

# COOPERATIVE

## CONNECTIONS



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# Co-op Hosts Annual Membership Meeting

Members attending Codington-Clark Electric Co-op's annual membership meeting in Watertown on Tuesday, March 26, were updated by General Manager Dave Eide on rates, capital credits, bill credits, solar panel installations, load management upgrade, East River line rebuild and power supply.

Secretary Dan Thyen announced the 2024 Operation Round Up® recipient.

Official business conducted during the meeting included the election of three directors. Incumbent directors Mike Meland, Ben Fleming and Russ Hurlbert ran unopposed and were each elected to serve a three-year term on the cooperative's board of directors.

In other business, Treasurer Russ Foster summarized the financial condition of the co-op and reported the co-op continues to maintain a strong financial position. He stated the accounting firm Eide Bailly, LLP of Sioux Falls, S.D., audited the books and records of the co-op during 2023. The audit firm made its report to the directors at the January 2024 board meeting and reported 'the books and records conformed to generally accepted accounting principles.'

Catie Linneman, Watertown, S.D. was drawn as the winner of the \$1,000 cash prize.

Winners of \$50 cash prize drawings included:

- Wayne F. Borgheiinck, Waverly, S.D.
- Douglas Nelson, Florence, S.D.
- Chris & Helen Bultsma, Watertown, S.D.
- Lowell Bach, Watertown, S.D.
- Zachery T. Hunke, Watertown, S.D.
- Albert E. & Pamela L. Raeder, Watertown, S.D.
- Scott Lentz, Watertown, S.D.
- Mike Okoniewski, Watertown, S.D.
- Jason M. & Leann E. Ducker, Henry, S.D.
- Arvid & Eileen Kraemer, Watertown, S.D.

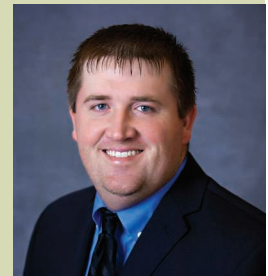
The winner of the door prize drawing was Raymond & Theresa Tesch, Watertown, S.D.

The winner of the Operation Round Up electric Blackstone griddle was Douglas Nelson, Florence, S.D.

The Winner of the Kindle Fire was Emily Thorson, Watertown, S.D.



District 1 - Mike Meland  
Rural Webster, S.D.



District 3 - Ben Fleming  
Rural Florence, S.D.



District 7 - Russ Hurlbert  
Rural Raymond, S.D.

## Operation Round Up Recipient Selected

The Operation Round Up Board met February 27 and selected the following recipient:

- Watertown Area People Against Child Hunger, \$1,500

If you're interested in the program please call (800) 463-8938, email [info@ccelectric.coop](mailto:info@ccelectric.coop), stop by the office or put a note in with your electric bill. We hope you'll consider being a part of this program.



ORU Board Member Johnny Rider presents a check to Sarah Zaug with PACH at CCEC's Annual Meeting.

## Kettwig Joins Line Crew

Codington-Clark Electric welcomes Kobe Kettwig to the line crew.

Kobe will be working towards obtaining his “journeyman” status, which involves completing a correspondence course and logging on-the-job experience hours.

Kobe graduated from Mitchell Technical College from the Power Line Construction and Maintenance program. He previously worked at Codington-Clark as a temporary line worker, Brink Construction, Dave’s Construction and for the City of Sioux Falls.

Welcome back, Kobe.



Codington-Clark Electric welcomes Kobe Kettwig to the line crew.

## COOPERATIVE CONNECTIONS

### CODINGTON-CLARK ELECTRIC

(USPS 019-073)

**Board of Directors**

**President:**

Alfred “Ben” Schleusner, Watertown

**Vice President:**

Daniel Thyen, Watertown

**Secretary:**

Roy Gjerde, Vienna

**Treasurer:**

John Rider, Henry

**Directors:**

Benjamin Fleming, Florence

Russell Foster, Garden City

Russell Hurlbert, Raymond

Michael Meland, Webster

David Warkenthien, Clark

**Management Staff**

Dave Eide, Manager

Tammy Popham, Staff Assistant

Tasha Torgerson, Office Services

Manager

Jarod Suttan, Member Services

Manager

Jared Terhark, Distribution System

Manager

**To report a power outage:**

1-844-968-1976

**Office Hours:**

Mon. - Fri., 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

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**[www.ccelectric.coop](http://www.ccelectric.coop)**

Codington-Clark Electric Cooperative, Inc. is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

## Officers For 2024

Codington-Clark Electric Co-op’s directors selected their officers for the coming year during an organizational board meeting held immediately following the cooperative’s annual meeting in Watertown on March 26.

Ben Schleusner, Watertown, was selected by his fellow directors to serve as president of the board for the coming year.

Other officers elected during the meeting were Dan Thyen, Watertown, vice president; Roy Gjerde, Vienna, secretary; and Johnny Rider, Henry, treasurer.

Board officers serve a one-year term. No director can serve more than three consecutive terms in the same office.

In other business, the board designated the first Thursday after the third Monday of each month for holding regular board meetings. The designated day is subject to change to avoid any scheduling conflicts.



Ben Schleusner – President



Dan Thyen – Vice President



Roy Gjerde - Secretary



Johnny Rider - Treasurer

# Your Safety Matters

## Prevent home electrical fires

Eight out of 10 fire-related deaths occur at home – the place that embodies comfort and security. That’s why it’s important to take steps to keep everyone safe.

