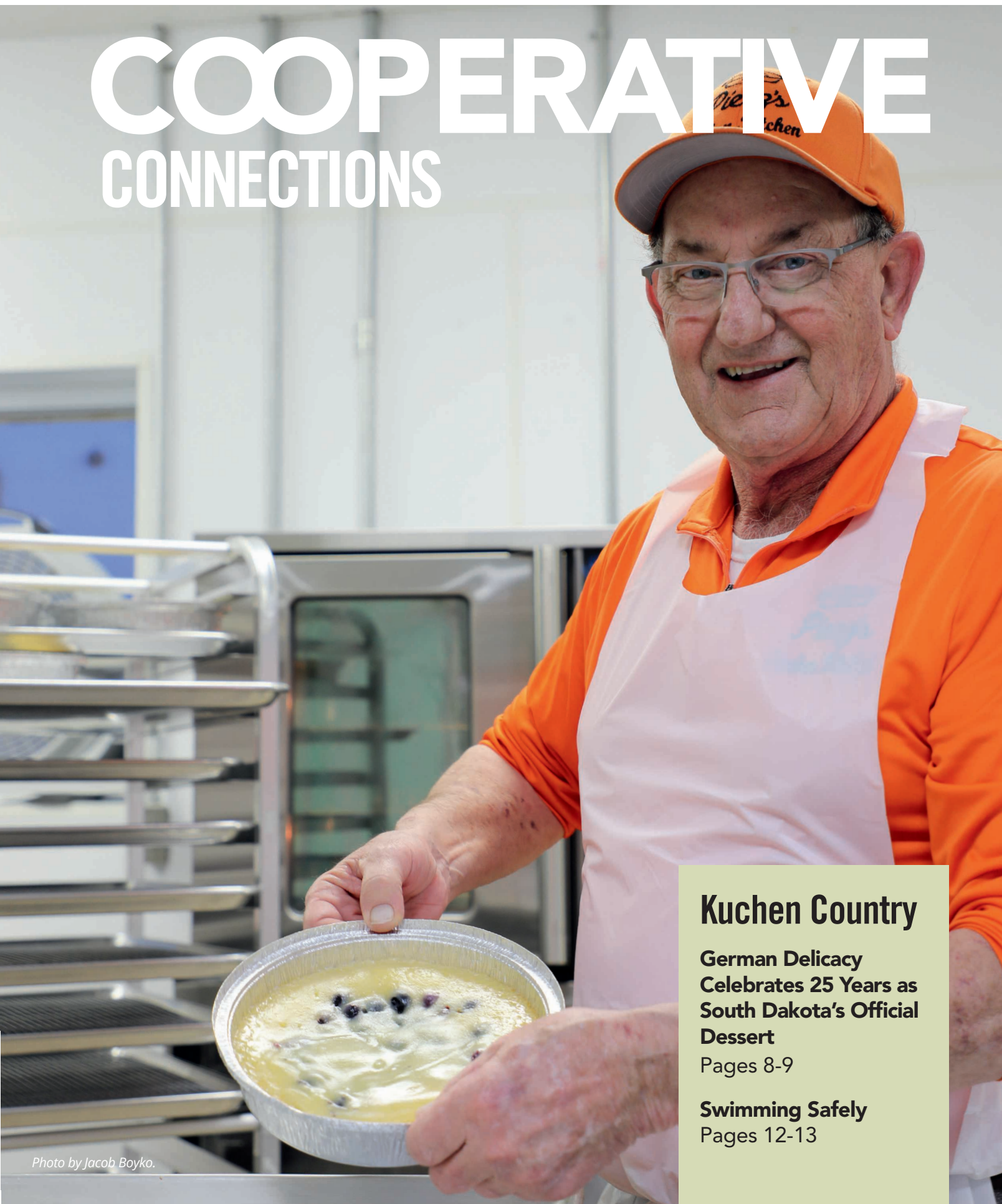


COOPERATIVE CONNECTIONS



Kuchen Country

**German Delicacy
Celebrates 25 Years as
South Dakota's Official
Dessert**

Pages 8-9

Swimming Safely
Pages 12-13

Don't Put All Your Power in One Basket



Matt Sleep
CEO

Happy June from Butte Electric. Construction season has started to ramp up again in our beautiful Cooperative territory and our crews have a busy summer 'lined out' (pun intended) in front of them!

We will be conducting a member survey on June 2nd. We will be sending out an email on that day with a link to the survey. Please take some time to complete the survey. The information is

valuable to us. If you haven't received any communications from us, we may not have your most current contact information. For example, many members now only have cell phones but may have forgotten to provide us with their cell phone numbers and to tell us that they no longer have a land line. Your help updating information is greatly appreciated. Please call us at (605)456-2494 and make sure that we have your current email address, phone number, spelling of your name, etc.

Prior to coming to work for Butte Electric, I spent many years managing money. In the investment world, whether managing institutional funds, trust funds, or personal funds the mantra is always 'diversification' (and being disciplined to stick to the plan). In essence, diversification, in an oversimplified sense, is avoiding putting all your eggs in one basket. When managing that diversification, we took into consideration the owners short, intermediate, and long-term goals along with the economy, interest rates, government policies, etc. There were a lot of things to be aware of and follow.

Because of this the psychological side of managing money was always fascinating to watch. When times are good, people often get greedy and forget why they should remain disciplined and diversified. When times are bad, people often get fearful and forget why they should remain disciplined and diversified. Personal bias also came into play, people would not want to diversify because they simply did not want to. The ability to remain disciplined and diversified when greed, fear, or bias are thrown into the mix is often very difficult for people.

