

F E R G U S

FEATURES

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

Engraved with Compassion

Husband and wife team engrave headstones and memorial stones

Story and photos by

Charlie Denison
Contributing Writer

For the past 34 years, John and Linda Anderson have enjoyed their life together. Best friends and partners, the two Lewistown natives are dedicated to one another through vows they honor and cherish. But unlike many married couples, they are also co-workers, collaborating together, doing work a little out of the ordinary: engravings for headstones and memorial stones.

Cemeteries are peaceful

“The cemeteries are pretty and peaceful, and our clients are peaceful, too,” Linda said, smiling and letting out a little laugh.

Some of their work is done at cemeteries, but a bulk of it is done from home. Linda traces the letters and John sandblasts them, making the messages display permanently, be it death dates, “hope” “love,” or simply a “welcome” stone for the doorstep.

These are just a few examples of stones John and Linda worked on during our visit last month. Stepping into their shop, the atmosphere was casual, calm and friendly. They bring joy to their work, whether it be a job at home or on the road.

“We go all over the state, working at cemeteries in Wolf Point, Livingston, Cut Bank and elsewhere,” Linda said.

John and Linda do this work as co-owners of J & J Engraving, a company started in 1976 by Linda’s father, Jack Songer, and his former business associate Jerry Cloyd. When Songer retired in 2000, John and Linda bought the business, and they are honored to reach the



John and Linda Anderson, co-owners of J & J Engraving, go through 100-plus commemorative stones, 50-75 death dates and 20-30 big rocks a year.

40th anniversary milestone together.

“I’m tickled my father started this business,” Linda said, “and I’m glad we can keep it going.”

Like father, like son-in-law

John started learning the trade in the early 1980s, not long after he and Linda got married. Curious about the art, he went to get training in Minnesota with his father-in-law.

“He just did it to be closer to me,” Linda joked.

A Fergus County employee, John said he has loved having this as a second job for the last few decades, and is happy to work with his wife.

Taking care of their clients

J & J Engraving is about keeping the customers satisfied, and even exceeding expectations, Linda said.

“Sometimes we suggest more advanced designs on headstones or stone engravings when they come our way,” Linda said. “If we can trace it, we can do it, from cabins to trees to animals. You name it.”

Many examples of their work are visible at the Lewistown Community Labyrinth Garden in Frank Day Park.

“We’ve done at least 500 stones for the labyrinth so far,” John said.

John and Linda’s work covers a lot of ground, and a lot of emotions, often bringing joy at times when it’s hard to come by. That’s the beauty of J & J Engraving.

“We love being able to help people with their funeral arrangements,” Linda added. “We are happy to sit down with them and help them through the

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MANAGER'S MESSAGE

From Scott Sweeney

Members 1st Power Cooperative

A new year has arrived, and I expect that 2017 will be a busy, productive year for the co-op. On January 1, Fergus Electric Cooperative started the year with a new power supply cooperative called Members 1st Power Cooperative (Members 1st) headquartered in Sundance, Wyoming.

Using a more traditional blueprint of developing a generation and transmission cooperative, Fergus Electric, Tongue River Electric and Powder River Energy Corporation (PRECorp) joined together to form Members 1st to sell wholesale power to the three distribution cooperatives.

In addition to providing power supply, one significant benefit of forming Members 1st is that as a Class A member of Basin Electric Power Cooperative (Basin), Members 1st is assured a seat on the Basin Board of Directors, a real advantage to Fergus Electric, PRECorp and Tongue River, which are all Class C members of Basin.

Members 1st receives power supply from Basin, headquartered in Bismarck, North Dakota, and Western Area Power Administration (WAPA). WAPA power is the lower-priced federal hydropower generated from the water flowing through the turbines/dams on the Missouri River drainage, providing clean, renewable power.

Southern Montana Electric G&T Co-op

Our "old" power supplier, Southern Montana Electric Generation and Transmission Cooperative (Southern) billed Fergus Electric in January for the December 2016 power usage, and now Southern will gradually wind down. Southern should be dissolved and out of business in April or May.

The Southern chapter has been challenging. Southern began in 2003/2004, and in 2017 it will come to an end. I am pleased that our co-op is going forward with Members 1st and will be in good company with three strong, well-established cooperatives: Basin,

PRECorp and Tongue River.

Lineman scholarship

During the October 28 board meeting, Fergus Electric Co-op's Board of Directors approved offering a \$6,000 scholarship for a student entering an accredited line technician school hoping that, after certification, the student will have an opportunity to find work in Montana.

