



A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative 

**LACREEK ELECTRIC**  
DECEMBER 2021 VOL. 22 NO. 8

# COOPERATIVE CONNECTIONS

## Christmas at the Capitol

Capitol Christmas  
event turns 40  
Pages 8-9

The wonders of  
winter stargazing  
Pages 12-13

Thousands of visitors are expected to view the nearly 100 Christmas trees on display in Pierre during the Christmas season.



# The Most Beautiful Christmas Tree



**Josh Fanning**  
General Manager

Growing up in South Dakota, my parents and siblings would always go find a tree to chop down for Christmas. Some years, it would be cold and snowy and other years not so bad, but I have fond memories of finding the perfect tree. Once we got the tree home, we would string lights on it and decorate it. We also had special and memorable ornaments on our

tree. The tree always symbolized that Christmas was coming which would get all of us kids excited. I can recall being in awe of the tree at night with all the twinkling lights and decorations. Nowadays, there are so many different kinds of Christmas trees from artificial to real, big and small and all the different colors.

Yet, no matter the tree, the lights warm our winter nights and put the twinkle in our hearts. So, let's make sure your tree decorating is done safely this year. The last thing we want is to create an unsafe condition in our homes.

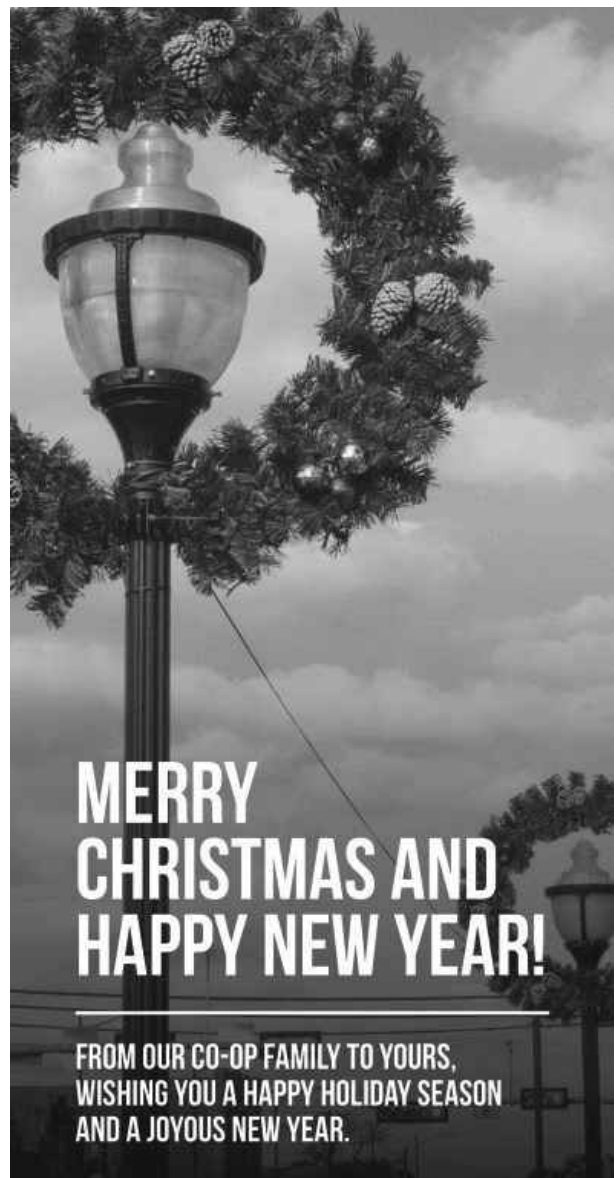
If you are decorating your tree, or already have it in place, take a few minutes to answer these questions and then take any necessary actions to correct your unsafe condition.

- Are your electrical decorations purchased from reputable retailers and approved by a national recognized testing lab such as UL, Intertek or CSA?
- Did you inspect your lights, decorations and extension cords for damage?
- Did you make sure to not connect more than three strings of incandescent lights together?
- Are you making it a habit to turn off all indoor and outdoor electrical decorations before leaving home or going to sleep?
- Have you kept your tree and other decorations

at least three feet away from heating equipment or an open flame?

- Who have you assigned to keep the Christmas tree watered? Note – the elf-on-the-shelf won't do it.
- Are you overloading your electrical outlets? They can overheat and cause a fire.

Let's keep the warmth in your home, not from a fire, but from the joy your tree brings, whatever type of tree you have adorned, with its beautiful twinkling lights..and may the traditions continue.



## COOPERATIVE CONNECTIONS

### LACREEK ELECTRIC

(USPS No. 018-912)

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# Stay Safe and Warm This Winter

Heating is a large expense for most members. Being aware of potential hazards and using what will be the most efficient for your needs, can make a big difference in safety and comfort. Below are some tips for heating your home in safe and smart ways.

**Furnace** – Check your furnace at least annually. Removing built-up debris can reduce the risk of fire and make your furnace run more efficiently. Also remember to replace your furnace filter during the winter. Replacing a dirty filter will increase the air flow and make your home more energy efficient.

