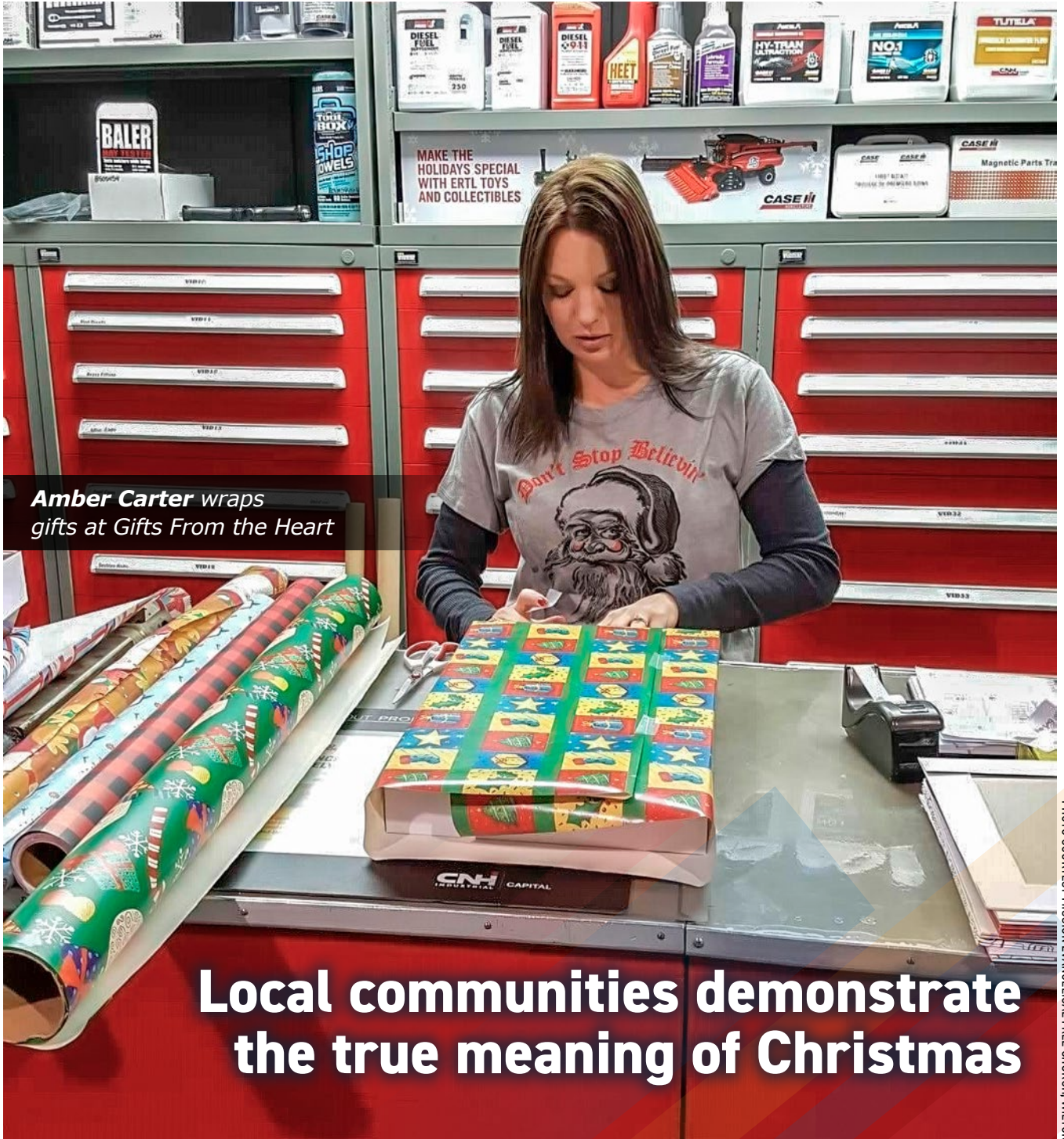


IN THIS ISSUE:

- Community calendar
- Apply for Youth Tour
- Hacks for holiday savings



Amber Carter wraps gifts at Gifts From the Heart

Local communities demonstrate the true meaning of Christmas

PHOTO COURTESY MISSION EVANGELICAL FREE CHURCH, WILTON



PHOTO COURTESY KATRINA HESKIN, UNDERWOOD

An Awana member with Wilton's Mission Evangelical Free Church writes a letter to the child who will receive the box she packed.

The true spirit

BY PATRICIA STOCKDILL

It's a star on a tree with the words, "Spider-Man T-shirt."

Or it may list someone's favorite snacks.

