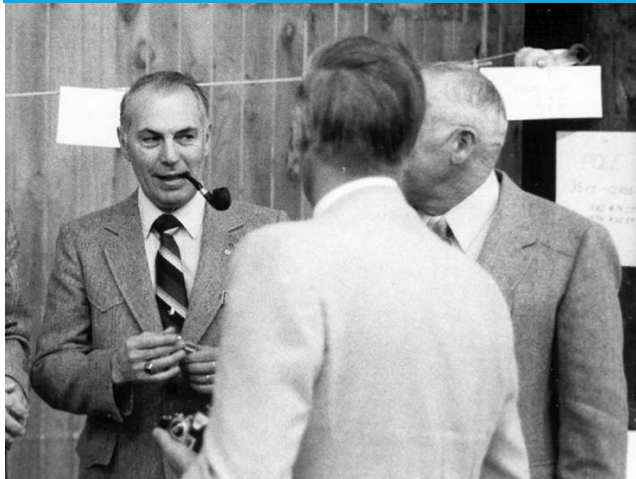


TRIBUTE TO A PAIR OF CO-OP STALWARTS



Rod Siring, 1934-2007

From the ground up

Rod Siring began his career after high school, moving from a lineman in North Dakota to line superintendent at Lower Yellowstone REA and eventually becoming manager at Livingston-based Park Electric for 30 years.

To Valley Electric manager Larry Tade of Glasgow, Rod was a manager's manager.

"He was one of the leaders in the nineties making sure we stayed on track," Tade said. "He was a role model to those of us wet behind the ears. Personally, he was a hero to me. I tried to be like him because I admired him and saw him as a mentor."

Indeed, veteran former Marias River Electric manager Larry Nelson of Shelby, said, "It was a compliment to be compared to Rod."

Siring was a point man on the key electric co-op issue in the 60s and 70s, territorial integrity, which became a battleground when Montana Power began to encroach on co-op territories.

Siring headed up the MECA Legislative Committee and worked the Montana Legislature until cooperatives won a bill that ended major disputes.

"He was a shrewd negotiator," Nelson said. "He knew the business so well that when we went to Montana Power to negotiate contracts for electricity we'd negotiate with attorneys. Then they'd leave the room, and we dealt with engineers. After they left, the accountants and then regulatory people would come in. They all had specialties, but Rod was so well-rounded, he could talk about all issues. He knew the utility business from the ground up."

Doug Hardy, current manager at Park, followed Siring at the helm and into a central role in MECA legislative affairs.

"He taught me to research things," Hardy said, "to make sure any action is well thought out. He tried to help co-ops take on issues important to them but to avoid issues that could hurt. He fully understood the risk of any legislative action, that a new law doesn't always go your way."

Hardy said, "He was a winner at all aspects of life and ethical in all he did. That's as important as any lesson anybody could learn from a man."



Don Park 1926-2007



A cooperative way of life

If you ask Allen Thiessen, past president of the Montana Electric Cooperatives' Association, how he recalls Don Park, long-time trustee of Corvallis-based Ravalli Electric, he'll say the first thing that comes to mind is that Don bled co-op blood.

"He believed in the association and the cooperative movement in general — it was absolutely unconditional. Even if we disagreed on an issue, to Don, it was always a matter of how to talk it out and make something happen for our co-op people."

Thiessen, now president of Lower Yellowstone REA, based in Sidney, said, "Don Park fully understood the power of our grassroots movement. Together the co-ops could conquer tough obstacles, climb any mountains. If we don't stick together, we're vulnerable."

According to Ric Brown, manager at Ravalli, Park, who retired in 2005, was an REC board member for 31 years, "just slightly less than half the co-op's existence." Brown said, "Don said that one of the most satisfying ventures of his life was being a part of the co-op life

because he got to work with the folks in the Bitterroot and throughout the region."

Don was vice president of MECA for 10 years and annually trekked to the nation's capital to talk cooperative issues.

Thiessen said, "Nobody covered any more ground in D.C. than Don. He worked hard. We'd get assignments to talk to one or two members of Congress, and he'd do that and go off down the hallways with an armload of pamphlets and talk to anybody he saw. If you'd listen, he'd lay it out there."

"When I saw the time he put in and his dedication, it makes me wonder how he and the other old-timers could have another life."

"He was blunt about it, too," said Missoula Electric trustee Ray Cebulski, who knew Park for 30 years.

Brown said that one of Don's long-lasting achievements was current REC low rates for power due to a 1997 BPA contract. "That's been a real, real bright spot for Ravalli Electric."

Don was instrumental in Brown's career, he said. "I met him in 1980 and were friends since. We miss him."