A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative

LACREEK ELECTRIC
JULY 2026 VOL. 27 NO. 3

COOPERATIVE CONNECTIONS



Photo by KSchurr Photography

The Days of '76 Rodeo

A Century of Grit and Glory
Pages 8-9

Fort Meade Patriotism
Pages 12-13

AG APPRECIATION AT THE CENTRAL STATES FAIR

WHAT: 4th Annual Ag Appreciation Night
WHEN: August 24th from 5:00pm -6:45pm | Meal from 5:00pm - 5:45pm | Short program to follow
WHERE: Monument Health Community Stage inside the fairgrounds

FREE fair entrance* and a chance at one of two, two-pack PREMIER passes to an event at the fair.***Must enter on LaCrosse Street and present ticket at the gate entrance for free fair entrance.**

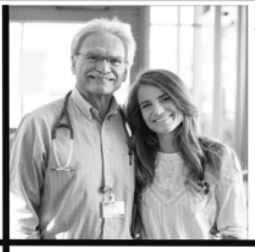
2026 RURAL NEIGHBOR NOMINEES



2026 Rural Neighbor Nominee:

Justin Tupper

SPONSORED BY: Central States Fair Rodeo



2026 Rural Health Care Neighbor Nominee:

Charles Lewis, D.O.
Sarah Lewis, D.O.

SPONSORED BY: Monument Health

2026 Agribusiness Nominee:

C-LOCK INC.

SPONSORED BY: Elevate Rapid City

2026 Rural Neighbor Nominee:

Dennis Quivey

SPONSORED BY: A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative



2026 Patriot Nominee:

Darla Crown

America's 250th Birthday — Real America. * Rapid City, SD



To learn more about the nominees and event, scan the QR code!

AG APPRECIATION EVENT TICKET

A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative | LaCreek Electric | LaCreek Electric | Central States Fair Rodeo

-Present this ticket at the LaCrosse St. gate entrance for FREE fair entrance.
-Present this ticket at the Appreciation event entrance for a meal ticket.
*Ticket is good for self + immediate family members only.

Monument Health | Elevate Rapid City

April 2026 Board Meeting Highlights

The regular meeting of the Board of Directors of Lacreek Electric Association, Inc. was held at the Cooperative office in Martin, South Dakota, on April 21st, 2026, beginning at 1:00 p.m.

The meeting was called to order by President Brent Ireland. Directors present included Connie Whirlwind Horse, Clarence Allen, Troy Kuxhaus, Scott Larson, Hadley Livermont, Cole Lange, Michel Melvin, Wade Risse, Marion Schultz, Tom Schlack and Jerry Sharp. Absent was director Clifford Lafferty.

Also in attendance were Josh Fanning (General Manager), Kasi Harris (Finance Manager), Mike Pisha (Operations Manager), Jessica Cook (Member Services/IT), Sherry Bakley (Work Order/Staff Assistant) and Ashley Turgeon (Administrative Assistant).

The Board Approved

- Appointment of Ashley Turgeon to record the minutes.
- March 2026 regular Board meeting minutes.
- March 2026 special Board meeting minutes.
- The meeting agenda.
- February Operating Report.
- March checks and disbursements.
- March Analysis of Investments.
- The list of new members.

Discussion Items

- Annual Meeting preparations were reviewed, including plans for a student drawing for eligible Lacreek Electric consumer households.
- Operations updates included ongoing pole inspection work, system upgrades, underground construction projects, substation improvements, and development of the new Work Plan.
- Operations Manager Mike Pisha announced his retirement and provided a safety report.
- Director Tom Schlack reported on the Rushmore Electric Board meeting.
- General Manager Josh Fanning provided updates regarding loans, the Operations Manager hiring process, wildfire mitigation planning, equipment purchases, facility maintenance projects and upcoming contract bid opportunities.
- Upcoming board and employee training sessions were discussed.
- Discussion was held regarding attendance at the REPC Annual Meeting scheduled for June 2–3, 2026, in Deadwood, South Dakota.

Executive Session

The Board entered executive session with the General Manager from 2:33 p.m. to 2:54 p.m. No action was taken.

Adjournment

With no further business to come before the Board, the meeting was adjourned.

Next Regular Board Meeting: May 19, 2026, at 4:00 p.m.

COOPERATIVE CONNECTIONS

LACREEK ELECTRIC

USPS No. 018-912)

Board of Directors
Brent Ireland - President
Troy Kuxhaus - Vice President
Cole Lange - Secretary
Scott Larson - Treasurer
Hadley Livermont . Michel Melvin
Angie Rascher . Wade Risse . Tom Schlack .
Marion Schultz . Jerry Sharp
Connie Whirlwind Horse

Management Staff
Josh Fanning - General Manager
Mike Pisha - Operations Manager
Sherry Bakley - Work Order/Staff Assistant
Kasi Harris - Finance Manager
Jessica Cook - Member Service/IT
Ashley Turgeon - Administrative Assistant

Office Personnel
Member Service Representative:
Lisa Jensen . Tawnni Risse
Billing/Member Service Representative:
Terri Gregg . Katrina Fish
Right of Way Specialist:
Amy Pisha
Accountant:
Cody Larson

