BIG FLAT NEWS

November 2026 www.bigflatelectric.com

BIG FLAT ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE

ANNUAL MEETING

79TH ANNUAL MEETING OF THE MEMBERS A SUCCESS

STORY BY **KATE EMOND** | BILLING CLERK/MEMBER SERVICES

BIG Flat Electric Cooperative held its 2026 Annual Meeting on Saturday, October 10, at Malta High School Auditorium. A total of 104 members attended the meeting. The members heard updates from the last year from the Manager Gretchen Boardman and the Board President Kevin Koss and the 2025 financial review from the Office Manager Kari Elletson.

The 2026 Youth Tour Winner Emerson Downing also shared her experience's in her trip to Washington DC.

Members also elected by acclimation three returning directors, with all three incumbent directors successfully re-elected to continue representing their respective districts.

This year's annual meeting included an exciting twist on the traditional jackpot drawing. When the winner of the $1,000 jackpot was not present, Manager Gretchen decided to give three additional members a chance to "win a piece of the pie". The jackpot was divided into three cash prizes: $500, $300, and $200, giving more members an opportunity to take home a little extra cash.

Local businesses and vendors also helped make the meeting special by donating a variety of door prizes. Some of the donations included a full-size car battery, tool sets, gift cards, clothing, a yard ornament and a stadium seat. In addition, members in attendance had the opportunity to enter drawings for beef and pork bundles purchased by Big Flat Electric from local 4-H members. This was a great way to support local youth while offering members another chance to win.



Grand prize winner Debra Cliff poses with Kari Elletson at Big Flat Electric's Annual Meeting.



Big Flat Electric Director Alan Van Voast and Alan Wasson (left and right) pose with $500 winner Richard Dunbar (center).



The meeting concluded in just one hour, providing members with important cooperative updates, an opportunity to participate in the election process and a few surprises along the way. As a thank-you for attending and being a valued part of Big Flat Electric Cooperative, each member received a sack lunch and a goodie bag on their way out. We appreciate our members' participation and the important role they play in shaping the future of their cooperative.

Big Flat Electric Cooperative would like to thank all the members who attended, the local businesses and vendors who contributed prizes, and the 4-H members whose animals made the beef and pork bundles possible. Member participation is an important part of what makes our cooperative strong, and we appreciate the continued support of the communities we serve. RM

A look at overhead versus below ground powerlines

THE bottom line: Both overhead and underground powerlines can provide reliable service. Overhead lines are generally less expensive and easier to repair, while underground lines offer a cleaner appearance and less exposure to severe weather. Big Flat Electric Cooperative maintains both systems and performs regular maintenance, including replacing poles that have tested poorly, to help keep electricity flowing reliably to our members. RM

OVERHEAD AND UNDERGROUNDS LINE COMPARISON

	OVERHEAD LINES	UNDERGROUND LINES
Installation Cost	Less expensive	More expensive
Example: 1,400 Feet	Approximately $14,000	Approximately $42,000
Weather Exposure	More affected by wind, ice, frost, and trees	Less exposed to weather-related damage
Finding Problems	Generally easier and faster	Can be more difficult; faults must be located
Repair Time	Generally faster	Generally longer
Repair Cost	Generally less expensive	Generally more expensive
Appearance	Visible poles and wires	Hidden from view
Long-Term Reliability	Can last for decades with proper maintenance	New underground cable offers excellent reliability
Digging Safety	No underground line locating needed for the overhead line itself	Call 811 before digging
Big Flat Electric's Distribution System	1,343 miles	217 miles

YOUTH TOUR

YOUTH TOUR 2027

Applications are due November 30 for the 2027 Youth Tour. Check our website www.*bigflatelectric.com* for information.



The importance of your voice in your cooperative

Column by **KATE EMOND**

ON September 29, 2026, I had the opportunity to attend the Montana Electric Cooperatives' Association (MECA) Annual Meeting, where I learned more about the importance of electric cooperatives, the challenges they face and the role members play in shaping their future.

One of the biggest takeaways was just how much cooperatives contribute to their communities. While many people may think of a cooperative simply as a place to get electricity, it is much more than that. Cooperatives are built around the communities they serve, with members' needs at the center of the decisions they make. Unlike businesses focused primarily on outside shareholders, cooperatives exist to serve their members.

I also gained a better understanding of how different cooperatives operate. In rural communities, employees often wear many hats, taking on a variety of responsibilities to keep things running smoothly. Although each cooperative operates a little differently, they share a common goal: providing reliable service while looking out for the people who depend on them. I was also surprised to learn more about the wide variety of businesses and organizations that operate under the cooperative model. Did you know that Welch's is a co-op?

One of the biggest challenges facing cooperatives today is finding ways to engage younger generations and help them understand the value of being a member. As times change, cooperatives must find new ways to connect with young adults and encourage them to become involved in the decisions that affect their communities.

The National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA) has launched a national study called *Lexicon* to help cooperatives better understand this challenge. A survey is expected to be released in the spring, with the goal of learning more about how upcoming generations view cooperatives, what they need and what tools can help encourage their participation.