My purpose in pointing the notion of diversification out in this column is in response to the blackout that happened on April 28th in Spain, Portugal, and France. The cause of the blackout, as of this writing, is still unknown. At this point, all the articles that I have read are simply speculating, as to the cause. However, there is one underlying theme to all the speculation, and that is that all three of these countries have moved to solar power generation for most of their power generation needs. Whether the blackouts were caused by unusual cloud cover, surges in generation, an imbalance in generation, lack of battery reserve, or whatever other reason, it appears to me that they simply lack diversification in their power generation.

It appears that a diversified mix of power generation would most certainly have helped avoid this blackout situation. Don't get me wrong, I have nothing against solar, if the technology works. Nor, batteries or wind, if the technology works and there is capacity. Technology and Capacity are evolving, we may get there sooner than later. However, the energy business and the investment business when it comes to diversification, aren't very different. The whole purpose of diversification is to have a broad mix of investments (or electrical generation) that behave differently in different situations. My favorite Benjamin Franklin quote is "For age and want, save while you may; no morning Sun lasts a whole day." That quote might even be applicable to power generation, as well.

Over time, I have found out that there really is one thing that matters most to you, our member, and that is that if your lights ARE ON you are happy and it is quiet at Butte Electric. However, if your lights are NOT ON, our phones start ringing! To me, that is the best argument for discipline and diversification.

In a prior Connections article, I had written about a windmill on my family's ranch. I took a photo of it this week. There is a Butte Electric powerline running to it. The old to the new and back to the old!

I must admit that the psychological side of dealing with electrical generation is becoming just as fascinating to watch as it was when managing money! Have a great month, stay safe, take care, and we'll keep doing our best to keep your lights on!

A New Chapter in Crew Leadership: Introducing Our Lead Linemen

At Butte Electric, we're always looking for ways to strengthen our team and support the people who keep the lights on—literally. Over the past month, we took a step forward by creating a new position designed to enhance on-site leadership and support for our hardworking crews. That role is now known as the Lead Lineman.

This new position was established to provide strong leadership on the ground when the Foreman is tied up with other projects or responsibilities. It's a way to ensure that every job site continues to operate safely, efficiently, and with the high standards we're known for—no matter what.

To fill this role, we turned to the people who know their teams best: our Foremen. Each Foreman was asked to nominate someone they believed embodied the skill, experience, and leadership qualities needed for the job.

We're excited to officially announce our first ever Lead Linemen:

- Dave Pietz, Lead Lineman – Newell Crew
- Adam Willuweit, Lead Lineman – Sturgis Crew
- Mike Davis, Lead Lineman – Spearfish Crew

These three individuals have consistently gone above and beyond in their work. Their dedication, expertise, and steady leadership have already made a difference, and now they step into this new role ready to lead and support their crews even further.

Please join us in congratulating Dave, Adam, and Mike—not just on their new roles, but on the years of hard work and commitment that led them here. We're proud to have them leading the way.



Adam Willuweit,
Lead Lineman
Sturgis Crew



Dave Pietz
Lead Lineman
Newell Crew



Mike Davis
Lead Lineman
Spearfish Crew

COOPERATIVE CONNECTIONS

BUTTE ELECTRIC

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Summer Safety

Mosquitoes and Ticks

Source: American Red Cross

Don't let mosquitoes and ticks ruin your carefree summer fun. As we spend more time outdoors for activities like camping, hiking, swimming, picnicking and barbecuing, there is a greater chance of getting bitten by mosquitoes and ticks. According to the American Mosquito Control Association there are 176 known species of mosquito in the U.S. – putting Americans at risk from coast to coast. And while mosquitoes may be the most obvious detractor from summer fun – ticks are silent but dangerous. Most active during warmer months (April to September), it is especially important to be vigilant of blacklegged ticks, more commonly known as deer ticks, especially if you live in the Northeast, Mid-Atlantic, North-central or Northwest.

Mosquitoes and ticks are more than just itchy and annoying – if infected, these pests can pose a major health risk to people by possibly transmitting diseases. Follow these tips to prevent mosquito and tick bites this summer:

- Use insect repellents containing DEET (N, N-diethyl-meta-toluamide) when you are outdoors. Be sure to follow the directions on the package.
- Consider staying indoors at dusk and dawn, when mosquitoes are most active.
- Wear long-sleeved shirts and long pants and tuck your pant legs into your socks or boots.



Photo by Jimmy Chan

- Use a rubber band or tape to hold pants against socks so that nothing can get under clothing.
- Tuck your shirt into your pants. Wear light-colored clothing to make it easier to see tiny insects or ticks.
- When hiking in woods and fields, stay in the middle of trails. Avoid underbrush and tall grass.
- If you are outdoors for a long time, check yourself several times during the day. Especially check in hairy areas of the body like the back of the neck and the scalp line.
- Inspect yourself carefully for insects or ticks after being outdoors or have someone else do it.
- If you have pets that go outdoors, spray with repellent made for their breed/type. Apply the repellent according to the label and check your pet for ticks often.
- Get rid of mosquito breeding sites by emptying sources of standing water outside of the home, such as from flowerpots, buckets and barrels.



"Never Touch a Power Line!!"

Kashton Schecher, Age 7

Kashton cautions readers not to touch power lines. Thank you for your picture, Kashton! Kashton's parents are Brad and Brooke Schecher from Bison, S.D.

