

F E R G U S

FEATURES

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

Back on the map: Garneill businesses thriving

Story and photos by

Charlie Denison
Contributing Writer

“**B**link and you miss it.” So often, that’s the phrase people use as they cruise past tiny Montana towns.

Garneill — a dot on the map 30 miles southwest of Lewistown — is no exception. However, two local businesses are giving people a reason to stop at this old railroad town, be it for animal feed or a hot cup of joe.

Mountain West Ag

When driving past Garneill on U.S. Highway 191, it’s practically impossible to miss the colossal grain elevator, a pillar of the town since 1910.

Although it has changed hands through the decades, the feed mill still stands. In fact, Mountain West Ag Co-Owner and Nutritional Sales Consultant Steve Morgan said it’s expanding.

Morgan, Jerry Schlessner and the late Fred Crisp started Mountain West Ag in 2010.

Wanting a central location, they set their eyes on Garneill.

“That’s when we met Tom Morrison, who owned the mill at the time,” said Morgan. “He was willing to sell and was looking to retire down the road. He’s stayed involved and has really been instrumental.”

Morrison has worked at the mill since 1977, and was glad to stay involved when Mountain West Ag started their operation.

“If I didn’t enjoy working with them, I wouldn’t still be here,” said Morrison, who turned 70 on January 16.



Elevated Coffee, left, and Mountain West Ag are putting Garneill, Montana, on the map.

Morrison said he’s pleased to see business boom at the elevator. It used to be a small feed operation, and now Mountain West Ag is putting in three new mills.

“These new additions will allow us to pellet product right here,” said Morgan.

Nine years in, Morgan said Mountain West Ag is “ahead of schedule.” It has more than 15 employees (including co-owner Schlessner’s sons) and is competing against some of the leading livestock nutrition companies around the nation.

“We serve people all around the state and into Idaho, Wyoming, North and South Dakota,” said Morgan.

Growing up in Great Falls, Morgan said he didn’t envision a career in agriculture, but a calling developed. As he continues manufacturing, distributing and retailing livestock nutritional

products to livestock producers, he couldn’t be happier about his direction.

“It’s been fantastic,” he said. “I enjoy providing quality products and servicing our customers. We are committed to making life easier — and more profitable — for them.”

Elevated Coffee

Jayden Diener of Judith Gap is a 19-year-old entrepreneur, starting her own coffee kiosk business in a location some recall being a post office or a grocery store.

As of Sept. 10, 2018, the site belongs to Diener and Elevated Coffee.

“I always knew I wanted to be my own boss,” Diener said, “I’d talked about doing this since 2014, and after moving here from Monroe, Washington, two years ago, I started to get more

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MANAGER'S MESSAGE

From Scott Sweeney

Cold weather and power bills

The dip to sub-zero temperatures in February has increased many members' monthly power bills. Fergus Electric Cooperative has not increased its electric rates, but when members increase electric usage due to the cold winter weather, it increases the bill. When temperatures drop to 20 below zero, I understand that our houses need to be warm, livestock need to be watered, and cars, trucks and tractors need to be plugged in to start, but I encourage all members to use electricity wisely and conserve electricity whenever possible.

With the arrival of snow and very cold temperatures, we are certainly happy to have our new truck garage available so the digger and bucket trucks can be parked inside out of the weather. The heat became available the first week of January, and with below zero weather, what a blessing it has been to house our large equipment in a heated garage! The co-op will use and appreciate the truck garage year-round for decades to come.

Fergus Features welcomes new editor

For years, as editor of *Fergus Features*, Vangie McConnell did a fine job of bringing items of interest to the membership. Upon Vangie's retirement in January, the role of editor was offered to Janine Rife Didier, who gladly accepted. Janine has been helping me write my *Manager's Message* since 2005, so I know she will do an excellent job to highlight our membership, and to feature stories and articles that are both informational and educational.



