

F E R G U S

FEATURES

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

Central Montana Museum in Lewistown brings local history to life

Story and photos by

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Contributing Writer

When entering the Central Montana Museum, the visitor steps back in time to a local "Frontierland" for all ages.

Be it outlaws such as Rattlesnake Jake, Kid Curry and Calamity Jane, or Metis red river carts and 19th century wedding dresses, this staple of Lewistown does not disappoint. Once inside, it's easy to get lost in its astonishing history, and that's exactly how the board members planned it.

Shirley Barrick, Nancy Watts, Betty Westburg and Dennis Borud are four of the 15 members particularly instrumental in making the museum what it is today: an interpretive celebration of the past.

Barrick, a board member for almost 30 years, has a heart for restoration, making it a life goal to preserve the history of the area. With a background as a student and educator in one-room schoolhouses, Barrick is particularly passionate about the schoolhouse dis-



Volunteer tea time: from left, board members Dennis Borud, Nancy Watts, Betty Westburg and Shirley Barrick pretend to have tea in one of the displays.



Torosaurus

play, which she helped put together with Westburg.

"[Westburg] is our superb decorator," Barrick said. "She gets everything looking nice."

In the last eight years, Westburg, Borud and others have given the museum a significant makeover, taking advantage of recent additions to the space.

"Beginning in 2009, we started reorganizing everything chronologically, making more displays and creating more interpretations," Westburg said.

This may sound like a lot of work, but not for these board members; they call it "fun."

"It's like a giant playhouse," Westburg said. "I love it."

This labor of love has paid off, as visitation continues to rise at Central Montana Museum. In 2016, more than 2,000 people came to visit, including

people from as many as 12 other countries.

What is it that attracts them?

There is no one answer, as people tend to get excited over different elements.

Barrick said, however, that most people are particularly impressed by the massive Torosaurus skull.

"There are only four of these that have been found in the world," she said, "and this one is the largest."

Discovered in Valentine (60 miles northeast of Lewistown) in July of 2001, the Torosaurus skull was donated to the Museum of the Rockies by Merl and Gladys Busenbark. The replica, produced by the Museum of the Rockies, was given to the Central Montana Museum by the Busenbarks.

The Torosaurus, a three-horned Cretaceous Period dinosaur, is one of

Continued on page 5



MANAGER'S MESSAGE

From Scott Sweeney

New development in community solar plans

When we originally talked about community solar with our members, Southern Montana, our power supplier at the time, was working its way through the final stages of bankruptcy. Fergus Electric Cooperative was preparing to obtain its power supply from another power supplier, Basin Electric Power Cooperative (Basin) and Powder River Energy Corporation (PRECorp).

In 2016, Powder River Energy Corporation (PRECorp) joined with Fergus Electric and Tongue River to form Members 1st, a new power supply cooperative. Effective January 1, 2017, Fergus Electric began receiving power supply from Members 1st by way of Basin.

Fergus Manager Scott Sweeney spoke to the group on the co-op's proposed community solar project.



When the Board of Directors and I researched future power suppliers, we learned that Basin and Members 1st could provide Fergus Electric with numerous options, incentives and opportunities that would benefit our cooperative in many ways for years to come.

Last fall, in preparing to become an active member of Members 1st and Basin, Fergus Electric completed a renewable energy purchase application describing our plans for a solar array to be constructed at our co-op's headquarters in 2017. Completing the application did not obligate Fergus Electric to build a solar array, instead, under the conditions of the application, Basin agreed that Fergus Electric would receive an incentive renewable energy purchase rate schedule if a solar array up to 100 kilowatts was constructed during the year 2017.

Essentially, Basin agreed to pay Fergus Electric for the power generated from the solar array, and in turn not bill the co-op for the power sales that Basin loses on the amount of solar energy generated. The rate incentive from Basin for Fergus Electric committing to completing a renewable energy (solar) project in 2017 has provided the co-op with options deserving consideration for additional research and development.

Continued on page 6



Approximately 90 interested parties heard several presentations. Darren Crawford (center back) of MSU Fergus Extension served as master of ceremonies. Laurie Lohrer (back right) chairs the Central Montana Resource Council.

TIMELY TOPICS



If the lights go out, so do the linemen

Vangie McConnell, Editor

Every year, we take the time to thank our extraordinary lineworkers who dedicate their lives to keeping the lights on in our local communities. Twelve linemen maintain 4,254 miles of line in Fergus Electric's 12-county service territory.

Entire staff keeps the co-op running smoothly

We depend on our entire staff to keep Fergus Electric running smoothly, but on April 10 we honor all lineworkers who often find themselves in dangerous and challenging situations, so our lives may be a little bit brighter and safer every day. These brave men repair damaged lines and maintain critical infrastructure for our communities. Without their hard work and commitment to the job, our co-op would not thrive. No matter the time — day or night, weekday or weekend — if the lights go out, so do they.

Perhaps you have seen them raising their bucket trucks in howling winds and torrential rains, or in freezing, icy conditions. They work around the clock near high-voltage power lines until electricity is restored to every member in our co-op community.

Write a thank you note, enjoy a snack

To express appreciation for the work linemen do, notecards will be available in Fergus Electric's lobby the week of April 3–7. The cards will be shared at the "Monday Morning Meeting" on April 10. To help celebrate "Thank a Lineman Day", cookies and coffee will be available at the co-op.

From Straight Talk



Board member Shirley Barrick, a former one-room-school student and educator, was instrumental in arranging the above schoolhouse scene. Dennis Borud organized the military display, which features an impressive assortment of uniforms, firearms and other artifacts.

Central Montana Museum

Continued from page 3

the first things a visitor sees when stepping through the doors. Placed in the center between the wedding dresses and the Metis wagon, it's often surprising to first-timers and lets them know they're in for a treat.

