

F E R G U S

FEATURES

Member Newsletter ♦ Fergus Electric Cooperative, Inc., Lewistown, MT ♦ www.ferguselectric.coop

WELCOME TO FEC

3 new employees share common interests

Story by **JANINE RIFE DIDIER** | *Fergus Electric*

SINCE the first of November 2023 Fergus Electric Cooperative has hired two journeyman linemen and a mechanic. The native Montanans appreciate living in Montana, and enjoy working and playing in the great outdoors.

“We have had a lot of interest in all our recent job postings, and have been fortunate enough to get people who fit into our proverbial puzzle,” said Bret Ophus, assistant line superintendent. Our Fergus Electric team includes multiple employees with similar backgrounds who work hard to meet the co-op’s goals and expectations. Bret said, “I want to thank all our new hires for taking the risk to seek out new employment.”

Jason Mills

When you first meet Jason Mills, it feels like you have known him for a long time. He is warm and gracious, and has the gift of making people feel at ease. His friendly nature came through when asked recently to tell a bit about himself. “In my off time,” he said, “I enjoy smoking barbeque for my friends, who call me ‘Slim’.”

Slim grew up ranching on a “big outfit” south of Three Forks. He said, “I’ve been married to my beautiful wife for 10 years. We have Alice, our 4-year-old daughter and George, our 2-year-old son.” He has spent the last two-plus



Jason “Slim” Mills joined Fergus Electric recently as a mechanic. | **FEC PHOTO BY DEBBY PETERSEN**

decades working as a diesel technician in the ag industry. At Fergus Electric, Slim has the responsibility of maintaining the co-op’s fleet of trucks and equipment. Slim said that he enjoys the people and the low-stress atmosphere at his new workplace.

When asked where he sees himself in 10 years, Slim replied, “I hope to be



Journeyman Lineman Bill Stanton recently joined Fergus Electric. | **FEC PHOTO BY DEBBY PETERSEN**

in Lewistown enjoying the outdoors with my family, and teaching my kids about hunting and fishing.”

Bill Stanton

Journeyman Lineman Bill Stanton, has lived in Montana his entire life,

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MANAGER'S MESSAGE

From Carson Sweeney

NEW RATE STRUCTURE UPDATE

As you know, Fergus Electric Cooperative implemented a new general service rate structure effective January 1, 2024.

This change was communicated to the membership as a revenue-neutral rate change, meaning that the monthly revenue under the old rates would closely align with the monthly revenue with the new rates.

To date, we have billed our members for the first two months of 2024, and I wanted to share the results.

For the month of January 2024, billing under our old rates would have collected \$1,297,483. Under the new rate structure for January, we collected \$1,293,383 which is a difference of \$4,100, or 0.316 percent.

For the month of February 2024,

billing under our old rates would have collected \$1,097,464. Under the new rate structure for February 2024, we collected \$1,091,591, which is a difference of \$5,872 or 0.535 percent.

With only two months of billing under our belt, I have confidence that the team at Fergus Electric hit the nail on the head in terms of implementing a universal demand billing component across the membership in a revenue-neutral manner.

The rate structure change has affected our membership in different ways. Members with average electric use have noticed slight decreases in their monthly electric bills.

Small energy consumers with average or above-average demand requirements have noticed a slight increase.

Members with large demand requirements have seen an increase of 3 to 5 percent.

We still have 10 months of the year left, and I intend to keep our membership informed. I will provide the next update on our revenue-neutral rate structure change at our upcoming 86th annual meeting, to be held at the Fergus County Trade Center on Thursday, June 6.

I look forward to updating the membership on many of the exciting projects we are wrapping up, including the new office/shop in Roundup, the new 24-mile 50 kilovolt transmission line from Hilger to Winifred, and the reliability upgrades we are implementing with new electronic reclosers throughout the system. RM

Call to enroll in the budget billing program

ARE you interested in enrolling in budget billing? Budget billing does not reduce your overall power bill; it spreads the cost out over a 12-month period.

To qualify for the co-op's budget billing program, the account must have been active at that location for the past 12 months and have a zero-balance due.

Once your account is set up as a budget-billing account, to remain enrolled in the budget billing program each month you must pay the budget amount due, in full, by the due date.

We will automatically remove accounts with two months unpaid balance from the budget billing program. If you choose, you can always pay extra during warmer months so that you build up a cash cushion to use



during the colder months. To ensure your payment is on time each month, we encourage you to consider enrolling in autopay.

True-up occurs every year during the anniversary month of your initial budget billing enrollment. This means whether you have a credit or a balance due; we will adjust your electric billing account accordingly.

We encourage members enrolled in

budget billing to monitor their monthly usage and look at the current charges. Compare last year's usage to the same month's usage in the current year. If there is a significant difference, is there an explanation? If you cannot determine why there is a change in your usage, call the office at 406-538-3465, and we can look at your daily usage history to help identify when your meter began showing more usage. This often helps members determine the cause, i.e., a worn-out refrigerator or a heater left turned on, or perhaps family members have been home more recently.

If you are interested in enrolling in the budget billing program, call (406) 538-3465 and sign up. RM

WELCOME

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mostly in Lewistown, and has worked in “all sorts of construction,” using a variety of equipment. He attended Montana Technical College and completed his apprenticeship before coming to Fergus Electric.

