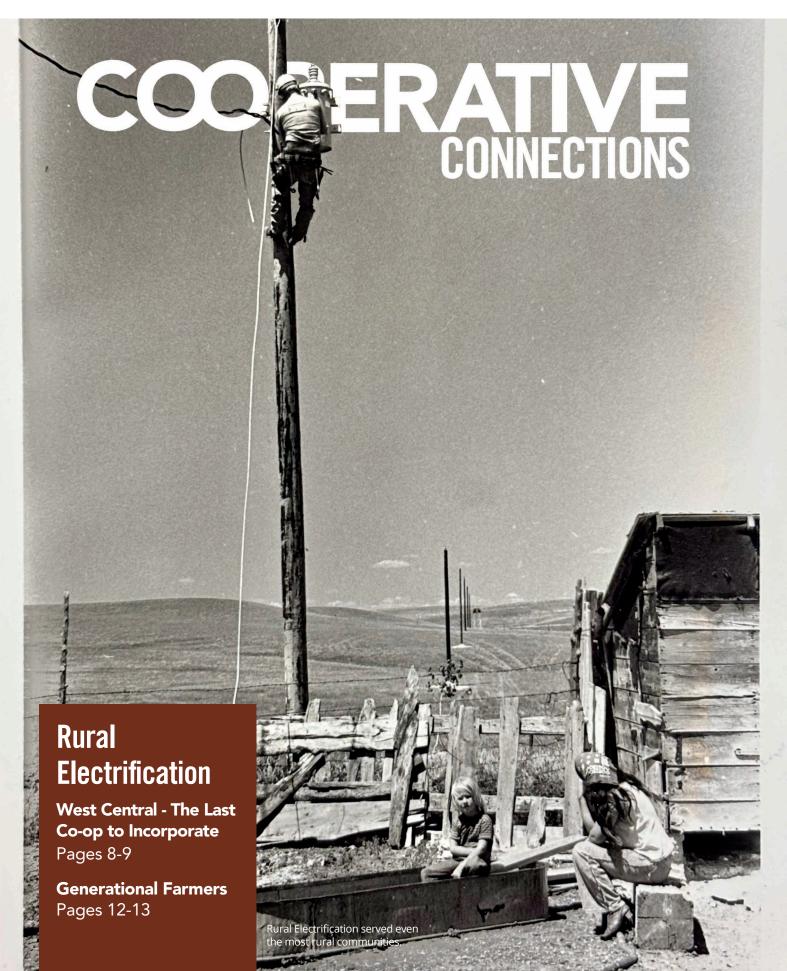
OCTOBER 2025 VOL. 26 NO. 6



Heat Season Starts October 1

Are You Ready?



Michelle Fischer Director of Communications & Member Services michellef@bhec.coop

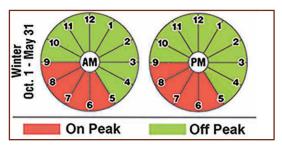
As South Dakota nights turn cooler, many of us start thinking about turning up the thermostat. Winter in the Black Hills means higher energy use, and it is important to make sure your heating system is ready to carry you through the coldest months of the year. If you have been putting off an upgrade, now may be the best time to act because a valuable federal incentive is about to run out.

Through December 31, 2025, homeowners can receive 30 percent back, up to \$2,000, through a federal tax credit when replacing or upgrading their heating system with a qualifying energy-efficient model. The expiration date for this credit was updated in July 2025. This credit helps offset the upfront cost of installation while also lowering monthly energy bills over time. For many members, this could mean significant savings both now and in the future.

Beyond the financial benefit, upgrading your system ensures your home will be warm and comfortable all season long. A new, efficient system not only provides peace of mind, but also helps reduce energy use and lower monthly bills.

October 1 marks the official start of heat season for our cooperative. If you are on the electric heat rate, please remember to turn the breaker on to the power serving your heat meter so you receive the discounted rate for the heating season. For the most benefit, it's recommended to keep your breaker on year-round. If you need your heat meter moved to a different circuit, please contact us and we can assist. If any work has been done in your electric panel since we were last there, please let us know so we can ensure all of your permanently installed electric heat load is connected to the heat meter.

