

# F E R G U S

## FEATURES

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

## Lewis and Clark students are eager to learn and happy to be at school with supportive staff

Story and photos  
by Judy Byrne

**Editor's comments:** Each December, I feature a school in Fergus Electric's service territory. Over the years, 22 schools have been on the front page of Fergus Features. Stories covered one- and two-room schools, small town schools, Hutterite schools, schools served by the cooperative and schools attended by member children.

Lewistown's Jerry Plovanic remembers attending sixth grade at Lewis and Clark School when it opened. "It was surrounded by barbed-wire fences and cattle grazing nearby," he says. "There was an open courtyard in the middle of the building." He began teaching at his old school in 1976 and plans to remain "until they stop sending me kids."

During his years at Lewis and Clark, Plovanic has witnessed many changes in the building's structure and surroundings, its organization, and staff.

"This year seems to be really upbeat. You can definitely see it in the kids."

Other staff members echo Plovanic. First-year teacher Rachel Cole is happy to be here. "This is a very welcoming community," she says. "Kids are eager to learn and happy to be at school with our wonderful staff."

In part, credit for this positive atmosphere lies with its new principal, Michelle Trafton.

A first-time administrator, Trafton is no stranger to Lewistown schools. For 14 years she has taught computer applications at the junior high. Previously, she taught sixth grade at Highland Park. She has participated in a variety of community activities and served on numerous committees.

A principalship has long been her aspiration, ever since her teacher prepa-



First-year administrator Michelle Trafton stands in front of the "Little Eagle Helper" bulletin board with Skylar Newman at Lewis and Clark Elementary School in Lewistown.

ration days at the University of Minnesota in Duluth. In 2008, Trafton earned her degree in Educational Leadership from the University of Montana and interned at Lewistown Junior High. After that, she often filled in as acting principal when needed.

"I've had wonderful opportunities with several principals as mentors, including Pat Hould, Jerry Feller and Tim Majerus," she says. "I gained a lot of experience working with students, staff, and community members, which makes this transition more comfortable. I feel honored to be here."

Staff members are equally happy. Long-time teacher Candy Dunn says, "Michelle is a nice addition. She is very organized and absolutely enthusiastic about school."

In her fifth year teaching fifth grade, Sandra Fox agrees. "Michelle is so supportive and knowledgeable. When she doesn't know, she finds answers. She has a very visible presence during the day, in the halls, on the playground, at lunch, and she really connects with kids."

In return, Trafton appreciates the help, support and knowledge of her 28 staff members. "I noticed immediately how collaborative they are. I was very impressed with our meetings even before school started. Everything revolves around what's in the students' best interest."

Trafton has many goals to accomplish. Most important, she recognizes

*Continued on page 5*



# MANAGER'S MESSAGE

From Scott Sweeney

## Southern Montana Electric G&T Cooperative, Inc.

As many of you have read by now, Southern, our power supplier is in Chapter 11 bankruptcy. This is a difficult situation for Fergus Electric. The board and I are working diligently to resolve the problem as quickly as possible. I want everyone to realize that this situation will likely take months to be settled. We do not want to make decisions without carefully analyzing all the

possible results. Tim Gregori, Southern's manager, has retired. Fergus Electric's board hired attorney John Paul of Great Falls as bankruptcy counsel to represent the co-op during the upcoming proceedings.

### Capital Credits

Several members have asked if the co-op uses its margins to lower electric rates. The simple answer is yes. The co-op paid some of its margins to estates and through a general capital credit

retirement earlier this year. For the year 2011, the co-op paid a general retirement of about \$380,000 in May and to date estate retirements total about \$180,000.

As of September 30, 2011, the total margins of Fergus Electric are approximately \$1,300,000. This means that the co-op paid out roughly \$560,000 in capital credits and has used the \$740,000 to self-finance pole replacements and other expenditures of the co-op.

Each year, the Board of Trustees considers the financial condition of the co-op and decides what amount, if any, the co-op will pay out in capital credits. Some years the board has determined that it was not in the best interest of the co-op to have a general retirement of capital credits, yet has continued to pay out capital credit balances to estates.

These decisions have helped our cooperative remain in good financial condition. Members enjoy receiving a check from the co-op but that payout means that the co-op has less money to use for system improvements to the plant, i.e. pole replacements and other items that are important for maintaining system reliability.