In the next room over, there are replicas of a little town, with a saloon, a mercantile and even a dentist's office. Fergus County founder James Fergus' horse-racing buggy is parked in the center of this small town set. Donated by Bonnie Russell, the buggy came to Montana in 1862, and arrived in Fergus County in 1880.

Then there is the military display.

Borud, a Vietnam veteran appointed to the board in 2012, has made it his mission to make this section respectable.

"I want people to see the leggings, the boots, everything a soldier had to have to survive," he said. "When people look at these uniforms, they get an idea of what it was like for the soldier."

Uniforms are one thing, but thanks to generous community members who have donated all kinds of memorabilia through the years, Borud also has German and Japanese uniforms and ammunition from World War II, firearms and other equipment from World War I and other impressive artifacts, including gas masks and a Norden bombsight.

"The Americans developed this bombsight for accuracy of bombing during World War II," Borud said. "They used to have some of them

stored at the municipal airport here in town."

Borud said he is proud of the amount of war memorabilia people have donated to the museum.

"Our earliest uniform is from the Spanish-American War, which took place in 1898," he said. "The only thing we don't really have is good French and Indian War representation. We have some firearms, too, and are always looking for more. We've got a lot of uniforms. In fact, we have more than we can display."

That's a good problem to have, as it means people are donating "too much."

"There is something always coming in," Westburg said. "It's the funniest thing: people say 'I was on my way to the dump, and I thought of you,' so they come by and usually give us something we can use."

Such community support is critical, as the museum depends on contribu-

tions in order to keep the doors open.

That's their goal, and the dedicated board members will make sure it remains the case.

"We want to keep the history alive," Westburg said. "If we don't, it will be lost to younger generations."

"I believe it was Abraham Lincoln who said 'if we don't have any interest in our past, we'll have little regard for our future.' We don't want that to be the case here," Borud added. "We can't let that happen. I've always been intrigued with how this country was formed, and I want to do my part to share it. It's always been a fascination of mine."

The museum opens the weekend of May 27 and closes Sept. 9. Those interested in checking it out during the off-season can call Shirley Barrick at 535-9289 or email cmha@middrivers.com to set up a tour.

For more information, go to <http://centralmtmuseum.weebly.com>.

Familiar faces in new places

Brian Godbey was promoted to serviceman/meter technician. He will assist meter technician Kerby Durbin in Fergus Electric's metering department and learn about the current automated meter reading devices (turtle meters) in



Brian Godbey

preparation for Durbin's eventual retirement. Durbin and Godbey will learn a new metering system, which the co-op plans to purchase in 2018. Fergus Electric will join with Powder River Energy Corporation (PRECorp) to solicit bids.

MANAGER'S MESSAGE

Continued from page 4

Opportunity to expand solar array

It has been our goal to not have the community solar project add expense to our budget, but rather be self-funding. However, in consideration of Basin's offer, which was not available to us when we first discussed community solar with the membership, I felt it necessary to calculate what impact a larger-scale solar array might have on the co-op.

If Fergus Electric should opt to expand its solar project beyond sales of solar panels to our members and self-finance a portion of the solar array, the commitment term for the renewable energy purchase incentive rate is from January 1, 2017, through December 31, 2042 — 25 years.

Fergus Electric estimates that the array will have at least a 20-year lifespan. Our calculations indicate that if Fergus Electric finances 50 kW, based on Basin's rates, the payback will be approximately nine years.

After the payback period, Fergus Electric Cooperative's power bill will be reduced by approximately \$15,000 per year for the remainder of years left in the Renewable Energy Purchase Rate agreement. Over a 10-year period, Fergus Electric will save about \$150,000 on its power bills from Members 1st through Basin.

Credit for member-owned community solar

Increasing the size of the co-op's community solar project will give more co-op members the opportunity to purchase solar panels from the co-op.

Any member who purchases individual or multiple solar panels will see a reduction on their monthly power bill for approximately 20 years. And the more panels a member purchases, the greater the reduction amount will be for the member. We expect to have the price of solar panels and other associated information ready to report next month.

The way the community solar energy will be calculated is that the total output (kWh) of solar energy generated in a month will be divided by the total number of solar panels in the array. That amount will be multiplied times the number of panels the member has purchased, and the member's power bill will be reduced accordingly.

As of now, we expect to bid the project in the spring, with it being built in the summer and in operation soon thereafter.

Fergus Electric Cooperative members who are interested in taking part in the co-op's community solar project can complete and return the Enrollment Application form found under Energy Information on our website, www.ferguselectric.coop and we will add your name to the signup list. Solar panels will be sold on a first-come, first-served basis.

Identify Account Number*

Win a \$32.50 credit

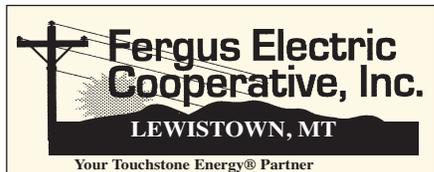
If one of the following account numbers is yours, call Fergus Electric (406-538-3465) and identify yourself and your account number.

**Account 170100 • Account 390585
Account 379588 • Account 390538
Account 114500 • Account 386456**

You will receive a \$32.50 credit on next month's statement.

Last month's winners were Darrel Gerer of Denton and Carl Seilstad of Roy.

**Numbers are drawn randomly.*



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	406-535-5192
Guy Johnson	406-366-9170
Scott Sweeney.....	406-538-7218
Don Criswell (Roundup)	406-366-3465
Monte Obert.....	406-425-1288
Melanie Foran.....	406-462-5650

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THEY'VE GOT ALL THE RIGHT TOOLS TO GET THE JOB DONE.

Thank a Lineman