

Sheridan Electric Cooperative

# LiveWire

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

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## 2018 Sheridan Electric Cooperative annual report

FROM THE SHERIDAN ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE BOARD OF DIRECTORS

On behalf of the board and staff of Sheridan Electric Cooperative, we want to welcome you to the 71st annual meeting of the members. It has been a good year at Sheridan Electric. The moderate growth in the oilfields and stabilized sales in the other rate classes have allowed the board and staff to focus on the maintenance that makes the system more reliable.

One of the topics in the boardroom is the average number of minutes per meter we are without electricity. This benchmark helps us determine how the distribution system is performing in the different areas of the cooperative. In 2017, each meter was without electricity for 194 minutes. Please keep in mind that the co-op serves 4,000 meters and 1,865 members, so this number doesn't reflect the number of minutes without electricity per member.

The alarming part of this statistic is that half of those minutes were caused by transmission system outages. These transmission lines are owned by Montana-Dakota Utilities (MDU) and it serves the majority of our substations. We will watch this number closely in the coming months and work with MDU to find solutions for this problem.

The other half of those outage minutes were caused by issues on Sheridan Electric's distribution system. The board budgeted \$1.5 million for system improvements in 2018 to curb those outage minutes. We have identified the areas with the most need and have started the rebuilding process. They are the overhead lines north of Outlook, southwest of Froid and the area between Culbertson and Bainville. We are also replacing underground wires in four locations.

Rates are always a concern with staff and the board. The majority of the power we buy comes from Basin

Electric Power Cooperative and Basin's rates are currently high compared to other power generators in the nation. Part of Basin's rate pressure is related to debt from building generation plant and transmission plant to serve the growth in the 125-plus co-ops that Basin serves. But a good part of the rate pressure comes from Dakota Gasification Company (DGC). DGC's primary mission is to make synthetic natural gas from coal, but a number of other products are now produced there. Natural gas prices and the commodity prices for a number of the other products DGC produces are depressed right now. This problem forces the electric generation side of the business to give financial aid, which, in turn, forces the electric rates up.

One of the policies that we spent some time on is the line extension policy. This policy directs the staff in determining what the member's financial responsibility is when building to a new account. Traditionally, Sheridan Electric receives around 45 new account requests per year. During the last oil boom, this number escalated to more than 150 per year. While that represented growth that other electric co-ops envy, it can be a financial burden when the growing co-op makes monetary contributions toward each new service line build.

We could not sustain the level we were contributing to each new account without raising the rates, so, in 2012, we reduced the amount the co-op was contributing. Now we are back to the normal number of new service requests (56 requests in 2016 and 48 requests in 2017), so the policy was changed to raise the level the co-op contributes.

Thank you for attending the annual meeting and we hope the coming year is a healthy and productive one for you and your family. ■



*Rick Knick*

## Advantages of automated meter readers

BY RICK KNICK

**N**ot too long ago, you had to read your electric meter and send those readings to the cooperative with your electric bill payment. The electric bill stub had a spot on it for you to record the meter reading, along with the date you read it. With that system, I remember taking calls from members who couldn't get the readings that month because they were out of town or simply couldn't get to the meter pole because of the deep snow.

For the first 60 years, Sheridan Electric Cooperative's residential meters were read by our members and the commercial meters were read by part-time employees or by the lineworkers. Of the 4,000 meters we have, about 1,000 are commercial meters. With this system, the billing clerk received your payment with readings on the stub or she received the meter reading books from the employees. She then had to type every reading into the billing program. I'm proud to say there were very few errors and very few members that could not get their readings to us every month.

How things have changed and how quick we forget where we used to

be. We are 16 years into converting our metering system over to an automated meter reading (AMR) system and we finally have every meter switched over. The metering system we have is the second generation of the technology. The first generation of AMR meters were called Turtle meters. The name fit because it took several hours for the readings to arrive at the substation.

Here is how our AMR system works. The meters include a transmitter/receiver that sends or receives a signal over the power lines to or from the substation. At the substation, a computer module collects the readings and inserts them onto phone lines that carry them back to the office. The readings are automatically inserted into the billing program that matches each meter's account. We can talk to the meter as many times a day as we need to.

This system is not perfect and, in fact, we still have to ask about 30 members to read their meters because we haven't been able to find the source of interference on the power line that prevents the signal from reaching the substation. One

of the fixes for a poor signal is to install a repeater to boost the signal, allowing it to reach the substation.

The advantages of an AMR system are: less workload for the member; monthly readings at the same time every month; quicker reaction to outages; the ability to isolate an outage; members' access to their load profile; and an accurate history, all accessible to the member.

