

F E R G U S

FEATURES

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

FROM POLE TOP TO TREE TOP

WE'VE GOT YOU COVERED

STORY BY JANINE RIFE DIDIER | FERGUS ELECTRIC

IN 2019, after a Lewistown-based journeymen lineman announced that he had accepted a job in another state, and three foremen and an engineer said that they planned to retire in 2020, the Operations Department team put a plan into action to fill the upcoming openings. As is often the case, several applicants responded to the advertisement for a lineman. Interviews were conducted and decisions were made and, one day in June 2019, the co-op hired three young apprentice linemen, Danyon “Dan” Rice, Collin Sullivan and Brock Pyrah, who earned his journeyman lineman certificate in September 2021.

A Lewistown native, Dan said, “I had planned to join the military after high school, but after looking at some photos and information on linemen, I felt being a lineman might be a good career choice.”

Dan’s parents and siblings had all moved out of state, but Dan chose to remain in Lewistown. Taking the first step toward his new occupation, Dan enrolled in Montana Tech’s Lineman Program in Butte. He studied hard and completed the program. When he saw that a lineman job was available at Fergus Electric Cooperative, he applied.

Collin Sullivan grew up in Great Falls and graduated from Great Falls High School. After high school he joined the Air Force and, during his six years serving his country, Collin traveled all over the world. After his voluntary discharge, he began serving in the National Guard and attended North-



Journeyman Linemen Collin Sullivan and Dan Rice and ROW Groundman Jake deRosier | **FERGUS ELECTRIC PHOTO**

west Lineman College in Meridian, Idaho. Collin said his dad was a lineman in Salt Lake City, but he does not remember him saying much to influence him about linework. His father died when Collin was in high school. It was Collin’s mother who told him that his dad had made a good living working as a lineman.

Collin and his fiancé, Brooke Dart, plan to marry in Mexico

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MANAGER'S MESSAGE

From Carson Sweeney

In this month's message I wanted to focus on a project our team has been working on behind the scenes for quite some time. In early 2022, we completed the installation of our new advanced metering system, which enhances our ability to share metering data with each member. Now that we have 12-plus months' worth of data for 98 percent of the meters throughout our system, we want to provide that information to each member in simple and intuitive ways.

First, hour-by-hour data is available to you within the SmartHub app. This app allows you to look back at consumption data for each meter to see yesterday's usage, this week's usage or last week's usage.

The graphs provide detailed information to help you understand when and how you consume electrical energy from Fergus Electric.

The SmartHub app also allows you to do many things, including review your monthly bill, pay your bill or update your contact information. I recommend that you download the app to your smart phone or tablet. Click "Register now" to set up an account, and then navigate within the app to begin understanding your own information using a simple and secure mobile application.

Redesigning monthly bill

The next part of our project is a redesign of our monthly billing statement. We are utilizing the new meter data to provide detailed usage graphs within your monthly bill. The new bills will provide information to help you understand your electricity consump-



tion profile. Do you typically consume the majority of electricity between 4 p.m. and 7 p.m. or are you a night owl who sees higher usage from 7 p.m. to 10 p.m.? Our new bills also have graphs to show

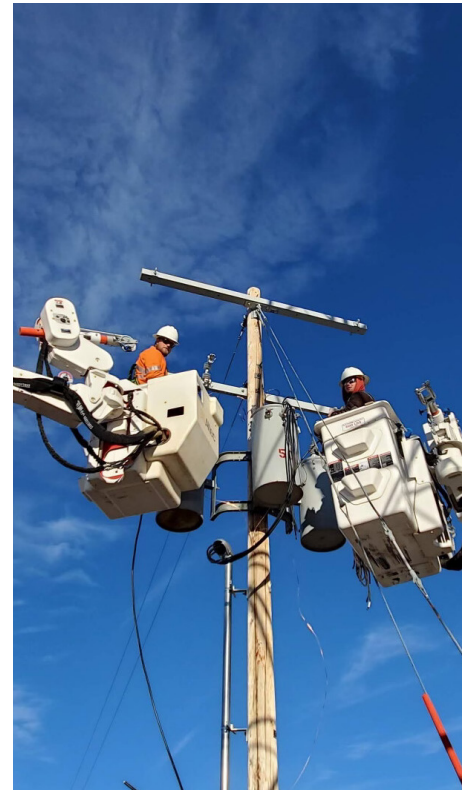
your highest system peak within the month and when it occurred. The peak kilowatt information will be represented as "Peak kW". This data will help you understand your highest electrical peak on the system and when it occurred. At my house, when multiple electrical appliances are running all at once, including our dryer, electric hot water heater, furnace fan and electric kitchen stove, I typically create a peak of 17 kW, usually in the evening.

