



Rural Montana

Montana Electric Cooperatives' Association Magazine | JUNE 2025

READER EDITION

FOURTEENTH ANNUAL



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Rural Montana

June 2025

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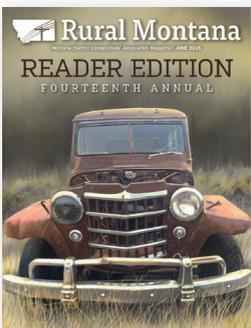
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COVER

Native Renegade
Digital fine art painting by Laura Melis of Florence



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Tribute to Jay Downen

By **GARY WIENS**, CEO of Montana Electric Cooperatives' Association



As the old proverb states, “time and chance happen to us all” and sometimes events can turn into a path-altering blessing that, upon reflection, makes one eternally grateful for the good people we are privileged to know.

One such very special person in my life was Jay Downen, a kind, caring and life-loving man who, sadly, passed away on April 21, at the age of 81.

Back in 1992, Jay took a chance hiring me to fill a newly created position at Montana Electric Cooperatives' Association (MECA) as assistant general manager.

This was the year then Eastern District Congressman Ron Marlenee narrowly lost his bid for re-election in a race against then Western District Congressman Pat Williams after the 1990 Census confirmed population loss would force our state down to one congressional seat.

At the time, I was completing my fifth year as a legislative aide to Congressman Marlenee at his Capitol Hill office. The election loss in November 1992 meant I was now within a few weeks of being jobless. Although yearning to move back to Montana, I thought my unwelcome fate was to remain in Washington, D.C., which, even back then, was not the best of places to raise a family.

But that all changed shortly after I got a call from Jay. I had gotten to know this endearing soul some months before as I worked with him to help the electric co-ops successfully pass much-needed federal legislation preserving their rights to low-cost federal hydropower.

Jay – a man consistently moved by compassion for those in need but also recognizing the good that can emerge from life's setbacks – flew out to have

dinner with me and my wife, Pamela, and, soon thereafter, offered me the new position. I gladly accepted, and we were thrilled at getting to return to a new life in Montana to raise our two young daughters.

Working for Jay, he mentored me in the art of serving our electric co-ops with class. Gregarious, professional and always visionary, his dedication to the co-ops transformed our statewide. As Max Davis, a close friend of Jay and our association's long-time attorney, put it, “I became a close observer of Jay almost single-handedly building MECA from an obscure two-person trade organization operating out of rented offices in Great Falls to the operational and lobbying powerhouse it is today. He did so with an unmatched political savvy and personal charm that carried over to his and my personal relationship.”

During my years with him at MECA, I also took note of his personal life as a husband to his wonderful wife, Marla, and their two children, Bo and Kate. “Our dad encouraged us to follow our interests, made us thankful for a strong sense of place and also taught us the value of exploring the world and always treating people with humor and kindness,” wrote Bo when asked what he recalled most about his father.

Later, Jay would go on to pursue other interests, eventually serving as a trustee at Flathead Electric Cooperative – his love for electric co-ops strong to the end.

Much more could be said about Jay – so much more – but, in a nutshell, suffice it to say both I and the MECA family were blessed to have known him. Thank you, Jay, for being a part of our lives! 

Paul Harvey's Montana connection

By **GLENN KACZMAR** | *Missoula*

"HELLO Americans — This is Paul Harvey — Stand by for news!"

With these words, each episode of *Paul Harvey News and Comment* would begin daily for more than 58 years.

Twenty-two million listeners enjoyed Paul's distinctive style of speaking. Paul Harvey's connection to Montana is every bit as interesting as the man himself. Missoula would prove to be the training ground needed to further Paul's career to eventually become America's most trusted and original one-man news machine.

Paul Harvey interned at a few radio stations right out of high school. After a short gig as a reporter in Honolulu, his contract assignment came to an end just a few days before the bombing attack on Pearl Harbor. Paul's next opportunity to grow in radio came as he landed in Missoula with his wife Angel in early December 1941.

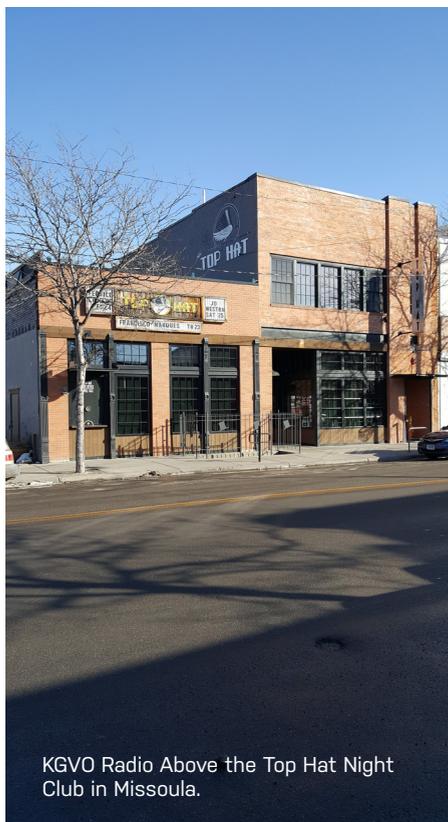
Missoula's first radio station, KGVO (Great Valley of Ours), was new to the airwaves. Paul was hired to do everything at the fledging station. Soon his creative juices kicked in and Paul was doing "live" man on the street interviews right on the sidewalks of downtown Missoula.

Today, you can relive Paul's pioneer radio work by walking the very sidewalks he walked. Imagine him stepping out from KGVO studio headquarters above Top Hat Night Club at 132 W. Front St. Paul instantly picks up the pace as he heads to interview the downtown passerby. He was seen all around Higgins Avenue, along Front and Main streets, and at the Missoula Mercantile.

Listeners were also sublimely stunned by the vivid scenery in Paul's airplane travel log. Montanans came out of their homes hoping to see Paul flying above only to later learn that the whole aired show was actually created



One of Paul Harvey's early jobs was at KGVO in Missoula, beginning in early December 1941.



KGVO Radio Above the Top Hat Night Club in Missoula.

in Paul's expansive imagination and as a demonstration of his superb writing skills.

All good things eventually come to an end. Paul's time in Missoula was all too short. Greater opportunities called with a much larger station in Kalamazoo, Michigan, WKZO. Missoula and all of Montana lost something special that day. Nevertheless, Paul remained friends with Art Mosby, the KGVO owner, the rest of his life. But our loss was the nation's gain as Paul was well on his way to converting his invaluable background into his eventual national show. Chicago, the city of big lights, made Paul and Angel part of its permanent family when *Paul Harvey News and Comment* first aired in 1951 for ABC News in Chicago.

So come walk the downtown streets of Missoula with Paul Harvey in your mind's eye. The historic journey will be well worth it.

