

FERGUS

FEATURES

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CMMC awarded loan for \$2 million to buy, install a linear accelerator

FERGUS ELECTRIC FACILITATED DEVELOPMENT FUNDING

By **STEPHANIE PRATER** | *Marketing & Community Relations Manager, Central Montana Medical Center*

RURAL Development Rural Business-Cooperative Services (RBCS) selected Central Montana Medical Center's (CMMC) application for a USDA Rural Economic Development Loan (REDL) in the amount of \$2 million to finance the purchase and installation of a linear accelerator for CMMC's new cancer center. This is a zero percent interest loan with a term of 10 years. Fergus Electric Cooperative acted as a qualified intermediary to assist with CMMC's application approval for the USDA Rural Economic Development Loan and Grant (REDLG) Program.

"Fergus Electric Cooperative, Inc., was honored to partner with Central Montana Medical Center to facilitate federal rural economic development funding in an effort to provide state-of-the-art cancer treatment in Central Montana," said Carson Sweeney, general manager of Fergus Electric. "As a coop-

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As a cooperative, we were eligible for USDA Rural Economic Development Revolving Loan funds for projects, like the new cancer center.

– **Carson Sweeney**,
General Manager of Fergus Electric

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erative, we were eligible for USDA Rural Economic Development Revolving Loan funds for projects like the new Cancer Center. Access to zero-percent interest rate federal funds, and the opportunity to assist CMMC to fund an asset that will benefit our local community and our members for decades to come, was an enjoyable and important project to be a part of. The local support from the community has been astonishing, and we are proud to be part of this excellent addition to our community.”

RBCS completed the selection process under its Rural Economic Development Loan and Grant Programs for loan and grant applications submitted during the first quarter of Fiscal Year 2024 application period. Business Programs selected eight loan applications for funding, totaling \$13,280,149. CMMC's application was

See CMMC page 8



Rendering of the new Central Montana Medical Center Cancer Center

FINDING THE

Groundman linemen enjoying their work

By **JANINE RIFE DIDIER**

FERGUS Electric Cooperative has a long history of hiring people who are “the salt of the earth.” No one at the co-op takes for granted how fortunate we are. We are grateful for our kind, hardworking, intelligent, responsible, reliable, respectful, honest employees that represent our co-op. Yes, we do feel that strongly about our team.

Without exception, our groundman linemen, Jason Deffinbaugh, Dylan Rickman and Travis Sura fit the bill.

Fergus Electric hired Jason Deffinbaugh as a mechanic in 2018. For the past five-plus years he has kept the fleet of trucks and equipment operating smoothly.

Jason is a quiet, caring, hardworking man who enjoys helping his coworkers, and loves his family. He has developed friendships with the line crews and has had the opportunity to watch them work in the field. Increasingly, he felt drawn to their line of work.

Jason and his wife Becky ranch on Cottonwood Creek. Jason, like our linemen, works outdoors year-round on the ranch in all types of weather. He and Becky balance their schedules between their town jobs, the ranch and being involved in all aspects of parenting their 8-year-old twin sons, Finn and Zane.

When asked where he sees himself in 10 years, Jason replied, “I hope to be working for Fergus Electric, serving our great community in some capacity.” He added, “My dream job would be serviceman.”

It’s unlikely that friends would describe Jason as impulsive, so when



Fergus Electric Groundman Linemen, from left: Jason Deffinbaugh, Dylan Rickman and Travis Sura. | **FERGUS ELECTRIC PHOTO**

Jason applied for Fergus Electric’s Groundman Lineman position last year, it was clear that he had strongly considered the pros and cons of switching careers. His application was one of 25 received. He was one of a handful

interviewed, and one of three hired to fill the groundman lineman positions.

When the co-op announced that they had hired Jason as a groundman lineman, the line crews were pleased and supportive of the decision.

PERFECT FIT

Bret Ophus, assistant line superintendent, said that Jason had proven himself to be an exceptional employee. “He is hardworking, safety conscious and extremely thorough. He makes plans and has a mechanical mind. All these things made him a great mechanic, and are also good attributes for an electrical lineman.” Bret continued, “I hated to lose him as our mechanic, but am glad we will be keeping him on our team. He will no doubt be a huge asset to our members.”

Dylan Rickman and Travis Sura first got a taste of what it was like to work on a line crew when Fergus Electric hired them to work as seasonal groundmen during the summer of 2022. They were both eager and excited about the work they would be doing.

As groundman linemen, their role is to assist the line crews with building, maintaining and repairing powerlines. Dylan joined the Roundup line crew while Travis became a member of Lewistown’s line crew.

