



Rural Montana

Montana Electric Cooperatives' Association Magazine | OCTOBER 2025



A PLACE OF HONOR

CO-OPS DONATE TO GET BUST OF BLACKFEET CHIEF IN STATE CAPITOL

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COVER

About our cover: Rep. Tyson Running Wolf stands next to a bust of Earl Old Person. Rep. Running Wolf is working with Sen. Susan Webber to get the sculpture placed in the state Capitol. **Photo by Ryan Hall.**

Rural Montana

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CEO | Viewpoint



Chief Earl Old Person bust needs to be in the Capitol

MARK LAMBRECHT, CEO of Montana Electric Cooperatives' Association



In this issue, you will read about the bust honoring the late Blackfeet Nation Chief, Earl Old Person.

You may ask why Montana's co-ops contributed significantly to the effort to have the bust displayed in the Capitol. The simple answer is it's the right thing to do and the right time to do it. Paintings in the Rotunda include mountain man Jim Bridger, prospector Henry Finnis Edgar, Salish Chief Charlo and a cowboy — all commissioned by Montana's first governor, Joseph Toole, for the building's opening in 1902. Busts of Senators Thomas J. Walsh and Burton K. Wheeler, and Representative Joseph M. Dixon, are placed on three of the four shelves in the Rotunda, while the fourth remains vacant. It's way past time for another Native American to be honored in the Rotunda, and Chief Old Person is the obvious choice.

MECA is committed to serving Montana's tribal communities. Its member co-ops provide electricity to six Indian reservations and thousands of tribal members statewide. Many co-ops have Native American trustees, managers and employees who are members

of MECA's Tribal Relations Committee, which ensures tribal perspectives are strongly considered by all co-ops.

Co-ops and the Montana American Indian Caucus worked together on several important issues last legislative session, including efforts to bolster law enforcement on Indian reservations and programs to address missing and murdered indigenous persons. The caucus was significantly influential in helping co-ops pass their priority wildfire legislation.

We'll be working together again next session on a bill for the bust to be displayed in the Rotunda. I expect we'll also find other opportunities to collaborate on issues benefiting co-ops and tribes.

The future of Montana's electric cooperatives is best secured by a strong commitment to partner with the tribal communities they serve. Advocating for the Chief Old Person bust to be displayed in the Capitol Rotunda is a symbol of that commitment. RM

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PLACE OF HONOR

Electric co-ops among donors to fund project to get bust of Earl Old Person placed in state Capitol

STORY BY RYAN HALL | RURAL MONTANA EDITOR

A beautiful bronze bust of the late Blackfeet Chief Earl Old Person may soon adorn the hallowed halls of the state Capitol in Helena.

Rep. Tyson Running Wolf and Sen. Susan Webber are the driving forces behind the effort to place the bust in an open display area in the Capitol Rotunda. The state's electric cooperatives were among the top donors to the fundraising effort to purchase, install and maintain the bust.

"I have been in the Legislature for 32 years. The Capitol has been my second home all that time. I revere the building, it is beautiful. It is the people's house. But in there, there's not much that depicts the indigenous population of Montana, which has a long history here," Webber said. "I was looking at all of the busts we have in there of great Montanans, and I think we need an Indian presence to be included in that line of great people and their busts that adorn the Capitol building."

Who was Old Person?

"In the Indian world, Earl Old Person served our people and the people of Montana," Webber said. "Earl was the leader of our tribe for nearly my entire life."

Running Wolf said Old Person had met with seven presidents and testified at the state and federal legislative levels.

"Just being able to advocate for Indian Country at that level (was



Rep. Tyson Running Wolf



Sen. Susan Webber

historic)," said Lona Running Wolf, Tyson's wife.

Old Person served as chief and a tribal council member of the Blackfeet Nation for more than 60 years. He served in an

elected office longer than any other elected official in Montana, and was the longest-serving tribal official in U.S. history.

His advocacy included promoting legislation that included the American Indian Religious Freedom Act of 1978, which protected access to traditional native sites and religious freedom. He was president of the National Congress of American Indians from 1969 to 1971. Among his accomplishments, he served on a committee that founded the nation's first tribally owned bank. He also was a member of a significant number of civic and governmental organizations, including president of the Affiliated Tribes of the Northwest, and was named Outstanding Indian of the Year in 1977 by the Chicago Indian Council. Though he was not identified with either U.S. political party, he was asked to speak at the 1988 Republican National Convention. In 1993, Old Person delivered the first-ever State of the Indian Nation address to the Montana Legislature.

The sculpture

Lyle Schwabauer created the bust of Old Person in 2021, long before any conversation started about honoring the tribal leader in the state Capitol.

"I just felt really inspired that I was supposed to sculpt Chief Earl Old Person," Schwabauer said.

He contacted family members of Old Person, who died in 2021, and asked for permission to sculpt him. The family agreed, with Old Person's grandson providing feedback throughout the process.

"I was going to make him middle-aged, but when I sent (his grandson) pictures, he would say no, make him older, more wrinkles, older," Schwabauer said.

When he started the piece, there was no commissioning, no promise that it would ever be sold or displayed anywhere. Schwabauer said he has a strong faith and sometimes he feels like there's a project he is destined to do.

"I felt I had a calling to do it," Schwabauer said of the Old Person piece. "I felt so strongly that I was supposed to sculpt Earl so I went ahead because I felt he needed the recognition."

He also had it cast in bronze before making its existence known.

"I was so honored and taken aback by the beauty of that bust," Webber said of the first time she saw it. "We have to have this in the Capitol and in the Rotunda, along with all the great Montanans who are honored there."

Requirements

In order for a bust to be displayed in the Capitol it must meet several requirements, including:

The person must have been deceased for a minimum of 10 years and have achieved recognition for an



event or contribution of “statewide significance and relevance.”

