

THIS ISSUE:

- Understanding your rates
- Student of the Month begins
- Guiding hands-on experience
- Importance of harvest safety

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Cow Chip Creations

Amanda Njos creates and refinishes timeless pieces for her customers. Read more inside.

PHOTOS PROVIDED BY AMANDA NJOS



Amanda works with a variety of pieces and textiles to create one-of-a-kind items.

CRAFTING ART AT THE RANCH: **Cow Chip Creations**

BY SAMANTHA VANGSNESS

In a rural community where time moves a little slower and tradition still holds strong, history has a way of sticking around. It is etched into the wooden buildings and found amongst worn materials. Many people pass by the material without a second glance, but not Amanda Njos. What others view as worn barn wood, Njos sees as an opportunity. Through craftsmanship and vision, she transforms used materials into treasured, one-of-a-kind pieces that carry both history and new life.

Cow Chip Creations

Njos's business, Cow Chip Creations, is nestled on the Cow Chip Ranch southwest of Bowman. There, Amanda and her husband, Chad, along with their four

children, Toby, Zak, Molly and Elliot, make up the Cow Chip Ranch crew.

Life on and off the ranch is busy, filled with ranch work, sporting events, rodeos and everything in between. But in the midst of it, Amanda can be found bringing her customers' ideas to life through her one-of-a-kind creations.

"I started about 18 years ago in the basement of our house," Amanda says. "I was doing handpainted barn wood signs with little sayings."

Creativity has been a part of Amanda's life since her childhood. She grew up refinishing furniture with her grandmother, learning how to see the potential in every piece.

Although she doesn't create as many handpainted signs anymore, that early passion has evolved into



The Njos family lives on their ranch southwest of Bowman.

something much larger. Amanda is busy bringing life to restored pieces and building statement pieces for her customers.

From her humble beginning in the basement, her work is now taking place in a 100-year-old remodeled barn on their ranch. The barn is Amanda's workshop, showroom and event space. The space itself has become a part of her story.

"We were at the point of either tearing the barn down or doing something with it," Amanda says.

In many ways, the old barn wood Amanda was using to make signs sparked the beginning of what her business would become. Amanda once had planned to become a teacher, but her path changed for a reason, she believes.

"God has funny plans sometimes, and here we are," Amanda says.

Creating timeless pieces

Each piece Amanda creates is carefully crafted, whether it is a piece for sale in her showroom or a custom creation. She creates pieces from scratch or can reclaim a customer's piece, whether it is a chair or some cowboy boots.

Amanda enjoys making staple pieces, such as benches, tables and barstools, which are all crafted from reclaimed barn wood. She jokes she has enough barn wood to last her lifetime and more.

Each curated piece is thoughtfully planned with the customer to ensure their vision comes to life from textiles such as leather or fabric to the stain and finishes. She enjoys working with different patterns and coming up with designs. The wood itself makes the piece stand out, but the added textures create a bit more accent.

"Every piece of wood is different," Amanda says, which adds an extra component to each piece.

Whatever the project, Amanda works to make timeless additions to her customers' homes.

More than art

The Cow Chip Creation workshop can be visited at the ranch, where you can shop her showroom and find other local products of artists she features. The barn not only houses Amanda's workshop and showroom, but also includes event space which can be rented. The event space is found in the loft of the barn and offers a welcoming atmosphere.

Amanda enjoys sharing her passion for art and creativity with others, and she does that in a few other ways, with a decorating service and workshops. To inquire about any of these services or to visit the barn, visit Cow Chips Creations on Facebook, cow-chip.com or contact Amanda.

Amanda's craftsmanship transforms reclaimed items into cherished pieces. What begins as worn wood or lived-in furniture becomes something entirely new, full of character. ■



Cow Chip Creations is nestled in a 100-year old barn that serves as a workshop, show room and event rental space.

MANAGER'S MESSAGE:

Understanding your electric cooperative rates



Jason Bentz

Co-General Manager/CEO

As your electric cooperative, our mission is simple: Serve our members, not outside shareholders, while balancing reliability, affordability and long-term sustainability.

One of the most important topics we evaluate is rates and how they affect our members. We are committed to keeping rates as low as possible while continuing to deliver safe, dependable service. This year, our cooperative experienced a rate increase driven primarily

by rising wholesale power costs. We anticipate an additional wholesale rate increase in 2027 that is expected to put further pressure on our rates, likely necessitating another rate adjustment.

Several key factors are contributing to these higher costs.

