

Cortney's Juggling Act

Office manager for NVEC stays busy both on and off the job

By Victor Bobb

Cortney Tillman was busy enough a year ago, when she took a new position as Nespelem Valley Electric Cooperative's (NVEC) office manager.

She is even busier now.

It's not that NVEC has heaped more duties on Cortney—who is doing the job formerly held by General Manager Laura McClure. Nor is she having difficulty learning the ins and outs of the job she loves.

What keeps Cortney on the hop is her busy personal life could easily be seen as adding up to a second, third or even fourth full-time job.

After a full day helping NVEC deliver reliable power to its members, Cortney goes home to being mom to twin boys, remodeling a house, helping keep the books of a long-established local business and being a "roadie" for one of the area's most successful rock bands.

That is not exactly a quiet night of reading.

Those duties do not count the outdoor activities—camping, fishing, riding, gardening and so on—that Cortney likes to fill her ... um ... spare time. Or, for that matter, new entertainment, such as off-road motorcycling, which she took up this year.

Oh yes, she also was married in February.

Despite the variety of her interests and commitments, Cortney shows up at the NVEC office in Nespelem with her attention



Cortney Tillman, NVEC's busy office manager. Below, a light fixture dating from 70 years ago in the house Cortney and Jimmer are restoring in Elmer City.



focused on the job.

"I ask a lot of questions," she says of her involvement with electric power distribution and the operation of a cooperative. "I want to make sure that I understand."

Cortney is working to familiarize herself with every facet of NVEC's operations.

"We're fortunate to have the crew we have," she says. "They're dedicated guys, and I hope everyone appreciates how hard they work. They were out there on Christmas day, making sure the power came back on as quickly as possible."

Cortney's enthusiasm for her job and her co-workers is mirrored by

the approval she enjoys from her fellow workers.

"Cortney is extremely competent and enjoyable to work with," says Laura, who spent many years as office manager before becoming general manager after the 2005 retirement of Bill Miller. "She is doing an exceptional job. Cortney and all our employees are NVEC's greatest asset."

Cortney's interest and experience in the accounting and financial responsibilities that are a significant part of her job goes back to her teenage years.

"I'm pretty good with numbers," she says.

She enjoys bookkeeping and accounting tasks.

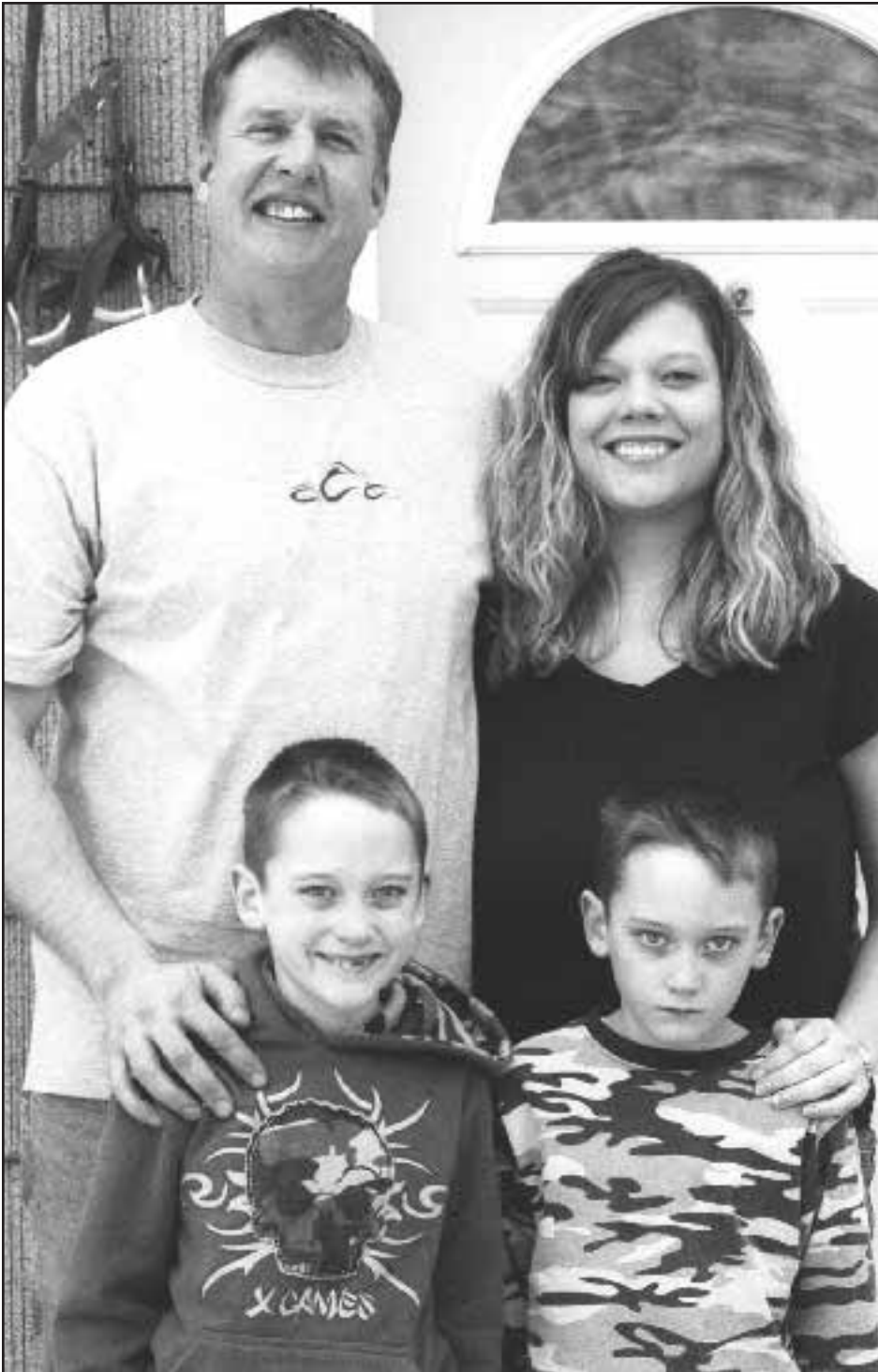
While a student at Lake Roosevelt High School—Cortney grew up in Electric City, and was educated in the area's public schools—she spent summers with an aunt in Burlingame, California.