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

SOUPS & SALADS

GERMAN KRAUT SOUP

Ingredients:

2 pork steaks
Water
1 diced onion
3 stalks celery
1 large carrot
Butter
6 diced potatoes
1 qt. sauerkraut
3 cups heavy cream
Salt and pepper (to taste)

Method

Gently simmer pork steaks in about three cups of water until done. (You can substitute other meat you have on hand – left over roasts or Polish sausage is nice). Dice meat. Sauté onion, celery and carrots in butter. In a Crock-Pot, add four cups of water, potatoes, sautéed veggies, diced meat and sauerkraut. Cook on low four to six hours until potatoes are tender. Add cream, salt and pepper. Transfer to a serving dish to share and enjoy!

Kari Bevers
Cotington-Clark Electric Member

BLACK BEAN SALAD

Ingredients:

3 tbsps. lemon juice
1 clove garlic (minced)
1/2 tsp. salt
1/4 tsp. pepper
3/4 tsp. ground cumin
2 tbsps. olive oil
(2)15 oz. cans black beans (drained and rinsed)
1 pt. cherry tomatoes (halved)
4 scallions or green onions
1 yellow or green bell pepper (cut into thin strips)
3 tbsps. fresh cilantro or parsley (chopped)

Method

In a small bowl, stir together lemon juice, garlic, salt, pepper and cumin until salt is dissolved. Slowly whisk in oil until dressing mixture thickens. In a large bowl combine beans, tomatoes, scallions or onions, peppers and cilantro or parsley. Toss with dressing to coat. Let stand at least 15 minutes before serving. *Makes 6 servings.

Reta Eidem
Clay-Union Electric Member

LASAGNA SOUP

Ingredients:

1 lb. lean ground beef
1 cup chopped onion
1 can (28 oz.) petite diced tomatoes, undrained
1 can (15 oz.) tomato sauce
2 tbsp. garlic, herb and black pepper and sea salt all purpose seasoning
1 container (32 oz.) chicken stock, (4 cups)
8 oz. (about 10) lasagna noodles, broken into small pieces

Method

Brown ground beef in large saucepan on medium heat. Drain fat. Add onion; cook and stir 2 to 3 minutes or until softened.

Stir in tomatoes, tomato sauce, Seasoning and stock. Bring to boil. Add lasagna noodle pieces; cook 6 to 7 minutes or until noodles are tender.

Ladle soup into serving bowls. Serve with dollops of ricotta cheese and sprinkle with shredded mozzarella cheese, if desired.

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.

Efficiency Tips for New Homes



Miranda Boutelle
Efficiency Services
Group

Q: What are some energy efficiency upgrades I should consider when building a new house?

A: Prioritizing energy efficiency when building a new home can create future savings and make living more comfortable. It might cost a little more upfront but will pay off in the long run.

Let's explore two approaches: Following an energy efficiency certification plan or adding energy efficient designs and equipment to your construction project.

There are several efficiency certifications available for new-construction homes that may qualify for discounted homeowner's insurance, tax credits and other incentives.

Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) certification ensures the home uses less energy while prioritizing sustainable resources and healthy indoor air quality. LEED-certified homes use 20% to 30% less energy than the average home – with some homes saving up to 60% – and can cost the same as non-LEED homes with proper planning, according to the U.S. Green Building Council.

Passive House certification requires the home to be so efficient it needs little to no heating and cooling equipment while remaining comfortable for

its occupants. To achieve up to 90% less energy use than the average home, the certification focuses on maximizing the efficiency of the building envelope – all components that separate the indoors from the outdoors – including proper insulation levels, air sealing and high-efficiency windows.

ENERGY STAR NextGen Certification for New Homes recognizes houses that are 20% more efficient than the average home and help reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 40% to 80%.

Although various certifications are available, you don't have to follow a set guide. Consider adding these energy efficiency principles to your new home build.

Advanced framing techniques maximize the amount of insulated area and save on material costs in wood-framed homes. This technique can save up to \$500 for a 1,200-square-foot home and \$1,000 for a 2,400-square-foot home on material costs, between 3% to 5% on labor costs and up to 5% on annual heating and cooling costs, according to the U.S. Department of Energy. Choose a contractor who is familiar with these techniques, and check with your local building officials to ensure compliance with local codes.

The importance of a home's orientation is often overlooked. According to the International Association of Certified Home Inspectors, homes oriented to the path of the sun use less energy for heating and cooling to reduce energy bills and improve comfort.

If you are building or buying a new home that doesn't allow options for orientation or framing, you might be able to request higher insulation levels in the attic. Increasing the insulation levels likely won't cost much more for materials and labor, but it can help you use less energy and save money in the long run.

Heating and cooling equipment should be properly sized using energy modeling tools that calculate the home's heating and cooling needs. Investing in a more efficient building envelope that is well insulated and air sealed can reduce the home's heating and cooling load, making it possible to have a smaller, less expensive heating and cooling system. This saves money on equipment costs and lowers energy use.

Optimizing the efficiency of a new home requires a whole-house approach. Analyze all systems and how they work together to ensure maximum efficiency for a safe and comfortable home.



