

F E R G U S

FEATURES

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

A NEW APPROACH TO AG EDUCATION

'AGTIVITY' BOXES PROVIDE SNAPSHOT INTO RURAL LIFE FOR YOUNG CHILDREN

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



KRISTA Arntzen may have left the classroom, but the classroom hasn't left her.

After working more than a decade as a special education teacher, she now stays at home, where she raises her two children and helps her husband, Kevin, on their black Angus ranch, located between Hilger and Winifred.

Although staying on the ranch keeps her plenty busy, she still consistently and creatively continues pursuing her true passion: education.

In August 2021, Krista started her home-based business Rural Resource Room, consisting of hands-on ag-related activity (or "agtivity") boxes for the purpose of helping children ages 3-6 have a better understanding of ranch life. These boxes allow children

to playfully engage in day-to-day ranch operations from the comfort of their own home. Better yet, the boxes stimulate the child's core skills, such as handwriting, number and letter recognition and agility.

Some of Krista's current agtivity boxes include "ranching," "feeding time," "cattle," "snow fun" and "calving."

"Each agtivity box includes a fine

motor activity using scissors," Krista said. "Boxes also include 'imaginative play' that uses supplies to build or construct, for example a fence or shelter."

Boxes often include a lesson about number logic or letter writing for the early childhood level, and each box typically has a kitchen-related agtivity

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RIGHT: Krista Arntzen visits with a potential customer at the Trade Center during the Winter Fair in January. This was the first time Krista had a booth for her agtivity boxes. She found the experience more rewarding than selling her boxes online. "There's a lot of affirmation," she said. "I love sharing the concept of the boxes with people who are unfamiliar, and I was really pleased with the reception." | **PHOTO BY CHARLIE DENISON**





MANAGER'S MESSAGE

From Carson Sweeney

Congrats to Brett Maxwell for earning his CCD certificate

WE recently received notification from one of our industry partners, National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA), that Fergus Electric Cooperative Board Director Brett Maxwell has earned his Credentialed Cooperative Director certificate. I would like to congratulate Brett, and thank him for his continued commitment to reach this achievement.

All seven of our directors have completed this program, which focuses on basic governance knowledge and essential skills required of cooperative directors. Serving on the Fergus Electric Board of Directors is a serious commitment. We are regularly



Brett Maxwell

engaged in discussions on cooperative financial requirements and multiyear strategic plans. The board understands how essential our system is to meet your diverse electrical needs. I am pleased to report that your democratically elected directors are educated and well versed in the electric utility industry.

The second part of the director education program, the Board Leadership Certificate, consists of a series of courses focusing in greater depth

on specific industry and governance issues. The Fergus Electric Cooperative board has two trustees who have completed this program, Bob Evans and Terry Frost. It is the responsibility of the Board of Directors to do their best to represent the membership they serve. I am grateful to work for a Board of Directors that commits the time and energy required to understand our unique cooperative business model and the Seven Cooperative Principles.

These Seven Cooperative Principles which guide each decision we make, are outlined in the graphic below.

