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A CALL TO COMMUNITY: Linton Lion's Den

BY SAMANTHA VANGSNESS

In the rural communities KEM Electric Cooperative serves, people are invested in others and are willing to lend a helping hand. This characteristic of our communities makes our local areas shine.

One shining example is the Lion's Den, a new addition to Linton Public School (LPS). The Lion's Den School Pantry gives a helping hand to all LPS students by providing food, clothes, hygiene products and much more.

Becoming the Lion's Den

The Lion's Den concept is modeled after a program called Central Cass Treehouse, which was launched in another community by a co-worker of Billie Schumacher's. Schumacher is a Linton resident invested in the betterment of students in the community. Schumacher says her friend saw a need in her own community and worked to fill it, as the Central Cass Treehouse offers food, hygiene products, clothes, school apparel and more.

Schumacher knew something similar would be an impactful asset to her home community in Linton.

"This idea started four or five years ago," Schumacher says.

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To get the ball rolling, Schumacher began visiting about the program initiative with LPS Elementary Principal Erin Huber and Renee Leier, the LPS counselor. The group agreed a pantry program would positively impact LPS students. Fortunately, the group didn't start from ground zero. LPS was already doing a similar backpack program, but the Lion's Den offers a larger variety of products to students and additional inclusion.

"This is for everyone," Huber says. "It's showing kids that it's needed and to ask for help."

As a principal, Huber works closely with both students and staff offering a unique point of view for the Lion's Den board of directors where she serves as the vice president. She also works closely with student families and stakeholders to inform about the program.

"We are fortunate to have families who are looking for ways to give," Huber says.

Leier has seen a need for an expanded program like the pantry for many years. She sees a lot of kids who need resources. Prior to the Lion's Den, Leier stocked her office with extra clothes, deodorant and snacks for students to utilize.

Huber saw other school staff stocking similar items, and the implementation of the Lion's Den takes that worry off students and staff. The Lion's Den has expanded beyond providing snacks, hygiene products and clothes, as it also offers sports equipment and school gear.

"Kids want to participate," Leier says. "Now, kids have these things available to them."

Through the connection with the Central Cass Treehouse, the Lion's Den has had the opportunity to

receive new sports gear.

Huber shares a recent story about a student who lost their shoes, and she was able to bring that student to the Lion's Den. There, the student was able to pick out not only their size of shoe, but choose from various brands with help from Huber and Schumacher.

"I think Erin and I looked at each other and said, 'This is why we do it,'" Schumacher says.

There are no requirements to access the Lion's Den. The pantry is open to all LPS students. Students access the pantry with help from a school administrator. To best serve the students, all items are tracked. This ensures the board knows the greatest needs and can continue to provide them.

Looking to the future, the Lion's Den recently received a freezer, and the Lion's Den board hopes to repackage leftover school meals for students to take home.

Helping the Lion's Den

The Lion's Den has been able to stock the pantry with various items, such as nonperishable snacks, new and donated clothing items, personal hygiene products and sports equipment. They are currently accepting winter clothing items as well as monetary donations to purchase items for the pantry to ensure students have what they need this winter.

"Small rural communities just rally around," Huber says. "We see a lot of good through our community."

If you wish to assist the Lion's Den, you can visit its Amazon wishlist, website or Facebook page all listed in the graphic below. ⚡

Lend a helping hand to the Lion's Den today!

Always-needed donations include:

- **Food:** Nonperishable snacks and meals, such as granola bars, fruit cups, popcorn, noodles, cereal and Chef Boyardee.
- **Hygiene products:** Basic hygiene items to support self-care and confidence.
- **School supplies and clothing:** Ensuring students are well equipped and comfortable every day.

All food and hygiene products must be new and unopened. Clothing items should be gently used and clean. Donations can be dropped off at either school office during school hours. Monetary donations can be made to the Linton Lion's Den and dropped off at the school or at Unison Bank in Linton. A detailed wishlist is available on the website and through its Amazon wishlist for those who'd like to help target the greatest needs and shop for high-priority items.



Scan here for the
Amazon wishlist



Scan here
for website

Visit Linton Lion's Den on Facebook

MANAGER'S MESSAGE:

Small change can change lives

**Jason Bentz**

Co-General Manager/CEO

The holiday season is finally here. It is commonly called the most wonderful season of all, because we associate it with family traditions and gathering with friends and loved ones. It's a time of giving and spreading joy.

But giving back reminds me of the many good things we have right in our communities and why it's so important to spread the good as far as we can, especially to the most vulnerable in our local area.

I'm also reminded of how wonderful our communities are and what a big impact we can have when we work together.

When you are a member of KEM Electric Cooperative, you help us spread the good during the holiday season and throughout the year. Through our Operation Round Up program, your donations help local organizations and individuals in need.

