

# MEA-MFTtoday

A publication for members of MEA-MFT

## Infectious exuberance

### Kelly Elder: 2017 Montana Teacher of the Year

Kelly Elder's post-holiday classroom is buzzing with energy. As his sixth-grade students file in, Elder walks around to greet each one. "Hi, how you doing, buddy?" he says to one young man.

When the bell rings, Elder launches a short, fast-paced discussion, constantly in motion around the room. "How many of you had turkey?" he asks, raising his hand. "How many of you had mashed potatoes? Apple pie? Pumpkin pie? Corn bread and honey?"

Hands wave wildly; students grin at Elder's infectious exuberance.

"Anyone have lefse?" A couple of hands tentatively go up. Elder briefly reminds students about the strong Norwegian presence in Montana, deftly tying in students' holiday experience with what they learned earlier about Montana's homesteading era.

Then it's on to the day's western hemisphere geography lesson, with students raptly engaged.

That's one small sample of how Elder connects his students' lives with the larger world.

Elder, who teaches at C.R. Anderson Middle School in Helena, was named 2017 Montana Teacher of the Year this fall. It's the highest honor a Montana teacher can receive. Elder's students clearly approve of the honor. "It's always just fun in his class," says student John (Continued on p. 11)



Teacher of the Year Kelly Elder explains latitude to his students at C.R. Anderson Middle School in Helena.



Kelly Elder's students join a lively discussion. Connecting with each student is key to Elder's teaching.

## Montana Unified: MEA-MFT & MPEA join forces as never before

For many years, MEA-MFT and the Montana Public Employees Association have joined forces on behalf of our members.

From state employee pay plan negotiations to the Work That Matters campaign that showcased the important work Montana's public employees do, our two unions have been great friends and team mates for decades.

Now, we are working together as never before. We call this new effort "Montana Unified."

Members of both unions can expect to see a lot of important information and action alerts from Montana Unified during and after the 2017 session of the Montana Legislature.

"Especially in the current political (Continued on p. 5)



# Our Point of View

BY ERIC FEAVER  
MEA-MFT PRESIDENT



## Two Heroes – a better place for all

Not unlike millions of Americans and thousands of Montanans, the last election left us gasping for progressive breath.

Need I say more about our new president than to suggest fake news, imaginary facts, and narcissistic impulsive behavior invite a ride to hell in a handbasket here in America and around the world?

Then there is our newly elected superintendent of public instruction, she of the “absolutely deplorable voting record.” ([bit.ly/1PoSiZG](http://bit.ly/1PoSiZG)) Throughout her legislative career

she has opposed almost everything we represent. Public school privatization and relaxed teacher licensure standards full speed ahead?

But we were not completely stomped at the polls. We reelected Steve Bullock governor. The governor has delivered on school funding and state employee pay and health care, protected public employee and teacher pensions, and expanded Medicaid. Working together we will do even more despite a slump in state revenue.

We helped elect Dirk Sandefur to our state supreme court. Most folks agree that our supreme court is about all that now stands between cynical, self-serving, right-wing, arbitrary and capricious misreading of

our constitution and those of us who believe in good government and quality public schools for all God’s children, including other people’s children.

We did in fact kill I-181, a dangerous, potentially precedent setting backdoor appropriation of taxpayer dollars that confounded our constitution and threatened to turn our state’s budgetary process inside out.

And we elected and reelected 12 MEA-MFT members to the state legislature. Add two holdover senators, and 14 member leaders will courageously defend the faith throughout the 2017 legislative session. Bless them all.

Now we must take a moment to praise and thank Denise Juneau and Melissa Romano, two champions of we the people, two MEA-MFT members, two heroes.

Both ran great campaigns. Both deserved to win. Both have significant leadership futures as we and they move on down the road.

And both heroes inspire us to seek out even more MEA-MFT members to run for political office. When and where our members serve, Montana is a better place for all. 🐾





## Making it right at Missoula College

Belonging to MEA-MFT benefits us as members year-round, in ways large and small. Sometimes, though, the payoff is more obvious than at other times.

That's what members at Missoula College saw recently when their local union, the Missoula College Faculty Association (MCFA), worked with their MEA-MFT field consultant to fix a problem.