**Thermostat** – Turning the thermostat down a few degrees when you are away from home or sleeping also helps to reduce your monthly utility bill. To help you do this automatically, consider investing in a programmable thermostat.

**Space heaters** – Space heaters are not more cost efficient when used to heat more than one or two small areas. However, they are a smart option when needing to heat one room. Make sure that you consider safety first and purchase only certified models that have been tested by an independent laboratory. Always place your space heater on a steady surface away from foot traffic to prevent it from being knocked over, and be on the lookout for units with a tip-off switch.

**Electric blankets and heating pads** – Make yourself aware of manufacturer's instructions, and use the product only as it is intended. Never use an electric blanket that is wet or folded, and perform regular checks of the product to look for scorch marks or visible damage.

**Fireplaces** – Always make sure that your chimney is clear, and open the damper if there are warm ashes in the hearth that could lead to a dangerous build-up of poisonous gases.

Remember not to overlook small-scale changes to help you stay warm this winter. When possible, dress in layers, with clothes that are tight and close to the skin so that they can trap heat near the body. Switch the rotation of your ceiling fan that so it circles in a clockwise direction, blowing rising hot air down. Additionally, use curtains to help block out the cold air when closed at night and to let in the sun's heat when parted during the day.

## Find Your Account Number: It's Worth \$60!

A member's account number has been hidden somewhere in this newsletter. If you find your account number, call the office before **Dec. 6, 2021**, and you will receive a \$60 credit on your next month's billing.

If no one finds their account number, the credit will be \$70 in the next issue.

# Ready your home for a winter break during the holidays

If you're planning to be out of town for an extended period of time during the holidays, take heed of the following recommendations to save some energy and keep your home safe while you're away.

- Set your home's thermostat to 50 degrees. This temperature is a happy midpoint that avoids wasting energy to warm an empty house while still preventing damage to your pipes and plants. If sub-20-degree days are forecast during the time you are away, drip faucets.
- Turn off your electric water heater at the breaker or set it to the lowest temperature possible.
- To avoid a potential fire hazard, unplug the washer and dryer before you leave your home. Disconnect the hoses leading to the washer to prevent them from freezing.
- Unplug all of your small appliances. You'll reduce the risk of a house fire and save a bit on your electric bill.
- Don't broadcast your travel plans on social media. Instead, share photos from your trip after you return.
- If you set a timer for your outdoor or indoor lights, make sure to switch up the times over the days you'll be gone so it's not obvious to any onlookers that the house is empty when lights go on at 6 p.m. every day like clockwork. If possible, stagger several timers that control different lights to approximate the natural movement of someone through a house.
- Close blinds and curtains. Don't advertise your belongings to any would-be house burglars.
- Be strategic about putting out post-holiday recycling and trash. If there are a lot of boxes from new gadgets or other expensive electronics, wait until you get back to put them out so they're not sitting outside in full view for days. Or have a trusted neighbor set them by the curb on the appropriate day.
- Place a hold on all mail and newspaper deliveries, and ask a neighbor or a friend to pick up any packages from your porch.

## DID YOU KNOW?



On Christmas Eve 1923, President Calvin Coolidge began the country's celebration of Christmas by lighting the first National Christmas Tree decorated with electric lights.



### Don't cut down trees by power lines

#### Milo Thompson

Milo reminds electric cooperative members that cutting down trees located near power lines can be hazardous. Milo is the child of Kurt and Rebecca Thompson of Hayti. They are members of H-D 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.





# HOLIDAY DESSERTS

## CRANBERRY CAKE

### Ingredients:

3 Tbsp. butter  
1 cup sugar  
1 egg  
2 cups flour  
1 cup milk  
3 tsp. baking powder  
1/4 tsp. salt  
2-3 cups raw cranberries

### Butter Sauce

1 cup sugar

1/2 cup butter  
1/2 cup evaporated milk or cream  
1 Tbsp. flour  
1 tsp. vanilla

### METHOD

Grease and flour a bundt pan or 9 x 13 inch pan. Cream butter, sugar and egg. Beat in flour, milk, baking powder and salt. Fold in cranberries. Spread batter in pan. Bake at 350 degrees about 45 minutes. Bundt pan may need one hour. Serve with butter sauce. For butter sauce, mix flour and sugar. Place all ingredients except vanilla in saucepan. Heat, beating well over high heat until hot and bubbly. Add vanilla. Serve warm over cranberry cake.

Mary Jessen, Holabird

## BAKED RICE PUDDING

### Ingredients:

2 cups milk  
1 cup water  
1/4 cup sugar  
3 tbsp. rice  
1 tbsp. butter  
1/4 cup raisins  
Pinch of salt

### Topping

Sugar  
Cinnamon  
Milk

### METHOD

In a 2-qt. baking dish, add milk, water, sugar and rice. Stir together. Add a pinch of salt and raisins. Bake at 350 degrees for one hour. Take out of oven and add butter. Let sit while you eat main meal. Dish up in bowls, sprinkle with sugar, cinnamon and add milk.

