

RM

Rural Montana

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VIEWPOINT

Dave Wheelihan

MECA hires RM editor, communications director

The new face at Statewide is James V. Smith, Jr., who takes over from the retired Mack McConnell as communications director of MECA and editor of *Rural Montana* magazine.

Jim grew up in Shelby, where his father was a mechanic at Marias River Electric. He served a tour in the Army, raised four children through college and eventually became editor of the Shelby Promoter newspaper. He was a writer at the Dallas Morning News and the Indianapolis News and the author of three writing reference books along the way. He holds a masters in Journalism from the University of Kansas.

He found MECA while doing volunteer PR for a veterans group that is raising a 100-ft. flagpole in Shelby to honor all Montana veterans and dedicated to Montanans serving in Iraq.

Jim has expressed an eagerness to get out and visit all the cooperatives of Montana as early as possible as he researches stories for the magazine. He has already been on the road from Ft. Peck Dam for the opening of the Interpretive Center there, to attending the recent Ravalli Electric Cooperative annual meeting. As he travels, his mission is to act as a sounding board from every sector of our membership.



He will talk to board members, managers, member services staff and individual co-op members. His purpose will be not only to listen for story ideas and watch for photo opportunities, but also to gather input and suggestions to improve communications at every level of MECA.

As a result of a cooperative effort between Statewide and a member co-op, this month's magazine includes the osprey nest photo story from Glacier Electric, superb photos shot and volunteered by Roy Nollkamper, member services manager of GEC. Jim will be on the lookout for such news items and photos from the member co-op insert pages, items that hold statewide interest.

I encourage managers and board members from all the cooperatives to call Jim at any time you find stories and photo opportunities suitable for the statewide edition and especially if you don't have space in your local inserts.

Dave Wheelihan is the CEO of the Montana Electric Cooperatives' Association

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