Faulty or deteriorating electrical cords are a top cause of fires at home. Cords that become frayed or cracked can send sparks to flammable surfaces. Check your cords to ensure that they are in good shape, and replace any that are worn.

In addition, make sure you are not overloading circuits. If you’ve been in your home for more than 10 years, have your circuit breaker box inspected by a licensed electrician to tighten loose connections and check for overloaded circuits.



Homes with copper wiring need to be inspected every 20 years, and homes with aluminum wiring should be inspected every five years.

Check all Ground Fault Circuit Interrupter (GFCI) outlets several times each year by pushing the test/reset button to be sure they are working properly.

If breakers are continually tripping or if fuses are blowing frequently, that’s a sign of potential trouble. The cause could be old wiring unable to handle the load demand of today’s modern appliances. If needed, ask a licensed electrician to install additional circuits for safety.

Use surge protectors and power bars to help prevent overloading an electrical outlet, plugging no more than three cords into the strip.

May is National Electrical Safety Month. We urge you to take the time and steps needed to lower the risks of electrical fires. Keep your family safe.



### Stay Away from Power Lines

#### Weston Koistinen, Age 6

Weston Koistinen warns readers to be safe by staying away from power lines. Weston’s parents are Dion and Stephanie Koistinen, members of H-D 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.

# SUMMER CASSEROLES

## BREAKFAST CASSEROLE

### Ingredients:

- 1 5 oz. package croutons, any flavor
- 2 cup sharp Cheddar cheese, shredded
- 1 lb. sausage, fried and drained
- 9 eggs
- 1 can evaporated milk
- 1 tbsp. mustard

### Method

Spray 9x13 pan with vegetable oil. Arrange croutons on bottom. Sprinkle cheese over croutons and put sausage over cheese. Combine eggs, milk and mustard. Beat to blend and pour into pan. Bake covered at 350 degrees for 45 minutes.

Janet Ochsner  
Box Elder, S.D.

## CHICKEN CASSEROLE

### Ingredients:

- 1 package Chicken Stove Top Stuffing mix
- 3 cups cooked cut up chicken
- 1 can cream of mushroom soup
- 2/3 cup milk
- 1 can cream of chicken soup
- 2 eggs, beaten
- 2 cups chicken broth

### Method

Grease a 9x13 pan and put 1/2 of the stuffing mix in the pan. Cover with chicken. Combine soups and milk and spoon over chicken. Spread other 1/2 of stuffing over the top. Pour 2 cups of chicken broth over all and spread with beaten eggs. Bake at 350 degrees for 1 hour.

Gail Lee  
Brookings, S.D.

## TACO CASSEROLE

### Ingredients:

- 1 1/2 lbs. ground beef
- 1 package taco seasoning mix
- 1 can (16 oz.) pinto beans, drained and rinsed
- 1 can (15 oz.) tomato sauce
- 1 can (11 oz.) whole kernel corn, drained
- 1 cup shredded Cheddar cheese
- 1 cup coarsely crushed tortilla chips

### Method

Preheat oven to 400°F. Brown meat in large skillet on medium-high heat. Drain fat. Stir in seasoning mix, beans, tomato sauce and corn. Bring to boil. Reduce heat to low; simmer 5 minutes. Spoon into 2-quart baking dish. Sprinkle with cheese and tortilla chips. Bake 5 to 10 minutes or until cheese is melted. Serve with assorted toppings, if desired.

McCormick

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 2024. All entries must include your name, mailing address, phone number and cooperative name.

# Why Solar is Not Free



**Miranda Boutelle**  
Efficiency Services  
Group

**Q:** I often hear claims you'll never pay an electric bill again if you go solar. Is that true?

**A:** The ability to generate your own renewable energy at home is an amazing thing. It's pretty cool that the technology is accessible to home and property owners across the country. The concept of free energy from the sun is appealing, but solar power isn't actually free. There are costs associated with capturing that energy for use in your home.

Installing a residential solar system doesn't equate to \$0 energy bills. Prices for the solar system and installation vary, but adding solar typically comes with a five-figure price tag. Solar systems only provide power when the sun is shining. You still rely on your electric utility for power at night and when the skies are cloudy. Most electric utility rate structures include a set monthly service fee. Unless you plan to disconnect from local electric service completely, you will still have a monthly electric bill.

Solar might be a good investment for you, or it might not. Several factors impact how well the investment pencils out, including where you live, home orientation and shading, electric bill rate structure and cost, available incentives and tax credits, your budget and credit rating.

If you are considering solar on your home, I suggest taking these three steps:

First, make your home as energy efficient as possible. It wouldn't make sense to put a new motor on a boat with holes in it, so why would you put a solar system on an energy-wasting home? Invest in reducing wasted energy before investing in creating new energy. The efficiency updates I recommend before installing solar include insulating and air sealing your home and upgrading to efficient appliances – especially the heating, ventilation and air conditioning system.

If your HVAC system is older than 10 years or malfunctioning, make sure replacing it is in the budget. Remember, energy efficiency upgrades might have a better return on investment than installing solar.

A more efficient home means a smaller – and lower-cost – solar energy system. Solar systems are typically designed to produce the amount of energy a home uses in a year, so if you complete energy efficiency improvements before installing a solar system, make sure the solar contractor accounts for those energy savings.

Second, check with your electric utility about the requirements to install solar and how it will impact your bill. If you decide to install solar panels, working with your utility will be essential, as you will need to take important steps, such as signing an interconnection agreement to ensure the system is properly connected to the electric grid.

Third, get at least three quotes to compare each contractor's recommended system design, equipment and cost. It's a significant investment, so you want to know your options.

