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JANUARY 2022

NEWS

The Bluestems



The Bluestems, front row: Mya, Mercedes, Molly; back row: Micah and Malachi.

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The Bluestems

BY ANNE HANSEN

In northern Grant County, Mor-Gran-Sou Electric Cooperative members Marty and Medora Meyer and their six children have a calendar on a wall in their house packed full of their children's sporting activities, work schedules and schooling.

Something that sticks out beyond the standard schedule of many families is weekly band practice and booked events. Together, their children – Mya, 16, Mercedes, 14, Malachi, 12, Micah, 10, and Molly, 8 – formed a bluegrass band, known in the area as The Bluestems.

Although parents Marty and Medora do not play any instruments, they thought it was important to introduce the fine arts to their children. It all began when the oldest sibling, Mya, was in first grade, and Medora and Marty signed her up for piano lessons.

"We felt that it was important to expose our children to the fine arts, as it enhances their overall education experience," Medora said.

Soon after, Mercedes, Malachi, Micah and Molly all followed in their sister's footsteps, as they began learning how to play as well. Their ability to play piano morphed into the children picking up and learning other instruments that had interested them.

It was interesting to see their playing styles corresponding with their personality, Medora noted.

"For example, Mya's piano teacher noted that she was very studious, learning what is on the pages and following along. When Mercedes began playing, she would do everything by ear and not follow the sheet music," Medora shared.

The festival that sparked the passion

In 2018, the Meyer family was invited by Jill Wiese, a family friend and bass player for the Cotton Wood bluegrass band, to come listen to her band open during the Blizzard Bluegrass Festival in Bismarck.

Sitting in the front row, the Meyer family experienced their first bluegrass festival that ignited their passion.

"We will never forget the bands that played during the first festival and watching fives guys around one microphone, playing bluegrass, harmonizing and cracking jokes," Mya said.

"At that time, I had been playing classical violin for a couple of years," she said. It was during the festival that Mya decided to trade her "strings for strangs," and learn to play the fiddle.

It was also at that same festival, during a performance by High Plains Tradition, Malachi's attention was fixed on

Mark Leslie – a banjo player from the band.

"After that night, Malachi declared that he wanted to play banjo, just like Mark, so we picked up a banjo at a garage sale and searched and found a teacher for him," Medora said.

Forming a family band

The bluegrass festival had sparked the Meyer family's interest in learning how to play the bluegrass genre of music. This resulted in the Meyer children occasionally playing piano and singing at local retirement homes.

It wasn't until a family trip to Minnesota that the children decided to take it to the next step. During this trip, the Meyer children entered a talent contest at the last minute.

"They had needed another entry into the contest, so we had decided on the spur of the moment to enter," Mya said.

Quickly, they needed to come up with a band name, so they chose "The Tschida Pickers," but the announcer referred to them as "Cheetah Pickers."

Regardless of the name, that entrance would result in winning the talent contest, and a decision to begin a band. They scrapped the name used at the contest and came up with The Little Bluestems, and later The Bluestems.

After the decision, Micah and Mercedes learned additional instruments to better fit the band. Today, Mya plays fiddle, mandolin and is the lead vocalist. Mercedes is on the guitar and mandolin, Malachi plays banjo and is a vocalist, Micah is on the bass and Molly plays the dobro.

Ever since, The Bluestems have been playing in bluegrass festivals, for private events and at town celebrations.

"We love interacting with the crowd and being able to share our love of music with others," Mercedes said.

"We couldn't be more proud of The Bluestems," Jill said. "They have won the hearts of North Dakota bluegrass fans. They have natural talent, but they work so hard and continue to grow."

The Bluestems practice together on a weekly basis and play their instruments daily.

"It's loud in our house, in a good way," Medora said. "They do it all on their own without our help."

As they continue to play, they also continue to grow and learn more. One lesson learned early was not to caffeinate their 10-year-old bass player, Micah.

"During one of the performances, we were unaware that Micah had drank his first Mountain Dew," Medora chuckled. "As the bass player, he sets the tempo for the whole band, and the pop was a contributing factor that reduced a 45-minute set to be completed within 20 minutes."

