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# Vigilante Electric Cooperative

A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative 

## MESSAGE FROM THE MANAGER



The "Brats and Kilowatts" Member Appreciation Day in Dillon in August was a hit. | VEC PHOTO

# Member Appreciation Days

By **ROLLIE MILLER** |  
General Manager



**A**s you may remember, we had our first series of "Brats and Kilowatts" Member Appreciation Days over the last three months. The first two were held in our outpost communities of Townsend and Whitehall. The final one was held in Dillon in August.

These were a great hit, and I'm happy to report we will definitely be doing these events annually in the future. It was a great opportunity for our members to meet some of our staff and board members in a low-key social environment. Although there were a lot of helpful staff making this work, I want to specifically acknowledge Chelsey Hutchinson and Paige Garrison for their

leadership roles in setting these up and making them work.

If you attended any of these, we hope you enjoyed them.

## September rebate

As you may have seen on your last month's billing statement, the board approved and we processed a rebate back to the members. Our revenues have exceeded expectations for a good part of this year, and since we are a non-profit member-owned cooperative, we are returning those excess revenues to you.

The total amount of the rebate was \$500,000, and all rate classifications received the rebate based on the amount of margins each rate class generated. This

See **MANAGER**, page 7

VIGILANTE ELECTRIC  
COOPERATIVE

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General Manager

# The history behind the NRECA Youth Tour

**S**INCE 1964, high school students from across the country have gathered in our nation's capital to take part in a special event. They come to see the American history enshrined in Washington, D.C., and bear witness to history in the making. They come to learn and share with others whose geographical diversity is rivaled only by their demographic diversity. Mostly, they come to have fun. What event is the thread that brings them together? The National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA) Youth Tour to Washington D.C.

While the first organized Youth Tour took place in 1964, the seeds for this program were planted in 1957 by then-Senator and future President Lyndon Baines Johnson. While addressing the NRECA Annual Meeting in Chicago, Senator Johnson declared, "If one thing goes out of this meeting, it will be sending youngsters to the national capital, where they can actually see what the flag stands for and represents."

Consequently, Johnson's home state of Texas got the ball rolling by sending groups of young people to Washington, D.C., to work in Johnson's office. A year later, busloads of youths from Iowa and Illinois were participating in a week-long study tour of the nation's capital. In the years following participation grew and, in 1964, NRECA organized Youth Tour Week with approximately 400 participants. In 2023, more than 1,800 students and chaperones attended this weeklong event.

The history of our participation in the Youth Tour is also intriguing. The first year that Vigilante Electric Cooperative sponsored students on the Youth Tour was 2003, and while this program was on our radar, it is a substantial financial commitment, and we really did not fully comprehend the magnitude and impact of this program until we met a young lady from our service territory by the name of Melissa Hibbard.


In 2002, Melissa submitted an essay that ended up being one of the two statewide winners. Upon returning from this adventure, the Board of Trustees invited her to one of its meetings to talk about her trip. Melissa, being active in speech and drama, put on quite a dazzling presentation, after which the board unanimously voted to sponsor a student for the 2003 tour.

Since then, we have had a remarkable group of students representing us on the Youth Tour, including four individuals who were elected to represent our state on the Youth Leadership Council. After the tour, each was invited to meet



This year Montana's electric cooperatives sent 24 Montana students and four chaperones to Washington, D.C., for a week as part of the NRECA Youth Tour. This trip was completely paid for by the cooperatives and the Montana Electric Cooperatives' Association. This amazing opportunity is available to qualifying students of co-op members. Contact Vigilante Electric for more information. | PHOTO BY RYAN HALL

with our board of trustees to talk about their experiences. Of those who attended a board meeting, the experience for them was remarkable and their gratitude for the opportunity was very sincere.

This is an incredible opportunity. Applications, contest rules and resource materials for the 2024 Youth Tour are available on our website at [vec.coop](http://vec.coop). Here you will also find a promotional video featuring the 2023 Montana delegation. This information can also be obtained at area high schools or by calling our office at (406) 683-2327 or (800) 221-8271. 

# Why we celebrate cooperatives

By **ADAM SCHWARTZ** | For *Vigilante Electric*

**E**VERY October, cooperatives from all sectors across the country celebrate National Cooperative Month. The purpose of this annual celebration is to recognize the cooperative difference and remind you, the members of the co-op, about Vigilante Electric's purpose.

I must admit that occasionally, I too have been somewhat cynical of the many different "days" and "months" that are celebrated, but National Cooperative Month is truly an opportunity to celebrate.

Celebrating National Cooperative Month informs others about our unique business model, which is based on the Seven Cooperative Principles: Voluntary and Open Membership; Democratic Member Control; Members' Economic Participation; Autonomy and Independence; Education, Training and Information; Cooperation Among Cooperatives; and Concern for Community.

For co-op employees and members that are familiar with the principles, the month of October is a fantastic opportunity to renew our connection to each other and the purpose of our co-op: to provide the most reliable service at the lowest possible cost.

In the U.S., there are more than 30,000 co-ops serving in every single industry. Many co-ops from different sectors join together during the month of October to educate members



in the community about cooperatives.

