

# COOPERATIVE CONNECTIONS



## Crisp Breezes and Corn Mazes

Autumn Family Fun  
Pages 8-9

Rodeo Champions  
Pages 12-13

# Why Is My Power Out?

## Understanding the Causes of Outages



Walker Witt - CEO  
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I was grocery shopping this past week when a member approached me. She said that her power went out earlier that week and wanted to know if I knew why. Although one of the first things I do each morning is look at each of our outage dispatch tickets from the previous night, I couldn't recall her specific outage. When I got to the office the next morning, I looked up her outage and found that it resulted from a squirrel getting into something it shouldn't have.

Your cooperative, especially your operations and engineering crew, take outages and outage mitigation very seriously. Your System Coordinator, Jesse Sorenson, tracks and compiles each outage, and a monthly report is included in your directors' monthly board book. The report identifies the cause of each outage, the number of members affected, and the total elapsed time of each outage.

During June and July, the most significant cause of outages were small animals and birds. During those two months, there were 34 outages that resulted from squirrels and birds. Squirrels are a problem throughout the year, but the hot and dry summer has resulted in an unusual number of bird-related outages. Some of you may have noticed the significant number of starlings on the power lines. This year, it is especially prevalent around ponds or stock wells. To mitigate the issue, our linemen put on what is called cover-up in areas of high bird concentrations. That helps, but only partially eliminates the issue. The crews also put sheet metal at the bottom of the poles to prevent squirrels, raccoons, and cats from climbing the poles, but squirrels often jump from trees onto the wires.

**During June and July, the most significant cause of outages were small animals and birds.**

The next most significant cause of outages this past June and July was lightning, which resulted in 18 outages. Hail is also a leading cause of outages during the summer months. There was one large animal-caused outage, which was the result of cattle rubbing on a guy wire. To mitigate the cattle issues, your crews place posts next to the guy wires. We had three member-caused outages, of which two were member dig-ins. Please call 811 prior to doing any digging or trenching. We had one outage due to a firewood gatherer dropping a tree on a line.

Last but certainly not least, we had one dead tree fall into a line. A member noticed the tree and called us. Thank you! Although we patrol all of our lines yearly and are constantly looking for danger trees, with millions of trees within striking distance of our lines, we may miss one, or it dies between the time of our patrols.

As I am writing this column in the first part of August, it is only 11:00 AM, and it is 95 degrees out. I don't want to write another article on the "F" word, so I will touch on it briefly. As I have said and written numerous

times, the greatest risk to our co-op is fire. Although millions of dollars have been and are being spent on fire mitigation, we can use your help. Please call

immediately if you see anything that doesn't look right along or in our lines and rights-of-way. If you need to cut a tree that could fall into our lines, please give us a call and we will come and access it. I hope by the time you read this column, it has been raining for a week, and we can't wait for it to warm up.

P.S. The strangest outage so far this summer happened just two days ago on August 1st. A fuse went out, and after the crew patrolled the line and couldn't find the cause, they climbed the pole to check the hardware. They found a snake that had been dropped, probably by a raptor, on top of the riser, which caused the outage.

Enjoy the remainder of the summer and the beginning of fall. Be safe!

## COOPERATIVE CONNECTIONS

### BLACK HILLS ELECTRIC

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# IS YOUR CONTACT INFORMATION ACCURATE?

Ensuring that we have the most current and accurate information on your account is essential for providing you with the best possible service. We rely on up-to-date contact details to keep you informed about outages, maintenance, billing, and other important notifications. Here's why keeping your information current is crucial and how you can update your account.

## WHY IT'S IMPORTANT TO KEEP YOUR INFORMATION UPDATED

- 1. Timely Notifications:** With accurate contact information, we can promptly notify you about planned maintenance, outages, and service interruptions, minimizing any inconvenience.
- 2. Efficient Service:** Up-to-date information helps us respond quickly to your service requests and ensures we can reach you when necessary.
- 3. Billing Accuracy:** Correct billing addresses and contact details ensure that your bills and payment confirmations reach you without delay, helping you avoid any late fees or missed payments.
- 4. Emergency Situations:** In the event of an emergency, having your current phone number and e-mail address allows us to communicate urgent messages effectively.

