

F E R G U S

FEATURES

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



MANAGER'S MESSAGE

From Carson Sweeney

Enduring changes during pandemic

AS I write this message, it is 14 °F outside and snow drifts stand taller than the fence. Fall has been blanketed in white and election season has thankfully passed.

Instead of being bombarded by election advertisements, we are being overwhelmed by COVID-19 cases. I am thankful to those who are working the front lines of this pandemic, helping individuals strive to overcome the virus.

At Fergus Electric Cooperative we have a few employees missing work each day as they quarantine from exposure or to care for a sick loved one. Our doors are still closed to walk-in traffic, and we are each wearing a face mask while interacting within the building. Our thoughts and prayers are with everyone throughout this winter as collectively we look for light at the end of the tunnel.

New construction work and meter installations

At Fergus Electric we continue to have a very busy new construction schedule, even as snow covers the landscape.

The operations team is working hard to complete each project amidst muddy or frozen terrain. Our busy new construction work has bumped the schedule of our AMI meter project, so we are looking to partner with local electricians to help us change out the

remaining 5,500 meters.

Our existing meter-reading communication system is outdated and unsupported. Each month our employees work hard to help the existing system limp along.

The new meters and communication system have been functioning well, and we look forward to installing them for each member.

As local electricians help us change out these meters, you will likely see them near your meter base and throughout our service territory. Please do not hesitate to say hello or ask them any questions. You can also call Fergus Electric as questions arise at 406-538-3465.

Extended line patrol and maintenance work

Soon we will be adding more to our plate as we pilot an extended line patrol program. Almost instinctually, all our employees patrol line on an ongoing basis. It seems to be built into their DNA. Even when traveling through another co-op's service area, they find themselves patrolling line. It's automatic. Patrolling line is important.

We plan to take our current line patrolling program a step further by beginning at a substation and systematically working outwards, inspecting each pole and noting maintenance and vegetation issues.

The intent is to identify maintenance issues on the line crew's iPads and correct them proactively to reduce outages our members would have likely experienced.

The line patrol work will begin at our Ruby Gulch Substation. We will inspect all three circuits in that area and then do the same at the other 29 substations on an ongoing basis. Throughout the inspections our employees will identify tree and vegetation issues for future trimming and removal.

We expect to have our tree trimming contractor in Roy this month. They will likely spend three weeks trimming and removing trees from around our power lines, as well as the service wires to your electric meter.

Once we have completed the tree trimming in our town areas, we will move to the rural areas identified during our line patrol inspections. As this maintenance work is being completed, please let us know if you have any questions or concerns.

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!

I believe as much as we might like, 2020 will be a year we will not soon forget. As we look toward welcoming a new year, all of us at Fergus Electric wish you a Merry Christmas, and a very healthy and happy holiday season! 

Lewistown RENTAL

Specialty and agricultural equipment rental shop continues to thrive

Story and photos by **CHARLIE DENISON** | Contributing Writer

THIRTY years ago Clyde Merwin moved to Lewistown with high hopes.

“The implement store I was working at in northeast Montana closed down, and I got offered a job down here,” he said. “I was immediately fond of the area and the people. They were down to earth, friendly and welcoming from the beginning.”

Clyde, whose background is primarily in agriculture, worked at implement dealerships in a variety of roles.

“I worked in the parts department, I worked in the shop and also gained some sales experience,” he said. “This background taught me a lot about customer service and product knowledge. Having some mechanical experience is an advantage, too.”

After a few years of selling equipment in Lewistown, Clyde took an interest in Lewistown Rental, then run by Ken Adams.

In 2007, Clyde purchased the business from Ken, who helped ensure a smooth transition.

Since then the business has grown significantly.

“We only had around three employees at that time,” Clyde said. “Now we have 12, plus the business has expanded to Havre and Glasgow. Having these additional locations really helps us out with the sharing of equipment. It’s also great to benefit



Lewistown Rental Assistant Manager Jake Barta, left, and Owner Clyde Merwin are pleased to see business continue to thrive during the pandemic. Clyde said a lot of people are taking this time to work on projects. | PHOTO COURTESY OF KAITLYN MOODIE

the other communities.”

Long list of items available

Lewistown Rental offers a wide variety of specialty tools, ones Clyde said people wouldn’t ordinarily own, including forklifts, skid steers, mini-excavators, trucks and trailers, aerial equipment and more.

“We also rent out a lot of party or event-related equipment, such as tables and chairs,” he said. “That’s not something everybody knows about us.”

Larger construction tools are often popular items, as are some of the modern farm tools in their inventory.

This time of year, however, snow removal products are perhaps in highest demand.

Focus on community needs

Being community-minded has always been Clyde’s philosophy. Assistant Manager Jake Barta and Accounting Manager Kaitlyn Moodie agree.

“We try to support a lot of nonprofit organizations with free rentals,” said

Jake.

“We often provide chairs to charitable events and help with aerial equipment for set up and tear down,” added Kaitlyn. “It’s important to us to be good community partners.”

When there is an opportunity to assist, Clyde and Lewistown Rental respond. This was certainly the case when the Lewistown Ice Skating Association installed an ice-skating rink at Frank Day Park a few years back.

