

# Big Skylights



An internal newsletter of the STATEWIDE ASSOCIATION OF MONTANA RURAL ELECTRIC COOPERATIVES

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A report from your Chief Executive Officer Dave Wheelihan

July 27, 2017

## Beartooth Electric selects new general manager

Beartooth Electric Cooperative's board of trustees announced Wednesday the hiring of **Kevin P. Owens** as general manager. Mr. Owens will assume his duties on Aug. 1. He replaces **James R. Webb**, who is president and CEO of Lower Valley Energy, and who managed Beartooth Electric through a management services agreement with Lower Valley that began in 2015.

Mr. Owens, the former general manager of Columbia River Peoples Utility District based in Deer Island, OR, holds a masters in business administration from the University of Puget Sound and a bachelor of science in Civil Engineering from Gonzaga University. He is a licensed professional engineer in Washington and Oregon.

Mr. Owens is very familiar with the Red Lodge area and has a family cabin in the Beartooth service territory, with Beartooth Electric membership since 1965.

## Congressman Gianforte speaks at co-op meeting

Tongue River Electric Cooperative members warmly welcomed Montana Congressman **Greg Gianforte** to their annual meeting in Broadus on July 22.

Congressman Gianforte, who was invited to the meeting by a co-op board member, visited with members during the dinner preceding the annual meeting, and then spoke briefly prior to the start of the meeting. He told members that his first vote as a member of Congress was in support of H.R. 1863. Passage of this legislation is one of electric co-ops' top priorities this year. The bill, which passed the House on June 22, is aimed at ensuring hazard trees and other vegetation located in or near utility right-of-ways can be cleared to prevent fires.

During the annual meeting, members heard good news that the co-op will not need to raise rates this year, marking the sixth straight year without a rate increase, said General Manager **Tary Hanson**. He added that the co-op's financial health is strong. The co-op's equity had dipped as low as nine percent in recent years but is steadily climbing. The goal is 30-percent equity by year's end, he said. The long-term goal is 40 percent, he added. Thanks to the co-op's solid finances, members received what amounted to a 20-percent credit on their power bills last November, reported **Brian Torgerson**, the co-op's office manager.

Mr. Hanson also announced the board will decide soon on whether to approve construction of a 50 kW solar demonstration project through a program with Basin Electric Power Cooperative. Basin will buy the output at 5 cents per kWh, reselling it to the co-op at no cost.

Reporting on the co-op's power supply situation, board member **Jim Collins** told members the co-op had begun receiving power on Jan. 1 through the newly formed generation and transmission cooperative, Members First. Mr. Collins, who is Tongue River Electric's representative on the Members First board, said Members First had recently signed a 65-year power supply contract with Basin Electric.

In trustee elections, re-elected unopposed were **Todd Tibbetts**, **Bob Janssen** and **Michael Speelman**. MECA was pleased to be able to provide a legislative update at the meeting. Also during the meeting, the membership approved a bylaw amendment. The amendment officially incorporates into the bylaws the co-op's longstanding practice of providing a Northern Cheyenne tribal member a non-voting seat on the board. The Northern Cheyenne tribal government may recommend someone from the tribe for the seat, but the board is not obligated to follow its recommendation.

### Co-op issues \$22,000 in college scholarships

Goldenwest Electric Cooperative gave away a scholarship to every student in attendance and members learned about the ongoing maintenance on the system at the co-op's annual meeting July 13 in Wibaux.

Board member **Ray Clouse** told co-op members that the Goldenwest Electric board approved 32 \$1,000 scholarships, so all 22 students who attended the annual meeting received one. He also stressed the importance of supporting education for local students to ensure a better future for them and their communities. "Education is our lifeblood," Mr. Clouse said.

President **Dale Schweigert** told members that crews have been working on completing the Beaver Hill substation, and are in the process of replacing poles on long spans of power lines.

