

# COOPERATIVE CONNECTIONS



## Gardening Greats

**Master Gardeners  
Cultivating Community  
Growth**

Pages 8-9

**Bridging History**  
Pages 12-13

*Photo courtesy of SDSU Extension.*



# Weathering the Drought



**Matt Sleep**  
CEO

My hope is that this issue of the Butte Electric Cooperative Connections magazine finds you enjoying all the May flowers that all the April showers have brought. I say this with some good old-fashioned agricultural optimism because the demands of publishing and printing the magazine require me to write this article well in advance of May (and even April!).

The joy of modern technology is that we all have abundant information at our fingertips. That abundance of information does not necessarily give us an abundance of accuracy when trying to predict the future. My early studies of economics, commodity prices, and the weather proved that over and over to me.

Speaking of technology and the weather, this time of the year, I start looking at the United State Drought map on a regular basis. Anyone can do that by going to the internet and either searching “Drought Monitor Map” or going to <https://droughtmonitor.unl.edu>. The studious folks at the National Drought Mitigation Center at the University of Nebraska put this map together by utilizing a vast web of data, government agencies, private organizations, and an enormous amount of technology. The result is a map that will either make you happy or fearful. Today, March 27, 2025, the map is making me fearful because it is showing the entire state in some stage of drought. My hope

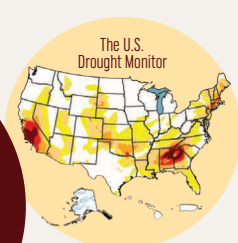
## THE U.S. DROUGHT MONITOR NETWORK

### IMPROVING DROUGHT EARLY WARNING

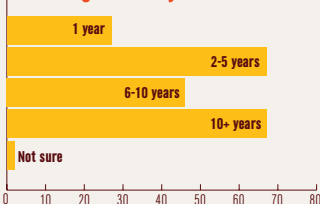
Based on a survey of the network by the National Drought Mitigation Center, with funding by the National Integrated Drought Information System.



NATIONAL DROUGHT  
MITIGATION CENTER  
UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA

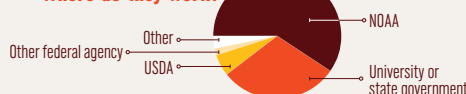


#### How long have they been involved?



Number of respondents\*  
\*209 participated in this survey question

#### Where do they work?



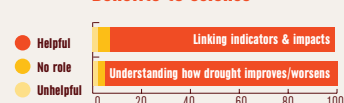
**89%**

say the USDM process has improved the ability to provide early drought warnings in the United States.

#### Benefits to the nation



#### Benefits to science



\* Each graphic reflects 100 percent of responses; not every participant answered every question.

is that by the time you read this article, that has changed. A good spring snowstorm or some thorough weeklong soakers can quickly change the drought monitor map for the better. My fingers are crossed.

Normally, I don't mind having a good drought in the middle of winter, but springtime is a different story. We need rain in the spring to get through the summer. We need rain for the crops. We need rain for the grass and trees. We need rain for the livestock and wildlife. We need rain for streams and lakes. We need rain to reduce fire danger. All the above are concerns, but for the purposes of this article, I'm going to focus on grass, trees, and fire danger. Our crews have been doing a great job patrolling our power lines and our crews and contractors have been doing a great job cutting trees within the right of ways around the power lines and equipment. The grass and trees that are outside the right of ways are what I would like to focus on today.

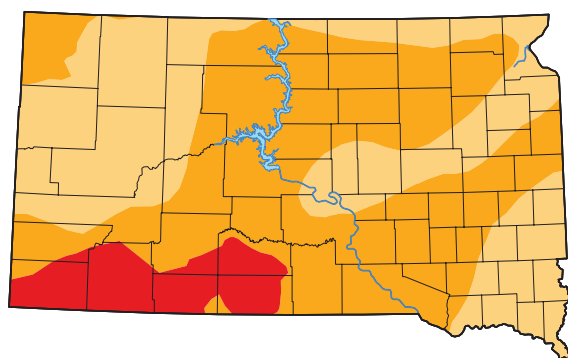
Electricity is a necessity that none of us can do without. Rural Electric Cooperative's were established to extend power lines out into the unserved rural areas often miles

through trees, over hills, through grasslands, etc. to serve one or two meters. Our area is still heavily agriculturally based. However, there are changes that have occurred within our communities that create greater risk for all of us. Farms and Ranches are being subdivided, there are houses in areas where houses never were before. There is less logging and thinning to reduce fuel load. There is less grazing of pastures to reduce the fuel load. Please be mindful of the risks that excess fuel loads can create on your property and take steps to minimize these risks as best as possible.

My mom recently accompanied my wife and I on a trip to one of our daughter's musical performances. During the trip we talked about my grandpa's involvement in extending power in the Crow Peak community for Butte Electric. Back then all the neighbors would get together in the afternoon, after they had done their work for the day, and build power line. It was a true community effort. The lights have been on ever since! Until next month, be safe and take care!