There are several ways to pay for a solar system and installation. It can be bought outright with cash or financed by a loan. This allows you to own the system immediately or at the end of the loan term. State and federal tax incentives can help offset the costs.

There is also the option to install a solar system through a lease or power purchase agreement. In this structure, a third party – usually the solar installer – owns the system. They install the system on your property and then sell you the energy produced at a predetermined rate. They are responsible for maintaining the system and own it at the end of the agreement term.

Loans, leases and power purchase agreements can impact the sale of a home. Although a solar system may increase the value of your home, some buyers – or their lenders – are not interested in taking on leases or power purchase agreements.

Investing in solar is one way to support the transition to renewable energy. Before you make the leap, improve your home's energy efficiency and empower yourself by thoroughly weighing the costs and benefits.

# Wish Upon a Crawdad

Curtis Condon's children's literature illuminates electric cooperative history

Frank Turner

frank.turner@sdrea.coop

What happens when you blend the rich history of electric cooperatives with the picturesque landscapes of rural America and the magic of fiction storytelling? Curtis W. Condon, a former writer and editor for electric cooperative magazines, finds the answer in his vibrant children's novel, "Wish Upon a Crawdad." This coming-of-age story combines these unlikely elements through the eyes of the main character, 12-year-old Ruby Mae Ryan, during the late Great Depression years in rural Oregon.

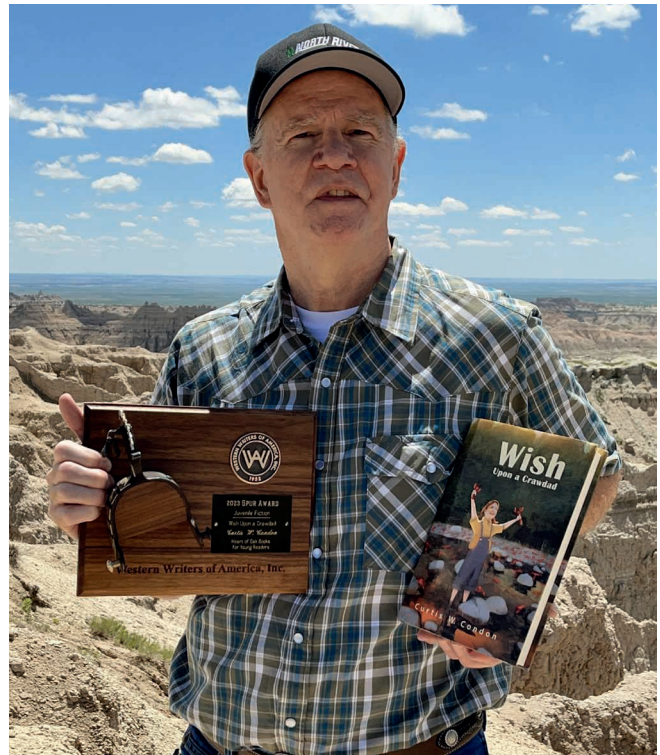
The book, highlighting Ruby's outdoor adventures, explores personal growth while giving testimony to rural electrification in American history. Before writing children's literature, Condon spent more than 27 years in the electric co-op industry as an editor and writer for *Ruralite*, a magazine for electric cooperatives and their members in the Northwest. His time there, conducting interviews and writing, familiarized Condon with the history of rural electrification in the U.S.

"I fell in love with the concept of the electric co-op. Electric co-ops have such a fantastic history and a wonderful story to tell, and I wanted to tell that in this book," said Condon.

This history began with President Franklin D. Roosevelt's determination to lead America out of the Great Depression. Deciding that electrification would play a central role in the process, the president established the Rural Electrification Administration through an executive order in the face of strong dismay from private utility companies. The president's order set the stage for the current network of member-owned electric cooperatives we recognize today, which bring electricity to rural homes that would otherwise be powerless.

However, "Wish Upon a Crawdad" doesn't tell the story of presidents and executive orders. Instead, the book focuses on the very real impact rural electrification had on Ruby, her family, and her community.

"It's about a girl who grows up without electricity until she is 12 years old, and she likes to wish upon crawdads the way that people wish upon stars," Condon explained. "One of the wishes is to get electricity, and that dream comes true because her mom



Curtis W. Condon, author of "Wish Upon a Crawdad," accepts the 2023 Western Writers of America Spur Award, an award presented to Condon in Rapid City, S.D.

and dad get together with their neighbors and create an electric co-op."

Condon's own upbringing in Oregon inspires the book's setting, filled with his memories of crawdad-filled pools, temperate forests and rural dirt roads. While set in the 1940s, many of Ruby's experiences reflect those of Condon's own family.

"My grandmother remembered when electricity was first introduced to her community. She considered electricity to be one of the greatest wonders of the world," said Condon.

Together, Condon's childhood and passion for electric cooperative history set the stage for "Wish Upon a Crawdad," his first children's book, fulfilling a dream he had held onto for years.

"Since I was twelve years old, I knew I wanted to be a children's book writer. It took me 30 years of doing a different kind of writing, but I finally got there," said Condon.

Fulfilling a childhood dream, Condon's book was published in 2022, and his passions and life history began connecting with readers. Although the target audience of the book is children ages 9 to 12, Condon said readers of all ages are enjoying Ruby's story.

Since publication, "Wish Upon a Crawdad" has won the 2023 Western Writers of America Spur Award, an award presented to Condon in Rapid City, S.D. Other awards include the 2023 Will Rogers Medallion Award, the 2023 First Horizon Award, and the 2023 Eric Hoffer Book Award. The book has a presence in libraries across 37 states, including South Dakota.



