



Vigilante Electric Cooperative

A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative 

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The best laid plans? Sometimes fate intervenes

Youth Tour replaced with scholarship contest

By **ROD SIRING** | Member Services, Vigilante Electric

ONE of the most valuable programs we offer to our membership is the Youth Tour to Washington D.C., For the participants, the event can be life changing. Last month we announced that despite the COVID dilemma that our country is in, we were making plans to send students to the 2021 tour. Unfortunately, now we must announce that we will not be participating in the 2021 Youth Tour.

This was not an easy decision, but one we had to make considering new information presented to us by our national association. Due to COVID-19, escalating costs of providing proper safeguards for participants and the need to commit by the end of October, there is too much uncertainty for the participating cooperatives from Montana.

As unfortunate as this is, our statewide association still wants to see the essays written by those who wanted to go. In lieu of the trip, Montana Electric Cooperatives' Association (MECA) will offer a \$2,500 scholarship to the winner for post-secondary education upon graduation from high school. The best essay that we receive will be part of the statewide contest.

The essay topic and eligibility



guidelines remain the same, however the deadline for submitting an entry to Vigilante Electric Cooperative has been extended to December 18, 2020.

• **Topic:** *How has reliable electricity benefitted you and your community through the COVID-19 pandemic?*

• The student must be a junior or senior in high school in the fall of 2021 (currently a sophomore or junior).

• The student and/or parent or guardian must be served by Vigilante Electric Cooperative.

• The essay must include a cover page with the student's name, address and telephone number.

This information will be forwarded to area high schools and updated on our website (vec.coop).

If you have any questions, please call us at (406) 683-2327 or (800)221-8271. 

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GIVING BACK

Vigilante Electric is dedicated to serving our community

By **ANNE PRINCE** | For Vigilante Electric

OVER the years, you've probably heard or read about Vigilante Electric Cooperative's concern for our community. This is one of the core principles that sets cooperatives apart from other types of utilities and businesses. We've always taken this mission and responsibility to heart. It's who we are as a co-op.

Over the past few months, like so many of you, we've risen to meet new challenges and implemented changes to keep our members and employees safe, particularly for those who are most vulnerable. Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, we've made numerous adjustments to programs and operations to maintain business continuity while staying focused on the bigger mission of helping our consumer-members during this turbulent time.

Now, with the holidays fast approaching, these recent events have made me pause and think about the role we play in our community. While our purpose is to provide safe and reliable energy to you, the members we serve, we have a greater mission – to be a catalyst for good.

You're probably aware of our Safety Round-Up program, where we take donations from generous members such as you have voluntarily "round up" the amount due on their electric bill to help the organizations in our communities that keep us safe. You may also be familiar with our Youth Tour program, where we take our community's brightest young people to Washington, D.C., for a week-long immersion to experience democracy in action.

We also have a strong commitment to safety – not just for our employees, but for our community as well. We



Pictured is lineman Cody Tarter demonstrating the dangers of electricity using Vigilante Electric Cooperative's high-voltage safety demonstration trailer. | **PHOTO BY ROD SIRING**

provide free safety demonstrations upon request from any organization. We actively seek out and provide training to first responders, area schools, members of our agricultural community and others whose work may place them in danger of contacting power lines. We also use these pages to provide information on electrical safety.

Not only do we help our members and communities stay safe around electricity, we help them use less energy through energy education and providing incentives for projects that save energy. Plus, we help members with their winter heating needs by offering bill credits to those members in need.

You'll also see our employees serving on local boards, coaching sports, and volunteering their time at community events and for charitable causes. When you work at a co-op, you understand how important a strong community is – after all, without you, the co-op wouldn't exist.

We know that our core job is to keep the lights on, but our passion is our community. We live and work here, too. We want to make it a better place for all.

If there's anything we can do to help you – whether providing energy-saving advice to help lower your monthly bill or discussing payment plan options during these difficult times – please reach out to us at (406) 683-2327 or (800) 221-8271.

Concern for community is the heart and soul of who we are. No matter what the future brings, you can count on your electric co-op to care about you. 



Vigilante Safety Roundup Tracker

Participating members: 368
Total Contributions: \$6,296.05

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

An online application is available at www.vec.coop.

Scholarship opportunities

VEC to pair Leadership Award with MECA scholarship

In the words of Benjamin Franklin, “An investment in knowledge pays the best interest.” Over the years, Vigilante Electric Cooperative has repeatedly shown our support for education, especially post-secondary, where these words ring as true today as they did in Franklin’s time. When viewed as an investment, the right type of education will give you the foundation to build a strong financial future.

We have a proven track record in providing opportunities to students who want to further their education, broaden their horizons and secure their futures. Vigilante Electric will once again pair our Leadership Award with the Montana Electric Cooperatives’ Association (MECA) Memorial Scholarship, giving qualifying students the opportunity to fill out one application and potentially be awarded two scholarships.