Here's what happened: Last year, the college's administration made some significant changes in faculty schedules in order to balance the budget. These changes "overlooked some important faculty service duties," said Tom Gallagher, president of MCFA.

In short, for faculty who serve as program directors/discipline leads, their workload increased but compensation didn't.

"These individuals are kind of

quasi-department chairs for the smaller programs," explained Gallagher, who teaches computer science and information technology and oversees that program area.

"We have program directors who serve the college through curriculum leadership, supervision of adjunct faculty, and programmatic leadership in the community," he said.

"The administration made a good-faith effort to balance the budget," Gallagher added, noting that inadequate state funding for higher education made it a tough job.

But balancing the budget on the backs of faculty didn't make sense. Plus, when workloads increased but salaries didn't, it went against the collective bargaining agreement.

"We've worked for years to get language in MCFA's contract saying people will get paid for the work they do," said MEA-MFT Field Consultant Tom Burgess.

MCFA eventually filed a grievance as a last resort, with help from Burgess. Thanks to collaborative work between the union and the administration, however, MCFA didn't have to pursue the grievance.

"Tom Gallagher sat down with [then-UM President] Royce Engstrom and got it resolved," said Burgess.

The resolution "resulted in market adjustments for faculty who've been

**"Please let me express my immense gratitude....Y'all found a way to right the wrongs and upend the inequity."** Lisa Swallow

underpaid for years," he said.

"We owe a lot of thanks to Tom Burgess," said Gallagher. "He has been such an important member of our team here. He's been a guiding force as we transition through our third dean in two years."

Lisa Swallow is one of the Missoula College faculty members celebrating the agreement. She teaches accounting and sustainable business and serves as program director for accounting technology.

"Please let me express my immense gratitude for the work you do for all of us," Swallow wrote in an e-mail message to Gallagher, Burgess, and MCFA Vice President Dennis Daneke.

"It's felt, in the past few years, that there were no avenues left to pursue. And yet y'all found a way to right the wrongs and upend the inequity. It has made 23 years of paying dues to MEA-MFT worth every penny!"



### MEA-MFT TODAY

MEA-MFT Today published bimonthly September through July by MEA-MFT. Third Class Nonprofit Postage Paid at Billings, MT 59101. Permit No. 88

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## Boosting our national recognition

Change doesn't usually happen overnight. But it does happen, especially when MEA-MFT members lead the charge.

When MEA and MFT merged in 2000, forming MEA-MFT, we brought thousands of state and local government employee members into the ranks of our national affiliates, NEA and AFT. Before that, the two national groups were almost exclusively composed of educators.

This created a major cultural shift for both national affiliates – a shift that wasn't often reflected in NEA and AFT publications and conferences.

But thanks to the persistence of MEA-MFT leaders like Jill Cohenour, Kevin Bock, and others, our public employee members are getting more recognition from NEA and AFT.

Recently, for example, Bock has been talking to NEA Secretary-Treasurer Princess Moss about the contributions our state employee members make.

Bock, an employee at the Montana Department of Revenue, is MEA-MFT's secretary-treasurer. "We have a lot in common," he said of Moss. "She even tells auditor jokes."

Bock has told Moss how MEA-MFT members help each other on issues, such as getting the state pay plan passed in the 2015 legislative session. "We broke the legislative computer system, we had so many calls going in," he told her. "We had teachers calling right along with state employees. We were a voice



From left: NEA Vice President Becky Pringle meets with Asst. Bureau Chief Debbie Gibson and MEA-MFT member Kathy Manion, a scientist at the DPHHS lab.



Pringle tours the Dept. of Revenue's liquor warehouse with employee Ed Senecal.

legislators couldn't tune out."

Moss now uses Montana as an example of how members can work together to get things done, Bock said, "how to elect good people, how to pass school levies, how to stop bad bills and bad initiatives."

Here's another example: NEA Vice President Becky Pringle visited Montana recently, meeting with MEA-MFT members and learning more about the different kinds of work our members do.

She toured the Department of Revenue, Public Health and Human

Services, and Montana Historical Society, meeting blue-collar workers, scientists, historians, and a wide array of other state employee members.

