FERGUS FEATURES

Member Newsletter ◆ Fergus Electric Cooperative, Inc. , Lewistown, MT

A Lewistown sand, gravel and concrete operation is ready to provide for projects large or small

Story and photos
by Judy Byrne

"If we can't do the job, we will help you find someone who can."

This is the business philosophy of Casino Creek Concrete, as stated on their website, and it summarizes how they have done business in Central Montana since 1984. Owned and operated by the Marv Mathison family, Casino Creek Concrete was a fixture for over two decades on Casino Creek Road south of Lewistown. Today, the operation is located three miles north of town on Hanover Road, overlooking Hi-Heat Industries and the entire valley below.

"We made the move here six years ago in order to be closer to our gravel source," says current president Andy Mathison.

The pit at the main plant provides gravel for road construction and maintenance, while the Hanover pit supplies sand and gravel for concrete projects. "The gravel here is too dirty for concrete," Mathison explains. "It contains too much clay. It won't come out in the wash."

Andy Mathison, Casino Creek Concrete president, says, "My company can perform services from building roads and dams to pouring sidewalks and driveways. We also produce an assortment of decorative items such as cinder blocks, patio bricks, concrete benches and concrete picnic tables."

For Casino Creek Concrete, having a variety of gravel is key to fulfilling the assortment of services they offer. A full-service ready-mix sand and gravel operation, Casino Creek Concrete can perform every concrete need whether large or small, from building roads and dams to pouring sidewalks and driveways.

This company can satisfy government contract specifications, commercial projects, even assignments for the private, do-it-yourself homeowner. A complete fleet of trucks, tractors, pups and belly dumpers ensures the company can deliver concrete loads up to as much as 10 yards. In addition, Casino Creek Concrete maintains a concrete pumping truck that extends 71 feet for those hard-to-reach places.

Last, they produce an assortment of decorative items to add a finishing touch to any landscaping project. Cinder blocks for retaining walls and borders, patio bricks, concrete benches and picnic tables all are made at the plant's primary location.

Even a quick drive through Lewistown reveals numerous examples of Casino Creek Concrete's products. Not quite so easily seen are some of their newer products: ICF foam blocks and LOGIX foam foundations.

Foam blocks and foundations provide an innovation in home construction that excites Mathison. These insulated forms provide walls that dramatically reduce air infiltration, which helps reduce cold spots in a home. It's a complete wall construction system. The insulated foam foundations provide comfort, durability and a more consistent temperature for the home.

Some claim this type of foundation can save the homeowner up to 50 percent on their monthly heating bills as compared to a conventionally built home.

Besides providing concrete and foam blocks, Casino Creek Concrete fabricates all its own equipment for crushing and moving gravel. The plant has several conveyers, stackers, crushers and

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MANAGER'S MESSAGE

From Scott Sweeney

Energy conservation may help

The cold winter weather has generated phone calls from members concerned about their power bills. This past December was a cold month. According to the National Weather Service, the average temperature in Lewistown was 8.2°F colder than normal and there were 13 days when the temperature was below zero. The month of January had seven days where the temperature dropped below zero.

I realize that when it is bitter cold outside, it can be hard to conserve electrical usage. One option to reduce usage is to install a timer on your car, truck and tractor's block heater, which will reduce the length of time electricity is used.

Another possibility is to look at livestock watering systems. When the unit is not in use, drain and turn the power off. Many new watering devices are more efficient, so upgrading is another option.

Magic boxes claim to heat for pennies

Radiant heaters are gaining popularity. This is a very comfortable heat and is relatively efficient provided you lower the temperature on your home's thermostat. However, if your thermostat setting is unchanged and your radiant heater is in use, you will increase your usage, which will reflect on your monthly electric bill. Operating a 1500-watt heater for a month will use as much as 1080 kWh's. Operating a 1500-watt heater for a month, for example, will use as much as 1080 kWh's and at 10¢ per kWh, your monthly bill will increase to $108.

Other energy tips

I recommend gradually replacing your old incandescent light bulbs with the new compact florescent bulbs. They cost more but in the long run they will save money.

Unplug or disconnect unused appliances. If you have an extra refrigerator or freezer with little in it, move the items into one refrigerator or freezer and unplug the unused one. This will likely save $10 to $15 per month.

Electricity is an important part of our lifestyle, and I encourage all members to conserve power where it is practical. The best value comes with using energy wisely.

Our Energy, Our Future

In the past six months, I have had many people ask me what can be done to help with future electrical power requirements.

I appreciate the concern shown by our members. Now is the time to get in touch with our state's delegation: Rep. Denny Rehberg, Sen. Max Baucus and Sen. Jon Tester and tell them how concerned we are about future electricity costs.

Our statewide group, Montana Electric Cooperatives' Association is teaming with our national lobbying group, National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA), to work with our national politicians on a future course for electrical energy.

It appears that Congress is going to pass some form of carbon tax or a cap and trade program on carbon emissions. NRECA is asking all cooperative members to go to NRECA's website www.ourenergy.coop, join the campaign and e-mail or write your congressional delegation in order to let them know that electric rates need to rise slowly. To allow customers time to adjust to rate increases, these new taxes need to be phased in gradually over many years.

Inside the back cover of this month's *Rural Montana* magazine the association has outlined details on how to contact our three congressional representatives.

I encourage you to take a few minutes to log on to the website and send an e-mail to them. The procedure is simple. The pre-formatted letter allows you to type your own words into the body of the prepared message. Use this opportunity to voice your concerns to your congressional representatives. Together, we can make a difference.

Please call the office at 406-538-3465 if you have questions about my request or have any questions concerning the cooperative.