Operations Personnel
Jesse Byerley - Line Foreman

Journeyman Lineman:
Jordon Bakley . Les Cuny . Kody Hagen
Matthew Kruid . Lonny Lesmeister
Garrett Metzinger . Aaron Risse . Trace Scott
Damon Wangerin

Apprentice Lineman:
Tee Allen . Burke Beer . Riley Meis . Spencer
Morrison . Ryan Porch . Chayson Schofield
Ryan Pettit - Staking Specialist
Henry Johnson - Warehouseman
Justin Smokov - Maintenance Man

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Postmaster: Please send address changes to Lacreek Electric Cooperative Connections, PO Box 220, Martin, SD 57551; telephone (605) 685 - 6581; fax (605) 685 - 6957

BEFORE THE SMOKE: PROTECT YOUR HOME BEFORE WILDFIRE SEASON

Wildfires can move quickly, especially when dry grass, high winds and hot weather come together. In rural South Dakota, where homes, farms, shelterbelts, outbuildings and open grassland share the same landscape, preparation matters.

But there is one important point to make first: fighting a wildfire is not a job for homeowners.

If a wildfire is nearby, leave firefighting to trained professionals. Follow evacuation orders, call 911 to report a fire and stay away from downed power lines, smoke-filled areas and active fire zones. Cooperative members can do their most important work in advance, taking steps that make a property harder for fire to reach and easier for responders to protect.

One of the most effective steps is creating defensible space around the home. That does not mean clearing every tree or turning a yard into bare ground. It means reducing combustible material near houses, garages, sheds and other structures, while thinking about how fire could move from brush to trees to buildings.

Start closest to the house. Embers can collect against siding, under decks, in gutters or near steps. Remove dry leaves, dead plants, stacked lumber, cardboard and other combustible materials from next to the home. Gravel, rock, concrete, pavers and other hardscaping can be better choices near walls, decks and porches.

Gutters and roofs deserve attention, too. Leaves and needles can become dry fuel. Cleaning them before fire season can reduce the chance that embers find an easy place to ignite.

From there, look at the rest of the yard. Clear dead brush, tall grass and dried weeds, especially near structures. Keep grass mowed around homes, outbuildings, propane tanks and driveways. Trim and space shrubs and trees so fire cannot easily climb from grass to brush to tree canopies. Low branches can act like ladder fuels.

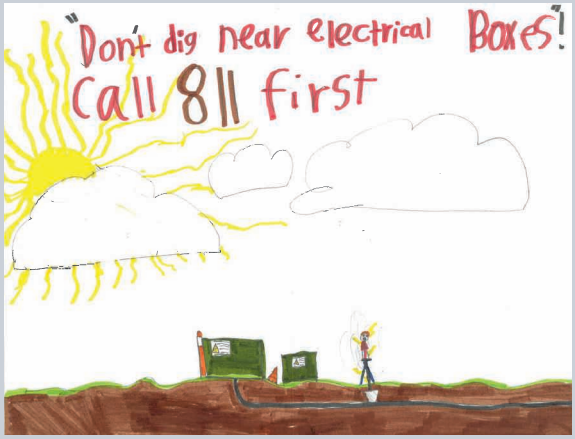
Do not overlook decks, porches and crawlspaces. Dry leaves, grass clippings and other materials can collect underneath. Cleaning those areas and using screening can help keep debris from building up.

Access is part of preparation, too. Firefighters need to reach a property quickly and safely. Keep driveways clear, make sure gates can open and trim branches that could block emergency vehicles. Clearly visible address signs can help responders find a home when visibility is poor.

Before making major landscaping changes, building fences, planting trees or adding new water lines, call 811. Underground electric, gas, water and communication lines may be closer than expected. A free locate request helps protect homeowners, utility crews and infrastructure.

Cooperative members can also make a plan. Know two ways out of the property or neighborhood. Keep important documents, medications and emergency supplies ready to go. Take photos or videos of buildings, equipment and belongings for insurance records.

Wildfire preparation is a seasonal habit, much like cleaning gutters, changing filters or preparing equipment for winter. The goal is not to fight the fire. That job belongs to firefighters and emergency responders. The goal is to give the home, property and responders a better chance before the fire ever starts.



"Don't dig near electrical boxes! Call 811 first."

Caleb Blake, age 9

Caleb urges members to not dig near a pad-mounted transformer. Thank you for sharing your picture, Caleb! Caleb's parents are Peter and Stephanie Blake – members of West River Electric.

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



Sweet on RHUBARB

Picture by Sokor Space and Shutterstock.

RHUBARB CAKE

Ingredients:

White cake mix
4 cups rhubarb, diced
1 cup white sugar
2 cups heavy whipping cream

Method

Mix white cake as directed on the box. Pour in a greased 9x12 pan. Place 4 cups of diced rhubarb over the top. Pour 1 cup of white sugar over the rhubarb. Pour 2 cups of heavy whipping cream over the top. Bake at 350˚ for 40 minutes.