To quote Paul, "And now you know the rest of the story. Good day!" RM

I PLAYED FETCH WITH A SKUNK LAST NIGHT

By **GREG BULL** | *Ashland*

It was around 9 p.m. when I walked to the front door, which was open to let some cool night air into the house. I heard scuffling sounds on the porch and flipped on the light to see what was making the ruckus. There, eating out of the dog food dish, was a skunk.

My faithful pooch, Spectra, was already in the house, bedded down for the night. One of the barn cats was cowering in the corner of the porch, bristled up like a fuzzy cactus, not impressed with the black and white invader. I spoke to the skunk through the screen door.

“Hey! That’s not your food, buddy.”

The skunk looked over his shoulder, shooting me a dirty look before wandering off to the edge of the porch. I stepped out the door and picked up the dog food dish to bring it inside. The skunk heard the dog food rattle in the dish and turned in my direction. He was staring at me with his head tilted to one side.

One could imagine his thoughts: “Why is this human taking my food away?”

I grabbed a piece of dog food and threw it at the skunk, hoping to scare it off. However, the piece of food missed its mark and rattled across the porch floor. To my amusement, the skunk scurried across the porch, chasing the rolling dog food. He grabbed the morsel, chomped on it for a bit and then turned to face me.

Hmmmm....do we have a game on our hands?

I tossed another piece of dog food in his direction and he again waddled after it, gobbling it down quickly.

This went on for a few minutes before the skunk grew bored with our



“
Why is this
human taking my
food away?”

– HUNGRY BUT
CURIOUS SKUNK

”

little game and wandered off the porch, disappearing into the night. I was somewhat bummed that my new friend was gone.

Fast forward to tonight.

A few minutes ago, more noises emanated from the porch. I leapt from my recliner, excited to play with my skunk buddy. When I opened the front door there was no skunk, but instead a fat raccoon was munching away on the dog food.

“Hi, raccoon! Want to play fetch?” I asked.

The coon spun around and charged off the porch into the night. I guess he doesn’t like to play games.

Maybe the skunk will stop by later.

RM

Submissions come pouring in for 2025 Reader Edition

BY RYAN HALL | RURAL MONTANA EDITOR

THIS is the 14th year we have done the annual Reader Edition, and our readers once again made us proud! We received more than 40 stories and poems, and hundreds of photos for this year's issue.

In this magazine you will find historical stories of celebrity connections to Montana, funny tales, event coverage and more. We have poems from young Montanans to adults, and even a war story.

Every submission, even the ones we couldn't squeeze in, was excellent, and many were thought-provoking. I wish we

had enough space to run them all – I wouldn't be surprised if some find their way into *Rural Montana* before next June.

We already can't wait to see what next year's Reader Edition will look like!!!



Ryan G. Hall, Editor

The Outlet

P o e m b y L O R I N E L S O N | S i m m s

You unplug your old green tractor,
from the outlet on the wall.
It's time to feed your cattle,
in the cold, you hear them bawl.

You don't give it too much thought,
when it starts up with a roar;
Electricity is something,
there's a million uses for.

Next, checking on the water,
that your cows drink as they please,
from the automatic trough,
and you pray it didn't freeze.

But it is plugged in too,
electric heat has kept it warm.
It should be able to withstand,
this winter's coldest storm.

The lethal grip of bitter cold,
can kill a newborn calf.
Sometimes human intervention,
must be made on their behalf.

A heat lamp's amber glow,
slaps the icy hand away.
As long as the power's on,
it won't steal any calves today!

But your power doesn't come,
from an outlet on the wall.
It's made possible by workers,
that are giving it their all.

From those working in the office,
to those who maintain powerlines,
and so many countless others,
who's efforts all combine.

These are the men and women
that bring light and warmth to you.
You don't have to look too far,
to see the work they do.

So when you plug your tractor in,
to make sure it will start,
spare a thought for the vast system,
of which that outlet is a part.





One step at a time

By **ROBIN MORRIS** | Columbus

I love mornings. While many of my friends enjoy lounging in bed, I'm up by 5 a.m. Before getting out of bed, I check the temperature on the thermometer that illuminates our ceiling. After that, I jump up, slip my barn coat over my robe, put on a stocking cap, muck boots and mittens, and head to the barn with the morning rations.

Every day, my herd of three — our 4-year-old Tennessee Walking Horse and 2-year-old John Mule, along with our Jenny Donkey, MaHon — gets a small scoop of steamed oats, drizzled with canola oil. If I'm even two minutes late with MaHon's feeding, she's braying for me. We suspect that the boys encourage her, as her bray carries so well. I always smile at her impatience.

This morning, however, there was no braying. I called for MaHon, but only the boys responded with their quiet murmurs and grunts. Concerned, I gave the boys their rations and headed out into the pitch-black pasture, calling for MaHon. After what seemed like an eternity, I heard a tiny squeak that soon grew into a bray as I moved closer.

To give some context, we've had an extraordinary winter. Since November, the ground has been covered in snow, with layers of rain turning to ice. By morning, a 300-square-foot ice pond separated the pasture from the paddock. The boys made it across, but

MaHon panicked after slipping on the ice and froze. Donkeys internalize fear and tend to shut down. I walked out to reassure her, and John Henry, my mule, followed, confident on the ice. I brought him back to the paddock and went to fetch "hospital socks" — the kind with rubber paw prints — saved from my husband's hospital stay years ago.

Back in the pasture, MaHon was relieved to see me. I greeted her with a stroke and a cookie, hoping to distract her from the ice. I haltered her and slipped on her socks — rubber ones in the front and regular tube socks in the rear. She looked adorable in her bright blue socks, and it made me smile.

Though she was still scared of falling, I adopted my calm, patient donkey persona.

"We have all day, MaHon," I reassured her, offering gentle encouragement.

After a few hesitant steps, I rewarded her with a cookie break. Donkeys process things slowly, but once they get it, they've got it. After several steps and some coaxing, MaHon followed me across the icy pond and into the paddock, where she finished her breakfast slowly and steadily.

I could have left her out to wait for the ice to melt, but I couldn't. It was another opportunity for her to trust me, and that's worth more than anything.

RM

How Boys Became Men

By **RICH TURNER** | Kalispell

I didn't fully appreciate until well after

The square bale wisdom and the round bale laughter, The sweaty advice that cuts and bruises,

Where boys become men as each one chooses To heed the wisdom, to release or to hold, To the endless truths in the valuable stories of old.

"If you don't stack it right, son, It'll fall to the ground.

And if you treat her right, She'll most likely stick around."

"Red sky at night, Sailor's delight.

Red sky in the morning, Sailors take warning."

Truths about death, about life, and about love,

And what will happen when Jesus returns from above.

The talks that take place sometimes before but mostly after,

And occasionally between throws or while climbing a loft ladder.

The practical lessons that school books can't teach,

Of which most city folk will find well out of reach.

