

# F E R G U S

## FEATURES

Member Newsletter ♦ Fergus Electric Cooperative, Inc., Lewistown, MT ♦ [www.ferguselectric.coop](http://www.ferguselectric.coop)

## Labor of Love

### Susan Lohmuller celebrates 40 years of weaving

Story and photos by

Charlie Denison  
Contributing Writer

It's hard for Susan Lohmuller to say what it was about Swedish rag rugs that captivated her so much, but, in 1978, the intricacies involved with weaving them inspired her to pick up a new hobby.

"I was interested in making things myself when I was young," she said. "Rag rugs are beautiful and cost very little to make, and at that time I had very little money."

Motivated, Lohmuller took to the challenge, immediately finding herself one with the loom.

This affinity for weaving did not go unnoticed. Susan's husband, Richard, encouraged her new passion, and, in 1982, he built her a loom of her own. Before that she'd been weaving on a four-shaft loom she purchased from one of her mentors.

"We saw a Swedish loom and he just basically jotted down the dimensions and tried to build it from memory," she said. "It's the loom I love the most."

Although Lohmuller started with rag rugs, she's evolved as a weaver, making table linens, baby blankets, hand towels and more.

"I just really like textiles," she said. "I like hand-made things... lately I've been challenging myself with a different technique called 'echo weave,' where one thread is echoed by another thread," she said. "I've been doing this for a year, and I'm really into it. It's really complicated, but it's awesome."

Most recently, Lohmuller's been making silk scarves, which she also



*Lohmuller stands with a rag rug she made. It was rag rugs that inspired her to start weaving in 1978.*

hand dyes.

Although she enjoys weaving, Lohmuller will be the first to tell you it's no picnic.

"It's really hard," she said. "It's the most difficult thing I've ever learned, and it's a life-long challenge because it's so complicated."

The difficulty, however, is part of what motivates Lohmuller.

#### Recognized for her talent

Through the years, Lohmuller has had much success with her weaving, and has become an instrumental part of the Montana Association of Weavers and Spinners (MAWS).

"MAWS is a very vibrant community of weavers and I'm honored to be a part

of it," said Lohmuller, who serves as MAWS president.

The group is glad to have Lohmuller. In 2016, MAWS presented her with the Living Treasure Award for "her contributions, leadership and source of inspiration and encouragement to others."

"I was deeply honored to receive that from my weaving peers," she said. "Those are the people who know my work, so it means so much to get that kind of recognition from them."

Despite such accolades, Lohmuller stays humble, not considering herself an artist, but her skill is undeniable, giving her the ability to get creative with her weaving.

"I've gotten to the point where I have developed my skill and am developing my own weave structures," said Lohmuller.

"That's taken many, many years... like anything. You really have to have confidence in your skill before you can get to this point."

Forty years in, Lohmuller feels like she's where she wants to be as a weaver, and she's glad she pushed herself to keep going once she got started, as there have definitely been times when it was a struggle to stick with it.

Sometimes when there is struggle, Lohmuller takes a break.

"I often take time away from weaving in the summer," she said. "I like to garden, and summer is short here. You have to take advantage of it when you can."

In the winter, Lohmuller takes

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# MANAGER'S MESSAGE

From Scott Sweeney

## **Congratulations to Vangie McConnell**

On January 2, Vangie put in her last day working in the office at Fergus Electric Cooperative. Among Vangie's many roles at the co-op, one of her labors of love has been working each month on the layout of the four pages that make up the *Fergus Features* section in the *Rural Montana* magazine. As its editor, Vangie has been the primary force in finding feature stories that are of interest to our members. In addition to my monthly message, Vangie consistently fills the pages with a variety of relevant topics and messages of importance to our membership. Recent MECA surveys have shown that our *Fergus Features* section is one of the co-op readers' favorites in the entire magazine. We appreciate and thank Vangie for providing us with many wonderful past issues and an award-winning outline to use going forward!

Since her co-op career began, Vangie has had the task or opportunity, (depending on her viewpoint) of working with five general managers, beginning with Dick Peck in 1980. Vangie's competence permitted her to seamlessly adjust with the change of management throughout the years. One of the important functions during Vangie's 38 years at the co-op was keeping the board minutes during the monthly board meetings and at the Annual Meeting of the membership. Minutes of board meetings are kept permanently, so Vangie's work will forever remain of record at the co-op.

