



# VIGILANTE ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE

A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative 

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## 2020 VEC Leadership Award and MECA Memorial Scholarships *Opportunities for Education*

Vigilante Electric Cooperative believes in post-secondary education. This is why we are again pairing our Leadership Award with the Montana Electric Cooperatives' Association (MECA) Memorial Scholarship. Most scholarship articles focus on the cost of furthering one's education, but I am going to take a different tack and focus on the cost of not going.

An abundance of economic research has correlated earnings to the educational level one has achieved. While the numbers vary depending on the source, the general findings are similar.

SmartAsset is a personal finance technology company headquartered in New York City that uses financial modeling to provide advice on major financial decisions. The following is information from one of its online columns:

Workers with less than a high school diploma are the lowest earners on average when you examine the average salary by education level. According to data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), median weekly earnings for those with less than a high school degree are \$493. That works out to \$25,636 per year, assuming a year of constant earning. The unemployment rate for Americans with less than a high school diploma is 8 percent, the highest of any of the educational categories.

Earnings are higher for those with a high school diploma. Median weekly earnings for workers with a high school diploma equal \$678. That works out to \$35,256 per year. The unemployment rate for those with a high school diploma is 5.4 percent.

Having some college credits but no degree still improves your earnings over having just a high school diploma. The average salary of someone with some college and no degree is \$738 per week, \$38,376 per year. The unemployment rate for people in this category is 5 percent.

Having an associate's degree gives you an edge over someone with no degree, but lower average earnings than someone with a bachelor's degree. Median weekly earnings for workers with an associate's degree are \$798, for an annual salary of \$41,496. The unemployment rate in this category is 3.8 percent, which is lower than the average across all educational attainment levels (4.3 percent).

Americans with a bachelor's degree earn a weekly aver-



age of \$1,137. That's higher than the median weekly earnings for workers at all education levels — \$860. Average earnings for workers with bachelor's degrees work out to \$59,124 per year. The unemployment rate for Americans with a bachelor's degree is 2.8 percent.

Another interesting study regarding the correlation in earnings potential to education was conducted by Georgetown University. It found that, on average, college graduates earn \$1 million more over their lifetimes than non-college graduates.

In today's economy, the numbers strongly suggest that all post-secondary education improves earning potential. Trade school, or vocational school, is a post-secondary institution that is designed to give students the technical skills to prepare them for a specific occupation. Careers in skilled trades are in high demand and are expected to remain high for the foreseeable future, according to the Bureau of Labor and Statistics. Trade school graduates are also well paid. The average annual salary of a trade school graduate is \$42,000.

We have structured the Vigilante Electric Cooperative Leadership Award in such a way that qualified applicants can use the funding to attend any type of post-secondary education they prefer. The application period for the 2020 Vigilante Electric Leadership Award/MECA Memorial Scholarship is now open. Applicants must be the dependent of a member of Vigilante Electric. They must complete all the elements of the application and return it to our office no later than January 24, 2020.

We are looking for applicants who not only excel in their schools, but also in their communities. Judging is based on academic strength, activities in school and community, awards and honors, employment, volunteerism, community service and a personal statement.

The top applications will receive our Leadership Award, and the best application will be forwarded to MECA for consideration for its Memorial Scholarship. Past recipients are not eligible. The application can be found on our website at [www.vec.coop/content/scholarships](http://www.vec.coop/content/scholarships).

If you have any questions regarding this, please contact our Dillon office at (800) 221-8271 or 683-2327.

# We're Thankful for Our Sister Cooperatives

By Anne Prince

When you think about Vigilante Electric Cooperative, you probably associate us with the local community. And you would be right. Our leadership team, board of trustees and employees all live and work right here in the communities we serve. But you may not realize that Vigilante Electric is actually part of a much larger cooperative network that brings additional value, tools and knowledge that benefit you, the members of the co-op.

A defining characteristic of a cooperative is “cooperation among cooperatives.” This is a way that co-ops work together to meet bigger challenges.

If our system was hit by a catastrophic event, we would call on our sister co-ops for assistance. Through a system of mutual aid, we can coordinate with other co-ops to bring additional trucks, equipment and manpower to our area. We work together and share resources in order to restore power to our communities. Vigilante Electric will reciprocate by assisting other electric co-ops when they request help as well.

Another area in which Vigilante Electric benefits from cooperation among cooperatives is cybersecurity. Through the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association’s (NRECA) “Rural Cooperative Cybersecurity Capabilities Program” (RC3), we are able to access training, resources and tools to strengthen our efforts to combat cyber threats.

Our ability to tap into the larger electric cooperative network to access tools, products, resources and leading practices from across the nation ultimately makes our co-op and our community stronger.

