

# F E R G U S

## FEATURES

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



A&E Design made this 3D model of Winifred Public Schools. The project is expected to be complete by September 2022.  
| ILLUSTRATION COURTESY OF A&E DESIGNS.

# Investing in the future

## Norm Asbjornson funds \$40 million project for Winifred Schools

Story and photos by **CHARLIE DENISON** | contributing writer

**N**ORM Asbjornson is once again making the news for his astounding philanthropic generosity, but he's not doing it for recognition.

The proud Winifred native is doing it in hopes to secure a more promising future for the youth of his beloved hometown.

After listening to the needs of the school and the community, Norm agreed to fully fund an ambitious academic and vocational program estimated to cost more than \$40 million.

"Education is one of the primary things that will make Winifred attrac-



Norm Asbjornson

"I don't want to tell the child what they have to do," Norm said. "I want them to make that choice, and I want to give them the capability to do so by having the resources available."

tive," Norm said, "It's an absolute necessity for schools to offer more education."

With more education comes more opportunity, and it thrills Norm to help provide it.

Founder of AAON, Inc., a NASDAQ-traded heating, ventilation, and air conditioning manufacturer based in Tulsa, Oklahoma, Norm has used his wealth to benefit the Winifred community on numerous occasions. He funded the Winifred Community Center, Winifred International Suites, the Mid-State signs building, paid for the pool rehabilitation, houses for school employees, a travel bus for the Winifred athletic teams and scholarships to Montana State University for

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## MANAGER'S MESSAGE

From Carson Sweeney

I hope you have been outside enjoying our beautiful state this summer. Like everyone, we are optimistic that our service territory will be blessed with significant moisture this fall. If we do not see moisture soon, I would expect that fire restrictions will begin to impact us by limiting our afternoon activities. Fire restrictions may push our construction schedule out further than we would like.

### Material lead times and future projects

Our construction crews continue to be busy installing new services. We anticipate connecting more new services this year than we have in recent years. If you have a project in mind and would like it completed this year, please contact our engineering department. Material lead times continue to be extended, especially for ground-mounted transformers. We are working hard to minimize delays. Be proactive and let our engineers get started soon on your project.

### Call 811 to request a locate

As your construction projects progress, please remember to call in a locate ticket for underground utilities. You can call 811 any time of the day to

request a locate. Utility companies will arrive within two business days to mark the ground to identify where underground utilities are present. Note that utility companies are not responsible for locating beyond the meter. Fergus Electric Cooperative has a locating

tool to rent for members who would like to locate their underground electric cables on the member's side of the meter. Please call ahead to our operations team to reserve a time to utilize this handy tool.

### Phase 2 solar array panels available

The Phase 2 solar array is producing for our members! We still have panels for sale for those

## Lack of moisture could result in fire restrictions

members who are interested in owning a solar panel. Each member that purchases a panel receives a monthly credit on their bill. The credit is based on the amount of electricity that was generated throughout the month. If you are interested in participating in this program, please contact our engineering team.

### Back to school is around the corner

A new school year is fast approaching, and students of all ages will be heading back to classrooms with fewer courses being held online this fall. We optimistically hope this is a more typical school year with face-to-face learning and fewer cancellations of extracurricular activities and events.

Each year, the co-op offers various scholarships to students whose parents are members of Fergus Electric. I encourage juniors and seniors in high school, and students enrolled in college, to contact our office and ask about the scholarships that Fergus Electric sponsors.

Over the course of this last spring and summer, Fergus Electric awarded scholarships to numerous students who will be attending several colleges, universities and vocational trade schools this fall. We are excited for them to pursue a higher education in the fields they have chosen, and are pleased to be able to help them further their education.

I wish all students good luck and hope they will make the most of their school year!

See all the scholarship winners on page 8

## Labor Day CLOSURE

Fergus Electric Cooperative's offices in Lewistown and Roundup will be closed Monday, September 6







Norm Asbjornson (second from left) toured the unprecedented, high-tech Winifred School makeover in May with Dick Anderson Construction managers (from left) TJ Lashley, Brayden Ginnaty and Josh DeVos. DAC demoed the interior of the school this summer and worked on the foundation to the new addition. According to Winifred Public School owner's representative Brandon Ewen, the construction is moving forward steadily. The first phase, he said, should be done in early March 2022. | **PHOTOS BY CHARLIE DENISON**

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graduating students.

It gives Norm pleasure to invest in the youth, and he's encouraged by what he's seen of them thus far, by listening to them and getting a better understanding of their dreams. He's fascinated by what interests them and wants them not to feel limited in rural Montana. After all, he didn't feel limited, and a big part of that is his life philosophy, one he's happy to share.

"I look at life as one big challenge," Norm said, "and it starts with the individual. All of us are in a race to be better than some other individual. It's a competitive situation. Some are successes and some are failures. Well, I hope this little bit that I can do can help reduce the amount of failures."

Norm may phrase his most recent contribution to Winifred Public Schools as just an individual doing his part to give back to the community that raised him, but Winifred Public Schools Chairman Gordon Wichman said it's also another great example of Norm's modesty.