## HOW TO UPDATE YOUR INFORMATION

- 1. Member Service:** Call our member service team at 800-742-0085 or 605-673-4461. Our representatives will be happy to help you update your account information.
- 2. In-Person:** Visit our office at 25191 Cooperative Way in Custer, S.D. Our staff will help you update your details on the spot.
- 3. Via E-mail:** Send an e-mail to [bhec@bhec.coop](mailto:bhec@bhec.coop) with the appropriate changes. We may ask additional questions to verify identity.
- 4. On the Back of Your Billing Stub:** If you receive paper billing statements, you can submit any changes on the back of the billing stub and submit it with your payment.

Keeping your account information current helps us serve you better. We appreciate your cooperation and are here to assist you with any questions or concerns.

Thank you for being a valued member of Black Hills Electric Cooperative!

LABOR  
DAY

OFFICE CLOSED

MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 2ND

# WHEN THUNDER ROARS, GO INDOORS

Each year in the United States, there are about 25 million cloud-to-ground lightning flashes and about 300 people struck by lightning. Of those struck, about 30 people are killed and others suffer lifelong disabilities. Most of these tragedies can be prevented. When thunderstorms threaten, get inside a building with plumbing and electricity, or a hard-topped metal vehicle!

The National Weather Service collects information on weather-related deaths to learn how to prevent these tragedies. Many lightning victims say they were “caught” outside in the storm and couldn’t get to a safe place. Other victims simply waited too long before seeking shelter. With proper planning, similar tragedies can be avoided.

Some people were struck because they went back outside too soon. Stay inside a safe building or vehicle for at least 30 minutes after you hear the last thunder. While 30 minutes may seem like a long time, it is necessary to be safe.

Finally, some victims were struck inside homes or buildings while they were using electrical equipment or corded phones. Others were in contact with plumbing, outside doors, or window frames. Avoid contact with these electrical conductors when a thunderstorm is nearby.

## AVOID THE LIGHTNING THREAT

- **Have a lightning safety plan.** Know where you’ll go for safety and ensure you’ll have enough time to get there.
- **Postpone activities.** Consider postponing activities if thunderstorms are forecasted.
- **Monitor the weather.** Once outside, look for signs of a developing or approaching thunderstorm such as towering clouds, darkening skies, or flashes of lightning.

- **Get to a safe place.** If you hear thunder, even a distant rumble, seek safety immediately. Fully enclosed buildings with wiring and plumbing are best. A hard-topped metal vehicle with the windows closed is also safe. Stay inside until 30 minutes after the last rumble of thunder. Sheds, picnic shelters, tents or covered porches do NOT protect you from lightning.
- **If you hear thunder, don’t use a corded phone except in an emergency.** Cordless phones and cell phones are safe to use.
- **Keep away from electrical equipment and plumbing.** Lightning can travel through the wiring and plumbing if your building is struck. Don’t take a bath or shower, or wash dishes during a storm.

*Source: National Weather Service*



### Power Line Safety “Don’t Fly Kites Close to Power Lines”

#### Lillee Pannell, Age 11

Lillee Pannell cautions kite flyers to be careful around power lines. Great advice, Lillee! Hobie’s parents are Scottie and Kimberly Pannell, members of Southeastern Electric Cooperative.

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

# Summertime SWEETS

## SUMMER FRUIT TART

### Ingredients:

1 refrigerated pie crust  
1 egg white, lightly beaten  
1/3 cup sugar  
2 tbsps. cornstarch  
1/2 tsp. cinnamon  
1/4 tsp. ginger  
2 cups sliced peeled peaches,  
(about 3 peaches)  
1 cup blueberries  
1/2 tsp. vanilla extract

### Method

Preheat oven to 425 degrees. Prepare crust as directed on package. Place on foil-lined 12-inch pizza pan. If necessary, press out any folds or creases. Brush crust with about 1/2 of the beaten egg white. Mix sugar, cornstarch, cinnamon and ginger in medium bowl. Add fruit and vanilla; toss gently. Spoon into center of crust, spreading to within 2 inches of edges. Fold 2-inch edge of crust up over fruit, pleating or folding crust as needed. Brush crust with remaining egg white. Bake 20 minutes or until crust is golden brown. Cool slightly before serving.