Cooperatives such as us also have a global impact. Communities across the globe have benefitted from the lessons learned and experience of co-ops in electrification of rural areas in the U.S. NRECA International has provided access to reliable and affordable electricity to 120 million people in 43 countries. This effort is made possible through the support of electric co-ops in this state and across the country.

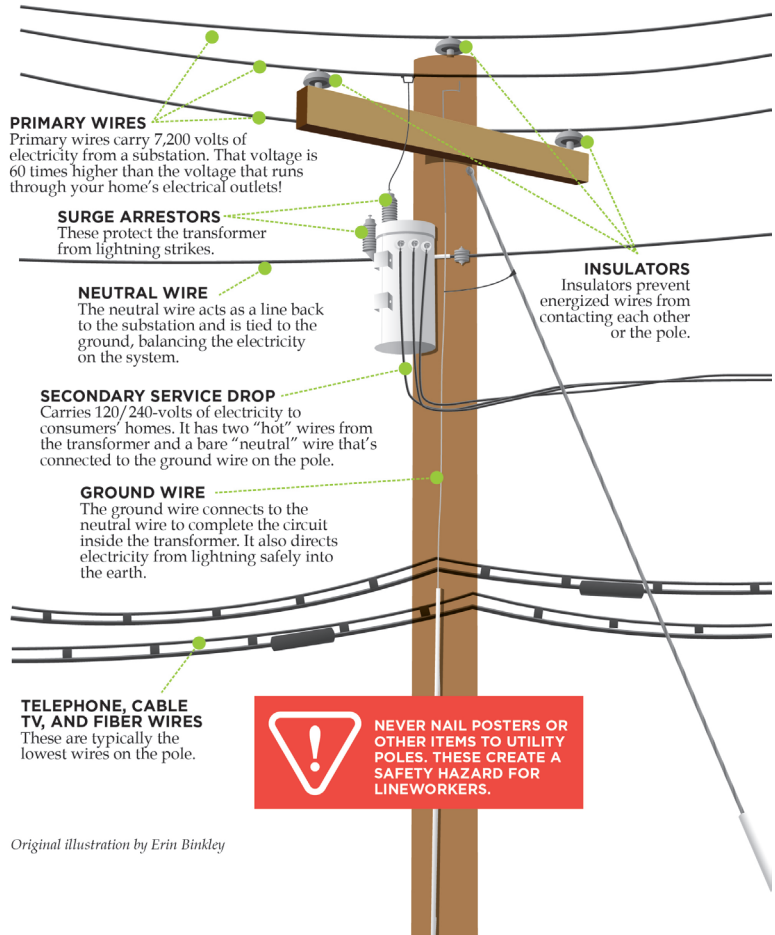
Hundreds of lineworkers, engineers and other co-op employees have served as volunteers to bring first-time access to electricity and train local partners to help utilities be sustainable in their own communities.

November is a time of year for reflection and giving thanks. We are grateful for our sister co-ops, who enable us to better serve you and our broader community. When electric co-ops collaborate, we strengthen each other and the communities we serve — and that is something to be truly thankful for. Happy Thanksgiving, everyone.



## WHAT'S ON THAT POLE?

This illustration shows the basic equipment found on electric utility poles. The equipment varies according to the location and the service they provide.



Original illustration by Erin Binkley



# An Amazing Learning Experience

## *Safety Demonstrations Available*

At Vigilante Electric Cooperative, safety is our highest priority. We take the safety of our employees and the members in our community very seriously. While electricity should not be feared, it should be granted a great deal of respect. After all, electricity is a necessary part of our lives. Treat it with respect and work gets done. Be careless around electricity and tragic consequence can occur.

Regardless of the source of the data, the numbers are sobering regarding the dangers of electricity. Here are just a few that I found from a Google search:

- The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) estimates there are approximately 350 electrical-related fatalities a year.
- The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), Atlanta, shows electrocution is the third-leading cause of death at work among 16- and 17-year-old workers, accounting for 12 percent of all workplace deaths.
- It's estimated that 62 agricultural workers a year die from electrocution in the U.S., with overhead power lines being the most common source.
- Each year, many children and adults are electrocuted or seriously injured in this country due to accidental contact with floating phases, downed power lines or objects such as green wood or fences in contact with downed wires.
- There were 2,210 nonfatal electrical injuries in 2017.
- More than 90 percent of power line contact accidents involved overhead distribution conductors.
- Heavy equipment events accounted for 50 percent of overhead power contacts.

