Patriotic performance

The New West Heritage Riders performed in Medora for the town’s Flag Day Celebration in June.

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Performing across the country unites them as a team. Together, they hope to unite the country.

The New West Heritage Riders, along with their horses, perform in parades, rodeos, centennials and other events.

Riders range in age from teenagers to grandmothers, and are students, farm women and business professionals. But once they pull down their blue cowboy hats, strap on their spurs and position their flags, all their differences melt away and they work together.

Carrying the flag and synchronizing their movements, the goal of the New West Heritage Riders is to instill pride.

“This is the way for us to show our patriotism to our country,” said Susie Nitschke, a Dakota Valley Electric Cooperative member from Jud. The Heritage Riders escorted Nitschke to her wedding in 2006.

Since the Riders’ inception in 1974, the team has won many awards including first-place trophies at the Minot State Fair Parade, Bismarck Parade of Lights and the Fargo Parade of Lights. The state selected New West Heritage Riders as its Official North Dakota Centennial Drill Team in 1988.

Travel is mostly in the state, but has even included performances in Deadwood, S.D., and Omaha, Neb. Most recently, the team performed in Medora as part of the town’s Flag Day parade. There, they won a $200 prize for Most Patriotic Group and a $100 prize for Largest Group.

Nitschke is the team’s president. The 15 or so members range in age – women as young as 14 can join. Most members live within a 50-mile radius of Jamestown including towns like Streeter, Medina and Montpelier.

The group is like a “little family” Nitschke said, both literally and figuratively. They practice once a week and vary the location to make travel less of a burden to each member.

Mary Ann Kaiser, Streeter, joined the group 32 years ago. It’s a great way to promote pride in one’s country and also a way to get her horse out each week, she said. Kaiser also has two other reasons – Kelsey Naze, Montpelier, and Lacey Kaiser, Streeter.

“I’m hanging in there so I can participate with my two daughters,” Mary Ann said.

Like Kaiser, many Heritage Riders are longtime members. However, the group is looking for new people to join.

To book the group, or to learn more about joining:
- visit www.nwhr.org
- call Susie at 701-320-6578 or Kelsey at 701-269-0489
With the goal of providing reliable, unbiased information, Dakota Valley Electric Cooperative installed a small solar project.

“Our members are self-reliant farmers, ranchers and small business operators who look for ways to control their costs,” said Co-manager Darrin Sand. “Along with our sister cooperative, Northern Plains, we installed a 6.56-KW system.”

The co-ops constructed the array in Carrington. Despite its modest size, it’s already producing valuable data.

“This is primarily a research project designed to help us learn what similar systems cost to maintain, and how reliable they will be throughout the year,” said Ashten Breker, system engineer for the two co-ops.

About $14,000 worth of materials went into the project. Labor costs were extra, but grants from U.S. Department of Agriculture Rural Development and the N.D. Department of Commerce helped offset some of the expenses. Similar grants are available for private projects.

The 6.56-kilowatt system is similar in size to what an average farm or small business might install, Breker said. “That’s enough electricity to power 19 60-watt incandescent light bulbs all day and all night for 12 months.”

Information about the system and its generation is available on dakotavalley.com, Facebook.com/dakotavalley and in North Dakota Living.

“We hope to learn what sort of return members could see on their investment,” Sand said. “With this information, Northern Plains and Dakota Valley can help members determine if these systems make economic sense at their homes, businesses and farms.”
DVEC looks to the clouds

Nearly 300 people attend annual meeting in Milnor

BY KATIE RYAN-ANDERSON
KatieA@nplains.com

Co-ops are a little different than most businesses – that’s why Dakota Valley Electric invited Jamestown Inflatable Games and the Touchstone Energy hot air balloon to its annual meeting.

Nearly 300 people attended the meeting in Milnor. In addition to games and rides, the meeting also included a vendor show and complimentary meal, courtesy of Greg Paulson and Hot Cakes Café.

“Few businesses share its financial status and other business updates like co-ops do. Co-ops do that because the people the co-ops serve – the members – are also the owners,” said Co-General Manager Darrin Sand.

And as owners, those members also elect the co-op’s leadership. This year, members re-elected incumbents: John Hauschild, Wahpeton, Dick Johnson, Brampton, and Blaine Lundgren, Kulm, in an uncontested race.

So while an annual meeting is for business, it’s also for fun.

This is the second year the co-op organized annual meeting games and rides. The goal was to engage and attract the membership – especially young families.

“They young people are our future leaders. They may run for office or work for the co-op one day. The electric industry is complex. Why not get them
engaged and involved in it now so they may better understand it as they grow,” Sand said.

