Minico High School teachers don their special protective glasses in anticipation of the total solar eclipse. From left are Amy Larson, Keelan McCaffrey, Lorinda Garner, Steve Barnes, Kallie O'Neal and Larry Lloyd.

PHOTO BY DIANNA TROYER
United Electric

By Dianna Troyer

Curtiss Peterson, manager of finance and administration at United Electric Co-op, understands the hype of this month’s total solar eclipse August 21. As a junior high school student in Hermiston, Oregon, he saw the last total solar eclipse that darkened the contiguous 48 United States in 1979.

“I’m lucky enough to witness a total solar eclipse for the second time without traveling more than 550 miles from my first experience,” says Curtiss. “It’s fascinating that in the middle of a day, without clouds or other atmospheric obstructions, to see the sun being blocked and to have the look and feel of the middle of the night. The experience makes many historical accounts even more believable, and much more real to me.”

To watch it, he and his wife will stay with their daughter, who lives in Rexburg.

Larry Lloyd saw the same eclipse when he was a student at the University of Idaho.

“The birds really did quit singing, and dogs started howling,” says Larry, a science teacher at Minico High School. “It was amazing. I’m glad I saw it.”

Unlike her colleague, Amy Larson, Minico High School’s astronomy teacher since 2002, has never seen a total solar eclipse. She has been eagerly awaiting this eclipse for more than a decade.

“When I started teaching about eclipses, I wondered when the next total solar eclipse would happen, so I looked it up,” Amy says. “I was excited that there was one in Idaho coming up in 2017. I’ve been waiting a long time.”

She and her husband, Aaron, will board a bus chartered by the College of Southern Idaho to travel to an area where the eclipse will be total.

“Depending on the weather and cloud cover, we’ll either go to Weiser or the
Rigby area,” Amy says. In the Minidoka School District, sixth- and ninth-graders have orientation scheduled the day of the eclipse.

“They’ll always remember starting school with an eclipse,” says Amy.

The morning eclipse will be visible from Oregon to South Carolina, with total darkness occurring about 11:30 a.m. and lasting about 2 minutes, depending on the location in a 60-mile wide swath across Idaho.

Amy uses a 3-D model of the Earth, moon and sun to help students visualize what happens. A total eclipse occurs when the sun and Earth align in their elliptical orbits.

As the moon blocks the sun, it casts a shadow due to a remarkable coincidence of nature. The sun is about 400 times as far away from Earth as is the moon. The sun is also about 400 times as large in diameter as the moon.

Devout total eclipse aficionados called shadow chasers may have their daytime dreams fulfilled fairly regularly if the eclipse happens in an easily accessible location. On average, a total solar eclipse occurs approximately every 18 months somewhere on Earth.

During a total solar eclipse, shadow chasers are in awe of several visually stunning phenomena: Baily’s beads, the diamond ring and the corona.

Baily’s beads—named for British astronomer Francis Baily, who described them—can be seen just before totality and just after totality ends, each time lasting 10 to 15 seconds.

As the moon almost blocks the sun, a small crescent of sunlight still shines through the moon’s jagged mountains to form irregular patterns resembling beads. When only one bead is left, it looks like a diamond ring.

Once the sun is completely blocked, the outer layer of its atmosphere, called the corona, shimmers as it encircles the moon.

In the deep twilight, planets and stars appear. Just to the left of the eclipsed sun, a star called Regulus will be visible. Mercury is farther to the left. Mars can be seen to the right, while Venus is farther away to the right.

To protect your eyes from the sun’s harmful ultraviolet radiation, special glasses can be bought. Most welders glasses aren’t dark enough to be safe.

“If you’re under a tree, the sun will shine through the spaces between the leaves, and you can see the eclipse progress by watching the sun’s image on the ground,” says Amy.

Like Amy, other Mini-Cassia residents cannot wait for the eclipse.

United Electric Co-op General Manager Jo Elg will be in Idaho Falls.

“We may never have the opportunity to see an eclipse again, so we better take advantage of this,” says Jo. “I hope we have good weather without cloud cover.”

The electric co-op’s accountant, Alice Bartschi, has seen partial eclipses, but never a total eclipse. She will watch the eclipse at a campground near Idaho Falls with out-of-state relatives.

