



# VIGILANTE ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE

A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative 

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OWNED BY THOSE WE SERVE

VIGILANTE ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE, INC.

## Ralph Dreyer— Off The Clock

On March 31st Vigilante Electric Cooperative hosted an open house celebrating the career of longtime Office Manager Ralph Dreyer. If there ever was a title that didn't do justice to one's contributions it would be Ralph's. Ralph has been our computer programmer, IT specialist, accountant, rate analyst and benefits administrator. Plus, the skill at which he performed his tasks makes his contributions to our organization immeasurable.

However, when writing of someone's career, sometimes the person's journey seamlessly reveals the complete picture. Not so for Ralph. Reviewing his work career is more like a jigsaw puzzle, with many pieces coming together to reveal an amazing picture.

In college Ralph would study math, science and accounting. He spent his summers working as a tour bus driver in McKinley National Park (now Denali) and as a train porter. He taught math and science in Missoula, Jamaica and Helena. He worked for a bank in Kalispell, an electrical engineering firm in Billings, and was self-employed as a self-taught computer programmer.

As disjointed as these may seem they all built upon an intellectual base that would service Vigilante Electric very well. Ralph always had a love of math and science. In particular, he had a fascination with electricity and electronics. He would routinely take things such as radios apart to see how they worked.

From here you add his time as a teacher, where he honed his abilities as an educator and mentor. To this, add his time in the banking world. This was very helpful in our industry, which is capital intensive as we use loans to fund upgrades to our system.

Then Ralph worked with SS&R Engineers in Billings, where his childhood fascination with electricity, and background in mathematics and cost accounting lent itself well in being a planning engineer. He did long-range work plans and cost-of-service studies. This is also where he started to use his self-taught computer programming skills to develop billing and general ledger programs for a few electric cooperatives, one of which was Vigilante.

Before coming to Vigilante Electric, Ralph started a software company called Data Tree and sold programs to electric cooperatives. Fortunately for us, this too was not meant to be. In fact, when Ralph contacted then-General Manager Wilbur Anderson that he was closing his business, Wilbur



Ralph Dreyer

asked him to come to work for us.

At Vigilante Electric he fully implemented his Data Tree programs, helped usher in the computer era for our office and, most importantly, he became responsible for our annual cost-of-service and rates study. To this day most cooperatives hire consultants to do cost-of-service and rate studies. Ralph's model has proven itself accurate and affordable. Doing these functions in house has saved our membership hundreds of thousands of dollars over the years.

You may think this is the complete picture. However, this picture is not complete without the last piece, provided by his wife Merrie. Merrie and Ralph met and married after he

came to work for Vigilante. In Merrie, Ralph found his soulmate, the one who brought balance into his life.

Ralph has meant a lot to the people he has worked with, two of which provide the following thoughts.

Rollie Miller, general manager. "I would just want to say that I have enjoyed working with him and will greatly miss his experience, knowledge and personality. I very much appreciated his efforts in training Raquel for his work over the last couple of years. I also wish him and Merrie a long, healthy, happy retirement."

Linda Meine, staff assistant. "Ralph arrived at Vigilante not long after the cooperative purchased his Data Tree software programs. He possessed the skills necessary to write computer code and programs, and his software served VEC well for almost 20 years. I have often said that Ralph has a brilliant mind with a thought process like no one else I know. If we needed the answer to a problem, he wrote the software to glean the information from our data. At times, Ralph would try to explain how he arrived at the answer, but I must confess that sometimes I got lost in the explanation.

"Another thing I had enjoyed while working with Ralph was his dry sense of humor. His stories and jokes usually left us smiling and laughing, and Ralph a little red in the face. It has been my pleasure and honor working with Ralph for the past 27 years. There was never a task too daunting for Ralph to handle. I will miss your voice of reason and your kindness to all."

To say that Ralph Dreyer is one of a kind is an understatement. While the office manager's position is being left in extremely capable hands, Ralph's presence in this office will be missed. Ralph has been a leader, mentor and friend. I wish Ralph and Merrie a long, enjoyable retirement.

# Changes at Vigilante Electric Cooperative

## Welcome Cheyenne Garrison

In the past three editions of this publication we paid tribute to long-time trustee Don Jones for his years of service and dedication to our organization. While it is difficult to replace people like Don, we hope to find people with commitment and drive. At our Annual Meeting in March, the attending members elected Cheyenne Garrison to be the next trustee for District #5.

Cheyenne was born and raised on a ranch in Wyoming. She has a Bachelor's of Science degree in animal science, with an accounting minor from the University of Wyoming. After completing her degree, she worked for the Montana Stockgrowers Association.

