



# VIGILANTE ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE

A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative 

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*A Message from Your General Manager*

## Some Good News and Some Bad News



### **(The Good News First) Capital Credit General Retirement**

As a non-profit entity, we do not permanently retain excess revenue over the cost to serve for a given year. We allocate those excess margins annually back to the individual members based on the patronage received for the specific rate classifications. You receive a statement every year identifying the amounts allocated back to you, and your total capital credit balance. To keep rates as low as possible we use those excess margins for a number of years, and then return them to the members in what is called a general retirement of capital credits. I am happy to report that due to our solid financial standing, the Board of Trustees has authorized the retirement of capital credits for the entire year 2004 in the amount of \$688,995. If I am correct, this is the largest general retirement of capital credits in the history of the cooperative. So if you were a member of the cooperative in 2004 and have not taken an early discounted distribution of your capital credits, you will be receiving your capital credit check in the mail around the first week in December.

### **(Now Some Bad News) 2020 Retail Rates**

In August of this year we were notified by our wholesale power provider, Bonneville Power Administration (BPA), that our wholesale power cost was increasing 2.85 percent effective October 1, 2019. Since we were notified of the rate increase, we have contracted with CH Guernsey, our rate consultant, to evaluate the impacts of this wholesale increase on our various retail rate classifications: Rate Schedule A (single-phase), Irrigation, Commercial and Lighting. CH Guernsey has completed its evaluation of the retail rates, called a Cost of Service Study (COSS). This information, coupled with the preparation of our 2020 Capital and Operating Budget, has provided the basis for total revenue requirements for the upcoming year.

Unfortunately, we are not able to absorb the additional wholesale power increase, and this article is to inform you of an upcoming retail rate increase and planned rate modifications. Effective January 1, 2020, the retail electric rates will change across all rate classes. The following are the details related to the existing and new rate structures:

<u>Rate Class</u>	<u>Existing Rate</u>	<u>New Rate</u>
Rate Schedule A (Single Phase Service)	Base Charge \$26.00 All Kwh@ \$0.058 Minimum Bill \$38.00	Base Charge \$28.00 All Kwh @ \$0.0581 Minimum Bill \$40.00
Irrigation	HP Charge@ \$12.00/HP Demand Chg @ \$2.15/KW All Kwh@ \$0.048	HP Charge @ \$12.50/HP Demand Chg @ \$2.45/KW All Kwh@ \$0.049
Commercial	KVA Charge @ \$1.00/KVA or KVA Charge @ \$1.10/KVA or Demand Chg@ \$3.00/KW All Kwh@ \$0.050	Demand Chg@ \$3.50/KW All Kwh@ \$0.04981

The board discussed and deliberated the COSS and rates extensively over the last few months. We are doing everything we can to control costs while providing reliable electric power and maintaining the solid financial well-being you have become accustomed to over the years and decades. Our strategic goal continues to be to treat all members in the most prudent and fair manner possible.

The good news is that this wholesale power rate will stay in effect for two years. Other good news is that we are expecting our residential and irrigation rates to continue to be the lowest in the state of Montana, and some of the lowest in the entire country, even after this rate change is implemented.

Happy Holidays, Merry Christmas and Happy New Year from all of us here at Vigilante Electric Cooperative. It has been an honor to serve you for the last year and we hope the upcoming year is even better. If you have any questions or comments, please call us here in the office at (406) 683-2327 or toll free at (800) 221-8271.

# Engine 18 Tailgating Company

## Tailgating for a Cause



By Rod Siring, Member Services

The Engine 18 Fleet.

After publishing *CrossFit Cowboy* earlier this year, I have been looking for that next great story that highlights the talents and/or efforts of people within our cooperative family. One of the more heartwarming stories that I have found in recent years involve some guys that got together to build a tailgating vehicle when a tragic event turned their endeavor into purpose — this is Engine 18.

The idea behind this tailgating vehicle originated with Darrin Morast, the husband of Vigilante Electric Cooperative Office Manager Raquel Reno-Morast. “As a fan of college football and tailgating, I just thought that it would be cool to build a truly unique tailgating vehicle,” said Darrin. Granted, a lot of people have probably had the same thought, but few people I know have the skillset and a group of like-minded friends to actually pull this off.

In the spring of 2017, Darrin approached Flint McCullough, a VEC member, to enlist his help. The initial plan was to convert an old ambulance, but through a twist of fate and some wheeling and dealing, they secured a fire engine. Now, having the platform for their tailgating vehicle, they enlisted more friends and began building a one-of-a-kind vehicle with plans to debut their creation that fall at the first home game of the University of Montana - Western (UMW) football team.

While plans for this tailgating vehicle moved forward, the Dillon community was rocked by the loss of an outstanding young man, MJ Simkins. MJ was a standout athlete while attending Beaverhead County High, and a member of the UMW football team, when his life was tragically cut short. MJ was a fierce competitor with a kind heart whose passion for sports was leading him into a career of teaching and coaching.

