

Sheridan Electric Cooperative

# LiveWire

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

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## Life skills: another perspective

BY SCOTT WESTLUND

Throughout life, we are always learning and adapting to our environment and cultures to which we are exposed. Whether it is moving from job to job, state to state, or country to country, we are always learning and adapting. It is from these adaptations that we learn skills to live in the environments we have chosen. Whether it is adapting to learn how to work with people or live off the lands, we are always learning.

The term “life skills” was presented to me last year from a school principal, who wanted to send a class of students to my home to learn to trap and skin. Although I was intrigued, I had no material at that time to show this skill. This year, I will make an attempt to have material for the next year’s class, and show what little I know about the process.

This request got me to thinking about my kids and what they may have learned about these types of life skills and what I learned as a kid.

As a kid, the most important thing I learned from my dad was to always work hard at whatever you are doing. He told me on several occasions to learn what the task is, and put your “back” into it. By doing this, he

believed that if you are committed to the task and working hard at it, nobody will ever question your work ethics. I, in turn, taught my kids the same principle, but added that with a hard work ethic, you can do or acquire anything you want out of life.

My wife and I have three children, all out of the nest and building families of their own. One lives in Westby, one in Las Vegas, Nev., and one in Dallas, Ore. You see three different cultures, and three different ways of life. But they have similar life skills.

I would bet that if you asked them what life skills they learned if one had to survive, they would all tell you they know the basics of hunting, fishing and gardening. It’s funny that none of them practice these skills, but I know that if faced with a dilemma, they could do it and do it well. They also know how to cut wood, cut wild meat and cook it to perfection. None of these would have been possible if I hadn’t learned the same life skills as a kid.

In a crisis, I learned how to survive, and my kids will survive, based on these simple skill sets.

Now my grandson is learning some of these skills from his father,

and I teach him to trap off the land. He can trap, and prepare furs for trade or sale. Although he is too young to do some of it, he is learning. He can also trap for food, if necessary. He is learning life skills to survive if need be. I saw a picture he drew at school one day, and within that picture he drew himself hunting and planting beans. He even wrote what he was doing on the paper. At 8 years old, he recalls some life skills already. That particular paper is in my keepsake box to be passed on to him when I am gone.

Life skills are exactly that, Skills for life. What types of skills have you taught your children or young people along the way? What have you taught someone that could be life-saving if and when it was needed? What is your definition of life skills?

As my wife and I continue our time in eastern Montana, we look to the schools for anything we can offer to young people as a life skill. We grew up in western Montana, where life was different on many levels. As we learn what we can here, we will always be adding to our life skills by what we learn from the people of this area.

The measure of a man is what he leaves behind as his legacy. These legacies should always be within the children who carry the name and remembrance of what we left with them. Life skills are a great way to ensure life, and legacy. ■

## Wanted: members to do some traveling

Every year, Sheridan Electric Cooperative takes a couple of members, or employees, to the Montana Electric Cooperatives' Association (MECA) annual meeting in Great Falls, Mont. This is a great opportunity to participate in the Today's Members program designed for members or employees to learn more about the electric cooperative business and why it's so important for members to be involved. This program has been in existence for many years, teaching, showing and empowering members to be involved in their cooperative.

Are you the next member to take a few days and learn more about your cooperative? Board members, and employees you know, will be there so you will not be alone during this time. Yes, we do have some meetings that we want you to attend, but the rest of the time will be spent as you please. The cooperative hopes that we have volunteers from the cooperative family to get involved in this paid trip to Great Falls to learn more about what really goes on within your cooperative in regards to education, power purchasing, legislative issues, board decisions and overall performance of cooperatives. Guest speakers in the Today's Members program may include someone who you know from your cooperative presenting informative material that you may have wanted to learn more about.

This year's MECA annual meeting will be held Oct. 2-5. If interested in going to the meeting, please contact Sheridan Electric Cooperative and get in touch with Scott Westlund at 406-789-2231. ■

## Fluctuating rates: the world we live in today

BY SCOTT WESTLUND

**W**hen we talk about rates, everyone takes notice within the membership.

On Jan. 1, we were forced to raise rates due to a rate increase from our power supplier. Now there is a possibility that rates may come down, thus a roller-coaster effect.

In essence, this is a lot like gas prices or fertilizer costs. They fluctuate based on supply, demand and manufacturing costs.

If you really look at it, electricity is now in this category and is changing with the times. Very seldom will we see the stable costs for many years, and I fear they are long past.

This topic was heavily discussed at the recent board meeting. The question was very simple: "What is the best approach for

our membership when it comes to rates?"

There were several scenarios;

- Bill credit (free month of electricity)
- Lower rates, then raise them when needed
- Keep rates where they are and build up a reserve for storms
- Keep rates where they are and pay down capital credits for past years

At the June board meeting, we discussed these scenarios for the best course of action for the membership.

In regards to power costs, the world we live in today is a roller coaster. But we have a strong board of directors that is always looking for the best path for the membership. ■

## Coal Ridge substation break-in

BY SCOTT WESTLUND

**O**n May 16, I was informed of a cut chain-link fence at our Coal Ridge substation.

At 1:30 p.m., I went out to take some photos and investigate the problem. The hole was approximately 1.5x1.5 and had been cut recently. After I took photos, I reported the incident to the Sheridan County sheriff's office. I talked with Jon Anderson, who asked me to have the hole repaired, but then asked me about any missing copper material that may have been sold to the recycling center a few hours before.

Substation break-ins are rare, but we do have them. Last year,

our Poplar substation was broken into and graffiti was sprayed on the control house. ■



# The value of a chain of command in leadership

BY SCOTT WESTLUND

One thing I always tell people who possess leadership skills is to take any opportunity that presents itself, and do not hesitate to do so. Too many times have I seen good people possessing leadership skills wait too long when an opportunity presents itself, and then the opportunity is gone.

