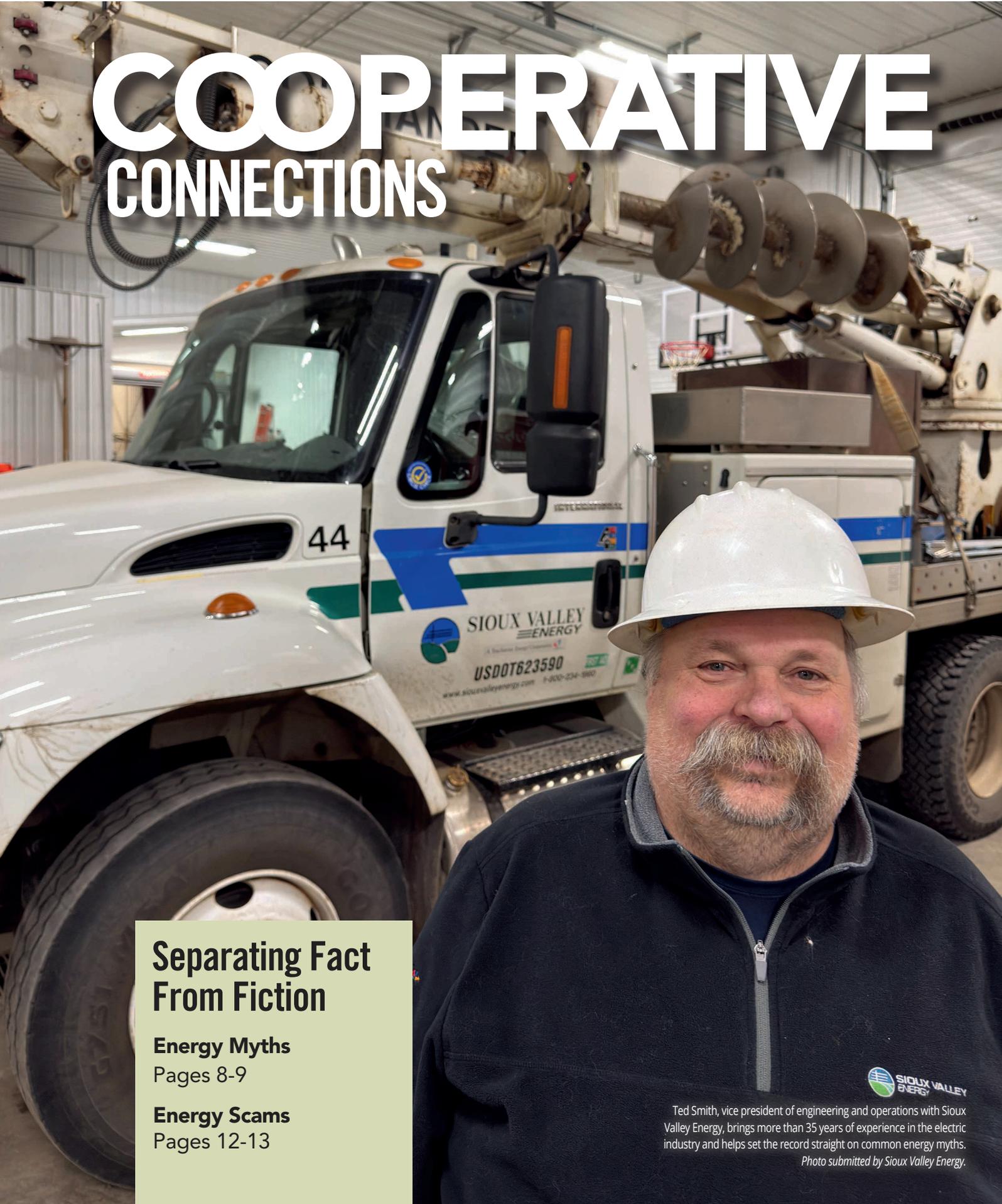




A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative 

**LACREEK ELECTRIC**  
APRIL 2026 VOL. 26 NO. 12

# COOPERATIVE CONNECTIONS



## Separating Fact From Fiction

**Energy Myths**

Pages 8-9

**Energy Scams**

Pages 12-13



Ted Smith, vice president of engineering and operations with Sioux Valley Energy, brings more than 35 years of experience in the electric industry and helps set the record straight on common energy myths.

*Photo submitted by Sioux Valley Energy.*

## Article IV – Director Bylaws

**SECTION 1. General Powers.** The business and affairs of the Cooperative shall be managed by a Board of thirteen (13) directors which shall exercise all of the powers of the Cooperative, except such as are by law, the Articles of Incorporation or these Bylaws conferred upon or reserved to the members.

**Section 2. Zones and General Qualifications of Directors.** For the purpose of election and qualification of directors, the service area of Lacreek Electric Association, Inc., shall be divided into nine (9) Zones each to have the number of directors indicated:

