

# COOPERATIVE CONNECTIONS



## **Crisp Breezes and Corn Mazes**

**Autumn Family Fun**  
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**Rodeo Champions**  
Pages 12-13



# Annual Report – Powering Possibilities, Reflecting on 2023



Board President  
Duane Wolbrink



General Manager  
Ken Schlimgen

We invite you to attend your cooperative's annual meeting on Tuesday, Sept. 10, 2024, at the Mitchell Corn Palace. Doors open for registration and the meal at 5:30 p.m., with the business meeting at 7 p.m. This year's annual meeting theme is "Powering Possibilities."

The meal will consist of our traditional three-meat buffet. There will be door prizes for registered members and a scholarship drawing for high school students in attendance. Watch for more details on the official notice you receive in the mail. Looking back, 2023 was a successful year, although it came with some challenges. Below is a brief recap.

## 2023 Highlights & Accomplishments

### ELECTRIC RATES

- The average revenue per kilowatt hour for farm and residential accounts was 11.9 cents per kilowatt hour, well below the national average of 13.6 cents.
- Rates were adjusted for the first time since 2019 to increase revenues by a modest 1%.

### FINANCIALS & CAPITAL CREDITS

- \$1,099,398 in capital credits was returned to member-owners and \$160,476 was paid toward capital credit estate retirements.
- Inflation affected the bottom line, but it was a positive year overall.
- Second consecutive year of lower energy sales.
- Operating margins increased from 2022.
- Refer to page 6 for a detailed financial report.

### OPERATIONS DEPARTMENT

- Progress was made on our plan for replacing aging infrastructure and meters.
- 56 miles of new underground line constructed.
- 10 miles of new overhead line constructed.
- 69 new electric services installed and 34 services retired for net growth of 35 electric services.
- Supply chain continued to affect material availability.

Like all cooperatives, Central Electric is in the business to serve our members as reliably and cost effectively as possible. This takes trust from our membership and it means our directors, and employees must continually seek ways to become more efficient while still being able to meet the challenges of constant change. We rely on our cooperative values of innovation, safety, integrity, commitment to community and accountability to help guide us.

Be assured that your cooperative remains committed to delivering reliable and reasonably priced electricity to you, the member owners, now and in the future. The 2023 annual report contains highlights of the year, as well as a financial report.

Please attend your cooperative's annual meeting on Tuesday, Sept. 10. You will hear a review of the 2023 year and a preview of what's ahead and the challenges facing the electric industry. Our employees, board of directors and management always look forward to visiting with the members we serve. Until next month, stay safe.

### SERVICE DEPARTMENT

- Revenues topped \$2 million with margins of \$21,425 after expenses.
- 2,000 service requests performed for heating and cooling, electrical wiring, security lights and appliance sales and service.

### MARKETING & MEMBER SERVICES

- The cooperative purchased a Ford F-150 Lightning pickup and a Polaris Kinetic electric UTV to study the impact of EV charging and to assess the efficiency of electric transportation technology.

### SAFETY, CUSTOMER SERVICE & SECURITY

- Second consecutive year of no lost time accidents.
- Customer service, metering and warehouse teams had another successful year.
- Efforts continue to protect your cooperative from physical and cyber threats.

### OPERATION ROUND-UP

- Members in all eight counties have contributed to and benefited from the program.
- Awarded \$36,700 in grants to community projects. Total grants from 2016-2023 was \$197,757.

**CENTRAL ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE CONNECTIONS**

(USPS 018-963)

**Board of Directors**

Aurora County - Duane Wolbrink, President  
 Brule County - Bradee Pazour  
 Buffalo County - Donita Loudner, SDREA Director  
 Davison County - Jeff Gustafson  
 Hanson County - Mark Hofer - Secretary & NRECA Director  
 Jerauld County - Mark Reindl, Treasurer  
 Miner County - Robert Banks - Director  
 Sanborn County - Todd VanWalleghen, Vice President  
 Director-At-Large - Merl Bechen



CENTRAL ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE CONNECTIONS is the monthly publication for the members of Central Electric Cooperative, PO Box 850, Mitchell, SD 57301. Families subscribe to Cooperative Connections as part of their electric cooperative membership. Central Electric Cooperative Connections' purpose is to provide reliable, helpful information to cooperative members on matters pertaining to their cooperative and living better with electricity. Also available at [www.centralelec.coop](http://www.centralelec.coop).

