

F E R G U S

FEATURES

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



MANAGER'S MESSAGE

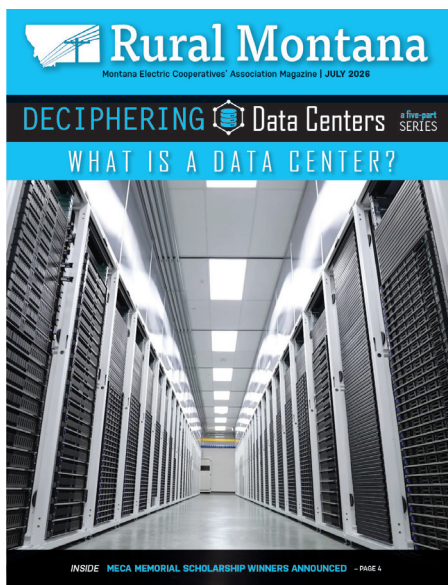
From Carson Sweeney

THROUGHOUT the last few months, I have traveled to several meetings across the state on behalf of the cooperative. Topics included data centers, industrial load growth, transmission capacity constraints, and future power costs.

Our nation is currently experiencing growth of approximately 2-3 percent in the electric sector, mainly due to industrial load growth and data centers. However, in comparison, our nation has averaged 4 percent electric load growth since the early 1900's.

For decades we have successfully met the growing electric demands of our nation, and I am confident that we will once again rise to the occasion. As a side note, the average price of electricity has increased at a rate slower than inflation. The average price of electricity in the U.S. is approximately \$0.18/kWh in 2026 as compared to \$0.90/kWh in the early 1900's, after adjusting for inflation.

As members read *Rural Montana's* five-part series on Data Centers, I look forward to hearing members input on the topic. (*This month's story is on pages 2-4*). The installation of railroads, overhead power lines, highways, hydro-



dams, power generation plants, ground based nuclear missile launch facilities, interstates, and fiber optic cable projects have each been controversial topics in their day, yet we all continue to benefit from these large infrastructure investments. I am curious to see if future generations place data centers within this strategic infrastructure list.

In the next few weeks, I will be engaged in discussions concerning power costs for 2027 and beyond. Power

MANAGER'S UPDATE:

Data centers, load growth, future power costs and current construction project progress

costs are expected to increase as suppliers continue to invest in new generation and transmission assets to meet regulatory requirements and rising electric demands. Shortly thereafter, we will begin developing our budgets and rates for 2027. Once we have firm numbers, I will share information with our members as quickly as possible.

Our 2026 construction projects are progressing as expected. New service requests have stabilized, and our crews are busy replacing poles and installing circuit coordination devices. Our vegetation management team has been busy utilizing our masticating equipment along our rights-of-way. I appreciate the enthusiasm from members that call to thank our crews for the vegetation trimming and removal work our guys have completed. I expect our efforts to pay dividends as we continue to work to reduce our risk of wildfire with consistent tree vegetation removal and trimming.

I hope the haying and harvest seasons go well for our vast membership, and I hope all the kids get off to a good start as classes begin for the 2026-2027 school year. See you next month. RM



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DIANA ROEN

Local artist paints the beauty of the Judith Basin landscape and wildlife

STORY BY CATHY MOSER | FOR FERGUS ELECTRIC

WITH paint, brush, and even dabs of soil, Diana Roen paints pictures of the Judith Basin landscape and the wildlife that lives there, the vestiges of its history and ranching heritage. Her passion to paint these scenes on canvas came later in life and, incidentally, on the heels of near tragedy.

She was born in Gillette, Wyoming, and lived there until age five when her parents moved the family to Roundup. “Our new home was a fixer-upper, and I mean a real fixer-upper,” Diana told me during our conversation at the Basin Gallery, located inside of the Basin Trading Post on Central Avenue in Stanford. She became a dental assistant and married Dave Roen before he left for basic training in the U.S. Army Reserve in 1971 at Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri. Upon returning to Montana, Dave was hired as foreman for the XZ Ranch in the Judith Basin. The couple worked hard on the ranch and would raise three children in a two-room cabin.

The trajectory of their lives shifted violently in 1980. A serious automobile accident hospitalized Dave and their two daughters. Diana stayed with them as they convalesced in Great Falls. Meanwhile, the Roens’ friends Chuck and Marie Ridgeway had stepped in to temporarily manage the XZ Ranch. Diana had to return to the ranch occasionally, and on one such trip her sister Gailene traveled with her. Chuck and Marie were both talented painters.