At AFT events, too, MEA-MFT members have been speaking to their colleagues from around the country about MEA-MFT's diversity and how we work together.

The message is getting through. "It'll be a slow shift," Bock said, "but it has begun." 🗨️

## Important tax notice

You can deduct your MEA-MFT dues from your taxes, but only if you itemize deductions, and only if your dues plus other miscellaneous deductions add up to at least 2 percent of your adjusted gross income.

NOTE: The portion of your MEA-MFT dues that goes toward our legislative activity is not deductible.

For 2016, the deductible amount equals 97.1% percent of your MEA-MFT dues, all of your local dues, and all of your national dues. 🗨️



# State employees rally for Great Falls members

The soaring cost of health care affects all of us. That's why MEA-MFT has participated in numerous efforts to control health costs for our members.

Recently, we've supported the State of Montana's switch to transparent pricing, a method of payment for medical services that controls health care costs. It saves money for state employees, Montana's self-funded State Plan, and Montana taxpayers alike.

When the state's Health Care Benefits Division moved to transparent pricing starting July 1, 2016, every major hospital in Montana signed on except one: Benefis in Great Falls.

This caused considerable anxiety for state employees in the Great Falls area, who feared they would have to pay far higher costs or drive somewhere else for procedures.

MEA-MFT took action. We joined Governor Steve Bullock in pushing Benefis to sign on to the transparent pricing plan. But the

hospital continued to resist – until we mobilized MEA-MFT members around the state to speak up.

"We needed a flood of messages to Benefis," said MEA-MFT President Eric Feaver. "So we asked our state employee members to speak up for their brothers and sisters in the Great Falls area."

Hundreds of members across Montana responded by sending cards to Benefis Chief Financial Officer Forrest Ehlinger and calling him, urging Benefis to get on board and do the right thing for state employees and taxpayers.

It worked. Benefis finally signed on to the state's transparent pricing plan. Great Falls area members will now enjoy the same savings as other state employees.

That's what can happen when we pull together for each other as union members!

**More about transparent pricing:** When you go to a restaurant, you know exactly what you'll pay for a meal. The price is right on the menu.

There's no nasty surprise when the bill arrives. If the restaurant's prices are too high, you can go elsewhere.

Not so with health care. Hospitals are not limited on how much they charge, and they can change prices at any time. Hospital A may charge thousands of dollars more than Hospital B for the same procedure.

Transparent pricing addresses that problem. By adopting transparent pricing, the State of Montana Benefit Plan (State Plan), with its third party administrator, Allegiance, now uses Medicare rates as a reference point and pays a multiple above that. Transparent pricing is fair for both patients and providers.

Now that Benefis has joined the pack, all of Montana's 10 largest hospitals and many smaller ones have signed on to the state's transparent pricing plan. The state's Health Care & Benefits Division estimates that transparent pricing will save the State Plan \$25 million dollars by the end of 2018.

That's a good deal for state employees and taxpayers alike.

(Source: Marilyn Bartlett, state Health Care & Benefits Division administrator) 🗨️

## Montana Unified (from page 1)

climate, we must stand together in solidarity," said MEA-MFT President Eric Feaver and MPEA Executive Director Quint Nyman in a joint statement.

"The future holds tremendous challenges and opportunities for our members. We will survive and thrive if we stick together, unified. We are excited about the possibilities ahead."

This partnership creates the strongest and largest group of union members working together

in Montana since the creation of the Montana AFL-CIO. The initial focus will be working with the Montana Legislature. After the session, the goal is to continue and strengthen

our partnership further.

Watch for more information about this exciting endeavor, and please get ready to take part as we move forward. 🗨️

# Montana Unified

**MEA-MFT**  
Public Schools, Public Service

**MPEA**  
MONTANA PUBLIC EMPLOYEES ASSOCIATION



## Election 2016: the wrap-up

New Supreme Court Justice Dirk Sandefur, right, one of MEA-MFT's top-priority candidates, takes the oath of office from Chief Justice Mike McGrath Jan. 2.

MEA-MFT members, leaders, and staff went all-out in the 2016 campaigns to elect candidates who support the vital work our members do.

Election Day was a decidedly mixed bag of results. But MEA-MFT members' involvement and commitment to great candidates and the values they represent has never been stronger.