If those qualifications are met then an application for a long-term display can be submitted to the Capitol Complex Advisory Council, which will review the proposal. Part of this evaluation includes reviewing the fundraising for the piece to ensure the costs of the artwork, installation and maintenance are covered. If the council recommends approval, the Legislature then is asked to approve the placement of the bust.

The only concern supporters of displaying Old Person’s bust have is that he does not meet the requirement of being deceased for 10 years. However, both Webber and Running

Wolf said that could be addressed in a bill in the 2027 legislative session approving the placement of the bust.

Fundraising

The cost of the sculpture, installation in the Capitol and the required maintenance is about \$16,000, and a significant portion of that was provided by electric cooperatives.

Tyson Running Wolf said the first contribution — of \$2,500 — came from a legislator who wishes to remain anonymous. After that, the Montana Electric Cooperatives’ Association (MECA), Glacier Electric Cooperative, Sheridan Electric Cooperative, Flathead Electric Cooperative, NorVal Electric Cooper-

ative, Big Flat Electric Cooperative, BNSF Railway, NorthWestern Energy and GridUnited all contributed to the fundraising campaign.

“I really have to thank the electric co-ops. I asked, ‘What do you think about this idea?’ and they just jumped all over it. There was no hesitation. I was just jumping for joy,” Webber said.

“MECA was honored to have the opportunity to lead fundraising efforts to have the bust of the late Blackfeet Nation Chief Earl Old Person placed in the Montana State Capitol Rotunda. Montana’s electric cooperatives greatly value the tribal communities they serve and their strong relationship with the Montana American Indian Caucus. Busts of several Montana historic figures are featured in the Capitol, but not one Native American. It’s way past time to include them, and honoring the significant achievements of Chief Old Person is the perfect way to start,” said MECA CEO Mark Lambrect.

The fundraising goal has been reached, and the bust is currently on display in the governor’s office in the Capitol.

A powerful message

Webber, Running Wolf and Schwabauer all said they strongly believe that Old Person deserves to be honored with the placement of his bust in the Capitol. The legislators also said it would send a powerful message of inclusion.

“Montana has come to mean inclusiveness,” Webber said. “Indigenous people of Montana would have a place in the people’s house.”

She added that she will be emotional if the day comes to unveil the bust in what she sees as its rightful place in the Capitol.

“Oh man, I’m just going to be in heaven. I am going to be so honored. Most likely I’ll cry,” she said. “To see it sitting in a beautiful building, in a place of honor — I don’t know if I will even have the words to express that.”


“It would be a sense of pride,” Running Wolf said. “A sense of this house belongs to us, too.” BM

2025 MECA Memorial Scholarship winners

THE winners of the annual Montana Electric Cooperatives' Association Memorial Scholarships have been selected.

They are: Corbin Weltzien from Missoula Electric Cooperative; Bradley Hjartarson from Glacier Electric Cooperative; Kayl Hadley of Southeast Electric Cooperative; and Hunter Sanders of Lower Yellowstone Rural Electric Cooperative.

MECA would like to extend a big thank you to our panel of judges: Scot Brown of McCone Electric Cooperative, Melissa Greenwood of Ravalli Electric Cooperative, Mitch Johnson of Sun River Electric Cooperative and Houston Bradbury of Yellowstone Valley Electric Cooperative.

MECA also wants to say congratulations to all four students, each of whom will receive a \$500 scholarship. 



Corbin Weltzien



Bradley Hjartarson



Kayl Hadley



Hunter Sanders




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Manager Hugo Anderson stands with Glacier Electric Board Member Terry Tatsey after receiving a traditional Blackfeet honoring for his years of work with the Blackfeet Tribe.

Glacier Electric announces the retirement of GM Hugo Anderson

By **JONNALEA ST.GODDARD**
Glacier Electric

Glacier Electric Cooperative has announced the retirement of General Manager Hugo Anderson, who has spent more than 16 years with the cooperative and more than 46 years in the service industry.

Anderson began his tenure with Glacier Electric as operations manager and was promoted to general manager in 2017, guiding the cooperative through a period of steady growth and modernization.

During his time as general manager, Anderson worked closely with all members of the cooperative, placing a strong emphasis on customer service and community engagement. He led significant efforts in substation

upgrades, a cornerstone in Glacier Electric's ongoing commitment to reliability and safety for its members.

Anderson's leadership and collaboration across departments helped position Glacier Electric for future success as it continued to invest in infrastructure and member services.

A luncheon was held in mid-August to celebrate Anderson's retirement. Anderson received a plaque showcasing his 46 years in the industry with Glacier Electric, Red Rock Power, and Sheridan Electric. Surrounded by friends, family and coworkers, Anderson also received a Pendleton blanket from the cooperative for his years of work with the Blackfeet Tribe. Terry Tatsey, Glacier Electric Board member and former Blackfeet Tribal Council member, presented the blanket to Mr.

Anderson. Tatsey recalled when he was on the council how Anderson was always a call away and willing to facilitate meetings when concerns about energy were brought up.

Dean Berkram has assumed the role of general manager in Anderson's stead. Berkram joined the cooperative in 1998 as the assistant warehouseman, later taking on the lead role. In the last several years Berkram has transitioned into the role of manager of staking, bringing a deep understanding of the cooperative's operations and member needs.

The organization extends its gratitude to Anderson for his dedicated service and contributions, and welcomes Berkram as he steps into the leadership role. RM

EUREKA VOLUNTEER FIRE DEPARTMENT

Powered by the sun

IF you've walked along the peaceful banks of the Tobacco River on the paved River Walk, you may have noticed the large red and tan buildings just beyond the fence belonging to the Eureka Rural Volunteer Fire Department (EVFD). If you looked a little closer, you may have also seen a large set of solar panels soaking up the sun on the metal roof.

