

Sheridan Electric Cooperative

# LiveWire

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

## WHAT'S INSIDE?

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## There for partners in need

by **Scott Westlund**

**H**opefully, we will cross the threshold for the pandemic soon, but maybe not.

It was heartbreaking to see COVID-19 affect our economy in such a manner. But, as with all things, this will also pass, making us even stronger in the days to come.

Sheridan Electric Cooperative took special note of our schools and the young folks within their walls. We knew school shutdowns would cause turmoil for the superintendents and staffing. Questions would arise for funding, scheduled openings and feeding of kids during this time.

Sheridan Electric was invited to join a conference call between all the superintendents within the region as they sorted out what the next moves would be on this changing landscape, and it changed every day.

These folks sorted through many levels of emotion as they progressed to form a plan of action. First there was fear, then concern, then focus. Just as everyone sorted out these same emotions, the leadership of the schools did the same and in a pragmatic manner.

This cooperative listened, and offered little to the conversation,

but quickly identified some of the “back-end” problems they were facing. With a goal to take some of the pressure off these folks, we quickly identified some items that would help them to focus on the big picture and not on the little things.

In this case, feeding the kids during this time was a big item. But did they have the resources to begin this task without several days of changing how they did it, to how they would have to do it?

On the evening of the first day, I looked for resources to help them. On the morning of the second day, we had a pallet of 280 cases of bottled water on the warehouse floor, with three more pallets in transit to the cooperative office. By noon of the second day, all of the water from the first pallet had been delivered to our nine schools.

This continued for a few days until we learned that these folks were running out of No. 6 paper bags and their resources were drying up.

Two days later, we had 20,000 No. 6 paper bags on the floor, with another 8,000 on the way.

By the time we finished, we had purchased and delivered approximately 3,500 bottles

of water, and 30,000 bags. In addition, we learned that these folks were running short of sandwich bags, which we promptly ordered and donated.

By April 6, it was apparent that these folks had a good handle on their direction, and we had assisted them over the hump.

After looking at the receipts for this project, we had topped \$8,500. When the board approved the amounts, we quickly went to our power supplier, Basin Electric Power Cooperative, who quickly matched the amount. These checks were dispersed to the schools to continue the purchasing of the materials.

These are our partners in the region.

I have often said and learned very early in my career that a “crisis will define people.” It is apparent that this crisis has defined the leadership we have in our school systems. These are great people well-deserved to be in their positions. They have taken this crisis and tamed it. They have made a difference in their young students’ eyes, kept them fed, taught them at a distance, and turned a bad situation into a doable one.

We applaud these folks and what they do for our kids within this region. ■

# Does the utility business have a captive customer?

by Scott Westlund



**D**oes the utility business have a captive customer? This statement has been made to me a couple times during the past few years. Is it a captive customer? Yes, I would say it is. Does that mean we can treat that customer any differently than if we were a timber mill, restaurant or local grocery store? No.

In those industries, if you treat customers poorly or think they cannot go anywhere else, you don't have customers any longer.

Having captive customers does not give us the right to treat people any differently than if we were any other business. In fact, it should serve as a reminder that we need to treat customers more special, and in a way that brings more to them each and every day.

I have been exposed to folks in this cooperative world who think that customers/patrons are captive and we can do whatever we want to do. We can sit back and do as little as possible and collect a

paycheck. We do not need to do improvement projects, we do not need to build relationships, we do not need to cultivate leadership, or do not need to challenge ourselves to the next levels.

All of these approaches are a false support of our cooperative principles. These principles not only guide us, but also combat the types of things I just described.

We should never look at our membership as a captive customer. We should treat them like we could lose them tomorrow. At all times, we should be looking for that "value-added product" to present to them. They are the foundation of the cooperative, not the other way around.

To look at this foundation as a captive customer is not the right course of action. As cooperative employees, we push ourselves to the next levels, do not get complacent, and look for ways to enhance the dollar that the cooperative members pay to keep their cooperative whole. We find ways to develop leadership for the next generations, either within the cooperative world or beyond. We have that talent within our ranks to make a difference.

This is part of who we are. ■



## Meet your new member service and marketing manager

by Scott Westlund

**A**s of mid-June, Sheridan Electric Cooperative has a new face as the member service and marketing manager. Please welcome Josh Johnson to his new position as your member service and marketing manager to complete the fourth leg of the management team. Josh has been with the cooperative for many years as an electrician and electrician foreman. His promotion into this new position will expose Josh to many new levels of the organization and he will have the opportunity to assist in shaping the cooperative future for many years to come.

Since early 2000, this position has made several changes and committed its work toward the well-being of its members and development of the young people

within our schools. We put the member first in everything we do. It is all about you, the membership.

Our region's school districts are the main focus of the time we will spend in the coming years. We will be dedicating

enormous amounts of time to find and develop the next generation of leadership for this region. We also have a few new programs to possibly keep these new leaders here and to enhance the teaching staffs within the school systems.

