

COOPERATIVE CONNECTIONS



Little cars, big smiles

**Smile makers build
Toys for God's Kids**
Pages 8-9

**Treatment center
changes young lives**
Pages 12-13

Asher Smith plays with a few
of the thousands of small
wooden cars built each year
by Toys for God's Kids

\$5,000 in academic scholarships available

Codington-Clark Electric, along with its partners, is offering \$5,000 in college and technical school scholarships for the 2023-24 school year.

Additional information and application forms are available from Codington-Clark's website www.ccelectric.coop or from area high schools.

The deadline for all scholarship applications is 4:30 p.m. February 13, 2023.

CODINGTON-CLARK ELECTRIC SCHOLARSHIPS

Codington-Clark Electric will award (4) \$500 scholarships and again partner with CoBank to award (2) \$1,000 scholarships for the 2023-24 school year. The program is designed to recognize certain academic achievements by children of member-consumers of Codington-Clark Electric and to encourage students to attend a South Dakota post-secondary institute.

The scholarships must be used for educational costs and the student must enter school in the fall of the school year for which the scholarship is given. The applicant must be a student who



is planning to enroll in a full-time undergraduate course of study at an accredited, two-year, or four-year college, university, or vocational/technical school located in South Dakota. Codington-Clark Electric will pay scholarships after the completion of the first semester. Checks will be made payable to the student and will be distributed by Codington-Clark Electric.

One application covers both scholarships.

BASIN ELECTRIC SCHOLARSHIP

Codington-Clark Electric will again

partner with Basin Electric Power Cooperative to offer a \$1,000 scholarship opportunity for the 2023-24 school year.

Applicants must be students who are enrolling or planning to enroll in a full-time graduate or undergraduate course of study at an accredited college, university, or vocational/technical school for the 2023-24 school year.

The \$1,000 award is part of the Rural Electric Cooperative Scholarship Program developed and funded by Codington-Clark Electric's power supply partner, Basin Electric Power Cooperative. Basin Electric operates a generation fleet that produces about 75 percent of the electricity used by Codington-Clark Electric members. Each of Basin Electric's member cooperatives will award a scholarship to a dependent of a consumer. That means one student whose parents are Codington-Clark Electric members will win a \$1,000 scholarship.

Applications will be considered by Codington-Clark Electric and then submitted to Basin Electric for scholarship distribution.

CCEC teaches safety at Lake Area Technical College

Codington-Clark Electric Cooperative's Jared Terhark, James Hatton and Jacob Ulrich were at Lake Area Technical College where they held classes with the agriculture students on electrical safety.

Students also attended a demonstration with the high voltage safety trailer.



**COOPERATIVE
CONNECTIONS****CODINGTON-CLARK
ELECTRIC**

(USPS 019-073)

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To report a power outage:

886-5848 or 1-800-463-8938

Office Hours:

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

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www.ccelectric.coop

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

New number for reporting outages**1-844-968-1976****Power outage checklist**

When the power goes off, don't panic. Grab the following checklist and do a little troubleshooting.

✓ Power is off in one area of building only. (Check for blown fuse or tripped breaker on one or more circuits in electric panel. Replace fuse or reset breaker.)

✓ Power is off in entire building. (Check building's electric service panel for blown main fuse or tripped main breaker. Replace or reset.)

✓ Power is off in buildings on site. (Check main breaker, usually located in metal box below electric meter. Move main breaker switch to "off" position and then to "on" position, even if switch appears to be in "on" position.)

✓ Check with neighbors to see if they have power. (If they have power, the problem is unique to you and you may want to contact your electrician. If they also have no power, the problem is likely utility-related.)

Call Codington-Clark Electric and report the problem using the outage reporting phone number 1-844-968-1976.

Do you have a storage heater?

If you have a storage heater installed at your home or farm it is not a bad idea to clean your unit. The bottom grill is removable which allows for vacuuming in and around the blower. These units get extremely hot. It is important to keep curtains or other flammable materials away from them. If you have any questions about proper cleaning, please call Jarod Suttan at the office at 886-5848 or 1-800-463-8938.

**HOLIDAY CLOSING**

In recognition of the upcoming holiday season,

CCEC will be closed the following days:

Thanksgiving – November 24 & 25

Christmas – December 26

New Year's Day – January 2

Deck your halls with home safety in mind

It's time to deck those halls - safely. More than 800 home fires are caused by holiday decorations each year, according to the National Fire Protection Association.

