

F E R G U S

FEATURES

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

A PASSION FOR WOOD WORKING



Retired rancher finds new purpose in turning wood

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

GIFT-GIVING has become a pastime of sorts for retired rancher Eldon Foster.

“I’ve given away probably 500 bowls,” he said, referring to ones he created using a wood lathe. “I’ve given them to people all over the country.”

Making bowls is Eldon’s passion these days, and he loves to share it with others – especially since he finally has time to do so.

Those on the receiving end appreciate his generosity, in large part because Eldon has refined the craft of woodturning. It’s an activity he got into “by accident.”

“I messed around with a lathe and thought it was kind of cool,” he said. “That’s all it took.”

Eldon has been at it five years and counting, mostly making bowls with lids. He also turns vases, game calls, rolling pins and more.

He makes them in all shapes and sizes, and uses a variety of wood.

“My favorite is juniper bush from the Missouri River and Musselshell Breaks,” he said. “It grows in some of the harshest climates we have in Montana and, because of its tenacity, it survives, just like the people born



and bred out there.”

Eldon often finds the wood himself. Wood is also given to him regularly by family and friends.

It is the wood, above all, that breathes life into each item Eldon makes.

“Take the Juniper wood, for exam-

Eldon Foster turns some wood on a lathe in his shop in November. The third-generation Montanan is thrilled to have a new hobby and is honored to be part of this month’s *Fergus Features*. His grandfather, J.C. Foster, was one of Fergus Electric’s original board members.

| PHOTO BY CHARLIE DENISON

See *WOOD*, page 7



MANAGER'S MESSAGE

From Carson Sweeney

Bright and joyful decorating

HAPPY New Year! I hope that the holiday season was enjoyed by everyone. We sure had fun decorating both the inside and outside of Fergus Electric Cooperative's headquarters. Dale Rikala amazed us all with the Christmas tree he built at home and installed on the roof of the office. We are sure proud to show off such a bright and joyful work of art.

Capital credit general retirement checks

We are also proud to have mailed out 2,260 capital credit general retirement checks totaling \$933,964.74 for the years 1992, 1993 and 1994. Sally and Susie worked many hours to have the checks ready for mailing out mid-December to our well-deserving members.

Thank you for your patronage and commitment to Fergus Electric Cooperative.

Changing out meters

The new advanced metering system could not be coming at a better time. As I wrote in my December message, we are beginning to see failures in the communication system of our old Turtle metering system, so we have ramped up the installation of our new meters using contracted electricians to expedite the project.

We are pleased to work with local electricians, keeping our members' dollars within our community and supporting local businesses.

As we replace the system, there may be times when we need to change out an existing meter prior to the new communication being installed. If that occurs, we will ask



Fergus Electric Cooperative is looking festive after employees decorated both the outside and inside of the headquarters building. Dale Rikala built a Christmas tree and it was installed on the roof of the office. | PHOTO COURTESY OF FERGUS ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE


members to help us in the interim by manually reading their meters. We are working diligently not to require your assistance, but if the need arises, we sure appreciate knowing we can count on you.

Offering scholarships – January deadline

We are pleased to announce that we are offering scholarships for current students of our membership. Due to COVID-19 restrictions the Washington D.C. Youth Tour was canceled this year.

In its place, we will be awarding two \$1,000 scholarships. Please check out page 8 of this month's *Fergus Features* for information on how to apply for these scholarships. Do not wait, the deadline to apply is approaching quickly!

Looking forward to a new year

I want to thank the board, staff and membership for making me feel very welcomed these past months. Becoming a new manager during a pandemic would have been much more challenging if not for employees who have taken the virus seriously and worked hard to follow the guidelines. As a result, we continue to build new powerlines, restore power outages and process monthly billing statements on schedule. That said, I think I speak on behalf of our entire membership, board and employees when I say I hope 2021 has fewer surprises than we all endured in 2020. All of us at Fergus Electric Cooperative would like to wish you a very happy, healthy new year! 

WOOD

Continued from page 5

ple,” he said. “Its grain and character is what makes the piece.”

This is evident in one of Eldon's most recent bowls.

“I used a piece of juniper that had an inclusion,” he said, referring to a pocket of bark found within the interior of a tree. “I was able to hollow it and keep it together.”

Such a bowl represents one of Eldon's favorite parts of creating: making something unique, something people can't get anywhere else.

Eldon usually makes one bowl a day, sometimes two.

“I'm not a fast turner, and I'm not a skilled turner,” he said. “I'm just persistent.”