Deanna Dean, Artesian

## FANCY CHRISTMAS CAKES

### Ingredients:

#### Cakes

1 pkg. (2-layer size) white cake mix  
1 tbsp. McCormick® Red Food Color  
1 tsp. McCormick® All Natural Pure Vanilla Extract  
1 tbsp. McCormick® Green Food Color  
1 pkg. (16 oz.) chocolate candy coating, such as CANDIQUIK®

#### Buttercream

1/2 cup (1 stick) butter, softened  
1 tsp. McCormick® All Natural Pure Vanilla Extract  
1 pkg. (16 oz.) confectioners' sugar, sifted  
2 tbsp. milk  
Pinch of salt

### METHOD

Preheat oven and prepare batter as directed. Divide batter evenly into 2 bowls (about 1-1/2 cups of batter each). Stir red food color and vanilla into first bowl. Stir green color into second bowl. Pour red and green batter into greased 13 x 9-inch baking pans. Gently tap on counter to remove any air bubbles. (If you do not have 2 13 x 9-inch pans, bake one color cake first, then reuse the pan to bake the second.) Bake 6 minutes. Remove pans from oven and tap on counter to remove any air bubbles. Return pans to oven and bake 6-9 minutes longer. Cool in pans 10 minutes. Invert cakes onto wire rack. Cool completely. Refrigerate cakes until ready to assemble. For buttercream, beat butter in large bowl with electric mixer until light and fluffy, about 3 minutes. Add vanilla and mix. Gradually beat in confectioners' sugar on low speed, scraping sides and bottom of bowl after each addition. Add milk and salt; beat on medium-high until light and fluffy, at least 3 minutes. If frosting is too thick, beat in additional milk.

[www.mccormick.com](http://www.mccormick.com)

Please send your favorite soup 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 2021. All entries must include your name, mailing address, phone number and cooperative name.

**Dear Pat and Brad: Our energy bills seem higher than they should be, but I'm not sure where to start looking around my home for opportunities to save energy. Do you have any suggestions? – Les**



**Pat Keegan**  
Collaborative  
Efficiency



**Brad Thiessen**  
Collaborative  
Efficiency

Dear Les: That's a great question. There are many products and services that claim to provide maximum energy efficiency, so it can be challenging to know where to start. Fortunately, our monthly bills can help identify areas for the most energy savings.

For the vast majority of homes, the months that require the most energy use are in the winter and summer when temperatures are most extreme. Just total up your average energy use for the months when you use the most energy, then subtract the average amount you use during "shoulder months," when you're barely using your heating or cooling system, typically during fall and spring.

The most likely reason for the difference in energy use is heating and cooling your home. If someone says switching to a new heating or cooling system could save you 20 percent, they likely mean you can save 20 percent on heating or cooling costs, which are a portion of your overall energy costs.

Every home is different. For example, there's a small percentage of homes that include uncommon energy uses like a well pump, swimming pool or a home business that requires more energy than heating or cooling. But typically, heating and cooling your home are by far the largest energy uses.

Sealing air leaks is often the least expensive energy-saving measure that delivers the most bang for your buck. The second most cost-effective way to cut heating and cooling costs depends on your situation.

If you have an older propane or oil furnace, replacing it with an energy efficient heat pump might be your best investment. If you already have a relatively efficient furnace or

air conditioning unit, insulating your attic could be the next most cost-effective measure, followed by insulating exterior walls or the crawl space or basement.

Replacing windows is a high-priority project for many homeowners, and new windows can certainly add value to your home. However, this can be a costly project, making it difficult to justify solely based on potential energy savings. If your windows are old and leaky, it could be worth the investment. Do your research upfront so you fully understand the costs of the project.

After you've found ways to reduce your heating and cooling costs, where else should you look for energy savings? Your next largest energy use is likely water heating. A few low-cost measures like repairing leaky faucets and insulating the first 6 to 10 feet of hot water line could deliver significant savings. Installing energy efficient showerheads can save water and reduce energy use. Check out Consumer Reports for reliable comparisons and reviews of energy efficient showerheads.

If your water heater is more than 10 years old, it's likely time to consider how and when to replace it. You can purchase a traditional water heater that uses the same fuel you're using now. But there are several other options, including heat pump water heaters, tankless water heaters and even solar water heaters. Be sure to do some research before your water heater breaks so you know about your options.

Appliances and lighting account for a smaller portion of your overall household energy use. As you replace older appliances and lighting, look for options that include the ENERGY STAR® sticker. You should also review energy use information found on the EnergyGuide label.

We hope this information will help you start to identify areas to save energy at home. Consider enlisting the help of an energy auditor who can provide an overall assessment of your home's efficiency.



Ben Hanten, left, has expanded his craft brew business in Yankton and reports record sales. *Photos provided by Ben Hanten.*

# BEN'S BREWING CO.

## Ben Hanten transforms Yankton's Freeman Building into a taproom and event venue

Billy Gibson

billy.gibson@sdrea.coop

Visitors to Ben's Brew Station in Yankton will find a number of mixed metaphors to stir the imagination.

