

F E R G U S

FEATURES

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



MANAGER'S MESSAGE

From Carson Sweeney

In the first quarter of each year, our engineering team provides our Board of Directors with an annual review of the work accomplished in the prior year. The engineers also review the number of instances when the co-op responded due to activities of the public. I typically share this informa-

tion with our members during my presentation at the annual meeting in June. With the seasonal changes upon us, many of our agricultural producers will be out working fields with their equipment, which caused notable safety concerns and damage to cooperative facilities in 2025. I wanted to

Stay safe around powerlines

Look up when using tall equipment

share some of these details now to bring awareness to our members to prevent future problems or injuries.

In 2025, we experienced 30 separate instances where activities of the public came into contact with our energized conductors. We had 15

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ALERT TODAY, ALIVE TOMORROW: HEADS UP FOR FARM SAFETY

Stay safe around downed power lines. Consider all lines, equipment and conductors to be live and dangerous.



If the vehicle is on fire, or you must exit for other safety reasons, follow these steps:

- 1.** Jump clear of the vehicle. Do not let any part of your body or clothes touch the ground and the machinery at the same time.
- 2.** Land with feet together and hop away in small steps to minimize the path of electric current and avoid electric shock.
- 3.** Keep going until you are at least 40 ft. away.
- 4.** Call for help. Make sure no one gets within 40 ft. of the downed line.
- 5.** Do not re-enter the area or vehicle until emergency responders and your electric co-op crews determine it is safe.

Keeper of the game

Central Montana rancher and referee,
passionate about basketball

STORY BY CATHY MOSER | FOR FERGUS ELECTRIC

REFEREEs sprinting up and down a basketball court and watching every player, every ball toss and every dribble can net two miles of running in a single game. They must tune out the cheering, fist pumps, groans and other reactions from parents, hecklers and coaches. Yet, neither athleticism on the court nor focus on the play is the greatest challenge referees must manage. It's the mental demands of making instantaneous decisions such as foul/not a foul. That's according to referee Jared Foran.

This past February, I met with Jared who, in addition to refereeing, ranches on the Foran family ranch near Christina.

Working school basketball courts as a referee since 2012 and officiating tournaments since 2017, Jared told me about his enthusiasm for basketball, how basketball enthusiasts in Montana become referees, and what the highlights and lowlights of the job were. His passion for the sport came early, passed to him by his father, Jim Foran, who refereed school basketball games and tournaments across Montana for 32 years.

Jim's first season as a referee was in 1989, and Jared remembered, "Since I could crawl, I traveled with him to the games." In this way, Jim exposed his son to the excitement and fun of hometown basketball.

According to Jared and the Hi-Line Today website, Jim's refereeing career began in college at Montana State-Northern, where he officiated college intramural basketball. After college, he coached grade school and



Jared Foran refereed the 2026 Southern C Divisional Tournament hosting both boys and girl's tournament action. | **FORAN FAMILY PHOTO.**

FOR MORE INFORMATION

If you would like information about becoming a referee, contact regional director George Maruska at (406) 366-0034.

middle school basketball, as well as junior varsity at Winifred High School.

Jim retired from officiating in 2022. His dedication as a referee earned him an induction into the Montana Officials Association Hall of Fame, Class of 2023. Jim has since stayed busy with the Foran ranch.

Jared started playing basketball as a fifth-grader at the Winifred school in 2000 and continued through high school.

His favorite professional basketball player was Michael Jordan, “just like every other kid my age,” Jared said. Entry into the referee profession wasn’t a calculated approach.

Coming home from Montana State University as a student in 2012, Jared rode with his father’s friend Mark Heggem. Like Jared’s father Jim, Mark refereed central Montana basketball. Just outside of Lewistown, Mark made his announcement, “I’m going to a referee meeting and so are you.” It so happened that Jim was riding in the car but not saying a word as Mark drove the three of them to the meeting.

Come fall, Jared wore the black and white stripes of a referee as he officiated central Montana junior high and high school basketball. Jim and Mark also officiated that season. In fact, they would referee together for 32 years.

Every state has its own pathway and requirements for referee certification, and in Montana, the Montana Officials Association administers the process. A series of tests, training and two-year apprenticeships advance referees from Apprentice to Certified to Master classification.

