

F E R G U S

FEATURES

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



Having sold his business, Mark Fabian is excited to ease into retirement by building custom bikes for himself and others. | **PHOTO BY CHARLIE DENISON**

LABOR OF LOVE



Mark Fabian turns career skills into passion project

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

RAISED in the realm of machining and welding, Lewistown native Mark Fabian has found a way to apply the trade he's most familiar with toward his favorite hobby: building bicycles.

"I just wanted to build my own frames," Mark said, "so I bought a frame jig, read up on how to use it,

watched examples on YouTube, and built my first frame. It wasn't real complicated, but it wasn't real easy."

A mountain biker since 1985, Mark said he gets a kick out of building his own frames, especially since it pays tribute to the skills he's been crafting practically since birth.

"I basically got started in the shop

when I was 5 years old," he said. "A lot of that time I was just screwing off, but being around it from that young of an age was a big deal. I was learning, even when I didn't realize it. You absorb more than you think."

And Mark absorbed a lot in the

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MANAGER'S MESSAGE

From Carson Sweeney

SINCE 1987, the Fergus Electric Roundup shop and office have been in the old Railroad Depot building on the south end of town at 102 Railroad Ave East. Throughout the years, our Roundup employees have utilized the 1908 building and lot as best they could.

The Roundup area has seen strong member growth and we expect that trend to continue. To keep pace with member growth and our commitment to respond to member outages 24/7, we have increased our Roundup operation to 5 full time employees. The Railroad Avenue property is no longer adequate to meet our equipment and material needs. Indoor space is limited and only allows parking for two small trucks.

The limited space doesn't currently provide sufficient material storage or convenient member access. Members visit the Lewistown office daily to purchase materials. They tell us that they appreciate this convenience. We

would like to provide our Roundup members that same level of service by offering them the sale of wire and material too.

Nearly 20 years ago, Fergus Electric purchased 5.7 acres approximately 1.5 miles east of Roundup on the south side of Highway 12. The property was purchased for use as a pole storage yard with the intent of eventually adding a shop building with office space to meet our business needs. As discussed during our 2021 annual meeting, we would like to work towards developing a site plan and building layout that meets our operational requirements as well as our member's needs.

We would like to provide a space within a new building that would accommodate Fergus Electric board meetings and meetings of small groups within the community. Our board would utilize the space to conduct their monthly business meeting in Roundup a few times each

Membership input requested

year. Doing so would help the board members stay engaged in the community and provide area members with an opportunity to connect with their member-elected board members.

We are committed to providing reliable service to all our members at a fair and stable price. To continue meeting that high bar, I believe we should invest in our Roundup employees and membership with a new shop. A shop with adequate space to protect our investment in equipment and to meet the needs of a growing membership. Your thoughts on this project matter. I would like your input on whether material sales would provide value to the Roundup area and membership. I would also like your input on Fergus Electric providing room within a new office for board meetings and small gatherings. Please call me or stop by our Lewistown office to visit. I look forward to hearing from you. RM

A HELPING HAND

Fergus Electric Cooperative crews helped neighboring cooperative, McCone Electric, rebuild its transmission lines.



Write an essay, win a trip to Washington, D.C.

PLANs are underway for the 2022 Youth to Washington Tour and Essay Contest. Read about the Youth Tour in this month's Rural Montana magazine. Fergus Electric's application deadline is November 19th. For additional information, call Erika at (406) 538-3465.





FABIAN

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shop, largely by observing his father, Bob Fabian, who established Fabian Machine & Welding in 1958, and managed it for 30 years. Upon Bob's retirement in 1988, Mark stepped up and has managed the family business ever since. This July, however, he sold it and is now easing into retirement.

"I'll have more time to do some of my own projects, such as building bike frames," he said.

Mark admits he's "strictly an amateur frame builder," and that's the way he'd like to keep it.

"I don't build frames for a living, and don't plan on building frames for a living. I do it for fun," he said. "Guys who do it for a living make 100 frames a year. I make about five. It takes time, and I don't want it to be a job; I want

to enjoy it. That's why I only plan on doing three this winter. I want to ski, too. It can't interfere with skiing."