"The level of activity from our members just kept growing," said MEA-MFT Executive Director Erik Burke. "I'm so impressed by the number of volunteers who made phone calls, knocked doors, wrote postcards, donated to our endorsed candidates, and more."

Key election results include the following:

### Wins

**Re-election of Governor Steve Bullock**, one of MEA-MFT's top election priorities: Governor Bullock won his race with a margin of 50-46%. His opponent, Greg Gianforte, has a long history of support for privatizing public schools and

wouldn't commit to protecting workers' rights.

Governor Bullock has vetoed more terrible bills than any other Montana governor. He will undoubtedly use the veto pen again in 2017, as the tea party-dominated legislature tries to undo good government and strong public schools.

**Election of Judge Dirk Sandefur** to the Montana Supreme Court, another top MEA-MFT priority: State supreme court races nationwide have been targeted by dark money groups in the last few elections. These shady, corporate-funded organizations spend millions of dollars on deceptive ads about supreme court candidates. They spent a bundle trying to defeat Dirk Sandefur.

MEA-MFT got the message to members about Judge Sandefur through phone calls, meetings, and mailings. Judge Sandefur won his race 56-40%.

With his election, the Montana Supreme Court remains a strong, independent bulwark against

unconstitutional attacks on public education, public services, and public access to public lands.

**Defeat of Initiative 181:** MEA-MFT led the campaign against this deceptive initiative. I-181 was designed to draw public dollars away from the state's general fund and into the coffers of private medical research institutions.

Thanks to our concerted effort of mailings and ads, Montanans saw through the scheme and voted 57-42% against I-181.

### Losses

**Melissa Romano**, superintendent of public instruction candidate, another top priority: MEA-MFT member Melissa Romano ran a strong campaign. She was a virtual unknown when she announced her candidacy last year.

MEA-MFT helped with thousands of phone calls, hundreds of postcards, mailings, ads, and more. Our members wrote dozens of letters to the editor, helping boost Romano's name recognition.



Unfortunately, the presidential race brought a national partisan divide to Montana, resulting in Romano's loss and the loss of MEA-MFT-endorsed candidates Jesse Laslovich (state auditor) and Monica Lindeen (secretary of state).

Romano raised more money than any other superintendent candidate in Montana history. She received more votes than Republican candidate for governor Greg Gianforte, and more votes than the other Democratic candidates

for statewide office, reflecting MEA-MFT's intensity of support. We haven't seen the last of Romano. She is the type of bright and fearless education leader Montana needs.

**Denise Juneau**, candidate for congress: MEA-MFT member Denise Juneau ran an impressive campaign, featuring her successful Graduation Matters program and her support for public education, public schools, and public lands.

MEA-MFT did thousands of phone calls and several mailings on

Juneau's behalf. In another election cycle, she likely may have won.

### Legislative races

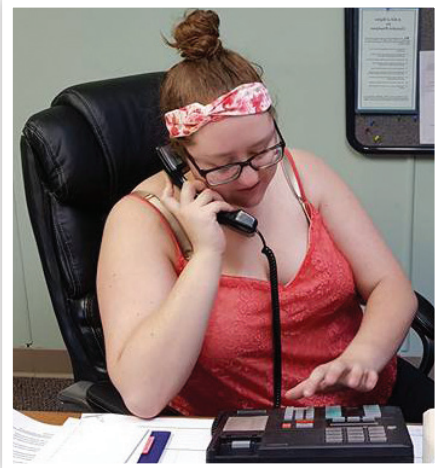
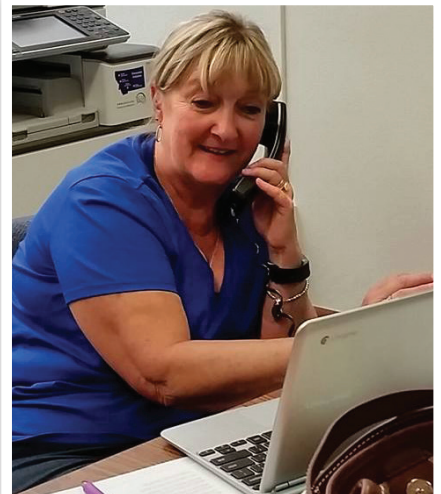
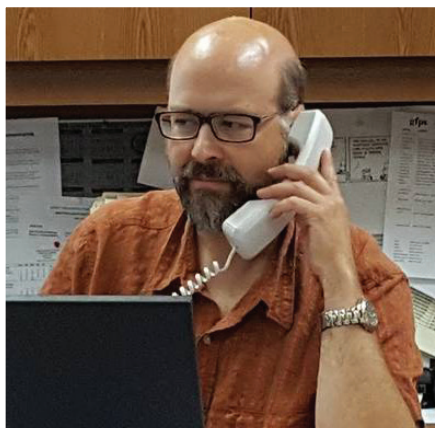
MEA-MFT was active in key competitive legislative races across the state. Our members interviewed every legislative candidate willing to be interviewed. MEA-MFT communicated the resulting endorsements to members through mailings and phone calls.

