



Billing Specialist Stephanie Tipps at her desk inside the office of Nespelem Valley Electric Cooperative.

Change as a Good Thing

Co-op billing specialist trades life on west side for new experiences in Central Washington



Stephanie with pal Josie.

By Victor Bobb

The past 2½ years have seen a lot of changes in Stephanie Tipps' life.

She moved away from the wet west side of the state to the dry central plateau; she left an urban area for the distinctly nonurban setting of Electric City; she got married; she encountered NASCAR racing up close and personal for the first time in her life; she traded in a lifetime of English riding for Western saddles; and she became one of the familiar faces at Nespelem Valley Electric Cooperative.

Stephanie, who became NVEC's billing specialist in fall 2008, acknowledges she never could have foreseen what her move to the Upper Columbia would bring. Nor

could she have dared hope her new circumstances would be so rewarding.

"I love my job," she says.

Being able to look forward to going to work is a blessing in anyone's life. In Stephanie's case, the blessing is particularly acute because the job she gave up to come to the Grand Coulee Dam area was a position she found immensely rewarding in many ways.

NEO Dental International manufactures endodontic products, specializing in temporary root canal medicament and reusable irrigation syringes. Although her job was in Federal Way, Stephanie's work took her all around the world.

"I traveled to Japan, Hong Kong, to

New York City three times,” she says. “We did an exhibit in Shanghai. I was in Chicago three times, visited Milan, went to Germany three times. I loved the opportunity to travel, to see new places.”

Holding down the phone and the front desk at NVEC headquarters in Nespelem does not include world travel, but Stephanie has discovered unexpected rewards in her new position.

“Nespelem Valley is completely service oriented,” she says. “We try hard to work with the members. The line crew is very compassionate, really wants to help. I like that. It means a lot to me.”

Stephanie enjoys working with the public, and is particularly pleased to be part of a company that is so committed to providing the best possible service in as friendly an atmosphere as possible.

Before her work that sent her from China to Germany, Stephanie enjoyed eight years with Service Intelligence, a market-research company that, in those days, was headquartered in downtown Seattle. Starting out as a basic receptionist, Stephanie rose rapidly in the company, winding up as a project manager, and as executive assistant to the chief operating officer and CEO.

“We had some very interesting clients,” she notes, explaining how the company devised customer-satisfaction surveys, and provided “secret shoppers,” who probed the quality of products and services for high-profile businesses, such as Starbucks, Harris Bank and Seattle’s famous seafood restaurant, Ivar’s.

Stephanie’s work included designing market-testing questionnaires and writing scenarios for the company’s secret shoppers to act out while testing products.

“We would rate a restaurant on service, timeliness and food,” she explains.

Visiting a restaurant, members of a testing group—sometimes Stephanie’s family—would order some dishes that cook quickly, others that take longer to prepare. The variety of orders aimed at

checking how successful the business was at serving every group member fresh, hot food at the same time.

While working in Federal Way for the dental company, Stephanie did business with a local printing company, where she met Ty Tipps. By the time Ty and Stephanie decided to get married, they also had decided to start married life back where Ty grew up, nowhere near Gig Harbor, where Stephanie was raised.

In a more direct and active connection to motor sports, Ty races pickups on the region’s tracks, and Stephanie has quickly come to treasure their race-oriented visits to tracks in Port Angeles, Wenatchee, State Line, Yakima and Moses Lake.

“I would never have expected it, but I love it,” she says, adding with a wide smile, “I’m his pit crew.”

One interest Stephanie brought with her is actually more useful in the Columbia Basin than on the west side.



A new pastime for Stephanie is NASCAR and Washington’s local racing circuit—mostly as a fan, but sometimes as pit crew.

The move to the middle of the state turned out to be much more rewarding than expected.

“Friends make it wonderful,” Stephanie says.

She is surprised how much she enjoys a part of the country so different from where she grew up.

“I love it here in the summer,” she says, adding kind words for the other seasons, “except for winter!”

Learning to like NASCAR was an experience Stephanie has embraced. She and Ty plan to be in Las Vegas for races this month.

Knowledgeable and passionate about wine—her tastes focus on red varieties—she has found the region’s wineries a spectacular treat. Particularly taken by some of the wines produced around Yakima and Zillah, Stephanie looks forward to the spring barrel events.

Stephanie never envisioned living in Central Washington or participating in rural activities. Now fully acclimated, she has discovered wonderful friends, a job and co-workers she loves, and a deep contentment with the life, however unexpected, she has chosen.

“I am glad to be here,” she says. ■