Janine Rife Didier

We use *Fergus Features* to communicate with our membership. I want to encourage our members to

provide feedback. Let us know your thoughts about the current articles and provide us with ideas or suggestions for future articles. All members of Fergus Electric Co-op automatically receive a subscription to *Rural Montana*, and each month the magazine is delivered to every members' current billing address. There is a lot of good information in the four pages that make up the Fergus Features section. I recommend you take time to read the monthly magazine when it arrives in the mail or check it out on our website at <http://www.ferguselectric.coop/rural-montana-newsletter>. Who knows, you might see your account number listed in the monthly "Identify Account Number" section, which would entitle you to receive a \$32.50 credit on your next power bill, simply by calling the office.

Summary of construction work completed in 2018

One sure sign of it being busy at the co-op is that when I thought about telling what happened in the year that just passed, I had to remind myself that I am writing my March article — already! Time flies. In 2018, we got a late start on projects due to the heavy snowfall and wet conditions that resulted from the long winter. Still, we added 5.91 miles of overhead line, 0.09 miles of secondary services and 1.56 miles of primary underground to new members. We added 76 meters, 22 of which were in the Roundup, South Roundup, Musselshell, Lavina and Ryegate areas. Eight new meters were connected in the area immediately around Lewistown. Of the 76 meters connected, there were 35 new

homes, 11 commercial accounts, eight stockwells, eight ranch outbuildings, seven new irrigation pumps, one cell tower, two cabins, and four seasonal and small loads. Six new members relocated here from out of state. This compares to 25 new homes, five new stockwells and one business in 2017. In addition to this, we connected three solar net meters, bringing our total to 22 solar and two wind net meters on our system.

Other work completed in 2018 included junking out 325 poles in the Lewistown and Roundup areas. Twenty poles were changed out when we upgraded meter loops for members. Thirteen transmission poles were changed, five poles changed for highway clearance improvements and five poles on special projects. We also replaced 3/8 mile of overhead power line with underground east of Winnett, due to Box Elder Creek washing out two poles.

Spring projects

I expect 2019 to be as busy or busier than 2018, as there are several projects already in the works, including installing meters and relays in part of the Hilger substation area this summer to kick off Phase 1 of our system-wide meter installation that will take place over the next two years.

I am pleased to say that there is never a lack of work to be done in any area of the co-op. Our line crews, engineers, mechanic, office staff and management are always busy working on co-op or member-related projects. I am looking forward to saying goodbye to winter and beginning work on our spring projects.



FEC trucks and equipment are neatly parked inside the new, heated truck garage.

Garneill

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Pictured left and above: Jayden Diener smiles behind the counter at Elevated Coffee, her kiosk in Garneill. Business has been steady since the 19-year-old entrepreneur opened in September 2018. Jody Lang, a truck driver from Cody, Wyoming, stops at the Elevated Coffee kiosk whenever he's in the area.

serious about it.”

Fortunately, Diener’s grandparents Bob and Beckie Tidwell — who live practically across the street from her business — have supported her aspiration from day one. When Diener graduated from high school last year, her grandparents bought the lot for her.

“Their support was a big part of why I moved out here,” she said. “This is such a good location for a coffee kiosk...I just had to go for it. I figured I might as well spend my money on something I can make back and not wait for a student loan later on.”

Wanting to save money and feel personally invested in this endeavor, Diener built the kiosk with help from her grandparents.

“My grandpa is a retired contractor,”

she said. “He helped me by supervising the project. I learned a lot, and I have a lot of appreciation for this place because I took the time to build it...and it was a pain.”

As far as business goes, Diener said traffic flow is steady. She already has several regulars, including some truck drivers. Jody Lang of Cody, Wyoming, is one of them.

“Any time I head this way I stop by Elevated Coffee,” he said. “She has great coffee and great service.”

Customers like Lang are not unusual. “I average about six semis a day,”

Diener said.

She encourages locals and travelers to find her Elevated Coffee page on Facebook and keep up with her weekly specials. She also sells baked goods and breakfast burritos.