Also beginning in October, our peak demand periods shift to the winter season, lasting through May 31st. Winter peak hours are Monday through Friday, 5–9 a.m. and 5–9 p.m. Scheduling high-energy activities outside these times can help you save on your bill.



If you are considering a heating system replacement, do not wait until the cold weather sets in. Scheduling an upgrade now means you will be ready before winter arrives, and you will secure up to \$2,000 in tax savings before the incentive disappears at the end of the year.

For information on qualifying heating systems and claiming the federal tax credit, contact your CPA or reach out to us here at the cooperative. We're happy to answer your questions and help you get ready for the season ahead.

Upgrade your heating system, save money, and stay warm this winter!

COOPERATIVE

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BLACK HILLS ELECTRIC

(ISSN No. 1531-104X)

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BLACK HILLS ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE CONNECTIONS is the monthly publication for the members of Black Hills Electric Cooperative, 25191 Cooperative Way, P.O. Box 792, Custer, S.D. 57730-0792. Black Hills Electric Cooperative Connections' purpose is to provide reliable, helpful information to electric cooperative members on matters pertaining to their cooperative and living better with electricity. Also available at www.bhec.coop.

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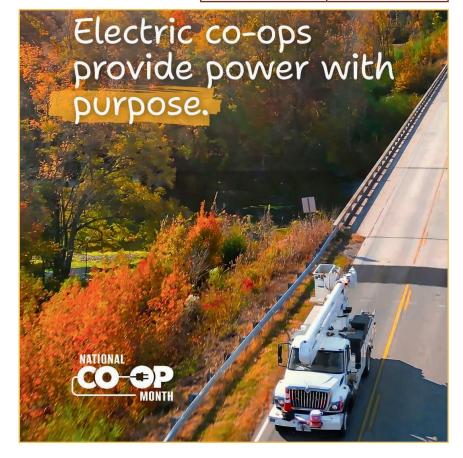
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Taxes Paid to Local Schools

Black Hills Electric is a rural electric cooperative. South Dakota law requires BHEC and our wholesale power provider, Basin Electric Power Cooperative, to pay a tax on the kilowatt hours that are sold during a year. The kilowatt hours are tracked according to the local school district where they were sold. The funds are distributed to the appropriate counties and then sent to the school districts.

The school districts in our service area received a total of \$324,074.06 in gross kilowatt hour tax as a result of electric sales to members in 2024.

School District	Tax Amounts
Custer	\$89,623.90
Edgemont	\$3,949.09
Elk Mountain	\$5,994.36
Hill City	\$22,551.57
Hot Springs	\$34,121.95
Lead/Deadwood	\$14,112.84
Meade	¢.18
Oelrichs	\$8,206.68
Oglala Lakota	\$2,657.69
Rapid City	\$142,855.48
Wall	¢.26
Total	\$324,074.06



Go Above and Beyond for a Safe Harvest

Anne Prince

NRFCA

Modern farming often relies on data and equipment with GPS and auto-guidance systems. However, even with these modern conveniences, farm workers must remain vigilant. That's because farming is considered one of the most dangerous jobs.

Massive machinery is indispensable to farming, but the same impressive size, height and extensions make them particularly vulnerable to contacting power lines. That's why staying alert, focused and knowledgeable about potential hazards and safety procedures is crucial.

During a busy harvest season, the familiar sights around the farm can easily fade into the background, and farm workers can overlook the power lines overhead. However, failing to notice them can lead to deadly accidents.

360 Awareness

Awareness of your surroundings, around, above and below, and planning safe equipment routes can significantly reduce the risk of accidents. Even with GPS and auto-steering, it's imperative that farm workers keep a close eye on the equipment's location and are ready to take action if necessary.

Exposed underground powerlines, defective wiring in farm buildings and extension cords are also hazards. Grain bins can pose a potential danger as well. The National Electrical Safety Code requires power lines to be at least 18 feet above the highest point on any grain bin with which portable augers or other portable filling equipment are used.

Smart Harvest Safety Tips

To ensure a safer harvest season, SafeElectricity.org recommends the following tips to avoid electrical accidents on the farm:

- Exercise caution near power lines. Be careful when raising augers or the bed of grain trucks around power lines.
- Use spotters when operating large machinery near power lines. Ensure the spotters do not touch the machinery while it is moving near power lines.