Sometimes, it's a box stuffed full of new socks, perhaps with a new toothbrush and comb on top, all meant for a 10-year-old girl.

The little girl's name is unknown, but that doesn't matter. The young boy with his colorful Spider-Man T-shirt may live across the street or down the road, but it doesn't matter.

A church group of children sings Christmas carols as an elderly neighbor is presented a food tray laden with homemade bread, meat, cheese and fruit. How many songs are sung probably depends on the weather, but it's the sound of Christmas that matters.

What matters is someone takes time to buy a gift for a child – or adult – in need. Someone takes time to bake dozens of small loaves of specialty breads, and someone else takes time to hand a gift or food tray to a friend or stranger.

What matters is an elderly person will enjoy a special snack.

Above all, what matters is each and every deed is just one example of the true meaning of Christmas. It takes place throughout communities around McLean County, North Dakota and the nation.

Perhaps Linda Holden, Wilton, sums it up best: "It's just something that people do in our communities and beyond."

Operation Christmas Child

Holden is just one volunteer with Wilton's Mission Evangelical Free Church, helping coordinate its Awana club's participation in Operation Christmas Child, part of the Samaritan's Purse organization conducting humanitarian aid throughout the world. Awana is an international nondenominational youth ministry program.

In November, Awana members filled shoebox-sized boxes with a variety of items many Americans may take

for granted: socks, combs, toothbrushes, pencils or paper. “You can get quite a lot in a box – it’s amazing,” Holden describes.

From there, the boxes are delivered to Bismarck’s Grace Point Church, then to a main collection location to be sent to children in undeveloped nations throughout the world.

Awana members contribute at least one item – and sometimes enough for an entire box – along with church members and the Awana organization, ensuring every box is full. The children decide who to pack a box for, selecting either a boy or girl and their age group, with the name and country unknown.

The church has participated in Operation Christmas Child more than 15 years, Holden explains. Sometimes, Awana members even had opportunities to correspond with a recipient of the box, she says.

As the boxes are filled, it’s an opportunity to appreciate the sense of goodness and kindness that comes from giving, she adds.

Trays of cheer

Stars on TruCommunity Bank’s Christmas tree in Turtle Lake reach out to a different age group, helping brighten holiday spirits by providing gifts that say “thank you” and “we’re thinking of you” to people living at Sheridan Memorial Home, a 16-bed basic care, assisted living and retirement community in nearby McClusky.

“If you pick a star, it will have a list of what the resident’s favorite items are, such as puzzles, diamond art, certain snacks or drinks, socks, pj’s, just about anything that they enjoy,” described Turtle Lake’s Linda Huelsman.

Simply pick a star, wrap the gift and return it to TruCommunity Bank in Turtle Lake, and volunteers will deliver the Christmas cheer.

Members of Turtle Lake’s Chamber of Progress and St. Olaf and Trinity Lutheran churches also extend a “thank you” to the community’s elderly citizens at Christmas.

Church members gather to make goodies, Chamber of Progress member Huelsman describes. They purchase meat snacks and cheeses and Huelsman bakes dozens of miniature bread loaves.

“Whatever kind I come up with,” she describes, including cranberry, pumpkin or banana bread. Fruit is purchased when Turtle Lake-Mercer Public School FFA students have fruit sales.

“It’s important to have the four food groups,” Huelsman says with a smile.

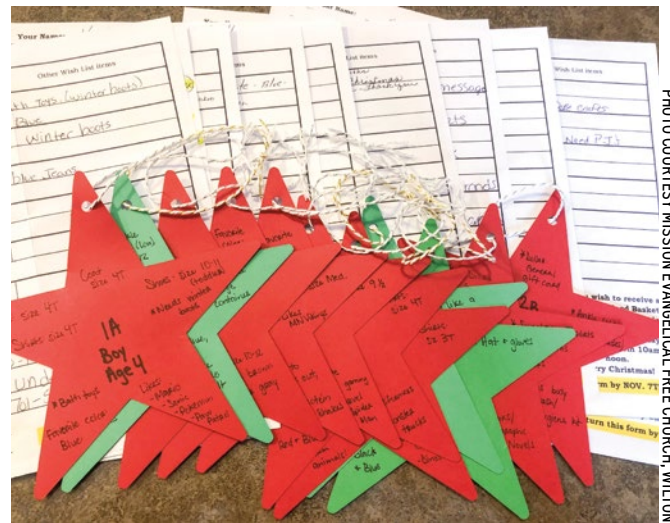


PHOTO COURTESY MISSION EVANGELICAL FREE CHURCH, WILTON

Red and green holiday stars help guide people in picking a star to purchase a gift for children in need of Christmas cheer. The items are donated to the Santa’s Helpers program in Underwood for students within the Underwood School District.