When you "round up" your monthly bill from KEM Electric and donate to this fund, you're making a big difference in someone's life. The cooperative

principle, "concern for community," is one of the seven principles we follow as a cooperative. It defines who we are as an organization.

When we first brought electricity to this community in 1949, the quality of life improved. But other issues also needed to be addressed, and this co-op has been at the forefront of bringing quality-of-life improvements to our communities through the years. It's why we created Operation Round Up.

To date, we've given \$147,707 back to local community organizations with your help. Across the country, more than 350 electric cooperatives have an Operation Round Up program. Together, we've raised millions for local communities. This shows small donations from electric co-ops like ours can collectively make a big impact over time.

As a local cooperative, we have a stake in our communities. We hope you will think of KEM Electric as more than your electric provider, but also as a catalyst for good in our community.

I hope all our members have a joyous holiday season. May it be merry and bright! ⚡



Join *-US-* MEMBER APPRECIATION OPEN HOUSE

Come enjoy a delicious meal on behalf of KEM Electric and visit with our board of directors, CEOs and staff as well as other members.



**11 A.M.- 1 P.M.
ON JAN. 27**



**PIFER'S AUCTION
CENTER, STEELE**



MESSAGE FROM MEMBER RELATIONS: Join the cooperative board



Marcy Sanders
Manager of
Member Relations

Are you a dedicated leader with a deep connection to our rural communities? We invite you to join the KEM Electric Cooperative board of directors and be a driving force behind positive change in our communities.

KEM Electric currently has a District 4, District 5 and District At Large position up for election.

Why join our board

Running for a director position for an electric cooperative can be a meaningful and impactful

decision. Here are just a few reasons to join:

- **Make a difference:** Contribute to decisions that impact our energy future.
- **Community engagement:** Collaborate with like-minded individuals dedicated to community growth.
- **Professional growth:** Enhance your leadership skills and network.

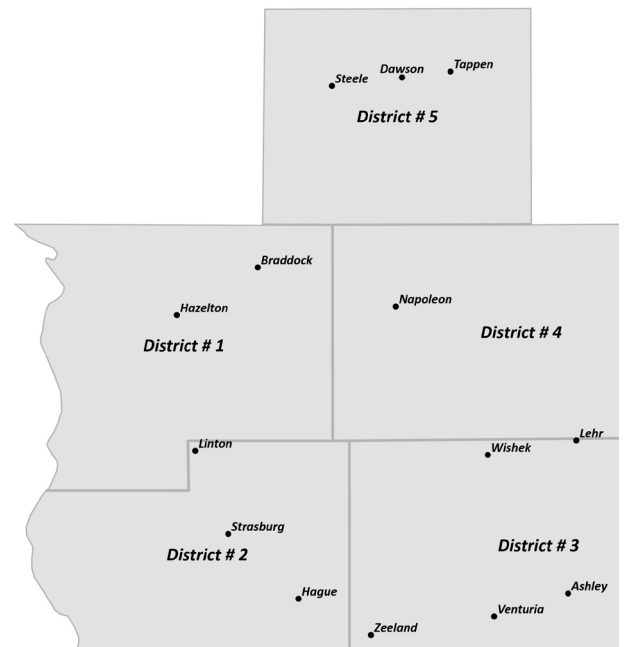
Who should serve

We're seeking individuals with diverse backgrounds, experiences and perspectives who share our commitment to serving the members of KEM Electric. Ideal candidates should have:

- Leadership and strategic thinking skills
- A commitment to our communities/service area
- Strong communication and collaboration abilities

If you're ready to make a meaningful impact, we encourage you to visit kemelectric.com to learn more. Nomination petitions open on Jan. 31, 2026, and must be submitted by the end of day on March 2, 2026.

For inquiries or more information, please contact Marcy Sanders at 701-254-4666 or email msanders@kemelectric.com. ⚡



KEM Electric district map

Congratulations SAWYER HENDRICKSON, HAZELTON-MOFFIT-BRADDOCK PUBLIC SCHOOL!

OCTOBER TOUCHSTONE ENERGY® STUDENT OF THE MONTH

"Sawyer is always there to give a hand to a classmate, peer, teacher or any staff member in need of help," says Hendrickson's nominator. "Sawyer walks the halls with respect for others, even if it is not what everyone else is doing. It doesn't matter if you are the janitor, the principal, a younger peer, or a visiting guest. She will greet you with the same, warm smile and hello."

In **December**, KEM Electric will be accepting nominations of students from **Linton Public School**. The deadline for nominations is Dec. 15. This sponsorship is open to any K-12 student. Visit kemelectric.com for more information.



CO-OP YOUTH PROGRAMS NOW AVAILABLE

TOUCHSTONE ENERGY® STUDENT OF THE MONTH

KEM Electric Cooperative selects a deserving student from each local school to receive sponsorship funds throughout the academic year. Nominations are due by the 15th of each month.

