

F E R G U S

FEATURES

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

ENERGIZING ROY: REMINISCING WITH MY DAD

Story by **JANINE RIFE DIDIER** | contributing writer

IT'S not every day that we have an opportunity to talk to a member about what their life was like before and after power was installed, but I am blessed to be able to visit with my dad, who is one of Fergus Electric Cooperative's oldest members, about his recollection of what life was like when Fergus Electric put in the power line in the Roy area.

My dad, Jim Rife, of Roy, celebrated his 95th birthday on July 7. He and my mom, Janet, who turned 90 in June, live on their ranch which has been in the Rife family since 1934. Dad was born in Lewistown in 1927 and has called Roy home for most of his 95 years.

Dad told me that he does not remember the exact year they got power to the ranch, but he and mom married in 1952, and at that time Dad, who was 25-years old, had a 1500-Watt Kohler generator that he bought in 1948, when he got back from the Army. I do not think my then 20-year-old mother would have been too keen to leave her parent's electric-powered home in Lewistown to move into a home in the country with no electricity. It was enough of a change for her to accept that initially her new



Jim and Janet Rife celebrate their 95th and 90th birthdays during a July 2022 family reunion. | COURTESY PHOTO

rural home did not have an indoor bathroom.

Dad was working away from home when the co-op put in the power poles, but he remembers the co-op brought in a meter pole and set it. The main entrance came into the porch. In

fact, my parents left it like that until the '90s, when dad trenched a line and the co-op trenched underground power lines and installed a transfer switch, so dad could use his generator

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MANAGER'S MESSAGE

From Carson Sweeney

GREENER PASTURES

WHAT a difference a little moisture does for our surrounding landscape. Hopefully the recent rain has replenished reservoirs and grazing pastures throughout your neck of the woods.

President Paul Descheemaeker, Director Bob Evans, Director Bret Maxwell and I recently traveled to Sheridan, WY, for a quarterly meeting with our Generation and Transmission Cooperative, Members 1st. We noticed nothing but green grass throughout the entire trip. Early July brought significant moisture to many of our members, along with numerous lightning strikes, hail damage and outages. Our crews worked around the clock in response to outages caused by gusting winds and direct lightning strikes.

Busy Schedule

At Fergus Electric Cooperative we are quite busy with several irons in the fire. Incoming projects for new construction are keeping pace with the strong growth of 2021.

If you have an upcoming project involving Fergus Electric, please contact us as soon as possible so our engineering staff can work you into our busy schedule. Our schedule is so full that we plan to bring in contractors to help us complete our 2022 work plan. Beginning mid-August, you may see contractors completing projects for us north of Winifred, south of Harlowton and south of Buffalo. In a recent meeting, our material supplier stated material lead times of 40+ weeks and requested that we proactively submit a material order for our 2023 work plan. We are actively working to procure as much material as possible to meet the needs of our members now and into the future.



Nolan Fry

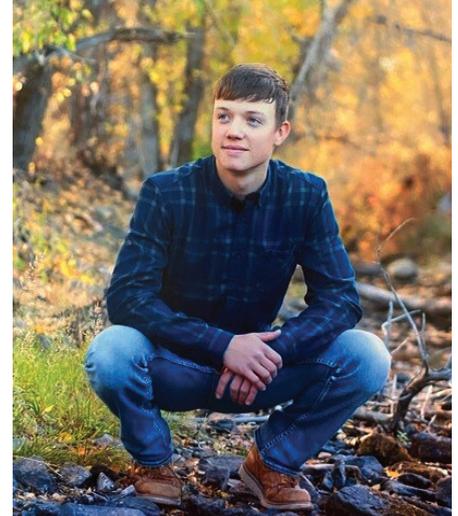
Job Openings

We recently closed two job postings (Right of Way Specialist "Tree Trimmer" and Billing Clerk) and hope to fill those in early August. Our strategic plan includes additional focus on vegetation management, testing wood poles and succession planning for upcoming retirements. The two positions mentioned will help us meet those goals, and I look forward to sharing more about our new team members in the future.

Lineman Scholarships

Fergus Electric Cooperative recently awarded \$6,000 lineman scholarships to Travis Sura and Nolan Fry, both from Lewistown. We are excited to help these two young Central Montana men pursue their dreams of attending lineman school and earning an apprenticeship in the trade.

"Thank you all so very much for the opportunity to be receiving your scholarship. This is greatly appreciated and will help out very much. I plan



Travis Sura

on attending the Highlands Lineman Program in Butte this upcoming fall to pursue a career as a lineman. I am looking forward to this and am thankful to have received this scholarship," Travis Sura said.

"I first want to thank Fergus Electric for the scholarship money that I will apply to school this fall or spring. I was accepted into Butte's lineman program and am currently on the waiting list to get in this August, but if I don't get in, I will start January 2023. My goal is to finish the program and head to Alaska, where I can get a cold lineman experience and hopefully a successful caribou hunt. I then want to bring lineman knowledge and passion back to Central Montana and retire here. I look forward to the many opportunities ahead and am thankful for Fergus Electric and their generous scholarship that will help me reach my goals," Nolan Fry said.

As busy as we all are, I hope you are enjoying the nice weather. We certainly have a lot to be thankful for in beautiful Central Montana. 

RIFE

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more safely.

