



Rural Montana

Montana Electric Cooperatives' Association Magazine | DECEMBER 2025

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(ISSN0199-6401)

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COVER

About our cover: Ellie Clarke, 10, from Florence helps RM wish all of our readers a Merry Christmas with her drawing.



RURAL MONTANA (ISSN0199-6401)

is an official publication of Montana Electric Cooperatives' Association and is published monthly by Montana's rural electric cooperatives in the interest of better rural and urban understanding of the benefits and the problems of rural utilities. Vol. 71 | No. 12

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SUBSCRIPTIONS | \$10 per year.

POSTMASTER | Published monthly by Montana Electric Cooperatives' Association, 501 Bay Drive, Great Falls, Montana. Periodicals postage paid at Great Falls, Montana, and at additional mailing offices. Postmaster send address corrections to P.O. Box 3469, Great Falls, MT 59403.

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Shaping Montana's energy future

MARK LAMBRECHT, CEO of Montana Electric Cooperatives' Association



MONTANA'S electric cooperatives have consistently advised members and policy makers that growing demand for electricity in the state and region continues to outpace development of generation and transmission. Electricity infrastructure development is needed to ensure a reliable electric grid and economic development. Gov. Greg Gianforte recognized this challenge and created the Unleashing American-Made Energy Task Force in September.

I was among the 20 representatives from industry, federal and state government agencies, and the Montana Legislature the governor appointed to the task force. He directed us to develop short- and long-term actionable items for the state of Montana, the Legislature and developers to consider to increase affordable and reliable energy options. Our recommendations and report are due to the governor next September.

The task force was divided into three workgroups: Generation; Transmission and Markets; and Growing Demand to identify barriers to energy development, draft problem statements and prepare recommendations for the full panel to consider. I was assigned to the Growing Demand and Transmission groups. Several common energy development barriers emerged from the workgroups: restrictive regulatory and permitting systems; property tax rates; uncertainty over wholesale energy supply and costs;

and the state's reputation as a difficult place to do business.

One of the biggest issues all three workgroups is evaluating is data centers. Developers of data computing centers to support artificial intelligence and cryptocurrency mining are looking to locate in Montana and other states. Data centers consume massive amounts of electricity, and require stable generation and transmission resources. If developed appropriately, data center demand for electricity could provide significant revenue for the utilities that serve them. Generation and transmission resources developed for data centers could be built with additional capacity to enhance reliability and affordability for other electricity consumers.

The most important questions about developing additional capacity for data centers are "who benefits and who pays?" Conversations in our workgroup meetings indicate there's common interest in making sure data centers pay their own way and are not subsidized by other consumers. As a task force member, I'm committed to making sure data center development does not increase costs for electric cooperative members, and does not impact reliability of their electricity service.

Please look for updates on the Energy Task Force in future issues of *Rural Montana* and in other MECA communications sources. 



A TALE OF TWO SEASONS

Evaluating an EV's performance in summer heat and bitter winter cold

COLUMN BY CARSON SWEENEY, FERGUS ELECTIC MANAGER | FOR RURAL MONTANA

FOR this article I will be providing my thoughts and experience on Fergus Electric Cooperative's 2023 Tesla Model Y electric all-wheel-drive vehicle during my work travels, comparing two vastly different weather scenarios.

The first part details a cold and snowy late-night drive from Billings to Lewistown in February. The second part of the article includes a trip from Miles City to Lewistown in July, during the height of summer's intense heat. I use the Tesla for work-related travel and have racked up just over 18,000 miles to date.

Winter performance

In February, a few electric cooperative leaders and I spent several days in Washington, D.C., meeting with our elected officials. Prior to my departure, I left the Tesla in a cold and snowy parking lot at the Billings airport, with a battery level of 85 percent. Upon arriving back in Billings several days later, I was greeted with blowing snow and a bitter air temperature of minus-10 degrees Fahrenheit. I preheated the car from the app while I waited for my luggage. I returned to the car at about 10 p.m. to find a warm interior, defrosted windows and a battery level of 78 percent. Several days in a cold parking lot had decreased the battery



charge minimally, but preheating the cabin certainly took some energy.

Using the touch screen within the vehicle, I typically enter my destination to take advantage of Tesla's analytics that estimate the battery usage for the trip. Tesla's predictive trip planner estimates the final battery percentage upon arrival by factoring in the route's elevation changes, weather and driving conditions. I have found this feature to be quite accurate while driving at or

near 70 mph. Under my circumstances, the vehicle was predicting a minus-5 percent battery level upon arrival, which meant I would not likely make it home without another charge. I drove to a supercharging station near the Target parking lot and connected the vehicle, as I had done many times before.

I typically wait anywhere from 20 to 30 minutes for a charge at this site, depending on the battery level I have



upon arrival and where I'm heading next. However, I had not connected this car to a supercharger during such cold conditions. The first 15 minutes of the charging session were spent heating the battery before charging would begin. The car had spent several cold days and nights sitting outside in a parking lot with temperatures reaching a low of minus-12 degrees. I had not come across this scenario before.

Upon conclusion of the battery preheating, charging commenced. I impatiently watched the battery level as it slowly increased less than 10 percent in a 45-minute period. I quickly learned that battery charging efficiency is significantly reduced under extreme cold conditions.