Diana likes high-energy challenge of Quick Finishes. At the 2025 C.M. Russell Stampede Quick Finish in Stanford, she finished and framed *By Still Waters*. | PHOTO COURTESY OF DIANA ROEN



They encouraged Gailene to paint a picture. She whispered to Diana, “I’m afraid to paint.” Diana assured her. “I’ll do one, too, and we’ll do one together.” The sisters painted — the medium was oils — and that is how Diana discovered her love for painting.

While balancing ranch work and raising a family, she purchased an art business from a Joliet, Montana, artist and relocated it to the XZ Ranch. She renamed her newly acquired business *Reflections by Diana*.



Diana and other MMAS artists greet Basin Gallery visitors who are drawn to the legacy and living tradition of Western Art. | CATHY MOSER PHOTO

She took a few painting classes but she's mostly self-taught. The intricate work of painting Western- or Montana-themed pictures on small smooth cuts of agate or metal honed Diana's skills as an artist. Backing each piece with a magnet, she sold these as refrigerator magnets. In time, she could paint one hundred pieces a day and made good money selling them.

Diana eventually transitioned to canvas and paper. The people who visited the XZ Ranch liked Diana's oils and watercolor works, which captured the essence of the sprawling Judith Basin and reflected her Western realism style. At this stage of her career, she sold the magnet-making business but kept ownership of the *Reflections by Diana* name. She continues to paint Montana-themed pictures on agate and metal magnets and sells them in the Basin Gallery, which is operated by the Montana Mid-State Art Society (MMAS).

Founded in 2001, MMAS promotes the work of visual fine artists in the Judith Basin. Member artists take turns staffing the Basin Gallery.

One day when Diana was on duty, her friend's young grandnephew

brought in his conservation service soil collection kit. It so happened that Diana's artist friend, Teresa Wilhelmf, had introduced her to painting with soil. Scooping a bit of soil from the kit, she mixed it with transparent acrylic gesso and water. They painted with soil, and thereon Diana delved into experimenting with soil. Rich in earthy color tones, soil paintings have a slightly three-dimensional texture.

That she has mastered the medium is evident in her painting of iconic Square Butte thrusting upward from the Judith Basin floor. She used soil to build the butte and then switched to watercolor to paint the sky. She has embraced painting with soil, but it is monochromatic, and, after a while, Diana returns to the vibrant colors of oils and watercolors.

Diana welcomes commissions. She likes the versatility they offer, and she likes the challenge of repurposing "old stuff," or as she explained, "I pull out one of my old paintings and rework it by adding something new. That is what I like about art, it's so diverse, and I appreciate every time I sell a painting



FOR INFO

Reflections by Diana

For information about Diana's art, contact her by phone, (406) 566-2336, or email her at reflectionsbydiana@yahoo.com.

The Basin Gallery in Stanford is open Tuesday through Friday from 10:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

See DIANA, next page



DIANA

Continued from previous page

to somebody who wants to look at it and enjoy it.”

Diana exhibits her work at the Judith Basin County Fair. She is also a regular during Western Art Week at the Legends of the West show in Great Falls. The event that honors artists who create Western art is one the nation’s largest.

Another favorite event is the Quick Finish at the C.M. Russell Stampede Weekend in Stanford. In a Quick Finish, artists have one hour to finish a painting and frame it. When last year’s Quick Finish neared, Diana found

herself perplexed about a subject until she asked, “Lord, what should I paint?” Inspiration struck. “The phrase ‘by still waters’ came to my head. I visualized sheep and water,” Diana said. She began researching Judith Basin history, steeped in thousands of sheep and the sheepmen who cared for the flocks. She packed up her brushes, paint, and soil. During the Quick Finish, Diana finished and framed her soil painting, *By Still Waters*.

Whether she’s in sync with a leisurely day of painting in her studio or the fast pace of a Quick Finish, stroke by stroke, dab by dab, Diana illustrates her deep reverence for the people and animals who make the Judith Basin their home. RM

Labor Day CLOSURE

Fergus Electric Cooperative's offices in Lewistown and Roundup will be closed Monday, September 7



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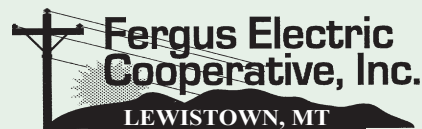
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CONGRATULATIONS!

John Nesselhuf of Lewistown was last month's winner!

*NUMBERS ARE DRAWN MONTHLY



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FERGUS ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE, INC.

84423 US Hwy. 87, Lewistown, MT
59457-2058

Tel: 406-538-3465

Office Hours: 7 a.m. - 5:30 p.m. M-Th.

Website: www.ferguselectric.coop

E-mail: ferguselectric@ferguselectric.coop

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