- **Zone 1** shall consist of territory within the corporate limits of the City of Martin and shall be entitled to two directors.
  - **Zone 2** shall consist of the territory designated as East Bennett and shall consist of all that portion of Bennett County east of the Range Line between Range 37 and 38 west of the Sixth Principal Meridian with such line extended north and south to the north and south boundaries of Bennett County, respectively, and shall be entitled to one director.
  - **Zone 3** shall consist of the territory designated as West Bennett, west of the Range Line between Range 37 and 38 west of the Sixth Principal Meridian with such line extended north and south to the north and south boundaries of Bennett County, respectively, and shall be entitled to one director.
  - **Zone 4** shall consist of the territory designated as East Oglala Lakota County and shall include all of that portion of Oglala Lakota County east of the Range Line between Range 42 and 43, and shall be entitled to two directors.
  - **Zone 5** shall consist of all that portion of Jackson County (including the former Washabaugh County) served by the cooperative and shall be entitled to two directors.
  - **Zone 6** shall consist of all of the Lacreek areas in Todd and Mellette Counties combined, and shall be entitled to one director.
  - **Zone 7** shall consist of all the Lacreek area in Cherry County, Nebraska, and shall be entitled to one director.
  - **Zone 8** shall be considered as a zone at-large consisting of all of the Lacreek Association territories and be entitled to one director elected from any place in the entire area including any of the zones heretofore defined.
  - **Zone 9** shall consist of the territory designated as West Oglala Lakota County and shall include all of that portion of Oglala Lakota County, west of the Range Line between Range 42 and 43, and shall be entitled to two directors.
- In the event the territory of the Lacreek Electric Association, Inc., should be enlarged in the future, the enlarged portion shall become a part of the Zone numbered from one to nine, excluding eight as above described with the exterior boundary of which it has the greatest distance of its own exterior boundary contiguous.

### SECTION 3. Tenure of Office.

- (a) Director shall be elected to serve a three-year term, with director terms staggered in such a manner that no more than five (5) directors are up for election in any one year
- (b) All directors shall serve until the close of the annual meeting in the year in which their successors have been elected and qualified. If an election of directors is or cannot be held, a special meeting shall be held for the purpose within a reasonable time thereafter. Failure of an election for a given year shall allow the incumbents whose directorships would have been voted on to hold over only until the next meeting at which an election shall be conducted.
- (c) In the event that the election results in a tie between two candidates, the winner shall be decided by the flip of a coin. In the event that there is a tie between three candidates, three coins shall be flipped, one by each of the candidates or their representatives, until an odd man shall have been established, and said odd man shall be declared the winner. In the event that more than three candidates are tied, the winner shall be determined by drawing lots in the form of slips of paper to be drawn from a hat, one of which shall be marked to designate a winner.

**SECTION 4. Qualifications.** No person shall be eligible to become or remain a director or hold any position in the Association who is not a member and bona fide resident of the area served or to be served by the Association, and in the case of a director, a resident of the zone from which elected. No person who is a close relative of an existing director, as the term "close relative" is defined by Section 9, may be elected to serve on the board of directors during the term of such close relative then serving. No person is eligible to become or remain a director who has been convicted of a felony criminal violation under Federal or State law within the 24 months before their election as a director or during their term(s) as a director. No person is eligible to become a director who is or has been an employee of the Association within the prior three years. No person may become a new director of the Association if they refuse to take or if they fail a drug test administered by the same Association's staff that also administers drug testing of the Association's employees.

**SECTION 5. Nominations.** Directors of the Cooperative shall be nominated by petition, signed by at least fifteen (15) members of the Cooperative, residing in the zone from which the candidate is to be elected, and stating the candidate's name, post office address, and zone which said candidate is to represent. Such petition shall be filed with the Secretary, not more than sixty (60) days no less than thirty (30) days before the day of the annual meeting. Not less than twenty (20) days before the annual meeting, the Secretary shall post at the front door of the principal office of the Cooperative, a list containing the name, post office address, and zone of each person so nominated. A true copy of such a list shall be posted by the Secretary prior to the commencement of the annual meeting at the site thereof. The Secretary shall mail with the Notice of Meeting, or separately, but at least seven (7) days before the date of the meeting, a statement of the number of directors to be elected and the names, post office addresses, and zone of the candidates. In the election of directors, each member shall be entitled to cast the number of votes but no cumulatively which correspond to the total number of directors to be elected, but no member may vote for more nominees than the number of directors that are to be elected from or with respect to any particular Zone. Ballots marked in violation of the foregoing restriction with respect to one or more Zones shall be invalid and shall not be counted with respect to such Zone or Zones. Notwithstanding the provisions contained in the Section, failure to comply with any of such provisions shall not affect in any manner whatsoever the validity of any action taken by the Board of Directors after the election.

In the election of directors, each member shall be entitled to cast the number of votes but no cumulatively which correspond to the total number of directors to be elected, but no member may vote for more nominees than the number of directors that are to be elected from or with respect to any particular Zone. Ballots marked in violation of the foregoing restriction with respect to one or more Zones shall be invalid and shall not be counted with respect to such Zone or Zones. Notwithstanding the provisions contained in the Section, failure to comply with any of such provisions shall not affect in any manner whatsoever the validity of any action taken by the Board of Directors after the election.

## Join Us for Lacreek Electric's 78th Annual Meeting!

Lacreek Electric's 78th Annual Meeting of the Members is coming up on **Thursday, April 23, 2026**, at the **American Legion Auditorium in Martin, S.D.** This annual gathering is your chance to stay informed, participate in cooperative business, and stay connected with the people who help power our communities.

While we will **not be serving a meal again this year**, members who attend will receive **meal vouchers** as a thank-you for participating.

**Registration opens at 5 p.m.**, and the **business meeting begins at 6 p.m.** Come hear important updates on co-op operations, take part in the **election of directors**, and stick around for your chance to win **door prizes and cash giveaways**.

### Director Elections

Members will vote on directors for the following zones:

- **Zone 1 – City of Martin:** Clarence Allen
- **Zone 5 – Jackson County:** Jerry Sharp
- **Zone 6 – Todd & Mellette Counties:** Clifford Lafferty
- **Zone 9 – West Oglala Lakota County:** Cole Lange

All positions are **three-year terms**. Candidates must reside in the zone they represent, and petitions require at least **15 member signatures** from within that zone. Petitions were available beginning **February 23, 2026**, and must be submitted by **March 23, 2026**.