An additional 170 home fires are caused by Christmas trees each year. Keep these tips in mind for a safe holiday season:

- Carefully inspect all electrical decorations before you use them. Cracked or damaged sockets and loose or exposed wires can cause serious shock or start a fire.
- Make sure all extension cords and electrical decorations are being used properly - indoor-rated cords indoors, outdoor-rated cords for outside decorations.
- Inspect extension cords for damage and discard (not repair) any that are not completely intact.
- Never mount or support light strings in a way that might damage the cord's insulation.
- Outdoor electrical lights and decorations should be plugged into circuits protected by ground-fault circuit interrupters.
- Exercise caution when decorating near power lines. Keep yourself and your ladder at least 10 feet from power lines.
- Turn off all indoor and outdoor electrical decorations before leaving home or going to sleep.
- Avoid overloading electrical outlets with too many decorations or electrical devices. They can overheat and cause a fire.
- Never connect more than three strings of incandescent lights together.
- Water your Christmas tree daily.
- Keep all decorations at least 3 feet away from heating equipment.
- Avoid using candles. The flames are just too dangerous with all the flammable decorations around.
- Purchase electrical decorations from reputable retailers and that are approved by a nationally recognized testing lab such as UL, Intertek or CSA.

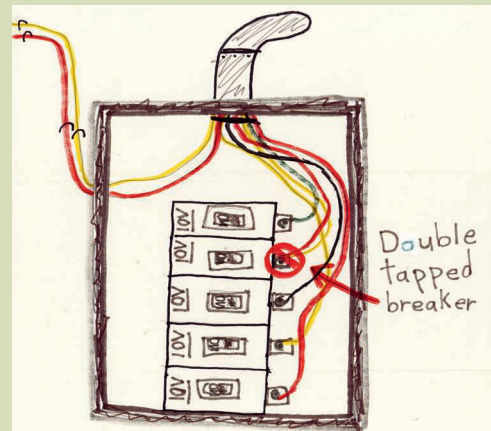


A NEW TEACHING TOOL FOR SOLAR POWER EDUCATION



Rushmore Electric and Touchstone Energy have joined together to construct a demo trailer designed to teach co-op members across the state more about how solar power functions. The trailer is equipped with fold-out collection panels and also battery storage capability. Co-op energy experts use the trailer to frame discussions about net metering, interconnection agreements and more.

To see a video of the trailer and learn more about how electric cooperatives serve our members, visit Cooperative Connections Plus by scanning the QR code at right.



Don't play on transformer boxes

Olaf Sahlstrom

Olaf Sahlstrom, 9, shares a tip he learned from his parents, Ben and Naomi Sahlstrom: Double-tapped breakers are unsafe and can lead to overheating, arcing, and electrical fires. The Sahlstroms reside in Tracy, MN and are members of Lyon-Lincoln 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.

CHRISTMAS DESSERTS

PEANUT BUTTER PIE

Ingredients:

1 heaping c. peanut butter
1 8 oz. pkg. cream cheese
(softened)
1 8 oz. tub cool whip (thawed)
1/2 c. milk
2 c. powdered sugar graham
cracker pie crust (prepared)
Crushed Butterfingers or Reeses
for garnish

METHOD

Thoroughly mix peanut butter and cream cheese. Add 1/2 cup milk and slowly add 2 cups powdered sugar. Mix well. Fold in cool whip. Put in a prepared graham cracker crust. Makes two 9" pies or one 10" pie with a little extra. Top with crushed candy. Place in freezer until frozen. Remove from freezer 10 minutes before serving.

Elaine Rieck, Harrisburg

HOLIDAY HOT CHOCOLATE

Ingredients:

8 qt. box powdered milk
1 lb. can Nestles Cocoa Mix
7-8 oz. jar powdered creamer
3 c. powdered sugar
1/3 c. cocoa

METHOD

Mix in order given in large bowl. Put in air tight container. Use 1/4 cup mix per cup of hot water. Makes about 16-cup mix.

Phyllis Niemann, Clear Lake

MOM'S CHRISTMAS DESSERT

Ingredients:

2-1/2 c. Rice Krispies
1/2 c. light brown sugar
1 c. slivered almonds or toasted
nut meats
1/2 c. butter, melted
1/2 gal. vanilla ice cream
1 can pie cherries
1/2 tsp. almond flavoring

METHOD

Mix first four ingredients together. Spread half mixture in a 9x13 pan evenly. Cut and press vanilla ice cream on top and spread remaining mixture on top. Freeze. When ready to serve, stir pie filling and almond flavoring together and heat on stove top or microwave and use for topping individual pieces.

Patty Sinning, Lennox

GINGERBREAD KISSED THUMBPRINT COOKIES

Ingredients:

3 c. flour
2 tsp. ground ginger
1 tsp. ground cinnamon
1 tsp. baking soda
1/4 tsp. ground nutmeg
1/4 tsp. salt
3/4 c. (1-1/2 sticks) butter,
softened
3/4 c. firmly packed brown sugar
1/2 c. molasses
1 egg
1 tsp. pure vanilla extract
1/4 c. granulated sugar
60 milk chocolate kisses

METHOD

Mix flour, ginger, cinnamon, baking soda, nutmeg and salt in large bowl. Set aside. Beat butter and brown sugar in large bowl with electric mixer on medium until light and fluffy. Add molasses, egg and vanilla; mix well. Gradually beat in flour mixture on low speed until well mixed. Press dough into a thick flat disk. Wrap in plastic wrap. Refrigerate 4 hours or overnight. Preheat oven to 350°F. Shape dough into 1-inch balls. Roll in granulated sugar to coat. Place 2 inches apart on ungreased baking sheets. Bake 8-10 minutes or until edges of cookies begin to brown. Immediately press a chocolate candy into center of each cookie. Remove to wire racks; cool completely. Store cookies in airtight container up to 5 days.

mccormick.com

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 2022. All entries must include your name, mailing address, phone number and cooperative name.

