

Sheridan Electric Cooperative

LiveWire

Sheridan Electric Cooperative - Medicine Lake, Mont. 406-789-2231

WHAT'S INSIDE?

- Leadership in the cooperatives
- Youth Tour process explained
- Statistical report

The price to develop young adults within the region

by Scott Westlund

As discussed at Sheridan Electric Cooperative's annual meeting and through articles written, the focus of the board and employees of the cooperative has been to develop our young folks to become professional leaders within the region.

So, some ask, what is the price attached to this endeavor?

It is true that I personally spend a tremendous amount of time on the road, in front of the membership, and within the schools. We have made a conscious decision to invest in this direction to assist in the development of young folks as our replacements and beyond.

Over the past years, we have seen some young folks come to the cooperative for professional interview development, professional introductions and public speaking. They have presented in front of employees and in front of the board. They have all been assisted, by the cooperative, in programs like Business Professionals of America (BPA), FFA, the Washington, D.C., Youth Tour, interview training, scholarships and professional introductions. Students have also been assisted in helping schools achieve programs they have decided to start, but could not

gather the required funds to do so.

Sheridan Electric Cooperative has been there to assist, and will continue to be there, as we believe that our future is within the walls of the schools in the area.

In November, the member services department spent three weeks in front of students, personally talking about scholarships and the Washington, D.C., Youth Tour. By the end of the third week, that department had been in front of more than 500 students, class by class, group by group, and school by school.

The messages were very simple. First, we teach professional introductions, with several demonstrations. Second, we talk about the program. Third, I look every student in the eyes during my talks and identify the next generation of leaders in this region. I tell them that this is what I am really looking for. We describe the workforce that will be needed going into the future, and describe how we will help them to the next levels by becoming professional and outstanding candidates for any positions they desire.

So, as I stated above, Sheridan Electric will be there.

But what is the cost? Does it really matter?

Any entity not looking for the next generation workforce, and not developing the next generation of leaders is not doing its part for its communities and region. Any entity not looking for its replacements is not doing its job.

The other day, someone questioned why we spend so much time at the schools when we do not serve that school with power, or it is not a member.

My answer was simple: We do serve the schools within the region. We serve the multitude of young folks' homes in the rural areas. We serve the schools, because our membership owns the schools within their region. We serve the schools, because not only do they need our help from time to time, but they are teaching the next generation of leaders who will take over when we are gone.

In other words, we have a concern for community. Sound familiar?

So, the cost of all of this work is really the cost of doing business of cooperatives. This cooperative has embraced the specified need within this region and the nation. We strive to be part of the solution, instead of part of the problem. Co-ops across the nation run this business model in this fashion. To not be a part of people development is a dismissal of the fundamentals of the co-op business model.

To put a dollar amount on this would be impossible. The true outcomes to this new equation will be realized in the coming years.

This is your cooperative, and this is what we do. ■

Leadership in the cooperatives

by Scott Westlund



I often wonder where leadership comes from in any industry. Is it groomed from the ranks of the individuals who work there and seek these positions, or brought in from the outside?

During my career, I have found leadership in some of the oddest places, both of which did not come from either of these resource pools.

I have found them sweeping floors on a graveyard shift while part of a cleanup crew, or found them working paint lines in the corner of a plant, or found them operating machine centers on a swing shift. Most times, these folks do not even know they have a trait of leadership, or find that people naturally follow them, and have never been asked where they see themselves in five, 10 or 20 years from now.

It takes dedication to find these people, nurture them to new levels, and turn them loose to do what they do best, which is lead.

It is no different in the electric cooperative industry. Current managers, in all co-ops, should be asking these questions of the employees they have within their ranks. In all actuality, the next CEO could be a lineworker or an

electrician, and you do not even know it.

It should be the task of all department heads to be looking for their replacements the day they start the position. This ensures continuity if anything should even happen to the current head.

Most folks are not comfortable with this concept, because what if this person they are grooming is better than they are?