September rolled around, and their stint as groundmen ended. Dylan attended line school at Northwest Lineman College in Meridian, Idaho. Knowing his summer position with the co-op was temporary, and having a desire to begin making a living as a lineworker, Travis applied to Highlands College of Montana Tech in Butte and was accepted. He applied for Fergus Electric’s lineman scholarship, which Central Montana Foundation manages. The Foundation selected Travis to receive the lineman scholarship.

In May 2023 Dylan and Travis returned to the co-op and resumed their summer groundmen positions. It was clear that not only were they able and willing to learn more about linework, but they were also both inter-

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I enjoy the family aspect of Fergus. I know I can call the guys anytime and they will help me out.

– DYLAN RICKMAN,
Groundman lineman

In 10 years, I see myself as a journeyman lineman, still working for Fergus Electric. I love working outside and enjoy working with my hands. I also really enjoy the guys I get to work with.

– TRAVIS SURA,
Groundman lineman

ested in making it their full-time career. In August 2023, Dylan and Travis were hired as full-time groundmen linemen.

Asked what he enjoys most about his job at Fergus Electric, Dylan replied, “I enjoy the family aspect of Fergus. I know I can call the guys anytime and they will help me out.”

Dylan hopes to eventually become a journeyman lineman for the co-op. Dylan’s aspiration to have a career in

linework dates to his youth. He said, “There is a picture of a school paper I wrote when I was young saying, ‘I want to be a “power pole” man,’ so to be in this position is really a dream come true!”


Dylan has ties to the co-op as his grandfather, Don Criswell, worked in the Roundup area as a foreman, staking engineer and assistant line superintendent during his 29-year career at Fergus Electric. Roundup Foreman Owen Thatcher said, “Dylan is a great young man with an excellent work ethic, and has the right attitude and drive to become a successful journeyman lineman.”

Travis said, “I grew up in Lewistown, was lucky enough to go to school in Butte, and be able to come back here and get a job.”

Travis has ambitions beyond being an apprentice, saying, “In 10 years, I see myself as a journeyman lineman, still working for Fergus Electric. I love working outside and enjoy working with my hands. I also really enjoy the guys I get to work with.”

Bret Ophus said, “We were lucky enough to have Travis work here for a couple of summers. It gives us a chance to assess their potential to be a full-time employee. Travis is always busy loading, cleaning, organizing and learning how to use the tools. In his brief time here, he has stood out as a model groundman. He has a great attitude, has caught on quickly and is a great asset to the crews.”

Bret said that he has no doubt that all three of our new groundmen will turn out to be great linemen.

“Fergus Electric is fortunate to have them on board and we are looking for many good things from them throughout their years of service.” 



The Central Montana Medical Center received a \$2,000,000 loan through the USDA Rural Economic Development Loan and Grant Program to purchase and install a linear accelerator for their new cancer center. | **COURTESY PHOTO**

CMMC

Continued from page 5

ranked number 2 of all the applications received in the nation. "There are many steps to a project of this size, and the partnership with Fergus Electric to receive the USDA Rural Development approval for financial support is a major step toward ensuring Central Montanans can receive cancer care right here in our community," said Cody Langbehn, chief executive officer for CMMC.

The Helmsley Cancer Center at CMMC will provide comprehensive, high-quality cancer care close to home for residents of a nine-county area in central Montana, with a population of over 33,000. The linear accelerator is considered the "crown jewel" of the project, as it is an advanced machine that aims radiation at cancer tumors

with pinpoint accuracy, sparing nearby healthy tissue.

The Cancer Center base project of \$15.6 million was funded by a \$9 million gift from The Leona M. and Harry B. Helmsley Charitable Trust, and a \$4.6 million community campaign. An additional \$2.8 million dollars in significant enhancements to the project are being explored with additional funding sources, such as grants, foundations and transformational gifts. Most recently, a \$1.5 million gift was given by Winifred native Norm Asbjornson to fund the CT Simulator equipment, as well as other parts of the enhancements.

For questions on the campaign or cancer center project, please contact Abby Franks at 406-535-6309, or by email at afranks@cmmccares.com. More information can also be found at www.cmmc.health/foundation/cancer-center/

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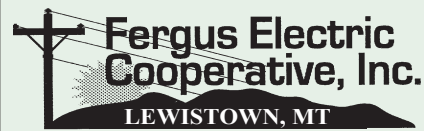
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CONGRATULATIONS!

Marily Fuselier of Lewistown, **Gerald Hinz** of Hilger, and **Mary Mehrer** of Moore were last month's winners!

*NUMBERS ARE DRAWN MONTHLY



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