

# The Heart of Hutchinson

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The sun has been tucked into bed on a cold December evening of my childhood. Mom lowers a tater tot hotdish into the oven and begins to flood the sink with warm water for washing dishes. Dad tugs the chain on Mom's antique lamp before flopping on the couch with the day's newspaper. Wrought with anticipation, my sister and I hold our breath as Scooby-Doo and the gang set a trap for the dastardly villain.

Growing up, I took public power for granted. Electricity to me was a mysterious, powerful animal that hid behind the holes in the wall and bit if you came too close. Splashing with a rubber ducky, it never crossed my burgeoning young mind that the water in my bathtub needed to be heated before flooding through the faucet. Aside from wondering about the man in a yellow vest who regularly trudged through our snowy backyard, I never thought about where our power came from because I never feared it would stop flowing. I did not need to worry about the lights flickering out or opening the door to a frigid house because, unbeknownst to me, Hutchinson Utility workers like Bruce Krueger were watching out for my family. A municipal utility is the lifeblood of a town because it values consumers and propels community progress.

Forty-one years in the heart of the action left a deep impression on Krueger about how a municipal utility supports the consumer. Monitoring generation equipment and fixing problems, he recalls that as an operating engineer "there was no such thing as a typical day" because the plant regularly adjusts its generation to fit the market. If buying power from outside sources is cheaper than generating it, the plant reduces output to keep prices competitive for local businesses and homeowners. Unlike an investor-owned utility, public power deposits its annual profits into the city's general fund, bolstering the pockets of taxpayers instead of wealthy executives.

“They worked hard to keep costs down for the consumers in Hutchinson,” said Krueger. From large corporations to nonprofits, Hutchinson businesses trust HUC will help them thrive because Commission members make decisions with the town’s best interest in mind.

“They’re not three states away in an office building,” said Krueger. Instead, Commission members are neighbors, coworkers, and friends that value community progress as much as consumers.

Public power is a crucial community asset because of its ability to meet local needs head-on. When Hutchinson music-lovers decided to make their dreams of founding a music festival a reality in 2009, HUC gladly provided the electricity needed to blast rocking tunes and cook up corn dogs. Now headed into its eighth year, RiverSong is one of many HUC-powered events that draw crowds into Hutchinson. Mark Muckenhirn, RiverSong’s electrical coordinator and construction manager at Quade Electric, praised HUC as one of the best utilities his company encounters.

“They put the community first and foremost,” he said, citing the utility’s quick response to emergencies and friendly, intelligent service representatives as examples of the high caliber of HUC employees.

“They care about the community and the success of the community,” he said.

The advantages of a locally-controlled utility are also manifested by HUC’s commitment to education. Each fall, HUC hosts an open house for families to explore topics such as how to identify natural gas leaks and ways to save energy. Passionate about keeping Hutchinson a safe place for everyone, HUC instructs elementary students about electrical dangers, posts safety messages on its website, and sponsors free programs such as a damage prevention seminar for

professional excavators. These activities demonstrate that a municipal utility not only provides power to consumers but also seeks to inform and protect them.

The pulse of a community is determined by the strength and dedication of its utility. Thanks to the hard work of HUC employees, from the Commission President to the meter man, Hutchinson's pulse beats strong and steady. This dependability was affirmed by the American Public Power Association when it designated HUC as a Reliable Public Power Provider in 2014. The people of Hutchinson, however, have known this all along. Because of the faithfulness of their municipal utility, new generations of children will continue to drift off to sleep unafraid of the dark or the cold.