

COOPERATIVE CONNECTIONS



Anglers from across the region compete in the Mobridge Ice Fishing Tournament each year to try their luck and test their skills

Hook, line and auger
Inside the Mobridge ice fishing tourney
Pages 8-9

Shake the blues with winter outdoor fun
Pages 12-13

Wishing you a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!



Walker Witt - CEO
wwitt@bhec.coop

Your board of directors had a busy beginning to the holiday season. The November Board Meeting had two significant items on the agenda: the capital credit retirement and the upcoming year's proposed budget.

Your board took action to retire 2.5 million dollars of allocated capital credits. The capital credit retirement will be applied to your December billing statement.

As a Black Hills Electric Cooperative member, each of you own a portion of this company in the form of capital credits. Capital credits are the profits or margins left over from revenue after all the operating expenses have been deducted. Each year, the margins are allocated to you based on the amount/percentage of electric service you purchased. The allocated capital credits are used to help finance capital improvements such as poles, wires, and substations. It is also used to help pay for unexpected emergencies like an ice or snowstorm. Allocated capital credits help decrease the need to raise rates and pay for infrastructure. Capital credits also increase the financial strength of your co-op.

The decision to retire capital credits and how much is based on the financial condition of your co-op. For the past several years, your board has set three goals. Those goals include strengthening the co-op's financial position, decreasing the capital credit retirement cycle to get allocated capital credits back to each of you sooner, and structuring the retirement in a manner that lessens the impact for future years as a result of those years that have high margins. It is difficult to accomplish all three goals at the same time. Retained allocated capital credits strengthen the financial positions of your co-op by strengthening equity levels. Retiring capital credits decrease

equity. Your directors have done an excellent job maintaining the right balance between retiring capital credits and retaining sufficient equity on the balance sheet. The years in which the board determines to retire capital credits impacts future retirements and impacts the future financial position of the co-op. Your board took action to strengthen the co-op for today and in the future. Finally, your board's action over the past several years has decreased the retirement cycle by over one-third, from 30 years to 19 years. These actions resulted in getting members' money back into their pockets more quickly.

Your board of directors acted to approve the 2023 budget of \$23,984,457, which is a 2.42% increase over the 2022 estimated actuals. Wholesale power costs to your co-op are projected to remain static this upcoming year. This year's projected increase is due to increased labor and material costs.

The 2023 Area Meetings are scheduled and ready for your participation. The annual area meetings allow cooperative personnel to show the co-op's appreciation to its members. There is no charge for the meal, so please plan to bring your family and join your neighbors and friends at an area meeting close to you. You can find a complete list of locations, dates, and times on page 11 of this newsletter.

Until next month, from all of us at Black Hills Electric, have a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!



COOPERATIVE CONNECTIONS

BLACK HILLS ELECTRIC

(ISSN No. 1531-104X)

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DIRECTOR ALAN BISHOP RECEIVES GOLD CERTIFICATION



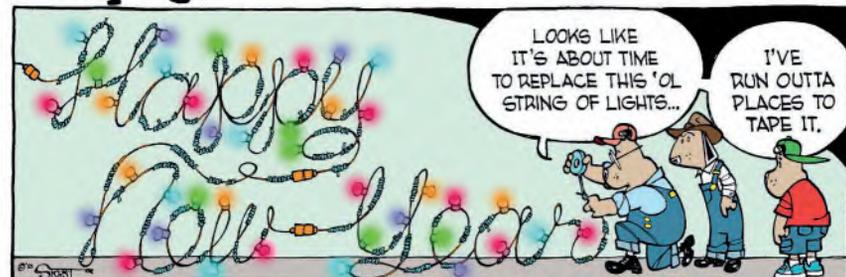
Board President, Dennis Quivey (L), presents Alan Bishop (R) with his Gold Certificate.

We want to congratulate Board Member Alan Bishop on earning his Director Gold Certificate. Director Gold is an NRECA (National Rural Electric Cooperative Association) certificate program geared toward directors who are committed to continuing their education to the highest standard.

To earn Director Gold, directors must first earn NRECA's Credentialed Cooperative Director Certificate (CCD) and Board Leadership Certificate (BLC) plus three additional leadership credits.

Congratulations, Alan!

Murphy



Tips to use your electric blanket wisely

Heating pads and electric blankets cause around 500 fires throughout the U.S. each year. Almost all of these fires involve electric blankets more than 10 years old.

Learn how to stay safe and injury-free.

- Heating appliances should never be left unattended or used while sleeping.
- Do not plug electric blankets into an extension cord or power strip, as they could overheat and cause a fire.
- Look for dark, charred, or frayed spots or electrical cords that are cracked or frayed. Replace any worn or old heating pads or electric blankets.
- Never fold electric blankets when in use. Folded or tucked-in electric blankets could overheat and cause a fire.
- When purchasing electronics, including electric blankets, be sure to only purchase from reputable retailers. Purchase devices that have been approved by a nationally recognized testing laboratory.
- Do not allow anything to rest on top of a heating pad or electric blanket when it is in use. It may cause the device to overheat.
- There are two types of personal heating appliances: electric blankets and heating pads that are placed directly on the mattress. They are not meant to be used interchangeably or at the same time.

