

## WILDFIRE UPDATE

◀ A crew from White River Electric Association helps Mountain Parks Electric restore power to its customers. The East Troublesome Fire is the second largest recorded fire in Colorado state history. It burned more than 190,000 acres in north central Colorado, or approximately 265 square miles.

## EVER IN SEASON: THE HUMAN SPIRIT ON DISPLAY

BY MARK JOHNSTON GENERAL MANAGER

Where to begin? The last time I experienced something comparable to the East Troublesome Fire was almost exactly two years ago. I lived in Anchorage, Alaska at the time. On November 30, 2018, a magnitude 7.1 earthquake shook the city of nearly 300,000. Less than 10 minutes later, a magnitude 5.7 aftershock hit. Later that day, I recall staring at damaged buildings, cars and concrete, unable to speak, awestruck by Mother Nature's footprint. In the days and weeks and months that followed, the community united.

As I write this column, there are two known fatalities from the East Troublesome Fire. To date, unofficially, more than 300 homes were destroyed, including some MPE employee houses. More than 3,500 people lost electric service as the fire tracked north and east of Grand Lake toward Rocky Mountain National Park. Then, not 48 hours later, 10 inches of snow fell. Temperatures plummeted. The 190-thousand-acre fire slowed. Locals with undamaged homes turned their attention to preventing water pipes from freezing.

As soon as MPE line crews were allowed to reenter the fire-damaged area, they began restoring electric service. We re-energized power lines as quickly and as safely as possible. Throughout the crisis, we published updates on our web site and social media outlets.

"... So glad we have power there to prevent freezing pipes ... Awesome team you have," one consumer wrote on our Facebook page.

Another consumer who downloaded our SmartHub app ([mpei.com/smarthub-instructions](http://mpei.com/smarthub-instructions)) viewed their electric usage online after the fire passed through. She wrote, "So thrilling to see our house using electricity. This means the furnace is running!"

Tragedy marked other comments. "Ours (our online electric account) isn't showing usage since Wednesday. Not a good sign," someone else posted.

In the hours that followed, people in our community opened up their homes to complete strangers who lost everything. It's this spirit of humankind, I believe, that is always in season, arresting in its display.

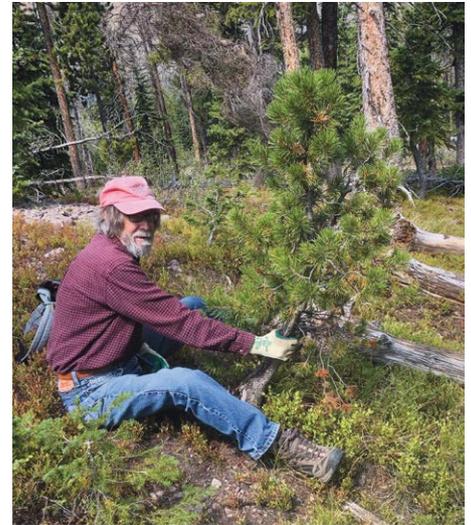
I would be remiss if I did not thank all of the MPE employees who worked countless hours to help restore power to the Grand Lake community. In addition, many Colorado electric cooperatives and ancillary services that answered our call for help, demonstrating the cooperative spirit. They dispatched crews, in some cases from many hundreds of miles away, to help us replace fire-damaged poles, wires and transformers. This includes:

- Gunnison County Electric Association
- Highline Electric Association
- Holy Cross Energy
- San Miguel Power Association
- Southeast Colorado Power Association
- United Power
- White River Electric Association
- Asplundh Tree Experts
- Power Pole Inspectors
- Colorado Rural Electric Association

Our thoughts and prayers are with all who suffered loss in the East Troublesome Fire. In the days ahead, I am confident that, together, we will recover and rebuild and heal.



◀ Lee's Crepe Myrtle in bloom. He has trained this tree for over 20 years.



▲ Stephen Lee finds a tree to harvest.

