



# BIG FLAT NEWS



February 2026

[www.bigflatelectric.com](http://www.bigflatelectric.com)

## Emerson Downing

### 2026 Big Flat Electric Youth Tour essay winner

**E**ACH year the sophomores and juniors from the schools within our service territory have the chance to win an all-expense-paid trip to Washington, D.C., by submitting an application and writing an essay. This unique trip is truly the trip of a lifetime as youth watch history come alive when they explore the museums, memorials, monuments and so much more with other students from across Montana and the nation. They will also gain a personal understanding of American history and explore their role as U.S. citizens by meeting



their state's representatives and senators.

Big Flat Electric Cooperative selected Emerson Downing as the winner for the 2026 Washington, D.C. Youth Tour. Emerson, daughter of Shawn and Kelly Downing, from Saco High School will represent Big Flat Electric in Washington, D.C. this June. Congratulations, Emerson.

This year's essay topic was: *All cooperatives share a concern for their communities. Write about how your local cooperative supports your community or detail new ways they could get involved.* Below is her essay.

## Powering the Hi-Line

ESSAY BY **EMERSON DOWNING** | BIG FLAT ELECTRIC YOUTH TOUR ESSAY WINNER

**W**ITH so many small towns peppered across the broad plains of Montana, it may seem difficult to comprehend what genuinely keeps these communities in motion. From the people I've met and the places I've been, I believe what keeps our communities united are cooperatives. Though compared to larger areas, these co-ops may seem insignificant, but they provide a steady framework that supports our small towns and have an immense impact on the surrounding community members in so many positive ways.

Cooperatives like Big Flat truly go above and beyond for our small communities. Living on a ranch 20 miles from the nearest town, I can attest to how much we deeply appre-



ciate Big Flat, knowing that when the power goes out in negative 40 degree weather, we can rely on them to value our needs and turn it back on. Not only does Big Flat warm us up, they also cool us down, offering free swimming at the pool in Malta when the sweltering heat seems nearly unbearable. Not everyone has the heart and grit to live where we do, but knowing that Big Flat will support and be the pillar to our way of life makes it that much easier to continue on.

Big Flat makes so many milestones in connecting with the youth, possibly even saving lives. After they visited my school to educate us on dangers

*See YOUTH TOUR, next page*

# YOUTH TOUR

*Continued from previous page*

around downed powerlines, I can confidently say that the impact of that presentation will be long-lasting. With mesmerizing demonstrations, engaging trivia and interactive learning, they managed to captivate both younger and older audiences in an admirably educational presentation that won't be forgotten any time soon. Another way they connect with the youth is by providing generous scholarships like the one my brother and 11 other fortunate students received. My brother was also able to attend this Youth Tour, and after he described the unforgettable experiences and people he'd met, I knew that someday I'd like to experience the same.

While Big Flat already provides numerous opportunities and support for our communities, there are a few other ways to get even more involved. As technology becomes more prevalent in our advancing world, one detrimental aspect gradually left behind is a love for reading. In the past 20 years, researchers have found that the art of reading for fun has declined by over 40 percent, meaning fewer people find joy in opening a good book or expanding their knowledge (*Deeply Concerning*). Reading is so important to not only small communities, but our society

as a whole. As an avid reader myself, I find that with each book I read, I feel changed in one way or another, mindset altered, perspective flipped. Reading is so vitally important in all aspects of life, and one way I believe Big Flat Electric Cooperative can foster a love of reading is by supporting local, student book clubs. Just this past summer, I was privileged to go rock climbing as a book club field trip, which was something I'd never experienced before, and it compelled me to continue reading and to inspire others to do so as well.

Cooperatives like Big Flat are the lifeblood of our small communities and the framework of our lives. They keep us warm literally and figuratively by powering our homes and bringing us together. Cooperatives make our lives here easier because their cores are forged by our very own tight-knit communities and the intricately woven support we've built with each other. We know what it takes to survive, and together we will continue to "power" the Hi-line, making it truly "The Last Best Place," and Montana's best-kept secret. 