### Why Your Participation Matters

Lacreek Electric's Board of Directors includes **13 members representing nine zones**. Serving on the board of a nonprofit cooperative is an important responsibility—directors help guide the co-op's future, uphold fiduciary duties and ensure co-op resources are managed wisely. Their decisions affect every member, every day. That's why your involvement matters. Your vote, your voice, and your presence shape the direction of Lacreek Electric.

### Make Your Voice Count

We invite you to join us for an evening of connection, conversation and cooperative decision-making. Whether you attend to learn more, participate in the election or simply support your community, **your presence strengthens your cooperative**.

We hope to see you there!

# Lacreek Electric Association

REGULAR BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING ..... January 20, 2026

## BUSINESS CONDUCTED

### ATTENDING:

- Directors **Connie Whirlwind Horse**, **Jerry Sharp**, **Marion Schultz**, **Wade Risse**, **Michel Melvin**, **Hadley Livermont**, **Clarence Allen**, **Troy Kuxhaus**, **Scott Larson** and **Cole Lange**.
- General Manager **Josh Fanning**, Finance Manager **Kasi Harris**, Operations Manager **Mike Pisha** and Administrative Assistant **Ashley Turgeon**.

### ABSENT:

- **Tom Schlack** and **Clifford Lafferty**, Work Order/Staff Assistant, **Sherry Bakley**, and Member Services/IT **Jessica Cook**.

### ITEMS APPROVED BY THE BOARD

- Approved Administrative Assistant **Ashley Turgeon** to record meeting minutes.
- Approved January 2026 Special Board Meeting minutes.
- Approved meeting agenda with addition of rates.
- Accepted November Operating Report.
- Approved December checks and disbursements.
- Accepted December Investment Analysis.
- Approved list of new members.
- Approved **Rate Option 2** with a rate increase effective April 1, 2026.
- Approved a one-time fee for switching from controlled to non-controlled irrigation service.

### ITEMS DISCUSSED

(NO FORMAL ACTION TAKEN)

#### FINANCIAL & ADMINISTRATIVE

- Investment planning for capital credit retirements
- Limits on retirement percentages
- RUS loan refinancing review
- Annual IRS Form 990 filings

#### OPERATIONS

- Easements & system improvements
- Line extension in Kyle
- FEMA inspection south of Wanblee
- Scrap wire pickup & outage review
- Employee return-to-duty & safety report

#### MEETINGS & EVENTS

- Reports from SDREA meetings
- GRIP grant progress & wildfire mitigation
- 2026 Annual Meeting planning
- Election petitions & bylaw updates

#### SCHEDULING & LEGISLATIVE

- Move February board meeting
- Plans for Co-op Day at the Capitol



## COOPERATIVE CONNECTIONS

### LACREEK ELECTRIC

USPS No. 018-912)

#### Board of Directors

- Brent Ireland** - President
- Troy Kuxhaus** - Vice President
- Cole Lange** - Secretary
- Scott Larson** - Treasurer
- Clarence Allen** . **Clifford Lafferty**
- Hadley Livermont** . **Michel Melvin**
- 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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**This institution is an equal opportunity provider and employer.**

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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

## FIND YOUR ACCOUNT NUMBER

~ Worth \$40 This Month ~

A member's account number has been hidden somewhere in this newsletter. If you find your account number, call the office before April 10th, 2026, and you will receive a \$40 credit on your next month's billing. If no one finds their account number, the credit will be \$50 in the next issue.

# STAYING FOCUSED BEHIND THE WHEEL: A SIMPLE GUIDE TO SAFER ROADS

Distractions behind the wheel aren't just inconvenient – they're deadly. Each moment you allocate to anything other than driving increases the risk for you and everyone sharing the road. According to the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration, distracted driving claimed 3,522 lives in the United States in 2021, underscoring how costly a split-second lapse can be. The good news is that small, deliberate habits behind the wheel can make a big difference. Here are three practical ways to stay focused.

First, minimize phone use. Store your device out of sight before starting the engine. Texting or scrolling through apps draws your eyes from the road, your hands from the wheel and your mind from the task at hand. If you must communicate, pull over safely or use hands-free features only if absolutely necessary and legal in your area. Remember, many places have laws prohibiting texting while driving, with penalties that reflect the risk. Consider enabling “do not disturb” modes that silence notifications while you drive, and set your status to indicate you're driving. This simple barrier can prevent impulsive checks and help you maintain steady attention.

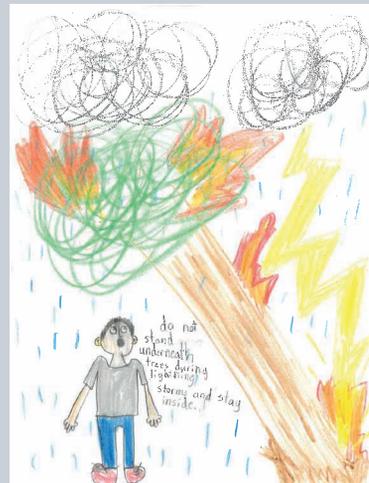
Second, plan your route before you depart. Entering a destination while driving is a dangerous distraction. Take a few minutes to review the route, check traffic conditions, and set your navigation system in advance. With your route loaded, you can keep your attention on driving rather than on-screen instructions during the journey. If possible, choose routes with fewer turns or fewer heavy-traffic segments, and be ready to adjust if conditions change. Having a mental map of the journey can also reduce the need to peek at the screen for updates.

