

F E R G U S

FEATURES

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

A Little Improvisation:

Whitcrafts turn cart barn into versatile event center with a beautiful ambiance

Story and photos by Charlie Denison,
Contributing Writer

Having an epiphany is a serious matter when you're an architect.

Instead of wanting something to happen, you make something happen.

Jeff Whitcraft — a Lewistown native who has found his way back home — doesn't take this for granted.

He's had many ideas through the years, be it a plan for a golf course, a hotel, a bar or something else. And, in his case, he has a wife who supports the things he envisions, such as the recently constructed Cart Barn/event center at Judith Shadows Golf Course, an 18-hole golf course Jeff built on his grandfather's land three miles outside Lewistown.

The Whitcrafts opened Judith Shadows in 1997, and it's been going strong ever since. Although sometimes it's hard to imagine the business is 22 years old, Jeff said he continues to find pleasure in the work, even though it's not exactly what he expected when he chose his career.

"I first got into architecture because I didn't want to shovel," he joked. "I like art and I like construction, but I wanted to be on the office side of construction... now (being back in Central Montana) I shovel all the time."

The Cart Barn



Jeff Whitcraft, left, and his wife Maria enjoy a Hawaiian-themed event at their Cart Barn in early April.

Nevertheless, it's worth it, he said.
Staying up to date

Through the years the Whitcrafts have kept busy maintaining and expanding the property, and engaging with golfers, as well as others in the community.

"Judith Shadows is always evolving," said Jeff. "We're continually modifying, updating and upgrading."

The course gets modernized often.

For instance, new sets of tees "are more forward," according to Jeff's wife Maria.

"It helps those golfers who aren't long drivers. It helps make the game more fun for them," she said. "This is a modification we acted on after listening to novice and seasoned golfers. We appreciate their comments and take their considerations to heart."

Maria and Jeff are always brainstorming ways to make Judith Shadows a great place for golfers and non-golfers alike.

"We both come up with ideas, and we

have fun working together," said Jeff. "We approach everything as a team."

The Cart Barn was no exception.

How the Cart Barn was born

Such a vision, however, was a result of misfortune. In 2011, the Whitcrafts' old cart barn housing golf carts was badly damaged during the calamitous floods, so they had to build a new one. Rather than making it a single-use facility, they improvised.

That's when the epiphany struck Jeff.

"I thought, 'why not have something else here at Judith Shadows that will bring the community together?'" he said.

"So instead of building a one-dimensional cart barn, we thought 'why not make it an event center?'" Maria added.

The Whitcrafts opened the Cart Barn in July 2017. This is their third season of hosting events, and it's wildly exceeded their expectations.

"We've done weddings, family

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MANAGER'S MESSAGE

From Scott Sweeney

Annual meeting review

Thank you to the 169 members and approximately 171 guests who attended Fergus Electric Cooperative's 81st annual meeting on June 6. The Central Montana Cattlewomen served a delicious meal, and Neil Hamilton and Friends — Les LaFranier and Carl DeBelly — played music for everyone before the meeting.

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.

MECA's CEO updates membership

Gary Wiens, CEO of the Montana Electric Cooperatives' Association, spoke to the members during our annual meeting. He shared cases of legislators and electric co-ops working to co-sponsor and support bills to keep co-ops safe and to help them conduct business. Gary also thanked everyone who signed up to support the Montana Electric Cooperatives' Association Grassroots Action Team. Gary drew Vangie McConnell's name from those who had registered to support grassroots and awarded her a \$50 cash prize.

District 1 and District 6 board directors announced

During the annual meeting, the members in attendance voted by paper ballot to elect Board of Directors for District 1, (Rural Lewistown) and District 6 (Ryegate, Harlowton areas). District 1 candidates were Peter Andersen, incumbent Paul Descheemaeker, Terry Gill, Paul Grensten and Terry Lankutis. Incumbent Director Jason Swanz from District 6 ran unopposed. The membership re-elected Descheemaeker from District 1 and Swanz from District 6 to serve on the Board of Directors. Thank you to all the candidates!

Drawing for prizes

The co-op's gift to each member who registered at the annual meeting was a bamboo cutting board and pizza cutter inscribed with the co-op's name. Registered members were handed a prize ticket giving them the chance to win any of the 30 prizes awarded throughout the meeting. The grand prize drawing winner of \$500 cash was Luther "Bill" Baldwin. At the close of the meeting, 20 flowering potted plants, which decorated the tables, were awarded to members via stickers on the agendas.

Thank you

I want to thank the staff, board, election and credentials committee, and nominating committee, whose hard work before, during and after the event helped make our 81st annual meeting a success. Great job, everyone! A big thanks to the co-op's members for attending!

Reorganization of officers

Directly after the annual meeting, a reorganization meeting of the Board of Directors took place, during which Corporate Counsel Kris Birdwell conducted an election of officers. Paul Descheemaeker was elected president, Terry Frost was elected vice president, Jason Swanz was elected secretary/treasurer and Brad Arntzen was elected assistant secretary/treasurer.

