

VIGILANTE ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE

A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative 

P.O. Box 1049, Dillon, MT 59725-1049
(406) 683-2327 or (800) 221-8271
Web site: www.vec.coop
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OWNED BY THOSE WE SERVE

Youth Tour Reflections

By *Dusty Keim, Dillon*

While back, I came across this quote: “You will never be completely at home again, because part of your heart will always be elsewhere. That is the price you pay for the richness of loving and knowing people in more than one place.” And while I had traveled before, it wasn’t until I had the privilege of attending the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association Youth Tour that I truly understood what it meant. Never before have I had the opportunity to spend a week with such a wonderful group of people that all became like family.

Washington, D.C., is a beautiful city. Every place we visited had something special about it, but I have to say my two favorite spots were the National Archives and the Thomas Jefferson Memorial. Thomas Jefferson is my favorite president, and his memorial is absolutely stunning. As for the National

Archives: One of the things my dad has taught and shared with me is a deep appreciation for our founding documents. To be able to see the original documents up close and personal was just incredibly moving for me.

I want to encourage anybody even remotely interested in visiting our nation’s capital to apply for this trip. It’s not a long process, nor is it very difficult, and the resulting reward is more than worth it. I would also like to thank the Vigilante Board of Directors, Montana Electric Cooperatives’ Association, and our amazing chaperones for granting this opportunity and making it truly the experience of a lifetime.



Dusty Keim



Dusty Keim, chaperone Ben Miller, Bailee Field and Kjersten Sandru.
Photos courtesy of Sherri Carl

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VIGILANTE ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE, INC.

What are your plans next summer? May I offer a suggestion?

By Rod Siring

“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.” These were the words of then-Senator Lyndon B. Johnson as he addressed the 1957 National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA) Annual Meeting in Chicago. These words became the seed for what is now the NRECA Youth Tour to Washington, D.C.

In 1958, rural electric cooperatives in Iowa sponsored the first busload of youths on a weeklong study tour of the nation’s capital, and other states started picking up on the idea. In 1964, NRECA began to coordinate the program. Participating groups arranged to be in the city the same week, and there were about 400 young people from 12 states that year. In 2014, there were 1,643 students and 300 chaperones representing 44 states.

For more than a decade, Vigilante Electric Cooperative has participated in the NRECA Youth Tour to Washington D.C. This past summer we were fortunate to have three participants from our service territory. Their pictures and stories have been featured in this publication. The term “once in a lifetime” has been used to describe this weeklong

event, but even this might not adequately describe an event that has had such an enormous impact on so many lives.

“DC exceeded my expectations and made me dream bigger, think outside the box, and walk in a zigzag rather than straight line. I feel an empowerment that can best be described by Henry David Thoreau, “What lies before us and what lies behind us are small matters compared to what lies within us. And when you bring what lies within out into the world, miracles happen.”

— Kjersten Sandru, Twin Bridges High School, Youth Leadership Council Winner

“All of the things we did on the trip were pretty amazing and unforgettable — touring Mount Vernon, going to the

zoo, touring all the monuments, going to the National Mall of Museums, going to Arlington Cemetery — it broadened my horizons substantially.”

— Bailee Field, Broadwater High School

“And while I had traveled before, it wasn’t until I had the privilege of attending the NRECA Youth Tour that I truly understood what it meant. Never before have I had the opportunity to spend a week with such a wonderful group of people that all became like family.”

— Dusty Keim, Twin Bridges High School

The 2015 dates are June 13-19. To qualify, a student must be the dependent of a member of Vigilante Electric Cooperative, and must currently be a sophomore or junior. Selection is based on an application and short essay. Information is available at area high schools or on our website, www.vec.coop. Applications and essays are due to the Vigilante Electric office, P.O. Box 1049, Dillon MT 59725, by November 28, 2014.

This year’s essay topic is: “Describe how electric cooperatives operate based on the seven cooperative principles. Tell which of the seven cooperative principles you think is the most important and why?”

