

# COOPERATIVE CONNECTIONS



## Power on Wheels

**Solar Power  
Education**

Pages 8-9

**Flipping the  
Switch**

Pages 12-13

Members of Sioux Valley Energy's Beneficial Electrification Department install panels on a 50 kW community solar array at the Sioux Valley Energy Colman office.

## Wildfires: Public Enemy # 1



**Michelle Fischer**  
Director of Communications  
& Member Services  
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Fires, fires, fires! That was the name of the field trip that I attended in 7th grade. During the trip, I kept thinking, “I wonder when they’re going to light something on fire?” At the time, I thought fires were intriguing. Little did I know fires would be a large part of my adult life. Being married to a wildland firefighter and working in the electric industry has unleashed a new set of fears and worries for me. Whenever I receive a message from my husband saying he is heading to a fire, my heart sinks. I can breathe again when he gets home safely and when I know the ignition of the fire didn’t involve BHEC’s infrastructure.

We are quickly approaching the dreaded fire season. We may sell electricity, but the main reason for our existence is to provide service to our members. A significant part of providing service to our members is taking all practical actions available to prevent the devastation a wildfire could bring to our members and communities. Wildfire mitigation is essential in our operational practices.

Improperly maintained right-of-ways can contribute to devastating wildfires that can spread quickly in remote areas. One of the most effective fire mitigation practices is vegetation management. We know the last thing you want us to do is come to your property and cut your beloved trees and shrubs, but it is a necessary evil to protect you, your neighbors, and your community.

Keep your property lean and green to help protect your family and home. Defensible space, coupled with home hardening, is essential to improve your home’s chance of surviving a wildfire. Defensible space is the buffer you create between a building on your property and the grass, trees, shrubs, or any wildland area that surround it. This space is needed to slow or stop the spread of wildfire and it helps protect your home from catching fire—either from embers, direct flame contact

or radiant heat. Proper defensible space also provides firefighters with a safe area to work in to defend your home. Refer to the diagram on this page for a guide to protect your structures.

We patrol 100% of our overhead power lines each year, but we can’t always be everywhere all the time. We need your help in finding potential hazards. If you have any trees next to or near the power lines, or if something doesn’t look quite right on our equipment, please contact us as soon as possible.

I’d also like to take this opportunity to invite you to our second annual Co-op Day at your cooperative’s headquarters on Friday, August 4th. We have first responders, city and county workers, and other critical personnel attend the high-voltage safety demonstration so they understand the dangers of electricity and what to do in a downed power line situation. We also have food, bucket-truck rides, music, and much more. Please mark your calendars and plan to attend.

Until next month, pray for rain!



## COOPERATIVE CONNECTIONS

### BLACK HILLS ELECTRIC

(ISSN No. 1531-104X)

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# JENNIFER TRAVELS TO WASHINGTON

Member Service Representative, Jennifer Kainz, was the lucky winner of an all-expenses paid trip to Washington, D.C. for the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association Legislative Conference. Her name was drawn from a large pool of South Dakota contributors to America's Electric Cooperative PAC (formerly known as ACRE).

Jennifer said the conference was a great opportunity to hear from folks in Washington and learn more about key issues impacting the rural electric cooperative industry.



Jennifer Kainz and BHEC Board President, Dennis Quivey.

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# Fireworks Safety Tips

Summer is synonymous with barbecues, parades and fireworks. The National Safety Council advises everyone to enjoy fireworks at public displays conducted by professionals, and not to use any fireworks at home. They may be legal but they are not safe.

In 2017, eight people died and over 12,000 were injured badly enough to require medical treatment after fireworks-related incidents. Of these, 50% of the injuries were to children and young adults under age 20. Over two-thirds (67%) of injuries took place from June 16 to July 16. And while the majority of these incidents were due to amateurs attempting to use professional-grade, homemade or other illegal fireworks or explosives, an estimated 1,200 injuries were from less powerful devices like small firecrackers and sparklers.

Additionally, fireworks start an average of 18,500 fires each year, including 1,300 structure fires, 300 vehicle fires and nearly 17,000 other fires.

## Fireworks Safety Tips: If You Choose to Use Legal Fireworks

If consumer fireworks are legal to buy where you live and you choose to use them, be sure to follow the following safety tips:

- Never allow young children to handle fireworks
- Older children should use them only under close adult supervision
- Never use fireworks while impaired by drugs or alcohol
- Anyone using fireworks or standing nearby should wear protective eyewear
- Never hold lighted fireworks in your hands
- Never light them indoors
- Only use them away from people, houses and flammable material
- Never point or throw fireworks at another person
- Only light one device at a time and maintain a safe distance after lighting
- Never ignite devices in a container
- Do not try to re-light or handle malfunctioning fireworks
- Soak both spent and unused fireworks in water for a few hours before discarding

- Keep a bucket of water nearby to fully extinguish fireworks that don't go off or in case of fire
- Never use illegal fireworks

## Sparklers Are Dangerous

Every year, young children can be found along parade routes and at festivals with sparklers in hand, but sparklers are a lot more dangerous than most people think.

Sparklers burn at about 2,000 degrees – hot enough to melt some metals. Sparklers can quickly ignite clothing, and children have received severe burns from dropping sparklers on their feet. According to the National Fire Protection Association, sparklers alone account for more than 25% of emergency room visits for fireworks injuries. For children under five years of age, sparklers accounted for nearly half of the total estimated injuries. Consider using safer alternatives, such as glow sticks, confetti poppers or colored streamers.



