

Big Skylights



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

A report from your Chief Executive Officer Dave Wheelihan

October 12, 2017

RM readership sets mark

Rural Montana will reach a new circulation milestone in November. Our printer, River's Edge Printing, expects to mail more than 124,000 copies to members — not counting copies mailed to the electric cooperatives' offices — for the first time. To put that in perspective, RM's mail total average in 2012 was just under 118,000 a month.

While the non-member paid subscription list has grown slightly over the past couple years, it seems the main reason for reaching this milestone is growth in co-op membership across the state.

Beartooth Electric hears about future power plans

Beartooth Electric Cooperative members officially met their new manager and learned about a future power supplier during their annual meeting Sept. 23 in Absarokee.

Manager **Kevin Owens** introduced himself to members and outlined his nearly 40 years' experience in the industry. He also detailed the past 30 hours, which encompassed a severe winter storm that knocked out power to 1,700 meters just the day before.

Mr. Owens then described the future of the cooperative, focusing on the recent securement of power for the next 10 years at fixed rates, and a plan to embrace technology. He said the cooperative's meter system, which features antiquated technology, will be swapped out for a new power-line carrier system that allows meters to be read remotely, and activated and disconnected from the office. This will represent a significant cost savings in gas as well as personnel and equipment hours.

During his report, Board President **David Peterson** focused on the manager search that resulted in Owens being hired. That was followed by the chairs of the Bylaws, Risk Management, Policy, Communications and Finance committees reporting on their activities since the last meeting.

Guest speaker **Travis Togo**, director of power management for Energy Keepers, which owns the Seli's Ksanka Qlispe' dam, formerly known as Kerr Dam, then detailed the power-purchase agreement for 2022-2027 between Beartooth Electric and Energy Keepers. He gave a history of the dam and the creation of the tribal corporation. He also assured members that the dam was in outstanding shape structurally, and explained the current modernization process for the equipment at the facility.

In elections, incumbent trustees Mr. Peterson, **Daniel Dutton** and **Julie Lindgren** were re-elected without opposition.

Montana co-op manager elected to CoBank board

Congratulations to **Brandon Wittman**, general manager at Yellowstone Valley Electric Cooperative, on being elected to the CoBank board of electors to fill a vacant seat in CoBank's Northwest Region. His one-year term begins Jan. 1, 2018.

Central Montana elects new trustee for Basin seat

We also want to congratulate **Dan Gliko** on recently being nominated to represent Central Montana Electric Power Cooperative on the Basin Electric Power Cooperative Board of Directors. Mr. Gliko, a director from Marias River Electric Cooperative, who had been Central's board president, replaces **Roberta Rohrer**. Ms. Rohrer, a director at Sun River Electric Cooperative, decided not to seek re-nomination to the Basin Board after 13 years of dedicated service on that board. Elected to replace Mr. Gliko as president of the Central board was **Kurt Breigenzer**, a trustee at NorVal Electric Cooperative.

MECA safety awards

Electric co-ops were presented safety awards at the MECA Awards Breakfast, Thursday, Oct. 5. They are as follows: *61 Years* – Goldenwest Electric; *29 Years* – Lincoln Electric; *19 Years* – Tongue River Electric; *15 Years* – Sun River Electric; *11 Years* – Marias River Electric; *10 Years* – Ravalli County Electric; *7 Years* – Beartooth Electric; *4 Years* – Big Flat Electric and Fergus Electric; *2 Years* – Big Horn County Electric and Fall River Electric; *1 Year* – Mid-Yellowstone Electric, Park Electric and Sheridan Electric.

MECA staff was the winner of this year's Fitness Challenge Award. Four walkers logged more than 3 million steps, or just over 1,500 miles. They also drank 15,344 ounces of water. Other participating co-ops were Sun River Electric, Lincoln Electric, Flathead Electric, Marias River Electric, Glacier Electric, NorVal Electric, McCone Electric and Fall River Rural Electric.

Communications awards

Flathead Electric Cooperative and Southeast Electric Cooperative won top communications awards at last week's MECA Awards Breakfast held in conjunction with MECA's annual meeting.

Flathead Electric won the Sweepstakes Awards for Excellence in Communications, large co-ops category, and Southeast Electric won for excellence in communications, small co-ops category. The sweepstakes is a points-based system with five points for every first place in other categories, three for every second place and one for every third. Judging this year's communications awards was **Curtis Condon**, recently retired editor of Ruralite, a publication serving public power utilities in the Northwest and Nevada.

Significant achievement in sweepstakes honors went to Ravalli County Electric in the large co-ops category and Hill County Electric, small co-ops.

