

The Lewistown Boys and Girls Club — where great futures are started each and every day

Story and photos
by Judy Byrne

“Eadie, Eadie,” shout the youngsters as they hop from the steps of the bus. They run to hug her as they line up to enter the Lewistown Boys and Girls Club. Others are just as excited to meet their teachers, Josie, Dusty, Tina and Sandra. Hugs are shared; lines quickly form, and the staff escorts their charges into the building.

Every day, approximately 80 students ride yellow school busses to participate in activities at the club. They arrive right after school and head downstairs for a quick snack. Then it’s off to join in a rotation of various activities.

Some receive homework assistance from Laura Stainbrook and her crew while others go to art, computer, or P.E. classes.

A few sit quietly in the lobby reading with volunteers Jackie Skipper or Tiffany Jorgenson.

Within moments of arrival, everyone is involved in a directed activity or class.

At 5:40, dinner is served according to USDA nutritional guidelines, a point of pride for the club. Day is done when parents gather them up at 6:15.

“We have over 13,000 visits through our doors every year,” says Executive Director Abby Hotz. “This is a place where great futures are started each and every day.”

Abby approaches her job with enthusiasm. “When you have a greater purpose than just earning a paycheck, it’s really a great feeling,” she says.

She came to the club in 2004 as its



Executive director Abby Hotz says the club provides a safe place to learn, grow and develop relationships with caring adults.

Teen Director, working with the junior high students. The club was in financial trouble and meeting in a building that barely suited its needs. When the former director was asked to resign, the board recruited Abby. She took the reins in 2005 and galloped into a huge undertaking – acquiring funds to purchase a new building. A community member had offered to donate \$250,000 toward the purchase, but only on the condition that the organization garner a matching amount within one month.

“I won’t lie. It was overwhelming, but I have an awesome staff. I just knew we could get things done.”

Their fundraising was a phenomenal success. They overreached their goal enough to buy the former church and had money left over for supplies and renovations.

According to Abby, relocating the club has gone rather smoothly.

“Our neighbors have been very helpful and cooperative. Most seem happy we’re here because our property is neat and well kept. When we’ve had minor problems, such as kids playing on our neighbor’s lawn, we’ve been able to use that as an opportunity for teaching proper behavior.”

Fundraising and budget management continue to be Abby’s primary responsibilities, much like a school superintendent. She is a step removed from working with the students, but her personality makes her a good fit for the work.

“This community has a lot of heart,” she says. “They really want to get involved, and that makes my job fun.”

Missy Ducimetiere is her second-in-command, comparable to a school principal. She supervises the staff and works with parents to meet the children’s needs. She works with the club’s partner agencies, including local schools, the Department of Family Services, Youth Mentoring, and the Yellowstone Boys and Girls Ranch. In addition, she supervises the club’s many support staff and volunteers. She estimates that volunteers donate 36-40 hours each week, more during school vacations.

“We are very blessed to have a partnership with the schools,” says Abby. “Besides the bus service, we are in

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MANAGER'S MESSAGE

From Scott Sweeney

Southern Montana Electric Bankruptcy

Our power supplier, Southern Montana Electric, filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy on Oct. 21, 2011. At the same time, Southern raised its rates to its members by 20 percent, which includes Fergus Electric. Then on Nov. 9, 2011, Tim Gregori, general manager of Southern, was placed on administrative leave and retired at year's end.

The Southern board met on Nov. 17, 2011 under the leadership of attorney Malcolm Goodrich and voted unanimously to reaffirm the bankruptcy filing and to rescind the 20 percent rate increase.

Had Southern not rescinded the 20 percent rate increase, Fergus Electric would have needed to implement a rate increase as well, in order to keep its financials positive. Fortunately, Fergus did not need to raise electric rates at the beginning of the winter season.

Southern Trustee appointed

On Nov. 28, 2011, Lee Freeman, a Livingston attorney was appointed as the trustee for Southern. Lee Freeman's task is to work with creditors and Southern to develop an acceptable plan for restructuring contracts and debts to pay creditors.

On Dec. 2, 2011, the bankruptcy creditors hearing took place at the federal courthouse in Billings. During the six-hour session, creditors were able to question Tim Gregori, Southern's general manager.

After the hearing, Fergus Trustee Joe Dirkson and I had the opportunity to visit with Lee Freeman in regards to the Chapter 11 bankruptcy plan for Southern.

Southern has many credit issues. Two key issues are: 1) The debt for the Highwood Generating Station is \$85 million, which is largely owed to Prudential, and 2) The PPL contract for power supply is too large and needs to be reduced or changed. This will allow Southern to reduce its risk of selling excess power into a depressed power market.

Fergus Board Trustee resigns

Steve Balster, who served as a trustee of District 1 (Lewistown area) since 2007, resigned effective Dec. 31, 2011 for health reasons. The board interviewed candidates in mid-December and appointed Balster's replacement who will begin in January 2012. As stated in the bylaws, the new trustee will serve the remainder of Balster's term, which ends June 2013, when the

co-op will hold an election at the 2013 annual meeting.