- Lower equipment extensions, portable augers or elevators before moving or transporting equipment. Do not raise equipment, such as ladders, poles or rods into power lines. Remember that non-metallic materials like lumber, tree limbs, ropes and hay can conduct electricity, especially when damp, dusty or dirty.
- Never attempt to raise or move power lines to clear a path. Doing so could result in electric shock or death.
- Avoid using metal poles inside bins. Don't use metal poles to break up bridged grain inside or around bins.
- Hire qualified electricians. Ensure that qualified electricians handle work on drying equipment and other farm electrical systems.

While rare, the only reason to exit equipment that has come into contact with overhead lines is if the equipment is on fire. However, if it happens, jump off the equipment with your feet together and without touching the machinery and the ground at the same time. Then, still keeping your feet together, hop to safety as you leave the area.

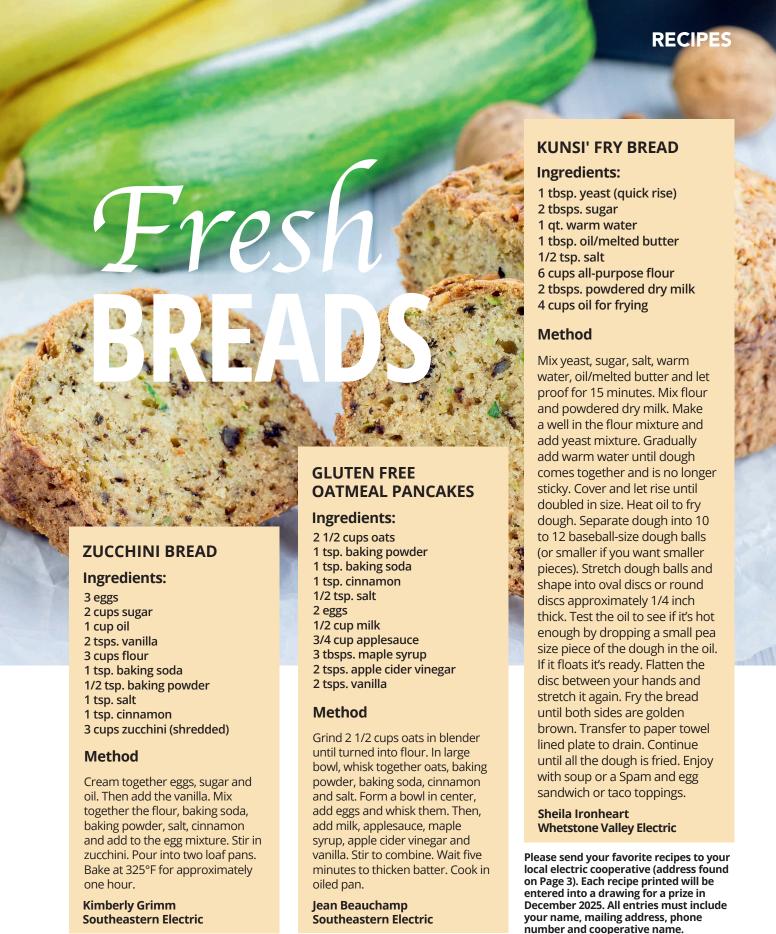


"Don't play with outlets!"

Kinzlee Klomp, Age 12

Kinzlee warns readers not to play with power outlets. Great advice, Kinzlee! Kinzlee's parents are Kaitlin and Austin Klomp from Box Elder, S.D.

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.



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DO WE OWE YOU MONEY?

THIS FOLLOWING LIST CONTAINS the names of former Black Hills Electric Cooperative members whose capital credit checks have not been cashed or were returned to us. Please review the list and if you know anyone listed, or his or her heirs, please contact BHEC at 605-673-4461or 800-742-0085. M-Z will be published in the November edition.



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WEST CENTRAL

Last to Incorporate, **Lasting in Impact**

Frank Turner

frank.turner@sdrea.coop

Before rural electrification, South Dakota's farmsteads ended the day in silence. There was no music from the radio playing in the living room or hum of an electric refrigerator in the kitchen. Over decades of work, power lines would stretch across the prairie through President Franklin Roosevelt's vision of rural electrification, carrying not only electricity but also a new way of life.