Other communications awards were as follows: *Best Newsletter*, 1st – Fergus Features by **Vangie McConnell**, Fergus Electric, 2nd – Electrical Hi-Lites, Yellowstone Valley Electric, Honorable mention – LightREADING, Flathead Electric Cooperative; *Best Social Media Post or Presence*, 1st – “Celebrating 35 Years,” **Vicki Fix**, Southeast Electric, 2nd – “The Warning Tree” campaign, **Melissa Greenwood**, Ravalli County Electric, Honorable mention – “Power Tip Tuesday,” Flathead Electric; *Best Feature Story*, 1st – “Yellow Bird Shares Culture with the World,” Lower Yellowstone REC, 2nd – “I Laughed, I Cried, I Sang Tour Bus Karaoke,” **Vicki Fix**, Southeast Electric, Honorable mention – “The Power of Hope,” **Betty Campbell**, Big Flat Electric; *Best News Story*, 1st – “Ric Twardoski and Alex Keith Receive Lifesaver Award,” **Jim Maunder**, Ravalli County Electric, 2nd – “Anderson Named Manager of GEC,” **Jonnalea Tatsey**, Glacier Electric; *Best Print Ad*, 1st – “Ribeye Raffle,” Flathead Electric, 2nd – “80 Years Strong,” Flathead Electric; *Best Special Publication*, 1st – “Capturing the Allure of Northwestern Montana” calendar, Flathead Electric, 2nd – “AG Knowledge” placemat, **Ross Oveson**, Sun River Electric, Honorable mention – MECroots grassroots publication, **Dan Rogers**, Missoula Electric; *Best News Photo*, “It's All Fun and Games Until Someone's Balloon Gets Caught on a Power Line,” **Melissa Greenwood**, Ravalli County Electric, 2nd – “Independence Day,” Flathead Electric; *Best Feature Photo*, 1st – “Past Meets Present,” **Jonnalea Tatsey**, Glacier Electric, 2nd – “Cotton Candy Man,” **Scot Brown**, McCone Electric; *Best Annual Report*, 1st – Flathead Electric, 2nd – Ravalli County Electric, Honorable mention – **Jonnalea Tatsey**, Glacier Electric; *Best Manager's Report*, 1st – “To Those Who Remember, From One Who Doesn't,” **Jack Hamblin**, Southeast Electric, 2nd – “Bridging the Data Divide,” **Mark Hayden**, Missoula Electric, Honorable Mention – Manager's Message in Co-op's Annual Report, **Mark Grotbo**, Ravalli County Electric; *Best Wild Card Entry*, 1st – Master Electrician Campaign, Hill County Electric, 2nd – YVEC Commercial, Yellowstone Valley Electric, Honorable mention – “Rates 101” video presentation, Flathead Electric.

MECA service awards

Also presented at the MECA Awards Breakfast on Thursday, Oct. 5, were service awards, honoring employees and trustees for their time, dedication and faithful service to their cooperatives. Service awards were as follows: *40 Years* – Beartooth Electric, **William Colgrove**, line foreman; *Mid-Yellowstone Electric*, **Jim DeCock**, trustee; *Vigilante Electric*, **Linda Meine**, staff assistant. *35 Years* – Southeast Electric, **Jerry Kalstrom**, line foreman; *Yellowstone Valley Electric*, **Rhonda Shaules**, work order clerk. *30 Years* – Fall River Rural Electric, **Brian Curr**, metering supervisor, and **David Stone**, journeyman line foreman; *Fergus Electric*, **Guy Johnson**, staking engineer; *McCone Electric*, **Ed Crockett**, plant superintendent; *Northern Lights, Inc.*, **Kellee Merrill**, lead member service specialist, and **Keven Seppala**, lead mechanic; *NorVal Electric*, **Walter Nelson**, groundman; *Sun River Electric*, **Shelley Batson**, senior billing clerk; *Tongue River*

Electric, Diana McLean, Northern Cheyenne Tribe representative. **25 Years** – *Fall River Rural Electric, Patty Nedrow*, human resources manager; *Fergus Electric, Don Criswell*, assistant line superintendent, **Kerby Durbin**, meterman/stores/compliance, **Bret Ophus**, foreman, **Dale Rikala**, line superintendent, and **Tom Simons**, mechanic; *Flathead Electric, Steve Fewlass*, journeyman line foreman; *Glacier Electric, Brian Elliott*, trustee; *Lincoln Electric, Josh Jankovsky*, line foreman; *Lower Yellowstone REC, John Redman*, trustee and board secretary/treasurer; *Marias River Electric, Eugene Haroldson*, senior accountant; *Northern Lights, Inc., Aaron McNall*, engineering assistant II, and **Bill Murray**, lineman/meterman; *Yellowstone Valley Electric, Ronda Laurie*, billing clerk.

Job Market

Journeyman Lineman

Vigilante Electric Cooperative (VEC), headquartered in Dillon, Mont., has an immediate opening for a journeyman lineman. Excellent pay and benefits are provided in this position. VEC may accept applications from a fourth step and above, “hot”, apprentice lineman. This position requires residing within a 20-minute response time of the co-op’s Dillon headquarters office. Please contact **Justin Bair**, line superintendent, at (406) 683-2327 or Justin@vec.coop, for further details/requirements related to the position and an application package. This position will remain open until filled. VEC is an Equal Opportunity Employer.

CALENDAR

October

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| 14 | Big Flat Electric Cooperative Annual Meeting | Malta, 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 |
| 18 | NorVal Electric Cooperative Annual Meeting | Opheim, MT |
| 19-20 | Substation Class | Missoula, MT |
| 27 | Park Electric Cooperative Annual Meeting | Livingston, MT |

November

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| 8 | Basin Electric Power Cooperative Annual Meeting | Bismarck, ND |
| 28-29 | MECA Winter Meeting | Great Falls, MT |

December

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| 12-14 | Midwest Electric Consumers Association Annual Meeting | Denver, CO |
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