

# F E R G U S

## FEATURES

Member Newsletter ♦ Fergus Electric Cooperative, Inc., Lewistown, MT ♦ [www.ferguselectric.coop](http://www.ferguselectric.coop)

# STEPPING OUT OF HER COMFORT ZONE

## Anna Morris finds a home at Hoven

Story and photos by **CHARLIE DENISON** | contributing writer

**A**FTER 14 years doing parts, service, warranty and sales with the same Case and New Holland dealer, Anna Morris was ready for a change.

“If you don’t get out of your comfort zone and challenge yourself, you’ll never grow,” she said.

Ready for a management role, Morris took her own advice, stepping out of her routine and into a new more demanding position.

The transition started with a conversation Morris had with Sean Hoven, general manager of Hoven Equipment – a dealer based in Great Falls that sells New Holland, AGCO, Bobcat, MacDon, Vermeer and other brands. Morris was already familiar with the company, as she often found herself competing against it. Now, however, she saw an opportunity to help herself, help Hoven and help the central Montana community.

“At the time of our conversation, Hoven didn’t have any intention of expanding past Great Falls,” Morris said. “They didn’t realize central Montana was being underserved.”

This opened up the perfect opportunity for Morris. She wanted something different, but she didn’t want to leave central Montana, nor did she want to



The Hoven Equipment crew stands out front of their Lewistown location. From left, Roy Bunn, Matt Bruchez, Zane Williams, Andrew Passow, Pete Anderson, KC Bowen, Matt Stark and Anna Morris. | **PHOTO BY CHARLIE DENISON**

lose her customers.

“They’d become more than customers,” she said. “They’d become family.”

In June 2017, Morris officially started with Hoven. Mechanic Matt Bruchez joined her soon after, and a

location for the business was established at 77335 U.S. Highway 87, just off the Truck Bypass, near Lewistown.

“We rented the front side of the

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## MANAGER'S MESSAGE

From Carson Sweeney

**T**HE Fergus Electric Cooperative Board of Directors and executive leadership team met recently with National Rural Utilities Cooperative Finance Corporation (CFC) professionals for a three-day strategic planning session. CFC is one of our long-time partners and has helped facilitate our strategic planning session for several years.

The purpose of this session was to achieve consensus on the goals that we will focus on implementing throughout the next three years. The group was challenged to identify the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats that are currently impacting our cooperative and the electric utility industry. We reviewed historic infrastructure replacements, investment in total utility plant and member growth from our new construction installations.

Throughout the session, we discussed our current financial position and what we may anticipate for expenses and revenues across the next few years. I appreciated the engagement level and consideration each of the seven directors gave to every topic we covered. Your board of directors is invested in the future of the cooperative and it strives to meet the current and future needs of our membership.

### Setting three-year goals

After three days of strategizing and number crunching, we concluded the session with a plan and a straightforward set of goals.

I would consider our first goal to be more of a standard performance expectation than a goal. We will build upon our already strong safety culture and preserve open lines of communica-


# STRATEGIC PLANNING

tion with our dedicated group of employees.

Second, it is our goal to work to maintain stable rates while consistently retiring capital credits to our membership. Fergus Electric members haven't experienced a rate increase since 2011, and we are working diligently on your behalf to maintain rates at existing levels.

Our third goal is to invest in system maintenance and infrastructure replacement. We have a robust line patrol program, and we are in the process of developing a vegetation management plan and pole-testing schedule. Our engineers are planning for the replacement of legacy underground cable in 2022, and we are currently working with members on the route of a new transmission line from Hilger to Winifred for construction in 2023. Our fourth goal is to fully utilize our new advanced metering infrastructure system to its full potential. We have spent several years installing the new system, and we are excited to make use of the many benefits inherent in this new technology.

Our final goal is to invest in our employees and members in the Roundup area by building a new metal shop with adequate equipment storage, warehouse and office space. We are currently in the design and planning phase of this project, and intend to bring it to the membership for a vote at the co-op's annual meeting, scheduled for June 9, 2022.

We appreciate your continued trust in us. We commit a great deal of time and energy into planning for and working toward providing reliable, safe and affordable energy services to the communities we serve. I look forward to sharing more of our work in future messages. 



## PRESIDENTS' DAY CLOSURE

Fergus Electric Cooperative's office will be closed  
on Monday, February 21



# HOVEN

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building [from Don Gregory], and turned it into an office and a space for our growing staff," she said. Staff currently consists of two full-time mechanics (Bruchez and Matt Stark), office administrator KC Bowen, parts representative Zane Williams, service assistant Andrew Passow and two part-time employees (Roy Bunn and Pete Anderson), who help run parts and deliver equipment.

Business is good, Morris said, but it hasn't been easy, as there have been more obstacles than anticipated. Not even three years into her new endeavor the coronavirus pandemic broke out. Then a drought, which persists still.

But that's agriculture for you. It's impossible to anticipate what's to come. When it comes down to it, Morris said, those who are most resilient are the ones who can best weather the storm.

Brian Hoven, Hoven Equipment founder, is an example of someone familiar with the struggle, as he and his wife Barbara went through their share of tribulation after they opened in 1978.

"Brian said if he had known what the next 10 years would bring, he'd have never done it," Morris said. "Droughts in '85 and '88 pretty much bankrupted them."

Such challenges, however, were not insurmountable, as Brian and Barbara found a way.

