

F E R R I G U S

FEATURES

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

A hobby grows into a nice business

Grandmas Bloomers offers a full line of annuals, perennials and herbs

Story and photos
by Judy Bryne

You can find Grandmas Bloomers 10 miles north of Hilger on Highway 236. No, these bloomers did not fly out the back end of someone's pickup truck, and they are not a part of anyone's lingerie.

"My husband will tell you he did this for me, but it's always been an interest of his," says Winifred native JoAnn Bergum. With her husband Boyd, JoAnn operates Grandmas Bloomers, a family nursery and greenhouse. The bloomers, of course, are their plants.

"I've always had one greenhouse or another, starting with a small lean-to against the house, but I kept out-growing them," she says.

In 2003, the Bergum family ordered the parts and constructed a 1,300 square foot greenhouse just off the road next to JoAnn and Boyd's home. It keeps them plenty busy six months out of the year and fills a need for many Central Montana gardeners.

Until she retired from her position as the Cenex bookkeeper in Winifred, JoAnn's gardening was little more than a hobby. Boyd held many different jobs, including 30 years as a maintenance worker at the C.M. Russell National Wildlife Refuge, but he actually studied botany while attending Northern Montana College in Havre.



Grandmas Bloomers keeps JoAnn Bergum plenty busy six months out of the year. Once vegetable seeds and plugs for flowering plants are planted, her greenhouse becomes a 24/7 operation.

Now, plants, seedlings, and plugs provide a supplemental income, as well as an opportunity to visit with friends and neighbors.

"We open on Mother's Day. Business really picks up in mid-May when we have our open house, and then it lasts through the end of June," JoAnn explains, "but our work starts in the winter."

The Bergums order their stock from

a Helena nursery supplier, the same as Albertson's, in January. All their vegetables are started from seeds, but they use plugs for the flowering plants. This year, they purchased 3,300 plugs, and working side by side, JoAnn and Boyd transplanted all of them into six-packs or pots. "We have a pretty good assembly line system worked out, so it takes us about twelve hours to do all of them."

From that point on, Grandmas Bloomers is a 24/7 operation. Automatic drip pipes keeps the plants watered as long as they are small, but once they begin to leaf out, all the watering must be done by hand, up to four times a day. The seedlings and sprouts require constant attention throughout the season, and customers drop in any time of day. Evening hours are particularly busy with commuters stopping on their way home from work.

Grandmas Bloomers leaves the Bergum's little time for other activities. If they need to be gone, however, they count on their large family for help. With three sons and three daughters, JoAnn and Boyd know someone can fill in if necessary.

"All of them help, but Kara does the most. She loves the greenhouse!" says JoAnn. Kara works as a bookkeeper at Westfeed Company in Lewistown. Her sister Krista works for Weeden Construction and is now in the process

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MANAGER'S MESSAGE

From Scott Sweeney



Power line safety

Summer is a good time to emphasize safety around power lines. The co-op recommends using caution around electricity at all times. Irrigators should also be cautious around 480 volt pumps. An electrical arc on 489 volts can create lots of fireworks.

Farmers need to be careful when operating equipment under power lines. Do not stack hay bales under the lines. Builders should be aware of lines when constructing new buildings or additions to existing buildings. If plans are to build near a power line, call Fergus Electric's engineers for help figuring proper clearances.

Always call 811 for an underground locate at least 48 hours in advance of

digging where underground lines may be buried.

Please do not plant trees under a power line. However, if trees have grown through the line, call the office (406-538-3465) and schedule to have them trimmed or cut down.

Never take chances with electricity, doing so risks serious injury or death. Let's all work safely this summer.

Highwood Generating Station

The financing for a natural gas power plant near Great Falls is continuing and the permit with the Montana Department of Environmental Quality is progressing.

Signal Peak Coal Mine

The new 100 kV transmission line

has been energized and the mine is gradually adding electrical load. Plans are for the mine to be fully developed by November. The railroad is complete. It is very exciting to see this project being built with the expectation of operating soon.