### Work Cited:

*'Deeply Concerning': Reading for Fun in the US Has Fallen by 40%, New Study Says.* The Guardian, Guardian News and Media, 20 Aug. 2025, [www.theguardian.com/us-news/2025/aug/20/reading-for-pleasure-study](http://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2025/aug/20/reading-for-pleasure-study).

## Use SmartHub to pay your bill, save time, eliminate late fees



Big Flat Electric Cooperative encourages our members to visit our website at [bigflatelectric.com](http://bigflatelectric.com), click "Pay Bill Online" and register as a new user. This bill pay option has many advantages such as selecting date of payment and amount, managing payment accounts, setting up auto pay, viewing billing and payment history, and managing your personal information.

## FEBRUARY 2026

# IN THE KNOW

HAPPENINGS AROUND BIG FLAT ELECTRIC

**Big Flat Electric employees had a busy finish to the 2025 year. Key activities from December include:**

- **Rights of Way:** Staff is updating rights-of-way procedures since Debbie Kindle, who previously handled rights-of-way, is retiring in June.
- **Financials:** Kari Elletson finalized the capital and operating budgets and presented them to the board for approval.
- **Warehouse Improvements:** Big Flat Electric is looking to insulate and heat the warehouse east of Malta. This will help to improve the wear and tear on trucks and equipment, and provide a safer environment for employees to work in.
- **New Equipment Replacement:** The crew had to replace a disconnect switch at the East Malta Colony. A 500 kilovolt-ampere transformer had to be replaced at the Loring Colony.
- **Meter Reads:** The crew was busy doing annual meter readings throughout the system in between power outages and other pressing issues that arose.
- **Youth Tour:** Emerson Downing of Saco High School was selected as Big Flat Electric's delegate for the NRECA Youth Tour to Washington, D.C., in June.
- **Windstorm:** The crew worked long, hard hours during the December windstorm to get members' power back on. It took approximately 3 days to get all power restored throughout our service area. A big thank-you goes out to our line crew for their hard work and dedication.
- **Pole Replacements:** The crew completed several pole replacements, a majority of which were damaged in the windstorm.
- **Equipment Incident:** Our 2007 freightliner bucket truck is up and running after being out of service due to a tire blowout that caused considerable damage.

# Bracket your budget

**J**UST as a basketball teams strategize to win March Madness, we believe you can work on developing a financial game plan. Here are some ways we suggest getting started:

- Start by “seeding” your expenses: prioritize essential costs (your top seeds), such as housing utilities and groceries.
- Create a “tournament” of discretionary spending, cutting less critical expenses in early “rounds.”
- Implement a “full-court press” on savings by automatically transferring a set amount to your emergency saving and retirement accounts each month, if you are financially able to do so.
- Like a coach manages player minutes, track your spending carefully and make strategic substitutions when unexpected costs arise.

Your financial “championship” goal? Financial professionals recommend building an emergency fund that covers

3 to 6 months of expenses. Practice discipline, avoid unnecessary “fouls” such as impulse purchases and stay committed to your long-term strategy. Small, consistent wins may lead to you being MVP of your financial success.

Investing involves risk, including the possible loss of principal. Past performance does not guarantee future results. RM

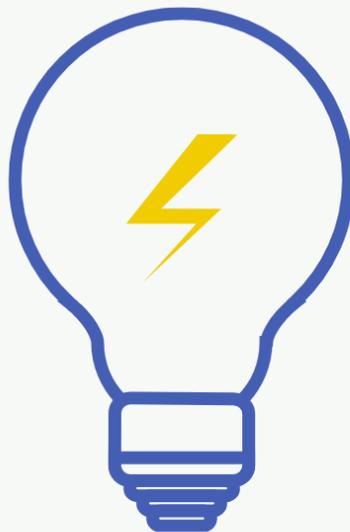
*This financial wellness tip is provided by Homestead Advisers, a financial services company established over 30 years ago to help meet the investment needs of communities within the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA) family. Homestead Advisers provides a range of investment advisory services, including financial planning, and also serves as the investment adviser for the Homestead Funds, a family of registered mutual funds.*