YOUTH TOUR

Youth Tour 2026 is calling, are you in? KEM Electric is now accepting applications for the 2026 Youth Tour. Apply today and level up your summer!

APPLICATION DEADLINE: JAN. 16

HIGH SCHOOL SCHOLARSHIPS

Each year, KEM Electric offers a variety of scholarships for high school seniors. Whether you're attending a four-year university, technical college, or trade school, there are various scholarship opportunities.

APPLICATION DEADLINE: FEB. 6

Visit **kemelectric.com** for more information and details on each of these initiatives.



MESSAGE FROM OPERATIONS: Reflecting on 2025



Dale Nagel

Chief of Staff/
Line Superintendent

This past year, we made significant strides on projects outlined in our work plan, but also faced some unplanned instances. Here are a few projects we completed to ensure safe and reliable electric services to you, our members.

Pole testing

One of our routine construction projects each year is pole testing. Pole testing is a practice done each year at the cooperative,

focusing on different sections of our service area.

This year, KEM Electric Cooperative flagged 100 poles in the Ashley and Zeeland area and 45 in the Steele area, which line crews will continue to replace. Utility poles and any infrastructure exposed to extreme weather conditions can begin to deteriorate over time, both externally and internally. Testing allows us to find poles that are an issue and replace them before they fail.

Underground conversions

KEM Electric installed 8 miles of single-phase underground cable and 8 miles of three-phase underground cable in 2025. Seven miles of the aged overhead line was retired and replaced with three-phase underground cable from the Tappen substation.

Additional projects included converting overhead utility line to underground cable, new service installations, service upgrades and replacement of line. Converting to underground cable allows for additional safety and reliability to our system.

Storm restoration

This summer, we faced various instances of high winds, hail and thunderstorms across the service area. The impact to our system included widespread outages caused by broken poles, damaged transformers and a number of broken power line wires due to falling trees and flying debris.

Technology updates

We continue to upgrade technology across our service area. Sectionalizing technology is being updated from aged oil-circuit reclosers to TripSavers. This year, we upgraded 40 oil-circuit reclosers to TripSavers.

TripSavers are oil-free equipment and require little to no maintenance when compared to traditional reclosures, ultimately reducing outages due to failures and creating better coordination throughout our system.

As reclosures are upgraded, so is the technology compatible with them. This year, KEM Electric installed supervisory control and data acquisition compatible technology, commonly known as SCADA, within substations. This technology acts as a remote data monitoring and control system, allowing the cooperative to have real-time data and control at its fingertips.

As we continue into the winter season, we would like to remind members to report outages by calling the office at 701-254-4666. You can now also report outages by text message (OUT to 844-955-2714) if you have a single service on your account or through SmartHub if you have multiple services on your account. Thank you for your support throughout 2025. We look forward to ensuring safe and reliable electric services for you all in 2026! ⚡



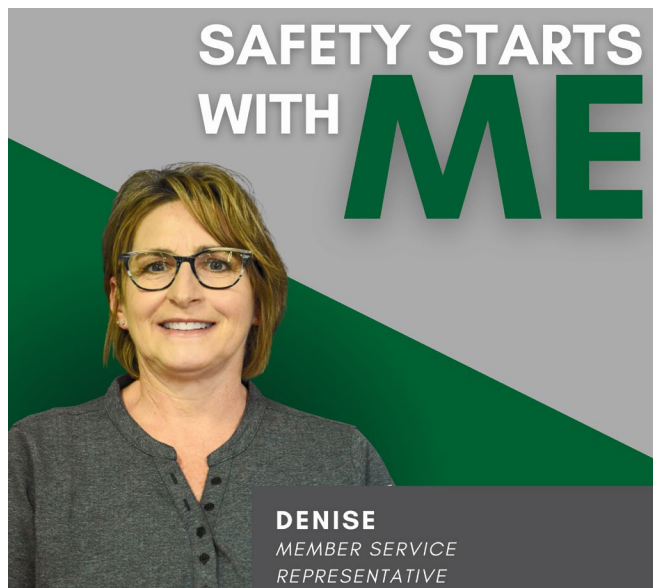
SAFETY STARTS WITH ME: Holiday cybersecurity tips

Did you know the average household with internet access owns about 17 connected devices? That figure covers a wide range of electronics, including smartphones, computers, streaming devices, smart speakers, home assistants and more. Given our increasing reliance on internet-connected technologies, the likelihood of new cyberattacks is ever-present.

"We are committed to ensuring our local system is safe and secure at KEM Electric. We routinely monitor and manage cyber risks, and we work together with other co-ops to share the latest advancements in cybersecurity measures that make us stronger," says Denise Ketterling, member service representative. "But members can help, too. When we all work together to stay safe online, we lower the risk of cyber threats to our systems, online accounts and sensitive data."

