

F E R R I G U S

FEATURES

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

Earning Her Wings

Ellie Pennell is training to become a fighter pilot

Story by Charlie Denison,
Contributing Writer

Photos contributed by Ellie Pennell

Lewistown has its own “Captain Marvel.”

Elizabeth “Ellie” Pennell, daughter of Fergus Electric Cooperative members Gray and Diane, is training to become a fighter pilot for the United States Air Force at Sheppard Air Force Base in northern Texas.

The only female out of 28 students in the Euro-NATO Joint Jet Pilot Training Program, Pennell is becoming something of a local superhero.

Flying upside down, spinning, making loops and barrel rolls in the air, she is doing things she never imagined while growing up in central Montana. Never before has she felt something so exhilarating.

“Flying is super fun,” she said. “When you’re up there, you can do anything. You can go upside down. It’s amazing.”

She’s also never experienced something so frightening.



Ellie Pennell celebrates after successfully completing one of her first solo flights.

“Sometimes it’s ‘helmet fire,’” she said. “There are so many things happening and you can’t focus on anything except trying to survive. That’s what makes it so rewarding when you do it well. It’s a great feeling to know I am capable of doing something like this.”

Fighter pilot training is physically, mentally and emotionally challenging, Pennell said, but she’s up for the task.

“Staying positive and optimistic is important,” she said. “Your attitude makes a huge difference, but the biggest thing is dedication, hard work and applying yourself. You can’t

give up when times get hard. You can’t get overwhelmed when you’re discouraged.”

Having support also helps Pennell, whether it’s through faith, family, friends on the base or encouragement from people back home.

“I’m really thankful for my central Montana fans,” she said. “Knowing an entire town is rooting for me means so much. Having a cheering squad means more than people realize.”

How she got here

After being homeschooled in Lewistown, Pennell went to Montana State University (MSU), where she signed up with the Air Force Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC), a decision partly inspired by her father, who was Navy ROTC.

“I was studying computer science, but I didn’t want to end up sitting at a desk,” she said. “I had to pick some sort of career by junior year.”

In June of 2015, Pennell went on an incentive flight in Alabama, where she

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One of Ellie Pennell’s instructors demonstrates how to inspect the exterior of a plane before flying.



MANAGER'S MESSAGE

From Scott Sweeney

Succession Planning

Fergus Electric Cooperative continues to plan for future retirements of its staff. The cooperative has six employees who will become eligible and may retire in the years 2020 and 2021. Management and the board have been planning for and taking steps to help fill in the gaps left when

employees retire.

In May we will hire a new staking engineer to fill an opening that is forthcoming, and in April we began advertising for a lineman position that will be filled with either a journeyman or an apprentice. Our immediate goal is to hire a line worker this summer, and if the timing is right and the

opportunity presents itself, the board has given management the authority to hire a second full-time line worker.

With 27 full-time employees and one half-time employee, who collectively have years and years of institutional knowledge, the task of replacing a potential of six retirees relatively soon is big, but with proper planning and preparation, it is very doable. I envision that the cooperative will be successful in its succession planning efforts and will continue its practice of recruiting dedicated, skilled individuals to fill the positions currently held by dedicated, skilled individuals who are choosing to retire.

Ellie Pennell

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was able to experience what it's like to fly a plane for the first time. When she stepped out of that Civil Air Patrol plane, she had a new career path in mind: fighter pilot.

"Going on that flight opened my eyes to what it was like to be a pilot and be in front of the cockpit of a plane instead of just a passenger," Pennell said. "It was also just so much fun to be up there and see everything from above."

This was not an easy decision, but as she continued to pray about it, she felt like it was the right direction for her. She also received much encouragement and advice from her family.

"My mom was really helpful," said Pennell. "Moms are great sources of wisdom. My mom knows me and knows my personality. She knows I

am a very structured person and knew the military would be a good place for me."

Pennell graduated from MSU in December of 2017, and headed to Texas in February of 2018. She worked an interim job for a few months and officially started pilot training in September.

So far, so good for Pennell, as her Air Force experience continues to get better. She's already done a handful of solo flights, and, after every landing, she's even more inspired to keep going.

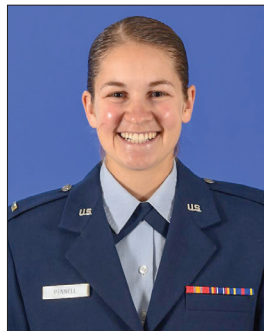
"Landing my first solo flight was a huge leap," she said. "I thought, 'Holy cow, I'm flying!' and 'I just landed this plane and I did it on my own! That was so awesome.'"

Every time she lands, Pennell said she gets more confident.

"I feel like — if anything bad happens — I'm ready for it," she said.

Still, she knows she has more to learn, as she's just getting started.