Patsy Besson helps package fresh cuts of meat at the Wall Meat Processing plant.  
Photo Credit: Shannon Marvel

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## Wall Meats Revives Local Meatcutting in South Dakota Through New Underwood Expansion

**Shannon Marvel**

shannon.marvel@sdrea.coop

A local meat processing plant is expanding its footprint in Pennington County in a way that will put more locally produced protein on dinner tables and bolster the local meat processing workforce throughout South Dakota.

The man behind this plan is local business owner Ken Charfauros, who owns Wall Meat Processing, which has locations in Wall and Rapid City.

Charfauros is currently raising funds through a capital drive campaign to finance the construction of a 30,000 square foot meat processing facility in New Underwood. The new facility will help train the next generation of meat processors through a partnership with Western Dakota Tech in Rapid City.

“We are at \$2.8 million in our drive. We also have the \$3.3 million USDA Rural Development grant, which is a meat and poultry expansion plan grant. We are about \$200,000 short of our goal,” Charfauros said.

He added that the New Underwood processing plant will also use funding from the Meat and Poultry Intermediary Lending Program (MPILP), which according to the USDA’s website “provides grant funding to intermediary lenders who finance – or plan to finance – the start-up, expansion, or operation of slaughter, or other processing of meat and poultry. The objective of the MPILP is to strengthen the financing capacity for independent meat processors, and to create a more resilient, diverse, and secure U.S. food supply chain.”

Charfauros said he’s still meeting with potential investors and has a financial team focused on creating relationships with local ag producers.

“After we get our capital drive, the plan itself will be about \$21 million,” he added. “And then we start the project. The groundbreaking is going to happen in about a year and the facility will begin operations six months after that.”

Charfauros said he expects to purchase the property to site the new plant this spring.

### Returning to a Passion

Wall Meats Processing opened for business 57 years ago, but

Charfauros took ownership over the facility in 2017. His passion for meat cutting began when he was a teenager while working for a local meat plant in Delaware.

“It was my high school job and I loved it. After I graduated high school, I felt that my country needed me, so I joined the Air Force and did 30 years. But I always missed that part of my life,” Charfauros recalled.

“A guy that taught me how to cut was like my second dad, and I always wanted to come back to it. My son had just graduated from South Dakota State University, and I had retired from the Air Force. That’s when we decided to buy a plant.”

His son manages the store in Rapid City while Ken’s three nephews help run the family’s businesses in Wall, which include Wall Meats and the Red Rock restaurant.

## Supporting Local Producers

Building the new facility has been a challenging venture that’s been years in the making.

“We started building this plan about four years ago, then COVID hit and got in our way. Then, we were lucky enough to get those grant awards last year, and ever since we have been working diligently to get the format right,” Charfauros said.

“I have drawings. I have an equipment list all put together — everything is ready to go except for this capital drive that we are undergoing.”

Charfauros said he has been meeting with both potential and locked-in investors daily over the last year to produce the required financing.

“We have met with over 600 people with 99 percent of those people being producers, because this is all for them. This plant offers them premium pricing above the market rates,” Charfauros said.

While the cattle market is high now, Charfauros remains realistic that the market can change for the worse.

While he hopes the market remains high enough for producers to survive, his partnership with producers will serve as

added security. That means the partnership must be tightknit.

He knows he cannot do it alone.

## Reviving a Dying Art

“Meat cutting is a dying art, and we teach meat processing at our store in Rapid City to bring that art back. We’re trying to fight for that industry as it is,” he said.

Three meat processing students are currently being taught at the Rapid City facility through a partnership with Western Dakota Tech, which recently began offering the two-year program.

Pam Stillman-Rokusek, director of communications and marketing at Western Dakota Tech, said three students are currently enrolled in the Meat Processing program. Of those three, two will graduate in May.

But the college is still working on more outreach.

“Enrollment has been a bit low in the program, so the plan is for a hiatus this fall. They’ll revamp the curriculum. Then, we will certainly do additional outreach. We have done advertising, gone to the schools. We have reached out to 4-H

groups and done some traveling, but we need to turn it up a notch to produce more students in the program. That is our goal,” Stillman-Rokusek said.

Despite the Meat Processing program being put on hiatus, the school will still ensure that the remaining student completes the program while actively working on developing the program and outreach methods.

“There’s such a high need for meat processors and we’re looking at different ways to fill that gap. It’s something we’re committed to doing,” she added.

The goal is to enroll at least five students in the following school years when the program restarts.

The learning center that will be built within the New Underwood facility will also teach producers, in addition to students, the art of meat cutting.

“We are trying to bring that industry back to what it should be—regionally processed protein,” Charfauros said.

“That means we must build the environment to spark that passion. In anything you do, you need to learn how to do it the right way.”



Wall Meat Processing plant, established in 1957. Photo Credit: Shannon Marvel

# \$230,000 REED Fund Loan Helps Garden City, SD Fire Hall Open for the First Time in 20 Years

Over the past two decades, the Garden City Volunteer Fire Department in Clark County, South Dakota had become inactive. Residents of Garden City and the townships of Eden and Maydell relied on neighboring fire departments for emergency services, which meant response times were slower and fires had more time to spread. This year, through a partnership with the Codington-Clark Electric Co-op (CCEC) and a \$230,000 loan from the Rural Electric Economic Development, Inc. (REED) Fund, the Garden City Fire Hall opened and 21 volunteer firemen clocked in to protect their neighbors.