The new bill format is expected to come out in April. I look forward to sharing more information on this upcoming change with examples and bill images in next month's Manager's Message.

Approved 2023 budgets

During our December board meeting, your directors approved the capital and expense budgets for the 2023 fiscal year. We are making excellent progress in the design and plans for the new building in Roundup. We expect the steel building package to arrive onsite late winter, with construction activities beginning in early spring. Materials continue to arrive for the Winifred transmission project, with an anticipated project start date of early fall. Our engineering team will soon be submitting orders for new electronic line protection devices to be installed throughout the lines on three of our substations. I look forward to providing project updates throughout the year on each of these exciting projects.

SmartHub app is a great tool



Journeyman Linemen Collin Sullivan and Dan Rice working on the Winifred water project. | **FERGUS ELECTRIC PHOTO**

Employee recognition

Lastly, I'd like to acknowledge and congratulate Collin Sullivan and Danyon Rice on successfully passing the journeyman lineman exam. We are very proud of them and the entire team of employees who invested in their training and apprenticeship. Jake deRosier, our ROW Groundman, has had a busy four months already. We are excited that Jake is part of our team. These young men are honest, intelligent and hard-working employees who provide value to our organization and our members. We have an excellent group of employees, and these three gentlemen are no exception. **RM**



Jake deRosier
trimming trees
| FERGUS
ELECTRIC
PHOTO

LINEMEN

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this May. He and Brooke went to high school together and began talking and becoming better acquainted while he was in the military. Brooke is a nurse at Central Montana Hospital and Nursing Center in Lewistown, working in the cancer center. Collin said they are excited to begin their future together.

Prior to becoming linemen, both Dan and Collin fought fires for the U.S. Forest Service. They both prefer being outdoors and like to hunt. Collin said that he likes recreating at his folk's cabin on Swan Lake when he gets the chance, while Dan enjoys horseback riding.

When it comes to work, Dan and Collin like that the job offers a variety of different tasks each day. Collin says, "It's always a different challenge. A different area. A different way of doing things." Although they do not like seeing members of the co-op without power, they stated that troubleshooting outages is one of their favorite duties. Dan likes having the opportunity to see and work in the different types of terrain that make up the co-op's large service territory.

"I especially like working in the mountains," Dan said.

Completing the lineman technical program is only the first step of many to becoming a certified journeyman lineman. Dale Rikala, line superintendent, said that the apprenticeship requires 7,000 hours of training, which



Journeyman Lineman Dan Rice. | FERGUS
ELECTRIC PHOTO

takes about three and a half years. Ours is a seven-step apprenticeship program, which consists of weekly classes of course workbooks and lots of studying during the winter months. In May through the summer months, the apprentices take part in hands-on pole-yard training, where they develop skills and are trained to work safely. Once the apprentices have successfully completed their training, Dale submits a request for the journeyman test, which includes a three-part written test, a test of physical skills on poles and a hands-on rope and splicing exam.

The instructor of the co-op's apprenticeship program is Mark Schwomeyer. Mark joined the co-op in 2011 as an apprentice lineman. In 2014, he passed his journeyman lineman test and worked in that capacity through 2018. In 2019, Mark was promoted to his current position as transformer repairman. It's Mark's goal to have his students put in the work and succeed.

On Saturday, December 17, 2022, Dan and Collin both tested to become a

journeyman lineman. Every employee at Fergus Electric Cooperative was a cheerleader for them. Mark spent many, many nights, week after week for nearly three years working his way through each part of the courses, teaching them and preparing them for their exams.

