

# Big Skylights



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

---

A report from your Chief Executive Officer Dave Wheelihan

June 9, 2016

## Economic, political pressures discussed at Southeast Electric

Southeast Electric Cooperative members learned about the history of their cooperative during the 70<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting on June 3 at Carter County High School in Ekalaka.

Manager **Jack Hamblin** told a brief history of the cooperative and recognized employee **Robin Kuntz** and Trustee **Leroy Jardee** for each serving the cooperative for 35 years. He also introduced employee **Vickie Fix**, who announced that the cooperative, along with Goldenwest Electric Cooperative, Basin Electric Power Cooperative and CoBank, donated a combined \$9,000 to a nonprofit organization. Positive Choices brings speakers to the Baker area to talk to students about the dangers of drugs and alcohol, among other issues.

Guest speaker **Claire Vigesaa**, general manager of Upper Missouri Power Cooperative, told members that despite its relatively small size, the generation and transmission cooperative averages about \$1.2 million in sales of electricity each day, or \$14 a second. Despite the strong sales, cooperative members need to be

concerned about economic pressures on rates, including the potential for not getting the full life use out of power plants because of federal regulations.

**Bill Drummond**, executive director of Mid-West Electric Consumers Association, told members that there are three threats to hydropower that they need to be aware of since Southeast Electric gets electricity from the Western Area Power Administration. He detailed the political, environmental and neglect concerns threatening hydropower. He urged members to talk to politicians and political candidates, and to ask for their support to keep federal hydropower an at-cost power source for cooperatives.

In trustee elections, **Dave Hayden** was re-elected without opposition. **Doug Gardner** was elected to fill the seat vacated by the retiring **Francis Hayes**.

## LYREC sees continued growth in electricity sales

Despite the decline in oil prices, growth at Lower Yellowstone Rural Electric Cooperative (LYREC) was strong in 2015 and, although slowing, some continued growth is expected in 2016, Board President **Allen Thiessen** told members at their 80<sup>th</sup> annual meeting June 1. He emphasized to members that LYREC is not dependent on oil prices to remain financially strong.

Mr. Thiessen, who serves on the Basin Electric Power Cooperative's board of trustees, cautioned a wholesale power rate increase from Basin may occur later this year, which could translate into the need for a retail rate hike.

General Manager **Jason Brothen** said the co-op continues to make improvements in its operations. He noted the construction of two new substations and a 115 kV transmission line to tie the two substations together. All of the work should be completed by early 2017, he said. Mr. Brothen also pointed out GIS mapping has been completed as well as upgrading of the co-op's metering system and installation of Smart Hub, a new online electronic billing system allowing members to pay utility bills, and track power usage and their bill history.

Also during the meeting, MECA appreciated the opportunity to provide a legislative update and emphasize the importance of grassroots action. A total of 20 \$1,000 higher-education scholarships from LYREC were awarded at the annual meeting.

In trustee elections, incumbents **John Redman** and **Dennis Schmierer** were re-elected without opposition.

### Mild winter necessitates rate hike at cooperative

Members of McCone Electric Cooperative heard at their 71<sup>st</sup> annual meeting June 3 in Circle how a mild winter in 2015 can affect co-op revenues. It was pointed out the lack of cold weather necessitated an increase earlier this year in the co-op's base rate and kWh charge.

General Manager **Michael Hoy** said the increases occurred after a 5.8 percent decline in sales in 2015.

Mr. Hoy also talked about improvements to the system made in 2016, including installation of Smart Hub billing and power usage services, and changes in automated meter reading. Both Mr. Hoy and Board President **Conrad Moline** underscored the impact government energy policies are having on co-ops like McCone Electric. Mr. Moline said the policies are forcing rate increases, adding a major challenge is the lack of public understanding of their sources of low-cost power, such as coal-fired generation. Mr. Hoy urged members to get involved in grassroots action, points that were echoed by MECA in its legislative update.

In trustee elections, incumbents Mr. Moline, **Arne Sutton** and **Brent Kluth** were re-elected without opposition.

### Condolences

#### Jay Nelson

We were saddened to hear of the death of one of Montana electric cooperatives' most stalwart advocates, **Jay Frederick Nelson**, 94, a longtime retired director at Vigilante Electric Cooperative. He passed away on June ,1 at his home in Jackson, surrounded by his loving family.