PRAIRIE PAGEANTRY

Birding in the National Grasslands

Frank Turner

frank.turner@sdrea.coop

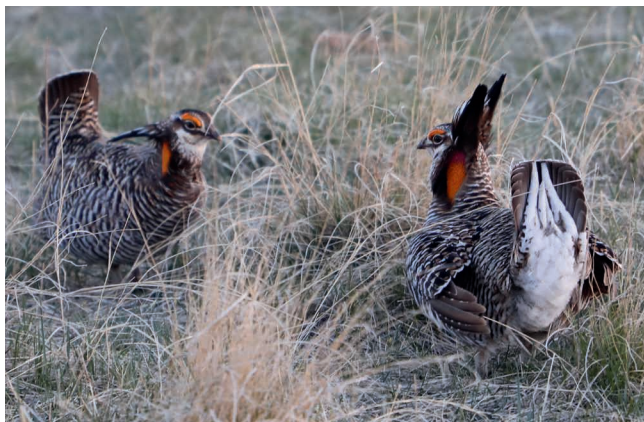
Pierre locals Mary Turner and her husband, Randy, rose an hour before sunrise on a brisk April morning to witness a curious natural phenomenon in South Dakota's National Grasslands. Guided by the light of a full moon, the two amateur birders traveled 10 miles south of Fort Pierre and hiked to a secluded location in the rolling plains, where they tucked themselves into a small, camouflaged shelter known as a viewing blind.

Mary and Randy were at the center of a spring lek – one of the prairie's most striking mating displays – where two closely related species of grouse, the greater prairie chickens and sharp-tailed grouse, gather at dawn in a specific location to compete for the attention of a suitable mate.

As the sun's glow overtook the prairie, the booming calls and fluttering dances of the two closely related birds began to echo across the grassland.

"This experience has been on my bucket list for almost 15 years," Mary said. "Pheasants were introduced here, but grouse are native – they've always been a part of this land, and the lek is proof of that connection."

The prairie doesn't just host the lek, it defines it. Before the females arrive, the males compete for alpha status by laying claim to the hotly contested ground at the center of the lek. Positioning is everything. What follows is a series of tense showdowns – staring matches, fluttering wings, bickering squabbles and the brandishing of talons – as each contender fights to control the prime real estate.



Two greater prairie chickens contend for their position in the lek.

Photo by Frank Turner



Mary Turner stands in front of the viewing blind used to observe a lek of sharp-tailed grouse and greater prairie-chicken.

Photo by Frank Turner

Once a dominant male is established, nearly all females will mate with him.

When the females arrive, the ritual transforms into a bid to impress. Male greater prairie-chickens fan their square tails, puff out their bright orange air sacs and take a "nuptial bow," lowering their heads to the ground. Male sharp-tail grouse stick their distractive sharp tails into the air and pump their feet in a pitter-patter dance.

"It's normal to see both sharp-tailed grouse and the greater prairie chicken in the same lek, because they are looking for the same conditions," said David Swanson, an ornithology professor at the University of South Dakota. "They are closely related. You can get even get a hybrid between the two, but it reduces the reproductive viability of their offspring."

The Turners estimated that, over a few hours, they watched nearly 50 greater prairie chickens and sharp-tailed grouse join the display.

Randy called the morning unforgettable. "We were so close to the experience that the grouse were jumping up onto the blind," he said, laughing.

Their adventure was made possible through the U.S. Forest Service's Prairie Grouse Viewing Blind Program, which provides access to the viewing blind, the geographic location of the spring lek and the viewing etiquette required to properly observe the prairie pageantry. Although reservations are required through the Fort Pierre National Grassland office, the experience is completely free of charge to the public – benefiting bird enthusiasts, conservationists, wildlife photographers and even reporters.

Mary said the experience revealed a whole new facet of appreciation for the National Grasslands and conservation.

"It's a treasure that's in our back yard," she said. "This experience revealed how important the grasslands are for this species and our well being too. I would do it again in a heartbeat."



Pietz's Kuchen Kitchen & Specialties employees Amanda Garcia and Myra Bachman with owners Lori and Roger Pietz.
Photo by Jacob Boyko

SOUTH DAKOTA IS KUCHEN COUNTRY

German Delicacy Celebrates 25 Years as State's Official Dessert

Jacob Boyko

jacob.boyko@sdrea.coop

On a brisk spring morning, balls of dough rise hours before the sun. One at a time, they're placed onto a press and flattened before being positioned into tins. Carefully, Lori Pietz ladles custard overtop, sprinkles in fruit, and passes off a tray of the desserts to her husband, Roger, for baking. As Roger pulls open the door of the stainless steel commercial oven, a wave of heat emanates across the kitchen. He slides the tray of five desserts onto a shelf in the oven, then removes another tray and sets it aside to cool before they begin packaging.

Roger and Lori will repeat this process at least 100 more times this morning to keep up with their customers' orders.

In the town of Scotland, northwest of Yankton, Pietz's Kuchen Kitchen & Specialties is one business that has turned South Dakotans' love for kuchen – a

delectable unification of cake, custard and pie – into a thriving business.

Kuchen, the German word for cake, has been a staple at European kitchen tables for centuries. The delicacy has stood the test of time, continuing to serve as a tea-time – or any-time – favorite across cultures and continents, especially right here in South Dakota.

"I think it's because of the population, because the greatest proportion of immigrants (in South Dakota) are the Germans from Russia," co-owner Lori Pietz said of kuchen's popularity. "There are German areas, there are Czech areas, there are Norwegian areas — but there are a lot of Germans from Russia."

Roger comes from one of those German-Russian families where the tradition of baking homemade kuchen has been passed down for generations.

"I watched my mother make kuchen as a little kid," Roger remembered. "I'd stand a little ways from the oven and I'd watch

her make it and I loved it."

Staying true to his German-Russian roots, Roger's love for kuchen never faded. After marrying Lori, Roger remembers telling her that if he could ever recreate his mother's kuchen recipe, he could probably market it and sell it.

