

May 2025

Horizons

A Golden West Customer Newsletter
& Award-Winning Publication

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Game on!

Couple turns hobby into
yard game business.



Dustin and Hezel
Garness sell and
rent out their various
hand-made yard
game creations.

Game on!

While Hezel studied for her undergraduate degree, her husband, Dustin Garness, began experimenting with his woodshop tools and machinery. Before long, he recreated kubb, a wooden yard game he had played with his father's family.

“We heard the weekend before that there was going to be a market on Thursday, so we decided to get a booth, and I worked overtime to make more yard games,” says Dustin. “Now, our games are our pride and joy, and they still hold up like new, three years later.”

Selling and renting games

Dustin and Hezel own and operate Garness Games, selling and renting out their various hand-made yard game creations in Hartford and the surrounding area. They attend the downtown Hartford markets in the summer and also list information online to sell games like cornhole, kubb, yard dice, yard dominoes, and giant tumbling blocks.

These games are also available for rent along with other options, including tic-tac-toe, dominoes, checkers, and more. Different rental packages allow customers to mix and match multiple games at a time for all kinds of events.

Dustin and Hezel got married and moved to Hartford a decade ago. They chose the area for the atmosphere, fun people, and community spaces. Hezel says she enjoys the comfort of the smaller community, where people know each other and are friendly.

“In a big city, we wouldn’t have the same marketing options as we do here,” says Dustin. “We use our website and social media, but we have gotten to the point where people in the community recognize us at the Downtown Hartford Market each summer.”

Exploring surrounding towns

Hezel explains that Garness Games gives her and Dustin the opportunity to experience new things. Transporting games for customer event rentals allows the duo to explore nearby towns and try new restaurants.

Along with Garness Games, the two have full-time jobs, where Dustin works for Family Memorials by Gibson

and Hezel teaches fourth grade at Tri-Valley Elementary School. They say the community makes them feel supported, which allows them to be passionate about their work.

Fast, reliable internet is key

Reliable internet plays a crucial role for the couple. Dustin and Hezel use their Golden West service to manage their website, invoice customers, and handle online inquiries from their home. Dustin researches new yard game designs online, and Hezel used it to complete her degree. They say their internet works so well that they hardly think about it.

“We’re happy with our service from Golden West,” says Hezel. “Other providers may try to get us to switch, but we’ve never needed to have that conversation, because we have no problems with our Golden West service.”



"In a big city, we wouldn't have the same marketing options as we do here," says Dustin. "We use our website and social media, but we have gotten to the point where people in the community recognize us at the Downtown Hartford Market each summer."



Denny Law retires after 27 years of service

Chief Executive Officer and General Manager Denny Law retired on May 9 after serving Golden West for nearly 28 years, with more than half that time spent in the top leadership role. For Law, managing the organization was always about the members and employees of Golden West.

“**W**hen you work with committed individuals across an organization and geography like Golden West and have the privilege of working with people who are committed to doing the right thing and working in members' best interests – that's such a blessing,” said Law.

Law started with Golden West at a time when dial-up internet in South Dakota was the primary way customers connected to the world. By the time he retired, the technology had evolved to allow rural communities to access new opportunities in education, communication, services, and more.

Unparalleled service

During Law's tenure, the cooperative expanded its fiber-optic infrastructure. This involved the efforts of many Golden West team members coordinating projects and also gave Law the opportunity to testify before Congress on the importance of broadband in rural America. Law said a deep sense of community and the dedication of his Golden West colleagues made everything possible.

“Working at Golden West has been unlike any other experience

in my professional career in terms of a sense of family and the pride both the organization and my coworkers take in serving communities,” says Law

Staying rural

Law grew up in rural South Dakota, and alongside his wife, raised two sons in the town of Wall. He said he has always felt at home in small communities, and he was thankful his career allowed him to stay connected to that way of life while making an impact statewide.

Due in large part to Law's affinity for local areas, rural communities in South Dakota are connecting to the world using fast and reliable fiber-optic networks. Law explained how world-class fiber connectivity helps eliminate geographical barriers. Now, communities like Philip, Pine Ridge, Armour, and Freeman are well prepared for the future.

Though Law has retired, he is excited to see how Golden West and the industry will continue to grow. “I may not be working in the middle of the cooperative anymore, but I will always be cheering it on for what's next.”

The National Telecommunications Cooperative Association (NTCA) recognized Denny Law who represented the needs of Golden West members when advocating for the rural broadband industry on the national level over the past two decades. The NTCA honored him with the Excellence in Advocacy Award in April. ***Congratulations, Denny Law, and thanks for your service!***



Students from three families attend Midland Elementary School and enjoy learning and socializing together.