Cheyenne and her husband Jim operate a ranch near Glen, where they raise Angus cross cattle. They have three children, Gavin (11), Scarlett (8) and Zane (4). Her family is very active in 4-H, in which Cheyenne is a leader of the Glen Pioneers.

When asked what motivated her to run for the Vigilante Electric Board, Cheyenne replied "I feel it is very important



Cheyenne Garrison

to become involved with organizations that affect your way of life. Power is something that affects each and every one of us — everyday, whether on a personal level or on a business level. Although I am not extremely knowledgeable of the in's and outs of an electric co-op, it seems a lot of the issues they face are similar to the ranching industry. Environmental, financial, logistical and regulatory issues are at the top of the list. I am certain that in

order to maintain these grassroots type organizations, we must become involved and speak up for our beliefs. I am proud to represent my community to help keep Vigilante Electric Cooperative moving forward in a positive direction."

On behalf of Vigilante Electric, I would like to congratulate Cheyenne on joining the Board of Trustees and welcome her to our Cooperative Family.

## Raquel Reno-Morast Promoted to Office Manager

With Office Manager Ralph Dreyer's retirement we are proud to announce that Raquel Reno-Morast has been promoted as Ralph's successor.

Raquel joined Vigilante Electric Cooperative in 2008 as our consumer clerk and was previously employed with State Bank of Dillon. Raquel also has a Bachelor's Degree in Business from Black Hills State University and broad work experience with State Bank, and Stockman Bank in Miles City and Great Harvest Bread Company in Dillon.

On behalf of Vigilante Electric we would like to congratulate Raquel on this well-deserved promotion.



Raquel Reno-Morast

## On the Clock — Emily May and Zach Maershbecker

Vigilante Electric Cooperative would like to take this opportunity to introduce you to our newest employees, Emily May and Zach Maershbecker.

Emily will be working in our Dillon office as the consumer clerk. She was born and raised in Red Lodge, Montana. She has a Bachelor of Arts degree in English literature from Rocky Mountain College in Billings. Most recently, she worked as the deputy clerk of the Beaverhead County District Court. Her work background also includes almost 14 years as a paralegal.

Emily enjoys skiing, golfing and camping. Emily states, "I appreciate all the wonderful outdoor recreational opportunities this area offers. We live in a great community, and I look forward to serving our members as an employee of Vigilante Electric."

Zach is a journeyman lineman and will be working out of our Whitehall shop. He is a native of North Dakota, and was raised on a dairy farm in New England. Upon graduating from high school, Zach enrolled in the line workers' program at Bismarck State College. Zach completed his apprenticeship and worked as a journeyman lineman at Rough Rider Electric Cooperative in Dickenson, N.D.

Zach is engaged to Rashell Simenson.

We would like to welcome Emily and Zach to our organization, and we look forward to a long association.



Emily May



Zach Maershbecker

## Nondiscrimination Statement

Vigilante Electric Cooperative is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

If you wish to file a Civil Rights program complaint of discrimination, complete the USDA Program Discrimination Complaint Form, found online at [http://www.ascr.usda.gov/complaint\\_filing\\_cust.html](http://www.ascr.usda.gov/complaint_filing_cust.html), or at any USDA office, or call (866) 632-9992 to request the form. You may also write a letter containing all of the information requested in the form. Send your completed complaint form or letter to us by mail at U.S. Department of Agriculture, Director, Office of Adjudication, 1400 Independence Avenue, S.W., Washington, D.C. 20250-9410, by fax (202) 690-7442 or email at [program.intake@usda.gov](mailto:program.intake@usda.gov).

# As Simple As Dialing 811

**C**all Before You Dig. You have seen this on TV, newspapers and on billboards. The Call Before You Dig campaign has been around for years. Why go to all of these efforts to have people call in to request for utility locates before they dig? Well, digging into underground utilities is extremely dangerous, there are serious financial repercussions, and it is the law.

Coming in contact with underground power lines is every bit as dangerous as contacting overhead lines. They can carry the same voltage as overhead lines, and are much harder to identify. Don't take a chance; one wrong decision could be your last.

Digging up an underground power line also has financial consequences. The costs associated with repairing an underground power line becomes the obligation of the person responsible for the damage. Depending on the situation, digging into a power line can get very expensive, very fast.

If you need further persuasion, the following are excerpts for the Montana Law regarding this issue:

*Montana Law, Annotated Code 2011, 69-4-502 states:* "...an excavator may not make or begin an excavation without first obtaining information concerning the possible location of an underground facility from each public utility, municipal corporation, underground facility owner or other person having the right to bury underground facilities that is a member of a one-call notification center ...."

*Montana Law, Annotated Code 2011, 69-4-503 states:* "Before beginning an excavation, the excavator shall notify, through a one-call notification center, all owners of underground facilities in the area of the proposed excavation."