Gums wins Connections annual recipe contest

Lily Gums of Clear Lake has been selected winner of the annual *Cooperative Connections* member recipe contest.

Gums submitted a beverage recipe she calls "Swamp Water" that was published in the April 2022 issue of the magazine. She received a \$25 gift card for her submission. Congratulations, Lily!

She is a member of H-D Electric Cooperative based in Clear Lake.



CO-OP LEADERS SERVE THEIR MEMBERS AND CONSTITUENTS



Ryan Maher is both a state senator and a board member at Moreau-Grand Electric Cooperative in Timber Lake. He is one of three cooperative leaders who play unique roles in serving their co-op consumers while also serving their constituents as state lawmakers during the legislative session in Pierre.

To view the comments and insights of these lawmakers and learn more about how electric cooperatives work to improve our communities, visit Cooperative Connections Plus by scanning the QR code at right.



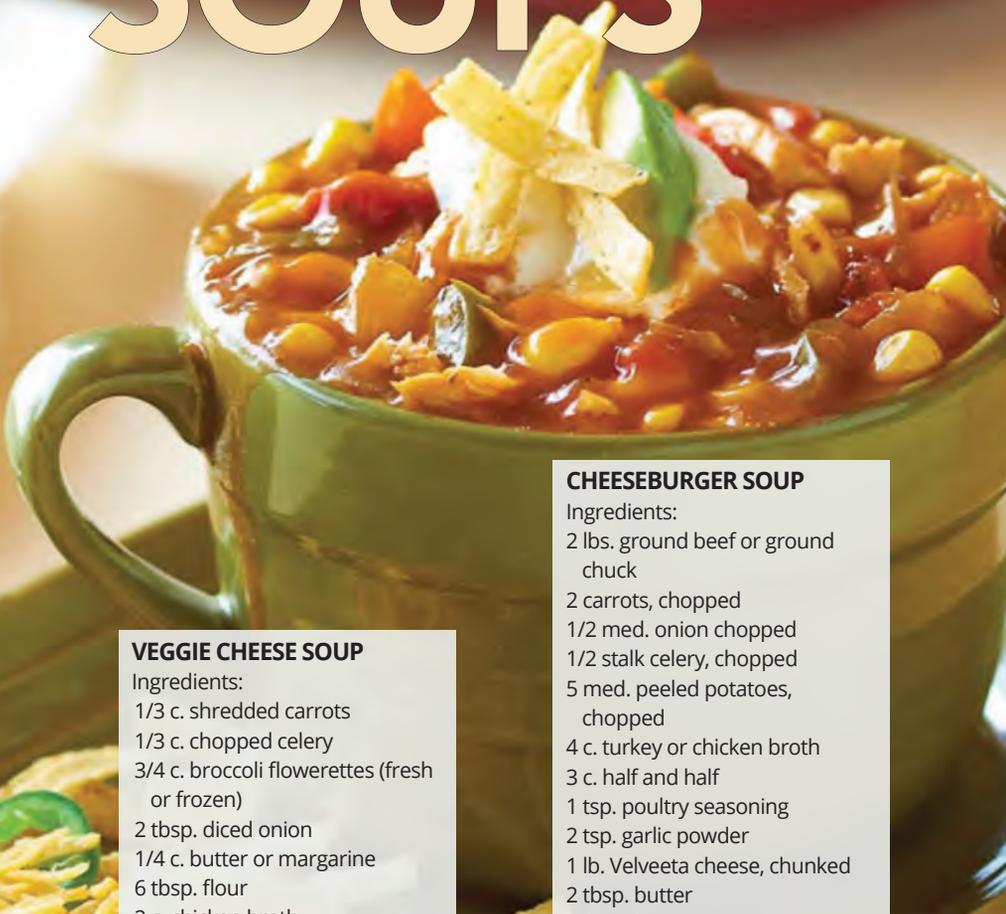
Be safe around power lines

Weston Kling

Weston Kling, age 7, urges equipment operators to always lower augers to accommodate for overhead power lines. Weston is the son of Tyler and Alexis Kling of Rapid City. They are members of West River Electric based in Wall.

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.

SUPER SOUPS



VEGGIE CHEESE SOUP

Ingredients:
 1/3 c. shredded carrots
 1/3 c. chopped celery
 3/4 c. broccoli flowerettes (fresh or frozen)
 2 tbsp. diced onion
 1/4 c. butter or margarine
 6 tbsp. flour
 2 c. chicken broth
 2 c. milk
 2 c. Velveeta cheese, cubed

METHOD

Cook carrots, celery and broccoli in 1 cup water until tender crisp. Saute onions in butter. Add flour to blend. Add milk and stir to make white sauce then add cheese and stir until melted. Add chicken broth and vegetables in remaining water. Blend until smooth.