Although the shop can still get busy with machine work, drivelines and hydraulics, Mark said he is pleased with the balance he has right now and is excited about diving further into this new endeavor, which — despite all his machining and welding experience — still has a learning curve. The challenge, he said, is one of the elements that makes the process most rewarding.

"I hope I never stop learning," he said.

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Sharing the skills

In addition to continually educating himself, Mark also hopes to educate his custom bike clients. One of the best ways to do this, he said, is to make frame-building an interactive experience.

"One of the things I like to do is have the customer do as much work as they can," Mark said. "Making it more hands-on makes it more fun for me, and for the client. For example, I show the customer how to cut tubing and then I let them cut tubing. I think almost everybody I've done a bike for has done something for their bicycle."

How much or how little involvement in the process is completely up to the client, Mark added. There is no pressure.

"I have one client who did nearly all of it," Mark said. "He brazed and filed the frame to give it a nice, smooth radius. That takes a lot of work and a lot of hand finishing."

Ultimately, Mark said he just loves to share the feeling that comes with riding something you played a part in creating.

A GOOD TRADE

WHEN Mark Fabian reflects on Fabian Machine & Welding, he can't help but feel tremendously grateful. He got to watch his father — who many considered a legend in the field — challenge himself constantly. Whether it be building a truck, a snow cap, restoring a 1914 Harley Davidson motorcycle or sculpting an elk, Mark saw his father perfect his craft.

All the moments they shared have meant even more since Bob's passing in 2017, Mark said. There is much pride, and there is also sorrow.

For Mark, there is one project of Bob's that stands out more than any other.

"My dad made a two-foot-tall sculpture of St. Francis," he said. "He carved it out of a block of steel and made the whole darn thing. It's unreal. I'm blown away every time I see it."

Mark said his dad's greatness continues to inspire him and always serves as a reminder not to take the skills he's developed for granted.

"The trade is a good trade, and it has served my family well," Mark said.



Mark's father Bob Fabian sculpted this portrayal of St. Francis. It's the piece that means the most to Mark and continually inspires him.

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This bike with a black frame is one Mark built that he rides the most. "It's fun to ride what you make," he said. "You just can't help it." | PHOTO BY CHARLIE DENISON

FABIAN

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"It's fun to ride what you make," he said. "You just can't help it."

Mark is reminded of this whenever he takes one of his own custom-made bikes for a ride.

He first felt the thrill with Raven, a frame he built around 2013 that he put to the test on the Continental Divide.

"That's what really got me started," he said. "I've done rides on the Divide with Raven, with my black bike, with my purple bike and some others. I've done some pretty long rides with bikes I built. I'd say I've put around 1,500 miles on the Raven alone. It's just really exciting to ride something you created, especially at first."

The rides, he said, have made all the intensive labor that goes into the

bikes worthwhile.

"By the end all you want to do is get on the bike and ride, so, when you do, it's a blast," he said.

The Raven frame is retired now, but Mark regularly rides his own custom bikes. Doing so fills him with a sense of accomplishment.

But as pleased as he is with these bikes, Mark said he will keep striving to make something even better.

"My plan is to make one out of titanium," he said. "I just haven't gotten that far, but I'm getting there...slowly but surely."

Although Mark is not accepting clients at this time, he is happy to visit about setting something up in the next year.

"Come by and we'll figure out what you want," he said. "We'll set the geometry up on the frame jig, sip on some beer, listen to some music and just enjoy the evening." 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 \$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 395984, Account 368334
Account 395099, Account 321219
Account 384369, Account 396823**

No winner to report for last month.

*NUMBERS ARE DRAWN MONTHLY

Fergus Electric Cooperative, Inc.

LEWISTOWN, MT

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	406-366-3374
Bret Ophus	406-366-7523
Bret Nelleremoe (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
Dale Rikala..... Line Superintendent
Sally Horacek Office Manager
Janine Rife Didier Editor

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