## U.S. Drought Monitor South Dakota

**March 25, 2025**  
(Released Thursday, Mar. 27, 2025)  
Valid 8 a.m. EDT



### Intensity:

- None
- D0 Abnormally Dry
- D1 Moderate Drought
- D2 Severe Drought
- D3 Extreme Drought
- D4 Exceptional Drought

The Drought Monitor focuses on broad-scale conditions. Local conditions may vary. For more information on the Drought Monitor, go to <https://droughtmonitor.unl.edu/About.aspx>

### Author:

Brad Rippey  
U.S. Department of Agriculture



[droughtmonitor.unl.edu](https://droughtmonitor.unl.edu)

## COOPERATIVE CONNECTIONS

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# Power Life Safely

## May is Electrical Safety Month

Every May, Electrical Safety Month serves as a vital reminder of the importance of preventing electrical hazards at home. Electricity powers nearly every aspect of modern life, but if handled improperly, it can pose serious risks, including injuries and property damage.

Your electric cooperative understands the risks associated with improper electricity use, which is why we're committed to reminding you to stay vigilant and practice electrical safety not only in May, but year-round.

By following key safety practices, you can reduce the risk of electrical hazards and ensure your family stays protected. Here are five essential tips for powering up safely at home.

1. **Be vigilant.** Regularly inspect your home's electrical system for any signs of damage or outdated components and replace any frayed electrical wires or cords. The Electrical Safety Foundation International estimates roughly 3,300 home fires originate from extension cords every year, either from overloading, overheating or fraying. If you're relying on extension cords as permanent power solutions, consider contacting a qualified electrician to install additional outlets where you need them.
2. **Use Surge Protectors.** Safeguard your sensitive electronics and appliances from surges with surge protectors. These handy devices help divert excess voltage away from your electronics, reducing the risk of damage or electrical fires. Not all power strips include surge protection, so read the product label carefully. Additionally, surge protectors can lose effectiveness over time and should be replaced when damaged or outdated.
3. **Practice Safe Power Strip Use.** Avoid overloading electrical outlets with power strips that exceed the outlet's capacity. High-energy devices, like heaters, microwaves and hairdryers should be distributed across multiple outlets. Overloading an outlet with a "busy" power strip can lead to overheating and create a fire hazard, so be sure to check the power strip's wattage rating before plugging in items.

4. **Water and Electricity Don't Mix.** It may seem obvious, but accidents involving water contact with electrical items happen. Always keep electrical appliances and devices away from water sources, like sinks, bathtubs or swimming pools. Make sure your hands are dry before touching any electrical switches or appliances – never handle electrical devices with wet hands. Ground Fault Circuit Interrupters (GFCIs) should be installed in areas where water and electricity are typically in close proximity, including kitchens, bathrooms and outdoor outlets.
5. **Educate Family Members.** One of the best ways to ensure the safety of everyone in your household is to talk about electrical safety. Teach children not to play with electrical outlets or appliances and ensure they understand the potential dangers of electricity. Create and practice a home fire escape plan that includes electrical safety precautions in case of emergencies.

Practicing electrical safety at home is essential for protecting your family, property and peace of mind. Remember, electrical safety isn't just a one-time effort – it's a year-round responsibility. Taking these steps can help ensure a safer, more secure home for you and your loved ones.



**"Don't plant trees near power lines."**

### Jeremiah Barlow

Jeremiah cautions readers not to plant trees near power lines. Thank you for your picture, Jeremiah! Jeremiah's parents are Mosiah and Cristine Barlow, members of West River Electric Association.

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.





# Delicious CHICKEN

## CHICKEN BREAST SUPREME

### Ingredients:

4 chicken breasts  
(boned and halved)  
8 strips bacon  
2 pkgs. chipped beef  
8 oz. sour cream  
1 can cream of chicken soup  
6 oz. evaporated milk

### Method

Wrap each half of chicken breast in a piece of bacon. Place in a baking dish lined with two layers of chipped beef.

Blend sour cream, soup, and milk. Pour over chicken.

Bake uncovered at 300°F for three hours. Serve over rice.

\*Makes 8 servings.

**Sharon Houchin**  
Central Electric Member

## CHICKEN ROLLUPS

### Ingredients:

8 oz. tube crescent rolls  
4 boneless chicken breasts  
(cooked shredded and seasoned to taste)  
8 oz. cheddar cheese  
(finely shredded, divided)  
10 1/2 oz. can cream of chicken soup  
1 packet chicken gravy mix  
1 cup water

### Method

In a bowl, mix the shredded chicken and 1/3 of the cheese. Take a scoop of the mixture and roll it into a crescent roll then place in a greased 9" x 13" pan. Bake at 350°F until the crescent rolls look browned on top. Mix the soup, gravy mix, 1/3 of the cheese, and enough water to make the mixture pourable. Pour over the crescent rolls. Sprinkle the remaining 1/3 of the cheese on top and bake again until the cheese melts and starts to brown.