## **This applies to everybody:**

*Montana Law, Annotated Code 2011, 69-4-501 states:* "**Excavator**" means a person conducting the excavation activities. "**Excavation**" means an operation in which earth, rock or other material in the ground is moved, removed or otherwise displaced by means or use of any tools, equipment or explosives. The term includes but is not limited to grading, trenching, digging, ditching, drilling, augering, tunneling, scraping, and cable or pipe plowing and driving.

The easiest way to stay safe and avoid unnecessary problems is to call the Utilities Underground

Locate Center (UULC) at (800) 424-5555, or you can simply dial 811. You need to make your request two full business days before you plan to dig. When you call, you will be asked a series of questions about your worksite. Being prepared greatly speeds up the process! Have the following information that is needed:

- **Your name, phone number, company name (if applicable), and mailing address.**
- **What type of work is being done.**
- **Who the work is being done for.**
- **The county and city the work is taking place in.**
- **The address or the street where the work is taking place.**
- **Marking instructions, (specific instructions as to where the work is taking place. Please use white or pink paint or white or pink flags to outline the area you are digging in.)**

Once UULC has all the information, they will notify the relevant utilities in your area. Once the utilities are notified, they will dispatch a person to locate their utilities. By making a simple call you could save time, money and maybe even your life.

Please note that Vigilante Electric Cooperative will only locate wire between the transformer and the meter. We will not locate wire between the meter and the load. This is the responsibility of the member, and will require an electrician.

**ALWAYS  
CALL  
BEFORE YOU  
DIG**



# Where will the young go? . . . Or will they stay?

*How co-ops can make a difference*

By Adam Schwartz

*“What should young people do with their lives today? Many things, obviously. But the most daring thing is to create stable communities...”*

— Kurt Vonnegut, Author

In June, Vigilante Electric Cooperative will send McKenna Jones and Wesley Armstrong to Washington, D.C., for the annual Electric Cooperative Youth Tour. There they will join more than 1,600 high school students from rural areas around the country. Like past years, it is expected that these young people will have the trip of their lives.

They will meet senators and congressmen, hear from co-op leaders, see the U.S. Capitol, Arlington National Cemetery, and Smithsonian Institution museums, and meet hundreds of kids just like them. They will return home filled with great memories. Then what? Where will the young go? Will they leave the place they’ve called home? Or will they stay to help create stable communities?

Nearly 60 percent of rural counties shrank in population in 2013, up from 40 percent in the 1990s. While some economists might see this as simply the “market” acting efficiently, we know communities such as ours cannot survive if this trend continues.

According to a study on rural youth migration, many young people living in rural areas have a negative view of their community when compared to major urban centers. There is a perception that rural areas offer limited economic and social opportunities. As we all know, your perception is your reality.



McKenna Jones



Wesley Armstrong

Cooperatives are a business model. But unlike investor-owned companies that focus almost exclusively on turning a profit, cooperatives serve both an economic and social purpose. So if the cooperative is operating in concert with our Seven Cooperative Principles and values, we can change the perception that rural areas offer limited opportunities. We can ensure that young people know and understand they have a critically important role to play in our community.

Vigilante Electric was created with the purpose to improve the quality of life in rural areas by providing safe, reliable and affordable electricity. While that mission has been accomplished, it needs to be maintained and expanded.

Sending our best and brightest to Washington, D.C., for a week is a wonderful first step, but we need to take the next step. We’re committed to engaging youth in our community

through a variety of educational and scholarship opportunities.

Ensuring that everyone in our community is working together to find economic and social opportunities for them to stay in our community is our challenge. Together, we can do this. Since none of us is as smart as all of us, we welcome your thoughts. Write to us at PO Box 1049 Dillon MT 59725 or by email at [contact@vec.coop](mailto:contact@vec.coop)

*Adam Schwartz is the founder of The Cooperative Way a consulting firm that helps co-ops succeed. He is an author, speaker and a member-owner of the CDS Consulting Co-op. You can follow him on Twitter @adamcooperative or email him at [aschwartz@thecooperativeway.coop](mailto:aschwartz@thecooperativeway.coop).*

## Outage Notification Numbers

M-F 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.  
**683-2327 or  
(800) 221-8271**

### Dillon

After Hours Mon. - Thurs.  
Dan Snellman.....683-6222  
Gary Ferris .....683-6321  
Cody Tarter .....925-3326  
Charles Wharton 660-1878

### Weekends

**683-2327 or  
(800) 221-8271**

### Whitehall

After Hours and  
Weekends  
Marty Simons .....287-3950  
Chuck Romerio.....287-3144  
John Moos .....266-3605

### Townsend

After Hours and  
Weekends  
John Moos .....266-3605  
Justin Bair .....266-3351  
Chase White .....459-3892  
Marty Simons .....287-3950

