

F E R G U S

FEATURES

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

CENTRAL MONTANA CATTLEWOMEN

LOCAL ORGANIZATION DEEPLY ROOTED IN AGRICULTURE

STORY BY CHARLIE DENISON | CONTRIBUTING WRITER

WHEN Geri Stilson insisted on paying her daughter-in-law's dues for the Central Montana CattleWomen, she had no idea how much young Sherry's life would change.

This was more than 30 years ago – 1989 – and Sherry's been at it ever since, keeping the family tradition alive one that started with Geri's mother-in-law Lorna.

"I'm the third Stilson to take the reins of the Central Montana CattleWomen, or the Central Montana CowBelles, as it was known before," Sherry said.

For 18 years Sherry served as president, only recently stepping down. Central Montana CattleWomen are now led by Audrey Olson of Hobson.

"The camaraderie is great," Olson said. "That's one of the reasons I joined. I was relatively new in the area and wanted to find a group who wanted to talk about ranching, muddy boots and manure."

Established in 1958 to support the livestock industry and its environment through communication, education and legislative actions, Central Montana CattleWomen is a group that has continued to stay involved and thrive in a community deeply rooted in agriculture.

"It's our goal to positively educate consumers about the beef industry and beef products," Olson said. "The ag industry feeds the world, not Costco."

The Central Montana CattleWomen work to educate the public in many ways. This includes setting up informational booths at events such as Montana's Longest Table and the Central Montana Fair. They've also worked with the schools.

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Central Montana CattleWomen members are seen in front of their Bright Country Lights display at the fairgrounds a few years ago. Pictured (from left) are Audrey Olson, Connie Ahlgren, Sherry Stilson, Allison Kellom and Christine Weder. | COURTESY PHOTO



MANAGER'S MESSAGE

From Carson Sweeney

Kind and generous donation will lead to many scholarships

FERGUS Electric Cooperative's Board of Directors, management and staff are excited and grateful for the ability to support our local youth with multiple scholarship opportunities throughout the year. Today, I have a few exciting things to share with you pertaining to scholarships. The Susan Knedler and Charlie Guinn estates donated their Fergus Electric capital credits of nearly \$70,000 to help support scholarship opportunities for students within our area. We are so blessed and thankful to receive such a kind and generous donation. As founders and owners of Hi-Heat Industries, Charlie and Susan were supporters of and job creators within our local economy. Their donation will lead to many scholarship opportunities to support continuing education for our youth for years to come.

We recently awarded scholarships to two strong and capable college students from our service territory. I am proud to inform you that Jacy Ayers was selected as the recipient of the \$1,000 Basin Electric Power Cooperative scholarship. Jacy is an impressive young lady and student at Montana State University. Jacy is studying to become a veterinarian with plans to return to Central Montana to support our local agricultural economy. I look forward to seeing Jacy excel from her hard work and all the support she has received from our communities.

Another impressive student that we selected to represent Fergus Electric for a Montana Electric Cooperatives' Association Memorial district scholarship is Elizabeth Hickey. Elizabeth is working on a biochemistry undergraduate degree at Montana State University. Elizabeth is heavily involved in FFA and the CattleWomen's association. Elizabeth has a passion and calling to serve others, and I have no doubt that she will amaze us with her accomplishments.

We received many impressive scholarship applications for these two awards. I can assure you that we have youth within our communities who are intelligent, hard-working contributors to society. I would encourage all our member students to watch for additional Fergus Electric scholarship opportunities in the future.

Your next scholarship opportunity will be at the Fergus Electric annual meeting held June 9th at the Fergus County Trade Center. Last year, every member student in attendance was awarded a scholarship. I look forward to seeing how many member students choose to attend our event this year.

As always, look for scholarship opportunities in this magazine, on our Facebook page, and on our website. RM



Jacy Ayers was selected as the recipient of the \$1,000 Basin Electric Power Cooperative scholarship. She is attending Montana State University. | **COURTESY PHOTO**



Elizabeth Hickey will represent Fergus Electric Cooperative for the Montana Electric Cooperatives' Association district scholarship. She is attending Montana State University. | **COURTESY PHOTO**



The Central Montana CattleWomen have catered the Fergus Electric Cooperative annual meeting for the past four years. Pictured from left to right are Heather Fryer, Allison Kellom, Nancy Schultz, Edee Eickhoff, Jill Wright, Marti Schultz, Audrey Olson, Christine Weder, Sherry Stilson, and Connie Ahlgren (children Johnny, Mason and Wyatt Schultz also pictured). | **COURTESY PHOTO**

CATTLEWOMEN

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“For 20 years we had an ag education day program for third graders,” said Sherry. “The program was set up to reach the younger generation and educate them on the nutritional value of beef.”

