

# F E R G U S

## FEATURES

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

## Live here, work anywhere

Young couple enjoys telecommuting from Winnett

Story and photos by Charlie Denison | Contributing Writer

**O**N a sunny, unusually warm January afternoon in Winnett, Chelsea and Will Hollender admire the Rims as they take a walk downtown, enjoying a break from their jobs.

Will works as a senior engineer for Keysight Technologies. Chelsea runs her own graphic-design business. They do this from the comfort of a 200-square-foot office inside the Petroleum County Courthouse.

"If your job is Internet-based, you can live anywhere," said Chelsea, a Winnett native who is grateful to be back home. "We'd been living in Santa Rosa, California, for seven years, had our son there, and not long after had the 'what would we do if we could do anything?' talk. We decided we really wanted to be closer to family. I was freelancing and Will asked his company if he could work remotely. They said 'yes.'"

This was no surprise to Will, as Keysight has employees all around the world.

"There are sites in California, Colorado, the U.K., Germany, China and Japan," Will said.

From Santa Rosa the young couple moved to Will's hometown of Minne-

apolis, where his parents reside. They stayed there for two years, and in that time had a daughter, then relocated, giving Chelsea's family an opportunity to get quality time with the children.

"We moved [to Winnett] last August," Chelsea said. "It's our plan to stay here for 2-3 years, and then rethink and settle for when the kids are in school. We love Winnett, we don't know if we want to be here forever, but we want to be with family while the kids are little."

Not long after the move, Will and Chelsea lucked into the office space at the courthouse, where Chelsea said the Internet is faster than it was in Minneapolis.

"Out at my parents' ranch the Internet is still pretty slow, but here in town it's amazing," she said. "We are grateful for the space. It ended up working out really well and, actually, there is another young couple who just moved home and she uses an office in the courthouse to do data-analysis work."

Petroleum County Manager and Sheriff Bill Cassell said having young people renting out office space has



Will and Chelsea Hollender stand by the Rims outside Winnett on a surprisingly warm January afternoon. The two are grateful to live in this small town, where Chelsea was born and raised, while being able to continue the careers they started in Santa Rosa, California.

been a blessing.

"Having the Hollenders and others renting our offices covers essentially half our insurance cost," he said. "It helps us maintain the building."

Cassell said the whole community benefits when people such as Will and Chelsea move back, especially when they are willing to contribute. Chelsea, for example, volunteers with the 4-H Club.

Chelsea's involvement in the community is not surprising, considering her father, Paul, is a Petroleum County commissioner, and her mother, Sue, co-chairs the Petroleum County Community Center Committee.

"They are very active, obviously," Chelsea said, "so I could get absorbed right away both in town and on the ranch, where we help move cattle, and assist with shipping and branding. We moved back to Winnett during the quieter time on the ranch, but we will get the rhythm ironed out as we go along."

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# MANAGER'S MESSAGE

From Scott Sweeney

## *Working to keep the lights on!*

Last month I wrote about the co-op's seven foremen and servicemen, and this month I am writing about our four journeyman linemen and three apprentice linemen. Typically, the natural line of progression in a career as an electrical line worker is to start out as an apprentice lineman, advancing to a journeyman lineman, and often the next step is advancing to serviceman and the next step is advancing to foreman, supervising the line crew. The step process does not happen overnight, but throughout the course of a lineman's career.

Jake Grensten and Dakota Wahl are our two Lewistown journeyman linemen, and journeyman linemen Bret Nellerhoe and Casey Kombol work out of Roundup. Jake was hired in June 2017 as a journeyman and the following June, Dakota was hired as a journeyman. It has been a pleasure to have two local young men, who grew up in the Lewistown area, return to central Montana and work at the cooperative. Bret grew up in the Wibaux area and was hired in May 2015 as a journeyman in Roundup, and Casey grew up in the Roundup area and was hired as an apprentice in May 2016, and has since been promoted to journeyman lineman. Bret and Casey are great additions to our Roundup crew.