These are the moments he recalled in the end,

When I'm holding his hand and he tells me,

"Son, this is how boys became men." RM

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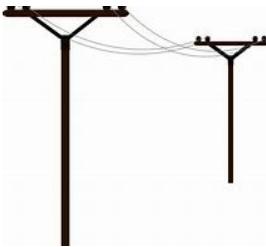
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ALONG THESE LINES . . .



SUMMER ELECTRICAL SAFETY TIPS

- **Stay away from power lines:** Never approach downed power lines or anything touching them. Assume all power lines are energized and maintain a safe distance (at least 10 feet).
- **Use outdoor-rated equipment:** Use extension cords and electrical equipment specifically designed for outdoor use.
- **Inspect equipment:** Regularly inspect cords and equipment for damage and replace any damaged items.
- **Protect outlets:** Use weatherproof covers or GFCIs on outdoor outlets.
- **Grounding:** Ensure electrical equipment is properly grounded, especially when using it near water.
- **Ladder safety:** When using ladders near power lines, use a clean, dry wooden or fiberglass ladder and keep it well away from the lines.
- **Generators:** If using a generator, position it outdoors away from doors, windows, and vents, and never leave it unattended.
- **Storms:** Unplug appliances and secure loose objects during storms.
- **Teach children:** Educate children about the dangers of electricity and safe practices.

Source: Internet

2024 ALLOCATION OF CAPITAL CREDITS

For most of our active members who were members in 2024 you should have seen this message on your May bill statement: *****SAVE THIS BILL*****YOUR 2024 ALLOCATION INFORMATION IS ON THIS BILL. PLEASE RETAIN THIS BILL FOR YOUR PERMANENT RECORDS. Then in the 'Billing Messages' was an explanation of Allocations as well as the amount that was allocated from 2024 to your capital credit account. REMEMBER: 1. You do not owe these amounts. 2. These amounts are not now payable and do not represent cash but rather your equity in your Cooperative. 3. You cannot apply these amounts to your electric bill.

SUMMER IS CONSTRUCTION TIME — Remember to obtain an electrical permit!

This institution is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

*The following essay, written by Abigayle Fay, a Forsyth High School sophomore, was selected by a cooperative committee as the winner in this spring's "Youth to Washington" contest. In June, Abigayle and 28 other Montana winners will join more than 1,500 students for a week in Washington D.C. to tour the sights and visit their congressmen. The topic that the students were asked to write about was: **What was the most important event to have occurred in our nation during your lifetime? How did it affect you?** Her essay is reprinted here for your enjoyment.*

Where were you when the world stopped turning, that September day? Ask any adult where they were on September 11, 2001 and they can tell you exactly where they were and what they were doing. Where was I on September 11, 2001? Well, I was nothing more than a twinkle in my mom and dad's eyes. You see, I wasn't born until the year 2009, nearly eight years after 9-11, but the aftermath of that pivotal event carried on through the year of my birth and many years thereafter. I cannot tell you what it felt like to experience the events of 9-11, but I can tell you about the most important event that happened to our country, in my lifetime, as a direct result. That is the War on Terror. The War on Terror was the longest war in American history. It is one of the most devastating, yet heroic events to ever happen. The war happened in Afghanistan and Iraq, and it affected the world as a whole, but it also affected me personally because my uncle was in the military at the time the war was going on. He fought in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom for the War on Terror.

The war started on September 11, 2001, the day we remember. It was such a sad day and a monumental event, that it is still taught in schools today. Ever since I was little, I've heard about 9-11, but I didn't fully understand it until I entered Elementary school. Every year on September 11th, the teachers play videos about the World Trade Centers, and talk about it, telling us what happened that day. They explain that 9-11 changed America, not only launching us into war, but calling for changes in security like we had never seen before. Men and women responded by enlisting in the U.S. military services, while active service men and women were ready and honored to take up the fight against terror for our great nation.

My uncle Eric was one of those service men. Eric enlisted in the Army in September 1998 and served as a Green Beret in the Special Forces. During the War on Terror, he went on five Afghan tours, two Iraqi tours, one Egypt tour, one Jordan tour, and one Tajikistan tour. That is 10 tours of duty, where he was in combat or in a hostile environment to prevent another terrorist attack from occurring in America. Uncle Eric served in the Army until May 2017, retiring only two years before the War on Terror ended.

My uncle was in the army before I was born in 2009, and continued to serve until I was eight years old. I remember having a conversation at our dinner table with my mom about Eric being in the war when I was young. She was talking with my dad about my uncle being in the middle of combat, and I asked what they were talking about. She said, "Your uncle, Eric. He has to eat with a lot of people he doesn't know. He does not get to sit around the table with his family for dinner every night." At the time, I didn't even know I had another uncle, because I had never seen him in person, unlike all of my other family. I asked my mom why he had to eat with people he didn't know and she had said, "Because he's in another country, fighting bad people." I didn't understand, but she had gone back to talking with my dad about my uncle, his brother, so I didn't ask her what she meant. Over time, of course, I understood what my parents meant, and just how important it was to our nation and our family personally.

I've had to live in a time of war that I wasn't even alive to see start, almost my entire life. My generation has grown up thinking it is normal for America to be at war, because that has been our experience. I have lived through a war for 2/3 of my life. Although I didn't really understand what was happening in my younger years, the War on Terror still affected me. My uncle was away for so long serving in the military, that I was denied the opportunity to get to know him well. I heard many stories about my Uncle Eric, but they were always told to me from other family members, not from Eric directly. All my grandparents' stories were told to me from their mouths, but my uncle's stories never were.

By the end of his 19 years of service, my Uncle Eric earned four Bronze Star Medals, a Bronze Star Medal with Valor, two Purple Hearts, a Meritorious Service Medal, an Army Commendation Medal with Valor, three NCO Professional Development Ribbons, an Air Assault Badge, a Combat Infantry Badge, an Expert Infantry Badge, a Parachutist Badge, and a Special Forces Tab. I did not understand the full awesomeness of his army experience until my 6th grade year, when I interviewed him for a school project. It was then that I realized my Uncle Eric is a military hero for our family and for all American citizens. The sacrifices he made, putting his life in danger and being away from his family, were to protect this nation during the War on Terror. The motto of the green beret is "De Oppresso Liber," which means, "free the oppressed." Uncle Eric said to me, "This is the greatest country on the planet. I am lucky to be a citizen of this country. We need to do what we can to make the world a better place. I have been blessed to make a difference in people's lives. Take your talents and gifts and use them to the best of your ability."