In addition to her other responsibilities, as the co-op's benefits administrator, Vangie has diligently managed and maintained employees' benefits and insurance records. I have truly appreciated that Vangie has respect for the professional obligation

to keep the employees' insurance and retirement records confidential.

Vangie, as your final general manager, I want to say thank you for everything you have done for the cooperative. During your career, you accepted a lot of responsibility at the co-op, took charge, produced fine work, and were always dependable. I appreciate and thank you for your loyalty to Fergus Electric, and I appreciate that you have the quality of not being a judgmental person, instead you accept everyone as they are and have worked well with everyone. I will certainly miss you, Vangie, and all of us,



Vangie McConnell

from the employees, membership and the board wish you the very best in your retirement! It's been a pleasure!

## **Transmission line rebuild**

Our contractor, Rocky Mountain Contractors is slowly, but surely, getting the seven miles of our 50 kilovolt transmission line reconstructed. This key piece of power line provides power to the Winifred, Roy, Hilger and Carters substations. On December 4, the contractor had a new wire accidentally make contact with one of the old conductors, which knocked out the power for about an hour. Most importantly, everyone was safe and there were no injuries. That afternoon, the boss paid a visit to our office to apologize for any inconvenience the outage caused to our members served out of the four substations. Rebuilding the existing power line in place is a tedious process and it requires line crews to be very safety conscious. The cooperative strongly encourages our line crews and our contractor's line crews to work safely.

Power outages are planned during the transmission line rebuild. Fergus Electric will notify members in

advance of these planned outages. I thank everyone for being patient with the interruptions caused by the power outages. Thank you for understanding. Once completed, the reconstructed transmission line will provide more reliability and dependability to the members it serves for many years to come.

## **Truck garage**

The new truck garage is nearly complete. Local contractors did a fine job of building the new truck garage for the co-op. Not only is it a nice-looking building, but the linemen, mechanic, engineers and all the other employees are very happy to have a heated building to park our trucks and other equipment in during the winter, and I have little doubt that they will be equally happy to be able to park indoors out of the elements during the other three seasons as well!

We appreciate the quality work of the local contractors who worked on the building and want to thank Birdwell Builders; Bozeman Plumbing of Lewistown; Advanced Electric; Besel Construction; Universal Heating, Cooling and Refrigeration; and Snowy Mountain Lock and Door.

## **Happy New Year!**

We want to wish everyone a new year filled with much happiness, good health, and prosperity!

*Did you know Fergus Electric offers high voltage safety demonstrations for schools and organizations. Call Dale Rikala, line superintendent, at 538-3465 to schedule a demonstration.*

## **Code of the West**

1. Live each day with courage
2. Take pride in your work
3. Always finish what you start
4. Do what has to be done
5. Be tough, but fair
6. When you make a promise, keep it
7. Ride for the brand
8. Talk less, say more
9. Remember that some things are not for sale
10. Know where to draw the line

*Reprint from Wyoming Rural Electric News*

## Susan Lohmuller

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advantage of the snowy weather and makes herself comfortable at a loom. When she's really into a piece, sometimes she hopes for a storm — then she has no excuse to step away from the loom.

"There are years I wish for one more snow storm so I can keep working," she said.

When she gets in a groove, it's hard for her to want to do anything else.

"It's like dancing," she said. "You dance on the treadles."

### Feeling connected

Lohmuller said she hopes weaving remains a pastime for future generations, as she feels it is critical to keep the art in existence. For her, it's an honor to keep the ancestral skill mainstream.

"Weaving is huge in our lives," she said. "Everything around you is woven: your bed sheets, bath towel, upholstery on your couch. It's all different manifestations of weaving. When you're born, you're wrapped in cloth."

For Lohmuller, weaving unites her with other cultures and other generations, which can sometimes be mind-blowing.

"My husband and I were in a museum

at Mesa Verde National Park once and I saw a little sandal woven in yucca fiber," she said. "It was the same pattern I'd been weaving. That was a powerful feeling, and it gives me even more respect for other cultures. There were some really tremendous weavers out there, and I feel connected to thousands of people who weaved."

Lohmuller is of Swedish heritage, and weaving has also helped her feel a connection to her homeland.

"Sweden valued their weaving culture enough to teach weaving to kindergartners at one time, and they still have folk schools for high-school-age students who wish to learn," she said. "I have a deep respect for that aspect of the Swedes."

Weaving has become an essential part of Lohmuller, and she wouldn't have it any other way.

"It's gratifying work," she said.