“I have 60-plus flavors to work with and like to get creative,” she said. “Tell me what you want, and I’ll make it happen.”

Elevated Coffee is open from 6 a.m. to 4 p.m. Monday to Friday, and from 6 a.m. to 11 a.m. on Saturdays.

According to Mabel Haynes’ book, “History of the Garneill-Judith Gap area of Central Montana,” Garneill was once known throughout Montana as “the smallest place with the largest reputation.”

The catchphrase was coined by the wife of saloon and hotel manager Robert Shiell, and inspired by parties hosted by Bobbie Burns at Shiell’s three-story hotel.

Back then, Garneill was alive and well, boasting a “railroad station and stage station, a two-room school, a church, two general stores, a meat market, a saddle maker’s shop, a livery barn, a blacksmith shop, a doctor’s office, two dance halls and three saloons.”

Although the town isn’t what it used to be, Mrs. Shiell’s motto seems to be gaining momentum. Thanks to the continued success of Mountain West Ag and Diener’s quality java, the little whistle stop is again making some noise.



Left: Mountain West Ag employee Tom Morrison does some light maintenance on a Friday morning in January. Morrison has worked at the Garneill grain elevator since 1977. He previously owned the operation before selling it to Steve Morgan and his Mountain West Ag associates. Center: Mountain West Ag has turned the Garneill grain elevator into a booming business site. Right: Mountain West Ag co-owner Steve Morgan stands by the controls for Mountain West Ag’s new pellet mills. Morgan’s business was established eight years ago and is continuing to exceed expectations.

Budget billing enrollment approaching

April is the enrollment month for budget billing. Budget billing is a good budgeting tool to help avoid periodic fluctuations in your monthly power bill. Budget billing doesn't reduce your overall power bill; it just spreads the cost out over a 12-month period.

To qualify for the co-op's 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.

Once your residential account is set up as a budget billing account, to remain enrolled in the Budget Billing program, each month you must pay

the budget amount due, in full, by the due date. An account with an unpaid balance for two months will automatically be removed from the budget billing program. You can also enroll in auto-pay and know that your electric account will be paid on time, without worry, each month.

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. If you are interested in enrolling in the budget billing program, now is the time to call (406) 538-3465 and sign up.

High-voltage safety demonstration offered

Accidentally contacting a power line can be dangerous and, in some cases, even deadly. For many years, Fergus Electric Cooperative has assigned experienced linemen to conduct high-voltage presentations for the public using a safety demonstration trailer specially equipped to show how dangerous it is to come in contact with power lines.

The graphic safety demonstration shows what happens when a hot dog, a grapefruit, a string, a tree branch or a tire come in contact with electricity. The demonstration offers an important visual reminder that whether you are playing outdoors flying kites, remote control airplanes or balloons, or using

ladders, trimming trees, working on landscaping or other outdoor projects, keeping a safe distance from power lines and other equipment your co-op uses to get electricity to your home can save a life.

Fergus Electric offers its safety demonstration to interested schools, groups and community organizations to provide a reminder to people of all ages that electricity is the safest form of energy, but only when treated with respect.

To schedule a high-voltage safety demonstration, call 538-3465 and ask for Dale or Bret. When scheduling, please provide Fergus Electric with a month's notice.



Fergus Electric Co-op Lineman Mark Schwomeyer conducts a high-voltage demonstration.

Join the Cheering Squad

Your mission: Say something encouraging today to someone who needs it. Supporting others when they take on a new challenge makes them more likely to support you in return. And having "cheerleaders" — encouraging friends, family, co-workers and colleagues — makes people more productive and more likely to succeed. (From *Mind & Body — Secrets to a Healthier, Happier Life*)

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 15000 • Account 320528
Account 395283 • Account 316884

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

Last month's winner was Alvin Shawver of Roy.

*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:

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Guy Johnson406-366-9170
Scott Sweeney406-538-7218
Don Criswell (Roundup)406-366-3465
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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

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