“We are so excited to have a building that will provide years of service for the community,” says Scott Campbell, Treasurer of the Fire Department. “REED saw the need for a community project and helped make it happen.”

The REED Fund loan allowed the community of Garden City to build more than just a fire hall. It also created a long-term meeting space that will be used throughout the year.

## The Fire Hall is a Major Upgrade From the Previous Headquarters

The Garden City Fire Hall has all the amenities needed to protect the town from fires. It has three large garage doors, ample space for the trucks, an area for the volunteer firemen to clean up, a large kitchen, and even a meeting space. It is also a significant improvement from the small home where the fire department previously operated.

“The fire hall that was being used at that time was an old remodeled house with two small garage doors and a failing basement and foundation,” says Campbell.

Even if the old hall was safe to use, it didn't have the storage, space, and utilities of a modern firehouse. Fortunately, there was overwhelming support from the residents of Garden City and its surrounding townships to bring back the volunteer fire department and build a better hall.

## Garden City Locked in Financing With the REED Fund

One of the biggest barriers to building a new fire hall was financing, so members of the fire department started meeting with local government officials and bank representatives to learn about their options. Eventually, the team met with Dave Eide, general manager of the CCEC, who suggested submitting a REED Fund application. He said the fire hall was a perfect project for a REED loan. The application went through and the fire department was awarded a \$230,000 loan.



CCEC's General Manager Dave Eide presents the Garden City Fire Department with a check from REED.

“Everyone needs fire protection,” says Eide. “We have lightning that causes fires and controlled burns that might get away from someone. We can't be without rural fire departments. The new fire hall in Garden City is a huge asset to the community.”

With the loan in place, the Garden City volunteer firefighters could start construction on their new hall without worrying about financing and paying their contractors.

## The Whole Community Raised Money for The Fire Hall

While the REED Fund loan covered a significant portion of the fire hall costs, members of the fire department still needed to raise money to pay for the rest of it. This was a community effort with several fundraisers over multiple years.

The fire department sent out a letter to alumni of the local school (which closed more than 50 years ago) along with others having past roots in the Garden City area, inviting them to help if they could. Several graduates who were proud Garden City Dragons donated to build the new hall.

The firemen hosted turkey bingo, burger feeds, a gun raffle, and dozens of other events to raise money for the project. Each of these events was fun for the community while also bringing Garden City one step closer to having a new fire department.

“The folks in the Garden City area are such good down-to-earth people who are easy to work with and fun at the same time,” says Eide. “It was exciting to see everyone come together to work toward one goal.”

## The Fire Station Will Be Used Year-Round

Now that the fire hall is open, everyone in Garden City and its nearby townships has started to use it. The space isn't just for storing fire trucks and housing the firemen. It also serves as a community center with wheelchair-accessible bathrooms, a large kitchen, and enough space for monthly town meetings. This will also be the new election precinct in the region.

“People are renting it for birthday parties, graduations, and anniversaries,” says Campbell. “The community had no other building with running water and kitchen facilities for these events.”

Through the REED Fund and community buy-in, the fire department has already been able to pay off some of its construction bills. This means the department saves money on interest payments, freeing up funds for additional projects. Next up, the volunteer firemen want to upgrade their trucks and gear so they can respond to calls more effectively.

## Learn More About the REED Fund

The new Garden City fire hall is just one project made possible by the REED Fund. Since 1996, the fund has provided more than \$121 million in support to rural communities in Minnesota, Nebraska, and South Dakota. The fund has supported 3.2 million square feet of facilities and impacted more than 10,268 jobs. This fund is governed by more than 25 electric cooperatives in the area, including the Codington-Clark Electric Coop.



## Co-op Awards \$5,000 in Scholarships to Area Students

### Madelyn Caulfield

Madelyn Caulfield, Bradley, S.D., has been selected to receive a \$1,000 scholarship awarded by Basin Electric Power Cooperative. Madelyn is a senior at Florence High School.

After high school, Madelyn plans to attend South Dakota State University where she will major in animal science.

Madelyn is the daughter of James and Ann Caulfield.

### Emma Peterson

Emma Peterson, Vienna S.D., has been selected to receive a \$1,000 scholarship awarded by Codington-Clark Electric and CoBank. Emma is a senior at Willow Lake High School.

After high school, Emma plans to attend South Dakota State University where she will major in agriculture business and business economics.

Emma is the daughter of Kyle and Jody Peterson.

### Allison Stark

Allison Stark, Watertown, S.D., has been selected to receive a \$1,000 scholarship awarded by Codington-Clark Electric and CoBank. Allison is a senior at Henry High School.

After high school, Allison plans to attend South Dakota State University where she will major in exercise science.

Allison is the daughter of David and Shannon Stark.

### Emily Everson

Emily Everson, Hayti, S.D., has been selected to receive a \$500 scholarship awarded by Codington-Clark Electric Cooperative. Emily is a senior at Hamlin High School.

After high school, Emily plans to attend South Dakota State University where she will major in business economics.

Emily is the daughter of Paul and Monica Everson.

### Emily Heuer

Emily Heuer, Summit, S.D., has been

selected to receive a \$500 scholarship awarded by Codington-Clark Electric Cooperative. Emily is a senior at Waverly-South Shore High School.

After high school, Emily plans to attend Lake Area Technical College where she will major in Physical Therapy Assistant.

Emily is the daughter of Allen and Amanda Heuer.