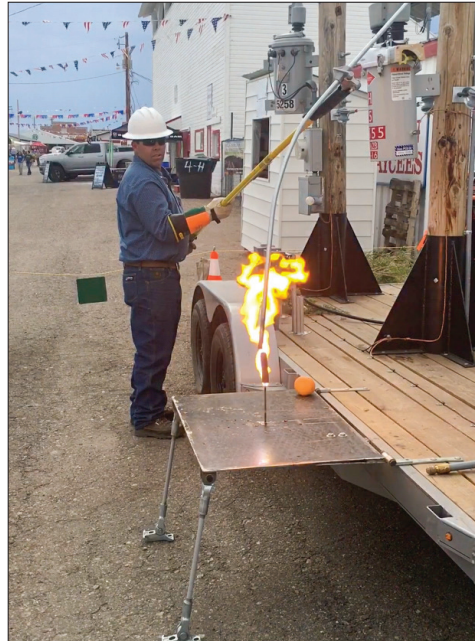
In the September edition of the *Rural Montana* we announced the completion and first demonstrations of our new high-voltage safety trailer. As the name implies, this trailer helps us demonstrate the dangers of high-voltage electricity in an environment that we control. Our goal with the creation of this trailer is to do these demonstrations in front of as many people as possible.

This trailer is a model of a single-phase overhead distribution system. There are real poles, real wires and the same components that you would see out on our system. We are also using the same voltage (7,200 volts) that is used in the field.

Over the course of the demonstration our linemen explain how our system works and go through different scenarios that can lead to harm. Things such as the dangers of flying a kite near power lines, or climbing a tree that has grown around power lines. They also discuss the dangers of moving irrigation hand lines near power lines, and what happens and what to do if you are in a car wreck that involves a power line.

While all of this could easily be explained in a classroom setting, the most impactful attribute of the demonstrations is the sensory. You see what an arc looks like, you hear the sounds of an arc. Then there is the smell. The smell of a burning tire that has been ignited by an electrical arc.

Part of the demonstration involves passing arcs through



*Pictured are linemen Cody Tarter and Charles Wharton doing a high voltage safety demonstration at the Beaverhead County Fair this past summer.*



various food items such as hotdogs, grapefruit and pineapples. After we have run some electricity through these items, our linemen cut them open so spectators see how the electricity tracks through it and feel the residual heat created by the arc. There is also the interaction between the spectators and our linemen. Spectators get to ask questions, and they get to try on and handle some of the personal protective gear used by our linemen.

This trailer is the perfect instrument for learning. Kids absorb information presented in this manner. I have participated in this type of demonstration for more than 20 years, and the main reaction that we get is "WOW." If you are part of a civic organization, first responder group or school and would like to have safety demonstration for your group, give us a call.

# You Belong Here

Day by day, it can be easy to forget just how different Vigilante Electric Cooperative really is from other energy companies. I suppose that's true in any industry—over time, the exceptional starts to seem ordinary. But while talking to some of our members recently, I was struck once again by how remarkable our electric cooperative really is.

Before this starts to sound immodest, let me make something clear: What makes us remarkable is you. After all, as an electric cooperative, we are led by members such as you who understand and listen to the community. We don't answer to outside investors who are only interested in using

us as a way to make a buck. And this key difference has been part of the plan from the beginning.

You see, we were built by the communities we serve from day one, which means that we have been shaped to respond to the specific needs of you and your neighbors. As an electric cooperative, we were created from the ground up by the people who live here and have a long-term interest in seeing the community thrive. Furthermore, if you live on our lines today, you're playing an important role right now in shaping our future as an energy company.

Your choices help us in our mission to efficiently deliver affordable, reliable and safe energy. So thanks, you may be used to getting your energy from us, because we love the energy we get from you.

## Safety Grant Available

Does your group or civic organization have a project that would improve community safety, but need some help with funding? Vigilante Electric Cooperative is looking to help fund safety related projects within our services territory through our safety roundup program.

Vigilante Electric Safety Roundup is a member-driven program. Participants have voluntarily agreed to round their monthly bill up to the next whole dollar. We also have members who round their monthly bill up plus add a few extra dollars each month, or make a one-time donation.

The application period is open until further notice. If your organization has an idea for a safety project, send us a letter providing some details. In the letter, we want to know about your organization, specifics regarding the project and how it will improve community safety. Please send all information to our General Manager Rollie Miller.



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### Vigilante Safety Roundup Tracker

Participating members: 285

Total Contributions: \$3,160

To apply contact our office at  
(800) 221-8271 or 683-2327

An online application is available at [www.vec.coop](http://www.vec.coop).

## Affordable. Innovative. Member Focused.

It's hard to predict the future, but one thing seems certain — **new government regulations will increase the cost of electricity.**

We want to work with you to keep your electric bills **AFFORDABLE**. We're controlling costs and no matter what the future holds we'll continue to put you, our members, **FIRST**.



*Vigilante Electric Cooperative*

Find out how we're Looking Out for You at  
[www.vec.coop](http://www.vec.coop)

Looking Out  
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