Nancy Stenson, Fort Pierre

CHEESEBURGER SOUP

Ingredients:
 2 lbs. ground beef or ground chuck
 2 carrots, chopped
 1/2 med. onion chopped
 1/2 stalk celery, chopped
 5 med. peeled potatoes, chopped
 4 c. turkey or chicken broth
 3 c. half and half
 1 tsp. poultry seasoning
 2 tsp. garlic powder
 1 lb. Velveeta cheese, chunked
 2 tbsp. butter
 salt and pepper to taste

METHOD

Brown ground meat in large pot. Drain and return to pot. Add butter, onion, carrots, celery and potatoes. Cook for 5 minutes. Add broth, poultry seasoning, garlic powder and continue cooking until vegetables are tender. Add half and half and Velveeta cheese and continue heating until cheese has melted. Salt and pepper to taste.

Kathleen Meier, Firesteel

CHICKEN FAJITA SOUP

Ingredients:
 1 tbsp. oil
 1 med. green bell pepper, cut into 1/2-inch chunks
 1 med. red bell pepper, cut into 1/2-inch chunks
 1 sm. onion, finely chopped
 3 tbsp. tomato paste
 1 lb. boneless skinless chicken breasts, cut into 1/2-inch cubes
 1 pkg. McCormick® Organics Fajita Seasoning Mix
 3 c. chicken stock
 1 can (14.5 ounces) petite diced tomatoes, drained
 1 c. frozen corn
 1 c. tortilla strips

METHOD

Heat oil in large saucepan or Dutch oven on medium-high heat. Add peppers and onion; cook and stir 2 minutes. Add tomato paste; cook and stir 2 minutes. Stir in chicken, Seasoning Mix, stock, tomatoes and corn. Bring to boil. Reduce heat; simmer 20 minutes or until chicken is cooked through. Ladle soup into bowls. Sprinkle with tortilla strips. Serve with desired toppings.

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.

Q: Are smart home technologies energy efficient? Will making these technology upgrades save me money?



Miranda Boutelle
Efficiency Services
Group

A: You've probably heard the term "smart home" a lot in recent years. If you're curious about what makes a home smart, how it can boost energy efficiency and help you save money, you have come to the right place.

"Smart" was originally an acronym for self-monitoring analysis and reporting technology. This refers to technology that can be programmed for automation or controlled remotely using Bluetooth or Wi-Fi from a smart phone app or online. A smart home is one with automated control of appliances and systems, such as lighting fixtures and heating and cooling systems.

There are multiple reasons people choose to automate their homes, including convenience, energy efficiency and security. Just because a product is smart, don't assume it's energy efficient. Added connectivity, lights and touchscreens can actually increase your energy use. Always look for the ENERGY STAR® logo, which certifies the products meet standards for energy efficiency.

Energy savings typically come from automating the systems, devices and appliances in your home to use less energy or use energy when it costs less. Here are a few ways you can start implementing smart technology at home.

SMART UPGRADES FOR THE ENTIRE HOME

Because heating and cooling account for the most energy use in a home, these systems are the best place to look for energy savings.

Smart thermostats offer features and functionality that can help you save energy and money without thinking about it, including learning preferences and automatically setting temperatures. Geofencing is a feature that uses your phone's location to gauge your distance from home and adjusts the temperature accordingly.

Smart thermostats also let you control the thermostat from anywhere with an internet

connection, and automatic software updates use new algorithms to maximize energy savings. Features vary by product, so be sure to choose the one that's right for you.

Smart window coverings are increasing in popularity. They can help save energy both in the winter and summer by operating based on the temperature of the room or a preset schedule.

Smart lighting can help you remotely control lights in your home, based on occupancy or a preset schedule. Lighting also can be paired with home security systems.

You can use smart outlets and power strips to control devices from outside the home or manage use based on load. For example, you can plug your devices into a load-sensing power strip that turns off peripheral devices, such as monitors and printers, when your computer is not in use.

SMART STREAMING FOR THE LIVING ROOM

Many people use Wi-Fi to stream TV shows and movies. Smart TVs with built-in streaming functionality offer the most efficient way to stream content. If your TV cannot connect to the internet for streaming, opt for a streaming media player, such as Roku or Apple TV. They use 15 times less energy than a gaming console to stream the same shows and movies.

SAVE ON SUDS IN THE LAUNDRY ROOM

Smart washing machines can be scheduled for off-peak energy times (when people in your community use less energy), which is helpful if your electric rate is based on the time of day energy is used. Smart clothes dryers can shut off automatically when your clothes are dry.

SMART SAVINGS IN THE KITCHEN

There are many options for smart appliances in the heart of the home. Smart refrigerators offer energy-saving features, such as notifications when the door is left open. Digital screens show the contents to keep you from opening the door.

Smart ovens let you preheat when you are on your way home or check if you forgot to turn off the oven when you are away. Toasters, range hoods, microwaves and countertop ice makers are among the growing list of additional smart kitchen gadgets available.



FEM Electric General Manager Scott Moore enters his first term in the state Legislature. *Photo by Billy Gibson*

Co-op GM hopes to take the 'D.C.' out of state politics

Billy Gibson

billy.gibson@sdrea.coop

Some people seem to enjoy playing in the political sandbox, and then some people have to be persuaded to seek public office.