Subscription information: Central Electric Cooperative members devote 50 cents of each monthly electric payments for a subscription. Non-member subscriptions are available for \$12 annually. Periodicals Postage Paid at Central Electric Cooperative, PO Box 850, Mitchell, SD 57301, and additional mailing offices.

Postmaster: Please send address changes to Central Electric Cooperative, PO Box 850, Mitchell, SD 57301. Address all other correspondence to: Cooperative Connections, PO Box 850, Mitchell, SD 57301 Telephone: (605)996-7516; Fax: (605) 996-0869; e-mail: [cec@centralelec.coop](mailto:cec@centralelec.coop); website: [www.centralelec.coop](http://www.centralelec.coop).

**Contact Us**

Office Hours: Monday - Friday 8 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.  
 Phone: 1-800-477-2892 or 1-605-996-7516  
 Website: [www.centralelec.coop](http://www.centralelec.coop)

**Our Mission**

Provide reliable energy and services with a commitment to safety and member satisfaction.

**Non-Discrimination Statement:**

In accordance with Federal civil rights law and U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) civil rights regulations and policies, the USDA, its Agencies, offices, and employees, and institutions participating in or administering USDA programs are prohibited from discriminating based on race, color, national origin, religion, sex, gender identity (including gender expression), sexual orientation, disability, age, marital status, family/parental status, income derived from a public assistance program, political beliefs, or reprisal or retaliation for prior civil rights activity, in any program or activity conducted or funded by USDA (not all bases apply to all programs). Remedies and complaint filing deadlines vary by program or incident. Persons with disabilities who require alternative means of communication for program information (e.g., Braille, large print, audiotope, American Sign Language, etc.) should contact the responsible Agency or USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TTY) or contact USDA through the Federal Relay Service at (800) 877-8339. Additionally, program information may be made available in languages other than English. To file a program discrimination complaint, complete the USDA Program Discrimination Complaint Form, AD-3027, found online at [www.usda.gov/oascr/how-to-file-a-program-discrimination-complaint](http://www.usda.gov/oascr/how-to-file-a-program-discrimination-complaint) and at any USDA office or write a letter addressed to USDA and provide in the letter all of the information requested in the form. To request a copy of the complaint form, call (866) 632-9992. Submit your completed form or letter to USDA by: (1) mail: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights, 1400 Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, D.C. 20250-9410; (2) fax: (202) 690-7442; or (3) email: [program.intake@usda.gov](mailto:program.intake@usda.gov). Central Electric Cooperative, Inc. is an equal opportunity provider, employer and lender.

**Board Meeting Summary**

The board of directors met on June 17, 2024, at Central Electric Cooperative's headquarters for the regular board meeting. They reviewed reports by management including details on operations, member services, communications, service department and financials.

**BOARD REPORT**

General Manager Ken Schlimgen updated the board of directors on Basin Electric Power Cooperative's Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) rate proceedings, East River Managers' Advisory Committee, Rural Electric Economic Development fund, employee visits and other management activities.

Accounting and Customer Service Supervisor DeEtte Bohr presented on the Western Area Power Administration (WAPA) Hilltop Irrigation District billing.

Manager of Finance and Administration Dean Uher reviewed the cooperative's 2023 IRS Form 990.

Director Wolbrink reported on East River Electric Power Cooperative happenings.

The board reviewed monthly director expenses.

**BOARD ACTION**

The board considered or acted upon the following:

- A motion was made and seconded to approve Policy 804 – Electric Heat Rate as revised. Motion carried.
- A motion was made and seconded to rescind Policy 803 – Electric Heat Rate. Motion carried.
- A motion was made and seconded to appoint Director Wolbrink as the East River Electric Power Cooperative board of directors. Motion carried.
- A motion was made and seconded to approve a member loan for heat pump installation. Motion carried.
- A motion was made and seconded to approve a member loan for heat pump installation. Motion carried.

