

F E R G U S

FEATURES

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



MANAGER'S MESSAGE

From Carson Sweeney

Incremental rate increases anticipated

LAST month I informed our members that we expect wholesale prices to increase between 10 and 20 percent for 2026. We recently met with our wholesale power provider at its annual meeting to advocate on behalf of our members. Collectively the electric cooperatives requested a multi-year stepped increase instead of one large rate increase. Our efforts were successful, and though the increases are still significant, we were able to avoid a 20-percent rate increase.

In our preliminary budget estimates for 2026, I am estimating a rate increase of approximately 12 percent for 2026. Furthermore, I do anticipate a similar rate increase for 2027. Throughout the next several board meetings, we will present expense budgets, capital projects and fleet investment budgets for 2026. With these budget forecasts,

we will develop member rates for 2026 to support the revenue requirements necessary to sustain a healthy electric cooperative. We will continue to maintain our electric system, replace infrastructure, and improve reliability in a consistent and responsible manner.

Wholesale power costs are increasing throughout the nation due to electric load growth. As electric requirements increase, new electric generating assets and transmission lines must be constructed to meet growing demand. Generation and transmission assets cost several billion dollars and take five to seven years to be completed. In addition, the retirement of existing electric generating stations increases the burden to build new plants. Reliability requirements have also become more stringent. Recent mandates requiring additional generating reserves to support the elec-

tric grid have been implemented. As our nation prepares for additional load growth to meet the needs of a growing economy, electric consumers throughout the country should expect costs for electricity to increase.

Our team has developed sophisticated analytical tools to inform and educate our members on their electric consumption and monthly expenses for each meter on our system. If you have any questions on how the upcoming rate increase will affect your meter(s), please contact us so that we can work through those details with you. If you would like to know more about our system improvement plans for 2026, please contact me directly.

I hope the fall season provides everyone with a smooth and enjoyable transition to the upcoming winter season. Happy Halloween! RM

OCTOBER IS NATIONAL

C O O P
M O N T H

Electric cooperatives are not-for-profit, community-led utilities. Because we are a co-op, we can adapt our local member's needs, providing the programs and services you care about most. That's the POWER of co-op membership.

70 years and counting

The Spojas are one of the longest married couples in the Fergus Electric region

STORY BY CATHY MOSER | FOR FERGUS ELECTRIC

"IT was a dandy of a party!" That is how Bill Spoja, a native of Lewistown, summarizes the party that family and friends threw for him and his bride of 70 years, Mary Helen. The celebration for their wedded milestone in June brought to Lewistown the Spoja children and other family members, long-time friends and "people I'd almost forgot about," Bill says.

A courtship begins

Seventy years together started in 1952, at The College of Great Falls. The students began production of the play, *The Hither and Thither of Danny Dither*. Bill was cast as Danny Dither, an angel who is sent to Earth for a special mission of spreading faith, hope and charity. During rehearsals, Bill's attention would drift from his acting to the pretty girl who was doubling as play co-director and piano accompanist in the music ensemble. She was Mary Helen, and she could play the organ, too. She and Bill sang in the student choir. It seemed they were always in the company of other students. One day, they left the campus for the neighborhood coffee shop. They talked about music for the play, but the conversation over cups of coffee strayed to other subjects. That's how they discovered shared interests in music, politics, literature and education.

Bill graduated from The College of Great Falls with a Bachelor of Arts degree in political science in 1953. Mary Helen, a native of Butte, graduated from the college with a degree in music education in 1954. She accepted



Married 70 years, Bill and Mary Helen Spoja of Lewistown surely must be among the longest married couples in the Fergus Electric Cooperative service region. | **PHOTO BY CHELSY CIAVARELLA**

a teaching job in Ritchey. That same year, Bill was called to service in the U.S. Army. Before leaving Montana for the Korean War, Bill gave Mary Helen his class ring. They wrote regularly to each other.

One weekend during Bill's service, Mary Helen drove from Ritchey to the Spoja home in Lewistown, where she met Bill's mother and father for the first time. Bill would be calling home that weekend, and as much as he wanted to talk to his parents, he hoped to talk to Mary Helen, too. Bill's call came through, and the conversation the young couple had over the phone would be the only time they talked to each other for an entire year. She

stayed the weekend with Bill's parents. They would relay to Bill that she was "a very nice young lady" and advised him to "pay attention to her."

Bill came home to Lewistown in 1955. On June 28, he and Mary Helen married in her hometown of Butte. He was 24 years old, and she was 23. They drove to Glacier National Park for their honeymoon, but constant rain made that a bust. Giving up on the dreary park, they drove to Butte, and then to Lewistown, where they wrapped up their honeymoon by moving into a house. The honeymoon had meandered off plan, and Bill was both relieved and grateful to his bride who, he says, "seemed fine with it all."



PHOTO BY CATHY MOSER

Married

They were blessed with six children, and a foster son bumped the number to seven. Inside the Spoja home, Mary Helen ensured one prevailing theme was “Read, read, read.” She and Bill instilled in their children a love for literature and music, which included piano lessons. Scholastics were important, too. Outside of the Spoja home, when there was work to do, the family “worked as partners,” Mary Helen says. Bill’s grandparents purchased the Spoja ranch just east of Lewistown in 1926. The property passed to Bill’s father, and Bill says of his father, “We would sing *Silent Night* while we milked the cows.” The ranch passed to Bill. Both he and Mary Helen described their parents as loving, gentle and kind and said they encouraged their children to realize their dreams. Bill and Mary Helen followed suit, encouraging their children to pursue and attain their dreams.