At around 11 p.m. my patience wore thin and I decided that I'd had enough. The predictive analysis expected I would reach Lewistown with 5 percent battery left, and at that particular moment that was good enough for me. Throughout my travels with the Tesla, I have learned that driving below 70

mph noticeably improved the distance traveled and lessened the battery usage. With reduced visibility of blowing snow, I expected I wouldn't be driving any faster than 55 mph, and would arrive with greater than 5 percent battery remaining.

A few hours later I arrived at Fergus Electric Cooperative in Lewistown with 10 percent battery remaining. I eagerly plugged in the Tesla, started my diesel pickup and drove the 14 miles home with zero range anxiety.

The all-wheel drive Tesla Model Y seems very stable and secure on snowy and icy roads. I am just as confident on the highway with the Tesla as I am with my four-wheel drive GMC Duramax pickup.

If you drive a Tesla in wintery conditions, do consider disabling the regenerative brake setting to prevent loss of traction. I have noticed that during winter driving conditions, drivers unfamiliar with Tesla's regenerative braking system can be caught off guard upon releasing the accelerator. The

setting is beneficial under dry road conditions, but not worth an accident on our wintery Montana roads.

Summer stretching

In July, I traveled from Lewistown to Deadwood, SD, for meetings with Basin Electric Power Cooperative, Fergus Electric Cooperative's power supplier. I began the trip in the Model Y with a fully charged battery, and made a single stop in Miles City. I made the 213-mile journey from my office in Lewistown to Miles City, and arrived with 12 percent battery remaining. I plugged in the car, walked a few blocks for lunch, and returned 45 minutes later with a full charge and a full belly.

While traveling I often stay at hotels with free level-two Tesla charging stations in their parking lots. These locations are convenient for overnight charging, because the typical level-two charging duration is approximately six hours. Upon arrival in Deadwood, I

See EV, next page

EV

From previous page

plugged in at the hotel's free charging station and awoke the next morning to a fully charged battery. The Tesla app is very impressive and provides many functions to control the car, including the ability to raise or lower the maximum charge level on the battery. The app often suggests lowering the maximum charge level to 80 percent for daily driving. I usually use this vehicle for extended trips, so I keep the level between 90 and 100 percent.

I am regularly asked how long it takes to charge the vehicle. My answer is typically in reference to charging your phone. If your phone battery is at 87 percent and you want to charge it to 100 percent, it doesn't take very long. However, if your battery is at 4 percent and you want to fully charge it, then it takes considerably longer. This is similar to electric vehicles. Lithium-ion batteries are able to charge faster when they are depleted of stored energy. As their storage levels increase, the charging speed slows down to maintain optimal battery life. I usually stop at fast charging stations and reach my desired level of charge in 30-40 minutes. I appreciate the opportunity to stretch my legs while catching up on missed phone calls and emails. I stop in for a coffee or quick lunch, and often return to the vehicle ready for the next stint.

A few days after my arrival in Deadwood our meetings concluded, and I decided to take the familiar route back home to Lewistown via Miles City, stopping for a single charge. While charging in Miles City, Tesla's predictive trip planner routed me through Billings to stop for an additional charge. This route would have added 55 miles, plus another 30 minutes for the second charging session. After being away from home for several days, I was not interested in this suggestion. I left the 96-degree heat in Miles City



bound for Lewistown, while the trip planner predicted I would have minus-5 percent battery charge upon arrival in Lewistown, and the GPS begged me to make a U-turn and head toward Billings.

I stayed on course and knew if I was going to be successful in my stubbornness, I would have to drive below 70 mph to make my destination without stopping to charge the battery.

For those unfamiliar with the available amenities between Miles City and Jordan via Highway 59, I'll shed some light. One will find vast and beautiful views of Montana's Big Sky Country, but you will not find electric vehicle charging stations — there are exactly zero charging stations between Jordan and Miles City.

My quest to truly understand the limits of the car and my tolerance for range anxiety were being put to the ultimate test. I cautiously drove 65 mph while the anticipated battery level upon arrival slowly made its way closer to zero. I made it to Winnett before I noticed a positive number. I eventually made it back to our office with 4 percent battery — and an estimated 11 miles of range — remaining.

I attribute the difference in battery performance between the two trips to the following:

- From Lewistown to Miles City there is a decrease in elevation of nearly 1,600 feet. Also, while heading east, I typically receive the benefit of a tailwind.
- On the way home I had a slight head wind and had to ascend the 1,600 feet in elevation difference. For these trips I was the sole member in the vehicle. I am confident that with the added weight of additional passengers and their associated luggage, we would not have been able to take the same route.

The performance and mileage of all vehicles change with added weight, speed and weather conditions. However, these circumstances are amplified when your maximum travel distance between charges is 220 miles. On a calm day and with three adult passengers, I would not plan a trip longer than 160 miles between charging stations. When traveling west of Lewistown this typically isn't a problem, however, traveling east of Lewistown may prevent you from using an electric vehicle altogether.

For anyone interested in owning an electric vehicle as your daily driver to and from work/home, I absolutely endorse the idea. The technology is impressive, charging at home is inexpensive and the immediate torque is amazing. If you regularly travel to areas of Montana where no electric charging infrastructure exists, an electric vehicle shouldn't be your only means of transportation. Range anxiety is real and stressful.

