

F E R G U S

FEATURES

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



MANAGER'S MESSAGE

From Carson Sweeney

THE early morning temperatures signal autumn's return. As the fall colors arrive, we are hopeful that some much-needed moisture will soon follow to bless our service territory.

I want to give you a progress report on what our team has accomplished over the last several months. Our line crews continue to install new electric services to members and replace circuit coordination devices to improve system reliability.

We have contract crews replacing poles in the Straw and Spion Kop service areas. Our consistency in testing poles, conducting line maintenance and year-round tree trimming continues to lower our risk of igniting a wildfire throughout our service territory. The dry and windy conditions certainly made us nervous throughout the last several months.

One of our journeyman linemen in

Roundup, Brock Pyrah, has moved to northwest North Dakota to be closer to coveted fishing areas. He joined the team at Burke-Divide Electric Cooperative, and we wish him the best of luck. I am glad he stayed with the electric cooperative family, and expect he will do well for our friends at Burke-Divide.

We recently hired Tyson Heuman, journeyman lineman, to help fill our open position in Roundup. Tyson brings years of experience in the trade, and is a great addition to the team.

Over the next several months we will be developing capital and expense budgets for 2027. Our largest project in 2027 will be the planned replacement of the existing transmission line from Hilger to Roy. Our engineering team has spent several months working with area landowners to find a reasonable route for the new line. Construction will begin mid-year in 2027, and is

MANAGER'S UPDATE:

Current construction project progress, staffing changes and consistent operating expenses

expected to be completed approximately 12 months later.

Our team has done an excellent job of keeping operating expenses remarkably consistent year-over-year; however, our purchase costs for wholesale power continue to climb. I expect to know more about the increase and rates for 2027 within the next month. Once the board officially approves the new rates, we will communicate the changes to our membership across several platforms to ensure our members are fully informed.

If you have any end-of-season new construction requests, please contact our engineers soon. We would prefer to finish your installation before the ground freezes, so you do not have to wait until spring. Please stop by the office or give me a call if you have any questions about your local electric cooperative. **Happy Co-op Month!**

Youth Tour 2027

WIN A FREE TRIP TO D.C.

YOUTH Tour Essay Contest applications are due Dec. 7.

The essay topic is: If you could build a monument in Washington, D.C., who would you honor and why?

High school sophomores and juniors whose parents are members of Fergus Electric Co-op are eligible for this trip to Washington, D.C. June 17-24, 2027. See www.ferguselectric.coop/youth-washington-essay-contest for more information.

More details in November *Fergus Features*.



Blossoms below the Rimrock

Rimrock Flower Farm, a *full-service floral design studio*

STORY BY CATHY MOSER | FOR FERGUS ELECTRIC

BENEATH the whitish rimrock outcroppings of the Bull Mountains, Andi Thatcher brightens the otherwise monochromatic setting by growing an array of pink, red, yellow, purple, blue and white flowers. It is from those signature outcroppings that she found the name for her farm, Rimrock Flower Farm.

I follow her through rows of familiar garden flowers, like sprightly snapdragons, and varieties new to me. Andi has always loved flowers and revels in growing them. She tells me about the weekend in 2020, when she displayed wrapped bouquets of her fresh-cut garden flowers at a local Farmer's Market. They were such a hit that she was inspired to sell them commercially.

Andi researched the cut flower industry. With most of the farms operating from the western part of the state, she had another reason to found Rimrock Flower Farm on one acre of her property. Describing her business as a "full-service floral design studio," she offers flower design and local delivery services for anniversaries, birthdays, funerals and "everything in between." Wedding floral design is her specialty.

Today more than 100 varieties of flowers grow in succession at Rimrock Flower Farm. "We have three micro-seasons of flowers," Andi tells me. In early spring, cold hardy perennials, such as Ranunculus, Anemones, Snapdragons and Campanula, are the



Andi Thatcher and her daughter, Maren, hold a bucket of Scabiosa. One reason Andi started a flower farm was to instill a work ethic in both Maren and her sister, Reese. Maren cuts flowers for her mother during the cool morning hours. | CATHY MOSER PHOTO.

"backbone" of Rimrock Flower Farm. "They can handle serious weather and give reliable blooms each year," she says. "We also grow and harvest tulips and daffodils. I grow 2,000 tulips and that's a small crop. The big flower farms in the state grow up to 40,000."

The cut-flower industry is a different animal than the traditional flower industry, with which retailers import cut flowers from South America. Imported flowers can be as old as two weeks by the time they are on display. "We cut flowers every day, at a specific stage in their bloom cycle, to

maximize the amount of time they will be fresh and beautiful in a vase," Andi says. "Most flowers go from field to customer within 48 hours." Uniting flower farm growers became a project in 2022. After experiencing a lack of representation in the agriculture industry, Andi and a few other growers founded the Montana Cut Flower Farm Association. "There were many growers across Montana, but no cohesive voice of flower producers," Andi said. She is president of this association.

My tour of the farm coincided with the peak of the second season, which

starts in July and ends in August. One stand of flowers looked identical to yarrow, a familiar native wildflower that grows in mountain meadows and has white blooms. Andi's cultivated version has blooms of yellow-orange, pink and lavender, in addition to the classic white.

