

# F E R G U S

## FEATURES

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

# Milkshakes, meats and pies

Story and photos  
by Judy Bryne

Milkshakes are always on the menu at the Judith Gap Mercantile. They're famous, in fact. The Merc offers a couple dozen flavors of ice cream blended into a frothy delight.

What makes the milkshakes so special? "They're made with love," laughs manager Ruth Walter. "That and some good Montana hard ice cream — Wilcoxson's.

Milkshakes made with love are just one indicator of the business philosophy at the Merc. A down-home, you're-part-of-the-family atmosphere flavors everything in this historic general merchandise store. Conveniently located somewhere in the middle of Montana, as its motto states, the Merc has operated continuously for over a hundred years, providing quality service and a local gathering place for the 153 souls of Judith Gap. But visitors and commuters enjoy a stop, too.

For years before moving to the Gap as school superintendent, Fran Swensgard made a stop at the Merc part of her routine while driving from Great Falls to Billings. By the time she took the superintendent's position, she already felt at home. "There is no newspaper here," she says. "If you want to know something, you go to the Merc."

Locals line up in tractor seats at the snack bar for coffee and fresh-baked



*According to manager Ruth Walter (above), locals line up in tractor seats at the Judith Gap Mercantile's snack bar for coffee and fresh baked rolls on a daily basis and for homemade pie in the summer.*

rolls on a daily basis. They savor not only the pastries, but also the warm, welcoming feel of the place. "People who work here care about the customers," says Ruth Walter, who has managed the store for about a year. "We get to see the regular customers, but there are also different people and faces every day. I love it!"

As much as she likes the variety of customers, Walter appreciates working

with the eight regular and part-time staff. "And our boss," she adds.

The boss is Bobbi Bloomquist. Originally from Montana, she bought the Merc sight-unseen in 2007. Living in Pocatello at the time with her husband Jim and daughter Racheal, Bloomquist learned the Merc was for sale from a former neighbor who had moved to Buffalo. "Jim decided to retire from his position in law enforcement, and we were looking to move to Montana. I had some experience managing a grocery store, and I liked the idea of having Racheal in a small school. So I looked at the Merc online."

Bloomquist made an offer for the business through a phone call, came to see the place at Easter, and sealed the deal. "I really like the quiet and being away from the city," she says. "This is a place where neighbors care about each other, the employees respect one another, and I enjoy meeting the people who are just traveling through."

Even the infamous Judith Gap weather doesn't dampen her spirits. "We haven't found the weather here to be any worse than Idaho. In fact, the winters we left in Pocatello make this seem balmy."

She would like to have more space for a dining area now that the town's only restaurant has closed, but Bloomquist has no plans for change. The store continues to offer a wide range of products, from milkshakes to

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# MANAGER'S MESSAGE

From Scott Sweeney



## Annual meeting

I want to thank the members who took the time to attend our annual meeting on June 4. Thank you WIFE for another excellent meal and also thank you Neil Hamilton, John Wehren and Adessa Campbell for your music. Our annual meeting is an important event for Fergus Electric Cooperative. The membership was updated on a variety of issues and they had the opportunity to share ideas and ask questions. With the election of trustees, local control and local ownership were reinforced.

## Net metering

One topic at the annual meeting was net metering, which includes wind or solar generation that a member could install to offset electrical usage and, in turn, lower their power bill.

On April 30, Fergus Electric had a

public meeting to discuss net metering and the cooperative's policy in this regard. The old net metering policy required monthly true up of electrical energy and it required \$3,000,000 liability insurance coverage. Shortly before the public meeting, the Board approved lowering the liability coverage to a more reasonable amount and the monthly true up changed to an annual true up.

After the public meeting, the Board approved increasing the size of the net meter generator from 10 kW to 25 kW. All the policy changes were approved to make it easier for a member to install a net meter on the electric system.

## Highwood Generating Station

Fergus Electric Co-op and our power supplier, Southern Montana, are continuing to work on the natural gas generation facility near Great Falls. A key

component, the financing of this project, is being pursued. Also, bids for natural gas contracts are in the works. The Montana Department of Environmental Quality is reviewing the air permit and construction cannot begin until it is approved.

Our board and the SME board are working to build the power plant with the long-term goal of owning our own generation. We believe this will benefit all cooperative members.

## Signal Peak coal mine

The 100 kV transmission line from Broadview to the coal mine was completed in June as were the new railroad and the 100 kV substation at the mine. The wash plant is being constructed and the long-wall miner is scheduled to be installed in August/September.

The electric load at the coal mine is gradually increasing and when construction is complete and everything is running, the cooperative will serve a very good electric load. Also, the mine will bring 180 new jobs to Musselshell County.

The board and I thank the town of Roundup for their efforts in helping to bring the mine to Musselshell County and Fergus Electric looks forward to serving Signal Peak Energy.

## Students view safety demonstration

Area first graders learned about the dangers of electricity associated with high voltage lines at a recent farm safety day.

The Fergus/Petroleum 4-H Ambassadors planned the event to educate first graders about the dangers on farms and ranches while letting the children see the fun side of rural living.

Experienced linemen Curt Olson and Ryan d'Autremont conducted the high voltage demonstration showing how dangerous it is to make contact with power lines. A hot dog was used to simulate the human body and showed what happens when it is zapped by electricity. A kite string and a tree branch were also used in the demonstration.