Scott Moore, the general manager at FEM Electric based in Ipswich, falls into the second category. Last November, Moore was elected to serve as the state representative for District 23, but it took a lot of cajoling and arm-twisting to get him to seek the seat.

Moore joined the cooperative as an apprentice lineman in 1993 and worked his way up to the top of the figurative power pole to become general manager in 2006. Along the way, he'd been approached about running for elected positions on the city council, school board and other public service organizations but always balked at the idea.

"I just never had any interest," he said while gearing up for his first

legislative session in Pierre. "But people kept asking me about running for the Legislature, so I thought I'd give it a try."

He talked it over with the FEM Board of Directors to seek their approval and recruited his wife, Beth, to serve as his de facto campaign advisor. She had been elected to two terms on the Ipswich City Council, so she knew the ropes.

Last spring, Moore hit the campaign trail with optimism and zeal, zipping from one end of the seven-county district to the other and engaging with the public through a series of forums and cracker barrel events. When the ballots were tallied, Moore led the pack with more than 3,100 votes.

Approaching his first session, Moore anticipates it might be like "drinking from a fire hose." It's an analogy that he also applies when thinking back to his days running a family-owned gas station and restaurant when he was 20 years old and back when he first took over as FEM's general manager. He notes that it didn't take him long to find his footing

with those other adventures.

Bearing down on the age of 60, Moore said he recognizes there will be a learning curve, but he feels no trepidation about taking on the responsibility of playing a role in crafting the laws that all citizens of the state are bound to follow.

"There are a lot of people to talk to and resources available if I have questions or need help," he said. "I'm pretty upfront and people usually know where I stand, but I don't come into this with any kind of political agenda."

Even though he'll be a legislative neophyte, that doesn't mean he has no opinions or points of view when it comes to the state political scene.

"We seem to be playing a lot of D.C. politics, and I would like to get rid of that," he said. "If you're not trying to find a way to compromise and work with people across the hallway, that's not real politics. That's just saying, 'It's my way or the highway.' That's not going to work. You can compromise without abandoning your principles. It didn't start happening overnight, so it's not going to be fixed overnight. But you have to start someplace."

ICE FISHING IN MOBRIDGE



The annual Mobridge Ice Fishing Tournament attracts more than 1,000 avid cold-weather anglers. *Photo by Mobridge Outdoors*

Mobridge Ice Fishing Tournament offers fun and friendly competition

Billy Gibson

editor@sdrea.coop

Last fall, the world of competitive walleye fishing was shaken with a startling saga of deception and skulduggery worthy of a Tom Clancy novel.

Social media lit up showing the dramatic moment a tournament director in Ohio shouted at the top of his lungs with horror and disgust: “We got weights in fish! We got weights in fish!”

Suspicion had long surrounded a pair of locals who ultimately got nabbed stuffing lead weights down the gullets of their walleye. After the two sparked skepticism with a catch of nearly 36 lbs. - one-third heavier than the runners-up - the director gutted the fish right in front of the entire field of wary competitors and held aloft several shiny orbs the size of steel ping-pong balls.

The viral video received more than 10 million views as cameras captured the chaotic scene with one of the accused hanging his head in shame (his partner had slithered away to his truck) while fellow competitors cursed and threatened to inflict bodily harm upon the sly anglers who were later indicted on four felony counts.

Vinson Dargatz is pretty sure nothing close to that degree of high drama will be replicated at the 22nd Annual Mobridge Walleye Ice Fishing Tournament set for Jan. 14. Based on his experience participating in the event over the past 12 years, this competition is more fisherman-friendly and the atmosphere is much more focused on fun.

Dargatz, an apprentice electrician at Lake Region Electric based in Webster, has continued to make the four-hour trip from his home to Mobridge mostly

because of the fellowship and the relaxed, laid-back vibe of the festivities.

He typically gets together with his two brothers and three cousins for the tournament that he describes as a “yearly ritual.”



Vinson Dargatz is shown with one of his prize catches.

“We always have a lot of fun” he said. “We used to just bring a portable shack out on the ice and sit on some buckets while we fished. But now that we’ve gotten older, softer and a little smarter, we have an Ice Castle and we fish and hang out and grill some burgers.”

Number of two-person fishing teams competing

551

in last year's Mobridge Ice Fishing Tournament

Dargatz confesses that the purchase of the 8 x 16-foot Ice Castle was actually his wife's idea. When it's time for an outdoor fishing excursion, the entire family with two boys and a girl always likes to come along. And mom insists on having adequate accommodations.