Q: How can I keep my home warm while saving on my electric bill this winter?

A: Winterizing is an important step to keep your home cozy and your bills low. These tried-and-true methods will ensure your home is sealed tight and ready for colder weather. I've also included tips that address common misconceptions.

INSULATING PIPES AND WATER HEATER

You can raise the water temperature inside your home's water pipes by 2 to 4 degrees by insulating, according to the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE). Insulating allows you to turn down the heat on your water heater, saving energy and money.

Start by insulating the pipes coming out of your water heater. If you have a gas water heater, keep pipe insulation at least 6 inches away from the flue. Insulate hot and cold water lines. The latter can prevent condensation and freezing pipes. Insulating your water heater can save 7% to 16% on water-heating costs, DOE says. Insulation kits are available at hardware stores. Don't obstruct the pressure relief valve, thermostats or access valves.

AIR SEALING

Air sealing and insulation are a great combination for minimizing home energy use. Insulation is like a warm sweater for your home, and air sealing is the wind breaker. All the cracks, gaps and holes in a home can be like having a window open year-round. Air sealing eliminates those leaks. It can be done as a do-it-yourself project or by a professional.

WINDOW SEALING AND IMPROVEMENTS

Windows can be a source of drafts and wasted energy. Close windows tightly.

Add weatherstripping around windows to prevent warm air from escaping your home and caulk the gaps where the window trim meets the wall and the window frame. Add curtains to make the room feel warmer.

Storm windows are a lower-cost option for upgrading single-pane windows. They are available with low-emissivity coatings, which insulate better, and are available for installation either from the inside or outside of the window.



Miranda Boutelle
Efficiency Services
Group

FIREPLACE DAMPERS

When I was little, my dad told me it was too cold to have a fire. I remember thinking that made no sense, but he was right.

We had an open, wood-burning fireplace—not a wood stove. A fireplace can draw the warm air out of the house, cooling it down or causing your heating system to use more energy.

Your fireplace adds ambiance to your home but isn't necessarily effective at heating it. If you have a wood-burning fireplace, close the damper when your fire is extinguished. An open damper in the winter is an easy exit for the air you paid to heat.

Adding tempered glass doors to a wood-burning fireplace can create an extra buffer between the cold outside and a cozy living space.

Some gas fireplaces require a damper to remain permanently open so gas can vent out of the home. Check the specifications of your unit to ensure safe operation.

BEST PRACTICES FOR CLOSING OFF PARTS OF A HOME

Through the years, I have heard a lot of debate about closing off rooms or parts of the home to save energy.

Best practices come down to the type of heat source. If you have a zonal heating system, where individual areas are controlled separately, you can close doors and only heat the areas you use. Examples of zonal systems are wall heaters, baseboard heat, hydronic radiant heat, radiators and ductless heat pumps, also called mini-splits.

Keep areas with plumbing or water lines warm enough so pipes do not freeze.

If you have a central forced-air heating system, leave doors open to all heated areas. Closing doors and/or register dampers forces the system to work harder, uses more energy and can shorten the life of heating equipment.

CHECK YOUR FILTERS

Maintaining a clean filter in your furnace is one of the best ways to keep it running efficiently and prevent costly repairs. Check your furnace or ductless heat pump filter monthly during peak heating season.

The Clauses share stories of Christmas seasons past

Billy Gibson

billy.gibson@sdrea.coop

If you want to be a big-time Santa, it's all about the beard.

These days, there's no place in the department store Santa scene for spurious scruff. Don't even try faking it. The kids can spot a fraud from halfway across the food court.

Sporting a convincing set of whiskers is how Curt Winquist scored a serious prime-time Santa gig more than 10 years ago.

He always dressed up as Santa Claus each Christmas to entertain local kids using the same homemade suit that his dad donned before him. But as it often happens with middle aged men and their suits, this one started shrinking and getting appreciably tighter...especially around the mid-section.

So, Winquist found himself shopping for a new suit at a costume store in Sioux Falls when he was approached by a stranger who just so happened to be connected with a photography company. She took one look at the humble farmer from Alcester and told him he was about to join the top ranks as a "professional department store Santa."

"I told her I only knew how to farm and milk cows," Winquist recalled. "She put my name on the standby list and later I got a call. They said a Santa at a mall in Connecticut had a heart attack and died and they needed someone right away. I didn't even have time to get ready. It was on-the-job training."