Jeanette Kleinsasser
Dakota Energy

RHUBARB SALAD

Ingredients:

2 cups rhubarb, chopped
4 tbsps. water
1/2 cup sugar
3 oz. red jello
3/4 cup cold water
1 apple, diced
1 banana, sliced

Method

Combine rhubarb, water and sugar. Stir and cook until mushy. Add jello and stir until dissolved. Add 3/4 cup cold water. Cool until it begins to set. Stir in diced apple and sliced banana. Chill and serve.

Leanne Eich
Central Electric

RHUBARB CHEESE CAKE

Ingredients:

Rhubarb Filling
9" pie shell, unbaked
2 1/2 cups rhurbarb, chopped
1/2 cup sugar
1 tbsp. flour

Cheese Cake Filling
8 oz. cream cheese
2 eggs, added one at a time
1/2 cup sugar

Topping
3/4 cup sour cream
2 tbsps. sugar
1 tsp. vanilla

Method

Stir rhubarb with flour and sugar. Put in the unbaked pie shell and bake at 425˚ for 15 minutes. Remove from oven and lower temperature to 350˚ degrees.

Beat cream cheese, add 2 eggs one at a time, then add the sugar. Mix well and pour over hot rhubarb layer. Bake 30 minutes at 350˚ degrees.

Mix the topping of sour cream, sugar and vanilla well and spread over hot pie. Cool 3 hours or more before serving. The flavors blend better the longer it cools. Refrigerate leftovers.

Charles Lebeda
Sioux Valley Energy

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 2026. All entries must include your name, mailing address, phone number and cooperative name.

HOW YOU CAN HELP DURING PEAK DEMAND



Miranda Boutelle
Efficiency Services Group

Your electric utility works hard to ensure safe, reliable power to homes and businesses 24/7. To make sure everyone has the power they need, generation must match consumption and have the capacity to adjust to changing demands for energy.

Peak demand is the period in a given range of time – day, month or year – when electricity use is highest. It's caused by many people using energy-consuming equipment at the same time. It differs based on geography, weather and time of year. For example, demand is typically highest on hot summer afternoons and cold winter mornings. Most utilities also experience daily peaks when people are getting ready in the mornings and returning home in the evenings.

When everyone uses more energy at the same time, it puts more stress on the electric grid and requires more expensive electricity to meet the need. Electricity pricing is based on supply and demand. The price of electricity is higher when the demand is higher, which costs the utility more.

To lower energy use and strain on the grid during peak times, there are habits we can adopt in our homes.

Let's look at two examples.

Joe and John arrive home from work at 5:30 p.m. They both turn on the oven to make dinner.

While John waits for the oven to preheat, he throws in a load of laundry. He finishes dinner, cleans up and starts the dishwasher. Then, he moves the clothes to the dryer.

Joe finishes dinner, loads the dishwasher and sets it to start at 10 p.m. He puts a load of laundry in the washing machine and later that evening switches it over to the dryer.

Although they use the same appliances and amount of energy, John uses it all at once, running multiple appliances during peak hours, creating higher demand and more strain on the electric grid while using more expensive energy.

To lower your demand, spread electricity use throughout the day and avoid peak times as much as possible. This will reduce the utility's cost of supplying electricity to your home. Another benefit of shifting your use to midday is that it can help integrate renewable energy, such as solar, which produces energy when the sun is shining.

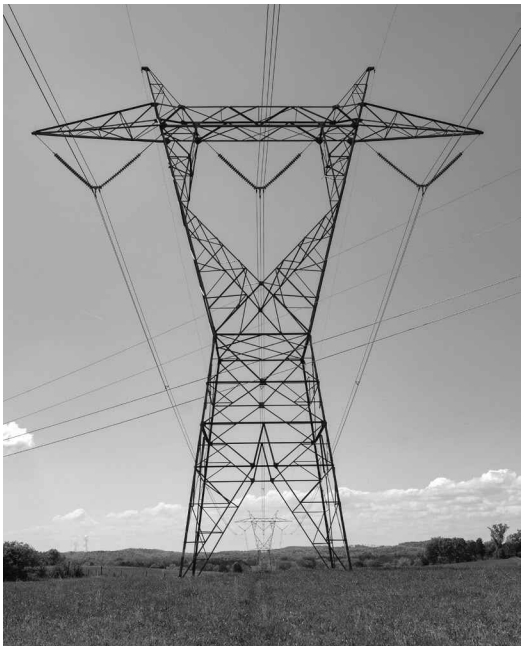
Large appliances – including washers, dryers, ovens, water heaters and air conditioners – have the biggest impact. Using them during off-peak hours or one at a time can help.

Automate as much as possible. Most electric vehicle chargers can be set to charge during scheduled hours with built-in timers or apps. Most modern dishwashers have delay-start features. If you have a pool, set the pool pump to run in the middle of the day, particularly if you are in a region with strong solar production.

You can also automate air conditioning. Some utilities offer programs that precool homes during off-peak hours to reduce demand during peak times. Simple, free adjustments, such as closing your curtains on hot afternoons and evenings, can help, too.

Keep in mind that extreme weather, such as freezing temperatures in Alabama or a heat wave in Minnesota, puts extra stress on the grid. Taking it easy on your energy use during extreme weather events can help prevent outages.

Spreading out your energy use helps your utility keep costs down and benefits your local energy grid.