“My sisters and our husbands are meeting to watch it,” says Alice. “Two sisters are coming from Colorado, and three of us are in Idaho. We’ll arrive the night before and have a cookout. A full solar eclipse this close to home will never happen again in my lifetime. It’s a must see.”
United Electric Scholarship Awards
United Electric’s annual $500 non-traditional scholarship was awarded to Amanda Bowen of Burley. Amanda is studying nursing at the College of Southern Idaho.

Amanda is a Brigham Young University graduate, but has returned to the Magic Valley area to be closer to family and further her education.

“I felt that it was important to better myself and establish a career that I was not only passionate about, but that would also allow me financial security for years to come,” she says.

Amanda will graduate in December with a registered nursing degree. She plans to then complete her nursing licensure exam, continue school to receive her bachelor’s degree in nursing and find employment in Magic Valley.

Don’t Forget UEC’s Website
A wealth of information is available to you on the United Electric website, www.uec.coop. You can check your account, monitor your power use, pay your bill, find out about power outages and look for someone you know who might have an unclaimed patronage check waiting for them.

While on our website, be sure to follow us on Facebook and Twitter to get the latest news about our annual meeting, scholarships, holiday hours and much more.

Did You Know?
Drop box payments are picked up only once a day—just after opening time.

The drive-thru window is always open during office hours. Please use the drive-thru during office hours so your payment can be credited the same day you make it.

Leaving cash in the drop box is never a good idea. Please use checks or money orders. Cash payments should only be made at the front desk or the drive-thru window.

Payment Options
United Electric makes it easy to pay your bills with several convenient options.

Members can pay in the office, at the drive-thru window, online, by phone, at the drop box, with a monthly bank draft or the new Prepay option.

Members who opt into the Prepay program pay for their use in advance. There are no bills, late fees or deposits because you determine when and how much you pay.

Because payments can be made monthly, weekly or even daily, this program offers flexibility for those who struggle to make one monthly payment.

Once a payment is made, members can watch their balance decrease as electricity is used, giving them a better understanding of their electricity use.

If you have questions about the Prepay program or our other payment options, please call the office at (208) 679-2222.
Appreciating Electricity a Penny at a Time

Electricity is about the only thing you can buy and still get value for just a penny's worth

By Curtis Condon

I’m old enough to remember when penny candy actually cost a penny. For a nickel, you could buy enough candy to rot your teeth out, as my mother used to say.

But what does a penny buy these days? Not much. The government can’t even make a penny for a penny anymore. According to the U.S. Mint, it now costs 1.5 cents to produce one.

About the only thing of value you can still get for a penny is electricity. You might call it “penny electricity.”

No, I’m not kidding. Think about it.

To make the math easier, let’s say the average rate for a kilowatt-hour of electricity is 10 cents. That is 60 minutes of 1,000 watts of electricity for a dime, so a penny of electricity equates to 100 watts. It’s enough to power a 9-watt LED lightbulb—the equivalent of a 60-watt incandescent bulb—for 11 hours, all for only a penny.

Where else can you get that kind of value?

How many eggs will a penny buy? How much milk, bread, coffee, medicine or gasoline?

Gas has come down from its stratospheric levels of several years ago, but there is still no comparison to the value of electricity. For example, if a gallon of gas costs $2.50 and your car gets 25 miles to the gallon, you can drive 176 yards—about two blocks—on a penny’s worth of gas.

I will take 11 hours of lighting for a penny over a two-block drive any day.

The value is just as evident when powering things other than lighting. Take, for instance, your smartphone. Using the same 10 cents per kWh price, penny electricity allows you to fully charge your iPhone more than 18 times for a penny. You can charge it once every day of the year for about 20 cents total.

Not impressed? Well, how about these other examples of what you can do with just a penny’s worth of electricity: power a 1,000-watt microwave on high for 6 minutes; run a 200-watt desktop computer for 30 minutes; watch 2.5 hours of your favorite shows on a 40-watt, 32-inch, LED television or 1.3 hours on a 75-watt, 75-inch mega TV.

The examples are endless.

A lot has changed since then. Wages and the cost of living today are a far cry from 1940, when the average annual wage was less than $150 a month and the average cost of a house was $3,920.

But one thing that hasn’t changed is the value of electricity. In 77 years, its price has risen much slower than the rate of inflation.

A penny in 1940 had as much buying power as 17 cents today, which means the residential price of electricity—which now averages 12 cents a kWh nationally and less than 10 cents in the Pacific Northwest—is actually a better deal today than it was in 1940.