"I have so much respect for this man," said Gordon, who has benefited from Norm's benevolence on several occasions. It was Norm who made it possible for Gordon, his wife Mary, and their foster children to find a home (and a job, by establishing Mid-State Signs, which Gordon

manages) in Winifred.

Now Gordon is seeing Norm's beneficence in action as a school board representative. Once again, he is floored by the generosity, as Norm's financial support makes it possible for Winifred Public Schools to add lab spaces, areas for woodwork, agricultural science, car repair, a competition-standard gym with an indoor running track, and more, essentially doubling the size of the original facility.

"Norm built his fortune by being honest and upright, and when he uses his money for such a cause he never makes it about him, nor does he ask for anything in return," said Gordon. "He attributes this to his parents being such giving people."

Norm is the first to tell anyone such a donation isn't for any personal gain. He funded this project because the school board and others in the community completed a thorough analysis of what is required for the students to have the best education possible. He believes in the results and believes in the people who will see it through.

"I'm doing this because the people involved are serious about what they asked me for," Norm said. "I am an infinitely small part of the picture, but I can provide the building. If you don't have the building, you can't deliver."

This is what Norm does. It's why he has become known throughout the state for his philanthropy, particularly

when it comes to education. In 2014, for example, Norm gave the Montana State University engineering program \$50 million to build a cutting-edge facility, the largest private gift in the state's history.

Four years later, Norm Asbjornson Hall opened its doors, a building that was highly praised for being Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) Platinum certified by the U.S. Green Building Council. Norm was so ecstatic with how it turned out that he wanted to work with architects at A&E Design again, and he's doing so with the Winifred School expansion.

"They do an extraordinarily fine job," he said.

Norm and A&E Design have the same goal in mind with the current project: to provide modern resources to help current and future generations succeed in today's fast-paced business world.

"I want to embrace the educational opportunities that are out there, and it is my hope this benefits not just Winifred but the entire state of Montana," Norm said.

The success of the program, however, lies in the Winifred school

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In May, Winifred students had the opportunity to tour the construction site of the massive school expansion project funded by Norm Asbjornson. Tours are offered the last Tuesday of every month. For more information, call Winifred School at (406) 462-5349.

# Scholarships awarded

## Luck of the Draw

Fergus Electric Cooperative is proud to provide scholarships to students growing up in Fergus Electric Cooperative households. The scholarships are funded by unclaimed and/or donated capital credits. Among the scholarships awarded throughout the year, the Luck of the Draw scholarship is always a favorite because it is presented during the annual meeting each year. Students are required to be present to win.

The Board of Directors determines (on an annual basis) the number of Luck of the Draw scholarships to be awarded and the size of each scholarship. The plan was to award 10 \$1,000 Luck of the Draw scholarships during the annual meeting, but to the delight of the applicants and attendees, the Board of Directors invited the 12 scholarship applicants to come forward, and they were each presented with a \$1,000 scholarship. Checks will be written directly to the educational institution where the winning applicant is enrolled.

Cole Ayers, Montana State University (MSU) Bozeman; Kendall Barta, MSU Northern; Chloe Derks, MSU Bozeman; Colin Gilpatrick, MSU Northern; Grady Gilpatrick, MSU Bozeman; Elizabeth Hickey, MSU Bozeman; June LePage, Carroll College;

Hannah Osmundson, Montana Wilderness School of the Bible; Bailey Uecker, Rocky Mountain College; Reba Watson, Great Falls College MSU; Alex Wickens, University of Texas Permian Basin; and Kallie Zinne, Northern Wyoming Community College District. Congratulations!

## Lineman Scholarships

Fergus Electric typically awards one \$6,000 lineman scholarship annually, funded by unclaimed and/or donated capital credits. By assisting a future electrical lineman in fulfilling their ambition to have a career in the electric industry, we help assure that electric cooperatives, which we hold in the highest regard, will continue to have a solid, capable workforce going forward.

This year, the co-op received an additional \$5,000 thanks to the generosity of an anonymous donor, bringing the total fund to \$11,000. After reviewing the three lineman scholarship applications the co-op received, the Board of Directors approved increasing the scholarship fund by \$1,000 and awarding a \$4,000.00 scholarship to each of the three applicants.

Congratulations to Zachery Hould, Lewistown; Quentin Lewis, Great Falls; and Dalton Salthe, Roundup. RM

the area thanks to these educational incentives.

"We want to promote growth and promote this community," Gordon said. "If everything stays the same... pretty soon we're not going to be here."

For this reason, Norm said, it is critical for the community to offer support for this monumental undertaking.

"This isn't something one individual can do," he said. "Everyone needs to contribute."

The expansion at Winifred Public Schools is slated for completion in September 2022. RM

## SCHOOL

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board, administration, faculty, the community, and the future students of this generation and beyond.

"Everything is organized now so the youth can come in and exploit the opportunities the school will offer," he said. "I hope they take every bit of advantage."

Gordon agrees, and hopes not only students take advantage but parents as well — especially those who may have a newfound interest in

## 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 and you will receive a \$32.50 credit on next month's statement.

**Account 389073, Account 319244  
Account 345282, Account 396462  
Account 394788, Account 385033**

### CONGRATULATIONS!

**Edward Day** of Roundup was last month's winner.

\*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
Bret Nelleremoe (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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