“We donated a lot of equipment for that project to help get the rink up and running,” said Clyde. “We try to help where we can. Some examples of this includes assisting 4-H, Boys and Girls Club and other entities. We enjoy doing it.”

Clyde said he is grateful for his employees and appreciates how they share his community-first mentality.

The feeling is mutual. Jake, who has worked with Clyde at Lewistown Rental for the past six years, said he wouldn’t trade it for anything.

“It’s been a good fit,” said Jake, a Lewistown native. “Lewistown Rental is a great place to be. All the people that work here are local people, and we are all here for our customers. We acknowledge who they are when they come through the door.”

Clyde agreed.

“We care about our customers and are proud to serve them and meet their needs. This goes for Lewistown as well as the surrounding areas,” he said. “We are always willing to be flexible with people coming in from out of town. For example, some folks may rent something they only need to use for an hour, so we honor that and only charge them for time they use the equipment.”

Silver lining

Continuing to operate the business during the pandemic has certainly had its challenges, but, overall business has not suffered. In fact, in many respects it’s picked up.

“Obviously a lot of people have to stay at home, so they are doing more projects around the house,” Clyde



Lewistown Rental is an ag-based company. They offer a lot of modern ag equipment, which members of the community and surrounding area communities rent regularly. | PHOTO COURTESY OF KAITLYN MOODIE



Lewistown Rental

OPEN:

Monday - Friday: 7 a.m. to 6 p.m.

Saturday: 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.

2566 Truck Bypass

For more information, call Lewistown Rental at (406) 538-9033. Reservations can be taken over the phone.

Check out their website at www.lewistownrental.com for updates on equipment rentals, sales, supplies and more.

said. “They have more time to work on things than just the weekend, so business is spread out much more during the week.”

“We feel fortunate our customers have been considered essential and we were also considered essential,” added Kaitlyn.

She started working for Lewistown Rental three and a half years ago. After telecommuting at her previous job, Kaitlyn said she was thrilled to be in the office again.

“When you’re working from home, technology doesn’t make up for the

“
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good community
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– Kaitlyn Moodie,
Accounting Manager

“
face-to-face interactions,” she said. “It’s much simpler to be in the office and catch people as you need them.” Working with Clyde and Jake has been a pleasure from the start, Kaitlyn said.

“I really like that they care a lot about providing a good service for their customers,” she said. “They also provide a nice, friendly, laid-back atmosphere here.”

But the biggest pleasure of all, Clyde added, is being an asset for the community, and assisting friends and neighbors with their interests and needs.

“We are here to help you decide what works best for your project,” he said. “We try to fit our customers with the best product for them.” RM

Editor’s note: Fergus Electric Cooperative has served Lewistown Rental since 2007.

Remembering Dee Boyce

THE co-op mourns the loss of Dee Boyce, who died October 26, 2020.

Dee became a member of Fergus Electric Cooperative in 1986, and as an active member of the co-op, he served on the Co-op's Member Advisory Committee from 2012 to 2014, representing District 1.

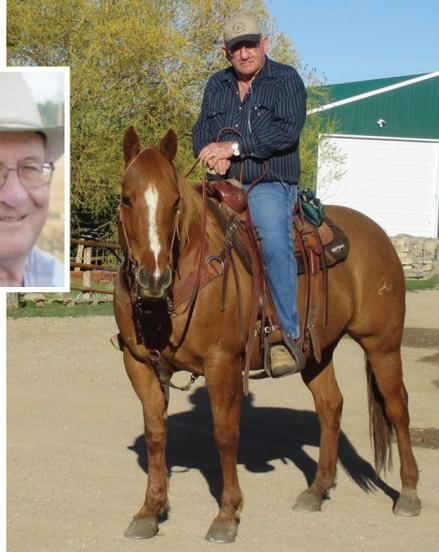
In 2014, Dee resigned his position saying that he enjoyed serving on the committee, but his health forced him to miss meetings, and he felt that was unfair to other committee members.

Dee's statement speaks to his ethical principles, good character and integrity.

Dee provided a valuable contribution to the committee, the cooperative and the community, and he will surely



Boyce



be missed.

Our condolences, thoughts and prayers go out to Dee's family during this difficult time.

FERGUS ELECTRIC CO-OP

HOLIDAY CLOSURES

Fergus Electric's offices in Lewistown and Roundup will close for Christmas December 24 and 25 and for New Year's December 31 and January 1.

Co-op Month DRAWING WINNERS

ON November 12, Scott Sweeney, Dale Rikala and Bret Ophus were each given the honor of drawing a member's entry form from the 27 forms submitted in the "October is Co-op Month" drawing. The drawing was part of a "Help Celebrate Co-op Month" promotion.

Congratulations to Stephen and Sharla Lalum, Lewistown; Scott Lutz, Lewistown; and Leah Negaard, Grass Range, for winning an electric credit of \$50, which will appear on the next billing statement! Thank you to all the co-op members who entered the drawing.

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 319282 ● Account 395986
- Account 395324 ● Account 396182
- Account 396164 ● Account 390061

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

Daniel Deegan of Hobson was last month's winner!

*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
- Scott Olson 406-366-5822
- Carson Sweeney 406-366-0971
- Bret Nellerhoe (Roundup) 406-939-0636
- Melanie Foran 406-462-5650
- 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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Fergus Features is an award-winning newsletter.