### Jalen Hohm

Jalen Hohm, Willow Lake, S.D., has been selected to receive a \$500 scholarship awarded by Codington-Clark Electric Cooperative. Jalen is a senior at Willow Lake High School.

After high school, Jalen plans to attend Black Hills State University where she will major in elementary education.

Jalen is the daughter of Jamie and Colleen Hohm.

### Marcus Rabine

Marcus Rabine, Watertown, S.D., has been selected to receive a \$500 scholarship awarded by Codington-Clark Electric Cooperative. Marcus is a senior at Watertown High School.

After high school, Marcus plans to attend South Dakota State University where he will major in civil engineering.

Marus is the son of Clinton and Traci Rabine.

## Taylor Watson, Named Scholar of the Week

Taylor Watson, a Henry High School senior, was selected the Touchstone Energy Scholar of the Week for March 31 - April 6 and featured on Dakota News Now.

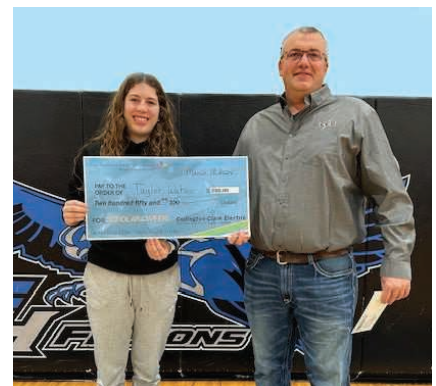
Taylor's parents are Troy and Nicky Watson, rural Henry.

Touchstone Energy Cooperatives (including Codington-Clark Electric Co-op) and Dakota News Now have joined together to recognize the achievements of high school seniors throughout the region. "Touchstone Energy Scholar of the Week" has been

celebrating the achievements of high school seniors since 2002.

Recipients are highly motivated high school seniors who excel in the classroom and community. This program was founded on the four pillars of Touchstone Energy: Integrity, Accountability, Innovation and a Commitment to Community.

For being selected, Taylor received \$250 and a chance to win a \$500 or \$1,000 scholarship to be awarded at the Touchstone Energy Scholar of the Year banquet.



Codington-Clark Electric Director Johnny Rider presented Taylor Watson with her "Touchstone Energy Scholar of the Week" award at Henry High School.



# CYBERSECURITY ON THE GRID

**Frank Turner**

frank.turner@sdrea.coop

Imagine sitting at your desk on a typical Monday morning. You have logged into your computer with coffee in hand, ready to tackle the day. But as you begin, your computer displays an ominous message: “Your files have been encrypted. Pay a ransom to regain access.” It’s not just your computer; your co-workers have received the same message. Overnight, the entire office has fallen victim

to a ransomware attack that has locked away critical data. Your office computers will remain unusable until a payment is made.

This scenario, among others, has become a primary concern for workplaces everywhere, including electric cooperatives. As a result, local co-ops are taking action in the cybersecurity space to prevent bad actors from disrupting the critical goal of delivering power that is safe, affordable and reliable to their members. Electric co-ops are focused

on enhancing cybersecurity resilience and readiness to defend against potential cyber threats.

Co-ops are routinely monitoring and managing cyber risks, working with federal and local law enforcement agencies and the North American Electric Reliability Corp. to protect critical infrastructure. By working as a network, co-ops are enhancing grid resilience, ensuring reliable electricity for their members.

According to an FBI Internet Crime Report, the U.S. reported more than \$12.5 billion in annual losses in 2023 due to cyberattacks like the one described. A significant number of these attacks target the elderly and vulnerable. When breaking down the losses by age group, individuals aged

20 to 29 accounted for \$360.7 million of the total losses, while those 60 and older incurred losses of \$3.4 billion in 2023 alone.

And it's not just about the money. These attacks also have the potential to undermine the stability of entire systems, including the electrical grid. This year, directors of the FBI, NSA, and CISA testified before Congress about Chinese Communist Party hacking groups that had gained access to the electric grid and other critical infrastructure to "wreak havoc and cause real-world harm to American citizens and communities."

"Many cyberattacks are conducted by criminals trying to steal money or collect a ransom," explains Chief Security and Compliance Officer Daniel Graham of Basin Electric Power Cooperative. "Nation-states

target electric utilities for different reasons. Some nation-states want to steal intellectual property. Others want to be able to disrupt our electric grid."

So how is it done? To execute their schemes, bad actors employ a long list of complex strategies and techniques, such as phishing, data breaches and malware to adversely impact their targets. Business email compromise, one of the most common techniques, occurs when an impostor poses as a legitimate business contact, seeking to steal sensitive information such as credit card numbers, bank account information or login credentials.