Communication is another area where cooperatives are adapting. With artificial intelligence (AI) and social media playing increasingly important roles, we must consider how best to reach our members. Does this mean printed newsletters will eventually become a thing of the past? Not necessarily. While digital communication continues to grow, printed newsletters remain a valuable way to reach members who may not regularly use social media or other online platforms. There is also a cost to consider. The cost to print and mail newsletters is rising.

Ultimately, one of the most important lessons I took away from the MECA Annual Meeting is that **your voice matters.** Cooperatives are strongest when their members participate, share their opinions and take an active interest in the future of their local cooperative.

The next time you receive a survey, are asked to vote on a change or have an opportunity to share your thoughts about a service your cooperative offers, take the time to participate. Your feedback helps guide decisions today and can influence the direction of your cooperative for years to come.

In our rural communities, every member has a voice, and every voice has the potential to make a difference. A cooperative is only as strong as the community behind it, and that strength begins with members who care enough to be involved.

Your cooperative belongs to you. Make your voice heard — because the future of your cooperative depends on you.

THINGS TO REMEMBER:

- **Find us on Facebook** under Big Flat Electric Cooperative, Inc.
- **Visit our website** at *www.bigflatelectric.com.*
- **Sign up for budget billing** and/or ACH (auto payments) by calling our office.
- **Bills** are generated on the 1st working day of each month, and are due on the 20th of each month.
- **Bills that are 60 days in arrears are subject to disconnect**. Once disconnected, a reconnect fee will be charged. The bill will then have to be paid in full to be reconnected.
- **We have a secure, automated toll-free phone number** for members making payments by credit card and/or bank account: 1-844-968-1965. You will need to have your account number and/or phone number that is on file with our office to access the automated system.
- **Take control of your electric account with SmartHub.** You can pay your bills; set up and cancel re-occurring payments; set up notifications; obtain duplicates of your bills; and view your monthly and yearly usage, all at your fingertips. Visit our website: *www.bigflatelectric.com* or download the SmartHub app from your Play Store on Android or the App Store on Apple devices.
- New service and service change quotes are only **valid for 30 days.**

QUOTE OF THE MONTH



NOTICE: New outage reporting process

BIG Flat Electric Cooperative (BFEC) will partner with Basin Electric's Security and Response Services (SRS) beginning in November.

- **One Phone Number:** Members can report outages anytime, day or night, by calling 406-654-2040.
- **During Business Hours:** BFEC office staff will continue handling outage calls.
- **After Hours, Weekends & Holidays:** SRS dispatchers will collect outage information and notify BFEC's on-call crew.
- **Improved Communication:** Multiple phone lines and available dispatchers will help ensure members can report outages, especially during widespread outages.
- **Increased Safety:** SRS can monitor line crews while they respond to outages, providing an additional level of employee safety.
- **Our Goal:** Make outage reporting easier for members while allowing linemen to focus on restoring power safely and quickly.
- **Stay Informed:** Watch BFEC's newsletter, website, and Facebook page for the official launch date. RM

BILLING NOTICE

BFEC disconnection fee changes coming in January

BEGINNING in January, Big Flat Electric Cooperative will implement changes to its disconnection fees. The first disconnection fee will be $150, with an additional $50 for each subsequent disconnection, up to a maximum of $400. Members can avoid these fees by keeping their accounts current and making payments on time. If you have questions, please contact our office at 406-654-2040. RM

FREE COMMUNITY ADVERTISING HERE

Big Flat Electric Cooperative is pleased to offer FREE advertising in our local newsletter for businesses, organizations and community events within our service area.

This is a great opportunity to share: Business promotions, community events, fundraisers, club or organization announcements, school and youth activities, classes, workshops, classified ads and special events.

HOW TO SUBMIT

Please include: Your advertisement or event information, contact information and a logo or photo (optional).

Deadline: To be considered for publication, please submit your information by the 1st of the month for events/items for the following month.

Email: *Kate@bigflatelectric.com*

Phone: 406-654-2040

NOTE: *Advertising is provided at no cost as a service to our local communities. Space is limited, and all submissions are subject to available space and editorial review.*

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

District 1	Duane Klindworth
District 2	Alan Van Voast, Sec./Treasurer
District 3	Alan Wasson
District 4	Warren Morin
District 5	Roger Solberg, Vice President
District 6	Patty Quisno
District 7	Kevin Koss, President

General Manager: **Gretchen Boardman**



BIG FLAT ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE

SERVING BLAINE, PHILLIPS AND VALLEY COUNTIES

P.O. BOX 229 • MALTA, MT 59538 • WWW.BIGFLATELECTRIC.COM

A Touchstone Energy® Partner
The power of human connections

CONNECT WITH US

OPEN WEEKDAYS 8 A.M. TO 5 P.M.

333 S 7TH ST E
MALTA, MT 59538
(406) 654-2040

AFTER HOURS OUTAGE:
(406) 654-2040

PAYMENT OPTIONS:
1-844-968-1965 or
bigflatelectric.com

Big Flat Electric Cooperative is an equal opportunity provider and employer.