Touchstone Energy promoted

Fergus Electric member Loretta Swanson visited the Touchstone® Energy booth at the March Home Improvement show in Billings.

Fergus Electric is part of a national consortium, Touchstone Energy, which works to educate the public, to share information about rural electric cooperatives, and to improve the quality of life in cooperative communities.

Visitors learned that Touchstone cooperatives work under four core values – integrity, accountability, innovation and commitment to community.

Those visiting the co-op booth had an opportunity to generate some power. When peddled at 10 miles per hour, a bicycle connected to a small generator produced enough energy to light a table lamp.

In a drawing, Irwin Allen of Ryegate won 1,000 kWhs of electricity.

Loretta Swanson
Photo by Vangie McConnell

Casino Creek

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traps, all built on-site. Mathison designs the equipment himself and makes certain every piece contains his signature, a Maltese cross. His staff welds the steel pieces together, then primes, sandblasts, and paints the final product.

A boss who is never afraid to get his own hands dirty, Mathison often works alongside his 20 employees, sandblasting, painting or operating the equipment. He began learning his skills from his father, Marv, who previously worked road construction in Great Falls.

In 1984, Marv purchased Casino Creek Concrete and moved his family to Lewistown. He gave the company its distinctive logo of hearts, spades, diamonds, and clubs, which are prominently displayed on all the trucks and familiar to local residents.

"Apparently, there used to be a gambling house out on Casino Creek," says Mathison. "That's where the creek and this business got the name, so my father thought the deck of cards theme was a good idea."

After graduating from Fergus High School in 1988, Mathison earned a degree in civil engineering at MSU-Bozeman. He worked six years for JTL Concrete and Paving in Missoula. In 1998, he decided to bring his own young family back to his roots and joined his father's business. He is the sole engineer on staff.

His wife Tami soon found work as a bank teller at the Fergus Federal Credit Union. They have two children. Eleven-year-old Kevin attends Lewis and Clark Elementary School, while his sister, Kelli, is enrolled at Highland Park.

Both of Mathison's parents still reside in Lewistown. His mother, Kay, works part-time at Country Junction. Although he has turned the presidency of Casino Creek Concrete over to his son, Marv still reports to work each day and serves as vice-president of the operation.

The family atmosphere is apparent at Casino Creek Concrete. Office manager Shelley Wiekart greets customers with the help of several family dogs who freely roam the office. They give customers a good sniff, then return to their romping across the driveway and through the snow. They add to the friendly, down-home atmosphere of the place.

Top left to right: Casino Creek Concrete fabricates all its own equipment for crushing and moving gravel. One of their newer products is LOGIX foam foundations. Center: A distinctive logo of hearts, spades, diamonds and clubs are displayed on all trucks. Bottom: With help from one of the family dogs, office manager Shelley Wiekart greets customers.

As much as they hope to make customers comfortable, Mathison says they also take pride in how they treat their staff. "We like being in Central Montana, and we appreciate the people we have working here," he says. "We try to provide a safe work environment where people enjoy what they're doing."

They also respect the land they use, returning it to usable crop land when they finish extracting its gravel. According to Mathison, the reclaimed land serves as a better wheat field when they are finished because they have removed the layer of gravel. "The crop is actually closer to its water supply," he says.

Treating customers right, keeping workers safe, returning the land to good use, providing an important service – Casino Creek Concrete does it all.

America is headed for an electricity crisis

Increasing demand. Rising Rates. CO_2 reductions. Transmission overload.

If Americans want to keep electricity safe, reliable and affordable, Congress and America's electric cooperatives must work together.

Join the 222,500 American consumers who have sent over 1,609,000 letters and e-mails to elected officials asking tough questions about our energy future.

The National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA), along with the Consumer Federation of America, Consumers Union, National Association of State Utility Consumer Advocates and National Consumer Law Center are urging Congress to take a least-cost approach to climate change.

Ultimately, consumers will be paying the bill for programs to reduce carbon emissions – they should, therefore, be considered equal stakeholders in policy debates that until now have included only environmental groups and industry.

It is estimated that we will need 30 percent more electricity by 2030 and experts have warned that unless we do something soon, regions of the country could face electricity shortages as soon as 2011.

Our Energy, Our Future
A Dialogue With America

Consumers are asking Congress some basic questions:

- *How is Congress going to help us meet the future demand for electricity?*
- *How are they going to help us develop technology to reduce carbon dioxide emissions?*
- *How is Congress going to help keep electricity affordable?*

The answers to these questions are important to every American. Elected officials need to know that electric cooperatives, and their consumer-owners, stand ready to work with them to develop a plan.

Begin a dialogue with your legislators: ask the tough questions. Once you start, keep it going by visiting www.ourenergy.coop.

Identify account number — *Win a $28 credit*

If one of the following account numbers is yours, call Fergus Electric (406-538-3465) and identify yourself and your account number.

Account 350885
Account 320924
Account 321892

You will receive a $28 credit on next month's statement.

Last month's winner was Clara Allen of Garneil.

Statement of Nondiscrimination

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Call 811 or visit www.callbeforeyoudig.com at least 48 hours before you dig and know what's below.

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Your Touchstone Energy® Partner

FOR OUTAGES

First: Check the fuses or breakers in the building in which the electricity is off.

Second: Check the breaker below the meter.

Third: If electricity is still out, call a neighbor to see if they have electricity.

Fourth: Call **406-538-3465** day or **night** or:

Dale Rikala 406-538-5192
Guy Johnson.....406-535-5132
Scott Sweeney 406-538-7218
Don Criswell (Roundup) 406-323-3426
Monte Obert 406-538-9705

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