

Big Skylights



An internal newsletter of the STATEWIDE ASSOCIATION OF MONTANA RURAL ELECTRIC COOPERATIVES

A report from your Chief Executive Officer Dave Wheelihan

October 13, 2005

MECA board elects new vice chairman

Marvin Kimmet, a trustee at Glacier Electric Cooperative, was elected last Wednesday as the new vice president of the MECA Board of Directors. He replaces **Don Jones**, a trustee at Vigilante Electric, who decided not to seek re-election. In other officer elections, **Bob Evans Jr.**, president of Fergus Electric, was elected president of the MECA board and **Gary Sethre**, a trustee at Northern Electric, was re-elected secretary/treasurer. In addition to the board officers, others named to the MECA executive committee were **Karl Ratzburg**, a trustee at Marias River Electric, representing the Northwest District cooperatives; **Rick Molvig**, a trustee at Valley Electric, representing the Northeast District cooperatives; **Ray Cebulski**, Missoula Electric trustee, representing the Southwest District cooperatives; and **James Mullin**, Tongue River Electric trustee, representing the Southeast District cooperatives.

Flathead board wins top MECA award

Flathead Electric Cooperative's board of trustees received MECA's Hard Ridin' Award, a top award presented to co-op trustees or employees who have demonstrated character and perseverance amidst extraordinary difficulties. The award was one of several awards presented at the annual MECA Awards Breakfast held last week at the culmination of MECA's annual meeting in Great Falls.

In presenting the award, MECA President Bob Evans, Jr., pointed out that in a period of only five years the board had taken Flathead Electric from a low equity position of 2 percent to 20 percent equity. He also emphasized the cooperative trustees' commitment to the cooperative way of doing business, saying the board had proven a "strong, courageous team on behalf of their own members." Members of the Flathead Electric board are **Jay Downen**, president; **Alan Ruby**, vice president; **Paul Holland**, secretary/treasurer; **Chris Byrd**, **Doug Grob**, **Earl Messick**, **Karl Schrade**, **Emery Smith** and **George Taylor**.

Among others honored at the awards breakfast was **Jasen Bronec**, manager at Glacier Electric, who was presented the Hog-Tied Award for his demonstrated leadership in communicating this year with legislators and other policy makers regarding legislative issues pertaining to renewable energy. Mr. Bronec is chairman of MECA's Net Metering and Transmission Interconnections Legislative Subcommittee.

Cooperative spirit honorees

This year's Trustee Cooperative Spirit Award went to **Bill Keller**, a trustee at Yellowstone Valley Electric Cooperative, for his more than 36 years of service on various co-op boards. Known as "Mister Energy," Mr. Keller has served on the boards of Basin Electric, the Dakota Coal Board, Western Fuels Association and Central Montana Electric Power Cooperative. This year's Employee Cooperative Spirit Award was

presented to **Claudia Larsen**, payroll and benefits administrator at Missoula Electric Cooperative. Mrs. Larsen holds a well-earned reputation at her co-op for setting the example of the attitude that “our members are our owners.”

Overall communications winners

A number of communications awards were also presented at the awards breakfast. Yellowstone Valley Electric was honored with the Significant Achievement in Communications Award. Lincoln Electric won the Excellence in Communications Award.

Safety achievers

No Lost Time Awards went to Goldenwest Electric, 49 years; Lincoln Electric, 17 years; Mid-Yellowstone Electric, 15 years; Marias River Electric, 13 years; Tongue River Electric, seven years; Lower Yellowstone REA, six years; Fall River Electric, four years; Sun River Electric and Sheridan Electric, three years; Valley Electric, Southeast Electric, McCone Electric and Fergus Electric, two years; Northern Lights, Inc., Northern Electric, Missoula Electric and Glacier Electric, one year.

Managers pick 2006 officers

The MECA Managers Group has elected a new chairman. He is **Rick Stevens**, manager of Hill County Electric Cooperative. Mr. Stevens, who succeeds Southeast Electric Cooperative Manager **Jack Hamblin** to the one-year post, was elected at the Managers Group meeting on Oct. 3 in Great Falls. Other officers are **Scott Sweeney**, manager at Fergus Electric, elected vice chairman, and **Mark Grotho**, manager at Marias River Electric, elected secretary.

