

F E R G U S

FEATURES

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

Roundup mother is Mrs. Montana 2009

Story and photos
by Judy Bryne

Behind the glitz and the glamour, Lacey Kraft is a down-home gal who believes she can represent Montana as only a native born Montanan can do. Today, she carries the title of Mrs. Montana 2009 and wears the rhinestone-studded tiara with pride.

"I began my quest for the crown almost on a whim," she admits. An ad in the Billings Gazette brought the contest to her attention. "I've traveled all over, and I like everything this state has to offer – hunting, camping, fishing. Why not me?" she asked. She completed her first application in 2006.

Not knowing the pageant routines and being a novice on the runway made that first competition tough. When the winners were announced, however, she came in fifth. She also won an award for Best in Evening Gown, and that spurred her determination to take home the crown.

"I've lived in Montana all my life, and I knew that my being active in both the urban and rural aspects of this state would make me a good representative of Montana women."

She entered again in 2007 and 2008, each time placing in the top five and learning more about how to improve.

"Each year I took home one thing to



Lacey Kraft, pictured with her children Ely and Bella, represents Montana as an American married woman who contributes to modern day family life.

work on, mostly for the interview portion," she says. "It's hard for me to talk about myself."

She practiced for the five judges throughout the winter months, applied again in 2009 and returned to her home in Roundup with the crown. She wears it and the sequined sash for public appearances – she will make at least 50 this year – but at home she seems more like any cowgirl next door.

Although Lacey graduated from

Billings West High School, she grew up in Miles City.

Farming and ranching have always been part of her life. An accomplished horsewoman, she earned a double degree in Equestrian Studies and History from Rocky Mountain College and toyed with the idea of becoming a professional horse trainer. Marriage to her high school sweetheart Josh has led her down a different path.

Neither one was willing to re-locate outside Montana, despite the job opportunities elsewhere. They love the prairies and badlands of Eastern Montana.

Originally, Lacey and Josh hoped to settle nearer to Billings, but they wanted land for the horses and some fowl.

"We were living on a small farm and started raising chickens. When this property became available, we jumped at it. It already had a pond,

a chicken coop, room for horses, and it's only 30 minutes for Josh to commute to Billings," she says. "The Roundup community is fantastic. We love it out here."

Now the Krafts are raising chickens, turkeys, guinea hens and pigeons in addition to a dog, a rabbit, some horses and two kids. Nine-year-old Ely loves to ride motorcycles and horses. His sister, Bella, 7, loves all kinds of animals

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MANAGER'S MESSAGE

From Scott Sweeney



Co-op faces challenges

This month I am addressing electric rates for the cooperative. The board of trustees and management are responsible for the financial stability of the cooperative. This includes preserving and, ultimately, returning to the membership patronage capital.

The cooperative also has an obligation to provide safe, reliable power at the lowest cost consistent with good business practices. The board is responsible for establishing policies and rates that meet those responsibilities.

Currently, cooperatives across the nation are facing new challenges and many are likely to see significantly higher costs, which are resulting in increased rates to their members. Fergus Electric is facing these same issues, which are:

- A new power supply construction cycle and rising construction costs (Demand for electricity is rising, and new sources need to be developed.)
- Increased volatility in fuel costs and wholesale electric market prices
- Political, environmental and regulatory pressures on utilities to achieve new goals
- Pending federal climate change legislation likely to increase costs on coal fossil fuel generation

Electric rates adjusted up slightly

All of the issues have been thoroughly discussed and analyzed by the board and management leading to the need for a rate adjustment. After agonizing discussion, the board of trustees approved a 5 percent rate increase to become effective for usage starting on Oct. 1, 2009. This will be reflected on the monthly bill you receive the first part of November.

This rate adjustment coincides with our power supplier, Southern Montana, receiving a rate increase of 7.5 percent from Bonneville Power Administration, effective Oct. 1. Southern Montana will

also see a rate increase of 13.1 percent from Western Area Power Administration on Jan. 1, 2010.

