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Vigilante Electric Cooperative

A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative

MESSAGE FROM THE MANAGER

Communication is key to strong relationships

Column by **TREVOR PARKE** |
General Manager

COMMUNICATION is an essential aspect of the development and ongoing maintenance of strong relationships. As your electric provider, Vigilante Electric Cooperative (VEC) wants to ensure we are communicating to our members effectively. VEC uses several platforms to communicate with its stakeholders, such as our website, social media, *Rural Montana* magazine, SmartHub, phone calls, post cards and Short Message Service (SMS).

We encourage our members to review and update us with their most recent



contact information. If your contact information needs updated, please call us at (406) 683-2327 or email us at contact@vec.coop to update. SmartHub users can update their information and notifications on the SmartHub application. Providing your updated contact information

helps us keep you informed about important topics such as planned outages or billing reminders. SMS and email are effective, non-intrusive forms of communication that we plan to use in the future to inform our members of important information. Your privacy is important to VEC, and we would never share your information with solicitors.

Co-ops power communities with purpose

By **ABBY BERRY** | For Vigilante Electric

Communities come in all shapes and sizes. Some are based on geographical proximity, some are based on shared interests or hobbies, and some communities can even be found in virtual spaces such as social media groups. Regardless of where or how they are formed, communities can bring people together and create a sense of belonging.

Vigilante Electric Cooperative is deeply committed to our members, and we're glad you are part of the electric cooperative community.

This month, more than 30,000 coop-

eratives across the U.S. are celebrating National Co-op Month. It's a time to reflect on all the aspects that set cooperatives apart from other types of businesses, but more importantly, it's a time to celebrate the power of co-op membership.

Electric cooperatives are not-for-profit utilities built by the communities they serve. For Vigilante Electric, our mission has always been to provide you with reliable energy at the lowest possible cost. We care about your quality of life and, because we are locally operated, we're uniquely suited to meet our members' evolving energy

See **CO-OPS**, page 8

OCTOBER 2024

VIGILANTE ELECTRIC
COOPERATIVE

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Trevor Parke
General Manager

Safety Round Up update

As an electric cooperative and a Touchstone Energy member, we adhere to seven cooperative principles and four core values. At the heart of this is a concern and commitment to our communities. As we have touted in this publication many times, safety is our highest priority, and this commitment extends beyond the safety of our employees to the communities we serve.

As part of our Commitment to Community, Vigilante Electric offers Safety Round Up. This program aims to accumulate and disburse funds to organizations that help keep our communities safe. Recipients of Safety Roundup funds do not have to be cooperative members but must be part of the communities within our service territory.

The funds to support this program are collected from members who voluntarily allow us to round up their electric bills to the next whole dollar. The average cost per meter will be \$6 a year. The maximum a person could pay per meter is \$11.88. Individually, it is not much, but collectively, this program can do great good.

Since launching this program in 2017, Vigilante Electric Safety Round Up has issued 17 grants for safety-related projects. The last two grants were



Pictured are Maria Emmer-Aanes (Beaverhead County DUI Task Force), Rod Siring (VEC), Phil Willett (President/CEO Pioneer Federal Savings and Loan), Jeremy Alvarez (Chief of Police, City of Dillon), Gerald Penn (Beaverhead County DUI Task Force) and Trevor Parke (VEC) | **VIGILANTE ELECTRIC PHOTO**

to the Broadwater County Search and Rescue and the Beaverhead Co. DUI Task Force.

At our July trustees meeting, the board awarded \$1,000 to Broadwater Co. S&R. This grant will be combined with other funds to purchase a new truck to tow their lake rescue boat. At the August meeting the board approved a \$3,000 grant to Beaverhead Co. DUI Task Force for free sober rides during Labor Day weekend in Dillon.

Safety Roundup embodies the cooperative spirit and is a shining example

of us living out one of our core principles. Vigilante Electric is proud to be associated with this program and we would like to thank all our participating members. Without you, this program does not exist.

Please contact us if you would like to join this effort or if you belong to an organization that could use some funds to help with a safety-related project. Call our office and we will help you through the process or you can find applications on our website at vec.coop/safety-roundup. RM



Vigilante Electric Cooperative
A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative 
Vigilante Safety Roundup Tracker

Participating members: 883
Total Contributions: \$29,904.89

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

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



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HELP FOR THOSE IN NEED

LIHEAP and other programs are there for low-income households that may need energy help this winter

THE *Old Farmer's Almanac* predicts cold weather with an average snowfall this coming winter. Whether or not you buy into this, for me, it conjures up memories of some of the harsher elements we faced these past two winters, and the reality of the pressure cold weather places on our utility bills. This is on top of the fact that the cost of most, if not all, consumer products continues to rise. For low-income families, winter utilities can become an overwhelming financial burden.