In early 2022, before the solar panels were installed, Patrick Broom — owner of NorthWest Electrical Contractors — was strolling along the path when he noticed the South-Southwest-facing roof of the building. Its size, angle and single-pitch design made it a perfect candidate for a solar array.

He reached out to Fire Chief Ron Komac and pitched the idea of installing a solar panel system to generate electricity and offset energy use from Lincoln Electric Co-op's (LEC) grid. Komac saw the potential benefits and cost savings, and asked Broom to develop some proposals to present to the EVFD Board of Directors.

Broom proposed a few different options, ranging from a 23 kilowatt-hour (kWh) system to a 48 kWh setup. After reviewing the proposals, the board decided to start with the smaller system to "test the waters," while keeping the option open to upgrade later.

After a year and a half of success with the solar setup, the board approved the upgrade to the 48 kWh system. By fall 2024, the upgraded array was operational.

The system now produces enough energy to offset approximately two-thirds of the department's total electricity usage.

"The system definitely made an impact on our energy costs and provided us with savings during



the times of year when our energy demands are highest. From around May through September, our meter actually runs backwards," Komac said.

Thanks to LEC's metering system, the fire department not only meets much of its own energy demand during peak solar months, but also sends excess energy back into the grid. These energy contributions earn the department credits that can be used later in the year, essentially making them a mini power plant for the community during sunny months.

"At the fire department, we've done a number of things to keep our operational costs low. The solar system is one of those efforts. We look at it this way: the less we spend on energy, the more we can invest in upgrading equipment and improving our service," Komac said.

Mark Frey, Alternate Energy Division manager at NorthWest Electrical, monitors the solar panel system's output and notes that energy production is influenced by weather, sun exposure and cloud cover.


"Around April, we start to see the

energy curve rising as the sun's angle increases. Production peaks in June, July and August. On a good day, the system can generate up to 470 kWh — which is more than the department needs. That excess gets sent back to LEC and earns us credits," Frey said.

Offsetting energy costs is especially critical during winter months.

"Because we store water in our trucks year-round, it's vital to prevent freezing. We rely on radiant heat to keep the warehouse at 65 degrees, no matter how cold it gets. We also have three large propane heaters as backup in case of a power outage. We have to be ready to help in any emergency," Komac said.

The fire department's investment in solar energy benefits more than just its bottom line — it also helps reduce overall electricity demand on LEC and the Bonneville Power Administration (BPA), indirectly benefiting all LEC members.

The Eureka Volunteer Fire Department consists of 22 dedicated volunteers who respond to fire emergencies in Eureka and the surrounding rural areas. 

Heavy winds tests TRECO infrastructure and resolve

COLUMN BY GINA VINEYARD | TONGUE RIVER ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE

ON the evening of Saturday, July 26, our region was struck by an intense and fast-moving storm system that caused widespread damage and power outages. Meteorologists often refer to these kinds of severe wind events as the result of either wind shear or microbursts — both of which can be extremely destructive.

Wind shear refers to a sudden change in wind speed or direction over a short distance in the atmosphere. It can occur at any altitude and is especially dangerous when it happens near the ground. Microbursts, on the other hand, are powerful, localized downdrafts within a thunderstorm that slam into the ground and push winds outward in all directions. Though short-lived, they can produce wind speeds more than 100 mph and are known for causing tornado-like damage.

While we may never know the exact nature of this particular event, the damage pattern — with poles being snapped and thrown 20 to 50 feet from their original locations — strongly suggests Tongue River Electric Cooperative (TRECO) experienced one or both of these intense wind phenomena. The storm carved a path several miles long and caused significant destruction across TRECO's service territory.

As a result of the storm, the Fallon Substation lost power, and approximately 250-300 members were affected. The force of the wind toppled eight single-phase distribution poles and a staggering 35 three-phase distribution poles. Despite the extent of the damage, crews responded immediately and began the enormous task of rebuilding.

In addition to utility infrastructure, significant damage was reported to irrigation pivots and agricultural buildings throughout the area — a reminder of how much these events affect all aspects of rural life.

Adding to the challenge, several additional storms passed through during the same period, further complicating restoration efforts and pulling crews in multiple directions.

Working long hours with minimal rest, the team had the distribution lines rebuilt and ready for members by Tuesday evening — just three days after the event. Their dedication, resilience and professionalism were truly extraordinary.

TRECO's power supplier, the Western Area Power Administration (WAPA), was also heavily impacted, losing approximately 24 structures. Their crews worked around the clock and full power restoration to TRECO's system was completed by 9 p.m. on Wednesday, July 30.




PHOTO BY RON VILHAUER, TONGUE RIVER ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE

We also learned that MDU Resources experienced similar damage, reporting the loss of around 23 structures. This reinforces the widespread and powerful nature of the storm.

Despite it all, our lineworkers showed unwavering commitment to our mission and our customers. They take pride in their works and in serving their communities with integrity and diligence — even in the face of extreme adversity.

Mother Nature has a way of throwing us curveballs. These events are unpredictable and can be incredibly frustrating. But during times like this, the patience and understanding of our members make all the difference. Your support allows us to respond quickly, safely and effectively.

Events such as this serve as a powerful reminder of the importance of being prepared. If you've been putting off getting a backup generator, now is the time to seriously consider it. Extended outages can happen with little warning, and having a generator can help keep essential appliances running and maintain comfort and safety during an emergency. We strongly recommend working with a qualified electrician to properly size and install your generator. Safety must come first — never attempt to connect a generator to your home's electrical system yourself. Improper installation can endanger utility workers, damage your equipment, and pose serious fire and shock risks. Your local electricians are here to help, and can ensure everything is set up safely and correctly. 



Co-op Month Word Search

Did you know October is National Co-op Month?

Read the following facts to learn how co-ops are unique, then find and circle the **bolded** words in the puzzle.

