

F E R G U S

FEATURES

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

Skaters of all ages enjoy Lewistown's ice rink

Story and photos by

Charlie Denison
Contributing Writer

It started with a conversation. "You like ice hockey? You should talk to Chris. He likes hockey," said a mutual friend.

That's how Scott Kirsch and Chris Merker met, and that's how the Lewistown Ice Skating Association was formed.

"We figured out we both wanted better ice in Lewistown, so we approached the city," Kirsch said.

Thus began the Lewistown Ice Skating Association (LISA), the group responsible for making Lewistown's outdoor ice rink what it is today.

"[Kirsch] and [Merker] developed the vision, and we went from there," said Bill Berg, LISA vice president. "We put a slab down to cool the ice and keep it consistent, and went phase to phase."

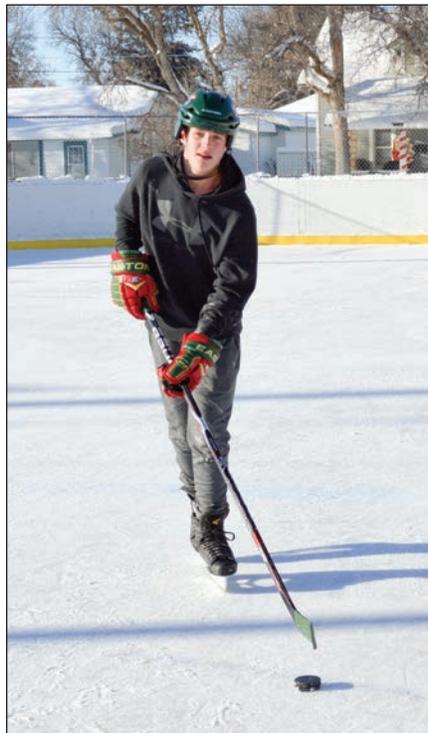
"With each phase we've reduced the amount of volunteer hours significantly," added Kirsch, LISA treasurer. "That's a big deal. I bet we were spending 300 or 400 hours a season building six to eight inches of ice, laying out water using the hydrant at Frank Day Park. Now, with our solid slab and refrigeration, we can create an inch-thick sheet of ice in two days without making any ice ourselves."

It all started with the zamboni, Kirsch said. That's what got peoples' attention.

"When Chris tracked down that zamboni in 2009, we started having perfect ice," Kirsch said. "It allowed us to make the ice, and it brought the people out. They started seeing what ice could be like."

Outpouring of community support

Getting such top-of-the-line equipment was no easy task, and LISA could



Joe Kirsch, top, and Taylor Smith enjoy a day on the ice. The Lewistown Ice Rink is used by all ages and is free to the public.

not have done it without the support of the community.

"All told this project cost about \$430,000, and almost all of it has come from donations," Kirsch said.

Berg and Kirsch are still amazed by the amount of people who came out and helped put slabs down to get the ice rink going.

"From a labor standpoint, the slabs seemed almost insurmountable, but we had people from all over come and help us, doing all kinds of labor-intensive work," said Kirsch. "That was the neatest thing about the project."

Kirsch believes one of the reasons the community has been so receptive to this ice rink is because they know what they're getting.

"This is one of the few — if not the only — refrigerated outdoor rinks that's 100-percent free to the community," Kirsch said. "It's just like the swingset around the corner. When you come to the park, you can swing on the swing set or you can skate on the ice. Neither costs anything."

And for those wanting to skate, chances are the rink is open.

"It is open to the public 70 percent of the time," Berg said.

Something everyone can enjoy

Even when the weather is cold, members of the community tend to take LISA up on the opportunity to skate, regularly using the rink during winter months.

All ages are encouraged to try.

"There is room for everybody," Berg said. "Whether you've skated for 40 years or never skated in your life, you can come skate."