A LEGACY OF SERVICE

Vedvei Father & Son Serve Their Community

Jacob Boyko
jacob.boyko@sdrea.coop

Before Alec Vedvei helped guide the future of rural electric cooperatives, he lived a life without electricity.

Growing up in the 1920s and 30s on a farm near Hetland, S.D., when chores had to be done before daylight, a kerosene lantern was part of the job.

"Either that or just guess where things were," the 100-year-old chuckled.

It was a different time; Alec's family farmed with horses, not tractors, and milked cows by hand. He remembers walking out to the pig pen with his little brother, Vernon, to collect corn cobs in a pail so his dad could burn them in the stove to heat their farmhouse.

"Vernon was going to grade school in the country, and the teacher asked him what he did for his mother, and he said that he carries 'coobs,'" Alec chuckled. "Teacher didn't know what 'coobs' were."

One day in the 1940s, thanks to the visionary farmers who started Kingsbury Electric Cooperative, the Vedvei family's lifestyle changed with the flip of a switch.

"The washing machine came first," Alec recalled. "Oh, yeah, it was a godsend for the farm women at that time."

That appreciation for electricity and rural cooperation inspired Alec to answer the call when he was approached about serving on the co-op board in 1970. He went on to serve about 18 years on the Kingsbury Electric Cooperative board, with about 15 of those years also spent on the board of the co-op's transmission and wholesale energy provider, East River Electric Power Cooperative. Alec played a pivotal role in helping shape the future of the cooperatives as the systems grew and modernized.

Alec's son, Alan Vedvei, followed a similar path. Alan joined the Kingsbury Electric board in 1999 and later joined the East River Electric board in 2011. Now, in his 15th year at East River Electric, Alan serves as board president.

Throughout Alan's time on the co-op boards, he says he's often turned to his dad for input and advice.

"A lot of times when things come up, I go and ask Dad about how this was done or how that was done when he was on the board," Alan said. "What do you think, Dad? How should we handle this?"

Alan said the learning curve was steep when he first joined East River Electric, but the experience has been rewarding. One of the larger efforts came in the 2010s with East River Electric's system upgrade plan, Alan recalled, when they voted to allocate funds to modernize and increase reliability across the transmission system.



Centenarian Alec Vedvei (right) and his son, Alan Vedvei, reminisce about the days before electricity and their years of service in the cooperative network.
Photo by Jacob Boyko

"People thought maybe that we were a little bit crazy," Alan said, "but it was the right thing to do, and it's only gotten more expensive since we started it."

For both father and son, the cooperative model is what drove them to sit on the boards and stay involved. Alan said electric cooperatives are built around a shared purpose: providing affordable, reliable power to the people they serve.

"I'll say this, the co-op business model is a perfect model for the utility industry," Alan said.

That's something Alec saw from the beginning, first hand, as rural lines were built and electricity reached more farms. He remembered the excitement people felt when the lights came on and when power made everyday work easier.

With his experience on the co-op board, Alec in 1974 was inspired to serve his community in an additional way. With the help of his neighbors, Alec helped start the Kingbrook Rural Water System to bring reliable and quality water to farms like his that relied on inconsistent wells.

While Alec and his wife, Helen, have moved off the farm east to Brookings, they keep up with the co-ops through the Cooperative Connections newsletter – and good chats with Alan.

Alec doesn't take rural development for granted – he was right there among the community cooperation that brought both power and water to him and his neighbors.

"No more corn cobs," Alec chuckled.



Photos by KSchurr Photography

A CENTURY OF GRIT AND GLORY

The Days of '76 Rodeo

Jocelyn Johnson
jocelyn.johnson@sdrea.coop

In the historic gulch of Deadwood, S.D., the past isn't tucked away in books – it rides out of old wooden chutes every July at the Days of '76 Rodeo.

What began more than a century ago as a short weekend celebration has grown into a week-long rodeo and parade tradition that draws contestants and visitors from across the country. Yet, amid the growth and national recognition, the Days of '76 remains rooted in family, heritage and a deep sense of place.

Pat Roberts, longtime board member of the Days of '76 Rodeo planning committee, said, "It started in 1924, and it actually wasn't a rodeo then. It was a celebration of Deadwood and its establishment in 1876 – hence where the name came from. It was started by the community just to promote the founding."

Those early celebrations featured parades, horses, fireworks and the kind of small-town pageantry that fits a frontier community proud of its past. The full-fledged rodeo format came a few years later in the late 1920s, but the heart of the event hasn't changed: honoring Deadwood's origins and the Western way of life that built it.

Today, the Days of '76 Rodeo is marking its 104th year alongside other milestones – the 150th anniversary of Deadwood and the nation's 250th anniversary.

The rodeo boasts a total payout of roughly $350,000 and typically draws 700 to 800 contestants, including top names like Rocker Steiner, Lisa Lockhart and rising stars such as Emily Beisel. During a week of performances, 25,000 to 30,000 spectators pack the grandstands, turning the arena into a sea of cowboy hats and hometown pride.

The events remain classic: bareback riding, steer wrestling, calf roping, team roping, barrel racing, saddle bronc riding, bull riding and breakaway roping. No frills, no gimmicks – just the timeless contests of skill and grit that define rodeo.