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

Fun Facts about Co-ops:

- Co-ops and their members work **together** toward a common goal.
- Co-ops are local organizations, so they understand the **communities** they serve.
- All co-ops operate according to the same set of seven cooperative **principles**.
- Concern for community is the seventh **cooperative** principle.
- Co-ops don't serve customers; instead, they serve **members**.
- Co-ops are led by the **local** members they serve.

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:

Statewide electric cooperative magazines were recently hit with nearly double the advertised postal rate increase by USPS, and consistent delays are impacting the delivery of magazines containing official meeting notices and electric bills. What can Congress do to help ensure the USPS is a cost-effective delivery solution and that service improves?

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



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Representative Ryan Zinke

THE Postal Service is essential for rural Montana. Families depend on it for voting, utility bills, staying in touch with family members, prescriptions and official notices. When rates rise faster than expected and delivery slows, it creates serious challenges for communities that don't have other options. Across Montana we are seeing missing packages, impossibly slow delivery and an overall lower quality of service from USPS, but it's not the fault of our dedicated postal employees. USPS needs systematic changes, and I am making sure those changes don't leave rural Montana behind.

A recent example shows why this matters: in early 2025, USPS planned to move Missoula's mail-processing operations to Spokane, which would have caused delays and disrupted service for rural Montana. I worked directly with USPS leadership and my colleagues in Congress to ensure these operations stayed local. As a result,

USPS scrapped the Spokane move and committed to investing over \$12 million to modernize the Missoula facility, preserving jobs and improving service. This action helps rural communities receive their mail on time, including electric bills, co-op newsletters like this one and other critical notices. It also demonstrates that proactive oversight and advocacy can protect Montana families and workers from disruptive changes.

I will keep working with my colleagues and USPS leadership to make sure rural Montanans have reliable, affordable mail service and that our postal workers have the support they need. In rural Montana, mail service isn't optional in Montana; and we can't have decisions made by bureaucrats thousands of miles away putting it in jeopardy. With the right reforms, USPS can continue serving every family, every co-op member and every community across our state.

RM



Rep. Downing

1037 Longworth, House
Office Building,
Washington, D.C. 20515
<https://downing.house.gov>
Ph: (202) 225-3211?

Representative Troy Downing

POSTAL service plays a critical role in Montana, especially in the rural communities that I represent. Often, USPS is tasked with facilitating correspondence across vast distances, connecting people to the goods and services they depend on.

I share concerns with Montana's electric cooperatives regarding the current status of USPS operations in Montana. My office has received complaints from constituents regarding their experiences with service disruptions in Bozeman and Belgrade.

That's why I sent a letter to Postmaster Louis DeJoy, alongside the Montana congressional

delegation, urging him to take immediate action and address these serious challenges.

While I greatly appreciate the dedicated USPS employees and carriers working tirelessly to mitigate these issues, and the ongoing efforts to recruit new staff, I recognize that these measures have fallen far short of Montana's needs.

As this Congress considers legislative action related to the United States Postal Service, I welcome further input from the Montana Electric Cooperatives' Association's members so that I might best represent your interests. RM

Organizations come together to promote farm safety

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

ELECTRIC utilities, farm and ranch organizations, businesses and the Montana Department of Agriculture have come together in a campaign to promote farm and ranch safety, and powerline awareness.

"I wanted to make sure as many Montanans as possible were made aware of the hazards of operating farm equipment around powerlines and what to do — and not do — when contact has been made," said Montana Electric Cooperatives' Association (MECA) CEO Mark Lambrecht. "It seemed to me collaborating with other utilities and agricultural organizations would be the best way to broadly distribute MECA's graphics, information and tips about safe operation of farm machinery around electricity."

He added that the increasing size of farm equipment was one of the main catalysts for the campaign.

"Farm equipment continues to get larger and taller, placing agricultural workers in greater danger of inadvertently making contact with powerlines. Helping make those who operate farm machinery aware of these hazards and how to safely respond to an electrical contact situation is simply the right thing to do. This is an incredibly important message, especially during harvest season," Lambrecht said.

In forming the coalition and campaign, he reached out across the state, offering access to MECA's resources on farm safety and asking to partner in future messaging. In

addition to the state's electric cooperatives, NorthWestern Energy, MDU Resources, the Montana Department of Agriculture, the Montana Council of Cooperatives, Montana Farm Bureau Federation, Montana Stockgrowers Association, Montana Equipment Dealers Association and BroadbandMT have joined the campaign.

"The most important part of any farm/ranch operation is the producer. Whether we think about it every day or not, agriculture can be dangerous. The well-being of our state's farmers and ranchers is vital to our rural communities and economies, which is why the Montana Department of Agriculture chose to be part of this awareness campaign," said Montana Department of Agriculture Director Jillien Streit.

"At MDU, we believe that raising awareness is one of the most effective ways to prevent accidents and save lives. Farmers face unique risks when working near powerlines, and we want to do all we can to protect them. That's why we joined this campaign — to help ensure Montana's agricultural communities have the knowledge and tools they need to stay safe. It's a shared responsibility, and we're proud to stand alongside our partners in promoting farm safety," said MDU Chief Human Resources, Safety and Administration Officer Anne Jones.

"As a small grains farmer who works around powerlines when we are moving equipment or plowing in some of our fields, being cognizant about the

dangers of electricity is paramount. As president of the Montana Farm Bureau, our organization understands the importance of educating all of our members regarding safety around powerlines. Whether you come across a downed wire after a storm on a rural road or have equipment come in contact with a powerline, everyone needs to be aware of how to stay safe and prevent a serious injury or fatality. We are thrilled to be a part of this campaign to increase awareness about powerlines and other electrical dangers," said Montana Farm Bureau President Cyndi Johnson.