What started as an idea to build a tailgating vehicle to celebrate Bulldog athletics quickly became a means to raise funds for athletic scholarships and honor not only MJ’s life, but lives of other Bulldog players and coaches lost way too soon. Even it’s name is to honor MJ’s legacy. MJ wore the number 18 to show his love for Dillon and Beaverhead County, hence Engine 18.

When football season rolled around in the fall of 2017, Engine 18 was there. With the food and beverages spon-



Example of the game day offering.

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# Engine 18

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sored by local businesses and individuals, the ultimate tailgate experience was provided in return for donations that would go to fund scholarships.

A 501 C-3 entity, Engine 18 was able to give one \$800 scholarship to a Western athlete in the spring of 2018. In 2019, Engine 18 also hosted an NCAA basketball tournament calcutta with proceeds benefitting Engine 18 scholarships. That spring they were able to give seven \$1,000 scholarships. When asked what their ultimate goal is for the scholarship program, everybody I talked to said the same thing, “fully endow a scholarship through the University of Montana – Western Foundation.”

Since that very first Engine 18 tailgating party, they have added a second fire engine to the fleet. Smoker 1, an amazing piece of equipment, is a rolling smoker capable of roasting two whole pigs. Then this fall a trailer was donated that they share with the college bookstore to sell UM-W and Engine 18 apparel.

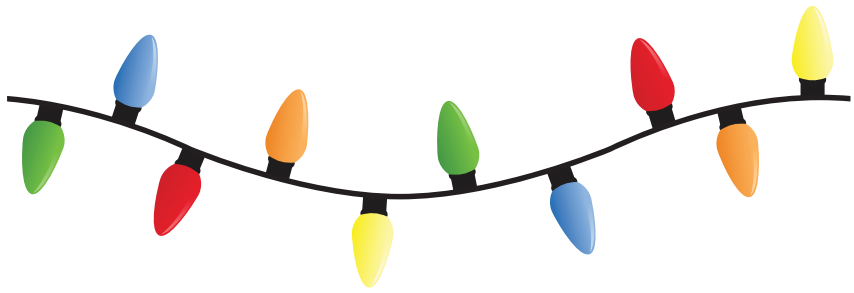
The generosity of Engine 18 does not stop with providing a great tailgating experience and scholarships to Western athletes. Engine 18 has also developed a program to provide beef, to UMW student-athletes. Many local ranches have generously donated beef and the Engine 18 crew distributes it to the athletes. During 2018, a total of seven cows were donated.

As remarkable as the response has been to Engine 18 tailgates, it is the selfless efforts of its board of directors and its army of volunteers that amazes me the most. The two fire trucks took a lot of time and money to build. Plus, they take a lot of time to setup. Needless to say, game day is quite a production.

Though Engine 18 is not a cooperative, the VEC cooperative family is well represented within the Engine 18 ranks. Of the 18 individuals that sit on the Engine 18 board, 11 are Vigilante Electric members, one employee and one employee's husband. Plus, in my conversation with Flint and Trina McCullough, every ranch that donated beef to the Engine 18 cause, are members of Vigilante Electric.

To me this is not just a great story, Engine 18 embodies cooperative spirit. Two cooperative principles are concern for community and cooperation among cooperatives. When you work together for a good cause, great things happen. For more details go to [engine18.org](http://engine18.org).

# Holiday Lighting Tips



By Tom Tate

This year is rapidly drawing to a close, and that means the holiday lighting season is back. If your home space is in need of a decorative refresh, here are some tips to take your artistic stylings to the next level. There are two areas to cover, so let's get started.

Safety is up first. If your lights are ground-mounted or can be installed standing on the floor or ground, you can skip ahead. However, since most decorations involve some installation at height, you need to do the following:

1. Have a ground crew (one or two people) to steady your ladder and pass up the decorations...an invaluable part of safety and keeping you supplied with untangled light strings, fasteners and encouragement.
2. Remember to keep a safe distance from your overhead electric service.
3. Don't overreach. If you cannot get to a point with your body completely centered between the sides of the ladder, get down and relocate it.
4. Don't overextend the ladder. If your ladder is too short, rent or borrow a longer one. A ladder extended beyond its working limits is as dangerous as standing on rungs too close to the top.
5. Do not overload circuits by stringing more light sets together than the manufacturer recommends. Check the packaging for details.
6. Check your wires for breaks and cracks in the insulation that can lead to shorts.

Most of these tips apply equally to inside and outside decorating activities.

Light selection is next. If at all possible, invest in LED lights this season. Unlike the first versions to hit the market that were characterized by rather harsh and unattractive colors, the newest generation's colors are reminiscent of the incandescent lights of yore.

Why go the LED route? Longevity and cost of operation are the two key reasons. Unlike incandescent lights, whether the large or mini bulb, LEDs will last for many, many years. LEDs have no filaments to burn out. Aside from physically destroying the bulb, the LED is amazingly robust. Given the modest number of hours of operation, you can expect LEDs to last seven or more years.