The answer to this question is I hope they are.

The recent issue surrounding eastern Montana cooperatives is shared services. While a great concept on so many levels, it fails to answer the question on how to get started and get traction in this endeavor. From IT specialists, to equipment, to pole testing, and even to shared CEO's, this concept is great for the membership of all co-ops.

Why the interest in sharing managers? Because several managers are retiring and no replacements are available.

Why are no replacements available? Because there are no candidates, or the cooperative has failed to build potential managers within its ranks.

Why have they not worked on this for many years if no candidates exist? We are not sure.

Is it a money issue for the membership? Maybe, in some cases.

This discussion happened at this cooperative. The service territory schools are one of these alternatives, including colleges, people/leaders who live in the towns within the region, and so on. There may even be unidentified candidates who have never been asked the question or been recognized as a potential leader/CEO for the future.

It is too easy to say, "we don't have any," when the raw material is there to be developed. I go back to my opening statement about finding and training your replacement on day one of your starting your department.

There are always options.

I would have to say that the current CEO of Sheridan Electric, Rick Knick, took on this problem from day one of his tenure as CEO of this cooperative. He has developed some great leaders who have moved on to other cooperatives and continues to this day developing more talent. He has taken the important step to find his replacement, and replacements for other cooperatives, and takes this very seriously. This is his job, as the caretaker of the future for this cooperative for many generations to come.

So, back to shared services. Shared services makes sense for the membership of all of the cooperatives. Sharing of high-priced equipment, centralized IT support, special services for preventive maintenance of a system or compliance saves the members money.

Should the shared services model focus on tangible equipment or specialized services first before moving on to the bigger picture? Should it start with a narrow approach, then widen the scope after the foundation has been laid?

Shared services are a great idea, and teams should continue this work for the members of the cooperatives. ■

Washington, D.C., Youth Tour process explained

by **Scott Westlund**

Every year, cooperatives across the state look for one to two individuals who will go to Washington, D.C., to represent the cooperative.

This process includes an application and essay competition to glean the best from the candidate pool. Every co-op conducts the process differently.

Every year, after the annual meeting, this co-op starts the Youth Tour and scholarship process. We have made a conscious decision to not just send the information to the schools, but also meet with the kids personally.

These meetings always start the same, with some life skills that all students will need in the real world.

This year, we taught introductions with a handshake.

The introduction and handshake are the best opportunity to leave a lasting impression on the person who you have met. Giving a firm handshake, looking the other person in the eye, and stating your name clearly leaves that impression.

I do not leave until they understand the importance of this action, because this small bit of information will be used later in our Youth Tour process.

Once at the schools and prior to the meetings with the young folks, we meet with the superintendent and English teacher(s). The goal is to have the essay portion of the contest through the English departments as essay curriculum.

See where this is going? First a professional introduction, now a professional essay.

Next comes the interview with these students. We are not only looking for the best to represent the cooperative, but we are also teaching them how to interview, including how to sit, how to make

eye contact and how to speak. We are also doing a behavioral-based interview where their answers dictate the next question.

The interview panel consists of a real-life scenario. I always represent the business, and my partner represents human resources. As you can probably guess, the business side of the process is somewhat harsher than the human resource side, thus there are more direct questions.

Our goal is to make these young individuals stronger and more prepared for any interview in which they may partake in their future.

These folks will get the questions before the interview to prepare. These questions are never asked in order, but may be asked several times in different ways, or may not be asked at all because we got the answer earlier in the chat.

These folks are interviewing for a job, and we are looking for the best.

Every interview will end with four to five tips to work on for their next interview. Sometimes, these young folks come to my office to practice the improvements for another interview they may have. Sometimes, we see the young person trying again the following year for the same trip, and can always recite what I wanted them to work on for the next time, and show they have improved. In these cases, they have embraced what they have learned and they do remarkably well.