## Call Before You Dig!

### Dixie Koistinen

Dixie Koistinen advises diggers to call 811 before digging. This is a great tip for anyone doing construction or yard work this summer. Dixie is the daughter of Jerome and Lisa Koistinen from Lake Norden, S.D., members of H-D Electric.

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



# Summer DESSERTS

## VICKY'S RHUBARB CAKE

### Ingredients:

- 1 egg
- 1 cup sugar
- 1 cup cream (sweet or sour)
- 1 1/2 cups flour
- 1 tsp. soda
- 1/4 tsp. cinnamon
- 2 cups rhubarb (slice thin)

### METHOD

Mix in order. Grease and flour pan. Pour batter into pan and sprinkle 1 cup brown sugar, 1/2 cup nuts, and 1/2 cup chocolate chips over the top. Bake at 350°F for 50 minutes.

**Vicky Hoffman**  
South Dakota

## CHERRY CLOUD 9 DESSERT

### Ingredients:

- 1 white cake mix
- 1 (3 oz.) pkg. cherry jello
- 1 (8 oz.) carton of Cool Whip
- 1 (24 oz.) can cherry pie filling

### METHOD

Bake 1 white cake mix in 9x13" pan according to directions.

Poke holes in cake and pour in 1 (3 oz.) pkg. cherry jello made with only 1 1/2 cups water. Refrigerate.

When this is cool, cover with 1 (8 oz.) carton of Cool Whip. Gently spoon on 1 (24 oz.) can of cherry pie filling. Refrigerate and serve.

This is a pretty red and white dessert to serve during holiday gatherings.

**Jane Ham**  
Rapid City, S.D.

## EASY RASPBERRY MOLTEN CAKES

### Ingredients:

- 4 oz. semi-sweet chocolate
- 1/2 cup (1 stick) butter
- 4 tsps. raspberry extract
- 1 cup confectioners' sugar
- 2 eggs
- 1 egg yolk
- 6 tbsp. flour
- Raspberry Sauce (recipe follows)

### Raspberry Sauce:

- 1 package (10 ounces) frozen raspberries in juice, thawed
- 1/2 teaspoon raspberry extract

### METHOD

Preheat oven to 425°F. Butter 6 (6 oz.) custard cups or soufflé dishes. Place on baking sheet.

Microwave chocolate and butter in large microwavable bowl on HIGH 1 minute or until butter is melted. Stir with wire whisk until chocolate is completely melted. Stir in raspberry flavor and vanilla. Stir in sugar until well blended. Whisk in eggs and yolk. Stir in flour. Pour batter into prepared custard cups.

Bake 10 to 14 minutes or until sides are firm but centers are soft. Let stand 1 minute. Carefully loosen edges with small knife. Invert cakes onto serving plates.

For the Raspberry Sauce, mix raspberries and raspberry extract until well blended. Serve with cakes.

[mccormick.com](http://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 2023. All entries must include your name, mailing address, phone number and cooperative name.

# 78th Annual Meeting Overview

The 78th Annual Membership Meeting of Black Hills Electric Cooperative, Inc. was held at the Ramkota Convention Center in Rapid City, South Dakota, on June 1st, 2023. We had around 300 members and guests attend. The registration gifts were a choice of either a \$20 bill credit or an extension cord. The \$20 bill credit was the top choice!

After members and guests made their way through displays and booths, they were served dinner by Minerva's staff. According to the survey results, the meal was outstanding.

President Quivey reported that Black Hills Electric ended the 2022 year without any rate adjustments, significant storms, or injured employees. He stated that the co-op is in a sound financial position and informed the members of the shortened capital credit return timeframe. Mr. Quivey concluded his report by thanking the employees, directors, and members for their commitment and dedication to the cooperative.

CEO and General Manager Walker Witt updated the membership on his health conditions over the past year and thanked the board, employees, and members for their support while he was recovering.

Mr. Witt discussed the three R's – Rates, Reliability, and Returns. Mr. Witt informed the membership that the capital credit return cycle had been shortened from a 30 year return to under 20 years. He touched base on rates and how we avoided having a rate increase in 2022. Increased labor costs, benefits, material, fuel, insurance, and inflation will inevitably result in a rate increase sometime in the future, but he doesn't predict one for the remainder of 2023. He discussed reliability with the membership and how they play a significant role in it. Mr. Witt informed the membership that the 2022 bad debt write-offs were the lowest dollar amount since the cooperative began record keeping in 1989. He thanked the Member Service department for all they do to help keep the bad debt amount low.

Mr. Witt stated that the amount of time the average BHEC member had service in 2022 was 99.996% of the time. He thanked the operations and engineering crews for their efforts in keeping

the system functional. Mr. Witt indicated that the response time could be a challenge to the most significant growth area on our system. He informed the membership of the purchase of a parcel of land near Hermosa for a future outpost.

Mr. Witt invited CFO Sammi Langendorf and Manager of Operations Bill Brisk to the stage to accept their 30 year pins and plaques. He thanked both of them for their dedication and commitment to the co-op.

Mr. Witt concluded his report by thanking the directors for their leadership and the membership for their continued support and participation.