In 1935, President Roosevelt created the Rural Electrification Administration (REA) as part of his New Deal policies to revive a nation struggling through the Great Depression and bring electricity to America's rural communities, something that private and investor-owned utilities refused to do.

Clay-Union Electric was the first rural community in South Dakota to adopt the cooperative model in 1937, and West Central was the last in 1949. But as former West Central Electric CEO Steve Reed can attest, being the last to adopt the cooperative way didn't hinder their success. Once the path to forming a cooperative was established, the members of West Central benefitted from electricity's transformation from a luxury into a necessity with the rest of rural South Dakota.

"We couldn't rely on the power

West Central Electric board directors present a check to a representative of Central Electric and Gas in 1951, finalizing the cooperative's purchase of the private utility system. Photo submitted by West Central Electric.

companies to come out to serve rural South Dakota," said Reed, a 42-year cooperative veteran who joined West Central Electric as a lineman and worked his way up to CEO. "They were never going to do it at price that was affordable, so rural electric has been great for not only the members of West Central but the entire country."

So why was West Central the last to form a cooperative? According to Reed, the rural communities that organized West Central Electric in 1949 had several hurdles to clear. The first was overcoming the sheer remoteness of the territory, which then had a system that averaged 1.5 members per mile of line constructed, even including towns and

RURAL ELECTRIFICATION

cities. Because members were few and far between, the REA needed the towns in the proposed West Central territory to become members: from Philip to Hayes and Murdo to Kennebec, where West Central Electric was incorporated.

That led to the next problem: the towns and cities in the proposed West Central Electric's service territory were already being served by Central Electric and Gas, a private company based out of Philadelphia. This obstacle didn't stop the people who had a vision of what rural electrification could accomplish. Following lengthy discussion in 1951, West Central Electric purchased systems from Central Electric and Gas for \$850,000 using low-interest REA federal funds.

Former West Central Electric Attorney John Larson outlined the discussions in his 50th Annual Meeting Speech: "There was no choice but to buy out the private supplier, Central Electric and Gas, and that was accomplished... (Former South Dakota Governor M. Q. Sharpe, who served as West Central Electric's attorney), showed up for the meeting that morning unshaven and unkempt, with a threadbare shirt and suit. For the entire morning, he listened with his head down and eyes shut to the Philadelphia lawyer types who represented the power company. After the dinner break, however, he showed up in a new suit, shaved, and took over the meeting by dictating exactly what West Central would do and what we would pay. During an afternoon break, one of the Philadelphia types was heard to mutter, 'You want to watch that old guy. When he's got his head down and eyes shut, he's not sleeping!""

West Central Electric's 1951 purchase included all the electrical infrastructure within the town boundaries, as well as the diesel generation system extending west from Chamberlain. Shortly after, the evolution of West Central Electric progressed with the construction of distribution systems to farms and reconstructing the systems of various

towns, including the installation of street lights.

Since that iconic moment, West Central has continued to grow with its membership, meeting more demand for electrical energy than had been previously thought possible, a reflection of just how integral electricity has

become in day-to-day living for business owners, ag producers, and rural folk alike.

'That moment modernized us." said Reed. "It just did so much for everything - and without it, where would we be?"





(Top) A West Central Electric Annual Meeting. (Bottom) A West Central Electric Board Meeting with the REA. Photos submitted by West Central Electric

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(continued from page 7)