Net Metering

The cooperative's net metering policy has been changed to make it more attractive. The monthly true up for kilowatt hours has been changed to an annual true up. The maximum KW has increased from 10 KW to 25 KW. The liability insurance requirement has been reduced: 10 KW or smaller – no requirement and 10 KW to 25 KW – \$300,000 of liability insurance listing the cooperative as a co-insured.

If a member is considering a wind, solar, hydro or other renewable net metering system, please call our engineers – Guy Johnson or Monte Obert for information and required forms.

These systems are going to cost money to purchase and install, so it is important to do proper planning and complete financial studies before installing a net meter system.

Scholarships awarded to area pair

Victoria Pennell received a \$500 award from the Montana Electric Cooperatives' Association Memorial Scholarship Fund. As Fergus Electric's first place selection, her application was forwarded to MECA in Great Falls for further judging. She is one of two statewide winners.

Victoria is a National Merit Scholar and a 2008 Youth to Washington essay winner.

In her personal statement, she writes, "Alarm clock, schoolwork, piano practice, PE, bowl with one of my mentees, teach them a lesson, work at a coffee shop, attend youth group, and finally drive home and collapse exhausted into bed. Each of my demanding days is jam-packed full of such activities, energizing my life

today while preparing me for my future college experience and career."

She adds, "All my volunteer time in the community has directed my love of people toward kids." Victoria intends to follow a career in pediatric nursing. She is the daughter of Fergus members Gray and Diana Pennell.

Shannon Gilskey earned a \$600 Fergus Electric scholarship funded by unclaimed capital credits.

She is a member of the National Honor Society, was student body president at Fergus High School and was Fergus Electric's 2007 Youth to Washington essay winner. Along with one student from each of 45 states, Shannon was elected by her peers to be Montana's Youth Leadership Council repre-

sentative.

Her activities and honors include Hugh O'Brian Youth Leadership winner, Student of the Month for Academics, Junior Bank Board, Business Professionals of America and the Central Montana Mentoring Program. She also founded Helping Our World, an environmental club at her school.

Shannon writes, "All of the wonderful opportunities I have been given have led me to the conclusion that I want to become a human resource director. I know that the past has shaped me and brings to mind my favorite quote by Desmond Tutu: 'I am who I am because of who we all are.'" Shannon is the daughter of Fergus members Barbara and the late Terry Gilskey.



Victoria Pennell



Shannon Gilskey

Hobby

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of building a home across the road from her parents, so she will soon be quite handy.

Brothers Ken and Kraig live nearby. Kraig is the county maintenance man in Roy, and Ken formerly taught science at Winifred School. Now he works as a geologist. Situated a little further down the highway, the remaining siblings spend less time in the greenhouse. Kelly owns a therapeutic massage business in Billings, and Keith raises quarter horses in Elko, Nevada.

Grandmas Bloomers offers a full line of annuals, perennials, and herbs, as well as trees and shrubs, and the Bergums are happy to fill special orders as much as they can. They grow starter pots of brussels sprouts especially for a neighbor, but they also stock tomatoes, peppers, cabbage, cauliflower, broccoli, strawberries, and a variety of squash, including pumpkins.

Winter provides down time from the greenhouse, when it turns into Boyd's woodshop. After building all the bedding tables for Grandmas

Bloomers, he started fabricating pinewood patio furniture, which is displayed for sale in the greenhouse entry. Also available are garden supplies, fountains, yard decorations, and hand-made barnwood frames.

Grandmas Bloomers keeps JoAnn and Boyd busy without a lot of marketing. They generally participate in the Christmas crafts show in Lewistown, and Kara hosts a Valentine's Store at the Community Hall in Winifred each spring. Other than those activities, the Bergums do very little advertising. Instead of maintaining a website, they depend on word-of-mouth to attract customers to their business.

"At our age, six months of work is plenty," JoAnn laughs.

She invites everyone to come visit and take a look. In fact, she grows a perennial garden alongside the greenhouse just to show visitors what the plants will look like as they grow. "It's fun to have people come and see what our hard work becomes," she says, "When the blossoms fill the greenhouse with color, then it's really worth all the effort."