There's the artwork hanging from the ceiling that depicts intriguing representations of various types of air craft, like a bi-plane made out of carpenter levels and a Spruce Goose replica with metal roller skate wheels for landing gear. The eclectic set of suspended sculptures represent the Freeman Company, an aerospace manufacturing business that once occupied the spacious building located on Walnut Street.

The name itself refers to the fact that the entertainment venue is situated a block away from an old railroad depot and there's a rail spur that enters the 28,500-sq. ft. building, which was used to convey products to the rail line for delivery to customers all across the country.

There's also a vintage vibe with a line of 1950s style pinball machines along one wall and pub games like darts, corn hole and bocce ball.

Finally, there's the names of the brews themselves, sure to pique a patron's

curiosity – descriptive designations such as Raspberry Porter, Bishop Marty, Walshtown Irish Red, Oktoberfest, West Side Live, Pineapple Heat, Strawberry Rhubarb, Slic and many more.

After 16 years owning and operating Ben's Brewing Company, Ben Hanten expanded his business by opening The Brew Station last summer. He acquired the building with the vision of creating a fun and energetic environment to serve custom brews while offering live music, games and menu options provided by local food trucks. Frequent vendors during weekends and special events include Grind N' Griddle, Broken Trellis, Up in Smoke and Windy City Bites. Popular entertainers such as Adam Moe and Shawn Coles have taken The Brew Station stage.

Customers come for the fun and fellowship but also for the craft beer and to see what new blends happen to be on tap. In October, for instance, a brew called Madcat Pumpkinslapper was on the menu through a collaborative effort with Jefferson Beer Supply and Madcat Pumpkin Patch. The blend included real pumpkin and gourds, and a number of spices like cinnamon, nutmeg, cloves and ginger.

Crafting new flavors never gets old

### THE BIG FOUR BREWS

Here are the top sellers at Ben's Brewing Company:

**West Side Park IPA** – The company's flagship product blends Dakota Challenger, Amarillo and Citra hops for a full juicy flavor with hints of orange, mango and grapefruit.

**Kenny Pepper Cream Ale** – the heat is on with this ale that's sure to warm the palate with roasted jalapenos and a hint of malt.

**Kelly's Cove Golden Ale** – a refreshing, easy-drinking ale with a light, delicate hop profile featuring Citra and Azacca and a smooth, clean finish.

**Burleigh** – a brown ale with a touch of roast, nuts and chocolate.

for Hanten. He enjoys visiting with customers, giving tours of the brewery and sharing stories of the building's history and colorful namesake, Edgar Freeman.

"He was quite a character," Hanten said. "We've learned a lot about him and many of the employees who worked at The Freeman Company have added a lot of extra details, too. We started the bar 16 years ago, and it's fun to see it blossom into this," Hanten said.

Hanten reports that his brew revenue is up nearly 90 percent with plans to venture into the canning business in the coming year. He said customers can look for the Ben's Brewing Company label "anywhere you buy beer."



# CHRISTMAS AT THE CAPITOL

Each year, musicians and other entertainers from across the state perform for the tens of thousands of visitors who travel to Pierre to see the “Christmas at the Capitol” displays and decorations. *Photo by Billy Gibson*

## Christmas at the Capitol: Celebrating 40 years of yuletide splendor and dazzling displays

**Billy Gibson**

[billy.gibson@sdrea.coop](mailto:billy.gibson@sdrea.coop)

With all of its spectacular lights, familiar carols and colorful decorations, Christmas at the Capitol inspires thousands to become awash in the spirit of the season.

It's an especially magical and meaningful event for Moriah Gross, founder and director of the Pierre Youth Orchestra. Over the past decade, Gross and her students have performed in the Capitol Rotunda and added to the yuletide ambiance that more than 20,000 visitors travel from far and near to experience.

Gross is one of many performers slated to appear in the Rotunda as Christmas at the Capitol takes place from Nov. 23 through Dec. 26. Visitors to this year's celebration can expect to see brilliant hues of ruby, pink and pearl in recognition of the event's 40th anniversary.

“Winter Wishes” is the theme for 2021 as nearly 100 decorated trees will line the halls and fill the

historic structure. Local businesses and government agencies, non-profit organizations and other community groups from across the state will once again put their decorating skills to the test and give the Capitol and its environs a South Dakota Christmas flair.

This year's official lighting ceremony will take place on Tuesday, Nov. 23, at 7:30 p.m. The popular Pie Day is set for Saturday, Dec. 4, from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m., when complimentary slices of pie, cookies, coffee and ice cream will be offered along with live musical entertainment sure to spark the Christmas spirit.

Gross said she and her students look forward to the event each year, but one memory stands out for her among the rest. Two years ago, she accompanied a guest performer who sang the traditional carol Silent Night in the language of the Lakota Sioux.

“It was so spectacular and moving to be able to have that experience there inside the State Capitol and honoring the Lakota people and

culture, and also to have our students experience that as well,” said Gross, a member of Oahe Electric Cooperative outside of Pierre.

A native of Kansas and accomplished string instrumentalist, Gross relocated to Pierre 10 years ago and soon realized there was no educational string program for public school students. So, she started the Pierre Youth Orchestra, which has nearly 40 students who are set to perform at the Capitol on Sunday, Dec. 19, at 5 p.m.