**Big Flat Electric  
welcomes all members  
to apply for \$175.00 in  
energy assistance.**

**Contact HRDC @  
406.265.6743  
for application.**

**It is on a first come first  
serve basis.**



## THINGS TO REMEMBER:

- **Find us on Facebook** under Big Flat Electric Cooperative, Inc.
- **Visit our website** at [www.bigflatelectric.com](http://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 reoccurring 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](http://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

**Nothing is  
impossible, the  
word itself says  
'I'm possible'!**

**Audrey Hepburn**

FROM FEBRUARY 1963: *BFEC NEWSLETTER*

## Last Year Good Season

As we look back over the operations in 1962 we find that the year was very good to your cooperative.

During the lightning and the heavy wet season we did have some heavy maintenance and some outages. However we will never complain when we receive moisture (hail excluded) during the growing season. We are sure that with the amount of moisture received last summer and the good crops helped a lot to put us over the top for the calendar year ending December 31. Our revenue increased \$11,000 over the previous year, our expenses \$4,000 and we had an increase of approximately \$6,000 in margins. We purchased 6,827,496 kilowatts wholesale power to distribute over our lines during the calendar year.

The crews had some extra time during the summer to patrol lines and do whatever work was necessary to keep them in good shape. More will be done this summer as time will permit.

Your board of directors has insisted that the office take a firm stand on payment of electric bills. As a result our accounts receivable are current. We congratulate our consumers on their fine payment record.

## Employee Retires

Sam K. Carlson, who has been a groundman on the Big Flat Electric crew since April 22, 1952 retired on January 15, 1963.

Sam and his wife, Jennie plan to remain at the present time in Malta where their children, Karen, Mike, Tim, Janet and Janice are attending the Malta Public Schools and Jimmy, who is a pre-schooler, is at home.

The employees held a combination Retirement and Birthday Party in Sam's honor on the evening of January 9 at the headquarters building. Potluck dinner was served and the evening was spent playing cards. Sam was presented with a gift from the group.

Replacing Sam is Sigurd M. (Sig) Salvesson. Mr. and Mrs. Salvesson and family have moved to Malta from the south community where they have been consumers of the Big Flat Electric when the headquarters was in Turner.

## Adequate Hot Water

Few things are more annoying than to run out of hot water halfway through a shower or bath.

If so — either your hot water tank is too small or its recovery rate (gallons of water heated 100 degrees in an hour) is too slow.

According to university extension home economists, the hot water supply in your home depends upon both tank size and recovery rate.

If you feel "left in the cold" too often and plan to purchase a new water heater, you have many things to consider.

Figure on 15 to 25 gallons of hot water per person each day — 15 for adults and 25 for children. The recovery rate should be greater than 30 gallons an hour to supply water for several simultaneous uses.

An electric hot water tank with an 80-gallon storage capacity and a 5,000-watt input (16 gallons heated an hour) will supply adequate hot water for most families.

Also available are two-temperature water heaters which will deliver water for laundry and the dishwasher at 180-degrees and water to faucets at 120 to 125 degrees.

## Along Our Lines

FEB. 1963 — BFEC Newsletter

- Security lights have been installed on the Clarence Harmon and Lidia Shaw Premises near Turner.

- The Eddie Harmons of Turner are among our consumers in the process of installing electric heat in their homes.

- Mr. and Mrs. Kenneth Truax and family of Whitewater have moved to Malta to make their home. Mr. and Mrs. Kenneth Robertson

and family have rented the Truax house. Mr. Robertson has accepted the janitor position in the Whitewater school.

- We of the Big Flat Electric would like to extend our deepest sympathy to the George Knudsen family south of Malta. Mr. Knudsen passed away January 23rd.

- Mr. and Mrs. Dale Green and family have moved to the former Tom Helgeson place near Matla.

- Graham Hutton of Turner is remodeling his kitchen and utility room and installing all electric appliances.

## BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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District 2	Alan Van Voast, Sec./Treasurer
District 3	Alan Wasson
District 4	Warren Morin
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District 7	Kevin Koss, President

General Manager: Gretchen Boardman



# BIG FLAT ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE

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