McCormick

## RHUBARB PIE

### Crust

1-2 cups flour  
1/2 stick butter or margarine  
1/4 cup water

Add ingredients and knead to complete a pie crust. Amounts will vary due to humidity. Knead dough into pie pan and poke holes into the bottom as needed. You may make creative edges as you wish, however it is not necessary.

### Pie

3 tbsps. butter or margarine  
1 cup sugar  
3 eggs, separated  
2 tbsps. flour  
1/8 tsp. salt  
2 1/2 cups rhubarb  
Smucker's Caramel Sundae  
Syrup

Soften butter or margarine and stir together with the sugar, egg yolks, flour and salt. Beat egg whites until stiff. Add rhubarb and fold in the egg whites. Add the filling to the 8-inch unbaked pie crust. You may add a drizzle of Smucker's sundae syrup for additional flavoring before baking. Bake in oven set at 400 degrees until golden brown. You may also add more Caramel syrup to pie after baking for ultimate effect.

Lisa Soukup (Kummer)  
Tea, S.D.

## PEACH DELIGHT

### Ingredients:

1/2 cup butter, melted  
1 3/4 cups flour  
Pinch of salt  
2 tbsps. sugar  
2 cups water  
2 cups sugar  
4 tbsps. cornstarch  
3 oz. package peach jello  
1 tbsp. butter  
10 fresh peaches

### Method

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Combine butter, flour, salt and 2 tbsps. sugar. Mix and pat in 9x13 inch pan which has been sprayed with Pam. Bake for 15 minutes. Let cool when done baking. Combine 2 cups sugar and 2 cups water. Whisk in 4 tbsps. cornstarch until smooth. Cook until thickened in the microwave – stirring often. Remove from microwave and add 1 tbsp. butter and package of peach jello (do not add any water). Stir until dissolved and let cool. While cooling, dip fresh peaches in hot water and plunge in cold water bath. Remove skins and pits. Place back in cold water until all peaches are peeled. Drain peaches, slice into bite size pieces and mix into cooled peach glaze. Carefully pour the glaze over the crust and chill until firmly set. May be served with whip cream. You can substitute strawberry jello and sliced strawberries in place of the peaches. This makes a delicious cool summer dessert.

Shirley Fletcher  
Rapid City, S.D.

Please send your favorite recipes to your local electric cooperative (address found on Page 3). Each recipe printed will be entered into a drawing for a prize in December 2024. All entries must include your name, mailing address, phone number and cooperative name.

# Federal Tax Credits, Incentives and Rebates for Efficiency Upgrades



**Miranda Boutelle**  
Efficiency Services  
Group

**Q:** How do I use federal tax credits and rebates to upgrade my home?

**A:** Tax credits and rebates can help bridge the affordability gap to higher efficiency equipment for your home, allowing you to complete energy efficiency upgrades that can lower your energy use and save you money in years to come.

First, knowing the difference between a tax credit and rebate is important. A rebate is a payment for purchasing or installing a qualified product or home improvement. Depending on how the rebate program is set up, it may be provided at the time of purchase or applied for and received after installation. Check with your electric cooperative to see if they offer rebates. Typically, the rebate is applied as a credit on your electric bill. In some cases, the rebate is provided a cash payment to those who complete eligible projects.

A tax credit is a dollar-for-dollar amount that taxpayers can report on their tax documents to reduce the amount of taxes owed. You apply for a tax credit when you file your tax documents, so it typically takes longer to reap the benefits than it does with a rebate.

According to ENERGY STAR®, homeowners can qualify for up to \$3,200 annually in federal tax credits for energy efficiency upgrades. Federal tax credits are available for heating and cooling system upgrades, including heat pumps, furnaces, central air conditioners, boilers and geothermal heat pumps. Tax credits for ENERGY STAR®-rated heat pump water heaters cover 30% of the project cost, up to \$2,000. You can also improve your home's envelope – the portion of the home that separates the inside from the outside – with tax credits for insulation, windows and skylights.

