

Sheridan Electric Cooperative

LiveWire

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

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Co-op goes full circle

by **Scott Westlund**

A region's needs are a focus of any cooperative within the state. One of our guiding principles is to assist the areas within which we operate. Ten years ago, a vision was stated by General Manager Rick Knick in regard to educating our young folks within the region about what a cooperative is and what it does for the region.

During the next few years, we spent enormous amounts of time building relationships within the schools and creating partnerships. These partnerships included donating money toward projects the schools could not do, educating the youth about co-op values, and investing in programs, like Business Professionals of America (BPA) and FFA, that teach leadership and life skills.

We are investing in the future.

Recently, we took another step toward ensuring that our region has sustainability. Our scholarship program has always been designed to target young folks who go to school for higher education. At no time was the program designed for sustainability for this region.

In 2013, we started scholarship programs designed to build lineworkers and electricians within this area and beyond. These two programs were designed to be fully paid by the cooperative to fill the voids that have been created by only investing in higher learning in the past. We home grew our employees for this cooperative.

The next step in the process was to become involved in programs that teach and exhibit leadership skills. BPA and FFA were identified as programs that would lend to the longevity of the needs of the management portion of the co-op and beyond.

It sounds somewhat self-serving, doesn't it? Well,

we firmly believe that you need a great foundation before you can move onto the next steps, or the entire program fails.

So, the next phases began.

We started to teach life skills through extensive professional interview processes when we interview for the Washington, D.C., Youth Tour. We visited directly with classes of young folks, and worked directly with the schools for the essay portions of the program. In most cases, essays were used as curriculum in the English departments. This has blossomed into a very good program with high participation. Again, the schools valued the life skill portion of the process more than the actual Youth Tour program.

Next, we went to work on an education program designed to teach the cooperative story and business platform to sixth-, seventh- and eighth-graders. Dubbed a 10-year program, the theory behind this age group was that in 10 years, these would be our new members. The entire cooperative world has stated that a problem is dwindling membership and the inability to connect with the younger generation. Your co-op has solved the equation. We teach the cooperative story, and during the teaching, we show governance. Thus far, this has been a huge success.

In addition, a portion is dedicated to these young folks and annual meeting attendance. During that time, they demonstrate to all cooperative employees and board members the life skills they have learned and interview each employee and board member. The questions are "canned," so they have a format to follow, but the essence is to see what they can do for the cooperative they just learned about. In all cases, the young folks

have done an outstanding job, are rewarded, see cooperative governance in action, and the cooperative story continues. Again, self-serving isn't it?

The next piece of the puzzle comes in the form of the needs of our region to keep the story going. We put together a team of people to identify what the needs of the region may be.

So, on all the levels, this cooperative has addressed:

- Building relationships within schools (1990 to present)
- Face-to-face interaction with young folks for scholarships in classroom settings, with an added benefit of a life skill taught (1990 to present)
- Lineworker/electrician scholarships designed to fill needs within this region (2013 to present)
- Investing in BPA and FFA that teach professional skills for future board members and managers of this cooperative (2014

to present)

- Life skills attached to the Washington, D.C., Youth Tour; professional interviews and feedback (2014 to present)
- Cooperative education, also teaching life skills (2018 to present)
- Northeastern Montana Educational Opportunity Foundation to recruit and retain teachers within our region (2019 to present)
- Full circle

It is all about building relationships with all entities and understanding that the cooperative's future lies within the young folks of the region, not those of us currently in positions. It is a renewable resource that needs to be continually cultivated, not only for future employees, but also as the co-op history and story. It is about nonstop legwork identifying any opportunity to engage and build trust.

This is Sheridan Electric Cooperative, and the board members and employees of this cooperative are committed to this renewable resource. ■

No one is to blame

by **Scott Westlund**

Recently, I was involved in a problem that took some time to figure out and respond to. A member had called one morning to ask about a water heater, as his had gone out and was leaking. After gaining some information about what size of water heater was needed, I dropped everything planned for the morning to respond to the needs of a member. Within a few minutes, I was in the truck loaded with all the material needed to get the member back into hot water.

Within a few miles of where I assumed the member lived, I made a call to confirm the directions. It was then that the member informed me that the place that sold him the original water heater was covering it under warranty.

The member then asked me to bill accordingly for the time spent on the project. So, I billed time and mileage and moved on to the next project for the day.

A few weeks later, we received a call from the member who was unhappy about the bill. While in

discussion, I agreed to reduce some of the miles.

The member was still not happy and began to talk about another incident in which he had been billed for some work by the cooperative.

This all happened on a Friday, so I decided to visit this member on Monday.

You see, my job is all about the members. It is about building relationships, and being as transparent as possible for the owners of the cooperative. Some folks raised an eyebrow when I said I was on my way to see this valuable member.

Not calling before I went out, my intent was to face the problem and make it clear that our whole goal is always for the membership. It was also my goal to not collect a check, but introduce myself as an ambassador for the membership.

This was a wonderful visit. I met Riley (dog) and Walter (the sick cat) who were this member's family.

I also learned a few things about what makes this member tick and put a face to the discussion I had

the previous Friday.