Fifteen of 22 MEA-MFT targeted legislative candidates won.

## THANK YOU, VOLUNTEERS!

Hundreds of MEA-MFT members from across Montana poured their hearts into helping elect our endorsed candidates. Thank you to

everyone who made calls, attended fundraisers, wrote letters to the editor, and knocked on doors. It made the difference! 🗣️



These volunteers in Billings, Helena, Great Falls, and Missoula joined MEA-MFT members across Montana in reaching out to fellow members in support of our endorsed candidates.

# 2017 Legislature begins

The 2017 Montana Legislature convened January 2 in Helena.

As always, MEA-MFT leaders and staff will be at the session every day, fighting for our members. We expect a tough session. We will fight to defend and strengthen public education and public services, protect our members' hard-earned retirement, and safeguard Montanan's voting rights.

**WE'LL NEED YOUR HELP!** Here's how you can be part of the effort:

- Watch for alerts and take action when we ask you to contact your

local legislators on key bills.

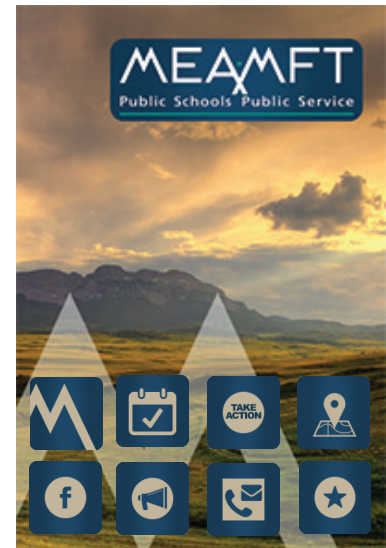
- Download our mobile app. Go to the iPhone or Google Play store. Search for MEA-MFT. Be sure to allow notifications.

- Like us on Facebook: (facebook.com/MEAMFT)

- Follow Eric Feaver on Twitter (@efeaver).

- Watch mea-mft.org for updates and talking points.

- Sign up for Eric Feaver's e-mail updates. Send him a message at efeaver@mea-mft.org. Say, "sign me up for your listserv."



Download the free MEA-MFT mobile app: Search for MEA-MFT.

## MEA-MFT members in the 2017 Legislature

Fourteen MEA-MFT members will serve in the 2017 Montana Legislature. That's great news, because MEA-MFT members make

smart, dedicated legislators. They listen carefully to all points of view and make educated decisions. (One member, Mary Moe, has decided to

resign from her legislative seat at the end of January to help her daughter care for premature infant triplets.)

Below are our member-legislators and their key committee assignments.



Sen. Mary McNally  
Billings, Finance & Claims, Appropriations/General Gov.



Sen. Edie McClafferty  
Butte, Boulder, Clancy Education, Taxation



Sen. Jill Cohenour  
Helena, E. Helena Taxation



Sen. Dick Barrett  
Missoula, Taxation



Sen. Tom Facey  
Missoula, Business & Labor



Sen. Mary Moe  
Gt. Falls Education



Rep. Amanda Curtis  
Butte, Business & Labor, Education



Rep. Moffie Funk  
Helena, Business & Labor, Education



Rep. John Fleming  
Ronan, Arlee, State Administration



Rep. Willis Curdy  
Missoula, Business & Labor



Rep. Marilyn Ryan  
Missoula Appropriations/Health & Human Services



Rep. Tom Woods  
Bozeman Appropriations/Education



Rep. Jean Price  
Gt. Falls, Education, State Administration



Rep. Casey Schreiner  
Gt. Falls, Business & Labor, Education

**THANK YOU** to all our MEA-MFT members in the legislature for your service to Montana's people. It's work that matters!



