

# F E R R I G U S

## FEATURES

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

## Community Center gives Winifred new look, economic boost, one-stop convenience

Story and photos  
by Judy Byrne

Winifred has a new face in town, and the locals are so pleased, they are proudly singing its praises. Visitors cannot miss the new building on Main Street, the Winifred Community Center.

Housing the library, post office, history museum and city offices, it has given downtown Winifred an economic boost as well as a brand new look. Its attached garage shelters a new fire truck and ambulance, and downstairs, a community hall can host parties for 400 guests.

Visiting the complex, anyone can appreciate its potential, but it took one man with an eye on the future to bring the Community Center to life.

Now living in Tulsa, Okla., Norm Asbjornson grew up in Winifred and graduated with the Red Raiders' Class of 1953. As a youth, he observed his parents' philanthropy. His father, Boots, owned the DY Garage and served several terms as town mayor, as well as state legislator. A Jefferson Award winner, Boots was instrumental in bringing



*In addition to the library, history museum, city offices and post office, the Community Center includes a downstairs rental hall providing a perfect venue for wedding receptions, funeral gatherings, family reunions and graduation parties.*

electrical, telephone and sewer services to Winifred, in addition to expanding the airport runway. His mother, Eric, was a long-time teacher at the school.

"Everybody loved Eric," says Janet Poertner. "She made you get your work done, but those are the teachers you remember."

While visiting his hometown a few years ago, Norm joined a group of friends for coffee. This self-made millionaire asked them for suggestions to improve the town. They mentioned a need for a new ambulance and assistance for the fire department.

"We never saw things as big as he did," laments Jim Arthur, one of those having coffee with Norm that day.

Following in his father's footsteps, Norm left his coffee at the café along with a check for \$20,000, which was used to build a new bathhouse at the city pool. Then he put into motion his

plans for a city complex. Using local contractors, planners and developers whenever possible, he footed the entire cost of the Community Center.

"It's truly amazing what he's done," says city clerk and acting museum curator Twila Lunde.

"He had to go through a lot with the federal government to get the post office changed, but I guarantee you, the postmistress loves it," adds Janet Poertner. The former post office sat down the block in a building with a poor water supply and little insulation. The new facility, located on the east side of the Community Center, offers a much more comfortable and up-to-date setting.

However, Norm had in mind improvements not only for the residents already living in Winifred; he wanted to draw others to Central Montana.

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# MANAGER'S MESSAGE

From Scott Sweeney



## Rate adjustments scheduled for spring

In March or April, we will implement a rate increase. I have been writing about the importance of getting the Highwood Generating Station construction started as soon as possible, because our power supplier, Southern Montana Electric (SME), will begin to lose its Bonneville Power allocation on July 1, 2008. SME will raise its rates to Fergus Electric by 15 percent. This increase will help to pay for the more expensive power SME will need to purchase from PPL MT's (Pennsylvania Power & Light – Montana) Colstrip power plants.

SME is also requiring a deposit equal to one month's power bill also being passed on by PPL MT. This adds about 8 percent to our power bill, so the net increase from our supplier will be about 23 percent in 2008. Fergus Electric's power bill is approximately 50 percent of the cooperative's total expenses.

### Cost of service study in the works

We will be making a very strong effort to minimize the rate increase that

Fergus Electric will pass on to the membership. We are working with Heberly and Associates, our engineers, to complete a cost-of-service study for all rate classes, which will determine the exact adjustment. Even so, it is most likely that we will have a significant rate increase this spring.

In the meantime, and to stabilize electric rates for future years, Fergus Electric and SME are working hard to begin the construction of the Highwood Generating Station.

### Pole change outs continue

In 2008, we will continue with our pole change-out program. With 65,000 poles on our system, I believe it is important to continue to maintain the cooperative's distribution system.

While it is important to keep electric rates as reasonable as possible, it is also important to maintain our system's reliability. No one wishes for long power outages in winter or even in summer, so the cooperative will continue to work hard to keep electric reliability a priority.