**THIS YEAR'S OFFICIAL LIGHTING CEREMONY WILL TAKE PLACE TUESDAY, NOV. 23, AT 7:30 P.M. THE POPULAR PIE DAY IS SET FOR SATURDAY, DEC. 4, FROM 11 A.M. TO 3 P.M.**

Gross said while she calls the Capitol “one of my favorite places to perform,” the experience is also beneficial for her music students in many ways.

“It's just the opportunity to play for



## DECKING THE CAPITOL HALLS



Nearly 100 trees are decorated by clubs, associations, non-profits and government agencies. *Photo by Travel South Dakota.*

an audience in this kind of setting. It's very intimate and not like playing on a stage in a large theater where the audience is sitting at a distance away from you," she said. "In the Rotunda, there are people all around, sometimes standing room only, and they're very close and intimate. It's an emotional time of year and you get to really connect with the audience. At the same time, they have to be disciplined and focused on what they're doing. It's a unique experience that a lot of students don't always get to have."

She said many students will return after they've graduated from the program and sit in on the performance and have their photos taken with the current crop of students at the Capitol.

Observing Christmas at the Capitol from behind the scenes, Gross noted the many individuals and volunteers who help make the event a success each year.

"I can't say enough about all the committees, greeters, volunteers, organizers and others around the

Approximate number  
of annual visitors

**20,000**

to the Christmas at  
the Capitol event.

community who make this possible for people coming in from all over the country and the world. You have the sights and sounds and scents of the pine trees, and it all adds up to a wonderful holiday experience," she said. "There are so many people who all work together to make this something special."

The annual holiday event started back in 1981 with a dozen decorated trees and has grown in popularity through the past 40 years. Visitors can look for some of the more popular recurring displays such as a set of hand-painted porcelain ornaments from the China Painters Organization and an old wooden nativity scene that the local Knights of Columbus group sets up on the second floor of the Capitol each year.

Those interested in serving as a volunteer for the event can contact [rick.augusztin@state.sd.us](mailto:rick.augusztin@state.sd.us).



The State Capitol grounds are also decorated to evoke the spirit of Christmas. *Photo by Travel South Dakota.*

# September 2021 Board Meeting

The regular meeting of the Board of Directors of Lacreek Electric Association, Inc. was held in the office of the Cooperative, located in the Town of Martin, South Dakota, Sept. 21, 2021, beginning at 4 p.m.

The meeting was then called to order by President Allen and the following directors were present: Wade Risse, Clifford Lafferty, Donovan Young Man, Jerry Sharp, Marion Schultz, Tom Schlack, Cole Lange, Brent Ireland, and Troy Kuxhaus. Absent was: Scott Larson and Connie Whirlwind Horse. Attending via WebEx was Neal Livermont and Office Manager Tracie Hahn. Also present: General Manager Josh Fanning, Administrative/Member Service Assistant Stacey Robinson, Finance Manager Anna Haynes, Work Order/Staff Assistant Sherry Bakley and Operations Manager Mike Pisha.

The Pledge of Allegiance was led by President Allen.

A motion was made, seconded and carried to approve Administrative/Member Service Assistant Stacey Robinson to record the board minutes.

A motion was made, seconded and carried to approve the August 2021 Board Minutes.

A motion was made, seconded and carried to accept the Operating Report for July that was presented by Finance Manager Anna Haynes.

A motion was made, seconded and carried to approve the checks and disbursements for August. (Jerry, "chairman", Marion and Tom) The September Check Audit Committee will be (Neal "chairman", Scott and Cole).

A motion was made, seconded and carried to accept the August Analysis of Investments that was presented by Finance Manager Anna Haynes.

A motion was made, seconded and carried to approve the list of new members, attached hereto.

Stacey reported that she has been working on the Homecoming float with the help of co-workers and asked the Board if they want to have a Christmas

party? The board agreed to a December 3rd Christmas party. 1132600201

Mike reported on the 2021 reject poles; on ROW Clearing; that finished mowing around the substations; that the Gooseneck Overhead Tie Line will be started this year which will also serve a new AT&T cell site; about a combination OH and URD back feed tie into Kyle from the East side of town; on the possible replacement of a mile of underground line South of Vetel and that will be hiring summer help Matthew Kruid and Les Cuny permanently.

Mike gave the safety report.

Tom reported on the Rushmore Electric Power Cooperative meeting he attended.

Wade and Marion reported on the Region VI meeting they attended online in the office.

Josh provided a video from Basin explaining how Basin plans to move forward and how they are doing structurally and financially.

Discussion was held on the Manager Evaluations.

Discussion was held on the Board Evaluations. The board asked for some different options for next year regarding the board evaluations.

Discussion was held on the Basin Electric Annual Meeting with Troy being the delegate and Brent being the alternate. Marion and Josh also plan to attend.

Discussion was held on the NREA Annual Meeting with Tom being the delegate and Clifford being the alternate.

Discussion was held on the Mid-West Annual Meeting with Brent being the delegate and Josh being the alternate. No one else plans to attend at this time.