National co-op group hears industry updates

I was pleased to represent the Rural Electric Statewide Managers Association (RESMA) on Sept. 21 at the Cooperative Business Council meeting in Washington, D.C. At the meeting, we heard updates on damage from Hurricane Katrina and the latest in industry trends. In addition to RESMA, the council includes representatives of National Rural Utilities Cooperative Finance Corporation, Touchstone Energy, National Information Solutions Cooperative, generation and transmission cooperatives, Federated Rural Electric Insurance Exchange, NRECA and Southeast Data Cooperative.

Homeland security official to contact co-ops

Randy Middlebrook, the program manager for Montana Homeland Security, has contacted MECA to announce that Montana’s Disaster and Emergency Services (DES) Division is canvassing the state in an effort to compile information on critical infrastructure within the state.

The information will be placed on a geographic information systems (GIS) database. Mr. Middlebrook said the database will serve as an informational and analytical resource for both the state Joint Terrorism Task Force and DES. “A very large and important part of

infrastructure in the state is, of course, energy,” explained Mr. Middlebrook. “We are leaving no stone unturned and are gathering information on systems or grids that provide power for both in-state and out-of-state subscribers and entities. The method of data collection is for a state Homeland Security analyst to visit key transmission, switch and distribution sites in the state, take digital photos and attain the GPS (global positioning system) coordinates for the site using a high precision handheld GPS unit.” He added that the agency will also be relying on the subject matter experts at each cooperative “for direction on any other sites that are critical to their operations and power supply.” Said Mr. Middlebrook: “If there are some cooperatives that are lucky enough to already have GIS information on their system, it will save everybody a lot of time if that information can be shared with this office.” He concluded by saying that he will discuss “security particulars once I have established contact with a representative from each cooperative.”

Time running out for seminar registrations

“Sales is NOT a Dirty Word,” a MECA-sponsored course designed to help cooperative employees understand sales fundamentals and provide top-notch customer service, is in urgent need of sign-ups. Oct. 18 is the registration deadline for the Nov. 1 course in Billings; Oct. 20 is the registration deadline for the Nov. 3 course in Sidney; Oct. 26 is the registration deadline for the Nov. 9 course in Missoula and Nov. 1 is the registration deadline for the Nov. 15 course in Great Falls. A minimum of 20 participants is needed at each location. The cost of the course is \$60 per person. To register or to obtain more information, contact MECA’s **Sharon McDonald** at 406-761-8333.

Job market

Journeyman lineman

Fergus Electric Cooperative has an opening for a journeyman lineman based out of operations in the co-op’s service territory near Roundup. Salary is \$26.42 per hour. The position will be open until filled. To be considered for the position, applicants must have a high school diploma or equivalent, have journeyman lineman certification and four years of journeyman work experience, be able to perform responsibilities and duties of the position which includes construction, maintenance and repair of overhead and underground distribution and transmission systems with knowledge of RUS construction standards and must possess a valid Montana Class A drivers license or obtain one within six months of employment. For additional information and an application contact Line Superintendent **Dale Rikala** at 406-538-3465.

Journeyman Electric Lineman

Hill County Electric Cooperative has an open position for a Journeyman Electric Lineman. Responsibilities include construction and maintenance of all aspects of electrical power facilities to deliver reliable energy to customers. Reporting location is Havre, Montana, and pay is \$25.40 per union contract. Applications will be accepted through November 11, 2005. Applications and job description are available at the address listed below or by calling (406) 394-7804. Applications are also on our website at www.mtintouch.net and may be sent to ttcjo@mtintouch.net or mailed to Job Search; Hill County Electric Coop Inc; PO Box 2330; Havre, Mt 59501. (EOE)

2005 CALENDAR

October

15	Big Flat Electric Cooperative Annual Meeting	Malta, MT
15	Sheridan Electric Cooperative Annual Meeting	Medicine Lake, MT
18-19	Governor's Energy Symposium	Bozeman, MT
19	Valley Electric Cooperative Annual Meeting	Glasgow, MT
27	Goldenwest Electric Cooperative Annual Meeting	Wibaux, MT
28	Park Electric Cooperative Annual Meeting	Livingston, MT

November

1	Sales is Not a Dirty Word Training	Billings, MT
2-3	Basin Electric Power Cooperative Annual Meeting	Bismarck, ND
3	Sales is Not a Dirty Word Training	Sidney, MT
9	Sales is Not a Dirty Word Training	Missoula, MT
9-11	NRECA Region IX Meeting	Kauai, HI
15	Sales is Not a Dirty Word Training	Great Falls, MT