If an energy efficiency upgrade requires improving the electrical panel in your home, there's a tax credit for that, too. You can receive 30% of the cost of the

panel upgrade, up to \$600.

These federal tax credits are available through 2032. You must own the home you're upgrading, and it must be your primary residence. Federal tax credits only apply to existing homes in the United States, not new construction.

The Inflation Reduction Act of 2022 expanded available funding for many home upgrades. The act allocated \$8.8 million for home rebate programs to be implemented at the state level, and this funding is offered in two different programs. The HOMES program allows up to \$8,000 per home for standard-income households. Higher rebates are available for low- to moderate-income households. The HEAR program offers rebates of up to \$14,000 per home for qualified, efficient electric equipment for low- to moderate-income households.

These programs are designed to bolster existing programs and should be available in late 2024 or early 2025. Check with your electric cooperative or state office to find out if they are being offered in your state.

Additional energy efficiency rebates might also be available. More than half of U.S. states require energy efficiency programs for residents, according to the American Council for an Energy-Efficient Economy. These programs can help people save money on their electric bills and help states meet climate goals, reduce system costs and improve the electric grid.

I have had the privilege of working in energy efficiency rebate programs for many years and have seen the benefits of these programs firsthand. Tax credit and rebate programs can make upgrades more affordable – helping people save money and improve the overall comfort of their homes.





Photo credit: Jackie Jensen

# LISA LOCKHART

## Winning at What She Loves While Enjoying a Beloved American Pastime

Jocelyn Johnson

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It's been her hustle and passion since she was six years old, and it's made her one of the best competitors in the world. South Dakota's Lisa Lockhart is an elite barrel racer from Oelrichs, S.D., and in her own words, "There is no off-season."

Dandy was the little Shetland pony that gave Lockhart her start on her family farm in Montana. She recounted her memories of racing him around her parent's yard and signing up for local rodeo events with him.

"I was definitely a horse-crazy little girl from the get-go," Lockhart said. "My pony was my babysitter in the

front yard."

Even though opportunities were limited in the early '70s when she started rodeo, Lockhart became a success story through dedication, lots of practice and the help of her family. She credits her sisters, Debbie and Angela, for being the pioneers of barrel racing in her own family as well as her husband, Grady, for his ongoing support.

"We enjoy it as a family," Lockhart said. "Grady was a calf roper, and we actually met at a rodeo. We're best friends and have like interests... it takes a village, and I am thankful for the village. It's definitely a team effort. I couldn't do it by myself."

Along with their kids – Alyssa,

Thane and Cade – the Lockharts have enjoyed rodeo and bonded over the experiences, conversations and goals they share.

Lockhart trains and buys her competitive horses but explains that having history and longevity with a horse impacts the level of success she has with them. She noted that having a personal bond with each horse not only impacts their performance but is also something she enjoys.

"They are such unique individuals, just like humans are," Lockhart explained. "Being able to tap into that personal relationship with each horse has an impact on our level of success. I love these equine athletes."

She's pocketed a handful of reserve world championships, three American Rodeo championships and more than \$3.1 million in career earnings; but Lockhart's current goal is to make it to her 18th consecutive National Finals Rodeo.

"I have a passion for the horses and am a competitive person by nature," Lockhart noted. "Your horsepower dictates where you go and how successful you may be. I'm always going to ride horses and I'm always going to train horses – I love it, but the level of competition I can attain depends on my horsepower. Sometimes, you got to go through a lot of horses to try and find the next champion."

Lockhart expounded that success is earned through training and passion. The horse matters, but the dedication of the racer will dictate how far they go.

When asked what her advice would be to young racers, Lockhart stated: "I think there is a lot of opportunity out there for people to learn – with technology. Educate yourself and spend the time practicing it. Knowledge is at your fingertips. Just like everything in life, if you want it, you have to work for it. It's not handed to you."



# CRISP BREEZES AND CORN MAZES

A broken-down 1950s-style Chevrolet pickup welcomes visitors to the Back Forty Beef corn maze. *Photo submitted by Back Forty Beef.*

## Celebrating Autumn on the Family Farm

**Frank Turner**

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The first signs of autumn sweep across the plains as daylight dwindles and treetops wither into amber. For some, the nostalgia of fall is evoked by the first crisp breeze at a football game or the taste of a freshly picked apple from the orchard. But for Clint and Kelly Brandlee, Lake Region Electric members living in rural Pierpont, the magic of the harvest season begins with the opening of their family-owned corn maze.