There being no further business, President Wolbrink adjourned the meeting. The next regular board meeting was scheduled for July 15.

FINANCIAL REPORT	YEAR TO DATE JUNE 2024	YEAR TO DATE JUNE 2023
Kilowatt Hour (kWh) Sales	172,730,607 kWh	172,002,840 kWh
Electric Revenues	\$ 18,459,765	\$ 17,561,745
Total Cost of Service	\$ 18,425,655	\$ 17,320,568
Operating Margins	\$ 34,109	\$ 241,177

# WHEN THUNDER ROARS, GO INDOORS

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

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

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

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

## AVOID THE LIGHTNING THREAT

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

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

*Source: National Weather Service*



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

#### Lillee Pannell, Age 11

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

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



# Summertime SWEETS

## SUMMER FRUIT TART

### Ingredients:

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

### Method

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

**McCormick**

## RHUBARB PIE

### Crust

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

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

### Pie

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

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

**Lisa Soukup (Kummer)  
Tea, S.D.**

## PEACH DELIGHT

### Ingredients:

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

### Method

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

**Shirley Fletcher  
Rapid City, S.D.**

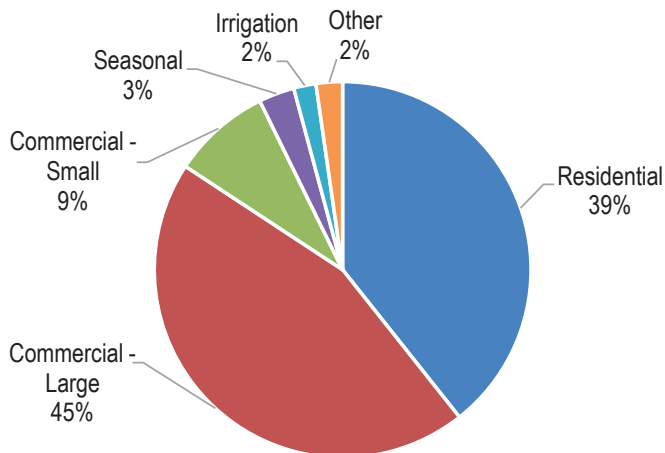
Please send your favorite recipes to your local electric cooperative (address found on Page 3). Each recipe printed will be entered into a drawing for a prize in December 2024. All entries must include your name, mailing address, phone number and cooperative name.

# Annual Report – 2023 Year End Financials

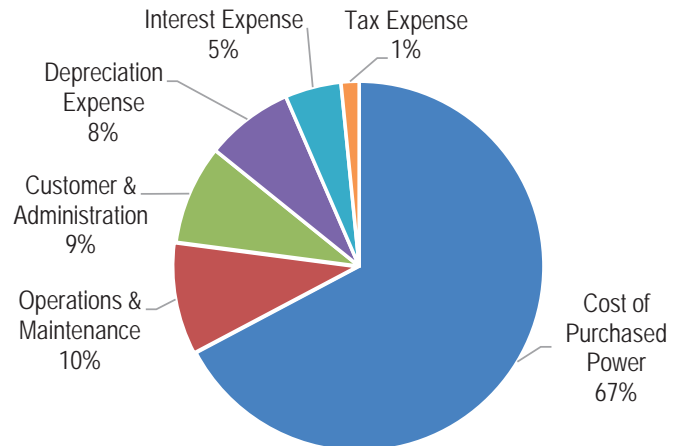
BALANCE SHEET	2023	2022
<i>ASSETS - What we have</i>		
Lines, Office Bldg and Operational Equipment	\$ 106,130,028	\$ 101,860,357
Less Depreciation	27,592,692	28,736,909
Total Electric Plant Less Depreciation	78,537,336	73,123,448
Cash and Investments:		
Cash and Cash Equivalents	4,071,373	4,180,295
Investment (Associated Organizations)	24,900,536	23,594,802
Investments (Other)	148,872	145,838
Total Cash Investments	29,120,781	27,920,935
Accounts Receivable	3,361,898	3,096,396
Materials and Supplies	6,265,419	4,420,733
Prepaid Insurance	190,832	165,619
Other Current and Accrued Assets	6,600	6,600
Deferred Debits	1,439,070	1,146,012
<b>TOTAL ASSETS</b>	<b>\$ 118,921,936</b>	<b>\$ 109,879,743</b>
<i>LIABILITIES - What we owe</i>		
Loans Payable to RUS & CFC	\$ 63,359,498	\$ 56,522,345
Accounts Payable	3,165,504	2,412,531
Other Current and Accrued Liabilities	1,336,664	1,355,506
Deferred Credits and Regulatory Liabilities	1,251,225	1,645,294
Consumer Deposits	190,804	136,691
<b>TOTAL AMOUNT OWED</b>	<b>\$ 69,303,695</b>	<b>\$ 62,072,367</b>
<i>MEMBER EQUITY - What's left after liabilities</i>		
Patronage Capital and Other Equities	\$ 49,618,241	\$ 47,807,376
<b>TOTAL EQUITIES</b>	<b>\$ 49,618,241</b>	<b>\$ 47,807,376</b>
<b>TOTAL LIABILITIES AND EQUITY</b>	<b>\$ 118,921,936</b>	<b>\$ 109,879,743</b>