I hope this article on our Tesla electric vehicle was informative. From 96-degree summer heat in Miles City to minus-10 degree winter chill in Billings, I've tested the spectrum. I enjoy taking short and long trips in the Tesla throughout Montana and the surrounding states. I am also appreciative of the 500-plus mile range with a full tank of fuel in my personal truck, while traveling with my family to enjoy all that Montana has to offer. RM

ROBIN KUNTZ RECEIVES CO-OP SPIRIT AWARD

Long-time SECO business manager wins the Fritz Keller Cooperative Spirit Award

AT the 2025 Montana Electric Cooperatives' Association (MECA) Annual Meeting in Great Falls, it was announced that Robin Kuntz received The Fritz Keller Cooperative Spirit Award. This award recognizes personnel whose actions in their community continually promote the cooperative spirit.

Kuntz has been at Southeast Electric for 44 years. Because it is a small cooperative, Kuntz wears many hats. Her official title is business manager, but she works in all aspects of her cooperative. She does billing, payroll mapping and even jumps at the chance to put on her jeans and help the guys when there is a trouble call. She is an important part of our outage team as she will dispatch during large outages. She ensures that messages are relayed correctly, and keeps the crew abreast of new issues as she gets calls. She



is also very patient with new employees while she teaches them that it is OK to repeat as many times as needed to keep the crew safe.

Kuntz also shares her knowledge of what transpires in the field as she has been there side by side with the crew on outage calls. She has educated employees as to what needs to happen and what the linemen need from the office staff during the day.

Kuntz knows our system inside and out. She knows everyone's account number and service.

Kuntz is not only an exemplary

employee, but also an outstanding community member. She volunteers at the Trails End Ranch Christian Camp south of Ekalaka during the summer, fall and winter. Evenings and weekends you can see her helping in all aspects of the camp, whether it be in the kitchen, with the horses, or on the zip line — she is willing to do it all.

Kuntz is also very active with the local credit union. She has served as a Loan Committee member and is now on the Supervisory Committee. She enjoys this because it is the cooperative model that she believes in. She also helps the community by taking tickets at events, and is always willing to help with town cleanup and be an election judge.

As far as the cooperative spirit, there is no one that is more dedicated to serving members and their community. If there are ever any changes, she wants to make sure that they will benefit the members because that is who we are here for.

“We work for our members,” she says almost daily. “They are what is important. Our service to our members is what the co-op is about.”

Very rarely does she take time for herself, but when she does, she likes anything outdoors such as hiking, kayaking, walking and boating. She also loves to travel and spend time with her beautiful granddaughter.

Kuntz is the face and the voice of this cooperative. The members know her and appreciate her knowledge, as do her co-workers. Kuntz is very deserving of the Fritz Keller Cooperative Spirit Award. RM

“

As far as the cooperative spirit, there is no one that is more dedicated to serving members and their community. If there are ever any changes, she [Kuntz] wants to make sure that they will benefit the members because that is who we are here for.

”



Goldenwest Electric opens new facility

Multi-use building focuses on innovation, collaboration

G**O****L****D****E****N****W****E****S****T** Electric Cooperative recently announced the opening of its new office and shop, marking a significant milestone in the cooperative's commitment to innovation, sustainability and providing a state-of-the-art environment for its employees and members.

Innovation at its core

The new facility is designed to foster a culture of innovation and is equipped with the latest technology and collaborative workspaces.

- **Advanced technology integration:** Smart building systems for optimized energy consumption and operational efficiency.

- **Collaborative workspaces:** Open-concept areas to encourage



teamwork and cross-departmental communication.

- **Training center:** A dedicated space for employee training and development, ensuring the team stays at the forefront of industry advancements.

Commitment to sustainability

Sustainability is a key focus of the new facility, reflecting Goldenwest Electric's dedication to environmental responsibility. Key sustainable features are included.

- **Energy-efficient lighting:** LED lighting throughout the building to minimize energy consumption.
- **Water conservation:** Low-flow fixtures and landscaping designed to conserve water.

Modern facilities for a modern workforce

The new office and shop provide a modern and comfortable environment for Goldenwest Electric's employees, enhancing productivity and job satisfaction.

- **Ergonomic workstations:** Adjustable desks and chairs to promote employee wellbeing.
- **Breakrooms and relaxation areas:** Providing spaces for employees to recharge and connect.
- **State-of-the-art shop:** A well-equipped shop with the latest tools and equipment to support efficient project execution.

Looking ahead

Goldenwest Electric's new office and shop represent a significant investment in the cooperative's future, enabling it to better serve its clients, support its employees and contribute to a more sustainable future. RM



HOLIDAY EFFICIENCY WORD SEARCH

The holidays are a fun, festive time of year! But this is also a time when we typically use more electricity at home because the weather is colder and we're home for the holiday season.

Read the efficiency tips below, then find and circle the **bolded** words in the puzzle.



Holiday Efficiency Tips:

Decorate your tree with energy-saving **LED lights**.

Save energy by using a **timer** to turn off holiday lights when you're sleeping.

If you have a **fireplace** in your home, remind an adult to close the **damper** when a fire is not burning.

Open blinds and curtains during the day to let **sunlight** in to warm your home.

Lower the **thermostat** when you invite friends or family over.