This was a beneficial program, and Sherry said she’s grateful for offering it for so many years, however, the educational approach has shifted. The CattleWomen are currently more focused on educating people on how to buy local beef. One way they’ve done this is through Crockpot educational programs, which teach young parents about beef nutrition, how to shop for beef and how to cook a beef-related meal for their families. The classes were made possible through the Beef Checkoff Program, a national marketing and research program designed to increase the demand for beef at home and abroad.

“Beef Checkoff does so much for our industry,” said Connie Ahlgren of Grass Range, a 20-year Central Montana CattleWomen member and former Montana CattleWomen president.

In hopes to further educate the public, Central Montana CattleWomen also host other beef-related programs both in person and over social media, often in collaboration with other organizations. Locally they work regularly with the Boys and Girls Club of Lewistown, be it the Festival of Trees or the 30 Days of Beef campaign.

“We’ve donated money to the program, and also have some representatives who help put beef facts up on the Boys and Girls Club social media sites,” Sherry said. “This all ties into our goal to educate the community on how to or where to buy beef.”

The Central Montana CattleWomen also host a cheeseburger program emphasizing nutrition. Such presentations



Audrey Olson, left, and Connie Ahlgren share educational information about beef during a recent Montana’s Longest Table event in Lewistown. | **COURTESY PHOTO**

are evolving, as the group is working harder to spread facts about beef. Fortunately, they have allies assisting them with the necessary resources.

“The Beef Council has been especially helpful,” said Central Montana CattleWomen member Marti Schultz. “We refer to them a lot. The Beef Council has also influenced the projects we use to creatively get our word out.”

Like Sherry Stilson, Schultz was also encouraged to join the Central Montana CattleWomen thanks to her mother-in-law, Nancy Schultz of Grass Range.

“That was 12 years ago now,” Marti said. “For me, personally, it’s been great having a group of like-minded women to get together with once in a while. A majority of us are ranch wives, and this is our outlet. It’s a great avenue for me. I live in a house with three sons and a husband, so it’s great having a group of women to turn to.”

Secretary Megan Green of Hilger also appreciates the social aspect.

“I joined because my husband is on a whole bunch of different boards that have activities, so I needed something for me to do,” she said.

Being involved with Central Montana CattleWomen goes beyond events, especially these days, as marketing is constant. For example, the CattleWomen Facebook page regularly shares eye-catching graphics with beef-related facts.

“There are so many myths and misconceptions out there about beef,” Green said. “We’re trying to get some truth

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LINEMAN APPRECIATION DAY

APRIL 18, 2022

YOU'VE GOT FRIENDS IN HIGH PLACES



Fergus Electric Cooperative Linemen Mark Schwomeyer and Dakota Wahl prepare to connect the service wires to the transformer. | PHOTO BY LOUIE HOULD



Fergus Electric Cooperative Linemen tie in a conductor on a freshly set pole between Bohemian Corner and Grass Range in February. | PHOTO BY LOUIE HOULD

#ThankALineworker

CATTLEWOMEN

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back in the mix.”

The Central Montana CattleWomen also go the retail route with their marketing.

“We have cards, brand napkins and T-shirts available at Marigold Market,” Marti said. “Marigold’s owner Shanna Swanson has been very supportive.”

Sherry has found many people in the community are supportive and appreciative of the efforts made by the CattleWomen, and that’s one of the reasons the group has sustained its success.

“We didn’t have very many members

when I started as president, and it was a challenge at times to hold the group together, but the community support has come a long way, and I’m excited about what we’ve been able to accomplish, and what we’ll be able to do moving forward,” Sherry said.

There are currently more than 20 members of Central Montana CattleWomen, and, according to Olson, they are always looking for more. Those interested in joining can get in touch through the Central Montana CattleWomen Facebook page.

“We welcome anyone passionate about the livestock industry,” Green said.

“You don’t have to be a ranch wife,” Marti added. RM

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CONGRATULATIONS!

Dorothy Fischer of Lavina was last month’s winner!

*NUMBERS ARE DRAWN MONTHLY



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