Owning a kuchen shop was always a retirement dream, the couple recalled. But after going through several farm accidents, the Pietzs' decided to pivot in 2008. Trading plows for whisks, Pietz's Kuchen became a reality.

The operation quickly outgrew their make-shift basement kitchen, so Roger and Lori opened up a storefront and commercial kitchen in the nearby town of Scotland in 2011.

Today, the store ships an estimated 2,500 kuchen monthly to grocery stores, butcher shops, and restaurants across South Dakota and the Midwest.

Roger and Lori's kuchen offerings range from Americanized options – blueberry, peach, strawberry – to the more traditional blends of 18th and 19th century Europe, including rhubarb,

prune and cottage cheese.

Lori explained that historically kuchen was made using ingredients that were readily available, making it the ideal comfort-food and cultural dish for immigrants building their lives on South Dakota farms.

“There are a lot of Germans from Russia who brought rhubarb over with them, so they made a lot of rhubarb kuchen,” Lori said. “Flour and sugar were available, and they all had chickens and cows, so that’s kind of how it kept going.”

Lori didn’t grow up eating much kuchen. Her mother, who was of Czech descent, favored fluffy pastries called kolaches – filled with jam, poppy seeds or cream cheese.

But once Lori joined the Pietz family, she saw an opportunity to bridge both traditions. Drawing on the popularity of poppy seed kolaches in the Czech community, she created a Czech-inspired twist: poppy seed kuchen.

“There’s a lot of Czech people out there that like poppy seed kolaches,” Roger said. “And when they hear there’s poppy seed kuchen, they’re buying it.”

Kuchen’s footprint in South Dakota extends far beyond Scotland. Annual events like the Kuchen Festival in Delmont and Schmeckfest in Freeman invite locals and visitors alike to sample a variety of recipes and baking styles.

In McPherson County, the town of Eureka also has a reputation for being a kuchen-tasting hot spot, with several local kitchens offering their own takes on the dish.

South Dakotans’ love for kuchen runs so deep that it’s been codified into law; In 2000, State Sen. James Lawler, whose district included Eureka, helped lead the charge in Pierre to designate kuchen as the official state dessert.

Lawler, who once served as a judge for a local kuchen contest in Eureka, said the bill was part of a broader push to support local industries and breathe new life into small towns.

“The town of Eureka really got behind me and supported that bill,” Lawler recalled. “Those women up there got together and made enough kuchen for the whole legislature, and we fed them all and got the bill passed.”

A framed commemorative print of that bill hangs on the wall by the checkout counter in Roger and Lori’s shop – a tribute to all of the kuchen fans who have made their business what it is today.

“If you asked me 15 years ago what our business was going to be...I’d have said we’d sell a few,” Roger laughed. “I thought if it flopped, my friends would buy some from me and they wouldn’t let me down. Never did I anticipate this. Never. It’s just unbelievable.”

The Germans From Russia

In the 18th and 19th centuries, Russian leaders made an appeal to German families to emigrate to Russia, promising land, religious freedom and military service exemptions.

According to the Prairie Public Broadcasting documentary, *The Germans From Russia: Children of the Steppe*, Children of the Prairie, the first wave of German immigrants arrived in 1764 during the reign of Catherine the Great. For Catherine, this was strategic; adding population to the sparser areas of her empire not only developed Russia’s agricultural economy, but also helped create a buffer against invaders from central Asia.

The settlements dotted the Volga River in Russia and the Black Sea in modern Ukraine and Crimea. The German villages closely resembled the communities they left behind as well as the ones they’d later build on the American prairie, with distinct churches and earth-brick houses.

While the Germans held onto their language, culture, and customs, Slavic influence gives the Germans from Russia a distinct identity. One notable difference is in their kuchen. While the traditional German dish resembles a yeast-based fruit cake, the eastern version is typically richer and made with custard.

Later in the 19th century, the special privileges German settlers had been granted were slowly being eroded. The Germans’ special status was lowered to that of common peasants, they could now be drafted into the Russian army, and were forced to assimilate to the Russian language and education system.

Many German settlers left their villages in Russia to start over once again in North America and South America, while those remaining in Russia would go on to suffer through civil and world wars and the man-made Holodomor famine during the 20th century.

The Germans who had settled the banks of the Volga River went on to populate large swaths of Nebraska, Kansas and Colorado, while the Germans from the Black Sea region primarily settled the Dakota Territory and Canada – bringing kuchen with them.



Fruit is sprinkled over the dough, followed by a ladle of custard. Lori Pietz uses a scale to ensure nutrition labeling is precise.

Photo by Olivia Opland

How to Pay Your Electric Bill on Time and Avoid Postal Delays

At Butte Electric Cooperative, we know how important it is for our members to have convenient, reliable ways to pay their bills—without having to worry about postal delays or late fees. Whether you're out in the pasture, on the road, or just busy with day-to-day life, we offer multiple ways to make sure your electric bill is paid on time, every time.

Here are some easy and secure options available to you as a Butte Electric member:

1. Sign Up for Billing Notifications

Stay in the loop by signing up for email or text notifications from Butte Electric. You'll get a reminder when your bill is ready, when it's due, and if it becomes past due.

- Why it helps: No more forgotten bills or digging through the mail.
- How to sign up: Log in to your SmartHub account and update your notification preferences. Or call the office and update your email address.

2. Use One-Time Online Payments

Need to make a quick payment without logging in? No problem. Butte Electric offers a one-time online payment option through our website.

- Where to pay: Visit www.butteelectric.com and click on "Pay Now."
- Tip: Have your account number and last name handy for faster processing.