W	F	M	M	V	X	W	Q	L	B	P	V	E	J	E
J	I	Z	O	P	T	W	E	N	A	W	A	C	N	E
R	E	M	I	T	M	D	E	R	U	K	V	A	H	B
I	J	X	Z	L	L	R	D	Y	L	A	P	L	J	F
K	L	F	A	I	N	Z	I	J	K	P	Q	P	P	H
T	R	P	G	C	T	B	O	X	A	S	R	E	G	T
J	T	H	E	R	M	O	S	T	A	T	Q	R	V	F
T	T	F	E	S	Y	A	F	G	C	T	X	I	G	T
S	R	B	R	A	Y	O	U	A	B	E	H	F	H	Y
J	Z	E	H	V	L	T	U	H	W	L	O	G	V	Y
E	F	O	P	L	Q	H	Y	K	K	L	I	B	B	I
A	R	A	W	M	V	W	D	Y	X	L	L	Q	Q	I
A	W	G	S	Z	A	W	R	O	N	J	J	J	P	Z
R	P	U	Q	U	K	D	G	U	P	B	K	D	K	Q
B	Z	S	C	J	Q	B	S	G	V	F	X	U	J	F



MONTANA U.S. REPRESENTATIVES

In order to allow ample space for responses, Rural Montana alternates asking Montana's senators and representatives the Dateline D.C. question each month. This month features the representatives. Next month, we will ask a question of the state's two senators.

THIS MONTH'S QUESTION:

The FAA's proposed beyond visual line of sight drone regulations, which would limit electric cooperative's ability to use drones for line and equipment inspections, and require costly reporting and compliance standards, were recently released. What is your opinion of the proposed rules?

THE SAME QUESTION WAS ASKED TO MONTANA'S TWO U.S. SENATORS IN RM'S LAST MONTH'S EDITION



Rep. Zinke

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<https://zinke.house.gov>
Ph: (202) 225-5628

Representative Ryan Zinke

As a member of the Appropriations Transportation Subcommittee, I have been actively pushing the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) to finalize standardized beyond visual line of sight (BVLOS) drone regulations. These rules offer tremendous benefits for Montana's rural communities by enhancing infrastructure inspections, emergency response, agricultural operations and other key operations. They also have the potential to drive economic growth in Montana's emerging tech hubs, positioning our state as a leader in drone innovation.

While I support the overall framework, I'm aware of concerns that some provisions could create unintended barriers for local electric cooperatives and small businesses that depend on drone technology every day. The FAA is currently accepting public comments to adjust the rule, and I am committed to working closely

with Secretary Duffy and FAA leadership to address these concerns and ensure the final rule strikes the right balance between safety and innovation.

Montana's vast open skies and plentiful available fly zones give our state a unique edge to become a national leader in drone operations and innovation. With a clear and consistent regulatory framework in place, Montana's businesses, public agencies and tech developers will have the certainty they need to confidently invest and grow in this field. The key to this rule's success lies in finding a balanced approach, one that ensures the highest levels of airspace safety while encouraging innovation and avoiding unnecessary red tape. Establishing a nationwide, standardized BVLOS framework is essential to keeping both Montana and America at the cutting edge of drone technology. RM



Rep. Downing

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<https://downing.house.gov>
Ph: (202) 225-3211?

Representative Troy Downing

I appreciate Secretary Duffy's commitment to improving safety in our skies. As a former regulator, I also understand the importance of right-sizing regulation so as not to stifle innovation or place undue burden on business. I welcome the opportunity to hear more from Montana's co-ops regarding BVLOS drone regulations so that I can best work on your behalf.

If you have a question, require assistance, or would like to learn more about arranging a meeting with me or my staff, please give us a call or stop by any one of our offices in Helena, Billings or Washington. Every day, I am humbled to serve you. It is truly the honor of a lifetime. RM



Sam Wolkowiak, above and at left on the pole, a line foreman for Beartooth Electric Cooperative in Red Lodge, was recently recognized for actions that may have saved a woman's life. |

COURTESY PHOTOS

A TRIO OF LIFESAVERS

Co-op employees helped stop a fire, save a life

STORY BY **RYAN HALL** | RURAL MONTANA EDITOR

THREE Montana electric cooperative employees were recognized as LifeSaver Award winners during the Montana Electric Cooperatives' Association Annual Meeting in October. They were Sam Wolkowiak of Beartooth Electric Cooperative, and Gunner Bergsing and Cole Kimball of Park Electric Cooperative.

Saving a member

Wolkowiak, a line foreman, was conducting a routine work order visit when he and his crew were faced with an unexpected and urgent emergency.

"This was a big job we were working on for about a month," he said, adding

that the project went through a property owned by an older couple, who were ranchers. The crew checked on the couple each morning to make sure they were happy with how the project looked, and to see if they had any questions.

"Just good people, good ol' ranchers," Wolkowiak said.

As the woman opened her door to greet Wolkowiak, he noticed she didn't have her normal look on her face.

"She seemed kind of confused, just not normal," Wolkowiak said. "Just about as soon as I turned around to leave, she passed out. She fell backwards and hit her head on the

banister."

Wolkowiak said the woman was bleeding a fair amount. He helped her up and waited until she got her bearings, then helped her to a sink to clean up and tend to her wounds.

She lost consciousness again, collapsing into Wolkowiak. He said she remained unconscious for 20-30 seconds. He called the crew and told them to call 9-1-1.

