

F E R G U S

FEATURES

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

Construction Academy students learn professional skills for future employment

Story and photos
by Judy Byrne

“I love it!” says D.J. Kamp as he powers nails into a stud. “I plan to be an architect in my real life, so I need to know all this stuff.”

A senior at Fergus High School, D.J. reports to class five days a week at the Central Montana Construction Academy on Airport Road in Lewistown. Come rain or shine, he slings on a tool belt, adjusts his hard hat, grabs a nail gun, and gets to work. Along with two dozen other high school students, D.J. is building a house.

Construction Academy is sponsored in part by the National Center for Construction, Education, and Research (NCCER), a non-profit foundation dedicated to building “a safe, productive, and sustainable workforce of craft professionals.” Headquartered in Gainesville, Fla., NCCER helps students learn skills that will facilitate their entry into the workforce. Through this high school program, NCCER aims to address the critical shortage of workers in the construction industry and to provide students with nationally recognized credentials as they begin to seek employment.

Long-time Montana teacher and construction engineer, Cleo Sutton of MSU-Billings, spearheaded efforts to bring this opportunity to Central Montana students. His passion for the industry spurred him to acquire funding



In order to learn professional construction skills, D.J. Kamp and two dozen other high school students are building a 3-bedroom modular home.

for this program’s start-up costs. Ron Peevey, a semi-retired Hobson contractor, attended Sutton’s seminar and was intrigued. “I love my work,” he says. “There’s nothing I’d rather do, and I love showing people how to do things. I was attracted by the idea of passing my knowledge along to students.”

Encouraged by school administrators, Peevey applied for and was hired as the Construction Academy instructor. He began in January of 2008. In the shop next door to the Central Montana Education Center, Construction

Academy students built 17 outdoor storage sheds, chicken houses and a greenhouse during their first semester.

“We had a great group of kids last year who really wanted to learn this work,” says Peevey, “and Edgewood Building Supplies was a joy to work with. They furnished the materials, delivered them here, then hauled out the finished sheds to sell at no expense to the Academy. In fact, they gave us a kickback when they sold the sheds so we could buy more tools.

“We actually started out building sawhorses. That project was a great way to teach about safety and how to use various tools.”

Peevey structures his lessons carefully, teaching students about various types of lumber, sizes of nails and screws, safety equipment and practices, and how to read the plans for a building. He treats his 24 students like employees as much as possible, even awarding them an artificial weekly paycheck based on an

hourly wage that corresponds to industry standards.

“I take deductions for being absent, horsing around, not wearing safety glasses, things like that. It keeps the students better motivated, and they respond pretty well,” says Peevey. He also provides each teacher a copy of the students’ performance paychecks, which they use in part to determine each student’s grade.

During this school year, the Academy is using grant monies provided by the

Continued on page 5

MANAGER'S MESSAGE

From Scott Sweeney



Construction on the Highwood Generating Station begins

I am very pleased to report that Wickens Construction of Lewistown began the first phase of the Highwood Generating Station construction in October.

They are building roads, excavating, and pouring concrete for the cooling tower. SME is working with the Montana Department of Environmental Quality to resolve the emission of very fine dust – PM 2.5.

A public meeting took place in Great Falls in October and the comment period closed Nov. 5. The air permit was finalized in November. This has been a long and thorough process.

The other important lawsuit is the rezoning of the land from agricultural to

industrial. By the time you read this, the judge will have heard all the arguments and a ruling will have been made. Let's all hope it was in our favor.

In regard to construction of the power plant, SME has had very strong support from the unions in the Great Falls area. Members of Fergus Electric Cooperative are also encouraging this construction as a long-term plan to provide low-cost or reasonably priced electricity for the future.

A picture is worth a thousand words, so I have included some photos of the job site. It has taken a lot of work to get to this point and I am very pleased that construction of the Highwood Generating Station has begun.



An aerial view of the Highwood Generating Station project near Great Falls shows the excavated area for the cooling tower.



Wickens Construction of Lewistown started site preparation in October. Photos by Tim Gregori and Marvin DeBuff.

Lance and Emily Heggem are Today's Members



Emily, Lance and Kellen Heggem

Realizing that many members today were not involved with the early years of their cooperatives, the Today's Members Program was created to educate participants about member-owned utilities. It has become an integral part of the Montana Electric Cooperatives' Association (MECA) annual meeting.

Through demonstrations, panel discussions and role playing, delegates learn about the cooperative way of doing business as well as cooperative involvement in local, state and national issues.