He soon found himself being flown to the Brass Mill Center located in Waterbury, CT. For the next 38 days, he played Santa for upwards of 14,000 kids, some of whom only met with failure when they tried to yank off his beard.

Winquist, who is a member of Union



Carla and Curt Winquist of Alcester enjoy entertaining hundreds of children each holiday season.

County Electric while his son is a lineman at Southeastern Electric, spent the next six years traveling to Waterbury each Christmas season. The company he worked for put him up in the local Hilton and provided a security team each morning as he made his way to breakfast in the hotel restaurant and then off to the mall. It was strongly suggested that he not leave the hotel for any other reason lest he be spotted by mall patrons and his identity revealed.

Even his wife, Carla, got in on the act and served as Mrs. Claus for several seasons. The Connecticut gig ended in 2017, and these days the two are seen at smaller and more private venues such as day care centers, nursing homes, birthday parties and schools.

Along the way, the Winquists discovered that portraying Santa and Mrs. Claus doesn't always come with lots of laughter and bellies that shake like jelly.

Especially in December of 2012. That's the year, just three weeks before Christmas, that 26 people were shot and killed at Sandy Hook Elementary in Newtown, CT. The massacre occurred just 20 miles from the mall where Winquist worked each season.

Winquist found himself having to take the service elevator and exit through the back door to evade kids in the hotel lobby.

"There were families of the victims who were staying at the hotel and they were upset and crying and we didn't want the kids to see Santa walking through the lobby in that situation when they were heading out to funerals," he said. "It was just horrible because there was such grief, but then there were people who had no connection to the killings and they just wanted things to be normal. I had to switch my mind on and off. You just want to make the kids and the families feel better."

The Winquists have reams of stories to tell from the past as they continue their roles as the Claus couple from the North Pole. In fact, they've written a book about their experiences entitled "Santa's Christmas Diary," which is available on Amazon.

"It has been a big thrill for us. We work pretty well together as a team," Curt said. "She does a good job of calming kids down when they get nervous about sitting on Santa's lap, or if the lines get long and the kids start getting antsy. I love Mrs. Claus!"



LeRoy Iedema, Richard Ringling and Duane Strand crank out nearly 60,000 toy cars each year from their 12x10-foot workshop in Platte.
Photo by Billy Gibson

Duane Strand gets lots of 'smileage' out of making toy cars for children

Billy Gibson

editor@sdrea.coop

Frustrated moms across the ages have been searching for a surefire method for getting an unruly child to simmer down.

Duane Strand is pretty sure he's found a failsafe solution: toy cars.

Several years ago, Strand began building tiny wooden cars in his nondescript backyard shed in Platte. He recalls visiting Pierre one evening and having dinner at a local restaurant when a young boy suddenly started pitching a fit and hollering at the top of his lungs.

Strand just happened to have one of the cars in his pocket. He reached out and handed it to the child and was rather amazed at the result. Not only did the whining stop forthwith, but that boy's frown turned upside down as the

kid started beaming from ear to ear.

"He quit yelling right then and there. His whole attitude changed," Strand recalls. "These cars really have a soothing effect on the kids."

That's the impact Strand is shooting for as he and his three-man team of retirees crank out nearly 60,000 toy cars each year. They're looking to squeeze all the "smileage" they can get out of the toy cars they build.

The main construction crew includes retired farmer Richard Ringling and retired mechanic LeRoy Iedema. Ringling usually works the drill press to create holes in the wood where the axles will go. Then Iedema follows up by pressing the wheels onto the axles. He came up with a way to make sure the wheels roll straight and stay in place and dares anyone to try and pull off a wheel.

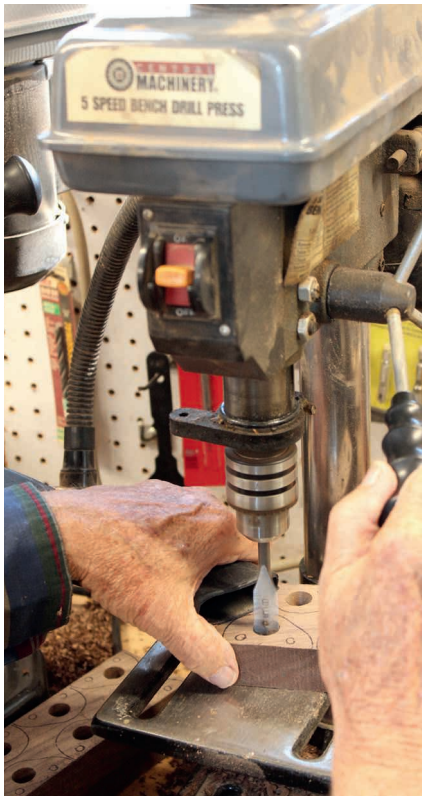
There are others who join in the

process: Justin Kok cuts the wood into manageable blocks; Brett Wynia performs repairs on the drill presses, band saws, sanders, routers and other pieces of equipment when they break down; and Curtis Versteeg helps to sand down the rough surfaces on the cars.