Steve Balster has devoted several decades of his life to Fergus Electric co-op. Hired in 1979, Steve and I worked together as staking engineers. Later, the co-op promoted Steve to line superintendent and then to general manager, which he carried out until his retirement in 2004. After his retirement, Steve's fondness of the co-op led him to run for the board. I have enjoyed working with Steve very much; I appreciate the depth of Steve's knowledge and I will miss working with him.

Foreman Murray Matthews retires

Murray Matthews, one of the co-ops four linemen/foremen is retiring on Jan. 1, 2012. Murray was hired in 1980 and after dedicating 31 years to line work has decided, it is time for a change. I sincerely thank Murray for his service to the co-op and for his leadership as a foreman. I know that Murray is looking forward to watching blizzards from inside his warm house rather than climbing poles with the snow blowing up his back, working to restore power during winter outages. Murray's dry wit has kept everyone entertained. We will miss his humor at the co-op.

Thank you Gentlemen, it certainly has been a pleasure! We all hope that you both enjoy your retirement.

Happy New Year

I want to wish everyone a Happy New Year! I am thankful for the many blessings that we have in Central Montana – the place that we call home!

Shammels are Today's Members

Realizing that many members today were not involved with the early years of their cooperative, the Today's Members Program was created to educate participants about member-owned utilities. It has become an integral part of the Montana Electric Cooperatives' Association (MECA) annual meeting.

Lyle and Mariah Shammel, Hilger-area ranchers, were selected from Fergus Electric's 12-county service area to represent the cooperative in Great Falls recently.

When asked about the Today's Members program, Lyle and Mariah agreed it was very informative and they felt it was good to learn how everything in the industry operates. They especially

enjoyed the home electrical safety presentation. When asked about improvements to the program, they felt more information about the individual co-ops and power suppliers would be helpful.

Lyle and Mariah enjoy ranch life and they especially enjoy their seven-month old son, Colter.



Has your bill jumped recently?

One of the goals at Fergus Electric is to help members use electricity wisely. The following is a list of some common causes of high bill complaints.

Space Heaters: sizes from 600 to 1,500 watts can drive your bill up by \$14 to \$37 per heater each month. Space heaters should be used sparingly.

Vehicle Engine Block Heaters: sizes vary from 1,000 to 1,800 watts and can add \$24 to \$44 per month. It is only necessary to plug most vehicles in for one or two hours before starting. Consider installing an outdoor timer.

Stock Tank Heaters: sizes vary from 750 to 1,500 watts and can run \$37 to \$73 per month in the coldest months.

Low and no energy models are available.

Well Pumps: a 2HP well pump with a broken shut-off switch will run non-stop and consume about 1500 watts per hour. This added load could boost your monthly bill by \$73.

If you suspect that your bill is artificially high, start with a load test. Turn all your breakers off and while one person watches the meter dial, turn each breaker on for a few seconds to see which one makes the dial turn fastest. The faster the dial turns, the more load there is on that circuit. Once you isolate the breaker, it should just be a matter of seeing what is hooked to that circuit. For more information call the office (538-3465).

Boys and Girls Club

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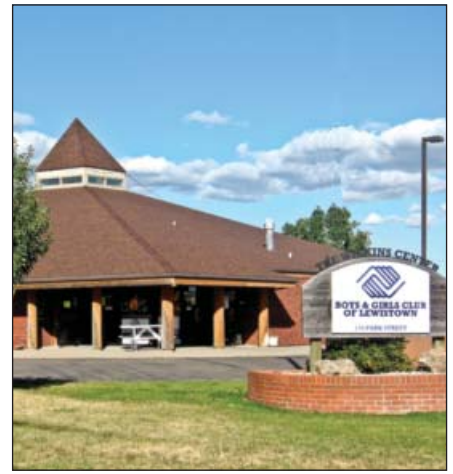
close contact with teachers and counselors for strategic planning.”

The club is fortunate to have a staff of student directors who either have a degree or experience working with students. Eadie Schultz has probably been with them the longest. This long-time Fergus High teacher now serves as the club’s Social Recreation Director. She has high praise for Abby’s leadership.

“Abby has fantastic ideas and gets others involved to get them done,” says Eadie. “Her enthusiasm carries on to everybody. She’s just a perfect executive director.”

Fitness Director Josie Thompson is the newest staff member. She says she loves being able to work with all the good kids each day. Another newcomer, Dusty Foster, serves as the computer lab teacher. He also substitutes in the local schools. Homework Director Laura Stainbrook says her responsibilities are growing fast. “Parents are requiring that students bring their homework here,” she says. “It’s cool, though, because when they go home, their homework is done.”

