

F E R G U S

FEATURES

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

Bob Lee shares his ranching philosophy

Story and photos by

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Contributing Writer

Judith Gap rancher Bob Lee prides himself on being more of a giver than a taker. If you know Bob, you can see how that's the case.

But what's not accounted for in this life philosophy is all that's been given to him. These include a State, Regional and National Environmental Stewardship Award and an honorary doctorate from Montana State University in animal and range science.

And three remarkable children who have all excelled in their careers. His son, Kenny, is even stepping on board to run the family business, a diverse cattle and farming operation Bob and his wife, Kathy, started in 1969.

For the last 49 years, the husband-and-wife team have built on and expanded what's become a tremendously successful enterprise.

How did they do it?

"Number one is goals, number two is measurements: it's hard to know where you're going if you don't know where you've been," Bob said.

Bob and Kathy factor in everything, from environmental limitations, range, water and riparian areas, wintering costs, off-ranch resources and reputation, to quality and sustainability (both economic and social).



"We have to be economically sustainable," Bob said. "Profit is not a four-letter word. We have to be rewarded with the quality products we produce. Sometimes that's a challenge."

Well-researched, highly educated and passionate about implementing their knowledge, the Lees don't just have success with Lee Ranch, Co., but they also share their expertise with younger ranchers. Just last month, the couple spoke at a Montana Department of Agriculture's Young Ag Couples Conference in Helena, something they try to do every year.

Bob, an upbeat, gregarious gentleman, loves to deliver his presentation. Called "10 Dimes Make a Dollar," the PowerPoint outlines what the Lees have done and how it can be applied to other operations.

All the elements are important, but some are extra critical, such as water.

"We consider water to be the limiting factor in a lot of grazing and management schemes," Bob said. "We love to develop water. We'll do anything we can to develop it. We have 32 of those 10-foot fiberglass tanks scattered around this place, and every year we develop more water. It helps with the grazing."

The same goes for riparian areas.

"If you have a healthy, functioning riparian area, that's a pretty good clue



Bob and Kathy Lee encourage future ranchers to follow their dreams and exceed their own expectations.

your grazing lands will be alright, too," Bob said.

Bob and Kathy recognize the challenges facing agriculture production in the West, and they take great pride in being able to share what they've learned in ways that are practical and adaptable.

"We have to take better care of what we have and enhance what we have," Bob said. "Our greatest renewable resource is our grazing land. We have to keep it sustainable. We must be stewards of the land. It's better for the environment, and better for the municipalities and towns."

The presentations are going over well, Bob said. People are getting it, especially the up-and-coming ranchers.

"I'm excited about the future generations," Bob said. "They are continuing

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MANAGER'S MESSAGE

From Scott Sweeney

New power supplier

As of January 1, 2017, Fergus Electric Cooperative began receiving power supply from Members 1st Power Cooperative. Fergus Electric anticipates a smooth changeover from Southern's billing to Members 1st. At our request, Southern — our previous power supplier — and Members 1st selected a month and each ran parallel tests of that month's power bill to verify accuracy between the two billing systems. The test proved valuable, revealing a couple of areas on the Members 1st bill that needed fine tuning to ensure precision. I will provide an update on the billing of the power bill in the next month or two, once the co-op has received a couple of consecutive bills.

Fergus Electric and Members 1st are working together on upgrading metering at our 21 delivery points. If "real-time" metering is installed, Basin Electric Power Cooperative will provide the power at a discounted price. All of Fergus Electric's delivery points come from NorthWestern Energy's (NWE) transmission lines, so we are working with NWE as well to accomplish the metering upgrades.

Budget Billing annual enrollment month is next month

By the time your April issue of the *Rural Montana* magazine arrives, the month will have already started.

Therefore, I am offering a reminder now that April is the enrollment month for Budget Billing. To qualify for our Budget Billing program, your account must be billed under a residential rate class, the account must have been active at that location for the past 12 months and the account must be paid in full before converting to Budget Billing.

In addition to April being the only month for enrollment, it is also the "true-up" month for members already enrolled in Budget Billing. This means whether you have a credit or a balance due; your electric billing account will be adjusted accordingly. April is almost here. Call the office at 406-538-3465 if you are interested in enrolling in Budget Billing or learning more about the program.

Lineman scholarship deadline approaching fast

Please submit your completed scholarship and required documents to Fergus Electric Cooperative by the March 15, 2017, deadline. If you are interested in a career as an electrical line worker, sign up now for a chance to win a \$6,000 scholarship. Scholarship applications are available on our website at <http://www.ferguselectric.coop/> or in our office. The successful applicant will be notified by April 15, 2017.

Alyssa Thomas writes winning essay

Each November central Montana Sophomores and Juniors vie for a trip to Washington, D.C. by writing an essay on an assigned topic. This year's topic was, "Why I should be selected for the 2017 Youth Tour to Washington, D.C." A Montana Electric Cooperatives' Association committee selected one state winner and other co-op



Alyssa Thomas

submittals were declared cooperative winners.

Along with 27 other Montana youth and 16 North Dakota students, Alyssa Thomas of Hobson will represent Fergus Electric Cooperative in Washington, D.C. this summer.

Her parents are cooperative members Chantelle and Dan Thomas.

Electric Co-op Day at the Capitol



Vangie McConnell and Daniel Zolnikov

In January, nearly 400 beef-sandwich lunches were served to state legislators, Capitol staff and visitors as part of Electric Cooperative Day at the Capitol. The event takes place each legislative session in the state Capitol Rotunda in Helena.

In addition to lunch, legislators and other visitors had a chance to see exhibits on energy efficiency and speak with cooperative representatives from across the state.