Win a trip to Washington



YOUTH TOUR



2014 Youth tour participants at the foot of the Lincoln Memorial. Photo courtesy of Sherri Carl

Paying Your Winter Heating Bill

Are you ready for winter? The prospect of a long, cold winter is something few, if any, people look forward to. It impacts not only our comfort levels, but can seriously impact our budgets. For low-income families, winter utilities can be an overwhelming burden. For this reason, there are organizations that can help.

Since 1998, Vigilante Electric Cooperative has helped qualified members receive credit on their accounts to aid in winter heating. Applications are available October 1st by contacting our Dillon office, and must be returned by November 14, 2014.

It should be noted that the funding levels for our program are very limited. We strongly recommend that families in need apply for the programs offered by the state of Montana through the Department of Public Health and Human Services. They offer two programs aimed at helping low-income individuals reduce their heating costs.

The Low Income Energy Assistance Program (LIEAP) pays part of winter energy bills for eligible people, and the Weatherization Program helps participants improve the heating efficiency of their homes, thus reducing long-term energy consumption and costs.

The LIEAP guidelines and contact information is presented below. The application period is October 1, 2014, to April 30, 2015. Eligibility is based on family size and total household income. If you think you qualify, call for an application. Each office serves specific counties, so contact the office nearest you. Please note that if you qualify for LIEAP, you qualify for the Weatherization Program.

Family Size	Income Limits	Family Size	Income Limits
1	21,702.00	7	56,341.00
2	28,379.00	8	60,135.00
3	35,057.00	9	66,225.00
4	41,734.00	10	72,315.00
5	48,412.00	11	78,405.00
6	55,089.00	12	84,495.00

Human Resources Council District 12 – Butte (800) 382-1325 (406) 496-4975	Rocky Mountain Development Council LIEAP Office - Helena (800) 356-6544 (406) 447-1625	HRDC District 9 - Bozeman (800) 332-2796 (406) 587-4486
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Another source of help is Energy Share of Montana — a private nonprofit organization whose primary purpose is to help Montanans faced with energy emergencies meet their needs and move toward self-reliance. Requests for this assistance also can be made through the state offices above.

In addition to what is listed here, there are charitable organizations that provide assistance. While many ask for help, we know there are people who desperately need help that do not ask. To borrow a quote “The hardest thing isn’t needing help. The hardest thing is being brave enough to ask for it.” Don’t be afraid to ask.

Useful Resource from Touchstone Energy

TOGETHERWESAVE.COM
As a Touchstone Energy cooperative we have used these pages to promote the many benefits available to you as a member, such as those available through the Co-op Connection Program. What you may not be aware of is Touchstone Energy’s Together We Save campaign.

Together We Save is an ongoing theme of Touchstone Energy cooperatives, which provides education and resources to our members. The current campaign is the “Power of Membership.” On the Together We Save website (www.togetherwesave.com) you will find information that will enhance your understanding of cooperatives, your power as a member, the value of electricity and the Co-op Connections Program.

You also will find useful resources to help you make informed decisions. With fall upon us and winter around the corner, I recommend looking at the Power of Using Energy Wisely. Here you will find two interactive programs and a smartphone app that show you the potential energy savings from simple upgrades and behavior changes.

The Power of Using Energy Wisely has a video series — Watch and Learn. Each video focuses on a specific issue that will help you save energy and money. There are four categories — heating and cooling, lighting, sealing and insulation, and general tips to save energy, and within each category there are a variety of topics.

There is also an energy blog, or Web log. The Together We Save blog is a collection of stories and videos on

energy efficiency, safety advice and tax benefits on efficiency projects, to name a few.

Finally, there is the Tip of the Day. This is exactly like it sounds. You click on the link and a screen pops up with an energy efficiency tidbit, and every day there is a new message. While writing this story the message was “tip of the day: LED and CFL bulbs use 75 percent less energy than traditional bulbs.”

The breadth and depth of the resources available from Touchstone Energy is remarkable. As always, we will use these pages to continue to explore savings opportunities available to you, our member, because we are a Touchstone Energy Cooperative.