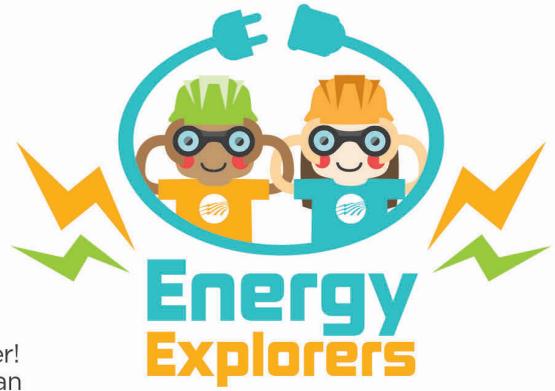
How lucky I am to learn such important life lessons from my uncle! The extensive War on Terror was the most important event to occur during my lifetime. I personally count myself blessed to have learned that amidst the death, destruction, and fear of war, come patriotism, humanitarianism, and heroism.



SOLAR ENERGY WORD SEARCH

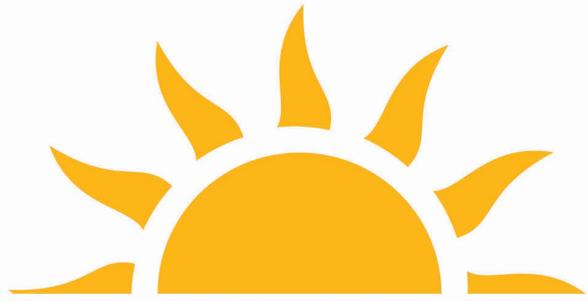
Did you know solar panels turn sunlight into electricity? When the sun shines on the panels, tiny particles of light hit cells on the panels to create a flow of energy, like magic sunlight turning into power! The electricity then travels across power lines and can be used to light up homes, charge gadgets and more.

Can you find all the words associated with solar energy in the puzzle below?



WORD BANK

- | | |
|------------------|---------------------|
| Solar | Sunlight |
| Panel | Efficiency |
| Renewable | Installation |
| Energy | Rooftop |



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

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:

What can Congress do to address delays in federal funding, such as the RUS program and FEMA, that could impact electric cooperatives?

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>
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Representative Ryan Zinke

I have been a longtime supporter of the Rural Utilities Service (RUS) at USDA and programs like it. In rural parts of Montana, broadband and reliable electricity are sometimes hard to come by, and RUS funding dedicated to building the infrastructure that makes those services possible is essential. Like many things in the federal government, delays often stem from bureaucracy. The permitting process for accessing these funds must be streamlined, redundant reviews and environmental permits can turn good projects into walls of paperwork. That system needs to be modernized.

While the administration has targeted cuts to federal spending in various areas, it is primar-

ily up to Congress to allocate that funding. I'm working directly to support rural infrastructure. In 2024, I secured \$35 million for 12 separate Western Montana infrastructure, rural development and public safety projects, including \$200,000 in rural broadband funding for Anaconda-Deer Lodge, and I'm actively working on this year's appropriations bills to make sure that rural infrastructure needs are represented. Infrastructure is one of the biggest barriers for access to essential services in rural areas, but it's too often overlooked by Washington; I'm committed to making sure programs like RUS work, and that our rural communities are not left behind.

RM


Rep. Downing

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Ph: (202) 225-3211?

Representative Troy Downing

IMEDIATELY upon entering office, President Donald Trump signed an executive order declaring a national energy emergency acknowledging the importance of a "reliable supply of energy and the integrity of our nation's electrical grid." On April 8, the president signed an additional executive order specifically addressed at "strengthening the reliability and security of the United States electric grid." Furthermore, USDA Secretary Rollins just recently announced the deployment of \$340.6 million in disaster assistance to deliver relief to farmers, ranchers and rural communities impacted by natural disasters that have caused devastation across the country, including dedicated funds to repair electric infrastructure.

It's clear that this administration is taking

swift and proactive action to address America's electric infrastructure needs, and both FEMA and the Department of Agriculture's Rural Utilities Service are key components to delivering on its promises. Look no further than a recent success story from Ralls County Electric Cooperative in Missouri, which secured \$28.6 million in RUS financing to help the cooperative expand and improve service across its territory.

For our part, Republicans in Congress are working to codify President Trump's executive actions, including those that bolster our electrical grid, into law. As this Congress considers funding for RUS and FEMA, I welcome further input from Montana Electric Cooperatives' Associations' members so that I might best represent your interests.

RM

No 'cash in' for Charlie Russell

By JANE LAMBERT | Stevensville

If a brave cowboy friend had not stayed out in a blizzard early in Charlie Russell's wrangling career, we wouldn't have known of his existence, or of his wonderful art talent.

Charlie had been hired by the Judith Basin Pool to "jingle" the horses being used on the fall roundup. A fierce storm blew in, stranding Charlie and the horse band up the Dry Wolf Creek drainage. A number of his cronies rode out to find him, but the heavy, blowing snow made them all return to camp. Well, not quite ALL. Pete Vann braved the storm until he found Charlie.

In Charlie's words, "...I was nearly in, when Peet found me so weak and cold, that Peet had to rope and saddle a fresh hoss and help me mount. A few more hours would have meant the cash in for me... and if my big laffing friend had turned back I believe I would be across the range waiting for him now."

(Art, not spelling/grammar was CMR's forte.)

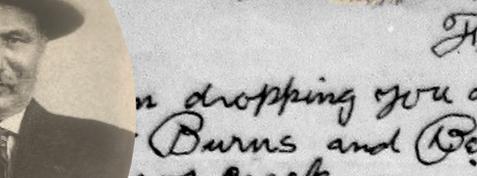
These were words written by Charlie on September 10, 1918, to his Elks Lodge in Great Falls after Pete passed away. Further evidence that Pete Vann saved Charles M. Russell's life is in the words of the letter, which Charlie sent Pete before his death.

Charlie wrote, "You found camp and got me and the saddle bunch both through the storm, and that was some storme Pete... you was a cow and hoss man and nobody could lose you on the prairie day or night an you deserved credit for getting them hosses in, but you fell down when you brought CM Russell back to camp."

