

# F E R G U S

## FEATURES

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

# A TRUE VALUE

## Lewistown couple finds passion in hardware

Story and photos by **CHARLIE DENISON** | Contributing Writer

**L**EWISTOWN'S True Value isn't just a hardware store; for Doug and Laurie Peterschick, it's a way of life.

For the past 40 years, the two have worked at the place on 301 W. Main Street as husband and wife, a journey that in many ways feels predestined.

After all, the location had always been like a second home for both of them.

Laurie's father worked there when it was Coast to Coast. He was still working there when Doug's parents started running it in 1973.

Three years later – the same year the two high school sweethearts graduated from Fergus County High School – Doug started managing the store.

"I've been involved with it pretty much my whole lifetime," he said.

Once he started managing, Doug said he didn't know what his plan was, but he liked the community and the job. He wanted to expand it and make it as customer friendly as possible.

"I didn't want to be just a cookie-cutter hardware store," he

said. "We try to be that old-fashioned, 12-department hardware store that doesn't just have nuts, bolts and screws, but toys, bicycles, sporting goods and housewares that you don't find in many of the hardware stores of today."

Laurie liked this approach, so when she came home from Bible college, she joined her boyfriend and her father at Coast to Coast. While she worked in the paint department and Doug worked his departments, their love continued to grow. In 1978, they married, and 42 years later they remain husband and wife, and remain at 301 Main Street.

"It's in our blood," Laurie said, smiling. The Peterschicks are a major reason why the central Montana community continues to support True Value, which they have always done.

"The loyalty is unbelievable," Doug said. "We have customers who have been coming here for 40 years, and, you know, back then there was a lot of competition. We had six other hardware stores other than ourselves. And



Doug and Laurie Peterschick have been running True Value together for 40 years as husband and wife. | PHOTO BY CHARLIE DENISON FOR FERGUS ELECTRIC

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## MANAGER'S MESSAGE

From Carson Sweeney

## Board of directors brings experience, valuable insight

**L**AST month, I proudly showed off the picture of our fine group of employees. Daily our employees care for our 3,885 members and maintain 6,505 meters and 3,949 miles of electric lines.

That commitment to service is also evident by our equally dedicated board of directors. For 82 consecutive years, Fergus Electric Cooperative has been carefully overseen by a group of seven directors.

This month, I wanted to focus on the current members of our board.

There are 75 years of service provided between the directors of Fergus Electric shown in the photo. Each one of them brings a unique perspective that adds valuable experience and insight.

The directors take their role and their commitment to serve the membership seriously, representing our cooperative's membership

regularly at regional meetings and statewide conferences. They serve on committees that, at times, require commitments of multiple days a month. At our monthly board meetings, I am impressed by their collective knowledge and understanding of the cooperative's business.

Led by President Paul Descheemaeker and supported by Corporate Counsel Kris Birdwell, our board is diligently serving on behalf of our



Fergus Electric Cooperative board of directors and corporate counsel (L to R) **Seated:** Kris Birdwell, Corporate Counsel; Cathy Kombol, District 4; Brad Arntzen, District 3; **Standing:** Jason Swanz, Sec./Treas., District 6; Terry Frost, Vice President, District 5; Bob Evans, District 7; Paul Descheemaeker, President, District 1; Brett Maxwell, District 2. | **PHOTO BY KATE LOOSE, SEVEN DIAMOND PHOTOGRAPHY**



membership and is considering each of us every step along the way.

As a member and employee, I would like to thank our board of directors for their leadership as we manage our cooperative together.

**Multiple fires in our area**

Sustained hot and dry conditions throughout August and September led to multiple fires within our service territory. In the Kolin area we lost 15 poles with 12 additional poles left to be changed out. The Bobcat fire south of Roundup damaged approximately 15 of our poles and scorched 30,030 acres of the surrounding area.

Thank you to the first responders and firefighters who worked to save our electric power lines and member properties. We are very appreciative of your efforts.

Our thoughts and prayers go out to those who were impacted by the destructive nature of these fires.

In trying times like these, it is neat to see friends and neighbors come together to help one another. I have already witnessed volunteers removing damaged fences, moving animals to neighboring pastures, and driving trucks to deliver donated hay. There is no better time than now to act and help a neighbor in need.

In addition to reacting to the system needs due to fire damage, we continue to stay busy responding to new construction requests. We are striving to complete our scheduled projects prior to the winter season. Once we are caught up with construction projects, we expect to get back to the installation of our new automated meter project. The tree trimming project is in full swing, with great work completed in the town of Grass Range.

I hope we are blessed with enough moisture to quell the fires, and are all able to enjoy the beautiful fall season that is quickly approaching. 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.