Then there is the cost of operation benefit from LEDs. These gems of technological advancement truly sip electricity. A reasonable estimate of power consumption is 7 watts per 100 lights. How does that compare to the old incandescent? Each of those bulbs used 12 watts so a string of 100 devoured 1,200 watts.

Truly want to manage the cost of operating holiday lights? Invest in timers to turn the lights on and off automatically. Really into gadgets? Invest in a smart plug for your lights that you can program and control from your smart phone.

Once you have your design finalized and installed, it is my recommendation to leave as much of the outside portion of lights in place. No, don't be that person who leaves the holiday lights on all year. Simply disconnect them after the holidays, protecting the plugs and sockets from dirt and debris. Think of the reduced stress and risk if you set and forget your design. With the longevity of the LEDs, you can enjoy this freedom and practically eliminate the risks associated with high-wire seasonal gymnastics.

## Portable Space Heaters

### *Some Things to Consider*

As winter closes in and temperatures fall you are bound to see advertisements for portable space heaters. Space heaters are small, versatile and generally good at warming a room. Unfortunately, there are those that would make you believe that there are serious energy savings to be had by using their product.

Space heaters are designed to be used as supplemental heat, and are only capable of warming small spaces. Most space heaters use between 600 and 1,500 watts of electricity. If a homeowner uses a 1,500-watt space heater for 10 hours a day for a month, the heater would consume an additional 450 kilowatts, costing \$26.10 at our current kilowatt-hour rate.

According to research, to save money you would have to turn the thermostat of your central heating system down considerably (as low as 50 degrees in some cases), place the space heater in the room that you occupy and then close that room off from the rest of the house. This type of “zone heating” could save some energy.

Even if you could pull this off there are other things to consider. If you currently heat electrically, remember, a kilowatt hour is a kilowatt hour. There is no savings from going from one electric source to another unless you convert to heat-pump technology. If you have a gas forced-air system, it depends on the cost of the fuel, the efficiency of the furnace and the effectiveness of the delivery system.

While it may be technically possible to cut your energy

bill using a space heater, it is impractical for most people. We recommend a holistic or whole-house approach to saving energy in your home and would be glad to help you explore better options.

Another issue to consider when using a space heater is safety. According to the National Fire Prevention Association (NFPA) and United States Fire Administration, space heaters annually account for 40 percent of reported U.S. home heating fires, and 84 percent of fire associated civilian deaths. If you intend to supplement your heat this winter with a portable space heater, please consider the following:

- Space heaters need space. Keep things that can burn at least three feet away from space heaters, and create a three-foot “kid-free zone” around them.
- When buying, look for a safety-certification label from an independent testing organization, such as the UL mark from Underwriters Laboratories, the ETL label from Intertek or certification from CSA International.
- Check the power cord for cracks, fraying, loose connections, and broken plugs; repair or replace the heater if you find any damage.
- Most manufacturers recommend against using extension cords or power strips with space heaters.
- Don’t use heaters on uneven surfaces, near foot traffic, or in children’s rooms.
- Never leave a heater on unattended or while you’re sleeping.

Portable space heaters have their place, and if used and maintained properly they can be a great source of supplemental heat.

## May Your Holiday Season Be Merry and Bright

*By Anne Prince*

The holidays are a time of year that many of us eagerly anticipate. The season is marked by special foods, seasonal decorations and lots of festivities. Right here in Dillon, we look forward to the Christmas stroll, annual parade of lights and festival of trees.

We cherish carrying on old family traditions and enjoy creating new ones. For me personally, I look forward to more time spent with family and friends.

However, given the hustle and bustle of the season, the holidays can also offer an opportunity to slow down and reflect. For all of us at Vigilante Electric Cooperative, we are grateful for you, the members of the co-op.

You see, one of our founding principles as a co-op is “Concern for Community.” While our main focus is providing safe, reliable and affordable energy, we want to give back. We want to help our community thrive.

In looking back at this past year, I’m grateful that we were able to make a positive impact in the communities we serve. Whether it is through our Safety Roundup program, providing safety demonstrations or through our low-income energy assistance program — we are making a difference.

We are particularly proud of our work with area high schools. In 2019, we sent two outstanding young ladies to Washington, D.C., for a weeklong educational adventure, and we offered 16 academic scholarships to area students.


We also make every effort to keep our membership abreast on the political climate impacting rates, trends in technology and even help you find ways to save energy at home, we want you to know we’re here to help.

Looking ahead to 2020, we hope you will share your opinions with us. We recognize that our members have a valuable perspective, and we seek your input. Whether through community events, social media or the annual meeting, we want to hear from you. We are led by you — the members of the co-op — and we depend on your feedback.

As we prepare for next year, we look forward to the opportunity to serve you and our communities. On behalf of the Vigilante Electric Cooperative family, we hope your holidays are indeed merry and bright!



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### **Vigilante Safety Roundup Tracker**

Participating members: 297

Total Contributions: \$3,359.88

To apply contact our office at  
(800) 221-8271 or 683-2327

An online application is available at [www.vec.coop](http://www.vec.coop).