OPERATING STATEMENT	2023	2022
<b>REVENUES - What the cooperative takes in</b>		
Revenue from the Sales of Electricity, Wheeling/Fees	\$ 35,385,449	\$ 33,383,874
<b>TOTAL REVENUE</b>	<b>\$ 35,385,449</b>	<b>\$ 33,383,874</b>
<b>EXPENSES - What the cooperative spends</b>		
Cost of Purchased Power	\$ 23,260,671	\$ 21,955,343
Distribution-Operations Expense	1,391,341	1,189,219
Distribution-Maintenance Expense	2,002,607	2,118,436
Consumer Accounting and Collecting Expense	392,569	355,700
Consumer Service and Information Expense	501,526	464,393
Sales Expense	119,604	127,245
Administrative and General Expense	1,964,050	1,856,464
Depreciation Expense	2,670,338	2,609,645
Tax Expense	551,048	559,056
Interest Expense	1,696,287	1,471,739
Other Deductions	34,026	25,674
<b>TOTAL EXPENSE</b>	<b>\$ 34,584,067</b>	<b>\$ 32,732,914</b>
<b>MARGINS - What's left after expenses</b>		
Patronage Capital and Operating Margins	\$ 801,382	\$ 650,960
Non-Operating Margins	153,934	132,480
Generation and Transmission and Other Capital Credits	2,062,474	2,694,614
<b>PATRONAGE CAPITAL OR MARGINS</b>	<b>\$ 3,017,790</b>	<b>\$ 3,478,054</b>

## 2023 REVENUE



## 2023 EXPENSES







# CRISP BREEZES AND CORN MAZES

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

## Celebrating Autumn on the Family Farm

**Frank Turner**

frank.turner@sdrea.coop

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

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

and Kylie, represent the sixth generation on the farm.

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

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



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



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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

Other local businesses are also joining

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

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

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

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



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

# Annual Report – East River Electric Update



**Bob Sahr**  
General Manager  
East River Electric

East River has worked alongside our member systems to provide safe, affordable and reliable power for over 70 years. We continue to power possibilities through our collective vision for the future that is fueled by our commitment to East River's mission of enhancing the value of our member systems. We can take pride in our past accomplishments and the challenges we have overcome along the way. East River's story is a testament to the dedication and hard work of our employees, the unwavering support from our member systems, and the trust placed in us by those we serve.

Over the past year, our cooperative family has accomplished many things while exhibiting resiliency, innovation, member engagement, and commitment to communities and individuals within the region we serve. We have faced and overcome many challenges including economic impacts and supply chain disruptions that continue to affect our construction work plan.