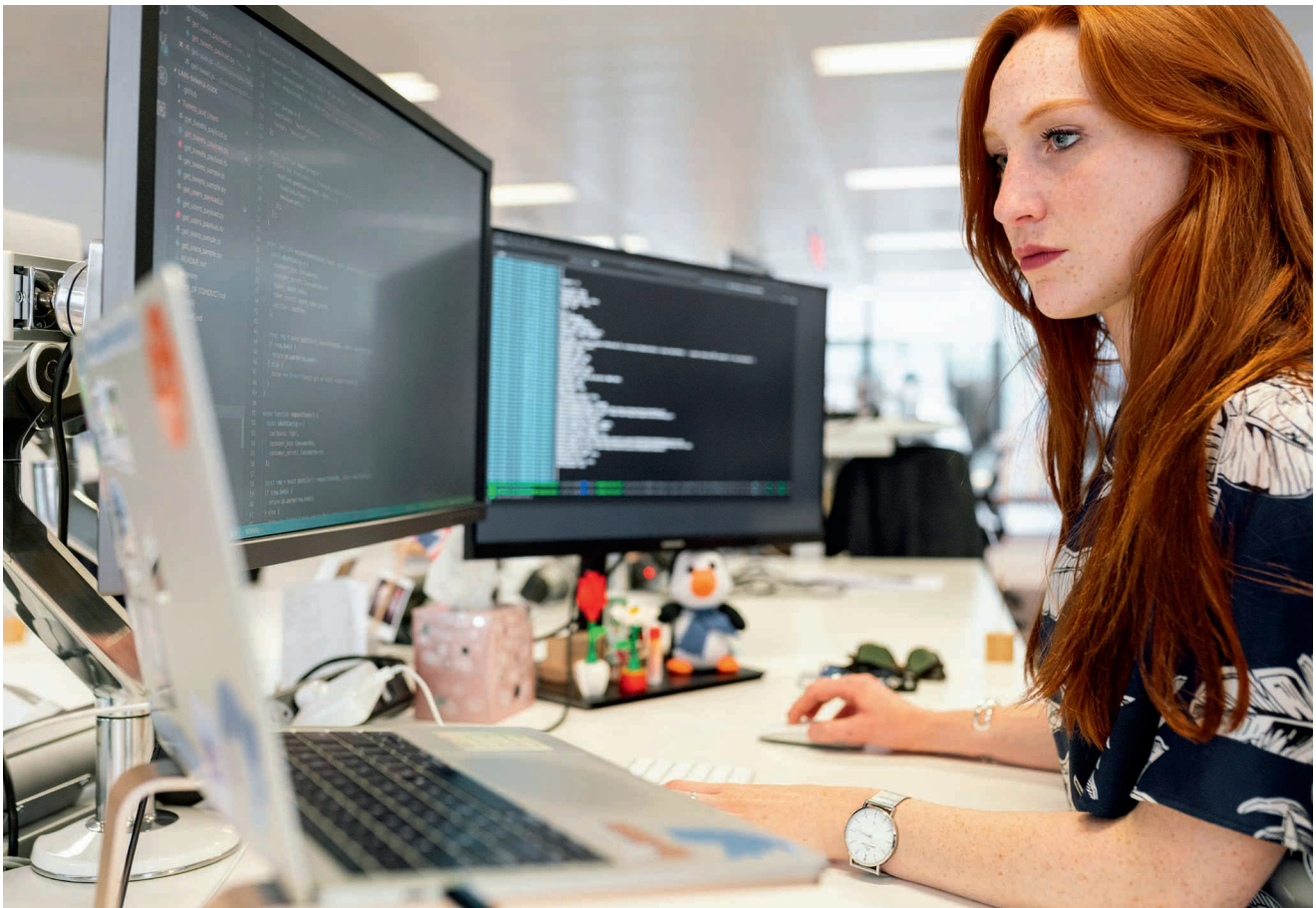
Luckily, co-ops are implementing a variety of tools, policies and training to help mitigate attacks and secure the grid. Programs like NRECA's Co-op Cyber Goals Program help co-ops build fundamental cybersecurity

measures, such as employee training, developing cyber incident response plans, and regular self-assessment. These strategies help co-ops reduce the risk of a successful cyberattack in the ongoing battle against cybercrime.

"Additionally, co-ops can conduct cybersecurity exercises to determine the effectiveness of current defenses and practice responses," Graham says.

Despite these efforts, the threat of a successful cyberattack persists, making vigilance an essential component of effective cybersecurity.

"If you see something suspicious, report it to your cooperative," explains Graham. "Electric co-ops are an essential part of our country's critical infrastructure. We can best protect our electric grid by working with each other."





# Living Prepared

## South Dakota's survivalist community live in bunkers

Jocelyn Johnson

[jocelyn.johnson@sdrea.coop](mailto:jocelyn.johnson@sdrea.coop)

It's a semi-underground community of survivalists acting as humanity's last chance.

These survivalists, otherwise known as preppers, have prepared for security and safety within what's touted as the world's largest survival community – in southwest South Dakota.

Vivos xPoint, owned by real-estate mogul Robert Vicino, is located south of the Black Hills, near Edgemont, S.D. It was formally established as the U.S. Army's Black Hills Ordnance Depot – a military base created to store

ammunition and bombs. The base's history began in 1942, just after the United States entered World War II.

Once humming with approximately 6,000 workers and their families, the military base was eventually retired in 1967, leading to its eventual abandonment. The army sold the property to the town of Edgemont, S.D., which in turn, sold it to local cattle ranchers.

"This land was used by landowners to graze cattle, until one of these ranchers sent me an email asking if I would be interested in the bunkers," Vicino said. "It took me about a minute, and I said yes. So, in 2016, I acquired the southern

Vivos xPoint owns 575 bunkers. *Photo Credit: Vivos xPoint*

portion of the base. That portion is about three-fourths the size of Manhattan. We take people up on a local hill that's about 300-400 feet higher than the rest of the site. From there, you can almost see all the quarters of the property. At a distance, the bunkers are like specs...you can't really tell what you're looking at. That's how big this thing is."

Vicino owns just under 6,000 acres of land where these bunkers sit. Originally, the army built 800 bunkers, but Vivos xPoint owns 575. Today, approximately 200 of these bunkers are being leased for 99 years with an up-front payment of \$55,000. Additionally, the ground lease is \$1,200 per year and utility payments are \$108 per month.