Six students. Two teachers. One small school *'family.'*

A sign hanging prominently in Marti Sudbeck's classroom at Midland Elementary School reads "Lucky to be part of this family." Together Marti and Nicki Nelson provide one-on-one instruction to six students between their two classrooms. Midland sits 35 miles northeast of Kadoka, and the school belongs to the Kadoka Area School District.

"We have three families here and they treat the other kids just like brothers and sisters. The sign I have explains the school," says Marti. "It feels good to have the number of students I have, because I know exactly where they are at in their lessons and can help them effectively."

Benefits of a small school

Teaching at a small school like Midland Elementary provides many unique learning opportunities, Marti says. For example, she and Nicki can be hands-on

with all their students from the moment their light-up sneakers dash through the doors in the morning until their lockers with nametags shut at the end of the day.

Kadoka Area School Superintendent Jamie Hermann says the education the kids receive sets them up for success. He says the teachers can challenge students where they need it and help them with subjects they struggle in, creating a great foundation for their future.

Internet closes the distance

According to school staff, Golden West internet services are a necessity for faculty and every student. Without it, their educational resources such as textbooks, modern teaching tools, and administrative functions would not be possible.

"We have really fast, reliable internet service and the students can achieve whatever they want to," says Jamie. "They

have access to the world at their fingertips and have a heck of a lot of opportunities."

Jeff Nemecek, principal of all the district's elementary schools, says students supplement some of their schoolwork with an online connection. Even with wide distances between schools, they all stay connected within and between each school.

At the end of each school day, Marti drives back home to Kadoka but explains she wouldn't have it any other way. "It's unique to be able to teach and learn in a small school like Midland. You don't see the same level of care in every school," says Marti. "We are lucky to be part of this family."

An article in the January 2025 issue of Horizons incorrectly stated the Midland School had closed. While the high school is no longer open, Midland Elementary School continues to serve area students in grades K-8 as part of the Kadoka School District.

Vote for directors in advance or at annual meeting

For the second year, Golden West members may vote for Board of Director candidates online or by mail ahead of time or in person at the annual meeting. The cooperative's 73rd annual meeting will be held at 10 a.m. Saturday, Sept. 27, in Wall.

"Advance voting options online and by mail have allowed more Golden West members to participate in electing representation to guide their cooperative without having to travel," says Director of Member Services Jody Bielmaier. "This year, those same opportunities to vote are available."

Survey & Ballot Systems (SBS) will again manage advance voting options for Golden West using deadlines that meet the

organization's bylaw requirements. SBS provides dependable and secure voting systems for many types of organizations, including cooperatives.

Five director elections in 2025

This year, five directors will be elected to the Board of Directors. Four of these seats — representing districts 1, 4, 6, and 7 — are scheduled for election in 2025 and will carry four-year terms. Additionally, the board has decided to fill the vacant seat in district 2, which was left open following the passing of John Knutson, through the election process. This seat will be up for election again in 2026.

Director election vacancy notices will be published in newspapers during the second half of May. Nominating petitions must be received by Sunday, June 29. Incumbent directors may run for re-election. For more information about the Board of Directors and what area each district covers visit goldenwest.com/board.

If two or more valid candidates file a petition for the same open seat on the Golden West Board of Directors, voting will be required as follows:

RESIDENTIAL MEMBERS

MONDAY, AUG. 11

- A voting instruction letter will be mailed to residential members. It will include their member number.
- Members may begin voting online by entering their member number and the last four digits of their Social Security Number which must match what Golden West has on file. Those who prefer to vote by mail must call to request a paper ballot.

TUESDAY, SEPT. 23

- Advance voting ends. Ballots must be received either electronically or by mail to be counted.

SATURDAY, SEPT. 27

- Residential members who have not already voted may cast a ballot in person during the annual meeting in Wall.

NON-INDIVIDUAL MEMBERS (i.e. businesses, churches, school districts, towns, etc.)

MONDAY, AUG. 11

- A voting instruction letter will be mailed to non-individual members.

TUESDAY, SEPT. 23

- Advance voting ends. Ballots must be received either electronically or by mail to be counted.
- Non-individual entities planning to vote in person at the annual meeting must submit a completed Authorization to Vote form by 2 p.m.

Golden West will combine vote totals from ballots cast in person at the annual meeting with SBS certified results from advance voting to determine the outcome. Elected directors will be announced at the end of the meeting.