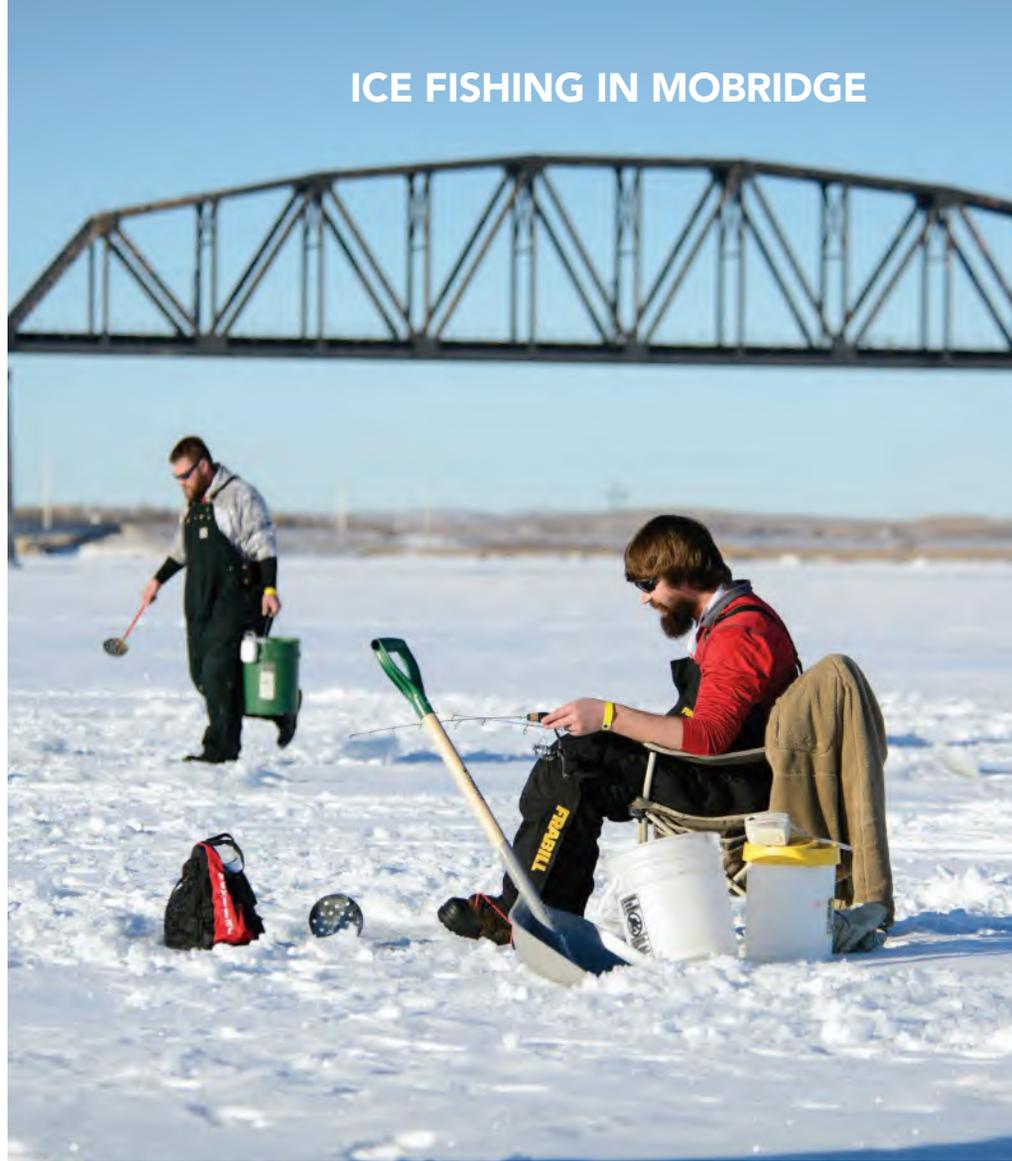
But Dargatz said when it comes to the annual winter escapes to Mobridge with the fellas, the family has to find something else to do. Besides, the town already doubles in size during tournament weekend and if every angler brought hangers-on in tow, Mobridge might expand to the size of Sioux Falls.

FILLED TO CAPACITY

Lately, the walleye population is standing less of a chance for survival against the increasing number of competitors testing their luck and skill in the annual tournament. The field has ballooned to the point of being capped at 551 two-person teams with fishermen swarming in from 16 different states.

Only so many humans can be stuffed into the town's expo center where the group events are held.

All of these developments have bewildered Jeff Jackson, one of the tournament's founders and owner of the Wrangler Inn in Mobridge. He recalls more than two decades ago sitting around the table with a group of town leaders who were trying to figure out a way to attract visitors to the area and capitalize on all the outdoor adventure the Missouri



The Mobridge Ice Fishing Tournament draws eager competitors from 16 different states.
Photo by Travel South Dakota

River and Lake Oahe have to offer.

In the first year, 50 eager contenders were lured to the event by the opportunity to claim the super grand prize of a Mr. Heater. These days, the prize list represents more than \$225,000 in assorted items such as Ice Castles, four-wheelers, a Polaris Ranger, clam shacks, \$8,000 worth of outdoor gear from Scheel's and Runnings, and more.

Anglers can keep their spot in the field if they register early in mid-July, otherwise their spot will be thrown into a lottery. Three guaranteed positions are drawn each year for those who participate in the town's summer fishing tournament, the Annual Denny Palmer Memorial Walleye Classic. Three spots are auctioned off on Ebay, which typically fetch up to \$4,000 apiece, while a

final spot is raffled off.