- Account 379480 ● Account 395152
- Account 321476 ● Account 362956
- Account 396276 ● Account 395182

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

**Russ Gerdrum of Grass Range 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
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- Scott Olson ..... 406-366-5822
- Carson Sweeney ..... 406-366-0971
- Bret Nellerhoe (Roundup)..... 406-939-0636
- Melanie Foran.....406-462-5650
- Dan Balster.....406-366-0975

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Carson Sweeney.....General Manager

Dale Rikala..... Line Superintendent

Sally Horacek ..... Office Manager

Janine Rife Didier ..... Editor

Fergus Electric is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

**BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

- District 1: Paul Descheemaeker, President, Lewistown, 428-2417
- District 2: Brett Maxwell, Lewistown, 538-9002
- District 3: Brad Arntzen, Hilger, 462-5555
- District 4: Cathy Kombol, Roundup, 428-2202
- District 5: Terry Frost, Vice President, Roundup, 323-3415
- District 6: Jason Swanz, Sec./Treas., Judith Gap, 473-2462
- District 7: Bob Evans, Jr., Geysers, 735-4476

*Fergus Features is an award-winning newsletter.*



**October is 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: \_\_\_\_\_

# TRUE VALUE

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of those other businesses, how many are still here? That's a testament to what we offer."

Doug said he believes customers continue to come to them because they have "the right product, at the right price, at the right time," but he knows it takes more than that to be successful for so long. Doug wants his customers to feel at home at 301 Main Street, just like he does.

"That's why a big percentage of our customers come back," he said. "They appreciate having a hometown hardware store where they know the people, and know we are looking out for them."

"More often than not these customers become more like friends," Laurie added.

This was certainly the case with James Phelps, who has been a valued part of the True Value team going on 27 years.

"He's been solid since day one," said Doug. "I watched him grow up from 18 or 19, to the man he is today. He's exceptional, and it's been really rewarding to watch him become who he is today."

James is not just a valued employee for the Peterschicks...he's also their son-in-law.

"You don't have to be in the family to work here," Laurie said. "Somehow it just worked out that way." James said he's tremendously grateful for the Peterschicks. He's grown up at True Value, and couldn't be happier about how things turned out.

"True Value is a family affair we all thoroughly enjoy," he said. "The atmosphere is great. We work hard, but also have fun. We've built a lot of strong relationships with our customers, and it means a lot to see them stay loyal to us through the years. Some of the customers I remember seeing when they were three feet tall and now they are six feet tall, looking down at me."

Doug and Laurie said they espe-



Laurie takes a call at the front desk in mid-September, keeping her mask on to adhere to the mask mandate. The coronavirus pandemic has created some challenges, but there is also some silver lining, she said, as customers have been more appreciative and more loyal.



James Phelps has worked at True Value for 27 years and has literally become part of the family, as he married Doug and Laurie's daughter. James said he is tremendously grateful to be part of the True Value team and has learned a lot about work and life from Doug and Laurie.



Laurie Peterschick assists Yvonne Miller at the computer during a busy afternoon at the store. Laurie said she is grateful for her staff. She said she and Doug couldn't have had this kind of success without them.

cially appreciate their customers during this unfathomable year plagued by the coronavirus, as it's made all the difference.

"We've had a pretty good increase in sales since COVID-19 hit," Doug said.

"I'd even say because of all this people have become even more loyal," Laurie added. "So many people ask us how we are doing. They care about us, and they know we care about them."

Despite the challenges the pandemic presents (especially staying on top of inventory), Doug and Laurie said there are also blessings. True Value is an essential service, one that can be easy to take for granted, and they believe this situation helped their customers see just how lucky they are to have a core hardware store of this caliber in town.

The support has been almost overwhelming.

"People have been telling us, 'you've been here 40 years and we want you to do well,'" Doug said. "They say, 'we want to give you the business first.' That being the case people have requested us to order things and we'd do it. We put the customers first."

Laurie said they also go out of their way for their customers.

"As soon as the pandemic started affecting us here, we started offering a delivery service," she said, "and, wow, did people ever appreciate that. We didn't even use it a lot, but people were grateful to know we are doing our part to keep people safe and at home."

"People can get pretty sentimental sometimes," Doug added, "and it means a lot. We just got another 'thank you' letter from a woman the other day."

Laurie said they receive feedback from all ages, and "it's this kind of recognition that makes this job fun."

"That's the true value," Doug said, smiling. "We get it. After 40 years it's sunk in."

*Editor's note: Doug and Laurie Peterschick have been members of Fergus Electric Cooperative since 1997.*