

Q&A with Your Staking Department!

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

A: "On a typical day, we usually meet with members throughout the day who are needing new service or who want to change service. If it's a slower day and not so many meetings then we have larger powerline rebuild projects or underground replacement projects that fill the time to help with reliability of our system."

Q: Why would a member need to meet with you?

A: "Members would meet with us if they are needing new electrical service or changing their service. We also meet with members about infrastructure on their property and if it needs to be upgraded, changed or moved."

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

A: "Something that goes on behind the scenes is the amount of planning that goes in before any construction is started. We don't just mark where we think the power should be installed. We review service needs, find the best possible route, check existing infrastructure, work through easements and permits and help ensure the project can be built safely, efficiently and in a way that works for both the member and WREA."

Q: What do the stats look like for the Staking Department?

A: "We stake on average around 900 work orders per year with 500 of those being new services. We also stake approximately

20 to 30 miles of powerline rebuilds every year. With these staking jobs come easements and permits, so we also acquire all of those that go with the different jobs to make it happen." 1039800

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

A: "Our mascot would be a beaver as they are natural planners and builders. Like us, beavers work with the land, solve problems, and build the groundwork for something bigger. Our department helps plan new services, rebuilds, easements and permits so the rest of the project can move forward smoothly."

Q: How does the Staking Department directly or indirectly serve the membership?

A: "We directly serve the membership by helping them get that new service built or change/upgrade an existing service on their property. We work with them to find the best possible route to serve their property and ensure they are happy with the outcome. We indirectly serve the membership by planning, replacing, and acquiring documents needed to help improve safety, reliability and efficiency across the entire WREA system. A common misconception members have about the Staking Department is they think we are just marking a route. What they don't see or realize is we also have to consider easements, permits, property lines, existing infrastructure, safety, terrain, and ultimately the long-term reliability the project will have before we can move forward."

If you are considering building a new home or shop or wanting to upgrade your service, give our staking department a call at 605-393-1500.

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. 1487700

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.

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!





LOST BENEATH OAHE

The Rise, Fall and Disappearance of a South Dakota Ghost Town

Frank Turner

frank.turner@sdrea.coop

Beneath the waves of Lake Oahe lies more than dead trees and walleye. Just below the surface near Akaska sit the remnants of LeBeau, an early 1900s railroad town once filled with immense promise and prosperity, whose story is worthy of its own Wild West feature film.

For years, Caroline Thorsen has collected the history of her great-grandfather, Antoine Le Beau, and the town that bore his name. Through Thorsen's collection and research by railroad historian Don Hofsommer in "A Promise Broken: LeBeau and the Railroad," we can dive beneath the waters of Lake Oahe and dredge up the story of LeBeau's dramatic rise and fall.

A French Fur Trader

The story of the ghost town of LeBeau begins with Antoine Le Beau Sr., a French fur trader whose journey in the mid-1800s took him from France to Quebec, Canada, then to St. Louis, Missouri and eventually up the Missouri River to what is now South Dakota.

"As I unfortunately did not know [Antoine], I hope he is remembered as being a brave gentleman who crossed the ocean from France to come to America and eventually become friends with the Native Americans, married in Native Tradition," said Thorsen, Le Beau's great-granddaughter.

The woman Antoine married was Mary Little Thunder, a member of the Two Kettle Band of Sioux. Antoine himself was later one of several Frenchmen adopted

into the Sioux Tribe at a Great Sioux Council, where he was given the name "Ogless," or "Red Shirt."

Le Beau worked with the American Fur Company before establishing a trading post along the Missouri River near present-day Akaska. The post became the foundation of a small town that would eventually bear his name and become a brief, yet bright, gateway to the West.

The Railroad

By the time the railroad arrived, Antoine Le Beau Sr. was gone, but the town was quickly gaining the reputation of a small metropolis. In 1907, the Minneapolis & St. Louis Railway (M&StL) reached LeBeau, connecting the small Missouri River settlement to Watertown and markets farther east.

"As LeBeau prospered, so did the M&StL's westernmost extension; as LeBeau withered, so did its railroad," Hofsommer writes.

Cattle companies from Texas had taken notice of both LeBeau and the grasslands west of the Missouri. Once they learned cattle thrived west of the river, they began moving large herds into the region. Through its railroad, LeBeau offered those ranchers a new route to market.

The next trick was getting the cattle across the river. On the west side of the Missouri, large holding pens could accommodate as many as 3,500 animals. From there, cattle crossed the river aboard the Scotty Philip, a steam-powered ferry. Once across, they could be loaded directly onto eastbound rail cars.