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 applicants will receive our Leadership Award, and the best application will be forwarded to MECA for consideration for its Memorial Scholarship.

With the Vigilante Electric Leadership Award, qualified applicants can use the funding to attend any type of post-secondary education. We realize that college is not for everyone, and we strongly encourage students to explore opportunities available through trade/vocational schools.

The application process is very straightforward, and over the past seven years every qualified applicant for the Leadership Award has received a scholarship. I mention this

2021 VEC LEADERSHIP AWARD and MECA MEMORIAL SCHOLARSHIP

Applications must be returned no later than January 25, 2021
Must be a dependant of a Vigilante Electric Cooperative member

because applying for scholarships is an opportunity to use the generosity of organizations such as ours to offset some of the costs of a post-secondary education.

Surprisingly enough, large amounts of these bursary funds go unclaimed each year. According to the Huffington Post, various reports suggest that more than \$15 million is left on the table each year. While the exact number is hard to quantify, the point is there are millions of dollars that can be leveraged for continued education, which can benefit students greatly.

A study published in June of this year by Northeastern University showed that students with a lower level of education had lower earning potential and a higher possibility of unemployment. Another interesting study regarding the correlation between earning potential and education was conducted by Georgetown University. It found that, on average, college graduates earn \$1 million more over their lifetimes than non-college graduates.

Also, when viewed as an investment, we must understand the costs involved. U.S. News recently surveyed colleges from across the country and found the average cost for tuition and fees for the 2020-21 academic year were anywhere from \$9,687 for public, in-state college, up to \$35,035 for a private university each year. The cost of trade/vocational schools

vary. Average tuition fees range from about \$3,600 to \$14,500 per year, but there are wide variations depending on the type of institution attended and the program chosen. Additionally, students must also pay for other expenses, such as housing, food and books, which can run thousands of dollars a year.

The cost of education is a significant financial challenge for many families, and in most situations requires the family and/or student to take on a significant amount of debt. In fact, student loan debt is one of the most serious economic issues facing our society. According to *Forbes*, the latest student loan debt statistics for 2020 show how serious the student loan debt crisis has become for borrowers across all demographics and age groups. There are 45 million borrowers who collectively owe nearly \$1.6 trillion in student loan debt in the U.S. Student loan debt is now the second highest consumer debt category – behind only mortgage debt – and higher than both credit cards and auto loans.

Hopefully these numbers drive home the importance of exploring every opportunity available for increasing income potential and reducing the debt level of a post-secondary education.

The application period for the 2021 Vigilante Electric Leadership Award/MECA Memorial Scholarship is open. All the elements of the application must be completed and returned to our office no later than January 25, 2021. Applicants must be the dependent of a member of Vigilante Electric. Past recipients are not eligible and the funding must be used in the 2021-22 academic year.

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

REDUCE YOUR POWER USE



Kitchen tips to cut your energy bill

By **ABBY BERRY**
For *Vigilante Electric*

Ah, the kitchen. It's undeniably one of the most-loved rooms in our homes. It's where we gather with family and friends for our favorite meals and memories. But like most of us, you probably aren't thinking about saving energy when you're planning that perfect dish. Here are four ways you can save energy in the kitchen with minimal effort.

Bonus tip: The best way to save energy is to not use it. Try a tasty, no-bake dessert recipe. Your sweet tooth (and energy bill) will thank you.

By slightly adjusting a few of your habits in the kitchen, you'll be well on your way to energy savings. Contact us to learn about additional ways you can save energy and money at home. RM



When possible, cook with smaller appliances

Using smaller kitchen appliances, such as slow cookers, toaster ovens and convection ovens is more energy efficient than using your large stove or oven. According to the Department of Energy, a toaster or convection oven uses one-third to one-half as much energy as a full-sized oven.



Use your dishwasher efficiently

Only run full loads and avoid using the "rinse hold" function on your machine for just a few dirty dishes; it uses 3-7 gallons of hot water each use. You can also save energy by letting your dishes air dry. If your dishwasher doesn't have an automatic air-dry switch, simply turn it off after the final rinse and prop the door open so the dishes dry faster.

Unplug appliances that suck phantom energy

Halloween may be over, but it's possible you have energy vampires in your kitchen – these are appliances that draw energy even when they're not in use, such as coffee makers, microwaves and toaster ovens. The Department of Energy has estimated that one home's energy vampires left plugged in year-round can add up to \$100-\$200 in wasted energy costs. Unplug them when they're not in use, or better yet, use a power strip for convenient control.



Help large appliances work less

There are small ways you can help your larger kitchen appliances run more efficiently. For example, keep range-top burners clean from spills and fallen foods so they'll reflect heat better. When it's time to put leftovers in the refrigerator, make sure the food is covered and allow it to cool down first. That way, the fridge doesn't have to work harder to cool warm food.