During the holiday season, people across our service territory increase their online shopping or manage personal accounting through the web. We'd like to share a few cybersecurity tips to help you bolster your online safety during this busy season.

- **Think before you click.** Phishing occurs when criminals use phony emails, direct messages or other types of digital communications that lure you to click a bad link or download a malicious attachment. Avoid messages that look too good to be true, oddly urgent, poorly crafted or include unusual requests.
- **Create strong, unique passwords.** When it comes to passwords, remember length trumps complexity. Strong passwords contain at least 12 characters and include a mix of letters, numbers and symbols. Create unique passwords for each online account you manage and use phrases you can easily remember.
- **Enable multifactor authentication when available.** Multifactor authentication (also known as two-factor authentication) adds an extra layer of security to your online accounts. These extra security steps can include facial recognition,



fingerprint access or one-time codes sent to your email or phone.

- **Update software regularly.** Software and internet-connected devices, including personal computers, smartphones and tablets, should always be updated to reduce the risk of infection from ransomware and malware. When possible, configure devices to automatically update or notify you when an update is available.
- **Stay protected while connected.** Whatever the network device, the best defense against viruses and malware is to update to the latest security software, web browser and operating systems. Sign up for automatic updates if possible and protect your devices with anti-virus software. Another way to stay safe while connected to outside networks is to use a virtual private network or VPN.

Being cyber aware is an essential practice year-round, but it is important to be additionally vigilante during busy times of the year. We hope these cyber tips help you stay safe this holiday season and everyone has an enjoyable holiday! ⚡

HOLIDAY CYBERSECURITY TIPS

- THINK BEFORE YOU CLICK
- CREATE STRONG, UNIQUE PASSWORDS
- ENABLE MULTIFACTOR AUTHENTICATION
- UPDATE SOFTWARE REGULARLY
- STAY PROTECTED WHILE CONNECTED



KEM ELECTRIC BOARD MEETING HIGHLIGHTS: **SEPT. 30**

The meeting of the board of directors of KEM Electric Cooperative was held on Sept. 30 in Linton. The meeting was called to order at 9:30 a.m. by Chairman Victor Wald. A quorum was present. Also present were co-General Managers/CEOs Travis Kupper and Jason Bentz, Chief of Staff/Line Superintendent Dale Nagel, Manager of Member Relations Marcy Sanders, Chief Financial Officer Alex Craigmile, Legal Counsel Jennifer Grosz and Executive Assistant Connie Hill.

Consent agenda: The consent agenda was approved as presented.

Strategic items: Bentz and Kupper presented the co-general managers' report, which included updates on a joint electric and broadband cooperative meeting, impacts of the June storms, the North Dakota Rural Electric Political Action Committee, power supplier updates and more. Several Basin Electric Power Cooperative reports and board documents were available for review.

Department reports: Craigmile provided the financial report. Nagel provided an operations

department report, which included projects line crews are completing and an outage report. Sanders provided a member service department report on member events, communication channels and upcoming programs. Chief Information Officer Charlie Dunbar provided a written report for the board. Grosz provided an update on the status on legal topics and projects.

Action items: The board discussed and resolved action items.

Discussion/general information: The board discussed workforce policies, financial forecasts and other items.

Executive session: The board entered an executive session during the meeting.

The meeting concluded with adjournment. Secretary-Treasurer Carter Vander Wal certified the accuracy of the minutes.

Next meeting date: The next meeting is at 9:30 a.m. on Dec. 16 in Linton. ⚡



Happy holidays!

KEM Electric Cooperative's offices will be closed Dec. 24 and 25 as well as Jan. 1. Line crews will be available in case of an emergency. To report a power outage, call 701-254-4666 or 800-472-2673. We hope everyone has a joy-filled holiday season!

KEM ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE INC.

DIRECTORS:

Victor Wald, Chairman, District 4.....Napoleon
John R. Beck, Vice Chairman, District 1.....Linton
Carter Vander Wal, Sec.-Treas., District 2.....Pollock
Dean Dewald, Director, District 5.....Dawson
Neil Meidinger, Director, District 3.....Zeeland
Carmen Essig, District-at-Large.....Lehr
Todd Schnabel, Director-at-Large.....Lehr

Your Touchstone Energy® Cooperative 

MANAGEMENT:

Travis Kupper.....Co-General Manager/CEO
Jason Bentz.....Co-General Manager/CEO

Report outages to the following toll-free number: **800-472-2673**

Hazleton, Linton and Strasburg exchanges' phone number: 701-254-4666

OFFICE HOURS:

Monday through Friday,
8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.
Website: kemelectric.com
Email address: info@kemelectric.com

FIND US ON:

