

F E R R G U S

FEATURES

Member Newsletter ♦ Fergus Electric Cooperative, Inc., Lewistown, MT

Utica Community Center is a major project for local volunteers

Story and photos by Judy Byrne

For more than 50 years, the Utica Community Center provided a lively gathering place for folks throughout Central Montana. Over the decades music and laughter floated from its open doors and windows on a summertime Saturday night as locals gathered for a foot-stomping good time with their neighbors. If there was no dancing, then a ball game brought shouts and hollers to encourage the home team up and down its hardwood floors. Quieter activities transpired inside, as well – club meetings, receptions, and private gatherings.

Originally built in 1916, the structure was always a community center. In fact, the saloonkeeper who originally owned the property donated it to the town of Utica with the stipulation that it remain a community center. So it did, until it was abandoned in the 1970's. Ownership of the property eventually reverted to John and Lear Flanagan, who had inherited the saloon property from their father.

A silent reminder of bygone days,

the hall sat empty, serving as a storage unit, until the turn of a new century. Automotive parts soiled its floors with oil and transmission fluids, and its doors and windows were vandalized repeatedly. The building suffered the whims and caprice of Mother Nature.

Then along came Ron Peevey, a general contractor from California newly relocated to Utica. He had admired the once-proud structure and saw potential in its crumbling walls. "I love my work and never want to completely retire," he said. "There's nothing I like better than to take a dilapidated old place and turn it into something beautiful and useful."

Coincidentally, the Utica Rod and Gun Club, of which Peevey was a member, was outgrowing their usual meeting place at the



Ron Peevey, a general contractor from California, newly relocated to Utica, finds bringing an old building back to life very satisfying.

Oxen Yoke Inn. Peevey suggested buying the Community Center and bringing it back to life. The Rod and Gun Club shot the idea past the Flanagan brothers and a deal was struck.

Following tradition, the Flanagans donated the building, once again on condition it be used as a community center. (Eventually, ownership will be deeded to the Rod and Gun Club.)

Rod and Gun Club President Tom Swanz jumped aboard the project, and Peevey went to work drawing up plans, hiring sub-contractors, enlisting support, and creating a budget. A major renovation project, they calculated a cost of about \$90,000 to revitalize the building and bring it up to code. The

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Built in 1916, this structure was always a community center.

MANAGER'S MESSAGE

From Scott Sweeney



Highwood Generating Station

The final environmental statement has been filed with the federal government. This is a significant, positive step forward for the generation project near Great Falls.

Plans to obtain the final record of decision and the final air permit by the end of March appear to be on track. This is a worthy project for Fergus Electric's membership as well as for the other five members of Southern Montana Electric Generation and Transmission Cooperative, Inc.

Construction work summary

In 2006, 131 new services were built which includes 75 new homes, 20 new stockwells, 16 remote telephone boosters, two irrigation pumps and 18 other services – i.e. barns, cell towers, shops, etc.

Of the 131 new services, 37 were in the Roundup, Musselshell, Ryegate and Lavina areas and 37 were in the Heath, Ruby Gulch, Glengarry and Carter's Pond areas around Lewistown.

Thirty of our new members relocated from out of state.

Record year

In 2006, we collected \$701,226 up front to build new lines. This was a record year.

Independent Inspections Company tested 3,256 poles in the Winifred and Roundup areas and crews replaced 591 old poles.

Turtle® meters (automated meter readers) were installed in the Geyser, White Sulphur, Harlowton, Judith Gap and Ryegate areas.

I anticipate that 2007 will be very similar.

Do you need an electrician?

From time to time the cooperative receives inquiries about available electricians. The following list includes electricians throughout the cooperative's service area plus the State electrical inspectors who serve Fergus Electric's 12 counties.

