



# TOUCHSTONE SUPPORTS H.S. RODEO

The Touchstone Energy flag has flown proudly at the last 20 State High School Rodeo Finals. *Photos by Billy Gibson*

## Electric co-ops support high school rodeo through popular Short Go Shirt program

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Folks who attended the State High School Rodeo Finals in Fort Pierre this summer could see Tobi Hintz coming from halfway across the arena.

Hintz is a student at Timber Lake High School and serves as the association's 2022 Rodeo Queen. She cut a dashing figure at the event with her decorative sash, bright red lipstick, fringed shoulder bag, buckle-shaped sterling silver earrings and baby blue cowgirl hat with a sparkling tiara wrapped above the brim.

Oh, and she can also ride pretty well, too. Over the past two years, she's earned Touchstone Energy Short Go Shirts at the state finals in recognition of her rodeo skills in barrel racing and pole bending.

This year marked the 20th celebration of the Touchstone Energy Short Go

Shirt program. Since 2002, Touchstone Energy cooperatives have donated more than \$140,000 towards the program that honors contestants who make it to the Short Go round of the state finals competition in their respective events.

This year in Fort Pierre, 145 student-athletes visited the Touchstone Energy booth to sign up for their shirts, which will be embroidered with the TSE logo and delivered to contestants this fall.

While Hintz has a bubbly personality and a flair for fashion, she takes pride in wearing her two Short Go Shirts that identify her as an accomplished competitor.

"It's so cool and it's such an honor to win a Short Go Shirt," she said. "It's so unique for us competitors because I don't know how many states actually get the opportunity to receive something like this. Every contestant appreciates it. The more shirts the merrier!"

Tobi, a national finalist in the rodeo

queen competition two years ago, has been involved in rodeo from a young age and said she likes the friendships that are forged with her peers.

"You meet so many people and make so many friends. Sometimes you wonder why you're doing it, but then you learn that there's a rhyme and reason for all the chaos and madness," she said.

Ann Sundermann has served as executive secretary for the High School Rodeo Association for the past 17 years. She describes the level of enthusiasm surrounding the TSE Short Go program that she's experienced over the years.

"Winning one of these shirts is the thing the kids anticipate the most," Sundermann said during a brief pause in the rodeo action. "We'll have 40 kids coming into the office asking where do they sign up for their Short Go Shirts. Then once they've been ordered they want to know when is their Short Go Shirt coming in. All the kids know about Touchstone because they've seen these shirts for the past 20 years."





Over the past 20 years, electric cooperatives have distributed more than 3,200 Short Go Shirts.

Sundermann said she's seen a lot of value from the program that demonstrates the electric cooperative system's ongoing involvement in youth development, education, sports activities and overall community support.

"It's been a privilege to work with the local electric cooperatives. They take pictures of the kids with their shirts and run them in their magazines and the kids send the pictures to us. They give the kids a lot of recognition for all their hard work and all they've achieved. With the commitment cooperatives have to their communities and their support for this outstanding program, I think it's a great long-term partnership and we look forward to continuing for many years to come," she said.

Marty Philips is public relations coordinator for the association. He noted that Short Go Shirts don't spend much time stashed away and gathering dust in the closet.

"The shirts get worn out because the kids wear them constantly. They're right at the front of their closets. It's such a great honor for them. They wear them to work, they wear them to school, they wear them to college and even when they're adults. I see them all over the state," Philips said. "They wear them

with pride because they know they earned it and they know they did the work to make it to the Short Go round. A lot of kids think it's better than a buckle. We appreciate what TSE has done for the kids because that's what this is all about, it's all about the kids. Everything we do is for the kids."

Todd Eliason, a recent retiree from Rushmore Electric in Rapid City who administered the program for Touchstone Energy since it began in 2002, said he looked forward to working with rodeo organizers and the student-athletes each year.

"These kids are our future, and to see how goal-oriented and determined they are and to see how hard they work, it really makes you feel positive about the future," he said.

Eliason cited Layni Stevens as a prime example. Not only did Layni earn a Short Go Shirt but she also punched her ticket to the national event in Gillette, W.Y., by finishing first in the girl's cutting competition.

**"It's such an honor to receive a Short Go Shirt. The more shirts, the merrier!"**

*- Rodeo Queen Tobi Hintz*

"I'm just grateful to be at the finals and it's an even greater blessing to get to wear a Short Go Shirt," Layni said. "It's one of your goals to get to the Short Go round. Sometimes it doesn't always go your way, but to know you get the reward of getting a shirt is just really cool. You can wear it all year long, to all kinds of events and to college."

To see a video of the event, visit [www.youtube.com/watch?v=iT-oZ1Oxn7o](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iT-oZ1Oxn7o)