Third, ensure you are well rested. Fatigue can dull reaction times, reduce concentration, and cause your eyes or your vehicle to drift. Prioritize a good night's sleep before long trips, and consider stopping for short breaks on extended drives to refresh your focus. Even brief pauses for stretching and deep breathing can reset your alertness and help you respond more quickly to changing road situations.

Beyond these tips, practice general safe-driving habits: obey speed limits, maintain a safe following distance and stay alert for pedestrians, cyclists, and other motorists. If you feel distracted or fatigued, it's wiser to pause and reassess rather than press on. Safe driving is about consistent, proactive choices that protect everyone on the road.



**"Do not stand underneath trees during lightning storms and stay inside."**



**Ramsey Faini,  
Age 8**

Ramsey warns readers about the dangers of lightning storms. Thank you for sharing your picture, Ramsey! Ramsey's mom is Katie Faini from Rapid City, S.D.

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

# MAIN DISHES

## HOMEMADE MAC & CHEESE

### Ingredients:

16 oz. box elbow macaroni noodles  
Oil  
1 pkg. bacon  
3 cups whole milk  
1/2 cup butter (melted)  
5 oz. can (about 2/3 cup) evaporated milk  
16 oz. block Velveeta cheese (cut into cubes)  
1 tsp. salt  
Guda cheese  
Parsley (to taste)  
1 tsp. garlic powder  
1/2 tsp. black pepper

### Method

Cook noodles as directed. Drain noodles and pour a small amount of oil on them while in the strainer. Cook bacon and cut into small pieces. Add all of the ingredients into a Crock-Pot and mix. Cover and cook on low for 1.5 hours, stirring once or twice while cooking. Serve and enjoy.

**Cindi Foster**  
Codington-Clark Electric

## CHEDDAR POTATO SOUP

### Ingredients:

1 medium onion, chopped  
3/4 cup celery, chopped  
1/4 cup butter  
5 cups peeled potatoes, cubed  
3 cups water  
3 cups milk, divided  
4 tps. chicken bouillon granules  
1/2 tsp. salt  
1/2 tsp. pepper  
1/4 cup flour  
4 cups (16 oz.) cheddar cheese, shredded

### Method

In large Dutch oven or kettle, saute onion and celery in butter for 5 minutes. Add potatoes and water, bring to a boil. Reduce heat, cover and simmer for 15 minutes or until potatoes are tender. Stir in 2 cups milk, bouillon, salt and pepper. Combine flour and remaining milk until smooth, gradually stir into soup. Bring to a boil, cook and stir for 2 minutes or until thickened. Reduce heat, add cheese and stir until cheese is melted.

**Sally Florey**  
Charles Mix Electric

## CARAMELIZED HAM & SWISS SLIDERS

### Ingredients:

12 Hawaiian dinner rolls, split  
1/4 cup horseradish sauce (optional)  
12 slices deli ham (or 24 if it's thinly sliced)  
6 slices Swiss cheese, cut in fourths (so you will have 24 squares of cheese)  
**Sauce**  
1/2 cup butter  
1/4 tsp. onion powder  
2 tbsps. brown sugar  
1 tbsp. Dijon mustard  
2 tps. poppy seeds  
1 1/2 tps. Worcestershire sauce  
1/4 tsp. garlic powder

### Method

Spray a 9x9 or 9x13 glass dish with non-stick cooking spray. Set aside. Preheat oven to 325°. Spread roll bottoms with horseradish sauce (if using). Fold up pieces of ham to fit the rolls and place them on the bottom halves of the roll. Next, place 2 squares of cheese. Replace tops and place in a single layer in the prepared pan.

### Sauce

In a small skillet, heat butter over medium-high heat. Stir in remaining ingredients. Pour over rolls. Cover with foil and bake covered for 20 minutes. Remove foil and bake 5 more minutes. These can also be made ahead of time. Just cover with foil and refrigerate for several hours or overnight. Bake as instructed.

**Jerald & Virginia Jensen**  
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.

# ELECTRIFY YOUR LAWN CARE



**Miranda Boutelle**  
Efficiency Services  
Group

Electric lawn equipment has seen drastic improvements in cost, motor efficiency and battery power in recent years. From hedge and string trimmers to leaf blowers, chainsaws, and push and riding mowers, there are lots of options for electric lawn equipment.

Electric equipment is quieter than its gas-powered counterparts and typically needs less maintenance. There's no more mixing fuel, changing spark plugs or worrying about gas going bad over the winter. Advances in rechargeable battery technology eliminate having to lug around a heavy extension cord to get your work done. Just pop in a battery and go.

Most popular lawn equipment brands offer battery-powered options, along with newer brands that specialize in electric tools. If you need multiple tools, buying the same brand with the same battery type allows you to swap batteries between different pieces of equipment. That also means fewer battery chargers to store or keep on your workbench.

Opt for equipment with brushless motors. They are more efficient, more powerful and have a longer lifespan than traditional brushed motors. A brushless motor typically costs more but is worth the improved efficiency. A brushed motor transfers electricity using physical brushes, which can wear down over time. The

friction caused by the brushes makes equipment run hotter and noisier. A brushless motor uses electronic commutation with less friction, which makes it more powerful, extends the lifespan and allows you to get more done on a single charge.

Just as gas-powered lawnmowers require safe storage and handling of gas and oil, battery-powered equipment requires proper care for maintenance, charging and disposal. Always use the manufacturer's original charging equipment, charge batteries on hard surfaces away from anything flammable, and store chargers in a cool, dry place.

Most manufacturers recommend charging batteries only until they reach full capacity instead of leaving them on the charger until you are ready to use them. This helps prevent damage to the battery from overcharging and heat buildup and reduces potential fire hazards. Unplug chargers when not in use to avoid energy waste.