The Brandlee family homesteaded their land in 1886 on the western edge of the Coteau Hills, an area characterized by rolling hills, fertile ground and native pastures. With deep roots extending through five generations of ranching and farming, Clint and Kelly's daughters, Jaycee

and Kylie, represent the sixth generation on the farm.

Over the years, the family has maintained their commitment to traditional farming values while embracing innovation. In 2020, Clint and Kelly

transformed their operation into a direct-to-consumer agriculture business, launching Back Forty Beef, LLC. Their new venture allowed them to provide locally raised beef at a fair price while giving customers the opportunity to see



Back Forty Beef hosts a number of family-friendly events including duck races. *Photo submitted by Back Forty Beef.*



how their animals and crops are raised, from farm to table.

“During the pandemic, people were looking for a direct source for their beef, and we wanted to provide that,” Kelly said.

Through Back Forty Beef, Clint and Kelly supplied their area with local beef and discovered new ways to engage their community. Just last year, the two started an annual tradition by planting a 12-acre, agriculture-themed corn maze as a way to bring something new to their part of the state. In just a year, the maze has become a hub for families to come together and celebrate agriculture and the harvest season.

“We wanted to do something really fun and get families outside in northeastern South Dakota during the fall, and what better way to do that than through a corn maze?” Kelly said. “It’s a way for us to share our passion for agriculture and our story. As a population, we are getting two to three generations removed from the farm. There is less of a connection to rural life, so any time we can provide people an opportunity to get out onto the farm and learn something, that benefits the whole of agriculture.”

This fall, Clint and Kelly are again inviting their surrounding communities to visit their homestead and explore this year’s newly designed maze. The maze is set to be open to the public every weekend after



A bird’s-eye view of last year’s Back Forty Beef corn maze. Photo submitted by Back Forty Beef.

Labor Day to the last week of October. The theme is pollinators, featuring images of a corn cob, flower, bee and barn. Several twists and turns will be embellished with fun facts about pollinators and crop production in South Dakota, making it an educational experience for all ages.

Along with the corn maze, Back Forty Beef is planning to incorporate other family-friendly activities, including duck races, farm animal exhibits, farm basketball, a straw mountain slide and more. Back Forty Beef will also host a farm store where customers can buy everything from local pumpkins to their homegrown beef.

Other local businesses are also joining

in the fun. A different local food truck is scheduled to attend each weekend during the open season, and local businesses are offering small discounts and deals for participants who complete the maze.

“There are checkpoints in the maze, and each checkpoint is equipped with a fun fact and a partnered local business,” said Kelly. “For example, Dairy Queen is offering a buy one, get one free offer for those who hole punch their card at their checkpoint and read the fun fact about pollinators and production agriculture.”

Clint and Kelly’s efforts to engage the community have resulted in a community that engages with their business. Like many other direct-to-consumer operations, Back Forty Beef has its own website and online shop for its brand of beef, dairy products, merchandise and even hand-poured tallow candles. The Brandlee family has also found success through their beef subscription club where boxes are regularly delivered to the doorsteps of customers every month. Whether it’s through the corn maze or the subscription beef boxes, Kelly said the local community has fully embraced Back Forty Beef.

“We had a lot of people who attended that had never done a corn maze before, so a lot of people were excited to do something new and different,” said Kelly. “We had a great turnout to our maze last year, and that’s why we decided to do it again.”



Owner-operators of Back Forty Beef, Kelly and Clint Brandlee and their two daughters, Jaycee and Kylie. Photo submitted by Back Forty Beef.



# Connecting with Communities

**Michelle Fischer**  
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Our commitment to community goes beyond providing reliable electric service. We take pride in participating in local events, engaging with our members, and promoting safety. Recently, we had the pleasure of joining in the fun at fairs, Rochford Day, and our very own Co-op Day. Here's a recap of our activities and highlights from these events.