With the introduction of Josh, we will continue that drive toward perfection, making every possible move in support of the family of members, employees and the Sheridan Electric Cooperative business model. ■

## A crisis will always define people

by **Scott Westlund**

**H**ave you ever wondered how people move up the ladders of leadership within a company or business entity? Have you ever wondered what types of people ascend to these levels of leadership, sometimes without effort?

Throughout my career, I have seen, developed and promoted people into positions of leadership based on a set of unique character traits. How do they conduct themselves in group settings? Do they follow the group trend and add to the topic? Do they separate themselves from the drama, and interject substance and fact? Are they quick to condemn/blame instead of looking at the facts and being part of a solution instead of the problem? Do they keep their heads in the face of crisis?

OK, this list seems long, but is really very simple. It is based on what happens to humans when faced with a crisis. An example comes from a mill where I worked while in Oregon. The shift leadership always met in the main office prior to all shifts starting. Once there, the answering machine was played

to find out who called in sick for the day. One day, five of the 10 employees called in sick on the planer. That shift supervisor was quick to say, in a panic form, that he needed to shut the planer down for the day, instead of looking at the problem methodically and pragmatically.

By shifting workers, the solutions were simple. We covered that crisis in about five minutes, with clear, cool heads. We knew it was temporary, so why panic?

This individual came to me several years later and made a comment to me I will never forget. He stated that no matter what the issue was, he always looked to me for clear black-and-white solutions (I got that from my mother).

Decisions made in haste, with emotion or panic-driven produce no results. They actually put people in harm's way by not acting in a level-headed manner. People feed off of the state of mind of their leadership. A cool head means a cool fact-driven workforce.

Now, we are faced with a crisis, and have been for several months now. How

is your cooperative facing the challenges with cool, calculating heads? Are we keeping our employees safe, do they have their heads in the game and are staying safe while they do what they are trained to do?

I will tell you that we do not alienate ourselves from the workforce during these times. We stay in front of them so they can see that decisions are made, and we care. We stay in front of them to confront exceptional behavior, or poor behavior. We coach, we guide, and we set the example.

Will we ever be questioned on decisions we have made? Yes, no matter what the industry, there are always folks who do that.

It is interesting to see how a crisis defines people. From a planer in Oregon, to a plywood plant in Libby, or your cooperative, a crisis will always define people's characters.

It is up to people to choose the bucket they want to be in.

This is the definition of leadership. ■

# 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 **Sarah Borah** for winning this month's light bulb giveaway.



## Sheridan Electric Cooperative STATISTICAL REPORT

	May 2019	May 2020
Total miles of line	2,835	2,835
Consumers billed	3,102	3,174
Kilowatt-hours purchased	11,018,512	8,538,727
Kilowatt-hours sold	10,183,360	7,830,712
Average KWH per residential consumer	826	799
Average bill per residential consumer	\$105.90	\$96.00
Cost of purchased power	\$493,771	\$321,333
Margins year to date	\$2,033,104	\$1,763,624

### LINE DEPARTMENT STATS

	May 2019	May 2020
Weather	16	541
Age or deterioration	5	3
Animals and public	3	12
Power supplier	1	0
Equipment	0	0

### SUMMARY OF WORK COMPLETED

	May 2019	May 2020	Year to date
Pole installations	6	9	541
New construction	4,404 ft.	811 ft.	27,210 ft.
Miles driven	21,318	23,428	116,238
New accounts	4	1	12
Accounts retired	1	11	48

### SHERIDAN ELECTRIC CO-OP

Medicine Lake, Mont. 59247  
406-789-2231

#### 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

Scott Westlund.....Manager  
Riley Tommerup..... Office Mgr./Accountant  
Jamie Ator ..... Accountant  
Lisa Salvevold ..... Office Assistant  
Tasha Roness ..... Customer Service Representative  
Torie Waller ..... Work Order Clerk  
Kory Opp ..... Line Superintendent  
Bryan Lenz ..... Line Foreman  
Nick Oelkers..... Staking Engineer  
Tim Ereth..... Operator/Utilityman  
Josh Johnson..... Electrical General Foreman  
Tom Hinds ..... Electrical Foreman  
Steve Augustine ..... Line Sub Foreman  
Dan Roeder ..... Journeyman Lineman  
Shawn Sansaver..... Journeyman Lineman  
Josh Marottek ..... Journeyman Lineman  
Josh Ming..... Journeyman Lineman  
Bill Baillie..... Apprentice Lineman  
Nolen Drury..... Apprentice Lineman  
Jake Backman..... Apprentice Lineman  
Tristan Ereth..... Apprentice Electrician  
Rod Luft..... Warehouse/Utility  
Vicky Haddix..... Custodian

OUTAGES • CALL 24 HOURS A DAY  
406-789-2231

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

Your Touchstone Energy® Cooperative