In June 2019, the co-op hired three apprentice linemen who arrive at the co-op each day ready to join their line crews and get to work. Dan Rice and Collin Sullivan work out of Lewistown, and Brock Pyrah works out of Roundup. It has been fun for me to observe our apprentices learning, asking questions and growing in their lineman abilities and skills. They are good employees who are demonstrating their willingness to learn and

to work as part of our team of five-lineworkers who cover the Roundup area and nine-lineworkers who cover the Lewistown area,

Fergus Electric Cooperative's service territory spans 14 counties and serves approximately 3,881 members. To maintain our existing power lines and build new services and restore power outages, this team of 14 dependable, capable, lineworkers devote their time to working hard for the co-op's members and keeping the lights on for you!

## *Former member donates capital credits*

In December 2019, the co-op issued general retirement capital credits to members and former members who had active electric accounts with Fergus Electric Co-op during the years 1987 through 1991. Former member Don Fudge, now of Canada, was surprised recently when he received notice that the co-op was holding a capital credit retirement check for him, so he called the co-op to ask about the check. He learned that the check was real and that it was for the balance remaining in his membership. After giving it some thought, Don decided that instead of accepting the check, he would rather donate it to the co-op's education fund, where it would be used for scholarships. We are always so pleased when members, former members or their heirs choose to donate their capital credits to the co-op's education fund as we have seen first-hand how receiving a scholarship, made possible from unclaimed and donated capital credits, can excite a young scholar who is enrolled or hopes to enroll in a college or vo-tech. Helping to support our youth's educa-

tion is always a good choice. On behalf of the co-op and future scholarship recipients, thank you so much for your kind, thoughtful and generous donation, Don. We appreciate you!

## *Fire safety*

In the power bill that you receive about March 10th, I have included a letter that I wrote. I am asking you to please take a couple minutes to read the "bill stuffer". It's rare that I have requested to have messages inserted in the bills, but when it comes to your safety and the safety of your neighbors and our employees, I feel it's necessary to make a request to all of Fergus Electric's members to inspect their electric wiring for the potential of fire danger.

In early February, our area had very warm temperatures, high winds, low humidity and no snow cover that prompted the National Weather Service to predict fire danger in the central Montana area, and unfortunately there were several fires in our area.

Reading the information inserted in the envelope that contains your March bill will take only a minute or two of your time, and if you follow up and do what is being requested, it will certainly be time well spent. Thanks in advance!

## *I will do more*

*I will do more than belong, I will participate.*

*I will do more than believe, I will practice.*

*I will do more than forgive, I will forget.*

*I will do more than teach, I will inspire.*

*I will do more than care, I will help.*

*I will do more than be fair, I will be kind.*

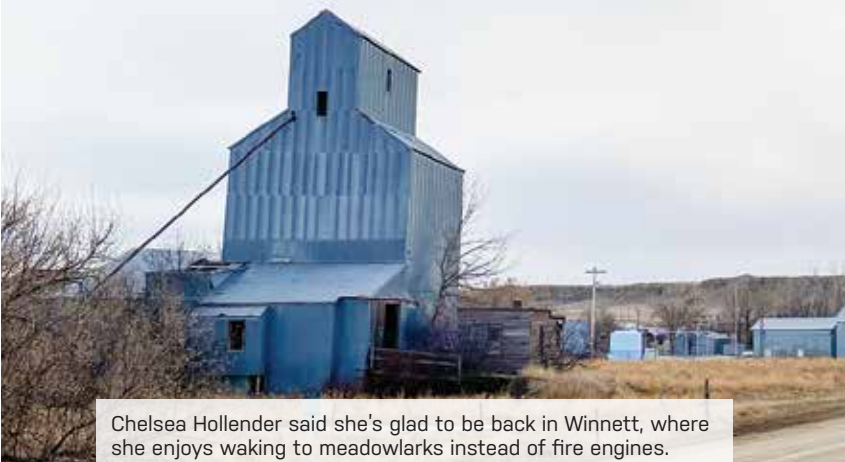
*I will do more than dream, I will work.*

*I will do more than give, I will serve.*

— Unknown

# Live here, work anywhere

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Chelsea Hollender said she's glad to be back in Winnett, where she enjoys waking to meadowlarks instead of fire engines.

## Benefits of small-town life

Chelsea's dad is also grateful to have his daughter and her family in town. He especially enjoys getting time with his grandkids.

According to Will, the children — who are currently 3 years and 19 months — have become accustomed to ranch life.