The band members laughed and noted that he is no



longer allowed to have any caffeine before a performance.

Learning from the best

Shortly after forming the band, each member found mentors who could help them grow and learn their instrument.

“This type of genre of music is really passed down from generation to generation of musicians,” Medora noted.

The band raved about their mentors.

“We have been lucky to have great multi-instrumentalists and songwriters that have influenced the band through sharing their knowledge and love for bluegrass,” Mya said.

Those mentors include Tara Linhardt, Gina Furtado, Bryan McDowell, Chris Luquette, Ira Gitlin, David McLaughlin and Holger Olesen. These mentors are professionals in the industry, Medora noted, and “as a parent, I couldn’t be happier to have my children learning from these bluegrass professionals, as each one of them is so humble and kind.”

“The bluegrass community is so willing to share with us and teach,” Mya said. On a weekly basis, each band member meets with an individual mentor. In addition, they have a band mentor to help them sound like a unified group.

Beyond the one-on-one sessions with their mentors, The Bluestems learn from others more experienced during festivals and learning workshops. “(Bluegrass) is a tightknit community, where everyone knows everyone and they are all willing to help you if you want to learn,” Mya said.

Continuing to grow

The band continues to make improvements and grow.

“Before the pandemic, we had about five performances per month, and we are beginning to see bookings pick up again,” Mya said.

“The crowd loves to watch The Bluestems,” Jill said. “We are really proud of them and happy they are a part of the bluegrass family in North Dakota.”

Some of those performances for 2022 include the Frozen Fingers Festival in Minot on April 9 and the Missouri River Bluegrass Festival at the Cross Ranch State Park on June 17-18.

The band is currently working on developing a CD, which will be available in the summer of 2022. For more information, or to request a performance, contact the band at thelittlebluestems@gmail.com. ■

MANAGER’S MESSAGE:

Happy New Year!



Travis Kupper

Happy New Year! We wish you and yours a safe, healthy and prosperous new year!

It is this time of year that evokes comfort and nostalgia, recalling family gatherings and traditions and often is a time for us to reflect on the past year.

Today and every day, I’m grateful for my own family and my co-op family. At Mor-Gran-Sou Electric Cooperative,

our team feels a strong connection to our community and our members, because we live here, too. This past year, we were driven by the motto, “Together we make a powerful difference,” which was also the theme of our annual meeting.

The motto shines a light on how together we not only make a difference, but we accomplish more than we would independently and do so in a safe manner. We continued to work in our new normal and placed a heavy focus on the safety of our employees to ensure our

workforce was able to be there for our members.

We are aided by the use of technology, which continues to play an important role. Holding virtual board and annual meetings is just one way we continue to find the beneficial use of technology can help our cooperatives

In addition to helping members today, we’re focusing on the future. We continued to have a financially sound year and expect the same for the future. In your January statements, you will find the benefit of our good year with a bill credit. At the end of the day, we are committed to you and the communities we serve.

At the heart of all we do is you, the members we proudly serve. Looking back, I’m grateful for so many wonderful community partners and for the positive impact we can continue to make.

Speaking on behalf of our team at Mor-Gran-Sou Electric Cooperative, we know the future will be bright, because of you. During the new year, we wish you and your loved ones peace, joy and prosperity.

We look forward to serving you in 2022.



Fitterer promoted to manager of operations

BY ANNE HANSEN

In early November 2021, Gary Fitterer was promoted to Mor-Gran-Sou Electric Cooperative’s manager of operations, after previously serving as the lead lineworker in Mandan.

“Gary has a vast knowledge base ranging from his time as an intern in Flasher, to leading the team in Mandan. We are excited to welcome Gary to the management team,” said Travis Kupper, co-general manager and CEO at Mor-Gran-Sou Electric Cooperative.

Fitterer, born and raised in Flasher, received his lineworker education at Bismarck State College. Shortly after receiving his degree, Fitterer had the chance to work for Mor-Gran-Sou Electric Cooperative as an intern.