Similar to gas and oil, old or damaged batteries should not end up in household garbage and landfills, where they can ignite fires and leak toxic chemicals into soil and groundwater. Instead, recycle them at a big-box store or at a county or city waste management site.

If you're looking for a quieter, more efficient, lower maintenance lawn care routine, rethink your equipment options and consider electric models. If you decide to make the switch, check with your electric utility or state agency for potential rebates.





Butte Electric Cooperative employees and other volunteers with Betty Krause after painting her house in Belle Fourche. Photo submitted by Clint Haffner

# Co-ops in the Community

## Butte Electric Volunteers Bring Fresh Paint and a Smile to Retired Nurse

**Jacob Boyko**

[jacob.boyko@sdrea.coop](mailto:jacob.boyko@sdrea.coop)

Concern for community is the seventh cooperative principle, and when Butte Electric Cooperative CEO Matt Sleep was approached to help with a nearby volunteer project, he knew it was his co-op's time to act.

•••

In Belle Fourche, about 25 miles southwest of Butte Electric's headquarters in Newell, City Code Enforcement Officer Clint Haffner keeps a busy schedule. When he's not on the clock for the city handling code enforcement and animal control matters, he's helping lead the local United Way chapter, where he organizes volunteering projects aiming to make Belle Fourche shine a little brighter.

"When I started the job [with the city], I'd come across situations where people are just physically unable to shovel a sidewalk or take care of things," Haffner said. "Some are simply too old. That's kind of how our group began – there just wasn't anyone helping the people who can't do it."

When Butte Electric reached out

to Haffner about potential volunteer opportunities, it didn't take him long to think of a project. Betty Krause, a 97-year-old retired nurse had spent 45 years of her life from 1950 to 1995 taking care of the Belle Fourche community. Haffner figured it was time the community gave something back to her.

Haffner approached Butte Electric about painting Betty's house, garage and shed. After all, who would be better than linemen with experience on ladders and working with their hands?

CEO Matt Sleep enthusiastically accepted, and a few weeks later on a warm September morning, volunteers from Butte Electric, Monument Health and the Belle Fourche United Way arrived at Betty's house to begin the work.

"We descended on the property with ladders, scrapers, paint buckets, paint brushes, a paint sprayer, weed eaters, tree trimmers, etc. and got busy," Sleep recalled.

The Butte Electric employees split into four teams; two would tackle the house, one the shed, and the other the garage. They made quick work of the project as Haffner kept everyone fed and hydrated.

"The Butte Electric guys are wonderful," Haffner said. "They're hard workers, handy, crafty, good on ladders. The paint job at Betty's place was smooth and efficient work."

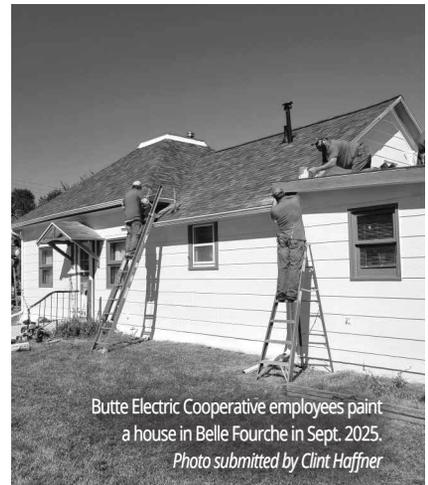
It took about a day of work between the setup, scraping and painting of the three

buildings – Betty was awestruck when she went outside to see the finished job.

"It was pretty wonderful, and I've had many compliments," she said of the result. "It shows it's a caring community. It's just awesome and amazing that they'd do it for one person."

While Betty's house received a coat of fresh paint, Sleep said the volunteers also took something back with them.

"When the painting was done, I think Betty's appreciation and thankfulness brought a great feeling of joy and accomplishment to all of us there – maybe even a tear or two," Sleep said. "A project like this just adds a little bit of goodness back into a community. And, we all need a little bit of goodness in our lives."



Butte Electric Cooperative employees paint a house in Belle Fourche in Sept. 2025. Photo submitted by Clint Haffner



significantly when conditions allow.

“Although sometimes it seems like it, the wind doesn’t always blow in South Dakota,” Smith said. “And solar only produces during daylight hours.”

Although battery storage has improved in recent years, Smith says storing enough energy to power the grid around the clock is prohibitively expensive at this point in time.

For now, maintaining reliability requires a mix of generation resources so supply remains available regardless of weather or time of day.

**Myth: If my neighbor has power and I do not after a storm, the cooperative skipped me.**

**Smith: That’s not how it works.**

In some cases, the cooperative may not yet know a member is without service. Reporting outages remains important.

Another possibility is that the issue is on the member side of the meter. Crews may restore cooperative equipment and determine that the damage is within the member’s own service.

“When crews see it’s a problem on the member side of the meter, they will call dispatch and have them contact the member,” Smith said.

He also emphasized the importance of keeping current phone numbers on file. Fewer households rely on landlines today, which makes updated cell phone numbers critical during storm response.

**Myth: Burying all power lines would eliminate outages.**

**Smith: No.**

Underground lines are not exposed to wind and ice, but they are not immune to failure. Over time, underground conductors deteriorate. Rodents such as gophers can damage them. Excavation damage is also common when individuals dig without confirming where utilities are buried.

Before digging, members should always contact 811, the national call-before-you-dig number. That service

notifies utility providers so buried lines can be located and marked before excavation begins. Failing to call 811 can be dangerous and increase the risk of damaging underground infrastructure, causing outages.

And even when damage occurs naturally, locating the fault underground can take time.