"It's really fun for the kids to be here," he said. "They love to be outside, and they always get excited to ride on the tractor with their grandpa."

By and large, however, it's the quality of life Chelsea and Will appreciate the most about rural small-town Montana.

"I love waking up to meadowlarks instead of fire engines," Chelsea said. "It's wonderful, and we have plenty going on, too. People back in California ask us what's here for us, but, really, there's a lot. Instead of taking the kids to the zoo or the Children's Museum, we're going camping, working on projects or going to the library."

"We also get to see a lot of wonderful sunsets and sunrises. Well, the sunrises are often thanks to the kids," added Will.

Whether it's the scenery or the people, Will said there is much to love about this little town. It hasn't taken long for him to get to know most of the people and run into his new friends at the Winnett Bar when he and Chelsea go there on their Monday lunch date.

Sometimes they will run into Chelsea's dad having dinner with the sheriff. This takes a little getting used to, Will admitted, but he's getting the hang of it. And, ultimately, it beats the old way of life, as he feels more productive and more in charge of his own schedule.

"There is a lot of freedom that comes with telecommuting at home," he said. "I can bike up the Rims on a break and then come back to the office. There are also fewer distractions, which is good."

Will spends more time in the office, as his job is full-time, while Chelsea is part-time. When not working with clients, she is busy with the children.

As they get used to this quieter, slower way of life, Chelsea said she can't help but smile. She always envisioned retiring here, but now she's working and raising her children in her hometown.

"You always think you'll be geographically tied down to your job, but that's really not the case anymore," she said.

**Editor's note:** Fergus Electric Cooperative provides electrical services to Will and Chelsea Hollender and Chelsea's parents, Paul and Sue McKenna.



Will and Chelsea Hollender work in their office, which is located inside the Petroleum County Courthouse. They rent the office space from building manager Bill Cassell.



Chelsea Hollender



Will Hollender

# Budget billing enrollment approaching

**A**PRIL is the enrollment month for budget billing. Budget billing is a good budgeting tool to help avoid periodic fluctuations in your monthly power bill. Budget billing doesn't reduce your overall power bill; it spreads the cost out over a 12-month period.



the budget amount due, in full, by the due date. An account with an unpaid balance for two months will automatically be removed from the budget billing program. You can also enroll in auto pay and know that your electric account will be paid on time, without worry, each month.

To qualify for the co-op's budget billing program, your account must be billed under a residential rate class, the account must have been active at that location for the past 12 months and the account must be paid in full before converting to budget billing.

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; your electric billing account will be adjusted accordingly.

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

April is almost here. If you are interested in enrolling in the Budget Billing program, now is the time to call (406) 538-3465 and sign up.

# Life Support and Medical Equipment Dependent members

**C**ONTINUED electrical service is particularly important for our members who depend on life support and other medical equipment. Fergus Electric maintains a list of such members. To make sure you are on our list, call Sue at (406) 538-3465.

backup power that is adequate to operate your life support/medical equipment. Due to system limitations, Fergus Electric Cooperative is not able to provide priority response to life support/medical equipment members in the restoration process. This makes it imperative that members with special needs take precautions in case the power is out for extended periods of time.

## Planned Outages

On the occasion of a planned outage (e.g., for needed repairs or upgrades), every attempt is made to contact life support/medical equipment users affected to ensure they are aware of the time and duration of the planned outage.

## Power Outages

In the event of a power outage, it is important that you have emergency



## Identify Account Number\*

Win a \$32.50 credit

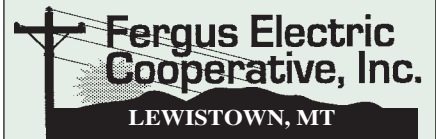
If one of the following account numbers is yours, call Fergus Electric (406-538-3465) and identify yourself and your account number.

- Account 4911 ● Account 383362
- Account 35501 ● Account 386945
- Account 395814 ● Account 395448

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

Earl Shammel of Lewistown 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
- Scott Olson ..... 406-366-5822
- Scott Sweeney ..... 406-538-7218
- Don Criswell (Roundup) ..... 406-366-3465
- David Dover ..... 406-366-1975
- Melanie Foran ..... 406-462-5650

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