“I will always appreciate the 1,000-hour internship I first had with Mor-Gran-Sou Electric, where I learned a lot about serving the cooperative,” he said.

Fitterer was hired by the cooperative full time in the spring of 1999 as a lineworker at the headquarters in Flasher. Nearly three years later, Fitterer was transferred to the Mandan outpost, where he would eventually be promoted to lead lineworker in 2006. It was during this time that Fitterer would work throughout his most memorable times as a lineworker, including the 2010 ice storm.

“I will never forget the experiences we had when the unpredictable North Dakota weather took out a large portion of our service territory,” he said.

Throughout his 20-plus years at Mor-Gran-Sou Electric Cooperative, Fitterer has never experienced any outage quite as extreme. Although the experience was a challenge, Fitterer was glad he was a part of a cooperative team that worked relentlessly to return power back to the members.

Looking ahead

As Fitterer steps into the new role as manager of operations, he is grateful to be following the example of

Randy Ressler, previous operations manager at Mor-Gran-Sou Electric.

“I have big shoes to fill, but that also means I was able to learn from someone who was such a great leader,” Fitterer said.

The most important aspect of the job is ensuring the safety of his employees and co-workers, Fitterer noted.

“I want to ensure that our employees return back to their homes safely each night,” he said.

Fitterer promotes open communications between employees.

“I truly believe that if you have a question, you should not be afraid to ask it. Furthermore, if employees don’t feel comfortable doing a job, I want them to know it is OK to ask for confirmation,” he said.

Fitterer continues to look for opportunities to learn and grow in his new role. ■



Gary Fitterer

Congratulations to Randy Ressler

Congratulations to Randy Ressler on your recent retirement. Your 43 years of leadership has had a lasting impact on our cooperative.



Prepare for tax season with SmartHub!

Print copies of your monthly utility bills for your tax records by logging into SmartHub! Visit www.morgransou.com and click SmartHub to proceed to your billing history. If you have not signed up for SmartHub, you can set up a new, secure account.

Call 800-750-8212 with questions.



Opt into Operation Round Up

Operation Round Up is a program in which Mor-Gran-Sou Electric Cooperative members can voluntarily choose to round up their monthly utility bills to the next dollar and donate their pennies to the Mor-Gran-Sou Charitable Foundation.

The foundation board members, who are also Mor-Gran-Sou Electric Cooperative members, meet and disburse funds in the form of grants to nonprofit corporations, organizations or agencies. All the money raised by members stays in our local communities.

On average, participating members donate about \$6 a year. The most a member would contribute a month is 99 cents.

The donation is tax-deductible, and members who participate will receive a summary on their last billing statement of the year. All rounded-up funds flow directly into the Mor-Gran-Sou Charitable Foundation and are overseen by the board of directors. Mor-Gran-Sou Electric Cooperative personnel administer the program as a service to the foundation.

If you have any questions, please call the office at 800-750-8212. If you haven't already signed up, please opt into the program and support your friends and neighbors in area communities. Please fill out the form below and return it to the co-op. ■



I wish to participate in Operation Round Up at Mor-Gran-Sou Electric Cooperative Inc.

- Yes, I agree that Mor-Gran-Sou, through the Operation Round Up program, has my permission to round up my monthly electric bill to the nearest dollar. I understand I have the option to opt out with a 30-day written notice to the co-op.

Name: _____

Address: _____

Account #(s): _____

Email the form to jarmijo@morgransou.com; or mail to:

Mor-Gran-Sou Electric Cooperative, Inc.

P.O. Box 297 / Flasher, ND 58535

Signature

Bill Credits: Strong financials lead to end-of-year return

BY ANNE HANSEN

The Mor-Gran-Sou Electric Cooperative board of directors and management staff have good news to share. Members, you will find a bill credit on your January billing statements.

Mor-Gran-Sou is a nonprofit business that exists only to provide goods and services to you, our member-owners, not to make a profit for a shareholder or investor. Cooperatives operate to provide electric service to their members at the lowest cost possible. At the end of each year, Mor-Gran-Sou Electric completes its financials and prepares a budget to plan for future cooperative needs.