Now in her seventh season of growing and selling flowers, Andi reflects that "no two seasons are ever the same, and timing is important. You want a succession of flowers, and you plant for a season, but there are several influencers." Montana's weather extremes are factors. Temperature fluctuations at the farm this year have ranged from 23 degrees in April to over 100 degrees in July.

"A small tight bud can survive the cold and frost, but if it is more developed, it will die," Andi says. "I book out for events a year in advance, but I don't promise anything."

To make her point, she shows me a stand of yarrow. A recent downpour had bent nearly every stem. They are no longer fit for bouquets, which need "straight stems only, no bending," Andi says.

As much as possible, she selects natural methods to control pests and weeds that invade the yarrow and other rows of plants.

"Bindweed is our enemy," she says. "It chokes everything."

Chickens and a rooster wander through the rows and scratch at the ground for pests. The 10-foot fence that



Flowers flourish in profusion at Rimrock Flower Farm through early spring, summer, and fall. | **CATHY MOSER PHOTO.**

her husband, Owen Thatcher, built around the one-acre enclosure protects flowers from deer. Owen has been instrumental in helping Andi realize her dream of founding and operating a successful flower farm.

"His support of the business is what has allowed the success I've had," Andi says. "He is my builder and large project guy for work on the farm, and I lovingly call him 'my best unpaid employee.'"

Owen is a paid employee at Fergus Electric Cooperative, having started there six years ago. He is now foreman of a lineman crew that works out of Roundup.

Andi and I step inside a high tunnel,

also built by Owen. A high tunnel is an unheated, plastic-covered structure similar to a greenhouse. The profusion of flowers within bloom in all sizes, shapes and colors. They include brilliant blue bachelor buttons. Andi tells me that blue is the rarest color in the flower world, and is a popular color for wedding floral designs. Not surprisingly, she targets the wedding season and follows wedding industry trends. Many of the flowers growing in the high tunnel, such as Echinops Thistle, with its globe-like head and steel blue color, reflect wedding floral trends.

Frost might hit Rimrock Flower Farm as early as September, but, typically, the late season runs into October. Varieties such as Amaranth with its striking spikes and Lisianthus with its ruffled petals, Rudbeckia sunflowers and Dahlias, highlight the late-season blooms.

"Each year, more clients tell me they are looking for something grown in Montana," Andi says. "This helps support our farm, our community, our land, and other growers."

Andi sent me home with a bouquet of fresh-cut flowers. For several days afterward, as I wrote this story, the flowers with their brilliant colors and sweet scents cheered me. 



FOR INFO

Rimrock Flower Farm

Contact Andi by email at
rimrockflowerco@gmail.com
 or by phone at (406) 320-1469.
www.rimrockflowerfarm.com

Montana Cut Flower Association:
www.montanacutflowerassociation.org

It's Co-op Month

Celebrating the local communities and members who make cooperatives great

WHEN you hear the word “cooperative,” what comes to mind? As your local electric co-op, we hope you think of Fergus Electric Cooperative.

Regardless of the services they provide, all cooperatives share one fundamental trait: they are led by the people they serve. This simple concept makes a world of difference. Unlike corporations that answer to outside investors, cooperatives are built entirely for their members.

Being locally owned gives us the flexibility to focus on what matters most to our area.

Our goal isn't to maximize profit — it's to deliver value, meet unique local needs and strengthen the communities we call home.

Your membership is what makes this mission possible, keeping us focused on serving the people who matter most. RM

October is Co-op Month

SPREAD THE WORD

Help celebrate Co-op Month! Complete this form and return it to Fergus Electric Cooperative, 84423 U.S. Highway 87, Lewistown, MT 59457 by October 31. Your name will be entered in a drawing for an electric credit of \$50. **Three winners will be contacted in November.**

NAME: _____ PHONE: _____

ADDRESS: _____

IDENTIFY ACCOUNT NUMBER*

WIN A \$35 CREDIT

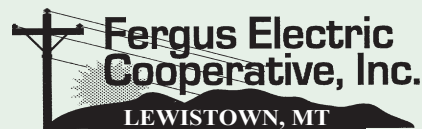
If one of the following account numbers is yours, call Fergus Electric (406-538-3465) and identify yourself and your account number, and you will receive a \$35 credit on next month's statement.

**Account 398376, Account 386992
Account 399052, Account 395079
Account 39099, Account 398558**

CONGRATULATIONS!

Karen King of Roundup was last month's winner!

*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:

Tyson Ruff	406-366-9830
Bret Ophus	406-366-7523
Bret Nellermeoe (Roundup).....	406-939-0636
Carson Sweeney	406-366-0971
Melanie Foran.....	406-462-5650
Scott Olson	406-366-5822
Dan Balster.....	406-366-0975

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

Facebook: www.facebook.com/ferguselectric

Carson Sweeney.....General Manager
Bret Ophus Line Superintendent
Sally Horacek Office Manager
Janine Rife Didier..... Editor

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Fergus Features is an award-winning newsletter.

