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# October is National Electric Co-op Month

## Meet your new assistant manager

By **TYE WILLIAMS** | Assistant Manager, Southeast Electric Cooperative

**O**CTOBER is National Co-op Month. For me, this is the first National Co-op Month as an employee of a cooperative. Growing up in Ekalaka, the electric cooperative meant a lot to our family ranch, and I did not even realize it. Being able to turn the lights on with the flick of a switch, watch TV at night or make sure the tractors were plugged in during the winter – these were just a few of the things I took for granted growing up. All of this was possible because of the foresight and hard work put in by previous generations.

The world of electric cooperatives has changed substantially over the years, and at an accelerated rate from the wealth of technology now at our disposal. Over the past decade, I have been a part of different industries and their solutions to deal with the challenges all the recent changes have brought about.

I first worked in the engineering field as an engineering technician for a civil engineering firm, which was situated in the Bakken oilfield. A large part of my job was to perform stormwater inspections, as well as assist surveyors. At most large installations, the inspections were designed by the Environmental Protection Agency to reduce the quantity of contaminants, which could be spilled onto adjacent land and water ways. At Southeast Electric Cooperative, we work to ensure our equipment and plant have a minimal impact on our local ecosystems and waterways.

While working toward my master's in electrical engineering, I was able to intern at 3M, Electric Machinery and Open Access Technology International




Inc. (OATI). While working at 3M, I was a part of their research and development department, which were design plastics and adhesives for the next generation of electronics. At Electric Machinery, I learned how massive electric generators

are designed and built, and the basics are the same as they have been for 100 years. OATI is a large player in the power industry, so it was amazing to work in its new electronics department, which opened my eyes to the possibilities of Supervisory Control and Data Acquisition (SCADA) throughout the power grid.

After grad school and before coming to Southeast Electric, I worked for the manufacturing company Medora Corporation, of Dickinson, ND.

Its initial product was a solar-powered water circulator and it expanded from there, to include high-horsepower submersible pumps for water treatment. I was able to expand my knowledge of small-scale solar generation, electronic controls and SCADA. Working through regulations and permitting of equipment was especially important as we worked with water utility districts across the US.

Even though I was not directly working for an electric cooperative, all the experience I have had included necessary skills for an electric cooperative. The best part of working for a cooperative, compared to a privately owned company, is the member-ownership. So, if you are in school or looking for a change, no matter your background and skillset, a work life in a cooperative would be very rewarding for you. 

# Electric cooperatives offer great career opportunities

Electric cooperatives are great places to work. Cooperatives are always there to serve their members not only with safe, affordable and reliable electric power, but also with community support and programs that help you save energy and money.

In general, not-for-profit, consumer-owned co-ops offer competitive salaries and benefits in a time when many companies are scaling back. It is also a very stable work environment. Many employees start at electric cooperatives and stay there throughout their career.

While the linemen are the public face, it takes all of the staff to run an electric cooperative. Many have communicators; accountants; key accounts representatives, who work with commercial and industrial members;

billing clerks; public relations professionals, who cultivate relationships with local, state and national opinion leaders and keep them updated on issues important to the cooperative and the communities served; information technology professionals; warehouse staff; and staking technicians and engineers, who plot where new power lines will be built.

The average electric co-op has 48 employees. In most cases, the largest group of employees at a co-op is line workers, followed by administrative assistants and engineering and operations staff.

Young people and those looking for a new direction are strongly encouraged to consider career opportunities within the electric cooperative network. RM

## Make your electric heat work for you

Do you heat your home with electricity? If your home is primarily electric heat you could save up to 3.4 cents per kilowatt during the months of October through April. Several members who have electric heat have installed a separate meter for their heat. These kilowatts are charged at 6 cents per kilowatt and the remainder KW on your house is charged at the regular rate of 9.4 cents.

The installation of the system must be done by a licensed electrician. When ready, Southeast Electric Cooperative will install the meter, and the rest is savings to you. The cost of installation of the equipment is quickly offset by the money you save. RM

## Don't be left in the cold – use LIEAP

Southeast Electric Cooperative offers energy assistance in conjunction with Action for Eastern Montana (AEM) Low-Income Energy Assistance Program (LIEAP). Applications are available at our office, the County Senior Coordinator office and propane providers. If you received assistance last year, you will

be sent the application form directly from AEM. Members who qualify for assistance through LIEAP will receive a \$500 credit to their winter electric bill. Residents who are eligible for LIEAP may also qualify for propane purchasing assistance. Applications are accepted from Oct. 1 through April 30. RM