"I helped her down to the ground. She was completely unresponsive," Wolkowiak said. "The crew came into the house to see if she needed anything."

After the woman regained

consciousness and responded, she again seemed to pass out for a second.

“Every time she (seemed to lose consciousness) her eyes rolled in the back of her head, so it scared the crap out of me,” Walkowiak said.

As the Beartooth Electric crew waited for emergency responders, they noticed the ambulance repeatedly passing the residence without turning into the driveway. The crew ran to the driveway to flag down emergency responders.

Walkowiak remained with the woman, monitoring her heart rate and breathing, until emergency personnel arrived. The woman was safely transported to the hospital, where she would make a full recovery from an underlying heart condition.

“It was quite the little rodeo there for a while,” Walkowiak said, adding he has never been on a fire department or taken EMS training.

“I’ve just done the training through the co-op, and (Beartooth Electric) has done first-aid and CPR with the local EMS.”

Fighting fire

Earlier this year, the Paradise Valley Fire Department was dispatched to a reported structure fire. However, when the first firefighter showed up, they found a wildland fire. Two people were already on the scene battling the blaze — Bergsing and Kimball, linemen from Park Electric.

The pair had been working on an outage, trying to find the source.

“We threw a fuse in (the equipment) and it blew back on us. At that point we were checking underground cans (transformer),” Bergsing said.

The linemen reached the second or third can at around 1 a.m., in pitch-black darkness.

“We just look in this field and we see there’s a big fire,” Bergsing said. “We took water cans and a fire extinguisher and ran.”

“We quickly assessed that something had to be done,” Kimball added. “We called 9-1-1, left the truck and ran



Linemen Gunner Bergsing and Cole Kimball of Park Electric in Livingston had to act quickly when they discovered a field on fire. They were recently recognized for their efforts in putting out a majority of that fire before it threatened homes. | COURTESY PHOTO

to the field, climbing over the fence.”

The men said at the time they arrived the flames were approximately 5 to 6 feet in height.

“We got there and started walking around the perimeter with water cans and the fire extinguisher,” Kimball said.

“We ran out of water and fire extinguishers, and just started to kick it out,” added Bergsing.

The two electric co-op employees extinguished 90 percent of the fire and were able to stop its forward progression before the fire department showed up. The fire department put out the remaining fire, which was on a transformer. The linemen had extinguished that fire numerous times, but it kept reigniting because of the oil in it.

“I was amazed at how well those filled water cans and fire extinguisher worked,” Kimball said. “It was actually quite impressive -- more than I would have ever guessed.”

The men said they never thought about their own safety, or of waiting for the fire department, rather than rushing to the blaze.

“We just had to take care of what was going on,” Kimball said. “There was a fire, it was starting to get breezy and it was burning pretty quick.”

“It was in an area where it could have set the whole Paradise Valley on fire,” Bergsing added.

“This fire could have been a disaster with many homes in the area, a fire could threaten many structures,” said Michael Carasia, assistant fire chief for the Paradise Valley Fire Department. “Because of their quick actions, no homes were threatened.”

“Once it got daylight and we got to see what was all around us, we knew that it could have taken off really quick,” Bergsing said, noting there was a house that was pretty close to the fire. RAM

Merry Christmas

AND A HAPPY NEW YEAR

FROM EVERYONE AT THE MONTANA ELECTRIC
COOPERATIVES' ASSOCIATION

AND RURAL MONTANA MAGAZINE

Montana Electric Cooperatives' Association staff, from left, **TOP ROW:** Communications Director/Rural Montana Editor Ryan Hall, Education and Training Coordinator/Program Assistant Andrea Doll, Chief Operating Officer Lea Potoczny and Chief Executive Officer Mark Lambrecht. **BOTTOM ROW:** Safety/Loss Instructor Jerry Lemm, Graphic Artist Nick Daniels and Safety/Loss Instructors Bill Doty and Berke Brown.



SCHOLARSHIP ANNOUNCEMENT

Four \$500 college scholarships available

If you are a high school senior planning to attend college or a student continuing an undergraduate education, you could win a scholarship from the Montana Electric Cooperatives' Association (MECA), the statewide association for Montana's electric cooperatives. Four \$500 scholarships (one from each of the four districts in MECA) will be awarded to qualified students.

To qualify for the scholarships, the applicant must:

- Be a member of a Montana electric cooperative;
- Be a graduating high school senior with plans to attend a university or vocational technical school, or be an undergraduate college student;
- Attach a copy of their school transcripts, grade and ACT/SAT scores;
- List all activities in school and community, awards and/or honors received and a description of any other extracurricular activities and volunteer service in a résumé-style format;
- List all high school and/or college employment, including employer, position and hours worked weekly during the school year and/or the summer;

• Include a personal statement – write about how your school/community/work activities will influence your goals and career choice. This statement should be no more than two, double-spaced, typed pages;

- Attach one letter of recommendation;
- Submit entries to his or her cooperative post-marked no later than March 6, but **please verify the due date with your electric co-op as it may vary.**

The criteria for scholarship judging includes: 20 percent – academic strength (as demonstrated by course, GPA and national testing scores); 20 percent – activities in school and community, awards and honors; 20 percent – employment, volunteerism and community service; and 40 percent – personal statement.