Pay by Phone

A little guidance

Last month in the *Rural Montana* magazine we promoted our new Pay by Phone system. This system provides a convenient and secure way to pay your bill, check your balance and update your account information over the phone, 24 hours a day. If you have called into our office to make a payment you have probably been transferred into this system.

Many of you have navigated this system successfully. For those that are hesitant, the process is not too daunting. You simply dial 1-855-385-9904. The system is automated and all the personal information, such as card number and payment amount, is entered by you.

After dialing the number, you will enter the main menu. Here you will be prompted to press numbers for the actions you wish to complete. The script will read "To check your account status or make a payment, press 1. To update your phone number, press 2. To create or update your pin number, press 3. To repeat this menu, press 9."

Say you are making a payment. This system can access your account information in two ways: by your phone number, if you have one currently in our system, or by the account number. Your account number is a five-digit number located at the top right corner of your bill.

The next part is a little quirky. You will be prompted – "If you are calling in regards to your service at". The system will then attempt to recite your mailing address. If you have a post office box the address will sound very strange. Say your mailing address is PO Box 555. The system will read this as PO (pronounced as a word not an abbreviation) Box five-hundred-and-fifty five. In fact, all address numbers will be read like this.

The system will then provide you with your account balance and ask if you want to pay in full, pay a specific amount or exit the menu without making a payment. If you select a payment option you will be asked how you wish to pay.

You can pay your electric accounts using Master Card, Visa or by check. Be mindful that you can only pay residential rate schedules A and B with credit and debit cards. You can pay all

of your accounts on this system by check, however you will need to contact our office to create a PIN number before you can make a payment by check.

When making a payment, you will have the option to save your payment information. You also will have the option to use this information to pay your bill automatically. Once the payment is verified and accepted, you will receive a verification code. Write this number down for your records.

While we didn't cover all of the options, if you listen to the prompts they will lead you successfully through the system. If you do run into an issue, you can always contact us at our Dillon office.

Prescription Discount Tracker

Total Paid Claims YTD	297
Total Savings YTD	\$9,558.97
Total Savings Percentage..	41.01%
August Paid Claims	9
August Savings	\$289.65
Aug. Savings Percentage ..	64.65%



Your Electric Bill

More than just an amount due

Each month you get a bill for the electricity used in the prior month. Many people simply open the bill, read how much is due and then file it away. However, your bill has a wealth of information that keeps you informed and alerts you to trouble.

The upper third of the bill provides all of the relevant contact information for our organization. On the left side you have the mailing address, telephone numbers (including Pay by Phone) and the office hours for the business office in Dillon. On the right is the billing summary. This includes due dates, previous balances, payment information and the total amount due.

It is important to note that if you have an account balance more than 60 days past due, a disconnect notice will appear below the summary. This will give you the minimum amount due and a payment deadline to avoid having your service disconnected.

Next is a message window and details on usage. The message window changes monthly and can display a variety of information. Messages can range from simple season greetings to information about our Annual Meeting.

Below the message box is what constitutes the bill. Here you will find the location and type of service being billed, the dates of the billing period, the number of days in the billing cycle, and the beginning and ending meter

reads.

Here you also will find usage information. The kilowatt hours used times the rate is what constitutes the energy charge. Usage information also allows for comparison with previous months and usage in similar periods of prior years. These comparisons are made easier by the graphical representation on the bill.

Additionally, these comparisons may show large discrepancies, which may indicate a problem. A large increase may signify a problem with a water heater, heating system or well pump. A large decrease, or zero usage, may indicate a problem with the automated reading (AMR) device on the meter. Both situations need to be investigated and remedied as soon as possible.

While the latter may seem to work in your favor, it absolutely doesn't. The meter is not dependent on the AMR. The AMR simply allows us to access readings remotely. When the AMR fails, the meter continues to record usage. We eventually catch up with these and when we do, we will bill to recover revenue of the kilowatt hours that were used but not billed.

We strongly encourage you to review the details of your electric bill and use the information to better manage your account. And always remember that if you do have a question, you can contact us for help.