"In Montana, where agriculture and open landscapes meet the power grid, we all share a responsibility to stay safe around powerlines," said Carolyn Loos, NorthWestern Energy director of safety and labor relations. "By staying alert and keeping farm equipment clear of overhead lines, we're not just protecting ourselves — we're looking out for our neighbors, our crews and our communities. Safety is something we all contribute to together."

The campaign launched in September with a series of social media posts. Additional posts and magazine articles will be distributed in the spring planting and fall harvest seasons next year.

"I expect these organizations will continue to collaborate on this safety campaign every year before and during harvest season," Lambrecht said. "I also expect other organizations to participate, further increasing statewide awareness." RM



AIR SEEDER

ROAD TRAVEL HEIGHT: 19'

TYPICAL ROAD AND FIELD
LINE HEIGHT: 15.5'

FILE GRAPHIC

REMINDER

Contact your electric cooperative if you operate oversized equipment and need powerlines raised, before an accident can happen.

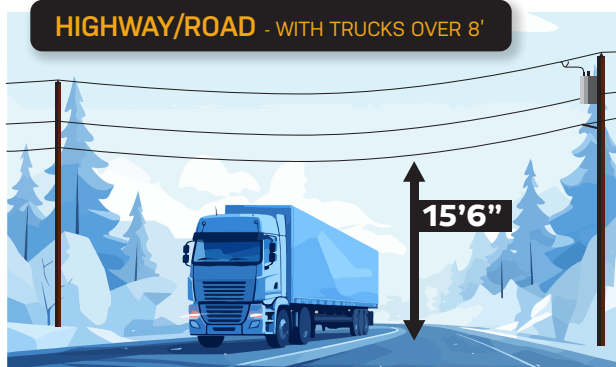
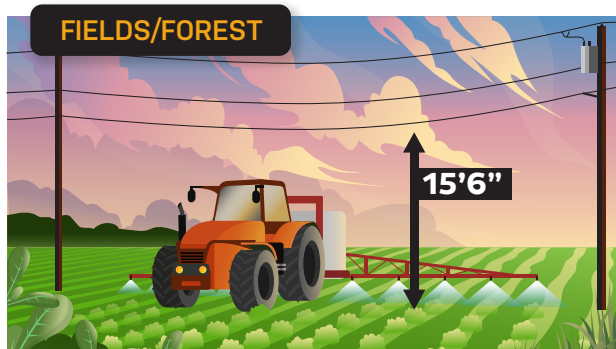
SAFETY TIPS



- 1 Maintain a 10-foot clearance around all utility equipment in all directions.
- 2 Use a spotter and deployed flags to maintain safe distances from powerlines and other equipment when doing field work.
- 3 If your equipment makes contact with an energized or downed powerline, contact your co-op immediately by phone and remain inside the vehicle until the power line is de-energized. In case of smoke or fire, exit the cab by making a solid jump out of the cab, without touching it at the same time, and hop away to safety.
- 4 Consider equipment and cargo extensions of your vehicle. Lumber, hay, tree limbs, irrigation pipe and even bulk materials can conduct electricity, so keep them out of contact with electrical equipment.

TYPICAL LINE HEIGHTS

VERTICAL CLEARANCE AT LARGEST VERTICAL SAG



BROADBANDMT



MONTANA-DAKOTA
UTILITIES CO.
A Subsidiary of MDU Resources Group, Inc.
In the Community to Serve®

NorthWestern
Energy
Delivering a Bright Future

Doug Hardy retires

Co-op manager and advocate reflects on 50-plus-year career and looks ahead

STORY BY RYAN HALL | RURAL MONTANA EDITOR

AFTER more than half a century of working for electric cooperatives, Central Montana Electric Power Cooperative General Manager Doug Hardy has announced his retirement. His last day on the job is Nov. 30.

"I never wanted to work past my prime," Hardy said. "That wouldn't be fair to the people I work on behalf of — the members served by the co-ops in Montana."

Throughout his career, Hardy always put the members at the end of the line first — whether it was as a lineman, working in member services, as operations manager, as the CEO at Park Electric Cooperative in Livingston, lobbying on behalf of electric cooperatives at the state and federal levels, or as the GM at Central Montana Electric.

"Everything I've done throughout my career has been focused on the benefit to my fellow electric co-ops, and ultimately the members at the end of the powerlines, that's what drives me," Hardy said last year, after being recognized with the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA) Regional Service Award.

What's next?

Hardy said his retirement plans include spending more time with his three grandchildren.

"I always want my children to want me there more with the grandkids rather than less," Hardy said with a smile. "I'm very cognizant of not overstaying my welcome."

One thing he doesn't plan to do in



PHOTOS COURTESY OF DOUG HARDY

retirement is be part of the state Legislature. Hardy has been at every legislative session since at least 1981, and lobbied in every session since 1983.

He said the 2027 legislative session will be "peaceful," as he doesn't plan to be part of it.

"I've pumped enough adrenaline in my body over the last five decades," Hardy said, adding that if any co-op or the statewide association calls with a question or needs information from past sessions, he would answer. "It's in my blood."

Hardy noted that despite numerous people encouraging him to do so, he doesn't see a run for the state Legislature in his future.

"A number of people have pushed me to run for the Legislature, and it's something I would never do while

representing an organization," Hardy said. "Nor do I have any desire to while in retirement — it's called retirement for a good reason."

Hardy said he does plan to get involved with some local organizations, such as Rotary, in the Livingston area, where he lives.

He added that though in the past he has often credited his time on the area school board for teaching him how to work with a board, he doesn't plan to run for a seat on that board either.

"Though I learned a lot from the school board, been there, done that, no," he said with a laugh.

But would Hardy consider running for a spot on an electric cooperative board of trustees? That answer was also "no."

"It'd be hypocritical. From my

school board days, I found employees of organizations that then step into governance are not always objective no matter how hard they try,” Hardy said.

As for no longer being part of the electric cooperative world on a daily basis, Hardy smiled when saying that’s one thing that worries him.