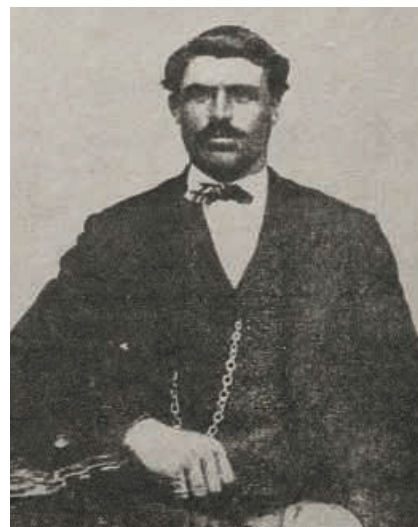
The mouth of Swan Creek on Lake Oahe where the ghost town of LeBeau resides under the waves. *Photo by Frank Turner*

In 1908, roughly 24,000 cattle passed through LeBeau on their way to and from the West River ranges, representing about \$1 million in livestock at the time. The feat helped cement the town's place as a major cattle-shipping point on the Missouri.

A Bustling Town

By the end of the season, LeBeau featured two banks, a newspaper, a drugstore, a general store and a local saloon. The growing town also boasted two lumberyards, a grain elevator and a livery, along with prominent businesses like the Idle Hour billiard and pool parlor, the Hotel LeBeau and Arcade Hotel. For entertainment, residents could even catch a show at Zimmer's Opera House.

As the town grew, M&StL officials planned to continue the rail line west of the



French fur trapper Antoine Le Beau Sr.
Photo submitted by Caroline Thorsen

Missouri by building a bridge across the Missouri, hinting at a long expansion all the way to the West Coast. The excitement only reinforced the idea that LeBeau was destined to become the gate to the west.

The buzz captured the attention of Murdo MacKenzie, general manager of the Matador Land and Cattle Company, and his wealthy son, Dode. Described as a likable and fine young man – while sober – Dode moved to LeBeau in his early 20s to oversee Matador's South Dakota operations.

A Questionable Killing

At the end of the 1909 shipping season, Dode MacKenzie began frequenting LeBeau's saloons. On Dec. 11, he was shot and killed by Bud Stephens, who was tending the bar that morning at Phil DuFran's saloon.

Local accounts of what happened that day – and of Dode MacKenzie's character – differ greatly. One local official described MacKenzie as a stand-up individual, while another local woman said he was known to shoot behind the heels of women in the town when "spirits took him."

Exactly what happened on Dec. 11 will never be known, but according to the version later presented by Stephens' defense at trial, MacKenzie became furious when Stephens failed to hear him order a drink. Rebuffed, MacKenzie crossed the street to purchase what he believed were



The paddle-wheeler Scotty Philip loads cattle at LeBeau, S.D., to be fattened on grasslands west of the Missouri River. For about three years, LeBeau was one of the Northwest's most important cattle-shipping towns.
Photo courtesy of the South Dakota Historical Society

.45-caliber shells, loaded his gun, walked back, pointed it at Stephens and pulled the trigger twice. As the story goes, MacKenzie had accidentally purchased .38-caliber shells, which failed to fire and instead plopped onto the floor. It was then that Stephens reached for his gun and began firing, killing the young MacKenzie.

A Dying Town

The trial resulted in Stephens' acquittal, drawing the ire of Dode MacKenzie's father and the Matador Cattle Company. The company effectively boycotted LeBeau, and no Matador cattle ever entered the town again.

Within months of the trial, a suspicious fire made matters worse. Although fires weren't uncommon in the Wild West, townsfolk discovered that the fire hose, telephone and telegraph lines had all been cut prior to the fire. No arsonist was ever caught.

The bad luck didn't stop there. A competing rail line to the north completed a bridge across the Missouri at Mobridge, undercutting LeBeau's stream of West River cattle. By 1924, M&StL abandoned the town, tearing out its segment of rail line. Within a year, the post office closed.

Beneath Lake Oahe

LeBeau had been a ghost town for decades when Lake Oahe came for what was left.

Construction of Oahe Dam near Pierre began in 1948 as part of a massive federal effort to control flooding and generate hydroelectric power along the Missouri River. In August 1958, the river was closed at the dam and the newly created reservoir began to fill.

As the water rose, it eventually covered the old LeBeau townsite near the mouth of Swan Creek. The empty foundations, cellar holes and remnants of the once-bustling railroad town disappeared beneath Lake Oahe. Unlike most ghost towns in South Dakota that faded away with time, LeBeau vanished beneath the Missouri.



A crowd gathers around a band near the railroad in LeBeau, S.D., with the depot and Missouri River visible in the distance. About a year after this photo was taken, the town installed 10-foot-wide concrete sidewalks along Main Street.
Photo courtesy of the South Dakota Historical Society.