### Christmas Season is here

Although the current events with Southern have our full attention, at Christmastime let us remember the many blessings upon all of us. I want to wish a very Merry Christmas to all of the co-op's members.



## Christmas memories TIMELY TOPICS

Vangie McConnell, Editor



Christmas - a nostalgic time of the year when the smell of freshly baked cookies, the twinkling of Christmas lights and good cheer help us rekindle our own Christmas memories. We would like to share some of our family favorites with you.

My Christmas memories growing up include the mini pageants that my sister and I prepared on Christmas Eve. At first, they were simple nativity scenes represented by dolls and a few costumes - mainly bathrobes. As we progressed through grade school and high school, we read the story of the nativity from Luke in the Bible or

read "A Visit from St. Nicholas" by Clement Moore along with other Christmas selections. I also entertained with piano solos.

Later my sons, niece, and nephew put together a more elaborate pageant with piano and drum music, a written program, and a dinner menu.

As adults, we all still celebrate with special music - violin and banjo, tell stories, and share memories of favorite Christmas activities or gifts.

Sally Horacek reminisces, "My mother loved to have the whole family together at Christmas. However, my sister, Carol, lived in Texas and had not been able to join us

for a long time."

A few Christmases ago, with Sally's help, Carol surprised her mother. The family was gathered and Sally announced that she had to get something from the kitchen. Carol entered through the back door and instead of Sally returning to join the family, Carol did. Her mother was thrilled. It was a very happy time for the entire family.

Bret Ophus remembers the Christmas when he was about five years old. Bret and his brother received an electric blanket from their Great Aunt Dorothy. Ever the practical person, his aunt knew that such a gift would be

most useful during the cold Montana winters.

As Bret and Brian tore open the package, they assumed the blanket was packing material and dug deeper into the box for the 'real' present. Their mother watched in horror as the boys flung the blanket to the floor. It was only then, the two boys realized the blanket was their gift.

As the winter progressed, the brothers were truly happy to have that electric blanket and Bret recalls that his aunt's practical gift provided

*Continued on page 6*

# Students learn

*Continued from page 3*

that school involves more than reading, writing and arithmetic.

“I want to make sure we teach the whole child to meet each individual’s intellectual, physical, social, and emotional needs.”

To that end, Lewis and Clark offers activities and programs that not only fulfill academic requirements, but also allow students to learn beyond the classroom.

*Hooked on Fishing* is one example. Fifth grade teacher Jill Reed explains, “This is a program provided by the state to get kids active and outdoors. The fishing theme carries into science obviously, but also into art. They create lures, tie flies, learn about insect behavior and even create T-shirts with native Montana fish designs. They use the fish they catch in dissection labs.”

A ride on the Charlie Russell Chew-Choo emphasizes social studies, science, and math. Attending a performance at the Alberta Bair Theater introduces students to performing arts in a professional setting.

Visiting the Museum of the Rockies in Bozeman brings science and social studies to life.

The Wax Museum, an annual school highlight, combines activities in reading, writing, research, history, and art. It is a popular event for the entire community.

New this year is an activity called Meaningful Work. Elementary teachers have long assigned classroom jobs to students, but rarely is this as a school-wide effort. “The idea came out of Montana Behavior Institute training,” says Trafton. “Its purpose is to give students a sense of ownership and let them know they are needed in our school



*Top l to r: Fifth grade teacher Jill Reed talks about the “Hooked on Fishing” program. Jerry Plovanic says the school atmosphere is really up beat. Bottom: Sandra Fox with Britney Thornton teaches fifth grade and praises the “Meaningful Work” program.*



community.” Each worker has a teacher-mentor to lend support and encouragement.

Skylar Newman’s job is Lizard Keeper, and Trafton mentors him. He is responsible for feeding a pair of Bearded Dragons in her office. He also gets to learn about and interact with them. “The little one is Louise, and the big one is Clark,” he explains. “Louise is a girl lizard.”

Dustin Thayne is the Recycling Engineer. He helps teacher Jacki Rickl by gathering papers for recycling and crushing empty cans. “I can’t tell you what a helper he is,” Rickl says.

Both are thrilled to have their photos displayed on the Meaningful Workers bulletin board in the main hallway. Secretary Jody d’Autremont happened to see one student discover his picture there. “The look on his face was priceless,” she says. “He just lit up.”