Toy cars are distributed by military personnel serving overseas.

And just down the road from the shop is the Platte Lumber Yard, where many of the material supplies are stored until needed for production. Strand said it was the folks down at the lumber yard who initiated the vital connection with



Dustin Knutson of Boyds Hardwood Gunstock supplies the toy makers with the laminated wood used to create the tiny cars (inset) for worldwide distribution. *Photo by Billy Gibson*

Boyds Hardwood Gunstock that keeps the operation humming along.

"Without Boyds we wouldn't be able to do any of this," Strand said.

Dustin Knutson, a member of Central Electric Cooperative and part owner of the company that bills itself as the largest after-market gun stock maker in the world, is a Shriner with a heart for community service and said he was all-in when Strand approached him about supporting the program by supplying excess wood.

"They're really easy to work with," he said, noting that he keeps one of the cars on his desk. "They take whatever they can get and they show up consistently. We started saving off-cut blocks of wood specifically for the cars. The laminated wood works well because it's colorful and looks good and the kids can pick out their favorite one."

Strand's distribution system is a bit scatter shot but he still manages to send them all over the globe. Anyone he knows who is planning a trip gets a supply of cars. Knutson, for instance, takes them with him when he travels for business or pleasure, whether vacationing in Mexico or hunting in Africa.

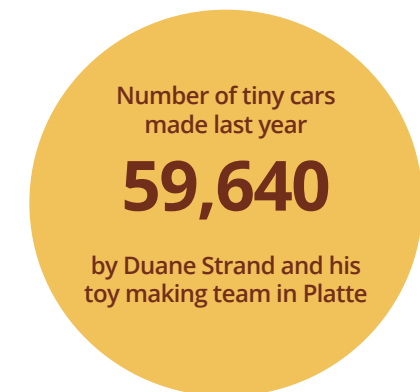
"People in America may think these are just simple toys, but I've been in parts of the world where a toy for a kid is a stick and a rock," Knutson said. "But these little cars give kids something to smile about. Duane and his guys are just beautiful people doing good things for the good of humanity and we're happy to help them any way we can."

The toys also ride along in ambulances, military satchels and police vehicles in the event a child needs to be calmed. They show up in doctor's offices, churches and other venues.

The operation is affiliated with a group called Toys for God's Kids, a non-denominational organization based in Denver. Strand is the only affiliated "smile maker" in South Dakota.

While the three-man crew claims they're working harder than they used to before retiring, Iedema assigns a greater value to his toil beyond the opportunity to put a smile on a kid's face. He said his heart doctor has informed him that he's in better shape than before he started woodworking three years ago. He's slimmer, more active and feels a lot better.

Strand chips in, "...yeah, and he's



more ornery than ever, too!"

Collectively, the guys crank out about 250 cars a day scrunched inside the 12 x 10-foot shed. Each unit has to be dipped in linseed oil to protect children from any potential toxicity. The toys are boxed and shipped to their destination at the recipient's expense.

Strand doesn't know how much longer he's going to be able to keep cranking out cars. He'll reach the age of 90 in a few months and his friend Ringling has a plan: "I told him when he turns 90 we're going to take him up by the interstate and take a picture underneath the sign that says I-90. Get it?"

Electrifying Education!

Above, East River Electric's Jennifer Gross discusses electrical safety while a student generates electricity with the Pedal Power bicycle. At right, a student tests out a Van de Graaff generator with hair-raising results.

Co-ops in the Classroom

What do socks, atoms and bicycles have in common? All these materials were used to teach nearly 500 children in schools throughout Codington-Clark Electric Co-op's service territory about electricity.

Co-ops in the Classroom is a program offered by Codington-Clark Electric's wholesale power provider, East River Electric Power Cooperative. Jenny Gross, Education and Outreach Coordinator for East River, travels throughout East River's service territory in eastern South Dakota and western Minnesota to teach children about electrical safety, generation, conservation and economics. In October and November, Gross brought this energy education to 23 classrooms in Codington-Clark Electric's territory.

During the hour-long presentations, Gross took the students on the journey of electricity at the atomic level, all the way to the hundreds of miles it travels from the power plant to our homes.

A variety of hands-on demonstrations engaged the students. A Van de Graaff generator demonstrated the movement of electrons with some hair-raising

results. "That one is always a crowd-pleaser," said Gross. "Not only does it provide a visible and audible example of how electricity moves, students also get a kick out of seeing their hair stand up and shocking their friends. Sometimes we even get the teachers to join in."

Another device that evokes excitement is the Pedal Power bicycle electricity generator. Students are asked to become human power plants as they provide the energy that produces electricity for lights and small household devices.

