

# LIVEWIRE

Sheridan Electric Cooperative - Medicine Lake, Mont.  
406-789-2231

## Sheridan Electric's 2015 highlights and accomplishments

BY SCOTT WESTLUND

### **2015 was an interesting year for accomplishments, hurdles, team building and identification of problem areas.**

#### **Starting with the first item, accomplishments:**

#### **Transmission line completion**

In 2015, we saw the completion of the transmission line that stretches from north Bainville to east Fortuna, with an additional leg (right in the middle) that stretches from east of the Montana state line into North Dakota.

With this addition, we will see greater reliability, loop feeds and a system that will be strong for the next 50 years. This system upgrade also stops the continuing breakdowns on an old system that was 60 years old.

#### **Inventory management**

Inventory management and database cleanup was a priority for the cooperative. While the line

department organized and reduced its inventory to historic lows (but still enough for emergencies), the electrician department cleaned up the database system to ensure that inventory check-ins and checkouts had all programs talking to each other. In both cases, this will free money that had been either used in stocking inventory, or trying to make decisions financially based on faulty information.

#### **Installation of SmartHub**

Over the summer of 2015, Sheridan Electric employees worked on implementing a new and innovative tool called SmartHub. For many years, Sheridan Electric members have been able to pay their utility bill online. SmartHub technology not only allows members to pay their utility bills quickly and easily online, but from their smartphones and tablets as well.

In addition, members are able to view their current bill, view billing history, view actual electricity use and compare usage to past history. Additional features are available through SmartHub that will allow

Sheridan Electric to keep up with the times.

#### **Sheridan Electric Facebook page**

Sheridan Electric is now on Facebook! Sheridan Electric's Cashier/Receptionist Casey Brunsvold did a fantastic job developing a Facebook page for the co-op in 2015. Check out <https://www.facebook.com/sheridanelectric.coop> to find out what is going on at Sheridan Electric with its employees and members as well as out on the line.

#### **Some of the hurdles we faced as a cooperative:**

#### **Safety program**

The safety program overhaul was accomplished late in December, with some outstanding work done by the manager and the new Safety Committee chairperson. Extensive research was done to find the right type of setting that fits the needs for this cooperative. The formation of a "charter" and a safety policy update placed this cooperative in new territory.

Very direct guidelines are present in the formation and the governance of the Safety Committee going forward, with special emphasis on employee input and research. This is a new landscape from which to build team involvement from all levels of the organization.

**Century Code**

This year, we faced an unusual hurdle with the newly built transmission system in the portions located in North Dakota. Our reliance on an engineering firm created a horrible mistake by neglecting a code which regulates all new structures next to county roads.

The North Dakota Century Code requires all new structures next to a county road to be 100 feet from the center line of the existing road base. This took massive amounts of time to extract a variance from the county, from both your cooperative staff and the Williams County commissioners, to permit us to leave the structures in place. After the dust had settled, we did some self-analysis on this problem and determined that we were not very good neighbors to our fellow cooperatives and did not hold our engineering firm to a high enough standard.

**Hiring**

Hiring the right personnel was, and still is, another hurdle within the cooperative. This topic is of the upmost importance and takes the time from several staff members. We firmly believe that it is the people who make up your cooperative, not the tools they wield.

People are the core of any business and we take it seriously, by dedicating time and money toward the task. We look at current openings and determine what type of individual needs to be in that place. By looking at many applicants, we go through an extensive vetting process for the right characteristics to fit the team. To say that our process is 100 percent perfection on hiring would be a lie, but we do hope for 70 percent hiring and retention. An interviewing team was put together consisting of people out of the department to find the “right” individual. At this point, we are faced with a couple of openings at the site but not the right applicants, but are confident that they are out there for recruitment.

**Team building opportunities**

As stated early on in this article, people are the most valuable resource for any business, in regard

to hiring and building the current teams within your cooperative. We have spent enormous amounts of time working with the team to identify opportunities we see to enhance the performance of the cooperative. These items come in the form of task assignments, internal training (cross training) and building trust. The management team firmly believes that we do not work in “silos” and should be leaning on each other’s expertise and share knowledge for the betterment of the program.