We successfully concluded a nearly three-year legal challenge when the 8th Circuit Court of Appeals ruled in favor of East River, affirming a lower court's decision to dismiss Dakota Energy Cooperative's lawsuit aimed at ending its wholesale power contract with us early in order to buy power from a for-profit, Colorado-based energy broker. This verdict reinforces the importance of wholesale power contracts which provide long-term reliability and cost control. We see this as a win for all East River's members. It sets a significant precedent highlighting the value of cooperative membership at all levels and the importance of honoring long-term contracts that will continue to allow us to provide modern infrastructure and affordable power for years to come.

A hallmark of the cooperative business model is members working together to achieve more as a group than they can accomplish individually. This case was about more than a contract – it's about a bond and commitment to work together with your neighbors for the greater good. The commitment cooperatives in our region made to each other, to work together through challenges and opportunities, is a testament to your unwavering commitment to cooperation among cooperatives, and East River and its members can stand as an example to other cooperative networks of how working together makes us stronger.

2023 marked the fifth year of our Transmission System Upgrade Plan. Our team has done an excellent job over the past year executing the plan. Through navigating extended material lead times, permitting and review challenges, and rising costs, we've worked together to adapt and maintain our momentum, successfully completing all major transmission projects on time.

The plan, approved by the East River Board in August 2018, was strategically designed to bolster and upgrade our infrastructure. It undergoes yearly reviews as part of each year's budgeting cycle, allowing adjustments for emerging technologies, load growth needs, supply costs and other changes. We have very exceptional employees and partnerships who have contributed to all we have completed over the past year and we continued to make progress in enhancing the reliability, efficiency and sustainability of our system's backbone and positioning the system to provide for growth.

East River and our power supply partners are continuously looking to ensure we have a mix of power resources to serve our membership





with reliable and affordable electricity. As a result, we employ an all the above generation strategy. We continue to see an increase in renewables within our generation mix adding to the significant percentage of power supply we already receive from wind and hydropower. We're excited to announce that solar has now become part of our energy mix. It's a small fraction of our total power supply, but it will continue to increase with generation being added through our power supplier Basin Electric and new utility-scale solar projects like the 128-megawatt Wild Springs Solar recently built in western South Dakota. Our cooperative network is leading the way toward a more diversified all-of-the-above generation strategy that will continue to bring affordable, reliable energy for years to come.

As legislation and regulatory requirements lead the electric utility industry toward more renewable energy sources, we remain at the forefront of change while remaining steadfast in our determination to ensure a transition that doesn't sacrifice reliability and affordability. We continue to advocate for an all-of-the-above generation strategy as new legislation and initiatives emerge.

East River's board-driven farm and contractor safety campaigns continued in the past year. It's a collective effort of our cooperative network that reminds farmers and contractors to be aware of electrical equipment when they're working. It also educates them on the steps to take if their equipment contacts a power line.

Finally, we're happy to reflect on what we've accomplished throughout the year that extends beyond the provision of electricity. East River places great value on our commitment to community. The REED Fund, our member cooperatives' economic development arm, continues to reach impressive milestones making a positive impact by providing no or low-interest financing for projects and initiatives that foster growth and prosperity throughout our region. Since 1996, the REED Fund has invested more than \$125 million dollars in the region through more than 400 loans. The REED Fund and partner lenders have combined to distribute nearly a billion dollars in economic investment, more than 10,000 jobs have been impacted, and more than three million square feet of facilities have been constructed or renovated, mostly by nonprofit development corporations committed to helping the region grow. Governed by 26 cooperatives in South Dakota and Minnesota, including your co-op, the REED Fund truly powers possibilities in our communities by supporting economic development.

We also work collaboratively with our member systems in many other ways to live out the cooperative principle of commitment to community. We do this by giving back to those we serve through charitable giving, events, youth outreach programs and education. This dedication extends to 4-H, the FFA Foundation, Feeding South Dakota, the United Way, Special Olympics, Junior Achievement and many more regional organizations that have positively impacted our communities.

East River exists to enhance the value of its members, and together, we have built a foundation for success. We continue to celebrate our accomplishments, acknowledge our challenges and plan for the future. Through it all, we remain committed to the cooperative principles that guide us. Working alongside our member systems, we strive to position our cooperative family for success today, tomorrow and in the coming years with a commitment to each other, and our members at the end of the line, we will continue working to power possibilities.