All cooperatives function under the ideals of honesty, openness, social responsibility and caring for others. Since 1998, Vigilante Electric Cooperative has helped qualified members with winter heating needs. Applications for our assistance program are available starting October 1, and must be returned by November 27, 2024. You can contact us at (800) 221-8271 or (406) 683-2327 for an application.

The funding level for Vigilante's program is limited. We strongly recommend that families in need also apply for the programs offered by the Department of Public Health and Human Services (DPHHS).

DPHHS administers federally funded programs designed to help low-income families. Here is a brief description of the opportunities available and income guidelines (the same we use) for the upcoming heating season.

LIHEAP

The Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) pays part of winter energy bills and may be able to assist with furnace emergencies for eligible people.


Weatherization

The Weatherization Program helps participants improve the heating efficiency of their homes and thus reduce their energy consumption.

Energy Share of Montana

Energy Share of Montana is a private nonprofit organization whose primary purpose is to help Montanans facing energy emergencies meet their needs and move toward self-reliance.

If you qualify, call for an application, and be sure to inquire about the weatherization program. Where LIHEAP helps with your immediate needs, weatherization is a long-term solution that helps lower your energy bills. You may automatically qualify if you receive benefits from programs such as SNAP, SSI or TANE.

These programs are administered through regional offices. Each office serves specific counties, so contact the office nearest you. 

LIHEAP INCOME GUIDELINES

FAMILY SIZE	INCOME LIMITS
1	\$32,102
2	\$41,979
3	\$51,857
4	\$61,735
5	\$71,612
6	\$81,490
7	\$83,342
8	\$85,194
9	\$87,150
10	\$95,220

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



OCTOBER IS NATIONAL

C O O P
M O N T H

Electric cooperatives are not-for-profit, community-led utilities. Because we are a co-op, we can adapt our local member's needs, providing the programs and services you care about most. That's the POWER of co-op membership.

Safety first with backup generators

THIS summer, high winds have wreaked havoc in Montana. While our service territory was mostly spared, neighboring cooperatives were not as lucky. If you watched the news, these storms left hundreds of cooperative members without power for extended periods. A way to minimize the impact of a long-term outage is to install a backup generator. Vigilante Electric Cooperative has no problem with members using backup generators, but the installation must be done correctly, or they can create some dangerous situations.

Under regular operation (a service connected to the distribution line), electricity is stepped down or transformed to more useful voltages. When an outage occurs, a generator can meet some or all home energy requirements. However, if the installation is not done correctly, the generator can back-feed onto the electrical distribution system, which is extremely dangerous for the line crews trying to restore power.

The National Electrical Code requires either a manual or automatic transfer switch. A transfer switch is a secondary circuit breaker panel that isolates a backup generator from the power grid. A properly installed transfer switch prevents feedback onto our distribution lines, protecting our linemen and the generator while the utility service is restored.

Another safety issue involves where the generator is located. According to the Consumer Products Safety Commission (an independent federal regulatory agency), in



2020, 92 people died from carbon monoxide poisoning while using portable generators.

Installing a generator and transfer switch is not overly complex; however, some projects are best left to professionals. A licensed electrician with expertise and knowledge of the National Electrical Code is best suited to select the size and install a generator to meet your needs, ensuring a safe and compliant installation.

If you have a backup generator and have not previously notified us, or intend to install one, please contact us so we can note the location. This knowledge is valuable to our line crews when trying to restore power. RM

CO-OPS

Continued from page 5

needs.

Beyond the business of electricity, our employees and trustees are equally invested in our local community. Why? Because we live here, too. That's why we work hard to support local economic development projects, youth programs and scholarships, charitable giving initiatives and additional programs that make our community a better place to call home.

All co-ops, including us, are guided by seven cooperative principles that embody the values and spirit of the cooperative movement. These seven principles are a framework to help all co-ops navigate challenges and opportunities while remaining true to our

purpose:

1. Open and Voluntary Membership: Co-op membership is open to anyone who can use the co-op's services.

2. Democratic Member Control: Members make decisions that shape the cooperative. Why? Because co-ops are created *by* the members, *for* the members.

3. Members' Economic Participation: Members contribute money to the co-op to make sure it runs smoothly now and in the future. At Vigilante Electric, this happens through paying your energy bills.

4. Autonomy and Independence: Co-ops are independent and can operate on their own, which ultimately benefits the members.

5. Education, Training and Information: Co-ops continuously focus on

education to ensure employees have the training and information they need to make the co-op successful.

6. Cooperation Among Cooperatives: Co-ops share with and learn from other cooperatives. We help each other out in times of need because we want other co-ops to thrive.

7. Concern for Community: All cooperatives work for the greater good of the local communities they serve. Co-ops give back to their communities to help them thrive and grow.

This October, as we celebrate National Co-op Month and the power of membership, we hope you will recognize the many aspects that set electric cooperatives apart. Our mission is reliable power. Our purpose is people — the local communities we're proud to serve. RM