**Nicole Einrem**  
B-Y Electric Member

## SMOKY CHICKEN TACOS

### Ingredients:

1 tbsp. oil  
1 lbs. boneless skinless chicken breast, cut into thin strips  
1/4 cup Flavor Maker Taco Night Topping Seasoning  
1/2 cup water  
12 (6-inch) flour or corn tortillas, warmed

### Method

Heat oil in large skillet on medium-high heat. Add chicken; cook and stir just until browned.

Stir in Flavor Maker Seasoning and water. Bring to boil. Reduce heat and simmer 5 minutes or until sauce has thickened and chicken is cooked through, stirring occasionally.

Spoon chicken into warm tortillas. Serve with desired toppings, such as shredded lettuce, shredded cheese, sour cream, guac or salsa.

**McCormick.com**

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 2025. All entries must include your name, mailing address, phone number and cooperative name.

# Tips to Beat the Energy Peak



**Miranda Boutelle**  
Efficiency Services  
Group

**Q:** What does “beat the peak” mean, and why should I care about it?

**A:** When your electric cooperative talks about “beat the peak,” it is a call to action for energy consumers to reduce electricity use during periods of highest demand. Using less energy during peak times can ease the strain on the electric grid, benefit your cooperative and sometimes lower your electric bill.

Electricity generation and energy supply must match consumption in real time to ensure safe, reliable power. Every moment of every day, an entire workforce monitors energy use, adjusting power plant production up or down as needed to keep the grid balanced.

As energy demand grows, all of us can do our part to use less. To put this in perspective, peak electricity demand is expected to increase by 38 gigawatts over the next four years, according to the Energy Information Administration. That’s like adding another California to our nation’s power grid.

Peak time varies for each electric utility but typically occurs in the morning when people get ready for the day and in the evening when they return home from work and school. During these times, we turn on lights, cook, adjust the thermostat, run

the dishwasher and do laundry – to name just a few energy-consuming activities.

Typically, the price of power increases when demand is higher. Reducing your electric use during peak times can help lower market prices for everyone and lessen stress on the electric grid.

Electric cooperatives set electric rates to cover costs. Some utilities have time-of-use rates that reflect higher costs during peak demand periods. Whether you have time-of-use rates or not, these tips can help keep costs down for your utility and establish off-peak energy habits.

As a general rule, I try to spread out my use of equipment and appliances. For example, I avoid washing dishes and clothes, and cooking all at the same time. Running a lot of hot water will cause your water heater to use more energy, too.

Increasing the energy efficiency of your home can lower its impact on the grid. Weatherize windows and doors and add insulation to improve the comfort of your home. You can also consider upgrading to energy efficient appliances or using energy-saving features on your existing appliances.

If you haven’t already, switch your incandescent lighting to LEDs, which use at least 75% less electricity and last up to 25 times longer, according to the U.S. Department of Energy. There are many affordable options on the market.

Schedule your dishwasher run time. My dishwasher, which is several years old, has a “delay start” button. This is also handy if your dishwasher is loud. Setting it to start after you go to bed shifts that energy consumption to off-peak hours, and you don’t have to hear it.

Running your washing machine and dryer during off-peak hours can help, too. If you’re in the market for a new washer or dryer, look for a model with a high Integrated Modified Energy Factor and a low Integrated Water Factor to save water and energy.

Also, consider switching your charging habits for all devices to off-peak hours. If you have an electric vehicle, use the scheduled charge settings. You’ll plug in your vehicle when you get home, and it will start charging automatically during the off-peak hours you choose.

Small changes at home can make a big difference to the energy grid. Incorporate these energy-wise habits into your daily routine.





# When the Lights Came On

## Darrell Kirby Reflects on the Arrival of Electricity and How Co-ops Powered His Career

Erica Fitzhugh

Southeastern Electric Cooperative

Growing up on a farm northwest of Salem, Darrell Kirby was the second oldest of five children in his family. Their farm had dairy cows, hogs and chickens and they grew corn, oats and beans. “Before we had electricity, the memory that sticks in my mind is doing schoolwork with an old kerosene lamp with a wick, set in the middle of the table for light,” shared Kirby. “After that we switched to a gas light with two mantels. It was much brighter and more dependable. But when we got electricity...that was out of this world.”