There are more co-ops in our local community than most people realize. Examples of which include credit unions, hardware stores, agricultural co-ops and electric cooperatives. Co-ops are even represented on the shelves at our local grocery stores, such as Land O'Lakes, Welch's, Organic Valley, Cabot Cheese, Sunkist, Ocean Spray and many more.

According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (2022), cooperatives account for more than two million jobs and boast about 350 million members, and generate approximately \$660 billion in annual revenue.

This speaks to the heart of why we must take every opportunity to celebrate and teach others about the cooperative business model. So, plan your own co-op celebration by purchasing co-op products, look to do business with co-ops right here in our local community and be an active member of Vigilante Electric Cooperative. RM

## MANAGER

*Continued from page 5*

action is the epitome of a non-profit electric cooperative, where the governing board members are paying the same rates as all the members. They recognize the importance of maintaining stable margins and returning any excess margins to the membership.

### Wholesale rates

Having stated the information in the last paragraph, I must inform you of an upcoming wholesale rate increase. We have what are called tiered wholesale rates, and the first block is a set amount of Tier 1 rate power. Over time, we have grown into the need for Tier 2 power, which has rates that are more

market-based. About 20 percent of our total load is in the Tier 2 category.

Although the Tier 1 rates will remain near where they are now, the Tier 2 power cost is almost doubling. This will create about a 10-12 percent shortfall in the revenue needed, all things being equal. Therefore, we will see a rate increase for January 2024 usage and beyond.

We have hired an electric rate consultant to assist us in making sure that each of the rate categories is bearing its share of the load. The consultant has not finalized recommendations yet, so there will be more to come on this as we get closer to the end of the year.

### Other item of interest

We are just finalizing our 2024-2027 construction work plan. This is the

document we and the U.S. Department of Agriculture use for financing capital improvement projects. We have a significant number of large capital improvements needed in the next five years, including three substation projects. We have put a significant amount of effort into preparing this document, but there is no substitute for proper planning.

We hope your summer and early fall are going well for you. It appears we will be in a very good position for irrigation water for next year, at least around the Dillon area.

As always, if you need anything from me, feel free to call me here at the office or on my cellphone at (406) 925-1085, or email me at [rollie@vec.coop](mailto:rollie@vec.coop). We are here to serve you, the members of Vigilante Electric Cooperative. RM

# SOMETIMES WE ALL NEED HELP

## Low-income energy assistance programs available

**"O**UR lives are but specks of dust falling through the fingers of time. Like sands of the hourglass, so are the days of our lives." While many will remember part of this quote from a popular daytime soap opera, it is also a quote attributed to Socrates. The quote is a metaphor for how quickly time passes. Personally, this reflects on how fast this year has gone and how quickly winter will be upon us.

Still fresh in our memories is how harsh this past winter was. So, the prospects of another challenging winter is scary. Every year, winter places pressure on our finances and lowers our comfort level. For low-income families, winter can be quite dire with struggles to keep homes warm and utility bills paid. Fortunately, there are organizations available to lend some assistance.

Vigilante Electric Cooperative has helped qualified members receive credit on their accounts to aid in winter heating since 1998. Applications for our assistance program are now available by contacting our office at (406) 683-2327 or (800) 221-8271, and must be returned by December 1, 2023. The national income guidelines for the 2023-24 heating season are in the chart to the right.

Note that our program's funding level is limited, so we strongly recommend the programs offered by the Department of Public Health and Human Services. The DPHHS administers federally funded programs

designed to help low-income families. The following is a brief description of the opportunities through them.

**THE LOW-INCOME ENERGY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (LIHEAP)** pays part of winter energy bills for eligible people. Most utilities offer LIHEAP recipients discounts on their bills.

**THE WEATHERIZATION PROGRAM** helps participants improve the heating efficiency and comfort of their homes.

**ENERGY SHARE OF MONTANA** provides emergency utility assistance loans to households experiencing financial hardship.

These programs are administered through regional offices. Each office serves specific counties, so contact the office nearest you. (See box to the right)

One thing that we cannot emphasize enough is that households who qualify for LIHEAP may be eligible for weatherization. Energy assistance helps with short-term heating needs. Weatherization is when improvements are made to a home that help reduce energy usage long-term.

If approved, applications are ranked according to degree of need and placed in "priority groups." Special priority is given to older adults and disabled individuals. Then an energy auditor will set up a time to visit with you about your home's needs. This person is trained to determine the most cost-effective weatherization measures for your home. RM

### INCOME GUIDELINES

FAMILY SIZE	INCOME LIMITS
1	\$29,796
2	\$38,964
3	\$48,132
4	\$57,300
5	\$66,468
6	\$75,636
7	\$77,355
8	\$79,074
9	\$83,550
10	\$91,260

### CONTACT INFORMATION

**ACTION INC.**

District 12 - Butte  
(800) 382-1325  
(406) 533-6855

**ROCKY MOUNTAIN DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL**

LIHEAP Office - Helena  
(800) 356-6544  
(406) 447-1625

**HRDC**

District 9 - Bozeman  
(800) 332-2796  
(406) 587-4486

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**Vigilante Electric Cooperative**  
 A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative

**Vigilante Safety Roundup Tracker**

Participating members: 819  
 Total Contributions: \$22,122.49

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).