Bill and Mary Helen’s careers as educators took the Spoja family to schools in Lewistown as well as Winifred. Friendships made in Winifred have stood the test of time. Bill eventually left teaching to pursue a career in law. He studied for three years at the University of Montana in Missoula, receiving his law degree in 1969. That lengthy career included

service as Fergus County attorney from 1969 to 1982, service as the Fergus Electric Cooperative attorney for several decades and a private law practice in Lewistown. Bill is now 94 and has retired from practicing law as of last January. Mary Helen is 93.

Marriage wisdom

When asked to share the wisdom he gathered through seven decades of marriage, Bill answers, “Be quiet.” Then he offers, “We’d fuss at each other, but we’d never let it go to a full-blown battle.” Mary Helen answers the same question, saying, “Pick your battles. If it is something you feel is worth fighting for, you state your feelings.” Their mutual interests in national and world news and politics continues, as does support for the Democratic Party. The Spojas are members of two churches in Lewistown, St. Leo’s Catholic Church and St. James Episcopal Church, and they also attend the St. Mathias Church in Moore. Although they enjoy community functions, Bill admits they stay home more than they used to.

He smiles and says, “We worked a lot and we worked hard, but we always took care of ourselves and each other. We sit in the living room and talk and reflect on our lives, and pretty soon we are both laughing at one memory or another. That I ended up married to Mary Helen is one of the best things in my life.” RM

OCTOBER IS CO-OP MONTH

OCTOBER is National Co-op Month, a celebration of cooperatives across the globe. This is particularly significant for 2025, as it is also the International Year of Cooperatives, which has the theme “Cooperatives Build a Better World”. This theme underscores the enduring global impact of cooperatives, positioning them as essential solutions to today’s global challenges. RM

It's Co-op Month

SPREAD THE WORD

Help celebrate Co-op Month! Complete this form and return it to Fergus Electric Cooperative, 84423 U.S. Highway 87, Lewistown, MT 59457 by October 31. Your name will be entered in a drawing for an electric credit of \$50. **Three winners will be contacted in November.**

NAME

PHONE

ADDRESS



WIN A FREE TRIP TO D.C.

Youth Tour Essay Contest applications due Dec. 5

ATTENTION current high school sophomores and juniors whose parent or guardian is served by Fergus Electric Cooperative. Here is your chance to win a free trip to Washington, D.C., June 13-20, 2026.

More than 1,500 students from across America take part in the Youth Tour experience each year, and so can you! This unique trip will give you the opportunity to watch history come alive as you explore the museums, memorials and monuments with students from Montana.

Students who are selected by their co-ops will travel to D.C. in June for a week of activities. Every Youth Tour includes meetings with Montana's U.S. senators and representatives, as well as visiting all the famous monuments and memorials, and the Smithsonian Museums.

Additionally, past Youth Tours have included a Washington Nationals baseball game, the International Spy Museum, a Broadway-style show, Ford's Theater, the Gettysburg Battlefield, the Naval Academy, the Marine Corps Museum, and countless other stops and attractions.

There is also a riverboat cruise and dance with students from other states. One thing we can guarantee from past experience is you will have fun, and you will make friendships with students from across the state and country that

will last a lifetime. You will be part of a group that has more than 50,000 alumni in every walk of life.

Contest entries are due December 5.

The contest rules

- The student must be a current sophomore or junior in high school.
- The student cannot be a prior winner of the Youth Tour.
- The student and/or parent or guardian must be served by Fergus Electric Cooperative.
- The student must author an essay on the topic: *All cooperatives share a concern for their communities. Write about how your local cooperative supports your community, or detail new ways it could get involved.*

Essays and applications are due to Fergus Electric by December 5.

Essays should include a cover page with the student's name, address, telephone number, the cooperative's name and a copy of the Youth Tour application.

The 2026 Youth Tour Required Application, Resource Guide and Contest Rules are available by calling Debby at (406) 538-3465 or on Fergus Electric's website at: <https://www.ferguselectric.coop/youth-washington-essay-contest>

Mail essays and applications to: Youth Tour Essay Contest, Fergus Electric Cooperative, Inc., 84423 U.S. Highway 87, Lewistown, MT 59457. RM

IDENTIFY ACCOUNT NUMBER*

WIN A \$34 CREDIT

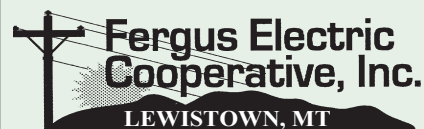
If one of the following account numbers is yours, call Fergus Electric (406-538-3465) and identify yourself and your account number, and you will receive a \$34.00 credit on next month's statement.

Account 276450, Account 319786
Account 397589, Account 397422
Account 397343, Account 395624

CONGRATULATIONS!

Ann Mabey of Roundup and **Michael G "Mick" Pertile** of Roundup 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:

Tyson Ruff	406-366-9830
Bret Ophus	406-366-7523
Bret Nelleremoe (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

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