Each cooperative will select one application to be forwarded to MECA for further judging. A MECA committee will choose the four scholarship recipients from the pool of finalists.

For an application or for more information, contact your local electric cooperative. 

APPLY TODAY

**CONTACT YOUR LOCAL ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE
TO GET AN APPLICATION**

SEND IN YOUR RECIPES

Recipes for *RM* magazine are submitted by cooperative members across the state. First, second and third place monthly winners are awarded \$30, \$20 and \$10 prizes, respectively. Send your recipes to *RM* Recipes, Box 3469, Great Falls, MT 59403, or email rural@mtco-ops.com. **Please include your name, hometown and an address. If you do not include this information, your submission will not be accepted.** For January send in your best meatball or meatloaf recipe by December 11. Please send in February recipes anytime: Your favorite Valentine recipe (Date-night entree, dessert, candy, etc...) Try to limit the ingredients and length of directions for space. Please include a photo, if possible.

**1st
PLACE**

Baked Mostaccioli

Teresa Gaylord | KALISPELL

INGREDIENTS

- 1 lb. uncooked mostaccioli or penne pasta
- 1-1/2 lb. Italian sausage
- 1 jar (28 oz.) meatless spaghetti sauce
- 4 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 large egg, lightly beaten
- 15 oz. ricotta cheese
- 2 cups shredded mozzarella cheese
- 1/2 Cup grated romano cheese
- Parsley for garnish, optional

DIRECTIONS

Preheat oven to 375 degrees.
Cook pasta according to package directions; drain.
Crumble sausage into a dutch oven. Cook over medium heat until no longer pink; drain.
Stir in spaghetti sauce, garlic and pasta.
In a large bowl, combine egg, ricotta cheese and mozzarella cheese.
Spoon half the pasta mixture into a greased 3-qt. baking dish.
Layer with cheese mixture, then remaining pasta mixture.
Cover and bake 40 minutes or until a thermometer reads 160 degrees.
Uncover; top with romano cheese and parsley. Bake 5 minutes longer, or until heated through.



**2nd
PLACE**

Festive Sweet Potatoes

Patsy McCracken | FORTINE

INGREDIENTS

- 1 cup chopped pecans
- 3/4 cup pumpkin seeds
- 2 cans whole cranberry sauce
- 2 bags frozen sweet potatoes
- 4 gala apples, chopped
- 1-1/2 cups old-fashioned oats
- 1-1/2 tsp. lemon juice
- 2 T maple syrup
- Cinnamon to taste

DIRECTIONS

Preheat oven to 350 degrees.
Put sweet potatoes in a large baking dish and add cranberry sauce. Add lemon juice to apples, mix and combine with potato mixture. Add nuts and seeds, and mix well.
Spread oats over the top of the mixture, sprinkle cinnamon on top and drizzle maple syrup over everything.
Bake for 30 to 40 minutes.
NOTE: If using fresh sweet potatoes, they will need to be pre-cooked.



**3rd
PLACE**

Slow-cooker Jambalaya

Mel Hayes | LIBBY

INGREDIENTS

- 2-1/2 cups chicken broth
- 1 can (14 oz.) diced tomatoes
- 1-1/2 cup tomato sauce
- 1-1/4 cup uncooked rice
- 3 T chopped onion
- 1 T olive oil
- 1/2 tsp. garlic powder
- 1/2 tsp. ground black pepper
- 1/2 tsp. dried thyme
- 1/2 tsp. salt
- 1/4 tsp. cayenne pepper
- 1 bay leaf
- 1/2 lb. fully cooked Andouille sausage, sliced
- 1/2 lb. uncooked shrimp, peeled and deveined
- 2/3 cup shredded Parmesan cheese
- Sliced green onions for garnish

DIRECTIONS

In a 5-quart slow cooker combine all the ingredients except sausage, shrimp, Parmesan cheese and green onions. Cover, cook on high for 1 hour and 45 minutes.
Stir in shrimp, sausage, cheese and cook about 15 minutes longer, until the shrimp is pink and rice is tender.
Garnish with green onions.



Events Calendar

SUBMIT YOUR EVENTS

To list an event, send it to: RM Events, PO Box 3469, Great Falls, MT 59403 or email us at: rural@mtco-ops.com — Submit items by December 11 for January events. Include date, time, site, city and contact number with your event. **Events without such info will not be used.**

NORTHWEST

December 5

Trego Christmas Bazaar — TFS Community Hall, Fri-Sat: 10 a.m. to 7 p.m., Sun: 10 a.m. to 3 p.m., 882-4779 | **TREGO**

December 5-6

Bake Sale — The Whitefish Thrift Haus and Soroptimist International of Whitefish bake sale along with the Crafty Women Holiday Market, Whitefish Community Center, Fri: 5 to 8 p.m., Sat: 9 a.m. to 1 p.m., 260-6443 | **WHITEFISH**

December 5-6

Christmas Market — Ferndale Community Hall, Fri: noon to 7 p.m., Sat: 8:30 a.m., to 5:30 p.m., 864-497-1827 | **BIGFORK**

December 5-7

Christmas Decorations and Bake Sale — Elks Club, 470-1511 | **SHELBY**

December 6

Children's Christmas Store — For shoppers ages 5-12, volunteers and donations needed, Anna Jeffries Elementary, 10 a.m. to noon, 873-2693 | **CUT BANK**