Discussion was held on the RST Utility Commission meeting about Net Metering.

Discussion about the rates continued with the board. Cole made a motion to approve the proposed rates with Tom seconding the motion; however, both Tom and Cole rescinded their motion and a special meeting will be held about the rates on Sept. 30, 2021 at 1 p.m.

No further business was brought before the board and the meeting was adjourned.

Next Board Meeting – Oct. 19, 2021 at 4 p.m.



# Safe Electricity Shares Six Tips For Safer Use Of Space Heaters

It's that time of year when many people will turn on a space heater to help them stay warm. However, it's also that time of year that firefighters are responding to home fires caused by improper use of these heating devices. The Safe Electricity program offers tips to help consumers be safe when using space heaters.

"When temperatures plunge, many people take out their space heaters to help them stay warm however, they can be deadly if they're not used with care.

Safe Electricity shares the following tips for operating space heaters safely:

- Check space heaters before use. Cords should not be frayed, brittle or cracked.
- Many fires start when flammable products are placed too close to heating devices, such as space heaters. Space heaters should be kept at least three feet from any flammable, such as blankets, clothing and paper.
- Place space heaters out of high-traffic areas and on a level, hard, non-flammable floor surface – NOT on carpets, furniture or countertops.
- Plug space heaters directly into the outlet, and never use an extension cord.
- Always remember to turn off space heaters when not in use. Never leave one of these devices on unattended or after going to bed.
- Do not attempt to warm your entire home using only space heaters.

Space heaters are useful in small areas, such as a study or living room. However, if you need to keep large areas warm, your home heating system will do the job more efficiently.

If shopping around for a space heater, look for one that has guards from heating elements and automatically shuts off if it is tipped over or overheating. Also be sure to check for safety certification marks to verify that the product has been tested for safety. If a certification mark is unfamiliar, check for the legitimacy online. Some common, legitimate marks are UL, CSA and ETL. Once you have made a purchase, make sure to fully read and follow the user instructions before using the product.

To learn more on how to avoid electrical hazards while staying warm this winter, visit [SafeElectricity.org](http://SafeElectricity.org).



## Energy Efficiency Tip of the Month

Heading out  
of town for the  
holiday season?

Remember to unplug electronics that draw a phantom energy load. Some gadgets like TVs, phone chargers, gaming consoles and toothbrush chargers use energy when plugged into an outlet—even when they're not in use.



# SEARCHING FOR THE STARS

Badlands Observatory photographer Teresa Hofer captured this image of The Pleiades, also known as the Seven Sisters.

## Badlands Observatory welcomes stargazers, researchers and others interested in pursuing the field of astronomy

**Billy Gibson**

billy.gibson@sdrea.coop

For centuries, astronomers have sought to find a scientific explanation for the Star of Bethlehem, which is described in the Gospel of Matthew as the celestial sign that led the Magi into the presence of the Christ child.

Some have speculated that the object high in the night sky could have been a supernova, a comet or possibly a conjunction of the planets Jupiter and Venus.

Accomplished astronomer Ron Dyvig has views of his own. As a researcher who adheres to scientific methods, he's a bit hesitant to plow into topics where science and faith may collide.

But when pressed to offer an educated opinion on the Christmas Star, he replies, "There are several elements that make it challenging to address from a scientific standpoint and there are a

half-dozen theories beyond what's there in the Biblical accounts. But I think it could have been a nova or the planet Venus. Venus can be remarkably bright after sunset when it appears to descend in the west for several weeks. That may have been what the Magi saw and would be something they could follow. But a lot of people have strong religious beliefs about it, and if you believe it was a miracle, then science can't really explain it adequately."

Dyvig is founder of the Badlands Observatory, which he opened for his own private viewing and independent research in 2000. Two years ago, he began renovating the facility located in the small community of Quinn just north of I-90, with the goal of one day welcoming members of the public interested in astronomy.

While the renovation project is not fully complete and a grand opening is set for next spring, Badlands

Observatory is now welcoming visitors by reservation only.

"Since we got settled into this facility, there has just been so much public interest in it that we decided to go public. It's as simple as that," Dyvig said. "Right now we're taking it slow with small groups. During the winter months our activities will be curtailed a bit, then we'll expect a busy spring."

A native of Deadwood, the 79-year old Dyvig took a keen interest in astronomy at an early age when he was



Teresa Hofer and Ron Dyvig are long-time collaborators who have opened the Badlands Observatory to public access.



introduced to the discipline by his local Boy Scout troop leader. He created his first observatory as a youngster when he made a concrete pad and a cylinder to hold his telescope in place in the middle of a rancher's field. During his high school and college years, he spent late nights scanning the skies, marveling at the vastness of the universe and hoping to discover new heavenly bodies.

As a college student, Dyvig learned and taught the art of telescope-making and became president of the Black Hills Astronomical Society. He later designed and fabricated the optics for the Hidden Valley Observatory in Rapid City.

Dyvig spent time honing his craft as a research assistant at the University of Arizona where he worked under several mentors and utilized the advanced facilities at Kitt Peak National Observatory. He was chosen to help design and test image intensifier camera systems for Steward Observatory.