Her aunt operates a car repair business specializing in "high-end cars," Cortney began learning and enjoying accounting skills and practices while helping out with the family business. After graduation, she worked in the car repair business office while attending college classes in San Mateo.

After returning to the Grand Coulee area, it was a natural step for her to become a loan officer for the credit union—a position she held for eight years before she joined the NVEC staff.

Much of the after-hours business in Cortney's life is an outgrowth of her relationship with her new husband Jim—or, as everyone calls him, Jimmer—Tillman.

Finding themselves compatible and enthusiastic about the same kinds of outdoor activities, Cortney and Jimmer have devoted hundreds of hours to renovating the cozy house behind Tillman's Store that



Cortney with Jimmer and twin sons, Matthew, left, and Cameron. Jimmer also has a 16-year-old daughter, Morgan, who lives in Ellensburg.

has been in Jimmer's family for more than 70 years.

"Carpenter-built," in contrast to the many houses that were hastily built during the building of Grand Coulee Dam, the little home offers rewards and challenges to the couple, who are working to restore it

to its condition when Jimmer's grandfather lived in it.

"The floors are very nice wood," Jimmer says, "but somebody glued linoleum directly to the wood and, in some places, the glue is like tar."

Painstaking hours of scraping the old adhesive from the floorboards,

sanding and refinishing the wood, and applying modern stains and sealers has returned about half the house to its original condition.

Many more hours lie ahead before the project is finished.

"I'm learning a lot," Cortney says. "It's a lot of work, but it's been very satisfying."

Until she began cutting the molding for the restoration project, she did not know how to use a mitre box.

Working on the house is not something Cortney and Jimmer can do every day, because many evenings are committed to the rock n' roll trio called Love Stitch.

Bass-player Jimmer, guitarist Jimmy Jackson and drummer Jerry Palmer play classic rock in venues all across Eastern and Central Washington.

They have developed such a following they do not have to go looking for gigs, and are booked as much as a year in advance.

Cortney helps transport, set up and break down the band's equipment. Jackson's wife also is one of Cortney's lifelong best friends.

If restoring a house and traveling with a band is not enough, Cortney has lent her bookkeeping talents and experience to Jimmer's third-generation family business, Tillman's Store in Elmer City.

She also has discovered she loves to garden. She will cultivate nearly twice as much area this summer than last.

Jimmer has introduced Cortney to the pleasures of back-country motorbiking.

All of her many pursuits do not detract from enjoying the pleasures of being mom to Matthew and Cameron, who turn 8 in April.

Given the array of commitments in Cortney's life, it is startling she lists reading novels as one of her favorite activities.

When is there time for sitting down, much less sitting down and reading?

"We juggle it all very well," Cortney says. ■