Raising electric rates is a very difficult decision for the board and management and, certainly, it is not a decision that is taken lightly.

For information on specific rate classes, call the office at 538-3465 or visit our website at www.ferguselectric.coop.

BPA contract goes away

Because our power suppliers wholesale electric supply contract with Bonneville Power is ramping down and will end in 2011, Southern Montana had to find a replacement for this source of power. The replacement for Bonneville's less expensive hydropower is PPL Montana whose primary supply is the Colstrip coal-fired plant.

In an effort to help stabilize electric rates, the board has instructed management to look at ways to reduce costs. The board and staff will carefully weigh many options on a continuing basis. In addition, the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association is recommending that, in the future, cooperative boards consider different rate structures. This is something that we will be investigating.

Highwood discussion continues

The cooperative is continuing to evaluate the feasibility of a natural gas generation plant and is taking steps to bring the project to fruition. Options are being studied, keeping in mind that future power supply contracts have been signed by Southern Montana with Western Area Power and PPL Montana. The plan to own part of our generation supply continues to be a goal of Fergus Electric.

Securing an Air Permit and financing the Highwood Generating Station continue to be major tasks. We have learned that such endeavors take time, endurance and perseverance, but I believe the Highwood Station continues to be a project worth pursuing.

Write an essay – Win a trip to Washington, D.C.

Plans are underway for the 2010 Youth to Washington Tour and Essay Contest. The tour is scheduled for June, 2010. Airfare from Great Falls to Washington, D.C., is paid along with lodging, meals and admission to events.

Contest rules are:

The student must be a junior or senior in high school in the fall of 2010.

The student's parents or guardian must be served by Fergus Electric Cooperative.

The student must write an essay of 500 words or less (double spaced) on the topic: *Identify and describe the key qualities of leadership that are important to young adults, and explain where today's young leaders should be focused.*

Submit entries to Youth Tour Essay Contest, Fergus Electric Cooperative, 84423 U.S. Highway 87, Lewistown, MT 59457, postmarked no later than Nov. 30, 2009.

Essays should include a cover page with the student's name, address, telephone number and the cooperative's name.

An application form must accompany the essay. Please call Vangie at 406-538-3465 for the form. It is also available on the MECA website at www.mtco-ops.com.

Student essayists are encouraged to be creative with their ideas.

Montana Electric Cooperatives' Association in Great Falls selects a state winner and Fergus Electric Cooperative also sponsors a student. For additional information, contact Vangie at 406-538-3465.



RURAL MONTANA

Call on Fergus Electric for safety demonstrations for your school or group

It's shocking! It's electrifying! It could save lives. To provide a graphic reminder that electricity is the safest form of energy, but only when treated with respect...Fergus Electric will perform electric safety demonstrations, upon request, to schools and community organizations.

Experienced linemen conduct high voltage demonstrations showing how dangerous it is to come in contact with power lines. The demonstration shows what happens when a hot dog, a grapefruit, a string, a tree branch or a tire have contact with electricity.

Fergus Electric's safety demonstrations will offer students and the public a chance to avoid being another statistic.

To schedule a high voltage safety demonstration, call 406-538-3465 and ask for Dale Rikala.



At an HRDC Kids Fair, lineman Curt Olson demonstrates how an automobile tire conducts electricity.

Mrs. Montana

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and makes friends immediately with any visitor's pet. Both children enjoy catching toads near their pond and helping with the free ranging birds in their yard.

For the most part, Lacey stays home with Ely and Bella, training her own horses and participating with Josh in the Roundup Ridge Riders.

With guidance from a neighbor, the family is learning calf roping. "We're still working on the ground with a dummy steer, but it's a lot of fun."

She also serves as a local distributor for Alison Pantry and joins in welcoming newcomers to town. She even won Best in Show at the fair for her bread and cookies.

