

FERGUS

FEATURES

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



MANAGER'S MESSAGE

From Carson Sweeney

AS costs for everyday goods increase throughout our nation, including the cost of electricity, members are looking for additional ways to reduce their monthly expenses.

For several years, Fergus Electric Cooperative has offered an electric-heat-rate program. For the heating season of 2025/2026, the electric-heat-rate credit provides a 40-percent energy savings for each member in the program. For members who heat their home or business with electricity, the electric-heat rate provides a monthly credit of \$0.04275/kilowatt hour.

A second Fergus Electric meter is required to measure the electric usage of the heating system separate from all other electric usage. To complete the installation, a local electrician will need to be involved to help manage member needs, along with the requirements of Fergus Electric. Members are

required to pay for all costs associated with installing the second meter, however, we do offer ways to pay for these costs over time.

Within the electric-heat-rate program, a credit is provided during the heating season months of October – April.

For months outside of the heating season, the member is charged our standard rate. The heat rate is offered to members who have permanently installed electric-resistance heat and/or an electric heat-pump space heating system. Net-metered accounts do not qualify for the electric-heat-rate program.

For those members who rely on electricity as their primary source of heat, I would encourage you to consider investing in a second meter to decrease your monthly energy costs going forward.

Consider our electric-heat-rate program if you heat with electricity

The heat-rate credit is revenue neutral to Fergus Electric, as it is a direct pass-through savings to our membership.

If you are interested in learning more about this program, please contact our office and ask to speak with an engineer.

As the year comes to an end, so does our busy construction season and the many system improvements that we accomplished in 2025.

Our capital plan kept us busy, and we intend to keep up the good work as we roll into 2026. You will continue to see our crews out inspecting and maintaining lines, changing poles and trimming trees.

Be sure to wave, honk or stop and say hi to any of our hardworking employees.

Have a Merry Christmas and a very happy New Year! 

HAPPY HOLIDAYS

FROM EVERYONE AT FERGUS ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE

Fergus Electric offices will close Wednesday, December 24 and Thursday, December 25 for Christmas and Wednesday December 31, and Thursday, January 1 for the New Year's holiday.



Brandy and Joel Barber bought the only cafe in Denton in 2010, and renamed it the Shade Tree Cafe. They also own the only apartment building and the Denton Motel, the only motel in Denton. | **PHOTOS BY CATHY MOSER**

THE SHADE TREE

Denton's little hometown cafe

STORY AND PHOTOS BY **CATHY MOSER** | FOR FERGUS ELECTRIC

IN 2010, a “For Sale” sign appeared in the Denton Cafe storefront. The cafe was, and still is, the town of Denton’s only cafe.

Brandy Kilgore and Joel Barber of Denton, who were dating, pondered the purchase of the cafe, seeing it as an opportunity for their future together as well as to establish themselves more firmly in the community. The young couple understood the purchase would be a leap of faith: neither of them had previous work experience in the restaurant industry. They took the leap.

Suddenly, they were juggling lives as restaurant owners who also served as managers, cooks and waiters.

“We put a lot of thought into buying it and bought it as a couple because we knew we could depend on each other,” Brandy said. “Neither of us would have bought it alone.”

Joel came up with a new name: Shade Tree Cafe. The couple married the following year.

Joining Brandy for a cup of coffee in the Shade Tree on an October morning, she told me about ownership of the cafe,



As much as the maple bars are a favorite treat among the locals, the bars have a rival in the homemade pies offered daily in three varieties.

as well as ownership of other properties in Denton. She and Joel own the only apartment building and the only motel, the Denton Motel – which offers five units and two RV hookups. While out-of-state hunters lodge or camp at the motel during the fall, Brandy said only a few residents in central Montana are aware of the motel's existence. One priority for the couple is to rectify this by identifying ways to better advertise the Denton Motel.

The Barbers have no need to advertise the Shade Tree Cafe. The red brick building stands on Broadway Avenue, the town's main thoroughfare. Its service to the community since its construction in 1917 has included a grocery, meat market and confectionery. Road-weary travelers, hunters, stockmen and truckers stop in for a meal. A group of local men comes in for morning coffee and sits at a corner table, with a sign above it proclaiming, "Old Farts' Corner." At about the time they finish hashing out the world's troubles and leave the cafe, the Denton ladies arrive for coffee. They, too, choose the corner table. One of them flips the sign, which now reads: "Lovely Ladies' Corner."