"I don't know what's ahead, but I'm excited for the future," she said. "I'm excited for the amount of opportunities that are out there for me. In the military, the world is your oyster shell, and I look forward to seeing where I land."



Second Lieutenant Ellie Pennell is proud to represent the U.S. Air Force.

Prepared for what's next

Pennell completes her training on the T-6 Texan II and will move on to T-238 fighter jets. She graduates in October.

"I'm excited to get to the point where I am serving the country and putting my training to use," she said. "I would like to fly F16s or F22s someday. That just sounds great."

Pilot training takes a lot of self-discipline and hard work, Pennell said, and those are some of her attributes that continue to push her forward. But it's her faith and her family she often credits for getting her where she is today.

"My faith is huge. It's the only way I can get through," she said. "And I couldn't do this without the support of my mom and dad. I really couldn't ask for better parents or a better upbringing. They taught me how to be a hard worker, be self-motivated and push through hard times. They encouraged me to hit the 'go' button on this journey, and I'm so glad they did, and I'm so glad God gave me that extra push to make it happen."

*Ellie had the good fortune of having her name drawn by her peers in the 2014, 2015 and 2017 "luck-of-the-draw" scholarship drawings held during the co-op's annual meetings. Fergus Electric Co-op is pleased to be able to follow up with scholarship winners and learn what they have done with their education. Luck-of-the-draw scholarships are funded by unclaimed capital credits — *see scholarship application form in this issue.*

Join us for your Annual Meeting

Thursday, June 6, 2019 at 11 a.m.
Fergus County Trade Center

Register for a chance to win:

- Grand prize — \$500 cash
- Ten \$1,000 scholarships
- Base charge credits • Cash prizes
- Gift cards • Other prizes

Mark your calendars for
Thursday, June 6

Scholarship drawing at annual meeting

Must be present to win

Fergus Electric Cooperative will offer 10 \$1,000 scholarships in a drawing at this year's annual meeting, on Thursday, June 6.

Rules for the scholarship drawing are: 1) The applicant or applicant's parent/guardian must be a member of Fergus Electric Cooperative, 2) The applicant must be present at the annual meeting accompanied by a parent/guardian, 3) The applicant must have at least a "C" grade average, and 4) The scholarship may be used for undergraduate college, vo-tech or for graduate studies.

No support documentation is required. Winners are determined by the luck of the draw. Checks will be written to the college or school of the winners' choice.

Please complete the following application and return it to: Fergus Electric Scholarship Drawing, 84423 U.S. Highway 87, Lewistown, MT 59457.

Fergus Electric Scholarship Application*

Name _____

Address _____

Phone _____

College/Vo-Tech attending/
 will attend _____

I maintain at least a "C" average _____

Student Signature _____

Parent/Guardian Signature _____

**Application due by May 31, 2019*

Meet your board candidates

In accordance with Fergus Electric Cooperative Bylaws, Article IV, Section 4.3, the nominating committees met and selected candidates for the Board of Trustees.

In addition to the procedure set forth above, any 15 or more members acting together from the district in which a trustee is to be elected may make other nominations by petition not less than 30 days prior to the meeting. The secretary shall post such nominations at the same place where the list of nominations made by the aforesaid committees are posted. No other method of nominating candidates for the trustee shall be permitted.

The following members from District 1 and District 6 are seeking board positions:

Paul Descheemaeker – District 1

Paul Descheemaeker is seeking a fourth term as a Fergus Electric trustee.

"The last three years have been very exciting for the co-op. With the Southern bankruptcy behind us, we have been able to get back to business strengthening and protecting the infrastructure and assets of our system. The co-op has replaced worn-out equipment and built a new building to house most of the trucks and other equipment. This investment has added to the safety of our workforce and the reliability of our system, without affecting our rates."

Paul is currently the vice president of Fergus Electric. He also serves on the Members 1st board. If he's not serving Fergus Electric or ranching, Paul and his wife, Mary, enjoy traveling and outdoor activities including hiking, fishing and skiing. Paul and Mary have four adult children and three grandchildren.

Paul has been a resident of Fergus County since 1976. He has a degree from Montana State University in ag business. He is active in the Montana Grain Growers and Montana Stock Growers. He served seven years on the Grass Range School Board, as well. He is currently raising certified all-natural feeder calves with two of his sons on two ranches east of Lewistown.

"I sincerely appreciate the opportunity to continue to serve

as a trustee on the Fergus Electric Cooperative board," Descheemaeker said.

Terry Gill — District 1

Terry Gill is running for the open position in District 1. Terry and his wife

Joan live south of Lewistown in the Snowy Mountains, where they build custom homes and raise Angus cattle. Terry has been active in community activities, including



but not limited to, the Fergus County Planning Board. He was born and raised in Fergus County, graduated from Fergus High School and attended MSU. Terry and Joan have two grown sons: Ty and Colt, who graduated from Montana universities and enjoy being able to live in Montana.