## FAIRS: CONNECTING WITH OUR COMMUNITIES

The cooperative has been a long-time supporter of local fairs and helped serve the complimentary kick-off suppers at both the Fall River County and Custer County Fairs. We enjoy the opportunity to engage with our members and community.



Front row L-R: Jim Preston, Alan Bishop, Don Andersen, Michelle Fischer, Jeff Barnes, and Bill Brisk. Back row L-R: Jesse Sorenson, Gary Kluthe, and Dennis Quivey at the Custer County Fair.



L-R: Don Andersen, Sammi Langendorf, Bill Brisk, Michelle Fischer, and Dennis Quivey at the Fall River County Fair.



Manager of Operations Bill Brisk visiting about electrical safety at Rochford Days.



Foreman Beau Bradeen giving a bucket truck ride.



Youngsters observing what electricity can do to internal organs. (Disclosure - this is just a grapefruit!)

**ROCHFORD DAYS: PROMOTING ELECTRICAL SAFETY**

Safety is a cornerstone of our mission at BHEC and Rochford Days offered the perfect platform to promote electrical safety to the community. Our team conducted engaging safety demonstrations and provided valuable information to help members stay safe around electricity. We also offered “almost” lavish swag for the participants. Attendees learned how to stay safe near power lines and what to do if your vehicle collides with a power pole.



MSR Stephanie Zacher engaging with attendees at Rochford Days.

for a day filled with fun, food, and fellowship. We expressed our gratitude with a complimentary meal, activities, and a rather WARM atmosphere. We also took this opportunity to educate the audience on electrical safety with the high-voltage safety trailer.

A group of FFA (Future Farmers of America) students helped serve the meal, and representatives of the United Way offered root beer floats and sundaes for a free-will donation.

Our members are at the heart of everything we do. Events like these help us strengthen our connection with the community and reaffirm our commitment to safety, service, and sustainability. We are grateful for the opportunity to engage with our members and look forward to continuing to serve you with excellence.

The FFA students L-R: Colter Gerard, Leighton Sander, Addie Sander, & Kylee Ellerton.



United Way representatives serving root beer floats and sundaes.

Thank you to everyone who joined us at the fairs, Rochford Days, and Co-op Day. Your participation and support make our cooperative stronger and more vibrant.

For more information about our events and services, please visit our website at [www.bhec.coop](http://www.bhec.coop) or contact our office at 800-742-0085 or 605-673-4461.

Together, we light up our community!

**CO-OP DAY: CELEBRATING OUR MEMBERS & COMMUNITY**

Our 3rd Annual Co-op Day was a heartfelt celebration dedicated to appreciating our members and community. This special event brought together the community



Keith Burden blessed us with his musical talents.



Journeyman Lineman Dominick Schouler pulling an arc from the high-voltage safety trailer.



Photo credit: Carl Hansen (Co-op Day)



# RODEO CHAMPIONS

## Short Go Finalists Win Touchstone Energy Shirts During the State Competition in Ft. Pierre

**Jocelyn Johnson**  
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South Dakota’s electric cooperatives united in celebrating rodeo on June 15 during the state high school competition in Ft. Pierre, S.D. Cowboys and cowgirls competed in events that mimic the daily chores of a typical rancher, racing to place in the Short Go.

Short Go state finalists earned the coveted Touchstone Energy shirts that mark them as the top competitors of a beloved rural pastime. After a season of competing, the visual representation of wearing this shirt is

more than a fashion statement. “These shirts are almost like a trophy,” said Kylee Ellerton, a member of Black Hills Electric Cooperative in Custer, S.D. “It’s something you can keep and look back on to remember.”

Ellerton earned the Short Go shirt, sponsored by Touchstone Energy electric cooperatives. She won 10th place in goat tying at state.

“My grandpa and dad grew up rodeoing,” Ellerton said. “So, I got started in rodeo pretty young.”