- **New generation and transmission:** Basin Electric Power Cooperative, one of our wholesale providers, is investing more than \$10 billion over the next 10 years to expand and maintain generation and transmission infrastructure. These investments are necessary to support growing demand and ensure long-term reliability. Additionally, the Western Area Power Administration (WAPA) is investing billions to modernize aging hydroelectric generation and transmission systems. While these upgrades come at a cost, they are essential to maintaining safe and reliable service for the future.
- **Inflationary pressures:** Like many industries, we face increased costs for labor, materials, contracted services and maintenance. Higher interest rates

have also raised the cost of borrowing, adding to overall expenses.

- **Market volatility:** Power markets have become more unpredictable, with prices influenced by fluctuating natural gas markets, increased intermittent generation and rising electricity demand. Managing this volatility requires additional resources and planning.

We are also seeing impacts from new regional requirements to maintain higher reserve capacity margins, essentially a reliability "insurance policy" to help ensure power is available during unexpected outages or peak demand.

Despite these challenges, we are focused on controlling costs wherever possible. We partner with other cooperatives for bulk purchasing, share services through Innovative Energy Alliance Cooperative and utilize specialized contractors and maintenance providers to improve efficiency and control expenses.

Strong financial management allows us to continue investing in infrastructure and managing risk while working to stabilize rates. Looking ahead, our management team and board of directors will carefully evaluate potential rate adjustments for 2027. Our recent cost-of-service study provides valuable guidance as we plan for the future.

We know these changes matter and we remain committed to transparency, thoughtful planning and responsible decision-making. Thank you for your continued support of your cooperative as we work together to provide reliable, affordable power for years to come. ■



THE RDFC GRANT APPLICATION DEADLINE IS APPROACHING!

Visit our website or call the office for more information. Applications are due Sept. 8.



MESSAGE FROM MEMBER SERVICES:

Touchstone Energy Student of the Month



Brooke Waltner

Manager of Member Relations/Chief of Staff

September marks the beginning of Slope Electric Cooperative's Touchstone Energy® Student of the Month program, in partnership with Touchstone Energy Cooperatives. This program aims to recognize outstanding K-12 students by sponsoring a school project or initiative, selected by the winning student, in the amount of \$200.

We firmly believe in supporting education and fostering the development of

young individuals in our community. The Touchstone Energy Student of the Month program presents an excellent opportunity for us to celebrate and recognize students who excel in anything, ranging from academics to leadership to community involvement or personal growth.

Application process

Students can be nominated by teachers, parents/guardians, school administrators or community members. Nomination forms can be accessed online through our website, slopeelectric.coop. The deadline is the 15th of each month. Students are eligible to be nominated and chosen from September through February. In March, we will recognize a teacher who has been nominated by sponsoring a school project or initiative of their selection in the amount of \$200. Students and teachers can be nominated anytime throughout this program and will be randomly chosen in the selected month. All students K-12 are eligible to be nominated.

- **September** – New England Public School (Nominations due Sept. 15)
- **October** – Scranton Public School (Nominations due Oct. 15)
- **November** – Lemmon Public School (Nominations due Nov. 15)
- **December** – Bowman County Public School (Nominations due Dec. 15)
- **January** – Hettinger Public School (Nominations due Jan. 15)

- **February** – Mott-Regent Public School (Nominations due Feb. 15)
- **March** – Area teacher (Nominations due March 15)

The winning recipients will receive a monetary donation to their school. The winners will have the opportunity to choose a project or initiative within their school, for which the donation will be utilized.

We look forward to celebrating the achievement of students in our service area. ■



NOMINATE A STUDENT TODAY!

SCAN THE QR CODE OR VISIT OUR WEBSITE FOR DETAILS.



MESSAGE FROM OPERATIONS: **Guiding hands-on experience**



Andrew Sonsalla

Operations Manager

Rooted in the cooperative principle of education and training, electric cooperatives offer seasonal apprentice lineworkers opportunities to help them build skills and advance their careers.

This year, Carson Massey and Joe Gieser joined the Slope Electric Cooperative crews in May as seasonal apprentice lineworkers. This opportunity for apprentice lineworkers allows them to gain 1,000 hours of field

experience, helping them along the path to achieving journeyman status.

By working alongside experienced crews, apprentices gain hands-on experience, learn essential safety practices and develop skills critical to the trade. This real-world exposure helps recent graduates

gain valuable skills in maintenance, troubleshooting and safety. This exposure allows apprentices to build confidence and proficiency, reinforcing technical knowledge while exposing them to on-the-job expectations and responsibilities.