3. Pay by Phone

You can pay your bill anytime using our secure 24/7 automated phone system.

- How: Call 1-855-940-3830 to pay using a credit card or checking account.
- Bonus: It's fast, easy, and always available.
- Tip: Have your account number or your phone number associated with your account handy.

4. Try Prepaid Billing (Pay-As-You-Go)

Want more control over your energy use and budget? Ask about Prepaid Billing.

- How it works: Instead of a traditional monthly bill, you add funds to your account as needed and pay in advance for your electricity.
- Perfect for: Seasonal residents, budget-conscious households, or those who prefer "pay-as-you-go" style service.

5. Use the SmartHub App or Website

With SmartHub, you can do it all—view bills, monitor energy usage, manage notifications, and pay your bill anytime, anywhere.

- Download: Available on the App Store and Google Play, or use the desktop version at SmartHub.
- Tip: Turn on auto-pay and never miss a due date again.

6. Set Up Auto Pay or Bank Draft

Take the hassle out of bill paying by enrolling in Auto Pay or Bank Draft.

- How: Payments are automatically withdrawn from your checking account or card each month.
- Benefits: No late fees, no stamps, no stress.

7. Use the Drop Box at Our Office

If you're in the area and prefer to save a stamp, use the secure payment drop box located at our Spearfish or Newell Offices.

- Address: Spearfish: 3540 Old Belle Rd; Newell: 109 S. Dartmouth Ave
- Reminder: Include your account number or payment stub, and avoid placing cash in the drop box.
- Note: The Spearfish drop box is checked daily, please allow a few additional days for processing, as payments are transferred to our Newell office before being posted.

8. Keep Your Info Updated

Make sure your contact details are current, so you never miss a billing update, especially if you've moved or changed phone numbers. You can update your information by calling our office.

We're Here to Help

At Butte Electric, we're proud to power your home, ranch, and business—and we want to make managing your account as easy as possible. If you ever have questions or need assistance with any payment method, our Member Services team is just a phone call away at (605) 456-2494.

Wildfire Mitigation Requires Planning and Collaboration

Scott Flood
NRECA

Wildfires have always been part of the ecosystem across North America. However, risk to communities and potential for electric facilities have risen in recent years due to declining forest and public land health, severe weather events and increased urban wildland interface. This risk can be compounded for electric cooperatives because dry vegetation ignites easily when it contacts downed power lines or sparks from equipment, and wind creates incidents that start fires and accelerates the spread of flames.

While there's a common perception that wildfires are only a problem out west, recent headlines about wildfires along the Carolina coast, on Long Island and even in the Milwaukee suburbs confirm that they're a potential threat everywhere. In fact, when the Forest Service proposed (but subsequently withdrew) a 2024 rule about forest conservation, they cited a study that wildfire risk is shifting eastward as fire-resistant species such as oaks in Eastern forests are giving way to more combustible species such as red maples.

There have been high-profile cases in which investigations have cited power infrastructure as the cause of wildfires, making the owners of that infrastructure liable for damage. The Western Fire Chiefs Association has reported that nearly a fifth of wildfires between 2016 and 2020 were triggered by electric power infrastructure. Even if an electric co-op isn't directly responsible for a wildfire, it may find itself compelled to pay for damages under federal strict liability statutes.

"Suppose there's a shed on a piece of private property, and a strong wind blows the shed into a co-op's power lines or other

infrastructure, causing a fire in a national forest," explains Regulatory Affairs Director Megan Olmstead for the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA). "Even though the co-op had no control over what the wind did, they may still be on the hook for strict liability, and the costs of suppressing the fire and any damage to timber and other natural resources. If you're operating on Forest Service or Bureau of Land Management lands, you could face between nearly \$2 to upwards of \$3 million dollars in damages per incident, and that is strict liability alone."

Given that responsibility, it's no surprise that liability insurance premiums for wildfire damage have been increasing and are even becoming unavailable in some states. Because insurers spread risk across all their policyholders, even electric co-ops facing minimal wildfire risk are seeing those higher premiums.

"Our focus is advocating before the federal government to resolve challenges that limit co-op wildfire mitigation efforts, including arduous permitting processes for vegetation management and grid hardening projects," Olmstead says.

At times, it can take several months and even years for federal regulators to approve the removal of a single tree that poses a danger to power lines – and even then, the threat is not removed from the forest or public land.

"In some cases, once co-op crews remove the trees, federal law requires them to leave the timber on the forest floor, which creates more of a fuel load for fires," she says. "Co-ops also face challenges acquiring approvals to simply access their power lines." Even basic grid hardening strategies like undergrounding a line or replacing an existing wood pole with a metal one can trigger a years-long

environmental review process.

Bipartisan legislation moving through Congress would allow electric co-ops to step up their mitigation efforts by eliminating delay-causing regulatory roadblocks. The Fix Our Forests Act is designed to expedite federal approvals, making it substantially easier for co-ops to harden their grids against wildfires and remove the hazardous vegetation that fuels blazes – as well as limiting co-op exposure to frivolous lawsuits that often complicate those efforts. Among its many helpful provisions is permission for co-ops to remove vegetation within 150 feet of power lines, rather than the current 10-foot limit.

NRECA's team has been working directly with federal agencies to help co-ops develop strategies for limiting liability.

"If your co-op creates a forest operating agreement with the U.S. Forest Service, they'll cap your strict liability amount per incident," notes Olmstead. "We're working to promote similar concepts across the other federal land management agencies."