Last year's winners were Travis Bergstrom and Tate Merchant, who registered four fish weighing a total of 15.8 lbs. including one lunker that tipped the scales at 9.33 lbs. Jason Converse and Josh Spilde finished second with five fish weighing in at 13.4 lbs.

Dargatz already has the July 2023 registration date on his calendar and reminder notifications set to make sure he doesn't miss out. He's anticipating another adventurous outing in this year's tourney.

"I think it's great for the town to have so many people visiting and spending money. It's pretty wild that a small town can pull something like that together. They run it like a well-oiled machine and make sure everyone has a good time."

ACCEPTING SCHOLARSHIP APPLICATIONS FOR 2023

Black Hills Electric Cooperative is offering college scholarships to graduating high school seniors. Basin Electric Power Cooperative provides a \$1,000 scholarship, and Rushmore Electric accepts runner-up applications for \$500. We will also be drawing for scholarships at our Annual Meeting on June 1, 2023, in Rapid City.

You can find the application online at www.bhec.coop, or request an application to be mailed or e-mailed to you. Completed applications and supporting documents must be returned to BHEC before Friday, February 3, 2023. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact Michelle Fischer at 800-742-0085 or 605-673-4461.

DEADLINE: FEBRUARY 3, 2023
WINNER WILL BE ANNOUNCED IN APRIL

FREE TRIP TO WASHINGTON D.C.

Black Hills Electric Cooperative will sponsor a junior or senior high school student who is a dependent of a BHEC member on an all-expense-paid trip to Washington, D.C. Each June, over 1,800 high school juniors and seniors 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.

The weeklong trip will be held 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.

Each applicant must submit an essay, not to exceed 500 words, on the following topic:

"If chosen as a youth tour delegate, you will be traveling to Washington, D.C. to experience and learn about America's rich history. What moment in American history do you wish you had been a part of, and what would you have contributed?"

All essays must be typed and include a cover sheet that states the title of the essay, the applicant's name and address, name of parent or guardian, and the name of your school.

DEADLINE: MARCH 3, 2023

AVAILABLE SCHOLARSHIPS FOR DEPENDENTS OF BHEC MEMBERS:

- \$1,000 Basin Electric
- \$500 Rushmore Electric

REQUIREMENTS:

- Must be a U.S. citizen
- Has to be a dependent of a BHEC member
- The graduating senior must be planning to enroll at an accredited college, university, or technical school.

THE RECIPIENTS WILL BE CHOSEN BASED ON:

- A combination of SAT or ACT scores
- Overall grade-point average
- Personal statement of career goals
- One-page essay
- An adult appraisal

AREA MEETINGS ARE SCHEDULED FOR 2023

February is a time many of us at Black Hills Electric Cooperative look forward to – a chance to visit with many of our members while enjoying a bowl of soup and scrumptious desserts.

Directors and employees of BHEC have been co-sponsoring area meetings for almost 35 years. Area meetings allow cooperative personnel to show the co-op’s appreciation to its members.

Each year the co-op teams up with local civic organizations to co-sponsor a free meal. The organization provides the food, and the cooperative sends a monetary donation. Any donations collected during the area meeting are given to the civic organization co-hosting the meeting.

Plan to bring your family and join your neighbors and friends at one of the locations listed below!



Meal will be served from 5:30 - 6:30 p.m. at all meetings.

AREA MEETING	DATE	LOCATION	CO-SPONSOR
Oelrichs	February 9th	Oelrichs Community Hall	Oelrichs Rodeo Association
Rockerville	February 10th	Rockerville Community Hall	Rockerville Community Club
Johnson Siding	February 16th	Rimrock Community Center	Rimrock Community Club
Whispering Pines	February 20th	Whispering Pines VFD	Whispering Pines VFD
Hermosa	February 23th	Hermosa Elementary School	Battle Creek Fire District
Rochford	April 7th	Rochford Community Hall	Rochford Community Club



WINTER OUTDOOR FUN

The chill of winter doesn't keep outdoors enthusiasts from finding adventure at Farm Island Recreation Area. *Photos by Travel South Dakota*

Winter adventure-seekers find wonder in the chilly outdoors

Billy Gibson

billy.gibson@sdrea.coop

Mental health counselors have discovered that seasonal affective disorder can be much more than just a harmless case of the blahs - it's a real condition that afflicts millions of people when the daylight diminishes and the temps turn colder.

They also agree that one way to defend against the winter doldrums is to get out of the house, embrace the crisp invigorating air and enjoy all the season has to offer.

It doesn't take much time or effort to create a list of fun things to do to get the blood pumping and the spirit soaring. Stepping away from a stuffy den and going outside to build a snowman, hike a nature trail, roast marshmallows over a bonfire and engage in other activities with family and friends can help bring back some

mental and emotional balance.

Nick Harrington of South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks said his department is eager to accommodate anyone looking to extract some fun from the chill of winter.

Harrington notes that many of the state's 50-plus public camping and recreation areas are open for attendance during the long winter months, although some facilities are closed in an effort to protect delicate nesting habitats

for eagles and other species of wildlife.

