

F E R G U S

FEATURES

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

The Lewistown Chamber continues to grow

Story and photos by

Charlie Denison
Contributing Writer

When Connie Fry started as executive director of the Lewistown Chamber of Commerce in 2003, she had no clue what she was getting into.

“I didn’t know what all the job entailed,” she said, “but I knew I wanted to learn.”

Fry, a Lewistown native, was excited for the opportunity to follow in the footsteps of her father-in-law, David Fry, Chamber Director in 1971.

But she still couldn’t help but feel in over her head. Thankfully, she had Deb Bowser as her secretary, who she said helped Fry get a feel for the position.

Flash forward 14 years later, and Fry is still executive director. The job, she said, is more a part of Fry than she could ever imagine.

It’s not always easy, she said, and the job has changed a lot, but she’s adapted and continues to lead through experience and passion.

She does this because she knows how vital the Chamber is to Lewistown.

“The Chamber is very important as far as promoting businesses and selling the community are concerned,” she said. “I care deeply about the Chamber and about our members. I care about who they are and what they do.”

Fry also cares deeply about the Chamber events, such as the annual Chokecherry Festival and the Charlie Russell Chew Choo dinner train/North Pole Adventure.

The train events alone are enough to keep her busy year-round. Just ask Don



Connie Fry shows off Chamber Bucks that are used for purchases at local businesses. Fry says she loves her job and is appreciative of all the community support the Chamber receives.

Bost, 1986 Chamber director.

“That darn train almost possessed me,” he said, shaking his head and letting out a little laugh. “It was a struggle.”

Looking at the Chamber now, however, Bost said he is thrilled with its success, especially when it comes to the train.

“This Chamber is for real,” Bost said.

Humbled by such a comment, Fry said she really can’t take the credit.

“So many have put so much time and

energy into our Chamber,” she said. “People pay their dues early so we have money to function.”

Fry also credits Bowser, who returned as secretary in October after 14 years working elsewhere.

“I’m glad to be back,” she said, “and I’m glad to be able to work with all the great people involved with the Chamber in one way or another. People have been so good to us.”

North Pole Adventure growing in popularity

Support goes a long way, Fry said, and that’s especially the case when it comes to the train.

“Thanks to community contributions, we can pay volunteers who work the train,” she said.

Many of these volunteers don’t keep the money, Fry added; instead, they give back. Fergus High School freshman Madi Affolder, for example, works as an elf on the North Pole Adventure to raise money for school sports. In the past year, she raised funds for both softball and cross country. She does this with friends, who also happen to be fellow athletes or members of the Lewistown Hoppers.

Affolder said she can’t think of a better way to raise money.

“It’s a lot of fun,” she said. “We get pretty into it by using elf magic, which can be anything, really. We make it up as we go along.”

The job of elf is mainly about entertaining the children and their parents, Madi said.

“Entertaining the adults can be a challenge, and can sometimes be a little embarrassing,” she said, “but we make it work. It’s a good way to meet people,

Continued on page 5



MANAGER'S MESSAGE

From Scott Sweeney



New metering system

Our existing automated “turtle meter” reading system is old, no longer supported by the manufacturer, and needs to be replaced. The system has worked well for more than 10 years, but as is often the case with technology — when new equipment is developed, the older systems quickly become obsolete and finding replacement parts becomes increasingly more difficult.

Powder River Electric Corp. (PRECorp) is in the same situation as Fergus Electric Cooperative so Dale Rikala, Kerby Durbin, Brian Godbey and I are teaming with PRECorp staff to conduct several online meetings with vendors to determine which new metering system provides the best value to the co-ops. Key items being addressed are initial cost, longevity, operating fees, support, ease of operating and updating the system, reliability, power outage detection, etc. Plans are to make our decision in the first quarter of 2018, and install the new metering system in 2018, 2019 and 2020.

Hiring an Assistant General Manager

On November 3, 2017, the Board, Kris Birdwell (corporate counsel) and I met to work on an employee Selection and Succession Plan. The cooperative has 27 employees, and just over half are eligible to retire in the next seven years. The Board recognizes that replacing that many experienced employees will be a challenge, so we are planning and preparing for the change.

Step one in the process is to hire an assistant general manager, preferably an in-house candidate who is willing to make a long-term commitment to the co-op. This will help ensure a smooth transition process over the next 10 years. While this change in workforce will mean changes for the cooperative, the Board and I plan to put together a staff who will continue to work hard to serve the energy-related needs of the co-op's members.

Longer days, more sunlight

As each day grows longer and the sun gets higher in the sky, the amount of power the Community Solar array generates will surely increase. It will be fun to monitor the changes that occur with the seasons.

Happy New Year!

We want to wish all of you a Happy New Year! Thanks to our members and

staff, 2017 was a very good year! Fergus Electric Cooperative paid out more than a million dollars in capital credits to active members, former members and estates!

As many people make new year's resolutions, let's resolve to make 2018 another good year at the co-op. On behalf of the board members and staff, we wish you all the best in the new year!

TIMELY TOPICS

Beyond the flip of a switch



Vangie McConnell, Editor

With the flip of a switch, electricity illuminates our lives. But have you ever thought about where your power comes from? Most of us don't give it a second thought until our service is interrupted, and we're left in the dark — even if only for a short amount of time. In today's world, electricity is a necessity, and this necessity travels a great distance to reach you — our members.

Fergus Electric Cooperative provides electricity to 3,812 members and 6,435 meters, and it takes a network of folks to do so. We build and maintain overhead and underground power lines, and manage the equipment needed to provide you with safe, reliable power — but did you know that we don't generate the power that is supplied to your home? That's where our local generation and transmission cooperatives (G&T) comes in.

