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Inductees

Robert Ching

When electricity was brought to his home in 1951, Robert Ching remembers that day fondly – updating his washing machine and milking machines with electric motors.

He often speaks highly of the great impact rural electrification had on country living.

Ching and his wife of 58 years, Shirley, raised one daughter and five sons while operating a farming operation from 1948 until their farm sale in 2000.

Ching joined the H-D Electric Cooperative board of directors in 1972 and served as the board's president from 1990-2002. He also served 23 years on the East River Electric Power Cooperative board of directors, 14 years of which he was the board treasurer.

Ching has also been an active member in the American Legion, participating at the local, district and state levels, currently serving as a state vice-commander. He has served on his local township board since 1968 and is active in the First Presbyterian Church of Castlewood, S.D.

Throughout Bob's tenure on the H-D Electric board, he encouraged other board members to take the opportunity to gain knowledge through education programs so together they could build a stronger cooperative.

Ching served 16 years on the Legislative Committee for the state's electric cooperatives.



Darrell Henderson

Darrell Henderson began his co-op career in northwestern South Dakota more than 30 years ago when he was elected to the Grand Electric Cooperative board of directors in 1974.

After nearly a decade as a director, Henderson was hired as the manager of Grand Electric and West River Cooperative Telephone in 1984 and continued in that capacity until his retirement in 2001.

During his career, Henderson provided vision and leadership to not only the local cooperatives, but also to South Dakota Network (SDN Communications), a consortium of many of the state's cooperative, independent and municipal telephone companies that created a fiber optic network of more than 5,000 miles to connect more than 300 communities in the state.

Henderson served as the SDN Communications board president for six years. During that period, SDN grew from a regulated company with a single product to a statewide network that connects business, carrier and governmental needs across the region.

Henderson was also active in the management of the South Dakota Telecommunications Association, serving many years as the group's secretary-treasurer and was a part of Basin Electric Power Cooperative's Manager's Advisory Committee.

He and wife, Jeanne, reside in Hettinger, N.D.



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Inductees

Alex J. Stoesser

For 21 years, Alex Stoesser provided leadership on the board of directors of the Pierre Farmers Co-op Elevator.

Early in his term, Stoesser was involved in the co-op's effort to build a new elevator. He was instrumental in securing financing through the use of Debenture Notes from the patrons of the elevator.

As board president, Stoesser enhanced and promoted the growth of the cooperative, now Midwest Cooperatives, more than 10 fold. Records indicate that from 1978 until 1993, patronage equity grew from \$379,000 to more than \$3.7 million.

In the early '80s, Stoesser and his wife, Lucille, were moved by news reports of high unemployment in Detroit, Mich., due to auto manufacturing layoffs. The two organized an effort to have a train car load of wheat made into flour. The resulting packages were labeled "With love from your friends in South Dakota" and the Stoessers were on hand to help distribute the bags to the unemployed in Detroit. The value of the gift was roughly \$200,000.

Stoesser was a lifelong member of St. John's Catholic Church in Fort Pierre where he served several years as a council member and also served as council chair. He was also a member of the Knights of Columbus, the Loyal Order of the Moose, American Legion and the Veterans of Foreign Wars.



1925-2000

Induction into the South Dakota Cooperative Hall of Fame is the highest honor that the cooperative community bestows on those men and women whose endeavors in the cause of the cooperative form of enterprises have been genuinely heroic.

The South Dakota Cooperative Hall of Fame provides recognition for a person contributing in especially significant ways to the enhancement of the cooperative idea, its broader acceptance or to the substantial advancement of cooperative enterprise in any of its various forms.

– Excerpted from the
South Dakota Cooperative
Hall of Fame Nomination Form

South Dakota
COOPERATIVE
Hall of Fame