# RODEO CHAMPIONS

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

Jocelyn Johnson

[jocelyn.johnson@sdrea.coop](mailto:jocelyn.johnson@sdrea.coop)

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

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

more than a fashion statement.

"These shirts are almost like a trophy," said Kylee Ellerton, a member of Black Hills Electric Cooperative in Custer, S.D. "It's something you can keep and look back on to remember."

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

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

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

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

Association.

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



Photo credit: Charles Minor





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

of the state finals competition in their respective events.

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

the college rodeo team in barrel racing and pole bending.

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

Decknikker placed 7th in barrel

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

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

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

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

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



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

# Minutes of Central Electric's 2023 Annual Meeting

The Annual Meeting of Central Electric Cooperative Inc. members was held on Tuesday, Sept. 19, 2023, at the Corn Palace, Mitchell, South Dakota. Duane Wolbrink, the President, called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. President Wolbrink thanked Central Catering of Hawarden, Iowa, for providing the meal. Attorney Don Petersen was appointed acting secretary. President Wolbrink announced that there was a quorum of 325 registered members present at the time the meeting began.

President Wolbrink called upon Pastor Dan Ziebarth of the River Tree Church to give the invocation.

President Wolbrink recognized past and present U.S. Military service members in the audience. Attendees were asked to stand as special guest Vayda Hofer sang the National Anthem, followed by attendees reciting the Pledge of Allegiance.

President Wolbrink introduced Manager of Member Services and Marketing Patrick Soukup and Manager of Communications Tara Miller who then conducted the drawing for a scholarship and youth door prizes.

President Wolbrink asked if any members wished to discuss the proof of notice or the order of business that had been mailed to them. The reading was dispensed with no objection, and the order of business was approved as mailed.

The minutes of the 2022 Annual Meeting were mailed to each member as part of the Central Electric Cooperative Connections Annual Report. President Wolbrink asked if there were any objections to dispensing with the reading of the minutes. There being no objections, the minutes were approved.

President Wolbrink announced that registration for the annual meeting had closed.

President Wolbrink introduced Vice President Todd VanWalleghen who then presented an overview of the proposed Bylaw amendments.

Vice President VanWalleghen called on Attorney Don Petersen to preside over the vote on the proposed Bylaw amendments. Attorney Petersen explained the voting process and the membership was then asked to vote on the proposed Bylaw amendments.

President Wolbrink introduced the board of directors to annual meeting attendees: Vice President Todd VanWalleghen representing Sanborn County; Secretary Mark Hofer representing Hanson County; Treasurer Mark Reindl representing Jerauld County; SDREA Director Donita Loudner representing Buffalo County; Roger Campbell representing Brule County; Jeff Gustafson representing Davison County; Bob Banks representing Miner County; and Director-At-Large Merl Bechen representing all eight

counties served by Central Electric.

President Wolbrink delivered the president's report, which included details on 2022 financials and capital credit retirements. President Wolbrink emphasized Central Electric's commitment to safety, reliability, and member satisfaction. He concluded the report with a personal thank you to Central Electric employees and their families.

President Wolbrink introduced Manager Ken Schlimgen. Manager Schlimgen welcomed members to the Annual Meeting and delivered the manager's report. He recognized and thanked board members from the Operation Round-Up board of trustees that will be leaving the board due to term limits: Ellen Speck representing Buffalo County and Jill Ekstrum representing Brule County.

Manager Schlimgen reviewed reliability metrics, accelerated line replacement progress, new services built, services removed, and the number of requests for electrical wiring, HVAC work, and appliance services. He added that the cooperative also performs annual maintenance activities, including tree trimming, pole replacements, and load management work. Manager Schlimgen discussed Central's annual financial audit and efforts the cooperative is taking to ensure stable operations.

Manager Schlimgen also recognized long-time employee Doug Schley who plans to retire in early 2024. Manager Schlimgen closed his report by thanking board members and employees for their dedication to the cooperative and Central Electric members for their cooperation and support.