While working at the cooperative, apprentices take part in a variety of tasks, including construction of new services, retiring aging infrastructure, working alongside contractors and answering members' requests. By joining the crews as they work around the service area, apprentices are not only learning about the technical side of the cooperative, but also the principles that make up the co-op.

Through mentorship and field experience, apprentices not only gain the hours required for advancement, but also insight into the membership and cooperative model and other values that make a successful lineworker. Through these efforts, Slope Electric continues to invest in education while maintaining the reliable service members rely upon every day. ■



Carson Massey helps line crews prepare material for a projects.



Joe Gieser helps load a voltage regulator.

SAFETY STARTS WITH ME:

Importance of harvest safety



Dusty Hoff

Staking Technician

It is harvest time across our service territory. Farmers are busy cutting hay and harvesting both crops and silage and equipment is moving in and out of fields all day long. As crops are trucked to the farm for storage or heading to the elevator, both fields and roads become much busier. We know this is an important time in every producer's operation, but safety cannot take a back seat.

Accident-related outages increase this time of year.

Whether it's from machinery, vehicles or even livestock. If electrical equipment is hit or damaged, it's important to let Slope Electric Cooperative know right away. The sooner we know, the faster we can repair the issue and make sure further damage does not occur to electrical equipment or to community members.

As a lineworker, safety is part of every job we do. Each time before we hop in the vehicle, we do a 360-safety check. The 360-safety check is a complete walk around the vehicle to check for hazards or anything misplaced. It might seem simple, but it catches problems before they turn into accidents.

The same idea could be beneficial for farmers and ranchers. No matter how familiar you are with a piece of machinery or area, it pays to take a second look. It is important to know clearances and keep an eye

on power lines, utility poles, transformers and other cooperative equipment is located in the farmyard or fields.

Here are additional electrical safety tips to keep in mind this harvest season:

- Use a spotter when operating large machinery near power lines.
- Keep machinery, equipment and materials at least 10 feet from power lines, at all times, in all directions.
- Look up and use care when moving any machinery such as extending augers or raising the bed of grain trucks around power lines.
- Inspect the height of farm machinery to determine clearance.
- Never attempt to move a power line out of the way or raise it for clearance.

If your equipment makes contact with a power line, stay in the cab. Call 911 and warn others to stay away. Wait until the power is shut off before exiting the cab.

If you must get out of the cab, like in the case of a fire, jump out of the cab with your feet together, without touching the ground and machinery at the same time. Keeping your feet together, hop away from the machinery.

At the end of the day, safety comes down to staying alert and taking your time. A quick look at your machinery and surroundings can prevent a serious accident. And if you notice any damaged or low-hanging lines, give the co-op a call at 701-579-4191. From all of us at Slope Electric, we hope you have a safe and successful harvest season. ■



SLOPE ELECTRIC BOARD MEETING HIGHLIGHTS MAY 28

The regular meeting of the board of directors of Slope Electric Cooperative was held on May 28 at the New England office. President Angela Carlson called the meeting to order at 8:01 a.m. A quorum was present. Slope Electric's General Counsel Jennifer Grosz was appointed recorder for the meeting. Also present were Slope Electric's co-General Managers/CEOs Travis Kupper and Jason Bentz, Chief Financial Officer Alex Craigmile, Chief of Staff/Member Relations Manager Brooke Waltner and Board Liaison Connie Hill.

Action items: The board reviewed and approved director vouchers, capital credit estate retirements, special equipment capitalization, annual meeting ballots, the wildfire mitigation plan and emergency response plan/crisis communication plan, board materials and other items.

Co-general managers' report: Bentz and Kupper presented the co-general managers' report, which included updates on Basin Electric Power Cooperative projects, National Rural Electric Cooperative Association's Legislative Rally and supplier agreements. The managers also highlighted meetings they attended, such as North Dakota

managers meeting, Upper Missouri Power Cooperative meeting and others.

Department reports: Craigmile provided a financial report and highlighted key items in the executive summary and information on retiring capital credits. Sonsalla provided a written operations report for the board's review. Waltner provided a member relations report covering disconnect services, youth programs, economic development opportunities, annual meeting details and member service and communication efforts for the month. Waltner also provided a chief of staff report that included updates on staff training, job postings and project progress. Chief Information Officer Charlie Dunbar provided a written information technology report. Grosz provided a legal counsel report, providing project status updates.

Executive session: The board entered into an executive session during the meeting.

The meeting concluded with adjournment. Secretary Charlotte Meier certified the accuracy of the minutes on May 28.

Next meeting date: The next meeting is at 8 a.m. Aug. 27 in New England. ■



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Jason Bentz
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code or visiting
the "Governance"
tab on our
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