Scholarship money is made available to the co-op through unclaimed capital credits. Any year that the co-op issues a general retirement of capital credits, there are many checks returned to the co-op by the post office because the address we have on file for the inactive member is no longer valid. The co-op attempts to locate the former members, but if we are unsuccessful, the money is placed into a fund where, if unclaimed for five years, it becomes eligible for the co-op to use for educational purposes, such as for scholarships.

This scholarship was established in appreciation for the work our line personnel do every day. Electrical linemen work as a team, building and maintaining electrical power systems. We are looking forward to awarding a scholarship to a student who has chosen a career as an electrical lineman. By assisting a future electrical lineman to fulfill their ambition to have a career in the electric utility industry, we help assure that the electric cooperatives, which we hold in the highest regard,

will continue to have a solid, capable work force going forward.

Do not let the title lineman dissuade you. Lineman is an electric utility term. Although female linemen are not as common as male, women hold about two percent of distribution and transmission lineman positions. Power line work is challenging, but rewarding work. It's high risk and you can expect to be outdoors in all types of weather imaginable to repair, replace and restore power. Linemen take pride in their work, and the co-op is certainly proud of its linemen.

If you know of a student or individual who is interested in a career as an electrical lineman, please tell them about the co-op's lineman scholarship. The scholarship applications are available at the co-op, on our website and via a link on our Facebook page. We are asking for completed applications to be returned to Fergus Electric Co-op by March 15, 2017, and we will notify the successful applicant by April 15, 2017. Best of luck to all scholarship applicants!

Happy New Year!

I want to thank all of the members for helping to make 2016 another successful year for the cooperative. In November, the co-op was pleased to pay out \$357,238.65 in a general retirement of capital credits, which was the balance of 1983, and 20 percent of 1984. And on behalf of the Board of Directors and everyone at the co-op, I am extremely grateful that our employees worked safe and were awarded with recognition for their outstanding achievement of an accident-free record for three consecutive years (2013-2016). As we begin a new year, I hope that we can make 2017 as good as 2016. Happy New Year!



TIMELY TOPICS

Vangie McConnell, Editor

Electric cooperatives are ready to work with elected officials

As the nation prepares to welcome a new Congress and Administration, America's electric cooperatives are ready to welcome

back old friends and introduce ourselves to newcomers. This applies to Montana legislators as well.

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Engraved

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process. We do so with compassion. We don't just help them, we are there for them."

Down by the river

Considering that John and Linda go through 100-plus headstones, 50-75 death dates and 20-30 big rocks a year, they need to constantly have a supply. Where do they get them?

"All of the big rocks we use are handpicked on the banks of the Yellowstone River just outside of Big Timber," John said.

"And the ones we use for the labyrinth come from Cottonwood Creek," Linda added.

The smoother the rock, the better.

"We are picky," Linda added. "We might look for 20 minutes before we find a rock we think will work."

It's worth it, Linda said, as the rocks go fast and — once completed — share a special meaning for a family in Montana, elsewhere in the nation or even overseas.

"We've had rocks shipped all over the United States and even to Japan, Europe and Russia," John said.

The stones aren't just made to com-



John wears heavy-duty protective gear when sandblasting stones.

memorate a life, either, Linda added. They are used for any occasion, and can make great gifts.

"They make for some unusual stocking stuffers," she joked.

Business as usual

"All occasions" was not the original concept for J & J Engraving, Linda said, as the business was established

"out of a need to have death dates engraved on headstones and planter hooks installed in area cemeteries."

A large amount of their work is done through contracts with funeral homes, John added. Sometimes the deadlines are intense, but they are able to get the job done efficiently and on time.

"The need is still there and we keep the tradition going," John said. "Most of our work continues to be done at cemeteries. We do the stencils and make the engravings on site. It's an old-school method, but it works well."

Labor of Love

Working together on engraving projects for decades, Linda and John said what has kept the business going — and what has kept their marriage going — is how much they enjoy being together.

"We work well together because we love what we do and we love each other," Linda said.

Letting out a little laugh, Linda added that she gets to do the "fun stuff" while John is the one who does the cutting and the sandblasting. But, for John, those jobs also constitute "fun."

"I enjoy what I do," he said, smiling. "We'll see if I have 10 more years in me. We'd like to celebrate a 50th anniversary."

TIMELY TOPICS

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The co-ops' message to elected officials, both old and new, Republican and Democrat, will be the same: we all need to work together to protect member access to safe, reliable and affordable electric service.

We have reason to believe this message will be well-received. After all, co-ops speak for more than 42 million electric consumers nationwide, a sizeable constituency by any measure. Moreover, whatever you thought of the 2016 campaign, one message came through loud and clear; many, many people don't believe their concerns are being heard. For member-owned cooperatives, listening to people is at the heart of our business model. And we carry our members' concerns to public officials every day.