Lewis and Clark students also perform meaningful work for the community. Youngsters clean up neighborhood trash and donate both food and money to the Community Cupboard. They collected and donated coins to build the

Veteran’s Memorial, and they annually participate in Coats for Kids.

The Chain of Kindness is another new project. Each random act of kindness witnessed becomes a link in a paper chain, which they hope will encircle the school. In addition, teachers who see students doing well refer them to the principal. Trafton bestows on each of them a Principal’s Award certificate worthy of framing and a token reward.

“We’re working toward building relationships and having the most positive school we can,” Trafton says. “Even before school started, we were building relationships with our neighbors.”

When Trafton received permission to improve the school’s entryway, people from all walks helped get it done.

“People brought us Gatorade and popsicles, donated weed wrap, and helped buy plants and topsoil. Everyone pitched in. It was an exciting start, and now we have an attractive and deer-resistant flower garden to greet everyone.”

“Michelle has a knack for leading others into whatever change is needed,” d’Autremont explains.

What does Jerry Plovanic think of these changes? “It’s great!”

## 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.

**Account 319448 • Account 365231  
Account 317279**

You will receive a \$32.50 credit on next month’s statement.

## Co-op month winners

Matt Wickens of Winifred and George Nelson of Grass Range won the co-op month drawings for electric credits of \$50 each. Congratulations. Your interest in the cooperative is appreciated.

# MECA and Fergus offer two \$500 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 com-

pleted 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 Tuesday, January 31, 2012 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. Fergus Electric Cooperative will also award one scholarship from the applications.

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

## memories

*Continued from page 4*  
many years of warmth.

As a child, Monte Obert recalls celebrating Christmas Eve in the family home with his family and friends in Roberts. Over the years, his family invited more friends and neighbors to join the merriment and the Christmas Eve gathering soon outgrew the Obert home. The family moved the celebration to the local feed store. Chuckling, he says, "Actually, it wasn't a feed store at the time, but a new, unoccupied building with lots of space." Later, the Roberts Fire Hall welcomed the large group who gathered to celebrate on Christmas Eve. "My mother prepared barbecued beef and guests brought their favorite dishes. It was a happy time."

Monte notes that this annual celebration continues today. "We still gather at the Fire Hall. Now, my wife Barbie and our children join in the festivities. It's something we look forward to."

Dale Rikala recalls hiking into the Judith Mountains with his brother,

father and mother searching for that perfect tree. His mother would plan a winter picnic, which included a pot of homemade chili. Sometimes, the tree wasn't so perfect, but mom's chili was good and the outing was always fun.

Mark Schwomeyer remembers the year Santa Claus paid a visit. He recalls hearing a disturbance outside and when he looked through the window, Santa sprinted by snatching the cookies and milk that were left for him in the bird feeder. Later, he learned that Santa was his grandpa dressed in a red robe.

At the dinner table on Christmas Eve, Mark's family lit candles in remembrance of those no longer with them. Each person at the table also lit a small candle. The privilege to open a present went to the one whose candle burned out first – a tradition that continues each year. Mark laughs as he recalls the many creative efforts used to make the candles burn faster.

We hope that sharing some of our Christmas memories has brought back some of your favorite recollections of Christmas.

*Fergus Electric's employees and trustees send warmest holiday wishes. Please note Lewistown and Roundup offices will close Dec. 23 and 26 for Christmas and December 30 and Jan. 2 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 .....	406-535-5192
Guy Johnson .....	406-535-5132
Scott Sweeney .....	406-538-7218
Don Criswell (Roundup) .....	406-323-3426
Monte Obert .....	406-425-1288

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

## Co-op Connections card coming soon

Fergus Electric's Co-op connections card is a money-saving tool we're proud to offer our membership. The card is not a credit card; it is a savings card.

One of the most valuable features of the Co-op Connections Card is the pharmacy discount. While it is not insurance, the discount can mean savings of 10 to 60 percent on prescription drugs. The logo and the information on the back of the

card are recognized at more than 60,000 national, regional and local pharmacies.

Prior to getting the card in Jan., 2012, you will receive a bill stuffer. The stuffer will have information about the program and will alert you to watch your mail. Remember, the savings card is another benefit of being a member of Fergus Electric.