Berg and Kirsch are good examples of the extremes you'll see on the ice: Berg started skating when he was 6

Continued on page 5



MANAGER'S MESSAGE

From Scott Sweeney



2017 year-end summary

The past year was both busy and challenging for the cooperative. Working in drought conditions coupled with an elevated risk of fire throughout the summer proved challenging. Construction of new electric services kept line crews busy installing 75 new meters. The cooperative purchased a pole-testing device, which has proven to be a valuable tool. In 2017, approximately 2,000 poles were tested, and 215 new poles were added to replace 209 old, "fully depreciated" poles. We tested all the transmission poles over 30 years in age, and replaced or stubbed those that tested poorly. Our line crews have been testing distribution poles and will continue as pole testing and pole replacements continue to be a priority in 2018.

Major projects planned in 2018

Fergus Electric Cooperative is continuing to work with Powder River Energy Corp. (PRECorp) on purchasing a new metering system and beginning installation in 2018. The existing metering equipment is old, obsolete and needs to be replaced. In November and December, an electronic interference problem on the system caused our turtle metering equipment in Utica to malfunction, making it unable to pull in meter readings normally, therefore metering readings were estimated for those two months. Once the issue was resolved, actual meter readings were pulled in and the current bill was calculated. The true-up of billing using actual meter readings versus estimated readings resulted in some members having high power bills in January.

Bids were received in December for an 80-foot by 120-foot steel building, which will be insulated and heated, have a concrete floor, four-foot concrete side walls and eight overhead doors. The board of directors accepted the low bid, which was submitted by Birdwell Builders of Lewistown at \$679,212.49.

Plans are underway for constructing the new truck garage this spring when the ground thaws. By next fall we will be able to park our digger trucks and bucket trucks inside, which will help preserve the trucks and ensure line

crews will be able to start and operate trucks and equipment when power lines need to be repaired during sub-zero temperatures.

Conservation and energy efficiency

I encourage all members to unplug heaters for cars, pickup trucks and tractors in warm weather to help with lowering your power bill in the winter time. If you can put the block heater on a timer and only heat the engine for a couple hours in the morning rather than leaving the vehicle plugged in all night,

you will save money. I urge members to use electricity with care, and to conserve electricity when practical.

Groundhog Day

By the time you receive your February issue of the *Rural Montana* magazine, Punxsutawney Phil's prediction will be known. Regardless of whether Phil saw his shadow on February 2nd, we can be certain that spring weather is not far off, so we had better plan now to be ready for the busy season ahead.

TIMELY TOPICS

Cooperatives offer a variety of career opportunities



Vangie McConnell, Editor

Distribution Cooperatives

Distribution cooperatives supply electricity directly to the consumer/member. Whether a career choice finds you working in the co-op office, outdoors with a crew or a combination of both, you will find the work fulfilling and purposeful. You will also find the cooperative spirit is contagious. Co-ops strive to employ highly trained, professional and self-motivated individuals who work with our most valuable resource – our members. To make sure they are knowledgeable of the most recent trends, a full range of training and educational opportunities are provided to our employees throughout their career at the co-op.

Generation & Transmission (G&Ts) Cooperatives

G&Ts are a unique type of wholesale power supplier owned by distribution cooperatives. The G&Ts have similar missions (to provide wholesale power to their members), but each is unique in how they are structured as it relates to power sources (fossil, nuclear and renewable energy), transmission facilities, shared ownership of

power plants and high-voltage transmission lines.

The career opportunities at G&Ts promote challenging responsibilities, encourage creativity, and offer professions in the areas of management, power plant production, transmission services, plant and field service operations, economic development and energy marketing.

Statewide Organizations

The statewide organization is an association of cooperatives formed to represent the interest of its members to legislators and to the governor's office. The statewide association also provides services such as communications and training, which allows for more efficiency than if co-ops took on these jobs themselves. Montana's statewide office is headquartered in Great Falls.

In 38 of the 47 states in which electric cooperatives operate, statewide associations provide a unified voice that speaks to the general public, regulatory bodies and state legislatures on behalf of their members. These associations are voluntarily supported, gov-

Continued on page 6

Lewistown's ice rink

Continued from page 3

years old and Kirsch didn't play on resurfaced ice until 2009, when the zamboni came to town.

"We've got people who started last year and are in their late 60s, plus we have young kids coming out of the woodwork," Kirsch said. "We are actually up another eight kids this year."