Those of us who love and value the Russell art totally disagree with that last statement. Charlie became the



Pete Vann



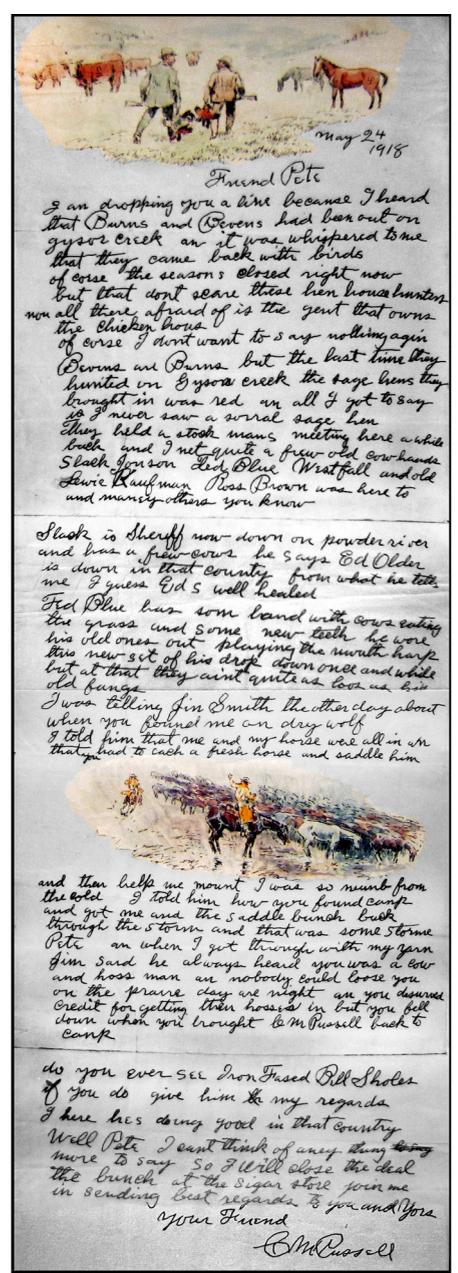
highest-paid living artist of his time, and left us with an authentic time capsule of Montana's open range cattle culture via artwork.

THANK YOU Pete Vann!

Pete was born in 1863, of Metis descent, and moved with his family to Montana when he was 12. He did some freighting, then in 1880 moved to the Judith Basin and got the job of night-hawk, taking care of the remuda at night. He aspired to be a real hand, and began to burn the candle at both ends, cowboying some during the day. When he was caught sleeping on the night job, Charlie Russell replaced him. They wished each other well and became good friends, evidenced by this testimony in the Elks letter.

"Pete and I were friends since boy hood in the days when friendship ment more than a hand shake. Our home was where we spread our blankets... Its the lonesome, motherless places that tie men's hearts to gether in a way that time distance or mans law not even death can break, for the grave cannot steal from memory, our friend."

For the rest of the story make a trip to the C.M. Russell Museum in Great Falls. Charlie's art and Pete Vann's rescue story are on full display. **RM**



Montana's Race to the Sky

Story by **MARREA MATTHEWS** | Hamilton

THE excitement of the coming race was evident on the faces of the spectators, the volunteer crew, mushers and especially the dogs. The energy of expectation continued to build as the race to the Sky sled dog race neared. The day was gorgeous and sunny after several days of gray skies and heavy snow. Everyone was thrilled to be outdoors.

The parking lot of Hi-Country Trading Post in Lincoln filled hours before the race, so parking spread to the shoulder of the highway. People filed into the store to pick up souvenirs and Hi-Country jerky. Kids played on the piles of snow. Just before the 2 p.m. start, folks began lining both sides of the chute just beyond the iconic arch.

The 300-milers set out first. The snow was loose and deep, making for a slow race. First out was Leon Church, who had driven from Bowsman, Manitoba. Then Wade Donaldson from Coalville, Utah, was followed by local favorites Charmayne Morrison from Bozeman, and Clayton Perry of Power.

When 100-miler Nicole Lombardi slid through the crossing from where I watched, a guy next to me said, "She's gonna win, just watch!" Well, Nicole came close to winning — finishing second to Sean de Wolski from Alaska.

About midnight, I was called out to post a turn onto a section of the Blackfoot Clearwater WPA. It was quiet, dark and beautiful. I sat warm in my van listening to podcasts. As racers' headlights came towards me, I readied my flashlight to shine on the trailhead. The temp dropped to 6 degrees by morning. Each musher called out a muffled, "Thanks!" as they swished by. The dogs still ran with excited energy.

The peaceful night sped by. Snow continued coming in squalls. Between them, the gibbous moon lit up the snow and the stars twinkled brightly.

After the last team passed, I drove on to Monture Creek. There I found Roy, a race organizer, who was needed to find a missing team. I covered his spot while he left for the last known place of that team. Later, I heard the team got stuck in deep snow on Huckleberry Pass near Lincoln. They all got out safely. The new snow also built up at Owl Creek Primitive Checkpoint North of Seeley Lake, forcing organizers to reroute the racers. They began finishing Sunday night.

Since 1986, Lincoln, Whitetail Ranch and Seeley Lake have lent support to the Race To The Sky. The race commemorates Camp Rimini, a training camp set up for the invasion of Norway in 1943. Knowing I had helped continue a Montana tradition felt wonderful. RM





How the wind got the better of me

STORY BY **BETHANY NOBLE**, AGE 14 | MISSOULA

THE unrelenting lake wind whipped through my hair, chilling my damp body. My small biceps strove to move the oar through the water, which seemed as thick as over-beaten cake batter. I looked over at my mom, and she was also having a hard time pushing her cumbersome paddleboard against the wind. It was a sunny day at Holland Lake, but the breeze over the clear water felt cold.

My whole family: Dad, my brother, Mom and I, had taken our paddleboards out into the middle of the lake, not realizing how strong the wind would be. When my dad thought it was time to start heading back, the wind began to fight us. Soon I lagged behind the boys with Mom, my body desperately yelling at me to rest.

"Hey, Dad!" I shouted at Dad's back. The wind pushed my voice back at me, and I looked at Mom helplessly. The harder I pushed at the stubborn water with my oar, the more tired I became. I lay down on my board and dangled my hand in the water for a moment, trying to catch my breath. It had been easy to go as far as we did, as the wind aided us, but going back to the beach was very difficult. Slowly, I sat up and again began my monotonous paddling.

"It doesn't feel like we're going anywhere," I complained to Mom.

"I know," she said. "This reminds me of the time I wanted to go all the way

to the waterfall at the other end of the lake."

She smiled reminiscently.

"Maybe the boys will come help us," I said, swallowing my pride.

We shouted at my brother and Dad, and finally they heard us. Turning around, they paddled with great strength over to where we floated, brave sailors worn down by the unrelenting gusts.

"What's wrong?" asked Dad, the bright sun reflecting on his sunscreen-white face.

We told him our problem, and he and my brother began tying their boards to ours with some thin rope that was attached to their paddleboards. Full of thanks and aching muscles, I allowed my paddleboard to be towed by Dad, as Mom was towed by my brother. I tried to help paddle our connected boards as much as I could, but Dad did most of the work.

Finally, our old camping chairs came into view, and we made it back to the beach. I don't remember much about the rest of my family's eventful lake-day, but I'm sure we had lots of fun swimming and eating burgers.

Whenever I look back upon that beautiful summer day, I'm thankful for my two strong men and their muscles. A lesson to others: if you ever decide to go really far out on a windy lake, don't forget the brawn. RM



BATHING BLUEBIRDS

By **LAURIE TONKEY**
Three Forks

I had some little friends
Come visit me today.
They twirled and splashed a lot
As I watched them play.

They took their turns each time.
But also jumped right in.
The dance of flapping spins...
This was my epic win.