## Finding the Perfect Tree

BY ROB TAYLOR MANAGER OF COMMUNICATIONS

Stephen Lee never imagined being this finicky in retirement. That was before the one-time Chicagoland biology instructor, current Hot Sulphur Springs resident, had time to spare. Now, after the Christmas tree harvesters have come and gone, he and wife Christine trek through Colorado's backcountry in search of perfection: a bonsai tree in raw form. They examine more Lodgepole & Ponderosa pine, Englemann spruce and wild Juniper than perhaps anyone in Grand County. Small 2-4 foot-tall specimens draw their attention, especially when stunted by wind or snow load. And trees with thick, slanted trunks. The older looking, the better. Such a tree inspires their careful digging. The Lees hope to unearth balled up roots wrapped around rocks. "I probably examine 1,000 trees before I find one to harvest," Stephen says. He emphasizes that he legally collects specimens with a forest service or a BLM permit. George Wilbur, ACCT #20030828

### Bonsai roots

"Bonsai" literally means "to plant in a container." Its origins trace back 2,000 years, to mainland China, where growing

miniature landscapes gained popularity. About 700 years ago, Japan adopted the practice, narrowing the craft's focus to sculpting individual miniature trees. And thus the iconic bonsai, as we now know it — half horticulture, half sculpting—came to exist.

Those unfamiliar with the hobby are often surprised to learn that any tree species can become a bonsai, even the Rocky Mountain juniper (a.k.a. *Juniperus scopulorum*), which is native to Colorado. The Lees have one in their collection, and numerous other species that they have personally harvested. Sometimes, they even collect one the easy way: at a local nursery. "Finding the right tree is the most time-consuming aspect of this hobby," Stephen says, "but the hardest part, by far, is keeping it alive in a shallow pot."

### The art of sculpting

Step one after bringing home a tree is to plant it in a big pot. Then water it every day. Fertilize it regularly, and, most importantly, leave it alone for at least 2 years. After that, the sculpting begins. Stephen wires the branches up or downward, into

classic shapes, prunes roots, transplants his specimen into a bonsai pot, snips leaves or needles, and trims branches. But sometimes, the sculpted vision escapes him. That's when he calls in a big gun: a Bonsai artist with pedigree, like Bjorn Bjorholm (who learned bonsai artistry under Fujikawa at Kouka-en Nursery in Osaka), Denver's Todd Schlafer or someone else with a 5-year bonsai apprenticeship.

### Bonsai Facts

- The most expensive bonsai tree sold for \$1.3 million USD (in Japan, a white pine)
- The oldest bonsai in the world is at least 1,000 years old (a *Ficus retusa* Linn in Italy)
- The smallest bonsai is the Keshuitsubo, from the poppy seed class (approximately 1-3 inches tall)
- Bonsais can produce fruit (tiny tree, but full-sized fruit)
- A bonsai artist's goal is to sculpt a miniature, yet realistic-looking (and visually-pleasing) representation of a full-sized tree



Christine and Stephen Lee.

### It's who you know

As far as the Lees know – and they hope they are wrong about this – they are the only bonsai enthusiasts in the county. That's not the case statewide. They belong to the Rocky Mountain Bonsai Society (established in 1969), an inclusive community of bonsai practitioners representing every skill level. Each year, the society hosts a public exhibition at the Denver Botanic Gardens.

“Anyone can do this,” Stephen says, chuckling. “You do not have to be a botanist. All you really need is four things: time, patience, money for pots and fertilizer and, most importantly, neighbors willing to water your trees if you ever want to vacation.”



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## DOES MPE OWE SOMEONE YOU KNOW MONEY?

As a not-for-profit energy provider, MPE returns profits (a.k.a. capital credits) to consumer-members on a 20+-year retirement cycle (based on the amount of electricity you purchased from us). If you were an MPE consumer-member from 1993-1998, within the past 60 days, you should have received a bill credit or check from MPE if:

- Your refund was more than \$5
- MPE has your current mailing address on file

Unfortunately, we sometimes lose contact with former consumer-members. We attempt to contact them using the last address/email/phone number we have on file. MPE publishes a list of names of people we have lost contact with in an attempt to return their capital credits. You can see the list at: [mpei.com/unclaimed-capital-credit-list](http://mpei.com/unclaimed-capital-credit-list).

**Questions? Call 970-887-3378, ext. 3 or email us at [capitalcredits@mpei.com](mailto:capitalcredits@mpei.com).**



### Find Your Name Win \$5

If you find your name in this magazine, contact Mountain Parks Electric to receive a \$5 credit on your power bill. Winners must contact MPE within one month of the date of issue.