"We just keep it traditional," Pat said. "Just welcome everybody to Deadwood to enjoy the best cowboys and the best bucking stock that we can get."

For a town of about 1,200 people, the Days of '76 Rodeo has earned outsized recognition.

In 2011, the Days of '76 was inducted into the Pro Rodeo Hall of Fame, a distinction the Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association (PRCA) had not extended to a rodeo in many years.

Chris Roberts, son of Pat Roberts and fellow board member on the Days of '76 Rodeo planning committee, said, "We won the PRCA Rodeo of the Year every single year that we were in the medium category until we surpassed into large. We've been nominated many times in the large category and won it once. To our knowledge, we're the only rodeo that's won Rodeo of the Year in each and every category."

In Deadwood, legacy still rides out of wooden chutes, year after year, drawing generational athletes. Rodeo here is a family affair. The Roberts family has been involved continuously since the event began.

"There's been a Roberts at every Days of '76 celebration since it started," said Pat.

Pat attended his first Days of '76 Rodeo when he was four days old and serves on the board with his son, Chris.

"I'm fourth generation," Chris said. "My great-granddad was there from year one, and we never missed a single year. Then his son – my granddad – followed in his footsteps, my dad and now me."

A fifth generation is already helping behind the scenes, continuing a family legacy that mirrors the rodeo's own endurance through the decades.

That kind of continuity isn't unique to the Roberts alone. Many contestants arrive with stories of parents and grandparents who once competed in Deadwood.

"From a contestant perspective, I'd be willing to bet that no matter where you grew up, if you are a rodeo family, Deadwood was one that was always on the map," Chris said. "I hear it every single year – contestants talking about how grandpa or great-grandpa, grandma or great-grandma competed in Deadwood, and they've always wanted to be here. In the rodeo world, everybody knows Deadwood."

Mackenzi Gatzke, secretary of the board of directors, says her family story is similar. She currently serves on the Days of '76 board alongside both of her parents and noted two other families who have long served on the board promoting the event.

"Our board is all made up of people who were or still are locals to Deadwood, and we're all volunteers," she said. "We really do it because we love Deadwood, and we love the Days of '76 and the tradition behind it. We actually have four different families with multiple generations on our board, and we all just work together like one big family that just loves the community."

That focus on authenticity extends beyond the arena. The Days of '76 Museum houses the largest working collection of horse-drawn wagons in the country, along with memorabilia from across the Black Hills dating back to 1876. During rodeo week, many of those wagons leave their resting place to roll through downtown Deadwood in historic parades – matching the sight of a 19th-century streetscape.



For Pat Roberts, rodeo's relevance in modern life is still significant and comes down to identity.

"It's tradition – it's the cowboy way," he said. "These cowboys and cowgirls are athletes…and the horses are too. They're bred to buck. We're not hurting anything by doing it – that's what they want to do. Just think of Deadwood and the West. Rodeo fits right in."





WHAT ARE CAPITAL CREDITS

An electric cooperative operates on an at-cost basis by annually "allocating" to each member, based upon the member's purchase of electricity, operating revenue remaining at the end of the year; later, as financial condition permits, these allocated amounts – capital credits – are retired. Capital Credits represent the most significant source of equity for Lacreek Electric. Since a cooperative's members are also the people the co-op serves, capital credits reflect each member's ownership in, and contribution of capital to, the cooperative. This differs from dividends that investor-owned utilities pay shareholders, who may or may not be customers of the utility. Each year, the Lacreek board of directors makes a decision on whether to retire capital credits based on the financial health of the cooperative. During some years, the co-op may experience high growth in the number of new accounts or severe storms may result in the need to spend additional funds to repair lines. These and other events might increase costs and decrease member equity, causing the board not to retire capital credits. For this reason, Lacreek's ability to retire capital credits reflects the cooperative's strength and financial stability. The board alone decides whether to retire capital credits.

The checks listed were issued in 2026 have not been claimed. If you know any of the members listed and can contact them, please have them call our office or if you see your name on this list, please contact us at 605-685-6581.