You see, what most people miss is that face-to-face discussion, which completely trumps a phone call. Face-to-face takes the insinuations out of the equation, and lets people see that you are genuine. It gives you the opportunity to learn about any member at any time. It gives you the ability to build a relationship that could lead to regaining trust.

Do we have a long road to regain the trust? Yes, we do, and that's OK. But doing it over the phone or not trying at all creates wrong thoughts about a perfectly good person.

Our job at this cooperative is to build relationships for the future, not to blame someone.

This was a great illustration of what we believe in and keeps me on the road for the membership. ■

Sheridan Electric to develop bold move for scholarships

by **Scott Westlund**

During recent research discussions within the schools, we have learned that needs for this region are also needs all over the nation. Topics that revolve around the trades, and teachers, look to be the areas of concern for this region especially.

In late November 2019, the board of directors from Sheridan Electric Cooperative conducted a discussion on this very topic. The board agreed that the needs of the region should dictate where scholarship monies should be spent, supported by research up to the national level.

Five years ago, the board approved a program that started this direction by starting the lineworker/electrician scholarship. These two scholarships are an all-paid tuition and books scholarship designed to create lineworkers and electricians for this region. Some of these folks work here now, while others are at other cooperatives within North Dakota and Montana. Again, these scholarships were a product of shortages of these trade skills within this region and the nation. Annually, and depending on how many are in school at a given time, we invest up to \$12,000 to this program.

In the past few years, Sheridan Electric has devoted \$12,000 to six scholarships to deserving students just graduating from high school. These folks go on to be engineers, doctors, dentists and other professionals. These fields of study are admirable, and it always marvels me that young folks have a very good idea of what they want to be when they graduate.

So, with everything that has been described,

the board has elected to trim the number of scholarships for higher education areas and put this money toward the needs of the region.

In January, we put together the first group of people to help flesh out what this would look like. The group is made up of two superintendents Janessa Parenteau (Froid), and Tony Holocek (Westby); Riley Tommerup; Andy Dethman (Sheridan board member); Jamie Kleppen (Sheridan Electric accountant); and me. We will add another team member after the first meeting to give us an outside opinion when needed.

At this first meeting, we will flesh out what this large project should look like and figure out the direction of the funds and the parameters of the selection process.

The next phase of the project will be to introduce other businesses and entities into the process. We will be talking to other cooperatives, especially because their cooperative principles and goals are the same as ours.

For Sheridan Electric, this effort touches on three of the seven cooperative principles: education and training, concern for community, and cooperation amongst cooperatives.

By touching three of the seven cooperative principles, we will continue to strive to help the regional communities, whether we serve them or not. These young folks are our future. Although some go on to be doctors and lawyers, some want to stay in the area and become lineworkers, electricians, teachers and plumbers. ■

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 **Ken Meagher** for winning this month's light bulb giveaway.



Sheridan Electric Cooperative STATISTICAL REPORT

| | February 2019 | February 2020 |
|---------------------------------------|---------------|---------------|
| Total miles of line | 2,836 | 2,835 |
| Consumers billed | 3,091 | 3,161 |
| Kilowatt-hours purchased | 16,054,423 | 14,630,361 |
| Kilowatt-hours sold | 14,987,383 | 13,455,269 |
| Average KWH per residential consumer | 2,066 | 1,561 |
| Average bill per residential consumer | \$160 | \$128 |
| Cost of purchased power | \$750,314 | \$709,325 |
| Margins year to date | \$609,964 | \$571,624 |

LINE DEPARTMENT STATS

| | February 2019 | February 2020 |
|----------------------|---------------|---------------|
| Weather | 7 | 8 |
| Age or deterioration | 1 | 3 |
| Animals and public | 0 | 1 |
| Power supplier | 0 | 0 |
| Equipment | 1 | 0 |

SUMMARY OF WORK COMPLETED

| | February 2019 | February 2020 | Year to date |
|--------------------|---------------|---------------|--------------|
| Pole installations | 0 | 8 | 75 |
| New construction | 0 ft. | 0 ft. | 2,100 ft. |
| Miles driven | 13,805 | 20,313 | 43,035 |
| New accounts | 0 | 1 | 3 |
| Accounts retired | 1 | 0 | 28 |

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.
 Sheri Shanks, Trustee..... Brockton, Mont.

EMPLOYEES

Rick Knick Manager
 Riley Tommerup..... Office Mgr./Accountant
 Scott Westlund.....Marketing/Member Service Manager
 Jamie Ator Accountant
 Lisa SalveoldOffice Assistant
 Tasha Roness Customer Service Representative
 Torie Waller Work Order Clerk
 Kory OppLine Superintendent
 Bryan Lenz Line Foreman
 Nick Oelkers..... Staking Engineer
 Tim Ereth..... Operator/Utilityman
 Josh Johnson Electrical General Foreman
 Tom Hinds Electrical Foreman
 Steve Augustine Line Sub Foreman
 Dan Roeder Journeyman Lineman
 Shawn Sansaver..... Journeyman Lineman
 Josh Marottek Journeyman Lineman
 Josh Ming Journeyman Lineman
 Bill Baillie..... Apprentice Lineman
 Nolen Drury..... Apprentice Lineman
 Tristan Ereth..... Apprentice Electrician
 Rod Luft..... Warehouse/Utility
 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