

F E R G U S

FEATURES

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

City girl is drawn to life in the country

Story and photos by

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Contributing Writer

First comes love, then comes marriage, then comes...goats?

That's how it went for Michelle (Adkins) Olson.

Although raised in urban areas of Washington and Arizona, Michelle found herself being drawn to a quieter life in the country, particularly somewhere in Lewistown, where her mother was born.

Then, visiting the area in 2007, something happened that was more than just a break from the hustle and bustle.

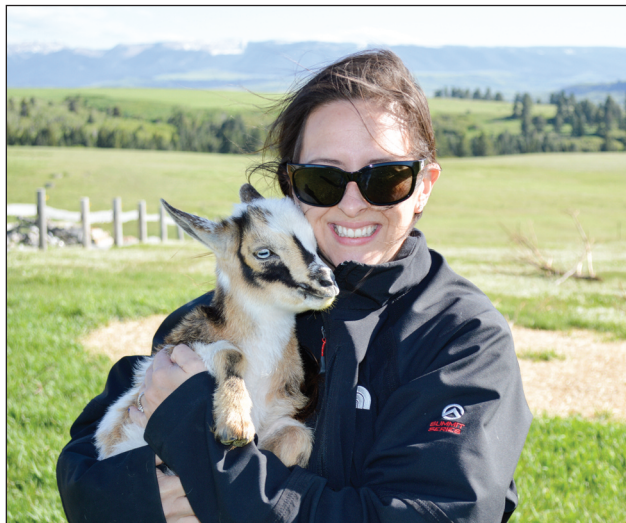
"I went on a blind date at the Mint," she said, laughing.

Her date, Curtis Olson, is now her husband of five years, and they've made a life in the Forest Grove area — 11 miles outside of Lewistown — raising children and Nigerian dwarf goats.

"Moving out here, I thought it would be a fun hobby since we had the space," Michelle said. "Curtis had goats growing up, and his dad got us going. Then we got chickens and miniature pigs, too."

Not only are the goats, pigs and chickens fun for the children, but the animals also give the kids more responsibilities and opportunities. Caden, for example, has shown goats at the Central Montana Fair for the past two years through 4-H.

"These are some of the advantages of living out here in the country," Michelle said. "My children can really learn a lot of skills. There are many valuable life lessons the kids can learn from 4-H — everything from how to sell goats, keep



Michelle Olson holds a baby Nigerian dwarf goat. She sells goats and soap made from goat milk.

logs for food, what expenses are involved — and they learn how to be presentable and how to dress nice when they do showings."

Michelle said she hopes her two youngest children — Jett and Reese — will follow in Caden's footsteps.

"Kidding" around

The Olsons have eight goats, and this year they had 14 babies. All but two are currently for sale, which is bittersweet, as it can be hard to say goodbye.

"The goats are so funny," Michelle said, "especially the babies. They just jump around on everything and they headbutt. They are so cute when they are figuring out that they can bounce around."

Big or small, the goats are also a constant source of entertainment.

"Anytime anyone comes over they want to see the babies," Michelle said. "It's always exciting for people to come over."

There is much joy brought by the

goats, but it's not all fun and games, Michelle said, especially in the winter.

"Having animals in Montana in the wintertime is the biggest challenge," she said. "Feeding and watering is hard when it's so cold and there is so much snow. Our weather is pretty intense."

But the pros outweigh the cons.

"I think this is a better upbringing for the kids than raising them in town," Curtis said, adding that he enjoys having the goats, but since he grew up with them, he usually just helps with necessities. He has fun playing with the children, but he'll be the first to tell you it's "more Michelle's

thing."

"I take care of mainly the outside stuff," he said. "I build the fences and keep the goats in."

"I didn't grow up farming and ranching, so it's exciting for me to try all this stuff," Michelle added.

A different kind of science experiment

Not only does Michelle raise and sell goats, but she also makes — and sells — goat milk soap.

"Dealing with the goat milk can be more complex than making other types of soap because of the lye," Michelle said. "You don't want to get the milk too hot because then it scalds and burns. It's like a science experiment with all the ingredients."

Michelle said she was looking for something different, and creating soap from goat milk definitely fits that bill. It's also been a good project to keep her busy while Curtis is working at Fergus

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MANAGER'S MESSAGE

From Scott Sweeney

Annual Meeting review

Thank you to the 169 members and 149 guests who attended Fergus Electric Cooperative's 79th annual meeting on June 8. The Women Involved in Farm Economics (WIFE) served a delicious meal to the attendees and Just Country provided enjoyable music for the event.