The Kirby family was one of the original members of McCook Electric, now Southeastern Electric. Kirby remembers that his home was energized by the cooperative around the time he was a fifth grader. “My uncle came out to wire our house,” said Kirby. “It was really something to be able to turn on a switch and have all that light!” Before electricity, Kirby and his siblings would carry a lantern from their house to the barn. A long wire was strung the length of the ceiling - they would hang the lantern from the wire and as they moved down the aisle milking cows by hand, they would slide the lantern down to light their way. Using a hand cranked milk separator, they would remove the cream from the

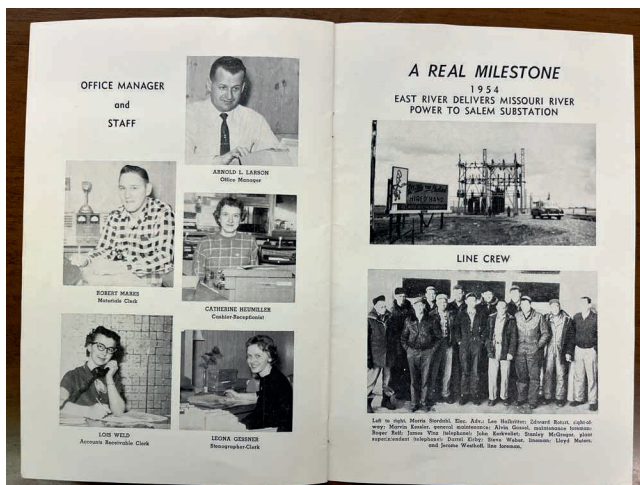


Photo by Erica Fitzhugh

milk. The milk would be fed to the hogs, and the cream would be kept in cream cans until it could be taken to town, usually twice a week, to trade for groceries and other goods at the K&K Store. “Electricity changed our lives,” Kirby exclaimed. “The yard light and lights in the barn, the milking machine, a cream separator with a motor instead of a crank, a refrigerator – the changes to our farming operation were remarkable.”

As Kirby finished high school, he had his mind set on farming. However, life had other plans for him. “I worked as a farmhand in the summer and as a mechanic in the winter. The next summer, McCook Electric bought property to build on and was looking for people to help with the construction. I assisted with the construction for a few months before I had to take a break due to a health issue,” said Kirby. He knew from that interaction with McCook Electric that he wanted to work for the electric cooperative. After Kirby recovered, he returned to McCook Electric and asked for a job as a lineman. He started in the spring of 1958 and spent the next 40 years powering the lives of his neighbors through his career at the co-op. “I was not scared of heights and liked working outdoors. I borrowed a set of hooks and belts and with no formal training or previous experience, I started my career as a lineman,” laughed Kirby.

Kirby held positions as a lineman, line superintendent and eventually as the general manager. He recalled experiencing ice and windstorms, working at annual meetings and witnessing several changes to the electric utility industry. “My fondest memories of working at the co-op included the people – our employees and our members. I got to know almost everyone because we were so small. I enjoyed visiting with and working for our members, helping them in any way I could,” smiled Kirby. “The co-op was so good to me and my family. I still miss the people after all these years.”



History is remembered in the 1959 McCook Electric Cooperative Annual Report, Years of Progress. It focused on the cooperative's growth from 1949-1959. Photo submitted by Erica Fitzhugh.



# GARDENING GREATS

## How Master Gardeners are Cultivating Community Growth

**Frank Turner**

frank.turner@sdua.coop

After years of tending to her garden, Codington-Clark Electric member Dianne Rider of Hazel can confidently say she is an expert in horticulture. However, her extensive experience of working with the earth isn't the only reason she is considered a soil savant.

In 2016, Rider earned the prodigious title of Master Gardener through the South Dakota State University Extension's Master Gardener Volunteer Program. This program provides in-depth horticultural training – covering topics like plant science, soil management and sustainable gardening practices – so enthusiasts like Rider can share their extensive gardening knowledge with their communities.

Becoming an Extension Master Gardener volunteer is a commitment. Applicants must complete horticulture classes, pass the course test and contribute 40 hours of volunteer service

during the first year of involvement. Despite the challenges, Rider had aspired to this achievement for decades, but it wasn't until she retired from her teaching career that she was able to dedicate herself fully and earn her place as a Master Gardener.

Reflecting the adage, “once a teacher, always a teacher,” Rider continues to educate and influence those around her, even after retirement, through gardening.

“Becoming a Master Gardener has always been on my bucket list since they organized,” Rider said. “I’ve always been a teacher, so finding a way to help others through gardening is probably what’s most rewarding.”

As a Master Gardener, Rider plays a key role in organizing annual gardening events for SDSU Extension, including the Master Gardener Annual Update Conference at Joy Ranch near Watertown. This event, attended by more than 125 Master Gardeners, serves as a thriving forum for gardening clubs to exchange ideas on the latest and greatest

projects they are tackling.

“The event is a lot of fun, because when you get 125 Master Gardeners in one room – let me tell you, the conversations are riveting,” Rider laughed.

Master gardeners also help SDSU Extension achieve its broader goal: to make cutting-edge research easily accessible to the people who can benefit from the findings. Master Gardeners have regular continuing education opportunities with experts from the SDSU Horticulture team, such as Professor John Ball, a SDSU Extension Forestry Specialist and South Dakota Department of Agriculture Forest Health Specialist. Once equipped with this information, volunteers can share the most significant takeaways from research being conducted across the state through the university, providing a bridge between research and practical application.