And if it’s not too cold, young members of the churches sing Christmas carols at each home.

The food trays are a way to recognize contributions the community’s elderly people have given throughout the years, Huelsman explains, and let them know how much they’re appreciated.

Food trays are also given to community members who lost loved ones throughout the year, she adds. It’s a way to let someone know they’re not alone during the holidays, which are often difficult times for those losing family members.

“Hopefully, it brings some cheer and to let them know we’re thinking of them,” Huelsman adds.

Holiday gift baskets

And while the name may differ in Garrison and Underwood, those two communities share the goodness and kindness of the Christmas holidays through gift baskets for needy area families.

Working in conjunction with their local food pantries, each program helps ensure families in need of a little support can still have a Christmas.

In Underwood, Katrina Heskin serves as the treasurer for the Community Cupboard, a food pantry and thrift store, as well as treasurer for Santa’s Helpers, the affiliated Christmas gift basket program for families within the Underwood School District.

In Garrison, St. Paul Lutheran Church Pastor Janis Sloka and Amber Carter co-chair the community’s

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Chamber of Commerce program, Gifts from the Heart, coordinating gift basket distributions with the Garrison Area Resource Council (GARC) & Food Pantry Christmas holiday food basket distribution.

Gift basket recipients are identified through the community's food pantries and receive forms to help Santa's Helpers and Gifts from the Heart volunteers identify needs for each family.

From there, volunteers make up stars with items, age group – including adults – and boy or girl.

Heskin says Underwood's Cottingham Insurance decorates trees with stars and people can select a star for whatever gift they want to donate, wrap it and return it to the insurance company. Rainbow Energy has a tree with stars, she adds.

In Garrison, Sloka says trees with stars are located at TruCommunity Bank and BNC Bank.

People can still support Santa's Helpers and Gifts from the Heart even if they're not in the mood to shop and wrap a gift. Heskin says financial contributions can be mailed to the Underwood Community Cupboard, P.O. Box 315, Underwood, ND 58576. Just make a note in the check's memo box so volunteers know if the donation goes to Santa's Helpers or the food pantry.

People in Garrison can leave financial contributions at TruCommunity Bank, Sloka describes.

Financial donations support the gift basket programs, with funds used to purchase items for any stars that may not have been selected. It helps ensure everyone receives a gift.

Volunteers in both Underwood and Garrison distribute their program's gift baskets on the same day their food pantries provide the Christmas food baskets, which is Dec. 21 for both the Underwood Community Cupboard and GARC's Food Pantry.

The spirit of giving, sharing and caring has lived on for many years. Each of the five different programs are longstanding traditions in their communities and surrounding rural areas.

They've evolved over the years, as needs and people change and evolve. In the case of Underwood's Santa's Helpers and Garrison's Gift from the Heart, the gift basket programs combined with their community food pantry to better reach the number of people in need.

Each year, Gifts from the Heart reaches about 50 to 60 families in Garrison and the surrounding area, Sloka describes.

Santa's Helpers brought smiles to 34 children and six senior citizens in 2022 and 27 children and six senior

citizens in 2023, Heskin describes.

Whether the needs of others less fortunate are in some distant underdeveloped country, a neighbor down the street or an elderly person, it's a way to say "thanks, we appreciate all you've done" and "we're here for you and thinking of you." These are just some examples from people throughout towns and rural parts of McLean County demonstrating the true spirit and meaning of Christmas lives on.

Merry Christmas from the McLean Electric Cooperative family.

May the Christmas spirit always live on. ■



PHOTO COURTESY MISSION EVANGELICAL FREE CHURCH, WILTON

A table is laden with items donated to Wilton's Mission Evangelical Free Church. Members of the church's Awana international nondenominational youth ministry program fill the boxes for distribution to needy children and families overseas as part of Samaritan's Purse Operation Christmas Child program providing humanitarian services around the world. It's been an annual Christmas project for club members more than 15 years.

