

# F E R G U S

## FEATURES

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

# FRESH OPPORTUNITIES IN THE NEW YEAR

Story by **JANINE RIFE DIDIER** | *Fergus Electric*

**W**HETHER members call or stop by Fergus Electric Cooperative, their first contact is with our front office staff – one of our biggest assets. Not only are they friendly and able to make your day brighter, but they are skilled, dedicated employees who give their best to serve our members well. Our co-op has developed a strong culture of service over the years. We care about and support the members of our local communities. The employees are proud of the work they do, and the co-op is proud of its employees. The co-op's employees become part of a team – and a family. They enjoy working together to achieve goals.

Due to the excellent work environment, it is seldom that we have any job openings. However, Susie Hinkley, who worked as senior billing clerk and managed capital credits for many years, retired this month. Susie began working fulltime for Fergus Electric in 1991, when her three children were still in grade school. Now, 31 years later, Susie is a great grandmother who is ready to have more free time to enjoy being with her family, and to devote to her passions of quilting and sewing.

Also, this fall, Sue Werdin, who has worked since 2012 as the co-op's cashier receptionist and accounts payable clerk, moved on to pursue other interests. For 10 years, Sue greeted members as they arrived in the office, welcoming many by name, always ready to assist them. Our members enjoyed their visits with Sue and Susie, and appreciated the help they gave. We thank Susie and Sue, and wish them both well in their new endeavors.

We have filled the two openings in our front office

See **OPPORTUNITIES**, page 7



Fergus Electric office staff from left: Janine Rife Didier, payroll administrator; Denise Jennings, billing clerk; Debby Petersen, cashier/receptionist; Sally Horacek, office manager; and Erika Mattaliano, senior billing clerk | **FERGUS ELECTRIC PHOTO**

# happy new year



## MANAGER'S MESSAGE

From Carson Sweeney

## Optimism in the New Year

**H**APPY New Year to each of you! As we begin 2023, I am optimistic and enthusiastic about the exciting work plan our team has put together. Our Operations Group has been planning and discussing options to best serve our members for another 84 years.

As members ourselves, we understand that reliable and affordable energy is paramount to our economy and communities. We will be investing in our system and communities in a consistent and thoughtful manner. These investments will slowly rebuild the system we rely on to meet your energy needs. I am excited for our plans, and would welcome any discussion from those seeking to understand them in more detail.

Our first goal in 2023 is to successfully complete our new building project east of Roundup. We have partnered with KE Construction in Billings on the shop/office building in Roundup. The metal building package has been ordered, and we expect construction activities to begin in the spring. We have also ordered material for the new 24-mile 50 kilovolt transmission line from Hilger to Winifred. We are currently working on contract documents for that project, and expect to bid it out to several of our preferred contractors within the next month.

A new goal that we have set for ourselves in 2023 is to regularly test the structural integrity of our wood poles within a 10-year cycle. Fergus Electric owns and

maintains more than 70,000 wood poles across 4,000 miles of line stretched throughout 14 counties in central Montana. We are working on plans to test approximately 7,000 wood poles in 2023. This information will then be used by our engineers to plan for the strategic replacement of our aging infrastructure in years to come.

Our aerial patrol program continues to be of significant value as we identify line maintenance needs and areas requiring tree trimming. Our crews are working to maintain our system, while also expanding our lines to meet the near record growth we continue to see.

We will continue to partner with our state legislators as they begin another important session at our state's capital. Montana electric cooperative members will be well represented as our impressive legislative team within the Montana Electric Cooperatives' Association office works to inform legislators on complex issues. I look forward to working with them throughout the session.

Lastly, as Janine wrote about in the feature story, we are pleased to welcome our two newest employees, Denise Jennings and Debby Petersen. In addition to being active members of their community, they are longstanding members of our co-op. We hope that you will have a chance to tell them hello and welcome them to the co-op. RM



Fergus Electric is accumulating material for upcoming underground cable replacements. | **FERGUS ELECTRIC PHOTO**

# OPPORTUNITIES

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with two very capable, skilled employees, whose names and faces are familiar to many in our community. We are happy to welcome Denise Jennings and Debby Petersen to the co-op. Both are Lewistown natives who are proud of their community and know many people throughout central Montana. Denise worked for Stockman Bank for 17 years and Debby worked for Mid-Rivers Communications for 15 years. They enjoyed the years they worked at their respective jobs, and they parted on good terms. Ready for a change and knowing that employment opportunities at Fergus Electric are rare, they jumped at the chance to become part of Fergus Electric's workforce.

In addition to having great customer skills, Denise describes herself as being self-motivated, hardworking and reliable, and says that she enjoys problem solving. Denise and Chris Jennings have been married for 31 years and live on the Jennings family ranch near Moore. They have two sons who are both married. One son lives in Hobson, the other in Utah. Denise enjoys being grandma to her two grandsons. When she is not working in the office, Denise enjoys working outdoors, landscaping and playing with her dogs. Denise said, "I was very excited to join the Fergus Electric team."