While through the decades he kept day jobs to support his avocation, his evenings were spent star gazing and pursuing new discoveries. His passion and dedication to astronomy paid off when he discovered - and aptly dubbed - Asteroid 26715 South Dakota just a year after opening the Badlands Observatory. It's just one of the 25



Photographer Bob Rossiter and Ron Dyvig are shown with the 26-inch Newtonian Reflector telescope at Badlands Observatory.

discoveries credited to Dyvig during the course of his astronomy work.

Building the observatory was no small task. First, he found and converted an old medical building in Quinn to house the facility. Then he personally designed and fabricated all of the optics, including grinding and polishing the mirror for the 26-inch f/4.8 Newtonian Reflector telescope. West River Electric

Cooperative worked with Dyvig and the town of Quinn to install hoods over surrounding street lights to reduce "light pollution" and enhance the ability to scan the night sky.

Dyvig describes himself as fortunate to find a partner in Teresa Hofer, a career accountant who shares his passion for all things celestial.

There's always something to be done

at the observatory, Hofer said. Ongoing duties include maintaining and upgrading the optical and drive systems, control systems for the telescope and dome, facility management, designing and implementing new educational programs for visitors, website updates and keeping up-to-date on developments in the field of astronomy.

"There's plenty to do, especially since we decided to make the facility public after we figured people might like to see what we do," she said. "We had to make sure everything was comfortable for the public and do a lot of renovating and painting and upgrading."

Hofer said she is starting to promote the observatory as a destination for astronomy enthusiasts who might be interested in touring the facility and peering through one of seven telescopes on the observation deck. Dyvig is in the process of also building a radio telescope to add to his collection.

Those interested in experiencing the Badlands Observatory can call 605-381-1521 to set up a viewing time or visit [www.badlandsobservatory.com](http://www.badlandsobservatory.com).



The Orion Nebula has long captured the imaginations of star watchers as it has been associated with the Greek myth of a huntsman placed among the stars by Zeus.

# BUILDING RURAL LEADERS

Minnesota Ag Rural Leadership Class IX members develop problem-solving skills during a “Building Strong Teams” session.

## Working today to develop tomorrow’s rural community leaders in South Dakota and Minnesota

**Billy Gibson**

[billy.gibson@sdrea.coop](mailto:billy.gibson@sdrea.coop)

Success in any endeavor calls for solid leadership. Don Norton of the South Dakota Agricultural and Rural Leadership Program (SDARL) is eager to build better leaders who envision a more prosperous future for individuals, families and businesses across the state.

Norton believes leadership skills don’t just materialize out of thin air. Those skills and abilities have to be taught. That’s the goal of SDARL, an 18-month program that takes participants through an intensive course of conferences, class time and state, national and international seminars all designed to prepare the students to return to their communities and make positive contributions.

“You don’t see SDARL graduates sitting on the sidelines,” Norton

said. “They’re stepping up to serve on commodity and corporate boards, in community organizations, in government and in their families, leading and taking action and inspiring others to do the same.”

SDARL Class VII graduate Mike Traxinger of Claremont is doing anything but sitting on the sidelines. Traxinger is a fifth-generation farmer and rancher who also serves as general counsel and director of governmental affairs for Agtegra Cooperative. He recently joined the board of directors at Northern Electric Cooperative based in Bath, is past president of the American Agricultural Law Association, co-chair of the Agricultural Law Committee of the State Bar of South Dakota and a member of the South Dakota Farm Bureau, Farmers Union and South Dakota Simmental Association.

“The SDARL program really helped hone my leadership skills and gave me more insight into ways that I could make a difference that I hadn’t thought of before,” said Traxinger, who also serves as president of the South Dakota Association of Cooperatives. “Leadership is vital to the continued success of rural America, farming and ranching operations, and our communities. And programs like SDARL are very effective in developing strong leaders who have a passion for service and a heart for helping others succeed in a way that’s beneficial for everyone.”

The SDARL Foundation was created in 1998 under the first Executive Director Dr. Dan Gee, who stepped into the role after retiring from the Animal Science Department at South Dakota State University. The first class started in 2000 with participants representing a range of backgrounds including ranching, farming, banking, media, government and private business.

Dr. Gee was the leader of SDARL





Leadership students take a field tour of a logging operation in northern Minnesota.

in 2008 when Olga Brouwer went through the curriculum. Brouwer was so impressed with Dr. Gee and the program that she later went on to become leader of the Minnesota Agriculture Rural Leadership (MARL) and has held that position for the past 10 years. She points out that both the MARL and SDARL programs were formed on the same day 21 years ago and have graduated a combined 600 students during that time.

“I learned so much from Dr. Gee,” said Brouwer, who once operated a dairy farm in Elkton. “He was super-educational and also provided a lot of insight into the political process, how to reach out. If you go and talk to legislators and staffers you find out there are reasons why things might not be working out so well. But in order to change things, you have to be at the table and be active, especially for cooperatives.”

While both programs have similar structures and operate in similar fashion, Brouwer said MARL is affiliated with the University of Minnesota Extension and places a bit more stress on the academic side in the learning material.