Auditor Cory Wheeler of Smith, Lange and Halley, P.C. provided the annual audit report telling the membership that their co-op is in good financial shape and everything is in order.

Ally Martin, who represented Fergus Electric Cooperative on the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association Youth Tour to Washington, D.C., in 2016, gave an excellent report on her visit and told the audience that soon she will embark on an even greater

adventure as she has been accepted to the United States Military Academy, commonly known as West Point.

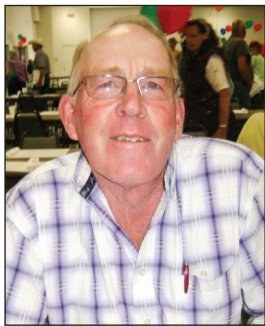
This year, in place of the Luck of the Draw contest, students received a surprise. All 30 students who accompanied their parent(s) or guardian to the annual meeting in hopes of being selected to win a scholarship were awarded a \$1,000 scholarship by Fergus Electric Cooperative's Board of Trustees.

Scholarship winners were Cole Ayers, Emily Bergum, Danielle Birdwell, Mary Birdwell, Haiden Collins, Carrie Cota, Tanner Crawford, Taylor Dahl, Addie Donaldson, Lukas Eickhoff, Jaden Flugge, Abigail Gatz, Chase Gerer, Lane Hathaway, Anthony Hofer, Kai Krumwiede, Kodi Myhre, Benjamin Naylor, Franny Obert, Ellie Pennell, Mariah Siroky, Clay Sluggett, Cole Sluggett, Logan Sluggett, Sarah Spear, Keelan Taber, Whitney Weeden, Nora Weichel, Ashley Wickens and Hailey Zinne.

The scholarships were funded in part due to the extraordinary generosity of the Leroy Strand Ranch estate and by unclaimed capital credits. It is a real pleasure and a lot of fun to support so many young scholars seeking to further their education. Congratulations to all!

Truck garage election

Members who attended the annual meeting largely voted in favor of Fergus Electric Cooperative building a truck garage with a not-to-exceed cost of \$850,000 to accommodate digger and bucket trucks, the backhoe and skid steer. We appreciate and thank our members for their support. Providing adequate shelter for our trucks and equipment will reduce the deterioration that occurs being parked outdoors day in and day out as the large equipment are currently.



Gregg Morse of Denton won the grand prize of a \$600 solar panel.

We will begin taking the necessary steps to design, bid and build a 100' x 100' building. When we did some preliminary comparisons of what it would cost to build a larger-sized building — a pole building versus a steel building — a steel building is comparable in price to a pole building. The building will be heated so trucks and equipment can be reliably started on cold winter days. We will also include floor drains and water in the building so the trucks can be washed and the floor cleaned.

We have ample cash on hand so we can build the truck garage without borrowing any money, and the building is not projected to increase electric rates. We have estimated the annual costs for a truck garage to be around \$14,000, including taxes, insurance and heat.

District 2 and 4 Board Trustees announced

Since the election for trustees was uncontested, the members approved seating the candidates by acclamation. Incumbent trustee from District 2 David Dover was re-elected to serve co-op members in the Glengarry, Buffalo and

Judith Gap areas, and Cathy Kombol became the new trustee from District 4, serving co-op members in the Grass Range, Winnett and north of Roundup areas. We look forward to start working with our newly seated director Cathy Kombol, and continuing working with David Dover, who is a committed and proficient director.

On average, Fergus Electric Cooperative's board of trustees work 34 hours a month on co-op-related business. Serving as a trustee on the board requires a significant commitment of time and energy. Recently elected board members are busier still as they attend rural electric program workshops and education classes to earn their certificates and accreditation. The co-op's membership is better served by the dedication, knowledge and success of its board.

Cooperative Solar Project

The solar project received seven bids for two array sizes: 70 kW and 100 kW, and the bidding was very competitive. The project was awarded to Independent Power Systems from Bozeman, MT. The total bid price was significantly less than we had anticipated, lowering the cost down to \$600 per panel. This works out to be a very good investment for members of the co-op. If you qualify for the 30-percent federal tax credit (and you need to check with your tax accountant as the co-op cannot give tax advice), the simple payoff is about nine years, and with each panel projected to produce 450 kilowatt hours (Kwh) per year and — with the co-op crediting 10 cents per Kwh — this makes an annual credit of about \$45 per year, or more than a 10-percent rate of return on your investment. On the day of the annual meeting, 45 percent (146) of the available solar panels were sold. Please contact the office at 406-538-3465 to request a presale purchase agreement, or download and print it from our website at <http://www.ferguselectric.coop/>.