More co-ops are developing wildfire mitigation plans. "Plans spell out the mitigation process co-ops employ to reduce risks to their systems, including vegetation management and grid hardening projects. Many co-ops also are increasingly navigating the complex decision-making process related to whether public safety power shutoffs are necessary or helpful in their systems, then determining how that process will work during a severe weather event," Olmstead adds.

Researchers and electric co-ops are investigating new technologies for detection of and response to wildfires, but for now, wildfire mitigation planning is crucial. The process is most effective when it involves a collaborative approach with all stakeholders.

"It's important to engage with land management agencies, state and local government, local businesses and the agricultural community to discuss the risks and how everyone should respond if a fire occurs. By working together, they can focus on key factors, such as community hardening and minimizing damage."

SWIMMING SAFELY

Tips to Ensure Your Family Swims Safe This Summer

Jacob Boyko

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The leading cause of death for American children under the age of five: drowning.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates 4,000 fatal drownings occur each year in the U.S., with the number of deaths sharply increasing in May and reaching a peak in July.

And according to Consumer Affairs, that number has been on the rise since 2020, especially among young children.

Whether at a waterpark, lake, backyard pool, or even a hot tub, being safety-aware and educating others can prevent drownings and other pool accidents and save lives.

According to Holly Hardy, aquatics director for the Oahe Family YMCA in Pierre, safety begins with supervision.

“Somebody should always be observing the water when there are kids in a pool,”

Hardy said. “It doesn’t matter if it’s our (YMCA) pool, a backyard pool, or the river. There needs to be a person there that’s responsible for watching the kids.”

At the YMCA’s pool, lifeguards who aren’t sure about a child’s swimming skills can have them do a swim test, where the child has to either show they can swim the length of the pool or remain in the shallow end.

“At our (YMCA) pool, we have those big slides and kids want to go down them because their buddies are going down them, and they want to go down but they can’t swim,” Hardy explained. “That’s where we pull the most people out of the water – the slide or the diving board.”

The YMCA lifeguards also have a rule against seeing how long you can hold your breath – children can hyperventilate before submerging and faint, which is called a

hypoxic blackout. Hardy also stresses the importance of swimming lessons, since understanding basics like how to float, swim, exit water and feeling oriented and calm are critical for water safety. She recommends to begin swimming lessons as soon as possible – The YMCA offers swimming lessons for children as young as six months old.

But swimming lessons are not a substitute for properly securing a pool.

According to Consumer Affairs, 87% of fatal drownings for the 0-5 age range occur in backyard pools.

That’s why a sturdy fence and self-latching gate around the pool area are still essential for preventing accidents. Even temporary mesh fence options can work in some instances.

Additionally, submersion alarms and door alarms can audibly alert you when someone enters the pool or pool area.

By communicating the pool safety rules to children and guests, as well as taking preventive measures to prevent accidents in the first place, you may be saving lives.

Pool Safety Checklist

Is there supervision?

- All children should be under responsible adult supervision.
- Designate “water watchers” and minimize distractions.
- Keep a phone close by for calling 911.
- Always swim with a buddy – Never alone.
- Keep throwing equipment or reaching equipment nearby.
- Consider CPR training – it could save a life.

Can everybody in the pool swim?

- Ensure everyone in the pool can at least swim from one end of the pool and back.
- Weak or new swimmers should keep to shallow water and use flotation aids.
- Parents should stay close – preferably within arm’s reach – to weak or new swimmers.
- Sign up for swimming lessons – it’s a lifesaving skill.

Are there safety barriers?

- Install and maintain a proper fence and self-latching gate around the pool.
- Consider a door alarm and pool alarm for an audible alert when someone enters the pool or pool area.
- Hot tubs should have properly-latched covers.

Recognize hazards.

- Stay away from drains and water intake pipes, as body parts, hair, jewelry, and loose clothing can get pulled in. Drains should have anti-entanglement drain covers, and pumps should have accessible shut-offs.
- Ensure tiles, handrails, anti-slip pads, and ladders are properly installed and maintained.

- Electrical work should be done by a qualified electrician. Chargers, extension cords and other electronics should be kept away from the pool area.
- Check your pool water regularly to avoid illness from contaminants and chemical burns.
- Avoid slips and falls by picking up pool toys and other hazards. Do not run or roughhouse near the pool.
- If you’re not sober, don’t swim.
- Diving can result in serious injury. Make sure others know when a pool is not safe for diving.
- Store pool chemicals and additives somewhere inaccessible to children.
- Ensure proper lighting is installed around the pool area and never swim in the dark.
- Consider an animal escape ramp for pets and wild animals.

Remind your children and guests...

Establish pool-safe rules for your children and any guests at your home. Remind your children to...

- Never swim without permission and supervision. Other children are not supervisors.
- Don’t enter a pool area or go near water alone.
- Never roughhouse or run in the pool area.
- Never dive in shallow water.
- Stay away from chemicals and additives.
- Keep the pool area tidy and hazard-free.
- Keep electrical devices and cords away from the pool area.
- Never hyperventilate or try and see how long you can hold your breath underwater. Hyperventilating can induce fainting, called hypoxic blackouts and lead to drowning.

SOURDOUGH STORIES

Two Families Sharing a Timeless Bread With Their Communities

Jocelyn Johnson

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Forming a fragrant blend of taste, craftsmanship and wholefoods, sourdough bread is bonding local communities together as a historical favorite.

As the surge of sourdough makes its way into current trends, the story is not new. It's been enjoyed throughout history as one of the first forms of bread. Today, sourdough is also a labor of love.