December 6

Stillwater Christmas Shoppe — Vendor booths, Stillwater Lutheran Church, 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., 257-4614 | **KALISPELL**

December 6

Frostbite Holiday Bazaar and Bake Sale — 24 vendors, Swan Valley School, 10 a.m. to 3 p.m., 499-0321 | **CONDON**

December 6

8th Annual Holiday Market — Woods Bay Wine, noon to 4 p.m., 420-2247 | **BIGFORK**

December 7

Santa Shop — Upstairs Elks Club, noon to 6 p.m., 470-1511 | **SHELBY**

December 7

37th Annual Community Carol Sing — Soup supper to follow with a freewill offering to support the purchase of Christmas gifts for the local nursing home and Beehive assisted living, First Presbyterian Church, 4 p.m., 873-4337 | **CUT BANK**

December 10

Flathead Valley Community Band with the New Horizons Band — Christmas concert, Red Lion Ballroom, 7:30 p.m., 270-1696 | **KALISPELL**

December 10

Columbia Falls Women's Connection Luncheon — Guest speaker is TBA, 827 9th St. West, 11:30 a.m., call 892-3621 for reservations | **COLUMBIA FALLS**

December 11

Kick N Glide Annual Fundraiser — Pint night, BiasBrewing, 5 to 8 p.m., 262-271-7508 | **KALISPELL**

December 12-13

Winter Expo Bazaar — Vendors, Santa, gift wrapping, bake sale, raffle and more, Heritage Museum, Fri: 4 to 7 p.m., Sat: 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., 293-7521 | **LIBBY**

December 15

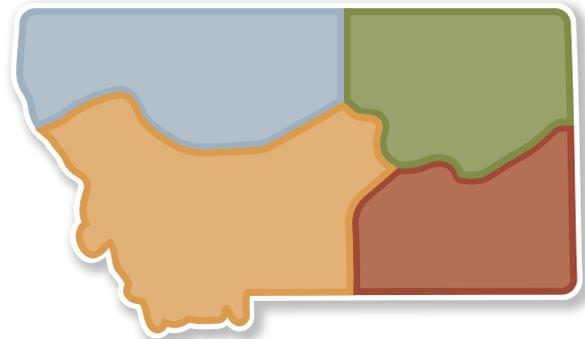
TUBACHRISTMAS — Concert, Red Lion Ballroom, 7 p.m., 270-1696 | **KALISPELL**

December 15

Toole County Medical Auxiliary's Tree of Lights Ceremony — Shelby Logan Health Assisted Living, 6:30 p.m., 470-1511 | **SHELBY**

December 19-20

Winter Wonderland on Ice "Home To You" — Stumptown Ice Den, Fri: 7 p.m., Sat: 2 and 5:30 p.m. | **WHITEFISH**



SOUTHWEST

December 2

Santa's Seconds Sale — Barnes Street Theater, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m., 366-0711 | **LEWISTOWN**

December 5

Christmas in the Highwoods — Hayrides, caroling, bingo, crafts, Santa, food, music and vendors, Highwood Community Hall, 5 to 9 p.m., 231-4177 | **HIGHWOOD**

December 6

St. Philip Benizi Christmas Market — Crafts, bake sale, raffle and lunch, Darby Clubhouse, 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., 925-405-2811 | **DARBY**

December 6

Missoula Community Chorus Holidays on Higgins — The XXXXs on the north end of Higgins Ave., 5 p.m. | **MISSOULA**

December 18

Celebrate the season with MPower Voices — Zootown Arts Community Center, 7 p.m. | **MISSOULA**

NORTHEAST

December 4

Phillips County Museum & Historical Society presents A Blue Christmas Festival — Annual fundraiser, Phillips County Museum, 654-1037 | **MALTA**

December 6-7

Real Country Christmas at a Real Country Store — Antiques and collectibles at special sale prices, Virgelle Mercantile, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., 800-426-2926 | **VIRGELLE**

December 14

MonDak Christmas — Santa photos, live music, bake sale, kids crafts, MonDak Heritage Center, 1:30 to 3 p.m., 433-3500 | **SIDNEY**

December 20

Calligraphy Christmas Card Class — Learn hand-lettering and design beautiful Christmas cards, MonDak Heritage Center, noon, 433-3500 | **SIDNEY**

SOUTHEAST

January 10

Pub Station Presents Paula Poundstone — Petro Theatre, 8 p.m., 919-653-0443 | **BILLINGS**

YOUNG MONTANANS

RM invites youngsters to send in original art and poems. If we use it, we'll pay you \$10. **Mail to:** Young Montanans, P.O. Box 3469, Great Falls, MT 59403.