Lewistown

Advanced Electric, Matt Burg, 538-6767
Barrick Electric, Leo Barrick, 535-7989
BPL Electric, Roger Larson, 538-7966
Butler Electric, Dick Butler, 538-8124
Central Electric, Greg Smith, 538-3786
Dennison Electric, Dick Dennison, 538-2252
Hutch's Electric, Dave Hutchison, 538-8526
Jeide Electric, John Jeide, 538-9604
Mountain Electric, Walt Regli, 538-4835

Harlowton

Tech Electric, Carl Dishong, 632-4441
Wheatland Electric, Don DeShaw, 632-4300

Moore

BPL Electric, Roger Larson, 374-7966
M/S Residential, Mark Kucera, 374-2584

Roundup

Electric Service Shop, Office, 323-2306 or Mike Kowalski, 323-2246
Eliasson Electric, Jay Eliasson, 323-1655
RDC, Inc., Rod Cook, 323-3470

Stanford

Basin Electric, Donny Jones, 566-2400

White Sulphur Springs

Fisher Electric, Mark Fisher, 547-2101
Townsend Electric, Office, 1-800-345-2279

State Electrical Inspectors

Charles Bassett, 374-2508
Robert Tull, 323-4181

Call for safety demonstrations

It's shocking! It's electrifying! It could save lives. To provide a graphic reminder that electricity is the safest form of energy, but only when treated with respect, Fergus Electric will perform safety demonstrations, upon request, to schools and community organizations.

Experienced linemen conduct the high voltage demonstration showing how dangerous it is to come in contact

with power lines. The presentation will offer students and the public a chance to avoid being another statistic.

To schedule a high voltage safety demonstration, call 406-538-3465 and ask for line superintendent Dale Rikala.

Lineman Louie Hould demonstrates how an automobile tire conducts electricity. Photo by Vangie McConnell.



Utica

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Rod and Gun Club received an astounding response.

“We’ve had great support from area businesses and individuals,” Peevey reported. “Next-door neighbor Thelma Walker allowed us to use her water well, and Casino Creek Concrete donated half the cost of our 1,500-gallon holding tank. Forbes Bobcat Service donated the labor to install the tank and water lines to the building, and Plum Plumbing out of Moore donated labor as well. All we paid for was materials. I have lists of people who’ve volunteered materials, labor or money to help us with this project.”

Jennifer Pfau and Kathie Bailey at Snowy Mountain Development assisted the Rod and Gun Club with grant applications, and many of their requests were successful. They received grants of various amounts from the Phil Tawney Foundation, the James Fish Foundation, TIIP, PPL, Northwestern Energy, BNSF Railroad, the Montana Communities Foundation, Jerry Metcalf Foundation, Brodum Foundation and Central Montana Foundation. Additionally, Peevey accepted donations from nearly 45 separate businesses and individuals, including Edgewood Building Supply, Basin Electric and Fergus Electric Cooperative.

Except as required by law, local volunteers joined the Rod and Gun Club members to provide sweat equity in roofing, siding, drywall work, window installation and clean-up. Others bought bricks, which are still available for \$50, to rebuild the front porch. “It’ll take about 600 bricks, and people can get three lines with up to 20 characters each engraved on their brick. These will be right at the entrance where you see them when you come in,” Peevey said.

Peevey first came into Utica as a guest at the Circle Bar Dude Ranch in 1989. “I just loved it here. My annual vacation to Montana soon became a twice-a-year adventure. In December

To purchase a brick, make a donation, or otherwise provide assistance, contact Building Chairman Ron Peevey (423-5247) or President Tom Swanz (423-5371).



Top left: The center will rent to the general public for a modest fee and is already reserved for five days next summer. Top right: When completed, the 1,800-square foot hall will maintain its basketball court, foyer and stage. Bottom right: Volunteers joined the Rod and Gun Club members to roof, side, drywall and install windows. Two right photos courtesy Ron Peevey.

of 1995, I bought a semi-trailer, loaded all my possessions and made the move,” he explained. He cemented his change of address in 2001 when he married Julie Turner Anderson, the Judith Basin County Clerk of Court, and bought a second home in Hobson.

Except for having to leave a favorite horse behind, Peevey felt no remorse about leaving California. “There is nothing I want there. You couldn’t pay me to go back.”

Instead he looks forward to completing the Utica Community Center. Already, most of the work on the back room is finished. When everything is done, the 1800-square-foot hall will maintain its basketball court, foyer and stage. The backstage area will include handicapped accessible restrooms, a meeting room, a soup-and-sandwich kitchen, an office and storage space.