Following Mr. Witt's report, the membership voted and re-elected incumbent Thad Wasson to represent the geographical area of Lawrence, Meade, and Pennington Counties.



Directors Alan Bishop and Board President Dennis Quivey were unopposed. They were declared elected by Vice President James Preston.

Public Utilities Commission (PUC) Chairperson Kristie Fiegen addressed the membership and provided a PUC update.

Director of Communications and Member Services Michelle Fischer presented the \$1,000 Basin/BHEC scholarship to Kaitlynn Wellman from Rapid City. Ms. Wellman drew for two \$500 scholarships. The winners were Molly Conway and Henry Wasson.

Cooperative personnel awarded several prizes after the meeting.

# 78TH ANNUAL MEETING



CFO Sammi Langendorf (L) received her 30-year service award from CEO Walker Witt (R).

Director Thad Wasson addressing the membership. Director Wasson was re-elected to the board for another three-year term.



CEO Walker Witt (L) presenting Manager of Operations Bill Brisk (R) with his 30-year service award.



Meter Technician Jeremiah Keller visiting with a member about energy efficiencies.

Public Utilities Commission Chairperson Kristie Fiegen addressing the membership and giving a PUC update.



Above L-R: Michelle Fischer and Basin Scholarship winner Kaitlynn Wellman. Below L-R: Mrs. Fischer, Kaitlynn Wellman and \$500 scholarship winners Henry Wasson and Molly Conway.



Grand Prize winner Jim Boulter, along with Member Service Representative, Jennifer Kainz. The grand prize was one year's customer charge waived. A \$420 value. Congratulations, Jim!



Member Robert Hovey visiting with Crew Foreman Beau Bradeen and Journeyman Lineman Corey Scott.





# POWER ON WHEELS

West Central Electric Cooperative's solar trailer serves as an interactive exhibit showcasing solar power generation in action for members. Equipped with a built-in generator, battery storage unit, inverter, and six rooftop solar arrays, the trailer is a great resource for public outreach and education efforts in South Dakota.

## Solar trailer takes renewable education on the road

**Frank Turner**

frank.turner@sdrea.coop

Solar panels are creating a buzz in the energy industry. Every day, co-op employees around the state answer an ever-growing list of questions, such as “Can solar save me money on my energy bill?” and “Are solar panels a reliable source of energy?”

Addressing increasing public interest, West Central Electric Co-op, serving towns such as Murdo and Kennebec, has developed an innovative approach to public outreach regarding solar panels. Their solution: a solar trailer — a portable structure designed to inform the public about the efficiency, pros and cons of solar panels.

“West Central Electric has approxi-

mately 3,700 members and I get two or three calls a month from our members asking about solar power,” said Jessie Tucker, the co-op’s member services manager.

Tucker noted that the recent surge in solar power interest isn’t limited to West Central. Co-ops throughout the state have been fielding similar inquiries. So, when the concept of a solar trailer was introduced in 2021, several nearby co-ops, including Rushmore Electric Power, were quick to get on board.

“We thought, wouldn’t it be great if we had something that we could show to the membership and explain how solar panels work and go from there,” said Tucker. “We envisioned the trailer as a resource that could be utilized throughout western South Dakota, if not the entire state.”

With support from surrounding co-ops, the trailer was completed in June 2022. Although the trailer is a work in progress, it has already been showcased at several co-op outreach events over the past year, including Black Hills Electric’s Co-op Day and more.

The solar trailer serves as an interactive exhibit where members can step inside for a first-hand experience. Upon pressing a button, the six rooftop solar arrays activate and start generating a total of 1.92 kilowatts of energy directly from the trailer’s roof. Apart from solar panels, the trailer is equipped with a built-in generator, a battery storage unit, and an inverter that converts power from direct current (DC) to alternating current (AC).

The trailer, according to Tucker, highlights the benefits of a diversified approach to South Dakota’s energy mix. For a reliable and dependable energy grid, renewable sources such as solar need to be paired with other forms of power generation.

“What we are really trying to com-

communicate is that you can't fully rely on distributed generation, whether it's solar or wind," Tucker explained. "For reliability and safety, it's important to consider all available energy sources. Solar power has its limitations, especially when the sun isn't shining or during the night."

The introduction of a solar trailer comes as co-ops across the state are in the midst of their own solar initiatives. Just last month, Sioux Valley Energy completed its own solar project that permits its members to purchase a 20-year subscription to the power output from a newly constructed 140-panel solar array located in Colman, S.D. The project allows members who are passionate about renewable energy a direct route to purchase solar power through their local co-op.

"A lot of people are very interested in solar power, but they don't want to go through the process of using up land and roof space," said Ben Pierson, manager of beneficial electrification for Sioux Valley. "Members aren't interested in constructing these projects themselves, so our solar

project offers those members an alternative way to get involved in solar."

More than 30 members participate in the subscription program, and because the project was entirely financed by the participating members, it won't impact other members of the co-op.

"This project was one hundred percent funded by the members that are purchasing the output of those panels," said Pierson. "This project allows these members to see a local, physical solar asset in their community that is working for them and is credited on their bill each. So really



The solar trailer has been featured at several co-op public outreach events.

our focus with renewable is really about member choice."

The landscape of renewable energy is vast and ever-changing and every co-op is planning their own approach, but with resources like the solar trailer, tools for education and engagement are within reach for members wanting to learn more.