Gill said, "Throughout years of construction, I have observed many of Fergus Electric's procedures and installations. I have wanted to be on the board for years to help with the continuing challenges of such an important community utility and asset.

"I am extremely pleased to have been asked by the nominating committee to run for this position," Gill added.

Paul Grensten – District 1

As a lifelong resident of Fergus County, Paul Grensten is honored to be considered as a candidate for the Fergus Electric Co-op Board.

Grensten says, "I will bring 35 years of experience as the maintenance supervisor for the



Montana Mental Health Nursing Care Center that helped me develop my common-sense approach. During that tenure at the center, I also served as secretary/treasurer for the Montana Society of Healthcare Engineers.

"Since my retirement, I have kept busy operating my own painting company, Pine Ridge Painting and Such. I have enjoyed getting to work with many different clients in the Lewistown area."

Grensten continues, "I enjoy spending time with Janet, my wife of

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candidates

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35 years, my sons Adam and Jacob and my new daughter-in-law, Rachael. I like to also keep busy camping, hunting and collecting old stuff. I have also been involved in a variety of community activities that keep me out of trouble. I have been a co-op member for the past 20 years.

"I am committed to our community since both of my grandfathers homesteaded in this area: my grandfather Gilskey near Hilger and my grandfather Grensten near Piper," he said. "I am excited to be part of the growth and continued progress of our community, especially Fergus Electric Co-op, as our world takes on the challenges of developing and delivering clean, sustainable energy for the future generations."

"Thank you for entrusting me with this opportunity," Grensten added.

Terry Lankutis – District 1

Ms. Terry Lankutis was born and raised on the family ranch south of Lewistown in the Snowies. She spent 20 years as a special education teacher then entered the instructional technology industry conducting workshops and consulting with educators on implementing technology in special education classrooms. During this career, she was not only involved in many school board meetings, but also sat on the Board of Directors for the Northwest Council for Computers in Education.



Ms. Lankutis moved back to Lewistown in 2008, and worked in the technology department at Lewistown Public Schools and came back to the family ranch. She now is retired from the school and works full time at the ranch. She finds joy in ranch work and

is glad to be home.

Her experience as a director on other boards lends itself well to the work of the Fergus Electric Board. Listening and attention to details are just two of her strengths. "The work of the Fergus Electric Board is important and being a member would be a chance to give back to a vital community organization," she said.

Jason Swanz – District 6

Jason Swanz is pleased to have been asked by the nominating committee to seek a third term as a Fergus Electric trustee. Jason says, "I feel fortunate to serve on a board that is surrounded by such good employees, management and fellow board members. It truly is an honor to be a part of Fergus Electric, and I look forward to continuing to work with such a fine group."



Swanz remarked on the shift Fergus Electric made to its new power supplier, as well as the cooperative's ongoing effort to maintain its vital infrastructure, saying, "Our initial years with Basin Electric (Power Cooperative) have gone very smoothly and we have made a seamless transition this far. I am pleased that we have been able to make some needed upgrades in our truck fleet as well as finishing our new shop to keep our fleet in good shape and make our linemen's jobs safer. I am also excited for the roll out of our new metering system that will provide our staff and members some new and exciting technology."

Jason and his wife Jody ranch near Judith Gap, where along with running their commercial cow herd and feedlot, they have added a working ranch vacation business.

Their two sons Jacob, 12, and Jackson, 14, attend school at Hobson, where in addition to their studies, they enthusiastically participate in sports.

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 322021 • Account 359195
Account 317502 • Account 202001**

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

Last month's winners were **Terry Ernst** of Lewistown and **Edward Day** of Roundup.

**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
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

FERGUS ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE, INC.

84423 US Hwy. 87, Lewistown, MT 59457-2058
Tel: 406-538-3465

Office Hours: 7 a.m. - 5:30 p.m. M-F

Website: www.ferguselectric.coop

E-mail: ferguselectric@ferguselectric.coop

Facebook: www.facebook.com/ferguselectric

Scott Sweeney General Manager

David Dover Assistant Manager

Dale Rikala Operations Supervisor

Sally Horacek Office Manager

Janine Rife Didier Editor

Fergus Electric is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

District 1: Paul Descheemaeker, Vice

President, Lewistown, 428-2417

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,

Geyser, 735-4476

Fergus Features is an award-winning newsletter.

Notice of annual meeting

Pursuant to Article III, Section 3 of the bylaws of Fergus Electric Cooperative, Inc., notice of the 81st annual meeting is hereby given.

The member meeting will take place at the Fergus County Trade Center, Lewistown, Montana, on Thursday, June 6, 2019. Registration begins at 11 a.m., with lunch at noon.

The business meeting convenes at 1 p.m., with the order of business as follows: report of members present, reading of notice and proof of publication, election of two trustees and transaction of other business.