“With overhead lines, crews can usually see the damage,” Smith said. “Underground, it takes troubleshooting to figure out exactly where the fault is, sometimes leading to longer outage durations.”

He recalled one outage that proved especially difficult to diagnose.

“One time we had an outage that we just could not narrow down,” he said. “When we finally found the damage, we saw that a gopher had chewed the bottom of the wire. You could not see it from the top. We had to dig up about 20 feet of cable and turn it over before we could see the damage.”

Underground systems can reduce certain types of outages, but they do not eliminate them, and repairs often require more time and labor.

**Myth: Wind and solar power are free once installed.**

**Smith: The fuel is free, but that’s the only thing that’s free.**

Wind turbines require ongoing maintenance, including mechanical components that need to be regularly serviced. Solar power relies on inverters and other equipment that must be maintained and eventually replaced.

There are construction costs, financing costs and transmission costs involved in delivering electricity from generation sites to homes and businesses. Those transmission and maintenance assets are accounted for over time and included in the overall cost of electricity.

Free fuel lowers one portion of cost. It does not remove the need to build, maintain and replace infrastructure.

**Myth: Electric cooperatives raise rates to increase profits.**

**Smith: No. Cooperatives are not-for-profit.**

Electric cooperatives are member owned, not investor owned. That means there are no outside shareholders expecting earnings. Instead, cooperatives operate on margins, collecting enough revenue to pay expenses, maintain infrastructure and meet financial obligations.

“The only place we get money is from the people at the end of the line,” Smith said. “We don’t have a printing press in the basement.”

In fact, if revenue exceeds expenses in a given year, a portion of those margins are allocated back to members as capital credits when the board determines it’s financially appropriate. Capital credits represent a member’s share of the cooperative’s financial performance during the years they received service.

However, in recent years, equipment costs have risen significantly. Smith cited bucket trucks that once cost around \$220,000 have since more than doubled in price, and major system components have seen similar increases. Usually, the cost of wholesale power from the cooperative’s power suppliers makes up the largest share of the budget and those costs have been increasing as well.

Rate adjustments reflect those rising operational costs and the need to maintain reliable service, not profit distribution.

Electricity may seem simple at the flip of a switch, but as Smith makes clear, the system behind it involves infrastructure, coordination and constant evaluation. Understanding how it works helps members separate assumption from reality and better appreciate the network that serves them every day.



**Lacreek Electric Association Inc.**  
*A Truist Energy Cooperative*

# 2026 ANNUAL MEETING

Come to our annual meeting and learn what your cooperative encountered in 2025.

**JOIN US!**

**23 APRIL**  
AT 6 PM

**Registration Gift**  
\$20 Bill Credit

**Meal Voucher**  
Redeem @  
Participating Locations

**PRIZES!**  
\$700 Cash &  
Door Prizes

+ 605.685.6581 Visit our website  
[www.lacreek.com](http://www.lacreek.com)

CAPITAL CREDIT CHECKS



**Check Your Mailbox**

CHECKS ARE BEING MAILED  
THE BEGINNING OF APRIL

KEEP YOUR MAILING ADDRESS UP  
TO DATE IN OUR OFFICE.



**Lacreek ELECTRIC**

RATE #  
PULSE

12345

HEAT kWh

2308987456

**READ YOUR HEAT METER BEFORE APRIL 30th!**

Receive Final Heat Credit for this Heat Season!

HEAT SERVICE A-250



# Thank You

## LINEMEN & OFFICE STAFF!



**Happy Linemen Appreciation Day & Administrative Professionals Day!**

We appreciate all of your hard work and dedication in keeping our communities powered and our office running smoothly!



# ON THE LOOKOUT FOR ENERGY SCAMS

Photo by Frank Turner

### Frank Turner

frank.turner@sdrea.coop

It's no April Fools' joke. Consumers with an electricity connection have long been targets for scams. In today's digital world, those schemes have evolved. As more daily business is conducted online, scammers have shifted their tactics to match. They now use phone calls, texts and emails to create urgency, confusion and fear, hoping consumers will act before taking time to verify the claim.

For victims, these scams can lead to financial loss and identity theft, but understanding how the most common schemes work and what they typically look like is one of the best defenses to staying safe.

### The "Past Due" Disconnection Threat

One of the most common tactics that scammers use is the disconnection threat. They use a fake message claiming a bill is past due and that service will be disconnected immediately unless payment is made on the spot.

The call may sound official. The message may include account numbers

or appear to come from your local cooperative's phone number due to caller ID spoofing. The scammer's goal is simple: create panic so you pay first and question later.

In reality, cooperatives follow clear procedures and provide advance notice before any disconnection. A demand for instant payment, especially with threats attached, is a major red flag.

### The "You Overpaid" Refund Scam

Who would not want a refund? Scammers take advantage of that instinct.

In this scheme, a text, call or email claims a member overpaid an electric bill and is owed money. The message often includes instructions to click a link or provide banking information so the refund can be "processed."

The message can sound especially convincing to cooperative members because electric cooperatives do return margins to members in the form of capital credits. Capital credits represent a member's share of the cooperative's annual margins and are returned over time.

However, capital credits are distributed through established,

official processes. They are not issued through unsolicited texts, surprise phone calls or links requesting personal banking information. When your local cooperative retires capital credits, members are notified through official channels such as billing statements, newsletters, verified mailings or even through Cooperative Connections.

An unexpected refund message that asks for sensitive information is a red flag. When in doubt, pause and contact your local cooperative directly using trusted contact information.

### Gift Card and Cryptocurrency Demands

Scammers often insist on unusual payment methods such as gift cards, prepaid debit cards or cryptocurrency. They may provide detailed instructions on how to purchase gift cards and read the numbers over the phone.