SEE THE LIST ON PG. 11

AFRAID OF BEAR, MARVIN

ALLTEL CORPORATE

ARCHITECTURAL CONCEPTS

ARENSDORF, LUCILLE

BALD EAGLE, TAYLOR V

BEAUDREAU, AUDREY

BIG CROW, LEE

BLUE LEGS, JOEY

BROKEN ROPE, ALBERT

BROKEN ROPE, ALICE

BROWN, KENNETH W

CARTER, JENNIFER

CEDAR FACE, CARMEN K

CICMANEC, BILL

COOK, LISA F

COON, PAUL

COTTIER, LANNA M

CYPRESS, SHANNON

DEAN, LOUIS

ERS CONSTRUCTORS

EAGLE FEATHER, RITA

ERICKSON, THERESA

ESCAMILLA, SABRINA I

FEATHERMAN, GERTRUDE

FINERAN, SHANNA

GHOST BEAR, ABBY

GHOST DOG, SHIRLEY M

GOOD LANCE, GINGER R

HERNANDEZ, ELLEN

HINTON, MAC

HUFFMAN, SHAWN

JANIS, CONAN

JANIS, TRAVIS

JANIS, PAM J

JEALOUS OF HIM, JULIANNE

KILLS IN WATER, WILMA

LENOIR, HEATHER

LEWIS, MARY

LOCKE, MERLE E

LONE ELK, MARGARET

LONG SOLDIER, DONELLA

LOOKS TWICE, JACQUELINE

MINOR, JOEL

NATIVE AMERICAN ENVIRONMENTAL

NEISS, BRENDA

NO NECK, ANTOINETTE

POOR THUNDER, LAVENA

PROVINCIAL, DANA

PROVOST, RAYETTE

RED BIRD, JOHN

RED FEATHER, MIRANDA

RED OWL, AMY

REESE, SCOTT

ROUILLARD, MAVIS

RUNING HORSE, DESIREE

SHANGREAUX, BAPTIST

SIGMAN, DEAN

SLOW BEAR, JUDY

SMITH, CLARENCE N

SMITH, LONZO SR

TEMPERATURE ENGINEERING CORP

TEN FINGES, BRENNAN

THUNDER HAWK, SKYHAWK

TIBBITTS, NORMA J

TWO BULLS, SONJA

VOCU, THERESA

WARD, ROBERTA

WATERS, STEPHANIE R

WEAVER, VERONICA

WHITE FACE, LILLIAN

WHITE WOMAN, VERNELL

WHITING, FRANKLIN J JR

WISECARVER, MITCHELL L

YOUNG, TAMMY





FIND YOUR ACCOUNT NUMBER

~ Worth $50 This Month ~

A member's account number has been hidden somewhere in this newsletter. If you find your account number, call the office before July 10th, 2026, and you will receive a $50 credit on your next month's billing. If no one finds their account number, the credit will be $50 in the next issue.

FORT MEADE & THE STAR SPANGLED BANNER

How South Dakota Set the Stage for a National Anthem

Jacob Boyko
jacob.boyko@sdrea.coop

This month – July of 2026 – the United States of America celebrates the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence, when the Founding Fathers declared the end of Great Britain's role as their colonial overseer.

No patriotic song captures the sacrifice and resilience of the American experiment quite like the national anthem, "The Star-Spangled Banner." However, the anthem is not from the American Revolution, nor was it immediately adopted as the nation's official song. Its story unfolded over more than a century, from a British bombardment in Baltimore to a flag-lowering ceremony on the plains of western South Dakota.

The War of 1812

The year is 1814. The United States of America is in the midst of its second war with Great Britain – The War of 1812 – and the nation is reeling from a recent attack on Washington, D.C., where British troops torched the Capitol and White House.

A Maryland lawyer, Francis Scott Key, had just boarded a British naval vessel. He was sent there on behalf of the U.S. government to negotiate the release of an American prisoner, and while his negotiation was successful, Key was not allowed to return ashore until the British forces completed their bombardment on nearby Fort McHenry for fear that Key had overheard military plans while on board.

Detained aboard the enemy ship, Key looked ashore to Baltimore as the American forces fended off the invasion. As dusk settled over the harbor, it became harder for Key to track the battle, his only illumination being the occasional glow of British rockets and exploding shells. Key watched through the night, not sure who was winning the drawn-out fight. At dawn, there was just enough illumination for Key to make out the American flag still flying over the fort. The Americans had held the fort and fended off the British from Baltimore.



Visitors to Fort Meade (1 mile west of Sturgis, S.D.) will see the very same flag pole used by Col. Caleb Carlton during the flag retirements. These once-a-day evening ceremonies were the first instance of the Star Spangled Banner serving as the United States' unofficial national anthem.
Photo submitted by Randy Bender

Key's experience that night inspired him to write a poem he titled "The Defence of Fort M'Henry." Later, it was put to song and became known as "The Star-Spangled Banner."

Fort Meade

Fast forward to 1892, thousands of miles west on the American frontier.

Col. Caleb Carlton is the new commander of the Eighth U.S. Cavalry at Fort Meade, a U.S. Army post in the young state of South Dakota. About a mile west, the bustling town of Sturgis is growing along with the fort, serving as an important stop along numerous trails heading toward gold country in the streams of the Black Hills.

"Fort Meade was put in place in about 1878 to help maintain the peace in the Black Hills region between the native tribes and the settlers coming in," explained Randy Bender, a lifelong resident of Sturgis and second-generation Fort Meade Museum board member.

Carlton was eager to make his mark – not through a battle, but patriotism. He and his wife discussed how they could better instill respect for the American flag among their troops stationed at the fort. The Carltons' idea was to have the band play an official song during the evening retreat, when the flag is retired for the night.

"Carlton issued orders that all within hearing distance were to stand at attention, and all men not under arms were to remove their hats as a sign of respect to the flag," Bender said.

That song, chosen at the urging of Mrs. Carlton, was the Star Spangled Banner.

"We selected the Star Spangled Banner as it was written under very unusual circumstances," Carlton later wrote in a 1914 letter.

Carlton's daughter, Mabel, recalled the first ceremony in her journal.

"As the final notes of the song faded away, the flag landed gently in the arms of the waiting troops," she wrote. "If it had been practiced, it could not have been done more perfectly."

From Fort Meade, the practice began to spread as other officers and government officials visited and observed the ceremony.