"In '88 they were able to get a Small Business Administration (SBA) disaster loan to give them a chance to rebuild," Morris said. "They were very fortunate. Before the drought they were selling a lot of combines and big iron. They were on recourse for all those equipment loans."

Morris is also one who demonstrates resilience, as she continues to move the business forward and still has her eyes set on expansion, despite today's unfavorable circumstances.



Hoven Equipment's Lewistown location manager Anna Morris enjoys her job. She's grateful for her team and excited to continue serving the central Montana community.

**| PHOTO BY CHARLIE DENISON**

It's this kind of resolve that keeps Morris – and the central Montana community – moving forward.

"In a community like this it takes all of us to do everything," she said. "That's why I serve as vice chair for the Fergus Conservation Board. I do this not only to get a better understanding of NRCS and DNR, but also to better serve my customers."

Morris is also president of the local Tough Enough to Wear Pink organization, which raises money to help central Montana women and men fight against cancer. Through this program Morris has seen just how giving the community can be, and it never ceases to amaze her.

"For the past 11 years with Tough Enough to Wear Pink, I've been blown away by the generosity of the community," she said. "We couldn't do what we do without it."

Morris also serves as a state delegate for the Central Montana Republican Committee.

"This is an important avenue that a lot of people don't want to get involved in," she said. "The only way we are going to keep our community, our state and our country on track – or

change the things we don't like about it – is by getting involved. That's also why I'm involved with Save the Cowboy... I want to preserve agriculture in central Montana. There's no use for me if agriculture is gone. The amount of money that will be offset and lost, I'll never sell in lawnmowers and small utility tractors."

## **Stepping into a new role**

Moving into management has its challenges, Morris said, but it also has its rewards.

"When you go into a management role versus a sales position or a parts position, you have to look out for the well-being of your staff," she said. "I have to keep pushing myself to grow the business and make it better because my staff relies on me."

The same goes for her customers.

"I have an obligation to take care of the farms here like I have in the past, and, if I sell them equipment, I need to be there to service it," she said. "Anybody can sell equipment. You have to provide customer service in order to keep repeat customers, and

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# Annual Meeting set for June 9

**I**n accordance with Fergus Electric Cooperative Bylaws, Article IV, Section 4.3, the committee for selecting board candidates will be appointed, and will meet to nominate candidates for the Board of Trustees.

In addition to candidates nominated by the committee, any 15 or more members acting together from District 1 (Rural Lewistown) or District 6 (Ryegate, Harlowton areas) may make other nominations by petition not less than 30 days prior to the annual meeting. Such nominations are to be posted where the committee list is posted. No other method of nominating candidates for the trustee is permitted.

In accordance with Fergus Electric

Cooperative Bylaws, Article III, Section 3.6, each member shall be entitled to only one vote upon each matter submitted to a vote at a meeting of the members. In the absence of the member holding a single membership, the spouse may vote.

Directors serve a term of three years and are elected by ballot at the annual meeting of the membership. Candidates must have their principal residence in the district from which they are selected.

If you are interested in running for a position on the board, watch for meeting dates and places in local newspapers, or call the office at (406) 538-3465 for more information. RM

## HOVEN

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that's one of the things we do well."

This is easier said than done, especially considering current supply issues with parts and equipment. This being the case, Morris and her team try to plan ahead and forecast what their customers will need.

"I've been doing this for 18 years, and that gives me the opportunity to look back and project what our growth and our need is going to be for our customers," she said. "Being in the heart of customer service so long you really get to know your customer and understand what their needs are."

Morris thrives on this kind of attention-to-detail with customers. She tries to treat each customer how she would like to be treated, and tries to go above and beyond. This has been her philosophy with Hoven since day one.

"The first tractor I sold we assembled and put the loader on in my backyard," she said. "That's another reason I love this community so much. I couldn't have done that without the networking that has taken place here,

without neighbors stepping up to let us use their forklift. This is an example of how so many of us in this industry have the same passion: to take care of each other. That's why we do this, and that's why we live here."

There will be challenges ahead, but Morris remains optimistic, and she looks forward to working with her crew, and with the community, not only to sustain business but sustain the community's way of life.

"It really comes down to how do we preserve agriculture in Montana, our way of life here in central Montana, and how do we make it accessible for the next generation?" she said. "One thing I can say is that those of us in agriculture are resilient people. We've been through droughts, fires and grasshoppers before, and we'll live through this. Agriculture as a whole is not going away; we're becoming more efficient with less people to feed more people."

For more information on Hoven Equipment, call the local office at (406) 538-3919 or email Morris at [anna@hovenequipment.com](mailto:anna@hovenequipment.com). RM

*Editor's note: Hoven Equipment Company has been a member of Fergus Electric Co-op since October 2017.*

## IDENTIFY ACCOUNT NUMBER\*

### WIN A \$32.50 CREDIT

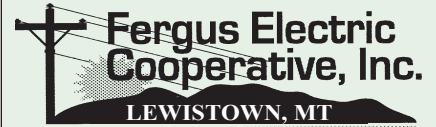
If one of the following account numbers is yours, call Fergus Electric (406-538-3465) and identify yourself and your account number and you will receive a \$32.50 credit on next month's statement.

**Account 387619, Account 395596  
Account 395374, Account 22250  
Account 23550, Account 396176**

### CONGRATULATIONS!

**Steve Reesor** of Lewistown was last month's winner.

\*NUMBERS ARE DRAWN MONTHLY



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### 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 .....	406-366-3374
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Fergus Electric is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

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*Fergus Features is an award-winning newsletter.*