Grandmas Bloomers keeps JoAnn Bergum plenty busy six months out of the year: Once vegetable seeds and plugs for flowering plants are planted, her greenhouse becomes a 24/7 operation.

Identify account number

Win a \$30 credit

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

Account 77316
Account 718481
Account 319148

You will receive a \$30 credit on next month's statement.

Power tips for conserving energy

High-powered tips for helping our environment while saving you money

Editor's note: You don't have to spend a lot of money to improve your home's energy efficiency. There are plenty of simple no-cost and low-cost steps you can take to save energy – and money. One of the great things about energy efficiency is that it gives the feeling of empowerment, that we really can take some level of control over our home energy costs.

Home – Turn off home office and entertainment equipment when not in use. Most electronics use electricity even when switched off. When purchasing appliances or home office

equipment, select energy efficient models with the Energy Star label. Unplug instant-on appliances (TV and cable box) when you go on vacation. Insulate doors and windows with weather stripping or caulking to prevent heating or cooling loss.

Laundry – Wash full loads only, but do not overload. Wash and rinse in cold water instead of hot water. Clothes dryers are the top of the energy consumption list of household appliances. Dry consecutive loads to utilize the already warm dryer. Don't dry heavy items like towels with light weight items. Clean the lint filter after each load to maxi-

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Power tips

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mize drying efficiency.

Kitchen – Use dishwasher for full loads whenever possible. Scrape food off dishes. Soak or prewash only if food is burned or dried-on. Reduce dishwasher energy usage by manually air-drying dishes or use auto-air dry feature. Ensure oven door seals are in good condition. Do not preheat the oven unless necessary. Thaw frozen foods before cooking to save energy.

Lighting – Change the five fixtures used most to Energy Star-qualified lighting. Compact fluorescent lighting uses up to two-thirds less energy and lasts six to 10 times longer than traditional lighting. Use task lighting instead of brightly lighting an entire room. Replace high-wattage halogen torchiere lamps with fluorescent equivalents. Take advantage of natural daylight when possible and decorate with

lighter colors to reflect light.

Electric Heating – Set thermostat at 68° F or lower, depending on your comfort level. If windows face the south, open drapes during the day to utilize heat from the sun. Close drapes if you have large windows which don't receive direct sun and also at night to retain heat. Inspect ducts and replace filters annually. Consider installing a programmable setback thermostat to control heating hours.

Refrigerator – If buying a new refrigerator consider the cost of operation and look for the Energy Star label. Keep your refrigerator and freezer filled for economical operation. Check and adjust refrigerator settings 37° – 40° F using a refrigerator thermometer. Inspect door seals, replace if necessary. Limit opening/closing of refrigerator door to a minimum. Clean condenser coils at least once per year.

Water Heating – Low-flow showerheads and faucets can reduce the amount of hot water used per day by

half. Use a timer to reduce the time spent in the shower. Turn down your water heater thermostat to 120° F. Insulate your water heater. Washing dishes in a basin or sink uses much less hot water than washing under running water.

Room Air Conditioning – Clean grills, filters, and drains once a month. Do not place lamps or TV sets which emit heat near your air-conditioning thermostat. Keep windows and drapes closed while using cooling devices. Consider using ceiling fans or outside air instead of A/C. Caulk and weather strip doors and windows to prevent air leaks. Use an interior fan to spread the cooled air more efficiently.

From Niagra Conservation at www.niagaraconservation.com

Fergus Electric Cooperative, Inc.
LEWISTOWN, MT

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 Rikala406-538-5192
Guy Johnson.....406-535-5132
Scott Sweeney406-538-7218
Don Criswell (Roundup)406-323-3426
Monte Obert406-538-9705

FERGUS ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE, INC.

84423 US Hwy 87, Lewistown, MT 59457-2058
Tel: 406-538-3465

Office Hours: 8 a.m. - 5 p.m. M-F
Website: www.ferguselectric.coop
E-mail: ferguselectric@ferguselectric.coop

Scott SweeneyGeneral Manager
Mike StanleyAssistant Manager
Dale RikalaOperations Supervisor
Sally Horacek.....Office Manager
Vangie McConnellEditor

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