One reason for this, Berg said, is the health benefits of ice skating.

"It's easier on your joints than running," he said.

"It's not as hard on a guy as everyone thinks," Kirsch added. "It's something you can enjoy your whole life. I get to play ice hockey with my kids for the next 20 years. It's unique that way."

Health benefits aside, there is also a camaraderie involved in the rink, which Berg said might be his favorite part of sharing the ice.

Such camaraderie, Kirsch added, is why people go out of their way to take care of the rink.

"I see people come out and shovel the ice out of the goodness of their hearts," he said. "It's amazing."

But seeing people utilize the rink is what matters most to Kirsch.

"For us, coming out and skating is just as big a statement as helping us maintain it," he said. "If people didn't come out and skate, we'd look pretty silly."



Lewistown Ice Skating Association Vice President Bill Berg, left, and Treasurer Scott Kirsch share a laugh in the changing room outside the ice rink. Both couldn't be happier with the community and city support the rink has received.

A bright future

Considering where Lewistown's ice rink is now, Kirsch and Berg can't help but feel optimistic moving forward.

"We're going to keep adding," Kirsch said. "We hope to have changing rooms and boards with glass. We'd also like to rebuild the snack shack."

They also hope to expand their event turnouts such as their Open Air Hockey Tournament, which just had a successful third year. Kirsch predicts the tournament will continue bringing in teams from all over the state.

"We've had it three years and counting," Kirsch said. "This last tournament brought in eight teams, and we expect more next year."

But by and large, this ice-skating rink is for central Montana, and Kirsch encourages people to give it a try.

"Come out," he said. "There is open skate and pick-up hockey every Saturday morning. We'd love to see you."

For more information on LISA, call (406) 538-2454. Skates are available for rent at the Civic Center.

Lineman scholarship offered

Individuals interested in a career as an electrical lineman can apply for a \$6,000 scholarship offered by Fergus Electric Cooperative. The scholarship application is available at the co-op, on the co-op's website — www.ferguselectric.coop — and via a link from the co-op's Facebook page. Completed applications must be post-marked and returned to Fergus Electric no later than March 30, 2018. The successful applicant will be notified by April 30, 2018. This offer is open to students, and to men and women seeking a new career.

Nominating committee seeks candidates

Fergus annual meeting set for June 7

In accordance with Section 4.3 of Fergus Electric's bylaws, the committee for selecting board candidates has been appointed and will meet this month. In addition to candidates selected by the committee, any 15 or more members acting together from districts one, five and seven 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 trustees is permitted.

Directors serve a term of three years and are elected by ballot at the annual meeting of the membership.

At least two candidates from District 3 (Winifred, Roy and Hilger areas), District 5 (Roundup and Musselshell areas), and District 7 (Geysler, Denton, Stanford and Hobson areas) will be nominated. 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 notice of meeting dates and locations in local newspapers or call the office (538-3465) for more information.

Save Energy

Most of the energy conservation actions listed don't cost much time, money or effort. But they can help reduce your energy bills if you do them consistently over time.

Heating – Bundle up and turn down the heat. A general recommendation for winter thermostat settings is to set your heater thermostat at 72 degrees if someone is at home in the daytime, but strive for lowering the thermostat to 68 degrees or lower by day, and put on a sweater if you feel chilly. At night set your thermostat even lower and get cozy with extra blankets. Clean or replace furnace filters regularly.

Your Thermostat – Don't use it like a gas pedal. Setting the temperature super high won't heat your home any faster. But it will make your heater run longer, overheating your home and wasting energy. Instead, just set it at a desired temperature

Cooking – Use the microwave to save. Pre-heat only for baking. Avoid opening the oven to check progress, turn the oven off before food is done, using retained heat to finish cooking. Use the microwave whenever possible — it saves energy.

Dishwashing – Let dishes air dry to save. Wash only full loads. Use a short cycle for lightly soiled dishes. Use the energy-saving no-heat dry feature. Or, turn dishwasher off after the final rinse to let the dishes air dry.