The rules are simple for the trip. You have to be a cooperative member's dependent to go on the trip, but all students will get the interview. The best nonmember essay and interview per school will receive \$100 for the efforts.

So, we have something for everyone.

So, why the effort?

It can be easily defined as



Kayden Hansen and **Kaya Parenteau** have been selected as your 2020 Washington D.C. Youth Tour winners.

younger generation engagement. From the co-op education project with sixth-, seventh- and eighth-graders, to the Youth Tour, to scholarships, we are looking all of these students in the eyes and telling our story. We teach, we incentivize, we know who we are talking to, and they know who we are.

When all is said and done, we have made an impression, we have connected, and we have also identified the next generation of leaders for this region.

Here is where your cooperative puts a good portion of its resources. We strive to educate and find the people who will take our places when we retire. We strive to have the best-educated and connected youth compared to anywhere in the state. We strive to have the most professional students to ever reach Washington, D.C., or to be leaders in the co-op.

We are here to make a difference. ■

Lighting to be given away



In the spirit of efficiency, Sheridan Electric Cooperative is giving away light-emitting diodes (LEDs) each month. Each month's winner will receive 12 new LED bulbs.

So this month, take a moment to complete and mail the coupon. Maybe you'll be this month's lucky winner and save on your energy costs. Good luck. ■

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone number: _____

Account number: _____

Congratulations to **John Crohn** for winning this month's light bulb giveaway.



Sheridan Electric Cooperative STATISTICAL REPORT

	November 2018	November 2019
Total miles of line	2,836	2,835
Consumers billed	3,084	3,144
Kilowatt-hours purchased	13,349,308	14,001,426
Kilowatt-hours sold	12,336,345	12,789,448
Average KWH per residential consumer	1,436	1,486
Average bill per residential consumer	\$138	\$70.90
Cost of purchased power	\$647,613	\$719,797
Margins year to date	\$3,539,731	\$3,379,839

LINE DEPARTMENT STATS

	November 2018	November 2019
Weather	2	7
Age or deterioration	2	3
Animals and public	0	2
Power supplier	0	0
Equipment	0	0

SUMMARY OF WORK COMPLETED

	November 2018	November 2019	Year to date
Pole installations	150	8	64
New construction	691 ft.	415 ft.	48,684 ft.
Miles driven	17,622	18,227	239,433
New accounts	4	4	42
Accounts retired	6	6	24

SHERIDAN ELECTRIC CO-OP

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TRUSTEES

Rod Smith, President Dagmar, Mont.
 Rick A. Hansen, V. President.....Froid, Mont.
 Rob Rust, Sec.....Alkabo, N.D.
 Kerrey Heppner, Treas. Plentywood, Mont
 Alan Danelson, Trustee..... Scobey, Mont.
 Andrew Dethman, Trustee Brockton, Mont.
 Harlan Skillingberg, Trustee Plentywood, Mont.
 Jody Lagerquist, Trustee Westby, Mont.
 Sheri Shanks, Trustee..... Brockton, Mont.

EMPLOYEES

Rick Knick Manager
 Riley Tommerup..... Office Mgr./Accountant
 Scott Westlund.....Marketing/Member Service Manager
 Jamie Ator Accountant
 Lisa SalveoldOffice Assistant
 Tasha Roness Customer Service Representative
 Torie Waller Work Order Clerk
 Kory OppLine Superintendent
 Bryan Lenz Line Foreman
 Nick Oelkers.....Staking Tech
 Tim Ereth..... Operator/Utilityman
 Josh Johnson Electrical General Foreman
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 Josh Marottek Journeyman Lineman
 Josh Ming Journeyman Lineman
 Bill Baillie.....Apprentice Lineman
 Nolen Drury.....Apprentice Lineman
 Tristan Ereth.....Apprentice Electrician
 Rod Luft..... Warehouse/Utility
 Vicky Haddix..... Custodian

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406-789-2231

OFFICE HOURS: 7 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.
Monday through Friday

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