Manager **John Sokoloski** went over several numbers that showed the cooperative's growth, then expanded on the pole-replacement project. He said a pole inspector has tested 2,069 poles, with only 39 failing the test and needing to be replaced.

**Claire Vigesaa** of Upper Missouri Power Cooperative provided an update on the G&T, and MECA was pleased to provide a communications update.

In elections, Mr. Schweigert was re-elected by unanimous ballot.

### RM to poll readership

Rural Montana has launched its readers survey, which is conducted every five years. The survey will appear in the August and September issues of the magazine.

The survey asks readers to rate the magazine; rate individual features, including cooperative insert pages; let the editor know what topics need more or less coverage; and to comment on what electronic media they use or would like to use to receive updates and even the magazine.

Preliminary results of the survey will be presented during the Communications Committee meeting at the MECA Annual Meeting. Final results will be presented during the winter meetings.

### RM, MECA to host co-op statewide editors institute

Rural Montana and the Montana Electric Cooperatives' Association will host the Statewide Editors Association (SEA) Institute from Aug. 5-8 at the Grouse Mountain Lodge in Whitefish.

The Institute is a training for statewide magazine editors, staff members and advertising representatives that takes place every other year in the state of one of the SEA members. This is believed to be the first time the Institute has taken place in Montana.

Training topics include how to take better videos, taking magazine-quality images with your cellphone, writing, electric cars and their impact on the grid, strategizing for digital content, use of social media and more. Instructors include a Pulitzer-Prize-winning reporter, the author of a photography book, a social media expert and others.

Participants also will hear from Montana speakers, including Native American storyteller **Jack Gladstone**, daredevil **Robbie Knieval**; and a name familiar to many electric cooperative directors, **Lois Olmstead**, the widow of the late **Robert Olmstead**, a past director at Park Electric Cooperative.

### Upcoming workshop focuses on co-op basics

MECA will hold a one-day Co-op 101 workshop, Aug. 9 in Havre and Aug. 11 in Dillon.

The Havre workshop will be held at the Best Western Plus Havre Inn and Suites, 1425 US Hwy 2 NW. The Dillon workshop on Aug. 11 will be held at the University of Montana Western, 710 S. Atlantic St.

This workshop was designed specifically by **Adam Swartz**. Mr. Swartz, who will conduct the workshop, is a former NRECA employee and the founder and principal of "The Cooperative Way," a consulting firm

dedicated to improving the operations of cooperatives by using the seven cooperative principles, and to solving cooperatives' needs for capital.

This course will provide strategic guidance to cooperatives seeking to utilize cooperative principles and values as a primary force in serving their members.

Topics of interest include: "Understanding the definition of a cooperative organizational culture," "Why cooperative culture is important to the future success of the cooperative," "How to implement and sustain a cooperative culture," "The seven steps to build or restore a cooperative culture within your organization," "The role your co-op can play in rebuilding your local economy," "Becoming an active leader in creating cross-sector cooperative collaboration for business, policy and social impacts," "How to grow your business through strategic alliances," and "Partnering to grow capital resources for co-ops."

A room block has been set up in Havre at the Best Western Plus at a group rate of \$105/night. Please ask for the group "MT Co-op" when making your reservation. A block of rooms has also been set aside at the Comfort Inn in Dillon at a group rate of \$104/night. Please reference group, "MT Electric Co-ops Association" when making your reservation.

To register, please contact **Beckie Frediani** at the statewide office. She can be reached via email at [beckie@mtco-ops.com](mailto:beckie@mtco-ops.com) or via phone at (406) 761-8333.

### **MECA sponsors winter survival training course**

MECA will hold a one-day Winter Survival Training course at the Yogo Inn in Lewistown, Mont., on Tuesday, Aug. 8. Course instructor will be **Art Seely**, a renowned authority in safety and survival training and the sole founder of Safety One Training International. He is one of the first certified rescue paramedics in the United States.

