

May 2026

Horizons

A Golden West Customer Magazine
& Award-Winning Publication

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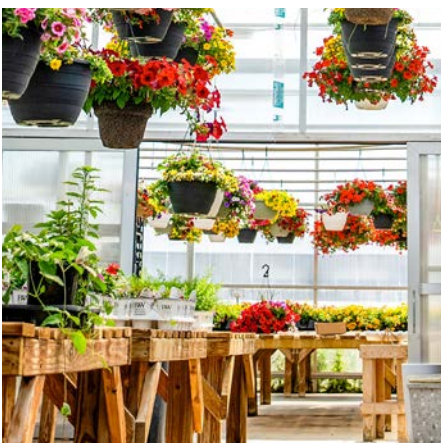
Planting seeds of joy

At Dakota Greens, Jeff and Robin Prior cultivate color, community, and connection.



Planting seeds of joy

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Step inside Dakota Greens in the spring for pops of color and earthy scents amidst a hum of activity as the greenhouse prepares for its busy season. It feels like a warm, welcoming gathering place, and that's exactly how owners Jeff and Robin Prior like it.

"People don't come here because they have to," Jeff says. "They come here because they want to. They come here to be happy."

For more than two decades, the Priors have been growing plants, a family, and relationships just east of Custer. They've turned what two decades ago was a small vegetable stand into a long-standing business that enhances the beauty of the area.

From Michigan to the Black Hills

Jeff grew up in Michigan with gardening as part of his daily life thanks to his mother and grandmother. Robin was born in Spearfish, but her father's job as a firefighter took the family to Michigan. The two became

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high school sweethearts, married in 2000, and soon joined Robin’s family in purchasing the property that would become Dakota Greens.

While Jeff completed the last of his 22 years in the U.S. Army, Robin moved to Custer with their two young children to be close to her family. Jeff retired from military service and joined his family in 2006.

Greenhouse growth

With degrees in horticulture and science and a passion for ornamental plants, Jeff saw potential in the small greenhouse already on the property. The Priors expanded steadily, building additional greenhouses in 2009, 2011, 2018, and then added The Shed, a store selling a unique selection of pottery, accessories, and gardening essentials.

Dakota Greens offers more than 120 varieties of perennials along with premium annuals and sells about 3,000 hanging baskets each season. They select everything with the Black Hills weather swings and short growing season in mind, incorporating their personal touch.

“What you see here is us,” Jeff says. “The colors, the combinations, and the plants we choose are all a reflection of what we love.”

Their art is also visible in the flowerpots and baskets adorning downtown Custer, which Dakota Greens creates, maintains, and waters throughout the summer. In addition, they help bring outdoor spaces to life by planting trees, landscaping, and coordinating regional commercial projects.



It’s a family affair

Jeff and Robin’s son, Gunner, works alongside them every day, and their daughter, Dakota, returns from Alaska to help during the busiest months. Their three-year-old granddaughter is already a familiar face and appears poised to grow up among the flowers.

Still, the family can’t do it alone. Over the years, the Priors estimate they have hired more than 150 seasonal employees, many of them students and young adults from the area.

“We’ve always seen this as a place to teach life skills,” Jeff says. “Showing up, working hard, treating people well – that matters.”

Connected with BizWorks

Dakota Greens relies on Golden West’s fast internet service, including the BizWorks Internet Suite, to keep the business running smoothly. BizWorks provides dependable Wi-Fi across the operation’s many buildings. Among other things, it also creates a point-of-sale network separate from guest and staff use to keep information more secure.

Golden West’s fiber-optic service allows their daughter to join weekly business meetings via Zoom from thousands of miles away. As a family-owned greenhouse, Jeff and



Jeff’s wife Robin and their son Gunner help keep their greenhouses growing and blooming year-round.

Robin appreciate Golden West as a cooperative that prioritizes its members and the communities it serves.

“When you call Golden West, you’re talking to someone local,” Jeff says. “They know us, they know our setup, and they’re there when we need them.”

Reaping a good life

After more than 25 years in the greenhouse business, Jeff acknowledges they haven’t gotten rich – at least not monetarily.

“We’ve been able to raise our kids, work side by side as a family, and be part of this community every day. I wouldn’t change it for the world.”

Giving back

It's how this co-op is wired!

Golden West supports hundreds of causes and events and invests in its own college scholarship program every year to sustain the communities it serves.

The cooperative helps communities with hospital expansions and other building or remodeling projects, supports service clubs and youth projects, contributes to foundations, and more. Golden West provides funding and assistance through three main avenues:

- 1. Donations:** Donations support community-focused initiatives that enhance well-being. While donations can be as large as \$500, the cooperative typically gives \$100 to \$250 as this allows support for more organizations across the service territory.
- 2. Sponsorships:** Sponsorships offer financial support for worthy causes and events that attract visitors for economic impact while offering Golden West exposure. Exposure often involves a combination of a banner, program advertising, online exposure, etc. that's memorable for Golden West's members and potential members.
- 3. Economic Development:** Economic Development supports projects that stimulate local economies, promote growth, and improve the quality of life. These grants take the nonprofit guideline one step further by generally requiring 501(c)3 status.
 - **Supporting local growth:** Economic Development grants provide funding over \$500, with the cooperative most commonly giving from \$1,000 to \$3,000. Some significant community projects may receive \$5,000 or more.