“I’ve never been good at halfway involvement. I anticipate it will be a form of torture — I’m a little concerned about that,” he said.

Accomplishments, advice

Hardy said his greatest accomplishment as general manager of Central Montana Electric was “maintaining a disproportionate amount of influence with generation and transmission entities.

“And the ability to look through the eyes of a distribution manager and board member on every decision,” he said.

When asked what advice he would give his successor, Hardy unsurprisingly made the answer member-focused.

“Keep your eyes wide open to anything that can be done that others aren’t doing, even if it’s a lot of work,” Hardy said. “If it benefits the consumers at the end of the line, step up, roll up your sleeves and dive in.”

In reflection on his years serving electric cooperatives and their members, Hardy had this to say:

“What an honor it’s been to apply the technical knowledge and thought processes learned from mentors, one specifically being a retired Air Force colonel, full wing, who was a board member in my early days at Park Electric. A very accomplished man, Bob Eyman, from who I learned more about analytical thinking than all of my college professors combined.” **RM**



AN IMPACTFUL CAREER

COLLEAGUES WEIGH IN ON DOUG HARDY

“

He’s gonna retire but I have a feeling he’s not going to retire, you know what I mean. He’s kind of like me. He has no hobbies. My hobby is farming, his hobby is keeping the lights on.

— **Jon Tester**, former U.S. senator

In all my time working at the Montana Legislature, I never encountered another lobbyist with more knowledge and integrity than Doug Hardy. His reputation among lawmakers as ‘the expert’ on all things electricity was well-earned and deserved. I’m grateful to have him as a mentor.

— **Mark Lambrecht**, MECA CEO

Doug is one of the most knowledgeable people in the electrical industry. His willingness to help anyone that had a need for his experience and knowledge was greeted with open arms. Not many people can put 25 hours into a 24-hour day, but Doug was one of them!

— **Brad Bauman**, Sun River Electric Cooperative manager

During my 12 years of service on both the House and Senate Energy Committees in the Montana Legislature, Doug stood out as one of the rare individuals I could consistently rely on for clear, factual insight. His counsel was invaluable as we navigated the often-complex landscape of energy-policy decisions. Whether the issues touched directly on electric cooperatives or broader statewide energy policy, Doug was always a steady and trusted source of knowledge. His guidance not only informed decisions, but also strengthened the confidence of those working alongside him.

— **Alan Olson**, former state legislator

Doug is what we all aspire to as cooperative leaders. He always does the right thing and expects the same of those around him. He stands up for the members and the employees, always remembering who we serve. He has mentored a generation of utility and political professionals. For those of us fortunate enough to know Doug, he will forever be the voice of conscience in our heads, making us better leaders and people.”

— **Jim Horan**, former CEO of Mid-West Electric Consumers Association

Doug has spent his entire working life spending countless hours and thousands of miles, always doing what is best for the member at the end of the line. He has a passion and knowledge of the electric cooperatives that very few in the industry have. Few in Montana will know how much of a difference in everyday Montanans’ lives he has made, but for those of us who do, thank you, Doug. Your expertise will be missed. Enjoy your well-deserved retirement.

— **Mark Grotbo**, Ravalli Electric Cooperative Manager

”



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@mt-co-ops.com. **Please include your name, hometown and an address. If you do not include this information, your submission will not be accepted.** For November, send in your best recipes that use Nuts and/or Seeds by October 15. Please send in December recipes anytime: Your favorite large-batch recipes (crowd-sized dishes for the holidays). Try to limit the ingredients and length of directions for space. Please include a photo, if possible.

1st
PLACE

Creamy Cambria Corn Chowder

Diane Carter | MOLT

INGREDIENTS

2 chicken breasts, diced
1/4 cup butter
2 cloves garlic
1/2 tsp. oregano
2 tsp. parsley
3 cans (15 oz.) creamed corn
2 cups chicken broth
1 cup milk
1 small can diced green chiles
Toppings: diced tomatoes, chopped cilantro, grated jack or pepper jack cheese, sour cream, sliced green onions, tortilla chips

DIRECTIONS

In a large pot, partially saute chicken then add butter, garlic, oregano, and parsley. Saute until chicken is cooked thoroughly.

Add to the pot the creamed corn, chicken broth, milk and green chiles. Stir occasionally, and allow mixture to come to a boil. Then simmer until ready to serve.

Top with tortilla chips, grated cheese, diced tomatoes, green onions, cilantro and sour cream.



2nd
PLACE

Green Chili Chicken-Stuffed Spaghetti Squash

Madison Broadbent | BALLANTINE

INGREDIENTS

1 large spaghetti squash
1 can (4 oz.) diced green chiles
1/2 cup green enchilada sauce
1/2 cup mexican cheese blend
1 tsp. chili powder (optional)
Olive oil (as needed)
2 cups cooked chicken, shredded
1 green onion, thinly sliced
1/2 cup fresh or frozen corn
1/4 cup sour cream
1/4 cup fresh cilantro, chopped

DIRECTIONS

Preheat oven to 400 degrees and line a baking sheet with foil.

Cut spaghetti squash lengthwise and remove seeds. Drizzle both sides with olive oil and a generous amount of salt and pepper. Place cut-side down on baking sheet and roast until fork tender (30 min). Use a fork to scrape out inside of squash and let "spaghetti" drain in a colander.

In a large bowl combine and mix chicken, green chiles, green onion, enchilada sauce, corn, cilantro, sour cream and chili powder.

Add squash to mixture and place in a 9-by-13-inch dish. Sprinkle cheese on top and bake for 15-20 minutes.