Mark said, "I am very proud of Dan and Collin for passing their journeyman test. In their last year of class they really buckled down and studied their books, made flashcards, studied several weekends and quizzed their fellow coworkers. Upon hearing the news of them passing, both with high scores in the 90s, I was really happy for them. Congratulations Dan and Collin!"

Collin said, "I feel super fortunate to work here. Good wages, good benefits and a great bunch of people who are very understanding if you have things going on. They're there for you."

ROW Groundman

Ongoing tree trimming is an essential part of maintaining our system's safety and reliability. Recently, the co-op found it more and more difficult to dedicate a worker to the job of tree trimming. The co-op hired a local contract tree trimmer, who did a fine job trimming trees in a number of our local towns, however with his other customers requesting his services too, he was unable to commit a substantial amount of time to the co-op. The conversation came up again and again about the need to hire a full-time

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LINEMEN

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employee to trim trees.


In August 2022, the co-op hired Jake deRosier as a Right-of-Way Groundman. Jake said, "I worked for the U.S. Forest Service and BLM (Bureau of Land Management) fighting fire for six years. That's where I gained my ability to cut trees."

The co-op sends Jake to areas where tree issues are reported. He may spend a day in a particular area trimming trees that are close to powerlines, or could potentially fall into them. His focus is eliminating or trimming what Rikala, refers to as danger trees. During his first year, Jake has teamed with a journeyman lineman to gain more experience and to become familiar with the co-op's system. The goal is for Jake's

role to eventually expand to include pole testing.

Jake and his wife Amanda have a baby girl named Ronnie Mae, who turned 1 in January. Jake said when he is not working, he is an avid outdoorsman who likes to hunt and fish. He particularly enjoys fishing, and participates in the sport year-round with Fort Peck being one of his preferred places to fish.

Jake said, "I am enjoying working for Fergus Electric, and I am excited to keep learning."

Fergus Electric Co-op's system consists of nearly 4,000 miles of powerline stretched across 14 counties. There is always plenty of work to be done. It is reassuring to know that whether an employee has just arrived or been on the job for years, we have a great team of capable, dependable employees who are up to the task. 

ANNUAL MEETING SET FOR JUNE 8

Nominating Committee seeking candidates

In accordance with Fergus Electric Cooperative Bylaws, Article IV, Section 4.3, the committee for selecting board candidates will be appointed, and will meet to nominate candidates for the Board of Trustees.


In addition to candidates nominated by the committee, any 15 or more members acting together from District 2 (Judith Gap/Moore areas) or District 4 (Grass Range/Winnett areas) may make other nominations by petition not less than 30 days prior to the annual meeting. Such nominations are to be posted where the committee list is posted. No other method of nominating candidates for trustees is permitted.

In accordance with Fergus Electric

Cooperative Bylaws, Article III, Section 3.6, each member shall be entitled to only one vote upon each matter submitted to a vote at a meeting of the members. In the absence of the member holding a single membership, the spouse may vote.

Directors serve a term of three years, and are elected by ballot at the annual meeting of the membership.

Candidates must have their principal residence in the district from which they are selected.

If you are interested in running for a position on the board, watch for meeting dates and places in local newspapers, or call the office (406) 538-3465 for more information. 

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 394910, Account 180336
Account 321728, Account 396413
Account 88430, Account 89449**

No winner to report for last month.

*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 Nellerhoe (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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Carson Sweeney.....General Manager

Dale Rikala..... Line Superintendent

Sally Horacek Office Manager

Janine Rife Didier.....Editor

Fergus Electric is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

District 1: Paul Descheemaeker, President, Lewistown, 428-2417

District 2: Brett Maxwell, Lewistown, 538-9002

District 3: Brad Arntzen, Hilger, 462-5555

District 4: Cathy Kombol, Roundup, 428-2202

District 5: Terry Frost, Vice President, Roundup, 323-3415

District 6: Jason Swanz, Sec./Treas., Judith Gap, 473-2462

District 7: Bob Evans, Jr., Geysers, 735-4476

Fergus Features is an award-winning newsletter.



PRESIDENT'S DAY CLOSURE

Fergus Electric Cooperative office will be closed on Monday, Feb. 20