How do I know if I qualify?

Golden West gives to a wide range of nonprofit organizations and works to support many different communities. Rather than being the sole donor, the cooperative prefers contributing to projects other local businesses also support.

Golden West will likely deny a request if the project lies outside the Golden West service territory, if it should be funded by tax dollars, if it requires payment to an individual or for-profit business, or if it covers travel expenses. A request will also be denied if it involves politics, religion, a third-party fundraising organization, or hosting a seminar, workshop, or telethon.

How do causes and events get funding?

To request funding, organizations must complete and submit an online application. This process is quick and easy for applicants and helps Golden West manage the many funding requests it receives throughout the year.



Allow time for the review process, which may take 4 to 12 weeks depending on the request type.



Scan the QR code or head to goldenwest.com/giving to learn more or submit an application.

Teen talent spotlighted as photo contest expands

Golden West invites you and your family to find and submit beautiful landscapes, scenic nature spots, or any other candid moments. Capture the beauty of the Golden West service territory on camera for a chance to win!



All entries due by
Friday, July 31

In addition to the adult contest, Golden West is expanding the photo contest this year to include a teen division for ages 13 to 17 with prizes awarded for all winners.

Adult entrants must live in a household with Golden West service, and teen entrants must have permission to enter from a parent or legal guardian who subscribes to Golden West service. Each photographer may enter only one photo, so submit your best shot!

By entering, you grant Golden West permission to use your photo in social media and other platforms to promote the cooperative and the beautiful area it serves. All entries may be considered for inclusion

in Golden West's large business calendar, for example.

For more information, visit theexchangesd.com/photo-entry.

To enter, complete the online form and upload the photo. The larger the file size, the higher the resolution, the better! All submitted photos will be posted to the Golden West Facebook page (@GoldenWestTelecom) where members will determine the winners by voting for their favorites.

TEEN DIVISION

Voting timeline

Aug. 3 to 19

Prizes

- **First** – \$60 check
- **Second** – \$40 check
- **Third** – \$20 check

ADULT DIVISION

Voting timeline

Aug. 19 to Sept. 1

Prizes

- **First** – GoPro camera
- **Second** – \$100 Visa gift card
- **Third** – \$50 Visa gift card

VOTE

Board of Directors elections open soon

Members of the Golden West Telecommunications Cooperative will elect four directors to its board of directors this year. Seats representing districts 1, 2, 5, and 8 are scheduled for election to four-year terms.

Any qualified member in these districts desiring to run for a directorship must request a petition from Golden West and obtain signatures from at least 20 members of the district. Completed nominating petitions must be received by Golden West or postmarked by June 28. Because this date falls on a weekend, filing or postmarking early is strongly recommended to ensure the deadline is met.

Director election vacancy notices will be published in newspapers and postcards will be mailed to members in the affected districts later in May. Incumbent directors may run for re-election.

Vote online, by mail, or in person

Golden West members may again vote for Board of Director candidates online or by mail between Aug. 10 and Sept. 22 or in person at the annual meeting. The cooperative's 74th annual meeting will be held at 10 a.m. Saturday, Sept. 26, in Wall.

Both residential and non-individual members with a taxpayer identification number on file with Golden West can vote online in advance. Including the vote by mail or in-person options, every member can have their voice heard by electing directors who help guide the cooperative.

Watch your mailbox and email for voting information coming in mid-August. For more information about the Board of Directors, what area each district covers, and director qualifications, visit goldenwest.com/board.





Webmail offers options for resetting password

Resetting Golden West email passwords is easier than ever with a recent update improving security. Add a recovery email in a few clicks and you won't need to call the help desk to do it.

TO ADD A RECOVERY EMAIL, log in to your webmail account, then click Settings on the left-hand side, select Recovery Email, and enter a second email address. A confirmation code will be sent to this newly designated Recovery Email address; the code must be entered within 30 minutes.

The next time you log in to your webmail account and your

mind goes blank, click “Forgot password?” to reset your password. A password reset link will be sent to your Recovery Email.

You can also manually change your password at any time. Resetting passwords regularly keeps your account and information secure. Moving forward, a new, longer 16-character requirement

also makes it harder for hackers to gain unauthorized access.

Make sure to create a strong password using memorable words unique to you and difficult for others to predict. Consider using a passphrase that's not easy to guess, with special characters and numbers interspersed, perhaps in place of letters, for added protection.

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TELECOMMUNICATIONS
PO Box 411, Wall, SD 57790

Electronic Service Requested



One free call (or click) protects it all!

Before you put a shovel in the ground to start a new landscaping project or plant a tree, make sure you **call 811** or **visit sdonecall.com**.

Contact 811 to locate, mark, and protect the underground infrastructure you depend on for your internet, phone, electricity, gas, etc. While this involves planning, the service is quick and free to use. Plus, it's the law.

Digging near buried lines is dangerous and can lead to injury; it can also be costly. Failure to notify 811 can leave you liable for all costs associated with repairing a damaged utility line, and you may have to pay penalties, as well.



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or visit **sdonecall.com**
goldenwest.com/811



HORIZONS – Volume 27, Number 3
Horizons is an award-winning customer newsletter published every two months by Golden West Telecommunications.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Golden West, PO Box 411, Wall, SD 57790
Dee Sleep, Editor • goldenwest.com • 1-855-888-7777