Each year the Fergus Electric Board of Trustees selects one couple from its 12-county service area to represent the cooperative in the program. Lance and Emily Heggem of Winifred recently joined 30 rural electric co-op members in Great Falls for this educational opportunity.

Although, Lance grew up on Fergus Electric lines, he and Emily have been members for three years. Lance is a farmer/rancher and Emily is a dietician working part time in Billings.

When asked about the Today's Members program, Lance and Emily said, "The program gave us a completely new impression of what electric co-ops are all about – their priorities for rural America and for the communities they serve." In addition, "Having an organization like MECA fighting for our way of life is neat."

The Heggems are satisfied with Fergus Electric's work and assistance and they feel that customer service is the cooperative's strong point.

Lance and Emily have three children – Madeline - 5, Isabelle - 3 and Kellen – six months. As a family, they enjoy horses, sports and travel.

1956 Bombadeer snowcat for sale

Call 406-538-3465 at Fergus Electric Cooperative and ask for Dale.

Construction Academy

Continued from page 3

Central Montana Foundation to purchase materials for the house currently under construction. Student workers are building a three-bedroom modular home from foundation to rafters. While they cannot install the plumbing fixtures or electrical wiring themselves, they are learning those aspects of construction from contractors hired to complete that work. Hobson's Julia Standly spends her class time today observing Harry Plum, a licensed plumbing contractor, as he installs pipes in one of the structure's two bathrooms.

One of only three girls enrolled in Construction Academy, Julia thinks this class is great. "My whole family is a hands-on group," she says. "I live on a farm, so the more I learn here, the more I can do at home."

Fergus High School shop teacher Loren Drivdahl, also an NCCER instructor, assists Peevey at the Construction Academy location two periods a day. Peevey is very happy to have him involved.

"Last year I had no assistance, so having Loren, as well as Clint Jensen and Seth Whitney, has been a real blessing, a godsend, for me," says Peevey. Jensen and Whitney teach shop classes at Moore and Hobson respectively, and they accompany their school's students to the worksite one day a week. Roy students also participate.

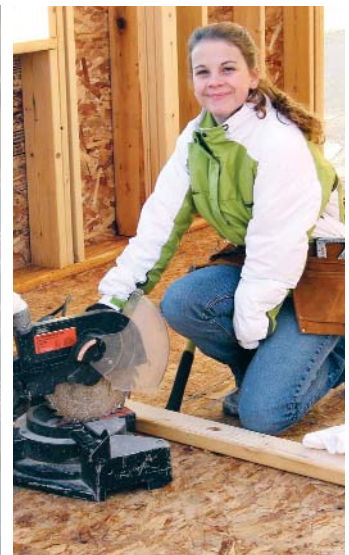
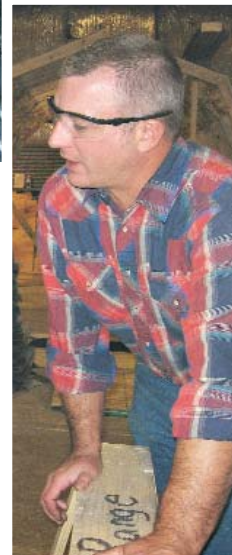
Jensen considers the Construction Academy to be a great opportunity for kids to have hands-on experience in the construction industry. "They can go right into this trade after graduation," he says.

His superintendent agrees. "Construction Academy provides our junior and senior students the opportunity to acquire lifelong skills, apply classroom content to a meaningful situation, and increase their own marketability upon graduation," says Yvette Majerus.

For more information

Prospective buyers or anyone curious to see the Construction Academy's work can contact the following:

Loren Drivdahl at Fergus High School - 535-2321, Ron Peevey - 350-5247 or Diane Oldenburg at Central Montana Education Center - 535-5570.



Top L to R: Moore student Paul Bradley joins the class one day each week. Construction Academy instructor Ron Peevey supervises P. J. Granot as he uses a crosscut saw. Bottom L to R: Kelsi Hicks is one of three girls enrolled in the program. Fergus shop teacher Loren Drivdahl assists two periods a day. Before donning her hard hat and safety glasses, Hobson student Julia Standly explains that equipment and supplies were purchased with grant money.

Besides overseeing the students onsite, Drivdahl strives to involve students from other curricular areas at the high school in this project. He is enlisting cooperation from the school's business, journalism and art departments for assistance in marketing the house. Plans include holding at least one open-house for prospective buyers when the building is enclosed, and Drivdahl hopes to see students take the lead in advertising the home for sale. He envisions a collaborative effort that provides an opportunity for students to put their skills to use beyond the classroom walls. "Maybe our students can create listing brochures or write news articles, even work with real estate people, to market this home. If we have a buyer before the house is finished, we could customize some of the interior work to the owner's

desires," says Drivdahl.