The interior of the solar trailer is equipped with battery storage and outlets – powering everyday electrical appliances, such as a hairdryer.

# Get Smart About Home Lighting

Abby Berry

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Gone are the days when a simple flip of the switch was the only choice for illuminating our homes. While we still have this tried-and-true option, we've entered a new era of innovative and intelligent technologies, which includes smart lighting.

Smart lighting connects to Wi-Fi and offers an array of cutting-edge functionality and convenience. Let's look at the main benefits of smart lighting options.

Smart lighting is energy efficient. Most smart bulbs utilize LED technology, which is much more efficient than traditional incandescent lighting. Additionally, smart lighting gives you more control over how and when you light your home, ultimately resulting in less energy used for lighting.

Smart lighting provides convenience and control. Most smart bulbs can be controlled from an app on your smartphone or can be paired with your voice assistant, like Amazon Alexa. You can conveniently control lighting settings from anywhere in your home or when you're away. Whether you want to set a schedule for lighting or adjust brightness levels, these smart options offer effortless control from the comfort of, well, anywhere!

Smart options empower you to personalize home lighting. Bright, warm, purple, green—whatever mood you want to create, smart lighting can help. For a more traditional look, try

dimnable white bulbs. If you want to create the perfect ambiance for movie night, look for bulbs that can be adjusted for a variety of vibrant colors. The possibilities are endless.

While smart lighting offers convenience and control, keep in mind your wall light switch will need to stay “on” for you to control the smart bulb from your phone or via voice command. To use a smart bulb, the wall switch it's connected to must be “on” so the bulb receives power, which enables it to connect to a Wi-Fi network.

If you need additional options to operate the lights, consider a smart light switch. Today's smart switches tend to play nicely with smart bulbs. If you want to control your smart bulbs with a physical switch (in addition to using your phone and voice commands), look for smart switches that include a built-in feature that allows both. Many smart light switches include motion detectors as well.

If you're looking to take the plunge and integrate multiple smart bulbs to your home lighting system, your best bet may be a kit, like the Philips Hue Starter Kit. Most kits include several

bulbs and any additional tools you'll need to get started.

If you're new to smart home tech and looking to start small, try a smart bulb in a high-traffic area of your home. It's also worth noting that smart plugs are a great starter option and allow convenient control of lamps or other lighting fixtures that are plugged in to a wall outlet. Smart plugs are inexpensive and simply plug in to your existing outlet. Electrical items that are connected to the smart plug can be controlled from a smart phone app, just like smart bulbs.

Whether you're looking for more convenience, colorful options or better ways to manage energy use, smart lighting can provide multiple benefits. Determine which smart lighting features are most important for your needs, then start shopping!



# Providing Your Own Power During an Outage

Paul Wesslund

If you're wondering whether to buy a home generator in case of a power outage, you're not alone. Backup power sources have gotten so popular that manufacturers now offer a wide range of choices.

Options run from pull-start gasoline models costing a few hundred dollars to permanent outdoor installations for several thousand dollars. That variety makes it easier to get exactly what you want, but harder to choose.

A good first step is to think about what you want a home generator to do. Do you just want to keep your phone charged? Do you want to make sure food doesn't spoil in your refrigerator? Do you want to make sure you have heat and air conditioning through an extended outage? Answering those questions will require you to know the wattage of the appliances you want to run so you know the capacity of the generator you need.

You might also ask if you really need a generator. The average U.S. home is without power about seven hours a year. Is that enough to justify the expense and attention?

Another part of your planning should be contacting your electric co-op to get their expert advice on the best and safest fit for your home.

Here's what to know about the four basic choices in home generators:

**Portable generators** are small enough that you might even take them on camping trips. The costs for these can vary – from more than \$2,000 to as low as \$400. Most should be able to run a refrigerator or a window air conditioner. Special attention to safety is required. They should never be used indoors, not even in a garage. The carbon monoxide they produce can be deadly in minutes. The Consumer Product Safety Commission reports that 85 people

die each year from carbon monoxide poisoning caused by gasoline-powered portable generators. Portable generators should be operated more than 20 feet from the house and be connected only with outdoor extension cords matched to the wattage being used. Look for models with a carbon monoxide detector and automatic shutoff.

Appliances should be plugged in to the generator – the generator should never be plugged into an outlet or your home's electrical system.

You should also spend the money to have an electrician install a transfer switch. That acts as a mini-circuit breaker to protect your appliances and can be an easier way to connect the house to the generator.