The hall will rent to the general public for a modest fee and has already been reserved for five days next summer. “The work should be done by



fall,” Peevey added, “and I can see it being used for a multitude of events – wedding receptions, plays, dances, family reunions, funeral gatherings and even classes, such as CPR training.”

Perhaps the sound of music and laughter from across the years echoed in his mind as Peevey ran his hand over walls that patiently await new siding. His gesture unveiled more than his simple words conveyed. “It’s very satisfying work,” he said.

Identify account number

**Win a
\$25 credit**

If one of the following account numbers is yours, call Fergus Electric (406-538-3465) by Mar. 30 and identify yourself and your account number.

Account 353960

Account 117700

Account 317420

You will receive a \$25 credit on next month’s statement.

Albert Schenk of Winnett and Charles Lavalva of Roundup were last month’s winners.

Substation upgrade will bring improved reliability



Top left: One three-man crew works on the upgrade daily. If an outage is planned, three crews participate. Top right: Here, two linemen are dead ending a distribution conductor onto crossarms. Right: Except for the breakers (bottom) this old structure is being replaced. Above: Ryan d'Autremont (left) and Eric Cheney select parts for the project. Photos by Vangie McConnell.

Fergus Electric is busy with an upgrade on the Hilger Substation. Crews are adding a second circuit breaker on the transmission line and burying the distribution circuits that leave the substation. They are also installing a new grounding grid and building a new fenced enclosure.

The additional work on the substation and distribution circuits is being done to improve reliability to the members served from the Hilger substation and to address safety issues within the substation facility.

Currently, if there is an outage on

either of the transmission lines to Roy or Winifred, all members in both areas are out of power until crews can patrol the routes. Once the cause is located and repairs are made, the power line is energized.

With the addition of a new circuit breaker, only the transmission line with the problem will open which, in turn, will allow crews to locate the cause and restore power more quickly.

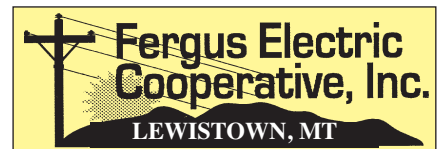
This upgrade is part of a continuing maintenance program designed to minimize power interruptions. Plans are to complete construction this spring.

Area meetings – March 6 — Annual Meeting – June 7

The nominating committees to select board of director candidates for District 1 (Lewistown area) and District 6 (Harlowton, Ryegate and Lavina areas) have set area meetings. District 1 will meet Tuesday, March 6 at 7 p.m. at the Yogo Inn, Lewistown. District 6 will meet Tuesday, March 6 at 7 p.m. at the Sportsman in Harlowton.

Committee members are: District 1 – Glenn Vogl, Chairman, 538-5536; Scott Damby, 538-6133; Jason Shobe, 538-5125 and District 6 – Morlee Vandervoort, Chairman, 568-2222; Tom Debuff, 632-4398; T. Neil Glennie, 473-2381.

Director Larry Descheemaeker of District 1 will retire in June. If you reside in either of the above districts and are interested in running for a position on the board, please contact one of the committee members.



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.....406-538-5192
 Guy Johnson406-535-5132
 Scott Sweeney406-538-7218
 Don Criswell (Roundup).....406-323-3426

FERGUS ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE, INC.

84423 US Hwy 87, Lewistown, MT 59457-2058
 Tel: 406-538-3465

Office Hours: 8 a. m. - 5 p. m. M-F

Scott SweeneyGeneral Manager
 Mike StanleyAssistant Manager
 Dale RikalaOperations Supervisor
 Sally Horacek.....Office Manager
 Vangie McConnellEditor

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

District 1: Larry Descheemaeker,
 Lewistown, 428-2322
 District 2: David Dover, Vice President,
 Buffalo, 374-2315
 District 3: Joe Dirkson, Winifred, 462-5631
 District 4: Leo Solf, Secretary/Treasurer,
 Winnett, 429-7301
 District 5: Alan Evans, Roundup, 323-2888
 District 6: Joe Pirrie, Shawmut, 632-4432
 District 7: Bob Evans, Jr., President,
 Geysler, 735-4476