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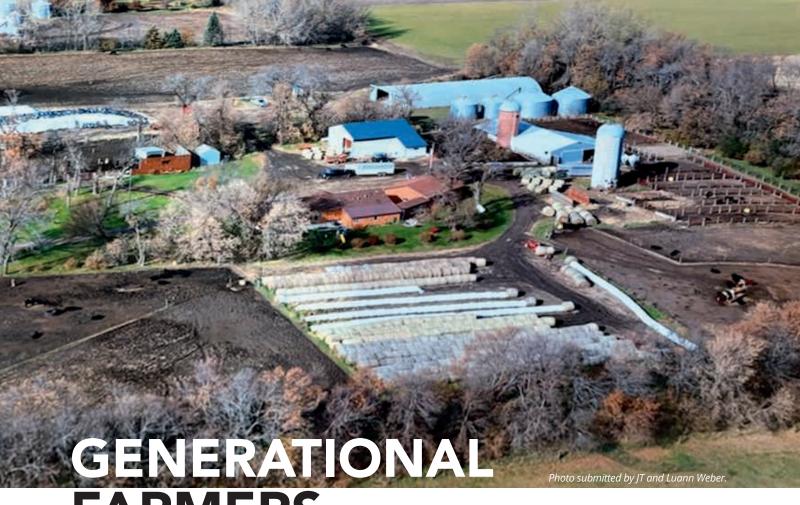
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M-Z will be published in the November edition.



FARMERS

Four Generations of Lyon-Lincoln Electric Members Ranch on Lake Benton-Area Land

Jacob Boyko

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Nestled amongst the rolling green pastures of western Minnesota, there's a generations-old farm worked by one family for over three quarters of a century.

From their Lincoln County property, the Weber family watched rural electrification improve the prairie, connect neighbors and bring reliability to farmsteads. Now they watch precision agriculture guide planting, bovine genetics strengthen herds, and social media and the internet connect their business to the wider world.

It all started in 1947, when John and Marie Weber moved into the old three-bedroom farmhouse from nearby Elkton, S.D. Luckily, the move came six years after Lyon-Lincoln Electric Cooperative energized lines in the area, so the Weber home enjoyed many of the modern amenities brought on by rural electrification, including electric lights, kitchen appliances and a washing machine.

"I know I had the best mom and dad in the world," said JT, one of John and Marie's eight children, who today helps run the ranch with his wife, Luann, their three sons and their families. "Dad was very community-oriented. He was on the school board, the elevator board and the rural water board. In fact, he was instrumental in starting rural water. He went from place to place, talking people

into getting rural water."

JT was born on the farm in 1957 during a blizzard that left his parents unable to reach the hospital in town. As a boy, he remembers collecting rainwater in a cistern and using it for cooking, cleaning and baths. Even as rural electrification began to transform the countryside, life on the farm remained far different - and often harder - than life in town.

"When I grew up, back in the 60s and 70s, if you milked 40 cows that was quite a few," JT said. "We were milking about 100 cows – we were kind of ahead of our time. But we had a big family, and us boys, we got right in there."

He continued, "We were hauling silage, hauling manure, milking cows and doing chores. But Dad never told us to do anything. He always asked us if we wanted to, and there's a difference. You wanted to work for him. He made you want to work for him, and it was never a burden."

That was a quality JT kept in mind with his own seven children on that same ranch where he grew up. Today, JT and Luann's sons Jake, Garret, and Matt all stay involved in the ranch, now Weber Bros. Cattle.

"Growing up, I kind of always had that bug to get in the tractor, chase cows, put up fence, and do what needs to be done," explained Jake, the oldest son.

Today, they specialize in raising purebred Angus bulls and Simmental-Angus crosses, while also producing corn silage and alfalfa to help sustain the operation. While the operation may be old, it's not at all low-tech.

"Our main thing is our bull program," Jake said. "We sell about 50 registered Angus and Simmental bulls by private treaty every spring, and we also develop 50 replacement and bred heifers, and market a portion of them. We do a lot of artificial insemination and embryo transfer. Some of the more elite donor cows we can get our hands on by buying females and buying embryos. We're just trying to make good cows."

Jake, like his dad, graduated from South Dakota State University with an animal science degree, and was excited to return to the ranch to incorporate some of his new skills into the operation.

"When I got back from school, we really amped up our embryo transfer program with different ideas and stuff I learned about genetics from contacts and producers we've met over the years," Jake continued. "We went from selling 10 bulls per year to selling close to 50 bulls."

Jake's younger brother and fellow SDSU animal science graduate, Garret, keeps involved on the family's ranch as well. Though he works full time as swine genetic company Hypor's US Sales Manager, he helps out with the operation and finds the time to run Weber Bros. Cattle's social media pages, which he says has successfully expanded their presence in the market.