3rd
PLACE

Corn Relish

Orry Nail | WHITEFISH

INGREDIENTS

10 cups fresh corn cut from cobs
1 cup chopped green bell pepper
1 cup chopped red bell pepper
1 cup chopped onion
1 cup chopped celery
1 T salt
1-1/2 cups sugar
2-1/2 T mustard seed
1 tsp. celery seed
1/2 tsp. turmeric
2-1/2 cups white vinegar
2 cups water

DIRECTIONS

Drop ears of corn in boiling water. Boil 5 minutes. Dip in cold water.

Combine corn with remaining ingredients and boil 15 minutes. Pack into sterilized jars to within 1/2 inch of top.

Put on cap, screw band firmly tight. Process in boiling water bath for 15 minutes. Makes 5-6 pints.



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 October 15 for November events. Include date, time, site, city and contact number with your event. **Events without such info will not be used.**

NORTHWEST

October 3-5

The 35th Annual Flathead River Writers Conference — Hilton Garden Inn, www.authorsoftheflathead.org/conference/, 734-395-2305 | **KALISPELL**

October 4

Trego Heritage Day — Family-friendly event, Blarney Ranch, 9 a.m., to 6 p.m., 307-699-5026 | **TREGO**

October 10-11

Teakettle Quilt Guild Harvest Quilt & Craft Sale — Hillside Church Quonset Hut, 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., 249-7216 | **WHITEFISH**

October 10-12

Ribbon Cutting for Bigfork Senior Center donation-based book and clothing store — Rummage sale and silent auction, Bigfork Senior Center, 837-4157 | **BIGFORK**

October 11

Tamarack Time! Fall Food Festival — Bring your food entry, plus free pumpkin decorating and apple press, Electric Ave., food judging at 12:15 p.m., public tasting at 1 p.m., 871-8946 | **BIGFORK**

October 14

Kalispell Women's Connection Live Auction — Guest speaker is Bernadetta Bailey, 1830 Hwy. 35, 11:30 a.m., call 261-9894 for reservations or information | **KALISPELL**

October 15

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

October 23

A Conversation for Family Caregivers — Whitefish Community Library, 6 p.m., 734-395-2305 | **WHITEFISH**

October 25

Sunburst Arts and Education Presents: The Lucky Valentines concert — Indie-folk duo from Fort Benton, LCHS Auditorium, 7 p.m., 297-0197 | **EUREKA**

October 26

Lutefisk Dinner — Trinity Lutheran Church, 12:30 to 3 p.m., 590-1379 | **CHOTEAU**

October 29

Flathead Valley Community Band presents 'Fall Fantasy' concert — Whitefish Performing Arts Center, 7:30 p.m., 270-1696 | **WHITEFISH**

Oct. 30-Nov. 1

NRA Finals Rodeo — Majestic Valley Arena, 7 p.m., 252-1122 | **KALISPELL**

November 1

Columbia Falls Women's Connection Make It, Bake It, Sew It, Grow It Fundraiser — 827 9th St. West, 9 a.m. to 2 p.m., 892-3621 | **COLUMBIA FALLS**

SOUTHWEST

October 1-31

Beaverhead Maze & Pumpkin Patch — 4565 MT-41, Thursdays through Sundays, noon to 8 p.m., 579-7955 | **DILLON**

October 3-4

Stevensville Scarecrow Festival — Family event, Main Street Stevensville, Fri: 3 to 9 p.m., Sat: 10 a.m. to 9 p.m., stevensvillescarecrowfestival.org 529-9715 | **STEVENSVILLE**

October 3-5

Rotary Club of Townsend's Fall Fest & Car Show — Heritage Park, Fri: 4 to 9 p.m., Sat: 10 a.m. to 9 p.m., Sun: 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., www.townsendfallfest.com, 530-5251 | **HAMILTON**

October 4

Harvest Sale — Pine Creek United Methodist Church, complimentary lunch at noon, auction 1 p.m. | **LIVINGSTON**

October 10-12

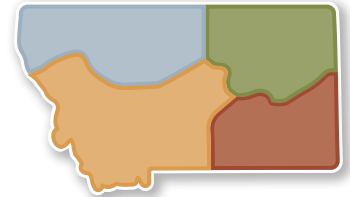
Lewistown Gun Show — Trade Center at the Fergus County Fairgrounds, Fri: 3 to 7 p.m., Sat: 9 a.m. to 6 p.m., Sun: 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., 366-1459 | **HAMILTON**

October 10-13

Indigenous Peoples Day Great Falls — Fri: Native American Fashion Show, Great Falls College Heritage Hall, 6 to 8 p.m.; Sat: 3 on 3 Basketball Tournament and traditional games, Paris Gibson Ed Center, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.; Sun: Soup and Story, Great Falls Public Library, 1 to 6 p.m.; Mon: Guest speakers and fry bread contest, Great Falls College Heritage Hall, 4 to 8 p.m., 799-4540 | **GREAT FALLS**

October 18, 25

Family Fright and Fun Day at the Farm — CCMT at Homestead Organics Farm, 1:30 to 5 p.m., events.humanitix.com/family-fright-and-fun-day-at-the-farm | **HAMILTON**



October 18

28th Annual Craft Fair — St. Agnes Catholic Church, 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., 446-1628 | **RED LODGE**

October 25

The Fairfield Historical Society presents Greenfields Irrigation District Centennial — Light lunch, program, speakers and raffle, Fairfield Community Hall, 11 a.m. to 4 p.m., 868-9381 | **FAIRFIELD**

October 25

Dillon's Halloween Fall Fest — Trunk or Treat on Idaho Street, haunted kids tours, 2 to 5 p.m., 683-5511 | **DILLON**

October 30

After Hours Mixer: Stockman Bank's Stocktober Fest — Dillon Stockman Bank branch, 5 to 7 p.m., 683-5511 | **DILLON**

November 1

How to Harvest a Pig workshop — CCMT at Homestead Organics Farm, 2 to 4 p.m., CultivatingConnectionsMT.org | **HAMILTON**