**Identification of problem areas needing attention**

These are some of the areas we will be working on in 2016:

- Training completed for impending retirements
- Transmission system included into SPP
- Low line identification
- Electrician inventory items and footprint reduced
- Cross training to critical areas like electrician billing
- Work information for electrician department correctly logged for timely response to consumer

Your cooperative employees never stop looking for the next levels within the cooperative business model and drive toward your continued satisfaction. ■

**We say goodbye to Don Haven**

BY SCOTT WESTLUND



If you stop at the cooperative, you will find people willing to help you with anything you may need. Throughout the years, Don Haven set the standard as the most helpful person a person could ask for, within the cooperative and the community.

We say goodbye to Don as he ends an outstanding 36-year career with this cooperative.

Sheridan Electric Cooperative wants to thank you for your outstanding service and dedication throughout these years, and wishes you well on your next adventure. ■



Back row: **Doris Wivholm**, **Victoria Waller** and **Casey Brunsvold**. Front row: **Jamie Ator**, **Pam Lund** and **Lisa Salvevold**.

## Behind the scenes

From all that this cooperative does in supplying electricity to 1,900 members and 4,000 meters, we tend to forget what goes on behind the scenes and the hard work from individuals who are not normally recognized.

Normally it's the lineworkers and electricians who are behind the power. Now let's talk about others who are behind the power.

We have a staff of six professional individuals who are the office part of the business. From receptionist to billing, these six individuals keep the cooperative running in areas that would collapse the more visible part of the business if not in place.

### **Casey Brunsvold**, cashier/receptionist

Casey is the first impression when you walk through the door. She greets with a smile, then gets down to business. It is part of her job to start the process toward a resolution of the topic you may have. Her duties are far-ranging, from being a team member for a continuous improvement project to keeping the Sheridan Electric Facebook updated. She will also be heavily involved with outages, assisting in the streamlining of getting to a problem area quickly.

### **Victoria Waller**, work order clerk

Victoria's duties center on material organization, serving as Safety Committee chairperson, work order closeouts, continuous improvement team member, and all-around morale officer. Being here for the past two years, "Torie" brings an interesting viewpoint to continually improving

from a different perspective. Her work with the lineworker team has been exceptional. She communicates well and leaves no stone unturned. In other words, she keeps that team on their toes.

### **Lisa Salvevold**, office assistant/accounts payable

Lisa's duties revolve around paying the bills, keeping an eye on what is going out and where. She excels in "matter-of-fact" analysis, bringing a viewpoint of a black-and-white mentality. She has proven herself a valuable asset in continuous improvement projects by getting right to the heart of the matter for solutions, and is valuable when confronted with a problem area. She works well in a team environment as well as by herself, always looking for improvements within the cooperative. She is also tasked with collections in the electrician department when needed.

### **Jamie Ator**, accountant

Jamie has a well-rounded set of duties within the cooperative that not necessarily fit the title she holds. Yes, she is the accountant, but she is also a viable continuous improvement team member, part of the hiring team, and leads the collections department. Her value in all of these areas is important as part of the leg that supports this team. She does all of these duties with a smile and professionalism that comes so naturally for her.

### **Doris Wivholm**, bookkeeper/billing specialist

Doris also has a well-rounded set of duties that encompass the electrician department and payroll. Doris spends the majority of her time keeping the electricians in line, and processing billing for that department. Doris is a valuable team member for continuous improvement projects bringing institutional knowledge to the discussions. She spends her time supporting the group in all areas of the cooperative when needed, showing compassion for overloaded areas by taking on additional duties to help where she can.

### **Pam Lund**, billing supervisor

Pam is exactly what her title describes, billing supervisor. Her duties revolve around making sure that we have accurate readings coming in from meters so the billing process can commence. She concentrates her time in service orders, discontinued services, and basic communication of the needs for her department.

All six of these important positions are vital to the smooth operation of your cooperative. Each one of these individuals will greet you with a smile and courtesy when you call or stop in. They are professionals at what they do, continually focusing on the cooperative principles and your satisfaction.