Those interested in her work can see it exhibited at the Lewistown Art Center.



*Susan Lohmuller weaves on a small loom at her home in November. She calls this loom "baby wolf," and jokes that it will be the one she takes to a nursing home.*

"I sell some table runners, table toppers, baby blankets and other products," Lohmuller said. "I'm grateful the art center supports my craft and this community supports the arts. I'm grateful people enjoy what I weave."

## Save Energy without Investing a Dime

While most folks know you can save energy by replacing inefficient appliances with new Energy Star models or adding insulation, sometimes there simply isn't money to spare. Does that mean you're powerless to lower your electric bill? Not at all.

There are several free things members can do to cut energy costs without investing a dime. These tips might not pack as big of an efficiency punch as upgrade investments, but every little bit counts.

1. Heating water makes up about 12 percent of your home's energy use. Set your water heater temperature no higher than 120°F. For households with only one or two members, a 115°F setting works.

2. Drain 1-2 gallons from the bottom of your water heater each year to keep sediment from building up and making your equipment work harder.

3. Since hot water costs more, wash clothes in cold water unless clothing is very dirty, and only do full loads of laundry.

4. Set your thermostats to 78°F in summer, 68°F in winter.

5. Have ceiling paddle fans? Run them on medium to blow air down in the summer, then run them low to blow air up in the winter. Better air circulation will keep your heating, ventilation and air conditioning, (HVAC) system from working overtime.

6. Don't make your fridge work too hard. Clean your refrigerator coils every year. You can also set the

temperature between 34° – 37°F and leave the freezer between 0° – 5°F. Keep the freezer full — frozen foods help your freezer stay cool.

7. When cooking, keep the lids on pots and let hot food cool off before placing it in the refrigerator.

8. Check your furnace or air conditioner filter each month, and clean or replace it as needed. Dirty filters block air flow through your heating and cooling systems, increasing your energy bill and shortening the equipment's life.

9. During hot months, keep window coverings closed on the south, east, and west windows. In winter, let the sun in.

You can find more ways to save at [www.TogetherWeSave.com](http://www.TogetherWeSave.com).

# Ensure a safe climb for Fergus Electric linemen

Here are a few steps members can take to protect and help ensure the safety of the linemen when on the job.

Fergus line crews consistently climb poles. If people hang signs on the poles with tacks or nails, or use poles for other purposes, it is dangerous for the linemen.

Even though a sign may have been torn down, the nails can remain and end up tearing or cracking a line worker's glove causing exposure to electric current.

Please remember:

- Do not hang



signs or nail objects to the pole. The nails or staples could also cause a lineman to slip.

- Do not hang birdhouses, basketball hoops or antennas on electrical poles. Line crews will have great difficulty climbing around them.
- Do not attach fences to the pole or take dirt from around the pole.
- Please use common sense around utility poles. Show your appreciation for those who work hard to make sure you have reliable electric service.

## It's a new year — Let's Get Organized

### 1. Write Things Down

Whether choosing to write things down with a pen and paper or set a reminder on a cellphone, writing things down is a simple way to ease the stress that can come with trying to remember multiple things at once.

### 2. Create Schedules

Don't waste time. The ability to keep things organized goes hand-in-hand with the ability to be productive. Set Goals. Create schedules. Make deadlines. Most importantly, stick to them.

### 3. Declutter Regularly and Keep only What You Need.

More possessions mean more clutter. Finding time to regularly organize and declutter can help in deciding where everything should go.

### 4. Share Responsibilities

There is no quicker way to become stressed than to feel overwhelmed with all that you have on your plate. It can be easy to take on too many responsibilities, but if you loosen the reins and let someone else help you, sometimes the outcome is better all-around.

### 5. Do Not Procrastinate

Don't wait. Although sometimes easier said than done, putting in the effort to get things done as soon as possible will help make your life less stressful. Sometimes the longer you wait to do something, the more you dread actually getting to it. Instead of putting things off, get them done right away so you won't dread taking care of those things later.

## 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 188000 • Account 360923  
Account 172001 • Account 70001**

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

Last month's winner was **John Moore** of Lewistown.

*\*Numbers are drawn monthly.*



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  
Bret Ophus .....406-366-7523  
Guy Johnson .....406-366-9170  
Scott Sweeney .....406-538-7218  
Don Criswell (Roundup) .....406-366-3465  
David Dover .....406-366-1975  
Melanie Foran .....406-462-5650

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