

Big Skylights



An internal newsletter of the STATEWIDE ASSOCIATION OF MONTANA RURAL ELECTRIC COOPERATIVES

A report from your Chief Executive Officer Dave Wheelihan

January 6, 2012

MECA offers three-day lineman basics course

Montana Electric Cooperatives' Association is pleased to offer a Lineman Basics Training School. The school will be held Feb. 7-9 in Great Falls. The three-day course will cover the topics of Lifting and Rigging, Meters and Metering, Transformer Connections and Theory, Maintenance and Inspection of Bucket Trucks and Wire Connections.

The courses will run 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. the first and second days and 8 a.m. to 2 p.m. the third day.

There will be a charge of \$225 per person for this course for MECA Safety & Loss Control Clients or \$250 per person for non-MECA SLC Clients. Lunch will be provided all three days.

The registration deadline is Friday, Jan. 27, 2012. To register or for more information on this course, please contact **Lea Potoczny** at (406)761-8333 or meca@mtco-ops.com.

Fast Track course series on tap for late January

Registrations are needed for the NRECA Credentialed Cooperative Director (CCD) Fast Track Course Series. The series is being offered by MECA the week of Jan. 23-27 at the MECA statewide building in Great Falls. During this week, all five CCD courses in the curriculum will be offered.

A director may take all five courses or only the course(s) needed to complete that person's CCD Certificate. These courses include:

2600	Director Duties and Liabilities	\$550	Monday, January 23 8:30 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.
2620	Board Roles and Relationships	\$350	Tuesday, January 24 8:30 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.
2640	Financial Decision Making	\$775	Tuesday, January 24 1:30 p.m. – 5:30 p.m. Wednesday, January 25 8:30 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.
2610	Understanding the Electric Business	\$550	Thursday, January 26 8:30 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.
2630	Strategic Planning	\$550	Friday, January 27 8:30 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.

Brochures explaining the courses and the registration form are available by contacting **Sharon McDonald** of our office. Jan. 6 is the early registration deadline. However, later registrations and last minute walk-ins are welcome.

The LaQuinta Suites has confirmed that the hotel is offering an additional \$10 per night discount to fast-track attendees staying five nights or more during the week of Jan. 22.

If you have any questions, you can contact Sharon McDonald of our staff (sharonm@mtco-ops.com) or you may reach her via telephone, (406) 761-8333.

Hone your communication skills at 1.5-day workshop

MECA will hold a day-and-a-half of strategic communications training on Jan. 17-18, at the statewide office Great Falls. Instructor will be **Jody Severson**. For nearly 25 years, Ms. Severson has been helping local cooperatives deal with all sorts of controversy, from hostile takeovers to territorial friction, rate increases, regulatory dust-ups, mergers, franchise elections, board disputes and press relations meltdowns.

Following are brief descriptions of each day's topics:

Day 1

How to (and how not to) Communicate Rate Increases

This is a hands-on workshop for co-op communicators and/or managers to create a strategy and to brainstorm tactics for communicating with members and other key audiences about impending rate increases. The workshop is designed for delivery to people from neighboring systems so they can find ways to leverage each other's efforts. The workshop is flexible and free-flowing based on the participant's feedback.

Key Topics Include:

- *A six-step plan for dealing with rate increases;*
- *How to handle tough questions about your rates from members, reporters and the public;*
 - *What the polling says at other co-ops;*
 - *How much can they afford before trouble starts?;*
 - *Identifying where the most trouble will be;*
 - *The link between rates and service and quality perceptions;*
 - *The tradeoffs between rates, renewable and climate change;*
- *Putting out little fires before they become big ones;*
- *What to do if organized opposition emerges;*
- *Case study team exercise.*

Guerrilla Marketing: Marketing and Communication Strategies for Tight Budgets, Limited Resources

This interactive presentation stresses message discipline and tight budget focus to get the main points across. Presented at the 2010 Connect Conference in Denver, these principles are included throughout the longer sessions, such as the budget section of the Strategic Communication Planning workshop.

DAY 2

How to Handle an Angry Member

This half-day workshop focuses on offering tips and developing skills for dealing with upset members. Jody will show you proven techniques for dealing with upset members, habits that you can share with fellow employees and directors. This is an interactive workshop which focuses on practicing the skills learned during the workshop.

Condolences**Charles Patten**

Our thoughts and prayers are with the family of **Charles Patten**, a long-time Tongue River Electric Cooperative director, who passed away Dec. 29 at the age of 80.

He is survived by his wife **Maxine** of Broadus and many other relatives, including 15 grandchildren and 16 great-grandchildren.

Funeral services for Mr. Patten were held Jan. 3. Should friends desire, memorials may be made to the **Henry Malley** Memorial Library or the charity of one's choice. Stevenson and Sons Funeral Home have been entrusted with the arrangements. Condolences may be sent to the family by visiting www.stevensonandsons.com.

CALENDAR

January

13	Legislature's Energy & Telecommunications Interim Committee	Helena, MT
17-18	Strategic Communications Workshop	Great Falls, MT
23-27	NRECA CCD Fast Track Courses	Great Falls, MT

February

1	MECA Line Superintendents' Group Meeting	Great Falls, MT
2	MECA Managers' Group & Line Superintendents' Group Meeting	Great Falls, MT
7-9	Lineman Basics Training School	Great Falls, MT
7	MECA-Sponsored Candidate Training School	Great Falls, MT
8	MECA-Sponsored Candidate Training School	Missoula, MT
9	MECA-Sponsored Candidate Training School	Bozeman, MT
10	MECA-Sponsored Candidate Training School	Billings, MT

March

5-7	NRECA Annual Meeting	San Diego, CA
-----	----------------------	---------------

April

3	NRECA Course 945.1: Under Scrutiny: The Board's Role in the Age of Consumer Activism and Transparency	Great Falls, MT
4-5	MECA Spring Board Meeting	Great Falls, MT
17-18	Leadership Boot Camp	Great Falls, MT