Leadership can come in many forms: the tyrant, the dictator, the pacifier, the leader who empowers or the team builder. In all cases, no matter what style is present, there is always a chain of command.

In your cooperative it is simple:

## The board of directors

We have a board of directors that governs. Governing means that the board is always at the 10,000-foot level, guiding the course set by the founding board and clearing the way for the future. Normally, the board is not attached to any of the employees of the cooperative other than the CEO, who they have hired to run the business.

## The chief executive officer

The CEO is the only employee the board hires, and is the only employee who reports directly to the board. The CEO is responsible for hiring his superintendent team to operate other parts of the business. In this case, the superintendents are the CFO, member services manager and utility superintendent. He places these departments under the control of the people he has hired for these positions.

The chief executive officer also guides the course of the business, watching for opportunities the superintendents can take to further the cause. In most cases, the

superintendents run their perspective areas, but are also guided by the CEO.

## The chief financial officer

This position handles the finances of the business, budgets, forecasts and reports abnormalities to the CEO. This position also has a support team that he/she has hired to support the activities that are a necessity to the business. This includes an accountant, accounts payable, customer service representative and billing. All of these tasks fall under the CFO's discretion, but are watched by the CEO.

## Member services manager

This position covers all member-related questions and communications. This position also employs an electrician team which reports directly to him. This team consists of three electricians and a material specialist. An additional part-time position is within the department which takes care of billing for that department. In this case, the actions of the electrician group are treated like a business where costs are measured against income, thus creating a break-even environment. All of these functions fall under the realm of the member services manager, but are also watched by the CEO for additional guidance.

## Utility superintendent

This position is in control of all utility-related topics and employs several lineworkers and apprentices. This position also has a team of engineers to assist with correct buildout of the system. Also within this group is the work order clerk who controls the work flow under his/her direction. And

again, all of these functions fall under the realm of the utility superintendent, but are watched by the CEO to ensure direction of the department.

Although the chain is clear, this cooperative empowers people to become more than they are, and gives them the ability to make decisions.

The value of an empowered workforce is that they grow, they learn to run businesses and they become more than they ever dreamed.

This leadership style is liberal enough to give some freedoms to employees, but still strict enough to visualize the goal and forge a path for them.

We have great people who know what must be done and when to do it. The ability to keep such a vibrant workforce is sometimes not easy, because the people we train for bigger and better things sometimes move on to do them elsewhere with great success. This is something that we will never stand in the way of and always promote.

The manager recently made a comment about the number of managers that this cooperative has turned out over the years.

This number is impressive, as well as the people we have now. ■

## CORRECTIONS

In an earlier issue, we wrote about the interview with Sigrid Peterson and the early days of electricity in this area. We identified her as the wife of one of the founding fathers. It was Sigrid's father who was one of the original board members of Sheridan Electric.

On another note, we listed one of our scholarship recipients, Kevin Rust, as going to Williston State College when actually he is going to Montana State University-Bozeman. Our apologies.

# 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! ■

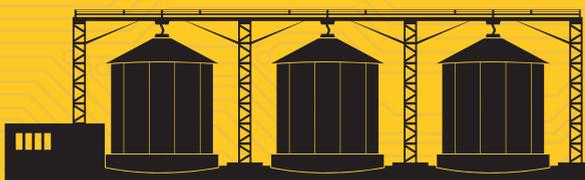
Name: \_\_\_\_\_

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

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

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

*Congratulations to **Daren Henke** for winning this month's light giveaway.*



## Sheridan Electric Cooperative STATISTICAL REPORT

	May 2016	May 2017
Total miles of line	2,833	2,831
Consumers billed	3,069	3,081
Kilowatt-hours purchased	8,663,510	9,653,105
Kilowatt-hours sold	7,994,201	9,341,997
Average KWH per residential consumer	742	868
Average bill per residential consumer	\$98.68	\$120.37
Cost of purchased power	\$413,560	\$439,294
Margins year to date	\$2,049,334	\$2,167,853

### LINE DEPARTMENT STATS

	May 2016	May 2017
Weather	10	10
Age or deterioration	3	3
Animals and public	7	12
Power supplier	0	1
Equipment	0	0

### SUMMARY OF WORK COMPLETED

	May 2016	May 2017	Year to date
Pole installations	9	23	40
New construction	14,949	364	38,658
Miles driven	22,184	32,576	118,664
New accounts	6	1	15
Accounts retired	10	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, Trustee..... Plentywood, Mont.

#### EMPLOYEES

Rick Knick ..... Manager  
Riley Tommerup ..... Office Mgr./Accountant  
Scott Westlund ..... Marketing/Member Service Manager  
Pam Lund ..... Billing Supervisor  
Jamie Ator ..... Accountant  
Lisa Salveld ..... Office Assistant  
Tasha Ronnes ..... Customer Service Representative  
Torie Waller ..... Work Order Clerk  
Kory Opp ..... Line Superintendent  
Bryan Lenz ..... Line Foreman  
Nick Oelkers ..... Staking Tech  
Tim Ereth ..... Operator/Utilityman  
Josh Johnson ..... Electrical General Foreman  
Tom Hinds ..... Electrical Foreman  
Steve Augustine ..... Line Sub Foreman  
Tristan Ereth ..... Apprentice Electrician  
Ronnie Gillett ..... Journeyman Lineman  
Dan Roeder ..... Journeyman Lineman  
Shawn Sansaver ..... Journeyman Lineman  
Josh Marottek ..... Journeyman 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 4:30 p.m.**

Monday through Friday

Your Touchstone Energy® Cooperative