"Whether it's Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat or our company website, we're able to hit such a broad spectrum of people, and it's a great way to tell the story of our operation, what we're doing year-in and year-out and advertise the



genetics of the cattle that we're showing and selling," Garret explained. "We're able to have a much greater touch point of individuals that we can reach out to and market our livestock."

JT, Jake and Garret all credit their spouses and families for supporting them as they work to grow the operation.

"It took a long time and a lot of support for us to get established and get to where we are today," JT said.

Looking toward the future – and the next generation, their goals are to make an already successful operation even

"We'll keep working with the cow herd, continue to make improvements and make better genetics every year." Jake said. "I want this opportunity to be available to my kids, so that if they want to be able to do this, they'll have the same chance we did."

Garret added, "It's something that I hope my sons can do someday if we're able to continue to grow the operation. I hope it's something they're going to be able to share and cherish with their own kids, because those are the memories that stick with you forever."

JT and Luann Weber with their adult children, Jake, Garret, Matt and Sara Weber, Liz Mergen, and Maria Opheim, and families.

Back, from left: Garret Weber, Levi Weber, Kailey Weber, Jake Weber, Amanda Weber, Sara Weber, Cade Opheim, Maria Opheim, Tawnee Opheim, JT Weber, Luann Weber, Brent Mergen, Liz Mergen, Davie Fiedler Matt Weber, Racheal Krog. Front, from left: Adam Weber, Chisum Weber, Abeline Weber, Vidalia Fiedler. Not pictured: Talon Weber







THINK BEFORE YOU CLICK

Frank Turner

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This October marks the 22nd National Cybersecurity Awareness Month, first established in 2004 by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security and the National Cybersecurity Alliance. The annual observance was created to highlight the importance of cybersecurity and safe online practices.

This year's theme, "Stay Safe Online," emphasizes the small but important steps individuals can take to reduce online risks, especially during an age when it seems a new data breach makes headlines every single day. While big companies often make headlines when they are hacked, everyday people are just as likely to be targeted through scams, phishing attempts, or weak passwords.

Jacob Steeg, IT Administrator at Rushmore Electric Power Cooperative, says there are many easy-to-implement strategies and tips people can use to reduce the likelihood of hacks and personal data breaches. Steeg has worked in the information technology field for more than 16 years and has spent the past three with Rushmore Electric Cooperative.

The first step is staying vigilant. Steeg compares cybersecurity to a bank: even if the vault – or in this case, technology - is impenetrable, a human can still be tricked into opening it. That's how phishing works. Hackers send fraudulent, attention-grabbing emails or messages designed to trick users into clicking a link or giving away personal information.

"If you convince the guard of your bank to give you the code to the safe, it doesn't matter how secure the vault is," Steeg said. "That's what phishing does. Bad actors are trying to bait you into giving up the information they need to break in."

"These messages may all look different, but they tend to follow the same script," he added. "They try to heighten your emotions with money, fear, or urgency so that you stop thinking clearly and hand over information you normally wouldn't."

Steeg also recommends users enable two-factor authentication. This extra layer of security requires not just a password, but a second step, such as entering a code sent to your phone or approving a login through an authentication app. Even if hackers steal your password, they won't be able to access your account without that second piece of verification. Steeg says this extra step may feel inconvenient at first, but it's one of the simplest and most effective tools for keeping accounts safe.

But of all the tips mentioned, Steeg says the most important step to staying secure online is to use different



Rushmore Electric Power Cooperative's information technology team, from left: Jacob Steeg, MarcCharles Zuatke and Jordan Kunkel. Photo submitted by Rushmore Electric Power Cooperative.

passwords for different websites.

"By using different passwords, you are reducing your attack surface," he said. "Let's assume that someone was able to hack into a small forum tied to a specific interest you had 15 years ago. The person who built that forum likely isn't a cybersecurity expert - and these small forums are exactly what are getting breached. If you're using the same email and password across every site, hackers suddenly have access to your bank account, social media and more."

Instead of trying to remember 100 different passwords for 100 different websites, Steeg advises using a password manager, which securely stores your password information and can generate strong passwords for each account. He also recommends using a password that is at least 14 characters long.

"A password manager's whole job is to store your passwords safely," said Steeg. "It's not impossible that it gets breached, but your information is a lot safer there."