You see, my front row seat,
Is only just for me.
Their trust is evident.
That's why I watch with glee.

These bluebirds bring me hope
And happiness galore.
I look for their return
When spring arrives once more.

Until then I will wait.
I know they're on their way.
My feathered friends draw nigh.
I'm yearning for that day!

RESCUE AT SEA

By **STEPHEN LITTFIN**, Capt. USN
(ret) | *Kalispell*

I was Officer-of-the-Deck onboard a U.S. Navy destroyer on a clear moonless night in May 1989. Few images etch themselves as indelibly as does the Milky Way on such a night.

We were transiting the South China Sea enroute to San Diego via the Philippine Islands. Glad to be completing a six-month Persian Gulf deployment, we were five weeks and some 6,000 miles from home. Outside on the bridge wing I could smell the salt air and feel the cool breeze as I scanned the horizon with binoculars, searching for the lights of other vessels. I saw none. From where I stood, I could reasonably expect to see the lights of vessels out to a distance of 15 to 17 miles. My job included being aware of all other vessel traffic within that 700 to 900 square-mile circle of ocean.

At 2 a.m. the signalman reported a faint light 15 degrees off the port (left) bow. But with no corresponding radar signal, the light's range couldn't be determined. I looked out along that line of bearing and saw nothing. A minute later the signalman reported it as a possible distress signal, an SOS. I looked again, and this time could see a very faint though unintelligible flickering light. A short time passed and the signalman confirmed the SOS. I woke the captain.

Thirty minutes later we approached the flickering light and found 35 people, mostly women and children, pressed together into a small open boat that bobbed and bumped clumsily against the side of our ship as we tied up. We later learned they had been at sea for two



weeks, and adrift for several days. Two elderly men had perished in the days before we found them. Their fuel had run out and what provisions remained were a few gallons of fresh water and a few pounds of rice. Seeing our lights in the distance, they perilously built a fire on the deck of their small wooden craft and signaled SOS with a blanket. They were clearly terrified as we approached, acutely aware of pirates that had been robbing, raping and killing refugees fleeing Vietnam in this manner. But such were their options.

As it happened, we had a young sailor onboard who'd been rescued under similar circumstances years earlier. Following his rescue, Ben Nguyen was sponsored by a family in Minnesota, and joined the Navy when he turned 18. Now 21-years-old and fluent in Vietnamese and French, Petty Officer Third-class Benjamin Nguyen was summoned to the bridge by the captain. Having just been relieved from watch two hours earlier, Ben reported to the

captain with bed-head, flip-flops and a *Harvesters of Sorrow* Metallica T-shirt. Rubbing his eyes and yawning, he awaited instructions.

"Petty Officer Nguyen, ask if they're Vietnamese," the captain said.

Our ship's floodlights harshly illuminated the small craft below, its occupants' faces, betraying alternating dread and relief. A baby's cry was quickly muffled as Petty Officer Nguyen leaned over the ship's railing to address them, his reassuring features advanced and receded with the mid-sea swells. By now the rest of the ship's crew was awake, curious and hushed as they anticipated Ben's query; would it be, "*Này đây! Mấy người Việt?*" Or perhaps its continental equivalent, "*Êtes-vous Vietnamiens?*"

"Hey! Are you guys Vietnamese?!" he asked, in English.

Turns out, they were. Three days later we delivered them to the naval base at Subic Bay, Philippines, and left them to the care of United Nations authorities. RM

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 July, send your favorite Ice Cream or Frozen recipes by June 17. Please send in August recipes anytime: Your best recipes that use sausage (breakfast, bratwurst, Italian, wild game, hotdog, chorizo, salami etc). Try to limit the ingredients and length of directions for space. Please include a photo, if possible.

1st
PLACE

Southwest Bean Salad

Orry Nail | WHITEFISH

DRESSING

- 1/4 cup ketchup
- 1/4 cup vinegar
- 1/4 cup olive oil
- 3 T brown sugar
- 1 T chili powder
- 1 tsp. ground cumin
- 1 T Worcestershire sauce
- 1 tsp. Tabasco
- 1 tsp. salt
- 1-1/2 T Dijon mustard

Combine all ingredients except the mustard in a small saucepan. Bring to a boil, reduce to a simmer for 10 minutes. Whisk in the mustard. Set aside to cool.

SALAD

- 1 can (15 oz.) black beans
- 1 can (15 oz.) garbanzo beans
- 1 can (15 oz.) pinto or kidney beans
- 1 can (15 oz.) corn
- 1 small green or red bell pepper, diced
- 1 small sweet onion, diced
- 1 bag chili cheese Fritos chips

Drain and rinse the beans, drain the corn. Place beans, corn, bell pepper and onion in a large bowl, mix well. Pour dressing over and mix to coat evenly.

Just before serving, stir in the chili cheese chips, or serve on the side.



2nd
PLACE

Aunt Terry's Favorite Pasta Salad

Pamela Forrest | ROUNDUP

INGREDIENTS

- 1-1/2 lb. ditalini pasta
- 1/2 lb. bacon
- 1 red bell pepper, diced
- 1 orange bell pepper, diced
- 1 English cucumber, diced
- 1/2 red onion, diced
- 1/2 cup Parmesan cheese, grated
- 1 cup Italian dressing



DIRECTIONS

In a frying pan over medium-high heat, cook bacon until crispy. Remove to a paper-towel-covered plate.

Cook pasta in boiling water for 2 minutes less (or preference) than directed on the package. Drain in a colander and rinse with cold water. Move to mixing bowl, cover and cool in refrigerator for 30 minutes.

Chop cooked bacon into bites.

Combine cooled pasta with vegetables, bacon bits and Parmesan cheese. Toss with Italian dressing.

Cover and store in refrigerator until ready to serve (up to 4 days).



3rd
PLACE

Pecan Crunch Salad

Ellie Wolfe, 10
LIVINGSTON

INGREDIENTS

- 1 small head of romaine or leaf lettuce, shredded
- 1 cucumber, diced
- 3 celery stalks, diced
- 2 avocados, diced
- 1 cup pecans, chopped
- 10 oz. cream cheese
- 1/4 cup balsamic vinegar
- 2 T honey

DIRECTIONS

Combine lettuce, cucumber, celery, avocados and pecans in a large bowl.

Crumble the cream cheese over the salad.

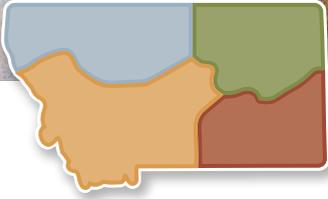
Drizzle with balsamic vinegar and honey mixture.

Toss gently and enjoy!



Events Calendar

Events | What's Happening?