## Members with multiple meters, call co-op

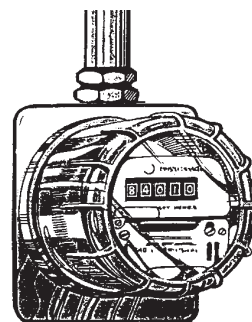
When an outage occurs or when a meter requires maintenance or needs to be read, a description of its location is very helpful to office/line personnel. A meter number, of course, is important, but a description of each meter's location recorded on office records is immensely helpful.

Some members have multiple meters. These might include stock wells and ranch buildings at different locations, cabins, barns and so on.

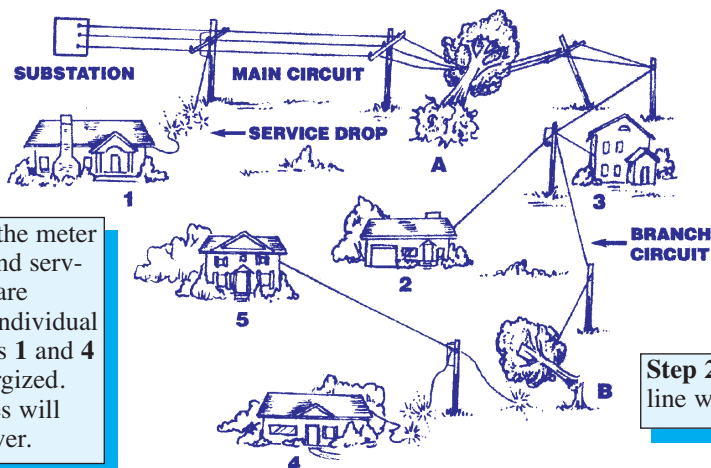
Therefore, as a member with more than one meter, notifying office services with information about the meter's location will be very much appreciated. Call 406-538-3465 and ask for Jill or write to her at the cooperative – 84423 US Highway 87, Lewistown 59457.

She will also need meter numbers.

These descriptions may be added to monthly statements as well.



## RESTORING YOUR POWER



**Step 3.** After the meter connections and service entrances are repaired, the individual lines to houses 1 and 4 can be re-energized. All five houses will now have power.

**Step 1.** Tree A knocked out the main circuit near the substation, causing power to be interrupted to all members served by this main line out of the substation. When the tree is removed, necessary repairs are made, and after all personnel and protective equipment are clear, the line is re-energized. Houses 2 and 3 now have power.

**Step 2.** Removing tree B and repairing the line will restore power to house 5.

# Community Center

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Now Winifred boasts a full-service library, which caters to the entire high school district, approximately 500 people. With a catalog of 5,000 books and free high-speed Internet access, the library is fast becoming a central meeting place. Besides the traditional book checkout, an honor system attracts a steady stream of readers who can borrow donated paperbacks and magazines from the Honor Borrow racks.

As director of the Dorothy "Eric" Asbjornson Community Library, Doris Knox is quickly learning the ropes. "Floss Kettering, another Winifred graduate, has spent hours helping me get things going, but I'm working on my library certification right now," she says. In addition to Doris and Janet, who serves as assistant library director, about a half dozen volunteers keep the library open 15 hours a week, Thursdays through Saturdays.

Storytime, under the direction of Jodi DeMars, has become very popular among the youngest community members, and a book review takes place at 1 p.m. the second Friday of each month. Further, the Garden Club and the Bridge Club take advantage of the warm, friendly setting for their meetings. Bookworms can even purchase original, hand-made bookmarks donated by local artisans Sidney Seilstad and Dorothy Thompson.

"The library attracts people," says Doris. "They're really happy to have this."

Twila is also happy with her office next door. Surrounded by hand-crafted oak cabinetry and window bricks, which create a bright and welcoming atmosphere, she now has opportunities to interact with community members much more frequently. Opening a maps closet, she says, "All of these cabinets were constructed by Vicki, Robert and Wes Ehlert of Ehlert Design. They did a beautiful job."