So to my way of thinking, the value of electricity is like the bygone days of penny candy, and it’s OK to indulge yourself a little. But, unlike penny candy, penny electricity won’t rot your teeth out.
Co-op Connections Card

Please support these businesses that participate in the Co-op Connections Card program

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• No annual fee Visa with a business checking account (upon approved credit).
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Farmers Corner
202 S. Highway 27, Burley
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Free pop with gas purchase.

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2853 Overland Ave., Burley
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1133 Albion Ave., Burley
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Mind & Body Wellness Center
2207 Overland Ave., Burley
878-9418
20 percent off any services,
15 percent off nutrition. Free consultation for Ideal Protein Weight Loss program.

Mini-Cassia Chamber of Commerce
1177 7th St., Heyburn
679-4793
www.minicassiachamber.com
25 percent discount on all Idaho gifts and jewelry items, excluding consignment and sale items.

Please support these businesses that participate in the Co-op Connections Card program

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Everyday savings

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Find all the ways to save at connections.coop

Mind & Body Wellness Center
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878-9418
20 percent off any services,
15 percent off nutrition. Free consultation for Ideal Protein Weight Loss program.

Mini-Cassia Chamber of Commerce
1177 7th St., Heyburn
679-4793
www.minicassiachamber.com
25 percent discount on all Idaho gifts and jewelry items, excluding consignment and sale items.
NAPA Auto Parts
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7 percent discount on regularly priced items.

Ponderosa Golf
320 Minidoka Ave., Burley
679-5730
$1 off green fees, Monday through Friday before 4 p.m.

Pro Paint Inc.
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Discount of up to 50 percent on regularly priced items.

Snake River Bowl
725 Minidoka Ave., Burley
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10 percent off regularly priced bowling, food or merchandise (league and tournament bowling excluded).

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10 percent off invitations or 30 percent off if Sweetheart Manor is used for receptions and tuxedo rental.

Ted’s Diesel Electric
1141 S. Hwy 30, Heyburn
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10 percent discount once a month on any rebuilt starter, alternator or generator.

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524 6th St., Rupert
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Special price for seniors and children.

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Thanks to the irrigation benefits of hydropower, the NW has nearly 8 million more acres of farmland.

The region’s hydropower offsets emissions equivalent to 10 million cars.

The NW can generate enough hydropower to power Seattle-sized cities.

Fueling the Northwest economy with clean and reliable power.

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AUGUST 2017
On the Wire at United Electric

The primary goal of any electric utility is to provide safe, economical and reliable service for its members. If we do our job well, members don’t even think about their power. It is simply there on demand to power their homes and lifestyles.

Achieving this goal involves a variety of programs managed by the utility. One of the most important—and certainly the most visible—is vegetation management.

Vegetation management is a major reliability program that, at times, is difficult to implement due to the direct impact on members. One tree can cause an outage for thousands, or even millions, of customers under certain circumstances. Vegetation contact with an overloaded transmission line is one of the major contributing factors to the Northeast blackout of 2003—one of the most widespread power outages in the United States. All told, more than 50 million people lost power. Additionally, vegetation contact with electrical infrastructure is one of the leading causes of power blinks on the electrical distribution system.

One of the most basic reasons to keep vegetation clear of electrical infrastructure is for the safety of United Electric employees and the public. Each year in the United States, people are injured when attempting to remove trees and branches from power lines or when attempting to cut down a tree and it falls on a power line. Children are sometimes injured climbing trees that have grown into overhead power lines.

A clear right-of-way enables UEC line crews to quickly and safely access power lines, identify outage causes and make repairs. Maintaining cleared rights-of-way helps shorten the length of outages.

As part of its vegetation management plan, United Electric has adopted the Trade-A-Tree program. The property owner is reimbursed up to $50 toward the purchase of a tree to replace each tree removed from the owner’s property in or near primary high-voltage lines. Removing a tree and planting a class 1 tree—one that doesn’t grow to a height that interferes with power lines—eliminates the need to continually trim a large, overgrown tree near a power line.

Although most members understand and accept vegetation management as a necessary task, there will always be cases where UEC’s responsibility to prune trees or remove vegetation creates conflict with members who object. This is a universal issue for electric utilities.

In the end, United Electric Co-op has an obligation to all of our members to maintain safe and reliable electric service, and vegetation management is an important component.

Jo Elg
General Manager