Art Director Tina Eastman has been with the club a little over a year. She holds degrees in computer graphics and cosmetology. Today, her students are decorating a dollhouse for auction at the Art Center. When finished, it will be complete with furniture, curtains, flooring, appliances, even light fixtures. The project combines activities in architec-



Top L to R: Rebecca Townsend appears anxious to get to the Boys and Girls Club. The club meets in a renovated church called the Wilkins Center. Bottom L to R: Volunteer Jackie Skipper shares one-on-one time with Natalie Tesco. Eadie Schultz and Josie Thompson greet bus riders.

ture, painting, sewing, construction and design.

Other staff members include kindergarten teacher Sandra Townsend, administrative assistant Crystal Tyler and Laurie Fowler, the cook. They are joined by both adult and student volunteers who help students read, assist in the classrooms, and serve meals in the lunchroom.

Although there is an enrollment process and a waiting list, membership is open to all students from kinder-

garten through sixth grade. During the summer months, the club offers expanded hours and increased staff. It provides the youth of Lewistown a safe place to learn and grow, ongoing relationships with caring adults, life-enhancing programs, character development, hope, and opportunity.

“At the Boys and Girls Club, we deliver a well-rounded package of healthy choices and healthy habits every day,” Missy declares.



Making One Dream A Reality

Mission:

To inspire and enable all young people, especially those who need us the most, to realize their full potential as productive, responsible, and caring citizens.

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 320761 • Account 370354 Account 392192

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

Thoughts for the New Year: Gratitude is an attitude

You likely say “thank you” several times a day – to the person pouring your coffee, to the co-worker holding the door or to the cashier handing you a receipt.

But what does it mean to be truly thankful – to live a life of gratitude? Gratitude is an attitude – a sense of appreciation for the gifts in your life, from the basic comforts of home to the people who are important to you.

Research shows that practicing gratitude can make you happier and healthier – emotionally and physically. This happens in part because thankful people tend to take better care of themselves – exercising regularly, eating a healthy diet and seeking regular medical care.

Expressing thankfulness also builds positive feelings – supplied, in part, by oxytocin, a hormone that prompts feelings of good will, empathy and kindness.

In addition, one large study suggests that the positive personal attributes linked to expressing gratitude may actually help prevent heart disease.

Researchers have found that people who regularly express their feelings of gratitude tend to:

- Get more — and better — sleep at night
- Spend more time exercising
- Have fewer headaches, nausea, pain and other physical symptoms of illness

- Be more alert, attentive, enthusiastic and energetic
- Have greater resistance to illness
- Experience less stress
- Have a greater sense of well-being
- View life as pleasurable, interesting and exciting

If practicing gratitude doesn't come naturally to you, start by calling a friend to express appreciation for your friendship, writing a short thank-you note or taking a few minutes each night to reflect on the gifts in your life. Research shows that changing your behavior in this way can change your attitude and feelings.

From Mayo Clinic EmbodyHealth

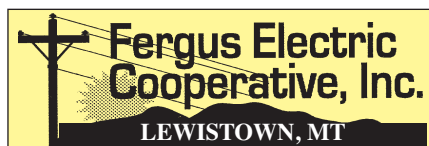
Need help with electric bills?

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 you get behind in your payments.

Office personnel will work with you to arrange a payment plan.

There is also some assistance available 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 1-800-766-3018 for more information.



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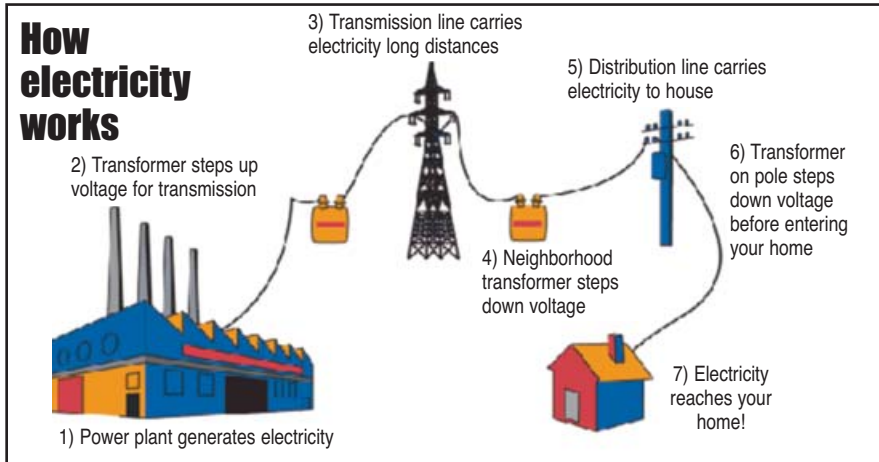
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Fergus Features is a national, state and regional award winning newsletter.

How electricity works



Co-op Connections card coming soon

Fergus Electric Cooperative, a Touchstone Energy cooperative, is proud to be an integral part of the communities we serve. That's why we're introducing Co-op Connections; a new program that helps you receive discounts on products and substantial pharmacy discounts nation-

wide.

This month you will receive a Co-op Connections Card and two Key Fobs for your household. There's no sign-up. No annual fees.

You get your Co-op Connections Card simply because you're a member of Fergus Electric.