**Inverter generators** are higher-tech versions of standard portable generators. The power they produce changes to match what the appliances are using, so although they are a little more expensive, they use fuel more efficiently and make less noise. The same safety guidelines apply to both

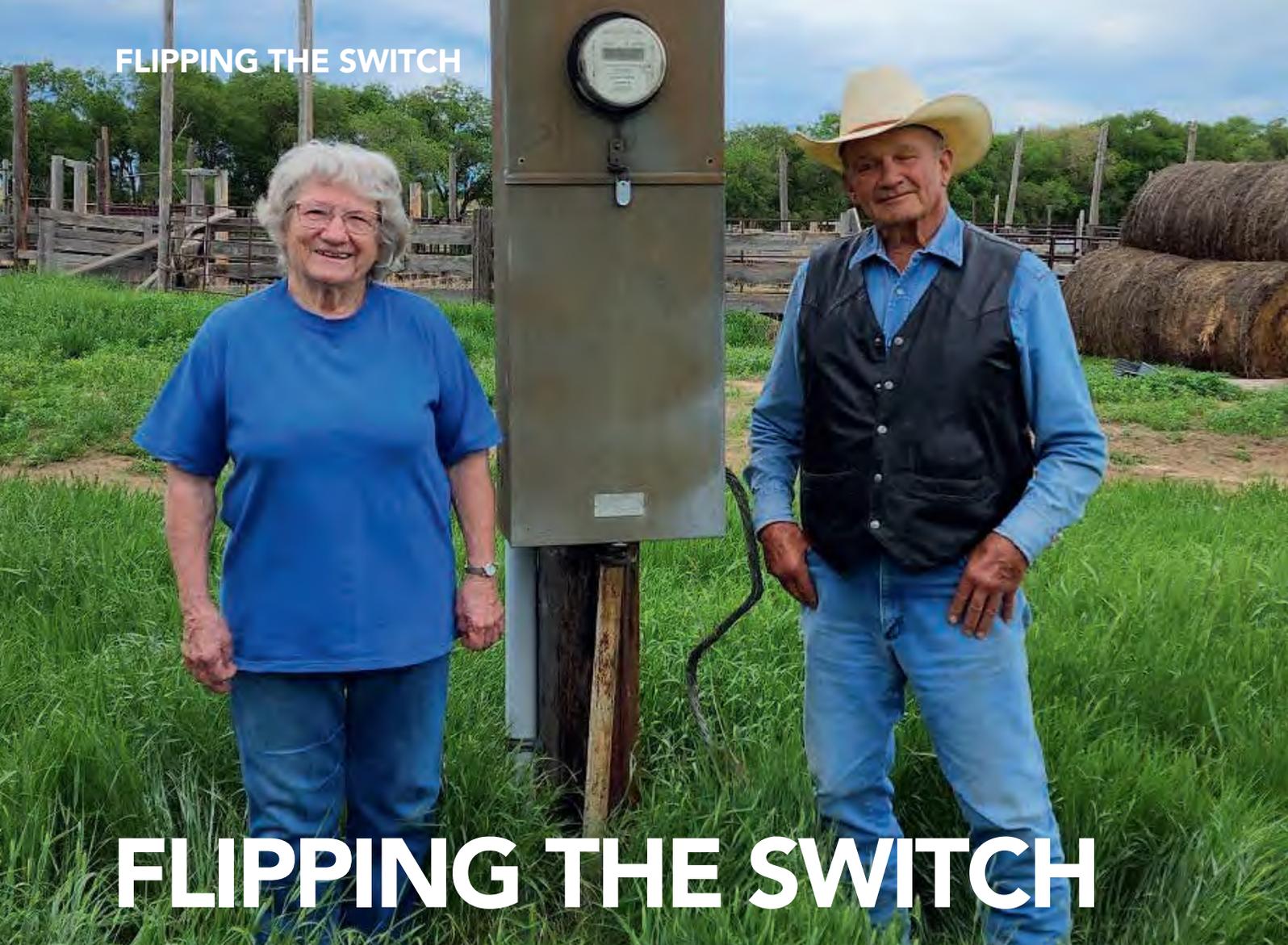
inverter and standard portable generators.

**Standby generators** can cost \$7,000, plus installation, but they have the benefit of turning on automatically during a power outage and running your whole house. They're typically a permanently-mounted outdoor unit that's connected to your home electrical system and runs on propane or natural gas. It must be installed by a professional electrician.

**Power stations**, also known as batteries, charge themselves up while the power is on. They're not as powerful as some of the other options, and can be more expensive, but they're quiet, easy to operate, and some are designed to look good hanging on the wall. They can cost between \$400 and \$6,000. One common use of power stations is to pair them with rooftop solar panels so that electricity from the sun can be available even at night.

With the increased intensity of storms and our reliance on electronic devices, power outages can be a bigger concern these days. Technology now gives you many choices for how to react, whether you want to make sure you're never without power, or you're willing to just light a candle and wait for the lights to come back on.





# FLIPPING THE SWITCH

Third generation ranchers Ken and Kathleen Meier stand by one of the first electric utility pole installed on their ranch.

## The Meier Family and Illuminating Rural South Dakota

**Frank Turner**

[frank.turner@sdrea.coop](mailto:frank.turner@sdrea.coop)

In the rural heartland of Firesteel, S.D., a transformational moment still echoes in the minds of third-generation ranchers Ken and Kathleen Meier. Over a span of 56 years on their farmstead, they have run cattle, reared horses, and even raised two children. After all

of those years, however, they still vividly remember the moment when electricity illuminated their rural community for the first time in the early 50s.

It's safe to say, their memories go back a long way. And yet, their bond with their home extends even further, reaching back a century to when their families were still

establishing roots in the frontier of the rural prairie.

Ken recalls the unlikely story which brought his grandpa, Anton Meier, from Iowa to the captivating, rolling landscape near Timber Lake, S.D., in 1923.

“Well, my grandpa was ornery when he had a bit too much to drink,” said Ken. “Anyway, after a night of drinking, they threw him out of a bar in Iowa, so he crawled into a train car for a nap. When he woke up, he was in South Dakota.”