THE SEVEN COOPERATIVE PRINCIPLES

THESE ARE THE WORDS WE LIVE BY

<div style="text-align: center; margin-bottom: 10px;"> <p>1</p> </div> <p>VOLUNTARY AND OPEN MEMBERSHIP</p> <p>Membership in a cooperative is open to all persons who can reasonably use its services and stand willing to accept the responsibilities of membership, regardless of race, religion, gender or economic circumstances.</p>	<div style="text-align: center; margin-bottom: 10px;"> <p>2</p> </div> <p>DEMOCRATIC MEMBER CONTROL</p> <p>Cooperatives are democratic organizations controlled by their members, who actively participate in setting policies and making decisions. Elected representatives (directors/trustees) are elected from among the membership and are accountable to the membership. In primary cooperatives, members have equal voting rights (one member, one vote); cooperatives at other levels are organized in a democratic manner.</p>	<div style="text-align: center; margin-bottom: 10px;"> <p>3</p> </div> <p>MEMBERS' ECONOMIC PARTICIPATION</p> <p>Members contribute equitably to, and democratically control, the capital of their cooperative. At least part of that capital remains the common property of the cooperative. Members allocate surpluses for any or all of the following purposes: developing the cooperative; setting up reserves; benefiting members in proportion to their transactions with the cooperative; and supporting other activities approved by the membership.</p>
<div style="text-align: center; margin-bottom: 10px;"> <p>4</p> </div> <p>AUTONOMY AND INDEPENDENCE</p> <p>Cooperatives are autonomous, self-help organizations controlled by their members. If they enter into agreements with other organizations, or raise capital from external sources, they do so on terms that ensure democratic control as well as their unique identity.</p>	<div style="text-align: center; margin-bottom: 10px;"> <p>5</p> </div> <p>EDUCATION, TRAINING AND INFORMATION</p> <p>Education and training for members, elected representatives (directors/trustees), CEOs and employees help them effectively contribute to the development of their cooperatives. Communications about the nature and benefits of cooperatives, particularly with the general public and opinion leaders, helps boost cooperative understanding.</p>	<div style="text-align: center; margin-bottom: 10px;"> <p>6</p> </div> <p>COOPERATION AMONG COOPERATIVES</p> <p>By working together through local, national, regional, and international structures, cooperatives improve services, bolster local economies and deal more effectively with social and community needs.</p>
<p>7</p> <p>CONCERN FOR COMMUNITY</p> <p>Cooperatives work for the sustainable development of their communities through policies supported by the membership.</p>		
<p>LEARN MORE AT WWW.ELECTRIC.COOP</p>		

AGTIVITY

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ity, as well, such as making mud pudding or milkshakes.

Instructions and recipes are included.

“The instructions are often a guide for the child and their family,” she said. “Ultimately [the children] are in charge of creating their own version of the agtivity.”

More boxes are in the works. Each box represents a time of year and the responsibilities on the ranch that come with it. Many of these ideas come from her husband.

“Kevin is my go-to guy for ideas,” she said. “I basically ask him what he’s up to and come up with some ways to translate the work into something children can do, either on their own or with some help from their mom and dad.”

Keeping it creative

Krista has always loved to create, so when she decided to stay at home, she immediately got a project brewing, one the whole family enjoys. Krista tests out agtivity boxes using her 4-year-old daughter, Knealy, as her pupil/“guinea pig.” Knealy also helps determine what children can do on their own and what requires some guidance; she even appears in some promotional videos on the Rural Resource Room Instagram page.

“She helps a lot,” Krista said

Krista’s son, Knox, is in kindergarten now, so he isn’t home as much to help, but Krista said he still enjoys assisting with assembly. Kevin also chips in.

“I’m often the one who runs the boxes to the post office,” he said. “They go all over the country: California, Colorado, New York, Illinois, Nebraska. I’m proud of her.”

Most of Krista’s sales are done online via her Instagram page or over Etsy, where she has an online



Krista, her husband Kevin and their children, Knealy and Knox, enjoy ranch life near Winifred. | COURTESY PHOTO

store. Ultimately, Krista’s goal is to get agtivity boxes into the hands of children in more urban settings.

“Educating about agriculture starting at the early childhood age is so important,” Krista said. “There are so many misconceptions about our industry. Many families are uninformed, and I definitely feel that making agricultural-related activities accessible to a younger group of people will help bridge some of the unfamiliar territory of rural living. By providing a resource for these individuals, not only are they learning and engaged, the whole family is being educated as well.”

This education includes bringing awareness to the obstacles Montana ranchers face, especially when it comes to weather. She accomplishes this in her “snow fun” agtivity box, which she was glad to sell to a family from Florida during the Winter Fair in January.