Pleasant and easygoing with a ready smile, Bill said that he expects to make a career of working as a journeyman lineman. Bill enjoys his coworkers and working outdoors. He said that he likes having different jobs from day to day, and enjoys the large area that Fergus Electric serves.

Bill and his wife, Michele, have two sons, Riley, 11, and Chase, 4. As is typical of those who choose line work as an occupation, Bill likes being outdoors and enjoys hunting, fishing and camping, which makes central Montana a wonderful place to call home.



Journeyman Lineman Lake Mellott joined Fergus Electric Cooperative in February. | **FEC**
PHOTO BY LOUIE HOULD

Lake Mellott

Lake Mellott, journeyman lineman, joined Fergus Electric’s team in February 2024. Like Slim and Bill, Lake is friendly, likable and a pleasure to talk to. When asked what he enjoys most about his job at Fergus Electric, Lake said, “I’ve always enjoyed the rural aspect of working at an electrical co-op, and the rural areas serviced by Fergus Electric are some of the most beautiful places in the state.” He continued, “In addition, I’ve found that although I haven’t been here very long, the people I’ve met, whether coworkers, members or employees at local businesses, they have all been very welcoming and down to earth.”

Before entering the line trade, Lake was a construction contractor in northwest Montana. He recalled that during a slow winter, he decided to enroll in a pre-apprenticeship program as an experiment more than anything. He enjoyed the schooling, but continued construction until a local co-op opened a position for an apprentice. He applied, and was hired, for the position.

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– **Bret Ophus**,
Assistant Line Superintendent,
Fergus Electric Cooperative

Lake said, “My wife and I are both local Montanans, and enjoy that heritage. I was born and raised in Conrad, Montana, and my wife spent most of her childhood and young adult life in the Flathead Valley. We were married in 2016, and now have four children, Wren, Flint, Rand and Decker.” He said that his family appreciates everything the outdoors has to offer, from ice skating to packing horses into the Bob Marshall Wilderness. Lake had his sights set on a couple of electrical co-ops that better fit his family’s lifestyle, recreational pursuits and his own career aspirations. “When Fergus Electric opened a position for a journeyman, I applied and was fortunate to be chosen as a new hire.”

Concerning moving his family to Lewistown, Lake said, “We enjoy living a country sort of lifestyle, along with our little crew of pets, which is currently horses, heelers and our

See WELCOME, next page

NATIONAL LINEMAN APPRECIATION DAY

THANK YOU!



THANK A LINEMAN

A big thank you goes out to all the Fergus Electric crew. **(Standing L to R):** Jason Deffinbaugh, Groundman Lineman; Dakota Wahl, Journeyman Lineman; Jake deRosier, Right-of-Way Groundman; Darek Dygert, Journeyman Lineman; Lake Mellott, Journeyman Lineman; Jake Grensten, Journeyman Lineman; Ryan d'Autremont, Serviceman; Danyon Rice, Journeyman Lineman; Bill Stanton, Journeyman Lineman; Andrew Reuterskiold, Journeyman Lineman; Mark Schwomeyer, Transformer Repairman; Brock Pyrah, Journeyman Lineman; Jason Mills, Mechanic; Dylan Rickman, Groundman Lineman; Travis Sura, Groundman Lineman; **(Sitting L to R):** Louie Hould, Foreman; Owen Thatcher, Foreman; Tyson Ruff, Foreman. Not pictured, Brian Godbey, Serviceman/Meter Tech. | **FERGUS ELECTRIC PHOTO**

WELCOME

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little cat. We are all looking forward to getting to know the community of Lewistown and the surrounding areas.”

Welcome to the team

Fergus Electric employs a team of skilled workers who are willing, able and particularly good at doing their jobs. Often, the workday goes smoothly. Yet, life happens and, at any given time, there may be unexpected obstacles, including extended material lead times or unrelated to work, a child may be sick, or their daycare may have an

unanticipated schedule change.

These situations involve teamwork to reschedule projects and accommodate parents who need to shuffle kids. Being flexible and working together is all part of keeping everything and everyone operating smoothly.

Our management team, engineers, line crews and office staff all work hard to establish and maintain a good working relationship. Fergus Electric wants its employees’ lives and work to have purpose, dignity and satisfaction, both off and on the job.

We have a fine group of employees. “We all want to welcome Slim, Bill and Lake,” said Bret. “We are excited that they have joined our team!” RM

IDENTIFY ACCOUNT NUMBER*

WIN A \$32.50 CREDIT

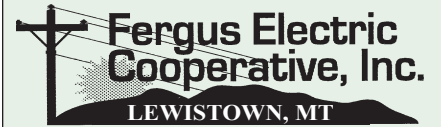
If one of the following account numbers is yours, call Fergus Electric (406-538-3465) and identify yourself and your account number and you will receive a \$32.50 credit on next month's statement.

**Account 371164, Account 250201
Account 284101, Account 397473
Account 380621, Account 397560**

CONGRATULATIONS!

Lissa Machler of Roundup, **James Scott Lutz** of Lewistown, and **Joyce McCauley** of Roundup were last month's winners!

*NUMBERS ARE DRAWN MONTHLY



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	406-366-3374
Bret Ophus	406-366-7523
Bret Nellerhoe (Roundup).....	406-939-0636
Carson Sweeney	406-366-0971
Melanie Foran.....	406-462-5650
Scott Olson.....	406-366-5822
Dan Balster.....	406-366-0975

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