# Staff changes at MEA-MFT

Three MEA-MFT veteran staff members retired recently. J.C. Weingartner, Terry Minow, and Jerry Rukavina have dedicated their lives to our members, our state, and the union ideal that all working people deserve a fair shake.

They passionately believe in public education and public services. Their work at MEA-MFT wasn't just a job to them; it was a calling.

**J.C. Weingartner, member rights director/field consultant:** J.C. Weingartner ("Counselor" to many of his fellow staff members) has a union career spanning seven decades. Raised in Butte, he joined his first union, the Brotherhood of Maintenance of Way Employees, in 1959, and his second, the Mine Mill and Smelter Workers, in 1961.

As to his work at MEA-MFT, he said, "It all began in the 1970s, tromping through the countryside with Jim McGarvey (late president of the Montana Federation of Teachers), trying to either recruit or raid members for the fledgling MFT."

It continued, he said, "through the merger with MEA in 2000, to my going in-house with MEA-MFT in 2004. What fun."

Throughout those years, Weingartner has helped innumerable members resolve their problems on the job. "J.C. has been with MEA-MFT from its founding," said Diane Fladmo, MEA-MFT research director.

"He has been a great mentor to fellow staff members, who relied on his legal expertise for how to best help members. We've always relied on him to keep us laughing, too."

**Terry Minow, political director/student program coordinator:** Don't try telling Terry Minow something



J.C. Weingartner



Terry Minow



Jerry Rukavina

she cares about is a lost cause. She'll prove you wrong 9.5 times out of 10.

A ranch kid from outside Miles City, Minow's slogan is "Powder River, let 'er buck!" and for someone whose laugh could melt icebergs, she knows a thing or two about toughness.

"In her 33 years here, Terry has stood up to tea party legislators, billionaires, and corporations that tried to attack Montana's public schools and services," said Sanna Porte, MEA-MFT communications director.

"She saved the Montana Veterans Home in Columbia Falls from being needlessly closed. She has gotten dozens of good people elected and killed countless bad bills and ballot measures. She's the co-creator of MEA-MFT's award-winning Work That Matters and Stand Up For Education campaigns."

"I have been a proud and active member of this union since my first job out of college," Minow said. As a teacher at Missoula Head Start, she signed up to join the Montana Federation of Teachers almost 40 years ago. Minow began working for MFT in 1983 and served on the merger task force that brought MFT and MEA together in 2000.

**Jerry Rukavina, field consultant:** Jerry Rukavina has been a union guy since he taught an apprenticeship class for the Machinists Union 45 years ago. As a welding and ma-

chine shop teacher, he led his local, the Great Falls Education Association, through the 1989 strike – the longest teacher strike in U.S. history at the time. The strike centered around the school district's human resources director, Rukavina recalled. "He abused people. Even the devil thought he was a jerk," he said.

After the strike, Rukavina set about working with the district superintendent to heal the wounds and bring the community back together.

That's typical of Rukavina's style. "He's a great communicator," said MEA-MFT Field Consultant Carol



Characteristic of our three big-hearted, fearless, creative retiring staff members, "Membership Man" Rukavina holds forth at MEA-MFT representative assembly.

Haverlandt. "He often solves problems through communication rather than confrontation. But he isn't afraid to fight when necessary."

After serving as GFEA president, Rukavina went to work for MEA-MFT in 1995. He has logged 20-25,000 miles a year driving across Northcentral Montana to help our members.

His alter-ego, Membership Man, has enlivened MEA-MFT events for years, exhorting MEA-MFT members to find new members and to remember that "Membership Man action figures are sold separately."

Thank you for everything, J.C., Terry, and Jerry!

### Incoming staff members

**Lauren Caldwell** replaces Terry Minow as political director and student coordinator. After earning degrees at the University of Montana, she has worked on campaigns in Montana for a decade, helping elect candidates who support public schools, public services, and working families.