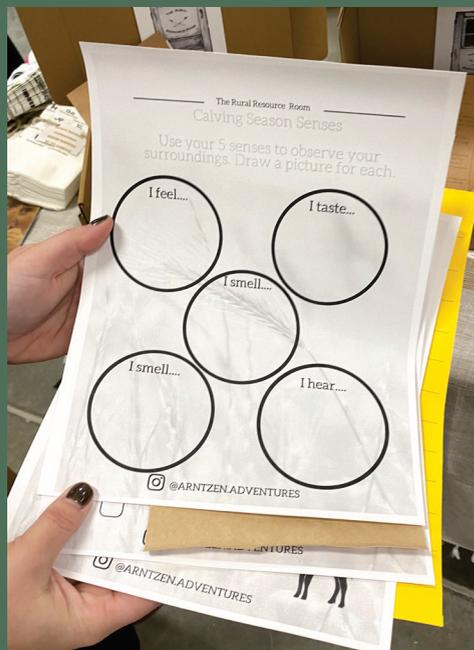
“They will have a great time building the little cattle corrals out of popsicle sticks, making a shovel and creating cattle hoof prints,” Krista said. “They can use their imagination, pretend they are here in Montana, and stay warm.”

It means a lot to Krista to

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Krista holds a calving and a “snow fun” agtivity box by her Winter Fair booth in January. Krista said these “personalized, rural lifestyle-inspired” boxes are “simple activities for busy moms” that are fun and educational for the whole family. | PHOTOS BY CHARLIE DENISON



Each agtivity box Krista makes comes with up to five projects, and includes all the materials to complete them. Every theme goes along with the work that takes place on the ranch. “I want to give children an idea of what it’s really like to live on a ranch,” she said.

Budget billing enrollment month is April



APRIL is the enrollment month for budget billing. Budget billing does not reduce your overall power bill; it just spreads the cost out over a 12-month period.

To qualify for the co-op's budget billing program, your account must be set up as a residential rate class, have been active at that location for the past 12 months and have a zero-balance due.

Once your residential account is set up as a budget billing account, to remain enrolled in the budget billing program, each month you must pay the budget amount due, in full, by the due date.

We will automatically remove accounts with two months unpaid balance from the budget billing program. If you choose, you can always pay extra during warmer months so that you build up a cash cushion to use during the colder months. To ensure your payment is on time each month, we encourage you to consider enrolling in auto pay.

In addition to April being the only month for enrollment, it is also the "true-up" month for members already

enrolled in budget billing. This means whether you have a credit or a balance due; we will adjust your electric billing account accordingly.

We encourage members enrolled in budget billing to monitor their monthly usage and look at the current charges. Compare last year's usage to the same month's usage in the current year. If there is a significant difference, is there an explanation? If you cannot determine why there is a change in your usage, call the office at 406-538-3465, and we can look at your daily usage history to help identify when your meter began showing more usage. This often helps members determine the cause, i.e., a worn-out refrigerator or a heater left turned on, or it is possible that due to the pandemic, family members have been home more recently.

April is just weeks away. If you are interested in enrolling in the budget billing program, now is the time to call (406) 538-3465 and sign up. RM

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send the boxes off to families. Even though she can't be at the family's home teaching the children, she knows what each box offers, and if it brings joy to the children, and to their parents, she's doing her job, especially considering the children are learning as they play.

"I still get to educate...it's just in a different way," she said.

Krista encourages families with children in the 3-6 age range – rural or urban – to give an agtivity box a try. RM

"I challenge you to put down your devices for 15 minutes and do one of these activity boxes," she said. "Take a break from technology for a little bit and be creative with your kids. At the same time, allow these agtivity boxes to open up a positive conversation about ranching and farming."

Agtivity boxes can be ordered by emailing Krista at theruralresource-room@gmail.com or by going to her Rural Resource Room online shop at etsy.me/3uqFCOQ. There is now a subscription option available on Etsy for interested parties. For more information call Krista at (406) 799-1526. RM

IDENTIFY ACCOUNT NUMBER*

WIN A \$32.50 CREDIT

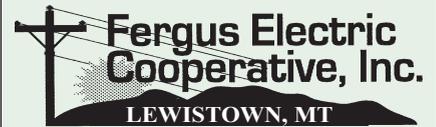
If one of the following account numbers is yours, call Fergus Electric (406-538-3465) and identify yourself and your account number and you will receive a \$32.50 credit on next month's statement.

**Account 363100, Account 353080
Account 390772, Account 350672
Account 380243, Account 395612**

CONGRATULATIONS!

Barbara Bandy of Shawmut, **James Berghorn** of White Sulphur Springs and **James Best** of Forest Grove 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:

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