According to Meier, his grandpa Anton quickly fell in love with the state and decided to relocate his

family to a new frontier near Timber Lake. In a coincidental twist of fate, Kathleen's family also settled in the same area around the same time. Unlike Anton's serendipitous journey,

Kathleen's grandfather, Frank Holzer, had a more traditional approach.

"My grandpa didn't get a free ride," laughed Kathleen. "He came down with our family from North Dakota with a horse and a milk cow tied to the back of the family's covered wagon."

When their families first settled the area, it was the era of kerosene lamps, horses and hard work. Yet in their childhood, both Ken and Kathleen witnessed the transition from kerosene lamps to electric light bulbs, a change that would propel their families and their communities forward.

"I must have been 9 or 10, but I remember when Moreau-Grand put our line up," Ken reminisced. "The memory of those first poles being driven into the ground by a couple of guys with an old International Truck has stuck with me. It was just something you don't forget."

Today, those original poles placed in the ground more than 70 years ago still stand tall on their ranch. Kathleen, too, recalls the transformative impact they had.

"I was about the same age when we first wired our house," said

Kathleen. "I remember how fun it was to just turn the lights on and have bright lights."

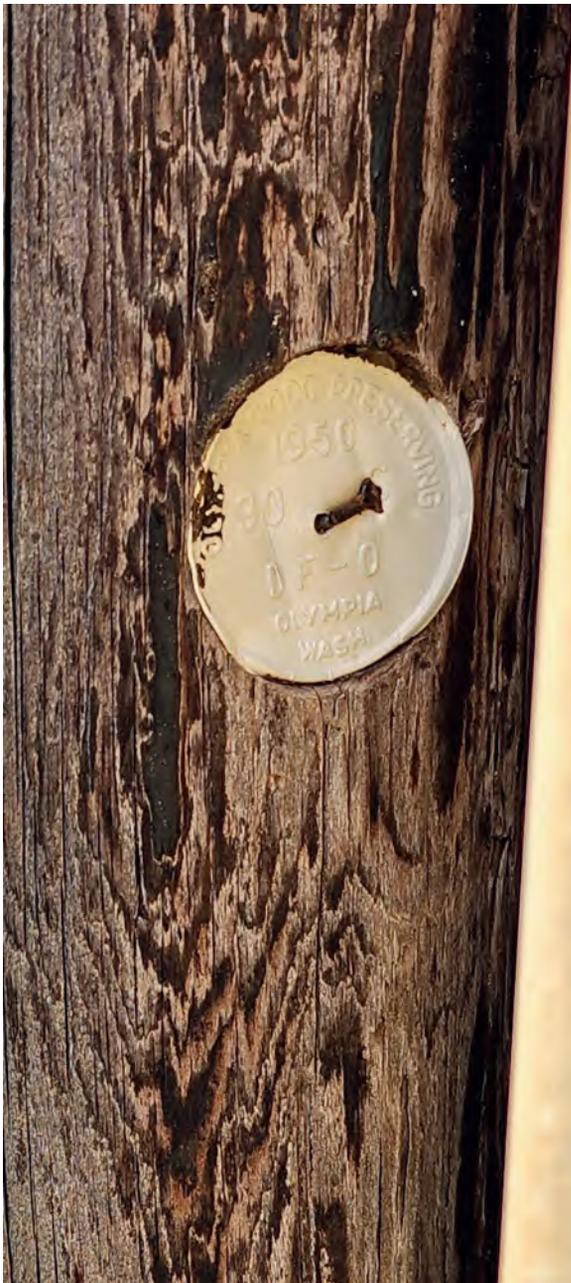
However, the electrification of their neighborhood brought more than just the novelty of flipping a switch. Kathleen's family promptly modernized their home. Their stove and fridge transitioned from kerosene to electric, and they even invested in a milking machine. The arrival of electricity didn't just bring about change; it revolutionized daily life on the ranch, making it cleaner and more efficient.

"Our old washing machine ran on a gas engine," said Kathleen. "You had to stomp on a pedal to get that motor started. It smoked up the entire house. Once we had electricity all we had to do was plug it in."