“Dr. John Ball’s presentation on how to trim a tree after planting it is one of the best things that I’ve learned that I can now share with others,” said Rider. “He says that raising a tree is just like raising a kid: you have to shape your tree when

Missouri Valley Master Gardeners remove invasive bellflower and other non-desirable plants at the Dorothy Jenks Memorial Garden in Yankton.  
*Photo courtesy of SDSU Extension.*



they are young, otherwise they turn into ugly adults.”

Master Gardener Field Specialist Prairey Walkling emphasizes that the connection between research-based information and enthusiasts is what the Master Gardener Volunteer Program thrives on. And the research goes far beyond just trees. SDSU’s horticulture research also extends into innovative mulching techniques, soil care and even studies on the growth and quality of four popular zinnia varieties.

“SDSU Extension wants to empower individuals to reach their gardening goals through providing science-based information. Each person has different pieces of land, resources and goals for their gardens and landscapes,” she said. “We strive to provide them with trusted, research-based information to help them make decisions.”

Walkling said the impact of these volunteers cannot be understated. According to Walkling, there are more than 400 Master Gardeners across the state and 14 Master Gardener clubs. In 2024, these vital volunteers hosted 153 gardening events, including farmers market booths, gardening workshops and demonstrations, reaching nearly 10,000 South Dakotans. Regardless of the event or what is being discussed, Walkling said Master Gardeners carry an infectious love of digging in the dirt.

“These volunteers help get people excited about gardening,” she said. “There are so many volunteer opportunities – teaching youth, teaching adults, maintaining demonstration gardens, answering questions, organizing events, engaging in horticultural research, writing horticulture articles – the sky is the limit.”



SDSU Extension Master Gardeners host an educational booth at the SD State Fair. From left: Lael Abelmann, Sharelle Meyer and Nancy Kadous.



Coteau Prairie Master Gardener Club (Watertown area) hosted the 2024 state conference at Joy Ranch. | Photos courtesy of SDSU Extension.

# We're Here to Help You Save



**Steve Barnett**  
General Manager

When summer heats up, our electric bills tend to increase as air conditioners are working overtime, driving up home energy consumption. South Dakota's electrical cooperatives are committed to helping you beat the heat without breaking the bank.

As the temperatures get hotter over the next few months, we want to make sure you know about a range of energy-saving offerings designed specifically with you in mind. By taking advantage of these programs and services, you can manage your summer energy consumption and costs.

### Time of Use Rate

When you sign up for a Time of Use Rate, you can lower your energy bills by shifting electric use to periods of lower demand (also known as off-peak times). Adjusting your electric use to off-peak hours helps cooperative member's avoid peak demand charges, and those savings can be passed on to you.

### Home Energy Audit

South Dakota's cooperative energy advisors are available to conduct an energy audit of your home to identify areas where energy is wasted and provide recommendations on ways to improve efficiency and lower your monthly bills.

### Rebate Program

When you make upgrades or purchases to reduce home energy use, those smart decisions should be rewarded. Your local electric cooperative may offer rebates on energy efficient appliances, heating and cooling equipment and more. Visit your cooperative's website to learn about rebate programs and how you can receive a bill credit/cash back for making smart energy choices.

### You Have the Power

Small actions combined can have a big impact on summer energy bills.

The best way to lower energy use during summer months is to raise the thermostat to the highest setting that's comfortable. Ceiling fans can also help you feel cooler, but remember to turn them off when you leave the room. On warm summer nights, fire up the grill to keep additional heat out of the kitchen. Remember to change air filters often so your cooling system doesn't have to work harder than necessary.

Contact your local electric cooperative for additional energy-saving advice from a trusted energy advisors.

Don't let energy bills take a toll on your summer fun. Your electric cooperative is here to help manage your energy use, whether through efficiency programs and services or energy-saving advice from our local energy advisors. We want you to learn more about practical strategies to lower your use, trim your bills and make this summer a breeze for both you and your wallet.

A photograph of a young girl with curly hair, wearing a white dress with a colorful butterfly pattern, running joyfully through a garden sprinkler. Water is spraying all around her, and she has a happy expression.

## STAY COOL. STAY EFFICIENT.

We're here to help you beat the summer heat. Take advantage of our efficiency programs and energy-saving recommendations designed to help you stay comfortable and cut costs all summer long.



# "Move Over" to Protect Roadside Crews

**Scott Flood**  
NRECA

When lineworkers are perched in a bucket truck, repairing power lines along a busy road, they have good reason to be concerned about their safety. However, most are less apprehensive about problems like working with high voltages or falling. Their biggest worry is also the most unpredictable: a distracted driver slamming into their vehicle or a nearby power pole.

