



Bell Ringer

Volume 59, No 10 February 2026
Clear Lake, South Dakota 57226

ITC SCHOLARSHIPS

It's that time of year when high school seniors start looking for scholarships. ITC has the perfect scholarship for them! The ITC and Dean E. Anderson scholarships are available to assist with some of the financial burdens. If you live in the ITC service area, now is the time to check with your school about this scholarship!

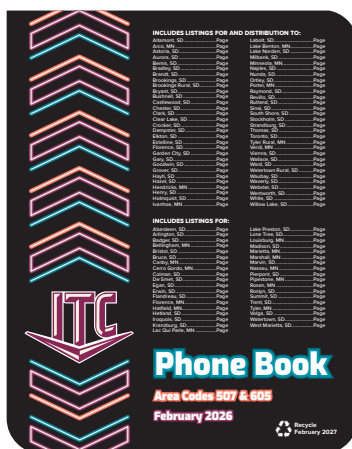
ITC offers twenty-four Dean E. Anderson scholarships to high school seniors who plan to attend a post-secondary institution in either South Dakota or Minnesota. Each scholarship is worth \$700 and will be awarded in the spring. The scholarships were created to assist seniors who want to continue their education. Since the 1990s, ITC has given out over \$400,000.

Scholarships will be awarded to one graduating senior from each of the twenty-three school districts in the ITC service area. Scholarship applicants' parents or guardians must maintain at least one ITC service (Phone or Internet). Students must plan to attend a post-secondary institution located in either South Dakota or Minnesota.

One \$700 scholarship will also be awarded to a graduating senior who attends a school other than the school in the district where they reside due to open enrollment. This student's parents or guardians must also maintain at least one ITC service (Phone or Internet) to be eligible for this scholarship.

This year, the ITC Scholarship is available online. The online form, eligibility requirements, and all terms and conditions are available on ITC's website. Go to www.itc-web.com/itc-scholarship or use your phone's camera to scan the QR code to the right. Completed online forms will automatically be sent to your high school principal/counselor for review. The deadline is February 27.

If you have a student planning to attend a post-secondary institution, encourage them to check out the scholarships offered by ITC! Good luck, seniors!



2026 PHONE BOOK

The 2026 ITC Phone Book is here! If you are currently subscribed to ITC Phone service, you will receive an ITC Phone Book in the mail. We have a few in the ITC offices, so you can also pick one up there, while supplies last.

Check out all the helpful items in the front of the book, like emergency numbers, prefixes and area codes, the ITC By-Laws, and financial assistance programs.

If you no longer want a print version of the book, you can opt-out by going to www.yellowpagesoptout.com or calling 1.800.343.8086. If you prefer the online phone book, go to www.localsolution.com. Enjoy the new book!

ITC will be at the Watertown Winter Farm Show on February 11-14 at the Codington County Extension Center! We will be handing out promo items and answering any questions you have. We hope to see you there!

DRAGGING DOWN THE NETWORK

By Michael Martinell, Network Broadband Technician

Many people notice that streaming or video calls suddenly buffer and aren't sure why. A speed test looks great, but things still feel slow, jumpy, or unreliable. In many cases, the problem isn't your Internet connection at all. It's what's happening inside your home network.

Your Wi-Fi is a shared space. Think of it like a group of friends sitting around chatting. Everyone takes turns talking. When everyone speaks clearly and at the same pace, the conversation flows. But if one person falls behind, everyone else has to wait. Your devices work the same way. Phones, TVs, laptops, cameras, and other smart gadgets all take turns communicating with the router. When most devices use modern Wi-Fi, things move quickly, but even one device can slow down the entire network, making everyday Internet use feel frustrating and unpredictable.

One common culprit is smart home gear like light bulbs, plugs, and other low-cost connected devices. Some of these devices are brand new but still rely on very old Wi-Fi standards, like 802.11g, which dates back to 2003. They don't use much data, but they stay connected all the time and communicate slowly. That means your router has to spend extra time talking to them, which can quietly slow everything else on the network.

That's why the problem can feel unpredictable. Speed tests may look fine, but everyday use feels sluggish. Streaming buffers, calls stutter, and things seem better or worse depending on the moment. In some homes, performance improves almost immediately when certain smart devices are unplugged. This is a good sign that it was older technology that was quietly dragging the whole network down.

The good news is you usually don't need to replace everything at once. You can try moving certain smart devices to a separate network or the guest network. You can also try unplugging devices one at a time and see if streaming or calls improve. Restarting your router after making changes can also help reset the network. Testing this way helps you identify which gadgets are slowing things down. These devices aren't "bad," and your Internet probably isn't broken. Being selective about what you add and upgrading the biggest offenders over time can make a noticeable difference. Even small changes, like moving your devices a few feet to avoid interference, can improve how everything feels.

If slowdowns don't seem to have a clear cause, looking at the mix of devices on your network is a great place to start. Our Help Desk can help identify whether older equipment may be part of the issue and suggest practical steps to get things running more smoothly.

CHATGPT

By Holly Stormo, Marketing Communications Specialist

Want to learn how to use ChatGPT? ITC has the class for you! Over the next couple of months, ITC will teach a class on how to use ChatGPT and what it's for. We will show you different prompts to make the most of the information ChatGPT can provide.

This class will be held at 10:00 AM in the following locations: Brookings, Clear Lake, Ivanhoe, Milbank, and Webster. It will be a hands-on class, so please bring your phone or tablet to follow along. To sign up, please fill out the form on the ITC website by scanning the QR code to the right or going to www.itc-web.com/itcuniversity.

If you have any questions, please call ITC at 1.800.417.8667. We hope to see you in class!



DO NOT CALL REGISTRY

The National Do Not Call Registry was established by the Federal Trade Commission to give you the choice of receiving telemarketing calls at home or on your cell phone. You can register, remove, or add a number to the National Do Not Call Registry online. Registration is free. Telemarketers have 31 days to remove your number from their call lists.

To register by phone or verify a number on the registry, call 1.888.382.1222 or TTY, call 1.866.290.4236 from the phone you want to register.

To register online or verify a number on the Do Not Call Registry, go to www.donotcall.gov. If you register online, you will receive a confirmation email from donotcall.gov. You must click the link in the email within 72 hours to complete your registration.

Even with the Do Not Call Registry, you may still receive political, charitable, debt-collection, informational, and telephone-survey calls. A company can still call if you've recently done business with them or permitted them to contact you. A company must honor your request not to call you.

Phone numbers placed on the National Do Not Call Registry will remain on it permanently unless you ask them to remove them.

WATCH OUT FOR PEDESTALS

Watch out for pedestals when removing snow. They are a distribution center that provides fiber-optic services to you and your neighbors. These pedestals offer network access to emergency, cellular, TV, and broadband services. If one becomes damaged, services could be affected. Don't be the cause of an outage. If you come across a damaged pedestal, please call ITC at 1.800.417.8667.