"The Pedal Power turns the concept of electricity from something abstract into something that's very tangible. By providing the energy needed to make a light bulb turn on, the students are able to quantify just how much more energy an incandescent light bulb requires than

a CFL or LED," said Gross.

By the end of the presentation, students had developed a new understanding and appreciation for electricity.

"As your local Touchstone Energy® Cooperative, Codington-Clark is committed to the communities we serve. By providing this service to the schools in our territory, we can reach thousands of people with the critical messages of electrical safety and conservation," said Dave Eide, General Manager for Codington-Clark Electric.

This is the 12th year Codington-Clark Electric has brought the Co-ops in the Classroom program to area schools, but we are already making plans to bring the program back next year. Contact the energy experts at Codington-Clark Electric for more information on energy education opportunities.

At left, Mrs. Hooth and a student demonstrate how electricity arcs using static electricity from a Van de Graaff generator.





Attention High School Sophomores and Juniors Win a Trip to Washington D.C.

Codington-Clark Electric Co-op will once again sponsor an all-expense-paid trip to Washington, D.C. for a high school sophomore or junior. Each June, over 1,800 high school students travel to Washington, D.C., to participate in the Rural Electric Youth Tour. During the week, they learn about Washington, D.C., government, cooperative philosophy and rural electrification. The students are selected and sponsored by their local rural electric cooperatives. The South Dakota Rural Electric Association (SDREA) coordinates arrangements for the South Dakota students.

Some of the sites that toured are the Lincoln Memorial, National Cathedral, The White House, Air and Space Museum, Washington Monument, U.S. Capitol, Ford's Theatre, The Kennedy Center, the Metro, Arlington National Cemetery, Mount Vernon, Tomb of the Unknown Soldier,

The Smithsonian, Iwo Jima Statue, National Archives, U.S. Supreme Court, and the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. Students will participate in a breakfast briefing with the South Dakota Congressional Delegation.

Who is Eligible? All area high school sophomores and juniors whose parents or guardians are members of Codington-Clark Electric.

What Does It Cost? Codington-Clark Electric, along with the other local electric cooperatives that participate in the weeklong event, funds the tour. The funding for the tour provides for each participant's transportation, room and board, entertainment, and sightseeing events. Students are required to provide their spending money (snacks and souvenirs).

When is it Held? The weeklong trip will be held on June 17-23, 2023. Participants will meet for an orientation meeting on

Saturday, June 17 in Sioux Falls. Then, the group will fly to D.C. on Sunday, June 18, and return to South Dakota on Friday, June 23. A commercial bus will be used for transportation while in D.C.

How do I Qualify? Complete the Rural Electric Youth Tour to Washington, D.C., application form available at the schools or Codington-Clark Electric's website, www.ccelectric.coop. Submit the completed application to Codington-Clark Electric before the December 31, 2022, deadline.

For more information, Contact:

Tammy Popham
tammyp@ccelectric.coop
3520 9th Ave. SW, PO Box 880
Watertown, SD 57201-0880
605-886-5848

www.ccelectric.coop

Application Deadline: Dec. 31, 2022

CHANGING YOUNG LIVES

The Great Plains Youth Regional Treatment Center near Mobridge is a place where at-risk youth can go to address their challenges with drug and alcohol abuse. *Photo by Roger Lawien*

Treatment center helps young people get back on the right path

Billy Gibson

billy.gibson@sdrea.coop

It was a small compliment, but it meant everything to the young lady who wasn't quite accustomed to receiving positive reinforcement. A simple affirmation spoken softly and sincerely into her ear: "You're gorgeous, and you're worthy." And the tears began to flow.

The Indian Health Service Great Plains Youth Regional Treatment Center near Mobridge is a place where at-risk youth can go to address their challenges with drug and alcohol abuse and find the support they need to deal with difficult situations.

Acting Clinical Director Charita Dowdell remembers that encounter with the young woman.

"I tell all of our residents how gorgeous they are and that I see the beauty in them and who they are deep down inside," Dowdell said. "I told her she was worthy and that she had value,

and she just broke down. She told me that nobody had ever said that to her."

That's just one of the stories about how the treatment center's staff strive to change the lives of teens who enter the program. There are many others.

Program Director Lavon Booth has been involved with the residential program for 20 years, initially as an administrative officer when she started in 2002. She previously served at the Cheyenne River Service Unit in her hometown of Eagle Butte before starting at the YRTC.

She sees the transformation of residents captured in plain view during graduation ceremonies that take place when the 12-week session concludes.

"We're very fortunate to see the change that happens in our residents from the time they arrive until the time they graduate," she said. "We see them moving in a positive direction and at graduation we get to hear them speak intimately about what they've learned and you see how it all comes together.

They come in very shy and reserved, and they leave here carrying a more positive spirit and more confidence. It's really touching for us and very rewarding."