"MEA-MFT was my steady partner in all those races," she said. Most recently, Caldwell managed Denise



Lauren Caldwell



Jeff Cowee

Juneau's congressional campaign. "It was great to be able to champion an MEA-MFT member like Denise," she said.

"Montana is a state where you can have a big impact on who the decision-makers are, who gets elected," Caldwell continued. "I look forward to getting our members the tools and information they need to be even more involved."

In her free time, Caldwell hunts and hikes with her husband, Gabe, and plays the harp.

**Jeff Cowee** replaces Jerry Rukavina as a field consultant in Northcentral Montana. Cowee grew up in Billings and attended Arizona State and UM. He taught middle

school physical science and American history in Helena for 21 years and served as the Helena Education Association full-time-release president.

Cowee said he's excited about advocating for MEA-MFT members. "I like working with people from diverse backgrounds," he said.

Cowee enjoys skiing, golf, and watching professional soccer. He and his wife, Lora, have a son, Aiden.

Welcome to the MEA-MFT staff, Lauren and Jeff! 🗨️

### Welcome, Olney-Bissell and Belgrade members!

Two new local unions recently formed and affiliated with MEA-MFT: Associated Belgrade Classified (ABC) in Belgrade and Olney-Bissell Education Association in Whitefish.

We are glad to have them as part of the MEA-MFT family! 🗨️

## Apply now for Porter Scholarships

Attention all MEA-MFT members: One of our national affiliates, AFT, has announced the 2017 Robert G. Porter Scholars Program. Two great opportunities are available to our members and their dependents: A one-time grant that will be awarded to 10 members in the amount of \$1,000 each, and four \$8,000 scholarships for high school seniors who are dependents of active members in good standing.

To access the online application and read more about eligibility, visit [aft.org/about/member-benefits/scholarships](http://aft.org/about/member-benefits/scholarships). Deadline to apply is March 31, 2017.





## Teacher of the Year

(from p. 1)

Goodwin. "He's good at describing things, teaching us new things," says Emma Compton. "He jokes around a lot, and his jokes are funny," says Willimena Mansfield. "He's serious, too. He wants us to be successful."

**Elder says his approach to teaching** is to get kids excited, intrigued, and motivated.

"I have succeeded if my students continually question and desire to learn more," he says.

He often collaborates with teachers of other subjects. For example, he works with his team's English teachers to have students discover the stories behind Montana's beginnings. Students choose their own topics, interview an adult expert from the community, and get research training at the public library and Montana Historical Society.

Students share their final projects through a published research paper and create a newscast filmed on the site of their choosing.

Projects like this connect students with their community and turn them into budding historians.

Elder, a National Board Certified teacher, says creating solid relationships with his students, making them feel valued, is key to his teaching.

He builds on these connections by serving as student council advisor, leading the Dynamos Mountain



From left: finalist Nicole Vradenburg, finalist Kimberly Knoche, and 2017 Montana Teacher of the Year Kelly Elder at the Teacher of the Year celebration.

Biking Club, taking students on an annual campout, and organizing trips to Central America.

**Back in Elder's classroom**, he is teaching about maps, longitude, and latitude. The lesson is fast-paced, but Elder constantly checks in to see if anyone is feeling lost. His students seem perfectly comfortable speaking up if they're confused.

"They're at such a dynamic age," Elder says of his sixth-graders. "They come in scared in the fall and leave knowing everything. They empower themselves to take on the world. By May, they're on fire."

As the 2017 Montana Teacher of the Year, Elder will serve as an ambassador for public education and represent Montana in the National

Teacher of the Year program.

**Finalists:** This year's Teacher of the Year finalists are Kimberly Knoche, a family and consumer sciences teacher in Forsyth, and Nicole Vradenburg, a kindergarten and first-grade teacher in Bozeman.

Elder, Knoche, and Vradenburg were honored at a celebration this fall in Helena, sponsored by the Montana Professional Teaching Foundation, in conjunction with the annual MEA-MFT Educators' Conference. The Montana Professional Teaching Foundation administers the Montana Teacher of the Year program.

Congratulations to these outstanding teachers and MEA-MFT members! 🗨️