Fergus receives electricity from Members 1st located in Sundance, WY and Basin Electric Power Cooperative out of Bismarck, N.D. G&Ts are wholesale power suppliers that are owned and governed by elec-

tric distribution cooperatives, just like us. Basin Electric produces electricity, then sends the power over high-voltage transmission lines to Members 1st, and then to Fergus Electric. Since G&Ts are owned by multiple distribution cooperatives, operating costs are split among the owners. This process allows us to purchase power at a lower cost.

After the power is sent over high-voltage transmission lines, it then makes its way to our substations, where the voltage is reduced to make it to your home safely. Fergus owns 30 substations/metering points, each located within our 14-county service territory. From the substations/metering points, power is sent to Fergus electric's transformers — those large boxes that sit at the top of power poles — then directed to your home.

As you can see, there's a little more to it than flipping a switch, but we've got you covered. We have provided our members with safe, reliable and affordable power for 79 years — and that continues to be our number-one goal today.

Chamber *Continued from page 3*



From left, Freshman elves Ellie Kuhlmann, Chelsea Jensen and Madi Affolder take a moment while getting a train car ready for their many guests. Affolder said she's seen people from all over the world get on board. Last year, she said, a family came in from Australia. Chamber Director Connie Fry, right, and Mrs. Claus (Cherry Arthur) smile while greeting guests arriving on the North Pole Adventure train. Arthur said her favorite part of the ride is "seeing the children filled with wonderment."

and people love it — especially the hot chocolate."

People also love seeing Santa and Mrs. Claus.

Cherry Arthur has played the role of Mrs. Claus since 1999, the year the North Pole Adventure was established.

"I do it for the children," she said. "I do it to see the wonderment in their eyes. I appreciate the joy it brings to them and the kindness it brings out in people."

Many riders feel the same, which is why Fry believes attendance continues to skyrocket.

"People are coming from all over the world," Fry said. "We've had guests from Germany, Australia and Japan, just to name a few."

As the word continues to get out and the train continues to get more publicity, tickets are getting harder to come by.

"The train sold out in two and a half days," Fry said. "We even added an extra train and that sold out, too."

Fry said she is grateful for the train, as money gathered from it goes right back to Lewistown.

"The train helps fund our fireworks celebration on the fourth of July, and it helps pay for our TV advertising,"

she said. "We try to use the resources and funds as best we can to promote people here."

The train, Fry added, is just one of many aspects of the Chamber.

"We do not just sit at our desk every day from 8 to 5 and do nothing," she said. "It's a pretty diverse job, whether preparing for Ladies' Night Out, putting together a membership drive or helping one of our new businesses."

And now more than ever, Fry said, people come in and ask to be a

Chamber member.

"I've had five people come in and become Chamber members in the last two months," she said. "The bakery, the cleaner, Kentucky Fried Chicken. We are growing, and hopefully it will continue to grow and people will continue to support it. We'll be here. Come see us and help us promote Lewistown."

For more information on the Chamber of Commerce, call (406) 535-5436 or visit www.lewistownchamber.com.

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Safe Start to the New Year

1. Make sure each level of your house is equipped with a working smoke detector. Test these detectors monthly and replace batteries every six months.

2. Keep your bathroom and kitchen floors dry. Wipe up spills immediately. Use nonskid rugs on bathroom floors.

3. Make sure each electrical outlet in your bathrooms and kitchen has a ground-fault-circuit interrupter. It can protect you from electrical shock if water and electricity accidentally mix.

4. If you have children or children visit your house, look at each room from a child's point of view. Remove dangling cords and sharp objects, and keep all medicines and cleaning supplies out of sight and locked. Install safety covers on unused electrical outlets.

5. Place nightlights in hallways, on stairs and in bathrooms.



Snowmobile with Care

Scooting across the snow in a roadside ditch is how many snowmobilers find their fun. But remember, power lines and poles are located along those same roadside ditches. Often poles are reinforced with guy wires, which extend some distance from the poles. They may not be easy to see from a speeding snowmobile, especially on a dark, winter night or when they are

buried under snow.

While you are snowmobiling this winter, always ride at a speed at which you can stop quickly. Ease up on the throttle, especially near any objects.

Know your riding area, too. Watch for guy wires, fences, underground cable junction boxes and other hazards as you ride.

Photo courtesy of Curt Olson



Creating Positive Attitudes

Speak to People – There is nothing so nice as a cheerful word of greeting to another.

Smile at People – It takes 72 muscles to frown, only 14 to smile.

Call People – by name. The sweetest music to anyone's ears is the sound of their own name.

Be Friendly – and helpful. If you want to have friends, be a friend.

Be Cordial – Speak and act as if everything you do is a genuine pleasure.

Be Genuinely – interested in people. You can like almost anybody if you try – even those certain people...you know who they are!

Be Generous – with praise. Cautious with criticism.

Be Considerate – with feelings of others. There are usually three sides to a controversy; Yours, the other person's and the right side.

Be alert – to give service. What counts most in life is what we do for others – this shouldn't change just because we're on the job!

Add to this – a good sense of humor, a big dose of patience and a dash of humility, and you will be rewarded many-fold.

Identify Account Number*

Win a \$32.50 credit

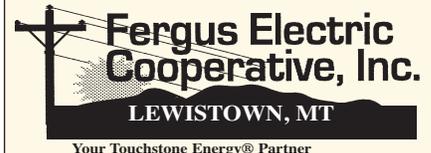
If one of the following account numbers is yours, call Fergus Electric (406-538-3465) and identify yourself and your account number.

**Account 2100 • Account 40201
Account 379331 • Account 336436**

You will receive a \$32.50 credit on next month's statement.

**Numbers are drawn randomly.*

William Crabtree of Denton was last month's winner.



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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Guy Johnson406-366-9170
Scott Sweeney406-538-7218
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