Top to bottom: Carl DeBelly, Les LaFranier and Neil Hamilton played music during annual meeting registration. David Dover, Joe Leavengood and Melanie Foran enjoy a laugh on annual meeting day. Montana Electric Cooperatives' Association

CEO Gary Wiens promotes statewide grassroots. Fred Lark and George Dengel catch up on some visiting before the meeting. Janet and Jim Rife of Roy celebrate her 87th birthday at the annual meeting. Three generations: Paul Descheemaeker, right, and granddaughter, Evelyn, greet his mother, Molly Descheemaeker, at the annual meeting.



Cart Barn

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reunions, graduation parties, golf tournaments and other family friendly events,” Maria said. “We’re open to all kinds of events. If you need a space for 200 people, we’re happy to be of service. We have a full bar and a beautiful ambiance.”

Opening up the Cart Barn as an event center has given Maria an opportunity to meet new people.

“I can’t believe how far some of these people come for a wedding,” she said. “People drive across the country to come to this beautiful spot in the middle of nowhere.”

Maria is thrilled to see locals and businesses hosting events in the Cart Barn.

Earlier this year, for example, the Chamber of Commerce hosted a family friendly luau at the Cart Barn. Chamber Director Connie Fry said it was the perfect venue for the festivity.

“One thing I really like is that it’s an open space,” Fry said. “It can be set up to your liking. If it’s nice outside they can open the doors. You can really set it up to fit whatever you’re doing, and you can decorate it however you want.”

Creative people in the community play around with a plethora of themes. The luau was especially convivial, as many in attendance wore leis and Hawaiian shirts. Each table had pineapple-shaped party decorations, balloons and paper garlands. Children flew kites, the Lewistown Hoppers

showcased their talents and a local band kept energy levels up.

Seeing community members of all ages enjoy themselves was a great way to kick off another season, Jeff said, and he hopes to host more events in the Cart Barn this year and next.

“Like most Lewistown businesses, we’re trying to find ways to make the Cart Barn grow,” he said.

“We offer a nice, intimate space for a couple hundred people,” added Maria.

The space is also versatile, as it offers both indoor and outdoor opportunities, thanks largely to glass overhead door window walls.

“If it’s good weather, we roll them up and you don’t know they’re there. If it’s bad weather, you can sit here and look outside,” Jeff said.



A crowd gathers at the Cart Barn recently for a family friendly event. The Whitcrafts host a variety of events at the Cart Barn during the spring and summer, including weddings, family reunions and golf tournaments.



Architect Jeff Whitcraft and his wife Maria turned this cart barn into an event center.

Wrapping up a successful event recently, Jeff looked out at the groomed golf course, the native prairie and the illustrious Judith Mountains, and smiled, knowing this epiphany was one worth pursuing.

And, fortunately, others agree.

Lineman Scholarship Awarded

Fergus Electric Cooperative is pleased to announce that Jory Chrest of Ryegate is the recipient of Fergus Electric’s third \$6,000 Lineman Scholarship. In May 2019, Chrest successfully completed the Pre-Apprenticeship Line Program from Highlands College of Montana Tech in Butte. Jory is anxious to put his education to use as he is currently seeking a position as an apprentice journeyman lineman.

Jory Chrest, left, is congratulated by Fergus Electric Cooperative Assistant Manager David Dover for receiving the 2019 Lineman Scholarship.



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

Scholarships awarded at annual meeting

Scholarships was a favorite annual meeting agenda item for a group of young, eager scholars.

Jessica Horan of Moore and Anna Slivka of Winifred were each awarded scholarships from Fergus Electric Cooperative (\$1,000) and from the co-op's power supplier — North Dakota's Basin Electric Power Cooperative (\$500).

Twenty-four students accompanied by a parent or guardian vied for 10 \$1,000 "Luck of the Draw" scholarships.



Jessica Horan



Anna Slivka

Luck of the Draw scholarship winners



Left to Right: Cody Bergum, Ade Lensing, Adam Grensten, Grady Gilpatrick, Alex Wickens, Riley Donaldson, Cole Ayers, Andrea Russell, Lauren Glennie and Kenzie Anderson.

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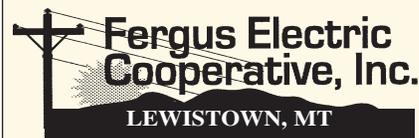
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BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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District 2: Brett Maxwell, Lewistown, 538-9002

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, Geysler, 735-4476

Fergus Features is an award-winning newsletter.



Anna Slivka



Kallie Zinne

Youth to Washington Tour winners recognized at annual meeting

As Fergus Electric Cooperative's winners of the 2018 National Rural Electric Cooperative Association Youth Tour to Washington, D.C. essay contest, Anna Slivka of Winifred and Kallie Zinne of Ryegate toured monuments, memorials and the Capitol, and visited with Montana's elected officials. In her presentation during the annual meeting, Zinne told the members that among her favorites during the tour was visiting the national World War II Memorial, the George Washington estate, the Capitol and seeing fireflies in all their nighttime glory for the first time!