Above:  
Lineman  
Curt Olson.  
Right:  
Lineman  
Ryan  
d'Autremont.



## McConnell receives national awards



Vangie  
McConnell,  
benefits and

communications administrator, received recognition in the "Spotlight on Excellence" national awards program sponsored by the Council of Rural Electric Communicators and NRECA.

At the recent Connect Conference in Las Vegas, an Award of Merit was presented to McConnell for Fergus Features in the best newsletter category and for a print ad titled "Reinvesting in our Local Community." More than 744 entries in 19 categories were submitted for judging. Winning entries were displayed during the conference.

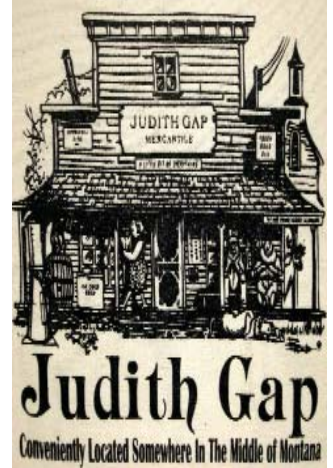
# Milkshakes

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meats and handicrafts to hardware. A Country Craft store occupies a nook off the main area, and even videos are available for rent. As the only general merchandise store in the area, the Merc is usually popping with business. Currently and for the foreseeable future, highway workmen frequently perch on the stools during lunch. Road crews are rebuilding the bridge and seven miles of highway at the south end of town. Next year, they will resurface the stretch of roadway through town.

They find a lot to look at as they munch a freshly made sandwich or slurp a cup of joe because the Merc does double duty as a local museum of sorts. Above the snack bar, brands of local ranches are handsomely displayed in woodcuts. Surrounding the general store, a huge variety of antiques line the shelves, everything from bottles to kitchenware to kerosene lamps. Much of the collection is on loan from the Haynes family, but others in the community have contributed, as well.

“People just trust us to take care of them,” says Walter. Besides taking care of the mementos from Montana’s past, Walter is proud of the care she takes in the store. She usually starts her day about 9 a.m. when she stocks shelves and cleans. She calls herself a slave driver when it comes to cleanliness, but



Top: Owner Bobbi Bloomquist and Ruth Walter enjoy travelers who stop for a famous milkshake. Refurbished tractor seats line the counter. Bottom: Meats are one of the Merc’s specialties. “Conveniently located somewhere in the middle of Montana” aptly describes the Judith Gap Mercantile.

all the staff share the cleaning chores. Next, Walter prepares the meat counter. She considers the meats one of the specialties of the Merc. Walter does all the cutting, grinding, and sausage making, and all the meats are Montana grown. Next to milkshakes, she says her meat counter contributes to the establish-

ment’s great reputation. That, and her homemade pies during summer.

A busy place and a friendly place, the Judith Gap Mercantile definitely merits a stop.

## Public meeting attracts 100 participants

Following requests for information on wind, solar and hydro generation, Fergus Electric organized a meeting at Harry’s on the Hill. Members and the general public learned about net metering and co-generation.

General Manager Scott Sweeney and Staking Engineer Guy Johnson led the discussion. Luke Lohmuller of Peaks to Prairie Power gave an overview of products available with pros and cons of installation along with costs, expected returns, maintenance, etc.

Fergus representatives encouraged comments and suggestions to be considered by the board of trustees for the co-ops net metering policy.



Top: Members participate in meeting. Above left: Scott Sweeney. Above right: Guy Johnson.

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# Members take care of business

Photos by Vangie McConnell

One hundred and ninety-two members plus an equal number of spouses and guests registered for Fergus Electric's 72nd annual meeting.

President Bob Evans talked about net metering – members generating electricity. He, also, warned the membership to be wary of companies trying to lease their land to build wind farms. He updated the membership in regard to the Highwood Generating Station.

Manager Scott Sweeney reported that Southern Montana, Fergus Electric's wholesale power supplier, has dropped plans to build a coal-fired plant and is studying details for a natural gas plant. He told the members that he believes the Board and staff are up to the task of turning challenges into positive opportunities.

Nancy Schultz of Grass Range won the \$900 grand prize.



WIFE served a beef/pork meal. Member Pauline Taylor offers dessert.



Jamie Wickens and Jill Owens register members.



Elected for three-year terms were Joe Dirkson, Terry Frost and Bob Evans.



Scholarship winners include L to R: Teri Husfloen, Victoria Pennell, Breanna Todd, Cedessa Berg, Melisa Stilson and Jacob Grensten.



The Eickhoff children Luke, Makenna and Garrett accompanied their father Alan and grandfather Wayne to the Lewistown meeting.



Members complete Our Energy, Our Future cards asking Montana's national legislators to help keep electricity affordable and reliable.

## 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.

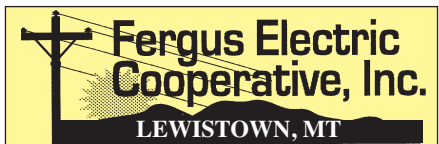
**Account 350894**

**Account 363233**

**Account 361133**

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

Last month's winners were **Braden and Stacie Arntzen of Winifred.**



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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