Watch future issues of Horizons as well as your mail, email, and social media for more information about the elections and all the voting options or visit goldenwest.com/voting.



Thank you for your service, John Knutson.

John Knutson of Grindstone in Haakon County represented District 2 on the Golden West Board of Directors from 2010 until his passing on Wednesday, April 2, 2025.

Our thoughts and prayers are with John's family during this difficult time. John contributed greatly to the cooperative and its members. He will be missed.

Capture South Dakota's beauty and win!

Golden West invites you to share your favorite scenic landscape, candid moment, or portrait taken within the Golden West service area for a chance to win!



**NOW
OPEN FOR
SUBMISSIONS!**

Submissions are due by
Aug. 10, 2025. Voting will
take place Aug. 15-31, 2025.

The top three photos
and photographers
will win a prize:

1st Place
GoPro Camera

2nd Place
\$100 Visa Gift Card

3rd Place
\$50 Visa Gift Card

- Only **one** photo per photographer may be entered in the contest, 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 will be considered for inclusion in Golden West's large 15" x 11" business calendar, for example.
- All photos must be uploaded online in high resolution using the online form at theexchangesd.com/photo-entry. The larger the file size, the better! All submitted photos will be posted to the Golden West Facebook page (@GoldenWestTelecom) where members determine the winners by voting for their favorites.



Community education classes coming to three more towns!



- **Online Power: Explore More While Staying Safe Online.** Learn how to make the most of your internet service while staying safe online.
- **Your Guide to Home Entertainment.** Learn about both cable TV and online streaming options and more.

Each two-hour session is taught by an experienced educator, with course materials reviewed by Mitchell Technical College for quality. Watch future Horizon newsletters and your email for new class location announcements. For details or to register, visit goldenwest.com/classes.

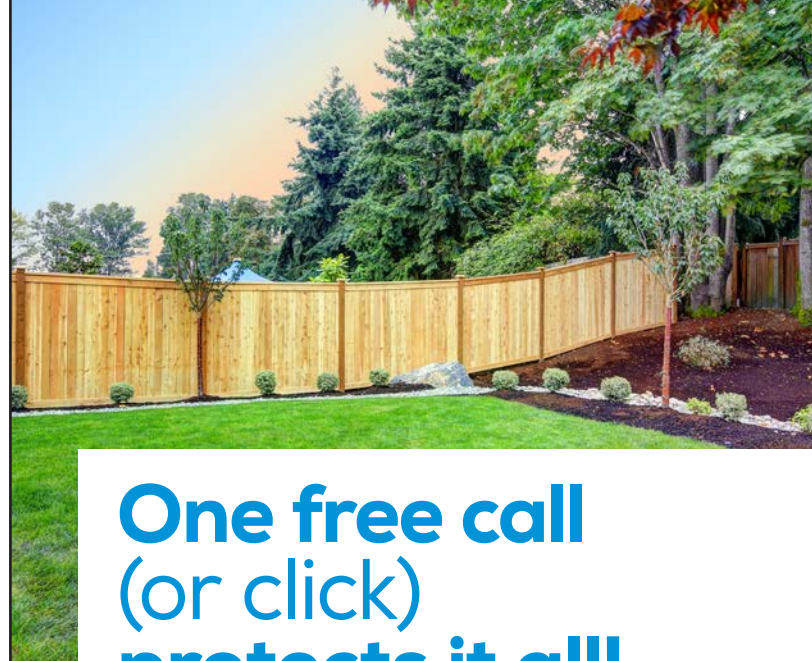
Golden West is offering community education classes – covering everything from email security to online gaming – to three more communities in June. Customers in or near Springfield, Menno, and Gregory can attend one or both FREE community sessions:

CITY	CLASS	DATE/TIME	LOCATION
Springfield	Online Power	June 9 – 3 to 5 p.m.	Springfield Community Building
	Home Entertainment	June 16 – 3 to 5 p.m.	
Menno	Online Power	June 12 – 3 to 5 p.m.	Menno School/Community Library
	Home Entertainment	June 30 – 3 to 5 p.m.	
Gregory	Online Power	June 19 – 3 to 5 p.m.	Gregory Comm. Room /School Auditorium
	Home Entertainment	June 26 – 3 to 5 p.m.	

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Click or call before you dig.

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



Surplus equipment selling at online auction

Golden West will sell more than 100 pieces of surplus equipment in an online auction with bidding open now! The first lot closes at 10 a.m. MDT / 11 a.m. CDT on Tuesday, June 17.

For more information visit goldenwest.com/auction.



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