Some comfort stations may close down during winter but the state has modern lodges available with amenities such as heaters and running water, including cabins, suites and group lodges for cold-weather outdoor vacationing.

Harrington said that while many vacationers from far and wide flock to South Dakota in the summertime, the state boasts more than 1,500 miles of nature trails for cold-weather adventurers to discover and is one



Fat-tire biking in Spearfish Canyon

8 WINTER WONDERLANDS FOR OUTDOOR ADVENTURE

- * Wind Cave National Park, Hot Springs
- * Snake Creek Recreation Area, Platte
- * Palisades State Park, Garretson
- * Custer State Park Spur, Custer
- * Randall Creek SRA, Pickstown
- * Pelican Lake, Pelican Township
- * Farm Island SRA, Pierre
- * Oakwood Lakes State Park, Bruce



Time spent outdoors during the winter can be beneficial to mental and physical well-being.

of the nation's top attractions for snowmobiling, snowshoeing, hiking, fat-tire biking and many other off-season outdoor adventures.

"Some people just enjoy getting out in the cold weather. They like the changing of the seasons we get in our region and they're always looking for new opportunities to explore what we have to offer without a lot of crowds," Harrington said. "It's already a beautiful state, but winter really changes the look of the landscape and is a big draw for many people looking for outdoor fun."

World-renowned summertime attractions such as the iconic Mount Rushmore and Crazy Horse destinations take on an entirely different appeal during the snowy season. The Badlands geological formations, Ponderosa pine forests, open prairies, secluded lakes and

scenic waterways become even more alluring for landscape photographers, bird-watchers, hikers and wildlife enthusiasts when set against a charming and aesthetically pleasing wintry backdrop.

One of the most highly-attended state park destinations during both the summer and winter is Custer State Park with its 71,000 acres of trails, spectacular vistas and pristine lakes. The site is open year-round and during winter offers a wide array of things to see and do.

But there is still lots to explore across the state, including the more centrally situated Farm Island Recreation Area located four miles east of Pierre. Considered one of the park system's best-kept secrets, Farm Island sits nestled along the banks of Lake Sharpe

and the Missouri River and welcomes many winter guests who enjoy majestic glowing sunsets, ice fishing, eight miles of hiking trails, cross-country skiing and exploring the perfect natural habitat for birdwatching. There's also RV, primitive and cabin camping opportunities available.

For more ideas on how to plan trip and shake off the winter blues, check out this handy guide: www.travelsouthdakota.com/winter.

And after deciding on your winter vacation plans, don't forget to pack the following along with the rest of your cold-weather gear:

- Wool base layer
- Fleece mid-layer
- Windproof outer layer
- Waterproof boots
- Warm hat, scarf, gloves and socks.



BUILDING A BETTER FUTURE

Habitat for Humanity is active in all 50 states and 70 countries around the world. *Photos by Habitat for Humanity*

Habitat for Humanity builds homes and hope one family at a time

Billy Gibson

billy.gibson@sdrea.coop

Habitat for Humanity homes have walls that can talk. Well, they don't actually vocalize, but they do carry messages of hope and inspiration.

There's a time-honored tradition that calls for Habitat volunteers to take a break from their carpentry work and jot down personal notes on studs and sheets of plywood before the materials are nailed into place.

The simple scribbles are intended to infuse the space with messages of hope, harmony and good fortune showered upon those family members who will soon call the dwelling home.

"May all who enter this home as guests, leave as family," reads one brief affirmation rendered in green with a fat felt-tipped marker.

"Smile through the darkness. It will always bring light," reads another message of encouragement.

Some notes are based on Biblical scriptures: "Walk by faith, not by sight."

Still others recite Bible verses verbatim such as John 3:16, Jeremiah 29:11 and other familiar passages that share the promise of a bountiful future.

School-age volunteers are also quick to get in on the act. While the adults are busy at work with nail guns and power saws, the kids are taking permanent markers and drawing colorful images of sunbeams, flowers, hearts, backyard playgrounds, church crosses and whatever comes to mind. Inside the walls of one Habitat home in Mitchell there happens to be a sketch of a Happy Meal from McDonald's, complete with a fully-dressed hamburger, fries and a drink.

If nothing else, these personal postings serve as reminders of the passion that Habitat volunteers put into their work.

Bon Homme Yankton Electric Board Member Rick Cheloha currently has a compensated "retirement job" as a construction supervisor with his local affiliate but plans to step down soon and continue on as a volunteer.

Before moving to Tabor several years ago, he volunteered with the affiliate in Columbus, Neb., while working full-time as a construction manager with Loupe River Electric.

"I've been involved in 10 projects and none of them would have been possible without the help of volunteers and others who support the program in so many ways. Some people think we build free houses, but that's not true. They have to pay for the house, but they can qualify for a zero percent loan."

Patrick Soukup, manager of member services and marketing at Central Electric in Mitchell, is president of his local Habitat affiliate. Mitchell Regional HFH is one of eight affiliates in South Dakota, representing the global program that was founded in 1976 and serves in all 50 states and 70 countries.