By the time you receive your July 2017 issue of *Rural Montana*, the Cooperative Solar Project should be built as construction is scheduled to begin the end of June. The array of 324 solar panels will be located on the west side of Fergus Electric Co-op headquarters, near the shelterbelt.

City girl

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Electric Cooperative.

"I've always liked to make different things," she said, "and I love selling and packaging. I also really like the product, partly because I made it and know what ingredients are in it, but it's also really good for dry skin and for people with sensitive skin."

The soap is a hot item, Michelle added.

"I actually need to make more soap right now," she said. "We're running low."

Goats: a gateway to retail

Finding a passion in selling goats and goat milk soap from home, Michelle recently started selling LuLaRoe clothing.

"I started selling LuLaRoe products in November as something fun to do to make a little extra money," she said. "I started wearing the clothes and liked them. Later I found out there was this business opportunity. Fortunately we had the space for me to have a little area where people can come and shop. It's going well."

LuLaRoe, based out of California, focuses on women's clothing, including



Three curious kids pose for a photo. The American Dairy Goat Association herd name the Olsons belong to is "Elle's Belles."

leggings and vests, which Michelle said are two of her most popular items.

But the most popular items are the goats and goat milk soap, and Michelle wouldn't have it any other way. She is making the most of this unique livelihood she continues to share with the children.

"We are living our Montana dream," she said. "I do miss the city, but I love the country on our little farm. It's been great."

For more information on Olson's Nigerian dwarf goats or her LuLaRoe clothing business, call (406) 535-7600. Olson can also be found on Facebook and Instagram. You can also check the goats out at <https://www.goatzz.com/farms/5015/elles-belles-nigerian-dwarf-goats>.

First lineman's scholarship awarded

Tanner Blair of White Sulphur Springs is the recipient of Fergus Electric Cooperative's first lineman's scholarship. Upon graduating from high school, Tanner worked for several years in construction. It was then he decided that line work would be a good career, and so

he applied and was accepted into the lineman's program at the Highlands College-Montana Tech in Butte.

The award, for \$6,000, was distributed in two increments — one half while in school and one half upon successfully completing his education.



Fergus Electric Cooperative General Manager Scott Sweeney and Financial Analyst Janine Rife Didier stand with Tanner Blair after he receives his award. Sweeney and Rife Didier were instrumental in developing criteria for the new scholarship.

Engineering student hired for the summer

Scott Olson, a graduate of Fergus High School, is Fergus Electric's summer hire in the Engineering Department. He works with staking engineers Guy Johnson, Monte Obert and Melanie Foran.



Scott Olson

Scott is a junior majoring in electrical engineering at Montana Tech in Butte. He is student body treasurer and belongs to an engineering society.

When asked what he likes about his summer work, without hesitating Scott said, "The friendly atmosphere."

Fergus awards scholarships

A generous donation from the Leroy Strand ranch estate allowed the cooperative to award additional scholarships to the top three Montana Electric Cooperatives' Association/Fergus applicants.

Each of these students very ably met the requirements.

The first-place winner received \$1,000. Jessica Horan from Moore, is enrolling at Montana State University, where she plans to study pediatric physical therapy. Jessica was also the winner



Jessica Horan




Chase Gere



Carrie Cota

of a \$500 MECA scholarship.

The second-place award of \$500 goes to Chase Gere of Denton, who is a student at North Dakota State University studying radiology. The third award of \$500 goes to Carrie Cota of Roundup. She is a sophomore at Rocky Mountain College studying business and art.



In celebration of Independence Day, Fergus Electric's offices in Lewistown and Roundup will close July 4.

Nondiscrimination Statement

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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 54430

Account 35501

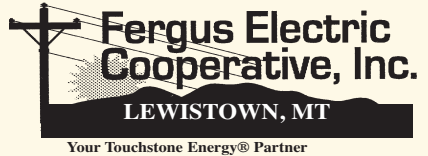
Account 395301

Account 322003

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

Last month's winner was Jill Smith of Heath.

**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	406-535-5192
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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Dale Rikala.....Operations Supervisor

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