As co-ops reach out to engage with

elected officials, they will request policymakers keep the needs of consumers front and center. Needs such as increasing the efficiency of the electric system, determining the future of hydropower, coal, and wind generation. Advocating for these issues is nothing new. In fact, we've been doing it for years. And we're ready to continue the fight on your behalf.

The time is now to reach out to elected officials, new and returning. Energy issues continue to be among rural America's biggest concerns.

In December, the Fergus Electric board and staff met with area senators and representatives to hear a brief presentation by the Montana Electric Cooperatives' Association, our statewide organization, about key energy issues of concern to the state's electric cooperatives. Montana's electric co-ops serve nearly 400,000 Montanans.

Area legislators include: Sen. Ryan Osmundson of Buffalo – SD 14, Rep.

James O'Hara of Fort Benton – HD 27, Rep. Dan Bartel of Lewistown – HD 29, Rep. Barry Usher of Rural Billings – HD 40, Sen. Duane Ankney of Colstrip, SD 20 and Rep. Wylie Galt of Martinsdale – HD 30.

In Washington, D.C., our national trade association, the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association, will be conducting similar introductions, speaking with key agencies and departments within the new administration. It is likely many of these new policymakers will know little or nothing of the co-op business model.

Forging an energy future that serves rural consumers and protecting access to safe, reliable and affordable electric power will be a bipartisan effort. As we work with our elected leaders, we hope to renew a spirit of cooperation in the nation's capital and in statehouses across the country.

After all, cooperation is what co-ops do best!

Virtual home-energy audits

Is your home using energy efficiently? Unless it was built quite recently to stringent energy-efficiency standards, there are bound to be areas of your home where you can improve efficiency, save money and reduce your carbon footprint.

An online or “virtual” home energy audit may be the answer. These online tools have come a long way over the last 10 years. Today’s online energy audits are user-friendly and take only a few minutes to complete. An online energy audit can provide an assessment of your home’s energy efficiency and typically provides helpful tips on how to reduce energy waste.

The audits utilize sophisticated computer models that typically use local housing types — factoring in the age, size, flooring and construction materials of the home — and local weather data. The Department of Energy offers an online audit at <http://hes.lbl.gov/consumer/>.

If an online energy audit doesn’t interest you, fear not. The Department of Energy offers a DIY (do it yourself) energy audit section on their website: <http://energy.gov/energysaver/do-it-yourself-home-energy-audits>.

The bottom line? Choose the energy

audit that works for you, then implement as many of the recommendations as you can. Even taking small steps can add up to significant results, and you’ll see the benefits in your utility bills for years to come.

Each audit is a little different, and the information required may vary. Below is a basic list of what you’ll need. Be as accurate as possible without creating so much work for yourself that you regret taking the audit.

- Your home zip code — for weather and housing data
- Your average monthly electric bill
- Your electric rate
- Your average monthly fossil fuel bill(s) — oil, propane and gas
- Your fossil fuel rate(s)
- Age of your home and general characteristics (size, floors, exterior materials)
- Age and number of appliances
- Type and age of heating and cooling systems
- How many incandescent, CFL and LED lights you have

Fergus Electric has a brochure available to members titled 101 Low-Cost/No-Cost Home Energy-Saving Measures. Please call 538-3465 and request a copy.

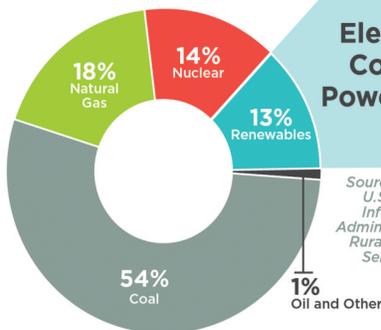
From NRECA Straight Talk



Electric Cooperatives Focus on Renewable Energy

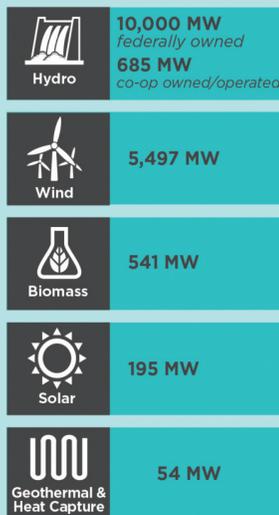
Electric cooperatives use a diverse mix of fuels to supply members with safe, reliable and affordable power.

Renewable resources provide 13 percent of cooperative power needs nationwide, in line with the national average.



Electric Co-op Power Mix

Sources: 2014 U.S. Energy Information Administration, Rural Utilities Service and NRECA.



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

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**Numbers are drawn randomly.*



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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

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