The National Safety Council reported that 891 people were killed and 37,701 people were injured in work zone crashes during 2022 (the most recent statistics). Most of those crashes occur in construction sites, which are usually well-marked. Electric co-op crews are likely to face even greater danger, as they are often working alone along remote stretches of roads, frequently in heavy rain or other adverse weather conditions that can reduce their visibility.

The danger of work zone crashes led every state to adopt "move over" laws that require drivers to lower their speed and switch lanes when possible to protect emergency vehicles. The goal is to provide an added safety buffer and minimize the potential for accidents. Drivers caught violating the laws can face penalties such as significant fines.

Unfortunately, the Journal of Road Safety reports that just 14 states' "move over" laws protect other types of service vehicles, such as construction

trucks and utility vehicles. That means drivers in those states are under no legal obligation to give lineworkers that added margin of safety.

Compounding this issue is the dramatic increase in distracted driving. The National Transportation Highway Safety Administration has reported that as many as 1,000 Americans are injured each day because of activities that take drivers' attention away from the road. The most common is reading and responding to text messages. If a driver traveling at 55 miles per hour glances at their phone for just five seconds, they'll have traveled the length of a football field before returning their gaze to the road.

The design of today's vehicles contributes to distraction. Many vehicles have complex controls for entertainment and climate that demand the driver take their eyes off the road to make even simple adjustments.

Geography can also be a factor. Co-ops serving rural and remote areas often have power lines along twisty and hilly roads. Locals accustomed to driving those roads at fairly high speeds may be startled and have little time to react when they encounter a work crew past a hill or around a curve.

Besides the potential for lineworker injuries, accidents can also damage or destroy expensive service vehicles, reducing a co-op's ability to respond to outages and other problems. Power poles and other infrastructure may also suffer severe damage.

Additionally, many of the tasks performed by lineworkers, such as reconnecting high-voltage power lines, are inherently dangerous and require their complete focus. When their attention is distracted by speeding or noisy vehicles, they're more likely to make mistakes that can complicate the repair or cause injury.

Nor are co-op employees at risk only when their vehicles are parked and repairs are underway. Lineworkers frequently have to drive slowly along the shoulder of roads to pinpoint broken power lines or failed transformers, especially in darkness or conditions that interfere with visibility.

Many state transportation agencies have work zone awareness programs. Amplifying those efforts by devoting part of a co-op's advertising, publicity and social media reminds co-op members and other drivers of the importance of giving lineworkers a wide berth.

Co-ops are considering ways they can modify bucket trucks and other service vehicles to make them more visible. Bright colors and additional lighting such as flashing strobe lights and lighted detour arrows can attract attention from a distance. Reflective "work zone ahead" signs can also alert drivers to be ready for an unusual situation. Sometimes, a little bit of extra attention is all that's needed to prevent a serious incident.





Local, state and federal officials celebrate the ribbon-cutting of the new Lieutenant Commander John C. Waldron Memorial Bridge, March 25, 2025. Photo by Marcy Anderson, Courtesy of the Pierre Area Chamber of Commerce.

# BRIDGING HISTORY

## The Demolition of the Waldron Memorial Bridge

**Frank Turner**

frank.turner@sdrea.coop

Tons of concrete and steel came crashing down in a planned demolition of the Lt. Cmdr. John C. Waldron Memorial Bridge that connected Pierre and Fort Pierre over a half mile stretch of river. The planned explosion marked a significant historic moment for not only Pierre and Fort Pierre, but also eastern and western South Dakota.

The demolition of the bridge unfolded in seconds. A plume of black smoke erupted from the detonating cord placed at key points in the bridge, quickly followed by a bone-rattling shock wave. Paul Nelson, a recently retired employee of the South Dakota Department of Transportation, witnessed the end of the bridge's 63-year lifespan. Nelson, a member of Oahe Elec-

tric, spent over 40 years with the SDDOT, serving most of that time as the regional bridge engineer. In this role, he was responsible for the maintenance, inspection and upkeep of the very bridge that he saw demolished.

As legacy bridge engineer, this was not Nelson's first experience with such a demolition. "I had actually witnessed the 1986 demolition of the old truss bridge that was just downstream of the current railroad bridge – so I have been around something of this magnitude before," he explained.

Even still, Nelson laughed that the modern demolition had a "pretty good report when it went off."

Although the bridge has been decommissioned, its history endures. In 2002, the bridge was dedicated to Lt. Cmdr. John C.

Waldron, a naval aviator from Fort Pierre who led a torpedo squadron during the Battle of Midway in World War II. His actions proved pivotal in the battle, but led to death of himself and most of his squadron. Of the 30 men who served under his command, only one survived the Battle of Midway.

Waldron's legacy is still commemorated through the new Pierre-Fort Pierre Bridge, which had its ribbon-cutting ceremony last month.