Debby has worked in customer service since she was a teenager working for Doug Flament at Flament Office Products. She is right at home with the software system that Fergus Electric uses as her former employer used the same software. Debby says that by working for a cooperative the last 15 years, she has gained a great appreciation for what cooperatives and their members mean in a rural society. Debby said that through the years people have often told her she looks familiar. She is deeply rooted in Lewistown, her parents owned Snowy Mountain Meats for 35 years, and Debby attended St. Leo's School. She married Scott Petersen in 1988, and they raised their two children in Lewistown. Their son Brad and his wife Kayla, and their son, Walker, live near Scott and Debby up Maiden Canyon, while their daughter Kelcy, husband Travis and son Grady live in Glasgow. Debby said she and her husband enjoy being outdoors hanging out with their three dogs and spending as much time as possible with their kids and grandsons. Debby echoed Denise's sentiment saying, "I am excited to be working at Fergus Electric."

Denise and Debby will receive ongoing support from their coworkers as they learn all about their new jobs. Erika Mattaliano, who was recently promoted to senior billing clerk is gladly sharing her vast billing-related knowledge, which she has gained during her 20 years of employment at Fergus Electric. Erika is a dedicated, responsible, loyal employee who is known to have a high level of accuracy in her work. Erika has recently inherited several new responsibilities, too. We have no doubt

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Debby Petersen joined Fergus Electric as a cashier/receptionist. | **FERGUS ELECTRIC PHOTO**



Denise Jennings recently joined Fergus Electric as a billing clerk. | **FERGUS ELECTRIC PHOTO**

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that she will do well in her new role.

There is a lot of training and learning occurring at the co-op currently but it is good. It's allowing staff to be cross-trained in more areas, which is a significant benefit to the co-op. And it's creating a bond between coworkers, which everyone is enjoying. Change does not have to be negative. Sometimes with change, there is opportunity and growth.

Sally Horacek, office manager, and Janine Rife Didier, payroll administra-

tor, are both very pleased that Denise and Debby accepted the positions they were offered at the co-op. Thus far, this has been a near seamless transition. Denise and Debby were already acquainted or friends with many of the co-op's employees. They come to the co-op with extensive knowledge and skills that tie in well with the work we do and, as a result, they have easily adapted to the workflow in the office. We welcome our new employees and look forward to working with them during the coming year, and for years to come. RM

## Keep food safe when the power goes out

**S**EVERE winds, lightning and even squirrels can temporarily cause the power to go out. We understand power outages of any length can be frustrating, especially when your fridge is stocked with perishable foods.

Extended power outages are rare, but when they occur, it's important to understand food safety measures to take to avoid illness.

Here are a few food safety tips to keep in mind before, during and after a power outage.

### Before an outage

A good rule of thumb is to keep an emergency supply kit on hand. Be sure to include nonperishable food items such as bottled water, powdered milk, canned goods, cereal and protein bars in your emergency kit.

If you have advance warning that an outage is possible, fill a cooler with ice — just in case the outage spans several hours. Having a cooler ready to go can buy extra time for your refrigerated, perishable items.

### During an outage

If an outage occurs, do not open the refrigerator or freezer unless *absolutely* necessary. An unopened refrigerator will keep food cold for about four

hours. A half-full freezer will keep food frozen for about 24 hours, and a full freezer for about 48 hours. If it looks like the power outage will last longer than four hours, move your important perishable items to an ice-filled cooler.

### After an outage

If refrigerated foods have been exposed to temperatures higher than 40 degrees for more than two hours, the American Red Cross recommends discarding the items. If any foods have an unusual color, odor or texture, they should be thrown away.

While most perishable foods should be thrown out after an extended outage, there are a few items that are safe to consume after a two-hour exposure to 40-plus degrees: Hard cheeses that are properly wrapped; butter or margarine that is properly wrapped; taco, barbecue and soy sauces; peanut butter, jelly, mustard, ketchup and relish.

The best way to avoid illness from spoiled food during or after an outage is to follow the four-hour rule of thumb. After an outage, always smell and inspect foods before consuming and remember: when in doubt, throw it out.

To learn more about food safety after an emergency, visit [www.ready.gov/food](http://www.ready.gov/food).

## IDENTIFY ACCOUNT NUMBER\*

### WIN A \$32.50 CREDIT

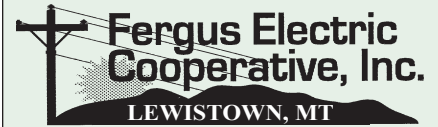
If one of the following account numbers is yours, call Fergus Electric (406-538-3465) and identify yourself and your account number and you will receive a \$32.50 credit on next month's statement.

**Account 394793, Account 346934  
Account 345911, Account 137917  
Account 336372, Account 388305**

### CONGRATULATIONS!

**Becky Cushing** of Grass Range was last month's winner!

\*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.

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**Fergus Features is an award-winning newsletter.**