I would have to say that one of the disadvantages of an AMR system is the fact that we lose one more interaction with our members. Coming from the member services of the business, it is very important to me that the members know who works for them.

When I look at our current employee roster, I see that there are only a few of us (three of 22) who worked here before we had an AMR program. This new generation of employees is way better at grasping technology. If you want to interrogate your usage or billing information, please give us a call and one of your more tech-minded employees can help you. ■

## COOPERATIVE CULTURE:

# The power of people in northeastern Montana

BY SCOTT WESTLUND

The power of storms in July showed the little towns of Plentywood and Froid what can happen when Mother Nature is not happy.

Plentywood sustained a tornado that struck the east side of town, creating tremendous damage. Later in the month, a thunderstorm wreaked havoc on the little town of Froid.

I talk about the power in northeastern Montana, not in the case of storms, but of the people who live here.

My trips to Plentywood after the storm showed many people helping those who had the need. They supplied equipment, labor and good-hearted humor during the toils.

I had a similar experience after the Froid storm destroyed so many homes, including mine. The aftermath of the storm left heavy damage to the northwestern side of the home, including the interior.

It was a daunting task to sum up what needed to be taken care of first and when by many folks.

After work, I went home and started stripping carpets from the bedrooms and the rest of the house. After a few minutes, the dog started to bark and I saw several cars pulling into the driveway, including my boss, Rick Knick, from Sheridan Electric. They were there to help.



*This crew helped others repair homes following a storm.*

Now I am not one to ask for anything that would take time from someone else. But this group was intent on getting the house to the level of drying out and making it safe for my grandson. From furniture and carpet removal, to vacuuming the grass for the glass, this group covered it all.

This is completely new to me, as I have always taken care of my own things as to not bother anyone else, but it was a relief to have the help.

As I listened to the conversations throughout the group, it showed me that this is normal practice for them,

neighbors helping neighbors, and having fun doing it.

My thanks go out to this group and the groups around the region who practice this cultural process. It shows me exactly why I live in northeastern Montana.

As far as I am concerned, this is a practice of paying it forward. In essence, this means that people help people all the time no matter when, where or how. They are always there. Even though they may not ask for help when needed, they can expect the same in return when they have a need. ■

# Lighting to be given away



In the spirit of efficiency, Sheridan Electric Cooperative is giving away light-emitting diodes (LEDs) each month. Each month's winner will receive 12 new LED bulbs.

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 **Karen Synan** for winning this month's light bulb giveaway.*



## Sheridan Electric Cooperative STATISTICAL REPORT

	August 2017	August 2018
Total miles of line	2,833	2,836
Consumers billed	3,084	3,090
Kilowatt-hours purchased	10,342,375	10,424,462
Kilowatt-hours sold	9,564,840	9,703,387
Average KWH per residential consumer	1,184	1,203
Average bill per residential consumer	\$141.00	\$134.70
Cost of purchased power	\$589,439	\$540,662
Margins year to date	\$2,359,821	\$2,468,395

### LINE DEPARTMENT STATS

	August 2017	August 2018
Weather	20	11
Age or deterioration	4	3
Animals and public	6	3
Power supplier	1	0
Equipment	1	0

### SUMMARY OF WORK COMPLETED

	August 2017	August 2018	Year to date
Pole installations	36	58	84
New construction	550 ft.	3,271 ft.	45,956 ft.
Miles driven	29,585	23,353	174,408
New accounts	3	4	25
Accounts retired	1	0	3

### SHERIDAN ELECTRIC CO-OP

Medicine Lake, Mont. 59247  
406-789-2231

#### TRUSTEES

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.  
 Harlan Skillingberg, Trustee ..... Plentywood, Mont.  
 Jody Lagerquist, Trustee ..... Westby, Mont.

#### EMPLOYEES

Rick Knick ..... Manager  
 Riley Tommerup..... Office Mgr./Accountant  
 Scott Westlund..... Marketing/Member Service Manager  
 Jamie Ator ..... Accountant  
 Lisa Salveold ..... 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 Erth..... Operator/Utilityman  
 Josh Johnson ..... Electrical General Foreman  
 Tom Hinds ..... Electrical Foreman  
 Steve Augustine ..... Line Sub Foreman  
 Tristan Erth ..... Apprentice Electrician  
 Dan Roeder ..... Journeyman Lineman  
 Shawn Sansaver..... Journeyman Lineman  
 Josh Marottek ..... Journeyman Lineman  
 Bill Baillie..... Apprentice Lineman  
 Josh Ming..... Apprentice Lineman  
 Nolen Drury..... 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