Refrigeration – Vacuum refrigera-

tor coils. Vacuum refrigerator coils at least twice a year. Open doors only when necessary.

Use Energy-Saver mode if available. If you buy a new refrigerator, unplug and recycle the old one.

Clothes Washing – Use cold water when you can.

Use the coolest water temperature that will get clothes clean, considering fabric types and the level of soiling. Wash only full loads. Select the correct water level for the load size.

Clothes Drying – Dry only full loads. Dry loads one after another to take advantage of heat build up. Clean the lint filter before each load. Use automatic cycle to prevent overdrying. Better yet, use a clothesline!

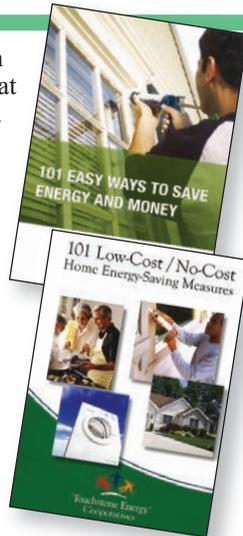
Bathing – Conserve hot water. Showers use much less hot water than baths. Install energy-saving low-flow showerheads and flow restrictors. Fix leaks to save energy and water. Fill the bathtub halfway or less.

Light – Try LEDs. Turn off lights when not in use, even for just a minute. Replace your most-used incandescent light bulbs with light-emitting diodes (LED), which use 90 percent less energy and last more than 40 times longer. Keep lights clean.

Cooling – AC is great at 78 degrees! Use portable fans and ceiling fans to keep cool for less. If you do use an air conditioner, set it at 78 degrees or higher when you're home, and 85 degrees when you'll be away more than four hours.

Shopping? – Use Energy Guide labels. All major appliances except ovens and ranges come with Energy Guide labels. Use the labels to compare the energy usage of different models. The labels also tell you the typical annual operating cost of the appliance, based on national average energy rates. The ENERGY STAR label helps you find the most energy-saving models.

Energy-Saving Guides – (1) Home Energy Savings Guide, (2) 101 Easy Ways to Save Energy and Money, and (3) 101 Low-Cost/No-Cost Home Energy-Saving Measures. To request copies of these energy-saving booklets, call Fergus Electric at 538-3465.



Identify Account Number*

Win a \$32.50 credit

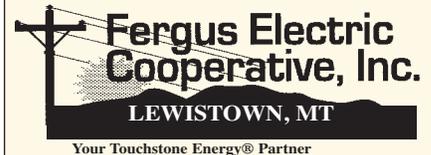
If one of the following account numbers is yours, call Fergus Electric (406-538-3465) and identify yourself and your account number.

**Account 394190 • Account 318919
Account 395672 • Account 15311**

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

*Numbers are drawn randomly.

Alfred Adolph of Roundup and **William Maxwell** of Winnett were last month's winner.



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
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

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-F

Website: www.ferguselectric.coop

E-mail: ferguselectric@ferguselectric.coop

Facebook: www.facebook.com/ferguselectric

Scott Sweeney.....General Manager

Dale Rikala.....Operations Supervisor

Sally Horacek.....Office Manager

Vangie McConnell.....Editor

Fergus Electric is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

District 1: Paul Descheemaeker, Vice President, Lewistown, 428-2417

District 3: Brad Arntzen, Hilger, 462-5555

District 4: Cathy Kombol, Roundup, 428-2202

District 5: Terry Frost, Sec./Treas., Roundup, 323-3415

District 6: Jason Swanz, Judith Gap, 473-2462

District 7: Bob Evans, Jr., President, Geysers, 735-4476

Fergus Features is an award-winning newsletter.

Timely Topics

Continued from page 4

erned by representatives of the member cooperatives and offer commonly desired services, such as job safety training.

NRECA International

NRECA (National Rural Electric Cooperative Association) International has been at the forefront of international rural economic development through electrification since its inception in 1962. NRECA International has developed some of the most successful rural electrification programs in the world, resulting in increased agricultural productivity, millions of new jobs in micro and small enterprises, and higher incomes and a better quality of life for more than 70 million people in more than 40 countries.