November 9

Helmville Bazaar — Main Street Helmville, 10 a.m. to 3:30 p.m., 793-5834 | **HELMVILLE**

November 14-15

Bazaar — Lunch, bake sale and handmade items and crafts, Florence/Carlton Community Church, Fri: 9 a.m. to 6 p.m., Sat: 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. | **FLORENCE**

November 15

Sourdough Holiday Sweet Treats Workshop — CCMT at Homestead Organics Farm, 11 a.m. to 1 p.m., CultivatingConnectionsMT.org | **HAMILTON**

SOUTHEAST

October 11

Spaghetti Dinner & Auction — Silent Auction, DJ and dancing, 143 Northern Avenue, 5 p.m., music starts at 8 p.m., 851-1137 | **HUNTLEY**

October 17

Pub Station Presents Charles Wesley Godwin — The Pub Station Ballroom, 8 p.m., thepubstation.com | **BILLINGS**

October 17

Q's Art 20th Anniversary Show — Q's Art & Framing, 3 to 7 p.m., 248-1102 | **BILLINGS**

October 25

Annual Bazaar — Lutheran Church of the Good Shepherd, 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., 672-3723 | **BILLINGS**

October 30

MSU Billings Preview Day — Explore campus, programs and student life, register online at msubillings.edu/future/previewday | **BILLINGS**

November 22

Strut Your Stuff Bazaar — 40 vendors, Fromberg Gym, 9 a.m. to 3:30 p.m., 696-5546 | **FROMBERG**

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**

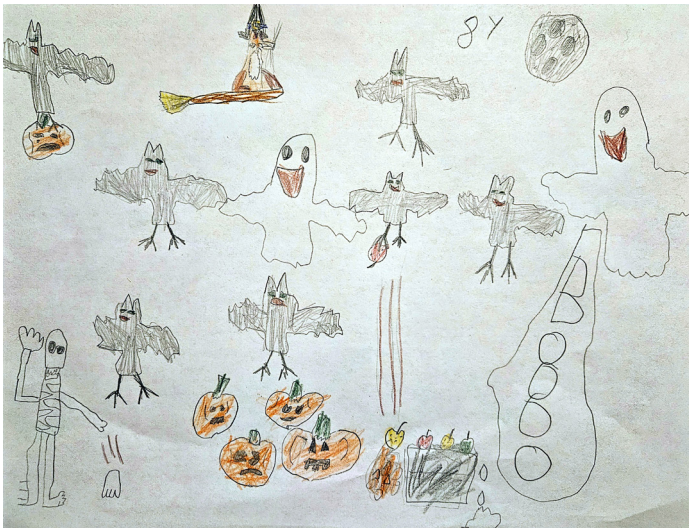


Alexia Lee, 10, Kalispell | **FLATHEAD ELECTRIC**

Milah Leikam, 8, Billings | **YELLOWSTONE VALLEY ELECTRIC**



Blaine Adkins, 10, Powell, WY | **BEARTOOTH ELECTRIC**



Johnnie Mahn, 12, Billings | **YELLOWSTONE VALLEY ELECTRIC**



READER PHOTOS

SEND US YOUR FAVORITE PHOTOS/ARTWORK

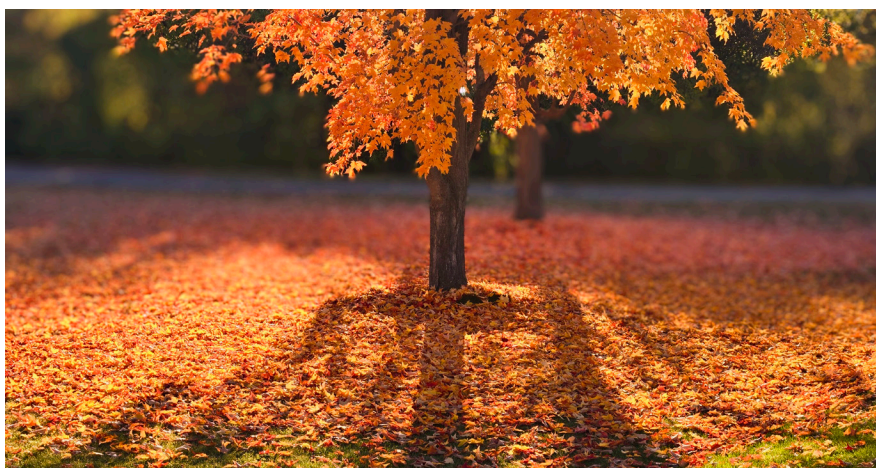
Please include: the photographer's/artist's name, address and hometown in the entry. *If you do not include this information, your submission will not be accepted.* If we use your entry we'll pay you \$25-\$100 (depending on size and location).

Send entries to: rural@mtco-ops.com. No more than 20 MB at a time. No prints please.



Autumn Elk

An elk's breath on an autumn day can be seen in this acrylic painting on canvas by **Jamie Weiss of Stevensville**



Fallen Leaves

The ground is painted with brightly colored leaves. **Photo by Ronald Pales of Missoula.**

Hangin On

Autumn leaves cling to their branch.

Photo by Jedidiah McCart of Florence



Perfect Pumpkins

Cullen and Heston Diede are excited to see their pumpkins have gotten so big. **Photo by Donna Nelson of Savage**



The Magazine of the
Montana Electric Cooperatives'
Association

Visit us online: www.mtco-ops.com

Email: rural@mtco-ops.com



BASIN ELECTRIC  COMMUNITY

CREATED FOR COMMUNITIES

Community support is more than a nice idea – it's Basin Electric's culture. Giving back is important to us because charitable programs and non-profit organizations help our communities thrive.

Our communities have supported us throughout the years by providing a strong workforce, and without them, we couldn't provide reliable, affordable electricity across rural America. Now more than ever, community matters.

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