We want to thank this group for the jobs that they do on a daily basis and beyond.

Thank you for the jobs that you do! ■

## Lighting to be given away

In the spirit of efficiency, Sheridan Electric Cooperative is giving away compact fluorescent lights (CFLs) each month. Each month's winner will receive 24 new CFL bulbs. A CFL produces the same amount of light for less than half the cost. The bulbs also produce about 75 percent less heat, so they are safer to operate. They can also last up to 10 times longer than the standard incandescent bulb. You could save \$80 a year by switching to CFLs throughout your home!

So this month, take a moment to complete and mail the coupon. Maybe you'll be this month's lucky winner and save on your energy costs. Good luck! ■

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Phone number: \_\_\_\_\_

Account number: \_\_\_\_\_

*Congratulations to **Ronald Yellow Hammer** for winning this month's light giveaway.*

## Sheridan Electric Cooperative statistical report



	November 2014	November 2015
Total miles of line	2,756	2,849
Consumers billed	3,895	3,950
Kilowatt-hours purchased	13,977,779	—
Kilowatt-hours sold	12,442,847	11,016,845
Average KWH per residential consumer	N/A	1,327
Average bill per residential consumer	N/A	\$110.00
Cost of purchased power	\$761,475	\$541,841
Margins year to date	\$649,697	\$3,599,416

### LINE DEPARTMENT STATS

	November 2014	November 2015
Weather	2	13
Age or deterioration	0	0
Animals and public	1	0
Power supplier	0	0
Equipment	8	5

### SUMMARY OF WORK COMPLETED

	November 2014	November 2015	Year to date
Pole installations	4	55	176
New construction	2,160 ft.	1,461 ft.	108,003 ft.
Miles driven	20,429	24,302	265,236
New accounts	9	5	77
Accounts retired	0	0	0

### SHERIDAN ELECTRIC CO-OP

Medicine Lake, Mont. 59247  
406-789-2231

#### TRUSTEES

Wayne Deubner, President..... Brockton, Mont.  
Rod Smith V. President..... Dagmar, Mont.  
Rob Rust, Sec. .... Alkabo, N.D.  
Kerrey Heppner, Treas. .... Plentywood, Mont.  
Alan Danelson, Trustee ..... Scobey, Mont.  
Andrew Dethman, Trustee ..... Brockton, Mont.  
Rick A. Hansen Trustee ..... Froid, Mont.  
Warren Overgaard Trustee ..... Westby, Mont.  
Harlan Skillingberg ..... Plentywood, Mont.

#### EMPLOYEES

Rick Knick ..... Manager  
Riley Tommerup ..... Office Mgr./Accountant  
Scott Westlund ..... Marketing/Member Service Manager  
Pam Lund ..... Billing Supervisor  
Doris Wivholm ..... Bookkeeper/Billing Specialist  
Jamie Ator ..... Accountant  
Lisa Salvevold ..... Office Assistant  
Casey Brunsvold ..... Cashier/Receptionist  
Torie Waller ..... Work Order Clerk  
Max Beach ..... Line Superintendent  
Kory Opp ..... Staking Engineer  
Tim Ereth ..... Operator/Utilityman  
Josh Johnson ..... Electrical General Foreman  
Tom Hinds ..... Electrical Foreman  
Jeff Carbonneau ..... Journeyman Electrician  
Travis Benton ..... Apprentice Electrician  
Tristen Ereth ..... Apprentice Electrician  
Will Mozingo ..... Line Foreman  
Ronnie Gillett ..... Journeyman Lineman  
Dan Roeder ..... Journeyman Lineman  
Shawn Sansaver ..... Journeyman Lineman  
Josh Marottek ..... Apprentice Lineman  
Bill Baillie ..... Apprentice Lineman  
Josh Ming ..... Apprentice Lineman  
Jim Bakken ..... Material Specialist  
Vicky Haddix ..... Custodian

**OUTAGES • CALL 24 HOURS A DAY**  
406-789-2231

**OFFICE HOURS: 7 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.**  
Monday through Friday

Your Touchstone Energy® Cooperative 