"We are so lucky to have Ron," he continues. "He's a very knowledgeable contractor who brings his real-world experience. He's already been there, done that. We invite everyone to come see this project and the work these kids are doing."

Co-op Month winner

Lorrie Linhart of Moccasin won the Co-op Month gift basket. She entered a drawing (entry form in October's *Fergus Features*) to help celebrate National Co-op Month. Congratulations Lorrie! Your interest in the cooperative is appreciated.

MECA and Fergus offer scholarships

If you are a high school senior planning to attend college, or are a student continuing an undergraduate education, you could win a scholarship.

Two \$500 scholarships will be awarded by Montana Electric Cooperatives' Association (MECA) in Great Falls to qualified students whose parents are cooperative members and whose cooperative belongs to MECA.

To qualify for the scholarship, the applicant must: 1) Be a member of a Montana electric cooperative; 2) Be a graduating high school senior with plans to attend a university or vocational technical school or be an undergraduate college student; 3) Submit a completed application to Fergus Electric which includes school transcripts, ACT/SAT scores, a personal statement and one letter of recommendation, and; 4) Submit entries to Fergus Electric postmarked no later than January 30, 2009 to: MECA Scholarship Committee, Fergus Electric Cooperative, 84423 U.S. Highway 87, Lewistown, MT 59457.

Criteria for scholarship judging includes: Grades - 20 Percent, ACT/SAT scores - 20 percent, Activities - 20 percent and Personal Statement - 40 percent.

Fergus Electric will select one application to be forwarded to Great Falls for further judging. A MECA committee will choose two scholarship recipients from the pool of finalists. In the event that Fergus Electric's application is not selected as a winner, the cooperative will award one scholarship selected from Fergus Electric's applications.

For an application or for more information, contact Vangie or Jill at 406-538-3465.

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 320714 • Account 368534
Account 319141**

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

Ronald and Dixie Denton of rural Lewistown were last month's winners.

Montana Winter Fair presents Rob Quist and the Mission Mountain Wood Band

Tickets are now on sale for Rob Quist and the Mission Mountain Wood Band's Montana Winter Fair opening day performance to take place Thursday, Jan. 22, 2009, from 7 to 9 p.m. at the Central Montana Fairgrounds Trade Center in Lewistown.

Winter Fair event coordinator Don Taylor said that approximately 800 tickets are being offered for sale at \$30, \$25 and \$20. "We figure that early sales and affordable prices will make these tickets a great gift idea for Christmas shoppers," said Taylor.

To purchase tickets, call 535-4520. Unsold tickets will be available at the door.

The 2009 Montana Winter Fair runs Jan. 22-25 at the Central Montana Fairgrounds.

McConnell receives regional and state awards



Benefits Administrator Vangie McConnell received recognition for Fergus Features the member newsletter she edits. Northwest Public Power Association headquartered in Vancouver, Washington and Montana Electric Cooperatives' Association in Great Falls awarded first place designations in recent regional and state communications competitions.

Judges wrote, "There is much to enjoy throughout the neatly designed and tightly written newsletter. Its organization and design keep the reader flowing easily from one article to the next. It's clear that it takes a lot of work to put each issue together."

NWPPA is a regional organization made up of utility districts, electric cooperatives, municipalities and crown corporations in the Pacific northwest and in Canada. MECA is a state organization whose membership includes Montana's 25 electric cooperatives.



Merry Christmas

Lineman Tyson Ruff with his family Jinx and Dashel send good wishes and remind you that Fergus Electric's offices in Lewistown and Roundup will close December 24 and 25 for Christmas and December 31 and January 1 for New Years.

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 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

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

Scott Sweeney	General Manager
Mike Stanley	Assistant Manager
Dale Rikala	Operations Supervisor
Sally Horacek.....	Office Manager
Vangie McConnell	Editor

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

District 1:	Steve Balster, Sec./Treas., Lewistown, 538-5142
District 2:	David Dover, Vice President, Buffalo, 374-2315
District 3:	Joe Dirkson, Winifred, 462-5631
District 4:	Mike Vlastelic, Grass Range, 428-2160
District 5:	Alan Evans, Roundup, 323-2888
District 6:	Joe Pirrie, Shawmut, 632-4432
District 7:	Bob Evans, Jr., President, Geysers, 735-4476

Fergus Features is a national, state and regional award winning newsletter.