Jay was born July 3, 1923, in Butte, Montana, to **Fred and Margaret (Woolaghan) Nelson** of the Big Hole Valley..

Jay spent all his life in his beloved Big Hole Valley. In 1941, he married **Jean Renz** of Dillon. In June 1943 he enlisted in the U.S. Army. He served in the 99th Division that fought in the Battle of the Bulge, and was one of the first to cross the Ludendorff Bridge at Remagen, and was wounded by shrapnel on March 13, 1945. In November, he was discharged and hitchhiked back to Montana to return to the Big Hole. He and Jean raised six children. They were married for 56 years when she passed away.

Mr. Nelson served on the Vigilante Electric Board for 41 years, retiring in 2009. In 1980, he helped found Western Montana G&T.

He is survived by children **Jenny (Virgil) Anderson, Ruthie (Gilbert) Little, Sherry Metzger, Kathy (John) Johnson, Mary Rangitsch, and Bob Nelson; grandchildren, Doug (Sally) Anderson, Laura Smith, Jeff (Jaime) Robinson, Mike Robinson, Brian (Kim) Harrison, Kyle Metzger, Steve (Anner) Johnson, Connie (Jody) Roark, Stacy (David) Parks, Shawn (Antonia) Rangitsch, James (Krista) Rangitsch, Jason (Dawnele) Rangitsch, and Jessica Batson** – and 29 great-grandchildren.

Services will be held at 10 a.m. Saturday, June 11, at the Wisdom Masonic Temple with Full Military Rites. Reception will follow at the Wisdom Community Center. Donations may be made to the Jackson Fire Department or the Big Hole Valley History Book Organization at Box 847, Jackson MT 59736 or the Beaverhead County Museum, 15 S. Montana St., Dillon, MT 59725.

#### Bruce Measure

Our thoughts and prayers are with the family and friends of **Bruce Measure**, president of the Flathead Electric Cooperative board of trustees, who died Monday at age 64 following a battle with cancer. Mr. Measure is survived by his partner, **Barbara Varnum**, his son, **Buck Measure**, and two grandchildren.

In addition to serving on the Flathead Electric Cooperative board, Mr. Measure was also a former state legislator, serving in the Montana House of Representatives from 1991 to 1993. In 2004, he was selected by Montana Gov. **Brian Schweitzer** as one of the state's two representatives on the Northwest Power and Conservation Council. At the time of his death, Mr. Measure was chairman of MECA's Distributive Generation Legislative Subcommittee.

After graduating from Flathead High School, Mr. Measure joined the U.S. Army and served as a military police offer. He also worked for years as a forester and millworker for Plum Creek. He earned his undergraduate political science degree and his law degree from the University of Montana before beginning

his legal career in Kalispell at his father’s law firm in 1988.

Mr. Measure’s father, **Ambrose Measure**, was Kalispell’s oldest practicing attorney and was a widely respected local leader who had represented the valley in the state Legislature and helped create Flathead Electric Cooperative in 1938.

The date is still pending for a memorial service for Mr. Measure at Risen Christ Catholic Church in Evergreen.

**MECA sets voltage regulator school for July**

MECA will hold a voltage regulator school July 19-20 in Corvallis. The school will be hosted by Ravalli County Electric Cooperative at the co-op’s headquarters building. The instructor will be **Mike Dean**.

The school will begin at 8:30 a.m. on Tuesday, July 19. It will conclude by 4 p.m. on Wednesday, July 20. Lunch will be provided both days.

Attendance will be limited to the first 28 registered participants. It is strongly recommended that registrations be made by no later than July 1.

For more information, please contact **Lea Potoczny** of the MECA staff. Her email is [meca@mtco-ops.com](mailto:meca@mtco-ops.com). The phone number is (406) 761-8333.

**CALENDAR**

**June**

11-17	Youth Tour to Washington, D.C.	Washington, D.C.
11	Fergus Electric Cooperative Annual Meeting	Lewistown, MT
11	Fall River Electric Cooperative Annual Meeting	Ashton, Idaho
14-15	MECA Managers’ Group Summer Meeting	Great Falls, MT

**July**

6-7	MECA Summer Meetings	Glasgow, MT
9	Tongue River Electric Cooperative Annual Meeting	Ashland, MT
14	Goldenwest Electric Cooperative Annual Meeting	Golva, ND
19-20	Regulator School	Corvallis, MT