Jared is at Master classification,



Officiating at Montana schools is already a multigenerational accomplishment in the Foran family, and little James Foran might be the family’s next referee. Pictured from left to right is Jared, James and Jim. | **FORAN FAMILY PHOTO.**



which makes him eligible to officiate junior high and high school games, as well as tournaments. It’s the highest classification before college officiating, which entails college-specific training. Collegiate conferences and national associations oversee the advancement of their college-level referees.

Jared is content to stay where he is.

Montana colleges are a long way from Christina, and officiating at the college level would require a lot more travel and time away from his wife, Melanie, and their three boys, ages 7, 4 and 1.

Given central Montana’s relative isolation, recruitment of new referees and maintaining a pool of them isn’t easy. Recruitment is mainly word of mouth, Jared said, mentioning Tuff Berg of Stanford, the 15-year-old high school sophomore newly recruited into the officiating pool.

“When he’s not playing the game, he’s helping us referee the junior high school games,” Jared said. “He’s really into it and he’ll be a good ref.”

I then asked, “What makes a good ref?” Jared responded, “Thick-skinned, short of memory, passion for the game and an understanding of the rules.”

Referees are comrades in arms as they play their positions of lead, trail and center. “We trust each other and we have each other’s back,” Jared said. “We make calls in our primaries (the assigned section of the court a referee monitors) and help out when a ref

See JARED, next page

A P R I L 1 8 , 2 0 2 5

HAPPY LINEMAN APPRECIATION DAY

TO ALL OUR FERGUS ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE LINEMEN!

JARED

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can't see his area because his vision is blocked."

A referee seamlessly blends in with the action on court until blowing his whistle. A ref's call can significantly impact the outcome of a game, and situations arise where he must explain his call to coaches and even act as a mediator or peacekeeper during disputes.

"You want to call a fair game," Jared said, "but you still get criticized. Make a questionable call, you have to forget about it. Half of the fans will think it's wrong, and the other half will think it's right."

Exemplary referees, according

to Jared, must be flexible, patient, even-tempered, smart and have an understanding wife – like Melanie. She and Jared used to travel to the games together. Nowadays while he's on a basketball court officiating, she's at home with the boys.

Referees in the central Montana pool earn \$80 for officiating varsity games and \$60 for junior varsity. Mileage is reimbursed.

Jared likes the camaraderie he shares with his fellow referees. He's developed long-time friendships with some of them. Another benefit of being a referee is the opportunity to support rural communities.

As Jared put it, "I ref for the kids, schools, and local coaches, and I spend part of each paycheck at a local business." RM

MANAGER

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separate instances of wires being torn down with equipment, typically grapple forks of tractors or large farming implements. Also, while working in the fields, equipment hit our poles or ground-mounted enclosures seven times. Our linemen identified four occasions where a rifle had shot the conductor and one instance when a spray plane caught it with its landing gear and tore it down. Finally, we responded to three instances where members made contact beyond our meter with their own equipment or wires which created an outage in which we responded.

I want to encourage everyone to maintain awareness of their surroundings. Remain at least 10 feet away from our facilities and look up when working with tall equipment such as farming implements and grain augers. While operating a vehicle, if you do come in contact with energized conductors, stay in your vehicle unless it is no longer safe to do so. Contact Fergus Electric immediately so that we can send first responders to make the scene safe and begin restoration. Please train family members and new employees in your operations, and point out where overhead lines are throughout your properties. I hope all our members have a safe and productive season as we venture outside to appreciate everything our area has to offer. RM

IDENTIFY ACCOUNT NUMBER*

WIN A \$35 CREDIT

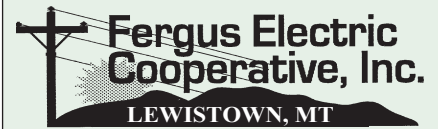
If one of the following account numbers is yours, call Fergus Electric (406-538-3465) and identify yourself and your account number, and you will receive a \$35 credit on next month's statement.

Account 393879, Account 57100
Account 134951, Account 389242
Account 136800, Account 154251

CONGRATULATIONS!

Cecil and Merikay Fletchall of Lewistown and **Y Bar U** of Roy were last month's winners!

*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:

Tyson Ruff 406-366-9830
Bret Ophus 406-366-7523
Bret Nellermoe (Roundup)..... 406-939-0636
Carson Sweeney 406-366-0971
Melanie Foran..... 406-462-5650
Scott Olson..... 406-366-5822
Dan Balster..... 406-366-0975

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