As the board of directors and management staff plan for the future, they also reflect on the current financial

strength of the cooperative. During the November board meeting, Mor-Gran-Sou Electric's directors noted the 2021 financials are stronger than forecasted, and at their discretion, saw an opportunity to initiate a bill credit to the membership. Please look for your credit on the line item on your January statement entitled "MGS Bill Credit."

If you have questions, please contact us at 701-663-0297, 701-597-3301 or 800-750-8212, Monday through Friday, between 8 a.m. and 4:30 p.m. CT.

We are pleased to share this good news with you. Thank you, members, for your support throughout the year. We wish you a happy, safe, and prosperous new year. ■



Apply for a grant

Do you have a specific need and could use a boost? Operation Round Up grants may be awarded to any nonprofit corporation, organization or agency for charitable causes and crucial needs, such as food, shelter, clothing, health care, emergency services and education.

All of the money raised by members stays in our local communities. Any person or group in the Mor-Gran-Sou Electric Cooperative service area, or providing a service

to the area, may apply to receive an Operation Round Up grant. Funds are disbursed in the general service area of Mor-Gran-Sou Electric solely for charitable, educational, scientific, health or safety purposes.

To request an application, contact Jackie Miller or Julie Armijo by calling Mor-Gran-Sou Electric at 800-750-8212, or email jmiller@morgransou.com or jarmijo@morgransou.com. If you have questions, you may also contact any of the foundation board members. ■

Mor-Gran-Sou offers scholarships

Mor-Gran-Sou Electric Cooperative takes pride in assisting with the development of rural leadership through our scholarship program. We feel it's important to help finance our local students' educational journeys by offering scholarships to qualifying seniors.

We continue to offer more scholarship opportunities to our graduating seniors. The applicants must be dependents of Mor-Gran-Sou Electric members. All scholarships will be awarded during the 2021-22 school year.

The co-op will award:

- Nine \$500 scholarships to qualified applicants whose parent(s) or guardian(s) are members of the co-op.
- \$500 scholarship to a graduating senior from a school outside of our service area.
- \$1,000 scholarship sponsored by Basin Electric Power Cooperative.
- \$500 scholarship sponsored by 3C Construction, for those pursuing a lineworker career.
- \$500 scholarship sponsored by West Dakota Utility Services, for those pursuing a career as a mechanic.
- \$500 luck-of-the-draw scholarships to be drawn at the annual meeting on July 15. ■



When to apply

Applications are due no later than 4:30 p.m. CT (3:30 p.m. MT) on Friday, Feb. 18.

Please deliver or mail all necessary information to Mor-Gran-Sou Electric Cooperative at P.O. Box 297, Flasher, ND 58535-0297.

If you have questions or would like further information, please call Julie or Jackie at 701-597-3301, 701-663-0297 or 800-750-8212.

Statement of nondiscrimination

Mor-Gran-Sou Electric Cooperative Inc. is a recipient of federal assistance from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). In accordance with federal civil rights law and U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) civil rights regulations and policies, the USDA, its agencies, offices, employees and institutions participating in or administering USDA programs are prohibited from discriminating based on race, color, national origin, religion, sex, gender identity (including gender expression), sexual orientation, disability, age, marital status, family/parental status, income derived from a public assistance program, political beliefs or reprisal or retaliation for prior civil rights activity, in any program or activity conducted or funded by USDA (not all bases apply to all programs).

Remedies and complaint filing deadlines vary by program or incident. Persons with disabilities who require alternative means of communication for program information (e.g., Braille, large print, audiotope, American Sign Language, etc.) should contact the responsible Agency or USDA's TARGET Center at 202-720-2600 (voice and TTY) or contact USDA through the Federal Relay Service at 800-877-8339.

Additionally, program information may be made available in languages other than English. To file a program discrimination complaint, complete the USDA Program Discrimination Complaint Form, AD-3027, found online at www.usda.gov/oascr/how-to-file-a-programdiscrimination-complaint and at any USDA office, or write a letter addressed to USDA and provide in the letter all of the information requested in the form. To request a copy of the complaint form, call 866-632-9992. Submit your completed form or letter to USDA by: 1) mail: U.S. Department of Agriculture Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights 1400 Independence Ave. S.W., Washington, DC 20250-9410; 2) fax: 202-690-7442; or 3) email: program.intake@usda.gov.