Training will focus on Case Histories — simple lessons to avoid disaster, Survival Attitude — how to get it, how to keep it; Winter Survival — secrets that make a difference; Hypothermia — why it kills so many, recognition and what you need to do; Frostbite — simple secrets to keep your fingers; and Survival Priorities — surviving the unexpected.

The registration deadline for this training is July 28.

For additional information, please contact **Lea Potoczny** of our office. She can be reached at (406) 761-8333 or, via email, [meca@mtco-ops.com](mailto:meca@mtco-ops.com).

### **OCR training schools set for Kalispell and Huntley**

Two Oil Circuit Recloser schools will be offered by MECA next month. The first course will be held Aug. 22-23 at Flathead Electric Cooperative in Kalispell. The second course will be held Aug. 29-30 at Yellowstone Valley Electric Cooperative in Huntley. Course instructor will again be **Mike Dean**.

The course is limited to the first 30 registered participants so those interested in attending are urged to register as soon as possible but no later than July 31.

For additional information, please contact **Lea Potoczny** of our office. She can be reached at (406) 761-8333 or, via email, [meca@mtco-ops.com](mailto:meca@mtco-ops.com).

### **Job Market**

#### **Accountant/Benefits Administrator**

Big Horn County Electric, based in Hardin, MT, is currently accepting resumes for the position of Accountant/Benefits Administrator. A bachelor's degree in accounting and/or a minimum of five years experience in accounting is recommended.

Accountant responsibilities will include maintaining work orders, inventory records, asset records, and preparing the monthly and annual financial statements. Benefits administrator responsibilities include all

duties associated with record keeping and reporting of employee benefits/payroll. Salary is commensurate with experience and qualifications. Send resume to: **Karan Uffelman**, Office Manager, Big Horn County Electric Cooperative, Inc., PO Box 410, Hardin MT 59034, or email to [kuffelman@bhcec.com](mailto:kuffelman@bhcec.com). This position will remain open until filled.

### Work Order Supervisor

A South Dakota electric cooperative, Southeastern Electric Cooperative, has an opening for a work order supervisor in the co-op's rural Sioux Falls office, located at exit 68 on I-29.

This position requires a self-motivated individual to check staking sheets with related material charge-outs, verify direct charges to work orders, close work orders and prepare inventories of completed work orders and summaries of special equipment purchases on a monthly basis. Prior experience with an electric cooperative is preferred along with a strong background in related software applications, such as those provided by National Information Solutions Cooperative.

This is a full-time, regular position with excellent benefit plan and salary commensurate with experience and qualifications. A bachelor's degree from a four-year college or university, or one to two years related experience and/or training; or equivalent combination of education and experience is required.

For an application and job description, visit [www.southeasternelectric.com](http://www.southeasternelectric.com) or contact **John McDonald** at (800) 333-2859 or [john@southeastern.coop](mailto:john@southeastern.coop). Application deadline is July 31, 2017.

## CALENDAR

31	Legislature's Energy & Telecommunication Interim Committee	Helena, MT
<b>August</b>		
5-8	Statewide Editors Association Institute	Whitefish, MT
8	Winter Survival Training	Lewistown, MT
9	Co-op 101 Class	Havre, MT
11	Co-op 101 Class	Dillon, MT
17-18	MECA Office Managers & Accountants Summer Meeting	Fairmont Hot Springs, MT
22-23	OCR School	Kalispell, MT
29-30	OCR School	Huntley, MT
<b>September</b>		
7	2630 Certified Credentialed Director's Course	Lewistown, MT
11-14	Annual MECA Operations Conference	Helena, MT
19	"Generational Differences" Training Course	Great Falls, MT
<b>October</b>		
2	943.1 Conversation Skills Outside the Boardroom BLC Course	Great Falls, MT
2-5	MECA Annual Meeting	Great Falls, MT
14	Sheridan Electric Cooperative Annual Meeting	Medicine Lake, MT
16-17	Substation Class	Sidney, MT
16-18	NRECA Region 7 & 9 Meetings	Denver, CO
19-20	Substation Class	Missoula, MT