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 June 17 for July events. Include date, time, site, city and contact number with your event. **Events without such info will not be used.**

NORTHWEST

June 2, 9, 23

Downtown Kalispell Walking Tour — Northwest Montana History Museum, 10 a.m., 756-8381 | **KALISPELL**

June 5-8

Kootenai Creation Fest — Free fair and conference that demonstrates how the Bible is supported by today's science, www.kootenaiCreationFest.org for more information | **LIBBY**

June 7

Author Colleen O'Brien in conversation with book reviewer Maggie Doherty — Conversation about her book *Baited*, set in Glacier Park, Bigfork Library, 11 a.m., 471-1451 | **BIGFORK**

June 14

Shelby Kiwanis Kite Festival — City Shop Road, 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. | **SHELBY**

June 14

Story Concert Fundraiser for The Making Place — True stories shared live by Flathead Story Concerts, White Raven Winery, 6 to 9 p.m., 747-238-0038 | **COLUMBIA FALLS**

June 14

Humane Society of Northwest Montana Summer Shindig Event — Humane Society of Northwest Montana, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., 752-7297 | **SHELBY**

June 18

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

June 21

American Cancer Society Relay for Life of Northwest Montana — Walk-a-thon, Lincoln County HS Track Facility, 5 to 11 p.m., www.relayforlife.org/northwestmt for more information | **EUREKA**

SOUTHWEST

June 2

Kids' Day Camp — Topic: My Montana Plate, for kids 5-12 years of age, Judith Basin County Feeders Sale Barn, 10 a.m. to 3 p.m., 380-0051 | **HOBSON**

June 7, 14, 21, 28

Haas Country Market — Saturdays, 5189 Hwy. 93, 9 a.m. to 2 p.m., 777-3638 | **FLORENCE**

June 14

Fun on the Farm — Fun, educational activities throughout the day, E.L. Peterson Ranch, 10 a.m. to 3 p.m., 380-0051 | **JUDITH GAP**

June 15

73rd Annual Roy Rodeo — 1 p.m., 464-2135 | **ROY**

June 20-21

37th Annual Lewis & Clark Festival — Demos, speakers, music featuring Supaman, art and more, www.leisandclarkfoundation.org/news-events for more information, Lewis & Clark Interpretive Center, Fri: 6:30 to 8 p.m., Sat: 9:30 a.m. to 4 p.m., 452-5661 | **GREAT FALLS**

June 27-29

Big Sky Draft Horse Expo — Celebrating 30 years, Powell Co. Fairgrounds, 490-1305 | **DEER LODGE**

June 30, July 14, 28

Shields Valley Farmers Market — Holliday Park, 4:30 to 7 p.m., 686-4084 | **CLYDE PARK**

STATEWIDE

All year

Blood Drives — Various locations, see website for full schedule, redcrossblood.org.

Blood Drives — See website for full details, vitalant.org.

NORTHEAST

June 7

Circle Community Garage Sale — The sales are around town, pick up a map at the Library, 8 a.m. to 2 p.m., 485-4782 | **CIRCLE**

June 9

Kids' Day Camp — Topic: My Montana Plate, for kids 5-12 years of age, Whitewater School Cafeteria, 10 a.m. to 3 p.m., 380-0051 | **WHITEWATER**

June 10

Kids' Day Camp — For kids 5-12 years of age, Ft. Peck Interpretive Center, 10 a.m. to 3 p.m., 380-0051 | **FORT PECK**

June 12-14

Wild West Days — Downtown Poplar, 768-3305 | **POPLAR**

June 27-29

Milk River Gospel Jamboree — Malta High School Auditorium, 301-2887 | **MALTA**

July 4

Zortman 4th of July Celebration — Volunteer Fire Department fundraiser, Parade starts at 11 a.m., prizes, activities, food and more, 673-3648 | **ZORTMAN**

July 9-12

Wolf Point Wild Horse Ranch Rodeo & Stampede — Marvin Brookman Stadium, Wed: 6 p.m., Thu-Sat: 7 p.m., 650-7460 | **WOLF POINT**

SOUTHEAST

June 7

Montana PikeMasters Annual Kids Fishing Day — Lion's Family Park, 9 a.m. to 2 p.m., 690-4044 | **LAUREL**

June 12

Kids' Day Camp — For kids 5-12 years of age, Lavina Public School, 10 a.m. to 3 p.m., 380-0051 | **LAVINA**

July 12

Pub Station Presents Sara Evans with special guests Braxton Keith and Kenny Feidler — ZooMontana, 6 p.m., 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 US YOUR SUMMER
DRAWINGS AND POEMS



Harlo Heitert, Somers | **FLATHEAD ELECTRIC**

Maggie Oylear, 13, Ashland | **TONGUE ELECTRIC**

Amiyah Reed, 8, Swan Lake | **MISSOULA ELECTRIC**

Kaisa Benson, 8, Kalispell | **FLATHEAD ELECTRIC**





ON THE GO

READER PHOTO CHALLENGE

Reader Submissions | Photos

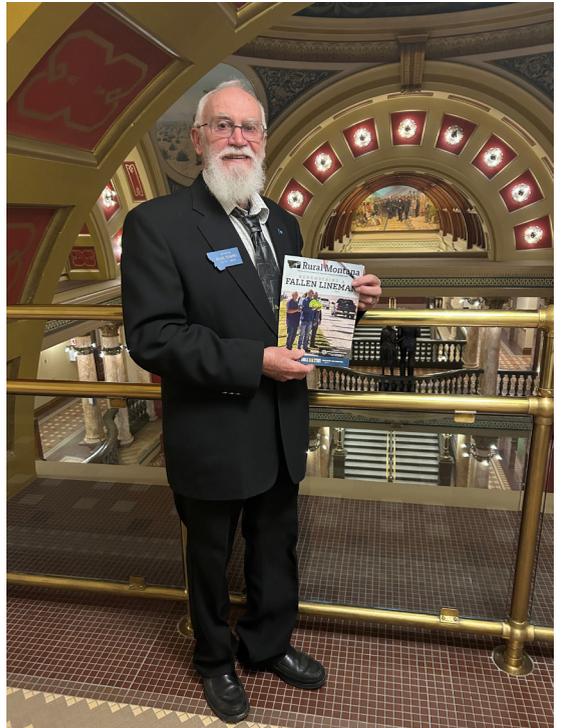
DON'T FORGET TO SEND US YOUR FAVORITE PHOTOS/ARTWORK FOR OUR USUAL READER PAGE AS WELL

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.



Pyramid Page Turner

Charlotte Kutsch of Bozeman passes the time with *RM* after touring the Step Pyramid in Saqqara, Egypt.



Capitol Connection

Sen. **Russ Tempel of Chester** poses with his *Rural Montana* in the hallways of the state Capitol in Helena.