The treatment center is housed in the old Chief Gall Inn hotel on land leased from the Standing Rock tribe. Youth between the ages of 13 and 17 are referred through tribal alcohol programs, local schools, community service organizations and other agencies.

According to the center's mission statement, the program "is dedicated to promoting a healthy lifestyle restoring balance and harmony in mind, body and spirit to our American Indian youth and their families."

Dowdell said playing a role in watching that mission statement come true to life in the form of changed behaviors and more positive attitudes makes her know she's definitely making a profound difference.

One effective modality is a mentoring program where residents taking part in the rehabilitation process shepherd those who are just entering the facility. Not only do the incumbent residents show the newbies around the physical



The youth treatment center is located in the former Chief Gall Inn hotel near Mobridge. *Photo by Roger Lawien*

space, but they also listen to their concerns, answer questions and try to allay their fears that stem from living in a new environment with certain rules, guidelines and expectations.

“When they start feeling homesick or afraid or stressed and they just need someone near their age to talk to, it helps them make the adjustment so they can settle down and focus on what they need to do to make changes. That bond is something that actually helps both of them get through and graduate successfully,” she said.

Dowdell noted there is a concern among staff about residents returning to a challenging environment. So, upon graduation, the youth receive support through a tracking system where staffers make regular check-in calls after three days, three months, six months and a year. A tele-health network is also

available to the graduates.

Role-playing also helps re-integration, Dowdell said. She added that the residents are taught to anticipate the same kind of challenges they faced before and how to handle them with a different approach.

“They return as a changed person, but everybody else around them will be doing the same things,” she said. “We tell them to stay connected to their support system and manage their emotions; how to be true to yourself while being respectful to others. We prepare them for what life is going to look like when they leave.”

She mentioned one particular youngster who entered the program with a defiant attitude and dealing with depression, anxiety and post-traumatic stress. She knuckled down academically and caught up to her class grade. After

graduation, she returned to juvenile detention for seven months. But in the end, she straightened out her life by applying the things she learned at the center.

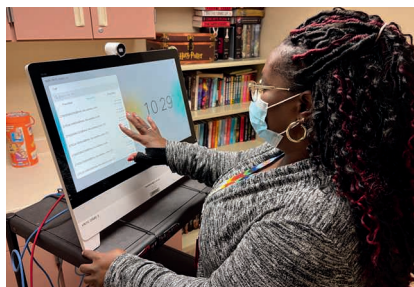
“She struggled with treatment, but she sent us a letter thanking us for what the program did for her,” Dowdell said. “She said she was grateful for giving her the skills to manage the difficult predicament she was going through. She changed her mentality and grew and matured and became a new person.”

Dowdell stressed that parents can play a key role in helping their children navigate through rehabilitation or prevent them from becoming a candidate in the first place.

“Listen to your children,” she emphasized. “They are saying something to you, but often they don’t feel like they’re being heard. Before you shut that door, listen to what they’re saying. You may have to shut the door anyway, but at least take the time to listen to what they have to say.”

Visit www.ihs.gov/greatplains/healthcarefacilities/greatplainsyrtc/.

Lavon Booth, left, and Charita Dowdell, work to provide students the skills they need to change the direction of their lives.



SANTA SACS FOR KIDS

The Botkins - Amanda, Dean, Elizabeth, Anna and Eric - work as a team to provide gift bags for students. Photo by Billy Gibson

Botkin family creates Santa Sacs program to spread holiday cheer

Billy Gibson

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Each Christmas season, the Botkin family home nestled in the foothills just outside of Spearfish is transformed from a cozy chalet-style space into a tightly managed, finely tuned assembly center.

The goal is to produce dozens of cinch sacks full of Christmas gifts for school-age children. There's even a name for the operation: Santa Sacs for Kids.

Amanda Botkin and her husband, Eric, have spent the past 10 yuletide seasons organizing the program and working in conjunction with local school counselors to connect with students and distribute the gift bags. When the calendar page flips to December, the Botkins and their three children ages 8 through 14 kick into high gear and the home starts buzzing with activity.

To achieve maximum efficiency – or possibly to prevent the family pets from completely freaking out - the process is

departmentalized. In the kitchen area, bags are filled with coloring books and stickers and small toys for kindergarten and elementary school children. In the living room, items specifically for older female students are gathered up and placed in pink plastic sacks. Down the hallway, fast-food gift cards, winter hats and personal hygiene products like body wash and shampoo for high schoolers are collected and deposited in the totes.

Closer to Christmas and before school lets out for the break, the bags are loaded up in the family Sequoia and transported to counselors at different schools in the area.

The entire program was Amanda's brainchild, which stemmed from her quest for a way to spark a spirit of giving and community service within her own children – and most of all, a sense of gratitude for blessings received.

"My oldest daughter, Elizabeth, was in kindergarten and I just felt that it was very important for my kids to understand how fortunate we are as a



Eric's sister, Amy Irion, also enjoyed participating in the annual project.

family. They need to know what it's like to do things for others," she said. "Not everybody has a Christmas that looks like ours does."

