

# Electric Co-ops Celebrate Co-op Spirit

**South Dakota's electric cooperatives** gathered in Pierre Jan. 11 and 12 to celebrate 65 years of co-operation and prepare for their future at the South Dakota Rural Electric Association's 65th annual meeting.

South Dakota's electric cooperatives provide electricity to more than 90,000 homes, farms and businesses in the state, averaging only 2.23 consumers per mile of line.

During Thursday's sessions, Dr. Sidney Goss, a sociology professor at South Dakota School of Mines and Technology in Rapid City, S.D., talked about demographic changes impacting the state.

Friday morning's sessions were started off by Gov. Mike Rounds who commended the cooperatives on their long-term involvement in local communities.

"That motto of working together has been modeled over and over again in South Dakota," said Rounds.

SDREA is a member-owned, member-controlled association of 31 electric cooperatives in South Dakota. SDREA is devoted to unifying, promoting and protecting the interests of member electric cooperatives in South Dakota by providing leadership, training, communication, legislative representation and other member services.

Each of the state's electric cooperatives was represented at the meeting with approximately 337 cooperative leaders in all attending.

"The theme of this year's annual meeting centered around our recently released book, "Going the Extra Mile: The Story of the South Dakota Rural Electric Association," which chronicles our association's 65-year history so far," said SDREA General Manager Audry Ricketts.

"Our cooperatives embody that spirit of going the extra mile to ensure that the electric cooperative members at the end of the line are being served with the Touchstone Energy® Cooperatives core





**Left:** Rep. Kristi Noem, R-Castlewood, takes a spin on a Segway human transporter at the SDREA annual meeting as Basin Electric's Michael Riedman assists. **Below:** SDREA Director of Government Affairs Ed Anderson, left, discusses issues with Commissioner Steve Kolbeck, South Dakota's newest member of the South Dakota Public Utilities Commission.



values of accountability, innovation, integrity and commitment to community," said Ricketts.

Following the meeting, the board of directors held their re-organizational meeting.

Bon Homme Yankton Electric Association director Dave Sternhagen of rural Yankton was elected the association's president. Sternhagen has been a director at Bon Homme Yankton in Tabor, S.D., since 1989 and has represented the cooperative on the SDREA board since 1999. He is currently president of the Bon Homme Yankton board.

"After personally experiencing the ice storm of 2006 and seeing all the different cooperatives come together to help repair the damages, that cooperation is what impressed me most about the cooperatives and SDREA brings those cooperatives together," said Sternhagen.

Sternhagen, who had been the association's vice president takes over from Nisland dairy farmer Tom Brunner who had been president since 2001. Brunner represents Butte Electric Cooperative in Newell on the statewide board.

Southeastern Electric Cooperative director Don Heeren of Parker was elected the association's vice president.

He was elected to the then Turner-Hutchinson Electric Cooperative board of directors in 1989 and continued on as a director when the cooperative became Marion-based Southeastern Electric Cooperative in 2000.

"It's exciting to work with the co-ops. There are a lot of new challenges," said Heeren, who, with wife Carol, operates a grain and livestock farm near Parker.

"I appreciate this opportunity to serve in this capacity," said Heeren.

Wall rancher Bill Bielmaier was re-elected secretary of the association. Bielmaier has been a director for West River Electric Association in Wall since 1983 and has represented West River on the SDREA board since 1988.

Dale Olsen, a farmer from Hayti, was re-elected the association's treasurer. Olsen has served on the SDREA board since 1997 and represents H-D Electric Cooperative, Clear Lake, where he has been a director since 1992.

South Dakota's electric cooperatives – like other cooperatives in the country – adhere to the seven cooperative principles of voluntary and open membership; democratic member control; members' economic participation; autonomy and independence; education, training and information; cooperation among cooperatives; and concern for community.



## Dedicated Service Award

Former SDREA employee Martin McGrane was recognized for his outstanding service to cooperatives through his three-decade career as a cooperative journalist and communicator. McGrane retired in June from Sioux Valley Energy in Colman, S.D. McGrane lived in Pierre in the late 1970s and early 1980s while at SDREA.

Here, McGrane, left, poses with fellow former SDREA employees Don Rounds and Eunice Jones, both of Pierre.



**Left:** Basin Electric's Jeremy Woeste explains features of a hydrogen-fueled pickup to South Dakota Lt. Gov. Dennis Daugaard and his wife. **Opposite:** As part of a panel discussion on mergers and consolidations, Northern Electric's Tom Green discusses issues the cooperative faced when it went through a merger.