Some of Lacey's activities will be put on hold as her calendar quickly fills with speaking engagements and appearances, a requirement for Mrs. Montana. She likes to be an active participant when she makes an appearance. "I'll take tickets or help with the set-up, anything to be involved in the event. It's nice just to get out and meet new people. I like to collect other people's stories," she smiles. "And little kids think it's great to meet Mrs. Montana."

More than just meeting people and wearing a smile, Lacey has a message to share. When first her left hand and arm, followed by the entire left side of her body, became numb during her second pregnancy, she was diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis.

To some, devastating news. Lacey takes it in stride. "I take medication, but I haven't let MS slow me down. That's the message I want to share. I'm an example of someone who is moving forward with my life despite obstacles that confront me. It's a message applicable to any facet of a person's life if

- * Catch Lacey Kraft in the Mrs. America Pageant live in September on the Women's Entertainment Network.
- * Check out Lacey's Mrs. Montana website at www.mrsmontanaamerica.com.
- * Contact Lacey to schedule an appearance by email at mrsmontana2009@imt.net or by phone at (406) 252-7692.



As Mrs. Montana, Lacey will make at least 50 public appearances during her reign.

they have to face a challenge."

In addition to raising awareness about MS, Lacey and Josh both participate in fundraisers for MS research.

Besides her appearances around the state, she is busily preparing for the Mrs. America Pageant to be held on Sept. 8 in Tucson. Part of the prize package includes Dale Carnegie training, which she considers an important perk, especially for the interviews she will undergo. If she comes in first among the 51 competitors in Arizona, one month later she will head to the Mrs. World competition in Vietnam.

Whether or not she brings home the national and international crowns, Lacey Kraft is loving the experience. "To be part of the Mrs. America family," she says, "I am so privileged."

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 30135 • Account 318752
Account 320515**

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

Fergus Electric Cooperative achieves safety accreditation

Fergus Electric recently received a Certificate of Excellence from the Rural Electric Safety Accreditation Program for completing a rigorous three-part process covering all aspects of the cooperative's safety efforts.

In order to qualify for the accreditation program, FEC completed an in-depth application, did a self-evaluation, participated in a peer-review safety audit and submitted the information electronically to the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association Accreditation Committee for judging.

Accreditation lasts three years and allows for a discount on liability insurance. Fergus Electric's accreditation signifies a team effort among the board of directors, management and employees. This is the cooperative's eighth

accreditation.

Fergus Electric's employees take pride in the safety standards they maintain. Foreman Dave Phifer puts it like this, "It's an on-going effort. We have no choice but to work as safely as possible – after all, our lives depend on it."

The accreditation program started in 1967 to establish effective self-policing of safety activities, to set standards for reducing disabling injuries, to encourage on-the-job system training programs and to provide recognition for all rural electric systems that achieve those goals.

In other words, Fergus Electric makes safety an integral part of daily operations and, in turn, makes the cooperative safer for the employees and the general public.



Fergus Electric employees (left to right) Erika Mattaliano, Susan Hinkley, Vangie McConnell and Jill Owens offer Halloween safety tips.

Choose light-colored costumes, be sure masks allow kids to see and breathe easily, teach kids to look both ways and cross only at corners, plan

You can prevent scary Halloween accidents

your child's route, provide a flashlight and accompany young children.

Let kids draw designs on pumpkins instead of using a knife, use glow sticks in pumpkins in place of candles, be sure the path to your front door is well-lit and free of obstacles, and inspect treats.

Electrical safety

Question: How can a bird sit on a power line and not be affected?

Answer: Electricity will take the quickest path to the ground to complete its circuit. While atop a power line, a bird is actually part of the electric circuit and does not provide a path to ground.



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

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

Win a gift basket!

Help celebrate co-op month! Complete this form and return it to Fergus Electric Cooperative, 84423 US Highway 87, Lewistown, MT 59457 by October 31.

Name _____

Address _____

Phone _____

Your name will be placed in a drawing for a gift basket. The winner will be contacted in November.