Amanda, who works as a nurse in Spearfish, contacted local school counselor and personal friend Mandi Scott and shared the details of her plan. Scott climbed aboard without hesitation. Then Amanda hopped on social media to seek support from other friends, relatives and anyone else interested in contributing to the project. The response was overwhelming.

"We've received so much help from so many people who were willing to donate items or funds to buy gifts," she said. "But we wouldn't be able to do



Anna Botkin, a student at Spearfish Middle School, has learned that it's more important to give than to receive. *Photo by Billy Gibson*

anything without participation from our counselors. We do everything through them and everything is anonymous with the kids. They give us the ages and genders and we put together the Santa Sacs for them based on the information we get. School counselors have a really hard job and don't always get the recognition they deserve, so we want them to know how much we appreciate what they do and the critical services they provide. They're amazing!"

While Amanda says that pursuing the project is its own reward, occasionally the counselors will forward messages of thanks they've received from students.

"It's nice to get notes when the kids send them," Amanda said. "But it's mostly about trying to give them the kinds of gifts that they'll like or use or have fun with."

Eric Botkin said he was gung-ho from the beginning when his wife approached him with her plans. He describes the influence his single mother had on developing his understanding of charity. When he was younger, his mom worked

Elizabeth was a youngster when her mother started Santa Sacs for Kids and helps each year to stuff and distribute gift bags.

at a nursing home in Douglas, WY, and he and his siblings would spend Christmas visiting with residents and giving them presents. When Eric was in high school, his mother was a patrolling police officer and used her position to serve others and help solve problems.

During the first year of Santa Sacs for Kids, Eric's role was to take care of the younger kids, Anna and Dean, while kindergartner Elizabeth played the role of Amanda's elf.

"I kept an eye on the kids while Elizabeth and Amanda went out and shopped," Eric said. "But then as the years went along, the number of bags and gifts kept growing. We needed



every hand in the house and whatever volunteers we could get. Amanda has a huge heart and is a great person and always tries to make sure there are nice things in the bags. She wants the kids to all love what they get."

Amanda, not exactly a loafer, has bigger dreams for the program she created: "I'd really like to get more of the surrounding communities involved and put more bags out there. There's so much need."

She would also like to see more older kids get involved in Christmas giving projects so that they can learn the lessons that Elizabeth has learned.

Elizabeth, a 14-year-old freshman at Spearfish High School, is a track and wrestling athlete and also participates in Spartans for Spartans, a group that helps elementary students make a smoother transition to middle school.

"I like getting Christmas presents, but it's more important to give to others," she said. "I like doing something positive with my family and it's great knowing I'm helping other kids make their lives better."

For those who wish to donate, visit <https://gofund.me/2f62016a>.

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December 15-18, 2022
Christmas at the Cathedral
521 N Duluth Ave.
Sioux Falls, SD
605-988-3765

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.

NOV. 25
Olde Tyme Christmas Kick-off and Parade
Hill City, SD

NOV. 25
"Light up the Night" Parade and Fireworks
Belle Fourche, SD

NOV. 25-26
Kris Kringle Kraft Fair
Hill City, SD

NOV. 26
Gregory Mid-Winter Fair
Gregory Auditorium
Gregory, SD
605-830-9778

DEC. 2-3
Christmas in the Hills
Mueller Center
Hot Springs, SD
605-745-4140

DEC. 3
Santa's Thrift Village
Minneluzahan Senior Center
Rapid City, SD
605-394-1887

DEC. 3
Tabor's Holiday Light Parade
Tabor, SD
605-660-0274

DEC. 3
60th Annual Wreath and Centerpiece Sale
Central States Fair Grounds,
Rapid City, SD
605-343-0710

DEC. 3
Julefest 2022: Scandinavian Christmas Festival & Bazaar
8 a.m.-2p.m.
Our Savior's Lutheran Church
Spearfish, SD

DEC. 4
Sioux Falls Legion Post 15 Pancake Breakfast
8:30 a.m.-noon
1600 W Russell St.
Sioux Falls, SD

DEC. 4
Hartford Hometown Christmas
Hartford, SD
www.hartfordhtc.com

DEC. 4
Walk Through Bethlehem
United Methodist Church
Webster, SD
605-345-3747

DEC. 10
Frontier Christmas
Fort Sisseton Historic State Park
Lake City, SD
605-448-5474

DEC. 15-18
Christmas at the Cathedral
521 N Duluth Ave.
Sioux Falls, SD
605-988-3765

DEC. 17
Custer Christmas for Kids
Custer High School
Custer, SD
custerchristmas4kids@gmail.com

JAN. 14
Coats for Kids Bowling Tournament
Registration Starts at 1 p.m.
\$80 for a four-person team
Meadowood Lanes
Rapid City, SD
605-393-2081

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