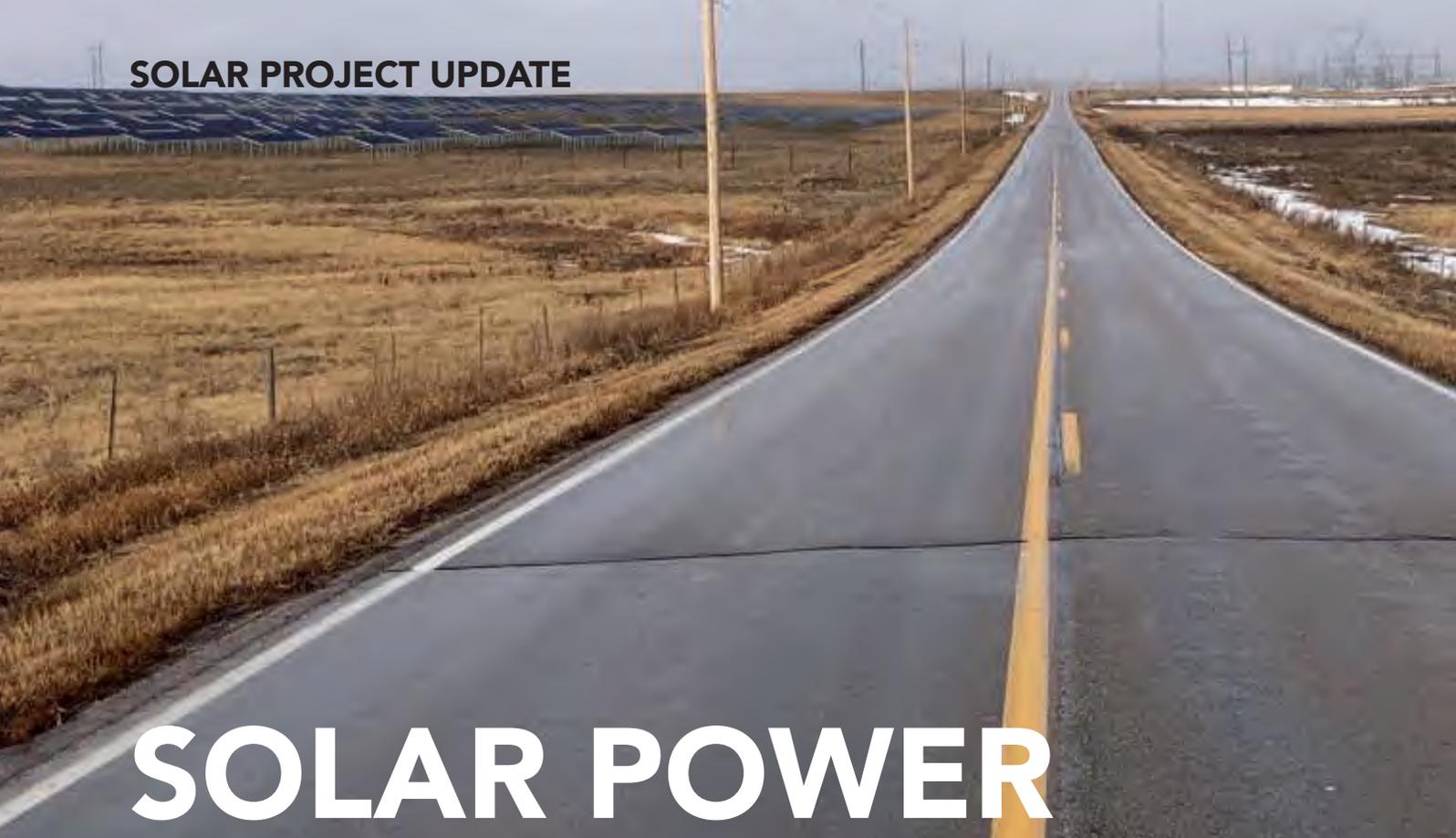
Progress didn't stop at the washing machine. "It didn't take long for things to change," added Ken. "I remember when I was about thirteen, my neighbor purchased the first television in the neighborhood, so everything happened fast. We would all go to watch whatever was on."

The transition has continued to benefit the Meier family. Today, their son, Kent Meier, works in the power industry with Border States Electric, a company that sells electrical equipment, tools and appliances. Their daughter, Cindy Lindskov has carried on the family tradition as a fourth-generation rancher in Isabelle, S.D., a town conveniently located just a stone's throw away from her parents.

It's amazing how much has changed over the years," said Ken. "Since the day we first got electricity, Moreau-Grand has done a great job of keeping our light on and burning bright."



One of the original utility poles on Ken and Kathleen Meier's land was created in 1950, yet it still functions to this day.



# SOLAR POWER

National Grid Renewables is building a solar farm next to an existing substation near New Underwood. Photo courtesy of Western Area Power Administration

## New Underwood Solar Power Update

**Scott Waltman**

Next year, a new solar farm near New Underwood should be providing power for homes and businesses in South Dakota and beyond.

Wild Springs Solar is being developed by Minnesota-based National Grid Renewables. The same company already operates a wind farm in Clark County, so it might already be familiar to some residents.

The solar farm is projected to be the biggest one in the state, according to National Grid Renewables. It's being built on roughly 1,000 acres.

Plans call for it to produce 128 megawatts a year. That could power 16,000 South Dakota homes, though some of the electricity will also be sent

out of state.

The solar farm is being built near an existing Western Area Power Administration substation, making for easier power distribution to groups like Basin Electric Power Cooperative, one of the largest providers of electricity in the Dakotas.

“When determining where to site renewable energy projects, things we consider include but are not limited to accessibility to transmission, land availability, resource, customer demand and community support,” a Wild Springs Solar representative. “The Wild Springs project area was selected for proximity to the electrical transmission system, New Underwood substation, land suitable for a solar project from an environmental, regulatory/permitting,

design perspective and cooperative landowners.”

Construction on the solar farm began in January.

Basin Electric, which is based in Bismarck, N.D., is a transmission cooperative that serves about 3 million customers in nine states. It has an agreement with National Grid Renewables to purchase 114 megawatts of electricity.

For Basin Electric, the agreement amounts to the first time it has agreed to buy solar power on a large scale. The cooperative has plans to bring on more than 150 megawatts of solar capability in the next two years.

Andy Buntrock, Basin Electric's vice president of strategic planning and communications, said stressing reliability is a priority for the cooperative this year.