4th Annual Ag Appreciation Recap



Amanda Haugen
Communications
Specialist

More than 400 community members came together for this year's 4th Annual Ag Appreciation event during the Central States Fair. They celebrated and recognized the

hard work our rural neighbors and ag producers put in to make our region and ag industry what it is today.

Attendees enjoyed live music from the Lonely Rangers, heard remarks from dignitaries in attendance and, most importantly, took time to recognize the farmers, ranchers and agricultural producers who help feed, fuel and strengthen our communities.

This year's celebration also kept the spirit of America's 250th birthday alive with commemorative 250th cookies, cutting of the cake by Mayor Jason Salamun, and the presentation of a special, one-time Patriot Award.

A highlight of the evening was recognizing this year's award recipients:



Rural Neighbor Award: Justin Tupper

Rural Neighbor Award: Dennis Quivey

Rural Health Care Neighbor Award:
Charles Lewis, D.O. and Sarah Lewis, D.O.

Agribusiness Award: C-Lock

Patriot Award: Darla Crown

Agriculture is about more than crops and livestock. It represents families, neighbors, perseverance and a way of life passed from one generation to the next. Our rural producers are truly the salt-of-the-earth backbone of this country—putting in the work each day and helping keep our communities strong.

Ag Appreciation was proudly sponsored, produced and supported by volunteers from Touchstone Energy Cooperatives, Elevate Rapid City, Monument Health and Central States Fair. Together, these organizations are proud to recognize the people who make agriculture—and our region—what it is today.

Thank you to everyone who joined us for another memorable evening. We're already looking forward to bringing the community together again next year for the 5th Annual Ag Appreciation event!





West River Electric Association, Inc.

Your Touchstone Energy® Cooperative 

"Powering You For A Brighter Future"

YOUR BOARD OF DIRECTORS VOTED
TO RETURN

\$1,000,000

IN CAPITAL CREDITS

BACK TO THE MEMBERSHIP

Each year, your Board of Directors review West River Electric's financial condition to determine if a capital credit "retirement" (payment of capital credits) will be possible for the year. Because of the strong margins, the board voted to return this \$1,000,000 back to the membership. You will receive a credit on your bill unless you call and specifically request a check to be sent.

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

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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.



OCT. 31
Yankton's Harvest Halloween
 Yankton, SD
www.harvesthalloween.com

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. 3
Pumpkin Train/ SoDak Vendor Showcase
 Prairie Village
 Madison, SD

OCT. 3
Community Rummage Sale
 8 a.m.-12 p.m.
 Rapid Valley UMC
 5103 Long View Rd.
 Rapid City, SD

OCT. 3
Fall Harvest Farmers Market
 9 a.m.
 Centennial Park
 Hot Springs, SD

OCT. 3-4
The Black Market
 Sat. 9 a.m.-5 p.m.,
 Sun. 10 a.m.-3 p.m.
 W.H. Lyon Fairgrounds Expo Bldg.
 Sioux Falls, SD
 605-332-6004

OCT. 4
Run Crazy Horse Full & Half Marathon

OCT. 5-11
Hill City Restaurant Week
 Hill City, SD

OCT. 10
Community Foundation Casino Night Fundraiser
 5:30 p.m.
 Eras Event Center
 Hill City, SD
 210-326-4414

OCT. 10
2026 Fall River Ag Appreciation Banquet
 4:30 p.m.
 Red Rock River Resort
 Hot Springs, SD

OCT. 11
BBQ Fundraiser for Delta Dental Bus
 11 a.m.-5 p.m.
 Hill City Center
 Hill City, SD

OCT. 15-17
Spearfish Senior Center Fall Fundraising Rummage Sale
 Pies, Coffee, Caramel Rolls
 Quilt Raffle
 Thurs., Fri. 8 a.m.-3 p.m.
 Sat. 8 a.m.-12 p.m.
 1306 N. 10th St.
 Spearfish, SD

OCT. 20
Korczak Remembrance Day
 Crazy Horse Memorial

OCT. 23
Monster Mash
 5-8 p.m.
 Box Elder Events Center
 Box Elder, SD

OCT. 24
Hill City Children's Boo Bash & Pumpkin Festival
 9-11 a.m.
 Hill City, SD

OCT. 24
Tin City Saloon Masquerade Mystery Pairing Party
 Light Up Hill City Fundraiser
 Hill City, SD

OCT. 24
Owl-O-Ween
 Black Hills Raptor Center
 12 p.m.-5 p.m.
 15256 E. Hwy. 44
 Rapid City, SD
 605-519-2008

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

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.