President Wolbrink recognized retiring director Roger Campbell with a gift presentation and invited him to share some comments with attendees.

President Wolbrink introduced incoming director Bradee Pazour representing Brule County. Director Pazour will take her seat on the board of directors at the October 16, 2023, regular board meeting.

President Wolbrink announced the results of the vote on the proposed Bylaw amendments; 268 votes in favor and 19 votes against. The proposed Bylaw amendments passed.

President Wolbrink called for any unfinished business. There was none. President Wolbrink then called for any new business. There was none.

President Wolbrink introduced Brian Bultje, Manager of Operations, and Patrick Soukup, Manager of Member Services and Marketing, who drew names for prizes.

President Wolbrink asked for and received a motion and a second to adjourn the 2023 Central Electric Annual Meeting. There being no further discussion from members the meeting was adjourned.



# Board of Directors 2023-2024



Duane Wolbrink, President  
Aurora County (District 1)  
Served 1995-Present



Bradee Pazour  
Brule County (District 2)  
Served 2023-Present



Donita Loudner, SDREA Dir.  
Buffalo County (District 3)  
Served 2002-07  
& 2017-Present



Jeff Gustafson  
Davison County (District 4)  
Served 2021-Present



Mark Hofer, Secretary,  
NRECA Director  
Hanson County (District 5)  
Served 1990-Present



Mark Reindl, Treasurer  
Jerauld County (District 6)  
Served 2010-Present



Bob Banks  
Miner County (District 7)  
Served 2022-Present



Todd VanWalleghen  
Vice President  
Sanborn County (District 8)  
Served 2010-Present



Merl Bechen  
Director-At-Large  
Served 2021-Present

Central Electric's board members are elected by the members to represent each county in the cooperative's service area.

Board members invest a tremendous amount of time in the co-op throughout the year. They meet monthly to review operations of the co-op, and they attend outside meetings to stay informed and capable of making sound decisions. It is their duty to ensure governing decisions are in the best interest of the cooperative and its member-owners.

We thank these directors for the time they invest upholding the mission of Central Electric Cooperative, which is to provide reliable energy and services with a commitment to safety and member satisfaction.

## REGISTER TO WIN!

Bring this coupon and mailing label to the Touchstone Energy® Cooperatives booth at Dakotafest or the South Dakota State Fair to win a prize!

Your Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Your E-mail Address: \_\_\_\_\_



Photo Credit: SDStateFair

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.

**AUG. 24**  
**Brad Clary Memorial Poker Run Benefitting Fedora Fire Department**  
Registration at 11 a.m.  
Howard Fire Hall  
Howard, SD

**AUG. 28-SEPT. 2**  
**South Dakota State Fair**  
7 a.m.-8 p.m.  
Huron, SD  
www.SDStateFair.com

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

**SEPT. 7**  
**Pink Ladies Rib Contest and Bean Bag Tournament**  
Sandy's Bar  
Emery, SD  
605-770-0841

**SEPT. 10**  
**Central Electric Annual Meeting**  
Meal 5:30-7 p.m.  
Business Meeting 7-7:45 p.m.  
Corn Palace  
Mitchell, SD

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

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

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

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

**SEPT. 20-22**  
**South Dakota Festival of Books**  
Brookings, SD  
605-688-6113

**OCT. 5-6**  
**The Black Market**  
W.H. Lyon Fairgrounds  
Expo Building  
Sioux Falls, SD  
605-332-6004

**OCT. 19**  
**Buffalo County Fall Ball**  
Live Music and Food  
8 p.m.  
Fire Hall  
Gann Valley, SD

**NOV. 2**  
**Reliance Christmas Carousel**  
9 a.m.-3 p.m.  
Legion Hall  
Reliance, SD  
605-730-0553

**NOV. 8**  
**Plankinton Dueling Pianos**  
Fundraiser  
Ag Building  
Plankinton, SD  
Facebook.com/  
PlankintonServiceClub

**NOV. 10**  
**29th Annual Lutefisk, Meatball & Lefse Supper**  
4 p.m. - 7 p.m.  
Trinity Lutheran Church  
Chamberlain, SD  
605-730-0553

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