This is a clear warning sign. Legitimate cooperatives do not request payment in gift cards or cryptocurrency. These forms of payment are nearly impossible to trace or recover, which makes them attractive to criminals.

## Spotting a Scam

Regardless of the method, every scam has similar warning signs that members can watch for:

- High-pressure tactics that demand immediate payment
- Requests for payment through gift cards, prepaid debit cards or cryptocurrency
- Emails or text messages with poor grammar, spelling errors or unfamiliar web addresses

Scammers rely on urgency. Taking a few extra minutes to verify a message can prevent lasting financial consequences.

## What Your Local Cooperative Will and Will Not Do

Your local cooperative will not demand immediate payment without prior notice. Cooperatives follow

established procedures and provide advance communication before any service interruption.

Your local cooperative will not ask for Social Security numbers, banking details or other sensitive information through unsolicited phone calls, emails or text messages.

Members have secure payment options available through official cooperative channels, including the cooperative's verified website and approved payment systems. When in doubt, independently locate the cooperative's official contact information rather than using links or phone numbers included in a message.

Text alerts are only sent to members who have enrolled in official notification programs, such as outage updates.

## Avoiding Energy Scams

If you receive a suspicious call, text or email claiming to be from your local cooperative, do not use the contact information provided in that message. Instead, use the phone number printed on your billing statement or listed on the cooperative's verified website.

Also, reporting suspected scams helps protect fellow members. By alerting your local cooperative to fraudulent activity, members help strengthen the community's defense against energy scams and ensure the cooperative network remains secure for everyone.

Have a question about whether something is real or not? Reach out to your local cooperative. Electric cooperatives are owned by the members they serve and powered by the communities around them.

## SIGNS OF AN

# ENERGY SCAM

### High-Pressure Tactics

Scammers will pressure you, creating a sense of urgency. Claims that your power will be disconnected without immediate payment are common with utility scams.

### Sketchy Payment Methods

Scammers may ask for unusual payment methods like gift cards or cryptocurrency. In these cases, it's likely a scam.

### Dodgy Communication

Whether an email, text message or letter, utility scams typically include poor grammar, spelling errors or unusual email addresses. These are common warning signs of a scam.





# DIAL 8-1-1 BEFORE DIGGING

South Dakota One Call teamed up with South Dakota's Electric Cooperatives to promote safety at the South Dakota State Fair.  
*Photo by Jacob Boyko*

## S.D. One Call/811 Q&A With Steve Barnett

**Jacob Boyko**

[jacob.boyko@sdrea.coop](mailto:jacob.boyko@sdrea.coop)

When planning any excavation project in South Dakota – whether installing a backyard fence, planting trees or building an outdoor shop – one simple phone call can protect lives, property and vital infrastructure. South Dakota One Call is the statewide system that helps homeowners, contractors and landowners locate underground utilities before digging begins. It's easy to get started – all you do is call 8-1-1.

Steve Barnett has served on the S.D. Call Board since 2022 when he was hired as the general manager of the South Dakota Rural Electric Association.

Barnett attends S.D. One Call's board meetings where he advocates for the interests of the utilities and co-op member-owners he represents, while helping guide the organization to better respond to the needs of utilities, rate payers, excavators and everyone else who may use the service.



**Steve Barnett**

S.D. One Call Board Member  
Representing Electric Cooperatives  
SDREA General Manager

Barnett sat down with Cooperative Connections to discuss the importance of S.D. One Call and how it benefits electric cooperatives and their members.

### **Q: What's your role on the South Dakota One Call board?**

I serve on the South Dakota One Call Board of Directors as the representative for the 31 rural electric cooperatives operating within our state. The One Call board includes representatives from different utility sectors as well as excavators. I've been involved in this role to help ensure our members' infrastructure is protected and that we're promoting safe excavation practices statewide.

### **Q: Why was South Dakota One Call founded, and why is calling 811 so important?**

South Dakota One Call serves as a centralized notification center for underground infrastructure. The system was created in 1993 to provide one central point of contact for excavators to encourage more responsible digging. Prior to the founding of S.D. One Call, excavators doing their due diligence needed to make multiple calls to various utilities. Today, thanks to S.D. One Call, the only number you need to dial is 811. That call triggers notification to all participating utilities in the area so they can send locators out to the digsite.

It's important to call 811 because state law requires it. If someone digs without a locate ticket and damages a buried utility, they are fully responsible for the damages and liability. Beyond that, hitting a gas or electric line can be extremely dangerous. There are thousands of miles of buried electric, gas, water, sewer, communication lines and drain tile underground.

Calling 811 is free, and it protects the excavator and the utilities.

## Q: What happens after I call 811?

When you call 811 or submit a request through [sdonecall.com](http://sdonecall.com):

- Your information goes to the South Dakota One Call center.
- You identify and map out where you plan to dig.
- The system notifies all utilities with infrastructure in that area.

Utilities have 48 hours from the start of the next business day to respond by marking their lines with paint or flags.

After that 48-hour period, excavation can begin.

The service is free to the caller, as the utilities fund the system by paying a small fee every time their infrastructure is identified in an excavation area. The utility is responsible for marking its own facilities.

During this year's legislative session in Pierre, legislators voted to enact a change to how the 48-hour locate window is determined.

Starting July 1, South Dakota will be a "midnight state," meaning the day you submit the ticket does not count toward the 48-hour window. The clock begins at 12:01 a.m. the next business day.

If you submit a ticket at 4 p.m. on a Tuesday, the 48-hour window will start Wednesday at 12:01 a.m. Your project start time will be Friday.