High school rodeo events began in 1949, and by 1951, South Dakota was among five states that established the National High School Rodeo

Mataya Ward keeps her eyes on a goat she tied during the Short Go. Photo credit: Charles Minor

Association. It’s a shared heritage for many in the state, and electric cooperatives have a 22-year history of celebrating rodeo by sponsoring the Touchstone Energy Short Go Shirt program. More than \$150,000 has been given to this program since 2002, and these funds are used to honor the contestants who make it to the Short Go round



Photo credit: Charles Minor



Kailey Deknikker rounds a Touchstone Energy barrel during the state Short Go in barrel racing. Photo credit: 4-C Photography

of the state finals competition in their respective events.

Kailey Deknikker, member of Southeastern Electric Cooperative in Lennox, S.D., has a passion for rodeo and wishes to go as far as she can in the sport. She will be attending Mitchell Technical College this fall for business management and joining

the college rodeo team in barrel racing and pole bending.

“The shirt shows that your hard work paid off,” explained Deknikker after placing in the Short Go and winning a Touchstone Energy Short Go shirt. “It shows your accomplishment.”

Decknikker placed 7th in barrel

racing after running a time of 18.246 seconds in the 1st Go, 17.802 seconds in the 2nd Go, and 18.078 seconds in the Short Go.

Leighton Sander, a member of Black Hills Electric Cooperative in Custer, S.D., won 6th place in the bareback riding Short Go competition. Sander works with his family on a cow/calf operation outside of Custer, S.D.

“There’s some pride that goes with wearing that Short Go shirt,” said Sander. “You go to a rodeo and see a couple people wearing those shirts outside of the high school season, and you think, ‘they must have been good enough to make it to the Short Go – I better watch that guy.’”

Sander explained that his draw to one of the toughest events in the sport of rodeo is the adrenaline rush. He hopes to use his bareback riding skills in future horse training efforts while noting, “being able to stick to a horse is important.”

“I don’t know how to explain it,” Sander said. “It’s super scary before you start, but once you climb into that chute and they open up the gate, it’s like eating your favorite cake.”



Finalists wear Touchstone Energy Short Go shirts. Photo credit: Charles Minor



# FROM FARM TO LODGE

A group of hunters showcase their success after a day of hunting on Larry Schecher's land. Photo submitted by Prairie Meadows Lodge.

## Prairie Meadows Lodge Fuels Economy and Conservation

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When a pheasant hunter travels to South Dakota, dons an orange hunting vest and steps out onto one of the state's many acres of pristine hunting land, they are doing more than just participating in local recreation and tradition; they are bolstering one of South Dakota's cornerstone industries. South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks estimates that hunting alone contributes \$683 million to the

state's economy, far exceeding the contributions from fishing and state park visitation.

Many producers across the state are enthusiastically welcoming these outdoor recreationists, including landowner Larry Schecher. Schecher is a fourth-generation, lifelong rancher, farmer and member of Grand Electric in Bison, S.D., who recently made the savvy decision to develop a private hunting lodge and accommodate hunters on his land.

So what prompted the lodge? In 2019, Schecher expanded his



Fourth-generation farmer and rancher Larry Schecher. Photo submitted by Prairie Meadows Lodge.

operation, taking the usual steps to purchase land that he had previously been leasing. The land came with one interesting perk: an outbuilding that the previous owner had used to repair and rebuild classic cars. The outbuilding became the perfect avenue for him to not only expand his operation physically but also add an entirely new revenue stream by transforming the old garage into Prairie Meadows Lodge.

“It wasn’t insulated or anything, but it was a nice enough building,” said Schecher. “We just took it to the next level and remodeled the entire interior.”

What started as a car garage quickly became a private hunting lodge on Schecher’s land, equipped with a complete kitchen and living space, two bedrooms with four beds each, an electric fireplace, and even a washer and dryer.

Yet, accommodations are only half the equation. Prairie Meadows Lodge hunts are self-guided, meaning hunters can explore the plentiful food plots, thick shelter belts and acres of brush that adorn Schecher’s land and plan their hunt accordingly. The producer estimates that he owns more than 300 acres of premier hunting land for Prairie Meadows Lodge hunts, scattered across almost 3,000 acres of farm and ranch land. The land, he said, harbors a healthy population of wild pheasants, sharp-tailed grouse and partridge.

Since starting Prairie Meadows Lodge, Schecher said he and his son, Bradley, have begun planting food plots specifically to promote healthy habitat and food sources for the wild birds on their land.