McLean County community calendar: Events and activities to see and do

McLean County area food pantry distribution dates, times and locations

- **Community Cupboard of Underwood food distribution:** 10 a.m.-noon Dec. 7 and Christmas dinner basket 10 a.m.-noon Dec. 21, 208 Lincoln Ave. Like us on Facebook (Community Cupboard of Underwood) for distribution dates, thrift store and other information.
- **Community Food Pantry serving Ryder, Makoti, Roseglen, Plaza, White Shield, Parshall and those in need:** 10 a.m.-1 p.m. Dec. 21, 181 Ellsworth St., Makoti.
- **Community Thrift Store serving Ryder, Makoti, Roseglen, Plaza, White Shield, Parshall and the region:** 3-6 p.m. Tuesday, 4-7 p.m. Thursday and 10 a.m.-1 p.m. Saturday, except holidays, 181 Ellsworth St., Makoti.
- **Free Community Clothing Share and Exchange Store,** every Thursday, noon-6 p.m., 221 Main St., Turtle Lake.
- **Garrison Area Resource Center & Food Pantry:** Noon-2 p.m. and 5-7 p.m. Dec. 21, Garrison.
- **McLean Family Resource Center:** McLean County residents can contact the center, 701-462-8643, for an appointment to pick up baskets and for more information or assistance through the center, 205 Seventh St., Washburn.
- **McLean Family Resource Center Clothing Outlet, Washburn:** 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday, 205 Seventh St., Washburn.
- **Our Savior Lord's Food Pantry:** Noon-3 p.m. and 5-7 p.m. Dec. 16, Max City Hall, 215 Main St., Max.
- **The Lord's Pantry:** 2-4 p.m. Dec. 12, 10 a.m.-noon Dec. 28, Trinity Lutheran Church, 515 Kundert St., Turtle Lake.
- **Wilton Food Pantry, Wilton:** "Mini" distributions every Friday, 11:30 a.m. until gone. Full food distribution, 4-6 p.m. Dec. 19, Wilton Senior Citizens Center, 42 Dakota Ave.
- **Wilton (free) Clothes Closet,** 3-5 p.m. Dec. 19, First Presbyterian Church, 401 Dakota Ave., Wilton.

Area food pantries often experience high needs for the following items: baked beans, pork and beans, canned fruit, tuna, chicken, vegetables, cereal, oatmeal, granola and breakfast bars, juice, macaroni and cheese, hamburger and tuna helper, pancake mix, syrup, pasta, spaghetti, Alfredo and pasta sauce, peanut butter, jelly, rice side dishes, soups and chili, and household items, such as body wash and soap, dish soap, laundry detergent, shampoo and conditioner, toilet paper, toothpaste and toothbrushes. Contact local food pantries for drop-off locations, information or a list of additional needs in your community.

December and early January 2025 events:

- **Dec. 1:** Christmas tree lighting ceremony, 5:30 p.m., Max City Hall.
- **Dec. 4:** Our Savior's Community Christmas Concert featuring Master's Plan, Bismarck, performing for the free event, 7 p.m., Our Savior's Lutheran Church, Mercer. Goodies and fellowship to follow.

- **Dec. 6-7, 13-14:** Dickens Village Festival. Visit www.dickensfestival.com for event details and schedule.
- **Dec. 6-7, 13-14:** Fort Stevenson State Park Dickens Village Festival Geocache. Contact the park at 701-337-5576 for details or go to www.facebook.com/fort.stevenson.
- **Dec. 6:** Angel of Hope Memorial, 7:30 p.m., Wilderness Park, Garrison.
- **Dec. 7:** Santa Day, Washburn Memorial Hall.
- **Dec. 8:** Annual Christmas tree lighting ceremony sponsored by the Riverdale-Pick City Women's Club, The Knights Coliseum, Riverdale. Light supper will be served with Santa as a special guest. More details in *The Riverdale Times*.
- **Dec. 8:** Santa Days, 9 a.m.-1 p.m., Max City Hall.
- **Dec. 10:** Annual Santa Store for elementary students, Turtle Lake.
- **Dec. 13:** Turtle Lake Christmas Open House with businesses serving holiday treats from 3:30-6 p.m. and Santa at Dakota West Credit Union at 5 p.m.
- **Dec. 14:** Milk and Cookies with Santa, 1-3 p.m., SACA Lodge, Garrison.
- **Dec. 14:** Christmas Craft & Bake Sale sponsored by Comet Kids Childcare, 10 a.m.-2 p.m. with Underwood Civic Club sponsoring visits and photos with Santa, 11 a.m.-noon, Underwood City Hall.
- **Dec. 14:** Annual Lions Club Santa Day, Wilton Memorial Hall.
- **Dec. 16:** Blood drive sponsored by the Garrison Lamplighters, 11 a.m.-5 p.m., Garrison City Auditorium.
- **Dec. 21:** Fort Stevenson State Park 50th Anniversary Celebration.
- **Dec. 22-Jan. 1, 2025:** Audubon National Wildlife Refuge Holiday Hike. Self-guided hike featuring "The Twelve Days of Christmas" along the refuge walking trail north of its visitor center and North Country Trail segment, a mile east along the south shore of Lake Audubon.
- **Dec. 23:** Max Community Library Preschool Story Hour, 10:30 a.m.
- **Dec. 25:** McLean Electric Cooperative closed in celebration of Christmas.
- **Dec. 29:** Audubon National Wildlife Refuge guided hike, 1:30 p.m. Meet at the educational center a mile east along south of Lake Audubon. Hot chocolate and treats to follow with snowshoes available, snow conditions permitting.
- **Jan. 1, 2025:** First Day Hike, Fort Stevenson State Park, Garrison.
- **Jan. 17, 2025:** McLean Electric Cooperative Washington, D.C., Youth applications deadline. High school sophomores and juniors are eligible to apply for the Youth Tour.