Mark Bowman, a retired tenant at Vivos xPoint, moved from Chicago with his wife to live in one of the bunkers



*Photo Credit: Jocelyn Johnson*



Each bunker is 2,200 square feet. Photo Credit: Vivos xPoint

seven years ago. Keeping busy by doing odd jobs and helping others get settled, Bowman commented that people from various backgrounds lease these bunkers. Some visit on occasion and some live in them full time.

“Eventually, we plan to have a health club, meeting hall and store out here too,” Bowman said. “It’s a work in progress.”

Each bunker is 2,200 square feet. It’s relatable to a narrow Quonset fixed underground, measuring 80 feet long and 26 feet wide with 12-foot ceilings. Vivos xPoint boasts 575 bunkers in total. Tenants can access floor plans and choose to have a Vivos xPoint contractor customize their bunker. Currently, there is a one-year backlog for customization services provided by a company contractor.

“It’s cavernous on the inside,” Vicino said. “We can build out a five-bedroom interior with a living room, two bathrooms, laundry room...everything you will need. When we build it, it’s effectively a submarine. The power we get from the local electric cooperative is to run our well pump that pumps water 4,300 feet underground up to a cistern on a hill. From there, it’s distributed to

the bunkers via gravity.”

Vicino noted that one of the most important features to these bunkers is the location. It’s centrally located within the United States and remote – making it an unlikely target in war. The off-grid area is also located at high altitude in a non-seismic area, relatively safe from natural disasters.

“Sometimes, I get asked why would anyone want one of these,” Vicino

commented. “And I say, ‘well, have you ever watched the news?’ Look what’s going on in this country.”

“All of the bunkers have NBC filtration, which is nuclear, biological and chemical filtration,” Vicino explained. “The air that comes in is scrubbed, so it’s breathable on the inside. We’re even adding CO2 scrubbers, which scrub the air you breath out if you had to shut off the air to the outside. You can do that for a week maybe.”

This isn’t a project that Vicino took lightly or stumbled upon in his business ventures. He emphasized it was years in the making.

“When I was 27 years old, I had a vision or an inspiration in my head. I could hear the words of a woman talking to me in total silence. The only thing I could attribute it to was the Holy Spirit. What she said to me was, ‘Robert, you need to build bunkers deep underground to help thousands of people survive what’s coming our way.’ The message was very loud and quick, and so I tucked it away for 30 years, thinking about it occasionally.... Then, I got the feeling I didn’t have any more time. It’s either now or never.”



Mark Bowman, right, shows an empty bunker to Calvin Romey, left. Bowman has been a tenant in a neighboring bunker for seven years with his wife. Photo Credit: Jocelyn Johnson



**MAY 11, 2024**  
**Cinco de Mayo Fiesta**  
 Falls Park  
 Sioux Falls, SD

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.

**MAY 4**  
**Groton City Wide Rummage Sale**  
 Groton, SD

**MAY 11-SEPT.28**  
**Malchow Plaza Farmers Market**  
 Saturdays, 8:30 a.m.-12 p.m.  
 Main Street  
 Aberdeen, SD

**MAY 18-28**  
**Free Amish Carriage & Buggy Rides**  
 10 a.m.-4 p.m. every Saturday  
 Buggy & Ag Museums  
 Stockholm, SD

**MAY 18**  
**Prairie Partners Master Gardeners Plant Sale**  
 9 a.m.  
 Brown County Fairgrounds  
 Aberdeen, SD

**MAY 27**  
**Memorial Day Services**  
 12 p.m.  
 Groton Union Cemetary with lunch at Legion Post #391  
 Groton, SD

**JUNE 1**  
**Blessed Sacrament Pastorate-Wide Celebration**  
 3:30 p.m.  
 Aberdeen Civic Center  
 Aberdeen, SD  
 605-216-2081

**JUNE 8**  
**Grace's Gas-Guzzlers Car Show, Carnival & Silent Auction**  
 Grace Lutheran Church  
 Watertown, SD

**JUNE 9**  
**Brookings Car Show**  
 11:30 a.m.-3 p.m.  
 Pioneer Park  
 Brookings, SD

**JUNE 12-13**  
**Rangeland & Soil Days Contest**  
 Codington County Extension Building  
 Watertown, SD

**JUNE 20**  
**Prairie Partners Master Gardeners Garden Walk**  
 Aberdeen, SD

**JUNE 22-23**  
**"Our Place: 15 Years of Onaka" Photography Exhibit**  
 11 a.m.-6 p.m. Sat.  
 12-4p.m. Sunday  
 Onaka Community Hall  
 Onaka, SD

**JUNE 26-29**  
**Crystal Springs Rodeo**  
 Clear Lake, SD  
 605-874-2996

**JULY 13**  
**9th Annual Auto Value Car Show**  
 11 a.m.-4 p.m.  
 Hav-A-Rest Campground  
 Redfield, SD

**JULY 14**  
**Lion's Club Summer Fest/ Car Show**  
 9 a.m.-4 p.m.  
 Groton City Park  
 Groton, SD

**JULY 20**  
**21st Annual "On the Road to Wishes" Poker Run for Make a Wish**  
 10:30 a.m.  
 Bieglers Motors/CNS Motor Sports  
 Aberdeen, SD

**JULY 25**  
**Groton Summer Downtown Sip & Shop**  
 5-8 p.m.  
 Groton, SD

**JULY 26-28**  
**Clear Lake Days**  
 ClearLakeDays.com  
 Clear Lake, SD

**AUG. 8**  
**Family Fun Fest**  
 5:30-7:30 p.m.  
 Groton, SD

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