Steeg says it's also important to share these basic online safety practices with those around you, especially older relatives, who are often the most vulnerable to scams.

"Please reach out to the less tech-savvy people around you, like the elderly," he said. "The world has changed so much around them, and they might just not know. Just tell them what's out there and what is coming. Try to help them be aware that you aren't just valuable for the money that's in your pocket; you are also valuable for the data you store online, and somebody wants it."

At the end of the day, Steeg says one of the best ways to stay safe online is to "remember the stuff your parents taught you as a kid."

"If it's too good to be true, it's probably not," he said. "Nobody is reaching out to you via email to give you a gift or free money. Just because the medium has changed, doesn't mean that the scam is any different."

An Important Message About Cybersecurity

The IRS will never contact you directly by email, text message or social media to ask for personal or financial information. If you receive a message claiming to be from the IRS, it's a scam.

The agency communicates primarily through official letters sent by mail. If you're unsure whether a message is legitimate, do not click links or provide information. Instead, contact the IRS directly through its official website or phone number.



To have your event listed on this page, send complete information, including date, event, place and contact to your local electric cooperative. Include your name, address and daytime telephone number. Information must be submitted at least eight weeks prior to your event. Please call ahead to confirm date, time and location of event.

OCT. 3-5 Black Hills Film Festival Journey Museum

Rapid City, SD

OCT. 4-5 Run Crazy Horse Full & Half Marathon Crazy Horse Memorial

OCT. 10-11 Holman Acres Pumpkin Fest & Vendor Show

Fri. 12 p.m.-6 p.m., Sat. 10 a.m.-6 p.m. Philip, SD 605-441-1060

OCT. 10 Homecoming Parade

Start: 1:30 p.m., Line up: 1 p.m. Hill City, SD

OCT. 11 Fall Festival

4 p.m. Fairburn Church Fairburn, SD 605-255-4329

OCT. 13 Native American Day

Crazy Horse Memorial Custer, SD

OCT. 14, 21, 28 Beginning Quilting Class The Farmer's Daughter

The Farmer's Daughter Hill City, SD

OCT. 15

Lions Club/Vitalant Blood Drive Hill City Center Hill City, SD

OCT. 16-18 Spearfish Senior Center Fall Fundraising Rummage Sale

Thurs. 8 a.m.-3 p.m. Fri. 8 a.m.-3 p.m. Sat. 8 a.m.-12 p.m. 1306 N. 10th St. Spearfish, SD

OCT. 18 Northern Prairie Arts Barn Quilt Class

Highland Conference Center Register by Oct. 6 Watertown, SD 605-882-1780

OCT. 18 Soup & Sweets

4-7 p.m. Hermosa United Church of Christ 105 2nd St. Hermosa, SD

OCT. 19

Helping With Horsepower Year-End Horse Show

10 a.m. Reclamation Ranch Mitchell, SD

OCT. 25

Breast Cancer Survivors' Luncheon

10:30 a.m.-1 p.m. Blessed Sacrament Parish Hall Rapid City, SD RSVP: 216-536-3683

OCT. 25

Spearfish Senior Center Fundraising Breakfast

Pancakes, sausage, biscuits & gravy, chokecherry syrup. 7:30 a.m.-10 a.m. 1306 N. 10th St. Spearfish. SD

OCT. 25

Hill City Children's Boo Bash & Pumpkin Festival

Hill City, SD

OCT. 25 Lions Club Bingo

5 p.m. Food, 6 p.m. Bingo Hill City Center Hill City, SD

OCT. 31

Hill City Main Street Merchant Trick-or-treat Boys & Girls Club Annual Halloween Carnival Hill City, SD

NOV. 1

Reliance Christmas Carousel

9 a.m.-3 p.m. Reliance, SD 605-730-1462

NOV. 1

Black Hills Meat Fest

2-4 p.m. Nerdy Nuts Expo Hall Rapid City, SD

NOV. 1

Spearfish Senior Center Fall Craft Fair & Bake Sale

9 a.m.-2 p.m. Spearfish, SD

> Note: We publish contact information as provided. If no phone number is given, none will be listed. Please call ahead to verify the event is still being held.