Construction of the new bridge began in 2020, just yards from the old bridge's location. In total, the bridge cost nearly \$50 million and is designed to last a century.

"This bridge is going to be a beautiful and wonderful enhancement to the communities and something that will last more than a hundred years," South Dakota Governor Larry Rhoden said at the ribbon cutting ceremony for the new bridge that now connects the two halves of the state.



# BRIDGE DEMOLITION



The Lt. Cmdr. John C. Waldron Memorial Bridge comes crashing down at 9:03 a.m., on March 13.  
*Photos by Frank Turner.*







Photo courtesy of the Belle Fourche Police Dept.

# PROTECT AND SERVE

**In 1962, President John F. Kennedy proclaimed May 15 as National Police Officers Memorial Day and the week as National Police Week.**

**As we pay special recognition to our law enforcement officers, we want to spotlight some of the selfless work police officers do to better serve communities and make positive impacts in people's lives.**

## Jacob Boyko

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In Belle Fourche, it's fun to hang out with the cops.

That's the consensus among fifth graders in the Kids-n-Cops programs when officers from the Belle Fourche Police Department arrive at kids' homes early in the morning to pick them up for an unforgettable Christmas shopping spree.

"We pick up the kids from their houses, drive them around for about a half hour and let them activate the lights and sirens, then we bring them to Runnings and go on a shopping spree for their family," explained Police Chief Ryan Cherveney. "They can buy shopping cart loads of gifts for everyone in their house, and then still buy some gifts for themselves."

The outing continues with games, gift wrapping and a pizza party. At the end of the day, officers drop the kids off at their

homes, leaving behind not only presents but a lasting friendship.

The police department works with the school to target children who may be going through something at home or could otherwise benefit from a friendly acquaintance with some of Belle Fourche's finest.

The program is supported by donations from community – last year, the community sponsored \$500 shopping limits for 16 kids.

Cherveney, who's headed the program for more than a decade, says it's as big of a hit with his officers as it is with the fifth graders.

"It's one of the things every year the officers look forward to," Cherveney explained. "We never have to ask for volunteers because just about everybody volunteers. Even the guys working the overnights come in, do the event, and then

go home and try to get the last two hours of sleep before they come back to work."

Knowing the community members they serve and making a difference in the life of a kid boosts officers' mental health "tremendously," he added.

"It helps keep the officers grounded – they know the people that they're serving and that they're there to protect. [Knowing community members] can help alleviate a really stressful situation into a much more manageable one where we're able to work with people to resolve things."

He continued, "Our main focus is just being out there in the community, helping kids recognize that when we show up to their houses during negative events, we're there because we have a job – it's less scary for the children and they see we're people they can always come to when they need somebody"

The success of the program and the outpouring of community support has led the department to expand their community involvement beyond Christmas shopping, according to Police Administrative Technician Mardi Reeves. The police force also distributed grocery



cards, gift bags, food and blankets to families in need. Reeves estimates a community-wide impact of nearly 200 people in 2024.

Police officers and other first responders also coach little league sports, with plans to soon offer registration fee and equipment “scholarships” so any kid can get involved.

“There are a lot of under-privileged children who can’t be in sports that end up wandering around town with nothing to do and trouble tends to find them,” Reeves said. “Having them participate in a sport really helps with that.”

Chervený says he is grateful for the continued community support that not only makes the Kids-n-Cops program possible, but also creates lasting friendships and memories for kids and their families.

“We had a kid that went shopping with us, and he ended up buying a popcorn popper, oil, butter, cheese, and the different popcorn toppings along with gifts for his other siblings,” Chervený remembered. “The family had never been able to go to a movie – the parents worked rough schedules – so this was the opportunity. The kid bought some movies and a Blu-ray player and the whole purpose was so that they could sit down and watch movies as a family.”

Gregory Police Chief Ryan Cook also believes in the merits of community

involvement. In Gregory, he spearheads multiple community initiatives including the popular bike rodeo.

A partnership between the police department, Avera Health and Gregory’s volunteer ambulance and fire services, the bike rodeo teaches kids – and anyone else interested – the rules of the road for kids on bicycles as well as other safety tips.

“We have volunteers at different stations and the kids go around to each station and participate in whatever event that is,” Cook explained. “One of the stations is helmet sizing and we hand out free helmets, other stations make sure the bicycle chain is lubed up and tight and the different parts are working correctly, and so on.”

The department is involved in other ways, too. For example, the officers work with the post office to ensure children’s letters to Santa Claus are delivered to the North Pole and receive a response.

The involvement is a necessity, explained Cook, because police can’t do their jobs and serve their communities without building relationships first.

“You need to be someone the community trusts,” he said. “You want folks to be comfortable approaching you, knowing there’s an open door, knowing they’re welcome to make the phone call or stop in. And obviously, when our officers are active and out doing stuff, it’s that much easier.”