Local historian Jim Arthur served as the museum curator for its first couple of years, but Twila performs that duty for the time being. She is assisted by a five-member board and by Melissa Hickey, who normally greets visitors and handles the museum's day-to-day operation.

Situated on the north side of the building, the museum offers various displays, from Indian artifacts and dinosaur fossils to vintage furniture and clothing. Its crowning glory, however, is one of the largest collections of Tonka toys gathered in one setting. They were loaned to the museum by John Thompson, also a Winifred native, now living in Washington state. Like Asbjornson, Thompson felt compelled to give something back to his hometown, something that would draw visitors to the area.

"People here are very happy to have this museum," Twila explains. "When relatives visit, they bring them here so they can show it off, and they do a lot of word-of-mouth advertising for us."

In addition to the facilities upstairs, the Community Center includes a downstairs rental hall. It provides a perfect venue for wedding receptions, funeral gatherings, family reunions and graduation parties. "We used to have to drive to Lewistown for these types of gatherings," Twila explains. "These days, the hall is booked regularly, and all fees help maintain the upkeep and costs of this building."

Asbjornson himself says he is experimenting, trying to learn what it takes to revive a town like Winifred. Twila sums up how locals react to his efforts, "This is a tremendous asset to our town, a wonderful gift."



The Community Center has something for everyone. Top: A collection of dinosaur fossils are housed in glass cases. Second row: Free Internet access and 5,000 books attract library users. Director Doris Knox (left) and assistant director Janet Poertner, along with half a dozen volunteers, keep the library open 15 hours a week. Third row: Museum curator Twila Lunde stands before a hand-crafted quilt honoring the Winifred community. Bottom: The Tonka toy collection is one of the largest gathered in one setting.

## Identify account number

*Win a \$26 credit*

If one of the following account numbers is yours, call Fergus Electric (406-538-3465) by February 29 and identify yourself and your account number.

*Account 336594  
Account 348030  
Account 319825*

You will receive a \$26 credit on next month's statement.

**Fritz Helmer of Lewistown was last month's winner.**

## Need help with heating bills?

Even with energy conservation, some members face serious challenges in keeping their homes warm during the winter months, and some may be overwhelmed by their utility bill.

Fergus Electric encourages you to call the office (406-538-3465) before getting behind in your payments. We will work with you to arrange a payment plan.

There is also some assistance for members who qualify. For those living in Fergus, Golden Valley, Judith Basin, Musselshell, Petroleum and Wheatland counties, call HRDC – District VI at 406-535-7488 or 1-800-433-1411 for more information.

Please remember Fergus Electric's offices in Lewistown and Roundup will be



closed Feb. 18 to observe Presidents Day.



## Brochures available

**WIND**  
*Generation*

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT WIND TURBINES

Brought to you by your local electric cooperative and the...

Montana Electric Cooperatives' Association  
Your Touchstone Energy® Partner



**SME**  
Southern Montana Electric  
Generation & Transmission Cooperative, Inc.

**Highwood Generating Station**

Affordable, clean and reliable energy. For and by Montanans.

**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

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### BOARD OF DIRECTORS

District 1: Steve Balster,  
Lewistown, 538-5142

District 2: David Dover, Vice President,  
Buffalo, 374-2315

District 3: Joe Dirkson, Winifred, 462-5631

District 4: Leo Solf, Secretary/Treasurer,  
Winnett, 429-7301

District 5: Alan Evans, Roundup, 323-2888

District 6: Joe Pirrie, Shawmut, 632-4432

District 7: Bob Evans, Jr., President,  
Geysler, 735-4476

*Fergus Features is a national and regional award winning newsletter.*

Two informational brochures are available at the cooperative. They may be picked up at the office, or upon request, be mailed. Call 406-538-3465 for more information.