

Sheridan Electric Cooperative

# LiveWire

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

## WHAT'S INSIDE?

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- Importance of member service
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## Electric heat installations

BY SCOTT WESTLUND

With heating season upon us, it is time to ensure that you and your family will be warm in the winter. Wintertime is sometimes hostile in northeastern Montana, so having a good, reliable heating system is critical.

While Sheridan Electric Cooperative does not install and sell furnaces, the cooperative does sell plenum heaters. These heaters can be used on a gas furnace so the choice for electric or gas is available. These are installed above the furnace itself to provide reliable heat.

Personally, I have a dual-fuel system consisting of a gas furnace and an electric plenum heater.

Baseboard and cove heaters are popular items that Sheridan Electric Cooperative sells and installs in many homes in the area.

Call the electricians at Sheridan Electric to see what we can do for you to enhance your heating system. Add a dual-fuel system or add other forms of heating to your home for the winter. ■

## Cooperative education pilot project



BY SCOTT WESTLUND

**D**windling member participation at the annual meetings is a problem that all cooperatives are facing. The discussions always describe the problem, but few have any answers as to why we see no interest in younger members to attend their annual meetings.

Annual meetings are a time when the membership can meet their employees, be a part of a business meeting, and learn about the goals for the coming year. It is also a time for you to voice your approval, or any concerns that you may have about the operation of your cooperative.

One of the activities that I perform every year is to meet with all sophomore and junior students for the Washington, D.C., Youth Tour. Sometimes, I am in front of 50 students at a time, talking about the program and what we also offer for a life skill. To add to this, I also talk with the seniors about scholarship

opportunities we either have or facilitate.

In all of these meetings, at eight of the 10 schools, I ask all of the groups if they belong to a cooperative. If no hands go up, I ask if they know what a cooperative is. Out of all the schools I visited this year, about 10 hands were raised out of well over 100 kids.

That's when I realized that this was the root cause of the problem.

How can we expect our annual meetings to be attended by a diverse age spectrum if they don't know what a co-op is? To further this, would I get the same results with young parents if offered the opportunity to ask them?

This is where your cooperative is going to take a major step this year.

If there is a lack of knowledge in the schools about co-ops, we will bring the knowledge of co-ops to the schools.

In December, we conducted a pilot project in the Westby School District. This project was a one-hour presentation educating students about a co-op and how cooperatives were formed. This time was also spent comparing the profit-driven business model against a co-op nonprofit business model. We talked about what forced the necessity to have a cooperative and how it affects everyday life. This included the history and an exercise for the group. With time, the lower grades in our schools will slowly learn about cooperatives and why we have them. This will plant seeds for future members to become engaged in the cooperative and the meetings they conduct. We expect this to be a long-term project, talking to class after class for the next few years.

The next segment of this project will include going to the next annual meeting. We are proposing that all

students attend the meeting, members or not, do an essay about what they took from the manager's message, which always contains a message. We may also have a scavenger hunt during that time. The final act will be to tell me what color the ties of the board members were and the directors' names.

Through the essay, and through the questions we will ask, we will glean the best 10 from the total and present them with \$100 each.

We know this project will be time-consuming, but the possibility to change the age-old question on how to get the younger generation involved is time well-spent.

The English departments of the schools most likely will be involved, as they are with the Washington, D.C., Youth Tour project, thus turning out some very good participation.

We are changing the equation for a different outcome than what we have been experiencing for years. Will it work? Only time will tell, and only when these young folks graduate and become the next board members, managers or IT specialists.

So, when your child or grandchild comes home from school and describes what they learned today, and the topic is co-ops, how will you contribute to the future by encouraging them to embrace the information they have been given?

These are your co-ops, and their future rests in the next generations we train to operate them.

The co-op world is a stable and great business model. Born out of necessity in the 1940s, and still strong in the 2000s, co-ops are the very necessity of rural America. ■



# Member service within the cooperative model

BY SCOTT WESTLUND

I was recently involved in a conversation with another cooperative struggling with the basic concepts of a cooperative. During this conversation, it became apparent to me that this person had lost the entire meaning of what it means to be a cooperative, and what makes them special.

The only real thing that separates a cooperative from any other business model is member service. Cooperatives continue if they remember that the members are the owners of the cooperative and that tending to their needs, building relationships and establishing connections beyond the bottom line is what keeps the cooperative whole.

During this conversation, a statement was made that, “member service does not pay the bills.” Though this statement would be sound in any other business model, it is not true with cooperatives.

The cooperative model is based on these members and the face of the employees they have. Lose touch with your member owners and problems begin. Stay in touch with your members and the model thrives.

Your cooperative is filled with member service people. They answer the phones, work on the lines, offer services not normally found in this area, and are always traveling the service territory. My official title is the marketing and member service manager. The duties that come with this title require that I spend most of my time with the membership or solving problems that come up between the membership and the business model. Sixty percent of my time is spent on the road, meeting the owners of the cooperative and building relationships.

I use this example when talking to anyone about the cooperative

member service portion of the model; If you are a cooperative and have a similar product that is also available 50 miles away. Wouldn't it behoove you to build a relationship with that member so they do not travel the 50 miles away to buy it cheaper, thus supporting their cooperative?

I am here to tell you that with a sound cooperative approach, good member service practices, and building relationships with your owners, you can keep the business within your cooperative region. This is based on simple cooperative values.

In other words, they may pay a little more to keep the money in their business versus a competitor.

The bottom line is that member service does pay the bills if you aggressively adhere to co-op basic principles. ■



# 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 **Shirley Rasmussen** for winning this month's light bulb giveaway.*



## Sheridan Electric Cooperative STATISTICAL REPORT

	October 2017	October 2018
Total miles of line	2,831	2,836
Consumers billed	3,103	3,081
Kilowatt-hours purchased	10,244,523	11,385,530
Kilowatt-hours sold	9,272,023	10,940,554
Average KWH per residential consumer	855	1,118
Average bill per residential consumer	\$90	\$109
Cost of purchased power	\$589,517	\$596,680
Margins year to date	\$3,428,879	\$3,179,853

### LINE DEPARTMENT STATS

	October 2017	October 2018
Weather	13	8
Age or deterioration	3	3
Animals and public	1	4
Power supplier	0	0
Equipment	0	0

### SUMMARY OF WORK COMPLETED

	October 2017	October 2018	Year to date
Pole installations	9	90	192
New construction	382 ft.	2,884 ft.	50,853 ft.
Miles driven	23,708	24,328	221,849
New accounts	5	2	32
Accounts retired	0	1	4

### SHERIDAN ELECTRIC CO-OP

Medicine Lake, Mont. 59247  
406-789-2231

#### TRUSTEES

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

#### EMPLOYEES

Rick Knick ..... Manager  
 Riley Tommerup ..... Office Mgr./Accountant  
 Scott Westlund ..... Marketing/Member Service Manager  
 Jamie Ator ..... Accountant  
 Lisa Salvevold ..... 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  
 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