“We never had auxiliary power until I came back from the Army. In fact, I probably had been back a couple, three years before I bought that light plant,” Dad said. “I kind of think Melvin Cottrell, who had a shop in Roy, was selling those Kohler light plants. I know that Duffy’s got one and we got one, and quite a few people around the country here bought those Kohler light plants, and anyway, I built a little log building to keep it in, then later I moved it down by the house and set it in the coal shed.

“The first bill from the REA was \$18 a month,” Dad said. “The minimum payment to the co-op was \$18 a month whether you used any electricity or not. To start with, we bought a secondhand refrigerator. Finally, after a year or so, around 1954, we bought a secondhand deep freeze, and I do not think we were still beginning to use \$18 worth of electricity.”

Dad explained that \$18 a month was hard to come by.

“For our wedding anniversary, someone gave us two round electric heaters,” Dad said. “We hardly had any electric tools. I bought a little quarter-inch drill and some bits. I did not buy any big electric tools for a long time. I did not even have an electric heater on the tractor to start it. I think the first was when we bought the tractor loader. It had a heater on it, and I would plug it in. I think I might have parked it right up by the shed where I had the generator.”

I asked my dad if the town of Roy got power before the ranch.

“No,” he said. “We got it at the same time. The streets were dark when I was growing up in there. There were no lights at all.

“I remember one April we had a blizzard that blocked the road between Lewistown and Roy,” Dad said. “The drifts were 10-12 feet high. After three days, they came in with a



Jim Rife stands next to a plaque made by his nephew, Paul McMartin, that honors the family members who established the Rife Ranch in 1934. | **COURTESY PHOTO**

big rotary snowblower and we went downtown to watch it, and it picked up a rock someplace and threw it through the restaurant window across the street. At that time, we had a drugstore, restaurant, barbershop, hardware store, two or three lumberyards, four mechanic shops, livery barn, bar, school and churches. They did not have electricity at the time. The businesses used generators. The restaurant kept its food on ice. It was tremendous to get electricity.”

Dad said he does not remember who did all the wiring, but the whole town needed wiring. Dad does not think the REA helped with the wiring. The co-op brought in the switchbox and if it remained off, the residents could go ahead and do the wiring.

He thinks that is how it was in the beginning.

“It sure changed the country to have that power,” Dad said. “When they started running powerlines out to all these places, I don’t think some of them even hardly had money enough to wire their houses.”

Dad said that his good friend Melvin Rindal bought a welder, which he left sitting by the power pole because he never wired his shop. He kept it out in the open next to the power pole. Dad explained that that was common.

“Wherever the power pole was, some people connected directly to it,” he said. “Dick Coulter ran the Farmers

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Union, and he had the dealership for P&H Welders. That is where I bought one. Some folks bought welders, and never learned how to run them. It took 220 volts to hook it up inside the building, and the co-op evidently left the switchbox on the pole to bring electricity in, so you could go from there. They would just set those welders out by the pole. That's where they would do their mechanic work," he said. "I wired the big shop in Roy, after I made a deal with a house mover in Winnett to bring the shop, built in the teens, to our Roy town property."

"It made it a lot better after we got electricity," Mom added. "We got a refrigerator."

Dad said they had a gas washing machine when they got married. They kept it on the porch and would heat water on the stove and put it in the washing machine and crank it up.

"We ran it outside because of the gas," Dad said. "You had to have it out there." In later years, dad got hold of an electric motor and put it on that washing machine. "The gas motor never started very good, but with an electric motor, they plugged it in, and it would go to working," Dad said.

"I think the biggest thing I can remember is when I bought my first

welder," Dad said. "That changed things more than anything when I could start repairing stuff." Dad reminisced. "The welder was only about \$180 and I had just sold my motorcycle for \$200. Mom did not like to ride it, so I sold it to Chester Duffy and bought the P&H welder. I still have it. It improved the place more than anything. I picked up some welding skills from Joe Murphy when I worked for him, but I never had a lesson. I could not probably qualify as a welder. I stick things together and a lot better than a lot of people with welders."

Dad said his welder and lights were the biggest improvements.

"Operating machinery," Dad said. "You just needed a welder all the time.

"We're really fortunate to have electricity," Dad said. "Of course, I have my own generator. Forty-seven hours was the most I have had to use my generator. Other than that, power outages have been short. Electricity has really been a blessing to the whole country. It is nice the people got together and got it financed through the government. It is one of the projects that really paid off. It took years to pay for it, but it has still been a worthwhile investment," Dad said. "And like Fergus Electric moving the poles closer to the roads and updating the line between Hilger and Lewistown. That is a good thing." RM

IDENTIFY ACCOUNT NUMBER*

WIN A \$32.50 CREDIT

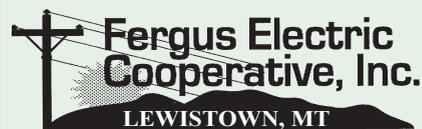
If one of the following account numbers is yours, call Fergus Electric (406-538-3465) and identify yourself and your account number and you will receive a \$32.50 credit on next month's statement.

**Account 378810, Account 385680
Account 54430, Account 396562
Account 319806, Account 394621**

CONGRATULATIONS!

Nancy McCleary of Roundup and **Esther Negaard** 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:

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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Fergus Features is an award-winning newsletter.

Labor Day CLOSURE

Fergus Electric Cooperative's offices in Lewistown and Roundup will be closed Monday, September 5