Kylie and Jake Rieke are both graduates of the MARL program and leaders in their community. Along with raising corn and bean crops, Jake is chairman and a founding organizer of the R-S Fiber Cooperative while Kylie serves on the board of Renville-Sibley Cooperative Power Association based in Danube, Minn.

Jake participated in MARL from 2018 to 2020 and was impressed with what he gained from the program. His group traveled to Cambodia and Taiwan to examine their agricultural practices.

“It was a great experience. For us, it blew open an entire network of connected individuals to draw off their expertise and bounce ideas off of,” he said. “Everybody in the group brings a unique background in different fields, so there are people you can call to ask questions or answer questions someone may have for you. It gives you a fast lane for networking and for getting your projects moving to accomplish whatever goals you have in front of you.”

Neither SDARL nor MARL receive direct funds from state or federal governments to support their programming. Participants pay

The number of years  
SDARL and MARL  
**21**  
have been developing  
community leaders.

a percentage of the cost of going through the program but most funding comes from individuals, businesses and partnering organizations whose goal is to improve and develop rural communities.

One of those organizations standing in full support of both programs and the concept of rural leadership development is East River Electric Power Cooperative, which provides transmission, substation and distribution services for electric cooperatives in both states.

Those interested in investing in rural leadership through these programs can visit [www.sdagleadership.com](http://www.sdagleadership.com) and [www.marlprogram.org](http://www.marlprogram.org).



**Christmas Day**  
**December 25, 2021**

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.

To view the publication's master event calendar, scan the QR code below:



Or visit <https://sdrea.coop/cooperative-connections-event-calendar> to view more upcoming events.

#### **NOVEMBER 26**

##### **Parade of Lights**

Dakota Avenue, Huron, SD,  
605-352-0000

#### **NOVEMBER 26-28**

##### **Beautiful – The Carole King Musical**

Washington Pavilion, Sioux Falls, SD, visit <https://www.washingtonpavilion.org/> for more info and tickets

#### **NOVEMBER 26-28**

##### **DECEMBER 4-6, 10-23, 26-31**

##### **Christmas Nights of Lights**

Storybook Island, Rapid City, SD, 1-605-342-6357

#### **NOVEMBER 27**

##### **Holiday Celebration and Winter Market/Festival of Lights Parade**

Downtown, Rapid City, SD,  
605-381-4204

#### **DECEMBER 2**

##### **Christmas on the Prairie**

526 North Broadway Avenue, Miller, SD, 605-853-3098

#### **DECEMBER 2**

##### **Yankton Holiday Festival of Lights**

Downtown, Yankton, SD,  
605-668-5231

#### **DECEMBER 3**

##### **Handel's Messiah**

First Lutheran Church, Sioux Falls, SD, 605-367-6000

#### **DECEMBER 3-4**

##### **Christmas in The Hills – "Visions of Sugar Plums"**

Various Locations, Hot Springs, SD, 605-890-0519

#### **DECEMBER 3-5**

##### **Annual Christmas Tree Lighting & Cowboy Christmas**

Casey Tibbs Rodeo Center, Fort Pierre, SD, 605-223-7690

#### **DECEMBER 4**

##### **Rapid City Garden Club's Wreath & Centerpiece Sale**

Central States Fairgrounds, Rapid City, SD, 605-343-0710

#### **DECEMBER 5**

##### **Magical Medora Christmas**

Homestake Opera House, Rapid City, SD, visit <https://www.homestakeoperahouse.org/> for more info and tickets

#### **DECEMBER 10**

##### **for KING & COUNTRY – A Drummer Boy Christmas Tour**

Denny Sanford Premier Center, Sioux Falls, SD, tickets available at <https://smarturl.it/DBSiouxFallsSD>

#### **DECEMBER 11**

##### **Breakfast with Santa**

Bramble Park Zoo, Watertown, SD, tickets go on sale after Thanksgiving, 605-882-6269

#### **DECEMBER 11**

##### **Frontier Christmas**

Fort Sisseton Historic State Park, Lake City, SD, 605-448-5474

#### **DECEMBER 11-12**

##### **Christmas with the Symphony: 'Tis the Season**

Washington Pavilion, Sioux Falls, SD, tickets available at <https://www.bhsymphony.org/>

#### **DECEMBER 11-12, 18-19**

##### **Christmas Tours of the Historic Adams House**

22 Van Buren Street, Deadwood, SD, 605-722-4800

#### **DECEMBER 15-18**

##### **Lakota Nation Invitational 45th Anniversary**

The Monument, Rapid City, SD, 605-394-4115

#### **DECEMBER 16-19**

##### **25th Annual Christmas at the Cathedral**

Cathedral of Saint Joseph, Sioux Falls, SD, visit <https://ccfesd.org/events/christmas-at-the-cathedral/>

#### **DECEMBER 18**

##### **Vendor and Craft Market**

Watertown Mall, Watertown, SD, 605-882-1734

#### **DECEMBER 31**

##### **New Year's Eve with The Davis Sisters**

601 Columbus Street, Rapid City, SD, tickets available at <https://www.bhsymphony.org/>

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