This persistence at times is an addiction.

“I can lose five hours out here in the winter time and almost regret having to go into the house,” he said. “It's just so much fun to see the forms come together.”

Eldon admits, however, creating wooden bowls wasn't always enjoyable.

“It was tough at first,” he said, “but as I got better equipment and kept putting more time into it I started to improve. The biggest challenge, really, is patience, and I've never had an abundance of that. This process has taught me to slow down.”

As he gets more comfortable with the process and continues to improve, he is more fascinated by the art form.

“It amuses me what shapes can come out of wood,” he said.

A new endeavor

Eldon — who grew up in Brooks and graduated from Fergus High School — always had a feeling he'd settle in the area. After working in finance for a few years, he did just that, moving home in 1975 to take over the family ranch.

“I followed the wrong end of a cow for 40 years,” he joked.



ABOVE: Eldon said he is constantly amused by the shapes that can come out of wood.

This vase is a prime example. “I had no idea where this was going except I had a neat hold and I wanted to work with it,” he said.

TOP: Eldon has many bowls he's working on, but he sends them off to friends and family constantly, so he doesn't have too many at once. | **PHOTOS BY CHARLIE DENISON**

CONTACT ELDON

Those interested in buying one of Eldon's creations can contact him at (406) 350-1089.

When he retired from the often-trying rancher livelihood, Eldon wanted to do something productive but relaxing, and working with his hands.

This would be a new pursuit for Eldon, one that would take him away from his other pastime of trap collecting.

“Woodturning is way better,” he said. “It keeps me home, and I can share it with others.”

The more he does it, the better he gets, which encourages him to keep creating bowls.

“I just want to get better at it,” Eldon said.

He's accomplishing this goal, which excites him. It also pleases him to just have something he can work on and be proud of, something that never gets stagnant.

“I'm just glad to have a hobby that keeps me occupied,” he said. “Boredom is terrible. You need a purpose when you retire, and I've found one making bowls. And it's not all for nothing. The day I tip over somebody's going to have a lot of good firewood.”

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SCHOLARSHIPS

3 scholarship applications are due at the end of January



Youth Tour Scholarship

The essay topic for the 2021 Essay Scholarship is: "How has reliable electricity benefited you and your community through the COVID-19 pandemic?"

Fergus Electric Cooperative will be awarding two \$1,000 scholarships and the statewide winner will receive a \$2,500 scholarship to a college or trade school.

The criteria to be eligible for the Youth Tour Essay Scholarship is:

- The student must be a junior or senior in high school in the fall of 2021 (currently a sophomore or junior);
- The student and/or parent or guardian must be served by Fergus Electric Cooperative;
- The essay must include a cover page with the student's name, address, and telephone number;
- Essays are due at Fergus Electric Cooperative by **January 27, 2021**.

The application and guidelines are posted on Fergus Electric's website <https://www.ferguselectric.coop/> or our Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/ferguselectric/> or you may call (406) 538-3465.

Montana Electric Cooperatives' Association Memorial Scholarship

MECA will offer a \$500 scholarship to an individual whose parents or

guardians are members of Fergus Electric Cooperative.

Applicants must return their application form, transcripts and letters of reference to Fergus Electric Cooperative by **January 27, 2021**.

Your application will be judged based on the following components:

20 percent - Academic Strength (as demonstrated by rigors of coursework, GPA, and national testing scores)

20 percent - Activities in school and community, awards and honors

20 percent - Employment, volunteerism and community service

40 percent - Personal statement

The application and guidelines are posted on Fergus Electric's website <https://www.ferguselectric.coop/> or our Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/ferguselectric/> or you may call (406) 538-3465.

Basin Electric Power Cooperative scholarship

Fergus Electric's power supplier, Basin Electric Power Cooperative, is offering a \$1,000 scholarship to the dependent of a member of Fergus Electric Cooperative.

The essay topic for the 2021 Essay Scholarship is: "Describe how cooperatives can be economic engines for their local communities."

Applicants must submit all materials to Fergus Electric Cooperative by **January 27, 2021**.

The application and guidelines are posted on Fergus Electric's website <https://www.ferguselectric.coop/> or our Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/ferguselectric/> or you may call (406) 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 387780 ● Account 396582

Account 394508 ● Account 317079

Account 366694 ● Account 380030

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

James Austin of Sawmut and Lana Anderson of Roundup were 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
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Bret Nellermoe (Roundup)	406-939-0636
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Dan Balster	406-366-0975

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Fergus Features is an award-winning newsletter.