Among the complex issues are the Environmental Protection Agency’s carbon regulations. But Dakota Valley Electric believes that electricity can be affordable, reliable and also clean. That’s why it partnered with its sister electric cooperative, Northern Plains Electric, to install a solar system in Carrington.

“The co-op also wants to learn how much the system will cost to maintain and how reliable it is,” said President Richard Schlosser. “With this information, we can help our members decide if these systems make economic sense at their homes, businesses and farms.”

Co-ops care about their members – especially their safety. That’s why the co-op dedicates time and resources to ensuring its members know what to do if they collide with a power pole.

Young members, Graci and Izzy Miller of Adrian, even recorded a radio ad to help get the word out.

“As harvest approaches, we can’t emphasize enough the importance of caution,” Schlosser said. “And if you do hit a line, remember to stay in the tractor unless there’s a fire or immediate danger.”

Following the meeting, the co-op awarded gifts and door prizes. Purchased from businesses within the service area, the gifts benefited both members at the meeting and also raised awareness to the goods and services offered locally.
Early detection

Forman woman: ‘I’m in this for the big prize. I want the cure.’

BY KATIE RYAN-ANDERSON
KatieA@nplains.com
One North Dakota woman said she didn’t expect it to happen to her – but now that it has, her attitude is less “Why me?” and more “Why not me?”

Diagnosed with cancer in February 2015, Val Bjork said she shares her story because it’s one with a happy ending and a moral – early detection is key.

No pity party

Val Bjork is a Dakota Valley Electric member from Forman. She has helped with the American Cancer Society’s annual Relay for Life event for more than 10 years. Most recently, she’s chaired the event, served on the North Dakota Advisory Council and even partnered with Ione Lunneborg, Rutland, to form the duo, “Little Old Ladies of Sargent County.” Together, the “Ladies” have raised more than $10,000 for the 2015 Relay alone, organizing events like a no-bake bake sale in which people purchased goodies and got just the recipe instead. That “event” raised $1,200. The duo also raised another $2,000 asking farmers to fill a grain bin. The Little Old Ladies didn’t want the crop – they just wanted the money farmers would have gotten selling the crop.

“Val is a great role model,” said Lisa Heinert, DVEC customer assistance specialist and captain of Brucie’s Thundering Herd Relay team. “After her diagnosis, she refused any pity parties and used the diagnosis to help others instead.”

Bjork’s roles with Relay for Life – raising money, supporting friends and family, sharing information – helped prepare her for the diagnosis. The doctor told her the mammogram found the cancer early. What she had was “very small and very treatable,” she remembers.

“I think that working with Relay for Life almost prepared me to be way less surprised, way less scared,” Bjork said.

Already passionate about raising money for Relay for Life, Bjork said getting cancer lit a new fire. Now, her mission is to raise money and awareness.

“You want to find cancer cells early and that’s what I did,” she said, “My story is small, but my story also, I hope, inspires people to get that screening.”

The U.S. Preventative Care Task Force recently released updated mammography recommendations. One of the recommendations includes biennial (as opposed to annual) screening mammography for women 50-74 years.

Bjork said if she’d have followed that advice, she wouldn’t have caught the cancer so early and her story might not end as well.

She’s so opposed to the changes that she’ll routinely ask people if they’ve gotten their mammogram. It matters not how well she knows them or how public of a place they’re in. What matters is that they see the importance of early detection.

About the money

Nationwide, Relay raises more than $100 million each year. Often questioned for “Where the money goes?” Relay for Life organizers like Bjork have an easy answer: American Cancer Society conducts research primarily. But the organization also provides money for wigs, hotel stays and travel vouchers.

“If we kept our money local, it would never go to research. And I’m in it for the big prize. I want the cure,” Bjork said.

And so far, the hard work has paid off. Sargent County’s Relay for Life took second place in the nation last year for most money raised per capita. It, along with LaMoure County Relay for Life, raised a combined $150,000 for the American Cancer Society in 2014. Dakota Valley Electric Cooperative sponsors both events.

Bjork said the future for her is bright. Doctors haven’t found any indication of more cancer. She has several follow-up appointments, but otherwise has a clean bill of health.

“This can be a piece of cake. It doesn’t have to be a long road – so go get your mammogram!” she said.
As a co-op, Dakota Valley Electric is committed to community. That's one of our principles. In celebration, we're conducting a Can & Coat Drive through Oct. 31. Anyone willing to contribute may drop donations off at headquarter offices in Milnor or Edgeley. Offices are open 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Mondays through Fridays. Questions? 1-800-342-4671.

Look up and around for power lines.

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