Soukup said the Mitchell crew is on the cusp of completing its ninth home. He remembers the smile on the faces of new homeowner Sonja Wells and her family when they participated in a "nail pounding" ceremony during the construction process last November.

Volunteers, family members and supporters were on hand as Fr. Yamato



Above/left, Patrick Soukup works at the Mitchell Regional HFH plant sale, while volunteers write special messages to future homeowners.

Icochea prayed over the property, the Wells family and the many participants who donated their time and resources to make the project come to fruition.

Soukup said he is sold on the merits of the ecumenical Christian housing ministry, which conducts thorough screenings of housing candidates and requires homeowners to invest considerable “sweat equity” into the homebuilding projects.

“It’s very fulfilling for everyone involved to see a home build take shape and to see so many people put their

hearts and souls into something like this to improve the lives of others. It really makes a difference, it has a direct impact, and you can get a sense of that as you get to know the homeowners and the volunteers during the different stages in the process.”

Local HFH affiliates apply some creativity to raise funds for their projects. The Mitchell affiliate holds an annual plant sale in the town square. The Brookings affiliate stages an annual gala called “Nail the Runway” which is billed as a “construction-based fashion show with a twist.” The twist happens to be that all fashions must be designed from raw construction materials.

Participants try their best to strut down the runway with grace while outfitted in pieces of tile, wood, landscaping fabric, wallpaper, nails and anything else they can drag out of the tool shed. This year’s event is set for March 18 at the Swiftel Center in Brookings.

Dan McColley is Executive Director and Lead Mission Officer for the Brookings HFH. He admits that he stole – um, “admired and acquired” - the fashion show idea from an affiliate in Rochester, MN. McColley got his start with HFH as a volunteer at the Northwoods ReStore in Bemidji, MN. He gave up his financially rewarding day job as an operations manager to

join Habitat full-time and relocated to Brookings six years ago.

For McColley, his work with Habitat is very personal. He chokes up when describing how his father and mother worked multiple jobs to make ends meet for the family of seven.

“We would have qualified for a Habitat home,” he said, noting that the Brookings group has approved 84 homeowners since 1995. “If I can do anything to lift that burden for another family, that’s what this job means to me. Every day, it’s coming to work and trying to give others an opportunity to have the benefit of home ownership. We celebrate what we’ve done, then we look for ways to do more.”

One family that stands out for McColley involved a mother and daughter who lived together. The daughter required ADA accommodations.

“She told us she needed soft carpeting because her wheelchair wouldn’t fit through the front door and she got rug burns having to crawl around the house,” he said. “We were able to build a home that was ADA compliant where she could use her wheelchair, open cabinets easily and cook without getting burned. The work we do transforms the lives of our homebuyers, our staff, our donors, our volunteers and our communities.”



The annual “Nail the Runway” event staged by the Brookings Area HFH is a “fashion show with a twist.”

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Black Hills Stock Show & Rodeo
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JAN. 27 - FEB. 4
Annual Black Hills Stock Show & Rodeo
Central States Fairgrounds and The Monument
Tickets may be purchased online and at the gate
Rapid City, SD
605-355-3861

JAN. 28
K9 Keg Pull
On-site registration
10:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m.
Deadwood Street by Outlaw Square
Deadwood, SD

FEB. 3-4
TOOTSIE
Show Dates:
Feb. 3, 7:30 p.m.
Feb. 4, 2 p.m.
Feb. 4, 7:30 p.m.
Washington Pavilion
Sioux Falls, SD

FEB. 10-11
Mardi Gras Weekend
Mardi Gras Events & Parade sponsored by Deadwood Chamber of Commerce
Main Street
Deadwood, SD

FEB. 11
Songs of Romance
7:30 p.m.
Washington Pavilion
Sioux Falls, SD

MAR. 4
Annual Ag Day
9 a.m.-1 p.m.
Washington Pavilion
Sioux Falls, SD

JAN. 1
American Legion Post 15 Pancake Breakfast
8:30 a.m.-12 p.m.
South Dakota Military Heritage Alliance Building
1600 W. Russell St.
Sioux Falls, SD

JAN. 13-14
ON YOUR FEET! THE MUSICAL
Show Dates:
Jan. 13, 7:30 p.m.
Jan. 14, 2 p.m.
Jan. 14, 7:30 p.m.
Washington Pavilion
Sioux Falls, SD

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

JAN. 14
Chinook Days Winter Carnival
10 a.m.-2 p.m.
Big Hill
Spearfish, SD

JAN. 20
Rapid Valley UMC Soup Supper
4:30 p.m.-7 p.m.
Rapid City, SD

JAN. 21
Lakota Games on Ice
1 p.m.-4 p.m.
Mitchell Prehistoric Indian Village
Mitchell, SD

JAN. 27-28
Annual Deadwood Pro Snocross Races
Jan. 27, 12:50 p.m.
Jan. 28, 8:25 a.m.
Days of '76 Rodeo Grounds
Deadwood, SD

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

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