## Women in Law Enforcement



**Metzger**

Public service knows no gender, and neither does a career in law enforcement. That’s the message South Dakota Highway Patrol

deputy Emily Metzger wants to send to young girls with a passion for public service.

Originally from Kansas, Metzger attended the University of South Dakota in Vermillion to study criminal justice and public administration.

“I wanted to be in law enforcement since I was very young,” Metzger explained. My grandfather was in law enforcement, and in college I worked for the fire department and ambulance and really decided being a first responder was something I wanted to do.”

After college, she attended the police academy training in Pierre, where for 13 weeks she studied everything ranging from traffic stops to defensive tactics to interrogation. Then, another 10 weeks of highway patrol academy and another 10 weeks of field training.

“In South Dakota, the Highway Patrol offers a lot of different things,” Metzger said. “All of our education and training is 100% paid for and they pay your salary while you’re there.”

While the Highway Patrol isn’t exactly brimming with female troopers, Metzger said she’s on the scene to help just like anyone else.

“I have the same expectations as any trooper highway patrol – there’s no special treatment,” she said.

Metzger encourages young women interested in applying to reach out to a local law enforcement officer for more information.



Officer Allan Guinard helps local children with their Christmas shopping. Photo courtesy of the Belle Fourche Police Dept.



The Annual Bike Rodeo. Photo courtesy of the Gregory Police Dept.



**MAY 31, JUNE 28, JULY 26**  
**Fort Sisseton Lantern Tour**  
 Lake City, SD  
 605-910-4465

*Photo courtesy of  
 Travel South Dakota*

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.

**APRIL 27**  
**Country Roads**  
 2 p.m. Matinee  
 Gayville Music Hall  
 Gayville, SD  
 605-760-5799

**MAY 2-3**  
**SD Spring Square Dance Festival**  
 Fri. 7:30-10:30 p.m.  
 Sat. 9:30 a.m.-7:30 p.m.  
 Faith Lutheran Church  
 601 N. Cliff Ave.  
 Sioux Falls, SD  
 Call for events & times  
 605-360-2524

**MAY 3-4**  
**Prairie Village Events**  
 Sat. Consignment Auction  
 Sun. Season Opening  
 Madison, SD  
[www.prairievillage.org](http://www.prairievillage.org)

**MAY 3**  
**West River Pheasants Forever Banquet**  
 5 p.m. Central Time  
 Draper Auditorium  
 Draper, SD  
 605-516-0143

**MAY 3**  
**American Legion Post 15**  
**Just Because It's Time to Dance**  
 6-10:30 p.m.  
 El Riad Shrine  
 Sioux Falls, SD  
 605-336-3470

**MAY 3**  
**Rummage & Bake Sale**  
 8 a.m.-12 p.m.  
 5103 Longview Rd.  
 Rapid City, SD

**MAY 6-7**  
**7th Annual Energize! Exploring Innovative Rural Communities Conference**  
 Hosted by SDSU Extension  
 Community Vitality  
 Platte, SD  
 605-626-2870

**MAY 10**  
**Cinco De Mayo Falls Park Fiesta**  
 11 a.m.-7 p.m.  
 Sioux Falls, SD

**MAY 17**  
**Norwegian Independence Day**  
 Vivian, SD  
 605-222-3296

**MAY 17**  
**Annual Plant Sale**  
 9 a.m.-11 a.m.  
 Codington Co. Extension Complex  
 Watertown, SD  
 830-534-5359

**MAY 23-25**  
**Brandon's Big Car Show**  
 Carnival & Car Show  
 Fri. 6-11 p.m., Sun. 12-5 p.m.  
 Sat. 1-11 p.m., Car Show 1-4 p.m.  
 815 McHardy Rd  
 Brandon, SD

**MAY 30-31**  
**Art in the Barn**  
**Fleece & Fiber Festival**  
 Meade Co. Fair Barn  
 Sturgis, SD  
 605-456-2802

**MAY 31**  
**Auto Parts Swap Meet & Car Show**  
 8 a.m.-2 p.m.  
 Brown County Fairgrounds  
 Aberdeen, SD

**MAY 31**  
**Miss Prairie Village Pageant**  
 6:30 p.m.  
 Lawrence Welk Opera House  
 Madison, SD  
[www.prairievillage.org](http://www.prairievillage.org)

**MAY 31**  
**Hay Country Jamboree**  
 7 p.m.  
 Gayville Music Hall  
 Gayville, SD  
 605-760-5799

**JUNE 5**  
**Danish Constitution Day Celebration**  
 6:15 p.m.-9 p.m.  
 Danish Folk Dancing & Music  
 Daneville Heritage Museum  
 Viborg, SD  
 605-766-1312  
[danevilleheritage.com](http://danevilleheritage.com)

**JUNE 11**  
**Agricultural Women's Day**  
 9 a.m.-4 p.m.  
 Agar-Blunt-Onida School  
 Onida, SD

**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.**