"The New York Times referred to the fact that (I) was trying to establish a national anthem," Carlton wrote. "This attracted the attention of Col. Cook in command of the recruiting depot at David's Island, who wrote me that he was having recruits taught to sing our national air. I suggested he concentrate his instruction on the Star Spangled Banner."

Carlton also wrote that later, during a meeting in Harrisburg with Pennsylvania Gov. Daniel H. Hastings, that the governor promised he would initiate the playing of the Star Spangled Banner among the state's militia.

The most decisive support came during a meeting between Carlton and Secretary of War Daniel Lamont, with the two speaking about the custom. Before long, Lamont ordered that the Star Spangled Banner be played during evening retreats across the nation.



Above: Officers of the 8th Cavalry in Fort Meade, S.D. in 1892. *Photo courtesy of the South Dakota State Historical Society*



Right: A photograph of Fort Meade with Bear Butte in the distance. *Photo courtesy of the Library of Congress.*

Nearly 40 years after Fort Meade's first Star Spangled Banner rendition, Congress in 1931 declared it the national anthem.

Today, visitors to Fort Meade can stand near the place where that custom began. A historical marker near the parade ground bears the words "It Started Here," connecting the South Dakota fort to the story of the national anthem.

"That flagpole that they lowered the flag down from for that event is still standing at Fort Meade, and still used," Bender said.

For Bender, who grew up at Fort Meade while his father worked at the VA hospital and mother served on the museum board, the historic post still carries the feel of another era.

"When you visit Fort Meade, it's like stepping back in time," Bender said.

Many visitors are surprised to learn about Fort Meade's place in the anthem's history.

"It's one of those things we just take for granted that we have a national anthem," Bender said, "We never stopped to think about how these things came to be. But every one of those stories had to start at some point, and the national anthem story got its start in Fort Meade, South Dakota."

The Fort Meade museum is open from mid-May through the end of September 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Monday-Saturday.



STILL ROLLING

Cody Denne, third-generation owner of Ron's Bike Shop, holds an e-bike available at his shop in Mitchell, S.D.
Photo by Frank Turner

Three Generations Later, Ron's Bike Shop Embraces E-Bikes

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For nearly 70 years, Ron's Bike Shop has helped keep Mitchell, S.D., moving.

The family-owned business has served generations of riders from the same location since 1958, when Cody Denne's grandfather, Ron, bought a local repair shop, renamed it and moved his family to South Dakota. Today, Denne is the third generation to run the business, carrying forward a name that has become familiar to local riders.

"I really just love the bike industry and trying to keep more people on a bike," Denne said.

The story traces back to St. Cloud, Minn., where Denne's grandfather, Ron, had been working at a bike shop when he told a bicycle sales representative he wanted to own a shop of his own.

The representative knew of one for sale in Mitchell: Harvey's Fix It Shop. Ron purchased the business in 1958, gave it the name it still carries today, beginning a family connection that has lasted nearly seven decades.

"My grandpa owned it for about 20 or 25 years," Denne said. "My dad, Mike, owned it for 40, and I'm going on year six since my dad passed away."

The shop has changed with each generation. Old photos from the 1960s show that Ron's Bike Shop once sold Cushman scooters and BSA motorcycles.

Today, the newest shift is electric. About 12 years ago, Denne added his first e-bike to the shop's inventory after a customer came in looking for one. At the time, he said, he did not know much about them. But he ordered the bike, the customer bought it and the sale became an early sign of where the industry was headed.

The trend took time to build, but over the past few years, e-bikes have become a major part of the showroom.

"I'd say three years ago was the big year where I started investing, putting more on my showroom floor than regular bikes," Denne said. "And last year, they took off. I think I sold, give or take, like 60 electric bikes last year."

Denne said the demand for e-bikes is something that would

have been hard for his grandfather, Ron, to imagine when he purchased the shop in 1958.

"He probably never would have thought electric bikes would ever exist," Cody said.

For some riders, the appeal is simple. An e-bike can make hills easier, make longer rides more realistic and give people confidence to ride farther than they otherwise would. Denne said the technology has opened cycling to customers who might have stopped riding or never considered buying a bike at all.

"E-bikes are getting more people riding who wouldn't have ridden before – people who are tired of riding their regular bike and need a little assist to climb hills," he said.

One couple from Huron helped Denne see what that could mean. About three years ago, the two came into the shop looking at electric bikes. Denne sent them out for a short test ride to a nearby bike path. After about 45 minutes, he started to worry.

"I was just getting in my van to go find them," he said.

But then they returned to the shop, smiling.

"They were so happy," Denne said. "They both took an e-bike home, and I think that first year they put like 1,500 miles on them."

That added distance is also where e-bikes can become a tool for accessibility. For riders who need a little help because of age, hills, wind, endurance or confidence, electric assist can lower the barrier without taking away the activity. Denne said some riders who may have gone only 3 or 4 miles on a regular bike are now riding closer to 12.

"They're seeing more," he said. "They're adding more adventure to their ride."

As e-bikes become more common, Denne spends more time answering questions about motors, batteries, charging and what type of e-bike makes sense for each rider. He also pushes back on the idea that e-bikes do all the work.