Vangie McConnell of Fergus Electric spoke with Representative Daniel Zolnikov of HD 45. Zolnikov serves on the Business and Labor; Federal Relations, Energy and Telecommunications; and Legislative Administration committees.

In 2004, Zolnikov represented Fergus Electric in Washington, D.C., by writing a winning essay titled, "If you could change five things in your community, what would they be and why?" Daniel was one of 26 young Montanans who participated in the annual Youth Tour that year.

Bob Lee

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to learn the value of soil health, and that's the root system. There is hope for us in agriculture."

That's the message the Lees want to spread with "10 Dimes Make a Dollar," a presentation Bob said is in demand.

"We get calls from people all over the United States," Bob said, adding that's especially the case after receiving the stewardship awards. "We've been featured on *Cattlemen to Cattlemen* and Larry Butler came out and filmed an episode of *Out on the Land* on our ranch. This exposure has given us the opportunity to talk agriculture with a lot of people."

This excites Bob, and he will continue to encourage future ranchers to follow their dreams and exceed their own expectations.

"I want to make the best better," Bob said. "I know that's a 4-H motto, and that's probably where it all started for me. It's been there for my kids, too. They were all state FFA officers."



That's another gift Bob's received: children who have followed in his footsteps and learned from his way of life. There is a lot to appreciate about ranch living, Bob said, and he doesn't take it for granted.

"When you get up every morning doing what you love, you don't have a job," Bob said. "One thing I've been blessed with is my dad taught me how to work and not know it was work."

Bob has fun on the ranch, and he especially enjoys it thanks to the camaraderie he has with his wife. This fall, they will celebrate their 50-year anniversary, and Bob couldn't be happier.

"She's my best half," he said. "She's my everything. We've put together a doggone nice place, and we've made a wonderful family."



Walker, Kade, Kenny and Rachel Lee are happy to be part of the family ranch operation.

Kathy agrees, saying it hardly feels like any time has gone by, and Bob knows why.

"We still think we're kids," he said.

But the reality is they're not anymore. Approaching retirement age, Bob and Kathy are passing the ranch – the last (and perhaps most important) step in their "10 Dimes Make a Dollar" ranching approach. And, once again,

Bob, the proud giver, is the one receiving a special gift.

"Kenny, who went to school at Montana State and has worked with other people, has always wanted to be in agriculture. He's done everything we've asked of him, and we're honored he, his wife and his two boys want to be here with us," Bob said.

Crews practice ice rescue

Along with Fergus Electric, Lewistown Fire Rescue and Central Montana Search and Rescue, crews participated in ice-rescue training in Fergus Electric's pond. Linemen Brain Godbey and Bret Ophus, who double as firefighters, arranged for the training. Approximately 25 men and women participated in the exercise.

To make a hole in the ice, Godbey used a chainsaw. Then each participant, wearing a dry suit, simulated an accident requiring an ice rescue. The

would-be victim was secured with a rope sling and was pulled to safety. For protection, rescue ropes were securely attached to each person.

The exercise lasted a little over three hours, and was considered a success.



New homes and new meters top 2016 construction year

Numbers compiled by Staking Engineers Guy Johnson and Monte Obert

Line crews constructed 3.31 miles of overhead line, 0.06 miles of secondary services and 4.01 miles of primary underground to new members. Seventy-six meters were installed. Of the 76 new meters, 13 were for members relocating from out of state. New services were built to 33 homes, of which three were between 11,000 and 23,000 square feet in size. Other new services included a recreational vehicle store west of Lewistown, a sign shop with apartments in Winifred, six new irrigation sites and extensions to 15

seasonal cabins. A total of 465 junk poles were replaced in the Kolin, Roy, Denton, Grass Range, Roundup and Musselshell service areas. Aid to construction dollars covered costs for new services. A two-mile stretch of line near Black Butte was rebuilt and moved adjacent to the county road. A severe wind/tornado event took place in the Roy and Valentine areas in June. Park Electric out of Livingston sent a crew to assist with the replacement and repair of 37 broken poles and downed wires. The storm also destroyed street lights in Roy and Winnett. They were replaced with energy-efficient LED fixtures.

Electrical Safety Quiz

Electricity is great! We use it to light our homes, watch TV with our families and enjoy many other activities. But electricity can be dangerous if we aren't careful when using it. Test your electrical safety knowledge by answering the questions below.

- It is safe to run extension cords under carpet or rugs in your home.
 - False
 - True
- How often should smoke alarms in your home be tested?
 - Once a year
 - Once a month
 - Once every three months
- How far should items be kept away from space heaters?
 - At least one foot
 - At least five feet
 - At least three feet
- Overloaded outlets can overheat and cause a fire.
 - True
 - False
- When using an electrical appliance or electrical tool outside, what is the minimum distance you should keep between yourself and any wet surface.
 - Ten feet
 - Five feet
 - Three feet

How many did you get right? Check the answer key below.

Answers: 1) A. 2) B. 3) C. 4) A. 5) A.

Identify Account Number*

Win a \$32.50 credit

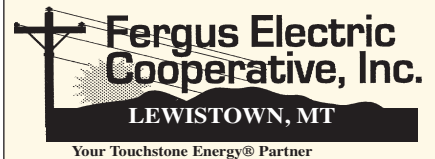
If one of the following account numbers is yours, call Fergus Electric (406-538-3465) and identify yourself and your account number.

Account 28880 • Account 321430
Account 88430 • Account 244000
Account 319440

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

Last month's winner was Gordon Stone of Roundup.

*Numbers are drawn randomly.



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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