“When we communicate on renewables we emphasize that they are just part of an all-of-the-above energy strategy that ensures reliable and

affordable power for our membership,” he said. “It’s important that we maintain dispatchable generation that has a reliable fuel source, while taking advantage of non-dispatchable generation like our first-ever solar project in South Dakota.”

Coal and natural gas are examples of dispatchable generation. They are fuels that are highly dependable because they are in constant supply.

“The construction of the Wild Springs Solar Project in South Dakota represents our commitment to bringing clean, renewable energy and economic development to the state of South Dakota. The project will contribute significantly to the tax base, as well as the local communities,” the National Grid Renewables spokesperson said.

In 2020, the South Dakota Public Utilities Commission approved a construction permit for Wild Springs Solar. That procedure set out what’s being built near New Underwood, including:

- 340,000 solar panels.
- A tracking system.
- Access roads.
- A substation.
- An operation and maintenance building and parking lot.
- Electric collection lines.

The plant will use solar panels that have been developed by First Solar.

National Grid Renewables is establishing a charitable fund for the New Underwood School District with plans to donate more than \$500,000 in the

first plant’s first two decades.

“Our National Grid Renewables onsite team has also worked closely with the school board and district to provide additional education about solar energy and the Wild Springs Solar project to some of the local high school classes, including a personalized tour of the site,” the company representative said.

But National Grid sees benefits that extend far beyond the Pennington County community. The upside, according to National Grid Renewables, will also include:

- Offsetting 193,000 metric tons of carbon dioxide emissions each year.
- A \$22 million economic impact in the project’s first 20 years of operation.
- \$12 in new tax revenue in the first two decades.
- 225 new construction and operation jobs.

And when the plant is producing power, that should equate to the removal of 41,000 vehicles from roads in a year’s time.

WAPA helped clear the way for the project in 2021, finding the solar farm would have no significant impact on environmental resources or humans, said Eric Barendsen, public affairs specialist for WAPA.

That’s also when WAPA entered into an agreement with Wild Springs Solar and the Southwest Power Pool allowing the solar farm to be connected to WAPA’s New Underwood Substation.

Ultimately, that will help Basin Electric power South Dakota.

The cooperative transmits power to two generation and transmission cooperatives in the state – Rushmore Electric Power Cooperative and East River Electric Cooperative. Those co-ops then send electricity to their distribution cooperatives, which provide electricity to homes, schools and businesses across South Dakota.

The Clark County wind farm uses 77 turbines to create 200 megawatts of power, the National Grid Renewables representative said. It began operation in 2019 and employs 10 people.



Construction began earlier this year on a large solar farm near New Underwood in Pennington County. Some of the power will be purchased by Basin Electric and be distributed to cooperatives in South Dakota.

## REGISTER TO WIN!

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**July 14-16**  
**Badlands Astronomy Festival**  
25216 Ben Reifel Road  
Interior, SD  
605-433-5243

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.

**JUNE 23-25**  
**46th Annual Main Street Arts & Crafts Festival**  
Centennial Park  
Hot Springs, SD

**JULY 1**  
**Hill City's Annual Star-Spangled Celebration**  
8 a.m.  
Hill City, SD  
605-574-2368

**JULY 4**  
**Philip VFD Firework Display**  
Lake Waggoner  
Philip, SD

**JULY 7-8**  
**Buffalo Gap Blow Out Rodeo**  
6 p.m.  
Buffalo Gap, SD  
605-890-1533

**JULY 8-9**  
**Brookings Summer Arts Festival**  
Brookings, SD  
605-692-2787

**JULY 12**  
**Tracy Area Gardens & Quilts Tour**  
2 p.m.  
Tracy, MN

**JULY 13-16**  
**Pioneer Days**  
White, SD  
605-690-4458

**JULY 14-16**  
**Burke Stampede PRCA Rodeo**  
Burke, SD  
605-830-2083

**JULY 15**  
**Huron MS Walk/Run**  
8 a.m.  
Lake Byron  
Huron, SD  
605-350-5922

**JULY 15-16**  
**Charles Mix Saddle Club SDRA Rodeo**  
Geddes, SD  
605-680-2763

**JULY 21-23**  
**Winner Elks 54th Annual Rodeo**  
Winner, SD

**JULY 28-29**  
**Farley Fest**  
Lake Farley Park  
Milbank, SD  
www.farleyfest.com

**JULY 29**  
**BBQ Pit Row and Car Show**  
Winner, SD

**JULY 30**  
**Bergen Threshing Bee**  
9 a.m.  
Bristol, SD  
605-237-0310

**AUG 5**  
**Taste the Goodness**  
5 p.m.  
Sioux Falls, SD  
605-988-3769

**AUG 21**  
**30th Annual Bishop's Cup Golf Tournament**  
Minnehaha Country Club and  
The Country Club of Sioux Falls  
Sioux Falls, SD  
605-988-3765

**AUG 13-14**  
**Twin Brooks Threshing Show**  
Featuring Allis Chalmers  
Twin Brooks, SD  
605-880-2884

**SEPT 9-10**  
**Hill City Quilt Show & Sale**  
Hill City School  
Hill City, SD  
605-574-2810

**SEPT 21-23**  
**Black Hills Plein Air Paint Out**  
Hill City, SD  
605-574-2810

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