"People think if you get an electric bike, it's just going to do all the assist for you," Denne said. "No, you've still got to pedal."

Safety has become part of that education. Denne encourages riders to understand the class of e-bike they are buying, know where that type of e-bike is allowed and respect the added speed that comes with electric assist. Helmets, working brakes, proper lights and basic awareness still matter, especially as riders travel farther and faster than they might on a traditional bicycle.

But regardless of the technology, Ron's Bike Shop continues to do what it has done for nearly 70 years: help people ride.

"Electric bikes are the thing right now," Denne said. "It's only getting bigger and better every year."

Only now, more of those bikes plug in before they hit the trail.



The Denne family purchased Harvey's Fix It Shop in 1958.
Photo submitted by Ron's Bicycle Shop

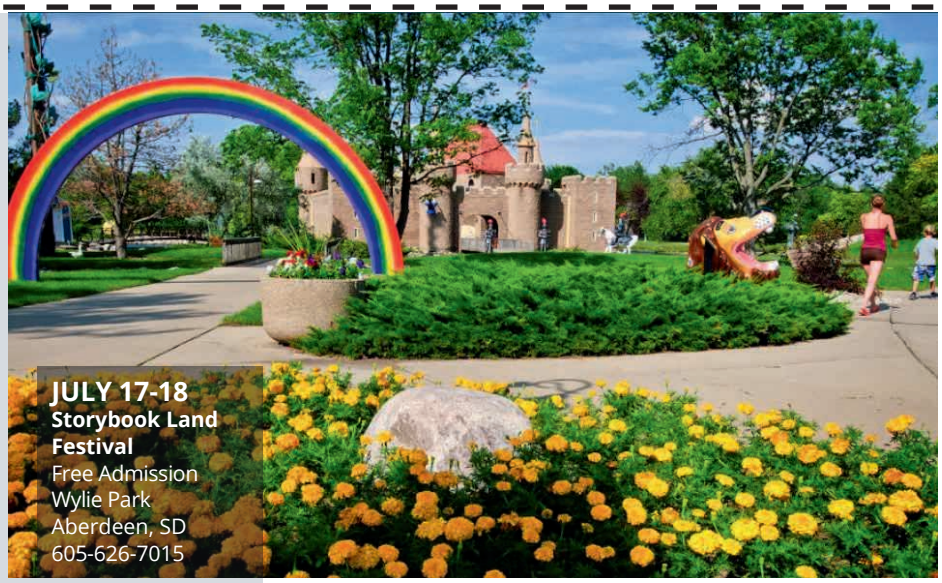


By 1963, Ron's Bicycle Shop was selling more than bicycles, with Cushman scooters and BSA motorcycles also part of the business.
Photo submitted by Ron's Bicycle Shop

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JULY 17-18
Storybook Land Festival
Free Admission
Wylie Park
Aberdeen, SD
605-626-7015

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.

JULY 2-4
USA 250th Celebration at Mount Rushmore
Rapid City, SD
www.nps.gov

JULY 4
Philip Volunteer Fire Dept. Annual Firework Display
Philip, SD
605-685-3082

JULY 11
40th Annual Spearfish Canyon Half Marathon & 5K
Start: 7 a.m., Savoy, SD
End: City Park, Spearfish, SD
Register: www.nhcasa.org

JULY 16-18
Spearfish Senior Center Summer Fundraising Rummage Sales
Thurs., Fri.: 8 a.m.-3 p.m.
Sat.: 8 a.m.-12 p.m.
1306 N. 10th St.
Spearfish, SD
605-642-2827

JULY 17-19
Custer Piecemaker's Quiltshow
9 a.m.-4 p.m.
527 Montgomery St.
Custer School Armory
Custer, SD

JULY 18-19
10th Annual Charles Mix Saddle Club SDRA Rodeo
Geddes, SD
605-680-2763

JULY 24-26
Bruce Honey Days
Bruce, SD
605-627-5671

JULY 24-26
Winner Elks 57th Annual Rodeo to Benefit LifeScape
7 p.m.
Tripp County Fairgrounds
Winner, SD

JULY 25
Planes, Trains & Automobiles
Prairie Village
Madison, SD

JULY 25
Disability Awareness & Accessibility Committees Resource Fair (DAAC)
11 a.m.-2 p.m.
Minneluzahan Senior Center
Rapid City, SD

JULY 30
Spurs Grand Classic Equestrian Competition
9 a.m.
Aberdeen, SD
605-226-1099

AUG. 1-2
51st Annual Pioneer Power Threshing Show
MN Machinery Museum
Hanley Falls, MN
507-828-5437

AUG. 4-6
Farmfest 2026
8-a.m.-4 p.m.
Gilfillan Estate
28269 MN Hwy. 67
Morgan, MN
ideagroup.com/farmfest

AUG. 7-9
Fur Trader Days
NEW Art in the Park
Geddes, SD
Vendors, Artists: 605-428-5007

AUG. 9
Czech Heritage Festival
8-a.m.-4 p.m.
Brechyn, MN
320-522-1218

AUG. 15
8th Annual Black Hills Super 6 Mountain Bike Race & Trail Run
8 a.m.
Big Hills Trails
Spearfish, SD
Register: www.nhcasa.org

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.