Katie Smith, member of Oahe Electric Cooperative and owner of 605 Sourdough Company – a cottage bakery in Pierre, S.D., believes sourdough may be a little more labor intensive, but is worth the effort.

She clarified that unlike modern bread with yeast, sourdough relies on water, flour and time for a natural fermentation process. The progression of creating a sourdough starter and making your first loaf of bread may take six weeks up to three months.

"It's a process, for sure," Smith said. "And that's our labor of love. One of our favorite things is being able to send a piece of us into every home and have our bread shared with family and friends – creating that togetherness culture of family. We're all so busy anymore, and life gets busy. When we hear that somebody got to sit down and eat our bread, whether it be through grilled cheese, French toast...whatever it may be...it always makes our day."

Zoey Smith, Katie's 5-year-old daughter, is also a chef in her mom's kitchen. Her favorite flavor of sourdough bread is called the ZoZo.

"The ZoZo I created myself," Zoey said. "It's made with Everything but the Bagel seasoning



Zoey Smith presents a beautiful loaf of sourdough bread she helped bake.
Photo submitted by Katie Smith.

and cheese. It's very yummy."

Cottage bakeries are popping up in many rural communities as more people prefer buying locally made food sources.

Lydia Mueller, member of Grand Electric Cooperative and owner of South Dakota Sourdough – a cottage bakery in Buffalo, S.D., acknowledged a renewed interest in sourdough for many people.

"It's a healthy alternative," Mueller said. We raise our own meat, and we like to know where our food comes from. In South Dakota, people are very proud of having home-raised beef. I'm kind of the same way with my bread. I like to buy local and fresh."

Mueller is originally from Wisconsin but became familiar with sourdough while living in Switzerland a few years ago. The knowledge she gained there, she brought to South Dakota and now sells her craft locally.

"South Dakota actually has a really cool history with sourdough, especially when we had the pioneers traveling," Mueller said. "Sourdough bread was an easy thing to make – like biscuits or bread or something you cook on the fire. You did that with sourdough, because you could not buy commercial yeast."

Mueller recognized a boom in sourdough's popularity since the COVID-19 pandemic but attributed the ongoing interest to health-conscious lifestyles.

"I think people are noticing that we are having a food problem in America," Mueller said. "They're realizing that we are almost like in a pandemic with food – with obesity, with diabetes, with all these weird diseases."

Both Smith and Mueller believe the art of making



Lydia Mueller, owner of South Dakota Sourdough, enjoys baking fresh foods with her kids. Photo submitted by Lydia Mueller.

sourdough is a commitment but not as complicated as it may seem.

"People have been making sourdough since the dawn of bread," Mueller said. "It's just leavened bread. Sourdough is minimalistic and simple to make. You just have to start."



Katie Smith, owner of 605 Sourdough Co., prepares dough with her daughter, Zoey. Photo submitted by Katie Smith.



JUNE 19-21
Czech Days
 Music, Dancing, Foods & Parades
 Tabor, SD

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.

MAY 24-SEPT. 13
Buggy Museum
 Free Buggy Rides + More
 Saturdays 10 a.m.-4 p.m.
 Stockholm, SD
 605-938-4192

JUNE 5
Danish Constitution Day Celebration
 6:15 p.m.-9 p.m.
 Danish Folk Dancing & Music
 Viborg, SD
 danevilleheritage.com

JUNE 5, 7
Wheel Jam
 7 p.m.
 Dakota State Fair Speedway
 Huron, SD

JUNE 6
Northern Bull Riding Tour
 6:30 p.m.
 Madison, SD
 www.prairievillage.org

JUNE 6
Joy Fest
 John Mogen Piano Performance
 7 p.m. CDT
 Okaton, SD
 cristenjoyphotography.com

JUNE 6-8
SDHSRA Regional Rodeos
 Buffalo, Huron, Wall, Kadoka, SD
 www.sdhsra.com

JUNE 7
Tractor Pull
 3 p.m.
 Madison, SD
 www.prairievillage.org

JUNE 7
Riverfest
 Center of the Nation Monument
 Belle Fourche, SD
 605-892-2676

JUNE 11
Agricultural Women's Day
 9 a.m.-4 p.m.
 Agar-Blunt-Onida School
 Onida, SD
 605-769-0013

JUNE 12-14
Gumbo Ridge Wagon Train
 Murdo, SD
 605-530-3638

JUNE 13-15
SDHSRA Regional Rodeos
 Dupree, Watertown,
 New Underwood, Winner, SD

JUNE 13-15
Ipswich Trail Days
 Ipswich, SD
 ipswichtraildays.com
 ipswichtraildays@gmail.com

JUNE 14
Roslyn Vinegar Festival
 Roslyn, SD
 320-808-8873

JUNE 15, 29
1880 Train Old West Shootout
 5 p.m.
 Hill City, SD

JUNE 17-21
SDHSRA State Finals Rodeo
 Fort Pierre, SD

JUNE 20-22
Farley Fest
 Milbank, SD
 605-432-6656
 www.farleyfest.com

JUNE 21
Hobby Horse Relay
 McCrossan Boys Ranch
 1 p.m.
 Lake Lorraine
 Sioux Falls, SD

JUNE 25-28
Crystal Springs Rodeo
 Clear Lake, SD
 605-874-2996

JUNE 27-28
Buckhorn Rodeo
 Britton, SD
 605-880-5077

JUNE 27-29
Leola Rhubarb Festival
 Leola, SD

JUNE 27-29
Bowdle Tower Days
 Bowdle, 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.