“We planted a few food plots this year with a ‘pheasant mix,’” said Schecher. “The mix includes



Prairie Meadow's Lodge welcomes pheasant hunters from across the nation. Photo submitted by Prairie Meadows Lodge.

flowering species that attract insects and milo, millet and sunflowers to produce seeds for the birds to eat. We plan to continue adding more food plots in the future to enhance our bird numbers, which have been steadily increasing over the past few years. It’s been great for being in the business of letting people hunt.”

A year after purchasing the outbuilding and preparing the land, Schecher invited hunters to test the newly renovated operation. The launch was a success, and Prairie Meadows Lodge has since hosted hunters from all over the country, including those from surrounding states and as far away as Washington, Texas and Pennsylvania, many of whom are repeat customers.

“Adding wildlife into the equation has just become another facet of being a producer,” said Schecher. “In many ways, it’s like adding another crop to the mix. It gives an incentive to create more habitat and include more conservation techniques into my operation, enhancing the ability of the wildlife to thrive and prosper.”



In 2019, Larry Schecher renovated an old garage into Prairie Meadows Lodge, a private hunting lodge for unguided pheasant hunts. Photo submitted by Prairie Meadows Lodge.

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**AUG. 28-SEPT. 2**  
**South Dakota State Fair**  
7 a.m.-8 p.m.  
Huron, SD  
[www.SDStateFair.com](http://www.SDStateFair.com)

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**SEPT. 1**  
**Studebaker Car Show**  
10 a.m.-3 p.m.  
Custer, SD  
605-673-2244

**SEPT. 2**  
**Hidewood Valley Steam Threshing Show**  
Starts at 1 p.m.  
Clear Lake, SD  
605-881-8405

**SEPT. 6-7**  
**Ribs, Rods & Rock n' Roll**  
Vermillion, SD  
[www.sdbbq.us](http://www.sdbbq.us)

**SEPT. 8**  
**Homesteader Day**  
1-4 p.m.  
Valley Springs, SD  
Beaver Creek Nature Area

**SEPT. 12-15**  
**South Dakota Film Festival**  
Downtown Capitol Theatre  
Aberdeen, SD  
605-226-5494

**SEPT. 13-14**  
**Black Hills Polkapalooza**  
Each Night at 4-10 p.m.  
Palmer Gulch  
Hill City, SD  
605-574-2525

**SEPT. 13-14**  
**Holiday Arts Fall Craft Show**  
Davison County Fairgrounds  
Mitchell, SD  
605-359-2049

**SEPT. 14-15**  
**2024 Kuchen & Harvest Festival**  
Delmont, SD  
605-928-3792

**SEPT. 17**  
**EV Expo**  
W.H. Lyon Fairgrounds  
Sioux Falls, SD

**SEPT. 19-21**  
**Black Hills Plein Air Paint Out**  
Mainstreet  
Hill City, SD  
605-574-2810

**OCT. 5-6**  
**Run Crazy Horse Marathons**  
Crazy Horse  
605-390-6137  
[www.runcrazyhorse.com](http://www.runcrazyhorse.com)

**OCT. 5-6**  
**The Black Market**  
Saturday 9 a.m.-5 p.m.  
Sunday 10 a.m.-3 p.m.  
W.H. Lyon Fairgrounds  
Expo Building  
Sioux Falls, SD  
605-332-6004

**OCT. 6**  
**Giant Pumpkin Festival**  
Bentley Memorial Building  
Bison, SD  
Enter Pumpkins by 11:30 a.m.  
605-244-5475

**OCT. 10-11**  
**Rural Women Conference**  
The Lodge of Deadwood  
Deadwood, SD  
[SouthDakotaWomeninAg.com](http://SouthDakotaWomeninAg.com)

**OCT. 12**  
**Fairburn Fall Festival**  
4:30 p.m.  
Fairburn Church  
Fairburn, SD  
605-255-4329

**OCT. 12**  
**Uniquely You 5K**  
Autism Society of the Black Hills  
3 p.m.  
Founders Park  
Rapid City, SD  
[www.autismsd.org](http://www.autismsd.org)

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