The menu at the Shade Tree is typical of those found in other hometown cafes scattered across America. Nothing fancy – burgers and fries, steaks, breaded and deep-fried options, French dips, patty melts, cold-cut sandwiches



Brandy Barber and her daughter, Salena, are at work behind the Shade Tree Cafe lunch counter.

and other standard fare. The cook determines the daily lunch special, such as chili mac – a ladle of chili heaped atop noodles. A daily salad bar is available and, except for weekends, a soup of the day. Pizza is not on the menu, but order one anyway. The cafe has all the ingredients to make it.

Thursday at the Shade Tree is Maple Bar Day. The maple bars look like a Long John and have thick maple butter-

cream glaze spread on top. Brandy's grandmother used to make the maple bars, which call for mashed potatoes as an ingredient. They were delicious. Everyone loved them and raved about them. One day Brandy decided to introduce them to Shade Tree customers.

"I hoped for a maple bar like my grandmother made or were as good as

See SHADE TREE, next page



Brandy and Joel Barber are in the process of updating the Denton Motel property.

Shade Tree Cafe:

512 Broadway Avenue, Denton

Phone: (406) 567-3035

Hours: Shade Tree Cafe is open every day of the week:

Monday: 7 a.m. - 3 p.m.

Tuesday-Friday: 7 a.m. - 7 p.m.

Saturday: 8 a.m. - 7 p.m.

Sunday: 8 - 10:30 a.m., except for the last Sunday of the month

Denton Motel:

313 Broadway Avenue, Denton

Phone: (406) 380-2031

Co-op Month Drawing winners announced

MELANIE Foran, Dan Balster and Slim Mills were each given the honor of drawing a member's entry form from the 51 forms submitted in the "October is Co-op Month" drawing. The drawing was part of a "Help Celebrate Co-op Month" promotion.

Congratulations to our three winners: Beth Henderson, Lewistown; Mark Fabian, Lewistown; and Lance Johnson, Geyser. Each will receive an

electric credit of \$50, which will appear on the next billing statement! Thank you to all the co-op members who participated in this year's drawing.

Your name wasn't drawn? Be sure to check the Identify Account Number section of your monthly *Rural Montana* magazine for a chance to win a \$34 credit on your account. Multiple account numbers are listed in every issue. Yours might be one of them.

SHADE TREE

Continued from previous page

what I made when I was a stay-at-home mom," Brandy said. "But they turned out greasy and had air pockets."

A kind customer who ordered one of the experimental maple bars wrote an encouraging note before leaving the cafe: "Brandy, we took a vote, more potato maple bars, please." The note was signed, "Old Farts."

Brandy said the sweet treat is "finicky," and because it requires a lot of time to make, her mother Karla helps with the mixing and baking. They have since perfected the maple bar.

The recipe for the quiche served at Sunday brunch at the cafe also calls for potatoes. Hashbrowns made fresh from baked potatoes form the quiche's bottom layer.

Quiche, bacon, sausage and fruit are the staples, as is bread pudding, which Brandy said is "really popular." Biscuits and gravy, pancakes, crepes or waffles alternately complement the staples. Brunch is served only on the last Sunday of the month, starting at 10 a.m. and wrapping up around noon.

In the 15 years since Brandy and Joel purchased the Shade Tree, operating the cafe has not always been easy.



In the snug and homey Shade Tree Cafe, Denton ladies chat, smile and enjoy morning coffee. Note the "Lovely Ladies' Corner" sign above the table. The ladies, from left to right, are Helen Lodman, Sylvia Drivdahl and Karla Coppedge.

"Equipment breaks down, or an employee can't come to work because she's sick or injured," Brandy said of the challenges. The COVID outbreak in 2020 also put the Barbers at a crossroads.

"I wondered and worried, 'how are we going to make it?'" Brandy said. "It was scary, but we stayed open, and God and the locals came through. Running the cafe requires teamwork. Joel and I would not be as successful with this little hometown cafe as we are without the support of family, employees who are dependable, loyal customers or faith in God." RM

IDENTIFY ACCOUNT NUMBER*

WIN A \$34 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 \$34.00 credit on next month's statement.

**Account 320218, Account 399065
Account 304300, Account 321822
Account 319169, Account 376745**

CONGRATULATIONS!

Kenneth Melton of Denton 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:

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

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-Th.

Website: www.ferguselectric.coop

E-mail: ferguselectric@ferguselectric.coop

Facebook: www.facebook.com/ferguselectric

Carson Sweeney.....General Manager
Bret Ophus.....Line Superintendent
Sally Horacek.....Office Manager
Janine Rife Didier.....Editor
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