Mor-Gran-Sou Electric Cooperative Inc. is an equal opportunity provider.



BOARD MEETING HIGHLIGHTS

Nov. 17, 2021

- Approved Oct. 27, 2021, board meeting minutes.
- Approved a work order inventory and special equipment capitalization.
- Approved increase to 2021 budget for retirements to estates and those age 80 and over.
- Approved capital credit retirement applications to estates and those age 80 and over.
- Reviewed the monthly director’s financial report.
- Reviewed the Mor-Gran-Sou Electric Cooperative financial report for October.
- Reviewed senior staff and general counsel reports.
- Reviewed co-general managers/CEOs update and report on meetings attended.
- Reviewed board meeting minutes of Basin Electric Power Cooperative and its subsidiaries.
- Approved recognition of 2021 revenue deferral .
- Approved a membership bill credit for 2021.
- Reviewed the 2022 budget assumption.
- Reviewed candidate declaration for National Information Solutions Cooperative board election for Region 6.
- Approved attendees for upcoming meetings.

- Authorized voting delegates and alternates for upcoming meetings.
- Elected a Mor-Gran-Sou director and alternate to serve on the North Daktoa Association of Rural Electric Cooperatives board of directors.
- Heard directors’ recap on meetings/training attended.
- Reviewed update on Mandan building remodel.
- Reviewed WDUS Holdings and 3C Construction updates
- Held executive session.

Upcoming regular board meeting dates:

- Jan. 26 - 10:30 a.m. CT/9:30 a.m. MT - J&L Building, Bismarck
- Feb. 16 - 10:30 a.m. CT/9:30 a.m. MT - J&L Building, Bismarck

Members are welcome to attend board meetings. Due to COVID-19, plans may change. Please call the office at 800-750-8212 or 597-3301 to confirm the meeting status if you wish to attend. To place an item on the agenda, please contact Board Chair Casey Wells or Co-General Manager/CEO Donald Franklund at 701-597-3301 at least one week in advance. Members may obtain a copy of approved board minutes by completing and returning the “Request for Information or Data” form. You can find this form at www.morgransou.com, or contact the Flasher office to request a copy.

Remembering John R. Jochim

BY JACKIE MILLER

As we look forward to 2022, it is fitting to take time to look back on 2021 and pay tribute to those we lost who were part of the Mor-Gran-Sou Electric Cooperative family. It is with great sadness that we learned that John R. Jochim, who served as a Morton County board director from 1973 to 1982, died on Nov. 11, 2021.

Jochim, a lifelong member of the Flasher community, was born on Oct. 29, 1935, and graduated from Flasher Public High School in 1955. He farmed and ranched with his parents and eventually became the sole owner of the Bow & Arrow Ranch, where he and his wife, Kathleen, who married in December 1965, raised their five children. John’s love for his family held a special place in his heart and he took immense pride in knowing that his legacy was being carried out by the third and fourth generations of his family.

Those who knew John best describe him as a man who cherished anything outdoors, including his passion for his farm and ranch, hunting wild game and just appreciating God’s creation. John supported his community and

served on various boards, which included his time with Mor-Gran-Sou Electric Cooperative.

Connie Rossow, retired assistant general manager for Mor-Gran-Sou, remembers John.

“He was always looking out for the rural area and how important it was to have linemen in the area. He was interested in learning and attended trainings and conferences that kept him informed of the changing utility industry,” she says.

Former Grant County Director Arlene Wells offers her insight: “I served on the board with John for a brief time. But I remember how fiscally conscious he was. He also did his best to work hard for the membership and got along well with his fellow directors.”

To his family and friends, please know how much we appreciated John’s shared time and talents as he served the members of Mor-Gran-Sou Electric, and that the board of directors and staff express our heartfelt condolences; he will be deeply missed. ■



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800-795-0555 OR 811

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