## Q: Since serving on the One Call board, what's one interesting thing you've learned?

What I've come to better understand is how much protection the system provides the excavator. When you call 811 and obtain a valid locate ticket, you've documented that you followed state law and gave utilities the opportunity to mark their facilities. If something is properly marked and you dig carefully around those markings, you've significantly reduced both safety risks and liability exposure. On the other hand, if you dig without a ticket and hit a line, you are fully responsible for the damages and any related costs.

I've also learned how many different types of underground infrastructure exist – everything from electric and fiber to water, sewer, gas, and even private drain tile that crosses into public right-of-way.

## Q: What's the mission of the One Call board?

I think you can summarize the board's mission pretty succinctly: promote public safety by preventing damage to underground utilities, and ensuring excavation across the state is conducted safely and responsibly.

Apart from that, our goal is to continue improving our one-call notification system, making it more efficient and effective, as well as just getting the word out. We've done some of that through letters to the editor in various newspapers and with booths at events including, the South Dakota State Fair. The more we can get the word out, the less problems we have, and that means keeping costs low for our member-owners.

At its core, the board's mission is to reduce injuries, prevent service disruptions and protect both excavators and utility providers through communication, compliance and education.



### Mark Meier, Chairman

Watertown Municipal Utilities  
South Dakota Municipalities

### Ryan Barr, Vice Chairman

Midco  
Community Antenna Television Companies

### Kay Braaten

Northern Border Pipeline  
Interstate Pipeline Carriers

### Steve Barnett

South Dakota Rural Electric Association  
Rural Electric Cooperatives

### Scott Wiese

Otter Tail Power Co.  
Investor-Owned Electric Utilities

### Brad Wenande

NorthWestern Energy  
Investor-Owned Natural Gas Companies

### Loren Beld

LL & Sons Excavating, Inc.  
Excavating Contractors

### Jim Wedin

CenturyLink  
Telecommunications with > 50,000 customers

### Lloyd Rave

Minnehaha Community Water Corporation Board  
Rural Water Systems

### John Morris

Morris Inc  
Excavating Contractors

### Jake VanDewater

SDN Communications  
Small Telecommunications with < 50,000 customers



**APRIL 9-11**  
**Annual Schmeckfest**  
 German Festival of  
 Tasting  
 Freeman, SD  
 605-925-4237  
 www.schmeckfest.com

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.

**MARCH 27-APRIL 4**  
**The Passion and the Cross**  
 Orpheum Theatre  
 Sioux Falls, SD  
 605-367-6000  
 www.ThePassionMusical.com

**APRIL 3**  
**Bachelors of Broadway:  
 Gentlemen of the Theatre**  
 7 p.m.  
 Johnson Fine Arts Center  
 Aberdeen, SD

**APRIL 5**  
**Easter Sunrise Service**  
 7 a.m.  
 Mount Rushmore

**APRIL 9**  
**McCrossan Wildest Banquet  
 Auction in the Midwest**  
 Jimmy Buffett Tribute  
 Polynesian Paradise Dancers  
 Sioux Falls, SD  
 www.mccrossan.org

**APRIL 9-11**  
**Annual Schmeckfest**  
 German Heritage Celebration  
 Freeman, SD  
 605-925-4237  
 www.schmeckfest.com

**APRIL 11**  
**Women VetsConnect Retreat**  
 A Wellness Retreat for  
 Women Veterans and Military  
 Spouses  
 9 a.m.-2 p.m.  
 Our Savior's Lutheran Church  
 909 W. 33rd St.  
 Sioux Falls, SD

**APRIL 11**  
**Minnehaha County Pheasants  
 Forever Annual Banquet**  
 5:30 p.m.-10 p.m.  
 Blue Haven Atrium  
 46594 268th St.  
 Sioux Falls, SD  
 605-214-1415

**APRIL 11-12**  
**The Black Market**  
 Sat. 9 a.m.-5 p.m.  
 Sun. 10 a.m.-3 p.m.  
 W.H. Lyon Fairgrounds Expo Bldg.  
 Sioux Falls, SD  
 605-332-6004

**APRIL 18**  
**Brookings Quilt Show XII**  
 9 a.m.-5 p.m.  
 Admission: \$10  
 Dakota Bank Center  
 Brookings, SD  
 605-690-3246

**APRIL 18**  
**Tri-Valley Chorus  
 75th Annual Show**  
 4 p.m.  
 Centerville, SD  
 605-201-9398

**APRIL 20**  
**The Bronx Wanderers**  
 7 p.m.  
 Johnson Fine Arts Center  
 Aberdeen, SD

**APRIL 25**  
**Screams by Night  
 Halfway to Halloween Con**  
 11 a.m.-5 p.m.  
 The Social  
 Sioux Falls, SD

**APRIL 28**  
**American Legion Bingo**  
 5-6 p.m. Social  
 6-6:30 p.m. Meal  
 6:45 p.m. Bingo  
 American Legion Post 15  
 1600 W. Russell  
 Sioux Falls, SD  
 605-682-1222

**MAY 2-10**  
**Rustic Designs & More Spring  
 Show, Flea Market**  
 41450 264th St.  
 Ethan, SD  
 605-770-2411

**MAY 2**  
**Cinco de Mayo Fiesta**  
 2-8 p.m.  
 Milbank, SD  
 605-432-6656

**JUNE 13**  
**Journey Into Historic Pickstown**  
 9 a.m.-5 p.m.  
 Ft. Randall Town & Museum  
 Pickstown, SD  
 605-487-7299

**JUNE 26-27**  
**Buckhorn Rodeo**  
 Britton, SD  
 605-880-5077

**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.**