## ATTENTION HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

Important Deadlines (and Opportunities)



### Friday, March 5 SCHOLARSHIP APPLICATIONS DUE

If your student applies for only one college/vocational scholarship, this one should be it. MPE awards more than 20 scholarships each year, ranging from \$1,000 to \$4,000. Contact your high school counselor for our application.

### Friday, January 8 ESSAY CONTEST ENTRIES DUE

If you are a high school student, 16 years or older and living in MPE's service area, you could win a weeklong, all-expenses-paid trip to our state Capitol in Denver to meet with legislators, learn about electric co-ops and the country's power supply system, hear educational and fun speakers and tour historic and entertaining downtown tourist sites. Second prize in our essay contest is a weeklong, all-expenses-paid trip to Leadership Camp in Clark, Colorado. To enter, write a 500-word or less energy-related essay (or another qualifying project) and submit it to [rtaylor@mpei.com](mailto:rtaylor@mpei.com) by Friday, January 8. If the trips are canceled due to the public health crisis, MPE will award \$2,000 college/vocational scholarships instead.

**More information: [mpei.com/scholarships-and-youth-programs](http://mpei.com/scholarships-and-youth-programs).**

## WAYS TO SAVE

BY LINDSAY MCCANN  
CUSTOMER SERVICE SUPERVISOR

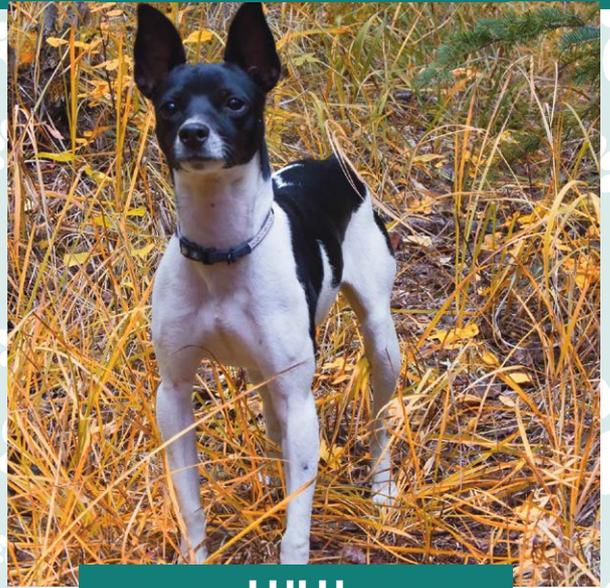
### CUTTING CHRISTMAS LIGHTING COSTS

#### Energy-Saving Tips

- **Don't leave Christmas tree lights on all night or on in unoccupied rooms**  
It's the classic "Turn off the lights!" dad-ism, Christmas edition.
- **Put outdoor Christmas lights on a timer, so when you sleep, they sleep**  
Doing this will keep you off of Santa's naughty list.
- **Dust your household lightbulbs**  
This is not an obsessive-compulsive cleaning behavior. It actually improves your lighting efficiency. Dust can reduce light output by 25%.

Keri Churchich, ACCT #1021634

## PET OF THE MONTH



**LULU**

Meet Lulu, my rat terrier, a resident of Fraser. Her diet consists of dog food and small game, namely local voles and mice.

Owner: Byron West

Email your pet photos and pet bio to [rtaylor@mpei.com](mailto:rtaylor@mpei.com)



**Chef and Barista Extraordinaire Frankie**

## Local Chef SPOTLIGHT

**RESTAURANT:**

**Lion Head Coffee**

100 E. Agate Ave., Granby  
Cooper Creek Square, Winter Park  
[lionheadcoffee.com](http://lionheadcoffee.com)

**HOURS:**

7 a.m. – 2 p.m. (Granby)  
7 a.m. – 5 p.m. (Winter Park)

**SPECIALTY:**

Locally roasted coffee, smoked brisket, breakfast burritos

**COOKING TIP FOR MPE READERS**

Let your filling completely cool before rolling burritos. Afterward, fill and roll your burritos, crisp with a panini press, then finish heating them in the microwave.

Fred Mooney, ACCT #200537200