Nonprofit organizations and communities throughout

McLean County can contact Patricia Stockdill at stockdill.patricia@gmail.com or 701-337-5462 to submit community events. ■

ICE ON POWER LINES: A WEIGHTY SUBJECT

The added weight of ice on poles can quickly lead to broken power poles and other pole equipment. Ice can also make falling tree branches 30 times heavier and much more likely to break power lines.

For example, on a 300-foot span of 1-inch-thick power lines:

- 1/2 inch of ice adds 281 pounds of weight
- 1 inch of ice adds 749 pounds of weight
- 2 inches of ice adds 2,248 pounds of weight

WHEN ICE MELTS

In addition, melting ice can cause power outages. If ice on the bottom (neutral) line melts before the lines above, it can cause the lines to touch, leading to an outage.

OTHER ICY FACTS

- Damage can begin when ice exceeds 1/4 of an inch.
- One-half inch of ice can cause a line to sag up to 12 inches.
- Pressure can also be caused by a broken tree limb.
- Both ice and melting ice can cause power outages.
- Ice can form around power lines in a teardrop shape. This shape acts as a wing, causing the line to gain lift and rise with high winds. The ice can also break off, causing unsafe conditions on the ground.

Source: www.safeelectricity.org

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HONORING HEROES @ WWI MEMORIAL



JUNE 15-21, 2025

1,800 students.
7 days.
1 unforgettable trip.

Join us on the adventure of a lifetime. On the Electric Cooperative Youth Tour, you'll do it all. You'll explore monuments and museums, meet with members of Congress and get an up-close look at where our country's laws are crafted. You'll stand on the Gettysburg Battlefield, walk the halls of George Washington's iconic 18th-century mansion and witness ceremonies honoring the men and women who fought in uniform for this great nation. For one jam-packed week, you'll be immersed in the cooperative spirit that built and sustains our great nation. And **all expenses are paid** by your local electric cooperative!

Yeah, Youth Tour hits different.

To enter the essay-writing contest:

- You must be a sophomore or junior in high school.
- You and your parents or guardian must be served by McLean Electric Cooperative.

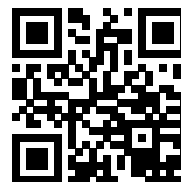
Essay question:

Why is it important to be involved in your community, and how does that prepare you to be a future leader?

The application deadline is Jan. 17, 2025.

Email entries to Sonja Moe at sonjadm@mcleanelectric.com or mail a hard copy to: Youth Tour Essay Contest, 4031 Hwy. 37 Bypass, P.O. Box 399, Garrison, ND, 58540.

Questions? Please contact Sonja Moe, McLean Electric, at 701-463-6700 during regular business hours.



Learn more at
ndyouthtour.com

8 hacks for holiday savings

1. Replace your old holiday lights with light-emitting diode (LED) light strings.

2. Plug your indoor and outdoor lighting displays into a timer set to run during the earlier evening hours. If you don't use a timer, be sure to unplug your lights when you go to sleep or leave home.

3. Cook as many dishes as possible in your microwave over the holidays. Because microwaves cook food so quickly, the typical model uses as much as 75% less energy than a conventional oven.

4. Use your slow cooker. For about 17 cents worth of electricity, you can prepare an entire meal.

5. When using your oven, check cooking progress by looking through the window. Opening the oven door for even a few seconds lowers the temperature inside by as much as 25 degrees. If your stove doesn't have a window, try not to open the door to check your food until it's as close to the expected finish time as possible.

6. When cooking on your stovetop, match the size of the pan to the heating element. More heat will get to the pan and less will be lost.

7. Turn down the thermostat when holiday guests arrive. Those extra bodies mean free heat.

8. Taking a holiday trip? Turn off and unplug all equipment that pulls power, such as TVs, computers, phone chargers and game consoles, and lower your thermostat.

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Office: 701-463-6700
Toll-Free: 800-263-4922
Fax: 701-337-5303

Email: mclean1@mcleanelectric.com
Website address:
www.mcleanelectric.com