Email: rural@mtco-ops.com. **Include:** Your name, age, address and your cooperative. *If you do not include this information, your submission will not be accepted.*

**SEND YOUR WINTER DRAWINGS
AND POEMS**



Naomi Wilson, 11, Ekalaka | **SOUTHEAST ELECTRIC**

Oakley Berg, 12, Florence | **MISSOULA ELECTRIC**



Rayne Morrison, 13, Kalispell | **FLATHEAD ELECTRIC**

Diana Hatch, 10, Kalispell | **FLATHEAD ELECTRIC**





ON THE GO

READER PHOTO CHALLENGE

Reader Submissions | Photos

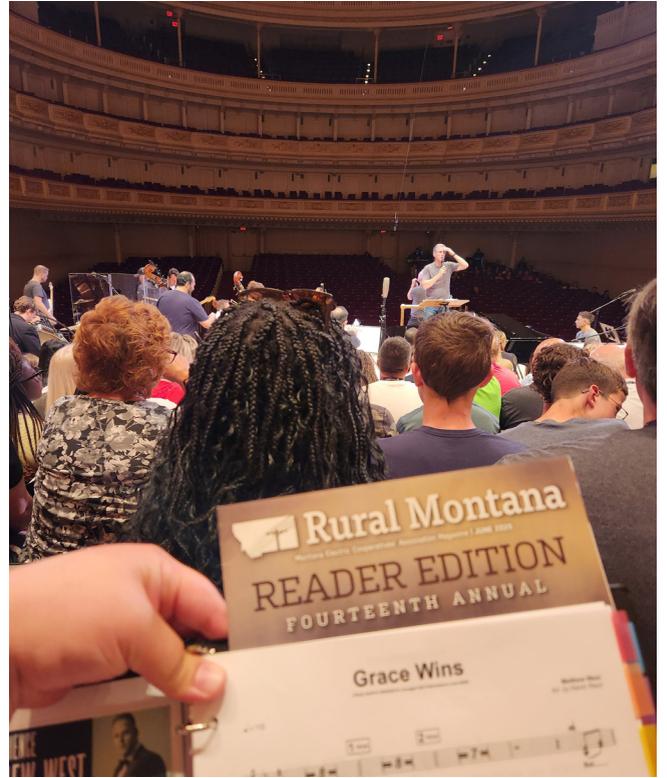
DON'T FORGET TO SEND US YOUR FAVORITE PHOTOS/ARTWORK FOR OUR USUAL READER PAGE AS WELL

ALL PHOTO ENTRIES MUST INCLUDE: the photographer's/artist's name, address and hometown in the entry. *If you do not include this information, your submission will not be accepted.* If we use your photo we'll pay you \$25-\$100 (depending on size and location). **Send entries to:** rural@mtco-ops.com. No more than 20 MB at a time. No prints please.



Seeing the Signs

Debra Seymour and her family brought *Rural Montana* on a 7,600-mile, 90-day journey from Butte to Canada to Alaska and back. Here the family, and the magazine, stop at the famous Sign Post Forest in Watson City, Yukon. **Photo courtesy of Debra Seymour.**

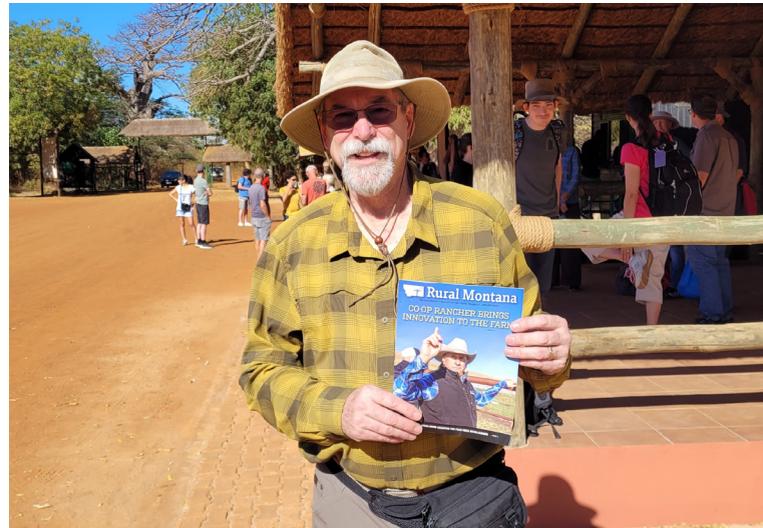


RM on Stage

Libby Barth took *Rural Montana* on stage with her at Carnegie Hall in New York City!!! **Photo by Libby Barth of Ekalaka.**

Capitol Connection

Seth Smiley, 12, the Montana delegate for the 2025 Breakthrough T1D Children's Congress, took *Rural Montana* with him to the steps of the U.S. Capitol while educating congress on what it's like for a child to live with Type 1 Diabetes. **Photo by Becky Jessop of Kalispell**



Seeing Senegal

RM went on a safari to Senegal, West Africa, this year with **Adriaan Overbeeke of Billings**, who provided this photo.

The logo consists of the letters 'RM' in a white, bold, sans-serif font, set against a dark teal background that is shaped like the state of Montana.

The Magazine of the
Montana Electric Cooperatives'
Association

Visit us online: www.mtco-ops.com

Email: rural@mtco-ops.com

A photograph of a woman and a child looking up at a Christmas tree. The woman is wearing a blue coat and a red beanie, and the child is wearing a blue and red striped jacket and a black beanie. They are both holding coffee cups. The background is filled with warm, glowing Christmas lights and a decorated tree with red ornaments and gold garlands.

MAY YOUR DAYS
BE MERRY AND BRIGHT!

This holiday season, we'll keep the lights twinkling and the cookies baking.
Happy holidays from your cooperative family at Basin Electric!



**BASIN ELECTRIC
POWER COOPERATIVE**

A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative 