

F E R R I G U S

FEATURES

Member Newsletter ♦ Fergus Electric Cooperative, Inc., Lewistown, MT ♦ www.ferguselectric.coop

Welcome to GS Oil: Roy's unofficial community center

Story and photos by

Charlie Denison
Contributing Writer

Roy native Gary Smith was raised in the public eye. “My folks had a little penny ante store downtown when I was a kid,” he said. “Smith’s Store.”

Through the years, the people of Roy got to know young Gary pretty well. He was always there. In fact, he was there so often he started calling his mom and dad Pearl and Clay like everyone else.

“I don’t know if I ever did call them mom and dad, come to think of it,” he said. “That’s just how it was.”

Now 71, Gary has spent nearly all his life working in customer service in Roy one way or another. He got away for a little while when he enlisted in the military, but — besides that — he’s a central Montana man through and through.

“I went to the Army in 1964, and was stationed overseas for a while,” he said. “In 1967, I helped supply tanks for the six-day Cold War between Israel and Syria. I came back to Roy afterward.”

Not long after he returned (around 1970), Gary’s dad asked him if he wanted to start a fuel station that specialized in mechanic work.

“Sounded good to me,” Gary said.

Although the business opened as a repair shop, it’s become the unofficial Roy community center. People don’t just get their vehicles fixed up or fueled up; they stop in and shoot the breeze over a cup of coffee.

“As long as we’ve got a free cup of coffee, people stop in,” Gary said.

And they always do have a free cup of coffee, just as they always have regulars popping in and out throughout the day, such as Larry Schultz, Jack Hemsing, John Berg, and brothers Dusty and Justin Murphy.



Owner Gary Smith, right, shares a laugh with Larry Schultz, left, and Dustin Murphy at GS Oil.

Usually the friends sit around in the morning and give each other a hard time.

“Gary is a responsible worker,” Schultz said. “If something goes to hell, he’s usually responsible.”

“The fuel ain’t worth a damn but the donuts are alright,” John Berg joked.

These kinds of comments are commonplace at GS Oil.

“We’ve got to give each other crap,” Gary said. “That’s the only way to survive.”

Gary dishes out plenty of wisecracks of his own.

“You might know Dusty from church,” Gary said. “He’s always the one doing the first hymn.”

This got a rise out of Dusty and Justin, who have known Gary since they were children. Their father happened to be one of Gary’s best friends. However, when asked why they keep coming back to GS Oil, they don’t get too sentimental.

“He’s the only place in town,” Justin joked.

Gary doesn’t get too sentimental, either.

“The Murphy boys are going to be my pallbearers,” he said. “I only need two because a garbage can only has two handles.”

Business as usual

Although there is a lot of goofing off, plenty of work gets done, too. Business is steady in Roy and the other two locations.

“We own Little Montana in Grass Range and Winnett Tire in Winnett,” Gary said. “We stay plenty busy.”

Gary added that he couldn’t do it on his own and greatly appreciates everything his wife, Jolene, does to keep the place going. She handles the books, makes a lot of phone calls and helps keep Gary out of trouble, which she jokes can be a challenge.

After all, when they got together in 1980 he was a “wild thing.”

“The first time we went out, he spun down Main Street,” she said, shaking her head and letting out a little laugh.

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MANAGER'S MESSAGE

From Scott Sweeney

Spring work schedule

With spring's arrival, many of us are making plans and starting projects. Fergus Electric's work schedule fills quickly with jobs for the upcoming construction season. If your plans include building a new power line, converting your overhead service to underground or upgrading your service, if you live in the Lewistown service area, please call 406-538-3465 and speak to one of our staking engineers. If you live in the Roundup service area, please call 406-323-1602 and discuss your plans with Assistant Line Superintendent Don Criswell.

I encourage you to set up an early consultation while the project is still in the development stage to make sure that everyone is on the same page when decisions are being made. Some planning, decision-making and groundwork will permit us to work together more effectively.

Assistant general manager

After the board of directors completed the Selection and Succession Planning session in November 2017, they instructed me to hire an assistant general manager to assist me in managing the cooperative and to be under consideration by the board to replace me, eventually.

I still very much enjoy my job and plan to continue working as the general manager for several more years, during which time I will work with the employees to help ensure that the cooperative has a smooth transition and will remain stable and strong.

On January 29, I hired David Dover to fill the position of assistant general manager. David is competent, intelligent, has great people skills and is very knowledgeable about our cooperative. I am pleased to welcome David and have him join the staff of Fergus Electric Cooperative.

Fergus Electric Cooperative is fortunate to have very dedicated line crews, engineers, supervisors and office staff, and I believe we are all committed to

making the cooperative better and more responsive to members' needs.

Copper mine project

One of the most exciting things going on at the cooperative is working to get power installed to the Black Butte Copper Project, the proposed copper mine north of White Sulphur Springs. This new mine is projected to use 9,000 kilowatts (kW) to 12,000 kW of electric load, and to add 200 new jobs in Meagher County. The copper mine would provide a key resource for the electric industry, including electric vehicles, wind turbines, solar panels, transformers and countless other beneficial uses for our world.

The Montana Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) has stringent rules on new mines that help ensure that an environmentally friendly mine will be constructed and that our valuable water resources will be protected. Tintina is committed to meeting or exceeding all DEQ requirements. The mine's key employees Jerry Zieg and Nancy Schlepp are from Meagher County. One of their key goals is to be a good steward of the land and the water resources adjacent to the mine, and in areas surrounding the mine.

With the good oversight of the DEQ

and the internal goals of Tintina, the new copper mine looks to be a strong win-win for White Sulphur Springs, Meagher County and the state of Montana, as well as Fergus Electric Cooperative.

Metering system

The cooperative is continuing to work with PRECorp to analyze all the information available on various metering systems. The goal is to decide on a new metering system later this month. Our existing "turtle" meter-reading system is obsolete and is no longer being supported, so purchasing and installing a new metering system is a necessity and goal of the staff and board.

Board of Director position open

The board of directors' position for District 2 is open, with David Dover having resigned effective October 4, 2017. District 2 includes the Glengarry, Kolin and Straw substation areas, as well as the Nihill West area, which includes members west of Highway 191 and north of Highway 12 in Wheatland and Meagher Counties.

The board plans to interview interested candidates from District 2 in the March/April timeframe, and to have a new director appointed soon thereafter to complete the remaining two years of the current term. Members interested in running for the board, whose principal residence is in District 2, should contact the office at 406-538-3465 or email ferguselectric@ferguselectric.coop, or contact any of the current board members listed on Page 6 of the *Rural Montana* magazine.

TIMELY TOPICS

Implementing Surge Protection



Vangie McConnell, Editor

There is little, if anything, you can buy today that does not have some electronic component — even clothing with wearable electronics is starting to take hold. So, it's time to look at making sure your electronics last as long as possible by protecting them from electrical surges.

The first order of business is to

define a surge. Here's one definition: "alternatively known as a line surge, a surge is an unexpected increase in voltage of an electrical current that causes damage to electrical equipment. For example, the standard United States voltage is 120 volts (V). If an electrical current above this rating was to come through a power outlet for

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Gary and Jolene make a good team. They share a great sense of humor. Gary stands behind the shop in front of what locals call "Tire Mountain."



"He got stopped."

Gary nodded and shrugged. "She's the only one who will put up with me," he said.

But "putting up" with Gary is something she enjoys doing.

"What can I say?" she said. "He makes me laugh."

Like Gary, Jolene is blunt. Whoever is engaged in conversation with her will feel like they know her afterward. She's also humorous, giving people a hard time just like her husband. It's easy to see that they're good together.

One big family

Gary and Jolene have enjoyed being part of the Roy community.

"It's like a big family here," she said. "If someone has an issue, we're here to help."

Despite all of their clowning, Gary and Jolene appreciate the Roy community and give back any chance they get.

"You always get back more than you put in," Jolene said. "The more you give, the better off you are."

Gary is especially giving, Jolene added.

"He'd give anybody the shirt off his back," she said. "He really would."

A new chapter on the horizon

As much as Jolene and Gary love having a business and providing a good gathering place for the community, they admit they're ready to retire. Jolene is especially ready, and constantly encourages Gary to hang it up. After all, he's spent about all his life in customer service.

"I want to get him out of this busi-

ness so we can go have fun," she said.

Gary is ready, too, but he admits he'll still be coming by GS Oil when local mechanic Dustin Snyder takes over. Snyder, who moved to Roy in April, is in the process of taking ownership.

"I hope to expand the business and bring more people to town," Snyder

said. "I look forward to working more regularly with the people of the community."

More than likely, Gary will continue to come by and have some of the free coffee available each morning.

"I'll be around," he said. "You can count on it."

Familiar faces in new places

After a thorough interview process, the cooperative's general manager is pleased to announce that effective January 29, David Dover of Buffalo became Fergus Electric Cooperative's new assistant general manager.



David Dover

The board established the position as part of its succession-planning effort. The assistant general manager position creates an opportunity for the staff member to develop the skill set necessary to effectively manage the cooperative. Dover will assist the general manager and cooperative staff to ensure that all efforts are directed toward the fulfillment and achievement of the goals and objectives of Fergus Electric.

In his former role as a Fergus Electric Cooperative board member, Dover's 16 years' experience has provided him with first-hand knowledge of the cooperative principles and how they apply to the structure of our rural

electric cooperative.

As a board member, Dover completed education courses to become a National Rural Electric Cooperative Association Credentialed Cooperative Director. He also served six years as one of Montana's representatives on the Northwest Public Power Association's Board of Directors, headquartered in Vancouver, Washington.

Dover was born and raised in the Buffalo area, and graduated from Hobson High School. He graduated from Montana State University with a degree in business finance. Dover is involved in various church, community and ag-related organizations. He also serves as an EMT with the Hobson Ambulance Service.

Dover and his wife Michele have four grown sons. The family lives on a ranch south of Buffalo, where they raise cattle and sheep.

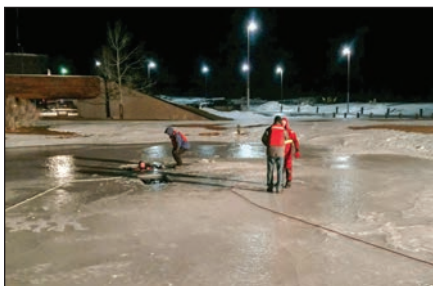
Crews practice ice rescue

Along with Fergus Electric Cooperative, Lewistown Fire Rescue and Central Montana Search and Rescue crews participated in ice-rescue training in Fergus Electric's pond. Lineman Brian Godbey, who doubles as a firefighter, arranged for the training.

Approximately 25 men and women participated in the exercise.

To make a hole in the ice, Godbey used a chainsaw. Then each participant, wearing a dry suit, simulated an accident requiring an ice rescue. The would-be victim was secured with a rope sling and was pulled to safety. For protection, rescue ropes were securely attached to each person.

The exercise lasted a little over three hours and was considered a success.



Timely Topics

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more than three nanoseconds, this would be considered a surge. Anything less is considered a spike. A surge is often created by lightning and can damage unprotected computers — and sometimes even protected computers.”

Many people think a blink from your co-op's system is a surge, but blinks are generally caused by something such as a tree contacting a line. In such cases, the system's protective devices work, causing an interruption to protect the wires and other components. These are not surges but blinks, and are more like turning a light on and off.

True surges will enter a home through any number of avenues. The most obvious way is through the power lines. Less obvious ways are through the telephone lines, cable/satellite connections, water lines, etc. To protect against surges, you need to take a three-pronged approach:

Step One – Perhaps the most important thing to do is to be sure all the grounds in your home are solid and that they are bonded together. Over the years grounds can deteriorate, or perhaps new services were added without adequate grounding. A faulty ground will allow surges into the home rather than bleeding them off into the earth. Get a qualified electrician to test and correct your grounding system.

Step Two – Next, protect your electrical service entrance with a surge protector. The easiest to install are those mounted behind the meter. They can also be mounted at the main electric panel. When a surge travels down the electric lines, a surge protector will act to “clamp” the surge and reduce its power, allowing itself to be destroyed in the process rather than allowing the surge to pass through and damage your home's system. Fergus Electric Cooperative sells and installs meter-based surge arrestors. For more information, call the co-op at 538-3465.

Step Three – The third line of defense is to protect expensive devices at their point of use. Computers and entertainment equipment are prime examples. Remember that surges can enter the home via avenues other than power lines. Computers and entertainment equipment are frequently connected to cable or phone lines. Those devices need to have protection at the point of use that covers all possible avenues.

These guards are generally found in the form of a power strip or wall device. Look for one with a rating of at least 1,000 joules (watts), a connected equipment warranty and compatibility with digital signals from cable and satellite. While you are at it, look for a “smart” strip that turns off all but one connected device when not in use. Not only will it protect your equipment, but it also will help you save electricity.

Identify Account Number*

Win a \$32 credit

If one of the following account numbers is yours, call Fergus Electric (406-538-3465) and identify yourself and your account number.

Account 395780

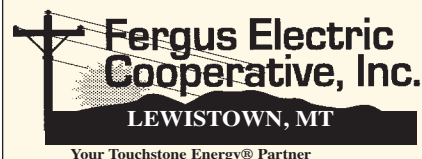
Account 92201

Account 91202

Account 242055

You will receive a \$32 credit on next month's statement.

**Numbers are drawn randomly.*



FOR OUTAGES

First: Check the fuses or breakers in the building in which the electricity is off.

Second: Check the breaker below the meter.

Third: If electricity is still out, call a neighbor to see if they have electricity.

Fourth: Call 406-538-3465 day or night or:

Dale Rikala406-366-3374
 Guy Johnson406-366-9170
 Scott Sweeney406-538-7218
 Don Criswell (Roundup)406-366-3465
 David Dover406-366-1975
 Melanie Foran406-462-5650

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Fergus Electric is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

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