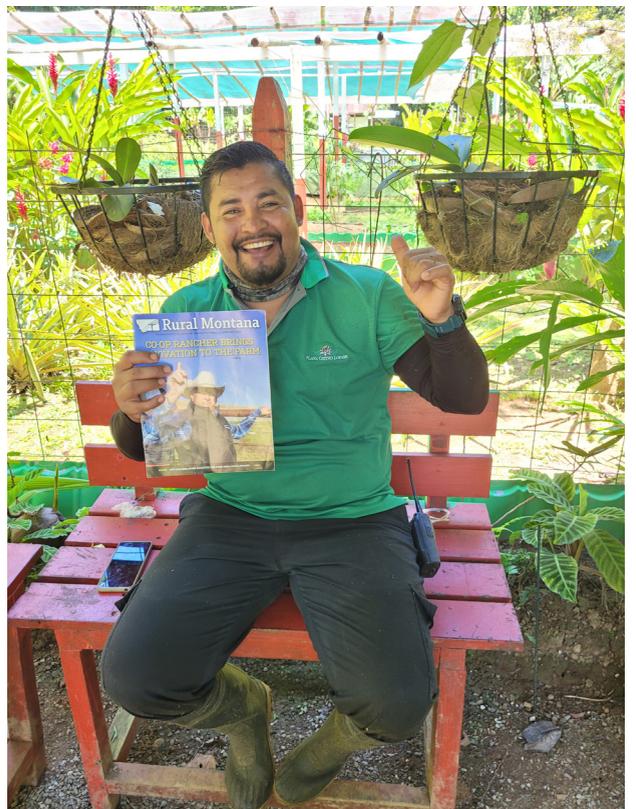


Sand and Stories

Eliza, 4, and Allie, 2, daughters of Alicia Schreiber, who took this photo, pose on a beach in the southeastern U.S.

RM in Costa Rica

A Costa Rican farmer poses with a *Rural Montana* magazine at the request of **Keith Liehr of Whitefish**, who took this photo.

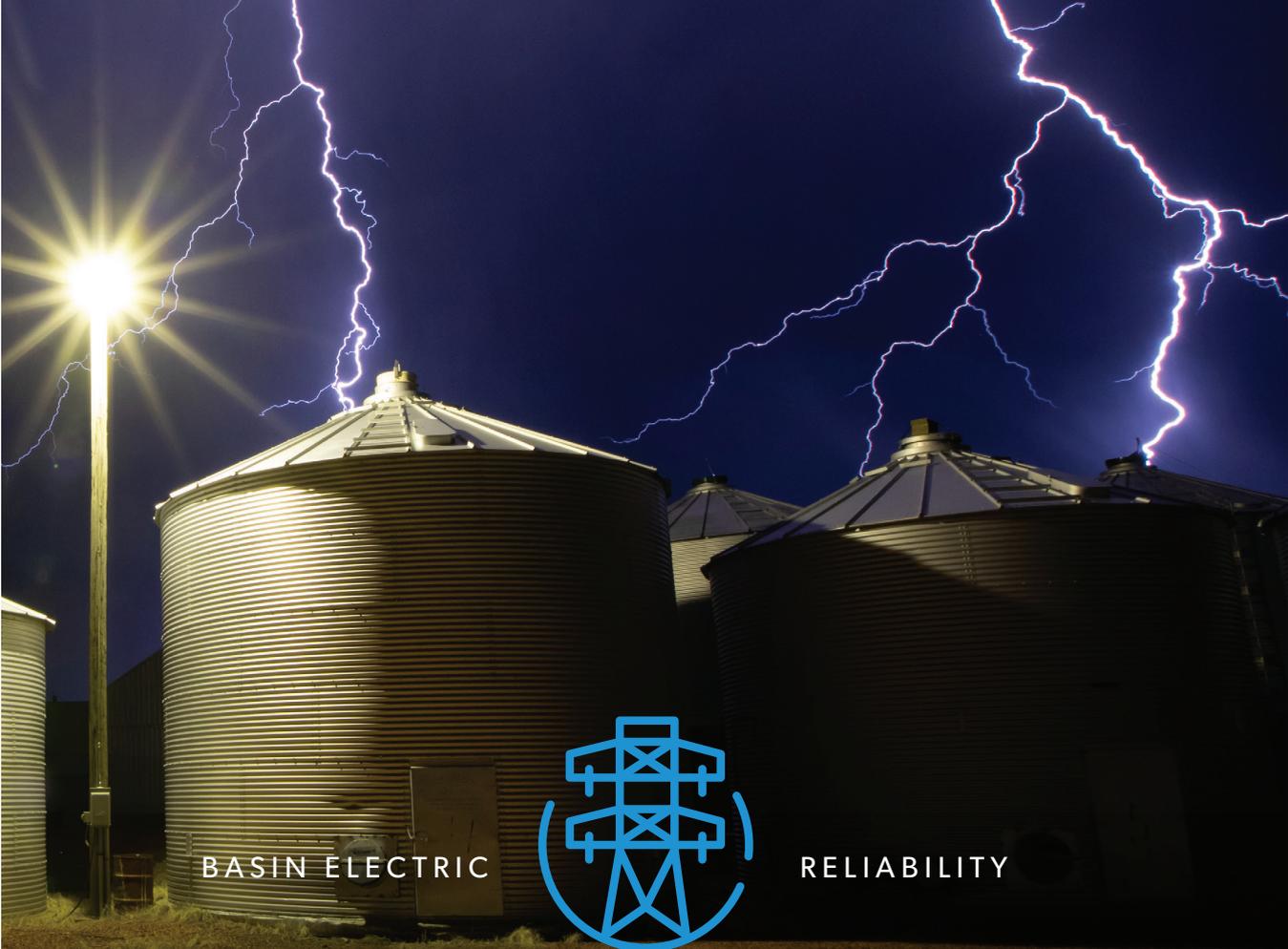


The logo consists of the letters 'RM' in a white, bold, sans-serif font, set against a dark teal background that is shaped like the state of Montana.

The Magazine of the
Montana Electric Cooperatives'
Association

Visit us online: www.mtco-ops.com

Email: rural@mtco-ops.com

A photograph of several large, cylindrical metal silos at night. A bright street lamp on the left illuminates the scene, and several bright lightning bolts are visible in the dark sky. The silos are lit from below, creating a strong contrast with the dark background.

BASIN ELECTRIC

A stylized, light blue icon of a lightning bolt or power tower, enclosed within a circular frame. The icon is composed of geometric shapes representing the structure of a power line tower.

RELIABILITY

POWER YOU CAN
ALWAYS DEPEND ON

No matter the season or storm our members face, Basin Electric provides reliable and affordable electricity for our members' homes, schools, and businesses. We'll do everything we can to keep fans running, the lights on, and the coffee brewing.

The logo for Basin Electric Power Cooperative, featuring a stylized blue and white graphic of a power line tower or a similar structure.

**BASIN ELECTRIC
POWER COOPERATIVE**
A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative 